

Classroom Libraries Work

How to **Maximize the Impact** of Your Classroom Library





Why Classroom Libraries Matter

In the race to raise reading achievement amidst competing priorities and budget constraints, the often-overlooked classroom library offers a high return on investment.

Classroom libraries are not just a luxury—they are essential.

For many children, particularly those in under-resourced communities, they may be the only consistent access to books. Classroom libraries are a vital tool for building reading proficiency, sparking engagement, and enhancing the impact of instruction.

Literacy is critical to student success—in school and beyond.

Strong reading skills aren't just essential for ELA—they're critical for academic success across disciplines, from science to math and beyond. Content-rich classroom libraries give students daily access to engaging, relevant books that build skills, deepen comprehension, and expand their understanding of the world around them.

Classroom libraries should be a cornerstone of every literacy plan and budget—because when the right books are within reach, reading and learning thrive.



Research shows that **students in classrooms with rich book access read 50–60% more, and greater reading volume leads to stronger academic performance.**

—Allington, Richard L. & Cunningham, Patricia M. *Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write*, Third Edition (2007)



Classroom Libraries Drive Access and Achievement

Students grow as readers when they read often—but telling them to read isn’t enough. They need easy and daily access to books they genuinely want to read. Research consistently demonstrates that the more students read, the more fluent, confident, and curious they become.

A well-stocked classroom library makes reading part of the school day, offering students a constant, visible invitation to explore, choose, and engage. Whether for whole-class read-alouds, independent reading, or deeper dives into curricular content, a strong classroom library fuels reading volume and strengthens every aspect of literacy instruction.

Classroom libraries also help to establish and build strong reading habits. When books are just a few steps away, students:

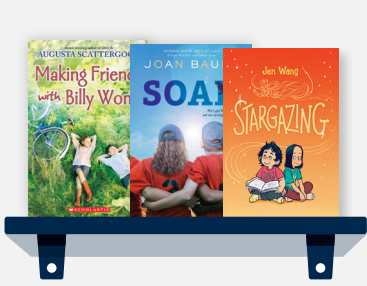
- ✓ Read more
- ✓ Revisit favorites
- ✓ Try new genres
- ✓ See themselves as readers
- ✓ Share books they love with classmates

For students who may have few or no books at home, a classroom library can be transformative. It’s more than a convenience; it’s a proven catalyst for reading volume, fluency, and motivation.



The single factor most strongly associated with reading achievement—more than socioeconomic status or any instructional approach—is time spent reading.

—Dr. Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading*



More Reading Leads to Measurable Results

Words read per year



60th Reading Percentile Rank

70th Reading Percentile Rank

80th Reading Percentile Rank

90th Reading Percentile Rank

98th Reading Percentile Rank

Minutes spent reading per day

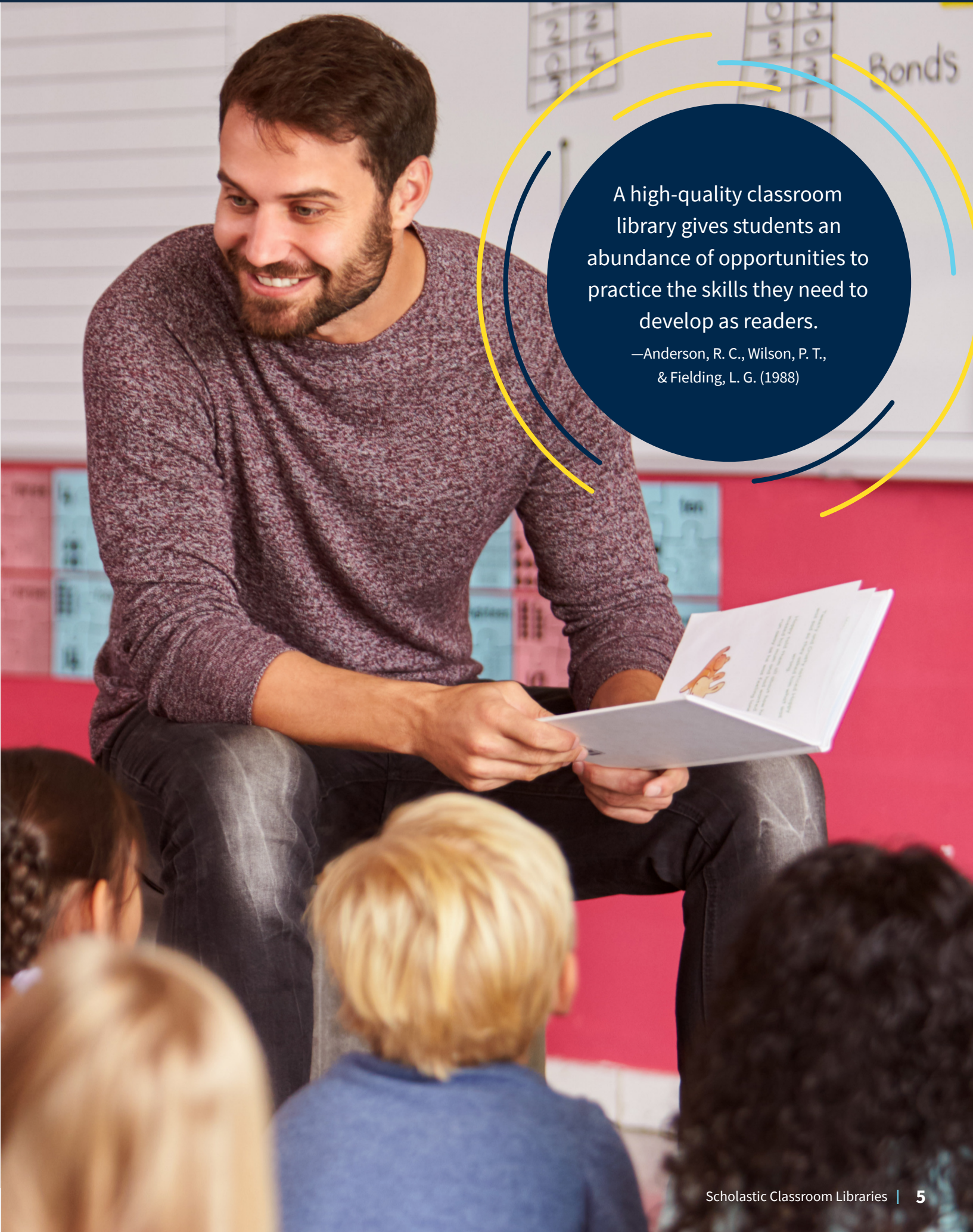
Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P. T., & Fielding, L. G. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23(3), 285–303.

Classroom Libraries Support Student Reading Outcomes

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that improving access to high-quality books can significantly boost reading achievement, spark curiosity, and foster a lifelong love of learning.

- ✓ **Help students read on their own productively, accountably, and efficiently:** To build stamina, confidence, and ownership, gradually increase the amount of independent reading done in class. Monitor progress and provide guidance and support as needed.
- ✓ **Target specific needs in small groups:** With multiple copies of a single title, educators meet the disparate needs of their students via small-group teacher-led instruction or student-managed groups, such as literature circles and book clubs.
- ✓ **Engage students with interactive read-alouds:** Interactive read-alouds model comprehension strategies and vocabulary development while encouraging student participation. This approach builds community and enhances literacy skills, especially for English learners.¹
- ✓ **Introduce complex topics in whole-group instruction:** Build the background knowledge and vocabulary needed for teaching and learning.

¹ Brooks, B. (2022, March 16). The hidden power of read-alouds. ASCD.



A high-quality classroom library gives students an abundance of opportunities to practice the skills they need to develop as readers.

—Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P. T., & Fielding, L. G. (1988)

Classroom Libraries Amplify the Impact of Instruction

Research-aligned instruction is most impactful when students have opportunities to practice and apply what they’re learning. Classroom libraries provide a wealth of opportunities for reading practice during any part of the literacy block.

Research Shows:

Reading volume helps improve reading achievement.

Students who engage in more reading—especially self-selected reading—show greater gains in reading achievement.¹

Student choice encourages lifelong readers.

Students who regularly choose what they read show significantly higher levels of motivation and engagement during reading instruction compared to when books are assigned.² Student choice also promotes positive attitudes toward literacy.³

A rich variety of texts and text types enhances reading comprehension and motivation.

A study with fourth-grade students found that encouraging reading across genres led to increased motivation and improved comprehension scores.⁴

Read-alouds cultivate literacy skills.

Effective read-alouds support students’ language development, comprehension, vocabulary, and overall literacy development.⁵

Knowledge drives comprehension.

Students who engage with texts that are thematically linked develop stronger background knowledge.⁶ Knowledge can facilitate comprehension, engagement, and the application of new information.⁷

In short, a great classroom library isn’t just a collection of books—it’s an active partner in literacy instruction, transforming theory into daily practice.

¹ Allington, R. L., & McGill-Franzen, A. M. (2021). Reading volume and reading achievement: A review of recent research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(S1), S231–S238.

² Theesfeld, S. (2021). Effects of student choice on student motivation and engagement within an elementary classroom [Master’s thesis, Minnesota State University Moorhead]. RED: Research & Scholarship Repository.

³ Creggan, C., et al. (2023). The impact of student choice on reading. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 30, Article E31386557.

⁴ Gingerich, J., & Adler, M. (2020). The importance of reading across genres. *Kansas English*, 101(1), 46–51.

⁵ Beck, Isabel & McKeown, Margaret. (2001). Text Talk: Capturing the Benefits of Read-Aloud Experiences for Young Children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55.

Dickinson, D. W. & Smith, M. W. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers’ book readings on low-income children’s vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29 (2): 104–22.

Wasik, B. A., & Bond, M. A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(2), 243–250.

Aram, D. (2006). Early Literacy Interventions: The Relative Roles of Storybook Reading, Alphabetic Activities, and Their Combination. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 19 (5): 489–515.

⁶ Kaefer, Tanya, et al. Improving Low-Income Preschoolers’ Word and World Knowledge: The Effects of Content-Rich Instruction. *Elementary School Journal*, 116 (2016): 652–674.

⁷ Kaefer, Tanya, et al. (2014). Taxonomies Support Preschoolers’ Knowledge Acquisition from Storybooks. *Child Development Research*, 1–10. 10.1155/2014/386762.

Digital Libraries Expand Possibility and Access

Print books are essential—but digital libraries can help districts expand access, stretch budgets, and meet the varied needs of today’s learners.

Adding a digital library can scale and support:

- ✓ **Anywhere, anytime access:** Students can read at school, at home, or on the go
- ✓ **Simultaneous use:** Every student can read the same title at the same time
- ✓ **Cost-effective updates:** Add new titles without replacing physical books
- ✓ **Multilingual learning:** Books available in multiple languages with read-aloud features
- ✓ **Built-in accessibility tools:** Support students with visual, auditory, or processing differences
- ✓ **Real-time insights:** Track student reading habits and progress
- ✓ **Personalized recommendations:** Help students discover books they’re excited to read
- ✓ **Book storage:** Store thousands of titles without needing physical shelves
- ✓ **Classroom library updates:** Easily refresh collections to reflect new topics and voices

While digital libraries aren’t a replacement for print, they are a smart, scalable way to expand access and engagement.



5 Features of a High-Impact Classroom Library

1

Supports learning goals to help students deepen knowledge and skills through a wide range of texts and text types

2

Reflects your students' lives and experiences, making reading more relevant, meaningful, and enjoyable

3

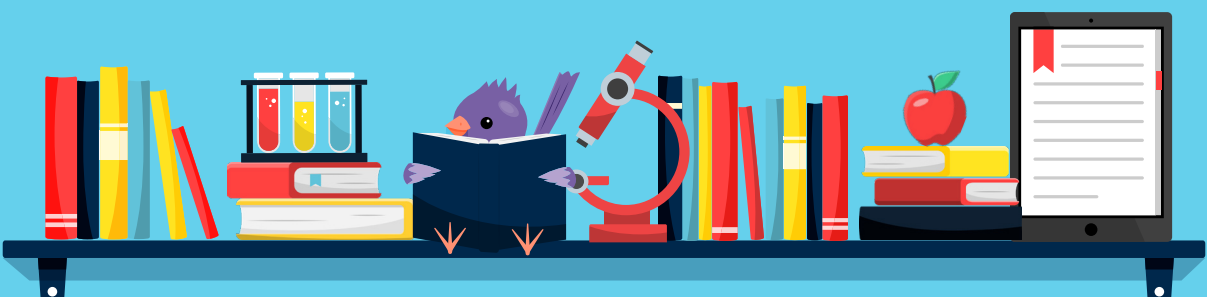
Introduces new topics and ideas outside of students' lived experiences to broaden knowledge and build comprehension

4

Provides access to high-quality grade-level texts to ensure all students experience the depth and breadth of learning vital to school and life success

5

Is codesigned with students to build trust, engagement, and agency—and ensure books are read again and again



Classroom Libraries vs. School Libraries

School and classroom libraries play distinct but complementary roles in literacy and learning achievement.

Classroom Libraries

School Libraries

Located inside the classroom	Located in a centralized space
Easily accessible throughout the school day	Accessible during scheduled visits or free time
Support daily reading routines and instruction	Designed to support research, media literacy, and exploration
Curated by the teacher based on students' needs	Curated by a certified librarian across grades
Support classroom curriculum, resources, and learning goals	Offer a broader selection for schoolwide interests
Books change frequently to match students' interests	House long-term, diverse collections



There's a Book for That

Is there any classroom resource more vital or versatile than a book?
They can be used for almost any learning need:

Whole-Class
Instruction

Knowledge
Building

Engaging in
Academic Discussion

Close Reading

Decoding
Skills Practice

Sparking Interest
and Excitement About
a New Topic

Genre Studies

Read-Alouds

Independent
Reading Time

Small-Group
Differentiated
Instruction

Access to Different
Perspectives and Exposure
to Different Experiences

Building
Vocabulary

Fostering
Understanding

Building
Reading Fluency

Developing Critical
Thinking Skills

Success Stories

Across the country, schools that invest in classroom libraries are seeing real results—
both in student outcomes and in the school community.



Spark a Love of Reading

St. Lucie, Florida

✓ **The Goal:** Boost reading engagement by providing each classroom with a fully stocked library.

✓ **The Impact:** Students were more motivated to read, and teachers gained a powerful tool to meet students' interests.

Create a Culture of Literacy

St. Louis, Missouri

✓ **The Goal:** Make books impossible to miss by placing red bins of books across schools in buses, gyms, and cafeterias.

✓ **The Impact:** Attendance improved, disciplinary incidents dropped, and reading became part of the rhythm of the day.

And in countless classrooms, teachers report students becoming more confident, curious, and engaged simply because they have the right books within reach.

These aren't isolated wins. They're proof that when we prioritize daily access to books—especially in the spaces where students learn most—we create environments where reading can take root and students can succeed.

A Powerful Investment in Literacy Gains

If we want to raise reading achievement, classroom libraries can't be an afterthought—they must be central to every school's literacy plan. That starts with leadership. **When district leaders prioritize funding for classroom libraries, they send a clear message: reading matters here.**

Without that support, classroom libraries often become a patchwork of donations, yard-sale finds, and discounted remainders, assembled by dedicated teachers who understand their value but can't always bear the cost. Admirable as these efforts are, they can't match the impact of a well-funded, thoughtfully curated collection tailored to each classroom's needs.

By investing in classroom libraries, districts take one of the most powerful steps toward increasing reading proficiency for every student.

How District Leaders Can Support Ongoing Impact:

- ✓ Dedicated budget lines for library refreshes
- ✓ Guidelines for high-interest, high-quality collections
- ✓ Professional development to help teachers maximize the impact of their libraries
- ✓ Strategic integration of digital platforms to broaden access

You don't have to do it all at once. Start with one grade. One collection. One team. Then grow from there. When students have access to books—and the time and encouragement to read—comprehension, confidence, and achievement all soar.

The stakes for literacy have never been higher, and classroom libraries play a critical role in improving reading outcomes. They help students build healthy reading habits, strengthen classroom instruction, and directly support academic growth and success.

Start Small, Build Big

Our thought partners and experts recommend following this three-year plan to build your classroom libraries.





SCHOLASTIC CLASSROOM **LiBRARiES**

A classroom library is more than a shelf of books. When curated with intention, it can drive greater engagement with reading, deeper comprehension of curriculum-aligned topics, and higher levels of reading achievement.

Are you ready to transform your bookshelves into a powerful lever for student success?

[scholastic.com/classroomlibraries](https://www.scholastic.com/classroomlibraries)

