

# Words can change the world

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Laconia Middle School students getting caught reading in creative spaces. (Courtesy photo)



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## “Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic” – author JK Rowling

Since fall, students and staff at Laconia Middle School have embraced Rowling’s views on the magical power of words in the classroom and school community. The theme for the year, Words Can Change the World, has been in evidence throughout the building from the "Get caught reading challenge" and CLiF (Children’s Literacy Foundation) grant which has immersed 6th grade in monthly author visits where each student receives a free book, to classroom assignments.

Librarian Tina Fleming has been at the center of this whirling vortex of words. She is the coordinator for the CLiF grant which awarded \$25,000 worth of literacy events and books to grade 6 as part of The Year of the Book. Fleming has used the grant as a center-piece for work throughout the grade-levels which will culminate in a lock-in for students who have completed a reading challenge. There are currently 219 students who have accepted the challenge to read and review multiple books this school year.

To expand the theme into classes, Ms. Fleming presented with Brianna Hemmah, the Laconia Public Library Teen Librarian, at the Lakes Region Curriculum workshop on Library Commons in October. The partnership between LMS and public library has been strengthened this year through the community partner aspect of the CLiF grant.

In the classroom, teachers and students are continuing the tradition of participating in the Global Read Aloud: One Book to Connect the World, which “provides an opportunity for students of all ages to connect with each other to discuss a common text” [www.theglobalreadaloud.com](http://www.theglobalreadaloud.com). English teachers at LMS have also added to their knowledge of the reading and writing workshop model, providing students with a powerful voice and choice in their study of words.

When asked about the impact of the CLiF grant, sixth grade English teacher, Mandi Youssef explained, “Choosing their own books to keep has been a spark in our goal to foster a passion of reading. We have watched this spark ignite into a contagious flame, as students buzz with excitement about their books, and swap them back and forth after reading them.”

“There is something about the smell and feel of a new book. However, often our students are reading books with pages worn, broken in bindings; our books are loved. We want them to own the experience of reading, and this can begin with owning their own book. To break the binding of a new book, to call it their own, is a wonderful experience,” Whitney McCallum, sixth grade English teacher.

The Children’s Literacy Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire a love of reading and writing among children up to age 12 throughout New Hampshire and Vermont. Since 1998, CLiF has served 250,000 children, [www.clifonline.org](http://www.clifonline.org). Local authors have become a regular occurrence at the middle school this year, bringing boxes of books, interesting stories, and inspiration for students to sink into a magical world of reading. Erin Moulton, Duncan McDougall and Doug Wilhelm have already presented to students. This spring Natalie Kinsey-Warnock will collaborate with 6th grade English teachers for Writer’s Workshop to allow students to translate what they have learned from published authors into their own stories and Bruce & Hobbs will finish the Year of the Book in June.

Gracie Hoyt, grade 6 stated, "I love the books I get from CLiF because they let me choose a brand-new book that I can keep. Knowing that the book will be mine forever makes me very interested in reading."

This winter LMS students will celebrate Harry Potter week, a celebration of not just Harry Potter but literacy. The band is learning Harry Potter music, Physical Education classes are learning how to play Quidditch, and Art classes are drawing book quotes. The Scripps National Spelling Bee will take place and a Spelling Wizard will be crowned. Students will have a day of reading and other literacy activities throughout the week.

Words can shape and articulate our outlook on the world, especially the world of learning. The spoken and written word are some of the most powerful tools we possess and seeing Laconia Middle School students embrace this power is magical