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JUST READ



IT

**UNLOCKING
THE MAGIC OF
INDEPENDENT
READING IN
MIDDLE AND
HIGH SCHOOL
CLASSROOMS**

**JARRED
AMATO**

Foreword by
KWAME ALEXANDER

CORWIN Literacy

BOOK STUDY GUIDE

A MESSAGE FROM DR. AMATO

Whether you are preparing for your first year in education, gearing up for one of your last, or, like me, find yourself somewhere in between, thank you. Thank you for the work you have done and for the work you will continue to do alongside and on behalf of young readers and writers. Thank you for championing this book and for bringing friends and colleagues together to discuss it. This book study guide offers discussion and reflection questions to help guide your use of the book in community with fellow educators. Please know that I would love to join y'all for these conversations, whether it is answering questions via email, participating in a virtual book study, or joining your team in person. Put simply, I love doing good work with good people, and it would be an honor to connect and collaborate with you—to exchange ideas, refine units, develop a yearlong Read and WRAP sequence, share book recommendations, or plan literacy events for students and educators.

When I first started writing this book, I had never even heard of the term “brain rot.” The day before I wrote this introduction, it was named the 2024 Oxford Word of the Year. As I reflect on books like Jonathan Haidt’s *The Anxious Generation* and Johann Hari’s *Stolen Focus* (along with *Fahrenheit 451*, which I revisit every fall with my 8th graders), I believe many adults are underestimating how different—and in many ways, how much more harmful—it is to grow up in today’s algorithmic age. While I certainly do not have all the answers, I believe, with all my heart, that creating a solid, daily framework for independent reading should be part of the solution. Moving forward, I believe every school should carve out 10–20 minutes for students and staff to unplug from screens and get lost in great books. To Read and WRAP. *Write. Reflect. Analyze. Participate.* When we maximize this time, when we *protect* this time, the rewards and possibilities are endless—for students, for educators, for everyone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Jarred Amato is an award-winning English teacher and the co-founder of Project LIT Community, a national grassroots literacy movement. He enjoys reading, writing, and laughing alongside young people every day and collaborating with fellow educators to improve literacy access, attitudes, and outcomes. Dr. Amato is a two-time MNPS Blue Ribbon teacher and the recipient of the Penguin Random House Teacher Award for Literacy and the Nashville Public Education Foundation Inspiring Educator Award. He received his BA in English and History from Vanderbilt University, his MAT from Belmont University, and his EdD from Lipscomb University. After thirteen years of teaching middle and high school English in Nashville, Dr. Amato recently relocated to New Jersey, where he and his wife are attempting to keep up with their two young boys. You can [follow Dr. Amato on Substack](#), where he writes a free weekly newsletter. You can also email him at jarred.amato@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like him to work with your organization, whether it's to deliver a keynote address or facilitate a literacy workshop/PD session.

WARM UP

Use these discussion prompts to get started with your book study.

- Dr. Amato writes that “books have a unique ability to connect us and comfort us, to challenge us and change us” (p. 2). As you reflect on both your childhood and your adult life, what books have connected with, comforted, challenged, and/or changed you?
- Why do you think that Dr. Amato felt compelled to write this book? What reasons resonate most with you?
- Near the end of the introduction, Dr. Amato makes two final points: One, there is nothing wrong when students are “just reading.” Two, getting to a place where all students are “just reading” (and *actually* reading) is a lot harder than it looks. Why is it important that we help every student unplug from technology and experience the magic of reading?
- Dr. Amato writes, “While this book can be read from start to finish, I know that if you are like me, you may want to jump to specific sections, depending on what you need (and how much time you have)” (p. 6–7). What do you hope to take away from this book? What chapters do you anticipate will help you achieve your short-term and long-term goals?

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING THE READ AND WRAP FRAMEWORK

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe your independent reading journey? What has independent reading looked like for you at different points in your teaching career?
- Dr. Amato believes that “there is more than enough room for both choice and the required, whole-class reads, ‘classic’ or contemporary” (p. 17). How do you balance the two? Why are both important?
- When it comes to education, and literacy instruction in particular, what are you “for” and “against”?
- How does Jason Reynolds distinguish between literacy and literature? Why is this distinction important? What are the implications, if any, for our English classrooms?
- As Dr. Amato asks on page 23, how many of our students can “name a book,” let alone dozens? How can we raise the number? Are we focusing on the right things? What should we keep doing? What practices should we reconsider?
- At the end of the chapter, Dr. Amato introduces the Read and WRAP framework. What does WRAP stand for, and what does it look like in action? Why is the WRAP piece so critical for educators and students alike?

CHAPTER 2: SIMPLIFYING OUR APPROACH TO SHIFT READING MINDSETS

Discussion Questions

- Dr. Amato recognizes that “every student enters our classroom at a different point in their literacy journey” (p. 28). How are you and your colleagues helping students establish or reestablish a positive reading identity?
- When looking at the chart on pages 28–29, do you find that more of your students identify with the statements in the left-hand column or right-hand column? Why do you think this is the case? What are the implications?
- In this chapter, Dr. Amato encourages educators to know their purpose, know their role, know their data, and know their readers. When looking at data specifically, have you ever created (or do you plan to create) a Literacy Dashboard for your classroom, grade level, or school? If so, what do you plan to include in your dashboard?
- On pages 35 and 36, Dr. Amato provides several questions for educators and literacy teams to consider. Which questions resonate most with you?
- Dr. Amato walks readers through the “first half” of his literacy block and addresses a few of the most frequently asked questions surrounding the Read and WRAP routine. How do you envision Read and WRAP fitting into your classroom? What barriers, if any, do you anticipate? How might you need to tweak the practice? What support do you need to make it happen?

CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMING PRINCIPLES INTO ACTIONS: STRATEGIES TO INCREASE ACCESS, PROMOTE CHOICE, GUARANTEE TIME, AND BUILD COMMUNITY

Discussion Questions

- Dr. Amato breaks down the four essential actions, or “moves,” that allow educators to unlock the magic of the Read and WRAP routine and set up their classroom for a winning school year. Which of these moves do you find most important? Most challenging?
- When it comes to access, how do you and your colleagues cultivate classroom libraries? What stood out from Dr. Amato’s list of recommendations (p. 53–56)?
- “Many educators ask, ‘What percentage of texts should be teacher-selected vs. student-selected?’ I don’t know if there’s a perfect ratio. But I do know this: student choice must be part of the equation” (p. 57). Do you agree or disagree?
- Why is it important for students (and educators) to “read widely and read often”?
- One of the biggest barriers to independent reading is time—or the lack thereof. However, Dr. Amato asks, “If not in our ELA classrooms, then when?” (p. 65) How do you answer this question? Have you tried “auditing” your classroom for a week? If so, what did you discover? How much time did students spend reading, writing, chatting with classmates, listening to the teacher talk, etc.?
- Why are community and belonging so critical, especially in today’s technological age? How do you nurture a community of readers in your classroom and/or school?

CHAPTER 4: STARTING STRONG: HOW TO INVEST READERS FROM DAY ONE THROUGH THE “INTRO TO LIT” UNIT

Discussion Questions

- Why is it important that we invest students in our Read and WRAP routine? How does this unit help us establish an authentic community of readers and writers?
- What specific activities, texts, and/or tasks from the “Intro to Lit” unit could make sense in your classroom?
- What do you want students to learn and accomplish over the course of a week, month, semester, and year?
- What are the benefits of facilitating frequent “book tasting” events (p. 81–83)? How could you and your colleagues make this a recurring practice in your classroom and school?
- One of Dr. Amato’s favorite assignments is the “Ten Things I’ve Been Meaning to Say to You” letter (p. 89–90). What are ten things you would like to share with your students and/or colleagues?
- Why is it helpful to have students “read about reading”? How could the Article of the Week (p. 94–100) become a yearlong staple in your classroom?
- Take a close look at the prompts on page 103. Why is it important to give students ongoing opportunities to reflect on their reading identity? As you reflect on your own journey, what memories, moments, people, or events inspired you to become an educator?

Homework Assignment: Reach out to Dr. Amato if you and your colleagues create additional resources for any of these units, including the “Intro to Lit” and culminating units, or a weekly, monthly, quarterly, and/or yearlong Read and WRAP sequence. He would love to collaborate with your team!

CHAPTER 5: MAINTAINING MOMENTUM: EVERYDAY WRAP PROMPTS TO ENGAGE AND EMPOWER ALL READERS

Discussion Questions

- As Dr. Amato asks, “What happens when the timer goes off and students take out their composition notebooks and open to a clean page?” (p. 115) Why is it critical that we give students time to WRAP following their reading? How does Read and WRAP differ from DEAR, and how does this framework support students and educators?
- Dr. Amato writes, “It’s important that we tailor our WRAP prompts to best support the readers and writers in our classrooms and to align with our goals as a school and ELA department” (p. 116). After reading the entire chapter, what WRAP prompts would make sense in your classroom?
- Based on classroom and school data, what should you prioritize during your WRAP time? What do your specific group of students need most? What do you want students to learn and accomplish over the course of a week? Over 180 days?

- More questions to consider when developing a WRAP sequence: How much time do you have? Do you want your WRAP time to feel collaborative and conversational? Do you want students to engage in literary analysis? Do you want students to examine authors' craft to inspire their own narrative writing? Do you want to use your WRAP time to incorporate poetry, authentic grammar instruction, or SEL competencies? Do you want students to reflect on their reading? All of the above?

CHAPTER 6: FINISHING WITH FINESSE: CELEBRATORY END-OF-YEAR ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

- What specific activities, texts, and/or tasks from Dr. Amato's end-of-year unit could help you end the "season" on a high note? What are some of the benefits of wrapping up the school year with a unit like this one?
- What do we want students to remember about our classroom? What would we like their lasting impression to be?
- When looking at the "Lit Awards," reflect on some of your favorite all-time authors, books, and characters (p. 182–184). What could this project look like in your classroom, library, and/or school?
- Does your team already create some version of a Literacy Dashboard? If not, what data points do you think it would be important to track over the course of a school year? How could a Literacy Dashboard improve student outcomes in your classroom, grade level, and/or school?

CHAPTER 7: LEVERAGING STUDENT FEEDBACK TO STRENGTHEN READ AND WRAP ROUTINES

Discussion Questions

- How can we leverage student feedback to strengthen our practice, and specifically, our Read and WRAP routine? What types of feedback (WRAP prompts, one-on-one conversations, quarterly reflections, formal reading surveys, etc.) do you find most valuable, and why?
- What do reading conferences typically look like in your classroom? What tweaks or changes would you like to make moving forward? How can the questions provided on pages 207 and 208 along with the sample reflections shared throughout the chapter help you connect with the readers in your classroom?
- Dr. Amato offers ten tips to consider when fine-tuning a Read and WRAP routine. Which resonate most with you? Why is it essential that you refine your Read and WRAP routine throughout the school year?
- While there is no perfect ratio, how do you balance independent reading of self-selected books with whole-class novels and in-class book clubs? What are some of your favorite texts and/or units that should remain staples in your curriculum? Are there others that you'd like to abandon?

CHAPTER 8: LAUNCHING AND LEADING A PROJECT LIT CHAPTER

Discussion Questions

- In this chapter, Dr. Amato reflects on the Project LIT journey and invites you and your students to **launch a chapter** of your own. What could this look like in your classroom, library, school, and/or community? What questions do you have? What are some possible next steps?

- What are some of the parallels between book club and “game day”? Why are student-led book clubs important in today’s algorithmic age?
- On page 246, Dr. Amato shares a “student leader” graphic along with a list of possible actions that can help you and your team get started, including a regular book club, “Lit Buddies” program, book drive, art and service projects, and author visits. Recognizing that “this work doesn’t need to be flashy or time-consuming or expensive,” what can you and your team do to promote a love of reading in your community?

OVERTIME

Reflect and discuss this final question to wrap up your book study.

- Dr. Amato recognizes *The Crossover* as the book that sparked a movement. What books have had a similar impact in your classroom and/or library? What books are you excited to read, discuss, and celebrate with your community?

Don’t forget to [follow Dr. Amato on Substack](#), where he writes a free weekly newsletter. You can also email him at jarred.amato@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like him to work with your organization, whether it’s to deliver a keynote address or to facilitate a literacy workshop/PD session.

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