

[Recording starts 0:00:00]

Vicki Davis:

“Change happens in a heartbeat, in a snap of a finger, in the blink of an eye. It may take time to prepare for change, it may take time to decide the change. But true change, when it occurs, happens instantaneously.” This is an excerpt from the book, *The Little Things*, <http://amzn.to/2lKmpEY> that I’ll be giving away this week. It’s a book that just came out from Andy Andrews. I’ll tell you more at the end of the show about this book and also how to get some free curriculum that I recommend for all of Andy Andrew’s book. So stay tuned.

Alex Corbitt:

“I really regret those little moments throughout the day where I wasn’t kind of joking around and making reading fun and funny.”

Vicki Davis:

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you’ll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

VICKI: Happy Five Idea Friday. Today, we’re talking about leveling up language arts with Alex Corbitt [@Alex Corbitt](#) from the Bronx where he teaches English and language art. So Alex, what’s your first idea for leveling up language arts?

ALEX: Thank you for having me, Vicki. My first idea is an idea that I used often with my students to scaffold reading. I actually will either take GarageBand on my computer or my phone and I’ll make little audiobook versions <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPglGidBzww> for a short story we’re reading or maybe a homework assignment and I’d upload it onto YouTube so students, when there at home doing some reading for class, they can actually – if they need to go onto YouTube, search up my username and listen along with me as I read for a little bit of extra support.

VICKI: Wow. So is there a difference between you reading and, maybe, somebody else?

ALEX: That’s interesting that you’ve mentioned that. We’ve had guest speakers come into – like, for example, I teach 7th grade but maybe they hear their 6th grade teacher to an excerpt of a reading or if it’s a narrative we might do different voices and then there might be extra credit, like, see if you can find out who the mystery reader is. So we definitely play with different voices.

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VICKI: Fine. Okay, what’s your second idea?

ALEX: All right, my second idea is making use of the classroom space. And this year I bought a bunch of rugs. I really think it’s important to kind of have a lot of choice in how they learn and the way they use the space around the classroom. So I have rugs at the front of my room and if we’re doing a reading I invite kids to come, almost like

elementary school, but they're in 7th grade, and to kind of sit down there too. An di don't make it out to be like, "Oh, this is supercool." You have a choice, you have different options to kind of accommodate your learning.

VICKI: So how did the kids respond to that?

ALEX: They love it. And some kids prefer to sit at their desk and do group work there. But for certain students who like to stretch out, especially for students who maybe have grown a little bit tall throughout the year and they don't quite fit under their desk sometimes – it's very popular.

VICKI: Yes, and I've read so much about stretching out those long muscles of the leg and how good that is to get that circulation going. Okay, what's number three?

ALEX: Number three is one of our favorite projects of the year, it's called the talk show project. And after we've read the number of stories in class we throw a talk show in which we have hosts and they interview different students actually acting as the different characters we've read in the books. And that's a technique called hot-seating but we do it in a very kind of real world way.

VICKI: Do you publish it?

ALEX: You know, that's interesting. I should throw it up on YouTube. I get sometimes a little paranoid with parental consent and everything like that. But I do put on YouTube an end-of-the-year video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcW_KStAs9U every year for my classroom, and you will see clips of it there.

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VICKI: Cool, okay. What's number four?

ALEX: Number four is to use picture books often. I teach middle school but there's no age which picture books are inappropriate and especially picture books are really good as a scaffold into more rigorous texts. So for example, I teach short story by Kurt Vonnegut called Harrison Bergeron https://archive.org/stream/HarrisonBergeron/Harrison%20Bergeron_djvu.txt and it's a really kind of futuristic sci-fi story that can be hard to access for some students. So to get their minds at that kind of thematic level, I read a picture book called The Dullards <http://amzn.to/2mqxlzn> and it's thematically almost identical and it gives kids a way in.

VICKI: Awesome. So you're using picture books and they don't find that insulting, huh?

ALEX: No, because I'm very transparent with why we're kind of doing what we're doing. And any text can be read at deep critical levels, even something that might seem childish like a picture book, it's real literature for sure.

VICKI: Okay. What's your fifth?

ALEX: All right, my last tip is to kind of supercharge independent reading, create benchmarks for students to hit as far as how many books they want to read. And then what I do is I created a way to supercharge independent reading. And the way I do that is I set benchmarks for books for students to read throughout the year. And as students hit those benchmarks they actually earn progressively prestigious bookmarks. And each bookmark unlocks different, kind of classroom privileges and abilities. For example, being able to check out two books at a time or being able to be like a library leader in the classroom.

And so students get very excited to kind of level up, get these new bookmarks and read more books. And I call this whole kind of process lit craft.

VICKI: Cool. And we're going to talk about that at the end because we're going to do a little giveaway, aren't we?

ALEX: Yes, that's right.

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VICKI: So I have a question.

ALEX: Sure.

VICKI: Alex, if you could go back and talk to yourself when you got started, is there a mistake you wish you could have avoided?

ALEX: You know, I think as a new teacher, I would have appreciated if I would have just chille out a little bit and laughed more with kids. I think learning needs to be fun and needs to be exciting and it needs to be some way, rigorous, but laid back. And I really regret those little moments throughout the day where I wasn't, kind of, joking around and making reading fun and funny.

VICKI: So, Alex, have you always just known that you were a great teacher or have you ever struggled with confidence?

ALEX: I think I always struggle with confidence because there's always this kind of feedback loop. I can really tell if my students are kind of not feeling the activity or the project we're working on and I'm always trying to adjust and kind of respond to their needs and kind of where they're at. But it always helps to make instruction student-centered and put more of the responsibility on them. And when I feel like they're doing the heavy lifting, I feel like it's not even about me anymore as the teacher and I can just let them learn.

VICKI: Cool. So let's talk about our giveaway. Tell us what we're about to giveaway and then I'll tell our listeners how they can win it.

ALEX: Awesome. So like I mentioned with LitCraft <https://www.alexcorbitt.com/shop>, I have these progressively prestigious bookmarks that my students kind of level up and earn as they read more independent reading books throughout the year. So for example, the first level is apprentice, the second is knight, ninja, master and then

titan. And so what I'm giving away today is a free bookmark set of 25 of each level bookmark.

VICKI: Cool. So that really sounds like that's enough for a classroom.

ALEX: Right.

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VICKI: So as we usually do, remarkable teachers, you just go to iTunes <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/10mt-10-minute-teacher-show/id1201263130> and leave a review. We'll also be starting to take this to Stitcher <http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/cool-cat-teacher/10mt-the-10-minute-teacher-show-the-5day-a-week-podcast?refid=stpr> too, so you can leave a review on iTunes or Stitcher. Leave your Twitter and Instagram handle. And go ahead and do that and we will be drawing for the bookmarks, which is awesome.

So teachers, as we've had this fantastic ideas to level up language arts, I just want to point out, some are technology, some are in the classroom face-to-face. There's just a wide variety and that's really what teachers do. We have a toolkit of a lot of different things to really engage our learners in what we're teaching.

So my husband Keith and I were handed a copy of the new book by Andy Andrews, *The Little Things* at church by my pastor Michael Catt www.michaelcatt.com and we were reading it as we came home in the car and it sparked so much conversation that we've decided to give away five copies of this book this week. So you can enter to win by leaving a review on iTunes or Stitcher and also include your Twitter or Instagram handle so that we can get up with you.

Now, I always want to recommend the free curriculum that Andy Andrew is sharing with all of his books. Just go to andyandrews.com/media-education. He's not paying me anything for this and really doesn't even know who I am but I think his books are awesome inspiration and I want you to be remarkable and I want you to think, and that's what his books make you do, they make you think about what you believe and what we should be teaching

Thank you for listening to the Ten-minute Teacher Podcast. You can download the show notes and see the archive at coolcatteacher.com/podcast. Never stop learning.

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