

I thrust my blankets off and jump out of bed. I can feel my heart beating rapidly through my veins. I race downstairs, forgetting all about tiptoeing quietly while the rest of my family is sleeping. All I want to do is pick up my book and jump back into the story. I wrap myself up in a tangle of blankets like a caterpillar in a cocoon and dive into reading. My mom comes down as I'm enveloped in the story and asks me if I want to work together on our daily morning puzzles or have breakfast. I decline both. I just want to read more about the characters I have grown attached to. I feel their troubles, their sacrifices, their achievements, and their dreams.

Ever since I can remember, reading has felt like a second home to me. Early on, I felt myself turning to books for support in all kinds of ways, whether I had a bad day or just needed some quiet time to myself. Reading is unique; it doesn't give me advice in the same way as my parents, teachers, or friends. Instead, it can put my life through a magnifying glass of a fictional character. Reading teaches me lessons without even realizing it; it constantly influences the way I approach the day, gives me perspective on the highs and lows of life, and helps me think about the world in a different way. When I read about Melody who has cerebral palsy, I am reminded of the unique journeys we each have to embrace in life. When I read about Mia Tang, I learn about the discrimination that some people have to navigate. When I read about Katniss Everdeen, I am inspired to stand up against unfairness and injustice.

Reading can be comforting and give me a place to think without the distractions of reality. No matter what I'm feeling, there are books out there to help me and provide me with an escape. One minute I am on the streets of New York City and the next, I am road tripping across the country in a school bus. With reading, there are endless possibilities. Like the characters I read about, I feel like I can achieve the impossible.

Reading will always be a part of my life, and that is why it is like a roof over my head. Shelter is more than just a person or a place. It is how you feel. It is what gives you love, confidence, and joy. Reading will always be my everlasting shelter.