

My Hero

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I never did think that I had a hero. When I scanned my life for people that influenced me, I couldn't find any. Then I realized: Heroes don't have to be famous, or important, or even real. My hero's not real, not at all. She's perfectly imaginary, spun from a story.

Her name's Matilda. You may have heard of her. There's a book about her, by Roald Dahl, along with a movie based on the book. You may also know something else: Matilda has magic.

Her power comes from the words that she finds amongst the pages of books. In a family that was addicted to TV, she was the loner that went to the library and discovered something amazing: By reading, she gained magic. I remember the first time I watched the movie Matilda. The magical twist that reading added to her life was enough to hook me: I wanted to be like Matilda.

"So, if I read," I'd asked my parents, "I can have magic like her?"

"Sure," they'd replied, humoring me. After all, I was only in kindergarten.

Then the frenzy for books started. They were picture books, mostly, and plenty of tiny chapter books, since I didn't have the ability to read anything larger. I threw myself into the task like it was my new religion. The crushing disappointment took over me when I discovered that reading didn't give me any sort of magical powers. I had to face the reality that there was no magic. And as a kindergartner, that was like telling me the sky was green. I took for granted that all the fairy tales and such existed, as surely as my family existed.

So, there I was, just a little kid with a bunch of books that didn't give me any special powers. Yet stubbornness drove me forward. I wouldn't stop reading, convinced that there had to be some magic, somewhere.

Now, as a reading-obsessed eighth grader, I can appreciate the message Matilda sent me. There is power in reading that many don't fully understand. Books are passports to undisclosed countries, places where you can shake hands with all kinds of new and fantastical creatures. There is so much meaning in words. Whether written or

spoken, words empower us. We send messages, transfer ideas, and stir the hearts and minds of millions with them.

Words are magic.

Whether we understand it, and put it to use for the right reasons, is all up to us.

Now I know that.

Thank you, Matilda.