

Instead of encouraging learning, Reading Logs turn a passion into a chore

By Lily Feather



ILLUSTRATION | Serina Yan

A few months ago, I peeked over my 10-year-old sister's shoulder as she reluctantly logged the details of the latest Chris Colfer book into a Google Slide.

"They digitized the Reading Log?" I yelped. I had hoped that the tedious reading system from my elementary school years had been phased out, but instead they had only updated it with pictures of happy cartoon children allegedly completing their own logs. It was a lie.

Back in my day, the system for ranking children's reading skills involved reading levels that ranged from A (amateurs) to Z (super genius reading wizards).

I didn't fully understand then that "reading comprehension" meant being assigned a level based on a specific set of questions and checkpoints; I just knew I loved to read. With my head completely in the clouds, I failed to realize that there were questions to answer, and, no matter what stale realistic fiction book the school decided on, those answers determined my reading level.

In fourth grade, I was assigned "Loser" by Jerry Spinelli, a book about a kid named Zinkoff with confidence issues.

We were never given any fantasy or science fiction – just what mirrored what might exist in our little worlds.

In fifth grade, I was stuck in Reading Level U (for Unbearably Close to Z) and awaiting my next reading level assignment. Once again, I was told to read "Loser" by Jerry Spinelli.

When I told my teacher that I had read the book last year, he refused to let me pick a different book. The leveling system was apparently finite and all-knowing. It was also the worst-kept secret of elementary school – everyone knew which kid was M(id) when everyone else was an S(uperstar).

Back then, I would read a book each day, and sometimes two on a Saturday. But it wasn't enough just to read.

In the olden days, we had to fill in a physical Reading Log, in which we logged every book, complete with the author, date, start/end time and which page we started/finished on. And yes, you had to turn it in. The teacher would look it over and decide if you were reading the right kind of books – the kind that matched your reading level.

Apparently the higher-ups behind the Reading Log decided that the tiny tech geniuses of Generation Alpha (those born between 2010–2025) were better suited to an online format, which includes a requirement for designating the genre of each book from a drop-down menu.

Back in elementary school, I was happy to plow through the 40 titles in the Warrior Cats canon. I certainly wasn't bringing my Reading Log with me in the car or the park

or the doctor's office. Kids who love reading want to lose track of time – not meticulously record how they spend it.

So I just made stuff up. I'd scribble down whatever information seemed plausible – my teachers saw me reading all the time, so I wasn't about to waste my energy charting arbitrary data when I could be reading.

A recent Google search proved I wasn't alone in my longstanding hatred of Reading Logs. One tweet included a picture of a Reading Log with the caption: "This is when the lying started."

According to a recent article in *The Atlantic*, keeping a reading log is equivalent to "telling your child that she must draw pictures for at least 20 minutes daily – and also record how much time she spent drawing and how many different colors she used." The article also cited a study of 100 second and third graders that found Reading Logs had a detrimental effect on their interest in reading.

Yet as frustrating as keeping a Reading Log was for me, it must have been exponentially worse for kids with ADHD or other learning differences.

Instead of teaching kids how to fake a Reading Log, we should be instilling a love of reading, which is destroyed, page by page, every time we make them document their progress.



"Given difficulties with sustained attention, reading can be particularly difficult as kids often report rereading passages over and over again given lack of focus and being easily distracted," said Angelique Snyder, a pediatric psychologist at the Children's Hospital of San Antonio.

Kids with ADHD need support and encouragement to make reading a stimulating activity – not extra pressure to meet the standards of a leveling system.

Each child is different, so how can we judge them by the same metric of pages versus reading time? The only surefire way to confirm that kids are reading is to establish silent reading time in schools – which would also create a relaxed environment around reading rather than making it feel like a chore.

My sister is now in fourth grade, and I don't want her to read just because she wants to move up a level. I want her to love reading.

Instead of teaching kids how to fake a Reading Log, we should leave more time to DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) and thereby instill the love of reading that is slowly destroyed, page by page, every time we make them document their progress. Instead of hyperfocusing on an arbitrary system, we should guide kids to books that make them want to read another – and another.



By Sophia Jazaeri

Last week, I was discussing with my mother my relative lack of romantic experience. We debated multiple possibilities, but once it was clear that dating within the private school community would be inefficient, I suggested downloading a dating app.

A few hours later, my mom said she didn't think it was safe. She was scared for her gay teenage daughter. My mom wants me to be happy, but she has good reason to believe that I could be attacked by some crazed homophobe catfishing as a queer woman.

"Wait until college," she told me. "You can try dating in Minnesota."

I have had a relatively easy time coming to terms with my sexuality. When I came out, my family was incredibly supportive. Even my grandparents were hyped that I was gay. I have never felt unsafe or unwelcome at home – a luxury that few queer kids can claim. Even so, it wasn't always simple.

I was outed in eighth grade by my best friend. It destroyed me. It took years to fully trust again. I decided that, in high school, I would be the one in control of my secrets, so I let everyone know from day one that I was queer. If someone was going to destroy my relationship with my peers on the basis of which fictional character I dreamed about marrying, it would be me.

And still, I am lucky. Most of the LGBTQ+ community in the South follow a few rules:

Keep your head down. Close your eyes. Hide your flags. Ignore imminent threats from every angle.

From a heterosexual perspective, this could sound like fear-mongering or hyperbole. Unfortunately, from the homosexual perspective, this is a daily reality. It is how we are told to protect ourselves.

I remember being genuinely terrified for my survival when I entered high school. Instead, I found a much more complicated situation.

Queer teenagers flocked to me like I was a beacon of light in a moth-infested alleyway. I had a purpose: to exist out and proud when others could not. They lived vicariously through me. Gay, ace and trans kids who could not so much as look at a rainbow or Subaru without being punished declared me their representative. It was a suffocating role to fulfill.

This makes my utter failures in dating doubly ironic. While I've never been the most comfortable on a date, I'm a hopeless romantic. My relatives ask when and where I'll get married; my friends ask who I have a crush on; the AP French exam asks what my ideal rendez-vous looks like. This lack of experience combined with a sincere drive for connection has caused me to miss out on the high school dating scene.

If this isn't making sense to you, that's because it's not supposed to. Queerness is incomprehensible and fluid. Identity is not something that you can control, and no one can predict or call dibs on your sexuality.

While I felt physically safe at St. John's, I had no guarantee I'd feel the same way at any college in the South. So when it came time to apply to colleges, I had to get out. I don't know if I will ever come back, and I certainly won't live here. For once, I am prioritizing my own life over being a Queer avatar, and maybe someday, a martyr.

Minnesota, a distinctly blue state, will be a bold contrast. I will no longer feel typecast by my peers as either a pillar of freedom or a target of mockery. The dating culture at Carleton is often touted by students as being openly Queer.

I have to leave Texas for my own wellbeing, but my hope for the future is that people in my shoes don't have to do the same. I wonder how many are going to come to this school long after this article has been published and feel utterly hopeless. When Greg Abbott revokes our ability to perform "Newsies" for promoting drag, and we fold to public pressure, closing down our gender-neutral bathrooms, I wonder who is going to look out for and protect the Queer youth of St. John's. I hope we can count on the heterosexual crowd to defend us, but I won't hold my breath. No offense.

I am Out – and I am getting out.

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