

# The Teacher Who Made a Difference



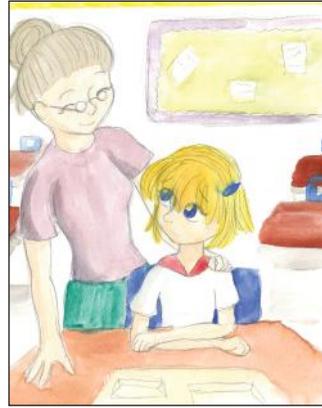
By Corinne M. Litzenberg  
Illustrated by Amy L. Dech

# 8 tips to help students

**1** Don't tell the student to "slow down" or "just relax."

**2** Don't complete words for the student or talk for him or her.

**3** Help all members of the class learn to take turns talking and listening. All children — and especially those who stutter — find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions and they have the listener's attention.



**4** Expect the same quality and quantity of work from the student who stutters as the one who doesn't.

**5** Speak with the student in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.

**6** Convey that you are listening to the content of the message, not how it is said.

**7** Have a one-on-one conversation with the student who stutters about needed accommodations in the classroom. Respect the student's needs, but do not be enabling.

**8** Don't make stuttering something to be ashamed of. Talk about stuttering just like any other matter.

# The Teacher Who Made a Difference



By Corinne M. Litzenberg

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## The Teacher Who Made a Difference

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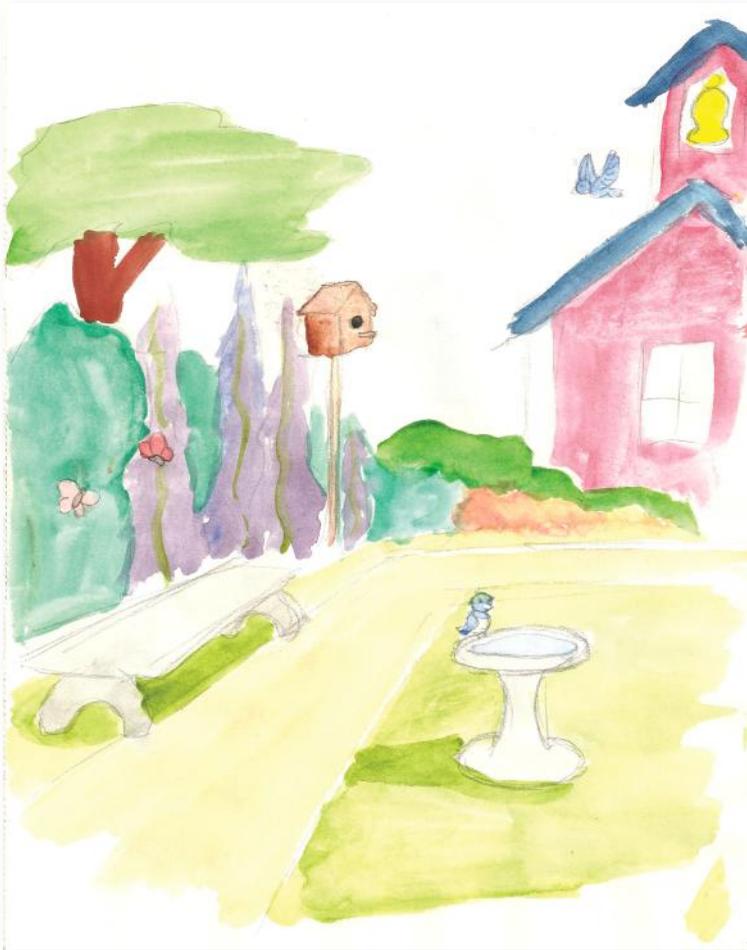
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# Dedication



In memory of my third grade teacher, Mrs. Mabel Jeannette Cassidy, who made a difference.

~Corinne M. Litzenberg

Mr. Gilger, my high school art teacher, who offered the constructive criticism that helped build confidence in my drawings.

~Amy L. Dech



"Time for breakfast!" Mom called from the bottom of the stairs. "Corinne, are you up yet?"

Corinne stretched her arms and sat up in bed. It was a Saturday morning, the one day her two brothers and three sisters slept in longer. In a big family, "the early bird gets the worm," even on Saturday mornings. If you wanted your favorite cereal for breakfast and a chance at the prize inside the box, you had to wake up when the birds started singing. Corinne's mom always went to the food store on Friday afternoons, and she knew it was her turn for her mom to buy her favorite cereal.



She scurried down the steps and sat next to her brother, Albert. Corinne pursed her lips, "P-P-P-Please ... p-p-pass the rice... p-p-p-puffs." Albert poured milk on his cereal then passed the box to her. Corinne picked up the box and out trickled a few rice puffs and cereal powder. If only she were able to get the words out before her brother poured his milk on top. Albert slid his cereal bowl across the table to his sister and settled for a toasted muffin. She felt it was going to be one of those "bad" days with her speech, since she didn't get a good night's sleep.

During conference week, Corinne's mom went to her kindergarten parent-teacher meeting. Back then, students visited the book fair while teachers spoke to their parents about their report cards. Corinne wanted to know what they were going to talk about, so she stood right outside the door and listened.



Mrs. Mabel asked, "Does Corinne talk much at home? We can hardly get her to say two words in the classroom or on the playground. I know she is a smart girl. She knows how to write all of her letters and even spell some words."

This surprised Corinne.

Her mother said, "She stammers when she speaks at home, and we have a speech teacher, Mrs. Taylor, who comes to the house once a week."

Now Corinne's secret was out. She did not want her teacher or her classmates to know she was a stutterer.

Mrs. Mabel thought that may have been the case by her



fear to speak in class. "That's wonderful that you have already started speech therapy with her. I give her time to

speak and respond in the classroom. I can tell when she is having trouble getting her words out. On those days, I try not to call on her and check on her written work instead. We have a wonderful speech pathologist here at school. If you could sign this paper, I could have Mrs. Brown test her."

Corinne's mom signed the forms, and Mrs. Mabel went over the rest of Corinne's grades. "I expect a lot from your daughter. The same as I would from any student," said Mrs. Mabel.

Corinne scurried down the hall to the book fair. She wondered, "What was a pathologist and why did she have to have this problem?"



The next morning, Corinne didn't want to go to school. She felt like pretending she was sick. In the middle of science, Mrs. Brown, the speech pathologist, came to Mrs. Mabel's classroom door and asked to see Corinne. The class was getting ready to make caterpillars with their thumbprints. Corinne didn't want to leave and miss out on her science project.

Mrs. Mabel stooped down and looked in Corinne's big, blue eyes. She whispered to her in a soft voice, "I'll make sure you have enough time later to make your caterpillar."



Mrs. Brown saw Corinne every Wednesday afternoon for speech therapy. Corinne never missed a science lesson, thanks to Mrs. Mabel. Her classmates did not know where she went when she left the room. They didn't need to know. Besides, Mrs. Brown was nice. She had Corinne speak into a tape recorder and helped her find out what letters were hard for her to say. She helped her with relaxing her face in a mirror and with her breathing.



Corinne learned how to speak slowly. "Ps" were no problem after kindergarten. She could even lead the class in *The Pledge of Allegiance* starting with "I pledge." Corinne was beginning to feel good about herself, but she was going to miss Mrs. Mabel next year when she would be a first grader.



In first grade, Corinne had a secret code with her teacher. A "thumbs up" in the morning meant that she was having a great day. A "thumbs down" meant "Please don't call on me. Short answers are better today." Mrs. Brown met with her on Thursdays and helped her talk slowly with "turtle talk." She learned talking tools like stretching her words and pausing in the middle of long sentences. Words flew off her tongue more easily when she had to read aloud in her small reading group.



In music class she sang her heart out without a stumble. Many times, Mrs. Mabel would pop her head in the door and give her the a-ok sign. Corinne was making good progress.



One day in second grade during lunch, Mrs. Mabel was standing behind Corinne in the cafeteria line. They were serving hamburgers, and Corinne really wanted one for lunch. The lunch lady serving food asked Corinne, "What would you like, honey?" Corinne clutched her tray and breathed heavily, "A h-h-h-h-ham, h-h-h-h-ham..." She just could not get it out.

Lucy, the girl next in line, put her hand on her hip and demanded, "Will you get it out? I'm hungry."



Corinne pursed her lips and blurted, "Burger, please!" Tears welled up in her eyes. She felt herself get hot inside from being embarrassed. She just wanted to disappear. Mrs. Mabel marched Lucy to one of the lunch ladies and had Lucy explain to her what just happened. That day, Lucy sat by herself at the time-out table for lunch.



Mrs. Mabel followed Corinne to the ketchup table and asked her to join her for lunch in her classroom. She asked Corinne about school and how she was doing. Her calm, soft voice put Corinne at ease. Mrs. Mabel listened carefully to what Corinne had to say. Corinne shared that her parents were going through a divorce. Now she stuttered more than ever. Everything seemed to be taking a turn for the worse. She just couldn't get her words out.

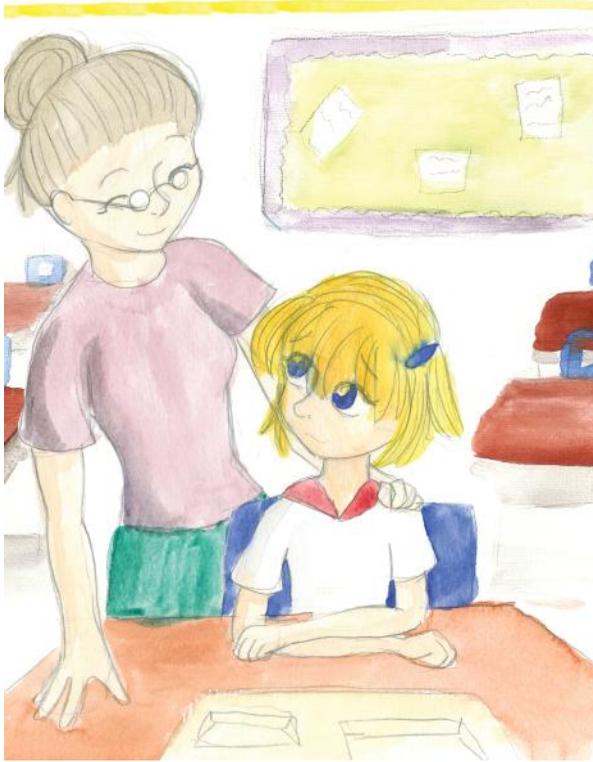
Then Mrs. Mabel said, "You know Corinne, many famous people had a problem with speaking like you do. I know you love to read. Did you know Lewis Carroll who wrote *Alice In Wonderland* also had a hard time speaking? He never let it stand in his way.



He wrote lots of books. There are many famous people who stuttered."

"L-Like who?" wondered Corinne as she took a bite from her burger.

"Like King George VI of England and Clara Barton who founded the Red Cross. You'll read about them when you get older. They never let their speech stand in their way, and neither should you. Your second grade teacher tells me that you write like you are painting a picture. Keep it up. I want to read what you are writing about in class."

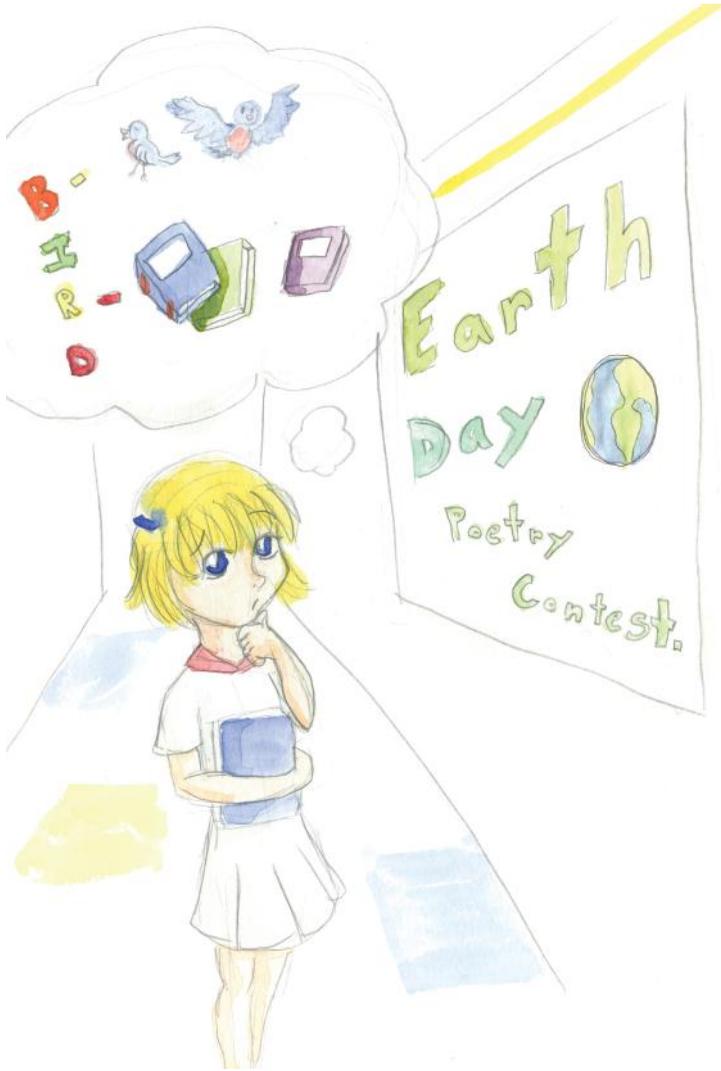


For some reason, her kindergarten teacher always had a way of making her feel calm and free to speak. Mrs. Mabel continued, "Mrs. Brown says you are doing so well in speech. Just let any nonsense you hear from other kids roll off like water on a duck's back. Let it go. Say to them, 'My brain just works faster than my mouth can go' or tell an adult if you are being teased when you can't handle it yourself."

Mrs. Mabel patted her on her shoulder, "Remember, you can talk to me, our counselor, Ms. Jacobs, or any teacher about problems at school or at home."



In third grade, Corinne was allowed to visit Mrs. Mabel's kindergarten room once a week during their same lunchtime. Sometimes they sat on the benches in the bird garden where students went as a class reward for lunch or for pair reading. Together they would read aloud Corinne's writing. Then, Mrs. Mabel helped her through any words she blocked or stumbled on in her speech. Words began to flow from her tongue as she read her animal stories and nature poems, something she learned to love in kindergarten. Then Mrs. Mabel would clap, "Bravo!" and put a gold star on her paper.



In fourth grade, her teacher announced a school-wide "Earth Day Poetry Contest." Corinne decided to write an acrostic poem about their school's bird garden. Each letter for "Bird Garden" would tell about something you could find or do in the bird garden.



A week before Earth Day, the grade level winners of the poetry contest were announced during the morning news at school. Corinne was the fourth grade winner. Each winner was going to be reading aloud their winning poem on Earth Day. Corinne wanted to read her poem aloud. After all, she had won the contest. She knew it was her best writing ever. She practiced with Mrs. Brown a few times the week before Earth Day.

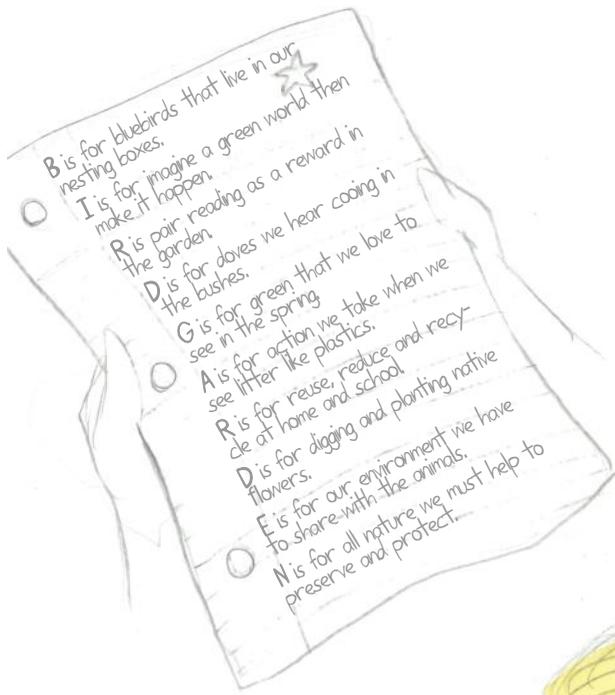


She practiced at home in front of a mirror. Then she had lunch with Mrs. Mabel in the bird garden and read it perfectly with lots of expression, too.



"Excellent! I knew you could do it! You'll do just fine," Mrs. Mabel cheered.

On the morning of Earth Day, Corinne's mother drove her to school and stayed for morning announcements.



Corinne unpacked her book bag and went right to the office to recite her poem over the loud speaker. Corinne wanted her mother to wait in the classroom. All grade level winners read aloud their poems.



Finally, it was Corinne's turn. Every "P" was perfect, and every "H" was heavenly.

Corinne walked proudly down the hall. Mrs. Mabel stood by her kindergarten classroom door. She stopped Corinne in the hall and gave her a hug. "I knew you could do it! I am so proud of you!"



As Corinne entered her classroom, everyone cheered ...even Lucy. Mrs. Mabel presented a writing award to Corinne in front of the class. She said, "Each one of you has different skills and talents. Today we celebrate Corinne's talent of writing. She has a special way with words." The class clapped loudly. Her mother beamed from the back of the room.



Corinne went back to her seat and placed her award in her take-home folder. She saw a note on her desk and unfolded it.



The note said,

Will you help me edit my next story?

Your friend,

Lucy



Corinne looked over at Lucy and smiled. Lucy smiled back.

□

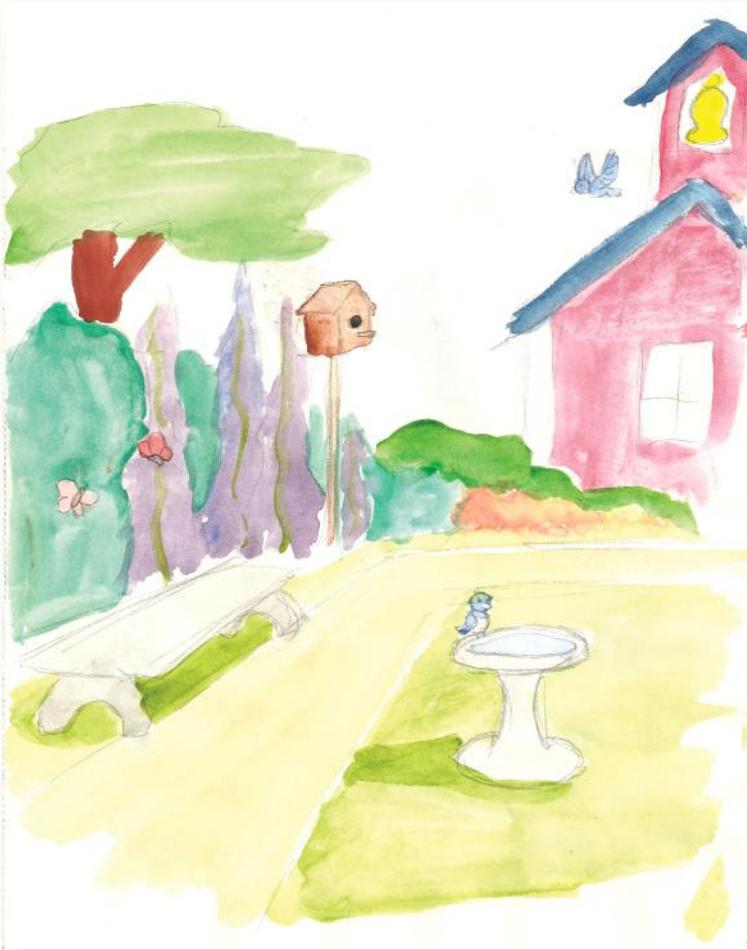
*I saw Mrs. Mabel twenty years ago when I was at a book signing in my hometown. A slender, older lady slowly shuffled up to me with a cane in her*



left hand and a tote bag on her right shoulder. Her silver hair was up in a bun just like she always wore it at school. She knew exactly who I was, and I knew who she was as soon as I saw her. I stood up as she walked toward me.

She took out a copy of my latest children's book from her bag, the one I dedicated to her, and asked me to sign it. I touched her soft hand on top of her cane and said, "Oh, Mrs. Mabel, I have thought about you with every book I write. I give book talks now ...and I teach second grade."

I hugged her close to me and kissed her soft cheek. Then I said, "Thank you, Mrs. Mabel. You are the teacher who made a difference."





If you believe this book has helped or  
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**About the Author:** Corinne M. Litzenberg is a native eastern shore Marylander. Dr. Litzenberg earned her Bachelor of Science from The University of Delaware and her Masters of Education at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland. Corinne earned her Doctorate of Education from Wilmington University, Wilmington, Delaware, where the dissertation was a study on local environmental education. This dissertation helped her school, Elk Neck Elementary, become the first K-5 Maryland Green School in Cecil County. Dr. Litzenberg has taught second and third grade in Cecil County Public Schools for twenty-eight years.



*Corinne M. Litzenberg (right) with her third grade teacher Mrs. Mabel Cassidy.*

Dr. Litzenberg has published a series of four historical fiction books for children on the Chesapeake Bay, *Flocktales from the Flats*. She is also the author of *The Sand Lady: A Cape May Tale*, *The Sand Lady: An Old Ocean City, Maryland Tale*, and *Grandpa's Basement* available through Schiffer Publishing. She enjoys giving book talks to children and adults on the writing process and environmental conservation. All of her children's books focus on teaching children environmental practices through character activism.

Collaborating with the illustrator, Amy Dech, and The Stuttering Foundation on this writing project was a great opportunity and a natural progression for Corinne to share her personal story and her passion for writing another environmental-themed book. She hopes her story will help all children understand this speech impediment and the challenges young children experience at school, especially with their peers. For Corinne, there was a teacher who made a difference. Her name was Mrs. Mabel Jeannette Cassidy, her third grade teacher, who was a much-loved teacher to many students in Elkton, Maryland. For more information on the author visit her website at [corinnelitzenberg.com](http://corinnelitzenberg.com).

**About the illustrator:** Amy L. Dech was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia. At a young age it was clear Amy would express her creativity and unique



*Amy L. Dech*

learning style through her art. She continually explores all art mediums, but hand-drawn illustrations are her passion. Her talent has been recognized and encouraged by many teachers along the way, as well as by her family. She has been recruited by school staff to design illustrations for their organizations, and in this manner became acquainted with the author, Corinne Litzenberg. With the publication of this book, Amy has taken a remarkable step toward her dream of writing and illustrating her own children's stories of individuality and self-confidence.

Amy lives with her family in Maryland and is currently enrolled as an art student at Cecil College.

# Myths about stuttering

**Myth:** People who stutter are not smart.

**Reality:** There is no link whatsoever between stuttering and intelligence.

**Myth:** Nervousness causes stuttering.

**Reality:** Nervousness does not cause stuttering. Nor should we assume that people who stutter are prone to be nervous, fearful, anxious, or shy. They have the same full range of personality traits as those who do not stutter.



**Myth:** Stuttering can be “caught” through imitation or by hearing another person stutter.

**Reality:** You can’t “catch” stuttering. No one knows the exact causes of stuttering, but recent research indicates that family history (genetics), neuromuscular development, and the child’s environment, including family dynamics, all play a role in the onset of stuttering.

**Myth:** It helps to tell a person to “take a deep breath before talking,” or “think about what you want to say first.”

**Reality:** This advice only makes a person more self-conscious, making the stuttering worse. More helpful responses include listening patiently and modeling slow and clear speech yourself.

**Myth:** Stress causes stuttering.

**Reality:** As mentioned above, many complex factors are involved. Stress is not the cause, but it certainly can aggravate stuttering.

*These myth busters are from the flyer Myths About Stuttering, which can be downloaded at [www.StutteringHelp.org](http://www.StutteringHelp.org), click on Resources.*





A week before Earth Day, the school-wide poetry contest winners were announced at Corinne's school. Each grade level winner was going to read their poem aloud to the entire school. Corinne's poem won! Her teachers always said that she paints a picture when she writes with words. But, now she would have to read her poem aloud. How Corinne wanted to share her poem. Find out how she was able to overcome some of the challenges of stuttering with help from a special teacher who made a difference.



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