The colored cushions are trounced on the classroom floor once a day. Sometime between math and science, when attention spans wane and rambunctious voices cannot be silenced, the mats are summoned

"Gather your sit-upons for story time!" my teacher, Mrs. Gilbert, sings. Story time --when our concrete floor is adorned with carpeted squares, small islands on which fourth grade bodies nestle. Mrs. Gilbert climbs comfortably atop her desk, crosses her legs elegantly, and waits patiently. I study her movements carefully, anticipating the arrival of the first sentence.

My classmates jostle for last row positions, hidden arenas for clandestine sessions of hair braiding and thumb wrestling. They will miss the best part of the show, I think, as I flip my favorite blue sit-upon into the front row. They laugh and call me a "brown noser" or an "apple polisher." I try to ignore them. Besides, from here I can catch the subtlety of her raised brow, or gather hints from a winked eye. I see her concentration as she raises or lowers her voice --sometimes down to a whisper--breathing life into the words.

Mrs. Gilbert reads about kids like me. Some are misfits, like *Freak The Mighty*, while others are teenage heroes, like the Little Rock Nine. One book sent me to China where a young girl challenged her family customs. Another showed me the terror of the concentration camps. In each book, individuality is honored and children are valued. My thoughts are interrupted when Mrs. Gilbert's perfectly manicured finger is raised and pointed at the last row of talkative resisters; she puts them in place and continues.

Regardless of the subject, my teacher's presentation is flawless. I look up at her with admiration, and secretly thank her. I thank her for the freedom to travel out of my loathsome fourth grade body and mind into any space or time, simply by opening a book. I dream about teaching, being beautiful, sophisticated and smart. But most of all, I dream about confidently challenging the hair braiders and thumb wrestlers of the world.

AnnMarie Marranzini

.