

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
Dunklin County Library
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Several months ago, children around the world received *A Little Emotional* by Christopher Eliopoulos through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Its story is wonderfully simple, yet so deeply relatable for little ones discovering their feelings. When a young boy misplaces his favorite toy, he rides a rollercoaster of emotions as he searches for it. The book is thoughtfully crafted; as feelings escalate, the text grows physically larger right alongside the character illustrations. It captures so beautifully how fast emotions can swell, fade, and shape a child's world.

For the past two years, my sister has held what she calls "the best job in the world"—caring for her young grandson while his mother works. Their days filled with cuddles, playtime, and cozy storytelling have shaped him in immeasurable ways. Every month, his eyes light up when a new book arrives in the mail addressed directly to him. *A Little Emotional* quickly became a daily favorite. Shortly after they read it together, my sister and her grandson were having a porch picnic when he looked up and said, "Mimi, I'm happy!" It was a breathtaking moment of connection. Through the loving guidance of his family and the magic of that simple story, he had learned to recognize and name the joy inside his heart.

Dolly Parton started the Imagination Library in 1995 as a heartfelt tribute to her father, Robert Parton, who never had the chance to learn to read or write. Though he was a brilliant man, illiteracy made his life a struggle. Dolly wanted to honor him, and nothing brought him greater joy than hearing local children call his daughter "The Book Lady." Starting in her home county of Sevier, Tennessee, Dolly set out to ensure every child, regardless of family income, could experience the magic of owning their very own books. She wanted reading to feel like a cherished gift, not a chore. What began as a local labor of love has now grown into a global blessing.

As former UK Education Secretary Lucy Powell shared in *The Independent*: "Dolly Parton understood that a book can be much more than a story. It can be a child's first step into a world of imagination, discovery and possibility." Whether it is a parent sharing a quiet bedtime story, a teacher bringing a classroom to life, or a librarian introducing a child to their next grand adventure, reading connects us.

Celebrating three decades of delivering hope, the Imagination Library has now gifted over 300 million books to children worldwide. The impact is deeply personal: one little girl with a speech delay whispered her very first word, "orange," while holding her

favorite book from Dolly, while visually impaired children receive the gift of story through monthly Braille editions. Books teach our children language, but more importantly, they open windows to empathy, creativity, and love. So let a child catch you reading: pull them into your lap, wrap your arms around them, and share a story.