

For a long time, I believed I was broken.

When I was younger, words felt like enemies—twisting on the page, slipping through my fingers no matter how hard I tried to hold on. While other kids breezed through chapter books, I struggled to read picture books aloud. I started to think I wasn't smart, that something inside me wasn't wired the way it should be. My classmates called me slow. Teachers told me I needed to "try harder." So I did. I tried so hard I'd go home with headaches and stomach aches from holding in my tears during reading time. But no amount of effort seemed to matter. I still couldn't read like everyone else.

Years later, when I was finally diagnosed with dyslexia, I cried—not out of fear, but relief. I wasn't broken. My brain just worked differently. For the first time, someone looked at me and said, "There's nothing wrong with you." Those words changed my life.

My dyslexia became the most powerful teacher I've ever had.

It taught me resilience. I learned how to be creative in how I approached problems—reading with color overlays, listening to audiobooks, finding different paths to the same goal. It wasn't about catching up to others anymore; it was about understanding my own strengths. I found confidence in math and science, where I didn't feel the same weight of letters and reading. Numbers felt like puzzles I could solve, and labs gave me a chance to learn through doing rather than decoding. Slowly, I started to believe that maybe I wasn't just "bad at school"—maybe I was good at thinking differently.

It also taught me empathy. Struggling in silence made me aware of how many others do too. Once I started to succeed, I wanted to make sure other students like me didn't feel as alone as I once did. That's what led me to student leadership—first in small ways, like helping organize events at school, then in bigger ways, like serving as the Student Advisor to the Alaska State Board of Education. There, I advocated for stronger reading interventions and pushed for more support for students who learn differently. I knew what it was like to have potential buried under the weight of misunderstanding. I wanted to dig others out, too.

My experiences with dyslexia shaped the way I think about education, leadership, and community. I no longer see academic success as a straight line or a checklist. I see it as a story—one that's richer when we include everyone, especially those who've been told they don't belong. That's why I've worked hard to make school more inclusive in every space I'm in, whether it's by increasing representation in student government, leading my AISES chapter to the national stage, or advocating for educational equity in boardrooms.

My dyslexia isn't something I would wish on anyone, but I wouldn't trade it either. It has given me a unique lens through which I see the world—a world that doesn't always bend to meet people where they are, but one that can, if we try hard enough. It's why I want to study engineering: not just to build things, but to build systems, ideas, and tools that make the world more accessible. It's why I care about public policy: because who we choose to include—or exclude—has lasting consequences.

The most important influence on my direction in life hasn't been a single person or moment. It's been a quiet, ongoing struggle—one that started in elementary school with a little girl staring at a book, wondering why the words didn't make sense. That struggle turned into a strength, and that strength became a mission: to make sure no student ever feels broken for learning differently.