

# Why Stickers Are Powerful Magic

## The Argument for “Magical, Ephemeral Badges”

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**M**y sister runs half-marathons and marathons and will likely train for an ultra-marathon one day. (They might as well call it a *super-duper-whoop-de-doop-doop-you-could-never-do-this* marathon of the master overlords!)

When I asked her before her first big race if she was going to get one of those incredibly annoying “26.2” stickers and put it on her car, she answered something along the lines of, “A thousand and ten percent I will, and just watch me fill up my entire back window with them, you weakling.”

You should know that my sister, master overload marathon runner though she is, is also one of the kindest human beings I have ever known, a selfless mother and teacher with a usual humility not normally seen outside of Buddhist monks. Yet the marathon stickers make her, shall we say, crazy.

After working as a children’s librarian for a few years, I have seen this kind of sticker mania up close.

One of the delightful surprises, in fact, of working with children in libraries is what greedy, gloriously unrepentant bloodsuckers they are for stickers. You can see the same crazy desire for stickers manifesting in the never-ending, almost cult-ish fandom of Taylor Swift.

In my sister’s marathon-sticker case, and all of those other super-annoying, spandex-clad endorphin chasers collecting various numbers for their windshields, these are emblems of their achievements. It is a socially accepted brag, for sure, but also a genuine reminder of their hard work, a representation of their time and dedication to the running arts.



Tulsa City-County Library Children’s Associate Angela Martinez gives a sticker to her storytime regular Ryker.

For children, the meanings are not as direct, but the passion is as real.

At the branch library where I was formerly a youth librarian, we gave children stickers for their library visits during the Summer Reading Program, but also at the end of storytimes, when they get their first library card, and—my favorite—just because.

I’ll never forget giving Kena, 3 or 4 years old, his first sticker. I gave him the choice of putting it on his hand or his shirt, and after deep and thoughtful consideration, he pointed to his shirt. Once it was there, he kept saying, “Is for me? Is for ME???” and then, eyes bright, chest puffed out, looking up at his mother, “Look, Mama, look! Is for ME!”

Stickers are magical for kids for a few reasons. They are something new that changes the look of your shirt or hand; they are a jolt of surprising joy, a wink from the gods. They give kids a psychological boost the way a kicky new haircut or electric-blue heels give me—when I catch a sight of myself in the mirror, wow! Instant tingles.

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