

Power of literature

Literature



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How the Power of Literature Has Affected My Life - Value of Literature Alex Sidorov English 101 Alex Sidorov Thompson English 101 May 27, 2009 How the Power of Literature Has Affected My Life - Value of Literature If you asked me how much I valued literature a few months ago, I would have probably laughed it off and proclaimed it has no value because it does not affect me. What kind of value could literature possibly have? It is just books. Random characters dealing with their random problems. What could that possibly offer me except giving me something to kill time?

It was not until I began researching about the value of literature that I realized its vital contributions to my life and the lives of everyone around me. I found out no matter how often (or not so often) that you read, literature can and will still affect you in a way nothing else can. The value of literature to me can not only be found in what I have learned from reading, but how it has influenced my life. In this essay, I am going to talk about how literature has affected me, and in a small way determined who I am today, and how it has affected my views on certain subjects.

Various types of literature have taught me many interesting things about the world, cultures, and most importantly, myself. In addition, I will describe my history as a reader and my plan for reading in the future. Literature has somewhat sculpted me into the person I am today. I believe that children are very easily influenced, and as a child, I was exposed to literature almost every night. I began to read Goosebumps books when I was only five years old.

I think that habit has affected my personality because literature is about connecting with the characters on a more-than-personal level, and I feel like I can do that now to my friends better than most people can. I have a great sense of empathy that keeps me from doing anything to anyone that I would not like to do to myself. An English teacher named Tim Gillespie, who has studied the value of literature and written many articles about it, concludes: By its truthful portrayal of life's complex moral choices, literature draws us in, submerges us into a story, and summons our imaginative power to identify with characters.

Literature thus might be one antidote to the disease of disconnection that afflicts us. Assaulting someone, tagging a wall with spray paint, sexually harassing another, or yelling a racial slur all show incapacity to empathize, to imagine another's deepest responses, to consider the real consequences of actions on others. In the fractious world we inhabit, empathy is a much-needed skill, and literature is a form in which we can practice this skill (Gillespie 61). Assuming this is true, I attribute my empathy to my childhood reading.

And who knows what other characteristics and changes to my personality reading has brought me. This is an aspect of reading I think is extremely under rated, and I think it should be more publicly known. When I think about it, there must be a link between empathy and reading at a young age, as my friends who seem to completely lack empathy don't read at all and don't have the strong family values that would support reading, especially at a young age. Empathy is one of the most valuable things literature can offer its readers.

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Bill Clinton once said that children could not be expected to live a life they cannot imagine. Moreover, there is no better way to expand one's imagination than with reading. The books I enjoy reading involve the protagonist embarking on a long and unlikely journey, which would be impossible for me to experience for myself in real life. However, I feel like by reading about this adventure, in a sense I am experiencing it for myself. There's something about reading that makes it so involving, unlike movies or television where I can become distracted and miss parts of it.

Reading requires all of my senses to be focused on the literature, which I believe helps expand my imagination. An article in the magazine *World & I* states: " The study of great literature nurtures the learner's imaginative power... and this imaginative power restores us to our real selves... and enriches an inner self. Great literature helps revive what is most precious in our souls" (" The Enduring Value"). Literature is the key for a healthy imagination. Although literature has, some " hidden" powers like expanding your imagination and promoting empathy, it serves another obvious purpose, to teach.

Literature, fiction or non-fiction, usually has something to offer. A great example of this is *A Complicated Kindness*. Before reading this novel, I believed the typical stereotype of Mennonites: boring, religious people who shun themselves from the outside world because for some reason, they think their way of life is better than ours. This book taught me how wrong I was. I learned that many of the Mennonite teenagers go through the same troubles and experiences many average Canadian teens go through.

I discovered the author grew up as a Mennonite in Manitoba, and although it is by no means a factual memoir, I am still confident, much of the information about the culture and the people's behavior is accurate. Reading the book was much more enjoyable than I had anticipated because I was learning about a new culture and I could in some ways, relate to Nomi, at least much more than I thought I would. Literature was able to teach me about the behind-the-scenes Mennonite lifestyle that I don't think I could learn about anywhere else.

In an essay by Cynthia Ozick, she states that "the pulse and purpose of literature is to reject the blur of the "universal"; to distinguish one life from another; to illumine diversity; to light up the least grain of being, to show how it is concretely individual, in particularized from any other; to tell, in all the marvel of its singularity, the separate holiness of the least grain.

Literature is the recognition of the particular" (Ozick 248). This is saying that literature can help you learn by showing you the hardships and experiences of one person: usually the protagonist.

This is especially true with Nomi. Instead of seeing a news special about Mennonite villages helping out by building houses for one another and then living happily ever after, we "reject the blur of the universal" and "light up the least grain of being": Nomi. It was not until grade four or five that I found out how much you can learn from a piece of fiction. I read a book called *Under a War Torn*, which was the by far the longest book I had read up to that point. It was about a soldier named Henry Forester who found himself behind enemy lines in the World War II. Henry travels through France on a journey to return home, and through the process, I was exposed to all sorts

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of information about the war. Blitzkriegs, battles, attitudes, and tragedies were some of the important things I learned about which still stick with me today. Even during history class in tenth grade, many of the facts that were taught from the textbook I had already learned through literature. Only this is a special kind of literature called "historical literature. Patricia Crawford, a professor in the Instruction and Learning department of the University of Pittsburgh, writes about how "Scholars and practitioners in the field recognize the importance of learning history in ways that actively engage students in their learning. The inclusion of high-quality literature in general and historical fiction in particular, within the social studies curriculum provides a powerful means of facilitating this type of engagement "(Crawford). I can personally say through my own experiences that historical fiction is an extremely valuable tool that should be included in history curriculums.

I do not enjoy reading fact-heavy textbooks, and would much rather read a story that incorporates the information into the plot. This way I will be more absorbed by the writing, and it is more likely I will retain the information. That is why historical literature is so valuable to me. A few years ago, I read a book called *The Secret*. It had been featured on Oprah and claimed to possess an ancient secret. The secret is that if you wish for something... anything, you will somehow get it. To prove this it uses testimonies and interprets the Laws of Attraction.

It went as far as to say "What you think and what you feel and what actually manifests is ALWAYS a match - no exception" (Byrne 23). If you wish for a shiny new red bicycle, you will be rewarded with one. After hearing about so
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many people having success with this "secret", even though it made no sense scientifically, I decided to read it. In addition, the strange thing is, the more I read into it, the more believable it was. I began trying it out, and sure enough, sometimes it did seem to work. However, deep down I knew it had to be a coincidence. Therefore, I researched it on the internet and realized how completely bogus it was.

I realized that only literature has the power to make you believe the impossible. In addition, in a sense, it made the impossible true. I have seen countless interviews with people who swear by it with real stories about how it worked, yet, it is impossible, and I think deep down everybody knows that. This just goes to show the power of literature. I consider myself to have a very high level of common sense, so the fact that I even googled it baffles me. There are many other texts out there that have influenced me along with millions of others, one being TheDa Vinci Code.

That work of fiction brought down a wave of suspicion based on the Christian religion just because it was written as if it was a true story, and it used real locations and real historical evidence. This just goes to show that literature can influence people's beliefs beyond what should be possible. I feel that literature can help improve my life because it makes me a better learner. Reading and literature force you to make connections and relate things to and to always be thinking, which are skills that allow me to learn things easier.

Author Bruce Meyer wrote in one of his books *The Golden Thread: A Reader's Journey Through the Great Books*: "Here's the simple truth: nothing prepares us

better for reading than reading. Reading is a process not just of assimilating ideas but of learning the skills, the fundamental structures, and the repeated story line that make further reading a richer, more enjoyable and much more powerful experience" (Meyer 4). I feel like the more I read, the easier it is to read and the more inclined I am to read more. During high school, I will admit I fell into a reading slump. I barely read.

I was far too busy with football, wrestling, homework, work, and other distractions to be bothered to pick up a book. For the most part, the only books I have read have been in the four English classes I have taken. This may even be what turned me off reading... many of the books I have read in high school are more geared towards girls. The main character is usually a girl, and the conflicts and problems in the book usually do not interest me. However, no matter how busy I am, I think I will always be able to make time for reading. So what is the value of literature to me?

I do not think I can put a value on something that helped shape me into the good person I am today. Something that expands my imagination and helps me learn. Something that teaches me about different cultures, and times then those that I'm already familiar with. Something that can influence and persuade me to do great things. Literature is far too powerful to put any value on. And that's why I'll continue to read throughout my life; so I can continue to benefit from all of literature's power. Works Cited Byrne, Rhonda. *The Secret*. New York: Atria Books/Beyond Words, 2006.

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