

# Free learning to read essay sample

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Education has always been said to be the key to a healthy and prosperous life. I have had the opportunity to pursue both formal and informal education. In both forms, I have been able to draw not only practical guides on life and experience valuable for a career but also discern ethical and moral teachings that I now use as a guide to better citizenship and mental health. In this paper, I reflect on my education by reviewing and comparing it to Malcolm X's education as it is portrayed in the excerpt " Learning to Read" from his seminal work The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

A formal education is something that my parents and family always wanted me to get. They made it clear that without it, I would have to become one of the lucky few who make it in the world without a formal education. I could pursue other forms of career that needed no education but in the end, I have something to draw back to. For me and the people around me, it was critical that one gets a graduate degree so I started reading early. The problem is that I got interested in subjects and topics that were not considered part of the school curriculum. Like, Malcolm X, I became fascinated with different kinds of books even those written in foreign languages. It was fascinating to know that some people use a different kind of language for all purposes and they live normal lives. Then I was just young and curious with no awareness of issues that pertain to political concerns or how society should be structured. Unlike Malcolm X, my political consciousness was not developed at a later stage nor did it become a broad universal understanding of history. It came in increments with a fusion of both formal and informal education. Despite the rigidity and bureaucracy, the classroom has become a place where I come to experiment with what I could have learnt from outside. Most

people learn in class and go outside to try their new knowledge and ideas. I figured out that I mostly learn outside the classroom and bring those ideas to class to see if they resonate with other students or teachers. Malcolm X's self-learning involved a level of self-fulfilling prophecy; he went around fishing for books and an education that supported what he already knew and believed. He was already militant and aware of the racial divide in America and when he started reading he was looking for a better way of articulating his views on race. As he notes at the beginning of the excerpt that, " I not only wasn't articulate. I wasn't functional" (Malcolm X, 281). I on the other hand read new books despite the content and the world view the books depicted and think about what the books teach or say when I am in class and try to compare the world of my outside books and the world of the classroom. I find the two complimentary. Lacking the balance between formal and informal education creates either drones who just eat up what they are given in class or dangerous radicals who dismiss every class work and opt for their own form of home based education.

Malcolm X acknowledges that had he had formal education, his reading and understanding of the world would have turned out to be different. I agree with his assertion that having the freedom to choose what to read and what not to read is one of the advantages of an informal education. Malcolm X says, " In fact prison enabled me to study far more than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended college" (Malcom X 288). He has a point in that classroom work sometimes feels like a chore that has no bearing on the future. I know that had I not ventured into the world of reading by myself, my understanding of the world would be limited, my

religious beliefs would have followed those of my parents and goals would have been decided by any person of higher authority. Through pouring into literature especially short American fiction, I discovered the endless possibilities of thought and imagination. They would not have necessarily dictated it but I would not have had the means to know I can things differently.

Even though I have maintained a balance between formal and informal education, it is formal education that has defined most of the course of my life. I believe that is the reason why I do not have the kind of militancy that Malcolm X has. He had the freedom to rummage through texts that supported his world view. He did it without the idea of incentive in mind. On value, I think my formal education has been valuable only in terms of a creating a career path. My informal education however has been critical in shaping my moral and ethical standards. Without venturing into the unknown and reading books about the great economic transformation in China, the history of certain tribes in Africa and even classical literature my level of tolerance of groups that are different from me would be low. My informal education managed to yank me out of bigotry.

In conclusion, both formal and informal education has played a critical role in my life. Their value however differs. Formal education has provided the gateway to a decent career while informal education has aided in molding me to become a rounded individual with a better understanding of society and politics. If I had had an education like Malcolm X's, I would have turned out to a radical or activist of some shape or form. The preoccupation with test scores can destroy in kids what we see in Malcolm X which is passion. I

have passion but it is limited because I also have to work for grades not necessarily ideas.

## **Works Cited**

Malcolm X. " Learning to Read." 50 Essays: A Portable Anthology. Ed. Samuel Cohen. New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010. 281-290.