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## Literary Types: How Literature Helped Inspire Healing and Joy in my Classroom and Beyond, a Narrative

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**LITERARY TYPES:  
HOW LITERATURE HELPED INSPIRE HEALING AND JOY  
IN MY CLASSROOM AND BEYOND, A NARRATIVE**

**By**

**DONALD R. ANDERSON**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Department of Education**

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LITERARY TYPES: HOW LITERATURE HELPED INSPIRE HEALING AND JOY IN MY CLASSROOM AND BEYOND; A NARRATIVE, a Doctoral research project prepared by DONALD ANDERSON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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April 14, 2023

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## **Abstract**

This manuscript examines the role of bibliotherapy, specifically the utilization of literature in the form of books, to address and treat emotional and psychological distress. The document offers a concise historical overview of bibliotherapy, in addition to 29 chapters presenting contemporary accounts illustrating the successful application of bibliotherapy in the lives of both adolescents and adults. Extensive research supports the notion that bibliotherapy constitutes a rational and practical approach to assisting individuals of all ages, with a particular emphasis on adolescents, in overcoming emotional trauma and initiating the healing process. Specifically, a seminal study conducted in the Netherlands by Tijms, J., Stoop, M. A., & Polleck, J. N. (2018) serves as a foundation for the research presented in this manuscript. By incorporating brief narrative chapters containing practical applications, this dissertation aims to contextualize the principles derived from the research conducted in this field.

*Keywords:* bibliotherapy; cognitive; socio-emotional; empathy interview; narrative, trauma

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### **Dedication**

This text is dedicated to my wife and my students. My wife, who has been unrelentingly patient and helpful during this process, is my best friend and life partner. The text is also dedicated to my students who, over three decades, have put up with my eccentricities and have grown into kind, loving, and joyful adults.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would first like to acknowledge the kindness of my chair at George Fox University, Dr. Debra Espinor, who guided me through the last steps of my dissertation. She has been most helpful and gracious. Thank you! This dissertation started as a study to be conducted with small bibliotherapeutic groups at a high school in southern Oregon. Because of Covid-19, and with the permission of the George Fox University Education Department, the study could take on its current form. Thank you for your flexibility and thoughtfulness.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Although there has been a growing interest in the therapeutic potential of reading in recent years, it is surprising that there remains a significant gap in research regarding exploring the impact of bibliotherapy, specifically for adolescents and adults within an educational setting. Studies focusing on both the socio-emotional (affective) and the comprehensive (cognitive) domains for these age groups in a school context are indeed scarce, pointing to a need for further exploration in this area.

Most existing research on bibliotherapy has tended to approach the subject from a medical or psychological perspective rather than considering the educational implications and potential benefits for youth and adults (Tijms, Stoop & Polleck, 2018). This limited focus may need to overlook essential aspects of bibliotherapy's influence on students' overall well-being, personal growth, and academic success in an educational environment.

As a result, there is a pressing need for more studies to examine the effects of bibliotherapy for adolescents and adults within the context of education. Such research could provide valuable insights into how bibliotherapy can support emotional healing, enhance reading comprehension, and develop social-emotional competencies in a school setting. This would enable educators, parents, and mental health professionals to understand better and utilize the power of literature to promote the well-being and success of students throughout their academic journeys.

#### **Problem Statement**

Although leisure reading is currently at an all-time low in the United States, educational psychologists increasingly recognize and promote its numerous social, psychological, and

educational benefits (Ingram, 2018). Regrettably, the individuals who stand to gain the most from engaging in reading for pleasure—those in need of emotional healing—are often the ones who read the least.

This narrative study seeks to delve deeper into the multifaceted effects of bibliotherapy, explicitly examining how its affective and cognitive components contribute to the social-emotional development, reading skills, and literature appreciation of both adolescents and adults who require emotional healing. By exploring the experiences of these individuals and analyzing the impact of bibliotherapy on their lives, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the transformative potential of literature for personal growth and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, the goal is to shed light on the power of bibliotherapy as an effective means of addressing emotional challenges and fostering resilience, empathy, and understanding. By highlighting the connections between reading, social-emotional development, and literary appreciation, the study aims to contribute to a broader discourse on promoting leisure reading as a tool for emotional healing and personal development, particularly for those most in need.

### **Purpose of the Study**

I am writing a series of narratives about the effects of bibliotherapy on persons needing emotional healing because, through my decades of experience as a literature instructor, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of bibliotherapeutic reading on individuals' lives. By sharing these stories, I aim to demonstrate the impact of literature on reading proficiency and social-emotional awareness, providing educators, parents, and caregivers with real-life examples of the benefits of this therapeutic approach.

Furthermore, these narratives will serve as a valuable resource for educators and parents seeking to improve the education and social adaptability of emotionally disoriented adults and

youth. By showcasing the potential of bibliotherapy to foster personal growth, resilience, and understanding, these stories can provide guidance and inspiration for those looking to harness the healing power of literature in their own lives or those they care for. Ultimately, I aim to contribute to the growing body of bibliotherapy knowledge and support the continued development and implementation of effective bibliotherapeutic interventions in educational and therapeutic settings.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Bibliotherapy uses literature to help people manage emotional difficulties, mental illness, or dramatic life changes. It is also used to promote social growth and development, enhance the affective and cognitive domains of learning, and support a healthy personality. Bibliotherapy augments social-emotional well-being by allowing the readers to identify with the works' themes, characters, and plots (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2007). Simultaneously, as readers begin to appreciate the results being read, bibliotherapy positively affects the reading skills of those undergoing treatment.

The narratives in this text examine the effects of bibliotherapy on the reading skills and social-emotional well-being of youth and adults. Bibliotherapy has exciting potential in secondary and post-secondary education, but even though Bibliotherapeutic studies have been conducted successfully in Europe, they must be replicated in America. Tijms, Stoop, & Polleck (2018) go a long way to establishing the credibility of the idea that reading for healing is a foundation for a healthy emotional and intellectual life.

Despite the rise of bibliotherapy as a formal treatment for persons at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was looked at as a medical or psychological curative for persons with various disorders rather than for its educational value (Miller, 2018). With the significant rise in

urban authors and authors from African American and Hispanic backgrounds in the 1980s and later, more quality reading material became available to urban and minority persons. Authors like Walter Dean Meyers and Mildred Taylor were at the forefront of a massive rise in fiction with urban minority youth as its protagonists. This greatly incentivized schools to expand their reading programs (Powell-Brown, 2004). Still, unfortunately, many did not, mainly because the teachers needed to be better acquainted with the reading material that most appealed to their students.

I am writing about the effects of bibliotherapy on the social-emotional health and the academic progress of adults and teenagers to find out how the characteristics of reading both with a group and individually can help people overcome their circumstances. I am exploring the healing effects of reading with various persons to guide educators and other professionals who work with persons needing emotional healing to understand reading as an efficacious tool in their daily lives. This narrative is grounded in the work of Tijms, Stoop & Polleck (2018), who set a high watermark in their quantitative study of the effect of bibliotherapeutic book clubs on inner-city youth in The Netherlands.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) How does bibliotherapeutic reading in a social context increase youth and adults' reading appreciation and social-emotional awareness?
- 2) What narratives come from bibliotherapy that is described through the experiences of emotionally fragile readers of all ages through their understanding and appreciation of literature?

### **Narrative Research Design**

#### **Background**

Existing research into bibliotherapy, such as that by Tijms, Stoop, and Polleck (2018), has been instrumental in underscoring the importance of social reading in the cultural context of the inner city, at-risk persons. Their work has been pivotal in understanding how shared reading experiences foster community, belonging, and empathy among individuals struggling with various challenges. In addition, these studies highlight the potential of bibliotherapy to bridge cultural and socioeconomic gaps, fostering inclusivity and understanding among diverse populations.

Tijms et al. (2018) and most other current studies in bibliotherapy have focused on homework comprehension scores and social-emotional competency evaluations of people. By examining these measurable outcomes, researchers have established connections between bibliotherapy interventions and cognitive and emotional improvement. These findings are crucial in providing evidence-based support for using bibliotherapy to promote reading skills, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

The experimental designs of these studies have gone a long way to prove the efficacy of bibliotherapy, both to promote reading skills and to improve the sociological and psychological lives of emotionally disoriented persons. By employing rigorous methodologies and carefully controlled conditions, researchers have isolated the specific benefits of bibliotherapy, lending credibility and validity to the field. This evidence base is essential for guiding the development of future bibliotherapy interventions and ensuring that they are well-targeted, effective, and appropriate for the diverse populations they serve. As a result, these studies contribute significantly to the growing body of knowledge on the transformative power of literature in promoting emotional healing, personal growth, and social connectedness.

This narrative acknowledges the importance of the experimental research of its forebears but seeks to take it further by writing a series of reports of the readers themselves. Currently, there needs to be more *qualitative* research in bibliotherapy. The reasons for this are several. First, most teachers or other educators who interact with youth need to be trained in bibliotherapy, which has traditionally been placed within the science of psychology, hence the need for more interest in traditional educators to conduct social science research into the topic. Second, there are a great many *quantitative* reading comprehension assessments available to the researcher, and it is easy to find ways to "test" subjects to obtain a numerical score. This is also true with the socio-emotional competency analysis, as Herman and Collins (2018) demonstrate with their 24-competency rubrics for children and adults.

## **Purpose**

Within the body of research that addresses the student's narrative of their experiences with bibliotherapy, most have to do with individual persons under a psychologist's guidance (McNicol & Brewster, 2018). Little narrative research has been conducted on the effects of reading on children and adults who are under the direction or are sometimes not guided at all. The object of this work, however, is to address the need for a narrative in analyzing the effect of reading on children's and adults' reading and social-emotional skills.

In collecting the stories of the individual persons in this narrative, the purpose is to complement the research that Tjims and others have conducted; to create a report that will fit with data from other sources, such as observations and documents. The narrative analysis establishes a collaboration between the researcher and the subjects, giving identities to the issues and contextual details often lost in quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This narrative approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how bibliotherapy impacts the lives of children and adults beyond the confines of clinical settings. By exploring personal experiences and reflections, the researcher can gain insights into how reading influences individuals' emotional and cognitive development, as well as their social interactions and self-perception.

Moreover, including diverse narratives provides a more holistic view of bibliotherapy's potential benefits and challenges. Diverse narratives can help identify trends, patterns, and commonalities among the stories while illuminating the differences arising from individual circumstances, preferences, and backgrounds. This rich and diverse data can be invaluable in informing future bibliotherapy interventions, ensuring they are tailored to the specific needs of various populations.

This narrative research on the effects of reading on children and adults highlights the importance of exploring personal experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of bibliotherapy. By collecting and analyzing these individual stories, the researcher can complement existing research and contribute valuable insights to inform the development of more effective and inclusive bibliotherapy interventions. This approach underscores the potential of narrative research in advancing our understanding of the complex relationships between literature, emotional well-being, and personal growth.

### **Narrative Structure**

The initial role of the author in this narrative study is to act as a facilitator, observer, note-taker, and interviewer. Besides empathy interviews given to all the students and staff involved in the study, the author has also written narratives from notes taken over a 25-year career as a literature instructor. The interviews are used to determine the subjects' attitudes

toward reading. During the study, the researcher took notes of the conversations with the subjects and observed student responses and attitudes. The goal is for the author to construct a narrative arc or oral history for each person given an interview, creating a story of how reading affects a person's cognitive and affective life.

Towards the end of the interviews, the author constructed narrative chapters discussing significant elements of bibliotherapy and applications for the reader. These chapters form a chronology for the characters in the narrative and are used to interpret the value of reading as related by both the children and the adults (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In these narrative chapters, the author looks for and highlights turning points or specific transitions in the subjects' lives. One of the benefits of narrative research is its ability to extract themes from the stories of its subjects and analyze those themes for similarities, differences, and structures found within the narratives. Much like a traditional literary approach to analysis, the data gathered from the articles can apply to similar situations.

Unlike most other forms of research, narrative research allows the researcher to develop a relationship with the studied subjects. The author's job is to publish a draft of his narrative for his subjects to witness before producing the final report in book form. The participants are vested in discovering the study results as their stories comprise most of the data.

Narrative research, as demonstrated in this study, has the potential to provide a unique and holistic view of the subjects' experiences, exploring the deep connections between literature, personal growth, and emotional well-being. Using a narrative methodology, the author can delve into the participants' stories' nuances and better understand bibliotherapy's transformative power. Furthermore, the narrative approach allows the human element to be at the forefront of the research. As the author becomes more intimately involved with the subjects' stories, they can



provide a richer and more empathetic portrayal of the participants and their experiences. This leads to a deeper understanding of the impact of bibliotherapy and the importance of fostering a love for reading in children and adults.

The findings from this narrative study may also serve as a foundation for future research in bibliotherapy. By highlighting the profound effects that literature can have on individuals' lives, the study can inspire further exploration into the therapeutic potential of reading and its applications in various settings and populations.

The narrative research approach taken by the author in this study allows for a comprehensive and meaningful exploration of the role of bibliotherapy in the participants' lives. By weaving together, the stories of students, staff, and literature, the author creates a tapestry that showcases the power of reading in shaping emotional and cognitive development. This research contributes to our understanding of bibliotherapy and emphasizes the need for continued exploration and promotion of literature as a healing tool for all.

### **Pitfalls**

The author needed a strong understanding of psychological and educational concepts and a deep knowledge of reading, literature, and social-emotional learning to conduct this study. This required a thorough literature review and an ability to synthesize and apply the relevant findings. Additionally, the author needed excellent interpersonal skills to build relationships with the study participants and create a comfortable and safe environment for sharing personal experiences. The author had to balance various roles throughout the study, acting as a facilitator, observer, note-taker, and interviewer. The author conducted empathy interviews with all participants and wrote narratives based on notes taken over a 25-year career as a literature instructor. The goal was to construct a narrative arc or oral history for each participant, creating a story of how

reading affects a person's cognitive and affective life. This required a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and a sensitivity to their emotions and perspectives.

One of the challenges of this study was balancing the role of an objective researcher with that of a compassionate listener. The author aimed to create a collaborative relationship with the study participants, giving them a voice in the narrative and ensuring their identities and issues were contextualized within the broader findings. This required the author to be open-minded, empathetic, and willing to adapt the study design and approach based on the needs and experiences of the participants.

## **Research Population and Sampling Method**

### **Population and Participants**

School C is a high school with about 400 students and 75 adults. It is one of five different high schools in a city of 100,000. In this narrative case, the students attending the high school and the adults working at the school who are from urban and suburban homes heard about or worked there for various reasons. However, they had one commonality: they were all emotionally fragile individuals needing healing. The term "emotionally fragile" is a broad term, and some researchers and educators, such as Moore (2006), believe that the term can stigmatize certain persons. However, other terms such as "disoriented" or "at-risk" also carry some baggage, and emotionally fragile is still commonly used. For this narrative, "emotionally fragile" means that the students would likely not finish high school without additional support. The adults would have a difficult time in their jobs and personal lives. The reasons for being emotionally fragile may be behavioral, psychological, social, familial, and medical.

The twenty participants in this narrative all attended School C or worked there. They are between 14 and 43 years old and regularly attend class, teach, or have another job at the school.

All of them volunteered to be considered for this study. The persons in the narrative represented the diverse student body and staff population; ten women and ten men were in the group of twenty. The participants were 50% Hispanic and 50% white. Importantly, all the study participants were literate and read at least at a fifth-grade level.

### **Type of Sampling**

The most appropriate type of sampling for the population was determined to be homogeneous sampling, as each of the participants possessed similar characteristics that were essential to the study, namely that they were all youth or adults who had a difficult time being successful in a regular school environment, whether as a student or as an adult staff member. Following a survey at School C asking for volunteers, twenty participants and two alternates were purposefully selected based on

1. the commonality of their emotionally fragile status,
2. their willingness to participate,
3. their willingness to be interviewed, and
4. their ability to read at least at a fifth-grade level.

As this is a narrative research study, homogeneous sampling was appropriate for individual interviewing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants and the author participated in empathy interviews. In-depth interviews and observations by the author were used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the significance of social reading and bibliotherapy within the study group (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, Neville, 2014).

### **Instrumentation**

The best way to approach the ultimate question of the efficacy of bibliotherapy in the social and academic growth of emotionally fragile readers is to close the topic from a variety of

data points and, in so doing, use a variety of instruments to conclude. During interviews, the author acted as a participant and observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and it was important for the author to take field notes using the proper observational protocol. This meant selecting a site for interviews that would facilitate uninterrupted conversation and identifying the critical points to observe ahead of time. It even said that the author needed to do a pilot observation or two, but the frequency of the observations in this narrative (one per week for thirty-six weeks) meant that the first few comments could act as pilots. Any adjustments that needed to be made could be affected. The observational protocol also steered the author in the best way to guide notes with a participant in mind.

Secondly, the author needed to determine the best way to record the empathy interviews and documentation. Instrumentation included everything from recording equipment, a waiver signed by the parents of the students involved, the standardized form used to record observations and interviews, and the researcher himself. Test (documentation) instrumentation will include the Assessment of Knowledge Organization, gathered through proximity data (Davis & Guthrie, 2014) that measures reading comprehension, and the SSIS SEL Rating Form that measures social-emotional competency (Core SEL Competencies, 2019).

### **Sample Interview Protocol**

Time of Interview:

Place:

Date:

Interviewer:

Project Title:

Interviewee & Position:

1. How does reading together as a group make you feel?
2. How does reading fit into your life?
3. How has this book changed your attitude toward reading?
4. What would you change about your reading habits if you could?
5. What is your attitude toward the book you chose to read?

### **Data Collection**

#### **Triangulation**

To establish the accuracy of the study, the researcher will use the triangulation of data from observation (the observational data), data from individual interviews with participants (empathy interviews), and data from tests and field notes (documentation), including a research journal where he will record reflections and other observations (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, Neville, 2014). Combining the data from interviews, focus groups, and documents enhanced data richness and gave the researcher and the reader a more accurate picture of what was occurring with the participants.

#### **Interviews**

As a narrative study, the foundational form of data used is often the semi-structured interview and, in the case of this study, an empathy interview. Empathy interviews were structured to be less formal and more like a conversation (May 2018). They fit well with this narrative as participants are more likely to be relaxed and give accurate information when engaging in an open conversation with the author. Empathy interviews require special skills and,

if done appropriately, could give sufficient data. Done correctly, however, they can give insights that other types of interviews could have yielded.

The critical element of empathy interviews is to allow the person being interviewed to tell his or her story by asking neutral questions. With empathy interviews, pursuing tangential topics is also encouraged if the general trend of the discussion is following the research question. This way, a skilled interviewer (the author here) can discover data that might have yet to be considered.

Empathy interviewers also encouraged the participants to tell stories, and this strategy kept the participants from giving rote or generic responses to questions. By making it personal, stories also helped the researcher better understand how the participant's past and current experiences affected their perceptions. Along with the stories, the researcher also observed the participants for body language that indicated how they felt about a topic without needing to verbalize it. They may have been looking for facial expressions, eye contact, fidgeting, and crossed arms. Empathy interviews were not opposed to silence, and the interviewer allowed these times of personal reflection to extricate more critical data from the person being interviewed (May 2018).

In the current narrative, empathy interviews were conducted with each member of the bibliotherapy participants (the focus group) at least every six weeks. The interviews were conducted during school hours or after school over a week-long period so that students or adults did not have to miss class or work time, and so the interviews did not interfere with after-school activities.

The narrative length was one school year (approximately thirty-six weeks), with the possibility of re-upping the study for another semester with either the same or a different group

of participants. Determination for extending the study was made based on narrative data collected by the research. The author determined that four weeks was necessary to acclimate the participants to empathy interviews. The narrative data showed that the first phase warranted the participant's requests to continue the reading interviews for the whole school year. Extending the study would have meant more detailed narrative data and enhanced the ultimate reliability of the study, but the COVID-19 crisis got in the way of that possibility.

### **Observation**

The focus group was an accepted data point for this study, as the bibliotherapy participants were a natural focus group. Consisting of a group of twenty emotionally fragile students and adults from the same school but with diverse backgrounds, such a focus group gave a variety of perspectives and allowed for one idea to build on another so that a growing consensus, often something that the researcher never thought of, was uncovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The advantages of this focus group were that it was flexible, allowed the researcher to talk to the group directly, and fit well with a school setting as both adults and students are already used to such groups.

A skilled moderator avoided the pitfalls of a focus group, but it took more than one attempt for the group to settle into a comfortable norm. Sometimes group members did not feel comfortable interacting with other members. Sometimes group members became distracted by outside influences or something happening within the group. Sometimes a group member or members wanted to talk about something unrelated to the subject of the interview (Devault, 2019). In these cases, the facilitator knew how to be flexible enough not to upset the participant while at the same time steering the conversation back to the topic at hand.

The participants in the focus group for this current study met weekly but only as part of the group, as that was practically impossible. They met in various settings, including a conference room at the school, individual classrooms, and coffee shops (in the case of adults), all quiet and comfortable places with minimal distractions. They discussed the book they had agreed to read with enough questions from the facilitator (researcher) to keep the conversation going if necessary. The author (researcher) was there as a facilitator but will try to remain a recorder and observer as much as possible.

### **Documents**

Besides the field notes taken during the focus groups and the empathy interviews, the researcher used other documentation (such as reading tests) as part of the narrative developed on each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The other documentation partially confirmed or denied the accuracy of the field notes. Still, it was important for the identity of the participants to be protected and their anonymity assured.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The primary form of research for this study will be narrative. Narrative Research focuses on the experiences of individuals and the construction of a chronology of stories as they pertain to the subject of the study. These stories form the data of narrative research. The subjects' stories are obtained through interviews with the subjects, and the discussion is the primary means of data collection (Kim, 2016). Each participant in this study has their own story about the issue of reading, and their growth (or lack thereof) during the study will become an essential part of their narrative. Their inclusion as part of the bibliotherapy story is part of the plot of the subject's lives that were examined by the author and analyzed for themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eventually, the researcher will restore and interpret the participants' pieces to find a more significant



meaning or conclusion (Brock, 2015). Notably, the author exercised the freedom to include some of his narratives of the healing power of reading in the general description of the study.

One of the primary attributes of narrative research is that it provides context to the research questions. By asking the individual participants, "And then what happened?" the researcher is recording not just numbers to put in an algorithm but is collaborating with the participant to construct a plot that will provide a variety of artifacts for analysis (Brock, 2015). These artifacts include summaries that the researcher takes during the interviews, observations (field notes) taken as both an active or passive observer, and documents the author obtains that fit with the narrative.

The narrative structure of the study was built around empathy interviews that occurred at least once a week for thirty-six weeks. These discussion sessions were contingent upon the participants 1) having read the book for that week and 2) being willing to participate in a discussion. Besides allowing the participant to choose reading material that was exciting enough to want to read, the author also demonstrated considerable skill as a facilitator (at least initially) to keep a discussion going. The relationship the researcher had formed with each participant was vital here.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis in narrative research involves a system that begins with good questioning techniques and ends with building themes and interpretations (Kim, 2016). The following was the standard procedure of data analysis for the current narrative (Kim, 2016):

1. Design and deliver questions.
2. Transcribe responses.
3. Code responses.

4. Find relations between codes.
5. Combine like codes into categories.
6. Find patterns in each category.
7. Build themes from observed patterns.
8. Interpret themes and form conclusions.

In a narrative design, the researcher participates in the interview and should develop questions with the participants' context and backgrounds in mind. While the above list suggests that interpretation results from the analysis, it would be more accurate to picture data analysis and interpretation as two tandem forces working together to form what Kim (2016) calls a narrative meaning.

Narratives were restored, analyzed for key themes, and placed into a logical order. This analysis method allowed the entire group narrative to break into definable aspects, including articles, characters, plots, and ideas that were reformed and presented as a complete text. The interpretation of each participant's narrative was written in a form available to each participant for editing. A draft copy of all the participants' narratives with interpretations will be made to the researcher's peer reviewers. After corrections, a copy was forwarded to the researcher's faculty chair.

Finding meaning and drawing conclusions from a narrative takes time, and most narrative research has few participants. Because meaning is not a simple statistic that can be enumerated but is part of the storyteller's memory and thought process, it is naturally subjective and challenging to grasp. In the current study, twenty participants, each interviewed at least four times during the study (Kim, 2016). Besides simple understanding and remembrance, the researcher looked at the subjects' perceptions and imagination.

## **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

### **Limitations**

The current study attempted to understand how bibliotherapy impacts the stories of the lives of its members: a group of twenty adults and teenagers. The scope of this study was the effect of therapeutic reading on students and adults who were emotionally fragile. These people are self-described as needing emotional healing, at least in the commonly defined educational terminology, and they struggle with coping in a typical 21st-century American educational landscape. This subset of students and adults was chosen for this study because the author believed they had a great deal to benefit from bibliotherapy because they were a convenient subset of participants at the high school where he taught and because it was possible to establish a long-term relationship with them.

As a narrative study, the chief limitations are the empathy interviews. Being all talk and text, they represented the whole story. Instead, if the researcher carefully wrote the questions, took field notes, and interviewed, only selectively and imperfectly revealed the narrative sought in the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There were at least four interviews per subject during the term of the study, each interview taking about 50 minutes. The interview's success was determined by the interviewer's skill in developing an unthreatening atmosphere for the interview and showing genuine interest in the participant's response. The attitude of the participants, their feelings (or lack of feelings) of security, subjective things going on in their lives, and the relationship they developed with the researcher were all factors that influenced how successful the interviews were.

Another limitation of this study was the reading ability of the participants. In some cases, only one or two books were completed within the study's timeframe, and in others that 8-10

books were completed. Participant interest, reading level, and attention were all unknown factors at the outset, factors that could influence the narrative path of the study.

### **Delimitations**

The reading material used by the participants in this study was a delimitation of what the study examined. Because the study surveyed reading for pleasure as a therapy, the books were not scholarly, classical, or canonical. Instead, they were primarily popular literature and young adult literature. The books were chosen by the participants, with the author only giving suggestions based on his knowledge of the participants, their backgrounds, and his knowledge of literature. It was essential to the study that the scope of the reading material remained within the student's interest and that the plots of the books involved characters with whom the participants could identify the characters identified. The books chosen were mostly fiction, but the study did not necessitate this if the books dealt with issues that pertained to the participants' lives. It was important for the participants' narratives that the books be short enough to complete in about a month and that each participant complete at least 3-4 books throughout the study.

Interview times were 50 minutes because period lengths at the school were 50 minutes. Having an interview that fits into one period is less disturbing to the flow of the school day for the participants, both students and adults.

The whole group size (the book club) was chosen to be 20 individuals because between 10 and 20 is considered the ideal size for a qualitative study (Kruger & Casey, 2014). It is small enough for each person to feel that they have a say in the outcome of the narrative but large enough that there will be a range of experiences within the group.

### **Validation: Credibility, Dependability, and Trustworthiness**

This study used multiple methods for collecting data on the research topic, or triangulation, to give validity to the research and establish its evaluative criteria. These interviews were coded and analyzed using the five Creswell and Poth (2018) standards. These included making sure the research questions were always the driving force behind the data collection; stipulating the researcher's presuppositions; establishing the study's inherent necessity; insisting on the ethical and private treatment of all communication with the participants and using at least two qualified coders to examine the narrative data. Besides the coded field notes the researcher takes during the empathy interviews, the interviews with participants will also establish a narrative arc for each student (Lombard, 2004). In addition, intercoder reliability will be ensured using the percent agreement and kappa statistic.

The key to the triangulation of data in this study was the addition of documentation taken from social-emotional competency and reading comprehension pre- and post-assessments given to the participants. This manuscript data added to the narrative data, confirming evidence to the study, and giving it greater credibility.

To enhance credibility, this study allowed the author to develop a prolonged engagement with each of the participants in the study. During the discussion time and the interviews, the importance of what was not said, but the body language, and the silence, gave much narrative data to the researcher, as did the verbal responses, which are documented through the researcher's field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The knowledge of this kind of language could only come through an established relationship, which the length of this study ensured.

Before the study's inception, the school district's superintendent, assistant superintendent, and the building principal agreed to act as peer reviewers to help with coding and review results

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the building housing the study, the researcher had several persons who will act as peer reviewers, identify strengths and weaknesses in the methods and data, and offer constructive criticism to the researcher. In addition, the researcher relied on colleagues during informal discussions to identify areas of improvement and for ideas to further the purpose of the study.

### **Ethical Issues in the Study**

Some of the study participants were minors, and everything in the study, from the design to the analysis, had to be based on this premise. Every aspect of the study was to have the consent of the participants, the participant's guardians, and the school district's consent. In essence, this study was treated like a class in a school. The researcher, acting like a professional teacher, followed all the school district and state guidelines for confidentiality and anonymity. Along with personal confidentiality, the participants also had to feel secure in knowing that the discussions generated by them and the notes taken by the author would not be used in any way outside the research study. No communications by the participants would be made to other teachers, staff, students, or administration. To protect the confidentiality of the students and adults, the following steps will be taken:

1. No one could participate in the study without the informed consent of their parents, themselves, and the school administration.
2. Data would be collected anonymously, and recognizable names or other identifiers would be removed from all documentation.
3. Only the researcher would have access to research data.
4. Anyone else using the data would be on a need-to-know and minimum-amount *necessary* principle.

5. Participants had a right to leave the study at any time without penalty.
6. The researcher had no authoritative role in the students' lives other than facilitating the bibliotherapy interviews.
7. The chief goal of the researcher was to protect the participants from harm by ensuring their privacy and confidentiality.
8. Standards for ethics were based upon those from the researcher's university, the school district, and the state department of education (Kim, 2016).

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

The Conflict-of-Interest Self-Assessment tool adopted by the University of California San Diego was used to measure the likelihood of conflict of interest in the study (Conflict of Interest, 2008). In the study under consideration, the probability of conflict of interest is near zero as there are no financial interests, no gifts, no grants to be awarded, or speaking or writing fees. There are no salary or professional bumps within the school system.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Chapter Two of this study provides a philosophical framework that establishes the theoretical foundation for the rest of the research. The chapter begins by discussing the transitional life period of adolescents, focusing on the role of narrative in shaping the lives of young adults. The author examines how narrative creates meaning and purpose in life, particularly during adolescence, a time of identity formation and emotional vulnerability. Additionally, the author explores the theoretical underpinnings of bibliotherapy, discussing its roots in narrative psychology, cognitive psychology, and other related fields.

In this chapter, the author delves into the literature surrounding the decline in reading comprehension and interest among secondary school students, examining socio-economic factors contributing to reading inequity, the lack of training for young teachers in reading appreciation, and the importance of reading enjoyment for quality of life. The author argues that bibliotherapy can play a significant role in improving the psycho-social well-being of young adults by providing them with the opportunity to explore their emotions and experiences through literature. The chapter concludes by discussing the advent of bibliotherapeutic book clubs, which can help students develop socially and academically while promoting a love of reading.

#### **Philosophical Framework: The Need for a Literate Healing Community**

Heath (2017) presents a compelling philosophical argument for the role of bibliotherapy in a literate and compassionate society. According to Heath, the advancement of civilization enables us to harness the power of stories in various aspects of life, including their capacity to facilitate psychological and emotional healing. As society progresses, our ability to utilize



literature as a therapeutic tool reflects our collective desire to care for and support one another, particularly in times of struggle and adversity.

Broadman-Bender (2015) and Holman, MacGillivray, Salem, & Tarbett (2019) explore the significance of bibliotherapy in addressing the needs of specific populations, such as grieving youth or those experiencing trauma and addiction. Broadman-Bender (2015) emphasizes the potential of bibliotherapy to help young people process grief and loss, providing a safe space to navigate complex emotions and develop coping mechanisms. Holman et al. (2019) examine the applicability of bibliotherapy as a framework for supporting youth grappling with the dual challenges of trauma and addiction, offering a structured and empathetic approach to healing.

Similarly, De Wet (2017) investigates the use of bibliotherapy to promote recovery in children who have experienced bullying. By engaging with literature that addresses this issue, young people can gain insight into their experiences, build resilience, and find a sense of empowerment. These studies collectively illustrate the versatility and effectiveness of bibliotherapy as a tool for addressing a wide range of emotional and psychological challenges faced by individuals across various age groups and circumstances.

Brewster and McNicol (2021) delve into the core principles of bibliotherapy, focusing on the importance of a person-centered approach to reading. They argue that the most effective bibliotherapy interventions prioritize the individual's needs and preferences while avoiding value judgments. This tailored approach ensures that bibliotherapy supports and empowers individuals facing mental or physical challenges, addressing their unique circumstances, and promoting personal growth.

The researchers emphasize the significance of volunteer-led bibliotherapy initiatives co-created by group participants. This collaborative model distinguishes itself from more

cognitively centered approaches by fostering a sense of agency and shared ownership among participants. By involving individuals in the decision-making process, bibliotherapy can be tailored to their needs and interests, resulting in a more authentic and engaging experience.

Brewster and McNicol (2021) advocate for a more inclusive and adaptive model of bibliotherapy that prioritizes the individual's voice and autonomy. By promoting a volunteer-led and co-created approach, bibliotherapy becomes a more dynamic and responsive form of support for those struggling with mental or physical problems. This person-centered methodology enhances bibliotherapy's therapeutic potential and fosters community and belonging among participants, contributing to a more holistic and effective intervention.

Rahmat, Muzaki, and Pernana (2021) discovered that bibliotherapy could be particularly beneficial during anxiety and uncertainty caused by events such as pandemics or other national or international crises. Reading is a powerful tool to alleviate the psychological pressures, economic stressors, and physical fears that arise from the apprehension and unease of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging with literature allows individuals to find solace, understanding, and a sense of control in the face of adversity.

The researchers identified five stages of bibliotherapy that contribute to its effectiveness during such challenging times: identification, selection, presentation, reading, and follow-up. The identification stage involves recognizing the specific needs and concerns of the individuals seeking support through bibliotherapy. The selection stage is choosing appropriate and relevant reading materials that address those concerns. The presentation stage involves introducing the selected materials to the reader in an engaging and accessible manner.

During the reading stage, individuals actively engage with the chosen materials, reflecting on their experiences and drawing connections between the stories and their personal

circumstances. Lastly, the follow-up stage ensures that readers can discuss their thoughts, feelings, and insights with a therapist or support group, facilitating the processing and internalization of the lessons learned through the bibliotherapy process. By following these five stages, bibliotherapy can serve as a valuable resource for coping with the emotional and psychological challenges brought about by crises such as pandemics (Rahmat, Muzaki, & Pernana, 2021).

Berns (2004) explores the healing qualities inherent in literature and the power of storytelling to create a safe space for students. Using group settings to share stories that resonate with students fosters a sense of community and belonging, allowing individuals to feel supported and understood. This shared experience facilitates emotional healing and encourages personal growth and the development of coping strategies. Hipple, Comer, and Boren (1997) delve into the specific qualities of adolescent literature that contribute to socio-emotional healing, shedding light on the factors that make stories particularly effective for this age group.

The prevailing philosophical belief in the current literature is that stories possess innate healing properties. This idea can be traced back to medieval Europe when scopos would recite tales like Beowulf around the fire in mead halls. Today, this concept is applied in the context of bibliotherapeutic groups for disoriented youth, providing them with psychological stability and grounding in their environment. Jones (1990) remarks on the continuity between the past and the present, emphasizing the enduring power of stories as a source of solace and healing for young people. Research on bibliotherapy is primarily characterized by qualitative studies that incorporate empathetic interviews, anecdotal accounts of successes and failures, and literature reviews on the subject. Detrixhe (2010) and Regan & Page (2008) exemplify this approach, employing interviews with students, teachers, and other professionals to gather data for their

investigations. These studies contribute valuable insights into the personal experiences and perspectives of those who have been directly impacted by bibliotherapy, deepening our understanding of its potential benefits and limitations.

Quantitative research also plays a vital role in understanding the impact of bibliotherapy on various aspects of student well-being and academic performance. Several key studies have demonstrated a connection between bibliotherapy and improvements in mental health, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed. Mendel, Harris, and Carson (2016) conducted a significant study that compiled data from clinical research on the psychological benefits experienced by at-risk children and adults who engaged with literature. This research underscores the potential of bibliotherapy to foster emotional well-being and resilience in vulnerable populations.

Schectman (2017) lends further credibility to the healing properties of bibliotherapy through quantitative analysis, demonstrating how carefully selected literature, read individually or in a controlled group setting, can alleviate anxiety, aggression, and depression in both adolescents and adults. This research highlights the importance of thoughtful curation and implementation of bibliotherapy interventions to maximize their therapeutic potential. By selecting literature that resonates with the target audience and fostering an environment conducive to emotional exploration and growth, bibliotherapy can be a powerful tool for promoting mental health and well-being.

These quantitative studies contribute valuable empirical evidence to the growing body of research on the efficacy of bibliotherapy. By demonstrating tangible improvements in student mental health and academic performance, these studies reinforce the notion that bibliotherapy can have a meaningful and lasting impact on individuals' lives. This quantitative evidence

complements qualitative research on the subject, painting a more comprehensive picture of bibliotherapy's potential benefits and applications in various settings and populations.

Stip, Oslundh, and Aziz (2020) highlight the potential of bibliotherapy as an effective method for healthcare professionals and educators to develop a systematic intervention tailored to individuals experiencing acute stress due to quarantine or confinement during pandemics or other health crises. In such circumstances, people often face unique challenges, including isolation, anxiety, and the social implications of being confined. Bibliotherapy can provide a structured and supportive framework to address these concerns, promoting emotional well-being and resilience in adversity.

The researchers emphasize the importance of verbalization during the bibliotherapy process, which enables individuals to identify and cope with their specific issues. Through active engagement with literature, individuals can express their thoughts and emotions, fostering a deeper understanding of their experiences and facilitating the development of effective coping strategies. Verbalization is a crucial component of bibliotherapy that encourages self-reflection, introspection, and personal growth, ultimately empowering individuals to navigate the challenges presented by quarantine and confinement.

Stip, Oslundh, and Aziz (2020) underscore the value of bibliotherapy as a tool for supporting individuals during times of crisis, particularly when conventional therapeutic interventions may be limited or inaccessible. By offering a flexible and adaptable approach to addressing the emotional and psychological needs of those affected by pandemics or other health crises, bibliotherapy can serve as a vital resource for healthcare workers and educators striving to provide meaningful support to their communities.

## **The Fleeting Period of Adolescence**

A significant portion of the literature on bibliotherapy's efficacy centers around adolescents. This age group undergoes considerable changes and often faces emotional, psychological, and social challenges, in addition to the physiological transformations accompanying the teenage years. De Vries, Brennan, Lankin, Morse, Rix, & Beck (2017) comment on the fragile nature of this stage in a young person's life, particularly within a school setting. According to the authors, most adolescents have experienced trauma, making them vulnerable to various risks. Furthermore, they suggest that many young people lack the coping mechanisms necessary to navigate severe tragedy or trauma, potentially leading to depression, anger, and even violence.

Jack and Ronan (2008) observe that while adults may typically seek outside help for issues they face, many adolescents are hesitant to do so, as they are still determining where to turn for assistance. This uncertainty often arises between relying on their guardians and seeking help independently. Ackerman, Scogin, McKendree-Smith & Lyman (1998) emphasize the potential of a meaningful connection with reading to help teenagers navigate depressive episodes. Similarly, Amer (1999) investigates the role of fiction in supporting children who are at risk due to circumstances beyond their control.

Lucas and Soares (2008) examine the progression of depression in an adolescent's life and explore the potential role of books in alleviating the anxiety that depression can trigger. Adolescents can find a safe and supportive space to process their emotions, develop coping strategies, and build resilience by engaging with literature through bibliotherapy. The research in this area underscores the importance of bibliotherapy as a valuable resource for young people navigating the complexities and challenges of their formative years.

A substantial portion of the literature that examines the impact of literature on adolescents' lives also addresses the influence of race and poverty in contributing to the disorientation experienced by many urban youths (Polleck, 2007). Socioeconomic factors and cultural backgrounds can exacerbate the challenges faced by adolescents, compounding the difficulties they encounter during this critical period of growth and development. It is crucial to consider these factors when exploring the potential benefits of bibliotherapy for young people in diverse contexts.

Additionally, sexual orientation, gender, nationality, and religion can significantly affect an adolescent's self-esteem and well-being, increasing the likelihood of experiencing depression, anxiety, or other psychological disorders. These aspects of identity can intersect with one another, creating unique challenges for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Bibliotherapy, when tailored to these youths' specific needs and experiences, can provide a valuable resource for emotional healing and personal growth (Polleck, 2007).

Recognizing these factors' role in shaping an adolescent's experience is essential for designing effective bibliotherapy interventions. By selecting culturally sensitive literature representative of diverse experiences, bibliotherapists can create a more inclusive and empathetic space for healing (Polleck, 2007). This approach can empower young people from various backgrounds, enabling them to navigate their challenges with resilience and confidence while fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Herman, Huang, and Reinke (2021) conducted a study examining the impact of bibliotherapy on school workers' stress levels, mental health, and anxiety. Their findings revealed that bibliotherapy positively affected the well-being of these professionals, helping them cope with stress and anxiety while improving their overall mental health. By engaging with

literature as a form of therapy, school workers found solace and support in navigating their struggles and emotional challenges.

However, it is worth noting that the positive effects of bibliotherapy on the mental health of school workers did not necessarily lead to improved outcomes within the classroom. The study suggests that while bibliotherapy can be a valuable tool for enhancing the emotional well-being of educators and other school personnel, additional strategies and interventions may be required to ensure that these personal benefits translate into a more supportive and effective learning environment for students. This highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex needs of both educators and students in the educational setting.

### **How Narrative Shapes Individuality**

During adolescence, young people's lives can often feel dull, painful, insipid, and anxiety-ridden. Even during relatively good times, they may experience a crippling ennui that makes coping with day-to-day stress from school and family difficult. As a result, many psychologists recognize the importance of literature, particularly fiction featuring relatable young protagonists, in promoting cognitive and emotional health in teenagers. Polleck (2007, 2010, 2011) has conducted various studies emphasizing the significance of narrative, especially for minority adolescents, as a tool for fostering understanding and connection.

Prater, Johnstun, Tina, & Johnstun (2006) primarily focused on students at risk of dropping out of school but found that if these individuals could discover a narrative they identified with or a book they enjoyed, they were more likely to be motivated to attend school the next day. The reasons for this increased motivation were diverse, ranging from wanting to share their reading experiences with others, finding encouragement in the resilience of characters



who overcame adversity, to understanding that life, much like a novel, is a story filled with ups and downs that must be navigated.

By engaging with literature that resonates with their experiences, adolescents can derive comfort, hope, and inspiration from the stories they read. This connection to narrative can provide a sense of belonging and the reassurance that they are not alone in facing life's challenges. Through exposure to diverse narratives, young people can develop a broader perspective and cultivate empathy, ultimately gaining the emotional strength to navigate their own unique stories and thrive amidst the complexities of adolescence.

Polleck (2007, p. 21) acknowledges that book clubs within educational settings should not be considered alternatives to individual or group therapy. However, the author also emphasizes that stories can help adolescents make meaning out of their lives, and bibliotherapeutic book clubs can play a significant role in a comprehensive approach to helping young people overcome emotional and psychological stress. The power of storytelling lies in its ability to connect with readers and provide them with a sense of understanding and belonging, which can be especially valuable for adolescents grappling with complex emotions and experiences.

Other authors are even more emphatic about the benefits of bibliotherapy. Heath (2018) and Montgomery and Maunders (2017) highlight the relatability of the narrative structure of fiction for young people, even those who may not have previously been inclined toward or enjoyed books. By engaging with stories that resonate with their experiences, adolescents can gain insight into their own lives, develop coping strategies, and better understand their emotions. This connection to narrative can serve as a valuable support system for young people navigating the challenges of adolescence.

Pierce (2015) discusses how the narrative structure of fiction can help entire families cope with the stresses that daily life presents, providing a shared experience and language to address their struggles. Vare and Norton (2004) focus on the unique challenges faced by gay and lesbian youth and the importance of finding narratives they can embrace. Through exposure to diverse stories that reflect their own experiences, young people can develop empathy, resilience, and a sense of belonging, ultimately contributing to their emotional and psychological well-being.

Ginns-Gruenberg and Bridgeman (2021) assert that the basis for honing therapeutic skills can be traced back to the rationale and history of both bibliotherapy and children's literature. By understanding the origins and evolution of these fields, practitioners can better appreciate the value of literature as a tool for healing and personal growth. The rich background of bibliotherapy and children's literature provides a solid foundation for developing effective therapeutic practices.

Ginns-Gruenberg and Bridgeman's (2021) writing delves into the numerous advantages of bibliotherapy, highlighting its role in enhancing communication, fostering emotional well-being, cultivating social connections, and building personal resilience. Bibliotherapy has the potential to positively impact children's lives, offering a unique approach to addressing various emotional and social challenges. By harnessing the power of storytelling, practitioners can create a supportive and nurturing environment for children to explore their feelings and develop coping strategies.

To maximize the benefits of bibliotherapy, the authors outline essential methods that encompass various aspects of its implementation. These techniques include the strategic positioning of books to encourage engagement, the captivating presentation and adaptation of

stories to resonate with children, and the active involvement of caregivers in the therapeutic process. By employing these core methods, practitioners can optimize bibliotherapy's effectiveness, ensuring that children's emotional and social development supports the transformative power of literature (Ginns-Gruenberg & Bridgeman, 2021).

A significant amount of research has been conducted in narrative psychology as it relates to adolescents, with notable contributions from scholars such as Klingbeil, McComas, Burns & Helman (2015), Heath (2017), and others. These researchers have explored the power of storytelling in shaping individuals' understanding of their experiences and emotions. In traditional narrative psychology, the focus lies on uncovering the personal stories of patients or clients to facilitate healing and personal growth.

In contrast, bibliotherapy employs a different approach, utilizing the narratives of books as a means of self-reflection and exploration. By engaging with the characters and plotlines of the literature, adolescents can gain insight into their own lives and develop strategies to address their socio-emotional issues (Jack & Ronan, 2008). This process allows young readers to make connections between their own experiences and those of the characters, fostering empathy, self-awareness, and problem-solving skills that can contribute to emotional healing and growth.

The integration of narrative psychology and bibliotherapy creates a powerful tool for addressing the challenges faced by adolescents. By incorporating personal stories and the narratives found within the literature, young people are provided diverse perspectives and experiences to draw from when navigating their emotional landscapes. This multifaceted approach to healing and self-discovery can empower adolescents to understand their emotions better, develop resilience, and ultimately cultivate a stronger sense of self and well-being.

Polleck (2007) warns, "I was careful not to assume the role of therapist..." when facilitating bibliotherapeutic book clubs. "Nonetheless, the guidelines that the narrative therapists offer provided me with useful techniques to create a safe environment for the [students] so that they would feel comfortable sharing their connections with the texts and each other" (p. 27).

### **Theoretical Framework: A Convergence of Disciplines**

Pehrsson and McMillen (2007) traced the roots of bibliotherapy back to ancient times, with Aristotle prescribing literature as a remedy for those suffering from anxiety or fear. However, the origins of bibliotherapy likely extend even further back in history. Throughout the centuries, bibliotherapy has taken on various forms and has been practiced by various professionals, including psychologists, counselors, librarians, teachers, medical doctors, and nurses. In its early stages, recipients of bibliotherapy were often patients in mental hospitals who were given religious texts to read to calm their nerves (Polleck, 2007).

The term "bibliotherapy" did not enter common usage until 1916, as reported in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Initially, bibliotherapy emerged as a fusion of library science and early psychology. During and after World War I, some hospital patients were provided with books to read to offer them a sense of calm and engage their minds (McKenna, Hevey & Martin, 2010). This practice served as an early example of the therapeutic benefits of literature, demonstrating the potential for reading to provide solace and mental engagement during difficult times.

Over time, bibliotherapy has evolved and expanded, encompassing a wide range of genres and applications. The field has grown to encompass religious texts, fiction, poetry, and other forms of literature. By engaging with diverse narratives, individuals can gain valuable insights, develop empathy, and find comfort and understanding in the experiences of others. Today, bibliotherapy is recognized as a powerful tool for promoting emotional healing, personal

growth, and overall well-being, offering a unique approach to addressing mental health challenges through the transformative power of storytelling.

Today, bibliotherapy predominantly falls within the realms of medical, psychological, and educational fields. Although it has been referred to by various names in the past, such as biopsychology, bibliocounseling, and liver therapy, the currently accepted terminology is "bibliotherapy" as a noun and "bibliotherapeutic" as an adjective to describe this cognitive treatment approach (Polleck, 2007).

During the early and mid-twentieth century, bibliotherapy for adults was widely accepted as a form of treatment, yet it still needed to be more adequately studied. When it came to children and adolescents, research on the topic was even more scarce. However, this began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, when bibliotherapy started to garner increased attention.

Randomized control trials and objective studies demonstrated its effectiveness, which caught the attention of school psychologists and counselors searching for solutions to various adolescent issues, ranging from depression to insomnia, addiction, and anger management (McKenna, Hevey & Martin, 2010).

As more research has been conducted, bibliotherapy has continued to gain recognition as a valuable therapeutic tool. Professionals in various disciplines have adopted it as part of their treatment toolkit, using literature to help individuals of all ages cope with a wide range of psychological and emotional challenges. This growth in interest has led to the development of more targeted and specialized bibliotherapy programs tailored to address the unique needs of different age groups and populations.

The expansion and increased acceptance of bibliotherapy have the potential to impact mental health care significantly. By offering an accessible, non-invasive, and relatable form of

therapy, bibliotherapy allows individuals to engage in self-exploration and personal growth through storytelling. As research in this area grows, bibliotherapy will likely become an even more integral part of the mental health landscape, providing valuable support and healing to those in need.

A current problem with bibliotherapy in educational circles is its need for clinical acceptance. For many educators, bibliotherapy is an academic term, not a psychological one, and it is viewed more as a reading program and not a psychological treatment (Polleck, 2007). This perception of bibliotherapy can limit its potential to address emotional and psychological challenges faced by students.

However, as bibliotherapy and bibliotherapeutic book clubs have gained more acceptance in scientific circles and have spread throughout the globe, it has risen from their reputation as a tool for enhancing one's emotional health to a bona fide psychological treatment. This shift in perception has allowed more educators and mental health professionals to recognize the value of using literature to address emotional and psychological issues in young people.

Essentially, bibliotherapy for adolescents gives at-risk or disoriented youth a narrative (a text) to engage with under the guidance of a trained therapist (Schneider, Peterson, Gathercoal, & Hamilton, 2013). Often a teacher, counselor, or other professional will act as a facilitator, and frequently the bibliotherapy is done within a group setting, as there is evidence that group discussion of a text aids in emotional growth (Detrixhe, 2010).

According to one of the foremost specialists in bibliotherapy, its primary purposes are to "provide information, to provide insight, to stimulate discussion about problems, to communicate new attitudes and values, to create awareness that others have similar problems, and to provide solutions to problems" (Pardeck, 1991, p. 106). By fulfilling these objectives, bibliotherapy can

be a powerful tool in fostering emotional well-being and resilience in adolescents, particularly those struggling with various challenges.

As bibliotherapy continues to evolve and gain more widespread acceptance, educators, mental health professionals, and other stakeholders must work together to develop further and refine approaches to implementing bibliotherapy. By doing so, they can ensure that this powerful therapeutic tool is accessible and effective in helping young people navigate the complexities of adolescence and achieve emotional and psychological well-being.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE NARRATIVE TEXTS**

#### **Forward**

The first draft of this text was typed on a manual typewriter, a Remington Model 5 typewriter to be exact, and many was the hour that my little typewriter could be heard down the halls of the college in the evening when I typed, a pencil tucked behind my ear to dash out any wayward words. Why a typewriter? Partly it is sentimental. I have always loved the staccato sound of the typewriter ever since my parents first bought me an Olympia SM9 for Christmas in the late 1970s. But typewriters, specifically manual typewriters, are healing in their way and fit well with the theme of this book. A manual typewriter inspires creativity and thought. One must occasionally pause with fingers perched in anticipation over the trembling keyboard. Then every word thought up by the human mind is permanently impressed on paper with black ink. Typing on a manual typewriter is deliberate, a little risky, but ultimately rewarding as each page is drawn out of the machine with flair and a zzzip from the platen.

As a teacher, I am amazed at the popularity of typewriters among my students. When I do a poetry unit, I bring several typewriters to school, and some of the student's best work is banged out slowly but honestly character by character on the old machines. Likewise, here I am cruising along at a modest 25 words a minute or so, trying to channel Tennessee Williams, who also favored a Remington Model 5 to type on. Typewriters also represent a world that was a little slower, more thoughtful, and considered than we currently occupy.

Of course, typewriters are not the best for editing, so the second and subsequent drafts were done on a computer. Computers are astounding, unique tools that we often take for granted. Not me. Dipping my toe back into the past with my old typewriter has also helped me appreciate the future. Thank goodness for spell-check, even if those little red squiggly lines bother me occasionally.



## INTRODUCTION

### Little Successes

Sophie is skipping down the hall to her junior English book club, her novel out and ready to read, her backpack jouncing up and down. I know it is Sophie; the whole classroom knows because she is talking brightly as she skips, and we can hear her a hundred feet away. “Don’t worry, Rachel, you’ll be all right. You’re going to be OK, darling,” she says, entering class. She is talking to the main character in the book the group is reading, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* by Heidi Durrow. Of course, Sophie is late—she nearly always is- but she is coming to the book club and is excited about the text she reads. Our whole book club is excited about this novel, except for maybe two boys, Alex, and Trystan, who had wanted to read *Lord of the Flies* but were voted down by the rest of the members. Still, they agreed to participate and are sticking with a novel I think they secretly like.

Sophie has found her place, and now the circle is complete. What had been idle chatter about the book now takes on a serious tone. The club is down to business. This is the part I love because I can just step back and let the students run their show as the student's teacher and the book club facilitator. The book club is their thing. They are the bosses, the workers, the actors, and the audience. I just sit back, take notes, and occasionally, just occasionally, adjudicate minor differences or answer questions.

“So, do you think that Rachel views herself as too much of an outsider to fit in her new community?” Alana asks. Alana is the *de facto* leader of the book club. Sometimes I think of her as a benevolent dictator, but I admire how she gets the group on task. Alana, who barely passed her classes before the book club, has found a niche in which she thrives. That the book club

positively affects her English grades is not so surprising, but her newfound spirit of learning is also helping her other grades rise.

“I think Rachel would be an outsider in any community she is in because of her race and looks.” This is from Noah, one of the quieter members of the club, but he has gotten into the character of Rachel, who is biracial, like he is, and beautiful and feels out of her element.

“I disagree,” says Naomi. “I think that Rachel is strong, and despite the tragedies that she’s had to live with, she can fit in anywhere.” I am taking notes furiously. This is starting to be good stuff. As the discussion ensues, Alana does a good job asking for responses from the twelve students. I only have to step in once when Lucy is too long-winded. “Let’s let someone else get in,” I suggest. She isn’t offended. She gives me the “Oh, OK” look, and the conversation passes on to others. The fifty minutes go by much too quickly. There are groans of disappointment when the bell rings for the next class. The students were in the middle of their discussion. I like those kinds of cries because it means the students are committed. They are into the literature.

Bibliotherapy is a big word, and I hesitate to use it because it can be intimidating. As a literature, science, and graphic design teacher for nearly three decades, I have used the concept of bibliotherapy with my students—if not the title—for many years. It has always been my goal to both spark the delight of reading in my students and to use reading as a means of helping students cope with all the difficulties that life throws their way. The junior English book club comprises students most educators consider disoriented by various tragedies. These misfortunes vary from family to legal issues and even personal health difficulties. Each student in the book club needs some extra English credit to graduate, so we set up a book club where all they had to do was show up, read the book, and be willing to discuss it in detail. They got to choose the book from a long list of vetted books. They could even have chosen a book off the list, as long as I

could read it and ensure it was age and reading-level appropriate. Also, I like to intimately know the books they are reading because I enjoy reading them and occasionally participating in the conversation too.

But it isn't just the disoriented, the disaffected youth that needs some bibliotherapy. Still, all students—and adults—can benefit from reading books with characters they can fall in love with, characters with which they identify, and characters that help them grow in empathy, understanding, and knowledge.

My journey as a reader started when I was five, sitting beside my grandfather on an old leather couch. While I had a panoply of kids' books, Grandpa introduced me to adult books by having me go and fetch one from one of the shelves and bring it to him. He would open the book and discuss the author with me, whether it was Herman Melville, Jane Austen, Ernest Hemingway, or Kate Chopin. We would talk about the book, and he would read me passages that would whet my interest. Of course, I wasn't ready for some of the tomes I dragged up on the couch at five, but I would read them all in time. One particular memory stands out. We had a long set of Ralph Waldo Emerson's that had been my great-grandfather's, and many of the books had never been read and still had their pages "uncut." My grandfather took out his pen knife and cut apart the pages, and we read with eyes on fresh pages what Emerson had to tell us.

But not all children have grandparents or even parents who can read with them, and often they become resistant readers, especially if they have had teachers who were not readers either. For example, consider what happened in one of my AP Literature classes. My students were into Chapter 9 of *Wuthering Heights*:

*It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now, so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our*

*souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning or frost from fire.'*

*Ere this speech ended, I became sensible of Heathcliff's presence. Having noticed a slight movement, I turned my head and saw him rise from the bench and steal out noiselessly. He had listened till he heard Catherine say it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed to listen to no further* (Bronte, 1847).

I could tell many of the students were not into it. Despite *Wuthering Heights* being a nearly perfect book for rebellious teenagers (so I thought) and doing my best to link it to their lives, I struggled to connect. Peddling this kind of book to readers who are already unwilling can be a moat that is hard to cross. Still, students need to become familiar with classic texts, as there is much that they can learn about life from them. Yes, Emily Bronte can be an important author for the current crop of young people, but there had to be a way to reach these students without having to force-feed a book to them chapter by chapter.

Most literature teachers I have worked with have their favorite books that they love to teach year by year. These canonical books range from Shakespeare to *The Outsiders*, *Toni Morrison*, J.K. Rowling, and Dickens—worthy books and authors. However, there must be a way to introduce these books to students without killing reading. How do we do it? Using reading as bibliotherapy allows students to choose what they want to read.

As individuals, we are shaped in part by the circumstances of our life, in part by those with whom we make contact, in part by our genetic makeup, and by the growth or learning we do throughout our lives. It is the latter that this book is primarily concerned with, for learning allows us to change ourselves, make new friends and meet new people, and create the circumstance in life that we most enjoy. And while we cannot change our genetic makeup,

learning will allow us to use our quirkiness to our advantage. However, learning itself is too large a topic for this book, so this book aims to narrow learning down to the peculiar habit of reading.

Even the most unread among us today reads more than the average person a hundred years ago, for today, words, those fascinating symbols that our minds decode into meaning, are put before our faces at a dizzying speed from the moment we wake up in the morning to the time our eyelids flicker for the last time in the day, and we sleep. Our eyes and our minds we inundated with words primarily from screens throughout the day, but there are plenty of other types of writing that we are subjected to as well. Even if someone doesn't read books or magazines, they decode thousands of words daily. Think of the difference in the number of words an average unread person from 1921 would be exposed to compared to someone from today. The only advertising, they would likely see would be in their newspaper or a flyer on the street, but that was it. If they didn't choose to read, they had very few words to decode daily. So, our modern non-reader is reading a lot, but they are not reading for transformation or joy, but rather for the information their screen brings them. For reading to change a person, it must be more than just information. However, it must be transformational.

## **Narrative 1**

### **Christine at College**

As a freshman in college, I had a friend who became an alcoholic at 18. She and I became friends because we were active in school clubs and had poetry classes together. One night Christine was taken to the emergency room after drinking two quarts of whisky. I didn't see her for several days when she was in intensive care, but when the hospital let me visit her, I told her about a special place I wanted her to see when she was released.

Two things saved Christine from alcoholism: nature and literature. Our college was in a rural part of Oregon, and when Christine got out of the hospital, we started taking walks almost every day in the hills behind the college. On the day of her release, I drove her to Ladd Lake near the college, where I had spotted some common loons a few days before. Though weak, she could walk to the lake's edge and look at the loons with me through my binoculars. She became a lifelong birder that day.

We found our nature walks a good time to slip a poetry book in our backpack, and at the climax of our journey, we would stop for a rest, a snack, a drink of water, and a poetry reading. These weren't long readings—usually only half an hour or so—but instrumental in Christine's healing. Gary Snyder was a favorite of ours, as were Mary Oliver and George Venn, who was also the professor of our poetry writing class. One poem that we especially liked was "Getting in the Wood" by Gary Snyder. Christine and I had grown up in rural areas (she on a gold mine, I on a ranch) where getting in wood was a ritual our families went through every year. We also really liked Mary Oliver's "At Black River" because the poem cascades down the page like a river, but the poem's subject lies submerged within the words, ready to pounce on prey. Christine and I

discovered new worlds in the poetry we read together next to streams and ponds or trailside after finding a friendly boulder to sit on.

Christine had a harsh upbringing, and alcohol is one way she coped with it. Her brush with the death of alcohol poisoning was an inflection in her life that allowed nature and literature in. Being able to share her feeling both through a deep discussion of literature and through writing her poems allowed her to overcome addiction. But both Christine and I found our core beliefs walking through the trees, discussing poetry around a campfire.

### **Application**

Reading poetry is a healing act because poetry has us look inward while celebrating the life within us and surrounding us. “I Celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belongs to me as good belongs to you” (Whitman, 1855). Poetry doesn’t have to be long or complicated. Some of the simplest poems are some of the most healing. Leonie Adams’s “Country Summer” always calms my spirit with, “Into the rooms flow meadow airs, / The warm farm baking smell’s blown around. / Inside and out, and sky and ground / Are much the same....” (Adams, 1954). I have found that poetry that nourishes my soul seeks me out; all I must do is open the book. Poetry books flood the shelves in my house, spilling over them like verbal waves. But healing with poetry can begin with one book. *The Voice That is Great Within Us* was my first poetry purchase as a college student. I still have the paperback on my shelf. It has gotten me through life’s trials and celebrations.

Find a place to hike near your home, where you can escape the tug of everyday life. Leave behind or turn off electronics that will distract you and hike until you get out of earshot of society. Pack along a book of poetry or essays, something you can read by the side of the trail. Then hike and observe the natural world around you. Let nature soak through you like an April

rain. At the apex of your hike, find a place to sit and read just one poem or essay, but read it with fresh eyes. Take a journal and pen or pencil to write down your thoughts. And if you can find a friend or friends who want to walk with you and discuss poetry and literature, that is good also. But often, to be alone with poetry is best.



## Narrative 2

### Emerson at Home

The basement of my home growing up was lined with shelves of books that my great-grandfather had owned. My parents weren't much interested in them, though I am glad they kept them, for they afforded me a world to explore on rainy days when it was too cold and wet to be excited about hiking on Fir Mountain. My great-grandfather's taste ranged from Zane Grey to Harold Bell Wright to Robert Louis Stevenson. What intrigued me most, though, was a set of twelve volumes of Ralph Waldo Emerson in pristine condition. At ten years old, much of Emerson was still out of reach for me, but often I would go down to the basement, grab a volume, and run back up the stairs to my Grandpa Howard. I would sit next to him while he read bits of Emerson to me, explaining the meaning of the words and sentences. The books were so new that many of the pages were uncut (as was sometimes the case in books from the 1800s), so we kept a sharp knife with us to cut open each page as we explored the books. The titles of Emerson's books intrigued me: *Nature*, *Representative Men*, *Society and Solitude*, *Natural History*, *Conduct of Life*, etc. During those sessions with my Grandpa Howard, the discussion of books became a significant part of my life.

"Be yourself; no base imitator of another, but your best self. There is something which you can do better than another. Listen to the inward voice and bravely obey that" (Emerson, 1844). Even as a child, I could understand what Emerson was getting at. Sometimes my grandpa's sonorous voice would put me to sleep, and I would wake up on the couch with the book still open on the coffee table and my Grandpa Howard talking with my parents in the dining room. He and I explored many other volumes, from adventure tales like *Treasure Island* to the poetry of William Blake, to historical romances like *Emma* and *Wuthering Heights*. But it

wasn't all serious literature. One soggy March morning, my Grandpa came over with a package about two inches thick. My fingers flew through the brown wrapping paper, and a slew of comic books spilled onto the carpet. My mother eyed Grandpa Howard suspiciously, but he smiled and helped me collect them. On the top of the pile was "100 Page Super Spectacular Superman" with Captain Triumph, The Atom, and TNT. The two of us pored over those comic books every bit as much as we did the more serious literature books.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, there was no internet, and a favorite refrain of my parents, whenever I had a question about a topic was, "Look it up." My parents had invested in a good set of encyclopedias, and with a family of seven, they were often spread throughout the house, so when someone needed the volume K, they would have to search for it. When I found the volume, I had often forgotten what I originally wanted to search for and simply got lost in the world of K for a few hours. "Kansas," "Kodiak," "Krypton." Every Saturday, one of my chores was to find all the encyclopedias and put them in proper order on the shelves, ready for the next week's use. It was a satisfying feeling seeing them perfectly lined up in alphabetical order. It wasn't long before the encyclopedias started disappearing into various house rooms.

We were also a home that believed in using dictionaries, and my parents did not want to volunteer information like definitions that could be found in Merriam-Webster's unabridged dictionary that had pride of place on its throne in the study. But there were several satellite dictionaries, mostly collegiate dictionaries of various sorts, and like the encyclopedias, these could be found in rooms throughout the house. A typical conversation with my mother might go like this:

"Mom, what does 'daytentay' (détente) mean?"

"You're pronouncing it incorrectly. It's 'daytawnt' honey."

“Well, what does détente mean?”

“Do you know how to spell it?”

“Yes, it is in my book.”

“You know where the dictionary is. Look it up.”

My mother wasn’t mean, but she knew it was better to teach me to be an independent reader than to give me the answer every time I asked. Sometimes I worry about that today when the answer to nearly everything can be had by Googling or asking Siri or Alexa. I’m no better than anyone else, though, and every day ask Siri for information that I should probably be looking up myself.

As a child, though, reading brought me through various triumphs and tragedies, and whether it was The Hardy Boys or Robert Frost, I knew that there was something in the books that I could identify with that would make me feel better.

### **Application**

I am struck by the fact that, while we will give food, socks, and blankets to homeless shelters and the homeless themselves, we rarely give them books. I am not naive enough to believe that a book can replace a good meal if a person is hungry. Still, the healing powers of literature should be a part of every shelter’s program, and sharing books should be a part of every literate person’s daily goal. The world needs more good books in the hands of people.

One of my wife’s jobs as a librarian is to get books into the hands of people at care centers in our area. Every week she packs books for people who cannot visit the library. The healing power is evident to them, just as it is to the discouraged teen who needs reassurance in a difficult time or an adult who is tired of the daily grind and wants inspiration.

As a teacher, one of the joys of my life is to share books with others—all kinds of books, from novels to biographies and poetry. I have grown quite fond of graphic novels in the last few

years and have a good supply of graphic and manga novels for students to read. I have always made it a point to give away books as prizes in my classroom and to lend books from my classroom library freely. I always told my students, “Pick a book, and leave a book if you can.”

Percy Shelley, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century English poet, once wrote, “A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its solitude with sweet sounds” (Shelly, 2002). The best aspect of reading is that the “sweet sounds” of the poet or the novelist sing to anyone who wants to listen to them. Make it a practice this week to share a poem, a book, or an article with another person. Start with your friends and family, but you may even dare to be bold and share a poem with someone you don’t know. It’s daring but energizing and gives us a connection to others that is often missing. In the back seat of my car, I keep a small stack of books that I give to people: students, coffee shop visitors, homeless, wait-staff, whomever really. Yesterday I gave a small book of poems by a new poet, James Morehead, called *Canvas*, to a woman with whom I had struck up a conversation at Starbucks. Literature is one of the most valuable commodities that we can share.

### **Narrative 3**

#### **Poetry on Mt. Hood**

I had invited my sophomore English class to a weekend of camping, poetry reading, and poetry writing on the side of Mt. Hood in Oregon. Sarah wanted to go, and so did Jaimie. Jesse said he would go, and so did Avery. Once Marisol decided to go, the rest of the class followed.

Early September beckoned. The days were still warm, even high on the mountain. The nights were crisp, but the students had toasty campfires, warm sleeping bags, and tents. We bivouacked high on the mountain at a camp called Tilly Jane next to Elliot Glacier.

Mr. Sikes, my principal, asked me if I was crazy when I told him I wanted to take the whole class up on the mountain, a four-hour bus ride from our school. The class had a reputation for being a little bit wild...OK, a lot wild...and unmanageable. Sikes, whose daughter was in the class, shook his head but reluctantly permitted me to drive the bus so he didn't have to pay for a bus driver all weekend. The kids grew excited. No one had ever taken them for an overnight trip as a class. However, they didn't understand that I had ulterior motives for the trip. I was determined that they would learn to like poetry and that, by Sunday afternoon, they would also express themselves through their poems.

The first night, I let the students get the kinks out from their long bus ride by racing around the camp and exploring the trails around the campground. Once their energy level burned from flare to candlelight level, I gathered the students around our central campfire, and we read poetry out loud. The students knew this was now "An English class," but they decided to participate if I didn't demand too much from them.

Robert Francis was the first poet I had put on the menu. His poem, “Cold,” was an appetizer for the weekend. Sitting on the side of Oregon’s highest mountain at night, they could identify with it.

*Cold and the colors of cold: mineral, shell,  
And burning blue. The sky is on fire with blue.  
And the wind keeps ringing, ringing the fire bell.*

*I am caught up in a chill as high.  
As creaking glaciers and powder-plumed peaks  
And the absolutes of interstellar sky.*

*Abstract, impersonal, metaphysical, pure,  
This dazzling art derides me. How should warm breath  
Dare to exist—exist, exult, endure?*

*Hums in my ear the old Ur-father of freeze  
And burn, that pre-post Christian Fellow before  
And after all myths and demonologies.*

*Under the glaring and sardonic sun,  
Behind the icicles and double glass  
I huddle, hoard, hold out, hold on, hold on*

(Francis, 1976).

The students read the poem, each taking a line. They liked the poem but had questions. (This was a good sign.) What does metaphysical mean? Whose warm breath was the author writing about? What is an Ur-father? Why does the poem have both freezing and burning? What is sardonic? We discussed these questions, and the students agreed that the poem is about a person who is alone for some reason and needs to hang onto their rope of life. They could identify with that sentiment. As young people, who had often been judged, sometimes ridiculed, pressured, discouraged, bored, and neglected, they also felt that despite the “icicles and double glass,” they had to huddle, hoard, hold out, and hold on.

The next day the students woke up to crystal skies and freezing temperatures. Predictably, no one wanted to get out of their sleeping bags—except to race to the primitive

restrooms on the site—but bacon, scrambled eggs, biscuits, and hot coffee got them up, bleary-eyed and yawning. Our next poetry bout was after they were all filled and warm again. We walked out on the rocky moraine, looking at the glacier's blue ice. We found a hollow in the moraine, out of the wind and basking in the morning sun. Before anything else, I had the students take out their journals and just write what they felt right then. There was laughter as comments like “still hungry” or “sleepy...I want to take a nap” made the rounds. But the students soon settled into writing in their journals. The fresh air awakened their creative senses, and they all wrote for five, ten, and fifteen without any prodding from me. Then, sharing—if they wanted to—and two or three did, but the rest held their feelings close to themselves.

Passing out the poetry books, I got a few eye rolls. What were we doing reading poetry on the side of a mountain? Some of the students would rather be boulder climbing and said so. I told them they could go boulder climbing after our morning reading. They were all right with that. What would be a good poem to start a new day? I decided to share with them “On the Pulse of the Morning” by Maya Angelou.

*Rock, A River, A Tree  
Hosts to species long since departed,  
Marked the mastodon,  
The dinosaur, who left dried tokens  
Of their sojourn here  
On our planet floor,  
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom  
It is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.  
But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,  
Come, you may stand upon my  
Back and face your distant destiny,  
But seek no haven in my shadow,  
I will give you no hiding place down here.  
You, created only a little lower than  
The angels, have crouched too long in  
The bruising darkness  
Have lain too long*

*Facedown in ignorance,  
Your mouths spilling words  
Armed for slaughter.  
The Rock cries out to us today,  
You may stand upon me,  
But do not hide your face*

(Angelou, 1983).

Monica thought this poem was a warning to human beings, and the rest of the class agreed. “I like how she said, ‘The rock cries out to us,’” she said. “What do you think that means?” I asked. There was a discussion, and the consensus was that the rocks and fossils were speaking to people to tell them something important. I brought up the subject of allusion and how Angelou showed her religious heritage by alluding to the Bible in her poem. “But I thought she was writing more about science,” said Jon. “Maybe it’s both,” chimed in Jaimie. “Maybe that’s the point,” said Chris. “Maybe she is juxtaposing religion and science.” “Maybe she is,” I said.

And so, that is how the weekend went. The students got time to play in a snowfield remnant from the previous spring. They got to walk through the stunted timberline forests, and they got to read more poetry, and they got to write poetry. Their poetry expressed their personalities, and most of it was dangling toes in the water to see how cold it was, but a few of the students challenged themselves or were inspired and wrote some lasting poetry. Sarah permitted me to publish her poem in the school’s literary magazine, and I give it here:

*Mountain Camp*

*Laughter through the tent walls didn’t outlast  
Headwaters of the Hood River  
That rushed past our camp  
Down canyon walls  
Through valleys  
To the sea*

*The scribble of pen on paper couldn’t be heard  
Over wind that buckled frail walls*



*Whistling in scraggy pines  
Keeping us all awake  
Scrunched down  
Cocooned*

*Crackle of the fire dwindled to nothing  
Like eventual thoughts of humans  
Now only the coals remain  
But they too dwindle  
Like all things  
Fall apart*

I asked Sarah if she meant to put the homage to Chinua Achebe in her poem, and she said no, but that I could think she did if I wanted to. I told her that she probably did, subconsciously, but that giving homage to another author is a form of flattery, and we had read Achebe's masterpiece the previous term.

### **Application**

The effect of nature and literature on people is unpredictable but almost always positive. Bringing both forces together with my "unruly" class brought joy to our class that lasted beyond that school year. Yes, there were some crazy moments and even disappointment, but those became part of the package of joy and growth that the weekend represented. John Muir once wrote, "Between every two pine trees, there is a door leading to a new way of life" (Muir, 1994). I take this as a truth, but I would also add, *In every poem is a truth to be found and a lesson to be learned.*

Train your eyes to look for joy in the nature that surrounds you. This can be in big things, such as a storm brewing on a midwestern horizon, or in little things, such as a warbler landing on a grass stem and making it sway back and forth. The other day I even found joy in a rat. Downtown in Portland, I passed an abandoned encampment when I noticed movement among the flotsam and jetsam of life at the edge of the street. Several rats scattered, but one remained,

and oddly, it was as interested in me as I was in it. It scurried out of its hiding hole in a cardboard box, then darted back in, only to come out again a few seconds later. Eventually, we got used to each other and just stared down. It made me smile and made me think of Robert Browning's rats in *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*:

*Rats!*

*They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,  
And bit the babies in the cradles,  
And eat the cheeses out of the vats,  
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,  
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
And even spoiled the women's chats  
By drowning their speaking  
With shrieking and squeaking  
In fifty different sharps and flats ...*

(Browning, 2008).

Though hated by humankind for thousands of years, this rat chose to communicate with me briefly, and however odd it may seem, its life and curiosity brought me joy. Now I understand that joy if looked for, can be found anywhere.

## **Narrative 4**

### **Shakespeare and the Park**

At first, the odor assaults you. “We are not camping here!” asserts Mitch. The other students concur. The air wafts with a sulfurous smell. “That is just the hot springs,” I tell the students optimistically. “You will get used to it right away. Let’s get the camping gear out.” I am not as hopeful as my words indicate. I have been here twenty years before with a college class and don’t remember the smell to be this strong. Of course, I was a fresh-faced college student attending a Shakespeare Camp with my girlfriend. Now I am a seasoned teacher, and life looks more realistic. Why do I have such fond memories of this place?

I have taken students to read and watch Shakespeare in almost every conceivable setting. We stayed in premium hotels and watched Shakespeare on Broadway. We stayed in low-budget motels and watched Shakespeare in the park. We have stayed in adorable bed and breakfasts and in yurts. We have four-wheeled to the theater from our backpacking camp in the Cascades. But the strangest way I have ever experienced Shakespeare with my students is at the Jackson Wellsprings campground in Ashland, Oregon.

Fortunately, the smell does fade over the half hour it takes to get our tents up and unloaded gear. Things are looking up. I have the students grab their edition of “Twelfth Night—the play we saw tonight. “Let’s go over and read by the pool,” I suggest. Moira is the first to fetch her dog-eared book from her backpack, and the rest of the students follow, eight in all. Next to the pool are picnic tables, and I drag two together endwise to form one long table. Moira and Sophie sit down, followed by Brandon, Cassy, Mitch, Bradley, and Cameron. Haven is the last to arrive at the table. None of these high school students had seen a Shakespearean play before, and now they were about to see four in three days.

“All right, there are just a few things I want to tell you about seeing these plays,” I tell them. “First, just have fun. Don’t worry about the language. You might find some of Shakespeare hard to understand on the stage, but you will be surprised at how much you understand. Relax and enjoy the play. Second, I want you to come away with some questions about the play that you would like answered. It’s good always to watch a play with a curious mindset....” Then I tell them some of the expectations I have of them, and by the time I finish, Moira points to her mouth, then to her stomach. “OK, I get it. Let’s go have dinner,” I say.

The first night I bought dinner for the crew at Martolli’s Pizza, located next to the theater. We all squeeze around a big table. The anticipation grows, and the students start to get wide-eyed with excitement. I have seen it before—many times. What is it about the Bard? How does he do it, over 400 years after he wrote down the words, and to students who have never even read a play of his...until this class? We practically inhale the pizza and are out the door and up the steps to watch the Green Show before the play. We mull about on “The Bricks” before the Elizabethan Theater. The excitement continues to build. At 7:30, the doors to the theater open. Blankets and warm beverages are purchased. There is a lot of discussion about the set. People wave to other people across the theater. The audience continues to file in. At 8:00 p.m., a trumpet sounds, and the flag on the highest point of the theater is raised. We take our seats as the play begins. Stares smiles, and goosebumps abound. The house lights dim, and the play starts. “If music is the food of love, play on....”

After the play, we enter the darkness with hundreds of others. I stand on a small brick wall so everyone can see me. My students gather around. There is smiling and yawning and some laughter. A Shakespearean play is a long experience for these young people. Sophie says what many are thinking:

“I am going to sleep so well tonight.” The smell of the hot springs is forgotten.

“I loved Viola,” says Moira. “She was so smart.”

“I thought Sir Toby was the best,” says Mitch.

“You just liked him because he burped a lot,” said Moira. Mitch grins.

The class makes its way over to the bus and gets in silently. When we get to the park, they get into their tents, and within half an hour, all is silent. Not too soon, they will wake up to another day of joy and action and pretend: the theater.

### **Application**

In one way, I envy the people of Shakespeare’s time. There are few people that I can honestly say have never let me down, but William Shakespeare is one of those people. Over my thirty years of teaching, I have taken numerous groups to see Shakespeare, and every single group has returned from the plays joyful, challenged, excited and thoughtful. From eighth graders to graduate students, I have witnessed the impact of Shakespeare, and in a broader sense, all of theater, on the students I have taught. The Theater was one of the few forms of entertainment available to the public. Sure, I suppose there was bear baiting and the occasional beheading, but who would want to see that? As Hamlet said in the opening of a famous soliloquy, “The play’s the thing....”

How should we respond today? Going to the live theater often and with young students who will grow up appreciating the theater and the amazing work that goes into the writing, set design, and costumes. And going to see a play should not be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a young person: it should be a yearly experience. Shakespeare should be viewed in the park, in the theater, in the movies, online, and read out loud.

An odd story: When I was in basic training in the Army, I carried a copy of *Hamlet* in the cargo pocket of my field uniform everywhere I went. Shakespeare kept me company in my tent on stormy nights in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, on the 15-mile hikes through the woods, and on the firing range. Aside from joking about “the professor” reading Shakespeare, the drill sergeants left me alone to read the Bard silently or aloud to those who wanted to listen.

## **Narrative 5**

### **Manga in the English Classroom**

Sometimes English teachers can be set in their ways. For years I had my sacred Canon of books and short stories that I used with students to reveal the glory of literature. And while most—maybe all—of those books and short stories are worthy of being read and understood, it took a unique student to shove me off my ivory tower and realize that reading was changing, and I needed to change too.

The first time I met Austin, I knew he would be a challenge, but we would get along too. That he was autistic was evident from his behavior, but he was a kind, sincere young man who, like the Vulcans, always told the truth. The class was to read the short story “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury. This story has no characters other than the self-operating machinery in a house that its owners have abandoned. I picked this story because it is a science fiction classic, and I thought it was a good story to start freshman year with. It was a serious story with humorous parts and a strong theme. It took place in the not-too-distant future, so I thought the students would relate to it.

Most students liked it, some not so much, but Austin would have none. I remember him approaching me at the end of our second-period class. “This is a bad story, Don. I don’t like it at all.” (He always called me by my first name for some reason, while most of the class called me Mr. Anderson.) “What don’t you like about it, Austin?”

“There aren’t any people in it. Only the machines...and a dog,” he said.

“Yes, and the house. Do you think the house is a character, Austin?”

“No, I don’t think so. But I don’t understand why it had to burn up.”

It was obvious that Austin had read this story, but it was also obvious that he didn't like it and that it upset him. Over the next few months, I tried various ways to interest Austin in literature, but the literature was always of my choosing. We tried authors from various periods and genres, including Jack London, J.K. Rowling, Amy Tan, Kurt Vonnegut, Maya Angelou, and Sarah Orne Jewett. There were no takers for Austin. He would read the assigned stories, poems, or books but reading never caught on with him. It was perfunctory. I felt discouraged. This wasn't my role as a teacher. I was here to inspire students with the love of literature, not make them despise it.

Then, I talked with a colleague from a school in Albany, New York. I met Susan at an AP reading. When I asked her what I should do about Austin, she suggested that I hang out in the young adult section of Barnes and Noble for a while and get to know what teenagers were reading. "Maybe Austin is more of a visual learner," she said. "Have you tried graphic novels or manga novels with him?"

"There's such a thing as manga novels?" I asked.

"Yep. And some of them are pretty good."

We were going through a module that included some short stories and poems from Poe, so I searched the bookstore for something that might appeal to Austin. Tucked away in the Poe section (that was quite large, I thought) was the *Manga Classics Edgar Allan Poe*. The stories we read were there, as was "The Raven." Of course, manga books start at what Westerners consider the "back" of the book, and I thought that this backward order might not appeal to Austin. But I was more concerned about how he would react to the images with the text. Fortunately, Barnes & Noble still has an educator's discount, so I paid \$16 for the book and read it that evening. I liked it. The new (to me) format took a little getting used to, but "The Tell-tale Heart" was there,



as was “The Cask of Amontillado,” two stories we were reading. Before class, I called Austin in to talk with him.

“I’ve got something for you.”

“What is it?”

“I want you to try this style of the book. It’s called manga....”

“I know what manga is,” he said, picking up the new book and thumbing through the pages. Already I could see he was intrigued by it.

“You read these books backward from what we are used to,” I said.

“I know that, Don.” He was barely paying attention to me, and before I could say anything more, he was gone, over at the chess table, book open and reading. “It can’t be that simple,” I thought.

Well, in one way, it wasn’t that simple. Once the rest of the class saw the book that Austin got to read, several students wanted to read the same volume, and so what started as a \$16 expense quickly became a \$128 expense. Also, since we would be through with Poe in a couple of weeks, what would I do about future manga novels? Could I ask my principal for some money to purchase other manga books? And what about manga novels? Were my students getting an adequate reading experience out of them?

There was a little bad news but a lot of good news. First, the bad: I would have to wait until the following year to put any new books in the English budget, so any books I got this year were out of my budget. Since I couldn’t afford several hundred dollars of new books for the rest of the school year, I decided to ask for donations of books from staff, parents, and anyone I could think of. I told people we needed books and asked them to just send the volume to the school, in

care of me. The response was overwhelming. Within a few weeks, I had enough books for the rest of the year for every student who wanted to read from a manga text.

The other good news was the reading comprehension scores. Austin and his classmates participated more in classroom discussions, scored about 20% higher on reading comprehension tests than the previous year, and maxed out the reading interest surveys. Because of the intense interest in manga novels, students were more invested in their reading. Their interest in reading also helped bring up the rest of the class, who read the traditional versions of the stories and poems.

I would refer to both the traditional and the manga texts in class. An excellent example of this was when the class read Shakespeare's *Othello* later in the year. *Othello* can be a complex play, and about half the class was reading the manga version of the text. Kellie, who was reading the manga text, surprised me when she said, "Iago is a more likable character in our version of the play."

"Why do you think that is?" Thus began a class discussion on *Othello* that lasted the entire period and involved every student. This would not have happened before when a few students who had read the play independently would have dominated the discussion. I was simply a referee of the meeting while the students shared their knowledge and opinions of the play.

Teachers know that while occasionally everything will click with a class and seem almost perfect, such classroom utopias never last, and one must come down to earth in day-to-day teaching. Sometimes teachers and schools have such set curricula that they lose track of their students' different learning styles, interests, and abilities. It is important to find solutions that are both progressive and sustainable.

English teachers seem to be especially prone to canon-creep: using books, they love and have used for years, regardless of how much interest the students have in the books. Sometimes it's a strong belief in the value of the particular books they use; other times, it is just laziness. A teacher already has all the curriculum, texts, worksheets, and lesson plans set for the year, so why make any changes?

An English teacher I worked with for years always spent the final quarter of the school year teaching Willa Cather's *My Antonia* to her juniors. When I recommended that she try something new with them, she scoffed.

"Why would I do that? *My Antonia* is a great book. Why would I want to create all that extra work for myself when the kids don't care," she said.

"Perhaps they do care," I suggested. "There are some amazing new books out there. Have you ever wanted to mix things up a bit?"

"Not when I'm going to retire in a few years," she said.

### **Application**

Discovering literature's joy and healing power means we must be open to modes and methods that push us out of our comfort zone. While *My Antonia* is a great book, it will probably only meet the needs of a few current students. Literature teachers should be investigators of contemporary literature, and literary forms like manga, that will help students develop a love of literature.

Being open to teaching different types of books and writing is essential for any teacher who wants to engage their students and foster a love of learning. It is easy to fall into the trap of teaching only the classics (i.e., the Dead White Men) or the books we enjoyed as students. Still,

this approach does a disservice to our students and can make learning feel like a chore rather than an exciting journey of discovery.

One way to be open to teaching different types of books is to broaden your reading horizons. This might mean incorporating diverse voices and perspectives or exploring genres and writing styles outside your comfort zone. Read books that challenge your assumptions, expose you to new perspectives, and consider incorporating them into your curriculum.

It is also essential to be open to different types of writing. While novels, short stories, and poetry are necessary forms of literature, they are not the only types of writing that students need to learn. Creative writing, journalism, and even social media posts are all valid forms of writing that can help students develop essential communication skills. Exposing your students to various writing styles and formats can help them develop well-rounded skills that will serve them academically and professionally.

Another benefit of being open to teaching different types of books and writing is that it can help students develop a love of reading and writing. When students see that their teachers are enthusiastic about a wide range of books and writing styles, they are more likely to be excited about learning and eager to explore new ideas. By fostering a love of reading and writing, you can help your students become lifelong learners keen to engage with the world around them.

Being open to teaching different types of books and writing is essential for any teacher who wants to engage their students and foster a love of learning. By broadening your reading horizons, being open to different types of writing, and exposing your students to various books and writing styles, you can help your students develop essential skills and a lifelong love of learning.

## Narrative 6

### Waiting for Emily Dickinson

Because of its intensely personal nature, poetry is an ideal form of writing for literary healing—except when it’s not.

Corey is sitting at a table in Poet’s Corner, a section of my classroom that I have walled off with bookshelves so students can read or study somewhat quietly. He is poring over a book of Shakespeare’s sonnets but is struggling with them.

“I just don’t get the sonnet form,” he says. “And the language. I have a hard time understanding medieval English.”

“Well, it’s Renaissance English, but that is understandable, Corey,” I say. “Shakespeare isn’t easy, and his poetry tends to be a little more difficult than his plays. What would you like to do? Do you want to give the Sonnets some more time, or do you want to switch up?”

The students can switch to poets once if they don’t want to keep their first choice. Each student in the English 11 class must create a ten-minute video about a poet and poem that affects them emotionally or spiritually.

“What will it be? Who is your second choice?”

“Emily Dickinson,” Corey says. “Will she be easier?”

“I don’t know about easier, Corey, but she will be more accessible,” I say. “Dickinson’s language is easy to understand, but the themes of her poetry are deep.”

“Then I want to switch to Dickinson,” Corey says. “She’s got to be better than Shakespeare.”

“Oh, you wound me, Corey.” I smile. What English teacher isn’t used to their favorite authors being disparaged occasionally? “But let me tell you. You’ve got to give Emily Dickinson

time. Just because her poems are short, don't assume they are as easy as a limerick to understand. You must wait on each poem; then you will begin to understand it."

OK. I'll give it a try," Corey says. I am both excited and concerned. Emily Dickinson is one of my favorite poets, and I don't want Corey to be upset with two of my favorite authors. I give him ten of my favorite Dickinson poems but allow him room to wander into different poems if he wants to.

The next day he finds me before class. "I chose a poem," he says.

"Good. Which one?"

He pulls out an aging volume of Dickinson, takes out a candy wrapper he has been using as a bookmark, and points to his poem of choice.

*This World is not a Conclusion.  
A Species stands beyond –  
Invisible, as Music –  
But positive, as Sound –  
It beckons, and it baffles –  
Philosophy – don't know –  
And through a Riddle, at last –  
Sagacity must go –  
To guess it puzzles scholars –  
To gain it, Men have borne.  
Contempt of Generations  
And Crucifixion, shown –  
Faith slips – and laughs, and rallies –  
Blushes, if any see –  
Plucks at a twig of Evidence –  
And asks a Vane, the way –  
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit –  
Strong Hallelujahs roll –  
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth  
That nibbles at the soul –*

(Dickinson, 2005).

"I still don't get it," he says. "It is too difficult."

"Then why did you choose it?" I ask.

“Well, I like some of the images in the poem.”

“Like what?”

“I like the image of the tooth at the poem's end. It's like she is saying that drugs can't help this toothache.”

“What else?”

“I like the idea that there is more to this world than we can see,” he says, “that there are alien species that are invisible to us.”

“Wow. You just got two of the major themes of this poem Corey. Don't be afraid to take ownership of your ideas. You understand more than you think. There is no wrong interpretation of a poem, but with a poem like this, the more you study it, the more you will get out of it.”

I suggest Corey divide the poem into sections and think about each. What about the first line? Why is it the only line in the poem to end in a period? How do philosophy and scholarship relate to faith in the poem? What are the religious images in the poem? What are the secular images? How do these compare?

The next day Corey again meets me in my classroom before the start of classes.

“I get it!” he says. “She is questioning her faith. She says there is something more to this life than what we can see, but she isn't sure what.”

“That's a good interpretation of the poem, but it isn't the only one, Corey,” I say. “It is important to remember in poetry that there are often multiple interpretations, and none are ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ Each poem has a special meaning to the person reading it. That is part of the joy of reading it.”

“OK, but I want to move on to another of her poems.”

“Fine. You can always come back to this poem. It will be waiting for you as you waited for it.”

### **Application**

We don’t always get everything we want. Take your student’s attitude toward literature seriously. When I was a young teacher, I had this idea that if I only reasoned with my students about a particular book or author, they would come to agree with me: “You must like William Faulkner because I love him, and he is one of the great American writers.” If students disagree with this, they will have to suck it up.

Letting children and young adults discover literature's beauty rather than forcing it on them is better. My junior English teacher, Mr. Gent, ruined John Steinbeck for me—at least during my high school years. He had worksheets on every chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and he taught the book so slowly that I thought we would never get through it. On top of that, only one student in the class, me, had to read the book and fill out the paperwork, as it was passed around to everyone. Dull, dull, dull.

In my first year of college, I picked up *The Grapes of Wrath* over the summer and decided to give it another shot, this time at my speed. I fell in love with the novel. Steinbeck was a genius at blending time and place with vibrant characters. His history and social consciousness knowledge gave his writing a poignancy I hadn’t experienced before. Why couldn’t I have had this in English 11 class?

I could have, and I should have. Teachers, parents, and anyone who works with children and literature need introducers and occasional explainers, but then get out of the way and let the child's mind fall in love with literature.



## Narrative 7

### How Not to Read Boring Books

I admire what Kimberly Reins has to say about author Jason Reynolds. Reynolds (*Long Way Down, Look Both Ways, As Brave as You*) knows that many people need to read for the joy and healing it brings, but he also knows that many people hate reading. However, Reynolds says he doesn't believe that people really hate reading but that they hate being bored, and many books are boring. "So here is what he plans to do: NOT WRITE BORING BOOKS. That's it, and that's all" (Reins, 2021).

But what exactly is a boring book? Isn't that subjective? Of course, it is. Reading the Russian novel *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy might be boring to most readers, but it will also be challenging and exciting to many readers. Reading *The Hunger Games* trilogy might excite some readers, but others might find it tedious. People find different genres of writing (novels, romance, action-adventure, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, etc.) suited to their taste. Some readers like poetry; others hate it. Some readers prefer graphic novels; others prefer to listen to books.

With all the significant current and past authors out there, no one should have to settle for a boring book. I have shared seven principles with my students when searching for a book they will enjoy and benefit from. These are: Be picky. Read about the book. Test the waters. Be open-minded. Don't be afraid to stop and pick up another book. Put in the effort. Reflect.

#### Be Picky

Being a picky reader can have several benefits. First, it allows you to maintain high standards for the books you read, which can lead to a more enjoyable reading experience. By only reading books that meet your specific preferences, you will likely save time on books you

don't enjoy or interest you. Additionally, being a picky reader can help you develop a more discerning eye for literature, allowing you to identify the qualities you appreciate in a book and seek authors and genres that align with your tastes. Finally, being a picky reader can help you become more critical, enabling you to analyze and evaluate the books you read more closely and develop a deeper appreciation for the art of writing.

Although you will occasionally be assigned a book in a class, on your own, you shouldn't have to settle for a book that doesn't interest you.

### **Read About the Book**

Reading about a book before you read it can have several benefits. First, it can help you decide whether or not the book is worth your time and attention. By reading reviews or summaries, you can get a sense of the book's plot, themes, and writing style and determine whether it aligns with your interests and preferences. Reading about a book can also provide context and background information to enhance your reading experience. For example, if you are reading a historical novel, learning about the historical events or period in which the book is set can deepen your understanding and appreciation of the story. Finally, reading about a book can spark your curiosity and excitement, building anticipation for the reading experience and making it all the more enjoyable.

### **Test the Waters**

Trying out a book before reading it can be a helpful way to determine whether or not it's worth your time and attention. One way to do this is to read a sample chapter or excerpt of the book, which can give you a sense of the author's writing style and the tone and pace of the story. Another way to try out a book is to listen to an audiobook or watch an adaptation, such as a movie or TV series. This can help you understand the characters and plot and determine whether

you are interested in reading the book. By trying out a book before reading it, you can save time and avoid investing in a book you won't enjoy. However, it's important to remember that trying out a book is not a foolproof method and that sometimes the best reading experiences come from taking a chance on a book that you might have yet to expect to enjoy.

### **Be Openly Minded**

Jillian loved reading. We all know the type of student who has a book under their nose for most of the day. However, she had always been drawn to a particular genre of books (historical romances) and was hesitant to try anything new. One day, her friend Carley recommended a book entirely outside her usual preferences —*Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld—a science fiction novel set in a dystopian future. Jillian was hesitant at first but decided to give it a chance.

To her surprise, Jillian found that she loved the book. It opened a new world of reading for her, and she began exploring other science fiction and fantasy novels she had previously overlooked. She found that she enjoyed the imaginative worlds and thought-provoking themes of the genre and that reading outside her usual preferences had expanded her horizons. Not only that, but she developed a new literary friend in Carley.

### **Don't Be Afraid to Stop and Pick Up Another Book**

What does it mean to be a discerning reader? Should we ever limit the types of books that we should read? Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we may need help to get through a book, whether due to a slow pace, uninteresting characters, or other factors. Rather than forcing ourselves to slog through a book we aren't enjoying, it's important to recognize when it's time to put it down and move on to something else.

By being willing to stop reading a book and pick out another one, we can save ourselves time and frustration and avoid wasting energy on something that isn't bringing us joy or fulfillment. It also allows us to explore new books and genres and discover new favorites we might have yet to encounter. Ultimately, not being afraid to stop reading a book and pick out another one is a sign of being confident, someone who knows what they like and isn't afraid to seek out new and exciting reading experiences. This was the case the first and second times I tried to read Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in my early 20s. I was ready for the book and gave it up...for about ten years. By then, I had lived enough life to appreciate it.

### **Put in the Effort**

Putting in the effort to read a demanding but rewarding book can be a challenge, but it can also lead to a profoundly fulfilling and enriching reading experience. While some readers may be challenging to read due to their length, complexity, or dense writing style, they may also offer valuable insights, thought-provoking ideas, or a unique perspective on the world. By reading such a book, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the art of writing and storytelling and develop critical thinking skills that can benefit us in other areas of our lives. While giving up on a problematic book may be tempting, pushing through, and persevering can lead to a sense of accomplishment and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Ultimately, putting in the effort to read a challenging but rewarding book is a sign of a committed and thoughtful reader willing to go the extra mile to pursue knowledge and understanding.

### **Reflecting**

James had just finished reading *The Call of the Wild*, and the story left a deep impression on him. Sitting at his desk in my English 9 classroom, he thought about the book and its themes. James drew parallels between Buck's transformation and the life of his grandfather. Like Buck,

James' grandfather had once lived a comfortable and sheltered existence, never having to worry about survival or struggle. But over time, he began to feel restlessness, a desire to experience something rawer and more authentic. That was when he left his job as a stockbroker in New York and came to Oregon to work on a cattle ranch.

*The Call of the Wild* also made James reflect on his relationship with nature. He realized how disconnected he had become from the natural world, spending most of his time indoors and plugged into his Xbox. Reading about Buck's connection with the wilderness made James long for a similar relationship: the chance to escape into the mountains and breathe in the fresh air.

Reflecting on the books we read is vital. It lets us understand them better, find connections to our beliefs and values, and get insights into ourselves and the world. Reflection makes us more empathetic and helps us identify and analyze themes and messages. It allows us to learn, grow and evaluate a book's significance.

## Narrative 8

### At the Knoll with Wordsworth...and Lisa

The summer I turned 16, I hid on a knoll on my parent's farm. On the top of the hill was a cluster of gnarled oak trees. The soil there wasn't fertile, so the oaks, despite their age, were scrawny and twisted. They were saying they would grow there despite the rocky ground. Within the grove of dwarf oaks, the grass grew thick. Atop the knoll, the summer breezes blew sweet scents from the valley below.

This little bump on the earth's surface was a favorite place to read. Usually, I would read some old book of poetry alone or occasionally a tattered volume of short stories by Poe, Chekov, or Bret Harte. Within the grassy hideout on this knoll, I first experienced the poetry of the three Williams: William Cullen Bryant, William Wordsworth, and William Shakespeare. Bryant impressed me with his poem about life and death called "Thanatopsis" –his best-known poem—written when he was just a year older than me.

To him who in the love of Nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks  
A various language...

Go forth, under the open sky, and list  
To Nature's teaching, while from all around—  
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—  
Comes a still voice—

(Bryant, 2013).

Often, I would climb the oaks to get a better view of the surroundings: the orchards, forests, and fields that made up the local countryside. Sometimes I would pretend that my little knoll was an island and that there was a sea that separated me from home and the rest of my life. Rarely would I share my special reading haunt with others. My friend Lisa sometimes came over from a neighboring farm, and we read comic books and poetry together. But there was always the

physical object...the book...and the physical place...the knoll. This made the act of reading like exploring for buried treasure, with the book as our map.

A decade later, I was the first teacher in my school district to introduce eBooks and iPads into my curriculum. It was a difficult choice. I remember not wanting anything to get in the way of students loving to read, and if an electronic device brought reading to students who otherwise wouldn't pick up a book, that is a good thing, right? One of my English classes was featured in the local newspaper with their iPads held over their faces, but on each iPad was a picture of their face. This was clever, but it was also prophetic. The iPads represented the books the students read, but they weren't quite the same.

And yet, my wife and I read anything we have handy, from eReaders, iPads, our phones, and paper books. And we listen to books a lot too. While I love my library at home, pulling a 150-year-old book off the shelf and sitting on the back porch to read, I also love the convenience of tossing my Kindle in my luggage and realizing I will have enough reading material for my whole vacation in a tiny device.

An image of reading in my mind has always stuck with me. Back on the knoll, sitting legs crossed with a book by Robert Frost open between us, Lisa picked up the book, put the book to her nose, and inhaled. I'm not sure why she did that.

"Mmm. Smells like reading," she said.

I tried that with my Kindle, and it doesn't work.

### **Application**

Experiencing a book on paper can be highly enjoyable. The tactile feeling of the book in your hands, and the weight and texture of its pages, all provide pleasurable sensations that electronic media can't match. Progressing through the story by turning the pages creates a sense

of achievement. The fragrance of a book can evoke nostalgic memories and take you back to past reading experiences. In today's tech-saturated world, reading a physical book can offer a chance to disconnect from the constant digital noise and enter a story's world. The gratification of reading a printed book is derived from its tactile pleasure, the emotions generated by its characters, and the relaxing escape it provides.



## Narrative 9

### Bethie Joy Takes on All Comers

She walked into the world's largest independent bookstore with an air of ownership. This was her city, Portland, and her bookstore, Powell's City of Books. Of course, she didn't own Powell's Books, but that didn't keep her from treating it like her own personal reading room, all 60,000 square feet. And while there is no way that Bethie Joy could read all 4 million books in Powell's, she has read a good chunk of them.

On the last afternoon, I saw her at the bookstore; she entered the coffee shop that is a part of the store cradling five books in her arm. She sat across from me at a table and neatly stacked the books in front of her. I was a graduate student at Portland State University at the time, and she lived in an apartment near the city's Park Blocks.

"What have you got today?" I asked.

"A Don DeLillo, *Geek Love*, and a new P.D. James," she said.

"What are the other two for?"

"My sister," she said.

"Do you want a coffee?" I asked.

"Tea, please," she said.

Bethie Joy sat down to read while I got in line to get her tea. By the time I got back, she was halfway through *Geek Love* and looked up briefly to thank me before diving back into the book. Bethie Joy devoured books. Strangely, she didn't just read fast to gain a general understanding; she read fast while still wholly immersing herself in the book. Years before, I had tested her reading ability while we were both in our 20s. I found a book she hadn't read yet, but I had. I believe it was *The Flowering of New England*, a textbook I had in a literature class. She took the book from

me and started through it, taking about three seconds per page. I shook my head. There was no way she was reading this book. She was just skimming it if anything.

She looked up from the book about fifteen minutes later and glanced at me.

“Well?” she asked.

“Well, what?”

“What do you want to know?”

“Oh, I don’t know. How about describing Emerson's effects on the thinking of Whitman in Chapter 7.”

“That was Chapter 6,” she said. “And it wasn’t Whitman whom Brook says Emerson had the major influence on; it was Thoreau, and to a lesser extent, Hawthorne....” She went on for several minutes describing Chapter 6, a chapter I had taken notes on but that she knew better than me after spending a few minutes on it. I knew then that she was a reading genius. I had never met anyone like her.

### **Application**

Devouring books can be an incredibly satisfying experience, unlike any other activity. Getting lost in a book can take us on a journey to other worlds and let us escape from the everyday stressors of life. Turning the pages fills us with excitement and anticipation as we uncover what comes next. We become deeply invested in the characters' struggles and triumphs, sharing their emotions. By devouring book after book, we gain knowledge, develop empathy, and expand our horizons. The pleasure of reading lies in the endless possibilities presented by books, the diverse stories and worlds available to explore, and the satisfaction of broadening our minds through reading.

## **Narrative 10**

### **Good Readers Make Good Writers**

For an English teacher, there is nothing quite like the rush you get when sitting with 3000 colleagues in one big room to discuss literature. I just realized that might be the nerdiest thing I've ever written. Over the past ten years, I have traveled back east during the early summer to score Advanced Placement (AP) essays for the College Board. Many other English teachers gather in places like Tampa, Louisville, and Kansas City to score over a million essays from AP students worldwide. Over that time, I have made friends with teachers from several states and texted them semi-regularly to ask how their teaching practice is going and if they can see any trends developing.

Over and over, my colleagues from places as diverse as Los Angeles, Tulsa, Oxford (Mississippi), Montpelier, and Boise say the same thing: "Good readers make good writers." At least, that is the simple way of putting it. A complete way would be, "Students who challenge themselves with reading that involves complex thought processes are more like writers who include these complex thought processes in their writing, whether poetry, science essays, or short stories.

Ashley was one of those students driven to get the most that she could think out of every class and expected to score top honors in every category. However, she was afraid of taking my AP Literature class because she had not done well as a ninth grader in her pre-AP English course. She caught me feeding my fish after school. "What can I do to ace your AP Lit class," she asked me. It was early June, and she was looking ahead to the next school year.

"Well, the fundamentals of your writing are good, Ashley," I said. "But if you want to do well on the AP Literature essays, you will need to become a well-read young person, with a

better knowledge of some of the great literature from the past and present.” She looked determined. “All right,” she said. “Can you set me up with the books I need to read?”

“What books you should read depends largely on you,” I said. “I can give you some good suggestions for books you will both like, often referred to in other literature and tests.” She took my advice, and we put our heads together to develop a summer reading list that she would enjoy and benefit from.

### **Application**

Imagine Jane Austen as a young girl taught at home by her father, the Rev. George Austen. From a young age, Jane was an enthusiastic reader. She was often seen with a book in her hand, so much so that her parents had to ask her to put it down when it was time to eat. As she grew up, her love for reading only intensified. Jane would read books from all genres and could be lost in a story for hours.

It wasn't until she was a young adult that Jane realized how much reading could affect writing. Her Father reminded her class that good readers often become good writers, but Jane already knew that. By her late teens, she began to read more critically, analyzing the books' plot, characters, and writing style.

As she read more and continued to write, young Jane Austen noticed that her writing improved. She became more confident in writing compelling stories, and her vocabulary expanded. The books she read provided her with a strong foundation of knowledge and inspiration that she used to create her first published novel, *Sense, and Sensibility*.

Reflecting on her journey, Jane realized that her love for reading led her to become a successful writer. She sharpened her writing skills and developed a distinctive writing style by

reading widely and examining writing techniques and storytelling closely. Jane knew she had become a good writer because she was a good reader.

## **Narrative 11**

### **Adventures at Malheur Field Station**

My favorite memory of Malheur Field Station is of a screech owl, no taller than six inches, that sat relentlessly on top of a fence post outside the bunk house where the students were staying. After coming in from an early morning walk through the sagebrush, Rebecca, staring out the window at the owl, said with an air of importance, "Hail to thee, blithe spirit!" Over a week, that little owl was the subject of more conversations, poetry, and photographs than Percy Shelly's Skylark. Sometimes those little things students say when they are not even aware of it can fill an English teacher's heart with delight.

"You realize you just quoted a line of poetry," I said. "Poetry."

"I know," she said. I happen to like that poem. The job my wife and I had volunteered to do was to take a group of students who were in danger of not graduating and give them some study time in the desert of eastern Oregon. And these weren't even supposed to be good students. Besides time at a table with their books, laptops, pencils, and paper, they also had time to hike, swim, and play board games. Notably absent were television and computer games. This little experiment was the brainchild of my superintendent after I told him I wanted to take some students on a trip. "Sure. You have two weeks at the beginning of June. I want to take all our students who are close to not graduating. Take them anywhere you want as long as it's not expensive, quiet, and has tables and chairs."

"What about fun and educational?" I asked.

"Sure, that too," he said.

We took 12 seniors. Half were excited to leave home for a few weeks, and half were loath to leave their PlayStations, HBO, Kraft Macaroni, and Cheese. William summed up the thinking of the latter group when he turned to me shortly before we left on the bus. "This better be good, he said. I told him he would have the time of his life. He didn't see me roll my eyes. But it turned out that everyone did have a good time-well everyone except for one boy, Kane, who got sick and had to spend most of the two weeks inside. Still, everyone graduated. They worked on math homework. They wrote essays for English class. They created projects for history. But the most impressive thing these young people did over the two weeks in the desert was read. Since I knew they wouldn't have access to a television or video games, I brought along a large selection of young adult novels and other books of literature, poetry, and even non-fiction.

Lilly had finished her second book on the morning of the third day. I caught her on the front porch of the bunkhouse reading before class at eight in the morning. "Geez, Lilly, I didn't know you liked reading so much," I said.

"I don't...At least, I didn't think I did. But I'm getting into *Redwall*." "Well, this is the perfect place for it, with all the animals surrounding us."

Lilly wasn't the only one who caught the reading bug during the week. I caught nine out of the twelve seniors reading intently over the two weeks, most finishing at least three books during our time in the desert. During a rest stop on our hike to The Round Barn (a famous landmark in Malheur County), I found Travis reading a copy of *Lord of the Flies* that I threw into the mix of books. "Whoa, that's a pretty powerful book to read out here," I said.

"Yeah, but I'm pretending that we are the characters in the novel," he said.

"Really."

"Yep. And I'm Jack," he said.

### **Application**

Taking time for oneself to read can have a positive impact on mental health and well-being. In today's fast-paced world, getting caught up in work and social life demands can be easy, leaving little time for rest and reflection. By escaping into a book alone, it is possible to reduce stress levels, increase mindfulness, and attain mental clarity. Furthermore, reading alone provides the opportunity to focus fully on the story without distractions and become fully engrossed in the narrative, allowing for a deeper understanding of the characters and themes. Ultimately, finding time to read alone is an act of self-care, enabling individuals to disconnect from the world's noise and connect with their thoughts and feelings through literature.



## Narrative 12

### Coming to Terms with Tolstoy

The summer before my final year at Reed College, I received a notice in the mail. It was from my professor of Russian literature. I should start reading *War and Peace* in July. The class would begin the first week in September. The book is over 1200 pages. It was originally written in Russian by Leo Tolstoy and has been translated into dozens of languages, including eleven English translations alone. But in every translation of *War and Peace*, the Russian names of the characters are retained. Since most of the 500 characters in the novel have several names, it is a choice, especially for a reader new to Russian literature, to keep track. Then there is the fact that each character probably has more than one name she or he goes by. For example, Countess Natalya Ilyinchina Rostova often goes by Natasha, sometimes by Natalie, sometimes by her surname, and sometimes by her maiden name. It is challenging for a reader of Tolstoy just to keep track of the characters, and I used a notepad to remind myself of who each character was and the various names they went by in the novel.

However, there is a reason why *War and Peace* and its sister novel *Anna Karenina* are often considered the best novels ever written. Though I struggled at first with the book, it became one of the joys of my life to read, and I delighted in diving into the world of Czarist Russia with all its pomp. I was fascinated with Tolstoy's interplay between the privileged classes, the academics, and the peasants. Once fully committed to reading him, I wanted to dive into the literature, and it never came up.

Sometimes the best literature, the most healing literature, may be difficult—for a time. Worthwhile things are often not easy, but once committed to, they yield the greatest rewards. I have tried to pass on what I learned from my college days with Tolstoy to my students. By

learning to read and even love Tolstoy, a whole world was opened to me that had not existed before, a world that I take with me always.

### **Application**

Reading a challenging book like *War and Peace* can be worthwhile, despite the initial difficulties that may arise. While these types of books may be long, complicated, or written in a dense style, they often provide unique insights, thought-provoking ideas, or a different perspective on life. By dedicating time and effort to reading such books, we can enhance our critical thinking skills, broaden our knowledge, and gain a deeper appreciation for the art of writing.

Challenging ourselves to read difficult books can bring about a sense of achievement and a deeper awareness of ourselves and the world around us. While it may be tempting to stick to books that are easy to read, venturing out of our comfort zones and attempting something more challenging can lead to personal growth and a more fulfilling reading experience. After digesting Tolstoy, I felt I knew world history much better. It did for me.

## Narrative 13

### The Healing Power of Literature

A week before, I had had to call Child Protective Services for Scottie. Never mind why, but his family life was a mess. For distressed children, schoolwork is often the last thing on their minds, and I knew that Scottie would not be up to the normal routine in English class for the next few weeks anyway. I called Scottie into my room after class and talked with him. He just stared at the wall and chewed on his thumbnail.

“Scottie, I know you are having some difficulties right now, so I want to try something different. We’ll drop all your usual assignments in English class, but I have a book I would like you to read. It is about a boy going through many of the same emotions I imagine you are going through and how he dealt with them. It is not an especially easy book, but it is amazingly good. I just want to discuss the book with you every day after school. How does that sound? I have even OK’d it with your coach.”

All I got from Scottie was a vague “Uhuh,” but he picked up my class copy of *A Catcher in the Rye*. “Thanks,” he said and left my room. Every day Scottie came into my classroom after school (as directed by Mr. Henderson, his coach), but he hadn’t read anything for a week. I kept telling him about the book and the character Holden, using the full 15 minutes allotted to Scottie to get him interested in the text. Nothing.

Then one week, a near miracle happened. At an away game (Scottie played football), the bus had broken down, and the players had to wait until another bus could pick them up. For some reason, Scottie, rather than talking with his friends, listening to music, or playing a portable video game, took out the book he had left in his backpack and started reading.

The next day I was greeted with, “Hey, Mr. A., I think I can get into this book.” And that's how it began. Scottie, a near non-reader as a sophomore, started to find the wonder of literature, and as he did so, literature started to heal him.

### **Application**

Literature possesses an incredible ability to heal and provide comfort to those who read it. Through the works of writers, readers can find support, recognition, and understanding, even in the face of difficult or traumatic situations. Books can serve as a form of escapism from the stresses of everyday life and offer a secure space for emotional exploration.

Literature can offer valuable insights into the human experience, enabling readers to develop empathy and compassion for others. By relating to the characters and their struggles, readers can gain a new understanding of their challenges and discover optimism for the future. Whether it's through novels, memoirs, or poetry, literature has the potential to connect us to the deeper truths of our collective experiences, providing a source of healing and resilience in the toughest of circumstances.

## **Narrative 14**

### **Going off the Grid...With Reading and Writing**

We weren't completely off the grid. My friend Mike had to have his CPAP machine plugged in during the night, so we ran a line from the cabin next door to the powerless yurt where we were staying. Just a wood stove, two Coleman lanterns, a set of bunk beds, and a table with chairs. We had chosen this destination to have bonding time, though we didn't like to admit that. Mike, ironically, needed to work on a book he was writing about Oregon's tech industry, and I was working on a Master's thesis. We were both "techies" that wanted to spend some time off the grid, so we bought a used manual typewriter, a ream of paper apiece, and felt fedoras that we thought made us look de classe. Our only homage to technology was our iPods, so we could zone out to music and not interfere with each other's inspiration.

Our yurt was in a small campground at the far eastern edge of Oregon near Jordan Valley. Yes, it is that small. Our tastes in manual typewriters reflected our personalities. Mike, who has a large, boisterous demeanor, brought a stylish turquoise Olivetti Studio 45. I brought a sensible Olympia SM(--the same model that had gotten me through my undergraduate years. While I was jealous of Mike's typewriter's sex appeal, he was jealous of my typewriter's German engineering, which worked all the time perfectly. In contrast, he spent nearly half his time fiddling with his Italian typing sports car. After day three, we did manage to settle into a rhythm of sorts, and someone who peeked into our little we might think it odd to see two middle-aged men with big headphones over their ears banking away at their typewriters.

But for all that, it wasn't the writing that was the most significant part of our trip, but rather the reading. Mike and I had brought along a small selection of books to read in the evening or presumably any other time we weren't writing. By mutual agreement, we only brought one

cell phone, which would only be used once daily to call our wives and let them know we were still alive. The books we brought along were mostly light reading to pass the time of day: David Baldacci, James Patterson, etc., but we both brought an unusual book that would affect us for years.

“How the hell did you bring *100 Years of Solitude*? Mike asked. Both our books were beat-up paperbacks that looked like they had been too long in a college freshman’s backpack.

“I don’t know. It is a book I’ve wanted to read for a long time, and I thought this trip would be a good time to give it a whack.”

“And you didn’t know I was bringing it? That’s just weird,” he said. “Maybe it’s a sign that we should study this book together,” I said.

And we decided to. Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s masterpiece occupied our evenings for a whole week. We talked about the village of Macondo and the Buendias family until 1:00 a.m. We read sections to each other and compared the various characters and themes in the novel. Mike, a tired technocrat, read this quote to me from the book several times during the week:

*It was as if God had decided to put to the test every capacity for surprise.*

*And was keeping the inhabitants of Macondo in a permanent alteration between*

*Excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation, to such an extreme that*

*No one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay.* (Marquez, 2006)

“God, that is how I feel almost daily,” Mike said. “Always hanging out between excitement and disappointment.”

We were so eager to finish the book by Wednesday night that we decided not to write on Friday but to read together until *100 Years of Solitude* was now part of our subconscious. During

the rest of our stay in the yurt, we returned to our writing and reading the normal, light literature one reads on vacation. But Marquez still haunts us and comes up in nearly every conversation.

### **Application**

Taking time to be alone (or with a best friend like Mike) and engaging in activities such as reading and writing can be essential for one's emotional and mental well-being. Being alone allows us to think deeply and reflect on our thoughts, emotions, and experiences without the distractions of others. Just make sure the friend you bring likes to read and write quietly.

Reading and writing can be very helpful when connecting with oneself on a deeper level. Reading can help us explore different perspectives and expand our understanding of the world, while writing can express our thoughts and emotions creatively.

Practicing these activities alone allows us to delve deeper into our inner world, leading to greater self-awareness. This can be especially important during difficult times when we feel overwhelmed or disconnected from ourselves and others.

## **Narrative 15**

### **A Wallowa Retreat**

We were high in the Wallowa Mountains in northeastern Oregon, once populated by the Shoshone Indians. The night was so cold that despite my down sleeping bag, rated 20 degrees below zero, I was shivering and had to put all my clothes and coats inside my sleeping bag to stay warm enough. Stupidly, as I look back on it, I had forgone sleeping in the tent with my college classmates, choosing to rough it outside in the open so I could see the stars and experience the night firsthand. Our class was inspired by one of the most delightful programs of any university I have attended: Get ten students to want to learn about any subject, and the university would provide an instructor and a class for you. Wow, did I take advantage of that program! I took classes in mycology (mushroom hunting), cross-country skiing, the Old Testament, poetry writing, and the class I was currently in, backpacking literature.

When I woke up in the morning, my sleeping back all around my head was encrusted with ice. I had to break through this frozen barrier to exit the sleeping bag, and I didn't want to, finally being warm, but nature called, and with one mad dash movement, I burst out of the bag, raced over to the nearest tree, and relieved myself. I had a few moments to look around. It was a glorious morning, clear and still. I had had time to get thoroughly cold again before I had built the morning fire, my cozy colleagues stilling their warm cocoons. What was backpacking literature anyway, and why would a group of students want to read extensively on such an esoteric subject? We asked each other these and other related questions as the sun was rising and shining through the majestic tamarack trees and into our camp, as the coffee percolated in the giant, blue metal pot, and as the smell of fried potatoes, peppers, and onions wafted in the morning air.



Vincent finished most of his cup of coffee, swirled the rest with the grounds at the bottom, and flicked it into the nearby huckleberry shrubs. Then he walked over to the edge of camp and looked up wonderfully at Sacagawea Peak, which shone brightly in the early morning sun. He strode back into camp and poured himself another cup of coffee.

"Do you suppose that all great nature writers feel like I feel this morning?" he asked. "I feel like I could write a novel about how I feel right now."

"I don't know. How do you feel?" asked Annie. I think Colin Fletcher probably felt at one with nature most of the days of his 1000-mile trek, but he also had to endure many injuries and privations."

"Not as much privation as I had to put up with last night," I joked.

"Well, it was your choice to sleep outside," said Dr. Ward, our professor and group leader. He was a full professor of geology at the university but welcomed the opportunity to teach a class that got him out of his office and lecture hall. The current book we were reading was *The Man Who Walked Through Time*, an account of Fletcher's hike through the length of the Grand Canyon. The book affected us differently. For me, it was a challenge to get outside more, discover my limits and challenge my assumptions of the natural world. The book helped Annie heal from her (successful) battle with cancer as she read about Fletcher's constant struggles with water, injuries, loneliness, and fatigue. For Kathy, the books were adventure yarn and were a fun read. It was almost as if she didn't register the difficult passages; she was so engrossed in the majesty of the Grand Canyon. Of our whole group, she was the only one who had never been to the Canyon, and *The Man Who Walked Through Time* had whetted her appetite for such an adventure.

"I want to do it. I want to go on a trek like Colin Fletcher. Is anybody in it with me?" Kathy asked.

"Well, we are on an adventure like that right now," said Dr. Ward. "We've had to hike fifteen miles to get to where we are, and we've got another ten today. This is quite a trek itself."

"Maybe for a college class," said Kathy, "But I want to do something big. What do you think about making the Pacific Crest Trail with me?" This was what I liked about Kathy. Life was no-holds-barred with her. Still, sometimes she didn't think things through very well. A last-minute trip to Mardi Gras in New Orleans comes to mind... Winter was more circumspect. She crawled out of the tent and looked longingly at the coffee pot and to a little grove of saplings where our makeshift potty was located. Grabbing her sleeping bag and wrapping it around herself, she joined us momentarily by the fire, then darted off to the latrine. "The only thing I know is that from now on, any adventure I am on has to have a real bathroom," she said, her voice trailing off like a receding train whistle.

The fire was big enough to keep about five people warm at a time, with the other six waiting their turn. When the first group got thoroughly roasted (at least one side), they retreated into the tent to fetch their heavy coats and boots. Inadvertently, our small elective class at the university had discovered that bibliotherapy should be a part of all education--that people identify with the books they read and achieve some mental and spiritual benefits from them. Literature develops a healing property in a group setting, such as students around a campfire in a quiet setting.

Besides *The Man Who Walked Through Time*, our group read *My First Summer in the Sierra* by John Muir, *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie

Dillard, and *Turtle Island* by Gary Snyder. Each of these books proved to be a journey for our class, much like our hike in the Wallow Mountains, and we each grew from reading them.

### **Application**

Sometimes books challenge your assumptions. The books that we read during our class with Professor Ward were both difficult and fun at the same time. Reading books that are challenging and unique can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Such books often require more effort and attention from the reader, but they can also offer a greater sense of fulfillment and growth. A reading group or class with such books can make the experience more enjoyable.

Challenging books can push us to expand our perspectives and challenge our assumptions about the world. They can expose us to new ideas and ways of thinking, ultimately leading to greater self-awareness and understanding. This is especially true with non-fiction books like *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. Similarly, unique books can offer fresh insights into familiar topics or introduce us to new subjects or experiences. They can spark our curiosity and inspire us to explore the world around us in new and exciting ways. By reading daring and exceptional books, we can broaden our horizons and gain a deeper appreciation for the complexity and richness of the human experience.

## **Narrative 16**

### **Falling in Love with My Dictionary**

Ms. Billie Jean Williams, an English professor, had made me a disciple. I was just 19 and still innocent in the ways of the English language, but Ms. Williams stood in front of the class with a large red book raised above her head. She was trying to convert the class of would-be writers. I can still remember her gently saying, “You need this book... you need this book....”

Of course, the class was full of naysayers. Several said they already had dictionaries at home or in their dorms; why did they need this huge red volume? Why should they buy another \$40 book when it costs \$400 a semester? “We are going to break our backs if you make us get that dictionary,” said a young woman about my age.

“Kayla, I am so glad you said that,” said Ms. Williams. I will look up one of the words in your sentence. The word is ‘literally.’” She brought the big red book, an American Heritage Dictionary, over to the document projector and flipped it open to the entry for ‘literally.’ “What does it say for this entry?”

“In a literal manner. Word for word.”

“Right. But what does it say after that?”

“Usage problem.”

“Exactly, and this is why I want each of you to get this dictionary. The editors have assembled hundreds of authors and scholars to discuss words we commonly have problems with. Now, look what it says. Many people use the word “literally,” as you did Kayla, as an intensifier, but not in its primary meaning. This book will not break your back, but you are saying it will figuratively break your back. It is a big boo, and I admit that, but the used panel writes that only 20% would find how you used it correctly. That doesn’t mean you are necessarily wrong, but

you should consider using words carefully and discover what they mean. This dictionary will be one of your best tools to become effective writers.”

In nine weeks, Ms. Williams helped me grow from being apathetic about dictionaries to joyfully bringing the big red book and using it weekly, sometimes daily, to help improve his writing. These days, nearly everyone has a dictionary on their phone or with a few keystrokes. Yet, it is even harder for many people to use a dictionary than before. The convenience of having a dictionary in our pocket has made us want to use it less, and because of that, our language has become less precise.

My classroom is populated with dictionaries, and I have followed Ms. Williams’s lead and counseled my students to have a dictionary by their side whenever they are reading. I discuss with them the best dictionary apps for their phones, and we practice using them while reading.

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Charlie put down the book he was reading and looked puzzled.

“What is it?” I asked.

“What is a ‘rector’?” he asked. He was reading *Howard’s End*.

I looked at him and smiled. “You know the drill,” I said.

“Just thought I would give it a try,” he said. He pulled a dictionary from his backpack and discovered what a *rector* was. A dictionary can make any reader more confident, and that confidence can grow into a joy for the printed word. Knowing what an author is trying to say—exactly—is important for a person seeking healing from the books they are reading.

### **Application**

For individuals passionate about language and words, dictionaries can be a source of immense pleasure and fascination. The act of leafing through the pages of *The American*

*Heritage Dictionary*, and examining the meanings and etymologies of words, is a deeply gratifying experience. Each new entry opens up a world of possibilities and connections, encouraging us to delve deeper into the complexities of language.

Keep a dictionary next to your bed. By exploring the meanings and applications of words, we can enrich our vocabularies and cultivate a greater appreciation for the subtleties of language. They are also a means of learning and exploration.

Dictionaries also serve as a tool for communication, enabling us to communicate more effectively and establish connections with others, whether we are writing letters, sending an email, or conducting an interview. Whether reading, writing or simply immersing ourselves in the intricacies of language, dictionaries are a valuable resource for those who treasure the written and spoken word.

## **Narrative 17**

### **The Sides of the Volcano**

Burdened with backpacks that weighed about 50 pounds each, Glenn and I had managed to make twenty miles on our first day hiking around Oregon's largest volcano, Mt. Hood. We have not experienced backpackers, and we had brought along the way too much equipment, but we were only seventeen and thought that if one frying pan was good, two must be better, and the same with tents, water filters, cooking stoves, etc. As it turned out, we never even used our tents.

The first night we were so tired, and it was getting so dark that we determined to spend the first night in the middle of the trail at the next sign of water. So, when a tiny but clear stream crossed the trail in front of us, we filled our canteens, drank our fill, made a quick supper of Mountain House freeze-dried stew, and rolled out our sleeping bags right in the middle of the trail as the slope of the mountain made impossible to camp off the trail. We didn't even think about what would happen if someone should try to get by us during the night, and fortunately, nobody did. We were sore and somewhat embarrassed by our stupidity and very tired. But mostly, we were joyful to be on a difficult yet compelling adventure. We were there for each other, and if we did something stupid, we were in it together by God.

We were Butch and Sundance jumping off the cliff and into the river together. Our second night on Mt. Hood was even more of an adventure. Glenn and I could tell that a storm was brewing, and we were high on the mountain, walking in and out of tree line. We debated setting up our tent on the top of a moraine made by Eliot Glacier or sleeping under the low-slung branches of the white-bark pine surrounding us. The gusty winds and threatening rain made us try for a rock shelter on the side of the mountain called Cooper Spur. The hut, made from mountain stones and topped with a metal roof, would be good if the noisy place to wait out the

storm. Until that time, neither of us had seriously thought about our safety on this trip, but that night, both of us thought that there was a good chance that we might die. We were sitting in a rock hut with a metal roof on an exposed ridge on the side of Mt. Hood. While we hunkered down in our sleeping bags, with a meager fire smoking in the fireplace of the hut, a lightning storm broke on the mountain that lit up the mountain and filled the air with a constant barrage of thunder. It didn't seem logical that we wouldn't be struck by lightning and die as two crispy morsels for any black bear that happened by. (I know, black bears don't generally venture that high on the mountain, but hey, our imaginations were running wild.)

Our faces resembled those of two people at the very top of the Kingda Ka ride at Six Flags; only we held those expressions for over an hour as the storm crashed around us and hail banged so loudly on the roof that we couldn't hear one another speak. Around eleven that night, the storm had passed, and we realized that we would live after all--that we hadn't been struck by lightning. We celebrated our good fortune by rekindling our dead fire, pulling out two bottles of Henry Weinhard's beer we had stolen from Glenn's father's fridge, and playing a quick game of crazy eights. We slept like the stones the hut was made from and woke to a perfect blue sky.

"No, it was your dad we stole the beer from," Glenn says today. "Hardly," I say. "My dad was a teetotaler. Don't you remember? We grabbed them from your dad's stash just before we left for the mountain."

"Well, he never missed them. If he had, I would have heard about it." Adventures like the one that Glenn and I had are rarely remembered the same by both parties. It's not like it matters. It is the same with books. Though we grew up in very different homes and now live at the opposite end of the country, Glenn and I developed the same taste in literature, though we like to argue about the meaning of the books we have in common. Glenn believes that *Huckleberry Finn*



is the story of an adventure of two friends who, like us, manage to get themselves out of all kinds of scrapes. I believe that *Huckleberry Finn* is the story of an abused child and runaway slave who are accidentally thrown together and are carried by the Mississippi and fate further into the belly of the beast.

Their "scrapes," while sometimes comical, reveal the rampant racism and division of the pre-Civil War South. Still, the conversations that Glenn and I have about this and other literature are a healing cream to the otherwise crusty skin of our lives. That we can talk about literature and the adventures of the characters we love helps us relive our adventures and ease the burdens we have placed on our lives through years of just plain living.

### **Application**

Engaging in literary discussions and disagreeing with others about literature respectfully and kindly can be a wonderful experience. Such discussions allow us to share our thoughts and insights about a particular work and learn from others, even if our opinions differ.

Discussing literature in a friendly manner creates a sense of community and connection. When we foster a respectful and open environment, we create a space where all voices are heard, and everyone can learn from each other. Engaging in discussions about literary works allows us to connect with others passionate about exploring literature's themes, language, and forms. Ultimately, discussing and disagreeing about literature positively and constructively can broaden our understanding of the world and enrich our appreciation of the diversity of human thought and experience.

## Narrative 18

### How Many Editions of Tolkien Do You Own?

My daughter visited us about a week ago. While she looked through my modest library, she looked incredulously at me. "How many editions of Tolkien do you own, anyway?" she asked. I thought about it briefly, then answered, "I have no idea." "Well, I counted at least seven," she said, "And I'm sure some others are hiding around here somewhere." She was right. I have been reading Tolkien since I was in fourth grade, and Mrs. MacDonald, my teacher, introduced me to the hobbit. I still have my tattered but much-loved paperback boxed set of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of The Rings* that my parents bought me that year. *Lord of the Rings* took me two months to get through as a fourth grader, but presumably, I was outside playing some of the time. *The Silmarillion*, my fifth-grade year, was a challenge, I'll admit, but it has since become the sort of Holy Grail of Tolkien literature: A bit unapproachable at first, but ultimately satisfying. Since then, whenever another book that had been written by Tolkien and published by his son came out, I would buy it, read it, and put it on my shelf. Then it was Chris Tolkien's multivolume, *A History of Middle Earth*. I've only read it through once, and it remains a sort of reference work for me of all things Tolkien. Sometimes, when a new artist or publisher would bring out a beautiful new edition of Tolkien, I would buy it, if only to compare it to earlier editions and admire the continued devotion of Tolkien by the literary world. As I write this, The Folio Society is publishing a new limited edition of *Lord of the Rings* for about \$2000, but I think I will skip this one. Even my obsession with Tolkien has its limits. Still, is such an obsession with an author healthy? "It depends" might seem to be a cop-out answer. Still, the people I have witnessed engaging in a long-term relationship with an author have used this passion for a particular person, genre, or style of writing to help them emotionally heal from the

pressures and trials of life. For example, my wife has been infatuated with Jane Austen since I have known her. While her obsession with *Pride and Prejudice* et al. might not be as strong as mine with *The Fellowship of the Ring* et al., still, she goes to Austen when she needs to be in her happy place--when she needs solace. My father was a Zane Grey nut. When the pressures of life got to him, you could often find him sitting in the easy chair in the evening reading his beloved *Riders of the Purple Sage* or any of the thousand other westerns (only slight exaggeration) that Zane Grey wrote.

A colleague in the English department is even more obsessed with Shakespeare than I am with Tolkien. She never tires of the plays and uses Shakespeare to escape the vicissitudes of the university system. She has visited Bard's birthplace on several occasions, has been to see everyone one of his plays in production, and has just under two dozen editions of the plays, including translations into Urdu and Swahili.

And then there is Kylee. Kylee isn't so much author obsessed as she is genre obsessed. During the pandemic, Kylee, a junior high student, showed the class her room during one of our Zoom calls. It is floor to ceiling manga books. She says her parents bought them for her to combat the loneliness and isolation brought on by the Covid crisis. The manga books are a literary poultice on the emotional wounds caused by being away from her friends and teachers for so long. "Some of my favorites are books you would like too, Mr. Anderson." She proudly holds up the manga version of *Les Misérables* and *The Scarlet Letter*. "Outstanding! I'm glad you are finding joy in books," I say. "By the way, is there a manga version of *Lord of the Rings* yet?" It has been my experience that most persons who like to read go through phases, most of which taper off over time as new authors and interests arise. For a time as a child, I was taken with the Star Wars books, Sir Walter Scott (of *Ivanhoe* fame), and anything Stephen King wrote. While I

have generally lost interest in those books, some authors have stood by me and still do Dickens, Tolstoy, the Bronte sisters, Umberto Eco, Toni Morrison, and Ursula LeGuin. If I'm worried, afraid, or panicked by something in my life, I can count on Dickens to transport me to my safe spot. I have often used Pip, Oliver, or David to help mend my soul.

### **Application**

Being obsessed with certain authors, whether it be Tolkien, Dickens, John Green, or Ursula Le Guin, can be an all-consuming experience. For those who are deeply moved by an author's work, reading their books can offer a sense of comfort and inspiration. The characters, themes, and settings of their stories can become familiar and cherished aspects of one's inner world, providing a sense of continuity and stability in times of change.

Obsessed with certain authors can be a means of self-discovery and personal growth. By immersing oneself in an author's work, one can gain insight into their beliefs, feelings, and experiences. The author's perspective can help shed light on previously unknown aspects of oneself, leading to greater self-awareness and understanding. Sometimes, being obsessed with a particular author can foster a stronger connection to oneself and the world and lead to a more meaningful and fulfilling life. Other times, not so much, but either way, it is fun!

## Narrative 19

### Eighteen Weeks on One Poem

Sometimes there is nothing as healing as well hard work. When I saw Dante offered as a course at Oregon State University, I imagined that the course would include Dante but also other authors of the period, as well as some history of medieval Italy. The class was 18 weeks of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in a thick volume translated by Charles Eliot Norton.

"One book, one man. How hard could that course be?" My roommate Paul was skeptical. An agricultural science major, he didn't believe anything as nebulous as literature could be that hard. After all, he had to get up at five in the morning for his first class, which involved caring for various farm animals. On the other hand, I had the luxury of sleeping in until my first class at 9:00, which happened to be Dante.

"Yeah, well, you have your stress; I have mine," I replied. I thumbed through the text that seemed to be a nearly endless poem. I thought I liked poetry fine enough, but I was used to lyric poetry, with maybe a few sonnets or villanelle. But 929 pages of one single poem? This would be literally and figuratively hell, or so I thought. We didn't even get a background on the author. Our professor dove right in with Canto One and the middle-aged man in the middle of a dark wood. That image of a human being alone, afraid, and lost on a trail through a forest captured me, as it had thousands upon thousands of readers over the last 700 years. I knew this class would be a lot of hard work, but because of literature's power, I knew I was up for the challenge.

Halfway through the course, I had a sort of epiphany when I sat in the middle of the university quad, book and pen in hand, wading through *Purgatorio* with Dante and Virgil. Wasn't it amazing that I lived in a society that could afford to send a student to a class that could

spend the whole time enriched by literature? And the fact that this literature was arguably the greatest poem ever written made me awestruck.

"What do you think heaven is?" Our professor posed this question to our class as we left *Purgatorio* and Entered *Paradiso*. Most of the members of our class gave the obvious answers: Heaven is a place where we are with our family and are eternally happy; Heaven is a spiritual existence where we don't know any pain, etc.

"Well, to Dante, heaven meant eternally circling the throne of God, worshipping him eternally in word and song."

"Wait a minute...wait a minute," I said. "What about action? What about doing stuff? Heaven can't be just about flying around God for eternity. That would be hell for me." "You must understand that worship was primary for Dante and the medieval Christian over every other facet of life. Not only will there not be any 'action' as you put it, but there won't be any desire for action either. All other desires will be subsumed in the greatest desire of all: to worship God."

At that moment, I saw my professor as a holy priest of literature and literature for the first time in my life helped me transcend the boundaries of time and faith so that I could see through the eyes of a 14th-century poet who wrote his great Comedy with the common people in mind; people like me who centuries later would still be awed by the majesty, power and religious fervor of his words.

All literature can change our lives in ways we cannot fully imagine. While Dante might be a ten on the Richter Scale of literature with its ability to knock people over with the power of its images, all literature has something of Dante in it. I owe my understanding of the settlement of Hawaii to James Michener. I owe my appreciation for the rural life of southwest England to Thomas Hardy. I owe the ongoing recognition of what African Americans went through after the

Civil War to Toni Morrison. And on and on it goes. Literature continually increases our understanding, and that understanding calms our minds, and as Ralph Smedley said, "...through understanding, we find the way to peace." At the end of my class on Dante, I asked my professor why he liked to teach an entire semester course on one poem.

"It is my honor to be able to teach one sublime poem of the World," he said. "Besides, teaching *The Inferno* is a lot of fun." Rage, rage, against the dying of the light! Do not go quietly into the night.

### **Application**

Engaging deeply with a single poem or novel can offer many benefits for lovers of literature. Rather than rushing through work and quickly moving on to the next one, spending an extended period with a single piece allows us to appreciate its intricacies and complexities. We can take the time to savor the work's language, form, and themes and gain a deeper understanding of the author's message.

Immersing oneself in a single poem or book like *The Divine Comedy* can catalyze personal growth and self-discovery. By examining a poem in-depth, we can explore our thoughts, feelings, and experiences fresh and meaningfully. The language and ideas presented in work can ignite our imagination, prompt us to reflect on our lives, and inspire us to engage more thoughtfully with the world around us. By devoting time to a single book, we can develop a richer appreciation for the depth and beauty of language and foster a deeper sense of connection and empathy with ourselves and others.

## **Narrative 20**

### **The Beauty of Disorganization**

My wife is a librarian, and like many--maybe most--librarians, she likes organization. The library where she works is the epitome of organization: the books are all in a specific order, the check-out system is organized and efficient, and the library itself, with its many tables, chairs, computers, artwork, etc., is always clean and tidy. I like going to my wife's library to study occasionally, but most of the time, it is a little too organized for my taste. That is why I prefer a coffee shop with many different noises and hints of messiness if I study away from home. My wife would like our library at home to reflect her library at work, at least in its organization, but with me in the house, that is not likely to happen. Our library, which is "my room," much like the kitchen and bedroom are "her rooms," is awash with bookshelves overflowing, typewriters (yes, more than one), two desks, laptops, busts of various people, a large fish tank with 15 fish, a printer, two office chairs, a wingback chair, and various nostalgic trinkets populating every flat surface. The library also has a card catalog, but it is only for appearance's sake. I use it to store my book repair supplies.

Around the library and on the floor are various items I am using or have recently used. Usually, this is camera gear and various backpacks with assorted equipment. Since the pandemic began, our home library has been where I teach. While the rest of the house is neat as a pin, in keeping with my wife's ethical stand as a librarian, she has let me keep our home library in controlled chaos. It is within this state of mild disorganization that I believe creativity thrives. On the days when something comes over me, and I decide to clean the library from bottom to top, I can hardly get anything done. I sit at the desk and wonder what needs to be cleaned, dusted, repaired, or polished. On a normal day, however, when I am surrounded by opened books, pens,



and tablets; when the fish tank needs a good cleaning; when I must be careful when I rotate my chair that I don't knock over a stack of papers, this is the day when I will get a lot done. My brain lets all thoughts of neatness and organization flee in the face of doing something creative, whether writing, reading, working on images, or teaching. Don't get me wrong, I am not a hoarder, and you can walk into my library on a nice carpet. If I take the camera lenses off the wing-back chair, you can even talk with someone. But for a small room, it is filled with the stuff of the creative life.

Our conversation in AP English Language class had evolved into a debate over, of all people, the life of Thomas Jefferson. After reading the Declaration of Independence before analyzing it, I simply posed the question: Was Thomas Jefferson primarily a statesman, an author, a scientist, or a farmer? Most of the class was divided between statesmen and scientists, but Julia insisted that he was primarily a creator. "Jefferson had the vision of a sculptor," she said. Initially, I thought this was strange, but I asked her to explain her reasoning.

"Well, he saw a vision of what this country could be, like a sculptor seeing his final sculpture in a piece of stone. That took a creative mind, and I think that creativity helped him as a writer and statesman too." "Well, what about the farmer," I asked. "From what I have read, Jefferson's neighbors thought he was the worst farmer in Virginia," she said. "Why is that?" I asked. "I'm not sure," she conceded. "Maybe he just didn't have the time." "I would like to suggest that the things that made Thomas Jefferson a creative genius probably made him a worse farmer. Jefferson liked to experiment in this farming and tried to raise many different crops, including over a hundred varieties of rice. But he couldn't settle in on any of them, and in the end, the same creative disorganization that made him a great writer and scientist made him a bad farmer. His lack of organization as a farmer is likely one reason he didn't free his slaves, despite

knowing it was the right thing to do." Some of the class had a hard time thinking of Thomas Jefferson as anything less than the "ideal human." We discussed how he constantly reinvented his house and left it in disrepair, how his finances were in constant trouble, and how he had to sell his famous library to the US government to replace the burned British library in the War of 1812. "My point is that sometimes disorganization can work for you, and sometimes it works against you. If you can harness the power of your disorganization and find beauty in it, you don't have to fear it."

### **Application**

Although an organization can benefit many areas of life, a little disorganization can also be advantageous. This is particularly true in our reading life. For instance, in terms of creativity and innovation, a little bit of disorder in what you are reading and when you read can spur new ideas and unique perspectives. By breaking free from strict routines and structures, we can explore novel methods of thinking and problem-solving, which can result in new insights and breakthroughs.

When we rely too heavily on structure and orderliness, we can become rigid and unyielding, making it difficult to adjust to new circumstances. However, when we embrace some chaos and disorder, we become more comfortable with uncertainty and change and better able to handle unforeseen challenges. Therefore, a little bit of disorganization can be a source of resilience and strength, enabling us to navigate the complexities of life with greater flexibility and ease. Furthermore, a little disorder, such as that in a home library, shop, or art studio, can help us develop greater resilience and adaptability when life gets messy.

## Narrative 21

### Lost in Translation

Sophia had shamed me. "Why don't we ever read Mexican or South American authors in class?" she asked bluntly after I had handed out the syllabus for the term. This wasn't a "world lit" class, and the official title was "honors English," but I knew that was a feeble reason for not including authors representing the home language of at least 25% of my class. I didn't know what to say to Sophia and stumbled over some feeble excuse before going on with class, but her question haunted me that night, and the next day, I caught her in the hall. "Your question made me think," I said. "And I appreciate that. From now on, I will include world literature in every class I teach, and Spanish-American authors will be at the top of the list." It was a big promise. I hoped I could keep it.

The next day I had my honors English class each choose two books originally written in a language other than English to read and analyze. They could look up and find any --appropriate-- foreign book they wanted to be translated into English, and I would find it for them. This was a huge challenge for me, as I had to call city and university libraries all over the state for some of the books, but in the end, I only had to buy three books, which are now a part of the school library. Most of the class chose readily accessible books like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Other books taxed my ability to find and read them before disseminating them to the students. At the end of one class period, when the honors English students were preparing to leave, I told Sophia, "You know, you revolutionized this class. We are doing something that has needed to be done for a long time. Thank you." "You're welcome," Sophia simply said and left the room.

English teachers, especially literature teachers, often fall into the trap of teaching the Canon, meaning the books are considered the greatest of all time. But considered by whom? If a fifteen-year-old won't read the book or will just look up the copious notes available on it on the internet, why should we bother? While teaching some of these great books is important, it is more important to help children--and adults--find books they like to read. Once I let go of the Canon and then let go of books originally written in English, it was like the little boat I was sailing down the river on opened into a wide ocean. Suddenly, my students are reading books from Cambodia, Nigeria, India, and Afghanistan. And when students read books by authors from other lands, they also develop empathy for people from other countries. Not only that, but the healing power of literature is spread by understanding and comparing one's situation to that of the characters in the foreign book they are reading. For these students, getting lost in translation means getting deeply involved in the plot and characters of a novel written by someone who may live in a different country but has many of the same issues they are going through.

### **Application**

Reading books by authors from other countries can offer many advantages for literature lovers. By exploring the world through the eyes of foreign writers, we gain a new perspective on life and our unique and wonderful world. Through reading novels and non-fiction written by international authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, we deepen our understanding of other cultures and their unique ways of thinking and living. This experience broadens our horizons and helps us become more compassionate towards people of different backgrounds while also giving us a greater appreciation of the diversity of human experience.

Reading books by foreign authors can also be an excellent way to challenge ourselves and grow. By exploring different writing styles and forms, we can gain new insights into our

writing and the nuances of language itself. Additionally, engaging with literature from different countries can help us identify and confront our biases and preconceptions. In doing so, we develop a more nuanced understanding of the world and our place in it, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful existence. Ultimately, reading books by authors from other countries is an excellent way to expand our minds, broaden our horizons, and grow as individuals. Including a book from an international author in your reading rotation is a good idea. I strive to read an international author for every five books I read.

## Narrative 22

### Why We Sometimes Find Healing in the Past

As I mentioned in the forward, I wrote this book on a manual typewriter (a Remington Model 5) that I used during my first year of college. I use many different technologies to write with a computer (of course), various typewriters, pens, paper for jotting down notes, and even my smartphone for recording ideas. But the fact that I chose to write this book with a technology that ended its usefulness in the 1980s tells me something about myself: I find healing in nostalgia. Every part of writing on a typewriter is more difficult than writing on a computer. It is loud, so I need help to take it to the library or Starbucks. It is heavy, so I don't want to lug it back and forth to my office at the college. Putting paper in the typewriter and getting it ready to type is slow: I must insert the paper, make sure it is straight, then scroll down to my first line before I can type. I timed it out. It takes me about two minutes to get ready to type on my Remington and only thirty seconds on my MacBook. Yet, I feel so much more empowered writing on my typewriter. I can gaze out at the world while my fingers speak for me. I am not distracted by email notifications or tempted to look at the headlines of the *New York Times*, shop for camera gear on eBay, or order coffee on Amazon. The fact that millions of others worldwide are discovering the power of retro-writing on a typewriter tells me that there is something to the idea that there is healing in looking to the past and using objects produced many years ago. I have found that this same rule applies to reading, and of course, countless people worldwide have discovered the yearning to read and re-read novels and poems, and short stories that bring up strong emotions of the past.

Kevin, a colleague of mine, grew up on a wheat ranch in eastern Oregon near Maupin. Kevin's father was an exacting taskmaster, and from the age of twelve, Kevin was expected to

put in six hours of work each day on the ranch besides going to school. Throughout his childhood, resentment was building in Kevin, a resentment he held onto even after leaving the ranch and attending college. Then in college, he discovered John Steinbeck for the first time. Kevin describes it this way: " Steinbeck became the father I wish I had. His books, particularly, *Of Mice and Men*, resonated with me like no other author. Despite my childhood challenges, I longed for the sights and smells of my youth. Even today, I cannot read about the conversations between Lenny and George in the ranch bunkhouse, and I do not long for the smell of hay, leather, and horse manure. I miss the shafts of sunlight that shine through the cracks in the barn siding, illuminating the dust particles in the air. Do I miss my experience growing up? Not at all. But that doesn't mean it was all bad. Steinbeck has gone a long way in helping heal my ugly childhood."

### **Application**

During stress or emotional difficulty, looking to our past can be a helpful tool for finding healing and comfort. Revisiting happy memories from the past can provide a sense of solace and familiarity, which can help to ease our anxieties and restore a sense of balance to our lives. Nostalgia can be particularly helpful when the world around us feels uncertain or unstable, as it can serve as a reminder of the constants in our lives.

Finding healing in the literature of the past can be a way to reconnect with our personal history and sense of identity. By reflecting on positive experiences from the literature we read, we can better appreciate the people, places, and events that have shaped our lives. This can foster a deeper understanding of ourselves and our unique life journey, helping us to find a greater sense of purpose and meaning in the present. Ultimately, finding comfort and healing in the past

through what we read can be a powerful way to promote emotional and mental well-being, helping us navigate life's ups and downs with greater ease and resilience.



## Narrative 23

### My Family and Other Animals (Using Nonfiction for Healing)

It was a warm June day when I went with Kiley to help feed her steer. She was raised to sell at the upcoming county fair and realized its fate, but that didn't keep her from treating it with the kindness that one normally reserves for a beloved pet. We gave the steer alfalfa hay with a grain chaser. It wasn't time to skimp on the feeding front if Kiley wanted a reasonable price for her steer. By the way, its name was Marvelous. Marvelous, the steer accepted Kiley's generous allotment of food with equanimity but was filled with evident pleasure when Kiley used a curry comb to brush out the steer's soft, rufous hair.

His hair was glossy and thick, from his dark red top and sides to his creamy-white bottom and face. The hair of a steer left to itself can get caked with mud and manure and be home to all sorts of little creatures, but not so the hide of Marvelous. Kiley loved farming life. She loved the practicality of it. She liked knowing what to expect and when to expect it. He loved working with animals and helping her parents raise hay and other crops. One day she hoped that she might have a farm like her parents.

However, Kiley struggled with her English classes partly because of this pragmatic attitude toward life. She did all right in math, passable in history, and very well in biology, but poorly in language arts. I had struggled all year with her, trying to get her interested in literature, even finding fictional stories and novels set on farms. "The author got this wrong," she was fond of saying about the books I gave her; then, she would drop a book on my desk unfinished. I finally gave up (or thought I did) after she dissed Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, and especially the character Diggory, as not knowing about how sheep are raised and farmed.

"But...but, Thomas Hardy grew up with sheep farms all around him. Many of his neighbors raised sheep," I protested. "Well, he didn't learn much from them," she said. I was exasperated. "Isn't there any book you would enjoy, Kiley," I asked. "Not novels," she said. "I want to know what happens to real people. Novels just aren't my thing." I felt like I had been hit over the head with my *American Heritage Dictionary*. Why had I been so stupid? English teachers sometimes need help with the right-headed idea that everyone can and should come to love fiction and that novels, plays, and poetry are the only true forms of literature. How stupid could I have been? However, I was interested in science too, and I had a shelf of science-related books in my classroom.

Kiley stood over me as I sat at my desk like she was daring me to challenge her to another novel for her to shoot down. She was barely passing her English class and needed to read and write an analysis of "a book of literary merit," as the syllabus put it.

"I have an idea," I said at last. "I have a small shelf of non-fiction books over there on various topics--most of them science related. All of them are classics of their kind. What if I let you pick one to read and write your paper on? Would that be acceptable to you?"

"I don't know," she said. "I guess it's worth a shot." She spent a half hour looking over the various books. There were about two dozen books for her, and she did select one, much to my surprise. There were books like *The Lives of the Cell* by Lewis Thomas, *Tales from the Ant World* by E.O. Wilson, *The Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, and even *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard.

"Ok, I found one," she said. "I guess I can try to read this one."

"Thank you for your extraordinary effort," I said. "Which one did you choose?" It was *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell. "No way!" I said. "That book is why I majored in biology and literature in college. It is that good."

"Well, I hope it lives up to the hype," she said. I was afraid I had oversold it too.

"Yes. I think you will like it. But we'll see." I ended up giving that book to Kiley. When she was ready to return it to me, it was mud-splattered and worn out, with pages falling out and water damage where she had left it in the field overnight. But she had read the book three times. At least, that is what she told me. She read it once by herself, and she said that the experience of liking a book was so novel to her that she didn't know what to do. She shared the book with her mother, Pam, and both reread it together. Finally, she re-read the book to prepare for her analysis paper, but by then, she knew it so well she could have quoted many of her favorite sections.

"I want another book like this," she said. And it struck me: I had helped create, along with the beautiful writing of Gerald Durrell, a reader.

"Well, if you like humor in your non-fiction, I could recommend *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat. I have never laughed so hard as when reading that book. If you want something about human and animal relationships, *Ring of Bright Water* was always one of my favorite books." The best part was that while Kiley started off reading within a narrow genre of books, she soon expanded while still staying within the non-fiction framework. Over the summer, she participated in our Reading Ahead program and polished off five more books. She had developed a taste for good books related to the biological sciences. She finished the summer with *Sweetness and Light* by Hattie Ellis, as her family had adopted some honeybees over the summer and wanted to read more about them.

One saved, hundreds to go. But I learned a lot from Kiley. Books bring a person an immeasurable amount of joy, delight, and healing, but any reading list should be tailored to the person doing the reading. Of course, sometimes we must read things we don't want to. (If I see another self-help book on leadership, I will cry!) But as far as possible, we should match the personality of the books we share with students, family, or friends with the nature of the books themselves.

### **Application**

Non-fiction books have the potential to offer readers a source of healing, as they provide unique insights into a variety of topics that can inform our understanding of the world and our place within it. By exploring subjects such as psychology, science, and history, we can gain valuable insights into our experiences and learn how others have navigated similar challenges. Doing so allows us to develop new coping mechanisms and gain greater control over our lives.

In addition to offering practical advice and insights, non-fiction literature can also help to foster a sense of connection with others. By reading about different individuals' experiences, we can develop greater empathy and understanding toward others. This can help to break down barriers and encourage a sense of community as we realize that we share similar struggles and experiences. Ultimately, non-fiction literature has the potential to be a powerful tool for healing and personal growth, as well as fostering a greater sense of compassion and empathy in the world around us.

English teachers and other literary types are often guilty of neglecting non-fiction works. For our education and the interest of those we meet, it is always good to mix non-fiction work into the books you read regularly.

## **Narrative 24**

### **Young Man Crying**

Back in the days before the internet was widespread, college students received their semester grades in the mail. As a sophomore at the university, I was confident in my ability as a student, but not so this spring semester. Full of desire to continue my success with biology, especially botany classes that I had taken, I somehow got the department head to let me take a graduate-level botany class. I was home for the summer. At 20, I still had my room in my parents' home, and my mother had put my mail on my bed. It was just one letter, and I immediately recognized it as my grade. I was slightly anxious because graduate botany had been a difficult class. It had been a mistake to jump ahead of myself and take a class in which I didn't have the proper foundation, but I did it. Unlike most field experience of my previous botany classes (I had had two), graduate botany mostly looked at images of microscope slides of plants in a textbook so dense it could have been made of lead. The "field experiences" were just labs where we used microscopes to look at slides of plant parts.

I struggled with the class, but still, I hung in there and continued to grow. Still, by the end of the term, I realized that it might be possible to get a C in the class. Up to this point, my grades had been flawless, so a C would be a gaping hole, but not the end of the world, or so I told myself. Still, I thought I would get a B, even if it was a narrow escape. When I picked up the envelope off my bed and tore it open, I was more excited than nervous. I had made a mistake in taking that class, but it was no big deal, right? I scanned the list of classes, scarcely caring about my grades in literature, writing, and oceanography. Then I came to it: Plant Physiology: D. My immediate grief was almost like I had lost a family member. Botany had been one of my favorite subjects at the university, and now I had nearly failed a class. How was that possible? I went

from deep sadness to guilt to anger very quickly. I thought, "This professor isn't going to get away with this," and vowed to take it to the Dean. My parents tried to be helpful, but they were disappointed too. I immediately tried to reach my advisor at the university to see what my options were, but it was too late in the day, and I would have to wait until tomorrow. I left a message. Damn!

However, in about half an hour, my advisor called back. When my mother said, "Dr. Head is on the line," my hopes rekindled. Maybe this is only a mistake. Maybe this can be fixed today. No such luck. I cried over the phone with Dr. Head. I must have sounded like a five-year-old child, and I cannot remember what I said, whimpering and gasping like I was. But I remember what she said, something I often think about. "Listen, Don, you got in over your head, you received a D, but you passed the class. There is nothing that is going to change that. Learn a lesson from it. Be thankful that at least you will get credit for the class." And that was it. She figuratively slapped me in the face. Grow up was her underlying message, which has translated into my teaching method.

### **Application**

When we face challenging times, persevering through adversity can be an important step in our personal growth and development. Although it may be tempting to give up and lose sight of our goals, we can demonstrate our resilience and determination through these moments of difficulty. By facing our challenges head-on, we can develop the skills and qualities that will help us succeed.

In addition to helping us grow and develop as individuals, persevering through hardship can foster a greater sense of gratitude and perspective. When we face setbacks and difficulties, we are reminded of life's preciousness and fleeting nature. This can help us better appreciate our

things and develop a deeper understanding of our lives and experiences. Ultimately, persevering through adversity can be a powerful means of personal transformation and growth, helping us become more grounded, compassionate, and resilient.

Literature helps us heal through challenging times. Many people find that poetry is a healing agent that can aid someone hurting because of the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” we must dodge in our daily walk in life's journey.

*When despair for the world grows in me  
And I wake in the night at the least sound.  
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake is.  
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

(Berry, 2018).

## **Narrative 25**

### **Just Say No to Jane Austen**

I am old enough to remember Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No to Drugs" campaign. While I thought it was naive, I also thought it was better than nothing. As a reader and an English teacher, I am embarking on my "Just Say No" campaign--Just say no to Jane Austen. Now you must understand something: I love Jane Austen, not as much as my wife, but still, I am a Jane Austen fan through and through. I have read all her books more than once, have watched all the movies based on her books, and love to discuss her with my literary friends. Nevertheless, readers and teachers should Just Say No to Jane Austen and other great classics for two reasons.

First, they are missing out on many outstanding new and foreign literature. Second, the people most likely to use literature for healing don't need the so-called classics; they need literature that speaks to them in their situations. While it is true that these books might sometimes be classic text, often it is not, and the more we can be better acquainted with the greater scope of literature, the better. I am not saying we should do away with the Canon of great literature but rather expand it.

Haven lived with her grandparents because her father was in prison, and her mother couldn't care for her. Like too many teenagers today, she was emotionally fragile, constantly tired, and depressed. I didn't have her in my English class, but she could come into my room at lunchtime and sometimes after school to eat, play chess or just socialize.

When she plopped her backpack on a table, I noticed it was overstuffed and too heavy for one person to lug around all day.

"If those are textbooks you have in your backpack, I think you are carrying around too many," I said.



"You are going to hurt your shoulder or back."

"Yeah, it's OK," she said.

"Why don't you keep some of your books in your locker?"

"Nah, we don't have that long between periods, besides..." "Besides what?" She signed.

"Besides, I don't like being in the hallway. Too much shit going on. Too much of a hassle. I would rather just carry all my books."

"Oh, OK," I said. I knew that being at school was difficult for Haven in her current situation, and it was easier for her to be outside the mainstream of high school life.

"What are you reading in English," I asked a few minutes later.

"This." She didn't even want to name it. It was a *Norton Introduction of Literature*.

"Wow, I had that book once too. It has a lot of great short stories and poems in it. Do you like it?" I could see that she didn't. The book was a burden to her, even though she could have downloaded most of the content on the internet if she wanted to.

"I just can't get into it," she said. I picked up the book and looked at the authors: Chaucer, Donne, Shakespeare, Milton, Marlowe, Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge stood out among others. All male, all white, all dead. These were some of my favorite authors, but I could see that, at least right now, they weren't making much of an impression on Haven.

And before you think anything to the contrary, I believe that students should be exposed to these and other great authors, but I think they should be allowed to develop an interest in them. Otherwise, we risk alienating them from the classic authors entirely. Too often, teachers and other influencers can turn students off the subject they are promoting. My freshman English teacher nearly ruined the book for me with her semester-long journey through *The Odyssey*. It wasn't until I read it again in college that I began to admire it.

Haven was looking down at her phone when I asked her, "What if I asked Mr. McKay if we can find a book better suited to you right now? Would that be all right with you? If he is OK with it, would you like to switch to a book you like?"

She looked at me, unbelieving. "Yeah," she said.

Fortunately, Mr. McKay was OK with the plan and was even excited that Haven had shown an interest in reading anything. I was to develop a reading list with her, and she would read, journal, discuss, and reflect on each book she agreed to read. Though she was still registered in Mr. McKay's class, I would "grade" her on her participation and creativity. Over the following week, Haven and I met at lunch to develop a reading list, and while the books weren't classics of the English Canon, they were all great books. Most importantly, these books helped Haven heal from the various areas of her life that had damaged her.

One of the first books Haven read was *Hold Still* by Nina LaCour. This book helped Haven deal with the grief of saying goodbye to her family, even though staying with her grandparents meant a much more stable life. I would read the book with her, and at lunch, we discussed it. Over time, other students joined our voluntary bibliotherapy sessions and received credit for reading books that were helping them in other ways.

That year, the closest we got to a "classic" was John Green's *Turtles Down*. It was amazing how much the students enjoyed discussing each book. I kept telling myself there would be time for them to read Hemingway and Dostoyevsky. They still may get a great deal of empathy reading the adventures of *Huckleberry Finn* or *Jane Eyre*. But for now, we needed to meet Haven and other students like her where they were.

As we approached the end of a book, the excitement grew about discovering which book we would read next. We usually spent a week on that process, poring over book lists and

reviews. Then when we ordered the books, it was all anticipation until they came in. However, I wouldn't open the box of new books until we had finished the current one. Our next book was *Darius the Great is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram. "Oh, please. Open the box! I want to get a head start on reading." It was music to my ears.

### **Application**

Books can serve as a helpful tool for teenagers struggling with mental and emotional health issues. Reading books discussing similar experiences or offering advice and guidance can provide comfort and reassurance for teens who may feel isolated or misunderstood. Furthermore, books offer a safe space to explore their emotions and thoughts in a non-judgmental environment, leading to greater self-awareness and understanding.

In addition to promoting mental and emotional well-being, books can also be instrumental in developing important life skills. By exposing teenagers to diverse perspectives and experiences, reading books can help to build empathy and communication skills. Moreover, books can help teenagers hone their critical thinking skills by exposing them to complex issues and ideas, which can be invaluable for academic success and the world beyond. Books can be essential for teenagers looking to heal and grow, offering valuable insights and skills for a lifetime.

## Narrative 26

### Poetry Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

A huge maple tree was outside my classroom with a bench underneath for years. On warm spring or autumn days, I often went there after classes ended just to reset and enjoy nature for a few minutes before returning to school to score essays, call parents, or do whatever my end-of-day routine required. Over my years of teaching, I discovered that taking a little time for myself at the end of the day allowed me to be a more disciplined teacher and get more done on time because I am not a naturally disciplined person—not by a long shot. This idea: that taking some “me time” can make a person more disciplined and productive is one that I have passed on to my students over the years.

Rachel was the classic over-achieving student. As a junior, she was determined to keep her 4.5 average, including the bonus GPA she got for taking mostly AP classes. While she was an exemplary student, I was worried about her. \ Her studies so drove her life, she allowed little time for her imagination and the arts—for the part of life that was the antithesis of the 8-page history essay, the mid-term pre-calc exam, or the AP biology presentation. It was May, near the end of a tough school year for students. In my writing class, I had several in Rachel’s shoes: stressed out and needing a break from their studiousness. “This is a job for Mary Oliver,” I thought.

One section of my classroom library is devoted to poetry, and a few students frequently pull the poetry books off the shelf to read, but most bypass poetry altogether unless we are working on a poetry unit. Even though my writing class wasn’t working on poetry then, they needed a poetry intervention. I scanned the shelves and saw the worn volume I wanted: *Owls and Other Fantasies* by Mary Oliver. Perfect.

The class had not started yet, and Rachel sat at her desk working on math problems. The other students were filing in, talking, and pulling a notebook or computer out of a backpack.

“Getting ready for class,” I thought. “Well, today is going to be a little different.”

“Grab a notebook and a pencil, and leave all your electronics behind,” I said. “We are going outside. We found the maple tree, resplendent in its spring attire. So far, the students were intrigued and happy to leave the school for a few minutes...all except Rachel. She seemed distracted, like she was missing something important.

“All right, I want you to spread out around the tree and then lie on your back with your feet toward the trunk of the tree.” These instructions were met with quite a kaffuffle. Phrases like, “I’ll get my jeans dirty,” “There are sticks on the ground,” and “I see a cigarette butt” came to my ears, but I ignored them.

“You’ll be fine. Just lie on your backs with your hands at your sides. We will spend five minutes just listening and looking into the sky. Just relax and listen to any sounds that come to your ears and look up at the sky and all that is in it.” The five minutes was a long time for some students, whose attention span was slightly longer than a bumblebee’s. I blamed it on Snapchat or whatever other smartphone distraction was shriveling our children’s attention span. Still, the whole class made it through the five minutes, and most liked the listening exercise and wanted to go even longer. The strangest thing I saw, however, was Rachel. In the short five minutes that she had to leave everything else behind her and just listen, her face had relaxed, and she had the makings of a smile on her face.

“All right, you young authors did an amazing job listening and looking. In a little while, I will have you do something with what you heard and saw, but I just want you to listen a little

longer.” Then I pulled out the Mary Oliver book of poetry. The maple tree and the birds, and the sky had set the mood. Now for the main act. I read them the poem, *Hawk*:

*This morning  
the hawk  
rose up  
out of the meadow’s brose  
and swung over the lake —  
it settled  
on the small black dome  
of a dead pine,  
alert as an admiral,  
its profile  
distinguished with sideburns  
the color of smoke,  
and I said: remember  
this is not something  
of the red fire, this is  
heaven’s fistful  
of death and destruction,  
and the hawk hooked  
one exquisite foot  
onto a last twig  
to look deeper  
into the yellow reeds  
along the edges of the water  
and I said: remember  
the tree, the cave,  
the white lilly of resurrection,  
and that’s when it simply lifted  
its golden feet and floated  
into the wind, belly-first,  
and then it cruised along the lake —  
all the time its eyes fastened  
harder than love on some  
unimportant rustling in the  
yellow reeds — and then it  
seemed to crouch high in the air, and then it  
turned into a white blade, which fell.*

(Oliver, 1955).

It was an unexpected delight that a red-tailed hawk happened to be soaring above us while I read the poem. “Couldn’t have planned it better,” I thought. “Now, take your notebook and write something about what you just heard and saw,” I told the class. “It could be a bird, the sounds of

spring, the sky, whatever. It can be a poem, a short story, or even an essay. There is no judgment in this. I want you to love it; that is the only requirement.” The students enjoyed this exercise so much that they wanted to do it every week for five weeks of the school year. And we did. Rachel didn’t change from being Miss Super Student, but I noticed she was happy and a little relaxed, spending time away from school for the half hour the class lay under the big maple tree each week.

### **Application**

Spending time getting away from life and doing things you enjoy can make you more creative and productive. Engaging in activities that bring you joy helps to reduce stress and enhance your overall mood. This can improve your cognitive function, allowing you to approach tasks with a clearer mind and increased focus. When relaxed and happy, you are more likely to think creatively and develop innovative solutions to problems. For many, reading fills this function. Part of the healing ability of literature relates to its ability to bring down stress levels and promote creativity and thought.

Engaging in hobbies or activities that you enjoy can lead to an increase in confidence and self-esteem. Feeling good about yourself makes you more likely to take on new challenges and think outside the box. Pursuing your passions can also help you develop new skills, which you can apply to other areas of your life. For example, learning a new instrument can improve your hand-eye coordination and problem-solving skills, which can be useful in other areas of your life.

Letting go of the stresses of life for a time and finding something you just enjoy doing can help you to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Taking time for yourself and engaging in hobbies or leisure activities makes you less likely to experience burnout or fatigue. This can help you to remain productive and focused when it comes time to tackle important tasks or projects.

When you balance work and play, you are more likely to feel fulfilled and satisfied with your life.



## Narrative 27

### If I Like the Book, Do I Have to Read the Series?

If you've read many young adult books, you know that many come in series. This is partly due to the demand for a series from the publisher, not to mention the author's fans, and partly for economic reasons. This is not to fault the author or publisher. If an author can write a series of popular books, there is much more money in royalties. Some of the greatest young adult books have been part of a series, including the *Earthsea* series by Ursula LeGuin, *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer, and the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth.

Of course, the series is nothing new. When I was a child, the *Anne of Green Gables* books by Lucy Maud Montgomery was very popular and still are. Then there were the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mystery series that drew hundreds of thousands of readers in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. But if you read the first book in a series, do you have to read the rest? And, for that matter, do you even have to read a series in order? For the most part, the answer is no, you are not obligated to read the whole series, and no, you don't have to read it in order, but there are some caveats.

Most series, such as *The Arc of Scythe* by Neal Shusterman, is written to build upon one another, and you can best see the development of the characters by reading the books in order. While the characters grow and develop through the books, each volume, such as *The Long Winter*, can stand independently. Some series, such as *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, were originally written as one book, but the publisher broke up the book into three parts for size and monetary reasons. The books in other series are written more as independent units that can be read in order, which doesn't affect their pleasure. *The Little House on the Prairie* book by Laura Ingalls Wilder is this type of series.

Still, other series of books are somewhere in-between. I first read the *Harry Potter* series in order, as they were published like much of the reading world did. But now, when I return to them, I usually go back to my favorite series of books, such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The *Redwall* series by Brian Jacques is a set of books that I read out of order from the start, and it never bothered me as a reader. The same couldn't be said of a series like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins; however, that would make any sense if read out of order.

When deciding if I want to read a whole series of books, I first ask myself if I have the time. If it is during the school year, I generally don't read a series of books because I want to keep up a lively mix of books I can discuss with others and write about. During the summer and other vacation times, however, I love to indulge in the whole series of books that let me completely submerge myself in the environment the author has created. This was (and is) the case with the *His Dark Materials* series by Phillip Pullman. I also have a yearly habit of reading *The Lord of the Rings* during the winter holiday.

I must admit I feel a little guilty for not reading the second book in a series. Sometimes, I think that the first book did not spark enough interest in me to read. I enjoyed *Artemis Fowl* by Eoin Colfer but was not inspired by the series, so I haven't completed it. Maybe next spring break or summer! However, you feel about a series of books, remember that the decision is yours, but choose wisely because you will spend some quality time with these books.

### **Application**

Reading a book series, even informal series such as Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* series can be a rewarding experience that offers a unique sense of immersion and engagement with the world and the characters created by the author. As the reader progresses through each book in the series, they become more deeply invested in the lives and struggles of the characters

and begin to develop a deeper appreciation for the author's storytelling and world-building abilities. The sense of continuity and familiarity offered by a book series can be comforting, providing stability and predictability amidst the chaos of the real world. Furthermore, completing a book series can be a deeply satisfying experience, as the reader feels a sense of closure and fulfillment from following the characters' journeys from beginning to end. I enjoy this experience with *Lord of the Rings* every year around Christmas. Overall, reading a book series can be a rewarding experience that offers both comfort and satisfaction to readers.

## Narrative 28

### What's a Good Bibliotherapist?

A High School Librarian, Don doesn't like the scene in the lunchroom. It's noisy, and he feels continually on display there. He realizes that his friends need a time and place to blow off the steam created by high school classes, but he prefers a quiet lunch. He also likes that he gets to do something that no other student can do- eat lunch in the library. His price of admission is a discussion with Mr. Rogers. Howard Rogers is a fifties-something curmudgeon whose love for books is only surpassed by his skepticism toward all things. He is an efficient librarian, well-liked by the staff, and mostly avoided by the students. Still, he has taken an interest in Don, and the two talk about many things during their lunchtime discussions, mostly books and the ideas conveyed in books. Mostly I remember (for I am the Don in this chapter) Mr. Rogers talking to me behind his counter and taking out the huge thermos that he always kept at the counter and pouring himself a coffee. I remember how he poured it slowly so that none of it spilled and looked carefully at the cup as if he was formatting his thoughts. Until then, no one had such a profound effect on Don's life as Mr. Rogers, the librarian, because no one, not even Don's parents, taught him to question everything the way Mr. Rogers did. "How do you know that's true?" "What evidence do you have for that?" "Can you prove it?" These are common expressions that Howard Rogers uses to get Don to think more deeply about issues surrounding science, politics, religion, and education. Coming from a conservative family and a conservative church, Don is used to being told what to think, not how to think. Howard Rogers helps show him how to think with the help of various authors in the library. On a typical day, Don enters the library for lunch, and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is lying on the counter. "You have to read this, man," Mr. Rogers says. "Who is Friedrich Nietzsche?" "His is someone who will make you think

a little deeper. He will stretch your perceptions. I'm not saying I agree with everything he says, but if you want to be well educated, you have to read Nietzsche and other philosophers." "Well, OK." "Besides, we have to have something to talk about." In his way, Howard Rogers was a bibliotherapist to hundreds of students during his career. He knew them well enough to recommend books that would help them grow in knowledge, help them with their classes, help them with a particular interest, and help them heal after a traumatic event. Thirty years after leaving high school, I returned to the halls and the library that meant so much. It isn't used as a library anymore.

### **Application**

To love sharing books, you don't have to be a Mr. Howard Rogers. Sharing the love of books can be a rewarding experience that brings people together and fosters a sense of community. We can introduce new ideas and perspectives by discussing their favorite books with others, spark meaningful discussions, and encourage others to explore new areas of interest. Additionally, sharing books can help to build stronger connections and relationships with others, as people bond over shared experiences and interests.

Communicating our love of books can have a positive impact on society. By promoting literacy and a love of reading, individuals can help cultivate a more informed and engaged citizenry better equipped to tackle complex issues and make informed decisions. By introducing new and diverse voices to others, individuals can help to promote a greater sense of empathy and understanding, fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society. Sharing the love of books can have far-reaching positive impacts on individuals and the greater collective. Ultimately, what Mr. Rogers did for me, we can all do for each other.

A word on librarians. Beyond their informational expertise, good librarians can also foster a sense of community and belong within their libraries. Creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere can help bring together individuals from all walks of life, providing a space for people to connect, share ideas, and collaborate on projects. Furthermore, good librarians can help to promote literacy and a love of reading by offering programs and events that encourage individuals to engage with books and other materials in new and exciting ways. Ultimately, the benefits of a good librarian go far beyond their knowledge of books and information, extending to their communities' social and cultural fabric.

Take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of your librarians. Have you stopped by the desk of your librarian (or any of the library assistants) to thank them or engage them in conversation? If you haven't, take the time to do so this week.

## Narrative 29

### Respecting Different Reading Styles

Apollo sat in the corner of the old, wainscoted classroom; legs crossed with *The Book Thief* propped up on his knees. This was his second week reading the book, and he enjoyed reading it, lifting each page carefully and paying attention to each word as his eyes scanned it. Apollo is a good reader and is often found with his latest book open in front of him. I call him a Reading Gourmand because reading is his passion, and he is very selective about what he wants to read. A marching band could be blaring next to the classroom, and Apollo wouldn't lose focus on his book. Nothing disturbs him when he is reading. However, he is also a slow reader, at least by conventional standards. I have learned that leisurely savoring words and sentences is Apollo's reading style. If necessary, Apollo can kick his reading into high gear, and his comprehension goes down a bit, but not by much. He is just naturally an unhurried reader.

Kaylyn's reading style couldn't be much more different than Apollo's. Kaylyn needs absolute quiet if she is to focus on her reading. During in-class reading sessions, I often let her read in the office next door, so she could read undisturbed. But unlike Apollo, Kaylyn liked to zip through books. She didn't want them to last more than a day or two, and it was hard on her to read a book with the rest of the class because she was through with the book days before her classmates. At home, she said that she read in her room with the door closed to the noises of the house. Kaylyn was our Reading Wolf because her reading was ravenous if she wasn't disturbed.

Bobby would never choose a book to read. Never is too strong a word. Eventually, I could—usually—persuade him about the value of a book, but Bobby acted like a toddler in a toy shop when we visited the library. He handled the books, read the first couple of pages, decided against them, came back to them, decided on another book, rejected that, returned to the first

book, rejected that again, and so on. However, I learned not to make Bobby decide before his time and not to decide for him. Once fed up, I reached for a book I knew he would love and said, “Here, Bobby, read this. You’ve taken too much time, and this is an awesome book. (It was *The Fault in Our Stars*.) Bobby grabbed the book from my hands and spent a week trying to read it, but they never liked it. He fidgeted, stared out the window, went to the bathroom—anything besides reading a book he did not want to. Finally, I realized it was futility for me to impose my will on this young reader. I took him to the library and said, “Look, Bobby, I’m sorry. You have an hour to pick out a book you want to read. Just you and the library for a whole hour. Do you think you can do that?” He smiled and nodded his head. I had learned an important lesson. Children have reading styles, and most of them are different from mine. I need to recognize their reading styles and honor them. If I want my students to become joyful readers, and if I want them to experience the healing that literature can bring, then I need to respect not only what they read but how they read.

### **Application**

Recognizing and respecting the diverse reading styles of children is crucial for fostering a love of literature and enhancing their intellectual growth. Each child is unique, and their approach to reading, comprehension, and engagement with the written word may vary significantly. By acknowledging these differences and providing a supportive environment, educators and parents can nurture individual strengths and encourage the development of lifelong reading habits. Respecting reading styles allows children to feel validated in their learning journeys and increases their self-esteem and motivation to explore new literary horizons. To cater to these distinct reading styles, it is essential to provide various reading materials and strategies that appeal to different learning preferences. Some children may gravitate towards



visual storytelling with graphic novels, while others may prefer the immersive world-building of novels, or the concise information presented in non-fiction works. By offering diverse texts, educators and parents can enable children to find their path in literature, fostering a sense of curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Ultimately, respecting the reading styles of children sets the foundation for their academic success and instills a lifelong passion for reading and learning.

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## **Appendix: Statement of Original Work**

The George Fox University Doctor of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms, throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the George Fox University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes but is not limited to texts, graphics, and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that is intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the George Fox University Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources have been used in this dissertation's production, all information and/or materials from outside sources have been properly referenced. All permissions required for the use of the information and/or materials have been obtained in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

*Donald R. Anderson*

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Digital Signature

DONALD R. ANDERSON

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Name (Typed)

22 March 2023

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Date