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The Future of Reading: An Introspective Look

Coming into this seminar, I was not entirely sure what to expect I simply knew that I have always loved reading and given the opportunity to read more I hastily signed up for the class. I never expected the class to change how I view reading as much as it did. Prior to finishing this class, I would read books for pleasure without really pondering as to what I was reading. In class, we examined reading across all spectrums from publishing to rarity to cultural impacts. Now, I think about all these aspects in every book, I consider when and how the book was made/published, why the author chose to write it a particular way with a specific audience in mind.

As a child, I began reading because of one of my brothers. My eldest brother was (and still is) a self-proclaimed nerd who loved to read, he inspired me to beg my mother to teach me how to read in pre-school so I could be just like him. From there my love of reading flourished and by the end of first grade I had finished two of the Harry Potter books which to this day hold a special place in my heart. As discussed in class, Harry Potter had an immense cultural impact that had been completely unheard of for a young adult fiction series. To this day, the books are still widely in circulation and recently a first edition signed copy sold for almost $200,000. Books are full of magic; they can transport the reader to a new place, time, or universe in a matter of a few hundred words. Every time I step into a bookstore from now on - whether it be Joseph-Beth or Half-Priced Books-, I will take what I have learned from class and apply it to gain a better understanding of not just why I choose a particular book but I will “lurk” and observe what draws others to particular books. My siblings and I all love to read and albeit we all have a few books that we enjoy in common (Harry Potter) but from those select few our favorites drastically differ. This seminar really encouraged me to look internally to see why I love reading and why I read the specific books I read.

From our discussions and assigned readings, the future of reading is slightly terrifying to me. I am the most antiquarian luddite one could meet according to my family. I abhor most technological especially e-reading. After finishing the book from the creator of the Kindle, I wanted to throw it against a wall. His attitude toward e-reading disheartened me because I think there is nothing better than holding a solid book. However, from classmates and discussions I learned new insights as to why e-reading may be beneficial (occasionally). Looking forward I will most likely never own an e-reader but I will try to adjust myself to the new reality we may be living in in the future.

Another aspect of reading and literacy that we touched on in class was the efforts of grassroots organizations in promoting literacy on an international scale. Some organizations fail at this because they simply provide books or libraries without ensuring community involvement or target language. However, we learned about an organization, Room to Read founded by John Wood, that incorporates all the elements necessary to ensure they leave a resource that will truly be beneficial. His organization truly believes in their mission which is illustrated through their willingness to listen to others and accept criticisms like when they were only providing books in English even though in a majority of their countries English was not the primary language. By incorporating community involvement, they ensure that the community benefits in other ways than improving literacy rates. For example, the jobs and resources they source from that community ensuring an economic benefit as well as proving that the community has a genuine interest in keeping the libraries running.

This organization also emphasizes the importance of girls’ rights to read which in many of the cultures they visit are not as encouraged as boys’ rights. This causes conflict at the political level due to cultural differences between the United States opinion of women’s rights and those of other countries where the organization visits. Although they are generally well-received and the impact they have had is unheard of for a truly non-profit organization, there are some places where different perspectives especially considering religion need changing to ensure they reach the most people possible without excluding or angering a government. Wood’s organization is truly inspiring and it truly illustrates how one individual with enough drive can make an impact. Upon reflection, Wood’s determination is inspiring and I intend to take that with me while continuing my education and passions.

Overall, I will take away more from this class than I ever imagined possible. When signing up, I did not think the class would learn about so many diverse aspects of reading, publishing, etc. and how they all differ from culture to culture. Furthermore, it amazes me how even between cultures that speak the same language (U.S. and Canada), reading habits can differ immensely. Yet, a simple story about a twelve-year-old wizard can cross cultural and language boundaries to immerse the world in a tale of fiction. The most impactful assignment we completed in class was by far creating our own mini book which was incredibly difficult but through the process I gained a better appreciation for the amount of work that goes into producing any book whether it be handmade or an e-book. I look forward to taking these concepts with me in life while encouraging more people to read so as to ensure that reading (especially hard copy books) will never die out.