Student Essays: Reading is a Chore

John Matthews
Reading Is A Chore
By John Matthews

I sat on my bed yesterday sorting through week-old newspaper clippings and printed emails that my dad sent me about ways to improve my career search, better my resume, or simply a chain email with some goofy story. Although I am one who never gets sick of trying to figure out if the email-story I’m reading is true or false, I can’t help but wonder what’s on TV, or if I have any new emails. It’s hard to make it through all of that reading without wanting to check Facebook, or myspace, recently developed interactive internet yearbook-like sites. What’s most interesting is not my desire to do something else, it’s the inability to finish the simple reading without being distracted.

There is much speculation as to why people my age are falling behind in the reading of books. An obvious initial response is to say that people are reading more online than in a physical printed source, but it is hard to conceive of someone reading an entire book over the internet. Some say, with our newer ways of eating and reading, being enhanced, that the brain is actually being mesmerized by the dazzling colors. A more compelling theory is that the colorful visual and audio images are actually quicker and therefore easier for the brain to translate into meaning than lines of black letters. In a society where everything seems to be about time and how valuable it is, it really shouldn’t be a surprise that reading is losing its appeal.

Simple desires for instant gratification have become commonplace for many Americans. Marketing has manipulated people into believing that if something does not satisfy in the short-run that it is not worth pursuing. In this instance, reading an entire book will probably lead to more long-run satisfaction, but watching a TV show will lead to more delight in the short-run, so a person should watch TV. Moreover, why should U.S. marketers be concerned with the lack of reading? It is not as if they are making money from people reading books, so of course they are going to promote a strategy that involves enticing more TV viewing. If more book-reading is what everyone wants, then the solution may be to allow marketers to advertise in books. Let them throw an ad in every ten pages or so. It sounds silly, but then again so is consciously choosing to focus-attention on little black characters over large colorful images.

For me, reading is a chore. Let’s just say clipping into a novel or indulging myself with a textbook is not my ideal nighttime activity. Perhaps the reason I’m not fascinated is that the books I’ve tried to read are outdated. Many fictional selections become classics because they were believed to be in some way possible, even though a stretch in some circumstances. Today, most of the ideas in those classics have either been proven right or wrong. Maybe some new classics would trigger fascination with our generation. Even text books, although new, often have the same ideas they’ve had for decades. Only the stories change in order to relate to the reader. The issue then becomes the education of the students. If the student cannot learn through reading anymore, teachers must become innovative and exploit new methods. Many instructors have already begun by utilizing powerpoint presentations more, which many students enjoy as an alternative to or in conjunction with reading a textbook. Much also rests on the shoulders of the student’s personality. Different students learn better with different styles, and in order to maximize potential, the student must discover how he or she learns best. It is not reasonable to blame the teacher or some other problem for personal learning. It seems as if students everywhere are being "diagnosed" with attention deficit disorder (ADD), or even better, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). Are these really disorders that have always been around that just recently have been discovered, excuses conjured up to explain the recent trend of illiteracy, or are they society’s explanation for a youthful reaction to a diverse technological world? Personally, I have no answer to these questions but I have been diagnosed with either disorder. That is not to say that I wouldn’t be if tested, but I guess I’ve just been too distracted to make an appointment.

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