

Transformation of Preference

In the United States, among other English-speaking countries, learning the English language is considered one of the most important keys, if not the most important key, in education. The two aspects of learning the language are reading and writing. Usually if someone likes one, they also like the other. But for me, there was a gradual change from preferring reading to preferring writing.

As a child, writing was never enjoyable for me. Each morning in Mr. Stockmaster's first grade class, we would use the first thirty minutes of class writing in our journals. If we finished writing early, we were able to use the remaining time to read. After the first week or two of school, the journal projects were tiring, and I resorted to writing the same few sentences every day, but simply worded them differently, so I could just spend my time reading because at that time, reading seemed infinitely superior to writing. As an added bonus to the situation, the journals were never really graded, but simply skimmed over to make sure we were writing something down each day, so my plan was flawless; I easily finished every book I could find in Marc Brown's *Arthur* picture book series, and I easily got away with not doing what I was supposed to be doing.

My love for reading continued throughout elementary school and by the beginning of second grade, I progressed into the *Captain Underpants*, *Junie B. Jones* and *Magic Treehouse* series. Considering there were over twenty books in two of the series, and over six in the other,

reading those books carried me well into the third grade. After finishing both series without delay, I wanted more of a challenge. My third grade teacher, Mrs. Nicely, suggested a series called *The Boxcar Children*, which were a bit more challenging in terms of the length of the novels, the complexity of mysterious plots, and the some-what advanced word choices. Most the books involved the four main characters, the Alden siblings, involved in some sort of big crisis, such as staying in a haunted house or trying to figure out who stole somebody else's money. The books kept me on the edge of my seat, and I was always excited to continue reading them. I read multiple different volumes of that series, but never got around to reading them all, because there were over one hundred volumes, from what I can remember.

In middle school, the weekly trips to the library were discontinued, and if we wanted to visit the library, we had to do so during a free period in the day. I never took advantage of a study hall in middle school, and without any trips to the library, my drive for reading slowly decomposed. Mr. Cahill's English class didn't help the situation, either. By the second semester of my seventh grade year, he had decided that we needed to read one novel before we were promoted to the eighth grade. Mr. Cahill settled on a short novel, *In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle*. The book very well could have been the worst piece of writing ever constructed. It was supposed to be a book about a girls' basketball team that was going to the playoffs. Instead, I believe that the majority of the book was spent describing the town that the girls lived in, the annual Memorial Day parade that happened in the town, and the bus ride to the game. I'm not suggesting that the former plot was very interesting, but it is definitely a little more intriguing than the latter. The daily quota was to read one chapter, and it wouldn't have been an easy task. Luckily, Mr. Cahill was not a very attentive teacher. He would usually tell us what to do, then would migrate to his desk in the back of the room and played around on his computer for the rest

of the period, and didn't bother paying attention to what we did. So, I usually read the first page or two, then would just hold the book by my face to make it seem like I was reading, but then would just daydream or stare blankly into the distance. When I finally "finished" the novel like everybody else, I convinced myself that if being older required me to read such terrible books, that I would die of boredom before I graduated high school.

The drive for reading might have been dimmed down, but a new passion slowly arose: writing. By eighth grade, Mr. Rosche had us writing large essays, book reports, and reports. They were much larger projects than what I was used to, but I found writing those large essays quite easy. I easily wrote the required number of pages, and usually went well beyond. I will never forget the last large assignment Mr. Rosche assigned to us before he retired during the fourth quarter of eighth grade, which was a book report over any novel of our choice. When he handed my graded paper back to me, on his last day teaching at the school, he told me that I had great writing skills, and that I was going to do great things in life. This was a great boost to my self-confidence, and was a sign that perhaps I did have a passion for writing. I also remember the book I got stuck reading for that report as well. My friend, Rachel, had spent most of middle school nagging that I read the novel *Twilight*. Tired of listening to the consistent requests to read the book and worrying about the looming due date for the book report, I decided to kill two birds with one stone by reading *Twilight* for the book report. After reading the novel, I wasn't impressed on any level, but I really wanted to learn what happened to the characters. So, I forced myself to read the other three poorly-written novels. Thanks to Stephenie Meyer's way of writing like a sixth grader, reading the remaining books caused pain that was equivalent to slamming my head repeatedly on a brick wall. I learned what happen to Edward, Bella, and Jacob, but reading those novels wounded my love for reading.

Freshman year of high school rolled around, and by then, reading had become something that I would do only if I could find a very well-written novel, or if it was required. However, my love for writing grew. Sadly, I think we wrote bigger papers in eighth grade than we did freshmen year; instead, reading novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Night*, and *Alas Babylon* was more superior on the hierarchy of things to do in English I Honors. So, I was forced to put writing on the back-burner and had to worry about completing the readings. It's not that I didn't enjoy the three novels, because I actually did, but I still craved to write.

The extensive reading coursework continued sophomore year, but the novels that were chosen for us to read were about as strenuous to read as the *Twilight* series that I had been nagged into reading two years earlier. One of my worst memories from Mrs. Dirlam's English II Honors class was the agonizing journey of reading two of the three books of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The books were boring, drawn-out, and wordy, and the plot seemed to be meaningless. About three chapters into *The Fellowship of the Ring*, I declared that reading the full novels would be a waste of my time and decided to start skimming for important information or simply the information that was needed to complete the worksheet of that night's assigned chapter. She then continued to torture us by putting *The Seventh Son* in front of us. Just like the two novels she previously assigned us, *The Seventh Son* was another bland novel which I again skimmed for the significant information. There was light at the end of the tunnel that was sophomore year: The final novel we read was *A Separate Peace*, and it was by far the best of the four books that we read, (and was the only one that I actually read in full.) The plot took me back to the days of *The Boxcar Children*; it seemed like each chapter had some sort of cliff-hanger and I always wanted to read ahead just to see what happened between Gene and Finny next. The symbolism in the novel was intense, and the plot had enough significance that I felt it

was worthwhile to read the book. Despite the fact that we did read one satisfactory novel in the class, sophomore year was the final nail into the coffin of my enthusiasm for reading.

Although sophomore year was a failure in terms of reading, I was able to finally belabor my somewhat new-found love for writing. With the requirements to take a health and physical education class fulfilled freshmen year, I finally had a free period to partake in a print journalism class. I figured that if my next level of English class was void of major writing assignments as it was in my first year of high school, I knew I would at least be able to write regularly for the newspaper. Quite quickly, I found that I enjoyed journalistic writing even better than the creative writing that all of my previous teachers had introduced to us. In fact, I enjoyed (and still enjoy) it to the point that I am considering majoring in journalism in college. Also to my surprise, English II Honors took a complete different direction than that of freshmen year's English class. In fact, they were polar opposites. The reading selections of Mr. Tackett and Ms. Roach were quite excellent, but writing was forgotten about, while Mrs. Dirlam's reading selections were below average, according to my terms, but her writing assignments were some of the best I had seen since Mr. Rosche's projects in eighth grade. Notably, she has us write persuasive essays over which charity or organization is the best, or which one was most worthy of great recognition. She also required that we write a heroic epic piece, in which we wrote what was supposed to be similar to the beginning of a fictional novel. By the middle of the second semester of the school year, I was extremely comfortable with the journalistic writing style that I had been taught to write in at the beginning of the year. The heroic epic project was a success, but the creative writing style seemed foreign to me after I had spent multiple months preparing most of my writings in a journalistic manner.

What will this year bring? I'm not sure. My love for writing can only prosper from here on out, and I don't think anything can change that. I'm still praying that this year's reading selections are not as terrible as those from last year, and if I'm lucky, reading will become somewhat more enjoyable for me this year. I would love to be able to revert back to elementary school, when I was able to pick up a book and actually enjoy it without looking back on all of the horrific experiences I had in reading, notably in seventh, eighth, and tenth grades. I can only hope that I will have a few more enjoyable experiences in reading that will raise my interest level for it once again.