

Experiences Evolve into Effects

Though I naturally felt the need to read and write as a child, I didn't realize that I'd want a career centered on English until I entered my higher levels of education: middle school and high school. Before then, I didn't recognize that I could never be as happy doing anything else, and I also didn't realize the extent of how special reading and writing were to me. As I journeyed through elementary English classes, teachers taught me the basics of writing and encouraged me to read, and I did so with pleasure. But most of the time during that period, my experiences with reading and writing came outside of school. Truthfully, it wasn't until I was in middle school that each English class experience became as potent as my more memorable experiences outside of the classroom.

Eighth grade was the year I felt I could finally unleash the writing skills I had secretly practiced in notebooks for years. My teacher, Mr. Rosche, was often more concerned with writing than reading and gave me some of the most useful tips for improvement. Each day he preached the importance of transitions and word variation, while my previous teachers just told my fellow students and me, "This is a noun" and "this is a verb." For the first time, someone understood my level of literary intelligence. Now that I could challenge myself to be more creative, English class became more fun.

During that particular year, I entered an Ohio writing competition called "Power of the Pen" along with other classmates. In this competition, students were given a prompt to write

about for less than an hour. Within that small amount a time, a short story was to be produced. Students were given three different prompts, one for each round, which resulted in distracting hand cramps. Of course, I was quite eager to do my best while I was there, but I wasn't as experienced with creative writing at the time. Outside of school, I'd fill notebooks with poetry and descriptive scenery, so I had issues with plot creation right away. However, I actually did very well in the district competition, for my third-round story got an honorable mention and I landed myself in eleventh place. Overall, the students from Clyde won second place as a team. Unfortunately, I didn't do so well at regionals, with the exception of one story. I was certainly disappointed, but more than anything, I was dejected that Mr. Rosche couldn't see one of his students go to a state writing competition before he retired.

Unlike my eighth grade year, my freshman year in high school seemed much more focused on reading than writing. Almost right away, my honors English class was instructed to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. I was so ecstatic! While I was on summer break before freshman year, I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* for my own enjoyment and completely loved it. Rereading one of my favorite books in English class would surely make for a fun year... Or so I thought. Discussing the book in class nearly drove me to insanity. Let it be known that I was not an ignorant fifteen year-old; I knew how to analyze a novel. In fact, that was my problem. My teacher kept preaching mature-immature contrasts throughout the entirety the book, but I saw innocence-experience contrasts. I understood where my teacher was coming from, but I also understood a flaw in his theories. One thing I regret was never speaking out, never telling the teacher that no matter how many times the concept was thrown at my face, I'd still have the same arguments to prove that he was wrong. Instead, I sat there quietly in anger for an entire semester, wondering if my English teacher read the *Sparknotes* and not the actual novel.

Fortunately, nothing of the sort irritated me during my second semester of ninth grade. My class only read two more books: *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank, which I only thought was semi-entertaining; and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a Holocaust autobiography, which had a profound effect on me. Throughout the novel, Elie Wiesel seemed to want readers to understand that being indifferent is an atrocious thing, and humanity would be better off if no one was indifferent and people truly cared about the suffering of others. Well, I had always been more emotional than most, so his autobiography didn't necessarily change me, but it did deeply sadden me and possibly assure that I'll never let myself become indifferent in the future. But due to my overly sentimental nature, as I read *Night*, I had trouble eating. One particular evening, I stared at my plate of spaghetti and simply asked aloud, "How could I eat this when Elie Wiesel is starving?"

Though *Night* is the first and only book to affect my eating habits, it is not the first to make me feel, nor will it be the last. Yet, I did not realize this utter importance of forcing emotion onto a reader until the next year, my sophomore year. With that school year came the balance of reading and writing in English class, and much reading and writing was expected of my fellow students and me. Again, I was excited. This time, I was to read the first two books of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*) in the first semester, which sparked my interest. Despite Tolkien's imperfect (but not unlikeable) writing style, I enjoyed these books. More than anything, I reveled in the inspiration behind them: the Industrial Revolution's noticeable negative effects. But what moved me most of all was the idea of trees (or more specifically, the tree-like species Tolkien invented, Ents) getting revenge on insensible humans for their destruction of Earth. Because of *The Lord of the Rings*, I no longer enjoy going to big cities and think only of how Earth's innocence was lost for them to be there.

This impact didn't just last during the time I was reading the books themselves, but forever. Even before sophomore year, I realized that the best books are not the ones that entertain, but the ones that make people think, cry, and carry the story as part of them long after finishing a novel. Also, I already knew that I wanted to write a book at some point in my life, but now I understood what I wanted to aim for since I'd been enlightened. What specifically makes a book special? What makes someone a good writer? Creating a piece of work which ignites passionate reactions amongst readers. Forcing emotion to stir within someone with word organization and scenario creation is the magic of the real world. Although it may sound sadistic, I want to make someone cry someday. I want to move someone the way I have been moved by literature.

Of course, this realization made me a better writer, and I had a chance to prove that towards the end of the first semester. After reading two novels sophomore year, I brushed up my writing skills for a heroic epic assignment. Basically, the assignment called for a portion of a story, five pages minimum. For someone that writes frequently in her spare time, five pages is a small number and is easily surpassed. So, my love for creative writing placed me at a huge advantage, not only in terms of length, but also in terms of coming up with a story. During the summer before, I came up with a couple of plot outlines and started writing an amateur manuscript. I decided to use one of the ideas I often daydreamed about, which was a science fiction/dystopian scenario. After hours of typing while listening to epic instrumental music, tremendous stressing over the ending, and dealing with a frustrating printer, I ended up with fifty-four pages as well as twenty-five extra credit points added to my perfect score. The comments I received on the grading rubric did not make my day, they made my life. As a writer, I had never been more confident.

Later on that year, I still received writing assignments and read two more novels, but the multiple-paragraph responses I wrote as worksheet answers for John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* and Orson Scott Card's *Seventh Son* probably amounted to another few large-scale writing assignments. It seemed I couldn't help but over-analyze as well as express opinions concerning either novel, which is something every creative writer should be able to do. After all, someone that enjoys reading at their leisure doesn't necessarily need to be a writer, but writers need to be readers. If I only read the books I was required to read in school and never read on my own time, I wouldn't be as experienced and I wouldn't have gained a very good sense of personal style.

Does such a statement imply that I believe English classes are less beneficial than outside-of-school reading and writing experiences? Definitely not. But in this case, practice makes perfect. The more one does outside of the classroom, the better. For me, English class not only improved my literary skills, but it also helped narrow down my future career options. Even though I had quite a negative English class experience during the first semester of freshman year, my love for reading and writing is stronger than ever, for my enthusiasm towards the subject can never be dulled. This love is too strong to be deterred. Subsequently, I will always write stories and poetry in addition to reading fiction by the truckload, and English class never failed to enforce that people like me will have a place in the world of careers.