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## Thoughts on Books and Reading (A Guest Editorial)

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# THOUGHTS ON BOOKS AND READING (A GUEST EDITORIAL)

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Frequently the daily emphasis on lesson plans, skill sheets, and work-book pages blurs the ultimate goal for which all reading teachers strive – and that, of course, is to develop in their students a love for reading. It is easy to forget that while the method or process of learning to read is important, it is the attitudes children acquire about reading during the school years which will largely determine their life-long patterns of reading.

With this thought in mind it might be appropriate to consider the attitudes toward reading of some of the great writers of the past, for perhaps through their words we may better see how reading can become a significant aspect of our students' lives.

He that loves reading has everything within his reach. He has but to desire, and he may possess himself of every species of wisdom to judge and power to perform.

William Godwin  
*Enquirer: Early Taste for Reading* (1797)

Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.  
*The Book of Common Prayer* (1662)

How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!  
Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden* (1854)

What's a book? Everything or nothing. The eye that sees it is all.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson  
*Journals* (1831)

We find little in a book but what we put there.  
Joseph Joubert  
*Pensees* (1842)

What we should read is not the words, but the man whom we feel to be behind the words.

Samuel Butler  
*Note-Books* (1890)

There is no frigate like a book  
To take us lands away  
Nor any coursers like a page  
Of prancing poetry.

Emily Dickinson  
*Poems* (1873)

A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good.

Samuel Johnson  
*Boswell's Life of Johnson* (1763)

My early and invincible love of reading . . . I would not exchange for the treasures of India.

Edward Gibbon  
*Memoirs* (1796)

In reading some books we occupy ourselves chiefly with the thoughts of the author; in perusing others, exclusively with our own.

Edgar Allan Poe  
*Marginalia* (1844)

If you wish to be a good reader, read.

Epictetus  
*Discourse* (cir. 115)

In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves.

Robert Louis Stevenson  
"A Gossip on Romance" (1882)

The delight of opening a new pursuit, or a new course of reading, imparts the vivacity and novelty of youth even to old age.

Isaac D'Israeli  
*Literary Character of Men of Genius* (1868)

The only important thing in a book is the meaning it has for you.

W. Somerset Maugham  
*The Summing Up* (1938)

There is an implied contract between author and reader.

William Wordsworth  
Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)

The proper study of mankind is books.

Aldous Huxley  
*Crome Yellow* (1922)

Reading maketh a full man.

Roger Bacon  
*Essay. Of Studies* (1625)

It is a great thing to start life with a small number of really good books which are your very own.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
*Through the Magic Door* (1907)

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. As by the one, health is preserved, strengthened and invigorated: by the other, virtue (which is the

health of the mind) is kept alive, cherished, and confirmed.

Joseph Addison  
*The Tatler* (1709)

Books we must have though we lack bread.

Alice W. Brotherton  
*Ballade of Poor Bookworms* (1887)

The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries.

Rene Descartes  
*Discourse on Method* (1639)

No man understands a deep book until he has seen and lived at least part of its contents.

Ezra Pound  
*The ABC of Reading* (1934)

Books are treasured wealth of the world, the fit inheritance of generations and nations.

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden* (1854)

All that Mankind has done, thought, gained or been it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of Books. They are the chosen possession of men.

Thomas Carlyle  
*Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840)

Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counsellors, and the most patient of teachers.

Charles W. Elliot  
*The Happy Life* (1896)

A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

John Milton  
*Areopagitica* (1644)

That is a good book which is opened with expectation and closed with profit.

Amos B. Alcott  
*Table Talk* (1877)

A book, like a landscape, is a state of consciousness varying with readers.

Ernest Dimnet  
*The Art of Thinking* (1928)

Appreciation of reading for these individuals was obviously much more than just an abstract ideal. Reading became a significant aspect of their lives because it satisfied the universal desire to know and comprehend the world in which we live. Note how often the reference is made to the reading process in relationship to the reader, especially in terms of understanding. Perhaps, we, in the field of reading education, ought to have paid more attention to the wisdom of the past for as William Shakespeare wrote in *Cymbeline*: "Read and declare the meaning."