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Reading for Life

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READING FOR LIFE

The fact that increased attention is being paid to ways of teaching reading in all the subject matter areas in middle and secondary schools is very gratifying. The evidence is now convincing that children are reading better today than in previous generations. And it is pleasant to note that more and more publishing companies are listening to teachers in reference to kinds of materials needed in the fields of developmental reading and reading therapy.

What is disturbing is the number of instances in which reading as a mental "life support system" is not being used by those who have been taught to read well. Regularly, we learn of surveys in which the respondents admit they haven't read a book in the past year. College students freely discuss courses they completed without having read a single text. Most wasteful of potential for continued growth is the number of people who are retiring each year, but who have not learned the art and efficacy of a life-long reading habit.

What we need to recognize is that reading is a set of skills that we must learn to demonstrate as satisfying and fulfilling. With such an emphasis, we can build the concept that reading is an essential part of consumerism, a basic skill for participation in a democracy, and an altogether reasonable form of entertainment.

At present, we struggle to bring our students to the point where we may regard them as reading and writing graduates, but because they never learned how to *like* reading, they drop it when they graduate. We can find our graduates at ages twenty, thirty, and forty, engaged in all forms of commercialized entertainment to use up the spare time they are blessed with. But reading is not chosen. Why not? Too time consuming. Too boring. A few, in a spasm of virtue, subscribe to Book-of-the-Month Club, Inc., but that may become an exercise in exhibiting the "right" books in the home, and knowing a few of the best quotes.

A book is the better part of an author, and the art of becoming well acquainted with a number of interesting authors through their works is a warming experience. Choose a writer and try to learn what he really thinks or believes about the experience of living. This is what raises reading to the level of a fine art.

In a few more years fifteen percent of our population will be over sixty-five years of age. Almost all will be expected to surrender their productive jobs to the younger people. Those who have been preparing for retirement by establishing satisfying and useful living patterns will not be traumatized by the sudden wrenching out of old routines. For this reason, it seems appropriate to suggest most emphatically that we all investigate a *personal reading program* for ourselves, at whatever age we are.

By program, we mean much more than a half-hearted resolution that we will soon begin reading regularly. A program calls for organization and sequence. Nancy Larrick guides elementary teachers in good book choices, and G. Robert Carlson's expertise helps junior and senior high school teachers. Just so, all of us adults need to set our individual goals and directions, and personal reading will be given a rebirth through regimen and its results. **READING IS GROWTH.**

Kenneth VanderMeulen
Editor