

This week's reading has built upon my belief that reading is a very personal hobby and experience. I truly enjoyed reading letters from *A Velocity of Being* and gaining insight on the extremely varied and unique reasons why people read, and continue to read. There were so many powerful excerpts that raved about the many things reading has to offer-several even stated that reading had "saved my life". That paired with the first two chapters of our textbook, *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*, has given me some insight on the role of literature in the lives of children and the rest of society. Throughout history it is clear that societal views about children and childhood were reflected in literature. As views on childhood and societies changed, so did literature. I have past experience studying the relation between art and views on childhood, but never about literature and I personally find it fascinating. In order to deepen our understanding of why we read today, it is important to explore why people read in the past.

The first two chapters of our textbook outlines different types of children, along with literary characters that exemplify each model of childhood. The romantic child is one that is "the embodiment of innocence" (p. 15). Several books were cited which represented the romantic child and the idea that childhood innocence should be protected. One example was from *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, "teenager Johnny encourages his friend Ponyboy to retain his 'childlike' wonder"(p. 17), he did this by telling Ponyboy to "stay gold". Quite the opposite idea of childhood is the sinful child, which describes children as in need of training to break them of their sinful ways. Before the early twentieth century, there was a shift resulting in the working child, in which children were utilized as sources of labor. Literature that illustrates this model of childhood, "show the working child as fully capable of earning an income, engaging in exhausting physical labor, and acting independently of adults" (p. 21). Then came along the sacred child model which revoked all previous views about children in the workforce. This era began to view children as precious lives to protect and provide for as school became much more important. The textbook goes on to describe several more childhood models, but I began to wonder; what does that tell us about why people read? Perhaps it can offer us insight on what sort of message that was meant to be sent to children through the use of childhood model characters. For instance, the era of the romantic child might have viewed the purpose of reading for pure enjoyment and entertainment, the era of the sinful child might have focused more on reading to learn and teach moral lessons, and the era of the sacred child could have seen the purpose of reading to assist in growth and development.

What I think our textbook fails to mention in the first two chapters are the emotional benefits of children's literature. There is a letter in *A Velocity of Being* written by Emily Levine in which she describes a book she read in school when she was 12. She developed a deep connection with the main character who seemed to be going through exactly what Emily was in her real life. "I felt such an intimate connection with her, as if she'd looked deep inside me and knew me in the way I wanted the world to know me. Reading didn't just offer escape; it offered connection" (p. 52). Just like there are many different reasons that people read in the past, I believe the reasons for reading are just as complex today. Children's literature is a genre that seems to contain many sub-genres that serve multiple purposes. Perhaps a children's book that is a historical fiction book has the intent of teaching young children about an event in history in a more meaningful way. Another children's book that is fantasy could have been written just for

the pure value of imagination. I believe that people choose to read today because it brings them joy, and that joy can come in many forms. For some, it brings the joy of learning new things and for others it could bring the joy of a good laugh, or even a good cry. What I think is so special about reading is that it can offer so many different things and could be just the thing you didn't know you needed. *A Velocity of Being* contains hundreds of testimonies of this. "I learned as a child that adventure doesn't have to be physical. Some of my biggest and most exciting escapades have sprung from the pages of books" (p. 102). "Some books are toolkits you take up to fix things...Some books are wings...Some are parties to which you are invited...Some books are medicine, bitter but clarifying....Some long books are journeys, and at the end you are not the same person you were at the beginning (p. 36). In order to access the magical world of literature it is imperative that children learn how to read first, which is why it is so important to instill a love of books early. As a first grade teacher, I see firsthand the pressure put on young children to learn how to read. Literacy based instruction takes up more than 2 hours of our day and at times, it feels like the enjoyment of reading is lost in the curriculum. I believe that if we teach our students not only to read, but to love reading, they will reap the benefits for the rest of their lives. If students learn to dislike reading they most likely will not make reading a habit as an adult. Why do adults read? Because they were once children who loved reading. We read because it is fun. We read because books offer us knowledge. We read because books offer us emotional support. We read because it can change who we are.