

# Experience Magic: Read!

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## 1. Introduction

If experience is the best teacher, then reading may be the best life experience. Reading books is a unique experience that will take you on a journey into another world. You will learn about people you have never met but who have already left an indelible mark and a legacy that inspired so many generations. Reading is an institution devoted wholly to the mind and the imagination. Books contain spiritual values of all ages and we perceive them as simultaneously present and vitally alive. Each book is a precious treasure with countless implications and the reader is ultimately left to discover not only the subject at hand but also the deep layers of the spell cast by a tremendous force with its innermost meaning for each individual with a curious mind and its probing questions.

## 2. What Is History Teaching Us?

John Dos Passos (1896 – 1970) was an American novelist who traveled a lot, especially to Europe and the Middle East, where, among other things, he learned a lot about literature. He left us a rich legacy of novels and essays that made him a major figure of the post-World War I “lost generation.” In one of his essays, Dos Passos reflected on the concept of history and its value on the new generations of Americans. In his view, going back in time “to the written record” we may be able to find solutions to “the riddles of today” simply by looking at the way previous generations solved their own problems:

In times of change and danger when there is a quicksand of fear under men’s reasoning, a sense of continuity with generations gone before can stretch like a lifeline across the scary present and get us past that idiot delusion of the exceptional Now that blocks good thinking. That is why, in times like ours, when old institutions are caving in and being replaced by new institutions not necessarily in accord with most men’s preconceived hopes, political thought has to look backwards as well as forward. (*The Ground We Stand on*, 2010, pp. 1-2)

From the general concept of history lessons, which Dos Passos so brilliantly presented in his essay, readers can also take copious notes from various cultures and apply them not only in everyday life, but also in challenging and empowering new generations to absorb every little bit of information that might become useful in the future. In other words, reading provides a necessary continuum which binds generation after generation to a common quest for what makes us what we are today: information seeking creatures. Therefore, we might say that the best examples from the past gradually become the building blocks that create new knowledge in the future.

Furthermore, from Socrates we learn that he was never happy with what he knew and always asked questions. We do the same in the classroom – we encourage students to ask questions too. The famous principle that a composition must have a beginning, a middle, and an end comes to us from Aristotle, who was also the first one who thought of parts of speech. Cervantes gave us Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who learn together and teach each other, just like teachers and students.

By the same token, in *The Little Prince*, a fox asks the young man to tame her. When the prince admits he doesn't know how, the fox just tells him to do it and learn by doing it. Isn't that more or less what we do when we teach? Hemingway was the master of understatement in writings you need to read twice to appreciate them. We do the same when we review or re-write previous tasks. In Shakespeare we see a seemingly impossible combination of tragedy and comedy, two opposites glued into one witty synthesis of characters and plots, which reminds us that our classes with their learning outcomes should also be a world of serious fun.

Similar historical or literary examples would definitely provide samples of human values in lessons that might offer food for thought, and, if possible, even role models. According to Kilpatrick,

Who can read about King Midas and his golden touch without desiring to always put people before possessions? Who can read *A Christmas Carol* without desiring like Scrooge to honor Christmas in his heart and keep it there? Who can read *To Kill a Mockingbird* without wishing to be a little more like Atticus Finch – a little braver, kinder, wiser? (Kilpatrick et al., 1994, pp. 23-24)

Writers use a universal language in the realm of imagination, with heroes embodying values that will be woven into our daily routine. Teachers, like writers, become role models, who, in many cultures can replace parents, and behind each lesson created for the classroom, students will be inspired and motivated to discover the powers of wonder (remember that the word 'wonderful' contains 'wonder') and imagination.

When addressing his students, a teacher once said: "I envy you the chance to read that book for the first time." Good education implies constant reading of new material.

Books will take the reader into another world, in which imagination and creativity are boundless, waiting for all of us to experience, each to his own surprise and delight. Books can inspire teachers to cultivate the same human values and life lessons in our students.

To recap, reading books is a unique experience that will take you on a journey into another world because reading is an institution devoted wholly to the mind and the imagination.

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