

Reading: A Privilege, not an Instinct

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I have a heavy addiction. Not drugs, alcohol, nor social media but reading. Whenever I use a kind of sauce, I have a habit of reading every single item and description on the label. I've read my school's student handbook from front to back not only because I was interested in it but unconsciously. My surroundings are made up by words and numbers. Why shouldn't I read them?

In this modern age, being literate is normal and many people take reading for granted. However, it wasn't always like this. Not too long ago, most people couldn't read, and those who could were able to earn money reciting letters. Literacy meant excellence. Just by knowing how to read, you could have a job with unlimited demand. Even now, some people can't read. I believe we should show gratitude for our ability to read.

However, not all people share my belief. Less people read every day due to the rise of mobile entertainment. Even when people read, they read in short sentences or even worse, in acronyms, mere symbols rather than words. Reading, I believe, is a privileged act that should be used for more meaningful purposes. Is today's convenient world making people think that reading is some sort of mundane task? Or is the ubiquity of reading making us fail to notice the privilege? No, we think of reading as a task, an overdone act that we fail to think as a privilege.

When I lived in the United States, books surrounded me. They were a shortcut to help me to learn English. I put my hands on any book I came upon and soon the shelves in my house were lined with books. Whenever my two hands were open, they quickly searched for a book and became busy flipping pages. Before I went to bed, I would read books. My mom would tell me to go to sleep, but I would read in the dark hours of the night using a desk lamp. I've lost sleep, money and my eyesight in exchange for reading in the dark. However, the time I spent reading books helped me gain the English

ability I have now.

After returning to Japan, books still possessed a big part of my life. With limited Japanese vocabulary, books existed as one of the few inputs I had to learn new words. I would go to the library at school and find books to read during my free time. The more I read, the more I wanted to read. I devoured many books. I reread the same books multiple times. Now, I could recall phrases from many of the books I read.

For me, being able to read in two languages allowed me to expand my world. Being able to read in multiple languages, means I can understand multiple cultures. To me, reading is not an instinct but a well-earned privilege which I fought to gain and expand.

With the more means of entertainment around us, it's becoming harder for us to put our hands on a good read. On the train, less people have their hands on books but smartphones, which wasn't the case ten years ago. I've seen many bookstores close because of the decline of readers. Less people read while having their hands on more technology. This means, our recognition of reading as a privilege lowers yearly. We act as if we were born literate. However, we think this way because everybody knows how to read. Look back at 200 hundred years ago when only the limited knew how to read. They knew the importance of reading and how it created countless possibilities. We should reflect on the importance of reading and think of reading with dignity. I do not claim that we should let go of technology and read but have a life more entwined with reading. Why? Because reading is a privilege we should use to the fullest.