

1

Nine propositions about reading

Objectives

- to orient you to some of the values and approaches that you will find in this book
- to spur your interest in wide and critical reading of the kinds of literary works appropriate to this stage of your education

This introductory unit is meant to engage you in some collaborative ‘play’. This word is not just meant as a kind of cover for what is essentially ‘work’. The National Institute for Play proposes that play “shapes our brains, creates our competencies, and ballasts our emotions”. As we examine some proposals about reading in this chapter, and then about writing in Chapter 2, we would like to look at these familiar parts of our schooling in a new light: the play that “sculpts our brains... makes us smarter and more adaptable” (National Institute for Play, <http://www.nifplay.org/vision.html>).

So we begin the collaboration by throwing out some ideas to you about reading, asking you to take them on board, wrestle with them and follow some activities that question them and see what they have to say.



*“Now you’re probably all asking yourselves,
‘Why must I learn to read and write?’”*

Reading, in its many forms

While you have the luxury of being a student, it’s a good time to consider what reading involves: how it can challenge you, change you, and make you a person who is interesting to converse with... even find a partner and certainly a circle of friends at different points in your life.

On the following pages are nine proposals about reading that might make you think more widely or deeply about reading; you are invited to examine them, argue with them, and refine them. They are not ‘truths’ but proposals.

Proposition 1: there are two kinds of reading

At the very least, here is one way to classify reading:

- Everyday reading.
- Artful reading.

In his DVD course *The Art of Reading* (The Teaching Company, 2009), Professor Timothy Spurgin makes this useful distinction between types of reading. He describes ‘everyday reading’ as the kind of reading we do in our daily life to acquire information, follow instructions, get directions, see what’s going on in the world: what we find in news reports, recipes, emails, blogs and tweets.

Some of the reading we will do in this course will involve everyday kind of reading – in fact, this book itself is that kind of reading. It will provide answers to the following questions:

- What’s this course about?
- What is the course asking me to do?
- How will I get my marks for the course?
- What kind of work have other students done?
- How have examiners responded to students’ work?

‘Artful reading’ is not quite the same thing. In fact, it can be very different from everyday reading and that may possibly be the very reason for its existence: to provide us with something that takes us beyond the ‘everyday’.

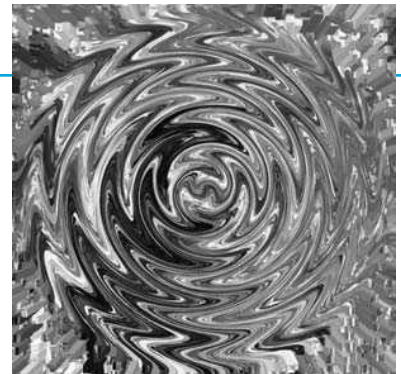
Professor Spurgin cites some of the differences; artful reading is:

- reading to encounter things we have not yet or may not experience. For example, what would it be like to be stranded on a desert island with only a group of our peers, male, as in *The Lord of the Flies* or female as in *John Dollar*?
- reading to become aware of words themselves and their potential. What difference from our everyday words do we see in the first part of W. B. Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming’?

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,...

W. B. Yeats



To these purposes, we can add:

- reading to compare to or understand our own experiences through those of others; how similar or different is your experience to that of Holden Caulfield of *The Catcher in the Rye* or to anyone in the Harry Potter books?
- reading to escape from our immediate surroundings, to enter other worlds or to participate in imagining them as in *Ender’s Game*.

Maryanne Wolf in *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* offers some interesting ideas about humans reading. She talks about reading as a remarkable invention, something that is neither a necessity nor a natural evolution. “We were never born to read,” says Wolf. She also argues that reading can cause a rewiring of the brain (Wolf 2007). On the other hand, Nicolas Carr and others are quite concerned that our habit of skimming and our “hyperactive online habits” are doing damage to our mental faculties (quoted by Patrick Kingsley, *The Guardian*, 15 July 2010). These issues are discussed further on pages 14–15.

Proposition 2: there are some special aspects about artful reading and probably some special skills connected to it

One of the features about artful or aesthetic writing and artful reading that you are already familiar with, if not especially aware of, is that there is more going on than the delivery of information.

So we could ask how do we artfully read things that are artfully written? We are talking, of course, about poetry, novels, plays, short stories, as well as travel narratives, essays, autobiographies and even letters.

Artful reading could be said to be reading that listens to words in several ways:

- first, to hear the **content** created by the words, such as the imaginary lives and events of the novel, the tragic choices or comic sequence of events of plays, the impressions of human feeling in poems.
- second, to hear the **molding of words and their music**, to find words used in new ways, in eye- and ear-catching ways; to be able to hear “the brightness of the present tense” (Corrado Minardi) or the music of the “still unravished bride of quietness / Thou foster child of silence and slow time” (John Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’).
- third, to listen for what Charles Baxter calls “the half-noticed and the half-heard,” the meanings that are playing beneath the words. Students often talk about this aspect of writing and reading as “the deeper meaning”, but the more sophisticated term today is “the subtext”. Baxter also calls this “the realm of what haunts the imagination: the implied, the half-visible, the unspoken” (Baxter 2007).

To open yourself to all of these levels will equip you quite well to become an ‘artful reader’. When you set yourself to read the words and hear the words and speak the words, you begin to evolve towards the adult reader that we hope you will become.

Proposition 3: there are reasons why there are so many bookstores, varieties of e-book devices and readers who read these artful kinds of writing

If you were one of the many lucky children who were read to before they could read on their own, you probably value the memory of reading aloud and of being read to. Many people continue to extend that experience by listening to audio books. It’s not by accident that people like to write (sometimes artfully) about their memories of books and being read to early in their lives and learning to read. Sven Birkert has written a book with a title worth thinking about. It’s called *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. In it, Birkert writes:

From the time of earliest childhood, I was enthralled by books. First, just by their material mysteries. I studied the pages of print and illustration, stared myself into the wells of fantasy that are the hallmark of the awakening inner life. Mostly there was pleasure, but not always. I remember a true paralytic terror brought on by the cartoon Dalmatians pictured on the endpapers of my Golden Books. For a time

I refused to be alone in the room with the books, even when the covers were safely closed... But that was the exception... A page was a field studded with tantalizing signs and a book was a vast play structure riddled with openings and crevices I could get inside...

Birkert, S. 1994. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*.



Whatever may happen to the 'fate of reading', it seems that books, reading and readers may be around for a while. What do you think?

Activity

All of us are likely to have some memory of being read to or learning to read – or a reason why we don't remember. After making a list with your class of some of the earliest books you encountered, write a short piece about one aspect or memory. Try to give it as much individuality as Birkert does in his account.

Proposition 4: reading books can change your life

In spite of the fact that this statement seems like the worst of easy platitudes, there are many people who claim that reading a particular book 'changed their life', so many of them in fact that in 2007 Time Out Guides published a book called *1000 Books to Change Your Life*. Quite a lot of people were willing to tell the publishers about reading that had had this dynamic effect. A good many of these books would come under the category of what we have called here 'artful reading' (or, in our case, IB reading).

Here is what Hari Kunzru, a novelist himself, has to say about his reading of a long and complicated novel called *Gravity's Rainbow*:

This is the one, the paperback that is held together with tape and probably won't stand another reading; this enormous novel about the chaos of the last days of World War II, with its weird concerns about pigs and bananas and plastics manufacture, its occult structure, its hokey songs, disconcerting scope and flagrant disregard for literary taste. *Gravity's Rainbow* is a book dumb enough to call a German spa town Bad Karma and clever enough to induce in me, as a 19-year-old would-be writer, a sense of quasi-religious awe that I find slightly embarrassing now, if only because it's not really gone away. After I first read it, I decided most of my considerable problems would be solved if only I could learn to make something as pleasurable and complex as this book. It made me abandon most of the other options I was considering to make the time pass, which in retrospect was a good thing.

Time Out Guides. 2007. *1000 Books to Change Your Life*.

Getting back to first experiences with books and reading, here is Jasper Fforde's recollection of encountering the two books about Alice by Lewis Carroll. Here, he touches not only on life-changing through books, but two other significant elements of personal reading: the first encounter with reading and the later pleasures of re-reading.

Learning to read, like learning to walk and talk, is one of life's Great Expanders. I can remember acquiring this skill, and also the realization that this was something pretty important. I set about finding a book in my parent's library to flex this newly found power. I didn't want the boring stuff that grown-ups read, but a proper book, with chapters, dialogue and pictures. And there it was – *The Complete Alice*. I fell into the books and was immediately dazzled by the virtuosity of the nonsense and the humorous warmth that runs through the pages – from the Red Queen to the Cheshire Cat to the *Jabberwocky*, possibly the finest piece of nonsense poetry ever written... a decade or two later... I discovered to my amazement that the books had changed. Yes, the old stuff I remembered was there, but there was something else. Something new, subtle, clever and wonderful, hovering in the shadow of the subtext – puzzles of logic, physics and metalanguage. I can't think of a book that has influenced me more. Not simply as an author but as a person: the value of humour, the

boundlessness of the human imagination and how rich life's experience can be, as long as one is willing to look – and be receptive enough to notice it when you find it. I still have that same volume in my library today, and do you know, I think it's still changing.

Time Out Guides. 2007. *1000 Books to Change Your Life*.



Activity

Write a short piece about a book that changed your life in some way.

Proposition 5: 'analysis' in relation to 'artful reading' is not an ugly word

Often, students complain about what they see as one of the primary activities of English classes: **the analysis of artful reading**. Words students may apply to this activity, often with disgust, are 'dissecting' and 'picking apart'. Well, there is perhaps some truth to these descriptions, but looking at the bigger picture sometimes makes the smaller elements of it more reasonable and easily understood.

Sometimes the best analogy or comparison to use when trying to rationalize the close reading or analysis of artful texts is to look at visual artists at work. Often, we feel more spontaneous about responding to visual art than to texts.

Here is both an illustration of a work and a comment on the shaping of the work by the artist, Andy Goldsworthy, who shapes and plays with natural objects, turning them into artful constructions. Goldsworthy's work, in installations around the world, often includes snake-like images or extensions of the natural forms. In the one opposite, constructed as a part of the 100th anniversary celebration of the Dutch Forestry Commission in 1999, first look at the images, play with some ideas about the interaction of the natural and the handmade, and then read what Goldsworthy has to say about his pieces.



Goldsworthy writes:

There is so much to this place that I can't see. Trees that I cannot find and places that I do not know. I cannot explain what I am looking for, but feel there is something here.

Seven days may not be enough to get anywhere close to it (Tuesday 16 March).

Worked among the dunes in the woods; white holes in the dark woods... I found two large birch trees growing together. The trees may even grow below ground and be the same tree. I extended the forms of the trunks into, and then along, the surface of the sand. I enjoyed making this piece and have never worked with sand so connected to trees, taking form, energy and movement from the trunks (Wednesday, 17 March).

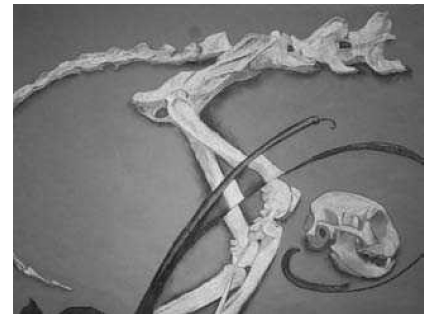
Goldsworthy, A. 2000. *Time*.

Activity

How did reading about Goldsworthy's intentions and feelings affect your response to his work? Could you have made some conjectures about what the artist was intrigued by or trying to express without his help?

In most of our viewing of visual art, we do not have such access, and yet we can appreciate both the parts as well as the whole, and often can express the reasons why we respond as we do.

Now look at the painting opposite for which we have provided no comment. Compare your two responses and your perceptions of what might be beautiful, intriguing or satisfying. Do you think a work of visual art can be 'life-changing' in the way a piece of writing might change your life?



'Untitled' by Joanna Jones

We don't know what ideas or feelings Jones was trying to convey, but it's possible you were willing to make some proposals, both about what the artist had on her mind and in her eye, and what aspects you appreciate or have some feelings about. We are equally free to make such conjectures about writing, even when we have no guidance from the writer about what they were thinking or wanting to articulate. Often this initial response evolves into some close analysis of **style**, technique, or overall impact, or how the work connects with other things we have seen or like.

Usually when we talk about literature – when we analyse – we have no access to what the writer intended, but occasionally we do.

Activity

Compare your responses to the two poems that follow; in the first case, the poet has given us some clues, but in the second we have only the words of the poem.

The first poem is by Jane Kenyon, an American poet:

Once There Was Light

Once, in my early thirties, I saw
that I was a speck of light in the great
river of light that undulates through time.



I was floating with the whole
human family. We were all colors – those
who are living now, those who have died,
those who are not yet born. For a few
moments I floated, completely calm,
and I no longer hated having to exist.

Like a crow who smells hot blood
you came flying to pull me out
of the glowing stream.
“I’ll hold you up, I never let my dear
ones drown!” After that, I wept for days.

Jane Kenyon

In an interview, Kenyon talks about the origins of the poem:

I really had a vision of that once. It was like a waking dream.

My eyes were open and I saw these rooms, this house, but in my mind’s eye, or whatever language you can find to say these things, I also saw a great ribbon of light and every human life was suspended. There was no struggle. There was only this buoyant shimmering, undulating stream of light. I took my place in this stream and after that my life changed fundamentally. I relaxed into existence in a way that I never had before.

Kenyon, J. 1999. *A Hundred White Daffodils*.

A bit later, when asked about the end of the poem, Kenyon indicates that the image at the end of the poem, however, stands for the depression with which she had struggled throughout life.

Now consider this second poem without any addition of comment from the poet:

To the Desert

I came to you one rainless August night.
You taught me how to live without the rain.
You are thirst and thirst is all I know.
You are sand, wind, sun, and burning sky,
The hottest blue. You blow a breeze and brand
Your breath into my mouth. You reach – then *bend*
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
You wrap your name tight around my ribs
And keep me warm. I was born for you.
Above, below, by you, by you surrounded.
I wake to you at dawn. Never break your
Knot. Reach, rise, blow, *Sálvame, mi dios,*
*Trágame, mi tierra. Salva, traga**, Break me,
I am bread. I will be the water for your thirst.

*Save me, my God; take me, swallow me, earth. Save me, take me.

Benjamin Alire Sáenz

Do you feel more secure about the way you read and understood the first poem than the second? What do we do about the question of what the author ‘intended’? How do we appreciate literary works if we know nothing about the author or the context? Can we, in fact, *really* come to understand the works without help from the writer?

For most aesthetic or artful writing that we will read in this course, we will not have this kind of access: what sort of person did Shakespeare want us to see in Hamlet? Did Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* support Okonkwo’s choices or emphathize with them or condemn them?

Collaborating to interpret, to analyse

What moves Hamlet to take action? What kind of a person is he? Do we find reasons in the text to emphathize with or question Okonkwo’s choices? Such questions, if changed a little, can sometimes be best explored if we ‘play’ with them in collaboration with others. This collaboration will involve looking carefully at the **words**, the **context**, the **structuring** of the **events**, the **response of other readers** and a good many other features as well, especially how the writer has shaped the meaning.

The whole point of the ‘analysis’, the collaboration, is that we can return to the texts with renewed appreciation of what we are reading. We are not dissecting some hapless dead frog, whose parts, even well identified, cannot be put back together and appreciated in all his ‘frogness’. We are able to return to the whole literary work and see it in a new way – that’s the whole point of analysis.

Proposition 6: reading alone, and reading with others are the same and different

People who like to read, or think about the human activity of reading, like Maryanne Wolf (see page 8) and those who simply love books, have some interesting ideas connected to reading.

Reading by yourself

Most of us do our reading as a solitary activity and, though we may listen to music at the same time, are usually focused deeply on that reading. Katherine Hayles, a scholar and student of the ways and whys of reading, likes to think about the interface between the past and the present in terms of such things as reading and computer language. She distinguishes two kinds of attention that impact the solitary reading experience.

Hayles makes a distinction between **hyper** and **deep attention** and she sees it as a generational divide. That is, she sees a difference between you, the IB student, and the people who are writing and editing this book.

As you may guess, the shift between generations is one she attributes to the development of “networked and programmable media”, which

changes the way people who have such access “do business, conduct their social lives, communicate with one another, and – perhaps most significant – think” (Hayles 2007).

When you settle down to read Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (because a number of chapters are expected for your class tomorrow), you will probably need to be focused on, maybe even ‘lost’ in, the events of the story. This is what Hayles calls **deep attention**.

However, if you are completing a short piece of reading for a class discussion tomorrow, say just one section of this chapter, you may allow yourself to give attention to it only as one of the “multiple information streams” or tasks that take up your time after the school day: texting or tweeting, checking your email, washing your hair, fixing a snack. This kind of attention is different; Hayles calls it **hyper attention**, and it’s not particularly useful if you have a long reading assignment in *Wuthering Heights*.

Clearly, both kinds of attention are important to anyone living in today’s environment, but it might be good to think carefully when choosing which kind to use in different activities and parts of your day, and, particularly for this course, how you will apply the ideas to your work (or play) that involves artful reading.

Reading as a social activity

As a student in an actual school setting (and some of you could be doing this course in a distance learning environment), you have a built-in group of readers with whom to collaborate. Even online, you have a group with whom to ‘play’ in terms of bouncing ideas off each other. In fact, many adult readers who want to talk about books they have read do so online. Some groups are even set up with a simultaneous discussion going on as people read through the book. David Foster Wallace’s 1079 page novel, *Infinite Jest*, is just one example of a group set up online so that people can share their ideas. (Perhaps the group functioned as a support group to help everyone get to page 1079?)

As an IB student in this course, you have both immediate and online opportunities to exchange ideas about books, to analyse and play with texts both alone and collaboratively. The more you take advantage of these the more you are likely to learn, or to reassemble the ‘frog’ with increased appreciation... or turn it into a prince.

Due to the divide between deep attention and hyper attention, and their relation to reading, many people today are so worried about the future of reading that a ‘slow reading’ movement is growing up. If you have ever heard of the ‘slow food’ movement (as opposed to the ‘fast food’ so widely available today), you will hear its echo in this impulse to ‘slow reading’. If you are interested in this lively debate, you can find Patrick Kingsley’s article at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading/print>. You can also check the slow reading blog at <http://tracyseeley.wordpress.com/>.

Social reading is such an integral part of human life that scholars are now beginning to study the phenomenon. One website where people are thinking about what is happening with reading in the present and could happen in the future is The Institute for the Future of the Book: <http://www.futureofthebook.org/>.

An interesting posting here is called ‘The Taxonomy of Social Reading: a proposal’ by Bob Stein, which sets up a chart showing all the permutations of reading practice that take place in today’s world. If you are interested, you can read his article at: <http://futureofthebook.org/social-reading/introduction/>. He will very likely publish a book one day about his findings.

Activity

There are a growing number of websites where IB and other students are talking about books, and many where you can join people of all ages in discussing, annotating and sharing ideas about literary works.

As an exploratory exercise, go to <http://www.bookglutton.com/> and see how things are organized and shared.

You might want to set up a blog within your class where people can post their results or respond as well as in class about books you are studying and ‘analyzing’. Above all, take the opportunity to talk about books with your classmates.

Proposition 7: 'talking' about books requires listening and 'hearing'

Do you ever get stage fright?

No, I'm not afraid of the stage. It's the audience that frightens me.

Discussion in your IB class, discussion that often centers on what the class is reading, is likely to happen almost every day. Whether or not this is really collaborative depends a lot on you.

Some people feel very at home in class discussions; some do not. Some of us are ready to comment at almost every opportunity; some prefer to listen. All positions are respected in a good collaborative classroom, and for some people speaking up in a discussion doesn't resemble their idea of 'play', but is closer to the anxiety of stage fright.

However, if everyone is to contribute to your group's success in the IB assessment, everyone needs to work at speaking, listening and really hearing. The best way for everyone to 'read' well is for everyone to make a contribution.

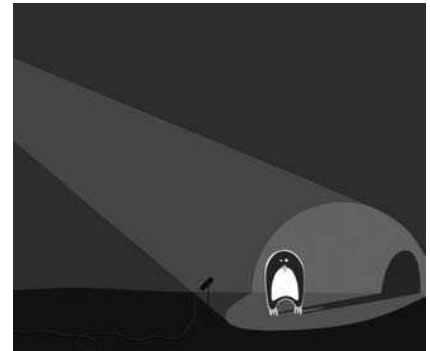
Proposition 8: we need to learn the language people use when talking about artful reading

David Lodge, a novelist and a writer about literature, has produced a very enjoyable and informative book about fiction called *The Art of Fiction* (1992). In short and lively chapters, he talks about particular features of fiction, usually just one, and how it appears in that writer's work. If, however, you look at the Contents, you will see that there is a certain kind of language involved in 'literary talk'. Here are the first entries:

- Beginnings
- The Intrusive Author
- Suspense
- Teenage *Skaz* (Holden Caulfield!)
- The Epistolary Novel
- Point of View

As you can see, there are some terms here that you might need to investigate or learn more about.

If you are going to carry out interesting conversations about reading, and if you are going to succeed in this IB literature course, you will need to acquire a working vocabulary of at least some of these terms – the conventional vocabulary used to identify, compare and closely analyse literary works.



A special point about proposition 7:

This IB course puts a high value on students being able to talk about what they have read or are reading. You will have two assessments that involve you as a speaker and even more often as a listener.

These are two oral assessments: a presentation to the whole class and an individual oral commentary, which at higher level is focused on poetry followed by an interview with your teacher about another work.

Both students who are traditionally eager speakers and those who are reluctant speakers need to use the classroom exchanges to practise for these assessments. The first group needs to slow down a little and listen more, and the second group needs to hear themselves speaking aloud about literature.

Activity

Below are a few assorted sentences from other writers talking about “books that changed my life”.

- a Pick out the literary terms that you recognize and compare them with the words other people in your class would have chosen to say.
- b Can you offer definitions of these literary terms?
- c Some of the terms may be familiar, but can you precisely define or paraphrase these writers’ views of other writers in the following selections?
 - i Of Murakami’s *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, Julie Myerson writes: “I am haunted by this novel. It’s told in an apparently passive, reasonable, deadpan prose, yet it’s one of the most emotionally shattering things I’ve ever read. It has all the stillness and lyricism of a poem...”
Time Out Guides. 2007. *1000 Books to Change Your Life*.
 - ii Andrew O’Hagan finds Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* “a perfect marriage of style and subject.” He says, “Like the best tragedies, *The Great Gatsby* is also a romance...”
Time Out Guides. 2007. *1000 Books to Change Your Life*.
 - iii Talking about Raymond Carver’s short stories, Will Napier immediately identifies the attraction: “It’s the conversational tone of the **narrative** that gets me.”
Time Out Guides. 2007. *1000 Books to Change Your Life*.

Working with terms in the IB guide to the course will, hopefully, increase your fluency with ‘literary talk’ and make you an even better reader. As an added benefit, you will certainly improve the way you write about literature.

Proposition 9: artful reading demands a wide-angle lens

Our final proposition takes in a great deal, and the wide-angle lens of a camera is used to suggest this.

Firstly, we need to think about the text itself and about ourselves in relation to the text as deeply and widely as we can. We sometimes need to widen our lens to consider the following:

- Where am I in relation to this piece of artful writing in terms of time, space, gender, ethnicity, class and other elements that define and shape both myself and the text?
- How many ways can we read this text? Are there layers of meaning we may not see at first reading: issues of power, class and politics, for example?
- How do I hear the author’s attitude to what’s in the text?

For example, will you and I understand the following poem by Gwendolyn Brooks, written around 1960, in the same way if I am a white female lawyer working in Paris today and you are an African-American male student in Atlanta, Georgia or a Chinese female student in an IB classroom in Singapore?

We Real Cool

The Pool Players
Seven at the Golden Shovel

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Secondly, we need to recognize that this IB literature course will ask us to venture into the larger world of reading by including some works of literature that are part of the literary traditions of places and language traditions that are different to our own.

The Rights of the Reader

by Daniel Pennac
illustrated by Quentin Blake



Activity

What works have you read that come from language traditions other than English? Can you think of attitudes that affect your reading from the wider world? Unit 3 considers these issues in more depth.

Another thought about reading:

The French novelist Daniel Pennac believes that you, as a reader, have some rights. What do you think about his ideas? Do you as readers in this IB literature course have rights? Or is this just a fanciful notion demonstrated in Quentin Blake's illustration?

This reading will widen the angle of vision even further. We will need to adopt an attitude of both openness and curiosity, a practice of investigation and adaptation.

The connections of your English course to your theory of knowledge course

One aspect of your English A literature course that will emerge as you go through this book is the inter-relatedness of two aspects of your IB curriculum: your English course and your theory of knowledge course.

As in this chapter, you will find exercises at the end of some chapters that ask you to consider these connections. As we have been exploring reading particularly in this chapter, Maryanne Wolf who has written *Proust and the Squid* offers some more interesting ideas:

...our brain presents a beautiful example of open architecture. Thanks to this design, we come into this world programmed with the capacity to change what is given us by nature so that we can go beyond it... Reading can only be learned because of the brain's plastic design. And when reading takes place, the individual brain is forever changed, both physiologically and intellectually. For example, at the neuronal level, a person who learns to read in Chinese uses a very particular set of neuronal connections that differ in significant ways from the pathways used in reading English.

Wolf, M. 2007. *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*.

At the end of her book, Wolf quotes Kevin Kelly, who takes us into another area of consideration about reading, now and in the future:

In the clash between the conventions of the book and the protocols of the screen, the screen will prevail. On this screen, now visible to one billion people on earth, the technology of the search will transform isolated books into the universal library of all human knowledge.

New York Times Magazine, 14 May 2006.

In a work called *The Future of the Book*, now almost out of date having been written in 1996, the Italian thinker and writer Umberto Eco, in the 'Afterword', speaks of screens versus books, images versus words. Eco takes the view that though many feared that photographs would displace paintings (and did not) the screen and the book will learn to live together harmoniously, that images and 'alphabetic' culture will both be important parts of human experience, that reading will endure as a significant part of life (Nunberg 1996).

Activity

As your final engagement with the 'play' of ideas about reading, consider some of the following questions:

- a What kind of knowledge comes through reading?
- b How does the knowledge derived from reading books measure up against other kinds of knowledge: what we gain through sensory perception or what we learn of the actual experience of emotions through events, for example?
- c Could we do without the kind of reading we do in books?
- d Will books disappear in the future? What kinds of knowledge would be lost, if any?
- e Would the disappearance of books make a difference to human development?