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Empowered by Reading: The Pleasures of a Book

by Barby Punzone

As an avid reader, I believe there is nothing better than getting lost in a writer's mind. I admire how an author can use words to create a new world; by opening the book, I am able to be a part of this world. Upon finishing, I give myself a mourning period of several days to mentally and emotionally detach myself from those characters I became so familiar with and prepare to meet new ones. Not only can the power of books lift your spirits, change your life, and/or inspire you to be a better person, but books can also enhance your vocabulary and grammar skills. As students, teachers, and parents, we all benefit, in many ways, from the habit of reading.

From when I was a little girl, I've always loved going to the library and getting new school supplies, but I didn't really appreciate a good book until later. My first love was *The Kite Runner*, a novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American writer. I welcomed the opportunity to learn more about Afghanistan through the characters portrayed in the novel. Hosseini's book enlightened me about traditional Afghani lifestyle and culture; I was intrigued and drawn in by the family relationships and themes of loyalty and friendship Hosseini depicts.

In the last five years, I've also started to enjoy audio books, which offer a different pleasure. My first was Maeve Binchy's *Nights of Rain and Stars*. I was so impressed by the reader's ability to distinguish the four characters through voice and nuance. After that, I was hooked. Because my children see the way I read, I've sparked their interest. For the last year, at bedtime, my son, my daughter, and I have listened to a book together as they hold the book and read along. I treasure this ritual every night.

I feel as though my passion for reading has also developed my teaching skills. Every semester, I incorporate novels into my ESL classes. Two years ago, I read *Girl in Translation* by Jeanne Kwok and was immediately moved to use it in an ESL remedial writing course. At first, the students were hesitant, as the course is described as one to improve writing—but I explained that reading and writing go hand in hand. I felt so empowered when I got a lot of positive feedback on the book and students' understanding of that connection. For some students, it was the first time they'd read a novel in English, and it gave them confidence to read more. Students may not enjoy every article, novel, or short story they read, but they still benefit from them. They consistently gain knowledge, vocabulary, new idioms, and better grammar by reading. In addition, I tell them that the more we read, the better we write. I incorporate reading into my classes because I love reading and believe in all the possibilities it creates. It gives me great satisfaction to see my students learning by reading, and enjoying it.

Reading offers reflection and respite from our busy lives, and if we can do it together, it is like sharing a vacation with a friend.

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