

THOUGHTS ON READING

By James Collins

Reading is a skill taught in the first grade but once acquired; it identifies you and totally changes your life. Without the skill of reading you are identified as illiterate; with it you are titled literate. The skills appear as magic as you now can create words from symbols and effectively 'hear' the thoughts of the author. Reading is the Siamese twin of writing; they are a conjoined pair. Neither can survive without the other and neither even has a reason to exist without its twin. Communication can now be performed at a distance using notes, letters and even scrolls. Prior to the emergence of reading, all communication had to be handled face to face or with drums and smoke signals. Individual warnings could be left at a location using a symbol for danger such as a skull or a pile of rocks but there would be limited details. This is how, I believe, writing started. Other symbols had to be added to identify the danger. Perhaps a wavy stick placed next to the skull to identify poisoned water or an arrow to indicate the direction of the hazard. It's like the old question, "Which came first the chicken or the egg?" In my humble estimation writing had to come first or there would be nothing to read.

Reading is a magnificent tool; with it you can read about a job; learn how to handle equipment; shop for any type of need; read about other's experiences from distant lands and olden times; and learn about loved ones across the world. When you read an article, you can be transported in your mind to the environment described in the document. The smells and sounds can be made to feel real in your imagination and emotions can be generated in your mind. Sorrow and grief can generate real tears; drama can cause a shortness of breath; humor can cause belly laughs. However, remember that the reader must have experienced some of these emotions previously or they can't comprehend the thoughts the writer is trying to convey. A prime example is the concept of color. We all take it as a

given that people understand color but that is not always the case. No matter how skilled the writer is; no matter how erudite; color can't be explained by the writer nor understood by a blind person unless the blind person previously experienced the sensation. How can the blind read? They can through the use of braille or by listening to a friend read to them.

Reading is truly a magnificent gift. It raises you out of the morass. You become educated. You become independent. You become a major asset to humanity. You are no longer a barbarian; no longer a savage; no longer a serf. You are a civilized human being. You are literate.

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