

Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in "The World of Ideas" -- the City College Honors Core Curriculum in General Education. We congratulate you on your choice of the very best pathway to success at the four-year university of your choice, and on the talent and hard work it took to get here.

To apply for a place in the Honors GE Core Curriculum you are asked to follow the steps below. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis.

1. If you are a new student to the district, submit an "Application for Admission" to the City College office of admissions. You can phone, write, or e-mail to request a complete enrollment packet:

San Diego City College
Office of Admissions
1313 12th Ave
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 388-3475

<http://www.sdcity.edu/request/information.asp>

2. Fill out the application form.
3. Read the attached article by Mark Edmundson entitled "The Way We Live: 8/1/04; The Risk of Reading" and submit a response paper of approximately 500 words.
4. Submit a copy of your assessment test scores to the City College Honors Program in room A-1-N.
5. Transcripts are necessary only for first time college students whose high school GPA is less than 3.50, or who don't meet the qualifying score on the college placement exam.
6. Are you interested in being considered for a Book Award Scholarship being awarded by the San Diego Scholarship Foundation and are you eligible for financial aid? Ask the City College Honors Office for details.

If you have questions or need additional information, please write to the Honors Program or call the office at (619) 388-3512 or e-mail us at bvalenzu@sdccd.edu.

The Application Essay

Please read "The Way We Live: 8/1/04; The Risk of Reading" and write a response essay of about 500 words. Include in your writing your own experiences and personal perspectives. How can reading be risky? In answering this question, discuss at least one book that has altered your view of the world and perhaps set you down a new path.

Honors Program Student Application For City College Honors GE Core Curriculum

***Rolling Admission until classes are filled**

(Please Print Clearly)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____, CA Zip _____

Home phone: () _____ Work/Cell phone: () _____

E-mail: _____

CSID# _____

I give permission for the District Honors Program

to access my records for the purpose of

determining my eligibility.

Student signature: _____

Date: _____

Check List

- Í Completed and Signed Application
- Í Transcripts - if less than 12 credits at San Diego City College
- Í Copy of Placement Test results, if applicable
- Í Completed Essay with Name, I.D., and Contact Information

Attach Essay to Application

August 1, 2004, Sunday

MAGAZINE DESK

The Way We Live: 8/1/04; The Risk of Reading

By Mark Edmundson (NYT) 1134 words

Now American culture can get singularly weird when it's time to say a good word for reading. Think of the television public-service ad that depicts Shaquille O'Neal goofily chasing down the last page of a novel, (Shaq reads? Sure.) or the one depicting a circle of kids being read to by Keith Van Horn, then with the New Jersey Nets, decked out in a "Cat in the Hat" stovepipe. Devising footage that makes reading look more ridiculous wouldn't be all that easy to do.

Now, in the wake of a National Endowment for the Arts report that says -- to no one's surprise -- that interest in literature is falling drastically; reading is getting some more thoughtful defense. But the terms of the defense still leave me wondering. I feel a little as if I'm sitting around with a bunch of boxing aficionados praising Muhammad Ali: one goes on about his jump-roping ability; another, about how well he does his road work; a third gets rhapsodic about his dietary discipline. O.K., O.K., I get it. But all that doesn't quite go to the heart of the matter, does it?

So it is with reading. Reading, you hear, is necessary to maintain democracy. It can produce informed citizens. Right, but couldn't public radio do the same thing? We hear that reading conveys knowledge; it delivers the bounty of the past to the present. Again, good, but in terms of pure rote knowledge, couldn't film and verbal delivery work nearly as well?

Reading is indeed nearly boundless in its promise. It can effect changes for the greatest good. But it is worth bearing in mind that reading's promise is tied up with some danger, too.

To me, the best way to think about reading is as life's grand second chance. All of us grow up once: we pass through a process of socialization. We learn about right and wrong and good and bad from our parents, then from our teachers or religious guides. Gradually, we are instilled with the common sense that conservative writers like Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson thought of as a great collective work. To them, common sense is infused with all that has been learned over time through trial and error, human frustration, sorrow and joy. In fact, a well-socialized being is something like a work of art.

Yet for many people, the process of socialization doesn't quite work. The values they acquire from all the well-meaning authorities don't fit them. And it is these people who often become obsessed readers. They don't read for information, and they don't read for beautiful escape. No, they read to remake themselves. They read to be socialized again, not into the ways of their city or village this time but into another world with different values. Such people want to revise, or even to displace, the influence their parents have had on them. They want to adopt values they perceive to be higher or perhaps just better suited to their natures.

When Walt Whitman picked up the work of his older contemporary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, he was a carpenter, framing two- and three-room houses in Brooklyn. He had been a journalist; he had written some mediocre fiction -- he looked to be someone who would never amount to much. After

reading the great essays, Whitman purportedly said: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering. Emerson brought me to a boil."

Whitman had been reared to be modest and self-effacing. But Emerson offered him a new image of authority. He was, for a while, Whitman's second father. Obviously it takes more than reading a book to create a Walt Whitman. But the act of reading Emerson was still at the center of what is probably the most marvelous transformation in the history of literature.

Similar things happen in the lives of everyday individuals all the time. I remember very well what it was like when, at 17, I read "The Autobiography of Malcolm X." Malcolm had spent time in Boston, not far from where I lived, and he had something to say about our common territory. He gave me a sense of how bitter and brutal it could be to be a black man right there in Massachusetts. There was a low-key race war on between white and black at my high school, and because of Malcolm, I began to try seeing it from the black point of view. I got into trouble, which was sometimes more than just verbal trouble, with my white buddies. And not every black kid in the school was pleased to see a white guy with his nose in Malcolm X.

Words are potent. Ten years after the fact, people often can't remember a grievous pain: "Was it the right leg or the left that I broke?" But a decade on, they'll remember every word and tonal twist of a painful insult. (Robert Frost once suggested that poems should have the force and intensity of rich insults.)

There is no doubt that the force of reading, the power of words, is not always a force for good. The abominable Marquis de Sade influenced many consequential writers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Often, you can only imagine, he made what was cruel in their hearts yet crueler.

Overall, though, the effects of reading major authors are almost always good ones. It is virtually impossible to be a consequential literary artist without infusing your work with sympathy. This understanding dates at least as far back as Homer, who makes it a point to depict the Trojans nearly as humanely as he does his fellow Greeks. One of the most moving scenes in "The Iliad," drastically edited in the recent film, "Troy," comes when Hector, fully armored, reaches to embrace his baby son before going into battle. The boy is terrified of the bronzed giant in front of him and cries out. With the greatest tenderness, Hector removes his helmet with its vast horsehair plume. Then he takes hold of his son to say goodbye.

Chart: "TV EYE"

"In 2002, those who do read and those who do not read literature watched about the same amount of TV per day -- three hours' worth. The Internet, however, could have played a role. During the time period when the literature participation rates declined, home Internet use soared."

From "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America" (National Endowment for the Arts, June 2004)

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