



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts for the Week

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It should not be a mystery to any of us that reading is the foundation of almost all of our learning. This seems so obvious; yet it was not always the case. Within the many centuries of the oral tradition, learning was the result of listening rather than reading. There was no reading, no 'text' from which to gather information, stimulate the imagination or record events. All of these practices were contained within the oral tradition.

However, for millennia, the tradition of literacy has been dominant and has been the single most important factor in the learning process as we have refashioned it to suit the needs of our societal and cultural objectives. Reading, which begins in PRE-K programs, now serves as the pathway through which and from which learning develops.

I have spent most of my professional life teaching reading and literature and seeing how important the idea of reading is to the cognitive and imaginative development of an individual. When the critic Northrop Frye wrote about 'educating the imagination' as the primary goal of learning, he was expressing the insight that reading ultimately focuses on development rather than product. Reading creates the cognitive facility to begin to imagine the world within the many contexts of learning, history, math, art, literature etc. Reading is conditioning.

The importance of this human activity reverberates throughout the entirety of our personal and professional lives. We read everywhere—at work, on the bus, on the beach, on a plane—everywhere. We read on our phones; we read on our computers; we read newspapers, texts, tax forms, road signs. Reading is everywhere and our ability to decode these 'signs' allows us to function in our world. If you ever drive a car in another country, the most important part of that experience is knowing how to read the 'signs.'

Another highly significant value of reading centers on how reading causes the expansion of the mind's ability to 'imagine' certain conditions. I am referring to being able to imagine another world and another time, but I am also thinking how reading allows us to imagine another person and how that person may be feeling or thinking at any moment. Reading contributes to empathy.

From nature to driving, from math and technology to sculpture and poetry—our lives consist of this process of 'reading' and decoding. Our personal, family and professional relationships depend on our skill with this larger definition of 'reading.' Our world is a reader's world. Our schools need to be that place where we read together (collegium) and where we learn to read the world.
