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The Nature of Literacy

Adam Rinehart

It is a beautiful spring day, and outside the birds are chirping, the sun is shining, and the trees sway in the wind. Enviously, I stare out of my bedroom window at my favorite climbing tree. If only I could focus on the task at hand. If only I could experience the freedom I feel when I am connected with the great outdoors: being near the birds, feeling the sun on my shoulders, my face staring into the wind. This is what I live for. But here I am, painstakingly completing my homeschool assignments for the day. I glance around my bedroom, admiring the loft that my father built for me and the miscellaneous objects organized into neat little rows on my shelves. Just downstairs, my sister practices piano and I hear her sigh in frustration at the mistakes she makes. On this day, I am searching for a reason to care about what I am learning, and searching for a reason to stay trapped inside on this beautiful spring day. My nine-year-old body bounds down the beautiful, Victorian-style spiral staircase and I race into the kitchen to find out what I get to eat for lunch.

“Mom, what’s for lunch? I’m starving,” I say. Without missing a beat, my mother responds, “Adam, it is insensitive for you to say that you’re starving, you don’t actually know what it feels like to starve. Have you finished your schoolwork for the day?” “Kind of...,” I say. “Can I go outside?” “Not until you finish your schoolwork and do your chores,” she says.

Reluctantly, I exit the kitchen and return to my room, unmotivated and distracted. If I can get through the next few hours and be relatively undistracted, I can finally taste the freedom of the outdoors. I lay down and pick up the big, heavy book on Greek Mythology. I sigh. Why do I have to learn about Zeus, the god of thunder, on the most beautiful, sunny day of the week? Life is so hard.

An hour later, I hear a car door slam and I race down the stairs just in time to greet my dad as he walks in the house.

“Daddy!” I exclaim. “Hey there, Son. I have something that I think you will enjoy reading,” he says. He hands me an old, brittle book entitled *Tom Sawyer* by Samuel Clemens. In my nine-year-old eyes, it looks to be at least 200 years old. I take the book from him, “thanks Dad, maybe I’ll get around to it sometime.” After surviving my homework and chores, I finally have my chance to go outside. As I exit the back door, I am quickly re-acquainted with the joys of nature. Immediately, I dash over to the neighbor’s house to get my friend, Braxton. Braxton and I do everything together; from playing “spies”, to catching bugs, to climbing trees. After getting his mom’s permission, Braxton’s small, slim figure runs out of the house, ready for adventure. With barely two acres of property between the two houses, we certainly know how to keep ourselves occupied. Today, Braxton (as usual) wants to catch bugs; however, this is going to require some negotiation, because I am dying to climb our favorite tree. “Okay, how about we catch bugs for thirty minutes, but then let’s go climb the tree,” I say. “Sounds good to me! Can we look for ants first?” he says. “Yeah, let’s do it,” I reply. And so continues our adventure: the demise of countless insects, and a trip above the ground in the safety of sturdy limbs and leafy branches. This is the place where I do not have a care in the world. I don’t have to think about my daily homework or tasks; instead, I just sit and focus on the nature around me.

The time comes when we must both go our separate ways, and I reluctantly return to the confines of the indoors, where my entire family seems to happily co-exist in the world of knowledge and education. After dinner, my three sisters and I do the dishes and then play a board game with our parents; however, as soon as the game ends, my sisters and parents return to their various books of adventure, mystery, and theology. Now I am left to my own devices. Unlike most of my friends, I do not own video games, and my family does not have television. Not owning video games gives my family more time to spend together; often times, my mom or dad read to all four of us before bed. I enjoy these times, but tonight we won’t be reading as a family. What should I do? To kill time, I go find the family dog, Ginger. Ginger is a medium-sized, short-haired dog, and her fur is golden-yellow and white. Naturally, she’s sleeping...she’s

so lazy. I gently rouse her; she opens her eyes, licks her lips with her long, pink tongue, and promptly returns to her nap. My last source of entertainment has failed me. It's time to do something drastic.

Returning to my bedroom, I pick the "200-year-old" copy of Tom Sawyer. Sighing loudly, I begin reading. "This book is such a drag," I think to myself.

Twenty minutes later I am totally engrossed in the wonderful story called Tom Sawyer. I am reading about a young boy named Tom, and he is just like me! Tom is the very definition of adventure: he sneaks out at night, he runs away to an island, and searches for buried treasure. This is the first book I have read that I truly connect with and understand. This is almost as good as playing outside. Somehow, I feel like reading this book is helping me connect with nature in a subtle, yet effective way. Perhaps I don't necessarily have to be outside to experience nature.

Two weeks later, I read the last word with deep satisfaction, knowing that I have gained something that cannot be gained any other way. Reading can help me understand and appreciate the world in a way I never imagined. Reading is almost as beautiful as experiencing nature itself. Reading makes the world around me more tangible. The best part is that it is right at my fingertips whenever I want it. I don't have to wait for a clear, sunny day because all I have to do is open a book and discover a wealth of adventure, mystery, and knowledge.

It's a cold, winter day, and outside it is snowing and the wind is almost too cold to bear. I am sitting in my dorm room, surrounded by pictures of my friends and family, school supplies, and many books. My roommate brews coffee, and I willingly breathe in the pleasing aroma. Today, I am content to be inside. Today, I have much to learn. I don't need a beautiful, sunny day to experience joy and satisfaction. I have the opportunity to learn about the world that God created through the beauty of literacy.