

Reading Unbound  
(aka Let Them Read Trash!)  
An Exploratory Study  
into the Engaged Reading of Non-  
Traditional Texts -  
And What This Means for Teachers

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## Why teach literature?

Please rank the following statements in order from most important (1) to least (15) important. Try to avoid ties. Expect frustration. Be prepared to justify your choices. If you wish, you can just rank the top 3 and bottom 3.

- \_\_\_ 1. To help young people explore their own feelings about literature
- \_\_\_ 2. *To help young people explore their own feelings and understandings about their personal experiences*
- \_\_\_ 3. To introduce students to great literary treasures
- \_\_\_ 4. To introduce students to other cultures, especially those distant from their experience
- \_\_\_ 5. *To foster the deep pleasures of reading.*
- \_\_\_ 6. To provide a meaningful context for learning to read
- \_\_\_ 7. To develop students' aesthetic sensibilities
- \_\_\_ 8. To develop critical thinking and writing skills
- \_\_\_ 9. *To learn to "read the world" from a critical perspective*
- \_\_\_ 10. *To help students solve intellectual puzzles.*
- \_\_\_ 11. *To discuss and come to deeper understandings of timeless themes such as love, loss, identity, heroism, etc.*
- \_\_\_ 12. To create an opportunity to discuss contemporary issues
- \_\_\_ 13. *To help students to create their own philosophies of life and living*
- \_\_\_ 14. To help students to "live through" experiences that are distant from them in time, place and experience, therefore widening and deepening their experience.
- \_\_\_ 15. *To help students come to terms with deep emotional and psychological issues in a safe space.*
- \_\_\_ 16. Other?:

# Those Winter Sundays

by [Robert Hayden](#)

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze.

No one ever thanked him.  
I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

# We Real Cool

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

*The Pool Players.  
Seven at the Golden Shovel.*

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

## The four essential pleasures

### 1) Immersive Play Pleasure: “I just get this joy reading!”

The essential characteristic of play is that it is a sensory experience, a kind of experience that harkens back to the physiological changes that Nell explains are linked to readers’ abandoning themselves to the world of a story. According to Dewey, **people engage in play for the experience itself, not for some other reason**. Here’s how he puts it:

*There are cases where action is direct and immediate. It puts itself forth with no thought of anything beyond. It satisfies in and of itself. The end is the present activity, and so there is no gap in the mind between means and end. All play is of this immediate character. (p. 21)*

In our view, then, pleasure in play is found in readers’ giving themselves over completely to the story world and the experience of that world. (24, Reading Unbound)

*Paul: “And I read because I love it, I just get this joy reading. . . . It doesn’t have any restrictions to it.”*

*John: “I basically read . . . for entertainment. I just read for fun.”*

#### **Fostering the pleasure of play:**

Dramatic techniques like revolving role play, in-role writing, good angel/bad angel, hot seating, and alter ego encourage and reward all students for entering story worlds in the way these committed readers do.

### 2) Work Pleasure: “This is it!”

Work pleasure is the pleasure one takes from **using a text as a tool to accomplish something**. As you’ll see, the ends that our readers were seeking to accomplish were not those instrumental ends discussed by policy makers. For the most part, our readers weren’t thinking about college and career. They had much more **immediate and personally compelling goals**.

Dewey (1916) provides an explanation for our readers’ emphasis on the immediate when he writes that, “children proverbially live in the present.” He notes further that young people’s focus on the here and now “is not only a fact not to be evaded, but it is an excellence!” (p. 55). (48, Reading Unbound)

Our readers embraced the present possibilities reading provides. They clearly took pleasure in the healthy work that they were doing. That’s why it’s important to understand that what we mean by work does not stand in opposition to what we mean by play. (49, Reading Unbound)

Narratives can do more than teach us who we are. They can also teach us who we might be.

*Helen: “Characters are just ways of thinking, really” and her intention to “try to be more like the good parts” of those characters.*

#### **Fostering the pleasure of work:**

Reframe inquiry as a problem to be solved by using essential questions (see Wilhelm, *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*)

Work towards culminating projects – service and social action

Drama work: Hotseating, mantle of the expert

### 3) Intellectual Pleasure: “It’s like being a detective almost.”

There’s a pleasure in **figuring something out** regardless of whether one is immediately going to employ that knowledge.

Dewey (1913) labels the pleasure of figuring things out as intellectual pleasure, noting that, “When any one becomes interested in a problem as a problem, and in inquiry and learning for the sake of solving the problem, interest is distinctively intellectual” (p. 83-84). Frijda (2001) calls such pleasures aesthetic pleasures, defining them as “disinterested pleasures” or “pleasures resulting from perceiving objects or events without a direct gain or interest being at stake” (p. 83). (68, Reading Unbound)

*Jeff: So [you like] that puzzle thing, you like having to figure things out?*

*Alex: I think so, because it’s that process of taking the information you have and coming up with possible solutions. Like, it’s like being a detective almost. It’s taking the evidence and the information and everything that’s happened, taking all that and putting it together. Processing through it and seeing what ends connect, and then finding, once all those ends connect, what that last piece is.*

#### **To foster intellectual pleasure**

Read a book for the first time along with your students – figure it out along with them – model your fits and starts and problems through think alouds and discussion

Pair an assigned reading with self-selected reading from a list, or a free reading choice that pertains to the topic.

Frame units as inquiry with essential questions, as a problem to be solved

Teach students to generate their own questions for discussion and sharing, using techniques like QtA and QAR. Discussion structures like Socratic Seminar that make it clear there is no teacherly agenda to fulfill as far as topics or insights to achieve (this is consistent with the Core which focuses on strategies over content)

### 4) Social Pleasure: “All my friends were telling me I had to read this!”

Social pleasure involves the pleasure of **using reading to connect to others and the pleasure of using reading to name and identify yourself.** (86, Reading Unbound)

Here’s Paul responding to Jeff’s question about when he needs to talk about a book:

*Paul: When it’s really deep, when it’s got metaphorical stuff that you can talk about, it’s got funny parts that you can talk about, it’s got stuff that you can relate to the real world, that’s when you know you’ve got a book that you need somebody to talk to.*

*Jeff: That’s really interesting, that’s come up a few times – that there are things that just need to be shared.*

*Paul: Yeah, it does. That’s kind of how humor goes.*

*Jeff: I like that; it’s kind of how it goes.*

*Paul: Yeah, so I mean, if you’ve got a hilarious joke you’re not going to want to sit there remembering it to yourself you’re kind of gonna want to pass it on. It’s kind of like that with books, too. Or when it’s really hilarious I’ll like find somebody who knows about these kinds of books and I’ll show them a funny part of the book because it’s so funny.*

#### **Fostering social pleasures of reading**

Be a fellow reader with students

Read one of their favorite books.

Foster peer discussion of reading in pairs, triads, small groups, literature circles, etc.

The special case of the pleasure of “inner work”

## **Depth Psychology**

### **\*Psychological and Archetypal**

### **Energies/Satisfactions**

- **Shaping and rehearsing existential issues**
- **Dealing with the unconscious, the shadow, the repressed but insistent**
- **Self as a questing figure trying different personae; imaginative rehearsal for living**
- **Functional values; immediate application**
- **(95-98% of all mental activity is from the unconscious/irrational – Damasio, Jung, Haidt, et al.)**

The current and future importance of literacy

Rank the top six of the following literacy activities as the most important (1-6) to your students' future lived experience in terms of both their "inner work" (psychological and emotional development) and "outer work" (functional/employment applications, etc).

Inner work

Outer work

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| ___ Personal, exploratory writing (e.g. blogging, journaling, etc.)       | ___ |
| ___ Expressive writing (poetry, stories)                                  | ___ |
| ___ Expressive reading (pursuing what is personally compelling)           | ___ |
| ___ Writing arguments, definitions, classifications, descriptions         | ___ |
| ___ Reading arguments, definitions, classifications, descriptions         | ___ |
| ___ Composing and designing electronic artifacts (html, multimedia)       | ___ |
| ___ Using electronic technologies (video games, computers)                | ___ |
| ___ Problem identification- social  | ___ |
| ___ Problem identification – personal                                     | ___ |
| ___ Making sense of one's experience, finding purpose, etc.               | ___ |
| ___ Making sense of the world and one's place in it                       | ___ |
| ___ interpersonal speech communication (conversation, presentations)      | ___ |
| ___ interpersonal written communication (e.g. email, texting, twittering) | ___ |
| ___ Intrapersonal communication (ability to communicate with self)        | ___ |
| ___ ability to listen and make others feel listened to                    | ___ |
| ___ ability to question   | ___ |
| ___ search for and find information through books, search engines, etc.   | ___ |
| ___ develop data and articulate new intellectual understandings           | ___ |
| ___ see new patterns and connections                                      | ___ |
| ___ other?  | ___ |

Connections or patterns you see? What is the relationship of inner to outer work?

SCHOLASTIC

# READING UNBOUND

WHY KIDS NEED TO READ WHAT THEY WANT  
AND WHY WE SHOULD LET THEM



by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Michael W. Smith with Sharon Fransen  
Foreword by Name to Come