

Because Learning Is Life

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

A friend of mine sent me the following note in my e-mail this morning:

From Jim Woosley

In an article titled "An Education in 404 Pages," by James Baccus, Vanderbilt Magazine, Spring 2003 issue, page 11, the author cites the following as the most significant recommended reading for someone interested in a liberal education but without the time to read the works in full.

- 1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self Reliance."*
- 2. Alexis de Tocqueville, "The Principle of Interest Rightly Understood," from Democracy in America.*
- 3. Thucydides, "the Melian Dialogue," from the History of the Peloponnesian War.*
- 4. James Madison, Federalist 10 and 51.*
- 5. Adam Smith, "On the Division of Labor," from The Wealth of Nations*
- 6. Voltaire, Letter 15, "On the System of Gravitation."*
- 7. Richard Feynman, "The Uncertainty of Science," from The Meaning of It All.*
- 8. Plato, "The Cave," from The Republic.*
- 9. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals," from The Essays.*
- 10. John Stuart Mill, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion," from On Liberty.*
- 11. Karl Popper, Chapter 10, The Open Society and Its Enemies*
- 12. Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," from The Brothers Karamazov.*
- 13. Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter From Birmingham Jail.*
- 14. Virginia Woolf, Chapter 6, A Room of One's Own.*
- 15. Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address."*

16. Suetonius, "Agustus, Afterward Deified," from *The Twelve Caesars*.
17. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language."
18. Edmon Burke, "Lette rot he Sheriffs of Bristol."
19. Samuel Johnson, Number 21, *The Rambler*.
20. Immaual Kant, "On Perpetual Peace."
21. Henry David Thoreau, "On Seeing," from his *Journal*.
22. Plutarch, "On Contentment."
23. Soren Kierkegaard, "The Story of Abraham," from *Fear and Trembling*.
24. William Hazelitt, "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth."

As you may or may not know, I am primarily self-educated, and entirely self-educated in my current professional field. (I have an ADN, and served as a registered nurse for ten years, but while that has been a useful background for writing, I don't think that anyone would claim it as a writing background.) My education as a writer consists of being a reader, having a wonderful English teacher my last two years of high school, and applying myself to the task of learning to write as if my life depended on it.

So. Of the above-listed works, I own a couple, have read a couple more, and of the rest am vastly ignorant.

But I felt challenged. I'm going to hit The Gutenberg Project today to see which of these I can locate in free e-book format, and I'm going to read them. I'll try used bookstores following that, and regular bookstores as my last resort (I'd like to keep this educational venture as close to free as possible.)

I figure a writer can never know enough, and this list looked like a valuable short course.

And FWIW, the ones I own are the Emerson and the Feynman. The ones I have previously read are the selections from Plato,

Woolf, Lincoln, Orwell, and Thoreau, as part of whole works where applicable.

To the rest, I could at least say I had heard of the works and the authors in some cases, but I drew a complete blank on Mill, Popper, Suetonius, and Hazelitt.

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