

WORDLOVE

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[Assignment: Students, say some experts, are more likely to learn to read well and happily if they are guided by their own interests and needs, not those of their teachers. Write an argument essay in which you forcefully agree or disagree with this assertion. Feel free to expand your ideas with examples and details drawn from your own life experience.]

(1) "Get your noses out of those books and look at the countryside, you two," called my mom from the front seat of our car which bumped along the roads of Spain, Germany, or wherever our travels led us. My sister and I buried our books in our laps as we made faces behind her back. How dare she disrupt our private little worlds? We sat back contentedly, pretending to gaze at the country that was flying by while our eyes were shifting downwards to absorb more words. Ever since we moved to Belgium when I was eight and I began rattling around the back seat of a foreign car, I have turned more and more to reading as means of creating a world of infinite pleasure and solace. Now, when I think about where and when I first learned to read inevitably the image of a first grade reading circle comes to mind. I experienced the wonders of "Bill sees Jill" and "see Lad run" in those circles, but that is not from where my love for reading and writing comes. I do not believe that the love for books can be taught by any amount of comprehension questions or reading circles. The skill of reading is definitely taught, but the love for words is self-taught.

(2) From the time I was in kindergarten, my sister's room was jokingly referred to as "The Library" because of the books overflowing within. She loved to bury herself in books. My mother told me recently that she always read books to us, from the time we were babies; possibly part of the "reading bug" rubbed off on me from my mother and sister. Apart from this, I enjoyed being alone when I was young. I could play alone for hours at a time; from there sprang my first love for books. Books were a rich source of entertainment when playing alone. I used them for plays acted out by my playmobile or Fisher Price figures. I began the road to discovery; books were fun. They opened an imagined world more exciting than the one I live in.

(3) When we moved to Brussels, Belgium in 1980, I became further engrossed in the world of books. The long vacation times from our school were spent driving to new places such as Norway, France, Holland, or Hungary. While my parents' friends would complain of the long trips and crying children in the back seat, my parents uttered no complaints of this sort. Their trouble was prying us from the car when we arrived at the hotel or sightseeing tour. I taught myself to sit for hours, to huddle under the shelter of a funny or moving book-world. But the trips weren't the only time for reading books; books became part of daily routine. As we floated into European society, we found a television which sputtered gibberish at us during all hours (but for two in which *The Muppet Show* and *Buck Rogers* were telecast in all their glory). American children dote on television; we were lacking in this commodity. In a matter of weeks, our bookshelves had brought forth replacements. There was the added bonus of being able to choose what we wanted to read about rather than be

restricted by T.V. programming. One day in third grade, I remember reading nine Beverly Cleary books in one sitting. I was addicted.

(4) In Holt's essay, "How Teachers Make Children Hate Reading," he describes a tedious question and answer/vocabulary list approach to teaching reading. The memory of these lists is very vivid in my mind. But despite the nightmarish quality of these memories, I know that nothing did or could discourage my interest in reading. I always read my assignments with enthusiasm, but I often answered the questions carelessly giving those teachers practicing such a joyless method precisely what they deserved. Such a way of teaching may have made school "no fun," but it could not dampen my desire to read. It was less the formal education and more I myself who was helping along my skill in reading.

(5) As I grew, my love for reading mushroomed, and so did a new love for writing. Leaving Belgium did not break the pattern of replacing television by books. Though now the television rambled on in a recognizable language, we continued to head for books after school--to the delight of our parents. I read books over and over again. I extracted new ideas from old stories I read, and in turn my own stories came bubbling from within. My first writings were fantasies, then they progressed to poems with a sort of rhyme and rhythm. All that reading was gradually transforming me into a writer, for I loved words. Every person who reads must love words, but those who write are specially transfixed by words. I was entranced. I still am.

(6) Now as I look at dozens of filled journals and notebooks, I smile because I know that I taught myself to love this. I am rather ignorant of European countryside with its green pastures and grazing Clydesdale horses. I am sure I have missed an important experience. But I am equally sure that I have acquired through books experiences and knowledge that are just as valuable. Now when I write, I jumble words this way and that trying to achieve something fresh and new. I understand what readers wish to disentangle and unravel as they pore over a book. I know, for I myself am a reader. I love to read.