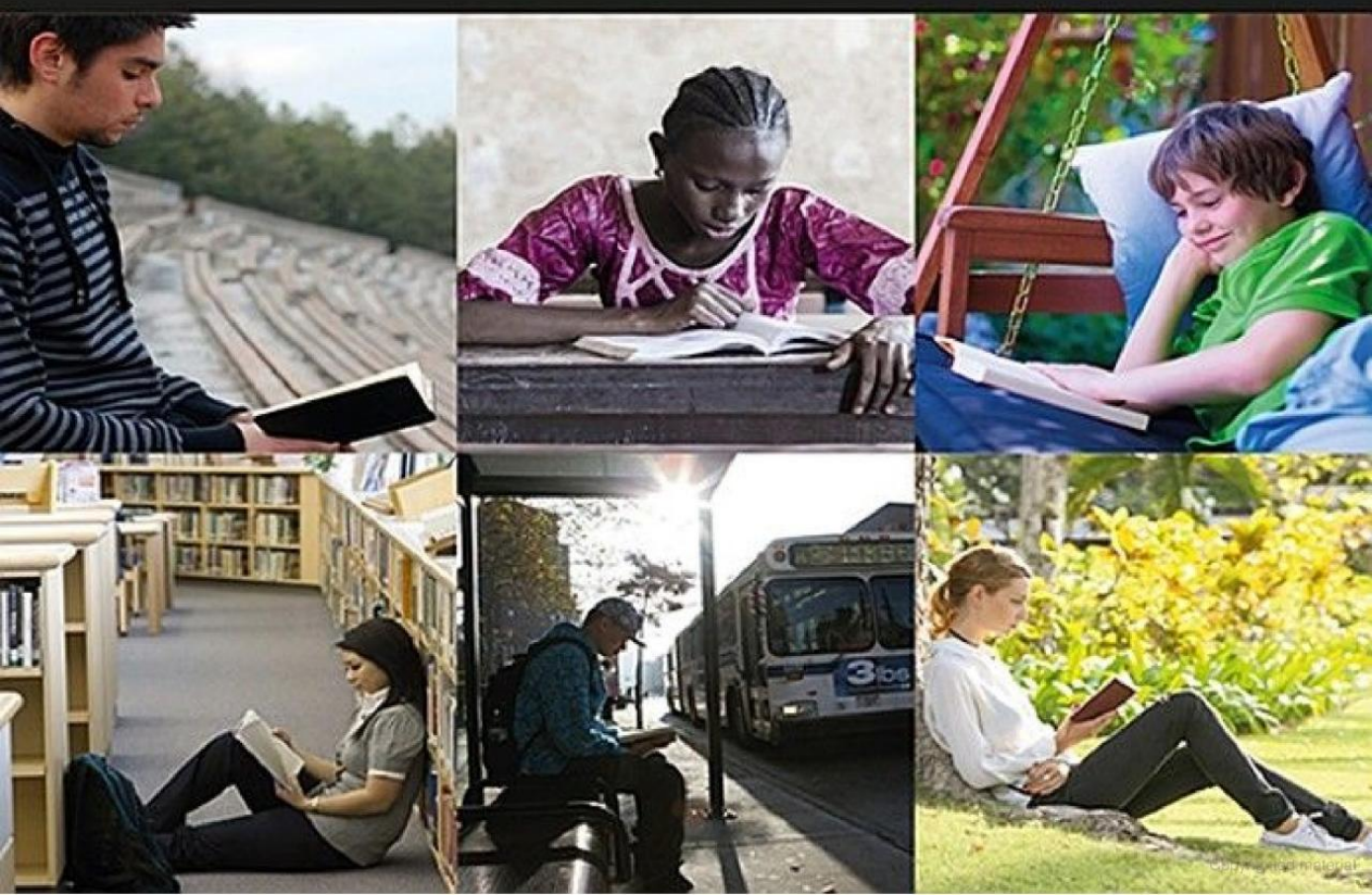
ROUTLEDGE

WHY READING BOOKS STILL MATTERS

The Power of Literature in Digital Times

Martha C. Pennington and Robert P. Waxler



Contents

Foreword

This is an important book that builds a strong case for the value of literature, literary reading, and book culture in the school curriculum. It challenges people to consider the effects that our media-centered lifestyle is having on literacy and learning, and the beneficial countering effects that an enhanced focus on literature and what Pennington and Waxler call the "human arts" can have.

The book stands as a wake-up call regarding our current screen-based culture and curricular focus on technology, science, and practical skills, arguing that they do not provide a sufficient basis for developing the full potential of children. The authors offer evidence that a literature-infused curriculum builds advanced competencies in language and literacy while also promoting children's emotional and social development. They further describe how reading and discussing literature can foster empathy and social change, as demonstrated in studies with prisoners and with students in schools and universities.

The number and diversity of sources which Pennington, a linguist, teacher-educator, and creative writer, marshals in her collaboration with Waxler, a literary scholar who is also a teacher-educator and creative writer, is impressive, including a body of psychological research demonstrating the mind-expanding effects of reading literature. The authors also draw on a number of literary stories, novels, and poems to illustrate the power of literature to engage a reader's feelings and imagination, and how literature might be used in the classroom or a discussion group to raise important issues of human relationship.

Why Reading Books Still Matters: The Power of Literature in Digital Times will make readers think about the significance of literature as language-based artistic creation and why it might be more important than many people have realized. In effect, it asks educators and society as a whole not to bet everything on digital technology, science, and economics but to hedge our bets by placing an equal emphasis on literature within a larger arts and humanities curriculum. The book has an important educative purpose, and I hope it will have the impact on

people's thinking and actions that it aims to have, shifting the focus in education more towards literature and the literacy of ideas rather than technical literacy, and ensuring that the next generation has the necessary foundation for addressing the problems they face with intelligence, imagination, passion, and compassion.

– Professor Jack C. Richards
Honorary Professor, University of Sydney and University of Auckland
Adjunct Professor, Victoria University of Wellington and Regional Language Centre Singapore
Leading author for Cambridge University Press with over 50 million books sold worldwide

Preface

Why Reading Books Still Matters: The Power of Literature in Digital Times makes the case that literature holds an invaluable place in human life which needs to be cherished and nurtured as a central aspect of our heritage and to be given a prominent place in society and the education of children. Literature stands at the intersection of art and language within a larger culture of what we call "human arts," giving a new twist to arts and humanities that stresses their contrast with business and STEM subjects. The book makes an original argument about the need for literature and human arts by:

1. challenging the potential of technology, science, and business to solve the world's problems without a complementary emphasis on social values;
2. demonstrating the power of literature and human arts to instill social values and foster change; and
3. bringing together a number of strands of public discourse which have largely been carried out as separate discussions, regarding the degradation of life by global capitalism, the emphasis on personal achievement at the expense of social values, the effects of mass media, and the impact of digital culture on the lives and education of children.

We argue that literature offers a needed corrective to our fast-lane, media-saturated, consumerist existence, in the way of the more meaningful and fulfilling life that can be promoted through a literate culture and that can get us back onto a healthier and more sustainable course for the future. Underpinning the book are the philosophy and educational initiatives of the Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) program, cofounded by Robert P. Waxler in the 1990s, which has repeatedly demonstrated the power of literature to change people in transformative ways.

The book has been written with an educator audience in mind that includes

professors, graduate students, and teachers in Literacy Education and English and in other fields, in addition to university and school administrators and educational policymakers. It may be of interest also to parents and members of the reading public concerned about declines in literacy and the effects of digital media on education, language, and society. The book is organized in a problem–solution form in which approximately the first half focuses on what we see as the current culture and its problems, and the second half describes the culture we are proposing and how it can help solve those problems. It incorporates discussion of literary works selected to illustrate the captivating power of literature and of a wide range of scholarly and popular books and articles that address different facets of our argument, including scientific studies showing how readers are changed by literature. We discuss how technology is affecting literacy and language, education and society, and discuss the risks that media environments pose, especially for children. We review calls to limit technology in the lives of children and adults, and model the CLTL approach in a series of stories about brothers that can be used in a classroom or reading group, or in family reading.

Chapter 1 raises issues about reading and culture in digital times and introduces the arguments we will be making about the value of literature as a counterweight in education and in society more generally to the focus on screen media, technology, and consumer values and practices. Chapter 2 continues the discussion of Chapter 1 in describing what we see as the state of the world and problems that can be addressed by greater attention to literate culture. Chapters 3 and 4 offer a description and a critique of our fast-lane, self-obsessed, media- and machine-centric lives, which are problematized in relation to literacy and language, human values and culture, and education.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe literacy and language in the online screen culture and ways in which these differ from, and are in certain respects inferior to, literacy and language outside of that context. As we argue, our culture needs to maintain a basis in literary and human arts values and not be given over primarily to the values of technology, competition, and consumerism.

Chapter 7 takes a closer look at fiction and poetry, seeking to show by example the powerful effects they can have on a reader through artfully crafted language and story. Chapters 8 and 9 review research demonstrating the

profound effects which reading and especially literary reading has on the brain and memory, emotional and social life, personality and empathy, and human experience and culture on the level of a whole society.

In Chapter 10, we review the effects of various initiatives in the Changing Lives Through Literature program and discuss specific readings that can be employed in schools and other contexts. In the final chapter, we paint recommendations in broad brushstrokes and then reinforce our message about the importance of keeping literary language and stories at the heart of our shared culture, from whence they came and where they should remain, as an essential part of what has made and will keep us human.

We wish to acknowledge a number of people who influenced and supported us during the writing of this book. Martha wishes to thank several writer-scholar friends for insightful critical input on the book's thesis and introductory material, including Pauline Burton, Colin Cavendish-Jones, Graham Lock, Dino Mahoney, and Simon Wu, and her friend Al Woodward for a scientist's perspective and invaluable assistance tracking down some original sources at the Library of Congress. Bob would like to thank Linda, his wonderful and patient wife, and Jeremy, his best reader always. In addition, we both thank the two Routledge reviewers for perceptive and detailed comments on our earlier draft. In their different ways, each of these individuals made a valuable contribution to this work, which we are grateful for and happy to acknowledge.

Acknowledgements

Permission to quote in Chapter 2 from the following source was given by Penguin Random House, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Díaz, Junot (1996/1995). How to date a browngirl (blackgirl, whitegirl, or halfie). In *Drown* (pp. 143–149). New York: Riverhead Books. Originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, December 25, 1995, pp. 83–85.

Permission to quote in Chapter 3 from the following source was given by ESADE Institute, Av. Pedralbes, 60–62, E-08034 Barcelona; and from IATEFL Special Interest Groups and Publications, 2–3 The Foundry, Seager Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 7FD, U.K.

Pennington, Martha C. (2001). Writing minds and talking fingers: Doing literacy in an electronic age. In P. Brett (ed.), *CALL in the 21st century* (CD-ROM). Barcelona: ESADE Institute (Idiomas) and Hove, U.K.: IATEFL. Papers from a conference sponsored jointly by ESADE Institute (Idiomas), Barcelona, and IATEFL CALL SIG, June 30–July 2, 2000.

Permission to quote in Chapter 10 from the following source was given by Office of Correctional Education, Division of Adult Literacy and Education; Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 550 12th Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202–7100.

Waxler, Robert P. (1997). Why literature? The power of stories. In Megan McLaughlin, Jean Trounstine, & Robert P. Waxler, *Success stories: Life skills through literature* (pp. 2–5). Washington, D.C.: Office of Correctional Education, U.S. Department of Education.

Permission to quote in Chapter 10 from the following source was given by The James Baldwin Estate, c/o Eileen Ahearn, 137 W. 71st Street, Apt. 4B, New York, NY 10023.

Excerpted from "Sonny's Blues" c 1957 by James Baldwin. Copyright renewed. Originally published in Partisan Review. Collected in GOING TO MEET THE MAN, published by Vintage Books (pp. 86–122). Used by arrangement with the James

Baldwin Estate.

Permission to quote in Chapter 10 from the following source was given by ICM Partners, 65 E. 55th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Wolff, Tobias (1985). The rich brother. In *Back in the world* (pp. 197–221). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Permission to quote in Chapter 11 from the following source was given by the author.

Pennington, Martha C. (2011). Pool culture. *Southern Humanities Review*, *45*(3), 250–252.

1

The Value of a Literate Culture

> In a very real sense, ... people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read. To read *Gulliver's Travels* is to have the experience, with Jonathan Swift, of turning sick at one's stomach at the conduct of the human race; to read *Huckleberry Finn* is to feel what it is like to drift down the Mississippi River on a raft; to read Byron is to suffer with him his rebellions and neuroses and to enjoy with him his nose-thumbing at society; to read *Native Son* is to know how it feels to be frustrated in the particular way in which many blacks in Chicago have been frustrated. This is the great task that affective communication performs: it enables us to feel how others felt about life, even if they lived thousands of miles away and centuries ago. It is not true that we have only one life to live; if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish.
>
> – *S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action (Hayakawa, 1990/1939, pp. 158–159)*

Why We Wrote This Book

According to UNESCO (2006, 2011), the world literacy rate, which in the mid-19th century was around 10 percent, is now approaching 85 percent. Yet even though the vast majority of people have gone from illiterate to literate, knowing how to read is not a guarantee that people are in fact reading, or reading much – much less that they are reading anything good, or good for them.

In the past century and a half, literacy, in the sense of being able to read, has risen greatly while the level of reading appears to have declined. The lowering of the level of reading is no doubt in part an inevitable statistical effect of reversion to the mean, as what was once a literate elite has turned into a literate public. There are however other factors causing a decline in the level of reading among the general population. One is the pull of other things pressuring people to spend their time not reading, especially visual media such as film, television, and all devices connected to the Internet. Another is the types of material

available to be read.

Reading matter has been altered substantially since the mid-19th century, when, for example, a page in a newspaper was a large sheet of paper covered in dense print text with few, if any, pictures. In the era of the Internet and near-universal literacy, reading matter is changing rapidly, as both publishers and many writers cater to mainstream, media-generation tastes and to the types of media and formats in which reading matter is increasingly consumed. Aiming to fit popular taste and media formats, they use language that is familiar and informal, with smaller units at every level – shorter words, shorter sentences, shorter paragraphs, shorter articles and reports of all kinds, and shorter books – and they give written text less of a priority in relation to pictures, graphics, and other kinds of visual and audial representations such as video and film, animation, speech, and music.

Although the rise of the Internet may have aided in the spread of literacy, it may also be a cause of the lowering of the level of literacy, as media technologies and the culture which they promote are taking over from other forms of culture and infiltrating global literacy practices, both writing and reading – and indeed, all kinds of practices. The "hijacking" of culture by the Internet and media technologies can be seen especially in that part of culture which is least stable – what normally goes under the name of "popular culture," referring to the widespread preferences and practices of the global mainstream at a particular point in time, especially in entertainment and other leisure-time activities, fashion and other lifestyle trends, and current business and political affairs. A component of popular culture is also the new language that develops to express the novelty and innovations associated with each of these areas of rapidly changing human affairs. Rapid changes in popular culture are initiated by and spread through the mass media, in collaboration with other corporate giants whose reach is global, especially via the Internet. Popular culture can then be seen as made up, in general, of all topics and people that grab the attention of a mass audience and are in the news or trending on popular websites.

And it is not only what people think of as popular culture – defined by what is "in" at the moment, by fads and fashions that change year to year and even day to day – that has been infiltrated and shaped by the Internet and media technologies. So has the more stable part of culture – the beliefs, values, and

practices that have developed over a long period and that are the background and backdrop to civilization and everyday life. In like manner, that part of culture often distinguished as "high culture," comprising literature and fine arts, has also been increasingly infiltrated and shaped by the Internet, mass media, and their attendant technologies, values, and practices (Pennington, 2013, 2017). We might even reflect that all of culture is becoming popular culture, through the influence of mass media and the Internet, and being pulled towards the values and agendas of the global business interests that control much of popular culture. These global business interests are increasingly using the Internet to advertise and sell their products, and to promote their ideas and agendas, as a way to grow their companies and enhance their power to influence consumers and world events.

As we will argue, some of the cultural changes wrought by media and online connectivity, often married to the interests of global business, have not been positive: some represent cultural shrinkage or loss, while others represent diversions or even perversions of culture to the purposes of consumerism and self-centeredness, or "Me-ness," and to a focus on the momentary excitement gained from things that are shiny or showy – that, in current parlance, exhibit "bling" and "pop" (as in a burst of sound or light, or a "pop" of color). These kinds of focus embody what might be dubbed a "pop-and-bling" lifestyle, which we maintain is a shallow way of living bought at a high cost: at the expense of depth and meaningfulness, and through abandonment of other values and pursuits that are important for sustaining human life and indeed the life of the planet.

The cultural effects of media and online connectivity are especially visible in the current generation of children and young adults, who were born into a world already saturated with the pop culture practices and values of television and other mass media. These young people grew up in a digital world which, having absorbed the values and practices of their parents' and grandparents' generation, is now rapidly developing its own new practices and characteristics, based especially on the wireless technology of the smartphone and other portable devices. The current generation is one that is always *on* – always doing something on mobile devices and always connected to the Internet. The absorption of culture, and people's time, by media, especially digital media and

the Internet, concerns us, as does the upbringing and education of children in an era when "literacy" is as likely to refer to digital literacy as to reading and writing in the traditional sense.

In this book, we will be expanding on these points to make a case for the importance of reading something good and good for you, in the form of literature. We argue that such reading – most especially in the form of literary fiction and poetry – offers an important corrective to the increasing emphasis in today's world on nonprint digital media and the culture of global capitalism, as it helps build knowledge of language and general knowledge as well as empathy, open-mindedness, and social skills. Reading about the adventures of Gulliver and Huckleberry Finn, of Ulysses and Robinson Crusoe, we travel out of ourselves, journeying in our imagination by their sides, seeing what they see, and learning what they learn. Journeying with them, we grow close to these characters; and seeing things through their eyes, we share their point of view, developing new perspectives that incorporate their ways of thinking and being. Thus do the memorable characters of literature catch and hold our attention, and draw us into the worlds that great writers are able to depict through words on the page. And walking along with those authors, through the characters and worlds they draw us into, our minds and our sympathies are expanded, and we are changed by the experience.

Beyond the literal journeys of a Gulliver, a Huck Finn, or a Ulysses, great literature offers opportunities for us to journey for a time in the minds and hearts of people whom we can imagine as ourselves or as people we know. We can enter for a while into the mind and heart of a Jay Gatsby and feel for the man doomed by obsession for a woman out of his reach, just as we can journey into the emotions and perceptions of an Elizabeth Bennett or a Caleb Trask and be reminded of the confusions and passions of youth, and the human capacity for love and forgiveness. So can we take a narrative journey into the worlds of Anne Shirley on Prince Edward Island, of John Grimes in Harlem, and of Bigger Thomas on Chicago's South Side, and, by walking in the shoes of those characters, gain an insider's view of the lives of people in those communities. Great poetry provides for such narrative journeys, too, in characters like Don Juan and Richard Cory, and for journeys of another kind, deep into language and into the poet's – and our own – emotions: into the feelings inspired by John

Keats' contemplation of his own life through the vision of a Grecian urn or by Lord Byron's vision of she who "walks in beauty." These are all journeys of an affective kind, engaging mind and body through the emotions, as triggered in finely crafted narrative and poetic language. They are the kinds of profound, eye-opening and mind-expanding experiences offered in the merger of art and language that can be found in literature.

Yet the perspective-widening, life-changing experiences that come from engaging with art-in-words are, we maintain, at risk in the era of the Internet and screen media. Some would argue that similar and equally valuable expansive experiences are available through screen media and the Internet. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016b), for example, notes in its policy statement on "Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents" that there are benefits from media use in the way of "exposure to new ideas and knowledge acquisition, increased opportunities for social contact and support, and new opportunities to access ... information" (p. 1). Clearly, film, television, and digital media offer important imaginative and artistic works and educative experiences for children as well as adults. We remain concerned, however, about the great pull of the younger generation towards an outer life of appearance and style defined by mass media and consumerist culture at the expense of an inner life defined by literate culture, independent thought, and social values reflecting attention to not just their own but also others' needs and well-being. We share the concern of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016b) about "risks of media use for the health of children and teenagers ... [including] negative health effects on weight and sleep; exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts; and compromised privacy and confidentiality" (p. 1).

We are concerned, too, about the education of our youth and the overemphasis on STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – at the expense of the other side of the curriculum – variously labeled "arts" (as contrasted with "sciences"), "liberal arts," or "humanities" – which we will label *human arts*. We intend this as a memorable conceptual amalgam or hybrid that captures our emphasis on both the human and the artistic features of language and literature and that does not have the (unfortunately) negative connotations which many attach these days to "humanities" and "liberal arts." We are alarmed by both the vision and the reality of a world that pursues achievement

within the STEM fields unconnected to, and unbalanced and untempered by, the human arts and that is increasingly run by machines and also modeled on them, as they set the pace and the focus for people's lives to be lived with speed and efficiency. We maintain, as Carl Honoré stresses in his book, *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement Is Challenging the Cult of Speed*, that "some things cannot, should not, be sped up. They take time; they need slowness" (Honoré, 2004, p. 4). We agree that "[i]nevitably, a life of hurry can become superficial. When we rush, we skim the surface, and fail to make real connections with the world or other people" (p. 9). We are alarmed by the extent to which the gigantic forces of mass media allied with global business have permeated our culture and are setting the agenda for the current age. We believe that it is time – past time, in fact – for a correction of the superficial lifestyle which so many are pursuing nowadays towards pursuit of a deeper kind of life.

In a very real sense, our higher species is losing ground. At this point in history, we humans find ourselves on a slippery slope and are starting to slide backwards from the highest point to which we have evolved in our knowledge and our humanity. We are in danger of degrading language and literacy to the point where our knowledge and our brain structure, even our intelligence, are affected; and there are already signs that we are losing many of our most valuable human qualities and suffering the consequences of such loss, including serious effects of social and environmental degradation on our own health and the health of the planet. As we will seek to convince you, literature and the human arts offer ways to boost our individual and collective knowledge and humanity, and our immunity to all that, in the current age, threatens our accumulated human advantages.

How Much and What People Are Reading

It is undeniable that the culture which has been created by mass media and digital technologies has attracted the current generation away from the literate culture of the past. This fact seems to be of less concern to the educational establishment – which has been rushing with the large commercial interests of Google, Microsoft, Apple, and the many other companies capitalizing on the electronic revolution to digitize the whole educational experience – than to the arts establishment, which seems to have more of a concern to preserve

traditional cultural values and practices. Two controversial reports by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) – *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004) and *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007) – raised alarms about a decline in the quantity and the quality of reading by Americans – particularly by children and adolescents and particularly as regards the reading of literature. These reports connected Americans' declining reading life to declines in civic life and education, shared culture, and the strength of our national economy.

The NEA reports acknowledged what has become a fact of 21st-century life: that our reading activity has moved away from the reading of literature and a focus on the kinds of activities that have traditionally surrounded the reading of literature. Today a great deal of people's reading takes place on the Internet and by means of digital screens and e-reading devices such as the Kindle, which, it can be noted, was introduced, with some initial hope that it might help reverse the decline in reading, on the very day that the NEA's 2007 report was released. A follow-up study (National Endowment for the Arts, 2009) found an increase in adult literary readers from 47 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2008, but this appears to have been a statistical blip, or short-lived improvement, as another NEA study carried out in late 2012 matched the figure of 47 percent reported in the 2002 study (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013). The NEA Survey of Public Participation in the Arts taken in July 2012 discovered that while 71 percent of American adults consumed arts through electronic media (including television and radio) and 59 percent went to the movies at least once in the preceding 12 months, only 58 percent did voluntary reading (as contrasted with reading required for work or school) at least once in the preceding one-year period (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013, p. 8). Of the 47 percent of Americans who reported doing any literary reading in the preceding year, 45 percent said they read novels or short stories, 7 percent read poetry, and 3 percent read plays (p. 24).

There does not seem much reason to cheer a population in which almost everyone is literate but less than half read literature – a smaller proportion than did so in 1982 (56.4%), when the NEA survey was first carried out. It can be considered especially alarming that, according to the 2013 report, "Since 2002,

the share of poetry-readers has contracted by 45 percent—resulting in the steepest decline in participation in any literary genre" (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013, p. 24). The story is not as bad for fiction, which remains a popular genre among the books that people are reading and buying,[1] perhaps because, as one blogger writing on the *Psychology Today* website suggests, it provides an escape from the concerns of life in today's world (Bergland, 2014).

The declines seen in the NEA figures for the reading of literature and offline arts activities can be considered in the light of figures for 2013 published by the Pew Research Center (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) that include not only voluntary reading but also reading at work and at school, and that break down the media that people are using for reading. The Pew survey paints a more positive picture of Americans' book-reading activity. It indicates that the number of books that Americans read on average in the previous year (including books related to school and work) remained stable at 12, which is an encouraging average of a book a month. However, this average masks considerable variation in the amount of reading that Americans do, as the 2013 survey records a decline since their 2011 survey in the number of adult Americans reading at least one book in the previous year, down from 79 percent in 2010 to 76 percent in 2013 (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014a). Examining the Pew statistics in terms of reading media, we note that 69 percent of American adults said they read at least one print book in the previous year, while 28 percent said they read an e-book (ibid.), with a higher percentage of e-book readers among young adults and those in their 30s and 40s (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014b). The results of the 2013 Pew study, when taken together with those of the 2012 NEA study, suggest that the decline in the reading of literature, and books in general, by Americans is tempered by those who still read multiple print books and by the reading of e-books on the part of some.

A potentially encouraging sign from the 2013 Pew study is that the Millennial Generation – those under 30, who have also been referred to as Generation Y or the Net Generation – while being big users of the Internet, especially social media, were somewhat more likely (88%) than older adults (79%) to report having read at least one book in the previous year (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014b). In addition, the percentage of Millennials who said they were regular book readers compares to that of the older generation who were not brought up with

computers: "Some 43% of [Millennials] report reading a book – in any format – on a daily basis, a rate similar to [that of] older adults" (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014b).

Books in the Contemporary World

The book industry, though it is becoming more competitive, is still vibrant and profitable in the 21st century, shipping more than 3 billion books in 2010 alone – "about 10 for every man, woman and child" (Schuessler, 2011). In addition, "Americans buy more than half of all e-books," and as of January 2012, "e-books accounted for nearly 20 percent of the sales of American publishers" (Cohen, 2012). Pew data from that year shows that most readers of print books or e-books "prefer to purchase their own copies of these books" (Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden, & Brenner, 2012, p. 6); e-books are preferred when people want "speedy access and portability" while print books are preferred for "reading to children and sharing books with others" (p. 5).

Although digital works such as e-books and many other kinds of works enabled by hypertext and the Internet are on an upward trend, the print book seems to be surviving well into the Digital Age. Print books still dominate the market and are preferred by most readers, including today's college students (Robb, 2015). According to Zickuhr and Rainie (2014a):

> Though e-books are rising in popularity, print remains the foundation of Americans' reading habits: Among adults who read at least one book in the past year, just 5% said they read an e-book in the last year without also reading a print book.
>
> ... Overall, about half (52%) of readers only read a print book, 4% only read an e-book, and just 2% only listened to an audiobook. Nine percent of readers said they read books in all three formats.

In sum, while there is a gradual decline in literary reading which is occurring at the same time as books are being increasingly produced and consumed in nonprint form, print books seem to be holding their own. Yet what people are reading is in many ways not the same kind of books as they read in the past, as the new formats for books impinge on the print book niche. The reading level of

books is lower, they are shorter, the level of editing is down, and self-published books are now common. These trends are related to wider trends in who is writing and in what media. According to professors Denis G. Pelli and Charles Bigelow, there has been a writing revolution in terms of public authorship, meaning the number of self-published books in addition to published new media authors of blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds:

> By 2000, there were 1 million book authors per year. ... Since 1400, book authorship has grown nearly tenfold in each *century*. Currently, authorship, including books and new media, is growing nearly tenfold each *year*. That's 100 times faster. Authors, once a select minority, will soon be a majority.
>
> *(Pelli & Bigelow, 2009, original emphasis)*

The fact that nearly anyone can be an author of a book – or other published or publicly available written work – changes the nature of writing to a less privileged, more vernacular kind of activity that connects the act of writing increasingly to popular culture, making it likely that what is being written focuses on the values and practices of that culture rather than those of traditional literate culture (Pennington, 2017). While this gives great scope for innovation, at the same time it means that what is being written answers to the requirements of the new context, such as for shorter text and more attention-grabbing form and content, as imposed by the constraints of the technology and by the commercial interests that exert control of the content and form of communication.

Much of what is now published is freely available to Internet users. In other ways, the consumption of written text has changed, as more and more people are buying their books online, leading to a steep decline in bookstores, and as libraries are being repurposed to become more like Internet cafés. Changes in the nature of books and how they are read, or "consumed" in ways that incorporate other modes of perception and comprehension, have occurred as a result of electronic capabilities. Books in digital form are often not intended to replicate print books but include multimedia elements such as video or sound files, or features such as multiple plots and endings that can be accessed as desired. Alongside new kinds of digital works (Pennington, 2013, 2017),

audiobooks are both supplementing and competing with print books, as are e-books, which differ from print books in a number of ways that we will examine.

Clearly, there is more variety now in types of books and other repositories of (what was originally and primarily) written language. This would seem to be progress, as would the possibility of putting all of these books and other published material online, which Google has been seeking to do for several years and which Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org/) has succeeded in doing for a great many books, especially those no longer covered by copyright. Anthony Grafton has reviewed the efforts of Google to index books all over the world, noting "the hordes of the Web's actual and potential users, many of whom will read material that would have been all but inaccessible to them a generation ago" (Grafton, 2007, p. 54). Despite all this attention to books online, Grafton concludes, "For now and for the foreseeable future, any serious reader will have to know how to travel down two very different roads simultaneously" (ibid.), the new road through the digital screen and the old road through print books.

In spite of suffering large funding cuts in recent decades, libraries remain a popular American institution (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014b) and have maintained a presence in the era of the Internet as repositories of print books and other print material, and also as repositories of digitized information that is freely available to the public rather than being culled and curated by Google or other media companies functioning as information distillers and idea managers. For these reasons, James Palfrey believes libraries should and will survive well into the future and has given his book *BiblioTech* the subtitle *Why Libraries Matter More Than Ever in the Age of Google* (Palfrey, 2015). If so, libraries might help keep a book culture alive while also providing a counterweight to the influence of mass media aligned with corporate interests.

The Pull Away from Book Culture and the Human Arts, and the Need to Push Back

Even if we believe Grafton and Palfrey, that our shared culture will involve printed text and books for some time well into the future, it nonetheless seems clear that in most people's everyday life the ephemeral texts and nontextual artifacts of the Internet – together with other mass media, the most notable of which in the present era is still television – are overshadowing the traditional

print and book culture that spawned the study of Great Books, both as a part of the standard academic curriculum and as part of a wider culture of enjoyment and learning from literature. The curriculum and culture of literature was based on the belief that knowledge of those great books reinforced a shared heritage and values among citizens while building linguistic and general knowledge. Great books held the promise of self-improvement that later led to the huge success in the United States of the Book-of-the-Month Club (Radway, 1997).

The current generation has little interest in literature as a model for shared values and a source of personal, linguistic, and general intellectual enrichment, ceding its educational functions to the practical values and skills of technology and business, and its societal position to the power and influence of mass media. The demise of bookstores, the decline of the Book-of-the-Month Club, and the overshadowing of the print and book culture by the pull of the Internet is a trend foreshadowed by the pull of television in the previous generation, when parents and educators worried that children spent too much time in front of what some referred to as "the idiot box." By the 1990s, many young people had supplemented or traded in the TV box for that other box, "the digital box," or computer, leading Luiz Costa-Lima to remark at the time that "the socialization of children takes place more through the electronic media than through reading" (Costa-Lima, 1996, p. 318).

What was a problem for reading then has only been magnified with the passage of time, as our digital devices, growing ever smaller, more portable, and more accessible, have moved people increasingly away from the literate culture of the past, with concomitant loss of the time, space, and privacy needed for solitary reading and contemplation. Michael Harris, in *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We've Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (Harris, 2014), sees a "restless idleness" in the digital generation and fears that those immersed in a digital lifestyle will lose the ability to "access absence and solitude" in moments of internal satisfaction and inspiration which those of us in the "straddle generation, with one foot in the digital pond and the other on the shore" (p. x), have known. Being online is being constantly connected, never alone. Yet it is a superficial kind of connection, a "constant intimacy" (ibid.) which is a poor substitute for authentic – that is, offline – intimacy. Harris is also concerned about how difficult it is nowadays to lead a life offline, as he found out when he

carved out a month (his "Analog August") to read *War and Peace*.

The book-centered activities of being read to or of curling up with a story or novel in bed or in a favorite comfy chair have in the present era been replaced by playing video games, watching television programs and movies, going on Facebook and other social media sites, surfing the Net, texting, and tweeting. As Jonathan Gottschall observes in *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*: "Video games – and other digital entertainments – are ... on the rise, drawing attention away from traditional story. The gaming industry is now much bigger than the book industry, bigger even than the film industry" (Gottschall, 2012, p. 178).

Figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from 2010 to 2011 (available at www.bls.gov/oes/) show huge growth in the multimedia and digital effects industry since the 1980s, as part of a general trend of entertainment industries overtaking defense as "the driving force for new technology" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 161). Gaming expert Ethan Gilsdorf makes the point that video games are an "almost $100-billion-a-year ... industry soon poised to overshadow all other forms of entertainment and diversion – motion pictures, television, books and Donald Trump combined" (Gilsdorf, 2016). *Vanity Fair*'s Nick Bilton reports that "[s]ocial networks alone are more valuable than the G.D.P. of more than 95 percent of the countries around the globe" (Bilton, 2016, p. 122). While gaming, texting and tweeting, Facebooking, and other kinds of online activity – sometimes performed simultaneously in a task-juggling mode generally referred to as "multitasking" – have become primary free-time activities for children and adolescents, their school time has been reconfigured from a literate curriculum, with its focus on reading, discussing, and writing about the great themes and issues of human life through Great Books, to a competency curriculum, with a focus on technical and employment skills (Slouka, 2009).

According to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges, writing in *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (Hedges, 2009), "We have bought hook, line and sinker into the idea that education is about training and 'success,' defined monetarily, rather than learning to think critically and to challenge" (p. 95). This has affected education at all levels, right up through college. Hedges (2009) maintains that "most universities have become high-priced occupational training centers" (p. 109). Even traditionally liberal arts

colleges, whose number has shrunk dramatically in the last 25 years, are under "pressure to add more practical offerings" such as engineering and business (Breneman, 2015). Economist David W. Breneman, who warned of this trend in 1990, has again come out with warnings about the decline in liberal arts education in America, reminding us of the Jeffersonian tradition that considers a liberal arts education essential for democracy:

> [W]e are drifting toward turning college into a trade school. And that is ultimately harmful. The original ethos of education was that it prepared people for citizenship, for enlightened leadership, enhanced their creativity. ... If we lose an educated populace, we're open for demagogy. We need broadly educated people.
>
> *(Breneman, 2015)*

We note that trade schools, while offering the expectation of employment for graduates, are a form of education that, rather than encouraging development of the individual – which has long been a treasured value and goal of life in America and Western culture – do the bidding of the commercial sector of the economy. The American government and educational system, in Hedges' (2009) view, do the bidding of corporations in providing them technical expertise and ignoring the fact that they are not operating with any sense of moral restraint or the common good. The educational system and the government, he maintains, neither value nor promote – and are indeed fearful of – "honest intellectual inquiry, which is by its nature distrustful of authority, fiercely independent, and often subversive" (p. 89).

Giving education a foundation in business might seem to secure it with a firm footing in practical principles that have proved their merit and survived the test of time; but a business model combining competition and Darwinian "survival-of-the-fittest" principles with technological innovation is far too simple, since it ignores the diversity and complexity of human beings – the actual people who are the teachers and learners in schools (Pennington, forthcoming). A broader educational model builds instruction to suit all of the students in a class, not just the best competitors among them as measured by test scores, and includes content and instructional modes other than those which focus on technology

and the Internet (e.g., in-class reading and writing groups). Bringing all of the diverse types of people and their characteristics and interests into the instructional agenda and ensuring a wide range of instructional content and approaches might offer other kinds of advantage and spur other kinds of innovation than those initiated by stereotypical high achievers or those linked to technology.[2]

As part of the present reshaping of the curriculum, the humanities and even creativity itself are rapidly being refashioned and repurposed by educational and management gurus to serve technical and commercial goals, being "promoted" to industrial status and scale. In becoming themselves "industries," they are being absorbed into vocational skills and marketable outcomes that fit their industrial status. Thus has the management guru Richard Florida, for instance, redefined "the highest order of creative work" as those "new forms or designs that are readily transferable and widely useful" (Florida, 2002, p. 69) – in particular, those which can be made into marketable products. This marketization and industrialization of aspects of life that are supposed to contribute to knowledge for its own sake, personal development, the life of the mind and the spirit, and the overall quality of experience as a human being is an enormous global trend in which all aspects of human life and culture are re-envisioned within commerce or economics, with a focus on profits and "the bottom line."

At the turn of the millennium, Jeremy Rifkin warned about the rapidly increasing consumerism of human life in his book *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-For Experience* (Rifkin, 2000). Now, approaching the end of the second decade of the 21st century, the trend to refashion all human culture and activity in the image of the god of Mammon, according to economic values and consumerism, continues apace, with many kinds of negative effects, including not only psychological and social damage to human beings but also physical damage to us and to the planet that affects the lives of all creatures.

There Is More to Life

This book is based on our strong belief that there is more to life than the worship of Mammon, which the Merriam-Webster online dictionary

(www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mammon) defines as:

> material wealth or possessions especially as having a debasing influence <you cannot serve God and *mammon* – Matthew 6:24 (Revised Standard Version)>.

It is also based on our strong belief that there is more to life than the worship of Techné, taken to refer to technology or, as it did for the ancient Greeks, to craft or skills aimed at practical outcomes. This is not to deny that some part of life must be focused on the economic and the practical, only that there needs to be ample room for other sorts of pursuits, and that economic and practical values should not dominate all other human values. *Civilization* includes much more than this: it includes *civic duty* (acting out of a sense of moral obligation to the community); *civility* (acting out of a sense of respect and courteousness towards others); *civil rights* (the rights guaranteed to all citizens for political and social freedom and equality); and, in general, being *civilized* in all the ways that word can be taken to imply educated and self-restrained, not barbarous.

We will argue that literature and related book-centered literate behaviors are a central aspect of our civilization, of our inherited shared language and culture, and so should remain a central aspect of our shared educational and human experience, as they did for decades past – before the Internet and business, as part of the great commercialization of culture, engulfed the curriculum and gave it a utilitarian, applied skills emphasis. As university president John W. Miller and reading professor Michael C. McKenna point out in *World Literacy: Where Countries Rank and Why It Matters* (Miller & McKenna, 2016):[3]

> Societies that do not practice literate behavior are often squalid, undernourished in mind and body, repressive of human rights and dignity, brutal, and harsh. ... [V]arious forms of "barbarity" ... found in all societies ... are much more prevalent where literate behavior is absent. Literacy and quality of life go hand in hand.
>
> *(p. 2)*

The experience of literature and through it "*deep reading*: the slow and meditative possession of a book" (Birkerts, 1994, p. 146, original emphasis) – or a poem, a story, or any work of literature – has become urgently important as a

counter-measure to the effects of our online, screen-saturated and digital-influenced lives and, more generally, to our consumerist culture and over-marketized and capitalized world. Along with the literary critic Harold Bloom, we maintain that "the struggle for literary values has to be ongoing, whatever the distractions of our moment" (Bloom, 2012).

The Education of Children

What we are advocating is a central role in people's lives and in the education of children for book culture, and specifically the reading of literature offline, and the knowledge, behaviors, and values that a culture of literary reading embodies. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2014) Council on Early Childhood recommends that children should be read to from birth, pointing out the many benefits of this practice in terms of developing language skills and interest in reading, in addition to the important social, motivational, and cognitive nurturing provided when parents read to their children. As they maintain:

> In contrast to often either passive or solitary electronic media exposure, parents reading with young children is a very personal and nurturing experience that promotes parent-child interaction, social-emotional development, and language and literacy skills during this critical period of early brain and child development.
>
> *(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014, p. 405)*

The Academy's Council on Communications and Media policy statement on "Media and Young Minds" recommends no media use other than video-chatting for children younger than 18 to 24 months; and for children 18 to 24 months of age, they support careful introduction of selected high-quality media that is used with a child interactively and not by the child alone (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016a). These recommendations stem from research showing that

> [c]hildren younger than 2 years need hands-on exploration and social interaction with trusted caregivers to develop their cognitive, language, motor, and social-emotional skills. Because of their immature symbolic,

> memory, and attentional skills, infants and toddlers cannot learn from traditional digital media as they do from interactions with caregivers.
>
> *(Ibid., p. 1)*

For children 2 to 5 years of age, the Academy recommends no more than one hour per day of high-quality programming co-viewed with assistance and scaffolding by adults to help the children understand and apply what they see onscreen to the offline context (p. 3).

Yet it is common these days to see infants and toddlers sitting alone in front of the television or in a world of their own, even within a family group or sitting on a parent's lap, engrossed in solitary activity on an iPad or smartphone. A few years ago, Christopher Bergland wrote that "61% of children under two use some type of screen technology and 43% watch television every day" (Bergland, 2013), and it is doubtful these percentages would now be lower. The Academy's own website reports that "[t]oday's children are spending an average of seven hours a day on entertainment media, including televisions, computers, phones and other electronic devices" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016c). According to the Academy's Council on Communications and Media policy statement on "Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents":

> The most common broadcast medium continues to be TV. A recent study found that TV hours among school-aged children have decreased in the past decade for children younger than 8 years. However, among children aged 8 years and older, average daily TV time remains over 2 hours per day. TV viewing also has changed over the past decade, with content available via streaming or social media sites, such as YouTube and Netflix.
>
> *(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016b, pp. 1–2)*

For children of any age, and for parents as well, the recommendation is to "develop a Family Media Use Plan for everyone" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016c). We suggest that this plan should incorporate print media and include initiatives for family members to read and discuss books and specifically literature together, starting in the preschool years and continuing for at least as long as children are living at home – and maybe beyond that time, as a way to maintain ties and a literate culture in the family.

Research on what preschool children learn from different kinds of media demonstrates that being read to – or watching movies – correlates with young children's ability to read other people, but television watching does not (Mar, Tackett, & Moore, 2010). It appears that there is something about television watching which (as opposed to watching films) does not engage the child's mind or emotions in relation to other human beings. There seems to be something about the television screen or content of television that encourages passivity rather than active engagement, as interaction with other people or with books does.[4] In the 1980s Wayne C. Booth was warning of the limitations of television to engage viewers, who, according to Booth (1982, 1989), tended to remain distant and isolated from the characters and actions portrayed. Booth (1982) contrasted the restricted world of television, "confined to some box or screen," with the expansive world of "printed stories, ... [where] [t]he action takes place in a country somehow in my head, yet freed to occur in a space not in my head" (p. 39). In the print world, readers step into the world created on the page and make it their own; they participate in making the experience created by the story.

The positive effects of being read to or watching movies contrast sharply with the negative effects of television watching. According to a study of television watching by preschoolers carried out by the Ohio State University team of Amy I. Nathanson, Molly L. Sharp, Fashina Aladé, Eric E. Rasmussen, and Katheryn Christy, it appears that being immersed in story culture helps develop children's social skills, whereas watching television has no such effects and can also weaken development of the ability to understand others (Nathanson, Sharp, Aladé, Rasmussen, & Christy, 2013). Such understanding occurs through what has been called "theory of mind." This expression, popularized by the philosopher Daniel Dennett (Dennett, 1987), refers to the ability to take the perspective of another by imagining how their mind, and also their emotions, work – how they think and react, in particular, to other people and their minds and emotions. Theory of mind abilities are divided by some psychologists into two types – *cognitive*, the ability to infer another person's mental state, and *affective*, the ability to recognize another person's emotional state. The cognitive side of theory of mind is crucial to language use and effective communication of all kinds, while the affective side of theory of mind is crucial to emotional

identification with others – that is, *empathy* – which is crucial to intimacy, relationship, and their expression through language and other means.

It appears that television viewing, and parallel aspects of digital screen viewing, lead to a reduction in theory of mind, empathy, and social competence. It can be speculated that this results, paradoxically, from desensitization, a dulling of the senses caused by an overload of a highly sensationalized mode of presentation and content, and from reduced face-to-face contact with human beings. MIT psychology professor Sherry Turkle has been warning about this in her writing, including the two books, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Turkle, 2012) and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk* (Turkle, 2015).[5] Later in this book, we examine research on how theory of mind and empathy might be enhanced in childhood and beyond by reading literature.

Research has also shown that kindergartners with good "prosocial" and emotional skills have a high likelihood of becoming successful adults. Using data from a study of children of low socioeconomic status[6] who were tracked for 13 to 19 years, starting in kindergarten, researchers Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, and Max Crowley found statistically significant associations between children's social-emotional skills, as evaluated by their teachers in kindergarten, and indicators of their success later in life, as assessed by such measures as graduating high school on time, completing college, obtaining employment, avoiding criminal activity, and otherwise being a productive and healthy, contributing member of society. Writing in the *American Journal of Public Health*, Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley (2015) also review a body of research showing that IQ or test scores measuring cognitive ability are not as good predictors of future success as are measures of educational attainment that include "noncognitive characteristics such as self-discipline, academic motivation, and interpersonal skills" (p. 2283). This body of prior research supports their own research in demonstrating that "[s]uccess in school involves both social-emotional and cognitive skills, because social interactions, attention, and self-control affect readiness for learning" (ibid.).[7]

This research with children from a range of circumstances provides compelling evidence of the importance of social development for the achievement of positive outcomes in life and the avoidance of negative ones. The

results are especially noteworthy given that these "noncognitive competencies ... may be more malleable than cognitive skills and so may be appropriate targets for prevention or intervention efforts" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2283). As is clear from this and other studies reviewed by Jones et al. (2015), we risk leaving out crucial aspects of education by not ensuring that all children have a strong grounding in the values and behaviors which help them get along with others, such as fairness, helpfulness, empathy, and cooperation. Luckily, these values and behaviors are highly teachable and learnable.

However, the forces of present-day consumerist, technological culture work against using school time to focus on children's emotional and social education, just as they work against giving attention in society to the culture of stories and literature in society. One consequence is that the reading of literary prose or poetry becomes a leisure-time activity of a small group – their self-indulgent "guilty pleasure." How sad that children might consider their reading a secret indulgence that must be hidden from peers and from those in authority who pressure everyone to spend time only on utilitarian pursuits, especially skill-building related to STEM and forms of reading which have the most obvious immediate relevance and practical value. These days much of the literature included in the curriculum is either part of humanities elective courses or has the practical purpose in an English (or other language) class of illustrating or teaching vocabulary and/or sentence structure. When it is included in the required curriculum, its practical value must be emphasized, especially in terms of how it makes one more employable.

Parents have become another force pushing consumerist and technological values and practices onto their children. Steven Pearlstein, Professor of Public Affairs at George Mason University, writes that the current generation of "helicopter parents" are urging their college-age children not to even consider studying literature and other liberal arts subjects (Pearlstein, 2016). He recounts many cases of parents not only advising their children not to study these subjects in college, but actually forbidding them from doing so, pushing them to major in subjects that are directly related to paid employment, typically the most practical branches of STEM fields, such as engineering and medical sciences, and of business and economics, such as accounting. Pearlstein (2016), who finds the strong pressure being put on students to bypass literature and

other subjects we classify as human arts alarming, remarks that those with narrow skills and knowledge will not be competitive in the economy of today or the future. In his view, "The good jobs of the future will go to those who can collaborate widely, think broadly and challenge conventional wisdom – precisely the capacities that a liberal arts education is meant to develop" (Pearlstein, 2016).

We see the reading of literature as representing a countercultural force, a significant alternative and corrective, to that other, now dominant culture in education and society more generally. And we advocate deep reading of literature as important not only for the satisfaction it brings, but also for its benefits in: building vocabulary and general knowledge, which ground intelligence; stimulating deep thinking and deep learning, which ground creativity and innovation; and enhancing empathy and connection to other human beings, which ground morality. Such effects improve a person in ways which go beyond, and indeed which trump, any effects of education which increase employability. At the same time, it can be argued that such effects do increase employability and, beyond that, people's chances for success in life, far beyond the immediately visible effects of skills-oriented learning. In addition, recent research (as detailed in Chapter 9) suggests that reading books has survival value, increasing a person's life span (Bavishi, Slade, & Levy, 2016).

Our Goals for This Book

We aim to show the value of literature as a source and repository of human language and stories, values and culture, which can teach people about these things and about themselves. In so doing, we build the case that literature holds an invaluable place in human life that society needs to maintain as a central aspect of its heritage, and to pass on to children. We will argue that literature, and human arts more generally, can foster honest intellectual inquiry of the sort that makes people question authority and maintain an independent mind, as a basis for critical thinking and action. We will further argue that literature can be a powerful force for good, improving people who read and the lives of others whom they influence. In this sense, literature has considerable value in preparing people for life and therefore should have a central place in education.

We articulate and expand upon a view of literature and its value developed in

Waxler's previous work – including Waxler (1997, 2007, 2008, 2014), Waxler and Trounstine (1999), Trounstine and Waxler (2005), Waxler and Hall (2011), and Hall and Waxler (2007, 2010) – and the Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) program at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth (http://cltl.umassd.edu/AboutPhilosophy.cfm) which Waxler codeveloped in the 1990s with Robert Kane and Wayne St. Pierre. This program was designed on the foundational view that literature has a transforming power which can be realized through reading and, further, through discussing it with others.

In our expansive view, literature:

- provides refreshing breaks and needed escape from technology, for leaving the "fast lane" and dwelling psychologically in a peaceful place away from everyday life;
- connects us to our sensuous nature;
- arouses our emotions and can both excite and calm us;
- engages the mind and the imagination in ways that go beyond other media, by painting worlds in words;
- enhances appreciation for and knowledge of well-crafted language;
- builds vocabulary and general knowledge;
- improves the ability to interpret information and think for oneself;
- cultivates understanding of the self and the development of individual identity;
- increases openness to new ideas and experiences and thus enlarges creative potentials and the possibilities for change;
- inspires appreciation for human complexity and improves the ability to read and understand others;
- fosters empathy for other human beings;
- serves as a cultural bridge to the key themes of human existence;
- raises complex ethical questions;
- provides models for human life that are inspiring and that help people create positive aspirations for the future; and
- helps to construct a road map in the journey from birth to death.

We illustrate these points with reference to selected literature, including

classics such as John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, stories by Kate Chopin and James Baldwin, and contemporary works by Junot Díaz and Gary Shteyngart, in addition to poems and stories by other authors. Other than some Biblical stories about brothers that provide a foundation for 20th- and 21st-century works addressing similar themes of sibling love and rivalry, our illustrations are all English-language works, specifically, poetry and literary fiction rather than plays (which are arguably less properly considered as a read rather than a performed medium). We also consider ways in which digital works differ from those born of print culture.

We cite research showing that the kind of deep concentration and reading which literature promotes is good for the brain and plays an important role in structuring its network of connections and keeping them functioning well. This argument, and the science that supports it, may be for some an especially convincing demonstration of the value of literature and the culture of reading that surrounds it. We also summarize a growing body of scientific research demonstrating the power of literature to widen people's perspectives and to promote empathy and tolerance. In this, literature can have an especially significant role in improving social relations and encouraging cooperative and peaceful coexistence among people. We go beyond a discussion of social issues to argue that many contemporary problems in the physical world are connected to a cultural decline which literature and human arts can help to reverse.

From these different perspectives, our book builds a case for the value of literary culture as a needed counterbalance to prevailing cultural forces, especially those related to mass media and digital culture, but also involving the current stress on competitive achievement and consumerism. We describe the downside of these prevailing cultural forces and suggest ways in which education and society can support literature and human arts to balance the focus on STEM, achievement and economic advantage, and all things digital. We seek to make the case that strengthening the culture of literature, of books, and of human arts more generally offers a means of improving people so that they are both willing and able to apply all of their knowledge – including their knowledge of science, technology, and business – to make the world a better place.

Notes

1 The website of the ProQuest company Bowker that provides ISBN numbers for books shows fiction as the book category with the most new ISBNs (over 50,000) for 2013, maintaining a rising trend for fiction against some other categories of traditional print books (www.bowker.com/news/2014/Traditional-Print-Book-Production-Dipped-Slightly-in-2013.html).

2 As argued in Pennington (forthcoming), in focusing on survival of the fittest competitors, with fitness defined by certain kinds of achievement and skills within an emphasis on technology and utilitarian outcomes, this business model reduces the opportunities that can occur in educational contexts for a kind of natural social evolution which exploits diversity in the characteristics and abilities of the human population as well as in curriculum content and modes of delivery for teaching that content.

3 Based on multiple measures of what the authors view as characteristic literate behaviors – including not only literacy test scores but also money spent on education, prevalence of computers, number and holdings of libraries, and number of newspapers – Miller and McKenna (2016) rank the United States in 7th place worldwide, behind 1st-place Finland and other Scandinavian countries as well as Switzerland, and just ahead of Germany.

4 Part of this may be the lack of continuity, as television has increasingly tended to be designed to be digestible in relatively self-contained short scenes or small bits of humor, information, or story that catch a viewer's momentary attention but do not require sustained attention so that programs can accommodate commercial breaks. It seems that television may in fact be training people to watch it in a non-concentrated, noncontinuous way. As technology writer and educator Marc Prensky reports, "Research done for *Sesame Street* reveals that children do not actually watch television continuously, but 'in bursts.' They tune in just enough to get the gist and be sure it makes sense" (Prensky, 2011/2001, p. 18).

5 Human interaction through face-to-face discussion is a powerful force that can even apparently counteract the potentially "de-empathetic," emotionally disconnected and deadening, effects of watching television. Nathanson et al. (2013) report that their overall finding, which is of a negative relationship between television watching and the children's development of theory of mind, did not apply in cases in which parents and children talked about the television that the preschoolers were watching.

6 The children came from rural Pennsylvania and three cities in different parts of the country (Seattle, Nashville, and Durham, North Carolina).

7 In their own research, Jones et al. (2015) used a measurement instrument (the Prosocial–Communication subscale of the Social Competence Scale) with eight items that teachers rated on a five-point Likert (degree of agreement) scale in order to judge

children's social interaction with others. Items included such attributes as "cooperates with peers without prompting," "is helpful to others," "very good at understanding feelings," and "resolves problems on own" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2284). In the follow-up studies, the researchers assessed participants' lives up to age 25 in the categories of education/employment, public assistance, crime, substance abuse, and mental health. Significant positive statistical relationships were found between the children's prosocial communicative skills as judged by their kindergarten teachers and a number of desirable outcomes, including whether participants later graduated from high school on time, completed a college degree, obtained stable employment in young adulthood, and were employed full time in young adulthood. The positive statistical relationships indicate that those who were rated high on social skills in kindergarten tended to achieve these outcomes, whereas those who were rated low on social skills tended not to. These results can be contrasted with a set of significant negative statistical relationships found between the children's prosocial communicative skills and a range of later undesirable outcomes, including:

- the number of years of special education services;
- the number of years of repeated grades through high school;
- the likelihood of living in or being on a waiting list for public housing;
- the likelihood of receiving public assistance;
- any involvement with police before adulthood;
- ever being in a detention facility;
- being arrested in young adulthood;
- appearing in court in young adulthood;
- the number of arrests for a severe offense by age 25;
- the number of days of binge drinking in the past month;
- the number of years on medication for emotional or behavioral issues through high school.

The negative statistical relationships mean that the lower the children were rated in their prosocial communicative skills, the more likely they were to experience these outcomes, whereas the higher they were rated, the less likely they were to experience them.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics (2014). Literacy promotion: An essential component of primary care pediatric practice. Council on Early Childhood Policy Statement. *Pediatrics*, 134(2), 404–409. doi:10.1542/peds.2014–1384.

American Academy of Pediatrics (2016a). Media and young minds. Council on Communications and Media Policy Statement. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), 1–6.

doi:10.1542/peds.2016–2591.
American Academy of Pediatrics (2016b). Media use in school-aged children and adolescents. Council on Communications and Media Policy Statement. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), 1–6. doi:10.1542/peds.2016–2592.
American Academy of Pediatrics (2016c). Media and children communication toolkit. Retrieved on December 22, 2016 from www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/pages/media-and-children.aspx.
Bavishi, Avni, Slade, Martin D., & Levy, Becca R. (2016). A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity. *Social Science and Medicine*, 164, 44–48. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.07.014.
Bergland, Christopher (2013). One more reason to unplug your television set. *Psychology Today* website. November 23, 2013. Retrieved on October 15, 2015 from www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201311/one-more-reason-unplug-your-television.
Bergland, Christopher (2014). Reading fiction improves brain connectivity and function. *Psychology Today* website. January 4, 2014. Retrieved on October 15, 2015 from www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201401/reading-fiction-improves-brain-connectivity-and-function.
Bilton, Nick (2016). The Rand pack. *Vanity Fair*, The New Establishment. November 20, 2016, pp. 120, 122.
Birkerts, Sven (1994). *The Gutenberg elegies: The fate of reading in an electronic age*. Boston: Faber and Faber.
Bloom, Harold (2012). Gardens of unearthly delights. Review of Stranger magic: Charmed states and the Arabian Nights by Marina Warner. *The New York Times*, Book Review. March 25, 2012, p. 9.
Booth, Wayne C. (1982). The company we keep: Self-making in imaginative art, old and new. *Daedalus*, 3, 33–61.
Booth, Wayne C. (1989). *The company we keep: An ethics of fiction*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Breneman, David W. (2015). Liberal arts, lost cause? *The New York Times*, Education Life. August 2, 2015, p. 6.
Cohen, Joshua (2012). Means of delivery. *The New York Times*, Book Review. January 15, 2012, p. 27.
Costa-Lima, Luiz (1996). *The limits of voice: Montaigne, Schlegel, Kafka*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
Dennett, Daniel C. (1987). *The intentional stance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Florida, Richard (2002). *The rise of the creative class... And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
Gilsdorf, Ethan (2016). Players gonna play: Three books on games, their appeal, purpose and

often addictive qualities. *The New York Times*, Book Review. October 2, 2016, p. 16.

Gottschall, Jonathan (2012). *The storytelling animal: How stories make us human*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Grafton, Anthony (2007). Future reading: Digitization and its discontents. *The New Yorker*. November 5, 2007, pp. 50–54.

Hall, Maureen P., & Waxler, Robert P. (2007). It worked for criminals: It will work for middle schoolers. *The Journal of Urban Education: Focus on Enrichment*, 4(1), 122–132.

Hall, Maureen P., & Waxler, Robert P. (2010). Engaging future teachers to reflect on how reading and writing can change lives. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 2(1), 91–101. doi:10.1558/wap.v2i1.91.

Harris, Michael (2014). *The end of absence: Reclaiming what we've lost in a world of constant connection*. New York: Current.

Hayakawa, S. I. (1990/1939). *Language in thought and action* (5th edition). New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Hedges, Chris (2009). *Empire of illusion: The end of literacy and the triumph of spectacle*. New York: Nation Books.

Honoré, Carl (2004). *In praise of slowness: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. New York: HarperCollins.

Jones, Damon E., Greenberg, Mark, & Crowley, Max (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11), 2283–2290. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630.

Mar, Raymond A., Tackett, Jennifer L., & Moore, Chris (2010). Exposure to media and theory-of-mind development in preschoolers. *Cognitive Development*, 25(1), 69–78. doi:10.1016/j.cogdev.2009.11.002.

Miller, John W., & McKenna, Michael C. (2016). *World literacy: Where countries rank and why it matters*. New York: Routledge.

Nathanson, Amy I., Sharp, Molly L., Aladé, Fashina, Rasmussen, Eric E., & Christy, Katheryn (2013). The relation between television exposure and theory of mind among preschoolers. *Journal of Communication* 63(6), 1088–1108. doi:10.1111/jcom.12062.

National Endowment for the Arts (2004). *Reading at risk: A survey of literary reading in America*. July 2004. Retrieved on May 1, 2013 from www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf.

National Endowment for the Arts (2007). *To read or not to read: A question of national consequence*. November 2007. Retrieved on May 1, 2013 from http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/ToRead.pdf.

National Endowment for the Arts (2009). *Reading on the rise: A new chapter in American literacy*. January 2009. Retrieved on May 1, 2013 from www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingonRise.pdf.

National Endowment for the Arts (2013). *How a nation engages with art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Report # 57. September 2013. Retrieved

on June 28, 2014 from http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/highlights-from-2012-sppa-revised-jan2015.pdf.

Palfrey, James (2015). *BiblioTech: Why libraries matter more than ever in the age of Google*. New York: Basic Books.

Pearlstein, Steven (2016). Meet the parents who won't let their children study literature. Post Everything, *The Washington Post* website. September 2, 2016. Retrieved on September 3, 2016 from www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/02/meet-the-parents-who-wont-let-their-children-study-literature/?utm_term=.0807b8d51c09.

Pelli, Denis G., & Bigelow, Charles (2009). A writing revolution. *Seed magazine* website. April 7, 2009. http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/a_writing_revolution/.

Pennington, Martha C. (2013). Trends in writing and technology. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 5(2), 155–179. doi:10.1558/wap.v5i2.155.

Pennington, Martha C. (2017). Literacy, culture, and creativity in a digital era. *Pedagogy*, 17(2), 259–287. doi: 10.1215/15314200-3770149.

Pennington, Martha C. (forthcoming). *Teacherâ€"Student Relationship: Key to Effective Teaching and Learning in Contexts of Diversity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Prensky, Marc (2011/2001). Do they really think differently? In Mark Bauerlein (ed.), *The digital divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, texting, and the age of social networking* (pp. 12–25). New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.

Radway, Janice A. (1997). *A feeling for books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Rainie, Lee, Zickuhr, Kathryn, Purcell, Kristen, Madden, Mary, & Brenner, Joanna (2012). The rise of e-reading. *Pew Internet and American Life Project* website, April 5, 2012. Retrieved on October 15, 2015 from http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/04/04/part-2-the-general-reading-habits-of-americans/.

Rifkin, Jeremy (2000). *The age of access: The new culture of hypercapitalism, where all of life is a paid-for experience*. New York: Tarcher.

Robb, Alice (2015). 92 percent of college students prefer reading print books to e-readers. Technology section. *New Republic* website, January 14, 2015. Retrieved on May 15, 2015 from www.newrepublic.com/article/120765/naomi-barons-words-onscreen-fate-reading-digital-world.

Schuessler, Jennifer (2011). Shelfless. *The New York Times*, Book Review. January 30, 2011, p. 22.

Slouka, Mark (2009). Dehumanized: When math and science rule the school. *Harper's Magazine*. September 2009, pp. 32–40.

Trounstine, Jean, & Waxler, Robert P. (2005). *Finding a voice: The practice of changing lives through literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Turkle, Sherry (2012). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each*

other. New York: Basic Books.

Turkle, Sherry (2015). *Reclaiming conversation: The power of talk*. New York: Penguin Press.

UNESCO (2006). *Education for all: Literacy for life*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2011). Factsheets. www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/FS16-2001-Literacy-EN.pdf.

Waxler, Robert P. (1997). Why literature? The power of stories. In Megan McLaughlin, Jean Trounstine, & Robert P. Waxler (eds.), *Success stories: Life skills through literature* (pp. 2–5). Washington, DC: Office of Correctional Education, U.S. Department of Education.

Waxler, Robert P. (2007). In honor of Rassias: What literature and language mean to me. In Mel B. Yoken (ed.), *Breakthrough: Essays and vignettes in honor of John A. Rassias* (pp. 125–130). New York: Peter Lang.

Waxler, Robert P. (2008). Changing lives through literature. *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)*, 123(3), 678–682. doi: 10.1632/pmla.2008.123.3.678.

Waxler, Robert P. (2014). *The risk of reading: How literature helps us to understand ourselves and the world*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Waxler, Robert P., & Hall, Maureen P. (2011). *Transforming literacy: Changing lives through reading and writing*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Waxler, Robert P., & Trounstine, Jean (eds.). (1999). *Changing lives through literature*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press.

Zickuhr, Kathryn, & Rainie, Lee (2014a). A snapshot of reading in America in 2013. *Pew Research Center* website. January 16, 2014. Retrieved on February 13, 2015 from www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/16/a-snapshot-of-reading-in-america-in-2013/.

Zickuhr, Kathryn, & Rainie, Lee (2014b). How those under 30 engage with libraries and think about libraries' role in their lives and communities. *Pew Research Center* website. September 10, 2014. Retrieved on August 8, 2016 from www.pewinternet.org/2014/09/10/younger-americans-and-public-libraries/.

Zickuhr, Kathryn, & Rainie, Lee (2014c). Younger Americans' reading habits and technology use. *Pew Research Center* website. September 10, 2014. Retrieved on February 13, 2015 from www.pewinternet.org/2014/09/10/younger-americans-reading-habits-and-technology-use/.

2

A Sketch of our World, Current and Future

> Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.
>
> – *George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life" (Eliot, 1856, p. 145)*

The Human Impact on the World: Degrading the Physical Environment

As Yuval Noah Harari argues in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Harari, 2015), the human impact on the world was relatively insignificant until about 100,000 years ago, when *Homo sapiens* "jumped to the top of the food chain" (p. 11), "ascend[ing] to the top so quickly that the ecosystem was not given time to adjust" (pp. 11–12).

> Moreover, humans themselves failed to adjust. Most top predators of the planet are majestic creatures. Millions of years of domination have filled them with self-confidence. Sapiens by contrast is more like a banana republic dictator. Having been so recently one of the underdogs of the savannah, we are full of fears and anxieties over our position, which makes us doubly cruel and dangerous. Many historical calamities, from deadly wars to ecological catastrophes, have resulted from this over-hasty jump.
>
> *(Harari, 2015, p. 12)*

In the afterword to his book, subtitled "The Animal That Became a God," Harari observes that over time, *Homo sapiens* has become "the terror of the ecosystem" (p. 415). As he sees us:

> We are more powerful than ever before, but have very little idea what to do

with all that power. Worse still, humans seem to be more irresponsible than ever. Self-made gods with only the laws of physics to keep us company, we are accountable to no one. We are consequently wreaking havoc on our fellow animals and on the surrounding ecosystem, seeking little more than our own comfort and amusement, yet never finding satisfaction.

Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?

(Harari, 2015, pp. 415–416)

The dominance of *Homo sapiens* over the planet is the result, as Harari (2015) points out, of our highly developed mode of communication, our language, which made possible most of the culture that was created on a pre-existing, two-million-year-old platform of our ancestor humans' super-large brain, "superior learning abilities and complex social structures" (p. 11), and tool use. However, this great capacity married to *H. sapiens*' less-than-majestic qualities[1] has put us in the place where we now find our species, becoming increasingly selfish and greedy, biting the very hand of Mother Nature that has always fed us. The great difficulties we are now experiencing with climate change, the extinction of plant and animal species which provide crucial parts of our ecology, and the pollution of the air and water which we need to survive can be seen as Mother Nature getting angry enough to bite us back, with a vengeance.

As we will seek to convince you, making better use of our great trump card of language and bringing literature out of the margins of society and into the mainstream is a practical approach to improving the physical world and to getting Mother Nature off our backs, through first improving the intellectual and spiritual life of Sapiens, making us more satisfied and less restless creatures, and improving our social and physical world in the process. The route to this better world is through the imagination, paradoxically the same route which leads to our restlessness and dissatisfaction with whatever is our current state and so fuels all of our desires for "more and better" ways to be. The specific route through the imagination that we propose is one focused on literature and the human arts.

The present era combining rapid technological change with global connectivity and the harnessing of data is sometimes referred to as the

Anthropocene era in order to emphasize the impact that humans are having on the planet. Besides incorporating the Digital Age, the Anthropocene is a time of widespread and rapid extinctions in the world which humans have both inherited and created. These include not only the great biological losses affecting the physical world in which *H. sapiens* and all other species live, but also the great cultural losses affecting the intellectual, emotional, and social world that is the unique ecology of human life.

Evidence of the first type of extinction, its human causes, and its dire consequences now and going forward is mounting. As the biological world has been and continues to be altered by human habitation and engineered to human purposes, we can see an increasingly "unnatural history" of the physical world as it has intersected human history and progresses towards ever more global warming and the planet's sixth mass extinction – the first in many millions of years and the only one caused by humans (Kolbert, 2014). Species are disappearing both as a direct effect of human actions, such as hunting and pollution of habitats, and as an indirect effect of changes we have made to the natural world. Donovan Hohn raises an alarm regarding "the trade routes and flight paths and navigable waterways with which we stitched continents and basins together. Thanks to us, species that evolved in isolation now collide, at times with devastating effects on ecosystems" (Hohn, 2015, p. 12). A prime example given by Hohn is of the man-made canal system in the American Great Lakes, which has made it possible for an invasive species with no predators (other than humans), the aggressive and rapidly reproducing Asian carp, to quickly spread and threaten to overwhelm native species. And, as Hohn warns, this is but one of hundreds of worrying species invasions in the Great Lakes area alone.

Naomi Klein, in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Klein, 2014), blames capitalism – essentially human greed and the desire for ever more profits – for destroying our planet and argues for a radical change in direction. Klein goes after the powerful voices pronouncing that competition and market forces can solve our climate woes, showing how those very market forces brought us to the place where we now find ourselves and how they are continuing to destroy our planet, pillaging its resources and treating it as our "waste dump." She argues that the current economic model, driven by perpetual growth, cannot