



Literature to Help Children Cope With Family Stressors

Real Life Calls for Real Books

By S. Killingsworth Roberts and P. A. Crawford

in “Naeyc” – Young Children on the Web

September 2008

What is Naeyc?



<http://www.naeyc.org/content/about-naeyc>

NAEYC's mission is to serve and act on behalf of the needs, rights and well-being of all young children with primary focus on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources (NAEYC Bylaws, Article I., Section 1.1). Association for the Education of Young Children

- NAEYC expresses its mission in terms of three broad goals:
- Improving professional practice and working conditions in early childhood education.
- Supporting early childhood programs by working to achieve a high-quality system of early childhood education.
- Building a high-performing, inclusive organization of groups and individuals who are committed to promoting excellence in early childhood education for all young children.

Goals

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Mission



- All early childhood professionals are supported as professionals with a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities, and compensation that attracts and retains high quality educators.
- All families have access to early childhood education programs that are affordable and of high quality and actively participate in their children's education as respected reciprocal partners.
- All communities, states, and the nation work together to ensure accountable systems of high-quality early childhood education for all children.

YC

Young Children is NAEYC's peer-reviewed professional journal, published five times a year—in March, May, July, September, and November. Issues are organized around topics important to the early childhood education field. *Young Children's* practitioner focus makes it unique among journals and its award-winning status testifies to its excellence.

Young Children on the Web is its online version



Opening Quotation



I divide all
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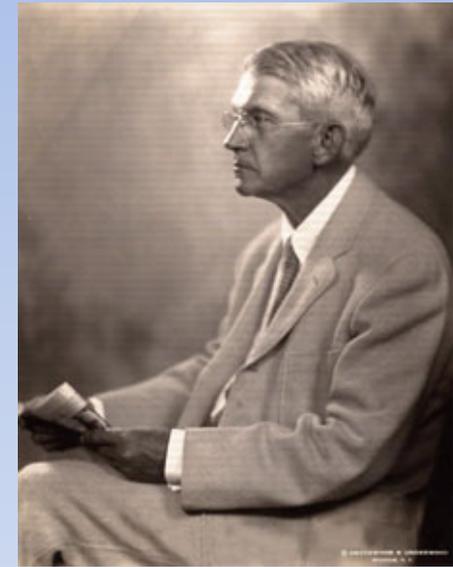
meetville.com

William Lyon Phelps

Who was William Lyon Phelps?

William Lyon Phelps (1865-1943) was an American educator, literary critic and author. He served as a professor of English at Yale University from 1901 to 1933. His works include *Advance of the English Novel* and *Essays on Modern Dramatists*. On April 6, 1933, he delivered this speech during a radio broadcast.

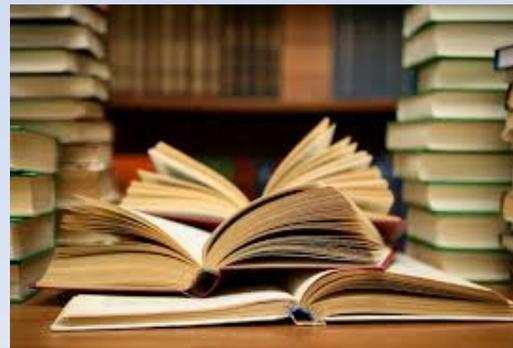
His reverence for books was not shared by everyone, especially those in Nazi Germany. On May 10, 1933, the Nazis had staged an event unseen since the Middle Ages as young German students from universities, formerly regarded as among the finest in the world, had gathered in Berlin and other German cities to burn books with "un-German" ideas.



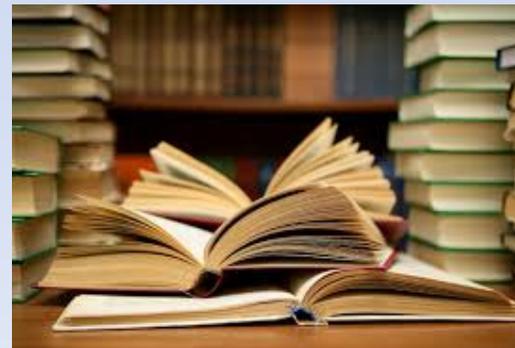
The Pleasure of Books (1933)

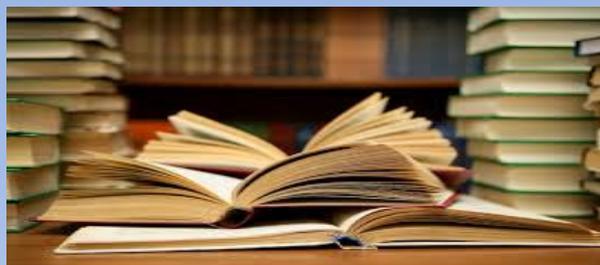
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uTaXrwAeLc>

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind; and we enjoy reading books that belong to us much more than if they are borrowed. A borrowed book is like a guest in the house; it must be treated with punctiliousness, with a certain considerate formality. You must see that it sustains no damage; it must not suffer while under your roof. You cannot leave it carelessly, you cannot mark it, you cannot turn down the pages, you cannot use it familiarly. And then, some day, although this is seldom done, you really ought to return it.



But your own books belong to you; you treat them with that affectionate intimacy that annihilates formality. Books are for use, not for show; you should own no book that you are afraid to mark up, or afraid to place on the table, wide open and face down. A good reason for marking favorite passages in books is that this practice enables you to remember more easily the significant sayings, to refer to them quickly, and then in later years, it is like visiting a forest where you once blazed a trail. You have the pleasure of going over the old ground, and recalling both the intellectual scenery and your own earlier self.

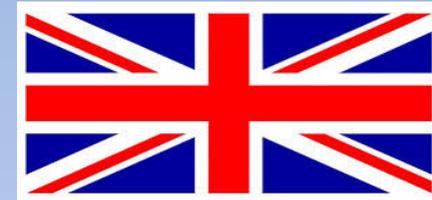




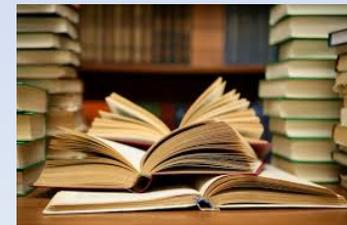
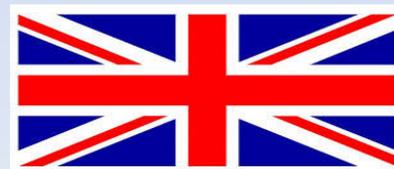
Everyone should begin collecting a private library in youth; the instinct of private property, which is fundamental in human beings, can here be cultivated with every advantage and no evils. One should have one's own bookshelves, which should not have doors, glass windows, or keys; they should be free and accessible to the hand as well as to the eye. The best of mural decorations is books; they are more varied in color and appearance than any wallpaper, they are more attractive in design, and they have the prime advantage of being separate personalities, so that if you sit alone in the room in the firelight, you are surrounded with intimate friends.

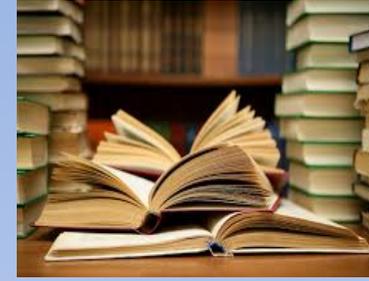
The knowledge that they are there in plain view is both stimulating and refreshing. You do not have to read them all. Most of my indoor life is spent in a room containing six thousand books; and I have a stock answer to the invariable question that comes from strangers. "Have you read all of these books?"

"Some of them twice." This reply is both true and unexpected.

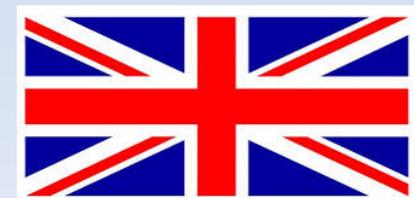


There are of course no friends like living, breathing, corporeal men and women; my devotion to reading has never made me a recluse. How could it? Books are of the people, by the people, for the people. ***Literature is the immortal part of history; it is the best and most enduring part of personality.*** But ***book-friends*** have this advantage over living friends; you can enjoy the most truly aristocratic society in the world whenever you want it. The great dead are beyond our physical reach, and the great living are usually almost as inaccessible; as for our personal friends and acquaintances, we cannot always see them. Perchance they are asleep, or away on a journey.





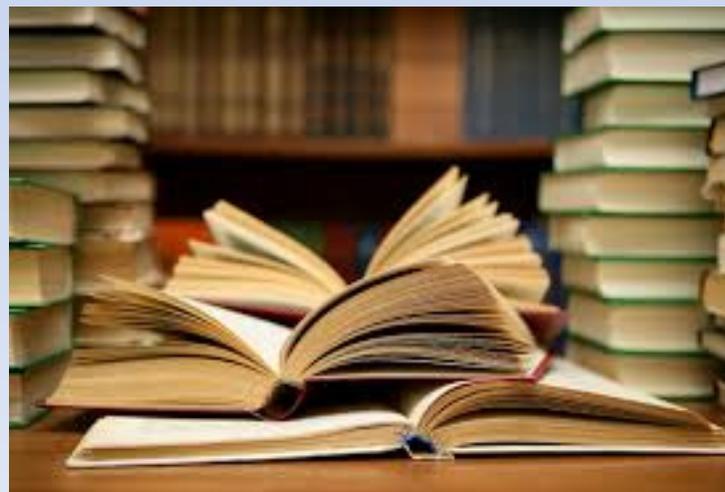
But in a private library, you can at any moment converse with Socrates or Shakespeare or Carlyle or Dumas or Dickens or Shaw or Barrie or Galsworthy. And there is no doubt that in these books you see these men at their best. ***They wrote for you.*** They "laid themselves out," they did their ultimate best to entertain you, to make a favorable impression. You are necessary to them as an audience is to an actor; only instead of seeing them masked, you look into their innermost heart of heart.



Why reading?

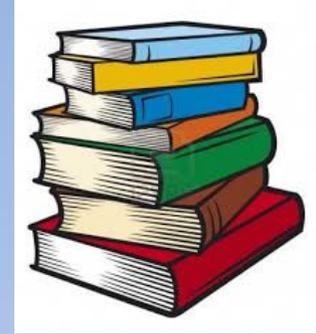


The article's opening quotation ("I divide all readers into two classes: those who read *to remember* and those who read *to forget*") points out to two functions, two unique, yet closely related potentials of literature.

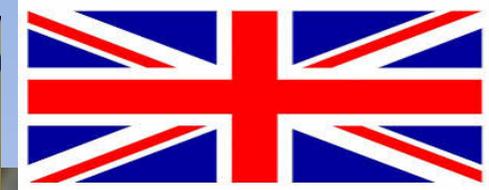


Two potentials

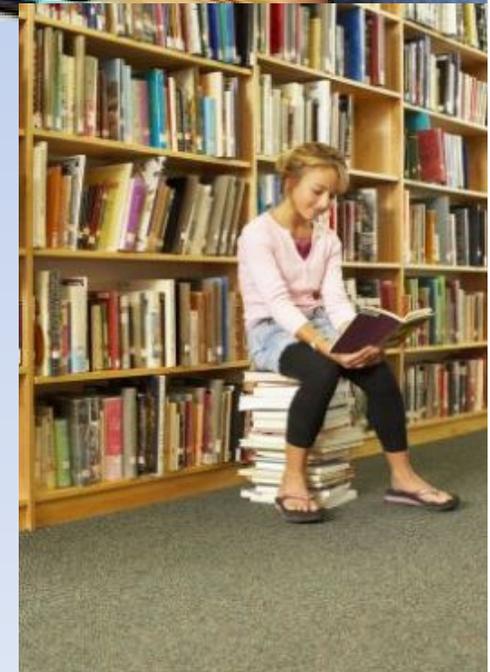
*Escape
vs
Memory and Hope*



- On the one hand... great books encourage readers to forget, to escape from the pressures of daily life and loose themselves within the pages of a story
- On the other hand, literature invites us to remember and take hope, practical support and a few life lessons from the pages of a book.



These dual potentials of literature, so often recognized by adults, are unfortunately often overlooked in the reading lives of children.



But...

High quality children's literature offers even the youngest children opportunities to at once find relaxation as they lose themselves in a story while also coming away from the reading experience equipped to meet life's daily challenges.

Relaxation and Experience



The article aims at

providing a rationale and related practical suggestions for using **literature as a support system** for social-emotional development *as children cope with the stress, anxieties, and feelings of loss* that can occur **in family life.**

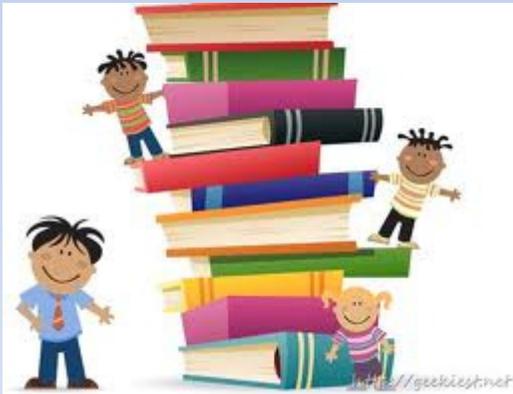


Why children's literature?



- To inform*
- To support*
- To enrich*

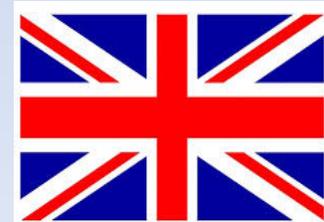
children's social-emotional lives



Supporting everyday challenges

Today's children need tangible support as they face a range of challenges that extend far beyond the cognitive domain.

They encounter many relatively *small stressors* in the midst of their daily events (the discovery of a favourite toy broken beyond repair, a playmate refusing to share, or incidents involving siblings rivalry are typical events that can cause stress in the social-emotional worlds of young learners.



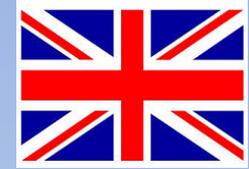


In other cases

Children come face-to-face with *dramatic events* that challenge and change the course of their lives. A parent's unemployment, military deployment, or incarceration are all situations affecting daily and long-term stress levels.

Divorce, remarriage, and the illness or death of a loved one have a potentially life-changing impact on every member of the family.

Even happy events



Such as the *arrival of a one sibling* or a *move to a new home*, add a *heightened level of tension* for the children



Coping skills



It is essential for children to learn the coping skills needed to successfully handle the *distress*, *frustration* and *anger* that are a part of daily life and to emerge with a *sense of self-control*, *hope*, and *resilience*.



Benefits



Denise Johnson (2009) suggests that quality children's literature offers many personal benefits to children.

- ✚ First, literature *serves as a point of reference* so children can better understand their life experience.
- ✚ Second, literature *offers insights into universal human behaviors, emotions and moral dilemmas*
- ✚ Finally, literature *stimulates children's curiosity and encourages them to develop problem-solving skills* to address challenging situations

Through...



- Positive classroom environment
- Consistent modelling of prosocial skills
- Secure relationships with caring adults

Reading high quality literature is crucial in helping children better understand and manage life's daily challenges.

