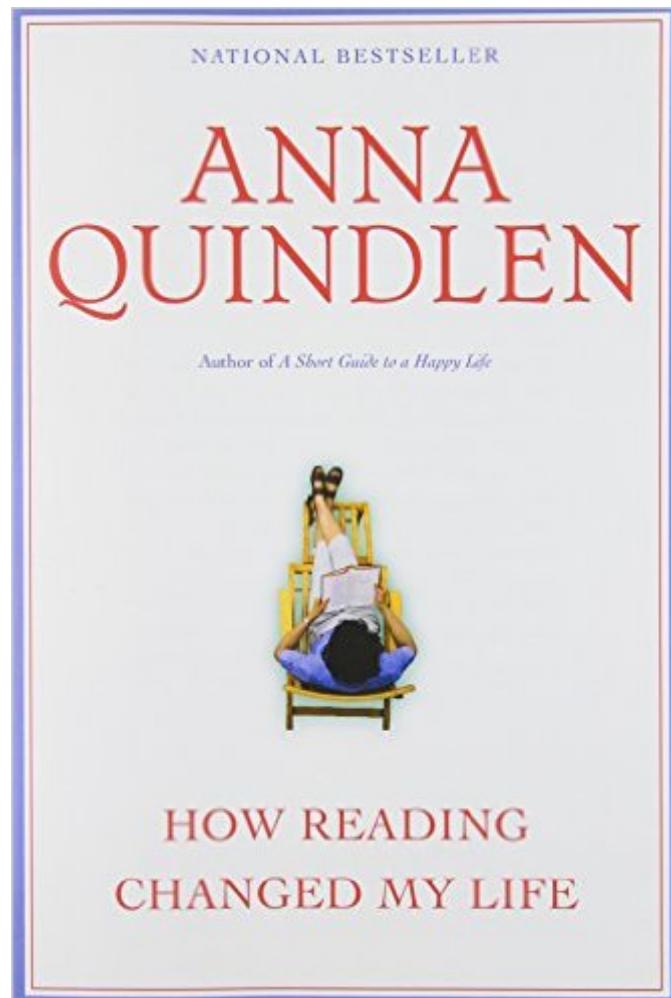


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How Reading Changed My Life



Synopsis

THE LIBRARY OF CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT is a groundbreaking series where America's finest writers and most brilliant minds tackle today's most provocative, fascinating, and relevant issues. Striking and daring, creative and important, these original voices on matters political, social, economic, and cultural, will enlighten, comfort, entertain, enrage, and ignite healthy debate across the country.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a wonderful way for readers to understand themselves, if they don't already. Quindlen shows that we're NOT weird because we read, we're NOT escapists who can't handle the real world, and we're NOT anti-social. We're just in love with words and the power of stories. In only 84 pages, Quindlen tackles the reasons why we read, reading and technology, why classics should not be crammed down our kids' throats, and much more. Her Top Ten lists alone are worth the price of the book. As great as this book is for readers, it makes an even better gift for friends and family members who DON'T understand our need to read. A must read, a must-have.

Anna Quindlen's "How Reading Changed My Life" is a charming and inspiring blend of autobiography and informal cultural criticism. In the book Quindlen reflects on books, reading, and readers. Quindlen notes, "While we pay lip service to the virtues of reading, the truth is that there is in our culture something that suspects those who read too much, whatever reading too much

means, of being lazy, aimless dreamers [...]." These, and many other insights in this book, really resonated with me. Throughout the book, Quindlen celebrates what she calls a "lively subculture" of truly serious readers. Quindlen reflects on differences in men's and women's reading practices, on book groups, on skirmishes over "The Canon" of great books, on banned books, and on other topics. She tells how reading helped her keep her sanity during the "year of disarray" after the birth of her second child, and recalls how she fell in love with John Galsworthy's "Forsyte Saga." Ultimately, she explains why she believes that new technologies will not make old-fashioned books (versus online books) obsolete. HRCML is full of wonderful passages, such as a remembered epiphany over D.H. Lawrence. This short book concludes with a few reading lists: "10 Nonfiction Books That Help Us Understand the World," "The 10 Books I Would Save in a Fire (If I Could Save Only 10)," etc. If you are a serious reader, I predict that, like me, you will recognize a kindred spirit in these pages, and will rejoice.

I hesitated to shell out \$8.95 plus tax for such a slim volume, but I am glad I did. I had recently skimmed an old copy of Mortimer Adler's *How To Read A Book* and found it utterly utilitarian. Ms. Quindlen's short but insightful book, on the other hand, succeeds in conveying the pleasure of reading for no particular reason other than the pleasure of reading. She gives a heart-warming account of her own history and experiences as a reader. This part of her book makes a wonderful story for young readers. (Her thoughts on technology are less convincing. Kids today are so much more at ease with computers than we are that it won't be hard for them to make the switch to electronic books—the size of which will shrink while their capacity expands within the next few years.) Definitely recommended by this reader.

Thus, Anna Quindlen quotes Charles Dickens' biographer, John Forster, in this slim and wonderful book. Apparently, Dickens, Quindlen, and I would all rather read than play or do almost anything else. I adore this book because it reminds me that there are other people for whom reading goes way beyond a pass-time or even something that we "love" to do. In addition to life's other milestones, we can mark the phases of life with the books that we have read, devoured, and assimilated. Like Quindlen, I remember a childhood influenced by writers like Ogden Nash, Carl Sandburg, Lore Segal, Irene Smith, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Louisa May Alcott, Johanna Spyri, Carolyn Keene, Judy Blume, Betty Smith, and many others who are less clear in my memory but who shaped who I have become and what I have loved to read. Quindlen reminded me that I am not the only one who is often biding time until my next chance to read. Of course, I read in line at the post

office, in a doctor's waiting room, in airports, and at professional sporting events. More telling is that from age 11 or so, I regularly took a novel to church. I sat in the back pew, out of my family's sight, so that I could read the book instead of listen to sermons and hymns. Quindlen knows that many of us have eased the tedium and discomfort of the here and now by going wherever a book will take us. I suppose that I love this book because she puts my understanding of books, as guidance, sustenance and salvation, into words. I feel validated. My way of being in this world has been endorsed and upheld. I feel good.

Quindlen writes about her experiences with being a bibliophile, ranging from discussing why fiction is worthwhile to what makes banned books so interesting to a critique of the snobbery of the literary critics. Her tangents are insightful and resonate with the trends I see in reading; for example, she characterizes the shift from reading for pleasure to reading for purpose: "whereas an executive might learn far more from *Moby Dick* ..., the book he was expected to have read might be *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* [sic]". I loved and identified with her descriptions of growing up obsessed with reading, having spent most childhood afternoons among the stacks of the local public library. This isn't as good as Anne Fadiman's *Ex Libris* (on the same topic), but it's thoughtful and quick. (I read it in about two hours.) She specifically deals with why she believes women read more than men. She also provides a number of interesting book lists at the end, ranging from "The 10 Books I Would Save in a Fire (If I Could Save Only 10)" to "10 Mystery Novels I'd Most Like to Find in a Summer Rental."

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