

Beyond the book review

By Dot S. Thompson and Roberta Laulich Sims

Sharing the impact of books

Remember the excitement you felt as a child when you began a new Nancy Drew? Maybe it was the Hardy boys, *The Black Stallion*, *Little Women*? Chances are, you felt a kinship with a character from a childhood book.

The impact books can have on our personal and professional lives is intriguing. Just as certain songs evoke phases in our lives, so do books. Remember the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy? The *Dune* trilogy? When was the first time you read *Alice in Wonderland*? *The Catcher in the Rye*? *The Diary of Anne Frank*? *The Grapes of Wrath*? *The Color Purple*? *The Sound and the Fury*?

Sometimes, reading a book can literally change our lives. Books have the ability to empower, inform, entertain, and inspire. Through books we can retrace history, catapult into the future, or explore contemporary life. Books can shock us, provoke us, and cause us to reflect upon our lives. Often, our reaction to a book depends upon what is happening in our personal lives. No two people experience any one book in the exact same way. Books speak to our individuality.

Reflecting upon the powerful influence books can have on our lives gave us an idea for a series of presentations, "Books That Made A Difference." We invited faculty and administrators to come to the library and speak about a significant book in their lives. We did not want a book review. We did not want an academic critique of the author, the genre, or the theme. What we wanted was something much more difficult—to hear about the very real and very personal influence of a particular book on an individual life. One of our goals was to gain insight into our colleagues; another goal was

to bring more people into the library. We also felt that a series focusing on the importance of books would be appropriate during a time when academic libraries are growing increasingly technological and computerized.

"Books That Made A Difference" began in the spring term of 1990 and met the third Friday of each month over the lunch hour. As with any public event, we spent many hours in preparation. Identifying speakers was the first crucial step; making sure they understood that we weren't interested in a traditional book review was our biggest challenge. Our speakers had to be willing to abandon academic rhetoric, to make themselves somewhat vulnerable.

On the more practical side, we had to reserve space, arrange for seating, microphones, refreshments, design a poster and write numerous publicity announcements.

The series has now concluded its second successful year. Our biggest concern—that our speakers would lapse into a traditional book review—proved unfounded. All of our speakers offered a unique blend of book summary and personal reflections. Many brought props—music, photographs, related books and bibliographies. All of the speakers brought personal folklore.

Although we anticipated that many speakers would select a book from their childhood, in fact only one speaker did. Curiously, this session attracted the largest audience. Our speakers discussed books ranging from the Nancy Drew mysteries to *Ulysses*. The presentations, which were as varied in style as the choice of books, managed to combine the scholarly with the intimate, offering the audience insight on the way books do indeed influence and affect our lives.

We look forward to future sessions of "Books That Made A Difference" which explore the fascinating and decisive impact books continue to have on our lives. ■

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