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The importance of reading the classics

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Reading classical literature provides a view of excellent composition, a window to the culture of the past, and moral lessons often lost on the modern world. The depth of substance of the classics is astounding.

**Mastery of language**

Classical authors had a mastery of language that far surpasses modern writers. For instance, in the Victorian era the Victorian novel was born. These novels were verbose, yet the now antiqued words are a delightful taste of literary excellence. They were written as high art, carefully weaved together for the person of leisure who could afford to sit back and read a very long novel. Charles Dickens’ novels were of this nature. In contrast, today most books are written in a low art manner of easy to read, fast paced stories, with little deep thought required. You will be surprised to find that despite the higher language the great books are not that difficult to read and are worth the time it takes to read them.

**Window to another world**

By reading classical literature a window is opened to the culture in which the book was written. Whether it is Charles Dickens writing about a poor orphan boy on the streets of London or Mark Twain writing about the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, a culture is unfolding in the story. C.S. Lewis advises for people to read an old book for every new book they read so as not to loose the picture of the past. We need not learn in a vacuum. Many authors of old have much to contribute to our own generation and cultural situations if only we take the time to read.

**Depth of story**

Moreover, classical literature has a depth to it that is not present in modern popular fiction. It has such a wealth of depth that books upon books are written to discuss the theme and intent of one book or play. It is like hunting for hidden treasure. Each reading reveals more and more of what the author is saying beyond the face value of the story being told. It is an incredible adventure to travel into that world and find the gems left by great minds in the folds of the story.

**Moral lessons**

Lastly, moral lessons are most often present in the story. There is something being taught. There is integrity and values being conveyed by the author that the reader is challenged to find and receive as part of the experience of the novel. The story is not just for the story’s sake, there is much more to be found in those pages.

**Wisdom**

Our culture desperately needs to read the classics and learn from the authors of old. During the Enlightenment there was a renewed interest in the books of the Greeks as a hunger for education and knowledge swept the Western world. What a shame that most children of this society have little value for embarking on a journey with Charles Dickens or Jane Austen or Mary Shelly. There is so much wisdom and artistic mastery of language sitting on dusty shelves seemingly lost to a generation who wants things fast.

Find a classical book, open the cover, and read aloud the wonderful flow of highly detailed language as you let the story soak into you and draw you in to an adventure. It may be hard work, but like exercise, you will feel accomplished afterwards.

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