

JK Rowling was my first foray into the world of chapter books. I was in kindergarten and my friend came to school exclaiming that I must read this book about a boy and a stone. I begged my parents to read it to me because some of the words didn't fit right in my mouth yet. I learned how to be an eleven year old and to look for trap doors and how there could be an adventure hidden in plain sight. I came to school the next day and my friend and I held the first meeting of what would become a book club in five years time. We brought the characters to life on the playground, reenacting scenes and making up new ones. The monkey bars were the quidditch pitch and the slide was a moving staircase. Our imaginations added stone pillars and flowing robes; we wove our world into the story.

I moved away for two years and in that time read *The Hobbit*. I came back with different adventures of too powerful rings and a pack of my own stories to share. I started working in my elementary library when I was in fifth grade. I learned the Dewey Decimal system and how to enjoy organizing piles of books. A different friend and I would spend all our free time shelving books, reading the inside cover to see if there was anything we wanted to check out. By this time I was reading books on my own, the words I didn't know I learned in context. I was reading books that I wanted purely for myself but I couldn't talk about them to anyone with out fear of spoiling it, which would be a dreadful thing to do. A book club was officially started to solve this problem.

At the first meeting of the book club I was ten. I picked out the first book to read, so I would be hosting the discussion. To get everything ready I, really my mother, had set up the dining room table with tea, fruit and cookies. After everyone had arrived we sat and had tea for an hour talking about the latest installments in our lives. The people in attendance were most of my kindergarten friends so it was a happy reunion. After everyone had talked about themselves we took the tea into the living room and sat to discuss the book. I had planned discussion questions to prompt everyone and we all went around in a circle talking about favorite characters, scenes and the ending.

In middle school the book club continued, every month we would meet at someone's house to discuss their pick over tea, fruit and cookies. The librarian at my middle school is a giant of a man at over six and a half feet tall with loudness to match. His voice boomed in the library, not a quiet space to work. I asked him for recommendations and would be in the library during lunch. By the time I reached eighth grade he would give me ARC's or advanced reader copies of books. I was used to talking about books in book club and now I started writing about them to tell my librarian if they were worthwhile or not to be added to the library when they came out. I started helping him shelve books, something he did not willingly let most students do, but I did not relent in my pestering. I continued to read more and more, but I was getting busier with school. I didn't stop reading because books were a place I could always go to. They tackled bigger problems than how to say "cup" in Spanish or graphing the square root of the absolute value of $x+2$.

I started high school and quickly found myself spending all my time in the library (big surprise there). In this case I was there because I had nowhere else to go. I was friends with the librarians and enjoyed all their new recommendations and info about new and old authors. The librarians seemed like encyclopedias: as if the library was inside them and books were just a physical manifestation of their knowledge. I started having midterms and finals, but I didn't socialize that much. I did work and tried not to procrastinate, but there was always a new book coming out. Books replaced my social life; they were solace in the unfathomable world that is teenagers. In between math problems and history essays I would sneak a chapter or two or four.

I started reviewing all the books I read. I wrote about books because I read too many to discuss all of them and I wanted some documentation. I wrote the plot recap so I could go back and refresh myself. I rated the books so I could return and see what I thought. Since I was keeping track of what books I read and when online, there was a numerical value: how many books and words I was reading. My reading habit, or rather lifestyle became quantified.

I was energized by living someone else's life. I saw characters that reminded me of myself and when they made mistakes I looked at my life and tried to learn from them: how to figure out my own life. It worked pretty well too because I started reading books about realer and realer people, no matter if they had pointy ears or magic rings. I discovered new books and new genres that I never would have guessed I would have liked. My favorite book was no longer *Harry Potter*, but *Macbeth* in all of its character depth and iambic pentameter.

For the last seven years my book club has been meeting nearly once a month. We always have tea and we always talk about more than the book we read. I see some friends during book club that I don't see during the rest of the month. We talk about how books represent women and how books cut up society. We talk about prom and the drama of people I have never met before. Tea and stories go hand in hand as they always have in my life because tea is just an excuse to reconnect, share and discuss.

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Stories have existed since the beginning of communication. People use stories to communicate, whether it is helpful knowledge or skills and experiences. Stories are an inherent part of how people express themselves. The earliest documentation of stories is drawings rendered on the sides of rocks. Before written language, pictures were the optimal tools for telling stories because of the amount of information that can be portrayed in an image. Images are easy descriptors of physical objects, locations and momentous occasions, like those described on cave walls. Stories have continued to be told through art that has gotten more detailed and realistic as artistic practices have advanced. For example, Jacques Louis David (b.1748 d.1825), the neoclassical painter, painted elaborate stories of power and heroism in works like *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) and *The Death of Marat* (1793). His paintings taught morals and told tales of exciting and gallant individuals, much like spoken and written fairy tales do.

While art was being created in elite circles, stories were told around fires and from elder to child. Fairy tales of extravagant proportions and fantastical worlds were told by memory as a social event and a bedtime ritual. Stories began to be told more for excitement and teaching than cave paintings. Telling children a fairy tale was a way to occupy them, but also foster their imagination. The act of passing down stories through generations kept them alive and their lessons relevant. However, the stories changed with every retelling because they were never cemented by being written down. Fairy tales cater to the ephemeral nature of spoken stories. They are stories that carry messages of success and heroism through magical worlds that welcome the imagination. One key feature of these tales is their lack of details. They have common or everyday characters placed in simplified situations.¹ Primarily this made fairy tales easier to remember and re-tell. It also made them last as one unit through centuries before they were written down because there was only the skeleton of the story to remember and the details could be embellished by each person as much or as little as desired.

When books started being produced they were full of time consuming designs and elaborate illustrations. Books were beautiful, but before the invention of the printing press, they

¹ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*

were expensive, as they had to be meticulously copied and were a rarity. Monks would hand copy every book, filling them with marginalia and beautiful penmanship. These books were and still are beautiful but were not easily produced and very slow to make. Johannes Gutenberg, a goldsmith, invented the printing press in Germany during the middle of the 15th century. Before that, books were a representation of wealth. If someone had the money, they could share more detailed stories with their children. However those who did not have books continued to tell stories verbally, continuing the progression of fairy tales in their simplicity.

Books became more available after the printing press as increasingly more sophisticated technology was developed. Fairy tales that had been lovingly passed down verbally were sold to the public in lavishly illustrated volumes with adventurous plots. These books were designed to keep children awake and to nourish their imagination. Bedtime stories were part of the culture.

The nature of bedtime stories was changed when World War I started. There were paper shortages and simply not enough resources to print oversize books anymore. Also, around this time parents were getting busier and busier. Children's books were still being written, but decreasingly about adventure. Whereas before WWI, children's books had titles like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and after, started having titles like Goodnight Moon and Go to bed, Fred. Bedtime stories were not about the imagination but about putting children to bed as quickly as possible.² Some of the magic was lost from the phrase: "will you read it to me again?" Starting at a young age society, is encouraging kids to yawn instead of adventure.

Today, everyone tells stories whether it be read or spoken. People tell stories about their lives: past triumphs and mistakes. Stories are ingrained in society. In fact, "stories are up to 22 times more memorable than facts alone."³ People tell stories and read for many reasons as they shape society with their fiction and truths. Just like art, stories help dictate society. For example, *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau brought up new ideas and sparked thoughts about its contemporary society. Everything that is written is influenced by society, either in agreement, opposition or details.

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Story telling is important for many reasons. One is being able to see one's own story in another and learn and connect with the story and the characters experiencing similar things as the reader, connect with suffering and disappointments, but also with triumphs and happiness. What happens when someone can't find their story in literature? Cultural diversity in Children's literature is incredibly important to everyone. Children are extremely malleable and what they read will stay with them in their morals, actions and thoughts about themselves and others.

In 2013, according to a study by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, a center dedicated to exploring children's and young adult literature, there were 3,200 children's books published in the US. Only 5.5% of these were about African characters, 2% were about Asian characters, less than 1% had main characters that were Native Americans, and 2% had Latino protagonists. This leaves 89.5% of books about white children. The cultural diversity in children's books increased in 2014, which is hopefully a positive trend.⁴ With 50.4% of the US

² Tartar, *Enchanted Hunters*

³ Jennifer Aaker, *Harnessing the Power of Stories*, Lean In

⁴ CCBC Education Statistics: <http://www.ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pestats.asp>

population in 2011 younger than 1 being a minority, it is especially important for these children to grow up with representation in literature.

Why is diversity so important? Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about her experience as a Nigerian girl reading western literature in her TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*. By having so little representation, there is only one story that characterizes an entire people and a person or group is never a single thing.⁵ If all you know about a person is that they are a scientist, or an artist or a female, that is what they become when you think about them. You will create associations based on preconceived notions of what a scientist, artist and female is, whether or not those associations fit the other aspects of a person's personality. A person is never just one thing, one characteristic. However, a person will become one thing if they only have one story; they are "flattened."

An individual who cannot find themselves in literature cannot identify with the written characters and therefore will not be able to find valuable connection and empathy with similar people. Walter Dean Myers, a black children's author, remarks that as a child and a teenager, "what [he] wanted, needed really, was to become an integral and valued part of the mosaic that [he] saw around [him]" in society.⁶ It is amazing to be able to hear one's own story because it proves that they exist and shows the possibilities of what they can achieve. The main character in Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, feels invisible because of his race. His invisibility was created because society refuses to see him for who he really is, not just his race. There was only one story about his race and that became all that people could see. The stereotype is true for some, but it is incomplete to characterize a whole group.⁷ A stereotype will fit one person in a group as it has to be created somewhere, but a stereotype is an assumed defining characteristic of a group that is not how the group categorizes themselves. For example, a group that is created with people who all identify as photographers are all different other than the fact that they like to take photos. If one person likes to take photos of birds it becomes a stereotype when it is assumed that the rest of the group also loves birds. This stereotype is true for one person, but is incomplete to label all photographers.

Cultural diversity in literature affects both minority groups and those around them. A single story forces a stereotype on someone; a stereotype that affects the way one is perceived and how one sees or doesn't see themselves. Children are extremely sensitive as they are growing up and their brain is making rapid connections. This is the time when people learn the most basic things about existence. Cultural diversity needs to be more prevalent because the world is diverse and literature needs to reflect that.

As there are misconceptions about groups of people, there are also misconceptions and assumptions about reading and readers. Some myths are true and others far from it because in some instances there is only one story or stereotype about who a reader is. Many phrases like "addicted to reading," "binge reading" and "book hangover" associate reading with a guilty pleasure and even an addiction. A bookworm has a great deal of negative connotations. Why is reading seen as such a negative activity?

⁵ Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TED

⁶ Walter Dean Myers, *Where are the People of Color in Children's Books?* NY Times

⁷ Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TED

Antisocial and misanthropic are words used to describe kids and teens who turn to books for comfort. It is seen as an “unhealthy escape from reality.”⁸ Why would someone choose to visit another world and meet new people in their mind when they could just live? During the middle and high school years social life is a tumultuous place. It is natural that some people will fit into different situations in different ways. “Books are the friends some children never had.”⁹ When one feels disconnected from the world of the living, books can connect them into something that feels worthwhile. Social misfits can live in their head and learn the lessons they missed out on with their peers. If a child or teen cannot see their story, their identity and basic, defining characteristics in literature, they will not be able to find some of the connectedness necessary for mental health.

Reading helps both antisocial and social children grow and learn. In books, there are characters in more vibrant worlds than the one in which we live. Everyone can gain something from reading. So, why are so many people drawn to books, children especially?

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What power do stories have over our lives? People read for many different reasons, but there are a few key ones that span over introverts and extroverts. Reading opens up the mind. Children want to experience new things and books are the perfect place to go without fear of getting hurt. Books can offer virtual worlds for the mind. Technology is getting more and more sophisticated. It is likely that there will be virtual reality worlds in which people can be totally immersed in as if the world was real. Brain to brain communication is being tested right now and works in preliminary stages.¹⁰ Miguel Nicolelis talks about the possibilities of brain to brain communication in his TED talk. Him and his team are able to trick the brain into having sensations that the body is not experiencing. The difference, however, between books and virtual realities is the imagination. Books foster imagination and creativity because the child has to actively be in the world of a book. People read for adventure and beauty that is sometimes unrealistic for their current situation. Reading opens up mental warehouses to explore and learn in ways that school can't always provide. Reading is a place where a child can learn about the beauties of life, as opposed to the facts and numbers (not that those are not important as well) in school.

The imagination is a powerful tool. It can take someone away from their current situation, but it can also be used to create solutions. Fairy tales provide children for ways to see their own lives in the hero's journey from immature to adulthood and watch how goodness conquers evil and lives as an adult, but most importantly with a happily ever after.¹¹ Fairy tales depict possible and common situations, showing children that it is possible to recover and get better. Books provide an avenue for children to experience new worlds and connect with the characters through imagination, bringing them into this world to help with the child's problems and confusions. Reading fosters imagination where it sends kids to new worlds and situations. For example, JK Rowling and her series *Harry Potter* made a fortune because of her fantastic world building. The world of the novels is well described and feels real because of the vivid textual descriptions and elaborate design. The world feels real: as if it could leave the page and join reality. So

⁸ Tartar, *Enchanted Hunters*

⁹ Tartar, *Enchanted Hunters*

¹⁰ Miguel Nicolelis, *Brain-to-Brain Communication*, TED

¹¹ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*

many children observed Harry Potter and his friends that they let their imagination take them to Hogwarts. By bringing the book into reality in the form of a pseudo Diagon Alley, it gives people the opportunity to see their imagination come to life as they live in the world of the book.

Another facet of the power of books is in their ability to foster empathy and provide honesty. In most books, children's in particular, the narrator is completely honest in showing their innermost thoughts to the reader.¹² Protagonists are the only people whose brains readers can fully know. This makes a book a "portal to connect with people."¹³ People intrinsically need human connection like most other mammals. Books can provide deep, honest connections for the reader to feed off of.

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Tea is the most popular beverage besides water.¹⁴ Its popularity was created because of its versatility, which allows it to fit into almost every culture. In addition, tea's adaptability exists because, "[it] has never been perceived as a threat to a way of life, has never been synonymous with uniformity."¹⁵ Tea is not like a drug in that it will quickly alter and influence people. Tea is not dangerous because it is seen like water: necessary for life. Tea is a docile beverage and if everyone drinks it, one cannot conform to society by drinking tea just as one will not conform by drinking water. The irony is that tea has moved entire nations. Cultures have created such specific rituals or practices around tea picking and drinking that have greatly changed societies.

Tea was first discovered and produced in China. Tea spread through the country. Everyone drank tea like water. It became an "honored ritual of offering a bowl of tea as a sign of welcoming."¹⁶ As in China, tea is a sign of friendship and hospitality in many cultures. Tea is a simple beverage which makes it fit in, yet there are many ways to make it elaborate. Tea in China was glorified under the T'ang Dynasty (AD 618-906), as it became a major trading platform full of different teas and fancy cups and saucers.¹⁷ Tea had become a staple of the diet by this time, but the making of tea is anything other than ordinary.

Tea making is focused heavily on purity: the purity of the leaves, the cleanliness and care during the picking process, and the lack of machines during the fermentation process. Tea is grown in tea gardens and the climate and altitude of these gardens plays a huge role in the taste and quality of the tea. Women harvest most of the tea in China. Making the black tea that comes from the gardens is a very technical process that is mostly carried out by men. In the best tea gardens, called "sacred gardens," tea is picked by young, virginal girls to make the whole process that much more pure in the minds of the elite. These special tea gardens are hidden from the public eye. In China especially, there is a strict hierarchy when it comes to different teas. The tea from the sacred gardens can only be drunk by an elite few. The more mechanized the

¹² Tartar, *Enchanted Hunters*

¹³ Lisa Bu, *How Books Can Open Your Mind*, TED

¹⁴ Tea USA fact sheet: <http://www.teausa.com/14655/tea-fact-sheet>

¹⁵ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

¹⁶ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

¹⁷ Museum of Modern Art, *Tang Dynasty*

process of picking and processing tea is, the lower the quality of the tea is. However, no matter which tea is consumed, all classes of people in China drink tea.

After tea had been established in China, it spread into Japan, where they took to it with the same fervor as the Chinese. However, there were much more specific rules and rituals surrounding tea in Japan than China. Tea gardens are more of meditative places, as is the tea ceremony, which involves specific practices and is held by a trained host, called the *sukiya*.¹⁸ Tea ceremonies are for gathering with friends for a peaceful afternoon. Yasunari Kawabata, a Japanese novelist, said, after participating in a tea ceremony, that it “is a communication of feeling, when good friends come together at the right moment under the best conditions.”¹⁹

After tea had spread through Asia, it made its way into Europe. Tea took fast, especially in England where it became “a way of life” for all British citizens. The average Brit dinks six cups of tea per day.²⁰ Tea was originally thought of as a medicinal plant in most of Europe. However, in England it became the center of life. Coffee houses were everywhere and during the Victorian era, eating habits changed to accommodate this beverage. Afternoon tea is so popular, it “governs the day of an entire nation.”²¹ Coffee houses, succeeding because of the rise in popularity of tea, became a social happening. Discussions about news and politics took place in coffee houses; people used tea as a means to socialize, similar to the Japanese.

Along with all these cultural practices involving tea there were strict rules. Firstly, the grade and quality of the tea is partly measured by the purity of the leaf, as it is in China. The type of serving utensil one uses to drink the tea was also dependent on class. Higher classes, especially in England, drank out of small teacups with saucers. Whereas poorer people drank out of large mugs without any plate or saucer, drinking higher quantities of tea at a time.²² These sharp distinctions illustrate tea’s particularities. Tea is so common it is surprising how many technicalities are associated with it. Tea without being obvious has been a strong symbol of status in part because of its great cultural importance. Since everyone drinks tea it is easy to compare people based on the one habit they share. Since the practice of cutting and preparing tea is so particular, it can be executed in varying degrees. The different grades of tea make different teas different qualities and thus are social indicators of class.

So, which is better, tea or coffee? Tea was easier to prepare than coffee before the invention of fancy coffee machines and espresso makers. Tea is stereotypically a domestic beverage because everyone could brew it at home. Its domesticity caused tea to be associated with women. Coffee was brewed in cafés and coffee houses where men would go to discuss politics and news. Women were not allowed into tearooms unaccompanied until 1864.²³ Since tea was more domestic it became a more peaceful activity as opposed to being riled up over politics with coffee.

¹⁸ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

¹⁹ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

²⁰ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

²¹ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

²² Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

²³ Burgess, *The Book of Tea*

Today coffee is ingrained into the American culture. It fits into hipster culture because of its high caffeine content and is used by many working people to stay awake in the fast paced society. However, tea is still, in the numbers, more prevalent. In the US, tea is most commonly found cold and in bottles at the supermarket.²⁴ The longevity of tea shows its effectiveness and importance in culture. Tea can be drunk non caffeinated or with lower caffeine concentrations than coffee. This makes it more adaptable to other times in the day. One of the primary purposes of coffee is the caffeine to wake people up in the morning. Once this has happened tea can be a social beverage. Tea is not dependent on caffeine, so it is more about the activity of drinking tea than the drink itself. Teatime is about telling stories and communicating with other humans to enjoy and empathize.

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Tea and reading go hand in hand. Telling and learning stories is one of the most important activities to take part in and tea is the most logical and peaceful way to accomplish this. Stories connect the fibers of everyone's being to each other and to the earth. There is no way to escape stories. Stories are told to improve, create and feel, not put children to bed or replace earth entirely. People have always written fiction along with the nonfiction stories people tell everyday. Fiction is a different kind of story, one that feels like any other but is more grand and magical than anything possible on this earth.

As society progresses, people are more and more focused on technology. Dinner with the family is the light from small screens that feed the sitter better than food could. People would rather text than call because it is easier to pretend people are just other computers than breathing organisms. As humans, we need physical and emotional connection with others to keep one's brain healthy.

Drinking tea is a long standing tradition of scones, sugar, tannin and people. Taking tea is a ritual that has not been destroyed by technology. Tea has been a sign of welcoming and hospitality, for everyone and anyone to come and chat. Tea is an event that is only about communication and has been in many cultures. In a contemporary society overrun with technology it is especially important to experience others away from distractions. Tea is the perfect outlet for this. The hospitable and versatile nature of the beverage sets differences aside as its warm and calming effects settle in the blood stream.

Tea is an ancient tradition that has had so many rules placed on it by different cultures. People already drink tea heavily that it is an easy change to take time and be with people over a cup of tea. Tea is a marker of hospitality and welcoming travelers to join a family and tell their story. Both tea and stories have traveled down through centuries together. Tea is the practice of welcoming new stories and experiences. Tea changed the British meal plan of the entire nation; it can change yours as well, if you let it.

²⁴ Tea USA fact sheet: <http://www.teausa.com/14655/tea-fact-sheet>

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