

“My name is Celeana Sardothien and I will not be afraid.”¹ Slowly and painfully, I heaved myself up the winding path, my body aching in places I did not know possible. The clear blue sky and shining sun laughing at me as I struggled to walk a few steps forward. I saw the birds and butterflies soaring overhead. I paused wishing I could move with their grace and strength, wishing I could stop moving, lie down in the middle of the path and never walk another inch. As I struggled to continue hiking, dragging my feet behind me, a quote from my favorite book floated through my mind. I started by repeating this quote quietly with the name of the character, Celeana Sardothien, who is the protagonist in the novel, *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas. At the time, I had assigned so much value to this character and what she lives through in the novel that she became a role model for me in any tough situation. This quote became my inspiration to keep moving instead of sitting down, crying, and not taking another step. Eventually, I substituted the character’s name with the names of other people I draw strength from, both real and fictional, before finally using my own name. I was able to find the courage within myself to push through the pain and be confident in my own strengths using this mantra. With each of my steps in beat to the melody of the words, I made it through the tough parts of our hike and was able to make it to the destination. If not for these words in my head it would have taken me much longer to build the courage and strength I needed to complete the hike.

Why do we put value in some words? Why is it that words can be our motivation or our downfall? These are questions that have often circulated around my mind, especially when there is a song lyric or a quote from a book that I keep repeating to myself. Words and language are very interesting pieces of our world today. How is it that we came to combine sounds to have meaning? Without words, we would have an infuriating time communicating, enough so that most people would probably give up trying to communicate with others. Our ability to find power and meaning in words is amazing. People take a phrase and make it their own, they put themselves into it and gain a new understanding of themselves and the world. Language can be used as a motivation for someone to keep moving, to find something to put their belief in.

Why do we assign value to words? What stuck with me so much about this sentence and this character that it pushed me through a tough situation? To many people, words hold a lot of power, they are how we understand each other and how we can have belief. Until something is expressed in words, it will hold no meaning to you or anybody around you.² William G. Moulton talks about how language is essential for everything action, internal and external, of humans. He opens with, “Language is a wonderfully rich vehicle for communication.”³ How would we live and communicate if it was not for the language we developed? Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, “the limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.”⁴ Without words or language it would be infinitely harder to communicate and to know our own emotions and thoughts. How do we take a concept that is impossibly large and give it a single word to define it? “How do we ever learn what words are?”⁵ As an infant with no

¹ Maas, Sarah J. “The Assassin and the Empire .” *The Assassin’s Blade* , Bloomsbury YA, 2012, pp. 373–373.

² Akhtar Sahab, Javed, director. *The Gift of Words* . TED, Dec. 2017, www.ted.com/talks/javed_akhtar_the_gift_of_words/up-next.

³ Moulton, William G. “The Nature of Language.” *Daedalus*, vol. 102, no. 3, 1973, pp. 17–35. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20024143.

⁴ Lederer, Richard. *The Miracle of Language*. Pocket Books, 1991.

⁵ Ibid.

preconception of words, how do they learn what defines things? Especially as an infant learning words and language, it is impossible to understand the true definition of verbs or actions. There is nothing to assign to a verb to that will conjure an image in the mind of a child. Nouns, on the other hand, possess a single object and image that is easily connected to that one word.⁶ Infants obtain knowledge of words and language largely through pairing body language, in particular pointing at an object, to sounds.⁷ Our language is arbitrary and the meaning of one word changes infinitesimally with every person. To understand language in its fullest capacity we must separate ourselves from the intended meaning, we must realize and accept every word's "pure" form.⁸ As humans, we can either access or already know multiple meanings for any word we come across. This makes the possibility of obtaining a knowledge of "pre-language consciousness" very improbable.⁹ In a sense, we must separate ourselves from language to obtain this consciousness of the purest form of a word because once "you apply a word to something it's purity is gone."¹⁰ Theoretically, the instant you know the meaning of a word, the purity of that word is gone. This makes a personal connection and understanding of a word or a phrase remarkably special.

Religious texts, like the Bible, Torah, and Quran, among others, are examples of words that have power. They have held this power for thousands of years. Many people take religious texts as fact and put all their faith in these words. We give power to spiritual beings by believing in them and their stories, especially when we are having a hard time. Many people pray in hopes of getting what they want. We search for meaning in everything, but it is extremely easy to find meaning in words that have been told for generations.¹¹ This is why people turn to religious texts to find meaning and wisdom over choices they must make. Another reason that people turn to religious text as a mantra they repeat could be because the stories are more easily remembered. Stories that have some fictional, or abnormal aspects, circulate in your mind and are easily accessible to be passed from person to person or book to person.¹² "Storytelling is the most important tradition humans possess."¹³ Stories transmit past history and knowledge to future generations. They also teach us essential lessons about experiences both real or fictional. These words circle in your mind because they are something different than your everyday normal. They can inspire you or be new words to place your belief, a new light in the possible dark surrounding you.

Along with religion, music is very important to our language and history. Before most people knew how to read, music would be the way that information was passed to people. This was in the form of folk songs and ballads which were considered the world's "first newspaper"

⁶ Gleitman, Lila R. "Words, Words, Words..." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, vol. 346, no. 1315, 1994, pp. 71–77. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/56021.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "The Paradox of Language." *The Universe, Life and Everything...: Dialogues on Our Changing Understanding of Reality*, by Sarah Durston and Ton Baggerman, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2017, pp. 41–48. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8pz9v8.5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Azar, Beth. "A Reason to Believe ." *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, Dec. 2010, www.apa.org/monitor/2010/12/believe.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ <https://hslida.org/content/Contests/Essay/2013/Cat3/Carpenter.pdf>

and “informational history book.”¹⁴ These songs would talk about anything from adventures and battles to a town’s scandals.¹⁵ Music is extremely important in our culture because of this. It is almost as if finding meaning through lyrics has been ingrained in us due to music’s history as our way to gather information.

Words hold power to inspire. In a sense, someone could think of them as magic. “Words are... our most inexhaustible source of magic, capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it.”¹⁶ Anyone using language to spread a story, along with truly anyone using language, must be aware of how they handle their words as we are captivated and motivated or hurt by words and language in any form. They can easily become our destruction or our inspiration, phrases we repeat to ourselves in order to keep moving in our life.

This is where music and literature make a large impact especially in young adults. Music is used as a way to express yourself and as a way to find your own identify.¹⁷ “We use music and the lyrics to reflect our emotional state, as a way to boost energy, and to create an image of ourselves” to the people surrounding us.¹⁸ This is something that most people do at some point in their life. Some say that music is the purest form of language, it can be understood by anyone in any culture. “Music is the universal language of mankind.”¹⁹ Even if you do not understand the notes of the music or the lyrics, you can grasp the meaning of the songs. Each piece of music speaks to different emotions making it easy to connect with songs and artists. These lyrics embody core values or struggles of a person's life, and turn into words they repeat to themselves daily. Almost any person you ask will have a favorite artist or song that they feel connected with, the lyrics speak to their heart and struggles. This is another example of how words have power and demonstrates how we assign value and importance to words, why we choose certain phrases to be our motivation.

There is one song in particular that I have found motivates me. This song, My Pace, by the group Stray Kids, talks about how it is okay to go at your own pace and to not comparing yourself to other people. Some of the lyrics read “It’s so funny how I compare myself to others,” and “No use in comparing...Just go your own way.”²⁰ Everytime I listen to this song, whether it occurs when I am running or before a test, I feel empowered. I know that it doesn’t matter if I am the fastest or if I get the best grade but that I should be happy with the outcome if I did the best I could. Stray Kids has many other songs with lyrics I can relate to and look towards when I am having a tough time with something. They might not all be words I can find myself in, but many times I find my own meaning and can relate to the experiences they talk about. Often, I am motivated and inspired by their songs and lyrics. This group and their message also had a large impact on one of my friends. In their song, Mixtape #3, they sing “Don’t give up, You’ve done so well, What are you worrying about? Believe in yourself, Blessings wait for you.”²¹ These

¹⁴ Boni, Margaret Bradford. *Fireside Book of Folk Songs*. Simon & Schuster, 1977.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Yates, David, director. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2011.

¹⁷ Council on Communications, Media Executive Committee. “Impact of Music, Music Lyrics, and Music Videos on Children and Youth.” *American Academy of Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1 Nov. 2009, pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/5/1488.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea*, 1835.

²⁰ Stray Kids. “My Pace.” *Spotify*, JYP Entertainment. August 6, 2018

²¹ Stray Kids. “Mixtape 3.” *Spotify*, JYP Entertainment. June 19, 2019

lyrics were something she took to heart in her struggle with depression and not thinking she was good enough or pretty enough. The lyrics—especially the line, “blessings wait for you” —and the members of the group, inspired her to keep moving in life, that struggling isn’t forever, but that there is a light at the end. To remind her of her depression and the fact that she was strong enough to overcome it, my friend got these lyrics tattooed on her arm. They will be a constant reminder of her strength through one of her hardest moments. People find meaning and inspiration in words, ones they hold in their hearts to make it through tough situations.

Not only are lyrics inspiring, but books and characters can also become a source of inspiration. Books have the ability to impact people in their lives as much as any other form of words. Not only are you impacted by the words but also the characters, their experiences and how they relate to your own experiences. There is a study on our emotional responses to works of fiction. This study focuses on human empathy, and how we can have the same emotional reaction to a character as a person in real life.²² We, as humans, are constantly searching for someone to understand and have empathy towards. We want to help them and trust them. C. Daniel Batson researched about the “significant role that characters can play in shaping readers’ beliefs and behaviors.”²³ Due to the impact on their own emotions, a reader can show equal amounts of empathy towards a fictional character as a real person. A reader intertwines their beliefs to a character and their story as they find themselves represented by that piece of fiction. The words in books stick with you, continuously circling in your head as you think about a similar experience or emotion you felt. Because you resonate with the character and form a connection with them, the words they say begin to hold importance. They become words that motivate and inspire you into action.

In any way we find words, they can become stuck in our heads. Whether it is a quote from a book that guides you in a hard decisions, the lyrics of a song that you constantly return to, or a message from a religious text, words are constantly impacting us. Not always is this impact positive, but no matter the impact, it shows how words and language are integral parts of our life and culture. Since words are what inform our life it explains why we hold them to have so much value. It explains why something you read or hear can become a mantra of your life.

The sun glistened, heating the day while shadows danced across the ground. A valley of green on either side of the path with stocks of fluffy white flowers and vibrant orange lilies blooming as the brown and white horses pranced about their field. Each of us at our own pace, the wind blowing comforting breaths through our hair and around our bodies. The smooth stick pressed into my sweaty hand on the descent into the town. The cadence of my every step in beat with my voice, “My name is [Piper Gordon] and I will not be afraid.”²⁴

²² Harrison, Mary-Catherine. “The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy: Reconceiving Dickens’s Realism.” *Narrative*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2008, pp. 256–278. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30219607.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Maas, Sarah J. “The Assassin and the Empire .” *The Assassin’s Blade* , Bloomsbury YA, 2012, pp. 373–373.

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