

Why Rereading Books is So Important

Reading a book for the first time is seen by many in our society as a badge of honor and a legitimate cause for boasting.

Rereading a book, on the other hand, doesn't usually come with the same pride or pack the same awe-inspiring punch in others. Nevertheless, according to Christopher Nelson, President of St. John's College in Annapolis, Md, rereading a book might be crucial to one's intellectual growth.

In [a piece he recently wrote](#) for the *Wall Street Journal*, Nelson says that rereading is a regular part of his college's life:

"We do a lot of rereading at my college. Students are instructed to reread assignments once or twice before going to class, and professors in faculty study groups must reread books from the college's core list."

One should note that St. John's is well known for [its Great Books program](#), where students read the classics (both past and modern) of Western civilization in seminar-style classes.

Nelson maintains that rereading serves an important function in the intellectual life:

"[A] first reading of a book is always a pressured reading. Even if it's only the latest potboiler, you don't know the landscape the first time through. You're on the edge of your seat trying to see what's coming. When rereading, you already know the big picture and can pay close attention to the details. You notice things that you missed the first time. Your imagination gets a workout, judging whether it was adequate to the book on the first pass, or whether you need to revise your previous images...

[T]he most familiar books reveal more about themselves when we attend to them anew. And our growing experience allows us

to approach our favorites from different angles. In a sense, rereading the same book produces new insights because the reader is a different person. Indeed, a good book is very much like a mirror: The glass is the same year after year, but the reflection in it changes over time."

As Francis Osborne said, "A few books well studied, and thoroughly digested, nourish the understanding more than hundreds but gargled in the mouth." Perhaps it's worth rereading one of your favorite books in the near future?

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