

AP DIGEST

AN ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM STUDENT RESOURCE
ADVANCED ACADEMIC SERVICES
AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Improve Your Mind by Reading the Classics

Bigger Vocabulary. When reading the classics you'll come across many words that are no longer commonly used. Why learn words most people don't use? Having a bigger vocabulary is like having a tool box with more tools. A larger arsenal of words enables you to express yourself more eloquently. You'll be able to communicate with precision and create a perception of higher intelligence that will give you an advantage in work and social situations.

Improved Writing Ability. Reading the classics is the easiest way to improve your writing. While reading you unconsciously absorb the grammar and style of the author. Why not learn from the best? After reading, I've observed that my thoughts begin to mirror the writer's style. This influence carries over to writing, helping form clear, rhythmic sentences.

Improved Speaking Ability. Becoming a better speaker accompanies becoming a better writer because both are caused by becoming a better thinker. Studying works of genius will teach you to express yourself with clarity and style. By improving your command of the English language, you'll become more persuasive, sound more intelligent, and enjoy an advantage over less articulate people.

Fresh Ideas. Isn't it ironic that the best source for new ideas is writers who've been dead for centuries? It makes sense when you consider the competition. Everyone you know is reading the same popular blogs and bestselling books. Observing the same ideas as everyone else leads to generic and repetitive thinking. No wonder it's difficult to sound original!

Historical Perspective. I could argue this point myself, but why bother if Einstein has already done it? Somebody who reads only newspapers and at best the books of contemporary authors looks to me like an extremely nearsighted person who scorns eyeglasses. He is completely dependent on the prejudices and fashions of his times, since he never gets to see or hear anything else.

Educational Entertainment. Reading great books is fun. The key is getting past the initial vocabulary barrier. It's actually less difficult than you think. Even challenging authors use a limited vocabulary. After the initial learning curve, you'll find the classics as readable as modern books and infinitely more stimulating. Classics have endured because of entertainment value. There's a reason filmmakers keep remaking old books — they have the best content.

Develop a Distinct Voice. If you're a writer/blogger, ignoring the classics is a mistake. This has *nothing* to do with subject matter. Regardless of what you write about, you need to be persuasive and develop a distinct voice. The best way to learn is from the masters. Spending some time with the classics will give you an edge.

Learn Timeless Ideas. We like to believe that technology has changed everything. In truth, it feels the same to be alive today as it did a thousand years ago. The lessons of the classics carry as much weight as ever. These are books that keep coming up. They're a part of human history that isn't going to disappear in 10 years. Reading the classics develops an understanding of the human condition and a deeper appreciation of modern problems. Plus quoting Aristotle or Voltaire is a great way to win an argument.

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