

# 读书如何改变人生

题目: The healing power of reading

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I want to talk today about how reading can change our lives and about the limits of that change. I want to talk to you about how reading can give us a **shareable** world of powerful human connection. But also about how that connection is always partial. How reading is **ultimately** a lonely, **idiosyncratic** **undertaking**.

今天,我想谈谈读书如何改变我们的人生,以及这种改变的局限性。我想谈谈读书如何给了我们一个人际关系的共享世界。我也想谈谈这种关系为何总是偏颇的,为何读书终究是一件孤独、独自乐乐的事。

The writer who changed my life was the great African American novelist James Baldwin. When I was growing up in Western Michigan in the 1980s, there weren't many Asian American writers interested in social change. And so I think I turned to James Baldwin as a way to fill this void, as a way to feel **racially** conscious. But perhaps because I knew I wasn't myself African American, I also felt challenged and indicted by his words. Especially these words: "There are liberals who have all the proper attitudes, but no real convictions. When the **chips** are down and you **somehow** expect them to deliver, they are somehow not there." They are somehow not there. I took those words very literally. Where should I put myself?

改变了我的人生的一位作家是伟大的非裔美国小说家詹姆斯·鲍德温。20世纪80年代,我在密歇根州西部长大,当时的美国亚裔作家中对社会变革感兴趣的并不多。所以我求教于詹姆斯·鲍德温,我想这是填补这一空白,加强种族意识的方式。但也许是因为知道自己不是非裔美国人,我从他的言论中感到了挑战 and 谴责,尤其是这些话:“自由派会表现出所有合宜的态度——但他们没有真正的信念。在紧急时刻,你希望他们履行诺言,他们却突然不见了人影。”他们出于某种原因不见了踪影。我是从字面上理解这些话的,我应该去哪里?

**shareable**  
adj. 可分享的; 可分担的

**ultimately**  
adv. 最终,最后

**idiosyncratic**  
adj. 独特的; 怪癖的

**undertake**  
v. 承担, 从事

**racially**  
adv. 人种上

**chips**  
n. 炸土豆条

**somehow**  
adv. 以某种方式

I went to the Mississippi Delta, one of the poorest regions in the United States. This is a place shaped by a powerful history. In the 1960s, African Americans risked their lives to fight for education, to fight for the right to vote. I wanted to be a part of that change, to help young teenagers graduate and go to college. When I got to the Mississippi Delta, it was a place that was still poor, still **segregated**, still **dramatically** in need of change.

我去了密西西比三角洲，美国最贫穷的地区之一，这个地方深受一段强有力的历史的影响。20世纪60年代，黑人冒着生命危险争取受教育的机会和投票权。我希望加入这一变革，帮助青少年从中学毕业，并继续进入大学深造。我到密西西比三角洲时，这个地方仍然很贫穷，仍实行种族隔离，极其需要变革。

My school, where I was placed, had no library, no **guidance counselor**, but it did have a police officer. Half the teachers were **substitutes** and when students got into fights, the school would send them to the local county jail.

我所任教的学校没有图书馆，也没有辅导员，但却有一名警察。有一半的老师是代课老师，学生打架时，学校就把他们送到当地的县监狱。

This is the school where I met Patrick. He was 15 and held back twice, he was in the eighth grade. He was quiet, **introspective**, like he was always in deep thought. And he hated seeing other people fight. I saw him once jump between two girls when they got into a fight and he got himself knocked to the ground. Patrick had just one problem. He wouldn't come to school. He said that sometimes school was just too depressing because people were always fighting and teachers were quitting.

就是在这所学校，我认识了帕特里克，他十五岁，留过两次级，正在上八年级。他很安静、内向，好像总在沉思。他很讨厌看到别人打架。有一次，我看见他跳到两个打架的女孩之间劝架，结果被撞倒在地上。帕特里克只有一个问题，他不愿意来上学。他说，有时候学校太令人沮丧了，因为总有人打架，有老师辞职。

**segregated**  
adj.(性别, 种族) 隔离的

**dramatically**  
adv.剧烈地, 明显的

**guidance counselor**  
辅导员

**substitute**  
n.替代品

**introspective**  
adj.内省的

And also, his mother worked two jobs and was just too tired to make him come. So I made it my job to get him to come to school. And because I was crazy and 22 and **zealously** optimistic, my **strategy** was just to show up at his house and say, "Hey, why don't you come to school?" And this strategy actually worked, he started to come to school every day. And he started to **flourish** in my class. He was writing poetry, he was reading books. He was coming to school every day.

他妈妈打两份工，没精力敦促他去上学。所以我把叫他来上学这事给揽了过来，因为我那时22岁，非常乐观。我的办法就是到他家里去，跟他说：“嘿，你为什么不来上学？”这招还真管用。他开始每天都来上学，并且在我的课上开始有进步了，他写诗、看书，每天都来上学。

Around the same time that I had figured out how to connect to Patrick, I got into law school at Harvard. I once again faced this question, where should I put myself, where do I put my body? And I thought to myself that the Mississippi Delta was a place where people with money, people with opportunity, those people leave. And the people who stay behind are the people who don't have the chance to leave. I didn't want to be a person who left. I wanted to be a person who stayed. On the other hand, I was lonely and tired. And so I convinced myself that I could do more change on a larger scale if I had a **prestigious** law degree. So I left.

在知道了该如何跟帕特里克建立良好关系的同时，我被哈佛法学院录取了。要再次面对同一个问题：我该去哪里？我该在哪落脚？我心想，密西西比三角洲是有钱的人和有机会的人都会离开的地方，而留下来的都是没有机会离开的人。我不想成为离开的人，我想成为留下的人。但另一方面，我感到孤独又疲惫。所以我说服自己，如果我取得法学学位，就可以在更大的范围内做更多的改变。于是我离开了。

**zealously**  
adv. 热心地

**strategy**  
n. 策略

**flourish**  
v. 繁荣，昌盛

**prestigious**  
adj. 有威望的，有声望的

Three years later, when I was about to graduate from law school, my friend called me and told me that Patrick had got into a fight and killed someone. I was **devastated**. Part of me didn't believe it, but part of me also knew that it was true. I flew down to see Patrick. I visited him in jail. And he told me that it was true. That he had killed someone. And he didn't want to talk more about it. I asked him what had happened with school and he said that he had dropped out the year after I left. And then he wanted to tell me something else. He looked down and he said that he had had a baby daughter who was just born. And he felt like he had let her down. That was it, our conversation was rushed and **awkward**.

三年后，我即将从法学院毕业时，我的朋友打电话告诉我，帕特里克跟人打架并杀了一个人。我很震惊，一方面我不相信，但另一方面我也知道这是真的。我乘飞机南下去看帕特里克，我到监狱里去探望他。他告诉我这是真的，他的确杀了人，但他不想多谈这件事。我问他学校怎么了，他说当年我走后，他就辍学了。然后他想告诉我一些别的事情，他低着头说，他有了一个刚出生的女儿。他觉得作为父亲让女儿失望了。我们的谈话就这样结束了，非常匆忙、尴尬。

When I stepped outside the jail, a voice inside me said, "Come back. If you don't come back now, you'll never come back." So I graduated from law school and I went back. I went back to see Patrick, I went back to see if I could help him with his legal case. And this time, when I saw him a second time, I thought I had this great idea, I said, "Hey, Patrick, why don't you write a letter to your daughter, so that you can keep her on your mind?" And I handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and he started to write. 我走出监狱时，内心里有个声音说：“回来吧。如果你现在不回来，你就永远不会回来了”。于是，从法学院毕业后，我又回去了。我回去看帕特里克，我回去看我能否帮他处理他的案件。这次我见到他时，我想到了一个好主意，说：“嘿，帕特里克，给你女儿写封信吧，这样你就可以记着她了。”我递给他一支笔和一张纸，于是他开始写信了。

**devastated**  
adj. 极为震惊的，极度不安的

**awkward**  
adj. 令人尴尬的

But when I saw the paper that he handed back to me, I was shocked. I didn't recognize his **handwriting**, he had made simple spelling mistakes. And I thought to myself that as a teacher, I knew that a student could **dramatically** improve in a very quick amount of time, but I never thought that a student could dramatically regress. What even pained me more, was seeing what he had written to his daughter. He had written, "I'm sorry for my mistakes, I'm sorry for not being there for you." And this was all he felt he had to say to her. And I asked myself how can I convince him that he has more to say, parts of himself that he doesn't need to apologize for. I wanted him to feel that he had something **worthwhile** to share with his daughter.

但是当我看到他递给我的信时，我很吃惊。我辨认不出他的笔迹，他犯了些简单的拼写错误。作为一名老师，我知道学生可以在很短的时间内取得很大进步，但我从未想过学生会大退步。更让我痛心的是，他写给女儿的信的内容。他写道：“我为我犯的错和不能陪伴你感到抱歉。”这就是他觉得他该对女儿说的所有话了。我问自己，怎么能说服他他还有更多话可以说，他在有些方面是不需要道歉的。我想让他觉得他有值得与女儿分享的东西。

For every day the next seven months, I visited him and brought books. My tote bag became a little library. I brought James Baldwin, I brought Walt Whitman, C.S. Lewis. I brought guidebooks to trees, to birds, and what would become his favorite book, the **dictionary**. On some days, we would sit for hours in silence, both of us reading. And on other days, we would read together, we would read poetry.

在接下来的7个月里，我每天都去看他，给他带些书，我的购物袋成了一个小图书馆。我带了詹姆斯·鲍德温，我带了沃尔特·惠特曼，C.S.刘易斯的书。我带上了树木指南、鸟类指南，字典成了他最喜欢的书。有时候，我们俩会静静地坐下几个小时看书。还有的时候，我们会一起看书，一起读诗歌。

**handwriting**  
n. 手写，书法

**dramatically**  
adv. 剧烈地，明显地

**worthwhile**  
adj. 重要的，有益的

**dictionary**  
n. 字典，词典

We started by reading **haikus**, hundreds of haikus, a **deceptively** simple **masterpiece**. And I would ask him, "Share with me your favorite haikus." And some of them are quite funny. So there's this by Issa: "Don't worry, spiders, I keep house casually." And this: "Napped half the day, no one punished me!" And this gorgeous one, which is about the first day of snow falling, "Deer licking first frost from each other's coats." There's something mysterious and **gorgeous** just about the way a poem looks. The empty space is as important as the words themselves.

我们从三行俳句诗开始，读了上百首三行俳句诗，这些诗看似简单但都是杰作。我会跟他说：“跟我分享一下你最喜欢的诗句吧。”有些很有趣。这是小林一茶的诗：“蜘蛛别慌，我打扫房子，很随意。”还有这首：“睡了大半天，却没人处罚我！”而这首优美的诗，描写的是初雪的场景：“小公鹿相互舔舐毛绒上初霜。”这些俳句，从视觉角度也看起来神秘又华丽。留白与文字本身同样重要。

We read this poem by W.S. Merwin, which he wrote after he saw his wife working in the garden and realized that they would spend the rest of their lives together. "Let me imagine that we will come again when we want to and it will be spring We will be no older than we ever were The worn griefs will have eased like the early cloud through which morning slowly comes to itself" I asked Patrick what his favorite line was, and he said, "We will be no older than we ever were." He said it reminded him of a place where time just stops, where time doesn't matter anymore.

我们读了W.S.梅尔文写的一首诗，这是他看到妻子在花园里劳作后写的，他意识到他们将一起度过余生。“让我想象我们随心所欲，再次归来，届时将是春天，我们会像往昔那般青春，磨旧忧愁将已消逝如朝雾，晨光总要慢慢破云而出。”我问帕特里克他最喜欢哪一句，他说，“我们会像往昔那般青春，”他说这让他想起一个地方，在那里，时间停下脚步，时间不再重要。

**haikus**

n. 三行俳句诗

**deceptively**

adv. 看似

**masterpiece**

n. 代表作，杰作

**gorgeous**

adj. 美丽动人的



And I asked him if he had a place like that, where time lasts forever. And he said, "My mother." When you read a poem alongside someone else, the poem changes in meaning. Because it becomes personal to that person, becomes personal to you.

我问他有没有 这样一个地方，那里时间永恒不变。他答道：“我的母亲。”当你和别人一起读一首诗时，这首诗的意境会发生变化，因为它分别成了你 和那个人的诗。

We then read books, we read so many books, we read the memoir of Frederick Douglass, an American slave who taught himself to read and write and who escaped to freedom because of his literacy. I had grown up thinking of Frederick Douglass as a hero and I thought of this story as one of uplift and hope. But this book put Patrick in a kind of panic. He fixated on a story Douglass told of how, over Christmas, masters give slaves gin as a way to prove to them that they can't handle freedom. Because slaves would be stumbling on the fields. Patrick said he related to this. He said that there are people in jail who, like slaves, don't want to think about their condition, because it's too painful. Too painful to think about the past, too painful to think about how far we have to go.

然后我们读书，我们读了很多书，我们读了弗雷德里克·道格拉斯的回忆录，他是个美国奴隶，自学读书写作，因为有文化，他得到了自由。我从小到大视弗雷德里克·道格拉斯为英雄，觉得他的故事励志且充满希望。但这本书却让帕特里克陷入恐慌。他着迷于道格拉斯讲述的一个故事：圣诞节期间，主人会给奴隶杜松子酒喝，以此向他们证明他们掌控不了自由，因为他们会醉得在田野上跌跌撞撞。帕特里克说他对此很有同感，他说，监狱里有些人就像奴隶一样，不愿去想他们的处境，因为这太痛苦了，思考过去太痛苦，思考久远的未来也太痛苦。

alongside

p.在...旁边

memoir

n.回忆录

uplift

v.抬起，举起

stumbling

adj.障碍的

His favorite line was this line: "Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this **everlasting** thinking of my condition that **tormented** me." Patrick said that Douglass was brave to write, to keep thinking. But Patrick would never know how much he seemed like Douglass to me. How he kept reading, even though it put him in a panic. He finished the book before I did, reading it in a concrete **stairway** with no light.

他最喜欢的是这段话：“无论什么都行，只要让我摆脱思考！我无时无刻不在思考自己的处境，这令我饱受折磨。没有任何法子能让我摆脱这些想法。”帕特里克说道格拉斯勇于去写，不断思考。但帕特里克不知道，我觉得他很像道格拉斯，虽然阅读让他感到恐慌，但是他却坚持看书。他在没有灯光的水泥楼梯间看书，比我先读完了一本书。

And then we went on to read one of my favorite books, Marilynne Robinson's "Gilead," which is an extended letter from a father to his son. He loved this line: "I'm writing this in part to tell you that if you ever wonder what you've done in your life ... you have been God's grace to me, a miracle, something more than a **miracle**."

然后我们接着读我最喜欢的书之一，玛里琳·鲁宾逊的《基列家书》，这是父亲写给儿子的一封信很长的家信。他喜欢这段话：“我写这封信给你的原因之一是要告诉你，如果你曾经自问你这辈子做了什么…你是上帝赐予我的恩典，一个奇迹，你的存在甚至超越奇迹。”

Something about this language, its love, its longing, its voice, rekindled Patrick's desire to write. And he would fill notebooks upon notebooks with letters to his daughter. In these beautiful, **intricate** letters, he would imagine him and his daughter going canoeing down the Mississippi river. He would imagine them finding a mountain stream with perfectly clear water.

这本书所用的语言，表达的爱、渴望、呼声，重新点燃了帕特里克写作的欲望。他在笔记本上写满了给女儿的信，一本接着一本。在这些美好、文字细腻的信中，他想象自己和女儿在密西西比河上划独木舟。他想象他们找到了一条清澈的山间小溪。

everlasting  
adj. 永恒的

tormented  
拷打

stairway  
n. 楼梯间

miracle  
n. 奇迹

intricate  
adj. 错综复杂的，难理解的



As I watched Patrick write, I thought to myself, and I now ask all of you, how many of you have written a letter to somebody you feel you have let down? It is just much easier to put those people out of your mind. But Patrick showed up every day, facing his daughter, holding himself **accountable** to her, word by word with intense **concentration**.

当我看着帕特里克写信，我心想，现在也要问一下大家，有多少人给觉得对不起的人写过信？不把这些人放在心上更容易。但帕特里克每天都去面对他的女儿，全神贯注、一个字一个字地写，想要对她负责。

I wanted in my own life to put myself at risk in that way. Because that risk reveals the strength of one's heart. Let me take a step back and just ask an uncomfortable question. Who am I to tell this story, as in this Patrick story? Patrick's the one who lived with this pain and I have never been hungry a day in my life. I thought about this question a lot, but what I want to say is that this story is not just about Patrick. It's about us, it's about the **inequality** between us. The world of plenty that Patrick and his parents and his grandparents have been shut out of. In this story, I represent that world of plenty. And in telling this story, I didn't want to hide myself. Hide the power that I do have.

我也想在自己的人生中，以这种方式冒险，因为这种冒险表现出了一个人心内的强大。退一步来说，我想扪心自问，我有什么资格讲帕特里克的故事？帕特里克是那个在苦海中求生的人，而我这辈子没有一天挨过饿。我经常想这个问题，但是我想说的是，这故事不仅跟帕特里克有关，它也跟我们有关，它讲述着人与人之间的不平等，它讲述着帕特里克以及他的父母和祖父母被这个富足的世界拒之门外。在这个故事里，我代表了那个富足的世界。我讲这个故事时，并不想隐瞒自己，隐瞒我所拥有的权力。

**accountable**

adj. 负有责任的；可理解的

**concentration**

n. 专注；集中

**inequality**

n. 不平等，不同

In telling this story, I wanted to expose that power and then to ask, how do we **diminish** the distance between us? Reading is one way to close that distance. It gives us a quiet universe that we can share together, that we can share in equally.

我讲这个故事，是想显露这种权力，然后问这个问题：我们如何能缩短我们之间的距离？读书是缩短这种距离的一种方法，它为我们提供了一个可以平等分享的宁静世界。

You're probably wondering now what happened to Patrick. Did reading save his life? It did and it didn't. When Patrick got out of prison, his journey was **excruciating**. Employers turned him away because of his record, his best friend, his mother, died at age 43 from heart disease and **diabetes**. He's been homeless, he's been hungry.

你现在可能会在想，帕特里克怎么样了。读书是否改变了他的命运？是的，但也不完全是。帕特里克出狱时，他的人生之旅极其艰辛，因为他有案底，雇主拒绝聘用他，他母亲，也是他最好的朋友，43岁时因心脏病和糖尿病去世。他一直无家可归，忍饥挨饿。

So people say a lot of things about reading that feel **exaggerated** to me. Being literate didn't stop him from being **discriminated** against. It didn't stop his mother from dying. So what can reading do? I have a few answers to end with today. 所以我觉得，很多对读书的评论都是夸大其词。帕特里克并未因读书识字而免遭歧视，也没能使他母亲免于病逝。那么读书到底有什么用呢？我想用几个答案来结束今天的演讲。

**diminish**

v.减弱，降低

**excruciating**

adj.折磨人的；使苦恼的

**diabetes**

n.糖尿病

**exaggerated**

adj.夸张的，言过其实的

**discriminat**

v.区分，辨别

Reading charged his inner life with mystery, with imagination, with beauty. Reading gave him images that gave him joy: mountain, ocean, deer, frost. Words that taste of a free, natural world. Reading gave him a language for what he had lost. How precious are these lines from the poet Derek Walcott? Patrick memorized this poem. "Days that I have held, days that I have lost, days that outgrow, like daughters, my harboring arms."

读书使他的内心世界充满神秘、想象力和美好的事物，读书给予他欢乐的画面：深山、大海、小鹿、秋霜。给予他体验自由自在的大自然的文字，读书给予他倾述所失去的东西的语言。诗人德里克·沃尔科特写的那首诗是多珍贵啊！帕特里克记住了它：“我拥有的岁月，我丢失的岁月，渐长的岁月，如女儿渐长再也容不进停泊的，我的臂弯。”

Reading taught him his own courage. Remember that he kept reading Frederick Douglass, even though it was painful. He kept being **conscious**, even though being conscious hurts. Reading is a form of thinking, that's why it's difficult to read because we have to think. And Patrick chose to think, rather than to not think. And last, reading gave him a language to speak to his daughter. Reading inspired him to want to write. The link between reading and writing is so powerful. When we begin to read, we begin to find the words. And he found the words to imagine the two of them together. He found the words to tell her how much he loved her.

读书赋予了他勇气。我记得他一直在看道格拉斯的书，尽管这令他很痛苦。他一直保持清醒，即使这清醒让人心痛。读书是一种思维方式，这就是为什么读书很难——因为我们必须思考。帕特里克选择思考，而不是拒绝思考。最后，读书给了他 与女儿交谈的语言，读书激发了他写作的欲望，阅读与写作之间的联系是如此的强大。在我们开始读书时，我们就开始找到了表达情感的文字。他找到了形容父女俩共处情景的文字，他找到了合适的文字来表达他对女儿深沉的爱。

conscious  
adj.有意识的

Reading also changed our relationship with each other. It gave us an occasion for **intimacy**, to see beyond our points of view. And reading took an unequal relationship and gave us a **momentary** equality. When you meet somebody as a reader, you meet him for the first time, newly, freshly. There is no way you can know what his favorite line will be. What memories and private griefs he has. And you face the **ultimate** privacy of his inner life. And then you start to wonder, "Well, what is my inner life made of? What do I have that's **worthwhile** to share with another?"

读书也改变了人与人之间的关系，它给了我们彼此亲近的机会，跳出我们的思维框架。读书消除了我们不平等的关系，给了我们短暂的平等。当我们以读者的身份遇见一个人时，我们初次带着新鲜感见到这个人，我们不可能知道他喜欢哪些文字，有什么往事，心里有什么悲伤。你面对的是他内心最深处的秘密，然后你开始想知道：那我的内心世界里有什么？我有什么值得与别人分享的？

I want to close on some of my favorite lines from Patrick's letters to his daughter. "The river is **shadowy** in some places but the light shines through the cracks of trees ... On some branches hang plenty of **mulberries**. You stretch your arm straight out to grab some." And this lovely letter, where he writes, "Close your eyes and listen to the sounds of the words. I know this poem by heart and I would like you to know it, too."

在帕特里克给女儿的信中，有些话我特别喜欢，我想用这些话来结束演讲：“河流的某些部分被阴影遮住，不过光线会从树木的缝隙透进来……许多桑葚悬挂在一些低矮树枝上。你伸长了手想去摘。”还有这封很优美的信，他在信中写道：“把眼睛闭上，听那些字词的声音我把它背得很熟，我想让你也知道它。”

Thank you so much everyone.  
谢谢大家。

**intimacy**  
n. 亲密，性关系

**momentary**  
adj. 片刻的，短暂的

**ultimate**  
adj. 最终的，最后的

**worthwhile**  
adj. 重要的，值得做的

**shadowy**  
adj. 幽暗的；鲜为人知的

**mulberry**  
n. 桑树，桑葚