

Introduction

Each year, libraries across Durham host the *Battle of the Books*, a competition where teams of avid readers from schools across Durham Region read and try to memorize details of 36 books to compete in a more structured trivia-style competition. I was one of these avid readers and would read and reread the books to make sure that I would not miss any details. Near the end of one Battle season, I was rereading a book that I enjoyed and I suggested the book to a friend of mine, who told me that he did not want to read because the school year was almost over. I realized that, to many people, reading is a chore and is only done for some assignment and not the actual story in the book. I began to reflect on my own reading habits and saw that, I would never be able to drop reading at some point just because of everything stories had taught me. That learning from stories leads me to the books we read this year and the first book on my timeline.

Gilgamesh

At the most recent hackathon I competed in, my team members and I worked tirelessly for twelve hours to create our submission. We were walking to the auditorium where the finalists would be chosen, and hoped the judges would call our names, but they never did. I was really frustrated about not gaining anything from a project that I had invested so much time and energy into. When I read *Gilgamesh* translated by Herbert Mason, I thought about how Gilgamesh goes on a very long and arduous journey to revive Enkidu, but ultimately fails because of conditions mainly out of his control. Gilgamesh's inability to save Enkidu has taught me that some events are out of my control, regardless of how hard I try. This resonated with me as I often mope about my marks or feel sad about my ranking a competition, and I have somewhat unhealthily tied success to grades or rankings in a competition. Moving forward, I am trying to accept that the value of a competition or a test is measured by the effort that I put into it and not the standings.

Understanding Comics

Before reading *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud, I saw comics as a juvenile form of storytelling lacking in depth and assumed it offered nothing more than a pastime. As I read the book, I learned that comics is a storytelling medium as legitimate as traditional literature. The book also taught me that my assumption about the value of comics was based on a bad habit of judging a concept before completely understanding it. This bad habit of mine resurfaced when I unfairly told a teammate that his project was easy without understanding the specifics of his project. This experience has allowed me to not only recognize the unfair assumptions I make but also realize that I must never assume a concept or device is simple before trying to understand it. Going forward, I hope to monitor the assumptions I make and understand an idea before creating an opinion.

Yu The Great

In a bag of food to be sent to my older brother, there were two chocolate bars. One of these chocolate bars was missing a quarter of its original contents, but it was not defective; I ate that quarter. After eating it, I wrapped the rest of the bar up to make it seem as if the full bar had never been opened. This may seem like a harmless prank, and it is only one of many. As I read *Yu The Great* by Paul D. Storrie, I noticed how a primary factor in Yu's success is respecting Huang Di and asking for help. Moreover, Gun failed his quest because he disrespected Huang Di and was subsequently murdered. Yu's success taught me that respect is especially important in asking for help and it made me reflect on the numerous pranks I have pulled on my brother over the past few years. I noticed that the pranks may have started playfully, but they have evolved into a continued pattern of disrespect. Much like Yu asking Huang Di, I realize that if I want to ask him or anyone else for help, I have to ensure that I remain respectful.

The Iliad

This year, I tried to join as many clubs as I could to see what I enjoyed and would be interested in pursuing for at least some of the next few years. However, I soon realised that I was joining clubs not entirely because I was interested in their purpose, but because other people were joining them. When I read *The Iliad* by Homer, I found Patroclus' death to be particularly tragic; he is targeted specifically because he is wearing Achilles' armour and because he is not Achilles. His death taught me a lesson, which was to be myself. Furthermore, this had a profound impact on my personal growth as I realised that I am not completely interested in some of the clubs I joined. Moreover, I have realized that I want to devote my time to the clubs and activities I am interested in and would like to pursue.

Twelfth Night

While many of these books have contributed to my personal growth, *Twelfth Night* contributed to my academic growth. When I read *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, I noticed how Malvolio was easily duped into believing Maria's letter mainly because Maria's handwriting is very similar to Olivia's handwriting. Malvolio's unfortunate situation highlighted the importance of critically analysing information and reminded me of the number of opinion paragraphs we wrote this year. When thinking of arguments to use in the paragraph, I often found myself linking pieces of evidence together with "if this, then that" logic. However, as many of us know, this extrapolation branches into uncharted territory that isn't covered in the text and is invalid. As such, I analysed more of the text and decided on arguments that I could support from the text. Going forward, I have made a mental checklist for information that's presented to me, with questions such as: How are the pieces of information linked?, How would they form an argument?, and Do the pieces of information require any other sources?

Haroun and the Sea of Stories

The school bell rings and marks the end of the school day, but I remember that my day is far from over. I remember that it will be awhile before I can get home and start working on whatever assignments or projects from my classes. When I finally get home and sit down to start working, I sometimes find myself distracted and unable to focus. As a result, I end up staying up too early trying to finish work. As I read Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, I noticed how the Guppees and Chupwalas both live happier once they achieve a balanced solar cycle. The lesson I learned from the story is that balance is critical to happiness, and this lesson has taught me that I need to ensure that I balance work and leisure time to finish my assignments and other goals in a timely manner.