

The Power of Literacy

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When I was six years old, I fell in love. I was utterly infatuated and exhibited resistance to change due to this newfound love. It was a love so deep that sentimentalists would envy it. I was not in love with a person, but with the composition that lay before me. I was entranced by Dr. Suess *The Cat in the Hat*, the first book I've ever owned in English.

Having been raised speaking Spanish, the transition to English was incredibly difficult upon my family's immigration to the United States of America. I was placed in a solely English-speaking class due to the lack of space in the bilingual courses and struggled with being left alone, much to the dismay of my mom. It was an endless cycle of crying and confusion due to my inability to decipher what my teacher and the signs on the walls said. I felt ashamed and singled out. I was used to being an exemplary student in Mexico, and returning to those standards seemed as unreachable as the graffiti on the margins of train tunnels. My classmates' ability to understand and participate deemed them superior in my eyes, and I was the mere exception to a flourishing class.

My life changed on a fateful trip to the public library. My mom picked up a publication, with an odd-looking cat wearing a tall striped hat on its cover, and handed it to me. I studied it carefully and decided to read it, ignoring the negative thoughts that circled my head and insisted I'd be unable to understand it. Its images and simple vocabulary gave me a sense of hope like no other as I was able to decipher the not so foreign characters and follow the story's plot. I was fascinated by the way the words were strung together, the way one had to interpret them, find their color, decipher, and observe them. I had found happiness in the form of rhyming words and visual escapes.

My oblivious pursuit of happiness led to the most drastic change in my life; it allowed me to live hundreds of lives, shed tears over inexplicable emotional attachments, and lose myself at the hands of a paperback. I began reading every day, devouring book after book at an alarming rate. I was blissfully in love knowing something I enjoyed so much also helped me progress academically. Dedicating my youth to literature not only made me a more proficient reader and writer, but also fostered in me a sense of the value of education, creativity, and imagination. The words that are thoughtfully curated for the books we read are impactful past the last page that threatens to end the story.

