

Compulsory Reading by Alison Bechdel

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you have reading guilt like Bechdel? Do you feel guilty when you feel like you haven't read enough or you've been reading the wrong books? How do you deal with that? How do you define the "wrong book"?
2. This is an extended narrative essay in that it deals with a singular event (reading) over the course of a lifetime. Since a good narrative should contain a lesson (or moral), what is the lesson presented in "Compulsory Reading"?
3. Bechdel identifies forbidden books, such as *Sexual Politics*. Can you think of any texts you were forbidden to read as a child? Why were they forbidden? Was the material sexually explicit, or too violent, or contained ideas that were too shocking? Are there any books you would forbid your children from reading? Would you let your children read *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*? Why or why not?
5. Were you force-fed reading material by parents or teachers? How did that make you feel about the works? Did you enjoy them more or less than books you picked for yourself?
6. Are you familiar with any of the "weird authors" in the Bechdel's playing cards? Which ones? Were you forced to read them?
7. What is on your current reading list? Are any of the books something other than textbooks?
4. According to *Researchist.wordpress.com*, "There's certainly something to be said for reading by inclination. The thrill and intimacy of discovering a book on your own, or the satisfaction of reading a book with no strings attached. Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Compulsory Reading* illustrates the killjoy-potential of recommended reading magnificently." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
8. Samuel Johnson said, "A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good." On the other hand, some believe this uniformity of thinking leads people to read texts that reinforce their own biases. Should people have a diverse reading list? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Questions for Writing:

1. This is a graphic essay. There are also video essays as well as the traditional text essay. Are you been surprised by how many forms essays come in? Why or why not?
2. How do Bechdel's graphics create a story? Do they make it more personal? Why or why not?
3. Comic books often make people laugh, can you see the humor in Bechdel's essay? Is it suitable? Why or why not?