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9-09-09

Top Ten Influential Stories

Atwood, Margaret.  Entire body of work: novels, essays, book reviews, and poetry. Print.

Atwood is the writer I would like to be if I were a novelist who also wrote essays and poetry: smart, creative, insightful, feminist, thought-provoking, moving, and master of many genres.  I've identified with her character's pain and confusion at a friend's betrayal.  She's prompted me to ponder the inequalities that women face, the complexities of female friendship, and the layers involved in good storytelling.

Faulkner, William.  *As I Lay Dying.* New York : Vintage Books, 1990. Print.

*Sound and the Fury, The.* New York : Random House, 1984. Print.

In college, after finishing my semester exams, I would buy myself a book.   Often, I selected a novel by Faulkner.  After the rigor of exams, it was a treat to lose myself in Faulkner's legendary rambling sentences.  *The Sound and the Fury* was a book I read in college on my own when I was still studying engineering.  It reminded me how much I missed English classes and helped me to realize that electrical engineering was too narrow a field for me.  Faulkner's use of multiple narrators is brilliant and I loved puzzling out who the narrator was and what was really happening.  *As I Lay Dying* is a book that some people might not find funny, but I do.  There is much in the book to be sad about, but I also appreciate the bleak comedy of a woman who's trying to manage her own burial and whose family she finds sadly lacking.  As a reader and a viewer, I prefer tragedies, so perhaps it's not surprising that I prefer my comedies dark.

Gilchrist, Ellen. *Nora Jane: A Life in Stories.* New York : Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co., 2005. Print.

When Nora Jane's husband gets cancer, she struggles and does everything she can to help him, finally comforting herself with the thought: 'There's more that's right with him then is wrong.'  I read this collection of short stories the year that my nephew Isaac was born three months premature and later got sick and had to breathe through a trach.  As I worried about Isaac and my family, I found solace in Nora Jane's epiphany.  Like Nora Jane, I believe in choosing to focus on the positive.  Although sometimes I have to remind myself to do so.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, The*.

New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

I love how Kingston creates a figurative language-filled autobiography that melds the fantastical and the prosaic, that comingles her culture and her family.  I admire her presentation of the contradictions that are possible within truth.  I rally behind the young girl as she fights for her family and country, allowing her identity to be carved into her body.  I also see her shame as she remains silent against racism and sexism.  I love Kingston's emphasis on the power of storytelling and truthtelling.  *Women Warrior* is one of the three novels I analyzed for my master's thesis so it also represents my love of close reading, analysis and research.

Morrison, Toni.  *Beloved: a Novel.* New York : A.A. Knopf, 1998. Print.

Morrison's *Beloved* gave me and the world the beautiful image of Paul D and Sethe's shadows holding hands at the fair.  The novel reminds me of the power of love and sacrifice, of the horrors of slavery, of man's inhumanity to man.  It was the first novel I taught; I learned the power of selecting a text that resonates with student's experiences and gained a first taste of guiding students’ reading and discussions.

Steinbeck, John. *East of Eden*. New York: Viking, 1952. Print.

Steinbeck's *East of Eden* validates my belief in how God's relationship with us works.  Samuel and Lee's discussion of the meaning of *Timshel,* thou mayest, reminds me that all of our actions, thoughts, and beliefs are a choice.  I believe that God created us and gave us the freedom to choose good or evil.  This novel has also been a point of connection: I have read it aloud with both my brother, Steven, and my husband's sister, Tammy.  I have lent or recommended it to my husband, to friends and to students, prompting many great discussions.  I wrote about it when I first became an English major.  I love the sweeping tale of good versus evil within the context of a family, the close analysis of words, the celebration of storytelling, the pain of misunderstanding, and the joy of love and acceptance.

Roy, Rose Marie.  Oral stories about being teased by her siblings, about picking potatoes, and about leaving home at 15 to get a job and send money home.  As told to the author.

My mom's stories taught me to remember the power of a kind word.  They also taught me about the importance of hard work, of the need to sacrifice for family, and of the reward of finding the humor in all things.  My mother is a good person and her stories transmitted her values and outlook to her children and now to her grandchildren.

Morneault, Wilbrod.  Oral stories about working in New York City and observations about how people are.  As told to the author.

My grandpa's stories and teasings always made me laugh. I miss him and the warmth and love he conveyed in his stories.  I have many good memories of sitting with him and my grandmother at their kitchen table, listening to his stories, and watching his large flat hands with the one crooked index finger smooth the oil cloth.

Pollan, Michael. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto.*

New York : Penguin Press, 2008. Print.

After reading Pollan's book, my husband and I began ordering a weekly veggie box from local farmers.  The book made me realize that I was naive not to consider meat a processed food.  It reinforced my belief that processed food is not food and not something I want to eat except for on rare occasions.

Springsteen, Bruce.  *Nebraska*. 1982. Sony. Record album.

In high school, Springsteen was the singer most likely to be stacked five records deep on my stereo.  I listened to *Nebraska* over and over again after my cousin Michelle died at the age of 18. I was only 16.  Michelle was the first person I was close to who died. "Reason to Believe" with a man standing over a dead dog "[l]ike if he stood there long enough that dog'd get up and run" and "Atlantic City"'s "maybe everything that dies someday comes back" provided a fittingly raw and sparse soundtrack to my first experience with grief.

Symborska, Wislawa.  *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems.* Translated from the Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1995. Print.

Symborska's *View with a Grain of Sand* compelled me to read a poem to my students each day.  Reading the collection, I realized that we all need more poetry in our lives.  When someone I love needs a bit of a pick-me-up or some advice, I often turn to Syzmborska and pass along a poem.  Like all good poetry, Wislawa mixes the particular with the general, fits the felt experience with an astute observation.  I try and do the same with my poetry.