

“Learning To Read Malcolm X Literary Summary”

Malcolm X was a very influential and power speaker during the civil rights movement. He self taught himself to articulate his feelings through writing in a prison with very few and efficient materials. Learning to read and write, an excerpt from Malcolm X’s larger autobiography, recounts his experience of this momentous journey of intellectual discovery and lists his motivation for learning as well as his thoughts and feelings, as he created his own method of learning using the dictionary, and a few tablets along with a pencil provided by the prison in a dark dimly lit cell. To look at this as a literary narrative is to evaluate his materials, the values inherent, and his literary sponsors.

“Learning To Read Malcolm X Literary Analysis ”

Malcolm X, referred to often as one of the most articulate African Americans civil rights activist, ironically became literate due to his own drive and his incorrigible sense of external efficacy. That incorrigible sense is what intrigues me the most. It’s almost impossible for me to imagine a human being taking such a task that in my generation is the primary duty of numerous institutions such as schools, early learning centers and even churches in some cases, upon themselves. Reading Malcolm X’s excerpt as a literacy narrative allowed me to understand how and why such a task had to be undertaken.

Exigency, for example; Malcolm expressed the need to convey his own thoughts and emotions through written words. I was surprised between the stark difference of “street talk articulation” and modern systematic English. I had never thought of it before in much detail, but to desecrate the English language in quotidian everyday casual speech, as in with your friends, is not only overlooked and reliably socially acceptable it is also a sort of language of it’s own. Mr. Malcolm X said, “Look daddy, let me pull your coat about a cat.” I don’t understand what message he is trying to convey, should I offer my coat to him so that he can cover a cat with it? In what context was this said? Would that help me comprehend such a perversion of the English language? Unfortunately not, I am not, sadly, “1960’s black street slang literate” Are these words a type of literacy? Of course, it could be taught, maybe by one of my African – American classmate’s funky hip grandfather, but taught to me nonetheless. However Mr.

X brought up a serious point, he described his speech as not functional as written words. When articulating a message in speech, gestures and facial expressions are used to better help with the understanding, most of our communication over 90% is non-verbal. So after pondering this thought, I figured out Malcolm X could of shouted out the most ludicrous mumbo jumbo and his peers on the streets would have understood him based almost solely on the way he said it. This mumbo jumbo he spoke was not functional on paper, just a bunch of jumbled words with no real meaning not even in the metaphorical sense. Malcolm X desired greatly to articulate his message written to people, most importantly Elijah Muhammad and to do this he had to become literate.

Malcolm began a very rudimentary unconventional technique to learning how to read. He focused on words. I personally think there is a reason why kindergartens don't use this strategy based on the fact that a child or anyone really could be overwhelmed with the afflux of new words. Malcolm expressed that he was momentarily overwhelmed himself. "I'd never realized how many words existed! I didn't know which words to learn." But viewing this excerpt as a literacy narrative I am brought upon the notion of his materials. In prison, Malcolm X is likely to very minimal to no light at some times and only textbook, as we'd call it in most learning institutions, was a dictionary. Malcolm X also utilized the prison's pencils and tablet, which probably made writing more difficult because of the task of sharpening it in a prison were razors and knives were most likely not allowed, and the pencils light gray shade of writing which under dim

lighting can look almost invisible. Malcolm had an infallible drive to achieve his goal of written communication, or did he, upon analyzing his materials it seemed as if he really had little choice. He was an activist in a prison and needed to talk to his peers on the outside, he could either stare at the wall making long jagged indentions counting his days on the prison walls, desperately experiment with telepathic communication, or learn to read and write. As expressed in the excerpt, this provided him with an escape from reality and once he learned "Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors,... and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned." Values attached to this literacy are escape and freedom. "I had never been so truly free in my life."

Malcolm X's sponsors were probably more indirectly apart of his learning process. Bimbi provided Mr. X with a type of envious inspiration. As Malcolm X said in this excerpt he wished to emulate Bimbi's stock of knowledge. And of course Elijah Muhammad was X's spiritual motivation being a black separatist, and it was X's will to write letters to his spiritual leader Elijah Muhammad that provoked him to began the painstaking task of self teaching literacy.