



Why Read?

By Mark Edmundson

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- A PSLA Young Adult Top 40 (or so) non-fiction title 2004

In this important book, acclaimed author Mark Edmundson reconceives the value and promise of reading. He enjoins educators to stop offering up literature as facile entertainment and instead teach students to read in a way that can change their lives for the better. At once controversial and inspiring, this is a groundbreaking book written with the elegance and power to change the way we teach and read.

Praise for *Why Read?*:

"Edmundson is dead on target." -*Washington Post Book World* "Edmundson's an engaging teacher, earnest, knowledgeable, witty." -*Boston Globe* "Why Read? makes passionate arguments for literature's soul-making potential." -*Raleigh News and Observer* "An engaging blend of social criticism, self-improvement wisdom, and appeal to fellow humanities professors...Edmundson writes with a rare combination of force and humility." -*Willamette Weekly*

Mark Edmundson is NEH/Daniels Family Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Virginia. A prizewinning scholar, he is the author of *Literature Against Philosophy*, *Plato to Derrida*, and the widely praised memoir, *Teacher: The One Who Made the Difference*. He has written for the *New Republic*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *the Nation*, and *Harper's*, where he is a contributing editor. Featured on Brian Lamb's final Booknotes

Also available: HC 1-58234-425-6 ISBN 13: 978-158234-425- \$21.95

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Extending the argument of his tome *Literature Against Philosophy: Plato to Derrida*, Edmundson laments the state of liberal arts teaching—and, despite his protestations to the contrary, effectively caricatures critical theory as the soulless antithesis to his own humanistic pedagogical ideals. While a stylish, erudite piece of rhetoric, Edmundson's book is dated, rooted as it is in the author's Harper's article of 1997 and in the culture wars of that decade. Edmundson, a professor of English at the University of Virginia, claims he is not "antitheory," but a humanist who believes a liberal arts education ought to expand minds rather than shut them down. For him, critical theory comes "between" the reader and the power of great books, distracting students from the big questions concerning life and how best to live it—questions central to a democracy. As an alternative approach, Edmundson permits students to identify with characters in a naïve manner currently out of favor in the academy and highlights the author's voice (a technique he calls "ventriloquism"). Edmundson gives examples of how he teaches classics from Wordsworth to Orwell and takes positions on canonicity, multiculturalism and pop culture. Yet for all its learning and elegance, Edmundson's challenge to teachers might have done more to rejuvenate or deepen the tired debate in which it engages had its observations extended beyond his own classroom.

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From [Booklist](#)

Reading literature nurtures our intelligence, our imagination, and our very soul. So believes Edmundson, a professor at the University of Virginia, as so many great thinkers have believed over the centuries, writers Edmundson quotes with passion and expertise as he places literature at the very heart of a liberal-arts education, which he fears is becoming an endangered tradition. An eloquent advocate, Edmundson continues the invaluable refresher course on the significance of the humanities that he's been so ably conducting in *Harper's* magazine and in his previous book, *Teacher* (2002). Here he objects to the commercialization of higher education as students are recast as consumers and instruction is reduced to job training. Edmundson feels that students deserve, and need, more. He avers, "The purpose of a liberal arts education is to give people an enhanced opportunity to decide how they should live their lives" and that literature is "the major cultural source of vital options." Edmundson's many-faceted argument is forthright, rigorous, and inspiring as he convincingly links literature with hope and humanism with democracy. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Thoughtful...striking...Edmundson lobbies for demonstrating literature's importance by teaching it through asking big, risk-taking philosophical questions."

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dorothy Marsh:

Book is to be different for every single grade. Book for children right up until adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important for all of us. The book Why Read? seemed to be making you to know about other knowledge and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The book Why Read? is not only giving you more new information but also for being your friend when you sense bored. You can spend your personal spend time to read your e-book. Try to make relationship with the book Why Read?. You never really feel lose out for everything in case you read some books.

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Wanda Jacobsen:

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