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Thank You, Mom and Brontë

While watching *Matilda* and slowly adding Teddy Grahams into my mouth one at a time, I looked over and saw my mother reading a book. The front cover caught my eye because the woman on the cover had on very different clothes than my oversized hand-me-down shirt and shorts. This intrigued me to ask my mother what she was reading. She simply replied that is *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, causing a cascade of questions from me about the plot of the story and who was involved. Finally, my mother just asked if I wanted to follow along with her while she read aloud. Some might be thinking I was too young to understand the complex romance and syntax filled with Brontë's charm, but my mother did not think that way at all. She wanted to simply share a story with me about the life of Jane Eyre, from a hard start to a lovely, albeit complex, ending. Answering all of my questions that my mind was curious about, my mother became a translator, using Brontë's words to paint me a simpler picture in order to follow along with the plot, fully comprehending the context. My mother is the foundation of my "creative reading" skills. She influenced my beginning stages of what it means to be a creative reader and how to improve upon it. Besides being able to pronounce words and understand their meaning, my mother taught me about the importance context. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky describe creative readers as those who "treat authors as equals . . . [and] [r]espect the difficulties and complexity of their texts and of the issues and questions they examine" (10). However, I've found that the qualities of a creative reader are not gained overnight. Not only reading itself takes

practice, but being a creative reader develops over a significant amount of time: it takes years to practice reading skills and to gain personal experiences that shape those reading skills.

Growing up, like many children, I had difficulties with lacking speed when it comes to my reading skills. Teachers were concerned that I was not understanding what I was reading, and that I needed some extra help to fully comprehend the words that were in my books. Being young, my confidence was shaken by how my teachers thought my intelligence was lagging because I read slowly. It didn't make sense to me that this was a huge problem. My mother took their advice and had me read some paragraphs at my speed and then asked what certain words or sentences meant. I confessed to my mother that I could comprehend everything that was written; I just did not want to misunderstand what was happening in the story by reading too fast. My mother put me in an afterschool program to slowly gain my speed in reading along with confidence, promising me that I would still understand the story. My memory will keep it stored, she said, as long as I enjoyed what I was reading. Slowly gaining my pace in reading, I felt more confident as a reader. My mother taught me that confidence is important when it comes to being a reader. You have to be comfortable with your abilities to read before you can begin to explore the underlining tones and "hidden" meanings--such as social implications--the authors portray through their words.

High school is where my growth as a reader took off exponentially. Having to write many essays about themes for books, I developed a new skill as a creative reader. Understanding the meaning of certain themes, tones, and qualities portrayed in stories made it easier to write about them for book reports. Going back to *Jane Eyre* for a book report on themes, that cannot just be one word, I put my new skills to the test. I could understand the feminist themes Brontë used that I was unable to hear when first reading *Jane Eyre* with my mother. Brontë only used subtle hints

of romance in the midst of a powerful woman acknowledging her worth as a human being--using the power of intelligence to speak her mind even when in disagreement with the other party member. This is a scandalous topic, because she is a woman in 19th-century Britain, and would have faced inequality based on sex and class differences. I was able to understand how improper Eyre's actions might be because of the mixed use of my previous knowledge from my mother, context, and my new skills of comprehending the use of theme and tone.

Entering into college, I have learned to write many different types of papers. From research science papers, to comparative literature. Research papers have been the easiest so far because of how straight forward they can be. As Bartholomae and Petrosky explain, "Readers face many kinds of experiences, and certain texts are written with specific situations in mind and invite specific ways of reading" (5). This applies to scientific papers, as well. They are straight forward readings that link to direct interpretation. There are not as many underlying tones or hidden meanings to search, mostly statements of facts. But when entering into COM 2, I met a professor who tried to emphasize the importance of opinions, and how we use our own to incorporate into our papers. After reading certain sections of *Don Quixote* or *The Story of the Grail*, we sat in a circle and discussed not only what is going on in the story, but what our thoughts were--how we interpreted things, and if those opinions were different from how others perceived it. This new skill of interpretation and analysis describes what Bartholomae and Petrosky explain when referring to Adrienne Rich while they define reading against the grain: "To ask questions they believe might come as a surprise, to look for the limits of her vision, to provide alternate endings . . . to challenge her argument" (11). Creative reading is to understand what the author portrays with words and opinions, but it also means to use your personal opinions to question the author. Questions may go against the author or fellow peers, but they

need evidence to back up the claim. Incorporating my opinion to question an author's intentions of writing has been the largest skill to learn so far in my reading growth. Open-ended questions about an author's process is challenging because there are no set-in-stone answers that follow these questions. My skills in interpretations and analysis continues to be shaped, because this skill take the longest to understand. Practicing through annotations and writing papers is the key to shaping creative reading skills, because constantly referring back to the story and developing your analysis strengthens the personal perspective.

Anyone who knows my mother, knows that she is a reader. Just meeting her, nine out of ten times if you ask what she has in her purse to read, she will pull out a book, magazine, or article she is interested in for that day. Sometimes she might even pull out two books that she is reading at the same time. This super power of hers has amazed me since day one. She can fully interpret what is going on in the two opposite plots, remembering the significance of the conversation between Mr. Darcy and Ms. Bennet and how Harry catching the golden snitch fits into the narrative. She has worked hard to pass this on to my sisters and me. My mother will tell you that one of her greatest achievements is that all three of her daughters love to read for pleasure, and it is all thanks to her. My mother is my beginning influence when it comes to being a creative reader. Everyone has the basics when it comes to being a creative reader, and the ability to gain perspective. We all gain the skills to read and comprehend what is going on. When it comes to deepening the strengths as a reader, it is all about continuous reading and developing new skills. Creative reading takes time, practice, and willingness to learn new skills. Throughout my years of school, I had many concepts to learn when it comes to diving deeper into an author's work. With *Jane Eyre*, I read it first through my mother's translated words, and now I have the

skills to interpret it myself. Creative reading has to develop over time in order to read past the words the author writes and to understand why the author put those words together.