

**The Classics:**  
**Comments by Students**

**As you read these comments, think...**

1. What do you notice?
2. What is an important question that can be answered by these comments?
3. What is the answer?

**You may take notes as you read.**

**Afterward, you will tell us about the books read during spring break.**

"Learning about classics affected my thinking on how to choose a book, how to tell if it is well-written or not....Classics make my mind think." Damen

"Learning about classics made me think that things change. Hundreds of years ago ,these books were newly written and unknown. Now, they are extremely famous and considered the best of literature. I think it will be interesting to live long and see if books like Harry Potter or The Hunger Games will be considered classic books." Alex

"Learning about the classics has given me the ability to find allusions and similarities in other books that I have read. Reading the classics has also given me more background knowledge of what good literature looks like. By learning about the classics, I can make better guesses on what books will some day become classics and which ones will not."

Brennan

"Learning about classics has affected my thinking by [making me realize] how many interesting ideas they had long ago. Take Jules Verne, for instance, he had an idea in the 1800's - 200 years ago - that a thing could go very deep in the ocean, and now we do! We have submarines that can withstand tons and tons of pressure." Josh

"It has shown me the way people spoke and acted in the 1800's. It has also shown me how unfortunate people were - Les Miserables - or how loved they were - Anne of Green Gables. It has shown me what writing styles and skills a book needs in order to be truly a classic."

"Sometimes writers talk about classic books in their novels. When I didn't know the classic book, the story didn't make sense and reading those parts about classic novels or authors became boring. Sometimes I even skipped them! But now, I know what they are talking about." Isabel

"Learning about classics has affected my thinking. It has improved my memorizing abilities, which I needed help with. It has made me read more classic stories such as Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. It has also helped me get a few more references in other stories." Greg



"Learning about classics has affected my thinking by giving me background knowledge. By knowing these classics, I can make connections and see allusions when I read other books and stories. Learning about classics also teaches me about how literature and popular genres have changed over the years. It has also shown me that there are many well-written books that I still have not read and lots that I have just heard of for the first time. Learning about classics should be an opportunity that everyone should get." Ann

"Learning about classics has made me think of what books these days will turn into classics. It has made me think that even in the 18th century, there were books being made that even kids these days will probably read. If a book is declared a classic, it's almost like part of our history. Learning about classics has made me wonder whether there could be a student in this very classroom who could grow up to [write] a classic story. Books are timeless." Chelsea

"Once I started learning about classic authors, I figured that there are a ton of interesting books that I don't know about. Learning about those authors and books increased my ability to read and it increased my curiosity. I feel like I want to read every book. Reading these books, I found out how to spell some words, how to describe scenes, and it just changed the way I write." Nadia

"Learning about classics affected my thinking by helping me realize that a lot of stories are based on these classics. Seeing something somewhere that I can relate to the plot of one of these books makes me feel full of knowledge and it opens my eyes to the plot. For example, I was watching a tv show last week and the main character's friend pretends to die only to see how his family would react and who his money and land will be given to. This made me stop and think; it reminded me of Huckleberry Finn written by Mark Twain in the 19th century in the U.S.A. I could understand how past stories from many years ago are still being used in stories today."

Fallon

"Classic books are called 'classics' for a reason. All those books were written in the 20th century, 19th century, or even 18th century, yet are still highly renowned. Those books have survived more than 200 years but are still recognized and respected by many people over the world. Those books are not only written for our entertainment, they also target the brain activity for they make us think. For example, in 'The Picture of Dorian Grey', we always wonder why did Dorian Grey destroy the painting which was so important to him? In 'The Pearl' by John Steinbeck, why did John throw away the pearl, which brought him fame, fortune and luck all at once? ....

"...These books stimulate the deepest brain corners, which make us think deeply and make us smarter. Classics also make us wiser. We learn to see things in a different way and open our vision wider for the Earth. Books such as 'War of the Worlds' activate our excitement part of the brain and thrill us. Books such as 'The Great Gatsby' activate our emotional part, making us feel sad or happy for the person. In brief, classic books must be read because they are still famous and they excite our brain which makes our vision wider to the open world." Solomon

"Classics have made me see how far back we have been writing books and collecting writing. Classics have also shown people what life was like during the different times and generations. Like in Anne of Green Gables, it shows what school was like before my time (and my parents' time): slates with chalk and little but thick books that were carried around by being tied together by string. And the fashions in Anne's time: dresses with aprons and gowns with poofy shoulders and sleeves. The classics show us what we didn't see." Madison

"...I now have a greater respect for the writing world, and I now think of books as movies. These lovely literary classics are like Oscar-winning books. Although not so good books would be like terrible movies that win razzies (raspberry awards), which are awards for the worst movies. In my mind, I have now realized and now think that the movie industry and the literature industry are awesomely alike...."

Brad



"Learning about classic authors has influenced my thinking by causing me to consider whether a good book I have read will be a modern classic in a few decades. For example, All Good Children and any book written by Roald Dahl has a good chance of becoming a modern classic. However, I don't think a series such as Twilight will become a modern classic; I think its popularity will wear out over the course of years. One other way learning about classic authors affected my thinking was by allowing me to consider why some certain books have remained popular over the years while others have not...."

"Learning about classics made me think about how they are so famous and still popular all around the world. So if they are still popular around the world, they must be very well-written. Eventually, I started to think about this question: What are the similarities between good novels?"

"First of all, they all have special and memorable characters....Some characters are orphans, others have mysterious powers, and other characters are just normal people like us. Still, they all have unique qualities that make us remember them...."

"...Secondly, they have strong beginning and endings....

"Finally, good books have unique plots to them. Some books introduce fantastical ideas like the Harry Potter series. Other books talk about a utopian or a dystopian world such as The Hunger Games. **I think classics usually talk about children or sometimes adults who struggle to find happiness in their own situations.** For example, Anne of Green Gables or The Secret Garden.

"Therefore, learning about the classics has affected my thinking about some qualities of well-written books." Juli

"It is important for us to learn about classics for many reasons, especially the ones I'm about to list. First, classics form the foundation of today's literature. They are the books that other books resemble and learn from. Also, classics have themes that everyone can relate to. For example, themes such as love, romance, adventure and perseverance are very common in these books. And finally, classics are great stories, and we can learn from the character's mistakes, adventures and triumphs. For all these reasons, it's important for us to learn about the classics."

## **How do classics affect people's thinking?**

- list 5 - 10 reasons in point form

Now, at last, I want to hear about the books you read during the break.

Get out your bibliographies.

## **What makes a classic?**

1. It is read by many people in many different countries.
2. It shows artistic merit.
3. It portrays an important truth about life.
4. It is read by more than one generation of readers.

**Another way to judge whether a book is a classic:**

1. Entertains the reader and is interesting to read.
2. Does not merely conform to the expectations of a single genre or formula.
3. Has been judged to have artistic quality by the literary community (teachers, students, librarians, critics, other writers, the reading public).
4. Has stood the test of time in some way, regardless of the date of publication.
5. Shows thematic depth: The themes merit revisiting and study because they are complex and nuanced.



6. Demonstrates innovation in style, voice, structure, characterization, plot and/or description.
7. May have a social, political or ideological impact on society during the lifetime of the author or afterward.
8. Does not fall into the traps of “pulp” fiction such as clichéd or derivative descriptions and plot devices, or sentimentality rather than “earned” emotion.
9. Is intended by the author to communicate in an artistic manner.
10. Is universal in its appeal (i.e., the themes and insights are not only accessible to one culture or time period).

Standing on Merit: The Role of Quality and Choice in Student Reading  
Barry Gilmore

Lausanne Collegiate School

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