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Fake Characters: Real Suffering

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Fake Characters: Real Suffering

Writing Process

In this paper, I was asked to describe positive or negative literacy sponsors I have encountered in my life.

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Brian Callahan

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Fake Characters: Real Suffering

As an English teacher, you probably would be appalled if you knew the last time I read a book for pleasure. I would never describe myself as an avid reader at any point in my life, but I have become exponentially less interested in reading and writing. I am slowly starting to disdain the mere sight of dry ink. I was never a bookworm, but I used to read for fun on occasion. It begged the question, “How did I get to this point?” What negative sponsors have driven me away from literary activities? I can identify three negative literary sponsors in my life: the fiction genre, the novel *Catcher in the Rye*, and my high school British Literature class.

My first negative literary sponsor may be shocking to some. I despise reading fiction that is not somewhat based in reality. My brother claims that I do not like to read fiction because I do not have a vivid imagination or sense of adventure. Whatever the case may be, I do not like reading about fictitious wizards, talking lions, or anything of the sort. Even as a kid my favorite books were non-fiction. I used to love reading this short series of books that would describe an animal’s habitat, diet, special skills, and compare the animal to humans. I was never the type to care whether the fake Harry Potter found the last fake Horcrux and saved the fake Hogwarts from the non-existent Voldemort. These books just seemed like endless pages upon pages of characterization followed by the author trying to shove their moral code down my throat.

Unfortunately for me, schools tend to make their students read fiction, as they believe it will

spark a love of reading in them. As a result, I have read more fiction than I would like to for one lifetime. I would have much rather read something tethered to reality about the fascinating birds known as cape gannets. The cape gannets are a bird that flies until it sees a grouping of fish and ambushes their prey by diving at 60mph into the water. Once in the water these majestic creatures are nimble enough to chase down a sardine for thirty to forty-five seconds. With that amount of diversity of life and all the other amazing mysteries of this world, why would I want to invest in false realities? Every time I read fiction it seemed like a waste of my time. I was never going to see a griffin flying overhead or meet someone in the lineage of Aslan. My life is too short to fill my mind with useless information. These bad experiences with fictional literature started to pile up and diminish my willingness to read or give books a chance. That is why the fiction genre has contributed to my loathing of reading.

The second negative influence on my literary progression would be the novel *Catcher in the Rye*. As I have stated, fiction in general is a negative literary sponsor of mine, but this book deserves its own paragraph. I was forced to read this piece of fiction in sophomore year English class. As a class we spent an entire month on this book; reading it, analyzing it, comparing it to our lives, and going over its societal implications. This book was banned at one point from schools because of its provocative language and its potential to affect students in a negative way. I yearn for those days. I would ban this book without a second thought. No student should have to suffer through 214 pages of what is essentially a list of complaints. I will more likely be able to explain the origins of the universe scientifically than be able to explain why I was forced to read Caulfield's fabricated problems. There is no educational value to trying to comprehend the depressing complaints of an over privileged snob. Holden does not even use colorful language. Half of the words spoken by him are the words "phony" or "goddamn." I could not relate to the

character and did not care about his opinions on innocence lost. This book clearly contributed to ruining an entire month of my English career and has made me less likely to read or write for fun.

The third negative literary sponsor would be my entire junior year of English. In this two semester marathon of torment, I was tossed into the world of British literature. It is not that I did not enjoy the stories of this former colonial power, it is that I did not enjoy having to sieve through the robust language. The language simply did not match up with my vernacular. After Googling half of the words in Hamlet or Macbeth, I will admit I thought the stories were fairly interesting. The act of doing research made it impossible to enjoy, however. I had to read through a piece several times and then it still did not flow easily. I wish we could have read more books like *The Lord of the Flies* or *Frankenstein*. Unfortunately, most of the class was dedicated to sonnets and works from the 16th century. Of course the themes still rings true in today's society, but I just could not enjoy the reading due to the disconnect. This year dragged on for decades, it seemed. The inability of my teacher to incorporate more contemporary British writers has contributed to my lack of interest in reading to this day.

All of my negative literary sponsors have deterred me from reading and writing. My negative sponsors did this by creating bad experiences with written texts. My negative sponsors are all books or texts that I did not enjoy. All of these detrimental influences have a common theme. All of my negative experiences with literary activities were forced upon me by an educational system. It truly should not affect the amount I read and write today, but it does. It reminds me of a problem I had with my alarm clock. At one point in my life I had decided to make my alarm one of my favorite songs. Every day for months, I woke up to the sound of Bob Marley's "Could you be loved?" It was a great way to wake up initially, but soon it became

associated with an abrupt disturbance to my sleep. This song which I found to be fantastic was twisted into something I could not even recognize. I no longer listen to that song voluntarily as it is associated with a repeated bad experience. The same thing happened to literary activities. I have been conditioned to dislike reading and writing. I have seen reading and writing be turned from an exciting new world, with limitless possibilities and knowledge, into a chore.