

Malcom X Reading Response

1. Discuss Malcolm X's motivation and opportunity to improve his literacy. What does he say about how imprisonment played a part?

Malcom X says that imprisonment played a huge part in his motivation and opportunity to improve his literacy. He credits being imprisoned to giving him access to books through the Norfolk Prison Colony school, as well as giving him the time to sit and consume the media. In the text "Learning to Read," Malcom X says that reading made him feel like "months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned." He then says that "up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life." This quote from Malcom X shows how imprisonment played a big role in his motivation and opportunity to improve his literacy.

2. Thinking back to Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy," who/what were Malcolm X's literacy sponsors?

After reading Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy," I now have a better understanding of what a literacy sponsor is and how they contribute to an individual's life. Malcom X had several literacy sponsors, ranging from people and institutions to materials and ideological figures. After Malcom X was imprisoned, he took it upon himself to become learned by reading the dictionary and copying the words onto a tablet on his own. This way, he taught himself a plethora of new words while also improving his fluency in the English language. His fellow inmate, Bimbi, inspired him to begin educating himself since he felt envious of Bimbi's "stock of knowledge." (Malcom X, 1) In this way, Bimbi was one of Malcom X's sponsors by motivating him to study. One of his institutional sponsors was the Norfolk Prison Colony, which provided him with access to books and dictionaries to read, as well as tablets and materials to copy words onto. These materials, like the dictionary and books, were a direct literacy sponsor, given that he was able to learn the information he desired through them. Finally, his "ideological" sponsor was Elijah Muhammad, who inspired what Malcom X studied. Muhammed's teachings of Islamic ideology helped Malcom X to understand that history had been "whitened," directing him to seek specific books with topics such as slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination. He was also driven to improve his literacy so that he would be able to write letters to Elijah Muhammad; he detailed that his English was not "even functional" (Malcom X, 1) before he began his journey of obtaining knowledge.

3. Does Malcolm X explain any cases of misappropriation/re-appropriation?

Malcom X indirectly addresses the ideas of misappropriation and re-appropriation throughout "Learning the Read." He describes that the history of black people has been misrepresented by white-dominated institutions. He goes on to say that these white-dominated institutions misappropriated knowledge to further black oppression and limited the distribution of knowledge surrounding black contributions to serve their white counterparts. By educating himself, Malcom X re-appropriates that knowledge, effectively reclaiming intellectual power and transforming the misused and buried history into a tool to empower himself.

4. What stood out to you most in this reading? What do you think is the most important idea of this excerpt from his autobiography?

The thing that stood out to me most in this reading is his mindset and perspective on life. Malcom X, after being imprisoned, decided to use his time to better himself rather than allowing his circumstances to consume him. When I think of my own life, I see many obstacles that I have had to overcome through mindset adjustments. Making these adjustments was far from easy, often requiring me to really dig deep personally and alter core things about myself to be successful. This idea of perspective being the most important power is heavily presented throughout this writing. He even details that being imprisoned gave him the time and the resources to become learned and better himself as a literate individual. I believe that it takes a lot of mental toughness and bravery to be able to shift your mindset like that, which is something that I see as a genuine main idea from his autobiography.