



# I Hear America Reading: Why We Read - What We Read

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"In an era of decreasing commitment to literacy . . . it is no surprise that most students, too, are bypassing books." So wrote English teacher Jim Burke in a seminal letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle*-seminal because of the astounding response that ensued when he invited readers to "write to my high school students about your experiences with books, perhaps telling them what role books and literature have played in your life." More than one thousand pages of letters came pouring in. The best are collected in this funny, poignant, and inspiring book.

As poet Muriel Rukeyser wrote, "Our lives are not made up of atoms. They are made of stories," and here we find plenty of them-stories from librarians and celebrities, nuns and felons, cattle ranchers and artists, second graders and septuagenarians. Through their experiences, we become enveloped in a rich tapestry of life. And isn't that the miracle of reading itself, its ability to inspire us across the full spectrum of humanity?

Each letter is preceded by an insightful quote from a famous person musing on the power of books. The appendixes feature extensive lists of recommended books for all types of readers, including lists broken into categories like "Ten Books We Should All Read Before Childhood Ends" and "Ten Books a Teenage Boy Would Want to Read."

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