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How to Become a Better Reader and Thinker

The chances are that you are not as good a reader as you should be to do well in college. If so, it's not surprising. You live in a culture where people watch an average of *over seven hours of television every day!!!* All that passive viewing does not allow much time for reading. Reading is a skill that must be actively practiced. The simple fact is that people who do not read very often are not likely to be strong readers.

- How much TV do you guess you watch on an average day? _____

Another reason besides TV for not reading much is that you may have a lot of responsibilities. You may be going to school and working at the same time, and you may have a lot of family duties as well. Given a hectic schedule, you're not going to have much time to read. When you do have free time, you're exhausted, and it's easier to turn on the TV than to open up a book.

- Do you do any regular reading (for example, a daily newspaper, weekly magazines, occasional novels)? _____
- When are you most likely to do your reading? _____

A third reason for not reading is that school may have caused you to associate reading with worksheets and drills and book reports and test scores. Experts agree that many schools have not done a good job of helping students discover the pleasures and rewards of reading. If reading was an unpleasant experience in school, you may have concluded that reading in general is not for you.

- Do you think that school made you dislike reading, rather than enjoy it?

Here are three final questions to ask yourself:

- Do you feel that perhaps you don't need a reading course, since you "already know how to read"? _____
- If you had a choice, would you be taking a reading course? (It's okay to be honest.) _____
- Do you think that a bit of speed reading may be all you need? _____

Chances are that you don't need to read *faster* as much as you need to read *smarter*. And it's a safe bet that if you don't read much, you can benefit enormously from the reading course in which you are using this book.

One goal of the book is to help you become a better reader. You will learn and practice ten key reading comprehension skills. As a result, you'll be better able to read and understand the many materials in your other college courses. The skills in this book have direct and practical value: they can help you perform better and more quickly—giving you an edge for success—in all of your college work.

The book is also concerned with helping you become a stronger thinker, a person able not just to *understand* what is read but to *analyze* and *evaluate* it as well. In fact, reading and thinking are closely related skills, and practice in thoughtful reading will also strengthen your ability to think clearly and logically. To find out just how the book will help you achieve these goals, read the next several pages and do the brief activities as well. The activities are easily completed and will give you a quick, helpful overview of the book.

How the Book Is Organized

The book is organized into six parts:

Introduction (pages 1–19)

In addition to this first section, "How to Become a Better Reader and Thinker," which will give you a good sense of the book, there are three other parts to the introduction. The second part, "Some Quick Study Tips," presents four hints that can make you a better student. If I had time to say just four things to incoming college students based on my thirty years of teaching experience, these are the things I would say. Turn to page 10 and then write, below, the second of these tips:

There is also a third section titled “Notes on Vocabulary in Context,” which will review the importance of using context clues to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. And finally, there is a section titled “A Reading Challenge,” which will give you a chance to earn some free books.

Part One: Ten Steps to Advanced Reading Skills (pages 21–408)

To help you become a more effective reader and thinker, this book presents a series of ten key reading skills. They are listed in the table of contents on pages vii and viii. Turn to those pages to fill in the skills missing below:

- 1 Main Ideas
- 2 _____
- 3 Implied Main Ideas
- 4 Relationships I
- 5 _____
- 6 Inferences
- 7 Purpose and Tone
- 8 _____
- 9 Critical Reading
- 10 Active Reading and Study

Each chapter is developed in the same way:

First of all, clear explanations and examples help you *understand* each skill. Practices then give you the “hands-on” experience needed to *learn* the skill.

- How many practices are there for the first chapter, “Main Ideas” (pages 23–62)? _____

Closing each chapter are two review tests. The first review test provides a check of the information presented in the chapter.

- On which page is the first review test for “Main Ideas”? _____

The second review test consists of a story, essay, or textbook selection that both gets you reading and gives you practice in the skill learned in the chapter as well as skills learned in previous chapters.

- What is the title of the reading selection in the “Main Ideas” chapter?

Following each chapter are six mastery tests which gradually increase in difficulty.

- On what pages are the mastery tests for the “Main Ideas” chapter? _____

The tests are on tear-out pages and so can be easily removed and handed in to your instructor. So that you can track your progress, there is a score box at the top of each test. Your score can also be entered into the “Reading Performance Chart” on the inside back cover of the book.

Part Two: Ten Reading Selections (pages 409–533)

The ten reading selections that make up Part Two are followed by activities that give you practice in all the skills studied in Part One. Each reading begins in the same way. Look, for example, at “Understand Your Nervousness,” which starts on page 411. What are the headings of the two sections that come before the reading itself?

- _____
- _____

Note that the vocabulary words in “Words to Watch” are followed by the numbers of the paragraphs in which the words appear. Look at the first page of “Understand Your Nervousness” and explain how each vocabulary word is marked in the reading itself.

- _____

Activities Following Each Reading Selection

After each selection, there are three kinds of activities to improve the reading and thinking skills you learned in Part One of the book.

- 1 The first activity consists of **reading comprehension questions**—questions involving vocabulary in context, main ideas (including implied main ideas and the central point), supporting details, relationships, inferences, purpose and tone, argument, fact and opinion, propaganda devices, and logical thinking.
 - Look at the reading comprehension questions for “Understand Your Nervousness” on pages 415–419. Note that the questions are labeled so you know which skill you are practicing in each case. How many questions deal with understanding vocabulary in context? _____
 - How many questions deal with critical reading? _____

- 2 The second activity involves **outlining, summarizing, or taking study notes**. Each of these activities will sharpen your ability to get to the heart of a piece and to think logically and clearly about what you read.
- What kind of activity is provided for “Understand Your Nervousness” on pages 420–421? _____
 - What kind of activity is provided for the reading titled “In My Day” on pages 519–520? _____
- 3 The third activity consists of **discussion questions**. These questions provide a chance for you to deepen your understanding of each selection.
- How many discussion questions are there for “Understand Your Nervousness” (page 422)—and indeed for every other reading?

Part Three: Relationships and Combined-Skills Tests (pages 535–606)

The first chapter in Part Three contains three tests that provide additional practice with the relationships you studied in Chapters 4 and 5.

- How many items are in each test? _____

The second chapter in Part Three consists of short passages that give you practice in all the reading skills taught in the book.

- How many such tests are there in all? _____

Part Four: Readings in Science and Mathematics (pages 607–628)

This part of the book presents tips that will help you do well in your science and math courses. It also contains a sample chapter in each of these fields.

- What is the title of the selection from a science textbook?

Appendixes (pages 629–650)

Following Part Four are appendixes that include a pronunciation guide, a limited answer key, and writing assignments for all twenty of the reading selections in the book. Reading and writing are closely connected skills, and writing practice will improve your ability to read closely and to think carefully.

Helpful Features of the Book

- 1 The book centers on *what you really need to know* to become a better reader and thinker. It presents ten key comprehension skills and explains the most important points about each one.
- 2 The book gives you *lots of practice*. We seldom learn a skill only by hearing or reading about it; we make it part of us by repeated practice. There are, then, numerous activities in the text. They are not “busywork,” but carefully designed materials that should help you truly learn each skill.

Notice that after you learn each skill in Part One, you progress to review tests and mastery tests that enable you to apply the skill. And as you move from one skill to the next, the reading selections help you practice and reinforce the skills already learned.

- 3 The selections throughout the book are *lively and appealing*. Dull and unvaried readings work against learning, so subjects have been carefully chosen for their high interest level. Almost all of the selections here are good examples of how what we read can capture our attention. For instance, if you, like many Americans, have some sleep problems, you will probably read with great interest the article from *Time* magazine on “Getting a Good Night’s Sleep” (page 46). Or look at the textbook selection on page 385; its title, “Personal Conflict Styles,” may seem unpromising, but you will be intrigued to compare the way you react to conflict with how other people react. Or read “A Civil War Soldier’s Letter to His Wife” on page 502 and try not to shake your head and shed a tear at the heartbreak of war.
- 4 The readings include *thirteen selections from college textbooks*. Therefore, you will be practicing on materials very much like those in your other courses. Doing so will increase your chances of transferring what you learn in your reading class to your other college courses.

How to Use the Book

- 1 A good way to proceed is to read and review the explanations and examples in a given chapter in Part One until you feel you understand the ideas presented. Then carefully work through the practices. As you finish each one, check your answers with the “Limited Answer Key” that starts on page 645.

For your own sake, *don't just copy in the answers without trying to do the practices!* The only way to learn a skill is to practice it first and then use the answer key to give yourself feedback. Also, take whatever time is needed to figure out just why you got some answers wrong. By using the answer key to help teach yourself the skills, you will prepare yourself for the review and mastery tests at the end of each chapter as well as the other reading tests in the book. Your instructor can supply you with answers to those tests.

If you have trouble catching on to a particular skill, stick with it. In time, you will learn each of the ten skills.

- 2 Read the selections first with the intent of simply enjoying them. There will be time afterward for rereading each selection and using it to develop your comprehension skills.
- 3 Keep track of your progress. Fill in the charts at the end of each chapter in Part One and each reading in Part Two. And in the “Reading Performance Chart” on the inside back cover, enter your scores for all of the review and mastery tests as well as the reading selections. These scores can give you a good view of your overall performance as you work through the book.

In summary, *Ten Steps to Advanced Reading* has been designed to interest and benefit you as much as possible. Its format is straightforward, its explanations are clear, its readings are appealing, and its many practices will help you learn through doing. *It is a book that has been created to reward effort*, and if you provide that effort, you will make yourself a better reader and a stronger thinker. I wish you success.

John Langan

2 Some Quick Study Tips

While it's not my purpose in this book to teach study skills, I do want to give you four quick hints that can make you a better student. The hints are based on my thirty years of experience working with first-year college students and teaching reading and study skills.

TIP 1 The most important steps you can take to succeed in school are to *go to every class and take a lot of notes*. If you don't go to class, or you go but just sit there without taking notes, chances are you're heading for a heap of trouble.

TIP 2 Let me ask you a question: Which is more important—learning how to read a textbook or learning how to read your professor? Write your answer here:

You may be surprised at the answer: What is far more important is learning how to read your professor—to understand what he or she expects you to learn in the course and to know for tests.

I remember becoming a good student in college only after I learned the truth of this statement. And I have interviewed hundreds of today's students who have said the same thing. Let me quote just one of them:

You absolutely have to be in class. Then you learn how to read the teacher and to know what he or she is going to want on tests. You could read an entire textbook, but that wouldn't be as good as being in class and writing down a teacher's understanding of ideas.

TIP 3 Many teachers base their tests mainly on the ideas they present in class. But when you have to learn a textbook chapter, do the following:

First, read the first and last few paragraphs of the chapter; they may give you a good overview of what the chapter is about.

Second, as you read the chapter, look for and mark off definitions of key terms and examples of those definitions.

Third, as you read the chapter, number any lists of items; if there are series of points and you number them *1, 2, 3*, and so on, it will be easier to understand and remember them.

Fourth, after you've read the chapter, take notes on the most important material and test yourself on those notes until you can say them to yourself without looking at them.



TIP 4 Here's another question: **Are you an organized person?** Do you get out of bed on time, do you get to places on time, do you keep up with school work, do you allow time to study for tests and write papers?

If you are *not* an organized person, you're going to have trouble in school. Here are three steps to take to control your time:

First, pay close attention to the course outline, or *syllabus*, your instructors will probably pass out at the start of a semester. Chances are that syllabus will give you the dates of exams and tell you when papers or reports are due.

Second, move all those dates onto a *large monthly calendar*—a calendar that has a good-sized block of white space for each date. Hang the calendar in a place where you'll be sure to see it every day—perhaps above your desk or on a bedroom wall.

Third, buy a small notebook and write down every day a “*to do*” list of things that need to get done that day. Decide which items are most important, and focus on them first. (If you have classes that day, going to those classes will be “A” priority items.) Carry your list with you during the day, referring to it every so often and checking off items as you complete them.

Questions

1. Of the four hints listed above, which is the most important one for you? Why?
2. Which hint is the second most important for you, and why?
3. You may not realize just how quickly new information can be forgotten. For example, how much class material do you think most people forget in just two weeks? Check (✓) the answer you think is correct.

___ 20 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 40 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 60 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 80 percent is forgotten within two weeks

The truth is that within two weeks most people forget almost 80 percent of what they have heard! Given that fact, what should you be sure to do in all your classes?

3

Notes on Vocabulary in Context

In this advanced reading skills book, there is no separate chapter on the skill of understanding vocabulary in context. Instead, this section will review the skill, and many of the readings in the book will include vocabulary-in-context questions.

Understanding vocabulary in context is an inference skill that most of us learn in the course of reading. For example, if you were asked to define the words *hyperbole*, *querulous*, and *surreptitious*, you might have some difficulty. On the other hand, if you saw these words in sentences, you might be able to infer their meanings by looking at the other words in the sentence.

See if you can define the words in *italics* in the three sentences below. In the space provided, write the letter of the meaning you think is correct in each case.

____ Marcella uses a lot of *hyperbole* to express herself: a restaurant is never just “good”—it’s “the most fabulous food in the universe”; her boyfriend isn’t just “good-looking”—he’s “divine beyond belief.”

Hyperbole (hī-pûr'bə-lē) means

- A. overstatement. B. compliment. C. accuracy.

____ People who work in the complaint department of a store must get used to dealing with lots of *querulous* customers.

Querulous (kwër'ə-ləs) means

- A. shaky. B. dishonest. C. dissatisfied.

____ Students naturally want to know what will be covered on a test. Instead of trying to find out by *surreptitious* means, it is often better to simply ask the instructor a direct question.

Surreptitious (sûr'əp-tîsh'əs) means

- A. straightforward. B. useless. C. secret.

In each sentence above, the *context*—the words surrounding the unfamiliar word—provides clues to the word’s meaning. You may have guessed from the context that *hyperbole* means “overstatement,” that *querulous* means “dissatisfied,” and that *surreptitious* means “secret.”

Using context clues to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words will help you save time when reading. You will not have to stop to look up words in the dictionary. (Of course, you won't always be able to understand a word from its context, so you should always have a dictionary nearby as you read.)

Types Of Context Clues

There are four common types of context clues:

- 1 Examples
- 2 Synonyms
- 3 Antonyms
- 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage

Following are brief practices that will give you a sense of each type of clue.

1 Examples

If you are given **examples** that relate to an unknown word, you can often figure out its meaning. For instance, note the examples in the sentence “Marcella uses a lot of *hyperbole* to express herself: a restaurant is never just ‘good’—it’s ‘the most fabulous food in the universe’; her boyfriend isn’t just ‘good-looking’—he’s ‘divine beyond belief.’” The examples help you figure out that the word *hyperbole* means “overstatement.”

Now read the items that follow. An *italicized* word in each sentence is followed by examples that serve as context clues for that word. These examples, which are in **boldfaced** type, will help you figure out the meaning of each word. On the answer line, write the letter of each meaning you think is correct.

Note that examples are often introduced with signal words and phrases like *for example*, *for instance*, *including*, and *such as*.

- _____ 1. Jean is a difficult roommate because her moods are so *volatile*. **One day she’s on top of the world; the next day she’s in the depths of despair.**

Volatile (vŏl’ə-tl) means

- A. insensitive. B. indirect. C. changeable.

- _____ 2. The boss, a *parsimonious* man, **keeps the office lights dimmed, frowns upon coffee breaks, and seldom turns on the heating or air conditioning.**

Parsimonious (pär’si-mŏ’nē-əs) means

- A. mischievous. B. stingy. C. moody.

_____ 3. My father has a *voracious* appetite for news. **He gets two morning papers, listens to an “all news” program in the car, and watches CNN every night.**

Voracious (vô-rā'shəs) means

- A. all-consuming. B. small. C. unconcerned.

In the first sentence, the examples show that *volatile* means “changeable.” In the second sentence, the examples show that *parsimonious* means “stingy.” Finally, the examples in the third sentence indicate that a *voracious* appetite is an “all-consuming” one.

2 Synonyms

Context clues are often found in the form of **synonyms**: one or more words that mean the same or almost the same as the unknown word. In the sentence “People who work in the complaint department of a store must get used to dealing with lots of querulous customers,” the word *complaint* suggests that *querulous* must mean “complaining” or “dissatisfied.” A synonym may appear anywhere in a sentence as a restatement of the meaning of the unknown word.

Each of the following items includes a word or phrase that is a synonym of the italicized word. Underline the synonym for each italicized word. Then, on the answer line, write the letter of each meaning you think is correct.

_____ 1. The heat wave *enervated* the kids. They were too tired to play outside.

Enervated (ĕn'ər-vā'tĭd) means

- A. frightened. B. exhausted. C. awakened.

_____ 2. Children may believe they are the only ones who are happy to see summer vacation arrive, but their teachers feel *exuberant* also.

Exuberant (ĭg-zōō'bər-ənt) means

- A. fearful. B. bored. C. overjoyed.

_____ 3. Larry always becomes *morose* when he drinks. Since alcohol makes him so dreary and blue, you'd think he'd give it up.

Morose (mə'rōs) means

- A. confused. B. frantic. C. gloomy.

You should have underlined *tired* as a synonym for *enervated*, *happy* as a synonym for *exuberant*, and *dreary and blue* as synonyms for *morose*. These synonym clues tell you that *enervated* means “exhausted,” *exuberant* means “overjoyed,” and *morose* means “gloomy.”

3 Antonyms

Antonyms—words and phrases that mean the opposite of a word—are also useful as context clues. Antonyms are sometimes signaled by words and phrases such as *however*, *but*, *yet*, *on the other hand*, and *in contrast*. In the sentences “Students naturally want to know what will be covered on a test. Instead of trying to find out by *surreptitious* means, it is often better to simply ask the instructor a direct question,” the antonym *direct* helps you figure out the meaning of *surreptitious*.

In each of the following sentences, underline the word or phrase that means the *opposite* of the italicized word. Then, on the answer line, write the letter of the meaning of the italicized word.

_____ 1. Who says that cats and dogs are enemies? Our dog and two cats live together in the most *amicable* way.

Amicable (əm'ī-kə-bəl) means

- A. hostile. B. friendly. C. cute.

_____ 2. I enjoyed the speaker's easygoing, *colloquial* style. She made the topic more interesting than a stiff, formal speaker could have done.

Colloquial (kə-lō'kwē-əl) means

- A. deceptive. B. unclear. C. informal.

_____ 3. The two women who were waiting to hear the results of their mammograms were quite different. One was a bundle of nerves while the other seemed quite *placid*.

Placid (plās'īd) means

- A. tense. B. untroubled. C. sad.

In the first sentence, the opposite of *amicable* creatures is *enemies*; thus *amicable* means “friendly.” In the second sentence, *colloquial* is the opposite of *stiff* and *formal*, so *colloquial* means “informal.” Last, someone who is “a bundle of nerves” is the opposite of someone who is placid, so *placid* means “untroubled.”

4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage

Sometimes it takes a bit more detective work to puzzle out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. In such cases, you must draw conclusions based on the information given.

By considering carefully the general sense of each of the following sentences, see if you can decide what the italicized word means in each case.

_____ 1. The students asked if they could use their notes during the test. They were pleased when the teacher *acquiesced*.

Acquiesced (ăk'wē-ěst') means

- A. consented. B. refused. C. was puzzled.

_____ 2. A person suspected of a crime has the *prerogative* of refusing to answer questions unless his or her lawyer is present.

Prerogative (prĭ-rŏg'ə-tĭv) means

- A. choice. B. duty. C. belief.

_____ 3. An introductory music course in college can *engender* a lifelong love of music.

Engender (ĕn-jĕn'dər) means

- A. endanger. B. complete. C. begin.

The first sentence provides enough evidence for you to guess that *acquiesced* means “consented.” *Prerogative* in the second sentence means “choice.” And *engender* means “begin.” (You may not hit on the exact dictionary definition of a word by using context clues, but you will often be accurate enough to make good sense of what you are reading.)

An Important Point about Textbook Definitions

You don't always have to use context clues or the dictionary to find definitions. Very often, textbook authors provide definitions of important terms. They usually follow a definition with one or more examples to ensure that you understand the word being defined. Moreover, they may set off their definitions in *italic* or **boldfaced** type. When an author takes the time to define and illustrate a word, you can generally assume that the material is important enough to learn.

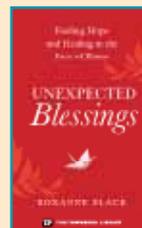
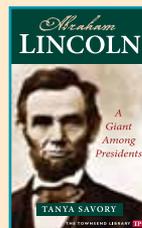
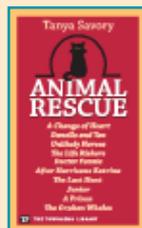
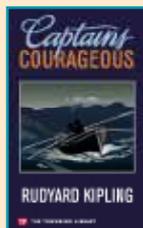
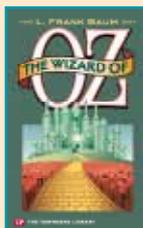
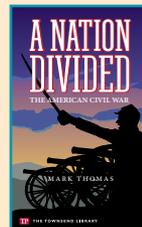
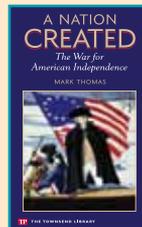
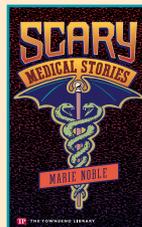
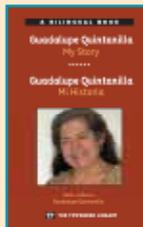
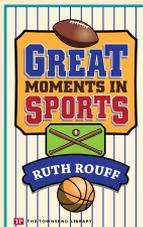
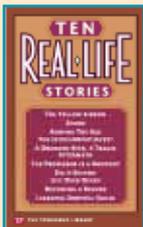
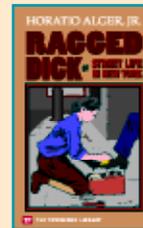
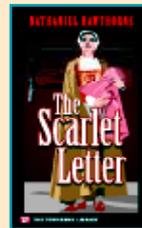
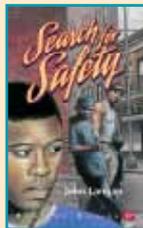
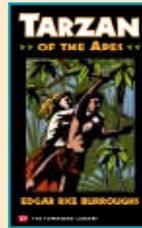
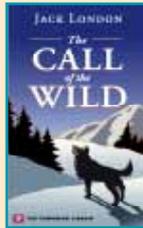
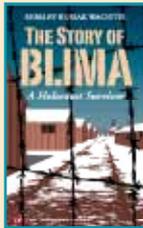
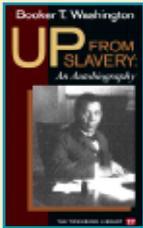
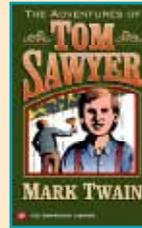
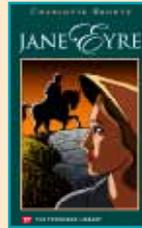
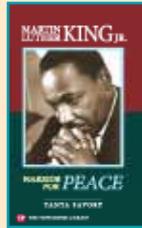
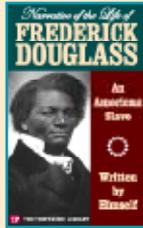
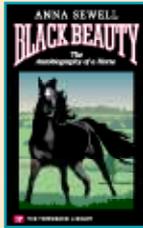
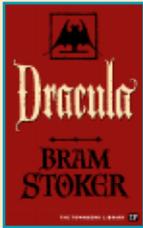
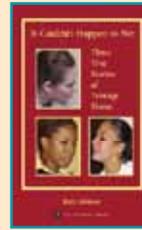
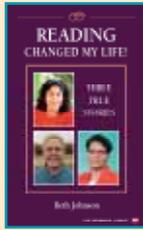
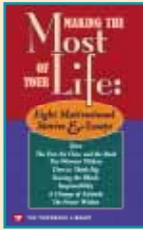
More about textbook definitions and examples appears on pages 178–180 in the “Relationships II” chapter.

4 A Reading Challenge

It's no secret. Reading researchers, teachers and people with common sense everywhere know that the best way to become a better reader is to do a lot of reading. Here's why:

- 1. Reading provides language power.** Research has shown *beyond any question* that frequent reading improves vocabulary, spelling, and reading speed and comprehension, as well as grammar and writing style. If you become a regular reader, all of these language and thinking abilities develop almost automatically!
- 2. Reading increases job power.** In today's world more than ever before, jobs involve the processing of information, with words being the tools of the trade. Studies have found that the better your command of words, the more success you are likely to have. *Nothing will give you a command of words like regular reading.*
- 3. Reading creates human power.** Reading enlarges the mind and the heart. It frees us from the narrow confines of our own experience. Knowing how other people view important matters helps us decide what we ourselves think and feel. Reading also helps us connect with others and realize our shared humanity. Someone once wrote, "We read in order to know that we are not alone." We become less isolated as we share the common experiences, emotions, and thoughts that make us human. We grow more sympathetic and understanding because we realize that others are like us.

With all the above in mind, Townsend Press is going to offer you a reading challenge. Send us \$50. We will then send you the 40 paperback books shown on the next page, with no charge for shipping or handling. Read all 40 books and then email us at cs@townsendpress.com. We'll send you a toll-free phone number you can use to speak to a person on our staff, who will ask you questions to confirm that you've really read the books. If you've read all 40, we'll return your \$50 and award you an Advanced Reading Achievement Certificate.



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