

**APT TO BE APART FROM ART
SOME OF US DON'T LIKE TO READ
BY SHAN SERAFIN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Some of us don't like to read. We shy away from textbooks, Buddhist books, newspapers — any kind of printed matter, from VCR instructions all the way up to that chief culprit of anxiety, the school- assigned novel. Written words can be daunting. I remember my own grade school days. When assigned a novel to read, I'd wait until the eve of a test before opening the book for the first time and wonder, "Is there a video for this?" Of course, there was no video and fatefully I ended up not reading the book. I spent my time researching the back cover and memorizing the index. My exam score reflected such effort.

So here's a question: Outside of class curriculum reading, why read at all?

Many would answer that reading literary works is a very accessible means to experiencing culture. But, then we ask why experience culture? To answer that let's refer to SGI President Ikeda's remark that "The power of culture may be hard to detect at times, but it is a fundamental force since it transforms the human heart."

President Ikeda acknowledges that many of us have difficulty enjoying art. This is a plight common to young people worldwide — the difficulty of settling in, let's say, to read a good book. President Ikeda advises that "to begin by simply enjoying art is most important."

So where do we begin?

If we're going to start anywhere, we might as well start with the best (the consensus best). With books, someone once defined "classics" as works that everybody likes but nobody reads. Funny enough, but sadly true, many folks take for granted what a classic work of art is. A classic has survived the test of time and scrutiny. As Chinese painter Chang Shuhong states, "True works of art never lose their power to move us, even after thousands of years." A classic touches our humanity and does so in a well-executed style. By studying, reading and, most importantly, enjoying the classics, we hone our mental keenness and develop our own unique taste, our aesthetic, as some say. The task then is to discern what works are good.

President Ikeda says: "Probably the best way [to nurture our ability to recognize great art] is to see and hear as many of the generally agreed-upon masterpieces of world art as you can, which will cultivate and refine your sensibilities. You will naturally learn to distinguish good from bad."

For those needing a friendly starting block, we offer a list of great authors that President Ikeda has at one time or another cited in his lectures and discussions. Our list is not comprehensive, nor is it truly representative. It's merely included here for suggestion — a guide to sampling the generally accepted authors of "great works." Maybe this will help make for an enjoyable summer.

A sampling of great **authors** cited by President Ikeda:

Alcott, Louisa May

Borges, Jorge Luis

Cain, Hall

Cousins, Norman

Dante, Alighieri

Dickens, Charles

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Dostoyevksi, Fyodor
Goethe, Wolfgang von
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Pauling, Linus
Sand, Georges
Shakespeare, William
Thoreau, Henry David
Tagore, Rabindrath
Tolstoy, Leo
Toynbee, Arnold
Twain, Mark
Whitman, Walt
Zola, Emile

All quotations from President Ikeda are taken from *Discussions on Youth*, volume 2, chapters 15 and 16.