

rubbing of two sticks together to make a fire, the act of reading, an improbable pedestrian task that leads to heat and light"); analyzes the difference between how men and women read ("there are very few books in which male characters, much less boys, are portrayed as devoted readers"); and cheerfully defends middlebrow literature: Most of those so-called middlebrow readers would have readily admitted that the *Iliad* set a standard that could not be matched by *What Makes Sammy Run?* or *Exodus*. But any reader with common sense would also understand intuitively, immediately, that such comparisons are false, that the uses of reading are vast and variegated and that some of them are not addressed by Homer. The Canon, censorship, and the future of publishing, not to mention that of reading itself, are all subjects Quindlen addresses with intelligence and optimism in a book that may not change your life, but will no doubt remind you of other books that did. --*Alix Wilber*

From Publishers Weekly In this pithy celebration of the power and joys of reading, Quindlen emphasizes that books are not simply a means of imparting knowledge, but also a way to strengthen emotional connectedness, to lessen isolation, to explore alternate realities and to challenge the established order. To these ends much of the book forms a plea for intellectual freedom as well as a personal paean to reading. Quindlen (*One True Thing*) recalls her own early love affair with reading; writes with unabashed fervor of books that shaped her psychosexual maturation (John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, Mary McCarthy's *The Group*); and discusses the books that made her a liberal committed to fighting social injustice (Dickens, the Bible). She compares reading books to intimate friendship?both activities enable us to deconstruct the underpinnings of interpersonal problems and relationships. Her analysis of the limitations of the computer screen is another rebuttal of those who predict the imminent demise of the book. In order to further inspire potential readers, she includes her own admittedly "arbitrary and capricious" reading lists? "The 10 books I would save in a fire," "10 modern novels that made me proud to be a writer," "10 books that will help a teenager feel more human" and various other categories. But most of all, like the columns she used to write for the *New York Times*, this essay is tart, smart, full of quirky insights, lapidary and a pleasure to read. (Sept.) FYI: This is the latest in Ballantine's Library of Contemporary Thought. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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