

I just became passé

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A week after her students left for the summer, Ms. McNeill boxed up the class sets of "To Kill a Mockingbird," along with "Diary of Anne Frank" and "The Giver" by Lois Lowry, keeping just three copies of each for her collection. She carted the rest to the English department storeroom.

This is the concluding paragraph of a lengthy front-page article in today's NY Times, profiling a teacher who has decided to let students (7th and 8th grade) choose their own books to read instead of the assigned literature she had used for years.

At least I'm in very good company, boxed up in that storeroom!

It is hardly a new concept, or a recent revelation, that kids don't respond well to much of the required reading of the past. I remember sitting down with a grandson, 14 at the time, who was about to give up on *A Tale of Two Cities* which he was supposed to read during a school vacation, and reading it aloud with him to see if that would help. Problem was, I could see exactly why he was feeling so negative. The book really had nothing to say to him at that time in his life.

Wrestling with the teaching of literature and trying to create lifelong readers has been an ongoing struggle for teachers. I'm a little troubled by the NYT presenting this one teacher's method as a wonderfully innovative solution—some of her students, she points out, are choosing to read *Captain Underpants*—but it does seem to me a sensible approach if a skilled teacher can combine such self-selection with an intelligent introduction to fine literature. A little asparagus if you want dessert.

Ironically, an essay on the last page of the book review section of the same NYT describes the writer's eighth-grade daughter announcing that "To Kill a Mockingbird" was one of the best books she'd ever read. I do hope Harper Lee doesn't remain closed up in that storeroom. Or Anne Frank for that matter.

Even if I have to be in there all alone.

Tags: Untagged