



What kind of reader are you?

We all have that sense of community when talking about reading, that we are among Our People when we see someone else toting a book, lined up at the checkout desk, discussing their crowded shelves, and generally looking like a reader. But readers fall into a number of different categories. See where you fall in these broad categories.

The Non-fiction Reader: No fiction for you! You freely embrace a bit of a sense of superiority in only reading “real” stuff. Lots of genres are included in this and, much as a large family can fuss among itself endlessly, values are attached depending on which of these genres you read. People who cannot get enough biographies and memoirs feel a deep connection to often-famous people and their motivations, while others read academic histories absorbing details of wars or the chain of royal families. Everyone – with some justification – feels smarter. But those who read a biography of Ulysses S. Grant feel quite a bit smarter than those who read the Keith Richards memoir – despite the fact Keith Richards is, arguably, a lot more entertaining.

All people in this category are at home on the library’s second floor.

The Literary Reader: These folks can often be defined as canonical readers. The literary canon is nothing more than a loose affiliation of what college professors decide is worth teaching and those who publish anthologies determine is worth selling. Seriously, that’s what it is. Much as Humpty Dumpty says to Alice, “A word means what I choose it to mean,” it’s a canonical work if my teaching colleagues say it is. That being said, murder mysteries and hilarious books galore have been written about passionate fights over the canon.

“Real Literature,” however, has some standards such as: a book must reward re-reading, transcend the age in which it was written, and possess the harder to define artistic merits of being written by a great writer who only needs to produce one great book to be in that category – an example being Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The writer is great because she wrote a great book – kind of a tautology. The fun and the trick with this kind of contemporary reading is catching it when it’s published and anticipating its staying power. But our descendants will decide.

The Popular Lit Reader: This general category, like the other categories, encompasses big genres such as Historical Fiction, Mystery and Suspense, that potentially debatable category sometimes called Chick Lit (really, I have to do a column just on that one day; it’s a “know it

when you see it” kind of deal), Romance, and intriguing human relationship stories. Spy novels are a thing unto themselves, some fitting into the Real Literature Category like LeCarre, others here. Popular lit books, as the title says, are the most popular at the library. (You can stay on the first floor.)

Once again, just because this is your category doesn’t mean you hold parts of this category in high regard. Those with a disdain for Historical Fiction might say, “Pick! Write a history or write a work of fiction, but don’t make me look it up.” Those who don’t like Suspense might say, “I read for pleasure and scaring the wits out of myself isn’t fun,” while others say, “Scaring the wits out of myself is great. Please. Hit me again.” Chick Lit readers, as Madonna once (or twice) said, just want to have fun.

The Specific Reference Reader reads to learn something particular – how to plant a raised vegetable garden, seeking Kondo’s help in sparking joy through organization, or how to feed the new bird you’re seeing in your yard. How well a book does this determines how good it is. (You should head right on upstairs, too.)

We all, of course, cross categories, but we also know which one feels like home. And this is only Step One in considering what kind of reader you are. Stay tuned one of these weeks for not just what you read but how you read it.

See you at the Library!

Upcoming Events: The public is invited to attend the dedication of an outdoor installation at the library in memory of Helen Olivier this Friday, August 2, at 11:00 a.m. Light refreshments will be served. Please keep track of our Calendar on the website so you don’t miss a thing.