

## What about Research: How to be "Well Read"

Susan B. Epstein

"The great end of education is to discipline rather than to furnish the mind; to train it to the use of its own powers, rather than fill it with the accumulation of others."

Tyrone Edwards

To be well-read is much like the idea that Edwards describes—to train the mind to use its own powers. In parliamentary debate, the ability of the debater to use information that has been read and create cases is the essence of the well-rounded, educated individual. There are a number of different things a debater needs to read in order to be "well read." The editors of The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy reason that, "to a large extent this common knowledge or collective memory allows people to communicate, to work together, and to live together." In the case of the debate community, it also allows us to debate together.

Parliamentary debate has been seen as the "easy form" of debate, requiring little research or preparation beyond that of one's general education. The practice of parliamentary debate suggests that the definition of general education is widely varied across the universities and colleges involved in the event. To that end, I have attempted to summarize, with the help of The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, what it means to be well read in parliamentary debate. It is, in essence, what it takes to be a well-educated, or generally educated member of our society.

Reading for parliamentary debate should include many different subject areas. The well-prepared parliamentary debater should have general understanding of debate and

rhetorical theory, current events, social sciences, hard sciences, liberal arts and humanities, and business and economics.

### Debate and Rhetorical Theory

Any debater should know basic elements of debate and rhetorical theory. There are a number of good textbooks that provide this information. One of the current difficulties in parliamentary debate, is that many of the debaters do not have a rudimentary knowledge or understanding of what an argument is, how to support, defend, and refute arguments. I usually start with a lecture based on Stephen Toulmin's work on analysis of argument. Argumentation and Debate by Austin Freeley is a good example of a basic debate textbook that provides the student with information about case construction, analysis, evidence, reasoning, and logical fallacies. The new edition (ninth) includes a chapter on parliamentary debate, that I would encourage debaters to read, even though it doesn't specifically deal with the rules of the National Parliamentary Debate Association. I give each of my debaters a copy of the rules of NPDA as published in the constitution, and I impress upon them the importance of knowing these rules and guidelines. I also encourage them to read new information, as published in the Parliamentary Debate: The Journal of the National Parliamentary Debate Association.

### Current Events

A general understanding of current events is essential in parliamentary debate. At a recent tournament, I encountered something in an elimination round that I should never see at a tournament: an opposition arguing that they can't respond to a government case because they don't have time to read the newspaper or spend all day watching CNN and

C-SPAN. As I explained on my ballot, a basic understanding of current events is the least that college students engaged in parliamentary debate should have. At a minimum level, students should read a good daily paper. At the University of Southern Colorado, debaters read the New York Times every day. I also encourage them to watch CNN, the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, as well as a network news program. At tournaments, TVs are rarely tuned to anything but CNN.

If a daily newspaper is difficult to accomplish, the evening network news isn't a bad substitute. Other weekly publications cover the news effectively—The Washington Post Weekly provides good coverage of the week's events. Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report are readily available, but I would suggest that one of those publications is enough to provide an overview of current events. Each of those publications covers about the same information, so reading one of the weekly news magazines would be sufficient. For greater depth of information, some monthly magazines could be included in the parliamentary debaters reading list. The World Press Review is an excellent source of international events. I would also recommend The Atlantic and Harper's Magazine as good monthly publications; you will find fewer stories, however they do include more depth of reporting. A good extemp. file could easily double as a reading list for parliamentary debate.

### Social Sciences

In addition to being well-versed in current events, the well-researched and prepared parliamentary debater should have general knowledge in the world of social sciences. Debaters should have knowledge of world and American history. I recommend various classes to my students who need this background. Then, textbooks for these

classes provide the necessary references for reading in these areas. A book that covers world civilization as well as American history would be recommended in preparation for parliamentary debate.

Sociology and psychology are also important for the well-read debater. Again, most colleges and universities can provide appropriate reading and class experiences through their general education programs. A good general textbook that provides an overview of each of these areas would be invaluable for the parliamentary debater. While these areas are currently under-utilized in the preparation of debate cases, I think there is room for expansion of knowledge and information. Certainly a good basic knowledge of psychology could be combined with an understanding of current events to create an interesting and multi-dimensional debate case.

Knowledge of philosophy and world religions should also be included in the well-read debater's library. A textbook for an introduction to philosophy course as well as a comparative or world religions course is invaluable. At the least, debaters should have an overview of the works of philosophers like Plato, Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Descartes, Kierkegaard and the like. They should also have a working knowledge of major movements in philosophy like epistemology, existentialism, utilitarianism, determinism, etc. The theories of John Locke should be required reading, as they are the foundation of American government and civilization.

Familiarity of the tenants of the world's major religions should also be included. Debaters should know the basis and practices of Islam, Buddhism (these two most-practiced religions in the world are largely ignored in American culture). The many forms of Christianity, as well as Judaism, should also be understood by the well-rounded debater.

Political science is another important area of reading and research for the parliamentary debater. Debaters should have knowledge of political systems as well as ideologies. Understanding and debating political issues will go hand in hand with a mastery of current events. Debaters should be able to argue cases that involve communism, capitalism, democracy, monarchy, socialism, and totalitarianism. In addition debaters should understand how and where these political systems are represented around the world. In addition, debaters should be able to defend any political system. The well-prepared parliamentary debater should be able to argue the advantages and disadvantages of any system. It should go without saying that the well-researched parliamentary debater would have a firm grip on American politics and the many influences on American political thought and reality.

### Science and Technology

One area left relatively unexplored in parliamentary debate is science and technology. The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy tells us, "There are two reasons to pursue scientific knowledge: for the sake of the knowledge itself, and for the practical uses of that knowledge." While it's generally true that most debaters come from the fields of social science or liberal arts, it's important in becoming a well-read debater that we have an understanding of the life sciences, medical science, earth science, and technology. There is an excellent book that provides an overview of the sciences that would be an appropriate reference for parliamentary debaters: 1001 Things Everyone Should know about Science, by James Trefil.

In the area of the life sciences, debaters should understand biology, botany, biochemistry and zoology. This would include, but is not limited to understanding of

important theories like the Theory of Evolution and natural selection. The workings of DNA (which, since the O.J. trial falls into the realm of common knowledge), and genetics should also be understood by the well-read debater. A good source on genetics is, Who Should Play God? by Ted Howard and Jeremy Rifkin.

Medical science and life science overlap quite a bit in terms of information, but understanding anatomy and physiology should also be included by the well-read debater. would include in this understanding and familiarity with major diseases, including AIDS, cancer, viruses, etc. Both Western and non-Western medicine should be included in your reading. There are numerous medical books available for the layman, and I would encourage debaters to read one of those.

In the area of earth science, I would include physics, and astronomy. An excellent book for understanding the effect of physics on our lives is Disappearing through the Skylight: Culture and Technology in the Twentieth Century, by O.B. Hardison, Jr. This book examines the way nature, history, language, art, and human evolution interact, (Hardison, 1990). Again, there is a interplay between these areas and current events, in terms of current research, the space program, etc. It is important to understand the theory behind the news, so being well-read in the sciences enables the debater to understand what is happening when s/he reads about space shuttle experiments, etc. Geology, meteorology, and geophysics make up the areas called earth sciences. At issue is understanding the way these naturally occurring events affect human activities.

Technology is very important here, too. Since World War II, technology has become more and more important to our society. From an historical perspective, we can see that we have moved from an agrarian to a technological society, but few of us

understand the nature of that change. While we regularly hear debates on the value of the information super-highway, we rarely hear debates that focus on basic knowledge of how technology works. Of course, this paper wouldn't exist without the use of a computer, but understanding technology should go beyond making hardware perform specific tasks. Additionally, technology affects our lives in ways far beyond that of the internet and computer technology, and it is this aspect of technology that should be included for the well-read debater.

### Liberal Arts and Humanities

Ovid wrote, "a faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character and permits it not to be cruel." Any well-read individual should have knowledge of literature, mythology and folklore, and the fine arts. Classical literature, along with philosophy, has shaped our society. Knowledge of the plots of literary classics is the minimum we should expect the well-read debater to know. A list of appropriate titles and authors could go on forever, so instead, I recommend that you consult one of the many books published that compile lists of the world's greatest books. One such book was edited by William Burroughs, and should be available in your local library or bookstore.

Edith Hamilton's Mythology is an excellent reading source for classical Greek and Roman mythology. This is one of the best known collections in the field and should be read by parliamentary debaters. In our growing multicultural society, it would also be appropriate to read non-Western myths and legends, as well as contemporary myths and legends, like those found in Talking Leaves: Contemporary Native American Short Stories edited by Craig Lesley. All cultures have their own myths, and the more of that kind of reading the debater does, the better prepared s/he is to debate from different perspectives.

The area of fine arts is a little more difficult to describe in terms of its relevance to parliamentary debate. Still, the arts help shape and define the society in which we live, and it is that aspect that makes understanding and familiarity with the arts important in terms of parliamentary debate. The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines fine arts as "all artistic works, including literature, architecture, drama, music, dance, opera, and even up-to-date kinds like television and movies. . . .Many of the images and songs and poems in our shared life are not only fine art but also indispensable symbols of our national existence." For this reason, debaters should know about classical works of art, including painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and television. Again, it is the influence the arts have on our life that make the arts a possible subject for debate.

### Business and Economics

This is another area where understanding theory and practice is influenced by current events. A good source of current events information in this area are periodicals like Business Week, The Economist, and The Wall Street Journal. Economic theory involving the budget deficit, trade, stocks and bonds are important to know in order to understand events affecting society. There are numerous classical texts in economics that should be understood by the well-read debater. I would encourage debaters to read The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money by John Maynard Keynes, and Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith.

Relevant knowledge of business should include management theory, finance, the workings of the stock market, fortune five hundred companies, and technology companies. An overview course like introduction to business or management would provide a textbook that provides the necessary background information.

A general education is the goal of the parliamentary debater. To be well-read is to engage in research for parliamentary debate. The well-prepared parliamentary debater should have general understanding of debate and rhetorical theory, current events, social sciences, hard sciences, liberal arts and humanities, and business and economics. There is a great deal of difference between common knowledge in practice and what should be common knowledge in reality. This essay was an effort to summarize the kinds of knowledge debaters should have in order to be well-read. Attached is a list of titles and authors that are recommended for the well-read debater. This list is not inclusive or complete; it is a work in progress.

## Reading List for Parliamentary Debate

Here are some recommended readings for parliamentary debate:

The Closing of the American Mind. Allen Bloom  
Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know. E.D. Hirsh, History of the Russian Revolution. Leon Trotsky  
The State and Revolution. Nikolai Lenin  
Essays in Sociology. Max Webber  
Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. R.H. Tawney  
Reflections on Violence. George Sorel  
What is War?. Karl Philipp Gottlieb von  
The General Theory of Employment, Interest & Money. J.M. Keynes  
The Moral Sense of Man and Lower Animals. Charles Darwin  
Civilization and its Discontents. Sigmund Freud  
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Edward Gibbon  
The Federalist Papers. Alexander Hamilton, et al  
Alienated Labour. Karl Marx  
The Republic and The Apology. Plato  
Principles of Government. Charles-Louis Montesque  
History of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides  
Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature. Arthur Schopenhauer  
Wealth of Nations. Adam Smith  
Civil Disobedience. Henry David Thoreau  
The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma. Henry Adams  
A Study of History and Civilization on Trial. Arnold Toynbee  
Totemism. Claude Levi-Strauss  
Technological Society. Jacques Ellul  
The Human Condition and The Origin of Totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt  
The Two Sources of Morality and Religion. Henri Bergson  
Science & the Modern World. Process & Reality. Modes of Thought. Alfred North Whitehead  
The Life of Reason. George Santayana  
The Degrees of Knowledge. Freedom in the Modern World. Man and the State. Jacques Martain  
The Nature and Destiny of Man. Reinhold Niebuhr  
The Logic of Scientific Discovery. Conjectures & Refutations. Karl Popper  
The Voices of Silence. Andre Malranx  
Scientific Autobiography. Max Plank  
The Meaning of Relativity. Albert Einstein  
What is Life?. Erwin Schrodinger  
Biological Principles. Joseph Woodger  
Chance and Necessity. Jacques Monad  
The Communist Manifesto. Karl Marx & Friedrich Engles

Disappearing Through the Skylight, O.B. Hardison, Jr.

Future Shock, Alvin Toffler

Understanding Media, Marshall McLuhan

The Death of Common Sense: How Law is Suffocating America, Phillip K. Howard

1001 Things Everyone Should know about Science, James Trefil

Any writings of the following philosophers would be useful, including the works listed here:

Alexis de Tocqueville, The Power of the Majority

Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract.

Thomas Hobbes, Origin of Government

Immanuel Kant, Conscience. First Principles of Morals

John Locke, Of Civil Government

Soren Kierkegaard

Plato

Aristotle

Cicero

Carl Jung

Bertrand Russell

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Martin Heidegger

Jean-Paul Sartre

Edmund Burke

The following literary works would also be appropriate:

1984, George Orwell

Gulliver's Travels, and The Modest Proposal, Jonathan Swift

Seize the Day, Saul Bellow

Catch-22, Joseph Heller

Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

All the King's Men, Robert Perm Warren

Endgame, Samuel Beckett

The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway

Brave New World, Aldous Huxley

Notes from the Underground, Feodor Dostoevsky

The Illiad and The Odyssey, Homer

Candide, Voltaire

Don Quixote, Cervantes

Charles Dickens

James Joyce

Shakespeare (especially the historical plays like "Julius Caesar," "Richard, III," etc.)