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### Reading in Public: Rules & Reactions

by Michael C. Sherrin  
 EDGE Style Contributor  
 Thursday Sep 22, 2005

With the coffee-sipping, café-hanging out culture of today, sitting around is the new cool. Now, as fun as people watching can be, sometimes you just need something to do. Whether at Starbucks, a job interview, the subway or the park, reading a book provides entertainment and reveals an inner layer about you to complete strangers. Think about how you'd view the guy reading Ann Coulter's new trash piece (also, it's a guy reading Ann Coulter). Different books send different messages about you and the right message can affect how you're viewed by an employer or a potential mate.

#### Mainstream Unknowns

Award-winning, critically acclaimed authors write numerous books of excellent quality but lesser stature. From the classy film noir of Raymond Chandler to the crude sexual humor of Anthony Burgess, these kinds of books present someone intelligent but not a snob. Make sure you buy paperback. This makes your book less conspicuous. You don't need a thousand page hardback proclaiming your intelligence (or lack thereof) right on your lap. Now your book has a well-know author but unknown title. This gives you wiggle room in perception. Someone who wants to find someone of intelligence would see an independently-minded individual who they would assume has read the better known books by the same author (whether or not you have). Conversely, if someone is looking for someone less academic, they would look past 'Farewell, My Lovely' when 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' might scare them away.

#### Airplane Paperback

Mostly the Fabio romance novels, these are the trash they're made to be (but a boon for us starving writers). You can finish them in a plane ride and they will never start a conversation. The higher-end toss-aways like Patterson and Grishem at least show you follow pop culture, though you are no connoisseur. If you care what people think about you, don't read these where those people can see you.

#### Critical Acclaim

The key to remember here is that smart people don't just read the classics – they've already read them. Now no one has read all the classics, but if you've read one some arrogant know-it all has, you will not hear the end of it.

Alternatively, classics tread the fine line of being a smarty-pants or a knowledge seeker. If you're reading this for school, then bring a highlighter and notebook. If you want to be seen as that smart, then go all-out.

As for the more current award winners, these work similar to Mainstream Unknowns as those interest in smart books will know smart books. These books are less original, though books don't succumb to being trendy like other aspects of pop culture.

#### Non-Fiction

From biographies to political editorials to self-help books, non-fiction instantly reveals the readers interest and certain aspects of their intelligence. The meanings can be quite obvious. Diet books to biographies of Benjamin Franklin can be surprisingly fun, certainly educational and always provide party fodder conversation. Though more academic books present the same images of arrogance, non-fiction at least reflects your preference instead of the I-desperately-want-to-be-viewed-as-smart-so-I'm-reading-William-Faulkner-on-my-three-day-weekend. Just make sure you 1) like the topic you're reading about and 2) be careful with political books. You don't want to be stopping in Lynchburg, Virginia reading about how vital Stonewall was in the gay rights movement.

#### Graphic Novels

Being a huge comic book fan, I have my biases, though even I rarely read comics in



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these public settings (opting for non-fiction). Nevertheless, even I give in on my subway ride home from the comic book store with the new shipment.

So back to the article. The fastest growing section at your bookstore is the graphic novels. While you may shrug at the thought of reading Spider-Man in your Gucci suit en route to your six-figure salary job. While as a young college student, conversations of super-heroes have more prevalence, someone wishing to be less nerdy may prefer something without spandex.

Graphic novels cover every genre from Blankets by Craig Thompson, a memoir of Thompson's rigid Catholic upbringing and meeting his first love, to 300 by Frank Miller (the author of Sin City), the retelling of the 300 Spartans who prepared a suicide mission against the Peloponnesian army [CHECK]. Another downside, though – graphic novels are big and heavy and not often made for traveling. Still, try reading some. I'm an unbiased journalist.

*A freelance writer and editor, Michael can be contacted at MikeCS83@yahoo.com or through his website at <http://mikecs.95mb.com/>.*

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