

# Book it



The fact is, books are relevant only to young people. There's no point in reading anything serious when you get older, because you're not going anywhere except the grave, and you know it.

That makes older people hypocrites when they start championing books, which I am about to do.

When I was young just last week, all the books in the world were in libraries and each seemed important. And they're still in libraries and bookstores, but now you can locate them in 60 seconds on a computer and order them delivered to your door.

The idea is to get a couple of really good books, read them, and then change your life for the better, or at least feel good for the rest of the day.

But which books?

Those you'll find recommended on [www.readingtrails.com](http://www.readingtrails.com), of course.

This Web site is the brainchild of a genius named Nick Romeo and a friend. Not only is Mr. Romeo physically Godlike and deeply compassionate, but he has an IQ of 460. He's well read and witty, too.

He's also my nephew, but when it comes to reading there's no such thing as nepotism, even though I'm a nepotistic maniac.

Nick and his sister, the genius Lia Romeo (she's a playwright with an IQ of 461 who looks like Botticelli's Venus would have if she'd jogged), have a book coming out from Abrams Image press in a few weeks, called, "11,002 Things To Be Miserable About."

Readingtrails.com is not one of them. It's a place where very smart people will tell you what books they like, and why, and sometimes show you their pictures and tell you what else they do besides read, like garden organically.

Once you locate a book that attracts you, people who have read it and others like it will lay out their reading trails for you. A trail is a series of books that have something in common: Love. War. Death. And variations on those themes: food, art, theology, philosophy, history and politics, poetry and music, chick-lit, Western lit. The South, North, East and West. The earth, sea, wind and sky.

My wife, The News-Press columnist and public radio essayist Amy Bennett Williams (WGCU 90.1 FM Naples and Fort Myers, or WMKO 90.7 FM, Marco), even lays out a couple of trails at [readingtrails.com](http://readingtrails.com) — one about food and one about Florida, with a variety of books in each. (And she really is a genius, so pay attention.)

Better yet, on Mr. Romeo's Web site there are links to companies that will ship you the books in a couple of days, if you want to read.

But why would you, unless you're still young in body or mind?

Here's my problem with book reading. When you get older, nothing you could possibly read is very

serious, anyway. Not if you assume that books are serious the way vitamin pills are serious, or exercise and sex and philanthropy and a night at the symphony are serious.

They can be hugely entertaining or nourishing. But they're just not very serious when you pass 50 or even 10 or 12, depending on where you've lived and what's happened to you.

When you've lived in the world for awhile — kicked a hard rock or touched a hot fire — what's the point of reading Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Virgil, Lucretius, Boethius, Sun Tzu, Confucius, the King James Bible, Buddha's writings, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Defoe, Cervantes, Martin Luther, Donne, Milton, Johnson and Boswell, Locke or Jefferson or Hume, Wordsworth or Coleridge or the Shelleys, Dickens, Darwin, Dickinson, Bronte, George Eliot, Mark Twain, Hawthorne, Stowe, Margaret Fuller, Karl Marx or anybody at all from the 20th or 21st centuries? We've been there and done that.

And what's the point of current events books or non-fiction commentaries by brilliant people like novelists Dave Eggers or Barbara Kingsolver or Joyce Carol Oates, or by Thomas Friedman or John Bowe or a hundred others? Is the point facts — new information?

Books are not ultimately about facts, though, because the fact is, you're alive and a book is not. Life is not about facts, either.

So how does it help you to read when you've experienced privation, catastrophe, despair, discrimination, physical and mental anguish, and unaccountable failure, on the one

hand; or success, good fortune, joy, pleasure, passion, warmth, friendship, love and hope, on the other?

Because you get the best that's been thought and said? Well, that's nice. Somebody can tell you eloquently why chocolate or wine tastes good and rot doesn't. But you already knew that.

A good book then becomes a mirror of the things you already know — many of which you may not want to be reminded of again.

The only exception to all of this is Shakespeare. Go figure, or go read.

Still, literature offers more than most of us have once we've set sail from our youths.

How else can you afford to travel to every corner of the globe or the mind, which "is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven," as Milton said?

You can't. With this economy, you probably can't go anywhere but home for Christmas or Hanukkah.

I once heard the philosopher and didact Mortimer Adler claim that the only reason to read what he called "the great books" the first time, was to read them again later, when you'd lived a little.

So if you haven't, go live a little. Pick any three: Walk across North America, Africa or Europe, or fall in love and remain in that fine country for a decade.

And if you're back, then what are you doing? Are you loafing in a café or the living room or a store lobby or your office, or perched on a toilet with your fists wrapped around this enlightening column? Well get the hell off. Book it, baby.

And go sign on. [Readingtrails.com](http://Readingtrails.com). ■

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**e-green checking** is a secure way to do your banking with no monthly service charge.

- (1) Electronic statement is a requirement of account along with a \$100.00 minimum opening deposit.
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## BONUS!

For every account opened, a donation<sup>(2)</sup> will be made to your choice of one of these e-friendly organizations. Each is focused on preserving Southwest Florida's pristine environment.

### e-friendly organizations

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[www.calusanature.com](http://www.calusanature.com)
- CREW Land & Water Trust  
[www.crewtrust.org](http://www.crewtrust.org)
- CROW  
[www.crowclinic.org](http://www.crowclinic.org)
- "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society  
[www.dingdarlingsociety.org](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org)
- Keep Lee County Beautiful  
[www.klcb.org](http://www.klcb.org)
- PURRE Water Coalition  
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