

“Learning to Read” Malcolm X

Malcolm X, born as Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, was an important leader in the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He was assassinated in Manhattan, NY in 1965 during a speaking engagement, when he was only 39 years old. This is an excerpt from his autobiography, as narrated to Alex Haley, where Malcolm remembers his time in prison.

Vocabulary...

articulate (adj)

emulate (v)

correspondence (n)

feigned (v)

peninsula (n)

atrocities (n)

fugitive (n)

exploitation (n)

meek (adj)

heathen (n)

eloquent (adj)

digressing (v)

Reading Questions...

1. Why does Malcolm X decide he needs to “learn” how to read? How does he go about learning?
2. What kind of books does Malcolm X have access to in prison? Why is this significant?

Discussion Questions...

1. What is the connection between Malcolm X “learning” to read and his increased political involvement? Could this political awakening have happened outside of prison?
2. How does Malcolm X’s Islamic faith impact his time in prison? How does it impact his political beliefs and activism?

Activities and Assignments...

1. In this text, Malcolm X gives a very detailed account of how he “learned” to read, including what he read, when he read it, and how it helped and influenced him. Write your own short narrative about how you learned to read. Think about how it happened, when it happened, where it happened, and who was influential in your learning.
2. Malcolm X was a very complex individual who was not viewed favorably by the US government. As a result, there is a lot of false information surrounding him and his beliefs. Do some research to determine which commonly held ideas are fact and which are fiction.

