

系所別:

英美語文學系

科目:

批判閱讀

Read carefully the short essay by Adrienne Rich.

As if your life depended on it

*You must write, and read, as if your life depended on it. That is not generally taught in school. At most, as if your livelihood depended on it: the next step, the next job, grant, scholarship, professional advancement, fame; no questions asked as to further meanings. And, let's face it, the lesson of the schools for a vast number of children—hence, of readers—is *This is not for you.**

To read as if your life depended on it would mean to let into your reading your beliefs, the swirl of your dreamlife, the physical sensations of your ordinary carnal life; and, simultaneously, to allow what you're reading to pierce the routines, safe and impermeable, in which ordinary carnal life is tracked, charted, channeled. Then, what of the right answers, the so-called multiple-choice examination sheet with the number 2 pencil to mark one choice and one choice only?

To write as if your life depended on it: to write across the chalkboard, putting up there in public words you have dredged, sieved up from dreams, from behind screen memories, out of silence—words you have dreaded and needed in order to know you exist. No, it's too much; you could be laughed out of school, set upon in the schoolyard, they would wait for you after school, they could expel you. The politics of the schoolyard, the power of the gang.

Or, they could ignore you.

To read as if your life depended on it—but what writing can be believed? Isn't all language just manipulation? Maybe the poet has a hidden program—to recruit you to a cause, send you into the streets, to destabilize, through the sensual powers of language, your tested and tried priorities? Rather than succumb, you can learn to inspect the poem at arm's length, through a long and protective viewing tube, as an interesting object, an example of this style or that period. You can take refuge in the idea of "irony." Or you can demand that artists demonstrate loyalty to that or this moral or political or religious or sexual norm, on pain of having books burned, banned, on pain of censorship or prison, on pain of lost public funding.

Or, you can say: "I don't understand poetry."

Choose ONLY ONE of the two topics. (100%)

1. "As if your life depended on it" discusses the conflict between writing and reading on the one hand and schooling on the other. Why does Adrienne Rich think there is such a conflict? How does the school discourage writing and reading? Or, rather, how does the school discourage the kind of reading and writing she has in mind? How would you describe that kind of writing and reading? Why is the school such an unfriendly environment for that kind of reading and writing? What kind of reading and writing does the school seek to foster instead?
2. Consider the concluding sentence and the paragraph that precedes it. In a sense, Rich is suggesting that writing, reading, and schooling are each political. What is politically at stake in the way we read and write? What does the school seek to achieve politically in the way it teaches reading and writing? Why and how does the kind of reading and writing Rich has in mind pose a danger both to the school and to what it seeks to achieve? How does the school protect "you" against it? What is involved in such a "protection"? What is its political agenda?

