

## How I learned to Write by Reading

Reading is not just a fun activity for a writer's spare time; reading is an important tool for writers. I consider it part of my working day, even though I mostly read at night. I may have started writing through storytelling, but I began learning *how* to write by reading (as well as forging ahead to finish that book for my daughter). Oh, I took writing workshops later and learned how to hone what I knew, how to edit, how to decide what to rewrite, and more. But in those early days of writing the draft of my first novel, I kept reading.

AJ Cronin's *The Lady with Carnations* (1978) taught me that I hadn't developed my characters well enough; Michener's *The Source* (1965) disclosed how to take my readers on a journey and to think more about my plot; Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Maypole* (1989) showed me that words can sing. As I wrote her first line in my journal, I sighed at the beauty: *Day came in like Joshua, with ramshorn blasts of sun.*

I took novels apart to see how the structure worked: how many chapters, what was in them and how they ended, where the climax came. As Francine Prose (2006) suggests by the title of her book *Reading Like a Writer*, we have to learn to read like writers, what she describes as 'close reading'. It's a good idea to keep a log or journal of what we read (I also use Goodreads) and do remember to cite who wrote that beautiful quote you wrote in your journal. Ten years later you may forget it wasn't you!

Not only do we learn how to write when we are reading, but our brains are also computing how story works. We think of creative ideas because, as we are reading, our brains relax. I often think of the very way to fix the hole in my current plot when I'm reading a novel with no connection to the story or genre I am writing. Other brain relaxants, like going for a walk, having a shower, listening to music or looking at images, will also give me ideas for fixing plot problems.

This page is from p32 of my writing book called *Riding the Wind: Writing for Children and Young Adults*.