



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Tyro: a beginner in learning; novice.”

-From *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*,
Eleventh Edition

A few months ago, I took the Graduate Record Exam. It had been many years since I took a standardized test and I found studying for it to be intimidating, demoralizing and puzzling. I can't see how the GRE could be much of a predictor of anything, except perhaps how you will do on a standardized test. Having gotten by in life pretty well up to this point, I had to force myself to take it seriously, even as it scared me.

At first, it was the analogies and vocabulary that made me anxious. I carried homemade flashcards everywhere I went. Each morning over my breakfast tea, I went through them, stacking them in two piles: yes, I know them and no, I don't. Now, months later, the only new word I can remember is tyro, and I have yet to slip it into a conversation. Fortunately, though, it did show up on the test.

Then there was the reading comprehension section. I soon realized it was going to be my downfall. It's not that the

passages are boring; many of them are quite interesting. But the idea of reading a passage and then answering questions about it is terrifying to me. I am convinced that no matter what, I am going to misunderstand the author's intent, which is a big deal in GRE tests. The tone, too, is tested and even what the author might have said about something else.

The hardest part of these questions was not panicking. The minute the passage appeared on the screen, my mind stalled. *I don't know!* it tried to tell me before I had even looked at the questions. I had to force myself to follow the tips garnered from reading four GRE test preparation books (checked out of the library) and using the online test preparation materials on the library's website. These, by the way, were great, and I recommend using your library's online test preparation materials for all sorts of tests, like civil service, cosmetology, TOEFL, firefighters, military, LSAT, MCAT and many more.

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The irony of this is that I have felt this way about reading comprehension since I wrote book reports in elementary school. I dreaded writing them because I knew that no matter how much I loved the book, I somehow wasn't going to have the correct answer when it came time to confront questions like: What was the theme of this book? What was the author's intent?

Not too long ago, I had a conversation with a parent in the library about this same topic. I was helping her young son find a book for a book report and she mentioned that he gets very anxious about book reports. He's afraid he'll get the wrong answer, she told me. She and the teacher had explained there is no wrong answer, as long as you support what you say with examples from the text, but it still got to him.

She mentioned she had also disliked book reports and

she didn't actually start reading for enjoyment until she graduated from college. It wasn't until then that she could start to read for pleasure, she said, as opposed to reading for content.

After we talked, I looked around the children's section. There were parents reading to their children and children reading to themselves. Books were everywhere – shelves, where they belonged, but also tables, chairs and carts. I found myself hoping these children would continue to read for enjoyment through their school years and into their adulthood. This experience made me appreciate again the role libraries play in literacy simply by making reading a pleasurable experience.