

Reading Response #1 – *On Impact*

Through his story *On Impact*, Stephen King explains his relationship with writing – the way that it enriches his life and how the process of writing allows him to manage and overcome the issues he faces. Writing serves as an escape for King, as a source of supportive strength in both his everyday life and in the midst of turmoil and strife: “I had been in terrible situations before, and writing had helped me get over them – had helped me to forget myself, at least for a little while” (King 128). He feels that even when his writing seems sluggish, disjointed and stiff, it helps him to adjust, regain his bearings, and work out “a way back to life” (King 129). By sharing his personal experience of how the simple act of writing altered his outlook on the process of recovery after the accident and helped him cope, King acknowledges writing’s importance to and influence over him, its ability to change or improve the way he looks at the events in his life.

Over the course of a lifetime, individuals invariably find themselves in difficult situations, faced with obstacles to overcome or hard decisions to make. Stephen King’s *On Impact* points out that people often come to rely heavily on a central source of energy and inspiration to guide and support them. For King, this role is filled by the act of writing, but each person draws hope and confidence from different activities, pursuits or relationships. *On Impact* is, for this reason, a story that anyone who has struggled to overcome adversity (and drawn strength from their specific passion to do so) can relate to.

After reading *On Impact* and learning of Stephen King’s reliance on writing for stability and support, I began to think about the things I’ve relied on for inspiration and those that have

served as my “emotional reset buttons” when faced with tough moments or stress in life. Sure, some of those things seem rather silly – putting the problem aside temporarily and losing myself in a sport, game, book, or time with friends in hopes of returning later with a clearer head and higher spirits – but they worked remarkably well! The more I think about it, the more I realize that while I’ve slowly gathered new sources of strength, the earliest ones have remained and grown even stronger (I still find that distracting myself with a good workout or an afternoon in the company of my family helps to maintain my sanity and deal with an issue far better than just butting heads with it until one of us crumbles). As I look further ahead, past my undergraduate years towards medical school, residency, and a career as a doctor, I wonder if the things that support and refresh me now will continue to do so. How will that list grow or shrink following changes in what is demanded of me or the events I experience? King’s explanation of how he drew on both internal and external support during his recovery further encourages me, as an aspiring doctor (or even as the patient), to keep in mind that recovery involves both physical and mental healing. It reminds me how important it is to really get to know individuals and those close to them, to learn about what keeps them mentally strong and optimistic even when they face uncertainties and illnesses (whether their own or those of someone close to them).

On a separate note, noticing the differences in the way King’s EMT, doctors and caretakers spoke to him once he was sure to survive made me consider something I hadn’t before. When treating a patient, should I maintain that “everything will be okay” – even if I am uncertain – until either the danger has passed or a horrible outcome is inevitable and must be revealed to the patient or his/her family? Do I speak my mind and let the patient know exactly how good her chances appear at that instant, or do I wait until she’s in the clear before informing her of how lucky she had been (as King’s doctors and the EMT had)? Though I can see reasons

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for both, I find it hard to weigh them against one another properly without any real experience in that kind of situation...

Perhaps my favorite characteristic about King's style of delivery in *On Impact* is that, despite the fact that King is describing an incredibly traumatic event from his life, he manages to infuse his story with dry humor and wit. When King comments that Bryan Smith could very well be "a character out of one of my own novels" (King 122) and – after listing dozens of his debilitating injuries from the impact – labels Smith's estimation of five or six broken bones as "a tad conservative", I couldn't help but chuckle (despite the seriousness of the situation). The fact that King could add a dose of sarcasm to a description of his own near-death experience leads me to appreciate both his skill as an engaging writer and his ability to take himself lightly. 