Many studies have shown that reading promotes students' mental growth, capacity to process information, and ability to understand themselves and the world around them. Good readers become good thinkers and good writers. Success in school and in the workplace depends heavily on the ability to read. In high school classes, students are required to read complex passages and decipher their meanings as part of instruction and assessments. The High School Assessments and countywide finals require students to understand complex questions and highlight the important information contained within a question. Students who take the SAT and Advanced Placement examinations will encounter tests similarly designed to evaluate their critical reading ability, understanding of a variety of vocabulary, and writing skills. In the workplace, employees are expected to understand their tasks based on written information. Therefore, it is important to expect all students to read during the summer. Research strongly suggests that reading, like most skills, improves with practice. Summer reading serves as one measure for determining proficiency of the following MCPS indicator and objective:

**Indicator:** Refine and extend comprehension skills through exposure to a variety of texts, including traditional print and electronic devices.

**Objective:** Read a minimum of 25 self-selected and/or assigned books or book equivalents representing various genres per year.

In order to prepare our students for these challenges both in high school and beyond, English Department members have selected books and created assignments to provide summer reading opportunities for each student. Students will be evaluated on their reading when they return in the fall with common assignments for each grade level.

All students are expected to complete the summer reading assignment for their grade level in the time allotted. Students transferring to Paint Branch High School may complete the assignments for their grade levels on the required reading from their previous schools and submit the assignments to the appropriate teacher on the second day of school.

In addition to reading assignments, students taking Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, Pre-Calculus, and AP Calculus are required to complete math review packets, due on the first day of school to math teachers. These packets will be distributed in math classes at the end of the previous year.

Copies of all summer math and reading assignments will be available in the Guidance Office and in the Main Office. Any questions concerning summer reading assignments or lists should be brought to the student's English teacher.
Grade 11 Summer Reading Assignment

All students entering Grade 11 are required to read one biography, autobiography, or memoir of their choice and complete double-entry journal. Students will also, after reading the "How to annotate" handout, read and annotate two of the articles provided and answer the attached questions. Both assignments are due on the third day of school to your English teacher. Late assignments will be penalized; none will be accepted after Monday, the second week of school. Each assignment is worth 25 pts for a total of 50 pts which will be 5% of your first marking period grade.

Students transferring from another school after August 15th should do the same assignment with the required readings from their former schools. Books should be at an 11th grade reading level and appropriate for school.

All assignments must have a heading which includes the student’s name, grade, the title and author of the book, and English teacher.

**Memoir/Double-Entry Journal**

Students are required to read one memoir. Some suggestions are (find some)... For the memoir, you are required to write a double entry journal with a minimum of 10 responses. Fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise. On the left side of the fold, place a quote from the book which gives insight into the theme or into a character. On the right side, write your response to the quote: question the text, make an outside connection that deals with life experience or make a personal connection. This is not an analysis. This is your dialogue with the text. You will need at least 5 quotes and 5 responses for the text.

**Essay Reading/Annotation**

In the second assignment students are required to read two to three essays. The assignment will be to annotate and answer questions on all articles looking for rhetorical devices. Please follow the guidelines for annotating included in the packet. Following the guidelines, you will find the articles along with a series of questions you will need to answer for each OR all of the articles. Read and follow ALL instructions.
11th Grade Summer Reading
Questions for the Essays

ON-LEVEL AND HONORS
After annotating both articles please answer the following questions:

For the article, “Are Your Jeans Sagging? Go Directly to Jail.”
1) Is the topic of this article still applicable today?

For the article, “Summer Bummer.”
2) Define the term ‘allusion’ and identify three allusions in the article.

For ALL articles:
3) Identify the author’s argument.

4) In two-three sentences, explain if you agree with the author, or not, and why.

5) Identify one use of ethos, pathos, OR logos in each article and explain the
author’s purpose for using that rhetorical appeal.

HONORS ONLY
IN ADDITION TO THE ASSIGNMENT ABOVE, read and annotate, “Learning to
Read and Write” by Frederick Douglass. When you are finished annotating, please
answer the following questions:

1. List the different ways Douglass taught himself to read and write. List also
some other things he learns.

2. The main focus of this excerpt is the process by which Douglass began to
become literate. Who else in the passage undergoes a “learning” process,
and what are the results?

3. How does Douglass appeal to ethos throughout the essay? Be specific and
use quotations.

4. How would you describe Douglass’s writing style in paragraph 6? What is his
tone?

5. Be prepared to discuss and write about the way that you learned to read
when you return to school as 11th graders.
The New York Times
August 30, 2007

Are Your Jeans Sagging? Go Directly to Jail.

By NIKO KOPPEL

JAMARCUS MARSHALL, a 17-year-old high school sophomore in Mansfield, La., believes that no one should be able to tell him how low to wear his jeans. “It’s up to the person who’s wearing the pants,” he said.

Mr. Marshall’s sagging pants, a style popularized in the early 1990s by hip-hop artists, are becoming a criminal offense in a growing number of communities, including his own.

Starting in Louisiana, an intensifying push by lawmakers has determined pants worn low enough to expose underwear poses a threat to the public, and they have enacted indecency ordinances to stop it.

Since June 11, sagging pants have been against the law in Delcambre, La., a town of 2,231 that is 80 miles southwest of Baton Rouge. The style carries a fine of as much as $500 or up to a six-month sentence. “We used to wear long hair, but I don’t think our trends were ever as bad as sagging,” said Mayor Carol Broussard.

An ordinance in Mansfield, a town of 5,496 near Shreveport, subjects offenders to a fine (as much as $150 plus court costs) or jail time (up to 15 days). Police Chief Don English said the law, which takes effect Sept. 15, will set a good civic image.

Behind the indecency laws may be the real issue — the hip-hop style itself, which critics say is worn as a badge of delinquency, with its distinctive walk conveying thuggish swagger and a disrespect for authority. Also at work is the larger issue of freedom of expression and the questions raised when fashion moves from being merely objectionable to illegal.

Sagging began in prison, where oversized uniforms were issued without belts to prevent suicide and their use as weapons. The style spread through rappers and music videos, from the ghetto to the suburbs and around the world.

Efforts to outlaw sagging in Virginia and statewide in Louisiana in 2004, failed, usually when opponents invoked a right to self-expression. But the latest legislative efforts have taken a different tack, drawing on indecency laws, and their success is inspiring lawmakers in other states.
In the West Ward of Trenton, Councilwoman Annette Lartigue is drafting an ordinance to fine or enforce community service in response to what she sees as the problem of exposing private parts in public.

“It’s a fad like hot pants; however, I think it crosses the line when a person shows their backside,” Ms. Lartigue said. “You can’t legislate how people dress, but you can legislate when people begin to become indecent by exposing their body parts.”

The American Civil Liberties Union has been steadfast in its opposition to dress restrictions. Debbie Seagraves, the executive director of the A.C.L.U. of Georgia said, “I don’t see any way that something constitutional could be crafted when the intention is to single out and label one style of dress that originated with the black youth culture, as an unacceptable form of expression.”

School districts have become more aggressive in enforcing dress bans, as the courts have given them greater latitude. Restrictions have been devised for jeans, miniskirts, long hair, piercing, logos with drug references and gang-affiliated clothing including colors, hats and jewelry.

Dress codes are showing up in unexpected places. The National Basketball Association now stipulates that no sports apparel, sunglasses, headgear, exposed chains or medallions may be worn at league-sponsored events. After experiencing a brawl that spilled into the stands and generated publicity headaches, the league sought to enforce a business-casual dress code, saying that hip-hop clothing projected an image that alienated middle-class audiences.

According to Andrew Bolton, the curator at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, fashions tend to be decried when they “challenge the conservative morality of a society.”

Not since the zoot suit has a style been greeted with such strong disapproval. The exaggerated boxy long coat and tight-cuffed pants, started in the 1930s, was the emblematic style of a subculture of young urban minorities. It was viewed as unpatriotic and flouted a fabric conservation order during World War II. The clothing was at the center of what were called Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles, racially motivated beatings of Hispanic youths by sailors. The youths were stripped of their garments, which were burned in the street.

Following a pattern of past fashion bans, the sagging prohibitions are seen by some as racially motivated because the wearers are young, predominantly African-American men.

Yet, this legislation has been proposed largely by African-American officials. It may speak to a generation gap. Michael Eric Dyson, a professor of sociology at Georgetown University and the author of “Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop,” said, “They’ve bought the myth that sagging pants represents an offensive lifestyle which leads to destructive behavior.”
Last week, Atlanta Councilman C. T. Martin sponsored an amendment to the city’s indecency laws to ban sagging, which he called an epidemic. “We are trying to craft a remedy,” said Mr. Martin, who sees the problem as “a prison mentality.”

But Larry Harris, Jr., 28, a musician from Miami, who stood in oversize gear outside a hip-hop show in Times Square, denied that prison style was his inspiration. “I think what you have here is people who don’t understand the language of hip-hop,” he said.

A dress code ordinance proposed in Stratford, Conn., by Councilman Alvin O’Neal was rejected at a Town Council meeting last Monday, drawing criticism that the law was unconstitutional and unjustly encouraged racial profiling. Many residents agreed that the town had more pressing issues.

Benjamin Chavis, the former executive director of the N.A.A.C.P., said, “I think to criminalize how a person wears their clothing is more offensive than what the remedy is trying to do.”

Dr. Chavis, who is often pictured in an impeccable suit and tie among the baggy outfits of the hip-hop elite, is a chairman of the Hip Hop Summit Action Network, a coalition he founded with the music mogul Russell Simmons. He said that the coalition will challenge the ordinances in court.

“The focus should be on cleaning up the social conditions that the sagging pants comes out of,” he said. “That they wear their pants the way they do is a statement of the reality that they’re struggling with on a day-to-day basis.”
Summer Bummer

By JOE QUEENAN

The gnashing of teeth never stopped the year my 15-year-old son brought home “A Tale of Two Cities” as his summer reading assignment. According to him, the backbreaking obligation to read Charles Dickens blighted June, ravaged July and obliterated August. Thus, at back-to-school night in September, when his teacher informed parents that their children were gifted, a joy to work with and loved Dickens, I knew she was lying. My kid hated “A Tale of Two Cities.” And he wasn’t alone.

For as long as anyone can remember, well-meaning pedagogues have been sabotaging summer vacations by forcing high schoolers to read “Lord of the Flies,” “All the King’s Men” and “A Separate Peace.” These books may be the cornerstones of our civilization, but they’re certainly no fun. One reason the average American male reads only one book a year may be the emotional trauma suffered in trying to hack his way through “Wuthering Heights” at the age of 14. I myself have never recovered from going toe-to-toe with “The Return of the Native” as a teenager, not only because Thomas Hardy’s bleak vision and lugubrious prose made me feel bleak and lugubrious, but also because it was my first exposure to the boundless cruelty of which adults are capable.

If my teachers had had an ounce of human decency in them they might have assigned us “Macbeth” or Caesar’s “Gallic Wars,” figuring that the merry carnage would at least hold the boys’ interest for a while. Or they could have saddled us with “The Stranger,” which had the mitigating charm of being glib and pretentious and would thus have kept the kids who were obviously going to end up at Bard happy. But by insisting that we write a full report on an uncompromisingly depressing 19th-century novel by a writer who never allowed a single ray of sunshine to brighten his work, the powers-that-be at Cardinal Dougherty High School were merely taunting the student body.

“Don’t mess with us, for there is no torment too beastly for us to contemplate,” they seemed to be saying. “If you even once complain about how boring and irrelevant ‘The Return of the Native’ is, next summer we’ll make you read ‘Daniel Deronda.’ Just try us, punks.”

Forty years after being pistol-whipped by Thomas Hardy, I am amazed that the summer reading list continues to exist. In a society that has dispensed with every other laudable cultural more, it bewilders me that students still allow adults to wreck their summer vacations by forcing them to feast on the passé cheekiness of “The Catcher in the Rye” or on mind-numbing kitsch like “The
“Alchemist.” I’m not saying it is necessarily a bad thing that schools require students to read books during the summer: culture, like vitamins, works best when imposed rather than selected. I am simply recording my amazement that in an age when urban high schools use weapons detectors to check for handguns, educators still make kids read “The Red Badge of Courage.”

And yet, the system seems to work. Recently, I conducted an informal survey among high school students I know, asking them to evaluate the books they had read over the past few summers. The results floored me. Even though today’s pandering, smorgasbord-style reading lists regularly include works by such non-Nobelists as Dean Koontz and David Baldacci, the kids I talked to had mostly spent the past few summers reading books that could only be described as “good.”

Though they were not always bubbling with enthusiasm, they generally used no phrase more abusive than “Well, it was interesting” to describe “Lord of the Flies” or “Beowulf.” One college-bound senior, Margaret Staudter, told me she actually enjoyed “Middlemarch,” even though it took her all summer to finish it.

“What I didn’t enjoy was writing all the chapter summaries to prove that I’d read it,” she said. “ ‘Middlemarch’ has something like 86 chapters.”

Other students were slightly less upbeat, but still reported enjoying the assigned books, if only because they got to read them in peace without having to examine them in the autopsy style that is the hallmark of the high school literature class. Of course, there was always the possibility that the kids were lying, merely telling an adult what he wanted to hear out of fear that any negative comments would be reported to the authorities.

But even if this were true, in the end I came to grudgingly admire what English teachers were trying to achieve. The theory seemed to be that smart students would eventually outgrow featherweight homilies like “To Kill a Mockingbird” and move on to something meatier like Chinua Achebe or Nadine Gordimer, whereas if you could get less gifted students to read anything, you were ahead of the game. In this sense, fleeting favorites like “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” and Harper Lee’s saccharine, historically implausible novel about the Nicest White Man Ever serve as a vital bridge between books that amuse and books that astound. When I was 16, I thought “A Farewell to Arms” was a classic; then I read “The Sun Also Rises” and realized that it wasn’t. No one ever gets to Balzac and Proust without first going through Camus.

My only unresolved beef about summer reading lists is their cavalier juxtaposition of the immortals and the knuckleheads, as if William Shakespeare and Wally Lamb were in the same weight class. While minor books can ultimately lure readers to the mountaintops, so-so or
crummy books — well represented on many of the lists I have seen — only lure readers to more so-so or crummy books. There is a direct line from “Slaughterhouse-Five” to “War and Peace,” from “The Red Pony” to “The Red and the Black.” But Dean Koontz leads no farther than James Patterson. “Sister Carrie” paves the way for “Anna Karenina”; “Carrie” paves the way for “Cujo.”

Even my son, now a classics major in college, seemed to realize that summer reading was, on balance, a valuable experience.

“I hated ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ until I got to the end,” he told me recently. “I wasn’t interested in the characters, and I didn’t believe the history. But then when I got to Sydney Carton up there on the scaffold, I thought, ‘Wow, what a great ending.’ I really liked it the second time I read it.”

“You reread ‘A Tale of Two Cities’?” I gasped in disbelief.

“Yes,” he replied. “It wasn’t as good as ‘Great Expectations,’ but those last 25 pages were amazing.”

This admission impelled me to re-evaluate everything I’d ever believed about summer reading. For 40 years I’d been cursing the day my high school English teacher was born, convinced that the months I’d wasted reading “The Return of the Native” had left indelible scars on my psyche. But if my son’s experience held true, perhaps it was merely a case of my being too young to appreciate Hardy’s genius when first exposed to it. Determined to clear up the matter, I picked up a copy of Hardy’s rustic masterpiece and gave Dorset’s most famous author a second chance to prove me wrong. On Page 6 I happened upon this sentence:

“To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New.”

That’s when I took it back to the library. Thomas Hardy wrecked the summer of ’66; there’s no way in hell he’s wrecking the summer of ’07.

Joe Queenan is the author of “Queenan Country: A Reluctant Anglophile’s Pilgrimage to the Mother Country.”
I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by anyone else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamb-like disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practice her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell.

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent to errands, I
always took my book with me, and by doing one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offense to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey’s shipyard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?” These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve-years-old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled "The Columbian Orator." Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as, well as impressive things in reply to his master-things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan’s mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had
already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed. While in this state of mind, I was eager to hear anyone speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every little while, I could hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did anything very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of abolition. Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant. The dictionary afforded me little or no help. I found it was "the act of abolishing"; but then I did not know what was to be abolished. Here I was perplexed. I did not dare to ask anyone about its meaning, for I was satisfied that it was something they wanted me to know very little about. After a patient waiting, I got one of our city papers, containing an account of the number of petitions from the North, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and of the slave trade between the States. From this time I understood the words abolition and abolitionist, and always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow-slaves. The light broke in upon me by degrees. I went one day down on the wharf of Mr. Waters; and seeing two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone, I went, unasked, and helped them. When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me if I were a slave. I told him I was. He asked, "Are ye a slave for life?" I told him that I was. The good Irishman seemed to be deeply affected by the statement. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life. He said it was a shame to hold me. They both advised me to run away to the North; that I should find friends there, and that I should be free. I pretended not to be interested in what they said, and treated them as if I did not understand them; for I feared they might be treacherous. White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters. I was afraid that these seemingly good men might use me so; but I nevertheless remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away. I
looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I should one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would learn to write.

The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus-"L." When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus-"S.F." A piece for the larboard side forward, would be marked thus-"L.F." When a piece was for starboard side forward, it would be marked thus-"S.F." For larboard aft, it would be marked thus-"L.A." For starboard aft, it would be marked thus-"S.A." I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the shipyard. I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way. During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write. I then commenced and continued copying the Italics in Webster's Spelling Book, until I could make them all without looking in the book. By this time, my little Master Thomas had gone to school, and learned how to write, and had written over a number of copy-books. These had been brought home, and shown to some of our near neighbors, and then laid aside. My mistress used to go to class meeting at the Wilk Street meeting-house every Monday afternoon, and leave me to take care of the house. When left thus, I used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in master Thomas's copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus, after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.

Taken from: http://www.gibbsmagazine.com/learning%20to%20read.htm