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From the Editor

Julie Miller
Butler University, jlmille5@butler.edu

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From the Editor

By Julie Miller

Have you read Rita Dove’s poem, “The First Book”? It’s one of my favorites, a deceptively short and simple poem about the transformative power of reading. “Open it,” Dove writes. “Go ahead, it won’t bite. Well, maybe a little.”

I am the reader in my family. My parents discouraged me from reading too much as a child, preferring that I experience life in the flesh. But for me, the world experienced through reading was as real as—if not more real than—my backyard. I navigated the swirls and eddies of the muddy Mississippi with Huck and Jim and performed in attic theatrics with the March sisters. Later, Harper Lee taught me about injustice, Flannery O’Connor about danger, and Tennessee Williams about the possibility of redemption. I was lucky to have an appetite for reading, and fine teachers, some of whom were librarians, to guide my tastes.

What is the state of reading in Washington? From early literacy initiatives, to book groups and “big reads,” to outreach to special populations, this issue of Alki explores the state of reading from the point of view of Washington libraries. In “Read or Die,” Michael Cook gives an overview of the latest report from the National Endowment for the Arts on reading trends and their impact. State Librarian Jan Walsh tells the story of the Washington Reads program. Debbie Lahue from ESD 101 describes reading assessment in Washington schools post-WASL.

Sit up straight and take a deep, cleansing breath before starting “Our Job Is to Promote Reading” by Dan Howard and Dean Marney. They are men on a mission.

The ability to understand symbols, to translate characters on a page into language—reading is a powerful act of discovery. Go ahead—open it. “It’s not like it’s the end of the world,” as Rita Dove writes. Just “the world as you think/you know it.”

Go to Rita Dove’s home page at http://people.virginia.edu/~rfd4b/ to hear her read “The First Book.”

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Julie Miller is Associate Dean of Libraries at Eastern Washington University