Name:

Period:

Due: Monday, 8/27

Directions: Read and annotate the following article. Annotate it by, **in the margins**, (1) Defining the bolded words, (2) briefly summarizing important information, (3) writing down text-specific questions you have. \*Note: Underlining and highlighting information is NOT the same as annotating. If you choose to underline or highlight something, in the margin be sure to explain why it’s important, or summarize what it says in your own words. When you have finished reading/annotating the article, answer the questions that follow it.

**Neil Gaiman: Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming**

**A lecture explaining why using our imaginations, and providing for others to use theirs, is an obligation for all citizens**



[1] It's important for people to tell you what side they are on and why, and whether they might be biased. A declaration of members' interests, of a sort. So, I am going to be talking to you about reading. I'm going to tell you that libraries are important. I'm going to suggest that reading fiction, that reading for pleasure, is one of the most important things one can do. I'm going to make an impassioned plea for people to understand what libraries and librarians are, and to preserve both of these things.

[2] And I am **biased**, obviously and enormously: I'm an author, often an author of fiction. I write for children and for adults. For about 30 years I have been earning my living though my words, mostly by making things up and writing them down. It is obviously in my interest for people to read, for them to read fiction, for libraries and librarians to exist and help foster a love of reading and places in which reading can occur.

[3] So I'm biased as a writer. But I am much, much more biased as a reader. And I am even more biased as a British citizen.

[4] And I'm here giving this talk tonight, under the auspices of the Reading Agency: a charity whose mission is to give everyone an equal chance in life by helping people become confident and enthusiastic readers. Which supports literacy programs, and libraries and individuals and nakedly and wantonly encourages the act of reading. Because, they tell us, everything changes when we read.

[5] And it's that change, and that act of reading that I'm here to talk about tonight. I want to talk about what reading does. What it's good for.

[6] I was once in New York, and I listened to a talk about the building of private prisons – a huge growth industry in America. The prison industry needs to plan its future growth – how many cells are they going to need? How many prisoners are there going to be, 15 years from now? And they found they could predict it very easily, using a pretty simple algorithm, based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds couldn't read. And certainly couldn't read for pleasure.

It's not one to one: you can't say that a literate society has no criminality. But there are very real correlations.

And I think some of those correlations, the simplest, come from something very simple. Literate people read fiction.

[7] [Fiction](https://www.theguardian.com/books/fiction) has two uses. Firstly…the drive to know what happens next, to want to turn the page, the need to keep going, even if it's hard, because someone's in trouble and you have to know how it's all going to end … that's a very real drive. And it forces you to learn new words, to think new thoughts, to keep going. To discover that reading per se is pleasurable. Once you learn that, you're on the road to reading everything. And reading is key. There were noises made briefly, a few years ago, about the idea that we were living in a post-literate world, in which the ability to make sense out of written words was somehow **redundant**, but those days are gone: words are more important than they ever were: we navigate the world with words, and as the world slips onto the web, we need to follow, to communicate and to comprehend what we are reading. People who cannot understand each other cannot exchange ideas, cannot communicate, and translation programs only go so far….

[8] And the second thing fiction does is to build **empathy**. When you watch TV or see a film, you are looking at things happening to other people. **Prose** fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you, and you alone, using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed.

[9] Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals.

You're also finding out something as you read vitally important for making your way in the world. And it's this:

The world doesn't have to be like this. Things can be different.

[10] I was in China in 2007, at the first party-approved science fiction and fantasy convention in Chinese history. And at one point I took a top official aside and asked him Why? Science fiction had been disapproved of for a long time. What had changed?

[11] It's simple, he told me. The Chinese were brilliant at making things if other people brought them the plans. But they did not innovate and they did not invent. They did not imagine. So they sent a delegation to the US, to Apple, to Microsoft, to Google, and they asked the people there who were inventing the future about themselves. And they found that all of them had read science fiction when they were boys or girls.

[12] Fiction can show you a different world. It can take you somewhere you've never been. Once you've visited other worlds, like those who ate fairy fruit, you can never be entirely content with the world that you grew up in. **Discontent** is a good thing: discontented people can modify and improve their worlds, leave them better, leave them different….

[13] And while we're on the subject, I'd like to say a few words about **escapism**. I hear the term bandied about as if it's a bad thing…. If you were trapped in an impossible situation, in an unpleasant place, with people who meant you ill, and someone offered you a temporary escape, why wouldn't you take it? And escapist fiction is just that: fiction that opens a door, shows the sunlight outside, gives you a place to go where you are in control, are with people you want to be with (and books are real places, make no mistake about that); and more importantly, during your escape, books can also give you knowledge about the world and your predicament, give you weapons, give you armour: real things you can take back into your prison. Skills and knowledge and tools you can use to escape for real. As JRR Tolkien reminded us, the only people who **inveigh** against escape are jailers….

*Regarding Libraries*

[14] ….libraries are about freedom. Freedom to read, freedom of ideas, freedom of communication. They are about education (which is not a process that finishes the day we leave school or university), about entertainment, about making safe spaces, and about access to information.

[15] I worry that here in the 21st century people misunderstand what libraries are and the purpose of them. If you perceive a library as a shelf of books, it may seem **antiquated** or outdated in a world in which most, but not all, books in print exist digitally. But that is to miss the point fundamentally.

[16] I think it has to do with nature of information. Information has value, and the right information has enormous value. For all of human history, we have lived in a time of information scarcity, and having the needed information was always important, and always worth something….

[17] In the last few years, we've moved from an information-**scarce** economy to one driven by an information **glut**. According to Eric Schmidt of Google, every two days now the human race creates as much information as we did from the dawn of civilisation until 2003. That's about five exobytes of data a day, for those of you keeping score. The challenge becomes, not finding that scarce plant growing in the desert, but finding a specific plant growing in a jungle. We are going to need help navigating that information to find the thing we actually need….

[18] Literacy is more important than ever it was, in this world of text and email, a world of written information. We need to read and write, we need global citizens who can read comfortably, comprehend what they are reading, understand nuance, and make themselves understood….

[19] Books are the way that we communicate with the dead. The way that we learn lessons from those who are no longer with us, that humanity has built on itself, progressed, made knowledge incremental rather than something that has to be relearned, over and over. There are tales that are older than most countries, tales that have long outlasted the cultures and the buildings in which they were first told….

[20] We have an **obligation** to use the language. To push ourselves: to find out what words mean and how to deploy them, to communicate clearly, to say what we mean. We must not to attempt to freeze language, or to pretend it is a dead thing that must be revered, but we should use it as a living thing, that flows, that borrows words, that allows meanings and pronunciations to change with time….

[21] We all – adults and children, writers and readers – have an obligation to daydream. We have an obligation to imagine. It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that we are in a world in which society is huge and the individual is less than nothing: an atom in a wall, a grain of rice in a rice field. But the truth is, individuals change their world over and over, individuals make the future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different.

[22] Look around you: I mean it. Pause, for a moment and look around the room that you are in. I'm going to point out something so obvious that it tends to be forgotten. It's this: that everything you can see, including the walls, was, at some point, imagined. Someone decided it was easier to sit on a chair than on the ground and imagined the chair. Someone had to imagine a way that I could talk to you in London right now without us all getting rained on. This room and the things in it, and all the other things in this building, this city, exist because, over and over and over, people imagined things.

We have an obligation to make things beautiful. Not to leave the world uglier than we found it, not to empty the oceans, not to leave our problems for the next generation. We have an obligation to clean up after ourselves, and not leave our children with a world we've shortsightedly messed up, shortchanged, and crippled.

[23] Albert Einstein was asked once how we could make our children intelligent. His reply was both simple and wise. "If you want your children to be intelligent," he said, "read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." He understood the value of reading, and of imagining. I hope we can give our children a world in which they will read, and be read to, and imagine, and understand.

*• This is an edited version of Neil Gaiman's lecture for* [*the Reading Agency*](http://readingagency.org.uk/)*, delivered on Monday October 14 at the Barbican in London. The Reading Agency's annual lecture series was initiated in 2012 as a platform for leading writers and thinkers to share original, challenging ideas about reading and libraries.*

From: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming>

**Reading Comprehension Questions**

1. What are two reasons, (from two different paragraphs) according to Gaiman, that people should read fiction?

**\*Note:** Your answers should be written in a format similar to the example below in order to demonstrate where your evidence was found:

*Ex. In the \_\_\_\_\_ paragraph, Gaiman suggests people should read fiction because, “…….” (page number).*

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1. In paragraph 12, Gaiman says that it’s good for people to be “discontent” because they “can modify and improve their worlds, leave them better, leave them different” (2). In the space below, describe a major event (it can be historical or present-day) that improved because people were discontent. Write your answer in complete sentences.

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1. In paragraph 17, Gaiman suggests there are major consequences of having too much available information. Based on your knowledge of the world, what is one consequence of having too much information? Explain your response in a complete sentence.

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1. Based on clues in the text, why are some words, such as “civilisation” in paragraph 17, spelled strangely? Use cited (provide a paragraph number and page number) evidence from the text to support your answer.

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