



The Write Way to Self-Discovery

Keeping a journal provides clarity, helps in decision-making and boosts memory

by Andrea Danelak

Using a pen and paper to record one's thoughts is a concept that has spanned thousands of years, with many important historical figures marking their thoughts down in journals.

While keeping a journal is often linked to teen girls writing about their crushes and the latest gossip, journaling can actually be a valuable self-discovery tool that can help male and female students better understand themselves and their personal experiences.

"Probably the biggest benefit of journaling is clarity," says John Robson, a certified journaling facilitator and founder of Higher Awareness, an Alberta-based company offering life coaching and information about spiritual awareness. "The more you have things in front of you, the clearer they are."

Journaling can help students make sense of their often-fleeting thoughts and give them more attention and reflection. According to Robson, our

minds work at about 1,000 words per minute; when we write, it slows down to about 100 words a minute.

"There is more feeling and more sensation when you write," he says. "And when you get things out of your head and see them on paper, you have a different response to them."

It is difficult for anyone to draw conclusions when only thinking about one fact or thought. Writing things in a journal can synthesize a whole host of information and form relationships and movement between thoughts, providing students with a better understanding of them. Being able to see the information also enables people to better retain it - some have theorized humans can retain almost twice as much information this way - and pick out the most important details.

On the same note, writing in a journal can boost students' memory retention by capturing their personal experiences for them. "Things go in one ear and out

the other. If you look at the learning process, most people read books and forget about them the next day," Robson says.

"But if we write it down, it's another way for things to sink into our minds."

Robson recommends a specific and extremely simple process to aid in retention and learning: recalling, writing and reviewing.

"That process works with life. Experience life, write it down, read it and bring it in again," he says, adding that it helps students to gain a different, more objective perspective. The more they review the information, the more they will uncover new dimensions to it.



John Robson

Counsellors can introduce journaling to students

Journaling can aid in students' important life and career decisions by employing both hemispheres of the human brain. While the left part of the brain is logical and rational, the right is more intuitive and symbolic. In one of Robson's many articles about journaling, he notes that people are the most effective when they can draw equally from both hemispheres, which they can achieve through journaling.

"When you put something on paper, your right brain will draw a different conclusion (than that of the left)," he says. "That is the power of writing down things like career choices."

According to Robson, the list of journaling benefits is a lengthy one, including stress reduction; increased focus and stability; and improved self-confidence and self-knowledge. Journaling, he adds, is useful in that it can be applied to any life situation and lets students connect causes to effects, which can be especially important during the trying times of growing up.

To incorporate journal writing into classrooms, counsellors and teachers can introduce simple journaling exercises as homework assignments. "Staff can say, 'Write this down' or 'Write a list. When you think about it, come back and talk to me.'"

"Journaling provides a great way for counsellors to interact with students," he says, noting that it also offers a creative outlet where spelling and grammar are not the primary focus.

Robson believes it is essential for students – and everyone else – to ask themselves two essential questions, both of which journaling can help answer: What do you want and why aren't you getting it?

"Journaling is a great coaching process to get us to think and write out our thoughts. Often, we find our own answers this way." ♣csc

For more information about journaling and other life coaching techniques, visit Robson's website at www.higherawareness.com.

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