

### In our digital age, what value do books have for Arts & Law students?

One weekend, my house was without internet access, a rather strange experience. I felt cut off from my friends, I struggled with Uni work, my usual leisure activities were gone. As my ever-optimistic Dad put it, it felt like we were the last people left alive. However, I read an entire novel uninterrupted and thoroughly enjoyed doing it. If this were a movie, I would have learnt the error of my digitised ways and abandoned the internet forever, but life is rarely so simple. Besides, I needed to find out what Peter Capaldi's outfit is going to be like in Doctor Who.

As a third year student, I should probably be ashamed that I have only ever borrowed two books from the library. The reason is simple - commuting means I don't want to journey in or carry heavy books more than necessary. The fact that our University's e-library is a fantastic resource, as well stocked as the real one, means that I don't have to. Honestly, the only reason I enter the library is the iLounge's excellent cake. Sorry.

However, don't consign those old-fashioned books to the recycling yet. Look around a literature seminar and you may see more e-readers than hard copies, but all is not lost. I felt cut off that weekend because the digital age is all about communication. We are all online and we love to share the things we love, hoping other people will love them too. I see quotes from a book, fan works, discussions; I get curious and I want to join in the fun. It's the online equivalent of having a sneaky peek at the book of the person sitting next to you. The internet means that rather than relying on critics, we can access the opinion of people like us. Nor is it all shallow, surface reactions; on social networking site Tumblr there is enough in-depth analysis of teen novel *The Fault in Our Stars* to make any GCSE English teacher proud. These are the University students of the future, and the more tomorrow's degrees can tap into this constant need for conversation, the better.

Strangely, all this online discussion makes physical books a better choice than digital. Sharing what you love has become so ingrained that it feels necessary. More than once, a single copy of a good book has circulated through an entire group, simply because it is still easier to share a physical copy than a digital one - and, as students, why would we pay to download something we can borrow? Lending out books taps into the modern desperation to share in the most old fashioned way. After all, I can't hide a digital copy of a book in your bag in the hope that you'll find and read it.

If you want to know how this is relevant specifically to students in Arts and Law, just look at all the people I forced to read *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* after studying it in first year. The reasons are on my blog.