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## Flying the readerly skies



I think planes may be our last reading rooms.

If you can judge by the people sitting around me on my flights yesterday, that is. Last night, as others dozed in the darkened cabin, my row kept our lights on and read.

At the window: a tall gray-haired man reading a hardback on personal finance. Middle seat: a middle-aged woman with a hefty romance novel. Me, I was working on my laptop; I'd finished the novel and two short story collections in my bag.

The woman across the aisle from me was reading a magazine. She got to the end and then, apparently with nothing else to read, paged back through it slowly, scrutinizing every advertisement. She seemed to want words to fill the airplane ride. I felt bad for her -- I had a surplus of words with me. Should I offer her one of my books -- a short story collection, maybe? What if she was content re-reading her magazine? Eventually I left her to the pharmaceutical disclaimers, deciding that her reading material was none of my business.

On my earlier flight, the guy next to me pulled a worn, spine-cracked **John Grisham** thriller from his pocket. Its bookmark was a faded boarding pass from another airline; the last time he'd read it, it seemed, was when he was on a plane.

Maybe all we need to do to boost American reading rates is to give everyone free plane tickets.

Carolyn Kellogg

*photo by Andrew J Stevens via flickr*

May 06, 2008 in [Books](#), [Travel](#) | [Permalink](#)

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15 years old, I finished my novel far too early into a transatlantic flight. "Are you gonna read that?" I asked the lady catty-corner up a row about the big book wedged into her seatback. She handed me *The Fountainhead*.

I got 2/3 of the way through it, but sadly for the world, it wasn't enough to make me an Objectivist. Real page-turner of a yarn; still, I didn't mind giving it back.

Posted by: [Wrongsore](#) | [May 07, 2008 at 12:09 AM](#)

In addition to planes, I'd add subways and buses to your list of reading rooms. When I lived in New York, Chicago, D.C., and San Francisco, I always found myself surrounded by people reading books, newspapers, and magazines.



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- [December 2007](#)
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- [September 2007](#)
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- [July 2007](#)
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Posted by: Lee Rice Epstein | May 07, 2008 at 07:48 AM

Interesting notion: planes as "our last reading rooms"--though I agree with Lee Epstein about subways as well. I've never read more than when living in NYC and London, all because of the Underground. Wonder if it has something to do with the absence of a TV or radio blaring commercials in our ears. Airports used to be a good place to read, too--but now every waiting area seems to come with a screen blasting CNN (or worse, Fox) 24/7, killing the silence that encourages one to open a book.

Posted by: Jim S | May 10, 2008 at 12:25 PM

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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