

The Wright Brothers ~ David McCullough

Page Turners Meeting – March 8, 2016 @ 6:30

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the Wright family circle—especially Sister Katharine and Bishop Milton Wright—what influence did it have on Orville and Wilbur and their achievement.
2. Compare and contrast the two brothers. Did you relate to one more than the other? Why?
3. What goes into making genius like the Wright brothers possess, aside from sheer intelligence? Consider traits such as perseverance, focus, and energy. What else? What role does imagination play in their development?
4. In his book, David McCullough reveals that when Wilbur Wright was in France, he spent a fair amount of time at the Louvre and that he was deeply moved by the great Gothic works he saw. What is the importance that the author ascribes to that interest—and why? What does it suggest about the importance of the liberal arts even in the fields of science and technology?
5. Why were the Wright brothers dismissed in the United States but taken seriously in France? What was the difference in culture and/or politics that generated interest on the part of the French but not the Americans?
6. Wilbur and Orville displayed few emotions. Do you think this hampered the author in his attempt to characterize the two men, to portray them as rich, fully-developed human beings? Do you feel that McCullough brings them to life? Do the two men come across as heroic? Why or why not?
7. Why was the story of the Wright brothers' achievement so unlikely? What obstacles do they have to overcome in order to get their invention off the ground?
8. What struck you most in the story of the Wright brothers? What surprised you or impressed you? How much did you know (or understand) before you read McCullough's book, and what did you come away having learned?
9. In 1908, when the Wrights finally showed their plane to the press, one reporter wrote: "this spectacle of men flying was so startling, so bewildering to the senses...that we all stood like so many marble men." Imagine yourself in that situation: how might you have reacted? Can you think of a future technological advancement that might astonish you the same way?
10. Were the brothers compensated fairly for their invention? As someone replied to Wilbur, "I am afraid, my friend, that your usually sound judgment has been warped by the desire for great wealth." What is your assessment of that remark—fair or unfair?

JOTTINGS...