

Bookmarks. Books. Marked.

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What is a book without a bookmark?

Unread, undiscovered, untapped potential. Worlds encased in hardbacks and paperbacks. The crisp, white pages unbroken by fingers, unseen by eyes. Eagerly waiting for someone to break them open and drink what's inside.

The crack of the binding, the smell of ink, glue, and paper. Eyes skimming eagerly for the anticipated tale, curiosity egging you on.

But pesky necessities send you reaching for that talisman to mark your progress, to remind you that even when the cover is closed, another world awaits beyond your job, beyond your family, your chores, your appointments.

The slim trinket, silently holding your place, reminding both reader and volume that you'll be back, just pause here, hold on just a few minutes, a few hours.

Such a frivolous thing, laying anchor to your escape, your education, your passion.

Where would us readers be without our quirky little page markers?

Paper ones, made by a child, bright colors in crayon or marker. Printed on cardstock, advertising a library or bookstore. Glossy ones, with cute animals and silly sayings

Paper-clip styles that slide conveniently, securely over the page. Plastic ones with literary quips, perhaps with a colorful tassel dangling in between pages.

And then there are the unconventional bookmarks. Those random items snagged at a moment's notice when the phone rings or nature calls or the doorbell sends the dogs into a tizzy and you (for shame!) abandon your precious book mid-paragraph, mid-sentence. Grab whatever is nearest so you can come easily back to your spot.

Receipts from the drugstore, the gas station. A losing lottery ticket, a rogue playing card, three of clubs. A plain piece of ragged notebook paper, the nub of a grocery list.

Then there are those readers who use no physical bookmarks at all but rather . . . mark books.

Usually only evident in volumes borrowed from the library, resold at the campus store, recycled at a neighborhood second-hand shop.

A slight pencil underlined in a library volume, the faded crease at the corner of a weathered page, a page number circled in ballpoint.

Perhaps my favorites though, are the accidental book marks from those borrowed or previously-loved volumes. Books from second-hand stores, well-loved and plastered with faded sale stickers. Softened, crinkled cover corners.

A thumbprint of makeup, a speckle of chocolate or spaghetti sauce. A crinkled bubble on a cluster of pages where the characters may have gone for a dip while the reader devoured plot in the bathtub.

A decades-old volume whose pages have been bleached by the sun and softened by dozens of fingertips turning from chapter to chapter. The creases on the spines when you can almost see how many people have held and read these pages.

New books, marked by page holders.

Old books, marked by readers.