

E. L. Doctorow

Quotes

*Writing, People, Book, Fiction, World, Ragtime, Memories, Children,
Government, Heart, Thinking, May, Country, Mean, Justice, Mind, Hands,
Longing, Narrative, Able*

Writing is like driving at night in the fog. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.

~E. L. Doctorow

Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader - not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon.

~E. L. Doctorow

Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go.

~E. L. Doctorow

I am often asked the question How can the masses permit themselves to be exploited by the few. The answer is By being persuaded to identify with them.

~E. L. Doctorow

The three most important documents a free society gives are a birth certificate, a passport, and a library card.

~E. L. Doctorow

Writers are not just people who sit down and write. They hazard themselves. Every time you compose a book your composition of yourself is at stake.

~E. L. Doctorow

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

~E. L. Doctorow

The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like.

~E. L. Doctorow

Planning to write is not writing. Outlining, researching, talking to people about what you're doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing.

~E. L. Doctorow

The poem is a cry of the unborn heart. Yes, because the poem perfectly embodies the world, there is no world without poem.

~E. L. Doctorow

We're always attracted to the edges of what we are, out by the edges where it's a little raw and nervy.

~E. L. Doctorow

I am telling you what I knowâ€”words have music and if you are a musician you will write to hear them.

~E. L. Doctorow

A novel is a printed circuit through which flows the force of a reader's own life.

~E. L. Doctorow

All over the world today, not just in the totalitarian countries, assiduous functionaries in Ministries of Truth are clubbing history dumb and rendering language insensible.

~E. L. Doctorow

There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there's only narrative.

~E. L. Doctorow

A novelist is a person who lives in other people's skins.

~E. L. Doctorow

I am led to the proposition that there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative.

~E. L. Doctorow

Like art and politics, gangsterism is a very important avenue of assimilation into society.

~E. L. Doctorow

History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth.

~E. L. Doctorow

The act of composition is a series of discoveries.

~E. L. Doctorow

Facts are the images of history, just as images are the facts of fiction.

~E. L. Doctorow

I can walk into a bookstore and hand over my credit card and they don't know who the hell I am. Maybe that says something about bookstore clerks.

~E. L. Doctorow

I like commas. I detest semi-colons " I don't think they belong in a story. And I gave up quotation marks long ago. I found I didn't need them, they were fly-specks on the page.

~E. L. Doctorow

Planning to write is not writing.

~E. L. Doctorow

Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. Sometimes you run over a drunk who's lain down and fallen asleep on the warm pavement. I mean, do you keep going, or what?

~E. L. Doctorow

I try to avoid experience if I can. Most experience is bad.

~E. L. Doctorow

The theory of the teacher with all these immigrant kids was that if you spoke English loudly enough they would eventually understand.

~E. L. Doctorow

Satire's nature is to be one-sided, contemptuous of ambiguity, and so unfairly selective as to find in the purity of ridicule an inarguable moral truth.

~E. L. Doctorow

Whenever citizens are seen routinely as enemies of their own government, writers are routinely seen to be the most dangerous enemies.

~E. L. Doctorow

If you feel a bump on page one hundred, it may be you went off on page fifty.

~E. L. Doctorow

Things that appear on the front page of the newspaper as 'fact' are far more dangerous than the games played by a novelist, and can lead to wars.

~E. L. Doctorow

A new reader shouldn't be able to find you in your work, though someone who's read more may begin to.

~E. L. Doctorow

We make a mistake to condescend to the past as if it were preparatory to our own time.

~E. L. Doctorow

And so do people pass out of one's life and all you can remember of them is their humanity, a poor fitful thing of no dominion, like your own.

~E. L. Doctorow

I did have a feeling then that the culture of factuality was so dominating that storytelling had lost all its authority.

~E. L. Doctorow

When I'm writing, I like to seal everything off and face the wall, not to look outside the window. The only way out is through the sentences.

~E. L. Doctorow

The voice of the Constitution is the inescapably solemn self-consciousness of the people giving the law unto themselves.

~E. L. Doctorow

I thought of myself as a writer for years before I got around to writing anything.

~E. L. Doctorow

And so the ordinary unendurable torments we all experienced were indeed exceptional in the way they were absorbed in each heart.

~E. L. Doctorow

Most people are quiet in the world, and live in it tentatively, as if it were not their own.

~E. L. Doctorow

One of the things I had to learn as a writer was to trust the act of writing. To put myself in the position of writing to find out what I was writing.

~E. L. Doctorow

And though the newspapers called the shooting the Crime of the Century, Goldman knew it was only 1906 and there were ninety-four years to go.

~E. L. Doctorow

Stories distribute the suffering so that it can be borne.

~E. L. Doctorow

It was evident to him that the world composed and recomposed itself constantly in an endless process of dissatisfaction.

~E. L. Doctorow

Someone dying asks if there is life after death. Yes, comes the answer, only not yours.

~E. L. Doctorow

We are able to walk on air, but only as long as our illusion supports us.

~E. L. Doctorow

I have been everywhere because I don't know what I'm looking for.

~E. L. Doctorow

The philosophical conservative is someone willing to pay the price of other people's suffering for his principles.

~E. L. Doctorow

I have committed many sins in my life. This precise sin-the sin against poets-is without absolution.

~E. L. Doctorow

Uncharged with invisible meaning, the visible is nothing, mere clay; and without visible circumstance, a territory, to connect to, our spirit is shapeless, nameless, and undefined.

~E. L. Doctorow

Communists have no respect for people, only for positions.

~E. L. Doctorow

Writing is immensely difficult. The short forms especially.

~E. L. Doctorow

We are all good friends. Friendship is what endures. Shared ideals, respect for the whole character of a human being.

~E. L. Doctorow

Anyone at any age is able to tell the story of his or her life with authority.

~E. L. Doctorow

There is music in words, and it can be heard you know, by thinking.

~E. L. Doctorow

It proposed that human beings, by the act of making witness, warranted times and places for their existence other than the time and place they were living through.

~E. L. Doctorow

Time seems to me a drift, a shifting of sand. And my mind is shifting with it. I am wearing away.

~E. L. Doctorow

I thought I would lose, so I didn't prepare a speech.

~E. L. Doctorow

We dress them [children] in the presumptions of the world. They are the bright small face of hope. They are the last belief we have, the belief in making them believe.

~E. L. Doctorow

My memories pale as I prevail upon them again and again. They become more and more ghostly. I fear nothing so much as losing them altogether and having only my blank endless mind to live in.

~E. L. Doctorow

Longing, the hope for fulfillment, is the one unwavering passion of the world's commerce.

~E. L. Doctorow

Every major work of art is a transgression, but the artist is not necessarily, by nature, a transgressor.

~E. L. Doctorow

It may be that the most avid readers of new fiction in America today are film producers, an indication of the trouble we're in.

~E. L. Doctorow

Dad is always hiding in his book.

~E. L. Doctorow

The music of the Stones pounds the air like the amplified pulse of my erection.

~E. L. Doctorow

Poems have ideas. The ideas of poems come out of their emotions and their emotions are carried on images.

~E. L. Doctorow

I lived in New York for a couple months. It seemed to me at first an incredibly clean place with well-dressed people and washed cars and bright-painted red-and-yellow streetcars and white buildings.

~E. L. Doctorow

A book begins as a private excitement of the mind.

~E. L. Doctorow

I worry about images. Images are what things mean.

~E. L. Doctorow

Movies are too literal.

~E. L. Doctorow

Children have a lot more to worry about from the parents who raised them than from the books they read.

~E. L. Doctorow

The writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses. The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses to this terrifying century.

~E. L. Doctorow

The images of things are not the things in themselves.

~E. L. Doctorow

When you're working well, you don't do research. Whatever you need comes to you.

~E. L. Doctorow

The Shadow had no imagination. He neither looked at naked women nor thought of ridding the world of dictators like Hitler or Mussolini.

~E. L. Doctorow

It is the immigrant hordes who keep this country alive, the waves of them arriving year after year.... Who believes in America more than the people who run down the gangplank and kiss the ground?

~E. L. Doctorow

A writer of books has to admit that film is the enemy, and that in my case I have been sleeping with the enemy.

~E. L. Doctorow

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