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# Understanding the process behind reading

“Reading is a kind of listening,” Jeffrey Skoblow, professor of English language and literature at SIUE, explained. “You, the reader, listen to what the author is telling you about whatever it might be, but always in some way that says what it means to be human.” Part of the process of reading is responding, reacting both emotionally and intellectually, Skoblow added. And he should know. Skoblow has spent his career – and his life – listening, learning and responding.

Born in New York City, he grew up on Long Island. He said that he was a rather indifferent student, at least until he was about 15.

“I remember my teacher giving us a long list of books and we had to pick any two of them to read,” he said. “I didn’t care about it much, but I chose J.D. Salinger’s ‘Catcher in the Rye,’ and after the first sentence I was hooked.” Skoblow said that at that moment he became a reader and a listener. He started devouring books and he started responding by writing his own short stories and poetry. He said that he thought he would become a writer, but in his senior year of college he fell in love with another way of responding to literature. He discovered teaching. “A college professor gave me an opportunity to teach and I loved it,” he said.

Skoblow went to graduate school at The Johns Hopkins University and received a position as a teaching adjunct in the writing program at the University of California Los Angeles.

“My wife and I were looking to leave L.A.,” Skoblow said. “The overload, the barrage of stimuli, the glitter and cultural smugness just kind of wore us down.” So they decided to look for some place that was the opposite of Los Angeles. “Small, slow, quiet and clean was the mantra,” he said. They came to Edwardsville in 1987 and have lived here ever since.



SIUE photo

Dr. Jeffrey Skoblow during one of his lectures at SIUE.

Skoblow received his Ph.D. in Victorian British literature, and his first book explored the poetry of 19th century English poet William Morris. Since then, he has pub-

lished a number of other articles, essays and books. In his latest book, “In a Trance: On

## Stephen Hansen College Talk

Paleo Art,” Skoblow “reads” and responds to the Paleolithic cave paintings found in southern France and northern Spain. Many different people created these paintings over a 30,000-year span. While archaeologists and anthropologists examine them for meaning, Skoblow responds to them in a different way. He explores our own connection to those images and the people who painted them.

“I am trying to understand the continuities of experiences from Paleolithic cave dwellers to modern humans,” Skoblow explained. “What does it mean to be human? It’s an enduring question that has had many answers.”

In addition to his writing, Skoblow also responds to reading and listening to authors of great literature through his teaching. “Teaching very much involves listening – listening to the students to learn what and how they think,” he said, adding that he teaches his students how to read or listen to authors, and he helps them respond. “I want my students to react to authors. I want them to respond emotionally as well as intellectually.”

Skoblow is now writing a book about teaching. “Its fiction,” he said, “but it obviously reflects my own experiences.” He is planning the book to be a collection of eight short stories. The book is simply another way for Skoblow to respond after having read and listened to a great number of people, ranging from world-renowned authors to nameless cave painters to eager college students. “It’s all about trying to understand what it means to be human.”

*Stephen Hansen is the Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at SIUE.*