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## The Survival of the Book — A Word from James Billington

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James H. Billington, the nation's Librarian of Congress, writes in today's edition of *The Washington Post* about the survival of books. The occasion is the 10th anniversary of the National Book Festival on Saturday. As the day approaches, Billington answered the question some might be asking — will the book survive in the digital age?

Billington writes:

*Why, you may ask, celebrate books at a time when everything is going digital? Certainly the book business is in a transitional state like all print media. But books are not going away. New technologies tend to supplement rather than supplant older ones. Television did not destroy radio; the VCR and DVD players did not keep people from movie theaters. While the technologies we use to read books may change, the value of reading them does not; and the values of the book culture that helped create our nation must not be left behind. In an era of 140-character messages and the increasing destruction of the basic unit of civilized discourse (the sentence), it is critical that we continue to encourage the production and reading of books.*



It is good, even essential, that the Librarian of Congress would defend the book against its detractors. But it is also important that he understands the digital revolution and the usefulness of electronic readers.

“Both electronic and analog media will have their place in the future of reading and research. Electronic books offer the ability to pinpoint a word or phrase in seconds, and there is a tsunami of information and much new knowledge on the Internet,” he writes. Yet, the printed book is still the best medium for most reading.

It is not news that the Librarian of Congress would defend books, but it is noteworthy that he would defend them in this way . . . and so well.

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James H. Billington, “[Choose Your Own Adventure](#),” *The Washington Post*, Friday, September 24, 2010.

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