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What happens to *you* when you read?



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Introduction

Reading as a form of entertainment has a long history. Not only does a good book entertain us though, it can be an activity that brings us comfort. In this course you will discover that people have often turned to reading as one way of meeting times of difficulty across history, stretching back from the present day's pandemic to, for example, the battlefields and hospitals of the First World War.

There is a good deal of evidence that reading can affect us psychologically, even changing how we think and feel in several different ways. During this course you will complete activities that not only get you reading but allow you to experience for yourself some of the effects that reading can have on you as an individual.

As well as changing you in some of the ways that you will explore here, research suggests that people who read books actually live longer. Bavishi, who carried out the research about this in 2016 says 'the benefits of reading books include a longer life in which to read them' (p.44, 2016).

In the following video, three of the authors who wrote this course will explain a little about their favourite book(s) and how reading has made them feel during difficult periods in their lives. (You will notice that the team contains some academics who have an interest in psychology and some who have an interest in literature.)

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1 My favourite book and why I like it



Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand some of the ways in which reading books can potentially transform you
- understand more about the psychological processes happening when you read
- demonstrate familiarity with the positive impacts of reading on mental wellbeing in some distressing times in history.

1 Stories: what do you remember?

Human beings are avid consumers of stories, whether they are in the form of large formal stories such as novels, or plays, or in the form of much smaller and more diffuse stories, such as soap operas or gossip. Stories also appear to be important, more broadly, to the ways in which we communicate. For example, **Bruner (1990)** points out that people quickly and instinctively learn what makes up a story, and even young children quickly learn that describing run-of-the-mill events, during which nothing unusual happens, does not do much to engage their audience.



Remember the story of ‘Hansel and Gretel’? This German fairy tale was collected and published in Grimms’ first collection of tales in 1812. It is a story many of us may remember having read to us as children or finding on book-shelves at school. In this activity you will try to identify the events that form part of this familiar story.

Activity 1 Remembering a story

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity.

This activity depends on some memory or knowledge of the story – so if you don’t remember it at all, perhaps ask someone you know if they do and see if they can tell you about it. The activity should work well by asking them about their memory of the tale.

Some of the following story elements come from widely accepted versions of the tale of ‘Hansel and Gretel’, and others are things that we have made up. Your task is to try and identify which *are* part of the story the Grimm brothers made famous.

Take a look at the elements of the story below, and decide whether you think they belong in the story.

Hansel and Gretel’s parents were farmers, who had lost their all their corn.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

When the witch first hears Hansel and Gretel nibbling at her house, they trick her into thinking they are just the sound of the wind.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel and Gretel are led deep into the woods by their parents who take the children into the thickest part of the forest and leave them.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel and Gretel were able to escape because the witch had very poor hearing.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel laid a trail of white pebbles to help them find his way back home.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel and Gretel became lost in the forest, because they had set off to find food for their mother who was unwell.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel fooled the witch into thinking he was too thin to eat by pretending a bone he found in his cage was his own finger.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel was tipped off to the witch’s plans when he saw other children that had been turned into pies on her shelf.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

To get to the gingerbread house Hansel and Gretel had to cross a river made from honey wine.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

The children found the witch’s cottage by following a beautiful white bird.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Hansel fell asleep after drinking magical sleeping syrup, Gretel stayed awake and overheard the witch's plans because she did not like syrup and only pretended to drink it.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

The children were returned home by a swan, that ferried them across an expanse of water.

- ○ In the story
- ○ Not in the story

Discussion

It is likely that you found the task quite difficult as all of the elements sound like they plausibly could have happened in a fairy tale. While you might remember that the gist of the story is that Hansel and Gretel were lost in a forest and came across a Gingerbread House with a witch in it, you might not remember much more detail than that. After all you may not have heard the story for many years. The following are elements that do pretty much always feature in the story of Hansel and Gretel:

- Hansel fooled the witch into thinking he was too thin to eat by pretending a bone he found in his cage was his own finger.
- The children were returned home by a swan, that ferried them across an expanse of water.
- Hansel and Gretel are led deep into the woods by their parents who take the children into the thickest part of the forest, and leave them.
- The children found the witch's cottage by following a beautiful white bird.
- Hansel laid a trail of white pebbles to help him find his way back home.
- When the witch first hears Hansel and Gretel nibbling at her house they trick her into thinking they are just the sound of the wind.

Of course, as is the case with many fairy stories, there are also different versions of this tale. The Grimm brothers did not write 'Hansel and Gretel' from scratch themselves. When tales have been told for generations, sometimes across large geographical areas, before being collected and published in a book, there are bound to be details that are added or lost. Versions can also change over time. Some writers dramatically re-write fairy stories, as in Angela Carter's collection of short stories (*The Bloody Chamber*, 1979) based on stories such as 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'Bluebeard'. It's possible to find versions of 'Hansel and Gretel' where the Swan is a duck, and in some versions there is no swan at all; instead the children's father just finds them in the forest. In other versions the white bird that leads Hansel and Gretel to the witch does not feature and in yet others the mother of the children is their step-mother instead.

If you are interested in the different versions of Hansel and Gretel you can look at this resource to make some comparisons. Remember to open this link in a new tab or browser, and then return to the course when you are ready.

1.1 The order of a story

Now that you know which are the generally accepted elements from ‘Hansel and Gretel’, have a go at the activity below by dragging and dropping the elements from the story into the order you think they take place in the story.

Activity 2 Remembering the order of a story

Allow approximately 5 minutes for this activity.

Hansel and Gretel are led deep into the woods by their parents who take the children into the thickest part of the forest, and leave them.

Hansel laid a trail of white pebbles to help him find his way back home.

The children found the witch’s cottage by following a beautiful white bird.

When the witch first hears Hansel and Gretel nibbling at her house they trick her into thinking they are just the sound of the wind.

Hansel fooled the witch into thinking he was too thin to eat by pretending a bone he found in his cage was his own finger.

The children were returned home by a swan, that ferried them across an expanse of water.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

1

2

3

4

5

6

Answer

Here are the elements in the right order.

1. Hansel and Gretel are led deep into the woods by their parents who take the children into the thickest part of the forest, and leave them.
2. Hansel laid a trail of white pebbles to help him find his way back home.
3. The children found the witch’s cottage by following a beautiful white bird.

4. When the witch first hears Hansel and Gretel nibbling at her house they trick her into thinking they are just the sound of the wind.
5. Hansel fooled the witch into thinking he was too thin to eat by pretending a bone he found in his cage was his own finger.
6. The children were returned home by a swan, that ferried them across an expanse of water.

You probably found this activity a lot easier to complete than the previous one. This is because humans are very used to story-like structures. These structures are argued by some psychologists to be fundamental to how we remember, think and communicate with others. The influential psychologist Frederic Bartlett (1932) suggested that our memories could be organised through story-like structures. Known as '**schemata**', these mental structures provide a framework for organising our memories and include 'scripts' which include information about the order of events. You are likely to have encountered (heard or read) many stories, including fairy tales, from the earliest times you remember in your life, so will have a memory 'script' that tells you what order the events are likely to happen in.



‘The silence that Lives in Houses’ by Henri Matisse, 1947 © Succession H.Matisse/ DACS2021

You have learned that stories are central to our experience as humans and most of us can easily relate to them. You have also learned that while, in today’s world, we tend to think about stories as things that we can read, listen to and watch, throughout history there has also been a strong tradition of oral storytelling. According to anthropological evidence, stories were used by our ancestral **hominids** (Donald, 1991), and formed part of cultures and geographies to such an extent that they are considered a universal form of discourse (Rubin, 1995).

In the next section you will start to think about how different types of reading might have different effects upon the reader.

2 The benefits of being a bookworm

Some researchers believe that reading fiction allows us to experience a ‘simulated social world’ (e.g. Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz & Peterson, 2006). That is to say that when we are introduced to a character in a book, it is similar to and potentially also practise for, meeting and understanding people in the real social world. Reading stories, therefore, allows us to practise understanding one another, but in a completely safe and simulated environment.



Not only does reading potentially help us simulate real social interactions, but when we read books, we have an additional advantage that we don’t have in the real social world. In fiction we often get access to the characters’ inner thoughts and motivations, helpfully written out by the author, in a way that we cannot so easily achieve in real life, unless we know a person very well. This additional information given to us by the author may also help us to imagine what it is like to be in another person’s shoes. Perhaps, then, when we are less able to spend time with other people in real life (such as in the recent Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, or when we are older and less physically mobile) we can still, to an extent, practise our social skills, and our understanding of others by reading fiction.

Activity 3 How writers bring readers up close

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity.

Writers tell us what we should be thinking about ‘others’ (i.e., their characters) in very different ways, but it’s always a vital part of their technique. Sometimes it’s as though writers are sitting at our shoulders, whispering in our ears with clear and detailed information about their characters – their feelings, for example, or their motivations. At other times, authors lodge that information in their descriptions of the scene or setting and the objects, for example, that the scene may contain.

Read the two examples below. After you have finished the reading, we will ask you some further questions about the way these extracts tell us about the characters they are portraying, developing our understanding of them.

In the first extract, the **narrator** of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1848), a dramatic tale of love, haunting and violent feeling, is musing on the novel's two main characters, Cathy Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Mr Lockwood tells us that

> It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at. The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again, at least the minute they had contrived some naughty plan […] (p. 87)

This second extract, written by Charles Dickens, is from his famous ghost story, *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

In this passage, below, the reader meets Scrooge at home.

> It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.
>
> 'Humbug!' said Scrooge; and walked across the room.
>
> (p. 18)

Which extract is devoted to telling us directly about feelings and motivations, and which works more subtly to imply feelings and motivation?

Answer

Brontë's narrator, Mr Lockwood, is full of important knowledge. He gives the reader the benefit of information about these characters we could not work out for ourselves even if we were also in this scene. He tells us about their motivations and their feelings: the fact that nothing matters more than each other, even brutal punishment. We might feel 'brought in' to their world, and keenly aware of the strength of feeling between them, after reading this part of the novel.

In the Dickens example, rather than clear signals from a narrator like Lockwood, images and description of objects are used to imply Scrooge's character traits, and to tell us how he might be feeling.

When we meet him, hunched over the tiny fire, Dickens manages to imply that it is this character's very meanness that caused his own misery. Next, we get two versions of the fireplace tiles. One is what is actually there and the other is what is being imagined by Scrooge. But look at what happens for the reader. Dickens leads

> us to also imagine the tiles ‘blank at first’ and then with the head of his dead business partner Marley, on every one, implying Scrooge’s increasing dread, and also allowing the reader to empathise with that dread, almost experiencing it for ourselves. Dickens finishes this mini-scene by having Scrooge react to the emotion as he gets up in exasperation and walks across the room.
>
> The important thing to take away from this activity into the rest of the course is that authors use different techniques to demonstrate social interactions in their stories, and to reveal their characters’ inner worlds. Bringing us ‘up close’ as they do means we are more likely to understand their characters, and what those characters feel and experience in their stories. As we shall see, this can have an impact on our understanding and experience of our real social worlds.

Research evidence supports the arguments that there are benefits to being a bookworm, including that people who read more fiction actually perform better on tests of social ability than those who consume more factual books (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz Peterson, 2006). The research suggests that ‘bookworms’ are likely to be socially very capable individuals!

3 The experience of reading

You may already relate to the idea that our experience of reading can feel almost magical. Many of you will have observed how absorbed children can become when being read to and you may well have had a similar experience yourself, when reading a great book on the beach in your holidays for example. In such instances you can become so immersed in the story and its characters that it can feel like you are wrenched from the world in the story when something drags you back to reality.



The writer Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), most famous for his fiction set in and around the First World War, also writes brilliantly about a real-life experience of this phenomenon. During his time as a soldier, near the Belgian front in the early autumn of 1916, he found himself unable to sleep:

> I came in at two o'clock in the morning after a job of trench digging behind Kemmel Hill [a strategically important hill formation]. And as I was unable to sleep I took up the *Red Badge of Courage* [an 1895 novel about the American Civil War by the American writer Stephen Crane] and read it till dawn. Toward five I got up and looked out through my tent flap. The mother-of-pearl light from the east threw a mother-of-pearl wash of color over the innumerable tents of a sleeping division. The stillness was absolute. But what worried me was the men bending over the red brands of some small wood fires. They were dressed in greenish dust color: it seemed to me they should have been in blue. And it gave my mind an extraordinary wrench to come back to the realisation that I was where and when I was, instead of being upon the Potomac half a century ago, so great was the illusion set up by this marvelous book.

The novel Ford is reading is 'so marvelous' (or 'magical' to go back to the word at the top of this section) that he finds himself confused by the uniforms he sees when he emerges from his tent. He was fully expecting to be met by the historical reality created so vividly by his book, rather than the reality of the war he was himself engaged in. There's an 'extraordinary wrench', a kind of screech of mental and visual gears changing, as he realises that he's not part of the American Civil War after all. Perhaps most importantly, Ford thinks it's vital to pass on to his readers that this kind of experience is possible as a direct result of reading. He writes about this memory several times across his career, demonstrating its significance.

This sense of being dragged out of the story world, and back into reality is something that you will return to in an activity shortly.

Activity 4 Thoughts and feelings

Before you take part in the next reading task, to prepare, answer some questions about yourself. These questions come from an established psychological scale which has 28 items and measures how you react **interpersonally**, and also measures some interesting aspects about your thoughts and feelings. It may seem a little long with 28 items to respond to, but when you have completed the questions you will learn a little more about what the questions were designed to measure. The responses you give here will be private and will not be stored or shared with anyone else.

The following statements enquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you on a scale from A, does not describe me well, to E, describes me very well, by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale. When you have decided on your answer, click on the appropriate letter.

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In the next section you will be introduced to what these scores measure and will find out a little more about the questions you have answered.

4 Empathy

The statements that you have just completed form a measure of ‘empathy’. People often struggle to define empathy, or to understand how it differs from related concepts such as sympathy. The word itself derives from two roots. One is the ancient Greek word empatheia which means passion or physical affection (Jamieson, 2014). The second root is the German adaptation of the term—em (into) and pathos (feeling). This sense of *feeling into* someone else’s emotional state sets empathy apart from sympathy. To put it simply sympathy is feeling sad for someone else’s misfortune. If I hear that a friend Sam has lost her job, sympathy might involve thinking, *Oh no, that must be awful for Sam, I would hate to lose my job*. Empathy is much more involved than sympathy and means psychologically experiencing someone else’s **cognitive perspective**and **emotional state**, whilst still maintaining a sense of your own identity as separate (Coplan, 2014). Being empathic towards Sam would involve thinking it through from Sam’s perspective, such as thinking, *Oh no, I know Sam is the breadwinner in her house, and she is so hard working, she really gets a lot from her job, it’s not just the money, it’s that she really enjoys her work, and it means a lot to her identity to be seen as good at her job.* Empathy is, therefore, a process that involves imagining what it is like to be the other person, rather than just imagining how the circumstances that have befallen someone else might feel to you.



The empathy measure you completed is called the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. It was created by Davis in 1983. He argues that empathy is not a one-dimensional construct but instead comprises a cluster of different aspects which include both how we think and how we feel emotionally.

The scale you filled in has four subcomponents and your score on each subscale is shown below.

The first subscale was personal distress. Questions 6 *In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease* and 24 *I tend to lose control during emergencies were*

examples of questions that tapped into personal distress. This measured the extent to which you feel uneasy or anxious in difficult interpersonal settings.

The second was empathic concern. Questions 9 *When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them*, and 20 *I am often quite touched by things that I see happen* were examples of questions which measured the extent to which you feel concern for unfortunate others.

The third was the fantasy scale. The questions 1 *I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me* and 16 *After seeing a play or a movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters* measured the extent to which you are likely to imaginatively inhabit the feelings and actions of fictional characters in books and films.

The final scale was about perspective taking. The questions 21 *I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both* and 25 *When I'm upset at someone I usually try to 'put myself in his shoes' for a while* measured your tendency to take the perspective of someone else. Davis suggests that the perspective taking score is the most cognitive aspect of empathy with the others being more linked to our emotional responses to other people.

Have a look at your scores and take a moment to reflect on them. Given the descriptions of the subscales, are those scores as you expected? For example, if you scored highly on perspective taking but lower on the other three, can you relate to the idea that you tend to think your way into other people's predicaments rather than emotionally feeling your way into them? Does your fantasy scale score seem to relate to how likely you are to become quickly involved with characters from literature?

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Keep in mind that your scores on the subscales are not objective measurements of your empathy, so don't be alarmed if you scored higher or lower than expected. There are [at least] two reasons for this. First, the scores are based on your self-assessment which may be less accurate or generous than if your friends or family had responded to the statements on your behalf. Second, the scores are based on general statements which may produce a different response depending on context. For example, it might be true (and perfectly understandable) that *When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces* when the person in question is a close relative. However, you may find that you cope much better when the person is a stranger.

You will return to some of these concepts after the first reading exercise which is the next activity you will do.

5 What happens *to you* as you read?

To begin to explore this question we're now asking you to read the following extract from the book *The Subtle Knife*, written by Philip Pullman and published in 1997. You may have read the book previously or have seen a screen adaptation, or it may be unfamiliar to you. For the purposes of this activity, whether or not you know the book doesn't matter – just enjoy the reading.



5.1 How do you relate to characters in a story?

Doing the reading and answering the questions that follow will take you around 5-6 minutes. If possible, try to read these extracts in a quiet room with a minimum of distractions, but again don't worry if these ideal conditions are not possible.

The passage you are about to read comes from the beginning section of the book. It is about a young boy called Will and his mother. It also talks a little bit about Will's father.

Extract 1 The Subtle Knife: His Dark Materials Book 2 by Phillip Pullman

Will had first realized his mother was different from other people, and that he had to look after her, when he was seven. They were in a supermarket, and they were playing a game: they were only allowed to put an item in the cart when no one was looking. It was Will's job to look all around and whisper "Now," and she would snatch a tin or a packet from the shelf and put it silently in the cart. When things were in there they were safe, because they became invisible.

It was a good game, and it went on for a long time, because this was a Saturday morning and the shop was full, but they were good at it and worked well together. They trusted each other. Will loved his mother very much and often told her so, and she told him the same.

So when they reached the checkout Will was excited and happy because they'd nearly won. And when his mother couldn't find her purse, that was part of the game too, even when she said the enemies must have stolen it; but Will was getting tired by this time, and hungry too, and Mummy wasn't so happy any more; she was really frightened, and they went round and round putting things back on the shelves, but this time they had to be extra careful because the enemies were tracking them down by means of her credit card numbers, which they knew because they had her purse …

And Will got more and more frightened himself. He realized how clever his mother had been to make this real danger into a game so that he wouldn't be alarmed, and how, now that he knew the truth, he had to pretend not to be frightened, so as to reassure her.

So the little boy pretended it was a game still, so she didn't have to worry that he was frightened, and they went home without any shopping, but safe from the enemies; and then Will found the purse on the hall table anyway. On Monday they went to the bank and closed her account, and opened another somewhere else, just to be sure. Thus the danger passed.

But some time during the next few months, Will realized slowly and unwillingly that those enemies of his mother's were not in the world out there, but in her mind. That made them no less real, no less frightening and dangerous; it just meant he had to protect her even more carefully. And from the moment in the supermarket when he realized he had to pretend in order not to worry his mother, part of Will's mind was always alert to her anxieties. He loved her so much he would have died to protect her.

As for Will's father, he had vanished long before Will was able to remember him. Will was passionately curious about his father, and he used to plague his mother with questions, most of which she couldn't answer.

"Was he a rich man?"

"Where did he go?"

"Why did he go?"

"Is he dead?"

"What was he like?"

The last question was the only one she could help him with. John Parry had been a handsome man, a brave and clever officer in the Royal Marines, who had left the army to become an explorer and lead expeditions to remote parts of the world. Will thrilled to hear about this. No father could be more exciting than an explorer. From then on, in all his games he had an invisible companion: he and his father were together hacking through the jungle, shading their eyes to gaze out across stormy seas from the deck of their schooner, holding up a torch to decipher mysterious inscriptions in a bat-infested cave … They were best of friends, they saved each other's life countless times, they laughed and talked together over campfires long into the night.

But the older he got the more Will began to wonder. Why were there no pictures of his father in this part of the world or that, with frost-bearded men on Arctic sledges or examining creeper-covered ruins in the jungle? Had nothing survived of the trophies and curiosities he must have brought home? Was nothing written about him in a book?

His mother didn't know. But one thing she said stuck in his mind.

She said, “One day, you’ll follow in your father’s footsteps. You’re going to be a great man too. You’ll take up his mantle …”

And though Will didn’t know what that meant, he understood the sense of it, and felt uplifted with pride and purpose. All his games were going to come true.

His father was alive, lost somewhere in the wild, and he was going to rescue him and take up his mantle … It was worth living a difficult life, if you had a great aim like that.

So he kept his mother’s trouble secret. There were times when she was calmer and clearer than others, and he took care to learn from her then how to shop and cook and keep the house clean, so that he could do it when she was confused and frightened. And he learned how to conceal himself too, how to remain unnoticed at school, how not to attract attention from the neighbours, even when his mother was in such a state of fear and madness that she could barely speak. What Will himself feared more than anything was that the authorities would find out about her, and take her away, and put him in a home among strangers. Any difficulty was better than that. Because there came times when the darkness cleared from her mind, and she was happy again, and she laughed at her fears and blessed him for looking after her so well; and she was so full of love and sweetness then that he could think of no better companion, and wanted nothing more than to live with her alone for ever.

But then the men came.

They weren’t police, and they weren’t social services, and they weren’t criminals – at least, as far as Will could judge. They wouldn’t tell him what they wanted, in spite of his efforts to keep them away; they’d only speak to his mother. And her state was fragile just then.

Now complete Activity 5 as soon as possible after reading Extract 1.

Activity 5 Reading from The Subtle Knife

Allow approximately 25 minutes for this activity.

The following statements and questions ask you to think about how you related to Will. You should respond to them as soon as you can after doing the reading. Please select the number which best represents your response to each statement or question, where 1 represents ‘not at all’ and 7 represents ‘very much’.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

These three statements/questions measured the extent to which you identified with Will. Identification is one of the psychological processes that are thought to be important when we read fiction. The term describes a process where readers feel like they take the place

of a character and react to her or his experiences as if they were happening to them (Sestir & Green, 2010). As you may have noticed when answering the questions, identification, if it happens, centres around one particular fictional character rather than the action in the extract in general. There are several different ways in which psychologists have tried to measure identification with characters in books, films or television, but the above set of questions was developed by Sestir and Green in 2010.

According to the scale a score of three would mean you didn't identify with Will at all, and a score of 21 would mean you fully identified with him. 'Your identification with Will' score is shown above.

Obviously, the Extract 1 was very short and you probably only spent a few minutes reading it, so arguably this will have only given you a very limited opportunity to identify with the character.

The writing activity in the next section will allow you the opportunity to explore Will's character further.

5.2 Creative writing

The act of writing 'in' the voice of a character from something we have read can help us to observe that character in an even more detailed way. It is possible that writing like this can deepen a reader's involvement with a story due to the encouragement to move closer to the perspective of a character.

In the extract in the previous section, which focuses on Will, we are given a sense of how he has dealt with the unfolding situation concerning his mother.

Activity 6 Creative writing activity

Allow approximately 20 minutes for this activity.

For this writing activity we would like you to write four or five sentences in the voice of Will. You should use the first person in your writing (e.g. using 'I' or 'me').

Here are some scenarios you can chose from:

Will explains how he felt in the supermarket as if speaking to a sympathetic school-teacher.

Will gives reasons why his mum should stay with him and not be taken away, as if speaking to a visiting social worker.

Will gives his class at school the reasons he has decided to be an explorer.

Note: There are no 'wrong' answers in this activity. It's a chance to use your own imagination and to experience something of what goes on inside an author as he or she attempts to bring characters to life.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

How did you feel doing this kind of writing? Did you find that you included Will having deep realisations in what you wrote? Did you find that you maintained that sense of saddened innocence which seems to characterise Will in the extract?

Now might be a good time to reflect on how the empathy task you did earlier might relate to your experience of reading the extract. When you answered the questions relating to the empathy scale (the IRI) you may remember you answered questions relating to personal distress, empathic concern, fantasy scale and perspective taking (which were the four different subscales).

Because the fantasy scale relates to your propensity to imagine you are a different character, you might expect that to relate to identification. As a result, you might find that if you scored highly on the fantasy scale of the empathy questions, you might also identify quite strongly with the characters in your favourite books, and you may also find you identified with Will in this extract.

The optional writing task also invited you to 'write three or four sentences in the voice of the character' and this instruction relates strongly to the concept of perspective taking. If you took part in this exercise it is possible that it might have allowed you to move closer to the perspective of Will.

Identification with a character is just one of the psychological processes that can happen to you when you read. In the next section you will encounter another similar psychological process, after the next bit of reading we'll ask you to do.

6 Exploring the story world

In literature, authors build fictional environments, or story worlds, in which their stories are set. Depending on the genre they may be set in a different historical period or country, they might be fantastical settings inhabited with magical creatures, or they may be everyday domestic settings that you can recognise as being very similar to the setting of your own life. Philip Pullman (2020) has written about how he combines the two, by setting his stories in our world, but in another time. This is probably because he wants to write about serious conditions and problems that many readers would recognise, like depression, but put them in a context which is not quite like the everyday so he can have freer rein to explore them.

This extract comes from the same book, The Subtle Knife. In fact, it is the very opening section of the book. It introduces Will and his mother and finds them in unusual circumstances.

Extract 2 The Subtle Knife: His Dark Materials Book 2 by Phillip Pullman

Will tugged at his mother's hand and said, "Come *on*, Come *on* …"

But his mother hung back. She was still afraid. Will looked up and down the narrow street in the evening light, along the little terrace of houses, each behind its tiny garden and its box hedge, with the sun glaring off the windows of one side and leaving the other in shadow. There wasn't much time. People would be having their meal about now, and soon there would be other children around, to stare and comment and notice. It was dangerous to wait, but all he could do was persuade her, as usual.

"Mum, let's go in and see Mrs Cooper," he said. "Look, we're nearly there."

"Mrs Cooper?" she said doubtfully.

But he was already ringing the bell. He had to put down the bag to do it, because his other hand still held his mother's. It might have bothered him at twelve years of age to be seen holding his mother's hand, but he knew what would happen to her if he didn't.

The door opened, and there was the stooped elderly figure of the piano teacher, with the scent of lavender water about her as he remembered.

"Who's that? Is that William?" the old lady said. "I haven't seen you for over a year. What do you want, dear?"

"I want to come in please, and bring my mother," he said firmly.

Mrs Cooper looked at the woman with the untidy hair and the distracted half-smile, and at the boy with the fierce unhappy glare in his eyes, the tight-set lips, the jutting jaw. And then she saw Mrs Parry, Will's mother, had put make-up on one eye but not the other. And she hadn't noticed. And neither had Will. Something was wrong.

"Well …" she said, and stepped aside to make room in the narrow hall.

Will looked up and down the road before closing the door, and Mrs Cooper saw how tightly Mrs Parry was clinging to her son's hand, and how tenderly he guided her into the sitting room where the piano was (of course, that was the only room he knew); and she noticed that Mrs Parry's clothes smelt slightly musty, as if they'd been too long in the washing machine before drying; and how similar the two of them looked

as they sat on the sofa with the evening sun full on their faces, their broad cheekbones, their wide eyes, their straight black brows.

“What is it, William?” the old lady said. “What’s the matter?”

“My mother needs somewhere to stay for a few days,” he said. “It’s too difficult to look after her at home just now. I don’t mean she’s ill. She’s just kind of confused and muddled and she gets a bit worried. She won’t be hard to look after. She just needs someone to be kind to her and I think you could do that quite easily, probably.”

The woman was looking at her son without seeming to understand, and Mrs Cooper saw a bruise on her cheek. Will hadn’t taken his eyes off Mrs Cooper, and his expression was desperate.

“She won’t be expensive,” he went on. “I’ve brought some packets of food, enough to last, I should think. You could have some of it too. She won’t mind sharing.”

“But … I don’t know if I should … Doesn’t she need a doctor?”

“No! She’s not ill.”

“But there must be someone who can … I mean, isn’t there a neighbour or someone in the family –”

“We haven’t got any family. Only us. And the neighbours are too busy.”

“What about the social services? I don’t mean to put you off, dear, but –”

“No! No. She just needs a bit of help. I can’t do it any more for a little while but I won’t be long. I’m going to … I’ve got things to do. But I’ll be back soon and I’ll take her home again, I promise. You won’t have to do it for long.”

The mother was looking at her son with such trust, and he turned and smiled at her with such love and reassurance that Mrs Cooper couldn’t say no.

“Well,” she said, turning to Mrs Parry, “I’m sure it won’t matter for a day or so. You can have my daughter’s room, dear; she’s in Australia; she won’t be needing it again.”

“Thank you,” said Will, and stood up as if he were in a hurry to leave.

“But where are you going to be?” said Mrs Cooper.

“I’m going to be staying with a friend,” he said. “I’ll phone up as often as I can. I’ve got your number. It’ll be alright.”

His mother was looking at him, bewildered. He bent over and kissed her clumsily.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “Mrs Cooper will look after you better than me, honest. And I’ll phone up and talk to you tomorrow.”

They hugged tightly, and then Will kissed her again and gently unfastened her arms from his neck before going to the front door. Mrs Cooper could see he was upset, because his eyes were glistening, but he turned, remembering his manners, and held out his hand.

“Goodbye,” he said, “and thank you very much.”

“William,” she said, “I wish you’d tell me what the matter is –”

“It’s a bit complicated,” he said, “but she won’t be any trouble, honestly.”

That wasn’t what she meant, and they both knew it; but somehow Will was in charge of this business, whatever it was. The old lady thought she’d never seen a child so implacable.

He turned away, already thinking about the empty house.

Now complete Activity 7 as soon as you can after reading Extract 2.

Activity 7 Reading an extract from *The Subtle Knife*

Allow approximately 25 minutes for this activity.

The following statements consider how you felt when reading the extract from the book. You should answer them as soon as you can after doing the reading by clicking on the number which best represents your feelings, where 1 represents ‘not at all’ and 7 represents ‘very much’

Interactive content is not available in this format.

7 How did you relate to the story world?

This activity measured the extent to which you felt like you had travelled into the story world. Psychologists call this *transportation*. Transportation is the extent to which you feel mentally and emotionally immersed in the story world (Sestir and Green, 2010) and can be likened to the sense that you, as a reader, become engrossed (Oliver, Dillard, Bae & Tamul, 2012), like Ford Madox Ford did when reading in his tent at war. Sometimes transportation can happen so strongly that your focus is completely on the story, as in Ford's case, and you can fail to notice things that are happening in your real environment.



There are several different ways in which psychologists have tried to measure transportation into books, films or television, and the specific set of questions you answered was developed by Sestir and Green in 2010.

The top of the transportation scale is a score of 56 so if you had been completely transported you would have scored 56. The bottom of the scale is a score of 8, so if you scored close to that number it suggests you weren't very transported into the text at all. Have a look at your own transportation score to give you a sense of the degree to which this activity suggests you were transported into the story world described in the extract. Previous research by Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004) has shown that there is a correlation between how transported into the story someone feels and how much they enjoy the experience of reading. You may wish to reflect on your own transportation score and the degree to which you enjoyed doing the reading. Importantly, it doesn't seem to matter for enjoyment whether or not the story world you are transported into is a nicer place than the real world, or a less nice place. The enjoyment seems to be more linked to leaving behind the real world, rather than the pleasantness of the story world you enter. In the example you just read, Will, for the most part, wasn't having a great time. However, whether or not Will's circumstances sound better or worse than your current situation shouldn't have impinged on your enjoyment! The enjoyment is much more likely to be linked to the degree to which you were transported – in other words the degree to which you felt you could 'get into' the story world.

A number of things might affect the degree of narrative transportation you experienced. Examples include the level of distraction of your current surroundings (Green, Brock and Kaufman, 2004) and the degree to which the literature you are reading is well crafted (Green and Brock, 2000). You might also wish to reflect on the degree to which you personally might have had different experiences regarding being transported into books, films and television shows in your life. One of this course's authors still remembers being very affected by the conclusion to Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* when she was travelling as a teenager: the coach attendant came to check if she was okay, she was crying so hard! You may have found one particular film completely transported you, or one particular author's work which always seems to transport you when others don't.

Obviously, like the previous reading activity, the current passage was only short and, therefore, you might not have found yourself as immersed into the story as you might have been reading a whole chapter or several chapters.

7.1 Story world and genre

You may find as a reader that some stories are more transporting, whilst others might be harder for you to access or get into. Readers often have preferences for the type of literature that they choose, for example some readers find that novels work best to transport them, and you looked at some examples from novels in activities above. Some readers find instead that poetry is especially transporting. We invite you to read the poem below to see if, and how, this example works for you in this way. If you are not accustomed to reading poems, you could read it as if it were a mini-story. This poem is a kind of conversation and we hope it draws you in.

Up-Hill by Christina Rossetti

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?

A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?

You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?

Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.

> Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
>
> Yea, beds for all who come.
>
> Selected Poems, Wordsworth Editions, 145

The world of this poem is the world we live in, where at times everything can seem an uphill struggle. The speaker asking the questions seems quite mournful but is still asking as though there could be a positive answer. The other speaker, the one answering, seems to be at least a bit reassuring, saying that the inn will be reached, and that hard work will have its reward. This poem may have transported you into identifying with both speakers here and you may have wondered if they imply the two sides of every person? In this way, a poem can become a larger metaphor, standing in for life itself. As we write this, the poem also seems to speak to our present moment, in the Covid-19 pandemic.

8 Transportation and empathy

So how does transportation relate to empathy (i.e. the first psychological test you did in this course)? To return to the initial questions you answered on the interpersonal reactivity index you might expect that transportation may relate strongly to the fantasy scale (which measured the degree to which you imaginatively inhabit book characters). This has been found to be the case in prior research (e.g. Hall, 2011) which has shown that scores on the fantasy scale and transportation correlated when measuring people's absorption into films.



What you might not have expected is that there appear to be strong links between the degree to which people are transported into a text and the degree of empathy they feel after finishing reading towards other people. In such research, high levels of transportation have been found to lead to increased empathic responding to others (e.g. Bal and Veltkamp, 2013; Walkington, Ashton Wigman and Bowles, 2020) and this holds true even if the people read about are 'baddies'. In effect, therefore, the act of reading, and being transported into the story, may actually improve our levels of empathy towards others.

9 What did reading do to you?

You have now had a go at reading activities that illustrate two of the psychological processes that can mean you become really, closely involved in a book: identification and transportation. In terms of the psychological research, the story does not end here, however. Psychologists have shown that the processes associated with engaging with narratives can do some fairly impressive things to people. You have already heard that such processes can improve empathic responding to other people, but given what you now know about identification and transportation, and to find out more, you're now going to undertake an activity to see where you think these processes may lead.

Activity 8 The potential impacts of story

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity.

In the following list, select the effects that you think research has shown can happen as a result of reading or listening to stories. Which of the following sound plausible to you?

1. Reading a story might make someone more likely to be helpful to others e.g. help them pick up pens if they dropped them in the office.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Johnson (2011) showed that after a reading intervention highly transported individuals were more likely to help the experimenter pick up pens that they dropped (on purpose) during the research study.

2. Improve the behaviour between two ethnic minority groups after extreme intergroup conflict such as a genocide.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Paluk (2009) used a radio show soap opera in Rwanda to change behaviours (ie co-operation and communication) from one group to another after a genocide.

3. Make people who read about vampires estimate their own teeth as being longer than other people's.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Gabriel and Young (2011) found that reading from the book *Twilight* made people psychologically assimilate the characteristics of the group they read about. To an extent therefore they argued their research participants 'became' the group they read about.

4. Make us agree that eating chocolate makes us lose weight.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Wheeler Green and Brock (1999) found that if presented in a story people would accept false statements like this, alongside others such as ‘most forms of mental illness are contagious’.

5. Understand the mental states of other people better.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading enhanced people’s ‘Theory of Mind’ which is the skill vital to human society of understanding what other people might be thinking.

6. Feel happier in general and more satisfied with life.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Gabriel and Young (2011) found the more people felt they were similar to either wizards (if they read *Harry Potter*) or Vampires (if they read *Twilight*) the more positive they felt and the more satisfied they felt with their lives.

7. Feel less lonely.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile & Arkin (2014) found that individuals created meaningful relationships with characters they read about, bringing them a feeling of psychological closeness with the characters.

8. Make us feel a romantic attraction to the storyteller.

- ○ yes
- ○ no

Answer

Yes this is true. However, the effect only seems to happen when the storyteller is male, and when referring to long term, as opposed to short term, dating partners. Donahue and Green (2016) found in a series of studies that storytelling ability in males seemed to help males attract long term partners and they suggested this was

> because story telling ability seems to increase their status (as perceived by potential partners).
>
> However surprising it may seem, all of the statements above have been proven to be true through research.

Now you have learned about the impact that reading can have on you, in the next section you will look at how the idea that books can provide comfort in difficult times is not a new one at all. In fact, books have been used this way for a long time throughout history.

10 Reading throughout history

> ‘Take choice of all my Library, and so beguile thy sorrow’
>
> Helen Mary Gaskell, 1918

During the Covid-19 pandemic, you might have noticed how much media attention was being given to the idea of reading offering one important way of responding to a crisis of this kind. Reading, as suggested everywhere from BBC podcasts to newspaper articles to tweets, could offer a distraction from the worry; it could offer a way of dealing with the boredom of lockdown; it could make you feel less alone. The idea of ‘transportation’ as you’ve learned about it here seems particularly relevant to some of these thoughts about reading in difficult times.

As critical as this idea has been for readers of all kinds in this contemporary crisis, it’s not a new one. Books have been regarded as a source of solace, consolation, and healing throughout history. One 2017 newspaper piece by Germaine Leece put it that ‘the understanding that literature can comfort, console and heal has been around since the second millennium BC’. The idea has been revived periodically, in slightly different forms, in different places, ever since. Key historical examples from the more recent past emerged during the First World War (1914-18) – and, as you’ll remember, the example of the transformative power of reading that Ford wrote about also came from this traumatic period in history.



Helen Mary Gaskell was a well-connected and wealthy woman who decided on the 4th August 1914, when war was declared, that her contribution to the war effort would be to organise donations of reading matter to sick and wounded soldiers. Her own experience of being sick and finding comfort in books had led her to respond some years previously by sending some out to a relative wounded in the Boer War. His reaction, and that of his wounded comrades, was so effusive that she knew, when war broke out on 4th August 1914, that she wanted to make sure sick and wounded soldiers had access to the books that they loved wherever they were in the world. Gaskell’s War Library was operational by the end of 1914 and had bases stretching as far as Alexandria, in Egypt. Millions of books and magazines were collected and donated via the War Library during

the course of the war, helping to counter what one editor of the time, Ernest Rhys, called a 'book hunger' affecting soldiers who were a long way from home. Soldiers' requests were met where at all possible. Gaskell's philosophy was that meeting the type of request was itself important, showing a personal touch and careful attention to the individual who was ill or wounded. When she wrote the account of her War Library, which she published in 1918, she chose a quotation from Shakespeare's play *Titus Andronicus* to head it: 'Take choice of all my Library, and so beguile thy sorrow'.

The 'healthiness' (or otherwise) of reading is an age-old question, but it's one that became increasingly prominent in the west as reading audiences grew with the expansion of literacy. Commentators in the nineteenth century thought that newly literate women were vulnerable to the manipulative appeals of fiction due to their feminine emotions. The supposed results were 'novel addiction' and a tendency to confuse the world represented on the fictional page with the external reality of the reader's life. The popularity of crime fiction and the biographies of famous criminals with newly literate working-class men, meanwhile, led to fears that reading would encourage them into lives of crime. At the same time however, other voices arose—from reforming politicians and journalists and public library advocates, for instance—claiming that 'good' literature was necessarily beneficial and encouraging the growth and spread of the 'reading habit' across all social classes. Female commentators also pushed back against hostile representations of their reading lives, claiming that fiction provided women with a temporary mental escape route from confined and predictable domestic routines of 'crushing boredom' (Flint, 1993, p. 32).

During the First World War, earlier general claims for the 'healthiness' of literature crystallised into the new discipline of bibliotherapy, which claimed to be able to heal bodies as well as minds with carefully prescribed and administered reading material. First trialled on a large scale in American Veterans' Administration hospitals in the United States after the First World War (and to a smaller extent in Red Cross-supplied hospital libraries in the Britain), bibliotherapy is now a well-established discipline with many practitioners across the globe and a high degree of visibility in the contemporary book market. Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin's bestselling book *The Novel Cure* (2013), for instance, contains lists of books recommended for readers with various afflictions, ranging from 'wanderlust' to a broken heart. Described as a 'medical handbook with a difference', this apparently light-hearted title masks a more serious purpose. Berthoud and Elderkin run their own bibliotherapeutic practice, while clinical evidence now indicates that reading certain carefully prescribed books in a bibliotherapeutic setting really can contribute to the treatment of some mental illnesses and personal problems, ranging from depression to loneliness and social isolation (Floyd, 2003). In the United Kingdom, the Books on Prescription programme (first piloted in 2003) provides patients in British hospitals with a range of reading material categorised to help alleviate various traumas and mental illnesses (Brewster, Sen, and Cox, 2012).

Activity 9 Books that mean something to you

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity.

In Ella Berthoud's and Susan Elderkin's book, *Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman (and the other books in the trilogy including the one you have read extracts from in this course) is suggested as one book that can help with feelings of loneliness. Berthoud and Elderkin argue this is a great book to read if you are lonely because the characters in the book are accompanied by a daemon (a companion in the form of an animal that is always with them).

Have a think about the books that have meant most to you in your reading life. Do they remind you of particularly good times, or friends and family that you love? Do they represent a time when you discovered your reading independence, or what an escape reading can be? Or are they simply as familiar as old friends, improving your feelings of well-being when you pick them up?

Answer

Each one of you will have had a different response to this activity. Continue to think about your own habits and preferences as a reader and how they are an important part of your identity, as important, say, as the clothes that you wear or the music that you like.

11 Therapeutic benefits of writing and reading

Creative Writing as a discipline within academia and as a practice (both amateur and professional) outside of that arena, has reading at its core. Undergraduates learn to 'read as a writer' in order to develop technique and in community settings, in evening classes and in hobby clubs for all ages, creative practice is accompanied by reading many kinds of writing from stories and poems through to memoir and scripts. Creative writing has also been studied in relation to how knowledge is acquired in education as well as in relation to the maintenance of individual well-being. In settings from working with rights activists in post-conflict situations, from writing with hospice patients and staff to workshops with military veterans, Creative Writing is seen to provide a dynamic of shared writing and reading which appears to make other things possible. Apart from stories being shared, communities of practice are created, new life-plans or futures are imagined, and skills are gained which amplify the kind of identification and empathy discussed above.

Philosopher Richard Rorty (1989) said that 'our society needs texts that promote compassion and persuade and show us how to feel the experience of others' and the reading and writing of poetry and other genres has been used both formally and informally in healing capacities since at least the early 19th century (Mazza, 2001, and some say much earlier, as you saw above). Many critical studies referring to this work have appeared in the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychology (Heimes' re-view, 2011). The use of a variety of writing methods (including metaphor making, journal writing, letter writing) in health and mental health disciplines is widely reported in professional literature of nursing care and other disciplines (Chavis, 2011; Mazza, 2003; McCulliss, 2011).



Writing in these ways involves reading, whether shared, in groups for example, or enjoyed alone, and it seems clear that the kind of transportation we've noticed here, along with the ability to identify and to empathise, may underpin some of these writing-based interventions.

See here for more on some OU research into Creative Writing Interventions.

Conclusion

While often thought of primarily as a form of entertainment, reading books offers so much more as an engaged activity as well. As you have learned in this course, reading can lead to psychological changes and can have positive impacts on our wellbeing in distressing times. As we write this course in 2021, the potential benefits of reading might be argued to be of particular significance. This time has brought challenges to the way we interact with others, and has challenged our ability to physically spend time with other people. Reading may be one way in which we can enjoy the company of a whole cast of interesting individuals, Heroes and Heroines, Villains, Witches, Wizards and Vampires, all depending on our literary tastes. By putting on the shoes of another in a story we read, we can inhabit the lives of others, and learn something of our social world and the inner lives of others, without even setting foot outside our own front door. Strikingly, studies have also shown that transportation into a story enables the reader to change their empathic responses to others in real life (e.g. Johnson, 2012; Paluk, 2009).

In research by one of the authors of this course, we have even found that reading interventions are able to alter empathic responding to non-positive role models (Walkington et al. 2020) and such results show that reading can lead to potentially important behavioural change within society.



‘The silence that Lives in Houses’ by Henri Matisse, 1947 © Succession H.Matisse/ DACS2021

As you have come to understand in this course, the experience of reading stories is in itself an activity that connects humanity through the centuries. When we think about the collective experience of reading, and the human desire throughout history to share its transformative effects, we learn that when we engage our imaginations, we share in a whole set of human processes that can establish links where there were perceived divisions, or a sense of disparateness. Reading may encourage us to discover we are more connected than we knew, and this experience can sustain us astonishingly well in times of need.

Where next?

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You may be particularly interested in these OpenLearn articles:

- Dr Sara Haslam on the Brontë sisters' work
- 'Literary Caregiving': The War Library and Endell Street Military Hospital Library
- Psychological drama: Writing fictional crime drama for a forensic psychology course

Or you might like to take a look at How stories shape our minds, a collaboration between the BBC and The Open University.

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Activity 4: adapted from Davis, M. H. (1983) 'Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(1), pp. 113–126. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.44.1

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Glossary

cognitive perspective

Cognition refers to the mental processes that take place in the brain, so cognitive perspective refers to how someone perceives and thinks about the world.

emotional state

Psychologists tend to differentiate between traits (which are long term or enduring tendencies) and states (which are more temporary or fleeting). An ‘emotional state’ is therefore the fleeting emotion you might experience from moment to moment as you go through any given day.

hominids

Erect, bipedal, primate mammals of the group *Hominidae*, which includes great apes (e.g. gorillas, orangutans and chimpanzees) and humans, including their recent, extinct ancestral forms.

interpersonally

Psychologists call behaviour that happens between people when they interact ‘interpersonal behaviour’.

narrator

Someone who tells a story, including a character who tells the story in a work of fiction.

schemata

Plural of the word schema, coming from the Greek word meaning ‘figure’. Mental structures that organise different types of information and the relationship between them.

Bruner (1990)

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