

Mindset Transformation Through Fiction Reading

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Abstract— Research has shown that reading fiction promotes empathy and increases social acuity. Through reading, we are exposed to a wide range of human experiences and emotions, which expands our understanding of the world and the people around us. We are able to see the world through different lenses and develop a more nuanced perspective. Additionally, reading fiction can help us develop a growth mindset. Books often contain characters who undergo personal transformations and overcome challenges. These stories can inspire us to adopt a similar mindset and believe in our own ability to grow and change. By seeing characters in fiction navigate obstacles and learn from failures, we can learn to approach our own lives with a similar mindset of resilience and growth.

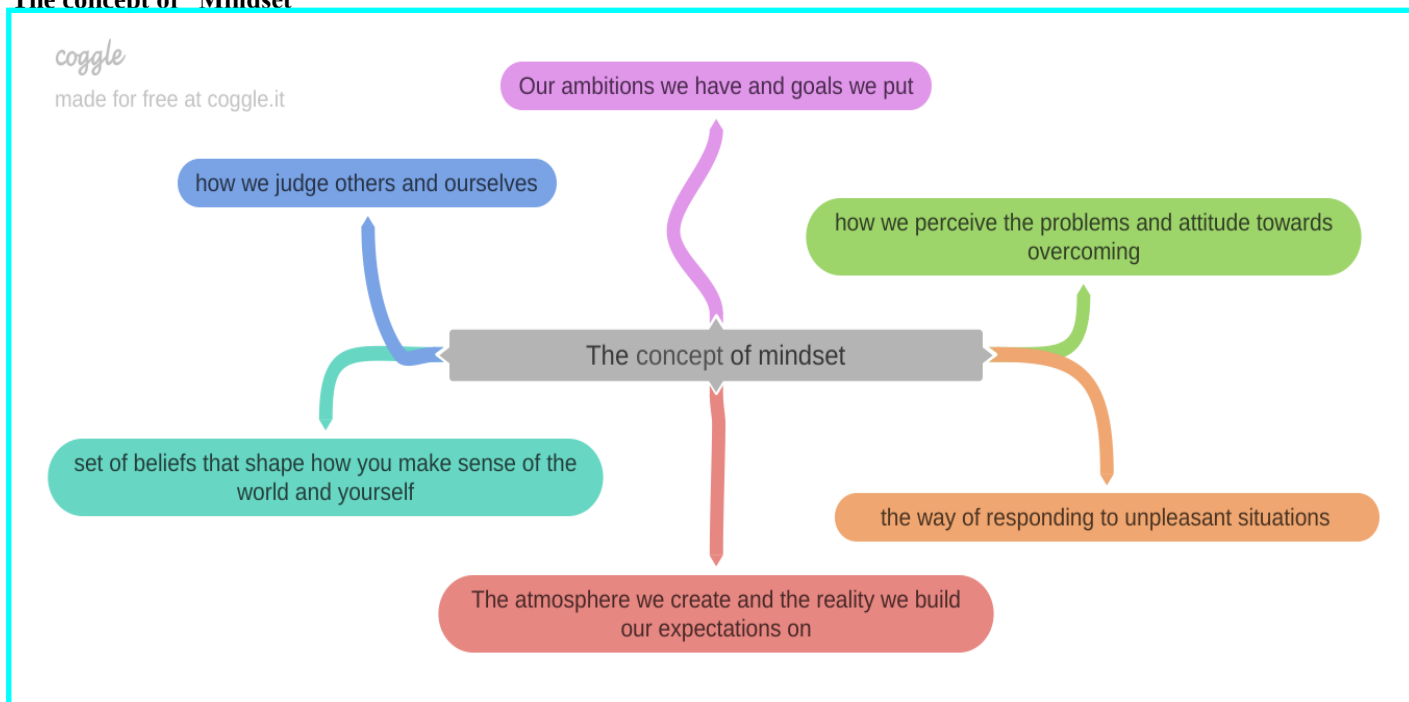
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1. INTRODUCTION

According to an article on Psychology Today, reading fiction involves a two-step process: an exit and a simulation. When we read fiction, we are temporarily transported from our own reality, allowing us to experience different perspectives and situations. This immersion in fictional worlds can lead to empathy and an enhanced ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings. Another study suggests that fiction reading promotes the simulation of fictional minds, which supports emotion recognition skills. It was found that fiction texts reliably use contextualized statistical experience with emotion category labels, which can contribute to improved emotion recognition. Literature has a transformative effect, as explained by the Transformative Reading Program. The program views the purpose of literature as an experience that transforms both the reader and the text. Reading literary works facilitates personal growth, challenges assumptions, and expands one's perspective on life.

2. MAIN PART

The concept of “Mindset”



According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "mindset" refers to a person's way of thinking and their opinions. Kendra Cherry, MSEd, defines it as a set of attitudes and beliefs that shape how we interpret the world and ourselves. The term encompasses our frame of mind, outlook, and disposition. It can also include our culture, values, philosophy, and beliefs about the meaning of life. There are various types of mindsets, such as fixed mindset and growth mindset.

In the field of psychology, mindset refers to the cognitive process activated in a specific task. According to Kendra Cherry, MSEd, it can influence how people behave in different situations. Psychologist Carol Dweck has extensively studied mindset, and has identified two basic types: fixed mindset and growth mindset. A fixed mindset believes that abilities are fixed traits, while a growth mindset believes that talents and abilities can be developed over time through effort and persistence.

In the founding of cognitive psychology by Kendra Cherry, MSEd, it is stated that, our mindset plays a significant role in how you cope with life's challenges. Those with a growth mindset tend to have a hunger for learning, a desire to work hard, and a willingness to persevere in the face of setbacks. On the other hand, individuals with a fixed mindset may be more likely to give up when faced with difficulties and believe that intelligence and abilities are static.

As mentioned in www.verywellmind.com, developing a growth mindset is possible, and it involves focusing on the journey rather than just the end result and incorporating the word "yet" when facing challenges. Adults can also help children develop a growth mindset by praising efforts rather than solely focusing on outcomes and by avoiding labels that may lead to fixed mindsets.

In summary, a mindset refers to a person's way of thinking, attitudes, and beliefs. It can influence behavior and play a crucial role in one's success and resilience. Developing a growth mindset can be beneficial in fostering a love for learning and facing challenges with determination and perseverance.

Growth Mindset

A growth mindset, proposed by Stanford professor Carol Dweck, in her book *Mindset*, describes people who believe that their success depends on time and effort. People with a growth mindset feel their skills and intelligence can be improved with effort and persistence. They embrace challenges, persist through obstacles, learn from criticism and seek out inspiration in others' success. ("Top Hat" Glossary)

Those who hold a growth mindset believe that they can get better at something by dedication of time, effort and energy. Working on one's flaws, and the process — not the outcome — are the most important components. With time and practice, people with a growth mindset believe they can achieve what they want. The opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset. ("Top Hat" Glossary)

In the work of Bernhard Schroeder "12 Advantages of A Growth Mindset That Could Accelerate Your Career" revealed that, adopting a growth mindset is not just essential in your life, it's critical. Those people with a growth mindset understand that knowledge can be acquired and intelligence can be developed. With a growth mindset, people focus on improvement instead of worrying about how smart they are. They work hard to learn more and get smarter. A "growth mindset," thrives on challenge and sees failure not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities.

Also Bernhard Schroeder considers that, a "fixed mindset," on the other hand, assumes that our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens, it's what we were born with, which we can't change in any meaningful way. Out of these two mindsets, which we manifest from a very early age, comes our belief about whether or not we believe we can succeed at whatever we want to be. We are not what other people said we were at a young age. Ever had a parent or teacher say this to you as a child, "You're drawing is terrible. You just don't have math skills. You are not athletic." They were wrong. Here's the good news. No matter your current mindset, you can adopt and nurture a growth mindset but you have work to do.

Ultimate way of changing your mindset.

As we grow, we change mentally, psychologically as well and there a lot of ways of improving our mentality and personality. But, we are going to discuss the most influential method, which is through reading fictional literature. According to Dylan Dowty in his book "THE EFFECTS OF FICTIONAL LITERATURE ON REAL-WORLD PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS", students begin metacognition — thinking about thinking — and shape the way that they think, thus shaping their identities. Students go about exploring their identities and themselves in many different ways, but researchers like Thomas Bean agree that many adolescents look to fictional literature when shaping their identities.

So, in what ways fiction reading helps us to build up mature mindset?

- First of all, through fiction reading engagement we improve parts of our brain that are critical for adaptation, salience and emotion processing network. In the study of "fMRI Study on Supra-Natural Effects" by Chun-Ting Hsu, Arthur M. Jacobs, Ulrike

Altmann and Markus Conrad, it was found that process of reading fiction with supra-natural events cognitive processing increases demanding for ongoing discourse integration, readers’ attention is caught, and might thus contribute to the pleasure and deep emotional experience. Also, the representation of magical events can be considered quite a demanding or sophisticated case of meaning construction, because for the sake of discourse processing.

In this research paper, it is reported that, parts of brain including left amygdala, left fusiform gyrus, frontal gyri and parietal lobules are affected advantageously, consequently increasing the cognitive demands associated with world knowledge integration, activating the salience and emotion network, and recruiting the fronto-parietal attention networks because of novelty, unexpectedness, and uncertainty in fictional texts. Miall DS, Kuiken D (1994) and Oatley K (1995) argues that, another characteristics of literary reading is involving processes of constructive content imagination and simulation, especially perspective taking and relational inferences associated with bringing about the novelty and emotional richness, that are essential for learning how to navigate through social issues surrounding our age group, (Bean, 2003, pg. 638; Wise, 2012).

●Secondly, fictional narratives nurture us emotionally, in other words, they have profound impact on how we feel about ourselves, others and behave towards. (Poulson C, Duncan J, Massie M (2005) “I am not what I am” – Destructive emotions in an organizational hierarchy: the case of Othello and Iago. *Research on Emotions in Organizations*, 1, 211–240). It has been suggested that people who read a lot of fiction become more empathic, because fiction is a simulation of social experiences, in which people practice and enhance their interpersonal skills. (Oatley K (2002) *Emotions and the story world of fiction*. In Green MC, Strange JJ, Brock TC, editors. *Narrative Impact. Social and Cognitive Foundations*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum. 39–70.) For example, there are several researchers who have explained why fiction reading influences empathy and Mar and colleagues [6,7,21] argued that fiction reading may have profound effects on empathic skills of the reader. Davis [22,23] defines the empathy as: the cognitive and intellectual ability to recognize the emotions of other persons and to emotionally respond to other persons. It includes sympathy and concern for unfortunate others. (Gerdes KE, Segal EA, Lietz CA (2010) *Conceptualising and measuring empathy*. *Br J Soc Work* 40: 2326–2343.).

Grant AM, Berry JW (2011) and Shuman A (2006) represent opinions, which state that, the study of empathy is important because high empathic persons are more prosocial which is associated for example in the workplace to higher performance, productivity, and creativity leading to high social cognition, defined as the perception, interpretation and use of social information, and comprises a set of abilities that we draw on daily to manage social relationships in a variety of situations (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). (Grant AM, Berry JW (2011) *The necessity of others is the mother of invention: intrinsic and prosocial motivations, perspective taking, and creativity*. *Academy of Management Journal* 54: 73–96) (Shuman A (2006) *Entitlement and empathy in personal narrative*. *Narrative Inquiry* 16: 148–155.)

According to Djikic, the mechanism behind the transformational potential of fiction involves a two-step process: an exit and a simulation.

“When we read fiction, we are asked to temporarily exit our identities and mentally step into different ones. Often, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, can prevent us from growing. Exiting our stories allows us to enter a state of potentiality that we often see in children, when we tell them ‘You can be anything!’ As adults, our self-narratives become more rigid. The invitation to put aside our identities and enter a space where we can simulate different ways of being can already be transformational. Then, by exploring other minds, we are given the opportunity to practice experiencing different emotions, thoughts and behaviors than what we otherwise live. When you find yourself re-engaging with the story and characters after you have finished reading a book, that’s when growth happens.” (Marianna Pogosyan Ph.D.

Between Cultures the Psychology of Fiction: Why Reading Transforms Us. January 27, 2022)

Apart from this, Mar et al argues, “People learn from fiction about the human psychology, and gain knowledge about how to react to other people in social situations.” (Mar RA, Oatley K, Peterson JB (2009) *Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes*. *Communications* 34: 407–428.) Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that seeing or reading about another person experiencing specific emotions and events activates the same neural structures as if one was experiencing them oneself, consequently influencing empathy (Gallese V (2001) *The “shared manifold” hypothesis: From mirror neurons to empathy*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8: 33–50.)

In addition to making readers more empathetic and invested in the story and characters, reading fiction also improves people’s social interactions. (How does fiction affect and influence our lives? By Jessie Gross. May 25, 2021)

“When an individual reads a story, he/she predicts the actions and reactions of the characters, by inferring what they are thinking, feeling, and intending. In order to do this, the reader sympathizes with the characters in the story, through taking the perspective of the characters and to experience the events as if it is the reader’s own experience.” — the National Center for Biotechnology Information

Another reason why fiction may have strong effects on empathy has been presented by the theory of psychic numbing (. Slovic P (2007) “If I look at the mass I will never act”: psychic numbing and genocide. *Judgm Decis Mak* 2: 79–95) Slovic argues that the way a message (e.g., about victims) is presented to people influences their capacity to experience the affective information in that message and to feel sympathy. Specifically, it is easier to experience affect if a message presents information about a single, identifiable individual, than when information is presented about entire groups or using statistics. (Bal PM, Veltkamp M (2013) How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation. *PLoS ONE* 8(1): e55341. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0055341)

Lastly, we can infer that, the mental journey elicited by transportation into fiction makes it possible for readers to change as a consequence of reading fiction, because it elicits various processes, including emotional involvement in the story and identification with the characters [. Oatley K (1999) Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. *Rev Gen Psychol* 3: 101–117.) (Oatley K (2002) Emotions and the story world of fiction. In Green MC, Strange JJ, Brock TC, editors. *Narrative Impact. Social and Cognitive Foundations*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum. 39–70.)). Many studies have shown that when readers become transported into a narrative, personal change is more likely to occur.

How we relate to fictional characters?

According to Cristina Guarneri in her work of “The Influence of Believable Characters on Readers realistic fiction”, in realistic fiction, impact of characters has a direct influence on reader’s decision-making and world view. Realistic fiction is a genre that consists of stories that have characters that live in a believable setting. Their stories resemble real life, and the fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people. Stories that are classified as realistic fiction have plots that highlight social or personal events, along with issues that mirror contemporary life and the characters seem to be like real people with real issues solved in a realistic way, along with the events conjuring questions that a reader could face in everyday life. (Realistic Fiction and Literature: The Influence of Believable Characters on Readers Cristina Guarneri, Ed.D. 2 October 2018)

“Fictional characters can leave a long-lasting impression on the minds of authors and readers.” — Abhinav Singh, Entrepreneur

“When you read fiction, you can be someone you’d never otherwise have the chance to become — another gender, another age, someone of another nationality or another circumstance. You can be an explorer, a scientist, an artist, a young and single mother or an orphaned cabin boy or a soldier. When you take off the guise again — set down the book — you walk away changed. You understood things you didn’t understand before, and that shapes your worldview.” — Hannah Frankman, Medium

From personal experience, I can mention that, while in our teens, we are mostly in the journey of discovery, so we can put the fictional books into good use by trying to identify with various characters of fiction and obtain good peculiarities as well as experiencing new identities. For example, some fictional characters teach us about useful attributes, as patience, boldness, trustworthiness and being responsible.

Moreover, via the monologue and dialogues of characters linguistic abilities of expressing oneself are fostered, since characters would have different speech characteristics of coherence and cohesion, fluency and eloquence. Psychologists Mar and Keith Oatley tested the idea that entering fiction’s simulated social worlds and connecting with characters enhances our ability to connect with actual human beings, internal representation.

Most influential fictional books of all times

- o “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll
- o “The adventures of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain
- o “Nineteen Eighty Four” by George Orwell
- o “Harry Potter” series by J.K. Rowling
- o “Anna Karenina” by L.N. Tolstoy
- o “The Lord of Rings” by J.R.R Tolkien

- o“The catcher in the Rye” J.d.Salinger
- oWorks of Agatha Christie
- o“The Alchemist” by Paulo Coelho
- o“A thousand splendid Suns” by Khaled Hosseini
- o “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austin.

3. CONCLUSION

Born and raised in Ohio, William Dean Howells was an effective advocate of a new realistic mode of fiction writing. At the start, Howells conceived of realism as truthful portrayal of ordinary facets of life--with some limitations; he preferred comedy to tragedy, and he tended to be reticent to the point of prudishness. The formula was displayed at its best in *Their Wedding Journey* (1872), *A Modern Instance* (1882), and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Howells preferred novels he wrote after he encountered Tolstoy's writings and was persuaded by them, as he said, to "set art forever below humanity." In such later novels as *Annie Kilburn* (1888) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), he chose characters not only because they were commonplace but also because the stories he told about them were commentaries upon society, government, and economics.

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