



Literary fiction promotes empathy, theory of mind, and critical thinking skills

Ravipati Kumara Swamy

Assistant Professor, Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation, Deemed to be University, Green Fields, Vaddeswaram, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract

Studying literature can indeed improve brain power and critical thinking skills. When we read fiction, our brains are engaged in a process called "mental simulation," where we imagine the characters, settings, and events in the story. This mental simulation activates various regions of the brain, including those responsible for language processing, memory, and empathy. Additionally, reading fiction can enhance our cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. It also helps improve our vocabulary and language skills. So, reading fiction is not only enjoyable but also beneficial for our brains. Research suggests that reading literary fiction is an effective way to enhance the brain's ability to keep an open mind while processing information, a necessary skill for effective decision-making. It is an open-hearted acceptance I am going to begin this article by posing an argument: Reading fiction is important to understand the society with open mind. The content polishes your brainpower and builds your evidences set. This research article will discuss the necessity of studying literature in brief.

Keywords: Fiction, reading, research, people, critical thinking, empathy

Introduction

Literature reflects both good and bad values of the society. In reflecting the bad values, it makes us to rectify and solve the issues. In reflection of good values in the society it makes us to emulate. Often as reflection, literature presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society. Fiction is a genre of literature that encompasses imaginative or invented stories. It is a form of storytelling that presents events, characters, and settings that are not based on real-life events or people. Fiction can take various forms, including novels, short stories, plays, and poems. It allows authors to create and explore different worlds, ideas, and perspectives. The primary purpose of fiction is to entertain and engage readers by evoking emotions, sparking imagination, and offering insights into the human condition. But, on the contrary literature deals the social issues such as poverty, homelessness, climate change, diaspora or immigration stress, human rights, racial prejudice or caste discrimination, gender inequality. The writers and they give their way of solutions for these societal maladies based on their point of view through their fictional divisions. Research, however, suggests that reading fiction may provide far more important benefits than nonfiction. For example, reading fiction predicts increased social acuity and a sharper ability to comprehend other people's motivations. The writer could be portrayal the genuine things that happen in society by modifying his views and ideas who is a witness of his or her civilization to interpret the good and evil of the consequences. He could instruct the readers in all arenas. Fiction can fulfil these gaps by caring ethics to regulate the society. The works of authors show light of knowledge in the dimness of ignorance. Fiction lets the readers to see themselves and their world in a different light. Some of the most valuable skills that managers look for in employees are often difficult to define, let alone evaluate or quantify: self-discipline, self-awareness, creative problem-solving, empathy, learning agility, adaptiveness, flexibility,

positivity, rational judgment, generosity, and kindness, among others. Recent research in neuroscience suggests that you might look to the library for solutions;

Reading literary fiction helps to develop the theory of mind

Maryanne Wolf, cognitive scientist and author of *Reader, Come Home*, argues that "the quality of our reading" stands as "an index to the quality of our thought." If we want better thinkers in the business world, we have to build better readers. Rather than reading books on psychology, fiction can help us understand our experience Fiction and free association help us to connect with our feelings, says Dr Christina Moutsou. If you are struggling to make sense of how you feel, find a therapist here, My patients often ask me if they could read a book to help themselves further. The question usually takes the form: 'Could you recommend a book I could read specifically on my symptom or on this problem I am dealing with?' I rarely recommend psychotherapy or psychology books, as I feel they may, in fact, make the problem worse through creating further anxiety what needs to be understood in terms of the person's specific experience. What I often suggest though is a novel or a short story or a memoir. All these genres are more likely to give a glimpse of direct experience that can move or even transform. In a recent talk about the power or reading to transform our lives, Michael Rosen talks movingly about reading a poem which helped him connect with his feelings about his son's death. He says: "There is an incredible poem (by Raymond Carver) where he gets locked out of his own study and he looks back into his study and thinks about himself. And he doesn't say he is thinking about death, he doesn't say that, but as a reader you can take it as a way of thinking about a person or yourself who is not there. And I got utterly overwhelmed by it. I remember thinking that's exactly how I feel about Eddie and that's exactly how I feel about myself."

Research suggests that reading literary fiction is an effective way to enhance the brain's ability to keep an open mind while processing information, a necessary skill for effective decision-making. In a 2013 study, researchers examined something called the need for cognitive closure, or the desire to "reach a quick conclusion in decision-making and an aversion to ambiguity and confusion."

Fiction indeed provides a unique opportunity to explore the world through the narrator's mindset. In literature, the narrator is the lens through which readers perceive the story and its characters, and this perspective can shape our understanding of the world in several ways:

Empathy

Fictional narratives allow readers to step into the shoes of characters with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. By immersing ourselves in the narrator's mindset, we can develop empathy for people who are different from us, helping to bridge gaps of understanding and promote tolerance.

Subjectivity

Narrators in fiction often have their own biases, beliefs, and emotions, just like real people. This subjectivity can offer a more nuanced view of the world, emphasizing that reality is not always black and white. Readers learn to appreciate the complexity of human experiences and the ambiguity of moral and ethical dilemmas.

Exploration of Themes

Through the narrator's perspective, fiction can delve into a wide range of themes, from love and loss to power and identity. These themes are often universal, and by experiencing them through the narrator's eyes, readers can gain insight into their own lives and the human condition.

Critique and Commentary

Many works of fiction use the narrator's mindset to provide social, political, or cultural commentary. By presenting a story through a particular lens, authors can critique or satirize aspects of society, encouraging readers to reflect on their own beliefs and values.

Psychological Depth

Fiction allows for the exploration of characters' inner thoughts and emotions, giving readers a window into the complexities of the human mind. This can lead to a greater understanding of human psychology and behavior.

Fiction helps to understand people's emotions.

Reading fiction helps you understand other people's perspectives. Fiction has a power that no other form of communication does: the power to insert you fully and completely in someone else's mind. It is a blend between the mind of the reader and the writer, and the attentions of reader and character. Reading novels can provide insight into the emotions and experiences of others. Novels often delve into the inner thoughts and feelings of characters, allowing readers to empathize and understand different perspectives. This can help readers develop a greater understanding of human emotions and enhance their ability to relate to others.

Fiction is a Source of knowledge and information

A person developing and aiming for success should steep themselves in fiction, and read it copiously. Fiction reading is one of the contemporary subjects across the globe. As a matter, it can really improve one's imagination and emotional intelligence skill. It helps to improve the quality of new literature at the dawn of civilization. Fiction attracts the attention of wide spectrum of audience. Because its main goal is to present facts and not to communicate the emotions of the author to be convinced and judged. Fictional writing uses senses and emotions to create a strong visual in the reader's mind whereas other forms of writing typically only leave the reader with facts and information instead of emotional intrigue.

Fiction mirrors the society

Fiction serves as a mirror to the human experience, reflecting our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions through the narrator's lens. It encourages us to step outside of our own mindset and explore the multifaceted nature of existence, ultimately enriching our understanding of the world and our place in it.

Fiction addresses conflicts and challenges in society

Fiction offers insights into societal issues and provides potential solutions. Fictional stories can inspire change and positive action. Fiction reading contribute to a richer, more empathetic society. Research on reading shows literature study to be one of the best methods for building empathy critical thinking, and creativity.

Fiction lets you see the world through a character's eyes

Watching a character interact with the world around them is powerful. When studying history, a history book gives you a series of dry facts and anecdotes, but historical fiction sets you down in the middle of the time period, allows you to touch and taste the world around you, interact with contemporaries, solve problems. You understand the period contextually as you never could from the removed perspective of a history book. Good fiction runs deep into the realms of psychology and philosophy. It explores and uncovers paradigm. It allows you to understand perspectives you've never seen before, both psychological and physical.

The key aspects of literature

Literature can indeed enhance critical thinking skills in various ways. Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, and literature provides an excellent platform for developing these skills. Here are some ways in which literature can enhance critical thinking:

Complex Characters and Motivations

In literature, characters often have multifaceted personalities and motivations. Analyzing their actions, decisions, and inner conflicts can encourage readers to think critically about human behavior and psychology.

Diverse Perspectives

Literature often exposes readers to different cultures, historical periods, and social contexts. Exploring these diverse perspectives can challenge preconceived notions and encourage critical reflection on issues like cultural relativism, ethics, and societal norms.

Interpretation and Inference

Literature often contains symbolism, allegory, and ambiguity. Readers must engage in interpretation and inference to uncover deeper meanings or understand the author's intent. This encourages critical thinking by requiring readers to analyze textual evidence and draw logical conclusions.

Moral and Ethical Dilemmas

Many literary works explore complex moral and ethical dilemmas. Readers are often asked to weigh the consequences of characters' actions and make their own judgments, which promotes critical thinking about ethics and values.

Identifying Bias and Perspective

Critical thinking involves recognizing bias and understanding the perspective from which information is presented. Literature often presents biased or unreliable narrators, which can help readers develop the skills to identify and question biased viewpoints.

Analyzing Narrative Structure

Examining the structure of a story, including plot development, narrative style, and point of view, encourages readers to think critically about how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the work.

Comparative Analysis

Comparing different works of literature or characters within a single work can foster critical thinking. Readers can analyze similarities and differences, drawing conclusions about themes, character development, and more.

Argumentation and Debate

Discussing and debating literary interpretations with others can sharpen critical thinking skills. Readers must defend their viewpoints with evidence from the text and respond to counterarguments, honing their analytical abilities.

Creative Problem-Solving

Engaging with imaginative and creative narratives in literature can inspire readers to think creatively and critically about solving problems, as they may identify with characters facing challenging situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, literature offers a rich source of material for enhancing critical thinking skills. Readers who engage with literary works actively, analyze text, and explore diverse perspectives can develop a deeper understanding of complex issues and sharpen their critical thinking abilities. Literature Study can also be an important tool for creating empathy, allowing people to see and understand the perspectives of those whose experiences may be very different from their own. Literature has the power to find solutions for personal and social problems.

References

1. <https://welldoing.org/article/how-reading-fiction-can-heal>
2. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/the-case-for-reading-fiction>
3. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190523-does-reading-fiction-make-us-better-people#:~:tet>

4. <https://oxfordsummercourses.com/articles/what-is-creative-writing>
5. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-creative-writing-definition-types-examples.html>