READING: Skimming and scanning



A Have you ever tried to be more like a character in a novel? Perhaps you started using one of the character's phrases or bought clothes to look more like him or her. If this describes you, you are not alone! Research suggests that readers of novels sometimes start behaving – and even thinking – like the fictional characters in their favorite books. Some may even start believing what the characters believe. It seems that what we read can have a huge effect on us.

B Other studies on the effects of reading found that many readers could actually "hear" what the characters on the page were saying. Characters had an actual "voice." For some readers, that voice wasn't silenced when the book was put down. A reader might be choosing a dish in a restaurant and find him- or herself wondering what a character from a favorite novel might order. In fact, some readers even reported having regular conversations in their heads with characters as if they had a real-life relationship with them. Others said that once a novel was finished, they found themselves "missing" a character, just as they would miss a departed friend or lover.

C Interestingly, it seems that what people experience when reading isn't quite the same as their experience when watching a movie. People watching a movie might react emotionally to what they see, but they remain aware that they are watching someone else. People reading a story lose their sense of "separateness" and personally feel what the character feels. What we read, then, has a powerful effect on the human mind.

D So what is it about the written word that makes characters live and breathe for us? Why do we feel this unique connection with people in books? The answer might lie in the brain's reaction. What scientists have recently discovered is that reading causes activity in many more areas of the brain than previously thought. You would expect that the words "lemon," "roses," and "perfume" would cause activity in the language-processing parts of your brain. However, it seems they also excite the areas of the brain related to smells. In other words, reading about an experience is more like actually having that experience than we previously thought.

1 Skim the text quickly. Match paragraphs A–D with summaries 1–4.

1 How fictional characters can seem real to some readers. ☐
2 The part that the brain plays in the reading experience. ☐
3 How the characters in books can sometimes influence the behavior of readers. ☐
4 The difference between people's reactions to novels and movies. ☐

2 Read the questions
Then choose the correct answers. **Mark with an X.**

1 What did studies show about people who read novels?
- ☐ a They are rarely influenced by the behavior of the people in the novels they are reading.
- ☐ b They sometimes change their behavior to be more like the people in the novels they are reading.
- ☐ c They like reading novels in which the characters have the same beliefs as them.

2 What did some readers report about the "voice" of a fictional character?
- ☐ a It was similar to their own.
- ☐ b They could hear it sometimes when they weren't reading.
- ☐ c They sometimes used it, for example, to order food in a restaurant.

3 When they are watching movies, people ...
- ☐ a never forget that the action is happening to someone else.
- ☐ b do not experience the emotions that the characters feel.
- ☐ c feel as if the action is happening to them personally.

4 Which parts of the brain are affected by words like "lemon" and "roses"?
- ☐ a the parts that deal with language
- ☐ b the parts that are concerned with smell
- ☐ c the parts that are concerned with language and smell

3 Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using clauses with *what*. The first one is done for you.

1 I liked the dress that she wore for the Oscars ceremony.
I liked *what she wore* for the Oscars ceremony.

2 The food that we eat can have an enormous effect on our health.
_____ can have an enormous effect on our health.

3 I still can't believe the things that she told me last night!
I still can't believe _____

4 I gave him the money I had in my pocket.
I gave him _____

5 The things that I saw that night will stay with me forever.
_____ will stay with me forever.

LIVEWORKSHEETS