

Graphic Novels as Substitutions of Traditional Books to Improve Intensive Reading Skills

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In today's world, a lot of concepts are being re-defined, and new methods, techniques, and alternatives are available for us to take new approaches to reach our goals. Such is the case in reading too. The term 'reading' does not apply only to reading traditional books anymore. There are many alternatives besides the traditional book for someone to read. Graphic novels, comic books, E-books, online articles – all of these are easily available to us and we can choose what appeals to us the most and what piques our interests the most.

In such a scenario where there are a myriad of options to choose, the very notion of academic reading can be taken to a whole new level. Instead of sticking to traditional novels, a great alternative would be graphic novels, especially for classroom settings where the students' imaginations can be expanded, and their senses can be heightened to yield better outcomes in terms of preserving and attaining information.

What is a Graphic Novel?

The most important thing to keep in mind when defining a graphic novel is the fact that it is not a genre, but a format. Graphic novels are often confused as a genre of novels. They are actually a completely different form of literature themselves, and they have their own genres, ranging from fiction, non-fiction, memoirs and even autobiographies, to name a few. The graphic novel is best defined when compared to the more popular format, comic books. Though they both use the form of sequential art to tell a story, they are two completely different forms.

The difference between graphic novels and comic books lie in three strata- form, content, and publication format. Firstly, the form is different. Graphic novels tend to stray from the specific format that comic books follow, such as the panelling and page format. Just as authors of traditional books have their own signature style in writing, graphic novelists tend to put their own twists and styles when it comes to their work. This could be in the form of their illustrations, how they use the panels, etc. Secondly, unlike comic books, the contents of graphic novels are more 'adult'. By this, it means that the contents are based on a more mature audience. Comic books usually deal with a lot of humour, supernatural elements, superheroes, and so on, aimed at a younger audience. Thirdly, unlike comic books which are serialised and come in sequential issues, graphic novels tend to resemble traditional books more. They are more similar to traditional novels in their size, the content, and they are not serialized, and the whole story is confined in the book.

Why Read Graphic Novels?

Graphic Novels have become more and more popular in today's world, with graphic novelists gaining due recognition. Popular graphic novels like *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi have been adapted in various forms. More and more people have been reading graphic novels, and more graphic novels have been published. Their popularity seems to lie in the fact that graphic novels offer a lot of advantage to readers.

The main benefit of reading a graphic novel would be the presence of visual aids. Through the illustrations, a lot of uncommon words and expressions can be easily depicted. Also, it is an enhancement to the text present in the story. Since the presence of visual aids help in breaking down complex vocabulary, graphic novels are therefore very ideal for readers, as they do not have to reach out to a dictionary as often as they would without illustrations being there to explain some of the concepts. Furthermore, we have to take into consideration that reading a huge text can be time-consuming. Thus, reading a graphic novel where illustrations substitute huge chunks of words can be useful when an individual wants to read effectively but does not have a lot of time on their hands.

Intensive Reading – An Overview

Intensive reading is a type of reading that requires the reader to read intensely in utter concentration. This type of reading always has a specific goal. The goal is to attain specific information from the text being read. It can be put in comparison with extensive reading, where the reader reads for enjoyment and leisure. Intensive reading is reading for a higher degree of comprehension and retention for a long period of time.

Intensive reading is required in schools and institutions, where students need to remember specific details of what is in their book for a long time. Presently, the materials handed out in classrooms for intensive reading purposes are all in the form of traditional books. Although the books may contain illustrations, the illustrations are few in number, and as the level of the studies grow higher, the number of illustrations present in textbooks decrease too. Since intensive reading is such an important element in helping a reader retain information, the materials for intensive reading are to be considered and planned out well too.

Graphic Novels Vs Traditional Books for Intensive Reading

The graphic novel, its benefits and suitability for intensive reading purposes have already been discussed in the previous chapters. Now we can move further into the topic, and compare the graphic novel and the traditional book with respect to their suitability for intensive reading.

In school textbooks and other books for exams and tests that require intensive reading, the format is mostly that of a traditional book, with little to no illustrations. Although this has been the case for ages and no such disadvantages or hindrance has been duly noted out, enhancements and improvements are always welcome and serve the purpose of helping the readers out well. In other words, though traditional books may suffice the goals of intensive reading, we must be open to the possibility of better alternatives that could help to cultivate the skill even further.

Graphic novels are ideal alternatives to the traditional book for intensive reading purposes. This is not a futile claim. Research has found that graphic novels may have more beneficial outcomes than traditional books with respect to the reader. The research and its results can be better explained below.

Conducted Research

In the University of Oklahoma, a recent study conducted in 2013 shows a striking result regarding graphic novels and traditional books. In this research, titled “Graphic Presentation: An empirical examination of the graphic novel approach to communicate business concepts”, 140 undergraduate business students were separated into two groups. A graphic novel containing key business management concepts was created for the study. One group was given the graphic novel form, and the other was given the traditional textbook containing the same topic as the graphic novel. After reading, all the participants had to answer a short quiz based on topics from the books.

Result of the Study

The results of the study were pretty interesting. After the participants took the quiz, it was found that those who had read the graphic novel fared much better in the quiz and retained more information than those who read the traditional textbooks. The ones who read the graphic novels were better at recognising direct quotes from the books than those who read the traditional textbook.

In a similar study, 114 students were assigned a graphic novel in their senior-level business course. When asked to give feedback regarding the book, more than 80% of the students indicated that the graphic novel was better than traditional textbooks.

Such research and findings seem to suggest that using graphic novels in settings such as schools, where intensive reading is required a lot of times, may not be a far-fetched idea at all.

Using Graphic Novels for Intensive Reading

As the aforementioned studies are very favourable towards graphic novels, graphic novels are suggestible for intensive reading purposes. The main goal of intensive reading is to help readers retain information for a longer period of time. The mentioned studies show that graphic novels fare much better than traditional books in helping the readers retain information. This is an indication that graphic novels could revolutionise the intensive reading process in the academic sphere.

The presence of visual aids in graphic novels thus seems to help in retaining information for a longer period of time. If there is a better way of helping students retain information, which is much needed, then idealistically speaking, such way should be implemented as soon as possible. After all, the whole purpose of intensive reading is attaining specific information and retaining it for a longer time. And if graphic novels can help do that, then they could be used in full effect.

When making a bold claim such as the suggestion of replacing traditional books with graphic novels for intensive reading, the idea may seem far-fetched at first and impractical as well. But through exploring the possibilities and weighing them, the findings of this study is more favourable

towards graphic novels. There were studies that backed-up the idea that graphic novels could substitute traditional books for attaining information for a longer time. Findings of the studies were all inclined towards the advantage of graphic novels over traditional textbooks in retaining specific details of topics.

In conclusion, graphic novels could possibly replace traditional textbooks for the specific purpose of intensive reading, since research suggests that graphic novels help in attaining information for a longer period of time. Since intensive reading entails reading with a goal, and if graphic novels can help attain that goal, then there is no reason why graphic novels should not be considered as suitable materials for intensive reading.

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