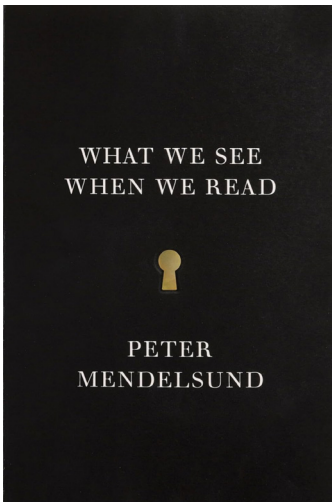


Book Review

What We See When We Read by Peter Mendelsund

Reviewed by Brianna Lantz



What We See When We Read shows readers what really goes on inside our heads when we read and how authors can influence those visuals. It prompts readers to consider how their prior knowledge and the author's choices can influence what they visualize while reading. Although this book doesn't go into the science and specifics behind what is actually happening inside of our minds, it does explore where we may get the images we produce and how we use other information to fill in any gaps.

Outside of being an author, Peter Mendelsund is a graphic designer known for his magazine and book covers. Due to his creative line of work, it would make sense that he has an interest and talent for understanding what readers visualize while reading. His ability to take written descriptions and create something from them makes him a great candidate to explore this topic.

Mendelsund uses different imagery examples throughout the novel in order to explain his thoughts. The most used image is of Anna Karenina, the

main character from Leo Tolstoy's 1878 novel. When readers are asked to describe Anna Karenina, we may rely on what Tolstoy has written and then fill in the gaps based on other information we already know. Mendelsund writes that we as readers have to go through this process because no author is going to go into great detail all at once. He also explains how certain descriptions are important not only to what readers see but also to how we imagine a character may feel and act. He uses the example of Anna's husband's ears and writes that they grow in tandem with Anna's disgust for him. Therefore, this visual aspect tells readers more about how Anna feels about her husband and less about his actual looks, which is often more important.

Regarding ethics in publishing, *What We See When We Read* could be incredibly important during a time of AI visualizers. Now more than ever, it seems like readers can be found relying on generative AI to create imagery of what a fictional character, world, or item may look like. Consumers seem to be losing their creativity and no longer using their imagination. This novel could help bring the focus back to originality and artistry and let authors and artists shine within their fields.

Several questions arise while reading as readers begin to consider their own experiences with visualization and imagery. How does modern technology, such as movies and TV shows, affect our visualizing experience? Does everyone visualize in color, or do some people visualize in black and white? What about the people who don't have the ability to actually see what they're reading inside of their head? These are all things that could be answered with more in-depth and scientific research but are ultimately not what the novel focuses on.

What We See When We Read offers a look into the cognitive and imaginative processes that occur when we engage with a text. Mendelsund explores how readers construct mental images based on limited textual clues, personal experiences, and cultural contexts, without delving into the neuroscience of reading. His insights challenge readers to consider what is happening in their minds and how outside influences may be affecting what they're visualizing in an age when AI-generated content is on the rise.