

Books, Brawls, and Beliefs: A Family Argument on Fiction

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Pull Quote:

Introduction:

To explore the research question, “What are the pros and cons of reading fiction literature?” I translated the key points of five scholarly articles into a fictional family argument between younger and older generations. I’ve always found the dismissal of fiction as “inferior” to nonfiction to be narrow-minded—especially as someone who enjoys storytelling. But my interest goes beyond academic curiosity. Fiction novels were my comfort during a difficult chapter of my life. During a time filled with loss, uncertainty, and change, stories gave me a place to escape, reflect, and heal. They taught me resilience, empathy, and acceptance of things that once felt unacceptable. That emotional connection inspired me to explore this topic through both a personal and analytical lens.

I chose to structure my conversation as a fictional argument because I wanted to show that fictional stories, just like my conversation, can reveal greater truths. Framing it as an argument helped me bring in and connect different perspectives. The academic articles I referenced were originally meant for researchers and educators, but I wanted my translation to appeal to teenagers and parents who might be skeptical of fiction’s value. I want those skeptics to be open to the idea of reading fiction and perhaps find the same comfort, insight, and growth through fiction as I did.

To keep readers engaged, I made the conversation casual and lighthearted while slipping in the key research points along the way. I created distinct character dynamics: the grandfather and father represent the older generation, viewing fiction as frivolous escapism, while Noah and Freya, the younger characters, defend fiction's deeper value. While Noah is sarcastic and impulsive, his older sister Freya is wiser and more analytical. By giving each character a distinct personality, I created a natural tension and contrast that made the conversation feel authentic. I also used humor and exaggeration, such as Grandpa's disdainful reaction to fantasy books, to highlight common stereotypes about fiction in a playful way.

Another rhetorical choice I made was incorporating academic research into casual dialogue. Rather than just dumping information and listing studies, I had the characters reference them naturally, such as when Noah explains that fiction improves empathy or when Freya mentions theory-of-mind tests. This helped maintain the tone of the conversation and made the academic information more digestible for readers. To ensure balance, I also gave the skeptical side a voice—Grandpa and their father argue that fiction is impractical compared to nonfiction, and their father even cites research suggesting that excessive fiction reading can detach people from reality. However, I struggled to find strong academic support for this argument, which is why the conversation leans more toward defending fiction rather than critiquing it.

Overall, my goal for this project was to write a short story that's both fun to read and challenges the negative stereotypes about fiction literature. By blending humor, family dynamics, and research, I aimed to show that fiction isn't just escapism—it's a valuable tool for understanding ourselves and the world around us. Although fictional stories aren't true in terms of events, they can reveal greater truths about human nature, love, suffering, or resilience, benefiting anyone who is open to their value.

Translation:

“What are all these?” Grandpa jabbed his cane toward the messy stacks of books beside the couch, his voice laced with disdain. “Not a single history book? No biographies? Just... fairy tales?”

Noah, sprawled on the carpet with a fantasy novel in hand, froze. He completely forgot that Grandpa was visiting today. The old man always brought trouble with him wherever he went. Realizing his afternoon peace had crashed and burned, Noah, fighting the urge to roll his eyes, turned to face his insufferable grandpa.

“And so it begins,” murmured Freya, Noah’s older sister, who was curled up with a book on the couch. She didn’t even bother to look up, merely flipping through another page as though her sheer indifference might bring the upcoming conversation to an end.

Grandpa stepped further into the siblings’ reading room. As his gaze raked over the bookshelves, his disapproval visibly deepened.

“This is what kids do these days?” He shook his head. “Fairy tales and fantasies? Back in my day, we read to learn something. You’d be better off with a good history book—you’re just wasting time reading all that made-up nonsense.”

Freya forced a very fake, polite smile. “Nice to see you too, Grandpa.”

Ignoring his granddaughter’s sarcastic remark, Grandpa poked at a book on the coffee table with his cane. The cover flipped over, revealing a stunning illustration of a dragon mid-flight. He scoffed as if it was the most ridiculous thing he has ever seen. “This one has dragons on it.”

“And? What’s wrong with that?” Noah shot back.

“What wisdom are you getting from a book about flying lizards? Tell me that.”

Noah rolled his eyes. “For starters? A lot more than you think.” He sat forward, setting his book aside. “Fiction isn’t just entertainment, Grandpa. It actually changes how people think. Studies show that reading literary fiction improves empathy and social understanding. When people engage with fictional characters, they practice understanding emotions, motivations, and perspectives they might not encounter in their everyday lives” (Oatley 618).

Grandpa scoffed, “And how does that help you in the real world?”

Freya finally looked up, clearly annoyed. “It helps a lot in the real world,” she said. “People who read fiction score higher on theory-of-mind tests, meaning they’re better at interpreting other people’s emotions and intentions. That’s not just good for making friends—it actually helps in leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making. Wouldn’t you say we need more people who can communicate and understand others?” (Oatley 620).

Grandpa gave a dismissive wave. “I don’t need a book about dragons and magic to teach me how to talk to people. I learned from real experience, not made-up nonsense.”

Noah groaned, “If fiction is so bad, why do people watch movies? Or TV? Or—” he pointed a finger at Grandpa “—Westerns? You love those, don’t you?”

Grandpa’s mouth opened, then closed. His frown deepened. “That’s different,” he said after a moment. “Those stories are rooted in real struggles—justice, survival, history.”

“Right. Because a cowboy single-handedly taking down twenty outlaws is so much more realistic than a novel exploring grief, loss, or identity.” Freya closed her book and held it up, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*. “This book is fiction, but it is about something real. It explores what it means to be remembered, to leave a mark on the world. I’ve even seen a scholar discussing how this book is a metaphor for resisting societal expectations and redefining legacy” (Tavera 346).

Grandpa crossed his arms, “A metaphor, huh? You sure that’s not just a fancy way of saying ‘it’s all made up?’”

Freya scoffed in disbelief, “No, Grandpa. It’s a way of saying that fiction reflects reality. Just because a story has magic in it doesn’t mean it’s not about something true.”

“Look, I’m not saying a story can’t have meaning. But at the end of the day, it’s just a story. It doesn’t give you real knowledge.”

Noah crossed his arms. “Define ‘real.’”

“Books that teach something. History. Science. Philosophy. Not just... escapism,” Grandpa shot back.

Charles, their father, who had been listening quietly from the doorway finally stepped in. “You know, Grandpa’s got a point,” he said, glancing at the shelves filled with novels. “I get that fiction can be fun, but you two act like it’s some great intellectual pursuit. Too much fiction can make people lose touch with reality. Researchers have done studies on it—excessive fiction reading can detach people from the real world” (Yang et al. 19830). He gave Noah and Freya a pointed look. “I mean, if you spent half as much time reading nonfiction as you do getting lost in fantasy worlds, you might learn something useful.”

Noah mocked, “So, you’re saying that all fiction is just escapism?”

“Exactly.”

Freya chimed in, “Fiction provides more than just escapism—it helps with self-discovery and identity formation. Take the book that Noah was reading earlier for example. It is found that young adult fiction, especially, gives people a space to explore themselves, question society, and even cultivate empathy for others” (Lawton and Cain 2939).

Grandpa narrowed his eyes at her. “And you think fantasy books help people discover themselves?”

Freya shrugged. “Yeah, actually. Researchers argue that young adult literature is a tool for perspective-taking, identity exploration, and self-discovery. Fictional characters provide readers with mirrors, windows, and sliding doors—a way to see themselves in stories, a way to understand others, and a way to imagine new possibilities” (Lawton and Cain 2943).

“Exactly. Which is why Grandpa should try reading a fantasy novel for once,” said Noah.

Grandpa let out a huff. “Still too much of it,” he muttered as he walked out of the reading room.

As the afternoon sunlight streamed through the window, Noah and Freya exchanged victorious glances before returning to their books. The battle had been fought, and, for now, their peace had been restored.

But deep down, they knew—this argument was far from over.

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