



Accentuating Emotions in readers through Visual Story telling techniques in the Novel “*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*”

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Abstract: *The artistic origins of visual storytelling can be traced back to a time predating written communication. In the early stages of human development, communication primarily relied on images and drawings. From the centuries back, the visual medium has proven to be the most effective tool for human communication. This can be traced back from the initiation of cave paintings towards the development of the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The concept of Visual story telling techniques has thus remained intact throughout the human progression and development even after the development of language.*

*This paper aims to explore the how the visual story telling techniques applied in Mark Haddon's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has occasioned in accentuating emotions by engaging the readers. Through an analysis of visual elements such as diagrams, illustrations, and mathematical patterns used in the book, the paper investigates how these techniques amplify emotional experiences and deepen reader engagement.*

In addition, it also investigates how the writer has generated the use of visual story telling techniques to portray the characteristic of an autistic protagonist, Christopher John Francis Boone to represent the unique perspective of the protagonist, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of autism in emotional and social level. Further, it reveals how the author brings awareness to the challenges, emotions, and thought processes of individuals on the autism spectrum through the technique of visual story telling.

Keywords: *Visual Story Telling, Autism, Social Awareness, Emotions, Reader-engagement, Visual elements.*

Introduction

A closer examination towards the history of visual novels reveals that the genre can be categorised into two distinct definitions. In its earlier iterations, visual novels predominantly conveyed their stories through manga-inspired compositions. Manga- inspired compositions can be traced back to the 12th



century time period, when the humans brought immersive and visually engaging experience by collaborating text and illustrations together. However, as the genre evolved, a modern form emerged, characterized by the use of character portraits, to tell the story through theatrical presentations. These two types of visual novels originated independently and had a profound influence on the narrative techniques employed within the genre. Thus, the modern graphic art of storytelling first perfected in Japan reflecting voice, identities and voice of expression through artistic explorations. The visual stories that emerged during the modern era were widely accepted by the public, in the form of cartoons, comic books and graphic novels. From the representation of day to day life events, authors started using visual elements to evoke the emotional response from the readers.

Visual novels possess the potential to raise awareness about social issues by presenting them in an engaging and thought-provoking manner. Through the medium of visual storytelling, they offer a platform to delve into complex topics, including mental health, social justice, and environmental concerns. Furthermore, visual novels have the capacity to educate individuals about diverse cultures and perspectives. Their strength lies in their ability to tell stories that foster empathy and understanding among individuals from varying backgrounds. As a powerful storytelling tool, visual novels have the capacity to shed light on societal issues and promote dialogue and reflection. This paper aims to explore the how the visual story telling techniques applied in Mark Haddon's novel, *"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"* has occasioned in accentuating emotions by engaging the readers. Through an analysis of visual elements such as diagrams, illustrations, and mathematical patterns used in the book, the paper investigates how these techniques amplify emotional experiences and deepen reader engagement, resulting in fostering awareness in readers about autism.

In addition, it also investigates how the writer has generated the use of visual story telling technique to portray the characteristic of an autistic protagonist, Christopher John Francis Boone to represent the unique perspective of the protagonist, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of autism in emotional and social level. Further, it reveals how the author brings awareness to the challenges, emotions, and thought processes of individuals on the autism spectrum through the technique of visual story telling. "Autism is a neuropsychiatric disorder characterized by severe and sustained impairment in social interaction, deviance in communication, and patterns of behaviour and interest that are restricted, stereotyped, or both. Onset is generally before age 3 years" (Kanner, 1992). Autism is a condition which is often stereotyped and considered under the category of mental illness.

Additionally, Autistic youth and children are often subjected to harsh treatment by their peers in schools because of a lack of understanding about their skills, abilities, disabilities, and limitations. In such conditions, the intervention measure must be introduced in the form of young adult literature so that more insights are gained about individuals with ASD and awareness is spread about their personification. As a result, the general public will have better abilities to deal with youths and children with ASD and there will be the inclusion of ASD individuals in the mainstream community. Mark Haddon's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is one such move, where the author brings in the protagonist- Christopher John Francis Boone who is an autistic. The story talks about a 15 year old young teenager and his journey of investigation. The protagonist in the novel, investigates the mysterious death of his neighbour's dog. Mark Haddon through his novel, brings in a compelling narrative, offering insights into the character's unique personality and perspectives. Through the novel the author also tries to bring in the representation of autism and its associated characteristics and behavioural patterns, through the protagonist.

Irwin et al., (2015) analysed that "Curious Incident" and stated that it is to be recommended as something to be read by secondary school children so that they could acquire better insights about



young people with ASD. Though the novel is the fictional representation of Christopher its characterization with ASD brought is a special recognition for providing the perspective of teen with ASD. To bring in more emotional acceptance and understanding the author indulge in the usage of visual elements to establish more impact on the novel in raising awareness and fostering understanding of ASD among readers. This paper aims to explore how the visual representations used by Mark Haddon in his novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* succeeds in evoking and accentuating emotions in readers resulting in a better awareness of Autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Young Adult Books

According to Bottema-Beutel, 2018, all of these young adult books represent people with ASD in an authentic manner that correctly depicts the disorder's symptoms. It's no surprise that many of the writers have personal experience with autistic children since many of them have autistic children of their own.

It's hard for Colin Fischer (2012) by Miller and Stenz, not to be distracted by the constant beep of a mobile phone. This is a common trait of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and Marcelo in the Real World by Stork is another good example. To illustrate yet another aspect of ASD, Hank, the protagonist of *The Half-Life of Planets* (2010), practices guitar chords with his fingers daily.

Atherton, 2019 states autism manifests itself differently in each person, as it does with other neurodevelopmental diseases. Adolescents with ASD present with a broad range of symptoms, ranging from clear signs of autism, such as decreased verbal abilities and repetitive hand-flapping or spinning, to those who are almost indistinguishable from their neurotypical classmates.. It's no longer just "autism," but rather "Autism Spectrum Disorder." In the autism community, "If you know one kid with autism, you know one kid with autism."

Atherton, (2019) analysed it has so far only known one autistic teen, a high-functioning, a hyper-verbal genius with Autistic syndrome, in young adult literature. At the centre of Mark Haddon's cross-genre work is Christopher Boone, the protagonist who is a prototype of Autistic character in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. According to a recent New York Times review of Ciaran Colins' 2013 book *Gamal*, "the weird but beautifully illuminating points of view of autistic narrators have grown more ubiquitous in every genre of literature, from young adult to science fiction, popular and literary fiction."

Clinton, (2014) examined that the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* also known as *Curious Incident* written by Mark Haddon acquire much fan following and readership for characterizing Christopher as the main protagonist. The book sold more than 10 million copies and was known to be the best seller in 2003. The novel has been translated into forty-four different languages and the author won 17 literary awards for it.

The one of the reason for the high reach and popularity of the novel was the visual representation that Mark Haddon had brought in his novel, to represent his young autistic protagonist.

Haddon's Protagonist – Christopher John Francis Boone

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time depicts the story of Christopher John Francis Boone a 15-year old autistic boy living with his father in Swindon, England. Christopher has clear views and demarcations like, "You can't trust people who lie". He could not understand figurative language and idioms like "catch you later". Christopher does not prefer to use metaphors in his conversation because



they are lies and face difficulty in understanding jokes. He faces issues in understanding and interpreting body language since a simple action like rising an eyebrow could mean a lot of things and are often confusing. However, Christopher likes symmetry and could observe patterns in colours. He likes solving math puzzles, studying math, physics, and space, and especially reading Sherlock Holmes mysteries because he could solve mysteries through logic and observation. However, he is highly sensitive to crowds, touch, and sounds. He often closes his eyes or hums when too much information is shared. He reacts panicky when confused by screaming and throwing things. Christopher studies in 10th grade with a high intelligence quotient level and scores A-level mathematics test. However, he does not associate with any other classmates and has no friends.

In the novel, the author clearly represents how Christopher John Francis Boone is aware of his own behavioural problems and these are some of my behavioral problems

- A. Not talking to people for a long time.
- B. Not eating or drinking anything for a long time.
- C. Not liking being touched.
- D. Screaming when I am angry or confused.
- E. Not liking being in really small places with other people.
- F. Smashing things when I am angry or confused.
- G. Groaning
- H. Not liking yellow things or brown things and refusing to touch yellow things or brown things.
- I. Refusing to use my toothbrush if anyone else has touched it.
- J. Not eating food if different sorts of food are touching each other.
- K. Not noticing that the people are angry with me.
- L. Not Smiling.
- M. Saying things that other people think are rude.
- N. Doing stupid things.
- O. Hitting other people.
- P. Driving Mother's car.
- Q. Getting cross when someone has moved the furniture.” (P.59, Haddon.M,2003)

Mark Haddon uses the technique of first person narrative by portraying the story through the character Christopher John Francis Boone and brings an accurate and effective representation of autistic character to raise the awareness and understanding of autism among the readers.

“My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,507.” (P. 2, Haddon. M,2003)

Haddon's meticulously provide attention to every minute details in describing Christopher's behaviours and routines contributing to a better understanding of ASD.

“I do not like people shouting at me. It makes me scared that they are going to hit me or touch me and I do not know what is going to happen.” (P. 2, Haddon. M,2003)

Visual Elements evoking emotional responses

The visual story telling techniques used in the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was successful in evoking and accentuating emotions in readers to better understand and to create awareness among the readers on the aspects of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Mark Haddon has employed a wide variety of visual representations like illustrations, diagrams, charts, mathematical patterns, maps and sketches to enhance reader engagement by incorporating visual cues that complement the narrative.



Christopher, the protagonist in the novel, tries to write a mystery novel but struggles with the power of imaginative creativity.

“ I said that I wanted to write about something real and I knew people who had died but I did not know any people who had been killed, except Edward’s father from school, Mr. Paulson, and that was a gliding accident, not murder, and I didn’t really know him. I also said that I cared about dogs because they were faithful and honest , and some dogs were cleverer.”

(P. 6, Haddon. M,2003)

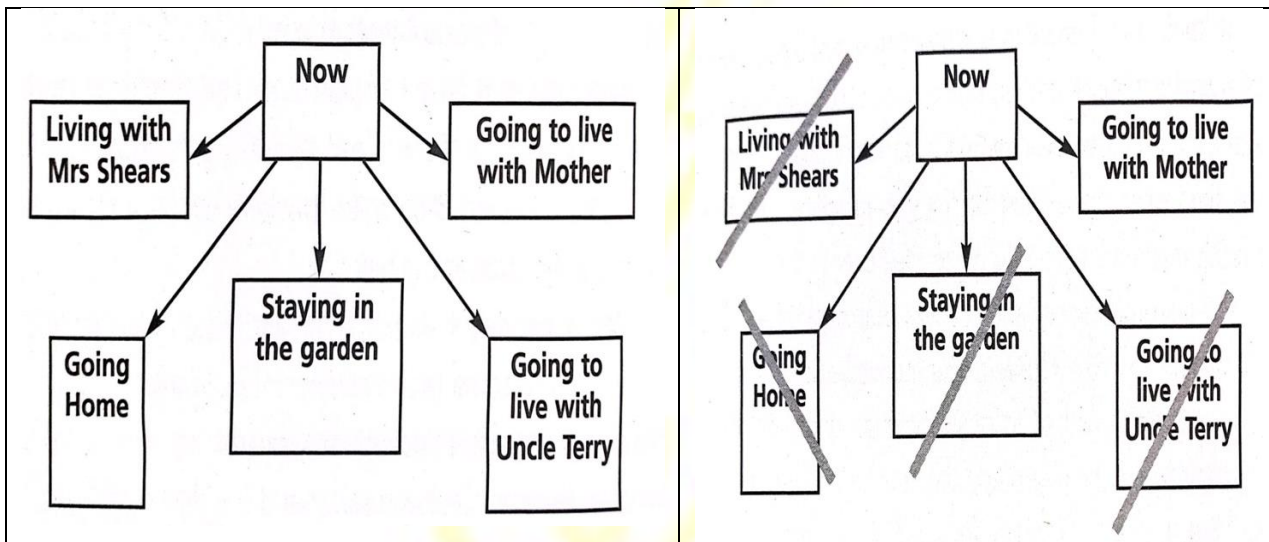


Illustration 1: (P. 162,163, Haddon. M,2003)

The illustration 1, shows how Mark Haddon, exposes the thought process of his protagonist Christopher John Francis Boone, who indulges in solving the mystery of the dog’s death. These illustrations serve as a powerful tool to convey Christopher’s perspectives to the readers.

According to the web article provided by the Psych Central (2022), Autistic people tend to have enhanced logic skills, which may help to offset a reduced drive toward sensitivity and spontaneous decision-making.

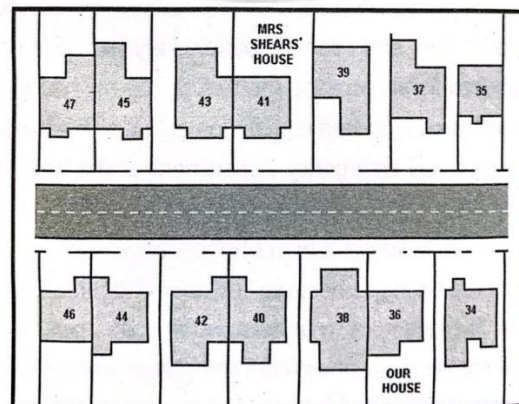


Illustration 2: (P. 46, Haddon. M,2003)



Mark Haddon uses the visual representation as depicted in illustration 2, to expose the mathematical and logical thinking abilities in Christopher, shedding a deeper insight on the unique thinking style of autistic children. Many such illustrations have been provided by the author and has successfully catered to the purpose of vibrant, sharp and flawless portrayal of a 15 year old autistic teenager and his emotional journey. This in turn, helps in constructing a more vivid visual atmosphere that aids in mirroring an autistic child's emotional and sensory state. Through the novel, the author has successfully depicted and reflected the anxieties and discomforts of a child with autism by collaborating visual effects with his writing.

Visual Portrayal of Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder

According to Black & Tsumoto, (2018) learning about ASD is much contributed by the revelations provided by visual media and press. For instance, the release of the movie, "Rain Man", in the year 1988 provided the very first instance of ASD representation in visual media. It was used as a remarkable reference point by others for more than twenty-five years.

Murray (2010) examined that "Rain Man" was a breakthrough representation of ASD to large audiences and is still regarded as one of the main mediums to provide seminal cultural insights about ASD characters. The movie explained to the individuals what it feels like to be with ASD when you could not understand facial expressions or eye contact importance or execute repetitive behaviour. In every respect "Rain Man" played an important role in highlighting the symptoms and sufferings of individuals with ASD.

Irwin, Goldsmith, & Applegate, (2015) examined that such studies or movies, or literature that highlight the characterization of ASD individuals have been limited. However, a slight surge can be seen in this segment in recent years with the spreading of more awareness about ASD among the common population. Additionally, there has been an increase in the participation of ASD children/students in general education classes which provide more opportunities to the peer to directly interact with them and witness their experiences as spectators closely. These young adults highly contribute towards ASD literature by depicting ASD characters in their research and reflecting about actual teens and their diverse experiences.

Along with the representations through media, the visual story telling techniques incorporated in the novels that have developed over the years, facilitates a more perfect path towards the journey of understanding and awareness. This is clearly depicted through the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Using the visual cues, the author has produced a multi-dimensional experience to the readers by visually depicting the thought process of the character and evoking the sense of tension, sadness, joy, emotions and understanding in every readers.

Conclusion

Visual story telling techniques integrated in the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* evidently represents the vivid imagery and better emotional response and awareness in the readers, compared with the other written novel genres on Autism. This novel has resulted in providing a lasting impression on the reader's mind providing them distinct and unobstructed view of autistic children and their behavioural patterns. The protagonist's challenges, excitements and sensations have been successfully brought about to the readers using the distinctive narrative technique and visual story telling technique used in the novel.



In conclusion, incorporation of visual story telling techniques in the novels will help in developing awareness about youth and children with ASD and developing a more sensitive approach towards them in mainstream community dealings. This research has focused only on the visual story telling technique approach. However, there are other significant elements that can contribute in accentuating emotions in readers which may need further research to be conducted.

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