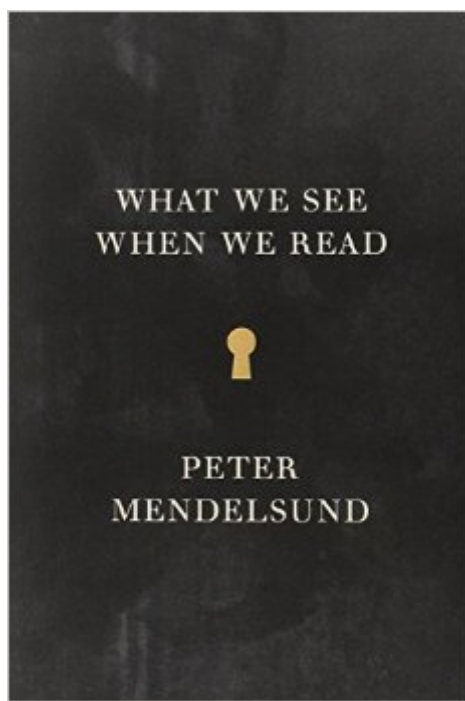


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# What We See When We Read



## Synopsis

A San Francisco Chronicle and Kirkus Best Book of the Year A gorgeously unique, fully illustrated exploration into the phenomenology of reading "how we visualize images from reading works of literature, from one of our very best book jacket designers, himself a passionate reader. What do we see when we read? Did Tolstoy really describe Anna Karenina? Did Melville ever really tell us what, exactly, Ishmael looked like? The collection of fragmented images on a page "a graceful ear there, a stray curl, a hat positioned just so "and other clues and signifiers helps us to create an image of a character. But in fact our sense that we know a character intimately has little to do with our ability to concretely picture our beloved "or reviled "literary figures. In this remarkable work of nonfiction, Knopf's Associate Art Director Peter Mendelsund combines his profession, as an award-winning designer; his first career, as a classically trained pianist; and his first love, literature "he considers himself first and foremost as a reader "into what is sure to be one of the most provocative and unusual investigations into how we understand the act of reading.

## Book Information

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Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (51 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #62,986 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics #85 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Books & Reading > General #5308 in Books > Arts & Photography

## Customer Reviews

To rephrase this book's title, what do we "see" when we read? What images flow through our minds, and what is the relationship between those images and the text on the pages? What does Anna Karenina (the one in the novel, not the one in the movie) look like? What does she look like to different readers? How does this appearance correspond to what Tolstoy actually wrote to describe her? These are interesting questions -- or at least they ought to be. But from the whole of this book, I can't remember a single interesting insight, observation, or thought. It seemed to me that

Mendelsund had almost nothing to say on his subject that wasn't blandly obvious, despite the often enthusiastic language of his delivery. On the rare occasions when he wasn't stating the obvious I usually disagreed with him, but even that disagreement didn't set any sparks flying in my brain; the notions I disagreed with were uninteresting or undeveloped as well as unconvincing. He says at one point, for example, that "description is not additive." Yes it is, say I; a pink elephant is a very different thing from a tiny pink elephant with bright blue ears standing in a field of flowers. But Mendelsund wanders away from this thought without defending it or devoting any time to it, so... meh. About 3/4 to 7/8 of this book's 400 pages of content consists of various sorts of illustrations (or just empty space). The illustrations are of course meant to support and add to the text, but it seemed to me that the vast majority of them contributed little or nothing. As for the text, I found Mendelsund's writing style somewhat annoying. He rarely goes more than a paragraph or two without interrupting himself with a footnoted or parenthetical side-comment.

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