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[Accessed: 25th April 2025]

Figure 2: Nelson. (2021). *Batman vs Catwoman*. Available at:

<https://doubtfireblog.wordpress.com/2021/10/12/the-highs-and-lows-of-batmans-long-halloween/>

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Figure 3: Anon. (2020). *Batman, Jim Gordon, and Harvey Dent Conversation*. Available at:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.reddit.com%2Fr%2FDCcomics%2Fcomments%2Fhhglw5%2Fcomic_excerpt_gentlemen_batman_the_long_ha

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Figure 8: How to Train Your Dragon Wiki. (2025). *How to Train Your Dragon Book Cover*. Available at: [https://howtotrainyourdragon.fandom.com/wiki/Gallery:_How_to_Train_Your_Dragon_\(Book\)](https://howtotrainyourdragon.fandom.com/wiki/Gallery:_How_to_Train_Your_Dragon_(Book))

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Figure 11: Rixon, V. (2025). *Early Digital Mock-up*.

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Proposed Question:

“How can illustration be used to show the effects of escapism?” Exploring how art interacts with imagination and escapism in the beneficial and detrimental effects.

Context

In this proposal, I shall explore three keywords: Narrative, Travel, and Escapism, and their role in the experience with art. I will provide examples of how artists use narrative stories to engage viewers to travel to another world and escape their own. My research shall be informed by theorists such as Sherline Pimenta and Ravi Poovaiah, and Joseph Campbell, travel philosophers Gaston Bachelard and Alain de Botton, and Yi-Fu Tuan, a Chinese American geographer who has investigated why people travel and the human psyche behind escaping their environment. The essay will be supported by Tim Sale, Miroslav Sasek, and *How to Train Your Dragon*. By looking at these theorists with supporting media to analyse, I will gain an understanding of the human need to escape from their lives and how this need interacts with art.

Narrative

Narrative can be defined as;

“The pictorial representation of or reference to one or more “events” that occur in a sequence of time and that bring about a change in the condition of at least one character” (Murray, 1995)

Narrative art in illustration is most known in comics, graphic novels, and children's books, working with words to visualize a story. This is helpful within children’s development as they cannot yet read (Berger, 1972). The role of an illustrator within a narrative industry is to translate a story to their viewers through a communicative and understandable style. The “use of visual metaphor to create stories that are rich with significance, offering layers of meaning to be uncovered by old and young readers alike.” (Salisbury & Styles, 2015). These illustrators must understand how stories engage readers, focusing on their

target audience. The story must be intriguing with a protagonist, the hero, learning something.

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.” (Campbell, 2014)

The reader is curious about the hero’s story and opens the narrative; the illustrator must visually communicate this story. Within the narrative industry, I will focus on comics and graphic novels where the illustrators have communicated a pre-written story. The writer and illustrator work in tandem to create a narrative where words and images interact and complement one another. Tim Sale’s work on *Batman: The Long Halloween* exemplifies this.

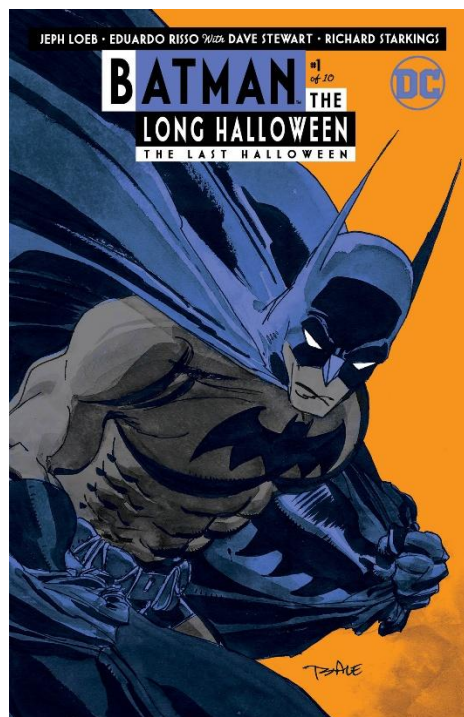


Fig.1: *Batman: The Long Halloween Front Cover*

The comic series tells the story of Batman's hunt for the mysterious Holiday Killer, a murderer who only kills on holidays, e.g., Halloween, Christmas. In this comic, the reader

is led through the story, meeting characters and joining Batman in his investigation. “The best picture books should have a quality within them that includes the listener or the reader so that they feel a part of the story as well” (Cook, 2008), *The Long Halloween* does this, the Story is written with misleading storylines, tricking Batman and the reader away from the actual killer’s identity. Writer Jeph Loeb collaborated with Tim Sale to bring the comic to life, with the aim to continue Frank Miller’s *Batman: Year One* and show the transformation of the villains from ordinary goons to the supervillains they are known as today. Sale’s work leads the reader through the story, with the panel order showing the pace of sequences in the story.



Fig. 2: *Batman vs Catwoman*



Fig. 3: *Batman, Jim Gordon, and Harvey Dent Conversation*

Fig.2 shows Batman and Catwoman locked in a tense moment where the reader is unsure whether the two are to fight. Sale has disjointed and overlapped the panels for the scene, different from the usual conversation panel shown in Fig. 3. Figure 3 shows Batman, Jim Gordon, and Harvey Dent in conversation, with Batman and Dent meeting each other for the first time. The panels in this interaction are structured in different-sized rectangles, with no overlap, and follow the left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading of the Western world. It is a professional conversation amongst allies without misleading the reader about what will happen. The reader's brain absorbs the structure and understands that the three men will converse about their mutual points without underlying motives. The reader is a silent witness to the interaction without worrying about it souring. Meanwhile, in Fig. 2, the difference between the Bat's and Cat's conversation is substantial. The first panel

overlaps the third; however, the second panel overlaps with both. It leaves the page feeling disjointed to the reader; it's a break in the pattern. The reader engages and worries about what outcome could follow, preparing to duck for cover. This is a narrative illustration within comics and graphic novels. There are no extra words such as "he prepared to exchange blows with his opponent." So, the illustrator oversees translating the character's actions, the story's scenes, and changing paces, which allows the reader to follow at the speed of the actions.

"Everyone will draw differently, see differently and think differently, but the apparently simple act of trying to articulate an idea or experience visually on paper, and in sequence, is still the basis for most illustrators' work." (Salisbury & Styles, 2015).

Travel

The Cambridge Dictionary defines travel as "to make a journey, usually over a long distance" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Travel and humanity have long since been a part of one another. "Animals move out when their home ground starts to deteriorate" (Tuan, 1998). Humanity once migrated like animals; however, the need to travel for survival has been lost as humanity has developed. Humanity learnt how to make permanent homes to withstand the weather. They learnt to grow crops, increase harvest, and reduce pest interference. They learnt to build farms to house and breed animals, removing the need to hunt, and made boats for mass fishing. The human need to travel to live has died out for many modern societies. However, humans still travel, although now for fun and escape. Travel for fun is because "Human restlessness finds release in geographical mobility" (Tuan, 1998). Despite humanity finding stability within the world, stable homes, and stable food sources, they are restless within their daily lives. They look forward to the end of the day, when they can shrug off the day's weight and find release through various escapisms. Summer is a perfect example of humans escaping their daily routines and

travelling for enjoyment; The European Travel Commission said that in 2024, 75% of Europeans planned to travel in the months of summer, which was up 6% from the previous year. (ETC Corporate, 2024). They always return home, though. Human nature craves stability, as within that stability comes safety. This is why they go home: “For our house is our corner of the world” (Bachelard, 2014). We can leave, we can run, we can fly, but we can always return to our haven. Yet not all travel needs to be physical. People can escape into art, film, and literature. An example of escape into art that overlaps with travel is Miroslav Šašek. Šašek is a Czech illustrator and author known for his line of children’s books, ‘This is’. These books showcase whimsical illustrations of cities worldwide, allowing readers, both old and young, to travel to these cities from their homes cheaply. It makes the city's views more accessible while keeping the real-life cities' beauty.

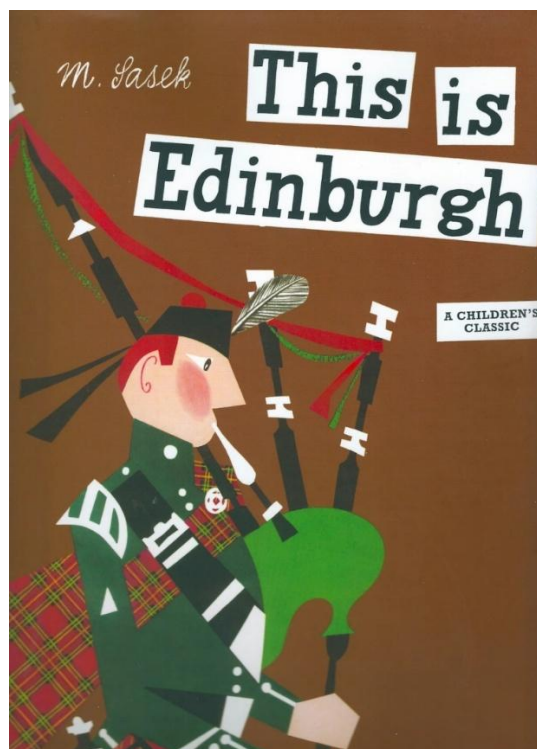


Fig. 4: *This is Edinburgh*

In Fig. 4 is the front cover for *This is Edinburgh* from Šašek's series. This is Edinburgh, which takes the reader on a journey with a childish note to it. The book's style is characterised by its attention to detail while keeping it legible to younger readers.



Fig. 5: *Castle Rock from the Street*



Fig. 6: *Castle Rock Photograph*

Fig. 5 shows Castle Rock illustrated from a street view, with Fig. 6 below showing a photograph of Castle Rock. With the illustration and photograph next to one another, you can see how Šašek has captured the charm of Edinburgh and its castle; however, the item that seizes the viewer's attention is the Tolbooth Kirk. The Tolbooth splits the illustration in two, and its dark colours draw the viewer's attention. The deep saturated colours combined with the fading castle in the background give the viewer perspective and contrast, inserting them into Edinburgh, standing in the street Šašek drew in. The viewer escapes their current surroundings and travels to Edinburgh. This escape brings joy.

“If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest—in all its ardour and paradoxes—than our travels. They express, however inarticulately, an understanding of what life might be about, outside of the constraints of work and the struggle for survival.” (Botton, 2003)

Šašek's illustrations help his audience find new places to escape to, even for a short period, giving the human mind a break from the battle of modern society.

Escapism

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines Escapism as “habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine” (Merriam Webster, 2025). Escapism is like travel, as it is used to escape society's constraints. The human mind conjures up escapism to deal with the stress of a modern-day life, such as a 9-5 job or raising children. “I can always resort to my imagination, which is the most readily available means of transporting the self, momentarily, out of its body” (Tuan, 1998). This transport is what makes escapism and travel alike. They both involve moving the body physically or mentally to another location to break the routine cycle.

Within this transport, the body can take temporary enjoyment from the routine. Humans rely on transportation as a break, and escapism through activity and imagination is a cheaper escape than physical travel. Mental escapism is a reliable way to take a break and can be done anywhere if the person only requires their imagination. “It could be part of the way in which the imagination enriches life just as it could be material for dream.” (Winnicott, 1971) However, escapism can become detrimental to the psyche and the body when used for an extended period. D. W. Winnicott had a case in which a middle-aged woman was escaping from her life for long periods, although he refers to it as fantasizing. The woman had been fantasizing since a young age as a defence and was missing portions of her life because of her escape.

“This part of her which became thoroughly dissociated was never the whole of her, and over long periods her defence was to live here in this fantasizing activity, and to watch herself playing the other children’s games as if watching someone else in the nursery group.” (Winnicott, 1971)

This is where escapism becomes a detriment. When it affects a person's outside life. People become blind to the world around them as they rely on fantasy. However, people can escape to avoid and ignore situations, distancing themselves from the issue. These people know what is happening but will turn away from it into their realm of escape to ignore it. The woman in the case became reliant on her defence as it had been a continuous defence she used since childhood; these people use it as an excuse. They are not willing to engage and so escape. The situations can involve relationship issues or politics. But for the mind to use imagination as an escape, the mind needs nourishment. This nourishment comes from the world around us and begins in childhood: “A child’s imagination and creativity are enriched through their awareness of art and other children around them.” (GOV UK, 2025) Art, such as art activities, stories, and narratives,

increases children's independence by encouraging them to create their own worlds by showing another person's world. Referring to Cook's words in my narrative paragraph, a good story includes the reader. "Myths are the 'masks of God, through which men everywhere have sought to relate themselves to the wonders of existence." (Campbell, 2014)

An example of a prominent media influencing children's imaginations into adulthood is How to Train Your Dragon. The How to Train Your Dragon media (books and films) follow a young Viking and his adventures through his world with a dragon and the challenges they face.

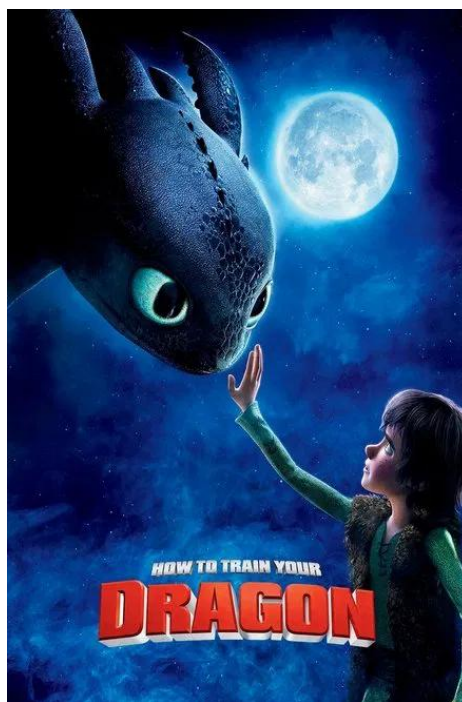


Fig. 7: *How To Train Your Dragon* Movie Poster

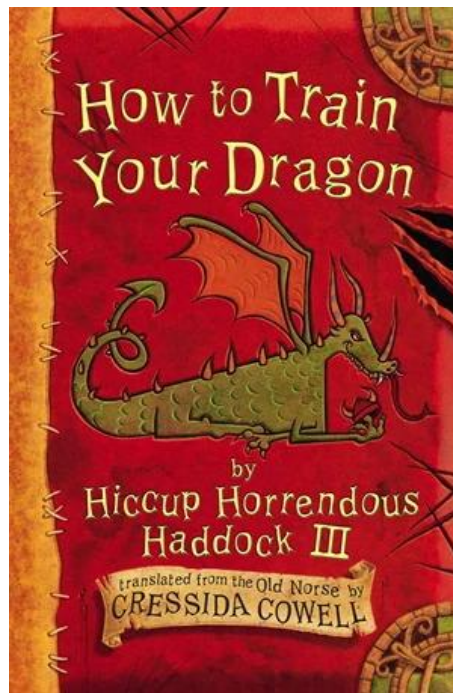


Fig. 8: *How to Train Your Dragon Book Cover*

The How to Train Your Dragon Franchise started as a book and was adapted into a series of films and shows to expand its reach; although the stories do not match, they follow the same protagonist. The primary focus of these stories is on a group of children and their adventures with dragons. Dragons have been a popular theme within storytelling due to their sense of fantasy and adventure. Children with their hunger for adventure love dragons. Because the characters are in the rough age of the target audience and have a popularised stereotype of adventure, dragons, the children are encouraged to relate to these stories. The book and film media differ, but both are made to fascinate the child.



Fig. 9: Movie Media



Fig. 10: Book Media

Fig. 9 shows a scene from the adaptation of *How to Train Your Dragon*. In the scene, you can see the sky and the characters are in saturated colours, with the characters holding animated expressions. This brightness and expressiveness capture the children's eyes and fascinate them, dragging them into the story. The movie uses visuals to engage the child's mind and bring them through the narrative, showing them a story they can imagine themselves in. The book's charcoal illustrations lack the film's effects, but they make up for it with humour. Fig. 10 shows characters with ironic names that match their features.

For example, the character Snotlout is drawn with large nostrils, and Stoick the Vast is shown as a big man; he's vast in size. Children will notice and laugh even if they cannot read. The humour interests the child to see what else the story makes them laugh, enjoying the dopamine it comes from, and engages them in the story. These media have reached a new level of popularity with a live-action movie in the works, adapted from the animated movie's storylines, which will encourage a new generation of children's imaginations. The media has allowed children to engage and escape into them and, in doing so, encourages their creativity and imagination, encouraging the children to build the capability to create their fantasies to escape into. This imagination stays with them as they age and helps their fantasies when they are growing up; the fantasies which give them a break from reality.

Conclusion

For my third-year project, I will create a comic series that focuses on a protagonist using physical escapism to show unhealthy escapism, whilst encouraging the reader into the story, engaging them in healthy escapism. However, I will slip in the protagonist's situation they escaped throughout the story with current world events as the contextual source. This shows the reader that escapism, while helpful, does help escape the situation, but distracts from it, and with the ending showing there's only so long you can abuse escapism. I have decided to encourage the readers to enter the story by creating a science-fiction fantasy, a world separate from their own to escape to, and have the protagonist migrate within that world. The reader will engage in new worlds, dragging them further into the escape with curiosity. I will never explicitly state the reason for the

protagonist's escape, only hint at it. The story also distracts the reader from the protagonist's situation.



Fig. 11: *Early Digital Mock-up*

Fig. 11 shows a mock-up illustration of a series of comic pages where the protagonist interacts with a local. Midway through the interaction, the protagonist has a flashback to the situation they are escaping, but moves on and pretends it never happened, though the local acknowledges something did. These pages display how the protagonist is actively ignoring their situation. The reader takes the place of the local, confused by what happened but curious to learn more. Through this project and research, I shall explore the question “How can illustration be used to show the effects of escapism?”

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