

Comparing Design Principles in Comics and Desserts to Discern its Impact on Visual and Sensory Perception

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Abstract: Be it in art, gastronomy, architecture or literature, visual appeal plays a vital role in enticing the viewer and conveying the creator's true thoughts. Particularly in the world of cuisine and writing, these first appearances are crucial to draw the reader's attention while maintaining an aesthetic sense. To highlight these striking similarities in the use of design elements, this paper compares five desserts created by Michelin Star chefs and five comic strips from the series 'Calvin and Hobbes' by Bill Watterson, particularly emphasising on these visual elements and their impact on the viewer.

Keywords: art, design principles, desserts, sensory perception, visual perception

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of aesthetics is undeniable, especially in the fast-paced modern world. Advertisements aim to capture the audience's attention in a matter of seconds, through unique and thought provoking designs. While these might look different on the surface, a closer look at any artwork will reveal certain repeated design elements that, when revised, allows any artist to have lasting effect on the viewer. This paper is a reflection on how chefs and writers also need to use the design principles to create appealing works which will attract their customers upon immediate interaction.

Some of the design principles are balance, rhythm, unity, proportion, use of line, colour etc. These principles allow creativity, as well enable the artist to portray their message in a subtle manner.

These techniques are particularly evident in the world of gastronomy and writing, since first appearances play a crucial role in grasping the viewer's attention while maintaining an aesthetic sense. Though, at first thought, a comic strip and a plated dessert seem incomparable, they make use of numerous overlapping techniques of design. Just as the chef is confined to one plate, a comic writer aims to guide the readers through a story in the limited space of panels. To highlight these striking similarities in the use of design elements, desserts by Michelin star chefs and comic strips from the series 'Calvin and Hobbes' by Bill Watterson can be analysed to determine the effect of these visual elements on a viewer.

Michelin is a brand based in Paris, and is now thought to be the golden standard in the culinary world. Chefs and

restaurants awarded this star are renowned for their quality, presentation and flavor of food, as well as their impeccably run restaurants. Restaurants can receive a total of 3 Michelin Stars and are given on the basis reports from anonymous reviewers. Thus, one can justifiably assume that the design elements used in desserts created by the chefs are of the highest standard and provide a valuable contribution to the culinary world (International Culinary Center, 2016).

Similarly, 'Calvin and Hobbes' was a popular American comic strip that was written by Bill Watterson from 1985 to 1995. With comics name coming from the two protagonists- Calvin, a young boy, and his stuffed tiger, Hobbes- the strips entail numerous adventures and even thought-provoking conversations Calvin imagines with his toy. Since this comic was intended for amusement, Watterson employs numerous design elements to immediately attract the reader and leave a long lasting impression despite his/her short interaction with the comics (Meskin & Cook, 2012).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand the scope of this research, one has to first understand the design principles that govern most visual and artistic creations. While artists may employ a multitude of techniques, main design principles are contrast, emphasis, balance, proportion, hierarchy, repetition, white space, movement, variety and unity (Bashiru, 2020).

Contrast refers to the relation between different elements, especially the differences between them. This aims to make the art work more stimulating as viewers can differentiate between elements and thus gain a better understanding of the message or main idea (Bashiru, 2020).

Next, balance refers to how objects complement each other and relative impacts of each object. There are two kinds of balance- symmetrical and asymmetrical. In symmetrical balance, there is an equal division of elements and is often divided across an imaginary central line. However, with asymmetrical balance, placements of elements might be skewed from this central line, but with them having 'different weights' they are able to maintain a sense of balance in the artwork (Bashiru, 2020).

Emphasis is used to ensure that one element stands out more than the others. This allows the artist to highlight certain

important information or components while subtly bringing out the others (Bashiru, 2020).

Furthermore, proportion is a method in which artists make some elements bigger than the others. Most often, this ties with emphasis, with the bigger object drawing the reader's attention and highlighting its importance (Bashiru, 2020).

Hierarchy makes the artwork more comprehensible for the viewers. This technique places the most important things at the eye level or highest in a list and as the components progress, their importance decreases (Bashiru, 2020).

Repetition means using the same elements, whether it is in colour, shapes, and text etc. This creates a sense of unity for the viewer, especially when a large number of elements are to be incorporated (Bashiru, 2020).

Then, we have pattern, which similar to repetition, brings a sense of unity through repeating elements. There can be numerous types of patterns like 'random, regular, alternating, flowing, and progressive' (Bashiru, 2020).

White space, also known as 'negative space' refers to an area where there are no elements. This provides a break for the viewer as well as emphasise on certain aspects of the artwork, especially if they are placed within the negative space (Bashiru, 2020).

Movement is how the viewer looks at a design as a whole. This means that the 'positioning' or style of certain elements immediately attracts one's attention, which are usually the artist's main focus (Bashiru, 2020).

Variety is used in all contexts, such as colour, font, and shapes. This enhances the creativity of an artwork and breaks any monotony that could arise. While on surface value, some art might appear to have no variety like in those that are monochromatic, one will always be able to point out certain changes in elements that grasp one's attention (Bashiru, 2020).

Finally, unity refers to a general sense of cohesion that one experiences when viewing the artwork. The relation between different elements is made evident, making them easier for the viewer to understand as well relate to one another (Bashiru, 2020).

Design principles have been commonly used in the culinary world, enhancing one's experience with the dish by stimulating numerous senses like smell, sight, touch etc. These senses allow the taster to gain a deeper understanding behind the complexities of a culinary creation. Since the purpose of a dessert in a restaurant is to please the taster and perhaps lay emphasis on a context created by the pastry chef, these design principles must be employed to, to an extent, improve one's life through that experience. As Stummerer & Hablesreiter stated "If eating were only about calories intake, we could simply use infusion bags and pills, however our food is tempting because it comes in different flavours, recipes, ways of cooking, shapes, colors, surfaces and textures"

(McClurg-Genevese, 2005). This is largely evident through a study carried out by Ed Cara, a reporter for Medical Daily. He used a material called Soylent, which provides all the nutrients and calories required for an individual to survive but lacks all other aspects of food like texture, flavour, smell. By the end of the experiment, Cara reported a need for actual food, stemming from a need for "a home-cooked meal, the smell of a hard-earned roast chicken wafting from the oven"(Cara, 2015). He emphasised an interactive experience with food which Michelin star chefs are known for.

Moreover, this idea of focus on the whole has been spoken about in Gestalt psychology. Max Wertheimer, a gestalt psychologist, known for this school of thought highlighted that "a physical, biological, or symbolic configuration or pattern of element so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be identified from a simple summation of its parts." This simply means that the human mind tends to look at visual stimuli with a sense of unity and usually looks for certain patterns or combinations that enhance the viewing experience. Some principles of gestalt psychology are similarity, in which we tend to group objects that look similar and perceive them to be one and continuation, where "law of continuity holds that points that are connected by straight or curving lines are seen in a way that follows the smoothest path." Another principle is closure, where our mind automatically fills in the gaps for something that is missing, drawing on past knowledge. Lastly, we have proximity, which explains human tendency to look at objects that are close together as belonging to the same group. These principles can be widely seen in food plating as well and have a great impact on our perceptions of food. For example, in the desserts, which components that are arranged together in the center of a plate, encourage the taster to eat the elements together as it is perceived as a whole dessert and not separate parts (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, 2016).

With this importance on the design principles in food, there are several techniques that a Michelin Star chef may employ while plating a particular dessert. This includes size of the plate, colour of the plate, colour of the components on the plate, shape of the plate, balance between textures and flavours. These allow the viewer to be visually excited and even impact the manner in which the dessert is accepted.

This is highlighted in a study conducted by Charles Spence and other researchers, which elucidated how 'Color creates a psychological expectation for a certain flavor that is often impossible to dislodge'. By reviewing previous literature including experiments conducted by DuBose et al., they brought to light how simply adding food colour to drink changed one's perception of it. For example, about 20% of the participants believed that the drink was orange flavoured when coloured orange. In actuality it was cherry flavored. Similar responses were also seen when the drink was coloured green, leading to the belief that it had a lime flavour (Spence et al., 2014).



Image 3: Dessert from Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons and Comic Strip 3



Image 4: Dessert by Grant Achatz and Comic Strip 4



Image 5: Dessert by George Blogg and Comic Strip 5

IV.RESULTS

7 questions were objective, i.e. participants had to select one answer from the choices given. The first question was “Which design element stands out the most?” for comic strip 1. 58.8% selected ‘use of varying colours’, 24.7% ‘repetition’ while

16.5% said ‘Contrast between imperfect speech bubbles and straight lines of panels’.

The second question pertained to the desert by Renee Redzepi and was ‘Which design element stands out the most?’ Here, 65.9% stated that ‘colour scheme’ was prominent, while

23.5% chose 'repetition' and 10.6% chose 'use of negative space'.

The next question was 'Which similarity between the comic and dessert is the most striking?' which referred to the dessert by Grant Achatz and Comic Strip 4. The majority (57.6%) chose 'sense of destruction' while 32.9% chose 'use of small colourful details'. 'Contrasts between curved and straight lines' and 'lack of boundaries in terms of gutters and plating' were chosen by 4.7% each.

Moreover, a similar question on the most striking design element for comic strip 5 showed that 43.5% participants thought it to be 'use of negative space'. The remaining participants were equally divided between 'monochromatic colour scheme' and 'varying panel sizes'(28.2% each).

To compare this comic strip with the dessert by Geroge Blogg the same question was repeated. Interestingly, 61.2% chose 'monochromatic colour scheme' while 31.8% chose 'varying shapes'. Finally, 7.1% chose 'use of negative space'.

On inquiring the similarities between the dessert from Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons and Comic Strip 3, the following results were obtained. 36.5% chose 'perception of texture', closely followed by 35.3% choosing 'use of colour'. 28.2% thought 'repetition of shapes' was most striking.

To conclude the survey the following question was asked 'On an average, how long do you spend reading a comic strip?'. To this, 32.9%, which was the highest amount, chose 3 minutes, followed by 24.7% choosing 1 minute and 20% choosing 2 minutes.

V. DISCUSSION

While choosing the comics and desserts, common design principles were looked at and analysed in each pair. For the dessert by Renee Redzepi and Comic Strip 1, the use of design principles is evident. Bill Waterson's comic captures the reader's attention through the bright colours and standardized camera angle, depicting Calvin's point of view. This is highlighted through the division of the first tier into 6 identical panels with speech bubbles drawn at the same height, subconsciously simplifying the comic and allowing the reader to focus on the plotline. Each of the panels showcases a different emotion, from curiosity in the first to delight in the last. This sense of curiosity is continued through the use of similar perspectives and shapes in René Redzepi's dessert for the 2 Michelin star restaurant Noma. Here, the use of repetition can be seen through the identical circles of varying colours placed in a clustered manner in the center of the plate, immediately attracting the viewer and invoke a sense of vibrancy. Thus these works of art utilise repeated shapes to create a sense of continuity through the piece. This sense of repetition was also deduced to be most significant by the majority of the participants (65.9%). However, it is important to note that in the case of the comic, Waterson makes use of the colours of the rainbow in the usually known order (violet, indigo, blue..etc) providing the readers with a sense of

familiarity, while intriguing their visual modality, evident through more than half participant choosing this to be appealing. This idea of familiarity and cohesion is created in the dessert through the repeated use of pink and red colours, while occasionally arousing one's sense through the disks of brown. Perhaps these disks of brown serve the same purpose of providing emphasis as do the pink speech bubbles in the last panel of the second tier.

Waterson further intrigues the reader through the contrast between the straight lines in his panel and the irregular speech bubbles of different shapes and sizes. This idea is repeated in Redzepi's work, as he takes advantage of the relative freedom in plating by making the the coulis an imperfect circle that greatly contrasts the perfectly cut disks. Hence, the viewers are subtly made aware of the human effort essential in producing these works of art.

Unlike the comic, the dessert makes use of numerous tones of red and pink, accentuated by the red coulis the disks are placed in. Both creators make effective use of negative space; Waterson achieves this through the relatively empty background in his panels, excluding the last panel on the second tier (which merely brings context to the comic). Redzepi, similarly, focuses his dessert in the center of the black plate which is strikingly contrasted with the pink colour scheme. This aims to simplify the design, while maintaining its aesthetics more subtly than other techniques since only a very small percentage of participants perceived this to be important.

Redzepi cleverly makes use of a red coulis at the bottom, thus not detracting from the main focus of the dish. This concept is seen in the comic through the use of yellow coloured panel to highlight the name "Calvin and Hobbes". In both cases, the viewers are encouraged to focus on the surrounding features, but are subtly reminded of the background elements which play a vital role in the overall structure. These features merge with the stylistic elements presented in the two works, almost restoring the harmony broken by the use of numerous colours.

For the second comic strip and the dessert from Le Cinq, the respective artists make use of these techniques in a unique manner. Both Bill Waterson's comic and this dessert from a 3 Michelin star restaurant, Le Cinq, make effective use of texture to visually please the readers. This is evident in the comic through the vivid drawing of the foam into a monster, representing Calvin's dislike for this daily activity. By using curved lines and emenata, a foamy texture is immediately brought to the reader's mind. Similarly, this dessert uses an iced granita sitting atop the main strawberry encompassed tart, almost mimicking the bubbles from a bathtub.

Waterson also makes use of bright colours and large font, especially in panel 4 of the second tier and the first panel in tier 3, to draw the reader's attention and highlight Calvin's emotions. However, one can see that the pink color scheme from the bathtub is repeated through the comic, notably in the first tier. This brings a sense of cohesion to the comic, thus

making it more aesthetically pleasing. Le Cinq implements this idea of colour scheme by making each component of the dessert with strawberry, thus not only creating a sense of unity in plating but also in taste.

These artworks invoke a sense of curiosity with their bolder and highlighted elements. The large 'NO' in the second panel in the first tier is unique in the sense that it does not follow the font and colour typically seen in a comic, thus intriguing the reader and inciting them to read further. Le Cinq further uses this technique through the placement of a single strawberry towards one side of the dessert. Despite the main components of the dessert being in the center of the plate, this strawberry seems to be a gateway into the dessert, arousing the viewer's visual sense, and perhaps introducing the theme of the dish, much like the 'NO' introduces a major component of the comic's plotline- Calvin's resistance to bathing. The survey revealed its influence as the majority of the participants mentioned 'No' or referred to this panel when asked what struck them the most.

This dessert from Le Cinq appeals to the sense of grandiosity, in a way that almost overwhelms the viewer with the elements placed on top of each other, in a towering fashion. However, the dessert is centered in the plate, thus creating negative space, lending to its elegance and providing the viewer with a break from visual stimulation. While Watterson does not aim to make his comic 'elegant' he uses a similar idea of crowding in some panels while others have ample negative space. These contrasts lend in making the comic more interesting by emphasising on the difference in emotion in Calvin's reactions in comparison to the parent's reaction in the second tier, invoking a sense of humour. Some participants were also able to pick up on this emotion as they were intrigued by Calvin's 'expression', and one even drew on past experience stating that 'This sounds like every kid these days;'. This emphasises how personal experience, along with design elements, plays a role in visual perception.

Watterson uses a perfectly straight line and Calvin's more freeform speech bubble in the first panel of the first tier to bring out a contrast that is immediately noticed by the reader. This feature, not repeated in any other panel in the comic, aims to provide variety, thus stimulating the reader through the course of the story. A similar concept is applied at Le Cinq, by placing a single line of tuile across a dish mainly composed of circular elements. This serves a dual purpose; it not only refocuses the viewer's attention from the lone strawberry onto the main dessert but also adds a layer of complexity by providing an additional texture and colour, augmenting one's overall experience.

The dessert by Grant Achatz and Comic Strip 4 too highlighted some interesting techniques that captured the viewer's attention and visual modality. This comic is unique from the others in that it makes use of a gutterless panel in the first tier. This is used to showcase the uncontrollable fear felt by the main characters and create a dramatic effect of their

fall. This lack of boundaries and traditional plating is seen in Grant Achatz's dessert for the restaurant Alinea. Here, the dessert appears to be smashed on the table itself, creating an almost overwhelming effect on the viewer and emphasising on the myriad of ingredients that would not be able to fit into a typical plate. In both works, this break from tradition serves to intrigue the viewer and highlight the unbounded features present. However, this proves to be a much subtler technique since only 4.7% of participants identified it.

Watterson also makes use of colours, particularly red and pink in the second panel of the first tier, to create a sense of panic and immediately draw the reader's attention. It is as though this panel is encircled to ensure adequate focus for a coherent understanding of the subsequent panel. Similarly, Grant Achatz makes use of bright coulis, possible mango and raspberry, and a white crumble to contrast the dark brown of the chocolate. This provides a break in a typically expected colour scheme. However, in this case, the presence of multiple lines and spots of colour perhaps assault the viewers visual senses with each part of the dessert immediately peaking one's interest as evidenced by 32.9% of participants being most receptive to this design element.

The unique colouring could also serve another purpose in the case of both works of art. The bold red exclamation in the second panel in tier one is in a curved line, almost helping the reader spot a minutely drawn Calvin and Hobbes. It could delineate the trajectory of their fall, while indicating what could possibly occur next as one could infer that the curve would soon end towards the ground. The use of curved lines as an arrow to the climax is a concept also attempted in this dessert. The red line of coulis seem to be random at first, but all actually point towards the main elements of the dessert, i.e. the white crumbles and complimenting elements. Hence, the viewer is immediately directed to the 'climax' or the actual dessert to be eaten, while appreciating the surrounding features.

Finally, the sense of destruction and chaos is the most evident feature created in both these works, evident from the majority of participants perceiving this to be the most striking. Watterson illustrates this through the drawings of multiple broken elements like wheels of the wagon cast aside and Calvin implanted head first into the ground. However, what stands out in creating this utter destruction is the lack of space or the manner in which he has added numerous small drawings to show disturbance. For example, he has introduced stars on Hobbes head and small puffs of smoke. To further break the sense of unity, each element is of different colour, contributing to the confusion created in the reader's mind. Developing this sense of confusion is the presentation of Alinea's dessert. Each element is of a unique colour, hence not establishing a colour scheme as seen in previous desserts. Moreover, the uneven shards of chocolate portray the ruin, allowing the viewers to associate them to shards of glass, indicating chaos. The dessert makes use of different textures as well, from the textured dried flowers to the light white

foam, breaking all sense of coherence, but rather creating a vibrant sensory experience.

For the dessert by Geroge Blogg and comic strip 5, simplicity is key. This concept of minimalism can be effectively seen in both the comic and dessert by Chef George Blogg. The idea of a monochrome color scheme brings a sense of tranquility to the comic, reinforcing the winter setting. Thus this colour scheme plays on our mental associations of white with the season of winter. While doing so, the bursts of colour from the drawings of Calvin and Hobbes intrigues the readers and prevents the comic from becoming too monotonous for the eye, leading to majority of participants perceiving this feature to be most stimulating. Similarly, this dessert's main colours revolve around a white/off-white palette, bringing a certain elegance to the overall composition. However, Blogg also considers the addition of a break in this uniformity through the dark red coulis placed around the main quenelles. Both works also make use of the white coloured negative space to further reiterate this colour scheme and not overburden the viewers with too many conflicting elements as seen in previous desserts. However, this technique was perhaps not received as well in comics, since a smaller proportion of participants found it to be appealing as compared to the dessert. Thus one can see that similar design principles can have varying impacts based on the context they are applied in.

For the plot of the comic to be completely understood by the reader, Watterson makes sure that each panel depicts the characters in the same clothing and setting, enabling one to follow and understand the comic. This idea of repetition can be seen in the dessert, where the quenelles are almost akin to panels, guiding the taster through each element plated by the chef. It is interesting to note that the colour of quenelles remains the same in the first and last one, almost providing the taster with a sense of familiarity and resolution at the end of the plate. This concept of design is mimicked in the size of the two characters. Their first and last appearance is drawn in the same size while Watterson has allowed them to vary through the strip. Hence, a sense of continuation is brought, which not only lends to the aesthetic look of the comic but also unconsciously provides the reader with a pattern.

An effective contrast between curved and straight lines can also be seen in both these works. Watterson does so by contrasting the straight gutters of the last panel with a swirl shaped element to depict the character's movement on the sled. This unique line in the midst of a relatively empty panel creates a sense of mystery and draws the reader to focus on the punchline of the comic- 'Let's go exploring'. It's whimsical and unconventional nature could be used to allude to these young characters' sense of imagination. George Blogg deftly contrasts the soft curves of the quenelles and sauces with the stark and dramatic decoration that spans across the dish. This immediately attracts the viewer, while adding a layer of complexity to an otherwise simple plating of ice creams and accompanying elements, clearly shown

through 31.8% and 28.2% choosing this design principle dessert.

While comparing the dessert from Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons and comic strip 3, certain elements were clearly preferred, especially texture. One can imagine that texture plays a vital role in this tiramisu from Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, in which the taster is pleasantly greeted by the soft cream and ice cream but suddenly ambushed by the crispy tuile cookie. This contrast of textures aims to create a sense of intrigue and enhance the complexity of the dessert. While comics do not allow one to experience physical textures, Watterson's description of the pile of leaves with pillows on the inside creates a similar impression. Here, one can imagine the soft pillows to be the lightly whipped cream at the bottom of the dessert and the comparison to the hard shell of the cookie is brought out through the onomatopoeia 'Krunch', created when Calvin dives into the pile.

The element of repetition is also effectively used in the comic through the repeated use of green and blue in diametrically opposite panels and the stark orange pile of leaves, creating a sense of continuity and uniformity through the various panels in tier one and two. This allows the reader to follow the plot with ease and helps retain the main setting (i.e. of a fall day) in the reader's mind. Similarly, this dessert repeats the form of two quenelles for the two ice cream flavours, thus maintaining a sense of cohesion as one observes it. However, the differences in size and colour allow the viewer to be constantly stimulated and make use of the limited space on the plate. This idea is also seen through the comic, as Watterson draws the pile of leaves with Calvin in different camera angles, allowing him to draw the reader's attention to different aspects in different panels. For example, the second panel in the second tier focuses more on the pile of leaves and Calvin's dive into it, thus showing more of the background while the next panel is more focused on Calvin, thus zooming into him and his speech bubble. A manipulation of size is done through the diametrically opposite panels in tier one and two with a blue background to establish balance in the comic strip.

Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons makes use of irregular curved lines in the form of the tuile to immediately attract the viewer and contrast the perfect circles of the plate and cream, along with the crafted quenelles. This draws attention to the dessert by creating a dramatic flair. The comic, too, makes use of elementata in the form of curved lines in the second panel in the second tier and the third tier to emphasise on the motion being performed, emulating this similar idea of exaggeration, bringing out a sense of humour.

The focus on smaller details and background features is also evident in both works of art. The comic highlights very small details like the colour of the leaves to symbolise fall, the addition of trees etc. to reinforce the setting of the plot and provide a greater variety in terms of colour and structure. Thus, one is never allowed to forget these small details that play a key role in understanding the context of the story. This

emphasis on small features is also seen through the placement of gold leaf and small jelly cubes that serve to enhance the overall flavour profile and create a break from the neutral brown and white colour scheme. The difference in colour could perhaps serve to incite the diner to try a combination of all elements on the dish, for a complete experience as in the comic. In both cases, these smaller elements do not distract but rather augment the overall interaction with the respective works.

For a general consensus on which design principles were most striking, and thus more memorable, participants provided numerous responses. The key principles were use of negative space and color scheme, which play a vital role in immediately stimulating one's visual senses. The others are perhaps more subtle since they have to be thought about and are not as evident. Some other responses include 'juxtaposition between food colors & textures and negative space of plate' and 'balance' which can be observed on some level in each of the chosen works. A unique design principle, not spoken about in the other analysis, was 'highlights' and a 'perfect edge finish', suggesting that some degree of mastery is required and hence Michelin Star chefs and renowned comic artists are able to impactfully capture their viewers. Since the majority of participants spend a relatively small amount of time on comic strips and desserts, they would most probably not be able to pick up on all the carefully thought of techniques. Thus, one can assume that colour scheme and negative space play the greatest role in aesthetics and have the most meaningful impact in the shortest period of time.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through these desserts and comic strips, the importance of design elements is evident. Though similar techniques are used in most works, each dessert and comic makes use of unique variations. These creative decisions such as colour scheme, size of plate or panel or placement of additional elements lend to the beauty of the work, distinguishing them from others. This importance on aesthetics is essential as

comics and desserts are not traditionally studied as paintings or literature would be and hence each novel interpretation of design elements serve to stimulate and intrigue the viewer, creating a lasting impact in their minds despite the limited attention they receive.

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