

‘In our digital age, what value do books have for Arts & Law students?’

As Carl Sagan once observed, ‘what an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles.’ Indeed, what value do books, as antiquated physical objects, still hold for modern students?

E-books are younger, smarter and better looking than their older relatives. Accessible by computer, e-reader and Kindle, you have a whole bookshelf, or even a whole library, at the touch of your fingertips. Locating a title is only a click of a search button away, as opposed to browsing endless library shelves. They are also compact; one Kindle can contain hundreds of titles whilst lugging just ten books back from the library seems like a chore for students.

The only advantage of the book is its cost. Whilst Kindles are still a relatively expensive luxury for students, you can pick up a second hand book from a charity shop for next to nothing. However, like most modern gadgets, e-readers will surely become more common among the student population. Furthermore, for the eco-friendly student, e-books are far more appealing than purchasing paperbacks. Thus books, and the libraries they sit in, seem somewhat redundant.

So why are we Arts & Law students still so attached to books as physical objects? Perhaps their value is embedded in the fact that they are physical objects- an art form in themselves. Reading should not just be a visual experience, of printed words on a screen, but a sensory one.

One cannot underestimate the satisfying weight of a heavy book in your hands, the soft texture of worn paper or the sense of anticipation created by the scent of fresh ink. Book collections hold memories, whether it is a tear smudged word or an underlined passage- a favourite paragraph to be read over and over again. There's even the satisfaction of turning pages and making progress; a Kindle won't let you judge the thickness of the pages left under your thumb.

Furthermore without books we wouldn't have libraries, and libraries are what made me fall in love with literature. As a child, the endless shelves of countless spines opened up a world of possibilities for me, encouraging me to discover new authors, new genres and new characters.

I will always choose shelves of books, of musty memories, over a single cold Kindle in the palm of my hand. Yes, e-books are efficient and practical. But books appeal to your senses, memories and experiences. And they can't run out of battery.

Perhaps books are indeed just flat objects with flexible parts and funny dark squiggles. But they are also my memories, my childhood and the reason I came to study English Literature at the University of Birmingham.