

# Why adolescents do and don't read books

A summary for teachers

## Background & Aims

Middle adolescence is a particularly vulnerable period for reading attitudes and engagement. For example, in a recent large UK survey, adolescents aged 14-16 report enjoying reading less and were less likely to read daily than younger (8-11 and 11-14), but also older (16-18) students (Clark, 2019). While the majority (> 90%) of adolescents use websites, text messaging and instant messaging daily, far fewer (<50%) read books daily (Clark, 2017). Yet we know book reading provides numerous cognitive, social and emotional benefits.

**Aim:** To understand why adolescents do (and don't) choose to read books.

## Methods

Ten high school students received research training and joined the research team to interview their peers about their reading choices. In total, 39 high school students (aged 15-16, ~50% female) from two UK schools were interviewed. A data-driven inductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse interview content.

### Why adolescents read books: Internal and external motivators



### Why adolescents don't read books



## Discussion & Implications for Education

Adolescents reported that book reading provide numerous benefits. Connecting adolescents with a book that really resonates with them may help to initiate or promote greater reading engagement.

Setting aside time in the school day to read for pleasure, providing up-to-date reading materials relevant to the needs, interests and experiences of adolescents, creating appealing/comfortable spaces to read and encouraging staff across subject areas to promote reading for pleasure can help to build a school reading culture.

To access our website: go to <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/> or scan the QR code



### Academic paper

Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Bonsall, J., Sabeti, S., & McGeown, S. (2020). Reading during adolescence: Why adolescents do (and don't) choose books. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*.



Growing Up  
A Reader

Contact: [s.mcgeown@ed.ac.uk](mailto:s.mcgeown@ed.ac.uk)