

How does fiction reading support wellbeing?

Learning from children

Wellbeing is associated with feelings of happiness, contentment and fulfilment, and fiction reading has considerable potential to support wellbeing across the lifespan. Recent research* has been carried out with children, young people, adults and older adults, exploring how fiction reading supports three aspects of wellbeing: **positive emotions, connection and personal growth.**

Here we share the research findings of children (aged 9-11) from across the UK.

Positive emotions

During childhood, reading can prompt feelings of happiness, interest, excitement, enjoyment, absorption and relaxation, with children sometimes selecting books to enhance their mood:

'I just love the thrill of it, I just love the magic...It just feels like I'm in another world.' (Girl, aged 9)

'I wanted to read more. I want to get deeper into the story.' (Boy, Aged 9)

'There are some quite sad bits and there is also like quite amazing like wow bits.' (Girl, aged 10)

'But then if I read a funny book I can use that comedy and also it just makes me feel up and good. Happy.' (Girl, aged 11)

Connection

Children spoke of feelings of connection with fictional characters and the story world, in addition to how reading supported connection with others in their lives:

'...when they tell you about their personal feelings and you can tell how much it actually relates to you. How, I know it's just a book, but it's it feels like sometimes just yourself.' (Boy, aged 9)

'I like how we have something in common, because it helps.' (Girl, aged 10)

'I think what I quite like doing is reading with somebody else, like somebody else reading a book to me. I really like that actually.' (Boy, aged 9)

Personal Growth

Children also felt that fiction reading supported their social, emotional and intellectual development, in addition to expanding their life experiences and learning about others:

'Some fiction helps me a lot to process what's happening to me, what's happening to other people around me' (Boy, aged 9)

But it also reminds me that it's OK, and that's just life... so it's like I can do that as well. And it's made me happy to feel it.' (Girl, aged 10)

'and it just made me have empathy for them a little bit more and step into their feet, step into their shoes.' (Girl, aged 9)

'it's just made me feel happy, sad, confused, question myself and, I think that's why I'm now at this stage that I can actually like, say my feelings out loud.' (Girl, aged 10)

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*Find out more:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/readwell/>