



Reading and Wellbeing

Exploring the evidence base

Professor Sarah McGeown
Literacy Lab

Moray House School of Education and Sport
University of Edinburgh



Overview

- Reading and Wellbeing
 - Exploring the evidence base
 - Deepening understanding
- Love to Read Libraries
- Questions and discussion

Exploring the evidence base



Exploring the evidence base

- Large-scale quantitative research typically highlights a positive, *albeit weak*, relationship between reading and wellbeing.
- UK and international research to date typically focuses on children and young people.

UK: Children and Young People

Table 1: Correlations between the reading and writing variables, and mental wellbeing

	Mental wellbeing
Reading enjoyment	.158**
Reading frequency	.146**
Reading self-perception	.174**
Reading attitudes	.280**
Writing enjoyment	.180**
Writing frequency	.114**
Writing self-perception	.224**
Writing attitudes	.275**

National Literacy Trust

Based on n = 49,046, aged 8-18

https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf



International: Children and Young People

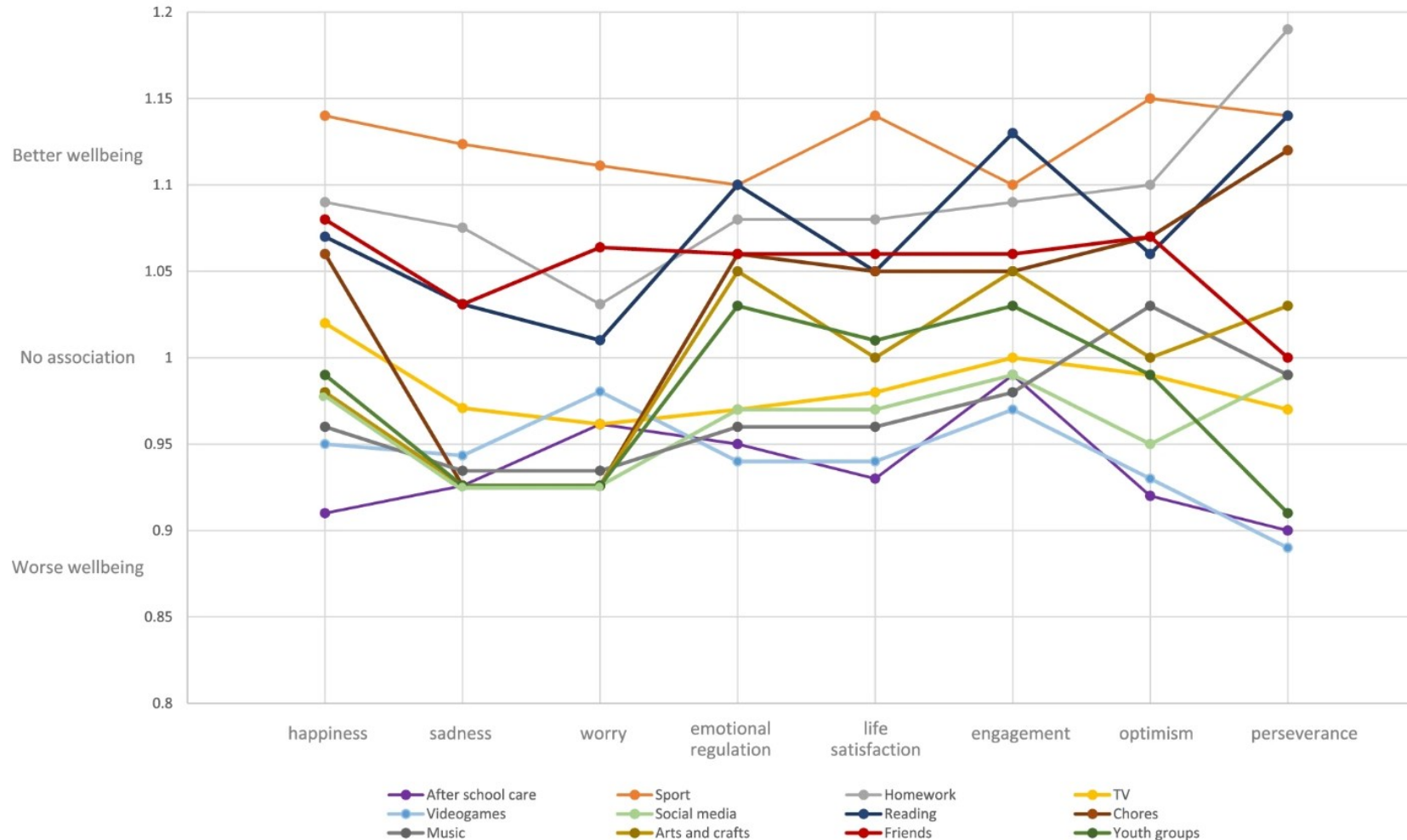
- Australia (n=61,759, aged 9-15): Frequency of reading for enjoyment was associated with higher self-reported wellbeing, among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Kennewell et al., 2022).
- US (n = 10,243, aged 9-14): Frequency of reading for pleasure at 9-11 years old was significantly negatively associated with mental health difficulties at 11-13 years old (Sun et al., 2023).

Kennewell et al. (2022): <https://bmcpediatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12887-022-03322-1>

Sun et al., (2023): <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37376848/>

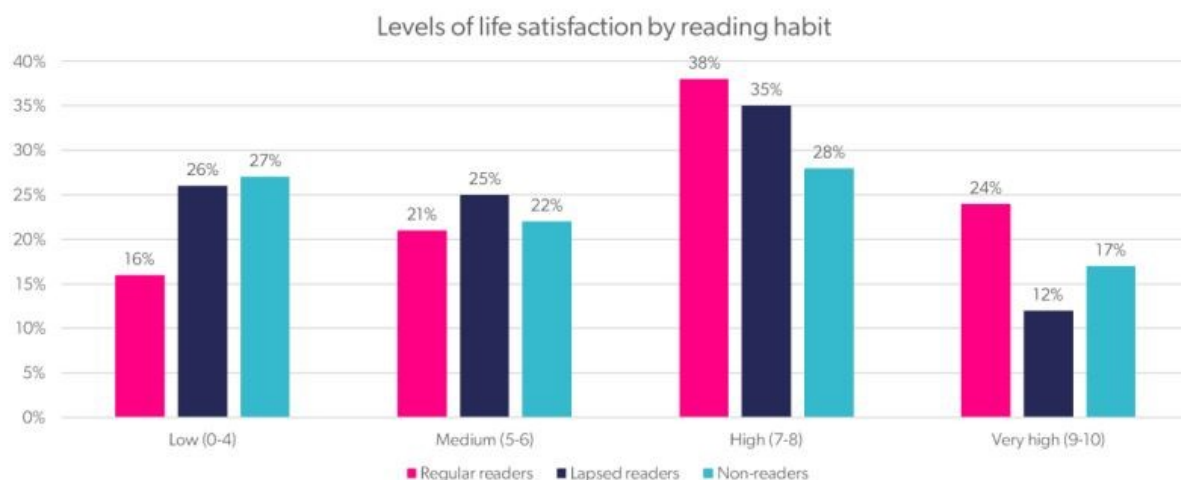
Australia: Children and Young People

From: [The relationships between school children's wellbeing, socio-economic disadvantage and after-school activities: a cross-sectional study](#)



UK: Adults

Figure 4. Levels of life satisfaction by reading habit



Reading Agency

Based on n = 2,003, aged 16+

https://readingagency.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/State-of-the-Nations-Adult-Reading_2024-Focus-on-Health-and-Wellbeing.pdf

UK: Adults

Figure 4. Levels of life satisfaction by reading habit

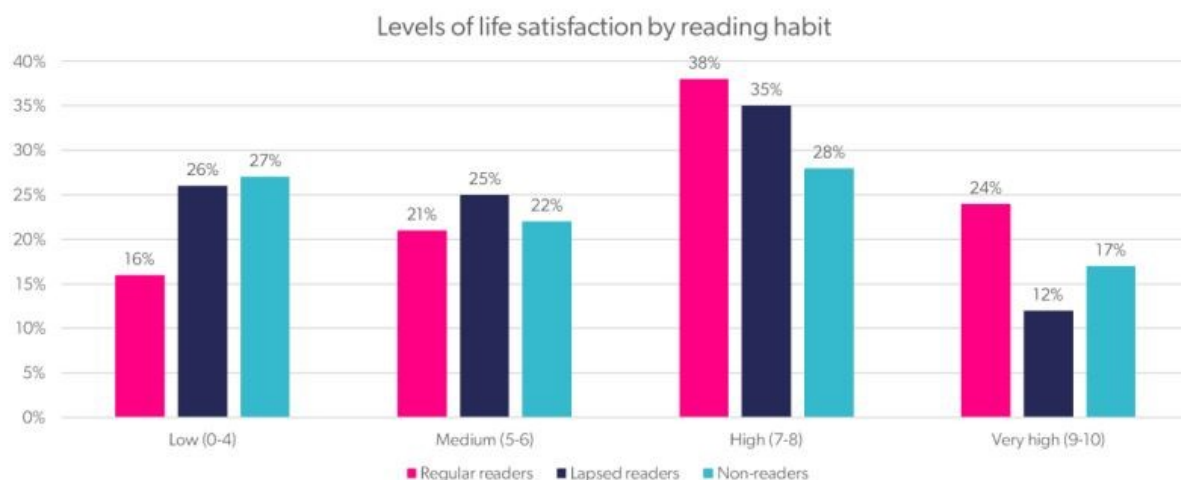
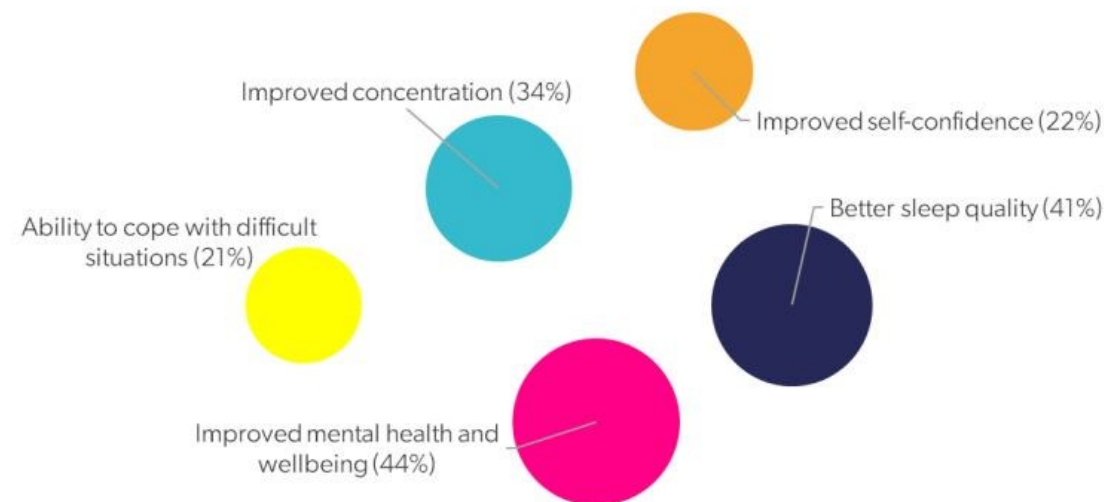


Figure 3. Regular readers' health and wellbeing-related responses to 'What, if anything, has reading helped you with?'



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https://readingagency.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/State-of-the-Nations-Adult-Reading_2024-Focus-on-Health-and-Wellbeing.pdf



Summary

- Some evidence that reading can support wellbeing, however considerable variability...
- Lack insights across the lifespan, and an understanding of the different ways in which reading can support wellbeing.

Deepening understanding

Reading and Wellbeing: Qualitative project

- Large scale (n = 78) qualitative research project, interviews with children (aged 9-11), young people (aged 15-17), adults (aged 30-50) and older adults (aged 63-83) who enjoy reading fiction.
- Focused on wellbeing from hedonistic (positive affect) and eudaimonic (connection, personal growth) perspectives.

Currie, N. et al., (2025). Reading Fiction and Psychological Well-being During Older Adulthood: Positive Affect, Connection and Personal Growth. *Reading Research Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.605>

Currie, N., et al., (forthcoming). How does reading fiction support adolescents' wellbeing? A qualitative study examining positive affect, connection and personal growth. *Reading Psychology*.

Currie, N., & McGeown, S. (2025). Fiction Books and Benefits to Wellbeing. In *Reading for Pleasure: International Perspectives*. Cremin, T., & McGeown, S. (Eds.) Routledge.



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Reading
& Wellbeing

Findings: Positive affect

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- Readers differ in their predisposition to seek out/engage in emotionally meaningful content

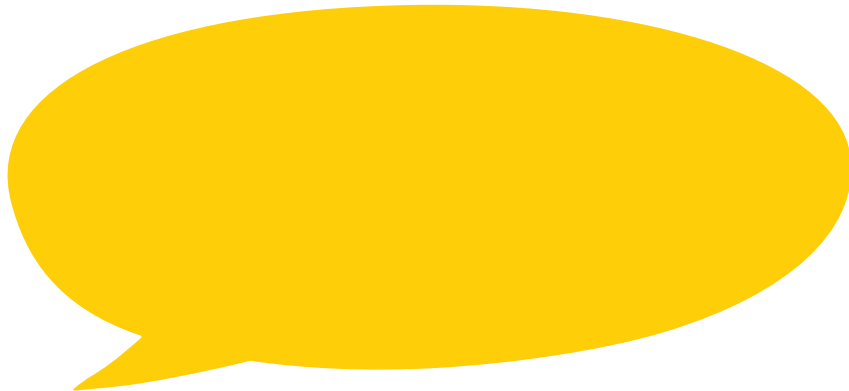
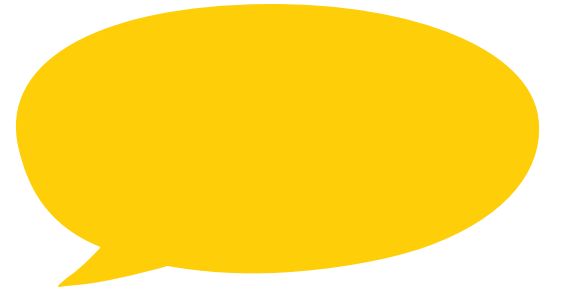
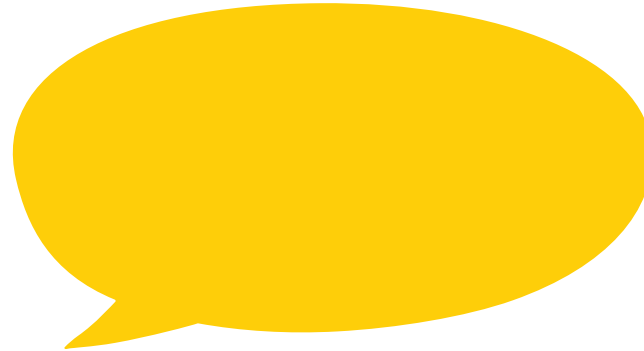
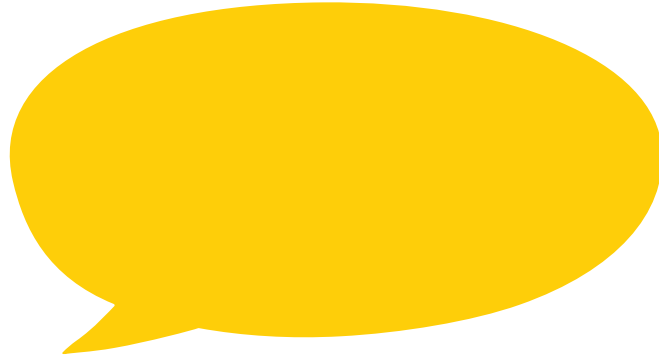
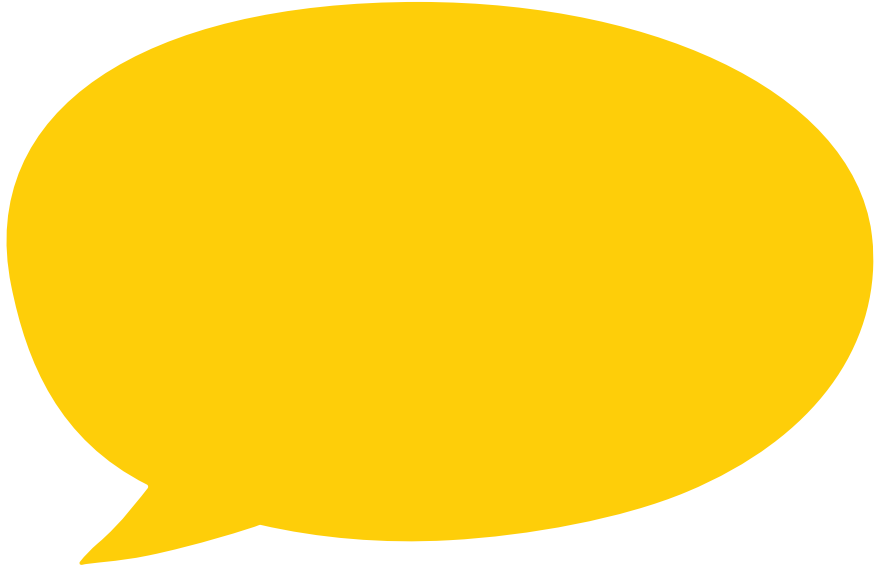


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- Some readers report that 'negative' emotions can be enjoyable
- Emotions before, and after, reading
- Emotions elicited via book content and/or cueing of personal memories
- Readers differ in their predisposition to seek out/engage in emotionally meaningful content
- Book content/writing quality influences emotional experiences



Positive affect



Positive affect

'it is genuinely one of the funniest things I've ever read. And then there's other moments where it's like hair-raisingly awful and it's-, yeah, it's just it's so good'

'I just love the thrill of it, I just love the magic...It just feels like I'm in another world'

'I've read a few books as well that that have like left me crying in tears, like, I'm not even kidding. But it's amazing'

'the way that that sentence was written terrified me...'

'It lived with me and I still think about it every once in a while'

'it gave me an experience that I haven't had in real life, but it was for me, it was quite a deep experience'

'remembering the days when you really could chase down the deck and grab the ropes that were thrown [laughing] reminds you of happy times.'

Findings: Connection

Through personal reading experiences....



Findings: Connection

Through personal reading experiences....

Fictional world

- Characters
- Settings
- Story events



Findings: Connection

Through personal reading experiences....

Fictional world

- Characters
- Settings
- Story events

Real world

- Known others
- Unknown others



Connection

‘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 feels like sometimes just yourself’

‘the people become real. Like, I don't care what anybody says to me, I genuinely believe that these people are real and that I know them intimately’

‘I felt as if I'd lived the whole life with her when she died. So I've really, I sort of lived and breathed the series’

‘It's always like an internal monologue. So it makes me think if other people I know, they're not saying anything, but they're having troubles, they're constantly thinking about stuff that is never talked about, you know?’

‘cause like when I read a book that's like about friendship and stuff I just, I just see how good that friendship is and I want that to happen with my friends and stuff’

Findings: Personal growth



Findings: Personal growth

- Intellectual and educational development



Findings: Personal growth

- Intellectual and educational development
- Supporting self



Findings: Personal growth

- Intellectual and educational development
- Supporting self
- Understanding others



Findings: Personal growth

- Intellectual and educational development
- Supporting self
- Understanding others
- Expand life experiences



Personal growth

'I would say I went to India, I went to Africa, I went to, you know, there was all these countries I went to with all of these books'

'it makes me understand that people are fighting battles that you have no idea about'

'just reading about different concepts and topics, it really helps to define what I enjoy and what I want to do in the future'

'but I think the quieter arena of reading is more likely to bring about change, or slow change. At least some self-questioning'

'it gives you an understanding and an insight and maybe hopefully an empathy into those experiences that you, were not gonna have yourself but help to be maybe, hopefully, a better human being'

'[through character] I can see that it is OK to not be perfect because it will always be OK, like, it will all be alright'

Summary

- Fiction book reading can provide a vast range of rich and diverse positive experiences.
- However, for the wellbeing benefits of reading to be realised, we need to find books we enjoy reading, and **engage deeply** with the books that we read....

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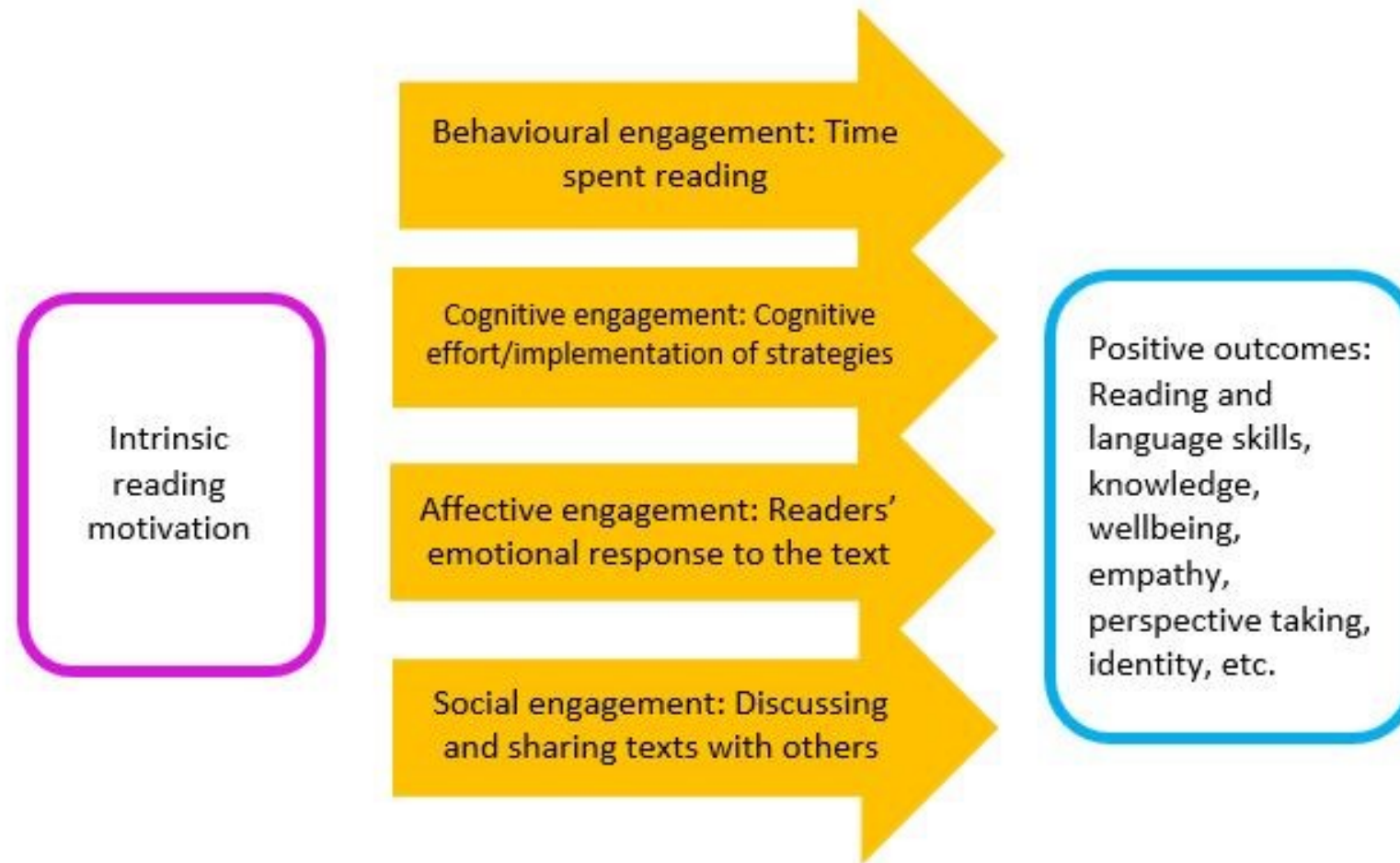


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Reading motivation and engagement



McGeown & Conradi-Smith (2023). Reading engagement matters! A new scale to measure and support children's engagement with books. The Reading Teacher, <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/trtr.2267>

McGeown, S., Oxley, E., and the Love to Read team (2023). Love to Read: A programme to inspire and sustain a love of reading. First Edition. University of Edinburgh. Access here: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/programme/>

Love to Read Libraries

Love to Read: Libraries: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>

To support children's reading motivation and engagement

- Access
- Choice
- Time
- Connection
- Social
- Success

Guide and resources
developed with library
organisations and
professionals.





Literacy Lab resources

Research articles

Blogposts

Reflective Reading Guide

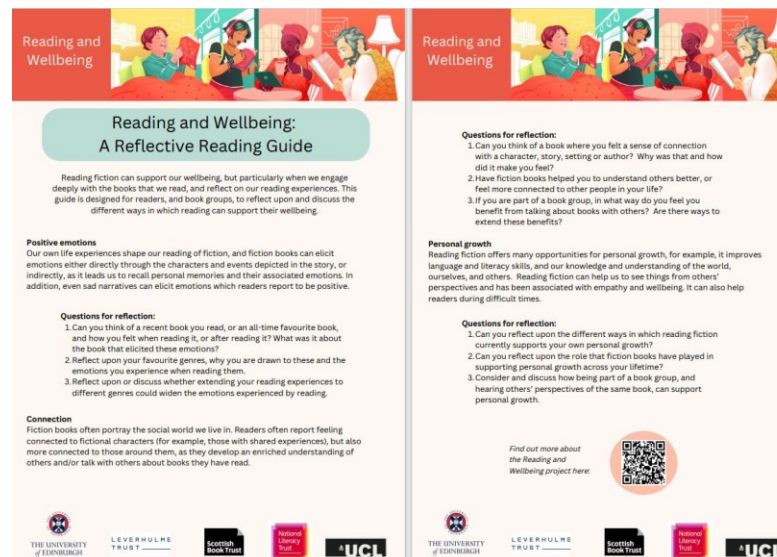
Love to Read Libraries



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Reading Fiction and Psychological Well-being During Older Adulthood: Positive Affect, Connection and Personal Growth

Nicola K. Currie✉ Katherine Wilkinson✉ Sarah McGeown✉



The importance of public libraries Supporting wellbeing later in life

Category: [Blog](#)



Reading and wellbeing: Exploring perspectives across the lifespan

Nicola Currie and Sarah McGeown of the University of Edinburgh's Literacy Lab explore the perceived impact of reading on people's wellbeing.

Topics: [Research and evaluation](#)
Last updated: 17 September 2024



Thank you for listening



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Opportunity for questions and discussion



University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/>

Contact details: s.mcgeown@ed.ac.uk

