



# Supporting Teenagers' Reading Enjoyment and Engagement

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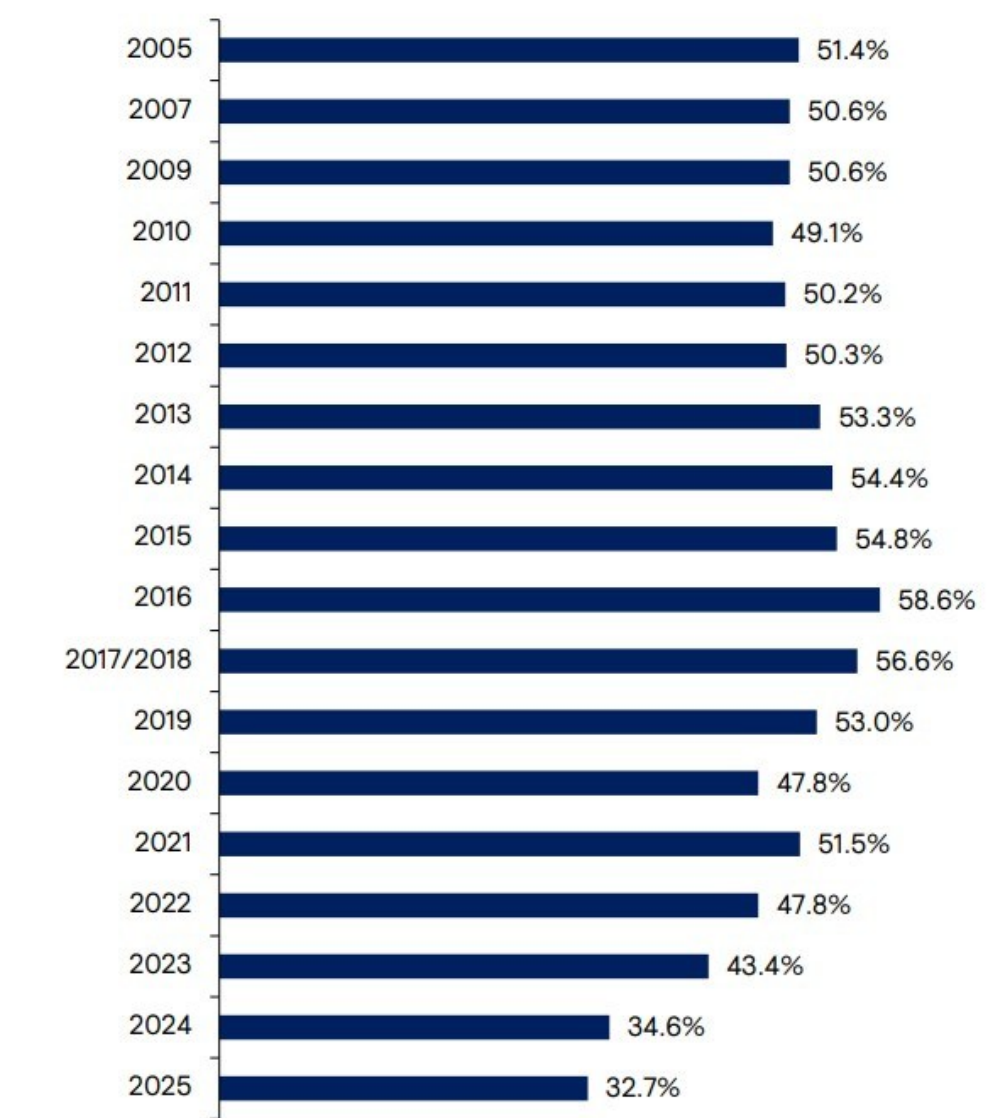
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# Current UK context

Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who told us that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot between 2005 and 2025



Clark et al., (2025). Available here:  
<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2025/>

Table 1: Reading enjoyment levels for children and young people aged 8 to 18 between 2005 and 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
2005	46.1%	56.8%	67.5%	44.3%	32.0%	44.4%	46.5%	50.2%
2010	42.3%	55.4%	68.1%	45.8%	32.5%	45.5%	44.1%	49.7%
2011	43.7%	56.7%	73.0%	47.2%	34.4%	46.3%	45.3%	50.8%
2012	43.9%	56.8%	64.0%	45.5%	36.3%	44.8%	47.7%	50.7%
2013	47.1%	59.8%	65.8%	49.5%	36.7%	40.1%	49.6%	53.9%
2014	47.2%	61.6%	65.6%	50.3%	43.4%	55.3%	50.4%	54.9%
2015	47.8%	61.2%	72.6%	51.7%	40.2%	53.6%	53.4%	55.1%
2016	52.4%	64.9%	77.6%	55.2%	43.8%	56.0%	58.3%	58.3%
2017/18	51.1%	62.6%	77.0%	53.2%	44.3%	54.4%	53.8%	56.3%
2019	46.5%	60.3%	71.9%	49.5%	40.2%	56.5%	51.4%	52.6%
2020	46.6%	48.9%	66.6%	46.2%	42.3%	56.0%	45.9%	48.0%
2021	45.6%	55.9%	62.4%	50.7%	48.1%	58.9%	47.5%	52.1%
2022	42.4%	51.5%	59.8%	45.6%	45.3%	57.5%	43.8%	42.8%
2023	40.5%	45.3%	56.2%	40.4%	40.8%	56.2%	39.5%	43.8%
2024	28.2%	40.5%	51.9%	30.7%	29.7%	40.0%	33.9%	34.8%
2025	25.7%	39.1%	46.9%	29.5%	28.6%	41.4%	31.0%	33.0%

Decline in percentage: 20.6 14.8 3.4 3



# What does it mean to be a reader?

Growing Up A Reader Project, in collaboration with Scottish Book Trust

Children and young people's perceptions of a 'reader'

## Common themes:

Readers were described as those who enjoy reading, read frequently, choose to read, are skilled at reading, and, primarily, read print books.

However, young people were more likely to say that readers read a wider range of reading materials and don't need to read as frequently to be described as a reader.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH  
2020, VOL. 62, NO. 2, 216–228  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2020.1747361>



## Growing up a reader: Exploring children's and adolescents' perceptions of 'a reader'

Sarah McGeown<sup>a</sup>, Jane Bonsall<sup>b</sup>, Valentina Andries<sup>a</sup>, Danielle Howarth<sup>b</sup>, Katherine Wilkinson<sup>c</sup> and Shari Sabeti<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>b</sup>School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>c</sup>Research and Evaluation, Scottish Book Trust, Edinburgh, UK

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Over the last two decades, the reading habits of children and adolescents have evolved. Research shows some similarities in the reading experiences of children and adolescents, but there are also differences. For example, adolescents are more likely to read digitally and generally report poorer attitudes towards reading. With this in mind, we asked: how do young people define a reader?

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 October 2019  
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### KEYWORDS

Reader; literacy; participatory research; children; adolescents; primary education; secondary



# Reading motivation and different text types....

**Journal of Research in Reading** UKLA  
The United Kingdom Literacy Association

Brief Report |  Open Access | 

**Understanding reading motivation across different text types: qualitative insights from children**

[Sarah McGeown](#) , [Jane Bonsall](#), [Valentina Andries](#), [Danielle Howarth](#), [Katherine Wilkinson](#)

First published: 23 July 2020 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12320> | [VIEW METRICS](#)

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**Reading During Adolescence: Why Adolescents Choose (or Do Not Choose) Books**

[Katherine Wilkinson](#), [Valentina Andries](#), [Danielle Howarth](#), [Jane Bonsall](#), [Shari Sabeti](#), [Sarah McGeown](#)

First published: 22 July 2020 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1065> | [VIEW METRICS](#)

<https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jaal.1065>



# What do we know already?

Synthesis of 38 peer-reviewed articles and research reports which have evaluated approaches for improving adolescents' (12–16 years old) reading motivation.

Reading & literacy skills programmes

Whole-school reading culture

Book clubs

Technology-supported approaches

Performance & theatre



Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L. G., & McGeown, S. P. (2023, August). Approaches for supporting adolescents' reading motivation: Existing research and future priorities. In Frontiers in Education (Vol. 8, p. 1254048). Frontiers.





# The Young People's Reading Project

## Research aims:

- (1) Explore teenagers' perspectives on their reasons for reading (or not reading)
- (2) Explore teenagers' perspectives on how can we inspire and sustain reading enjoyment and engagement

## Young People's Advisory Panel (YPAP)

- 6 young people (13-14 years old) from 3 secondary schools
- Included readers & non-readers

## Interviews with young people

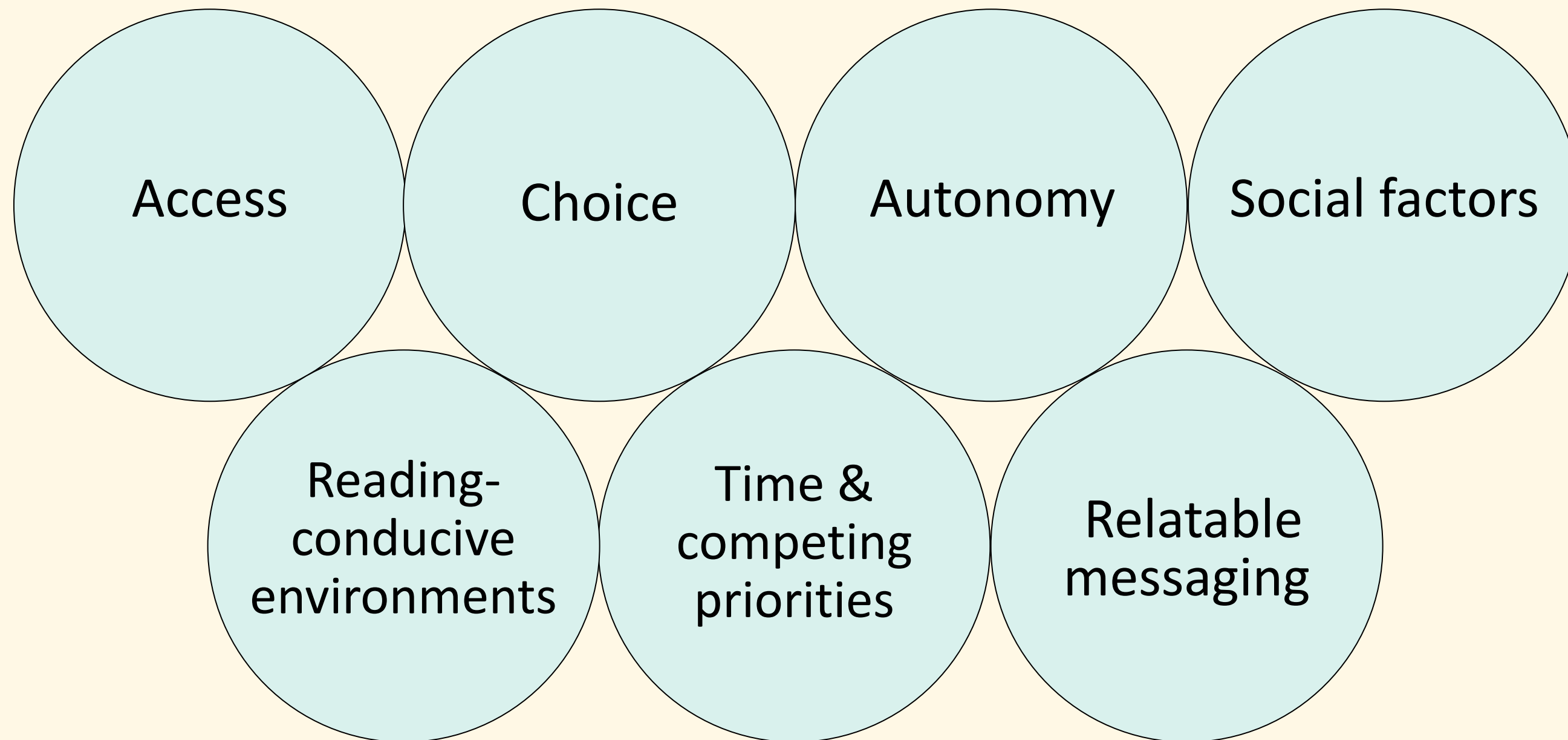
- 46 adolescents (13 - 15 years old) from 6 secondary schools
- Interviewed by adult researcher (CW) or peer (YPAP member)
- Questions about the barriers and motivators to volitional reading during adolescence

PhD researcher: Charlotte Webber, now at University of Strathclyde



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# Factors influencing young people's reading motivation and engagement, from their perspectives



\*The data was split into three datasets (1) barriers, (2) motivators, (3) perceptions; the findings have been integrated for the purpose of this presentation.



# Access

*“...well, this is going to sound really bad but, like, our school library, it doesn't get updated a lot...I feel like if you update that and gave us more access to different kinds of books that would help out.”*

As a barrier:

Finding it hard to physically access books  
at home and/or at school

As a motivator:

Perceiving reading material to be readily  
available and having regular  
opportunities to access it



- Updating school library provision, with young people's input
- Regular library visits (school and local)
- Making it easier to find books aligned with personal interests/preferences
- Support technology use to increase access to quality books



# Choice

*"when you read different books in school, if you're enjoying them, it gives you, like, more of an insight of why you would read at home"*

As a barrier:

Young people don't feel able to choose books which are relevant to their lives

As a motivator:

Young people feel confident choosing books they will enjoy and know how to access these.



- Provide more experience with different books and genres, supporting book knowledge
- Explicitly develop skills in book choice
- Make it easier to find books with visible recommendations/apps to support book choice

# Autonomy

*“if you’re trying to force someone into it, they’ll get bad feelings associated with it”*

As a motivator:

Young people need to feel a sense of control over when, where, what, why, and how they read



- Support reading routines which fit into (and enrich) their lives
- Link reading to personal interests and goals
- Encourage input to book provision, class reads, activities, etc – fostering a sense of agency



# Social factors

As a barrier:

Reading does not fit with young people's social lives

As a motivator:

Supportive relationships which facilitate reading in personally enjoyable and meaningful ways

*“Yeah, there's like a specific group of my friends that read a lot of books and recommend me their books. And then, yeah, like, we all borrow each other's books. It's like a tiny book club. So you want to read it to, like, be able to talk about it with them.”*

- Book clubs (led by young people).
- Online and in-person reading communities (e.g., BookTok)
- Reading role models (esp. inspiring/positive others) reading.



# Reading-conducive environments

*“Yeah, and having somewhere that’s, like, comfortable and not, like, plastic chairs to sit on and that. And it’s like not, not like it’s, like, formal, you know like what you do in, like, Reg and English....so like, if it was a nicer environment you know, like, cosier.”*

## As a barrier:

Mismatch between what young people want to read/ways they want to read and how reading is taught/supported in school

## As a motivator:

Encouragement from teachers, having quality books and comfortable spaces/time to read, support for reading skills



- Support reading enjoyment (e.g., through supporting choice) throughout secondary school
- Recognize that some key book/ways of teaching may undermine reading enjoyment
- Create comfortable spaces and time for reading in school



# Time and competing priorities

*“Some people prefer to watch TV...it's more interesting with, like, you can see people's facial reactions. Like, it's more, like, fun, I guess. And then, it's just- it's a bit more, like, engaging and not as hard. But like, when you're reading...it's like, to get through it can be quite, like, tiring, I guess.”*

As a barrier:

Young people have less free time to read for pleasure than when they were younger and/or prioritise other activities in their free time



- Provide time in the school day to read for enjoyment (encouraging out of school reading)
- Improve provision, support skills in book choice - help young people find books they will want to read
- Support access to audiobooks and online texts to better fit within young people's lives

# Relatable messaging

*“it’s the same thing over and over again if they do advertise it like, you know, it is a way to escape or something like that, which is true, but it’s on every single poster or every single advertisement”*

As a motivator:

The messages young people receive about reading are authentic and relevant to them, communicated in their own ways of thinking and speaking.



- Involve young people in reading promotion messaging so it aligns with their ways of communicating and goals for reading.
- Link reading to young people’s personal goals, rather than adult-defined goals.



# Research articles

## Adolescents’ perspectives on the barriers to reading for pleasure

Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L. G., & McGeown, S. (2023), *Literacy*.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12359>

## Motivating book reading during adolescence: qualitative insights from adolescents.

Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L. G., & McGeown, S. (2025), *Educational Research*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2024.2445618>

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xxxx 2023

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### Adolescents’ perspectives on the barriers to reading for pleasure

Charlotte Webber , Katherine Wilkinson, Dr Lynne G. Duncan and Dr Sarah McGeown 

Abstract

Adolescence is often positioned as a particularly vulnerable period for reading motivation and engagement both for academic reading and reading for

taking and well-being (Howard, 2011; Wilhelm, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Eekhof et al., 2022), understanding the barriers to reading for pleasure during adolescence is necessary to support personal reading

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National Foundation for Educational Research

 **Routledge**  
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### Motivating book reading during adolescence: qualitative insights from adolescents

Charlotte Webber <sup>a</sup>, Katherine Wilkinson <sup>b</sup>, Lynne G. Duncan <sup>c</sup> and Sarah McGeown <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>b</sup>Research and Evaluation, Scottish Book Trust, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>c</sup>Psychology, University of Dundee, Dundee, UK

ABSTRACT


**Background:** Research demonstrates a wide range of benefits associated with reading books, from academic and cognitive to social and emotional. Reading motivation has been shown to drive the volitional reading of books; however, international research consistently demonstrates a global decline in reading motivation from childhood to adolescence. As a result, there is considerable research, policy and practice interest in understanding how to increase adolescents’ volitional reading. To date, very little research has centred on adolescents’ views within this exploration.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 24 June 2024  
Accepted 18 December 2024

KEYWORDS

Volitional reading; motivation; books; adolescence; qualitative research; peer research



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# Guide for secondary teachers and librarians

Available here:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/previous-projects/yprp/>

Scottish Book Trust blog posts:

[www.scottishbooktrust.com/articles/authors/charlotte-webber](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/articles/authors/charlotte-webber)



## Supporting Teenagers' Reading Enjoyment and Engagement: A Guide for Teachers and Librarians

This guide has been created for secondary school teachers and librarians to support teenagers' enjoyment and engagement with books.

The guide was created as part of The Young People's Reading Project, a collaboration between the Universities of Edinburgh and Dundee, Scottish Book Trust, and a Young People's Advisory Group.

### Authors:

Dr Charlotte Webber, University of Edinburgh  
Prof Sarah McGeown, University of Edinburgh

### Funding information:

This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Scottish Book Trust and managed by the Scottish Graduate School of Social Sciences (SGSSS). Grant number ES/P000681/1. Additional funding came from the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account. Grant number ES/X00466X/1.

### Relatable messaging

Teenagers told us that it was important to see reading being promoted, but that it should be promoted in ways which resonate with them and which are genuine and relatable.

They said that the messages they receive from adults about reading didn't always align with their own goals for reading. To make messaging more relevant, they suggested:

- Being given information about how reading can support a variety of outcomes which are relevant to them (e.g., mental health and wellbeing, learning about others)
- Being recommended books by friends or teachers whose opinions they trust
- Being recommended books on social media or other sources which use language they are familiar with
- Seeing those they respect and look up to being genuinely positive about reading

*"They do need to advertise reading a little more...it's the same thing over and over again if they do advertise it like, you know, is it way to escape or something like that, which is true, but it's on every single poster or every single advertisement."*

*"If someone I look up to would say 'read more, it's good for you', then probably would read a bit more."*

How to make the messaging around reading more relatable to teenagers:

- Link reading to their own goals and interests - ask pupils themselves what outcomes from reading they would value most and centre your messaging around these
- Look for existing messages from sources which are more relatable to teenagers (e.g., using Tiktok recommendations)

### Ideas from practitioners:

- Build book lists based on pupil recommendations
- Improve staff knowledge of current trending books on social media - even if they're not in the library, you could recommend similar titles
- Display books recommended by social media
- Support pupils to make short 'Booktok-style' video reviews
- Encourage pupils to write book reviews for one another, emphasising why others will enjoy the book
- Particularly highlight the mental health and wellbeing benefits of reading for pleasure
- Organise author visits
- Support pupils to reflect on their own goals for reading, for example through reading journals or discussion



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# Thank you for listening

Project led by Dr Charlotte Webber. With thanks to the young people, teachers, librarians and Scottish Book Trust who contributed so much to this project

## Upcoming talk

Title: Seeing yourself in what you read: Representing marginalised identities and experiences in fiction

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> March, 4.45pm

Speakers: Professor Sarah McGeown and Dr Charlotte Webber

**Now over to Heather Collins,  
Scottish Book Trust.....**

