

Dear Parent/Carer

Reading is such an important life skill and we recognise and respect the role of parents in this area, but why is reading so important?

Whether or not reading is something we enjoy, we cannot deny that the ability to read is a fundamental skill and to be able to read with confidence is very important. In a world where there are so many other things we could be doing with our time, reading often falls to the bottom of the pile. With a screen to entertain us, why would anyone take the time to pick up a book?

One reason is because reading increases vocabulary and helps to improve communication skills. Those who read tend to have a much better vocabulary than those who don't. Having a more varied range of words to express how we feel and get our point across often serves to make us a better communicator, so it's no surprise to see a positive correlation between those who read regularly and those who are better communicators.

Also, reading makes students better spellers and writers. Writing is such an important skill to have and having the capability to be able to write well and with ease is something which should never be undervalued. Reading exposes us to other styles, other voices, other forms and genres of writing. Importantly, it exposes us to writing that is better than our own.

Reading improves focus and concentration. Sitting down with a book often involves long periods of focus and concentration, which at first is challenging to do, in fact it's probably one of the main reasons we choose not to read in the first place. Being fully engaged with a book involves closing off the outside world and immersing yourself in the text. It is this exercise which will strengthen a child's attention span and improve their ability to focus.

Reading improves imagination. Our ability to imagine impacts everything we do, think about and create. It leads to elegant theories, complex dreams and intricate inventions in any profession. We are only limited by what we can imagine, and the worlds described in books, as well as other people's views and opinions, help young people to expand their understanding of what is possible.

Reading reduces stress. In a world where stresses and strains are ever present for young people, reading often tends to take a back seat. But studies show that reading helps to reduce stress. Taking a moment out of a busy schedule to read and enter the realms of escapism has been proven to slow down heart rate and ease tension in muscles.

Reading improves memory. Reading gives us a unique pause button for comprehension and insight. When we read, we have more time to think and contemplate. The benefits of this increased activity keeps our memory sharp and our learning capacity nimble.

Reading increases intellect and leads to academic success. It is a fact that children who enjoy reading are more academically successful. Books, whether fiction or non-fiction offer an incredible wealth of learning. Reading gives us a chance to consume a huge amount of research in a relatively short amount of time. When we read, we

often don't even realise how much knowledge we are actually taking in. It's no surprise to learn that books at home have been strongly linked to academic achievement when we consider all the skills reading helps to develop and improve.

Reading increases capacity for empathy. Reading fiction has been shown to develop empathy by increasing our knowledge of others' lives and experiences, helping us to recognise our similarity to them. Literary fiction helps us to practise empathy because of its complexity. The interpretation and critical thinking involved in understanding literary fiction requires extensive mental processing; it has the power to disrupt our stereotypes making us contemplate and often reassess our position on a particular subject.

Reading is entertaining. Although mentioned last, this is probably one of the most important reasons for reading. If reading wasn't entertaining, then it would simply be a chore and that's probably how a number of people view reading, but it needn't be the case. Reading is not only fun, but it has all the added benefits that have already been mentioned. Much more enthralling than watching a movie or a TV show, a good book can keep us amused for hours while developing our life skills.

So how can you help with reading at home? Studies show that the top 10% of students read more than 40 minutes a day, whilst the bottom 10% read less than 2 minutes a day. *Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988)* Research also indicates that students who read appropriately complex texts 25 minutes or more a day will grow at twice the rate of those reading less than 5 minutes daily. *Renaissance Learning (2014)*

A child that reads for 30 minutes a day at home reads for an extra 10,950 minutes a year. Over the course of their secondary school education that amounts to 54,750 minutes. Compare this to a child that doesn't read at home at all. Which child do you think will become the more confident, mature, successful individual?

We can't stress enough how important reading at home is! We recognise and respect the role of the parent as a child's primary educator in this area and want to support you in this role. With this in mind the English Department have given every student in Year 7 and Year 8 a book to read as part of their homework. The books have been carefully chosen as age appropriate and with the right level of challenge. We would really appreciate your support in encouraging your child to read this book regularly and ensuring that they look after it. If the book is damaged or lost, then we will have to charge you for a replacement.

Many thanks for your support in this crucial part of your child's education.

Mrs Murray

Head of English