



## Encouraging your son to read over the summer holidays

Many boys at Abingdon are avid readers who enjoy a diverse range of books. However, parents often express concern that their son isn't reading enough, or is reading less than he used to, and consequently ask us what can be done to encourage more reading. If this sounds familiar, you may be interested to read on.



### Does my son read enough?



There are no hard and fast rules, but research suggests that reading for pleasure for 15-20 minutes a day is a good rule of thumb for how much is 'enough' for your son to be developing his reading and getting through books at enough of a rate to sustain progress. A boy who reads for less than 20 minutes a day is at risk of his reading age (i.e. his vocabulary, reading speed, and ability to comprehend increasingly complex sentence structures) falling behind that of his peers. A boy who reads for 15-20 minutes a day, on the other hand, will read eighteen average length novels every year.

### Why doesn't my son read enough?

Middle teenage years have long been seen as a time when boys' reading can drop off, and there are various reasons for this. Boys' social commitments get busier around this time of their lives, and the amount of prep and other activities they are involved in also increases.

At the same time, technology in the modern world is often the default 'go-to' for boys to relax, and with the various games and social media platforms out there, all clamouring for their (and our!) attention, it becomes easy to fall into the habit of looking at a phone, tablet or computer rather than reading a book in situations like a journey on public transport, or even before bed. The same can be true for adults.



Lastly, many boys will have read younger teenage fiction and worked through a series (Robert Muchamore, Anthony Horowitz, Harry Potter...) and when they get a bit old for that, they struggle to find suitable books – books that are interesting and challenging, but not 'boring' or too grown up.

### Does it matter if my son doesn't read?

Yes, it does. Reading quality non-fiction and fiction helps boys to significantly widen their vocabulary and develop their ability to decode complex texts, which in turn has huge (and tangible) educational benefits.

The findings of a team from Oxford University suggest that teenagers who regularly read gain cognitive advantages that are at least four times greater than the impact of any other variable, leading them to score up to fourteen percent higher on tests of vocabulary, spelling and mathematical ability.

‘...teenagers who regularly read for pleasure score up to 14% higher on tests of vocabulary, spelling and mathematical ability.’

Reading is also, alongside being a great pleasure, an important means of developing empathy and emotional intelligence – recent findings reported in *Science* magazine suggest that strong readers are consistently better at ‘reading’ body language and facial expressions - as well as learning about other places, people and ways of life.

### What does the school do to encourage reading?

At school, we often focus on reading and reading habits during English lessons. We encourage boys to read and ask them about their reading habits and interests so we can make book recommendations. We often set reading challenges or targets for the holidays, and talk about our own favourite books. We get recommendations and feedback from the boys so we can suggest things that similar boys have liked. We keep an open mind about what the boys might read and will recommend books across a huge range, from sports autobiographies to Victorian classics, in order that many different tastes and interests are catered for.



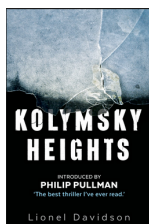
**Summer Reading Challenge!**

There's plenty of time to get lost in a good book during our long summer holiday, so it's time to get ambitious about reading! Could you read a book a fortnight? What about a book a week?

Book recommendations for Lower School Pupils

1. *Wonder* - R J Palacio. 'A really unique storyline...enjoyable and full of comic moments.'
2. *Blitzcat* - Robert Westall. An engaging story of cat who survives the blitz and searches for its owner.
3. *A Monster Calls* - Patrick Ness. 'A stunning novel...I read it cover to cover in two hours.'

Classes will be taken to the library to find and borrow books, and again to get personalised recommendations. We also issue reading recommendations and incentives before holidays and talk to boys about the benefits of reading and of maintaining a reading habit.



While all of this helps, however, research shows that the biggest influence on whether a boy is reading for pleasure is not the school but the parents and the experience of books and reading he is getting at home.

### So what I can do to encourage my son to read?

You have probably worked out by now that just telling your son that he should read more doesn't really work! If he sees it as a chore, or something that he must do to please someone else, he is unlikely to acquire a lasting or meaningful reading habit. However there are things that are proven to make boys more likely to read for pleasure and view reading positively.

Here are our top tips:

1. **Get the first book right.** If it is the start of the holidays and your son hasn't read a book for pleasure in a while, it is very important that his first book is one that he finds easy to get going with and finish. Help him to choose a quick win. This might be a book by an author that he already knows and likes; it

might be something fairly short; it might even be a re-read of something he has already read and liked. Short chapters and large font are also things which make it more likely that a boy will finish a book.

2. **Help him identify a regular time for reading.** As little as 20 minutes a day will allow your son to sustain progress through a book and over a year should allow him to read 20 average length novels! Discuss some times that he might be able to read regularly e.g. before bed (rather than looking at a screen, which is known to lead to disrupted sleep), after dinner, on a regular journey.
3. **Make use of recommendations.** [www.whatshouldireadnext.com](http://www.whatshouldireadnext.com) is a useful tool. Just type in a book you've enjoyed and it makes recommendations. School reading lists are another port of call (and can all be found on Firefly on the Library pages), as are reviews on Amazon. Recommendations from you and from friends or older siblings are very likely to be powerful.
4. **Read the same book as your son is reading.** He will be much more likely to want to finish a book if you are reading it too! You can also discuss it and make predictions about what might happen.
5. **Read the beginning of a book together.** Getting started is often the hardest step. Read it aloud to each other (perhaps do a paragraph each and take turns) or read it quietly but at the same time and share thoughts after fifteen minutes.
6. **Read in front of your son.** If you do most of your own reading somewhere your son doesn't see you doing it, he may not be aware of your reading and therefore not picking up the habit from you. Consider reading in a communal area like a living room so he sees reading as a normal thing to do and also as a potentially absorbing, enjoyable activity.
7. **Consider creating a regular reading/ no screen time.** This could be a nominated slot where everyone in the family reads together for 10 or 15 minutes and puts the screens away.
8. **Discuss the process of book choice with your son.** Go into a bookshop or look at a selection of books on Amazon together. What looks appealing to him? What looks good when you look at reviews on Amazon? What turns him off? Is it the same for you? Look too at books he has already read and enjoyed, and talk about what made him choose those.
9. **Stress the exciting aspect of reading rather than the 'you should read' element.** Talk about books you loved or how 'into' your current book you are. Talk about what you are thinking of reading next. Talk about what has got in the way of you reading recently and why you would like to find time to read more and how you might do it. Chances are that you aren't reading as often as you used to either – so share your experiences!

