

Reading and Mental Health



Our mental health is an ongoing state of being that is affected by innumerable stimuli in our lives. The things we do, say, and think throughout each day; these are all inputs that have their own effect on our mental health. Today, we spend time reflecting on an activity that has been shown to have many benefits to our health: reading.

Some of the old adages we probably heard as kids still ring true: reading is good for us. In this newsletter we will unpack this concept and find out more about why reading is health for us.



What are the Benefits of Reading?



A habit or routine of reading books can have many positive effects in our lives. Research which includes the use of MRI technology to monitor brain activity (Wright, 2023), has shown that reading is a very stimulating task for the brain. Reading books has been shown to enhance memory and cognitive functioning and strengthen neural pathways. Reading books also can help to lower blood pressure, reduce stress, and improve sleep. Further, there is research that links reading with longevity.

In addition to some of these physical benefits, reading can hold many benefits for our mental health as well. Reading books, especially fictional stories which closely follow certain characters, has been shown to help us better understand the feelings and beliefs of other people. This, of course, is otherwise known as empathy. Reading books also allows us to experience many different emotions. Books can make us laugh, cry, feel anger, anxiety, and much more. Experiencing these emotions like this can help us to build resilience and effective means of coping. It also gives us a chance to experience difficult emotions that can sometimes be scary to us, in a safe and controlled manner.



Reading books helps us to experience the lives, cultures, and stories of other people. It allows us to travel to far off places and imagine ourselves in situations that are totally new to us. It gives us insight into the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. We can learn important life lessons in our reading and even shape our opinions and beliefs.

Reading and Catholicity

“Grass dries up, and flowers wither, but our God’s word will last forever.” (Isaiah, 40:8)

“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” (Proverbs, 30:5)

There is a reason that The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. Millions the world over take wisdom and knowledge from countless readings of scripture. Many feel strengthened and comforted in reading The Bible.



A Fictional World with Non-Fictional Benefits

Reading both fiction and non-fiction can have many benefits to our health, including our mental health. As a fiction lover myself, I think it's important to note that, while fictional stories are obviously imagined, they can have many real world implications for readers. Fictional stories can teach us extremely important lessons. Think of the triumph of spirit of common people against evil shown to us in The Lord of the Rings. Think of the moral ideals displayed by Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird (though I haven't read Go Set A Watchman and probably won't). These characters, their struggles and triumphs, can teach us much about life and how we wish to live ours.

Further, reading about fictional lands, even new worlds can help us feel connected to something. Spending time with enjoyable characters in places where anything could be possible can be comforting to those feeling isolated. Some research has shown that reading fiction can have positive effects for those experiencing depression and anxiety disorders. An example might be the world of Harry Potter which has resonated with millions of young people. These books craft a setting where magic is real, and even the most downtrodden are capable of incredible things. Indeed, this series ignited my own love of reading.



Building our Vocabulary



To accurately describe our opinions and experiences, we need the right words! When we set out time to read books that interest us, we quickly find that our vocabulary increases! Learning new words can be an exciting experience, and it is also linked to improved memory, critical thinking skills and confidence. Additionally, anyone wishing to expand their own vocabulary should come check out our Word Wall, on display in the Special Education Department!

Ways to Get into Reading

Join a Book Club

Turn reading into a social activity by joining a book club! You get to enjoy books with friends and have snacks!

Find a New Genre

Stories can be told in so many interesting ways. Give a new genre a try to see if it might be a good fit for you!

Try an Audio Book

If you are too busy to read, why not try an audio book? You can listen in the car, while you cook, even while you're exercising!

Set Time Aside

Consider having a consistent time to read. It could be before bed, certain days of the week, whatever works!

New Yorker List

Consider checking out the New Yorker's list of their best books of 2023.

[Link Found Here](#)

Time's All-Time List

Did you know Time Magazine published a list of their 100 all-time best books?

[Link Found Here](#)

Books for Non-Readers

Good Reads has a user generated list of books that might interest those who rarely read.

[Link Found Here](#)

The Edgar Awards

I love mysteries. The Edgar Awards honour the best mystery novels each year.

[Link Found Here](#)