GALAXY® Quick Reads

The Untold Power of the Book
“Let us pick up our books and our pens, they are the most powerful weapons.” So said Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai. Few have done more to highlight how reading can empower and enrich our lives.

And yet even in the UK, where reading whatever we choose is seen as the most basic of human rights, one in six adults struggles with reading and may never pick up a book.

It is this shocking statistic that drives the Quick Reads programme to try to break down the barriers to reading. Every year we publish six books by well-known authors which are short, pack all of the punch you’d expect from a bestseller but, critically, are easier for less confident readers to enjoy. Since 1996 we have published over 100 titles, distributed over 4.7 million books and recorded over 4.3 million library loans (PLR). 98% of literacy coordinators say that Quick Reads have been effective in raising adult learners’ confidence to start reading.

The ability to read and write is not only about being able to follow signs or fill in an application form – though do take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you couldn’t do those things – reading can help us to connect with others, to make a positive change in our own lives and even lead us to greater wellbeing.

And so as we celebrate our tenth anniversary, our longstanding partner, Galaxy, has commissioned a report from Dr. Josie Billington at the University of Liverpool which shines a light on the many and varied ways in which reading can empower and enrich our lives, every day. This landmark year also marks an exciting new chapter for Quick Reads as we join The Reading Agency – together, we look forward to continuing to help everyone discover the delights and rewards that books can bring.

In the words of bestselling author Andy McNab – who had the reading age of an 11-year-old on joining the Army – “Every time you read a book you get a bit of knowledge, every time you get a bit of knowledge you get a bit more power.”

Malala and Andy are two of our excellent authors this year and I hope this report will inspire many of you to join them in spreading the word or simply to pick up a book.

Baroness Gail Rebuck, DBE, Chair of Quick Reads and Penguin Random House UK
Executive Summary:  
Dr. Josie Billington

This study explored the unique and often untold potential books have to empower those who read them, by offering a ‘powerful life tool’ that enriches experience at both individual and societal levels. The research was conducted by Quick Reads, in partnership with the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS) at the University of Liverpool. The study was commissioned by GALAXY® Chocolate who has now supported the Quick Reads initiative for six years.

The Study

An online poll was conducted across two thousand adults and consisted of seventeen questions, designed to elicit participants’ perceptions as to why they read, when they read and which kind of books they prefer. The survey also established reading habits relative to other forms of leisure, pleasure and relaxation. In addition, open-ended questions invited participants to comment specifically on how reading had impacted on their lives, practically, personally or emotionally and to identify books or fictional characters, which had inspired them to be and do more in their lives.

The findings combine numerical and thematic analysis of the data against a background of current reading research, helping us to build the full picture as to why, how and when people in the UK turn to reading.

Findings

The report identified numerous and significant benefits that can be derived from reading. From the awareness it offers of a world beyond our own, through to the guidance it provides us on connecting with others or reflecting on ourselves – the impact reading for pleasure can have on our everyday lives is substantial.

When it comes to offering an awareness of the world outside our own, findings show that the majority of respondents agree that learning about other cultures, worldviews and ways of life is the primary benefit of reading and the key reason they turn to books. Almost half of participants also felt that reading made them more sympathetic to others’ beliefs, whilst many respondents even said that this had had a direct effect upon their behaviours in life situations, especially their tolerance.

For many, reading provides the impetus and guidance to make significant changes in their lives. Nearly one in ten people has been empowered by reading to change their job, one fifth of regular readers have made changes to their health routines and hobbies, and more than a third have been encouraged to travel. A further two fifths of respondents told us reading is an alternative to conventional stress remedies.

Reading is also a catalyst for self-reflection with books allowing readers to realise they are happy with what they have, enabling them to better appreciate their own lives. Many readers also cited books as being important in their coming to terms with difficult situations, whilst two fifths of respondents reported that reading has led them to recognise it is the small things in life that bring the most joy.

Conclusions and recommendations

Reading for pleasure is a pivotal way to empower, enlighten and guide us through our everyday lives. Reading acts as a window to the outside world that enlighten and guide us through our everyday lives. Reading acts as a window to the outside world that challenges our thinking and changes our lifestyles for the better.

Our research reveals that reading for many has provided the fundamental impetus they need to make a positive and sometimes life-altering change in their own lives. For example, one in ten people have applied for a new job or quit a job they were unhappy in as a result of reading an inspiring book. Our research has also shown books can act as a true source of empowerment, offering a unique snapshot of another person’s life or forcing us to look at our own life in a different way.

Reading is also seen to build confidence which gives people the courage needed to instigate change, over one in ten (14%) people say that reading helps them to be more confident.

As well as inspiring life-changing decisions like moving jobs or setting up new businesses, reading can also guide lives in subtler, longer-term ways. One fifth of regular readers have been inspired by reading to make positive changes to their health or take up a new hobby, and over a third have been inspired to take a trip or travel somewhere.
“Years ago I read an Italian book by a guy called Favio Volo. The main character, who lived in Milan, travelled all the way to New York to meet someone he had met on a train on holiday after spending months trying to track her down. This book gave me the courage to do something crazy in my life – I ended a bad relationship and went travelling. I have been repaid by great happiness for taking that risk.”

Male, 25, Lapsed Reader

“Reading empowered me to follow my own dreams and take control of my life.”

Female, 21, Reader

“I read a book about a woman who was really overweight, she could not leave the house in fact. It was about the impact on her and her family who had to care for her. I am not like that, but I did feel inspired to do something about my increasing girth and that feeling stayed with me long after I’d finished it.”

Female, 48, Reader

Whilst reading can help guide big life decisions, it can also have a significant impact on our day-to-day emotions. For many, reading is a quick fix to a problem – so much so that reading a book is one of the most likely activities to bring comfort to people when they are feeling down, ahead of having a glass of wine or even a hot bath. Women especially value reading as a tool for de-stressing.

Reading is also seen as a more constructive solution to many of our go to stress remedies – over two fifths (41%) of people feel that losing themselves in a book is a better way to take their minds off their worries than going out with friends. Academic research has also shown that it is possible that some of the benefit associated with reading may come from “diverting individuals away from processing their struggles via ingrained and ineffective channels and towards more diverse, novel and effective reasoning options.”

Male, 35, Reader

“The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy really made me laugh and cheered me up when I was in a deeply unhappy period of my life and nothing else helped me.”

Female, 28, Reader

“Getting absorbed in the unreal world of Game of Thrones. It was highly beneficial at a time of severe stress at work.”

Male, 19, Reader

“I loved Twilight, just to relax and fantasise. I needed to unwind as taking my finals was a period of such importance in my life.”

Female, 21, Reader

“Reading empowered me to follow my own dreams and take control of my life.”

Female, 21, Reader

The power of escapism

Things books have inspired readers to do

- Go travelling or take a trip somewhere: 38%
- Take better care of my health: 20%
- Take up a new hobby: 19%
- Remain calm during a disagreement: 17%
- Quit a job I was unhappy in or apply for a new job or promotion: 12%
- Take better care of a loved one: 10%
- Get over a break-up or being dumped: 8%

*regular readers

Things that bring comfort

- Listening to music: 42%
- Reading a good book: 40%
- Having a glass of wine or a beer: 35%
- Exercising: 27%
- Having a hot bath: 22%

(total base, male, female)
Chapter 2: Exploring the World

The power of discovery

Another evidently prominent benefit of reading is its ability to allow readers to learn about the world beyond their own lives, unlocking a gateway to an authentic, emotional understanding that enables them to truly connect with the diverse life experiences of others.

Across the whole of our sample, gaining an understanding of different people, countries and cultures was seen to be the number one emotional benefit of reading, with as many as 57% of people agreeing that reading makes them interested in the world outside their own. These findings are consonant with another recent review, which showed how reading enhanced understanding of other identities. Here, the most consistent outcomes reported were the ability to learn about others’ culture and worldviews, and to have an enhanced understanding of people’s class, ethnicity and cultural identity.3

The emotional benefits of reading

- **I gain an understanding of different people / cultures / countries** 45%
- **To forget about my worries** 38%
- **I find encouragement in inspiring characters** 31%
- **It helps me put my own problems into perspective** 17%

This is not just a “side effect” of reading, but something readers actively seek out, demonstrated in the diversity of their favourite novels revealed during the survey. *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *The Kite Runner* and *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* are amongst some of the favourite books selected, alongside fantasy novels such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. None of these novels are set in the UK, but in different cultures, different times and different worlds, opening the eyes of the reader to new perspectives and different ways of life.

“*That book inspired my love of travelling and other cultures and made me a better person because of that.*”

Male, 55, Reader
Chapter 3: Learning to love ourselves

In a world that often values perfection, books can be a way to ground readers in what is true and real. A third of people in our survey agreed that society puts pressure on people to be perfect, and reading can be an antidote to this: 1 in 5 regular readers say that books have shown them it is okay to be flawed, and regular readers are more likely to say they feel happy when they look in the mirror compared to lapsed or non-readers.

Other studies outside of this one have showed how reading can be a testing ground for exploring new ways of being. For example, one reader reported how Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre and Willy Russell’s Blood Brothers had both, in their different ways, led her to re-appraise her habits and consider breaking out of ways of thinking and behaving that were dragging her down. Both stories helped this reader to think about herself in a different way, aiding self-discovery and offering an alternative tool for processing and reasoning about her life:

“It made me feel how lucky I am to live in the time and place that I do. It makes me realise we are lucky to be born in an equal, educated society.”

Female, 59, Reader

Elizabeth is Missing was a really important book for me. When it becomes clear that the main character, Maud, has dementia - it made me understand how to cope with my aunt’s dementia - that it isn’t all doom and gloom. It helped me to understand how she might be feeling, it has helped me cope with it better.”

Female, 40, Reader

Whilst this alone is a great benefit for many people, it also has wider reaching implications in terms of how people then act in the real world, as readers are able to apply these learnings to their own lives. In another recent study, one reader put it like this:

‘Reading is like a portal into another person’s consciousness. It evokes a kind of wordless knowledge inside your mind. It is so, so real. It’s that portal into the accumulated experience of an individual.’

The ability reading has to offer us a new perspective is evidently powerful, with 42% of respondents saying that reading helps them to understand others’ points of view and what they may be going through, making them more empathetic individuals.

Our research also showed that reading can help individuals to recognise that ‘everybody else’s beliefs are as valid as mine’, bridging the gap between the reader and the outside world, enabling exploration of others’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours in a safe way. As a result, 17% of regular readers said that reading has helped them to stay calm during a disagreement and 15% have been able to admit they were wrong about something.

For many, reading also enables them to celebrate diversity and reach out to others on a day by day basis, with one in ten regular readers noting that reading makes them more able to make immediate connections with other people.

“I identified with Bridget Jones’ insecurity and how that leads to ridiculous situations. I identified with her family/parent situation. I identified with her low self-esteem that she battles and manages to overcome – even if not in the most appropriate of times sometimes. I loved her self-deprecation, her humour and her silliness.”

Female, 42, Reader

Because of this, it is clear that readers are not looking for flawless characters, but instead they are looking for real characters that show us that it is okay to make mistakes. Bridget Jones tops the list as the character that most women identify with, but interestingly she is also in the top 5 of most inspiring characters too. As a character that is symbolic of the endearing nature of imperfection, this is highly indicative of individuals’ increasing desire to step away from overtly manufactured concepts of beauty or excellence. The realisation that others share similar feelings of imperfection or inadequacy creates a shift from being ‘alone’ to being ‘one of many,’ enabling readers to challenge previous ideas of being different or non-normal, and become more accepting of their true selves.5

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The power of a new perspective

The power of empathy
Similarly for male readers, Atticus Finch (To Kill a Mockingbird) tops the ‘most inspiring’ list—a character who is widely heralded for his strong moral compass, but is certainly not without his flaws too. Other academic research has explored the idea that reading exposes people to the widest and most inclusive human range: ‘Literature widens and enriches the human norm, accepting and allowing for traumas, troubles, inadequacies and other experiences usually classed as negative.’ It is unsurprising therefore that when asked about the characters from bestselling novels that most people enjoy reading about, it is those that make mistakes who topped the list, above characters that are loyal or brave for example.

### Things that books have made readers realise

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<th>Reflection</th>
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For many, this self-reflection helps readers view their own lives more positively. 1 in 5 regular readers say that reading helps them appreciate their own lives more. More specifically, it can help individuals to resolve certain issues. 14% of regular readers say that reading has helped them to come to terms with difficult situations in their lives, and 27% say that reading happy moments in books has made them reflect on happy times in their own lives.

**The power of acceptance**

As a result, reading has enabled a series of realisations for many people, fundamentally focused around an acceptance of and an appreciation for the lives that they already have. From reading, a third of regular readers have realised that they are happy with the lives they have, and 39% have realised that it is the little things in life that bring them the most joy.

**Female, 50, Reader**

“It dawned on me how simple things make me happy.”

**Female, 24, Lapsed Reader**

“It made me realise not to care what other people think and just do what I want to live any dreams I may have.”

Other academic research has also shown that reading inspires this acceptance of ourselves and our circumstances. It does not force us to think of a solution to our imperfect life or even to contemplate change but rather value our “human pursuits” and continue to emotionally invest in them. This is illustrated by one reader, responding to Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol: “Like Scrooge, I have got happiness locked inside me somewhere, and I know that it is possible for my happiness to come out.”

In other words, whilst empowerment which inspires positive change is hugely beneficial for many people, empowerment that inspires self-appreciation and acceptance can be just as worthwhile.

Female, 50, Reader

“As a child I spent a lot of time in hospital and The 39 Steps echoed how I felt and how quiet and awkward I was as I grew up because I had missed a lot of school and mixing with other children, and had always been overly protected by my family. Reading the book helped me feel I wasn’t alone that other people felt the same way and helped me do something about it”

Female, 50, Reader

“It made me realise not to care what other people think and just do what I want to live any dreams I may have.”
Chapter 4: What a difference a decade makes...

The power of inspiration

For the past ten years, Quick Reads has been commissioning bestselling authors to write short, accessible books aimed at emergent adult readers. 1 in 6 adults of working age in the UK find reading difficult, whilst 1 in 3 choose not to read for pleasure. Those who struggle with reading cite many varied reasons but they are often based in fear. It was ten years ago this year that Quick Reads set out to overcome these obstacles, showing that books and reading can be for everyone.

Today Quick Reads touches hundreds of thousands of people’s lives each year with the joys and benefits of reading, often those in some of the hardest-to-reach communities. In 2015 the initiative joined The Reading Agency, a charity which runs World Book Night and Reading Ahead, two programmes which already use Quick Reads extensively. Its new home will enable it to encourage even more people to explore the joys and benefits of reading.

Since 2006, Quick Reads has...

- Published over 100 titles with bestselling authors
- Distributed over 4.7 million books
- Helped adult learners with 98% of literacy coordinators reporting that Quick Reads have been effective in raising confidence when learning to read
- Recorded over 4.3 million library loans (PLR)
- Provided support to the 1 in 6 adults who struggle with reading
- Offering captivating and appealing reads for the 1 in 3 who do not read for pleasure
- No comparable book product in the market

Prisons

Adult learners

Libraries

Health

Communities

Workplaces

No comparable book product in the market.
Quick Reads continue to play a vital role in educational settings, with educational practitioners, literacy tutors and reading groups all utilising them to support the 1 in 6 UK adults who struggle with reading.

Adjudicating with the Reading Agency, called 2013 saw the launch of an annual project in that 46% of people entering the prison system have Government research released in 2015 revealed books by the authors he has most enjoyed. Quick Reads, he looks forward to the list every year, to go back into education, to learn how to read and write. When Kevin started working, he and 13. In this time, Kevin completely lost the ability to read and write. When Kevin started working, he found that his reading ability was holding him back significantly – it would take him around three hours to write just half a page for a shift report each day – and it was this that made him realise he needed to go back into education, to learn how to read and write again.

Since learning how to read again as an adult, Kevin is now a passionate reader, with Cathy as his “Chief Book Recommender”. Kevin is a huge supporter of Quick Reads, he looks forward to the list every year, reads them all, and then often goes on to read other books by the authors he has most enjoyed.Quick Reads can have a powerful impact on the confidence, attitudes and communication skills of less enthusiastic readers – whilst supporting the morale and wellbeing of all staff. Today, Quick Reads are used in settings as diverse as oilrigs, cross channel ferries, bus depots and refuse disposal units. A survey conducted in 2010 showed that morale was improved in more than half (52%) of all workplaces where Quick Reads were used, whilst more than a third (41%) of employees noticed an improvement in their employees’ communication skills.

Quick Reads are a big hit in libraries. The books are a key way to encourage the local community to celebrate reading and then go on to explore other library services. Since Quick Reads’ inception in 2006, more than 4.3 million library loans have been recorded (PLR):
Author quotes through the years

Malala Yousafzai
“Reading is the most effective way to empower yourself. Everyone in society deserves this basic right.”

Lucy Diamond
“As a life-long book-lover, I am thrilled to be joining the Quick Reads family. Reading has made me laugh, cry and open my eyes to new worlds, educate me and provide escapism during difficult times. I love that the Quick Reads aims to pass that gift of reading out to everyone, and am really proud to have a book in the series.”

Ann Cleeves
“As a reader I know books can be a comfort, an escape or a challenge. I don’t go a day without reading. Quick Reads bring that pleasure to thousands of people who have never before known the joy of being lost in a story.”

Andy McNab
“I have seen first-hand the difference that the Galaxy Quick Reads books can make to people in all walks of life. It doesn’t matter what you read, just as long as you start reading. It has the power to change lives, it certainly changed mine.”

Alvin Hall
“I was raised in a very poor community, many of the people I was raised with read at very low levels and had a hard time writing. I thought if I could write a Galaxy Quick Read book that would be useful to adult learners, like the people I grew up with, this would be a good thing. By simplifying the language, I did not at all simplify the underlying message.”

Harriet Evans
“It’s no exaggeration to say that being involved in Quick Reads, from writing the book itself to working with the organisation is the highlight of my career as an author. It made me realise how the best writing is not about the longest words or the most complicated plot but the clarity and simplicity which makes images and stories seem enticing and real to the reader.”

Fanny Blake
“I’ve loved writing and reading all my life and was dismayed to hear the statistic that one in six adults of working age in the UK find reading difficult and as many as one in three don’t read for pleasure. The idea of a series of short books by well known authors that are specifically designed to be easy to read, so that people can discover books aren’t necessarily difficult or boring, is genius. I’m thrilled to be a part of that list.”

Sophie Hannah
“I wanted to make reading pleasurable and not terrifying for new readers, and give them the key to a reading world.”

Lindsey Davis
“I’ve wanted to write a Galaxy Quick Read ever since I discovered them. I enjoyed it as much as I hoped. I believe passionately in helping everyone who wants to read to achieve it. I am thrilled to be part of this initiative.”

Methodology

The Untold Power of the Book was produced by Quick Reads in partnership with Dr Josie Billington from the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society at the University of Liverpool. Quantitative research was conducted online amongst a sample of 2,008 nationally representative individuals in the UK from 5th November – 9th November 2015 with Research Now.

This research set out to uncover the emotional benefits of reading, with specific emphasis on how readers can feel empowered through different books, characters or even just from the process of reading itself as opposed to other activities.

References:


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