

Importance of Reading for Fun

One of main goals of The South Carolina Reading Project[™] is to challenge parents to encourage their children to read for fun. Research shows that pleasure reading has been mostly squeezed out of classrooms because of increasing pressures of accountability. The result is that often children have reading skills, but do not read. Voluntary reading for pleasure increases positive feelings about reading and is potentially an effective way to inspire in children an intrinsic love of reading.

But for students to be motivated to read voluntarily for fun, it is important that they be given the opportunity to choose their own books. Since low-achievers typically do not read outside of school, most of their reading is mandated. And research suggests that in many cases, low-achievers really don't hate to read - they hate to be told what to read. So it is not surprising that the two largest contributors to reading achievement, according to numerous studies, were access to interesting books and student choice of books.

Additionally, according to one formal study (Allington et al. 2010), children who had participated in book fairs and received free, self-selected books for summer reading significantly improved reading achievement on high stakes state tests when compared to their peers in the control group who received no summer books. Other research has shown that when children were given the opportunity to choose their own books, reading gains were almost double those of children whose books were selected by someone else (Lindsay 2013).

And what do kids want to read? According to the *Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report*, the majority of kids ages 6–17 (70%) say they want books that “make me laugh.” Kids also want books that “let me use my imagination” (54%), “tell a made-up story” (48%), “have characters I wish I could be like because they’re smart, strong or brave” (43%), “teach me something new” (43%) and “have a mystery or a problem to solve” (41%).

It has also been suggested that voluntary pleasure reading not only increases children's motivation to develop reading habits, but actually works better to improve reading skills than formal instruction and systematic programs designed to raise test scores. The U.S. Department of Education found that, generally, the more students read for fun on their own time, the higher their reading scores.