

Independent reading and your child: a brief overview for parents of Lower School and Third Year students

Regular independent reading is strongly associated with a range of benefits, ranging from enhanced vocabulary and critical thinking to greater curiosity, empathy and wellbeing. In turn, these benefits contribute towards academic success and personal growth.

Many young people, however, never develop a habit of regular independent reading, or lose the habit as they proceed through secondary school.

This document provides a brief overview of how Abingdon School encourages and supports independent reading in Lower School and Third Year, the period which is most important for developing and maintaining reading habits; it also indicates how parents can help.¹

HOW ABINGDON SUPPORTS, ENCOURAGES AND GUIDES INDEPENDENT READING

All first and second year students are encouraged to carry a book for personal reading at all times, enabling them to take advantage of opportunities for voluntary reading, such as at the start of a lesson, when a teacher may choose to dedicate time for independent reading.

Lower School Reading & Research lessons include time for students to read, browse the shelves and ask for advice on reading choices. Students learn about the importance of independent reading, and how to develop and maintain a habit of independent reading, and are introduced to stimulating fiction and non-fiction texts. **Reading & Research preps** are for independent reading (either one 40 minute session or two 20 minute sessions).

Likewise, all **third year students** are encouraged to carry a book for personal reading. For the weekly English lesson in which time is devoted to silent reading, third year students are **required** to bring in a book and will be sanctioned if they do not. The **librarian visits all third year English classes** at the start of every term to talk about the value of reading for academic success, wellbeing and personal growth, and to introduce and recommend a range of books. Recommended books are chosen on the basis of their capacity to help strengthen vocabulary development and stimulate thought as well as their storytelling power.

To help students find books they want to read, the librarian has created [lists of recommended books tailored to different year groups](#). Some lists focus solely on fiction; others focus on factual titles, either reflecting a particular theme or supporting a particular area of academic study.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Research suggests that parents can be hugely influential when it comes to independent reading, but that the right approach is critical if well-meaning attempts are not to backfire. The seven strategies listed over the page are proven to make students aged 11-14 more likely to read independently and view reading positively.

¹ More details, including links to relevant research, can be found [here](#).

Help your child identify a regular time to read. The key to maintaining and developing a good reading habit is 'regularly and often'. Aim for slots of no less than 20 minutes at least four days a week. Identify and discuss potentially suitable times, such as immediately after dinner or before bed.

Help your child identify good places for reading. Discuss where they are likely to be able to read comfortably and without interruption or distraction (including from their phone). Even if you meet resistance, try to be constructive; avoid discussions turning into arguments about 'books versus screens'.

Take a non-judgemental interest in what your child is reading. Even if you think their reading choices are questionable, try and get a sense of why what they're reading appeals to them and look for positive grounds for discussion. If you are concerned by their reading choices, the library is happy to advise.

Discuss reading choices with your child. Physical bookstores are ideal for helping your child pick out books that appeal to them; alternatively, see if they will browse virtual stores or the library's web portal with you. Having books (or at least book covers) in front of you can make reading choices a lot easier.

Think of reading in terms of more than books and fiction. If your child doesn't want to get lost in a story, don't try to force the issue; instead, consider alternatives, such as books about factual subjects, or magazines that appeal to their interests.

Take advantage of reading recommendations. Don't be daunted by infinite choice. The [school library's web portal offers reading recommendations](#), based on what other students have read and enjoyed. Bookshops are usually very happy to provide advice. The website www.whatshouldireadnext.com/ can also be useful.

Be seen reading. Ultimately, in reading as in other matters, parents can be hugely powerful role models for their children. Avoid being open to accusations of 'do as I say, not as I do'. Try to find time to read yourself and to read where your children are likely to see you.

Above all, whenever and wherever you can, make reading appear as a normal thing for you to do; that way, your child is more likely to follow in your footsteps.

LOOKING FORWARD

The forces ranged against independent reading in the teenage years are formidable, but, as many Abingdon students demonstrate, reading decline is not inevitable. Concerted action, including demonstrating the benefits of independent reading, helping young people find the right times and places for reading, promoting the right books, discussing book choices and modelling reading in our lives, has the power to help children and teenagers develop and maintain a habit of independent reading - and thus realising the many rewards it can bring.

Dr Gardner, *Librarian*