

# Article of the Week

*Reading for Pleasure Puts Children Ahead in the Classroom, Study Finds*

**Instructions: COMPLETE ALL QUESTIONS AND MARGIN NOTES**

**Questions:** Answer in COMPLETE SENTENCES unless otherwise instructed.

**Read** the following article carefully and **make notes in the margin** as you read.

Your notes should include:

- Comments that show that you **understand** the article. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important sections may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are **wondering** about as you read.

Your **margin notes** are part of your score for this assessment.

**Student** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class Period** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Reading for Pleasure Puts Children Ahead in the Classroom, Study Finds*

(includes British spelling of many words)

Children who read for pleasure are likely to do significantly better at school than their peers, according to new research from the Institute of Education (IOE).

The IOE study, which is believed to be the first to examine the effect of reading for pleasure on cognitive development over time, found that children who read for pleasure made more progress in maths, vocabulary and spelling between the ages of 10 and 16 than those who rarely read.

The research was conducted by Dr Alice Sullivan and Matt Brown, who analysed the reading behaviour of approximately 6,000 young people being followed by the 1970 British Cohort Study, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. They looked at how often the teenagers read during childhood and their test results in maths, vocabulary and spelling at ages 5, 10 and 16.

The researchers, who are based in the IOE's Centre for Longitudinal Studies, compared children from the same social backgrounds who had achieved the same test scores as each other both at ages 5 and 10. They discovered that those who read books often at age 10 and more than once a week at age 16 gained higher results in all three tests at age 16 than those who read less regularly.

Perhaps surprisingly, reading for pleasure was found to be more important for children's cognitive development between ages 10 and 16 than their parents' level of education. The combined effect on children's progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage children gained from having a parent with a degree.

*Notes on my thoughts,  
reactions and questions as I  
read:*

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Children who were read to regularly by their parents at age 5 performed better in all three tests at age 16 than those who were not helped in this way.

Dr Sullivan notes that reading for pleasure had the strongest effect on children's vocabulary development, but the impact on spelling and maths was still significant. "It may seem surprising that reading for pleasure would help to improve children's maths scores," she said. "But it is likely that strong reading ability will enable children to absorb and understand new information and affect their attainment in all subjects."

The study also found that having older siblings had a negative effect on children's test scores in all three subject areas but particularly for vocabulary. Having younger siblings had less effect on test performance but was linked to lower vocabulary scores. The researchers suggest this may be because children in larger families spend less time in one-to-one conversations with their parents and therefore have less opportunity to develop their vocabularies.

Dr Sullivan says this study underlines the importance of encouraging children to read – even in the digital age. "There are concerns that young people's reading for pleasure has declined. There could be various reasons for this, including more time spent in organised activities, more homework, and of course more time spent online," she said.

"However, new technologies, such as e-readers, can offer easy access to books and newspapers and it is important that government policies support and encourage children's reading, particularly in their teenage years."

Dr Sullivan also emphasises that improving adult literacy could be important for children's cognitive development. "Children of parents who had reading problems performed significantly less well in all three tests than children of parents who reported no reading problems," she said. "Given the prevalence of adult illiteracy in Britain, with functional illiteracy estimated at 15 per cent, policies to increase adult literacy rates could significantly improve children's learning outcomes."

"Many of the young people included in this study are now parents themselves, and their literacy levels and enjoyment of reading will in turn influence their children's educational attainment."

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**Comprehension questions – answers may be in phrases.**

1. *What does IOE stand for?*
2. *What does reading for pleasure have the strongest effect on?*
3. *Define **cognitive development** as used in the article*
4. *When is it most important for children to read for pleasure (What age group)?*
5. *Define **functional illiteracy** as used in the text.*

RI.1.4

**2. Answer each question in one or more complete sentences.**

*Why is it important to read for pleasure?*

*By means of inference, why might older siblings negatively influence a child's vocabulary?*

RI.1.3.4

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3. *What is the author's purpose in writing this article? Describe the author's tone. How might the tone of the article influence the readers' perspectives? Cite from the article using quotation marks to support your answer.*

RI.4.5,6

4. *You, and many of your fellow students, feel that reading is important, but you also struggle to find texts that you'd actually want to read for pleasure. Come up with an idea that your class can use to increase reading for pleasure. Be as thorough as possible, your idea may be used.*

RI.8