



# Can we increase the amount that adolescents read? ... in service of vocabulary

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July 2023

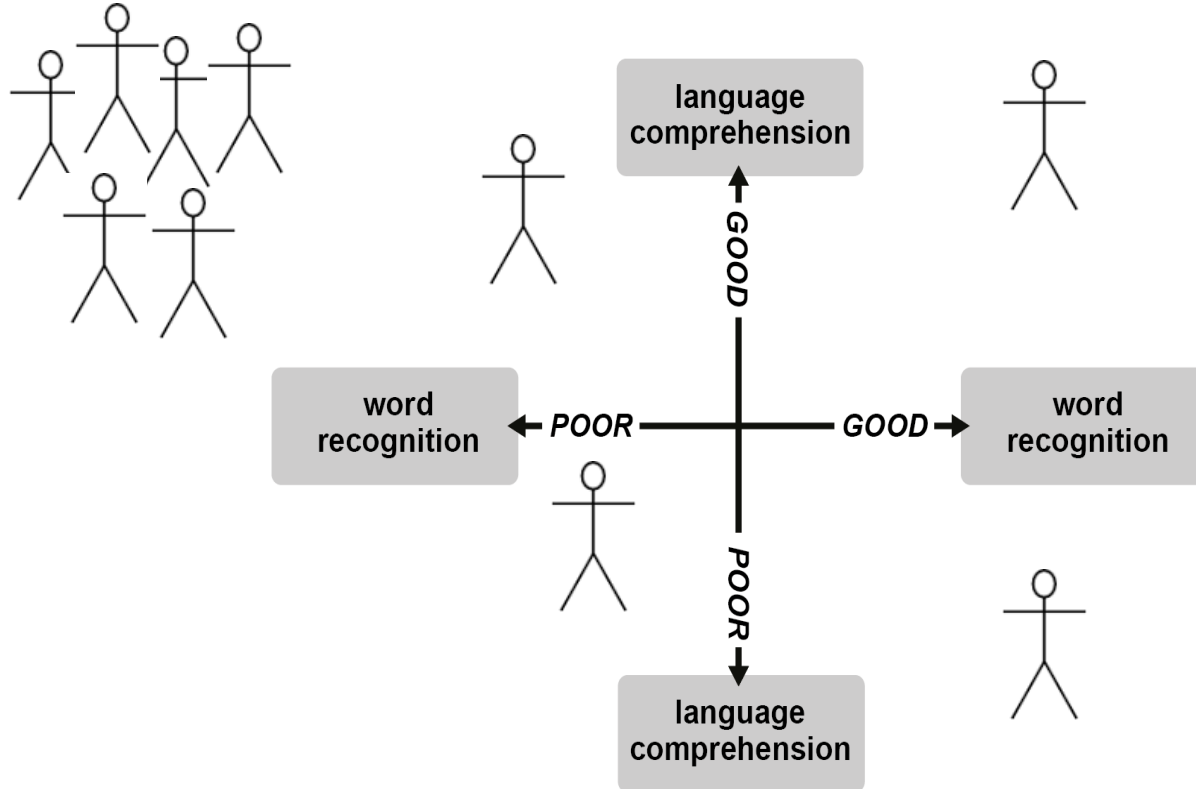
Collaboration: researchers,  
practitioners, young people,  
charities, industry

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LeRA Language and  
Reading Acquisition

# So, what is reading?



## The Simple View of Reading

Both word recognition and language comprehension are necessary, neither sufficient

Learning to read and teaching of reading is not simple but framework is simple

Adopted by Rose Reviews (2006; 2009), National Curriculum 2013 and in initial teacher education

# Reading words is necessary but not sufficient



word  
recognition

language  
comprehension

Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.

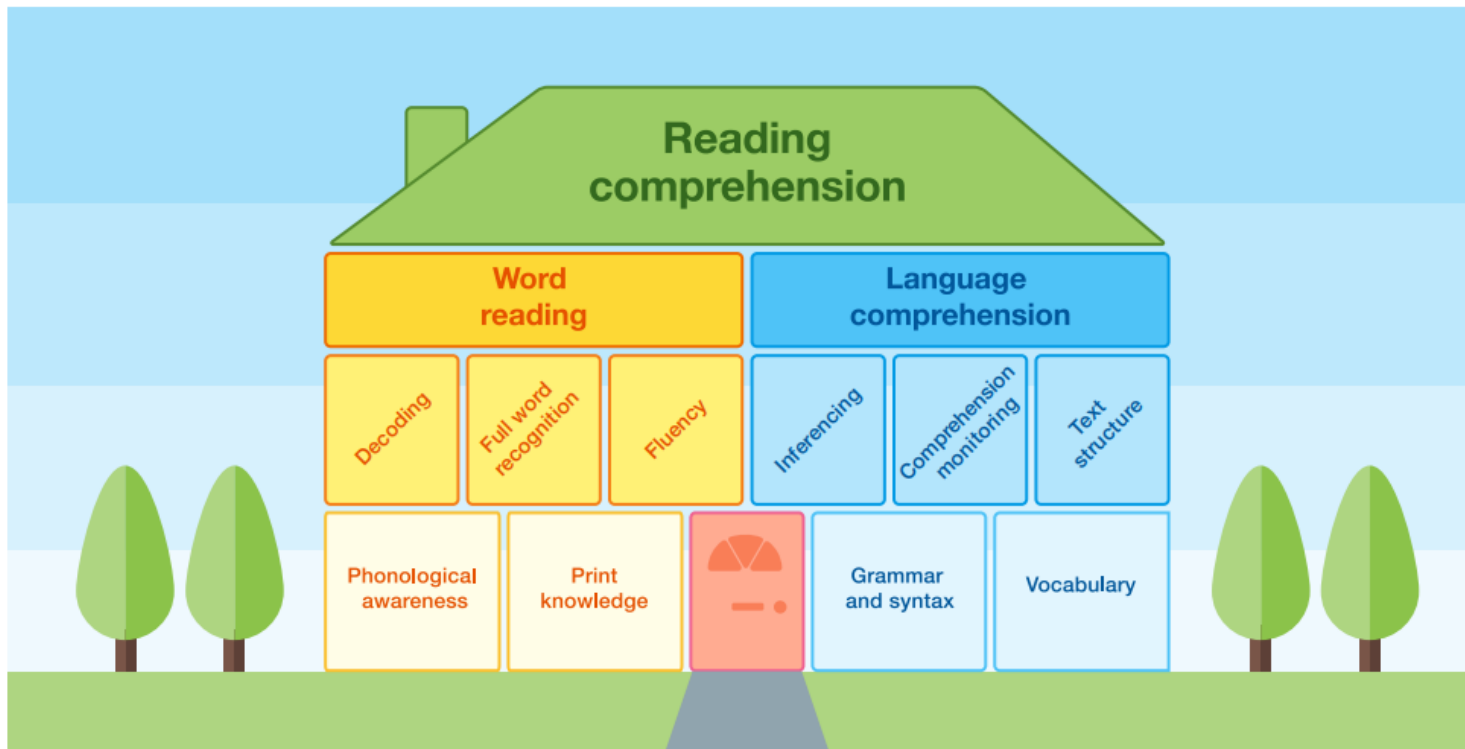
(no points for  
guessing the book!)

# Another way of representing this



## The Reading Comprehension House

*Adapted from Hogan, Bridges, Justice, and Cain (2011)*



Both word reading and language comprehension are complex, in their own right

Many pressure points or barriers to successful reading

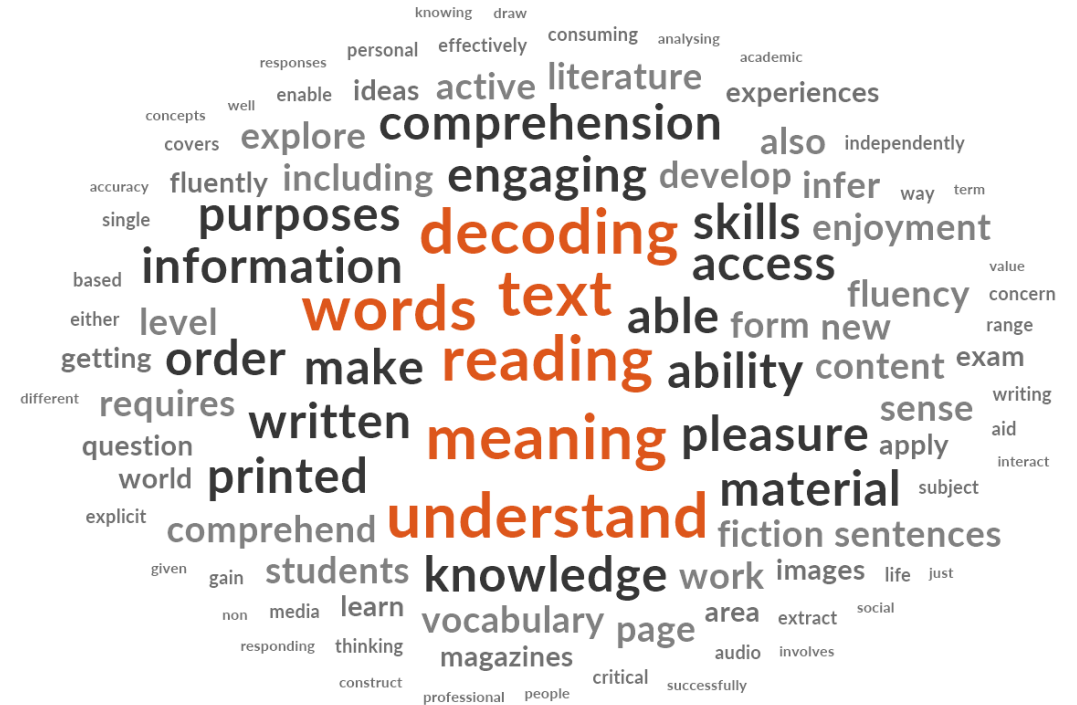
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-supporting-reading-comprehension-in-key-stage-2>

# It isn't all about proficiency



A broader definition of reading

- Knowledge and skills, but also:
- behaviour (e.g. frequency)
- affect (e.g. motivation, engagement)
- (and lots of other things, there are many definitions of reading)

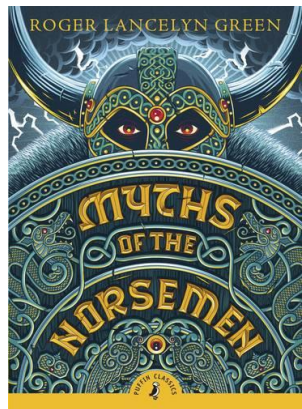


# Reading and vocabulary



“The more that you read, the more things you will know” (Seuss, 1978)

“A mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge. That is why I read so much.” (Tyrion Lannister from Game of Thrones).

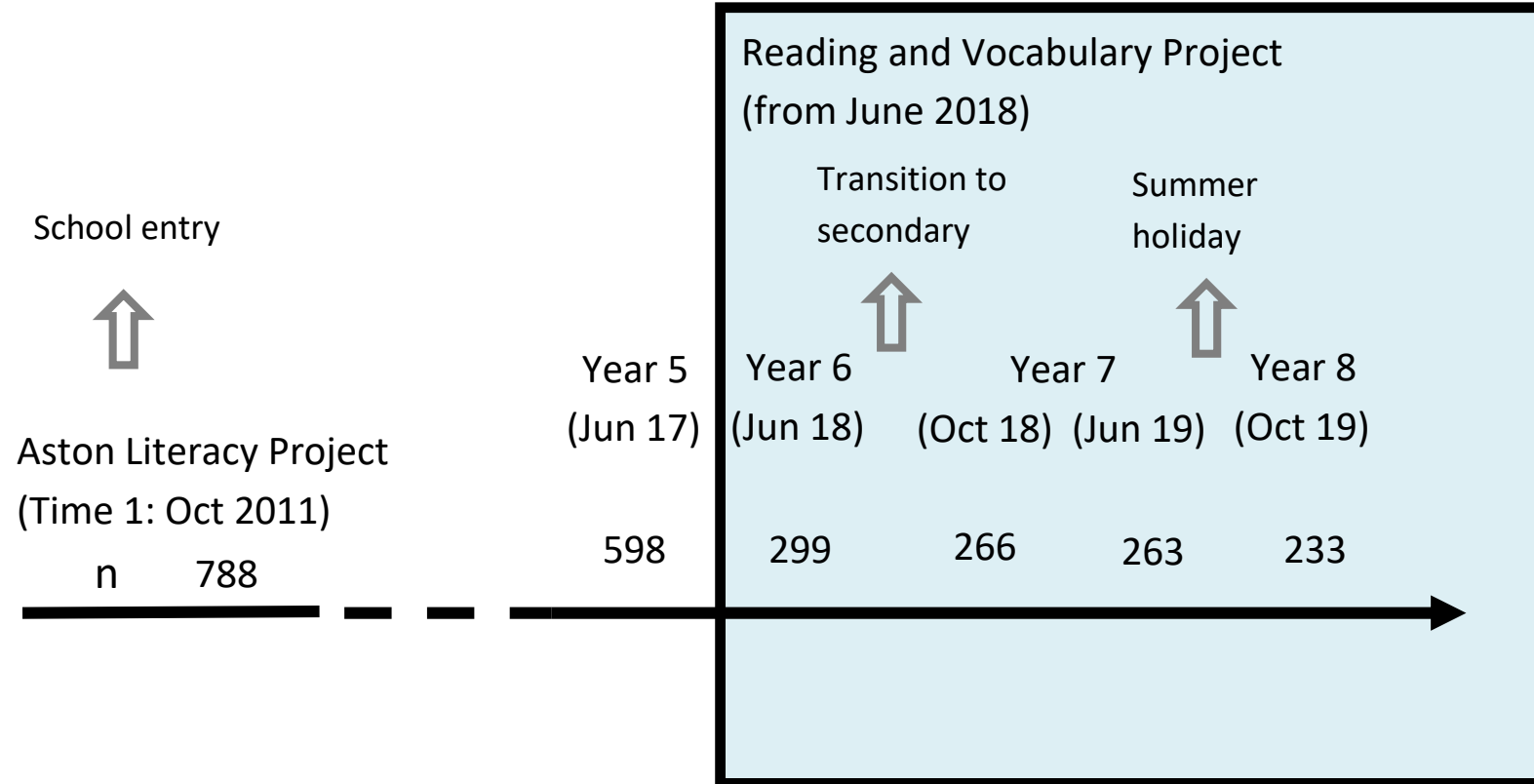


the Vanir, and by the arts which the wisdom of Mimir had already taught him, he made of it a man called Kvasir. This man came into being fully grown, remembering no childhood: but instead he was filled with all the knowledge both of the Vanir and the Æsir.

In Asgard he was loved for his goodness; but in Midgard he was adored by all men for bringing peace among them, teaching them manners and showing them many of the arts and crafts which made their lives better and happier. Anyone who was in trouble, or in need of advice, had only to send for Kvasir, and he would go wherever he was needed.

We need longitudinal and experimental research...

# Longitudinal research



Measures:

Word reading proficiency

Leisure reading

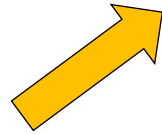
Vocabulary knowledge



# Direct, indirect, both?

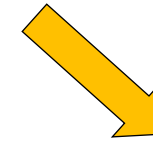


More proficient readers  
read more books (e.g. van  
Bergen et al., 2018)



Which enhances vocabulary

...and syntax,  
background knowledge...  
(Torppa et al., 2019)



More able readers are better at learning new words

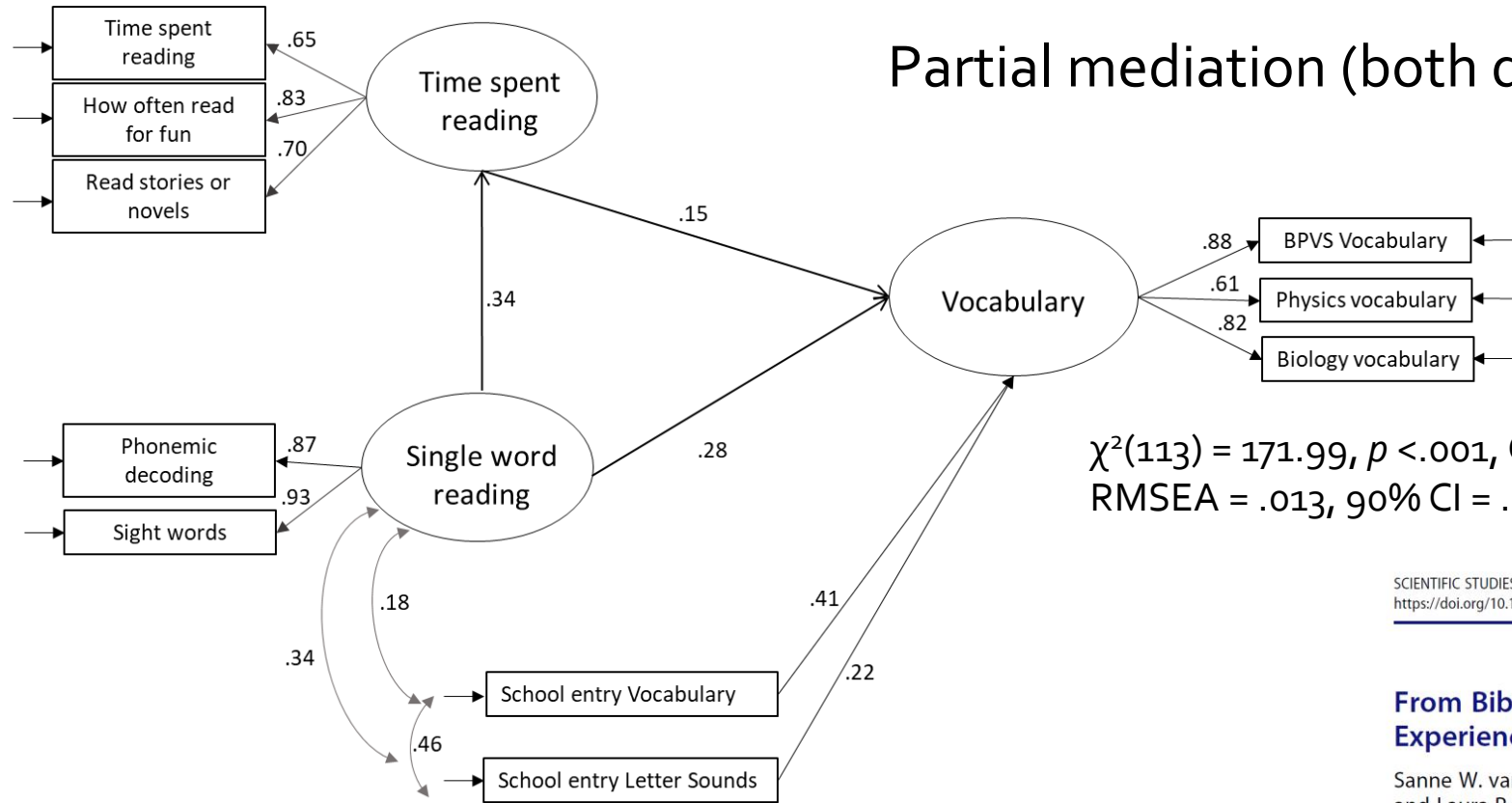


frees resources for comprehension (Perfetti et al., 2005)

quality of existing lexical representations determines integration (James et al., 2017; Mak & Twitchell, 2020)



# Both



## Partial mediation (both direct and indirect)





$\chi^2(113) = 171.99, p < .001, CFI = .99,$   
 $RMSEA = .013, 90\% CI = .010-.020$

SCIENTIFIC STUDIES OF READING  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2022.2068418>



OPEN ACCESS 

### From Bibliophile to Sesquipedalian: Modeling the Role of Reading Experience in Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Sanne W. van der Kleij <sup>a,b</sup>, Adrian P. Burgess <sup>a</sup>, Jessie Ricketts <sup>c\*</sup>, and Laura R. Shapiro <sup>ax\*</sup>

Note. Regression paths equal i.e. relationships between variables stable over time  
 Also, early vocabulary and letter knowledge independently predicted vocabulary

# Longitudinal study conclusions



- Both reading activity and reading *ability* independently predict vocabulary and reading comprehension
  - Better readers read more books; reading more books increases vocabulary
  - Being a better reader drives vocabulary directly
- Improving word reading skills likely to have knock-on effects on vocabulary (and reading comprehension)
- Interventions to support basic reading skills (e.g., decoding efficiency) should continue into early secondary school... BUT
- Interventions that increase reading should also be beneficial...

# BUT, causality? An experiment



An experiment, can we increase reading amount?  
Behavioural change approach: goal setting, diary, text messages

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## Stage 1: Pre-test

- Test knowledge of book-specific vocabulary items

## Stage 2: Practice diary and drop-in session

- 4-day SMS diary

## Stage 3: Reading phase

- Students given access to 4 books over 10 weeks
- Experimental group complete reading diary and set goals

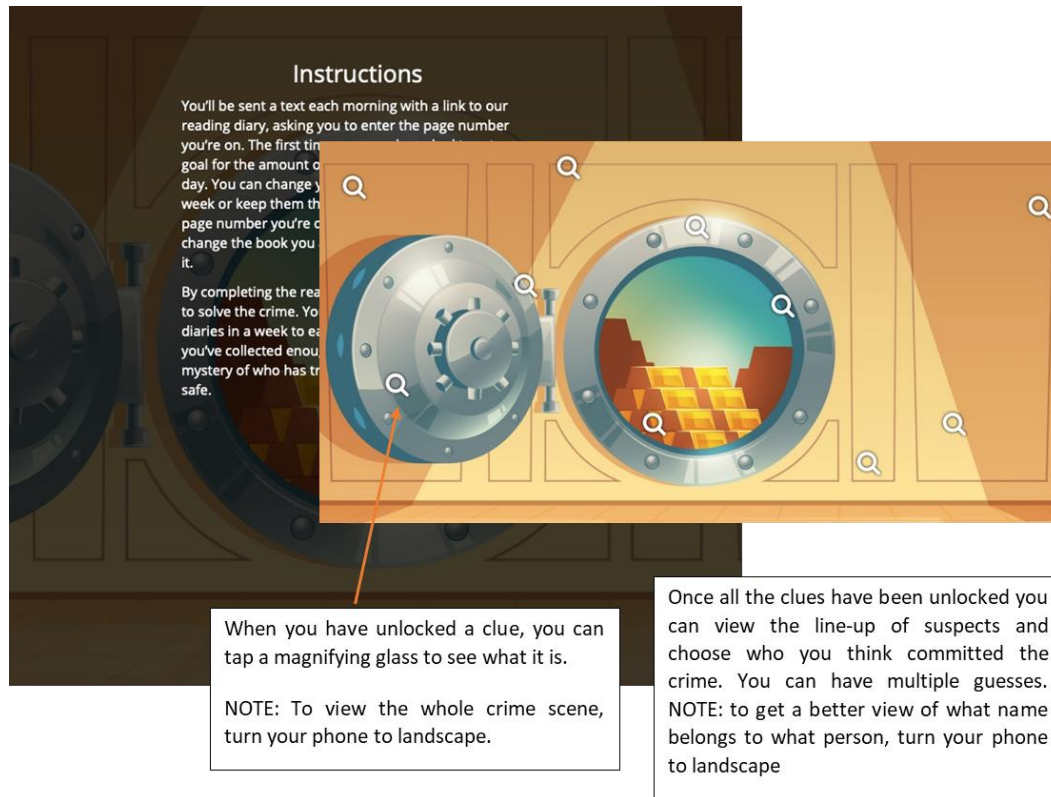
## Stage 4: Post-test

- Test knowledge of book-specific vocabulary items after the 10 week period
- 4-day reading diary to capture increases in reading

# Engaging teenagers...



Completing the diary unlocks clues to solve the case



**Instructions**

You'll be sent a text each morning with a link to our reading diary, asking you to enter the page number you're on. The first time you enter a page number, you'll be given a goal for the amount of time you should spend on that page each day. You can change your goal at any time, week or keep them the same. You can also change the page number you're on at any time, or change the book you're reading at any time.

By completing the reading diary, you can solve the crime. You can also complete the reading diaries in a week to earn a reward. Once you've collected enough rewards, you can solve the mystery of who has taken the safe.

When you have unlocked a clue, you can tap a magnifying glass to see what it is.

NOTE: To view the whole crime scene, turn your phone to landscape.

Once all the clues have been unlocked you can view the line-up of suspects and choose who you think committed the crime. You can have multiple guesses.

NOTE: to get a better view of what name belongs to what person, turn your phone to landscape



# What did we find?



When adolescents read real books because they choose to, in their own time, the *quantity* of leisure-reading is linked to vocabulary growth



*tempest....*



*...tempest....*



*.....tempest....*



BUT

Despite developing an attractive tool with input from experts, teachers and teenagers, few participants completed the diary consistently

We need to collaborate more deeply...







# Some take home messages



1. Reading for pleasure matters
2. Reading is not a primary school issue
3. Two-step screening can help
4. Don't worry about the transition slump
5. Teacher training must be prioritised

For more information,  
see our brand new report



Exploring how Skilled Independent Reading Supports Vocabulary Learning in Primary and Secondary School, is available for download here from 22 June 2023:  
[https://www.aston.ac.uk/sites/default/files/aston\\_hls\\_rav\\_report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.aston.ac.uk/sites/default/files/aston_hls_rav_report_2023.pdf)

# Acknowledgements



- Thank you for listening!
- All schools, participants and families
- Laura Shapiro, Sanne van der Kleij, Adrian Burgess
- Many many research assistants!

Collaboration: researchers, practitioners,  
young people, charities, industry

<https://bit.ly/AstonLiteracyProjectTeam>  
<https://lara.psychologyresearch.co.uk>



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# Further reading – all open access



## Publications mentioned today:

McGeown, S., Oxley, E., Practice Partners, L. t. R., Ricketts, J., & Shapiro, L. (2023). Working at the intersection of research and practice: The love to read project. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *117*, 102134.

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