

## Aquinas College Middle and Senior Schools have launched reading programmes that build on the existing Junior School programme.

This edition of Learning Solutions provides an insight into the College's reading programme, its rationale and how you can, as parents, provide additional support.

### Why is reading important?

Reading is the foundation of literacy development which helps consolidate the essential underpinnings required for success in all educational and professional environments. Although many boys reach Middle School with good reading habits, these can quickly fall away unless reading is prioritised by students, parents and teachers.

Regular reading enriches vocabulary development, enhances comprehension skills, and exposes boys to an increasingly wide range of human experiences. Put together, they form the core components of critical literacy, which are essential if boys are to fulfil their academic potential.

**Research has shown that a developed teenage reading habit is associated with higher academic achievement:**

*"On average, students who read daily for enjoyment score the equivalent of one-and-a-half years of schooling better than those who do not."* (OECD, 2011). Other significant benefits include:

1. Improves understanding, provides exposure to new ideas and experience of other people
2. Improves mental well being
3. Improves social mobility
4. Improves imagination and creativity, essential in the future

### Benefits of reading for pleasure

1. You feel less stressed – your heart rate slows down
2. You can switch off from worries
3. It helps you get to sleep
4. It gives you a quiet time to refresh your mind
5. It helps you understand other people better
6. It helps you face and understand difficult times
7. It helps you know more about the world – including facts
8. It improves imagination/creativity
9. It exercises lots of areas of the brain
10. It helps you succeed better at school

11. It increases your vocabulary
12. It makes you a better writer
13. It raises your confidence and self-esteem
14. It helps you work through your own worries or problems
15. It lets you feel emotions you want to feel
16. It raises your spirits by making you laugh
17. You can take risks and face adventures in a book while staying safe
18. It makes your life feel better
19. It makes you more open-minded and tolerant
20. It lets you escape into another world for a while

Nicola Morgan

### Why Can't I Skip My 20 Minutes of Reading Tonight?

Student "A" reads <b>20 minutes</b> each day	Student "B" reads <b>5 minutes</b> each day	Student "C" reads <b>1 minute</b> each day
3600 minutes in a school year	900 minutes in a school year	180 minutes in a school year

**1,800,000 words**



90<sup>th</sup> percentile

**282,000 words**



50<sup>th</sup> percentile

**8,000 words**



10<sup>th</sup> percentile

By the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade Student "A" will have read the equivalent of 60 whole school days. Student "B" will have read only 12 school days. Which student would you expect to have a better vocabulary? Which student would you expect to be more successful in school...and in life?

(Nagy & Herman, 1987)

## What does research tell us?

A recent large-scale study concluded reading for pleasure has "...a powerful influence on children's learning", particularly in developing vocabulary, but also on spelling and mathematical skills.

"Reading for pleasure made a substantial difference [on intellectual progress] – the difference made was around four times greater than the difference made by having a parent with a degree." (Sullivan, 2014).

Yet, in Australia, enjoyment of reading among school students is on a downward trend. According to Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) analysis of PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) data, 45 per cent of Year 4 students in Australia say they only read if they have to.

## Reading surveys

In 2015 surveys, one of more than 1700 parents and children conducted across Australia by Scholastic and the reading habits of 2000 12 to 16-year-olds by Gallagher (2015), explored attitudes and behaviours around reading books for pleasure.

The reports revealed that progress made by pupils in primary school halts when they transfer to secondary school and, from then on, the gap between students' reading ability and their age grows wider each year. The research found just over one-third (37%) of children (6-17 years) report they are frequent readers, with the frequency declining rapidly during secondary school years. Worryingly, by the later years of secondary school many students are reading books that are no harder than those in primary school.

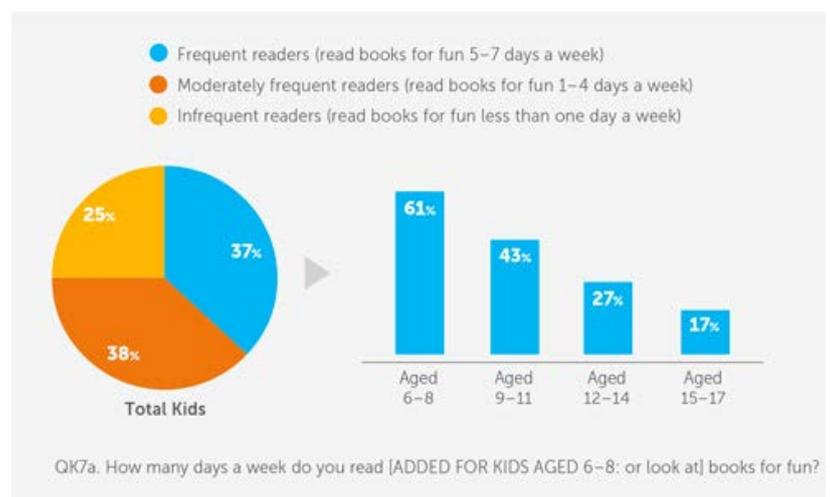
## Boys reading

Many studies have found boys are less likely to read or enjoy relationship-based fiction so beloved by girls. However, biographies, autobiographies and other fact-based works often have appeal to boys. These can include stories about war heroes, sporting heroes, inventors and inventions, scientists and scientific discoveries

A recent American survey of teenagers found avid male readers particularly valued talking with their fathers about what they were reading and were also more likely to read books recommended by their fathers. "Boys need masculine reading models that they actually know and can talk with, too," the study authors said. "They should talk about what they are reading, casually and often."

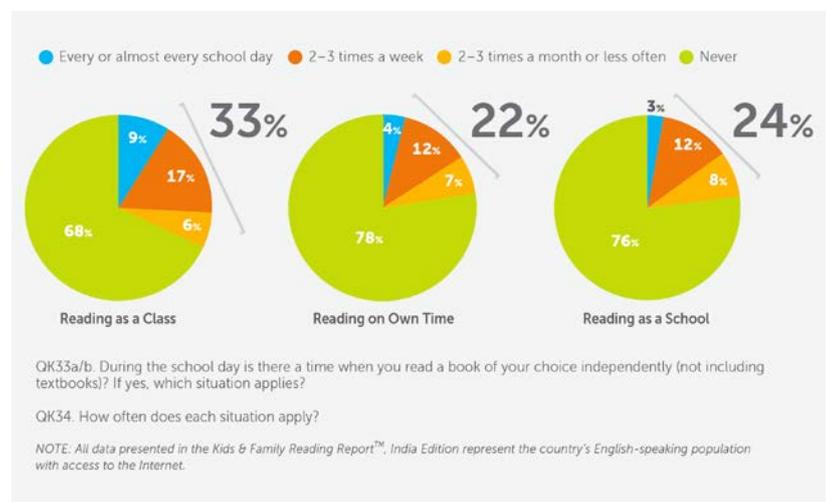
While the digital age has certainly impacted on reading and literature, it is still vital to ensure that reading, including books and articles of significant length, is fostered. It is vital for basic employment skills, being able to engage meaningfully with the wider community without appearing ignorant – and it can give immense life-long pleasure.

Frequency with Which Children Read Books for Fun  
Base: Children Aged 6–17



Frequency with Which Children read a Book of their Choice Independently in School as a Class, During Available Free time and as a School

Base: Children Aged 6–17



## LECTIO

### The Middle School Reading Program

All boys in Year 7-9 will be expected to read for a **minimum** of 180 minutes per week, which is to be comprised of 100 minutes of reading at home (ideally, five slots of 20 minutes each), and 80 minutes of reading in Tutor time. Boys can choose a novel, biography, autobiography or expository text on whichever subject or theme appeals to them. They may use books from home or from our College Library.

**It is important for boys to ensure they have a book to read at all times throughout the day (other than during Break A and Break B), along with their iPad or Mac Book and their College Planner.**

Boys will be asked to record in their OneNote page:

- the name of each book they select; and
- reflections on the books they have read throughout the year.

Tutor teachers will assist boys in the selection of books in whatever capacity they can, but primarily, the College's Library staff will help boys find books that capture and hold their interest, and to select books that are suitably challenging. Boys are expected to visit the Library before or after school, or during Break A or B in order to select their reading material.

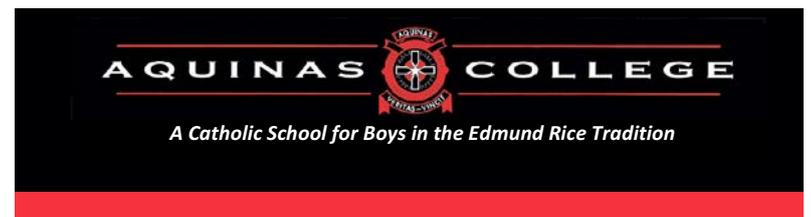
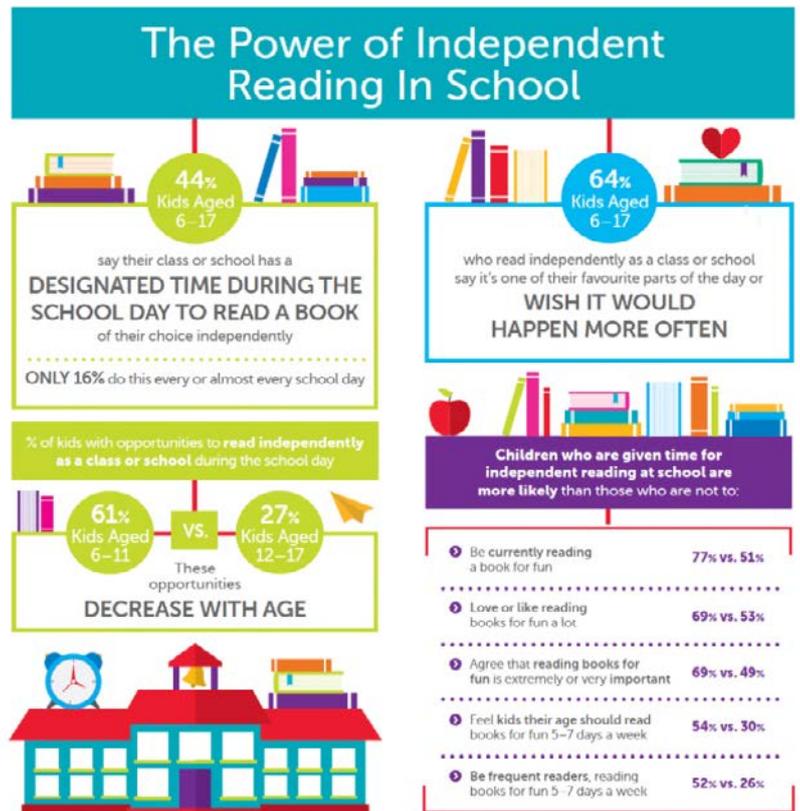
Boys who demonstrate a commitment to reading will be affirmed and rewarded whenever merited. Boys who need encouragement to read will be given as much support as possible.

## VIDEMUS

### The Senior School Reading Program

Videmus means "to see". The senior reading program builds upon the practice of reading to challenge the reader's understanding of what they are reading and engage them in other daily forms of meaningful information sources.

In addition to reading for pleasure each week all students are expected to view the weekly TED talk and a weekly newspaper article. Students will also have the opportunity to listen to guest speakers from a variety vocational and university backgrounds together with significant Old Boys.



## Videmus Program

**The Life we lead is limited by our imagination.  
We live in a more limited space than God intends for us.**



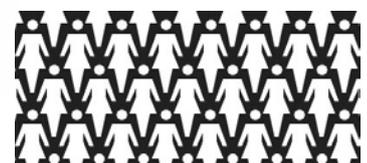
"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."  
T.S. Eliot.

**Date:** Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018

**Videmus Topic:** Violence against women.

**Synopsis:** An average of 137 women across the world are killed by a partner or family member every day, according to new data released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). They say it makes "the home the most likely place for a woman to be killed".

**Link to Weekly Catalyst:**  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46292919>



**Videmus Reflection Questions:**

1. What is the most striking statistic from this article?
2. What does this information reveal to you about the difference between the way men and women experience violence?
3. What role could a member of the Aquinas College community play in reducing men's violence against women?



Since 1802, when the first school began in Waterford, Ireland, Edmund Rice education has grown in over 20 countries. Across the world, over 170,000 students are educated in the Edmund Rice Tradition each day to build a better world.



## 14 Ways READING IMPROVES Your Mind and Body

### Strengthens the Brain



1 Reading brings existing neural pathways in the brain to life.



2 Reading complex poetry in particular helps the brain remain plastic and active.



3 Frequent brain exercises, like reading, decreases mental decline for the elderly by 32%.



4 When you read a book you have to remember a lot of things, including the different characters, and also the main plot and any subplots throughout the story.

All of these points throughout the story are a new memory in your brain, which means new synapses being created, and existing ones being strengthened. Therefore, your brain's short-term memory and recall capabilities improve.



### Study

Participants read thirty pages of a book the night before and then had an MRI of their brains the next morning. Results showed there was a heightened connectivity in the left temporal cortex. This is the area of the brain that's associated with language and intelligence.

### The result

Even though the participants weren't reading the novel in the MRI machine, their brains were still retaining a heightened connectivity as if they were. This means **the brain is like a muscle**, and by exercising this muscle, people can improve their brain power.

### Improves Your Health

5 A study showed that depressed patients in the mental health ward showed **positive improvement** when they were read stories aloud. They reported feeling better and more positive about things.

6 In the case of depression, **self-help books** are the best type because people with severe depression benefit greater from a low-intensity intervention. Self-help books fit into this category, so not only does reading them help patients with depression, but the topic also adds a benefit.



7 Researchers have demonstrated that reading can **reduce stress** by around 68%.

8 Elderly patients who regularly played mentally challenging games or read books were **two and a half times less likely to develop Alzheimer's**.

9 Creating a **bedtime ritual**, like reading before bed, signals to your body that it's time to wind down and go to sleep. However, this only applies to real books as screens like e-readers and tablets can actually keep you awake longer and hurt your sleep.

### Children's Brains



10 Children who read are better able to grasp abstract concepts, apply logic in various scenarios, recognize cause and effect, and utilize good judgment.



11 Numerous studies have shown that students who are exposed to **reading before preschool** are more likely to do well in all facets of formal education.



12 A children's book exposes your child to **50% more words** than watching a television show.

### Reading Helps in Real Life

13 Researchers have discovered that those who read about characters doing something are more likely actually to do that activity in real life. This means that you're more motivated to ask your employer for a raise, or complete that bucket list you've meant to get to.



14 Identifying with characters in a book also helps you experience the type of real-life relationship you would experience with a real person, which means you identify with people who are shy if you read about a shy character.

## How can parents encourage reading?

1. Value all reading equally, especially at early/reluctant stages. The more children enjoy it, the more they will do and the better they'll become. Show positive interest in every book choice.
2. When a child is keen and confident, encourage wider choice but always allow return to favourite books or personal choices. There's nothing wrong with comfort reading.
3. Don't over-promote a particular book – we're allowed not to like what "everyone" else likes!
4. Ask human booksellers/librarians to recommend. (Avoid "Amazon recommends".)
5. Give huge choice. Libraries are ideal because they're free, so not enjoying a book doesn't matter.
6. Create reading time/space. The habit of reading before bed is perfect.
7. "Model" reading – if they see you love reading, it helps children aspire to it.
8. Dad reading has a powerful effect on boys accepting reading.
9. No TV in bedroom; limit computer/smartphone. I suggest whole family screen-off time.
10. Allow children to stop a book they aren't enjoying if they've given it a go. It should be pleasure.

## Worried about a reluctant reader?

1. Don't worry about quality of text – all text is practice. Never dismiss a choice.
2. Find topics that interest the child. Non-fiction is equally valuable reading.
3. De-stress the situation – never show worry in front of him.
4. Don't invade time a child is spending doing something else enjoyable.
5. If genuinely concerned, discuss with a school librarian or teacher and press for help if needed.

Nicola Morgan

**CAUTION:**

Children who read a lot risk becoming independent, open-minded, knowledgeable, questioning and CONFIDENT

Realisation and the power of reading for pleasure - www.nicolamorgan.com

## References

Scholastic (2015). *Kids & Family Reading Report: 5th Edition*. New York: NY.

Sullivan, A. (2014). *Reading for pleasure, and attainment in maths, vocabulary and spelling [IOE Research Briefing N° 106]*. Institute of Education, University of London, London.

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