

Are American Schools Killing Interest in Reading?

In a recent exchange of small talk, I asked a friend how the last school year had gone for his child. He replied that it had gone relatively well except for one thing. School, he explained, was killing his child's interest in reading.

When I asked how that was happening, he noted that his child had adopted the mentality that reading was a thing to be done only in the confines of the classroom. Furthermore, he suspected that his child was growing bored with the reading assignments, for there were only a few books studied during the year, and those were dissected to such an extent that interest in the storyline waned considerably by the end of the book.

Hearing such a report from the trenches makes America's poor reading stats make more sense. According to the [Nation's Report Card](#), only 34 percent of eighth graders are able to read at a proficient level. This increases slightly to 37 percent by the time students graduate from high school. Still, such numbers are nothing to write home about, for nearly two out of three students leave the school system without proficient literacy skills.

The question is, would these skills improve if reading instruction took a different course? If students were allowed to spend more time in school reading for pleasure, would interest and ability in reading increase?

University of Virginia psychology professor and author Daniel Willingham thinks that could be a possibility. Based on research, Willingham [suggests](#) that carving out time for pleasure reading in schools can boost understanding and ability as long as the books are "information rich" and the

teacher knowledgeable and quick to recognize the interests and needs of students.

As it stands right now, reading for pleasure is not common amongst school age children. [In the U.K.](#), only a quarter of middle school students and 11 percent of high school students are allowed to read for pleasure during the school day.

Statistics for pleasure reading in school don't seem to even exist in the U.S. However, a Common Sense Media study from 2014 [suggests](#) that nearly half of American high school seniors "read by choice only once or twice a year."

John Adams once said that the decision-making of the American citizens was based upon the insights gleaned in books. He [opined](#) that in order for Americans to make good, wise, and informed judgments in the selection of leaders, they must first let their minds be "opened and enlarged by reading."

Based on the approval ratings of both [President](#) Trump and the [major political parties](#), Americans do not seem all that happy with their choices regarding their political leaders. Is it possible that some of this discontent can be laid at the feet of an education system that appears to kill, rather than foster, a love and interest in reading?

[Image Credit: Flickr-Juliana Dacoregio [\(CC BY 2.0\)](#)]