

# Exploring children's and adolescents' perceptions of a reader

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## A summary for teachers

**Background:** The reading habits of children and adolescents have changed considerably over the last two decades. Recent research suggests that text messages, websites, song lyrics, social networking sites, followed by fiction books, are among the leisure time reading matter most read by children and adolescents (Clark & Teravainen, 2017). However, there are considerable differences in the reading habits of children and adolescents. Does this influence their perceptions of 'a reader'?

**Aim:** To understand how children and young people describe 'a reader' and explore similarities and differences in their responses.

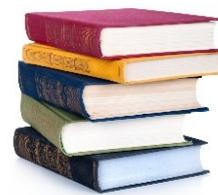
**Method:** In total, 33 children aged 9-11 and 30 adolescents aged 15-16 from one primary school and one secondary school in the UK were individually interviewed. Using a participatory approach, adult researchers interviewed student researchers, who then in turn interviewed their peers. A data-driven inductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse interview content.

### Insights from children:

A reader enjoys reading, reads frequently and primarily reads books. Furthermore, a reader is someone who chooses to read, knows their own reading interests, is a skilled reader, a knowledge-gatherer or an imaginative person.

### Insights from adolescents:

A reader enjoys reading, reads frequently (although not as frequently as children's responses), reads books (but other text types mentioned more frequently) and is someone who chooses to read. A reader may have developed a close relationship with books over a long period of time, or may simply be someone who reads for a specific purpose (e.g., reads a street sign).



## Growing Up A Reader

**Educational implications:** Broadening our conceptualisation of a reader may encourage more children and young people to self-identify readers and develop their own identities as readers. The context in which children and adolescents are learning and the messages they receive about reading are likely to influence their perceptions of a reader; therefore teachers should pay attention to the implicit and explicit messages young people receive about reading.

For more information about this project, visit our Growing Up A Reader website:

[www.growingupareader.ed.ac.uk](http://www.growingupareader.ed.ac.uk)

**Academic paper:** McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Wilkinson, K., & Sabeti, S. (2020). Growing up a reader: Exploring children's and adolescents' perceptions of a reader. *Educational Research*.