



Improving Learning

Australian Council *for* Educational Research

Becoming a reader:

Relationships between early home activities,
attitudes and reading performance in PIRLS

What is PIRLS anyway?

The Progress in International Reading Study

- PIRLS is one of the international assessments in Australia's National Assessment Program
- Managed internationally by the IEA – International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement
- Began in 2001, repeated every five years
- Australia joined in 2011
- Focus is on reading comprehension
- Year 4 students are assessed because by this age they have moved from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*

Reading comprehension in PIRLS

What do students do?

Each student receives a booklet containing two different texts and questions related to those texts.

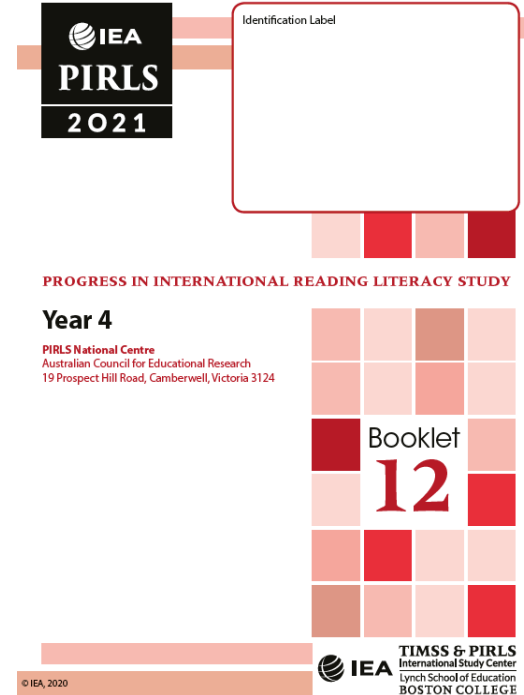
- Two literary texts (narratives)
- Two informational texts (non-fiction articles)
- One literary and one informational

Texts cover *purposes* for reading

- for literary experience
- to acquire and use information

Questions cover different *processes* of reading

- Focusing on and retrieving explicitly stated information
- Making straight forward inferences
- Interpreting and integrating ideas and information
- Examining and evaluating content, language and textual elements



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Australia's results from

PIRLS 2021

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

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Australian Council for Educational Research



Reading behaviours and attitudes

The PIRLS questionnaires

Students – current reading behaviours, attitudes, experiences at school

Teachers – training, classroom environment, strategies, practices, school environment

Principals – resourcing, policies, school population, school environment

Parents – home environment, early activities, early education, attitudes towards reading

Getting a good start – early literacy activities at home

- Read books
- Tell stories
- Sing songs
- Play with alphabet toys (e.g. blocks with letters)
- Talk about things you had done
- Talk about what you had read
- Play word games
- Write letters or words
- Read aloud signs and labels

Students are categorised based on the combination of their parents' responses:

Often

Sometimes

Never or almost never engaged in early literacy activities



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Early literacy activities

Often – over 50% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Sometimes – over 40% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Never or almost never – around 1% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Reading scores in PIRLS 2011 and PIRLS 2016 were higher among students whose parents often engaged in early literacy activities.

Reading scores were lowest among students whose parent never or almost never did these things with them



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Parents' attitudes towards reading

- I read only if I have to (reversed)
- I like talking about what I read with other people
- I like to spend my spare time reading
- I read only if I need information
- Reading is an important activity in my home
- I would like to have more time for reading
- I enjoy reading

Very much like to read – 48% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Somewhat like to read – over 40% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Do not like to read – around 10% of Australian students (2011, 2016)

Reading scores in PIRLS 2011 and PIRLS 2016 were higher among Australian students whose parents Very Much Like reading.

Reading scores were lowest among students whose parent Do Not Like reading.

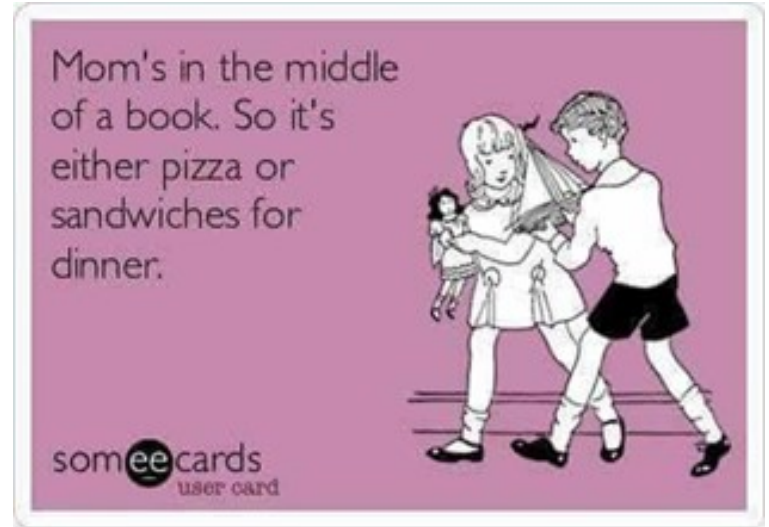


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Principals' reports of early literacy skills in students....

How many students in your school can do the following when they begin school?

- Recognise most of the letters of the alphabet
- Read some words
- Read sentences
- Write letters of the alphabet
- Write some words

Responses are combined and students categorised as being at schools where:

More than 75% of students begin with early literacy

51 to 75%...

25 to 50%...

Less than 25% of students begin with early literacy

Reading scores at Year 4 tend to be higher in schools where high proportions of students begin with early literacy skills.

That's not really news....

And what happens in other people's home isn't under my control!

These findings underscore how important EARLY literacy skills are in order for young people to learn how to read and to develop into competent readers who can engage with and understand different texts.

Students whose parents reported that they had attended early education programs scored higher in reading in PIRLS 2011 (mathematics and science too!) and in reading in 2016.

Early education settings are CRUCIAL players in providing opportunities for all children to engage in early literacy activities, but particularly those children who are not engaging in these activities at home (for whatever reasons).

Therefore, early educators need to be trained and recognised accordingly.

What makes a “reader”?

Reading behaviour and attitudes of Australian Year 4 students over the past ten years (2011 – 2021)

Eight statements about reading – students are asked how strongly they agree or disagree to each:

- I like talking about what I read with other people.
- I would be happy if someone gave me a book as a present.
- I think reading is boring (reversed).
- I would like to have more time for reading.
- I enjoy reading.
- I learn a lot from reading.
- I like to read things that make me think.
- I like it when a book helps me imagine other worlds.

Responses are combined to form the Students Like Reading scale (numeric) and index (3 groups – Very much, Somewhat and Do Not Like)

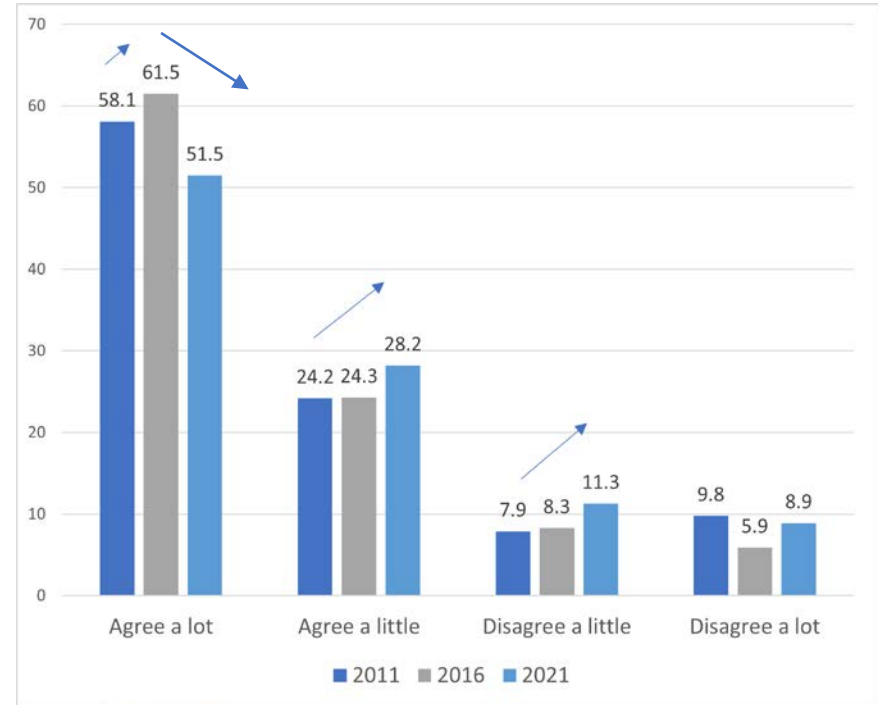
I enjoy reading

Proportion of students who agree a lot increased from 2011 to 2016 (yay!) but declined between 2016 and 2021.

Decline between 2011 and 2021 is also statistically significant.

Proportion of students who agree a little has increased from 2011 and 2016 to 2021.

Proportion of students who disagree a little has also increased from 2011 and 2016 to 2021.



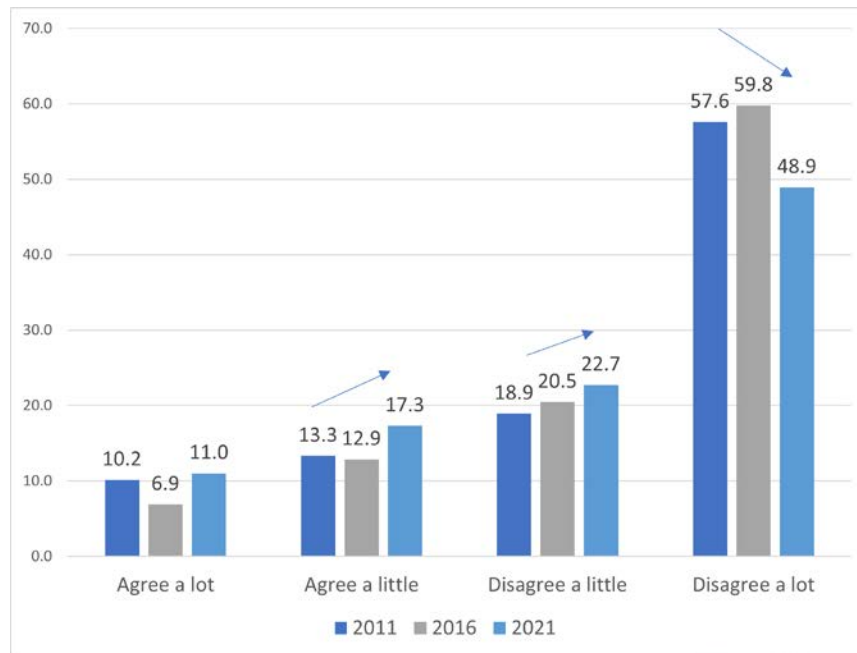
Reading is boring 😞

Remember – reverse scored

Proportion of students who agree a little has increased from 2011 and 2016 to 2021.

Proportion of students who disagree a little has also increased from 2011 and 2016 to 2021.

Proportion of students who disagree a lot that reading is boring has declined (10 percentage points) between 2011 and 2016 to 2021.

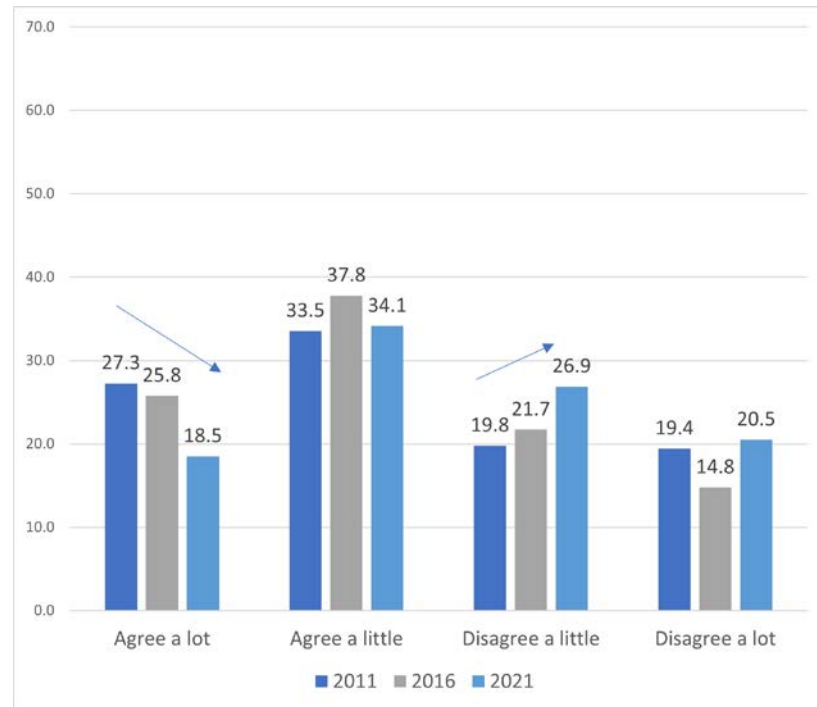


I like talking about what I read with other people

Patterns are not necessarily as clear as for Enjoy Reading and Reading is boring.

Proportion of students who agree a lot has declined between 2011 and 2021. Difference between 2016 and 2021 also significant.

Proportion of students who disagree a little has also increased from 2011 and 2016 to 2021.



Cause for concern?

Indications of decline in positive attitudes towards reading in primary students – PIRLS – and secondary students – PISA.

PIRLS

Between 2011 and 2021:

- the proportion of students who read every day for fun decreased by 8 percentage points (35%)
- The proportion of students who never or almost never read for fun increased by 6 percentage points, to 18%

PISA – 15-year-olds (mostly Year 10 in Australia)

Reading was major domain in 2000, 2009 and 2018

Between 2000 and 2018:

- the proportion of female students who said that they do not read for enjoyment increased by 11 percentage points, to 36%
- The proportion of male students who did not read for enjoyment increased by 13 percentage points, to 53%

How important is liking reading anyway?

Young people who do not like to read do so less often and will thus find it more challenging to develop their skills.

PIRLS 2021 example

Students who agree a lot to “I enjoy reading” – the Readers (49.3%)

Students who disagree a lot – the Non-readers (10.5%)

All other students – the Ambivalents (40.2%)

94% of students who are in the Do Not Like Reading group according to their combined responses to 8 items are in the Non-reader group for this exercise.

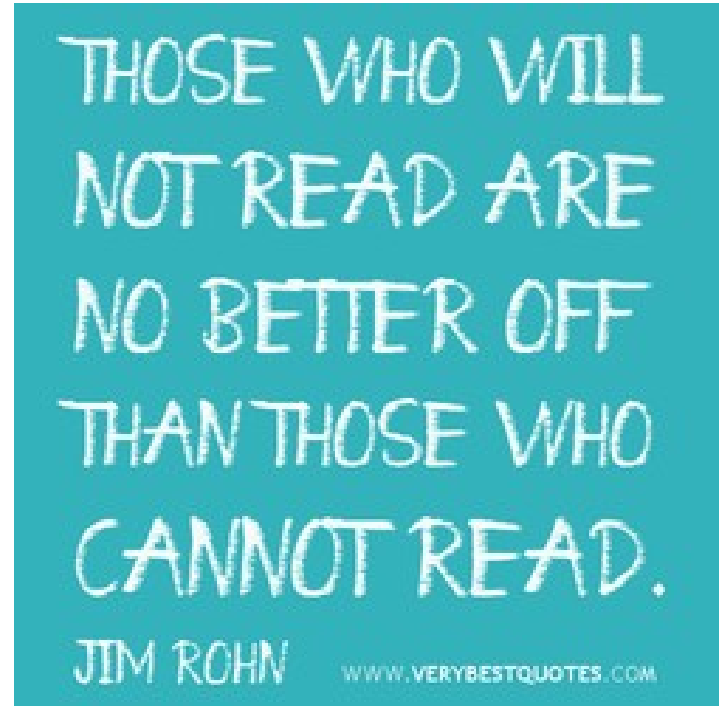


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How do our Readers and Non-readers compare?

Current Reading Activity Levels

Borrow at least once a week from school or local library

- Readers – 61.4%
- Non-readers – 40.2%
- Ambivalents – 53.4%

Read outside of school on a normal school day for 30 minutes to an hour

- Readers – 39.7% 29.8% less than 30 mins 15.7% spent more than 2 hours!!
- Non-readers – 7.9% 85.8% less than 30 mins
- Ambivalents – 29.7% 65.6% less than 30 mins

Read for fun every day or almost every day

- Readers – 58.8%
- Non-readers – 3.7% 74.3% never or almost never
- Ambivalents – 13.3%

How do our Readers and Non-readers compare?

Read to find out about things I want to learn every day or almost every day

- Readers – 34.7%
- Non-readers – 10.5% 57.6% never or almost never
- Ambivalents – 15.0%

Talk about things I have read with my parents every day

- Readers – 14.6% 14.5% never or almost never
- Non-readers – 4.0% 57.6% never or almost never
- Ambivalents – 5.6% 15.0% never or almost never

How do our Readers and Non-readers compare?

Other attitudes

Very confident in reading

- Readers – 62.2%
- Non-readers – 18.5%
- Ambivalents – 25.8%

Very engaged during reading lessons

- Readers – 65.8%
- Non-readers – 22.1% **31.3% less than engaged**
- Ambivalents – 42.9%

Performance on PIRLS 2021 reading comprehension test

- Readers – 562 points (High international benchmark)
- Non-readers – 489 points (Intermediate benchmark)
- Ambivalents – 531 points (Intermediate benchmark)

How do our Readers and Non-readers compare?

Something you might not expect...

High digital self-efficacy

- Readers – 48.6% (not significantly different to Ambivalents)
- Non-readers – 29.9%
- Ambivalents – 34.0% (not significantly different to Readers)

High sense of school belonging

- Readers – 66.0%
- Non-readers – 23.7%
- Ambivalents – 48.2%

Never see parents read

- Readers – 14.0% (not significantly different to Ambivalents)
- Non-readers – 32.0%
- Ambivalents – 15.8% (not significantly different to Readers)

Absent from school once a week or once every two weeks

- Readers – 9.5%
- Non-readers – 17.4%
- Ambivalents – 12.5%

What do we do?

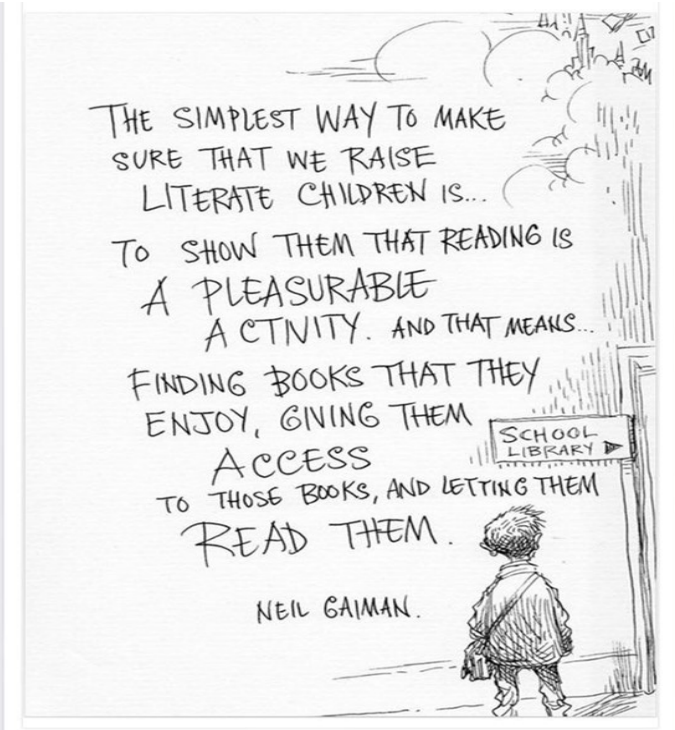
Putting the 'fun' back into a fundamental skill

Model being a “reader” – let a kid catch you reading. Let a kid catch you reading one of “their” books.

Normalise sometimes having difficulty with reading – we are all learning all of the time.

Build early connections to books and reading.

Start conversations with young people about reading, now and in their (not so distant) past...



Neil Gaiman (2016). “The View from the Cheap Seats: Selected Nonfiction”.
Image sourced from [pinterest.com.au](https://www.pinterest.com.au)

What do students remember about early reading experiences?

Sophie, age 10 (but nearly 11!)

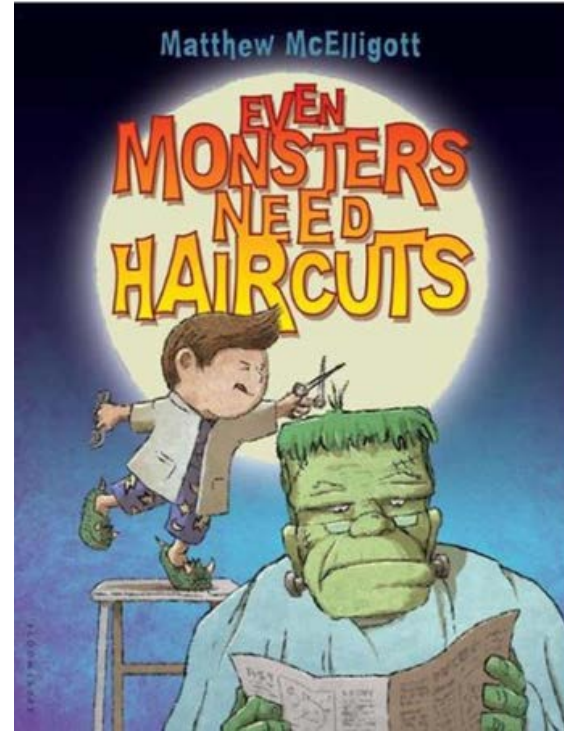
Prompts:

Can you remember a book that you enjoyed having read to you (or reading yourself) before you began primary school?

I remember *Even Monsters Need Haircuts* – I keep it by my bed still!

What do you remember liking about it most?

I remember that it was about monsters, but not scary. I remember it because Mum used to read it to me every night when I was little.



Cover image sourced from Amazon.com.au

What do students remember about early reading experiences?

Anna, age 7

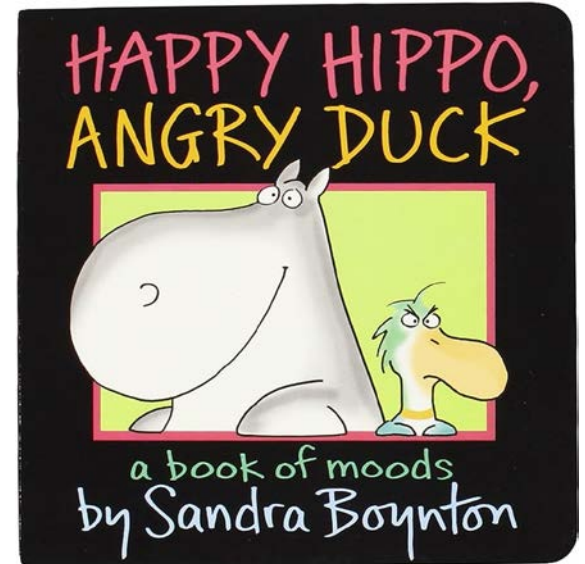
Prompts:

Can you remember a book that you enjoyed having read to you (or reading yourself) before you began primary school?

Oh yes – Happy Hippo, Angry Duck, Not the Hippopotamus, Not the Armadillo, oh and Hairy Maclary...so all my cardboard books really. And that poem about the man and they threw him in the pond cos he hit everyone on the head each day (Bad Sir Brian Botany) and there was a night-time poem (Time for bed, by Mem Fox).

What do you remember liking about them most?

Well, they all say “you” so it is like they are talking to me. Sometimes someone else but most of them talk to me. And they have good endings.



Cover image sourced from Amazon.com.au

Just sit quietly....

Further reading:

PIRLS in Australia - <https://www.acer.org/in/pirls>

PIRLS internationally - <https://pirls2021.org/results>

PISA reading - <https://www.acer.org/au/snapshots>