Are Teenagers Reading Less Than They Were Fifty Years ago?

Introduction (50-150 words)

This Project explores the reading habits of teenagers across the world over the last fifty years, and how rapid advances in at-home technology has affected them.

When referring to 'teenagers' this mostly ranges from the ages of 12-21, although sometimes is lower or higher, depending on the source used.

The term 'reading' refers to looking at text and translating it into meaning. Aural mediums are not considered 'reading' in this project. I have chosen this project because I am passionate about reading, as I find it to be a wonderful source of entertainment. However, I have found that as I've gotten older, my interest in online entertainment has increased. This observation gave me the initial idea for the project, as it made me wonder how popular reading is with teenagers, who are surrounded with a range of seemingly more interesting pass-times than reading. This then gave me the idea of comparing the popularity of reading in teenagers now, to fifty years ago, during a time when entertainment sources were far more limited, making reading a more exciting option.

This Project links to my other subjects in that reading is a crucial skill that must be used to research, learn and absorb necessary information to be successful in other subjects. My project links to my future aspiration of becoming an author or writer, as reading is an important part of understanding different styles of writing, as well as becoming exposed to new, interesting opinions on things that enable you to develop fresh views and ideas. Finally, the objectives of my Project are to find out whether teenagers read less in their spare time compared to teenagers fifty years ago. To do this, I will improve my researching skills, and learn how to find reliable, relevant and recent information to support my arguments, for and against.

Research Review

Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report: 8th Edition

The Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report: 8th Edition is a biennially released survey managed by Fluent Research and published in 2023 by scholastic INC. This is a secondary source and is open access. This source is relevant to my research question in that it provides statistics about teenagers' enjoyment and frequency of reading, therefore helping me better understand whether reading is becoming more or less popular over time. From this research, I learn that teenagers aged 12-17 are overall reading at least once a week. From the information provided by the 1,724 parents and children aged 6-17, (data from the 12-17 age demographic was only used) 41% involved in the survey read less than once a week, another 41% read one to four times per week, and the remaining 18% were frequent readers, reading five to seven times per week. This source helps me place my research question into the wider context of the research area by helping me understand the frequency of which teenagers read. This will enable me to come to a conclusion, as I can

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compare this data to other information and factors from today and 1970. The source scores 15/15 using the CRAAP method because it was written in 2023, therefore providing very recent data which will not have changed since released, therefore being very accurate. The source addresses my question and gives me useful information on the reading habits of related teenagers in the U.S. This information directly relates to my question, as it provides very specific sets of data that I can use to support my arguments in the discussion section of my project, as well as be compared to data from 50 years ago to aid in answering my project question. The source is authoritative as Scholastic is over one hundred years old, becoming the world's #1 Childrens publisher. The manager of the survey, Fluent Research, also has authority, as it has worked with major brands such as Google, Meta and YouTube to provide their researching skills, proving that they are authoritative as they have been chosen by some of the most valuable companies to do their research for them. The source is trustworthy in that all the graphs used are clearly labelled. Also, a clear link is provided to the methodology of the whole survey, making it easy to find how they undertook the research. All the claims and statements made were clearly supported with evidence from their own research, making it a credible, trustworthy and accurate primary source. Finally, the purpose of this source is to provide clear statistics about the opinions and habits that children and teenagers have about reading. Overall, this is a reliable source for academic work because it scores a 15 on the CRAAP test, as it provides clear, factual statistics, produced by a well-known, trustworthy and credible source. Also, the source provides the perfect information that specifically relates to my project question, making it overall very useful. Scholastic Corporation, 2023)

<u>'How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds every day' – TED Talk by Tristan Harris</u>

The TED talk, 'How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds every day' is presented by Tristan Harris and was released in April, 2017 by TED. This is a secondary source and is closed access. This source is relevant to my research question in that it provides relevant information about the impacts of social media on people's decisiondescribes making and where they place their attention. This information can help me better understand what factors in modern life are potentially reducing the rates of reading in teenagers, From this research, I learnt about the phycological techniques tech companies (in phycological techniques) use to keep people on their app for longer. Examples of this are YouTube, who use the autoplay feature to maximise the time spent on the app. Snapchat uses a feature called 'snap streaks', which is the number of days in a row two people have communicated with each other, creating a sense of value around the streak, therefore making it an incentive for teenagers to use the app to maintain their streak. As well as this, Harris stated that companies like Facebook and TikTok show their users content that provoke feelings of shock or outrage. It's users then feel inclined to share these feelings of outrage with other people, all the while causing them to spend more time on the application. This source helps me place my research question into the wider context of the research area by allowing me to understand what factors are contributing to the general reading habits of teenagers. The source scores 11/15 using the CRAAP method because it was released in 2017, therefore being five years old. I have rated the source down for this, as in the five years since it's release, research in the area may have moved on The source gives me useful information to colored help me understand why reading levels in teenagers have been decreasing. This is because it informs me what social media are most common in teenagers, and how these apps are keeping it's users on it for such long periods. However, the source does not directly address reading habits in teenagers specifically, it only provides information about social media. I have marked it down for this reason as well. The speaker, Tristan Harris is well-known in the area of persuasive design and ethical persuasion, having briefed heads of state, tech

company CEOs and members of the US congress about these topics. This tells me that he

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has a high level of knowledge in these fields, as he is informing many high-profile, important people about it. Also, he was named as one of the '25 people shaping the world' by Rolling Stone. Therefore, he has a high level of authority, as he has a level of knowledge that allows him to accurately inform very important people on his topics. The source is trustworthy in that the speaker is highly knowledgeable in the topic and has been trusted by many highranking officials to educate them on the topics he covers. However, since the source is a TED Talk, he does not mention any of the sources that he has used to get his information. According to the Ted website, Harris 'has spent a decade understanding the invisible influences that hijack human thinking and action', so his arguments are clearly based of of facts, and not his opinion. Finally, the purpose of this source is to inform people on the control that common tech companies have over us, and what techniques they use to maintain this control. He used to work for Google, so he has a first-hand view of all the techniques they used, therefore meaning that the source's information is opinionated, but based on factual evidence. Overall, this is a reliable source for academic work because the speaker is highly knowledgeable in the topic, which is why I have rated it highly in the 'Authority' category. It is also reasonably new, so it contains up-to -date information. Finally, it provides information to help me further my research with my project question. (Harris, 2017)

Uswitch Online Gaming Statistics 2023

Uswitch Online Gaming Statistics 2023 is a web page written by Nick Baker and published on 12th May 2023 by Uswitch. This is a secondary source and is open access. This source is relevant to my research question in that it provides reliable, accurate statistics regarding the technology usage of different age groups. This allows me to find information that can content support the 'for' arguments in my discussion section, as the statistics from this source all linked to signify that technology is an integral part of teenage society now. From this research, I Source learnt that 76% of 12-15-year-olds play video games online. Also, 91% of UK children aged 3-15 play games on some device. Of that statistic, 59% own a video game console, 54% own a tablet, 53% a smartphone, 31% a PC, 10% a smart TV and 1% a VR Headset. This research helps me better understand what percentage of teenagers are playing video games in their spare time, and on what device. However, the source does not provide statistics that solely refer to teenage habits, making the statistics slightly less effective to answer my research question. This source helps me place my research question into the wider context of the evaluative research area by allowing me to understand how commonly used technology is in the demographic of 'teenagers'. The source scores 12/15 using the CRAAP method because it was written in 2023, so I scored it a 3 on currency, as it is a recent source, meaning the information it provided is unlikely to have changed since it was published. The source addresses my question in that it provides statistics about gaming habits of people in the UK, which helps me further understand how common gaming is within our modern society, and what impacts this may have on the popularity of reading, which is a much older source of entertainment. The author is an expert in 'broadband services and technology'. This suggests that he understands the consoles, phones and other devices that are being so commonly used nowadays, allowing him to effectively research statistics about the subject. However, as the research was not conducted by a research firm or by the company, it does page. Finally, the purpose of this source is to provide statistics to educate readers about the usage of technology for online gaming in 2023. Overall, this is a reliable source for work because it offers a range of one. Therefore, it deserves a high relevance score (3/3), as it is incredibly recent. Also, all the

statistics are accurately cited and labelled, therefore I gave it a 3/3 for accuracy. I gave it a

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2/3 for all other categories, as the author has reasonable knowledge in the subject, the source provides a decent amount of useful information and the purpose of the source is to educate, but not to provide scholarly information. (Baker, 2023)

'Reading Habits Among Students in the Digital Era: Changes of Trends and Behaviours'

'Reading Habits Among Students in the Digital Era: Changes of Trends and Behaviours' is an article written by Dayang Azimah Abang Yusof and published on 15th July 2021 by 'Journal of Academic Library Management'. This is a secondary source and is open access. This source is relevant to my research question in that it researches the reading habits in teenagers' reading habits, including how often they read, what they read and how they read (what format they read from). Therefore it allows me to support my discussion arguments that mention that the reading rates in teenagers have decreased. This is because the study proves that (of the participants within the study) reading levels are reasonably low, especially in leisurely reading. From this research, I learnt that of the 2340 student participants aged 17-21 Read a print book in their spare time, 14% Read an e-book, 16% Read a magazine, 44% from a website, 5% from a novel and 1% Read a newspaper. As well (1) 1000 to as this, the researcher investigated what kind of format the participants enjoyed reading from most. They found that 44% enjoyed reading from a print book the most, 7% said they enjoyed reading from a computer the most and 49% said they enjoyed reading from their mobile phone. Furthermore, students in the study also stated how often they read. 38% said they read every day, 30% said they read 1-2 times per week, 16% said they read 2-3 times per week, 12% said they read 4-5 times per week and finally 4% said they didn't read at all. Finally, the students stated from which format they acquired information. 45.9% said they gained information from the Internet, 49.2 from various other sources and only 4.9 through book sources. This source helps me place my research question into the wider context of the research area by telling me what medium teenagers consume information from, allowing me to understand how technology has impacted how teenagers read. The source scores 13/15 using the CRAAP method because it was written on the 6th July 2021, so I therefore gave it a 2/3 for relevancy. Because it is a relatively recent source, it's content should be accurate as there has not been significant change technology-wise during the time since it was published. The source addresses my question and gives me useful information in that it specifies in the devices that teenagers read on, as well as how much they enjoy reading. Also, it studies the usage of technology in teenagers. Therefore, I can see whether there is any corelation between screen usage and reading. As well as this, it helps me prove my argument 'Teenagers are not reading less, they are just reading from different sources', as the source includes detailed information about the devices that teenagers read on. Due to these factors I have rated it 3/3 on relevance. The publisher, Universiti Teknologi Mara is a top university in Malaysia, and this source was reviewed by a few of the Professors from the university. (Prof. Dr. Ts. Mohamad Noorman Masrek and Prof. Dr.Kiran a/p Gurmit Singh) However, the researchers have no direct expertise in this topic. Because of these reasons, I have given the source a 2/3 for authority. The source is trustworthy in that all diagrams are labelled. Also, all methodology is provided, showing how these results were achieved. As well as this, the researcher cites all the research he used to further support his claims. I have therefore given the source a 3/3 for accuracy. Finally, the overall purpose of this source is to provide a claim that is supported by factual information gained from an accurate and reliable research method. This is a reliable source for academic work because it is a relatively new, factual, scholarly study done by a

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legitimate and prominent university. I have there for given it a 3/3 for purpose. (Yusof, developed 2021)

Discussion

Are Teenagers Reading Less Than They

Arguments in favour: 'Yes' because	Arguments against: 'No' because
Teenagers use technology so much that they don't have time to read	1) Musical development in the 1970s decreased reading habits of teenagers of the time.
 The distractibility of technology reduces teenagers' attention-spans, making reading more difficult. 	Teenagers are not reading less, they are just reading from different sources.
3) Audiobook usage has decreased reading habits of teenagers	3) Adolescent's reading habits depend on their exposure to literature in their home and school environment.

To answer my project question - 'Are teenagers reading less that they did fifty years ago' - I have considered a variety of for and against questions. My opinion is that reading rates have decreased, due to the level of accessible technology that is available to most teenagers, all the time. However, it must be acknowledged that the high usage of technology has had some positive impacts on reading rates.

Gaming is integral part of adolescents' lives, and this is shown in a gaming report from 2023. The report said that most common demographic for gamers in the UK is 12-15 years old owned a videogame console. (EMILY A. VOGELS, 2022) Also, according to the same survey, 95% of teenagers use Youtube, with one in five almost using it constantly. 16% use TikTok almost constantly and 54% say it would be too hard to give up social media. (Baker, 2023). Furthermore, in a Pew Research Centre survey, 80% of the 1,316 participants owned a videogame console. (EMILY A. VOGELS, 2022) Also, according to the same survey, for many teenagers. Therefore, with teens stating their, 'constant use' of social media, it seems as if reading would find it hard to compete with this pass-time. Also, in the journal Jama Paediatrics, the data they collected in 14-year-olds found that only 23% of them interacted with a screen for two hours or less. This seems to suggest that 77% of the participants were spending longer than this amount on screens. This usage of technology further reduces the likelihood of teenagers being able to fit reading into their already-busy

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schooling, sporting and gaming lives. However, as the surveys mentioned only record the technology-usage of teenagers, their reading habits are left to be worked out by inference based on the data.

Furthering the argument that reading has declined, research has found that the distractibility of technology usage has been associated with lowering attention-span, further reducing reading rates. Gloria Mark, a professor of informatics at the University of California, mentioned how the internet was designed to capitalize on the way humans think, creating the compulsion to respond to notifications (Ducharme, 2023). Therefore, reading does not have the same addictive aspects, making unable to compete with technology. Also, in a TedTalk by Tristan Harris, he stated that Snapchat, a popular social media app, was the number one used app for communication by teenagers. In the 1970s, you were not constantly connected to your peer group in this way, meaning you had to engage in solitary activities like reading for entertainment. (Harris, 2017). Furthermore, a research study found that using a screen for more than a day was associated with an inability to complete tasks. (Jean M Twenge, 2018). In summary, the distractibility of technology increases teenagers' usage of it, which in turn decreases their attention span. This effect makes reading books difficult.

Since the early 2000, audiobooks have gained much popularity due to advancements in technology (Verma, 2022). Due to the accessibility of technology mentioned in previous paragraphs, audiobooks have gained considerable traction. It has been found that young American tend to use audiobooks more than the older population. Also, a 22% increase in adolescent audiobook sales further indicate that teenagers are listening to audiobooks (Moore & Cahill, 2016). It was also found that nearly 40% of a study's 496 participants downloaded or accessed audiobooks at least once a week (Watson, 2022). It is evident that audiobooks are popular in teenagers, and that they may be a preferred alternative to reading text. Despite audiobooks first development being in 1932 (Verma, 2022), their surge in popularity came in the 2000s, so were not as readily available for teenagers of the 1970s. Therefore it can be inferred that the popularity of audiobooks have decreased the reading habits of teenagers today.

Contrary to the arguments above, the 1970s saw its own surge in alternative entertainment for young people. In the 1970s, pop music greatly increased in popularity across teenagers. Music advanced with the same momentum and excitement as online activities today. Webb, 1 Apr 2013). Simon Webb stated that music was a social glue for teenagers. Furthermore, in a survey conducted by Isaac Fowle, six out of seven respondents mentioned music as entertainment sources in their homes. (Fowle, 2023). This may suggest that teenagers in the 1970s were similarly excited in advancing technologies. Whilst it is not possible to conclude that this lead to a decline in their reading habits, it is possible to infer as such.

The technological impact on teenagers in our society has been shown to positively impact their reading habits. In our modernised world of gaming and streaming there is now a variety of ways to read without touching paper. A study exploring this topic found that of their 2340 participants, 44% read from an online website, 25% more than the 19% of participants who read from a print book in their spare time. Furthermore, about 45.9% of participants reported acquiring new information through the internet. (Yusof, 2024). This shows that teenagers are using the internet to read instead of books. This format of reading is preferable for a teenage demographic, as it caters for an infinite number of interests, with little effort from the reader, due to it being readily accessible. Moreover, people from the study cited above mentioned how often they read. 38% stated that they read daily. This signifies that reading is still a daily activity for many adolescents, just with their preferred

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online format. Furthermore, in the 1970s, online reading content was scarce and harder to access, making reading less accessible than it is today.

An adolescent's reading habits are heavily dependent on the exposure they had to reading at an early age Gottfried, 2015). It was found that the time that parents spent reading to a child between 15 and 60 months old had a positive and direct effect on their reading motivation in adolescence. Furthermore, teenagers with parents who participated in home literacy activities self-reported higher reading interests. In a study conducted by Isaac Fowle, all seven participants mentioned that their parents read, with five respondents stating that they read seven days a week as a teenager. (Fowle, 2023) Finally, there is a positive informational online reading behaviour. This means that teenagers who read from print well-engine that the implies the implies that the implies that the implies that the implies the implies the implies that the implies that the implies that the implies that teenagers who have experienced a high level of literacy exposure at home, especially at a young age, will still use technology to read, as well as game and stream TV shows. This means that technology's development has not impacted their reading habits, but potentially made them better. Looking at the school environments of teenagers, Ofsted managed a study into school's reading programmes. It found that, as teenagers' reading improved, they gained confidence and became more motivated to engage with reading Ofsted, 2022). Overall, the reading rates in teenagers are dependent on their home and school literacy environments. Changes in technology have impacted teenagers life styles, although those who have experienced literature from a young age will have developed reading habits before the influence of technology. Those without this exposure will have not gained those same reading habits.

Conclusion

In answer to the question 'Is reading a less common activity for teenagers than it was fifty years ago?', the following factors have swayed my decision. Evidence suggests that exposing young children to books at home and at school has a positive impact on literacy and reading habits. However, as discussed previously transfer to the question 'Is reading a less common activity for teenagers than it was fifty years ago?', the following factors have swayed my decision. Evidence suggests that exposing young children to books at home and at school has a positive impact on literacy and reading habits. However, as discussed previously transfer to the question 'Is reading a less common activity for teenagers than it was fifty technology to entertain them, so these early gains in reading may be being lost. Although musical advancements were an exciting distraction for teenagers in the 1970s, technology is far more intrusive, and has been designed specifically to gain our attention, therefore being the dominant factor in reducing adolescents' reading routines. Finally, the different sources available to read from do help in maintaining reading habits, but based on the research from this project, the preferred use of technology is gaming or social media. Also, audiobooks have disrupted the reading trends of teenagers, becoming a preferable medium for literature consumption. In conclusion, I believe that the reading habits of teenagers have decreased over the last fifty years.

> This Project could be extended by conducting further research into the actual reading habits of teenagers during the 1970s. A study piloted by Isaac Fowle investigated the reading frequency and entertainment options of once-teenagers of the 1970s. (Fowle, 2023) This could be extended by interviewing more people over the age of sixty-seven, as well as by carrying out a survey for teenagers. These interviews could include questions about their reading habits and what impacted them. This would allow for more statistical comparison between the reading trends of today's teenagers, and those of 1970. Furthermore, reports detailing how schools are impacting teenagers' reading rates would provide additional

detailed

information, assisting the argument of how literature environments impact reading habits. This would in turn allow for a more definite conclusion.

Evaluation

Whilst undertaking this Project, I have learnt a great deal about the factors impacting the reading habits of teenagers. I now have a better understanding of the technology usage of teenagers, how audiobooks have rapidly gained popularity, the ways technology was designed to manipulate our attention and the developments happening in the 1970s.

My original aims and objectives, as set out in Section 1 of my Project Proposal Form, were to explore whether reading rates have increased or decreased over the last fifty years, as well as what impact technology has had on it. I have managed to gather multiple influential factors that have an impact on the topic, although I still have not reached a definitive answer. In regards to my researching skills, I wanted to improve my ability to find specific information in an efficient way, then use this information effectively when writing my project. I believe that I have partially achieved these aims, as I have managed to develop my use of resources, such as Google scholar and JStore to find scholarly articles. When utilising this information, I think I have written my project relatively cohesively, using my research in an impactful way. However, I still believe that I need to build on my researching strategies. I could use other, non-digital, resources like libraries to find accurate information faster.

I have learnt a great deal about the research process whilst doing my project. In particular, I Skills have learn how to add citations to my project, assisting me in understanding how to write and structure an academic essay. Furthermore, I have improved my tone when writing my essay, ensuring that it is not story-like, but factual. Also, I have vastly improved my time management, scheduling and planning my sessions ahead of time. This has helped my get on top of the project, especially after being behind. When designing my research time, I believe that I spent far too long debating and deciding on the topic. For my end question, I think that it wasn't too open, and had clear researching boundaries. However it could have included mention of technology, as technology played a decisive role in coming to my conclusion for the question.

Whilst researching my question, there were some limitations to my methodology. At first, I only used Google and searched vague questions, hoping for a specific result. This made the process slow and inefficient. However, as my researching skills improved, I used Google Scholar and JStore to my advantage, which helped me find the specific, scholarly information that I wanted. This change instantly improved the research process, and is a technique that I will carry with me for future projects. Over the course of my project, my time management has also drastically improved. I now try to prioritise important things, setting timers to ensure put the required amount of effort into each section. When documenting my activities that I undertook throughout my project, I think that I was quite organised. I managed to write something the majority of the time after working on this project.

With hindsight, I should have chosen my research question faster. I spent four sessions researching for possible questions, wasting time that could've been spent researching for my actual question. Furthermore, I believe that the researching stage could've been conducted more efficiently. I rushed into the process, unaware of resources like Google scholar, and was not able to find sufficient information. If I had slowed down and used other

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techniques, the process would've been more productive. Also, when organising my research, this skill could've been improved. I placed all my information below a heading in separate categories, however I did not place links or citations with them. I did manage to overcome this problem, although this mistake could've been avoided by clearly citing and organising my data.

I have learnt skills such as using the citation tool on word, which will help me in the future because I will be able to write future academic essays. Also, I have learnt how to use Google Scholar and JStore to efficiently research. This will help me in the future when I need to find scholarly information for a project. When writing my dissertation, I have learnt how to use research to prove a point. I have managed to manipulate data to improve the persuasiveness of the paragraph. This will help meet in the future when I need to use research in a persuasive way.

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Well organised and chew bibliography

Questionnaire Findings:

Details of research primery research conducted.

The following images are the results of a range of questions in a survey conducted by Isaac Fowle when attempting to find how reading habits have changed over the last fifty years, and what has influenced these changes.

As teenager what at-home options did you have to entertain yourself? 7 responses

Listening to the radio, listening to music, reading, chatting to friends on the phone. Watching TV when we got one. Playing games with my brothers/parents, playing with my dog.

Radio TV Board Games

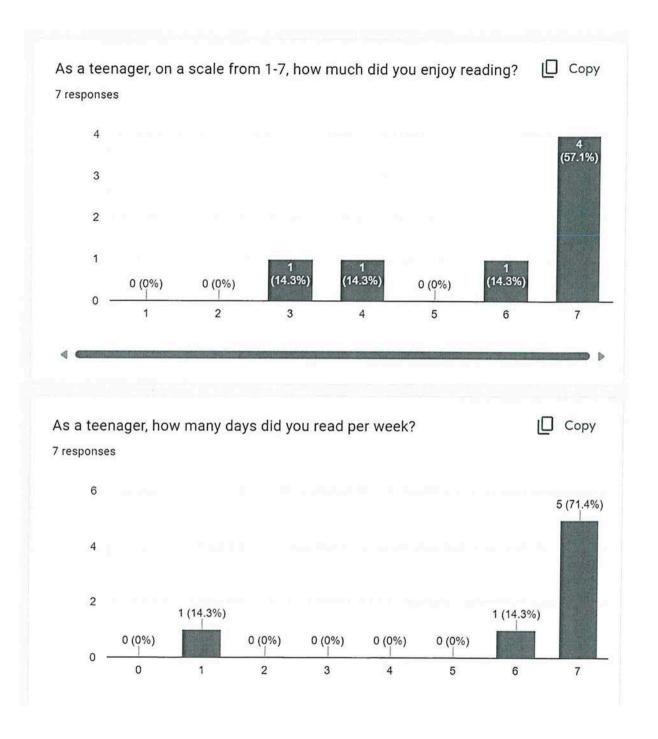
Radio, record player and (later) TV

TV.

swimming, reading, listening to music, drawing and painting.

we got a tv when I was about 14. Watched some things then. Reading singing and music generally

I lived in South Africa and we had to make our own entertainment. We played a lot of



What was your main source of motivation to read?

7 responses

I loved stories and we had no TV!

My father encouraged me to read. He read all kinds of books and in different langauages

Model airplane construction

Escapism and enjoying the fiction.

Because where I grew up in Africa there was no TV there was plenty of time to read, and if I had a book with me I was never bored or lonely.

To find out about other lives and cultures and to be transported into other worlds.

I recognised how important education was and knew I had to work harder than most of my peers to do well. We had encyclopaedias at home and I did a lot of research from them and at the town library for school projects. During the school holiday I read for pleasure. I was and still am a slow reader.

As a teenager, how hard did you find it to concentrate for long periods? 7 responses

Quite hard I was a daydreamer!

Not hard at all

Medium

no problem

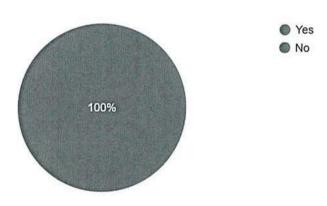
Not too hard.

not hard at all

I struggled to concentrate for longer than 20 minutes at a time.



7 responses



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