

MEDIA RELEASE
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Australian Reading Hour

Feeling stressed? Pick up a book
Research shows that reading can reduce stress levels by 68%

Thursday 20 September 2018
<http://www.readinghour.org.au/>

It comes as no surprise that reading books can be good for you, but did you know that reading can reduce stress more quickly than having a cup of tea?

According to a study from the University of Sussex ¹, reading can reduce stress by as much as 68% and it works faster than other relaxation methods such as listening to music, going for a walk or having a cup of tea.

The study also found that reading for even six minutes, was enough to reduce stress levels by two thirds. Psychologists explain that when you read, your mind is distracted and the tension in your muscles and the heart eases and stress levels reduce.

This is just one good reason to take some time out and pick up a book for Australian Reading Hour, an important annual campaign encouraging Australians of all ages to read for one hour, any time on Thursday 20 September 2018. The project has been assisted by the Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts and by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Minister for Communications and the Arts, said, "Australian Reading Hour is a welcome initiative to encourage people of all ages to engage with books and reading. Australia's literary canon includes classics in all genres and distinct new voices are reflecting contemporary life. Read to your children, read with your spouse, recommend books to your friends – and enjoy reading as a skill for life."

CEO of Hachette Australia and Chair of the Australian Reading Hour Committee, Louise Sherwin-Stark, says "Our day to day lives seem more frantic than ever. Taking an hour to read a book or read with the children in your life is an amazing way to step out of the churn, reconnect with stories and set your imagination free."

Copyright Agency CEO, Adam Suckling, says the entire books sector supports the Australian Reading Hour because reading informs, uplifts and entertains. “Reading can even be life changing. Many of us can readily recall a book that we’ve read that changed our lives by, for instance, helping us see the world differently, opening up new professional or personal pathways or by just being good fun and filling us with happiness.”

There are also many other good reasons to pick up a book. Neuropsychologist and author of *A Brain for Life* Dr Nicola Gates, says that reading is not only good for our brains, it also has huge psychological benefits such as;

Reading increases empathy

When we read about characters going through an experience, research shows the same regions of our brain light up as if we were experiencing the situation ourselves. Psychologists say that people who have high levels of empathy generally have larger social circles and report more satisfying relationships.

Reading contributes to healthy brain development in children

Research shows that up to 90% of a child’s brain development happens in the first five years. During this time, 700 new neural connections are formed every second.² Associate Professor Mike Piper, neuroscientist from the University of Queensland says, “The early years are when the brain grows at its fastest and positive interactions and experiences, such as reading to your child, all contribute to healthy brain development. Reading to your child is simple, and fun, and can help them to develop skills that will last them for a life time.”

Reading books help to decrease dementia risk

Dementia researchers in the United States³ spent around six years collecting information from 300 elderly people and their engagement in cognitive activities, such as reading and doing other similarly cognitively stimulating activities throughout their lives. They had a slower rate of cognitive decline compared with people who didn’t read.

So there are plenty of good reasons to pick up a book this Australian Reading Hour on 20 September.

The 2018 campaign of Australian Reading Hour will be officially launched at Parliament House in Canberra on Tuesday 18th September, with ambassadors Judy Nunn and Children’s Laureate Morris Gleitzman.

Queensland Transport Minister Mark Bailey said reading in transit was one of the joys of catching public transport.

“Reading a book while on a bus, train, ferry or tram is a simple pleasure that makes catching public transport enjoyable,” Mr Bailey said.

“Reading is good for our brains, creativity and gives us time to energise for the day ahead if we’re on our way to work or recharging and relaxing on the way home.

“I encourage people travelling on public transport to consider swapping your phone or mobile device for an old-school paperback.”

TransLink and Queensland Rail has helped promote the event and will hand out 1000 free books at busway and train stations across Brisbane.

Join an event

www.readinghour.org.au/events

There are over 80 library and bookstore events across the country, including Dame Quentin Bryce at Indooroopilly as a part of Brisbane Libraries *The Books That Made Me* series; Rachael Johns in Perth; Toni Tapp Coutts in Darwin; Rebekah Clarkson and Fiona Macintosh in Adelaide; Pip Williams at the Mostly Books Store in Adelaide; Stephen Dando-Collins at the Stories Bookshop in Launceston; and Garth Nix at Better Read Than Dead in Newtown just to name a few.

There's a major event at the Wheeler Centre for Morris Gleitzman with hundreds of children from local Melbourne schools. Books on the Rail will be hosting a romantic book club on a Melbourne train and the YA Room will be celebrating with three #LoveOzYA authors at Library at the Docks and Sydney Children's Hospital will have a visit from Matt Stanton.

Take the time to... Escape, Relax, Grow and Learn.

Make a pledge to read for one hour on Thursday 20 September and check out Better Reading's Top 100 Books, as voted by avid readers at www.readinghour.org.au

Background of Australian Reading Hour:

Australian Reading Hour is an extension of ALIA's Reading Hour event, which ran annually from 2012 to 2016 in public and school libraries, and is a cross industry promotion of Australian writers and books. The campaign is supported by: Australian Booksellers Association (ABA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA), the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), the Australian Publishers Association (APA), the Australian Literary Agent's Association, Better Reading, the Copyright Agency and has also been assisted by The Australian Government Department of Communication and The Arts.

References:

1. Lewis, D. (2009), *Galaxy Stress Research*, Mindlab International, Sussex University, UK
2. Centre on the Developing Child (2009). [Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development](#)
3. Robert S. Wilson, Patricia A. Boyle, Lei Yu, Lisa L. Barnes, Julie A. Schneider, David A. Bennett (2013) Life-span cognitive activity, neuropathologic burden, and cognitive aging
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