

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT)

Discussion, reflection and next steps for Women, Library Users, Everyone and Anyone...

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT) is a two-year project researching whether, what, where, how and why adults read aloud. Findings so far tell us that most adults read *something* out loud (and listen to others reading) at least *sometimes*. Very few people never do this. What we read aloud is diverse, including newspapers, social media, books, religious texts, graffiti, recipes, poems, instructions, posters, children's books and crossword clues. Our reasons are equally diverse, including to share, entertain, inform, help, be together, worship, enjoy, memorize, learn, understand and write. Some people read to other adults, some to children, some to pets and some people read aloud when completely alone. Some of this reading we notice; some we may do regularly but rarely notice. Some people read out loud in different languages, including languages we may not use in conversation with others. Forms of reading aloud are important in many workplaces, as well as within family and community relationships, for learning and as part of religious practice.

Points for reflection and action based on a discussion with the Story Café group at the Glasgow Women's Library in January 2019

Throughout our daily lives, we read aloud to

- *concentrate* or *focus* on complex text or instructions, including knitting patterns, translating words into actions
- *remember others* – one person reads aloud to remember her late husband, with whom she often read aloud
- *be with others* – as friends or family members, reading songs or poems, feeling love or affection for each other
- *learn* – some read aloud to learn, understand or memorize something, even recording our voices and listening back
- In *Story Café*, we take a step outside of our usual lives to get together to read, listen to someone else reading and talk about what has been read. In doing all this, we gain different understandings of the text and of each other's lives.

Other thoughts

- How we feel about reading aloud (and being read to) is very individual. Some like audiobooks and some don't. Some prefer listening to 'live' people reading rather than audiobooks or recordings. Some can concentrate better listening than when reading ourselves (aloud or silent). Others feel exactly the opposite and prefer to read things ourselves.
- Reading aloud should always be a choice, never a requirement or enforced.

- We have memories of reading out loud: sisters, friends, fathers, mothers, partners, spouses. These are memories of the texts, and of the voices, and of the time spent together.
- We can feel afraid of reading aloud, of getting it wrong, or being laughed at, but if we are able to read the text beforehand and/or if those listening are friends or friendly, then this anxiety goes away.
- We often enjoy listening to others reading out loud in languages we don't understand, for the beauty of the sounds.
- If we are reading aloud something that has lots of dialogue, we can find ourselves 'doing the voices' without realising it (and enjoying it...).
- Practice can help reading aloud, depending on the text or purpose.
- There is a relationship between our body positioning and our use of voice.
- Sometimes the layout on the page of a poem can encourage us to stand or sit in a certain way and then say the poem in a certain way. Reading aloud reminds us that reading is physical.

What do you think?

Thank you very much to everyone at the Glasgow Women's Library!

Sam Duncan, April 2019