

# Growing signs of ‘death of reading’

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*By candlelight:* A modern update to Dutch artist Matthias Stom's 1630 painting might show the young man scrolling on his phone, lit only by the white light of the screen.

**Could we live without books? The number of people who read for enjoyment is falling fast. Some think that one day we may no longer read at all.**

## What's happening?

For most of history, in most places around the world, most people could not read or write.

In 1800, just 12% of the planet could read. Today, only 14% *cannot* read. For historians, this is nothing short of a **miracle**.

However, **literacy** skills are now falling at a worrying rate. Some 20% of UK adults have reading skills at or below the level expected of a 10-year-old. Figures in the US are similar.

## Find out more

So what is the cause? Experts believe it is a drop in reading for pleasure. More than a third of adults say they no longer read for pleasure, while 15% report they have never done so.

This saddens many historians. They say it marks the death of a culture that valued learning.

And scientists fear that the collapse of reading masks a deeper problem. There are two reasons, they claim, why people are reading less.

The first is that people's attention spans are getting shorter thanks to social media. The second is the pace of everyday life, which leaves people tired and stressed.

But others say that there is no point in **mourning** the loss of the book. The means by which we learn and tell stories has always changed. Perhaps, they say, we are simply entering a new phase of cultural life. We can tell stories with TikToks and voicenotes now.

## Could we live without books?

### Some say

Yes! For most of human existence, we did not have books. For thousands of years people simply told stories and swapped important information in other ways. And with the internet, we no longer need books.

### Others think

No! Books are more than just a way of passing the time. They make us wiser and more understanding people. And they allow us to escape from the modern world of screens and notifications.

### Some people say

*"A room without books is like a body without a soul."*

**Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 BC), Roman statesman**

Empty heading

*What do you think?*

### Six steps to discovery

#### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Do you wish you spent more time reading?

#### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: Was social media a mistake?

#### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

#### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You are in charge of making sure students at your school read. How would you encourage everyone to read?

#### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - Get in a small group and work together to come up with a campaign to persuade people to read more books.

#### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - Write your own short story. How do you make it as interesting as possible?

### Glossary

**Miracle** - Something amazing or wonderful. It is a very unusual event.

**Literacy** - The ability to read and write.

**Mourning** - The expression of sorrow for someone's death.