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Alarming News from the NEA's Report "To Read or Not To Read"

By Leonard D. Chan

Have you read the National Endowment for the Arts' report "*To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence?*" If you're an average American, then the answer is probably no. But according to the report, it's not that surprising because Americans are not reading much of anything that is not school or work related.

So what is in this NEA report and why is it important? In brief, the report is a collection of statistical studies that show that Americans are reading less and less and that this trend correlates strongly with negative effects on individuals and society.

Here is a summary of the report.

Americans are reading less.

Young adults are reading fewer books in general.

Among all Americans, the percentage of people that read a book for reasons other than for work or school went down. In 1992 that number was 61% and by 2002 it was 57%. The percentage drop was even greater for adults between the ages of 18 to 24 - 59% in 1992 and 52% in 2002. If this rate of decrease were to continue for the next 45 years, then by 2052 only 28% of 18-24 year olds would choose to read a book each year.

Although the report did not explicitly follow individuals' reading patterns over time, the data also seems to indicate that people read fewer books as they get older. If this is indeed true, then the future of noncompulsory book reading seems very dim.

Reading is declining as an activity among teenagers.

One study by the US Department of Education (DOE) shows that teenagers are doing less leisure reading than teens from previous generations. The study categorizes students' leisure reading habits under five categories - almost every day, once or twice a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, and never or hardly ever. 35% of 13-year-olds from 1984 read almost every day and by 2004 that number was down to 30%. While that number was going down, the number of 13-year-olds in the never or hardly ever reads category went up from 8% to 13%.

For 17-year-olds the numbers are even more dismal.

Read almost every day: 1984 - 31%, 2004 - 22%

Never or hardly ever read: 1984 - 9%, 2004 - 19%.

Interesting enough, another study by the DOE shows that 17-year-olds are not doing more reading in school or for homework. The amount of pages read each day stayed approximately the same for 17-year-olds from 2004 with those from 1984.

College attendance no longer guarantees active reading habits.

One study of 2005 college freshmen shows that 85% of these students read less than two hours per week for pleasure. 86% of 2005 college seniors read less than two hours per week for pleasure.

Another study of college graduates also shows that literary reading has gone down among this group. In 1982, 82% of college graduates were literary readers. By 2002, only 67% from this group were literature readers.

Teens and young adults spend less time reading than people of other age groups.

A US Department of Labor 2006 study shows that people between the ages of 15 to 24 only spent 2.6% of their leisure time reading each week. All other age groups spent more time reading. The highest amount of time spent reading per week was done by people 65 year of age or older. People from this group spent 11.6% of their leisure time during the week reading and 14% during the weekend.

The average amount of time spent reading, by all Americans 15 years of age and older, was only 20 minutes per weekday and 26 minutes per weekend day. TV watching averaged 2:21 hours per weekday and 3:06 hours per weekend day.

A University of Michigan study from 2002-2003, done for children between 6-17 years of age, shows that only 1:17 hours are spent reading each week. TV watching was 14:36 hours per week.

This same study showed that children from progressively older age brackets spent less time reading - 9 to 11-year-olds spent 93 minutes per week reading, while 15 to 17-year-olds spent only 49 minutes.

Even when reading does occur, it competes with other media. This multi-tasking suggests less focused engagement with a text.

A Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation 2003-2004 report states that 58% of 7 to 12th grade students did other things while reading. 35% of total weekly reading time is spent multitasking. A New York Times' March 2007 article stated that recent studies showed that multitasking lead to some amount of inefficient use of time. Although more research is needed to prove this conclusion, the NEA's study believes that multitasking while reading does not appear to be beneficial to the overall reading experience.

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Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us at -
aacpinc@asianamericanbooks.com

Up Coming Events

Here are some events that AACP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
Jan 12 2pm	4th Annual Poetry In San Mateo Day A Beginning of the Year Poetry Celebration Featuring poets Genny Lim, Oscar Peñaranda, and Hiroshi Kashiwagi	SM Main Library San Mateo, CA
Jan. 19 8:30am-12:30pm	The Association of Chinese Teachers Lunar New Year Event	Alice Fong Yu Elem. School San Francisco, CA
Jan 27 1-5pm	Families with Children from China - N. CA 13th Between Two New Years Celebration!	Golden Gate Club SF Presidio San Francisco, CA
Feb. 5	Library Materials Fair Exhibit/Sale	SC County Office of Educ. Santa Clara, CA
Feb. 17 5:30pm	The 28th Annual San Jose Day of Remembrance 2008	Betsuin Bud. Church 640 N 5th St. San Jose, CA
Feb. 23	Day of Remembrance 2008	Merced, CA
Mar. 2 11am-5:30pm	Chinese New Year's Celebration	Stockton Civic Aud. 525 N. Center St. Stockton, CA
Mar. 7-9	California Council for the Social Studies Conference	Marriott Oakland City Center Oakland, CA
Other Event of Interest that AACP May Not Attend		
Jan. 26 2pm	Eddie Fung and Judy Yung presenting their new book <i>The Adventures of Eddie Fung</i>	SF Main Lib. San Francisco, CA
Feb. 2-24	Chinese New Year Celebration Events in SF	Chinatown San Francisco, CA
Feb. 23 5:30pm	Chinese New Year Parade	San Francisco, CA
Feb. 10 10am-6pm	11th Vietnamese Spring Festival & Parade Parade 11am-6pm	Parkside Hall 180 Park Ave. San Jose, CA
Feb. 16-17	Reading the World X	USF 2350 Turk Blvd. San Francisco, CA

Editor's Message

Seasons Greetings Everyone!

Wow, I can't believe another year has gone by. This has possibly been the busiest year for me at AACP. AACP attended and hosted close to 40 events this year. Included among these events was our wonderfully successful *San Mateo Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration* in May. We meet thousands of educators, librarians, and the general public at these events. We helped promote the reading and use of many outstanding books and media items among these people.

AACP published Grace Takahashi's novel "*To Breathe the Sky*" and are nearly finished with another wonderful book that will be out in early 2008. Stay tuned :).

Our website continues to get hundreds of thousand visitors each year and our newsletter enjoys your loyal readership.

As always, AACP could not have done all of this without the efforts of its dedicated volunteers and devoted donor investors. **It's not too late for you to join our cause.** We welcome your participation in our mission. This month's article highlights why you are needed. Instilling and promoting a reading culture requires all of you to start with yourselves. Read, read to others, share your thoughts about what you read, write, be a good example for your kids, students, and friends, and come along with us on our grand mission of making our communities a better place through education. We're doing it one word and one book at a time, and we'll get there with your help.

This year, AACP is trying out a new special contribution fund that will go back to educators at the California Council for the Social Studies (CCSS) conference in March 2008. For every ten dollars donated, we will give a visitor to our booth at the conference, one \$10 voucher towards the purchase of a book. We have from now until March 7 to raise as much money as possible for this fund. Please help make this campaign successful with your generous investment to our educational community.

Please go to the following link to either contribute to our general fund or to our special CCSS fund.

<https://aacpinc-best.securesites.com/secure/dform.htm>

Before I go, here is a big thank you for our volunteer newsletter staff and volunteers at AACP. Thank you very much Philip Chin and Sophie Wong for all of your help. You out there - I'd like to include your names here next year. So please help us by volunteering.

Thank you to all of you that did interviews with us. Thank you to all of the authors and publishers that have sent us your books for review. I'm sorry that I didn't get to all of your books. Thank you to all the authors that did book signings with us. Most of all, thank you to all the AACP newsletter readers out there.

Don't forget everyone, write a poem on New Year's day and share it with us. Come and read it at our poetry event on January 12th, 2pm at the San Mateo Main Library or email it to me and I'll share it with the attendees of our event and with our newsletter readers.

Peace, love, joy, and good health to all of you!

Leonard Chan
Executive Editor

To Read or Not To Read

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American families are spending less on books than at almost any other time in the past two decades.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey, conducted for the Bureau of

Labor Statistics, shows that consumer's average yearly spending for books (adjusted for inflation) has dropped by 14% from 1985 to 2005. Likewise, the Book Industry Study Group's report shows that the number of books sold has gone down by 100 million books between the years of 2000 to 2006.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports that the average annual spending on reading materials has gone from 10.1% of total spending in 1995 down to 5.3% in 2005. During that same period, spending on TV and audio equipment has gone from 33.6% to 37.2%.

Newspaper reading and revenues are also dipping to new lows each year. One study states that in 1972 46% of college age Americans read a newspaper every day. Today, it's only 21%.

Americans are reading less well.

Reading scores for 17-year-olds are down.

Although reading scores have gradually trended up for 9-year-olds since 1990, 17-year-olds' scores continue to go down during that same period.

Among high school seniors, the average score has declined for virtually all levels of reading.

On another test conducted by the DOE, 12th graders' reading scores are also declining. The test defines anyone scoring above 301 out of 500 as being a proficient reader. In 1992, 40% of the 12th graders taking the test were proficient. By 2005, only 35% were proficient. A closer analysis of the 12th graders taking the test shows that the bottom 10% of the test takers had an average score of 249 in 1992. By 2005, this group had an average score of 235. The test takers in the top 10% had the same test scores in 2005 as they did in 1992. Thus, bad readers are reading worse and those at the top are just staying even.

Also interesting were the results for the 4th and 8th graders - their reading scores stayed relatively even to a slight improvement between 1992 and 2005. These test scores correlate well with the reading habit studies that showed younger kids reading more than older kids.

Reading proficiency rates are stagnant or declining in adults of both genders and all education levels.

The DOE conducted a reading test for adults called the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). Of the four categories in which test takers fell (below basic, basic, intermediate, and proficient), those that were deemed proficient went from 15% in 1992 down to 13% in 2003. People from every educational level obtained, dropped from their 1992 scores. Those that had the most education, the college graduates and postgraduates, showed the largest drop in reading scores. Bachelor's degree holders had an average score of 325 in 1992 and 314 in 2003. Graduate study and or graduate degree holders went from 340 in 1992 down to 327 in 2003.

The number of adults that had proficient level scores dropped from 1992 to 2003. Once again, the most educated had the biggest drop in numbers. The percentage of college graduates with proficient scores went from 40% down to 31%. Those with graduate degrees or some graduate level study fell from 51% down to 41%.

Also noteworthy - men's scores fell among proficient readers while women proficient readers stayed the same.

Reading for pleasure correlates strongly with academic achievement.

The DOE tests show a strong correlation between how often kids read for fun and their test scores. Those that read every day for fun had the highest test scores while those that hardly ever or never read had the lowest reading test scores.

The test scores also show that reading for fun correlates with writing scores. Once again, those that read often had better writing scores.

Another interesting correlation is between the number of books in a household and the children's science, math, civics, and history test scores - the more books in a household the higher the test scores. The study shows that the number of books in a household may even be more important than the amount of education obtained by the parent's of the tested children. For example, children with college graduate parents that only had 10 or fewer books in the household scored worse than children with non-college graduate parents that had 26 or more books in a household.

The declines in reading have civic, social, and economic implications.

The following points from the NEA's report are pretty much self explanatory. The declines in reading have negative consequences to our society.

1. Employers now rank reading and writing as top deficiencies in new hires.
2. Good readers generally have more financially rewarding jobs.
3. Less advanced readers report fewer opportunities for career growth.
4. Good readers play a crucial role in enriching our cultural and civic life.
5. Good readers make good citizens.
6. Deficient readers are far more likely than skilled readers to be high school dropouts.
7. Deficient readers are more likely than skilled readers to be out of the workforce.
8. Poor reading skills are endemic in the prison population.

Conclusions of the Report

The NEA's own conclusions state that more studies must be done to prove the causal effect between volunteer/leisure reading and reading achievement. Correlation between reading habits and reading performance does not mean that one thing is the reason for the other, but one can make that logical inference from this report.

Reading is important and each day we have the choice to read or not to read. Choose to read.

For More Information

- **National Endowment for the Arts' web page for this report**
<http://www.nea.gov/news/news07/TRNR.html>
- **National Endowment for the Arts' executive summary**
http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead_ExecSum.pdf
- **National Endowment for the Arts' full report**
<http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>
- **National Public Radio's Talk of the Nation show on this report**
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16739654>

ADDITIONS TO OUR WEBSITE

The following books are discounted for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end January 1, 2008.

	<p>The Adventures of Eddie Fung Chinatown Kid, Texas Cowboy, Prisoner of War</p> <p>By Eddie Fung Edited by Judy Yung 2007, 227 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>The Adventures of Eddie Fung is a fascinating autobiography about a person that experienced life in San Francisco's Chinatown during the depression, the real hard life of a Texas cowboy, and the unimaginably grueling life of a World War II POW building the infamous Burma-Siam railroad (the same railway made famous by the movie Bridge on the River Kwai). Learn how Eddie Fung's early life helped prepare him to survive one of World War II's most brutal chapters.</p> <p>Item #3485, Normally \$22.50 ... for newsletter subscribers \$18.00</p>
	<p>Our Seasons</p> <p>By Grace Lin and Ranida T. McKneally Illustrated by Grace Lin 2006, 32 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Another not-to-be-missed work by Grace Lin... Children, ages 4 - 8, will definitely appreciate this poetically written, vividly illustrated, and facts-based book celebrating our four seasons!</p> <p>Item #3484, Normally \$16.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$13.56</p>
	<p>The North Pole Is Sinking! A tale about global warming</p> <p>By Ethan Khiem Matsuda and Michael Matsuda Illustrated by Vanessa Lam 2005, 28 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>When Santa's North Pole toy factory begins to sink into the Arctic Ocean, he goes south to investigate why the ice is melting. While choking on the smog in California, Santa meets up with a boy named Ethan. Will Ethan and his friends be able to help Santa? Are they too late to stop global warming? Read this imaginative story, written by a real boy named Ethan, to find out.</p> <p>Item #3483, Normally \$9.99 ... for newsletter subscribers \$7.99</p>
	<p>Christmas Carols Let's All Sing!</p> <p>Illustrated by Grace Lin 2005, 60 Total Pages, 3 Board Books and an Audio CD.</p> <p>Christmas Carols: Let's All Sing! is a wonderful box set of three card books and a music CD. Each book contains the lyrics to a Christmas carol and is illustrated by prolific children's author Grace Lin. The carols in this set include, Silent Night, Away in a Manger, and Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.</p> <p>Item #3486, Normally \$12.99 ... for newsletter subscribers \$10.39</p>
	<p>Gecko's Complaint A Balinese Folktale</p> <p>By Retold by Ann Martin Bowler Illustrated by I Gusti Made Sukanada 2003, 32 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Can PEACE ever be restored to the jungle...or the world? Youngsters will ponder while being drawn to this beautifully illustrated picture book on a problem-solving Balinese fable!</p> <p>Item #3487, Normally \$12.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$10.36</p>