



FACTSHEET

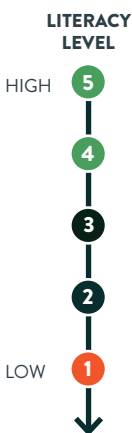
Why Literacy Matters for Youth in Ontario: Five Benefits of Strong **Literacy** Skills

“Literacy is more than just reading and writing. It’s the foundation upon which we learn and grow. Building literacy skills in children is one of the most effective ways to ensure they can achieve their full potential in school and throughout life.”

– Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation ¹

This factsheet summarizes five ways in which strong literacy skills can support positive outcomes for children, youth, and adults in Ontario.

Researchers often assess literacy skills across six levels of proficiency: from below Level 1 to Level 5. Scoring at Level 1 or below indicates **poor literacy skills**, while Levels 4 and 5 indicate **high literacy skills**. Level 3 is considered the minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life.



01. Children who read proficiently are more likely to be successful in school.

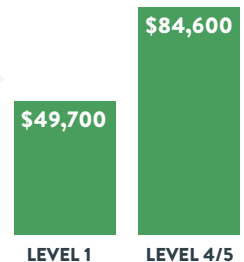
Research suggests that Grade 3 reading proficiency is especially important, as this is the last year in which students are learning to read before they begin reading to learn.² Children with below-grade reading proficiency in Grade 3 tend to have more behavioural and social problems in later grades, and 3 in 4 will remain poor readers in high school.²

Compared to proficient readers, children who are not reading proficiently by the end of Grade 3 are **four times** less likely to graduate high school on time.³



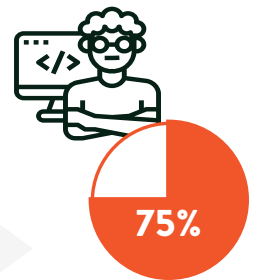
02. Youth and adults with high literacy skills are more likely to experience economic security.

As literacy skill level increases, so does median household income: Canadians with high literacy skills earn **1.7 times** more than those with low literacy skills.⁴



High literacy skills are essential in today’s economy, and advanced competencies, such as digital and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) skills, are also becoming increasingly important.⁵

According to Statistics Canada, **75%** of all new jobs created in the next decade are projected to be in high-skilled occupations (management, and occupations that require a post-secondary education).⁶



03. High literacy skills are associated with improved health outcomes.

Compared to Canadians with high literacy skills, Canadians with low literacy skills are **more than twice** as likely to report fair or poor health.⁷



Recreational reading is particularly impactful on mental health: among young people, it has been linked to improvements in imagination, focus and flow, relaxation, and mood regulation⁸; for adults, it is associated with lower levels of stress, and research suggests that it can also reduce symptoms of depression.⁸

04. Literacy can contribute to a sense of belonging and foster community engagement.

Compared to Canadians with high literacy skills, those with low literacy skills are:

- » **more than twice** as likely to report low levels of political efficacy,
- » **more than three times** as likely to report non-participation in volunteer activities, and
- » **two times** as likely to report low levels of trust.⁷

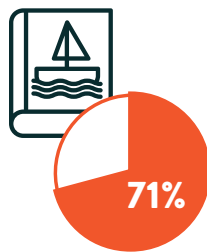
Recreational reading is associated with a greater sense of community, a stronger feeling of social inclusion, and an increased understanding of other people's social identities, political perspectives, and worldviews.⁸

05. Reading expands young people's sense of possibility.

Books can serve as “windows” into the lives of others, “mirrors” that affirm our own lived experience, and “doors” to new possibilities.⁹ When we develop young people's literacy skills and share stories in which young people see themselves reflected, we provide them with the tools to imagine, pursue, and achieve deeply meaningful, joyful, and expansive futures.

We must be diligent and intentional about this work, because research suggests that diverse characters are still in the minority.

71% of children's and young adult books published in the United States in 2019 were about white or non-human characters.¹⁰



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