

ADVANCING LITERACY WITH LARGE PRINT

RESULTS FROM A NATIONWIDE STUDY ABOUT THE
EFFICACY OF LARGE PRINT BOOKS ON STUDENT
READING SKILLS AND MINDSETS

WHEN LITERACY MEETS LARGE PRINT

Rather than a catalyst for lifelong learning, reading can represent a challenging and demoralizing school experience for many of our nation's students. According to the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing, **almost two-thirds of 4th and 8th grade students in our schools are reading at a basic or below basic level.**¹ NAEP guidelines define the basic level as a partial mastery of fundamental skills, while the higher proficient level in reading is marked by solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. Given the low level of reading mastery overall, it's not surprising that many students say they don't enjoy reading for schoolwork. Strong reading comprehension skills are essential for student success. If students don't feel comfortable reading in elementary and middle school, not only will they not develop lifelong reading habits, they won't be well prepared for high school-level work or the intensive academic and workplace reading that comes after.

This situation is especially acute for *striving readers*. Striving readers are students who may be unmotivated or perceive reading as having little value for them. They may lack visual acuity, vocabulary, or comprehension skills. Striving readers can also include those for whom English is a second language, have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), or have a learning disability like dyslexia. Besides obvious academic obstacles, striving readers face emotional and social issues. Research indicates that low achievement in reading correlates with increased referrals for school discipline and higher incidences of poor school attendance, dropping out of school, and even juvenile crime.

National thought leaders on reading instruction affirm that if a student is not intrinsically motivated to read and not engaged in what they are reading, their teacher's explicit skill-based instruction around reading is unproductive.² It is therefore critical that educators find new ways to make reading more meaningful for students by leveraging the power of context and comfort in the reading process to increase student engagement, elevate reading comprehension, and support the development of lifelong reading habits.

With that goal in mind, Thorndike Press, from Gale, a Cengage company, partnered with Project Tomorrow[®] to design and implement a new nationwide study to investigate the impact of students reading large print-formatted books on their reading engagement and achievement levels. The large print format, as supported by the Thorndike Press titles, encompasses several key characteristics, including larger font size than standard edition books; enhanced spacing between letters, words, and sentences; clearer contrast between text and the background color of the page; and fewer words and lines per page within the books. A text excerpt is provided on page 7 to illustrate these characteristics.

While the large print format has a strong legacy of supporting increased reading engagement and proficiency for adults, most notably those with visual challenges, **this study is on the role of large print text with children and youth.** It is our hope that the report findings will provide school and district leaders as well as classroom educators with new insights into the role of large print text as a tool to support students' reading development.

THE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

This report documents the key findings of the study, which included the participation of elementary, middle, and high school students; teachers; and librarians from 15 schools nationwide. The selection of schools for the study was specifically focused on student and community diversity. Ten of the 15 schools in the study have student populations that are over 50% African American and/or Hispanic. All 15 of the schools qualify as Title 1 schools, an indicator of home poverty. Within the study cohort, nine of the schools are located in urban communities, four are in suburban towns, and two are in rural areas.

“Two things made this particular study so significant. First, the enthusiasm of the students and teachers for large print was unparalleled. And then second, the academic results of the study indicate that this is a very viable literacy intervention resource that everyone should investigate more fully.”

—Dr. Julie A. Evans, Ed.D., Chief Executive Officer, Project Tomorrow

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In each school, students had access to a variety of large print titles provided by Thorndike Press to use within regular classroom reading activities. The titles provided were popular, age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction titles, including *The Outsiders*, *I Am Malala*, *Salt to the Sea*, and *Hatchet*. Teachers incorporated the large print titles into regular instructional practices, such as literature circles, book clubs, read alouds in class, student self-paced reading, and guided reading methodologies. Student and teacher experiences, along with their valuations on those experiences, were captured through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

A comparative analysis was conducted evaluating the perspectives of students who read a large print text with the views of students who read the same book in standard print. Student achievement outcomes were also examined to understand the impact of the large print modality on reading comprehension. In total, 1,696 students in grades 3–12 and 56 teachers and librarians participated in this large-scale study.

“I liked that the larger size font seemed much more interesting. When you look at a billboard the first thing you see is the larger print. When you look at a book that has all large print it seems like it’s calling to you.”

—8th grade student, Young Women’s Leadership Academy (TX)

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

STUDENTS

Felt positive change in their perception of reading Students reported a 43% reduction in feelings of anxiety about reading when using the large print format.

Grew in personal self-efficacy Compared to other reading experiences, nearly 60% of students in grades 6–8 said they were better able to stay focused and did not lose their place due to distractions when reading large print.

Wanted greater access to large print books 54% of students in grades 3–12 in the study said that school reading experiences would be more enjoyable if all books were large print.

TEACHERS

Attributed large print as helping to develop stronger reading skills 3 in 4 of teachers said students reading below grade level demonstrated increased reading comprehension and better retention with the large print books.

Developed an expanded perception on how various striving readers can benefit from large print As a result of exposure to large print, 4 in 5 teachers said large print would benefit their students who have trouble tracking when reading or lack self-confidence in their reading abilities.

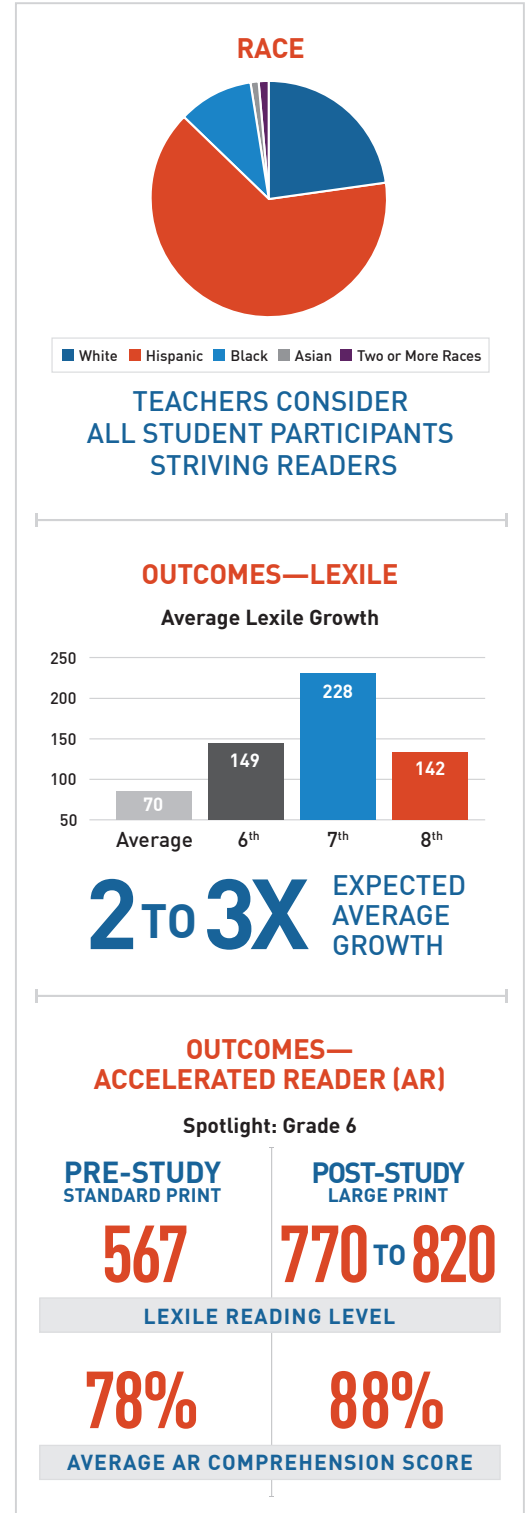
Recommended and will continue using large print 95% of teachers said they’re likely to use large print text in the upcoming school year with their students.

OUTCOMES

Improved reading mindsets 69% of striving readers said they enjoyed reading the large print text more than any other class books during the school year. Only 20% of striving readers who read the standard print edition of the identical title said the same.

Increased Lexile levels and comprehension scores One school with access to large print text increased their Lexile reading levels by 2–3 times the average recommended growth for middle school students. Learn more in the Snapshot on the right.

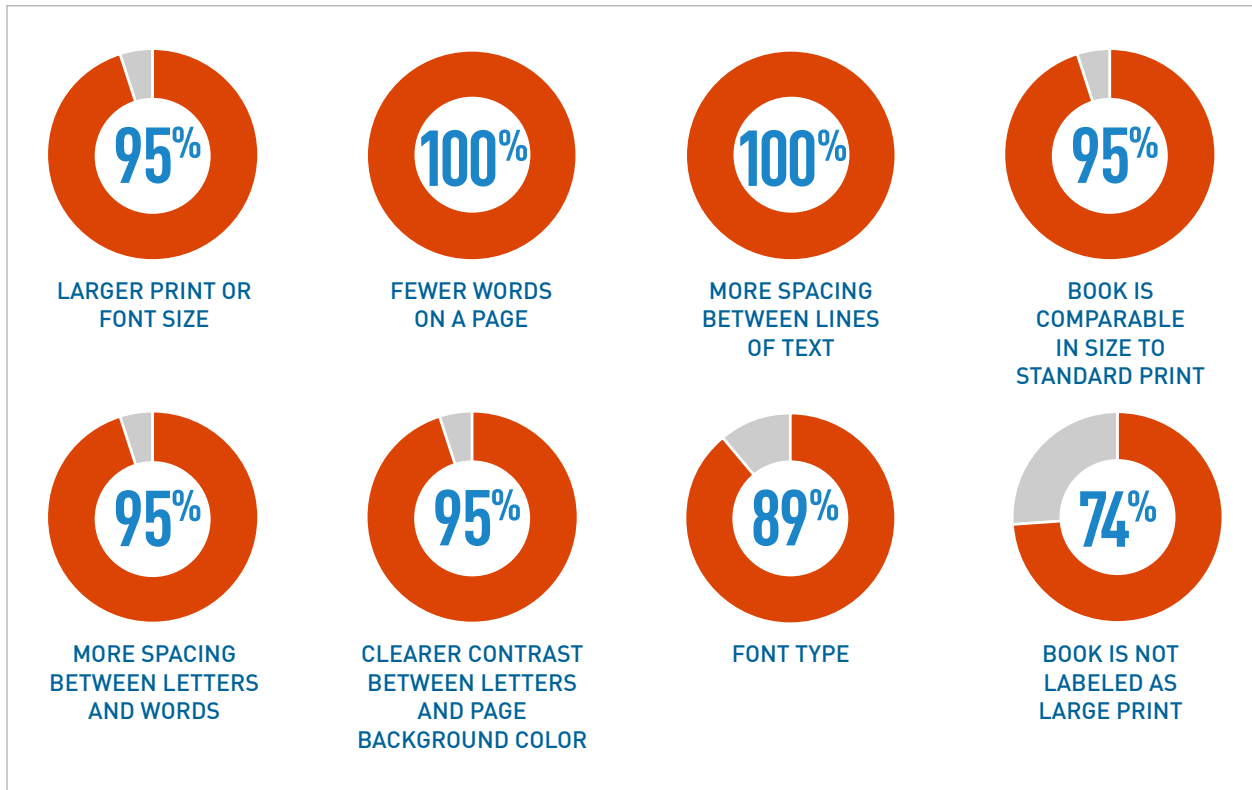
SNAPSHOT URBAN TX MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES 6, 7, AND 8



66 I really liked the large print because it was less intimidating for my students to read books with less words on each page and more space between the words. They liked reading books that are popular as well.”

—Reading Intervention Teacher, West Feliciana Middle School (LA)

After using the Thorndike Press large print titles in their classroom, the teachers in this study **identified the following features as important for changing students’ reading skills and mindsets:**



66 The title of the book that I was reading was *The Sun Is Also a Star*. It had unusually large print, but this made it much easier to read. I think that the best thing about reading books with large text is that it makes it easier to focus and not lose your spot. Losing spots when reading can make it not fun for the reader, or even difficult. I think that we should have more books with bigger text because they are simply much more enjoyable.”

—10th grade student, O’Fallon Township High School (IL)

Ending Thoughts

It's increasingly necessary for students to develop strong reading comprehension skills to be prepared for today's reading intensive academic environment and workplace. Despite this, too many of our nation's students continue to lag in reading proficiency due to a variety of factors, including lack of motivation to read, weaknesses in vocabulary and decoding skills, learning differences, disabilities, or visual acuity issues. This situation is further compounded for students for whom English is not their first language. Educators are determined to find new ways to make reading more meaningful for students by leveraging the power of context and comfort in the reading process to increase student engagement, elevate reading comprehension, and support the development of lifelong reading habits.

The findings described in this report validate several important conclusions:

- Reading large print text is a valuable literacy intervention resource for all types of learners, striving readers, and readers on grade level.
- Having access to large print books not only improves students' reading comprehension levels, but the experience also changes students' mindsets about their own reading capabilities and notably, increases the confidence levels of striving readers.
- Including large print books in classroom collections as well as in libraries provides a more equitable and comprehensive offering to young readers learning to read, struggling to read at grade level, or simply reluctant.
- Increasing student access to large print books is a low-cost, easy-to-implement literacy solution that does not require changes to instructional plans or special training, as noted by several teachers who participated in the study.
- Teachers and students alike value the large print reading experience and believe in its potential as a literacy intervention resource to impact the outcome so desired by education leaders today: improved reading comprehension by all students as a result of enhanced student engagement in reading and a more comfortable reading environment for every student.

ABOUT LARGE PRINT BOOKS FROM THORNDIKE PRESS

SUBTLE DIFFERENCES, BIG ADVANTAGES

See the difference with this font comparison. Thorndike Press books are completely unabridged and printed on high-opacity paper, keeping them similar in size to the standard print edition.

THORNDIKE PRESS 16-POINT FONT

HIGH-CONTRAST BLACK INK

1/3 MORE LINE SPACING

EXPANDED SPACING BETWEEN WORDS

STANDARD PUBLISHING TYPEFACE

Tom presented himself before Aunt Polly, who was sitting by an open window in a pleasant rearward apartment which was bed-room, breakfast-room, dining-room, and library combined. The balmy summer air, the restful quiet, the odour of the flowers, and the drowsing murmur of the bees had had their effect, and she was nodding over

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Book excerpt from The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Books are similar in size and weight to the standard print edition, and library processing is offered. All hardcovers are library bound and have a 100% guarantee on binding.

Produced with the same cover art and illustrations as the original edition, Thorndike Press books do not feature the words “Large Print” on the outside of the book.



Book spine comparison

Standard print book is pictured on the left; the large print version is on the right.



Original Edition

Large Print Edition

ABOUT PROJECT TOMORROW

The mission of Project Tomorrow®, a national education nonprofit organization, is to ensure that all students are well prepared to become tomorrow's leaders, innovators, and engaged citizens of the world. For the past 15 years, the organization has focused efforts on national research projects and the design and implementation of evaluation, efficacy, and feedback studies examining the impact of innovative learning models in the classroom. Learn more about our research activities, including our globally recognized Speak Up Research Project at tomorrow.org.

ABOUT THORNDIKE PRESS, FROM GALE, A CENGAGE COMPANY

As the world's leading large print publisher, Thorndike Press helps readers of all ages enjoy books. Publishing unabridged reprints in large print format for middle grade and young adult readers started in 1999, and our catalog of nearly 400 titles grows monthly with high-interest fiction and nonfiction books, including contemporary classics, award winners, and bestsellers. Our commitment to producing high-quality, 100% guaranteed large print books supports young readers as they develop the skills necessary to become successful, confident, lifelong readers.



Browse titles or read the full white paper at
gale.com/literacystudy

1. National Assessment of Educational Progress. The Nation's Report Card 2017 (July 2019), accessed July 15, 2019.
2. McFarland, J. et al., The Condition of Education 2019, (National Center for Education Statistics, May 2019); "Classroom Practices on Reading Comprehension, Engagement, and Motivations for Adolescents," Reading Research Quarterly 49, no. 4, 387-416; Ivey, Gay, "The Social Side of Engaged Reading for Young Adolescents," The Reading Teacher 68, no. 3 (2014): 165-171.