

Reading fiction 'improves empathy', study finds

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The Guardian:

Burying your head in a novel isn't just a way to escape the world: psychologists are increasingly finding that reading can affect our personalities. A trip into the world of Stephenie Meyer, for example, actually makes us feel like vampires.

Researchers from the University at Buffalo gave 140 undergraduates passages from either Meyer's *Twilight* or JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to read, with the vampire group delving into an extract in which Edward Cullen tells his teenage love interest Bella what it is like to be a vampire, and the wizardly readers getting a section in which Harry and his cohorts are "sorted" into Hogwarts houses.

The candidates then went through a series of tests, in which they categorised "me" words (myself, mine) and "wizard" words (wand, broomstick, spells, potions) by pressing one key when they appeared on the screen, and "not me" words (they, theirs) and "vampire" words (blood, undead, fangs, bitten) by pressing another key, with the test then reversed. The study's authors, Dr Shira Gabriel and Ariana Young, expected them to respond more quickly to the "me" words when they were linked to the book they had just read.

Gabriel and Young then applied what they dubbed the *Twilight/Harry Potter Narrative Collective Assimilation Scale*, which saw the students asked questions designed to measure their identification with the worlds they had been reading about – including "How long could you go without sleep?", "How sharp are your teeth?" and "Do you think, if you tried really hard, you might be able to make an object move just using the power of your mind?" Their moods, life satisfaction, and absorption into the stories were then measured.

Read the whole story: [The Guardian](#)