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## What You Read: Issues, Trends and Potential Solutions to Cultivate Reading Habits

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### Abstract

*It is rightly said that, while children are the future of the country, youth are its present. The present paper highlights the importance of reading and different types of reading. Realising the pivotal role of reading in personal and academic achievement, reading habit is described as a link between students and teachers which need to be cultivated. The development of lifelong reading interests and reading habits is a process which begins at home and nurtured in the school. The role of the teachers, the role of the parents, school libraries and school librarians is also discussed along-with different library- related activities as they play a vital role in this regard. NCAER (National Council of Applied Economic Research)- 2009 statistics provided in the paper make the author very much optimistic about the increase in reading habit in future if the teachers, parents and school librarians join hands together. Schools and homes need to ensure that, they tap into the richness of children's literature in order to hook boys and girls into reading habit. Children need to be engaged in reading to create a nation of lifelong enthusiastic readers. The child should learn to be inquisitive. The author emphasises on the development of a national policy which can empower the school libraries and school librarians*

### Keywords

Reading; Reading habit; Life-long reading; School libraries; NCAER

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man and writing an exact man” — Francis Bacon”

Reading is one of the most ancient means of bringing knowledge and culture within the reach of the people. It helps in enriching the knowledge of an individual in the society as it increases more intellectually motivated interactions as the primary source of acquiring the knowledge. The cultivation of regular reading habit helps in achieving intellectual development which is an important factor of personal and social development. Reading creates an important place in the intellectual and social life of an individual. The fundamental requirement of one's career prospect is “Reading”. Education loses its purpose and value, if reading is not one of the daily programmes of an individual. Reading is a complex cognitive process. It is a means of language acquisition, communication and of sharing information and ideas.

In the present day context, growth or decline of reading habits has become a social phenomenon than individual pursuit. Now, the human life as well as the world is fragmented. In such a fragmented world and fragmented lives, the biggest challenge comes to the reading material and reading habits. Society and books are very much linked to each other. Reading materials are the creative output of the human being. The publications are considered as the mirror of the society. The reading materials play a major role in changing the present day society. The human being can change drastically and that's a reason we can be optimistic to see in changing society with much importance to the Reading habit.

### 1.1 NCAER Statistics on Reading

Major findings of National Youth Readership survey-2009 conducted by NCAER on demographic profile of youth, their exposure to mass media, their attitudes towards reading habits and luring youth into reading are as follows in brief, which are the extracts from the report.

- The youth population is 38% which is expected to reach 574 million by 2020.
- The population of literate youth is 27.4%.
- The average age of Indian Youth to complete their higher education is 15 years.

- d) Among the literate youth 41% belong to the age group of 25-30 years which is the primary work-force of the country.
- e) Of all the literate youth only 10% are graduates.
- f) TV remains the most popular source of information for the youth followed by newspaper. 63% read newspaper for current affairs whereas only 10% read for entertainment
- g) Readership of books, newspapers and magazines increases with rising level of education but decreases with increasing age. The proportion of those reading books during leisure time declines with increasing age groups.
- h) Youth belonging to the joint families, staying in hostels read more than those stay in nuclear families.
- i) Readership is also significantly higher among youth with salaried/retired parents.
- j) 25% of literate youth read books for pleasure, relaxation and knowledge enhancement. Reading habit is more among the younger generations. Youth readers prefer reading leisure books mostly on holidays. Only 4% read on working days. 75% read at least once a week, while 26.4% read daily. About 39% youth are members of the public libraries, 3% of the literate youth visit book promotion programmes.
- k) The four important reasons for not reading enough are:
  - i. Lack of interest,
  - ii. Lack of time to read ,
  - iii. Advent of new channels of information,
  - iv. Lack of availability of books at affordable prices.
- l) Schools have emerged as the hotbed of readership development. 59% initiated into reading from school whereas 20% learnt from the parents. The overall percent of teacher encouragement to inculcate reading habit is 27%
- m) During the survey on luring the youth into reading it was concluded with three suggestions (a) Motivation and encouragement (b) Compulsory leisure reading in schools (c) Easy access to libraries

Going through the above statistics and findings, it is felt that the Indian youth need general awareness on reading through motivation and inspiration.

## 2. READING HABIT

Reading is not just an important professional skill. It is also a way to enjoy informative, creative and

inspiring works of literature. "Reading is to mind what exercise is to body" — Richard Steele (1672-1729). To understand what is going on the world today requires knowledge that can be found through reading materials. Books are the quickest and constant friends. They are easily accessible and the best counsellors. Reading is necessary for one to live well and let others live well. Books have long been an intellectual's best friend and as long as scholars roam the earth, books will keep them good company. It is said that, today, the youth have more challenges on mind and more deadlines to meet. Every minute has become precious especially for the youth. The beauties of reading are a faraway dream for the career-centric, goal oriented generation of today. The importance of time has become so valuable that, one does not even wait for morning newspaper to catch up with the details of events happening around the world. The growth, development and plurality of internet have also added another dimension to reading habits. The access to internet has raised the bar over media all over the world. In order to develop reading habit, one has to improve reading skills. In order to improve reading skills, one has to read for content, search for unfamiliar words, reading for learning and enjoyment is never a sprint. One has to keep the reading material handy for which one has to go to the library. It is easier to grow reading skills if one makes reading skills part of daily life. Word of the month is often a useful tool to direct our reading choices. Book swapping is also a good means of reading. Reading can be converted to a life-long commitment.

### 2.1 Types of Reading

It is already pointed out that; social factor is one of the major factors affecting the reading habits. But there are other factors too. Basically, reading habit is a mental process which is developed and indeed influenced by the individual's family and social environment, his/her level of education, needs and aspirations and availability of resources. We come across various types of reading as follows:

- Life-long reading
- Reading for pleasure
- Reading for information
- Reading for knowledge
- Casual reading
- Daily reading

**2.1.1 Life-long reading:** Every person, at every stage of their life has life-long learning opportunities

to acquire knowledge and skills. Learning is a lifelong process. Lifelong learning is “it’s never too soon or too late for learning”. Lifelong learning allows citizens with learning opportunities at all ages and in numerous contexts at work, home and through leisure activities, not just through normal channels such as schools and higher education. It is a form of pedagogy often accomplished through distance learning or e-learning or continuing education. Lifelong learning is incomplete without lifelong reading. Reading is an essential and integral part of lifelong learning.

### **Benefits of lifelong reading**

- Lifelong reading strengthens one’s ability to concentrate. Reading trains to be alert, flexible, prepared to meet challenges that come along with changing situation.
- Lifelong reading makes oneself a better self starter when the situation calls for it. A self motivated reader becomes more valuable while moving ahead with life path.
- Lifelong reading helps to become a better writer, if somebody wants to craft the writing style. Professional writers suggest that, you read, read and read and you will find a difference in your writing when you make time to read.
- Lifelong reading helps in building self confidence.
- ICTS have become a viable means for expanding learning opportunities.

Researchers on lifelong reading have found that, lifelong readers recognise their true value, feel worthwhile and secure, fully able to move themselves forward in an uncertain world. Learning benefits the individual to maintain healthy life and decent work, benefits society to contribute to peace, responsible citizenship and sustainable development leading to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

**2.1.2 Reading for Pleasure:** Reading for pleasure is an extra-ordinary and entertaining activity. Some people read for instruction, which is praise-worthy and some for pleasure and entertainment. The books meant for this category keep the reader in a happier mood, relaxes from the day-today worriness and refreshes the mind for the incoming work and also adds to the creativity in different spheres of life. The more we read, the better we get at it and the more we enjoy it. Now-a-days, it is a well-known fact that, we enjoy by watching televisions or by using computers.

But prior to that, reading was a primary leisure activity. People spent hours in reading books while traveling to different places. The invention of TV, computers etc. are the additional measures of entertainment. We should continue our old habits. As there is a saying “Old habits never die”. We should keep in mind that, reading offers a productive approach to improve vocabulary and word power. It is advisable to spend at least half an hour of reading in a day to keep abreast of the various style of writing and new vocabulary. There is strong evidence linking reading and educational outcomes. Reading for pleasure can result in increased empathy, reductions in stress/depression and improved well-being. Reading is not just for children reading in schools. It needs to be part of our lives.

**2.1.3 Reading for Information:** Reading for information is a life-long skill, which happens at a task-based approach to reading. Reading allows a person to be well informed. Without being informed about the latest happenings around one feels ashamed of while living in a society. On the other hand, at some point of time people hesitate to express their ignorance before a public forum and in this situation books play a major role. This helps as the best companion to overcome the above situation. Readers make use of libraries of the nearby locality and remove their ignorance and feel empowered to know the recent developments.

Reading helps to decipher new words and phrases in everyday conversations. The habit can become a healthy addiction and adds to the information available on various topics. It also helps to stay in-touch with contemporary writers as well as those from the days of yore and makes sensitive to global issues. Reading provides information on reading. Reading also supplements educational developments. Developing independence in learning is hereby are the major goals of education and reading have a much greater chance of success. Learning to read is an exercise in acquiring knowledge. Reading is nothing but the application of knowledge, which is applied in a lightning speed. Knowledge sets you apart from people, who don’t know. Just like what we eat, feeds our body, what we think, feeds our mind. Reading exposes to variety of ideas. Reading helps us to become wise, feed our mind with gems of wisdom. Thus reading makes us a leader.

**2.1.4 Reading for knowledge:** Knowledge is power. We study to increase our knowledge and the textbooks are the essential means to fulfill this objective. But textbooks are curriculum and syllabus

oriented. The mental and intellectual development can take place only when we read more. Here comes the role of reading. There are a lot of references and further readings. In order to supplement the class room teaching and knowledge one has to go through the textbooks and other references relating to the topic. It is observed that, children and teenagers, who love reading, have comparatively higher IQs. They are more creative and have better academic contribution in schools and colleges. It helps in intellectual development. It is an indulgence that enhances the knowledge acquired consistently. This habit can become a healthy addiction and adds to information available on various topics and hence helps in gaining knowledge.

**2.1.5 Casual reading:** The importance of reading habits among the children cannot be over emphasised. The importance of reading among the children plays out in a myriad of developmental, emotional and learning issues from bonding and security.... to learning to read.... to future success. The books on different stories like, Ramayana, Mahabharata, adventurous stories, travelogue, biographies... etc. help the child in strengthening the habit of casual reading. Every child deserves to have good books. Good books act as the treasure of knowledge, which he/she can call as his/her "own". This has to be stored in one's own book shelf, which can be pulled at any time the reader wants to read.

Paper-back editions have been of late, very popular throughout the world. A 1990 study showed, on the one hand, a drop in the number of "avid" reader (those who read more than 25 books a year) from 22% in 1973 to 17% in 1988 and on the other hand, an increase among "casual" readers (who read less than 10 books per year) from 24% to 32%. These casual readers read more because they read more expensively, with the market for paper-backs hardly being hurt. Of the 413 million books sold in 1996 (in France), 33.9% (i.e. one third) were paper backs vs. 31.7% in 1988. General readers prefer paper-back and pocket book editions to meet the motto "Read While Travel". Many people have the habit of reading while travelling. It may be school children, middle-aged people or aged people even if it is not advised. Reading while traveling is a hobby for some and is a time pass for some however, reading in trains is better than reading in moving buses. All books are not travelling companions. Few are there.

**2.1.6 Daily Reading:** Hobby is a spare-time recreational pursuit. Realising the importance of

reading many people develop reading as a hobby. It is felt that, it is worth to spend time in reading. It is possible through reading to develop a mind-set that, you are the master. They understand the quality of learning, how beautiful a book is and this is a treasure to hold in hands, to look guard and preserve. As a result they develop reading is a hobby and become daily readers. They spend some time for reading in their daily routine. This helps in intellectual growth, mental stimulation and enriches the background of knowledge for increased wisdom, broader outlook and mature understanding. Daily scripture reading can be one example.

### 3. NEED OF READING HABIT

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills a child needs to learn to succeed in life. Developing a good reading habit is vital for the child's future. Reading develops vocabulary. When the child reads loudly is exposed to the rich language. Literature forms one of the ingredients of any culture. Our culture has inherited a rich treasure of literature, besides epics, folktales, Jatak Katha etc. All these were presentations through oral tradition. We can boast this evergreen literature, which is the mirror of our culture. A good book or reading an informative piece makes the ideal companion; it is interesting, builds on our patience and allows growing in the pool of knowledge. Coping with the challenges of present society needs child's mental, emotional as well as social development where reading plays a vital role. Reading increases attention span. Developing reading habits leads to a life-long love for books. Reading encourages a thirst for knowledge.

#### 3.1 For Students

Reading seems to be a part of education of a child but actually it is related to the overall development of children. Reading provides coherence among recognisable depiction of the real world. Reading plays a vital role in all-round development of the child. Reading helps to learn think logically, Learn to work alone, Learn to work and play with others, Learn to draw pictures to enjoy together, Learn songs to sing, Learn stories to tell, Learn games to play, Learn to keep safe and stay out of danger, Learn to eat good food to stay well, Learn to know about our country and to keep it great, Learn about rest of the world (moon, sun, stars), Decide what we want to do when we grow up and help us find out what we can do best, Learn to be a voracious reader. Students, who are good at monitoring their comprehension,

know when they understand, what they understand and what they don't. Good readers use meta cognitive strategies to think about and have control over their reading. Students read a lot and choose what to read. From the above points, it is clear that, reading opens the door for knowledge. The need to nurture the love for reading cannot be over-emphasised. It is a battle which must be won at any cost. By developing love of reading among the children, we can increase the literacy skills.

### **3.2 For Teachers**

As we move into the twenty-first century, we see the possibility of great change in how students learn in school, brought about by the revolution in computer-generated learning resources. The World-Wide-Web and the availability of electronic resources are multiplying the possibilities of what teachers can do with their students. Making adequate computing equipment and educational software available to all teachers is one of the economic challenges. The future of education is determined by the national response to human needs. Keeping in mind the needs of the students in the educational system, it has become important to read. The reasons are the following:

- Reading is required as an essential skill in our chatting society.
- Reading is a skill we count on amount of lectures, videos or inquiries permitted to cover all the essential material in the discipline. As educators, we rely on students' abilities to learn through reading. Textbooks, Journal articles, on-line resources including primary and secondary literature serve as the foundation for powerful teaching and learning.
- Reading is thinking – by reading well-written texts, thoughtful readers become thoughtful problem solvers.
- Reading helps to organise ideas and information to fit the task at hand.
- Reading helps to filter out the most important information and to clarify the students' doubts.
- Reading helps to use their imagination to make predictions, draw inferences and create pictures that mirror important concepts in the text before the pupils.

The problem of declining reading habit in India is however not so alarming. The National Policy on Education, 1986 has rightly emphasised on book promotion "Measures will be taken to improve the

quality of books, promote the reading habit and encourage creative writing. The other aspect of the problem is also worth consideration. About 70% of our population is rural-based. The tentacles of e-media have not yet reached the roots of our population. Only a meager percentage 0.5% of our population is net-users. More and more people are gradually attaining capability to read and write. In view of such rural-based situation of our country, we have to think of seriously to develop the measures of inculcating reading habits among children."

The modern life has become more entertaining due to the introduction of electronic-media like TV, computer etc. But the accuracy, authenticity and the prestige of book is still unparalleled. Those, who possess books, can turn back the pages while the Radio word and TV image is melt along with the wavelength. Some think that, with the advent of computers there's a marked decline in the time spent on reading books. More and more people are getting hooked to the use of Net. The use of books is declining. But internet can never replace the charm of reading books.

### **4. FACTORS INFLUENCING READING HABITS**

- Inadequate literature for school children,
- Growth and Development of Electronic Media,
- Recognising the value and importance of school libraries/librarians,
- Teachers act as Instructors (providing bibliographic instructions),
- Lack of chapter on School libraries in the national policy,
- Inadequacy of physical, human and environmental resources,
- Lack of bibliographic control over the children's literature.

### **5. WAYS TO CULTIVATE READING HABIT**

*"To acquire the habit of reading is to construct for yourself a refuge almost all the miseries of life" — W. Somerset Maugham.*

People set many goals for themselves. For example: "to loose weight", to stop procrastinating and so on. So, "Read more" can be one of the set goals of the human being. A good book can be highly enjoyable, entertaining, and informative and a best companion. Realising the importance of a book, we should

cultivate the habit of reading. There are a number of ways to cultivate reading habit.

- Make reading enjoyable.
- Always carry a book wherever you go.
- Use interactive books.
- Make a list of all the great books you want to read.
- Find a quiet place. Find a place in your home where you can spend time quietly and comfortably.
- Reduce watching television and browsing internet to minimise watching/browsing.
- Read for your kid. If you have children, you must, must read for them.
- Maintain a log similar to the reading list, this log should not have only the title and author of the books you read, but record the dates you started and finished reading.
- Visit the second hand book shops.
- Have a library day.
- Join a reading group or book club.
- Have a reading hour or reading day. If you turn off the TV or use internet in the evening, you could have a set hour (perhaps just after dinner) when you and may be all the members of your family read each night.
- Visit a local library.

## **6.THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY**

The mission statement of IFLA/UNESCO school library manifesto describes as “School libraries is teaching and learning for all”. The mission of the school library is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of the library resources. The School library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. School Libraries link to the wider library and information network in accordance with UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.

The library staff helps to promote the use of books and other information sources, ranging from the fictional to the documentary, from print to electronic, both on-site and remote. The materials complement and enrich textbooks, teaching materials and methodologies. When librarians and teachers work together, students get more library facility by increasing their reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills. School library services must be provided

equally to all members of the school community, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, professional of those who are unable to use mainstream library services and materials.

## **7.GOALS OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY**

The School library is integral to the educational process. The following are essential to the development of literacy, information literacy, teaching, learning and culture and are core school library services:

- supporting and enhancing educational goals and outline in the schools’ mission and curriculum;
- developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- offering opportunities for experience in creating and using information on knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
- supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within and community;
- providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions;
- organising activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
- working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the schools;
- proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in the democracy;
- Promoting reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.
- The school library fulfils these functions by developing policies and service, selecting and acquiring resources, providing physical and intellectual access to appropriate sources of information, providing instructional facilities, and employing trained staff. In order to meet the aforesaid goals of the school library, the students and teachers should:
- Understand how information and resources are organised.
- Use the processes necessary to locate, evaluate and communicate information and ideas.

- Recognise information being an independent reader, listener, and viewer of material in print. Non-print and electronic formats will contribute to personal enjoyment and lifelong learning.
- Be aware of the freedom to seek information and possess the confidence to pursue information needs beyond immediately available sources.
- Understand ethical, legal and social behavioural issues with respect to information resources.
- Precisely to maintain a current collection of resources addressing curriculum and recreational reading needs of our students population.
- To help instill a love of reading in each student to convert to life-long readers.
- To help students and staff become effective users of information.
- To support the curriculum through resources and collaboration.

1.

## **8. ROLE OF PARENTS**

Parents are the first persons with whom a child comes into contact. A child imitates his parents. If parents introduce books to their children, they develop a love for books. The attitude of parents forms the base for promoting reading habits. In India illiteracy of parents is a stumbling block in promoting reading habits in rural children, who form the majority of more than 200 million children population of India. Now, with spread of compulsory education and awareness in parents – especially in rural women folk, the importance of giving good books to read to children is slowly realised. Reading books is very important for a child to develop as that of nutritious food, comfortable clothes and health care.

## **9.ROLE OF TEACHERS**

After parents, it is the teacher who wields great influence on the child. At primary level, the teacher's word is 'Brahma Vakya' or sacred word for a child. Teachers can and should encourage children to read. A good school library with enthusiastic librarian can be a vibrant place for promoting reading habits in children. But today hardly a good percent of schools have libraries. Books are locked in the cupboards. And librarians are most reluctant to issue books to children for the unwarranted fear of children losing and damaging them.

Once the books are published and the teachers guide them into the wonderful world of books, then the children are motivated to use the books. From pre-

primary level, teachers should read out books to the children. Teachers must know the importance of children's books. Hence children's literature should be made a part of the teacher's training programme. To make their subjects interesting, they can use other interesting books from library. As referred by NCF-2005, there should be class libraries.

Every week one hour can be reading hour for whole school right from Principal to pre-school child even the employees. It creates an atmosphere of reading.

Book related activities go a long way in motivating children to read. Book weeks may be organised, in which book discussion, writing book reviews meeting the author, book exhibitions are held. The language teachers may be involved to carry-out such kind of programmes.

School teachers can plan visit to public libraries. It will enable children to know the working of libraries, how to choose books of their choice in the library. It also makes them realise the presence of vast numbers and variety of books.

## **10. ROLE OF LIBRARIES**

The libraries play a vital role in motivating the children and teachers towards reading. Presence of extensive collection of resources is the beginning of the reading program. Children need guidance and support in learning about the materials. Many ways (activities) are adopted by the library staff to increase the reading habit among the children. A few to mention are as follows:

- Acquire quality materials for school libraries that support and enrich the curriculum,
- Teach critical research skills for both print and electronic material formats,
- Teach the importance of research evaluation and location,
- Organising orientation programme for freshers,
- Guide students, in developing love for reading,
- encourage lifelong education among students,
- Actively promote various authors and titles through book talks,
- Creating special displays to promote books,
- Helping students find books that fit their particular interests,

- Participate in local and national reading celebration,
- Encouraging children to ask questions and find answers in books,
- Collaborating summer reading programmes,
- Organising book fairs,
- Organising book-related programmes like book jacket competition, book review competitions, and book quiz competition, Book Hunt Competition etc.,
- Organising story-telling programmes by the children's writers,
- Visiting other libraries,
- Maintaining record for library usage,
- Instituting award for maximum use of the library.
- Realising the significance of the school library National Curriculum Framework NCF-2005 has recommended
- one period a week to be devoted to library reading,
- If there is no library room, the teacher can bring out books appropriate to the age group and allow the children to choose,
- Library books can be brought to the language class,
- Children can be asked to write about the book they have read,
- Children can be asked to share a story they have read,
- The school library should be kept open during vacation.

Learning to read should be one of the highest priorities of our educational system. Teachers, parents and librarians should join together and see to it that children learn to read.

## 11. CONCLUSION

There's now growing acceptance of the fact that, a country's social and economic progress greatly depends on its people having access to the vast expanse of knowledge provided by the printed word. Youth power can be harnessed for the countries development by providing young Indian with the right dose of education, motivation and exposure to the outside world. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the era of the learning society. If economic development is to be ensured, continuous learning is necessary. The young people of today require reading much more than their forebears to fulfill their obligation as responsible citizens as well as to meet their personal and social objectives. The country can compete with developed

countries only if it creates a strong culture of reading among the youth. Without a regular reading habit the advantages accruing from literacy of what is learnt from class room may be quickly frittered away. Books have a significant role in lifelong self education. A good reader is a good learner. Building up solid knowledge is indeed a way of developing values and character. In our country, there is a general lack of respect for the children. If we visit the developed countries, we hardly find a child working. There is a prevalent insensitivity towards kids. Accordingly, we should feel responsible towards the psychological and physical well-being of children. We should take initiative for the upliftment of children's literature by identifying the authors and their writings. There should be a national policy advocating for the school libraries to empower the school libraries and school librarians. Once good school libraries will come into existence with qualified library staff, they will take necessary initiative to inculcate reading habit among children. Their reading is rich and diverse but their preferences vary according to the gender and age. Schools and homes need to ensure that, they tap into the rich collection in order to hook boys and girls into reading habit. Children need to be engaged in reading to create a nation of lifelong enthusiastic readers. The child should learn to be inquisitive for which Rudyard Kipling wrote, "I keep six honest serving men. They taught me all I know, their names are what and why and when and where and how and who."

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