



Dive the Gift of Reading

If you're stumped about how to spend your winter break or what to give as holiday gifts, consider the following fun facts:

- There is an Icelandic tradition called *Jolabokafloð* (sounds like "yo-la-boke-a-floð") that loosely translates to meaning "Yule book flood" or "Christmas book flood." Icelanders gift books to their loved ones at Christmastime, a practice that stems from World War II, when one of the only commodities not strictly rationed was paper. Presents are opened on Dec. 24, and then everyone spends the rest of their evening curled up reading that book and sipping on hot chocolate.
- December is also Read a New Book Month. (Though apparently so is September? And National Book Month is in October? We book nerds are really encroaching on other holidays.)
- Reading has a number of physical and mental benefits. For instance:
 - It can strengthen the network of circuits and signals in the brain.
 - Reading literary fiction (stories that explore the inner lives of characters) increases your ability to empathize with others by imagining yourself in another person's shoes.
 - Reading builds your vocabulary, which contributes greatly to your comprehension.
 - Keeping your mind engaged as you grow older helps maintain and improve cognition function.
 - 30 minutes of reading lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and feelings of psychological distress, according to a 2009 study.
 - Reading before bed (on print, not a screen) helps you have better rest.
 - Reading can help alleviate symptoms of depression. In fact, a scientific study showed that reading self-help books really help, especially when used in combination with support sessions on how to use the books. The study showed that this practice was associated with decreased depression levels after one year, compared to those individuals who only underwent more typical treatments for depression.

Start your own book flood tradition with family and friends this year. Check out the Friday Facts for book suggestions, ways to stretch your book and gift-wrapping budget, and reasons to shop locally.



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