

HED: What made reading popular again? BookTok and COVID-19

After the first COVID-19 lockdown started on March 15, the hashtag #BookTok took TikTok by storm, which led to an increase in young adult readership.

#BookTok led new and avid readers to find comradery during a time of isolation. In the United States, the YA market is up almost 50% in the first half of 2021 because of #BookTok, according to Nielsen Bookscan.

Francie and Finch, a local Lincoln bookstore, found that they could maintain relationships with customers and continue sharing their book knowledge with local readers by selling the books recommended on TikTok.

"I feel like before TikTok was a thing and before the pandemic, our young adult fiction section was a little smaller," Francie and Finch bookseller Megan Mejstrik said. "So we do focus on trying to keep things in stock in young adult, in romance and in fantasy [sections], which are some of the you know, higher, more popular things on Tik Tok."

There was a spike in reading, with book sales up by more than 6% compared to 2019, according to "Publishers Weekly."

As young people sat at home with nothing to do and BookTok, a genre on TikTok focused on reading, became a prominent niche on the app with 84.0 billion views under #BookTok. Mejstrik credits the rise in readership to COVID-19 and BookTok.

Megan Berg, a sophomore actuarial science major from Kansas City, Missouri, found that while she nannied during COVID-19, there was not a lot for her and the kids to do. So, she decided that reading time would be the best option.

"So I was like, 'Alright, kids are gonna do reading time,' because, well, we have to do something with our time," Berg said. "So, that was like when I started reading. I read "The Guest List" by Lucy Foley, and I absolutely loved the book."

Avid reader Anna Ulferts, a sophomore sociology and psychology major from Omaha, Nebraska, found that BookTok gave her more of a boost to keep reading during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown and it has stayed with her up till now.

"I would say a majority of them have been good and then some of them have not been good," Ulferts said about the recommendations she gets on BookTok.

Even though Ulferts and Berg believe that some of the recommendations found on BookTok can be a letdown, they both agreed that what matters is that people are reading again.

Ulferts said, "I think it's become more of a norm for people to read. I think that that's a really good thing. I think it's definitely done more good than harm."

Megan Mejstrik - <https://otter.ai/u/qFtUExyWkcyIgvk6HtZMW8VaBkk> (interviewed in person, (402) 781-0459)

Anna Ulferts - https://otter.ai/u/Z_pEMJppr1qUUipc8P-fsdrY8DE (interviewed in person, aulferts2@huskers.unl.edu)

Megan Berg - https://otter.ai/u/0Y5_2tWLxJ09Qw-erYRZtHyAf_k (interviewed in person, mberg13@huskers.unl.edu)

Tweet: Young adult reading is on the rise because of COVID-19 and #BookTok. I spoke with @francieandfinch and UNL students to learn more.

