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# Read all about it: The array of celebrities and young literature lovers in Trafalgar Square tells its own story



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MATTHEW BELL | Sunday 14 July 2013

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What do Lily Cole, Rupert Everett and Peppa Pig have in common? Apart, obviously, from their striking good looks. Answer: they are passionate about reading, and about encouraging children to read. To prove their point, they joined a host of other actors and writers at yesterday's inaugural Get Reading event, a day-long festival in Trafalgar Square in London.

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The idea was spawned by a literacy campaign started by the *London Evening Standard* two years ago. When journalists on that newspaper learned that one in four 11-year-olds were unable to read and write, they launched a campaign to change things. Yesterday's event, held on the hottest day of the year, was a culmination of the extraordinary feats they have achieved. Thanks to the generosity of their readers, £1m has been raised for the literacy charity Beanstalk, and 600 volunteers now read



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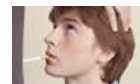
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 For many children, books play no part in their lives. You only had to look at the row of transfixed faces staring up at Rupert Everett as he read from Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* to see how affecting a good story can be. "There's something about the written word that is absolutely magical for the development of the human brain," he said afterwards. "If reading is phased out completely, we're going to become blobs, if we aren't already. Looking back on my own life, the more I read, the more textured and thorough I felt as a person. So to start off reading early is an amazing thing."

Lily Cole, a model who got a double first from Cambridge in art history, read from Winnie-the-Pooh, while Peppa Pig, star of the Channel 5 children's show, read from her own books. Inside the oversized pig costume is 11-year-old Harley Bird, the youngest ever recipient of a Bafta. She will star in the film adaptation of Meg Rosoff's novel *How I Live Now*, which is out in October. Speaking as Peppa Pig afterwards, she said: "People should like reading because it's all about stories, and when you read you can get lots of information in your brain."

Cole said she almost chose to read from the Harry Potter books, because they played such an important part in her childhood. But her favourite author is the Russian Vladimir Nabokov, in particular his novel *Invitation of a Bearded Man*, which she reads "perpetually". Evgeny Lebedev, owner of the *London Evening Standard* and *The Independent on Sunday*, took to the stage later in the afternoon. He chose to co-read Roald Dahl's *The Twits* with the actress Barbara Windsor. "As a bearded man, it seemed an appropriate choice," he quipped.

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