

# The importance of *imagination*

Understanding the state of  
Australia's imagination and the role  
reading plays in fostering creativity



# Foreword

This paper aims to better understand the state of the nation's imagination and the role reading plays in fostering creativity. It has been commissioned by us at BookPeople and was conducted in partnership with research agency, YouGov.

Analysis of the research has highlighted that there is a growing concern about the level in which we use our imagination in our day-to-day lives, with many Australians expressing their desire to use it more. This paper explores the nation's use of imagination and the ways in which we can foster our creativity further.

Books and reading give us access to infinite worlds, past and future histories, and are the best medium for exploring narratives and ideas. Whether we read for entertainment or information, reading generates a net benefit for our mental health and our understanding of the world.

## **Robbie Egan**

Chief Executive Officer  
BookPeople

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

BookPeople acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our offices are located and where we conduct our business, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.



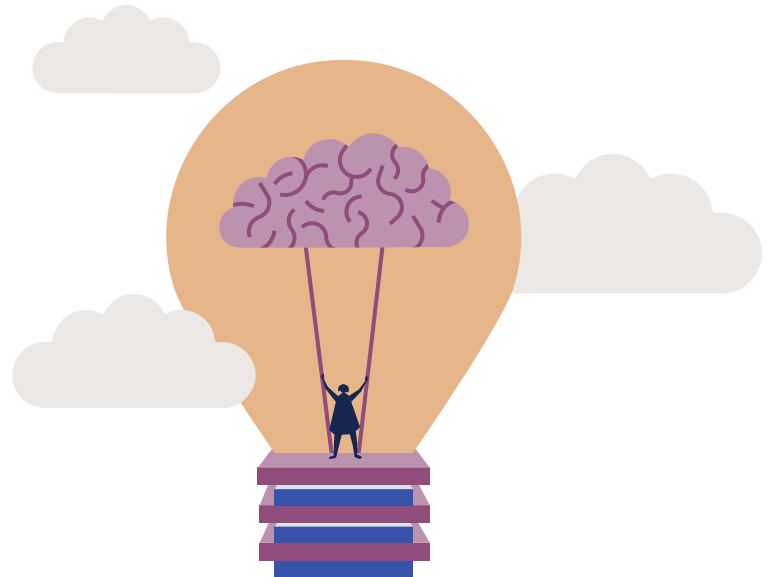
# The importance of *imagination*

Imagination, the ability to imagine things, permeates through our entire existence.

Some of our earliest memories are of characters from our favourite childhood books or of imaginary lands dreamt up, while playing with friends. However, imagination also serves a far more important function, it's key to innovation, and new ideas and fresh ways of thinking are vital for progress.

In this frenetic, disparate world, where we're constantly bombarded by information and experiencing distractions from our devices, there is a concern that there isn't the focus and space in our minds for imagination anymore. Potentially, as a result of our increasingly busy lives, we're losing access to this crucial skill.

The research was designed specifically for the Australian market and conducted in March 2023. It surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,042 Australians aged 18 years, and older, via an online survey.



# The majority of Aussies want to *use their imagination more*

The research paints quite a stark picture of the state of Australia's imagination.

It reveals that Australians consider imagination to be important and we want to use it more but 1.6 million of us are claiming we rarely or never get to use our imagination.

This paper presents some of the barriers that are holding many of us back from using our imagination and also highlights ways in which imagination can be cultivated.

9 out of 10 (94%)

Australians acknowledge that **imagination is important**



1 in 5 (22%)

claim that they get to use their imagination **all the time**

1 in 10 (8%)

**rarely or never** get to use their imagination

Despite the low level use of imagination among Australians,

64%

would like to use their **imagination more within their daily life**

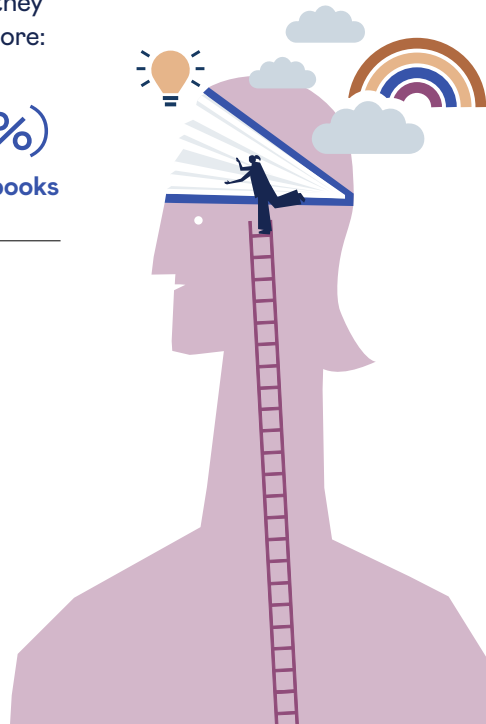
# Reading is the best way to foster imagination

It's clear from the research that reading plays a vital role in helping to foster creativity.

Among those Australians who claim they would like to **use their imagination** more:

just under **half** (45%)  
would like to do so by **reading more books**

**9 in 10** (92%)  
believe **reading** is one of the  
best ways to **foster imagination**



Other ways Australians believe they can **boost their imagination** include:

**53%** adopting creative hobbies

**41%** cooking

**40%** working in a job that  
involves creativity

**40%** creative writing

# Reading is the best way to foster imagination

Some of the top reasons why reading is cited as one of the best ways to spark imagination:

58%

increases knowledge and understanding of new things



58%

allows people to escape from everyday mundanity

57%

stimulates thinking



Australians consider these things to be important in helping to maintain an acceptable level of imagination.

Apart from reading, Australians believe that there are also **other ways in which imagination can be fostered:**

57% being open-minded

51% making time to play even as an adult

51% collaborating with others to combine different perspectives and generate new ideas

50% engaging in art and other creative pursuits

50% starting early by teaching children in schools to think innovatively

# A lack of imagination leads to a lack of progress

The implications of a lack of imagination were explored as part of the research.

Barriers holding people back from being more imaginative were also interrogated and are included in this paper. The perceived ramifications of a lack of imagination appear to be quite severe, with Australians reporting that a lack of imagination hinders advancements and innovation more broadly, as well as contributing to cognitive decline.

What is clear from the research, is that Australians recognise the importance of imagination and the role it plays more broadly in innovation and idea generation. However, there is a lot more work to be done to create safe and comfortable environments, where people feel comfortable enough to challenge the status quo.

nearly **9 in 10** (87%)

Australians believe there are **negative consequences of not using our imagination enough**



## Top\* negative consequences:

- > fewer new ideas or inventions across various disciplines
- > becoming bored/uninspired
- > cognitive decline and memory loss
- > difficulties problem-solving

## Top\* barriers holding people back:

- > fear of criticism
- > self-doubt and lack of confidence
- > rigid thinking
- > distractions interrupting one's ability to think

\*highlighted by almost half of Australians

# Children are *more imaginative* than adults

A child's imagination is powerful and magical.

It's not an unfamiliar tale to hear how parents have been stood in awe of the fantasy worlds conjured up by their small humans. However, it seems that the majority of Australians think they lose their ability to tap into their imagination when they become an adult.

We can only hypothesise as to why this might be, perhaps it's that many of us don't engage in activities which spark our imagination when we're an adult, such as play or reading. Or, perhaps we don't give our minds the space and time to switch off from the daily grind and explore other ideas and ways of thinking.



**1 in 2 (54%)**

Australians think they were **more imaginative when they were a child** compared to now



# Aussies believe *imagination* can be learnt

We can improve the situation by incorporating imagination into our every-day lives.

Despite the bleak picture that the research has painted about Australia's current state of imagination, it has shown that many Australians believe the situation can be improved.

If imagination can be learnt, then it's possible that we can look to improve the state of our imagination and adopt activities and methods that help to cultivate this skill so that it becomes integrated into our everyday life.

Almost **half** (49%)  
of Australians believe that imagination  
is both **something that we are  
born with** and also something  
that is a **skill that can be learnt**



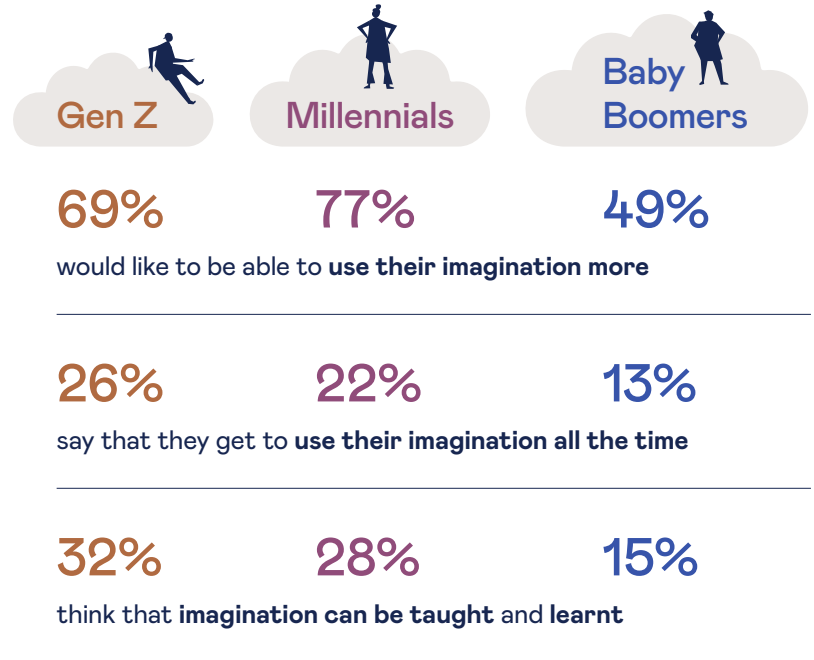
# Gen Z are *more imaginative* than older generations

The research highlighted significant differences between generations.

Particularly between Gen Z's and Baby Boomers, with younger Australians more likely to say they would like to be able to use their imagination more.

Younger Australians are also more likely to say that they get to use their imagination all the time.

Lastly, Gen Z are also more optimistic about improving their use of imagination than Baby Boomers, with Gen Z more likely to think that imagination can be taught and learnt.



# Where to from *here*?

The research has shown there's little doubt as to the importance of imagination among Australians.

However, despite this, many of us admit that we're not as imaginative as we'd like to be in our lives.

It's important we give our minds the time and space to switch off from the daily distractions, so we can have the freedom to use our imagination and explore its benefits. Reading is a great way to do this.

Not only does reading provide an escape but books also promote the use of imagination through the worlds and characters brought to life through their pages – they are the **gift of imagination**.

So, what are you going to read next?



# Who *we are.*

We have been advocating for bookshops, books and reading for almost 100 years, originally as the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA). Along the way, we have evolved for the needs of our members and our industry. We are a not-for-profit and exist exclusively for the benefit of our members.

We are a sustainable and strategic retail partner for our members, representing our booksellers' uniqueness, individuality, and expertise. We nurture positive relationships with all our stakeholders and promote professional and ethical practices.

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