**2 science-backed ways reading fiction makes you smarter**

Marguerite Ward / CNBC May 28, 2017

Bill Gates often includes a novel in his semi-annual book recommendations, noting the captivating characters or beautiful prose. Elon Musk says reading novels like "Lord of the Flies" and the science fiction book "Foundation" helped shape his worldview. Mark Cuban credits "The Fountainhead" with his strong work ethic.

It's no accident these highly successful individuals read fiction. And research shows it might not be just for fun. Multiple psychological studies points to a few reasons why successful people are drawn to books.

Here are two ways "beach reading" helps you get ahead.

**1. It improves your vocabulary and language skills**

Books, no matter the type, increase language comprehension, a larger vocabulary and increased brain activity, studies show.

"If 'smarter' means having a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge ... then reading may well make people smarter," psychologist Keith Stanovich writes in the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.

He adds that the data supports this finding "time and again."

In separate research, brain scans of college students after reading a thriller showed increased activity in the areas of the brain related to language comprehension and sensation.

The benefits of reading can help you stay sharp too. Research published in the Journal of American Academy of Neurology finds that people who engage in mentally stimulating activities like reading experience slower memory decline than those who do not.

**2. It boosts your emotional intelligence**

People who read literary fiction show higher levels of empathy and emotional intelligence, according to studies published in the Public Library of Science, the Journal of Research in Personality and The European Journal of Communication Research.

And emotional intelligence plays an important role in the workplace.

A study published by the American Psychological Association suggests that bosses prefer candidates who they find likable and friendly over those who are self-promotional, though they note that a combination of the two is probably best.

Research published in the Journal of Education for Business shows that managers pay special attention to communication skills and analytical skills when reviewing an employee.

And while not a scientific study, an analysis of 943,008 market-wide job postings from a variety of sources and found that most employers are looking for candidates who know how to communicate well with others.