

B2-C1 Worksheet: Clever Is the New Cool - 22 March 2026

Article

At a time when politics often seems openly suspicious of expertise, pop culture may be moving in the opposite direction. A new Guardian feature argues that being clever is no longer something to play down. In fashion, music and film, books, ideas and literary references are being pulled into the spotlight. Pop stars launch reading projects, fashion campaigns nod to philosophers, and book clubs are cropping up in places that once cared far more about image than intellect. For some observers, that shift has come out of a wider hunger for depth in an online world that can feel flat and repetitive.

The article does not claim that everyone has suddenly become a serious reader. If anything, it suggests that intelligence itself is turning into a style signal. Carrying a novel, quoting a thinker or showing off a carefully chosen reading list can help people stand out and shape a public identity. Supporters see this as a welcome change, arguing that it opens the door to richer conversations and gives young people permission to be thoughtful in public. Critics, however, wonder whether some of it is just branding dressed up as substance.

Even so, the trend seems to have struck a chord. In a culture often accused of rewarding speed, noise and short attention spans, the idea that curiosity might be fashionable again feels surprisingly hopeful. Whether this shift goes the distance remains to be seen, but for now it has stirred up a useful debate: are people really engaging more deeply with ideas, or have books simply become another accessory?

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. The article says politics and pop culture are moving in exactly the same direction.
2. The Guardian feature suggests that books and ideas are becoming more visible in pop culture.
3. The article claims that everyone has become a serious reader.
4. Some people use reading and intellectual references to shape their image.
5. Supporters think the trend could encourage more thoughtful public conversation.
6. Critics believe the trend is always deep and sincere.
7. The article presents the shift as possibly temporary.
8. The final paragraph questions whether books have partly become a fashion accessory.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. play down	A. to result from something
2. pull into the spotlight	B. to remain successful or effective for a long time
3. crop up	C. to make something seem less important
4. come out of	D. to create the possibility for something
5. stand out	E. to feel familiar or emotionally powerful
6. open the door to	F. to appear from time to time
7. dressed up as	G. to cause discussion or strong feeling
8. struck a chord	H. to give something a lot of public attention
9. go the distance	I. presented as something more attractive than it really is
10. stir up	J. to be easy to notice because it is different

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. expertise	A. showing careful consideration
2. literary	B. connected with books or writing
3. hunger	C. happening again and again in the same way
4. substance	D. strong desire to know or understand
5. curiosity	E. a general direction or movement in society
6. accessory	F. strong desire or need
7. thoughtful	G. sense of who someone is
8. trend	H. real content or value
9. identity	I. specialist knowledge or skill
10. repetitive	J. an extra item that adds to appearance or style

Use the new language

Please choose 5 words or phrases and make your own sentence using the new word or phrase.

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. Do you think being clever is seen as attractive today?
2. Have books or reading ever helped you stand out in some way?
3. Do you know anyone who tries to play down their intelligence?
4. What kinds of ideas or topics strike a chord with you most strongly?
5. Do you think social media encourages curiosity or short attention spans?
6. Have you noticed book clubs or reading trends cropping up around you?
7. Do you prefer fashion and culture that feel thoughtful or playful?
8. What book, writer or idea would you pull into the spotlight?

Student B

1. Is intelligence genuinely becoming fashionable, or is it mostly branding?
2. Can books become just another accessory, or is that too cynical?
3. Why might young people be hungry for deeper ideas now?
4. Does pop culture open the door to serious thinking, or does it simplify everything?
5. Should public figures be expected to promote substance as well as style?
6. Why do some societies admire expertise while others seem suspicious of it?
7. Could this trend go the distance, or will it fade quickly?
8. What is the difference between real curiosity and performative intelligence?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=F, 2=T, 3=F, 4=T, 5=T, 6=F, 7=T, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=C, 2=H, 3=F, 4=A, 5=J, 6=D, 7=I, 8=E, 9=B, 10=G

Synonym Match: 1=I, 2=B, 3=F, 4=H, 5=D, 6=J, 7=A, 8=E, 9=G, 10=C

Example sentences with the phrases

1. She tried to play down her achievement, but everyone knew how hard she had worked.
2. The documentary pulled forgotten artists into the spotlight.
3. Problems always crop up when a plan is rushed.
4. His interest in architecture came out of years spent travelling around Europe.
5. Bright colours really stand out in a dark room.
6. This course could open the door to a new career.
7. The report was dressed up as good news, but the details told a different story.
8. Her comments struck a chord with anyone who has felt out of place.
9. Some trends disappear quickly, but a few go the distance.
10. The advert stirred up a lot of debate online.