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## Children's bookshelves invaded as they become overrun with DVDs and video games

### Booktime and Booked Up deliver over 2 million free books to children across the UK

- More dads reading with their children than in previous years: 40% increase since September 2008.
- 60% of children like to share a book with their parents/carers as it shows that they like to spend time with them.
- Households with girls have ten more children's books than those with boys. One in every 20 family homes in Britain today has fewer than ten books.
- Children enjoying reading more: 96% of all children surveyed say that they enjoy reading, peaking at 99% among seven year olds and falling to 89% of 12 year olds (overall, this represents a year on year increase of 5%).
- 56% of all parents and carers (and almost half of all parents of 4-5 year olds [48%]) say their child spends more time facing a screen, playing computer games and watching DVDs rather than reading.
- Parents and carers of boys are twice as likely not to read with them compared to those who have girls.
- Technology, home entertainment and work (through emails and home working) are impacting on book time. While flexible working is supposed to enable a positive work-life balance, children are increasingly losing out.
- Bookshelves under threat in a third of British homes: one in three parents and carers (34%) say shelves are increasingly being filled up with DVDs and computer games, especially in homes with older children (this is the case in 41% of homes of 11-12 year olds).
- The UK's all time favourite fictional character according to over 1,300 children is Harry Potter, followed by Horrid Henry and Tracy Beaker. Action heroes Captain Underpants and Ben 10 relegate children's classic Cinderella and Peter Pan out of the top 10. Roald Dahl's characters including Matilda, Charlie (from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) and the Fantastic Mr Fox make multiple entries in the top 20 all time favourite characters.

It is widely acknowledged that one of the most important things a parent or carer can do to help their children's learning and development is to inspire a love of books and reading. New research commissioned for Booktime and Booked Up published today (20 October 2009) of over 3,000 parents, carers and children in the UK found that the love of reading is growing amongst children. However, the research also showed that 3% of parents and carers never or rarely read with their children. For those who do, just one in three read with their children on a daily basis.

The results reveal that in today's economic climate, parents and carers face ever-increasing pressures and demands on their time, which directly impacts on opportunities for sharing a book with their children. According to the research, long working hours, getting home late and tiredness prevent parents and carers from reading with their offspring, while one in ten say checking emails and spending time online is a barrier to reading for pleasure.

The research also reveals:

- **Children keen for both parents/carers to read more:** When it comes to choosing between mum and dad reading more often with them, 79% of children want mum and 56% prefer dad while a further 23% cited their grandparents.
- **Reading frequency:** One in every 30 children say 'they can't remember' the last time they read with parent or carer as it was so long ago and one in 20 (6%) say it was over three months ago. (This could be linked to the child wanting to read by themselves.) However, the vast majority of parents and carers say that they often read for pleasure with their children (72% say weekly and 54% say the last time they read together was only yesterday).
- **Number of books in the home varies:** While 13% of parents and carers say there are more than 100 children's books in their home, one in 20 parents and carers say they have fewer than ten children's books (in total) at home.
- **Mum is still the main reader but dads are catching up:** Mums are still the principal reader (58%) versus 16% of dads in British homes.

- **Term ends, book time increases:** 33% of parents and carers say they spend more time reading with their children during the school holiday, such as in half term, compared to 20% who say they read together more during term time.

The research also asked parents and carers what books their children enjoy reading for pleasure. Three-quarters (75%) say story books are the type of books their child likes to read most, while 47% say fact books are becoming their children's top choice, closely followed by books linked to a TV series (45%), fairy tales (42%) and school books (39%). By the age of 11-12, more than half of children surveyed said that they enjoy young adult novels.

### Children's views on reading for pleasure

The Booktime and Booked Up research asked over 1,300 children about their own reading habits, *what* influences their choice of book, *who* influences them when it comes to reading for pleasure and what, if anything, hinders them. It found:

- **Love of reading growing:** 96% of all children surveyed said that they enjoyed reading (this is a 5% increase since September 2008).
- **Reading role models:** one in every 12 children say they rarely or never see their parents or carers reading for pleasure. Those children who never/rarely witness their parents or reading are most likely to give the reasons that they are either too busy or are watching TV.
- **Children's distractions revealed:** when the researchers asked children themselves what prevents them from reading for pleasure more, they did not give interacting with friends or taking part in physical exercise as causes impacting most of all on book time, but sedentary activities such as watching TV (54%) and playing on the computer or video games (41%). Nearly one in five children (18%) say that nothing stops them and they always find time to read for pleasure.
- **Who chooses what to read:** 74% of children say they are the key decision maker when it comes to choosing which books to read, while 15% say mum decides what they read, 5% say teachers and only 3% say dads.

Children were then asked *why* they liked reading with someone and interestingly, the top reason related to the emotional benefit sharing a book brings:

Why children love reading with parents/carers	%	Comments
They like spending time with me	60%	This becomes the best thing about reading for older children (8-12), for whom time spent with adults has clear emotional benefits
We talk about the story / pictures together	55%	Younger children (5-7) rated this as their favourite thing about reading together
They put on funny voices and make me laugh	50%	This rises to 64% amongst 5 year olds and resonates more strongly amongst boys (52%)
I like the sound of their voice, it helps me relax/sleep	28%	Younger children are more likely to cite this as reason for enjoying reading (34% of 5 year olds)
They / we make up new characters and stories	17%	More than a quarter of 5 year olds said this is what they enjoyed about reading

The researchers also conducted an **audit of reading influences** with children being asked what would help them to get interested in reading a particular book. Characters in a book are the single biggest draw for children: 51% say if they liked a character it would get them interested in reading that particular book. See overleaf for the ten biggest 'reading catalysts'.

The ten biggest 'reading catalysts' are:

1	Character(s)	51%
2	Storyline	43%
3=	If it was part of a series they liked	41%
3=	The genre (e.g. adventure story)	41%
4	If friends were reading the book too	39%
5=	If it was based on/also a TV show	38%
5=	Pictures in the book	38%
6	Appeal of front or back cover	36%
7	If teacher said it was a good book	35%
8=	Parents/carers said they enjoyed it as a child	32%
8=	If it was based on/also a film	32%
9	If an author the child likes had written it	24%
10	If read something interesting about it	20%

While many children are enjoying reading for pleasure, one in ten parents and carers say that their child rarely or never reads the books they have, and a further 20% say they read them only occasionally.

**To help encourage a lifelong love of reading – both stories and poetry – over two million free books will be given to schoolchildren across the UK through two free books programmes, Booktime and Booked Up, from independent charity Booktrust.** Both programmes promote reading for pleasure at important transition stages in children's learning and development and are supported in England by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Inspired by Bookstart, the free books programme for babies and toddlers, **Booktime** will give a free book pack to every reception-aged pupil (4-5 years) in England and Scotland this term and Northern Ireland next term as a gift from education and publishing company Pearson. A bilingual version of the Booktime programme is being piloted in Wales for the first time this year. This year, children will receive a book pack that includes a copy of *Mr Big* by Ed Vere and packs being distributed in England will also include *The Booktime Book of Fantastic First Poems*, a poetry anthology edited by June Crebbin.

For children ages 11-12, Booktrust will give 670,000 Year 7 pupils in England a choice of one free book from a list of 12 carefully selected titles this term as part of its **Booked Up** programme. This encourages independent reading and is and generously supported by a number of children's book publishers.

In total, nearly one-and-a-half million books will be distributed along with 750,000 *book* packs to children in over 20,000 schools across the UK. Nearly 24,000 *resource* packs will be given to schools and libraries in England to support the programme.

TV presenter Kirsty Gallacher, herself a proud mum of one to son Oscar, supports the programmes and comments: "It's such a joy to snuggle down with my son and share a story. It's a wonderful escapist activity and gives us time to enjoy the characters, be creative and bond. It's also a great learning experience for him and lots of fun.



Kirsty continues: "I'm proud to be supporting these two reading initiatives. It's a brilliant way to keep children interested in books as they make the move from nursery to 'big school' and from primary to secondary. Plus, the fact that it's free and available to everyone makes it even more appealing!"

Schools Minister Diana Johnson said: "This is an excellent scheme that encourages reading from an early age and helps sustain it into a child's secondary years, and I am delighted to support it. Reading is a great way for families to spend time together and improves children's learning. I am also pleased that, as well as mothers, fathers are increasingly reading with their children. Parents who introduce their children to books can really inspire a lifetime's love of reading so it is very good to see that more and more children are enjoying reading, not only by themselves but also with their parents or carers."

Viv Bird, Chief Executive of Booktrust, says: "It's wonderful to see that children are enjoying books more and more each year and our sustained campaigns are working. Any time children spend reading for pleasure – either with a parent or carer or by themselves - is wonderful and life-enriching. We're delighted that we can offer such wonderful quality books through Booktime and Booked Up and hope they will provide many hours of fun."

Marjorie Scardino, CEO, Pearson, adds: "Five years ago, we began to talk to Booktrust about how we could find a way to foster a love of reading in children. Since then, thanks to our partnership with Booktrust and the generous support of the DCSF, Booktime has delivered nearly four million books to over two and a half million children across the UK. Our research shows that more than half of children say that the characters in a book are the biggest influence on what they choose to read. In *Mr Big*, I think we've found the perfect choice - you don't get a character that is 'bigger' or better and we hope that they have fun reading Ed Vere's beautiful story."

Ed Vere, author of *Mr Big*, comments: "It's truly exciting to be working with Booktime to help get picture books into as many young hands as possible and to encourage a love of reading from an early age."

Ends

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**Notes to Editors**

**Booktime and Booked Up 2009 Research**

Independent research was conducted on behalf of Booktime and Booked Up. 1,772 UK parents of primary school aged children and 1,318 children aged 5-12 years took part in the research. This was conducted between 22 September and 1 October 2009. A combination of online and telephone research techniques were used to ensure a representative sample of the UK population was approached.

**About Booktime**

For more information and a range of downloadable activities and games, log on to [www.booktime.org.uk](http://www.booktime.org.uk) The site features activities and games as well as videos, competitions, blogs and book recommendations.

**About Booked Up**

For more information, visit the Booked Up website, which also features games, competitions and author blogs [www.bookedup.org.uk](http://www.bookedup.org.uk) Both **Booktime** and **Booked Up** are supported by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families).



### **Interview opportunities and photographs & graphics**

- Ed Vere, author
- Viv Bird, Director of Booktrust
- Primary school teacher/headteacher in key regions
- Parent of school aged children and children of various ages

A range of visuals (all print quality) featuring Ed Vere reading to children plus pictures featuring parents reading with their children can be downloaded by accessing and clicking on the press materials section at <http://www.booktime.org.uk>. A range of visuals (all print quality) featuring 11 year olds reading for pleasure, and images of all of the Booked Up jackets can be downloaded by accessing and clicking on the media section at [www.bookedup.org.uk](http://www.bookedup.org.uk)

### **About Pearson**

Pearson is an international media and education company. Its major businesses are: Pearson Education, the world's leading education business, providing print and digital learning materials and services used by more than 100 million students of all ages every year; The Financial Times Group, which has an international network of business and financial newspapers and online services that are read by millions of business executives and investors every day; and Penguin Group, which is one of the pre-eminent names in consumer publishing, with an unrivalled range of fiction and non-fiction, bestsellers, and classic titles. Through its books, newspapers and online services, Pearson helps people of all ages to live and learn. [www.pearson.com](http://www.pearson.com)  
Since 2006, Pearson staff have been giving their time to read with children in local primary schools. In 2008/9 around 200 volunteers supported 450 children.

### **About Booktrust**

Booktrust is an independent charity dedicated to encouraging people of all ages and cultures to engage with books. The written word underpins all our activity and enables us to fulfil our vision of inspiring a lifelong love of books for all. Booktrust is responsible for a number of successful national reading promotions, sponsored book prizes and creative reading projects aimed at encouraging readers to discover and enjoy books. These include the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Children's Laureate, the Get London Reading campaign, the Booktrust Teenage Prize and Bookstart, the national programme that works through locally based organisations to give a free pack of books to young children, with guidance materials for parents and carers. See [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)