

## Introduction

Independent research was conducted on behalf of Booktime and Booked Up, two programmes that promote the pleasures of reading.

1,507 UK parents/carers of pre-school and school age children took part in the research between 12 Aug 2008 – 8 Sept 2008. A combination of online and telephone research techniques were used to ensure that a representative sample of the UK population was approached. In addition, 1,051 children aged seven to 14 years old were surveyed. Questions were developed in conjunction with some of the UK's leading experts who specialise in literacy.

The research builds on previous fieldwork conducted in 2006 and 2007. Detailed below is an executive summary of the 2008 research findings.

### 1. Who reads the most?

The research asked all parents and carers about their household reading habits (in particular about who reads with their child/ren). It reveals:

- **Mums are five times more likely to be the main reader:** 64% of mums of 4-5 year olds say that they are the principle 'reader' with their child/ren, compared to just 12% of dads. Despite changing social and gender patterns where women are almost as likely to be in employment<sup>1</sup>, mums are still the chief reader by far. Among parents/carers of 11-12 year olds, mums still dominate, with 46% stating that they are the principle reader compared to just one in 20 dads.
- **Daily habit for some but not all:** Just one third of parents/carers across all age ranges read with their child/ren on a daily basis, although among parents/carers of 4-5 year olds this rises to 50%. Less than one in ten parents/carers of 11-12 year olds (7%) read with their child/ren daily.
- **Daily reading aloud with children has decreased over the last two years:** In 2006, 43% of parents/carers of young children read with them daily but this figure has now dropped to one in three in 2008. Again, while parent/child reading rates appear to have improved, ever increasing time/work pressures appear to be impacting on frequency two years on (see below).

#### The barriers stopping parents and carers from reading more with their children are:

Barriers to reading more with children	
1. Too much else to do	35%
2. Tiredness	30%
3. Cooking dinner	25%
4. Other children's demands	22%
5. Too much homework for them to do first	11%
6. I/my child isn't interested in books or reading	10%
7= I don't get home in time	6%
7= Watching TV gets in the way	6%
7= Using the internet gets in the way	6%
10= Home improvements	4%
10= Checking emails	4%

- **Some parents and carers never read with children:** Across all age ranges, 23% of parents/carers (and 20% of all dads) never or rarely read aloud with their child/ren. This peaks at 19% in Glasgow, 17% in Leeds and 16% in Newcastle and Birmingham. Conversely, Sheffield and Liverpool have the highest rates of 'daily parental reading' where four out of ten (mostly mums) read aloud with their child/ren everyday. One in 50 parents/carers of four to five year olds say that they *never* spend time reading aloud with them, with this figure rising to 18% of parents/carers of 11-12 year olds.
- **One major benefit for parents and carers is the enjoyment they gain from reading with their children.** 78% of parents/carers who do read with their children agree or strongly agree that 'reading with my child/ren is a good way for me to get away from everyday worries' and a great form of escapism. This endorses recent research by the National Year of Reading which shows that reading for pleasure enhances quality of life.

<sup>1</sup> Source: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows an increase of an extra 4 million female employees in nearly 35 years (1971 to 2005). The employment rate for women in 1971 was just 56% and now stands at 70%, almost rivalling the 79% for men.

- **Age of parent determines who reads the most with children:** The older the mum, the *less* likely they are to read most with their child/ren. Conversely, the older the father, the *more* likely they are to read most with their offspring (see below table).

Mums who read the most (by age of mother)	Dads who read the most (by age of father)
25-34 75%	25-34 7%
35-44 58%	35-44 10%
45-54 33%	45-54 13%

- Analysis of research collated over the last three years reveals that the ratio of parents/carers who do not read aloud with their children is dwindling. In 2006, half of all dads said they did not read with their child/ren. This figure is now 20% in 2008 (i.e. one in five). However, mums are still doing the lion's share. In fact, in 2006, 14% of dads said they read the most with their child/ren, rising to 16% in 2007. In 2008, this drops to just 12% of dads. While dads are more likely to read with their children than two years ago, it is still something of a 'minority sport'.

Mums who read the most with their child/ren by region	Dads who read the most with their child/ren by region
1. Northern Ireland (68%)	1. London (18%)
2. South West (65%)	2. Wales (14%)
3. North East (58%)	3. North West (12%)

## 2. Poets' Corner

The research asked all parents/carers about their own poetry reading habits, reading poetry with their children and also explored their attitudes towards the genre.

How often do you read poetry with your child/ren?	
Never	31%
Rarely	30%
Less than monthly	9%
Weekly	8%
Monthly	6%
2-3 times a week	6%
Fortnightly	5%
4-6 times a week	3%
Daily	2%

- **Nearly a quarter (31%) of all parents/carers surveyed said that they never read poetry with their child/ren** (rising to four out of ten dads). Even among parents/carers of 4-5 year olds, more than one in five (22%) say they never read poetry with their child/ren, rising to 43% of parents/carers of 11-12 year olds.
- **Poetry reading with children is strong in major cities:** However, poetry is still a much-loved genre for many. London (17%), Birmingham (14%), Sheffield (14%) and Liverpool (13%) have the highest rates of weekly (or more) poetry reading.
- **Poetry is a turn-off for parents and carers in Scotland:** Glaswegian parents/carers are least likely to read poetry with their child/ren, almost half (47%) say that they never do.
- **Children's enjoyment:** The researchers asked parents/carers about the benefits of reading poetry. The main benefits included their children's enjoyment of the 'rhythm & rhyming' (62%), humour (36%) and that the repetition and sounds of the poem aids their child's memory (34%).
- **Poetry saves on story time for some:** The research found that some parents/carers choose to read poetry with their child/ren for their **own** benefit, as a way of 'cutting corners' when it comes to shared reading, with 9% saying it saves them time, rising to 12% of dads!
- **The benefits of reading poetry:**
  - 39% of parents/carers say reading poetry sparks the imagination;
  - 26% like doing it as it's enjoyable/fun;
  - 25% say reading poetry reminds them of happy memories and childhood days;
  - 22% believe it expands their language and vocabulary;
  - 22% of parents/carers say reading poetry represents the perfect escape from the stress of modern life;
  - 18% say it helps them feel better;
  - 7% say it helps to give them a better understanding of life and the world.

For those who do enjoy reading poetry, the top three responses emphasise the pleasure and enjoyment they gain. Overall, these results again endorse the recent National Year of Reading research that found that reading for pleasure enhances quality of life.

### 3. Barriers to reading poetry with children

The research explored the barriers to reading poetry that parents/carers felt they faced. There were many - proven by the fact that **one third** of parents/carers **never** read poetry with their children. The biggest barriers are detailed below.

Barriers to reading poetry with children	
Finding poetry that I and my child will like	20%
I'm too busy at home	11%
I personally don't like poetry	11%
Poetry can be difficult for my child to understand as it's not a 'normal' story	10%
My child finds it hard to enjoy	8%
Work pressures	5%
I don't understand poetry	2.5%
I think poetry is more for academics	2.5%
I find it difficult to read	2%
I think reading poetry is quite elitist	2%

- **The most common barrier to reading poetry is the difficulty in finding poetry that they and their child/ren will like.**
- **Interestingly, one in four parents and carers DO NOT feel that poetry is important in enhancing the enjoyment of reading for their child.**

### 4. Children's views

- **Reading gets thumbs up with kids:** Nine out of ten children said that they enjoyed reading (89% average – 87% boys; 91% girls) rising to 95% of 7-8 year olds.
- **Even when children can read, they still like a parent to read with them:** 47% of 9-11 year olds say they like to read with mum and 20% like to read with dad.
- **One in five of all children say that they don't read enough with their family** and friends. This rises to 40% of 7-8 year olds and is highest regionally in Bristol and Newcastle (30% each respectively).
- **More poetry reading wanted:** One third of all children said they would like to read more poetry or have more poetry read with them.

### 5. Nation's favourite poets and poems revealed

The researchers also asked all respondents if they have a favourite poet and poem.

- 12% of parents/carers have a favourite poet of their own and 14% have a favourite poem.
- Dads are more likely to have a favourite poet (15% compared to 11% of mums) as are those who live in Edinburgh (20%).
- **The nation's favourite poet is First World War soldier Wilfred Owen**, narrowly ahead of late comic Spike Milligan.

Nation's favourite poet	
1.	Wilfred Owen
2.	Spike Milligan
3.	William Wordsworth
4.	Robbie Burns
5.	Lord Byron
6.	John Keats
7.	Dylan Thomas
8.	John Donne
9.	Roger McGough
10.	Rudyard Kipling

## 6. The research reveals that the UK's five favourite poems are:

Nation's favourite poem
1. 'If' by Rudyard Kipling
2. 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth
3. 'The Lady of Shalott' by Alfred Tennyson
4. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen
5. 'Not Waving but Drowning' by Stevie Smith

## 7. Portrait of modern childhood in 2008: Children's activity audit

The research also explored children's activities and asked parents/carers how long, in a typical week, their child/ren spend doing the following things:

Activity	Average weekly time spent (4-5 yr olds)	Average weekly time spent (11-12 yr olds)
Watching TV/DVDs	7hrs 26mins	8hrs 30mins
Playing computer games	2hrs 13mins	5hrs 49mins
Surfing internet	58 mins	4hrs 14mins
Reading on their own	1 hr 22 mins	3 hrs 19mins
Reading together	3hrs 4mins	41 mins
Sporting activities	2hrs 41mins	3hrs 40mins
Chores	31 mins	46 mins
Playing outside	6hrs 32mins	5hrs 50mins
Toys and games	5hrs 53mins	3hrs 8mins
Time with friends	6hrs 11mins	7hrs 37mins
Emailing	3 mins	38 mins

- **Reading with parents and carers declines with age** even though literacy experts encourage parents/carers to read with their children at this age given its benefits. Indeed, it declines dramatically from an average of over three hours for 4-5 year olds to just 41 minutes by the age of 11-12 years.
- **Watching TV/DVDs dominates** both age groups' time and increases with age. There has been a slight decrease year on year among parents/carers of younger children in the amount of time spent sharing book time (a 10% decrease from 3hrs 25mins in 2007 to 3hrs 4mins in 2008). This means that children of all ages are still spending more than twice their time watching TV compared to reading with parents/carers.
- **Time spent on household chores overtakes time spent reading for older children:** The average 11-12 year old spends 4hrs 14mins surfing the internet compared to just 41 mins reading with their parent/carer. In reality, they spend longer doing household chores.

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