

Introduction

Independent research was conducted on behalf of Booktime and Booked Up, two free books programmes from independent charity Booktrust promoting reading for pleasure.

1,772 UK parents/carers of four-12 year olds took part in the research between 22 September and 1 October 2009. A combination of online and telephone research techniques were used to ensure that a representative sample of the UK population was approached. In addition, **1,318 children aged five to 12 years old** were surveyed. Questions were developed in conjunction with some of the UK's leading experts who specialise in literature and education.

The research builds on previous fieldwork conducted in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Detailed below is an executive summary of the 2009 research findings.

Love of reading growing

- 96% of all children surveyed said that they enjoyed reading for pleasure (peaking at 99% amongst 7 year olds and falling to 89% amongst 12 year olds). This represents an increase of over 5% since September 2008 (nine out of ten children said they enjoyed reading in 2008).
- 93% of boys and 98% of girls said that they liked reading for pleasure, whilst enthusiasm for reading peaked in Cardiff, Bristol, Leeds and Nottingham (above 98% in each city).

Reading with mother (still) in 2009

- Children say that mums are still the principal reader in 60% of British homes, three times the rate for dads (18%), while 17% of younger children said that there is no other principal reader, and that they read predominantly on their own– this rises to one in three 11-12yr olds.
- In one in four Glasgow and Newcastle homes, dads are the principal reader, while this is the case in just 8% of Brighton homes.
- When children were asked who they *liked* to read with them, mums were chosen by 79% of all children. However, 56% also said that they liked dad to read with them, while a further 23% cited grandparents as a favourite reading partner.

Why children love reading– ingredients revealed

The most loved ingredients of reading together were identified through the research.

Q. What do you enjoy about someone reading with you?

Response	%	Comments
They like spending time with me	60%	This becomes the best thing about reading among 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

Demand for more book time with dad

- While mums are still three times more likely than dads to be the principal reader, there is a huge desire among children for their dads to spend more time reading with them. Nearly half (45%) of all children surveyed said they'd like dad to read more with them.
- Crucially, among the youngest children surveyed, the 5 year olds, 61% said that they would like dad to read with them more, rising to 60% of Birmingham children, , higher than anywhere else in the UK.
- Just 24% of all children said they didn't want anyone to read more with them or that they were happy reading independently, though this rises through the age ranges to 47% of 12 year olds.

Polarised reading habits for British children

- Three quarters of the children surveyed said that they have read a book with a parent or carer in the past week. However, for a small but significant minority (6%), the last time they read with a parent or carer was over three months ago.
- This figure starts to rise by the age of 8 years, and by the age of 12 years, one in every eight children surveyed said that it was over a year ago, or so long ago that they cannot remember the last time. This figure rises to one in ten Glaswegian children, more than twice the UK average.
- 8% of children surveyed said that they rarely or never see their parents or carers reading in their spare time, rising to one in ten London children and almost one in five in the Welsh capital. It is younger children who tend to say their parents and carers rarely read.
- The six main reasons these children believe their parents and carers do not read are: being too busy, watching TV or spending time online.

Why do your parents not read?	%
Too busy	60%
Prefer watching TV	40%
Checking emails/work on PC	26%
Cooking	26%
Too tired	25%
Surfing internet	23%

- Technology and home entertainment are clearly obstacles to book time in British homes, according to the nation's children, with work encroaching into family life (through emails/home PC working) and preventing reading in a quarter of all homes. Whilst flexible working is supposed to enable a positive work-life balance, it seems that children may be losing out.

Barriers to book time revealed

- When we asked children themselves what stops them from reading more for pleasure it was not spending time interacting with friends or taking part in physical exercise which impacted most of all on book time, but sedentary activities, such as watching TV and time spent on the computer or playing video games. The five biggest barriers to book time are:

What stops you from reading?	%
Watching TV	54%
Playing computer games	41%
Playing outside	37%
Homework	33%
Spending time with friends	25%

- Boys are significantly more likely to cite playing computer games/consoles as a top barrier to reading. 52% of all boys said this stops them from reading for pleasure compared to three out of ten girls.
- Girls were slightly more likely than boys (35% versus 30%) to say that doing their homework curtails time reading for pleasure.
- Just 18% of all children said that nothing stops them reading for pleasure, suggesting that eight out of ten children experience barriers to book time.

Real world book time influences revealed

- In an audit of reading influences we asked all children what would help them to get interested in reading a particular book, covering a wide range of different factors from 'book ingredients' such as characterisation and plot, through to more external influences, such as peer groups, teachers and mass media or other 'art forms' such as films

- The most powerful ingredients for attracting children to a particular book were based on characters and storylines, although the power of TV and marketing are clear to see in the rankings delivered through the research:

If I liked the character(s)	51%
If I liked the storyline (plot)	43%
If the book was part of a series I liked	41%
If I liked the type of book / genre (e.g. ghost story, adventure story)	41%
If my friend(s) were reading it too	39%
If it was based on / also a TV show	38%
If I liked the pictures	38%
If I liked the front or back covers	36%
If my teacher said it was a good book	35%
If my parent/s / carers said it was a good book / they enjoyed it as a child	32%
If it was based on / also a film	32%
If an author I liked had written it	24%
If I read something interesting about it	20%
If a librarian said it was a good book	20%
If a website said it was a good book	6%
If a bookseller in a book shop said it was a good book	6%
If someone famous said they liked it	5%
If someone famous wrote it (a celebrity like Madonna or David Walliams)	5%
If a famous author said they liked it	4%

- Girls are more likely to be swayed by personal and trusted recommendations, such as parents or carers, teachers, librarians and peer group influences, compared to boys who are more likely to be influenced by visual stimulus and mass media such as TV or film tie-ins.
- For example, girls are a third more likely to be influenced by their teacher talking about a good book compared to boys, whilst boys are one third more likely than girls to want to read a book because of a related film.
- Visual stimuli, such as attractive covers and illustrations/pictures, have a bigger sway amongst younger children: 80% of 5 year olds said the pictures would encourage them to read a particular book.
- The power of authorship grows with age, where one in three 11 year olds says they would choose a book because of its author (compared to less than one in ten 5 year olds).

Book time autonomy?

- Children of all ages exert genuine autonomy in their book choices, with more than half of 5 year olds saying that, in the main, they tend to choose the books they read, rather than other adults.
- Across the entire sample, 76% of children said they principally choose what they read, while 15% say that Mum is the main decision-maker.
- Mirroring the relatively low reading rates between dads and children, just 3% of children say that dads tend to choose what they read most often (which is less than the influence teachers have over children's reading for pleasure at 5%).

Top 20 best loved children's characters

Finally the research asked all children to tell us how their favourite character from a book was, revealing a truly eclectic mix of TV-based spin offs, much loved classics and topping the list (unsurprisingly) the literary phenomenon of the past decade, Harry Potter:

1. Harry Potter
2. Horrid Henry
3. Tracy Beaker
4. Biff, Chip and Kipper (school reading scheme characters)
5. Hannah Montana
6. Doctor Who
7. Ben 10
8. Winnie the Pooh
9. Captain Underpants
10. Charlie from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
- 11=Cinderella
- 11=Gruffalo
- 11=Peter Pan
- 11=Charlie and Lola
15. Matilda
- 16= Alex Rider
- 16= Fantastic Mr Fox
- 16= Spiderman
- 19 Thomas The Tank Engine
- 20.BFG

- The list taps into the real-world loves of British children and shows how Captain Underpants and Ben 10 relegate Peter Pan and Cinderella out of the top ten.
- Modern classics from Roald Dahl make multiple entries in the top 20 suggesting that they will remain firm favourites for decades to come.

Ends

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