

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.

Dads increasing 'book time' dramatically

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

- 67% of mums of 4-5 year olds say that they are the principal 'reader' with their child compared to just 17% of dads.
- However, the rate of 'dads as principal reader' has actually risen steeply in the past year (by 40% since September 2008).
- Similarly among older children, whilst mums are still more likely to be the principal reader (41% compared to 46% last year), dads now account for 17% of all reading with 11-12 year olds. This has more than *tripled* in the space of a year from 5% in 2008.
- These increases are a dramatic sea-change in parental book reading habits, though dads clearly still have a long way to go before they become equal partners in the reading experience.
- The rate of dads reading to their children is highest in higher income households – for example 21% of Dads in £40-50k income homes are the principal reader, compared to just 11% in homes with an annual income of £10-15k.

3% of family homes are reading-free zones

While reading with children is the norm in the vast majority of British homes, in 3% of homes parents and carers say that they never read with their child (highest in homes with older children).

- 8% of family homes in Liverpool and Newcastle are 'parent/child' reading free zones.
- Parents and carers of boys are twice as likely to NOT read with them compared to parents and carers of girls.
- Households with the lowest parent/carer-child reading rates tend to be at the lowest and highest end of the income scale (one in twenty homes with incomes less than £10k and over £50k).

Term time trends

While for most parents and carers, family reading habits (for pleasure) do not change dramatically between term time and holiday time, 33% of parents say they spend more time reading with their children during half term, compared to a smaller 20% who say they spend longer during term time.

What do children enjoy reading?

92% of the parents and carers surveyed said that their child does enjoy reading for pleasure, but what ten books do they enjoy reading most?

1. Story books	75%
2. Fact books	47%
3. Books linked to TV series	45%
4. Fairy tales	42%
5. School books	39%
6. Picture books	30%
7. Joke books	27%
8. Young adult novels	23%
9. Graphic novels/comics	22%
10. Nursery rhymes	18%

- There is a strong female bias towards fairy tales, poetry and classics, whilst parents and carers of boys were more likely to say they preferred comics and joke books.
- By the age of 11-12, more than half of children enjoy young adult novels, while story books and fairy tales are the two preferred book types for 4-5 year olds.

Bookshelves to be renamed?

- 34% of British parents and carers say that bookshelves in their home are increasingly being filled up with DVDs and computer games, rather than books, especially in homes with older children (41% of homes with 11-12 year olds) and boys (37%)
- 64% of those parents and carers said this was particularly the case in their child's bedroom where rows of story books are being replaced with video games and films (peaking at 74% in homes with 11-12yr olds).
- In pure number, 40% of family homes tend to have more books than DVDs/toys etc. However consider the comparative low cost of books, a surprising 15% of homes spend more on books (in total) than DVDs, toys or video games.

Books in numbers

- The average family home has 75 children's books, however, 5% have fewer than ten children's books in total (rising to 10% in Birmingham).
- Households with female children, on average, have ten more children's books than those with boys.
- Norwich and Leeds' homes have the most children's books in the UK (100 and 95 respectively).
- Lower income homes (under £10k p/a) have the fewest books (55) whilst homes with an income over £100k have the most books (115).

DVDs & video games take over

- 57% of parents and carers agree that their child now spends more time playing video games and watching DVDs rather than reading books. This peaks at 70% of parents and carers with older children aged 11-12.
- Parents and carers of boys are much more likely to agree that this is true (69%) than parents and carers of girls (45%).
- However, non-working parents (full-time mums/dads) tend to disagree as a whole that DVDs/video games are taking over. Only 45% of them say that their child spends more time in front of a screen playing games/watching DVDs rather than turning the pages of a book.
- Almost half of parents of 4-5yr olds say their child already spends more time facing a screen playing games/watching DVDs, rather than reading (48%).

Reading frequency

- The vast majority of parents and carers say that their child does read their books often (73% say this is at least weekly).
- However, reading is a rarity for 8% of younger British children, rising to 13% of 11-12 year olds.
- Boys and children in lower income homes read least often (11% and 14% respectively rarely or never read their books for pleasure).

Reading for pleasure versus reading for school

- On average, children aged 4-5 will read 70 books for pleasure in a year while 11-12 year olds read just 25.
- This is a dramatic fall, showing that older children read almost three times fewer books for pleasure than when they were 4-5 year olds.
- The number of books read for school is actually considerably higher among all ages of children – the average 4-5 year olds will read 88 books in a year, while 11-12 year olds will, on average, read 49 books a year for school.
- Girls read, on average, eight more books a year for pleasure than boys.
- Children in Bristol read the most books for pleasure of any city in the UK (54 a year), while those in Newcastle read the least (31).

What barriers do parents and carers face when it comes to making time for reading with children?

In previous studies the research has investigated what has prevented parents and carers from reading certain types of books with their children (e.g. poetry). This year the research investigates the barriers that prevent parents from reading for pleasure with their children:

What from the following stops you from reading more for pleasure with your child?

Reason	%
Tiredness	35%
My child likes to read independently	31%
Too much else to do	30%
Cooking dinner	25%
Other children's demands	24%
Nothing I always make time to read with my child	19%
Too much homework for them to do first	16%
Preparing school bags / packed lunches	12%
Watching TV	12%
I don't get home in time	9%
I / my child isn't that interested in books or reading	6%
Using the internet	6%
Home improvements	6%
Other	5%
Time spent socialising / going out	5%
Checking emails	4%
Paying the bills	4%
Watching videos / DVDs	2%
Lack of confidence	0.5%

- These results show that fatigue is the biggest barrier preventing parents/carers from reading for pleasure with their children, suggesting that the rise in flexible working and the ideal of achieving a healthy work-life balance do not match up to the reality for millions of homes across the UK.
- However, for many parents and carers there are other distractions and duties that prevent sharing reading for pleasure. One in five working parents and carers simply don't get home in time to read with their children, while 16% cite their child's homework as an obstacle to spending time reading for pleasure.
- 7% of dads blame excessive emails for getting in the way of reading with their child.
- Interestingly, only 12% cite watching TV as a key barrier, a figure far lower than the children themselves cited when asked a very similar question.
- One in five parents and carers say that nothing is an obstacle and that they always make the time for reading with their child for pleasure

Parental views on reading influences

- The final part of the research looked at parental views around reading influences, to help reflect what children themselves thought.
- Books that were part of a series (e.g. Harry Potter) or from TV shows were seen as the most powerful influencers on their child's reading habits.
- Only 8% of parents and carers said that they themselves were the single biggest influence on their child's reading/book choices.

Biggest influence on child's reading	%
Books that are part of a series	17%
Children's TV shows / books based on them	13%
The front or back covers	13%
Following a particular character	10%
What their friends are reading	10%
The illustrations	9%
I do	8%
Books I used to read myself as a child	6%
Other - please specify	4%
Major films	4%
What their siblings are reading	2%
Grown up TV shows / books based on them	1%
Reviews of fiction / books	1%
If a famous author said they liked a particular book	1%
If a website / social networking site said it was good	1%
If a celebrity wrote the book (eg Madonna, Geri Halliwell, Jay Leno)	0.5%
If a celebrity said they liked a particular book	0.5%

Ends

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