

**Booktime: a portrait of modern childhood**  
**Research executive summary**

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**Introduction**

Independent research was conducted on behalf of Booktime, a programme to promote the pleasure of reading and encourage parents and carers to read aloud with their children.

Over 1800 UK parents of primary school aged children took part in the research between 20 Aug 2007 – 12 Sept 2007. A combination of online and telephone research techniques were used to ensure a representative sample of the UK population was approached.

Questions were developed in conjunction with some of the UK's leading university academics who specialise in literacy, including Dr. David Wray, University of Warwick, Fiona Collins, Roehampton University and Wendy Cooling, independent consultant.

The research builds on a previous study conducted to coincide with the launch of Booktime in 2006. Detailed below is an executive summary of the 2007 research findings:

**1. Who reads the most?**

- Mums read most to their children. The Booktime research reveals that 73% of mums read the most to their primary school aged children (this is an increase vs 66% of mums in 2006). Although the scales are firmly tipped in the favour of mums, dads meanwhile are improving slightly as 16% of fathers now state that they read the most (vs 14% in 2006).

<b>Mums who read the most to their child by region</b>	<b>Dads who read the most to their child by region</b>
1. Scotland (83%)	1. Northern Ireland (24%)
2. London (77%)	2. Yorkshire (23%)
3. Midlands (76%)	3. North East (19%)
4. East (74%)	3. Wales (17%)
5. North East (72%)	4. South East (17%)

- Older parents = more reading time with offspring:** Older dads are more likely to read most to their children vs younger dads: of those aged 16-24, only 9% say they read most to their children vs twice as many dads (21%) aged 45-54. This could be explained by dads being less stressed, or on second marriage/second family and wanting to do things differently second time around.
- Divide and conquer?:** Only 3% of parents claimed that they share the task of reading with their children equally.

**2. Income is a positive influencing factor for some but not for others....**

- The more dads earn, the *more* likely they are to read to their child: the research reveals that twice as many fathers (21%) in the £50,000 income bracket read most to their children compared to the 10% of dads in the under £10,000 income bracket. This could be explained by the fact that many higher income families have a dual income and dad is expected to help out with story time.
- As mums' income increases, the number of mums reading with their child decreases** (84% of mums who earn less than £10,000 income read most to their children vs 70% of mums who earn over £50,000.)

<b>Mums who read the most to their child by total yearly income</b>	<b>Dads who read the most to their child by total yearly income</b>
1. £0-£10,000 (84%)	1. £0-£10,000 (10%)
2. £10,000-£20,000 (74%)	2. £10,000-£20,000 (15%)
3. £20,000-£30,000 (75%)	3. £20,000-£30,000 (15%)
4. £30,000-£50,000 (69%)	3. £30,000-£50,000 (20%)
5. Over £50,000 (70%)	4. Over £50,000 (21%)

### 3. Reading habits increasingly start very early in a child's life

- **Reading starts early for some:** Just over half of UK parents (54%) claim that they started to read aloud to their child before they reached nine months, with eight out of ten (80%) reading before they reached 18 months. Mums again are the lead readers at this early stage with 59% dedicating time to reading in the first nine months vs 42% of dads.
- **Reading while in the womb:** Last year's Booktime research revealed that 5% of parents said that they stated to read with their child while s/he was in the womb compared to this year where even more (8%) parents are reading PRE birth!

### 4. Booktime leads to question time for many parents

- The research found that children ask a regular stream of questions during story time which is an excellent way of helping to formulate their understanding of the world.

<b>Most commonly cited questions children ask parents</b>
1. What is in the pictures
2. What is happening/what happens next
3. What a word means
4. The characters and their inter-relationships
5. Why the characters behaved the way they did
6. All about the animals in the story
7. Whether the story is actually true
8. How cars, planes and trains work
9. How the story relates to them
10. "Again?!"

### 5. Most enjoyable books

- According to the research, story books and picture books are by far the most popular (81% and 71% respectively).

<b>Books children enjoy</b>
1. Story books (81%)
2. Picture books (71%)
3. Books linked to TV programmes (53%)
4. Fairy tales (52%)
5. Nursery rhymes (47%)
6. Fact books (38%)
7. School books (33%)
8. Children's poetry (20%)

#### 5.1 Marked gender differences in books children enjoy the most

- Whilst story books and picture books are universally popular, nursery rhymes and fairy tales are enjoyed more by girls than boys (girls: 70% and 55% against boys 35% and 40% respectively).

<b>Types of book enjoyed by boys</b>	<b>Types of book enjoyed by Girls</b>
Fact books (42%)	Fairy tales (70%)
Nursery rhymes (40%)	Nursery rhymes (55%)
Fairy tales (35%)	Fact books (34%)
Children's poetry (18%)	Children's poetry (22%)

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- **School book enjoyment decreases as family income increases:** Interestingly, 42 per cent of parents earning less than £10,000 a year claim that their children enjoy reading school books compared to less than a quarter (23%) of parents who earn over £50,000. This may be because children in higher income families have a greater choice of books.

## 6. How many books do children own?

- According to the Booktime research, nearly three quarters of the cross section of parents surveyed (73%) said that their children own more than 25 books, with 41% stating that their child owned more than 50.
- **Some have no books:** 3% of parents in Northern Ireland stated that their children don't have any books – the highest figure in the UK.
- **Others have just a few books:** 14% parents in London stated that their children own fewer than ten books compared to only 2% of children in Wales.
- **Bigger collection – especially for children in North East:** According to the research, children in the North East have the most books with almost half (49%) owning more than 50 books.
- **Higher the family income=the more books child has:** Children from wealthier families have more books with half (50%) of all children in families with a total yearly income of over £50,000 owning more than 50 books. Only a third (34%) of all children in the £10,000-£20,000 income bracket own this number of books.

### Average number of books owned by primary school children

- 46% of parents of primary school children state that their child has more than 50 books of their own.
- 34% state that their child has between 25-50 books
- 16% state that their child has 11-25 books
- 4% state that their child owns between one and ten books.

## 7. Favourite books

As part of the research, parents were asked to name their child's favourite book. The research reveals that children's classics such as *Dora the Explorer*, *Each Peach Pear Plum*, *The Gruffalo*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Jolly Postman*, *Mr Men*, *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* are firm favourites for parents and their children. Other popular books include those that are adapted and brought to life via TV including *Angelina Ballerina*, *Charlie and Lola*, *Thomas the Tank Engine*, and *Winnie the Pooh*..

## 8. Where do parents go to get children books?

Where parents get most of their children's books:
1. Bookshops (32%)
2. Supermarkets (16%)
3= Library (11%)
3= Internet (11%)
4. Charity shops (9%)
5. Family (8%)
6. Other (6%)
7. School (4%)
8. Friends (2%)
9. Pound shops (1%)

- **Older parents** (55-64) are far more likely to buy children's books from traditional bookshops. Two thirds of this age bracket (60%) are buying from bookshops compared to just over a quarter (26%) of 16-24 year old parents.
- **Younger parents** are the most likely to buy children's books as they do their weekly shop with supermarkets being the most popular place for book purchasing (20% of 25-34 year old parents buy children's books while food shopping).
- 38% of parents in London are the most likely to buy children's books in bookshops.
- Yorkshire parents are the ones who are most likely to surf the net for children's books (17%) followed by 15% of London parents who regularly use this method to purchase. Charity shops are popular with parents in the North East as 14% state that they regularly pick up books here.

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- Parents in Northern Ireland are the heaviest users of their local libraries for picking up children’s books with 18% stating that they get their books following a visit to the library.

**9. Children’s books are more widespread than any other kind of reading material in the home**

- Children’s books are found in 97 per cent of all homes vs magazines (81%) catalogues (75%) and newspapers (68%).
- Religious books and poetry books are found in less than a third of all homes (28% and 32% respectively).
- Poetry is more likely to be found in London homes (42%) and least likely to be found in Scottish homes (22%).

**10. Two thirds of children have library cards**

- Three quarters of children in the North East have library cards (75%) – this is the highest in the UK.
- 47% of parents in Yorkshire say that their child isn’t a member of their local library.

**10.1 Younger parents are the least likely to take their children to the library**

- Over one-third of all UK parents (36%) say that they never or rarely take their child to the library.
- Nearly a quarter of all children in Wales (22%), Yorkshire (22%) and Scotland (21%) have never been to a library.
- In terms of frequency of visits, London parents are the most likely to take their children to the library on a *weekly* basis (27%) while those in the Midlands are the most likely to visit a library on a *monthly* basis (31%).
- Parents aged 35-44 year old are the most likely to take their children regularly with nearly third (29%) taking their children to the library monthly.

**11. A portrait of modern childhood**

As part of the *Booktime* research, parents of primary school aged children (between the ages of 4-9 years old) were asked how much time was spent reading with them vs other activities. The results are detailed below and paint an interesting view of a primary school child’s life in 2007 Britain:

**Activity and time spent each week by the average primary school child on the following activities:**

Activity	Average time UK children spend per week
Watching TV	7 hours, 46 minutes
Playing outside	7 hours, 8 minutes
Playing with toys	7 hours, 0 minutes
With friends	6 hours, 4 minutes
Playing sport	5 hours, 27 minutes
Sitting down to eat at mealtimes	5 hours, 5 minutes
Reading independently	3 hours, 51 minutes
Video games and DVDs	3 hours, 31 minutes
Sharing a book with an adult	3 hours, 25 minutes
Playing computer games or PlayStation	2 hours, 52 minutes
Travelling in a car	1 hour, 47 minutes
Doing household chores	37 minutes

**Children spend more time watching TV than any other leisure activity**

- Looking at average times UK children spend on various activities, the highest volume of time in a primary school aged child’s day is spent watching TV.
- 23% of parents of children in the South West state that their child watches between 10-20 hours each week and 3% of London parents admitted that their primary school aged child watched 30 hours or more.
- Children in Northern Ireland appear to be lighter viewers of TV, with just under half (41%) watching five to ten hours a week, compared to less than a quarter of children in London (23%).

**TV vs reading books: twice as much time spent on TV vs sharing a book with an adult**

- In the quest to encourage children to enjoy books (and at the same time expand their vocabulary, listening and communication skills), it appears that TV wins out over the traditional act of reading a book with a child or even the child reading it themselves.

Activity	Average time UK children spend per week
Watching TV	7 hours, 46 minutes
Reading with an adult	3 hours, 25 minutes

**Children in Northern Ireland spend more time playing outside than children elsewhere in the country**

- A third of children in Northern Ireland (29%) spend between 10-20 hours playing outside compared to just 7% of children in London. However, children in London are the most likely to spend time playing with friends with nearly a third of children (31%) spending two to five hours with friends compared to just 18% of children in the North East. This may reflect the popularity of play dates in the capital.
- Younger parents aged 16-24 are the least likely to let their children spend five to ten hours a week with their friends.

**Children spend more time reading to themselves vs being read to**

- On average, children will spend 3 hrs 51 mins reading and looking through books themselves vs 3hrs 25 mins being read to by an adult.
- When it comes to reading alone, children in Northern Ireland (29%), those living in the East (29%), Midlands (28%) and Yorkshire (28%) are the lead bookworms with a third of under nines spending between two and five hours looking at books.
- When it comes to reading aloud to their children, 38% of parents in Northern Ireland dedicate between two to five hours each week to this activity (the highest in the country). They are followed by Welsh parents (34%) and those living in the South West (32%).

**Nearly a third of girls under nine never use computers or PlayStation**

- Boys are more likely to spend time playing with computers and PlayStations than girls and more than a third of girls never use either (37%) vs 29% of boys.
- Contrary to concerns about time spent playing on computer games, the Booktime research reveals that the average primary school child spends **less** time on this activity compared to playing outside, spending time with friends and pursuing sporting activities. This could be explained due to the fact that certain age groups of the children have not yet got the 'PlayStation bug'; parents are policing time spent on computer games/PlayStation; or the fact that the child is more interested in other activities.

**Children in the capital are the least likely to participate in sports**

- When it comes to playing sport, children in London are the least likely to participate in any kind of sport with 15 per cent claiming to not engage in any sporting activities. Children in Northern Ireland appear to be more active with a third of children (32%) spending five to ten hours a week playing sport.

**Half of under nine-year-olds never do household chores**

- It may be the rise of the 'whatever' generation or the fact that children are too busy watching TV and playing but it appears that helping mum and dad with simple chores come bottom of the activity league for primary school children!
- 38% of parents state that their children do not do ANY household chores; 29% state that they will spend up to half an hour a week and 12% of lucky parents state their children spend between one and two hours helping them each week.

**Children don't spend much time commuting**

- Surprisingly, children do not appear to spend much time travelling about in cars – be it to school or accompanying adults on chores and trips further afield.
- Just over a third of children in Scotland (36%) spend one to two hours a week, and less than a quarter of children in London (20%) spend this amount of time.

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- The longest time spent in the car commuting is experienced by children in the North East who spend between five and ten hours commuting each week (twice the national average).

**Sitting down to eat at mealtimes**

- The Booktime research also explored mealtimes. Parents reveal that their primary school aged children spend more time watching TV, playing outside and doing sport vs sitting down to eat a meal times ie breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- On average, they will dedicate just 43 mins a day to this although some spend even less: 18% of parents said that their children spend just 17 mins a day eating breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Children in Yorkshire are most likely to enjoy leisurely mealtime with 32% spending between 5-10 hours sitting down to eat each week.
- The research also reveals the more income a family has, the more time children spend on mealtimes. Children from the highest income households spend more time eating than children from lower income families: 40% of children in the £50,000 bracket spending two to five hours a week at the table, compared to just over a quarter (27%) of children in the £10,000-£20,000 bracket.

**A year in the life of a primary school child**

**Activity and time spent each year by the average primary school child to the following activities:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Average time UK children spend per year</b>
Watching TV	16 days, 19 hours, 49 mins
Playing outside	15 days, 11 hours, 10 mins
Playing with toys	15 days, 3 hours, 57 mins
With friends	13 days, 3 hours, 16 mins
Playing sport	11 days, 19 hours, 34 mins
Sitting down to eat at mealtimes	11 days, 0 hours, 11 mins
Reading	8 days, 8 hour, 2 mins
Video games and DVDs	7 days, 15 hours, 3 mins
Reading with an adult	7 days, 9 hours, 40 mins
Playing computer games or PlayStation	6 days, 5 hours, 25 mins
Travelling in a car	2 days, 20 hours, 40 mins
Doing household chores	1 day, 8 hours, 26 mins

-Ends-

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