

Celebrity responses to Booktime

Jools Oliver

I love nothing better than snuggling up with my two girls and reading a book - whether on the sofa or just before bedtime. Like many busy parents, I sometimes struggle to find the time to turn off, slow down and sit and read aloud to my girls but I know it's not only one of the best things I can do with them, it's also hugely rewarding - for them and for me. That's why I am fully supporting Booktime. Pick up a book, sit down and enjoy the experience. A love of books is truly a very special gift mums and dads across the UK can give to their children.



photo by Jamie Oliver

Tana Ramsay

In today's hectic life with our four children having different interests and activities the one thing that always brings us together is reading at bedtime. It is the calmest and cosiest time of the day and is the one thing that has not changed as the children have got older - if ever we are going out in the evening and both have to miss story time it is our loss!



As a child I remember the comfort of losing myself in books if I was having a hard time at school and I hope my children find the same. It is so important to make that 10 minutes a day to encourage reading, it helps in all areas of educational development and social interaction. I watch our 9 year old swapping books now with friends and acting out scenes they have read - so much more stimulating than television!

Michael Parkinson

I remember as a small child, aged 3 or 4, being read to by my Father who was tired and in danger of nodding off. Sure enough, next sentence, he fell asleep. I woke him. "Should I read to you instead?" I said. My father loved telling that story. Fact is I was a fluent reader at a very early age. I read my Mothers library books - Gollsworthy, Francis Parkinson Keyes, J. B. Priestley, Graham Green, John Steinbeck.



My favourite author of children's books was Malcolm Saville who wrote in a clean stylish and very unpatronising way.

When we first had children I worked away from home for long periods, so I recorded several of their favourite stories on an old tape machine and taught them how to start it. I read to my Grandchildren whenever they stay over. I love doing silly voices, I love seeing the words in their eyes. If there is one thing I want to encourage is for them to

read every night. I do and I fall asleep not with a head full of electronic images but a mind soothed by the power of words.

Allan Ahlberg
Author of *Funnybones*

I'm a re-reader. I've just read Daniel Woodrell's *Winter's Bone*. I'm about to read it again. Every few years I re-read Conrad's *Typhoon* and *Youth*, Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*, Charles Portis's *True Grit*. And others. I acquired this habit early on. There were no books in our house when I was a boy in the 1940s, except Sunday School prizes. For attending Sunday School – accumulating the necessary number of little stamped stars in your attendance card – you received at the end of the year a prize: 1st, 2nd or 3rd, depending on the number of stars. So after five years my private library had five books in it: a book about a toy bear that nobody wanted; a book about an English Berkshire pig in South Africa that escaped and ran wild on the veldt; a book about Banjo the Crow; a book about ... And I read them, and read them again. And again. They soaked down into me: the stories, the pictures, the paper, the smell. And they are with me still, shadowy presences in my life, re-reading around in my elderly brain. Ghost books.



Sue Palmer
Author of *Toxic Childhood: how the modern world is damaging our children...and what we can do about it*

Funnybones was one of my daughter's favourite books -- we must have read it hundreds of times, and eventually she could recite it with me! She loved the repetition and the slightly scary theme. Her other favourite, *Good Morning, Chick* by Mirra Ginsberg, was opposite in mood. It was about a mother hen coddling and caring for her chick. But both books were about a parent and child sharing time together - I think that's so important for children.



Nina Wadia

It was a new experience for us, reading with our children – I have a three and a half year old daughter and a little boy who's five months old. When my daughter can't get to sleep, it's lots of fun. It's different in our culture, Indian storytimes are quite moral, with good verses evil. I remember I was five or six before my parents read to me, traditional Indianised classics, like *Sleeping Beauty* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*. I remember getting the Bookstart book packs when my daughter was a baby and asking my friends, they said they did it and encouraged me to read with my daughter too. It's become our thing to do on a Saturday, for a couple of hours a week and she just loves it. It focused me on what books to get and made it a bit easier.



Reading with her helps me understand where her brain is at, it's fascinating, at age three, when you realize what they're thinking. She loves *Who's Poorly Too?*, by Kes Gray, about animals who've hurt themselves. My daughter hurt her knee and told me one day "I'm still poorly", using the word she'd learnt and then remembered details about the centipede who hurt her ankles. When she was a bit younger she got the *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear* book set, by Martin Waddell, as a present. It was her absolute favourite. We also really enjoy listening to the CBeebies goodnight stories.

A little while ago my daughter asked for a bookshelf, so we got her one, and she calls it her "library". I love to read to her, as does my husband, who introduced her to the Dr Seuss books.

Carol Smillie

I remember reading CS Lewis *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. I was mesmerised by the whole idea of a fantasy world out the other side of an old wardrobe!

My Dad did all the bedtime stories when I was smaller, and I seem to remember Brer rabbit stories written in a South American drawl.

Finally, I was given at prize-giving, a paperback book called *Things To Do*. It really fired up my creative side, and I think I tried out most of the ideas in it! In fact, I still have it today! When it comes to reading to my own children, my real favourite was *Clarice Bean, That's Me!* by Lauren Child.



The illustrations are so creative, and the story is hilarious. All my children loved it, but nowadays, they all like different things, and bedtime stories as a group are, sadly, over.

Both my girls are avid readers, but my son needs a little more encouragement!

Prunella Scales

I believe very strongly in the importance and value of reading aloud to children and I think my mother inspired my brother and me to love books and become early readers ourselves. Tim and I used to read regularly to our own children in bed, and thought how lucky they were to hear these books delivered by sensitive and experienced actors – until one day our elder son, who must have been four at the time, said “Oh mummy, stop doing funny voices – give it to me, I’ll read it,” which he duly did. They were both keen readers from an early age, and one of them indeed now does it professionally.



Janet Ellis

Like everyone with happy memories of being read to, I am still instantly soothed and transported by hearing a narrator's voice. Whether it was my mother 'performing' Winnie The Pooh or -later-listening with her to the serial on Woman's Hour, or my teacher's story at the end of the day, the appeal of hearing a book has never dimmed. I'd fight to the death for the life of Book at Bedtime! My time spent reading to my own three children was very special - and even the repetition of favourite books was part of the fun. I really enjoyed bringing books and characters to life, or sharing books I had loved when I was little.... and now that I have a grandson, the fun starts over again!

Sue Townsend

Creator of Adrian Mole

I recently heard about a traveller in Africa who was taken by a village head man to inspect the library. The traveller was taken to a dark, empty shack. 'But where are the books?' he asked. The head man went to a chest in a dark corner and with great ceremony opened the lid. Inside were two books. Both were English grammar primers and were over 40 years old. Books *are* precious. To have books in the house and to encourage the love of reading is the most wonderful gift a parent can give a child.

photo by Niall McDermid



Cathy Cassidy

Author of *Dizzy*, *Indigo Blue*, *Driftwood*, *Scarlett*, *Sundae Girl* and *Lucky Star*

As a small child, my mum read me nursery rhymes and my gran, who lived with us, told me ghost stories every night before I went to sleep...I'm sure that's where my love of stories originates!

When I was about seven, my teacher marched the entire class along to the local library. All those books, all those stories! I went home and told my parents, and Dad whisked me off back to the library to join up. In the years that followed, we joined three libraries and took out tickets for the whole family, although only Dad and I ever borrowed books. We'd have dozens waiting to be read, piles and piles of books in corners of the living room. A library is an education, a treasure box, an invaluable resource for any child who doesn't have a house full of books. The only books I owned were the nursery rhyme book and a couple of Bunty annuals, but the library opened up whole new worlds of adventure, excitement and drama.



I've always preferred kid's books to adult ones, so I loved reading to my children when they were small. They loved anything with repetition and surprises... things like Dr Suss and Lynley Dodd and *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*. After that, my kids got hooked on story tapes and then read to themselves - my son is a really keen reader and I still have to remember to 'tidy' the books out from his bed. They'll be stashed under his pillow, scattered about under the duvet, everywhere. My daughter is a fussier reader, and one of the reasons I started writing was to produce the kind of thing she might like. I guess I have a lot to thank her for!

photo courtesy of Walker Books Ltd.

Tanya Landman

Author of *Waking Merlin* and *Merlin's Apprentice*, the popular *Flotsam* and *Jetsam* series and *Apache*

My mother read to us a lot at home and we always had plenty of books in the house - it was a natural part of growing up. But it was at school that I really treasured being read to. I didn't like school at all - in fact, I loathed it most of the time - the only good part of the day was when the teacher read to us. Just before home time we'd all sit down and be drawn into a different world. It was both an escape and an education. I encountered all sorts of books and writers who I wouldn't have discovered on my own. It was the only time when the entire class was wholly engaged in an activity.



As a parent, I love reading to my children. It's wonderful to revisit the books I loved as a child (*Where the Wild Things Are*, *the Tiger Who Came to Tea*, *Stig of the Dump*) - you experience a real sense of passing on something of value. It's also a joy to go on new adventures together - discovering *The Dream Team*, or meeting Percy Jackson. And the really great thing is that you can do it anywhere - on a picnic, on a train, in a tent - books are so wonderfully, gloriously portable.

Ann Coburn

Author of *The Dream Team* series, *The Borderlands Sequence*, *Glint*, *The Domino Effect*, *Welcome to the Real World* and *The Granite Beast*

We have always shared books with our children. When they were very young we would read to them at every bedtime (nothing beats the feeling of cuddling up together with a great book and a freshly-bathed child) but also at any odd moment through the day. When we went out, a book would always go into the travelling bag alongside the nappies, beakers and other essentials. A story kept them happy through many a tedious journey or long wait at the doctor's. *Dogger*, *Peepo*, *The Hungry Caterpillar*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Can't You Sleep Little Bear?* and *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* were (are) just a few of our family favourites.



By the time they started school, our children already loved books. They jumped into learning to read for themselves but we didn't stop reading to them. Sometimes they liked the ritual of returning to earlier favourites. At Christmas, *The Snowman*, *Lucy and Tom's Christmas*, *The Little Matchgirl* or *The Christmas Postman* would be pulled from the shelves. When they were ill, fairytales such as the lushly illustrated *East Of The Sun, West Of The Moon*, proved to be excellent medicine. We also moved on to reading aloud longer, more demanding texts which might be daunting to a beginner reader. One winter we read *Lord of the Rings* every evening - editing out all the scholarly stuff and concentrating on the cracking story. My children are adults now but they have never forgotten that winter when we journeyed through Middle Earth together. They also continue to keep a space on their own bookshelves for all those early family favourites.

photo courtesy of Walker Books Ltd.

Lauren Child

I have really vivid memories of being read to as a child – either by my Father or my Mother. It just seemed such a normal childhood experience I have been surprised when certain friends have told me they were rarely read to.

When we went away on holiday my father would choose a book that would suit everyone (I have two sisters, one older and one younger). He wouldn't always necessarily choose children's books, but any sort of chapter books that were suitable for our age - like *The Moonstone* - and we would park up on the side of the road in the Yorkshire Dales or somewhere and listen to him read. It was a real holiday treat and rather like listening to an ongoing story on the radio – except of course you could interrupt and get him to re-read a page if you hadn't understood.



In the evenings at home my parents would mostly read us picture books, usually chosen by us on a visit to the library. There were so many I can't particularly remember many by title.

I suppose the ones I can think of are *The Tiger who came to Tea*, *Madeline*, or the *Frances* books.

I now often listen to audio books while I am illustrating – it's a kind of treat that comes with that side of my work – being able to listen while I concentrate on something visual. It helps to get me through late nights when I am working on something tricky.

Anne Fine

Author of *The Diary of a Killer Cat, Goggle-eyes, Flour Babies, Madame Doubtfire, The Tulip Touch* and many more



Here we go. Memories of being read to.

The first things that were read to me often really stuck in my brain. I was born in 1947, and had a book that I can only presume must have been written in wartime. Monty the mouse was falling from a hastily abandoned plane holding onto an umbrella, and a handsome young pilot was floating down beside him by parachute. I still remember the spongy nature of the cover (I met it again later in the covers of my beloved Beacon Readers at primary school) and one particular verse:

*"There's something wrong!" the airman cried.
(Such a splendid fella.)
And down he came by parachute
But Monty came by 'Brella'.*

My father would also endlessly read (or quote) to me the poem illustrated and framed on our bathroom wall. It was by Mabel Lucy Atwell, and began, as I recall:

*Please remember, don't forget,
Never leave the bathroom wet,
Nor leave the the soap still in the water
(That's a thing you never oughter!)
Nor leave the towels upon the floor,
Or keep the bath an hour or more
When other folk are wanting one
Just don't forget, it isn't done....*

But when I was three my parents had triplet daughters so after that I think my sister and I found there was a lot less reading at our bedsides.

I *adored* reading to and with, my own children. Some days we barely left the double bed, except to forage for food and come back with pineapple chunks stuck to the bums of our nighties, to go through the library books again. We must have used the library several times a week, because I don't recall any of us ever being bored. (We also moved a lot, so had refreshing stock changes from California to Edinburgh.) We read our way through one whole grim Canadian winter when, since I couldn't master the business of snowchains, we hardly travelled at all. I taught both children to read quite early, and then regretted it when they started prising the books out from between my fingers and claiming they liked it better read in their own heads.

One of the things that fascinated me was how they always preferred different people to read different books. I got the longer, calmer stories. But their father was always the one who had to read the books with the silly voices. But there you go. As with everything else, horses for courses.

photo courtesy of Walker Books Ltd.

Fiona Collins
Roehampton University

Booktime is a wonderful initiative as it builds on previous book gifts that children have received through the Bookstart programme. A love of books is key to children's later success in reading and writing. By giving a free book to all children at the beginning of their primary school career Booktime is giving all children a positive message about the importance of both books and reading.