

Learnings from Lockdown

*Exploring new insights around the benefits, barriers and solutions
to more children reading for pleasure*

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Introduction

Understanding children’s reading for pleasure is at the heart of our publishing approach at Farshore (formerly Egmont). Since 2012 we’ve conducted research, developed insights, and shared what we discover with our partners. Why? Because children’s reading is in long term decline and no significant progress is being made to arrest it. This has both commercial and social implications: our industry depends on adults continuing to share the reading habit and children acquiring it from a young age; and reading for pleasure positively influences children’s well-being and attainment. Reading for pleasure has the potential to level up life chances, a hugely compelling benefit when so many children struggle with disadvantage and inequalities.

Reading for Pleasure’s impact on progress is four times greater on a child’s progress than the impact of having a parent with a degree
Source: Sullivan and Brown

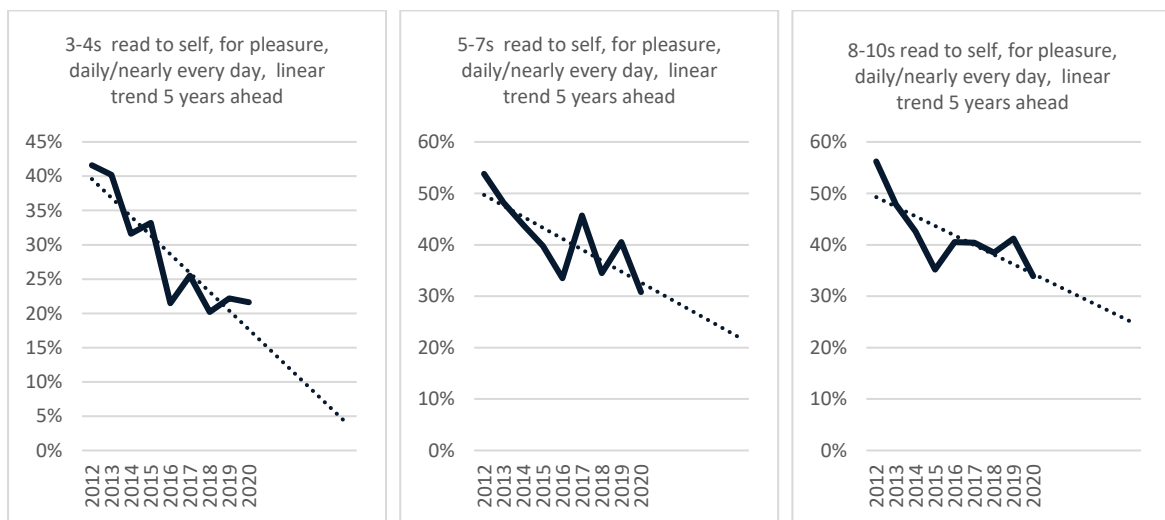
Reading correlates with children’s wellbeing:
76% with high mental wellbeing think positively about reading
48% with low mental wellbeing think positively about reading
Source: National Literacy Trust

Reading for pleasure is more important for a child’s academic success than the family’s socio-economic status
Source: OECD

The quality and quantity of children’s vocabulary at age five is a strong predictor of how well they are doing aged 34
Source: The Institute of Education

Forecasting the future

In 2020, only 23% of 0-17s read for pleasure ‘daily or nearly every day’, down from 26% in 2019 and 38% in 2012. By focusing on narrower age bands, we can get a clearer idea of the seriousness of the situation, both in absolute numbers who read now, and by projecting forward at the same rate of decline. The graphs below assume decline continues, and at the same average rate as since 2012. Of course, reading for pleasure may have already bottomed out; if this is so, we need to re-build it. At the present levels, far too many children are missing out on the benefits of reading and the consumer base for children’s publishers is being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.



3-4-year olds

Source: Nielsen Book ‘Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer’ 2012-2020

The proportion of 3-4-year olds who read or look at books for fun ‘daily or nearly every day’ has almost halved since 2012, while reading ‘rarely or never’ has grown from 10% to 23% over the same time period. By projecting the hitherto average decline in daily reading forward for a further 5 years, we can see what may happen: fewer than 5% of pre-schoolers would engage with books independently on a regular basis by 2025.

This highlights the importance of reading aloud to young children: since children this age can't read, they rely on parents or other adults to help them discover and access books.

5-10-year olds

In 2012, 54% of 5-7s chose to read '*daily or nearly every day*' for pleasure, which has declined to 31% in 2020. Unless something changes, in 5 years' time, it's possible that just over one fifth will choose to read a book daily or nearly every day. And for 8-10s we see the same picture: in 2012 56% read daily, by 2020 around a third did and the trend could lead to one quarter by 2025.

What is causing the decline in children reading for pleasure?

Through our research we know there are three key blocks to children developing an interest in reading:

1. Children's leisure interests are dominated by screen-based entertainment. Time spent online has been growing rapidly and in 2020 it leapt ahead (for 5-10-year olds, in particular). The ubiquity of devices means spare moments are easily and compulsively filled with screens. Available time to read is vastly reduced and needs to be consciously created in a day.
2. Children are not being read to often enough by their parents or at school. Our research shows that being read to regularly is the most effective way to encourage a child to read for pleasure independently.
3. 'Reading for pleasure' is confused with 'literacy'. Our research has shown that, at home, many parents perceive reading primarily as a key part of their child's education. Although parents would like their children to read for pleasure, too, they commonly don't realise that the more it's pushed as a school subject, the less likely a child is to choose to do it. In the school environment, the national curriculum focuses on reading skills above reading pleasure. However, when pleasure drives reading, children achieve more.

Children are helped to love reading by three key things:

1. Being read to, which helps them experience the pleasure and results in them wanting more of it.
2. Having wide choice of reading materials.
3. Having free choice: through making their own book choices, children have an intent to read.

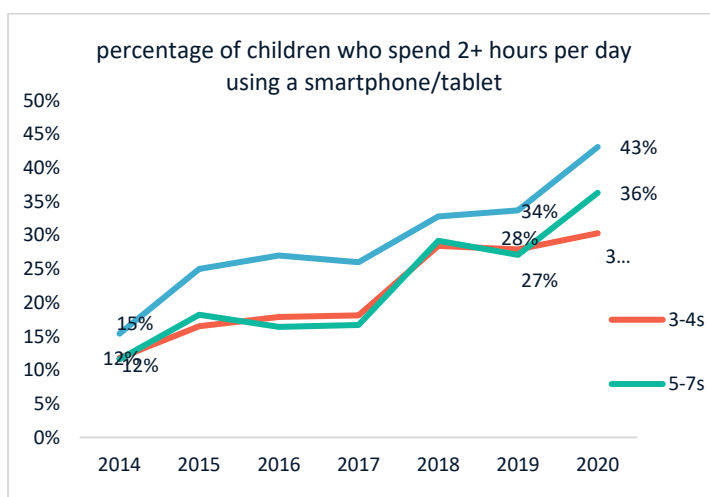
New Research and Insights

Farshore’s purpose is to make every child a proud reader. To do that we offer a broad portfolio with something for every child’s interests and we are committed to a good representation of minority groups. We also recognise the need to understand how to encourage *all* children to read for pleasure, which requires good insight across diverse consumer backgrounds. In 2020, we set out to learn more with two key pieces of research:

1. We continued to work closely with Nielsen Book. We commissioned unique new research into the reading attitudes and experiences of parents, and new data on parents from ethnic minority backgrounds. We boosted sample sizes to enable closer analysis of five key ethnic backgrounds: Black African, Black Caribbean, Eastern European, Indian, Pakistani. This was in addition to the already robust White British/Irish data. (See Appendix for methodology.) We wanted to understand whether the barriers to reading have equal weight or are different according to ethnic background, so that we can identify opportunities for better publishing and marketing. The survey has been running since 2012 with a total sample size of 2000 every year and is nationally representative. On a national level in England and Wales, for example, people from an ethnic minority background represent 14% of the population, and 20% of those aged 24 and below. So nationally representative sample sizes are simply too small to find out anything meaningful. By sampling larger numbers we’ve been able to carry out some more robust analysis. The resulting data were then weighted back, where necessary, so that the overall sample more accurately reflects the ethnic diversity of the UK population.
2. The Lockdown Reading Club. This was a family reading intervention during the first lockdown, which explored the impact of parental involvement and shared reading.

Screen time grew in 2020

Existing trends accelerated during lockdown. This was particularly evident with screens: more time was spent with devices, and increasingly by younger children. This is not surprising, since children were unable to socialise, to see friends at school or play outside for much of the year.

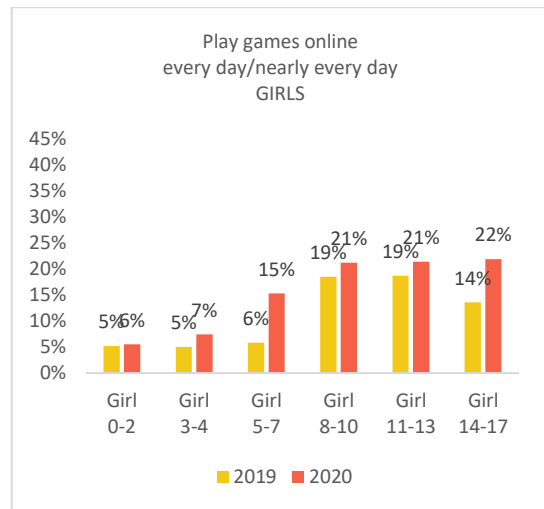
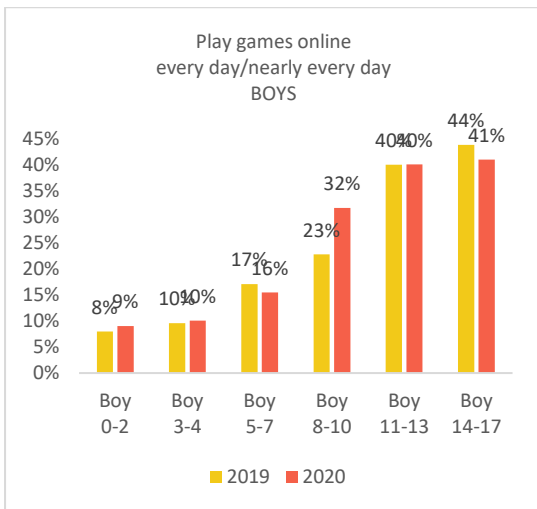
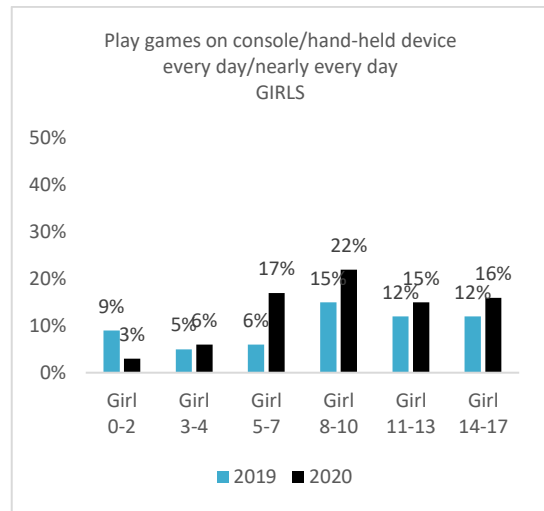
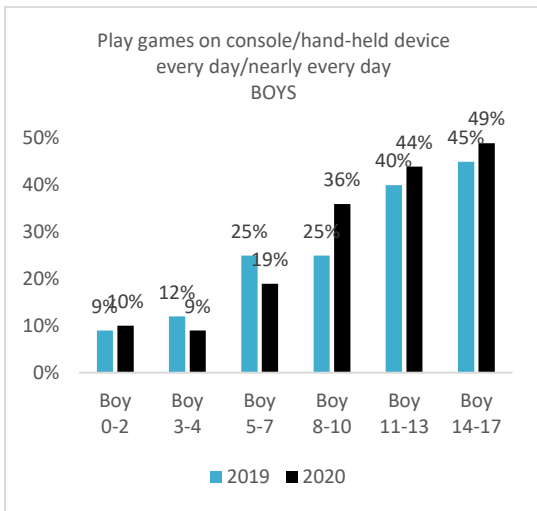


Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2014-2020

Screens came into their own for maintaining social contact, with 48% of 0-17s video-chatting with friends and family at least weekly. There was a fourfold increase with girls 5-7 using WhatsApp, and large increases with both boys and girls 8-10 years.

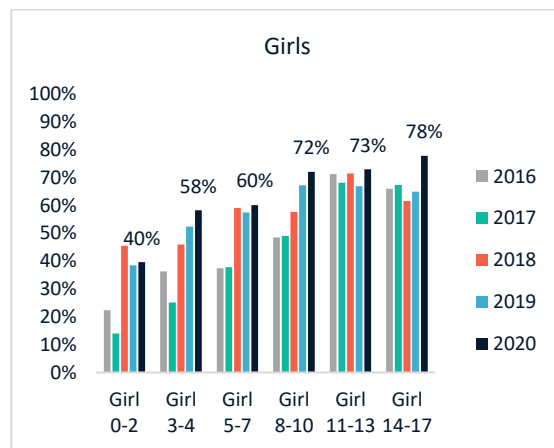
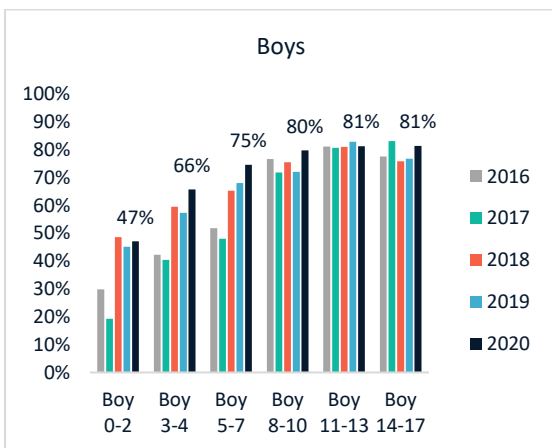
Watching Netflix grew strongly across all age groups with an average of 42% of 0-17s watching in the last four weeks (up from 35% in 2019).

Gaming increased, both online and on a console, with girls taking part on a daily basis significantly more than in 2019.



Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2019-2020

Preference for screen-based entertainment over reading books has been high for several years, and especially so for boys. Over the last five years there has been a steep and rapid increase in this preference, and especially with 0-7s. However, there was a big increase with teen girls in 2020 vs 2019.

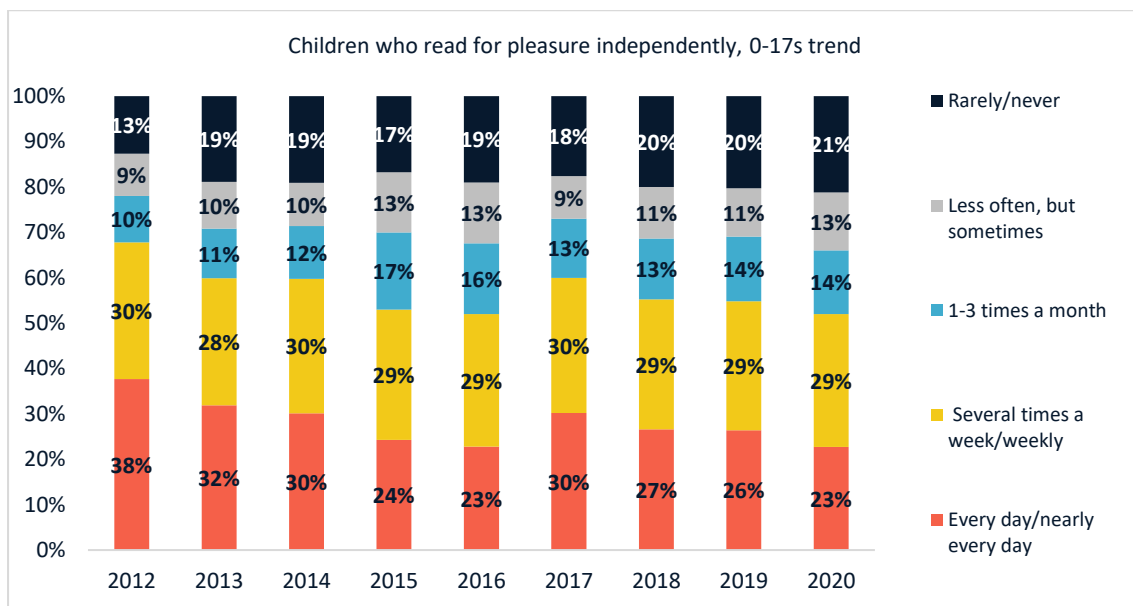


Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2016-2020.
NB 2016/17 'I/they would rather be using the internet than reading books', changed in 2018-2020 to 'I, they would rather be using/watching a screen than reading books'

Independent reading for pleasure declined in 2020

Measuring across the broadest age span, reading for pleasure *'daily or nearly every day'* declined three percentage points year on year, to 23% of 0-17s in 2020 (from 26% in 2019). Some narrower age bands showed very serious decline year on year:

- 5-7-year olds: 31% (41% in 2019)
- 8-10-year olds: 34% (41% in 2019)
- 14-17-year olds: 10% (15% in 2019)



Source: Nielsen Book *'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer'* 2012-2020

21% of 0-17s rarely or never read for pleasure, up from 13% in 2012. (Childwise 2021 finds a quarter of 5-16-year-olds never read for pleasure.)

At Farshore, we are interested in understanding barriers and enablers to regular reading. We want to encourage more children to read daily or nearly every day. While any reading for pleasure is great, it's regular frequent reading that is key to establishing a reading habit, because doing something often is how habits develop and become established. It's this kind of reading that benefits children the most and that builds a sustainable book market.

Many parents (64%) wish their child would *'spend more time reading books'*. On average, this peaks with parents of boys at 11-13 (77%) and with parents of girls at 3-4 years (70%).

Parents were asked to respond to a range of suggestions that may encourage their child to read more and we are now able to find out if these ideas differ according to ethnic background. In the following chart, all actions linked to restricting screen time are shaded in the darkest blue. They are the most prevalent and affect families from all backgrounds. Having a reading routine is recognised as important, and this is linked to screen time: Farshore's research has found that a conscious decision needs to be made to have a reading routine, and for many families that means turning off screens. While research shows the most effective way to encourage a child to read is to read to them, its clear parents generally don't know this to the same extent.

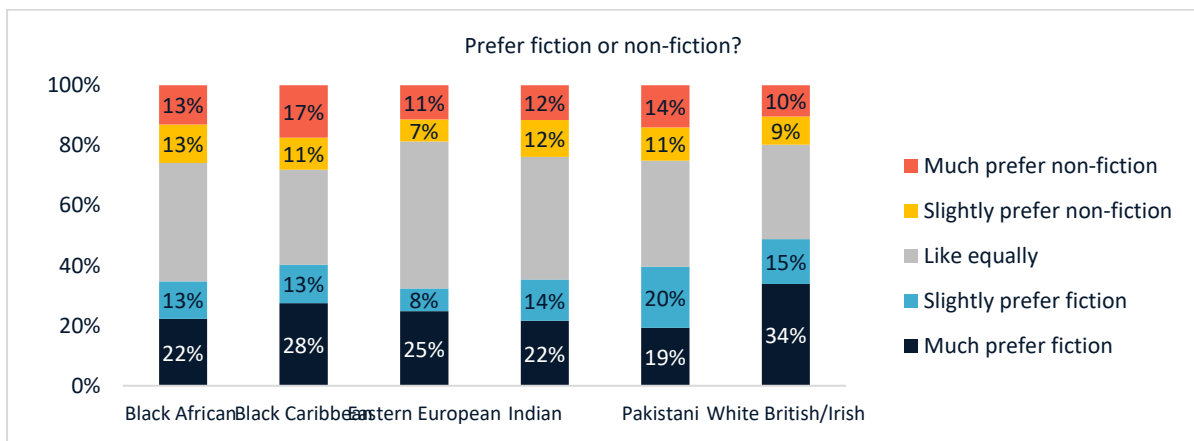
Overall, parents are most likely to think finding *'more interesting books'* is the top way to encourage their child to read more. The more specific *'books with more characters/circumstances children can relate to'* is important but ranks lower and for 3 of these 6 groups of parents it appears in the top 10.

Farshore INSIGHT

Which, if any, of the following do you think would help encourage you/your child to spend more time reading books?					
BLACK AFRICAN	BLACK CARIBBEAN	EASTERN EUROPEAN	INDIAN	PAKISTANI	WHITE BRITISH/IRISH
More interesting books	More interesting books	More interesting books	More interesting books	Reading routine	More interesting books
Rewarding for reading more	Restricting time - TV	Read to more often at home	Reading routine	More Interesting books	Reading routine
Restricting time - YouTube	Reading routine	Reading routine	Restricting time - YouTube	Restricting time - TV	Restricting time - TV
Restricting time - TV	Restricting time - YouTube	Showing them that I enjoy reading myself	More books characters/circumstances can relate to	Read to more often at home	Showing them that I enjoy reading myself
More books characters/circumstances can relate to	More interactive reading experience	Rewarding for reading more	Showing them that I enjoy reading myself	Showing them that I enjoy reading myself	More books characters/circumstances can relate to
Reading routine	More book events (bookshops/ libraries)	Family discussions about books	Family discussions about books	Restricting time - YouTube	Restricting time - YouTube
Read to more often at home	Rewarding for reading more	Restricting time - TV	Restricting time - TV	Restricting time - video games	Read to more often at home
More interactive reading experience	Restricting time - social media	Restricting time - YouTube	Read to more often at home	Rewarding for reading more	Rewarding for reading more
Showing them that I enjoy reading myself	Restricting time - video games	More books characters/circumstances can relate to	Being read to more often at school	Family discussions about books	Restricting time - video games
More books:TV progs/films	Read to more often at home	More interactive reading experience	More book events (bookshops/libraries)	Being read to more often at school	More books: TV progs/films

Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020

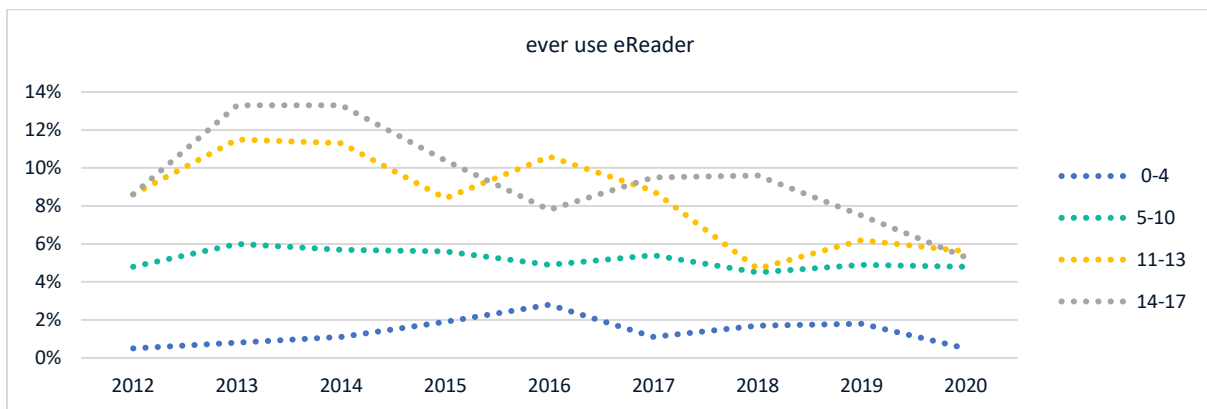
In addition to this, we know that children from ethnic minority backgrounds are less strongly in favour of fiction than children from White British/Irish backgrounds. Based on this information, and that finding 'more interesting books' is so important, one of the assumptions Farshore is working on is that better representation and inclusion will in itself make books, both fact and fiction, more interesting and engaging to children from diverse backgrounds. (For adult readers, many non-fiction genres are more popular among Asian and Black buyers than average, including self-help, science, religion, computing, fitness & diet, politics/social science and business. However, they're less likely than the UK average to have read leading non-fiction genres such as cookery, biography and history.)



Although an increasing amount of time is spent using screens, print is still preferred for reading books, and across all ages. It appears that digitising texts is not an especially strong driver to encourage *more* children to read for pleasure. For example, for 8-10-year-olds, 52% enjoy fiction and non-fiction in printed form, and 18% enjoy them in eBook form. Devices are less likely to be used for reading than for other forms of entertainment, and dedicated eReaders have not taken off at all: currently, just 4% of 0-17s use them. Rather, tablets are used for reading eBooks:

	Ever use a Tablet for reading	Tablet used for most often: <i>reading</i>
5-10s	29%	1%
11-17s	17%	4%

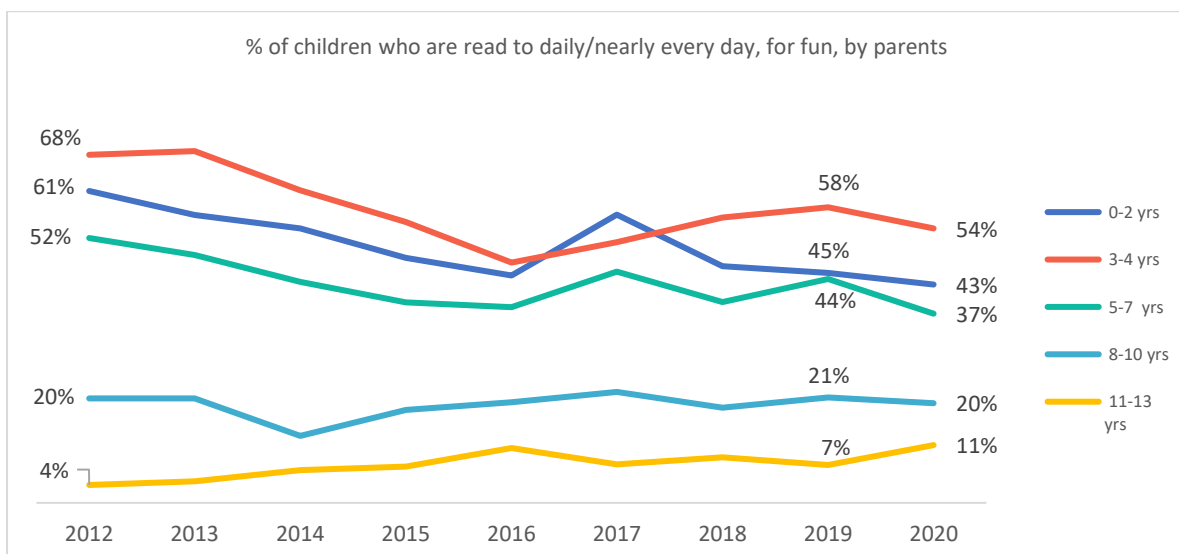
Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020



Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2012-2020

Reading to children at home declined in 2020

In 2012, an average of 41% of 0-13s were read to 'daily or nearly every day', and in 2020, 31%. However, as can be seen in the chart below, children most affected by this decline are the sevens and under. They have experienced the steepest drop, from an average of 60% in 2012 to an average of 43% in 2020.



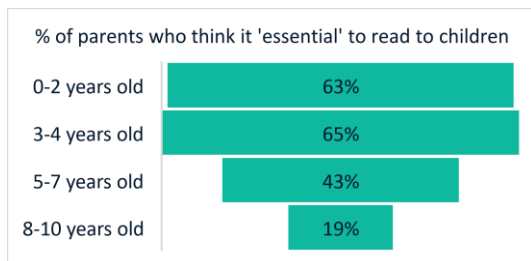
Source: Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2012-2020

In 2020, there was a significant drop in reading aloud to 3-7-year-olds. This may have been due to the pressures of the pandemic; perhaps the focus on education at home trumped reading for fun or parents especially struggled with lack of time, as they tried to balance working from home with family life and home education. As to the cause of the longer term trend in parents from all from all backgrounds reading less often to children, Farshore’s research has found it is a combination of many things including, parents’ busy lives, parents thinking of reading aloud to their child as a chore, and children’s preference for screen time. Ultimately, it’s because parents do not understand that reading aloud to a child will encourage their independent reading. Nor are they aware of the extent of the benefits of reading for pleasure, including improved wellbeing, the positive impact on their child’s attainment, as well as the joy reading to a child brings to children and to parents themselves.

Parents’ attitudes to reading to their children

To understand more about the reasons behind this decline we asked parents for their views on reading to children in different age groups. There were four possible responses: ‘*Essential*’, ‘*important*’, ‘*nice but not necessary*’ and ‘*too old to be read to*’. The vast majority of parents (an average of 89%) view it as either ‘*essential*’ or ‘*important*’ to read to children up to the age of seven.

It’s a commonly held belief that reading to children is important, whether parents do it often or infrequently. So, when we measure only the responses to the more emphatic ‘*essential*’ to read to children we see clearer differences by age and stage of child. At 5-7 years there is a significant drop in the proportion of parents who think it ‘*essential*’, which coincides with starting school and formally learning to read. At 8-10, there is a further steep drop, which coincides with the age most children are relatively competent in the skills of reading. Further analysis across an average of all parents reveals those who are younger have different views. The Millennial generation are less likely to think it ‘*essential*’ to read to children.



	Essential to read to children according to age of parent	
	23-38 years: Millennial parents	39-54 years: Generation X parents
0-2s	59%	66%
3-4s	60%	70%
5-7s	41%	47%

Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book ‘*Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer*’ 2020

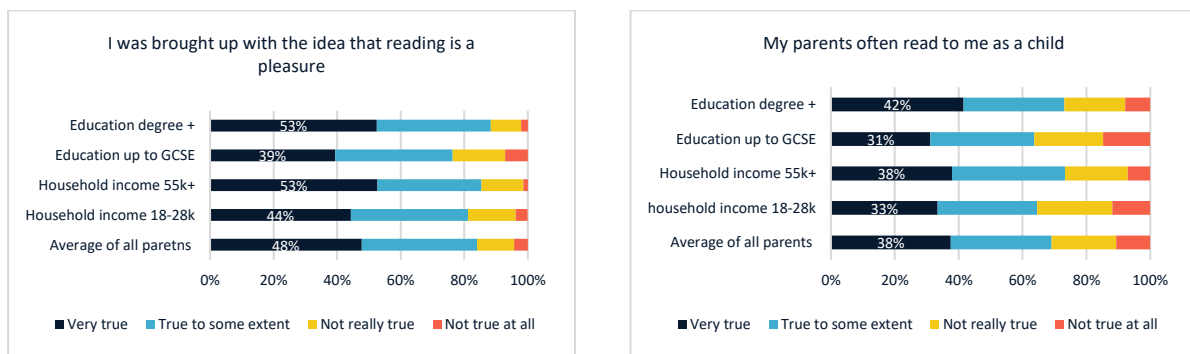
Farshore’s research shows parents commonly don’t differentiate reading for pleasure from literacy; many parents perceive reading as primarily a key part of their child’s education and a skill to acquire. As children begin to learn to read independently, parents perceive their role in reading reduces and this explains the reduction in the proportion of parents who think it essential to read to their child. Although parents would like their children to read for pleasure, they don’t realise that the more it’s treated as a school subject with emphasis placed on getting reading homework done, the less likely a child is to choose to read for fun. In the school environment, the national curriculum focuses on reading skills above reading pleasure, but when pleasure drives reading, children achieve more.

Parent’s own reading experience as a child affects their child’s propensity to read

We wanted to find out if a parent’s experience as a child has a bearing on how much their own child reads for pleasure. We found there is a direct relationship:

- Of children who are heavy readers, 57% have parents who say they were brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure and only 11% have parents who did not grow up associating reading with pleasure
- Of children who never read books, only 32% have parents who say they were brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure, and 27% have parents who did not grow up associating reading with pleasure

However, fewer than half of parents grew up strongly associating reading with pleasure – and much more likely mums than dads (51% of mums, 42% of dads). Might this have a bearing on why we often see boys more reluctant to read than girls? How much is reading for pleasure linked to handing on the baton, generation to generation?

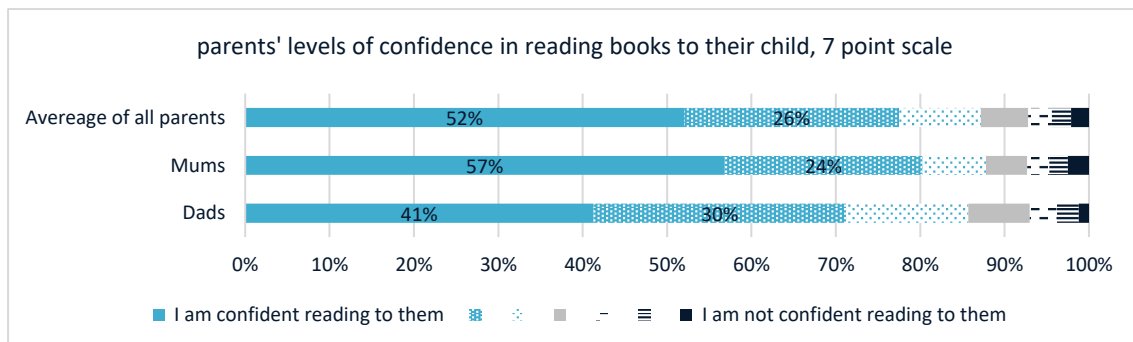


Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020

It’s interesting to see that of those parents who achieved a degree+ education, 42% say it’s very true that their parents often read to them as a child, whereas of those parents who achieved GCSE level education, 31% say it’s very true that their parents often read to them as a child. Research shows reading to children encourages them to read themselves, and that those children who read for pleasure do better in life: these findings bear that out.

Parents are generally not very confident in reading aloud

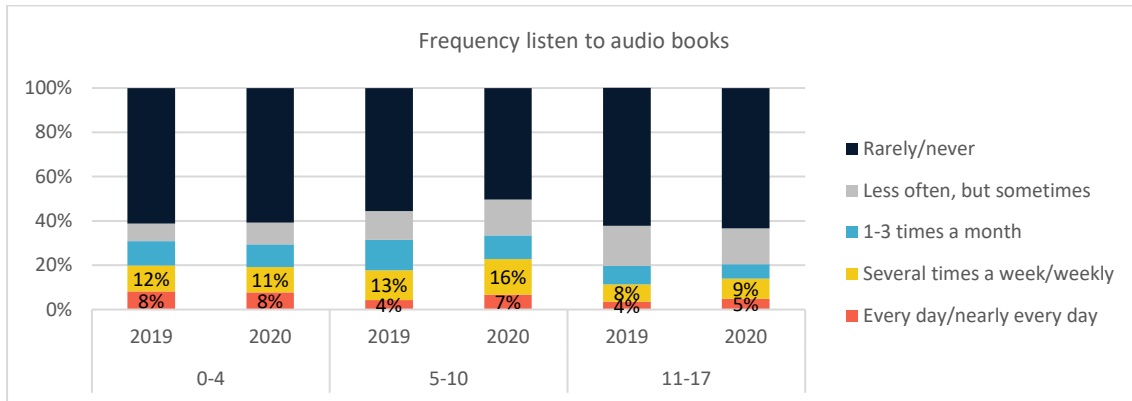
In 2020 we also asked parents how confident they felt about reading aloud to their child on a seven-point scale from (1) 'confident' to (7) 'not confident'. Just over half of parents of 0-13s selected (1) on the scale. With parents of 8-10s, this drops to 47%. Lack of confidence will obviously affect parents’ motivation to read to their child. In further sub-analysis we found dads are less confident than mums. Audio books may be a good alternative for parents that lack confidence to read aloud.



Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020

Audio grew in 2020

Audio in the Children’s market remains modest but it is growing. In 2020, we saw a six-percentage-point growth year-on-year in 5-10s using audio at least weekly (23% vs 17%).

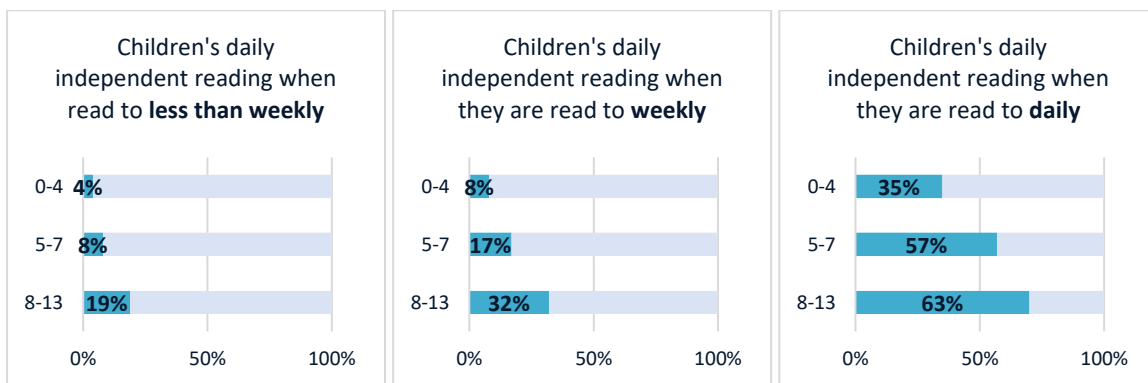


Source: Nielsen Book ‘Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer’ 2019-2020

SOLUTIONS

Reading aloud, for fun, makes children want to read

Farshore’s extensive qualitative research has shown that shared reading very effectively changes attitudes and behaviours: children become motivated to read for fun. Quantitative data shows this clearly, too: those children who are read to ‘daily or nearly every day’ are much more likely to choose to read themselves.

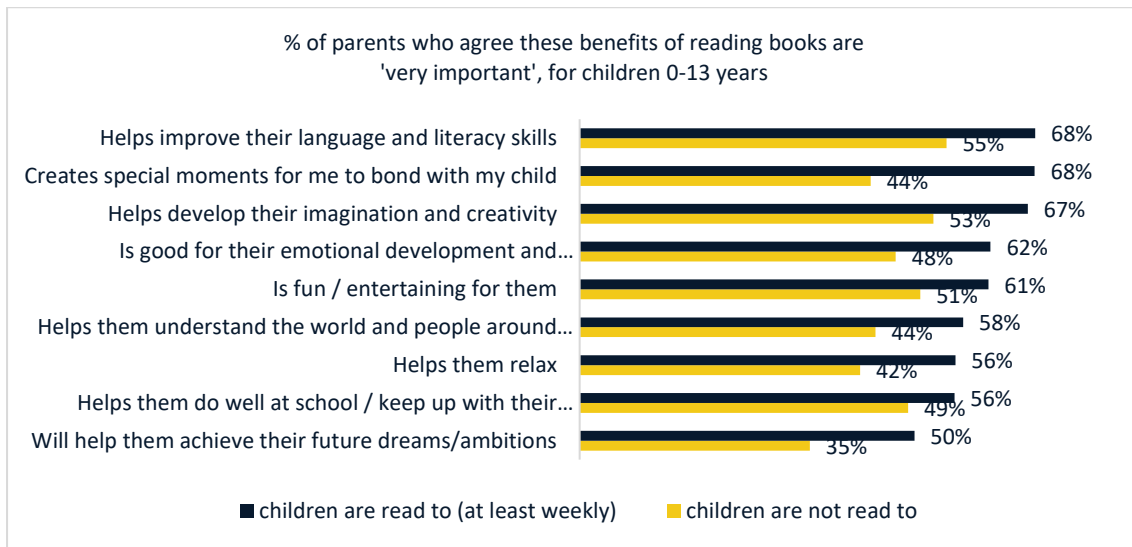


Source: Nielsen Book ‘Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer’ 2020

The value of intervention methodologies

We have found that the best way to convey to parents the value of reading to their children is to create scenarios when parents and children experience it. There are good examples of this in these Farshore research projects: ‘Print Matters More’, ‘The Reading Magic Project’, ‘Stories and Choices’.

New data in the following chart shows that parents’ understanding of the benefits of reading is much increased when they experience the impact of it.



Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020

The Lockdown Reading Club

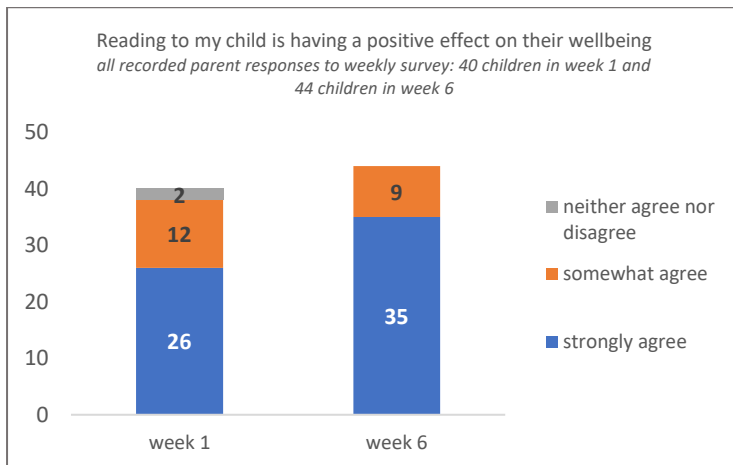
Farshore's most recent study where parents and children experienced shared reading was during the first lockdown in 2020. The reading club was a large qualitative study involving 42 families and a total of 64 children aged 3-12 years old, conducted over six weeks (17th April -28th May 2020) in collaboration with mumsnet. Families were almost entirely confined to home and parents were home-schooling and we saw this as a great opportunity to test the impact of choice and being read to, to bring into focus the difference between reading for schoolwork and reading for pleasure.

Mums agreed to read to their child daily, just for fun, and to co-read, but only if their child wanted to. (Co-reading is taking it in turns reading or sharing portions of the text.) Children exercised their free choice by deciding what they wanted to have read to them and by selecting two new books a week from our online catalogue. Mums kept a diary of the experience, and the entries tell the story of the joy and effectiveness of the approach.

Key findings

There were three key findings, all of which confirmed insights from our previous studies:

- A parent's promise to read to their child every day changes the atmosphere around reading so that it is no longer associated with a task, with school work or thought of as boring. Instead it becomes a huge treat where the child enjoys their parent's attention, they love the experience of being read to and want more of it. It motivates independent reading, too.
- Regularly reading to a child normalises the experience; it quickly becomes 'what we do' as a family. The child will actively request it and remind their parents to do it.
- Sharing stories improves child and parent wellbeing, reinforces and improves family bonds, and forms new connections between child and parent. Over the six-week project we measured parents' responses to questions about their child's wellbeing and we saw a strong increase the number of parents who strongly agreed that reading to their child was having a positive effect, shown in the following graph:



Source: Farshore's Lockdown Reading Club, 2020

This project is making both me and my son (age 5) feel closer. It really is the best part of my day. We both get a mental pause, forget about Corona and escape into whatever magical world we choose. Thank you, thank you.

*She continues to respond positively, more than I expected to be honest. We have nice cuddles when reading! I feel that reading together is helping her stay settled in these very strange times
Mum to girl, 8*

Feedback from parents revealed how this simple solution had enormous benefits. Parents observed their child's attitudes changing and enthusiasm increasing. They also saw first-hand the positive impact on schoolwork, since they were immersed in home-schooling.

My daughter has managed to read both books in 2 days, I'm so proud of her. One of them she wanted to take to the bath too. Her screen time has gone down massively, her sleep has improved and her communication with me has improved too. Also, she said to me when lockdown is over, she wants to go to the library to get more books.

Mum to girl, 8

Another cosy read together tonight. Lovely to catch up just the two of us and we're both enjoying the story. My son's attitude to reading is definitely improving and he even talked about reading a chapter on his own today which is unheard of!

Mum to boy, 10

More bedtime reading today. We've had a rubbish day with schoolwork that's she had no interest in. Tantrum central. Thankfully she still wanted to read at bedtime as she's interested in the story. Very glad she's interested to read and doesn't view it as work 🙌

Mum to girl, 7

Today has been the worst day for me since the lockdown started. The mood here today has been grim and neither child wanted to cooperate with any schoolwork. Homeschool was a disaster so I gave up. I didn't expect to get her to sit and read with me at all, but she was smiling and wanted to read together. I'm still in shock. It really was a haven today and escape into the story together

Mum to girl, 8

My son really looks forward to this special reading time together, as it's quality bonding time for us both. He generally seems happier and more valued. He is really intrigued and interested in the plot of the book we're reading and loves reading it. It has introduced new vocabulary and sentence types to him which he's asked me to explain more, too. He also talks about the book during the day when it relates to daily activities. This project is making me feel like I'm making a difference to his educational and personal life in terms of strengthening our relationship.

Mum to boy, 6

My daughter (age 10) is responding very enthusiastically to the project and begs for extra reading time. I told her we'd read a chapter a day but we ending up reading three today as she loves it so much - my voice was cracking by the end! I have noticed she will go and read instead of automatically asking to go on a screen because of the daily reading activity

Mum to girl, 10

Interventions such as this study have long-lasting benefits. Although the Lockdown Reading club happened in very particular circumstances, parents and children enjoyed it so much that they continued with it after lockdown lifted. In December 2020, we were able to speak to parents of 34 of the children who had taken part. We heard how they'd continued reading together, that their child's progress at school had taken a leap forward and reading ages had increased, and that the teachers had noticed great improvements. Not only

that, in these families, more pleasure in reading resulted in more book buying: more than half of the mums said they'd bought an increased amount of books for their child since the project.

S has become a very independent reader since the project and is often found snuggled up with a book. This would never have happened before

Mum to girl, 7

Great feedback, in a reading assessment at the start of year 8 in September he was told he has the reading age of a 15-year-old

Mum to boy, 12

Book discovery, decision-making and purchase

We wanted to understand how families find out about books for children, what factors help in their decision to buy, where they choose to buy and whether there were any differences according to ethnic background. Our new data is unique and valuable for better informed sales and marketing plans to reach all family groups.

Discovery

Ethnic minority households as a whole, and those with Asian and Black backgrounds specifically, are more likely than average to discover books for children through public libraries. Conversely, households with Asian and Black backgrounds are less likely than average to discover children's books via physical bookshops and from their child's friends. Physical bookshops are relatively more important for discovery for families from Eastern European and White British/Irish backgrounds. It's also clear how important teachers and school libraries are for book discovery and this highlights the importance of author and illustrator events in schools.

The pandemic accelerated browsing and buying online in 2020, but for three of these six groups of parents, 'online book retailers' does not feature in their top six sources of discovery. In addition, with schools and libraries closed, it's clear the pandemic must have impacted discoverability for all children.

<i>'How/where do you and your child usually find out about books they might like to read?'</i>					
BLACK AFRICAN	BLACK CARIBBEAN	EASTERN EUROPEAN	INDIAN	PAKISTANI	WHITE BRITISH/ IRISH
Public libraries	Teachers/school (inc school libraries)	Teachers/school (inc school libraries)	Public libraries	Teachers/school (inc school libraries)	Teachers/school (inc school libraries)
World Book Day	Public libraries	Your child's friends	Teachers/school (inc school libraries)	Public libraries	Your child's friends
Online book retailers	Your friends/other relatives	Physical bookshops	Your child's friends	World Book Day	Physical bookshops
Teachers/school (inc school libraries)	Watching TV/films linked to books	Online book retailers	World Book Day	Supermarkets	Online book retailers
Supermarkets	World Book Day	Public libraries	Supermarkets	Your friends/other relatives	Public libraries
Your child's friends	Physical bookshops	Your friends/other relatives	Physical bookshops	Physical bookshops	World Book Day

Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2020

Decision-making

Once families have found out about books, what encourages them to purchase? We can see that the average of the top 10 factors does not give a true picture and that Farshore's new data shows some important differences according to parents' ethnic backgrounds.

The most important factor in deciding to buy a book is the '*description of the book*': all backgrounds rank this top. '*Recommendations by school/library*' is more important to families with Asian and Black backgrounds than to families with a White British/Irish background. '*Previously enjoyed authors/series*' features for about one third of parents from a White British/Irish Background and about one quarter of parents from Asian and Black backgrounds. '*Author/book from your own childhood*' features only in Black African and Black Caribbean parents' top 10. '*Recommendations in bookshop*' features only in Indian and Pakistani parents' top 10, '*age guidance information*' does not appear in White British/Irish top 10 and '*price/whether on special offer*' does not appear in Black African/Black Caribbean top 10.

<i>'Which, if any, of the following factors usually play a part in your decision or encourage you when buying books for your year old?'</i>							
AVERAGE ALL PARENTS		INDIAN/PAKISTANI		BLACK AFRICAN/BLACK CARIBBEAN		WHITE BRITISH/IRISH	
Description of the book	32%	Description of the book	30%	Description of the book	29%	Description of the book	33%
Author/series child has enjoyed before	29%	Recommendations from friends/family	28%	Recommendations by school/library	28%	Author/series child has enjoyed before	32%
Recommendations from friends/family	23%	Author/series child has enjoyed before	24%	Author/series child has enjoyed before	24%	Book/characters on TV/made into a film	22%
Front cover design	22%	Reading extract/looking inside the book	23%	Book/characters on TV/made into a film	24%	Recommendations from friends/family	22%
Book/characters on TV/made into a film	21%	Front cover design	22%	Recommendations from friends/family	23%	Front cover design	21%
Reading extract/looking inside the book	21%	Recommendations by school/library	21%	Age guidance information	22%	Reading extract/looking inside the book	21%
Recommendations by school/library	20%	Book/characters on TV/made into a film	20%	Reading extract/looking inside the book	21%	What child's friends are reading	19%
Price/whether on special offer	19%	Recommendations in bookshop	19%	Author/book from your own childhood	21%	Price/whether on special offer	19%
What child's friends are reading	19%	Age guidance information	17%	Gift requests from your child	21%	Gift requests from your child	17%
Gift requests from your child	17%	Price/whether on special offer	17%	Reviews/recommendations on websites like Amazon	20%	Recommendations by school/library	17%

Purchase

Again, we can see the average response for where parents choose to buy books for children is not a true picture of all book buying habits. Depending on ethnic background, there are differences in the rank order of the top 10 sources of purchase and for some retailers there are notably different proportions of parents choosing to shop there.

Farshore INSIGHT

Amazon is the top source for all parents. WHSmith is a relatively more important source for children’s books for parents from Asian and Black backgrounds. Bargain Bookshops is a relatively more important source for children’s books for parents from White British/Irish backgrounds.

<i>‘Where does your household tend to buy books for your child?’</i>			
TOTAL MARKET AVERAGE	INDIAN/PAKISTANI	BLACK AFRICAN/ BLACK CARIBBEAN	WHITE BRITISH/IRISH
Amazon	Amazon	Amazon	Amazon
Bargain bookshops e.g. The Works	WHSmith	WHSmith	Bargain bookshops e.g. The Works
WHSmith	Asda	Waterstone's	Tesco
Tesco	Bargain bookshops e.g. The Works	Tesco	Asda
Asda	Tesco	Asda	Waterstone's
Waterstone's	Pound shop/discount store	School book fair/ school book shop	WHSmith
Pound shop/discount store	Waterstone's	Bargain bookshops e.g. The Works	Pound shop/ discount store
School book fair/ school book shop	School book fair/ school book shop	Pound shop/discount store	School book fair/ school book shop
Sainsbury	Department stores	Book club	Sainsbury
Local/independent bookshop	Sainsbury	Department stores	Local/independent bookshop

Source: Egmont / Nielsen Book ‘Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer’ 2020

Conclusion

In 2020, we learned that the pandemic caused existing trends to accelerate. More time was spent with digital devices and, increasingly, by younger children. Children’s independent reading for pleasure declined, as did parents reading aloud to their children. The latter are inextricably linked; reading aloud to children is the most effective way to encourage children to choose to read for pleasure independently. Thus, if children are not read to, they are less likely to develop a reading habit.

Although sharing reading is a deeply pleasurable and joyful pastime, many families are unaware of this. Children are unaware because they have not experienced it often enough, and because they are more likely to associate reading with schoolwork. There are several factors that affect parents’ views on reading to their children. Our new data shows a direct link between parents’ own experience of reading as a child and their child’s propensity to read; children who are heavy readers are much more likely to have parents who say they were brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure. Fewer than half of parents grew up strongly associating reading with pleasure, and mums are more likely to have experienced this than dads (51% of mums, 42% of dads). There is also a large proportion of parents who are not fully confident with reading aloud to their child.

Farshore INSIGHT

We've found 64% of parents would like their child to spend more time reading books, yet although reading aloud is the most effective way to make it happen, most parents don't know this to the same degree. Parents also place an emphasis on reading as part of education so that when children become competent in the skills of reading, parents perceive there is less need for their involvement. There is a difference between a child learning to decode and becoming a competent reader, and a child choosing to read and finding joy in it. For both these things, children need help and input.

Our Lockdown Reading Club found a parent's promise to read to their child every day changes the atmosphere around reading so that it is no longer associated with a task, with school work or thought of as boring. Instead it becomes a huge treat where the child enjoys their parent's attention, loves the experience of being read to and wants more of it. It motivates independent reading, too. This study has added to the already compelling body of research that finds the same; children who are read to, read themselves.

As well as finding pleasure in reading at home, school also needs to be a place where reading is fun. A return to daily storytime for all children, with no formal teaching attached to it, would have far-reaching impact. It would enable those children whose parents don't read to them at home to benefit from the positive impact on attainment, communication, empathy, confidence, and wellbeing.

Beyond focusing on reading for pleasure, we need to get more books into the hands of more children. We need to publish engaging, interesting, diverse and inclusive books, and having better marketing and sales strategies to meet all families where they find out about books and where they choose to shop will also make a difference.

Farshore is committed to making every child a proud reader and we are keen to work with partners in all the ways we can to reach more children and their parents.

APPENDIX

‘UNDERSTANDING THE CHILDREN’S BOOK CONSUMER’ METHODOLOGY

- Nielsen Book’s *Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer* is an annual, online survey designed to examine UK children’s book reading and buying habits in wider context, undertaken in each year since 2012. The 2020 survey was undertaken in October-November 2020
- The survey uses a c2000 sample covering 0-17s, nationally representative by social grade, region & sex/age of child
- In previous years, around one in six (c350) respondents had ethnic minority backgrounds (i.e. other than White British/Irish), with around one in ten (c200) with Black/Asian backgrounds. While these sample sizes allowed some analysis of the habits of those with ethnic minority backgrounds, this was limited to broad ethnic groupings and did not allow for sub-analysis by e.g. age of child.
- In order to allow a more robust analysis of the habits of children with ethnic minority backgrounds, Egmont Books commissioned Nielsen to boost the ethnic minority sample in the 2020 survey by an additional c300 respondents, bringing the total sample to c2300 and the ethnic minority sample to c650, and using quotas to ensure that there were 100 respondents in each of five groups of particular interest to Egmont:
 - Asian/Asian British – Indian background (including mixed Indian & white backgrounds)
 - Asian/Asian British – Pakistani background (including mixed Pakistani & white backgrounds)
 - Black/Black British – African background (including mixed Black African & white background)
 - Black/Black British – Caribbean background (including mixed Black Caribbean & white background)
 - White – Eastern European background

Samples from 2019 and 2020 for comparison:

2019 sample

Base: Weighted - Total Respondents	2015
Asian	6.90%
Black	4.10%
White British	79.60%
White other	7.70%
Any BME	11.00%
Any White	87.30%
Prefer not to say	1.70%

2020 sample

Base: Weighted - Total Respondents	2301
Asian	13.90%
Black	8.90%
White British/Irish	66.30%
White other	6.70%
Any Black/Asian	22.00%
Any White	73.00%
Any Minority Ethnic	32.40%
Any Indian	3.50%
Any Pakistani	5.00%
Any Black African	4.80%
Any Black Caribbean	2.60%
Any Eastern European	3.50%
Prefer not to say	1.30%

- While these samples were boosted to allow analysis within these ethnic groups, the data were then weighted so that the overall composition of the 2300 respondents reflected the ethnic composition of UK children (e.g. to take account of the fact that there are fewer with Black Caribbean, Eastern European and Indian backgrounds compared to Pakistani and Black African). (Source: School Census data for January 2019)

Farshore INSIGHT

- While quotas and weightings were used to ensure the overall sample broadly reflected the population in terms of ethnic background, and more generally (i.e. across all ethnicities) to ensure a representative sample in terms of sex/age of child, region and social grade, quotas and weightings for sex, age and socio-economics were not applied within the ethnic sub-groups. Rather, these were allowed to fall out naturally (*Applying additional quotas within ethnic groups would have made it prohibitively difficult to achieve the overall quotas*)
- As a result, there were variations in the profile of the ethnic groups. For example, respondents with minority ethnic backgrounds overall, and especially within the Pakistani, Caribbean & Eastern European groups, were more likely to answer on behalf of younger children than average, while there was a significant variation in socio-economic profile: e.g. those with Pakistani & Eastern European backgrounds were less affluent than average, whereas those with Indian and Black backgrounds tended to have higher incomes than average.
- These variations should be borne in mind when viewing variations between the groups.
- The survey is undertaken in English, so that people with ethnic minority backgrounds with limited English language are excluded.