

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2020

MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A MILLION SCHOOL CHILDREN EXPERIENCING LITERARY POVERTY

- 345,000 primary school children in the UK receive less than 15 minutes of shared reading a week
- One in seven parents or carers never read their child a bedtime story
- Former Waterstones Children's Laureate Anne Fine backs BookTrust's [Pyjamarama](#) campaign to end literary poverty

Wednesday 5 February 2020: New research reveals that more than a quarter of a million UK primary school children are experiencing literary poverty.

Literary poverty is defined by [BookTrust](#), the UK's largest children's reading charity, as a child who is read to or with for pleasure, for less than 15 minutes a week outside of school.

The study shows that 345,000¹ (14%) school children aged seven to nine are currently falling into this category, with a further 17% on the border, being read to or with for less than half an hour a week.

Worryingly, six per cent of children aged 7-9 falls into the worse category of literary poverty, with their parents or guardians never reading to or with them at all.

Just a third (37%) of young children in the UK are reading with or being read to by a parent or carer for over an hour a week in total. BookTrust encourages families to read together for just 10 minutes a day as this helps develop their language, curiosity, imagination and listening skills, as well as benefitting their academic development, including writing skills.

It appears that the traditional bedtime story is also suffering. One in seven parents admits that they never read to their child before bed, with a further 11% say they only do so once a week on average.

The research shows that the importance of regular reading is not lost on parents, with nine in ten believing that reading for pleasure is important for their child. However, children aged 7 – 11 today are on average reading for pleasure for 28 minutes less a week than their parents did at the same age. In fact, half of children aged 7 - 11 in the UK (50%) read for less than an hour a week.

In response to the worrying findings, former **Waterstones Children's Laureate Anne Fine** has launched BookTrust's annual fundraising Pyjamarama campaign to call on families to rediscover the joy of reading:

"With far fewer screen distractions, my friends and I spent half our lives deep in books. Now, half our primary school children spend less than an hour a week reading for pleasure. But reading's a vital skill. It's the bedrock of education in all subjects, and enriches our children from both an emotional and a cultural perspective. For the parent, sharing a story with a small child is a sanity-saving, calming comfort, and reading to an older child soon becomes addictive. I'd encourage everyone to put aside the screens a little more to engage children with reading. It truly does work wonders."

Pyjamarama invites Primary Schools and Nurseries to sign up and allow children to wear their pyjamas all day on Friday 5th June and celebrate the bedtime story in return for a £1 donation. All funds raised will go towards helping help BookTrust ensure that every child experiences the life changing benefits of access to books and reading.

¹ 14 % of 7, 8 and 9 year olds in the UK based on most recent ONS data
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/p4oplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

Gemma Malley, Director at BookTrust comments, *“We are seeing a real cliff-edge in terms of children reading for enjoyment and whilst parents want their children to read more, there’s a real danger that families are sleepwalking into literary poverty. We know that reading for enjoyment is closely linked to academic development as well as building confidence and resilience, and children who are read to are much more likely to read for enjoyment themselves. We hope that through Pyjamarama we can encourage families across the country to reconnect with reading and to snuggle up with a fantastic book together.”*

– ENDS –

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the research

The research was conducted by Opinion Research in January 2020 with 2,000 UK parents with children aged seven to 11. Shared reading is described as reading to, with or by a parent or carer outside of an educational setting.

About Pyjamarama

Pyjamarama is supported by Tony Ross and Francesca Simon’s Horrid Henry (Orion Publishing, part of Hachette Children’s Group), Jacqueline Wilson and Nick Sharratt’s Tracy Beaker (Penguin Random House Children’s) and Catboy, Owlette and Gekko from Entertainment One’s PJ Masks.

Pyjamarama will take place on Friday 5 June 2020 and we're asking children around the country - in schools, nurseries, clubs and at home - to spend a fun-filled day in PJs and donate £1 to help give every child a bedtime story

About BookTrust

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school.

We are the UK’s largest children’s reading charity; each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives.

We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health, library, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. booktrust.org.uk

Funds raised from BookTrust's Pyjamarama campaign could go towards:

£25 could provide 10 pre-school children who are vulnerable with their own book pack

£50 could provide 6 families from deprived communities with additional support through their children's centre to develop a reading habit

£100 could help us work with a struggling secondary school to support teenagers re-engage with reading

£1,000 could enable us to support 49 children with a disability that impacts motor skills, providing them with specially created touch and feel books, finger puppets and guidance for parents