

Young (5-8) Children's Reading in 2022/ Children's and Young People's Reading Engagement in 2022

Introduction and background

Since 2005, the National Literacy Trust (NLT) has carried out an extensive survey to explore children and young people's reading enjoyment, attitudes, and practices over time. More recently, it has also allowed the Trust to explore reading engagement before, during, and after disruption related to the pandemic. These reports are based on the online survey responses received from 70,403 children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 327 schools in England, Scotland, and Wales. The first report focusses on the responses received from the youngest children.

Background and context

- Broadly speaking, pupils in Key Stage 1 (ages 5 to 7) and Key Stage 3 (11 to 14) experienced the greatest learning loss in reading as a result of the educational disruption caused by the pandemic. At the same time, Key Stage 2 SATs showed that the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading increased from 73 per cent in 2019 to 74 per cent in 2022.
- In line with these findings, NLT research into children and young people's reading during the first national lockdown in spring 2020 showed that more children and young people were enjoying reading, and more were reading more often than before the pandemic. Children's comments suggested that this was because they suddenly had time to (re)engage with reading, having fewer activities vying for their time.
- However, the research also showed that existing gaps in reading enjoyment increased significantly during lockdown, with boys, specifically those from disadvantaged backgrounds, at risk of poor reading engagement as a result of the pandemic.
- Any gains in reading enjoyment and reading frequency during the first national lockdown had eroded slightly by the time children and young people were surveyed again in early 2021, a period that coincided with the third national lockdown in the UK. The gap between boys' and girls' reading enjoyment that had opened up during the first lockdown in 2020 persisted into early 2021.
- More worryingly, the gap between those who received free school meals (FSMs) and those who didn't doubled over the course of the year (from 2.1 percentage points in early 2020 to 4.6 percentage points in early 2021), with more non-FSM than FSM pupils saying that they enjoyed reading. Indeed, the year between early 2020 and early 2021 had a particularly detrimental impact on the reading enjoyment of boys who received FSMs.

Findings for 5 to 8 year-olds

- The findings below are based on data from 8,210 5 to 8 year-olds who took part in the Annual Literacy Survey between January and March 2022. They were asked about their reading enjoyment, confidence, and frequency, what sorts of things they read in their spare time, their reading attitudes, and book ownership.
- Most children in this age group (81.4%) reported that they have a book of their own at home. Girls (81.4%) were slightly more likely than boys (79.1%) to say they have a book at home. Of those with a book of their own at home, 77.7 per cent enjoy reading compared with 66.2 per cent of those who don't have a book of their own at home.
- The proportion of children with a book of their own at home varied by region. It was highest in the South East (90%) and lowest in London (80.5%) and the East of England (80.3%).
- In 2022, 3 in 4 children aged 5 to 8 reported that they enjoy reading. Reading enjoyment in children aged 5 to 8 has remained relatively stable over the past 4 years, even during the pandemic.
- More girls than boys in this age group enjoy reading, and more than twice as many boys (7.2%) as girls (2.9%) said that they don't enjoy reading at all.
- Just over half of children aged 5 to 8 said that they read daily (52.4%), and 7.7 per cent never read at all. More girls (56.9%) than boys (48.2%) said that they read daily. Those in the South East (61.7%) and London (59.7%) were more likely to report reading daily than those in the North East (49.1%) and East Midlands (49.0%).
- Four in 5 children aged 5 to 8 said they felt they were 'very good' or 'good' readers, while only 3.8 per cent described themselves as 'not very good' at reading.
- More girls than boys rated themselves as good readers (81.4% vs 76.5%). Four in 5 (81.0%) of those with a book of their own at home also rated themselves to be good readers compared with 7 in 10 (70.0%) of those who don't have a book of their own.
- Three in 4 (77.1%) children aged 5 to 8 said they read stories, while nearly half (53.6%) said they read non-fiction. Around 1 in 3 children said they read magazines (36.3%) or poems (32.1%), while 3 in 10 (29.1%) read comics. Girls are more likely to read stories, whereas boys are more likely to read comics.

Young children's reading in 2022

- This report explores how much young children enjoy reading, how often they read, and what is their access to reading materials at home is like.



Findings for 8 year-olds

- Two in 3 (67.4%) children aged 8 said that reading makes them feel better. While 3 in 4 (74.4%) girls agreed with this, only 6 in 10 (60.6%) boys did. While Sixty-four per cent of children said that reading helps them feel happy, and 64.1 per cent said that it helps them relax. Girls were more likely to say that reading makes them happy and helps them to relax. More than 1 in 3 (36.2%) children said that reading helps them deal with their problems.
- More girls than boys said that they read to learn new words (73.9% vs 68.0%) or to learn about new things (73.1% vs 65.7%). Half of children read to feel more confident – 57 per cent of girls and 48.7 per cent of boys.

While just under half of 8 year-olds read to learn about other people and cultures (47.0%), 2 in 5 children read to understand the views of other people (41.8%) or to feel connected to the world (41.8), and 2 in 5 read to learn about the issues and causes they care about (38.5%). One in 3 (31.8%) children read to spend time with others.

Children and young people's reading engagement in 2022

- This broader report is based on all 70,403 responses to the survey from children and young people aged 5-18 in 2022.
- Fewer than 1 in 2 (47.8%) children aged 8 to 18 said they enjoyed reading in 2022. This is back on a par with those recorded in early 2020, previously the lowest level since the question was first asked in 2005.
- The percentage-point-gap in reading enjoyment between FSM and non-FSM pupils has more than doubled from 2.1pp in 2020 to 5.0pp in 2022.
- Fewer boys (45.6%) than girls (54.9%) said they enjoy reading in 2022. The gender gap widened considerably in 2022, from 2.9 per cent to 9.3 per cent.
- Reading enjoyment decreased with age, 75.4 per cent of 5 to 8 year-olds, to just 45.3 per cent of those aged 14 to 16.
- Just 28 per cent of children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they read daily in their free time in 2022. There is a small gap in reported daily reading between FSM pupils (24.7%) and non FSM pupils (28.9%). More girls reported daily reading than boys (34.3% vs 26.5%) – a gap which has more than doubled over the past 3 years. Reading enjoyment and daily reading are linked: of those who enjoy reading, 48.5 per cent read daily compared with just 9.3 per cent of those who don't enjoy reading.
- Children and young people read for several reasons. More than half (54.9%) read to learn new words, to relax (55.4%) or to learn about new things (53.5%). Two in 5 (41.0%) read to feel happy, and almost 2 in 5 read to understand the views of other people (38.8%). Three in 10 (28.7%) read to learn about the issues and causes they care about.
- Larger proportions of FSM pupils said they read to feel confident (30.3% vs 25.5%), to deal with problems (26.4% vs 22.7%), and to spend time with others (14.0% vs 9.4%). More girls than boys read for mental-wellbeing purposes. For example, 56.0 per cent of girls

read to relax, while only 2 in 5 (41.5%) boys said the same.

- One in 4 children and young people (26.5%) reported being unable to find things to read that interest them. Around 2 in 5 (43.3%) said that they find more things to read that relate to their interest online (43.3%), while half (53.3%) said that they find inspiration for things to read online.
- Two in 5 (41.9%) reported that reading makes them feel better - 48.6 per cent of girls and 1 in 3 (33.9%) of boys. One in 3 (35.8%) boys said they only read when they have to, compared with 1 in 4 (25.7%) girls.
- Those aged 8-18 still read a lot on paper, as opposed to on screen. Three in 4 (77.1%) read stories on paper (21.7% on screen), while 53.6 per cent read about facts (17.6% on screen). More than 1 in 3 (36.3%) read magazines on paper (6.4% on screen), while one in 3 (32.1%) read poems (14.4% on screen).
- Children varied in their access to reading resources, with FSM pupils generally having lower levels of access – they were less likely to be encouraged to read at home (40.6% compared with 45.9% of non FSM pupils). They were also less likely to have talked with their family about what they read (33.8% vs 38.1% of non FSM pupils).
- Boys were less likely than girls to have talked to their family about what they read (33.1% vs 41.5%). Girls were much more likely to have bought books (44.8% vs 32.1% of boys).

The full documents can be downloaded from:

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/>