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ADULTS SHOULD READ TO CHILDREN “WELL INTO THEIR TEENS”

- New research shows number of children aged 0-13 being read to daily, for pleasure, has dropped to just 32%¹.
- Most parents give up reading to their child at the age of eight, despite a strong link between older children being read to and independent reading for pleasure.
- Leading children’s publisher calls for storytime to be made an intrinsic part of the primary school day following success of independent study.
- *War Horse* author, Michael Morpurgo, supports the call to action with a specially-written poem celebrating the power of storytelling.

The UK’s biggest children’s specialist publisher has today, 5th March 2019, raised the alarm after annual research reveals that the number of children being read to daily for pleasure has dropped again. Egmont co-funds [Nielsen Book Research](#)’s annual *Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer* survey into the reading habits of UK children aged 0-17 and reveals its latest findings today at an industry conference, just ahead of World Book Day – a global celebration of reading for pleasure – on Thursday 7th March.

Number of British children being read to for pleasure daily drops to 32%

Data shows that only 32% of British children aged 0-13 are read to daily by an adult for pleasure, down 4% points since last year and 9% points since 2012².

It also reveals that most parents stop reading to their child by the age of eight³. The publisher stressed that this steep decline signals a significant threat to children’s wellbeing, with potential longer-term social impact, and called for parents and government to take action.

Just 19% of 8-10-year-old children have books read to them by an adult daily⁴, down 3% points since last year⁵. The figure is even lower for boys at just 14%⁶ (contrasted with 24% of girls⁷). The study found that this is true across all socio-economic groups, irrespective of parents’ education, household income or social grade⁸.

Parents stop reading to their children once they can read independently

Egmont cites parents giving up the shared reading experience as a major cause for concern as the data also reveals a strong correlation between older children being read to and choosing to read independently for pleasure. 74% of 8-13-year olds who are read to each

day also read independently daily for pleasure⁹, a figure that drops to just 29%¹⁰ with children who are read to less than once a week.

The research also revealed that most parents are unaware of the impact of reading to an older child. When asked what age children should be read to, in order to ensure they read for pleasure independently, only 31% thought beyond the age of eight¹¹ and only 16% beyond the age of 10¹². 1 in 4 parents felt that parents need only read to their child until the age of four or under in order to encourage them to read for pleasure independently¹³.

Reading for pleasure has measurable impact on a child not only in terms of literacy but also on their overall wellbeing, development and resulting attainment across all subjects. Studies have shown that children who think positively about reading are significantly less likely to report mental health problems¹⁴ and reading for pleasure has a four-times-greater impact on academic success than a parent having a degree¹⁵. Research shows that if all pupils read for pleasure daily, 75% of year 6 would achieve the level that predicts 5 or more GCSE passes (currently 67%)¹⁶.

Alison David, Consumer Insight Director, Egmont Publishing, said:

“We know that reading to children is a very effective way to encourage them to read independently but, sadly, many parents simply don’t know what a great impact they could have on their children’s lives if they read to them daily. Many parents confuse literacy with reading for pleasure, so it is seen as a task to complete rather than a joy to share. If a child has mastered reading skills, it does not mean they will choose to read for pleasure, and even if they are currently reading independently it does not mean this will continue – there are many and growing distractions. Reading to them throughout childhood reinforces the great pleasure of sharing a story; it creates quality time in hectic family schedules, close moments of parent-child bonding and, effectively, future-proofs a reading habit.”

David – also the author of *Help Your Children Love Reading* – called for the government to make space for storytime in the primary school curriculum:

“Children should experience storytime throughout primary school and ideally well into their teens. Being read to, just for pleasure, should be an intrinsic part of the school day, as normal, unquestionable and as unchangeable as lunch break. The Department for Education states that nothing is more important in education than ensuring every child can read well, and the way to do this is to instil a passion for reading for pleasure. This won’t be achieved by guided reading lessons and tests. Space must be made in the school day for storytime. Teachers are vastly over burdened by the curriculum and unless time is made for story, by removing other demands, then it won’t happen for all children every day, which it needs to – for our children’s futures.”

Teresa Cremin, Professor of Literacy at the Open University and a leading researcher on the benefits of reading for pleasure, adds:

“Research indicates that reading aloud to young people, without attendant work, is a key pedagogic and professional practice in fostering reading for pleasure¹⁷. It is not an optional ‘extra’ activity, but every child’s right to hear fiction, non-fiction and poetry read aloud with passion and pleasure. Such shared experiences offer rich reading role models, create ‘books in common’ in families and in classrooms and help build communities of readers. It is encouraging that the draft Ofsted Inspection framework (2019) underscores the value of reading aloud to children¹⁸, but this is not just crucial in the early years but across primary schooling and beyond.”

Stories and Choices school study in Stoke-on-Trent

Egmont has been working with schools and retailers on a number of projects to explore how to increase the numbers of children being read to and reading for themselves, and how to reach those children least likely to read for pleasure. Their latest piece of independent research, the *Stories and Choices* project – also released today – showed how important it is to create space in the primary school curriculum for daily storytime.

In autumn 2018, Egmont partnered with St Joseph’s Catholic Academy in Stoke-on-Trent to see whether daily teacher-led storytime sessions, purely for pleasure without testing, would inspire a greater love of reading in children.

Over a five-month period, teachers recorded a dramatic improvement in the children’s reading skills, as well as a significantly greater level of excitement around books, magazines and the reading process. Children’s reading comprehension ages increased by an average of 10 months, twice as much as would normally be expected in the five-month timeframe, with some children progressing more than two years. Teachers also noted a profound improvement in children’s wellbeing. The project culminated with a visit from the Book Bus, with The Book People providing a free book to each child.

Laura Hamilton, Headteacher, St Joseph’s Catholic Academy, comments:

“It is no secret that the primary curriculum is jam-packed and some days it was a struggle to fit in storytime, but the benefits were clearly evident. During the five months of the project, almost all children made accelerated progress in reading comprehension. However, the most notable and most important impact of the project for our school was on children’s enthusiasm for reading for pleasure and on their eagerness to share stories with their family, friends and teachers. Both children and staff looked forward to storytime each day because they were eager to hear the characters’ next adventures. Storytime was also an opportunity to relax with friends and be mindful and both children and staff felt calmer, more positive and ready to learn. Despite the time pressures, all the children and staff agreed that it was well worth investing in reading aloud each day. It was a joy to hear the

children excited for their next storytime and groaning with disappointment when the teacher closed the book.”

Michael Morpurgo supports the call to action

To mark the release of the data **Michael Morpurgo, author of *War Horse*** and former Children’s Laureate, has written a celebratory poem in support of Egmont’s call to action. He said:

“It is vital that children, young people and all of us have access to stories which give us the knowledge, empathy and understanding we need to negotiate life. But just as importantly, we need to give children and their teachers and parents time to read.”

The research papers from Egmont Publishing’s conference today, including the findings of *Stories and Choices*, can be found [here](#).

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors:

1. About Egmont Publishing

In the UK, Egmont Publishing is the leading specialist children’s publisher for babies to teens, inspiring children to read through more than 25 million award-winning books, magazines, ebooks and apps sold each year. We’re proud to be home to many of the world’s favourite stories and best-loved authors, illustrators and characters such as Michael Morpurgo, Andy Stanton, Enid Blyton, Julia Donaldson, Lemony Snicket, Michael Grant, Winnie-the-Pooh, Tintin, Mr. Men, Thomas & Friends, Disney Princess, Ben 10, Fireman Sam, Angry Birds, Minecraft and Star Wars. www.egmont.co.uk Egmont Publishing is part of Egmont, a leading Danish media group, with activities in 30 countries and 6,600 employees. Our media world includes Nordisk Film, TV2 in Norway, cinemas, book publishers, educational publishers and PlayStation, as well as a number of partly owned film companies, including Zentropa. Egmont is a commercial foundation that generates revenue amounting to €1.6 billion. Every year we donate over €10 million to help improve the lives of children and young people.

2. About Nielsen Book

Nielsen Book is a leading provider of search, discovery, commerce, consumer research and retail sales analysis services globally. Nielsen runs the Registration Agencies (ISBN and SAN Agencies for UK & Ireland), provides search and discovery products through its Nielsen BookData product range, electronic trading via Nielsen BookNet and PubEasy services, retail sales analysis via Nielsen BookScan and consumer research through its Books and Consumers Survey. The company is wholly owned by Nielsen. For more information, please visit: www.nielsenbook.co.uk

3. About Nielsen

Nielsen Holdings plc is a global performance management company that provides a comprehensive understanding of what consumers watch and buy. Nielsen's Watch segment provides media and advertising clients with Total Audience measurement services for all devices on which content — video, audio and text — is consumed. The Buy segment offers consumer packaged goods manufacturers and retailers the industry's only global view of retail performance measurement. By integrating information from its Watch and Buy segments and other data sources, Nielsen also provides its clients with analytics that help improve performance. Nielsen, an S&P 500 company, has operations in over 100 countries, covering more than 90% of the world's population. For more information, visit www.nielsen.com

4. **Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer* survey** Nielsen's 2018 *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer* survey was undertaken in December 2018 with a nationally representative sample size of 1591 parents of 0-13-year-olds, alongside 409 children aged 14-17. Every year Egmont is one of several publishers that co-funds the survey and as part of this study Egmont also commissions their own proprietary questions, providing unique insights into reading for pleasure trends.

Nielsen will be highlighting further findings from the 2018 *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer* research at the annual Nielsen Book UK Children's Summit, at the London Book Fair, on Thursday 14th March, 2019.

Further details are available at:

www.londonbookfair.co.uk/en/Whats-On/conferences/Nielsen-Books-UK-Childrens-Summit/

5. The Stories and Choices Project

Egmont worked with 120 children aged 7-11 at St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Stoke-on-Trent. Through an intervention approach over the autumn term in 2018, teachers committed to read to their class each day, using a variety of books and magazines provided by Egmont. At the end of the project, the children also received a free book from The Book People's 'Book Bus'.

The hypothesis was that if teachers and children experienced the pure pleasure of reading together it would be enough to create long-term behaviour and attitude change – that the joy of reading would lead them to want to read more. The hypothesis was correct, attitudes and behaviours did change. Children became keen readers and teachers noticed a remarkable impact on wellbeing, as well as literacy levels increasing at twice the expected rate. The two key elements in the motivation of the children was being read to and using a variety of different reading materials, including magazines as well as traditional storybooks.

6. Alison David, Consumer Insight Director at Egmont Publishing

Alison David is Consumer Insight Director at Egmont, the UK's leading specialist children's publisher and home to Enid Blyton, Julia Donaldson, Michael Grant, Steve Lenton, Lydia Monks, Michael Morpurgo, Andy Stanton, Jim Smith, Winnie-the-Pooh, Thomas & Friends, the Mr. Men and more. Alison has worked with research as a creator, analyst and end user.

Her research programme at Egmont includes investigating what it takes to inspire children to read. Her ground-breaking studies include Print Matters, Print Matters More, The Reading Magic Project and Stories and Choices. She is the author of *Help Your Child Love Reading*, which draws on her research and her experience as a mother.

7. References

- ¹ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ² Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2013-2018*
- ³ Egmont / Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ⁴ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ⁵ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2017-2018*
- ⁶ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ⁷ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ⁸ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ⁹ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ¹⁰ Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ¹¹ Egmont / Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ¹² Egmont / Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ¹³ Egmont / Nielsen's *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey 2018*
- ¹⁴ National Literacy Trust's *Wellbeing, Reading and Writing 2018*
- ¹⁵ CLS *Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: the role of reading 2013*
- ¹⁶ OECD *PISA 2009 Results: Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices (Volume III) 2010*
- ¹⁷ Cremin, T. Mottram, M. Collins, F. Powell, S. and Safford, K, *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure, 2014*
- ¹⁸ Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework: *Inspecting the Substance of Education, 2019*