

Reading for pleasure

Starting school: a critical moment to support reading enjoyment

2 July 2026



Housekeeping

- We will be recording this webinar and will share it with you all afterwards
- We will also share these slides with you, so watch out for an email from us in your inbox in a couple of days
- Your microphone is muted, but please submit any questions in the Q&A or chat box and our panel will answer as many as they can

Agenda

- Welcome and introduction
- **Highlights from BookTrust's latest research drawn from our new evidence-informed guide** on the transition to school
- **In conversation with Tom Percival**, children's author-illustrator and BookTrust Writer-in-Residence and **Matthew Courtney**, Strategic Lead of Wandle English Hub and Director of Wandle Learning Partnership – talking about **practical ways to support children's reading journeys as they start primary school and in the early school years**
- Overview of **BookTrust's starting school and early school years resources** – including exciting addition to come in the autumn!

Highlights from our latest research

Starting school: a critical moment
for supporting reading
enjoyment

Amy McGarvey,
Research and Impact Lead



Starting school: a significant milestone

- A **key milestone** in childhood
- **Policy focus:** emphasising the importance of helping all children to feel safe, confident and ready to learn.
 - The Government's Best Start in Life agenda
 - Guidance on Supporting a smooth transition into Reception



Different journeys into the same moment

- **Universal ‘moment’** – but transitions into school aren’t experienced equally
- **Reading can help overcome inequalities** but is shaped by what’s happening at home
- Our Trends, drivers and inequalities in UK childhood reading report highlights **differences in family time, routines and support affect how easy it is to sustain reading at home**

→ *This provides the backdrop to these findings focusing on age 4-5*



What does the research tell us?

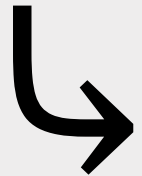
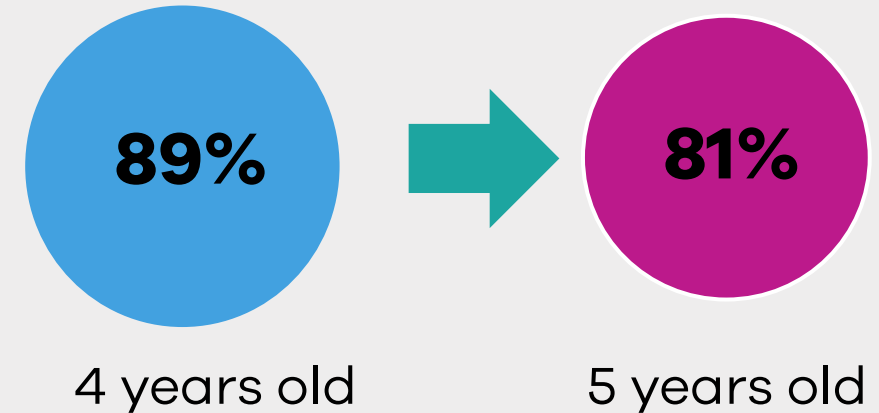
From our brand
new guide



Reading enjoyment drops around school entry, marking a critical point in children's reading journeys

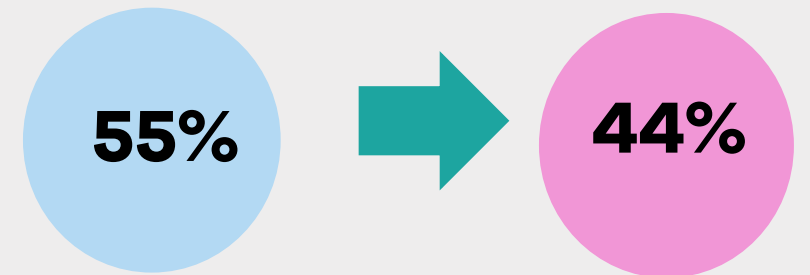
There is a noticeable drop in children's reading enjoyment between 4 and 5 years old:


Parents and carers who said their child "Likes or loves reading"



This drop is larger when looking at children who are reported to 'love' reading.

"Loves reading"



 In our survey, 'reading' is defined in age-appropriate ways that reflect how young children typically engage with books including sharing, looking at or reading books

What changes?

Different factors converge between ages 4 and 5

- Understanding what's happening at this stage is important for finding the right solutions.
- Our research suggests it's not simply about children losing interest in books.

What changes around school entry



Changing reading practices

From playful sharing to more structured, skill-focused reading



Different kinds of reading at home

Balancing school books, child choice, shared stories and read-alouds

Reading enjoyment drops around school entry (age 4 to 5)



Support is an important equaliser

Parents and carers have different starting points and are open to guidance



Pressure on family routines

More tiredness, less flexible time and more competing demands

Reading practices change

During the transition into school, we see a shift in shared reading practices:

Playful and expressive practices



Acting out stories using puppets, toys or objects



Using different voices, tones, expressions and actions



Instructional and dialogic practices



Encouraging recall of the story from memory or in the child's own words



Asking their child questions about the story

a b
c d

Explaining or teaching sounds, letters or words from the book

Different kinds of reading at home require balancing

Phonics books

85%

bring home
these books



**Free choice books to
read for fun**

76%

bring home
these books

**Help children practise and
apply developing skills**

**Help sustain enjoyment,
motivation, conversation,
emotional connections with books**

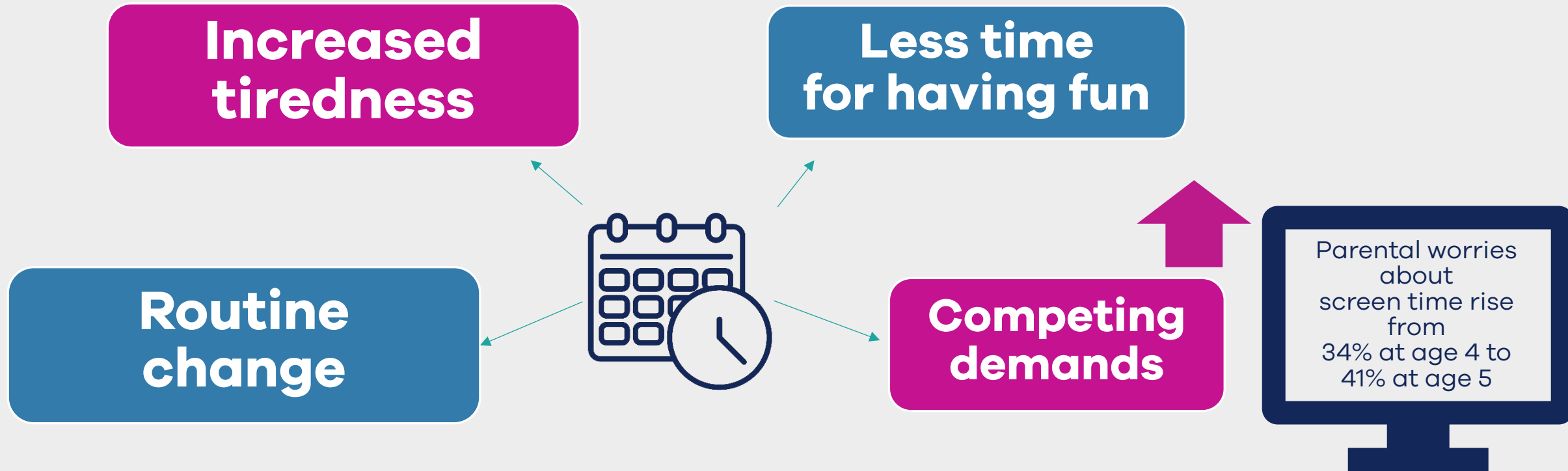
Navigating new reading routines

“ We find now that we're not reading as many books...outside of the books coming home from school. So we do need to get back into the habit of that. We just kind of changed priority just because we know that she has to read that one, you know. ”

Parent of 5-year-old, Northern Ireland



Family routines come under pressure



Daily shared reading falls from 55% at age 4 to 47% at age 5

Families value reading and are open to support

92%

of parents and carers of 5-year-olds believe they play a vital role in developing their child's reading ability.

79%

of parents and carers of children aged 5 say they want their child to spend more time with books

64%

of parents and carers of 5-year-olds say they would like more information and support to help their child to spend more time with books and stories



Up from **57%** of parents and carers of 4-year-olds



Starting points are not the same

Differences in....

Time

Confidence

Access to books

Support

+ wider factors



...shape how easy it is to sustain reading enjoyment at home

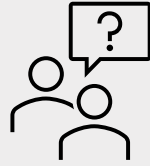
"When I think of primary school, I think of...they're already getting homework...they're able to write their own names or, I don't know...I feel like he still has a bit a ways to go. So, I think that that side of it just makes me really nervous"

Parent of 4-year-old

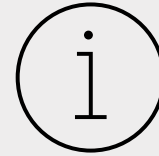
Children in low-income households are less likely to experience shared reading:
42% daily shared reading (low-income households) vs 50% (non-low-income households)

Support is an important equaliser

Support isn't reaching families consistently



Lack of clarity



Not had information or support

It is crucial to provide support as children start school that reaches *all* families, that is:

1

Accessible & reassuring

2

Practical & easy to act on

3

Built on families' strengths



This can help narrow gaps in children's reading experiences and build a strong foundation for their lifelong love of reading.

How can we nurture reading enjoyment as children start school and beyond?

3 areas of focus for schools and early years settings as children start school and in the early primary years:

Embedding reading and sharing stories within the school preparation journey



Supporting parents and carers at a moment of openness and uncertainty

Keeping the balance between reading for enjoyment alongside learning to read



More detail on the research and support areas are in our guide:

BookTrust
Getting children reading

Starting school: a critical moment to support reading enjoyment



How can we nurture reading enjoyment as children start school and beyond?

BookTrust's resources for starting school and beyond



Our evidence-informed guide – out today!



Starting school: a critical moment to support reading... | BookTrust

Practical areas and signposting to resources:

13 Starting school: a critical moment to support reading enjoyment

1 2 3 4 5



Embedding reading and sharing stories within the school preparation journey

53% of parents and carers of 4–5-year-olds say reading and sharing stories has helped prepare their child for starting school. This suggests it already plays a role but greater awareness is needed – both for supporting skills but also as a routine that can provide stability and connection during a time of change.

Practical Ideas

- **Use within transition moments:** Including books, stories, rhymes, songs or oral storytelling in stay-and-play sessions, home visits, settling-in days, welcome packs and the first weeks of Reception can help children get to know people, spaces and routines in a low-pressure way.
- **Reassure families:** Offering clear, low-pressure messages can reassure that children don't need to start school already reading, and that enjoying books, stories, songs and rhymes together is a great way of helping children feel familiar with what they will experience in school.
- **Use books to explore change:** Sharing and recommending stories about starting school, friendship, separation, routines and feelings can support conversations at home about the experiences that accompany transition.
- **Create continuity between home and school:** Using book bags, lending libraries and shared recommendations can create familiarity and continuity. A book a child has enjoyed at school can become a bridge into shared reading at home.

Useful BookTrust resources

Our top 5 starting school books:



- 🔗 [More books to read to a new class](#)
- 🔗 [Resources for teachers, including lesson plans, to support children starting school through reading and sharing stories](#)
- 🔗 [Information for parents and carers on how books and stories can help get your child ready for school and top tips for reading together](#)
- 🔗 [Video from author Tom Percival about how books and stories can help open up conversations about how children are feeling](#)

15 Starting school: a critical moment to support reading enjoyment

1 2 3 4 5



Keeping the balance between reading for enjoyment alongside learning to read

A balanced approach that combines phonics with reading for enjoyment supports both skill development and deeper engagement. While phonics builds decoding and fluency, reading for enjoyment fosters motivation, confidence and connection to books, and gives children access to richer language and stories beyond their reading level.¹⁹

Practical Ideas

- **Protect space for enjoyment:** Creating regular opportunities for pressure-free reading with no links to performance helps children keep the connection between reading and enjoyment. For example, try daily story times, quiet browsing time, picture book exploration or adult read-alouds.
- **Read aloud regularly:** Using expressive, engaging read-alouds gives children access to stories, vocabulary and ideas beyond their independent reading level, supporting listening, imagination, comprehension, attention and positive reading attitudes. For example, choose books that give opportunities for expression, pauses, repetition, props or actions that bring reading to life.
- **Offer choice and connection:** Providing supported choice and a diverse range of books that reflect children's interests, experiences and languages helps with children's motivation through providing agency and relevance. For example, let children choose between two or three books, vote for a class story, or pick from a small basket linked to their interests or lives.
- **Make reading social and visible:** Social reading can reinforce reading as a valued classroom practice and help children develop reader identities. For example, book talk, peer recommendations, shared responses and opportunities for children to say what they liked, disliked, noticed or wondered. Adult enthusiasm can help normalise reading as enjoyable and meaningful.

Useful BookTrust resources

BookTrust's book recommendations:

- 🔗 [Great Books Guide: books for 4-5-year-olds](#)
 - 🔗 [Best books to read aloud to ages 4 and 5](#)
 - 🔗 [Suggested books for reading in the autumn term in Reception](#)
 - 🔗 [What to read after your favourites](#)
- Explore further tips from BookTrust here:
- 🔗 [Top tips on how to encourage and support more book choice](#)
 - 🔗 [Teacher toolkit on being a teaching role model](#)
 - 🔗 [How to read aloud](#)

14 Starting school: a critical moment to support reading enjoyment

1 2 3 4 5



Supporting parents and carers at a moment of openness and uncertainty

The transition into school is a time when many parents and carers are open to guidance, creating a valuable opportunity for schools and early years settings to build positive relationships, align approaches between home and school, and support families' confidence in sharing books and stories so children continue to see reading as enjoyable and valued.

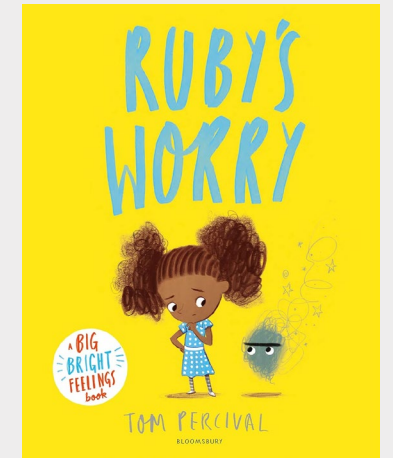
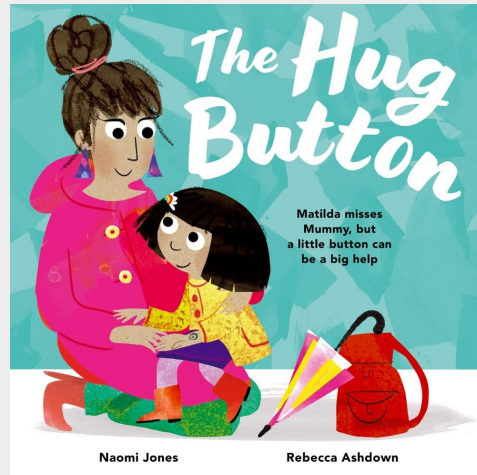
Practical Ideas

- **Provide reassuring guidance:** Consistent messages emphasising that enjoyable, informal reading at home is valuable and doesn't need to be perfect can help parents and carers keep this in mind at a time when they have lots of information to take in.
- **Offer small, flexible suggestions:** Encouraging manageable actions and providing suggestions helps build on existing routines and strengths, rather than appearing like fixed 'homework'. For example, suggest spending five minutes with a familiar book, talking about the cover, asking what they notice in a picture, joining in with repeated words, or telling a story in the family's home language.
- **Show what shared reading can look like:** Using demonstrations, for example in informal book-sharing sessions or short videos in newsletters, can help translate advice into concrete behaviours. This may be especially helpful for parents and carers with less prior experience.
- **Make support accessible and inclusive:** Reducing practical and psychological barriers can help more families feel that reading is achievable. For example, visual prompts or translated materials can support a range of literacy experiences and preferences.

Useful BookTrust resources

- 🔗 ['Shared Reading Together': teacher resources for Reception parent workshops \(designed by BookTrust and Wandl English Hub\)](#)
- 🔗 [CPD resources for teaching assistants in developing best practice for reading in EYFS and Key Stage 1](#)
- 🔗 [Practical tips for parents and carers to help motivate children to read at home](#)
- 🔗 [Easy ways to make sharing stories fun when reading at home](#)
- 🔗 [Find your child's next favourite read using our Bookfinder search tool](#)

Some of our favourite books for starting school



Find books to read with a new Reception class here: [Starting school: books to read with a new class](#)

Resources for starting school

Teacher resources to support children starting school through books and stories

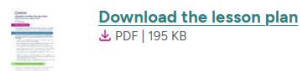
Our research with families highlights that starting school can come with mixed emotions for children and their parents and carers, and it is a time they may look for support as they navigate this change.

As teachers help settle new starters into primary school, we've developed resources to build on what you're already doing, embedding books and stories into your activities from familiarising children with classrooms to introducing them to new areas of learning.

Our [teacher lesson plan](#) can be used as a template for a transition day or stay and play session at the beginning of term. It uses the classic children's book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury as an inspiration for a story time with linked enhanced provision activities.

Using this plan, practitioners can introduce children to the joys of reading together and engage them from the outset with opportunities to participate with repeated refrains and role play. After the story, the plan outlines linked provision ideas for key areas so that children feel confident and excited to explore and get creative – all while building on the themes, language and structures from the book.

See our teacher lesson plan



Ways to support and encourage parents and carers

We've created this accessible [one-pager](#) that can be downloaded and shared with parents and carers to help them understand the many benefits of books and stories as their child prepares for school. This links to our [parent web page](#) which includes tips, guidance and book lists. Using this page, you might:

- encourage parents and carers to see how reading and books can help their child as they prepare for school and once they start.
- reassure parents and carers that the best thing they can do as their child gets ready to start school is to enjoy and have fun sharing stories and books with them.
- recommend some books that they can read with their child. This could include books on the topic of starting school, or ones that might encourage their child to open up about how they're feeling.



Download the one pager for parents and carers

PDF | 275 KB



One pager for parents and carers (Welsh language version)

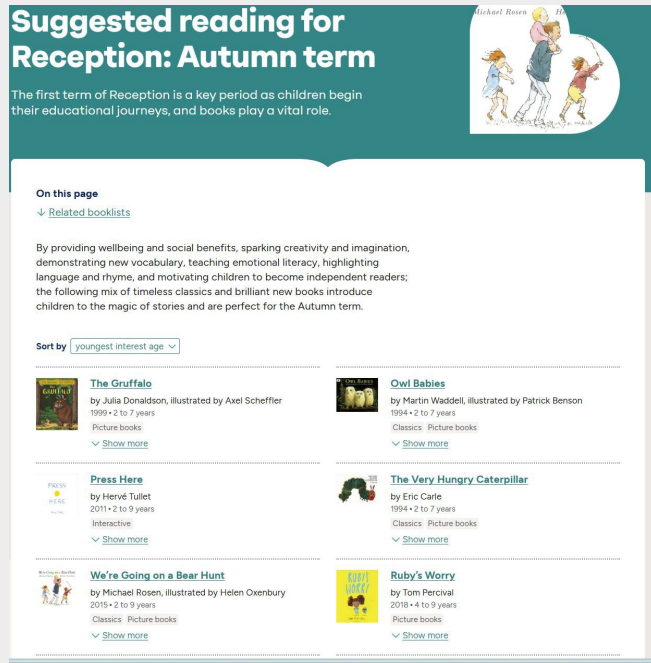
PDF | 631 KB



Visit our starting school page for parents

Find out more here: [How reading and sharing stories can support children... | BookTrust](#)

Supporting reading enjoyment throughout primary school









Suggested reading for Reception: Autumn term

The first term of Reception is a key period as children begin their educational journeys, and books play a vital role.

On this page
↓ [Related booklists](#)

By providing wellbeing and social benefits, sparking creativity and imagination, demonstrating new vocabulary, teaching emotional literacy, highlighting language and rhyme, and motivating children to become independent readers; the following mix of timeless classics and brilliant new books introduce children to the magic of stories and are perfect for the Autumn term.

Sort by

 The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler 1999 • 2 to 5 years Picture books Show more	 Owl Babies by Martin Waddell, illustrated by Patrick Benson 1994 • 2 to 3 years Classics Picture books Show more
 Press Here by Hervé Tullet 2011 • 2 to 5 years Interactive Show more	 The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle 1971 • 2 to 3 years Classics Picture books Show more
 We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury 2015 • 2 to 5 years Classics Picture books Show more	 Ruby's Worry by Tom Percival 2015 • 4 to 5 years Picture books Show more

[Suggested reading for Reception: Autumn Term](#)



Toolkit for Teachers as Reading Role Models

[Collaborate and tips](#) (5 to 14 years)

We've put together these tips for modelling being an enthusiastic reader.



On this page
↓ [How to be a reading role model](#)
↓ [Discover the best inclusive books](#)
↓ [Be a visible reader](#)
↓ [Create a culture of reading for pleasure](#)
↓ [Video: the magic of sharing stories at home](#)
↓ [Book review template](#)

How to be a reading role model

- 1 [Ten top tips for teachers on how to be a reading role model](#) PDF | 12 KB
- 2 [Read a teacher's guide to getting to know your class's reading habits](#)

Discover the best inclusive books

 Great Books Guide → Here are 100 books from 2025-26 that we think are great – and so will children	 BookTrust Represents Virtual Author Workshops → Bring an author into your classroom! Schools can register to join our free Virtual Author Workshops with BookTrust Represents, allowing your children to ask authors questions	Explore our booklists → We've curated hundreds of carefully chosen themed booklists for children. Take a look here.
--	--	---

[Toolkit for Teachers as Reading Role Models](#)

Bookbuzz Primary supports Key Stage 2 children to develop reading for pleasure and book choice skills by picking a book to take home and keep from a selection of 16 diverse and inclusive titles.

[Bookbuzz Primary](#)

Resources for parents & carers

We offer research, videos, tips and recommendations:

- Fun booklists: [Read aloud for 4-5 year olds](#)
- Help find your child's next favourite read using our [Bookfinder](#) search tool
- [Practical tips for parents](#) to help motivate children to read at home
- Find more information here: [Getting ready to start school | BookTrust](#)

Getting ready to start school

On this page, you will find information on how sharing books and stories can help to prepare your child for starting school, plus top tips and book recommendations.



On this page

- ↓ [How can books and stories help my child get ready for school?](#)
- ↓ [Helping your child prepare](#)
- ↓ [Watch: How books help children understand feelings](#)
- ↓ [Tips for reading together](#)
- ↓ [Once your child starts school](#)
- ↓ [Helpful resources and book recommendations](#)

Coming in September: new resources for parent and carer workshops

New resources to help you deliver parent workshops to Reception families, designed by BookTrust and Wandle English Hub to help families build confidence and enjoyment in shared reading at home:

Designed with teachers and families and drawing on our evidence and understanding of schools and families, the resources will:

- help encourage positive, home-school engagement
- help promote the relational, enjoyable practice of shared reading at home
- offer practical suggestions for families on how to share stories at home, building on families' existing practices

Resources will include:

- A teacher's guide
- A presentation to adapt and use
- A printable handout for parents and carers to take home

Thank you!

The slides will be shared by email.

We'd love your feedback – please complete our poll.