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Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024-2026, and the UK's largest children's reading charity – BookTrust – release inaugural 'Reading Rights' Report with roadmap to turn children's reading from an 'invisible privilege to a universal right'

www.booktrust.org.uk | [@UKLaureate](https://twitter.com/UKLaureate) | [@BookTrust](https://twitter.com/BookTrust) | [#ReadingRights](https://hashtage.com/ReadingRights) | [Full report, images, Info](#)



Reading Rights

Books Build a Brighter Future

- Calls on national and local leaders in early years, health, education and culture to come together to make reading a part of daily life for every child in the first seven years of life
- Shares five focus areas that will turn the tide on 'indefensible' reading inequality
- Cottrell-Boyce embraces role as 'the angry, political Laureate' & shares 'stark warning'
- Announces plans for a place-based pilot 'City of Stories' that will create a reading blueprint

London, Wednesday 21 May 2025: Today, the multi award-winning children's book author, screenwriter and current Waterstones Children's Laureate, **Frank Cottrell-Boyce**, releases his inaugural 'Reading Rights' Report with partner **BookTrust**, who are the UK's largest children's reading charity.

The 'Reading Rights: Books Build a Brighter Future' Interim Report calls on national and local leaders in early years, health, education and culture to come together to make reading a part of daily life for every child in the first seven years of life.

The report – which will be formally launched this morning at a visit by Cottrell-Boyce and BookTrust to Edith Kerrison Nursery School and Children's Centre in Newham, London – puts forward a vision for early childhood reading and story-sharing across three key areas for improvement – reading for the best start in life, reading in nurseries and schools, and reading for children with experience of social care; it identifies five specific points of focus where change will lead to real impact on the ground and on children's lives; and it also announces plans for an innovative place-based pilot called the 'City of Stories', with the aim of creating a reading blueprint.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024–2026, said:

"Britain is not an equal society. 4.3 million children are growing up in poverty. When I was named Waterstones Children's Laureate, I knew I wanted to use my position to campaign for these children, the ones that are being left behind.

I started the 'Reading Rights' campaign to highlight this indefensible inequality, but also to say that we can do something about it. We have an astonishingly powerful tool in our hands – shared reading. If you've been read to, as a child, by someone who cares about you, you have been given an enormous invisible privilege. If you haven't been given that privilege, then you've been left with an enormous mountain to climb.

During my travels as Waterstones Children's Laureate I've encountered brilliant people and ideas who are already making a difference. We just need to make sure that every child gets a chance to experience that difference. To turn that invisible privilege into a universal right.

This report contains a stark warning. If we vacate that space – where child and story meet, where human love slows the world down and makes it a bit more navigable – we will hand it to something that is not human, that will not slow down, that does not love us. We will be ceding the territory of clam and connection to confusion, anxiety and fury. The mission is urgent. Childhood is fleeting. But the mission is also achievable. And it is full of joy.

I'm asking for government support on a local and national level to make sure this simple, vital experience is available to all. To help us remember who we really are – the storytelling species."

About the 'Reading Rights: Books Build a Brighter Future' Interim Report

The report follows Cottrell-Boyce's 'Reading Rights' Summit – held in January at St George's Hall, Liverpool – which brought together expert voices across the political, education, literacy, early years, arts, library and health sectors, as well as national and local government leaders including Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotheram and Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza.

The report captures the innovative practice shared at this unique cross sector summit to create a comprehensive strategy for shared-reading as an early year's health and wellbeing intervention. **The full 'Reading Rights Report' can be read [here](#).**

Delegates dissected three specific areas for improvement – the best start in life; nurseries and schools; and children with experience of social care – and the report reflects these discussions by summarising the current context and challenges, together with presenting a vision of best practice and support that will change children's lives.

Five key areas of action have been identified for their potential to make tangible change: these will be the focus of BookTrust and Frank Cottrell-Boyce's activity over the next twelve months. A second 'Reading Rights' Summit will be held in early 2026, followed by a second 'Reading Rights' Report in Summer 2026, detailing progress over the following target areas:

1. **Workforce training:** Supporting all professionals and practitioners working with children and families in the early years to understand the benefits of early reading and to be confident sharing stories and showing parents and carers how to read with their children.
2. **Policy, guidance and frameworks:** Making sure that early childhood reading shows up in policy, guidance and frameworks – wherever it can make a difference.
3. **Access to books:** Making sure that children and families, early years professionals and practitioners, and community spaces, childcare settings and schools – all have access to high-quality books and reading-support resources, including books that are representative of the contemporary UK.
4. **Sharing high-quality research and evidence:** Sharing the evidence base about reading in the early years with everyone involved in supporting children and families during this phase, in ways that are clear and meaningful and will drive change.
5. **Multi-agency leadership:** Demonstrating the impact that early shared reading could make when effective practice is implemented in a coordinated manner by a wide range of local leaders across a community, city or wider area.

Diana Gerald MBE, CEO of BookTrust, said: *"It is our huge privilege to be working with Frank Cottrell-Boyce on the Reading Rights campaign, and with the extraordinary cross-sector coalition that has been involved in this work so far. BookTrust has been working to get children and families reading for many decades, but we know that too many children are missing out on the immediate and lifelong benefits of early shared reading.*

That's why, for BookTrust, this report is the next step on our journey to make early shared reading and storytelling an everyday part of all children's lives.

We want this report and campaign to unite us, inspire us and give focus to our shared commitment to improving children's lives. We invite everyone who cares about the health, wellbeing and happiness of children to join the Reading Rights campaign and help make a difference."

Darren Henley, Chief Executive, Arts Council England said *"As part of our Let's Create strategy, we want more children and young people to experience the richness of creativity and culture, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances. We know that shared reading creates happiness while also developing lifelong skills. There is no greater endeavour than seeking to build the happiness of our children and we're proud to support BookTrust's promotion of literacy as an essential tool."*

Alongside these areas of focus, Cottrell-Boyce and BookTrust have shared plans to build a 'City of Stories': a sustainable and replicable model that can be scaled across other regions. Further information will be announced on this in the following weeks.

The 'Reading Rights: Books Build a Brighter Future' Vision

This report spotlights some of the amazing initiatives and excellent practice we have seen while travelling around the UK. We hope it is an inspiring read.

But it will mean nothing if nothing changes.

Every child should have the best start in life. Every child should have the opportunity to hear stories and experience books in their early years.

As things stand, this is a privilege, a privilege only shared by fewer and fewer children. We see the price of that loss every day in the increasing anxiety levels of our children.

We believe that it is not only necessary but also entirely possible to turn the tide. We have seen what can happen when people understand the amazing power of sharing stories in early childhood.

How it can build relationships, bond communities and create opportunity. In many places, we have seen what can happen when local leaders and services, community networks and professionals working in childcare, education, health and culture come together to empower parents and carers to harness the power of shared reading. How professionals and practitioners lacking confidence or understanding of how to share stories can develop their skills and play a vital role. How even those who are most often marginalised – children in the social care system, communities that are least well-served with infrastructure and investment – can be reached with enough good will and good work.

But 'many places' is not all places, and good will is not inexhaustible.

This report shows what can be done.

We need government support to make sure that it is done, equally, and for all.

The 'Reading Rights: Books Build a Brighter Future': Three areas of focus

The full 'Reading Rights Report' including all information, statistics and references can be found [here](#).

1. Best start in life:

- **Why does it matter?** The first years of a child's life are critical for cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Shared reading helps children's emotional and social development: children who are read to from their earliest years are more likely to develop secure relationships with their caregivers and have better mental wellbeing, social skills. Shared reading routines also create positive habits – with a sense of security, comfort and structure – as well as helping children overcome socio-economic inequalities: those growing up in poverty have a better chance of moving out of poverty as adults if they are read to as young children.



- **What is the picture now?** For the 36% of children aged 0-4 growing up in poverty, the barriers to being read to regularly through childhood can be hard to overcome. BookTrust research shows:
 - o 95% of carers and parents agree it is important to read with their child, but only 40% say a bedtime story is part of their normal routine.
 - o 49% do not have a library card.
 - o 30% say that reading isn't a big part of family life.
 - o 28% don't find reading with their child easy, while 21% lack confidence in choosing books their child will enjoy.
 - o 38% don't read with their child due to lack of time.

- **What are the barriers?** For adults who have grown up in homes without reading and books, shared reading is not associated with positive interactions and experiences of childhood. Reading can feel daunting, stressful or irrelevant and this is made worse when it is hard to find books which reflect the culture, life experiences, values and beliefs of our diverse society. Parents struggle with lack of time to read with their child, as well as the confidence to do so. Furthermore, not all homes have books: BookTrust research carried out with families on low incomes showed that for 72% the books included in BookTrust's Bookstart Baby pack were among the first they owned for their child¹.

- **The 'Reading Rights' vision:**

- o Early shared-reading takes place in all families, regardless of the barriers they are facing, and becomes part of all children's early experiences.
- o Parents and carers are supported to enjoy reading with their children in ways that work for them, and which drive positive social, emotional and cognitive developmental outcomes.
- o Local leaders, services, and networks join up to promote shared reading and storytelling everywhere as an effective developmental strategy and a wellbeing intervention in children's earliest years.
- o Professionals working with families antenatally and in the first years of life understand the importance of shared-reading, and have the skills and capacity to support families to embed story sharing in early family life.



2. Nurseries and schools

¹ BookTrust (2022) Online survey of parents/carers from low-income households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, conducted between April and June 2022. Unpublished data. Figures based on responses from 974 parents/carers of children aged 0–1

- **Why does it matter?** Story sharing should sit at the heart of a child's educational experience because the more children are read to the more likely they are to flourish and succeed academically, socially and emotionally. Shared reading develops children's communication skills, and children with good speech and language skills have better social skills and emotional wellbeing. Schools are crucial in developing positive attitudes to reading, and reading aloud and sharing stories supports happier, calmer learning environments. Storybooks promote new ways of thinking and making sense of the world.
- **What is the picture now?** The systematic structured approach to reading set out in the English National Curriculum has created a generation of children who are amongst the most proficient readers in the world, but reading enjoyment is a different picture: only 29% of 10-year-olds in England, compared with 42% around the world say they like reading 'very much'². At the same time, the wellbeing benefits that reading offer are more important than ever before with the latest data showing currently 1 in 5 children have a probable mental health condition (around 6 children in each classroom) and that half of all mental health issues develop before age of 14.³
- **What are the barriers?** Access to high-quality books and reading support resources is a challenge for many early years settings, struggling with funding levels. Based on data gathered in 2022, 14% of primary schools do not have a library area. One in eight (81%) of primary teachers point to barriers they face in encouraging pupils to read for enjoyment. These barriers include resource challenges, such as lack of time to let children read (36%), lack of resources (10%), or lack of available books that pupils enjoy (18%).⁴
- **The 'Reading Rights' vision:**
 - o Early education and care standards recognise the broad and foundational role that reading plays in children's wider development beyond literacy and curriculum outcomes.
 - o Early years professionals working in nurseries and schools have an excellent understanding of shared, interactive or dialogic reading, and the role it plays in developing children's language skills, social and emotional development and cognitive capacity.
 - o All nurseries and schools are equipped and supported to ensure all children experience regular reading for enjoyment through access to expertise, high-quality books and reading resources.
 - o Nurseries and schools promote the benefits of shared reading to parents so that children and families enjoy reading together at home.



3. Children with experience of social care

- **Why does it matter?** Shared reading can be especially transformative for babies and children who have had early relationships disrupted, or experienced trauma, abuse or neglect. Books create connections and help to build trust, as well as providing routine, structure and predictability. They support identity development alongside promoting an enhanced sense of wellbeing.
- **What is the picture now?** The costs of children's social care are high and growing, against a backdrop of declining spend on early intervention services. The number



² Lindorff, A., Stiff, J., and Kayton, H. (2024) PIRLS 2021: National Report for England. London: Department for Education. Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661667a756df202ca4ac0538/PIRLS_2021_national_report_for_england.pdf

³ Newlove-Delgado, T., Marcheselli, F., Williams, T., Mandalia, D., Dennes, M., McManus, S., Savic, M., Treloar, W., Croft, K., & Ford, T. (2023). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023. Leeds: NHS England. Available at: digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mentalhealth-of-children-and-youngpeople-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up

⁴ BookTrust and Teacher Tapp (2024) Online survey of teachers in England conducted in August 2024. Unpublished data. Figures based on 2,942 primary school teachers

of looked after children as a proportion of the UK child population is also growing. Children with experience of the care system and those with experience of kinship care are more likely to have SEND: for example research by Kinship shows that 31% of children in kinship care have diagnosed or suspected social, emotional or mental health needs⁵, plus children in care have poorer educational outcomes on average than other children, including being less likely to meet age-related expectations in reading⁶.

- **What are the barriers?** Foster parents, kinship carers and adoptive families can all struggle to get the support they need, and that would best support the children they care for. Being able to find representative and relatable books is important to families, but they need help to find and access them. The expectation of creating an idealised calm storytime experience can feel daunting, with support required to help families find what works for them and their children. Social workers often see the value of reading and love being able to provide books but can struggle to find time and resource for this given pressure of workload and competing professional priorities.



- **The 'Reading Rights' vision:**
 - o Research into the impact and value of shared-reading to children with experience of the social care system makes clear the benefits of early shared reading experiences for bonding and attachment, stability and identity.
 - o Professionals working with children and families in foster care, kinship care and adoption understand the importance of shared reading as a strategy to use alongside specialist interventions for building trust and relationships, overcoming trauma and providing a safe space for young children.
 - o Services and organisations working with children with experience of social care are helped to integrate shared-reading strategies into training and support.
 - o Families are provided with high-quality books and resources which meet the needs of care-experienced children, and are given the support they want and need to enjoy sharing stories with the children in their care.

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About the Waterstones Children's Laureate

The Waterstones Children's Laureate is the foremost representative of children's literature, awarded biannually to a renowned writer or illustrator in recognition of exceptional talent. Managed by BookTrust – the UK's largest children's reading charity – and sponsored by Waterstones, this prestigious role celebrates creativity and storytelling, promotes the vital importance of reading and children's literature, and champions the right of every child to enjoy a lifetime enriched with books and stories. The Children's Laureate role was originally created by Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and author Michael Morpurgo, and each Laureate brings their own passion and themes to create a unique legacy.

The current Waterstones Children's Laureate is Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the multi-award-winning author and screenwriter. The previous twelve Laureates are: Quentin Blake (1999-2001), Anne Fine (2001-2003), Michael

⁵ Kinship (2024) "Forgotten: Support for kinship children's education and mental". London: Kinship. Available at: kinship.org.uk/our-work-and-impact/policy-and-influencing/reports-and-publications/forgotten-report/

⁶ Department for Education (2024) "Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England", reporting year 2023. London: Department for Education. Available at: exploreeducation-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2023

Morpurgo (2003-2005), Jacqueline Wilson (2005-2007), Michael Rosen (2007-2009), Anthony Browne (2009-2011), Julia Donaldson (2011-2013), Malorie Blackman (2013-2015), Chris Riddell (2015-2017), Lauren Child (2017-2019), Cressida Cowell (2019-2022), Joseph Coelho (2022-2024).

Further information on Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024-2026, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, is [here](#).

About Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Frank Cottrell-Boyce is a multi award-winning children's book author and screenwriter. *Millions*, his debut children's novel, won the prestigious CILIP Carnegie Medal. His other books include *Cosmic*, *Framed*, *The Astounding Broccoli Boy*, *Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth*, *Runaway Robot*, *Noah's Gold*, *The Wonder Brothers* and most recently *The Blockbusters!*, which was published by Pan Macmillan on 15 May 2025. He has enjoyed a long-time collaboration with award-winning illustrator Steven Lenton. His books have been shortlisted for a multitude of prizes, including the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Whitbread Children's Fiction Award, The Roald Dahl Funny Prize and the Blue Peter Book Award.

Frank is also a highly successful screenwriter. He has written for the hit TV series *Doctor Who* and his script for Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* won a British Animation Award. Along with Danny Boyle, he devised the Opening Ceremony for the London 2012 Olympics. Frank has been the judge for the 500 Words competition and the BBC's *One Show As You Write It* competition. Frank is a lifelong champion of children's books. In 2023 he launched a successful podcast with Nadia Shireen, *The Island of Brilliant!*, celebrating writing and illustration for children of all ages. He lives in Merseyside with his family.

About BookTrust

We get millions of children reading, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. Children who choose to read and who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. They enjoy more success in life. This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age and throughout their early years. Our carefully selected books and well-researched programmes are delivered by thousands of local partners, bringing the magic of reading to children in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

About Waterstones

Waterstones is the UK and Ireland's leading high street bookseller with over 300 bookshops, including Foyles, Hatchards, Hodges Figgis, Blackwell's and branches in Ireland, Brussels and Amsterdam. It is the only national specialist book retailer of scale in the UK, with the average sized shop carrying a range of around 30,000 individual books and with over 200,000 titles in the largest shop. [Waterstones.com](https://www.waterstones.com) | [@Waterstones](https://www.instagram.com/waterstones)