



WORLD  
**BOOK**  
DAY

## **Project Matilda**

The child's perspective on motivations and barriers to reading for pleasure

**Ellie Green**, Commercial Insight Director  
**Asia Braithwaite**, Insight Executive

BEANO  
**BRAIN**

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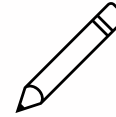
# Objectives

- You've a wealth of insight about the **motivations and barriers to reading for pleasure** for children
- However, the vast majority of this has come from parents and educators – it's time to change this, and **add children's perspectives** and voices into the mix
- You'd like to harness this insight in 2 ways:
  - **Campaign activity / activations** – insight-driven activations to encourage positive reading experiences / break down barriers
  - **News / editorial** – supported by a mix of quantitative and qualitative data

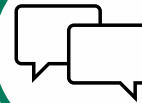
# Approach

We tapped into our panel of Trendspotters to ask 8–14-year-olds about the motivations and barriers to reading for pleasure.

- 8 x pre-tasked 40 minute interviews
- Varying levels of engagement with reading for pleasure: a mixture of readers, light readers and non-readers
- Location spread: Across England (6), Scotland (1) and Wales (1)
- Even gender split



**Pre-tasks** – Focused on kids' favourite and least favourite memories of reading alongside a task that encouraged them to report the highs and lows of World Book Day for themselves, their family & friends



**Interviews** – Deep dive into feelings surrounding reading, opinions on the 6 WBD principles for motivating kids to read for pleasure, and their ideas for World Book Day activities



# What reading means to kids



# For Alphas, a typical reader doesn't need to be a bookworm or a nerd; reading can be for anyone.

Alphas have shifted away from generalised labels for themselves and each other; they've a much more sophisticated approach to identity that focuses on personal quirks and the many things that make each individual unique.

So regardless of where they sit on the reading scale, they don't connect with age-old stereotypes about what a reader should be, look like or what hobbies they engage in.

"It's hard to describe someone who likes reading, because reading is for anyone!"  
- **Girl 8, Reader**

"I can't imagine what he looks like... but maybe he reads to get smarter?"  
- **Boy, 13, Non-Reader**



# At its best, reading is...

Immersing myself in a new world	Playful, silly and fun	Endless discovery and variety	A part of my identity and interests	A way to relax; self-care	A way to pass the time
"I like reading because when I really get into a book, it feels like I'm watching a film or a TV series" ~ <b>Girl, 12, Reader</b>	"Captain Underpants really made me laugh; some words were made up like fabdabulous!" ~ <b>Boy, 8, Light Reader</b>	"If there was only one type of book they could get really boring! I can always find books that I like and that's why I like reading" ~ <b>Boy, 8, Light Reader</b>	"When I was in Year 4, I got really into Harry Potter and bought all of the merch!" ~ <b>Girl, 8, Reader</b>	"It's fun because you're quite chilled, you're just sitting there reading and it makes you quite sleepy" ~ <b>Boy, 10, Light Reader</b>	"When I get home from school and I have nothing to do, under my desk I have some books and I read them" ~ <b>Girl, 8, Reader</b>

# At its worst, reading is...

Too difficult	Functional; a means to an end	Something I can't be honest about	Not relevant to my life or interests	A waste of time	Too samey
"It gives me a headache... there are so many words" ~ <b>Boy, 13, Non-Reader</b>	"When you're older and signing up for a job, you have to read the questions and when you're answering them, reading can help you spell the words" ~ <b>Boy, 10, Light Reader</b>	"I didn't tell my teacher that I didn't like that book in case she thought it was a bit rude and told me off" ~ <b>Boy, 10, Light Reader</b>	"We do have books at school, but they're all factual like about Egyptians!" ~ <b>Girl, 11, Non-Reader</b>	"Sometimes you read the second book in the series and it isn't even that good!" ~ <b>Girl, 11, Non-Reader</b>	"It's either murder mystery or fairies; there's no in-between. It's hard to find a book for a 12-year-old" ~ <b>Girl, 12, Reader</b>



# What makes a non-reader?





# There are three main barriers leading kids to opt-out of reading



**EARLY EXPERIENCES  
OF SHAME OR  
FAILURE**

**ALWAYS  
BE  
READING**

**PRESSURE &  
EXPECTATIONS**



**LACK OF GOOD  
READING  
ENVIRONMENTS**

# Early experiences of shame or failure

*"Reading makes me feel bad about myself"*

- Being **read to from an early age** can create **positive** early reading experiences, for example, parents doing funny voices for different characters or reading being part of quality family or class time

"Once my mum read me the Gruffalo; she was reading it in a silly voice and it made me laugh"

- **Boy, 10, Light Reader**

- However, early experiences of **reading being part of a test** (including being read to in Dictation!), of being **put on the spot** or **getting into trouble** in connection with reading can create overwhelming negative associations that override the positive
- For kids who are reading below their literacy level, **early experiences of struggling to read** can cause long lasting associations of reading with shame and judgement

## MEET OUR TRENDSPOTTER

He struggles to find reading enjoyable and has strong memories of negative early experiences with reading.

When he thinks of reading, he thinks of times when he used to get into trouble at school: ***"there's really no point (In reading); I was really bad in primary school I couldn't do anything the teacher said."***

Although, he loves writing and is passionate about writing his own book, he struggles to find anything that he'd like to read and finds reading in class repetitive and boring.

# Pressure & expectations

*"Reading is a chore not play"*

- The message all kids hear from adults is that **reading is something they SHOULD do** – because it'll make them better at English, make them smart and eventually help them to get a good job
- This rhetoric often comes from **adults who don't read themselves** and feels hypocritical, even to those who enjoy reading!

"Adults usually tell you to read but then they don't read and go on their phones. My teachers and my dad do that!"

**- Girl, 11, Non-Reader**

- Kids feel **unable to express negative opinions** due to a fear that it'll reflect badly on them – either they'll be perceived as rude or as a bad reader themselves
- Having friends who enjoy reading, who discuss and **recommend books to each other** can be a powerful buffer, opening kids' and teens' eyes to the idea that it can be playful and fun

## MEET OUR TRENDSPOTTER

She wouldn't describe herself as someone who would read for fun. This is mainly due to the expectations and pressure she feels are placed on her when she reads.

She feels that her choice of what to read is taken away from her by her parents who tell her to ***"read more of it and it then won't be so boring!"***

She likes diary-style books and finds **reading books that are younger than her literacy level can be more fun**. However, **adults don't seem to value this** and push her towards things she's less keen on.

# Lack of good reading environments

*"I just can't focus or relax"*

- Reading isn't just about the act itself: **finding the right environment** to read in plays a key role for both readers and non-readers
- Avid readers have cultivated '**reading happy places**' that they **are feel conducive to focused, relaxed reading**. They mention curling up under their duvet with a torch, or snuggling up to mum to be read to, or reading as 'chill time'

"I like to get into my pyjamas and curl up on the sofa; it doesn't have to be silent but it has to be calm"

- Girl, 9, Reader

- In contrast, non-readers haven't found the right environment to encourage them to read. They mention **noisy, chaotic classrooms and time constraints** placed on when they're allowed to read and how long for

**BROADER TRENDSPOTTER HYPOTHESIS:** Adult intervention may be key in setting up good reading environments – in terms of space AND removing distractions. (1) Parents in China vs UK/US // (2) Longitudinal observation of confident Readers when they hit Year 7

## MEET OUR TRENDSPOTTER

He likes reading books about footballers because he can imagine their celebrations in his head when they score a goal.

His ideal reading situation is under his bed cover with a torch as he finds that reading can help him *"chill and calm down if I've been a bit angry."*

In contrast, he finds **reading in class highly stressful because everyone's always chatting and being loud**. This means that during reading time at school, he finds that he *"can't read as good"* and gets distracted.



**Kids affected by one or more of these barriers often do not feel that reading is fun and enjoyable.**

**This is the foundation on which everything else rests – so their journey to being a Reader stops.**

The reading experience being enjoyable

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The ability and experience to choose what they want to read

Access to books at home and at school

Being read to

Finding time to read

Trusted adults and peers who recommend books to them

# Without perceiving the reading experience as enjoyable, the other principles fall flat

	Readers	Non-Readers
The reading experience being enjoyable	Know that whilst they won't love every book, reading can be a very enjoyable experience	Not convinced that reading as a whole is for them, regardless of whether the book connects to their interests
The ability and experience to choose what they want to read	Have an understanding of their own personal taste, so can make informed choices based on author, genre, blurb etc	Don't know what they like so don't know where to start when making a choice, even if they've technically got autonomy
Access to books at home and at school	See the importance of having access to a wide variety of books at home and at school to choose from	There are so many other activities they want to do more so no matter how many books they have access to, it doesn't make a difference
Being read to	Recall this mostly from earlier childhood as a positive experience but as less relevant now – prefer to read on their own terms	Many recall from earlier childhood as a positive experience but not relevant now
Finding time to read	Make time to read just as they do for other activities – it's part of their entertainment diet	Won't ever make a choice to read – only read if it's being enforced which feeds back into the sense it's a chore
Trusted adults and peers who recommend books to them	Exchange recommendations with friends // explore recommendations on social media (e.g. TikTok)	No motivation to discuss or pay attention to recommendations – not of interest to them

# The lure of digital makes it even more difficult for reading to win them over



- Overcoming the initial barrier to reading is especially challenging within this generation of kids and teens because of digital devices competing for their time
- Whether it's the thrill of gaming, the ability to talk to friends on WhatsApp or create content on social media, the lure of the digital world makes the choice to pick up a book even less likely – especially as they get older
- What's more, adults are mirroring these exact behaviours, unable to put their devices down and not practicing what they preach!

"On weekdays when I'm gaming with my friends, I don't have time for reading."

**- Boy, 10, Light-Reader**

"I have books at home and it just doesn't catch my eye; I've got other things to do that are more interesting... Xbox, phone... I'd rather sort through my wardrobe than read a book!"

**- Boy, 14, Non-Reader**



# **TO SUCCEED IN MAKING READING ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL, INTERVENTIONS NEED TO TACKLE THE BARRIERS TO READING FROM THE BOTTOM UP**

**EARLY EXPERIENCES  
OF SHAME OR  
FAILURE**

**PRESSURE &  
EXPECTATIONS**

**LACK OF GOOD  
READING  
ENVIRONMENTS**



# World Book Day: The Kids-Eye View and Ideas for the Future



# Feelings towards World Book Day range from wonderment, to indifference, to frustration

"I like seeing different types of books, dressing up as my favourite characters and becoming a storyteller for younger children." ~ **Boy, 8, Light reader**

"I like WBD because I like dressing up and seeing what my friends' favourite books are!" ~ **Boy, 11, Non-reader**

"Sometimes it's hard to decide what to go as and I don't want to have the same costume as my friend " ~ **Girl, 8, Reader**

"It made me feel excited and happy. When I was younger I dressed up as Ariel from the Little Mermaid and my mum sent it off to the local newspaper and I got in it!" ~ **Girl, 8, Reader**

"I'm not as into the dressing up and in primary school it was like 'oh yeah look you're dressed up, NOW BACK TO WORK!'" ~ **Girl, 12, Reader**

"I didn't do anything for WBD, I just did a lot of school work!" ~ **Boy, 13, Non-reader**

# Keen readers love having their eyes opened to new stories, characters and authors

Already sold on the joys of books, for keen readers World Book Day is a reading utopia; a special festival where they get to celebrate and have fun around a loved hobby with their peers and teachers.

In particular, it's an **opportunity for discovery**, of books to try, characters to connect with, and authors to be inspired by.

However, this does mean that World Book Day **falls a little flat when it doesn't provide this opportunity** – and keen readers talk of their disappointment when this is the case.

"I love seeing everyone characters and maybe you'll even see a new character that you like." – **Boy, 10, Light Reader**

"I like it because we get book tokens to buy a new book." – **Girl, 12, Reader**

"I didn't like that there was not enough books to choose from and too many copies of the same book." – **Boy, 8, Reader**







# For non-readers, the day can just feel like ordinary work in fancy dress

Amongst kids who don't identify as 'readers' and don't perceive reading as a pleasure, it's hard to get excited about much of what goes on at school on World Book Day :

- Lessons and assemblies celebrating books can be **hard to connect with**
- Being able to choose new books **isn't necessarily an exciting opportunity** because they aren't convinced they'll like anything and don't know what to pick
- Discussing books can feel difficult and a **source of self-consciousness**; *"I don't know what to say"*

Even amongst keen readers, the joy of the day can feel superficial when beyond the dress-up it feels like business as usual.

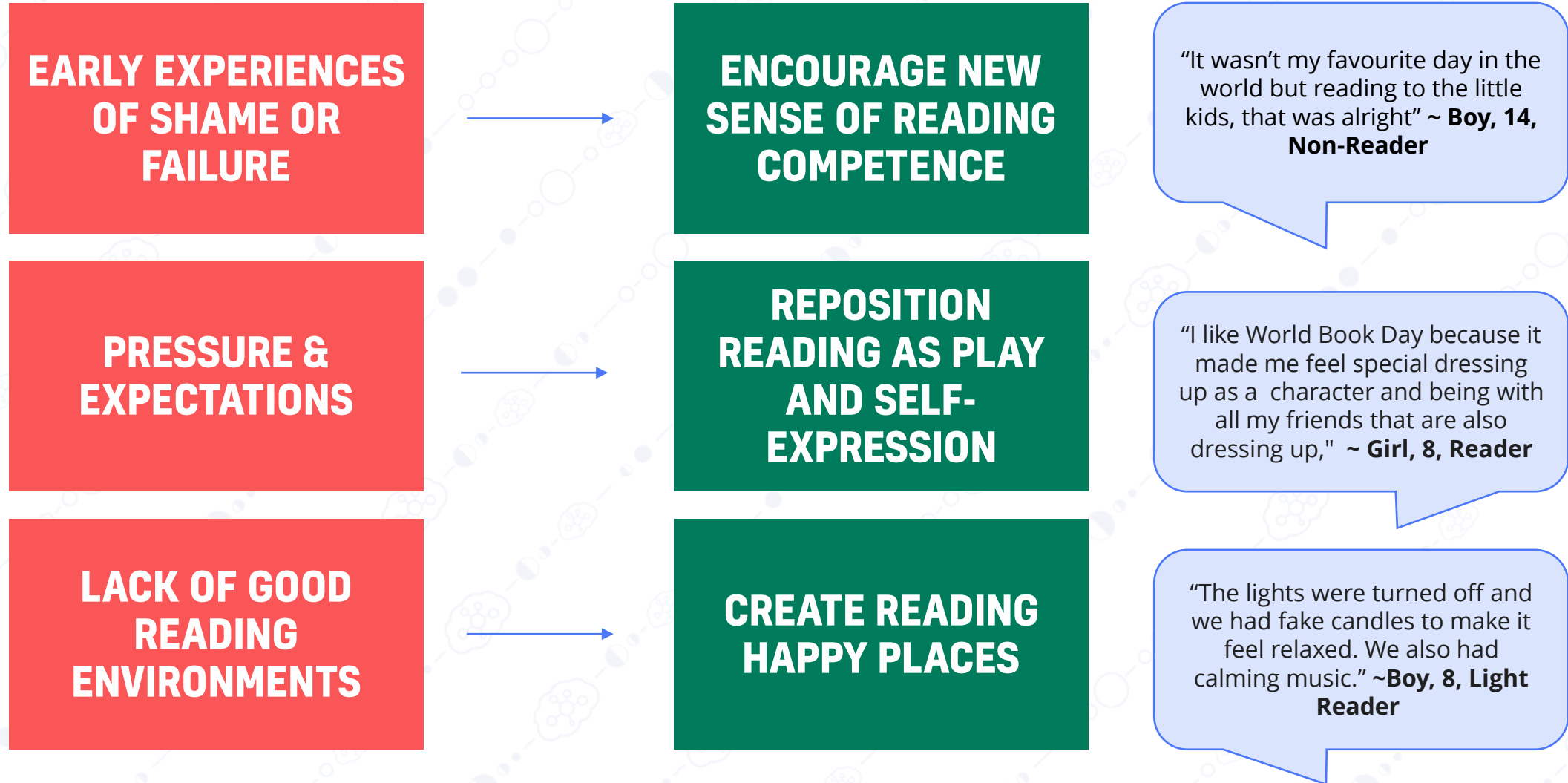


“When I was in primary I kept  
getting into trouble everyday...  
**World Book Day is just the same  
as any normal day, I just get to  
dress up.”**

– Boy, 13, Non-Reader

*Sentiment shared by 3 of the 8 children interviewed*

# The most successful elements of the day squash the barriers and level the reading playing-field for all



# Readers and non-readers alike dream of more World Book Play!



## PLAYFUL COMPETITION

"Each classroom would **decorate the door to their classroom** with a certain book and then the best one gets a prize!" – **Girl, 12, Reader**

**How can you encourage playful competition, accessible to both readers and non-readers, connected to books?**



## VIDEO-GAMIFICATION

"There would be different areas... in **science fiction there could be creepiness because there's aliens**, in the mystery area it's really dark, you have to use a flashlight to look around." – **Boy, 13, Non-Reader**

**What elements of Alphas' favourite video games can you bring into the day to create deeper immersion in story-worlds?**



## BREAKING RULES

I'd like to have a special lunch related to book, like James and The Giant Peach cookies!" – **Girl, 8, Reader**

"At the end I'd have bouncy castles!" – **Lori, 11, Non-Reader**

**What parts of the school day can you turn upside down to position reading as rebellious and extraordinary?**



# But the impact of World Book Day rests on dismantling the barriers all year round

## EARLY EXPERIENCES OF SHAME OR FAILURE

- How can you work with teachers, parents and other adults to **prevent these experiences** happening?
- In what ways could you **support kids who have experienced negative early experiences** with reading?
- How can you help kids to **build reading resilience**?

## PRESSURE & EXPECTATIONS

- How can you give reading a makeover to **shift perceptions that it's a chore** / 'means to an end'?
- What would it look like to support **adults to be better reading role models** for kids?
- How can you help kids to defy others' opinions and have **pride in reading what they want to**

## LACK OF GOOD READING ENVIRONMENTS

- How can you support schools to create a **wider variety of reading environments**?
- How can you empower kids to **find their own personal reading 'happy place'**?
- How can you help parents to **remove distractions at home**?



**Thank you**  
**Any questions?**

Ellie Green  
**[ellie.green@beano.com](mailto:ellie.green@beano.com)**

Asia Braithwaite  
**[asia.braithwaite@beano.com](mailto:asia.braithwaite@beano.com)**