



EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 6/3/03

Is reading a dying pastime? Youngsters across the globe say no!

Book Aid International has commissioned a survey of children in the UK and developing world to find out more about reading habits.

Children love to learn and books are valued because they help in this process: 66% of children polled said they enjoyed reading because books help them to learn new things.

Survey background

During the build up to World Book Day 2003 libraries in 13 countries around the world have asked young people why they loved reading. The survey was part of the 'Reading Around the World' project which will link up ten UK libraries with ten in the developing world on World Book Day, Thursday 6th March 2003. Each library will host an event that brings local children together to celebrate reading. Children at the twinned events will exchange information about their hopes and aspirations and the books that they enjoy reading.

Learning new things

Children recognise that reading helps to open up the world and teach them new ideas and information. Reading is a skill that has importance for many different areas of children's lives. It is valued because it is both a social activity and a skill that facilitates learning. Children were aware of the importance of reading as a skill that would enhance lifelong learning and career opportunities.

Social Skills

Children from all parts of the world value the way in which reading gives them new knowledge of the world and helps them to gain confidence and express themselves. As Natalie from Gloucester says, 'Reading helps me to feel confident about myself, as some of the things in books I can relate to.' Children from Jamaica say 'reading brings excitement and adventure to my life' and 'helps me to be a better person'.

Libraries and Literacy

The library is an important focus of social activity as well as learning. Children in Nigeria mention being allowed time to enjoy themselves there and make friends. Sometimes you can 'teach your friends to read'¹. Or, as a child from Ethiopia put it, 'It helps me not to spend my time in unwanted places!' In fact for children overseas the library is frequently the only place where they can obtain books so they rely on it as a source of books that can help them to embed the literacy skills they have been taught in the classroom.

Meanwhile, in the UK there is some evidence that the literacy strategy has influenced the way in which children relate to reading. They are interested in textual analysis and the way in which reading can support their own writing. Dania from Paddington says, 'I like reading books because they help me to get good ideas so when I am an author I can write the story quickly.'

¹ Child from Malawi

Reading and learning for the future: Exams and ambitions

Over half of young readers in the developing world say that they are motivated to read because books will help them to pass exams. Only one third of children in the UK named this as a reason for enjoying reading, while far more of them (50% compared to 37%) like to read for relaxation.

The children from developing countries are ambitious and recognise that reading will help them to get on in the world. Reading helps you to 'be someone' and find a good job. For instance, one young reader from Uganda told us about his ambition to become a judge. It is also a way of improving your English, which is important because 'offices use English'. If you can't read and write 'you will look like a big fool'. As one child from Ethiopia put it, 'All educated people reach to higher position, so I must read to be a great person'.

The children from the UK have less focussed ambitions and instead enjoy books because they offer an opportunity to fantasise about their future. Jacob, aged 7, from Leicester tells us that when reading 'I can make believe I am whoever I want to be'.

Education and Development

The responses from children in the developing world highlight some of the well-known links between education and development. Globally agreed goals have been set to achieve universal primary education by 2015, but schools will only be able to deliver quality in education if the resources are there to support them. Children in Ethiopia say that by reading in the library they can 'get better information than the classroom books' and 'learn other information that we don't get from the teachers'.

Countries need a population which is well-educated and well-informed if good governance is to flourish. A child from Zimbabwe says he values reading 'because I won't get brainwashed at all costs.'

And finally...

Every child needs to share the experience which five-year-old Louis from Leicester values. 'I like to read at bedtime with my mummy, especially funny stories'.

Survey Notes:

614 completed surveys have been collected from children in 13 countries around the world. Of these 267 came from children in the UK. The children surveyed were aged between 5 and 16.

Participating countries: Nigeria, Palestine, Nepal, Uganda, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Guyana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, UK

Editor's Notes:

- For more information on this project and full details of the twenty events taking place on World Book Day please refer to our website news page at www.bookaid.org or telephone 020 7733 3577 and request a copy of our first press release.
- Book Aid International is a designated charity for the World Book Day event in the UK. £67,000 was raised in support of its work on World Book Day in 2002.
- Dorling Kindersley have sponsored this project and provided 500 free copies of 'A Life Like Mine'. Website: www.dk.com/alifelikemine
- The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) are coordinating UK libraries' involvement in this project.

For more information:

Nicola Cadbury or Richard Leggatt at Book Aid International Tel: 020 7733 3577 Fax: 020 7978 8006
E: nicola.cadbury@bookaid.org / richard.leggatt@bookaid.org
Hermione Ireland at Dorling Kindersley Tel: 020 7010 4336 E: hermione.ireland@dk.com