



 SCHOLASTIC

# KIDS & FAMILY READING REPORT™

7<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

## FINDING THEIR STORY

YouGov



**READING FOR FUN SPURS THE IMAGINATION AND ENCOURAGES KIDS TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN THOUGHTS AND ASK QUESTIONS. DIFFERENT BOOKS CAN ALSO HELP THEM TO LEARN DIFFERENT THINGS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT SEEK OUT THEMSELVES.”**

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FATHER OF A 12-YEAR-OLD BOY

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## A LETTER FROM THE CEO

Connecting kids with stories they love, in whatever format they prefer—from fiction to nonfiction, chapter books to graphic novels, physical books to digital books—has been Scholastic’s mission for nearly 100 years. And since my early days as a teacher, getting students to read more, and to read with understanding, has been a personal mission.

We all know why reading is crucial: it provides myriad academic and social-emotional benefits and is also increasingly a way for children to connect with their peers, their families, their communities and the world at large. Reading the right book can help every child feel seen and heard. And it’s that connection that can lay the groundwork for becoming a lifelong reader—and in turn, building empathy, inspiring discovery and finding wonder in the world.

Compelling learnings from the seven editions of the *Kids & Family Reading Report* have helped Scholastic produce materials that educate and inspire. In this

edition, we notice a trend that signals an urgent call to action: our research is telling us that kids reach their peak engagement with reading books for fun at a very young age, and that as children age, the pleasure they get from reading declines. This data is powerful: it is the story of how a child grows up and loses a connection with reading and books along the way.

That missing connection has consequences. Literacy is not just a gateway to academic success and discovery, but a means of preparing for the future. Never has this been more critical. Without the ability to read, a child faces significant challenges in navigating the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. Reading allows kids to develop the skills they’ll need to do the work of tomorrow—work we can’t even envision today. Reading can provide an ability to visualize what language means, the capacity to discern fact from fiction—and also the emotional intelligence and self-discovery that comes from reading the great books and stories of the world. The child who has access to reading is a child better prepared to rise and meet their future.

The voice of parents continues to be critical. Parents have told us that the key qualities they hope their children develop as they grow up are self-confidence, responsibility, honesty, respectfulness and kindness, and they overwhelmingly believe that the characters their children read about in books can help them achieve these understandings. Parents also agree reading is a way to help their child understand different points of view and help their children find their place in the world. And, just as many adults turn to books to help us through difficult times, many parents have also seen how the right story can support their child through life's challenges—a finding that children themselves agree to be true.

Has it ever been more clear that the role of parents, caregivers and those of us at Scholastic is to help a child discover a book that can change their life—and, in doing so, change the world? By supporting our youngest readers with access to engaging, relatable stories—to stories that spark their innate curiosity and

answer their desire to be heard—we can turn around the drop off in reading engagement you will see cited in this report.

This report is a call to action to help young people discover what they want and need from books, and to together build a way forward to ensure that they will have access to the books which will ultimately help them shape our collective future.



**RICHARD ROBINSON**

**CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND  
CEO SCHOLASTIC INC.**

# KEY FINDINGS

## READING TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD

- Three critical measures of a school-aged child's (ages 6–17) relationship with reading have remained fairly steady since 2010. In the seventh edition of the *Kids & Family Reading Report*:
  - ▶ Fifty-eight percent say they love or like reading books for fun.
  - ▶ Fifty-two percent agree reading books for fun is extremely or very important.
  - ▶ Thirty-one percent read books for fun 5–7 days a week (known as frequent readers); 41% of kids read for fun 1–4 days a week (known as moderately frequent readers); 28% of kids read for fun less than 1 day a week (known as infrequent readers).
- Even so, incremental changes in reading frequency since 2010 have culminated in a decrease of frequent readers (down six points) and an increase of infrequent readers (up seven points).
- Each edition of the *Kids & Family Reading Report* has, with the seventh being no exception, revealed a striking downward trend as children grow up: by age nine all three critical measures noted above decrease dramatically; more, they rarely rebound as kids move through adolescence.
- This loss of engagement means kids miss out on the benefits books provide – and those benefits are agreed on by both kids and parents:
  - ▶ Seventy-four percent of kids say that reading fiction and nonfiction is a way to help them understand the world; 88% of parents say the same.
  - ▶ More than half of kids (53%) and parents (55%) agree a book has helped them/their child through a difficult time.
  - ▶ Seventy-three percent of kids say that reading about current events make it easier to talk about or understand them.
- In the past two years, both kids and parents are less likely to say that when picking a children's book to read for fun, the type of book doesn't matter, it just has to be a good story (down 17 points among kids; 21 points among parents). Today, they are more likely to want several specific outcomes from their book selections:
  - ▶ More kids want books that make them laugh (up 10 points to 52%), help them explore new worlds (up nine points to 40%) and become familiar with new topics (up seven points to 26%).
  - ▶ More parents want these types of books, as well as those which help their child learn about the lives of others (up 12 points to 48%) and books that make their child think and feel (up nine points to 51%).

## BOOKS AND CHARACTERS TO REFLECT OUR DIVERSE WORLD

- Diversity in children’s books has broad meaning and is highly inclusive. For a majority of parents and a near-majority of kids, diversity in books includes people and experiences different than their own, various cultures, customs and religions, and various settings and living situations.
- About half of kids ages 9–17 and parents with kids ages 6–17 agree “I wish there were more books available that include diversity;” among kids and parents who agree that diversity in children’s books is important, these percentages rise to 76% of kids and 69% of parents.
  - ▶ Black and Hispanic families overall have the strongest views on the importance of and need for books with diversity.
- Both kids ages 12–17 and parents with kids ages 6–17 are more likely today than they were in 2016 to want books with diverse storylines, characters or settings (18% of kids, up five points; 31% of parents, up five points).
- The characters both kids and parents look for in children’s books signify the powerful role characters can play in a young reader’s life:
  - ▶ The top three most wanted types of characters among kids are those who can be role models, who face challenges and overcome them and those who are “similar to me.”
  - ▶ Parents overwhelmingly agree (95%) that characters in books can help foster the qualities they value for their children. And the data suggests that parents are placing a greater overall focus on character-building: the percentage of parents who want more from characters is on the rise.

## ACCESS MATTERS: READING ROLE MODELS AND BOOKS

- Creating a literacy-rich environment for children by surrounding them with books and encouraging reading role models – of all ages and types of relationships – makes a difference. Frequent readers:
  - ▶ Get more encouragement to read from family members, friends, principals, teachers and school librarians than infrequent readers,
  - ▶ Are far more likely to say that nearly everyone or a lot of people in their lives enjoy reading,
  - ▶ Are more likely to have parents who value reading and who read frequently, and
  - ▶ Have, on average, 139 children’s books at home vs. the 74 books infrequent readers have at home.
- Further, classroom libraries are critically important, as across all ages the data show that kids who have robust classroom libraries are more likely to be frequent readers. Yet, only 43% of school-aged children have access to a classroom library, and only one-third say that it has enough of the types of books they’d like to read.
- In the 13 years of the *Kids & Family Reading Report*, one thing remains constant no matter what: when kids get to choose, they read. Across demographics, the majority of kids (89%) agree their favorite books are the ones that they have picked out themselves.

I am constantly inspired to see how kids—even those who struggle with reading—are wildly curious about other people and far-away lands. They are ready and eager to engage in stories that will open their eyes and their hearts and challenge them to think in new ways. These are the kinds of meaningful stories that I try to tell in my *I Survived* series. And these are the stories that are at the core of the mission of Scholastic Classroom Magazines, where I have worked for more than 25 years.

And yet as the seventh edition of the *Kids & Family Reading Report* shows, the role of reading in the lives of kids is at risk. As kids get older, fewer see reading as something to do just for fun and, in turn, are reading less.

It's especially worrisome that kids are losing their connection to reading when they need it most, in third grade. This should be a magical year in the life of a young learner, when reading opens doors to new knowledge and understanding. Yet studies show that for many children, reading struggles in third grade presage a lifetime of challenges in school and beyond.

Few of us can be surprised by the trends that show that kids are reading less. Mention the word Fortnite to a group of fourth graders and they burst out in exuberant cheers (as I witnessed at a recent school visit). According to the American Heart Association, today an average kid—whether they're in third grade or high school—spends more than seven hours of time on screens per day. Considering this, it's actually pretty remarkable that kids are reading as much as they are.

But the *Kids & Family Reading Report* also gives us reasons for hope and provided me with a call to action. Kids and parents

know reading is important; they agree that reading both fiction and nonfiction is key to understanding the world.

And kids do love reading books—but not just any books. No surprise: kids want to read books that make them laugh and that introduce them to new places, new cultures, and new kinds of people.

It is these kinds of books and stories that are most likely to pull a child's eyes away from a glowing screen, not generic "texts" or "reading passages" or "content" used to practice a reading skill.

This year's *Kids & Family Reading Report* will inspire my colleagues and me to work even harder to create fascinating, meaningful stories about important topics, to create characters who inspire empathy and model resilience.

These are the stories kids and their families are asking us for, and that we need now more than ever.



## LAUREN TARSHIS

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SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT &  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/PUBLISHER,  
SCHOLASTIC MAGAZINES

AUTHOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLING SERIES *I SURVIVED*

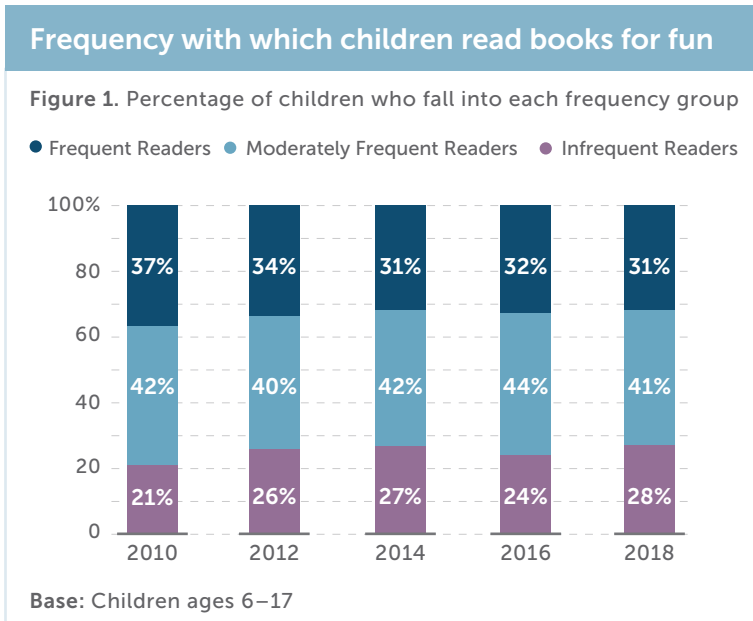




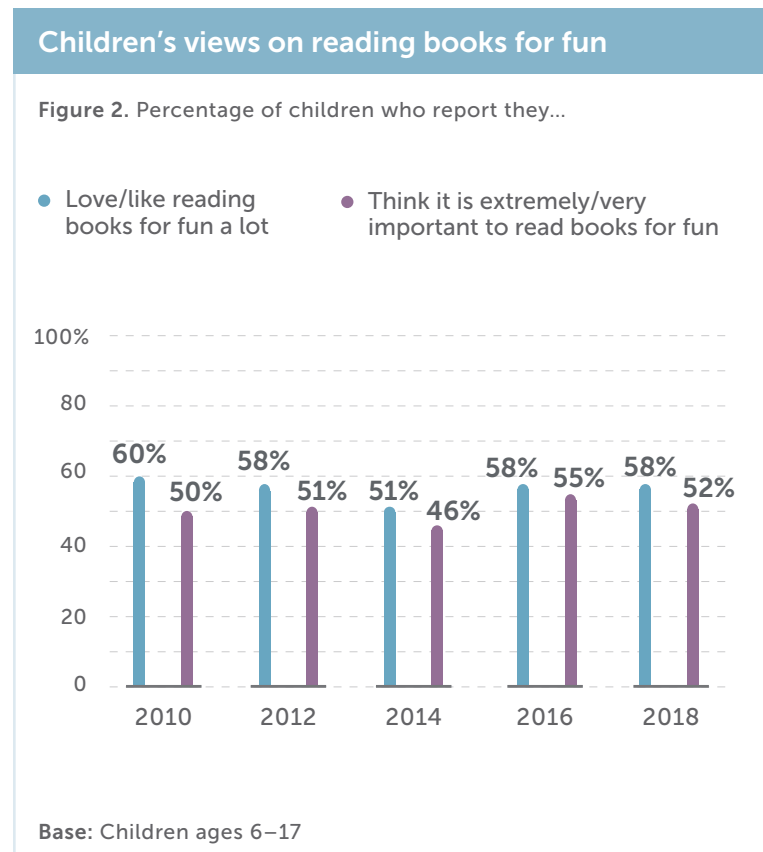
**READING TO  
NAVIGATE THE WORLD**

## CHILDREN'S READING TRENDS REMAIN FAIRLY STEADY, BUT DISPLAY A DOWNWARD TREND AS KIDS GROW UP

Over seven editions, the *Kids & Family Reading Report* has explored the reading habits and behaviors of children ages 6–17. Since 2010, the benchmark for tracking data from this report, the year-over-year changes in children's reading frequency have been minimal, with a consistent percentage of kids reading books for fun 1–4 days a week (moderately frequent readers). However, incremental changes have culminated in an overall decline of children reading nearly every day (frequent readers), and a rise in those reading less than 1 day a week (infrequent readers) (see *Figure 1*).



Kids' views on reading enjoyment have largely held steady over the years with about six in 10 kids reporting they love or like reading books for fun a lot. This percentage dipped in 2014 but rebounded in 2016, and remains steady at 58% in 2018. Kids' views on the importance of reading have also maintained consistency over time, hovering around 50% of children saying that reading books for fun is extremely or very important (see *Figure 2*).



Overall, trends we observed in years past continue to hold true: each edition of our report has found that as kids grow up, reading frequency, enjoyment and children's sense of its importance decline. As one 16-year-old girl described it, "I really don't have time to read any books that I want. I liked it better when I was younger and could read whatever I wanted."

Additionally, girls are more likely than boys to be frequent readers and they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards reading.

## THE "DECLINE BY NINE"

A child turning nine is generally found in a third grade classroom, a critical year in a child's academic journey. Landmark research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation has previously shown that reaching reading proficiency by third grade is a clear predictor of academic success. And yet the *Kids & Family Reading Report* finds it is just at that stage that children's frequency of reading books for fun begins to drop: only 35% of nine-year-olds report reading 5–7 days a week compared to 57% of eight-year-olds (see *Figure 3*).

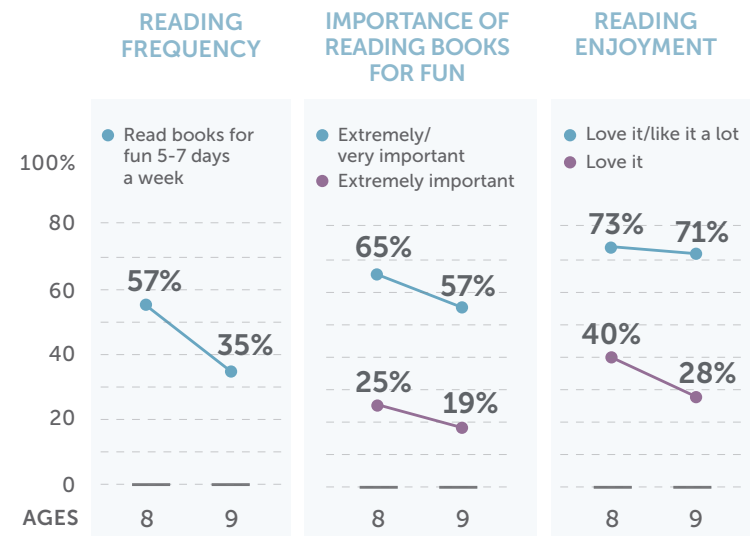
The *Kids & Family Reading Report* has shown a child's attitude towards reading enjoyment and importance is a predictor of reading frequency, which is why it also is striking to note the drop between ages eight and nine in the percentage of kids who think reading books for fun is extremely or very important (from 65% to 57%). Similarly, the number of kids who say they love reading drops

significantly from 40% among eight-year-olds to 28% among nine-year-olds (see *Figure 3*).

What is to be done about the "decline by nine"? Rarely do we see a rebound from these benchmarks as kids grow older. Yet across ages, the majority of kids agree they should read more books for fun, and tell us they believe reading matters. This suggests it is possible to prevent the decline and even to re-engage a child in reading, provided the experience meets their needs and expectations.

### Frequency of and views on reading books for fun decline between ages 8 and 9

Figure 3. Percentage of children ages 8 and 9 who report...



Base: Children ages 8–9

## KIDS WANT BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, BUT ALSO THOSE THAT HELP THEM MAKE SENSE OF THEIR WORLD

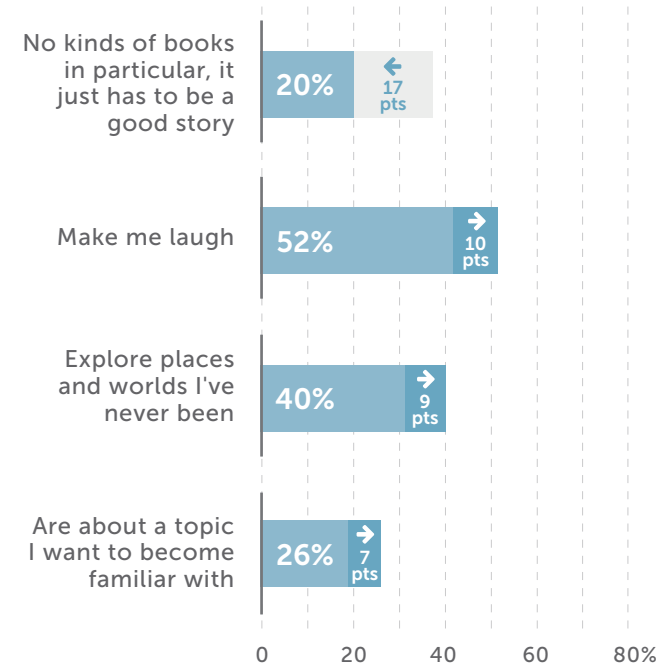
When choosing books to read for fun, many kids want stories that make them laugh. In fact, the desire for funny books increased 10 points since 2016, while the percentage of kids who say the type of book doesn't matter, they just want a good story, is down 17 points.

But funny isn't everything. Kids also turn to books to connect them to the world at large:

- 40% want books that allow them to explore places and worlds they have never been (up nine points from 2016),
- 26% want books about topics they want to become familiar with (up seven points from 2016),
- 25% want books that help them imagine and understand other people's lives,
- 25% want books that make them think and feel,
- 23% want books that help them forget about real life for a while,
- 22% want books that inspire them to do something good, and
- 19% want books that are about things they are experiencing (see *Figure 4*).

### What kids want in books, compared to 2016

Figure 4. Percentage of children who selected each item, compared to 2016



Base: Children ages 6–17



IT'S GOOD TO LEARN ABOUT DIFFERENT THINGS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND."

11-YEAR-OLD BOY

Moderate and frequent readers are by far more opinionated in what they are looking for in books while infrequent readers are the most likely to say they look for no kinds of books in particular, it just has to be a good story. It is also after age eight that we see kids being more likely to want books that inspire them to do something good, understand other people's lives and learn about topics unfamiliar to them.

## READING HELPS KIDS IRL

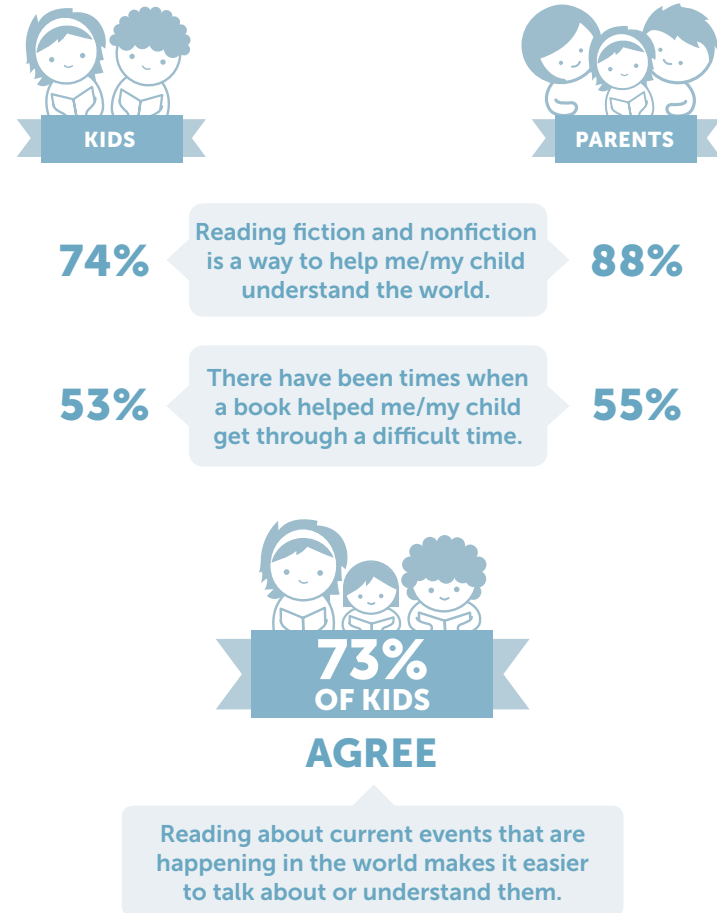
Kids agree reading helps them understand broader issues in their communities and beyond, and even helps them through their own personal rough spots. Seventy four percent of children agree that reading fiction and nonfiction is a way to help them understand the world, with a similar percent (73%) agreeing that reading about current events makes it easier to talk about or understand them. One 11-year-old boy told us, *"It's good to learn about different things to help you understand."* Just over half of kids (53%) also agree a book has helped them through a difficult time, and it's heartening to see that nearly the same percentage of parents (55%) feel books have played this role for their child (see Figure 5).

“  
I LIKE WHEN I CAN IDENTIFY WITH  
THE EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS  
[CHARACTERS] ARE FACING.”

15-YEAR-OLD GIRL

## Reading helps children navigate the world

Figure 5. Percentage of children and parents who agree...



Base: Children ages 6–17; Parents with kids ages 6–17

## PARENTS SEE THAT BOOKS CAN HELP CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR WORLDS

Parents have even stronger views than do their children about the role of books in a child’s life. Over the past two years, in a trend mirrored among the kids surveyed, there has been a steep decline in the number of parents who feel the type of book doesn’t matter, it just has to be a good story (42% to 21%). Children’s book characteristics that parents are now more likely to want include learning about the lives of others (up 12 points to 48%), exploring different places and worlds (up eight points to 46%), and making their child think and feel (up nine points to 51%) (see Figure 6).

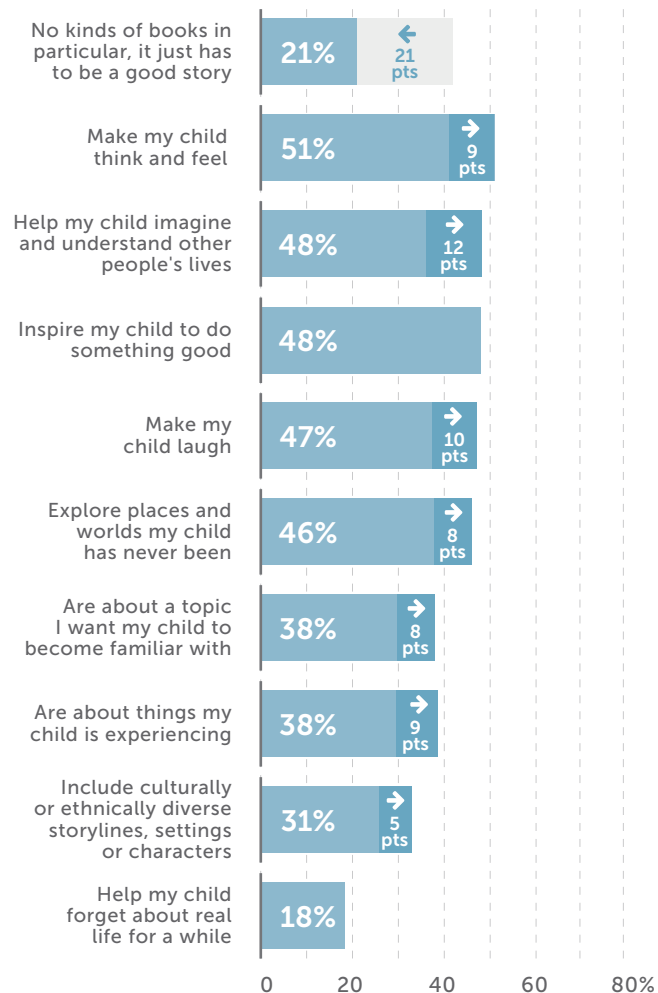


**I GREW UP READING DOZENS OF BOOKS AND THEY’VE ALL SHAPED ME INTO THE PERSON I AM TODAY. I LEARNED ABOUT STRUGGLES THROUGHOUT HISTORY AND WHAT PEOPLE FACE DAY-TO-DAY, LEARNED NEW WORDS FROM FICTION BOOKS THAT I WOULD HAVE NEVER LEARNED OTHERWISE, AND DEVELOPED A LOVE FOR ADVENTURE THROUGH BOOKS. I WISH THE SAME FOR MY CHILD.”**

MOTHER OF A 7-YEAR-OLD BOY

### What parents want in books for their kids

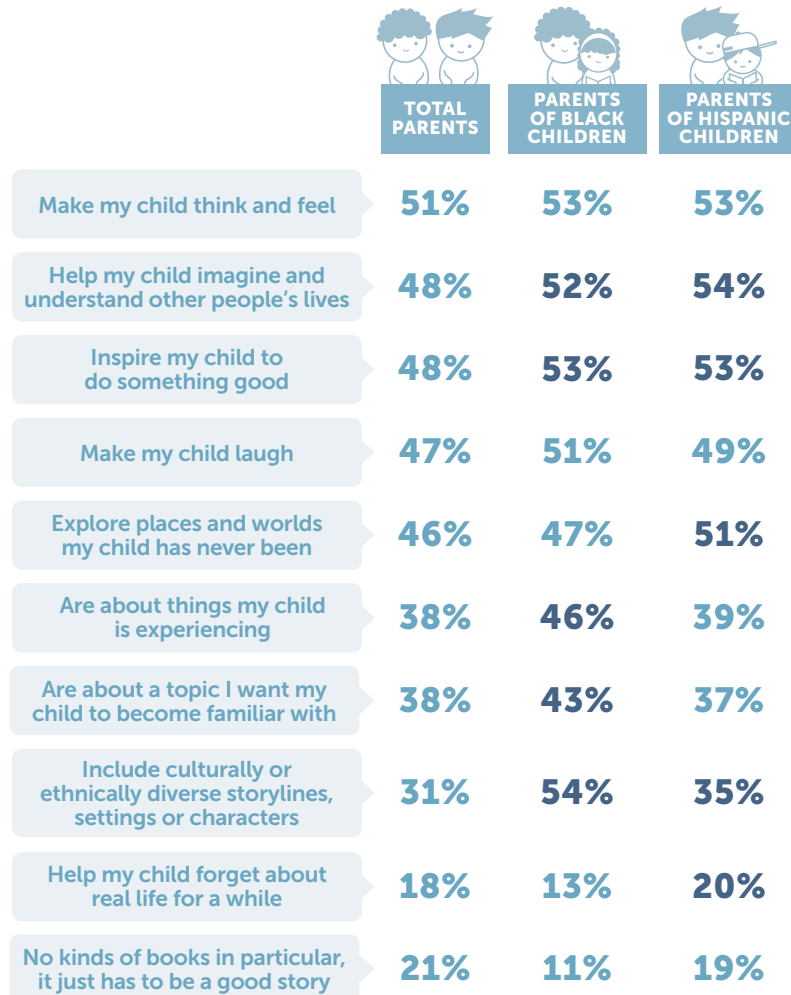
Figure 6. Percentage of parents who said each response, compared to 2016



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17

## Parents with Black and Hispanic kids are the most likely to look for a number of book characteristics

Figure 7. Percentage of parents who said each response



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17

Parents of kids 11 or younger are more likely than parents with older children—by at least 10 points—to look for all of the book characteristics asked about in the survey, save for “help your child forget about real life for a while,” which is consistent across age groups. Parents of Black and Hispanic children are the most likely to look for a number of book characteristics, more than other parents. “Make my child laugh” and “make my child think and feel” are universally wanted by about half of parents across races and ethnicities (see Figure 7).

Additionally, the majority of parents agree that reading fiction and nonfiction is a way for their child to better understand the world (88%), and that reading can help their child understand different points of view (94%).

“READING FOR FUN SPURS THE IMAGINATION AND ENCOURAGES KIDS TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN THOUGHTS AND ASK QUESTIONS. DIFFERENT BOOKS CAN ALSO HELP THEM TO LEARN DIFFERENT THINGS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT SEEK OUT THEMSELVES.”

FATHER OF A 12-YEAR-OLD BOY

As a mom of two very different kids, I've always believed in books that reflect a multitude of experiences and perspectives. This is one of the reasons I've devoted my life's work to creating diverse children's books, both as an author and as Scholastic Vice President, Executive Editor. As a parent, writer, and publisher, my primary purpose is to provide books for kids that help them experience the complexities of a diverse world. And throughout each of my jobs, I witness a basic truth: Kids see what they see, and they don't see what they don't see. When a young reader finds a story that positively reflects his or her cultural, familial, or abilities experience, that child becomes empowered to read more, which has a direct impact on how they view their place in the world. And when that reader reads about experiences different from their own, they develop empathy and open-mindedness. Conversely, when kids don't see books that reflect diverse experiences, they're not emboldened to expand their thinking.

Thankfully, diversity is central to our publishing mission at Scholastic. We have a credo, part of which says, "We believe in the respect for the diverse groups in our multicultural society." These words are stenciled on the risers of our corporate headquarters staircase as a celebration of our firm commitment to serving a diverse population of readers. Each and every time I climb those stairs, I can't help but think that we're literally supported by our core values which continue to elevate us.

And so, the new data on diversity in this *Kids & Family Reading Report* is especially helpful. The data underscores our belief that diverse books matter. But parents and teachers often tell me that while they value diversity, they struggle with how to put it into practice. So I share my story: from the time my own kids were babies, I exposed them to diverse stories by reading them aloud. And I learn a lot about my kids' perceptions of the world's diversity

when we spend time together with books. The same can be done with the children in your life—talk to them about what you're reading together. Ask questions. Stay interested.

Like every parent, I want so much for my kids. Developing their characters is no small task, but we know that books can lend a helping hand. This is another gift of the *Kids & Family Reading Report*, which also tells us that families want more from the books they read. Good books go beyond just good stories; kids and parents alike expect books to bring the world to them in all its beautiful shapes, sizes, and colors. I see firsthand that what moves a reader is not just a chain of events that creates a narrative arc—the stories that stick are about the emotions that blossom when a reader connects to a character, experience or place. It's this connection that empowers readers to be the protagonists of their own stories.

Tomorrow's leaders may not yet have seen themselves in a book. But we have the power to change that. With the information in this report, we can work toward helping each child find their story. If it isn't created yet, we can help them tell it.



## ANDREA DAVIS-PINKNEY

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VICE PRESIDENT, EXECUTIVE EDITOR,  
SCHOLASTIC TRADE BOOKS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING  
AND AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF  
MARTIN RISING: REQUIEM FOR A KING



A photograph of three diverse children lying on their stomachs on a grassy area, reading books. The child in the center is a young boy with light skin and brown hair, wearing a brown shirt, looking up and smiling broadly. To his left is a young girl with dark skin and dark hair, wearing a dark shirt, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. To his right is a young girl with light skin and dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The scene is captured in a monochromatic blue tone. The text 'BOOKS & CHARACTERS TO REFLECT OUR DIVERSE WORLD' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font at the bottom of the image.

**BOOKS & CHARACTERS  
TO REFLECT OUR DIVERSE WORLD**

## DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS HAS A HIGHLY-INCLUSIVE MEANING

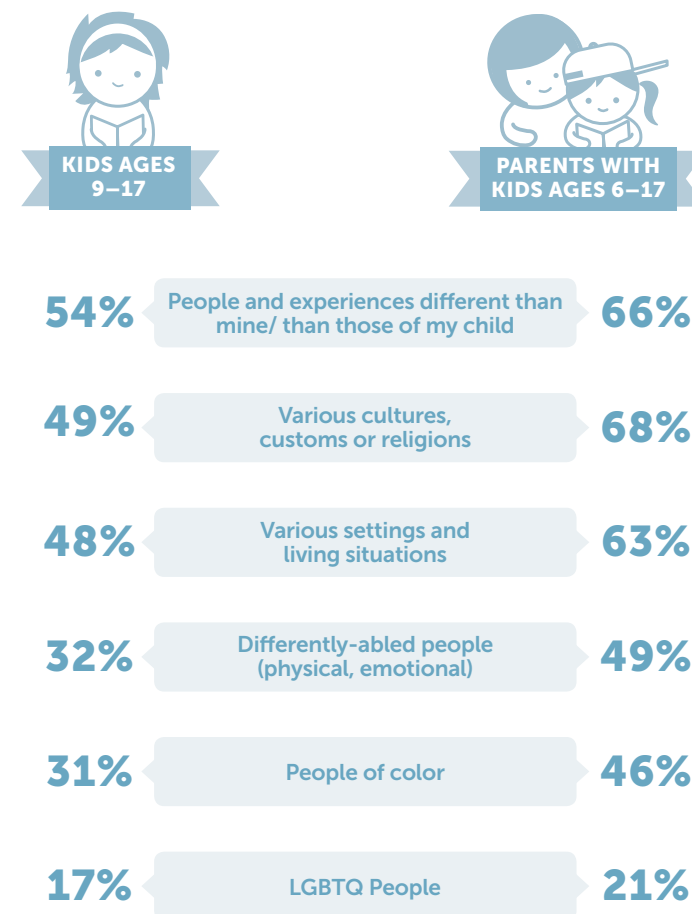
Diversity in children's books has a broad meaning among kids and parents. A majority of parents and a near majority of kids ages 9–17 say diversity in children's books includes people and experiences different than their own, various cultures, customs, religions, settings and living situations. And while not as commonly cited, many believe diversity in children's books also includes differently-abled people, people of color and LGBTQ people (see Figure 1).

About six in 10 parents (58%) report diversity is extremely or very important in the books their child reads, and nearly four in 10 kids ages 9–17 (38%) agree. When asked why this is important, parents predominantly responded with answers related to learning about differences and understanding the world.

As one father of a 14-year-old girl said, *"The world is a diverse place. My child should be able to experience stories of those who are not just like her, or just look like her, or live like her. She should be able to learn that people come in all shapes, sizes, colors, belief systems and educational or cultural backgrounds, so that she is ready to engage with the world in an authentic way."*

### What diversity in books means to parents and kids

Figure 1. Percentage of parents and children who selected each response



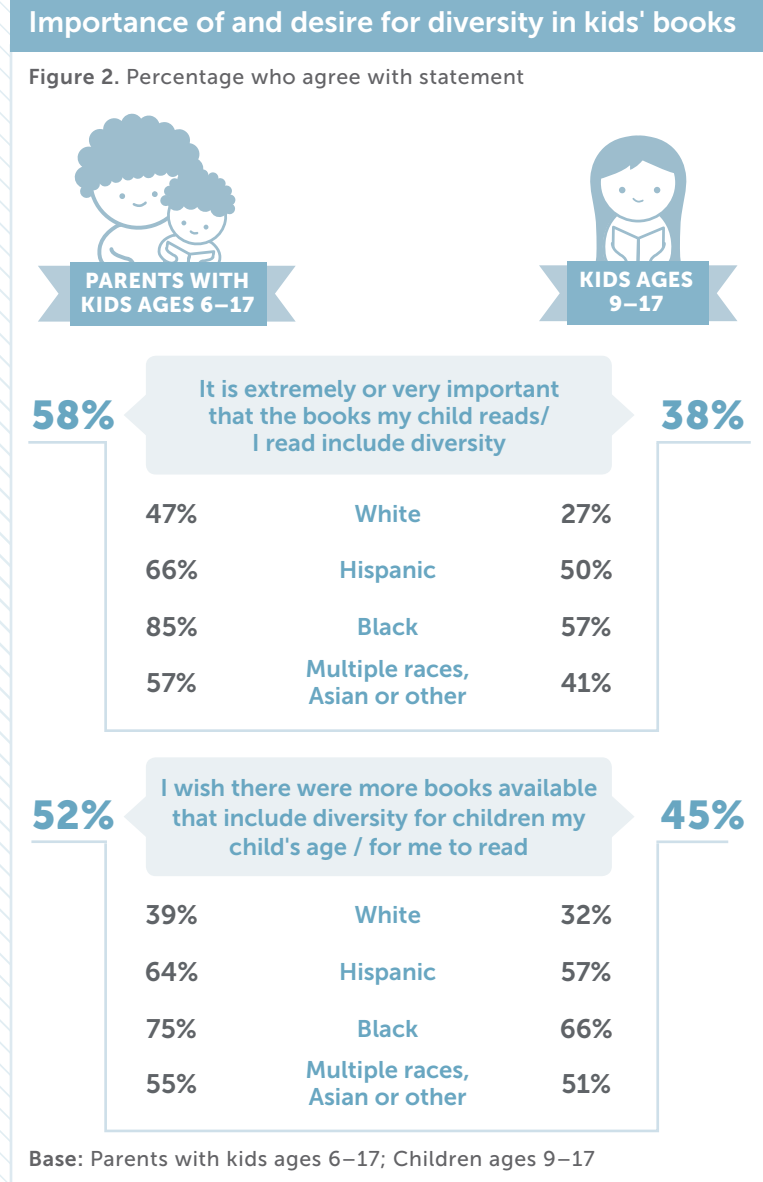
Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17; Children ages 9–17

## MANY FAMILIES WANT MORE BOOKS TO INCLUDE DIVERSITY

About half of kids ages 9–17 and parents overall agree “I wish there were more books available that include diversity.” This sentiment increases to 76% of kids and 69% of parents who also agree diversity in children’s books is important. The desire for more diverse books is strongest among Black children and their parents, followed by Hispanic families, then by families of multi-racial, Asian or other racial backgrounds (see *Figure 2*).

The data also suggest that highly-visual reading materials resonate with both parents and children who believe it is important that the books children read include diversity. Parents who say diversity is important are more likely than other parents to prefer their child reads story books (58% vs. 48%), picture books (28% vs. 19%), comic books (27% vs. 15%) and magazines (20% vs. 15%). They are also far more likely to say it is important their child experiences books with characters that look like him/her (59% vs. 25%).

Similarly, children who say reading books with diversity is important to them are more likely to say they like to read story books (47% vs. 30%), and these children are more likely to agree that it is easy to find books with characters that “look like me” (63% vs. 45%).



## DESIRE FOR DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS IS ON THE RISE

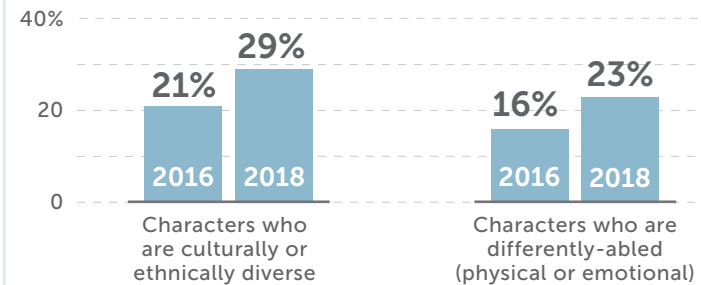
Both kids ages 12–17 and parents of children across ages are more likely today than they were in 2016 to want books with diverse storylines, characters or settings (18% of kids, up six points; 31% of parents with kids ages 6–17, up five points; parents of children ages 0–5 up nine points to 36%). Since 2016, parents are also more likely to want culturally or ethnically diverse characters (21% to 29%, up eight points) and differently-abled characters (16% to 23%, up seven points) (see *Figure 3a/b*).

Black and Hispanic families as well as families of multi-racial, Asian or other racial backgrounds are the most likely to look for books that include diverse storylines, characters or settings. Notably, finding these diversity-related characteristics is just as important to parents of Black children as finding books that help their child imagine and understand other people's lives, make their child think and feel, as well as books that inspire kids to do something good or make them laugh.

Similarly, while just over one in 10 kids ages 9–17 look specifically for characters that are culturally or ethnically diverse, Black children are the most likely to seek out these characters (24% compared to 18% of children of multiple, Asian or other races, 16% of Hispanic children and 7% of white children). One in 10 children ages 9–17 also looks for characters who are differently-abled, and a similar number look for those who break stereotypes. Three percent look for LGBTQ characters. As one 17-year-old girl shared, *"Life is different for everyone so I would like to understand the differences."*

### More parents seek diversity in characters

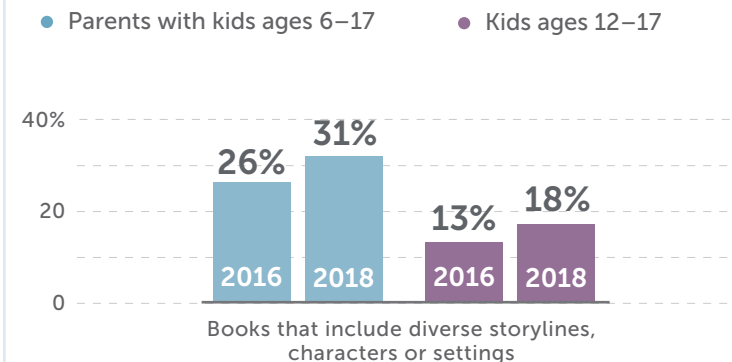
Figure 3a. Percentage of parents who say they want each type of character, compared to 2016



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17

### More parents and kids seek diversity in books

Figure 3b. Percentage of parents and children who say they want each type of book, compared to 2016



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17; Children ages 12–17

## KIDS SEEK OUT AND LEARN FROM CHARACTERS

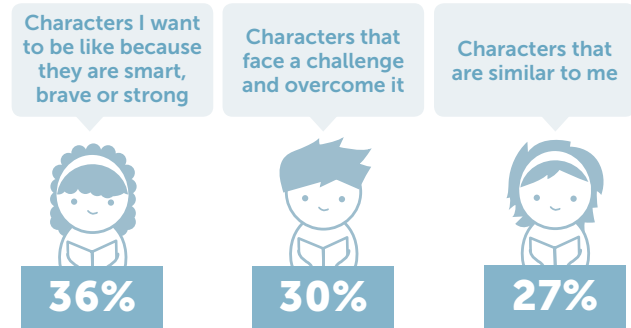
While a good story is, of course, a key factor that influences a parent or child's desire for a book, a book's characters are an important driver of preference and integral to the overall social-emotional benefits of reading. The top three types of characters kids ages 6–17 want in books do not vary across gender, age or ethnicity and reflect the reader's own aspirations: characters who they want to be like because they are smart, brave or strong, who face and overcome challenges, and who are "similar to me" (see Figure 4a). A 13-year-old girl simply stated, "I like to read books [about] girls my age who can achieve things beyond reach, who overcome difficulties and become great."

Overall, four in 10 kids agree that there has been a character—fictional or a real person—whose story taught them a life lesson. One 11-year-old girl shared that Auggie, a character from *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio, inspired her "because even though people made fun of him for the way he looked, he still found a way to make [it] through the day, every day...It just goes to show that you don't have to be what someone thinks you should be, or act how someone thinks you should act. You just have to be you." Many other children cited historical figures, with one 10-year-old girl saying of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "He taught me that you can be proud of your color and you can accomplish anything no matter who you are."

Kids selected real-life people and fictional characters in equal numbers, illustrating the impact that both book formats can make in a child's life (see Figure 4b).

### Top 3 types of characters kids want in books

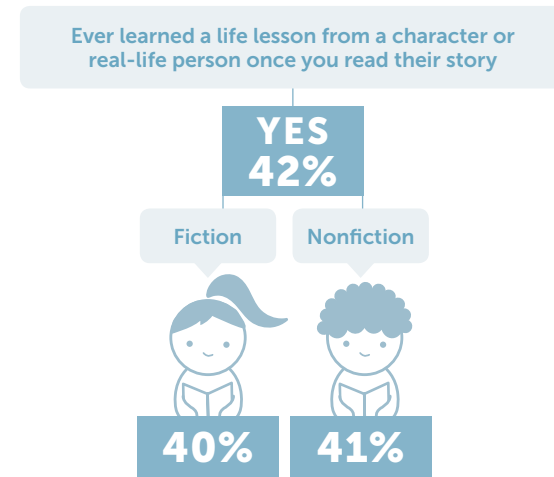
Figure 4a. Percentage of kids who say they want each type of character



Base: Children ages 6–17

### Characters inspire many kids

Figure 4b. Percentage of kids who say they learned a life lesson; type of book from which lesson learned



Base: Children ages 6–17

## PARENTS KNOW THAT CHARACTERS BUILD CHARACTER

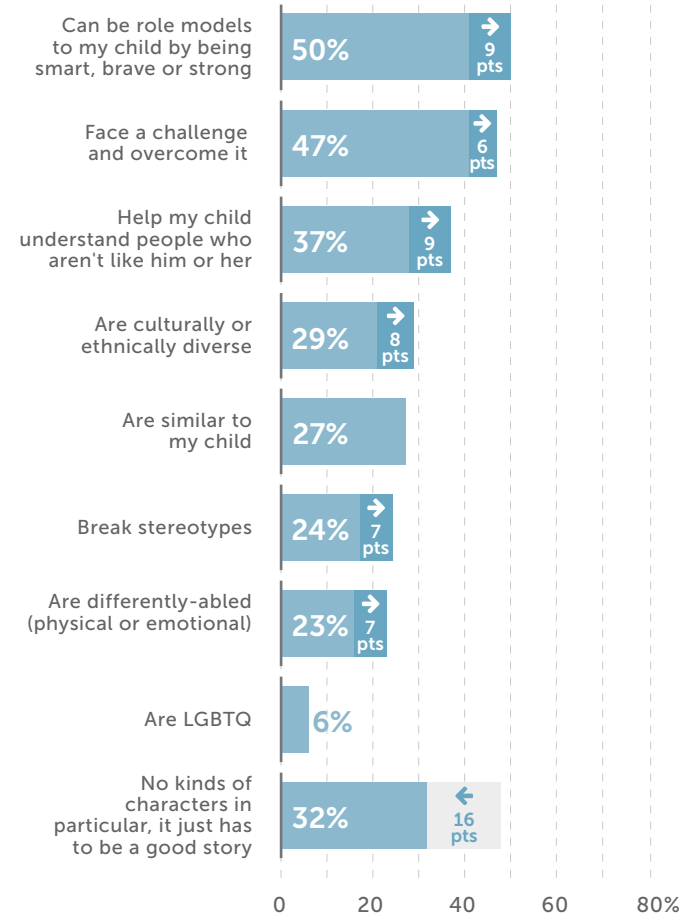
To determine what parents value most, this year's survey asked them to prioritize the qualities they hope their children develop as they grow. Responsibility, self-confidence, honesty, respectfulness and kindness top the list. Parents know that developing these qualities can be challenging, and they overwhelmingly agree that books and reading can help, with 95% agreeing that characters in books can help their children develop these positive qualities. A similar percentage of parents with children under five also agree.

A focus on character-building has increased since our last survey. In this edition, parents are more likely to want characters who:

- Can be role models to their children (50%, up nine points from 2016),
- Overcome challenges (47%, up six points),
- Help kids understand people who are not like them (37%, up nine points), and
- Break stereotypes (24%, up seven points) (see Figure 5).

### Parents want more from characters in books

Figure 5. Percentage of parents who say they want each, compared to 2016



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17

As one mom with a six-year-old daughter shared, “Not everyone is exactly the same as my child. So a vast selection of characters helps her understand more about the world around her.” A mother of an 11-year-old boy added, “Reading gives them confidence, curiosity, knowledge and expands their imagination.”

## FREQUENT READERS WANT EVEN MORE FROM BOOKS AND CHARACTERS

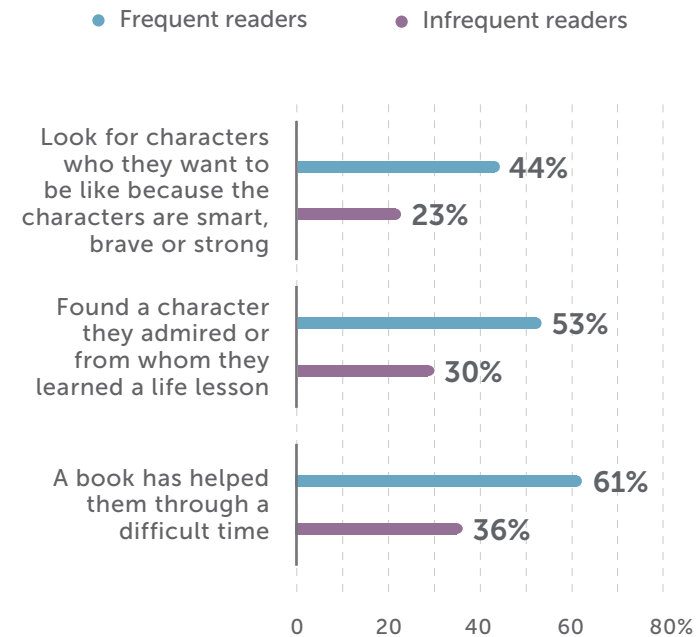
*The Kids & Family Reading Report* punctuates that the more kids read, the more likely it is that the social-emotional side of literacy is reflected in their views on books and characters.

Frequent readers are more likely to say that reading fiction and nonfiction is a way to help them understand the world. They are also more likely to say that reading makes it easier to talk about and understand things that are happening in the world. Frequent readers are also more apt to seek out books with characters who they want to be like because the characters are smart, brave or strong; and perhaps due to this, they are more likely to say there is a character they have admired or learned a lot from. In the same vein, they more often say a book has helped them through a difficult time (see *Figure 6*).

Frequent readers ages 9–17 are more likely to say it is extremely or very important to them that the books they read include diversity (50% vs. 23% among infrequent readers). They are also more likely to define diversity in books as including people and experiences different than their own (57% vs. 49%), various settings and living situations (52% vs. 43%), people of color (36% vs. 26%) and differently-abled people (34% vs. 26%).

## Frequent readers get more from books

Figure 6. Percentage of kids who agree with each statement



Base: Children ages 6–17

As one 17-year-old male, frequent reader shared, “I love to read books where I can either educate myself and learn more about someone’s culture/ traditions/ ethnicity, or relate to characters I have major things in common with. It gives you someone to connect with even though they can be fictional characters.”

In my earlier career as a classroom teacher, principal and then administrator, and now in my travels visiting hundreds of schools annually as the Chief Academic Officer for Scholastic Education, I've seen how meaningful it is when a child connects with a book. A relationship with reading nurtures a sense of curiosity, develops empathy, enhances academic skills and, perhaps most importantly, creates an understanding among kids that both fiction and real-life stories are available to them to learn from and help decipher their own experience when they need it. This is so vital that we must take active roles to ensure every kid becomes a reader.

You don't have to be a literacy or education expert to know that children are carefully observing those around them. The research punctuates that reading role models are influential, showing us the more there are in a child's life, the more likely a child is to be a frequent reader. In turn, frequent readers gain greater access to the personal and academic benefits reading provides earlier and more often.

This edition of the *Kids & Family Reading Report* also gives us important touchpoints around access to books, and insight into why children might lose interest in reading as they age. Around age nine, the data show an increase in the number of both parents and kids who say it's difficult to find books the child likes. At this same stage, kids find themselves with more choices to make as the variety of book formats available for their age and reading level increases, as does the volume and diversity of characters and storylines. This combination—knowing

what they want in books but not being able to find it—is likely a contributing factor to the overall decrease in engagement with reading that's evident as children move through adolescence. Of course, great books are futile if children are unable to access them and in every edition of this report, we see that regardless of age, gender or background, the power of choice reigns. Are there compelling, engaging books in all the places all kids need them to be? As we'll see from this research, access to books both at home and in school remains an inequity among our kids.

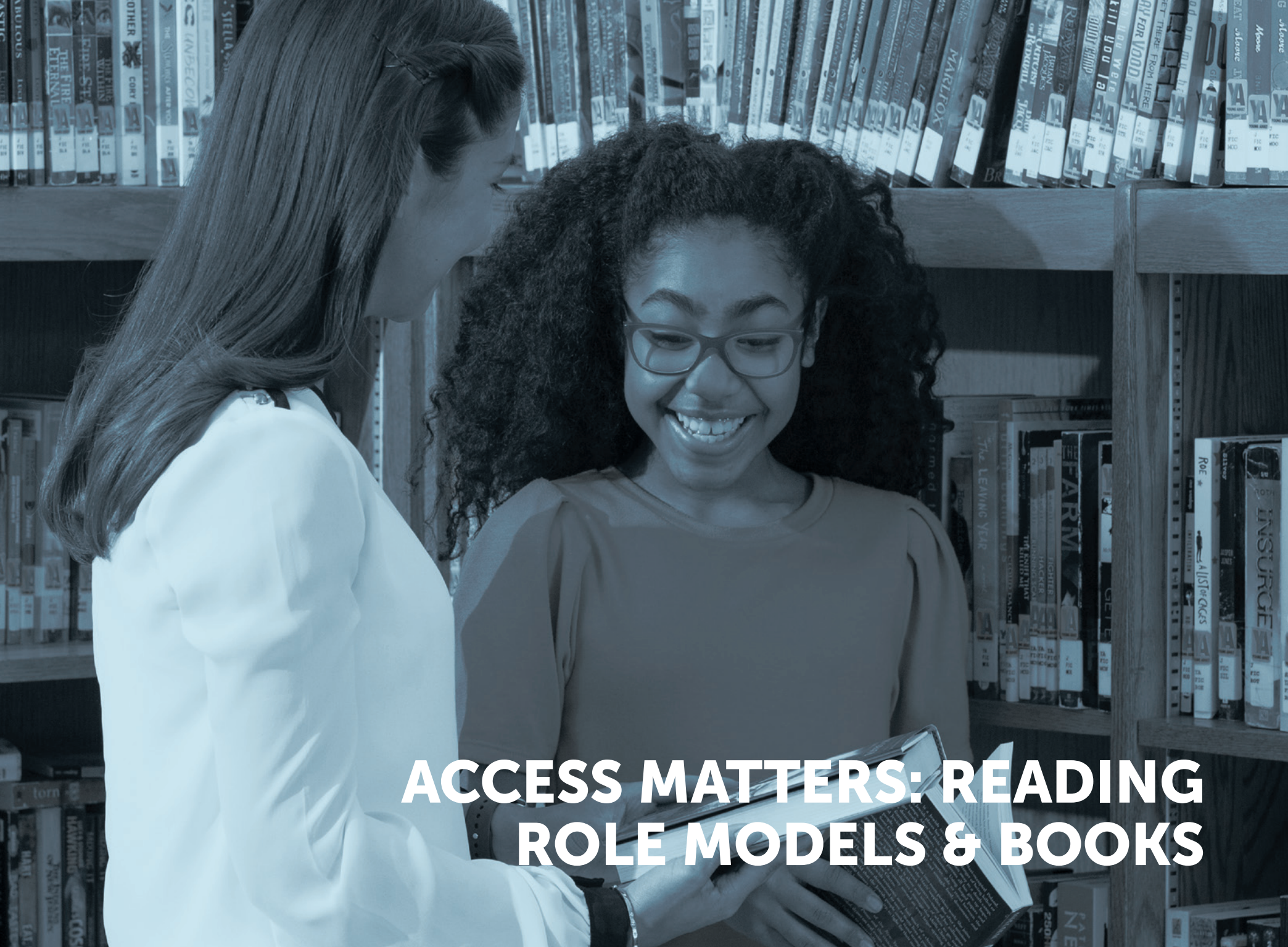
Parents, grandparents, older siblings, teachers, principals—everyone in a child's life—can be a reading role model. It's up to us all to provide the opportunity for choice, be readers ourselves, ask and answer questions about what a child is reading, read aloud together (regardless of age!), and more. When a child knows that the people surrounding them value reading, we will have a greater culture of literacy in our homes and in our schools.



**MICHAEL HAGGEN**

CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER,  
SCHOLASTIC EDUCATION





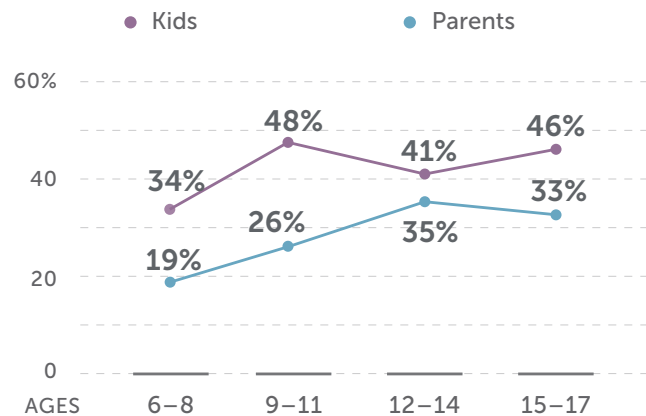
# ACCESS MATTERS: READING ROLE MODELS & BOOKS

## KIDS NEED HELP FINDING BOOKS

Four in 10 kids agree (42%) that they have trouble finding books that they like. This is far higher at 59% among infrequent readers and is true of roughly half of kids by age nine. Similarly, nearly one in three parents (28%) agree that their child has trouble finding books. This percentage increases among parents of infrequent readers and among parents of children older than age eight. Despite a similarity in trend lines, there is a disconnect between parents and kids on this challenge: one-third fewer parents than children think their child has trouble finding books (see *Figure 1*).

### Kids agree they have trouble finding books; parents underestimate this challenge

**Figure 1.** Percentage of kids and parents who agree with the statement "I/My child have/has trouble finding books that I/he/she likes"



Base: Children ages 6-17; Parents with kids ages 6-17

## FREQUENT READERS HAVE MORE READING ROLE MODELS

Parents of frequent readers are far more likely to consider reading books for fun important compared to parents of infrequent readers (95% vs. 70%). The difference is most notable when comparing parents who agree reading books for fun is extremely important (70% vs. 27%). Parents of frequent readers are also more likely to be frequent readers themselves (39% vs. 16%).

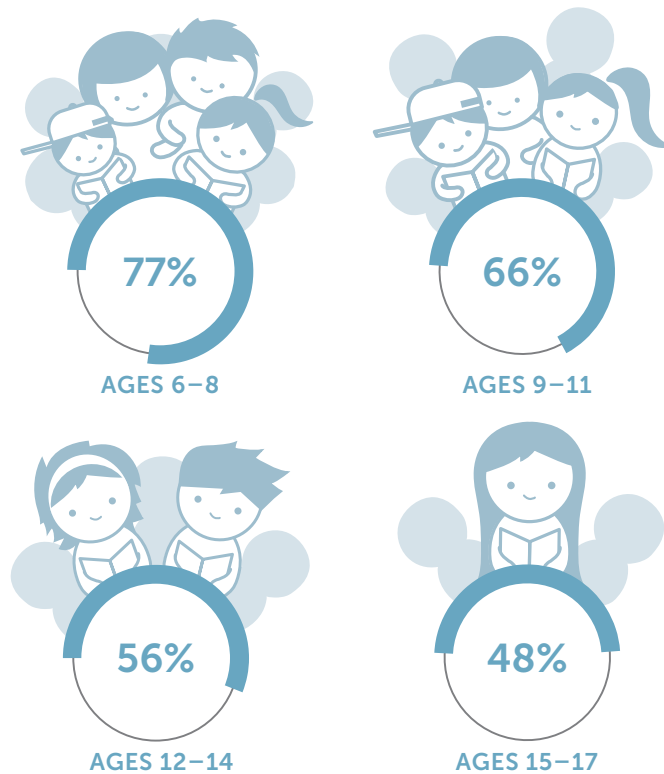
Frequent readers are also more likely to be surrounded by people who they perceive to enjoy reading: 82% say a lot or nearly everyone they know enjoys reading, versus infrequent readers at 34%. And much like reading frequency decreases as children age, there's a clear decline in the number of kids who say this: 77% of kids ages 6-8 say a lot or nearly everyone they know enjoys reading, and this drops to 66% among 9-11 year-olds, 56% among 12-14 year-olds, and 48% among 15-17 year-olds (see *Figure 2*).

Reading role models are critical to instilling reading as an integral part of a child's life, and do not need to be limited to parents: frequent readers have more encouragement to read from family members, friends, principals, teachers and school librarians than infrequent readers.

As one mother to an 11-year-old boy told us: “We’re a family of readers, who enjoy a good story. It’s important for mental health, intelligence and personal entertainment.”

### The number of reading role models decrease as children age

Figure 2. Percentage of kids who say that nearly everyone or a lot of people in their lives enjoy reading



Base: Children ages 6-17

## FREQUENT READERS HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO BOOKS AT HOME

Having access to books—whether in or outside the home—is not a reality for all kids. On average, there are 103 books in the home libraries of children ages 6-17, yet this varies widely. Most strikingly, frequent readers have an average of 139 books in their homes vs. 74 in infrequent readers’ homes. Similar trends are seen by income as well as race and ethnicity. Families with incomes of \$100,000 or more have nearly twice the amount of books than families with less than \$35,000 in annual income (125 vs. 73), and Hispanic and Black children have fewer books in their homes than white, multi-racial, Asian or children of other racial backgrounds (see Figure 3).

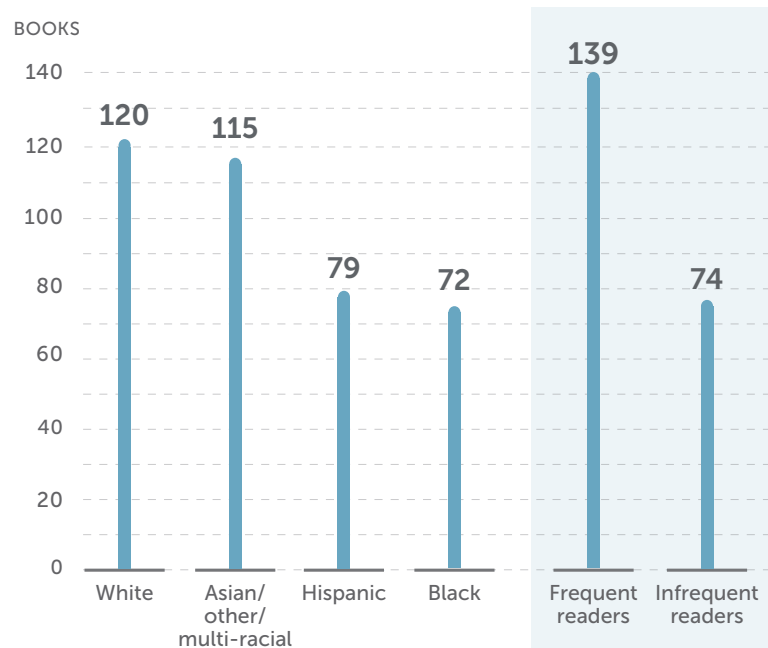
“

I WAS ALWAYS AN AVID READER AND I READ A LOT OF CHAPTER BOOKS TO MY SON WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER. I STILL HOPE THAT HE WILL GAIN MORE INTEREST IN READING FOR FUN. MY YOUNGER GIRLS ARE READ TO OFTEN AND MY SEVEN-YEAR-OLD IS BEGINNING TO READ ON HER OWN NOW. IT’S VERY EXCITING TO WATCH THEM ALL GROW AND HAVE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF FUN WITH BOOKS.”

MOTHER OF A 17-YEAR-OLD BOY

## Number of books in the home varies by child ethnicity and reading frequency

Figure 3. Average number of books in the home



Base: Parents with kids ages 6–17

## CLASSROOM & SCHOOL LIBRARIES NEED MORE BOOKS KIDS WANT

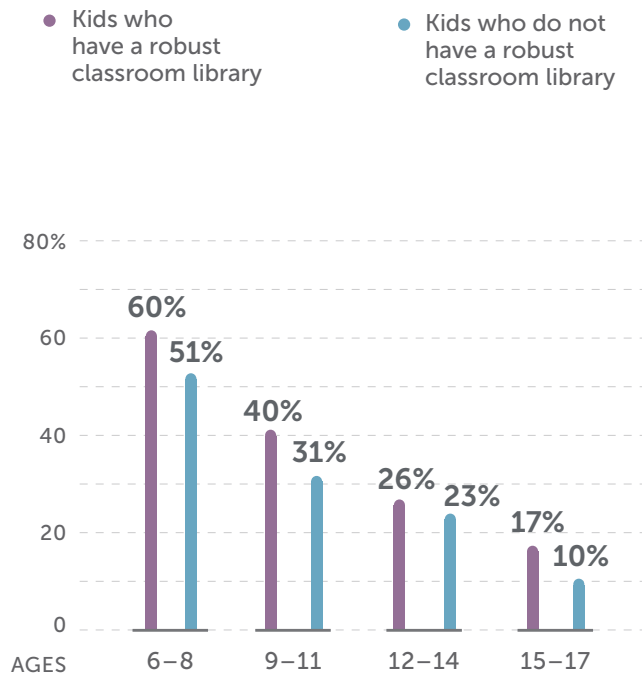
Adding to the challenges some kids face accessing books at home is the reality of book access at school: classroom libraries—the collection of books teachers have inside the classroom, easily accessible by students—are only available for 43% of school-aged children and only one-third say they have a classroom library that has enough of the types of books they'd like to read. A robust classroom library means the inclusion of books that make kids laugh, books with diverse characters and storylines, and books that provide opportunities to explore the world and allow kids to see themselves in the books.

Classroom libraries are critically important, as across ages of children, kids who have robust classroom libraries are more likely to be frequent readers:

- Among 6–8 year-olds, 60% of kids with a robust classroom library are frequent readers, compared to 51% of kids without a robust classroom library.
- Among 9–11 year-olds, this split is 40% vs. 31% and among 12–14 year-olds, the gap narrows to 26% vs. 23%.
- Among 15–17 year-olds, the gap widens once again with 17% of kids with a robust classroom library being frequent readers, compared to only 10% of kids without a robust classroom library (see *Figure 4*).

## Across ages, frequent readers have more robust classroom libraries

Figure 4. Percentage of children who are frequent readers by child's classroom library description



Base: Children ages 6-17

Additionally, while 70% of school-aged children say they have a school library, only 56% say the school library has enough of the books they want to read. Furthermore, it has been well-documented that the number of certified school librarians or library-media specialists per student has been in decline. According to a 2016 analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), data conducted by the National Education Association, only 62% of library-media centers in elementary schools are staffed by at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media center specialist. A 2011 study in *School Library Journal* adds that having library and media specialists leads to higher reading scores among students; meanwhile from the *Kids & Family Reading Report*, we know that frequent readers are twice as likely to receive encouragement to read books for fun from their school librarian (37% vs. 18%).

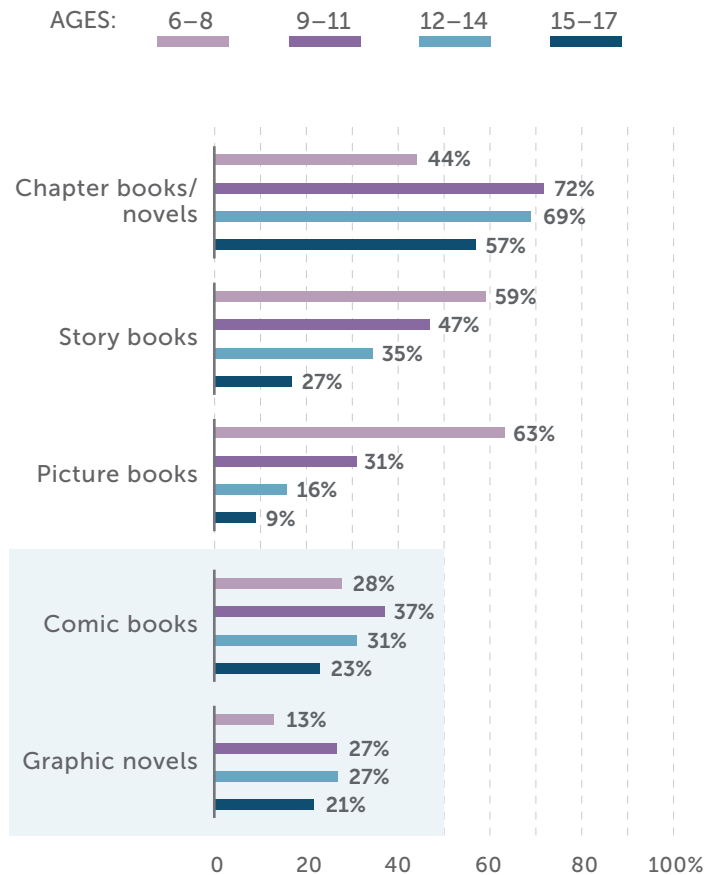
Overall, frequent readers are more likely to cite more sources of books including public libraries as well as school book fairs or clubs.

## ACCESS INCLUDES A VARIETY OF GENRES AND FORMATS IN BOOK SELECTION

As kids grow older, their list of interests grows with them, and so when providing children access to books, including a variety of genres and formats is helpful. Overall, chapter books and story books are the most popular formats among kids. Chapter books jump in popularity as children become independent readers whereas the popularity of story books begins to decrease—even as about one in three 12-17 year-olds say they like reading story books.

## Book types children like to read the most

Figure 5. Percentage of children who like to read each book type the most



Base: Children ages 6-17

Comic books and graphic novels also begin to capture the attention of kids beginning at age eight, and have a unique appeal as they are nearly equally as popular among frequent, moderate and infrequent readers (see Figure 5).

Additionally, considering magazines can be a motivating approach to building a library. Magazines grow in appeal as children age (rising from 9% of 6-8 year-olds to 19% of 12-17 year-olds), are more popular among Black children (22% vs. 14%), and are the only format preferred among a greater percentage of infrequent readers than frequent readers (21% vs. 13%).

Even though kids continue to agree they will always want books printed on paper (69%), there is value in using technology to support a child's growth as a reader. Seventy-one percent agree that technology has made it easier for them to find books they would like to read, and 70% of kids who have listened to an audiobook agree that it has encouraged them to read more.

“

I ALWAYS HAD BOOKS IN MY HOUSE GROWING UP AND I LOVE READING. I MAKE SURE MY CHILD ALWAYS HAS ACCESS TO BOOKS, EBOOKS, AND OTHER DIFFERENT FORMATS OF READING.”

MOTHER OF AN 11-YEAR-OLD BOY

## WHEN KIDS CHOOSE, KIDS READ

In the 13 years of the *Kids & Family Reading Report*, one thing remains constant no matter what: when kids choose, they read. Across demographics, the majority of kids (89%) agree their favorite books are the ones that they have picked out themselves (see *Figure 6*).

Further, nearly nine in 10 (88%) say they are more likely to finish a book they have picked out themselves and eight in 10 (82%) say they feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish reading a book. Each time these statements have been asked in a *Kids & Family Reading Report*, even among the most infrequent readers, the data punctuate the opportunity that choice can provide for all children.

“

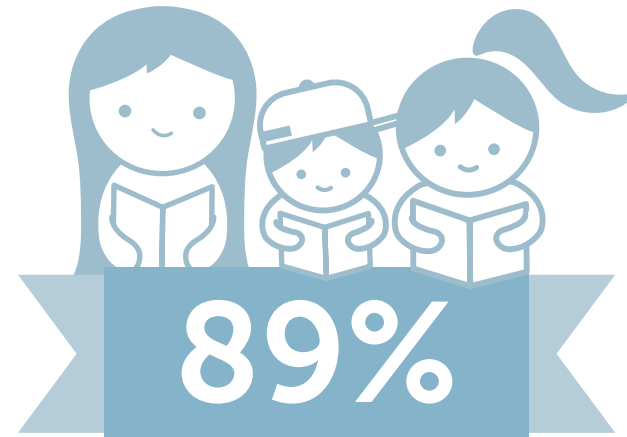
**IF CHILDREN GET TO PICK THE BOOKS AND ARE INTERESTED IN THEM, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO READ THEM, WANT TO READ AND FIND MORE BOOKS THEY ENJOY.”**

MOTHER OF A 7-YEAR-OLD BOY

## NINE IN 10 KIDS AGREE

Figure 6. Children's agreement with statement

My favorite books are the ones that I have picked out myself



Base: Children ages 6–17

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

### STUDY METHODOLOGY

- The study was managed by YouGov and was fielded between September 6, 2018 and October 4, 2018. The total sample size of 2,758 parents and children includes:
  - ▶ 678 parents with children ages 0–5,
  - ▶ 1,040 parents with children ages 6–17, plus one child ages 6–17 from the same household.
- Parents of children ages 6–17 completed their survey questions first before passing the survey on to one randomly selected child in the target age range. The survey sample was sourced and recruited by GfK using their nationally representative KnowledgePanel®<sup>1</sup>.
- To further ensure proper demographic representation within the sample, final data were weighted according to the following benchmark distributions of children ages 0–17 from the most recent (March 2018) Current Population Survey (CPS) from the U.S. Census Bureau:

- ▶ Child gender within each of six age groups (0–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–11, 12–14, 15–17), region, household income, and child race/ethnicity.

### ADDITIONAL STUDY METHODOLOGY

- Some survey language was modified in age-appropriate ways to ensure comprehension among children ages 6–8.
- Children ages 6–8 were not asked some survey questions that involved more sophisticated thinking than is reasonable to ask 6–8 year-olds.
- Parents were invited to help young children read the survey but they were asked to allow children to independently answer all questions. At the end of the survey, children were asked to record the degree to which a parent helped them with the survey. Consistent with prior research, an analysis



comparing the responses of children with and without parental involvement showed no significant differences.

- Virtually all (99%) of the adults interviewed were the parent or stepparent of the child surveyed. Therefore, throughout this report, we refer to adult respondents as “parents.”
- Ethnicity and Race data were collected using the United States Census Bureau approach; where race and ethnicity are two distinct concepts. An individual can select one or more of the following: White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or some other race.

- According to the Census Bureau, ethnicity determines whether a person is of Hispanic origin or not. For this reason, ethnicity is broken out in two categories, Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics may report as any race.
- For the purposes of subgroup analysis, four groups are compared to each other: Hispanics (of any race); Non-Hispanic Whites; Non-Hispanic Blacks; and Non-Hispanic Multiple race, Asian, or Other races. These labels are shortened throughout the report to: Hispanic; White; Black; Multiple, Asian or Other.
- Data may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The recruitment process employs an address-based sampling methodology from the latest Delivery Sequence File of the USPS—a database with full coverage of all delivery points in the U.S. As such, samples from KnowledgePanel cover all households regardless of their Internet or telephone status, providing fully representative online samples to the research community. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, GfK provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection. People who already have computers and internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online, and then are sent emails throughout each month inviting them to participate in research.

<sup>2</sup> ([www.census.gov/mso/www/training/pdf/race-ethnicity-onepager.pdf](http://www.census.gov/mso/www/training/pdf/race-ethnicity-onepager.pdf))

## APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

AGE OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
6–8	24%
9–11	25%
12–14	25%
15–17	26%

GENDER OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
Total Boys	51%
Total Girls	49%
Total Prefer to Describe as (Specify)	0%

RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
Non-Hispanic White	51%
Hispanic	25%
Non-Hispanic Black	13%
Non-Hispanic, Other	6%
Non-Hispanic, Multiple Races	4%

AGE OF CHILD THAT PARENTS OF CHILDREN 0–5 ANSWERED ABOUT	
0–2	49%
3–5	51%

GENDER OF CHILD THAT PARENTS OF CHILDREN 0–5 ANSWERED ABOUT	
Total Boys	51%
Total Girls	49%
Total Prefer to Describe as (Specify)	0%

RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILD THAT PARENTS OF CHILDREN 0–5 ANSWERED ABOUT	
Non-Hispanic White	50%
Hispanic	26%
Non-Hispanic Black	14%
Non-Hispanic, Other	6%
Non-Hispanic, Multiple Races	5%

MARITAL STATUS OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Married/Living with partner (NET)	87%	84%
Married	79%	79%
Living with partner	9%	5%
Widowed/Divorced/Separated	7%	9%
Never married	6%	7%

AGE OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Under age 35	<b>53%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Age 35–44	<b>40%</b>	<b>48%</b>
Age 45–54	<b>5%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Age 55+	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Mean	<b>34.8 years</b>	<b>41.5 years</b>

GENDER OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Male	<b>45%</b>	<b>47%</b>
Female	<b>55%</b>	<b>53%</b>
Prefer to self-describe	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>

RELATIONSHIP OF ADULT RESPONDENTS TO CHILD	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Parent (NET)	<b>99%</b>	<b>99%</b>
Parent	<b>97%</b>	<b>94%</b>
Stepparent	<b>1%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Other legal guardian (NET)	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Grandparent	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Other legal guardian	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION EARNED BY PARENT RESPONDENTS	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
High school graduate or less (NET)	<b>22%</b>	<b>34%</b>
Less than high school	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>
High school	<b>19%</b>	<b>26%</b>
Some college or more (NET)	<b>78%</b>	<b>66%</b>
Some college	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>
Bachelor’s degree +	<b>52%</b>	<b>41%</b>

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Less than \$35K	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>
\$35K–\$60K	<b>20%</b>	<b>17%</b>
\$60K–\$100K	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>
\$100K+	<b>30%</b>	<b>37%</b>
Mean	<b>\$81K</b>	<b>\$91K</b>
Median	<b>\$80K</b>	<b>\$80K</b>

RACE/ETHNICITY OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Non-Hispanic White	<b>59%</b>	<b>57%</b>
Hispanic	<b>17%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Non-Hispanic Black	<b>13%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Non-Hispanic, Other	<b>8%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Non-Hispanic, Multiple Races	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>

## APPENDIX C: SUBGROUP SAMPLE SIZES

AGE OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
Total	<b>1,040</b>
6–8	<b>275</b>
9–11	<b>241</b>
12–14	<b>262</b>
15–17	<b>262</b>
GENDER OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
Boys ages 6–17	<b>509</b>
Girls ages 6–17	<b>529</b>
AGE OF CHILD RESPONDENTS WITHIN GENDER	
Boys ages 6–8	<b>130</b>
Girls ages 6–8	<b>145</b>
Boys ages 9–11	<b>117</b>
Girls ages 9–11	<b>124</b>
Boys ages 12–14	<b>133</b>
Girls ages 12–14	<b>127</b>
Boys ages 15–17	<b>129</b>
Girls ages 15–17	<b>133</b>
AGE OF CHILD THAT PARENTS ANSWERED ABOUT	
Parents of children ages 0–17	<b>1,718</b>
Parents of children ages 0–5	<b>678</b>
Parents of children ages 0–2	<b>313</b>
Parents of children ages 3–5	<b>365</b>
Parents of children ages 6–17	<b>1,040</b>

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	KIDS/PARENTS OF 0–5 YEAR-OLDS	KIDS/PARENTS OF 6–17 YEAR-OLDS
Less than \$35K	<b>109</b>	<b>206</b>
\$35K–\$60K	<b>118</b>	<b>161</b>
\$60K–\$100K	<b>203</b>	<b>261</b>
\$100K+	<b>248</b>	<b>412</b>

READING FREQUENCY OF CHILD AGES 6–17	
Frequent readers (read books for fun 5–7 days a week)	<b>339</b>
Moderately frequent readers (read books for fun 1–4 days a week)	<b>410</b>
Infrequent readers (read books for fun less than 1 day a week)	<b>289</b>

RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILD RESPONDENTS	
Non-Hispanic White	<b>596</b>
Hispanic	<b>244</b>
Non-Hispanic Black	<b>100</b>
Non-Hispanic, Other, Multiple Races	<b>100</b>

***Finding Their Story*** is the second installment of the Scholastic *Kids & Family Reading Report™: 7th Edition*, and explores attitudes and behaviors around reading books for fun, the latest trends in children's reading habits, what both kids and parents want in books, and the importance of book access. Additional installments of the report examine the rise of read-aloud and summer reading.

**[scholastic.com/readingreport](https://www.scholastic.com/readingreport)**