

BookTrust Storytime

Summary of key lessons
from first year of pilot

June 2022



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Executive Summary

In 2021, BookTrust partnered with 2,366 libraries in England and Northern Ireland to deliver the first pilot of **BookTrust Storytime**, aiming to support lower income families to engage with their local libraries. **This new offer for libraries and families was co-designed in partnership with libraries and families.**

BookTrust Storytime represents a continuation and evolution of our long-term work with libraries across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as of the BookTrust Storytime Prize, designed to celebrate the best books for sharing with children aged 0-5. This report summarises key lessons from learning activities during the first year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot.

Key lessons from BookTrust Storytime 2021/22

1. Building partnerships:

The BookTrust Storytime offer had wide reach across England, with more than 2,000 libraries engaged and receiving resources. Although Covid-19 presented a challenge to both BookTrust and our partners, many libraries were able to successfully create engaging BookTrust Storytime experiences despite these limitations.

2. Engaging experiences:

BookTrust Storytime was designed to provide libraries with a flexible suite of resources that they could use in ways that would work for them and their communities. Libraries and families engaged with Storytime in many different ways. Our library partners created a range of different experiences for their visitors using BookTrust Storytime resources; from Storytime visits to community partners and opportunities for visitors to self-guide and explore libraries on their own, to fantastic Storytime sessions in libraries across regions. BookTrust Storytime supported libraries in their partnership work to bring new families into their libraries. Nearly half of libraries participating in Storytime told us they had tried new approaches to engage low-income families as a result of BookTrust Storytime.

3. Building longer-term impacts:

Families loved the BookTrust Storytime books and activities. During our library visits we heard from first-time visiting parents who were amazed at their children's engagement with storytelling. In addition, BookTrust Storytime helped some new low-income families build confidence to visit their local libraries and encouraged some of those families to join libraries. Storytime served as a gateway to using the library, particularly where libraries worked in close partnership with community partners to engage new families. 66% of survey respondents say that BookTrust Storytime helped them attract new families to their library.

4. Supporting libraries in their future work:

72% of our library survey respondents reported that they really enjoyed working on the pilot and 85% of our survey respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with the level of support they received from BookTrust. We also learnt through BookTrust Storytime that there are opportunities for BookTrust to further strengthen how we engage with libraries and partners. Libraries provided valuable feedback on a range of issues around timing of the BookTrust Storytime offer, questions about intended audience, and the importance of sharing details of our work early to support effective planning.

Next steps

BookTrust Storytime is part of our wider early years work and we want to continue to support libraries to harness their potential to provide access to books and to also engage and sustain reading support for low-income families in the early years. In 2022/23, we will again provide libraries with a flexible BookTrust Storytime experience informed by lessons from **the valuable feedback we have received from library partners. We are making some changes as Storytime goes into its second pilot year.**

Timing:

BookTrust will provide greater advance notice of what the offer entails and how libraries can take part. In addition, Storytime 22/23 will run over a longer period of time, from September 2022 until May 2023.

Support for library partners:

BookTrust is developing more digital guidance and resources as part of our new Storyteller Hub. We are working closely with a steering group of key library stakeholders to ensure we communicate about BookTrust Storytime as widely as possible. In addition to physical and digital resources we will provide case studies from 2021/22 to support libraries to create engaging experiences.

Storytime resources:

We have worked closely with families and partners to ensure that the books appeal to the full range of children 0-5. We are working with authors, illustrators, and libraries to ensure that the activities are more age appropriate. We have streamlined and simplified some elements of the offer, modifying some so they work better for more library partners to create inviting Storytime experiences.

Promoting BookTrust Storytime in the community:

In its second year, BookTrust Storytime will be part of our wider early years programme, tying in with offers such as Bookstart Early Years. We will continue to provide tools to promote BookTrust Storytime in the community (such as social media assets and customisable flyers). We will seek to understand how BookTrust Storytime integrates and interacts with local initiatives outside of the BookTrust journey and how it might be promoted in local communities.

We are immensely grateful to all families, libraries and community partners who fed back and took part in learning activities on BookTrust Storytime 2021/22. Feedback and contributions from libraries to our ongoing evaluation work continues to be vital, so that we can continue to improve our work. We hope to hear from even more libraries as part of our learning in 2022/23.



Background

In 2021, BookTrust partnered with 2,366 libraries in England and Northern Ireland to deliver the first pilot of BookTrust Storytime, aiming to support lower-income families to engage with their local libraries. This new offer for libraries and families was co-designed in partnership with libraries and families.

BookTrust Storytime represents a continuation of our long-term work with libraries across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This report summarises key lessons from learning activities during the first year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot.

The first year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot aimed to test and discover new ways of reaching lower-income families and supporting them to engage with their local library. BookTrust worked with library partners to help families see these libraries as a valuable resource in their ongoing shared reading journeys. The pilot was designed to inform our future work with families and libraries.

BookTrust Storytime 2021/22 set out to create engaging moments and experiences that bring stories to life in safe, inviting, and inspiring ways. It included an evolution of the BookTrust Storytime Prize, designed to celebrate the best books for sharing with children aged 0-5. As part of BookTrust Storytime 2021/22, we showcased six shortlisted books, with libraries and families encouraged to vote for their favourite.



As set out in our Storytime Logic Model, BookTrust Storytime aimed to:

1. Build BookTrust Storytime partnerships with libraries
2. Deliver engaging experiences which support families on their shared reading journeys

in order to:

3. Build longer-term outcomes and impacts for families
4. Support libraries in their future work

In this document we summarise lessons across these 4 areas.

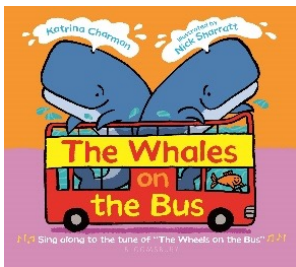
About BookTrust Storytime: Year 1 of the pilot

In total, 2,366 libraries participated in BookTrust Storytime across three different tiers:

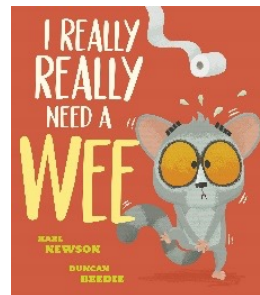
- Pilot tier libraries: 10 libraries were selected as pilot partners for in-depth learning, receiving a wide set of BookTrust Storytime resources and experiences.
- Learning tier libraries: 297 libraries received copies of the BookTrust Storytime books and additional physical and digital resources for use in their library and community.

- National tier libraries: 2,059 libraries received copies of the BookTrust Storytime shortlisted books and digital resources for use in their library and community.

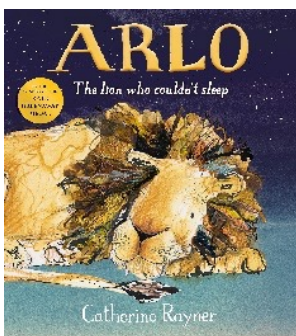
The six books shortlisted for Storytime 2021/22 were:



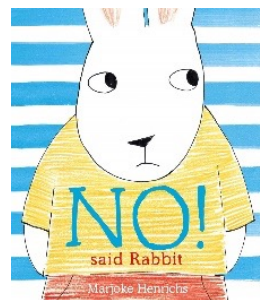
The Whales on the Bus
Katrina Charman,
Nick Sharratt
Storytime Prize Winner



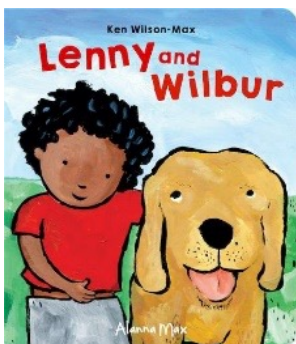
I Really, Really Need a Wee
Karl Newson,
Duncan Beedie



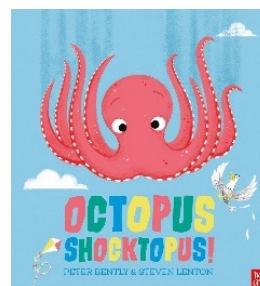
Arlo The Lion Who Couldn't Sleep
Catherine Rayner



No! said Rabbit
Marjoke Henrichs



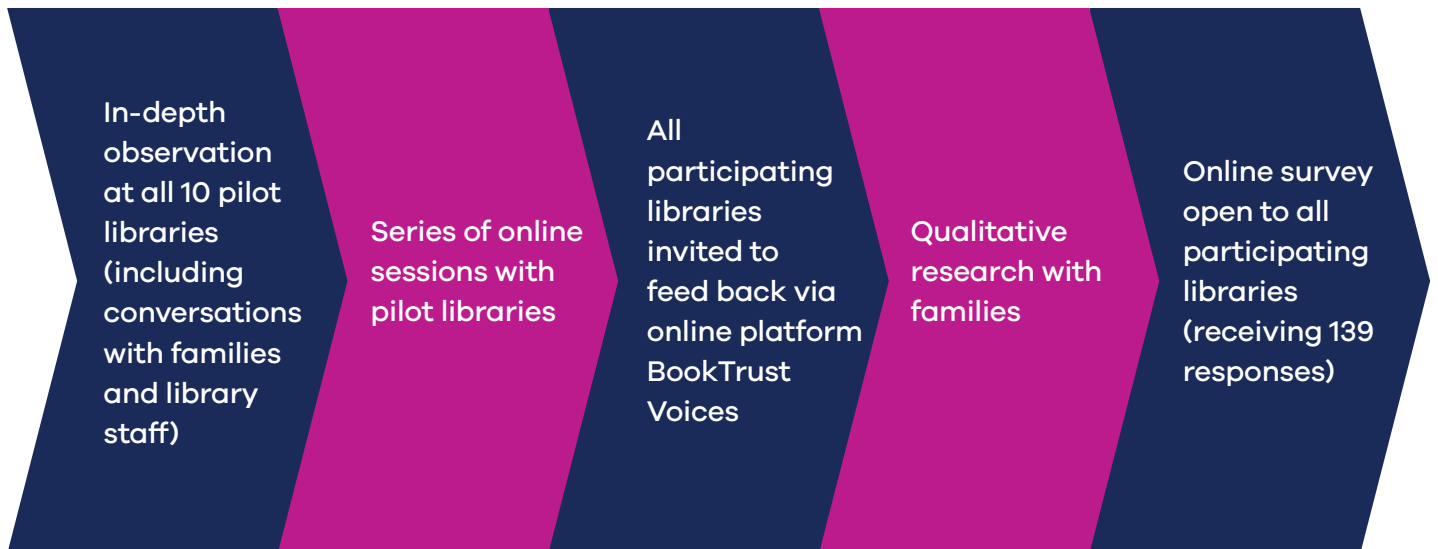
Lenny and Wilbur
Ken Wilson-Max



Octopus Shocktopus!
Peter Bentley,
Steven Lenton

Learning approach

As part of BookTrust's wider work in the early years space and our ongoing commitment to giving libraries and families a voice in the development of our offers, this pilot is a testing and learning process. To assess the pilot's success, we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative (in person and digital) methods and data capture:



We are immensely grateful to all families, libraries and community partners who fed back.

Lessons from BookTrust Storytime 2021/22

Lessons learnt: Building BookTrust Storytime partnerships with libraries

BookTrust used an innovative approach to co-design BookTrust Storytime, engaging libraries, partners and families in shaping the pilot. This co-creation took place at a time when social distancing required us to move much of our co-design work online. BookTrust conducted 20 workshops, successfully engaging 88 library staff and more than 25 families in the creation of the BookTrust Storytime offer. In addition, we held 3 meetings with a library stakeholder steering group.

BookTrust Storytime was designed to have national reach and engage libraries in all local authorities. In total, BookTrust distributed Storytime resources to 2,363 libraries across England, and 3 libraries in Northern Ireland¹. Among the 139 libraries that responded to the final survey, we saw representation from 71 local authorities, with a good mix of urban and rural areas. BookTrust will continue to seek input from libraries across the three nations as we plan the next stages of our work.

Covid-19 presented a significant challenge to the delivery of the BookTrust Storytime pilot in some libraries. However, many libraries were able to successfully create engaging BookTrust Storytime experiences, working around the challenges presented by Covid-19 restrictions. For some libraries, BookTrust Storytime came at 'exactly the right time', supporting their work to revive their family engagement after restrictions lifted. Covid-19 related restrictions were in place during key phases of the year-1 pilot. Some libraries were unable to hold events, others faced limitations on capacity in their libraries and at events. Covid-related absences presented further issues. Many libraries and local authorities had to work differently and/or restructure in response to the pandemic, with

many experiencing reduced staffing levels. These issues impacted their ability to conduct outreach and other events. The restrictions also had some impact on BookTrust's ability to interact with and support libraries in the set-up of the pilot.



"Running two BookTrust Storytime sessions enabled us to re-engage with families post pandemic and discussions about the prize titles helped to build relationships among the local community. It was a good opportunity to re-launch story and rhyme sessions for pre-school children."

Pilot library staff

"Our Covid restrictions meant that Storytimes had to be ticketed, and numbers limited to around 15 parent/child pairs. Pre-pandemic, the equivalent sessions would easily have 30 families attending."

Learning library staff

¹ It is important to note that Covid-19 and the response to the pandemic had a significant impact on library services in Northern Ireland, limiting libraries' ability to take part in this pilot.

Lessons learnt: Delivering engaging experiences which encourage families to begin their shared reading journey

Libraries and families engaged with BookTrust Storytime in many different ways.

Libraries used BookTrust Storytime resources to create a range of experiences for their visitors – from Storytime sessions to creative displays and opportunities for families to explore BookTrust Storytime independently. Families attended BookTrust Storytime sessions in libraries and other community settings, with many returning for repeat sessions. Families used resources, engaged with library staff, took shortlisted books home, and participated in craft and other activities. Some families shared news of Storytime within their personal networks.

As part of this pilot, BookTrust was keen to find out how libraries would use the resources to fit their needs and communities. We found that libraries most commonly opted to run sessions, with more than a thousand BookTrust Storytime sessions happening over the course of the pilot.

Families loved the books and activities related to BookTrust Storytime.

Feedback from families attending Storytime sessions was overwhelmingly positive; they often praised the books, as well as those delivering the sessions. During library visits BookTrust representatives heard from first-time visiting parents who were amazed at their children's engagement with storytelling, and many took Storytime books home to continue shared reading journeys in their families, including with siblings and grandparents.



"It's a lovely book, having a lot of colours, which attracts my daughter and it also encourages the child to look at details and also numbers."

Parent, Pilot library

Library partners were impressed by the high-quality resources and enjoyed delivering BookTrust Storytime in their communities.

In the feedback we received on BookTrust Storytime resources in 2021/22, 'fun', 'engaging', and 'interactive' were the most commonly used words by library and local authority partners to describe BookTrust Storytime. 72% of survey respondents rated their enjoyment of working on Storytime at 4 or 5 out of 5. Engagement with the offer was very high, with 80% of participating libraries saying they used the resources they received 'a lot'.

From extensive work with families and libraries BookTrust knows that selecting high-quality and relevant resources is key to promoting engagement with reading and story sharing.

In conversation with BookTrust representatives, library partners highlighted the quality of the BookTrust Storytime resources. While all books were well received, library partners particularly praised stories that included rhyming, repetition, or song (such as in Lenny & Wilbur or Whales on a Bus), as well as vibrant illustrations (such as in Octopus Shocktopus). These elements made the books particularly engaging for youngest age groups. Library partners told us that families enjoyed being able to vote for their favourite books by using the stickers provided as part of the offer.



"It was nice to have something high quality to give out and to hear how they were being read at home and with other family members who hadn't been attending the sessions."

Pilot library staff

"The repeated refrains were really enjoyable for the children, as they got to join in and learn the words. The families gave positive feedback at the end of the sessions and lots of families took home the additional resources."

Learning library staff

"We loved being involved, the sessions were fun, it was great having stickers and activities to hand out and parents and children had a great time thinking about how they would vote."

Learning library staff

Libraries showed their incredible creativity in making Storytime work for their spaces and their communities. Through the pilot BookTrust has collected a wealth of examples of how libraries used resources flexibly to make them work for their physical spaces and tailored them for their communities. However, a majority (63%) told us that they received too many resources last year, particularly non-book related materials. As a result, BookTrust will aim to simplify the resources, modifying some so they work better for more library partners to create inviting Storytime experiences.

BookTrust supported libraries with a toolkit to help them create a compelling Storytime experience with the resources supplied. Among those who made use of the toolkit, 81% found it useful, though we received comments on how it could be improved. This year's digital toolkit will form part of our online Storyteller Hub and aims to be even more useful and accessible, to support libraries to use the BookTrust Storytime resources to deliver high-quality, engaging experiences for families.



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Pilot library staff

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Learning library staff

Lessons learnt: Building towards longer-term outcomes and impacts for families

BookTrust Storytime helps families build confidence to visit their local libraries. Parents with little prior experience of visiting and using libraries told BookTrust and library staff that they felt comfortable and relaxed about attending the library after coming in as part of BookTrust Storytime. Many explained they had initially felt some nervousness, based on preconceptions about library environments (e.g., fears of getting into trouble if children are disruptive or feeling judged by other parents, and of fines for late returns). Others were generally anxious about taking part in group activities. It is important to note that for some families coming to and connecting with libraries as part of BookTrust Storytime represented one of their first group experiences with their child due to Covid-19 restrictions. BookTrust Storytime experiences, including engaging Storytime sessions and resources, assurances and encouragement from library partners helped to ease anxieties and to connect families in communities. Many families told us and library partners that they now saw libraries as places for them, and that they would visit again.



"We found out about the library on social media. We enjoyed the session as we've never been before. Looking forward to coming back next week. Yes, I would recommend it to others."

Parent, Pilot library

"I was nervous about coming; I didn't know what to expect. I didn't want my son to be naughty and get told off but I felt at ease once it started as everything was relaxed, no one shouted at him for messing with the books and not sitting still [...] I would 100% come to another session. We loved it. I'm looking forward to next week - I'm going to phone my friend later to tell her about it. Her daughters would love it!"

Parent, Pilot library

BookTrust Storytime showed examples of how shared reading experiences can support children and families.

In some participating libraries, library staff and parents reported an increase in children's attention span as they attended more Storytime sessions. Children increasingly focussed on the stories and engaged more in craft and other activities.

BookTrust Storytime supported libraries in building relationships with new families in their communities.

65% of survey respondents say that BookTrust Storytime helped them attract new families to their library. Some families who attended a Storytime session not only continued to come to further sessions but also began to use the library on other occasions. We observed, and partners in pilot and learning-tier libraries reported, many instances of families signing up for library memberships after engaging with BookTrust Storytime.



"A really worthwhile set of sessions. Thank you for allowing our library to participate and many thanks from the children and parents who came and enjoyed the sessions here at the library. Some families were inspired to actually create a library card for their children to borrow more books, so that is a definite winner!"

Pilot library staff

"This was the first time for five families, they all joined their children into the library and took out the BookTrust books to read at home."

Pilot library staff

"Using the books as a vehicle to model to parents how they can engage their child in interacting with books and how sharing stories can support language and communication and emotional connection was a positive take-away."

Learning library staff

Lessons learnt: Supporting libraries in their future work

Libraries and local authority partners were positive about many elements of the BookTrust Storytime offer and felt it made a difference to their work. A number of libraries also highlighted some challenges with the pilot which we aim to respond to in BookTrust Storytime 22/23. Asked to score out of 10 the extent to which BookTrust Storytime made a difference to their library, almost all respondents to the survey said it made at least some difference, with half of respondents giving a score of 7 or higher. However, while some partners found BookTrust Storytime to be an enriching experience, we also know that others felt elements of BookTrust Storytime were challenging, and in some cases time-consuming, at a time when libraries were facing other pressures.



“Working with the children’s centre, this pilot has been able to show that libraries are not how they used to be, but a happy, bright, welcoming place with friendly staff and that they are a non-judgemental safe place for all of the community.”

Pilot library staff

“Having use of promotional materials and resources was crucial to delivering a sustainable series of sessions to families in encouraging them to come to the library. The resources were high quality. [...] Having the library as a venue and to have new library members join up and to see the facilities and benefits that are on offer.”

Learning library staff

“All this takes time to plan and deliver, so our verdict is that a much longer lead-in time is required especially in this exceptionally disrupted year - note for future schemes. With hindsight an earlier introduction to the scheme would have enabled us to coordinate and further publicise the sessions through our online offer and in Libraries.”

Learning library staff

BookTrust Storytime supported libraries to work with local partners and to explore novel approaches to bring new families into libraries. We learnt from our survey and conversations with libraries participating in the pilot and learning tiers that many worked with community partners as part of BookTrust Storytime.

BookTrust's extensive research with low-income families makes clear the importance of community partnerships in inspiring families to engage in early shared reading. Families who are new to libraries, who are disengaged with reading or lack confidence and support in reading with their children are often receptive to receiving messages about reading from sources they have existing and trusting relationships with. In many cases this will be local community organisations (e.g. children's centres, nurseries, community support groups). 51% of survey respondents told us they worked with partner organisations to try to encourage new lower-income families into their library and 43% of these said they built relationships with organisations they had not partnered with before.

Most commonly, libraries partnered with **local children's centres, nurseries, schools, community groups** (such as support groups for young parents), **local play groups, local charities, and housing groups**. Some libraries organised outreach events, for example by holding an initial Storytime session at a children's centre before encouraging families to attend subsequent sessions at the library. Many invited nursery and school groups to visit, sometimes extending the invitation to parents.



"For us, we really needed more advice on the outreach side of things, and knowing what other libraries were doing would have been helpful."

Learning library staff

"We have always struggled to get a well-attended Storytime. By contacting our local nursery to join in the BookTrust Storytime we have now got a regular Storytime going even though we have finished the 6 books, which has encouraged a positive link with the nursery for other events."

The pilot made clear the role and value of community partnerships in raising awareness and bringing families into libraries for the first time. Our pilot libraries successfully worked with local organisations to reach new families and have shared that there is more that BookTrust can do to support libraries in this outreach work, particularly where they do not have established partnerships in the local community.

The first year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot has provided BookTrust with important feedback on our ongoing work to improve our support to partners and families in the early years. 83% of libraries say BookTrust Storytime supported their work with under 5s and 56% say it supported their work with lower-income families. Lessons from the pilot will help to inform the second year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot and our wider work within the early years sector. Families will benefit from our deeper understanding of works to support community partnerships.

Libraries were largely positive about their engagement with and support from BookTrust during BookTrust Storytime. Libraries largely felt supported throughout the process, with 85% saying they are satisfied with the level of support they received from BookTrust throughout the pilot. The vast majority (95%) of survey respondents said they personally understood the objectives of Storytime.

BookTrust's close partnerships with libraries through BookTrust Storytime have further strengthened our understanding of opportunities and challenges around supporting low-income families in their shared reading journeys. We understand the need to communicate more about our target audience families, their needs, and why BookTrust has a particular focus on supporting disadvantaged families. We can communicate this approach more effectively to our community partners, including libraries. We also want to ensure our partners understand that BookTrust recognises and values the universal nature of library services. It is not BookTrust's intent to exclude any families from enjoying a BookTrust Storytime experience, but that our new offers (including BookTrust Storytime) are designed to provide particular support to lower-income families. We know that families facing disadvantage stand to benefit most from the short- and long-term benefits of early shared reading habits.

What's next for BookTrust Storytime 2022/23?

BookTrust is hugely thankful to all the families, libraries and community partners who have contributed to delivering and learning on the first year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot. We are responding to this feedback as we shape our future work with libraries and families through Storytime and other new BookTrust pilots.

BookTrust is excited to be working with libraries again in 2022/23 as part of our wider work with early years families. At present, the BookTrust team is finalising plans for the second year of the BookTrust Storytime pilot for 22/23, informed by lessons from the first year of the pilot, our wider work with families, and ongoing conversations with the library sector. Through this second-year national pilot, Storytime 22/23 will continue to support libraries to:

- Bring early years families into libraries, again with a focus on reaching low-income families who are new to their local libraries.
- Provide early years families with welcoming, inclusive experiences and high-quality resources.
- Encourage early years families to build early shared reading habits and to recognise the support that libraries can provide on their reading journeys.



Some of the key lessons from Storytime 2021/22 and how these are informing BookTrust's plans for 2022/23:

Theme	What we heard in 2021/22...	What we will do to improve Storytime 2022/23...
Timing	Libraries have busy schedules. More advance knowledge of BookTrust Storytime and how it will look will support planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will share detailed information on BookTrust Storytime earlier than last year. Detailed plans will come to libraries in June with resources delivered in September.
	Libraries enjoyed using the resources and were keen to use BookTrust Storytime resources over an extended period of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This year's offer will include opportunities to engage families with BookTrust Storytime between September and May.
BookTrust Storytime resources	Some staff working with families in libraries did not receive or use the practitioner content designed to support them in their work. Those who used the Storytime PDF toolkit say it was useful but that it could be improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want to do more to support frontline library staff to create engaging experiences for families, through an approach that enables them to use resources in a way that works for them and their communities. We will do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing more digital guidance and resources as part of our new Storyteller Hub. This will be more easily accessible than the previous pdf toolkit. Working closely with a steering group of key library stakeholders to ensure we communicate about BookTrust Storytime as widely as possible. Including a physical guidance letter with the Storytime resources that signposts to digital resources.
	Quality of resources	
	Libraries felt the selection of books and resources for the Storytime offer could be more appropriate for a range of ages in the early years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Libraries and families have played an active role in shortlisting books for Storytime 22/23 to ensure that the books appeal to the full range of children 0-5. We are also working with authors, illustrators, and libraries to ensure that the activities are more age appropriate. We will simplify the process for both families and libraries to feed back on their favourite books.
	Some libraries in the pilot and learning tiers felt there were too many resources provided with Storytime.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have used feedback from libraries and families to streamline our offer of physical resources to maximise our impact for target families.
Libraries have expertise in delivering engaging and welcoming experiences to families but are eager for additional new ideas and suggestions and to learn what works well in other libraries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our priority for this year is to further support libraries through resources, information and guidance including case studies, activity ideas and customisable downloadable resources. 	

Promoting the Storytime offer in the community	Libraries have varying levels of partnerships with community organisations that can connect them to new lower-income families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our offer this year will again provide tools that can support partnership working to bring new families into libraries (e.g., posters, flyers, social media content). • We will share case studies of libraries' experiences in Storytime 21/22 on attracting new families from partners who successfully engaged local community groups. • This year, Storytime will form part of BookTrust's wider early years work – you may have heard of our new Bookstart Early Years work.
	Libraries want to be able to provide specific information about their local library on advertisements, rather than generic advertising materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide more customisable resources that libraries can use to tailor to their needs.
	Many libraries used social media to advertise Storytime.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide even more digital resources for sharing on social media.
Learning	Libraries asked for opportunities to contribute to learning .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As we develop the Storytime offer for 2022/23, we are also developing a plan for evaluation and learning, giving libraries different opportunities to provide feedback to inform our future work with libraries. • We will simplify how we ask for feedback from our partners.

About us

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. We are dedicated to getting children reading. Each year we reach millions of children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading.

We get children reading in lots of different ways, but our priority is to get more children excited about books, rhymes and stories – because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. We run nationwide programmes – like our flagship programme Bookstart. We reach millions of families across the country each year with books, resources and advice to encourage parents and carers to start reading with their babies right from the beginning.

Much of our focus is on early years because we've learnt that starting early and involving the whole family is the best way to get children reading. We also work with schools to support teachers and school librarians to get children and young people excited about books and reading.

We want all families to have access to reading, which is why we also deliver more targeted programmes aimed at helping those who need us most – whether that's families facing economic hardship, children in care or children with additional needs.

We want every child to have the best possible start in life. It's why we're so passionate about getting children reading.

Our work is funded by Arts Council England, as well as BookTrust's partners and donors.

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