**Under embargo until 00.01 on Wednesday 28 July**

**BOOKTRUST UNVEILS PILOT PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPERIENCE TO SUPPORT DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES START THEIR READING JOURNEY**

[***booktrust.org.uk***](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/news/news-2021/coming-soon-a-new-public-library-experience-to-help-more-families-discover-the-joy-of-reading)**| *#BookTrustStorytime***

* Created in collaboration with leading library partners, families and local authorities
* More than 2500 libraries across England taking part in national pilot
* Stats show only 49% of families in poverty with children 0-5 are registered with a public library

**Wednesday 28 July**, **London**: BookTrust, the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, has today announced plans to pilot a new, national library experience called **BookTrust Storytime**. Developed in partnership with libraries, local authorities and families, and funded by Arts Council England, the project will support disadvantaged families with children in their early years to engage with their local public library and develop an ongoing reading habit.

Sharing stories is invaluable for children in their early years and creates lifelong positive impacts on health, wellbeing, creativity and education, yet children from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face the biggest barriers to reading. A recent BookTrust survey of 1,000 families in poverty with a child under 5 across England, NI and Wales revealed that less than half (49%) of these families are registered with a public library.

In the wake of the COVID pandemic, BookTrust Storytime forms part of the charity’s new strategy, which is focused on finding the most effective ways of supporting the families who need more help beginning their reading journeys, so that more children can enjoy the transformative benefits of reading. The pilot also aligns with libraries’ aspirations to reconnect with their local communities after a year of closures, to kick-start visits as part of the ongoing recovery from the pandemic, and support more disadvantaged children.

**About BookTrust Storytime**

Launching in Autumn 2021, the large-scale national pilot, created with the support of library partners including The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), Libraries Connected, The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Youth Libraries Group (YLG), will bring together local authorities, libraries, authors and illustrators to test new ways of inspiring shared early years story experiences through local libraries.

The project has been developed in collaboration with librarians and families to ensure the design and content reflects their experiences and meets their needs, including breaking down any limiting preconceptions – such as libraries being solely a place for reading books quietly – as well as showcasing the broader opportunities available with clear signage and a welcoming, friendly environment.

Insight from the co-design process showed that families are more likely to return to the library if they have a positive, fun first experience and can see the enjoyment and benefit experienced by their child. The BookTrust Storytime experience will offer a raft of resources for librarians alongside activities for families that will bring the magic of reading to life, and to inspire sharing stories and visiting the local library to become a regular and long-lasting part of family life.

These experiences will also incorporate the existing BookTrust Storytime Prize, which celebrates the best early years children’s books. This year’s shortlist, announced today, will be integrated into the experience and used to encourage families to make repeat visits to the library to read the different books and engage in the different activities on offer.

The pilot itself will adopt a three-tiered approach, with different levels of library engagement:

* National Tier: Every library in England will be invited to take part and receive a pack of the Storytime shortlisted books, alongside access to a range of digital resources.
* Learning Tier: More than 300 libraries across the country, will receive multiple Storytime shortlist packs, digital and physical resources to reach families, as well as running Storytime sessions for local families and taking part in the Storytime winner vote – announced in early 2022.
* Pilot Tier: A further group of 10 libraries – located in Luton (Leagrave Road Library​), Lancashire (Nelson Library), Cornwall (Camborne Library​), Rochdale (Balderstone library​), Bradford (Laisterdyke library​), Cambridge (Wisbech Library​), Rotherham (Rawmarsh Library), Hackney (Dalston CLR Library​), Bristol (Junction 3 Library) and Sandwell (Stone Cross Library​) – have been selected to work intensely with BookTrust to test a range of additional ideas, materials and activities to further inspire and motivate families who need more help beginning their reading journeys.

**Diana Gerald, CEO of BookTrust** said:*‘At BookTrust we believe all children should reap the life changing benefits of reading, and our bold new strategy is focused on finding innovative ways to ensure children from disadvantaged families are not left behind. Working with the local authorities and library services that share these ambitions, our BookTrust Storytime experience will remind families about the treasure trove of support available from their local library and kickstart visits as we emerge from the pandemic. Through this pilot, we will work with our library and local authority partners to test and learn how families can be best supported to engage with their local public library and make sharing stories a regular part of family life.’*

**Dr. Darren Henley, OBE, Chief Executive, Arts Council England:** *“Reading books changes a child’s life, opening their minds to whole new worlds of possibilities. It’s so important that every young person, no matter what their start in life, can unlock the opportunities offered by reading for pleasure. And there’s no better place for that magic to happen than in our network of public libraries in villages, towns and cities across the country. BookTrust’s Storytime programme will help local councils support families to provide a great start for their children by encouraging them to love reading and supporting that vital development of communication skills in early years.”*

**Annabel Gittins, Vice Chair, ASCEL** and **Library Development Manager, Shropshire** said:

*‘With books and reading at their heart, libraries offer connections and support for every age and every stage through a myriad of projects that allow families to be creative, to feel included, and above all experience kindness. BookTrust Storytime resources will enable libraries to play a key role in local COVID-19 recovery not only by supporting local authority priorities around the development of early speech, language and communication skills in pre-school children, but also enticing more families to recognise libraries as their space to explore, with opportunities available for all age groups.’*

**Isobel Hunter, CEO, Libraries Connected,** said: *‘Projects like BookTrust Storytime are vital because libraries are places of possibility with the power to change lives. With libraries gradually reopening, we are thrilled to be working with BookTrust to celebrate and showcase the invaluable role they play within the community, and to create innovative new ways of ensuring that families and young children from all backgrounds have access to high quality, engaging public library experiences that reflect, respond and support their needs.’*

**Sir Michael Morpurgo, President of BookTrust,** said: *‘I first walked into a library when I was about three, I think. It lent us the first books I ever loved, and I’ll never forget that.* *Every library is a pathway to enjoyment, knowledge and understanding, and, to me, every librarian is a hero because they pass on what they love to children, making readers and writers of them, and bringing joy to their lives. It is wonderful that BookTrust and libraries across the country are working together and using their invaluable expertise to do something new and different to support more families discover the joy of reading.’*

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

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**About BookTrust**

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school. We are the UK’s largest children’s reading charity; each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives. We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health services, libraries, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. [booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**About BookTrust Storytime**

BookTrust Storytime is a new library experience we are piloting to learn about how we can best support disadvantaged families engage with their local public library and develop an ongoing reading habit. The pilot activities have been designed in collaboration with librarians and families across the UK to test new ways of inspiring families with children aged 0-5 to engage in shared story experiences through their local library and to celebrate the best books to make sharing stories a regular part of family life.

Libraries across England will be receiving toolkits, books and resources ahead of the pilot launch in Autumn 2021. Storytime activities will take place across the coming months, including the announcement of the Storytime Prize winner in early 2022. We are also exploring how we can pilot BookTrust Storytime across all regions we work in, including in Northern Ireland and Wales.

During the project, BookTrust will learn more about family engagement in library services and how best to support the development of a reading habit, and over time will reflect on experience and feedback in order to evaluate impact and inform development and next steps.

**About the BookTrust Storytime prize shortlist**

The prize – which celebrates the very best books for sharing with babies and children under five and is run in association with the CILIP Youth Libraries Group has this year been incorporated into the new national pilot – BookTrust Storytime.

Selected by a panel of experts, the six titles in contention for 2021 are:

* *I Really, Really Need a Wee!* by Karl Newson & Duncan Beedie (Little Tiger Press)
* *Octopus Shocktopus!* by Peter Bently & Steven Lenton (Nosy Crow)
* *No! Said Rabbit* by Marjoke Henrichs (Scallywag Press)
* *The Whales on the Bus* by Katrina Charman & Nick Sharratt (Bloomsbury Children’s)
* *Lenny and Wilbur* by Ken Wilson-Max (Alanna Max)
* *Arlo The Lion Who Couldn't Sleep* by Catherine Rayner (Macmillan Children’s Books)

The families and librarians taking part in the BookTrust Storytime pilot will also be invited to take part in the vote to crown this year’s winner of the £5,000 prize, to be announced in early 2022. Previous winners of the £5,000 award include This Is Owl by Libby Walden and Jacqui Lee (2020) and Cyril and Pat by Emily Gravett (2019).