

Read All About It

A Report on the State of Kids' Reading Habits and Interests During 2021

As the world reopened, children kept opening books.



epic!

Letter From Our Co-Founders



We just made a pretty great discovery.

In 2021, even as schools reopened—along with playgrounds and amusement parks, scouting troops and soccer leagues—kids were still reading.

As dads, we wondered if our own kids would continue reading as much as they did in 2020, when they were stuck at home with little else to do. As it turns out, they did, and as the co-founders of Epic, we're delighted to learn that the same was true for millions of other children.

This is our second report on the state of kids' reading, and like the first, it's helped us glean deep, valuable insights into their reading habits—from what they want to read about to what stays with them long after they've finished their stories.

We've long known that reading brings endless opportunities to learn more, explore more and be more. What we learned this year is that kids were picking up books that reflected the things they most wanted to learn and explore in their physical post-pandemic worlds.

Our [first report](#) included the amazing fact that fifty million kids read one billion books on Epic in 2020—and in general spent 89% more time reading on Epic than 2019. In a year with so many added activities returning, this year's report showed that kids continued at these record levels in 2021.

It's our hope that the information contained in this report will help parents find more ways to inspire their children to make reading a habit that's so deeply ingrained, they never want to stop.

Keep reading.

Suren Markosian and Kevin Donahue

Epic co-founders and proud dads of curious Epic readers



Introduction

How much are kids reading, why does it matter and how can we get them to read more? Those are some of the questions we try to answer in our annual Read All About It report. The 2022 report connects data from Epic, the leading digital reading platform for kids age 12 and under, with an Epic-commissioned parent survey conducted by global data intelligence company Morning Consult. The purpose is to offer a comprehensive look at the state of children's reading patterns.

We hope that the insights below will help guide parents, educators and others seeking high-quality books that cultivate a lifelong love of learning and get children excited to read.

Summary

These results reveal that in 2021, kids read just as much as they did in 2020, which was significantly more than in pre-pandemic years. What makes the 2021 results all the more compelling is that children kept reading despite having more activities available, as their communities gradually reopened.

These findings show that for kids 12 and under, reading resulted in more reading. They read more when they were confined during the lockdowns, but didn't abandon that habit once restrictions

loosened. Far from it, actually. Children wanted to read—or be read to—and parents reported that reading time remained high. Far fewer reported that their children were playing video games on a console or VR headset once or more per day.

Parents told us this year that they encouraged their kids to read more, and to that we say, "Keep up the good work." The more time children spend with books, the more benefits they'll reap both academically and personally.

Key Findings

Reading stayed high: Levels of reading, which increased significantly last year, plateaued at that elevated level. Our 2021 report showed that reading increased by 89% from 2019 to 2020. According to our 2022 report, in 2021 it stayed at this level.*

Choosing reading over other activities: As the world reopened, kids still found time to read. Increased opportunities to play outside and hang out with friends didn't change kids' reading habits. Even better, they spent less time on passive activities like video games.**

From escape to exploration: As lockdowns started to lift, kids read more adventure and fantasy books, seeking out magic and mythical creatures. As they began spending more time exploring the world outside their homes, they also spent more time exploring new worlds in books.

Reading supported emotional well-being: Parents said that their children exhibited positive behaviors like creativity, self-confidence and curiosity after reading, and fewer negative emotions like anger, sadness and anxiety.**

Books helped parents of little kids, especially ages 5-7, with tough conversations. Nearly 70% of parents surveyed used books for discussions about climate change, and 65% used books for discussions about mental health.**

Report Methodology

This report relies on two sources of information about children and their reading habits: A poll of parents; and aggregated, anonymized user data from Epic, which provided insights on the reading habits of 50 million children ages 12 and under.

Epic commissioned Morning Consult to conduct an online poll between March 18 and March 20, 2022 from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 U.S. parents of children ages 5 to 12, who have at least some technological decision-making responsibility—with data weighted by each child's gender, age and region. Results have a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points. The goal was to track kids' interests during 2021, as well as reading behavior and the effects of returning to in-person schooling and being outdoors.

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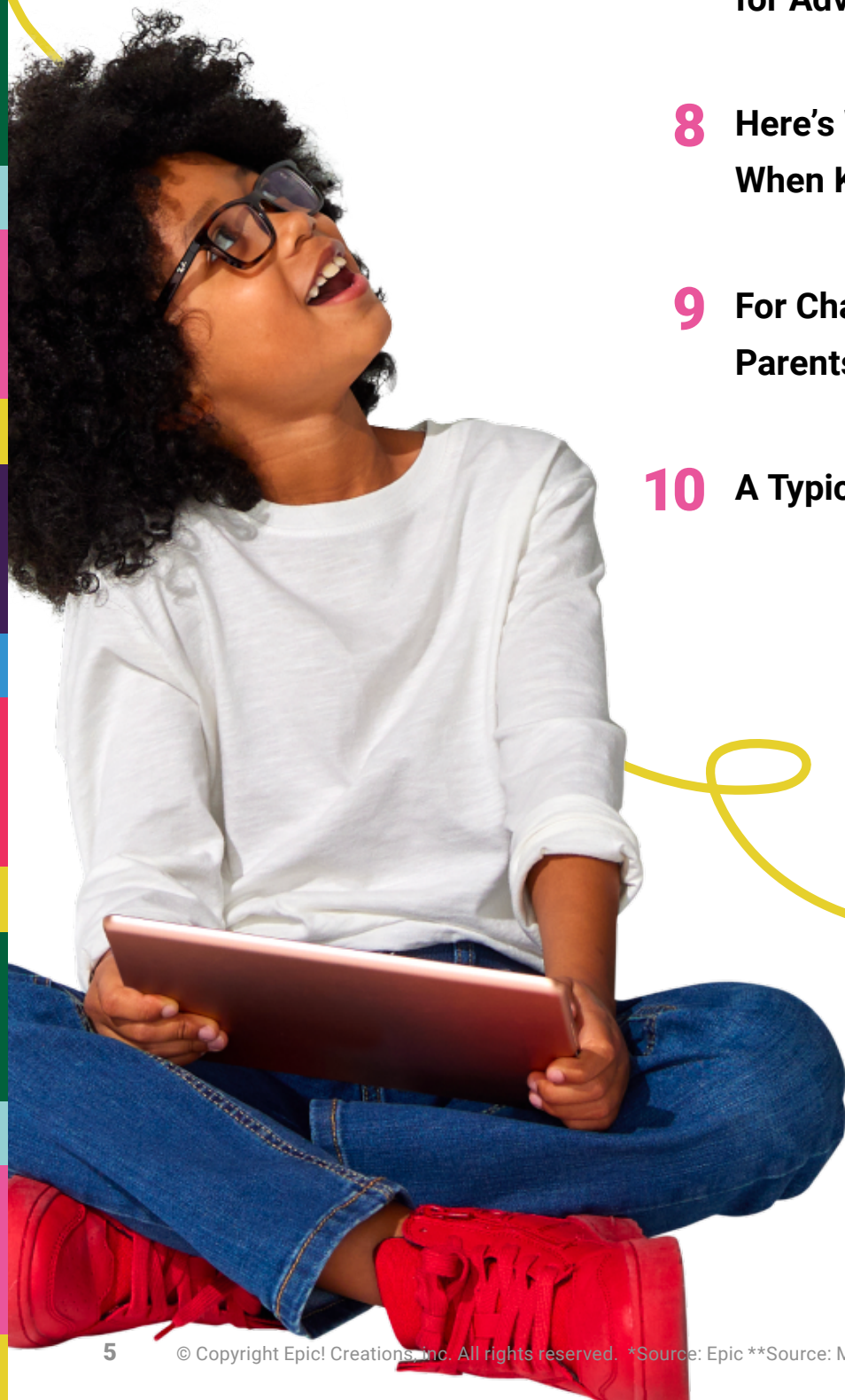
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Increased Reading: A Sticky Habit

71%
of parents said their kids spent more time reading when they're the ones selecting the book

Even as the world began reopening in 2021, kids continued to keep their noses in books, something reflected in both the Epic platform user data and the parent survey. In 2021, the daily, weekly and monthly average number of minutes children spent reading were nearly identical to 2020—when they read for an hour more each month. Parents also believed that their kids spent about the same time (46%) or more time (44%) reading in the past year.**

Much of this was due to the pandemic. In 2020, kids started reading more once the restrictions took effect in March because they had fewer options for safe activities outside their homes. When restrictions loosened in 2021, they had already built the habit of reading and chose it over other activities.

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT:

Parents are making that habit even stickier. About 65% said they encouraged their kids to read more in 2021, with 58% urging them to pick reading over other activities.**

The ability to pick their own books continues to motivate children to read. Parents said their kids spent “a lot more” (38%) or “a little more” (33%) time reading when they were the ones making the selections instead of a parent or teacher.**



Return to Normal or Yearning for Adventure?

As schools opened back up in 2021, kids craved excitement—at least from the books they were reading. Adventure stories rose one spot in 2021 to become the second most popular genre (behind humor), and fantasy jumped to fourth place, up two spots from 2020. Similar genres in the top 10 included science fiction (5th) and fairy tale (7th).*

Similarly, there were a couple of new additions to the most searched topics in 2021: magic and mythical creatures. In fact, they knocked two old favorites off the top 10 list—dogs and monsters.*

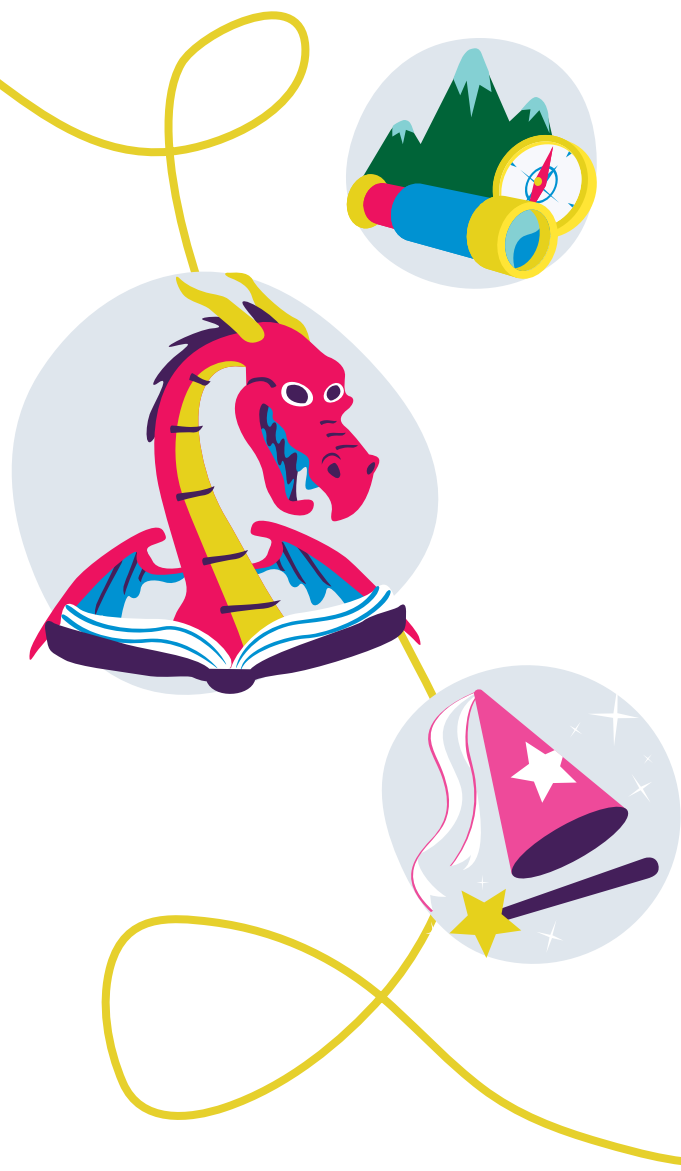
Though the topics kids choose to read changed little from 2020 to 2021, this yearning for adventure stands out as a notable trend. It's possible that the return to in-person instruction, where schedules were more rigid, left children longing for stories about unpredictable and otherworldly experiences. Or maybe after nearly a year stuck at home, they wanted to explore the world.

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT:

Books in the comics genre were most popular with 9- to 12-year olds.*

Unlike 2020, kids favored felines over canines in 2021. Not only were “cat” and “kitty” the most popular animal search terms, the number of searches with those words grew 84% in 2021 from the year before.*

Sharks, cars and dinosaurs made noticeable gains, too.*



What Happens When Kids Read

This year's findings reinforced what researchers have known for decades: Reading begets reading. Sixty-five percent of parents said that after reading a book, their child was more likely to want to read more. This may explain the "stickiness" of reading as a habit between 2020 and 2021.**

That's music to the ears of parents. When reading is compared to other activities, 34% of parents said reading had the most positive impact on their child, more than going outside (21%) and arts and crafts (13%). Parents also said reading made their kid more willing to try new things, demonstrate creativity and curiosity, and want to read more. And 62% said they've noticed improved school performance behaviors (62%).**

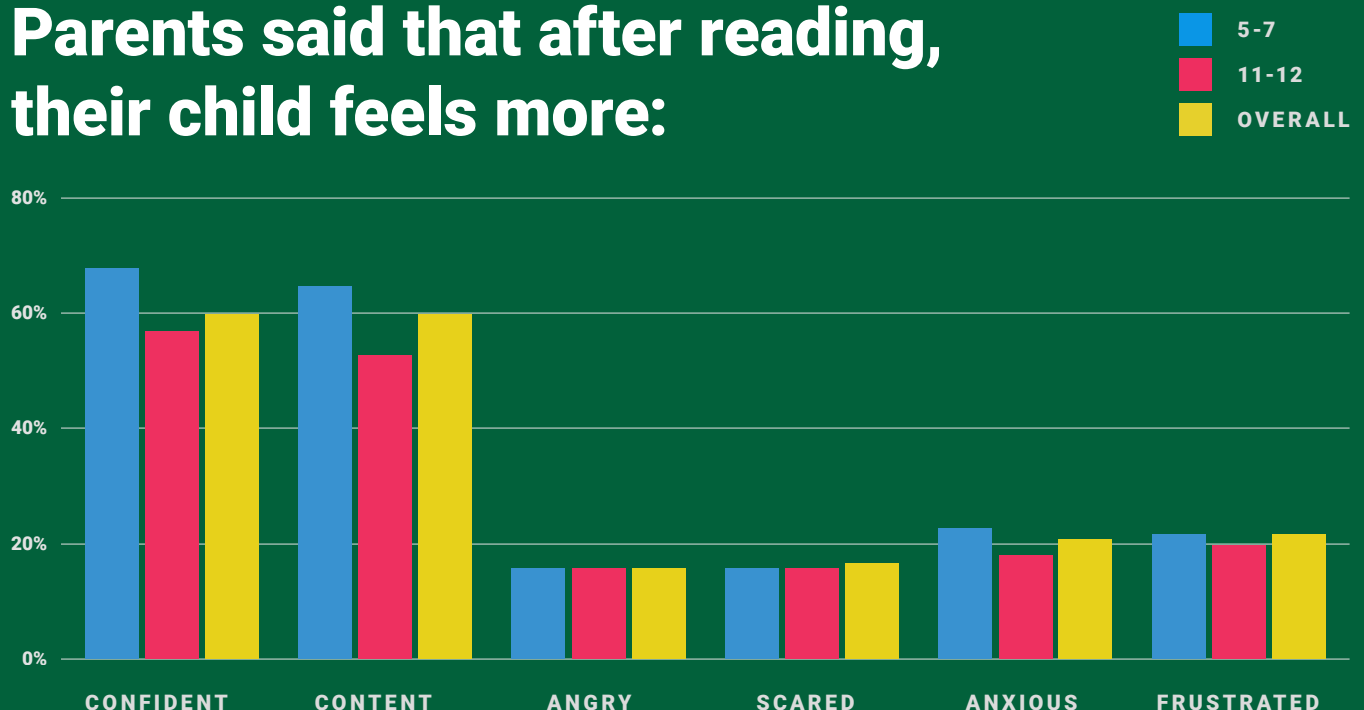
WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT:

Reading had a significant impact on a child's emotional well-being: Parents said that after reading, their kids felt more confident (60%) and more content (60%).**

Parents also noted that their kids were less likely to feel angry (84%) scared (83%), anxious (79%) and frustrated (78%) after reading. Almost a quarter felt anxious or frustrated, at 21% and 22% respectively.**

In nearly all cases, these outcomes were more pronounced among younger children (those 5-7) than older kids and tweens.**

Parents said that after reading, their child feels more:



For Challenging Conversations, Parents Turn To Books

Children have an endless curiosity about the world around them, which can lead them to ask questions that don't have easy answers. Unfortunately, events in recent years have made it necessary for parents to have some difficult discussions with their kids. Fortunately, in some of those instances, parents say they use books to kick off those conversations.

Take, for instance, climate change. The survey showed that 56% of parents who discussed the issue with their kids used books to help explain it. The same was true for parents who discussed mental health issues with their children: Half turned to books for answers.**

The overwhelming majority of parents who used books for these discussions were glad they did. About 54% said the books were "very helpful," and another 34% said they were "somewhat helpful."

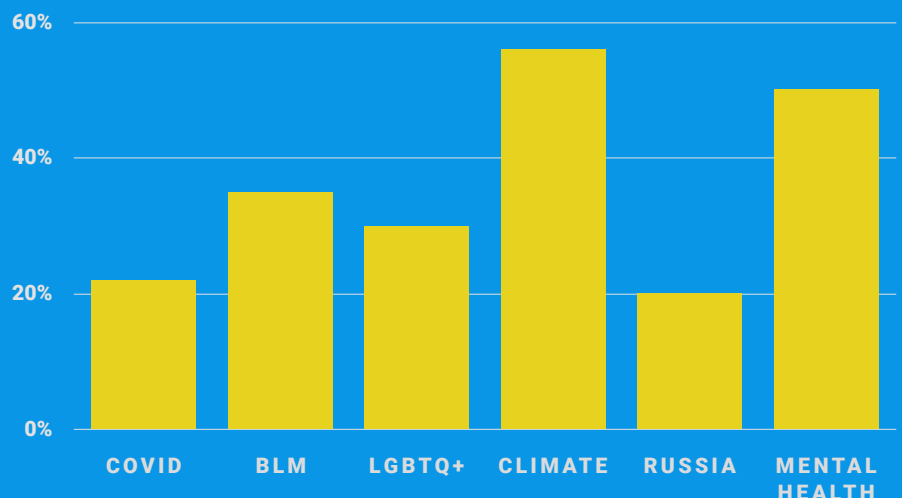
Again, this was particularly true for parents of younger kids.**

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT:

Parents of younger kids (age 5-7) turned to books even more often: 69% of these parents used books when discussing climate change and 65% used books to support discussions of mental health.**

Among topics mentioned in the survey, parents were less likely to use books to help with discussions about COVID-19 (22%) and Russia (20%). Part of that may have been the lack of availability of books on these topics. Only 46% said there was "a lot of variety" in books to aid their discussions, with another 45% noting just "a little bit of variety."***

Parents used books to help explain:



A Typical Young Reader

Because no two kids are alike, reading habits and preferences run the gamut of themes. But if we created a composite of the typical Epic user in 2021, we'd have had a kid who liked reading about funny cats for about 23 minutes a week in the winter.* Here are some more specifics to paint a deeper picture:

What they read: Readers in all age groups preferred fiction over nonfiction in 2021, though not quite as much as they did in 2020. Kids spent nearly 61% of their time on Epic reading made-up stories, a sharp decline from 86% the year before. This may suggest that as a result of the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, kids were able to return to activities, like sports for example, inspiring them to choose nonfiction topics related to their interests rather than seek comfort in the escapism of fiction.*

How much they read: The good news is that the reading gains we saw in 2020 continued in 2021 for kids across all age groups. Last year, children ages 6-12 spent the same amount of time reading each month—99 minutes, on average. Children ages 3-5 had a slightly lower average, 81 minutes a month, perhaps because most kids in that age group prefer someone to read with them.*

When they read: Kids across all age groups also were consistent about the time of day they were most likely to read: between 9 am and 2 pm. And just like in 2020, they were more likely to read on weekdays rather than weekends. But there was a significant shift in the months in which they read, something that's directly attributable to the pandemic. For example, they read the most in

January, February and March 2021, when COVID-19 restrictions were in full force—as opposed to June and July in 2020. Likewise, in 2021 children read the least in November and December (after the Delta and before the Omicron variant outbreaks), compared to January and February in 2020 (before the pandemic took hold in the U.S.).*

How they read: This answer depends on age. Epic users age 8 and younger spent the majority of their time engaging with Read-To-Me content. For kids ages 9-12, it was reading standard books (59%) or listening to audiobooks (14%).*

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT:

As a general rule, kids spent the majority of their time (71%) reading on the web, followed by apps on iOS devices (28%) and Android devices (1%). But children ages 3-5 were significantly more likely to read on an iOS device (58%) than other age groups.*

Kids responded to cultural moments in 2021 by searching for books. In January, for example, there was a spike in searches for the terms “Joe Biden” and “Kamala Harris.” The same was true for the terms “Olympics” and “Olympians” in July and August. They began searching for “Encanto” in December, when the film by the same name premiered.*

Rates of listening to music or podcasts also increased: 32% of parents reported their children listening “multiple times a day,” up from 25% last year.**

About Epic

Designed for unlimited discovery and unmatched safety, Epic is the leading digital reading platform for kids. Built on a collection of 40,000+ popular, high-quality books, audiobooks and videos from 250+ of the world's best publishers—Epic reaches more than 75 million kids in homes and classrooms and fuels curiosity and reading confidence. Epic has made access free to educators and more than 2 million teachers use it in the classroom. Epic is part of the BYJU'S family of brands, working together to unlock a love of learning around the world. To learn more, visit getepic.com, or follow Epic! on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



*Epic commissioned global research firm **Morning Consult** to conduct independent research on this topic. Morning Consult is a global data intelligence company delivering insights on what people think in real time.*