

## Young (aged 5 to 8) children's reading in 2022

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How much do young children enjoy reading, how often do they read, and what is their access to reading materials at home?

We sought to answer these questions using data from 8,210 5- to 8-year-olds who took part in our Annual Literacy Survey between January and March 2022. More specifically, we asked these children about their reading enjoyment, confidence and frequency, what sorts of things they read in their spare time, their reading attitudes, and book ownership.

Additionally, we had data from 2,130 8-year-olds who answered a survey for older pupils in 2022, which gives us further insight into how reading can support young children's mental wellbeing. These data also highlight what motivates young children to read in their free time.

Some of the key findings include:

### Their access to books at home

- 4 in 5 (81.4%) children aged 5 to 8 said in 2022 that they have a book of their own at home.
- However, this means that nearly 1 in 5 (18.6%) children aged 5 to 8 told us that they don't have a book of their own at home.
- Of those who had a book of their own, 1 in 7 (14.4%) said they had fewer than 10 books at home.
- More girls (84.1%) than boys (79.1%) said they have a book of their own at home.
- The regions with the highest percentage of book ownership were the South East (90.6%) and South West (84.1%), while the regions with the lowest percentage of book ownership were London (80.5%) and the East of England (80.3%).

### How much they enjoy reading

- 3 in 4 children aged 5 to 8 said in 2022 that they enjoy reading (75.4%), which means that 1 in 4 of this age group don't enjoy reading (24.6%).

- Reading enjoyment in children aged 5 to 8 has remained relatively stable over the past four years, even during the pandemic.
- More girls than boys enjoy reading. Indeed, more than twice as many boys (7.2%) as girls (2.9%) aged 5 to 8 said that they don't enjoy reading at all.
- Fewer children in Yorkshire and the Humber (72.4%) and the South East (71.9%) said that they enjoy reading, while children in the North East (79.1%) and London (77.8%) were most likely to say that they enjoy reading.

#### Impact of book ownership on reading enjoyment

- Of those with a book of their own at home, 3 in 4 (77.7%) enjoy reading compared with 2 in 3 (66.2%) of those who don't have a book of their own at home.

#### How often they read

- Only 1 in 2 children aged 5 to 8 said that they read daily (52.4%), and 1 in 13 never read at all (7.7%).
- Reading frequency has remained stable over the past four years.
- More girls (56.9%) than boys (48.2%) said that they read daily.
- More of those in the South East (61.7%) and London (59.7%) said that they read daily, while fewer of those in the North East (49.1%) and East Midlands (49.0%) said the same.

#### How they rate their own reading ability

- 4 in 5 (78.8%) children aged 5 to 8 said they felt they were 'very good' or 'good' readers, while only 3.8% described themselves as 'not very good' at reading.
- More girls than boys were rated themselves as good readers (81.4% vs 76.5%).
- More children in the East Midlands (82.2%) and West Midlands (80.5%) rated themselves as good readers, while fewer children in the North East (77.7%) and East of England (77.7%) said the same.

#### Impact of book ownership on children's perceptions of their reading ability

- 4 in 5 (81.0%) of those with a book of their own at home also rated themselves to be good readers compared with 7 in 10 (70.0%) of those who don't have a book of their own.
- 1 in 5 (19.0%) of those with a book of their own at home rated their own reading ability as not very good compared with almost 1 in 3 (30.0%) of those who don't have a book of their own at home.

#### What they read

- 3 in 4 (77.1%) children aged 5 to 8 said they read stories, while nearly half (53.6%) said they read non-fiction. Around 1 in 3 children said they read magazines (36.3%) or poems (32.1%), while 3 in 10 (29.1%) read comics.
- More girls (82.8%) than boys (72.0%) read stories, while a similar percentage read non-fiction (55.2% vs 53.3%). More girls (38.8%) than boys (25.1%) read poems, while more boys (34.8%) than girls (23.6%) read comics.

#### What they think about reading

- More than 9 in 10 children aged 5 to 8 agreed that there are lots of things that they want to read (92.1%), that they find it easy to understand what they read (93.4%), and that learning new words is fun (92.0%).

- 95.0% of girls agreed that there were lots of things they want to read compared with 9 in 10 (89.7%) boys.
- A similar percentage of girls (94.7%) and boys (92.4%) said they find it easy to understand what they read.
- More girls than boys said that learning new words is fun (94.7% vs 89.8%).
- Nearly 9 in 10 children said that they would be happy to get a book as a present (87.9%), while 1 in 10 (12.1%) felt this was not true for them.
  - While 9 in 10 (92.2%) girls said they would be happy if they got a book as a present, only around 8 in 10 (83.8%) boys said the same.

#### **Why they read: reading to support mental wellbeing**

- 2 in 3 (67.4%) children aged 8 said that reading makes them feel better.
  - While 3 in 4 (74.4%) girls agreed with this, only 6 in 10 (60.6%) boys did.
- 64.1% of children said that reading helps them relax, while 64.0% said that reading helps them feel happy.
  - 7 in 10 girls said that reading helps them relax (71.6%) and makes them happy (72.8%) compared with nearly 6 in 10 boys (57.3% and 57.2%).
- Almost half (46.0%) of children said that reading makes them feel better when they are sad.
  - More than half of girls agreed with this (53.3%) compared with 2 in 5 boys (39.2%).
- Over 1 in 3 (36.2%) children said that reading helps them deal with their problems.
  - A similar percentage of girls (38.1%) and boys (34.0%) agreed with this.

#### **What motivates them to read**

- 70.2% of children aged 8 said that they read to learn new words, while 68.6% read to learn about new things
  - More girls than boys said that they read to learn new words (73.9% vs 68.0%) or to learn about new things (73.1% vs 65.7%).
- Half of children read to feel more confident (52.3%).
  - Almost 6 in 10 (57.0%) girls read to feel more confident compared with nearly half (48.7%) of boys.
- While just less than half read to learn about other people and cultures (47.0%), 2 in 5 children read to understand the views of other people (41.8%) or to feel connected to the world (41.8%), and 2 in 5 read to learn about the issues and causes they care about (38.5%).
  - A similar percentage of girls and boys selected these as motivations to read, suggesting that girls and boys are equally likely to read to improve their understanding of the emotions and feelings of others.
- 1 in 3 (31.8%) children read to spend time with others.

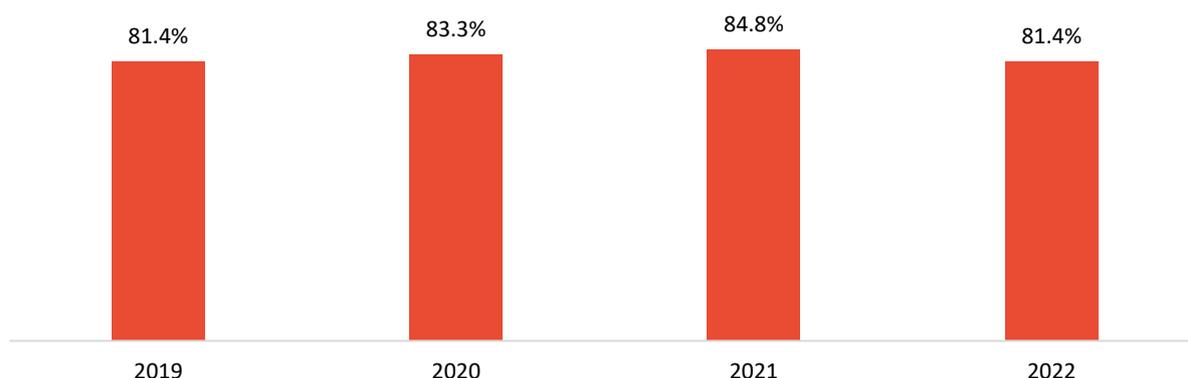
#### **What is their access to books at home?**

4 in 5 (81.4%) children aged 5 to 8 said in 2022 that they have a book of their own at home. However, this means that around 1 in 5 (18.6%) children aged 5 to 8 told us that they didn't have a book of their own. This is important because we know that children who reported that they have a book of their own are not only more engaged with reading but also six times more

likely to read above the level expected for their age than children who don't own a book (22% vs. 3.6%)<sup>1</sup>.

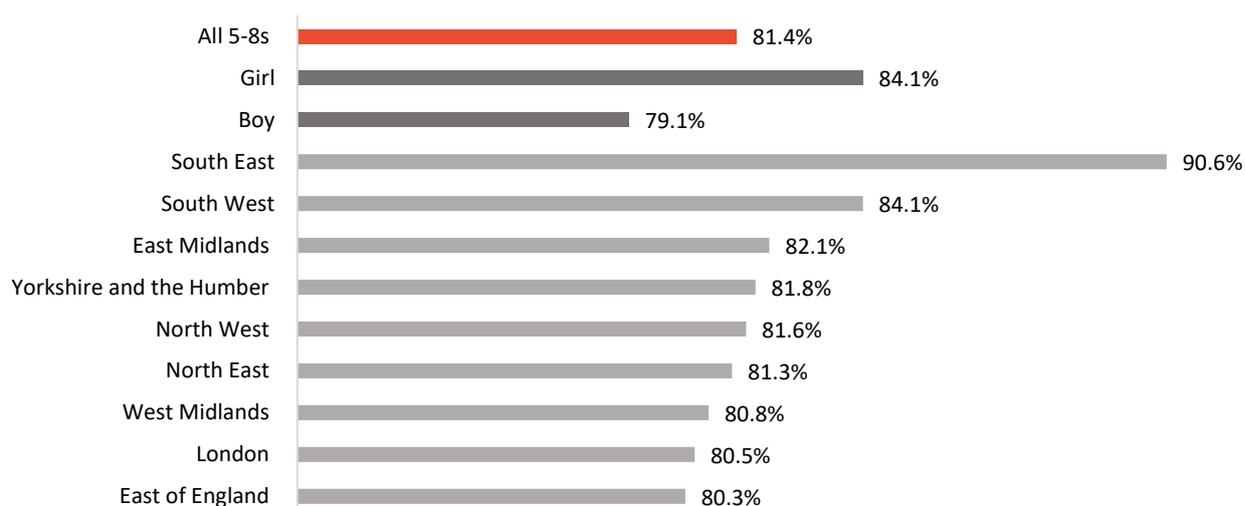
Book ownership has remained reasonably stable over the last four years (see Figure 1). Levels in 2022 are identical to levels reported in 2019. Levels increased slightly in 2020 and again in 2021, before dropping slightly by 3.4 percentage points in 2022.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who said that they have a book of their own at home between 2019 and 2022**



In 2022, more girls (84.1%) than boys (79.1%) said they have a book of their own at home (see Figure 2). Additionally, more of those in the South East<sup>2</sup> (90.6%), South West (84.1%) and East Midlands (82.1%) said that they have a book of their own at home. Those in the West Midlands (80.8%), London (80.5%) and East of England (80.3%) were less likely to say they had a book of their own at home, although these percentage differences were small.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who said in 2022 that they have a book of their own at home by gender and region**

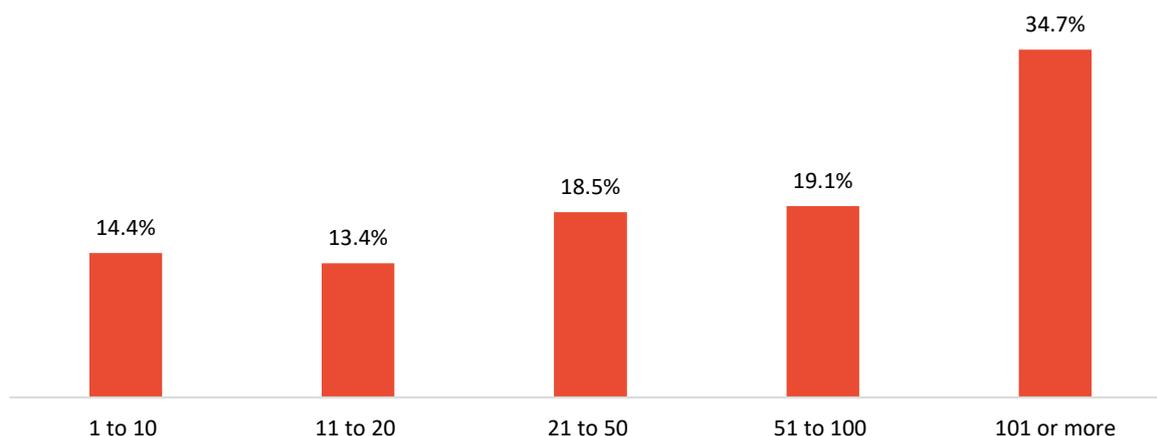


<sup>1</sup> [Gift of reading - research summary.pdf \(literacytrust.org.uk\)](https://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/gift-of-reading-research-summary/)

<sup>2</sup> We have included data from the South East throughout this report for comparison, although the sample size is smaller than that of the other regions.

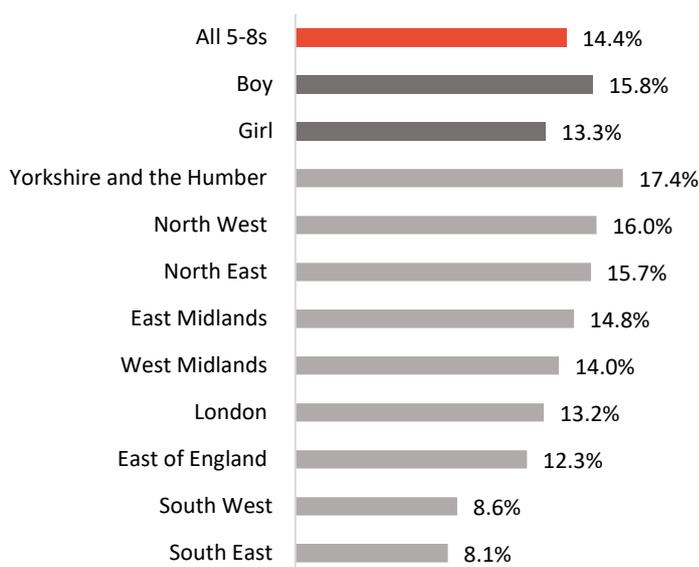
Of those aged 5 to 8 who said they had a book of their own at home, there was a reasonable amount of variation in the number of books they owned (see Figure 3). Indeed, about 1 in 7 (14.4%) of those aged 5 to 8 said that they had 10 or fewer books at home, while a similar amount said they had between 11 and 20 (13.5%). Almost 1 in 5 said they had between 21 and 50 (18.5%) and 51 and 100 (19.1%) books at home. One in 3 (34.7%) told us they had more than 100 books at home.

**Figure 3: Children’s estimate of the number of books in their home in 2022**



Looking at those who said they had 10 or fewer books (see Figure 4), slightly more boys (15.8%) than girls (13.3%) had fewer than 10 books at home. There were also some regional variations in the number of children who had fewer than 10 books at home, with twice as many children in Yorkshire and the Humber, the North West and the North East saying that they had fewer than 10 books at home compared with children in the South West and the South East.

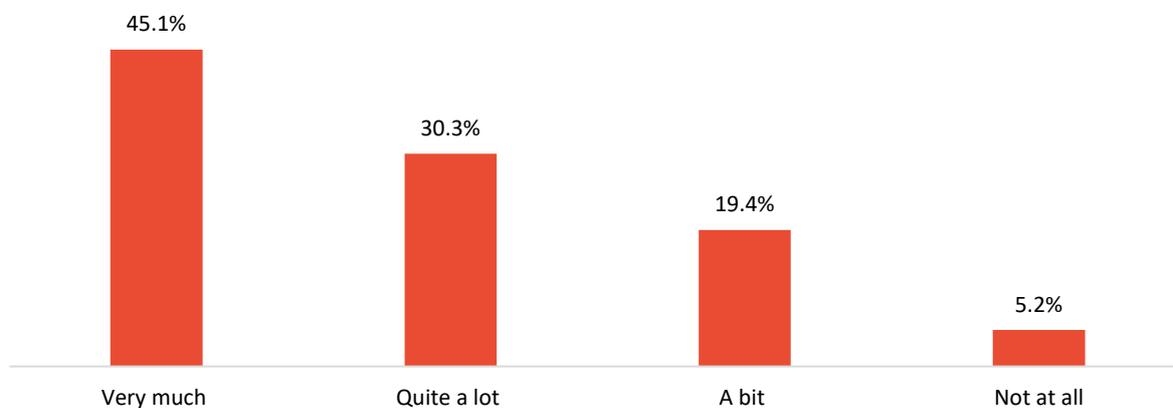
**Figure 4: Children age 5 to 8 in 2022 who said that they have fewer than 10 books by gender and region**



## How much do they enjoy reading?

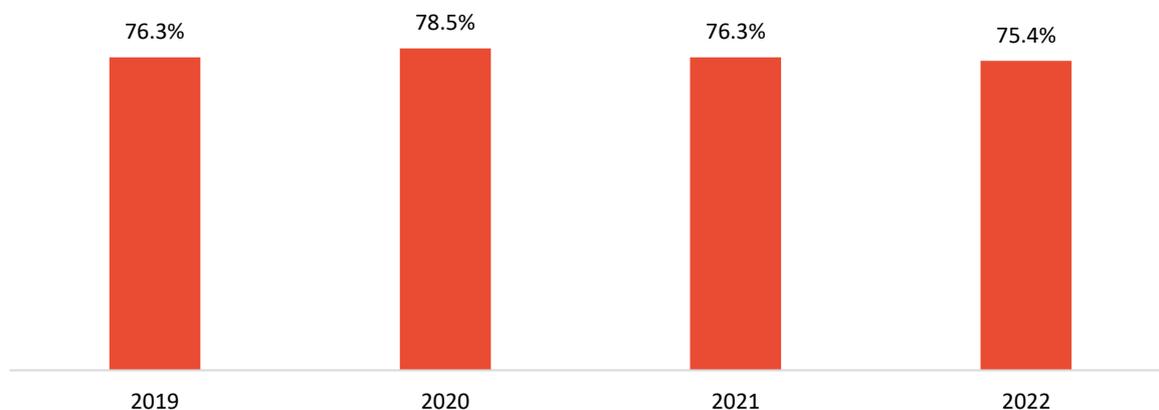
In 2022, 3 in 4 (75.4%) children aged 5 to 8 said that they enjoyed reading either 'very much' (45.1%) or 'quite a lot' (30.3%) (see Figure 5). 1 in 5 said that they only enjoyed reading a bit (19.4%) and 1 in 20 didn't enjoy reading at all (5.2%).

**Figure 5: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading in 2022**



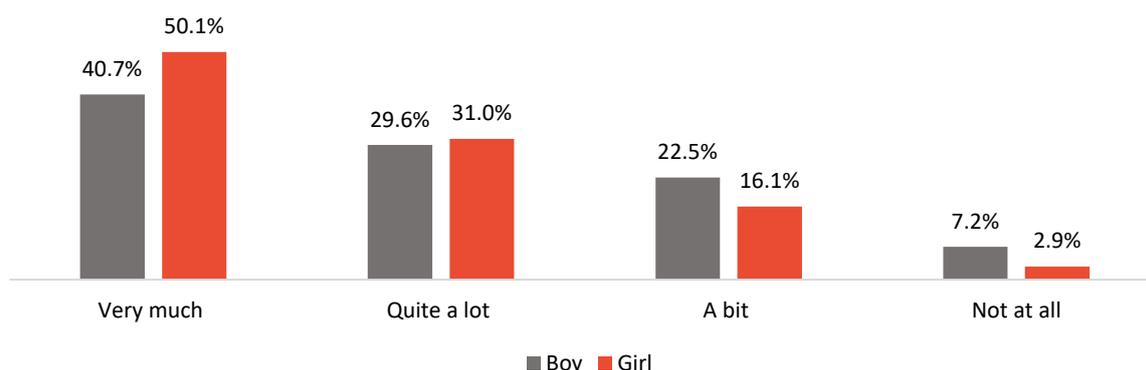
We've asked the same question about reading enjoyment since 2019. As shown in Figure 6, reading enjoyment in children aged 5 to 8 has remained relatively stable over the past four years, even during the pandemic. While reading enjoyment was lowest in 2022, it was only 0.9 percentage points down from the previous year.

**Figure 6: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading between 2019 and 2022**



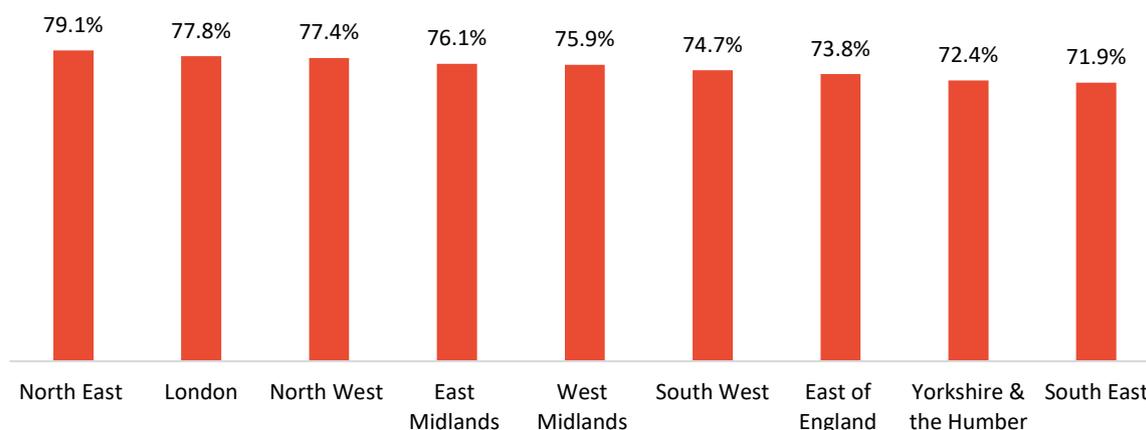
While half (50.1%) of girls said they enjoy reading 'very much' in 2022, only 2 in 5 (40.7%) boys said the same (see Figure 7). A similar percentage of girls (31.0%) and boys (29.6%) said they enjoy reading 'quite a lot', but more boys (22.5%) than girls (16.1%) said they only enjoy reading 'a bit'. Interestingly, while only 2.9% of girls said they don't enjoy reading at all, 7.2% of boys said the same.

**Figure 7: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading in 2022 by gender**



There were some regional differences in the degree to which children aged 5 to 8 enjoyed reading in 2022<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 8). Most notably, fewer children in the East of England (73.8%), Yorkshire and the Humber (72.4%), and the South East<sup>4</sup> (71.9%) said that they enjoyed reading, while children in the North East (79.1%), London (77.8%) and the North West (77.4%) were most likely to say that they enjoyed reading.

**Figure 8: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading in 2022 by region in England**



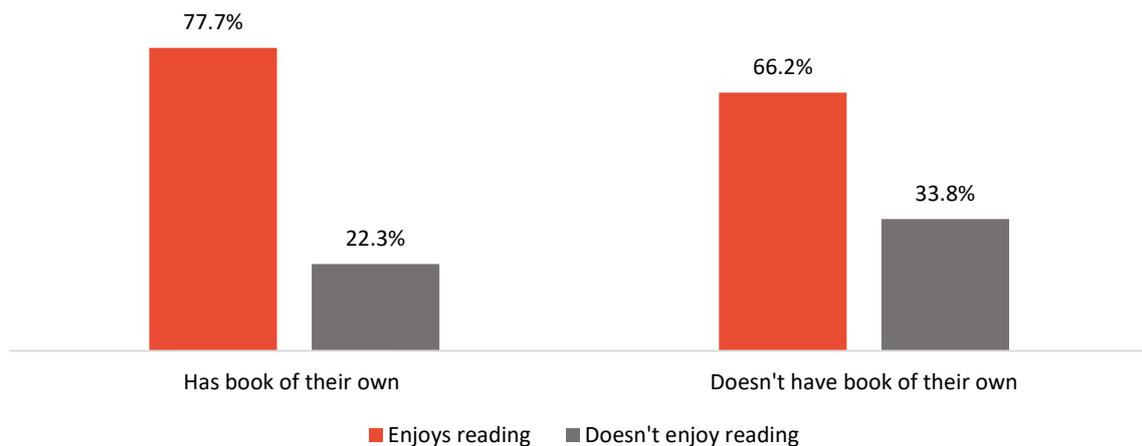
### Impact of book ownership on reading enjoyment

As shown in Figure 9, of those who said they have a book of their own at home, 3 in 4 (77.7%) enjoy reading, while only 2 in 3 (66.2%) of those who don't have a book of their own at home said the same. At the same time, 1 in 5 (22.3%) of those with a book of their own at home don't enjoy reading, compared with 1 in 3 (33.8%) of those who don't have a book of their own.

<sup>3</sup> We have included data from the South East throughout this report for comparison, although the sample size is smaller than that of the other regions.

<sup>4</sup> As per previous footnote

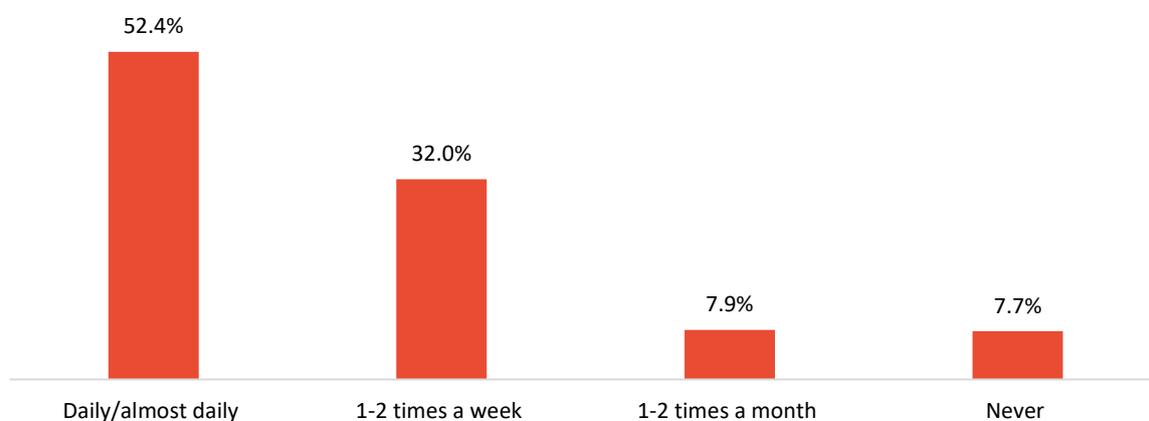
**Figure 9: Book ownership by reading enjoyment in 2022**



### How often do they read?

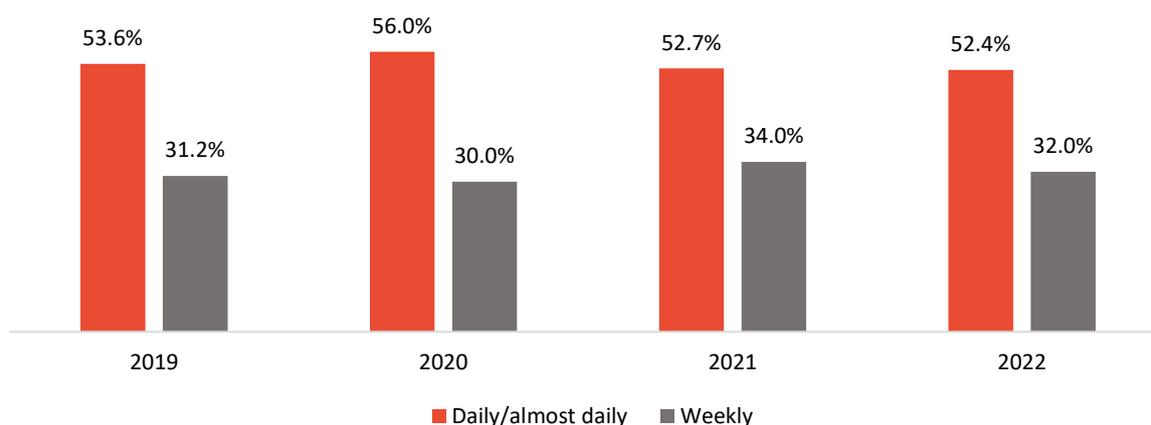
How often children read in their free time varied among children aged 5 to 8 in 2022, although over half (52.4%) said they read daily or almost daily (see Figure 10). 1 in 3 (32.0%) said they read 1-2 times a week, and 1 in 13 (7.9%) said they read 1-2 times a month. Only 7.7% of children aged 5 to 8 said that they never read.

**Figure 10: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read in their free time in 2022**



As shown in Figure 11, over the past four years, including throughout the pandemic, reading frequency has remained relatively stable. While fewer children aged 5 to 8 reported reading daily or almost daily in 2022 (52.4%), this was only 0.3 percentage points lower than in 2021. Similarly, the number of children who said they read weekly has remained relatively stable since 2019.

**Figure 11: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read daily or at least once a week between 2019 and 2022**



Looking in more detail at daily reading in 2022, more girls (56.9%) than boys (48.2%) said that they read daily (see Figure 12). Additionally, more of those in the South East (61.7%), London (59.7%) and South West (55.7%) said that they read daily, while fewer of those in Yorkshire and the Humber (50.2%), the North East (49.1%) and East Midlands (49.0%) said the same.

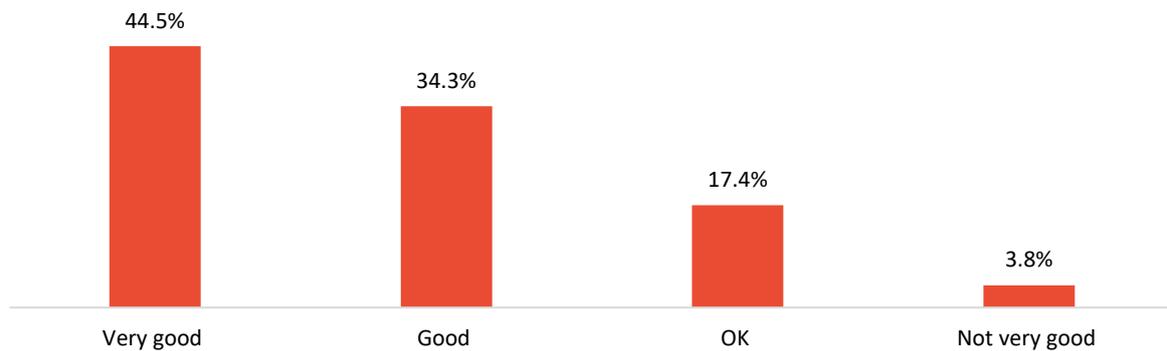
**Figure 12: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read daily in 2022 by gender and region**



### How do they rate their own reading ability?

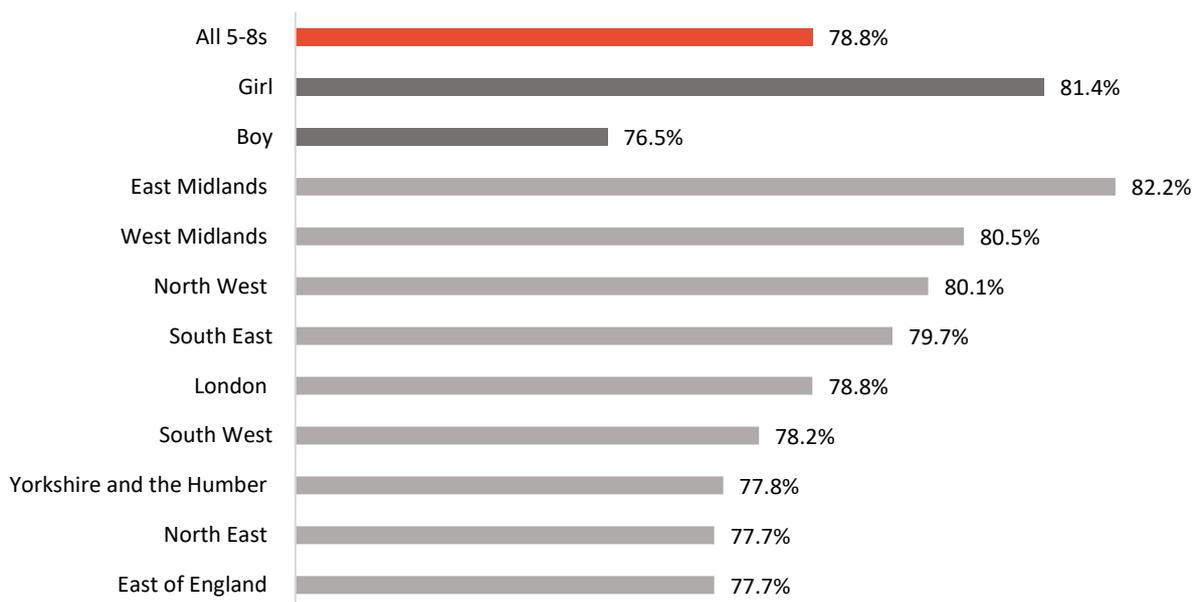
In 2022, 4 in 5 (78.8%) children aged 5 to 8 said they were ‘very good’ (44.5%) or ‘good’ (34.3%) readers (see Figure 13). Of the remaining fifth, 17.4% of children described their reading ability as ‘OK’ and, promisingly, only 3.8% said they were ‘not very good’ readers.

**Figure 13: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who rated their reading ability as very good, good, ok or not very good in 2022**



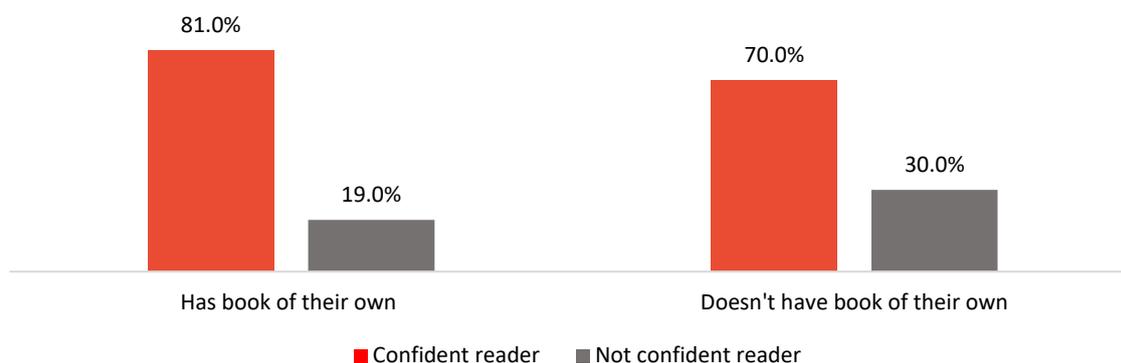
As shown in Figure 14, more girls rated themselves to be good readers than boys (81.4% vs 76.5%). More of those from the East (82.2%) and West Midlands (80.5%), as well as the North West (80.1%) rated themselves to be good readers, while those from Yorkshire and the Humber (77.8%), the North East (77.7%) and the East of England (77.7%) were less likely to do so.

**Figure 14: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who rated their reading ability in 2022 as either very good or good by gender and region**



Looking at the impact of book ownership on reading confidence, 4 in 5 (81.0%) of those with a book of their own at home rated themselves as good readers compared with 7 in 10 (70.0%) of those who don't have a book of their own (see Figure 15). At the same time, 1 in 5 (19.0%) of those with a book of their own at home didn't rate themselves as being good readers reading compared with almost 1 in 3 (30.0%) of those who don't have a book of their own at home.

**Figure 15: Impact of book ownership on children’s perception of their reading ability**

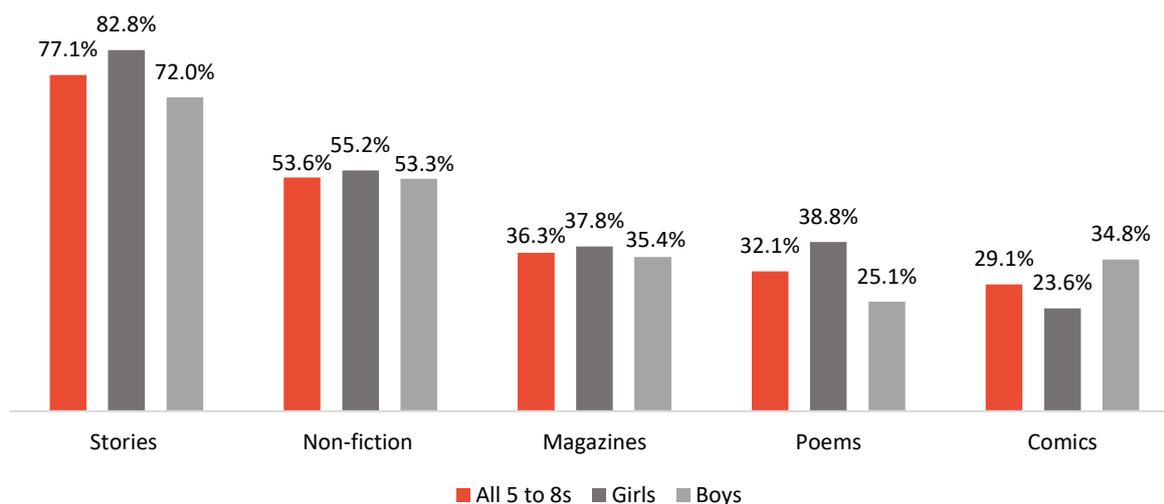


### What do they read?

We also asked what type of material children were reading (see Figure 16). 3 in 4 (77.1%) children said they read stories, while just over half (53.6%) said they read non-fiction. Interestingly, around 1 in 3 said they read magazines (36.3%) or poems (32.1%) and 29.1% said they read comics, which indicates a considerable diversity in the types of content children choose to read.

Looking at the types of materials read by gender, more girls (82.8%) than boys (72.0%) said that they read stories, while a similar percentage of girls and boys said that they read non-fiction (55.2% vs 53.3%) and magazines (37.8% and 35.4%). More girls (38.8%) than boys (25.1%) said that they read poems, while more boys (34.8%) than girls (23.6%) said that they read comics.

**Figure 16: Types of material that children read on paper, overall and by gender**



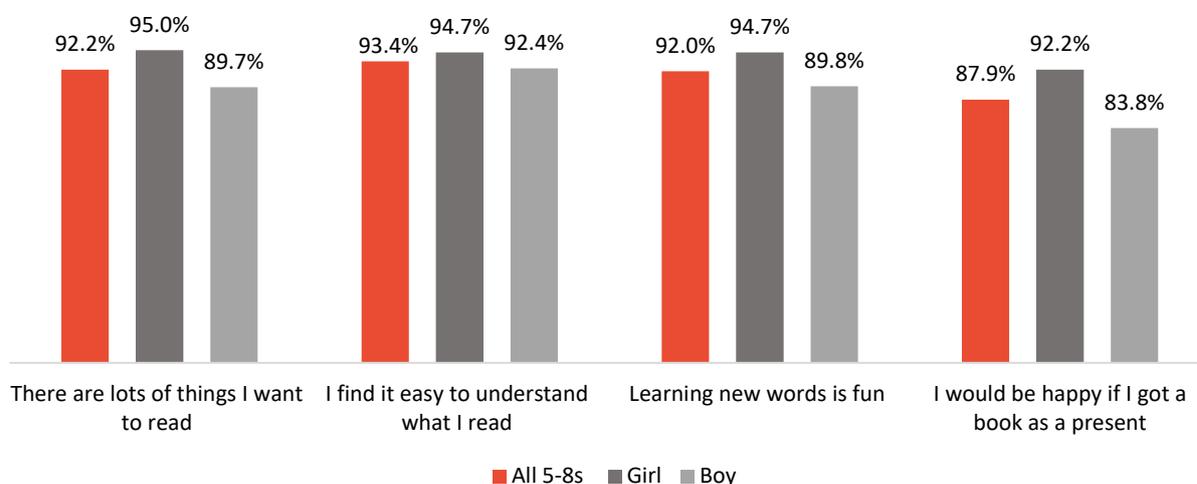
### What they think about reading

Attitudes towards books and reading were typically positive, with many children indicating their interest in reading and book ownership. As shown in Figure 17, 92.1% of children aged

5 to 8 agreed that there are lots of things that they would like to read. At the same time, 93.4% agreed with the statement 'I find it easy to understand what I read'. 92.0% of children agreed that learning new words is fun, demonstrating a predominantly positive attitude towards unfamiliar vocabulary. Finally, almost 9 in 10 (87.9%) children said that they would be happy if they got a book as a present.

Looking at reading attitudes by gender, 95.0% of girls agreed that there were lots of things they want to read compared with 9 in 10 (89.7%) boys (see Figure 17). A similar percentage of girls (94.7%) and boys (92.4%) said they find it easy to understand what they read. More girls than boys said that learning new words is fun (94.7% vs 89.8%). Finally, while around 9 in 10 (92.2%) girls said they would be happy if they got a book as a present, only around 8 in 10 (83.8%) boys said the same.

**Figure 17: Reading attitudes in 2022 for all children aged 5 to 8 and by gender**

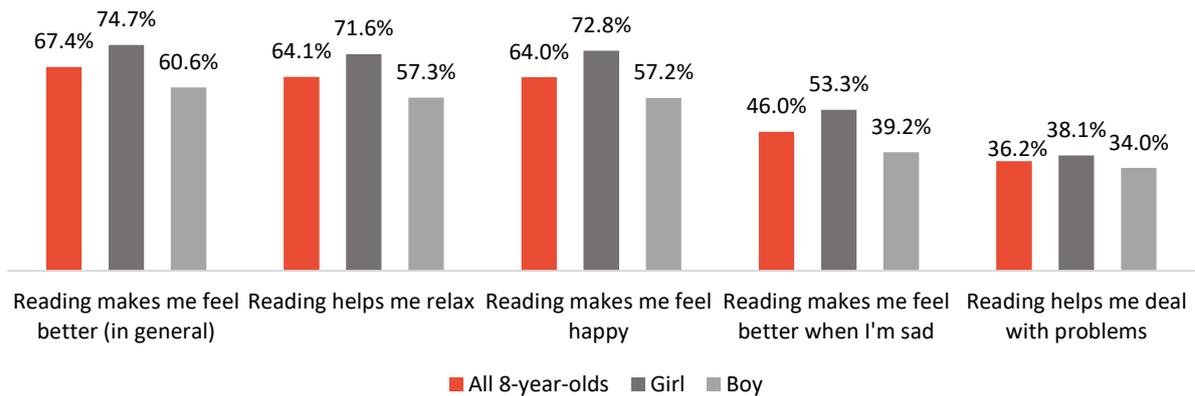


### Why they read: Reading to support mental wellbeing

Of the 2,130 8-year-olds who answered our survey for older pupils in 2022, 2 in 3 (67.4%) said that reading makes them feel better in general, while nearly 2 in 3 said that reading helps them relax (64.1%) or feel happy (64.0%) (see Figure 18). Nearly half (46.0%) said that reading makes them feel better when they are sad, while more than 1 in 3 (36.2%) said that reading helps them deal with their problems. This indicates that these 8-year-olds do indeed read to support their mental wellbeing.

While 3 in 4 girls (74.4%) said that reading makes them feel better, only 6 in 10 (60.6%) boys said the same (see Figure 18). Additionally, while around 7 in 10 girls said that reading helps them relax (71.6%) and makes them feel happy (72.8%), fewer than 6 in 10 boys said the same (57.3% and 57.2%). More than half of girls said that reading makes them feel better when they are sad (53.3%) compared with 2 in 5 boys (39.2%). Finally, a similar percentage of girls (38.1%) and boys (34.0%) said that reading helps them deal with their problems.

**Figure 18: Reading to support mental wellbeing in 2022 for all children aged 8 and by gender**

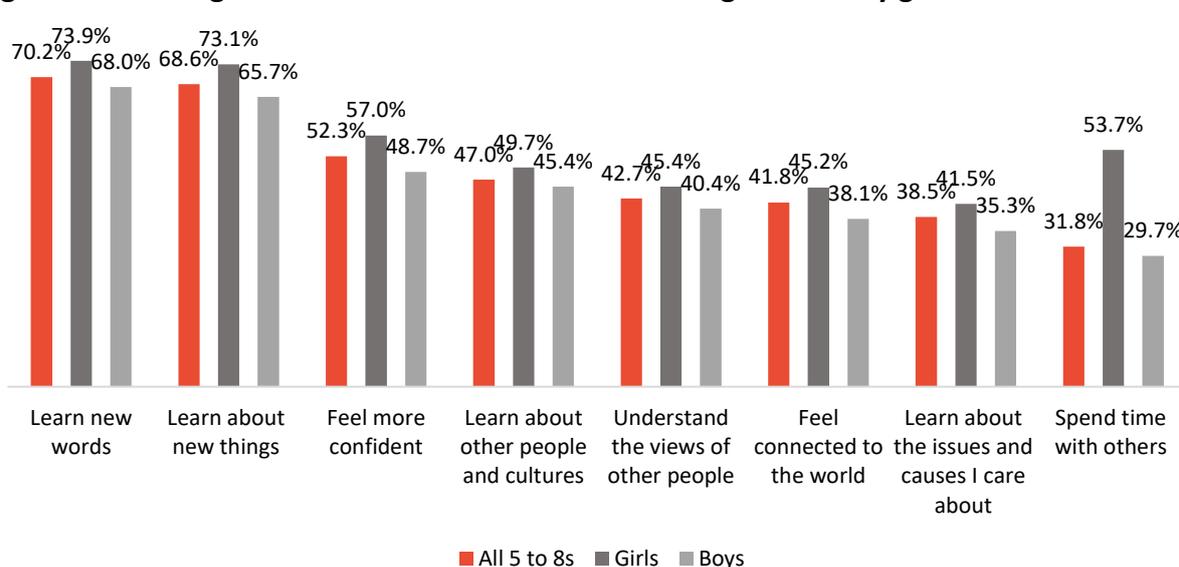


### What motivates them to read?

Finally, looking at reading motivations (see Figure 19), 7 in 10 (70.2%) children read to learn new words, while nearly 7 in 10 (68.6%) read to learn about new things. Around half of children read to feel more confident (52.3%) or to learn about other people and cultures (47.0%). Around 2 in 5 children read to understand the views of other people (42.7%), to feel connected to the world (41.8%), or to learn about the issues and causes they care about (38.5%). Finally, nearly 1 in 3 (31.8%) children read to spend time with others.

Looking now by gender, slightly more girls than boys said that they read to learn new words (73.9% vs 68.0%), to learn about new things (73.1% vs 65.7%) or to feel more confident (57.0% vs 48.7%). A similar percentage of girls and boys said that they read to learn about other people and cultures (49.7% and 45.4%), to understand the views of other people (45.4% and 40.4%), or to learn about the issues and causes they care about (41.5%). This may be indicative of reading to improve empathy, suggesting that girls and boys are equally likely to read to improve their understanding of the emotions and feelings of others. Interestingly, more girls than boys said that they read to feel connected to the world (45.2% vs 38.1%) and to spend time with others (53.7% vs 29.7%), indicating that more young girls read for social purposes.

**Figure 19: Reading motivations in 2022 for all children aged 8 and by gender**



## Conclusion

In sum, this report has highlighted not only the reading habits of 5- to 8-year-olds and their access to books in the home, but also the impact that their book ownership has on their reading enjoyment and confidence. One in 5 children told us they don't have a book of their own, and, of those who did, 1 in 7 had fewer than 10 books. Indeed, we know that book ownership can have far-reaching implications: children who reported that they have a book of their own are not only more engaged with reading but also six times more likely to read above the level expected for their age than children who don't own a book (22% vs. 3.6%)<sup>5</sup>. We also found that those with a book of their own were more likely to enjoy reading, and be confident in their reading ability.

Although at this young age there is already a sizeable percentage of children who do not enjoy reading, we also found that reading enjoyment, frequency and perceptions of their reading ability had remained high and stable across the last four years, even during the pandemic. Many children at this age read to support their mental wellbeing, with 2 in 3 saying that reading makes them feel better. Others also read to understand other people and cultures. Indeed, it was heartening to see that there was no difference in reading to empathise by gender, with a similar percentage of girls and boys saying that they read to improve their understanding of the emotions and feelings of others.

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<sup>5</sup> [Gift\\_of\\_reading\\_-\\_research\\_summary.pdf \(literacytrust.org.uk\)](https://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/gift-of-reading-research-summary)

## Acknowledgements

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## About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

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