

**CHILDREN'S CLASSICS ARE GATHERING DUST ON THE SHELVES,
ACCORDING TO RESULTS OF NEW SURVEY**

Traditional children's literary classics are in danger of disappearing from our culture, a survey has revealed.

While Harry Potter continues to storm the book charts, old favourites such as *Treasure Island*, *Swallows and Amazons* and *Little Women* are being read less and less by younger generations. In many cases, today's youngsters have not even heard of the masterpieces enjoyed by their parents and grandparents.

The survey of more than 2,000 parents across the UK revealed that 78% believed their children were not being introduced to traditional literary classics.

And the findings of the survey, commissioned to mark the launch of an ambitious city-wide *Treasure Island* reading project in Bristol, appear to justify their fears.

- Robert Louis Stevenson's famous tale has been read by only 5% of youngsters, although two-thirds knew of the story of Long John Silver, Jim Hawkins and Squire Trelawney.
- Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* was less well known but slightly better read – only 58% of youngsters had 'heard of it' but 6% had read it.
- More children knew of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – 74%, but still only 12% had read it.
- *Peter Pan* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, were both known by every youngster yet only 12% had read JM Barrie's tale compared to 81% who had read JK Rowling's.

Despite the findings, more than half of parents polled read to their children and 78 per cent encourage them to read books they enjoyed as a child. Just as importantly, TV, film and radio adaptations are doing their bit to keep classics in the public eye and often prompt children to read them in book form.

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The film of *Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone* had been seen by 98% of children, while 81% had watched or listened to an adaptation of Peter Pan. Nearly a third of children (32%) had enjoyed a dramatisation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (32%) and similar numbers had seen or heard *The Secret Garden* (31%). Film or broadcast adaptations of *Treasure Island* were familiar to 16% of those asked.

The top three favourite books from the survey are all from the last 100 years – with the Harry Potter books in first place, followed by *Winnie the Pooh* (AA Milne) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Roald Dahl). Nearly half the children asked said that action (25%) or adventure (21%) was their favourite genre.

Andrew Kelly, director of Bristol's European Capital of Culture 2008 bid, which is organising the Treasure Island initiative to get more people of all ages reading, says, "It is sad to see the great classics slipping out of our children's lives.

"While we are delighted that books such as JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* adventures encourage reading among children, they are just the latest in a legacy of great books.

"To redress the balance we are encouraging everyone in Bristol to join in a city-wide reading of *Treasure Island*, one of the great classics of our literary heritage. The action-packed adventure has strong local links and appeals to children and adults alike".

The 'great reading adventure' started in Bristol's schools, businesses, libraries and book clubs in February and will run until early spring, with most activities taking place in the first week of March to coincide with World Book Day. A 'film weekend', lectures and short story competitions are planned. Companies are establishing new reading groups and the women's prison, HMP Eastwood Park, is taking part. Penguin Books is supporting the initiative through the donation of 8,000 copies of the classic book.

Nigel Wilcockson, Publisher of Classics at Penguin Books said: "We are absolutely delighted to be involved in this wonderfully exciting project.

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“Penguin has always prided itself on bringing classic works of literature to as a wide a readership as possible, and this seems a perfect way to share one of the most outstanding of all adventure stories with the people of Bristol. Coming as it does in a year when Penguin is embarking on a hugely ambitious relaunch of our world-famous Classics list, the venture will also help re-popularise the classics and offer people a wonderful reminder of the wealth and variety of great literature of the past.”

The idea of ‘one book, one city’ originated in the US, with successful campaigns run in Seattle and Chicago. This will be the first time that a city-wide project of this type and on such a huge scale will have been attempted in the UK.

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Notes to Editors

For a full copy of the survey results, please call Strategy PR on 0117 983 6400

If Wallace and Gromit image is to be used, please incorporate the following credit:
‘Wallace and Gromit’s Treasure Island© Aardman Animations 2003’

The Treasure Island project is part of Bristol’s bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2008 and is supported by Bristol City Council, South West Arts, Society of Merchant Venturers, Arts & Business, Penguin Books, Bristol Evening Post, GWR FM, Aardman Animations and others.

Bristol is one of six shortlisted cities bidding to be European Capital of Culture. The others are Liverpool, Newcastle and Gateshead, Birmingham, Cardiff and Oxford. The Prime Minister is expected to announce the final decision next spring.

Issued on behalf of Bristol 2008 by Strategy PR.

MEDIA CONTACT: KEVIN COUGHLAN or KATY COSH on 0117 983 6400