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In a digital age, parents value printed books for their kids

BY **KATHRYN ZICKUHR**

Parents who have minor children at home are a relatively tech-savvy group. They are more likely than other adults to have computers, internet access, smartphones, and tablet computers. (This relatively high tech use may be due to the fact that parents with minor children living at home **tend to also be younger** than other adults.) They are also more likely than adults without children to read e-books.

But as parents adopt new reading habits for themselves on electronic devices, the data show that print books remain important when it comes to their children.

More than nine in ten parents of minor children say it is important to them that their children read print books—eighty-one percent say it is “very important,” and an additional 13% say it is “somewhat important.” Very few say having their children read print books is “not too important” (3%) or “not important at all” (3%).

E-reading has been **on the rise**—some 23% of Americans ages 16 and older read an e-book in 2012, up from 16% the year before. **The proportion of American adults who own an e-reading device is increasing** as well, with 31% of adults ages 18 and older now owning a tablet and 26% owning an e-reader. And even at the end of 2011, over a third of tablet and e-reader owners who did long-form reading in digital format **said they were reading more** due to the availability of e-content.

When it comes to sharing books or reading with a child, most Americans adults (not just parents) who have read both print and e-books **think that print books are the better option**.

So why do parents want their children exposed to print? We don't know exactly. But Pew Research gained some insight from a recent in-person focus groups.

Modeling the Reading Habit: Some parents may want their children to have the same pleasant book-reading experience they remember from when they themselves were children. In fact, one parent from the focus group said that reading printed books himself was important because it helped him model reading habits for his children:

“I'm reading like a book [on a tablet] and my children don't know if I'm reading a book or if I'm playing on Twitter, so I think it's important to have the book so that they go, ‘Oh Dad's reading’ . . . not just, ‘Oh he's updating his Facebook page.’ I think there is like a difference in that.”

Many parents described positive memories of their early reading habits and library use, memories centered around print books. One said that picking up books from the library was a reward for good behavior:

“My parents were real big on [the library]. It was a treat for us, twice a week after church . . . You behave, you [get] to go to the library and get a book, get two books if you're real good, read them that week and bring them back.”

A Sensory Experience: Some think that children's books, which often feature large illustrations and may incorporate various tactile elements, aren't as well suited to e-ink or touchscreens. And given the relative newness of e-reading and uncertainty around [the effects of reading on screens](#), some parents may simply want to temper the exposure their children have to digital materials. “Somehow, I think it's different,” Alexandra Tyler told [the New York Times](#). “When you read a book, a proper kid's book, it engages all the senses. It's teaching them to turn the page properly. You get the smell of paper, the touch.”

What do you think? Do you prefer some formats for your own reading, and others for reading with children?

Topic [E-reading](#)



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