

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
HEADLINE FINDINGS  
28 MAY 2012**

### Top Words

- It is great to see that *mum* and *friend* are in the top ten nouns used by the children.
- The most common noun is *door* – used 67,783 times! With only 500 words to play with, opening or closing doors is a great plot device to begin or move the story on.
- Girls use the word *school* a lot – but it isn't in the boys' top ten nouns.
- Children love their pets. The number one animal is *dog* followed by *cat*, *rabbit*, and *hamster*. Children also write about more unusual pets, like *snakes* and *tarantulas*, and imagined ones, like *dragons* and *unicorns*.
- Both boys and girls have *cars* in their stories (the word was used 21,265 times) but boys are much more likely to mention exactly the type of car (*Ferrari*, *BMW*, *Ford*) than girls.
- Lots of famous people feature in the stories but by far the most popular is *Chris Evans* himself, followed by *Jacqueline Wilson*, *Messi*, *Justin Bieber*, *Jessie J*, and *president Obama*.
- The most popular names used in the stories are *Jack* for boys and *Lucy* for girls.
- Children of 9 years & under are more likely to use playground vocabulary in their writing than older children, e.g. *baddies*, *fairyland*, *pirates*, *moshlings*.
- The key words for older children of 10-13 years suggest a growing interest in the 'darker' side of life, e.g. *depression*, *oblivious*, *anxiety*, *adrenalin*.
- The top key words boys use relate to army and football, e.g. *sniper*, *grenade*, *nuclear*, *commander*, and *penalty* and *goalkeeper*.
- Key words girls use relate to fantasy and girls' hobbies, e.g. *fairies*, *pony*, *ballet*, *mermaid*, and *princesses*.

### Spelling and Punctuation

- Children know or take the time to check the spelling of unusual or technical words. Children as young as 7 spell *pterodactyl*, *palomino*, *archaeologist*, and *spectacular* correctly, almost 100% of the time. However, children have difficulty spelling more common words such as *don't* and *doesn't*.
- The exclamation mark is a favourite piece of punctuation. It was used 351,731 times!
- The poor old apostrophe is often misused.

- Adults are sometimes concerned that children's spelling will be affected by 'txtspk' – but young writers 'know the difference'. It is only used when a text message is included in the story.
- US vocabulary and spelling is influencing UK children's writing, with some US terms now existing alongside UK terms, especially in the 10-13 age group, e.g. *flashlight, garbage truck, trash can, sidewalk, sneakers, soda, tuxedo*. Both US and UK English appear in some sentences: *They have a drink of soda each and porridge to help their brain power. I walked onto the cobbled pavement, opening the metal trashcan.*

### Invented Words

- The children are wonderfully inventive, particularly in their use of technology, e.g. *apps* are now being used as ways to enter a fantasy world, like the earlier rabbit holes or wardrobes. Genetic experimentation is another popular topic: *He said that I was a clone spliced from a human and a reptile.*
- There are lots of brilliant similes: *as saggy as a baboons bum; as tall as a dozen giraffes standing on top of each other; as soft as a new bought dressing gown from M and S; as puzzled as a baby doing proper fractions.*
- Great made-up words for places: *Knickerville, Hidocidron, Land of Woopa Woopa, Pigsville, Bootroad Manor, Azkabanian River, Paragraph Forest & Metaphor Lane.*
- Fantastic names: *Quanan, Hibeosus, Gom* (who are aliens), *Sir Lostalot, Charlie Chewsalot, Wackadoodle maniac, King Drunkenstein, Prince Roastbeef.*
- New and futuristic gadgets in spy and sci-fi stories: *fingerlaser, electrospecs, a zaporator* (to shrink planets), a *shrinkiniser*, an *electrostone* (to disable electrical circuits), a *shutdownotron*, and a *takeovertheworldinator*; *telepaper* (visual newspaper), *hologrammails, galactagraph, astro-bus.*
- A range of robotic hybrids: *dino-droid, Cyclo-bot* (a robotic Cyclops), *dog-bot* or *robo-dog, bandit-bot, teacherbot.*
- Magical creatures/monsters: *sharkbaragator* (third shark, third bear and a third alligator), *drogen* (half-dog, half-dragon), *Minosaur, werbat, were-croc*; e.g. *The Minosaur had the tail of a scorpion, tusks of mammoths, a head of a witch and legs of a horse.*  
Humorous hybrid creatures: *pandaroo, parraphant.*  
Made-up dinosaurs: *chocolateosaurus, spottysaurus.*
- New branches of study and specialists: *experimentology, monsterologist, robopsychologist.*
- We also have amazing titles: *How biscuits, mustard and prune juice can save the world...*
- Fantastic story openers: *It was the night I became a hero with my pyjamas turned inside out.*

## Unusual Words

- There is a fantastic range of sophisticated words used throughout the stories. Many are surprising because they are very unusual or showed very creative ways of using descriptive words, e.g.

BOYS 9 YEARS & UNDER: *galactical, pyramidal, spherical* (words relating to space and shape) *elven-cloaked, trench-like, spectre-like* (illustrative compounds), *cerulean-blue scaly wings, titanic white serrated teeth* (phrases)

BOYS 10-13 YEARS: *ominous* (used to describe a character's goatee beard), *caliginous, cybernetic, fathomless, labyrinthine, pulchritudinous, bloodsucking, bone-shattering, dragon like, horror-struck, piranha-infested, soul-warming, terror-stricken*

GIRLS 9 YEARS & UNDER: *apotropaic, crocodilian, lachrymose, rancid, sumptuous; He did make lots of crocodilian friends at the zoo*

GIRLS 10-13 YEARS: *acrid, bodacious, caliginous, nefarious, parsimonious, stentorian, vulpine, maggot-infested, saliva-cobwebbed, wraith-like.*

## Research

- Children showed knowledge or willingness to research subject vocabulary for their chosen topic, e.g.
  - over 20 types of dinosaur, including less well-known types: *carcharodontosaurus, coelophys, eudimorphodon, and muttaburrasaurus*
  - medieval knights equipped with *chainmail, visor, greaves, and gauntlets*
  - Roman coins (*denarius* and *sestertius*) and types of gladiator (*retiarius* with *trident*)
  - ancient Egyptian *sarcophagi* (which is the correct plural), *canopic jars*, and *shabti* (funerary figurines)
  - martial arts terms such as *sensei* (master) and *dojo* (training school)
  - scientists and experts such as *egyptologists, entomologists, volcanologists*, and the more unusual *selenologist* (a scientist who studies the moon)
  - collective nouns for groups of animals: *a pod of Narwhals; a school of clown fish; a giant shoal of anchovies.*