



*Celebrating*  
**30 Years**  
of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

**Changing Children's Lives One  
Book at a Time: A Worldwide  
Study of Shared Book Reading**



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United Way Australia



# Outline of Presentation

## **Introduction & Background**

Importance of shared book reading

PhD outline

## **Sample Study – Tamworth, Australia**

Key findings

Insights from qualitative feedback

## **Worldwide Research**

Study design

Key findings

## **Conclusions**



“Immunize kids against illiteracy, break out a book in infancy”

- American Academy of Pediatrics



## Systematic Review & Meta Analysis

Published: *Frontiers in Language Sciences*

01

## Sample Study: Tamworth Australia

Published: *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*

02

## Worldwide Study

Currently under peer review: *Reading Research Quarterly*

03

## Thesis: Awarded 2025

Completed through  
Macquarie University

04

# PhD

# The impact of shared book reading on children and their families: Insights from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library



**MACQUARIE**  
University  
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA



# Imagination Library Research: Tamworth, Australia

# Tamworth

**Home of country music in Australia**

**Sister City to Nashville**

**Population > 63,000**

**Nearly 4,000 square miles**

**5.5 hours drive North-east of Sydney**



# Tamworth

## Study

Longitudinal study birth to 3 years of 89 caregivers and their children.

## Results

- Children in the Imagination Library in Tamworth were being read to more often, for longer and had more books in the home than the average Australian child.
- Participation in the program supported the caregiver's role as the child's first teacher by establishing early, regular reading routines.
- These routines were maintained and associated with improved emerging literacy skills in children by age three.

**Dolly Parton's  
IMAGINATION LIBRARY**  
Book Tip Sheet

**Big Rain Coming**  
*Katrina Germein and Bronwyn Bancroft*

This beautifully illustrated book introduces children to life in the north of Australia. It's about a storm slowly building every day of the week until finally the rain arrives. And children will enjoy joining in with the repeated refrain, 'still no rain.'



**BEFORE READING...**

- ▶ Sit together and looking at the cover, talk about what you see.
- ▶ Talk about how sometimes we wait and wait for rain to come, especially if it's been a hot day.



**WHILE READING...**

- ▶ Encourage your child to join in with you when you read 'still no rain.' You might hold your arms outstretched with your palms facing upwards to show that you are feeling for raindrops.
- ▶ Talk about why we need the rain and how we use water for gardens, for washing and for drinking. See what else your child can come up with.



**AFTER READING...**

- ▶ Re-read this book and recite the days of the week. See if your child can remember on what day different events from the story occurred, e.g. on Wednesday the children swam in the billabong.
- ▶ Together you might like to create some drawings like the beautiful pictures in this story to show what your house would look like if you didn't have rain for a week.



# Tamworth: Qualitative Findings



"I never knew reading to babies was a thing."

"Leaving the tip sheets on the fridge were another gentle reminder."

"The library has helped me so much and I am feeling more confident to read the books after watching the library lady read the program books out loud in the library."

"My kids couldn't believe that kids of their colour could fly a plane, they really looked into it a lot deeper."

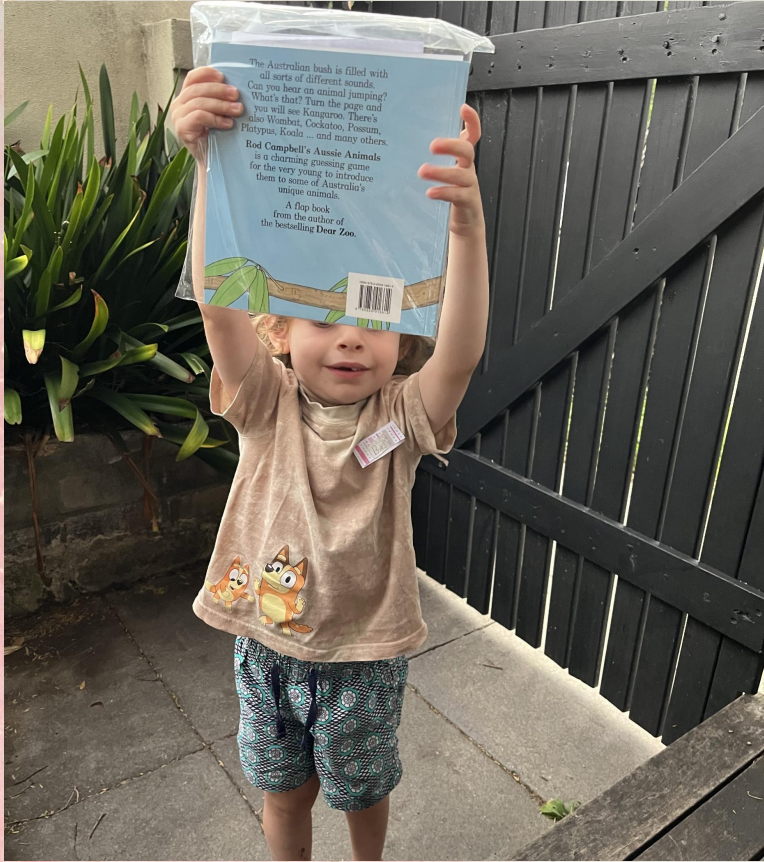
"The Imagination Library is about strengthening our community and forging a generation of early childhood literacy at the forefront."

"Because the children all have access to the Dolly Parton books ... by every child getting the program ... they are all familiar with the characters in the books, which gives the children a connection."



## Imagination Library Research: Worldwide Study





**Dream**  
More

# Worldwide Study

## Study

Longitudinal study over 12 months

Caregivers of children born in Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) who joined the program between October 10, 2022, and April 24, 2023, were invited to join the research.

## Data Collection

Surveys completed on Alchemer (5-7 minutes)

De-identified data analyzed

# Worldwide Study: Logic Model



# Worldwide Study: Participants

	WORLDWIDE	US	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	UK + IRELAND
Baseline	<b>86,206</b> <b>(26% response rate)</b>	80,835 (26% response rate)	1,275 (11% response rate)	2,817 (41% response rate)	1,279 (23% response rate)
Survey 2	<b>34,435</b> <b>(41% of baseline)</b>	33,015 (41% of baseline)	529 (41% of baseline)	1,327 (47% of baseline)	564 (44% of baseline)
Survey 3	<b>18,072</b> <b>(21% of baseline)</b>	16,863 (21% of baseline)	237 (19% of baseline)	738 (26% of baseline)	274 (21% of baseline)

# Statistical Analysis



Learn  
More

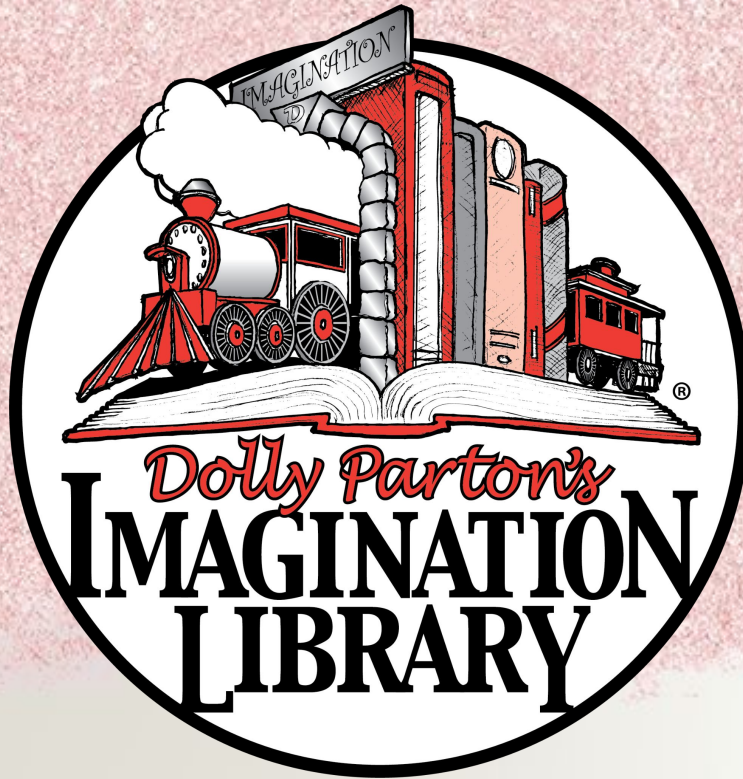
## Analyses

Logistic regression was used to calculate the relative odds of the Imagination Library group (N=18,072) experiencing each outcome compared to a comparison group (N=37,896) controlling for potential confounds.

## Confounds:

- Socioeconomic deprivation
- Country
- Caregiver education
- Child age
- Importance caregivers place on reading
- Frequency caregivers were read to as a child

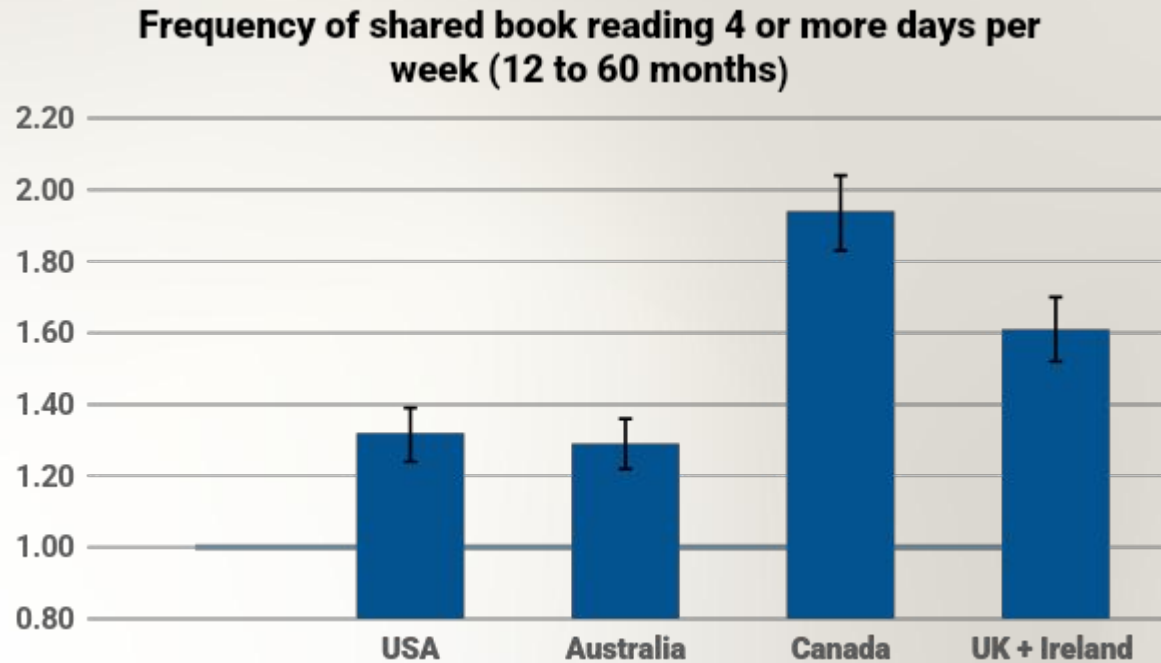
Overall: 12 to 60 months			
12 to 23 months	24 to 35 months	36 to 47 months	48 to 60 months



## Part 1: Home Literacy Environment

# Worldwide Results: Home Literacy Environment

Children not read to at home are six times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable in areas like language and cognitive skills.\* **Children in the Imagination Library were more likely to be read to 4 or more days a week compared to children not in the program.**



\*Vulnerability & Disadvantage in early Childhood Report, Phase 2, April 2024 (Commissioned by the Department of Education, Australia. Undertaken by Murdoch Children's Research Institute, April 2024).

# Statistical Modeling

## How the modeling works

Using multiplication, we can determine the odds, or chance of other scenarios

## Examples

Canada = **1.322** x 1.469 = 1.94

“Nearly twice as likely”

UK + Ireland and Bachelors Education =

**1.322** x 1.215 x 1.575 = 4.11

“Over 4 times more likely”

Australia and least deprivation and read to as a child

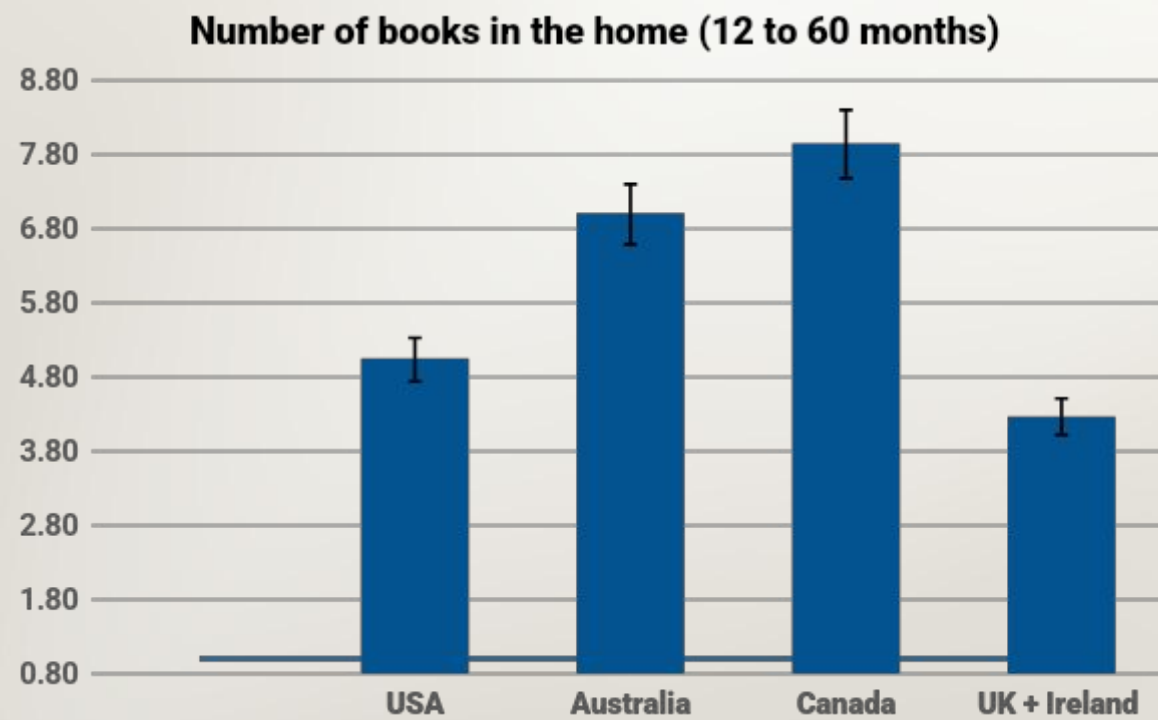
= **1.322** x 1.911 x 2.066 = 5.22

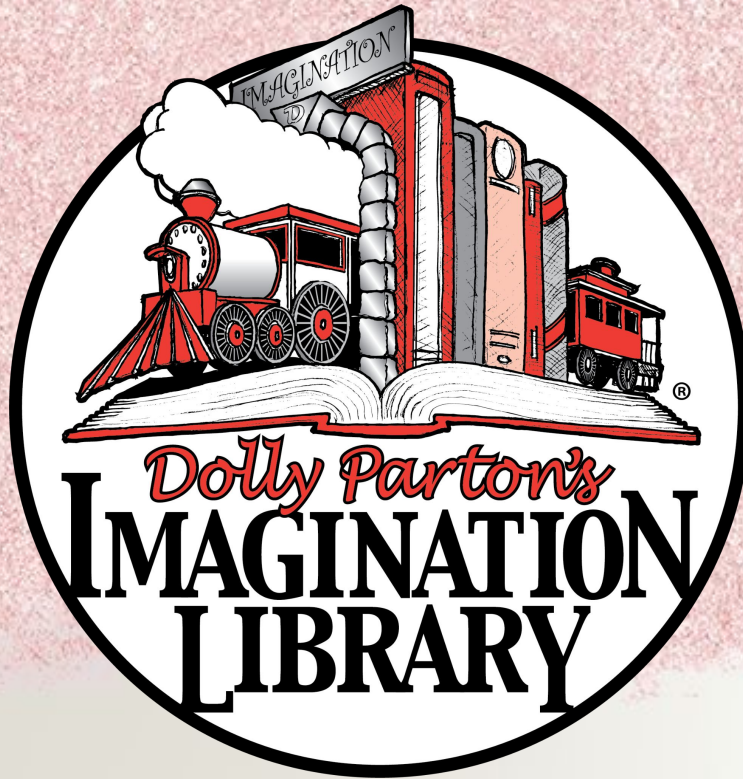
“Over 5 times more likely”

Reading 4 or more days per week	Odds Ratio
Imagination Library (N=18036) versus Comparison Group (N=37776)	<b>1.322</b>
<b>Most deprived</b>	<b>1</b>
Least deprived	1.911
Middle deprived	1.320
<b>Caregiver highest education = School</b>	<b>1</b>
Caregiver highest education = Diploma	1.081
Caregiver highest education = Bachelor's	1.575
Caregiver highest education = Postgraduate	1.770
Age of child at baseline (years)	0.973
<b>Country = USA</b>	<b>1</b>
Country = Australia	0.972
Country = Canada	1.469
Country = UK + Ireland	1.215
<b>Caregiver read to as a child (Never, Rarely, Sometimes)</b>	<b>1</b>
Caregiver read to as a child (Most days, Always)	2.066
<b>Important to read (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral)</b>	<b>1</b>
Important to read (Strongly agree, agree)	1.549
Constant	1.027

# Worldwide Results: Home Literacy Environment

Having books in the home is a key factor in early literacy development. **Children in the Imagination Library were more likely to have 25 or more books in the home compared to children not in the program.**



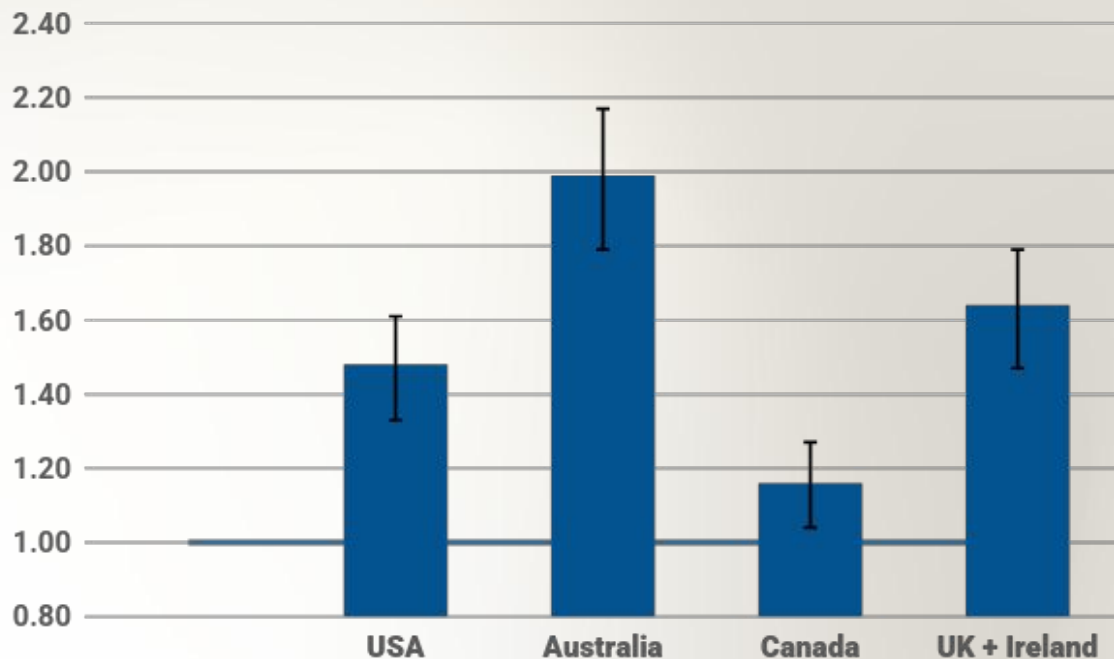


## Part 2: Reading Attitudes and Interactions

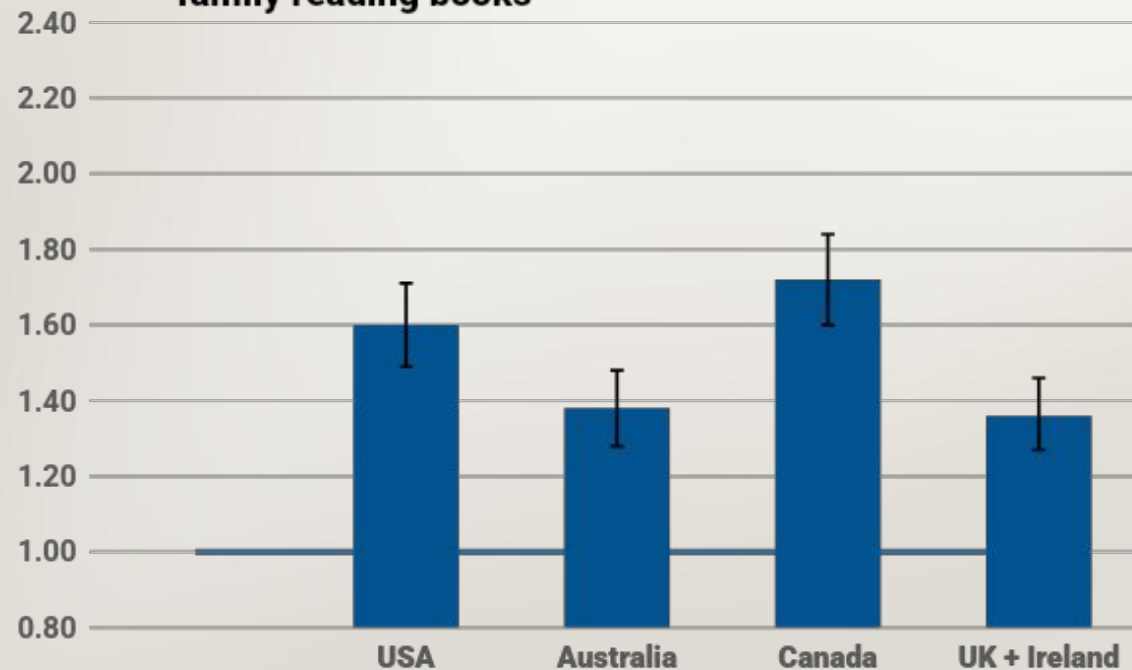
# Worldwide Results: Caregiver Reading Attitudes and Interactions

Sustained engagement in literacy activities is key to reducing developmental vulnerabilities.

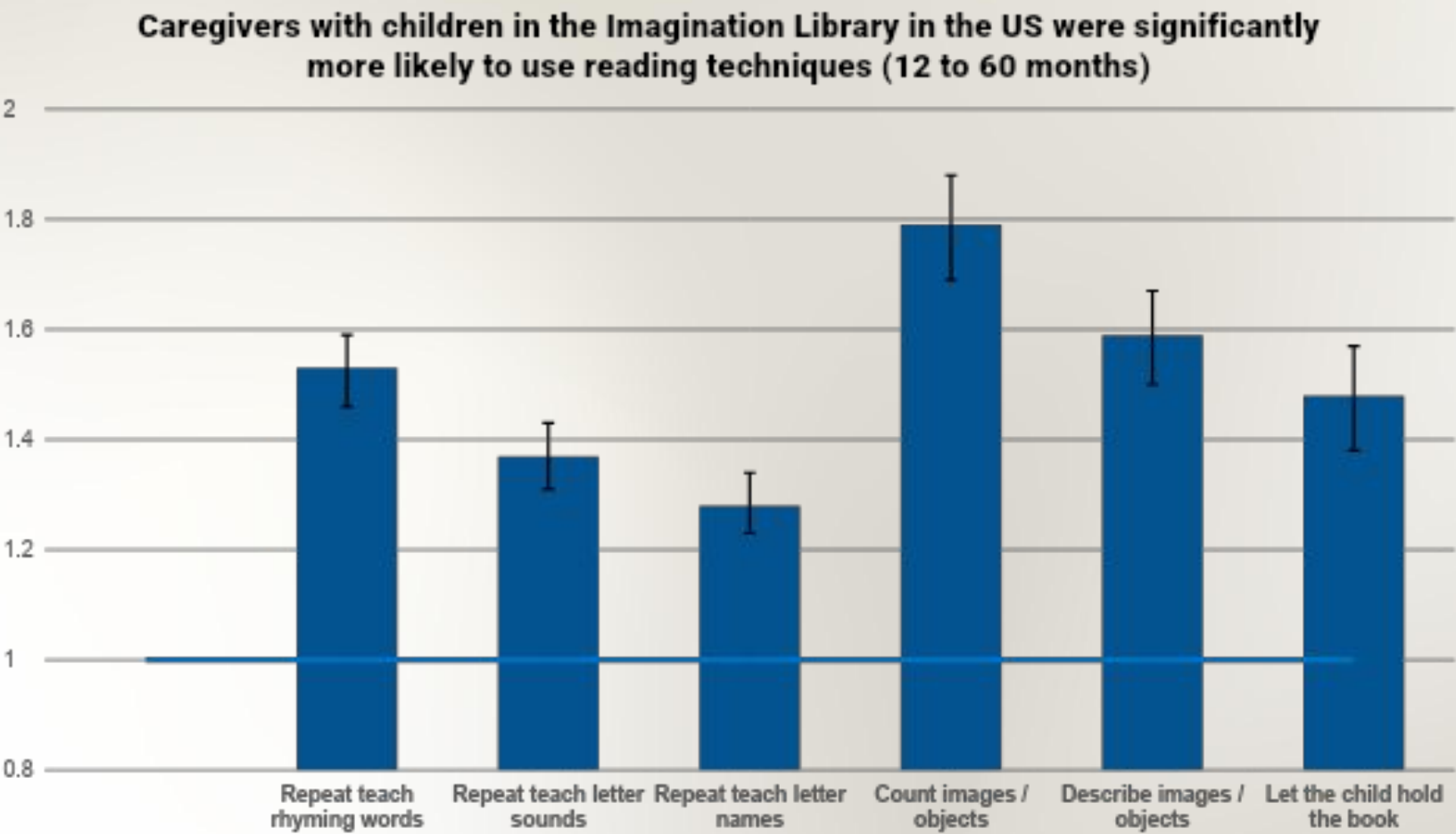
**Caregivers with children in the Imagination Library were significantly more likely to find reading more enjoyable**



**Caregivers with children in the Imagination Library were significantly more likely to spend quality time as a family reading books**

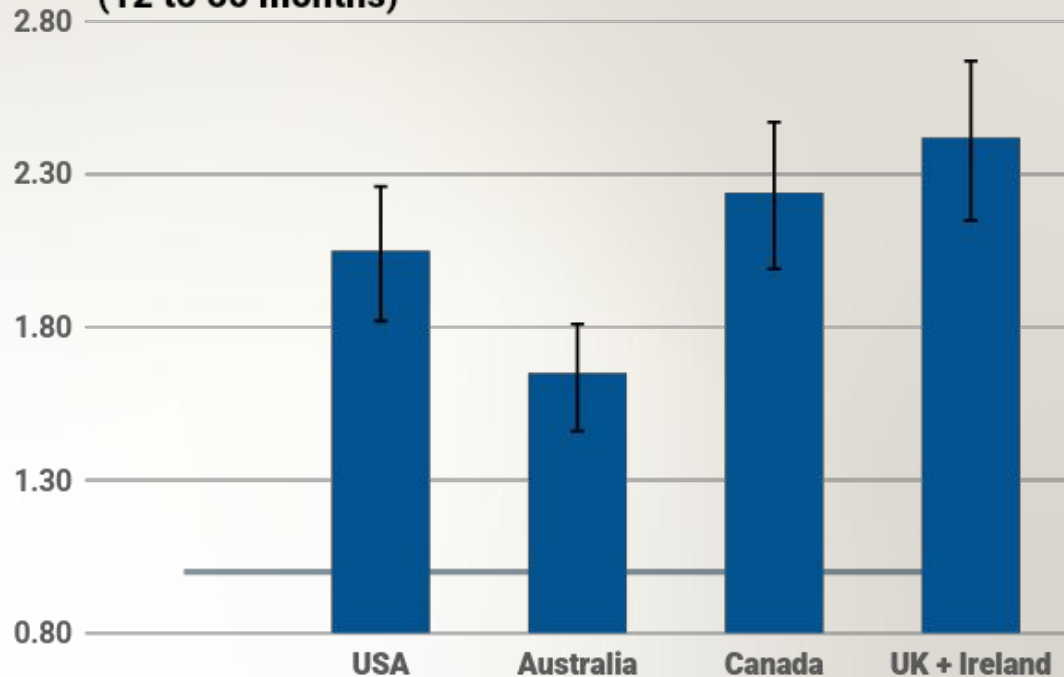


# USA Results: Caregiver Reading Attitudes and Interactions

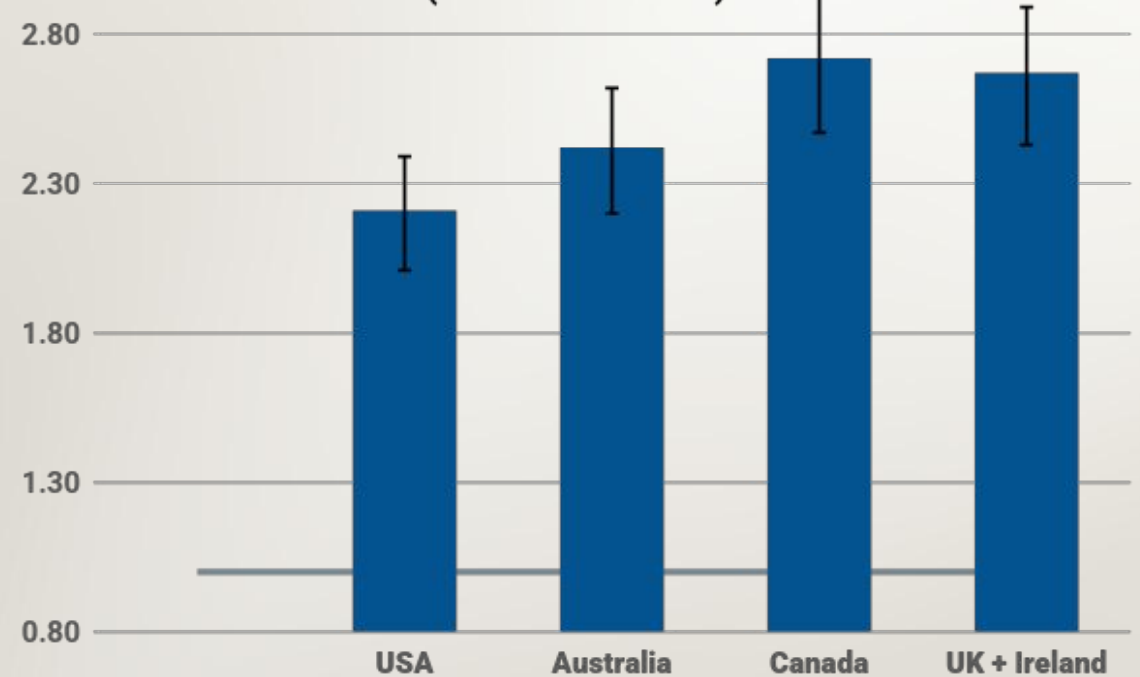


# Worldwide Results: Child Reading Attitudes and Interactions

**Children in the Imagination Library were significantly more likely to be interested in books (12 to 60 months)**



**Children in the Imagination Library were significantly more likely to show they want to be read to (12 to 35 months)**



# Worldwide Results: Child Reading Attitudes and Interactions

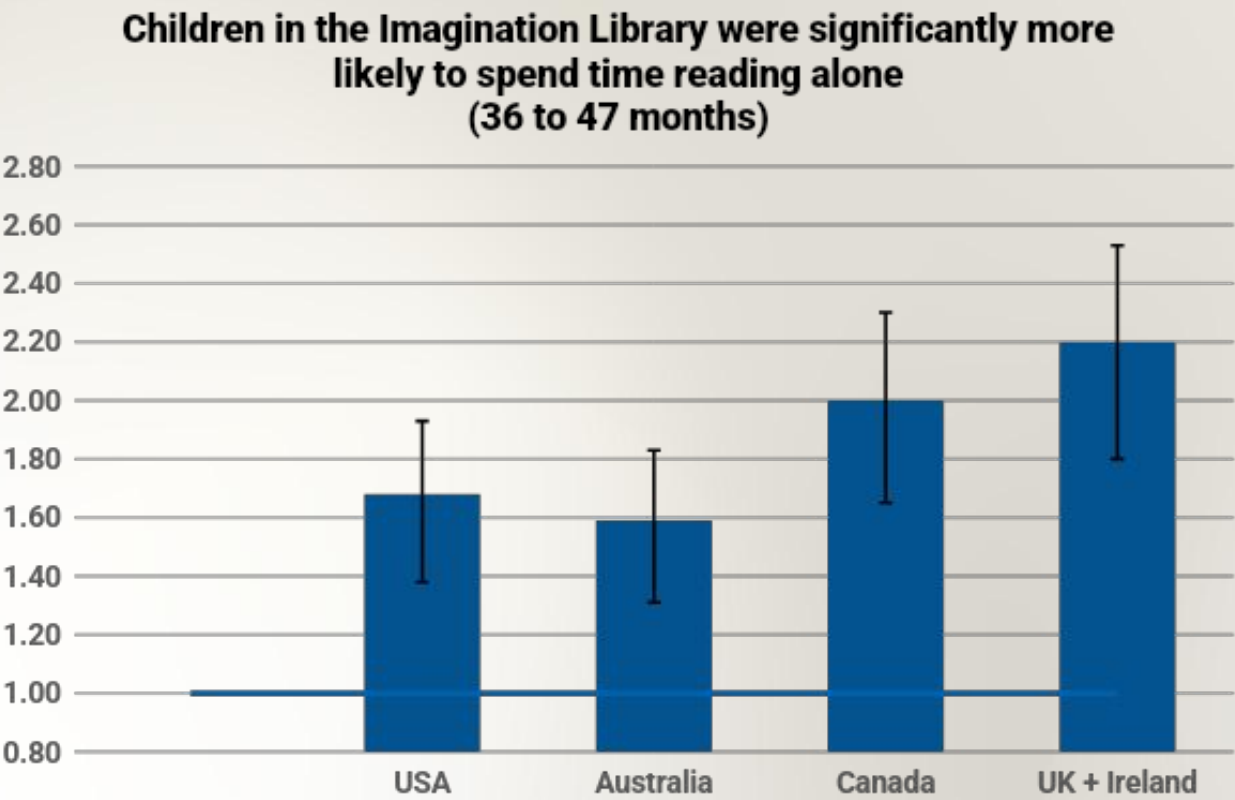
After receiving 10 books, children in the Imagination Library were more than **2.3 times more likely to be interested in reading** (48-60 months).

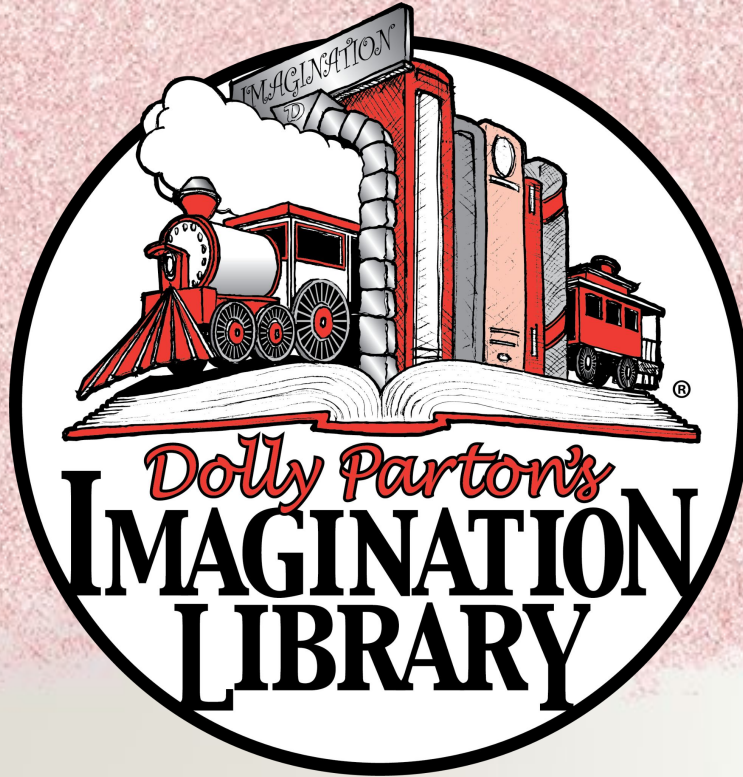


**Imagine the impact after 60 books!**



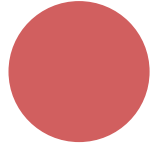
# Worldwide Results: Child Reading Attitudes and Interactions





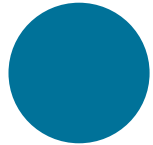
## Part 3: Emerging Literacy Skills

# Emerging Literacy Skills Questions



## Concepts About Print

- hold books the correct way up and turn pages for reading?
- pretend to read by pointing to words, or moving their finger left to right across the writing?



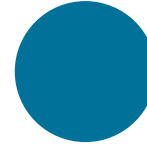
## Receptive Vocabulary

- answer to questions like who, what, when, where and why?
- follow directions that include two or more steps?



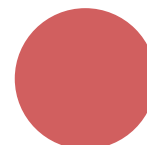
## Phonological Awareness

- rhyme (e.g., if you ask them what rhymes with "bed", they would say red, head, said, etc)?
- name words beginning with a certain sound (e.g., if you ask them what starts with "buh" they would say bed, bath, ball, etc)?



## Alphabet Knowledge

- name letters that you point to?
- make the sounds of the letters you point to?



## Expressive Vocabulary

- retell the sequence of events in a story or an activity (e.g., making something)?
- connect two sentences using the word "and"?



## Phonological Memory

- repeat new words that they hear?

# Worldwide Results: Emerging Literacy Skills

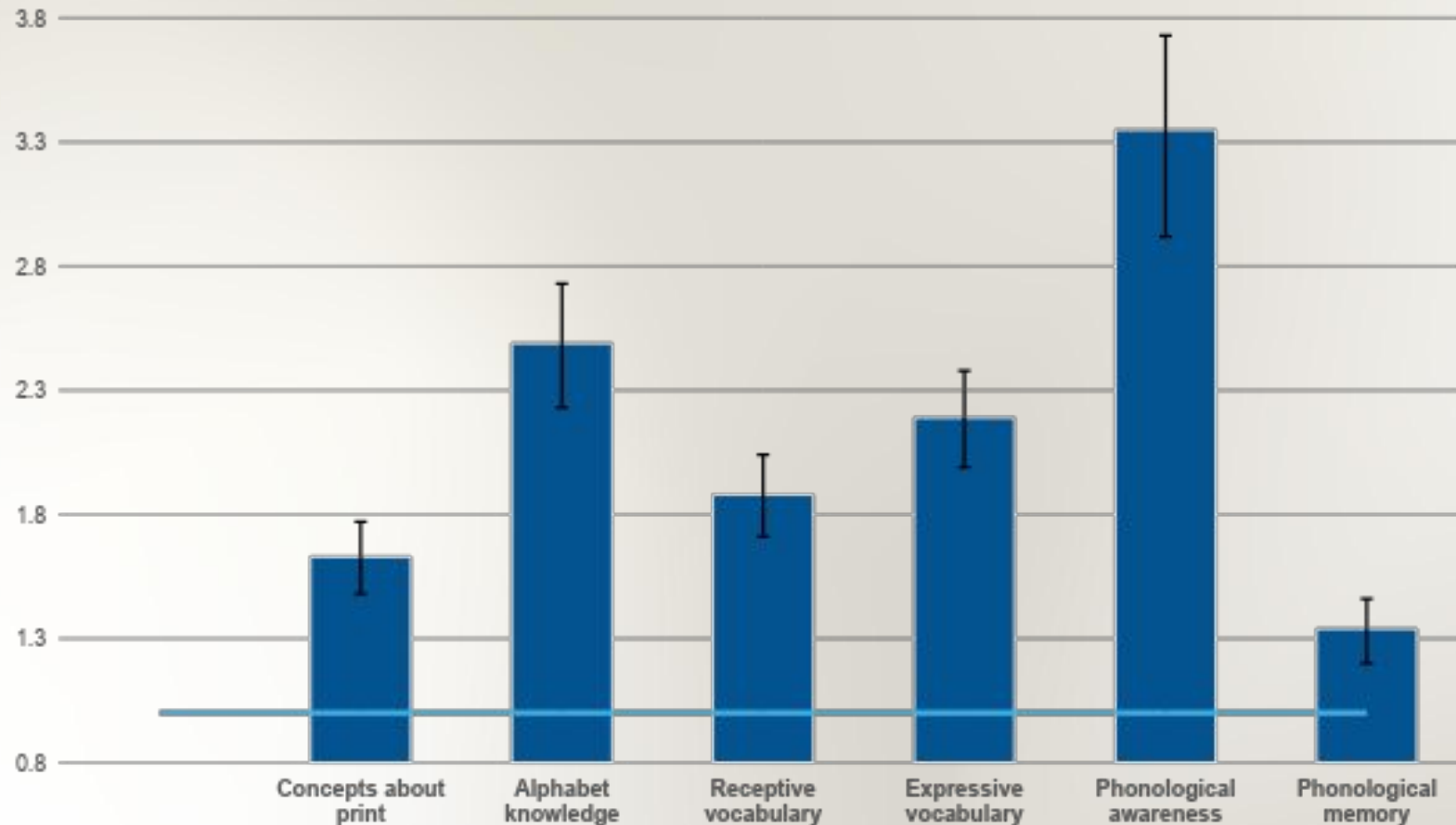
After receiving 10 books, children in the Imagination Library were more likely to demonstrate key emerging literacy skills including:

- concepts about print
- alphabet knowledge
- receptive vocabulary
- expressive vocabulary
- phonological awareness
- phonological memory.



# USA Results: Emerging Literacy Skills

Children in the Imagination Library in the US were significantly more likely to demonstrate emerging literacy skills (36 to 60 months)





## Conclusions



# Key Findings:

1. Enhanced home literacy environment
2. Positive reading attitudes and interactions
3. Demonstrate key emerging literacy skills



**Children were more likely to be interested in books and reading with the Imagination Library contributing to cultural celebration, connecting regions and citizens as well as fostering a vibrant community atmosphere.**



# Inspire

A Love Of Reading

# Thank you



ImaginationLibrary.com  
[help@imaginationlibrary.com](mailto:help@imaginationlibrary.com)  
ATT: Global research



*Celebrating*  
**30**  
**YEARS**

of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library



# Any questions?

ImaginationLibrary.com  
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Att: Global research

"You can never  
get enough books  
into the hands of  
enough children."

*Dolly*

