



Inspiring ?Reluctant? Readers

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Cynthia Dummett and **Anne Marley** on books that worked.

Teacher, **Cynthia Dummett** , on how sometimes an old book can do the trick, even a tatty old book? and Librarian, **Anne Marley** , on a book that gripped a disruptive teenager?

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As a teacher of children in their first year at school, I prided myself on sending children on to Year 1 with a very positive attitude to books and reading. Some could read by the time they left our Early Years Unit, all were spending longer periods in the book corner and the library, and all loved books.

All except Nicholas, that is.

Nicholas loved stories, rhymes, songs, videos and films, and loved to talk about them, but I had yet to see him *choose* to look at a book of his own accord. His visits to our library were brief. He'd lug the biggest and heaviest book he could see off the shelf, inspect it for damage ? the smallest rip would cause him to reject it ? and hurry over to the computer to scan the book in so that he could return to the classroom and his favourite activity: bulldozing in the sand tray.

A fortnight before the end of term, a classroom assistant contributed a set of ?Cat in the Hat? books that her own boys had outgrown to the Early Years Unit. I was delighted: my own children had loved Dr Seuss and I'd used them extensively in my adult literacy classes. The combination of sound, sense (and *non* -sense!) and zany illustrations appeals to a wide range of readers. I was a little disappointed that the box contained mainly Beginner Books: not all the writers working within the vocabulary constraints of the series capture the imagination.

But the box of books made me look through my own library at home and as soon as I saw **The Lorax** , I knew it was for Nicholas. It wasn't big but it was weighty in that it dealt with big issues; it entertained but it didn't talk down; it had a strong story line, it caught the imagination and best of all, it caught the ear. Also, as a result of reading it so frequently to my own children, I had most of it by heart. Unfortunately it was also the tattiest book I had seen for a long time.

Calls to local book shops drew blanks. Our local librarian reported that the three library copies were out and offered to reserve the book for me, but time was of the essence, so I took my copy to school with me. How to ?sell? it to Nicholas?

Next day, I knelt down beside him at the sand tray as he bulldozed.

?At the far of end town where the Grickle-grass grows and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows and no birds ever sing excepting old crows...? I began.

The bulldozer stopped.

?... is the Street of the Lifted Lorax,? I went on.

And on through the adventure we went, until I got stuck.

?Go on!?' urged Nicholas.

?I can?t,? I said. ?I'll have to get the book to remind me.?

And that was it. We read it together to the end and he took it home: a book lover.

Cynthia Dummett is a teacher, writer and storyteller.

Cynthia Dummett's top favourite Dr Seuss books for inspiring/motivating reluctant readers

(HarperCollins, £4.99 each pbk)

The Lorax , 0 00 170012 X

Horton Hatches the Egg , 0 00 195740 6

The Cat in the Hat , 0 00 171303 5

Green Eggs and Ham , 0 00 171306 X

One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish , 0 00 171321 3

Ten Apples Up on Top , Theo LeSieg, 0 00 171323 X

Fox in Socks , 0 00 171311 6

The Berenstain Bears and the Spooky Old Tree , Stan and Jan Berenstain, 0 00 171284 5

Librarian, **Anne Marley** , on a book that gripped a disruptive teenager?

I did a book talk in a secondary school to 13/14-year-olds some time ago now, but I remember it very clearly. It was in one of our less affluent areas of the county and this particular class of teenagers were not really very book orientated. The teacher asked me in to see if I could generate some enthusiasm, as a new voice with new books often can have an impact that their regular teacher can then follow up.

I talked about a few books, asked them their opinion about book jackets, asked them what they liked to read ? which ranged from ?Sweet Valley High? to motorbiking magazines ? and whilst most of the class participated, there was one particular girl who was disruptive and attracting the teacher's attention.

I decided to read to them from Melvin Burgess' **The Cry of the Wolf** . We talked about the striking cover and then I told them the beginning of the story ? about the last English wolves and the Hunter who is out to destroy them. I read for about ten minutes, from the part where the Hunter attempts to kill Silver, the female wolf who has gone with her cub for sanctuary with humans. Ben, the boy who originally finds her and her cub, tries to fight the Hunter off, but fails. The writing is incredibly powerful and is made for reading aloud and there wasn't a sound from this group for the entire reading and at the end of the chapter there was silence, followed by them clamouring for more. Of course, the response is ? ?Well you'll find out what happens if you read the book.?

But the most interesting response was from the disruptive girl who till this point hadn't shown any interest. She was leaning forward so far in her seat that I thought she would fall off and at the end, she had tears in her eyes. It turns out,

as she told me afterwards, that she loved animals and wanted to work with them when she got older. The teacher was amazed at her reaction, as she'd never shown much interest in books before, but now she has something with which to help her build.

I'm a great believer in 'the right book for the right reader at the right time'. **The Cry of the Wolf** was just such a book for this reader at this particular time.

This kind of experience makes me feel that what librarians do is one of the most important and rewarding jobs there is.

Anne Marley is the Principal Librarian, Children's and Schools Library Service, Hampshire County Library.

The Cry of the Wolf by Melvin Burgess is published by Puffin, 0 14 037318 7, £4.99 pbk.

Readers who would like to contribute to this series are invited to submit an account of their experience (500 words) to the Editor. Please mark your submission 'Reluctant Readers'.

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