



# Beyond World Book Day

Article Author:

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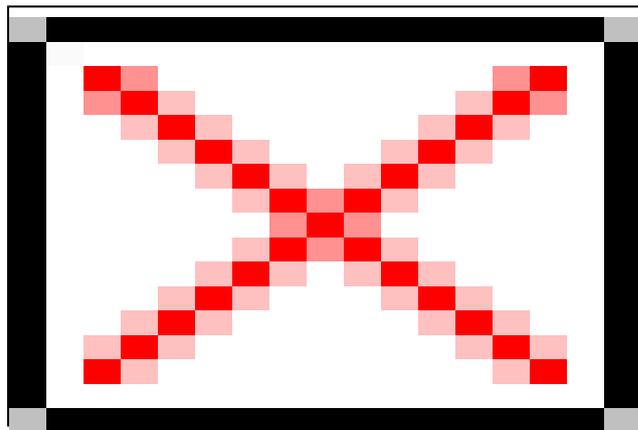
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**Laura Fraine** suggests ways to keep pupils reading for pleasure



**Laura Fraine** speaks to school librarians about creating a year-round strategy to encourage reading for pleasure.

This month, schools in the UK have been involved in **World Book Day**, from the simplest doling out of £1 vouchers, to major whole school festivities. The event has become a staple in the school calendar and the annual celebration of reading for pleasure.

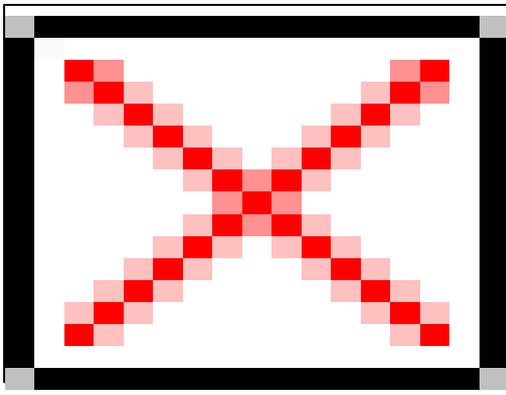
Whether or not a child reads for enjoyment is a crucial factor in their wider achievement. Reading for pleasure has been shown to have a bigger impact on a child's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002). Children who enjoy reading are much more likely to read above the expected level for their age.

There is a recognition of the importance of reading for pleasure in Ofsted's **Moving English Forward** report and the government's draft curriculum for primary schools. Yet, a survey by Booktrust in 2012 found that just 39% of schools have a policy in this area.

The need to read goes beyond literacy skills. There isn't a subject in the timetable that can't be bolstered by wider reading. And those that learn at a young age the value of reading for pleasure exercise their imagination in a world without borders.

The Siobhan Dowd Trust is one of a number of organisations which works to encourage children to read. In 2012, the trust held a competition to find the schools which are most pro-active in encouraging reading for pleasure. I spoke to some of the winning librarians.

**Creating a culture of reading**



One thing that became clear when researching this article is that creating a culture of reading for pleasure is a whole-school practice, not simply the work of a dedicated librarian or English teacher.

The schools which excel in encouraging their pupils to read are the ones where all members of staff act as role models for reading. They run their own staff book group in their free time, and update the school notice-board with what they are reading, as in Tobermory High School. Or they have a policy whereby pupils can ask any member of staff what they are reading and they must be able to give them an answer. Or they run a staff and student book group with KS4 pupils, as they do in Old Buckenham High School in Norfolk. 'They are not going to be books that are available to younger children,' says the school librarian Andrea Hassan. 'We expect the students to be mature enough to handle them.'

Eileen Roberts is librarian at The Ravensbourne School in Bromley. Five years ago, her school introduced a policy that pupils must have a book of their choice with them at all times. Now reading makes the most of the gaps in the day. While waiting for the whole school to be seated in assembly, at the beginning and end of lessons, when a pupil has finished their work, the standard advice is, 'get out your reading book'. Eileen says this simple policy 'has made reading the norm in our school. It is unusual not to have a book on you, rather than the other way around'. She describes year 12 pupils who have now been bringing reading books to school for the past five years, for whom reading is a completely natural way of life.

Lindsey Blake is a library consultant, working with different schools through her company, LibraryLive. All Saints Junior School in Reading is one of the schools for which she provides librarian services. One of the first of the 24 Free Schools in the country, it currently has 40 pupils on its roll, with only space for 60 more. Head-teacher, Susannah Daniels, was adamant that a fantastic library should form the heart of the school, putting the case for library space over an ICT suite. The library is accessible from the playground, so that pupils can use it during break and lunch times and withdraw books themselves. 'Reading is absolutely the central plank of that school,' says Lindsey. 'The library is this really beautiful room, while the staff room next door is grotty! I think that's brilliant.'

### **Making reading aspirational**

Children love a challenge and there are numerous programmes which aim to bring a sense of natural competition to reading, including **Kids' Lit Quiz**, a children's literature competition for ages 10-13, and **Read for My School**, a new national schools competition for years 5 and 6, run by Booktrust and The Pearson Foundation.

**Readathon** encourages children to be sponsored for spending time reading. The sponsorship money is divided between CLIC Sargent, Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity and ReadWell, a children's reading programme being rolled out across UK hospitals. Pupils can be as creative as they like when compiling their reading lists. **Readathon** co-ordinator Debbie Young says, 'Cynics might think that children, especially reluctant readers, might be under-ambitious when compiling their reading list, but we find that they tend to stretch themselves. For example, one girl recently pledged to read all the Harry Potter books! But it's not a contest to see who can read the most books, or the hardest books, or to be the fastest. It's about reading at your own pace - this is one of the reasons it engages all children so effectively.'

Andrea Hassan has similar experience of pupils being willing to stretch themselves in the name of a challenge. In 2011 she set up the Reading Star Awards at Old Buckenham High School. These awards aim high in their ambition: in year 7, pupils are encouraged to read 25 books (bronze star), in year 8, 30 books (silver star); in year 9, 40 books (gold star).

The Platinum level, which is optional, requires years 10 and 11 to read 50 books across two years. Of these books, ten per year are to be selected from an age-appropriate reading list, the remainder can be chosen freely. Those students who succeed are given a blazer badge. 'The whole point is that it's quite an obvious symbol. If people see someone walking around with a star badge, they know that they've got it for their commitment.' Despite the high thresholds, last year a third of year 7 pupils met the target of reading 25 books, and 20% of year 8 pupils achieved Silver.

This school also has its own Poet Laureate. Students who show a particularly good attitude to school – not necessarily the greatest writers – are invited by staff to apply for the annual post. The appointed poet then writes an original piece for each school newsletter as well as for special anniversaries and events in the life of the school.

### **Making books a talking point**

Like adult readers, young readers get a lot out of discussing books with a small group of like-minded peers. Book groups for keen readers or specific age groups were in place in most of the schools interviewed for this article. Carnegie Shadowing is a popular theme for book groups. The students read the books on the awards shortlist and then vote on which author they think should be crowned the winner. Some schools make a special event of results day.

But talking about books is not just for the top students. Lindsey Blake also works for Slough and Eton Business and Enterprise College. She says one of the most popular projects she has run has been an Angels versus Vampires 'read off?', where students were asked to vote whether they were on the side of darkness or light. Choosing accessible and highly popular books – even if she admits some of them aren't the greatest literature – reminds students that reading is a form of entertainment and a visit to the library is fun. The whole selection of books had flown off the shelf by mid-morning.

'WOW' or Words On Walls! was a project delivered by Kay Sellers at Worle Community School in Weston-super-Mare. 'Over the summer holidays I chose some passages from some of our books and pasted them on walls. I deliberately set out to find cliff hangers that would make people want to read on. I didn't say which books the passages were from, the students had to come into the library to find out.'

Some librarians go to enormous lengths to create a buzz around reading. Sue Penny at Tobermory High School, which has just over 200 pupils, aged 3-18, had the entire school record themselves reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears, while she enlisted the island rugby club to record a reading of Rudyard Kipling's poem **If**. During a Scotland match in the Rugby World Cup, the whole school gathered to watch the game and the video of **If** recorded by local sporting heroes was shown at half time.

Sometimes it is the little things which get everybody talking. Eileen Roberts' project, **Get Caught Reading**, involved her handing out five disposable cameras to teachers and having them photograph people reading in school. Any child who got caught reading on camera was awarded credit points. When Eileen mounted the display in the library, she couldn't believe the massive response; classes were being sent out of lessons just to look at the photographs. 'I realised that children are so used to seeing pictures on a screen, but are not used to seeing photographs developed any more. It was a real novelty for them to see a photographic display.'

### **The gift of reading**

We're all agreed that instilling the love of reading in a child is one of the greatest gifts you can give them. Eileen Roberts plays on the idea of reading as a gift by wrapping library books in Christmas wrapping paper each December and inviting students to 'Take a Risk' by choosing a mystery book to take home over the holidays. Andrea Hassan applied a similar technique with the £1000-worth of library books the school won from the Siobhan Dowd Trust: she wrapped each as a gift and put it under the Christmas tree at the staff Christmas party. Teachers were invited to choose a book to read over the holidays.

Group outings to bookshops to choose new library stock prove very popular, especially for the students at Tobermory High School, who take the ferry to the mainland to go book shopping in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

‘I always go to great lengths to make the library a welcoming and comfortable environment for the students,’ says Kay Sellers. ‘It has to be a place they want to come into and read. I create displays usually based around genres or current films to attract them to read the books.’

Lindsey Blake agrees. ‘I think of the students as my customers. I am there to serve them,’ she says. When she first started working at Slough and Eton Business and Enterprise College, which is in one of the most deprived areas in the country and has 80% EAL, she ordered in the books she felt a school library ought to hold. The students weren’t interested. She has now made the emphasis on reading for pleasure on the library. By changing the stock, she has created a real buzz around books.

‘I believe walking into my library should be like walking into a good bookshop - the choice should be there, the stock should be attractively displayed, up-to-date and in excellent condition. I want the pupils here to love books and I don’t care if that book is **War and Peace** or a Simpsons graphic novel, we have far too many children starting here for whom the book is the enemy.’

There might be fewer classics on the shelves than there used to be, but Lindsey says that once the pupils get into reading, she can move them towards the wealth of brilliant contemporary children’s literature. ‘Do you want the library to be a place where they come and whip the books off the shelves?’ she asks. ‘If I can get them to see that books are fun then I am halfway there.’

Laura Fraine is a freelance journalist based in the North-East.

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