



BfK's Brilliant Libraries

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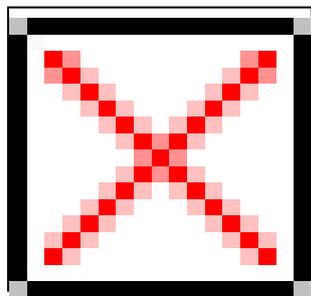
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Byline:

The Summer Reading Challenge in Essex Libraries

In each issue of **Books for Keeps** we turn the spotlight on a brilliant bookshop, helping to make children into keen readers. For this issue, as libraries across the UK prepare to run the 2013 Summer Reading Challenge, we invited Sarah Mears Children's Services Manager for Essex Libraries, to tell us about the work libraries will be doing this summer to keep children reading.

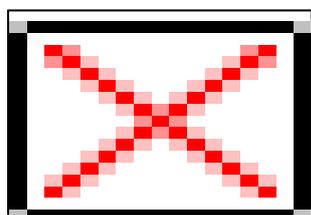


In July, libraries across Essex along with most other library services in the country, will be welcoming thousands of children through their doors as the annual **Summer Reading Challenge (SRC)** gets underway. This year's theme is 'Creepy House' and with illustrations by Chris Riddell and some very stinky stickers, we think it is going to be a hit with children.

The **Summer Reading Challenge** is produced by The Reading Agency and delivered by libraries to 750,000 children annually. In Essex we attract around 37,000 children each summer with another 7,000 taking part in a separate challenge for teenagers.

The **Summer Reading Challenge** is special. There is a brilliant atmosphere in libraries; they are buzzing with excited children and their parents and carers; there are imaginative displays and an army of young volunteers to support and encourage the participants.

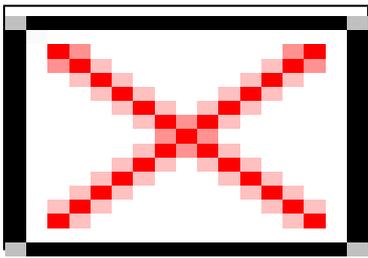
Children who take part are encouraged to read six books during the holidays and for each book they read, they collect a sticker, which this year will enhance the illustrations in the creepy house. Children who complete the challenge receive a medal and a certificate for taking part.



Children love collecting the stickers and there is no doubt that an imaginative theme and appealing rewards play a huge part in making the **SRC** a success. But the most important element of the Challenge is that it gives children the

opportunity to read for pleasure, and not only to read, but to share their reading with their family; friends; library staff and volunteers. At a time when we are rightly concerned about children's enthusiasm for reading, it is really heartening to see how excited children can be about finding and sharing new books. Many parents report to Essex library staff that the summer is the time when reading finally 'clicks' for children. They either begin to read independently or, after years of struggling, suddenly find the book that gets them 'hooked'. Even the most reluctant reader can find a new enthusiasm when presented with an exciting range of titles and adults who are genuinely interested in talking to them. We've learned over the years that there are very few children who don't enjoy talking about their reading. Ensuring that there are staff in the library ready to discuss books with children builds their confidence, improves their speaking and listening skills and gives every child a sense that what they think is really valued.

We build capacity in the summer by recruiting volunteers, the majority of whom are aged between 14 and 25. We recruit them through local schools, colleges, the youth service, press and social media channels. Last summer in Essex we had 578 volunteers who between them clocked up just short 10,000 hours of volunteering time. Many of the young people did the **SRC** themselves and see it as a natural progression to support younger children. Children love talking to the teenagers they aspire to be.



Because 'book talking' is such an important part of the Challenge in Essex, we ensure that staff understand the significance of what they do and we encourage them to talk to the child in a way that paves the way for discussion. For new staff and volunteers and for children who find talking difficult, we've created a series of 'book talking tools'- simple activities such as 'Expression Faces' which children can select to show how they felt about a book. New for this year is a series of 'wow words'- descriptive words on cards that children can choose to describe their book, words like 'incredible' and 'peculiar?', moving children on from a simple 'it was good' and extending their vocabulary.

In Essex we also offer our own activity for teenagers developed in consultation with young people. This year the title is 'Mystery Street' - young people will receive a folder with 10 street images inside 'eyes peeping through a fence; a car speeding by; a full moon. We want participants to write or draw the story of what has happened on the street. They also have to answer questions and read two books to earn rewards. Involving young people in age-appropriate creative activity helps to keep them engaged with library services.

Partnerships to support the **Summer Reading Challenge** are really important to us. Primary schools in Essex give us active support, welcoming library staff into assemblies to promote the challenge and celebrating children's success after the summer. This year we are cementing our partnership with Essex County Council's specialist teacher team who work with children with special needs and who will be training a group of volunteers to deliver sensory storytimes in libraries throughout the holidays. We are also working with Colchester Castle Museum who will be offering some particularly creepy story activities. Children's centres and district council partners are also providing events and activities in libraries to tie in with the creepy theme.

The Summer Reading Challenge is a Learning Destination for the Children's University and so children taking part are able to use their participation towards accreditation. And for the first time this year we will be testing out Arts Award Discover as part of the Challenge.

So it is a busy time for us. It can be difficult, library services are experiencing tough times, but with the help of our amazing volunteers we will ensure that Essex children have a wonderful experience with us. We have all the ingredients to make it work 'the child, the book and caring interested adults. This, for us, is what makes the summer a magical time in our libraries.

And what will children be reading in Essex Libraries this summer? There will be lots of new books for children to read, but old favourites too. The current top ten most borrowed children's books are

Aliens Love Underpants, Claire Freedman, illus Ben Cort, Simon and Schuster Children's Books, 978-1416917052, £5.99 pbk

Where's Wally?, Martin Handford, Walker Books, 978-1406305890, £6.99 pbk

Tabby McTat, Julia Donaldson, illus Axel Scheffler, Alison Green Books, 978-1407109275, £6.99 pbk

Cabin Fever. Jeff Kinney, Puffin, 978-0141343006, £6.99 pbk

The Snail and the Whale, Julia Donaldson, illus Axel Scheffler, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-0333982242, £6.99 pbk

The Jungle Run, Tony Mitton illus. Guy Parker-Rees, Orchard Books, 978-1408311752, £5.99 pbk

The Dinosaur Games, David Bedford, illus Dankerleroux, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-0330537971, £6.99 pbk

Socks, Elizabeth Lindsay, illus Nick Sharratt, David Fickling Books, 978-1849921657, £5.99 pbk

Zog Julia Donaldson, illus Axel Scheffler, Alison Green Books, 978-1407115597, £6.99

Monstersaurus! Claire Freedman, illus Ben Cort, Simon and Schuster Children's Books, 978-1847389053, £6.99 pbk

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