

Encouraging Reading for pleasure in Primary schools

[Notes from a talk given to teachers Feb 2012]

Imagine if every child read for pleasure. Imagine if every child really wanted to read books. What would school be like? Writing would be a lot better. All school work would be better. The world would be better.

Reading develops thinking and understanding – it's the key to unlock opportunity.

So, how can we encourage reading for pleasure?

You can't make someone enjoy something, can you? But you can give opportunity for it to happen – you can break up the hard ground and create a fertile environment for a love of reading to at least stand a chance of growing.

Here are 7 suggestions for how you might do this.

Some are obvious but bear repeating. Some you'll be doing already but I'm going to encourage you to carry on with gusto. Some may be new.

1. Enthusing

This is one of the most important and fruitful things you can do: enthuse about books. What can we say about enthusing?

- It works
- There's no secret to it but it improves with practice
- It has to be genuine, natural
- The more books you look at and read, the more likely you are to find some gold among the dross (and there is some dross out there) – go to your local library (and I know you have no time: I was a teacher for 17 years)
- If you find something really good you can't help but enthuse.

2. Model reading

Tricky one – who has time to sit and read with the children? So what can you do?

- Talk about books – tell the children that you read and what you read (unless it's Jeffrey Archer, of course)
- Show that you value books: give them away as prizes: get the PTA to fund new books for this and for the library
- Encourage parents to model reading: make it very clear to them that if they only model TV and computer then how can they expect their children to be fully literate? The girl on the train had clearly no model of male reading – that is until she met me.
- You may have heard that 61% of low income families have no books in their homes but does having books at home really make a difference? **Yes!**

3. Make books freely available to children

Books must be available to read in class and to take home. Don't let them gather dust in the library.

- Not reading scheme books but books which can be read for pleasure
- Change displays of books frequently
- Use the Schools Library Service
- Take children to the town library if the school is near one.
- Ensure that the books appeal to the children: not tatty; non-fiction; a wide range of types

4. Offer a wide range of books and topics

- Not every child likes reading stories, certainly fewer boys than girls
- Ensure you have the types of books that appeal more to reluctant readers:
 - Joke books
 - Graphic novels
 - Puzzle books
 - Picture books
 - TV tie-ins
 - Funny poems
 - Miscellanies

Schools also need to have books freely available on topics that interest children of each age group. For KS2 you need books on football and ponies. What else?

5. Read a story every day

- Or non-fiction
- Or a poem
- Or teach the children an interactive poem ([See my new book](#))
- Don't forget some of the oldest books are the best... Treasure Island, Charlotte's Web, Burglar Bill.

6. Get an author in

- Sometimes, as the teacher, it's hard to be enthusiastic: you're tired, you're overstretched, you're the one who has to do the telling off and lay down the law – so why not get an outsider in: a real live author (and perhaps a male role model too) – let them enthuse
- Even children who aren't keen readers often respond well to authors
- An author in school can really make an impact
- Go for someone with a track record and book early.
- It doesn't have to be World Book Day!
- Prepare: look at the books, get questions ready.
- Don't expect that authors will always do writing workshops: I generally don't.

Reading is the secret to writing. We spend so much time trying to get children to write but how can they when they aren't familiar with the written word?

7. Prioritise Books

Schools simply need to spend money on books. Not ipads or laptops. Not even kindles. Books.

If you can't afford them look around – I found these on the *Book People* website:

20 Horrid Henry for £15

21 Rainbow Magic £15

7 Michael Morpurgo £9

18 Beast Quest £16

10 Joke books £8

The Simpsons Annual £3

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[For information about school visits by Andy visit www.andyseed.com]