



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM
SCHOOL

Creating a shared space for reading

By Kevin Cobane MA (Ed); PG Dip; PG Cert; BA
(Hons) QTS; NSIQ; MCCT

k.cobane@uobschool.org.uk

@KevC46

theliteracyglobe.wordpress.co.uk

Doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons.





Context of the Project

- 1) Our School is a Free School which opened in September 2015 as the first secondary university training school in the country.
- 2) It currently has pupils in key stage 3 and 4 up to Year 10 and students in Years 12 and 13 in the sixth form.
- 3) Our School is an incredibly diverse and inclusive
- 4) All pupils are taught in mixed-attainment classes throughout the School.

Doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons.



OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

From my extensive work in Primary Schools and own passion for Reading I have developed a considerable knowledge of children's Literature and other texts along with a range of pedagogic strategies to help develop reading skills. I was particularly interested in how this knowledge could be used to develop my RfP Pedagogy (Cremin et al., 2014) by:

- Planning and developing Social Reading Areas in the Classroom in a Secondary setting.
- Planning a dedicated time to Read Aloud to students.
- Extending the opportunities for informal book talk, inside text-talk and reading recommendations.

I chose these areas as a focus because, as Cremin et al. (2014) found, 'Social Reading Environments are key to creating richly reciprocal reading communities'. I passionately believe that with a physically engaging and stimulating environment the students will be more likely to engage with texts and, when offered appropriate spaces to relax and browse, will be much more likely to read for pleasure.

Doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons.



Aims and Objectives:

- To develop a Social Reading area in the classroom stocked with high quality texts.

(It was important that the reading area had a range of books and texts, comfortable furniture/ seats, high quality displays that advertised the books and was a place that students would want to go to sit and read.)

- To plan a 1 hour slot every week where I would read aloud to students.

(A range of high quality texts would be chosen to share with the students that develop their love of reading and develop their awareness of the types and range of books that are available to them to read.)

- To plan opportunities to celebrate the books that we have read and ‘blether about books’ sharing recommendations and good reads.

(This would develop a buzz around books and help to create a ‘shared’ reading history.)



Outline of the Project:

Create a comfortable environment

When I arrived at The University of Birmingham School I was delighted to be provided with a Classroom that was a 'blank canvas'. It was clear as a committed Reading Teacher that this was a golden opportunity to create the perfect environment for Reading. I needed to alter the look of my classroom so that it felt like it was a space where reading for pleasure was valued. Any area devoted to reading carries significant messages about the value placed on reading in classrooms and so the first thing I needed to do was to source a bookcase with a range of the very best fiction and non-fiction texts to create a 'buzz' around reading.

Resourcing the reading environment can be a challenge but with a little creativity it was possible to source a range of high quality books and texts.



Outline of the Project:

We are very lucky to benefit from an excellent School Library and indeed a very knowledgeable Librarian who was only too happy to help develop our project. This created immense excitement and there were some excellent conversations about the book choices in our bookcase. I allocated time in school for students to share the library books they borrowed and encourage them to add to the book corner/class anthology of recommendations. I was grateful to the School Librarian and my Local Public Librarians as they helped to provide me with the perfect range of texts to engage my students.

I also invited librarians into school to talk about events happening in the library to foster the important notion that reading is not only something that happens in school but is a community event. This led to taking students to their Local Library to enrol as Members. It was interesting to note that only one student in the class was a member of a Public Library. I also enrolled them on the Summer Reading Challenge which will hopefully ensure that they continue to develop their passion for Reading over the summer in readiness for September.



Outline of the Project:

Once books had been chosen I considered how to create a book area or space in the classroom that offered comfort and promoted reading for pleasure. This included a range of comfortable furniture such as a sofa, a soft chair, bean-bags and occasional tables on which I could display themed books.





The students were really excited about being allowed to sit on the new furniture as they read books themselves. As well as a one hour session per week in the School Library we now had a one hour additional Reading for Pleasure session in class.





The creation of Reading Displays

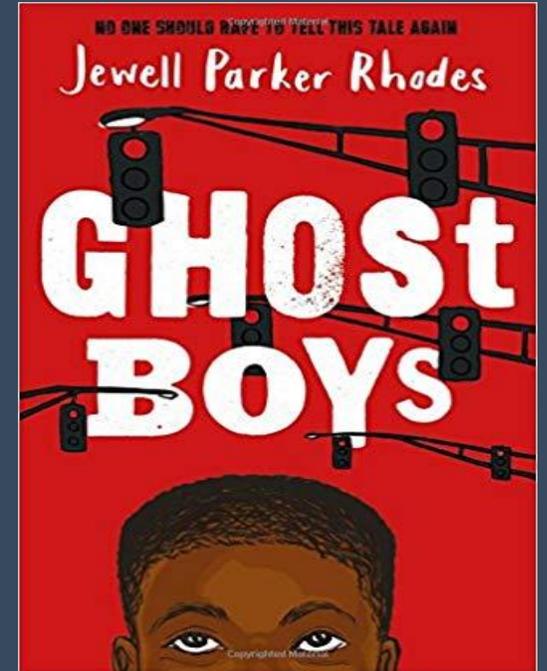
Displays carry significant messages and those featuring personal, home and community aspects of reading can add wide appeal to our readers. In order to celebrate and share these displays I deliberately included some that focused on what the students were reading, some on texts/authors and some on where the students might like to read. I also created displays that reflected key themes linked to our No Outsiders themes which again generated huge amounts of interest, enthusiasm and discussion about wider social issues. I was sure to update these and made them interactive.



Fostering interactive reading environments

Fostering an interactive reading environment is not just about what happens in the classroom reading area/corner – it is about the ethos and interaction around reading and readers moment by moment. I sought to create an environment where the students felt relaxed and wanted to share and discuss their reading.

As the project began to grow I began to choose books together with the students and it was great to blather about books with them. I created themed book displays focusing on Maz Evan's *'Who Let the Gods Out?'* series, a World War One and Two display with books from the excellent Tom Palmer, Christopher Edge and Lisa Thompson and another showcasing great new fiction such as *'Ghost Boys'*, *'Long Way Down'* and *'Boy 87'*



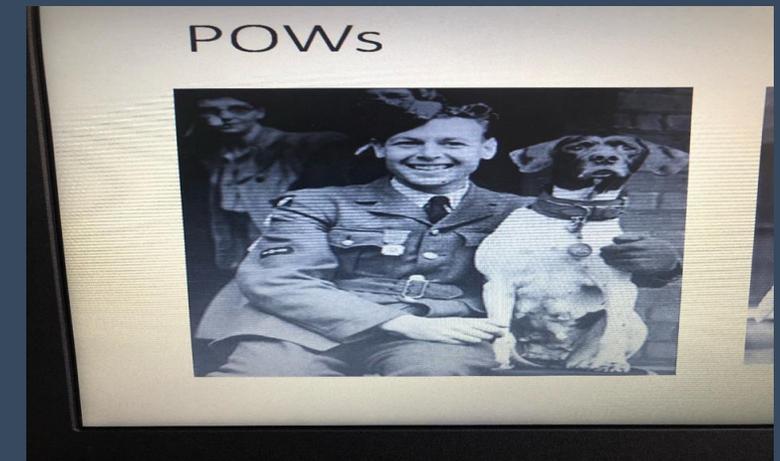
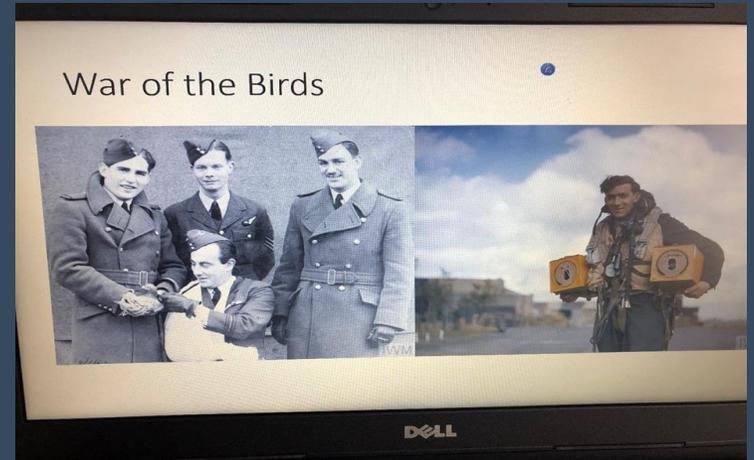


Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is another important element of the project as it enabled the children to experience rich and challenging texts, offered a model for silent independent reading, prompted the children's affective engagement and created a class repertoire of 'texts in common' to discuss.

I chose to focus on D-Day Dog by Tom Palmer as a shared text to read aloud and it emerged that our Library Assistant had a PhD in the role of animals in armed conflicts and so we arranged for him to come in and do a presentation to the students about it. It was superb and we learnt a great deal about the secret Mi14 Pigeon division, the Dickens Medal and the Judy the POW Dog. It was a fabulous experience that we would otherwise have missed had we not read and shared the book.

Doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons.





We then arranged a visit to Peters Books in Birmingham in liaison with our School Librarian. The purpose of the visit was to buy new books for our School Library. Armed with a list of books and a budget we set off and had the most wonderful experience. The students then unpacked the books, checked them off against the order list and scanned and bar-coded the books ready to be put into the Library for all of the students to read. They were so proud to have been involved.





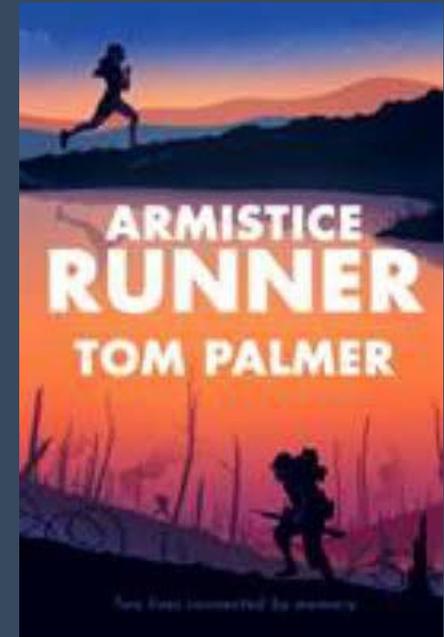
Impact of the Project

Having a Social Reading Area in the classroom with a wide range of books and a range of flexible seating arrangements has helped the students to actively engage with reading and has raised their levels of interest and enthusiasm about books and reading. One student stated that they no longer view reading as 'boring' and something that they have to do in silence where they 'gaze at a page and pretend to have read it before turning over to the next one'.

We do still read in silence, but because they often have a choice where they can move or change a book they look forward to their RfP for session. They have more agency over their book choices and are much more able to exercise their rights as readers.

They enjoy sharing their books with each other and me and we have created a strong shared reading history which is a source of joy and inspiration. They have particularly enjoyed having books read to them and such as *D-Day Dog* and *Armistice Runner* by Tom Palmer, *Owen and the Soldier* by Lisa Thompson and *The Longest Night of Charlie Moon* by Christopher Edge.

Doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons.



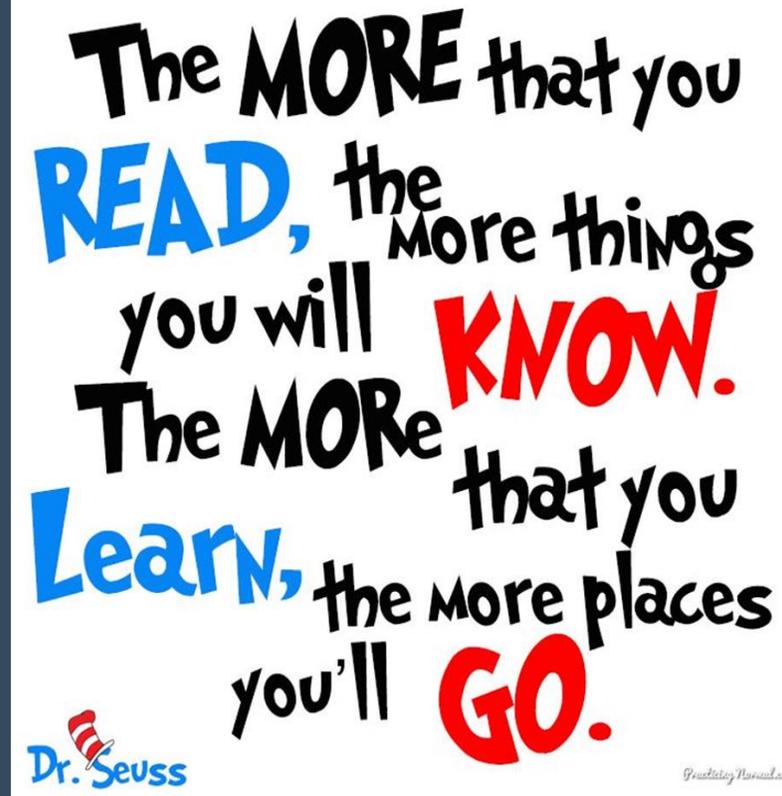


This RfP project has enabled me to:

- Take responsibility for and develop a social reading area in the classroom that fosters students' RfP alongside and as complementary to reading instruction.
- Effectively use my wider knowledge of young people's literature and other texts to enrich students' experience and pleasure in reading
- Let students control more of their own reading and exercise their rights as readers
- Make time and space for students to explore texts in greater depth, share favourites and talk spontaneously about their reading
- Build reciprocal and interactive communities of readers.



I would thoroughly recommend that all Teachers join an OU/UKLA TARs group and engage in a project. In the words of Dr Seuss:



Doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons.