

# Chapter Free Friday

Gemma Gascoine

@whizpoppie

Trinity



C. E. Primary School



Submitted for the Egmont Reading For Pleasure Awards: Experienced Teacher

## Context

I work at Trinity Church of England school, a small village school located near to Oundle in Northamptonshire. Historically, our reading results have always been good, therefore 'reading' or 'Reading for Pleasure' was not a priority or stated in our school development plan. However, more and more conversations were being held in school where teaching staff and parents voiced concerns that children weren't reading as much or weren't enjoying their reading in general. The number of children reading at home regularly and the number of library books borrowed had decreased. This refocused my attention on Reading for Pleasure at the core of our reading curriculum.

## OU Research inspiration and rationale

Having already begun to address teacher's knowledge of children's literature and teacher's knowledge of children's reading practices, (separate document titled: Developing a whole school vision), I chose to develop 'reading aloud' next. This is one of the five strands of research from the Teachers as Readers project (Cremin et al., 2009, 2014) which I felt could have a dramatic impact on the reading for pleasure pedagogy and practice at Trinity.

We teach reading and writing based heavily on providing children with high quality model texts, so it seemed imperative to me that we reflect and review our practice. I had read the findings of the Teachers as Readers' (TaRs) research and became increasingly interested in notion of 'the will influencing the skill' (Cremin et al 2008, 2014). The research explains that a rich reading for pleasure environment provides children with the will to read. We can then in turn teach the skill much more effectively because the children have ownership of their learning: '*a reading for pleasure agenda can positively impact upon children's attainment, achievement, disposition and desire to read (The will influences the skill)*' (Cremin et al., 3:2008).

This was the first discussion where we as a staff began to reflect on our own reading practice and the opportunities that we provide. Subsequent conversations were targeted towards the actual practice of reading aloud. Staff brought a paragraph of a book to read to each other at staff meetings. The aim of this exercise was for us to comment on our reading aloud practices and draw up a common list of the skills we need to do this effectively.

When we conducted the RfP surveys with the children in our school, we found that some children commented that they didn't enjoy the part of the day where reading aloud took place, they preferred to read alone or at home. As a staff, we wondered if this was down to the timing of when reading aloud took place, or the way in which this happened. We discussed the setbacks of reading aloud happening at the end of the day when children were up and about, getting ready for home or when the time might be disrupted, for example by office staff popping in with letters etc. We also discussed the fact that if teachers were running behind schedule, it was easier for reading aloud to slip off the timetable.

With this in mind, teachers were given the freedom to read where best suited them. For some this is before lunch or after lunch. However, teachers made choices based on their routines and their children, knowing that the expectation was for every child to hear something read aloud to them every day.

As a staff we understood '*the affective impact of reading aloud to 'reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire'*' (Trelellas, 2013:4), but felt that we weren't giving children enough opportunities to make these connections. The TaRs findings also gave us an insight into how RfP is strongly influenced by relationships. I wondered how we could ensure these relationships were formed throughout our school.

## Aims and outline

We now had up and running, a daily read aloud programme detailing some fabulous books and a striking library display of book recommendations,

thoughts & feelings about books and notes from the authors. This focal point provided children and adults with a space to share their reading identities. We now needed to somehow culminate the work we were all doing to enable us as children and adults to collectively own RfP in our school.

So I set out to find a way to taste test books in a way that was relaxed and comfy (based on my analysis of the children's questionnaires). I came up with the idea of Chapter Free Friday (CFF).

This was in direct response to the children who had indicated a lack of interest in reading and my need to find out more about children's reading practices. We knew that to tackle the disinterested children, we had to look closely at when reading aloud happens, where reading aloud happens and most importantly who had ownership over this.

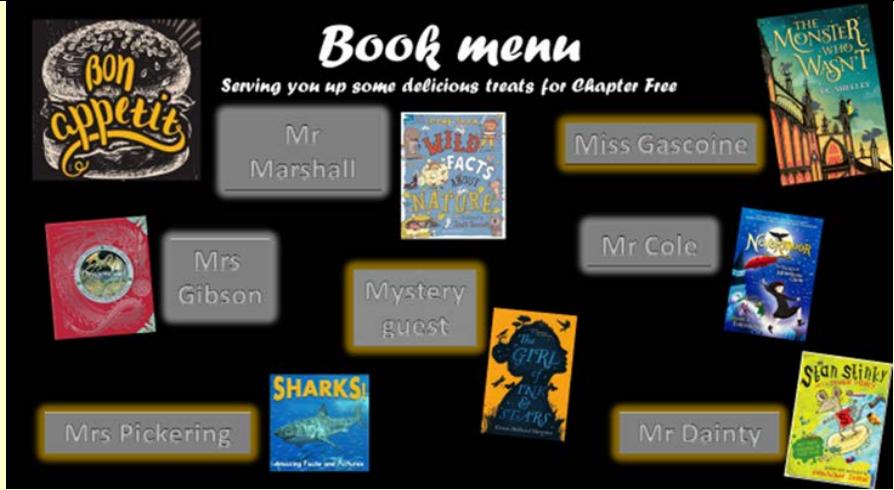
So, here's how we did it:

Every fortnight, children choose where and who they hear read a chapter of a story or book (sometimes more than a chapter) on a Friday afternoon as this was when the children indicated that they felt most relaxed and story ready.



Choices are made early in the week. Children selected a person who in turn, decided on the place for their read aloud. Our whole school and wider community were involved in Chapter Free Friday, so children had the opportunity to hear a range of adults read to them: teachers; our head teacher and other senior leaders; teaching assistants and now, parents and other adults from our community. We monitored the books read to ensure that a variety of texts were heard by the children.

As we continued with the programme, I recognised that in order to ensure that read aloud was owned by the children, I needed to provide teachers with a better system to ensure children had more choice about the type of book on offer; the book menu was born.



Children were now able to choose the book they heard, the adult who read to them and the location of where they were listening.

## Impact

When asked about the experience, children made the following comments:

*'I love that we get to hear different adults and different books. Sometimes if you're not into the daily read, you've got a long time to wait to hear something else but with Chapter free, we don't have to.'*

*'I like getting out of my classroom and hearing a story somewhere else.'*

*'I like sitting with children from other year groups.'*

Children have explained their own classroom isn't always the most relaxing place to listen. Children enjoy discussing where they were going and explained that they loved the subsequent conversations on returning to class, sharing what they had heard.

When discussing why children made their CFF choices, they said:

*'I think the book is going to be funny and Mr Burrows is kind.'*

*'I like the person reading the book because we both like sports.'*

*'I chose a book that I have seen my sister reading before. I think it's going to be silly.'*

*'I like Miss Stocker and I like the book. It's one I know from last year when you read it to us for bedtime stories.'*

*'I chose this book because it's about Vikings and Mr Marshall is reading it and he's big and strong.'*

It was evident from the comments, that the relational and social aspect of reading aloud is incredibly important in the choices they make, which is indicative of the research findings of the TaRs project.



Teachers have all responded positively to CFF. The ground work we had completed prior to CFF (Whole school approach: part one) meant that, as a staff, we valued the project and what reading aloud could offer our children. Adults have explained that they genuinely enjoy that part of the day and that they look forward to welcoming a different group of children each week.

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The Teachers as Readers research has contributed considerably to this project. The research shaped and developed our pedagogy. As CFF has become something our whole school community is a part of. Alongside the commitment of staff, the research enabled us to build a reading community where children have the choice of where and what they hear read aloud, but more importantly changed views, and developed a shared understanding that reading aloud is something the children have ownership of. Children are not swayed to visit a different teacher each week or directed to go to a particular member of staff; they have the right to choose freely.

CFF gives children the opportunity to see reading modelled from different adults on a regular basis, helping them to '*hear the sounds and music of the text within a risk-free environment*' (Reading Rich Pedagogies website 'Social Reading Environments pg.5) At no point during CFF, are children asked comprehension questions or expected to recall events in a text.

We are also gaining a better understanding of our children as readers, as we start to compile information about which books or readers are more popular. I intend to use this information to plan our next steps.

Trelease, J. (2013) *The Read Aloud Handbook*, (7th edition). New York: Penguin

Cremin, Teresa (2019). Teachers' knowledge of children's literature: the cornerstone of reading for pleasure. Scottish Book Trust.

Cremin, T., Bearne, E., Goodwin, P. and Mottram, M. (2008) Primary teachers as readers English in Education