

# Mystery Readers

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## Context:

I am an NQT working in Reception at a new three form entry school in Cambridgeshire. There are thirty children in each Reception class from a range of different nurseries. Our school has a diverse intake of learners and many children are bilingual or new to English. In my class (Sunflower) there are more than ten different languages spoken by the children including: Bengali, Turkish, Polish, Spanish and Greek. I set up Mystery Readers as an initiative across all three Reception Classes.

## Research inspiration and rationale:

The Teachers as Readers research highlights that children's reading for pleasure is encouraged when children feel they are part of a reading community where different voices and text types are valued. In particular, the Teachers as Readers research shows that strong connections between home and school encourage this type of reading community, with new kinds of conversation about texts.

## Aims:

- To encourage book talk and sharing of favourite texts within our class reading community.
- To support the development of our class's reading community, in particular encouraging a two-way exchange of books between home and school.

## Outline:

Another teacher, from the Trumpington Federation in Cambridge, had shared the idea for Mystery Readers with me. She explained that it had supported their parental engagement with reading. Mystery Readers is a weekly thirty minute slot where a parent or carer comes into school and shares a text with the class. The children do not know who is going to visit them each week and what story they will bring.

The format for Mystery Readers is very simple and inexpensive. We placed a sign up sheet in each Reception classroom, inviting parents and carers to sign up for a weekly reading slot. We also placed a call for readers on our school website and blog. We asked each Mystery Reader to decide on a book title before coming into school and think about why this text is special to them and their family.

This term the children have shared stories in Italian, Turkish, Polish, Spanish and French. We are looking forward to hearing more new languages next term!

## Impact:

- Increased children's interest in reading in their home language and English. Parents have reported an increased motivation and request for stories in the children's home language at bedtime. In addition parents have reported increased discussion about texts in English and other languages.
- Broadened children's conceptions of what it means to be a "reader". For example, parents have shared oral stories, non fiction texts and stories from different countries. This has demonstrated to the children that reading is much more than just a school phonics scheme.
- Deepened children's understanding and empathy for members of their class. For example child X said, "now I know how Y (child new to English) feels at story time because I can hear the words but I don't know who the goody and the baddie is."
- Greater discussions about books between teachers and parents have happened since the Mystery Readers invitation. For example, parents have discussed the stories they are currently enjoying and have brought favourite books in from home to share at story time.

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice:

The Teachers as Readers research has enabled me to understand more fully the role of relationships and community on children's reading for pleasure. Furthermore, the research has supported me in reflecting on the positive impact of inviting parents into the classroom to share their favourite texts from home, blurring the boundary between home and school literacy practices.