

Reading journeys and book choice: making connections

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This draws on:

- My children's own experiences
- Many conversations over a number of years with children and parents in my role as an independent children's bookseller and reading for pleasure advocate

www.readersthatcare.co.uk

Blog: www.readingpebbles.co.uk

Context: motivation to learn more about RfP



“Four plus years ago my daughter aged just 7 (Summer born year 2) came dangerously close to losing interest in reading altogether because she could not find anything she wanted to read. Then we discovered Hetty Feather.

But, that was only the start of her reading journey. In the next 18 months there were several more times she just about lost interest in reading altogether.

It took till Easter of year 4, for her to accurately be able to select her own a middle grade novel she would enjoy and was able to read”.

Context

“ I have learnt so much from being part of the @_Reading_Rocks_ community and then @OpenUni_RfP community about children’s books and the processes which can help children become motivated readers.

In the past 6 months (since joining OU/UKLA RfP group) one of the most important things I have learnt is what a difference ‘small changes’ can make.

And the realisation that sometimes looking at something from a ‘slightly different perspective’ or changing your ‘mind-set ’ a little can help you make a small change that make a real difference to reading for pleasure”

Reading journeys and book choice: OU RfP research

Two things that developed my interest in reading journeys:

- having been encouraged to look at the OU rich pedagogies website by attending an OU/UKLA RfP group I found I became particularly interested in the posts on '*Reading Rivers*'.
- Attending the OU RfP conference in Macclesfield in March I was introduced to the idea of brick walls to show the books a child had read.

What I did next:

- I used both of these ideas to look at my son's reading journey in more detail
- Then I came up with the concept of: 'Layering in a reading for pleasure context' to explain a process that I believe happens naturally in some families.

OU Research Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings which fed my work:

2. Knowledge of children's reading practices

3. Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy in particular:

- Reading aloud (but especially what is read aloud at home)
- Reading independently
- Social environment - especially outside of school (Cremin et al., 2014)

Layering: in context of RfP

What do I mean by Layering?

➤ It's about going back in time and looking at the books a child has most enjoyed hearing 'read aloud', reading independently and/or 'literacy experiences' (e.g. author visits/festivals and possibly TV dramas/films) and seeing what influence they may have had on a child's reading choices.

Why does it matter?

➤ From my experience many 'developing readers' and especially those aged 7 and 8 years do not 'consciously' know what it was about that story that kept them reading. Making it more challenging to navigate between one read and the next.

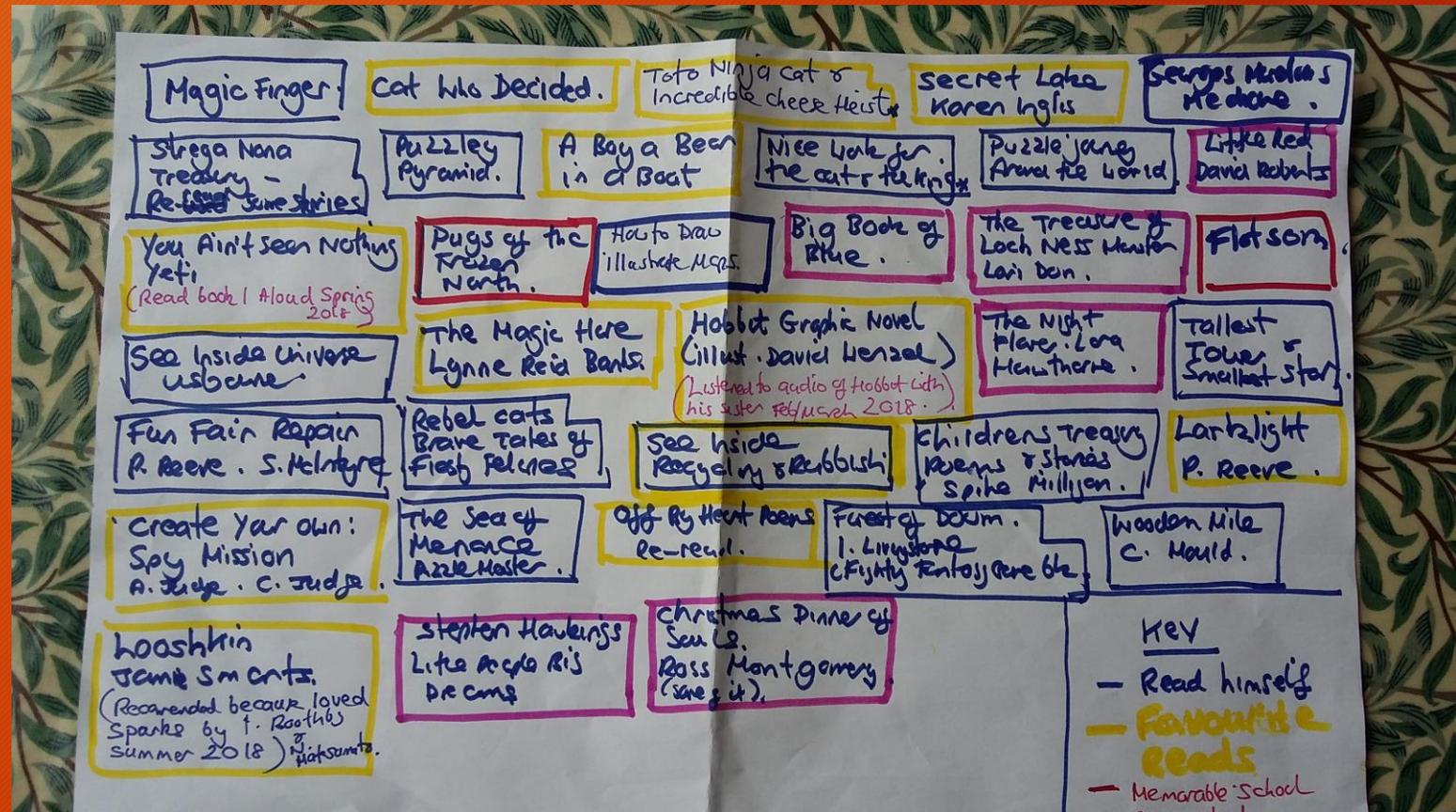
Layering: term perspective, using brick walls

Books my son read independently and most books read aloud at home and at school. October half-term to February of Year 3.

Yellow - favourite personal reads

Red - most memorable books read aloud at school.

Note: Usbourne puzzle books and fantasy quest played part in his development as a reader



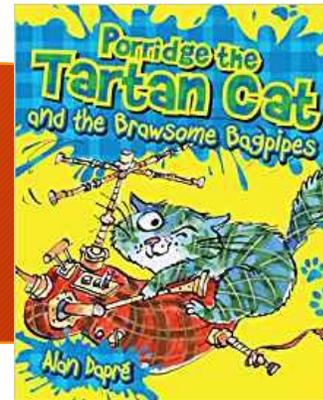
Layering - longer perspectives (BFG)



BFG

Summer holidays:
Film and then Audio
September 2016:
Roald Dahl Day

My son was fascinated by the mixed-up language in the BFG and that he'd kind of invented his own language

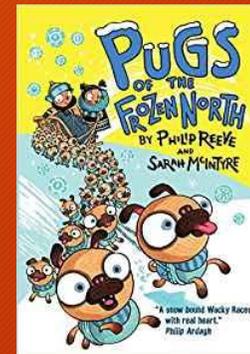


Porridge Tartan Cat
The sSeries that got my son interested in reading - began shared reading bk1, July 2017



Some of the books my son chose to read aloud in the Summer holidays of 2018

Layering: longer perspectives (fantasy)



Opening the door to Fantasy adventures

Books Read Aloud at home
to R and his sister:
March 2018 (Year 2)
Hobbit
Nothing to See Here Hotel
(Bk1)

Independent Reading
Nov 17 - March 18
Year 2

School
Read
Aloud
Oct 2018
Year 3

Oct 2018:
Nothing to See Here Hotel Bk2
Dec18: Graphic novel Hobbit
Feb 2019: Larklight, Philip Reeve
April 2019: Warrior Cats
Year 3

Layering: examples additional notes

BFG example

- It was fascinating to realise that one of the key things that interested him and influenced his book choices in summer holidays 2018 was the idea of 'made up' and 'mixed up language'. *Harry the Centipede* has his own language. In *Dottie Blanket* there are some Welsh words. Listening to the *BFG* also influenced this interest in playing with language.
- **Other 'layering' in the context of the *BFG* is worth noting:**
 - **Accessing a longer text through film and audio:** The film got him interested in the story, which we then listened to in the car on the way to our summer holiday in Wales (at this point he would not have listened to the book being read aloud).
 - **Social environment reinforcing personal interest.** On Roald Dahl day at his school for the first time he wanted to dress up as something! All of the *BFG* experiences he shared with his sister.

Layering: reflections and next steps

- I shared the Layering slides in this PowerPoint in the last session of our OU /UKLA RfP group.
- I have since had some really positive feedback about how the idea of layering has really got them thinking on how the idea could be used to support reading for pleasure.
- I also reflected this is not something that classroom teachers would have time to do with a whole class. It is subtly different to Reading Rivers that you could do with a whole class.
 - If teachers, teaching assistants, staff or volunteers working to support children's development as readers were given the time to follow and reflect on a small number of children's reading journey's over a period of 12-18 months plus, they are likely to gain useful insights which would help them support other children to navigate their book choices.

Layering: reflections and next steps

There are a number of ways this is starting to influence my own thoughts and practice in supporting children to navigate their reading journeys

- *Subtly shifting my perspective* has given me a different angle from which to frame some conversations with parents. For example, suggesting books a child could read, AND some books that could be read aloud at the same time (See next section helping parents with book choices).
- It has enabled me to appreciate the important role *reading aloud books at home* can have not only on a child's enjoyment and motivation to want to read, but also in broadening their book experience and opening doors to future reads. I have begun to think of some ideas for how parents could be encouraged and supported to read aloud with their children.

Helping parents/carers: support their children reading choices

I have events where I talk directly to children and help them choose books. But, more than 60% of what I do is talk to parents or grandparents who are trying to help the children in their lives find books they want to read

Whilst all 5 of the Open University *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) findings on what helped foster RfP could be relevant to conversations I have with parents. These are particularly important.

1. Considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts
2. Knowledge of children's reading practices
3. A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:
 - Social reading environments
 - Reading aloud
 - Independent reading
 - Informal book talk, inside text talk and recommendations (Cremin et al., 2014)

Examples and applying new understanding

What follows are 3 brief examples of conversations with parents which indicate the emerging impact of this approach.

1. A Year 5 child who has lost interest in reading
2. A Year 3 child likes bite-sized information
3. A Year 3 child re-engaging in reading

Note: You don't need all the answers you just need to know where to look for it and who to ask. In Example 1 I used: information from another child and a useful website to share with a parent.

Some things that have changed my approach from my understanding of '*Layering*' are:

- Where possible give parents the suggestion for now *AND* a next step as I never quite know when you will speak to them again.
- The potential life changing difference for some readers of suggesting some books they could read independently *AND* books parents could read aloud at the same time.

Example 1: A Year 5 child who had lost interest in reading

“A mum came to me and said:
“ Her child had lost interest in reading.
That she had tried *Amulet* (graphic
novel) , but then seemed to loose
interest.”

I asked another child:
“ I noticed a while back you picked *up Amulet* and
didn't read it and then recently you have. What made
the difference?”
She replied:
“ I discovered you needed to read the books in order,
otherwise it was confusing”

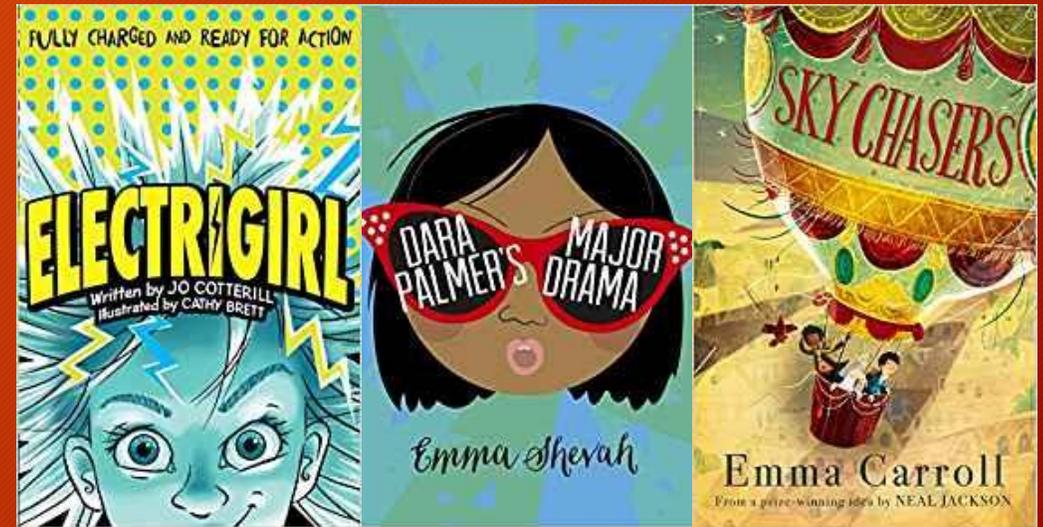
Year 5 child enjoying reading again

What I did:

1. Gave her mum a print out from children's sequels of the order of the *Amulet* books so that she could read them in order
2. Gave her a box of 3 books to borrow for an unspecified period of time.

A useful place to find out the order of a series is:

www.childrensbooksequels.co.uk

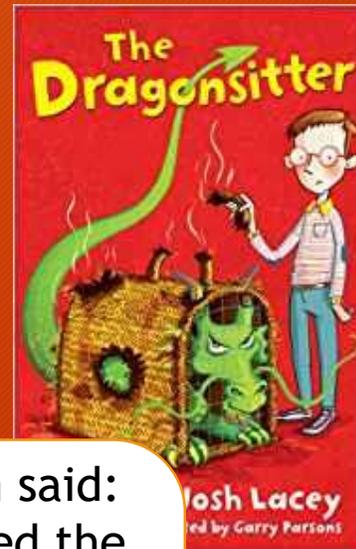


Example 2: A Year 3 child who likes bite-sized information

A mum came to me and said:
“ Her son really enjoyed non-fiction books at home. But, was struggling to find a fiction book he wanted to read at school. He prefers bite-sized information and shorter reads.”

I said:
“ I had just finished reading a series he might like called the *Dragon Sitters*. It’s written as a series of emails.

His mum said:
“ He loved the book, and I’ve just bought him the other books in the series”



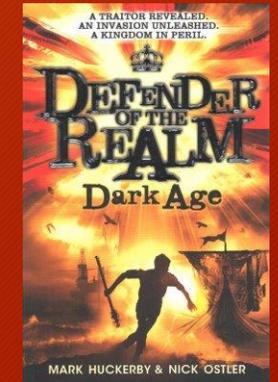
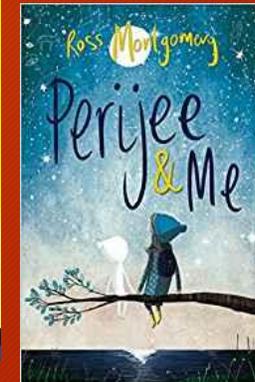
What I would say is:

You could also read him aloud *Beetle Boy* by MG Leonard (great choice for non-fiction animal lovers)
OR
Storm Hound by Claire Fayers.

Example 3: A Year 3 child: re-engaging in reading

A mum came to me and said (June 19):
“ My daughter seems to have lost interest in reading towards the end of this year. She doesn’t seem interested in her current book. “

I also suggested some books to read aloud this Summer (see right).



I asked the child :
“ Do you prefer fantasy or ‘real stories’”
She said fantasy, so I learnt her 5 books over the weekend to choose one.
She chose: *The Naughtiest Unicorn*.

Before I came up with the idea of layering after examining my son’s reading journey I would never have thought of suggesting a book AND books to read aloud at the same time.

In a different conversation with her mum I learnt they loved Northumbria. Which immediately made me think of *Defenders of the Realm*, as book 2 begins on Lindisfarne in Northumbria.