

Our Desert Island Reads by Charlotte Underhill

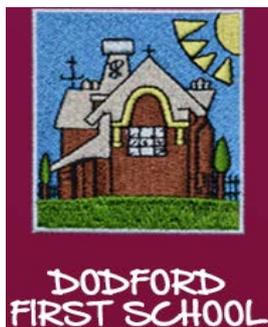


Desert Island Reads

The Challenge

You can take one book only to read on a desert island.

What would it be?



Context

I am English Subject Leader at Dodford First School in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. We are a very small village school and I currently teach a mixed Year 1 and 2 class. English is a high priority on our school development plan with particular focus on reading into writing. We have already been working to establish a reading for pleasure ethos across the school and many children, staff and parents are already on board and engaged.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

We started by carrying out a reading survey across the whole school. Our initial results demonstrated that most pupils have a positive image of themselves as readers, with many children already enjoying reading and reading regularly both in school and at home.

94% of pupils across the school agreed, "I like reading".

100% of pupils in Reception and KS1 said they read regularly at home whilst 72% of pupils in KS2 preferred to read at home rather than at school.

Reading for Pleasure research, led by Professor Teresa Cremin (Building Communities of Engaged Readers Reading for Pleasure, Cremin et al., 2014) suggests that whilst many teachers know their children's reading scores/levels, their targets and colour band from which children select appropriate books, many teachers readily acknowledged they knew little about the children's preferences as readers, their favourite genres, authors, text types for instance, or their everyday reading practices at home.

Following our initial survey and discussions with staff, we felt that this was a reflection of current practice at our school. Therefore, we decide to focus on developing:

teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices.

Whilst many of our pupils were reading regularly at home, information recorded in home reading diaries didn't encourage staff to find out more about pupils' personal reading habits and preferences.

Reading is timetabled regularly but staff felt that our emphasis was on teaching decoding and comprehension skills and that teachers dictating book choice. We wanted to look at increasing time for informal book talk and to consider pupil book preferences when planning our reading curriculum and developing class resources.

We decided to find out more about our pupils' reading interests outside of lessons. As teachers we wanted to get to know the children in our class as readers away from the National Curriculum expectations. We wanted to explore the types of reading materials, books and authors that pupils were interested in and by investigating children's reading habits outside the classroom, we hoped to build and further develop our school 'reading for pleasure' ethos.

Aims

- ❖ To improve teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices in school and at home.
- ❖ To increase opportunities for book talk.
- ❖ To create a wider buzz about reading across the school and home, leading to increased engagement from our small group of reluctant readers.

Outline

We began by asking pupils to create reading rivers as a homework project. Children were invited to record their reading over a period of time – all reading! We were extremely pleased with the results, with most families throughout the school taking up the challenge. This offered staff a valuable insight into the children's reading habits at home.



Teachers used these reading rivers to hold book conversations with pupils. They discussed the children's reading choices, discovering favourite authors and reading materials. As a direct result, we created comic boxes for every classroom; our children loved reading comics, but we provided very few in school.

Following the reading river class discussions, as a staff, we decided to look at further opportunities where pupils could share their own reading preferences with their friends; we decided to hold a whole school reading event. Pupils were asked to recommend their favourite desert island read to their peers by completing bookmark reviews. Each class then went on to spend a day building dens in which to read, discuss and share their desert island books with friends and teachers.



After 'Reading Den Day', pupils were asked to vote for their all-time favourite desert island read and the top three book selections were then kindly purchased by our school Parents' Association and added to each class reading area. We felt that this was a successful way to raise the profile of reading for pleasure placing the children's choices at the heart of the conversations – valuing their interests and opinions. It provided a great opportunity for informal book talk, and refocused teachers on not only teaching the skills of reading but investing in developing the children's reading for enjoyment.



Following this whole school event within my own classroom, pupils began to bring their own books into school more regularly. I decided to set up a voting system for my class to decide on their own story time book for each day. This has proved to be very popular and a real talking point of the day.



Impact

The desert island read project provided an engaging way to promote informal book talk in classrooms. In some instances it expanded the teachers' knowledge of texts and encouraged them to step outside of their comfort zones, providing alternative reading materials that teachers may have originally avoided, e.g. comic books, alternative authors.

Observations within my own classroom during free reading times demonstrated that more pupils were using the class reading area. They enjoyed sharing and recommending their own books and enthusiasm has grown for shared reading times. *"Can we read the desert island books?"* *"When can we vote for the next read?"* were just some of the pupils' comments. Over the rest of the summer term, pupils regularly began to bring in books from home to add to our reading selection and the voting system has now become a daily fixture within the classroom. This demonstrates the children have more autonomy over classroom reading times. By valuing their preferences and choices, the children are developing more confidence and are reading books recommended by their peers.

The top nominated desert island read books have been purchased and are in each classroom for pupils to enjoy. Our Parents' Association were happy to provide funds to support this project and book choice has come directly from the pupils, validating and valuing the children's book selection.

Finally, I returned to chat with the two reluctant readers within my class who had initially given negative responses about reading. I carried out the reading survey again with them and they had both changed their opinion. One stated that they now loved reading whilst the other felt reading was okay. Both pupils could talk more positively about their experiences of reading within the classroom:

"I like voting for our stories because you get to hear the books you like."

"I like reading in the igloo and all the comfy reading areas around school."

"I enjoy listening to adults when they read us stories."

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

I feel participation in the reading project has enhanced our work as a school on promoting reading for pleasure. It has been particularly useful to meet and share ideas with other teachers and the Open University website, Research Rich Pedagogies: <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/reading-for-pleasure>, provides an invaluable source of ideas and starting points.

'Children, like adults, develop reading preferences, and teachers need to be able to match texts to individual's interests and needs. Such focused advice not only widens reading repertoires, but increases the chances of young readers finding reading relevant. It can also foster shared knowledge of texts, prompting rich text talk between peers and between teachers and children who have read the same text' (Cremin et al., 2014:35). The Teachers as Readers research team found that effective teachers of reading require sound knowledge of the children as readers and of children's literature. In finding out about our readers through a range of ways and using this information to provide more tailored reading resources, we have been able to raise the profile of reading for pleasure and demonstrate that we value our children's opinions. I feel that reading for pleasure within my own classroom has become more prominent with a focus on pupils' voice to guide our reading materials. Pupils are now encouraged to bring in their own books to share and the voting system for story time has been well received by my new class.

As a school, we are planning to continue to hold regular 'read for pleasure' events and to continue to promote informal book talk within each classroom. Staff are now in the process of developing class reading areas both to be a special place to read and an area where book recommendations and pupil reading preferences can be shared.