

## **And the winner is...**

**How participation in Shrewsbury Bookfest Book Award cultivated a love of reading for pleasure.**

**Simone Goward**

**For consideration within the Egmont RfP Awards – Experienced Teacher**

## **Context**

I work in Greenacres Primary School which is situated Shrewsbury, Shropshire. We have a relatively transient population with approximately 150 children (including Nursery pupils) on role; a larger than average percentage of children who are Pupil Premium and our pupils are of predominately white British heritage. An above average number of our families need additional support and involvement with external agencies.



Year 6 was a small cohort of 17 who took part in Book Award.

## **OU Research inspiration and rationale**

In September, I was concerned that many of the children in my new Y6 class only read when they had to and those who struggled with reading had become, for the most part, disengaged and reluctant readers. They needed prompting to read independently, avoided participating in book talk and couldn't name authors or books that they had enjoyed.

I wanted my class to be buzzing about books but at the beginning of the year they were flat. The TaRs project (Cremin et al 2008) identified informal book talk and recommendations within a highly social reading environment as one of the areas fundamental in developing a reading for pleasure pedagogy. This was where I needed to begin.

I saw participating in Shrewsbury Bookfest as the ideal starting point to develop talk about books within the classroom. Books in common would give our children the opportunity to develop in depth conversations with each other.

Recognising themselves as readers within a wider community, was another area identified as integral in developing reading for pleasure. The project would help to develop a community of readers within the class as well as support the children in recognising themselves as part of a wider community of readers outside of our school.

## Aims

With these considerations in mind, I had the following aims:

- To foster a common reading culture within class
- To introduce new authors, to learn about these authors and the range of books that they have written.
- To encourage reluctant readers to read for pleasure
- To develop opportunities for book talk
- To create a legacy of reading for pleasure that continued once the children moved on to Secondary school.

## Outline

Shrewsbury Bookfest Book Award is an award voted for solely by children across Shropshire which culminates in an award ceremony at Theatre Severn.

I wanted the project to create excitement about reading in our class and so I introduced the books with great fanfare. They were wrapped in paper with enticing comments on the front and given to the children to open in their groups.

That evening each child was able to take one of the shortlisted books home to read.



I had read each of the books beforehand so that I knew them well and was able to talk to all of the children about what they were reading right from the start. Each morning I would welcome the class as they came in and instigate talk about what they had read the previous night. It wasn't long before the children were instigating these conversations themselves and this book talk spread throughout the day.

As well as talking about the books, I also introduced the children to the authors via their websites. I wanted to make the authors real to the children and for the class to have a sense that they knew the authors personally. The next step was to interact with the authors directly and we did this via Twitter.



To help all of the class access the stories, I created photobooks to accompany the texts. This helped those children with weaker language knowledge and memory skills to follow the storylines and recall quickly what had happened so far. I also set up a book club with this small group where we shared the reading and talked about our responses. Having the time to look at the pictures and talk about things that they did not know, helped them greatly. This 'special time' became important to me as well as them.

We created 'story shelves' of objects that related to the books they were reading with some children making their own props to go on the shelves as well. For some children, interacting with the texts in different ways, helped to bring them alive.



After a few weeks, I organised a special treat in the form of a Book Breakfast to celebrate the books we had been reading. Each of the children received a personalised invitation to attend breakfast before school and all bar one of the class attended.







It was lovely to watch the children clutching their books and talking animatedly about them. Our Bookfest visitors were warmly welcomed and the children talked animatedly to them about their reading.

Finally, it was time to vote. Decisions were eventually made and the results were sent off.

Next, we had opportunity to attend the Award Ceremony at Theatre Severn. Seeing the theatre full of children who had read the same book as them, was amazing. They could see their blog responses on the big screen on stage, listen to the authors reading extracts from their books and find out the winners of the art and writing competitions.

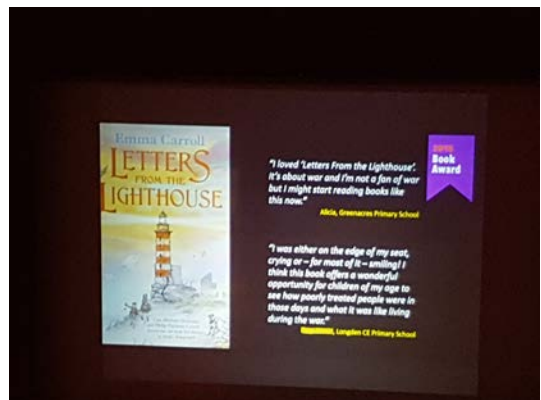
After the ceremony, they had opportunity to meet all of the authors to get their autographs and to have photos taken with them. It was heart-warming to watch the pleasure that they had from this experience. One child said that it was his, "Best day ever!" and there were comments of agreement from his classmates.



## Impact

Taking part in this project had the greatest impact on children choosing to read than any other initiative that we have run previously.

Within class, the project had been one that everyone could take part in, regardless of ability or interest, and



children were willing to read genres that they might not have chosen to read otherwise.

I had been steadily filling the bookshelves with enticing books and organised the classroom to invite the children to explore what we had on offer.

All of the children were now having conversations about what they were reading. They were now having full debates on the texts that they liked and disliked. Some children started to read at home on Kindles and we brought some into class.

They also began to bring books in from home to share and recommend. One boy shyly arrived with Pax by Sara Pennymaker one morning and said, "Miss, you always recommend books to us, so I would like to recommend this to you."

More of the children reported buying books outside of school.

They all knew at least six new authors and for some of those authors could now talk about other books that they had published.

Without us initiating the topic, parents started to talk to us about their child's reading and noticing improvements in attitudes to reading at home, "K has started reading a lot at home... She didn't like her reading books before... She lays on her bed and I have to tell her to stop because it's time to go to sleep..."

A bonus was the impact on the previously lowest attaining readers, many of which made better than expected progress. Two, who had previously had the lowest standardised scores throughout their time in school, had made an increase of +18 and + 22.

I had always hoped that participating in the award would be a spring board to developing a reading for pleasure culture in class. This was definitely the case.

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

Informal booktalk and recommendations within a highly social reading environment was identified through the TaRs research as a vital area in developing a reading for pleasure pedagogy.

Participating in a book award created a sense of excitement in reading for pleasure which continued beyond the award itself. The starting point of me drawing their attention to texts and focusing on these for a short time before stepping back, had a great impact on my pupils. After this input from me, they then moved forward independently to choose their own books and talk about them.

Knowing as many of the books in my classroom as possible helped me to have in depth, knowledgeable, conversations with the children about what they were reading and make recommendations to them. They reciprocated when they realised that the book talk that took place was genuine, that I knew the books and was honestly interested in what they were reading.

Following the success of the project, all classes from Y1 to Y6 are participating in the next award run by Bookfest which is to work with authors and to create their own books.

All teachers (and a TA) in our school from Nursery to Y6 are now taking part in the OU/UKLA Reading for Pleasure project.



"Mrs Goward, thank-you for encouraging my reading addiction!!! From S."