

# Expanding Reading Repertoires – Book Tastings

by Sadie Phillips



## Context

I am a Year 5 teacher in my fourth year of teaching at a free school in London. Last year, I was given responsibility for Writing within the school and I am also part of the Literacy Co-ordinator Team. Creating a reading culture is an essential part of my role.

## Research inspiration and rationale

The Teachers as Readers research project (Cremin et al, 2008, 2014) talks about the need to expand teachers' and children's knowledge of literature and other texts in order to develop children as individual, independent readers. Dedicating time for children to read and talk about their reading was seen as central to building rich communities in the TaRs research and children's choice and access to a wide range of quality texts was also the key to the success of this practice.

The children in my class are creatures of habit. We all know how much children like to watch the same movies over and over again and they also liked to stick to one series of books, one author, or one genre too. I had been looking for an idea to encourage my Year 5 class to venture out of their own comfort zones and try some new texts and hosting a book tasting looked like the perfect mechanism to do just that.



It was exactly what I was looking for, a fun, exciting way to make time and space for children to explore texts in greater depth, sharing favourites, exploring new genres and authors and widening their reading repertoires, whilst also giving them spontaneous opportunities to talk about their reading.

## Aims

1. **To expand children's knowledge of literature and other texts** by exposing them to new genres and authors
2. **To make space and time for Reading for Pleasure**, allowing time also for impromptu book talk and discussion
3. **To create a 'buzz' about Reading for Pleasure amongst pupils** by introducing new books/texts in a fun and engaging way



## Outline

For this RfP project, I wanted to engage and support children to become motivated, independent readers who aren't afraid to explore new genres and authors. I wanted them to be inspired as readers and motivated to seek out and read new texts for themselves. So I sent them each an invitation to join me at a 'book tasting' and placed a few posters around the classroom to build intrigue.

The idea was simple. The classroom would be set up in the style of a typical French restaurant, complete with chequered tablecloths, flowers, place settings and suitable background music for added ambience. Each table would be served a basket of books with a different genre and children would be given short amounts of time to 'taste each dish' (or book).

When the children arrived for the session, I stood at the door in an apron with a clipboard and ushered them to their tables as if I were the *maître d'*. There was a real buzz around the classroom as the children excitedly sat at their tables, eagerly anticipating their amuse bouche, but once the texts were in front of them the room fell completely silent.

They were hooked. After reading a few pages of a book, they were asked to discuss what they had read with others at their table before completing the question prompts on their menu. They were also encouraged to add any interesting vocabulary they found to their placemats. The children also had little bookmarks to record any book titles or authors that they particularly enjoyed so that they could remember them for our next library visit.

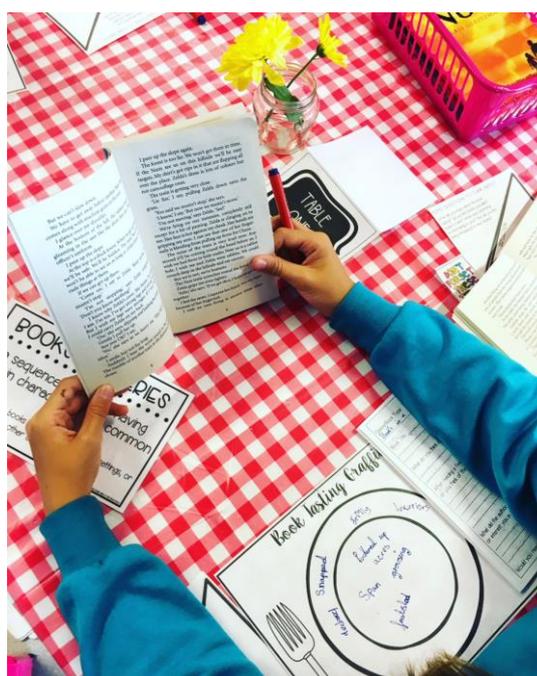


After 10 minutes or so, I then swapped the baskets of books in a clock-wise direction, so that each table was able to explore each genre within the session (historical fiction, picture books, comics and graphic novels, non-fiction, poetry – or whichever genres you choose).

Finally, at the end of the session, the children were asked to complete the 'reflection' napkins so that I knew what they had felt about their experience of the book tasting. I was overwhelmed with the positive response from even my most reluctant readers and I was even more pleased when I heard the book blether continue into lunchtime with lively chatter and comparisons about their favourites.

### Impact

- The idea was so successful that it was rolled out to all of the other classes in school during Literacy Week. 280 children participated in a book tasting last year from EYFS through to Year 6.
- Children were very excited to see the tables set up and to experience a 'taster' of some new books that they had not read or seen.
- All of the children could all engage in in-depth chat about the 'tasters'. Suddenly, a much wider range of books were flying off the bookshelves in our reading corner.
- Feedback from the children was overwhelmingly positive. Quotes included, *"This is amazing! Can we do it again tomorrow?"* and *"I have found 5 new books I want to read today!"*
- This year we are taking it one step further with a book tasting hosted in class at the end of each term (or whenever the library receives a fresh batch of books!) in order to keep the momentum going.
- I now keep a 'special selection' of my own books on the shelf in our book corner and when children are looking for recommendations I try to suggest 2 or 3 (including a wild card!) so that they still have choice and ownership over what they are reading.
- The 'book blether' continued beyond the classroom into lunchtime and onto the playground.



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

I was absolutely blown away by the impact of this activity focused on widening their knowledge in an informal social space. Whilst I always seek out quality texts to invigorate my teaching, I had not put as much focus on ensuring the children were choosing quality texts for their own reading books as well. The book tasting was a fantastic activity for enthusing and engaging my class to explore new texts and I will certainly be using it more regularly in the future.

Coaxing children to open up to other genres can yield huge benefits in the long run. Not only does it expose them to whole new worlds and grow their love of reading, but it also builds vocabulary, fosters skill development, and contributes to comprehension and social and emotional development (conjuring up a greater range and depth of different emotions and ways of expression).

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