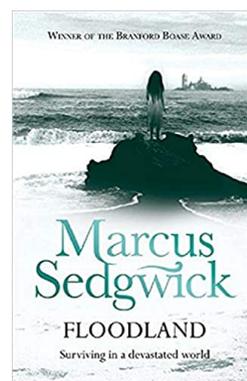


Books, Blogs and Blether

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Context

I am a Year 6 teacher and Literacy specialist at an independent school in South London. As a school, we are committed to developing a community of engaged readers. I pride myself on creating a rich reading culture in my classroom and cherish time spent reading aloud and discussing books with my class.

As schools, teachers and families have abruptly shifted to online education, one question on teachers' minds has been how to transition to virtual platforms, where classes can continue to enjoy reading for pleasure and maintain their passion for reading during this challenging time.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

The Teachers as Readers research (Cremin et al. 2014) highlights the importance of reading aloud:

- Reading aloud and discussing the text was a crucial strand of the RfP pedagogy identified in the TaRs research. It enabled children to access rich and challenging texts, offered a model for silent independent reading, prompted the children's affective engagement and created a class repertoire of 'texts in common' to discuss.

The *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer* survey into the reading habits of UK children by Nielsen Book Research in partnership with Egmont Publishing (March 2019) states that:

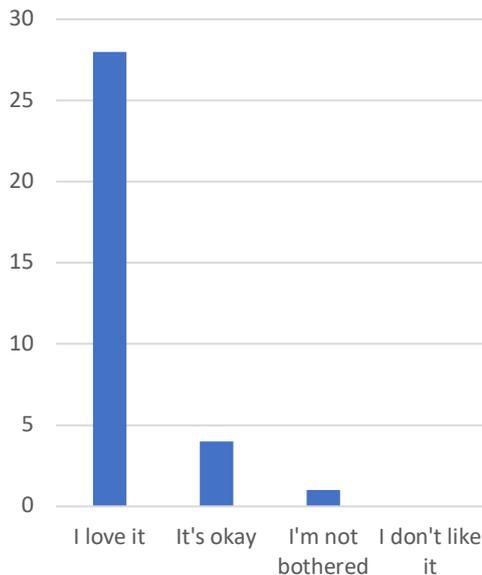
- only 32% of British children are read to daily by an adult
- Most parents stop reading to their child by the age of eight
- Just 19% of 8-10-year-olds have books read to them by an adult daily

Given the evidence, I wanted to ensure that children continued to enjoy daily read alouds throughout the school closure period. Reading aloud is not an 'optional extra'; it is every child's right to hear fiction, non-fiction and poetry read aloud with passion and pleasure every day (whether they are in school or at home!)

Internal Research Inspiration

Shortly before COVID-19 hit the UK, I had conducted a reading survey with my class to evaluate their reading habits and preferences. It became very clear that the class read alouds were a firm favourite among many so I knew that this was something I definitely wanted to continue whilst the children were at home.

Q11. Do you like it when your teacher reads aloud?



When asked **why** they enjoyed it when their teacher reads aloud, responses included:

- She puts a lot of expression in when she reads and makes it fun.*
- Because she reads with passion.*
- It creates more tension. I find it more enjoyable with facial features and physical features.*
- I like relaxing at the end of an English lesson and listening to a story.*
- I really enjoy the book in class.*
- My teacher reads very enthusiastically and really grippingly. She reads it in a way that you want to listen to her.*
- I find it calming and soothing to listen to her.*
- It is nice to listen to someone else read – you can learn things from it too.*
- I like seeing how other people express the characters and listening to other voices.*
- Because at school it helps you relax after lots of busy lessons.*
- It's a fun way to get together with the class and listen to a book.*
- Because I can just relax and enjoy the story instead of having to get all my spellings and stuff right.*
- Because she says it with emotion and it's like it's really happening in front of me.*
- She puts on loads of voices and is very good at reading aloud.*
- She does it with expression and makes you interested.*
- Because she really expresses her voice and she really interprets the characters.*
- I like to hear other people than myself.*
- She reads books really nicely and the book is interesting anyway.*
- I think this is because she is an English teacher so she always picks really interesting and exciting books.*
- Because I enjoy the book and how my teacher reads.*
- She is good at reading at the book is good.*
- She uses different voices and it's like a little treat.*
- I love being read at, not just reading by myself.*
- I feel relaxed when Miss Phillips reads and she takes on the characters of the people in the book really well.*

Not only did many children **enjoy** this time, but many also stated that it helped them to **relax** or **escape** – something I felt was going to be incredibly important for the children's mental health during these uncertain times. No matter what's going on in the world, a good book can provide enjoyment, comfort and a welcome escape.

Aims

1. **To continue with daily read alouds, offering children enjoyment, relaxation and escapism**
2. **To create a safe online space for children to meet, listen, share and enjoy quality texts together**
3. **To encourage and promote rich, informal book talk**

Outline

Despite being apart, I wanted to bring our reading community even closer together and so we created our **Y6 Read Aloud Blog** on the virtual learning platform Purple Mash.

1. **Trial Run – Author Videos:** I began by posting a chapter a day of *Floodland* by Marcus Sedgwick. I did throughout the first week and over the Easter holiday. I simply posted the chapter and asked a few questions to prompt discussion. I was new to the Purple Mash platform and, quite simply, I wanted to get something up and running quickly. As the children quickly became used to this new platform, they began commenting and joining the discussion on the blog. The first chapter gain 27 responses almost immediately.
2. **Questions to engage and entice:** I continued to upload the chapters one by one. With each blog post, I also encouraged responses by posting some questions for the children to think about. I too joined in with the discussions and book bletcher online – commenting on their responses and pushing for a little more depth where necessary. At the end of the book, I filmed myself giving my own thoughts and reactions and asked for responses.



I hope you all enjoyed the last chapter! I hope you all enjoyed listening along together!! I have included a little video from me too - this was filmed in my cosy little reading corner in the spare bedroom 😊

As most people know, I am a middle child too, and sometimes it gets a little annoying. But I can't entirely relate because I have two sisters and not two brothers.

Last Monday at 12:01

I think that the genre is 'Adventure' because the cover had trees on and is dark and gloomy.

Last Monday at 11:57

I think it is about a family, who get separated from their parents, as they weren't any adults judging by the cover.

Last Monday at 11:20

The bunch of trees could be the beginning of the quite war territory, like the trenches and no mans land in world war 1

Last Monday at 10:37

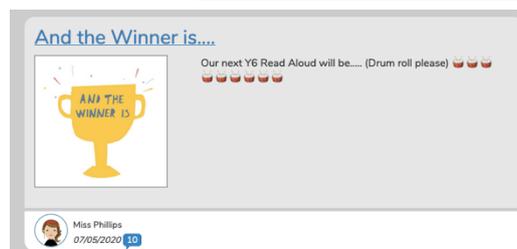
It was really interesting. I like books about world war 2, very factual. This is also about a quite war. Hidden secrets of what is happening out there, like in the concentration camps.

Last Monday at 10:35

3. Giving children choice and voice: Following on from the success of *Floodland*, we used the Purple Mash platform to host a vote for the next Read Aloud. The children were given four texts to choose from with a picture of the cover and a brief synopsis of each text. They were given a few days to consider their choices and vote. When we announced the winning book there was clearly excitement around the 'reveal'.



4. Switching to Teams and Teacher Videos: With students craving teacher contact (and having had some time to set up and navigate our new virtual learning platform - Microsoft Teams), our second read aloud *The Middler* by Kirsty Applebaum was read by me. I filmed myself reading a chapter a day and uploaded this to our new Y6 Read Aloud Blog on Microsoft Teams. The children responded very well to the new platform. Recording myself also allowed time to pause, ask questions verbally and make it even more informal. It allowed me to use expressive voices and tone. I also stopped writing question prompts below my posts and simply invited responses verbally at the end of each video instead, just as I would have done in the classroom.



5. Handing over responsibility: The final phase, once we had spent several weeks engaging in online discussions via our online platforms, was to hand over ownership to the children. I wrote a comment on one of the chapters calling for 'Online Reading Champions' to lead our online discussions and this worked really well. I had previously found that children were only responding directly to my questions (and not engaging with each other), which meant the chat felt a big 'one way'. I felt by inviting the children to lead it, they would make more effort to engage with each other. This shift in ownership gave them more responsibility over the book chat and the number of responses rocketed! They look it upon themselves to become 'Online Reading Champions' (we never officially named anyone in particular) and started to question, challenge and engage with each other online – just as they would in a small group discussion or a whole class discussion in school. They also began using the emojis to respond to each other, allowing others to see who they agreed with, or were shocked by! It was brilliant!

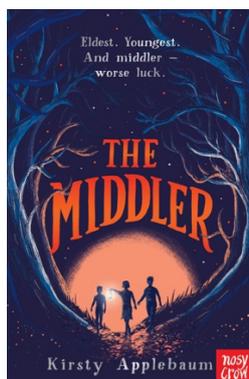


Subject: RE: Thank you so much.

Message: Thank you Miss Phillips for replying so quickly. I feel like I can count on you and you are always here for me even if it's not face to face. It's so funny how a teacher has done a Tik Tok. (You're so cool 😊) LOL. I have finished Floodland and I loved it thank you for introducing so many different types of books. I would have never thought I would read anything like that. I love how it was jammed packed full of adventure. Thank you for always being there and I can't wait for more daily chats to come 😊 .

Impact

- We were able to **build an online community of readers and talk remotely about books**. Children enjoyed the experience of a shared daily read aloud (albeit virtual!). Significantly, this was **volitional** (children had a choice whether to participate or not and the overwhelming majority of children did).
- Children commented that they would not have chosen the texts themselves but that they enjoyed them and that it had **opened them up to new types of books**. *"I have finished Floodland and I loved it. Thank you for introducing me to so many different types of books. I would have never thought I would read anything like that. It was jampacked full of adventure. Thank you for always being there and I can't wait for more daily chats to come."*
- Children were **expanding their reading repertoires** beyond their normal choices – they expressed interest in sequels and one child also told me they bought a book by the same author to read on their own. They often expressed enthusiasm and excitement, "these chapters are getting better and better", "can't wait for the next chapter Miss P", "It's getting soooo good" etc.
- Many children's comments and **responses became more sophisticated** as time went on. They went from simple responses to much longer, more detailed thoughts and discussions, as well as introducing questions of their own. **Children began to take ownership of the discussion**. Online Reading Champions took it upon themselves to drive the book blether, ask questions and encourage debate about the book.
- Added functions such as emojis or the like/love/shocked/angry buttons on Microsoft Teams encouraged them to respond and react to each others' comments, as well as the chapter itself.
- Children were clearly **enjoying the books** and often asked about it during form time Zooms or live English lessons too ('*Will you still read The Middler of half term?*' etc).
- Some **parents emailed to say they had enjoyed listening to the book** with their child at home.
- Something I didn't expect was that children displayed **gratitude** for the continuation of the daily read alouds. **Messages of thanks** (from children and parents) were regular, which shows that they were enjoying the read alouds at home.



Cool	Last Monday at 10:00
It looks great	Last Monday at 09:31
I am SO EXCITED	Last Sunday at 18:42
so excited	Last Sunday at 18:44
I am so excited	Last Sunday at 10:39
So am !!	Last Sunday at 10:04

I think the mayor is horrible and trying to protect her legacy by not telling it the full truth about the wanderers and doing it, from the mayors point of view, to make sure their isn't a riot from the villagers to try and get rid of the mayor because of all the evil things the mayor had done to the wanderers and possibly more people. The mayor seems like a person who seems nice on the outside but nasty on the inside. There is also the mystery of what happens to the 'Elders' and they could be killed maybe because they were old enough to want to sneak out into the real world and see what it is like behind the barriers of the village and they could possibly encounter a wanderer and hear the truth about the mayor. The camp could also be where the Elders are trained to fight the people trying to stop the mayor. This place seems quite alien with the way that they try and give the eldest's a feel that they are the best and Maggie said that the eldests always win the diary competition which gives a feel that they are biased towards them which is quite unlike the world today. I cannot wait to read more of this book as it seems very interesting 😊. Thank you Miss P for having this idea!

Last Tuesday at 11:41

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Finding new ways to promote Reading for Pleasure during remote learning has undoubtedly been a challenge. However, I think the key thing to take away is that this shared experience of reading was volitional and the overwhelming majority of children chose to participate and contribute to the book blether. It allowed us all a moment of pure escapism and enjoyment every day and I feel that it has brought us even closer together as a reading community.

References

- Building Communities of Engaged Readers (Cremin et al., 2014)
- Understanding the Children's Book Consumer survey into the reading habits of UK children (Nielsen Book Research, 2019).