

# Creating Readers

Lucy Catten

## Context



Thomas Hickman School is based in an area of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire with above average rates of Pupil Premium, EAL and SEN children. We have nearly 500 pupils on role from the age of 2-11.

I am a Year 5 Class Teacher and, as a passionate advocate of Reading for Pleasure, was asked to take on the role of Reading Lead in September 2020. Despite having a high level of success in phonics screening results at the end of KS1, our KS2 results do not reflect this. Anecdotal evidence suggests many children in KS2 do not enjoy reading, don't read outside of school and do not have access to books at home.



[@Lucy\\_Literati](#)



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## Research inspiration and rationale

The Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research revealed the importance of richly engaging reading spaces, both physically and socially, in developing children's reading for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2014). It also highlighted that teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices and preferences is fundamental to bringing about positive change in classroom reading cultures and developing highly reciprocal and social reading environments.

Other research has found that:

- Reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD 2002).
- There is a large gap in achievement between students who read books for pleasure and those who do not (OECD 2010 and Mol and Bus 2011).
- The strongest predictor of reading growth from age 10 to age 16 is whether a child reads for pleasure (Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

In addition, The National Literacy Trust's Children and young people's reading survey completed in 2017/18 and published on 5th June 2019 found that:

- Children and young people's reading engagement has steadily fallen over the past four years.
- Children and young people who enjoy reading are five times more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with their peers who don't enjoy reading (17.0% vs 3.5%)
- Children and young people who read daily are four times more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with their peers who don't read daily (22.3% vs 5.7%)

At Thomas Hickman we strive to ensure that our children all leave primary school with a broad 'sky of opportunity'. We know that being readers will give our children the best chance of success in whatever career they decide to pursue and are determined to lay a strong foundation before their move to Secondary school in Year 7.

## Aims

The Open University's *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) findings found that in order to foster Reading for Pleasure effectively, teachers need to develop a range of knowledge and skills, including a **knowledge of children's reading practices** (Cremin et al., 2014).

We know that children who read for pleasure make more progress across the curriculum and so my aim this year has been to create new readers!

## Outline

### Step 1

I thoroughly enjoy reading children's literature and have always done so in order to be able to share books with my class. I noticed that when bringing in a book I had just read and enjoyed to share with my class, I always had lots of requests to borrow it. I therefore decided that my first step in creating new readers, was to



generate a good class library. My class were always far more interested in reading MY books than those on the school book shelves so Mrs Catten's Little Library came into being.

I also created lots of laminated book covers to stick on the walls in the hope that something would catch the eye of those who wouldn't yet venture to the Little Library itself. I had stickers made which signposted them to my copy of that book if they wanted to give it a go.



### Step 2

As I got to know my new class better, I was able to make better recommendations. I used a reading survey to find out more about my class and their reading practices.

Dear E. Reading Survey

Do you enjoy reading? What kind of books do you like to read? What do you like to read about?

Yes, I love reading books and I like to read about adventures.

What does the cover of your book look like? Do you like to read about adventures?

Yes, I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures.

Can you tell me any (children's) books? Do you have a favourite? Why?

Yes, I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures.

What is your favourite type of book?

Adventure & Thriller books.

Do you read at home? If yes, what type of books do you read?

Yes, every day at school, home, weekends and vacations. I prefer to read books, so you can just constantly reading.

Are you a member of a library? If yes, which one?

Yes.

Do you enjoy talking to others when an adult reads them? If yes, why? When reads to you?

Yes, because they read it for me to understand it properly. Like reading words.

What would make reading more enjoyable for you?

Reading, I already like reading.

Tell me two interesting facts about you as a reader (e.g. Mrs Catten loves reading adventure stories and books about history).

I love adventure books. I am reading when I read.

Dear E. Reading Survey

Do you enjoy reading? What kind of books do you like to read? What do you like to read about?

Yes, I love reading books and I like to read about adventures.

What does the cover of your book look like? Do you like to read about adventures?

Yes, I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures.

Can you tell me any (children's) books? Do you have a favourite? Why?

Yes, I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures. I like to read about adventures.

What is your favourite type of book?

My favourite type of book is mystery books because they make me get hooked to the book more.

Do you read at home? If yes, what type of books do you read?

I read at home. I read comedies, mysteries and adventure. I read in my bed.

Are you a member of a library? If yes, which one?

Yes, I am a member of Milton Keynes Central Library.

Do you enjoy talking to others when an adult reads them? If yes, why? When reads to you?

Yes, I really enjoy it because it's fun. My mum and my friends and my teacher read to me.

What would make reading more enjoyable for you?

Getting read by people.

Tell me two interesting facts about you as a reader (e.g. Mrs Catten loves reading adventure stories and books about history).

I like to take part and share with a different plot.

This helped me realise that I needed to broaden the children's experience of reading. Many that were not already 'readers' had a very fixed perception of what 'reading' involved and felt very negatively towards books in general. Many were not reading at a Year 5 level and many had never seen themselves, their culture or their religion represented in reading material.

(Huge thanks to Jon Biddle for the inspirational survey questions!)

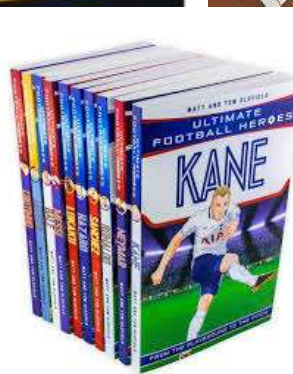
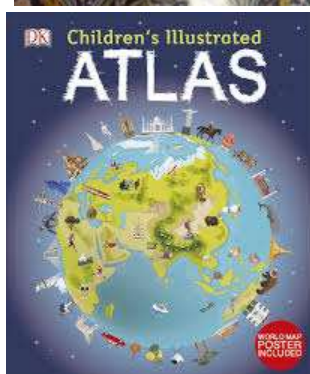
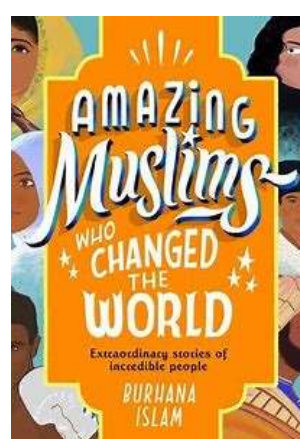
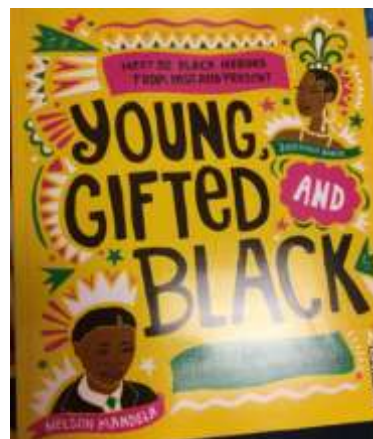
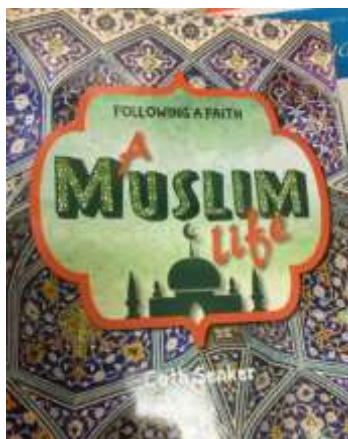
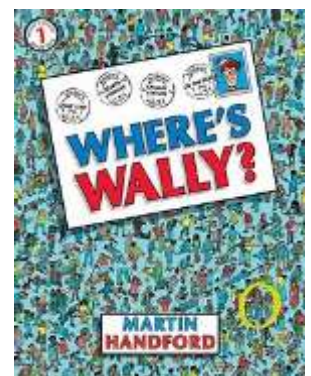


### Step 3

I realised that my children were all at different points on the journey towards becoming readers. I thought carefully about adding reading material to our Class Library that would therefore inspire as many of them as possible to pick up some reading material and try it.

For some this meant adding picture books to try and foster a love of books as objects. For others it meant adding picture books with simple language that they could decode easily. Many of these children felt that they were only able to read books with a number on the back. I wanted them to be able to pick from the Class Library too and for them to experience that sense of satisfaction and achievement when they read a whole book cover to cover and understand it too! For others, it simply meant broadening their experience of books – introducing them to current titles and including diverse authors and characters. I also began to make books part of our display each time I taught a new Field of Study.

Mrs Catten's Little Library grew!





## Step 4

As the children began to read more, they wanted to share what they were reading. I timetabled a short weekly slot for Book Talk and cleared a surface for another display of books.

I kicked off Book Talk the first week and each time we did it, more and more children wanted to share what they were reading and why they thought their classmates would like it. Like our Class Library, Book Talk grew and spread into the other Year 5 class too. (NB: Written permission received to include photos).



## Impact

I have been so pleased with the impact of the relatively small changes I have made in making books and reading central to our school life. I definitely have more readers in my class than I did before and my Reading data confirms that they are reading more effectively too; from starting with 46% at Year 5 ARE, I now have 60%.

## Class specific examples

The child below loved *My Life as a Cat* by Carlie Sorosiak so much that once he'd done his Book Talk on it, he also wrote a book review on it. I tweeted the author to let her know how much he'd enjoyed it and she replied – once I'd read it out in class, everyone wanted to read the book! His review is now on our school website too.



Carlisle Sorosiak – news & updates...  
@carliesorosiak

Replying to @Lucy\_Literati @StephanieHilde6 and @OpenUni\_RIP

Oh, this is brilliant! Thanks so much for sharing, and I'm THRILLED that he liked it! 🐾🐾🐾

21:34 - 21/05/2021 - Twitter Web App

This girl really struggled with reading at the beginning of Year 5. After choosing and discarding many books, she gave *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman a go and really persevered. It took her 7 months but she finished it – the first time she has finished a 'grown up' book. She was so proud of herself and relished every second of her Book Talk!

I was really touched to read her RE work at the end of March in which she'd been asked to think about making a promise of some kind.



Some children decided to use their reading records to respond to their reading in a different way (does it always need to be in words? Does this put some off from recording their reading at all?) and were able to use this as the basis for their Book Talks:



## Whole school examples

I was lucky enough to be able to present some of my ideas in creating new readers in a series of Staff Meetings. I have been very pleased with the response and feedback - lots of our teachers have created wonderful book displays and reading corners, thereby elevating the importance of books and readers and creating new readers along the way!



I now regularly have children from other Year groups borrowing books from Mrs Catten's Little Library!



## Reading Inbox



Amy Brown 20:09  
to me ▾

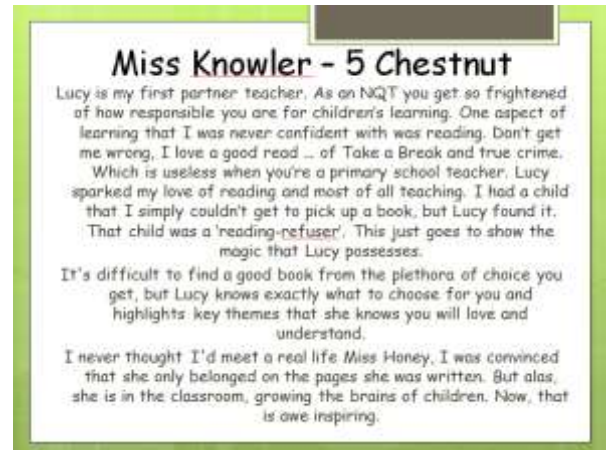


Hello  
Hope your ok isolating, Phoebe wants me to tell you she's loved your book and hasn't put it down and finished it. Hope you don't mind me messaging  
Thanks

...

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

It became clear throughout my journey this year that many of the TaRs overlap and are inextricably linked. It was very hard to simply focus on one. Having said this, everything I did this year stemmed from having **‘Considerable knowledge of children’s literature and other texts’**. Without that, I couldn’t have made meaningful recommendations no matter how well I got to know my children and their interests, cultures and existing **‘reading practices’**.



I learned that creating readers also has as much to do with the **‘social reading environment’** as it does with access to reading material. My surveys showed that very few of our children were members of or even knew that there was a local library they could join for free. I realized that I had to create a reading environment in school, in which books and other kinds of reading material were readily available and too tempting to ignore. **‘Informal Book Talk’** naturally led on from this.

## Next Steps

During this academic year, I had to shield for nearly 5 months during which I largely taught my class via zoom. This prevented me from being able to specifically target key children in my class. As a result, the changes I made, whilst effective, were general ones. Going forward, I am excited to specifically target a select few children in my class and create even more readers.

I am also looking forward to rolling out these changes across the school so that every teacher in every classroom puts Reading for Pleasure at the heart of everything we do; creating readers and opening up a Sky of Opportunity for every single one of our Thomas Hickman children.