



**Winner of the Farshore Reading for Pleasure Award**  
**In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2021**  
**Experienced Teacher**

## *The 'Funnies' and the 'Feelies!'*

*Books to support children's wellbeing in the times of Covid-19*



*By Georgie Lax*

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### Context

**Starcross** is a friendly single-form entry primary school at the **heart** of the local community.

Working alongside **Ilsham English Hub** to implement a new Systematic Synthetic Phonics programme in Autumn 2019, we confidently teach the **'skill'** to **read** to all our pupils.



We have now turned our attention to foster children's **'will'** to read.

Promoting the love of reading through Reading for Pleasure (RfP) also forms part of our whole school development plan during this very strange academic year.



## OU Research inspiration and rationale

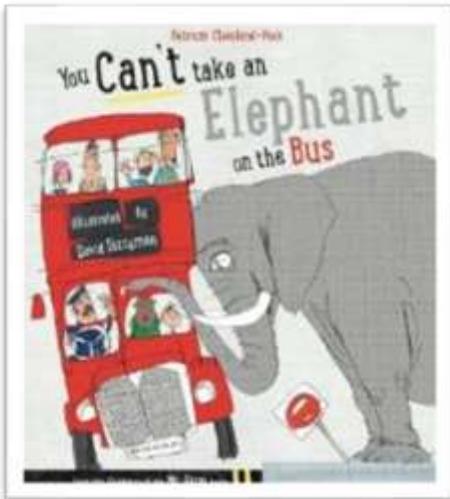
Through my involvement with Torquay's RfP Teacher Reading Group (TRG), my preliminary focus for this project was to promote RfP in my class by means of organising an appealing book corner: *TaRs (Teachers as Readers) Strand 3 - Social reading environments (Cremin et al., 2014)*.

However, my 'initial' proposal has undergone considerable transformation over recent months.

This is due to both my developing RfP pedagogy, and Covid-19.

My understanding of what constitutes 'appealing' has changed. Furthermore, **Teresa Cremin's article on 'Reading Communities: why, what and how (2019)**' enlightened me to the fact; I could create the most attractive, innovative and tempting book corner in the world, but this alone would not enable my class, nor myself to be any more proficient Readers' of Pleasure.





Instead, I needed to address the **'elephant in the room'** and update my own knowledge of rich children's literature and texts (TaRs, Cremin et al., 2014 Strand 1). I used two **OU resources** to support me with this, allowing me to audit my understanding of children's **reading practices**, as well as my own knowledge. Following this, through a combination of research and recommendations, I have been regularly adding to my collection of children's books, which, unlike previous years, are on display to be used and enjoyed by all.

If bought specifically for the class, what good is an award winning example of children's literature, when stored in a 'teacher's box?' What is the value of books if they are only read by the same person, at best, several times a year and then gather dust until a new cohort emerges?

## Aims

With reference to my earlier focus on 'book corners,' the adjective **'appealing'** has been replaced by **'appropriate.'** I now sought to develop a **'fit for purpose'** (Hepplewhite - 2021) social reading environment within my classroom, rather than create a tokenistic, *'all singing and all dancing'* book corner that lacked quality books.

I was inspired to combine the **'Open University's Teachers as Readers'** (TaRs) findings 1 and 3(a). However, what I did not expect to discover was how dramatically a few tweaks in these highlighted areas, would in turn, positively impact on all other strands. And so it began, a **'Reading Community'** developed in my classroom, before my very eyes, regardless of Covid-19!



I wanted my class to see me as a Reading Teacher - **'a teacher who reads and a reader who teaches'** (Cremin et al., 2009), allowing them to understand I read through choice, rather than necessity. **How could I expect children to develop their love of reading if I did not lead by example?**

In this year like no other, perhaps by developing my knowledge of children's literature, I would be better positioned to read the **perfect story** or suggest the **perfect book**.

## Outline

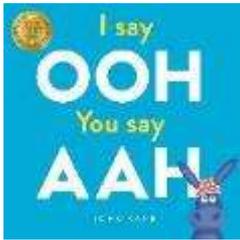
It soon became apparent to me that these *'perfect' books* could be broadly split into two categories, which I have chosen to entitle:

- The 'Funnies' - books to provide respite, light relief and above all, laughter and escapism from the scary and unpredictable outside world.
- The 'Feelies'- books to support children's wellbeing, allowing them to connect and empathise with this bizarrely difficult time, giving them a voice, when they do not have the words.

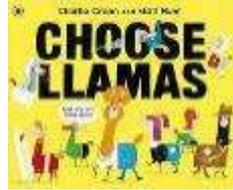


- *"They learn, by reading for pleasure, the power of interpretation (Rosen, 2021)."*

## The 'Funnies'

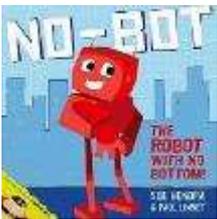


**Traction Man is Here** - Mini Grey  
**I Say Ooh, You Say Aah** - John Kane  
**The Night Before, the Night**



**Before Christmas** - Kes Gray & Claire Powell

**The Night After Christmas** - Kes Gray & Claire Powell



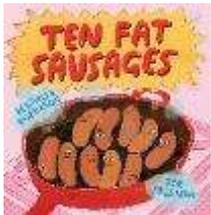
**Choose Llamas** - Charlie Green & Matt Hunt

**You Choose in Space** - Pippa Goodhart & Nick Sharratt

**No-Bot, the Robot with no Bottom!** - Sue

Hendra & Paul Linnet

**Ten Fat Sausages** - Michelle

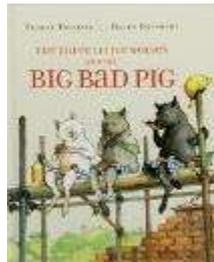


Robinson & Tor Freeman

**The Book with No**

**Pictures** - B.J Novak

**Hairy Maclary**



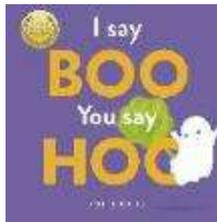
**The Book With No Pictures**

B.J. Novak

**and Zachary Quack** - Lynley Dodd

**After the Fall** - Dan Santat

**You Can't Take an Elephant on**



**the Bus** -

Patricia

Cleveland-Peck & David Tazzyman

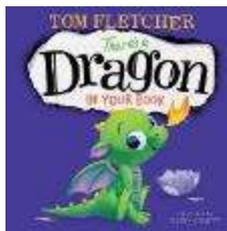
**I Say Boo, You Say Hoo** - John Kane

**Oi Frog** - Kes

Gray & Jim Field

**There's A Dragon in Your Book** -

Tom Fletcher



**Three Little**

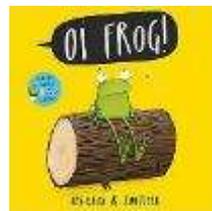
**Wolves and the Big Bad Pig** -

Eugene Trivizas & Helen Oxenbury

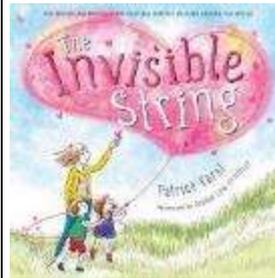
**Looshkin: The Adventures of**

**the Maddest Cat in the World** -

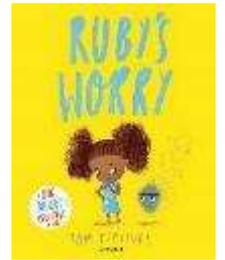
Jamie Smart



## The 'Feelies'

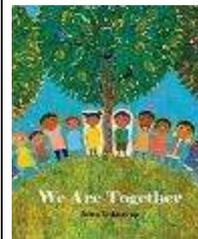


**The Invisible String** - Patrice Karst  
**Ruby's Worry** - Tom Percival

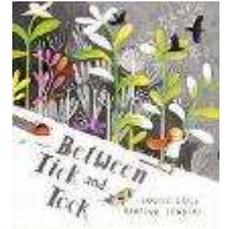


**No Matter What** - Debbie Glori

**Silly Billy** - Anthony Brown

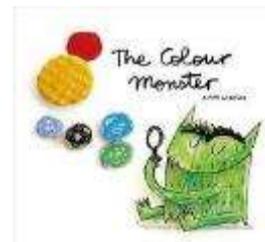
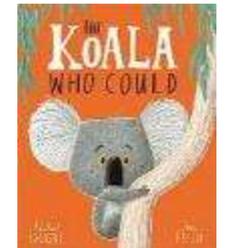


**I Don't Want to Wash My Hands!** - Tony Ross



**The Rhythm of the Rain** - Grahame Baker-Smith

**Felix, After the Rain (Hope in a Scary World)** - Dunja Jogan & Olivia Hellewell



**The Colour Monster**

- Anna Llenas

**Between Tick and Tock** - Louise Greig & Aishling Lindsay

**The Koala Who Could** -

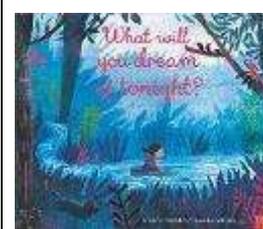
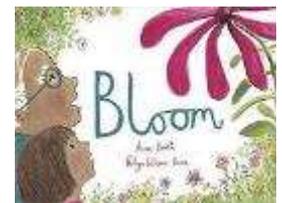
Rachel Bright & Jim Field

**We Are Together** -

Britta Teckentrup

**Bloom (Hope in a Scary**

**World)** - Anne Boothe & Robyn Owen



**It's A No Money Day** - Kate

Milner **Moon** - Britta Teckentrup

(& Patrica Hegarty)

**The Colour Monster Goes to**

**School** - Anna Llenas

**The Extraordinary Gardener**

- Sam Boughton **Leaf** - Sandra Dieckmann

**What Will You Dream Tonight** - Frances Stickley &

Anuska Allepuz **Augustus and His Smile** - Catherine

Rayner **On Sudden Hill** - Linda Sarah & Benji Davies **The**

**Squirrels Who Squabbled** - Rachel Bright & Jim Field

## Outline continued...

I developed my knowledge of quality **EYFS/KS1 fiction** during Autumn 2020, and then set about sharing these rich texts with my lovely new Year 1 class. Two favourites emerged almost instantly - John Kane's '**When I Say Ooh, You Say Aah,**' and Patrice Karst's '**The Invisible String.**' Returning to school, after the Summer Lockdown, having only spent two terms in their Reception class, the children thrived on a mixture of laughter and empathy.

It was now time to develop the '*book corner*' and to begin to better understand the children's reading preferences. I used another OU resource for this (**RfP KS1 Children's Reading Survey**). Amongst other areas, this survey helped me to ascertain **how** my class viewed themselves as readers, '**how**' and '**what**' they enjoy reading, and their two **favourite books**.



It became further apparent, as referenced by Cremin (2019) that '**true reading communities are informal, social, reader-led and filled with texts that tempt.**'

Members of the class also stated they liked to be comfortable when reading, with some suggesting taking shoes off, sitting on blankets, mats, under tables, collaborating with friends, perhaps with a hot chocolate and snack.

Children were given ample opportunities to **Read for Pleasure** in their own **unique** ways. I watched them explore the new books, all of which had their own



'designated' places in our book area. The care and attention the children gave to these special new books, really was remarkable. I noted quotes from the children, who, weather permitting, also read for pleasure in our outside area.

Our little Year 1 reading community was developing well and we were excited to come back to continue this journey after Christmas... **but then came Lockdown part 3...**



We used '**Seesaw**' as our online home-learning platform, which enabled us to continue to share daily '**funnies**' and '**feelies**.' We also introduced the idea of a '**Mystery Book**.'



I organised a **Whole School RfP Week** before the national school return in March 2021. Every day, all children took part in a range of activities to promote the **love of reading** and parents were fully informed also. I used ideas from the **OU RfP website**, as well as Ilsham Hub's TRG. This week also encompassed **World Book Day**.



On **March 8<sup>th</sup>** children returned to school dressed as their favourite book character, staff participated too! It was a **lovely joyful day**, removing focus from what may have otherwise been an uncertain and unsettling time for many.



To lighten the mood further, I replicated an Emily Gravett 'draw along,' as we have really been appreciating all the



beautiful illustrations in our new class books. The children are now illustrators too!

I conducted a second **Reading Survey**, allowing me to analyse changing attitudes towards RfP and to identify children who may need further support.



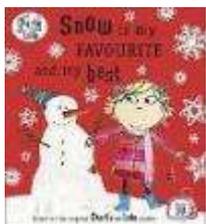
Our 'four-week school return' ended with a

Kite Day, whereby children in **all** classes made and flew their own Kites. We had the 'perfect' picture book to enjoy before the big event!

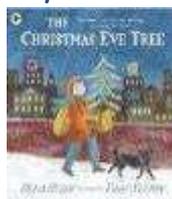


Further reading recommendations explored in class to promote **diversity, difference, empathy, appreciation, valuing others, wordless books and OU Book Chat:**

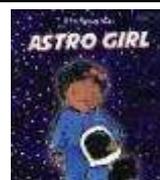
Poems Aloud - Joseph Coelho & Daniel Gray-Barnett



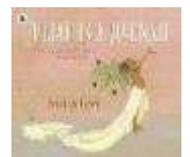
Charlie and Lola - Snow is My Favourite and My Best - Lauren Child



An Alphabet of Stories - Oliver Jeffers  
The Christmas Eve

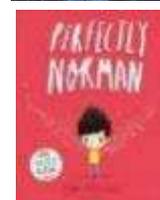


Julien is a Mermaid - Jessica Love



The Dot - Peter H Reynolds

Astro Girl - Ken Wilson-Max



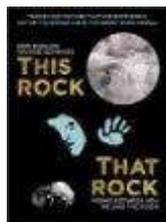
The Suitcase - Chris Naylor-Ballesteros  
Perfectly Norman (A Big Bright Feelings Book) - Tom Percival

A Cultivated Wolf - Becky Bloom & Pascal Biet



Tree - Delia Huddy

This Rock, That Rock: Poems between you, me and the Moon) - Dom Conlon & Viviane Schwartz



One Fox: A Counting Book Thriller - Kate Read



A House That Once Was - Julie Fogliano & Lane Smith



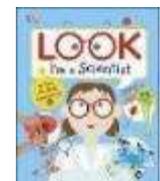
Flotsam, Mr. Wuffles! -

Wiesner (wordless books)

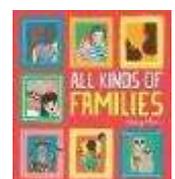
Tuesday & David

The Word Collector - Peter H Reynolds

All Kinds of Families - Sophy Henn



You Are All My Favourites - Sam McBratney & Anita Jeram  
Look, I'm a Scientist - DK Children's Books

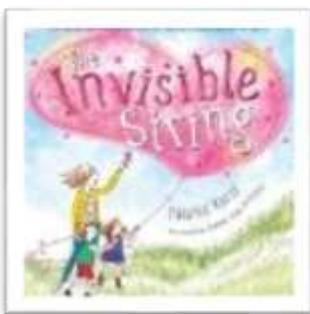


## Impact

In my eight years in this very same Year 1 classroom, I have never known children to finish their work and then so

regularly ask... **"Can I get a book?"**

Certain texts are used to support children coming into school in the morning if they are experiencing any separation anxiety.



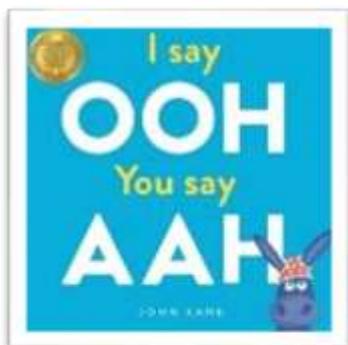
**'The Invisible String'** is the text most requested, to help children settle and feel connected to their loved ones; both those near to them and far away, physically with us, or sadly departed. Our wonderful parents have commented on the power of this book too. The children don't even need to be reading the book, just having it next to them at their table is enough, the comfort it brings is **invisible and incredible.**

Supporting Key Worker children's 'free choice' in Spring 21, it was evident how their attitudes had changed: **"Yay, let's read books! We don't want to do boring colouring!"**



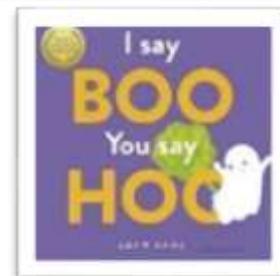
Creating a **reading community** in my classroom was not my initial intention. However, through following the guidance from **Ilsham English Hub** and the **Open University**, by using the recommended resources, purchasing suggested books and learning more about **book awards**, things steadily came together.

While 'Ten Fat Sausages' is a hilarious 'Lollies' winner, and features highly as one of our classroom favourites, it is John Kane's 'When I Say Ooh, You Say Aah' and its subsequent follow up 'When I Say Boo, You Say Hoo' that have provided the most 'LOLS' this academic year.



Nominated for The Irish Book Awards in 2018, the former has been described as:

**“A madcap call-and-response picture book. This is interactive storytelling at its best (2018).”**



Conducting termly **Reading Surveys** enabled me to analyse changing attitudes regarding how children view themselves as readers. Children's **love of reading** remained high in both the Autumn and Spring survey. However, in the Spring, more children viewed themselves as 'good' readers than in the previous term (as illustrated below in termly surveys from the same pupil).

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1) Do you like reading?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I love reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's okay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't like reading</p>   | <p>1) Do you like reading?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I love reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's okay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't like reading</p>   |
| <p>2) Are you a good reader?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm good at reading</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'm okay at reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not good at reading yet</p>   | <p>2) Are you a good reader?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'm good at reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm okay at reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not good at reading yet</p>   |
| <p>3) Do you read at home?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>   | <p>3) Do you read at home?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>   |
| <p>4) If yes, who do you read with at home?</p> <p>With my Mum or Dad <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I read by myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>With my sister or brother <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With someone else <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>4) If yes, who do you read with at home?</p> <p>With my Mum or Dad <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I read by myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>With my sister or brother <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With someone else <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> |

Children valued a range of literature, including **comics and non-fiction**, so more examples of these will be added to the classroom.



Children enjoy reading in a range of informal areas, including beds, sofas, outside, in trees, train carriages and in 'dens,' while some children stated they most like to read...

**"EVERYWHERE!"**



This remains a collaborative activity, with no rights or wrongs, the children are confident that they are as good at RfP as EVERYONE else. The pleasure will not disappear once they have finished exploring their books, they will not be tested on their concentration, commitment or understanding. Whether they can read these books independently or not, doesn't matter, it is pure, unadulterated enjoyment, that is theirs to own.

7) Does anyone read out loud to you at home?  
 Yes  No

8) Can you remember something that you have found interesting?  
you chose...

9) Where do you most like to read? (For example, on the sofa, in bed or outside)  
in my den

10) What do you most like to read?  
Adventure  Non-fiction  Fiction   
Comics  Short stories  Reference

11) What are your two favourite books?  
1. Zoo House  
2. The House  
3. The House

Thank you!

Regarding 'favourite books' - of the 40 responses in the Autumn Term survey, 29 of these were titles explored in class. In the Spring Survey 35 books were mentioned and 24 of these were books we have read together in school. My so-called 'Funnies' and 'Feelies' were cited so frequently, hence my inspiration and rationale for this research project. The power we have to influence is astounding. One child could not state her **two** favourite books because:

**"It is too hard to choose two!  
There are SO many!"**

A selection of quotes from children regarding the books they choose to read for pleasure:

## The 'Funnies'

### Ten Fat Sausages

"Because it is the bestest book in the whole world - because one sausage goes pop, and one goes ... you know!"



"I like sausages!"

"I want to see what it is about!"

### Nobot, the Robot!

"I just love it when he loses his bottom!"

"Nobot is funny and silly!"



### Choose Llamas

"I really want to choose the best llama!"

### When I Say Ooh, You Say Aah!

"I like it because it is funny."

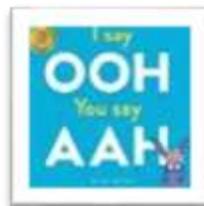
"My favourite one, because it has underpants!"

"It is funny because it is about underpants!"

"It is really funny, and I can read it and I remember all the words!"

"I really like it when we get to do the bit with the little ants!"

"Every time you see an ant, you say underpants!"



## The 'Feelies'

### Between Tick and Tock

"It makes me feel calm."

"I like it because it is nice and calm."



### The Colour Monster

"Mummy is getting it from the store to help me not to be sad of Nanny."

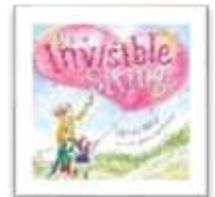
"This one makes me feel calm."



### The Invisible String

"It reminds me of my Mummy."

"I chose this because I always miss my Mum."



"I remember which is my favourite ... The Invisible String!"



The way I read to the class has changed, giving children more ownership of *'what'* we read.

The Mystery Book has become a staple of our classroom practice due to the excitement it brings. The 'class vote' opts for 'mystery' every time, despite being pitched against our new favourites.

## Reflections (on the impact TaRs research has had on practice):



The TaRs research has facilitated my ability to foster children's **love of reading**. I can confidently state that I have a class of 5 and 6 year olds who are **passionate about books**.

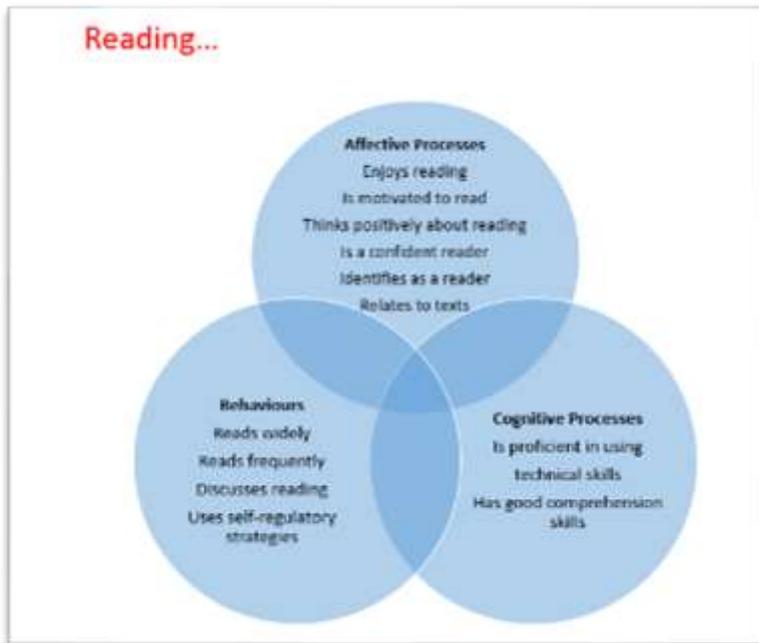
Despite the current pandemic, I have been on a journey of discovery and development, and my understanding of an **appropriate, informal, child-led, social, reciprocal RfP pedagogy** has positively transcended to those around me.

**At the heart of everything is the children and they benefit because I am a more capable Reading Teacher.**

Taking the lead on RfP at school, has also enabled me to cascade all I have learned onto staff through various CPD opportunities.

During a recent training meeting, I asked staff to explicitly consider '**how**' they **read for pleasure**. Not one person mentioned... at a desk, or sitting with their back straight in a hard chair, or with texts that someone else had chosen for them, or that the event concluded with another person quizzing them on their understanding.

**We must not confuse RfP within school, or put children off it by removing the 'pleasure.'**



Through various small adjustments to my own practice, I have supported the children in my class to develop **positive attitudes** towards reading, they **love books** and are excited about new stories...

**They enjoy reading.**

**They relate to texts in a way I could never have imagined...**

They have surpassed expectations on their Spring NFER Reading Comprehension paper, achieving higher than the standardised sample, again, regardless of Covid-19. The children are inspired to read widely and ask repeatedly

**"Can I get a book?"** They recommend books to me and RfP is a valued, collaborative and reciprocal practice in our school day.

In conclusion, the **TaRs research** has influenced my practice in numerous ways. I am far more aware of '**children's literature (1)**, and **children's reading practices (2)**, I have developed my **RfP pedagogy**, with specific reference to **social reading environments (3)**, I have become '**reader who teaches, as well as a teacher who reads (4)**' and our classroom will forever be in continual development as a **reciprocal and interactive reading community (5)**.'



As **Hempel-Jorgensen, Cremin, Harris and Chamberlain** consider, prior to this research project, I was perhaps guilty of '*unconsciously framing and constraining RfP practices...*'

**"...teachers may need to be supported to reconsider the nature of reading in order to encompass children's volition and social interaction around texts in addition to proficiency (2018)."**

Furthermore, as referenced by James Clements (2021) in a recent OUP webinar: **"Explicit instruction and conscious effort are the tip of the iceberg; statistical learning is the mass below the surface."**

We have the power to foster RfP in our pupils, a process which is both qualitative and intrinsic. Without specific guidance, 'some' children (that **20%** perhaps, who require our focus the most) will leave our classrooms only having exposed the tip of the iceberg. However, we have the ability to instil their **love of reading** in the 'mass below the surface' through appropriate knowledge, input and inclination. It can then become habitual, supporting not only their achievement at school, but also **their success, mental health and wellbeing in later life.**

Cremin states **"Reading for pleasure has myriad other benefits (2019)"** and the DfE notes the following positive outcomes: **'reading attainment and writing ability, text comprehension and grammar, breadth of vocabulary, positive reading attitudes, greater self-confidence as a reader, pleasure in reading in later life, general knowledge, a better understanding of other cultures, community participation and a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (2012).'**

When asking my class whether they preferred **'The Funnies'** or **'The Feelies'** the vast majority (over 80%) opted for **'The Funnies.'** **However, our focus in all we do, MUST always encompass the other 20%.**

These children opted for **'The Feelies'** and so they got them and have access to these at any point they need them.

In these extraordinary times of readjustment, books give children a voice.

They can **empathise, relate, connect** and **analyse** in their own unique ways through texts that are **personally tempting** to them.



Of course a mix of 'Funnies' and 'Feelies' will always be necessary, and as one pupil remarked, when I was asking the class about their preferences;

'we could make special areas in our book corner that contain 'Funnies' and 'Feelies,' so we know exactly where to go when we want a book like this.'



The pupil went on further to say

'we could have other areas too, like 'Scardies,' or 'Nicies' or 'Nighties' (if we are feeling scared, or nice or tired).'

...And so we will, because this is their reading community, not mine, it will be child-led, child-developed and child-owned.



*"You don't have to read. But it's the quickest way I know to time travel. Or to access other worlds. To escape, or find a friend. And once you get into the reading habit, it's like oxygen. Brain oxygen. It will keep you alive - Hilary McKay (2021)."*

## Next Steps...



- I will conduct a **Summer Term KS1 RfP Children's Survey** and focus my attention on any children who **do not** 'love' reading or view themselves as 'good' readers.
- I will continue to develop my knowledge of children's literature, stemming beyond KS1, to also include age-appropriate novels to **read aloud**. I also want to focus more on **wordless books**.
- I have obtained all the **KS2 World Book Day** books on offer this year (we are currently exploring all the EYFS/KS1 WBD books in class). I

aim to read these, as well as other recommendations from the library lady (<https://alibrarylady.blog/>) including a 'Funnie' - **The Incredible Record**

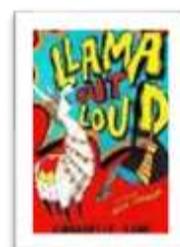
**Smashers (Jenny Pearson)** and a 'Feelie' - **Tragedy at Sea (David Long)**.

Additionally, I have also purchased KS2 recommended reads from Rumena Aktar

(OU article on 'Humorous Read Alouds for April) including **Llama Out Loud**

**(Annabelle Sami)** and **Vote for Effie (Laura Wood)**. Reading such texts, will

enable me to more confidently recommend books to KS2 pupils and my colleagues further up the school.



- At Starcross we are **so excited** to be part of an upcoming **Open University Research project to focus on our development as a Whole School RfP Community** (to commence in Autumn 2021).



- I shall also keep up to date with **award winning children's books**.

• I will honour my promise and develop our classroom reading community in the ways suggested by the children, to include areas of **'Funnies,' 'Feelies,' 'Scardies,' 'Nicies' and 'Nighties!'** We will also continue the excitement of the **Mystery Book** in class!

- I will continue to organise **staff training and CPD** to share my developing knowledge and book recommendations with my friends and colleagues at school.

• There are many exciting workshops on the horizon with **Ilsham English Hub** and I particularly look forward to developing my knowledge of **poetry** with guest speaker **Michael Rosen** later this month.

- I also aim to update my knowledge of **non-fiction**, adding this, comics and magazines to our book area.
- Lastly, we have plans to develop our school website to include more specific information on Reading for Pleasure for parents, including a **virtual library**, possibly with specific 'Funnies' and 'Feelies' sections!



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- [Word Count](#) from Aims to Reflections (omitting references, quotes, book and research project titles, school information and category) - Approximately 1500 words.

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I know our class are very grateful too!