

Book Crates

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CONTEXT

I am the Year 5 teacher and English lead at Holy Family Roman Catholic Primary school in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Reading for Pleasure is high on our school's agenda and as a whole school, our staff have been involved in the Rochdale TaRs group for a number of years.

Children in our school are read to by their teachers daily, our English lessons and children's writing comes from a text led approach and along with our guided reading sessions, children encounter a wide range of high quality texts every day. We have implemented a variety of strategies and activities to promote and encourage reading for pleasure across our school. Our staff continue to work hard so that more children engage in RfP opportunities, especially during the pandemic.

RESEARCH INSPIRATION AND RATIONALE

The TaRs research emphasised the need for whole schools to build reading communities which focus on the importance of giving children ownership over their reading choices (Cremin et al, 2014).

When teachers give children space to **choose their own books**, it produces reading networks and positive reader identities (Moss and McDonald 2005).

Within our school, children are always given free choice over their reading choices but I wanted to allow them the opportunity to **recommend books to one another**. Ross (2001) highlighted several ways that pupils can make meaningful and informed choices about their reading which included **peer recommendations**.

I also felt that some children might have been slightly overwhelmed by the vast choice on offer in the book area of my classroom, so I wanted to streamline choices in some way, without reducing the variety.

AIMS

Through undertaking this practice, I hoped to further my own development in

1. **Considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts**
2. **A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:
Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations**

Increasing my knowledge of children's literature, particularly newer titles from a more diverse range of authors than I had previously considered, and then recommending these titles to children in my class, would allow me to promote discussion of books and reading for pleasure.

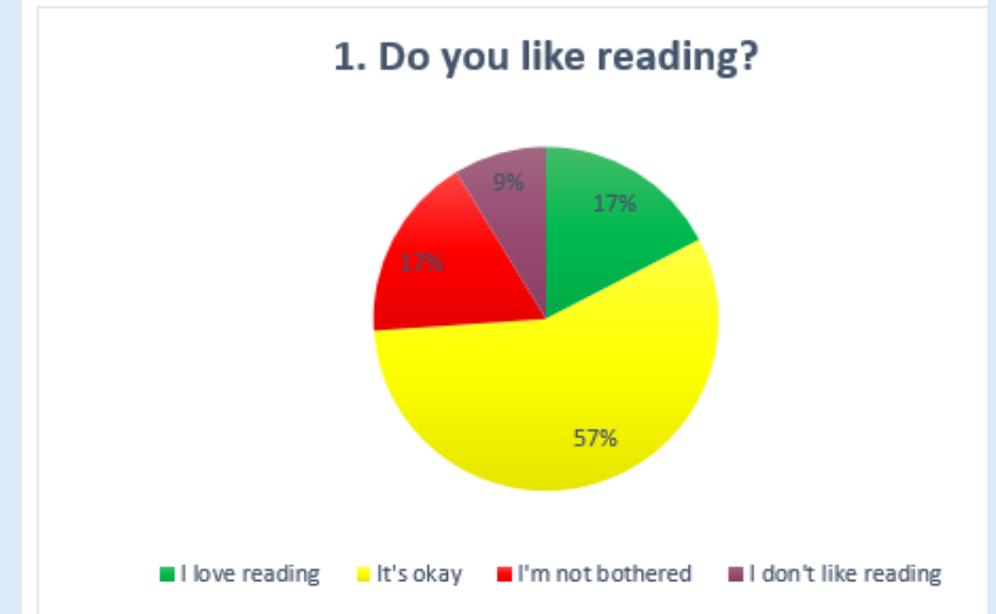
I hoped that children would then emulate these discussions between one another about their current reading and what they had enjoyed, and that these discussions would occur spontaneously.

OUTLINE

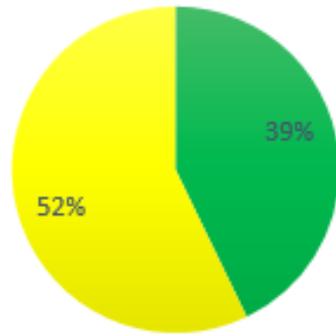
This year I realised that within my classroom, many of the children (UKS2) were becoming disengaged with RfP. The majority of these children were capable 'on track' readers with 'the skill but not the will' to choose reading as an activity to pass their time.

I asked the children in my class to complete the OU reading survey and the findings confirmed my initial suspicions.

Only 17% of my class ticked that they 'love reading' with 57% saying 'It's okay' and a further 17% commenting that they were 'not bothered' by reading. On the same questionnaire, 70% of this group of children self-identified as either a very good (9%) or good reader (61%) supporting the view that these children were capable readers but did not all have a passion for reading.

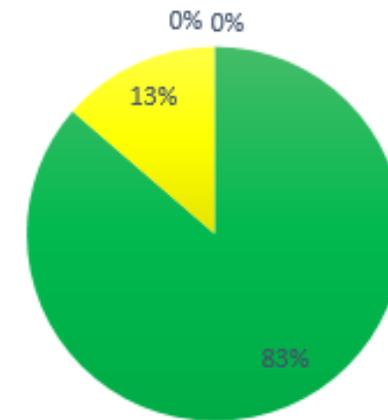


Do you ever chat about what you've chosen to read? At school



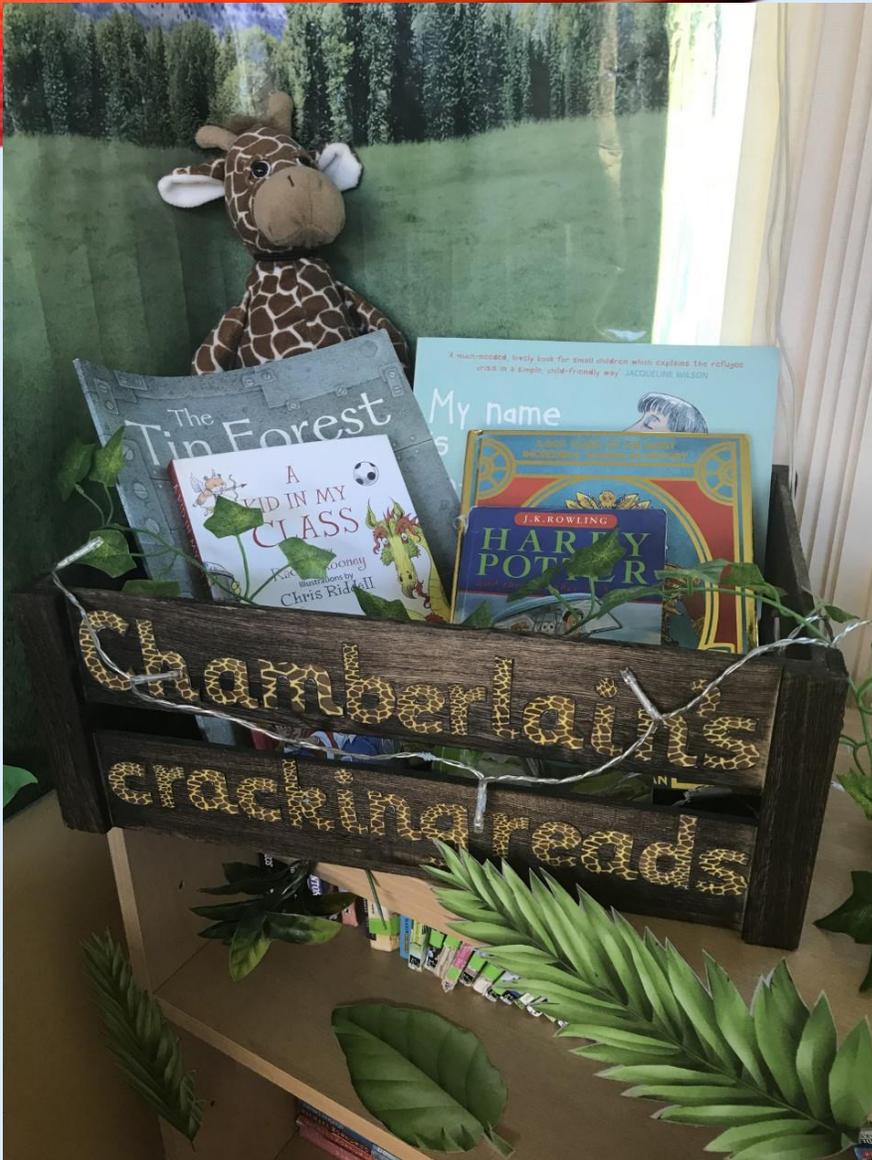
■ Yes ■ No

12. Does your teacher?



■ Love reading ■ Think it's ok ■ Is not bothered ■ Doesn't like it

52% commented that they never speak about what they're reading to *anyone* else at school, this included all staff and their friends and classmates. The same group of children believed I had a positive attitude towards reading with 83% commenting that they thought I 'loved reading' and the final 17% considered my opinion to be that 'reading is okay'. I knew that if my class considered me to have a positive view of reading then they would feel comfortable discussing reading with me. I realised that I needed to create allocated time within my timetable to discuss reading with my class and I considered it crucial that children began to develop discussions with one another about what they were reading too.



I created the '**Chamberlain's cracking reads**' crate, where I hand-picked a range of different texts including fiction and non-fiction across a range of genres. I included some books I had already read to my class, some books I had discussed with certain children and some unknown (for the children) titles, but which I had enjoyed.

I presented the crate in the book corner one morning and discussed with the children that it included some of my favourite children's books and when they next came to choose their own book, they were welcome to choose a title from my crate. Utilising some of our daily book talk time, I briefly introduced each text and discussed why I liked it and the types of people I would recommend it to.

The children were immediately engaged and began choosing books from the crate and discussing them with one another.



After a few weeks, I then introduced the '**Children's Cracking reads**' crate, placing it next to mine and asking the children which titles they would each choose, asking them to think about why they would put in that text. I asked children to consider carefully which texts they would include and explained that they must be able to articulate to each other, if asked, why they had included it and who they recommended the book to (eg based on interests rather than specific children).

Over the next few days and weeks, children continued to take recommended books from the Chamberlain Crate and began adding them, and others, to the Children's Crate.

I promoted it further every few days mentioning new books that had been added to either crate, and asking children to explain why they had added it. These informal recommendations worked well and gave more reluctant readers inspiration to choose books their friends and classmates had recommended.



I selected diverse authors and illustrators as well as a wide range of book types, including fiction, non-fiction and poetry. For each book I added, I introduced the text to the children and talked through my recommendation, modelling the way I would like the children to promote books to one another.

The children are given regular opportunities to choose books and talk about their choices and recommendations, if they don't want to tell everyone, then they tell me and I explain their choices to the rest of the class.

IMPACT

Introducing the crates to my classroom has been a **really simple idea** which immediately boosted engagement with RfP. It **encouraged and promoted book talk**, gave a **status to books** within our classroom. I have also noted that the class now have a more pronounced whole class reading identity.

My class have so much more enthusiasm for reading! They have an infectious positivity about books and they are delighted when they have the chance to choose from the crates. They are even more enthusiastic to place their own recommendations. Children are **always keen to look at the new books placed in either crate** and to hear the recommendations from me but especially from their peers.

Because this has allowed such a wide range of books to be read by more children than would have been otherwise, it also means that there are contributions from more voices and opinions involved in our class book chats.

I have observed less able and less confident readers choosing books that they are really keen to read, based on peer recommendation and discussions. By not putting any restriction on the types of books placed in the crate, this meant that more picture books were placed in and regularly chosen to be read, than perhaps would have ordinarily in my Year 5 classroom. I am certain that many of the recommended books would have not been chosen by many members of the class and so I am really pleased that children have chosen a wider range of texts than they otherwise would have.

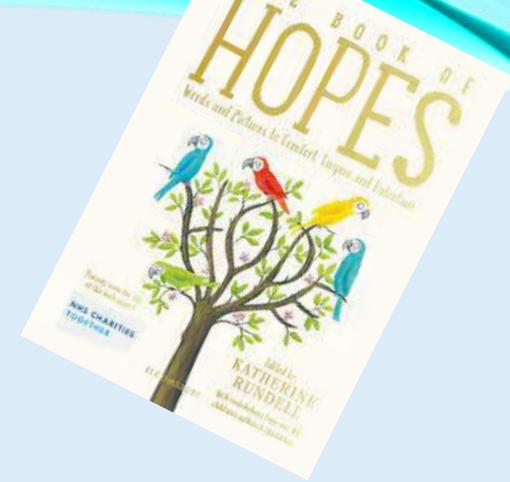
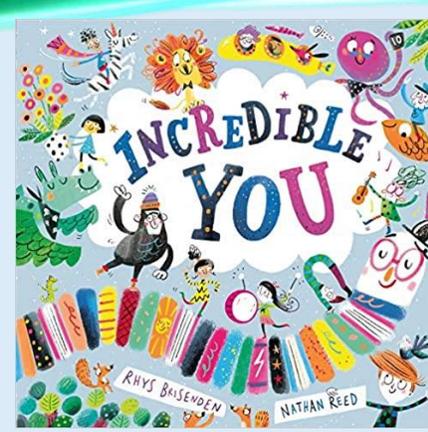
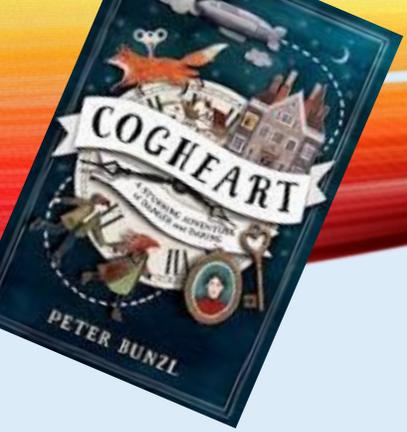
I also think that choosing from the crates is far less intimidating and overwhelming for children than choosing from a huge range within the book corner. Especially when children know that their choices have been selected and recommended by someone in the room that they can then have a discussion with.



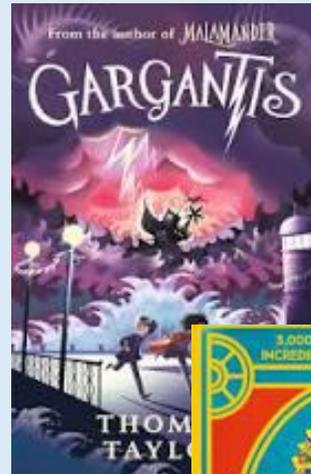
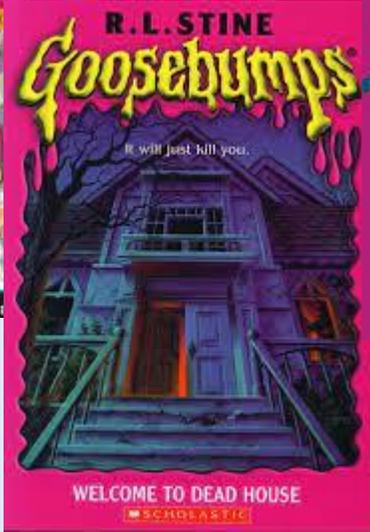
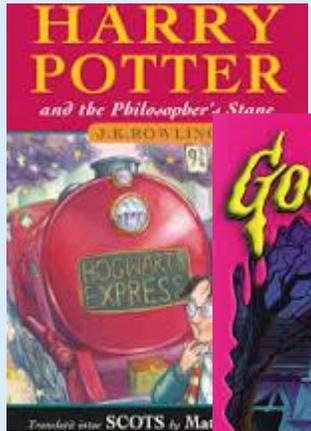


It has been a real pleasure to observe less confident children become increasingly more involved in choosing and reflecting on their book choices. I think this is partly due to them being able to select books their friends have enjoyed, whilst there is no pressure to choose a certain book. I also believe they have come to realise that their reading choices and recommendations have just as much value as everyone else's. Because the pupils are continually learning more about each other's reading preferences, it also means that they are more willing to recommend books directly to individuals, including me!

3 'target' children have all increased the frequency of their reading for pleasure opportunities – one child even came to brag that he had purchased the newly released sequel to a book we had discussed together which he knew I had not read.



For my part, I have read more children's literature this year than in any of my previous ten years of teaching! It has been a pleasure to give myself a more up-to-date repertoire of texts and I have fully embraced the opportunity!



REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPACT TARS RESEARCH HAD ON PRACTICE

This was a **really simple idea** which has had a **profound impact** on the children in my class! Children include book talk much more in their personal conversations and discuss with peers who they think will like each text.

Lots of the staff at Holy Family this year chose to make similar changes and improvements to their book talk and informal recommendation practices. We have seen an increase in engagement and enjoyment in RfP across school.

By collating and introducing my crate first, I knew I had to diversify my choices further before offering it to the children. Whilst there was certainly a place for my old favourites, newer texts which covered a range of genres and themes were absolutely needed to engage more children.

This EOP has certainly improved my own knowledge of children's books, a key aspect of the Teachers as Reader research (Cremin et al, 2014).

GOING FORWARD

- Repeat the reading survey at the end of the year to compare the scores – hopefully a more positive outcome!
- Continue to make recommendations to specific children.
- Continue to scour the OU website for simple RfP ideas and EOPs!

