

Talking about Books

How we became a class that loves to talk about what we are reading

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Context



I am the Year 6 teacher at All Souls Church of England Primary School, Westminster. From September 2021, I will be the Literacy Lead.

Literacy is at the heart of our curriculum and writing is a strength of the school. I moved to Year 6 in September 2021 after spending four years teaching in Key Stage 1. I quickly noticed the lower level of engagement in reading for pleasure in school amongst the older children in the school.

Our work to develop reading for pleasure across the school, and to engage families with this too, was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic. This project is the first step towards rebuilding a stronger reading for pleasure pedagogy in the school.

Research Inspiration and Rationale

The TaRs research findings highlighted *a reading for pleasure pedagogy* as one of five key strands required to build a reading for pleasure culture (Cremin et al., 2014). Within this, I chose to focus on developing *informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations*.

The problems I identified in my class were:

- Covid-19 safety measures had complicated children's access to reading books in school.
- I felt I didn't know what the children were choosing to read.
- I sensed the children didn't think I was interested in what they were choosing to read.
- There seemed to be a gap between reading in school and reading at home.

Aims

- To create a culture where informal book talk (discussing texts beyond those in the curriculum) amongst children, and between children and adults, occurs spontaneously and often.
- To give the children greater choice in the texts they read, have read to them and have available to them in the classroom.

Outline

Strand 1: To give the children greater ownership and support in their reading choices.

I began by reorganising our book area to create a shelf of “Mrs Legg’s books”. This shelf only **contained books that I have read and am therefore able to talk about and recommend** to the children. I was able to add to this regularly by signing up to a *Reading Rocks Teacher Book Subscription*:

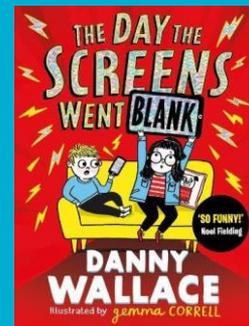
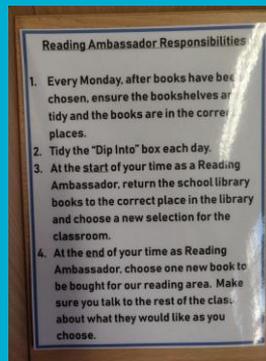
<https://wherereadingrocks.com/rr-teacher-book-box-subscription/>

When it was time to start a new class reader, **I selected two books from the most recent UKLA awards list and asked the children to vote** for the one they wanted read to them.

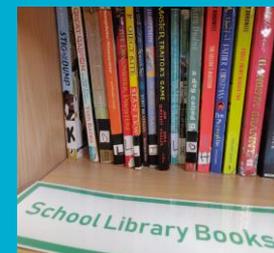
I also selected **three reading ambassadors, changing these half-termly**. The jobs of the reading ambassadors were to: select books from the school library to have in our classroom for the term; ensure the book area remained tidy and welcoming; and, at the end of term, choose a new book for me to buy for the classroom. I directed the children to the *New Releases* section of www.booktrust.org.uk to do this.



These were the books the children voted on for the class reader. Although *Vi Spy* won the vote, *The Eleventh Trade* quickly became a popular choice in the book area.



This was the first “new book” choice the reading ambassadors made.



Outline

Strand 2: To raise my expectations of the children's reading.

I used the Christmas and Easter holidays as opportunities to set the children extended reading challenges.

The **Christmas Reading Challenge** was designed to **encourage the children to read a range of texts and to enjoy reading in different contexts.** The children were given a challenge grid and asked to complete as many of the boxes as they could.

The **Easter Reading Challenge** was designed to encourage the children **to share their reading choices with the class.** They were asked to create a short set of slides about a book they had read over the Easter holiday which they then presented to the other children. (Examples of their work are on the next slide.)

In addition to this, each week the children completed a page of their Reading Journal. They then **shared their Reading Journal with their partner each Monday** as a way to encourage the children to talk about what they were reading with each other.

Year 6 Christmas Reading Challenge

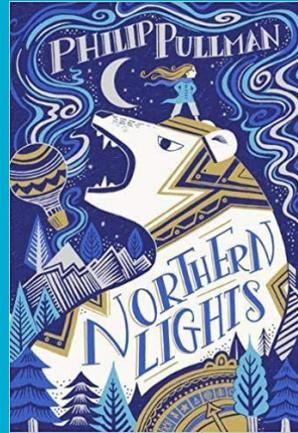
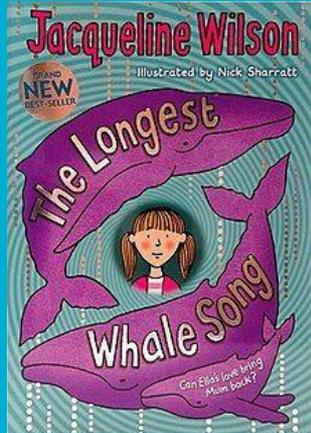
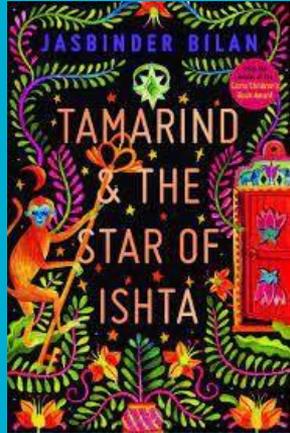
Over the holiday, I am Challenging you to Complete as many of these reading Challenges as you Can. Each time you Complete a Challenge, Cross it off on the grid and write down the name of the book you read on the back of this sheet. Bring your completed grid to school on the first day back. I'll be joining in, too!

Happy Reading!

Read after dinner.	Read a book by an author you haven't read before.	Read a poem.
Read a book that is set in Winter.	Read first thing in the morning.	Read a book that was published in 2020.
Read a non-fiction book.	Read a story to a younger sibling or family member.	Read in bed.
Read a book that a friend has recommended to you.	Read a book that has been turned into a film, then watch the film.	Read a recipe book (and choose a recipe to try).



Examples of slides the children produced for the Easter Reading Challenge



Tamarind her dad and her step-mother live in the wet gloomy London while her family lives in the hot, humid and exotic India. Tamarind's mother died and she thought she'd never be happy again but slowly her life is coming back to normal. Her parents are going on their honeymoon so Tamarind will just have to stay with her family in India. In India Tamarind goes on an amazing journey and learns to like new things that she never thought she'd enjoy! She even meets a new mysterious yet kind and fun friend- Ishta. She goes through dangerous adventures and has a great time in India but also wants to find out more information about her mother but her family won't tell her. Her family forbids her to go into the mysterious hut but does her curiosity get the best of her; is her 'friend' really who Tamarind thought she was?



Reasons you did / didn't enjoy the book

I personally really enjoyed the book because throughout the book you were able to understand their emotions and their character development really grew towards the end of the book and it all makes sense on the last few pages why it's called "The Longest Whale Song"!!



Other reflections



The book reminded me of Harry Potter and the Last Wild trilogy. People who have the curiosity about this world and beyond and the courage to explore would enjoy this book.

This book is about the battle between good and evil. But sometimes people are complicated, like Mrs Coulter, Lyra's mother. First people would think she is evil, but actually she is on Lord Asriel's side so she is good. I really enjoy this book: it makes me feel like stepping into an enchanting world, so unlike the one we are in.

The Secret Garden



The Secret Garden is about a girl called Mary Lennox's childhood. When she was very young she was really spoiled. But then she got taken to her uncle's house and there, behind the ivy, she found the secret garden. She played in it everyday and shared the secret with Colin and Dickon. The secret garden changed the girls and she became a nice, playful and enthusiastic girl. The garden also changed Colin, a sick, selfish and angry boy into a strong, independent young man.

I would recommend this book to everyone I know.

Mrs Legg said she liked the book very much.

The book taught me how to be strong and how to be brave. I use our pairs of eyes to find the secrets of life.

I've also learned that there is happiness even among the darkest times and we must find it.

Every kind of life has its colors and we need to find them!



I finished the trilogy this week. The books are absolutely fascinating though I must admit the ending was quite sad. Although Kester's best friend Polly, his brave animals the mouse and the toad and his dad were forced to go to another planet to live forever, he has got some animals (like the great Stag and the Wolf) with him and his dad in the Ring of Trees. And his story begins and ends there.

I really enjoyed this trilogy because it involves a lot of imagination but not the endings that good books usually have (Choppy ones) so I think the ending was pretty unique that it was happy and sad at the same time.

I would recommend this book to everyone who loves animals and would like to know more about them. This book tells you the relationship between humans, animals and nature.

THE WILD BEYOND

A Girl Called

JOY

By Jenny Valentine.

Although this book is pretty short, I really enjoyed it. Joy's most important personality is like her name, finding her ^{purpose} because she believe that "the every cloud has a silver lining". But Joy is finding trouble because her family has just moved to England at Grandad's. She is going to a new school with the horrible Mrs Hunter and she doesn't know how to make a friend. Right now her only friends are the old oak tree and Benny and the old oak tree is about to be cut down. Joy and Benny must make a plan and save the tree. But with a bit of Grandad's help, she and Benny kind of did save the tree. I loved the book because it's so bright and joyous and I would like everyone to read and enjoy it. I really admire how courageous they are and how they would do anything to save the old oak tree. My favorite line in the book is: We're small but we are not nobody and something is always better than nothing.

PLEASE SAVE THIS TREE!

Stars: ★★★★★

Outline

Strand 3: To increase time for reading for pleasure in school.

In order for the children to have a fair chance to “get stuck into” a book, **I realised that I needed to give them a significant amount of time to start reading the book they had chosen in school.** This meant that by the time they got home, they were sufficiently “hooked” on the book to want to keep reading.

This time **also gave me a chance to ask the children what they were reading and show an interest in their choices.**

In addition to this, **I created a “Dip into” box for the children to use in those moments when they only had a few minutes to read.** This contained newspapers, non-fiction, poetry, etc and reinforced the idea that **reading for pleasure can come in many different forms.**

	Monday
8:40	Reading for Pleasure
8:50	
9:25	<i>Collective Worship</i>



Impact

Not long into the project, **I realised that some of the children were keener readers that I had realised but were reluctant to share this love for reading with their peers.** We have turned that around this year and become a class in which it is normal and expected that everyone can talk about what they are reading at any given point.

I have developed a greater understanding of the types of texts that the children enjoy, both individually and collectively. This has enabled me to make more **personal recommendations.** I have also created space for them to share their recommendations with me and I have come across new books this way.

As I have regularly introduced new books to the reading area, the **children have developed an excitement for books** they might not otherwise have been drawn to. The children are reading more **widely and more frequently** than they were at the start of the year and, most excitingly, **they are encouraging each other to do the same.**

One parent has commented on how much more engaged with reading a child has become, at home.

Several children have purchased their own copies of the new books within days of me introducing them.

Children have been lending books to each other.

One child, who would never have chosen to read a book before, has become an avid reader.

Children are bringing their own choices into the classroom and enjoy talking about them with me.

The children regularly ask me what I am currently reading.

Children have been coming to school with new books they have purchased.

Reflections

There have been three underlying principles to this project which I believe allowed it to have such an impact:

- the importance of me, as the teacher, setting an example of talking about what I am reading
- creating space and time within the classroom routine for children to enjoy reading and to share their reading with others
- regularly refreshing the book selection with new releases.

The TaRs research (Gemin *et al.*, 2014) highlighted the **need for book talk in a classroom to be informal and spontaneous**. The structures I have put in place were aimed to take the class to a place where those spontaneous and informal conversations happened regularly. However, the end result went much further than that. As the children began talking about their reading, they also began to read more, to push themselves out of their comfort zone with their text choices and to read with greater investment and understanding.