



**Joint winner of the Farshore Reading for Pleasure Award**

**In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2022**

**Whole School**

## Widening Children's Experiences of Authors when Reading for Pleasure

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### Context



Cheadle Catholic Infant School is a three form entry Catholic Infant School with a Nursery class in Cheadle Hulme. Cheadle Hulme is a suburban village in Stockport, Greater Manchester. 3% of the children qualify for the Pupil Premium Grant, 9% speak English as an Additional Language and 7% children receive SEND support, of which 10 children have an EHCP.

### OU Research inspiration and rationale

After reading and hearing Teresa Cremin highlighting the importance of teachers having 'considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts' this became the focus of a lot of the work we have done on Reading for Pleasure at our school this year.

The reason we chose this focus is because we felt that both the staff and the children were becoming over-reliant on the same familiar titles. For example, when we completed questionnaires across the school, we found that almost exclusively, the authors the children named were Julia Donaldson and Roald Dahl. We would never deny the pleasure these two classic authors bring to children, but with the amount of talent in today's children's publications industry we knew it was our duty as professionals to widen our range of literature for ourselves and the children we teach.

Another motivating factor that we had in widening our knowledge of children's books was that we wanted to make sure that the books we shared with the children were representative of the world our children live in. We wanted the children to read books that were both 'mirrors' (where the children can see themselves in the characters and familiar scenarios) and 'windows' (where children can get a snapshot into characters, places, cultures and dilemmas they have not experienced themselves) (Sims Bishop, 1990).

### Aims

- Engage all children by giving them the autonomy to pick and choose their own books and develop a sense of their preferred styles and genres.
- Begin the task of diversifying our bookshelves both in the classrooms and in the library so that the children at our school had the opportunity to experience books as both 'mirrors' (characters and scenarios which they relate to a similar to their own) and 'windows' (where children can get a snapshot into characters, places, cultures and dilemmas they have not experienced themselves).
- Give parents and carers the tools they need to have positive book experiences with their children.

- Give teachers the knowledge and expertise to choose new and exciting books and authors to make sure that all children in their classes enjoy reading for pleasure activities such as storytime, Drop Everything and Read sessions and independent reading time.



## Outline

### Creating a Lending Library

With help from the experts at the Cheshire Education Library Service and some parent volunteers, the library has been transformed from a space that was used to store books into a lending library. All books are displayed in an attractive manner, a computer program has been installed so that they are catalogued, and every child takes home a book on a weekly basis.

Children have helped to inform the books we stock, and we have been so pleased to see that texts such as cookery books, craft books and poetry are becoming very popular as the word spreads from child to child. We are also committed to making sure that characters in our books mirror the diverse society our children live in. We have an increasing number of books written by and depicting people of different colours, faiths and ethnicities and will continue to make this a priority as our library grows.



The library has proven so popular that we also use it for lunchtime book clubs with Year 1 and 2 children who love to come in for some quiet time to read a book or listen to a story being read by an adult.

A Year 2 parent recently said:

*"She chooses to read now. Not her reading books but the ones she brings home from the library. She's really into the 'Isadora Moon' series and we have got her a couple from the shops. I'm a big reader myself and its so lovely to see her choosing to read to a book by herself at bedtime."*

## Adopt an Author



As a strategy for widening the children's knowledge of authors, every class in school has adopted an author. This author has a special place in the class library and their books are read and reread with the children regularly. Most of the authors are based in the UK (with the exception of Eric Carle in Nursery). The authors have been chosen to be a true representation of wider society with an equal number of male and females and three authors who are from a black or minority ethnic background, one for each year group. This year we are trialling swapping our adopted authors halfway through the year to expose children to more authors. In this way, by the end of their Infant School journey the children will be able to talk about at least six authors and their work in detail.

## Author visits and experiences

The next step after highlighting and discussing authors seemed to be for the children to get to know the person behind some of their best loved books. So we started to organise some author visits and experiences. The children are given the opportunity to meet at least one author, poet or illustrator every year.

The authors we have chosen in the past have led interactive workshops which the children have loved and it really added a new dimension and brought the books to life. We aim to keep introducing children to a range of different types of authors. So far we have had two local picture book authors (Mike Morris and Fay Evans), an online workshop with an author/illustrator (Hannah Shaw) and a poet (Matt Goodfellow). In this way, children feel more connection with the texts they are reading and return to these books independently.



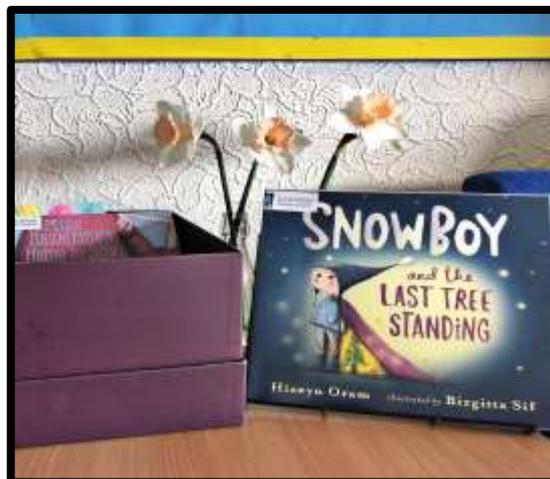
A Year 2 parent recently commented:

*"The workshop with the illustrator blew his mind! He couldn't believe it was the person who had written the actual book. He wants to be an illustrator himself when he grows up. It has really inspired him."*

## **Staff 'Author of the Month'**

Keeping abreast of new publications and authors can be a daunting task when added to the never-ending list of things teachers do. However, we all acknowledged that it was an important step to take, and we knew the dialogue between staff would be an invaluable tool in widening our range of texts.

Using resources from the Cheshire Library Service, I organised a staff 'Author of the month'. This showcases talented authors who have a wide back catalogue that would appeal to the full age range of Nursery to Year 2. These books can be browsed and borrowed for use as class reads or even in assembly by Mrs Glynn the headteacher.



These books are picked up and enjoyed by staff and as they are in the staff room they lead to interesting incidental conversations between staff about what they have read to their children, what the book reminds them of and as a result of this valuable book talk the staff have seen their repertoire of books and authors broaden.

*"This has opened my eyes to other books that I hadn't heard of or come across before. I have been able to share them and the children have loved them."*

*Miss Ward, Y2 teacher (ECT)*

## **Battle of the Books**

Along with the Reading Champions (a group of Year 2 children who help to organise the library and Reading for Pleasure events across the school) we organised our first ever 'Battle of the Books'. The theme was '**Books to Make You Laugh**' as we had found that funny books were the ones that engaged the most children.



The reading champions chose the books, created videos to engage the classes (as they were in post-covid bubbles) and helped to reveal the winner.

Posters around school added to the excitement and discussions could be heard as children waited for lunch, queued up to go into the hall for PE and in the playground.

All classes received a copy of the winning book for their class libraries. It was hugely successful in engaging staff and children, creating a 'book buzz' around school and as a

result it has now become an annual event.

## Engaging Parents and Carers



Parents are a child's first and most important educators. They are the experts on their children. We know that children who see their parents and caregivers reading at home are much more likely to view it as a pleasurable activity and be more motivated to read themselves. With this in mind, we work hard to share what we are doing in school with parents and seek to engage them in making positive reading experiences with their children. This comes in many forms.

We have a termly reading newsletter which shares what we have been doing in school and makes recommendations for ways to make reading fun at home. We have arranged a bookfair where all books cost £2.50 to encourage parents to purchase books for their children at a discount price on the run up to Christmas.

Over the summer, we have a summer reading challenge and encourage children to use their local

libraries. We also give them challenges like 'get caught reading somewhere unusual' which the children and parents enjoy. As one Year 1 parent recently shared

*"By fostering this love of reading at school we have been able to share lovely reading opportunities at home as my child is so enthused to cuddle up and read his favourite book- he never lets me miss a bedtime story!"*

## Impact

We have been delighted with the impact of our work on the children. When we repeated the questionnaire we found that the children's knowledge of authors was indeed much wider than it had been with children naming authors such as Nadia Shireen, Eric Carle and Emily Gravett as well as their old favourites. Not only this, but the children are becoming more specific about their favourite books and when the children visit the library they are using what they know about a wider range of books to make requests and suggestions about what they would like us to stock.

For example, the Mr Penguin books became very popular after class 2L found out that they were written by Alex T Smith who their class had adopted. A year 1 child was excited to find a copy of a Caryl Hart book (their adopted author) that they had been reading in class and couldn't wait to take it home and share it with her family. The books that were in the 'Battle of the Books' are still very popular months after the battle ended.



There is also no doubt that as a staff we are now in a much stronger position to recommend books to our children. Staff ask each other for recommendations when a certain book has been a success.

It has also been really interesting to see how different classes in the same year group are developing their own tastes for example one Year 2 class is very keen on the Dogman series while another has a waiting list for Beast Quest and Rainbow Magic Fairy books. This has come about from teachers having the confidence to respond to their own class preferences and knowing or finding out what they might like next.

It has also been invaluable to have access to Cheshire Education Library Service who have a wealth of expertise and knowledge and can recommend authors, illustrators, poets and books which keep us moving forwards.

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Looking back on our progress this year it is clear that the TaRs research had a great impact on refining and focusing our approach as a school. Without it, we might not have identified the importance of upskilling the staff and widening our own knowledge of books as such a critical factor in fostering Reading for Pleasure across the school.

It has made us all so much more confident and intentional in our choices and we know that when we reach for a book it will be more engaging and valuable because of the thought we have put into it first. We also know that we are giving the children access to a more diverse list of authors and in doing so help to promote the message that authors come from all walks of life and that everyone can find themselves in a one of the books on our shelves.

## **Next Steps**

- To welcome families and carers back into school to join in with events such as our book café, DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) sessions and library visits.
- To continue the work of diversifying the texts and the authors/illustrators the children are exposed to.
- To investigate alternative types of texts for the library such as graphic novels, comics, magazines and junior newspapers.
- To arrange more opportunities for children to meet with authors and illustrators either in person or virtually.
- Look at the use of book journaling as way for staff to staff and child to child book recommendations.