



Highly Commended
The Harper Collins Reading for Pleasure Award
 In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2025
School Reading Champion Category



The Big Rivendell Reader: Book Swap, Newsletter and YouTube

Hayley Lang

Rivendell Flying High Academy Primary School

Context



Rivendell Flying High Academy Primary School, in Stoke Bardolph, Nottingham, is a single-form entry school with 23% of our students eligible for pupil premium. The school opened in September 2022 in a new-build community and developing reading for pleasure has been a key aim for the establishment of school values. I work as a volunteer in school and I enjoy reading texts written for children. Our Headteacher, Julie Worthington, was eager to help me share this love of reading with the children and has fully supported the project.

I also have links to the Open University as I am employed as an Associate Lecturer in the Access and STEM faculty.

Research inspiration and rationale

In 2021 I attended a lecture at the OU on social justice and childhood reading (Mackey, 2021). As a child from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background, who experienced social mobility through a love of reading and study through the Open University, the theme of access, choice and particularly ownership, resonated with me. I was inspired to improve opportunities for childhood reading and with the help of Julie Worthington, we decided to work towards this aim.

Mackey, (2021) identified that “successful readers have ready access to appealing books” and asserted the importance of ownership of books, making it six times more likely to read above expected age level and three times more likely to read for enjoyment. Based on this, we acknowledged that providing free books could help improve literacy and remove some of the barriers to access and choice.





The Teachers as Readers project (The Open University, 2025) identified informal book talk and building reading communities as key drivers for encouraging reading for pleasure and also for encouraging inclusion and social cohesion. I was inspired by these findings to provide a further framework around providing books and encouraging engagement.

Aims

We identified the main aim was to provide free books to the children at Rivendell Primary School, with freedom to choose what they would like to read, without judgment. Additionally, we aimed to improve informal book talk and to encourage reading communities between children, other members of the school and families.

Outline

The project began with the purchase of 1500 books with the intention of collecting diverse and desirable texts. All books were included, irrelevant of whether they are perceived to be 'good' texts, although attempts were made not to include books that reflected outdated values. Initially, these books were given away free to children at the beginning of the 22/23 summer holiday, both as an investigative pilot and to provide reading material to combat the summer reading slump.



In the following year, 23/24, we offered book giveaway opportunities at the end of each term. We continued to purchase books, focusing on those requested and most desired by the children. During this pilot we listened to, and observed the behaviour of, the children taking books in order to understand what influenced choice and desire. There were strong themes of requests for popular texts, especially the 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid' series, books by David Walliams and Roald Dahl, and comic books such as the 'Dog Man' series.

Win a free book!

Suggest a name for our new Rivendell book newsletter and if we use your suggestion you will win a copy of *The Great Crisp Robbery* by Pamela Butchart.

When you find out what happened to Gary's Tesco Finest crisps you will

GASP!

Submit your suggestions using the slip below before Thursday 19th September 2024.

Your name: _____ Class: _____

Suggestion: _____

Following reflection on the lessons learned, we began in September 2024 to produce content for the Big Rivendell Reader project with three main activity streams: a newsletter, a YouTube channel, and a book swap.

A monthly book-related newsletter, including a book and author of the month, was produced. The book of the month was offered as a prize, awarded in the celebration assembly, for submitting book related content, and also added to the school library. The newsletter was aimed at both children and adults with content specifically for each group as well as both groups.

A competition to name the newsletter was the first activity and a copy of *The Great Crisp Robbery* by Pamela Butchart, the latest book in the Baby Aliens series, was identified as a popular choice for a prize.

The Big Rivendell Reader

Issue 2: November 2024

In this issue of *The Big Rivendell Reader* we will be talking about comics! It's easy to think that comics are inferior to text only stories but there are lots of reasons why this isn't true. We have a Rivendell exclusive discount code for you (We're particularly excited about this!) and we will also be announcing the winner of the book giveaway this month. We will have another book to give away next month so do please get your submissions in for a chance to win.

November's book of the month:

Bunny vs Monkey: The Impossible Pig by Jamie Smart

This is the latest book in the 'Bunny vs Monkey' series and as usual there's lots of silliness and toilet humour!

These books are in the classic comics style but don't let that fool you into thinking they're not valuable reading. See our reasons below for why comics are wonderful for all ages.

We have 2 copies of *Bunny vs Monkey: The Impossible Pig* in the school library and other comics such as *Dog Man* and *The Investigators* so if you missed out in our competition this month, you can borrow these whenever you like as your Reading for Pleasure book.

Author of the month:

Jamie Smart

Jamie is a comic artist and author of our book of the month. He's written other books such as the *Pember* and *Lookalike* series but for those of you that are a bit older, he was also the artist for the most recent *Desperate Dan* and *Roger the Dodger!* A lot of his work can be seen in *The Phoenix* comic (see below) and he has a series of drawing tutorials on YouTube. We have created a playlist of these on our YouTube channel so that you can find them easily. Find us @thebigrivendellreader

On Saturday 14th December at 10:00, Jamie will be presenting a live drawing workshop online and we have a Rivendell exclusive discount code! Use the code **RIVENDELL** for 10% off making the workshop only £5.39. The link to the workshop can be found here: <https://greatbigdrawingworkshop.eventbrite.co.uk/>

PHOENIX Comic

Bunny vs Monkey features in the Phoenix comic which is published and delivered weekly. It's really exciting to get things through the post in this digital age and it doesn't have lots of plastic junk attached to it to clutter up the house. You can subscribe and get the first 6 issues for £1 to see if you like it by going to HomePage-ThePhoenixcomic and clicking subscribe. You can also use your **RIVENDELL** discount code to get 10% off in the shop but it doesn't apply to a subscription as this is already discounted.

Three reasons to read comics:

1. They're fun! (Do we need any more reasons?)
2. They're great for building confidence. The pictures give us clues to what the words might say.
3. Comics can help to teach language skills. The written content of comic books is often speech or simple sentences which is great for learning a first or second language.

Find more reasons to read comics and recommendations on our November YouTube video and associated playlists. <http://www.youtube.com/@thebigrivendellreader>

Next Month's Prize Book:

We want to see your submissions for *The Big Rivendell Reader* and one lucky winner will receive a copy of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!* Send us your book related pictures, jokes, reviews (one word or one sentence reviews are fine!), poems, stories and anything else book related, and we will pick one person at random to win a copy of our book.

There is no closing date for entries as those received after the book has been won will be entered into January's draw. Send your electronic entries to: bigrivendellreader@rivendellth.co.uk and any paper copies to your teacher or to the office.

Reader Submissions and winner!

The best bit of the newsletter! We have had some wonderful submissions from our readers and the winner was drawn at random. Congratulations to Noah Tarry who wins a copy of *Bunny vs Monkey: The Impossible Pig!* See all the submissions we received this month below.

The Big Rivendell Reader: Submissions

A funny book related joke by Noah.

A beautiful picture of a monster from "That's not my monster." by Layla.

The good side of London

once upon a time there was a fat named bison and a flet named wisk and they were best friends and then one day they were late by a worm. Tooty bison suddenly a little snark jumped out of the oven and then a huge fire started and then got bigger and bigger.

igger and bigger and then one day bison was a man who buried cheese wine in his back garden and also all of the people in London lived in fear so bison and then the Mayor said to the King our country is on fire can you help? bison said the King and when he had made out of brick and the Mayor said what a great idea and then they lived happily ever after.

A wonderful retelling of the Great Fire of London by Grace. (I love the mention of the man burying wine and cheese in his back garden)

The second activity was to produce a YouTube channel to present the content of the newsletter in an accessible way for those who cannot yet read or who find it difficult to read large amounts of information. The channel also promotes playlists of associated content, such as illustrator tutorials and author book readings.

With the newsletter and YouTube channel, we hoped to promote informal book talk and reading communities. By encouraging submissions from children and offering the reward of a free book, it was hoped to build a sense of belonging, joy, and desire for reading.

THE BIG RIVENDELL READER

@thebigrivendellreader · 6 subscribers · 2 videos

Rivendell Flying High Primary School's channel for all things book related!

Customize channel Manage videos

Home Videos Playlists Community

Big Rivendell Reader November Newsletter 12:25

The Big Rivendell Reader Introduction 3:27



Finally a regular book swap, every Tuesday morning in term time, was implemented. Children may take books without swapping but the swap element was added to encourage engagement and reduce reliance on the reading champion to choose appropriate texts. The children are able to ask for books that they would like to read and we try to source them in an attempt to improve the access and choice for children.

Impact



The initial newsletter competition created a lot of excitement in class 3/4 in particular as the teacher promoted the competition as part of their teaching. I also tried to promote the competitions when reading with the children and this opened up opportunities to listen to them talk about books they enjoy and the reasons for enjoyment. The children were excited to find out who had won the book but it also created excitement around the book itself. The competition books have been popular choices for borrowing from the school library.

The newsletter and YouTube channel have created opportunities for asynchronous book talk and engagement with reading. In particular the 'Get Caught Reading' section has promoted the idea of kudos and status to those who read.

The book swap and book giveaways have been great for encouraging synchronous informal book talk. There are frequent requests for recommendations from the children and sometimes the children will ask for specific books or recommend something they've read to either me or one of their peers. Peer recommendation appears to be more valuable to children than recommendations from us, as adults. I try to recruit some of the older children who enjoy reading to help the other children to choose books if they're not sure what to take.





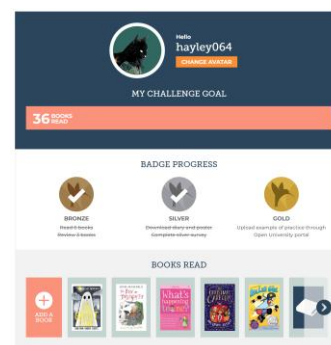
One child spotted that we had sourced the entire Tom Gates series of books and asked if she could please take two. I told her that if she wanted to, she could take all of them, and the look of joy on her face was wonderful. I saw her later walking home with her parent, peering over her stack of books, and she asked, "Please can I have a bookcase for Christmas?"

Another child repeatedly looked at the books at the swap but didn't choose to take any declaring that she 'wasn't much of a reader'. I tried to find books that she might like in line with her interests (horse-riding) but was continually unsuccessful. The week of the submission of this proposal she came to the book swap and said that she "just wanted to try reading something" but then didn't make a decision. I have hope that we will make a reader of her yet!

So far we have given away over 2000 books to the children of our small school. While we can only hope that this will impact on social justice, reading for pleasure and all of the associated benefits, we know and have witnessed the excitement and joy that taking and owning books has given to our children.

Reflections on the impact that research had on your practice

The research by Cremin et al (2014, cited in The Open University, 2025) helped formalise the practice of talking about books and creating excitement around reading, while the impact of Mackey (2021) identified a focus and desire. The Teachers as Readers project (The Open University, 2025) gave the framework and support to diversify my reading and gain insights. I will build on my love of reading and desire to encourage others, with support from the children and their recommendations, by reading texts that are popular with children to deepen my understanding of children as readers.



On reflection, it would appear that the most excitement was generated by teachers who were engaged and included activities to generate content for the newsletter in their lessons. The book swap was a deep source of informal book talk and community building and it would perhaps be beneficial to include a time after school and during lunch time to include those who are habitually less punctual, or who make use of wrap around care provision.

References:

Mackey, M. (2021) 'Access, Choice, and Time to Read: A Reader-Driven Perspective on Social Justice' [Lecture], Centre for Literacy and Social Justice. The Open University. 12 May.

The Open University (2025) *Reading for Pleasure*. Available at: <https://ourfp.org/> (Accessed 8th January 2025)