

GETTING EVERYONE READING FOR PLEASURE



A resource for primary and early years settings



This is a new edition of the NUT's popular reading for pleasure resource which replaces the version shown above. It's bursting with ideas from the many schools involved in helping the NUT to compile *Getting EVERYONE Reading for Pleasure*.

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General Secretary's introduction

It is texts, not just the ability to decode words, which make children into readers.

'I learned to read around my sixth birthday,' wrote Francis Spufford in *The Child That Books Built*. 'I had mumps... When I caught the mumps I couldn't read; when I went back to school again, I could.'

Francis had not taken a reading scheme home with him. He had read *The Hobbit*. Page 1 was a 'thicket of symbols' to be decoded hesitantly. By the time he reached the final page 'the writing was flowing faster and faster until it reached me at the speed of thinking'.

Here is the joy and excitement of reading, a joy that stems from the child's sense of amazing accomplishment, and of wonder at the world that reading has opened up.

Schools want to build communities of passionate readers so that children develop a relationship with books that is as intense as Francis Spufford's, yet as relaxed as Phillip Pullman's, when he evokes the pleasures of reading '... in the middle of the night, or over breakfast, or during a long summer's evening... in bed, or at the bus stop or (as I used to do when I was younger and more agile) up a tree'.

The NUT celebrates the world of the book and all who inhabit it – writers and artists, readers and teachers.

Some technologies make human life possible. Others – like the book – make it worthwhile. There has never been an invention that has done so much for the sharing of complex ideas and deep experiences, or to empower humanity and dispel ignorance.

Reading is more than a necessity. Learning to read should be an excitement and a joy. All too often, however, it is accompanied by anxiety and regulated by curriculum guidelines which are narrow and restrictive. The Union's message to Government has always been that literacy is essential – but when literacy is reduced to decoding and reading is confined to snippets of text the door to reading may well remain closed. Government policy needs to be alert to this.

In this guide you will find ideas and inspiration from teachers and schools who, despite accountability pressures, phonics and SPaG, are finding time in the school day to celebrate reading for pleasure and to develop a culture of reading for the children and young people in their communities. You'll find teachers who are working with a range of children from different backgrounds to make reading for pleasure accessible and relevant for all.

You will also find evidence, should you need it, for why you should make time for reading for pleasure. It enriches children's cognitive, social and emotional development in a way that reciting phonemes, words and sentences cannot. Its benefits are immense and enduring.

We commend this publication to you.

Foreword

Systematic phonics teaching has been present in schools for many years, yet substantial numbers of children continue to struggle with reading. Reading is not just a technique – it is a lifelong experience. You get better at it, not just by learning ‘rules’ or ‘basics’ (the most basic of basics is meaning), but by doing it day in day out and doing it because you enjoy it.

Reading is learned through immersion, through enjoyment. Schools that want to make their children lifelong readers have to reproduce the warmth, diversity and engagement seen in families that read together. Schools should be full of books, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, joke books, factual books. The faces of authors should peer out from the walls. Top tens of film tie-ins, comics, graphic novels, adventure books and fantasy tales should be displayed. There should be read aloud sessions, author and illustrator visits, poetry slams. Most of all, there should be libraries – temples of books where children browse, share and become entranced by the joy of books.

I commend the NUT for this initiative and encourage teachers to use these materials.

Read on!

Alan Gibbons, Blue Peter Book Award winning author and former teacher

When I was ten I had a truly terrifying teacher. She had a vast, jutting bosom, a towering beehive and spiky glasses. She wore crimplene tunic dresses, zipped at the front, and nylon blouses with voluminous puffed sleeves: there was so much synthetic fabric that she crackled with static every time she moved.

She had an appalling temper. And yet my last year of primary school wasn't one of unmitigated misery.

Why? Because she read to us.

We didn't all have access to books at home and we certainly weren't all fluent readers. But we could all listen, and for ten or twenty minutes at the end of each day that's what we did. All her grumpy-grouchiness disappeared as she became immersed in the story. She was a good reader, doing funny voices and holding us enthralled for the moments of drama and magic.

It was the only time my whole class was fully engaged and attentive. The only time we could all be safely said to be enjoying ourselves.

Through that teacher I discovered books I'd never have picked up myself. Books that I thought were too difficult, too long, too complicated for me to manage alone. Books that I then fell in love with – that shaped me, that have stayed with me and which I've treasured all my life. For that, I'm truly grateful to her.

Of course, those were the distant days when teachers had relative freedom. There was no National Curriculum. No Ofsted. SATS were a nightmare of the far future that no one had yet imagined.

I know how much pressure today's teachers are under and have no desire to add to it. And yet I know from my own experience that if it's possible to squeeze in even five minutes of reading aloud to a class the effect is enormous. It can open the door to the world of books, and give a child a love of reading that will last them their whole life.

Tanya Landman, Carnegie Medal winning author

Why reading for pleasure matters

“He loves it when they go to the library and change their books. He always unwraps the book as though it’s a present and he talks about the ones his friends have picked as well.” Parent of Thomas, aged 6

One young person in three says they do not have a book of their own at home.

This figure, from research conducted by the National Literacy Trust in 2011¹, is startling. But does it matter? After all, children access information and entertainment from many sources so why are books so important?

“Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child.” National Literacy Trust, 2011¹.

In fact, a large body of evidence shows that reading books has many long term benefits for children and young people in terms of academic achievement and social and emotional development. Reading is key to both combatting social exclusion and raising educational standards. Crucially, the evidence also indicates that these benefits only accrue when children have some choice over what, when and where they read – in other words, when they have opportunities to read because they want to and not just as part of structured reading lessons.

In 2012, Department of Education (DfE) collated much of the evidence on reading for pleasure² which shows that:

- **Reading can lift children out of poverty and promote social inclusion** The OECD (2002)³ found that reading enjoyment is more important for children’s educational success than their family’s socio-economic status.
More recently, research by the Institute of Education (IoE)⁴ demonstrated that reading for pleasure was more important for children’s cognitive development than their parents’ level of education.
- **Reading for pleasure leads to increased attainment** The IoE research found that children who read for pleasure are likely to do significantly better at school than their peers in maths, vocabulary and spelling.
Just fifteen minutes a day of independent recreational reading significantly improves children’s reading abilities – which indicates the importance of giving children frequent opportunities for self-directed reading, especially given that many of them may not have such chances outside school.
- **Reading for pleasure promotes empathy** The DfE document draws heavily on earlier work by the National Literacy Trust⁵ which collected evidence that reading for pleasure promotes general knowledge, a better understanding of other cultures, community participation and a greater insight into human nature and decision making. Many practitioners talk about how books provide both a mirror (that helps us to reflect on our own identities, motivations and feelings) and a window (on to worlds, cultures, identities and ideas that are new to us).

“Books can inspire children by helping them to express their feelings. They empathised with the character in Something Else [by Kathryn Cave] about being different or not having somebody to play with – they talked about how they would feel in that situation. Children will say he’s feeling nervous or frightened – these may be new words to some but it helps them to understand what they mean.” Nursery teacher

- **What we read does matter.** Reading experts agree that high quality texts – whatever their form – are key to achieving the benefits associated with reading for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust’s research also demonstrated that ‘those who read the more traditional materials, such as fiction, poems and non-fiction... are more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with those who read text messages, websites and the like’.

For more information on the benefits of reading for pleasure see the NUT Edufact at www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure

“How do you find space in the curriculum? You have to do it, it’s so important – and if I don’t do it, no b#@*&r else will!”

Year 1 teacher

Developing and sustaining reading for pleasure

“Enable teachers – provide books and time to read them and an attractive environment where people want to read. They stimulate a desire to become a thoughtful reader. They demonstrate by reading aloud and by their own behaviour what a ‘good’ reader does. And they respond, and help others respond, to the individuality of everyone in the reading community they belong to.”

Aiden Chambers, *The Reading Environment*⁶

For this resource, we reviewed many useful sources of support and guidance as well as talking to teachers and other professionals about how they have developed and sustained reading for pleasure across their schools.

In their book, *Building Communities of Engaged Readers*⁷, Cremin et al describe four key elements:

- Reading aloud to the class for pleasure (rather than for instrumental literacy teaching purposes)
- Creating diverse, supportive and social reading environments
- Talking about books and making recommendations to individuals and the whole class
- Creating frequent opportunities for children to read independently for pleasure, and giving them choices about what to read.

They also highlight the importance of:

- Teachers as reflective readers who are knowledgeable about texts
- The significance of developing reading as a social, communal activity.

Reading aloud

“There is considerable evidence that reading aloud to children enables them to process challenging content, text features and vocabulary – even in subjects not normally associated with reading aloud such as science and technology”. Teresa Cremin et al, *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure*⁷

Reading aloud helps children to associate reading with pleasure. It removes the pressure to achieve and allows them to access themes and language beyond their reading abilities, thus developing their cognitive skills and aiding language development. It creates a sense of community and a shared reading history, allowing children to discuss stories they are all familiar with. They learn that we each interpret stories differently, that books contain things that we recognise and things that we don't and that we all empathise with different parts of a story. This is very exciting.

“I read to the class at least three times a week just for fun, so that we can all enjoy the story and just get lost in it. You need to do it separately from literacy hour so it's not ‘work’. Sometimes I will ask them questions – we might talk about what they think will happen next – but it's just to heighten the excitement.” Year 4 teacher

“My job share colleague and I always read to the class at the end of the day. The children will talk about the differences in our accents which is another thing that makes it interesting for them. There are a few children who find it difficult to engage in these sessions so I sometimes give them the audio book to listen to at home as this makes it easier for them.” Year 2 teacher

In his book *The Reading Environment*⁶, Aidan Chambers suggests several things that can make reading aloud more effective:

- Prepare – read the story several times, think about the key things you want to bring out, what the mood of the story is at different points and how you will convey this
- Read picture books, non-fiction and poems as well as fiction. Pictures always enhance the interpretation of a text – don’t confine them to KS1!
- Some children may like to follow the text – either in their own copies of the book or perhaps, if the text is relatively simple, onscreen. This will also help them to read it for themselves in due course
- Encourage children to read aloud themselves – not as a task but for fun
- Read aloud all through school years – and every day.

“Children rarely get the chance to read out loud what they or others have written. Some children can be put off by the formality of a printed and bound book – but hearing another child reading something they have written can open their eyes. I encourage older children to read their stories to younger children. It’s one way to create space in the curriculum for reading for pleasure and, as well as being fun, it also enhances speaking and listening.” Year 4 teacher

Most importantly, reading aloud helps all children to find pleasure in books and reading – together. Some children will find it harder to decode text than others. Reading aloud simplifies many of the challenges teachers face over identifying stimulating and enjoyable class texts while ensuring that some children aren’t bored and others don’t feel they are failing.

As a nursery teacher said, *“Children who have not had the experience of being read to at home or who may not, initially, choose to read themselves can begin to appreciate the excitement of things like story and rhyme. We also encourage parents to come in and read aloud – as well as running workshops to show them how they can help children with their reading – and I think that helps to establish those practices at home as well”*.

Reading environments

Most adults would not choose to read at a desk or on a hard chair so why should children? Many schools create inviting and stimulating book corners which all children are encouraged to spend time in every day. Others are lucky enough to have school or community libraries (see below) which children can visit or be taken to in groups. It is vital that these spaces are well curated, functional and inviting. Some things to consider include:

- Making spaces relaxing and cosy – think about providing cushions, chairs, sofas, tents etc
- Make them engaging and attractive – they could be decorated with posters children have made that relate to favourite books or with photos of children, their families and teachers reading at school, at home and elsewhere. This helps to promote reading as a shared, social experience

- Ensure they are well stocked with books that are well displayed and easy to browse with a selection of new titles, favourite authors, picture books, graphic novels, poetry and non-fiction
- Displays should be easy to navigate and changed regularly. Help children to browse for books and find what they want
- Try grouping books by theme (change these regularly) and encourage children to recommend books for display
- Encourage children to bring in their own books to read (as well as manuals, catalogues, magazines etc)
- Think about creating spaces where children can talk about books but also where they can be quiet if they want to
- Make sure the space is kept tidy.

“We have books all around the classroom and lots of play-based stuff – so we have building books in the construction area, or books about minibeasts in that space. The children will look at them while they play and talk about them with each other.” Year 1 teacher

Talking about and recommending books

“Sometimes a child will get ‘stuck’ on one kind book or a single author so I will recommend something they don’t know. I’ll get a copy for them and tell them a little of what it’s about. They can give it back if they don’t like it but they tend to persevere – often they will recommend it to others because they want them to like it too. It’s powerful because someone is taking an interest in their reading life.”

Year 3 teacher

Many teachers will be familiar with ‘book talk’ as described by Aiden Chambers in his book *Tell Me*⁸. Teachers can create opportunities for discussion with the whole class, small groups and individuals about different texts. They can talk about:

- **Likes and dislikes** What caught their attention about a story and made them want to keep reading and was there anything that put them off the book? Starting with these questions takes the pressure off children – everyone can talk about something they enjoyed or didn’t like about a book. Make sure you ask their views first – or there is a danger that the teacher’s opinion will be seen as the ‘right’ one
- **Puzzles** “What did it mean when ...”. Sharing and solving these puzzles helps readers to discover the ‘meaning’ of a story together – and to learn that it may mean different things to different people. You can encourage children to look for evidence in the text to support their views – “how do you know that?” – but it is also OK for them to say “I don’t know” or “I guessed”. As adults, we will often have a ‘feeling’ about what a story ‘means’ – we don’t always need to ‘know’
- **Patterns and connections** “Were there any patterns you noticed? Did it remind you of anything?” These might be repeated motifs like “I’ll huff and I’ll puff...”, rhythm and rhyme in poems, repeated images or themes in illustrations etc. You can also help children to compare events or characters in the story to those in other stories or from their own lives.

Initially, this process will be teacher led (and may be quite formal) but as children become more familiar with it they will start to share their ideas with each other.

“Any response to a book is valid – even if children really hate it. There is no one interpretation – I don’t want children just saying what they think I want to hear.” Year 5 teacher

Encourage children to talk about their reading – and join in their conversations. Find out what children are reading outside school, ask them for their opinions and whether they would recommend the book to you or to other children. This will, in turn, make it easier for you to recommend books that they might like.

“Children are talking about what they read in the playground – and our TAs are joining in too which is brilliant. We’ve managed to create this idea that talking about books is ‘cool’. Children will talk about books they like in the same way they talk about TV programmes or games. Sometimes I’ll recommend a book to one child and they will recommend it to others and it snowballs.” Year 3 teacher.

Recommending particular books to children requires that teachers have a good knowledge of available texts (see below for further discussion of this) but can be very effective in encouraging children to read for pleasure:

“Keila was an unenthusiastic reader. She didn’t read anything except The Diary of a Wimpy Kid. All the children keep reading diaries so her motivation was really having something to write in that. Her main aim was to read 5 pages every night so that she could stop and do something more interesting! I wanted her to read a whole text enthusiastically. She loved Voices In The Park when we did it in class so I gave her another Anthony Browne book. At first she was put off – she thought it was a picture book for babies – but when I pointed out it was

my own book she was delighted. Keila loved it – she thought the drawings were really funny and felt great about finishing the whole book.

“I asked what she liked about the Wimpy Kid books and she couldn’t say so I asked her if it was because it’s a diary. She said yes so we tried Diary Of A Killer Cat by Anne Fine. This was another of my own books and this seemed very important. She loved that – and read it in one night. I sat her next to Sophie in book club and they chatted about books. Sophie recommended one and Keila read that. It was all about expanding Keila’s view of herself as a reader. Finishing a text quickly was obviously important to her so we started with shorter books but now she’s happily reading novels.” Reading coordinator

Making time for independent reading

“We do 15 minutes quiet reading after every lunchtime. They can read anything they want. Some children find it hard to find something they want to read so you have to support them. I took one group to the library and helped them to find something – or we encourage them just to pick a book they like the look of and try it. You need to interact with them – one boy just wanted to look at car magazines so I found him a book about cars and he loved it.” Year 1 teacher

Independent reading helps children develop their reading stamina – the ‘will’ to read as well as the ‘skill’. Such sessions should not involve children being quizzed about their reading or having to explain why they have given up on a particular book – unless, of course, they want to talk about these things. Many teachers will be familiar with the acronyms DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) and ERIC (Everybody Reading In Class) and it is helpful if everyone is reading together – including adults who can act as positive models of being a reader. As well as having somewhere comfortable to read (see above) it’s helpful if children don’t have to read alone or in silence but can if they want to.

“Some children will read together but we also have a quiet corner where they can go if they want to.” Year 3 teacher

Despite the proven benefits of reading for pleasure, many schools have difficulty making time for it in packed timetables, particularly in upper key stage 2. Most find it easier to place it next to a ‘free’ period like break or lunchtime as it is less likely to be interrupted or displaced by something else. Research indicates that, to be effective, sessions do not need to be long but they do need to be sustained and relatively frequent (so several short sessions in a week are likely to be better than one long one). Teachers we spoke to found a number of ways of fitting them in to the curriculum.

“In my class some of the children will be doing independent reading while others are doing things like guided reading sessions. We rotate this so everybody does some independent reading several times a week. It’s not ideal but it does mean we can fit it in. We present it as ‘down time’ and are very clear that they can read anything they want as opposed to other ‘literacy’ sessions which are more teacher-directed.

“As well as books we let them listen to stories on CD or read them on iPads or Kindles. They can read comics and reference books as well. It took a while to establish, but now the independent readers require very little supervision. They often swap books and suggest things to each other so we don’t have to motivate them. It helps that myself and the other staff also spend time talking with them about the books they like and recommend stuff so that they always have plenty to read.”
Year 6 teacher.

“We have clubs before school, at lunchtime and in a quieter area in the playground where children can come in and read. It’s an opportunity for children who don’t read at home to read at school. We might also just stop and read for a few minutes before lunch or at the end of the day – it’s not structured, just having fun for a few minutes.” Head teacher

Cremin et al cite several examples of activities that can help promote independent reading⁷, such as:

- *Reading Prefects* where children profile and popularise reading, making reading a high status activity
- *Book Swaps* across the whole school, where children bring a book, swap it for a token and choose a ‘new’ book
- *Reading Buddies* across age groups, and with secondary school children.

Many schools will operate a ‘book-based curriculum’ which is a valuable way of incorporating reading into the whole curriculum but can have the effect of linking it too closely with ‘work’. When asked how she avoided this one Head responded *“It’s simple – by choosing the right books! You have to find the right book for the children – not the right book for the teacher or topic. It varies from cohort to cohort – what works for one group won’t work for another. Last year’s Year 5 loved There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom [by Louis Sachar] but not this year’s. So far everyone has loved Stitch Head [Guy Bass] which is brilliant for D&T. You can get it wrong and it’s OK to stop reading the book.*

“With the class readers, we read them in the first half term then do the work in the second. Many of the children will read other books by the same author or related ones recommended by staff so they are still doing lots of self-directed reading as well.”

Traditional ‘reading schemes’ (which, inevitably, remove the element of choice from readers) can take the pleasure out of reading and many schools no longer used them. Some teachers, noting that they can be popular with parents as they can help to demonstrate progress, came up with their own responses to this.

“We code all our books in terms of picture books with no words, then a word on one page, then three to four words, then sentences and this satisfies the parents. They’re happy for us to use all kinds of books together as long as they can also see that children are progressing.”
Nursery head

“For their homework our children just read. Some parents worry because they want them to be answering questions (although others like it because they’ve had trouble getting their kids to read and now they want to). And I can show them that their children are reading more and harder books and making progress. And we’ve made progress in reading – as was noted by Ofsted!”

Year 2 teacher

Louise Johns–Shepherd, Chief Executive of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, says *“It’s about communicating as a school what you think is important. You need a really secure pedagogy – being clear that there is real value in developing reading stamina itself. It isn’t about the number of words you read or getting to the end of long books – it’s more important that children freely and willingly pick up a book, read it, discuss it, tell you their preferences, ask questions, have favourites. All this is observable and recordable. As long as teachers have knowledge of a good range of books, they will be able to recommend something appropriate for the next step of a child’s progression that they will also enjoy.”*

Teachers as reflective and knowledgeable readers

Teachers who enjoy literature themselves will always find it easier to nurture that enjoyment in their pupils. Thinking about what you like to read – and why, when and where you like to do it – will make it easier to understand what helps children to enjoy books.

In his book *Reads Like A Novel*⁹, Daniel Pennac identified ten ‘rights of a reader’:

- The right not to read
- The right to skip pages
- The right not to finish a book
- The right to re-read
- The right to read anything
- The right to ‘bovarysme’ (to lose yourself in a book or to mistake it for real life)
- The right to read anywhere
- The right to browse
- The right to read out loud
- The right to remain silent (and not have to talk about or defend your tastes).

Think about how you exercise these rights and how you can empower children to do the same. Would you enjoy reading if you couldn't give up on a book you didn't like? Isn't it important to be able to read the books you choose? Does re-reading a favourite book enhance the experience – and confirm our appreciation of reading as fun, stimulating or comforting? Would you enjoy reading as much if you always had to answer lots of questions about it later?

Think about drawing up your own list of readers' rights with the children in your class.

"I talked to the children about how I found it difficult to learn to read [as a child] but that I always loved picture books and listening to poetry – and that I still do! We read a poem every day now but only talk about it if the children want to – I want them to just enjoy listening to it. I brought in some of the books I enjoyed as a child as well as a couple I hadn't and asked them what they thought of them and about books they did and didn't like. I told them that I still sometimes don't finish a book I'm not enjoying – I think they were quite shocked!

"I also talked about a book [Sense and Sensibility] that I found quite hard to get into but I had to keep reading because I enjoyed the story so much. I told them there was a film as well and we talked about how many of the films they liked were based on books. Some of them didn't know about these and were then keen to read the books so we got some. We talked about how some were different from the film and some of the children preferred the books. One boy said 'I liked the book because it lasted longer and you can go back and read bits that you don't understand again.'" Year 3 teacher

As well as knowing what their pupils like to read, if teachers are to recommend appropriate books – or choose the right ones to read aloud – it is vital that they have a broad knowledge of good picture books, fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Many teachers rely on books they loved as children or read in training and these will not necessarily suit the tastes of all children. Some schools have appointed a Reading Advocate. Their responsibilities might include keeping up to date with new children's books as they are published and sharing the best ones with colleagues via staff meetings, circulars or displays in the staff room. They could advise colleagues on ways to encourage reading for pleasure and evaluate the impact of reading initiatives. Their first job might be to develop a whole-school reading for pleasure policy like the example at www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure.

Developing communities of readers: help and support

There are a number of organisations that can support teachers in selecting and using children's books in school:

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (www.clpe.org.uk) offer highly respected CPD training, resources and book packs. Their website includes free core book lists (www.clpe.org.uk/corebooks), as well as themed lists and books of the week.

The UK Literacy Association (www.ukla.org) offers a range of resources including *Building Communities of Readers*, a CPD booklet to help teachers develop as 'reading teachers' and to record children's attitudes. It includes detailed outlines of sessions that support teachers to:

- develop their knowledge of children's authors and books
- plan and sustain opportunities for children to read independently for pleasure
- read aloud
- plan regular book promotion activities

- make individual and whole class book recommendations
- reflect on their personal reading histories
- develop mutually beneficial relationships with families and libraries and build on children's out of school reading experiences.

The National Literacy Trust (www.literacytrust.org.uk) provides a wealth of useful research and practice materials. Their *Literacy Guide for Primary Schools* and *Annual Literacy Review* both contain sections on reading for pleasure. They also produce a staff meeting PowerPoint resource, *Building Our Knowledge of Quality Children's Literature*.

Letterbox Library (www.letterboxlibrary.com) is a children's bookseller specialising in books which celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion. They ensure that everything they sell is inclusive since if all children are to engage with books and reading it is vital that they are given opportunities to find themselves in stories. All of their books have been pre-selected by a team of reviewers which includes teachers, librarians and children. They have put together a booklist especially for this resource and you can find it at www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure.

Other ways that teachers can support reading for pleasure

- **Help younger children to see how books 'work'** – how to turn the pages, which way to hold them etc. *"We often talk about how a book looks, examine the front and back covers with them, notice the smell of new books and how the pages stick together. When books are well-worn we talk about how loved they are. We mend books to show they are precious. Those we can't mend we dispose of quietly – we don't want children to see that!"* Nursery teacher
- Help children to develop their **book choosing skills** – for example, read the 'blurb' or a page from the middle of the book.

- **Pictures are as important as words.** They help children to follow and interpret text. Look for beautiful picture books with images that extend the meaning of the text and use them across the school – not just in KS1. Graphic novels help older readers to know it's still OK to be inspired by pictures – as well as giving those who may find it harder to decode large amounts of text (including readers with EAL) access to the pleasure of reading. Illustrations complement reading aloud and help children to engage with stories that might challenge their reading abilities. They are just as important in non-fiction texts where they can show things that words cannot describe and enhance the value of books as windows into worlds we didn't know existed.

"My Yr. 6 class still love picture books – I always say there is so much more to books than mere words – you don't need to 'read' to be reading!"

- **Use drama and role play** to deepen children's understanding of stories and open their eyes to the possibilities of books to challenge our ideas and perceptions. Role play is one of the best ways to 'put yourself in someone else's shoes' and see things from a different point of view. You can use it to think about what might happen next in a story, or how characters from different stories might interact.

“We dress up and act out the stories – or use puppets – and encourage the children to do the same. After we read The Gruffalo, we took the children to the local eco-park. We went on a nature walk and looked at the trees and wildflowers and listened to the birds. The children camouflaged themselves with bits of grass and leaves. We retold the story and we got the TAs to hide story props along the trail so we all went on a Gruffalo hunt.” Nursery teacher

- Experiment with **collaborative story telling**. *“We sometimes start with an object and ask what it is and where it comes from and who it might belong to.”* Year 4 teacher.
- Investigate opportunities to **work with authors and illustrators**. Check out www.contactanauthor.co.uk to find authors in your area.
- **Use literature in cross-curricular planning**, making books the basis of lessons. This helps to promote the value of reading as a source of information and understanding about the world.

*“I encourage children to keep **reading diaries**. It helps them to think about what they like to read and helps us to make suggestions. I write the diary for them when they are little and later they keep the diaries themselves. I look at them – with the child – often. It should be fun – I don’t mark them and they can write as much or as little as they like. I also keep my own diary and share it with the class.”* Year 5 teacher and whole-school reading coordinator

- Put aside a **budget** for spending on books. The School Library Association recommends spending £10 per child on books each year.
- Engage with **local and national festivals** and events. *“We expand World Book Day to a week. The children come off timetable for the afternoons and every year we have a different theme. We have four books as our main focus – one each for nursery, KS1 and KS2, and a fourth one for parents to read. We read them in stages over the week and talk about them with each other.”* Deputy head

*“We have pictures all over school of teachers reading books. They write about what they’re reading and why. We also have **pictures of children and families** engaged in extreme reading or taking part in the local library’s treasure trail. It’s all part of our aim to make reading just part of everyday life and not something that’s just for school.”* Head teacher

*“We had an **incentive scheme** to encourage children to read lots of books – Reading with Robo. Each child had a card with a drawing of a robot. They coloured in sections for each book they read. When they had completed it they got a prize.”*

Check out the website linked to this resource (www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure) for examples of other initiatives and ideas to promote reading for pleasure.

Getting EVERYONE reading for pleasure...

Every child has a right to see themselves in books

Books are invaluable for finding out about lives, cultures, ideas and beliefs that are different from our own. They can help children to develop empathy and a positive view of difference. But children need to see their own identities in books as well. Make sure your school library, classroom, booklists and recommendations include stories about children from a range of different cultures and backgrounds – and reflect the variety of families that children come from.

There is simply no excuse for children not to encounter characters with same-sex or single parents, from blended families or who are being fostered or living in care. They need to see characters living with disability and who challenge accepted stereotypes about race, gender, religion and culture. This is not about political correctness – without it, children will be deprived of the power of books to promote wonder and debate. And if they sense that they, their families and their experiences have no place in stories, they may conclude that books are not for them.

Inclusion needs to be implicit as well as explicit. Some children may be drawn to books which are ‘about’ different identities. These can be invaluable teaching aids – but if we only read stories in which these identities are foregrounded then this could make some children feel more, rather than less excluded. If every book which includes black and minority ethnic characters is about challenge or struggle, then what message is that sending out? What might we feel if our sexual orientation or gender identity is always problematized?

When you talk about stories with children, explore the similarities as well as the differences between characters and what they have in common. Expand all children’s understanding of reading by introducing them to stories with universal themes (family, love, endurance, fear etc) located in what, for them, may be unusual settings. Search online for sites like www.ethiopianenglishreaders.com which features many traditional Ethiopian stories.

“Some very straightforward texts lend themselves to discussing difference. We read The Tiger Who Came To Tea [by Judith Kerr] and talked about whether all families have a mum and dad and Owl Babies [Martin Waddell] lead to discussions about single parents. When we did Monkey Puzzle [Julia Donaldson] we asked if all babies look like their parents and Zog [Donaldson again] challenged the idea that all doctors are men!” KS1 teacher

Kerry Mason from Letterbox Library says, *“There is a danger that children may disengage from reading because they think literature has nothing to do with them. Publishers often perceive – and market – inclusive texts as being issued and therefore, by implication, not of general interest. One of my favourite books, Freddie and the Fairy by Julia Donaldson features a character who is hearing-impaired. It’s not a story ‘about’ hearing impairment – although it is a wonderful opportunity for hearing impaired children to see a character like themselves in a book – it’s just a great story that appeals to all children”.*

See www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure for the list of high quality, inclusive children’s books that Letterbox Library have compiled to accompany this resource.

Some children may find it harder to access books outside school or be less likely to own books themselves. It is vital that they are helped to engage with reading by finding stories and characters they can relate to. This may be a particular issue for some looked after children. Coram BAAF Adoption & Fostering Academy (www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/ChildrensBooksPage) offers a range of books about children who are in care or adopted. Book Trust's Letterbox Club (www.letterboxclub.org.uk) provides parcels of books for looked after children.

Supporting boys' and girls' reading

Teacher: ***“Are some books for boys and some for girls?”***

Jake, Year 2: ***“That would be silly. All books are for everyone.”***

One of the biggest concerns for many teachers is that boys seem to find it harder to engage with reading than girls. While numerous surveys tell us that more girls than boys enjoy reading, it would be wrong to deduce from this that girls are somehow ‘naturally’ more inclined to read.

While in some UK schools girls do achieve better reading scores than boys, PISA results demonstrate that the differences *within* genders are far greater than those *between* them. This is also true of so-called ‘learning styles’, where there is as much difference between pupils of the same sex as between girls and boys.

Furthermore, focusing energy on the perceived needs of boys not only risks failing those girls who struggle to enjoy reading but also ignores a wider issue. Many strategies aimed at engaging boys, which use for example ‘boy-friendly’ texts, risk reinforcing the very gender stereotypes that cause the problems in the first place – in particular that reading is a passive, ‘feminine’ activity of little

interest to boys. As Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2007 note, *“reinforcing traditional ‘masculine’ stereotypes without critically reflecting on these can exacerbate, rather than reduce, gender differences in achievement”*¹⁰.

“I think there are fewer emotionally rounded male leads than female ones in children’s books. It worries me that we are in danger of reinforcing the very stereotypes about boys and girls that we want to challenge.” Year 6 teacher.

“It’s terribly important that we don’t make assumptions about what children would like to read based on stereotypes. I have seen teachers fail to challenge comments about ‘girly’ books or even make remarks in front of boys [who like to read] about ‘exploring their feminine side’. Just being surprised by a child’s book choice can be unhelpful. Children should never be embarrassed about what they read and suggesting that boys should prefer certain books could leave some of them [who like different ones] feeling excluded.” Librarian

Research conducted by the National Literacy Trust for the Boy’s Reading Commission highlighted some of the strategies employed by practitioners to help boys to engage with reading¹¹. Many of these – working with their interests, offering a wide choice of materials, promoting reading for pleasure across the school – would be just as effective with girls.

Stereotypes about boys and reading are not helped by the fact that children are more likely to see mothers read than fathers. ALL children may benefit from at least some exposure to male reading role-models, so encourage dads, uncles and granddads to share books or read with children both in and out of school.

Differences in motor skill development between girls and boys (and younger and older children in the same class) may make it harder for some children to hold a book or turn pages and it is certainly worth taking things like this into account. However, all of the suggestions outlined in this resource and elsewhere have been shown to be effective in increasing the interest of both girls and boys in reading. Teachers should feel confident that understanding the needs and interests of individual pupils will always be most effective in enhancing reading performance across the school.

Enabling children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to read for pleasure

Some SEND pupils may need additional support to engage in discussion about books and to find books that suit their age and interests.

Jill is the SENCO at a primary school which has a resource base for children with physical disabilities and visual impairment. They also have a number of children with Down's Syndrome and additional learning needs.

“We try to give children access to the same stories that their friends will be sharing. Sometimes it's just a question of enlarging the text – you can retype it in larger print or in braille – but we also try and adapt illustrations too if we can. Some of them are too busy and detailed. We might make them tactile rather than visual. We used a book called Walking Through The Jungle [by Julie Lacome] in which a child encounters an animal on each page. There is lots of foliage in the pictures but you can scan them or make photocopies and extract the image of the relevant animal. We made leafy shapes with raffia and used furry material for the lion in a tactile version of the story and we had a cut out of the little boy that we or the children could place on each page. It takes a bit of work but it's worth doing with well-loved books because they get used again and again.”

“If children can't turn the pages of a book we might cut them up or make photocopies and laminate them so they are less fiddly. You can bind them with comb ring binders to make them easier to turn over.”

“If children are non-verbal we put books on to a laptop or on to their communication aid. You can use software like PowerPoint or Clicker 6 in which case the computer will read the text for them. They still have control and can decide when to turn pages but it also works in group reading situations or if they want to follow the book while we read aloud. Sometimes the children read aloud to each other. If a child has speech and language difficulties they can follow the text with their finger while a friend or TA reads it out so they can join in.”

“If teachers read aloud and there are children with hearing impairments we obviously make sure the child can see their lips but also give them their own copy of the book so they can look at it and follow along. Sometimes we will spend some time with a child the day before looking at the books so they are familiar with the story and not struggling to understand it. You can follow the sequence of pictures so they get a feel for the structure. We might do a story map with certain pictures or characters in different places as the story progresses.”

“If we ask them what they think about a story or a picture, some children will find it easier if you give them some choices. We might suggest two or three different opinions and they might pick from different symbols or words that represent how they feel about the book. This is really helpful if they communicate by eye pointing, for example.”

“With some children the learning gap between them and their peers can get bigger as they get older so class texts can be quite challenging. Our TAs are really good at helping the children to understand them. At the moment we are looking at Greek myths so they do lots of creative activities like making 3D story maps (we made a labyrinth with a Minotaur!) so they can understand the stories and act them out and be involved. We use lots of drama and role play in relation to books. Of course ALL the children enjoy these things – it’s very much part of our ethos that the SEND children are fully integrated and that goes for reading just like everything else.”

You can see more about Jill’s school here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4B4CGopmZw&feature=youtu.be>.

Bag Books (www.bagbooks.org) publish multi-sensory books, offer multi-sensory storytelling sessions and provide training for teachers, librarians, parents and carers.

Barrington Stoke (www.barringtonstoke.co.uk) is an independent publisher whose books are edited and designed to minimise some of the obstacles that can make it harder for struggling or reluctant readers or those with dyslexia or visual stress.

Clear Vision (www.clearvisionproject.org) is a UK postal lending library of mainstream children’s books with added braille. Their books all have braille (or Moon) print and pictures, making them suitable for visually-impaired and sighted children and adults to share.

National Autism Resources (www.nationalautismresources.com/autism-childrens-books.html) and **Different Roads** (www.difflearn.com/category/childrens_books) are two US sites with lists of books that may be particularly useful for those working with children with autism. Most of the books are easily available in the UK.

Working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds or who have English as an additional language

According to Farrah Serroukh from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, *“To really engage with reading, children need to be able to access texts that are genuinely representative of their cultures, identities and language background. Lots of resources are very generic. Don’t just go for the poster with 50 languages when you have a high proportion of Mongolian or Vietnamese children and their languages aren’t on there. And remember that the demographic will change over time.*

“Routines foster reading for pleasure so it’s good to develop relationships with family groups. Parents may think they can’t engage with their children’s reading because they don’t speak English. Reading practices will be different in some cultures so take time to find out what they are. Invite parents to come in and share a story – it could be a bilingual text or an oral story.

“Encourage parents to come in and use the school resources – books, book based games, story sacks or bags that correspond to different texts that parents can borrow. And show them how they can use them. You can work with parents to devise your own resources linked to popular books.”

One teacher who provides EAL support in primary schools in South London said: *“Many children who may not be literate in English will be in their home language. There are some excellent dual language picture books of traditional tales like the Three Little Pigs and Red Riding Hood that children can read at home and then join in with classroom discussions. This helps children to keep up their literacy in their home language and is also useful for families who may not have access to many books if they are not in an established community”.*

In other schools, the reverse is true and children will read in English but not the home language. One deputy head commented: *“We have parents who are fluent in both English and Rumanian. We get them to record books in Rumanian so they can be shared with other families who may not be able to read the English versions. We also get them to do things like write labels for book displays of dual language books etc.*

“We have books in our library in all the languages spoken in the school and we involved pupils in drawing up a list of their favourites which then went on display with their recommendations in both English and home languages. Signage in our library is also in several languages and I think parents are surprised and really delighted when they come in and see this – it really helps to engage them in the idea of reading with their children. We have storytellers in from different communities and we also have lots of stories about children from other parts of the world in English so that the whole school is involved in each other’s stories.”

A KS2 lead said: *“Our school has about 65% Somali, 15% Pakistani and 6% Bangladeshi families, with small numbers from Eastern Europe and the rest of white British, African or Caribbean heritage. We have a book bank of dual language books that parents can borrow. It was great to see a Turkish parent talking to a Somali parent about a book they had both read in different home languages.*

“We also run a book group for parents (grown up books!). Even those who can’t speak much English join in conversations because they are enthused by the books. Parents wrote about their own journeys to England – we got people to scribe if necessary – and we put them in a book so the children can read what their parents have written. We want them to see that anyone can write their story and that books are a marvellous way of sharing them with others.”

“The choice of books is really important – they need to be relevant to the children and their families but we don’t just want to use folk stories set in Pakistan – what about their lives at the moment? They love authors like David Walliams because they represent inner city life and a diverse range of characters – like children who are carers for example – and people they would meet in everyday life.

“We use lots of visual stuff to support reading aloud – props, images, role play, dress up – and sometimes give key vocabulary beforehand. Or we do some ‘pre-reading’ – take a group and read with them first so they can join in discussion with other children a bit more confidently.”

Mantra Lingua (<http://uk.mantralingua.com>) is the world’s largest publisher of dual language books in English and 65 other languages. They also produce talking dictionaries and devices like the PENpal that will read out text from enabled resources in more than 50 different languages.

The importance of school and community libraries

“What made the biggest impact [on reading for pleasure] was revamping the library. We employed someone to be in at lunchtime and after school, ran competitions, and got children involved in organising the shelves and cataloguing the books using the computer system. It’s the heart of the school now, it belongs to everybody and it’s a place the children love.” Deputy head

A 2014 report by the Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group collected evidence demonstrating a positive correlation between a good school library and attainment, achievement and motivation¹². The most vulnerable students, such as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were found to benefit even more¹³.

One school librarian talked about how the library complements the other work going on in the school to encourage reading: *“What’s so important is that in the library it’s just about reading for pleasure. Children can take out books that are ‘too young’ for them, for example, just because they love them and want to re-read them. They are not being cross examined afterwards.*

“We run an after school book club, reading books together and doing related activities. The library is open at lunchtime and at breaks. We will order in particular books that children request and we have a newsletter that goes out to all children about new books – many of them write reviews for it.

“We have author and illustrator visits. Children have lunch with them so they get to meet them informally as well. This has a really lasting effect with children wanting to read lots of their books for a year or more afterwards.

“I always brief authors so they are very clear that it’s about reading for pleasure rather than a workshop. We have the sessions in the library so it doesn’t seem like another lesson and we don’t attach writing tasks to them – it’s all about pleasure. We sometimes do it with quite small groups so they can really talk and ask questions, as well as having big assembly style events.

“I help children to find books they want by talking to them about their hobbies and what they’re interested in – do they want a novel or non-fiction, for example? I pick out a range of things for them – something at their level, something that’s a bit harder perhaps and something a little bit easier. We forget that as adults we don’t always want to read something ‘challenging’! Because we have an electronic system that records who’s taking out which books we have really useful data about what each child is reading that we can share with teaching staff as well.

“When children have used the library for a while they get a feel for what they like – they learn to self-select, become more confident. I took a group of children to ASDA to use their World Book Day vouchers in the shop – they knew what to do, what to choose, how to browse. Knowing what to look for and where to look for it is a skill.

“When I started, some children didn’t come to the library because they thought they had to pay for the books and they didn’t have the money. Now they know the routine so they will know about public libraries too. There are fewer public libraries so school libraries are even more important now. I was in a village recently where someone had turned the phone box into a library and people had donated books. You could recreate this in school to start your own library – ask people to donate old books and use a small space and stock it well.”

The School Library Association (www.sla.org.uk) provides advice and support to anyone (not just qualified librarians) who works in a school library. Their online CPD course *Learning About Libraries* is for teachers, TAs, parent volunteers and others who have responsibility for the day to day running of a primary school library. Their journal *The School Librarian* includes reviews of new children's books.

Sally Duncan of the SLA says, *"You can be taught how to read – but reading for pleasure is a habit that has to be acquired. Schools can create the right environment and one prerequisite is to have plenty of different books.*

Teachers may find it difficult to know about everything that's available so librarians are often a vital intermediary who can steer a child towards books that will suit their interests and level of reading.

"School libraries shouldn't just be rooms that people visit – you need to take the library to the children as well. You can have trolleys of books in classrooms and assemblies, in the playground at break times and the end of the day so parents can see what's available as well as storytelling and other activities throughout the school."

Local **School Library Services** provide similar support – check www.sla.org.uk/sls-map.php or <http://schoolslibraryservicesuk.org> to find your nearest one.

"A large part of our job is supplying schools with books and resources linked to what they are working on in classrooms, but we can also source books to support children's broader reading. Sometimes a teacher will call and say 'I can't find anything this child likes' so we can discuss their background and interests and try and find something that suits them. Schools that subscribe to our service also get regular emails about new books and other resources." Gillian Harris, Head of Tower Hamlets Library Service

Some community library services still have children's librarians but there won't be one in every local library. If you take a class to visit, see if you can arrange for the children's librarian to be there so that they can talk about the collection.

Schools can make a huge impact by promoting reading for pleasure and helping children to broaden their horizons through books. However, in order for this to be sustained, children and their families need access to a broad range of books in their communities. Community libraries are vitally important for ensuring that children are able to build on their love of reading in their own time and helping them continue this into their adult lives.

Support your local library

Schools want to create communities of passionate readers – and the Union's publication *Reading for Pleasure* aims to help them in this. But schools cannot manage alone.

We need Government to nurture the conditions in which reading can thrive. Poverty is not a good teacher of literacy; and cuts to library and arts provision sabotage teachers' efforts to get children and their families reading for pleasure.

Support campaigns in your area to keep public libraries open and get your students involved.

See also www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure for more information on school and community libraries.

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Further resources

The NUT is collecting further school examples and tools to support you at www.teachers.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure

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“My first, and greatest, liberty was that of being able to read anything and everything I cared to. I could never have dreamt that there were such goings-on in the world between the covers of books, such sandstorms and ice blasts of words, such slashing of humbug, and humbug too, such staggering peace, such enormous laughter, such and so many blinding bright lights, breaking across the just-awaking wits and splashing all over the pages in a million bits and pieces all of which were words, words, words, and each of which were alive forever in its own delight and glory and oddity and light.”

Dylan Thomas, from Notes on the Art of Poetry

