

Making Reading Ahead work for prisoners with ESOL

“I like Reading Ahead. I have read six books and my English is getting better.” - ESOL learner, HMP Manchester

The Reading Agency’s Reading Ahead is an annual programme that challenges people to choose six reads – these can be poems, articles and graphic novels as well as books like Quick Reads - and record their thoughts on what they read in a diary to get a certificate. Reading Ahead is delivered through libraries in around 100 prisons across the UK each year and reached more than 9000 prisoners in 2018/19.

The number of prisoners with English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) may be relatively small but they are disproportionately affected by their lack of English skills in the prison environment. Too often the language barrier prevents them from accessing rehabilitation or other services offered by prisons.

To extend the reach of Reading Ahead to prisoners with ESOL, and to support the ESOL tutors and library staff working with them, The Reading Agency received funding from The Bell Foundation to deliver a three-year project in prisons (2016-19) focusing on this group. The project encouraged participants to take pleasure in their reading as a way of developing language skills, as well as learner autonomy, knowledge and motivation.

Evaluation shows that Reading Ahead can be adapted to be an effective reading intervention for ESOL learners. *“The participant survey has consistently demonstrated how participants feel they have benefited, from improving their reading wider language confidence to enhancing their ability to access prison services, to gain skills, and to make them feel more prepared for life after prison.”* Cloud Chamber Evaluation Services.

“Before it was very hard. I would go to an officer and it would be Yes/No. I couldn’t ask for anything. Now I have been in the class and my English is good it is much easier.” - ESOL learner, HMP Pentonville

Benefits of running Reading Ahead

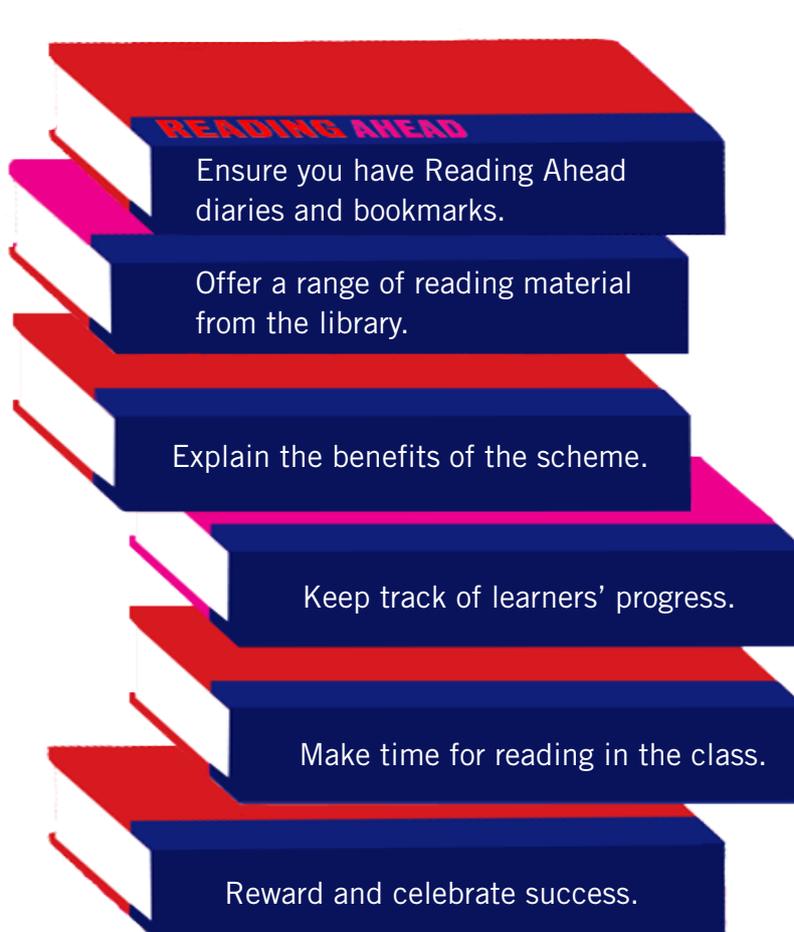
As demonstrated by this project there are clear benefits for ESOL learners from engaging in reading for pleasure through Reading Ahead.

1. Improves learners' reading and writing skills
2. Provides an icebreaker and changes the pace in a long lesson
3. Engages learners in topics that interest them
4. Offers learners an incentive to keep practising their reading and writing
5. Makes the link to the library and a wide choice of reading materials
6. Gives learners a real sense of achievement

"The thing I like is that it gives the group a shared reading experience which is otherwise rare." - ESOL tutor, HMP Isle of Wight

"It's a hook into reading. Somewhere to start." - Librarian, HMP Isle of Wight

Be prepared!



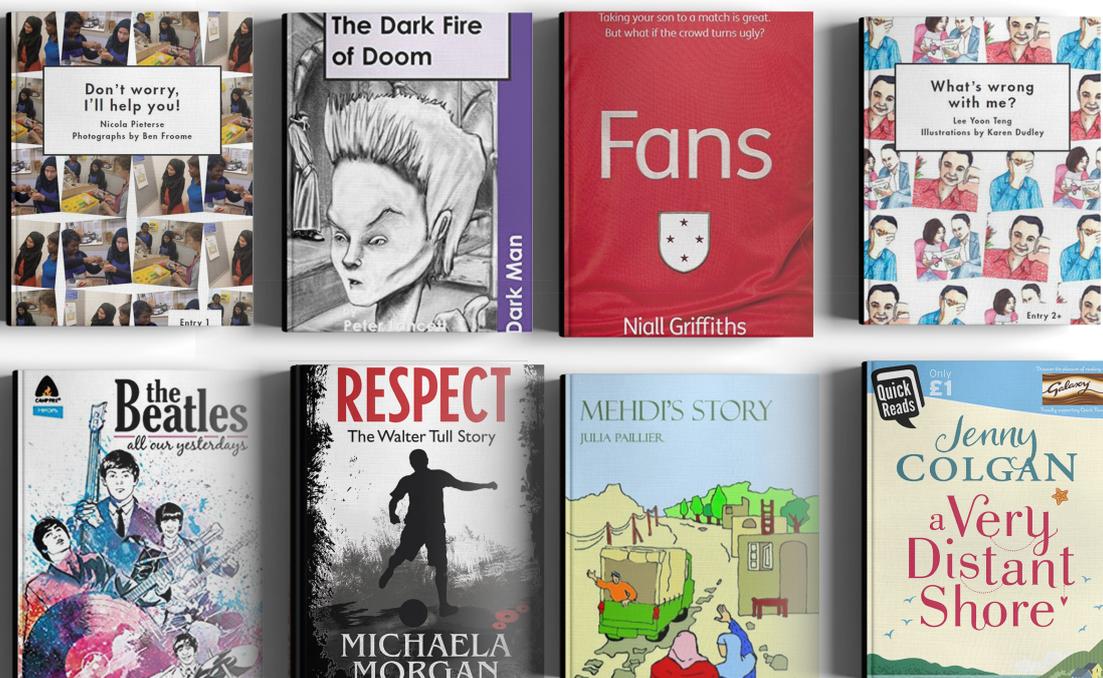
“Having the diary to fill in really helps. It’s good that they read six books but the writing makes it better.” - ESOL tutor, HMP Manchester

Six top tips for success

1. Assign regular time for Reading Ahead in the class. This could be 20 minutes spent reading the same book as a group or learners could make their own choice from a range of texts at the right level. It can also be used at the beginning of lessons as learners arrive.
2. Ensure that most Reading Ahead activity is done in class so that ESOL learners complete their reading tasks and fill in their diaries.
3. Work closely with the library to choose a range of reading material that can be kept in the classroom or take learners to the library on a regular basis.
4. Get learners thinking about books and stories in different ways by using creative reading and writing activities.
5. Display completed reading diaries to inspire others and give out Reading Ahead certificates in wider education celebration events.
6. Encourage completers to keep reading. It’s fine for them to take part in Reading Ahead more than once as long as they challenge themselves.

“Very calming and entertaining, even though I don’t like reading.” - ESOL learner, HMP Moorland

“You see we can do this. I have already read one book.”
- ESOL learner, HMP Nottingham



**READING
AHEAD**

Downloadable resources

Recommended booklists <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/3123/>

Creative reading activities <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/3146>

Creative writing activities <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/3123/>

Lesson plans developed by the British Council

<https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/teachers/teaching-english-for-work/offender-learning>

The Reading Agency is a charity whose mission is to tackle life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop and deliver programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England. www.readingagency.org.uk Contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

The Bell Foundation aims to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged by language, working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. www.bell-foundation.org.uk

