

Why reading for pleasure is vital and how to encourage your students to read for enjoyment

Reading for pleasure is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' level of education and is a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background.¹



Photographs © Dave Warren 2019 for The Reading Agency

There is [strong evidence](#) linking reading for pleasure and [educational outcomes](#). Academic attainment is of vital importance, but the benefits of reading for pleasure go beyond this to impact on health and wellbeing and even our ability to connect with others. In 2015, we published an independent [literature review](#) highlighting the wider outcomes of reading for pleasure and empowerment, conducted for us by BOP Consulting and generously funded by the Peter Sowerby Foundation. The research finds that reading for pleasure can result in lifelong benefits including increased empathy, improved relationships with others, reductions in the symptoms of depression and dementia, and improved wellbeing.

Despite the multifaceted advantages of reading for pleasure, it has been found that only 35% of 10-year-olds in England report that they like reading 'very much'. This lags behind countries like Russia (46%), Ireland (46%), New Zealand (44%), and Australia (43%).² The National Literacy Trust further outlined the scale of this disparity in their [recent research](#):

- Children and young people's levels of reading enjoyment continue to decline and are at their lowest since 2013
- Children and young people's daily reading levels are the lowest National Literacy Trust have ever recorded, with just 25.8% of children saying they read daily in their free time in 2019

You can find more research about the value and impact of reading for pleasure on our [Reading Facts](#) page.

Below are some ways your school can continue to encourage reading for pleasure.

¹ Sullivan and Brown (2013) [Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading](#)

² McGrane et al. (2017) [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study \(PIRLS\): National Report for England](#), p. 102

Join the Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge, presented by [The Reading Agency](#) and funded by Arts Council England, encourages children aged 4 to 11 to set themselves a reading challenge and keep up a reading habit over the long summer holidays; this in turn can help prevent the summer reading '[dip](#)'.

"We have lots of good feedback each year about the Challenge, sometimes from parents who really appreciate the fact that their children are reading and like to share the stories with them; sometimes from schools who often say they have little time to build reading for pleasure into the curriculum and are really keen on the sense of achievement if their particular school does especially well in the Reading Challenge; often from the children themselves who are the toughest critics in the world and never hesitate to tell us about the merits (or not) of the books they've read for the Challenge! It's great to be able to show children that they're valued and to give them a sense of achievement."

Simon, Children's Librarian at Pontefract Library (2019)³

For the Summer Reading Challenge 2020, we are asking everyone to get silly. The theme for the Challenge is "Silly Squad" – a celebration of funny books, happiness and laughter, featuring bespoke artwork from award-winning children's author and illustrator Laura Ellen Anderson. The Silly Squad [book collection](#) comprises 68 must-have reads for children aged 4-11, providing a wealth of inspiration for young readers choosing books for this summer's Challenge and beyond. Every title in the collection has been specially picked by children, librarians and industry experts to reflect the funny theme, with plenty of choices and genres to entertain readers at all stages. The [Summer Reading Challenge website](#) is free to access and a place where children can rate and review their books and work towards their reading goal. It also features video content, games, quizzes and digital and downloadable activities to incentivise and encourage children and their families to take part in the Challenge at home.

Find out more about how your school can get involved with the Summer Reading Challenge in our 'How to get involved in the Summer Reading Challenge' article in the [Dropbox folder](#).

Promote reading aloud

Reading aloud is a great way to build a child's confidence with reading. Reading aloud can be between teacher and student, parent/carer and child or even between siblings. It can allow children to access books that they may have struggled to connect with if reading independently. It's also lots of fun for everyone involved.

Jim Trelease, author of the [Read-Aloud Handbook](#), states that as well as improving a child's vocabulary, there are many other benefits for reading aloud. In conversation, we tend to use verbal shorthand, not full sentences. The language in books, by contrast, is very rich and mainly in complete sentences – as a result, reading aloud also increases a child's attention span. Having this set time to read to or with your students (of any age) may have a positive impact of their engagement with reading.

Due to the restrictions placed on school and libraries due to Covid-19, some publishers have amended their rights agreements so that librarians and teachers can deliver reading activities online.

³<https://readingagency.org.uk/children/004-impact/the-power-of-reading-to-break-down-barriers-and-build-up-confidence.html>

This may include holding a class storytime session where you read to the class. You can find out more information from the publishers on the [Libraries Connected](#) website.

Host a virtual reading group

Reading groups where children can discuss their thoughts on a book can inspire children and young people to read different kinds of books, to develop confidence in talking in a group and to have a good time with fun and creative activities. Participation in the groups (such as our [Chatterbooks groups](#)) can also encourage young people to enjoy reading for its own sake and share their enthusiasm with their peers and their families. In addition, young reading group members will be increasing their book knowledge and their use of libraries. Reading for pleasure and the Chatterbooks model are endorsed by the Department for Education.

“Reading, and discussing what you have read, are cornerstones of education, and the national curriculum aims to encourage all pupils into the habit of reading widely and often. The government expects teachers to do everything they can to foster a love of reading. All children should be encouraged to choose and read books independently as they move through primary school and beyond, so they discover writing that interests them, makes them think or makes them laugh – and are inspired to read more.” Department for Education (2015) Reading: the next steps⁴

Due to the effects of the Covid-19, it may be best to host a virtual book club with your students. You can read our suggestions on how to run a virtual reading group in our article in the [Dropbox folder](#).

Work with your local library

Promoting your local library to your students is a quick way to support families in promoting reading for pleasure. Public libraries can offer a safe, local space for children and families with free access to books and other resources as well as the expertise of the librarians. With the temporary closures of libraries due to Covid-19, some libraries have been active on social media, running virtual events, sharing book suggestions or videos online that may provide inspiration for connecting virtually with your students.

Some libraries may begin to open on a restricted basis in June, but did you know that you and your students can borrow e-books and audiobooks from your local library directly to your phone, tablet or e-reader? Just check on their website how to do this. Or if you prefer to have a print book, many independent bookshops are taking orders online and on the phone to post out. Don't worry if you haven't yet signed up to your local library, as many libraries are taking new members remotely.

Make authors accessible

The National Literacy Trust found that author visits to schools have a positive relationship with children and young people's literacy. [Their report](#) found that if a school had an author visit, children were twice as likely to read above the expected level for their age and were more likely to enjoy reading.

This is an extremely difficult time to host an author visit but there are still lots of ways you can connect authors with your students. For our launch, we had a whole host of virtual events on the [Summer Reading Challenge Facebook page](#) with guest celebrities. The videos are still available and this may be a way to build excitement with your students and get them excited about the Challenge.

⁴ Department for Education (2015) [Reading: the next steps](#): Supporting higher standards in schools

There are also [featured author videos](#) on the Summer Reading Challenge reading club that children may enjoy watching.

Throughout the Summer Reading Challenge period, [The School Zone](#) on the [Summer Reading Challenge website](#) will be updated regularly with resources that schools can use to promote the Challenge. For more ideas you may want to visit the [Chatterbooks resources page](#) which has hundreds of free resources including [themed booklists](#) and activity packs and author videos provided by our publisher partners.