



## The Teachers' Reading Challenge

One of the fondest memories from my childhood is still signing up for the Summer Reading Challenge at the local library. There were badges to collect, brightly coloured fold-out charts and puzzles to pore over, as well as regular meetings at the library where, with other kids, I'd talk books during the hot, stretched-out weeks.

So when The Open University and The Reading Agency launched their Teachers' Reading Challenge back in August, I was delighted - judging by the uptake, I wasn't alone either, more than 1800 have signed up already! Logging on, I found I could set and manage my own challenges, find recommendations, post reviews, and download a reading diary to log my journey as I had when I was young!

As a reader, I've come a long way since I was a boy, with many twists and turns in my reading life, but I still relish the opportunity to challenge myself with what I read, to share those experiences with others, and to hear their thoughts and feelings too..

But why is a challenge like this so important for every teacher?



When we teach reading<sup>*ing*</sup>, we need to remember above all else that we are helping children to **become readers**. It's not just a question of ability: real readers *choose* to read, and to broaden, deepen, and challenge themselves as readers. Indeed, Reading for Pleasure is an important part of the National Curriculum. So surely, we teachers should be readers ourselves? Through experiencing the highs, lows, difficulties and curiosities of the reading life, we are better informed and more able to support young readers.

Taking up The Teachers' Reading Challenge is a call to arms – "Children's Literature is vital!" And what a time it is to enjoy such literature: picture books from Mini Grey, Oliver Jeffers; the non-fiction of Nicola Davies and David Long; verse novels from Joseph Coelho and Sarah Crossan. Fiction so diverse and exciting you can barely keep up with the new releases each month: Jason Reynolds, Sophie Anderson, Kwame Alexander...the choice is huge!

[The Reading Challenge website](#) helps so much here: booklists of Top 20 Recommendations in different fields, message boards, reviews from other readers: it's a welcoming and supportive community. As research from the OU and National Literacy Trust shows, teachers' knowledge needs expansion and continual refreshment. I've made my challenge to read at least one book in each category of verse novels, graphic novels, picture books, and a range of books *outside* the Key Stage in which I currently teach.

[The Open University's research](#) also shows that being a Reading Teacher makes a real difference to children's reading lives and thereby to their life chances. Such teachers know and read literature published for children and for young adults, share their passion, engage in book discussions in positive and inspiring ways, and are recognised by children as readers who are 'in it with them'. Mutual respect, deep connections and far wider and more frequent reading on the part of the young emerge as the result.



The Teachers' Reading Challenge supports this. The website welcomes any teacher, teaching assistant, student teacher, librarian or passionate-about-books educator and encourages all who sign up to give their reading a nudge, to explore and expand their repertoires, and to push themselves to be more thoughtful readers – just as we teachers expect that of the children in our classes.

Being a reader is a life-long joy. In my case it has grown from those trips to the library when I was seven - that collector's chart clutched tightly in hand, reading badges pinned proudly to my T-shirt - through to now, with the #trc2020 offering me another reading dimension and helping me to connect further afield with other readers.

If you missed out on doing these sorts of challenges when you were young, it's not too late - the TRC closes on October 30<sup>th</sup>. I don't think there's a better reason than the one offered by one of my class in a recent survey:

6. Are reading challenges for teachers an important thing to do?

Yes  No

If Yes, why? If No, why not?

Because the more they read the better teachers they become.

Join the Teachers' Reading Challenge right now and help make a difference to all our young people!

Ben Harris, Dunmow St Mary's Primary school, Essex.