

Book Clubs at Home

by Sadie Phillips

Context

I am a Year 5 teacher in my fourth year of teaching at a free school in London. Last year, I was given responsibility for Writing within the school and I am also part of the Literacy Co-ordinator Team. Creating a reading culture is an essential part of my role.



Research inspiration and rationale

The Teachers as Readers research project (Cremin et al, 2014) showed that the relationships between children, teachers, families and communities have a strong influence on Reading for Pleasure. I wanted to build reading relationships beyond the classroom between children and children and children and their families (as well as between children, their families and the teacher). I started by considering how I personally connect with others about reading outside of school – through the OU /UKLA Teachers' RfP book group – and I decided to try and encourage some parents to start a children's book club outside of school to raise the profile of reading for pleasure at home.

Aims

- 1. To create space and time for Reading for Pleasure outside the classroom environment**
- 2. To encourage book talk and discussion about books**
- 3. To raise the profile of Reading for Pleasure in the local community.**

Outline

I wanted to demonstrate to the children that many adults read for pleasure by joining book clubs and that they could do this too. To encourage reading for pleasure, we wanted to create a cosy space where they would be in their own clothes, at their own homes, enjoying reading with their friends.

- I contacted parents asking them to let me know if they would be interested in running a book club at home.
- I gave a rough outline of what the book club sessions should involve and even helped by recommending books and resources that would be useful for the club.
- I developed some top tips for running a club (e.g. cosy setting, make sure there are snacks and juice available, comfy clothes etc.)
- I communicated with the parent leaders regularly to see how things were going and always celebrated the club in class by allowing time for them to talk about what they did in the book club.
- We shared certificates, posters they had made and photos in class.
- Parents would send photos to me regularly and inform me about each club session.
- I then created a display in the book corner where the group could display any work they had done as part of their book group (this could be writing, art, photos etc).

Impact

- 8 girls joined the very first Year 5 book club, which was hosted by a different parent each time. I have 20 children in my class so this was deemed as a great uptake.

- All of the children could all engage in in-depth chat about the books they were reading. The 'book blether' continued beyond the home into the classroom as they shared what they had done with the class and displayed their work in the book corner.
- Time and space was made for reading for pleasure at home, in comfy clothes in a cosy setting. This allowed the children to associate reading with enjoyment and book talk.
- The first book club is still running now (it started 18 months ago and the children are now in Year 6). New children have since joined the club.
- Feedback from children and parents was overwhelmingly positive.
- Feedback from other teachers was also received once the children moved onto Year 6, "Thanks for handing over such inspired readers and writers! Great to see the children so involved."
- I have since produced a 'how to run a book club at home' document and I now roll this out every year with my parents and class. We have succeeded in starting another book group this year with 7 children involved.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research has had on practice

The idea of Book Clubs at Home, based upon the focus on reader relationships in the *Teachers as Readers* research has helped to develop links between the children's reading at home and at school, as well as demonstrating to parents that the school genuinely cares about nurturing a passion for reading. It has also provided opportunities for discussion about reading between children, families and school staff and also allowed opportunities for writing and art linked to texts.

For more information visit www.literacywithmissp.com

or follow @sadiephillips on Twitter.

Example Document sent to Parents:

PARENT GUIDE: HOW TO START A BOOK CLUB AT HOME

How important is reading? Exposing children to different books and genres is important for developing vocabulary for fluency and comprehension (it will also improve their writing!). Children who read for 20 minutes a day are exposed to 1.8 million words a year. Those who read for 5 minutes a day are exposed to 282,000 words per year. Children who read for less than 1 minute per day are only exposed to 8,000 words per year. One way to encourage your child to read (and enjoy reading!) is to start up a book club at home.



Book clubs for kids provide excellent opportunities for learning and imagination. Starting a book club is easy. All you need to do is drum up some interest among kids – your child and their friends, neighbours or classmates - and find out what they want to read. Define the goals and structure of the book club, and select the ages of the children you want to participate. Then, find out what they want to read, and start reading.

Miss Phillips' dos and don'ts for starting up your own book club at home!

Do: Limit the number of participants. A group of 5 to 8 children is best.

Do: Allow the children some choice (many book group books are chosen by showing 4-5 book covers and taking a vote on what to read next).

Do: Establish some ground rules for talk to encourage participation and cooperation (no interrupting, no idea is a bad idea etc.)

Do: Make the meetings fun (try not to make it seem like extra homework but add fun tasks to enthuse the children and get creative e.g. if reading about magic or potions, make some slime!)

Do: Mix up the genres (switch it up frequently and read both fiction (mysteries, young adult novels, and science fiction) and nonfiction (historical works, books about science, and so on).

Do: Keep it simple. Each club should start with book talk/discussion, followed by a fun craft related to the book. **Top Tip!** *Don't make crafts too elaborate. The focus should remain on the book and the conversation about the book.*

Don't: Underestimate the children's maturity level (they will surprise you!)

Things to consider when setting up a book club at home:

- Make sure everyone wants to be involved in the book club.
- Make sure the children are roughly the same reading level.
- Advertise your book club – get in touch with your child's class teacher, your class parent rep or send a message on the parent Whatsapp group.
- Decide where to host the book club – choose a space that is well lit, quiet, clean, free from distractions and conducive to conversation.
- Consider having some snacks and juice (popcorn, fruit etc.)
- Share the responsibility of hosting among other parents of children in the book club.
- Contact the local library – they might be able to reserve books for you. If you don't have space at home, they might also have a space in the library for you to host the book club.
- Contact your class teacher – they might have suggestions, ideas, question cards or resources to help you get started!



Top Tip! Every club meeting should have two discussion leaders. The team should include one book club member and one of their parents. Together, this team should guide the discussion (but not dominate it) by asking questions and determining who can talk. This helps maintain order and ensure everyone gets a chance to speak. Facilitators should prepare leading questions before the meeting in order to ensure the discussion is productive and thought-provoking. Good questions include: What was the setting? What kind of book is this? Is it a true story? Who was your favourite character? What was your favourite part? If you didn't like the book – why not? Why did a certain character choose a certain course of action? If you're not sure what questions to go for, ask your teacher for support.

Starting out – the first meeting:

- It might be worthwhile hosting an organizational meeting first. This is an initial meeting between the kids in the book club and their parents or guardians. This meeting will provide space for the children to get to know each other before the club begins reading and allow time for parents to work out dates for hosting at different houses etc.
- Allow time for the kids to talk freely, but provide a structured activity to draw out kids who might be shy, too. Perhaps ask children to design a poster about their favourite character?
- Have all the children sit in a circle and introduce themselves. For example, "Hello, my name is . . ." and list three facts about themselves.
- Provide 4-5 books (or photos of book covers) and snacks/drinks for the children. Ask them to look at the book covers and choose one to read for the first club. This will help them associate the book club with good feelings and happiness.
- The first meeting is also a good opportunity to create some rules for the book club. Ask the children to come up with some 'rules for talk' e.g. only one person can talk at a time, raise your hand if you want to speak, treat the book club location with respect etc.
- Whilst the children are doing their activities, decide with the other parents or guardians how often you want to meet, and choose the days and times that work best.
- The first meeting might end with a trip to the library (or calling to reserve the books) a bookshop, or simply ordering the first book club book on Amazon!

Please feel free to get in touch if you are considering starting up a book club at home. I'd love to hear from you!

Miss Phillips

**Many thanks to the parents of the children pictured for allowing me to use their fabulous book club photos for this guide.*