

Empowering through Choice



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Context

I am currently in my 8th year of teaching. After six years in KS2 I am now in my second year of Year One. My school is in quite an affluent area and reading has always been an area of strong data. Our children can read well, but many of them don't read for pleasure. For a majority it is seen as something that they must do in school and will either flick between many books without reading them or constantly thumb the same book for weeks on end. Those that do enjoy reading tend to stick to the same series or author.

Throughout my career, story time has always been a priority of mine but my knowledge and awareness of newer books was never great. I often relied on classics from my childhood to guide me.

Before becoming a teacher I completed a Drama Degree and worked for Chickenshed Theatre company for 4 years working alongside many children with varying needs. It was here that I discovered my passion for working alongside children and witnessed the power of storytelling.

As a child, I was a very reluctant reader apparently, but looking back I always had my head stuck in a comic. This was always discouraged by teachers as 'not a proper book'



OU Research inspiration and rationale

Twitter pushed me towards my quest to improve my own and others knowledge of children's literature and other texts. Seeing many reading teachers such as Ashley Booth, Simon Smith and Jon Biddle share the works of their classes and schools inspired me. I attended the OU Reading for Pleasure conference in Cambridge and was opened up to a world of research that could support my journey.

I was shocked to read the Egmont research about reading aloud to a class and the effect on listeners (Egmont/Nielsen, 2019). Especially finding out that many children are not read to by their teachers or their parents so this was another area that I was keen to develop.

Aims

I feel that many teachers and pupils are restricted due to their knowledge of children's books. I didn't want children to be missing out on good books due to a lack of exposure and likewise, I didn't want teachers not reading to their class due to not knowing what to read.

I aimed to empower teachers to select appropriate books and empower readers to find the next book that would hook them in to their reading journey.

This started because I wanted to expand my own knowledge of KS1 appropriate texts after my move from KS2.

I hoped that I could create some resources and share my knowledge with colleagues and the children at my school.

Outline

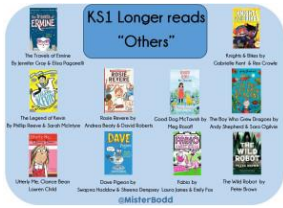
My project started at the beginning of 2019, when I was looking for some short chapter books to read to my Year 1 class. I asked advice from colleagues and looked in my class library but I found myself only finding classic choices with nothing that excited me. I conducted some research. Searching through my daughter's library record of previous reads, asking for recommendations on social media and visiting bookshops/libraries to peruse.



I then created a visual list of books that would be suitable for KS1 as read alouds. I sent this to colleagues and I also used it with my class to pick books suitable for world cups. I used book world cups (championed by Ashley Booth on Twitter) to enable choice and to build excitement around the books we read, before we read them.

This was a massive personal help. I went on to read 16 of these books to my classes over 15 months. I also

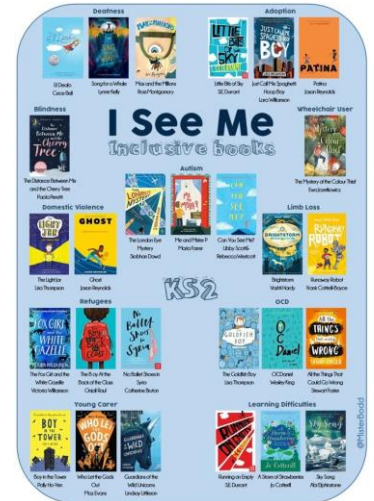




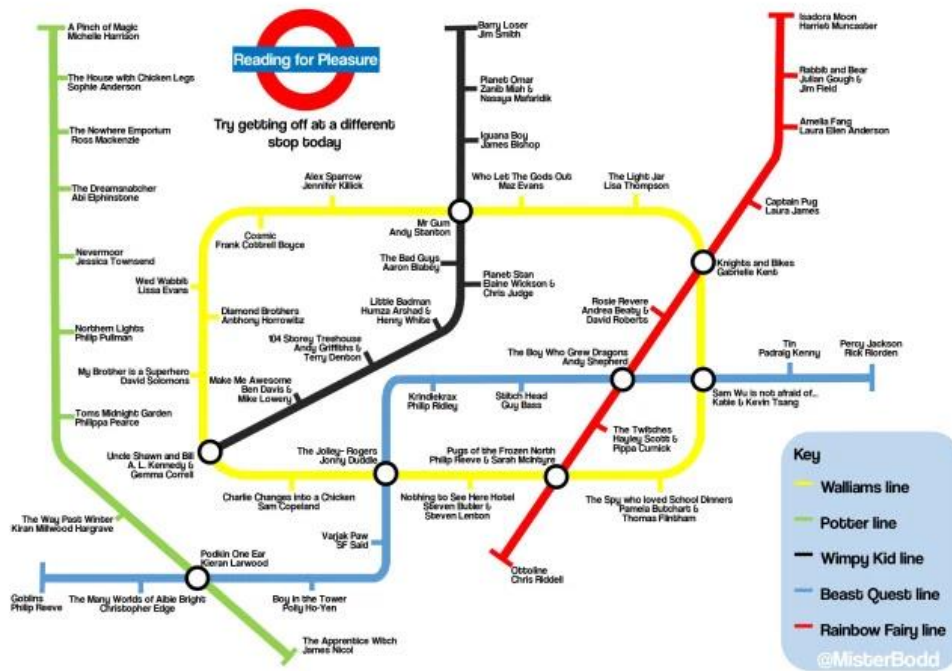
gave copies to parents of my class and I know that many of them purchased books from this list. I was empowering myself, my colleagues and the parents.

Next I turned my attention to KS2 after conversations with a Year 4 TA and librarian

who was worried about children who were unwilling to move from their reading comfort blankets. She didn't think that the teachers had many recommendations to help support them move away. She had seen a tube map of genres that another school had created and she wanted some help to make one for our school. Weeks of research was involved. Reading and seeking recommendations for books that were similar to the 'comfort blanket books'.



The Reading for Pleasure Tube map was born and as well as being put up in every KS2 classroom in my school. It has received over 10,000 views and downloads. Being displayed in many other classrooms across the country.

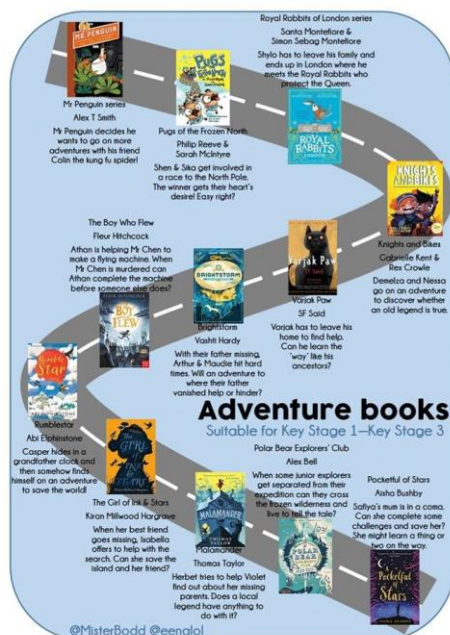


After the tube maps, I got in discussion with our school councillor who wanted a recommendation for a book about bereavement that she could lend to a child. This sowed the seeds for my next resource which started as books about bereavement but then escalated into books that covered many disabilities and mental health issues. The reasoning behind this was to enable our teachers (and others up and down the country) to be able to push children towards books that could allow them to either 'see themselves' or to open up their empathy for others' struggles.

The reason that I've made all of my resources into visual posters is so that they are easily accessible in the classroom. Children are drawn to them and are able to explore and be inspired by what they see. Whilst Teachers can easily navigate for inspiration.

The last resource that I created for my colleagues was the 'reading roads'

These came about after hearing that a teacher wanted to know some progression of books for a pupil in her class. This allowed children/pupils and parents to navigate around a genre. Finding similar books but of different levels.



Impact

The impact within our school is fantastic, walking around different classrooms there is a much wider choice of books on the tables. There are obviously still some of the big names out there. Previously 28/30 would be 'comfort blanket' authors but now we're down to approximately 12/30.

Teachers are also reading a more varied diet of books to their classes on a more regular basis. Exposing the children to new authors and different genres of books whilst creating new readers.

I feel the impact of my resources is much further reaching than just my school. With nearly 40,000 views of my resources in 2019. The support that they have given to other teachers and their pupils is undeniable.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Now that the children and teachers have a better understanding of the books that are out there I'd like to turn my attention to parental involvement – I've started a bedtime book box that is a weekly reward that aims to encourage parents to read their children a bed time story. Hoping that it can kick start more parents to do this regularly.

I have also lead on a school-wide reading for pleasure scheme that rewards those that are reading more and aims to hook readers using intrinsic rewards.

I also choose the best pieces of research from the site to share with colleagues on a termly basis hoping to encourage them to try out new ideas.