

*For the consideration within Egmont Reading for Pleasure Award 2019 -  
Experienced Teacher Category*

## **Inspiring Reading: Media Club By Sadie Phillips**

@sadiephillips [www.literacywithmissp.com](http://www.literacywithmissp.com)

### **Context**

I am a Year 5 teacher in my fourth year of teaching at Canary Wharf College in London. Last year, I was given responsibility for Writing within the school and I am also part of the Literacy Co-ordinator Team. Although my specialism lies within Writing for Pleasure, it soon became clear that this was impossible to develop without cultivating children's engagement in Reading for Pleasure first. The two are inextricably linked. I found that, due to the pressures many schools face, reading in schools can often be confined to reading instruction (the explicit teaching of reading skills and comprehension) with little time given to fostering children's love of reading for enjoyment. I wanted to ensure a healthier balance between reading instruction and reading for pleasure in my classroom (and throughout the school) to inspire a life-long love of reading that is shared and celebrated within our local school community.



### **OU Research inspiration and rationale**

The Teachers as Readers research project (Cremin et al, 2008) revealed that a robust RfP pedagogy encompassed four specific practices: reading aloud, informal book talk and recommendations, and independent reading time within a highly social reading environment. Building Communities of Engaged Readers (Cremin et al, 2014) also recommends that, in order to influence children's attitudes, motivations and achievements as readers, you must focus on the children from the outset – learning about them, their reading habits and interests.

After issuing whole-school literacy surveys and reading rivers at the start of the year, as well as observing the children's reading habits and speaking to them informally, it soon became clear that many of our children shared a passion for magazines and enjoyed reading short, snappy, fun articles for fun and enjoyment. I instantly set up a magazine rack in our book corner with some of their favourite magazines. The class, who now regularly donate magazines from home, have continued to generously add to this collection.

Children often shared articles with me or pointed out stories that linked to our learning. So we now also have a short 'show n tell' at the end of each RfP session, where children can choose to share interesting facts or articles they've found by reading it aloud to the rest of the class. It soon became apparent that magazines were a good way to 'hook in' even my most reluctant readers.

### **Aims**

- 1. To expand my knowledge** of reading practices and experiences, individual children as readers, and to expand my own repertoire as a Reading Teacher
- 2. To make space and time for Reading for Pleasure** and the building of reciprocal reading communities in my classroom, balanced alongside reading instruction
- 3. To extend reading relationships to the wider community**, exploring the impact of reading role models within the wider community

## Outline

For this RfP project, I wanted to focus my efforts on challenging and extending my experienced readers, as well as encouraging those more reluctant children, before gradually beginning to bring the rest of the school community (children, teachers and parents) on board with an exciting project that truly reflected a Reading for Pleasure pedagogy that could be shared and celebrated.



I created a **Media Club**, which was born out of the idea that many children shared a passion for magazines. I wanted to implement something that would impact the entire school and encourage all children, as well as the wider school community of parents and teachers, to engage in Reading for Pleasure. My background is also in Public Relations and Marketing so it's an area that I'm passionate about too and one that I would be able to share my own experiences of with the children. I wanted them to see me as a reader and a writer too.



Media Club met once a week with the end goal of producing a school magazine that could be read and enjoyed by everyone. It was important that the content choices and editorial decisions were made by the children so, during the first few sessions, we began exploring who the children were as readers. They brought in their favourite magazines and snippets of articles that interested them and we explored our personal preferences and reading identities. We made recommendations to each other and began to pull together ideas for content that we all enjoyed.

Then, each week between sessions, the children read widely for inspiration and ideas and they were enjoying it. I didn't ask them to read at home, they had chosen to. Every time I saw a member of the Media Club in the hallway or in class, they would strike up a conversation about some new piece of information they'd discovered or that they thought would be an interesting read for others too. The importance of them choosing their own content was crucial, as it then led them to read around the topics even further. They were excited and engaged by the project and during each Media Club session you'd see children reading (and writing) for pleasure.

Much of the magazine content revolved around books and authors. They wrote their own book reviews based on novels they'd read and we even succeeded in setting up interviews with some of their favourite authors (Michael Rosen, Piers Torday and Tom Palmer). Inevitably, this led to a reading frenzy as children swotted up on the authors' books prior to interviews taking place.

## Impact

Although the club had only been running for a matter of weeks, excitement around reading the magazine had begun to build as we neared publishing day. The excitement surrounding the author interviews was palpable amongst the children in Media Club, as news





had quickly spread throughout the school. The children were discussing writers and their books inside and outside of the classroom, the children had been telling their parents about it too. Chatter about books and authors had even spread to the playground. It became almost impossible to get your hands on any Michael Rosen, Piers Torday or Tom Palmer books from the library and I was often stopped by children around school requesting that they too become part of the Media Club, other children were simply desperate to read the magazine, "How much longer until it's out Miss Phillips? I can't wait to read it!"

We took full advantage of the hype and began to add to the excitement with posters, teasers in the school newsletter and a special assembly led by the children. We also had a VIP launch party for the magazine and invited parents and teachers along to celebrate the magazine. Over 30 people attended the launch party and it was a huge success! On the actual magazine launch day, there was a real buzz around the school. Children could be seen reading it all around the school, as well as teachers in the staff room. Parents even emailed me to tell me how much they'd enjoyed reading it at home:

*"We would like to congratulate you all for your fantastic work. The magazine is amazing! We could see the immense amount of work. Yesterday, we had a great time reading it together. We are looking forward to reading the next issue! Keep working hard and believe in yourself. Thank you very much."*

*"Thank you so, so much for the launch party today. We all had a great time. Child D has loved media club so much. She's so enthusiastic about it every week. She didn't really enjoy reading or literacy until recently but has really changed over the last term – I'm sure that her involvement in media club has a huge part to play in this. Thank you so much."*

The Canary Crunch had been distributed to families in every single book bag and placed in all of the book corners throughout the school, as well as a few copies for the school library and main entrance. Several children, who hadn't previously shown much interest in reading, had chosen to read the magazine during their Reading for Pleasure time or snack time and some were even taking it out onto the playground to continue reading outside. Many teachers also commented on how it had been a 'hot topic' in their classrooms.

We're continuing the Media Club next term and children and teachers alike are already excited to read the Spring edition of the magazine. We're also introducing a **Blogging Club** to encourage children to regularly read and write blogs for pleasure – which the whole school will be able to read on iPads or on their computer at home.

### **Reflections on impact the TaRs research has had on practice**

The project demonstrates that if children are empowered to make their own choices and are supported to widen their reading repertoires this can have a positive impact on children's desire to read and their attitudes towards reading. To further support reading engagement and enjoyment, we will continue to seek opportunities to give children choice, space, time, guidance, role models and the opportunity to share, discuss and celebrate reading.



## Additional / Supporting Material

In addition to the Media Club, I've also been able to introduce many new Reading for Pleasure strategies and initiatives at Canary Wharf College, which address 3 main RfP aims:

### 1) To expand my knowledge of children's literature



**OU RfP Book Club:** To teach reading and writing effectively and enthusiastically, we must be keen readers and writers ourselves. With this in mind, I sought out opportunities to develop myself as a reader and, after attending an inspirational CPD morning with the Open University, I set up an Open University and UKLA Teachers' Reading Group in Blackheath. This enabled me to explore new literature, develop my RfP pedagogy and practice, as well as connect with other Teacher Readers.



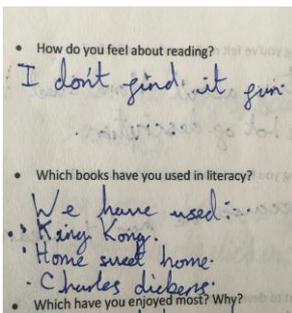
**Connecting and Reflecting:** I use social media to connect with other teachers and stay up to date with recent books and research. I even started my own blog to document my journey and to share reflections with other primary teachers and professionals ([www.literacywithmissp.com](http://www.literacywithmissp.com)). The site received over 10,000 views within the first month. This included publishing of The Literacy Calendar 2018-19 to aid the planning and implementation of reading for pleasure strategies, which has since been shared on Twitter 1,200 times.



**Author Events:** I began seeking opportunities to develop my knowledge of children's literature by attending book launches and author events. I have since met and been inspired by Michael Rosen, Piers Torday, Nicola Davies, Rebecca Cobb, Kiran Millwood Hargrave and Joseph Coelho and I am then able to share these experiences to excite and engage my class! I also attended two OU RfP conferences and will be running a workshop at the upcoming conference in March 2019.



**Reading Rivers:** At the start of the year, we assigned Reading Rivers as homework. I also completed my own Reading River and shared it with the class so they could also understand more about my identity as a reading teacher. The reading rivers allowed me to reflect on the reading practices and interests of the children in my class. It gave invaluable insight into their reading engagement at home, their reading habits (e.g. online, tablets, kindle) and likes, which can be acted on instantly (e.g. we introduced a magazine corner and invested in more poetry).



**Pupil Voice:** In Autumn Term, we issued questionnaires to children and staff throughout the whole school reading to gather a 'snapshot' of where they were in terms of habits, attitudes, engagement, interests and enthusiasm for reading. We also spent time observing children during reading time, noting habits and engagement (e.g. child C got up 3 times to change his book in the book corner within 20 mins). It became obvious that some children were disengaged with reading whilst others were very passionate, "Reading is marvellous. You can get away from everything; the noise goes away and you end up in an amazing world of your own!" Teachers can then instantly act on results.

## 2) To make space and time for Reading for Pleasure



**Reading Environment:** The reading environment is such an important place. When I thought about myself as a reader and where/how I like to read, I instantly set about making our classroom book corner just as cosy. Children enjoy sitting on the sofa, or opening up the sofa to create a 'reading bed', they also build dens, remove their shoes, we've even tried reading with torches in the dark. We have iPads and audio books, class read aloud and we've enjoyed our most recent book so much that we're also going to see *Wonder* in the cinema (with a special talk by someone with a facial disfigurement). We share recommendations and talk about books, asking each other questions about what we've read. It is no longer 'silent reading' but it has very much become Reading for Pleasure!



**Book Tastings:** At the heart of this book tasting, was the idea that I wanted to engage and support children to become motivated, independent readers who aren't afraid to explore new genres and authors. The aim was to encourage them to be inspired as readers, to empower them and give them choice and autonomy over what they read next and to motivate them to seek out and read new texts for themselves. Each child was sent an invitation to my special 'Reading Restaurant' to taste a whole new selection of books through a book tasting event.



**Daily 'Poet-Tree' Readings:** We've also begun addressing the poetry knowledge gap by reciting a poem a day so that we are all exposed to a range of poetic styles and poets as this was noted as a weakness across the school. We introduced a special 'Poet-Tree' in the classroom so that if a child finds a poem they love they can write it on a leaf, share it with the class and then add it to the tree. This is a new initiative but the children are already choosing to read more poetry books in their own time in order to add to the tree. We've also created a dedicated poetry windowsill and are working on Performance Poetry with an upcoming Poetry Slam!



**Book Blankets:** We are encouraging children to regularly participate in 'book blankets' where we can see and discuss what we are reading, whilst also looking at what the rest of the class is reading. It gives children the chance to share recommendations, as well as allowing the teacher to get a better picture of the reading habits of the class and what interests them. As a result, children are engaging in more 'book blether' and often ask 'Can I read that one after you?' if they see something they like. It definitely helps to expand their reading repertoires and develop their personal reading tastes.



**Blind Date with a Book:** Roughly once per term, we hold a 'blind date with a book' afternoon where each child gets to choose a book based on a clue about the content. Once again, this encourages children to choose a book because of their own personal interests and helps them to find new genres and authors. There is always a buzz around the room when the blind date books are revealed and it also encourages the children to make their own choices about what to read based on their interests.

### **3) To extend reading relationships to the wider community**



**Author Visits:** We encourage regular author visits wherever possible. In addition, we also encourage classes to work with poets and authors during literacy lessons. In Year 5 this year, we have met Ade Adepitan, we are working with Joseph Coehlo on a project for the Southbank Centre's Imagine Children's Festival, we have been inspired by Michael Rosen's performance poetry through the Lit Film Fest project, we are working with another poet in school as part of the Young City Poets Project (via the Literacy Trust) and we have interviewed several authors for our school magazine, *The Crunch*.



**Book Clubs at Home:** For the past 2 years, I have encouraged the parents of children in my class to run a book club for the children. By taking it in turns to host the book club, the children can enjoy socialising over their monthly reads in the comfort of their own (and their friends') homes with snacks, pyjamas and fun activities related to their book blether. I always encourage them to share with the class once they've had a session and we have issued certificates for those taking part. We are looking at making this a school-wide initiative with workshops for parents who are keen to get involved.



**Year 5 and 6 Pen Pal Projects:** To put reading into a real life context, we introduced a pen pal project to Year 5 and 6 who are now connected with schools in the USA and Australia respectively. In today's modern world, most communication is online but the children have absolutely loved receiving and reading post from their newly formed pen pals overseas. The anticipation of receiving a letter is so exciting and the children are always fully engaged and enjoying reading once a new parcel arrives.



**#WeAreReaders:** To encourage children to see their teachers, families and wider community as readers and reading role models, we introduced the #WeAreReaders campaign. We asked teachers, parents and children to send in 'shelfies' (a photo of their bookshelf at home) and a picture of their favourite place to read with a caption about why they love reading. The campaign was so successful that it now has pride of place in our school entrance, showcasing all of the lovely pictures and quotes from our community of readers.

Hopefully, these additional projects demonstrate just how dedicated we are to developing our Reading for Pleasure pedagogy and practice at Canary Wharf College. RfP is at the heart of everything we do, as we strive to inspire children to read for enjoyment. We aim to instill a lifelong love of reading and writing for pleasure through a creative curriculum that is exciting, engaging, inspirational, meaningful and purposeful. We want children to be excited to read and we hope to help children foster a life long love of literacy that extends beyond school.

For more information visit: [www.literacywithmissp.com](http://www.literacywithmissp.com)