

## Becoming 'Mr B Reads' – A Reading Journey

Jonathan Baugh



### Context

I am currently three weeks into my NQT year, teaching Year 5 at St John's C of E Primary, a two-form entry school in Kent.

Last year, when my 'Mr B Reads' journey began, I completed a PGCE at Canterbury Christ Church University. There I undertook a research project into Teachers' vs children's reading recommendations as well as a project *Book-share: From I Read to We Read* (also on this website).

### OU research inspiration and rationale

When Teresa Cremin came into Canterbury Christ Church University to introduce the OU Reading for Pleasure research, I was at first shocked at the confessed lack of knowledge of children's literature demonstrated by the questionnaires' respondents. The responses indicated that many teachers, as suggested by the lack of breadth in their knowledge of children's authors, were 'not keeping abreast of significant children's books' (p. 42).

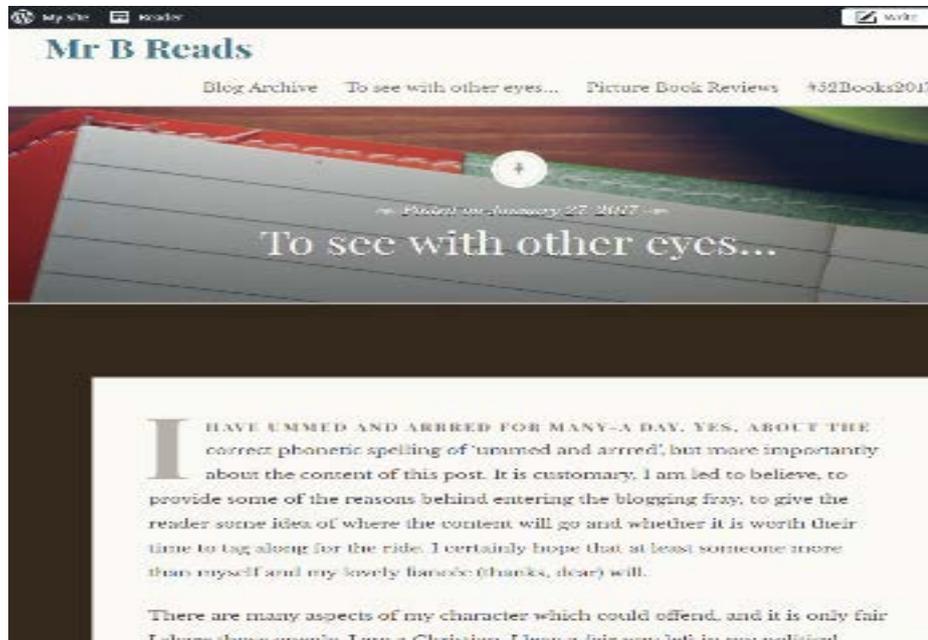
As I reflected, however, I came to realise that my own knowledge was similarly limited largely to what I had read as a child. I was, as Cremin et al diagnose, 'obliged to rely upon [my] own childhood reading' (p. 42). Aware that newly qualified teachers and those in the early years of their careers are statistically less likely to have a deep knowledge of children's literature (p.38, 45), and convicted of my own poor knowledge beyond Dahl, Morpurgo and Lewis, I adopted a new identity, 'Mr B Reads', and set out to immerse myself in the world of 'KidLit'.



@MrBReading

Making use of social media (predominantly Twitter @MrBReading) and a new blog (mrbreads.wordpress.com), I determined to not only read more children's books but also become active in recommending books to others in my situation.

All quotes come from '*Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for Pleasure*' (Cremin et al., 2014)



The first post...

## Aims

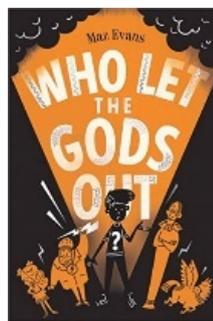
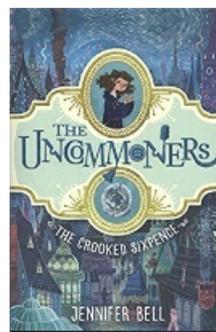
- Deepen and widen my own knowledge of current children's literature, both books and authors, through active participation in the #52books2017 challenge.
- Read, and consequently recommend, modern children's books.
- Engage in professional discussions with more experienced colleagues around the country, particularly on reading/children's literature.

## Outline

The most important step on this journey was, simply, to begin reading.

However, knowing the pressures that were soon to come with the second half of my PGCE and the NQT year I hoped would follow, I was keen to put some kind of framework in place, to keep me both focused and to some degree accountable. I thus started my Twitter account, @MrBReading, and began following teachers who I could see were tweeting about reading/KidLit. Particularly instrumental around this time was the excellent @Mat\_at\_Brookes and I heard about #52Books2017, a perfect medium through which to keep track of and share my reading. Indeed, though I had been a voracious reader as a child and had reignited my passion for reading around the time I finished my undergraduate degree (2011), I had been functionally unaware that reading is ‘profoundly social’ (p. 5).

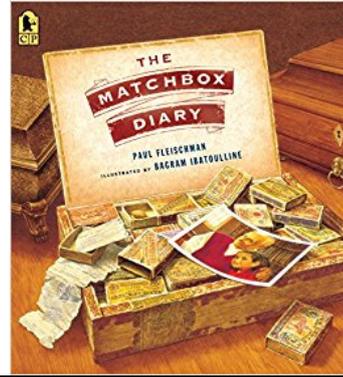
My first month of reading saw me read well-known authors such as David Walliams, and up-and-coming writers such as Peter Bunzl and Ross Welford (both highly recommended!). As I reached the end of January 2017 I became aware of the potential that blogging could have in achieving the aims above, and began to chronicle my monthly progress, a process which is ongoing over at [mrbreads.wordpress.com](http://mrbreads.wordpress.com). Here I give a brief synopsis and review – spoiler-free of course! – before selecting a ‘Star Read’ from the children’s books I have read. I have also used this medium to start reviewing and recommending picture books. Getting my fiancée, a Year 1 teacher, involved with a guest review was particularly special!



Three of my favourite 'Star Reads'!

An unexpected consequence of immersing myself in this world has been the opportunity to interact with some wonderful children’s authors, many of whom go under the radar as booksellers to promote ‘celebrity authors’. Whilst some of these have done wonders for children’s reading habits, I have established excellent contact with some underrated (for now!) and immensely talented authors which is really showing in my sharing of children’s books in my teaching today! To be able to say, ‘*ooh I was chatting to the author earlier and she said...*’ is very powerful in engaging young readers!

One of many picture books for Key Stage 2 that I discovered as part of my journey!



## Impact

By connecting with fellow 'Reading Teachers' and intentionally making myself aware of what is 'out there' with regards children's literature, my personal knowledge of children's literature has grown substantially.

Whilst I have often felt like something of a fraud when engaging in conversations with far more experienced colleagues, in just a few short months I now feel comfortable to offer reading suggestions in the staffroom, on social media and, by far the most important, to the children in my class. I've found that children in my placement classes and now my own class really appreciate me being able to have genuine conversations about what they are reading (and are secretly impressed when I can work out which book they are reading when they can't remember the title or the author!).

By sharing my own reading with the children with a very simple 'Mr Baugh is reading...' poster in our class 'Reading Den', (and other activities) I am beginning to see the emergence of a reading community. I have even been pestered to change the poster when the children know I've finished the book and haven't gotten around to displaying my next read!



My class are already quick to nag me when I haven't updated this Mr Baugh is reading'

**Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice** By reading more widely, as recommended by the TaRs research, I feel I am now able to break free from what Teresa Cremin has referred to as 'Dahl-dependency'. Whilst I am as much a fan of Dahl as any other teacher, I feel much more able

to select a wider range of children's literature to read, enjoy, teach and recommend. I now know that if I choose a Roald Dahl novel it is because it is the best I know, rather than all I know.

I am by no means an expert in children's literature, and as a very new teacher I am nowhere near considering myself an authority on teaching either! But through this journey I have seen the power of children's literature to inspire learning, conversation, imagination and introspection, and I encourage you to start your own KidLit adventure too!