

# Reading with Reluctant Readers: a *Coram Beanstalk* Case Study



by Richard Himsworth

## Context

I am into my second year as a Coram Beanstalk Reading Volunteer and this year joined the **Medway OU/ UKLA Teachers' Reading Group with other Coram Beanstalk** volunteers from Medway and Kent. I wanted to explore how to support reluctant readers as my three current children assigned to me at school are reluctant to read and I am always thinking of ways to encourage reading engagement.

## OU Research inspiration and rationale

The *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) research project (Cremin et al., 2014) found that by extending teachers' knowledge of children's literature and talking to children about their reading habits and interests, teachers can guide and support children with their reading selections and enthuse them as readers.

## Aims

During the Coram Beanstalk Medway group meetings my more experienced colleagues, our facilitator and I had group discussions about suitable books and techniques to use to which I listened avidly. I then focused my attention on my readers, and during our sessions I raised their reluctance with them when appropriate.

Each character is different, but they did agree they were reluctant!

Using my increasing knowledge of children's literature and taking time to find out about their interests, I decided to find out why they were reluctant and how to change this.

## Outline

I looked at what factors may be dissuading my children from reading for pleasure.

Their love of modern technology as entertainment could be regarded as a hindrance in particular.

Their situations at home would also appear to not always create an environment that would lead to a love of reading and books.

I undertook attempts to encourage a positive outlook towards books and reading whilst working on an atmosphere and relationship that put them at ease as we read together

weekly. I tried a perhaps somewhat old-fashioned method looking at traditional stories (Treasure Island, Peter Pan etc) which received a luke-warmish response.



Updating to more modern publications (Footballer called Flip, Horrid Henry series etc.) was more successful but the children's attention span could be limited.

I looked at different publications like newspapers, local news magazines, map books and the most successful, factual books. If the children were interested in the subject matter, e.g. animals, the army, warfare! it was all the more well received.

I decided to look at the projects the class were undertaking and I provided my readers with material associated with their class subject (initially The Romans, a sure fire winner followed by The Stone Age) coming from a different angle of facts and knowledge.

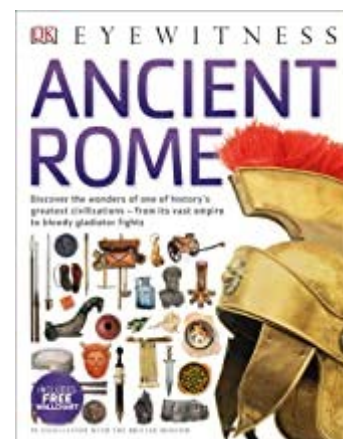


## Impact

The traditional stories (no matter how hard I tried) did not get the reaction that eight-year-old me would have given. I needed to move on to more recently written books.

The subject matter in these texts seemed more relevant to the children and I could see an improvement in interest and engagement when reading these together.

I decided to open out the reading matter into factual subjects and publications and the reaction to facts and figures brought even more success. Undoubtedly **involving the current class projects in our reading was the most successful**. I believe they gained more confidence within the classroom and it enhanced their understanding of the subject.



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

I drew on modern technology, research and a family member in the teaching profession looking for ideas on children's texts. The TaRs research (Cremin et al., 2014) identified that a breadth of knowledge of good quality children's literature is essential to motivate young readers and nurture the development of positive reader identities, and I will continue to do this.

I have explored some ways to assist reluctant readers using the advice from others and other sources to help me understand how I can assist individuals I come across in my role as a reading volunteer. I will always look for other ideas in the future (my research has not been exhausted) and I suspect there is no definitive answer. I will welcome assistance from whence it comes.

The home environment appeared to be a big factor in turning reluctant readers into readers that thrive. Storytelling and the availability of books in the household play a big part and can lead to an improvement in reading skills. The assistance of volunteers, parents and grandparents can also assist the teaching profession with this identifiable situation.

I will continue to be enthusiastic, to encourage, to support and work hard turning Reluctant Readers into 'less' reluctant readers using my life skills and the knowledge I have gained undertaking this task.