



For the love of books: 10 top tips for how to create a reading for pleasure culture in your school

St Matthew's C of E Primary, a Talk for Writing training school in Birmingham, won the first Egmont/UKLA School Reading for Pleasure Award in 2018. Here, headteacher Sonia Thompson gives her 10 top tips for improving reading for pleasure.

1. Build a reading environment

Build a reading environment, which extends out of the reading corner, into the whole classroom and across the whole school. At St Matthew's, reading corners have been a powerful way of developing and nurturing children's love of reading, but they are certainly not just for show. They are used and curated by the children and teachers. What has been more impactful though, has been extending these reading for pleasure spaces into the heart of the classroom, where reading is celebrated daily and is just what teachers do. Corridors and outdoors spaces – including our Reception Reading Shed – also celebrate reading as part of the school's ethos and culture.



2. Develop Teachers, who read and readers who teach.

Teachers, who are knowledgeable about children's books, make a difference to children's reading lives. The research is clear, we have the power to influence, but we can only do this, if we are knowledgeable about children's literature. We encourage all of our staff to promote the importance and pleasure of being a fluent reader and loving books. Having been involved in the original UKLA Teachers as Readers research (2008), which subsequently resulted in the *Building Communities of Engaged Readers* book (by the way, St Matthew's Y6 class is on the front cover), I am only too aware of the impact it can have. To support this, teachers and support staff are encouraged to attend the OU/UKLA Teacher Reading CPD Group and use and add to the Research Rich Pedagogies website.



3. Get outside reading for pleasure agencies involved in deepening your offer to your children.

Reading for pleasure at St Matthew's has benefited greatly from outside involvement. One of the most successful was a Book Trust programme called *Story Hunters*. It involved each child in a lower KS2 year group receiving a book package each month. This created an amazing personal library (18 books) to keep, take home and share. We currently run two Just Imagine Centre programmes. *Reading Gladiators* is for our higher attaining Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6 readers. Amongst other things, this empowering reading for pleasure programme equips the children with the knowledge to influence and guide other children's choices. This has made a big difference. *The Reading Journey* involves themed reading spaces, which contain three copies of each book. Having multiple copies has had striking results. It has improved the social and reciprocal nature of reading interactions, between children and children and children and teachers. I would also recommend *Patron of Reading* where schools can affiliate with and build a longer-term, special relationship with an author, poet or storyteller.



4. Plan reading for pleasure activities, which will actively engage parents.

We have found that consistent and persistent drip-feeding of reading for pleasure in our school, has eventually got our parents engaged. Our parents have really appreciated knowing why reading for pleasure is so crucial. Through sharing the research with them – that reading for pleasure, impacts on all of children's learning, across the curriculum – our parents saw the wider value; beyond the book bag and the home reading journal. Regular reading events, which encourage family engagement in reading, also add to this. Our most recent event was our *Summer Reading Picnic*. We used it to iterate why reading for pleasure matters and promote the *Summer Reading Challenge* – inviting our local librarian in to speak about it. Our church gifted books to each of our families and we ate, read stories and shared poetry and prose. With almost every family in the school represented, it was a real success. We also had the highest ever number of children completing the *Summer Challenge* and getting an award.

5. Read aloud everyday ... and not just at the end of the day.

Read fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Reading aloud to children is part of the fabric of St Matthew's. Teachers and children look forward to any opportunity to take out the class reader, relax and listen. Don't forget to do the voices ... it matters to children so much! Create your own reading spine – books you feel your children should hear read aloud,

before they leave your school – by getting support from your local library or bookshop, such as Peters Bookshop, or use Pie Corbett’s *Reading Spine*. Doing this, can really support schools in ensuring that when reading aloud, children hear the classics, as well as new releases.



6. Purposely and purposefully plan for booktalk.

Children need time, space and support to interact, with books. Deliberately using texts, which encourage children to see themselves, reflect on their own lives, as well as the lives of others is crucial. Throughout our curriculum, we help the children to recognise the themes within books and through unpicking the affective nature of some books, we have provided a springboard for further storytelling, drama discussion and of course writing. This year, our celebration of National Empathy Day added to these opportunities.

7. Take part in and celebrate local and national reading for pleasure events and awards

St Matthew’s is always on the look-out for reading-for-pleasure events. These provide children with additional and exciting opportunities, which they would normally never experience. They also provide wonderful memories. We have been involved in the CliPPA Poetry Awards, reviewed for the Children’s Book Awards and participated in our wonderful, local Bournville Bookfest.

8. Talk about quality books whenever you can.

At St Matthew’s, we regularly use assemblies to introduce new books and re-introduce classics. Our children are used to all teachers talking about and promoting children’s literature, including their own favourites – all teachers and support staff have their own box of reading books, within their classrooms. We have found that when teachers do this, children are more willing to talk to and interact with each other about books.



9. Widen and deepen children's reading choices but don't forget their agency as well.

We are passionate about ensuring that our children read wide and deep. We want them to get lost in a plethora of books from a plethora of authors, both new and old. We also want children to own their choices and find 'their' author, book or series. Regular reading surveys help to locate preferences and the impact of changes. If alongside this, they also indulge in a bit of Dahl and Walliams, it's not the end of the world! We, as reading teachers, will continue to read/share quality books, picture books, poetry and non-fiction with them and guide their choices. Daniel Pennac's popular *Rights of the Reader* declaration is a manifesto which we display around the school. We actively make time to discuss, enact and model it, so that our children understand that all reading has value and is valued at our school.

10. Make dedicated time for reading for pleasure within the school timetable.

Finally, at our school, whole class reading, guided reading, independent reading, 1-1 reading, reading across the curriculum and, of course, reading for pleasure, are all part of our reading diet. Reading for pleasure has ring-fenced time, where children can read alone, with peers and across classes, using the library and reading spaces round the school. Whether it is interactive, solitary or social, this time is treasured and sacrosanct ... no matter what!

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