

Chapter 1

Introduction

Summary

Chapter 1 defines the term 'reading for pleasure' and related terminology, and looks briefly at the history of reading for pleasure. It then explores the background to the current concern about children's attitudes to reading resulting from the PISA and PIRLS international surveys, along with the official government responses and initiatives which followed, such as Reading Connects and the National Year of Reading. The chapter also considers the evidence from national and international research in the area of reading engagement and motivation, and from previous surveys of British children's reading attitudes.

Reading for Pleasure

This book takes as its subject the promotion of 'reading for pleasure'. I chose this term because, along with 'reading for enjoyment', it is the one used most often in official British curriculum documents. 'Pleasure' and 'enjoyment' are both words that occur, for example, in England's National Curriculum (NC) programmes of study for reading (DfEE/QCA, 1999: 46). Within reading for pleasure, I include the reading of popular as well as literary fiction, of comics and magazines as well as books, non-fiction as well as fiction, and electronic as well as printed texts. Reading for pleasure can take place in or out of the school, at home, in the public library or indeed anywhere, and often involves what is called 'wider reading' or 'independent reading'. Related terms used in the United States are 'free voluntary reading' and 'recreational reading'. Reading for pleasure is one very important and common manifestation of having a positive 'attitude to reading', which is another term frequently used in the research and writing in this area. Having a positive attitude to reading is obviously closely related to the concepts of 'reading engagement' and 'reading motivation', which link to a much wider literature on learning motivation

and extra-curricular activities and external links that promote reading for enjoyment. Once the school has identified where it is, the process can then begin of deciding how to get to where it wants to be and how to monitor progress towards this, as with the school described on page 18.

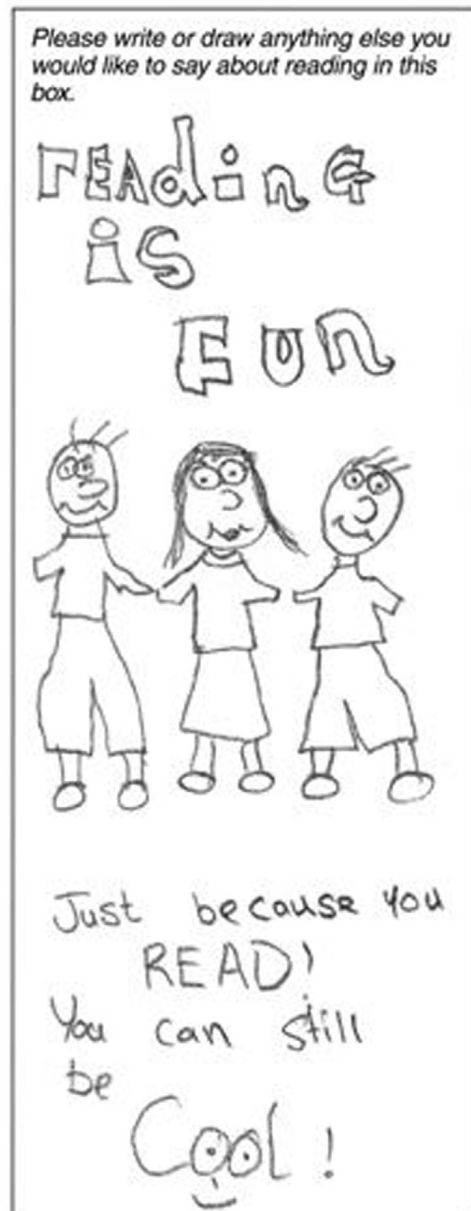


Figure 2.1 Children's drawings about reading reveal the importance of self-image

Reading for Pleasure across the Curriculum

This has two aspects:

- using children's enjoyment of literature in other subject areas, outside of literacy lessons, to promote learning in those areas;
- extending children's enjoyment of reading to include non-literary texts in other subject areas.

Children's enjoyment of literary reading does not have to end with the literacy lesson. Stories and poems offer ways into other areas of learning for young children. It is important, though, that the literature used is worth reading in its own right. A picture book may offer attractive links to the topic being studied, but if it does not have an engaging storyline and illustrations that capture children's attention then using it will be counterproductive. Using poor-quality books in any context gives the unspoken message that the reading experience does not really matter. Cross-curricular projects can be organised around good-quality picture books. For example, *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* by Ronda and David Armitage (1977), as well as being an enjoyable and worthwhile read in itself, invites problem-solving activities in other curriculum areas such as Science or Design and Technology (how to get lunch to the lighthouse keeper without the seagulls eating it). Adequate time needs to be allowed, though, for reading and enjoying stories or poems like these which are used in other subject areas.







Familiar stories or rhymes and traditional tales can also be revisited in cross-curricular contexts. Looking at these stories from a different angle can enhance children's pleasure in hearing them again, or, in an increasing number of cases, actually hearing the stories for the first time.

Case Study School

This infant and nursery school has organised learning at KS1 into a topic-based curriculum since well before the publication of the government's *Excellence and Enjoyment* document (DfES, 2003), which promoted this approach. The teachers use fairy tales such as *The Three Little Pigs*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *The Elves and the Shoemaker* to link Literacy with Design and Technology and with Science; for example, looking at materials, plant growth or evaluating footwear. These particular tales were chosen in part because they were seen as boy-friendly stories. Another topic on castles, also seen as having boy-appeal, was linked with the reading of Ruth Brown's classic atmospheric picture book *A Dark, Dark Tale* (1981). The construction of a castle in the classroom 'home corner' gave plenty of opportunities for role-playing related to this text. Other stories used across the curriculum in this way are also acted out using simple props and dressing up clothes, or alternatively using puppets that the children have made themselves based on characters in the books read.

Table 4.1 Extract from the planning for a sustained, three-week teaching unit on a complete novel/text

Literacy Weekly Planner for Year Group 4

Context (Stimulus): <i>The Butterfly Lion</i> by Michael Morpurgo T1 To identify social, moral or cultural issues. T8 To write critically about an issue or a dilemma raised in a story, explaining the problem, alternative courses of action and evaluating the writer's solution.			
Success Criteria: (see below)		Success Criteria: (see below)	
Speaking and Listening Activities	Thinking Hat Activities	Demonstration Writing Activities	Guided Writing Activities
Whole Class Work	Independent/Guided Work	Plenary	Assessment opportunities
<p>Monday Ch 1 & 2 MG to read Ch 3 during story time</p> <p> T1 T8 Start off by asking the children if they have heard of Michael Morpurgo. Get the children to work with their talk partners and discuss which books by MM they know. List these and explain that he often writes books about his own experiences and historical books. Read the blurb to the children and show them the front cover. Ask the children why the book is called <i>The Butterfly Lion</i>. Share their ideas. Read the first chapter and discuss why the boy didn't like public school. Discuss what 'homesick' is and if the children have ever felt like this. Have the children ever felt like running away? Read the second chapter and ask the class whether they would go ever go away with a stranger. As the story develops discuss what a 'compound' is and ask children where lions might be found. Ask the children what they think the 'veld' is and what it looks like, based on what the author has told them. Also how life seemed to be different for men and women (men had exciting adventures on the veld, women stayed home with the children in the compound). Could also pick up on foreign words. Explain to the children that they are going to design a front cover to <i>The Butterfly Lion</i>. Model ideas.</p>	<p> Independent/Guided Work</p> <p> Give out copies of the book with different front covers and ask the children which one they prefer. Share responses.</p> <p>Children to create a front cover for the book in groups.</p> <p>MG with Guided Writing group</p> <p><u>Resources</u> - copies of <i>The Butterfly Lion</i>. Writing frame for book.</p>	<p> Plenary</p> <p> Hot seat the boy in the first chapter. Encourage the children to ask him questions about boarding school and why he ran away.</p>	<p> Assessment opportunities</p> <p>Children are able to create a front cover for <i>The Butterfly Lion</i>.</p>

(Continued)

- *I like reading at home but not very much at school because some of the books are boring and I want harder books.*
- *I only like Captain Underpants books.*
- *I like blood and guts books.*
- *I start to feel sleepy when I read. I'd rather read comics, funny books and newspapers, also magazines.*
- *I like comics and drawn books the best.*
- *Reading a book is boring. Reading a comic is fun.*
- *I don't like reading, only reading the papers and a magazine. I am good at it but don't like it.*

Not only did some of the boys feel that their home reading was often not recognised in school, but also sometimes that they could not talk about it there.

- *I like comics and Simpsons books. That's all I like, not any other books except Goosebumps. I never talk about it because they never let me.*

It is difficult to see boys such as these widening their reading to 'other books' in a positive way if they are not allowed to share the reading interests they currently have.

Pause for Thought

Which of the children's comments or drawings about reading in this and the previous chapters do you find most revealing and why? How would you respond to the points the children make?

Some schools take the approach of meeting gender issues in reading head on by encouraging debate that challenges stereotypes. A text such as Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock*, where the main character becomes a girl for a day and experiences among other things the different kind of reading material offered to girls and boys at school, offers plenty of scope for animated discussion with Year 3 or 4 children. Other activities can lead to passionate debate about gendered reading material, such as asking older KS2 children to sort through books, looking at covers, blurb, first pages and author notes, and decide whether they are aimed mainly at girls, boys or both, and what features suggest this. Boys can then be asked to read the 'girls' books' and vice versa. At the resultant reporting-back session, the boy and girl readers can discuss whether their prejudices were confirmed or not.

In other successful schools, where boys' achievements in reading have given rise to particular concern, they are sometimes targeted for specific measures. These can be designed to improve boys' engagement with books and reading at classroom level, as in the first case study example below.