

Pupil Recommendations Shelf by Jon Biddle

Context

I'm currently Year 5/6 teacher, English Coordinator and Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk. The school has been rebuilding over the past few years and has worked hard to create a genuine, schoolwide Reading for Pleasure culture. Many children, staff and parents are already engaged and enthused by the progress that has been made. Staff have become far more willing to engage in new ideas and initiatives as they have seen the impact that Reading for Pleasure can have.



Research inspiration and rationale

Much of the published research on Reading for Pleasure (RfP) has emphasised the need for schools to build reading communities which focus on the importance of giving children ownership over their reading choices (Cremin et al., 2014). Moss and McDonald (2005) found that in classroom libraries, when teachers gave children space to choose their own books, it produced reading networks and positive reader identities. Ross (2001) highlighted several ways to help pupils make informed meaningful choices, which includes peer recommendations. As pupil knowledge of books increased in my class during a school year, I wanted to hand over more of the responsibility for recommending books to the children and felt a pupil recommendations shelf would be one way of helping achieve this.



Aims

- To build a classroom Reading for Pleasure culture that includes carefully considered peer recommendations



- To encourage children to think about the variety of books available for them to read in the classroom library (novels, picturebooks, poetry, graphic novels, etc) and begin to broaden their reading choices
- To provide children with an opportunity to become 'book experts' and have their reading choices and recommendations publicly celebrated

Outline

Recommending books to each other has always been an integral component of our classroom reading culture and is an important part of our daily book chat. As we progress through the school year, I find that the children gradually increase in confidence and are prepared to share and talk about a broader range of books.

To celebrate this, and to provide an opportunity for the less confident children to have their selections given equal status, I created the Pupil Recommendations Shelf on one of our class bookcases.

The idea was that every two weeks, a new pupil (or pair of pupils, if they wanted to work with a friend) would choose 12-15 books that they'd enjoyed reading and wanted the rest of the class to know about. These choices would then be displayed on the shelf.

I modelled the process of choosing books for the first few weeks of the new term. I tried to ensure that I selected diverse authors and illustrators as well as a wide range of book types, including fiction, non-fiction, picturebooks, poetry and graphic novels. For each book, I wrote a mini-review on a sticky note, often only a couple of words, and arranged all the books on the shelf. I then spent a few minutes talking through my selections with the children.

After having repeated this a couple of times, I made it clear that I wanted them to have full ownership of the shelf and that I'd be looking for them to share their favourite selections with their peers. Several children immediately volunteered to take part, some individually and some with a partner.

The children are given time during the school day to collate their choices, write their mini-reviews and display the books on the shelf. They often want to talk about the books to the rest of the class so we always ensure that time is prioritised for this.

In order to keep the excitement levels high, as well as displaying the names of the children responsible for the current recommendations, I share the names of the next two people or groups. It also helps remind them to start thinking about their selections. We rotate

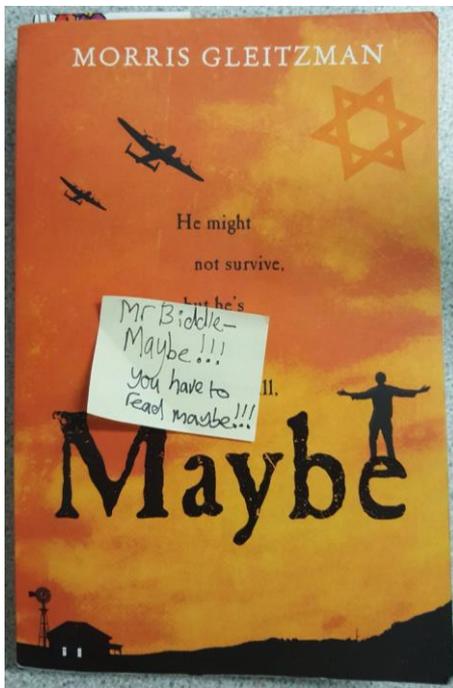
ownership of the shelf every couple of weeks to ensure that everyone who wants to take part will get an opportunity at some point during the school year.

Occasionally I give the children reminders that they need consider what other children may enjoy reading in their choices but, as time has gone, I've needed to have less and less involvement.



Impact

Having a Pupil Recommendations Shelf that's given a high value and status in the classroom has definitely helped strengthen our class reading identity. The children are always keen to look at the new books on the shelf and a large number are generally borrowed within an hour or two of being displayed. Because certain books are now being read by more children than would have been otherwise, it also means that there are more voices and opinions involved during our class book chats.

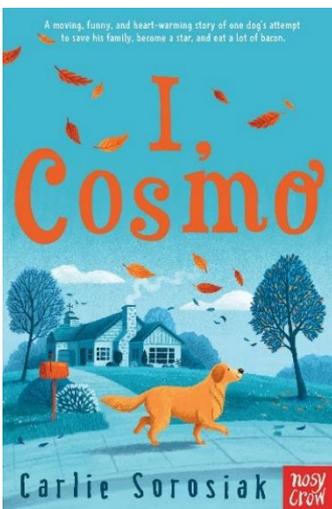


There are definitely some books and authors which appear more regularly (for example, the *Amulet* graphic novel series by Kazu Kibuishi and *Varjak Paw* by SF Said) but, as time has gone on, a much broader range of books have started to be chosen. Because the children know that they need to consider different types of book and other readers in the class, they have started to think and reflect on their own reading choices.

Observing the less confident children increasingly become more involved has been a real highlight. I feel this is partly due to the fact that they're able to select books with a friend and therefore don't feel under as much pressure. They've also realised that their reading choices have just as much value and importance as those of their peers.

Because the pupils are continually learning more about each other's reading preferences, it also means that they are more willing to recommend books directly to individuals, including me. I regularly walk into class and see a book on my desk with a personalised review.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice



Although a relatively simple idea, the shelf has helped to give me a clearer picture of what's currently 'hot' in the classroom and therefore made me consider reading books which I may not otherwise have read. For example, I became aware that *I, Cosmo* by Carlie Sorosiak appeared on the shelf several times during a half-term and was spoken about passionately by everyone who'd read it. After reading it, I could understand why, and therefore improved my own knowledge of children's

books, a key aspect of the Teachers as Readers research (Cremin et al., 2014).

I also shared the idea on social media, and was pleased to see positive feedback from other teachers who tried it. This led to email conversations with some of those teachers, who were also working to develop their own RfP pedagogy.



Whitney Watson @MrsWatson90 · 2h

Loved the idea of the pupil recommendation shelf shared by @jonnybid. Introduced it to my children last week. They loved the idea and started with it straight away. Overheard some incredible conversations between children already. Such a buzz around reading @TeamFour

