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Reading Together Treasure Hunt!



Context:

I am the Year 5 teacher and a Senior Leader at St. Andrew's C of E Primary School, a one-form entry primary school in North Essex. I lead Reading across our Trust.

As a school, and a Trust, we are committed to developing as a community of engaged readers and we are continually striving to improve our reading for pleasure pedagogy.

I am passionate about fostering a love of reading and giving children 'irresistible' experiences of reading that support their development as lifelong readers.

Research Inspiration and Rationale:

- u The Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research revealed that children's reading for pleasure (RfP) is supported where shared understandings are established between children, teachers, families and communities about about the changing nature of reading – and, indeed, about the diversity of what 'counts' as reading (Cremin et al., 2014).
- u The research also documented how developing reciprocal, interactive reading communities enabled strong connections to be forged between children's home and school reading lives.
- u When teachers know more about children's reading lives and practices beyond school, they can nurture RfP and build communities of readers more effectively.
- u **How did these TaRs research findings inspire me?**
I returned to this research following the announcement that schools were to close for many; finding ways to continue fostering children's enjoyment of reading during this time was a significant professional responsibility. Teaching remotely using Microsoft Teams had potential to develop reciprocal, interactive reading relationships with families and strengthen connections with children's home reading lives in new ways.

Aims:

- u To develop the children and their families' understanding of the diversity of what 'counts' as reading – and to encourage them to reflect on and celebrate diversity in their own reading as a family!
- u To encourage children to reflect on their wider experiences of reading at home and make connections with their reading lives in school. At this stage, I felt that we had reflected on our reading identifies and lives in school to a far greater extent.
- u To help children and their families to identify ways of developing the diversity in their reading in their homes and communities in the future – and see the value in doing so.
- u To improve my knowledge of children's reading lives and practices beyond school ahead of a new academic year teaching the same class.

Outline:

- u I included the '**OU Reading Together Treasure Hunt**' they developed for the National Reading Together Day in 2020 as 'optional' on our Microsoft Teams timetable one week.

Rather than one treasure hunt for the whole class, I offered two smaller ones. The **invite was extended to families** as well as children, I felt that this would give everyone more of a voice and time and space to share their reflections. I wanted **volition** and **social interaction** to be at the core of the hunt. I also hoped that the first hunt would generate a '**booktalk buzz**' that would continue afterwards and tempt any children that hadn't yet signed up to sign up for the second one.

- u I was aware that this Hunt was for my class – families with an incredibly diverse range of reading backgrounds – rather than one single family. Not wanting anyone to feel negatively about their reading identities as a result of the hunt, I decided not to award points for treasure. Instead, we aimed to find as much treasure as we could as a whole group of children and families - 'reading together' in another sense! The children were invested in this.

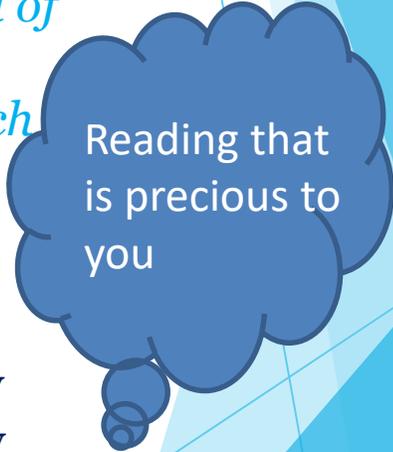
Impact:

- The 'OU Reading Together Treasure Hunt' gave us huge amounts of **fun together** and a real reason to **celebrate as a community of readers** during a challenging time. It was evident from children's posts to our online classroom community, and from messages from parents, that **the 'booktalk buzz' created by the hunt continued afterwards.**

"Thanks for arranging the treasure hunt – I have just come back and X was full of it – I have a massive pile of stuff on the dining room table and talk of rifling through bins! He loved it ... and he was really enthusiastic to tell me what each layer of the pile was!"*

- *The rifling through the bins was to find a takeaway menu!*

- Children were surprised by how many 'reading treasures' they were able to lay their hands on – the different challenges, particularly 'thought bubbles', really made them **think beyond the 'obvious' about reading.** It was absolutely fascinating watching the children's immediate reactions when I read out a challenge – reactions tended to be one of four, shown on the next slide!

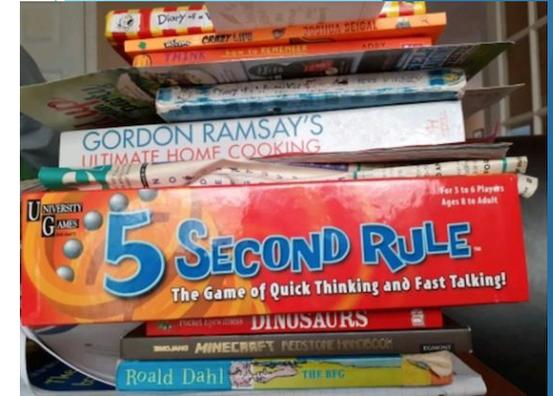


Reading that
is precious to
you

Impact:

- **Reaction 1:** deciding what they wanted to find, often before I'd even finished reading the challenge, and running off to find it immediately – often running back, announcing that they had a better idea and running off again!
- **Reaction 2:** taking time to 'possibility think' what would count, reflecting on which would be the most fitting and then running off to find it.
- **Reaction 3:** turning to discuss the challenge with somebody else at home, eyes lighting up when they'd arrived at a decision and then running off to find it (or instructing a parent to find it – like the takeaway menu in the bin!).
- **Reaction 4:** turning to discuss the challenge with somebody else at home, coming up with what they considered to be a better idea than their family's and running off to find that!

Regardless of the immediate reaction to the challenge and whether the children were hunting with somebody else or on their own, they all had something in common. **Each and every challenge made the children reflect on what 'counted' as reading in their lives.** They finished the hunt with a hoard of 17 reading treasures but during that time, **many of had thought about hundreds of other reading treasures when making their decision – some of which they wouldn't have counted as reading before.**



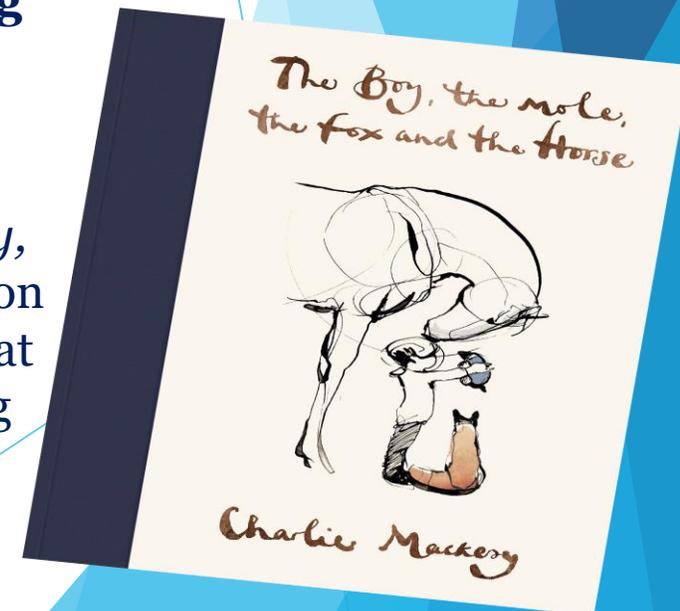
Impact:

Although the treasure hunts both started off being about how quickly children could return with their 'reading treasures', this began to change after the first few challenges. They became more interested in:

- sharing their choices,
- discussing why their choices were important to them
- listening to others sharing their choices
- as well as recognising the diversity in their own reading.

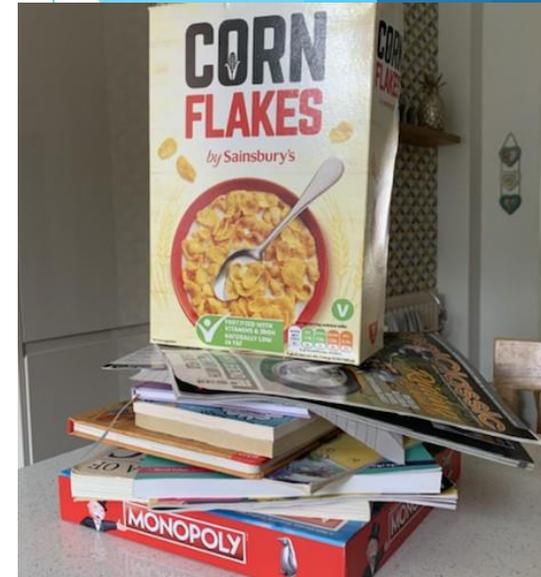
They were interested in discussing the diversity evident in the 'reading treasures' chosen by the group for each challenge.

These discussions were at their most interesting when different children had chosen the same 'reading treasure' for different challenges. For example, *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and the Horse* was chosen by children as an example of a fiction book, as an example of reading that gives advice and as an example of reading that is precious! They were open to the justifications of others and rather than seeing their choices as a 'right' or a 'wrong', they reflected on how reading can mean different things to different individuals.



Impact:

- In responding to the challenges and reflecting on what ‘counted’ as a particular kind of reading in their lives, there were definitely times when **the children had to think more laterally about their reading** than they were used to perhaps.
- This brought about many laughs and much enjoyment; for example, when one of the children brought her dog back as an example of reading that is precious to her because *‘I have to read my dog’s emotions to know how he is feeling!’* and another returned with a Marauder’s Map as an example of reading that is hidden.
- Although in both instances, the children came back laughing and questioning whether their ‘reading treasures counted’, they then came to realise through discussion with others that actually, they could be counted!



Reflections:

u The TaRs research revealed that children's RfP is supported where shared understandings are established between children, teachers, families and communities about about the changing nature of reading – and, indeed, about the diversity of what 'counts' as reading (Cremin et al., 2014). The research also documented how developing reciprocal, interactive reading communities enabled strong connections to be forged between children's home and school reading lives.

u The 'Reading Together Treasure Hunt' proved to be an extremely powerful tool to **develop shared understandings about the diversity of what 'counts' as reading** and to **strengthen connections between children's reading lives at home and school.**

The way in which it engaged the children meant that, with their families, they were **discovering greater diversity in their reading *for themselves***. As a result, I felt they came to appreciate this more authentically than they had done when we'd talked about what 'counts' as reading in school.

They had such diverse, meaningful, personal hoards of 'reading treasure' around them at home, which gave an energy and life to this, that I don't think could be replicated in school. Part of the power was that **every piece of 'reading treasure' had its own story**, many of which were situated in the context of family life – even if the children and their families hadn't previously appreciated that.

u This was, undoubtedly, **one of the most significant shared experiences of reading** that I have had with a class and their families in my teaching career.