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The Big Reveal (Blind Book Tasting)

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Jennifer Cole



Context

I am the Reading Lead and a Year 6 teacher at Rayleigh Primary School in Essex. The town demographic has changed significantly within the last five years, with a much higher number of Pupil Premium children than historically. There remains relative affluence in the area. However, a significantly large proportion of children are reading infrequently at home and creating lifelong readers is at the centre of our reading curriculum.

Research inspiration and rationale

The UKLA / Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research project concluded that *'strategic support is needed to enable the profession to find more equivalent and reciprocal ways of working with families and communities that connect with their everyday reading practices and experiences,'* recommending that schools *'[explore] the potential synergy between teachers', children's and parents' reading lives and practices'* (Cremin et al., 2014).

The TaRs research found that in order to foster Reading for Pleasure (RfP) effectively, teachers need to develop 'reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive' (Cremin et al., 2014). This project marks the beginning of my work to widen our in-school reading community to include parents more actively in enjoying reading with their children.

In today's fast-paced society it seems that, often, parents do not read to and with their children as much as in past generations, nor do they engage in regular book-talk. The advancement of technology and the wealth of digital and computer-based activities available to children nowadays seems to have created a decline in children's willingness to pick up a book and read for pleasure (either alone or to a parent), and the busy parent seems less inclined to encourage their children to do so.

At our school, we have noticed a decline in the number of parents who listen to their children read regularly, if at all, and many affected children are subsequently struggling to improve their phonics, sight reading, language acquisition and use, spelling and comprehension skills. It is critical that we re-engage our parents with reading with their children.

Aims

My aim was to begin effecting an increase in the numbers and frequency of parents engaging in all aspects of reading with their children, including listening to them read, reading to them, choosing books with them, and talking about books with them.

My aims for our Blind Book Tasting were to:

1. encourage parent-child, child-child, child-teacher and teacher-parent discussions about children's literature (within the Book Tasting itself);
2. increase parental awareness of current and quality age-related literature;

3. increase usage of the school libraries;
4. facilitate further opportunities and enthusiasm for parents to read with and to their children, and to engage in more discourse about books and reading at home;
5. create the beginnings of a 3-way reading community between the school, pupils and parents.

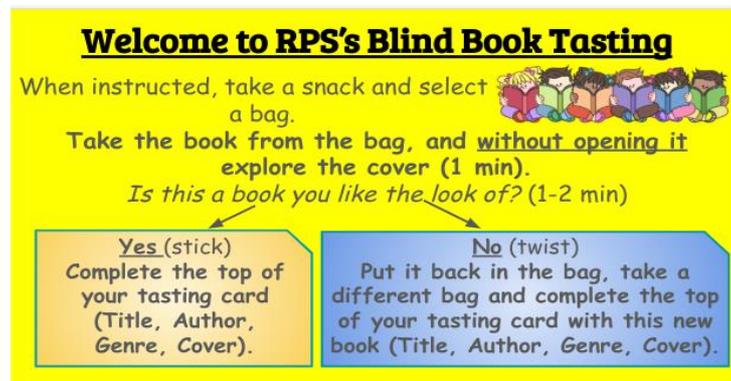
Outline

All parents were invited to join their child/children for a 45-minute book tasting session on World Book Day 2020.

I bought several books from the Books for Topics Recommended lists for each year group (Reception through to Y6: <https://www.booksfortopics.com>) and asked for a selection of Y3-6 students to help me to choose other school library books that they thought children would find interesting, ensuring that they selected only a few 'common' reads, as I wanted participants to have the opportunity to sample books that they were not familiar with and may not consider picking up normally.

Once I had approximately 60 books per class, I wrapped each individual book in donated carrier bags (preferring to recycle than opt for more appealing paper bags).

Visiting parents were welcomed and sat with their children. The parental turnout was fantastic, largely because of the 'exciting event' nature. On each table were enough books for at least 2 per child; I set these out randomly, rather than in genres, year groups etc.. A PowerPoint was displayed and instructions explained by the class teacher.



When invited to do so, pupils and parents selected a bag and opened it together. They were then encouraged to explore and discuss the front and back covers in order to decide whether they would 'stick or twist'. It was lovely to see excitement on the faces of both pupils and parents

as books were revealed! However, if the child did not wish to sample that book then they were welcome to switch for another book/bag but had to stick with this one. Cue more excitement!

Once the children had completed the name and genre of the book on their tasting card, they sampled the book (they could read any pages they chose, not necessarily the beginning) for 5 minutes with their parents, snacking on a variety of treats at the same time! Largely depending on year group/age, children either read to their parents, listened to their parents read or read alongside their parents.

After the 5 minutes sampling time, children and parents discussed what they thought of the book and completed the rest of the tasting card with their views: a rating out of 5 and whether or not they would like to read more of the book.

Books were then placed back in the bags, children and parents moved to a different tasting table and repeated the process. Most got to sample 4 or more different books. During the session, the class teacher and learning assistants circulated, talking with both children



and parents about the books that were being explored, and reading with children whose parents were not in attendance.

Teachers also made parents aware that the books would be available to the children for them to borrow from the library, read at home *together*, and to look out for the books as well as the recommended books lists in their book bags.

At the end of the day, all children (Nursery through to Y6) took home a copy of the list of 50 Recommended books for their year group (Nursery children took copies of the Reception recommended books) with a reminder that all of the books would be available in the school libraries from Monday (the tasting took place on the Thursday).



On the following Monday, I reminded children of the event and the new books' availability during the whole school assembly.

Impact

Following the event, there was a renewed buzz about books and reading in school again, and many, many children visited the library with their tasting cards over the next few weeks, looking for and borrowing the books that they had tasted. Where books were not available because they had already been taken out, children reserved them and took out books to read in the meantime. When children were taken to the library to borrow books to take home, many were overheard asking about books they had sampled.

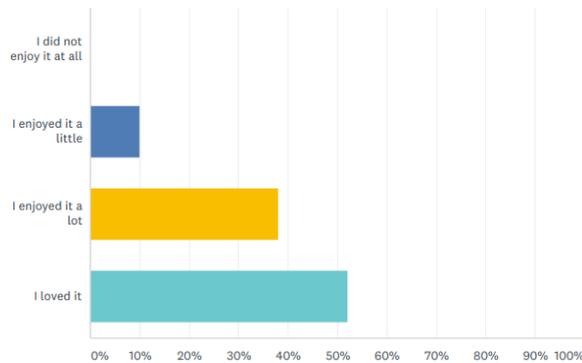
The plan was to circulate follow-up surveys to parents as well as children to compare with those sent prior to the event. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent disruption, this was not possible on the same scale as planned, and this time, the results of the surveys distributed has been limited.

The results of the small number of surveys returned do, however, suggest that the majority of parents and children enjoyed the event itself. Many contributors indicated that the event effected increases in book-talk at home; borrowing/buying of new children's literature 'sampled' at the event and reading for pleasure at home (adult independent reading and reading with child). The majority of parent contributors also stated that they would be 'very keen' to attend regular events designed to foster and develop the parent-school reading community.

PUPIL SURVEY:

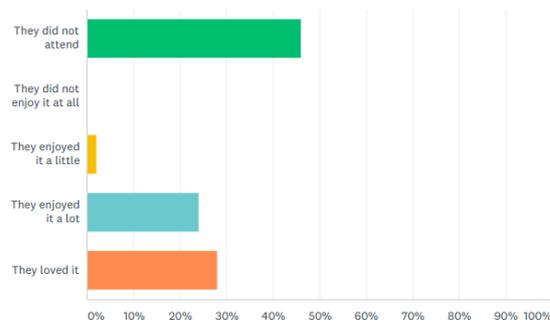
How much did you enjoy the Book Tasting?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



How much did your parent/family member enjoy the Book Tasting? (Feel free to ask them!)

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



What did you enjoy about the Book Tasting? Would you like to do it again? Was there anything that you would like us to do differently if we did it again?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1

RESPONSES (49) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0) Sentiments: OFF

Apply to selected Filter by tag Search responses

Showing 49 responses

- I liked that we could try different books, to see if we might enjoy them and to see what books we like reading.
3/31/2020 11:48 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- I liked having the chance to read a lot of different books, I think it was VERY educational. I don't think the school could have changed anything about the book tasting.
3/31/2020 11:27 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- I liked how we could borrow the books after the tasting! 🥰📖
3/31/2020 11:25 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

If your parent/family member attended the Book Tasting, what did they like or dislike about it? Please ask them for their comments and write below.

Answered: 35 Skipped: 15

[RESPONSES \(35\)](#)
[WORD CLOUD](#)
[TAGS \(0\)](#)
Sentiments: OFF

Apply to selected Filter by tag
Search responses

Showing 35 responses

- my mum thought that one of the books was so funny that she cried she absolutely loved it
3/31/2020 9:14 AM
[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- they actually found a book that they wanted and i got it out for them
3/31/2020 9:08 AM
[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- My mum enjoyed the variety of BOOKS
3/31/2020 8:58 AM
[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

PARENT SURVEY:

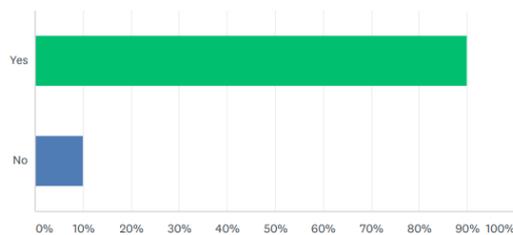
Please rank these aspects of the experience from what you found most beneficial (top) to least (bottom).

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Seeing/reading new books appropriate to my child	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	40.00% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10	3.90
Spending time reading with my child	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	10.00% 1	10	2.90
Spending time discussing books with my child	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	10	3.70
Spending time discussing books with other parents	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	80.00% 8	10	1.50
Book recommendations from the Class Teacher	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	10.00% 1	50.00% 5	0.00% 0	10	3.00

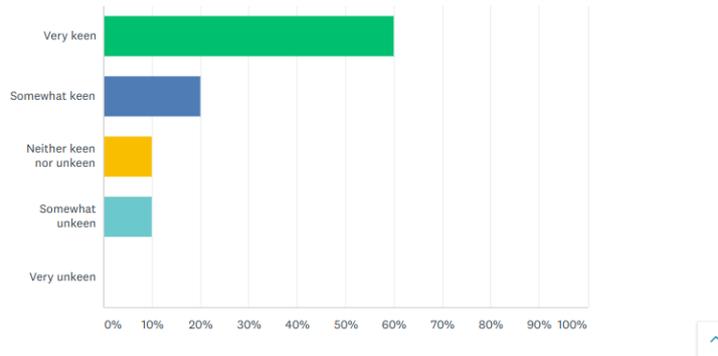
Did you and your child have any conversations about the Book Tasting books at home following the event?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



How keen would you be to regularly attend Reading for Pleasure events at the school (designed to build wider reading communities)?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



As well as the survey response, impact has been measured according to anecdotal evidence. Several teachers, teaching assistants and parents reported children having told them that they thoroughly enjoyed the book tasting, that they would like us to arrange another, and that it was their favourite part of World Book Day, with many engaging in book-talk with teachers and other pupils immediately, discussing authors, text types etc. positively and excitedly.

Teachers reported that the sessions were very well attended by parents - more so than expected - and that in-session feedback was positive. Additionally, several parents commented to staff later on that they enjoyed the sessions, that they felt that they had been beneficial to their children and that they were excited about reading some of the books they had tasted.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research was really at the heart of this project as this highlighted the importance of involving and widening home-school reading communities, of adults getting to know what individual children like to read so as to support them in reading for pleasure, and of broadening the range of reading material available to youngsters. Our Blind Book Tasting event aimed to begin to address these areas, and marks the beginning of a concerted push to develop stronger reading relationships with our parents in order to build an effective and beneficial parent reading community.