

From Reluctant to Ravenous: Encouraging Reading in the Digital Age



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Illustration created by ChatGPT

I once heard a story about a boy who loved reading books madly. So much so that he would even read them aloud to the cows in the pasture. On top of that, the boy could also speak in rhyme. Sounds like a fairy tale, doesn't it? In any case, it's hard to imagine something like that happening today. That someone would read out of their own free will. That a child would pick up a book not because the teacher told them to, but because the world inside simply pulls them in. And yet, there was once a time when books played an important role in a young person's life, offering entertainment as well as opening the path to knowledge.

Urba, L. Is Reading a Thing of the Past? *Postimees* May 20 2025.

Are bookworms becoming extinct?

- The 2024 *What Kids Are Reading Report* (n=1.2 million pupils across the UK and Ireland) revealed a 4.4% decrease in the number of books read by pupils.
- The UK *Annual Literacy Survey* in 2025 (n = 114,970), revealed that the percentage of children and young people who said they enjoyed reading was its lowest in 20 years.
- 1 in 3 (32.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed reading in their free time in 2025 (a 36% decrease in reading enjoyment levels since 2005).
- The drop in reading enjoyment over the last year has been especially steep among primary-aged children and boys, particularly boys aged 11 to 16.

THE MOTIVATION FOR READING?

- 2 in 5 children and young people were motivated to read when material related to a favourite film or TV series (38.1%) or matched their interests or hobbies (37.1%).
- 3 in 10 (30.9%) were drawn in by an interesting book cover or title.
- 1 in 4 (26.6%) valued having the freedom to choose what they read.
- Hearing recommendations from friends, family or teachers.
- Encouraging reading through a variety of formats.

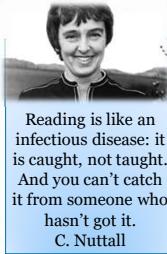
The UK Annual Literacy Survey, 2025

MICHAEL ROSEN

Research says:

- The teacher's love for literature and ability to find reading and writing material that interests pupils are crucial.
- It is crucial that the teacher gathers information about his or her pupils' interests. With interesting reading material it is possible to encourage even the most reluctant readers to read.

Merisuo-Storm, 2006, cited in Waugh et al., 2013.



BASIC CHILDREN'S BOOK AGE CATEGORIES

Board Books	0-3 y/o	Max. 300 words
Picture Books	4-8 y/o	600 - 1000 words
Early Readers	5-8 y/o	Max. 2000 words
Chapter Books	6-10 y/o	8.5k - 12k words Max. 20k words
Middle Grade Fiction	8-12 y/o	30k - 50k words
Young Adult (YA)	12+ y/o	45k - 80k words

Features of Middle Grade Literature

Protagonist	typically aged 8(9)-12
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> family (including heavy topics like grief and divorce) friendships (especially lost, new or evolving friendships) relationships (including innocent crushes) school life (including conflicts and problems) the question of belonging at home, school or in the community growing sense of identity, personal growth awareness of what's going on in the wider world navigating the challenges of life fantasy and adventure
MGL helps children to develop empathy, build their imagination and learn valuable life lessons.	
Language	clear narration, avoids excessive slang and swearing
Plot	simpler, slower pace, allowing for character development and exploration of themes through relatable events
Ending	a clear resolution and a sense of hope or optimism

What?

- a whole book
- titles
- book covers
- book trailers
- blurbs
- extracts
- illustrations
- reviews



PRE, WHILE & POST READING ACTIVITIES

englishteaching101.com

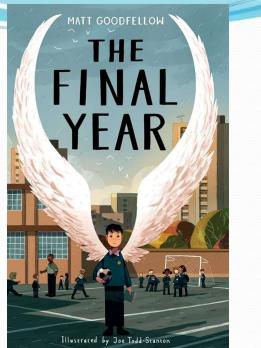
What tasks could be done before reading?



- Discussions about the topic
- Activating prior knowledge
- Matching the title with a genre
 - Predicting the plot
- Describing/ analysing images
- Suggesting a title based on images
- Searching information
 - Vocabulary review
 - ...

The illustrated cover

A half-open door to a dimension that is still unknown. And it hopes to trigger emotional experiences, promote thought, bring back memories and references to knowledge that are strengthened by reading, helping first and foremost to recognise their presence and meaning (Bernardi, 2019).

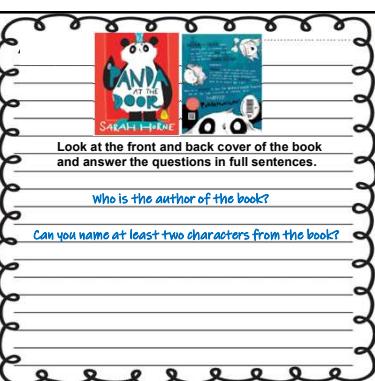


You can't judge a book by its cover. Or can you?

- Look at the cover and blurb of the book.
- Explain how they are designed to entice you to read the book:
 - What do we know from the blurb?
 - What do we want to find out?
 - Does the story look predictable?



Sample task for younger learners



Look at the front and back cover of the book and answer the questions in full sentences.

Who is the author of the book?

Can you name at least two characters from the book?



Sample task: Write a blurb

1. Name the title of the book and introduce the main character(s).

2. Say one (or two) sentences about the problem in the story.

3. Add a question for some suspense. Tell us if you recommend it.

KNUFFLE BUNNY
A LITTLE PICTURE BOOK BY MO WILLEMS

Trixie loses her favorite bunny.

Will she ever find her favorite bunny?
Read the book to find out!

Improve student engagement with **SEE, THINK, WONDER** Reading Activities

I see...

I think ...

I wonder ...

IT'S NOT EASY TO 'FIT IN' WHEN YOU'RE...

The BOY in the SUIT
JAMES FOX



Is it typical for a ten-year-old boy to wear a suit to school?
Why do you think he goes to school in a suit?

Based on the short blurb, what other questions could be asked?

Ten-year-old Solo – embarrassingly, that isn't short for anything – just wants to be normal. He wants a name that doesn't stand out. He wishes he had a proper school uniform that fitted him. He dreams about a mum who doesn't get the Big Bad Reds, like his mum Morag. But most of all he longs to stop ...

crashing funerals for the free food.

What tasks can be done while reading?



- Search for information
- Identify and solve problems
- Create character profiles/ character scrapbooks
 - Jigsaw reading
 - Draw maps/ settings
 - Analyse illustrations
- Tell the story from a different point of view
 - Put events in the order
 - Write letters to/ from the characters
 - Learn new vocabulary



What do you know about the London Eye?

Read the extract and write out as many facts as you can

The London Eye

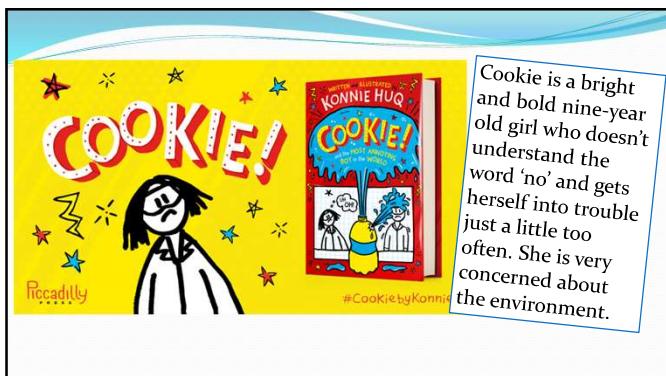
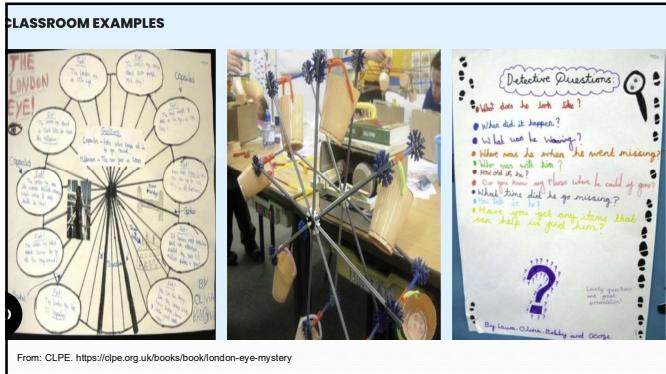
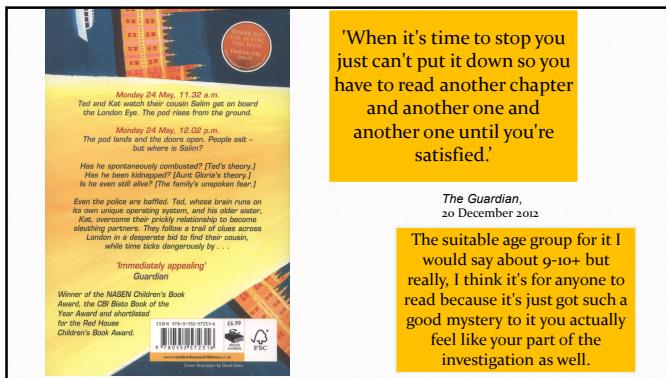


'Compulsive reading' *Independent*

THE LONDON EYE MYSTERY

What goes up must come down

SIOBHAN DOWD



TEACHER RESOURCES

EXTRACT 1: SAVING THE PLANET (taken from Chapter 1: Spinner in The Works)

I watched this documentary the other day and it showed how harmful plastics can be. Get this – every day approximately eight million pieces of plastic pollution find their way into the sea. Eight million!!

MEANWHILE IN THE BAHAMAS

That's more plastic in the sea than there are people living in the whole of Scotland!! Unbelievable!!

So since then I've been making the entire family ditch single-use plastic, start recycling

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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Piccadilly

and generally be more environmentally friendly!

Keziah and Jake are both down with the whole eco friendly thing too. Can you believe that a one-and-a-half degree rise in average temperature has an irreversible effect on our planet?? Loads of different species would be wiped out!

Book with the environment don't drink Book don't put plastic bags in the bin Mum: nice using reusable bags you are! More, more, more for our environment! But not for the weather! The nice, nice, nice shade! I'd like to be a bit of a shadow!

Page 3 of 12

Task 'Save the Planet' party

Cookie's birthday party is coming up and she has had the most fantastic idea for a 'Save the Planet' party where everything is recyclable and no plastic is used.

TEACHER RESOURCES

SAVE THE PLANET PARTY PLANNING

BAD for the environment - Avoid		GOOD for the environment - Use or buy	
FOOD AND DRINK		DECORATIONS, PARTY BAGS & GIFTS	
TRAVEL TO AND FROM THE PARTY		INVITATIONS, WASTE, ENERGY USAGE	

Piccadilly

Lenny, 12 and Bruce

Who might the people in the picture be? What do you think their relationship is?

Lenny, 12 says:

Imagine being trapped in a world with everything you hate. Picture how that makes you feel. Well, that's school for me.

Which feelings and emotions do you associate with school and why?

So, today in English Liam McAvoy called me Fatso. Sometimes he's swallowed a dictionary and says Chunky. Other times Blubber. But Fatso is the main one. Teachers have never called me it, but I know the word pinballs around their brain cells. I caught Mr Sutton, the PE teacher, giggling his head off when I was playing dodgeball once. He tried to hide it but I snared him, standing there like a human letter A, arms folded, legs spread and cheese-faced.

What should you do if you witness a classmate being treated like Lenny?

Nate, 10

... asks his teacher Mr Joshua:

How can my head
be so full of stuff, Sir
so full of sadness
so full of questions
so full of anger
so full of pain
yet I am
so
empty?

What do you
think Nate
means by feeling
"full" yet "empty"
at the same
time?

Can you relate to the
feelings described in
the poem? What
answer would you
give to Nate's
question?



IT'S NOT EASY TO FIT IN WHEN YOU'RE...

THE BOY IN THE SUIT



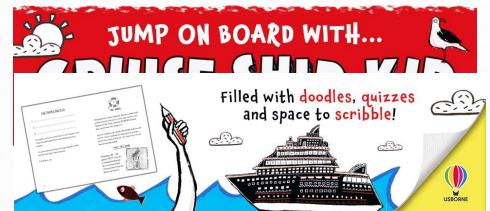
Which of these might be a typical funeral food in Britain?



Read the extracts and tell your partner which food Solo likes and which he hates.

There's **4** things you should know about me:

1. I live on a cruise ship.
2. My name is Silver. Yes, really.
3. I've never had a best friend my own age.
4. I'm definitely not a detective.

DAD

I don't know my dad because he was eaten by a shark. Okay, that's not true but it's what I like to tell people. Really, he left when I was a tiny baby, and it's sort of the reason I live on the ship. Mum and Dad had a plan when I was born that Dad would live on land with me, so I could go to school, and Mum would live at sea as that's where her job was, then we would join together on the ship for the holidays.

Then Dad got in the ~~car~~ one day when I was little and didn't come back. I know, not as cool as the shark story, but it meant that after the divorce Mum and I came to live on the ship full-time instead.

I don't really think about my dad much because I don't remember him, but I sometimes get nostalgic and I'm never ~~so~~ **ENOUGH** about me.

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I want to know you better, let's do a quick quiz:

Which do you like best? (Circle the answers.)

1. Animal

- A. Dogs
- B. Cats
- C. Pygmy hippos (look them up - SO cute!)

2. Food

- A. Pizza
- B. Chocolate
- C. Healthy, healthy salad with a crunchy coating of health

3. Place

- A. The sea
- B. The pool
- C. The bath

What do you see when you look in the mirror?

- Do you think how we see ourselves in the mirror is always accurate? Why or why not?
- Have you ever looked in a mirror and felt something surprising - either positive or negative?
- What voices or influences might shape what we see in the mirror?



Near the exit of the library
is the bathroom.

In the bathroom
is a mirror.

In the mirror
is an ugly, grotesque blob
staring back at me,
telling me I'm a waste of space,
pathetic, worthless.

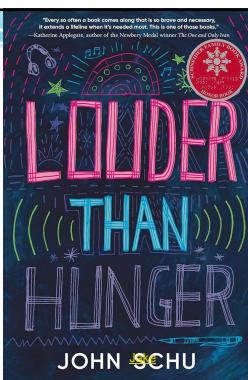
Is that really me?

I usually avoid mirrors.

Mirrors are
cruel, ruthless.

Do mirrors tell lies?

Why do you
think Jake (13)
feels like this?

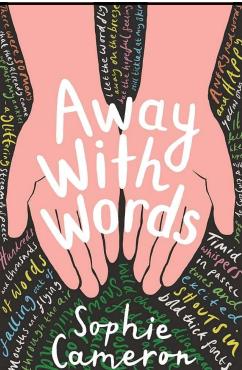


***Louder than Hunger* tells Jake's story**

Jake volunteers at Tinley Terrace, a nursing home near his house.
He loves books.
He loves musicals and movies.
He avoids people his own age.
He avoids mirrors and food.
There's a very loud voice inside his head that tells him he's unworthy of taking up space. That he's unworthy of a happy life.
Eventually, Jake's hospitalized at Whispering Pines for anorexia nervosa, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and depression.

Jake's story is based on the author's experiences and emotions while living in multiple residential treatment facilities as a teen.

11-year-old Gala and her Dad Jordi have just moved to Scotland from Spain to live with Jordi's boyfriend Ryan. Gala feels lost, lonely and unable to be her usual funny self. Until she befriends Natalie, a girl with selective mutism. Gala notices that Natalie collects words. The very idea that words are tangible items to be collected seems brilliant ...



Do you think
words
have colour?



In Sophie Cameron's book *Away With Words*, words have a physical presence after they are spoken. They are different colours, sizes and fonts, depending on who has spoken, what the word means and how it has been said.

Look at your word and think what colour and they could be. Share your thoughts with your partner(s).

Teaching ideas: Search for words to build a word bank

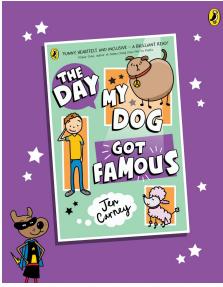
- ❖ Write down words that stand out to you from books or extracts.
- ❖ Listen to conversations, or pay close attention to words when you're watching shows or films. Write down any words that stick in your mind.
- ❖ Write down some of your favourite words - words you love because of how they sound or make you feel.
- ❖ Write your own poem using the words.

When writing down your chosen words, you could use different colours and styles to represent how the words feel, or what they mean. For example, if you were writing the word "fluffy", you could make the letters look fluffy through their size and colour, maybe giving them a fluffy outline! Or, if you were writing the word "jagged", you could make the letters thin and sharp.

Ideas from: LoveReading 4kids



Learn new words



Read the extract from the book and do the tasks.
How many new words did you learn?





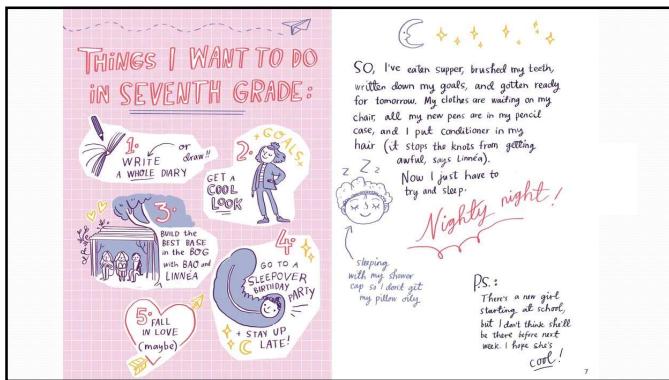
Illustration from *The Guardian* 16. December 2018

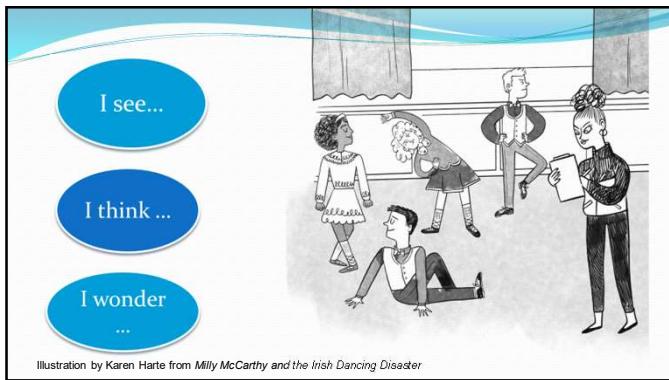
What do you think is happening?



Illustration from *Cross MY Heart and Never Lie* by N. Dåsnes







Draw the characters

In John Donne School, UK, in Year 5 children were reading the book 'The London Eye Mystery'. Their task was to draw the two main characters, based on what they know about their personalities and their appearances so far.



Name _____

CHARACTER PROFILE

Character's Name: _____

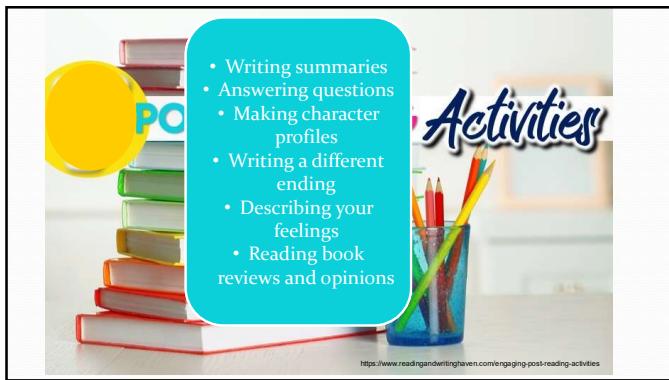
What is the character's personality? _____

What does the character look like? _____

What does the character do? _____



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<https://www.readingandwritinghaven.com/engaging-post-reading-activities>

Dear Diary

Place yourself in the shoes of one of the characters you have just read about and write a diary entry of a key moment from the story.

Try to choose a moment in the story in which the character has plenty of interaction and emotion to share in a diary entry.

Your diary entry should be around a page in length and contain information you learnt from the book when the character was in that specific place and time.

Remember when you are writing a diary entry you are writing it from first person perspective. It is usually but not always written in present tense.

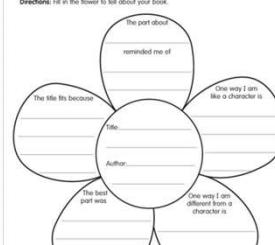


Q LIFETIME TALE IN PICTURES

Draw the main character from a book you have recently read. Show them as a baby, middle aged and as an older person. Underneath each picture write what you think they might be doing at that point of their life.

For example if you drew Harry Potter as a baby, he might be casting spells on his mum to feed her lots of yummy food.



<p>TEXT TO SELF</p> <p>Based upon a book you have read, share a story about yourself that is related to an event or character that was in the book.</p> <p>A great opportunity for students to think about the content they read and make comparisons to their own experiences in life.</p>	<p>Name: _____ Date: _____</p> <p>A Blooming Good Book</p> <p>Directions: Fill in the flower to tell about your book.</p>  <p>The part about _____ reminded me of _____</p> <p>The title fits because _____</p> <p>Author: _____</p> <p>The best part was _____</p> <p>One way I am like a character is _____</p> <p>One way I am different from a character is _____</p>
--	--

Books take us on journeys that we
can all share,
And give us the power to go
anywhere!
So no matter just how, or what book,
Or your speed, what I wish for NOW
...
Is that YOU love to read!
L. Baker



The boy who once read books aloud to cows in the pasture was Jaan Jensen. Later in life he became known as Johann Voldemar Jannsen. Or Papa Jannsen, if you like. A man who became one of the cornerstones of Estonian culture. Would he have become such a significant figure if he had not read books? Hard to say. But even harder is to imagine a world where no one reads.

Illustration created by ChatGPT



Thank you!
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Useful sources

- Books for Topics. <https://www.booksfortopics.com/new-books/>
- Candlewick Press. <https://www.candlewick.com/>
- Children's Books Ireland. <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/>
- LoveReading 4Kids. <https://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/>
- Nora Dásnes: Cross My Heart and Hope to Die – material download. <https://osloliteraryagency.no/2020/06/12/englishmaterialdaasnes-nora-cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die-download-here/>
- Reading Zone. <https://www.readingzone.com/>
- School Reading List. <https://schoolreadinglist.co.uk/>
- The Kids Book Curator. <https://www.thekidsbookscurator.com/>
- The Song Walker. Activities. <https://usborne.com/row/quicklinks/quicklink/the-song-walker>

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