

## We're going on a book hunt

Caroline Jones



I am currently an undergraduate studying for a BA in Primary Education with QTS. I am in my final year at Bishop Grosseteste. Alongside studying to become a teacher I work full time in a village primary school. The school has just over 200 pupils from a variety of backgrounds. In my work as a Teaching Assistant, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, I have seen a difference in children's attitudes towards reading and exploring books.

### OU Research inspiration and rationale

As part of the Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research I have decided to focus on fostering and promoting a *reading for pleasure pedagogy*. I plan to promote Reading for Pleasure (RfP) through informal book talk/book club which includes inside text-talk, exploring different books and genres and recommendations of books within the group, including from myself. The reason for identifying this area is due to the ever-changing climate with increasing reliance of technology and screens in everyday life. Following the COVID-19 lockdowns, I have seen a decline in children's reading and enthusiasm for books. This could be linked with children being taught online as part of home schooling and having limited resources; this decline may be akin to the summer reading loss identified by Kim and Quinn (2013). Multiple variables impact children becoming successful readers; two significant factors are access to books and poverty (Green, Nadelson, & Miller, 2020). Children throughout the pandemic may not have been able to access physical books or online due to limited resources. I have a real passion for children's literature and what better way to explore and broaden my own knowledge, and also promote excitement and curiosity amongst children, than to share books together, face to face in a small group with a positive atmosphere.

Another aspect that I feel is important and interlinks with my ideas of RfP is a teacher's pedagogical approach to children's books. In the TaRs it is listed as Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach. This is not simply knowing iconic authors or books but being able to recommend books based on the reading experience the teacher has and make recommendations that suit the child based on personal experience. Ripp (2016) highlights the need for teachers to know and read a variety of books in order to recommend appropriate books to children. Children at all stages of reading need teachers who can mentor and role model a positive attitude and love of reading. Research has demonstrated the importance of a teacher's knowledge and experience of children's books and the long-lasting benefits this can have on children's reading (Burgess et al., 2011; Collins & Safford, 2008; Cremin et al., 2009). As a trainee

teacher I am in a privileged position to be able to foster a love of reading in children, through modelling and showing the value of reading. As part of the group I want to create an atmosphere that promotes excitement surrounding reading and share my own passion, whilst broadening my knowledge of children's books and expanding upon my literacy skills. In a study about children's literature, Cunningham et al. (2004) found the majority of teachers were unable to identify books that were appropriate for the needs of the child. In a further study by Burgess, Sargent, and Smith (2011), they found teachers' who read children's literature in their spare time were more likely to implement effective literacy strategies, demonstrating the wider benefits of reading for pleasure for teachers and children.

## Aims

The aims in relation to TaRs research findings for promoting a *reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes informal book talk, inside text talk* and recommendations were:

- To acquaint children with physical books and enjoy exploring them together.
- Excite children about books and reading, explore different genres and our favourite books together.
- Recommend books to one another.
- Ask questions, explore illustrations, and read our favourite parts aloud.
- Promote an inclusive environment, filled with excitement and enjoyment of children's books.

The aims in relation to TaRs promoting *As Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach* were:

- Broaden my own experience and knowledge of children's literature.
- Understand children's differing tastes in books.
- Follow book recommendations from the children and feedback to them.
- Develop my reading and literacy skills as a trainee teacher.

## Outline

Whilst working in school I started a book club in year 3, it had to be restricted at this present time because of year group 'bubbles' within the school. I offered it for children to attend face to face after school one day a week for an hour.

I told the children in the class about the group, what it would be about and sent a flyer out through the school newsletter and called it a catchy name, based upon the children's iconic book 'We're going on a bear hunt' (Michael Rosen). Children were then asked to bring with them their favourite book, it could be anything: a story they enjoyed when they were younger; a recent read; a book they've read several times or a family favourite. The first week was favourite books, the second was books about the world/environment and the third week was fiction stories.

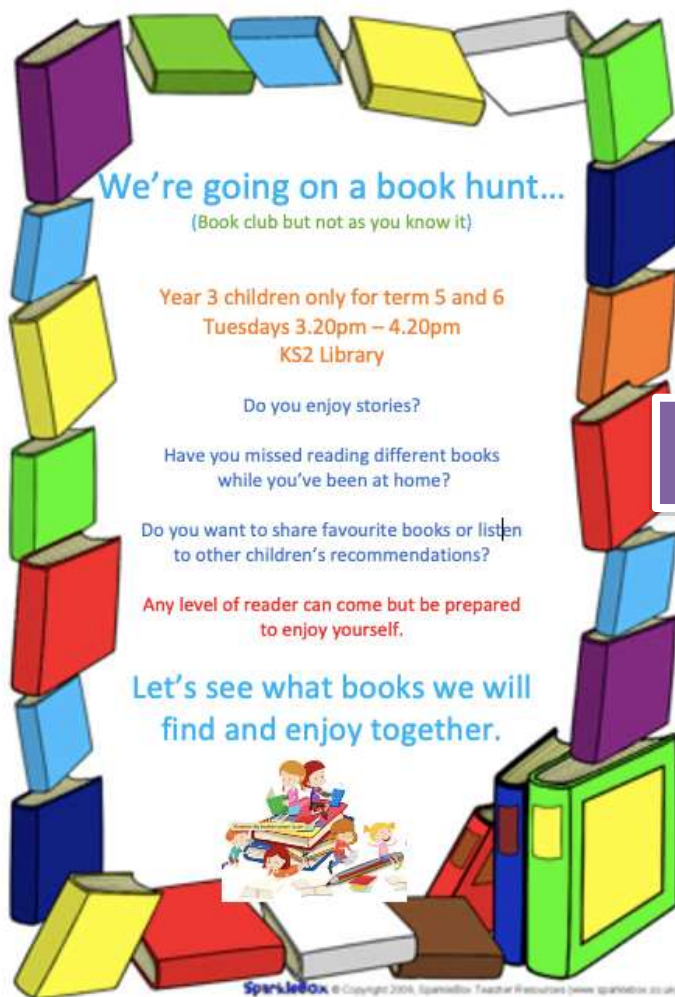
After the first week the children started to grow in confidence and as a group we

decided upon taking elements of the books to put into our own rhyme of 'We're going on a bear hunt'. The children were keen to brainstorm key features about the different books they had brought in or had chosen from the library and then collectively put these into a rhyme together. The children really enjoyed doing this together and then saying it and each week adding another verse, taking it in turns to write it down.

We would collectively ask the child 'What book have you got, what book have you got, what have you got, have you got, have you got?' Building excitement and suspense for the reveal of the book.

Each child had an opportunity to tell the group about their book, who the author and illustrator is, and which part of the book is their favourite and why. They also have the opportunity to read an extract from their book to the group. We would then open up the book on the table and look through it together, taking in the font, illustrations, layout, and any other key features.

I used prompt question cards for the children to choose and ask someone about their book if they were struggling to think of a question themselves.



We're going on a book  
hunt flyer



Our favourite books from session 1



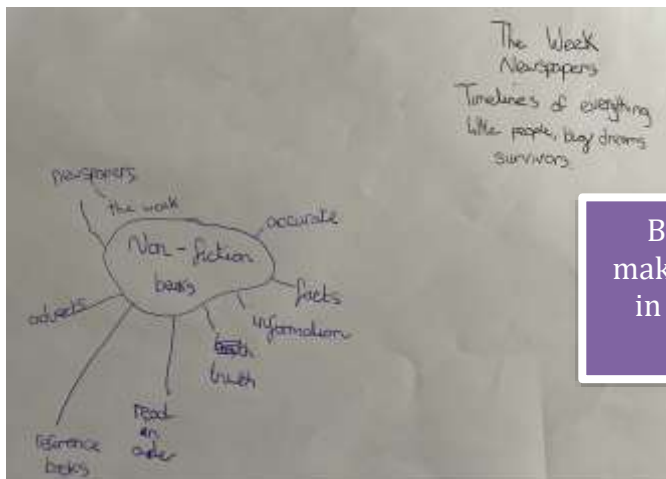
Our fiction books



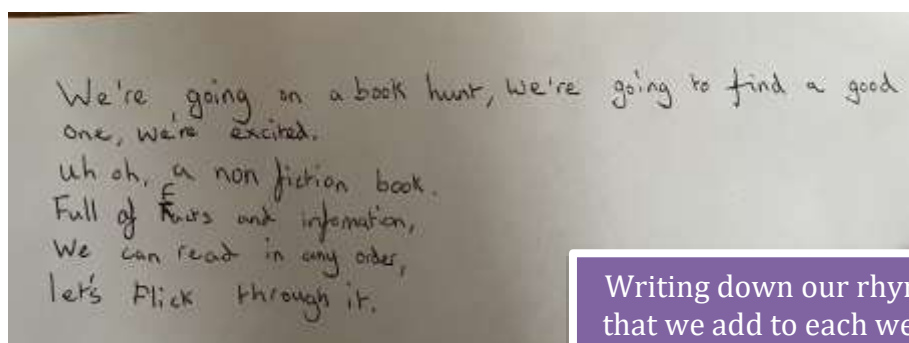
Our books about the world/environment



Our non-fiction books, we had a lot of the Little People, Big Dreams books



Brainstorming what makes a non-fiction book in preparation for our rhyme



Writing down our rhyme that we add to each week

Through the book club I wanted the children to become excited by physical books again, explore the text and illustrations and take recommendations from one another about books. Making books a subject to talk about and enjoy, creating more RfP amongst the children.

In conducting the group, it was a great opportunity as a trainee teacher to read more children's books based on the children's recommendations, different genres, broadening my understanding of what books they choose and why; this helps to inform my book choices for teaching practice. As part of the group, I liaised with the headteacher who said the book club could buy one book of the group's choice each term for the Key Stage 2 library.

## Impact

The impact of the 'We're going on a book hunt' club on children's RfP has been evident in their increased enthusiasm, confidence, and enjoyment of books. All members of the group are keen to discuss the books they are reading or books they have found that relate to the week's chosen genre, often discussing their choices with me ahead of the week's meeting. The children are now actively discussing books more widely, with the year 3 class teacher receiving ClassDojo messages with photos of

children with books to share with the class and even recommending books to the class teacher for the next class story.

**The year 3 teacher said, “members of your group are very different in our VIPERS sessions now, their confidence is shining through, providing more detailed answers and often supporting their talk partners”.**

Only recently one of the children in the group discussed ‘BookTok’. An online bookclub, where people share their favourite books in a meme filmed video of them reading a book, book recommendations or even reactions to events within the book. The best part of this child’s recommendation was not only the opportunity to develop my knowledge and understanding of children’s literature, but that I can use ideas from the site to inspire and engage children in our group. **The child said, “I thought you’d all like it because it's like what we do here”.**

I think the group has been successful in meeting the aims of the RfP project through creating a space where we discuss books in a different way to structured lessons, the freedom to explore different books, genres and make informed recommendations. I am really proud of the children and how much they have thrown themselves into the group and the enthusiasm they are showing. This is spreading through the whole year group, with more children wanting to join and contribute to our weekly themes. Through observations in lessons, I believe the children have made progress in literacy, specifically VIPERS reading sessions. They all demonstrate affective processes, behaviours and cognitive processes regarding reading as outline in the ROGO model evidence base (National Literacy Trust, 2017).

The impact this has had on myself as a trainee teacher has been incredible, being in a position to prioritise RfP, sharing and promoting a passion for reading with children. Having created an environment that not only encourages children to be inspired and excited about reading but has further fuelled my desire to gain more knowledge of books and the many differing ways I can use them as a teacher.

I now have a better understanding of what children look for when choosing books, how they interpret different texts and the pleasure they take from reading a book that is suited to them. I have far more confidence when recommending books to children from the library, having broadened my knowledge and understanding of books and differing genres.

RfP has fuelled my passion for children’s literature and strengthen my desire to continue to read widely across all genres and expand my knowledge in what could be deemed as a golden age in children’s literature.

## **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice**

The TaRs research has improved my practice as a trainee teacher in several ways, such as:

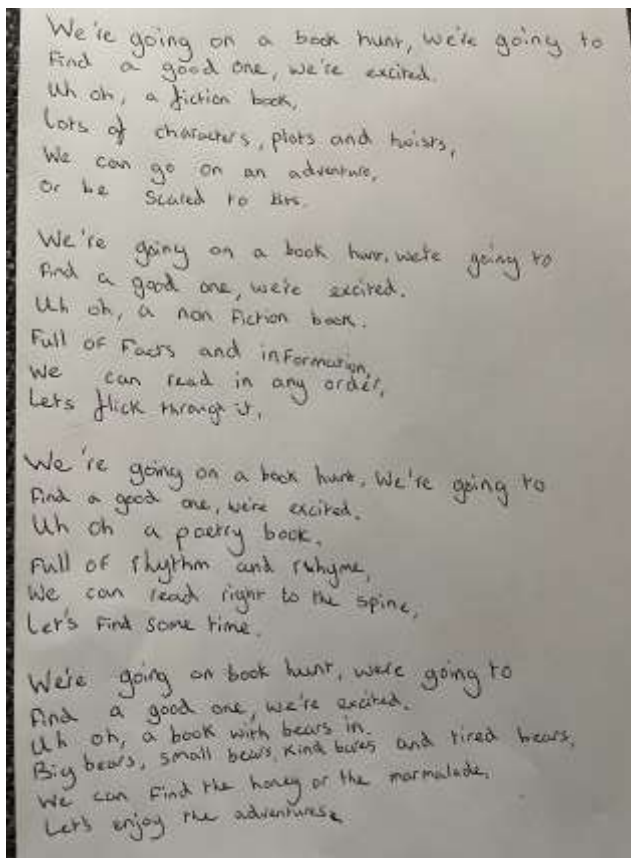
- Becoming a better teacher, acting as a reading role model for children, discussing recent children's literature and being able to make recommendations based upon this.
- Developing my subject knowledge of children's literature and children's choices of books.
- Improving my wellbeing and professional development, enjoying reminiscing whilst reading childhood favourite books and discovering new literature that can take me on a journey whilst escaping the stress and constraints of everyday life.
- Increasing my confidence to use different children's literature creatively in the classroom and to take forward to my future placement.

## Next steps

I have already planned to hold a Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 book club throughout next year, so we can keep the groups small and intermit but everyone has the opportunity.

To develop the ideas, incorporating 'BookTok' to engage children with 'on trend' themes. Possibly creating our own short clips and videos to share with different classes as part of the weekly online assemblies with recommendations.

Expand into viewing books in different ways from the library, a visit to the local library, kindle books, YouTube authors reading books and BookTok alongside physical books.



Four verses of our We're  
going on a book hunt  
rhyme