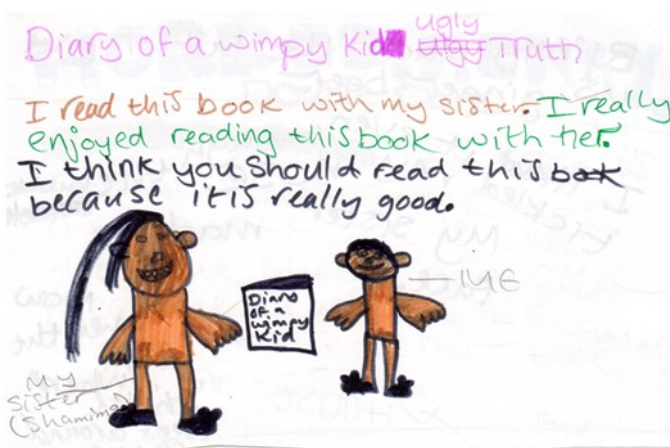




A recent study by the Institute of Education at the University of London found that children who read for pleasure perform significantly better at school than those who read less. Reading for pleasure had more effect than their parents' level of education on the cognitive development of the children studied. It was shown to improve performance in vocabulary, spelling and maths tests. (See the full report at: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk>)

In 2012/13, funded by the Siobhan Dowd Trust, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) worked with targeted schools in the London Borough of Southwark to set up Book clubs for Year 3 and 4 children to give the children involved greater access to books and reading, encourage them to read for pleasure more widely and evaluate the impact on their attainment in and enthusiasm for reading.

This guide shares the experiences of the schools, book group leaders, children and families involved in the project to give hints and tips to other schools and organisations thinking of setting up bookgroups as a strategy for raising attainment and pleasure in reading.



CLPE would like to thank the following Southwark schools in particular for their involvement in the project and for their presentations and evaluations that contributed to the making of this guide:  
**Snowsfields Primary, Rye Oak Primary, Michael Faraday Primary, Friars Primary, St Jude's Primary, Ivydale Primary, St George's Cathedral School**

## Supporting the set-up; what we did:

- ★ Drawing on its library and its wealth of experience in book selection, CLPE helped the schools choose and buy a selection of stimulating books appropriate for the age group and provided professional development for teachers and other staff to run two book clubs for Year 3 and 4 children in their schools. Children were supported to become enthusiastic and reflective readers in the sessions and each was given a reading journal in which to note their reflections and responses to books through writing and drawing.
- ★ Working with the teachers from the schools, a member of CLPE's staff supported the running of book clubs over a year during term time. Staff were trained in how to engage children in responding to texts, using ideas and strategies, including Book Talk, drawn from Aidan Chambers *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk* (Thimble Press, 1993), Literature Circles, drawn from Harvey Daniels *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* (Stenhouse, 2002) and the knowledge of creative activities that engage children in reading that CLPE has built up from its extensive research into reading in publications such as *The Reader in the Writer*, Barrs & Cork (CLPE, 2001) and *The Power of Reading Project* ([www.por.clpe.org.uk](http://www.por.clpe.org.uk)).
- ★ Schools were supported to choose carefully a group of children to focus on during the project; these included children who had little access to books at home, children who were not read with regularly outside of school and those who needed support in their motivation and enthusiasm to read in and outside of class.
- ★ The trained adults then selected appropriate times and places for their book clubs to run; this was individual to each school to ensure timings could be consistent and appropriate for the adults, children and parents.
- ★ Most book clubs started in November 2012, and a review meeting was held in June to evaluate the impact, with teachers presenting on this back to the group. The book groups had significant impact in all the schools involved, not just on the children in the groups but in whole school reflections and practice in reading.
- ★ The children involved really appreciated the fact that these books were new and special to them and having the additional time with an adult to talk about books in a less formal setting. It raised the profile of the more reluctant readers that were involved, both in their enthusiasm for reading but also in their confidence to be involved in discussions and reading in class, due to the focus on talk and reader response. In some schools, the classteacher also shared the book club book with the class after these children had seen it in the club, giving them the chance to be the experts and voice their ideas confidently. Many more children became critical readers and also more able and willing to talk about books with their peers; creating a buzz about reading.
- ★ Children particularly enjoyed the use of the reading journals; these were very different to 'class books' and provided the children with much more freedom in relation to the ways they presented their ideas and responses to books, e.g. Artwork and free writing. In some of the schools, this has now gone on to be whole-school practice as it was so effective.
- ★ At the end of the year, children involved received certificates to celebrate their involvement in the project and their commitment to the group.

**It gave the children a chance to express themselves, to read aloud to one another in a way guided reading doesn't allow. The children who lacked confidence developed it, and those who had it became more keen to read at home. The reading journals were really important to the children – they liked owning them, and not being told what to do in them!: Book Group Leader**

I loved reading *The Troll* because it was so funny, especially how the troll looked! I liked using my reading journal to draw a map of the journeys.

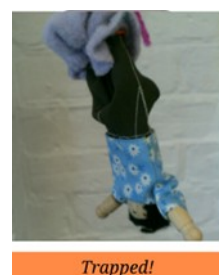
Book club encouraged me to read more at home and in school. I liked showing the group how I read with expression! I would love to do it again but with even longer books!: Year 3 Boy



### Hints and Tips for setting up your own bookgroup; what we learnt:

#### Successes:

- ★ Give the group a special identity—like a special club. One school chose the name Jabberwockies. In the first session, the children made pledges to the ‘Jabberwocky’ and agreed ‘rules’.
- ★ Explore exciting follow up activities to hook and keep the children interested and to enhance ideas and understanding of the texts. One group had the task of collecting things for a disgusting meal for the Troll in Julia Donaldson’s *The Troll* (Macmillan, 2010) and took photographs of their gruesome concoctions to put in their reading journals! Another group designed and made traps to catch the poachers in Alexander McCall Smith’s *Akimbo and the Elephants* (Egmont, 2005).
- ★ It helps if there are small snacks and drinks to create that relaxed ‘at home’ feeling during the session.
- ★ Picking books in a series was effective in children then going on to read the rest of the books in that series. Alex T. Smith’s *Claude in the City* (Hodder, 2011) was a particularly popular choice.
- ★ Investigate ways to support the spread of enthusiasm; using Year 5 & 6 children as Book Group leaders was a strategy one school used to open up opportunities for keen readers to have their own book clubs after they heard about the targeted book club.
- ★ Recognition of the book club’s achievements through special assemblies, a special display in a whole school areas or rewarding with attendance certificates or a book token at the end of term gave children pride in what they were doing.



#### Things to consider:

- ★ Pick a time that is convenient for parents, staff and the children themselves; children will not be encouraged when the club is at football or golden time! Parents may find before or after school difficult if they have work or childcare commitments.
- ★ Ensure that book group members class teachers are aware of their involvement in the club, its aims and ethos so that they can support the work too and can feed in their response to the children’s development.
- ★ Some groups allowed the children to take books home between sessions, however, this provided a problem if they were not bought back for the next session.



## Impact:

- ★ The children involved became more active readers, choosing to read for themselves and became more willing and able to talk about and share books with peers on a social level. This was more natural for the children and “not because we were being asked to”.
- ★ Following input on book-talk with teachers, the children became more reflective and critical readers.
- ★ Responses to books from the children were much more positive than had been observed previously. They particularly liked the freedom of the open reading journals. These were “different to class books” and provided opportunities for freedom in relation to the ways children presented their ideas and responses to books.
- ★ The children themselves became aware of how their language and vocabulary were being developed through reading. They felt freer to ask for clarification of unknown vocabulary in the informal groups and to discuss word meanings. One child remarked “I really learned some difficult words because I was reading harder books and we read books we hadn’t read before.”
- ★ Children’s wider confidence to talk and participate in lessons outside of the book groups grew due to the amount of discussion and responsive talk they had been involved in during the informal, small group sessions.
- ★ Parents were supportive of the groups. Many of them were coming to school to talk about impact it had made on their children and to ask about the books involved, other books and libraries. These were often parents who had previously been observed as less engaged with their children’s reading.
- ★ Children involved wanted the groups to continue running next year.
- ★ All children made academic progress over the course of the sessions. Almost all the children made 2 or 3 National Curriculum sub-levels of progress from November to June. A large number of children made more progress over the two terms than they had in the previous whole year.

## Wider school impact on reading and learning:

- ★ The enthusiasm for the book clubs spread through the schools involved. Other classes and children were keen to join or to have their own book group.
- ★ The open reading journal approach has been adapted in classes to encourage enthusiasm and reflective reading in a more informal way that will engage children.
- ★ Schools are keen to make these book clubs self-sustaining, investigating ways to draw in community partners to support the running of clubs or to invest in a wider range of books to extend and open up more book clubs.
- ★ Class teachers of children involved have noticed the difference on the targeted children back in class, commenting on improvements in enthusiasm and attitude towards reading, motivation to read independently and reading fluency.

