



# Quality counts

Want to engage and motivate children as readers and writers? Then choose brilliant books, and use them brilliantly, says **Charlotte Hacking**

**T**he use of high-quality books within the reading curriculum should be at the heart of any school's approach to engaging and supporting children to become motivated and independent readers. Quite simply, if children enjoy reading, they will do it more frequently and become better at it. So, from CLPE's research into the role of core books for teaching English – and through our work with schools that have implemented this approach – what have we learnt about how to choose and use texts in the classroom?

First, it's important that schools have a collection of books from a wide and diverse range of authors, illustrators, genres and forms. There are various resources that can help with this: CLPE's Core Books Online database contains books that have been tried, tested and found to work successfully in classrooms, while websites such as

Books for Keeps ([booksforkeeps.co.uk](http://booksforkeeps.co.uk)) and Letterbox Library ([letterboxlibrary.com](http://letterboxlibrary.com)) and magazines such as Carousel ([carouselguide.co.uk](http://carouselguide.co.uk)) share regular reviews of new children's books and offer further suggestions for a diverse range of choices.

It's also essential that staff become familiar with the ways in which different books can be used to support a variety of reading experiences. Build up a bank of titles that you enjoy, and that you know work in particular contexts. For example, consider stories which lend themselves especially well to reading aloud, those that can be used to support teaching, and those that are better for groups or for individuals.

If all those who work in schools know about the best children's literature available they will be able to share that with the youngsters they support, and encourage them to be inspired and motivated to read for themselves. Having a bulletin board in the staffroom or a regular

slot in staff meetings for teachers to share good books they've read or used will help spread knowledge of good books. A dedicated bookshelf where new books can be sourced and displayed in a central area will help teachers to keep abreast of new titles available, and contribute to making books more accessible and irresistible to the whole school community.

## Active involvement

Secondly, when choosing and using books for teaching, the ideal is to plan a range of activities that allow deep understanding and explore different genres with a view to enable writing for purpose. Storyboards revealing the content of a book visually and captivates children. Reading together, engaging in talk about the book, and drama around it, will draw out more understanding pupils might not otherwise have had. For example:

1 Using Chris Judge's *The Lonely Beast* (Andersen Press, 2011), 'Ro Wall' is a perfect introductory text to get children to understand the character of the Beast by others. An imposing figure strikes fear into the citizens of the town on his arrival. Observing this scene through the illustration which comes towards the end of the story is an ideal starting point for the children to look at the Beast through the eyes of others before learning his story and developing empathy for the character and his feelings. Role on the character is a technique that uses a displayed character to record feelings (feelings) and outward appearance (appearance) at various stopping points throughout the story. Using a diary format at each of the stopping points all track changes in the character's emotional journey. This text also offers opportunity to produce poetry and non-chronological reports about the different scenes the Beast meets on his journey, and non-fictional articles to convey the Beast's story.



Illustration: Chris Judge, from *The Lonely Beast* (Andersen Press, 2011)

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