

Reading for Pleasure in 2020

Learning about
literacy teaching
during the pandemic

March 2021



CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

www.clpe.org.uk

What teachers told us about the importance of reading and stories in 2020



"The children seem to have a greater appreciation for story – being at home for so long has made them reflect more deeply and value human experiences other than their own."



"Books and stories provided a sense of togetherness when it can feel awfully isolating. It's provided content for conversations and a shared dialogue."



"It has been a time to be a group again. Brings back a sense of community and unity. Friendships and nurturing. Shows we still care about our little ones."



"I believe that reading has really helped maintain their mental health as well as its usual benefits to learning."



"It has kept the profile of reading for pleasure at the forefront. I continually remind children that reading is their 'super power'! It has also been invaluable to ensuring progress but also has had a positive impact on the children's mental health."

Reading for Pleasure

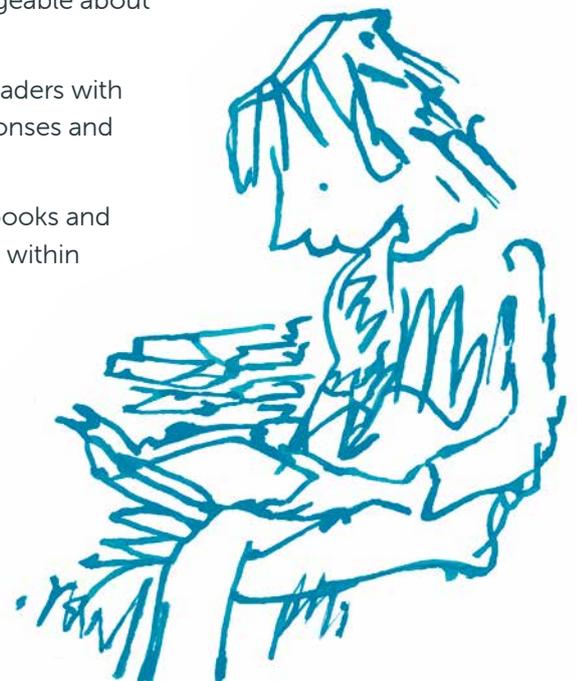
At CLPE we do the work we do because we believe, and the research shows us, that being literate changes your life. The research also shows us that if you are a literate child who reads for pleasure then this has more impact on your future life chances than any other factor. Encouraging reading for pleasure is a social justice issue.

We have been working with thousands of primary school teachers throughout this strange and unpredictable year. We have witnessed the way in which teachers have adapted their planning, their pedagogy and their approaches in order to ensure that children receive high quality literacy learning, wherever that is taking place and under whatever circumstances.

This research report shares the outcomes of a survey that we conducted in January 2021. We wanted to find out how teachers are coping with the demands of primary literacy teaching and to see how the principles of developing Reading for Pleasure are being enacted in primary schools during lockdown. The questions in the survey were guided by our own research into Reading for Pleasure which identifies factors which will be present in a school with a successful 'Reading for Pleasure' culture.

These include:

- Developing an ethos and an environment that excites, enthuses, inspires and values
- High quality texts with depth and interest in story, character, illustration, vocabulary, structure and subject matter
- A read aloud programme
- Teachers who are knowledgeable about children's literature
- Creating a community of readers with opportunities to share responses and opinions
- Planning for talking about books and stories, providing structures within which to do this
- Working with authors and author/illustrators to understand the process of creating books.



What teachers told us about access to books



"In the 1st partial school closure, we asked parents to support children in taking multiple books from the school library and made bespoke parcels for vulnerable children – this cleared our library!"



"With no notice for the 2nd partial school closure, we have prepared packs for collection and isolated these for 72 hrs. Those that have not been collected, especially class guided reading books, will be distributed by the leadership team to families."



"We quarantine books coming in and out of school so that we keep all children, families and staff safe. It is important because some children have not got access to the internet so we need to provide them with resources for this."



"Quarantining books over the weekend to re-share. Giving books away regularly and asking, for those who could, to return once back in school. We gifted books by posting to every child in our school."

Main findings from the research

Access to books from school at home during the pandemic

A quarter of teachers are worried about children's access to books being a barrier to their reading development. Many teachers identified it as the main barrier not just to developing reading for pleasure but to children's literacy achievement overall.

This was even higher in respondents from the North West and South West where a third of teachers were worried about children's access to books.

Percentage of teachers worried about children's access to books and reading material	
East of England	27%
East Midlands	17%
London	20%
North East	27%
North West	31%
South East	18%
South West	31%
West Midlands	21%
Yorkshire and Humber	25%

Nearly **60% of children have been able to take books home from school during the pandemic.** This is very positive as we know the importance of children having access to books. Of course, this means that **40% of children have not been able to take books home** and have either had to rely on having their own books at home or solely on electronic versions of texts. A small percentage of teachers told us that they are using a public library to support children's access to books.

This picture was similar across the country although **in London fewer than half the children in schools have been able to take books home.**

	Able to take books home	Not able to take books home	Use public library
East of England	61%	39%	0%
East Midlands	64%	31%	5%
London	49%	49%	2%
North East	63%	36%	1%
North West	61%	36%	3%
South East	65%	33%	2%
South West	59%	35%	6%
West Midlands	54%	44%	1%
Yorkshire and Humber	60%	37%	4%

What teachers told us about access to books



"We isolated the books before they went back out – this did often become a problem as we did not have enough books."



"It is challenging! We have two online reading platforms – so kept promoting those, plus giving access to online libraries and whatever came along free. Access to devices is a challenge in our community. There are also some households with very few paper copies of books to access."



"Many of our children do not have books at home and cannot get to a library so everything has to be provided by us. Have started an 'anyone can read a book', video it and it goes on our Facebook page and website for the rest of the school to read."



"It has been a lot harder to get children to read at home as many do not have access to books. We are having to find free online subscriptions for e-books to allow children the chance to read. It is of huge importance and we want children to be able to access many texts."

Our data suggests that **the younger the child, the less likely they have been able to take books from school home.**

	Able to take books home	Not able to take books home	Use public library
Early Years	52%	46%	2%
Y1/2	53%	47%	0%
Y3/4	63%	34%	3%
Y5/6	56%	41%	3%

There was a clear difference evident between the first and the second school 'closure'. Schools felt that they had had time to prepare for the Spring 20 arrangements but had not had the same preparation time in January 21. They also talked about having 'run out' of book stock by January 21.

Primary schools have been endlessly and relentlessly inventive in the ways in which they have supported children to have access to books. **Where schools have been able to send books home they have developed a range of different systems including complicated and inventive quarantine systems** in order that they can rotate and distribute their books to as many children as possible and make the most of their limited book stock

Many schools have done a combination of things and are obviously working incredibly hard to find as many ways as possible to get books to children. This has included buying books to give children as gifts or delivering books to children's homes.

Ways in which schools that were able to send books home managed the process:

System of quarantined books to enable children to choose and change books	460	68%
Books taken home before lockdown or choice made by teacher	98	15%
Rationing – only enough for some children	35	5%
Used e-books and online platforms	29	4%
Gave children books to keep or bought books specifically for lockdown	14	2%
Home delivery	10	1%
Photocopies of texts in packs	3	0%

Teachers did use online books to support reading for pleasure but this does come with its own difficulties. Teachers cited 'screen fatigue', access to the internet or appropriate devices and the difficulty of engaging with a book online.

What teachers told us about reading aloud



"The books the children may have at home might be limited but we have been pre-recording stories, doing live reading on Zoom, encouraging children to read their e-books and holding an inter school competition.

We also have some parents being Mystery Readers either pre-recorded or live on Zoom."



"Children and parents have really enjoyed engaging with the stories we have read to them in our recorded sessions. The fact that parents have 'listened in' to these sessions has raised their interest in texts we use and several parents have bought the stories we have been reading after their child has shown an interest. This has not been financially possible for many parents, however."



"It gives the time for children to switch off from the current pandemic and be absorbed in a book. Sharing the screen with electronic copies of books works well so that the children can easily see the text and illustrations."



"Every member of staff recorded a bedtime story that was released every Friday on YouTube. The children were encouraged to read their own and submit them for the YouTube channel as well. We ran out of Fridays!!"

Reading aloud

Most teachers (82%) are finding ways to read aloud to their classes at least weekly. The majority are reading daily (58%). The most popular way of doing this was by a pre-recorded video but there were also many examples of live storytimes where families could join in, assembly type story times led by senior leaders and one to one or small group remote stories.

The pattern was similar across the year groups although teachers were more likely to read more frequently with the youngest children.

Reading aloud by age group

	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Not at all
All	58%	23%	13%	5%
Early Years	68%	25%	8%	0%
Y1/2	54%	30%	13%	3%
Y3/4	56%	22%	17%	6%
Y5/6	61%	19%	15%	5%

Reading aloud by region

	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Not at all
East of England	56%	24%	10%	10%
East Midlands	59%	24%	14%	3%
London	55%	25%	16%	5%
North East	57%	27%	10%	6%
North West	59%	26%	11%	4%
South East	61%	24%	11%	4%
South West	60%	17%	19%	4%
West Midlands	70%	20%	9%	1%
Yorkshire and Humber	63%	18%	13%	6%

Teachers in the West Midlands were most likely to read daily and London teachers were least likely to read to their classes daily.

Teachers were clear about the benefits of a read aloud programme and planning it into the weekly routine was definitely seen as a priority.



Top five books for reading aloud in year group phases EYFS and Y1/2

EYFS

Burglar Bill

Janet and Allan Ahlberg

If I Had a Dinosaur

Gabby Dawnay and Alex Barrow

Wonky Donkey

Craig Smith and Katz Cowley

Handa's Surprise

Eileen Browne

Man on the Moon

Simon Bartram

Y1/2

George's Marvellous Medicine

Roald Dahl

Beegu

Alexis Deacon

Traction Man

Mini Grey

James and the Giant Peach

Roald Dahl

The Adventures of Egg Box Dragon

Richard Adams

Authors, illustrators and texts

It is clear that teachers have engaged with a wide range of online content produced by professional authors and illustrators. Many said that they used this content to engage children and as a part of their Reading for Pleasure programmes. It was also seen as accessible to parents and useful 'enrichment' content.

The teachers who responded to this survey were very keen to share a wide range of texts that they were reading to their classes or that they had found useful or particularly engaging.

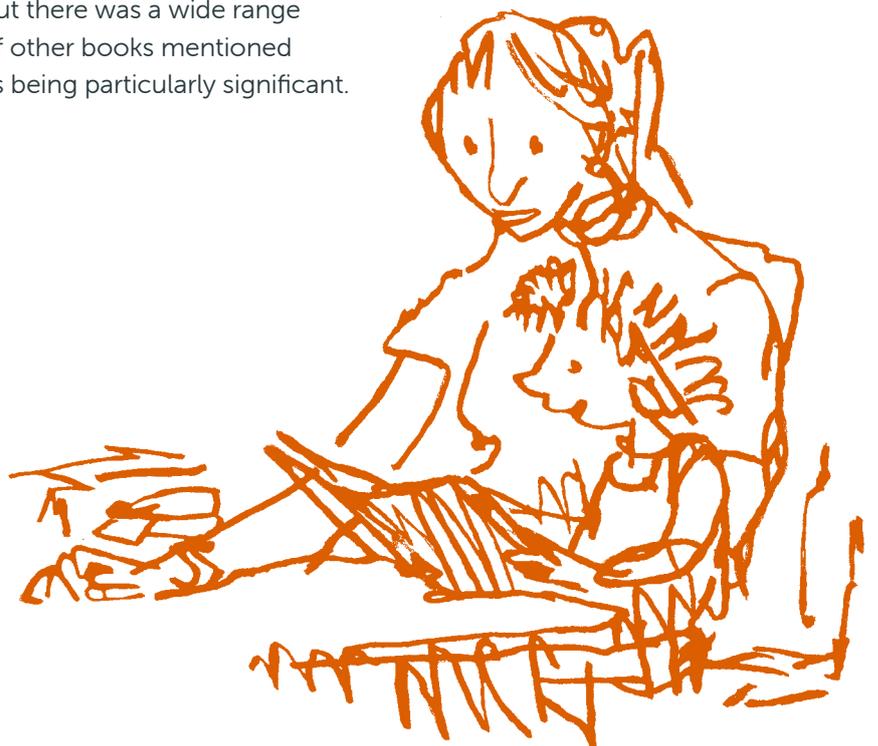
- **EYFS teachers** named **71** different titles
- **Y1/2 teachers** named **156** different titles
- **Y3/4 teachers** named **132** different titles
- **Y5/6 teachers** named **165** different titles

The top five books for reading aloud in each year group phase are listed on the left and continued on the following page.

Teachers were asked to name the most important book to them/their class in 2020. The top five books mentioned were:

- **Here We Are**, Oliver Jeffers
- **The Boy at the Back of the Class**, Onjali Q Raúf
- **Harry Potter**, J K Rowling
- **The Gruffalo**, Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler
- **The Book of Hopes**, ed. Katherine Rundell

But there was a wide range of other books mentioned as being particularly significant.



Top five books for reading aloud in year group phases Y3/4 and Y5/6

Y3/4

Pugs of the Frozen North
Philip Reeve and Sarah McIntyre

The Boy who Grew Dragons
Andy Shepherd, illustrated by Sara Ogilvie

The Explorer
Katherine Rundell

James and the Giant Peach
Roald Dahl

How to Train your Dragon
Cressida Cowell

Y5/6

Holes
Louis Sachar

Cosmic
Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Letters from the Lighthouse
Emma Carroll

Kensuke's Kingdom
Michael Morpurgo

Wonder
R. J. Palacio

Teachers were asked to name authors, illustrators or poets that they had recommended or asked children to watch read aloud or doing an activity. **69% of teachers had recommended a video of an author reading aloud and 38% of teachers had recommended a video of an author led activity.** Teachers of children in the EYFS were much less likely to use these kind of resources.

Teachers in schools where the children were able to take books from school home were more likely to ask children to watch videos of authors reading aloud and to recommend that children took part in author led activities.

Schools where children were NOT able to take books home

Percentage of schools that had asked children to watch authors reading aloud	64%
Percentage of schools that asked children to take part in activities with authors and illustrators	42%

Schools where children WERE able to take books home

Percentage of schools that had asked children to watch authors reading aloud	73%
Percentage of schools that asked children to take part in activities with authors and illustrators	48%

The teachers named 132 different authors, illustrators or poets. 22 of these authors were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background and 51 were women.

The top 30 most recommended authors were:

Michael Rosen: 245	Mini Grey: 40
Oliver Jeffers: 192	Neil Gaiman: 39
Julia Donaldson: 185	Maz Evans: 31
David Walliams: 168	Malorie Blackman: 30
Roald Dahl: 134	Tom Palmer: 30
Michael Morpurgo: 117	Frank Cottrell Boyce: 29
Rob Biddulph: 95	Karl Nova: 26
Katherine Rundell: 85	J K Rowling: 26
Cressida Cowell: 83	David Almond: 26
Onjali Q Raúf: 57	Abi Elphinstone: 25
Emma Carroll: 47	Shaun Tan: 25
Philip Pullman: 45	Tom Fletcher: 24
Jacqueline Wilson: 44	Louis Sachar: 24
Quentin Blake: 44	Chris Riddell: 23
Joseph Coelho: 42	Nicola Davies: 22

What teachers told us about developing reading for pleasure during the pandemic



“Children love stories. Even at home with the distraction of devices and toys. It has been difficult to reach some of our readers that we are most concerned about in terms of getting them to regularly read aloud. But all children have had access to class teachers sharing stories.”



“They were keen to read when back in school but some families couldn’t prioritise books and so some had few books to read whilst others had lots.”



“Teachers personally reading books to their class works well – they love seeing familiar faces. E-books online don’t seem to engage the children as much.”



“Our school culture pre-pandemic set a great precedent for reading for pleasure and we haven’t had to change much to keep this up.”



“It is harder when you don’t see all the children all the time to be able to instil that pleasure of reading. When online with them it is a bit easier though. You can talk about a book with them and try and get them wanting to know more. Although their access to a book at home may be limited.”

Reading for Pleasure pedagogy during the pandemic

Teachers are finding a number of ways to implement the key components of reading for pleasure and are being inventive with technology about how they do this.

We asked teachers to tell us what they have learnt about promoting reading for pleasure during the pandemic, we asked them to identify the things that have worked and the barriers that have made it difficult to do.

The free text responses were wide ranging but could be grouped into some broad categories.



What Works	
Planning for talking about books and stories, providing structures within which to do this	240
A read aloud programme	175
Online environments and tools that create enthusiasm, interest and excitement in books and reading	89
Using high quality texts and teachers who are knowledgeable about children’s literature	60
Facilitating support at home – including books at home, support and encouragement for parents, creating a community of readers that goes beyond the school and into homes	38
	602

Barriers	
Access to reading material in general and books in particular, many teachers were really worried about this and identified it as a major barrier not just to developing reading for pleasure but to children’s literacy achievement overall	274
Lack of opportunity to talk about books or time to spend on reading because of all the other pressures	84
Too much screen time which was actually switching children off or difficulties with screens/IT/remote support – or just access to IT at home	84
	442

What teachers told us about successful literacy activities during the pandemic



"Using picture books, images or videos as stimuli for writing have been really useful in supporting our children to continue to be creative in their writing. Modelled writing by our teachers has been successful in continuing to set high expectations for literacy outcomes in remote learning."



"Activities need to be more structured than in the classroom with more emphasis on written rather than verbal comprehension. Have based all literacy activities around the texts."



"As a senior leader, I introduced a whole school approach to delivering 'Here We Are' by Oliver Jeffers. For some teachers he was a new author to discover. For me to see this come together across all age ranges was amazing. We felt together and not alone. The children were able to reflect and appreciate. We plan to use 'What We'll Build' when we are all back together again."



"Acting out parts of a story, drawing favourite part of story, creative activities-design and make own dinosaur."

We asked schools where they got their recommendations for the books and authors that they used in their classrooms and their planning. There were some clear categories indicating where teachers were finding out about books.

Where schools get their recommendations from	
Charity or Not for Profit Literacy Organisation	288
Books that link with school topics	209
Commercial scheme or organisation	157
Vote or children's choice	124
DfE/Oak National	67
Social Media (all platforms)	43
Book Shop or online retailer	12

There were many other places that teachers went for ideas including: libraries, publications, looked in their own schools, asked colleagues, were told what to use in their planning, own reading, friends. These all had fewer than 12 mentions.

Planning around a text

The vast majority (86%) of teachers who responded to this survey based their literacy planning around a text.

The majority of teachers were still able to do this during the pandemic.

However, they were more likely to still be doing this in the EY and Y1/2 than in KS2.

		EY	Y1/2	Y3/4	Y5/6
Base planning around a text normally	86%	87%	96%	86%	86%
Base planning around a text during the pandemic	71%	80%	86%	68%	65%



About the Research

This report is based on the responses of 1162 people who filled in our survey in January 2021. The respondents were from across the regions and taught in all year groups of primary schools. We did have respondents from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but the numbers from these countries were too low for us to be able to draw conclusions about the other nations of the UK so we have limited this report to the responses from schools in England.

The breakdown of responses is as follows:

Responses by age group

Early Years	102	9%
Y1/2	227	20%
Y3/4	192	17%
Y5/6	293	25%
All primary ages	313	27%
Secondary	35	3%
	1162	

Responses by region

London	244	21%
South East	215	19%
North West	117	10%
South West	108	9%
East of England	109	9%
Yorkshire and Humber	109	9%
North East	86	7%
West Midlands	81	7%
East Midlands	59	5%
Wales	21	2%
Scotland	12	1%
Northern Ireland	1	0
	1162	

We are aware that this is a survey that relies on people self-referring. The survey was publicised through CLPE email and social media therefore the respondents are likely to be teachers with an interest in literacy teaching and children's literature. They are also more likely to be teachers who understand the importance of reading for pleasure and the pedagogical approaches that are effective.





CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an independent UK charity dedicated to raising the literacy achievement of children by putting quality children's literature at the heart of all learning. It is a charity with a national and international reputation for excellent literacy training, teaching resources and research. CLPE has worked with Primary Schools for nearly 50 years and during 2020, supported over 6,000 schools and 500,000 teachers. CLPE was the winner of the 2019 Eleanor Farjeon Award and was named Southwark Charity of the Year in 2020.

We are so grateful for all the support we receive from teachers, schools, publisher, authors, illustrators and more, but we would like to say a big thank you to the Arts Council England, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, City Bridge Trust and the Garfield-Weston Foundation for their invaluable support during these tough times.

Contact us

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
Webber Street, London SE1 8QW

www.clpe.org.uk

020 7401 3382/3

info@clpe.org.uk

Follow us

 Twitter: @clpe1

 Facebook: CLPE

 Instagram: clpe.org.uk

 LinkedIn: CLPE

 YouTube: CLPE

Illustrations © Quentin Blake. Report design: Ben Cotterill.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**