

Poetry Fortnight (Poetry Not Perfection)



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Context



- Bucklesham Primary School is a small school in the heart of Suffolk, with links to the archaeologist Basil Brown (of Sutton Hoo fame). The school has just under 100 children on roll and is part of the FOSS (Federation of Small Schools). There are mixed age classes and an award-winning gardening club.
- The School Development Plan links to the promotion of Reading for Pleasure for all children.

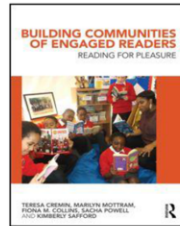


OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

To develop children's RfP effectively, the TaRs research showed that teachers need to develop:

1. Considerable knowledge of children's literature & other texts
2. Knowledge of children as readers
3. A RfP pedagogy:
 - ❖ social reading environments
 - ❖ reading aloud
 - ❖ informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations
 - ❖ independent reading time
4. As Reading Teachers - teachers who read and readers who teach
5. Reciprocal and interactive reading communities.

(Cremin et al., 2014)



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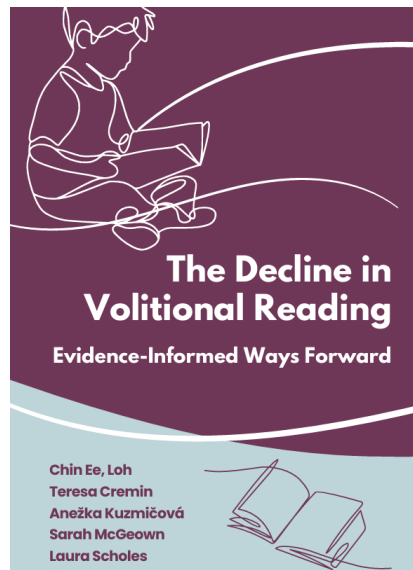
OU/ UKLA Teachers as Readers (TaRs) Research.

1. Considerable knowledge of children's literature & other texts.

3. A RfP pedagogy:

❖ Reading Aloud

(Cremin et al., 2014)



The Decline in Volitional Reading: Evidence-Informed Ways Forward

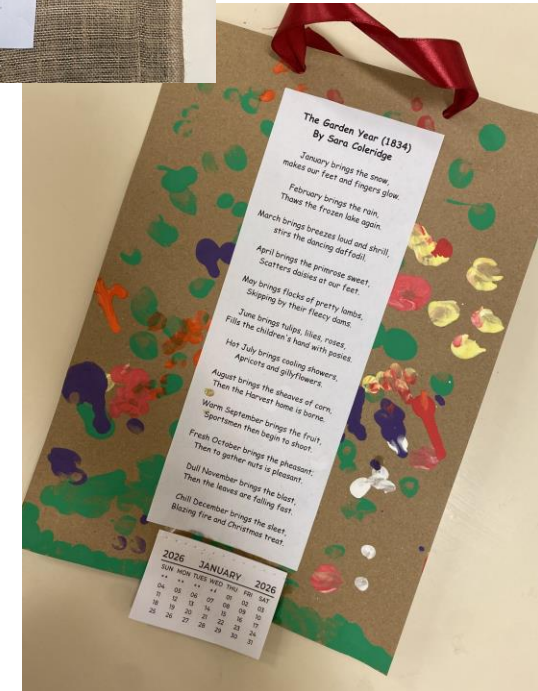
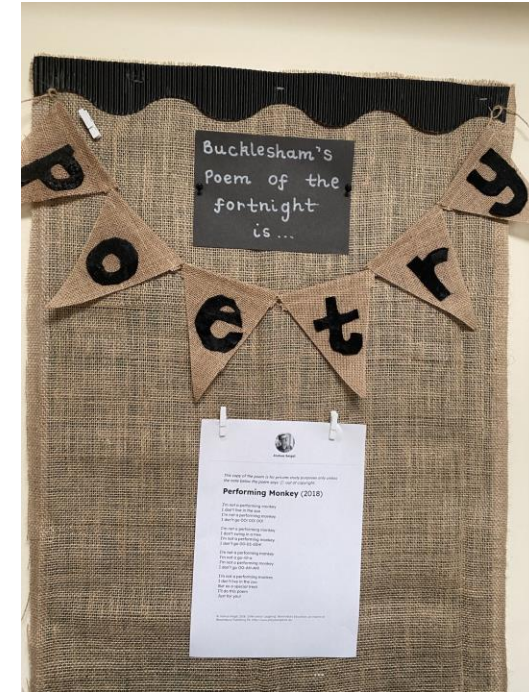
Myth 2: Young People Should Only Read Novels. *Diverse genres support reading: When children reflect on what different text types add to their lives, the results can be surprising... which particularly benefits marginalised children . Similarly, encyclopaedias and other nonfiction support peer sharing better than novels thanks to their prominent visuals and shorter text segments . Teachers should therefore invite young readers to choose from diverse genres other than novels to foster their growth and self-initiated creative activities.*

Myth 3: Reading is Solitary. *Motivation is social. Successful school-based communities are characterized by high degrees of interaction and reciprocity... Sharing reading experiences: Sharing the experience of reading with others prompts closer reading and enhances the depth of young people's understanding of texts . Enabling child-led conversations about being a reader and texts matters . Informal interactions nurture social and relational connections between readers and strengthen children's interest in and commitment to volitional reading.*

(Loh et al., 2025)

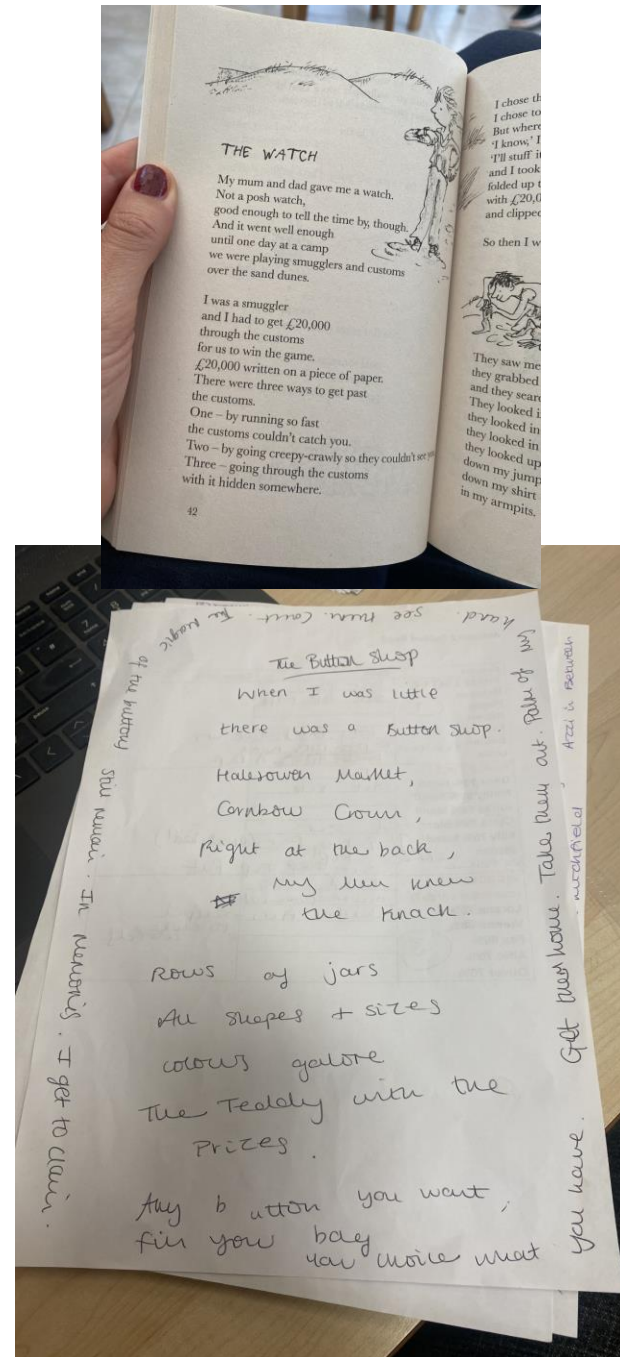
Aims

- ✓ To get a poetry buzz going across school.
- ✓ To get poetry read more frequently in classrooms.
- ✓ To begin to build a bank of poems that staff and children know.
- ✓ To inspire children to read and write poetry.



Outline

- ✓ I sent out an email to staff to explain that every two weeks I would email a poem. The expectation would be that they read it aloud in classes at least once in that fortnight. They could also perform it, learn it by heart or link learning. I reassured staff that the baseline was to just read it. I was mindful of workload and adding to timetables and vocalised this.
- ✓ I began sharing a poem every two weeks with the staff.
- ✓ As the EYFS teacher I began performing these poems in my EYFS class. In EYFS I began to link play opportunities with the poems.
- ✓ The fortnightly poem began to be included on our weekly newsletter to parents/carers.
- ✓ Poetry was read out more often in assemblies. I performed several poems to the whole school, *Platform* (2011) by Michael Rosen was a highlight. I played a steam train video behind me and reflected on *The Railway Children* platform scene after reading the poem.
- ✓ We held our first *Poetry by Heart* festival. Children were encouraged to learn a poem by heart and then to perform it in a special assembly. Seventeen children took part from EYFS-Y6, and several staff members also took part, including our Headteacher.
- ✓ At the weekly book club, Bucklesham Bookworms, I would sometimes write poems alongside the children. I modelled how to be a writer: pondering, playing with word options, editing and performing it.
- ✓ I continued to email a poem to the whole school every fortnight, looking for seasonal poems or poems that linked with a current topic/interest.



Outline

- ✓ In the summer term I checked in with teachers and asked for feedback about the poetry fortnight. Staff were honest which I value highly, each teacher saw the benefit of reading poetry aloud but had found it hard to fit in. Initially I was disappointed by this feedback. On reflecting on it I decided to spend the summer term visiting the classrooms to perform the poetry that had worked well in EYFS.
- ✓ I took a selection of poems and several linked objects, such as: bubbles, *Little Red Riding Hood* book, seashells and telephones.

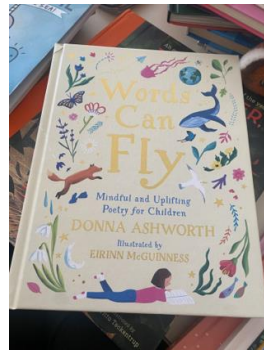
Poems
<i>Performing Monkey</i> By Joshua Seigal (2018)
<i>The Book</i> by Michael Rosen (2010)
<i>'Please do not feed the animals...'</i> by Robert Hull (2010)
<i>Bubble</i> by Kate Wakeling (2026)
<i>Words That Make Me Smile</i> by Laura Mucha (2020)



- ✓ I performed the poems to the classes. Every class responded well: laughing, commenting, exploring the objects and the teachers all stayed to watch. One teacher even performed a rap off by heart at the end of my session. Children asked me questions about the poems, the objects and even my 'accent'! I told each class about how poems aid memory. Along with discussing their own poems which several children across school now regularly write.

Impact

- I was expecting that the impact would be on teachers, however, I think the impact is more on my leadership. I learnt towards the end of the project that I needed to react to the feedback positively. I did this and didn't give up. It was quite scary going to read to the older children and to perform. However, with each class there was a moment of shift, when smiles and giggles began, from that point on I knew I had engaged them and their teachers. One of the teachers came to see me to tell me she had read our poem of the fortnight to her class and that she wants to perform in next year's *Poetry By Heart* festival. Another teacher has lots of poetry books in her book corner, and I've found out another teacher loves rap poems.
- I learnt that you can plan for impact but sometimes the impact is in conversations with children about a poem they have written and engaging parents in informal poetry talk. Impact is in children using a phrase from a poem informally and smiling. It did not look how I imagined, it was not perfect but it was poetry, which was the aim. We do have poetry alive in our school, being performed and giggled over.
- I had learnt a WW1 poem for *Poetry by Heart*, *Violets (April 1915)* by Roland Leighton (1915). I performed this poem several times in assemblies and I discussed the WW1 soldiers from our village who went to our school. I had several KS2 boys approach me about this and we found a shared love of WW1. I began to share WW1 books with two of the boys over the summer term, one of these families then shared this text between family members. Poetry helped connect me to children with similar reading interests.
- I have learnt that poetry is messy and the leadership of it can be, but if we keep performing it and sharing it, it becomes alive in our school. Poetry demands imperfection but to always be performed. That is something all schools should strive towards – less perfection and more poetry, giving it a go and performing with gusto.



Next Steps

- I am going to continue sharing poems but include some shorter poems and poems from the *Poetry By Heart* video performances.
- I will visit classes again to perform poems, potentially in the Spring term when I have a new bank of poems to perform.
- I would like to start a Poetry Club for the budding poets across school, to encourage their writing for pleasure, I will write alongside them.

