

Poetry Play



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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.

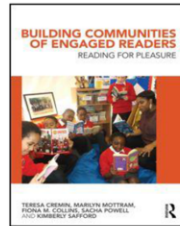


OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

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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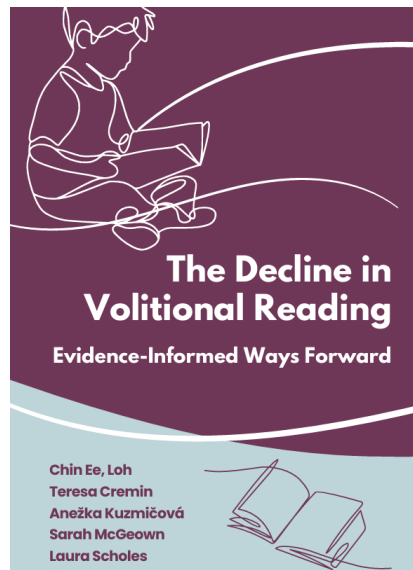
OU/ UKLA Teachers as Readers (TaRs) Research.

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

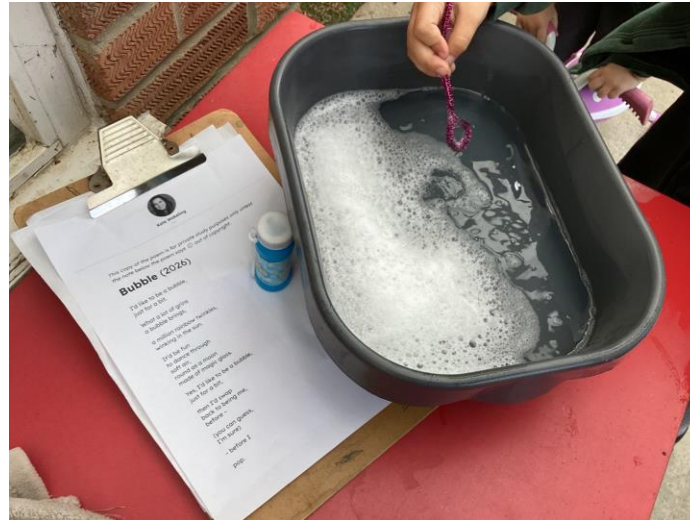
Myth 2: Young People Should Only Read Novels. *Diverse genres support reading: When children reflect on what different text types add to their lives, the results can be surprising... which particularly benefits marginalised children . Similarly, encyclopedias and other nonfiction support peer sharing 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)

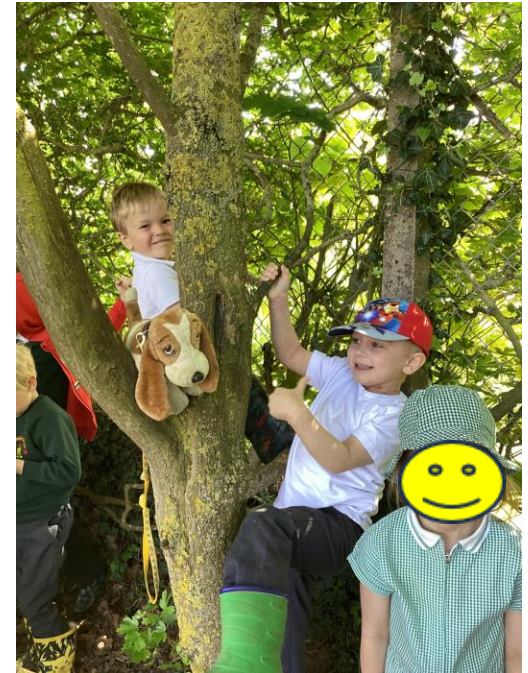
Aims

- ✓ I have known my whole career that poetry is an area I am less confident in. I like reading poetry, but I haven't intentionally tried to deliver poetry in EYFS or planned for it. I only know a handful of modern-day poets that write for children.
- ✓ I would like to read poems aloud consistently.
- ✓ I would like to build up a bank of class poems/poets that we refer to.
- ✓ I would like to engage parents/carers in reading poetry at home.
- ✓ I would like to build up a mini-library of poetry books.
- ✓ I would like to build up my confidence with performing poetry.



Outline – Poetry Play

- ✓ Every week I would choose one poem, this was often from the *Poetry by Heart* website but also from several poetry books I had sourced (see final page).
- ✓ With this poem I would plan a play opportunity from it. For example, for *Roger the Dog* by Ted Hughes I ensured that I had some soft toy dogs, a dog basket, a ball and sticks.
- ✓ I would then read the poem aloud to the children. I would make sure I performed it – adding voices, actions and movement. This often developed the more I read it aloud.
- ✓ We then went into our play time (sometimes at Wild School) and the poem and linked toys were available for the children to explore freely.
- ✓ I played with the children and the linked poetry toys. I would repeat some key words or language from the poem, but more importantly, I played!
- ✓ This poem was then read throughout the week at transition times or story time.
- ✓ I shared the weekly poem with parents on our Seesaw and Class Dojo app.
- ✓ I shared the poem in the Poetry Post bag as an extra poem.



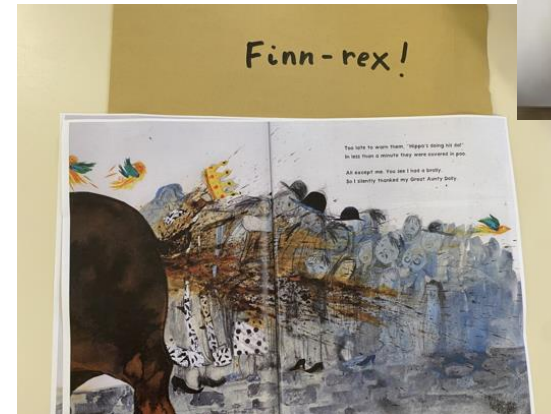
Outline – Some of the Poems and Linked Play



Poem	Play
<i>Mix a Pancake</i> by Christina Rossetti (1893)	Baking role play, frying pan and ingredients. Making pancakes. Pancake races.
<i>Paper Boats</i> by Rabindranath Tagore (1913)	Making paper boats, water play, junk modelling boats, making a fairy garden.
<i>'Please do not feed the animals...'</i> by Robert Hull (2010)	Small world animal role play (include some people for the teacher). Animal puppets.
<i>Bubble</i> by Kate Wakeling (2026)	Blowing bubbles. Making giant bubble wands with sticks and laces.
<i>Roger the Dog</i> by Ted Hughes (1984)	Dog soft toys, dog basket, ball, sticks, leads.
<i>Eletelephony</i> by Laura Richards (1930) and <i>On My Phone</i> by Sean Taylor (2025)	Elephant soft toy, selection of telephones, art resources for making telephones.
<i>Butterfly</i> by Sean Taylor (2025)	Parachute games. Butterfly spotting.

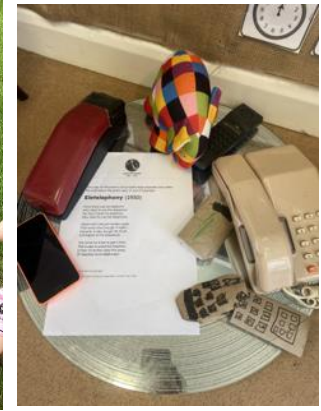
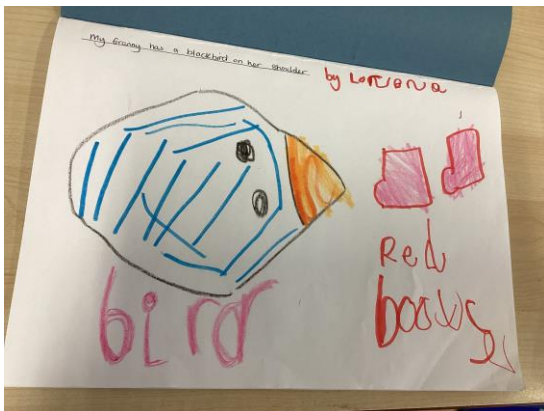
Outline – Poetry Post

- ✓ I chose three children to receive a poetry bag to take home. I spoke to them about the poetry bag I had personalised for them. They would get to take this home every three weeks.
- ✓ In the bag I included: a dragon puppet, several OU leaflets aimed at parents for reading at home, an A4 envelope with one selected poem for that child in (this followed their individual interests), and a poetry book to read aloud at home. I also included a blank sketch book for children to respond in.
- ✓ I sent parents/carers a message on Class Dojo to explain the bag. I requested that the poems be read aloud and if the child wanted to respond with a drawing they could.
- ✓ I made sure that each week the poem was personalised to the child and that they always received a new poetry book to share.
- ✓ On the return of the bag I looked at it with the child and celebrated their drawing response.
- ✓ I spoke to parents informally about the bag and poems, sharing my opinion on the poem and why I chose it for their child.



Impact

- Poetry Bag: One parent sent me several Dojo messages of small world play she had set up at home linked to this.
- Poetry Bag: The children were visibly excited about taking the bag home and would verbalise this to me when it was their turn. They were linking poetry with pleasure. So many children wanted the bag that in the summer term I opened it up for more children to access.
- Poetry Bag: By sourcing poems I knew the children would like, I got to know new poems/poets myself, increasing my own knowledge.
- Poetry Play: Our enhanced and continuous provision improved as resources and poems stayed out for the week. We now have a toy class pet – Roger! And he gets up to lots of mischief!
- Poetry Play: I feel so confident in reading and performing poems aloud. I have begun to do this in assembly as well.
- Poetry Play: The children now have key memories from certain poems, and we refer to these often. When the telephone rings it's the 'eletelephony', when we see a cheetah the children say 'eat the teacher!' and when I discuss their names or writing them on their work I say, 'isn't my name magical?' Essentially poetry has weaved itself into our EYFS world, it has enriched our language, play and relationships.
- Parents have spoken to me informally about poetry, an increase from the baseline (0%!)



Impact

- *At the start of the year, Mrs Greatrex gave my daughter a Poetry Bag, which she absolutely loved. She thoroughly enjoyed listening to the poems and expressing her imagination by drawing pictures inspired by what she had heard. It was such a lovely and creative activity that really encouraged her imagination and artistic skills. **EYFS Parent***
- *Ensuring that I planned a poem each week has meant that I've had purposeful linked provision, the children have developed a bank of poems, it's bonded us as a community but more than this, it's given me the gift of memories. At the weekend I saw a paper boat on the TV and I instantly started thinking about the Paper Boats poem and the time we spent together making them, and that wish the poet had of sending it to the next village. These poems are now in my heart, that is not impact you can measure other than I know my knowledge of poems has grown and they've given me professional love. Playing with and performing the poems has given me hope in teaching, in literature and in playing more, alongside the children. This is something I will do for the rest of my career. **Amy Greatrex EYFS Teacher.***
- *I like the cheetah poem because cheetah ate the teacher and that's funny! **EYFS child.***
- *I really love the pancake one because I kept saying it to my parents everyday. **EYFS child.***
- *I like when we try to catch the pancake! **EYFS child.***
- *I liked it when he sailed the boat, it made me happy because he put flowers in it for fairies. **EYFS child.***
- *That was so funny because the dog kept trying to climb the trees! It fills me with funny! **EYFS child.***
- *I really love Roger the Dog because we have dogs to play with. **EYFS child.***
- *I like the dragon in the bag, the button poem is my favourite. I love the poems. **EYFS child.***
- *The poems make me happy. **EYFS child.***
- *I was excited when I got the bag. **EYFS child.***
- *I was full of love in my heart when you rang the Willow class parents and told them that we were telephones! **EYFS child.***

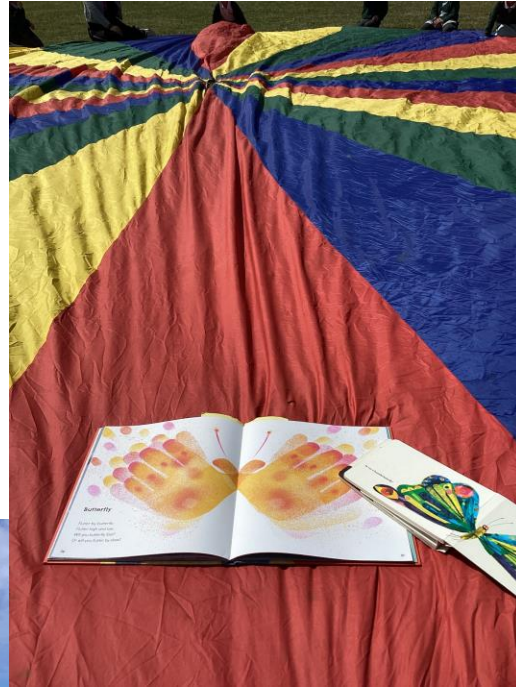


Next Steps

- To begin formally adding this to my Mid-Term Plans and weekly plans.
- To continue 'playing with poetry' in my teaching and in whole school assemblies.
- I would like to share this with other EYFS practitioners – through sharing this document, at EYFS events I attend in Suffolk and at my TRG next year.
- I want to share this work with *Poetry by Heart* and national literacy organisations.
- We are having a focus on our class book corners next year so I want to ensure that poetry texts are available and support children in accessing them.



Poetry Play Poems



- *Isn't My Name Magical?* By James Berry (2004)
- *Mix a Pancake* by Christina Rossetti (1893)
- *If You Were a Carrot* by Berlie Doherty (1993)
- *The Door* by Miroslav Holub (1962)
- *Paper Boats* by Rabindranath Tagore (1913)
- *The Book* by Michael Rosen (2010)
- *'Please do not feed the animals...'* by Robert Hull (2010)
- *The Garden Year* by Sara Coleridge (1834)
- *The Strawberry* by Mary Effie Lee Newsome (1921)
- *Words That Make Me Smile* by Laura Mucha (2020)
- *Bubble* by Kate Wakeling (2026)
- *Performing Monkey* By Joshua Seigal (2018)
- *Eletelephony* by Laura Richards (1930)

POETRY BY
HEART

Poetry Play

EYFS Top

Texts

