

Case Study: Mrs Julie Hoskins (LRC Manager) and Mr Rob Glossop (KS3 Literacy Lead), The Gryphon School, Sherborne, Dorset

Year 8 and Year 9 Reading Challenge

How do you keep students reading? It's a difficult task with all the other activities they could be doing: gaming; watching you-tube; and generally browsing the internet. As a School Librarian in a large comprehensive school, an important part of Julie's role is selecting the correct fiction books and promoting reading to students. The Library is very popular and open from 8.30am – 5pm every day so students have plenty of opportunity to access it and all its resources in their free time. It is in the centre of the school so easy to find and is well-resourced. Julie is proud of the 4,000 fiction books that the library currently has enabling a wide-ranging selection for students.

Students have fortnightly reading lessons at Key Stage 3 but Julie found that many students were reading books that were not challenging them – choosing either ones they had read before or ones aimed at students of lower reading ages. Even some more-able students who were keen on reading had got into the habit of reading books from the same authors, series or genres, and she wanted to give them a guided opportunity to stretch and expose them to engaging stories, including non-fiction and poetry as well as fiction.

This year Julie, in conjunction with the English Department, came up with a plan to try and engage more students to read something different, but to also try and read more. However, it was important to ensure that any plan did not put students off reading and also gave them plenty of choice; firstly as the Library only had so many copies of each book and secondly so that each student would find something that appealed to them.

Julie spoke with Rob Glossop, KS3 English lead, and they came up with six categories. The challenge was to read 6 books over the academic year, one from each category per half term (every 6 weeks) so nothing too onerous for the less keen reader, but something achievable.

The categories were: a Carnegie book; a classic book; a biography or autobiography; a dystopian book; a book written in prose; and a book from a list "the 25 YA books you should read".

The English team promoted the scheme to the students, with many of the teachers bringing whole classes to the Library to choose books. Each student had a booklet explaining the challenge and there was space at the back to fill in the details of the books they read and get it signed off by a member of staff. Additional stock of more popular titles was purchased and displays promoting the challenge were put up in the Library.

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One or two students did ask why they could not just read any book they wanted to and their teachers explained the rationale behind the challenge. For keen readers, this was not inhibiting as it was just 6 books over the year and outside of the challenge they could read what they wanted. For other students who were barely reading or repeatedly re-reading the same books it exposed them to a much wider range of quality fiction and non-fiction.

One of the outcomes of the challenge was that when teachers brought in their classes after having explained it to them, there was a real feeling of excitement from the students who were keen to take it up and find books for each of the categories. Julie has already noticed, through loan statistics, that the students are taking out a wider range of books. Library loans have definitely increased and she is hoping that some students might find books that will make them think about

different life situations and encourage them to try different books from their usual choices.

This is a Year 8 & Year 9 project. If it is successful, Julie plans to repeat it next year with different categories to appeal to the Year 9 students who would have done the challenge in Year 8. She also plans to use the book lists with the more able/higher reading age readers in Year 7. This cohort is undertaking Accelerated Reader, which can be a little inhibiting for the very top end of the ability range. Julie feels there is definitely scope to add to the whole school reading activities and that it would be good to get other subjects involved in their own reading challenge as well as other reading initiatives.

Advice

1. Always enlist the help of the English Department, trying to do these schemes on your own rarely works.
2. Make sure you have enough stock to cover the increased demand of different books – we needed more books written as prose.
3. Ensure that all the resources - reading records, computer lists and printed lists - are in place before the scheme is launched to the students.
4. Make sure you have displays in the LRC promoting the scheme and highlighting the books.