

Reading environment

20 practical ideas to inspire a vibrant, whole-school reading environment

Bring your reading environment alive



1. Book nook

Most of us like to be comfortable when we read, so think about creating an informal, relaxing space for reading.

- You could use sofa chairs, cushions, beanbag seats or colourful mats. Reading tents created by hanging mosquito nets, transformed with ribbons and cushions, can make special magical areas.
- Even better, get pupils to design and create their ideal reading area or hold a class competition to create the most innovative book nook. Different lighting (lava lamps or fairy lights) can also create an exciting atmosphere in corners or little hidden spaces.
- Some younger children feel comfortable learning in an enclosed, semi-private space. It is not as impractical as it sounds to create an area like this. You could use a pop-up tent with a story sack or some mark-making equipment inside. Or use a large washing basket and allow one child at a time to relax and read a book inside it. Perhaps your setting has a cupboard that you don't use? If so, take the door off, line it with material and maybe some fairy lights. Fill space with puppets or use it as somewhere for children to listen to audio books. Remember to make sure the space is child-sized, not to exclude adults, but showing that children are the main

guests and decision-makers in the space.

2. Satellite reads

Create displays to widen your pupils' reading repertoire. *If you like... you might like to try this...* Of course good knowledge of children's literature helps to provide choice and suitable recommendations for pupils. Check out our Member resource **Building our knowledge of high quality children's literature – resources for a staff meeting** to help develop expertise in this area. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/building-our-knowledge-high-quality-childrens-literature-resources-staff-meeting/>

3. Get caught reading

Create an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement by dropping in a *Get caught reading* time into your school day. Three rings of a school bell means time to freeze. Whoever has a book in their hand at that very moment receives a token. The pupil with the most tokens over a half-term gets a special book of their choice to take home.

4. Parent power

- Reserve an area of the library for parents and wider family members and have appropriate display materials and a diverse range of reading materials including newspapers, fiction and non-fiction titles. Include a special Quick Reads bookshelf to entice adults into reading: <https://readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/quick-reads/>
- Reading foyer for visitors: In the visitors' waiting area, provide a selection of library books, magazines and newspapers for parents to browse through. You could leave some reading recommendation slips for parents to fill in and create a parent recommendation display in the foyer. With the variety of visitors in school, not just parents, you should get a wide range of reading interests and preferences.

5. Book hook

Entice pupils into a particular book by creating a display of artefacts, objects, clues and questions to encourage pupils to guess the chosen book. Make sure there is a copy of it in the library! Let pupils themselves choose books and create a display to challenge other classes to try and guess their current whole class reader.

6. Steal a scene

Lunchtimes, playtimes and corridor spaces can be fantastic areas to create pupil freeze frames of a particular famous scene from a book. For example, Macbeth meeting the three witches or Matilda in class with Miss Trunchbull, Miss Honey and that pesky newt. Pupils read, explore, dramatize and then freeze frame for fellow pupils to guess the scene and guess the book. This also makes for a great whole school assembly. Take pictures to create an ongoing display. Or film your pupils and then add the video to a learning platform or visitor display monitor.

7. Love your library

Libraries matter. Not convinced? Read our recent **School Library Review** for evidence that libraries really do make a difference. Research shows that school libraries have a positive impact on all areas of pupils' learning, including the development of reading and writing skills, their self-esteem and their overall academic attainment.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/school-libraries-literature-review-current-provision-and-evidence-impact-2017/>

Ideally, the library should be centrally located and a designated space. Obviously, this is not always possible, but many of the best libraries can be created through the imaginative use of stock rooms, corridors and redundant classrooms. If your library is not a central space, a little bit of creativity and vision can go a very long way. Above all, the library should be exciting and feel different from the classroom.

- Why not rearrange the library to make it more like a bookshop? Put together themed book carousels, create book tables, luggage labels with recommended reads attached to shelves or book of the month displays.
- Better still sign up for our **Love our Libraries** programme which aims to transform primary school libraries. Available to all members of the National Literacy Trust, the e-learning course will include four modules to develop the skills, knowledge and expertise that anyone in a school (teachers, teaching assistants or even parents) needs to transform their primary school library.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/love-our-libraries/>

8. Graffiti walls

Some blackboard paint on a wall outside or a dedicated changeable display area with a variety of different chinks, pens and colours or even post it notes can provide a graffiti space to comment on books. The only rule is that you must add your name to your comment to encourage peer discussions around the comments and observations made.

9. List mania

If you want to be more focussed with your graffiti wall, you can create a different type of interactive display which changes week by week. Each week a different theme is given and pupils must comment and recommend books on that theme. Everything from dystopian epics to books that make you laugh out loud – a great way to encourage list mania around themes and broaden pupil's reading diets.

10. Break out library

Take a selection of books to the lunch queue, the playground or the reception area. Get library helpers to record which books are borrowed.

Put books in unexpected places; don't confine the library resources to the library. Stock some sports autobiographies in the gym and put food and cookery books in the dinner hall, for example. Make reading unavoidable.

11. Screensavers

A quick and easy way to provide an instant display and keep the profile of reading preferences high is to encourage staff to set their screensaver as a favourite book cover image once a month. Office staff, IWBs and hall screens should also be converted – a super way to encourage book gossip across the school!

12. Story museum

This is a creative and eye catching display that brings parents and pupils together. They can take many forms but shoe boxes make for perfect mini museums, decorated to reflect the book/story of choice and then filled with characters, objects, artefacts or clues from the story. Made at home and then displayed together, an amazing museum of stories comes alive to intrigue and delight fellow pupils.

13. Art attack

Use your specialist art teachers or talented parents to help create and decorate the school in all things of a literary nature. Collaborative murals depicting classic children's stories, favourite authors or even quotes and character descriptions can be wonderful ways of involving all pupils in creating lasting, colourful and striking art works and collages.. Matching murals to local authors or poets is a must!

14. Secret garden

Reading gardens can be a great place to escape the classroom and let your imagination flourish. If you don't have space or resources for a whole garden, a reading shelter or corner designed by pupils is a good alternative. Willow structures to guide pupils into a labyrinth, storyteller chairs made out of tree stumps or even a simple idea such as baskets in every classroom holding rugs and cushions to encourage quiet reading outside in good weather can be effective. The basic garden shed of course can be fitted with a few lights and cushions to protect from winter weather.

15. Imagination stations

Story sacks, shadow puppets, and story mapping tools arranged in special areas, complete with a range of frequently changed titles can encourage pupils to reenact, retell and create new stories based on well-known favourites. Older pupils can man the stations and support younger pupils in reading, retelling and imagining new stories.

16. What I'm reading

An instant and easy quick win is to require that all staff, teaching and non-teaching, display a poster of what they are currently reading on their doors or around their work areas. A simple format which can be changed regularly works well or just visit the excellent and easy website *What I'm reading*, which creates a free poster in a click of a button to print and display. What could be easier! <http://whatimreading.org>

17. Reading journeys

Encourage pupils and staff alike to create posters and collages which illustrate their own personal reading journeys. From the first books you remember being read to you through

the years to your current favourites. Illustrate with characters and images from the books and try to add ages of when you remember these being part of your life.

18. Film, camera, action

With iPads and digital cameras readily available in school, let pupils show off their technical skills and release their inner actors to create short trailers for their favourite books. These can then provide a rolling display on learning platforms and school visual visitor displays. Some great advice on filmmaking can be found on the amazing Into Film website:

[https://www.intofilm.org/resources/all#&fk_product_id\[\]=1&fk_product_id\[\]=2&fk_product_id\[\]=3&search=film%20making&sort=relevance&limit=20&start=0](https://www.intofilm.org/resources/all#&fk_product_id[]=1&fk_product_id[]=2&fk_product_id[]=3&search=film%20making&sort=relevance&limit=20&start=0)

For inspiration, a whole range of recent book trailers can be found on the World Book Day website here: <http://www.worldbookday.com/booktrailers-online/>

19. Extreme reading

Set up a photographic competition for the most obscure and entertaining place that the pupils, staff or parents can be caught reading. Display the winners' photographs around the school, or include them in a school calendar (if you have one) or newsletter. If you really want to go to town, try an inter-school competition in your local area.

20. Rivers of reading

A great homework task for over a weekend is to encourage pupils to create their own river of reading. Across a weekend or holiday, pupils must record in a creative way (through collage, drawing, photographs etc.) everything that they can remember reading that weekend. From the instructions to a new computer game, to the back of a packet of cereal. Collate each pupil's work and add to a collaborate display. A simple backdrop of a river with fabric or paint provides the starting point to a whole corridor or *river of reading*.

"If we want to be skilful in helping other people, especially children, become willing, avid, and – most important of all – thoughtful readers, we need to know how to create a reading environment that enables them."

Aiden Chambers