

# Libraries, labels and leisure reading

An essential report for schools seeking to establish lifelong readers.



"You can't make someone read. Just as you can't make them fall in love, or dream..." So states Daniel Pennac in *The Rights of the Reader*, 1992; but as teachers and librarians what we do have is the opportunity to provide variety to entice young people into the alternative worlds books can provide, in the hope that at least one of these journeys will launch their lifelong love of reading.

What we also, perhaps inadvertently, have the potential to do, is to deter children from reading by restricting their choices, harnessing reading as simply a vehicle to drive progress in English, and failing to engage in the very conversations around their reading preferences which should in fact be at the heart of the current Reading for Pleasure drive in schools.

At Peters, we are responding to a huge increase in Reading for Pleasure libraries and collections, but also an increase in requests for these collections to be labelled in a very prescriptive manner. At the very least this results in the freedom of choice which helps ignite reading for pleasure being rescinded, and at worst it may cause a school's efforts to instil a Reading for Pleasure culture to fall at the very first hurdle.

We hope to help you thoroughly consider the implications of the labels you choose for your library stock, so that you can make an informed decision which will meet the needs of both your staff and pupils.

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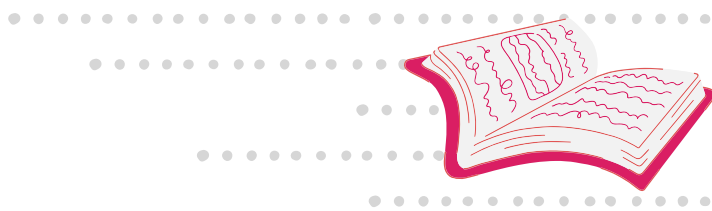
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## Who do we label a library collection for and how are these labels used?

When used with consideration, labelling library stock is an essential way of ensuring that books are reshelfed efficiently, thus ensuring pupils visiting the library always have access to as wide a range of titles as possible. This is where the label is used purely as a directional aid (e.g. denoting fiction, non-fiction, or a particular section /shelf of the library), and the library user may choose to consult or ignore the aid when selecting material. Other labels, however well intended, can become prejudicial – restricting a child's access to certain titles, or encouraging them to view certain choices as beneath their age range, colour band, or points score on one of the many tools used to level reading material.

While tools to aid assessment and monitoring are irrefutably useful in assisting teachers to track a child's progress in developing reading skills, this requirement should not be confused with the intent to provide a reading for pleasure collection, where the focus is on building an enthusiasm for reading, nurturing a child's personal interests and crucially, respecting their right to choose. If it is a necessity that titles must fulfil a dual purpose, both providing the adults in schools with data and the pupils with sufficient engaging stock to select from, consideration must turn to where this label is placed so that the influence it has over the pupil is as limited as possible.



Beyond data driven labels, or labels that are used purely for reshelfing purposes, there is a final category which has become equally popular but is nevertheless a cause for concern: labelling with an audience in mind. This can be to distinguish texts in a different format, for instance HiLo material, or to group certain texts as demonstrating a common purpose, for instance diversity or disability collections. In these instances, thought needs to go beyond the obvious ease which labelling texts in this manner provides to the adults in school, and much deeper consideration should be given to the outcome for pupils having to negotiate them.

“ Children's agency and autonomy as readers is critical to developing their intrinsic motivation.”

*Professor Teresa Cremin, Co-Director, Literacy and Social Justice Centre, The Open University*

## Labelling examples in school libraries



**Fiction spine label**, 3 letters of the author surname to ensure books by the same author are shelved together.

**Non-fiction Dewey label with accompanying colour code label** to ensure books on the same subject are shelved together: History, and within that, British history of the Stuart period.



**Non-fiction Dewey label with accompanying colour code label** to aid placement within the library. **Colour label** indicating the reading level range 4.0-4.9.

**Accelerated Reader label** detailing the exact reading level.

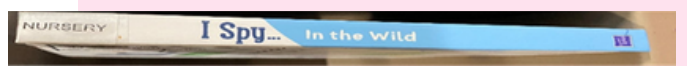
**Key Stage label**, limiting readership to a small section of library users.



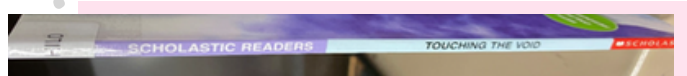
**Accelerated Reader label** detailing the exact reading level.

**Colour label** indicating the reading level range 5.0-5.9.

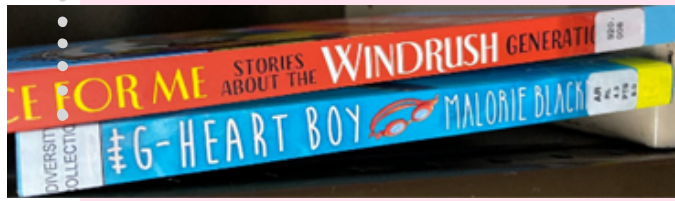
**Key Stage and Year group labels** – limiting readership of the text to a specific group.



**HiLo labels** – becoming increasingly common as a means of identifying texts that will support struggling readers, but displaying this label so prominently in turn also 'others' these texts.



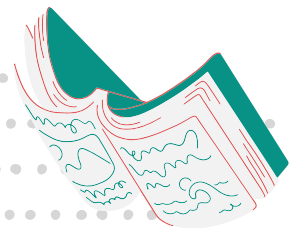
**Diversity, inclusion, PSHE collection labels** – to determine texts for a particular purpose limits the potential scope of these books and their authors, failing to ensure they have a place in every collection rather than being selected to fulfil a criteria.



With greater consideration, labels can be placed discreetly, offering support to staff but not inhibiting the selection process for pupils. For example:



**HiLo label** (left) being placed on the back of the book for reshelving purposes only. **Accelerated Reader** levelled text (right) identified by a label on the inside of the front cover.



## In what ways do the labels selected impact on pupils?

Outlined above are three core purposes currently driving the labelling of library collections. Generally, consideration over which option to follow is determined by the approach that will provide staff with the greatest guidance, but just as much thought should be given to the potential impact of a chosen system on the pupils.

In the first instance, where labelling is provided simply to aid reshelving, the system can be of benefit to both staff and pupils. Staff are able to efficiently reshelve the stock, whilst pupils can begin to assume some ownership of their library space and potentially improve their own knowledge at the same time, by assisting staff. For instance, pupils' familiarity with the alphabet may improve when reshelving titles with a fiction spine label denoting the initial letters of the author; they might also begin to appreciate common forms of categorisation if following dewey sequencing, or a colour equivalent, to reshelve non-fiction.



“**Readers** are not built through embarrassment, othering, reduction of choices.

They are built through

**opportunity, time and conversation.**”

*Alison Tarrant: CEO School Library Association and chartered librarian*

There can be a tendency however to see the positive impact of labelling a library collection in this way, and assume that the approach can be extended with additional labels to provide even greater clarity for staff. Further categorisation, for instance labelling volumes by key stage or even year group, often then becomes a consideration, but there are a number of factors here which should be carefully considered.

When we choose to assign texts with a key stage or year group label, or segregate stock by ability bands, points scores or HiLo material etc for reading progression purposes, children (of all abilities) start to become defined by the labels imposed and their ability to establish themselves as autonomous, engaged readers becomes limited. By labelling in this manner, we have subconsciously replaced the rights of the reader, which promote reading for pleasure, and instead imposed a set of rules. We make reading a comparative and competitive activity when labels that level or rank a book are visible; we devalue a child's right to return to a much loved title for comfort if a year group or key stage sticker encourages the child to view that book as suddenly beneath their ability; we disengage those that may already find reading a challenge by labelling books that might support them as in some way separate from the other books.

Critically, when we label with these criteria in mind, we don't develop the key practices associated with becoming a lifelong reader, so we compromise our long term goal in order to facilitate progression in the short term. Reading for Pleasure does not follow a prescribed pattern. Instead, a reader who is 'successful' at reading for pleasure understands: how to choose a book they might enjoy, how to react if the book they are reading is not enjoyable, the friendship that is fostered in sharing book talk with a peer or teacher. Children are much more likely to read a book that is recommended, and the creation of reading networks within schools can be extremely motivating, 'especially with sequels and series, that playground currency of: "I've read No. 3 – have you got No. 4?" is gold dust.' (*Get everyone reading, School Library Association, p.19*). Consequently, children who are able to engage with books

in a self-directed way are less likely to see literacy as ‘something done to them’, and therefore something that they can fail at. Thus, labelling a library to offer progression in reading skills may not just fail to create lifelong readers, but it can also have a negative impact on engagement with literacy, limiting the progress the labels were put there to support. As the table below ably demonstrates, there are two competing objectives in mind, and schools must find a way to ensure both objectives are reciprocally nurtured.

<b>Reading Instruction</b> is orientated towards...	<b>Reading for Pleasure</b> is orientated towards...
The skill	The will
Decoding and comprehension	Engagement and response
System readers	Lifelong readers
Teacher direction	Child direction
Teacher ownership	Child ownership
Attainment	Achievement

(UKLA, *Teachers as Readers*. 2007-08.)

If, after much consideration, a label to convey age suitability is deemed necessary by the school, then the placement of this (so as to inform reshelving, but not impede freedom of choice) is key; a discrete solution, such as placing the label on the back cover, can limit negative or restrictive associations.

Similarly, titles or collections which have assessment-based information such as points scores, colour banding, quiz details etc. can retain this information on the inside of the front cover. This maintains a point of reference for the adults implementing the scheme, but not a source of detraction for pupils choosing reading material.





Whilst school reading is important, we know that a **lifelong love of reading** is what we're trying to achieve to **really make a difference.**



*Cressida Cowell, MBE: award winning children's author-illustrator and Children's Laureate 2019-22*

The desire which has arisen to demarcate certain books as relevant to a common theme, such as diversity or disability, would be better reimagined entirely. Again, the end objective must be kept in mind: whilst doing so may help staff locate books of a similar nature, distinguishing them as in some way different from the rest of the library collection is, in its very practice, opposed to the reason for including them in the first place. Children of all backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities and disabilities should be able to find themselves within the books on the library shelves, but the inclusion of these titles should be a standard expectation when compiling a library collection, and an example of inclusivity in practice. By distinguishing certain titles, we have removed the inclusivity that we sought to provide and other means of informing staff should be considered. For instance, a digital or hard copy of titles for certain topics or themes, or for identifying collections of HiLo materials, then circulated to all staff, can be retained as a point of reference to inform the conversations and advice given to pupils when choosing books. This can be shared between staff without the experience pupils have when visiting the library being incumbered by visible labels. Maintaining an up to date and comprehensive key wording system for all titles on your LMS is another way to share knowledge, without restricting or prejudicing choice.

Perhaps one other consideration when determining the best solution for labelling your library stock is to consider how easy the labels are to navigate. In some cases, schools end up labelling their books to such an extent that the initial intent to aid library users becomes impaired, as both staff and pupils have to remember the placement of each label and what this signifies. For instance, if you have two or more coloured both placed on the spine, it is easy for

**Children of all backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities and disabilities should be able to find themselves within the books on the library shelves.**



meaning to be lost – not to mention the visibility of both the title and the author in some cases being obstructed, which in itself discourages engagement with the book. In addition, the more labels that a collection possesses, the more complicated and time consuming adhering to any changes in policy, either at a school or national level, becomes. Given the current uncertainty within national education initiatives, the ability to be flexible and change focus smoothly where required seems wise.

“ If we want to close that reading gap and create **life-long readers**, perhaps our time needs to focus more closely on the **individual support** we give pupils to help them **commence their reading journey**, and be less focussed on pushing children through generic systems. ”

*Antony Witheyman: CEO of Innovate Multi Academy Trust and teacher with over twenty years experience*

## Which labelling approaches should we consider best practice?

### 1. Standard labelling

Peters' standard suggestion to cover the vast majority of schools' requirements (ensuring the books can be used for many years, can be efficiently returned to shelves, and introducing children to formats followed in their local libraries) would be:

- Fiction spines – to help sequence authors alphabetically and to aid searching for titles.
- Non-Fiction – either coloured labels or dewey referencing to denote categories and to simply group books within the library space.
- Jackets – to ensure longevity of titles purchased.





## 2. Dynamic shelving

This approach discourages any labels and instead relies on the school's chosen library management system to hold the data on each title in the library for reference when a member of staff or pupil wishes to locate a specific title. This option is ideal for schools really embracing a Reading for Pleasure culture, as it enables you to reorganise your shelving easily to respond to topical issues (e.g. a women in sport focus for the women's world cup; a selection on protests as stimulus for discussion in response to the riots in France...). This approach means experienced readers are encouraged to diversify their choices and that more reluctant readers are offered the widest range possible in the endeavour to ensure something catches their eye.

The library management system you select here is integral, and researching the right option for your school should replace the time you might have dedicated to considering labels.

Jackets are still used to ensure longevity of titles purchased.



## 3. Bespoke labelling (for shelving purposes only)

This would be determined in consultation with the school and their needs, but would usually include a coloured label to signify key stage, or similar, to aid staff with reshelving only. The label would be placed somewhere discreet (such as the back cover) so that the eye is not drawn to it when a pupil is exploring the library.

Similarly, if a school is using a monitored reading system such as Accelerated Reader or Book Bands, we would support with providing labels to inform staff of the data related to certain titles. We would again advise that these labels are better located inside the front cover, or similar, where the information can be used as required, but does not stifle a child's choice when selecting for pleasure.

## Is there evidence of these systems working effectively in schools?

There is nothing like receiving advice from people who have walked in your shoes. Our Schools Team is made up of teachers who have experience implementing these strategies and can guide you towards finding a solution to suit your school. In addition, we have included various testimonies from schools, advisors and authors working in this field, to help you refine your decision.

## Testimonials

Read all testimonials collected in the [appendix](#).

**Jane Garland, Montessori school Headteacher with over thirty years experience in this practice:**

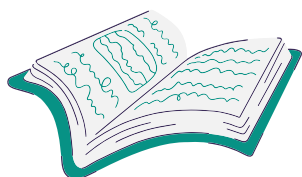
"Ensuring that our classroom libraries reflect the principles of the Montessori approach was an important consideration, this led to us embedding a Reading for Pleasure culture as the two approaches dovetail so effectively. We don't label our books in any way, nor do we restrict the children's choices. We ensure that staff have access to lists of titles that might support certain topics or needs, so that they can guide pupils on an individual basis. We focus our time instead on the relationships we have with our pupils; on supporting them in their selection of texts, listening to their opinions, and crucially, on supporting them when a selection hasn't been successful so that they view this as a step on their journey rather than a significant failure."

“ We focus our time instead on the **relationships we have with our pupils** ”

**Hayden Gigner, Librarian at Forge Valley School, Sheffield and advocate for dynamic shelving:**

"We chose to move away from traditional cataloguing and the related labels, which is based in a world without search algorithms. We now arrange the books by theme (hashtag), specifically in small groups to mitigate cognitive load. The pupils are expected to engage with the OPAC, which contains locations for each of the books. By using this approach pupils are significantly more likely to find books that will enthuse. Since using this system our number of books out on loan has tripled and we have also seen borrowing increase in areas we were concerned to support, such as our PP pupils. Because all of these changes were informed by interacting with our young people and observing their behaviour, we have managed to create a library environment which is busy and easier to navigate, and our pupils are reading more and with greater confidence."

“ Our pupils are **reading more** and with **greater confidence.** ”



**Antony Witheyman, CEO of Innovate Multi Academy Trust and teacher with over twenty years experience:**

"A quality book is one that a child wants to read. Sometimes I think that we stunt creativity and reading development by binding children's choices through a particular band, colour or scheme. How can we enable a child to develop their reading personality if an adult is telling them which book to choose? Today's children have all the distractions we grew up with, plus mobile phones, YouTube Shorts and the Xbox. Why on earth therefore would they want to pick up a book? This is a question that has been plaguing schools for years, even more urgently as the gap between boys and girls grows yet further. Boys reading levels are consistently below girls and the pandemic has heightened this gap: lockdown increased the gap in reading enjoyment between boys and girls to 11.5%, which has a knock-on for attainment.

If we want to close that reading gap AND create life-long readers, perhaps our time needs to focus more closely on the individual support we give pupils to help them commence their reading journey, and be less focussed on pushing children through generic systems. There's a lot of contemporary fiction supporting the societal shift away from stereotypes – showcasing male protagonists dealing with difficult issues and confronting difficult feelings, though as well as that these resources are often brilliantly written, engaging, exciting and relevant too. In addition to providing more reasons to read, these books might well help boys to develop socially and emotionally – something all young people need, perhaps now more than ever, regardless of gender."

“ How can we enable a child to develop a **reading personality** if an adult is telling them which **book to choose?** ”



**Professor Teresa Cremin, Co-Director, Literacy and Social Justice Centre, The Open University:**

"We all know that reading matters, but it's not just school reading (though that's important) that makes the most difference to young people's academic, social and emotional development- it's reading for pleasure. This involves choosing to read, to make time for reading and talking to others about texts and life, their own and others. Developing the habit of reading- that's the game changer. The research evidence is clear, children's agency and autonomy as readers is critical to developing their intrinsic motivation. Curiosity, affective involvement and interest all power young people's desire to read on, to read more frequently, to try new kinds of texts

and find those that sing with relevance.

Intrinsically motivated readers develop their preferences and connect to friends who have similar interests and passions, although these interests will change over time and in response to the texts available. Rich text access and supported choice are therefore key, and professionally responsible educators read children's texts regularly and widely in order to recommend and discuss these with the young people- reader to reader. So, we need to avoid excessively explicit book labelling that can implicitly label and limit children to be certain kinds of readers, and respect and support their autonomy as readers to exercise discrimination and choice. In this way we can seek to ensure that reading for pleasure is an agentic, social and relational activity - one that makes a difference."

**Cressida Cowell, MBE, award winning children's author-illustrator and Children's Laureate 2019-22:**

"We know from decades of research that the huge, long-term benefits of reading for pleasure are life-changing. For every percentage point your literacy level goes up, you're more likely to be happier, healthier, wealthier, more likely to own your own home, more likely to vote, less likely to be in prison. OECD research going back to 2002 suggests that reading for the joy of it is one of the two key indicators in a child's later economic success, irrespective of their background. This ought to be a hopeful statistic – we know, therefore, what we can do to make a difference to every single child's life chances."

**Anthony Horowitz, CBE, acclaimed children's and YA author**

"Reading is a journey that will take you wherever you want to go. Yes, teachers (and parents) guided me. To this day, my favourite book will be the one I never intended to read. But for me it was never an assault course, never a mental challenge. I found what I loved and that led me another step along the way."



“ We can seek to ensure that **reading for pleasure** is an agentic, social, and relational activity - one that really **makes a difference.** ”



## Conclusions

As a new term emerges on the horizon and teachers embark once more on their campaign to arm children with the skills they will require to navigate life, perhaps the thoughts shared above will inspire you to think afresh about the reading experiences you are providing for your pupils, about the decisions you make about how to label your stock, and the potential consequences of these decisions. Pennac was right when he said you can't make someone read, but he was right too when he said "by making time to read, like making time to love, we expand our time for living" (Pennac, 1992). Schools of course reflect society; there is never enough time in the world we now live in, and yet those schools that manage to engage with pupils on an individual basis and ignite their journey towards a lifetime spent reading, are not only finding time in the here and now, but are offering the children in their care the gift of time – that experienced through books. They are offering them the opportunity to gain understanding in a world compromised with conflict; the tools to navigate their way through life, interpreting signs both literal and metaphorical; a chance to experience a life other than their own - to escape, to forget, to dream. And as Pennac says "who could be too busy for that?" (Pennac, 1992).

This is not to say providing both a progressive and successful approach to developing reading skills and instilling a Reading for Pleasure culture is anything but a challenge. But perhaps this document will start to suggest ways forward, where both factors can be acknowledged, and will serve as a reminder that there are still some challenges worth embracing wholeheartedly. Because here is an educational concept that is much more than simply a label on a book, or another initiative that will be replaced tomorrow. Reading for Pleasure at its heart is about offering children a future; a tool or companion they can rely on for the rest of their life.

*'And there I was upon the seashore seeking a smoother more perfect pebble, where all around me the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered'*. Newton may not have known his thoughts would still be relevant so many years later, and yet they seem more apt in this instance than perhaps any parting words I can offer. As teachers we seek constantly to hone a child's skills, to reach the next goal, to make the 'pebble more perfect'. When in the case of reading certainly, the most important part of our role as teachers is to open up the vast ocean of reading opportunities that lie in wait for them. The ability to swim is essential, yes; but the channels our pupils may wish to traverse cannot and should not be prescribed, any more than in any other of life's great adventures.



## References

Pennac, Daniel, *The Rights of the Reader*, Walker Books (1992)

School Library Association, [Get Everyone Reading: A primer on Reading for Pleasure.](#)

UKLA, [Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers \(2007-08\).](#)



To this day, my favourite book will be **the one I never intended to read**. But for me it was never an assault course, never a mental challenge. **I found what I loved and that led me another step along the way.**

I believe that all children should have this freedom.

**Don't judge reading. Just read.**



*Anthony Horowitz, CBE: Acclaimed children's and YA author*



## About the author

Anna is a qualified primary school teacher and English lead who has taught all year groups, from Reception to Year 6. Finding new ways to inspire children to become lifelong readers has always been a key mission. She now leads the Schools Team at Peters.



Peters is the UK's leading specialist supplier of children's books and furniture to schools and public libraries, working closely with schools to support their reading requirements. Reading for pleasure is key to children's overall attainment, and we're passionate about getting the right books into the hands of pupils.



## Appendix

### All testimonials

Thank you to all who contributed to this report. Full testimonials from the following contributors are included in the appendix:

- Alison Tarrant, CEO School Library Association and chartered librarian
- Anthony Horowitz, CBE, children's and YA author
- Antony Witheyman, CEO of Innovate Multi Academy Trust and teacher
- Barbara Band, school library and reading consultant
- Cressida Cowell, MBE, children's author-illustrator and Children's Laureate 2019-22
- Hayden Gigner, school librarian
- Jake Hope, reading development and children's book consultant
- Jane Garland, Montessori school Headteacher
- Miranda McKearney, Empathy Lab founder
- Professor Teresa Cremin, Co-Director, Literacy and Social Justice Centre, The Open University



#### **Alison Tarrant, CEO School Library Association and chartered librarian**

"As the discussion about reading for pleasure has grown, there has almost inevitably been some distilling of its core purpose, and how it might be achieved. Often it is used in contrast to 'reading for learning'; as though this were some binary choice rather than a complex interweaving of skills, ideas and attitudes.

Reading for pleasure is based on two core tenants in my experience: respect and choice. Without them you might have a reading habit, but you do not have a reading for pleasure culture. Respect between readers; staff and pupil; pupil to pupil; staff to staff. Any reader makes decisions about what to read, and what not to, and it's on us as the adults responsible for enthusing and encouraging reading to accept it and try and prompt them to make 'better' choices in the future. Choice means the reader having a choice about what to read, not just a broad and varied selection of resources (though that is vital) but the ways they read, the format they read in and the language in which they read.

Now the nuance of this is that in a school it's not that simple; you wouldn't be doing your job if you let those who wanted to read, read, while the others sat and stared into space. Reading is vital for attainment and long-term success. I'm always mindful of the Matthew Effect – those who read more, gain more – more vocabulary, more ideas, more grammar, more confidence, more. Those who don't, don't, and are likely to decrease in confidence as they grow older and the consequences are felt.

Working in a school, it's your ethical duty to ensure that every child has the best possible chance, and that includes reading. Readers are not built through embarrassment, othering, reduction of choices. They are built through opportunity, time and conversation. As a school engaged with reading for pleasure consider the impacts your decisions have on all readers."

**Anthony Horowitz, CBE, acclaimed children's and YA author**

"Let me be honest. When I was young – from eight or nine all the way to my mid-teens, many of my reading choices were deplorable. I particularly loved pulp fiction such as *The Saint* by Leslie Charteris (with Roger Moore on the cover) and I couldn't wait to get hold of the next *Man from Uncle* paperback. Many of the books I read, from *Billy Bunter* to *Fu Manchu* have now been cancelled. I loved comics too. Valiant was my favourite: I still remember *The Steel Claw* and *Kelly's Eye*.

But somehow, I developed a love of literature that has embraced Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro...great classics modern and old. I love Zola, Cervantes, Dürrenmatt and Albert Camus.

The point I'm trying to make is that reading is a journey that will take you wherever you want to go. Yes, teachers (and parents) guided me. To this day, my favourite book will be the one I never intended to read. But for me it was never an assault course, never a mental challenge. I found what I loved and that led me another step along the way.

I believe that all children should have this freedom. Don't judge reading. Just read."

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societal shift away from stereotypes – showcasing male protagonists dealing with difficult issues and confronting difficult feelings, though as well as that these resources are often brilliantly written, engaging, exciting and relevant too. In addition to providing more reasons to read, these books might well help boys to develop socially and emotionally – something all young people need, perhaps now more than ever, regardless of gender."

**Barbara Band, School library and reading consultant with over thirty-five years experience supporting schools:**

'I can understand prescriptive labelling to a certain extent. Unless you are familiar with a book, its characters and storyline, you will not know what aspects of society it encompasses. I do wonder though if labelling (as opposed to keywording on the LMS or creating book lists/displays) restricts students' choices. A book may be labelled (with a sticker) as being a fantasy and avoided, yet the book may just as easily be considered an adventure, a horror story, a book about friendships. Genres are subjective! I tell school librarians to add as many keywords as they can to describe the book, because these are what enable you to pull out relevant titles or students to search for things they may be interested in.

If a school runs a reading scheme, many staff want every library book to be labelled appropriately and if it can't be, then the library should not stock it. Needless to say, I absolutely do not agree with this. They profess to have a buy in to the Reading for Pleasure agenda but don't connect the fact that this needs access to a wide range of books, time to both select something and read it, and the freedom to choose what you personally want to read. They seem to feel that by progressing through reading levels, by becoming a more competent reader, a student will turn into a "reader". Decoding and comprehension skills do not make readers; that takes a love of stories, the written word, the escape into other worlds.

The ideal situation would be to have library lessons (giving students access, time and choice) AND reading scheme lessons that enable students to progress through reading levels.'

**Cressida Cowell, MBE, Award winning children's author-illustrator and Children's Laureate 2019-22**

"I knew when I became Children's Laureate that school libraries would be my flagship project. As part of my 'Life-changing Libraries' campaign, I asked central government for ring-fenced money for school libraries.

We know from decades of research that the huge, long-term benefits of reading for pleasure are life-changing. For every percentage point your literacy level goes up, you're more likely to be happier, healthier, wealthier, more likely to own your own home, more likely to vote, less likely to be in prison. OECD research going back to 2002 suggests that reading for the joy of it is one of the two key indicators in a child's

later economic success, irrespective of their background. This ought to be a hopeful statistic – we know, therefore, what we can do to make a difference to every single child’s life chances. It has been estimated that if all children were to read for pleasure, the economic impact of their increased skills, and therefore increased incomes, would raise the UK’s GDP by £4.6 billion per year within a generation. The Confederation of British Industry among others has called repeatedly for literacy to be made a priority.

The ‘for pleasure’ part is VITAL: whilst school reading is important, we know that a lifelong love of reading is what we’re trying to achieve to really make a difference. Teaching a child to read is only part of the process, encouraging them to love reading can be far more complicated. The availability of a choice of books – telling a variety of stories – is key. As Laureate, I worked with BookTrust to set up six gold standard school libraries, to demonstrate what a great school library can do. (Incidentally, a great school library needs new books, because books should look like sweets and not Brussels sprouts.) The results were extraordinary, even to me. Teachers reported benefits far beyond enthusiasm for reading. They mentioned improvements in behaviour, staff-pupil relationships, well-being and an increased sense of community within the school and with parents. To quote the Headteacher at Woodside Primary: ‘For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.’

But despite the urgency, there’s a real lack of awareness. I have lost count of the times, when I have mentioned any of this on television or radio, that people have said, ‘Really? Do so many primary schools really not have a library?’. In Hansard, the official record of parliamentary debate, libraries are mentioned fewer times than sausages. It’s crucial that school libraries are put back on the agenda.

I want every child to read with the same delight and wonder that I read with when I was a child. Morally, economically, socially, it’s the right thing to do. Reading is magic, and magic should be for everyone.’

**Hayden Gigner, Librarian at Forge Valley School, Sheffield and advocate for dynamic shelving:**

"We chose to move away from traditional cataloguing and the related labels, which is based in a world without search algorithms. We now arrange the books by theme (hashtag), specifically in small groups to mitigate cognitive load. The pupils are expected to engage with the OPAC, which contains locations for each of the books. By using this approach pupils are significantly more likely to find books that will enthuse. Since using this system our number of books out on loan has tripled and we have also seen borrowing increase in areas we were concerned to support, such as our PP pupils. Because all of these changes were informed by interacting with our

young people and observing their behaviour, we have managed to create a library environment which is busy and easier to navigate, and our pupils are reading more and with greater confidence."

**Jake Hope, Reading development and children's book consultant:**

"One of the joys of the library space is the opportunity it affords for people at all stages in their personal reading journeys, to browse and find books or materials that most suit their interests and needs. This serendipitous act - or art - underpins so much of our experience and choices as readers and often leads to chancing upon exactly the right reading at precisely the right point. How we facilitate that as professionals is important, sometimes in efforts to create pathways and progression we can limit its opportunity and power. Different sections in the library, personal recommendation from staff or volunteers within the library and stickers are all tools we can use, the challenge is always to make sure we don't restrict our use of any one in such a way that reading feels to be prescriptive and a chore rather than being for pleasure and based around choice."

**Jane Garland, Montessori school Headteacher with over thirty years experience in this practice:**

"Ensuring that our classroom libraries reflect the principles of the Montessori approach was an important consideration, this led to us embedding a Reading for Pleasure culture as the two approaches dovetail so effectively. We don't label our books in any way, nor do we restrict the children's choices. We ensure that staff have access to lists of titles that might support certain topics or needs, so that they can guide pupils on an individual basis. We focus our time instead on the relationships we have with our pupils; on supporting them in their selection of texts, listening to their opinions, and crucially, on supporting them when a selection hasn't been successful so that they view this as a step on their journey rather than a significant failure."

**Miranda McKearney, Empathy Lab founder:**

"It's thrilling that we now have a gold standard body of research confirming the power of reading for pleasure in a child's development and life chances. There's also a building body of research about the empathy-building effects of reading.

We can all aim for a "double win" – simultaneously building reading for pleasure and the critical life skill of empathy. Right now, surrounding children with empathetic adults, and giving them the empathy skills to create a kinder less polarised world feels pretty urgent. Books have a pivotal role to play.

Freedom, choice and relationships have always been key factors in helping children love reading, and anything that restricts a child's freedom to choose must be avoided. Blending empathy and reading for pleasure practices builds a sense of

belonging, of being heard and understood that can underpin a lifelong love of reading.

A sharper focus on empathy maximises the relationship factor - for instance, there's a strong evidence base for the effect of reading aloud on RfP and a shared read aloud book has a marked empathy effect too, building a sense of community and connection, getting new insights into each other by sharing different experiences of the same text and honing listening skills.

Book talk can blend reading for pleasure and empathy-building practices - it's a beautiful opportunity for teachers to model empathic dialogue and listening. Part of this involves teachers placing more of an emphasis on sharing their own feelings, and creating a dialogue around reading which encourages the building of relationships - between teacher and child, and between the children. Those relationships, and the trust at their heart, will have a profound effect on a child's confidence to choose what to read."

**Professor Teresa Cremin, Co-Director, Literacy and Social Justice Centre, The Open University:**

"We all know that reading matters, but it's not just school reading (though that's important) that makes the most difference to young people's academic, social and emotional development- it's reading for pleasure. This involves choosing to read, to make time for reading and talking to others about texts and life, their own and others. Developing the habit of reading- that's the game changer. The research evidence is clear, children's agency and autonomy as readers is critical to developing their intrinsic motivation. Curiosity, affective involvement and interest all power young people's desire to read on, to read more frequently, to try new kinds of texts and find those that sing with relevance.

Intrinsically motivated readers develop their preferences and connect to friends who have similar interests and passions, although these interests will change over time and in response to the texts available. Rich text access and supported choice are therefore key, and professionally responsible educators read children's texts regularly and widely in order to recommend and discuss these with the young people- reader to reader. So, we need to avoid excessively explicit book labelling that can implicitly label and limit children to be certain kinds of readers, and respect and support their autonomy as readers to exercise discrimination and choice. In this way we can seek to ensure that reading for pleasure is an agentic, social and relational activity - one that makes a difference."

