

# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

2ND EDITION

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Learning Matters  
An imprint of SAGE Publications Ltd  
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55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP

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2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

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Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India  
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon,  
CR0 4YY

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First published in 2013

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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2016940059**

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-6901-8 paperback  
ISBN 978-1-4739-6900-1 hardback

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# 1 Developing a love of reading

## Learning Outcomes

By reading this chapter you will have considered:

- how you can make reading an appealing activity;
- why it is important for teachers to be active readers with a wide knowledge of texts;
- strategies for developing children's enthusiasm for and engagement with reading;
- gender issues in reading.

## Introduction

*The best teachers of literature are those for whom reading is important in their own lives, and who read more than the texts they teach .... Being a reader of literature gives a teacher the confidence to teach powerfully.*

(Martin, 2003, p.6)

## Why is it important to develop a love of reading?

For many people, like the 'best teachers of literature' Martin describes, reading is as much a part of life as eating and watching television. They always have at least one novel on the go and they buy books regularly, either in hard copy or electronically. Look around a bus or train and you will see that many people are reading novels, newspapers and magazines, or are reading from an electronic device. Some may be texting or sending e-mails, while others may be solving word puzzles. In fact, anyone new to a place like Britain would probably assume that it is a nation of readers, and enthusiastic readers at that.

However, many people are not so enthusiastic about reading and while most may engage in reading activities at a functional level by texting, e-mailing, etc., they may not read novels and poems. They may struggle with reading and find it challenging, but more likely they lost whatever enthusiasm they may once have had for literature while still at school. Does this matter? After all, if people have reading skills which are adequate for their daily lives and their reading preferences do not include fiction and poetry, shouldn't we simply respect their choices? Are they actually missing anything if they choose not to read novels and poems? Is there anything which these genres can offer which cannot be found in other media, including theatre, films and television?

## Research Focus

### Fiction and non-fiction

*Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, conducted a study of 94 people and measured the extent to which they read fiction and non-fiction. Through conducting tests which included showing participants video clips of people interacting and then asking them questions, they discovered that people who read predominantly fiction had greater social abilities, for example in guessing the mental states of people in photographs and in matching children in videos to their parents. The researchers argued that while non-fiction increases expertise in topics such as cookery, genetics or whatever the subject matter of the books was, fiction develops expertise in empathising and socialising.*

(Oatley, 2009)

So perhaps there are sound reasons why teachers should foster a love of reading in children. Apart from providing entertainment, information, pleasure and relaxation, stories and poems can help us to look at the world around us in a more reflective way, and be better able to consider people's motives for actions. Indeed, DiYanni (1997) argued that besides entertaining and enlightening us and engaging our imaginations, stories *enlarge our understanding of ourselves and deepen our appreciation of life* (p.27).

As you will see in Chapter 8 on issue fiction, sometimes authors set out to address a current issue or scenario with the specific aim of getting readers to explore their views. Often authors set up moral dilemmas which force readers to consider how they would react to situations and to compare their own solutions to problems with those of fictional characters. Indeed, it has been argued that most fiction can be viewed in terms of 'facts' about characters. Peha (2003) maintains there are five facts of fiction:

***Fact 1: Fiction is all about a character.*** *Who is your main character? What does he or she look like? Can you describe your character's personality? How did this character get to be this way?*

***Fact 2: Fiction is all about what your character wants.*** *What does your character want more than anything else? Why does your character want it? Some characters want a lot; some want a little. It doesn't really matter as long as what your character wants is extremely important. The more important it is, the more your character will do to get it, and that's what makes the plot so interesting.*

***Fact 3: Fiction is all about how your character gets or does not get what he or she wants.*** *Is your character successful? Or does your character's quest end in failure? Either way, it can still be a great story. The trick is to understand how your character succeeds or fails. What obstacles does your character encounter? What solutions does your character craft to meet the challenges of his or her world?*

**Fact 4: Fiction is all about how your character changes.** How does your character change as a result of what happens? What was your character like at the beginning? What is your character like at the end? What has your character learned? What did you learn from reading the story?

**Fact 5: Fiction is all about a world an author creates.** How did the author create the world of the book? What kinds of people, places, things and ideas did the author include? What successes, disasters and conflicts does this world have? What are the good things in this world? What are the bad things? Complete the following sentence: 'This is a world where ...' Remember: the story is made up, but it is also true to its world.

## Activity

Look at Peha's *Five Facts of Fiction* and apply them to a character in a story you know well. How well do they work? Is this a model you could use in the classroom? How might you adapt it for different age groups?

What Peha's model achieves is to make us think about the potential of literature for helping us to think more deeply about character and to give us ideas for how we might explore this with children. Through reading and discussing what we read, we can develop an understanding of ways in which problems can be tackled and learn how other people live or used to live. And literature can help us in all sorts of other ways. Through reading, we broaden our knowledge and understanding of language, our vocabularies and our appreciation of different ways of expressing ideas. This helps us when we write as well as when we hold conversations.

As teachers, we can enhance work across the curriculum by introducing children to relevant stories and poems. For example, for history we might look at some of the following to add interest to studies of different periods.

|                  |                                      |   |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Aiken, Joan      | <i>Black Hearts in Battersea</i>     | nineteenth century (historical fantasy) |
| Avery, Gillian   | <i>The Elephant War</i>              | nineteenth century                      |
| Bawden, Nina     | <i>Carrie's War</i>                  | Second World War                        |
| Boston, Lucy M   | <i>Children of Green Knowe</i>       | seventeenth century                     |
| Dickens, Monica  | <i>The Great Fire</i>                | seventeenth century                     |
| Jones, Terry     | <i>The Saga of Erik the Viking</i>   | Vikings                                 |
| Kerr, Judith     | <i>When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit</i> | 1930s refugees                          |
| King, Clive      | <i>Stig of the Dump</i>              | present and Stone Age                   |
| Lively, Penelope | <i>The Ghost of Thomas Kempe</i>     | today and seventeenth century           |

|                     |                               |                    |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Morpurgo, Michael   | <i>Friend or Foe</i>          | Second World War   |
| Sutcliffe, Rosemary | <i>The Eagle of the Ninth</i> | Romans             |
| Treece, Henry       | <i>Children's Crusade</i>     | thirteenth century |

(See Chapter 3 for further ideas and suggestions.)

Given the huge potential of literature, it is worrying that some teachers do not appear to value children's literature or have a wide knowledge of it.

## Research Focus

### Teachers and reading

Concerned by evidence from such sources as PIRLS (2006; see Twist, et al., 2007) that children in the UK increasingly found less pleasure in reading than those in other countries, Cremin, et al. (2008) undertook a survey of teachers' reading habits, preferences and knowledge of children's literature. While they found that most of the 1200 teachers who responded to their questionnaire were regular readers who made use of stories and poems which they had enjoyed as children, the researchers had significant concerns about their findings.

Teachers were asked to name six children's authors, poets and picture book makers. The researchers concluded that:

*... it is questionable whether they know a sufficiently diverse range of writers to enable them to foster reader development and make informed recommendations to emerging readers with different needs and interests. The lack of professional knowledge and assurance with children's literature which this research reveals and the minimal knowledge of global literature indicated has potentially serious consequences for all learners, particularly those from linguistic and cultural minority groups who may well be marginalised unless teachers' own reading repertoires can be expanded. Furthermore, the infrequent mention of poetry in teachers' personal reading and their lack of knowledge of poets, as well as the relative absence of women poets and poets from other cultures writing in English, is also a concern, as is the dearth of knowledge of picture book creators, and the almost non-existent mention of picture book writers for older readers.*

*It is debatable therefore whether teachers are familiar with a wide enough range of children's authors in order to plan richly integrated and holistic literacy work. The evidence suggests that if units of work or author studies are undertaken they are likely to be based around the work of writers from the canon, whose writing may already be very well known to children. The wide popularity and teacher reliance on the prolific work of Dahl may restrict children's reading repertoires, since child-based surveys suggest he is also a core author of choice for children. This convergence of choice by adults and children is likely to narrow the range still further.*

(p.458)

Cremin, et al. (2008) provide a disquieting view of the consequences of some teachers' lack of engagement with literature. It is therefore important that as teachers train they develop a knowledge and understanding of children's literature, as well as an enthusiasm for sharing it with children, which will enable them to broaden children's reading horizons. In the case study below, you will see that tutorial discussions about children's literature revealed that some student teachers claim that they never read children's literature and that it doesn't appeal to them.

## Case Study

### Trainees who don't read children's novels

Some students also said that they had few recollections of reading stories as children and only did so later in order to pass English Literature GCSE. Other students asserted that those who didn't read and didn't know about children's literature were not only missing a treat but were also going to be ill-prepared to be primary teachers. The tutor, seeking to avoid a potentially unpleasant argument, suggested a challenge: she asked if two people who did not read children's literature would agree to sample a selection made by others in the group. Josh and Lauren agreed and were asked to say what their hobbies were and what kind of stories appealed to them in films and on TV so that the others could discuss in small groups some stories which might appeal to them. The tutor suggested there should be six recommendations each for Josh and Lauren and that these should include at least one which would appeal to Key Stage 1 children and should not include two books by the same author.

Josh enjoyed adventure movies and sport. He said that he liked stories which had clear endings in which everything was sorted out and he thought he would be unlikely to persist with a book which didn't have plenty of action. Lauren liked to travel and enjoyed movies set in other countries and those which addressed social issues and made her think. She asked for stories in which girls were central characters and were 'feisty and had opinions'.

The other students held lengthy discussions about a wide range of stories and agreed to narrow their selections down for the following week and to bring in copies of the chosen stories. The top six recommendations for Josh and for Lauren were as follows.

| Josh   | Lauren  |
|--|---|
| <i>Billy the Kid</i> by Michael Morpurgo                                   | <i>The Gruffalo</i> by Julia Donaldson                    |
| <i>Goodnight Mr Tom</i> by Michelle Magorian                               | <i>Matilda</i> by Roald Dahl                              |
| <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> by Jeff Kinney                                 | <i>Bill's New Frock</i> by Anne Fine                      |
| <i>Cliff-hanger</i> and <i>Buried Alive!</i> (sequel) by Jacqueline Wilson | <i>The Boy in the Dress</i> by David Walliams             |
| <i>A Series of Unfortunate Events</i> by Lemony Snicket                    | <i>Sylvia and Bird</i> by Catherine Rayner                |
| <i>The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark</i> by Jill Tomlinson                | <i>Precious and the Monkeys</i> by Alexander McCall Smith |

## Activity

How many of the stories above do you know?

Which other stories would you recommend for Josh and Lauren?

What would you recommend for each of the following:

- a Year 3 girl who is a proficient reader but doesn't read for pleasure – she likes horses and enjoys soaps on TV;
- a Year 5 boy who likes football, action films and computer games.

## Guiding children to reading

### Research focus

#### What do we know about children's love of reading?

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) has conducted a national annual literacy survey since 2010. Their annual report outlines findings about the reading habits, and levels of enjoyment, of children and young people aged eight to 18. Their 2015 report contains findings from their survey conducted in November and December 2014.

Overall, it is good news. In 2014 children and young people's level of daily reading increased across all formats, and 60 per cent of children reported having a favourite book. Many thought positively about reading, many reported reading for fun, and children and young people's enjoyment of reading improved (Clark, 2015). However, despite these positive shifts in attitudes, there are still only just over 50 per cent of children who report that they enjoy reading, and there are some significant differences between groups of children: overall girls enjoy reading more than boys, and socio-economic status remains a factor in reading frequency and enjoyment. Additionally, technology-based reading (websites, social networking and messaging) remain the most commonly read material outside the classroom.

Clearly, if we are to be able to help our pupils to broaden their knowledge and experience of literature, we need to develop our own knowledge and experience. If you look at an online bookseller site you will see that whenever you locate a book you are interested in buying you will be shown examples of other books which people who bought your choice also bought. It is part of our role as teachers of reading to guide children to the range of children's literature which is available. This means that we need to have a broad knowledge of different texts and we also need to develop strategies for enabling children to share their recommendations. To help develop your own knowledge of texts, build a literature portfolio.

## Activity

### Creating a literature portfolio

Look at charts of best-selling children's books both current and over time (you will find lists on several websites) and identify those which you haven't read. Make brief notes on the books as you read them, commenting on the following:

- age groups which might enjoy the book;
- how the book might be linked to work across the curriculum;
- whether the book would have wide appeal and be suitable for reading to a whole class or whether it might be one which only some readers would enjoy;
- other books that someone who enjoyed the book might like to read.

Build your portfolio throughout your teaching career and include poems as well as stories and you will find not only that your own knowledge of children's literature broadens, but also that you have a useful resource for finding stories and poems for the children you teach and the student teachers you will help to train. As you can see from the case study below, a literature portfolio can be an invaluable resource.

## Case Study

### Changing children's attitudes

At a school in the northeast of England the literacy co-ordinator was concerned that so many children rarely read except when directed to do so. Children's reading performance was below the national average and the teacher felt that it would improve if children's attitudes to reading for pleasure improved. She asked the English tutor from a local university for suggestions as to how to go about changing children's attitudes. It was agreed that the tutor would seek volunteers from the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course to attend the school on Wednesday afternoons, when they had no workshops or school visits, to act as reading role models.

As part of their course, the students produced children's literature portfolios which were placed in the course VLE to share with others. At an exploratory meeting between the tutor and the volunteer students, it was suggested that a starting point for work with the children could be to share with them some of the stories and poems the students had included in their portfolios, even where these might be more appropriate for younger children. It was hoped that sharing some of the books which the students loved, and which, perhaps, the children had enjoyed when younger, might be a good way to get them to talk about stories and poems and what they enjoyed.



In all, 17 student teachers volunteered to work in the school over a four-week period, taking with them some of the books they had reviewed and being prepared to share and discuss them with Year 5 and Year 6 children. Most children responded very well to working in pairs with a student and enjoyed the attention they received and found revisiting old favourites enjoyable. The students discussed with the children what they enjoyed reading and made notes which they could compare with other students. In a plenary session after the children had gone home, students and the tutor and literacy co-ordinator discussed and suggested stories which might engage different children, given their expressed preferences. Students went away to find copies of stories in readiness for the following week's visit.

### Curriculum Links

Literature portfolios can be an excellent resource for noting stories and poems which might enhance learning across the curriculum. Try creating a spreadsheet which you can use to pick out selections of texts relevant to different topics. This can be added to as you discover new stories and poems and could become a shared resource for a school staff or a group of trainee teachers.

### Activity

In the next chapter, you will find strategies for sharing literature with children. Before reading the chapter, consider how you would share stories with Year 5 and Year 6 children in a school with a similar situation to that described in the case study above.

## Further strategies for developing a love of reading

### Reading groups

Another way of increasing knowledge of books is to arrange children into reading groups which meet to discuss what they have read. Encourage them to prepare for these meetings and to share excerpts from books they enjoy, as well as to try out some of the recommendations of other group members. For some meetings, ask everyone in the group to read the same book in advance and be prepared to discuss it. The BBC Radio 4 programme, *A Good Read*, is an excellent model for this. The programme is especially interesting when each of the three panel members shares a favourite book, which the others also have to read in advance, and some love the book and others hate it!

If you look in many bookshops you will find a section of shelves on which members of staff have placed cards with their own comments about the books. Try this with your class, asking each child to choose and display a book and write on a postcard-sized sheet their opinions on it and to whom they would recommend it.

## Shared and guided reading

Another simple way to introduce children to different books is to use excerpts in shared and guided reading. While it is good practice to choose extracts from books which children will read from beginning to end, it can also be a very good strategy to show them passages which may encourage them to find the book and read it in full. It is important, therefore, to have available copies of any books which you select excerpts from for shared reading.

Guided reading, too, can provide opportunities to whet appetites, especially when the parts children read can be discussed and children are asked to make predictions about what might happen next. They can subsequently read the rest of the books independently to see how their predictions matched the authors' decisions.

However, you need to exercise caution when conducting guided reading sessions. Guided reading enables us to:

- help children to apply newly learned skills in context;
- meet the needs of individuals, or groups of individuals working at the same level;
- guide children through a text;
- prompt children to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned elsewhere;
- encourage and extend independent reading skills on new and increasingly challenging texts.

But it can also put some children off reading stories if they feel that the only reason to do this is to engage in analysis of the text. It is important to balance direct learning with giving children opportunities to enjoy stories for their own sake.

## Dialogic book talk

A possible alternative to guided reading, which enables children to have greater ownership of discussions, is dialogic book talk. This has been described as a collaborative act of enquiry, in which participants:

- use language for thinking;
- make connections to things they already know;
- ask questions of the book;

- explore the book at different levels;
- give reasons for what they say.

(DCSF, 2008, p.1)

Sessions might begin with you reading to the children or the children may read independently or in pairs. Books may be full of pictures or could be prose, depending upon the age and abilities of the children.

Books can be fiction or non-fiction but should make the reader ask questions. To plan for sessions you need to think about possible questions and opportunities for children to have differing views about aspects of the text. They might discuss:

- the setting for a story and how this affects characters and events;
- the characters and their relationships with each other and importance to the story;
- events: do they like the way things turned out? Can they suggest alternatives?

Rather than having a prepared script for the discussion, it may be better to anticipate what children may wish to discuss and to prepare some prompts to move things on as they exhaust topics. You should avoid simple questions such as 'Who is that?' or 'What is he doing?', which result in simple answers, and instead prompt children to think and discuss. Important things to consider when using dialogic book talk include the following.

- Allow pauses and thinking time – don't rush in to fill gaps in the talk.
- Try to use prompts such as 'I wonder why ...' rather than direct questions such as 'Why does ...?' This suggests that you really want to know, rather than that you already have the answer and are checking whether or not the children know it.
- You need to be ready to move things on if children have nothing to say or are going round in circles.
- Expect children to listen to each other first time round rather than making them repeat what they've said, or repeating it for them, though you may wish to recast it in order to encourage other children to contribute.
- Listen carefully to everything the children say – be ready for the flash of insight from the child who doesn't seem to have been listening at all.
- Be prepared to let the conversation go in directions which you hadn't expected.
- Encourage children to go back to the book to look again at pictures, and re-read for them bits they refer to. The activity is not a test of memory, and going back often gives an opportunity to go deeper or change your mind.
- Stop when the children start to show that they have had enough.

## Using excerpts to whet appetites – the DVD approach

In the days when renting videos and DVDs was a regular activity for many people, the first thing we saw after inserting the film into our machine was a series of highlights from other films. These excerpts were short and designed to tempt us to go out and buy or rent the films or watch them in the cinema. While there are many occasions when we may wish to avoid sharing only small passages from books with children, there is also a place for the DVD approach, which can show children a range of potentially interesting and exciting stories. Do be careful not to give too much of the story away since children, just like most adults, may not wish to read a story if they know how it ends.

In the case study below, you will see how Asif, a newly qualified teacher working in a small rural school and teaching a Years 3–4 class, sets about raising the profile of books for his class.

### Case Study

#### A book week

After discussing his ideas with the other staff members, it was decided that a whole-school book week would be planned. Asif was given responsibility for co-ordinating it.

Asif had experienced a book week in one of his placement schools during training and contacted the literacy co-ordinator there to ask for a meeting so he could find out about some of the practicalities of arranging one for his school. He was advised that if the book week was to be really successful he would need at least three months' preparation time in which to do the following.

- Invite a local children's bookshop to set up a stall offering discounts to parents and children.
- Invite a local children's author and establish that she has a DBS certificate.
- Hire costumes for teachers who would take on roles from well-known stories.
- Involve parents and carers.
- Plan activities and competitions including designing book covers; best book-related costumes; book quizzes, etc.
- Invite an English tutor from the local university to speak to parents at an evening meeting about ways of sharing literature with children.
- Put up displays of extracts from books, poems and plays.

Asif took his former colleague's advice and added further ideas of his own, including a school performance for parents in which each class divided children into groups to enact scenes from stories, read poems chorally, sing songs from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and hold a *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*-style quiz on children's literature for volunteer children and parents.

The week was a great success and there was a noticeable increase in many children's engagement with fiction in the weeks which followed.

## Research Focus

### Reading and ebooks

*The impact of ebooks on reading motivation and reading skill of children and young people*  
(Picton and Clarke, 2015)

*I like reading now, it's more simple, it's easier to use – I read a lot more at home even. I'm more comfortable reading online, I'm not sure why. I read at home on my phone, my ipad, my brother's game console ... a lot more people should give it a try.*

(Picton and Clarke, 2015, p.6)

This study investigated the impact of ebooks on reading motivation and skill over the period of an academic year. Schools from across the UK provided attitudinal and attainment data before and after running an ebooks project with a group of pupils. Practitioners and pupils were also interviewed and took part in focus groups to explore the initial findings in more depth.

The key findings from the study relating to children's enjoyment of reading were as follows.

- Enjoyment of reading increased significantly over the course of the project activities.
- More pupils thought reading was cool after the project.
- Fewer children said that they found reading difficult or that they couldn't find things to read that interested them.
- Positive attitudinal changes were more pronounced for boys than girls.
- Reading enjoyment increased, in particular for boys who started the project with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment.
- Most pupils preferred reading using technology but a higher proportion didn't have a preference for the format they read on.
- 84.6 per cent of practitioners felt that the ebooks project had increased pupils reading enjoyment and motivation.

## Curriculum Links

Book weeks can be themed to link them to topics and subject areas being studied by different classes. As you will see in Chapter 3, there is great potential for enhancing work across the curriculum through the use of stories and poems. For example, in Asif's book week teachers and children dressed in costumes related to stories. These costumes could have been related to historical periods, with a Second World War topic being enhanced through the creation of a school museum with artefacts borrowed from library services and children's families, and children discovering novels about the period, such as Michele Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom* and Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*.

## Reading into writing – teaching sequence for writing

The success of Asif's book week demonstrates that enjoying literature can lead to other activities, one of which is writing. However, not all teachers make the link effectively, perhaps because of a limited knowledge of children's literature or because they fail to see the opportunities available, as the conversation below illustrates.

### These children have no imaginations. They can't write stories!

These were the words of an experienced teacher who despaired of her class's inability to write the kind of imaginative, exciting tales which she claimed children would have been capable of producing when she began teaching 30 years earlier.

*How often do you read to them?* I asked.

*Well, I read to them in shared reading, but there's no time for reading stories in lesson time these days. We've got SATs to practise for and there aren't enough hours in the day to spend time reading stories to them.*

#### Activity

How could the teacher above help develop children's imaginations so that they could write more exciting stories?

In fact, the *Talk for Writing* (DCSF, 2008b) shows us that reading is the essential starting point for writing. Just as the BBC's *Blue Peter* always showed 'one I made earlier' before demonstrating how to make a model, so teachers need to show children examples of the genres they wish them to use in their writing. By reading stories and poems we provide ideas for content and structure for children's writing.

### A further challenge

You have seen in this chapter the importance of teachers developing a wide knowledge of children's literature. Through doing this they can help inspire and engage their pupils. However, international studies (Twist, et al., 2007; OECD, 2010) consistently show that there is a particular challenge in engaging boys with reading.

## Research Focus

### Boys' and girls' reading

A study in Finland, which also looked at research from elsewhere, is worth considering as we look for strategies to address many boys' lack of enthusiasm for reading. In Finland boys achieve higher than boys in other countries yet achieve significantly lower than Finnish girls, according to PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment, of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (OECD, 2010). Finnish children perform significantly better than their peers in almost all other countries and have a high level of interest and engagement in reading outside school. The PISA assessment showed that they borrowed books from the library more frequently than in any other OECD country and 41 per cent of boys reported that reading was one of their favourite pastimes, but for girls the figure was 60 per cent.

Merisuo-Storm (2006) studied 145 ten- and eleven-year-olds (67 boys and 78 girls) from a Finnish comprehensive school in order to:

- explore fourth-grade pupils' attitudes towards reading and writing;
- find out what texts pupils would choose to read and write and which materials they did not find attractive;
- find whether girls and boys enjoyed reading different texts. (p.115)

Merisuo-Storm's (2006) conclusions accord strongly with those of Cremin, et al. (2008) described earlier in this chapter:

*The teacher's love for literature, and ability to find reading and writing material that interests pupils, are crucial.*

(p.114)

*It is crucial that the teacher gathers information about his or her pupils' interests. With interesting reading material it is possible to encourage even the most reluctant reader to read.*

(p.124)

## Activity

Have you found in your experience in schools that boys tend to be less enthusiastic about reading than girls?

Do you think teachers need to take into account gender differences when planning reading activities?

Discuss your views with a colleague.

## Conclusion

As you will see in Chapter 10 on classic texts, literature permeates our culture. We know things about stories which we have never read, and not only because literature so often becomes films, television programmes, musicals and plays. We use phrases and names in everyday life which refer to novels and poems. Sometimes these come from Shakespeare or Dickens and many people can complete lines even if they have never read a play or novel. If we say *To be or not to be*, people will very probably know that the next words are *that is the question*, even if they have never read or seen *Hamlet*. If we say *Romeo, Romeo* people will continue with *wherefore art thou Romeo?* We refer to mean people as *Scrooge* even though we may never have read *A Christmas Carol*, and if anyone says *Please sir, I want some more*, many people will know the line comes from *Oliver Twist*.

Literature is, then, part of our heritage. We live in a highly literate society with texts all around us. Many texts are used functionally and enable us to go about our daily lives getting from place to place; filling in forms; responding to messages; and keeping up to date with events. We can function in our society without necessarily having a love of reading, but many would argue that life is richer if we read for pleasure as well as purpose.

For children acquiring reading skills, having teachers whose enthusiasm for reading is infectious can be just the incentive they need to make progress. If they know what a good story can sound like because a skilled reader has shared it with them, they are more likely to want to read stories independently. Just as people who want to be top athletes will spend hours practising the skills of their sports so that they can perform at the highest level, so children are more likely to work hard to develop the reading skills which will enable them to enjoy exciting stories if they can see a purpose for their endeavours. As Rose (2006) maintained: *it is important to make sure that, over the course of acquiring phonic skills, children are also given every opportunity to enjoy and benefit from excellent literature* (para 116, p.36).

### Learning Outcomes Review

You should now have ideas for making reading an appealing activity and recognise the importance of being an active reader with a wide knowledge of texts. You should also be aware of strategies for developing children's enthusiasm for and engagement with reading, and for developing both girls' and boys' love of reading.

#### Self-assessment questions

- 1 What are the key features of dialogic book talk?
- 2 Why is it important for teachers to have a wide knowledge of texts?

## Further Reading

Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, Final Report, March 2006* (The Rose Review – Ref: 0201–2006DOC-EN). Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Most initial teacher education courses make the Rose Review essential reading. It is important to understand that while there is a strong emphasis in the review on phonics, this is set within the context of an emphasis on the importance of providing children *with every opportunity to enjoy and benefit from excellent literature* (para 116, p.36).

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