

Case Study: Jenny Howe, Reading Engagement Agent, Queensbridge School, Birmingham

Library sessions, library displays & borrowing in KS3 pupils

Queensbridge School is a co-educational comprehensive school in the West Midlands with students aged 11 – 16 years. Reading engagement and wider reading is at the heart of the school; it is part of everything they do and starts with the library. Part of Jenny Howe's role is to ensure that the library has material for all students which reflects the school's diverse community. As research from The National Literacy Trust shows: *"Children and young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and young people aged 14 to 16 are less likely to use their school library compared with their more advantaged and younger peers."* Thus the school consider it is incredibly important to make the library space inviting and welcoming for all pupils across the board and to include interesting and relevant reading materials for all.

Jenny has been involved in lots of different projects since she started her role at Queensbridge School. These have taken many different forms from book advent calendars (a huge advent calendar with cosy treats to encourage the reading of new books which were also wrapped up behind each door) to a book tasting menu using the library pack of books from BookTrust. The books were served on plates by the library monitors. Each book was wrapped up with only a small written clue to what they were about.

She works closely with the English department and for part of the school's cycle of learning last term decided that it would be a good idea to offer a 'book choosing' session to all KS3 pupils as part of their English lessons. This also linked nicely with the planned 'Bookflix' display. Jenny wanted to concentrate on different genres and promote the idea that the library is a physical version of Netflix; the library gives recommendations, 'now trending' and top picks, and also 'because you read' tips and ideas, too.

This 'book choosing' project aims to encourage pupils to step outside of their reading comfort zone and explore lots of different types of books and authors.

Jenny put together the 'Bookflix' library display first for visual impact and then displayed physical books alongside it. The 'QB book choosing' flow chart was devised to include all genres: Action & Adventure; Crime & Mystery; Stories Set in the Past; Gen Z: Our Modern World; Comedy & LOLs; Horror & Scares; and Science Fiction & Fantasy. A simple presentation was made to support each section.

Jenny began by going through the book choosing with a class of pupils (each pupil had their own copy to follow) and posed the question 'Do you like films set in the real world?' This linked in with the 'Bookflix' display and helped pupils to see the library as a physical version of the display; it was also a great discussion point as pupils were able to talk about some of their favourite books and films, and make the link between the visual and the written. In addition, it was a great way in to talk about genres as a more accessible concept and in terms that all pupils would be able to understand.

Each pupil was asked to pick three books from their chosen genre; one that looked interesting, one that had a great blurb and one with an interesting title. They all read the first page of each (either to themselves, myself, a T.A or their teacher) and were then asked to mark them out of 10. At the end of the session, every pupil had chosen a book and borrowed it from the library.

Jenny gave the pupils a sheet for them to fill out with their chosen book genre and that information has been used to order new books, and to get a full insight into what books would engage and encourage the diverse range of pupils to become interested in reading. This project worked alongside the pupil's wider reading/reading for pleasure, provided information about how to choose books and the exploration of different genres and how these overlap.

Part of the Queensbridge Equality and Diversity Objectives states: “...reduce the attainment gap between different key groups of pupils, in particular the difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils.” This project has worked well alongside the English department to encourage and engage disadvantaged pupils by giving them the opportunity to discuss and choose books, and learn how to use and explore the library space. Having ownership over choices in education (particularly reading) is extremely important for pupils as it allows more investment in their actions.

The project was based on research evidence from The National Literacy Trust, articles in the journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy and conversations with English teachers.

Statistics have been gathered from every pupil who took part in the sessions to use for research and to ensure that interesting and relevant books are chosen for the library to engage pupils. The results allow Jenny to view current reading trends in KS3 pupils.

The impact of the project will be maintained by running the sessions every year (from September) and Jenny is now developing some study skills lessons to improve the research methods of pupils.

Tips:

1. Think about the display
2. Create a relevant presentation to help as you go through the session
3. Make sure there is a question sheet for you to gather data from the pupils.

Bookflix display



Book choosing chart

