

TIPS FOR SCHOOLS TO ENCOURAGE A READING CULTURE

by Nicola Morgan



My training in dyslexia first inspired me to want to understand the human brain and behaviour. Alongside my work in adolescent wellbeing, I've kept up this interest and now regularly lecture on the science of reading for pleasure and the different effects of various types of reading, including digital. These are my tips (or treat them as discussion points) for schools to develop a healthy whole-school reading culture.

1. A reading culture will only happen if senior management are on side. They will only be on side if they know the benefits and value. See the Reading Brain section of my website.
2. Reading for pleasure should be cross-curricular, not just English/Library. All subjects have wonderful books that enrich them. Fiction can boost understanding of science or history, etc.
3. Most people are best motivated by instant benefits: they don't respond to the idea that reading will make them *live longer* as much as the idea that it will make them *feel* good or make them *know* something, results they'll appreciate straightaway. Use this strong human tendency.
4. Non-fiction is just as able to inspire empathy as fiction and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I argue strongly about this, with science, but let me say four words: Diary of Anne Frank... (The full argument is on my website.)
5. Use careful psychology: some children react badly to being told they should read something "harder"; others like the challenge. You risk further discouraging reluctant readers if you undermine their choices.
6. Talk about books you love and books you don't love. Talk about why. Discussions about books open eyes and inspire more investigation and enquiry.
7. Making time for reading is especially necessary and difficult in today's busy world. Schools which have introduced whole-school (adults, too) reading sessions see benefits and find that most people come to value and enjoy this quiet time. Can your school do this?
8. Even if some students or teachers don't enjoy quiet reading time, how about prioritising the needs of your quiet thinkers, for once, not just your extroverts? We have to do sport and all sorts of things we might not like at first, and often we find pleasures we didn't expect – same with reading. Providing opportunity to try quiet reading helps those who already like/need it and those who don't.
9. Don't make books seem special: make them a normal part of life, because they are.
10. Fund author visits: these work brilliantly to inspire young readers. You'll find information on the Society of Authors website and the site of pretty much any children's author. You *do* have to pay authors, though. We can't eat goodwill!

Nicola Morgan, The Teenage Brain Woman, is the author of award-winning books of fiction and non-fiction and is an international expert on aspects of wellbeing, adolescence and reading. See her website for lots of free resources and details of her work, including her exciting and award-winning novels for teenagers. www.nicolamorgan.com

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