**Choosing books: An activity for school visits**

This activity has been created to be led by library staff for class visits to the library, to talk children through the process of choosing a book they’ll enjoy. It is based on research demonstrating that children often have very poor knowledge of how to choose books, as this is not typically taught. This activity has been tried and tested in libraries as a whole class activity, but would also work well with small groups of children.

Resources *Choice 1* and *Choice 3* are optional and not recommended for younger children/less experienced readers/writers.

# **Introduce the activity and yourself**

Introducing the activity: Today we are going to talk about how to choose a book. You will all have something to write on (*Choice 3*) so you can write your own ideas as we do this together.

Introducing yourself: Share the types of experiences you like to get from books (e.g., learning about your interests, making you laugh, scary/gripping books, etc) and/or the types of books you read as a child.

# **Think:**

Books offer all types of experiences – they can make us laugh, be exciting or scary, help us learn new things, take us on adventures, help us learn more about other people, or more about ourselves. Books can inspire us to write, to draw, to use our imagination.

So, when choosing a book, one of the first things to think about is ‘what type of book are you in the mood for?’ Are you looking for something to make you laugh, something familiar or something completely new, a book which is exciting, or one which helps you learn new things? You can also think about what sorts of things you like or are interested in – animals, sports, space, technology. We can use our interests and the types of experiences we want to get from reading to choose books.

What types of experiences would you like to get from a book?

*Encourage hands up and get lots of ideas from children.*

Brilliant, so hands up those of you that like books that:

Make you laugh

Are about things you’re interested in – animals, space, technology etc.

Teach you new things

Are close/similar to your own life, for example, have characters similar to you

Are scary/exciting

*Choice 3 ACTIVITY*: Now write down the reasons that you like to read/the types of experiences that you want from a book.

Now we are going to move onto how you might choose a book.

# **Choose:**

Once we’ve thought of the type of book we’d like, we now have to think about how we will choose it. There are lots of different strategies/ways you can choose a book.

What types of ways do you use to choose a book?

*Encourage hands up and get lots of ideas from children.*

Brilliant, so you can: look at the front cover, look at the illustrations/pictures, read the blurb on the back, read the first few pages or a few random pages inside the book. You can choose based on the genre, the author or pick the next book in a series. You could also choose based on a recommendation from someone else or reading a review. You might want to try an author/series/character that is familiar, or try something completely new. You might even use several of these ways at once.

*Choice 3 ACTIVITY:* We’ve thought of lots of ways to pick a book. Now I want each of you to see if you can think/remember 3-4 ways that we’ve just mentioned and write them down. I always find a really good way is trying the book a little first – maybe reading the first couple of pages, so I’d always encourage you to try that, as it gives you the best idea of whether you’ll like the book or not.

**Support:**

There will be lots of others in your class (peers, friends) who like reading the same things as you do, or who like the same sorts of things that you do. You can support each other by recommending books to each other and talking about books together. You can also write short reviews/recommendations to display in your class/school/local library to support others to choose books.

*Choice 3 ACTIVITY:*  Write down the names of a couple of people in your class who you think would be good to discuss books with/help you find books you will enjoy.

Why did you write their name?

That’s great. It is good to ask friends/classmates who know you well, know the sorts of things you like, someone who has similar interests, someone who you think you’d enjoy talking about books with, someone who likes books or knows a lot about books.

# **Ask:**

You can also ask others – some adults have lots of experience choosing books.

*Choice 3 ACVITIY:* Write down two or three adults who you think might be good to ask to help you choose a book.

*Why did you write their name?*

It’s good to ask adults who know you as a person, the sorts of things you like, or an adult who knows something about books. Your teacher, other adults in school, and librarians will know a lot of children’s books. You can see if they can help you choose a book. Remember, librarians may not know you as a person as well as a teacher does, so tell them about the sorts of things you like (e.g., your interests, what type of experience you want from a book) and then they will be better able to help you.

# **Look:**

Now it’s time to think about how we can find books to choose from in the library. Let’s look around the library and I’ll talk about how the books are organised – over here we have X and there is X and X, etc. The books have been organised by *EXPLAIN LIBRARY LAYOUT.*

Learning how books are organised can really make your choices much easier as you know which ‘section’ to go to.

*Choice 3 ACTIVITY:*  After this activity I’d like to you spend time looking round the books here and see how they are organised. *Additionally/alternatively, consider selecting a range of books to have on display for children to browse through to illustrate the different types of books/texts on offer.*

# **Swap:**

Even with good ways of choosing, sometimes a book is just not right, and that’s ok. Part of being a reader is about knowing when a book is not right for you.

When do you know when a book isn’t right for you?

*Encourage show of hands for replies.*

Good – you may find that you don’t want to read it, find it boring, that it’s too difficult, or not what you expected. With any book, give it a go, don’t give up too soon, but if you are just not enjoying it, choose something else – there’s a better book out there for you.

**Thank you for thinking this through with me, and for sharing your ideas. Hopefully you have some good ideas now to choose books you’ll enjoy. We’ll now spend some time practicing these**.

