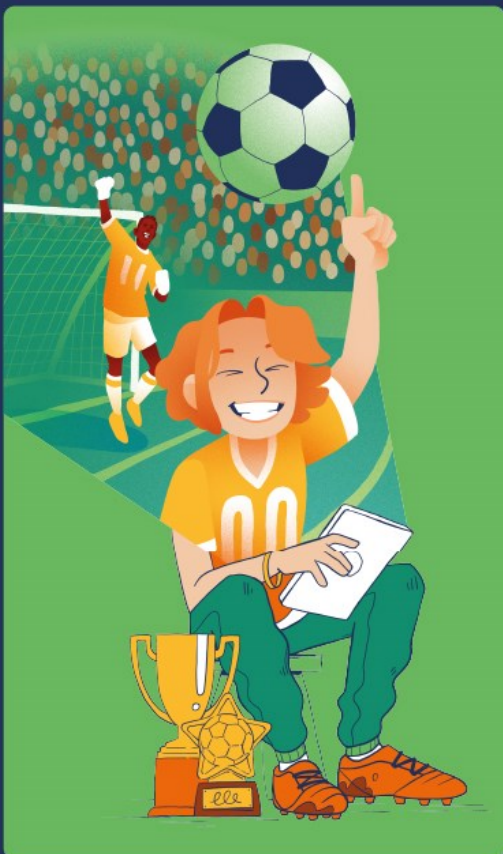


LOVE TO READ

A Programme to Inspire
and Sustain a Love of Reading



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Love to Read Libraries

Libraries and library staff are essential to support a love of reading among children. Libraries provide children with access to a range of rich and diverse reading material, and those working within libraries can, and do, make a **meaningful difference** to children's reading enjoyment, reading engagement, and reading experiences.

This guide has been created to support librarians and library staff to further inspire and sustain a love of reading among primary school children, by providing recent research insights and resources to support with this. With input from library professionals, all activities and resources have been created to be **easily adopted into library settings**, either as resources, or to support school visits to the library. You can learn more about Love to Read Libraries, and access all resources for free, via our website: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>

The development of this guide has been prompted by research evidence of a continuing decline in children's reading enjoyment and engagement (National Literacy Trust, 2023). Of most concern are declines in book reading, given the known benefits of reading books. For example, research demonstrates that books develop children's language and literacy skills, and their knowledge of the world around them (Korochkina et al., 2024; McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021; Nation et al., 2022; Torppa et al., 2019). In addition, books provide **opportunities for children** to relax, laugh, escape to new worlds, pursue their interests, learn new things, experience adventures and spend time with fictional friends (Currie & McGeown, 2024; McGeown et al., 2020).

Furthermore, when children explore personally meaningful content through books, or reflect on a story from the characters' perspective, this can support their **understanding of themselves and/or others** (McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021). Indeed, research demonstrates the benefits of reading books for self-understanding, empathy, and wellbeing (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018; Eekhof et al., 2022; Webber et al., 2024), in addition to their ability to leverage social change (OECD, 2021). However, for these benefits to be realised, children need to be **motivated** to read and to deeply **engage** with the texts that they read.



Love to Read principles

Reading motivation reflects children's desire to read – that is, whether they want to read or not. It is underpinned by children's *beliefs about reading* (i.e., their self-perceptions of themselves as readers, for example whether they think they are good

at reading or not), their *attitudes toward reading* (i.e., whether they think reading is an enjoyable, useful and/or important activity) and their *reasons for reading* (Conradi et al., 2014). Therefore, children need to be supported to develop positive beliefs about themselves as readers, positive attitudes towards reading, and have reasons to want to read. Reading motivation is important because it influences reading engagement (Schiefele et al., 2012).

Reading engagement reflects the quality and quantity of children's reading experiences and includes behavioural, cognitive, affective, and social aspects (McGeown & Conradi-Smith, 2024). **Behavioural** engagement refers to how much time children spend reading, and the text types they read. **Cognitive** engagement refers to children's cognitive effort when reading and the extent to which they use strategies (e.g., decoding, re-reading) to support their comprehension. **Affective** engagement reflects the emotions children experience while reading, for example, the extent to which children enjoy, and are interested in, what they read. Finally, **social** engagement refers to children's participation in reading activities with others as they share, swap, and discuss books. This allows children to learn and benefit from others' reading experiences, and be part of a reading community.



Why children read books, from McGeown et al., 2020

Love to Read Libraries draws upon six research-informed principles: access, choice, time, connection, social, and success, to support children's reading motivation and engagement. This guide provides an overview of each principle, with activities and resources, created with library professionals, to embed these activities into practice.

Access

Children need to have regular and easy access to books which reflect their interests, preferences, lives, experiences and abilities.



Libraries are essential for children to have access to reading materials which reflect their interests, preferences, lives, experiences, and abilities. By providing free and equal access to the communities they serve, the importance of public libraries to support children's reading enjoyment and development cannot be underestimated. Research demonstrates that children are **more motivated** to read when they have **access to a wide range** of books and other text types (Gambrell, 2011), but specifically those that reflect their lives, interests, preferences, and abilities (McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021). Inequalities in access to books at home reflect social and economic inequalities (Clark et al., 2021) and many primary schools in the UK have no dedicated library budget (Tyler Todd, 2021). Public libraries are therefore **essential in reducing inequalities**, and are more important than ever in the current economic climate. As a result, **developing and maintaining connections** between public libraries and schools is essential.

Library practices

- If you have responsibility over your library book budget, seek children's input into new book purchases to ensure these reflect children's interests, preferences, and abilities. You could have a small post box in the library for children to submit their suggestions (see resource *Access 1*). New purchases can be made visible (e.g., within children's section of library) when the book is purchased and will support positive feelings of agency and empowerment, as children recognise their contribution to their public library.
- Look at book provision from the perspectives of all children, paying particular attention to those children who you think may not currently have adequate access to books (e.g., struggling readers, minority groups), and use this to guide new book purchases. If you improve provision for specific groups, make sure this is visible to library users.
- If you do not have responsibility over your library book budget, encourage children to reserve books they would like access to, and/or discuss alternative

books currently available in your library. Discussions about different books can extend children's knowledge of other great titles.

- If feasible, contact local schools in your community to arrange library visits for different year groups. During this time, children can learn what their local library has to offer, access new resources (e.g., resource *Choice 1*) and take part in activities to support reader enjoyment and development (e.g., *Choice 2*, *Success 2*).
- If feasible, attend school and/or community events, to raise the profile of what libraries offer in terms of book provision and other resources.

Choice

Children need to have choice over their reading activities. Libraries need to have the structure, and children need to have the skills, to ensure 'good' (i.e., skill and interest aligned) reading choices.



Providing children with choice over their reading is necessary for both their reading motivation and engagement (Brandt et al., 2021; De Naeghel et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 2007; McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021). However, children often haven't developed good strategies/ways to choose books (Merga and Roni, 2017) and this is typically not a skill that is taught. While more regular readers will have more experience choosing books, they can also often rely on more familiar reads (e.g., preferred authors/series/genres) without extending their reading experiences. On the other hand, those who rarely read are likely to struggle to choose a book aligned with their interests. Libraries are **ideal sites** to support and develop children's skills in **how to choose books they will enjoy**. Libraries can further support this by ensuring their bookshelves, reading corners and book displays facilitate and optimise children's reading choices (e.g., organised by theme, genre, etc).

Library practices

- Have copies of the 'Choosing a book' (resource *Choice 1*) resource available within the children's section of your library for children and their families to use when visiting the library. This resource guides children through the process of choosing a book and can help them to find books they are more likely to enjoy.

- If hosting school visits, guide children through the process of choosing a book as part of a whole-class activity (see resource *Choice 2*) so they feel more supported to develop their skills in choosing books (see also resource *Choice 3* to accompany).
- Ensure, as much as possible, that books are organised by genre/theme/topic and that the library structure is clear to children. Consider providing and displaying resources, reviews and recommendations (resources *Choice 4*, *Choice 5*) for children to support each other's reading choices.

Time

Children need to have regular quality time to read books and take part in book reading activities.



Libraries and library staff are essential to **foster children's reading** motivation and engagement **outside of school**, and while research points to the importance of time spent reading, it is time spent reading outside of school that is particularly important for reader development (Torppa et al., 2019). Providing children with access to quality books which reflect their interests, developing their skills and confidence to choose books they will enjoy, and developing positive identities as readers, will all make a meaningful difference to whether, and how much, children **choose to read** outside of school.

Library practices

- Create a display within your library (e.g., using resource *Time 1*) to highlight the benefits of leisure time reading, and illustrate the different types of reading experiences that books can offer.
- Have copies of resources (e.g., resource *Choice 1*) available to support children's reading choices and encourage more leisure time reading.

Connection

Children need to be able to access and choose books, and book reading activities, which are personally relevant, and connect with their own reading goals.



It is essential that children have access to books which reflect their lives and experiences, and that children see someone ‘like them’ reflected in the books that they read (Picton, 2017; Webber et al., 2024). **Representation can take different forms** and may be in terms of ethnicity, culture, home language, religion, disability, family structure, family background, or in relation to story events or representation of topics of interest. Personal connection to fictional stories and characters, or personal interest to non-fiction topics, can **increase readers’ enjoyment** of, and immersion in, books (Brandt et al., 2021; Kuzmičová & Cremin, 2021; McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021).

In addition to personal connection, students are more engaged when reading if the books they read **align with their reading goals** (i.e., why they want to read or what type of reading experience they are seeking). Children read for different reasons (e.g., to relax, laugh, for escapism, for excitement, to spend time with fictional friends, to learn more about their interests, and so much more) (McGeown et al., 2020). Encouraging children to **reflect on why they want to read**, and then finding books aligned with that experience can promote greater depth of engagement.

Library practices:

- Look at book and other text provision available in your library and, if possible, seek input from children (resource *Access 1*) to plan future purchases which reflect their interests, lives, experiences, etc.
- Encourage children to find books that are personally meaningful and/or connect with the type of reading experience they are seeking by guiding them through the process of choosing a book (see resources and activities *Choice 1*, *Choice 2* and *Choice 3*).
- If feasible, author and illustrator visits can support feelings of connection, particularly when their books, personal interests, lives, or experiences resonate with children.

Social

Children need to have the time, skills and confidence to be able to share and discuss books with others.



The library space offers opportunities for both informal and more organised social reading activities. Providing **inclusive opportunities** for children to share, recommend or discuss books and/or their interests with others is essential for reader development (Cremin et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 2007; Nuegebauer & Gilmore, 2020; Taboada Barber & Klauda, 2020). Social reading activities can take different forms, for example, reading aloud during school visits, encouraging book recommendations or supporting book-talk.

It is important to recognise that **many children will need support to take part** in social reading activities; not all children have the skills, confidence, or reading experiences to feel they can contribute in meaningful ways. Therefore, the social reading activities offered should be **diverse and inclusive** to encourage all children to take part in ways which are comfortable and meaningful to them.

Library practices:

- Reading aloud during school visits can be a great way to engage children in reading. Before the school visit, ask their teacher for recommendations and/or send several book suggestions to the school to allow children to choose the book they will have read to them when they visit. This can create feelings of anticipation and agency, and further support school-library connections. Prior to the school visit, agree whether the teacher or a member of library staff will be leading the read-aloud.
- If hosting school visits, provide resources to guide children through the process of talking about books with others (e.g., resource *Social 2*).
- Craft and other library-based activities are a great way for children to relax, and can be used to support book knowledge and book-talk. They can also allow children to explore and better understand their own reading interests. Resource *Social 1* has ideas to support with this.
- If feasible, author and illustrator visits can create feelings of excitement and support book-talk and sharing of reading preferences.
- Encourage children to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings about books through writing, drawing pictures and making recommendations, and sharing these with others, perhaps via a library display or on book shelves (e.g., resource *Social 3*).

Success

Children need to have a range of rich and diverse positive reading experiences, be able to set meaningful goals for themselves, and recognise their growing success as readers.



Librarians and library staff champion reader enjoyment and development and are ideally positioned to support a lifelong love of reading. To support children's reading motivation and engagement it is essential to **support their holistic understanding** of what it means to be a reader, that is, a successful reader. A successful reader is a reader who enjoys reading, knows how to choose books they will enjoy, feels confident sharing their thoughts and ideas about books, chooses to read in their own time, uses their imagination when they read, isn't afraid to extend their reading practices and try out new authors or genres, makes book suggestions to others, learns new things when reading, has strategies/ways to improve their reading skills and comprehension, uses reading to develop their interests, and so much more (McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021).

This concept of 'a reader' needs to be highlighted, so that **children can see the different ways they can, and are, developing as readers**. In addition, access to books aligned with their reading skills will also support motivation to read (Toste et al., 2020).

Library practices:

- Ensure all children have access to books which align with their reading skills as well as their reading interests and consider extending provision of more accessible text types.
- Have copies of *Success 1* resource available in your library. This resource encourages children to think about, and add to, the different ways in which they are developing as readers.
- If hosting school visits, use activity Resource *Success 2* to encourage children to think about, and share, what it means to be a successful reader, creating a holistic view of what this is.

Conclusion

“I feel like if it’s written very well, I feel like I’m there”

“If I read a funny book, it just lightens my mood”

Inspiring and sustaining a love of reading is so important, yet we recognise that it is becoming increasingly challenging, as research evidence illustrates a decline in reading enjoyment and engagement. We hope the research-informed principles underpinning the Love to Read Libraries guide, and accompanying resources and activities, support our collective efforts to increase children’s reading motivation and engagement, and expand the quality of their reading experiences and outcomes.

Please visit <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/> to access all resources for free.

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Resources

Please note, those with a * indicate an activity for school visits.

Access:

Access 1: A book I'd like in the library

Choice:

Choice 1: Choosing a book: Support for children

* Choice 2: Choosing a book: An activity for school visits

Choice 3: Choosing a book: A resource to accompany Ch2 activity

Choice 4: Supporting choice: Bookmark recommendations

Choice 4: Supporting choice: Full page recommendation

Time:

Time 1: Library display (children's quotes)

Social:

Social 1: Craft and library-based activities

Social 2: Sentence starters: Sharing thoughts about books

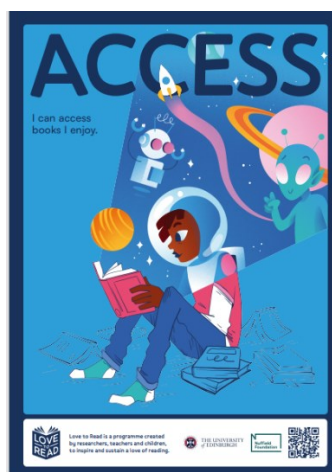
Social 3: Social recommendations

Success:

Success 1: My Reading Successes template

* Success2: What is a successful reader? An activity for school visits

Freely available additional resources are available on the Love to Read website and include posters and bookmarks. For example:



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