

# National Year of Reading starter toolkit

A starting point for educators to spark a year of reading.



**GO  
ALL  
IN.**

National  
Year of  
Reading  
2026

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# Introduction

Welcome to the National Literacy Trust's National Year of Reading starter toolkit!

Inside the pages of this toolkit, you'll find everything you need to get started on the journey to enhance the reading for pleasure culture in your school or setting.

On the pages that follow, you'll discover insights, ideas, opportunities and practical guidance, designed to help you take action, explore new resources and inspire your students to read for pleasure.

Use this toolkit to plan activities, engage your colleagues and start making the National Year of Reading come alive in your classrooms today.

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The National Year of Reading 2026 invites every school and early years setting to help spark a renewed national love of reading. More than a campaign, it is a chance to reshape how children experience books, seeing reading not as a task but as a vibrant, social and meaningful part of everyday life.

Throughout the year, you will have access to a rich programme of free, ready-to-use resources and national moments designed to inspire, connect and celebrate reading across schools and communities.

As we embark on this shared effort, it is important to understand why reading for pleasure matters so profoundly, and to acknowledge the growing body of evidence that shows we are facing a significant decline in children's reading enjoyment and engagement. The following sections explore both the importance of reading for pleasure and what recent research reveals about this emerging crisis.



# The strategic value of reading for pleasure in schools

Reading for pleasure refers to reading that is chosen and self-directed, where children and young people decide what to read, how to read and the place reading holds in their lives. It grows from personal interest rather than external requirement and can involve many forms of text, from stories and information books to comics, magazines, digital content, audiobooks and shared reading experiences.

While earlier definitions emphasised enjoyment, our understanding has broadened. Today, reading for pleasure is seen as a dynamic, everyday practice: connecting with ideas and people, exploring identity, finding calm or curiosity and engaging with texts that feel relevant. At its heart is choice, agency, relevance and connection.

## Why reading for pleasure matters

### 1. Attainment and reading development

Decades of research show a consistent relationship between reading enjoyment and reading performance. Children who enjoy reading score higher on standardised reading assessments, both in UK and international studies<sup>1</sup>. The message is simple: when students enjoy reading, they read more<sup>2</sup>; when they read more, their skills accelerate<sup>3</sup>.

### 2. Benefits across all subjects

Evidence from longitudinal research shows that regular reading for pleasure predicts better outcomes in vocabulary, maths and spelling, outweighing even parental education level in its influence on attainment<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. Wellbeing and personal development

Reading for pleasure supports mental wellbeing, emotional resilience and empathy<sup>5</sup>. It helps young people understand themselves and others, reduces stress and contributes to positive identity development<sup>6</sup>. Given rising concerns about pupil wellbeing, this makes reading a strategically valuable tool.

### 4. School attendance

Ongoing research suggests that reading and engagement are related, and that lower reading ages may impact dramatically on pupils' engagement with school<sup>7</sup>.

### 5. Wider life outcomes

Reading enjoyment is linked to future earnings, national economic productivity and even increased life expectancy<sup>8</sup>. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to influence long-term life chances.

## The current picture: a concerning decline

The UK is experiencing a profound, generational decline in reading engagement. A recent survey of parents and carers of children aged 0 to 7 found that more than 1 in 3 (35%) said they didn't enjoy reading. This is important as strong links were found between family reading attitudes and children's reading environments and experiences. If parents enjoyed reading themselves, children were 25% more likely to be read to every day and 40% more likely to enjoy reading themselves<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, a recent survey of parents of children aged 0 to 13 found that just 2 in 5 (40%) agreed that reading books to their child was fun<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, surveys of parents of children aged from birth to 5 have found a steep decline in the number who say they read daily with their child over the last five years, decreasing from 2 in 3 (66.1%) in 2019 to 1 in 2 (50.5%) in 2024<sup>11</sup>.

Evidence from the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey shows that only one in three children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported enjoying reading in their free time, while just one in five read something daily<sup>12</sup>. International comparisons further highlight this challenge: according to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, only 29% of pupils aged 9 to 10 in England said they "very much like reading," which is significantly below the international average of 42%<sup>13</sup>.

This pattern of disengagement extends beyond childhood. Research from The Reading Agency found a lack of engagement with reading among adults, many of whom cited barriers such as time pressures, low confidence and limited access to relevant reading materials<sup>14</sup>.

Alongside falling enjoyment, another challenge persists: access. A significant number of pupils have few or no books at home, particularly those from lower-income families<sup>15</sup>, and many schools struggle without dedicated library budgets or space.

# National Year of Reading 2026

We hope this summary makes clear the strength of evidence for prioritising reading for pleasure. The benefits are wide-ranging: they boost reading development, support wellbeing and shape future life chances. In every early years setting, primary and secondary school, a focus on reading for pleasure pays dividends for learners.

We also recognise the scale of the challenge. The sharp decline in reading engagement among children and young people demands a collective response. Yet the evidence is equally clear that change is possible. Across schools, early years settings and the wider education sector, there is inspiring work already underway to motivate disengaged readers and build positive reading cultures.<sup>16</sup>

The National Year of Reading 2026 is an opportunity for every setting to **Go All In** and help reignite the nation's love of reading. It offers a fresh moment to reposition reading as a modern, social and meaningful everyday practice. By taking part, settings can help reverse the downward trend in reading for pleasure and strengthen one of the most powerful drivers of equity and opportunity: a lifelong reading habit.

Throughout 2026, settings will have access to a full programme of free, ready-to-use resources designed to make reading irresistible. This includes virtual national events with inspirational figures, professional development webinars, networking opportunities and locally led activities that bring communities together around books and stories. National Reading Quizzes and other interactive challenges will sustain excitement and engagement.

All support will be grounded in robust evidence and new research to ensure a lasting legacy. A new National Year of Reading website will bring the best tools, templates and guidance into one accessible place.

As momentum builds, settings will also be able to use the **Go All In** brand toolkit to create tailored materials and amplify the campaign in ways that speak directly to their communities. Joining the movement means contributing to a national effort to celebrate stories, spark curiosity and build a reading culture that endures.

For more on the National Literacy Trust's research, please visit [literacytrust.org.uk/research-services](https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services).

To find more out more about our reading for pleasure work go to [literacytrust.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure](https://literacytrust.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure).

To join our National Year of Reading campaign, see [goallin.org.uk](https://goallin.org.uk).

Thank you for all you are already doing to encourage children and young people to read for pleasure.



## Endnotes

- 1 See, e.g. Clark et al, (2024), *Children and young people's reading in 2024*, National Literacy Trust; Lindorff, A. et al., (2023). *PIRLS 2021: National report for England*, Department for Education.
- 2 Clark et al, (2025), *Children and young people's reading in 2025*, National Literacy Trust
- 3 See, e.g. Allington, R. L., & McGill-Franzen, A. M. (2021). *Reading Volume and Reading Achievement: A Review of Recent Research*. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(S1).
- 4 Sullivan, A., & Brown, M. (2013). *Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading*.
- 5 See, e.g. Sun, Y.-J., et al: (2023). *Early-initiated childhood reading for pleasure: Associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence*. *Psychological Medicine*, 1-15; BOP consulting. (2015). *Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment*. The Reading Agency.
- 6 Clark, C. et al, (forthcoming) *Why children and young people do or do not read*, National Literacy Trust
- 7 The Engagement Platform. (2025). *Acting on the Engagement Gap: Insights from the Research Cohort*.
- 8 See e.g. British Land & WPI Consulting. (2021). *The power of reading for pleasure*; Bavishi, A. et al., (2016). *A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity*. *Social Science & Medicine*, 164, 44-48.
- 9 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/booktrust-research-children-are-40-more-likely-to-enjoy-reading-if-their-parents-or-carers-do/>
- 10 HarperCollins Children's Books, & Farshore. (2025). *Children's Reading: How do we move from Endurance to Enjoyment*.
- 11 Picton, I., et al, (2024). *Parents' support for young children's literacy at home in 2024*, National Literacy Trust
- 12 Clark, C. (2025). *Children and young people's reading in 2025*, National Literacy Trust.
- 13 Lindorff, A. et al., (2023). *PIRLS 2021: National report for England*, Department for Education.
- 14 <https://readingagency.org.uk/adult-reading-research-report-2024/>
- 15 In 2025, 1 in 6 (15.7%) 8 to 18s receiving free school meals (FSMs) did not have a book of their own, compared with 1 in 11 (9.0%) of their non-FSM peers - Clark, C. et al., (2025). *Children and young people's book ownership in 2025*, National Literacy Trust.
- 16 Cremin, Teresa and McGeown, Sarah (2025). *Reading for pleasure: Exploring the Concept, the causes and consequences*. In: Cremin, Teresa and McGeown, Sarah eds. *Reading for Pleasure: International Perspectives*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, xii-xxii.

# Exploring your reading culture – Reflection guides for Schools and Settings

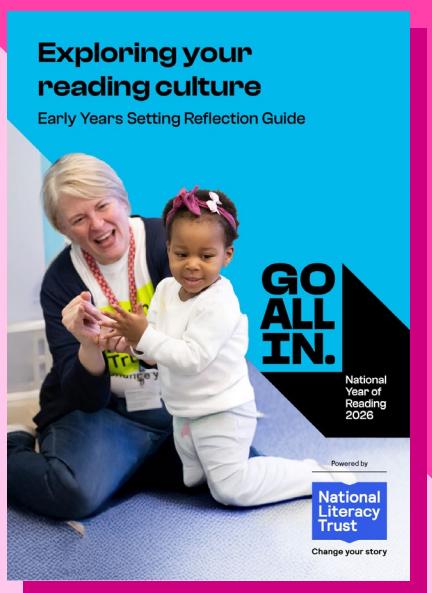
Reading for pleasure is one of the most powerful drivers of literacy development, academic success and lifelong learning. When children and young people choose to read in ways that feel meaningful to them, the benefits extend far beyond literacy. They gain confidence, empathy and a sense of identity as readers. Yet research shows that many learners do not experience reading as a voluntary, enjoyable activity.

As you embark on the National Year of Reading, a phase-specific reflection guide has been created as an evaluative starting point for your setting. This guide can be found on the [National Year of Reading Schools and Early Years Toolkit and Resources page](#), in the [downloadable files at the bottom](#).

These reflection guides have been designed to help settings across all phases, from early years through to secondary, consider how their current provision supports a reading for pleasure culture and fosters volitional reading. They offer a framework for thinking about the conditions that enable children and young people to develop both the will and the skill to read.

The guides recognise that reading today is multimodal and diverse. It includes books, magazines, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks, digital texts, gaming narratives, music and song lyrics. Meeting readers where they are means valuing these forms and understanding how they connect to interests, identities and sociocultural experiences. By embracing this breadth, we create inclusive environments where every learner can see reading as relevant and rewarding.

To ensure maximum impact when utilising the 'Exploring your reading culture' guide, use it as a flexible tool to reflect on current practice, spark professional conversation and identify priorities for growth. Organised around key themes, such as leadership, choice, environment, time, social reading, role models and inclusive provision, it offers prompts to consider your setting's strengths, explore next steps and support a coherent, inclusive reading culture.



# Briefing your schools and settings

The briefing presentation linked below has been designed to help you introduce the National Year of Reading to your colleagues and explain how your school or early years setting can get involved. It provides everything you need to deliver a clear, confident briefing, including speaker notes under each slide to guide you through the key messages.

In this briefing, you'll find:

- **An overview of the campaign** – what the National Year of Reading is, why it matters, the creative campaign behind it and the positive impact it aims to have
- **The Schools & Early Years Offer** – a look at the objectives of the offer, as well as an overarching view of what activity in each term will look like
- **How to get involved** – links on where to sign up for activity and how to partake in the participation award each term

The goal of this briefing is to ensure *every* member of staff, no matter their role, understands the impact they can have in the National Year of Reading and feels equipped to play their part.

Download the briefing presentation on the same toolkit webpage:

[Schools and Early Years Settings Offer Toolkit & Resources | National Year of Reading | National Literacy Trust](#)



## Go All In brand asset toolkits for schools and early years settings

We're excited to share a comprehensive Go All In Brand toolkit for early years settings and schools to help you show your support for the National Year of Reading campaign.

Inside, you'll find a range of **branded assets** that make it easy to bring the campaign to life in your classrooms, corridors and community spaces.

The toolkit includes:

- **Official National Year of Reading branding** for use across your communications and social channels.
- **Student-facing resources** to inspire a love of reading and encourage participation in campaign activities.
- **Parent-facing materials** to help families engage with the campaign and support reading at home.

By using these assets, you'll help create a consistent, recognisable message that celebrates reading and builds excitement among pupils, parents and staff. Together, we can make reading a national priority and a joyful part of everyday life.

<https://pitch.com/v/schools-early-years-toolkit-1912-bupanz>

# National Year of Reading Participatory Award and the Learning Management System

During the National Year of Reading, we are running a Participation Award scheme for schools and early years settings. The award is a structured pathway through the resources, events and professional development offered throughout the year.

If you choose to **Go All In** with us as a school or setting, your lead person will be registered on our new learning management system. This will house the participation award pathways, with:

- specific routes for early years settings, primary schools (including early years provision) and secondary schools
- links to the resources and key guidance on their use in your settings
- guidance and links to sign up to professional development opportunities and Go All In Together events across the year
- opportunities for you to share your good practice and reflect on activities
- the space to build a community of participating schools and leads
- downloadable certificates, email signatures and graphics each term to show your school community that you are participating in the National Year of Reading
- the chance to win prizes and rewards for participating.

Your lead person will have access to this platform from mid-January.

Remember that even if you don't sign up to the full participation award, individual teachers and classes can still **Dip In** to the resources, events and professional development taking place, as part of the National Year of Reading; the award scheme provides a roadmap, and allows us to recognise the brilliant work you are already doing in your day-to-day school practice.

[National Year of Reading, Learning Management System Sign Up](#)



This calendar gives you a quick overview of all activity dates in the Spring Term, as well as content toplines. Use it to plan the programme into wider school or setting life, and make the most of upcoming opportunities to engage pupils and colleagues.

# National Year of Reading

## Spring term overview Schools and Early Years settings



Focused on Reading for Pleasure in the room

### January 2026

Date	What	Content	For	Where	Cost
<b>15</b>	Launch toolkit	A resource pack helping you make the most out of the National Year of Reading. Includes a self-reflection guide, research digest, and a staff briefing PowerPoint.	Practitioners (all phases)	Download online	Free
<b>15</b>	Resource drop	Three to five resources per phase focused on building a reading for pleasure culture in the classroom.	Practitioners (all phases)	Download online	Free
<b>15</b>	Live launch webinar	A live webinar to kick off the year, and explore the research and vision behind it.	Practitioners (all phases)	Online	Free
<b>19</b>	Primary live practitioner webinar	Building reading for pleasure cultures through diverse reading provision and choice.	Primary practitioners	Online	Free
<b>20</b>	Early years live practitioner webinar	The Gift of Early Reading in Practice: your role in shaping a child's future	Early Years practitioners	Online	Free
<b>Jan</b>	National Reading Champions Quiz sign-up	Sign-ups are open throughout January for our spectacular Senior Quiz!	Pupils aged 11 to 14	Online	Paid

### February 2026

Date	What	Content	For	Where	Cost
<b>03</b>	Secondary live practitioner webinar	What our research tells us about teenage reading.	Secondary practitioners	Online	Free
<b>03</b>		Join Annemarie Anang - author, musician, actress and former primary school teacher - for an interactive, live workshop.	Pupils aged 5 to 7	Online	Free
<b>03</b>	Go All In Together: National Storytelling Week	Join storyteller and rapper Alim Kamara for an interactive, live workshop full of music and excitement.	Pupils aged 7 to 11	Online	Free
<b>04</b>		Join Jeffrey Boakye - ex-teacher turned writer, speaker, broadcaster and educator - in a dynamic, live workshop.	Pupils aged 11 to 14	Online	Free
<b>11</b>	Primary live practitioner webinar	Holding space for reading for pleasure.	Primary practitioners	Online	Free
<b>13</b>	Secondary pre-recorded practitioner webinar	The power of reading Shakespeare's Macbeth out loud to bring his play to life.	Secondary practitioners	Online	Free
<b>13</b>		The power of reading Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet out loud to bring his play to life.	Secondary practitioners	Online	Free

### March 2026

Date	What	Content	For	Where	Cost
<b>02</b>	Early Years resource	Share Stories With Me booklet: designed for parents and carers to look at books and share stories with children.	Parents and carers	Download online	Free
<b>05</b>	Go All In Together: The Great Big World Book Day Footy and Booky Quiz 2026	Featuring questions pitched by your football heroes and our author pals.	Pupils aged 8 to 12	Online	Free
<b>10</b>	TeachBrief Live	Our panel of education practitioners will unpack the DfE Curriculum and Assessment Review and its implications for primary literacy.	Primary practitioners	Online	Free
<b>13</b>	Regional teenage reading seminar	Explore how we can find routes into reading and validate teenage reading experiences.	Secondary practitioners	York	Paid
<b>20</b>	Primary Conference	Beyond the book: routes into reading. Rethink reading in the primary curriculum and discover the power of stories in every form.	Primary practitioners	London	Paid
<b>20</b>	Regional teenage reading seminar	Explore how we can find routes into reading and validate teenage reading experiences.	Secondary practitioners	Plymouth	Paid
<b>27</b>	Early Words Matter Conference	Science to Stories: Take a research lens to the role of homes, early years and community settings, illuminating new chances to cultivate lifelong readers.	Early Years practitioners	London	Paid

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# Annual Literacy Survey 2026

Now in its sixteenth year, the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey is the largest study of its kind, capturing the voices of children and young people aged 5 to 18 across the UK.

By taking part in the 2026 Annual Literacy Survey, you will gain valuable insights into your pupils' literacy attitudes, experiences and behaviour. Your participation will also contribute to a vital national evidence base, enabling the National Literacy Trust to track literacy trends year-on-year and inform its research, campaigns and programmes across the UK.

This year, your involvement is especially meaningful as the survey takes place during the National Year of Reading, a nationwide celebration of reading and its power to transform the lives of children and young people.

This year, we are capping the number of sign-ups by nation to ensure balanced representation across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. If your school is keen to participate, we strongly encourage you to register as soon as possible to avoid missing out. Once the cap is reached in your nation, registration will close.

The survey will open for responses on 5 January and you will have until 6 March to complete it. As a thank you for taking part, all schools will receive a personalised school report with their pupils' responses, which you can compare with the national results once they are published.

Sign up here:  
Annual Literacy Survey 2026  
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**GO  
ALL  
IN.**

# Go All in fundraiser

Join us this upcoming February half term by organising your own fundraiser to help the National Literacy Trust get everyone in the UK reading for pleasure!



By encouraging your students to get involved in a fundraiser of your choice, the money you raise will:

- Support our mission to embed reading for pleasure in school culture and leadership around the UK.
- 50% of the funds raised will also support your own school library, enabling you to buy new books to help more students discover the stories they love.

Every school who signs up will receive:

1. Fundraising resources, including information A-Z of fundraising and template emails to share your event with the rest of your school!
2. Our fundraising team will support you every step of the way!

Sign up here, set up your fundraising page and get started: [superkind.org/go-all-in-fundraiser](https://superkind.org/go-all-in-fundraiser)

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