

Exploring your reading culture

Primary Reflection Guide



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National
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2026

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Change your story

Exploring reading culture in your setting

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.

These reflection guides have been designed to help settings across all phases, from early years through to secondary, consider how their current provision supports reading for pleasure 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.

How to use these guides

These guides are supportive tools, not checklists. They are intended to:

- **Encourage personal and professional reflection** on your current practice and provision.
- **Stimulate professional conversations** within teams about what is working well and where there is room for growth.
- **Provide a shared language** for discussing reading for pleasure across different phases and roles.
- **Help identify priorities** for strategic planning, time and energy as part of the National Year of Reading and beyond.

Each guide is organised around key themes, such as leadership, choice, environment, time, social reading, role models and inclusive provision. Within each theme, you will find:

- **Overview statements** describing effective practice.
- **Reflect prompts** to help you consider your current position.
- **Refresh space** to inspire next steps and future planning.

You can use these guides flexibly:

- As part of staff meetings or CPD sessions to spark discussion.
- For individual reflection to deepen understanding of your own practice.
- To inform whole-school or setting audits and action planning.

The aim is not to judge but to support continuous improvement. By using these guides collaboratively, you can build a coherent, inclusive reading culture that values all forms of reading and meets learners where they are, helping every child and young person to experience reading as a source of joy, curiosity and connection.

Aspects of a Reading for Pleasure culture



Leadership

There is a commitment to lead a shared and valued reading for pleasure culture.



Choice

Children are supported to choose personally meaningful reading material and develop their own reader identities.



Environment

Children are supported to enjoy reading experiences within and beyond school and given access to a vibrant, engaging reading culture.



Space and time

Children have regular opportunities and welcoming spaces to read, with daily routines and support making reading a natural, enjoyable part of life.



Social

Children are given time and space to engage in social reading practices and connect with others in ways that are personally enjoyable and motivating.



Reading aloud

Children experience joy and language growth through shared reading materials, stories, songs and rhymes, as adults bring texts to life with expression and imagination, making storytelling a valued and social part of daily routines.



Role models and parental engagement

Children see reading as an enjoyable part of life when adults and peers model positive reading habits and families share their own reading practices beyond the classroom.



Inclusive provision

Children are supported to engage with and enjoy a wide range of diverse reading experiences that reflect their own lives but also provide perspectives on others' lives.



A book written for every child may never be held and read by a child who cannot afford to buy it.

Sita Brahmachari



All children need to see themselves and others reflected in culture – representation leads to empathy.

Sharna Jackson



Something special happens when you read poems aloud.

Joseph Coehlo



Wherever you can find a library, wherever you can find a book... you can find a friend! You are NOT alone.

Mychal Threets, Librarian.



If you were to take the performance side of poetry and story away... the magic would be lost.

Oliver Sykes



By listening to somebody read you learn that words are alive and can move and hurt you.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce




Exploring Our Reading Culture: Primary


Where schools include early years provision, leaders should consult both the Primary and Early Years Guides. This alignment helps create a unified reading culture across all phases, ensuring that strategies for volitional and agentic reading are consistent and progressive from the foundation stage onwards.


The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
Leadership  <p>There is a commitment to lead a shared and valued reading for pleasure culture</p>	<p>Primary school leaders prioritise reading for pleasure, advising on and supporting a whole school approach.</p> <p>Leaders engage with robust evidence and research to inform the strategic implementation plan and understand the relationship between reading proficiency (the skill) and reading engagement (the will).</p> <p>The work on developing reading for pleasure is valued and is understood to be part of the wider reading strategy, often led by an implementation team.</p> <p>Time and space for planning, implementation, and reflection on programmes of strategic development/programmes of change is protected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are leaders able to articulate a clear, ambitious vision for reading for pleasure which is woven through the curriculum? • Is reading for pleasure consistently visible in policy, practice and everyday routines? • Do leaders prioritise reading for pleasure in their school, and is it sustained, rather than treated as enrichment? • Are reading materials, story resources and environments audited regularly to ensure quality, inclusion and responsiveness to children's evolving interests? • Is professional dialogue about texts and reading pedagogy embedded into meetings, building shared professional language and reflective habits? • Do leaders model enthusiasm by joining story sessions, championing reading events and celebrating reading successes with children and families? • Do partnerships with libraries, feeder schools and community organisations extend the reading culture beyond the setting, supporting family engagement and continuity? • Are leaders attending training to ensure their current knowledge of creating a reading/ language rich school is up to date? 	Action Points


		<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clark, C., Picton, I. and Cole, A. (2025). Children and young people’s reading in 2025. London: National Literacy Trust• Department for Education (2023). The Reading Framework London: Department for Education• Loh, C. E. et al. (2025) <i>The Decline in Volitional Reading: Evidence-Informed Ways Forward</i>. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.• Cremin, T., Hendry, H., Chamberlain, L., & Hulston, S. (2023). <i>Approaches to Reading and Writing for Pleasure: An Executive Summary of the Research</i>. The Mercers' Company, London.• Moisi,et al. (2025). <i>Reading report 2025: Rethinking reading for pleasure in schools</i>. National Literacy Trust.	
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The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Choice</p>  <p>Children are supported to choose personally meaningful reading material and develop their own reader identities</p>	<p>A broad range of age-appropriate reading materials (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, poetry, graphic novels, magazines, digital books, audiobooks and high-interest, low-difficulty reads) are available for children to read so they can try out different genres and begin to discover what they enjoy.</p> <p>Children are encouraged to choose and change reading materials when they need to, which helps them learn more about themselves as readers.</p> <p>Adults introduce a wide variety of reading materials for the class to explore together, sharing favourites and discovering new authors without suggesting that any one type of book is “better” than another.</p> <p>The reading materials that children select at school can be easily enjoyed at home, allowing reading to become part of their personal spaces, daily routines and family life.</p>	<p>Range of texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an adequate range of reading materials for my readers to choose from? • Where are the gaps (e.g., contemporary non-fiction, graphic novels, e-books)? • Do the reading materials at school reflect the interests, cultures, languages and identities of the readers? • Are reading materials curated to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate as part of reading provision? <p>Making choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How confidently do readers choose reading materials independently? • Can they change reading materials if the one they picked isn't right for them? • Do children feel confident choosing and changing reading materials as their preferences evolve? • How visible are varied formats in my classroom and around the school (e.g., comics, magazines, audio and digital reading)? • Do children have the genre, author and library user knowledge needed to make informed choices about what they read? <p>Home Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How easy is it for children to enjoy reading materials (e.g., books from school collections/ access to e-books) /take reading home from school? • Do the reading materials going/read at home feel relevant and appealing to the children choosing them? 	<p>Action points</p>


		<p>Readers' identities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do practitioners know what each child in their class likes to read? • Do practitioners know what is of interest to the children in their class and what might drive motivation and engagement? <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Literacy Trust case study https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/developing-a-culture-of-reading-for-pleasure-case-study/ • National Literacy Trust (2025). The future of literacy: Multimodal reading. Literacy for learning: Redefining literacy for the next generation. 	
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The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Environment</p>  <p>Children are supported to enjoy reading experiences within and beyond school and given access to a vibrant, engaging reading culture</p>	<p>In a primary school setting, reading materials are easy for children to access both in the classroom and around school, with library spaces, bookshelves, book corners, browsing boxes and displays inviting them to explore the world of personal reading.</p> <p>Readers feel welcomed and motivated by the reading spaces available—whether that’s a cosy book corner, a quiet corridor nook or a shaded spot outdoors—helping them choose places that feel comfortable and engaging.</p> <p>Adults and pupils work together to shape these spaces, deciding how books are organised, adding recommendations and making sure these areas stay tidy and welcoming</p> <p>Working with local libraries, bookshops and community reading spaces gives children more access to books and helps them see reading as something that happens in the wider world as much as it does in school.</p>	<p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it easy for children to access reading materials in classrooms and around the school? Where are the spaces where access could be improved? <p>Reading spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do reading spaces (book corners, library areas, corridor nooks) feel like somewhere the children would choose to read? How often do practioners see children choosing to read in these spaces independently? <p>Presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are books displayed in ways that invite browsing and curiosity (e.g., front-facing covers, themed collections, pupil recommendations)? How involved are children in shaping and maintaining our reading spaces? <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cole, A., Clark, C. & Teravainen-Goff. (2023). The impact of school libraries on children and young people’s literacy outcomes: An evidence review. London: National Literacy Trust. TaRs Research (Cremin et al.). <i>Social Reading Environments</i>. https://ourfp.org/finding/rfpp/social-reading-environments/ 	<p>Action points</p>

The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Space and Time</p>  <p>Children have regular opportunities and welcoming spaces to read, with daily routines and support making reading a natural, enjoyable part of life</p>	<p>In a primary setting, readers can access reading materials whenever they need or want to, without restrictions such as tightly controlled library timetables or out-of-bounds spaces.</p> <p>Daily reading routines help children see reading as an enjoyable and familiar part of daily life, i.e., something they might choose to do, even when they are not at school.</p> <p>Families play an important role too, strengthening these routines by taking an interest in what their child is reading (reading with them, reading to them and listening as they read aloud) so that reading becomes a shared, valued experience at home and at school. Challenges facing families in creating a rich reading environment at home are understood and respected.</p> <p>Practical guidance, encouragement and flexible strategies, support families to build children's confidence, enjoyment and success in reading.</p>	<p>Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do children access reading materials throughout the day? (e.g., at the start of the day, after finishing work or during transitions)? • Are there any routines (e.g., book changing times) that currently limit this? • Do children have access to reading materials during free time, such as at lunch or breaktime? Are they able to see volitional reading at these times? <p>Consistency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How consistent are daily reading routines? What disrupts them? • Do children know when and how reading will happen each day? <p>Getting lost in a book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there times when children can 'get lost in a book/ text'? <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies are in place to support readers who struggle to maintain motivation to 'keep reading'? • What helps them build this confidence and stamina? <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Education (2023). The Reading Framework London: Department for Education • Cremin, T., Hendry, H., Chamberlain, L., & Hulston, S. (2023). <i>Approaches to Reading and Writing for Pleasure: An Executive Summary of the Research</i>. The Mercers' Company, London. • 	<p>Action points</p>


The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Social</p>  <p>Children are given time and space to engage in social reading practices and connect with others in ways that are personally enjoyable and motivating</p>	<p>In a primary school setting, multiple copies of favourite titles, poems and short texts, as well as e-readers, encourage children to talk together about their reading experiences.</p> <p>Readers enjoy discussing what they read and how it made them feel, often recommending books to friends or encouraging others to try something new.</p> <p>Adults make time for informal book talk by initiating open, relaxed conversations about the books they have read and by giving thoughtful suggestions and recommendations that spark interest and dialogue.</p> <p>Community events are used as opportunities to further highlight the importance of reading as a social experience, helping children develop strong, shared reader identities both within and beyond school.</p>	<p>Facilitating talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often are children provided with multiple copies of texts so they can read and discuss them together? • Do children class talk naturally about what they are reading? What could help them do this? <p>Book recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do children have the knowledge of authors, titles, genres and forms to make informed choices and talk about their choices with others? • How confident are my readers at recommending reading materials to one another? • Is informal book talk modelled regularly? <p>Teachers as readers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do practitioners share what they are reading, and why they are enjoying/not enjoying it? • How familiar are practitioners with children's reading habits and preferences? Is this information used to tailor suggestions to individual children? <p>Reading in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there community and whole-school events (e.g., assemblies, fairs, library visits and book swaps) to promote a positive reading culture? • Are all forms of storytelling tradition, including reading in different languages, oral storytelling and storytelling through music and performing arts, embraced? • Are there other non-reading related events, which could incorporate positive reading culture? 	<p>Action points</p>

		<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• McGeown, S., Errington, P., et al. (2025). <i>The Future of Books and Reading</i>. Literacy Lab, University of Edinburgh, UK.• Loh, C., Cremin, T., Kuzmicova, A., McGeown, S., & Scholes, L. (2025). <i>The Decline in Volitional Reading: Evidence-Informed Ways Forward</i>. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.	
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The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Reading aloud</p>  <p>Children experience the joy of shared stories as adults read aloud expressively, introducing rich language and ideas and making reading a valued, social part of school life</p>	<p>In a primary school setting, reading materials are chosen to spark imagination and discover new words and language, giving children access to a wide range of literature that they may not choose to read themselves.</p> <p>Through shared reading, children experience calm, joy and emotional connection as literature helps them to explore new ideas and feelings.</p> <p>Adults read aloud expressively and confidently, creating moments of wonder and reflection that draw children into the text.</p> <p>The involvement of authors, storytellers and librarians enriches children's experience of stories, helping them see reading as something social, exciting and therefore valuable.</p>	<p>Range</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How varied is the range of reading materials chosen for shared reading? • Do they represent a broad range of cultures, traditions and literary experiences? <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do reading materials offer children new ideas, and new language? Do they introduce children to perspectives they might not encounter on their own? <p>Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively do practitioners use a read-aloud voice (pace, expression, emphasis and characterisation) to bring texts to life for their class? • How do children feel during read aloud times? How do practitioners know? • How often do practitioners create moments for children to pause and reflect during reading aloud times? <p>Books beyond the classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might settings/practitioners be able to involve external partners, such as authors, poets, storytellers, cultural groups, theatre groups, local businesses or librarians, to enrich the children's reading experiences? 	<p>Action points</p>

Read:


- https://www.farshore.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2023/09/E6869-Storytime-in-School-Headline-Findings_FINAL_20.09.23.pdf
- Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S. and Safford, Kimberly. (2014). Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure.

The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Role Models & Parental Engagement</p>  <p>Children see reading as an enjoyable part of life when adults and peers model positive reading habits and families share their own reading practices beyond the classroom</p>	<p>In a primary setting, adults share the texts they genuinely enjoy, as well as those they are exploring for the first time, showing children that reading is something real people choose to do.</p> <p>Readers begin to see reading as a part of daily life, something enjoyable and valuable, and they notice the adults around them enjoying reading too. Children act as peer-to-peer role models.</p> <p>Staff make reading visible in everyday life. This approach values all types of reading, including the reading that children and families engage in outside of school.</p> <p>Families and community members contribute by acting as reading role models, helping children understand that reading belongs in everyday life beyond the classroom.</p>	<p>Teachers as readers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often do practitioners share what they enjoy reading with the class, including new texts they are exploring for the first time? Do the children see adults choosing to read for enjoyment, not just for teaching purposes? <p>Ethos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How visible is reading in classrooms, and is it present in everyday interactions with pupils (e.g., discussing books, referring to practitioners' own reading and showing curiosity about the children's)? Do practitioners show that all reading counts, including magazines, recipes, online texts, instructions, newspapers, game guides and family reading practices? Are there opportunities for children to act as peer role models or reading buddies? <p>Role models beyond the classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well do children recognise other adults in our school as role models for reading? What opportunities are created for families to share their reading interests with the class? How often do community members (e.g., librarians, authors, local professionals) contribute to reading culture? Do children recognise adults, at home and at school, as readers? 	<p>Action points</p>

- Are children within the setting enabled to be ambassadors for reading (e.g., peer-to-peer reading buddies, older children reading to/ mentoring young children, pupil librarians)?
- Are there other organisations, such as local businesses or community groups, who could add to the reading culture?

Read:

- Cole, A., Brown, A., Clark, C. and Picton, I. (2022) Role models and their influence on children and young people's reading. National Literacy Trust
- Primary school children's reading and the vital role teachers play in nurturing reading enjoyment, BookTrust, <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/booktrust-research-children-are-40-more-likely-to-enjoy-reading-if-their-parents-or-carers-do/>

The Golden Threads	Overview	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Inclusive Provision</p>  <p>Children are supported to engage with and enjoy a wide range of diverse reading experiences that reflect their own lives but also provide perspectives on others' lives</p>	<p>In the primary school setting, texts are chosen to challenge assumptions and broaden perspectives by introducing children to diverse cultures, identities and experiences. Consideration is given to protected characteristics in providing a rich reading experience to children.</p> <p>Readers feel recognised and able to engage with reading in ways that are personal to them.</p> <p>Adults promote inclusive texts with intention, knowledge and enthusiasm, helping every child locate stories and information that speak to who they are.</p> <p>Partnerships with libraries, community groups and local services ensure that all families can access inclusive reading materials, formats and languages that reflect their identities, interests and needs.</p>	<p>Text selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the reading materials in classrooms reflect the diversity of the children and the diversity of the UK as a whole? • What perspectives might be missing? • How often do practitioners introduce reading materials that challenge assumptions or offer new ways of seeing the world? • Do practitioners promote inclusive texts confidently and knowledgeably, showing enthusiasm for a wide range of stories and formats? <p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies are used to ensure that all readers can access texts that feel relevant and affirming to them? • How strong are links with libraries, community groups or local services that support access to inclusive materials? <p>Home links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do all families have access to reading materials that match their identities, interests and home languages—and how could I help remove any barriers? <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picton, I., & Clark, C. (2022). <i>Seeing yourself in what you read: Diversity and children and young people's reading in 2022</i>. National Literacy Trust. • Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. <i>Perspectives</i>, 6(3), ix–xi. 	<p>Action points</p>

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Leadership

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- Moisi, et al. (2025). Reading report 2025: Rethinking reading for pleasure in schools. National Literacy Trust.

Choice

- National Literacy Trust case study: Developing a culture of reading for pleasure: a school case study | National Literacy Trust
- National Literacy Trust (2025). The future of literacy: Multimodal reading. Literacy for learning: Redefining literacy for the next generation

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- Cole, A., Clark, C. & Teravainen-Goff. (2023). The impact of school libraries on children and young people's literacy outcomes: An evidence review. London: National Literacy Trust.
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Social

- McGeown, S., Errington, P., et al. (2025). The Future of Books and Reading. Literacy Lab, University of Edinburgh, UK.
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Reading aloud

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Role models and parental engagement

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Inclusive Provision

- Picton, I., & Clark, C. (2022). Seeing yourself in what you read: Diversity and children and young people's reading in 2022. National Literacy Trust.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix–xi.



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