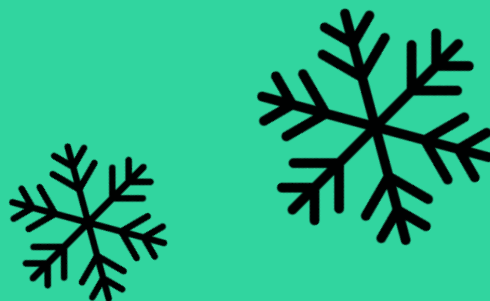


Winter reading:

Jólabókaflóð

A resource to encourage reading for pleasure in
your classroom



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Introduction

Jólabókaflóð (pronounced 'yola-boka-flod') is an Icelandic Christmas tradition, which roughly translates as 'Christmas book flood'. In Iceland, publishers traditionally publish most of their books in the run up to Christmas. A book catalogue is sent to every home during November, and people then order books as gifts for friends and family. On Christmas Eve, people exchange their gifts of books and then they read them straight away, snuggled up in front of the fire, eating chocolate or drinking hot chocolate. What a cosy idea!



This essence of this tradition is a great idea to adopt and then adapt for your setting to foster reading for pleasure. It celebrates love of reading by creating a cosy and festive experience. This time of year can feel very busy and, at times, hectic, and this is a great way to bring calm to the classroom, and it places value on quality shared reading time while engaging with materials that excite your pupils.

Why is this activity relevant for my school?

Reading for pleasure among children and young people in the UK has reached its lowest point in twenty years, with only 32.7% saying they enjoy reading in their free time and just 18.7% reading daily. The report, [Children and young people's reading in 2025](#), based its responses from over 114,000 participants aged 5 to 18, and shows a continued decline in reading habits, though at a slightly slower rate than in 2024. Despite this, many pupils still recognise reading's educational value, especially for learning new words and gaining knowledge.

By creating opportunities to read that feel less formal, more leisure focused and where there is opportunity to choose what is read, pupils will feel more engaged and motivated.

How to use this resource

This resource outlines a sequence of activities for how you might implement the Icelandic tradition of *Jólabókaflóð* in your classroom. This resource centres around the broader seasonal theme of winter to bring reading for enjoyment into the classroom during the colder months.

To help you adapt this tradition meaningfully, we have highlighted key features that can be easily replicated in schools:

- **Sharing book recommendations** rather than gifting books, encouraging peer-to-peer engagement.
- **Creating a dedicated time** for swapping or sharing books, making it a special classroom moment.
- **Planning and preparing** for the event to build anticipation and ownership.
- **Getting cosy to read**, whether that means cushions, blankets, warm drinks or simply a quiet, relaxed atmosphere so students can enjoy reading in a way that feels comforting and personal.

Feel free to follow the suggested activities sequence and adapt them to suit the needs and preferences of your class. This resource is designed to be flexible and suitable for any age group.

Jólabókaflóð in your classroom

Introducing Jólabókaflóð

Begin by sharing the story or origins of Jólabókaflóð with your class. You may like to explain the concept to pupils, or find a short, informative video about how the people of Iceland celebrate wintertime, with books and hot chocolate!

Allow time to discuss the community and connection that comes with this reading tradition. You may like to use these questions to guide your discussion:

- *Why do you think giving books as gifts is a good idea?*
- *How does this tradition create a sense of community?*
- *Do you like reading with the people you care about?*
- *What feeling do you get when reading in a cosy setting?*

Creating a cosy reading environment

Explain to your class that you are going to create your own Jólabókaflóð moment in class. Allow the class to lean into their excitement and take suggestions from pupils as to what you would like to do to create a Jólabókaflóð classroom,

Suggestions for a cosy reading environment may include:

- *Hanging up fairy lights around the class*
- *Bringing in extra blankets and pillows to create mini book tents under the classroom tables*

- *Inviting pupils to bring in their slippers and dressing gowns, or even teddies to snuggle up with when reading*
- *Proving the class with the treat of hot chocolate (be sure to have parental/guardian permission)*
- *Playing a crackling fire video on the board*

Preparing for a book exchange

The most important part of this Icelandic tradition is the actual books! Invite students to bring in a book from home that they no longer need to donate to your Jólabókaflóð moment. You can then wrap these books up in winter-themed paper and encourage pupils to write festive, cheerful messages on the tag or they might like to write a short review of the book on the tag instead.

If, for your pupils, bringing in books is not an option, you may like to choose one of the following alternatives:

- **Curate some books from your school library**
Select a range of titles that are age-appropriate and engaging and make them available for pupils to browse and choose from.
- **Borrow some books from a local library**
Many local libraries are happy to support schools with themed collections or bulk loans. Contact your nearest branch to explore options.
- **Source free books from social media sites**
Platforms like Facebook Marketplace often feature individuals or groups offering free book bundles, especially in local community groups. These can be a great way to access a variety of titles at no cost. Look out for posts offering books for free or join book swap groups in your area.
- **Ask for donations from your local community**
A simple call-out via newsletters, social media or community noticeboards can result in generous donations of pre-loved books from families and local residents.

Additionally, for secondary schools or schools with a dedicated library space, consider turning the library into your Jólabókaflóð space. This could be part of a special library visit where pupils are encouraged to choose a book from the shelves to recommend to someone in their class. This approach not only supports reading for pleasure but also fosters peer-to-peer engagement and thoughtful book selection.

Celebrating Jólábókaflóð day in your class

Once your class have planned how you are going to create a cosy classroom and sourced some books for the exchange, it is time to choose a day when you are all going to celebrate. You may like to take this beyond a single moment, and timetable this activity weekly during the autumn term and early spring term too. Be sure to take pictures and include these in your classroom scrap books (if you practice this) or create a fun and engaging display.



Reflection

After you have taken part in your Jólábókaflóð moment, allow pupils to discuss the books they have read and enjoyed. Encourage pupils to recreate a similar moment during the winter holidays and share this tradition with their families too!

Other ideas to implement Jólábókaflóð in your school

Hold an assembly about the Jólábókaflóð

Introduce Jolabokaflod to the pupils in an assembly. Share the story of the winter tradition and invite members of staff to share passages from their favourite winter books..

Whole school participation

Ask all classes to timetable at least one hour in the run up to the winter holidays focused on book choice and encouraging children to read what interests them. Older pupils could choose their own books to read independently, and younger children could enjoy story time with an adult or reading buddy. This would make a relaxing break in the middle of the festivities or a calm and cosy end to the term.

Staff involvement

Invite staff to bring in a previously read book from home and hold a book swap event in the staffroom with hot drinks, biscuits and cake. Could this be instead of an end of term staff meeting or an alternative Secret Santa?

Book lists

Here you will find some festive themed book lists that you might like to use as inspiration when sourcing books or making recommendations for pupils. Below you will also find some of our own recommendations too.

[KS2/KS3 Festive reads – Puffin Schools](#)

[Inclusive Christmas books | BookTrust](#)

[10 Festive Books for Christmas – Scottish Book Trust](#)

[Classic Christmas books for festive times | BookTrust](#)

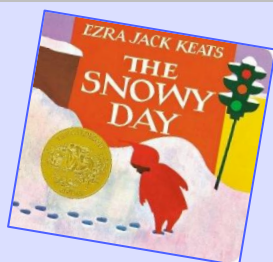
[Festive books in Welsh and English / Llyfrau Nadoligaidd... | BookTrust](#)

Ages 4–7



Snow Still by *Holly Surplice*

A little fawn wakes up to discover that the world outside has changed after a fall of snow. A heart-warming celebration of snowfall featuring exquisitely detailed illustrations.



The Snowy Day by *Ezra Jack Keats*

A timeless classic about the magic of a child's first snowfall.



Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter by *Kenard Pak*

Join a brother and sister as they explore nature and take a stroll through their twinkling town, greeting all the signs of the coming season. In a series of conversations with everything from the setting sun to curious deer, they say goodbye to autumn and welcome the glorious first snow of winter.

Ages 7–9



Winter Dance by *Marion Dane Bauer* and illustrated by *Richard Jones*

A poetic exploration of how animals prepare for winter.



Here Comes Jack Frost by *Kazuno Kohara*

One cold morning a lonely boy wishes for something to do. His animal friends are hibernating, and he has nobody to play with—even all the birds have flown south. When he meets Jack Frost, the last thing he expects is to make a new friend . . . or to discover how enchanting winter can be!



The Thing About Yetis by *Vin Vogel*

A charming picture book that introduces readers to a lovable yeti character who navigates the joys and challenges of winter while longing for the warmth of summer.

Ages 9–12



Blizzard by *John Rocco*

Blizzard is based on John Rocco's childhood experience during the now infamous Blizzard of 1978, which brought 53 inches of snow to his town in Rhode Island.



Winter Magic (Anthology) edited by *Abi Elphinstone*

Winter Magic is a fabulous collection of atmospheric, sometimes sad, sometimes unnerving but mostly warming stories for cosy bedtimes or cold winter afternoons under a blanket – with a mug of hot chocolate handy, of course.



Winter Tales by *Dawn Casey* and illustrated by *Zanna Goldhawk*

A treasury of stories celebrating the wonders of winter, and the qualities within that warm our hearts through the long cold. This stunning book brings together a selection of wintry tales from all over the world – from North America to Siberia, Scotland, France, Russia and Norway.

Ages 13–16



Greenglass House by *Kate Milford*

A wintry mystery set in a smuggler's inn, where guests arrive with secrets and a young boy must solve the puzzle.



Stealing Snow by *Danielle Paige*

Seventeen-year-old Snow escapes a hospital and discovers her true identity in the magical, wintry land of Algid, where witches, thieves, and a mysterious boy named Kai await. As she uncovers secrets about her royal lineage and faces choices that could shape her destiny, Snow must decide whether she will become a heroine, a villain, or something in between.