



professional development

creating a reading culture in your school



secondary school



children's
books
ireland
every child a reader

Children's Books Ireland is the national charity and arts organisation that champions every child's right to develop a love of reading. Our mission at Children's Books Ireland is to inspire a love of reading in children and young people on the island of Ireland, and to champion equitable access for all to excellent books. We share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide and influence young readers, and encourage schools and early childhood settings to build a positive culture of reading and reading aloud. We support and promote authors and illustrators and connect them with their audiences through our work.

childrensbooksireland.ie

#EveryChildAReader

📷 @kidsbooksirel

📘 @childrensbooksireland

📺 childrens-books-ireland

📺 Children's Books Ireland

🎵 @kidsbooksirel

🌐 @childrensbooksireland.ie

Children's Books Ireland/Leabhair Pháistí Éireann

First Floor, 17 North Great Georges Street,
Dublin 1, D01 R2F1

Telephone: 00 353 1 8727475

info@childrensbooksireland.ie

childrensbooksireland.ie

Design: fintanwall.com 📷 WallHello

This resource was published in September 2026.

Children's Books Ireland/Leabhair Pháistí Éireann
receives financial assistance from

The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon,

70 Merrion Square,
Dublin 2, Ireland

With thanks to the students and staff of St Kevin's
Community College, Clondalkin and Deansrath
Community College, Clondalkin

Is í **Leabhair Pháistí Éireann** an eagraíocht náisiúnta carthanachta agus ealaíne a chosnaíonn agus a chuireann chun cinn an ceart atá ag gach páiste grá don léitheoireacht a fhás agus a fhorbairt. Tá sé mar aidhm againn grá don léitheoireacht a spreagadh i bpáistí agus daoine óga ar oileán na hÉireann agus cás a dhéanamh maidir le leabhair den scoth a sholáthar go cothrom. Roinnimid ár gcuid saineolais agus ár gcuid díograise leis na daoine fásta a threoraíonn na léitheoirí óga agus a théann i bhfeidhm orthu, agus cuirimid ina luí ar scoileanna agus suíomhanna luath-óige gur fiú cultúr dearfach a chothú maidir leis an léitheoireacht agus an léitheoireacht os ard. Tugaimid tacaíocht d'údair agus do mhaisitheoirí, cuirimid chun cinn iad agus nascaimid iad lena lucht léitheoireachta.

If you'd like advice about developing your reading culture, get in touch with our Education & Advocacy Manager, Becky Long on becky@childrensbooksireland.ie

Creating a Reading Culture in your school

Who is this Guide for?

Children's Books Ireland wants to support schools on the island of Ireland to develop, sustain, and celebrate cultures of reading for joy. Everyone in the school, from students to families to staff, has a role to play in nurturing and sustaining a reading culture. With this in mind, this reading culture guide has been written for anyone in a secondary school who has a role in reading promotion, whether they be individual subject teachers, literacy coordinators, principals, deputy principals or home-school community liaison (HSCL) coordinators.

Teachers of any subject can embed reading for joy into their classrooms and support individual students to discover a love of books. Principals can see the bigger picture when it comes to the school's resources, funding for books, and all-important school policy, which can make huge, strategic change. HSCLs get to connect with families in a different way, outside the classroom. The ideas in this guide offer a framework that is far from prescriptive and should be adapted to suit the needs of every student and staff member in a school..

Reading for Joy

Children's Books Ireland is the national charity and arts organisation that champions every child's right to develop a love of reading. We believe that every child and young person should be able to read for joy at home, in school and in their community, and we want to support teachers and educators around the country to make reading for joy a priority for the children and young people they work with.

One of the key aims in Ireland's *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood* is,

‘Increased time learners in primary and post-primary schools spend reading and writing for enjoyment’,

... and that's where Children's Books Ireland comes in. With resources, ideas, knowledge and practical guidance, we'll support you to create and develop a culture of reading in your school.



What is a Reading Culture?

A reading culture exists in a secondary school community when reading is valued, actively encouraged, supported and celebrated, and when staff and students alike can access excellent and appealing books, and have multiple opportunities to engage with those books. Reading culture is, essentially, about offering teenagers a variety of reading opportunities, or moments, that are integral to the day-to-day life of the school.

This could be independent reading time in class, exploring subject-specific titles with their teachers, books on shelves in the corridors, chances for book-talk with staff and with peers – the ideas are endless. When young people are given *multiple* and *consistent* opportunities to read of their own free will, and they take these chances, choosing their own books and sharing their opinions, a reading culture can flourish. Individual readers who come together make a community of reading, and school is often the best place to support such a community. If teenagers see their peers and the adults they admire reading, they are more likely to open a book themselves and experience the benefits of being a reader.

Sometimes, it can be easy to lose sight of the importance of offering teenagers the chance to read for joy when literacy milestones must be reached, and curricula criteria checked. But the joy of reading is what fuels literacy attainment and academic success across all subjects. Any form of reading that is actively *chosen* by a young person – fiction, non-fiction, comic books, graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, poetry, audiobooks – is reading for joy, and it is powerful and positive.

Every classroom is different, and each term brings new challenges in terms of language and literacy barriers to be overcome; students not having access to a reading culture at home, individual students' learning needs and contexts. Whatever your role is in your school, and regardless of the budget and resources you have access to, you can have a powerful impact on your students' motivation to read, and on their opportunities to develop a love of reading. If you want your students to become skilled readers who enjoy the act of reading, you have to make sure that they have access to interesting and inspiring books that they actually want to read, texts that meaningfully reflect their lives and show them new things about the world.



Creating a whole-school reading culture

As a principal, where do I start?

As the school principal, you are in a wonderful position to set a positive, inspirational and supportive tone when it comes to reading for joy, both for your students and for your staff. Even policy changes that seem small can have a huge impact if they're instated on a whole-school basis, such as 'Book in a Bag', where students always have a book they can read in their schoolbag; reading prose and poetry for joy over the intercom; a commitment to whole-school membership of the local library, including the staff – the possibilities are both infinite and achievable. You are your school's ultimate reading role model. If students and staff know that their principal values and enjoys reading, they'll be more likely to do the same in their daily lives in (and outside of) school.

A whole-school reading culture means:

- Putting reading and books at the heart of school life and at the centre of the curriculum, acknowledging the fact that the skill of reading and students' capacity to see themselves as readers is often key to unlocking academic engagement and positive wellbeing.
- Recognising that reading is an essential life skill for children and young people which they should be supported to develop and improve across their school lives.
- Being aware that, for lots of reasons, not all children will have had the chance to develop a love of books and reading at home, so they must be supported to become readers in school.
- Actively building time into the school day for students to be read to, to read independently and talk about books with their teachers and peers.
- Supporting all subject teachers to engage with books and reading, offering them relevant training, and recognising their impact as reading role models and as advocates for reading.
- Involving families and the wider school community to support and encourage reading at home.



Making your reading culture visible

If a visitor walked into your school, would they have a sense that reading is celebrated by staff and pupils? Are there any visible signs that reading is a priority for the school community? If your reading culture isn't visible, you could try:

- Setting up displays of books in corridors and outside offices, which could be seasonal or themed.
- Creating posters or drawings about favourite reads – you could invite the students to re-design the cover of a book they've enjoyed.
- Making staff and student book recommendations visible on notice boards.
- Putting up signs pointing to the school library if there's a dedicated space.
- Having reading-related signs on each classroom door to share what whole classes or individual teachers are reading, as a way of modelling reading for joy to students.
- Putting a Swap Box or Little Free Library near the entrance to the school so that students can donate books they're finished with and share them with their peers, and staff and families can do the same.
- Giving books as prizes or rewards for students who make an exceptional effort.

What does reading for joy look like in secondary school?

The research into the benefits of reading for children and young people is extensive. Teenagers who read for fun and for joy are more likely to be happier in themselves and to be successful in school and beyond (The Reading Agency, 2023). Reading for joy is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' or guardians' level of education and affects their achievement in life more than their socio-economic background. (Sullivan & Brown, 2013). Teenagers can improve their literacy skills more effectively by reading for joy than through explicit formal literacy lessons: the more they read, the more likely they are to see themselves as readers and to feel confident in their own abilities. (Hilhorst et al., 2018).

A coherent culture of reading in a secondary school community goes beyond encouraging teenagers to pick up a book and read. This is the best and most impactful starting point, but it is most powerful when readers *choose* to read rather than being told to read. This takes time, and involves creating multiple and diverse opportunities to read and engage with books in all formats throughout the school day. Children and young people who associate reading with fun are three times more likely to experience good mental wellbeing when compared with peers who don't enjoy reading (National Literacy Trust, 2018).

At the heart of an impactful culture of reading are:

- **time,**
- **agency,**
- **motivation, and**
- **choice.**

Teenagers in secondary school **must be given time to read** (in the midst of a busy curriculum), **the freedom to choose what they want to read**, encouragement and **support to make reading a part of their lives**, and **access to a wide range of books**, across multiple formats and genres. School must be a positive and inclusive reading environment where staff read and talk about books, book talk is celebrated and facilitated, staff and students share reading recommendations, and books are visible throughout the school, not just in a central library space or on classroom shelves.

The secondary school context: realities and challenges

The transition from primary to secondary school can often coincide with teenagers reading less, and missing out on the myriad benefits of reading for joy and for fun. There are lots of reasons for this, from the academic to the social to the emotional, and including factors such as the availability of devices like smartphones, sometimes for the first time.

- Because children in primary school are learning to read and then building on the skills associated with reading, primary school teachers often place more of an emphasis on reading for joy. In secondary school, students are developing subject-specific skills – but the skill of reading underpins all of these, and students who find joy and fun in reading will be more likely to excel in their new subjects.
- Teenagers in secondary school are often time-poor, not least because the curriculum is busy. Extra-curricular activities like sports, part-time jobs, socialising with friends, and increased access to screens and social media can leave less and less time for reading as a hobby that's enjoyed outside of school.
- If school libraries exist in their secondary school, there might be an over-emphasis on reference texts and textbooks, or on class novels which are selected with no input from the students themselves, meaning that teenagers might feel that their interests are not represented on the shelves.
- If reading was a fun and joyful activity in primary school, it might be associated with schoolwork in secondary school, and perceived as an academic chore rather than something a teenager would choose to do for themselves.
- Encouraging reading and supporting literacy skill development can often be seen as the remit of the English department alone in a secondary school. But students who see themselves as readers are more likely to succeed and engage in all their subjects, not just English, so all teachers should be promoting reading to students, not only as a fantastic pastime but as an excellent investment in their futures. This can also mean helping students to realise that reading happens in lots of different contexts, not least for research and improving skills (especially in relation to their hobbies and interests).
- From a school perspective, finding the time and the budget to invest in nurturing a reading culture can be challenging. However, the most powerful changes can be the ones that are small, cost little or nothing – time spent on encouraging and facilitating book talk or book chatter is a valuable investment – and are implemented consistently. Developing a reading culture can be an incremental project, and starting small is better than not starting until the conditions are perfect.



A reading culture review

Creating a new culture of reading or enriching an already existing culture can seem like an overwhelming task, but you'll often find that small changes can have big impacts. To get a sense of what reading for joy looks like in your school, think about these questions and what your answers tell you (you can also ask students for their input here):

- Do students in the school have access to a library (or multiple classroom libraries) where they can read and borrow excellent and engaging books that cater to their interests?
- If yes, do students use the library currently? Is the library only available on an opt-in basis (e.g. open before school and during lunch) or are classes actively brought to the library and given time to choose and exchange books?
- How is reading perceived by the students in the school? Do you regularly overhear students talking about what they're reading, either to their peers or to school staff?
- Do students make reading recommendations to their friends?
- Are students in the school aware of the benefits of reading, both in terms of their academic engagement and the positive effect it can have on wellbeing?
- Are there book clubs that students can join?
- Is there a Library Committee or Reading Committee in addition to the Student Council?
- Do you have a connection to your local public library?
- Do students have access to any digital libraries, like BorrowBox or Sora? If so, are students and their families aware of this?
- Are there any reading-related events or celebrations which take place in the school? If so, is this one day or week in the year, and are there other opportunities to bring reading into the conversation among the school community?
- Do staff talk about books? For example, during school assemblies, where they might read aloud or share recommendations?

Think of your students as readers – and get to know them

- At the beginning of the year, as you start to build relationships with your students, talk to them about reading. How does it fit into their lives? Were they readers in primary school? What kind of books do they like?
- Encourage them to develop a reading plan for the year – this can be as simple as a personal commitment to recommend books to their friends, or to read a book that isn't on their subject reading list.
- Explore the possibility of your students undertaking a Reading Challenge for their Gaisce award. Children's Books Ireland has developed materials which can support this goal. You can learn more about the Reading Challenge in the **Reading culture ideas** section below.
- Support them to choose the right books for them. This involves knowing their interests and reading abilities or challenges, and making sure that they have access to as many different genres and formats of books as possible, from verse novels to graphic novels, longer prose fiction to audiobooks. The Children's Books Ireland website, childrensbooksireland.ie, has many themed reading lists, reading guides and reviews of current titles which are searchable by age, theme etc.

Reading across the curriculum: a holistic reading culture

Being literate is one of the key Junior Cycle skills that students in First to Third Year are being supported to develop, and central to this is ‘reading for enjoyment with critical understanding’ (*Junior Cycle English Specification*, P. 7). Reading is naturally central to the study of the English language, but students must be supported to read for what the Specification calls ‘a variety of purposes: learning, pleasure, research, comparison’ (p. 14). In other words, **students must be supported and encouraged to see themselves as readers** who ‘engage in sustained private reading as a pleasurable and purposeful activity’ (p. 14). Their reading experiences matter, not just in relation to their study of English, but to their life in school and their life at home. As they move into Senior Cycle, ‘the joy of exploration and the pleasure of engagement with literature and language’ (*Curriculum Specification for Leaving Certificate English*, p. 5) should be central, not only to their study of English but to their reading experiences more broadly.

With this in mind, **teachers should be supported to think about what reading looks like for their subject, because reading happens right across the curriculum, in different contexts.** For instance, in STEM, reading is a key research tool, and in History, primary texts or sources are essential to understanding important concepts and ideas. Think about appointing a Champion of Reading for each subject in the school who might be responsible for curating subject-specific reading lists and encouraging students to read into and around their favourite subjects, demonstrating that reading can be the key to furthering their knowledge and sating their curiosity. Think of the hook that will engage a student’s interest, and lead them to exploring a new book.

Creating opportunities for positive reading experiences:

- Teenagers need access to books that reflect their lives and the lives of their peers, and that explore themes that are relevant and important to them. Teachers should endeavour to build their own knowledge by reading and engaging with books written for young people so that they can support students to choose books that will resonate with them, and that will challenge but not overwhelm them. Reading YA or young adult literature will also allow teachers to assess whether the content is suitable for their students.
- Diverse readers must be supported to develop a love of reading and make books a part of their daily lives. This can sometimes mean guidance around books that are interesting and engaging enough to hook them in but also appropriate for their reading ability. (For more information on hi lo – high interest, low ability – books and resources and supports for teachers, you can go to [www.https://collins.co.uk/pages/barrington-stoke](https://collins.co.uk/pages/barrington-stoke)). This should also be a consideration when managing books in a school library, where shelves can be organised by topic, theme, genre, format, etc., rather than purely by age or ability, so as not to alienate diverse readers. Discuss topics and themes with students – what books do they want to see on the school’s shelves? Encourage them to think about their hobbies, the media they consume, the global issues that affect them, and make the explicit connection between their lives and the books they may wish to engage with, as well as the benefits of reading these books – not least, for enjoyment.
- Create social reading spaces around the school, with involvement from students so they feel invested in these spaces and comfortable enough to use them. There may be an opportunity for senior students to engage with younger students to encourage their reading, and as an informal means of making connections between, for instance, incoming First Years and their older peers.
- Introduce dedicated reading time within the curriculum. Make the connection between wellbeing, self-regulation and reading – SPHE classes are an excellent opportunity to model reading for wellbeing.
- Set up (or support students to set up and maintain) themed book clubs that can focus on specific genres or formats. These might focus on graphic novels, sports-themed books, or anything which students share an interest in. Discussion time in class can help readers who lack confidence to develop their opinions about books and to figure out their reading identity.
- Create reading communities around the school by encouraging students and staff to write reviews and recommendations for each other.

Shared reading allows younger pupils to experience the joy of discovering new books while increasing the confidence and reading skills of older readers. Scottish Book Trust have put together this handy document that introduces the concept of shared reading and gives some suggested approaches: <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-resources>

Reading culture ideas

The KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards – become a Junior Jury!

Junior Juries is a unique, free programme for schools, libraries and book clubs, designed to raise awareness and encourage enjoyment of contemporary children's books, in both English and Irish, by Irish and Irish-based authors and illustrators. Participating classes or book clubs sign up from September. In late January/early February, the shortlist of approximately ten books is announced, and each Junior Jury decides which of the books they plan to read; Junior Juries can read as many or as few as they wish. A specially designed resource pack is made available to support Junior Juries to engage with the books in creative and playful ways. At the end of this process each group is asked to collectively score the books they have read, just as our adult judging panel does. In May, the Junior Juries' Award is presented by one of our Junior Juries, based on the cumulative scores from thousands of readers around the island of Ireland.

The programme is suitable for all ages and classes.

<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/what-we-do/kpmg-childrens-books-ireland-awards/junior-juries-programme>

Gaisce Reading Challenge

Children's Books Ireland is proud to be an official Gaisce Challenge Partner and we have lots of ideas and resources to help students use books and reading to work towards their Gaisce Awards. Our Reading Challenge Guide will be especially relevant to students who undertake Gaisce from the age of 14, specifically in the Personal Skill and Community Involvement Challenge areas.

You can find more information and download the Reading Challenge Guide on our website:

<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/gaisce-presidents-award>



Author and illustrator visits

Arranging for an author or illustrator to visit your school and talk to different classes or run a workshop can be especially impactful if your students have read their work and done some research on the artist who created it. It can also be a great way to introduce them to a new genre. Author and illustrator visits do require a budget and some planning, but there is lots of advice and support available:

- You can apply to Poetry Ireland's Writers in Schools scheme which part-funds visits by writers, poets and storytellers to schools: (<https://www.poetryireland.ie/education/writers-in-schools>)
- If you have some budget to pay for a writer or illustrator to visit but are unsure of the appropriate fee, you can check out Children's Books Ireland's own rates of pay for similar events: (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/what-we-do/supporting-artists/paying-the-artist>)
- You can also check out our free resource on organising events with authors and illustrators for more information and ideas on event planning and management: (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/event-guidelines-venues>).
- Your local library might also host authors and illustrators for events throughout the year, especially during the Children's Book Festival throughout the month of October, so be sure to link in with your librarian to stay up to date: (<https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/right-to-read/childrens-book-festival>)
- You can apply to our annual book-gifting programmes. Selected schools can receive specially chosen books for their school and class libraries and author and illustrator visits, free of charge. For more information on application deadlines, please visit our website. (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/what-we-do/book-gifting>)

Recommendations & Resources

- The 'Recommendations' section of our website features a vast breadth of reviews to help you find excellent books for young readers of all ages. (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations>)
- In our 'Resources & Ideas' section, you'll find activity packs, and specific advice on managing school libraries and starting book clubs. (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas>)



Reading assemblies/announcements

- Staff share what they're currently reading and why reading is important to them.
- Poetry readings, which could also include poems by pupils, can be integrated into regular assemblies.
- Local figures from the community could talk to the school about the books they love and why reading is important to them. This could be a past pupil of the school, someone from a local sports club, a librarian from the local library or a staff member.

The Wellread National Award

Children's Books Ireland is proud to support The Wellread National Award, Oide's literacy initiative for secondary schools that celebrates reading for pleasure and joy. The award aims to promote the development of a reading culture in school communities and requires the involvement of all stakeholders including students, teachers, parents and the wider community in reading and associated activities. Working towards the Wellread National Award is a fantastic way to boost a whole-school culture of reading.

You can find more information on the Oide website:

<https://oide.ie/post-primary/home/english/literacy/professional-learning-materials/#title-for-this-block>

Connecting to your local public library

Your local library can be an invaluable support to your school's reading culture, especially in the context of the Right to Read campaign, which is a national programme to promote reading for people of all ages, and especially children. Even if it's not feasible to schedule regular class visits to the local library, either because of distance or staffing, or to have the mobile library come to visit, making a connection with a librarian will boost your access to new class novels. Every teenager in the school should be encouraged to become a library member and the idea of the local library as a family-friendly space should be communicated enthusiastically to the school community. Library membership is free, and Irish public libraries provide all users with a wide range of free online services including eBooks, audiobooks, eMagazines, online courses and online newspapers.



References

Department of Education and Skills (2018) *Junior Cycle English*.

https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d14fd46d-5a10-46fc-9002-83df0b4fc2ce/JuniorCycle_-_English_-_specification_amended_2018.pdf

Department of Education and Youth (2025) *Curriculum Specifications for Leaving Certificate English*.

<https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/cea2a97f-0663-4bd7-9a16-6dcec6249e24/SC-English-Spec-ENG-INT.pdf>

Hilhorst, S, Lockey, A & Speight, T; (2018) *A Society of Readers*. Demos.

<https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/A-Society-of-Readers-Formatted-1.pdf>

Sullivan, A; Brown, M; (2013) *Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading*. (CLS Working Papers '13/10).

Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University College London: London, UK.

<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1473708/>

The National Literacy Trust; (2018) *Mental wellbeing, reading and writing*.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/mental-wellbeing-reading-and-writing/>

The Reading Agency (2023) *Reading facts*.

<https://readingagency.org.uk/our-work/our-research/reading-facts/>



Notes

[illegible]



Follow us!



@kidsbooksirel



@childrensbooksireland



childrens-books-ireland



Children's Books Ireland



@kidsbooksirel



@childrensbooksireland.ie

childrensbooksireland.ie

#EveryChildAReader



children's
books
ireland

every child a reader



funding
literature