



TEN POINTERS TO HELP BRING BOOKS TO LIFE

(FOR EVEN THE MOST RELUCTANT READERS!)

BY PETER J MURRAY

Please accept my apologies if any of the points below seem very 'obvious', but I'm sure you'll agree that we often overlook the 'obvious' in our quest for success.



1 When reading books to children, only read books that you enjoy yourself. Your 'passion' for the book will be evident to the children in the way you read it and your enthusiasm will be passed onto them. Children are no fools! If you read a book to them that you secretly dislike, it will be apparent - no matter how well you try to hide it. One of the reasons my own readings are successful is because I believe totally in my books.

2 'Characterisation' is so important in bringing books to life. Children adore book characters that they understand and can relate to. During your readings, stop occasionally and discuss the characters. Ask the children about them, what they think of them, do they know anyone like them etc.

3 While reading, use your voice to maximum effect putting all the stress in the right places. This is why it's a good idea to have read the book yourself beforehand - you will know what's coming and be ready to read to gain maximum effect. Did your own parents read to you as a child? If they did (mine did frequently), they probably used a 'silly voice' for each of the characters to bring them to life. You would have enjoyed that - so did they!

4 If possible, move around and be animated during your reading. I tend to hold the book in one hand and wave my other arm about appropriately to stress the current mood of the narrative. We all use our hands in everyday conversation - try to do the same while reading - again, it brings the book to life.



5 Pick out one or two scenes from the book and get some of the children to act them in front of class. It always amazes me how many children volunteer to come up 'on stage' to help me act out my books. It also amazes me how many times the teachers tell me that I picked the quieter and more unlikely pupils to volunteer - and what a brilliant job they did! Children love acting parts from books - use this fact to help bring the book to life.

6 Choose characters or scenes from the book and get the children to draw them. These should be characters or scenes not already illustrated - we don't want the children to copy - but to draw completely from their own imagination. In my own books, I often challenge them to draw some of my more mysterious characters using my descriptions in the book. As I always say to them, 'with my descriptions and your imagination, you can achieve fantastic results'. Again, these art/illustration exercises help bring the book to life; they also give some of the less academic and less able readers a chance to express themselves in a way that may better suit them.

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Stop the reading on a cliff-hanger (all my chapters end on cliff-hangers) and ask the class to get together and decide what is going to happen next - they can work in small groups if they wish. One school I visited read up to the end of a particularly dramatic chapter, which ended on a real cliff-hanger, and then the teacher put the class into small groups to work out what happened next. Each group put together a script, practiced it and acted it in front of the rest of the class. After all the acting had taken place, the class couldn't wait to get back to the text to find out how accurate their predictions were and which group were closest. Children love competition!



8

Once the book has been read, work with the class to find out as much as information as possible about the author and his/her background. Get the class to think about questions like:

- What inspired the author to write the book?
- Where did the author get his/her ideas for the characters?
- How long did it take the author to write the book etc?

9

Ask the children if reading the book has had an effect on them in any way? Has it changed their ideas about anything? Have any of the characters made an impression on them - good or bad? This makes for a great class discussion.



10

Ask the children to pick out their favourite part of the book and learn it really well, not so they could copy it out word for word, but so that they could tell that part of the story accurately to someone who has not read the book. Remind them that authors are really 'storytellers'. The written word is just another way of passing on information. Ask for volunteers to come out and tell their favourite part of the story. Maybe another class could come in who have not read the book and hear some of the volunteers relate their favourite parts.

During my own presentations I often tell part of the story rather than read it - the children love this - and I do too! My hands and body are free to move around as much as I wish in bringing the characters and book to life.

I hope this all helps. It would be good if even some of it helps. Most of us agree that in today's age of technology, teachers and authors need all the help they can get in striving to prove to pupils that the imagination is still more powerful and rewarding to use than any electronic device. We all believe it...it's just a small matter of convincing our children!

As recently happened at the end of one of my school presentations when I asked the question:

"What do you all have that is more powerful than any computer, I-pod, mp3 player, electronic game...it begins with the letter 'i'?"

The small child at the front raised his hand and answered loudly *"I-phone!"*

GOOD LUCK!



Peter J Murray