

TIPS FOR SCHOOLS TO ENCOURAGE A READING CULTURE

by Nicola Morgan



My training in dyslexia first inspired me to want to understand the human brain and behaviour. Alongside my work in adolescent wellbeing, I've kept up this interest and now regularly lecture on the science of reading for pleasure and the different effects of various types of reading, including digital. These are my tips for schools to develop a healthy whole-school reading culture.

1. A reading culture can only happen if senior management are on side. They will only be on side if they know the benefits and value. Tell them! See the Reading Brain section of my website.
2. Reading needs to be cross-curricular – all subjects and staff. Fiction and non-fiction; poetry and prose; graphic novels – anything a reader can enjoy.
3. Most people are most motivated by instant benefits: they don't respond to the idea that reading will make them *live longer* as much as the idea that it will make them *feel* good or make them *know* something, results they'll notice straightaway.
4. Non-fiction is just as able to inspire empathy as fiction and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I can argue vehemently about this, with science, but for now let me just say four words: Diary of Anne Frank? (The full argument is on my website.)
5. Adults should talk about books they love and books they don't love. Arguments about books are good!
6. Making time for reading is especially necessary and difficult in today's busy world. Schools which have introduced whole-school (adults, too) reading sessions see benefits and find that most people come to value and enjoy this quiet time.
7. Even if some students or teachers don't like it, how about prioritising the needs of your quiet thinkers, for once, not just your extroverts? We have to do sport and all sorts of things we might not like at first, because there are benefits – same with reading.
8. Don't make books special: make them a normal part of life, because they are.
9. Use careful psychology: some children react badly to being told they should read something "harder"; others like the challenge. You risk further discouraging reluctant readers if you undermine their choices.
10. Fund author visits: these work brilliantly to inspire young readers. You'll find information on the Society of Authors website and the site of pretty much any children's author. You *do* have to pay authors, though. We can't eat goodwill!

Nicola Morgan is the author of award-winning books of fiction and non-fiction and is an international expert on aspects of wellbeing, adolescence and reading. She lectures on the science and benefits of reading (and other topics connected to wellbeing and adolescence. See her website for lots of free resources and details of her work, including her exciting and award-winning novels for teenagers.

www.nicolamorgan.com

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