

Summer Reading Challenge 2012 – Story Lab



This is my first time I've done this challenge. I used to hate books but now I love them. Story Lab has encouraged me to read, THANK YOU!

Shayan, 9, Solihull

Library volunteering has DEFINITELY changed me! There's so many skills I've learnt, and things it's opened me up to do. I'm much better at reading now, and more confident all round.

Tom Hotston, 13, Warrington



Key Achievements

- 750,000 children took part in the Story Lab Summer Reading Challenge¹
- 98% of UK libraries ran the Story Lab Summer Reading Challenge
- 322,500 or 43% of participants were boys
- Children doing the Challenge read more than 3 million books over the summer holidays
- 48,200 children signed up as new library members
- The website attracted 130,000 visitors, who visited 208,000 times, with 2.6 million page views
- 48,000 children created profiles on the website, logging 100,000 books on the *Booksorter*

THE READING AGENCY

- 349,400 children attended 13,700 Story Lab events organised by libraries
- 5761 volunteers helped in 68% of library authorities. Of these, 4382 were young people aged 11-24 – a 49% increase on the number involved in 2011
- 97% of the young people involved in volunteering gained new skills and experience
- The Summer Reading Challenge was part of the Olympics' London 2012 Festival, highlighting libraries' vital cultural and educational role

2012 Report

1. Background

Each year independent charity The Reading Agency partners with libraries to create the Summer Reading Challenge, the UK's biggest children's reading promotion. Research shows the Challenge improves children's enjoyment of reading, as well as their reading range, confidence and motivation. It helps prevent the summer holiday dip in literacy skills.²

The Summer Reading Challenge encourages children to read six library books of their choice over the summer holidays. They join the Challenge at their local library, where library staff and volunteers give out themed materials and incentives. There are medals and certificates for those who finish six books.

The 2012 Challenge was called Story Lab, was part of the Olympics' 2012 Festival, and was partnered by the BBC, the Children's University, the RNIB and several others. The materials were created with top children's illustrator Steve May.

Aims and evaluation methodology

The Summer Reading Challenge's aims for children and young people are:

- To get more children reading more
- To build children's confidence and enthusiasm about reading
- To build children's and families' use of public libraries
- To help children and families benefit from cultural experiences
- To help young people experience rewarding reading and library volunteering activity
- To reach disadvantaged children with a summer reading offer

The 2012 programme was evaluated through an online survey completed by 100% of participating library authorities; detailed reports from a selection of these; feedback from children and parents; statistics from the Story Lab website; a survey of the young people volunteering to support the programme, and the library services running a volunteering programme.

² Summer Reading Challenge 2009 Impact Research Report, UKLA, December 2009

The changing library environment

In England and Wales, the Summer Reading Challenge is a prioritised programme within a new Universal Reading Offer strategy developed by the Society of Chief Librarians³, and it has maintained a high level of take-up amongst library authorities – 98%. In Scotland Tesco Bank sponsor the programme, where it is known as the Tesco Bank Summer Reading Challenge Scotland. Here, 94% of local authorities run the programme and children’s participation has risen by 26% in the two years of the sponsorship.

At a time of huge change for libraries, the Summer Reading Challenge is a pivotal programme, helping libraries work smarter and collectively across local authority boundaries to help build children’s love of reading. The combination of national co-ordination and local delivery helps save costs through economies of scale, and this model also helps libraries attract major partnerships, develop positive media profile and demonstrate impact.

The involvement of young volunteers is growing significantly; 4,382 young *Reading Activists* helped deliver the 2012 Challenge, and increase of 49% on 2011. Their work was celebrated at an event at No 11 Downing Street early in 2013. Evaluation shows volunteering increases their skills, experience and confidence.

2. Programme impact

2.1 Children’s reading and use of the library

750,000 children took part in the 2012 Summer Reading Challenge in 2012, which is roughly comparable with 2011.⁴ 37% of library authorities reported increases on the previous year, the greatest increase being 138%.⁵ Scottish authorities saw an increase of 12.6% on last year. The Challenge is more successful at drawing in boys than many other reading promotions. The percentage of boys taking part in the Challenge was 43%.

427,500 children, 57% of participants, completed the Challenge by reading six books over the summer. Completion rates vary considerably in different library authorities, but three quarters have a rate of 49% or above, and a quarter have over 64% (see Appendix Charts, Completion Rate Individual Authorities). The highest completion rate is 89%.

More than 3 million library books were read by children taking part in the Challenge, and the Impact Research suggests that many children read even more over the summer. 25% of the children who took part in the Summer Reading Challenge read between 7 and 12 books, and 8% read more than 12.⁶

“Story Lab was great. Rebecca has a tough time with reading and this really pushed her on. My children would not have read a single word over the summer if it wasn’t for Story Lab. Thankyou!”

Lisa and Matthew Cook, parents, Torfaen

³ <http://www.goscl.com/libraries-of-the-21st-century-scl-launches-four-national-offers-for-public-libraries/>

⁴ The 2011 total of 780,000 included 30,000 younger children taking part with Bookstart Book Crawl and Bookbug certificates. This year Bookstart Bear Club certificates were only available as downloads, and the numbers couldn’t be collected. Excluding the Bookstart and Bookbug totals, the number of children taking part in 2012 was roughly the same as the previous year.

⁵ See Appendix 1 Charts, Change in Participant Numbers

⁶ Summer Reading Challenge 2009 Impact Research Report, UKLA, December 2009

Previous UKLA impact research provides evidence that the Summer Reading Challenge can contribute towards preventing the ‘summer holiday dip’ in reading motivation and attainment⁶. Teachers indicate that children who undertake the Challenge are more likely to maintain or improve their reading performance than those who do not, and far fewer dip in attainment after the summer. All teachers surveyed commented on the value of the Challenge in developing a wider reading repertoire and increasing children’s confidence – giving them a more secure view of themselves as readers as well as greater independence.⁶ This was borne out by feedback from the 2012 Challenge:

“The children really enjoy doing the challenge and feel a real sense of achievement. They particularly appreciate the tie-in with the school ... Good way to engage with the library!”

Parent, Edinburgh

“I think Story Lab is a great thing to do during the summer holidays. Reading the books keeps your brain warm.”

Maeling Booth, age 10, Amesbury, Wiltshire

Reaching disadvantaged children

Library services worked with a wide range of local partners to reach children needing extra support. These included children of refugees and asylum seekers, Looked After children, young carers, children of homeless families and with a parent in prison. Some services sent out information through the local home educated network, or visited traveller sites.

In Norfolk the library service used the Schools Library Service mobile library during the summer to enable children from families in remote areas to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge. You can read about it [here](#).

Portsmouth reached visually impaired children through special story times and drop-in sessions. Slough used Aiming High funding to run sessions with Bag Books for children at a special school in Slough. Hartlepool ran targeted events for summer special needs groups.

For the first time we adapted the way we carried out the SRC for children with special needs. The emphasis was for families to attend a special multi-sensory storytelling session and then the child received all the prizes. We used the partially sighted set with these children. Our Bookstart librarian visited refugees and asylum seekers - a few have started using the library.

Elaine Walters, Southwark Library

Use of the library

The Summer Reading Challenge encourages thousands of children to join their library. In 2012 48,200 children joined their local library to take part in Story Lab. The Summer Reading Challenge also builds children’s borrowing of books and other materials from libraries. 54% of authorities provided data on loans of children’s materials, and that totalled 14 million during the 10 week summer period.

Wider cultural experiences

As part of their delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge libraries organised a wide range of events – music, dance, poetry, art, performance – in many different community settings. During the summer holidays there were 13,700 different Story Lab events, attended by 349,500 children, fewer events than in 2012, but with more children.

2500 of these activities were run by partner organisations and arts practitioners working with libraries. For example Discover ran a Story Cloud event and South East Dance ran a Big Dance 2012 event in Jubilee Library, Brighton, as part of the London 2012 Festival. There were also art clubs, author and illustrator events and workshops using story telling, drama, poetry and creative writing.

In Hull, the library service worked with a local theatre company who created a production about the Summer Reading Challenge theme, for school assemblies, to encourage participation. The actors dressed up as the child characters from the Challenge; as well as the play, they created YouTube clips introducing the characters, and also appeared at shopping centres to promote the challenge. Here are some [photos](#) and a YouTube [video](#). They also created a Story Lab [song](#).

2.2 Young people volunteering

There has been a big increase in the number of library authorities involving volunteers with the Summer Reading Challenge. In 2011, 117 library authorities involved volunteers in 1,000 libraries. In 2012 this rose to 139 library authorities in 1,271 libraries.

The Reading Agency was supported by the John Laing Charitable Trust and the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund to provide training and support for libraries involving young volunteers. Working with libraries, the programme has been embedded as an important model that adds capacity for libraries, alongside very real benefits for young people and participating children.

4,382 young volunteers aged 11-24 years were involved, a 49% increase on 2011. 97% said they gained skills and experience, and 85% said they would like to keep volunteering in a library after the Summer Reading Challenge has finished.

65% of library authorities have offered volunteers opportunities to continue volunteering in the library or the community after the summer, with offers made to at least 1023 volunteers.

It's been a truly fantastic opportunity. I've had the chance to work closely with children - something I've never really done before, at any level. There's something great about seeing their eyes light up when you've read and enjoyed a book that they love too. You just don't get to have that kind of interaction anywhere else. Rest assured, I'll be back next year!

Katya, 17, Milton Keynes

Taking part in volunteering is a good way to spend a little time to give back to your community while developing your people skills. In addition working with children is very rewarding and really makes the job satisfying.

Ben, 19, Fleet

I really enjoyed working with the Summer Reading Challenge... the library staff were very welcoming and it felt great to be contributing to the community.

Anindita, 15, Kingston upon Thames

Spending time in the library has helped to remind me how much I love reading for leisure and not just for my course at university.

Emily, 19, West Berkshire

There is a separate, fuller report on library volunteering, which can be found [here](#)

2.3 Working with schools

Evidence shows that the Summer Reading Challenge works best where there are strong links between schools, teachers, librarians and children's and youth services.

The 2012 feedback from library authorities indicated that 92% of library authorities organised visits to schools (as last year). They visited 7460 schools, representing 45% of the total schools in their authorities, to encourage children to take part in the Challenge.

Resources provided by The Reading Agency included a video trailer for Story Lab, introducing the characters and encouraging children to sign up at their local library. And a PowerPoint for delivering an assembly about the Challenge, which library authorities could customise.

Libraries used invitations, posters and noticeboard information, PowerPoint presentations, and their own specially printed flyers/summer activity booklets. They reported on a range of successful approaches including

- Children acting as ambassadors and talking about the Challenge to the other children at school
- Using the video trailer and website to generate interest in the characters and narrative
- Creating You Tube clips to promote the Challenge
- Talking to parents at school open days and summer events
- Presentation at Head teachers' conference and presentations to Literacy Co-ordinators
- Sending out registration forms via the schools

"Dover Extended schools are bringing in 9 children who are attending the Project launch pad for reluctant reader summer school into Aylesham library to join and have a mini induction to help improve their reading skills before they go up to secondary school in the autumn. They will be using the opportunity to add another stamp to their Kent Children's University Learning Destination's Passport as well."

Lesley Gallagher, Kent Libraries

At Ysgol Esgob Morgan in **St Asaph, North Wales**, ALL of the pupils took part in the Summer Reading Challenge and completed it. They were encouraged by their Patron of Reading; author Helena Pielichaty, who presented them with a [trophy](#). Helena also worked with Nottinghamshire Library Service and fellow authors Michael Cox and Elizabeth Baguley to donate book prizes to the school in Newark with the highest percentage of Summer Reading Challenge participants, and gave a cup to the class with the highest percentage of completing the [Challenge](#).

Through a close partnership between the library service and primary schools (via the Bradford Primary Improvement Partnership and Bradford Achievement Service), Bradford **Libraries** succeeded in increasing the number of children joining the challenge by 40% in 2012. The Challenge was promoted through school clusters, and schools with more than 25 or more pupils taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge were also entered into a prize draw.

In November the library service held a big [celebration event](#) for all the children from Bradford schools who took part in the Challenge. The children were given medals and certificates from the council along with big prizes. Extra incentives for pupils were the chance to win a Kindle and an iPad. The celebration event was filmed to promote the Challenge in schools and children's centres next summer, and children who took part will also be acting as ambassadors to encourage others to take part.

3. Programme innovation and development in 2012

3.1 Digital developments

The Reading Agency introduced a digital step change to the programme in 2012. The Story Lab website featured a **Book Sorter**. Using the database of titles input by children during the Challenge, visitors to the site could ask for book recommendations based on the types of books they like reading. 48,000 children created profiles, and collectively input 100,000 titles between June and the end of September – a huge crowd sourced reading recommendation list.

The Story Lab website attracted 130,000 visitors, visiting the site 208,000 times, with 2.6 million page views.

Other developments were the introduction of online incentives to complete the Challenge, with codes at the end of each stage which unlocked videos. The site offered encouraging video messages from children's authors, a Story Lab game, a facility to keep a note of the books read and advice from library staff (online Lab Assistants) for reading tips. A new 'Finish the Story' writing competition featured stories started by well-known children's writers including Julia Donaldson and Dame Jacqueline Wilson; there were 7000 entries.

Digital partners included Mumsnet, Netmums, Parentdish, Stories from the Web and Discover's [Story Cloud](#).

The Summer Reading Challenge website is now a year-round site. Children can continue to log books on their profiles, earning badges for reaching new totals of books read. It also offers competitions, publisher promotions, messages from authors, online support from library staff, games, and a place to chat about books.

In 2012 the potential of **social media** became apparent when the Summer Reading Challenge trended on Twitter on launch day – approximately 350 tweets including the #SummerReadingChallenge hash tag were sent.

The Summer Reading Challenge Facebook page and Twitter highlighted activities, events and photos from all over the UK throughout the Challenge. During the challenge up to 190 people a week were talking about the SRC page.

THE READING AGENCY

3.2 Press and PR

The Reading Agency worked with libraries to run a strong PR campaign for the Summer Reading Challenge and increased national coverage through press and online media.

- In a partnership with the BBC, Story Lab featured heavily on Blue Peter and on the CBBC website
- Coverage on CBBC's Newsround, and Sky News.
- Coverage in the Daily Star, the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror and Independent.
- The Daily Telegraph ran an additional Finish the Story competition with a story written by Michael Morpurgo.
- The Guardian ran a special reading supplement feature on the 2012 Summer Reading Challenge
- The Sun ran a Michael Rosen interview on children's reading and the launch of the Challenge
- Evening Standard - news story and photo, plus editorial on launch of Summer Reading Challenge
- Lots of regional coverage, including 11 newspaper items about support for the Challenge from local MPs



3.3 Public affairs

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Libraries hosted a July launch event for MPs at Portcullis House. This was attended by 52 MPs and children's writers Malorie Blackman and Charlie Higson.

The Cabinet Office and Frances Osborne arranged a reception in January 2013 at No 11 Downing Street to celebrate the work of the young people who volunteered to support the Challenge.

3.4 Supporting Partnerships 2012

The Reading Agency works with libraries to build key partnerships at national level to reach wider audiences:

Cultural Olympiad, The London 2012 Festival: Story Lab was part of the London 2012 Festival, which celebrated the Olympic and Paralympic Games with events across the UK. Highlights included a launch event for the Summer Reading Challenge at the British Library with Michael Morpurgo on June 26.

“I have enjoyed all of the reading challenges however Story lab has been the best because you have linked it with the Olympics”

10 year old girl, Rayleigh, Essex

Local authorities reported that links to the London 2012 Olympics helped them to get more publicity:

“We developed a story telling relay with Peter Chand visiting the libraries in the areas where the torch had passed through. One of the torch bearers came to Peter's session in her costume and bearing the torch. This enabled us to gain extra promotion from the Challenge in the West Midlands brochure of Cultural Olympiad events and the Staffordshire Schools Torch Relay brochure.”

Sue Ball, Staffordshire Libraries

Tesco Bank: as in 2011, Tesco Bank supported the Summer Reading Challenge in Scotland. This gave each Scottish authority free materials for 300 children and £350 for each participating authority to run extra activities aimed at increasing participation. There was a successful launch event in Edinburgh with Jonathan Meres on 19 June.

The BBC supported the Summer Reading Challenge with a feature on Blue Peter and CBBC commissioned 10 short films called Bringing Books to Life, and showed six of them over the summer. These featured well-known children's celebrities talking about and reading from their favourite books.

A new **Children's University** partnership meant that the Summer Reading Challenge became a Children's University nationally validated learning activity. 32 library authorities reported that children brought passports in, and we hope to extend the reach further in 2013.

Welsh Books Council: Welsh/English bilingual versions of all the Challenge materials were made possible through the support of the Welsh Books Council and funding from the Welsh Government.

RNIB National Library Service: The RNIB National Library Service supported the creation of large print and Braille versions of the Story Lab materials to enable children with visual impairment to take part anywhere in the UK, through their local library.

BookStart: younger children (under four) were involved in the Challenge as part of BookStart Bear Club (in England), or BookStart in Wales. These schemes are run by Book Trust.

Bookbug: A similar certificate was created and available for younger children in Scotland, through a partnership with Scottish Book Trust.

THE READING AGENCY

The British Council: Story Lab ran in 19 different countries through 33 British Council offices, involving an estimated 12,000 children.



Big Dance Brighton. Big Dance 2012. Image courtesy of South East Dance / © Elaine Mayson.

4. Looking Forward: The 2013 Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge strategy group is currently working on a three year development plan. For 2013 the following developments are being prioritised:

Diversification of funding

- Continue the Tesco Bank sponsorship pilot in Scotland, alongside developing plans for a national sponsor in 2014
- Encourage libraries to innovate/develop the programme using Grants for the Arts funding and plan a national Grants for the Arts and Nesta bid
- Position libraries' reading for pleasure work with health commissioners and explore the possibility of schools commissioning funding, Pupil Premium etc.
- Test a donations model

National Partnership development

- Develop media partnerships, with special focus on BBC and the Times Education Supplement

THE READING AGENCY

- Develop partnerships to support drive to reach disadvantaged children/troubled families, e.g. with Barnados
- Develop partnerships to support a new schools engagement plan: the National Association of Teachers of English; UKLA; Education Scotland; the Arts Council's Bridge organisations; Trinity
- Develop partnerships with the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Trinity to accredit young people's contribution

Delivery models

- Develop the involvement of young people as volunteers with skills benefits for themselves, especially in Wales and Scotland.
- Develop policy for how the Challenge will work in volunteer run libraries

PR and public affairs

- High profile launches, including in Scottish Parliament. MPs supported to publicise locally.
- Ten big name authors acting as advocates and media spokespeople + an army of other author champions
- New media partnerships
- SCL and ASCEL working regionally with the Arts Council on *before and after* stories and advocacy

Digital audience development

- Develop children's engagement through further development of website and Booksorter , with new drive to use on People's Network computers, and in schools. Further develop website to become all year round presence
- Bid to Nesta for linked parents' digital development
- Integration of approaches from digital skills sharing programme with publishers, especially Reading Families online
- Develop co-ordinated national social media campaign through Facebook and Twitter

Local partnership development:

Schools

- Encourage schools to put SRC and partnerships with libraries into the school improvement plan
- Develop new volunteering *Reading Activists* roles to incentivise participation
- Develop use of schools trophies to incentivise participation
- Invite authors to promote libraries and the Challenge; work with CWIG
- Develop links with literacy co-ordinator roles where they exist – Primary Consultant (Every Child a Reader) etc.

- Explore commissioning possibilities through Bridges and possibility of ITT package to support summer term teaching practice

Health

- Incorporate health/well-being advocacy and link to SCL/TRA's new drive on health
- Pilot the use of Challenge in hospital settings (Leicestershire)
- Explore commissioning possibilities linked to local health and well being strategies. Develop Commissioner interest in mental health by focusing on wider determinants of health

Culture

- Support the development of models of arts and museums delivery partnerships

Evaluation

- Refocus evaluation strategy to deliver priority linked evidence based relevant to commissioners and other partners
- 2013: pilot health/well being impact in two authorities with an established relationship with health commissioners and partners. Roll out framework in 2014
- UKLA research with education partners still valid for establishing impact on reading range, motivation and prevention of summer holiday reading dip.