



# Backwell School

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Dear Parent/Carer

### **Year 7, 8 and 9 English – Reluctant Readers**

Please find below a document that outlines the importance of students reading independently and offers useful tips for encouraging reluctant readers to pick up a book.

Kind Regards

The English Department



## So you have a reluctant reader...?

Reading independently is possibly the single-most important activity your child can do to improve achievement in school.

Research shows that reading helps cognitive development; recent studies revealed that students who read at home do significantly better **across the curriculum** – including 9.9% better in maths – than students who don't read. Linked to this is the fact that reading is the best way to improve vocabulary, essential for success in every subject.

Reading also has social and emotional benefits. It increases self-esteem and studies show that students who read are more empathetic. Growing up is tough - reading can help young people explore complex problems from the safe fictional world of a book.

The problem, of course, is convincing young people of the importance and joy of reading. We understand how difficult this can be in a world of electronic distractions. Here are some tactics that may work for you:

- Find books with a connection to something they love. If they are football fans, look for fiction like *Ultimate Football Heroes* or Tom Palmer's books: <https://tompalmer.co.uk/>.

If they like military/action/war, try any of Alan Gratz's books (*Allies*, *Grenade*, *Ground Zero*). If they are into gaming, try fast-paced chapter books or 'choose your own adventure' stories (Tip: try the interactive 'Lost' series by Tracey Turner). 'Recommended Reads' lists will help them to select just the right book; check out the Year Group Favourites on our excellent library homepage (accessible via Frog).

- Graphic novels are wonderful for reluctant readers. In addition to the *Heartstopper* novels which are hugely popular, try graphic novel versions of *The Recruit* by Muchamore or *Silverfin* by Higson. We have an increasingly large collection of graphic novels in our library. This list has some excellent recommendations: <https://schoolreadinglist.co.uk/secondary-ks3-ks4-reading-lists/graphic-novels-for-young-adults-aged-12-16-in-ks3-ks4/>
- Try Barrington Stoke: these are produced with tinted pages, special fonts and additional spacing, plus are edited to reduce reading barriers, and they foster success as they are age-appropriate quick reads. <https://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk/>
- Try audio books: Libraries have free, downloadable audio books plus Audible has a wide range of teen books. Many teens like the idea of being able to do something active while listening to a book. By listening to an audio book, your teen will pick up new vocabulary, hear complex sentence structures and engage with stories. You

might also listen to audio books as a family as sharing a story together is a fabulous way to bond; we still talk about books we listened to years ago.

- If your child is ready, you might select a 'grittier' book, then verbally hum-and-haw about whether they are old enough to read the book, tell them maybe they should wait six months as 'there is some language and some blood'. Pretty soon they will be begging you for the book, and you can eventually give in, saying 'since you are now in Year ..., I guess it is okay'. Charlie Higson's *Enemy* series is a gritty series written for teens, as is *Zom-B* by Darren Shan.
- They might want to read a BANNED book (banned by overzealous schoolboards in the USA). There are many wonderful 'banned' books that you can find through a Google search, but I recommend *George* by Alex Gino, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Diary of Anne Frank*, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green or *Captain Underpants* by Dav Pilkey
- Set ambitious but realistic Accelerated Reader targets for your child: can they get to 100,000 words read? Or can they read and quiz on 15 short books? Or 25 articles? It can be motivating to work towards a target and then celebrate its achievement.
- Visit the public library. Ask your child to meet you in the library after errands, then take the time to look through their excellent collection of books for young people and for adults.
- Try a 'phone free' hour, or use a timer/concentration App. Research shows that the average concentration span for a 12-year-old is 19 seconds, and the main culprit for reduced concentration is phones. So, for your YouTube-addicted student, make them hand in their phone for an hour – once the boredom kicks in they will soon see the appeal of a good book.
- Another incentive, particularly if your child is environmentally minded, is the 'Forest' App where trees grow if you don't touch your phone: <https://www.forestapp.cc/>
- Be enthusiastic about what they are reading: Ask them to describe a character or to read aloud an exciting bit. You might read a teen/Young Adult book yourself; the plot-driven nature of many of these books means they are relatively easy reads – perfect after a day at work.
- Let your children see you reading for pleasure and talk about how you choose books.
- If you have younger children, ask your older (reluctant reader) child to read aloud to them. This is confidence booster, and it helps with sibling bonding. Michael Morpurgo is a good, shared read; I highly recommend *Kensuke's Kingdom* for sibling read-alouds.
- Children can also read to pets: When our youngest child went through a 'reluctant reader' phase, we asked him to read to the dog for 10 minutes every day. He quickly

switched back to being an enthusiastic reader – and funnily enough, the dog seemed to love reading too!

- Continue to read aloud to your children (even if they are fluent). You might read until you get to a cliff-hanger in the story, and then say you need to do something urgent, but they can read on...
- Offer incentives: Try a summer reading rewards programme; if they read a certain number of books you could take them out somewhere. It's not good to always rely on this, as the focus is extrinsic motivation, but it works for times when a 'breakthrough' is necessary.
- Another idea is to find the book version of a movie: *Stormbreaker*, *Eragon*, *Harry Potter*, *The Book Thief*, *I am Number Four*, *The Princess Diaries*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Percy Jackson*, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Maze Runner*, *Fault in Our Stars*, *Twilight* and *Inkheart* and *Wonder* are all films based on children/young adult books. Both of you can read the book and watch the movie together -- then discuss the differences.
- Have them pick up a device – an e-reader! then check with your local library about borrowing e-books or try BookBub with 99p books.
- Visit a bookstore and allow your child to select a book of their choice. The visually appealing marketing and layout of best-selling books can attract even reluctant readers.
- Try biographies/autobiographies that interest your child. Recent student favourites have been *You Can Do It* by Rashford and *Becoming Muhammed Ali* by Patterson and Alexander
- Gentle encouragement works best.