



## ***Three Men and a Dog No More***

National Year of Reading event toolkit

### **What this toolkit is about**

The National Year of Reading is a great opportunity to bring readers and writers together. For the benefit of both.

For years libraries across the UK have been devising new ways for readers and writers to come together, creating opportunities that publishers are keen to exploit.

This work is part of a larger programme that The Reading Agency is doing to create reader-writer encounters. The intention: to help libraries become buzzing community hubs for reading. In a bid to share these ideas, this toolkit provides the following:

- ideas for a variety of models of events to use when you have an author in your library
- advice on how to devise your own event model, based on which author and audience you will be working with
- tips on how to give authors and publishers what they want from an event
- ideas about how to involve your community in reading activities in the library
- tips on how to make sure *you* get what you want from an author and a publisher

### **Who this toolkit is for**

The toolkit is for library staff. Whatever stage your library is at with author activities: whether you've been running large scale events for years, or are just starting out on working more closely with authors, there should be some food for thought here.

But first, a little context.

## **Reading Partners and the National Year of Reading**

This toolkit has been put together by Reading Partners with the National Year of Reading in mind. It's part of a big push to help libraries offer equal chances for all readers to meet writers, and to help libraries offer local people lively, social reading opportunities.

**Reading Partners** is a partnership between all the UK's 208 library authorities and nine of the main UK adult publishers. Since 2004, Reading Partners has been working as a conduit, encouraging publishers to work with as many libraries across the UK as possible.

It is led by The Reading Agency and its co-ordinators are Sandeep Mahal and Tom Palmer.

The publishers involved are Bloomsbury, Faber, HarperCollins, Headline, Hodder, Little Brown, Mills & Boon, Orion, Pan Macmillan, Penguin, Random House, and Transworld.

[www.readingagency.org.uk/readingpartners](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/readingpartners)

The **National Year of Reading** is a government inspired plan to spread the message about reading for

pleasure in England. The Reading Agency has been commissioned to help libraries make a success of the National Year of Reading.

[www.nationalyearofreading.org.uk](http://www.nationalyearofreading.org.uk)

## **Authors in Libraries**

A major strand of the plans for the National Year of Reading is a *Reader Meets Writer* programme in libraries. The backbone of this is two ambitious author event programmes supported by Reading Partners. The first is a series of 50 major author events around the country. The second is a plan to put 149 National Year of Reading writers in residences in each library authority across England.

## **Major Author events**

The Reading Partners publishers have confirmed 50 of their biggest names to libraries for large-scale National Year of Reading events. These authors will be sent to those libraries, which demonstrated their ability to deliver on big and enthusiastic audiences. The plan was

to deliver at least four large scale events to each English region.

### **National Year of Reading writers in residence**

In parallel, Reading Partners is working to pair an author with each of the 149 English library authorities. These authors will act as National Year of Reading writers in residence.

The plan is that – once we have matched an author with a library authority – the library and the author work out how to find the best way they can cooperate.

And that is where this toolkit could be useful.

The residency may be a one-off event, even just a small gathering where the author can meet a single reading group. Ask your readers to help with ideas.

Or it could be more, depending on the time and resources the library and author have.

It could go as far as being a nine month partnership between the library and the author with a range of activities, ideas and events.

We hope libraries can tie authors in with the planned library membership campaign for the Year.

This carries on all year, kicked off by *Join Your Library Day* on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April.

We are encouraging libraries to use their author to help recruit new members and to promote libraries in general. Using the author to get local press for the library service, for instance or to front a “pop up” library in unusual venues to reach new people.

This toolkit is meant to help with these residencies. The ideas below should help libraries and authors to work out how best to get the most out of their relationship. Please involve your readers as much as you can in shaping your plans.

You can use these models to engage many different parts of your community and to work on the National Year of Reading membership drive.

In the end it is up to you.

We hope these ideas can kick start your thinking and ideas for a very successful National Year of Reading.

### **Standing on firm ground**

The Reading Partners publishers tell us that libraries should be proud of the strength of their creative work with readers, so you can be confident in approaching this work.

*Libraries bring a creativity and interactivity to author events making books seem more appealing, less rarefied and more part of everyday life. Library audiences are extremely diverse and our authors get far more feedback from both readers and staff making it a rewarding experience. And in addition you sell lots of books.”* Joanna Prior, Penguin

There are libraries in every community, including those where there’s a dearth of bookshops. This makes libraries the best place for readers to find new authors. From a marketing point of view, publishers can use their partnership with libraries to access the huge public sector network of press contacts and publicity outlets. Publishers are also tapping into the massive Reading Group network. In recent years, hundreds of reading

groups organised through libraries have sprung up around the country and more are being set up all the time.

### **Part of the work you already do is to attract a**

**more diverse audience to events.** Libraries’ reach into different parts of their community is huge. The Taking Part survey shows that 57% of BME adults use libraries at least once a year.

Publishers are keen to connect to libraries community knowledge to reach BME audiences; local government is placing a greater emphasis on bringing people from different backgrounds together. These writer to reader activities can create wins all round.

In 2005, The Reading Partners consortium did some research which identified **libraries unique selling points for readers**. These are:

- Free books (47% borrow instead of buy)
- Libraries make it easier to take risks and experiment with your reading (39% of borrowers will try new authors)
- Libraries are a trusted source with expert staff

**The Reading Agency** is working with the Society of Chief Librarians to support the development of libraries as THE place where local people go for active reading experiences. This includes borrowing books but also meeting authors, joining reading groups, blogging with other readers, doing reading challenges and getting expert help from library staff with book choices.

**Readers meeting Writers: a set of ideas**

*Each of these descriptions has been kept brief – to keep this toolkit brief. The idea is to give you ideas that you can develop yourself to meet your own needs.*

**Author on the day's papers or the internet news**

Ask the author to talk about the day's newspapers or the news on-line. Good for a Saturday morning event.

**Author on a genre or area of writing**

Ask an author to choose their top ten crime books or war stories or cricket texts. Can be a good way of bringing in a larger audience, who want to hear about the broader stuff, rather than just hear the one author.

**On getting published**

Aim an event at budding writers as well as readers. Ask the author to speak about how they got published and the options unpublished authors have.

**Genre panel**

Bring together two or three authors from one genre. Crime. Literary. Science Fiction. Chick Lit. Football writing. A good way of getting an audience who may not have heard of any of the authors, but are interested in the genre. As always, try to ensure the panel is diverse by having a gender and ethnic mix of authors. If you can.

**Mimic broadcast Events**

Use an author to host a bookish version of a TV or radio show: Desert Island Books, Book Idol, A Question of Sports Reading. Libraries all over the UK are using formats familiar to the public to bring in new audiences.

### **Online chat**

Use the author even when they're not there. Get them to be part of an online chat for readers in the library, but also at home, for those who can't get into the library. See the Reading Partners rolling calendar for possible online chat authors. Some publishers are experimenting with the Long Pen idea – <http://www.longpen.com/> where an author does a signing and video link up with a library audience from 1000s of miles away.)

### **Author meets reading group**

Encourage your reading group to read an author's book before the author comes to the library. Ask the author to introduce the book, then open it up for questions – and comments – about the book. Authors enjoy meeting an audience who have read their book, rather than the event feeling like a sales pitch to those who haven't. It also allows readers to tell authors – and sometimes their publishers – what readers they think.

### **Author and reading group feedback**

Author asks a reading group to read a work in progress – a story, or part or all of a novel – and uses the

feedback from the readers to inform their next draft. So you can help the writer develop, as well as the readers.

### **Debate around a theme**

Choose at least two authors and a theme – and have a chaired or unchaired debate around that theme. The theme would probably be informed by what the authors write about. Try choosing two authors who have different slants on the theme and are willing to have a healthy exchange of views. Many authors are journalists too, so maybe great to diversify the panel of authors to reflect their work.

### **Straight reading**

Out of fashion, but sometimes an author reading for forty-five to sixty minutes *can* work, especially if it is a piece written or adapted for performance. Liverpool's Penny Readings of the classics have been attracting huge audiences. Authors like Will Self and Louis de Bernieres – along with very many less well-known authors – can deliver what are probably better termed performances rather than readings. If you get the right author for this it can be a success.

### **Reading with Q&A**

Probably the most popular event in libraries. An author comes to the library, talks about and reads from their new book. Followed by questions from the audience. This event can be chaired or not, depending on the author's needs. Try and find a good questioner. A confident member of staff. Another – local - author. Some libraries use local journalists. Others use TV and radio presenters.

### **Commission a unique piece**

Ask an author to write a new piece of writing to perform at the library. Something relevant to the library or the setting, perhaps. Have a reading, then maybe a debate about the piece. (This would require a fee for the author, very probably.)

### **Writer meets reader one-to-one**

Offer sessions where the author talks with readers one to one. Hold them while the library is open, maybe in the afternoon, before a larger event later on. The author and reader can talk about the author's book or general reading that both enjoy.

### **Join up with other authorities and tour your authors**

If you and neighbouring library authorities have an author each as part of the National Year of Reading, try outing on a tour of all of them around all your libraries. Promote them together and share costs.

### **Author with music**

Some authors like to do readings and talks interspersed with music. It can be either complicated to set up or expensive, but offers a more varied event. Also, good for attracting a broader audience than a straight literary event.

### **Author with film**

Work with a local cinema to host an event where an author can talk both about their books and their favourite film. Then show the film.

### **Family Fun Day**

If the author is appropriate, set up a family fun day around the theme of the book. Have an event and

related activities like colouring, games, library hunts and quizzes to help promote your stock.

### **Readers Day**

One of the great library offers. Bring together three or four authors to talk as readers in a panel discussion and then break up into smaller groups, where readers can quiz them individually about their own books. Can attract audiences of 100+.

### **Readers evening or afternoon**

As above, but on a smaller scale, taking place over an afternoon or an evening. Both the above activities rely on the author coming to speak as a reader. The Readers Day is as much about getting to know an author's reading habits as his or her writing life.

### **Author on another author**

Ask an author to talk about – as well as their own work – their favourite author. Hearing an author as a reader as well as a writer can be very inspiring.

### **Author with editor or jacket designer**

Ask an author if they can bring their editor or jacket designer to talk both about the book and the journey a novel takes from a manuscript to a finished object. Readers are fascinated with this process.

### **Open mic hosted by author**

Ask the author to host an event where local unpublished writers come and read for five minutes each. The author can act as a compare and comment on each reading, then can read their own material in the second half.

### **On stage interview**

Have a chair interview an author and take questions from the audience. With or without a reading from the author. This can take the heat off the author, so they don't have to worry about keeping the audience's attention, leaving it to the chair to drive the event.

### **Author with new author**

Put the author on alongside an emerging author – perhaps from a local independent press – as they do in music gigs, a band with a support act.

### **Ask an author to devise a reader development idea**

Work with the author to create a new reader development idea or promotion that knits with their interests and would reach a new audience for you. Bringing a new slant on your reader development work to the library.

### **Reaching out**

Use the author to reach people who may not come to the library. Make a plan with your readers and partners to take him or her to venues where people gather: sports stadiums, community groups, shopping centres, colleges, the magistrates courts... Have an idea about what you can do to attract the attention of people at these venues and work with the author to deliver it.

### **Hard to Reach Groups**

If your author has links or ideas about parts of your community, take them to meet those people. Do you have a Polish Centre, a church or mosque, local support groups, etc. Can you tie your work in with a visit to them?

### **Writing Workshops**

Use the author to run straightforward writing workshops. If they are from the city in question, then maybe a session about writing about your city. Or a starting to write session. Or a how to get published session.

### **Girls Night In**

Programme two or three chick lit authors and appeal to intergenerational audiences. Approach big department stores – e.g. Selfridges, Debenhams – to sponsor prizes. Ask the author to draw the winner.

### **Reading Group Experiments**

Work with a debut author and two very different reading groups, maybe in terms of ethnicity, geography or age. The groups could read and discuss proof copies of books in their reading groups and then come together to discuss the books and share different perspectives with the author.

### **Slams**

Employ a local poet to host a Slam or open mic event. A good way of getting writers to come to events, then hook them into coming to see other authors.

### **And then...**

The above is just a sample of the models of authors working with readers and libraries. Authors can be used in other ways:

- to help promote the library and its services through media interviews
- to go into schools and encourage participation in library activities, such as the Summer Reading Challenge
- to stimulate and encourage library staff
- to meet and excite potential partners who the library can work with in the National Year of Reading
- and more – just ask the author what they'd like to do. They could bring in fresh ideas from outside the sector.

Also, if you want to exploit the National Year of Reading themes, try and think of the best monthly theme to exploit your author. Perhaps an event on the writer writing about the local area for the *You Are What You Read* theme? A book and film event for *Screen Reads*? Or, a sports author for *Read the Game*.

### **How to devise an event to exploit the author you're working with and the audience you're aiming at**

Sometimes it's good to think outside the box, if you'll excuse the cliché. If you want to deliver an innovative event to a new audience, try and think about devising one that could become a new model that others could emulate. Libraries pioneered Readers Days, authors meeting reading groups and online author interviews. What's next?

1. Talk to the author. Maybe with readers groups too. What can they talk about? What are their interests? What do they care about? Who do they know? Explore innovative ways of working with

them. Do it over a drink or a coffee. Get to know them.

2. Who can you target with your author? Are they only good for a reading group? Or can you chase new audiences? Think of groups, places and partners you could work with to reach new people.
3. Is there a format of an event that would work better than a straight reading. Could you set up a police style grilling for a crime author? Or put a football writer in goal? The more innovative you can be the better chance you have of press coverage.
4. Where can you do an event? Would the author fit well in an unusual venue? A courtroom drama in a courtroom? A historical drama in a historical house?
5. Is your target audience more likely to come to a venue that is not a library? A pub? A cinema? A

park? A sport centre? A community centre? A train carriage? Ask them what they want and where they want it.

6. Involve your readers. This whole programme is about how readers and writers can gain from meeting each others. Ask the readers – one, to or a focus group – to join you and the author in deciding what would work well for your National Year of Reading Activity.

### **Tips for working with publishers and authors**

The most important thing to do when working with publishers and authors is to think about the event from *their* point of view. What are they looking to get out of the event? And – equally importantly – to let them know clearly and forthrightly what *you* want from it.

#### **The author**

- a chance to talk to readers about their book, so to encourage sales and borrowing
- as above, but to help create word of mouth for their book

- press coverage of them and their book
- the chance the library will buy copies of the book
- meeting readers to know better their audience
- to feel looked after (many authors are somewhere on the scale between mildly nervous and utterly terrified when doing an event)
- to have a nice evening, a more creative event, more fun

#### **The publisher**

- to sell books
- to have a good sized and engaged audience
- to get media coverage for the book
- to be kept in touch with developments, even if things are going wrong
- to ensure their author has a nice time and leaves happy
- to be able to tell their bosses that the event was worthwhile and worth the investment of their much-pressured time and (often) scant money

#### **You**

- that you are treated as an equal by the publisher and author
- that the time-scales are realistic for you and you lay down what works for you
- that you increase awareness of your stock and services – and issues
- that you deliver an event that pleases your customers
- that you get the support from the publisher and author that can help you deliver the best event
- that you enjoy the event

#### **The Reader**

- that your readers enjoy the event
- that they find out about new books
- that they borrow books
- that they come back to your next activity
- that they can see there are chances to get involved with planning library events

## **Other resources that may be useful**

### **Event Planning Form**

<http://www.readingagency.org.uk.studiolift.webhoster.co.uk/adults/adults-upload/RPLibrariespublishersplanningform.pdf>

### **Books**

More Readers Reading More – TRA, 2006

How to Market Your Own Book – Alison Baverstock

### **Websites**

The Reading Agency [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

Reading Partners

[www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-partners/](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-partners/)

National Year of Reading 2008

[www.yearofreading.org.uk](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk)

Time to Read <http://www.time-to-read.co.uk/read/>

Longpen – [www.longpen.com](http://www.longpen.com)

**Publisher websites** – lots of author background information and potential creative ideas

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/>

<http://www.faber.co.uk/>

[www.harpercollins.co.uk/](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/)

<http://www.hodderheadline.co.uk/>

<http://www.littlebrown.co.uk/>

[www.millsandboon.co.uk/](http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/)

<http://www.orionbooks.co.uk/>

<http://www.panmacmillan.com/>

<http://www.penguin.co.uk/>

<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/>

<http://www.booksatransworld.co.uk/>

### **Case Studies**

Reaching Readers 2007

[http://www.readingagency.org.uk.studiolift.webhoster.co.uk/adults/adults-](http://www.readingagency.org.uk.studiolift.webhoster.co.uk/adults/adults-upload/RPreachingreaderscasestudies.pdf)

[upload/RPreachingreaderscasestudies.pdf](http://www.readingagency.org.uk.studiolift.webhoster.co.uk/adults/adults-upload/RPreachingreaderscasestudies.pdf)

Reading Partners 2006

<http://www.readingagency.org.uk.studiolift.webhoster.co.uk/adults/adults-upload/RPcasestudies.pdf>

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