



---

# Reading for pleasure

## Ideas to inspire

### ESOL learners

---



---

# Ideas to inspire ESOL learners

---

**'The National Year of Reading gives us a great opportunity to work together to promote reading for pleasure to adults who are improving their skills.'**

*David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills,  
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*

---

**'If you read, the world has never been more accessible and more exciting. If you don't, the door on opportunity has never been more firmly shut. By starting with what people love – be it sport, music, film, family history, magazines or adventure gaming – the National Year of Reading is a perfect opportunity to weave a rich variety of reading into all your work with learners.'**

*Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director, National Year of Reading*

---

**'I can underestimate learners' understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.'** *Adult literacy tutor*

---

Start with what you love. This is the message of the National Year of Reading. And this is the message for adult learners as much as for any other audience.

The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme, together with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), have created this series of ideas packs for practitioners working with adults in a range of different settings. **This pack contains ideas to inspire adults for whom English is an additional language. There is a full list of all the packs available on page 9.**

The aim is to support you in introducing learners to reading in all its forms – books, magazines, websites, lyrics – not just this year, but every year. We need to widen people's concept of reading so that they can think of themselves as 'readers' whatever kind of reading they enjoy. We know that learners can get the reading bug if they are encouraged to choose what they read and can share their experience of reading with others. Reading needs to fit into their busy lives, be relevant to their interests and concerns but also to surprise them with new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

Research tells us that reading for pleasure 'helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills'. Libraries are ideally placed to support learners as they discover an enjoyment of reading of all kinds. But other organisations also have expertise and resources to offer, which can help to engage people in a love of reading. Local authorities, colleges, prisons, trade unions, businesses and voluntary organisations have all made a commitment to use the National Year of Reading to create new readers.

Please make good use of these ideas while the profile for reading is high and help us to make 2008 an exciting point in their reading journey for adult learners across the country.

**Genevieve Clarke**, The Vital Link and **Jenny Cobley**, NIACE

See [www.yearofreading.org.uk](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk) for more information about the National Year of Reading.

---

# Introduction

---

ESOL learners will be extremely diverse in their ability to read and in their attitudes towards reading. Some may be highly educated in their own language and will just want to concentrate on reading and understanding written English whether or not they read for pleasure in their own language. Others may not be literate in their own language and thus will have no experience of reading.

There are cultural differences in attitudes to reading too. For instance, some cultures value reading for information while others place an extremely high value on literature and poetry. It's also worth remembering that some books and magazines assume a cultural knowledge of informal English and are written colloquially or contain lots of references to English society and English history. This can make them very difficult to penetrate for those not born and brought up in the UK.

ESOL tutors may find it difficult to find the time to encourage their learners to read for pleasure as they are often under pressure to focus on functional language to prepare learners for tests. But wider reading both in class time and between classes will reinforce learning as well as helping people to familiarise themselves with different cultures. Discussion about books is also ideal practice for speaking and listening skills and participants learn that, as is their own language, it is not necessary to understand every single word in order to enjoy a rich variety of reading.

---

## Top ten ideas

---

- 1.** Provide texts that reflect the learners' cultural experience, for example stories translated from other languages, folk tales, such as those about Juha or Nasruddin, or the collection of animal fables, 'Kalila and Dimna'. These can be adapted for language level depending on the learners. (*Tales of Juha: Classic Arab Folk Humour*, edited by S K Jayyusi, Interlink Books, 1-56656-641-X and *Kalila and Dimna: Fables of Friendship and Betrayal*, R Wood, Saqi Books, 978-0-86356-661-5.)
- 2.** Use learners themselves as generators of reading texts. More confident ones can write stories or autobiographical pieces for others to read. Many will know examples of the tales referred to above. At Entry Level 1, the language experience method can be used, with the learner telling a story and the teacher writing it up.
- 3.** Form links with local writing groups and libraries. In Lewisham, an ESOL group meets regularly in a local library to discuss books. The session is held during class time and is considered to be part of the normal learning process. The learners find the library environment attractive and have the opportunity to practise language in a real way and interact with native speakers.
- 4.** There may also be opportunities to work with the local library to arrange dual language storytelling sessions for children and adults, which will help to celebrate language diversity and build bridges and confidence for ESOL learners.
- 5.** Use books with a dual text. Gatehouse Books publish a small number of titles, mostly simple texts for beginners. Local community groups sometimes produce collections of writing with a dual text published in conjunction with a local library or as part of a project.
- 6.** Use 'hooks' to engage learners in reading. Kirklees Library Service arranged a conversation group for mothers from a local infant school. The learners worked together to sew a wall hanging and also took part in the Six Book Challenge. They talked about books around the table while sewing and all successfully completed the Challenge (as well as the wall hanging).
- 7.** Encourage learners to read regularly as a means of developing their vocabulary and an understanding of grammatical constructions in a real context. You can show learners how to use a dictionary that provides information about word frequency and collocation to ensure that they focus on the most important words to learn.

---

## Top ten ideas cont...

---

8. Use literary texts regularly in class, even though learners will not meet them in Skills for Life tests. Carefully chosen stories that deal with problems or real-life issues stimulate lively discussion and can form the basis for writing. They can be used effectively to draw learners' attention to points of grammar and vocabulary.
9. More advanced learners can be encouraged to read a daily newspaper or a weekly newspaper such as *The Voice* or *Eastern Eye* or to visit a news website such as [www.breakingnewenglish.com](http://www.breakingnewenglish.com) Both they and the teacher can regularly cut out or print news stories they think may interest other learners in the class and these can be used for discussion.
10. Advanced learners who are interested in supplementing their knowledge of life in the UK can be encouraged to visit websites like the Office for National Statistics ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)), which provides information about social trends in graphic form with commentary, or the Government website at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk). Again, interesting findings can be shared with other learners.

---

## Case study 1:

# Six Story Reading Challenge

---

The Slough Six Story Reading Challenge is a project involving ESOL learners in classes run by the WEA in the Slough area. The learners are women of mostly Asian or Somali and, more recently, Polish backgrounds. They work towards Trinity ESOL Skills for Life (SfL) tests.

The stories, 'Doodlebugs and Doozledogs', were written by a local group formed following a WEA creative writing course at Slough Library. The writers now meet once a month. They compiled the collection with the intention of providing reading material for adult learners who are currently studying ESOL. The stories, mostly 500–1000 words long, are all about life in and around Slough in the past and some are by writers who themselves migrated to the area.

The Six Story Challenge began in March 2008 and is based on the national Six Book Challenge. It was felt that the learners were not ready for whole books, even easy readers, and that the stories provided a more manageable challenge. At present seven classes are involved and tutors have handled them in a number of different ways, including using them to teach grammar and vocabulary.

Learners have been very enthusiastic about the stories. Following the reading of one called 'Grandad', several talked about their own grandfathers and also wrote descriptions using picture prompts. There's now a plan to compile a bank of resources to accompany the stories as other tutors contribute their own activities and comments.

To take part in the Challenge, learners record each story they read on a form, saying whether or not they enjoyed it. To make the Challenge as inclusive as possible they are not tested on their comprehension in any formal way, but most learners are very happy to chat about what they have read and what they think. For example, one learner read a story about a local country park and subsequently took her family there.

The challenge ends with a celebration at which the writers will present prizes to the learners and everyone will share experiences.

---

## Case study 2:

# Stories in translation

---

Working with ESOL learners, particularly of Arabic, Pakistani and Somali backgrounds, led me to seek out literature in translation from these languages, initially for my own interest. It struck me that some of the stories I found would also interest my learners. Certain stories that dealt with problems or real-life issues would stimulate discussion and show how reading broadens the mind.

From a pragmatic point of view, I also thought that the stories could be used to teach points of English grammar and vocabulary but in a more meaningful context. For example, in a story called 'Another Evening at the Club', set in Cairo, a female character has to wrestle with her conscience, so discussion of this provides practice in the use of modal verbs: 'What could she do?' 'What should she do?' 'What would you do?' ('Another Evening at the Club' by Alifa Rifaat in *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa*, edited by C H Bruner, Heinemann, 0-453-90989-4.)

Only a small number of the stories were suitable for this kind of use and, in their original form, some of them required quite high level reading skills. However, it was possible to simplify them to different levels so they could be used even with learners at Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3 and to adapt the language, if necessary, to focus on particular grammatical structures. They were also well suited to the use of DARTS techniques, particularly prediction, releasing short sections at a time and discussing what the readers thought would happen next.

I found the stories interested learners at all levels, both women and men. Learners were happy to discuss controversial issues and also felt they were doing the kind of work that might be done in a GCSE class. The cultural familiarity of the stories was appealing. For example, in 'Nothing New', a woman in a village in Yemen hopes to receive news of her husband who left many years ago to find work abroad. He never returns. One woman, who was particularly moved, told us that this was her story; her father had left home when she was a young girl and she had never seen him again. ('Nothing New' in: *They Die Strangers: a novella and stories from Yemen*, Mohammad Abdul-Wali, University of Texas Press, 0-292-70508-5.)

---

## Resources

---

A good source for **literature in translation**, especially, but not only, from Arabic is Alsaqi Bookshop of London: [www.alsaqibookshop.com](http://www.alsaqibookshop.com). They supply collections of short stories by Iranian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

**Telegram Books**, based at the same address, also publishes short story selections from around the world: [www.telegrambooks.com](http://www.telegrambooks.com)

**New Leaf Books** publish short, high quality titles written by and for adult learners who are developing their reading and writing skills. Their list includes titles suitable for Entry level readers and audio CDs are available to accompany all beginner readers.  
[www.newleafbooks.org.uk](http://www.newleafbooks.org.uk)

**Avanti Books Resources Guide** A useful guide to the huge variety of basic skills support materials that are available, including those produced by Avanti and by other publishers.  
[www.avantibooks.com](http://www.avantibooks.com)

**Gatehouse Media** publishes Gatehouse Books – adult beginner reader books and resources for use in Adult Literacy and ESOL, and also audio-cassettes, interactive CD-ROMs and educational resources. [www.gatehousebooks.co.uk/beginner](http://www.gatehousebooks.co.uk/beginner)

The following **ELT publishers** have series of structured readers whose texts use carefully restricted vocabulary and grammar. Many of them have the text on an accompanying CD.

Oxford University Press: [www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/general/readers/?cc=gb](http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/general/readers/?cc=gb)

Cambridge University Press: [www.cambridge.org/elt/readers/](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/readers/)

Pearson Longman: [www.penguinreaders.com/](http://www.penguinreaders.com/)

Macmillan: [www.macmillanenglish.com/readers/](http://www.macmillanenglish.com/readers/)

**Quick Reads** books for emergent readers are listed on [www.niace.org.uk/quickreads](http://www.niace.org.uk/quickreads). Audio versions are available from libraries or W F Howes Ltd as part of their Clipper Emergent Reader programme (sales@wfhowes.co.uk 01664 423000). Downloadable files providing ideas for using the books can be found via [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk)

[www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk](http://www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk) is a unique online database of books of over 600 titles recommended for emergent readers and searchable by title, author, category and readability level. It includes graphic novels, poetry, fiction and non-fiction chosen using selection criteria developed by The Vital Link programme as well as titles written especially for this audience by publishers such as New Island ([www.newisland.ie](http://www.newisland.ie)), Sandstone Press ([www.sandstonepress.com](http://www.sandstonepress.com)) and Barrington Stoke ([www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)).

---

## Full list of *Ideas to inspire* packs

---

**New readers 1 (up to Adult Literacy Entry Level 2)**

**New readers 2 (Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 – Level 2)**

**Parents and carers of young children**

**Dads and male carers of young children**

**ESOL learners**

**People in prisons and young offender institutions**

**People in the workplace**

**FE college students**

**HE students**

**Readers with additional needs**

These packs are available to download as individual PDF files from [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk) or [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

### ***Ideas to inspire ESOL learners***

Writer: Roger Adams

Case study 1 contributed by Hilary Pugh

Photographs of braille reading and flower-seller reading novel by Sim Canetty-Clarke

We welcome all feedback on these ideas and on how you are promoting reading to your learners. Please contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk)



The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. See [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk)



NIACE is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different learners. See [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)