

# **Words for Life Resource Pack**

**Case studies and resources for  
supporting adults at the lowest level  
of literacy to engage in reading for  
pleasure**

**November 2011**

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To find out more about The Reading Agency's work to support adults with low literacy visit [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

This pack has been compiled by Michelle Treagust for The Reading Agency with thanks to library staff, tutors and learners in Essex, Warrington and at HMP Birmingham. The Words for Life project was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

We welcome all feedback on this resource pack and how you are using it. Please contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk)

## **Introduction**

The Reading Agency is an independent charity founded in 2002. Our mission is to inspire more people to read more in the belief that reading can have a profound effect on people's life chances. We run national programmes for audiences of all ages and abilities including adults and young people who struggle with reading. We work closely with the public library service and also with schools, adult education, colleges, prisons and workplaces and we link libraries to national partners such as broadcasters, publishers and businesses.

Our vision is of a society where everyone's lives are enriched and changed through democratic access to reading opportunities. We aim to create reading experiences that help people feel inspired, confident and excited about reading, to build communities of readers and to unblock barriers to reading. Since our formation in 2002 we've created reading programmes right across the public library network for children, teenagers and adults and encouraged libraries to work with local partners to reach new audiences.

### **Work with less confident readers**

Some of these programmes specifically target adult learners and the partners and practitioners who support them. The most ambitious of these is the Six Book Challenge ([www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk)), which invites less confident readers to pick six reads of their choice and record their reading in a diary in order to receive incentives, a certificate and the chance to enter a national prize draw. Since its launch in 2008 an estimated 47,500 people have registered for the scheme through libraries, adult education, colleges, prisons and workplaces. Impact research in its first year found that 94% of respondents felt a sense of achievement, 88% said that they had gained from the experience and 60% reported an improvement in their skills. The idea is to help people get into reading – in many cases for the first time – and it works!

However, the majority of our work until recently has focused on 'emergent' readers, those at Entry Level 3 or Level 1 who can read but need motivation and support to develop an enjoyment of reading. We wanted to build on this work and adapt what we have learnt to reach people at the lowest level of literacy, ie those at Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or even below, in the belief that they, too, can benefit from engaging in reading for pleasure and sharing their reading experiences with others.

In 2010 the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded The Reading Agency to undertake a pioneering project, Words for Life, in order to kick start new thinking about policy and practice in engaging and supporting this audience in creative reading activity.

### **Words for Life**

The aim of Words for Life has been to identify a sustainable model for injecting new approaches and new materials into regular teaching practice for adults at the lowest level of literacy with the support of libraries.

Through this study we have investigated the potential impact of:

- partnership working between tutors and library staff to broaden the horizons of practitioners and learners to encompass the widest possible range of stimulating materials and delivery approaches;
- new creative techniques which bring reading materials to life for learners;
- working with tutors, learners, library staff and publishers to identify and share new approaches and new materials, printed and online.

To reflect the range of organisations that engage with people at the lowest level of literacy, we worked with three widely contrasting library and learning partnerships as follows:

- Essex County Council Libraries with Adult Community Learning
- Birmingham City Council Libraries and Archives with HMP Birmingham and Manchester College
- Warrington Borough Council Library Service with Priestley College

Activity focused on action research in each location to explore how existing practice could include more creativity ranging from the use of 'Book Boxes' to library quizzes and a communally written poem. It also included a review of existing materials and their suitability for the target audience.

The impact of this activity on practitioners and learners was evaluated by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). This relied mostly on qualitative evidence, including interviews with partnership teams at project sites, teaching materials used by practitioners, work produced by learners and reading lists. The full report, *Words for Life: Reading for pleasure for adults at the lowest level of literacy*, can be found on the Reading Agency website.<sup>1</sup>

Here we highlight some of the key recommendations that literacy tutors and library staff working with readers at Entry Level should consider:

- recognising that text comes in many different formats and genres and that all forms of reading should be encouraged;
- choosing reading material that relates to learners' own understanding and experience of life;
- using reading for pleasure as an opportunity for readers to discuss reading practices inside and outside a learning environment;
- using reading for pleasure as a way of developing speaking and listening skills and linking to writing practice;
- sharing materials, best practice and ideas across local partnerships.

### **About this pack**

This Resource Pack has been created to disseminate best practice and resources to practitioners to support them in working with readers at the lowest level of literacy. It contains an overview of the activity undertaken by each of the three partnerships in the project, resources drawn from their work and other more general ideas that can be used by practitioners in a range of settings to engage people who are right at the start of their reading journey.

It should be used in conjunction with the Reading Agency's Find a Read resource at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread). This is a unique searchable database where practitioners and readers can find materials ranging from titles written specially for readers from pre-Entry Level to Level 2 as well as other print and online items selected according to criteria developed by The Reading Agency. Users can browse by category (from Fiction through to Sport and History) by format (audio, large print, digital game) and by level (Pre-Entry up to Level 2). We also hope that they will rate and review the reading materials they try and recommend other items that they have enjoyed so that the database becomes a lively resource for everyone engaged in discovering that reading can be a pleasure.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

## Essex County Council Libraries with Adult Community Learning

Essex Libraries and Adult Community Learning (ACL) have worked together for several years to weave reading for pleasure into provision for adult literacy learners, contributing to much of the national activity in this area led by The Reading Agency. Their involvement with this project was to build on and further develop the established partnership.

The Essex team undertook the following activities:

- review of existing Entry Level materials, purchase of new stock and active promotion of these titles in libraries;
- joint development of creative ideas for weaving reading for pleasure into the curriculum by library staff and tutors;
- recruitment of library staff as Learning Champions who received initial awareness training from ACL staff and developed their role in linking tutors, classes and libraries;
- a range of creative techniques trialled by tutors in classes, including poetry, reading aloud, library visits, short stories, local newspapers and cookery.

Library staff, tutors and learners all benefited from involvement in the project. For example, many learners enjoyed reading collaboratively:

*"If we got stuck, either the helpers help us or we help each other. It actually helps us to read better when we're helping each other."*

Student, Essex ACL

Through reflecting on their practice, tutors noted how the project had impacted on their teaching:

*"It's made me move beyond the basics of the curriculum a bit more... You look at the outside world ..... and try and bring it into the class."*

Tutor, Essex ACL

Learning Champions found their confidence in supporting adult readers grew and they recognised the benefits of working in partnership with ACL:

*"I now feel extremely comfortable delivering class visits ... This communication has been invaluable and has hopefully enabled me to make a difference at some level."*

Library staff member, Essex County Council Libraries

Resources in this pack include a checklist for learners to list the material they read and to record progression, guidance for tutors on visiting their local library and a quiz. There are also two activities on using everyday texts: local history resources and newspapers.

Reading materials used by the project team have been added to the Find a Read database at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread).

**Resource: What do I read?**

Name:

Date:

<b>Reading material</b>	<b>Yes or No</b>	<b>I would like to</b>
Magazines:		
• General		
• Special interest		
• TV Guide		
Brochures:		
• Leaflets		
• Holiday brochures		
• Catalogues		
Books:		
• Comics		
• Story books (novels)		
• Factual books		
• Audio books		
• Prayer & hymn books		
• Picture books		
• Children's books		
Letters:		
• From friends		
• Official letters		

Go to next page >

<b>Reading material</b>	<b>Yes or No</b>	<b>I would like to</b>
News:		
• Newsletters		
• Local newspaper		
• National newspaper		
Other:		
• Signs		
• Notices		
• Food packaging		
• Menus		
• Diary or calendar		
• Notes and messages		
• Word searches		
• Symbols (Makaton etc.)		
• Poetry and rhyme		
Digital texts:		
• Email		
• Facebook		
• Mobile phone texts		
• Internet – websites		
• Games		
Other (please give examples)		

Where and when do you like to read?

Do you borrow books from your local library?

Do you buy books?

### **Activity: Using your local library**

The tutors who took part in the project were keen to bring the library to the readers (through library staff visits to classes) and also arrange for class visits to local libraries.

For readers who have not been to a library before, or for a very long time, it can be an intimidating experience. By visiting a library as part of a class group they can be supported by their tutor, library staff and also their peers.

To help readers prepare to visit their local library, the Essex team developed a prompt sheet for tutors when leading a discussion about the local library service.

#### **Local library discussion:**

- Introduce the topic: using your local library
- Ask when anyone last visited his or her local library. Why did they go? Did they go with family or friends?
- Explain how libraries have changed – in addition to books (free to borrow!) there are audio books, CDs, DVDs and books for less confident readers. There are also books that help readers find out about their interests or hobbies.
- Internet access – libraries allow members to use computers to search the internet and send emails. Some libraries also have free short courses on how to use the computers.
- Library staff – a wonderful resource! They are there to help, ask them questions.
- Books – lots and lots of different categories. Explain how the library arranges the books:
  - Fiction categories and spine labels
  - A to Z author within each category
  - Information books by subject
  - Dewey numbers
  - Library catalogue on computer and the internet

Ideally this should be followed up with a class visit to a local library where readers can take part in the library quiz (on the next page). However, in reality, this may not always be possible. But you could encourage readers to visit the library themselves – with the quiz – and try and answer as many questions as they can.

The answers to the quiz have not been provided, as they will be different for each local library.

*“We (the group) have talked about libraries and how they have changed, stressing that they are not scary places anymore. It is surprising how many learners are already library members but haven’t been to a library for years. I stressed the range of materials available now and the free access to ICT facilities.”*

Jenny Main, library staff member and tutor, Essex

## **Resource: Library quiz**

Name:

Date:

1. What is the name of this library?
2. How many days a week is the library open?
3. On which evenings is this library open?
4. How many items can you borrow on an adult library ticket?
5. How much does it cost to borrow a DVD for a week?
6. Where in the library are the crime fiction books?
7. Name one newspaper in this library.
8. Name two magazines you can find in the library.
9. What does LP stand for?
10. What type of non-fiction books can you find at 636?
11. What is the online catalogue called?
12. Is a reading group held here? If so, what is it called?

### **Activity: Using newspapers**

Less confident readers should be encouraged to read all types of material, not just books. Local and national newspapers are an excellent source of reading material to use with readers of all levels.

For Entry Level readers choose interesting, funny and unusual articles that are not too long, but which have a good headline, picture and short text.

Cut out the story and then separate the headline, picture and text from each other. These can then be laminated if required and used with groups of readers. The facilitator, or reader with appropriate skills, can read out the text. The others then have to find the relevant headline and picture to match with the text.

More confident readers can go on to choose a story and rewrite it in their own words. For example they could substitute their own names in to the story, as the reporter or subject of the story. These can then be used to produce create a group newspaper – a very popular activity with readers!

*“I had to repeat this activity as the readers really enjoyed it. As an extension activity, I asked the readers to choose an article and write it in their own words. This meant they had to read the article and understand it in order to rewrite it. There were some really good articles so I made it into a class newssheet.”*

Jenny Main, library staff member and tutor, Essex

### **Activity: Talking about history**

Local history resources can be useful for Entry Level readers. Most libraries have a local studies section that will contain books with old photographs that are great starting points for discussion.

With your readers you can look at how the town or village has altered over the years. Look at pictures of then and now and compare, making a note of the differences. Note how high street shops have changed. Can anyone remember which shops have disappeared?

Family history is also a good topic. Ask learners to find out about their ancestors and start a family tree. They can go on to learn about spellings of family names and relations.

Anniversaries and commemorations also allow for research and discussion and many are covered on the television and radio so readers might have heard about the topics.

The Second World War gives a lot of scope for discussion and discovery. Topics such as evacuees, food rationing, the Home Guard, planes, ships, military conflict and the Home Front can all be used with groups.

Other history topics that are popular include:

- Kings and queens
- Famous people in history
- Castles
- Historic houses
- History of London
- Food through the ages
- Personal history – childhood memories

If you have a local museum you could contact them to find out if they'd visit your group, or you could arrange for the group to visit the museum.

Literacy tutor and library staff member Jenny Main created an activity based on local history for her group of readers. She researched the local area, including using an old map from the 1920s, postcards and local history books. They talked about how the town had changed, by looking at the resources, and then everyone sat down to write their reflections:

*"They spent the rest of the session engrossed, many even missing their coffee break! The results were so impressive that I have asked to have a display of the pictures and learners' writing in the main college corridor."*

Jenny Main, library staff member and tutor, Essex

For suggestions of history texts to use with this activity visit the Find a Read database at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread) and click on the History category.

## Warrington Borough Council Library Service with Priestley College

The Warrington partnership already existed through work on programmes such as the Six Book Challenge. It's a strong relationship with staff in libraries and the college having a common desire to meet the needs of the local community and learners.

The Warrington team undertook the following activities as part of the project:

- two eight-week 'Book Box' creation courses to create folders around the theme of different books attended by Pre-Entry, Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 2 learners;
- a Flickr session in the library with a Family Learning course to create a book of photographs and text;
- weekly 'Read to Relax' sessions at a library for people at Entry Level;
- weekly reading sessions at a local hospital for elderly patients who had been competent readers but who are now at Entry Level because of dementia.

For the majority of learners involved, the Book Box course provided them with an opportunity to use a computer for the first time, which proved to be a high spot. They felt that the Book Box course increased their self-esteem:

*"I can read what I could never do at school, because I was bullied at school... I feel a lot better [now that I can read] you know, a lot more confident... I enjoy reading now... I've got used to reading; it's brought me out more..."*

Student, Book Box course

One unanticipated outcome was the impact on carers who accompanied the learners on the course. They were amazed at the achievements of the people they had been caring for as they had previously not considered activity that included computers and the internet. The carers went on to adopt new approaches to working with their clients.

The project gave tutors a new understanding of how they might use books with their learners. There was recognition that the content of a book is important to a learner, as is the additional motivating factor of reading a whole book:

*"It's made us all realise that small is OK... Something can be really well-written and enjoyable if it's small. It doesn't have to be War and Peace for it to be a proper book."*

Kate Hillesdon, Tutor, Priestley College

The librarians felt strongly that the project had made a difference to their outlook as they had developed much greater awareness of literacy issues:

*"I think it's opened my eyes really because I really did not understand what it means to have that limited level of skills, how restrictive it was on your life."*

Cheryl Siddall, Librarian, Warrington Borough Council Library Service

This Resource Pack contains an outline for the Book Box course and a summary of the Flickr session from librarian Janet Puzylo.

Reading materials sourced by the project team have been added to the Find a Read database at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread).

## **Course: Making Book Boxes**

Readers at the lowest level of literacy often need support and guidance to engage with text and the creation of Book Boxes is a great way to facilitate this. A Book Box is an 'adult' version of storybags or storysacks which are successfully used in schools and early years settings to draw in readers. A Book Box is a box file that contains a book and associated materials to encourage the reader to engage with the text. Different types of activities can be included to appeal to a wide range of interests and learning styles.

Rather than make the Book Boxes themselves to use with readers, the partnership in Warrington developed an eight-week course during which readers would create their own Book Boxes. These then became a resource for literacy and reading groups.

An overview of the course is detailed below, but you can pick and choose activities to use with your groups, depending on time.

### **Aims of course**

To create a Book Box with contents that will help those with literacy needs to read the book for pleasure and with some independence.

### **Objectives**

#### **By the end of the course the readers will have:**

- selected a book of personal interest to base their Book Box on;
- decorated the box using images relating to the title and text;
- decorated and created a Log Sheet, which all future readers may complete entitled 'Why I chose this book...';
- made at least two paper-based activities that will help readers to access any difficult vocabulary from the book;
- identified and used at least one internet based activity related to the book's text, e.g. online game or quiz;
- created or contributed to making an audio recording of the story (or other text) that will be burned on to CD and included in the box.

## Course: Book Box course continued

### Session outline

Session	Outline
Session 1	Select, read and discuss books to be used. Design book cover and log sheet. (Library staff and tutors to bring in a selection of appropriate books).
Session 2	(All selected books will have been copied on to A4 paper). Learners will highlight difficult words or phrases. Look at a range of activities that will help understanding of these words. Select an activity and make.
Sessions 3 and 4	Investigate websites and games related to their book. Include the website address within the book box. If possible include some 'easy to follow rules' on using the website and games.
Session 5	Link a second paper-based activity with the internet search from previous weeks. For example, create a word search using an online word search generator, or basic comprehension questions, or fact of fiction questions that a reader could use a search engines to answer.
Session 6	Investigate how to use the recording device. Re-read story, or selected text, and prepare to record.
Session 7	Record the stories / text.
Session 8	Listen to other readers' stories, look at other Book Boxes and reflect on activities.

### Learner journey: Hazel

*"Hazel is functionally illiterate so it took a lot of courage for her to even walk through the door of the Book Box course. She came along because a friend persuaded her to keep her company. When she came she chose the book Memories of Nana. She thoroughly enjoyed the book and was able to tell lots of stories about her own memories of her nan when she was growing up. She developed some IT skills by going on to the internet to search for images of things her nan had had in the house such as grandfather clocks and dolly tubs. She narrated a recipe for a stew that her nan used to make. One of the most heart-warming moments was when Hazel 'read' her book alongside the librarian, Janet. They read it together and because she knew the story so well Hazel was able to complete phrases on her own. She was so overwhelmed by this experience that she burst into tears at the end as it was the closest she had every got to reading."*

Kate Hillesden, Tutor, Priestley College

For suggestions of books to use with this activity visit the Find a Read database at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread) and browse through some Entry Level titles.

## Activity: Flickr session

Through previous work on the Six Book Challenge, librarian Janet Puzylo had discovered that many adult learners have a keen interest in local history, so she wanted to try and build on this. Janet also wanted to test a creative approach using IT and to get the learners into the library. As Flickr is image-based, it seemed like a good thing to use with this particular group of learners.

A group from a literacy class came into Warrington Central Library, where staff worked with them to look at lots of old local photographs that had been uploaded on to Flickr. The learners led the search by talking about the sorts of subjects and areas they were interested in. They then discussed the images, posted comments on the website and looked at some local history books that contained plenty of pictures. Staff then talked about the library and gave them a tour. The learners took copies of some of their favourite photos back to use in class as an inspiration for writing, and some books to read for pleasure.

The session addressed speaking and listening (discussion), reading (looking at comments already posted) and writing (posting comments and entering search terms), as well as IT skills (using the mouse, keyboard etc). The learners also gave us feedback on the sort of books they'd like to see in the library. One learner joined the library – the rest were already members.

The tutor was delighted with the activity: *“The learners really enjoyed the session and we’ll use the photos next week to inspire some writing.”*

Tutor, Ruth Mitchell, Priestley College

The photos the group liked best and their comments have been turned into an easy to read book using Pixum software, and several copies are now in stock in our Quick Reads collection, so that it's available for other learners to use.

Resources used:

[www.flickr.com/photos/warringtonarchives](http://www.flickr.com/photos/warringtonarchives)

[www.1museumstreet.co.uk](http://www.1museumstreet.co.uk)

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

plus books from the library's local studies collection.

## **Birmingham Libraries with HMP Birmingham**

Engaging new readers in a prison environment is particularly challenging. Around 60% of offenders have difficulties with literacy but only a proportion take up education opportunities and so may be difficult to reach. Plus the regular transfer of prisoners between establishments and movement restrictions within a prison all create constraints for practitioners.

Birmingham City Council is contracted to provide a library service within HMP Birmingham. The prison library, with four staff and supporting officers and prison orderlies, works closely with Education and other departments in the prison and runs several initiatives to engage new readers including our Six Book Challenge scheme.

The Birmingham team undertook the following activities as part of the project:

- review of existing library stock that can be used to support literacy development;
- weekly visits to the library from the side of the prison that had previously had less access to library facilities;
- delivery of two sessions for each of two groups by performance poet 'Spoz' who worked with them to explore use of different materials such as audio and song lyrics and encouraged them to write their own multimedia poem. This was followed by a celebration event for both groups at which the final poems were performed and certificates awarded.

As a result of the project there were increased enquiries at the library because some men came back and asked for reading books or books to help with technical aspects of literacy such as spelling. Evaluation of the poetry sessions also showed that the men rated the activity highly and found it relevant to their needs and interests.

Project lead, Sue Wilkinson, formerly prison librarian but now Reader Development Manager for Birmingham Libraries, welcomed the opportunity the project gave the team to reflect on current practice:

*"The outcomes have been really good. The project has provided an opportunity to research this area of provision and will help us to develop a long term plan for this work."*

Session plans for the poetry workshop have been included in this Resource Pack, along with the poems written by the learners. We have also included two activities that the prison library staff have successfully used with Entry Level readers in the past.

Reading materials sourced by the project team have been added to the Find a Read database at [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread).

## Activity: Poetry workshop

A workshop, held over two sessions, where a group collaborate with a facilitator to write a poem. At HMP Birmingham the end result was two recorded poems, voiced by the group, illustrated with digital images from the internet. If you don't have access to technology a group can still take part in this activity, just without the recording element at the end.

### SESSION OUTLINES

Resources:

- Selection of poems to read aloud
- White board / flip chart and pens
- Audio recording device (e.g. laptop with microphone, mobile phone)
- Audio editing device (e.g. Windows Movie Maker, iMovie)

SESSION 1	
Topic	Facilitator / reader activity
Introduction	Facilitator introduces the aims of sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As a group come up with ideas for a poem</li><li>• The facilitator will use their ideas to write a poem</li><li>• To produce a recording of their work</li></ul>
Poetry	Introduce the group to some poems. Facilitator to read some aloud / perform them. Select poems that are fun and will engage everyone.
How to write a poem	Explain how poetry is created using building blocks – words and ideas.  Even the best builders need bricks to build a house and today the readers will provide the bricks – i.e. the words.
Words for Life	Write 'Words for Life' on a white board / flip chart. Ask the readers to brainstorm ideas relating to life. They may need a little encouragement (e.g. birth, death, family, friends, wisdom, journey etc.).  Follow up with a discussion about what type of poem they'd like – funny, sad, fast, slow, rhyming etc.
Review	Explain the next step – the facilitator will take away all their ideas and draft a poem. As the next session they will record the poem, a line at a time.

## Activity: Poetry workshop continued

SESSION 2	
Topic	Facilitator / reader activity
Introduction	Recap last session and aims.
Presenting the poem	Read the created poem out to the group. Encourage them to give feedback and make changes to the poem.
Recording the poem	<p>Divide the poem between the group and explain that each person will say their line and it will be recorded.</p> <p>First show how the recording works (e.g. recording your own voice and playing it back).</p> <p>Next read a line to a reader and ask them to repeat it back to you. Once they are comfortable with repeating the line you can record it. Repeat - stopping and starting the recording.</p>
Playing the poem	Then play the whole poem back to the group. What does it feel like for them hearing their words spoken by them? Is it anything like they expected? How is the spoken word different to the written word?
Images	Facilitate a discussion about what images the poem evokes. What pictures can they imagine when they hear the words? If you have internet access you can go on to find images on the web that could be used to illustrate the poem.
Review	<p>Explain the next step – the facilitator will take the audio recording and ‘tidy it up’ to play back to the group at another time / or play it to an audience.</p> <p>Recap what they’ve done as a group: chosen words to create an original piece of work, a poem; recorded themselves saying their poem and discussed imagery.</p>

*“The look of pride and achievement on the faces of all the men was very plain to see, as the end of each poem was met with smiles and applause! From my point of view, I believe the project was a great success and I hope it has enthused the men who took part with their writing and literacy – especially poetry!”*

Giovanni “Spoz” Esposito, Project Facilitator (poet)

Two groups at HMP Birmingham created poems, which you could read to your group. The poems are on the next few pages. For further suggestions of poems to use with this activity visit the Find a Read website [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread) and click on the Poetry category.

## **Words for Life**

Life is like a train journey  
With stations along the way  
Sometimes the track is bumpy  
A new experience every day

The first station is when you're born  
The tracks are bright and new  
So many tracks to choose from  
Which one, is up to you

We stop at many stations  
With family and friends  
Sometimes we change direction  
With twists and turns and bends

Some stations are called "Happiness"  
That make you laugh and smile  
A station called a good sexy woman  
Where you want to stay a while

Sometimes the journey is like drugs  
With lots of highs and lows  
Some days are really difficult  
But that's the way it goes

Some journeys take you to the top  
With position and respect  
Some take you to the places  
Where you'd least expect

As we ride the train through life  
We all look around and learn  
We get a little bit wiser  
So we don't crash on the next turn

As we get older, the train speeds up  
Experience starts to grow  
Sometimes we get on the wrong train  
And the journey begins to slow

Some people believe that dying  
Is our final destination  
But some say it's part of the journey  
And it's just another station.

## **Words for Life**

Life is a journey  
We make every day  
From the second we're born  
To when we pass away

It's the bits in-between  
Our birth and our death  
That give us the wisdom  
To take every breath

The bits in-between  
Like family and friends  
The delightful or spiteful  
And the making amends

We're all given a brain  
Though some people don't use it  
Anything is possible  
You just have to choose it

Like learning or loved ones  
Make us feel alive  
We might choose a career  
To help is to thrive

The future is yours  
What do you want to do?  
Money? Marriage?  
It's all up to you

**Choose life!**

### **Activity: The Body in the Library**

When HMP Birmingham's library ran an opening event in 2002 Librarian Sue Wilkinson and author Ann Cleeves wanted to run a group exercise that would involve readers of all levels. They devised an activity called 'The Body in the Library' which could be presented to an audience.

With a group of readers, start off by explaining that there has been a murder in the library. The group have to agree on who the victim is and why they were murdered. They next decide on other characters who will be involved with the victim's story, for example the murderer, witnesses, staff, police etc. Everyone in the group has to take on a role and think about their motives for knowing the victim and possibly wanting to harm them.

Some suggested roles:

- Victim
- Murderer
- Police Sergeant
- Police Detective
- Neighbour
- Witness – person on street
- Mother
- Father
- Brother
- Sister
- Husband / wife / boyfriend / girlfriend
- Best friend
- Local news journalist

Each person is then asked to present their evidence verbally to the audience. The audience must decide whether the accused is guilty or innocent.

*"This was a really successful activity because every member of the group could be part of the creative process, regardless of their reading ability. It was something that they had never done before, and it really got them thinking and working together. The end result was very impressive."*

Sue Wilkinson, Librarian

### Activity: Read Aloud session

Sessions where a facilitator reads aloud to learners have worked well in the library at HMP Birmingham. They normally revolve around a short story but do not involve the group in any reading or writing. This ensures that even the least able students can be fully involved and no one is embarrassed by any lack of skills. The key is finding an engaging story with one main character that can really hold the interest of the learners.

The session starts with the facilitator reading part of the story, stopping at a significant point about a third of the way in to the story. The facilitator then engages the group in discussion about the main character by asking some questions:

- Who is he / she?
- What do they look like?
- Where do they buy their clothes?
- How old are they?
- Are they single, married, divorced, gay?
- Where do they live – a house, flat or bedsit?
- What hobbies do they have?

The group develops a whole character for the person, based on what they have heard in the story. You can then go on to speculate about what might happen next.

The facilitator then goes on to read the rest of the story. At the end, the group can discuss whether their initial thoughts about the character were correct. Depending on the way the story ends; it might be possible to have some discussion about what happens to the main character after the end of this story.

The facilitator can then bring the story to a close by explaining to the group how important stories are in life, whether you are reading them, listening to them or writing them. Also how there is always much, much more to any story than the words you see or hear.

If there are any talented artists in the group they can do sketches of the characters, based on the group's discussion and possibly sketch a short comic strip of an event. There are many texts that can be used with this activity. Librarian Sue Wilkinson recommends:

*"It's best to use a story that has one main character, rather than lots of characters.*

*"It's also good to have one that has an ending that is open to interpretation. The group can then start to think about what happens to the character next, and even 'write' a sequel.*

*"Make sure the story isn't too long, so that there is plenty of time for discussion.*

*"A story that I particularly like for this is 'Ultra Violent' by Stuart Pawson. It's in an anthology called Murder Squad, edited by Martin Edwards (ISBN 1-873226-51-9)."*

For further suggestions of texts to use with this activity visit the Find a Read website [www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread).

## Other ideas for working with Entry Level readers<sup>2</sup>

In order to help adults who don't normally read or aren't confident readers to find purpose and pleasure in their reading, the key is to introduce simple but appealing material on topics that interest them. Ideally this will spur them on to improve their skills so that they can read more in their own time. It's important to stress that information or stories about any subject, in whatever format they find most accessible – online or in newspapers or magazines as well as books – all counts as 'reading'.

Here are some ideas:

- Encourage everyone to write messages and bring them to the group to share. They could be anything from notes, SMS messages and emails addressed to family members or friends to postcards or greetings cards. Other members of the group could then write replies to each other's messages.
- Invite everyone to bring in their own material to make scrapbooks about personal interests or family histories.
- Leaflets offer an opportunity for reading which can be relevant to individual needs. The Post Office, the library, the health centre and tourist information centres are all useful sources. Pick out the logos, read the bullet points and text boxes and extract information from captions, pictures, diagrams and maps.
- Create a story together using an interactive whiteboard with everyone adding in a word or sentence. Print out copies for everyone and then use it as a reading resource.
- Find a photo of an interesting face in the newspaper or on the internet and ask everyone to describe it, decide who the person is, and invent a history for them. They can record their ideas in any appropriate way, using a tape, a word bank, a cloze sheet, a writing frame or a personal scribe. Share the stories and collect them into a book, which then becomes another reading source.
- Use audio versions of books for emergent readers or short stories so that people can get involved in a discussion about a book without having to read it for themselves.
- Use new stories from papers or the internet, looking at headlines and captions too. Ask the group to suggest a local event or news story and write it up together. Then encourage them to work together to produce their own news sheet or page for a news website.
- Create a 'Canterbury Tales' storybook from your group's own life experiences. They'll need encouragement but everyone has a story to tell which can then be illustrated and produced using a publishing package.
- Have a discussion about book covers, titles and blurbs. Use a wide range of strong and weak examples so that people get to see that there's a lot to talk about before you've even read a book.

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<sup>2</sup> These are largely drawn from a resource pack to support Entry Level readers created during the National Year of Reading in 2008.

## Other useful resources

[www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk) – a website covering all our work to inspire more people to read more including national programmes, tips and resources, research and creative development

[www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/findaread) - a unique searchable database where practitioners and readers can find materials ranging from titles written specially for readers from pre-Entry Level to Level 2 as well as other print and online items selected according to criteria developed by The Reading Agency

[www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) – an annual incentive scheme designed to encourage readers at all levels of literacy to develop a reading habit

[www.readinggroups.org](http://www.readinggroups.org) – a digital platform for all kinds of reading groups, writing groups and book clubs including those for less confident readers

[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk) – access to news on policy, events, campaigns and publications relating to adult literacy including the Quick Reads ([www.quickreads.org.uk](http://www.quickreads.org.uk))

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/> - information and resources for literacy, numeracy and language practitioners including the core curriculum

[www.skillsworkshop.org](http://www.skillsworkshop.org) – a database of resources to support practitioners delivering literacy, numeracy, functional skills and ESOL at all levels from Foundation (including pre-Entry) through to Level 2

[www.talent.ac.uk](http://www.talent.ac.uk) – a database of resources and activities designed to help teachers develop and share ideas for good practice

[www.skillsforlifeframework.com](http://www.skillsforlifeframework.com) – a news and information resource for everyone with an interest in learning and skills

[www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise) - a website for adult numeracy and literacy tutors and students, with printable worksheets and factsheets and online games, videos and quizzes that can be used in class or by students at home.

[www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk) - access to over 150 NRDC research reports and reviews produced by the National Research and Development Centre as well as magazine features and teaching and learning resources related to adult literacy, language and numeracy