



September 2007

**NATIONAL SIX BOOK CHALLENGE™
IN ASSOCIATION WITH COSTA BOOK AWARDS**

The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to get more reading to more people, is delighted to announce the launch of a national Six Book Challenge™ in association with the Costa Book Awards. The Six Book Challenge™ is targeted at adults who want to improve their literacy skills, and forms part of the Vital Link programme for libraries and literacy run by The Reading Agency.

The Six Book Challenge™, designed to run from January to May each year, will invite adult literacy learners to read six books whilst supporting them with incentives and creative reading activities. It will be delivered through libraries working in partnership with organisations such as colleges, community adult education, trade unions and prisons which work closely with emergent readers – adults who can read but who have yet to build reading stamina and experience.

All participants will receive free Costa coffee cards and have the chance to win an all-expenses paid trip to London for two, courtesy of the Costa Book Awards.

A trailblazing experiment will take place in three cities - Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool - to explore the development of a closer relationship between Costa outlet staff and local literacy groups. Joint reading activities are planned as well as additional local incentives. Awards ceremonies will be held in Costa stores for Challenge completers in those cities.

Piloted by Hull Libraries last year, the challenge has since been trialled successfully by all 15 library authorities across Yorkshire & The Humber with support from the BBC RaW adult literacy campaign. Participants were invited to fill in a reading diary as they read six books from collections including the Quick Reads and other titles specially written or selected for emergent readers. They were given incentives such as free DVD loans or vouchers with each book they borrowed from the library and presented with a certificate on completion of the challenge.

Evaluation shows that participants felt a real sense of achievement: *“To read six books is quite hard for some people. But once you've read one you have to go on to another to compare them. It makes you appreciate books. You get a buzz out of it.”* Tina Hewitt, an adult learner from Hull who has now started her own Quick Reads group.

Adult literacy tutors are enthusiastic about the Six Book Challenge™ and its impact on their students' skills and confidence:

"It's a fantastic scheme. We do a group read at the end of every class and then they read the book at home and bring back a review. Their confidence has grown and grown and they are happy to tackle other reading now. It's certainly made a contribution to improving their level of literacy." Cheryl Parker, Skills for Life tutor, Adult Community Learning, Hull.

Library staff feel that the challenge is a way of establishing new partnerships with learning organisations in order to encourage new readers and library users.

"The Six Book Challenge™ has given us an excellent opportunity to work closely with adult education providers in a way that really makes a difference to learners. Through these partnerships we have been able to encourage people to use their local library and have helped them to discover the joy of choosing and reading books for pleasure." Jessica Leathley, Senior Librarian: Reader and Audience Development, Hull Libraries.

The Society of Chief Librarians in England has made support for basic skills a priority and library bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland work closely with national adult literacy partners. Libraries are also committed to using reading for pleasure as a way of engaging, motivating and sustaining adult literacy learners and this will form an important part of their activity for the National Year of Reading in 2008.

Over 90% of library services UK-wide invested in the Quick Reads initiative for emergent readers in 2006 and 2007 and many libraries hold titles either specially written or selected for emergent readers using criteria developed by The Vital Link programme.

Research commissioned by The Vital Link has shown that as a result of libraries' creative reading activity: '...emergent readers are learning to do new things and to do things differently ... Over three-quarters of respondents reported an increase in skills.' (*Confidence All Round: The Impact on Emergent Adult Readers of Reading for Pleasure through Libraries*, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2005.)

"The Six Book Challenge™ is part of our response to the million dollar question of how we can improve the nation's literacy skills," said Miranda McKearney, director of The Reading Agency. *"It has grown out of our work with adults who are improving their literacy skills which has shown just how important it is to inject fun, creativity and reading for pleasure into the process."*

Miranda continues: *"It's great to have the support of Costa right at the start of this exciting experiment. We look forward to working with them as the Six Book Challenge grows."*

Promotional materials for the Six Book Challenge™, including a registration card, reading diary and certificate, can be purchased from The Reading Agency. Orders made by 1 October will be fulfilled by the end of October so that libraries and learning providers can establish partnerships in good time to run the Six Book Challenge™ from January to May 2008. Visit: www.readingagency.org.uk or contact ruth.harrison@readingagency.org.uk

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Notes to editors:

- Founded in 2002, The Reading Agency is an independent charity and reading development agency. We work with public libraries, running national programmes like the Summer Reading Challenge, Fulfilling their Potential (changing library services for teenagers), and The Vital Link programme. For more general information, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk
- The Vital Link, run by The Reading Agency, is a national programme designed to build and promote libraries' capacity to support the adult literacy agenda. It encourages partnership working and has a special focus on using reading for pleasure to inspire and support existing students and engage potential new learners. The Vital Link forms part of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being taken forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and has had support from the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills) for its reading for pleasure campaign.
- BBC RaW is a three-year adult literacy campaign which launched in October 2005 and is run by BBC Learning.
- Quick Reads is a World Book Day initiative launched in March 2006 which works with the book trade to produce short fiction and non-fiction by well-known names specially written for emergent readers. To find out more about the Quick Reads campaign and order a free promotional pack visit www.quickreads.org.uk.
- The Reading Agency also sets up and runs national partnerships, linking libraries to broadcasters, the book trade, youth services and the basic skills sector. Partners include the BBC, major publishers, Orange and the National Youth Agency.
- The Reading Agency engages in research, policy and advocacy, exploring the benefits of reading and libraries. We also develop practical resources to support people working with readers: training, toolkits and promotional materials.
- The Costa Book Awards, formerly the Whitbread Book Awards, were established in 1971 to encourage, promote and celebrate the best contemporary British writing. For more information on the Costa Book Awards, please contact Amanda Johnson on 07715 922 180.

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