

Welcome to a New Year Vital Link eletter. This is to bring you news of exciting developments for the year ahead. In particular:

- **the start of the Six Book Challenge™ in association with the Costa Book Awards**
- **information about the Vital Link conference on 12 March 2008 in Birmingham to mark the National Year of Reading**
- **plans for the Vital Link Reading and Libraries Campaign**

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1. WHAT IS THE VITAL LINK?

For readers of this newsletter who are new to The Vital Link, it is a national programme designed to build and promote libraries capacity to support the adult literacy agenda. Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, it encourages libraries and adult literacy providers to work together and has a special focus on using reading for pleasure to motivate and inspire existing students and to engage potential 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 support from the Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills for its Reading and Libraries Campaign.

2. SIX BOOK CHALLENGE™

We are delighted to report that over 70% of library authorities across England (and 60% across the UK) are now offering the Six Book Challenge to emergent adult readers. Several learning providers have also signed up and around 40 prisons are participating in the Challenge. This is the new national scheme which invites people to read six books and record their reading in a

diary. The Six Book Challenge is based on a model pioneered by Hull Libraries in 2006 and since taken up successfully by libraries across Yorkshire with support from BBC RaW. Please see our new website at www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk for the latest information and a list of the organisations taking part. This is the place to find news about the Challenge and ideas for how to make it a success.

The Reading Agency is grateful to the Costa Book Awards for their generous support for the Challenge which includes £2 Coffee Cards for all participants, a generous national prize draw open to all those who complete the Challenge by June (and a separate prize for prisons) and experimental partnership work with Costa stores and libraries in Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds.

Costa have also worked with The Reading Agency to appoint a patron for the Challenge, announced on Monday 14 January as the bestselling author Mike Gayle. Mike is very enthusiastic about the initiative and will be working with us to promote it over the coming months. He says, 'Ever since my first visit to my local library when I was three, books have played a major role in my life, so I am absolutely thrilled to have been asked to be Patron of the national Six Book Challenge initiative. Anything that encourages adult learners to get stuck into a good read has got to be a good thing in my book! It's great that The Reading Agency and the Costa Book Awards have teamed up to make this happen and I look forward to the initiative making a real difference to those who have felt excluded from the world of books.'

We are using the Six Book Challenge as an ideal opportunity to evaluate the learning benefits of reading for pleasure and links with libraries. This qualitative evaluation will focus on libraries running the Challenge in the South East (almost 100%) but all organisations running the Challenge are encouraged to use the same methodology.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the Six Book Challenge, please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

3. REDESIGNED AND EXPANDED FIRST CHOICE BOOKS DATABASE!

The Six Book Challenge website also links through to an entirely revamped, updated and expanded First Choice Books database at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk created by Ruth Harrison and a small team of designers and book selectors.

As far as we know, this online searchable database of titles published or selected for emergent readers is still a world first so please make good use of it! There is a facility to submit new titles that fit the Vital Link stock selection criteria as well as get full information about how to use the criteria and the SMOG formula for readability. Practitioners can also print out book lists from the site.

We are keen to work with library services or learning providers in order to continue expanding this database, so please contact us if you would like to get involved with this process.

4. BOOK EARLY FOR 12 MARCH 2008 VITAL LINK CONFERENCE!

You can now book online at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitalink/conference08.html> for the national Vital Link conference to mark the National Year of Reading 2008 to be held on **Wednesday 12 March at the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham.**

The Reading Agency and the National Literacy Trust are running this important conference in association with LLU+, the national consultancy and professional development centre which has recently created a reading course for the Skills for Life Improvement Programme and are currently reviewing the curricula. The conference is targeted mainly at Skills for Life providers in order to promote and showcase messages about integrating reading and links with libraries into adult literacy provision in a range of settings. **Please take advantage of the 'early bird' rate of £165 (pre 8 February).**

Key speakers include Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills, Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director for the National Year of Reading and Helen Sunderland, Assistant Director, LLU+. We've also just heard that Quick Reads author Gilda O'Neill can join us to end the day on a high note.

For further details please contact Ronan Cahill on 020 7820 6258 or ronan.cahill@literacytrust.org.uk

5. NATIONAL YEAR OF READING

The 2008 National Year of Reading was launched on 8 January by the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Secretary of State Ed Balls who called for every employer, school, library, college and local authority to get involved: We need children, adults, and families to be reading because they love it and appreciate the opportunities that reading brings. not because

people like me say it's important. And it's never too late to improve your reading skills.

For the first three months of the year the NYR is challenging organisations to sign up at www.yearofreading.org.uk to be followed by a launch to the public in April. Library authorities across the country are supporting the NYR and it is hoped that all organisations supporting adult learners will also get involved.

6. READING AND LIBRARIES CAMPAIGN

The Vital Link has now embarked on a further phase of its Reading and Libraries Campaign with support from the Skills for Life Strategy Unit, now in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. This ranges from the production of a reading for pleasure support pack linked to the National Year of Reading to an audience engagement project in Yorkshire which will bring together libraries and union learning reps in workplaces through the Six Book Challenge. We are also undertaking two pieces of evaluation. One developing a set of indicators for the impact of reading for pleasure on learners; the other looking at the impact of our work to date on practitioners and deepening understanding of the barriers to integrating reading for pleasure and links with libraries into regular teaching practice.

7. QUICK READS 2008

The Vital Link will also be producing further resources to support ten new Quick Reads titles due to be published on World Book Day 6 March. Please see www.quickreads.org.uk for more about this year's list which features titles by Josephine Cox, Colin Jackson, Chris Ryan, Adele Parks, Scott Quinnell, John Bird, Gilda O'Neill, Gordon Ramsay, another Doctor Who and *RaW Voices of Hardship and Hope*. **Order your copies NOW to ensure delivery by World Book Day!**

8. BBC RAW UPDATE

Please see the newsletter attached for the latest news about RaW and note the closing date for the short story competition. 31 January 2008.

9. AND FINALLY

If you have found this eletter useful, please pass it on to colleagues and ask them to sign up by sending their **full** contact details to: resources@readingagency.org.uk

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