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**Boosting achievement through reading for pleasure – Westminster City Council**

Reading Ahead challenges participants to pick six reads of their choice (short texts such as poems and magazine articles as well as books) and record, rate and review them in a small print reading diary in order to get incentives along the way and a certificate on completion.

Westminster Libraries have been supporting adult learners in the central London borough for many years and has gained a gold award from The Reading Agency for supporting more than 200 people to complete the reading challenge. They’ve done this by working with a range of local partners including Westminster Kingsway College, the Cardinal Hume Centre and Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES). *“We believe it is a great way to reach out to the numerous ESOL students in the area,”* explains City Librarian Laurence Foe. *“Local tutors say it complements their course work and helps to improve the students' success in their exams and studies. What works best are the visits to literacy classes as it raises the profile of the library service and the celebration event as it creates a feel-good environment and gives participants and completers a sense of self-esteem.”*

The relationship with WAES is particularly strong where the library and education services are co-located as in Pimlico. Here the library provides WAES tutors with reading diaries, supports learners with appropriate books and arranges celebration events for people who complete the reading challenge.

Reading Ahead has mainly been used with ESOL classes in Westminster but learners in Functional Skills classes are now getting involved, many of whom don’t have English as their first language. Ruth Lennard, Course Leader at the Pimlico Centre, is integrating reading into a Level 2 Functional Skills course in a range of ways.

***“****We agree a target in their Individual Learning Plan to read a certain amount or to complete Reading Ahead. I’ll be helping them to choose and read different texts such as articles from the newspaper as well as books. They might research someone’s life in a biography and write a timeline to pick out the main points.* ***”***

She also supports them to reflect on their reading, to think about the adjectives they might use and to post reviews on the WAES Moodle. She then responds online and encourages them to comment on each other’s reviews. All this can be shared on the whiteboard in class leading to further discussion about book choices

Her students are enthusiastic about reading even if it’s quite a laborious process. Helene, whose first language is French, explains: *“I have to read slowly in English, going back to check the vocab. But I read about the book from the cover. If I like the sound of it I will try it. It’s good because you learn about other people’s lives. On each reading you learn something.”*

“Reading Ahead is brilliant for them,” says Ruth whose students have GCSE English in their sights with its new requirement to tackle 19th-century language. “Students need as much encouragement as they can get for reading. It expands their vocabulary. Too many get stuck on reading the Metro newspaper. Reading will stay with them. We help them to get into a habit of reading so that they will carry on. “

Tutor Dr Chioma Onwere, is aiming to do the same with her Level 1 Functional Skills class and is passionate about the power of reading*. “I would like my students to do ten minutes of silent reading in every class. It opens so many doors for them.”* Luckily one of her students, Hawo, has already completed the reading challenge a couple of times and is able to encourage her classmates to give it a try.

Staff use a mix of methods – sometimes all reading the same book such as a Quick Read or otherwise students sharing views about their individual choice of book. All of it encourages speaking and listening skills in addition to reading and writing.

It undoubtedly helps to have a public library on the doorstep and the partnership is mutually beneficial. Librarian Aitor Quintana is very happy about the relationship and the way in which the Reading Ahead programme increases their footfall: *“It’s very useful having WAES in the same building. Every teacher brings their class or individual students for an introduction to the library and we issue them with library cards. The more people use the library the* more they discover other things they can use.”

**Top Tips**

* Try an informal weekly book club to get people swapping their book choices.
* Give guidance and models for writing reviews of fiction and non-fiction.
* Share reviews online and ask learners to comment on each other’s reviews.
* Use previous Reading Ahead participants to champion the scheme to their classmates – they are the strongest advocates.
* Take your class to the college or local library as part of a session and invite library staff to visit your students.
* Suggest that learners read a range of texts from poems to books; they could try a 19th-century graded reader to help them prepare for GCSE.