**Andrew Rough, Red Oak Primary School – Reader profile**

**When did you first become a reader?**

I have been a reader for as long as I can remember. I was a bit of a bookworm when I was a child and was reading ahead of my age range quite early. I was an extremely shy child (I may have even been called elective mute when I was very young, if I was in school nowadays) and my teachers were concerned with my progress, but my parents weren’t because they knew how much I read and could see I was reading at a high level for my age. It was only as I got a bit older and started communicating with my teachers that they realised I was fine.

**What were some of your favourite books when growing up?**

I remember reading a lot of Enid Blyton books when I was growing up. I had inherited lots of them from my brother and sister who are older than me. I discovered the Hobbit when I was about 8 and fell in love with it, that led me onto The Lord of the Rings, for a while I devoured all things Tolkien or C.S. Lewis as I also loved the Narnia stories. For me, reading was about escapism, I loved to be taken away to different lands. As I got older I also discovered Terry Pratchett and his Discworld series-I loved the idea of seeing the world through the lense of fantasy but with a satirical edge making comment on the real world.

**What kind of a reader are you now?**

Now I am still a bookworm. I love to read; I read every day. Quite often I read children’s literature, partly because I have a professional interest in it-I feel it is part of my job to know about good books for children, so I can highlight them to children and recommend books to them (something you can only really do successfully if you have read the books yourself), and partly because some of the best books I have read, books that have really made me think, played on my emotions or changed me in some way, have been children’s literature. I also read books for adults, but I don’t tend to read anything too heavy or hard work, reading is still an act of escapism for me, I don’t want it to be too much hard work. Having said that, I read Crime and Punishment whilst I was at university (just for pleasure, it wasn’t on the syllabus) and although it was hard work, it was a very rewarding book, and possibly the best piece of literature I have read. I have similar feelings about 100 years of solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; I loved the book, but I had to concentrate. I recommended that one to my wife when she needed a suggestion for her book club but they all hated it! No accounting for tastes, I guess. The adult books I read are varied; I’m currently reading ‘Circe’ by Madeline Miller, which is a reimagining of a Greek myth (I can recommend it, it’s a very enjoyable read), I discovered a couple of years ago that I quite like historical fiction; I am also still a fan of fantasy and have read the Game of Thrones books amongst others. I also enjoy reading a good teaching book, e.g. Dylan William’s Formative Assessment, (I’m currently reading a book by Mark McCourt on Teaching for Mastery), but I read these sorts of books mainly as a way of developing myself as a teacher rather than as a leisure activity.

**What book(s) are you currently reading?**

Oh, whoops, just answered this above. Circe by Madeline Miller and Teaching for Mastery by Mark McCourt. I have just finished The boy who fooled the world by Lisa Thompson and am still reading The boy who sailed the ocean in an armchair to my class via videos posted one chapter at a time on YouTube (I contacted the author to ask if this was alright and she was delighted but also asked me to check with the publisher, which I did).

**Who would be in your top ten of children’s authors?**

I have spent most of my teaching career in KS2 and more recently in Y5/6 so my list will be quite heavy on authors for that age range, however I will start with: Michael Rosen, Julia Donaldson and Alan Ahlberg. Roald Dahl has to be on the list, his books are still an excellent introduction to engage reluctant readers. Kiran Millwood Hargraves is one of my favourite children’s authors, she is relatively new but is an excellent writer. Lisa Thompson (who wrote the Goldfish boy amongst others) is another relatively new author who is excellent. Anything by Eva Ibbotson is good, (I had planned to read the Journey to Riversea to my class this summer but might not get the chance to do so now), Phillip Pullman is one of the best writers in the country, I love a Michael Morpurgo book and I will end my list with Katherine Rundell who has written some excellent children’s books and also published a short book called ‘Why you should read children’s books’ last year with the aim of getting more people to be aware of how beneficial reading children’s books really is. *I did consider David Walliams and J.K Rowling for this list as both have done a wonderful job in getting more children reading but I feel it is part of my role as a teacher to point children towards the other fantastic books by less well known writers as well and so I never actively discourage children from reading their books but say, ‘well if you liked that, then you will also like…’*

**How do you encourage ‘reluctant’ readers to read?**

It partly comes down to being a good role model and building a good relationship with the reluctant reader. Hopefully to the children I teach, my enthusiasm for reading shows. I talk about reading a lot, I read a lot to the children, I recommend books to them and ask them about the books they are reading. I try hard to engage children in stories-story time is an essential part of our day (there is a lot of research that shows that the best way for children to develop a wider vocabulary is for them to hear the vocabulary read in context, and reading aloud to children, particularly texts that are slightly more challenging than their independent reading level helps improve their reading comprehension, even, and especially for the weaker readers). Often when I have finished a class book there is a high demand to borrow it. Some of the books I have read to my class have also been in the school library and when that happens there is also a high demand for these, the children enjoy reading along. When I have finished a class book, I tend to target the reluctant readers, providing they show a glimmer of interest, in being the first people to borrow the book. Also as my children get to know me, and trust me, and want to please me, they start listening to my book recommendations more. I try hard to get to know the children well and find out about their interests so I can direct them to the right sort of books (it’s only when they become more engaged, enthusiastic readers that I start recommending books that might not be their usual taste, to broaden their horizons a bit.) Once you have found a book that the child enjoys, you have opened the door to the pleasure of reading, after that first book, it gets a bit easier. Luckily, we have an excellent school library as well as a good selection/range of class books (as well as my own personal library of books that the children can borrow) which makes it easier to find the right book to engage the child. I have never personally been a fan of non-fiction books, but many children love them, particularly boys who are reluctant readers (I’m stereotyping here, I know), and we have invested quite a lot of money over the last couple of years in updating our selection of quality non-fiction books. This has helped greatly with some of the reluctant readers. Also, in Year 6, the children all have a reading buddy in one of the reception classes. This has been a great way to engage them as readers as well because they have to act as a reading role model for someone younger, a challenge they always rise to (although, I do sometimes have to model how to read a story in an engaging way to a little person to stop some of them sounding like bored robots when they read out loud).

**What would you see as best practice in a primary / secondary school to encourage children to read widely and for enjoyment?**

Promoting reading for pleasure is key. This isn’t easy to achieve but with team effort it can be done effectively. All the adults in the school need to show they are engaged in reading and enjoy it (even if they aren’t), children need to see them as reading role models. Investment in good quality books also helps a lot; if all children have to read is tatty old books that are falling apart they aren’t going to want to read them. Talk about books a lot. In primary school, I think story time should be sacrosanct; unfortunately, as the timetable gets squeezed, this is often one of the first activities that gets dropped, but I feel it should be the last. There is so much to be gained from reading to children regularly, it has a huge impact on children’s learning, something a lot of people don’t appreciate or realise. Reading is embedded into our curriculum, so for instance, in literacy lessons, we study a book each half term and teach our reading, writing and grammar using the book as a stimulus. We have ensured that across the school children are exposed to good quality literature and poetry (both classic and modern) which is normally at a level slightly above the typical independent level for their age to ensure they get to hear challenging literature regularly. Reading happens in other subjects as well, more typically non-fiction reading but also chosen so it is challenging and hopefully engaging. Reading shouldn’t feel like a chore and although we do read a lot at Red Oak a lot of the reading is introduced subtly (so not always the main focus of the task, but it is a crucial part of it nevertheless). I also like to provide time for the children just to read for enjoyment, a time when (where possible) I will read as well, to show them I am a reader. Having a school library, (particularly a well-resourced one) helps a lot and having class book areas that are attractive and well-resourced also helps. Anything that makes reading for pleasure high profile. I think that sometimes schools, in their effort to improve reading, think just doing more reading is the answer-reading lots certainly helps, but if the reading activities you plan into your curriculum become a chore and are not enjoyable then you lose the engagement of the learners and then it doesn’t matter how much reading you make them do, the progress will be slow- so for me it is important to find the right balance-you need to provide reading activities and opportunities that allow the children to read often enough but they need to be presented in a way that keeps them engaged and promotes a love of reading. If the children find it boring, the activity may be having a negative effect on their reading ability rather than a positive one.

Other ways to keep reading high profile and encourage reading for pleasure are things like author visits, book buddies (I have seen this done with older children being buddies with younger ones as in my school but also adults being reading buddies for reluctant readers, we don’t do this at Red Oak, but I know it has been very successful elsewhere).