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Orange Chatterbooks Newsletter

Number 18

Winter 2005/2006



The next edition of the Orange Chatterbooks newsletter will be March 2006. Please email items for potential inclusion asap and before March 10th. They should go directly to Jerry Hurst at jerry.hurst@readingagency.org.uk. Thank you.

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Orange Chatterbooks 2004-5 Evaluation

Very many thanks to all of you who contributed to our latest evaluation of how Orange Chatterbooks is working. You gave us a wealth of information, plus stories of what Chatterbooks has meant for individual children, and ideas for session themes and activities. Some of these are included in this newsletter, and we'll feature more in the next edition.

You told us about the outcomes your library services are working towards, and achieving, with your Orange Chatterbooks groups – lots of common aims as well as special local targets.

We used this information for a PowerPoint presentation to update Orange on Chatterbooks activities and achievements. We are also producing a report and PowerPoint presentation which will shortly be available on the Reading Agency website for you to use in updating colleagues and partners, training, and library service advocacy.

Here are some of the headlines about Orange Chatterbooks 2004-5:

- 18 new authorities, including the Orkney Islands Council
- 127 authorities in total, running Chatterbooks
- 323 active groups (up from 266 in November 2004)
- 5000 children taking part: 3350 girls and 1650 boys
- 23% 5-8 years old; 72% 9-12 years old; 5% 12+ years

Impact for children

- Better reading skills
- Reading more widely
- Enjoying reading more
- More confidence in choosing books
- Children from different backgrounds sharing together

- Leadership and responsibility for planning and activities
- More use of the library

Impact for libraries

- Better skills in working with young people
- More relevant and vibrant reading services
- More involvement of parents and carers
- Closer contact with children helping them to make the service more responsive to their needs
- Reaching 'hard to reach' groups of children
- Developing community partnerships, especially with schools

Impact for Orange

- Corporate investment in communities
- Partnership development
- Promoting imagination and reading
- Development of communication
- Opportunities for employees

Solihull Orange Chatterbooks advises Summer Reading Challenge

A small group of librarians and reading consultants spent the day at Solihull Central Library, discussing which books to include in next year's *Summer Reading Challenge (The Reading Mission)* promotional dumpbins. As always, it was an exciting and challenging process, but this year the acid test came in the evening when Orange Chatterbooks children and parents scrutinised our selections.

In a brief introductory session we talked about what we and others like to read and what makes a really good *holiday* read. Amongst many others, there were lively arguments in favour of...

'Horror, adventure, mystery and fantasy' - *Connor*

'Fairy books!' - *Rebecca*

'Funny books!' - *Sarah*

'Animal books' - *Charlotte*

The children and parents looked at the librarians' choices and discussed with one another their merits or otherwise. Everyone was encouraged to think about:

- how much *I* want to read it. Why?
- how good it is likely to be *as a holiday read*. Why?
- whether it has *cover appeal*. Will people want to choose it from the dumpbin?
- any other ideas (about the pictures maybe, or about *who* would be likely to enjoy the book)

A voting process involved sticking dull yellow post-it notes onto 'no thanks!' titles, pink post-it notes onto 'maybe' titles and fabulously glamorous bright fluorescent smiley (or was it kissy?) lips post-it notes onto 'yes please!' titles. Everyone was encouraged to write brief comments on the post-its, to explain their decision... and the Summer Reading Challenge team was swamped with comment and opinion!

The Chatterbooks group looked at more than a hundred titles, swapping books and excitedly exchanging opinions for the better part of two hours. Arguments and counter-arguments developed as post-its covered post-its on the front of each book. Here are just a few examples:

'This book looks terrible'... alongside another child's comment in response... 'You're having a laugh, it looks great!'

'I looked for a perfect Princess book and I have found it.'

'This book would be good for someone looking for a new adventure book.'

'The cover is boring, nobody would notice it.'

... and so enthusiastic was someone in the group that a travel brochure for Boscombe, having accidentally found its way into the room, was stickered with a comment(!): 'I suppose this might be a good holiday read if you want to go to the beach!'

After the activity, we shared our thoughts about the range of books we'd just looked at and about the *Summer Reading Challenge* in general. Here are some headline comments:

'Its been really brilliant - we have seen lots of new authors and have made notes to reserve them from the library.'

'I am surprised at the subject matter of some of the books my son reads but it does not seem to worry him at all - you have to let them choose don't you?' - parent

'It was really good to discover / explore new authors and books.' - parent

'Sometimes I didn't like a book, because I didn't like it's cover, but then when I read some of it I found it was good after all.'

'It's good being able to see books before they are even in the library and some of them are just papers... they haven't even been made into proper books yet!'

'I think it will be a great lot of books.'

'I've enjoyed looking at what other people thought. I don't always agree but it's good working out why.'

'There are lots of action adventures, so boys will be happy.'

'I can't wait to read them next year!'

To close the session, we had some top notch refreshments and each child chose a book to keep, along with other goodies and gifts.

So, what difference did the children's input make to the selection of materials? Well, it was reassuring that most of the selections were supported by most of the group, but sixteen previously selected titles were rejected, whilst eleven 'possibles' became 'must haves'. Excellent!

Jerry Hurst

Orange Chatterbooks Training Courses 2006

Two Orange Chatterbooks training sessions for 2006 are now organised. They are:

- Friday 17 March at Marylebone Library, London
- Wednesday 5 July at York Central Library

Places, at £150 per delegate, are limited – please download a booking form from www.readingagency.org.uk/projects/children/chatterbooks.html

What's worked for us? Successful Orange Chatterbooks activities: autumn 2005

ARTHUR ACTIVITIES IN BARNET LIBRARIES

Mill Hill Orange Chatterbooks held a session about letters, involving the *Arthur* books by Marc Brown. The book reviews were written in letter form. We used puzzles printed out from www.randomhouse.com/kids/arthur and a letter game at www.pbskids.org/arthur. The children had great fun seeing who could create the most nonsensical letter and most went on to explore the sites further. The latter site is very pro-library and learning (although the children didn't realise this!) We have also had craft sessions making bookmarks and do not disturb signs for their doors. The bookmarks were people shaped and were decorated by the children as themselves, or as their favourite character from a book. The reversible door hangers were decorated on the theme of favourite books.

CHATTERBOOKS CELEBRITIES FROM WEST LOTHIAN!

At Carmondean Library Orange Chatterbooks, which has only recently started up, one of the first activities we did was to talk about poems. The children made up their own poems and they were displayed in the library. As National Poetry Day was on 6th October we arranged a visit to our local radio station, *River FM*, where we were recorded reading out our own poems. This was then aired five times a day for a week! The radio station also gave us a tour, with freebies at the end. The children loved being mini-celebrities and the Orange Chatterbooks group got some new members as a result. Some of the children also read their poems out in class / assembly at school. The children were keen before but we have a lot to live up to now!!

Pat Fisher

Here are just two of the many excellent poems from Carmodean Orange Chatterbooks:

I like Lemony Snicket,
I get him on my library ticket.
Violet, Klaus and Sunny,
Count Olaf is after their money.
They are looking for VFD,
What will happen to these three?

By Halle McMillan

Enid Blyton to Dick King-Smith,
Full of adventure, horror and myth.
So much information inside many pages,
On animals, nature, the world through the ages.
Bored and don't know what to do?
Visit your local library,
See what's there for you.

By Grant Kirkwood

Please send *your* successful reading activity ideas for inclusion in the Orange Chatterbooks newsletter – jerry.hurst@readingagency.org.uk

News from Orange Chatterbooks groups

ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS HISTORIANS EXPLORE THEIR PAST AND PRESENT IN DEVON

Tiverton Library's new Orange Chatterbooks group is the first in Devon County and although we have only met twice it is turning out to be a brilliant experience for everyone involved. At our first meeting we had eight 7-11 year olds who just wanted to talk about books from the minute they met - grabbing them from the library shelves and sharing them with each other. I've certainly now read a couple of things that were new to me. The goody bags were just the job and we all went home happy!

Meeting number two - and they all came back! We were thinking about the story of where we live and who tells it and how the story changes. A local author, Mike Sampson, came to visit the group and talked with us while we looked at old photographs of the town and Virtual Victorians on the internet www.tivertonmuseum.org.uk

We moved into our new library about a year ago and we were able to put together a time line of photos from the laying of the foundation stone of the old library in 1919, the whole process of the building of the new library with pictures taken at monthly intervals - and when we handed out disposable cameras we could all bring it right up to date. So, we have all gone off armed with our cameras to take pictures of places that are important to us and places that are changing so that we can tell our own history and display our work in the library in December.

Next time we are off to the local museum for our own "private view" - it is staying open after hours just for us. It will be really interesting to see what bits our Orange Chatterbooks group choose to look at.

Lesley Salter

PAUL CLEMENTS CHATS BOOKS IN EAST BELFAST

As part of the "East Belfast Celebrates Literature" month of events, a special Orange Chatterbooks meeting was held in Ballymacarrett Library on Monday 19th September. Children from groups at Ballymacarrett Library and Lisburn Road Library were invited to hear Paul Clements talk about the work involved in writing his latest book *The height of nonsense*. Paul is a travel writer and journalist and his latest book describes his adventure to find and climb the highest point in each county in Ireland. He talked to the children about the interesting people he met on his journey and his search for the origin of particularly unusual place names.

Paul expanded his talk by sharing with the children tips on writing a book, talking about the many drafts and the hard work involved in checking and re-checking your work. This was demonstrated with a copy of his manuscript illustrating the changes on every page. He even confided that despite all of these checks a mistake had slipped into his book and a song that should be "Shoe the Donkey" is referred to as "Shoot the Donkey"!

Paul's talk was enthusiastic and he encouraged the children to try their hand at writing, citing the competition currently being run by *The Radio Times*. The children's interest was evident as they followed up his talk with a lively session of questions and answers, where they discovered what had inspired Paul to write, what authors he had read as a child and whether he would ever consider writing fiction instead of non-fiction.

As this was a special Orange Chatterbooks meeting the group had been encouraged to invite friends and family and the evening was concluded when two lucky parents were each presented with a signed copy of *The Height Of Nonsense*.

Joanne Brown

ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS HAVE THEIR SAY IN HARINGEY...

After a really good first year, Hornsey Orange Chatterbooks has expanded to ten children at each fortnightly session. Parents are saying how much the children are enjoying the group and how much confidence they now have in expressing themselves! And here's what some of the children are saying about their reading choices:

Powder Monkey by Paul Dowsell was reviewed so favourably we ordered eight copies of the title for everyone to share. *Kate*, 10 and *Josie*, 9 said:

'It felt like you were in hell....'

'You really feel for Sam and his experiences...'

'I never knew that the British Navy could just 'press-gang' you so young!'

Another title that everyone really enthused about was *Hitler's Canary*, Sandi Toksvig's factional account of her grandparents' struggle in war-torn Denmark.

One child said that she would give it marks of 10/10!

The group then answered email questions from the Orange Chatterbooks group at Marcus Garvey Library, who had also read and discussed the book.

We also had a session dedicated to the *Guardian's* Children's Quiz and the associated book titles, which was a lot of fun.

Other titles which the children enjoyed were:

- **Percy Jackson and the Olympians: the lightning thief** by Rick Riordan
Kipp, 11, said it was the humour that appealed to him... 'Mount Olympus was on the 600th floor of the Empire State Building.' He can't wait for the sequel!
- **The Magician's Guild** trilogy by Trudi Canavan

- **Framed** by Frank Cottrell-Boyce.
Quite a realistic story, the setting is very wet and grey and I can see it being turned into a film...! *Kate*, age 10.
- **The extraordinary adventures of Alfred Kropp** by Rick Yancey
'Lots of gruesome murders plus humour, I'd give this book 9/10.' *Finn*, 10.
- **Raven's Gate** by Anthony Horowitz
The first in a new series, *The Power of Five*, 'Some loose ends at the moment, but you can tell that the jigsaw puzzle will be complete when the other books are published.' *Kate*, 10.
- **Spirit Walker** by Michelle Paver
'This is a really interesting book, I didn't want to finish it because it was sooooo good... my favourite book so far....!' *Bhavna*, 10

Sean Edwards

ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS AND THE IRISH CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL

Courtesy of Orange, award-winning children's author **Eleanor Updale** recently visited members of Lisburn and Moira Libraries' Orange Chatterbooks part of the Irish Children's Book Festival.

She hosted a lively and entertaining session which began with readings from her *Montmorency* series, published by Scholastic. She then fielded a variety of questions about her books and on writing in general. At the end of the session Eleanor signed bookmarks and copies of her books.

Set in Victorian London, *Montmorency* is the interweaving of two tales of one man, Montmorency and his alter ego Scarper, who live in contradictory worlds. Scarper, a small-time crook, lives in a dark underground world whereas Montmorency enjoys a life in high society. He struggles to prevent each of his identities spoiling everything for the other.

The *Montmorency* novels have won several awards including the Nestle Smarties Silver Award, the Medway Book Award and the Blue Peter award in the category "the book I couldn't put down".

Valerie Christie

ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS GOES ROMAN

Reading, Wokingham, West Berkshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are planning a day of themed activities based around the Caroline Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* series.

Orange Chatterbooks groups across the four authorities are working with Reading Museum, which has a renowned collection of Roman artefacts from nearby Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) and an excellent track record of devising activities for children themed around them (for more details see www.readingmuseum.org.uk).

Caroline Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* are extremely popular with our readers; they are exciting, well written and have a good basis in historical fact (for more information see www.romanmysteries.com).

The Roman Mysteries Day will give children the opportunity to share their reading experience in a stimulating and supportive environment; they will be able to explore the history behind the stories and have access to actual Roman objects excavated locally at a site they could go on to visit. They will be interacting positively with adults who share their enthusiasm (librarians, museum staff, family members and the author) and taking part in activities that will help build their confidence as readers, writers and historians.

The day will raise the profile of Orange Chatterbooks, the children's library service and Reading Museum, increasing the uptake of services. It also ties in with key themes of *Inspiring Learning for All* www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk

The event will take place at Reading Museum on Friday 2nd June 2006 during Reading's annual Children's Festival. We will use the Victoria Hall, adjacent to the Museum for Caroline's main session, some of the activities, lunch and refreshments. We have lots of ideas for activities related to the theme and to reading, these will take place in the Hall, in the "Silchester" area of the Museum and in another room where "Roman food" can be made and tasted.

Working together, we are hoping to organise a day to remember!

Nicci Shepherd

STOCKTON ON TEES HOST PAUL COOKSON

In November we invited all members of our six Orange Chatterbooks groups to an exclusive evening with Paul Cookson at Stockton Library. Paul wowed the children, parents and teachers with his performance (always at top speed) of his hilarious and sometimes irreverent poetry. The children had been reading and talking about Paul's poetry at Chatterbooks meetings for weeks beforehand and were ready with questions and comments.

One teacher who came along in loco parentis made this comment a week after the event:

'Being singled out by Paul has made Joe's day. He is an unhappy, isolated little boy starved of attention. Having Paul single him out in the performance and talk to him was just what he needs. He has talked about nothing else since.'

Paul was visiting the north-east as part of the 23rd annual **Northern Children's Book Festival**. This is Europe's largest free children's book festival with over forty authors, poets and performers visiting the north-east for two weeks each November. Twelve authorities come together every year to plan and run the festival. It was wonderful to be able to link up one of Stockton's NCBF authors with a Chatterbooks session this year. For more information go to www.ncbf.org.uk

Claire Pratt

WEST LOTHIAN ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS DISCUSSING DISABILITY AND BOOKS

The theme for this year's National Children's Book Week was a focus on disability and books. The Fauldhouse Orange Chatterbooks group were asked if they could name any book featuring a character with a disability. Most of the children said *Tracy Beaker* but could not name the character. The children felt that it was important to show more characters with disabled characters in books as this would give both a better understanding of the issues faced by people with disabilities.

The children also thought illustrators should draw children with disabilities in everyday situations, having fun and mixing with other children. The children thought about and discussed what one message they might give to writers, illustrators, publishers about disability and children's books. Here are some examples:

'It would be to put more disabled children in books and learn people to care.'

'It would be to say to make it more exciting and adventurous for the disabled.'

'Include others so they can have their moment.'

Marilyn James

ORANGE CHATTERBOOKS... A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I took over responsibility for Orange Chatterbooks at Lydney in Gloucestershire just over a year ago and I decided to start afresh and recruit a whole new group from the nearest primary school.

We opened the opportunity to the whole Year Five group on a first come, first serve basis to a maximum of ten and we were pleased to find we'd got roughly equal girls and boys. We soon discovered however that, at this age, the girls and boys had markedly different tastes in reading. In addition, the group, despite themselves initiating a system of 'whoever's holding the special book is the one who is talking', were inclined to talk all over each other, talk to their friends in little enclaves and occasionally wander off. My 'class management' skills at that

time were somewhat limited and despite the excellent Chatterbooks training course I had been on, led by Jerry Hurst over the summer I often felt (particularly in the first months) that I arrived at Chatterbooks under-prepared and that I was not giving 'best value'. And just as I was starting to get through this phase, the boys all dropped out 'because it was boring'.

So... lots of feelings of frustration and unworthiness. Frustration partly because, as a non-children's specialist trying to expand children's reading and going mostly on what I had read with my own children (both boys, currently eight and twelve and both avid and advanced readers) I realised that that knowledge was going to be harder to pass on to the girls who would be more resistant to, say, Anthony Horowitz perhaps.

However, for whatever reason, the girls did keep coming and were joined by other friends who just happened along. We even had another boy join although I later discovered he doesn't really read much and he came mostly to hold hands with his girlfriend!!! (and they are ten / eleven at most - at one point, the 'girlfriend' even had to ask a friend across the table to peel off her Summer Reading Challenge stickers for her, as she couldn't possibly let go of the 'boyfriend's hand!) I struggled to get them to touch anything other than Jacqueline Wilson however, although Francine Pascal (groan) was beginning to be mentioned. To be honest I've never read a Francine Pascal but they always make me think of Mills & Boon. I also struggled to think up a new topic or activity every week – the 'Oh no! It's Chatterbooks again already and I can't think what to do' syndrome.

I resolved to put aside a whole day over the summer to think it through and plan.

We decided to start a session with a discussion about what Chatterbooks was all about and to see if the children would like to take on rotating responsibility for chairing the meetings. We also asked them what they wanted to discuss on a month-by-month basis. This might not let me push some authors that I'd like to push, but I'd perhaps have a better chance of starting where they were (usually a good principle with anybody and any subject, I find) and moving them gently forward from there. And it would be a two-way process, because I would have to read what they were reading, which would expand my 'specialist knowledge' for use with other children.

So that is what we did. The group as a whole seemed to have turned what I would call a 'maturity corner' over the summer which certainly helps. They seemed more receptive generally, and a number of them had just got into *Goosebumps* and other horror titles. They were very keen to take it in turns to chair and were forthcoming about who / what they'd like to talk about - so we were able to set up a schedule for the whole year. Now I can make sure I've read something along the theme before the meeting, gather other items to suggest and make sure we have various titles for the next month's theme ready for them to take at the end. Plus I undertake to prepare a related activity for each meeting as well as provide the obligatory squash and biscuits. We do a manual issue so the books don't incur fines before the next meeting.

The second meeting of this term was attended by Carmel O'Hara from Orange. It was the first one where we had tried to work to the schedule. The theme was 'Fairies / Faeries' and because it was near National Poetry day, I brought along the 'Poetry Magnets' so we could split in two and each group write a poem as the activity. Having Carmel there was a great help and I'm hoping now that I'll be able to get an Orange volunteer to come and help regularly because we now have a membership of twelve, which can be quite hard to manage. Here is a brief insight into some very positive moments from that session:

Several children of them were interested in reading *Ella enchanted* after I spoke about it... Daryl wanted to read *Artemis Fowl*, despite the fact that they weren't 'fairy fairies' and most of the other girls seemed completely disinterested... Sammy really wanted to tell everyone about that book called *How to handle your parents* - previously she has been one of those who would often not have read anything between meetings... I was pleased that Matt took a Brian Jacques on my recommendation. I personally loathe them - but my son loves them and Matt picked it up and read the back on that basis before declaring 'I'll take it' with shining eyes!... and yes, Sophie did very well at chairing the meeting.

PS: An additional note about the Orange Chatterbooks training day...

The day was very enjoyable and motivating and I learnt a lot about the *Their Reading Futures* website, which has stood me in good stead for a range of tasks: thinking through Orange Chatterbooks over the summer; responding to customer comment; preparing to talk to school groups etc. I would highly recommend attending such a course if you get the chance.

Catherine Escott-Allen

Orange Employee Volunteers

Good news - The first Orange employee volunteers will start helping out at Chatterbooks sessions in the New Year. We've linked several volunteers to Orange Chatterbooks groups near their work place. Library staff and Orange volunteers all seem very excited and enthusiastic about the project so we are hoping it will be a great success. We'll let you how the first set of volunteers works out and the types of things they get involved in.

Coming up...

January 28th – February 4th 2006

National Storytelling Week

Contact the Society for Storytelling Society for Storytelling - tel: 0118 935 1381 or email: SfS@fairbruk.demon.co.uk Visit www.sfs.org.uk

March 2nd 2006

World Book Day

www.worldbookday.com

Your Orange Chatterbooks co-ordinators

Your Orange Chatterbooks co-ordinators are: Patricia Sharkey patriciasharkey@hotmail.co.uk and Tricia Kings tricia.kings@readingagency.org.uk

The next edition of the Orange Chatterbooks newsletter

We'd love to hear from you about your Orange Chatterbooks groups. Please let us have your stories so that we can share your thoughts with others through the Orange Chatterbooks newsletter.

The next edition of the Orange Chatterbooks newsletter will be March 2006. Please e mail items for potential inclusion asap and before March 10th. They should go directly to Jerry Hurst, at jerry.hurst@readingagency.org.uk Thank you.