

March 2011

Reading takes centre stage!

July: *Circus Stars*: the 13th Summer Reading Challenge launches

Roll up! Roll up! Libraries across the UK are getting ready to introduce children to a summertime circus spectacle that will keep them reading throughout the school summer holidays....with the 2011 Summer Reading Challenge™.

And it's all free fun, which is top news for parents! The Summer Reading Challenge is just one of many exciting schemes public libraries are developing to help children love reading, gaining confidence and new skills. So mums, dads and carers, pop down to your local library and find out more!

The Summer Reading Challenge is an immensely popular and successful reading initiative. Now in its thirteenth successful year it reaches 760,000 children aged four to 12 years annually via the UK library network. It is created and run by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more, and is supported by children's publishers.

Each year the Summer Reading Challenge to children is simple. They're encouraged to read six or more books of their choice during the holidays with collectable incentives and rewards, plus a certificate or medal for every child who completes the Challenge. Children can sign up at their local library as the summer term draws to a close (from end of June onwards – dates differ throughout England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and all materials are absolutely free to children. (Please check with relevant local authority for launch activity in your area.)

The 2011 Summer Reading Challenge has a circus theme. Called *Circus Stars*, it owes more to *Cirque due Soleil*, the new generation of circuses and the performance arts than the old-fashioned Big Top circus. The *Circus Stars* razzmatazz starts with six children who have signed up for a contemporary circus skills academy. As they read books, mirrored by children everywhere who are doing the Challenge via their local libraries, they gain new circus skills through three important stages: *Practice*, *Rehearsal* and *Show Time!* The artwork for *Circus Stars* comes from top children's illustrator Nick Price, who has illustrated Emily Bearn's *Tumtum* and *Nutmeg* series (Egmont Books) and has just reillustrated the Wombles for the new editions of Elisabeth Beresford's beloved books (Bloomsbury).

An interactive *Circus Stars* (www.circus-stars.org.uk) website is due to launch in June, linking children with top authors and illustrators, and giving them space to talk about their favourite books and to share reading ideas. *Circus Stars* also promotes their local library as a place of wonder for children, where librarians can offer them invaluable advice and guidance.

Once again this year there are also large print Summer Reading Challenge materials available for visually impaired children, thanks to the support of the RNIB National Library Service. Also available in a variety of languages are special "family leaflets". These explain, for parents and carers visiting their local library, the benefits for children doing the Summer Reading Challenge. They also suggest ways of supporting children

during the Challenge, and provide joint reading ideas for the whole family during the summer.

For the second summer running, The Reading Agency will also be co-ordinating Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities in a growing number of local libraries around the UK. These are for young people aged 16-25 years, in partnership with v, (the national youth volunteering charity) and John Laing Integrated Services. Last summer, over 2,000 young people took part.

“Our research shows that children really enjoy taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge,” says Anne Sarrag, Summer Reading Challenge director for The Reading Agency. “It’s a great way to keep them entertained over the holidays, but more importantly, we know that children who take part read more books and read more widely than those who don’t, with potentially life-changing results”.

“I like doing the Summer Reading Challenge because it’s fun to do over the summer – you don’t have to get bored because it gives you something to do. Reading is a proper hobby of mine now. I read a lot more than I used to.” Joseph Stevenson, Solihull.

“The Summer Reading Challenge is one of the largest creative reading opportunities available to children in the UK. It introduces children to one of the best free resources for their minds that they have on their doorsteps – the local library - and focuses on the development of skills that are vital for their life chances and life skills – reading.” Alan Yentob, creative director of the BBC.

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Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. (www.readingagency.org.uk)
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- Importance of reading for pleasure for children’s life chances: *Reading for Change*, OECD, 2002. This showed that students who were more enthusiastic about and engaged in reading performed better in tests, and that being a frequent reader was more of an advantage, on its own, than wealth or social status.
- For more information about Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities for young people, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk/young/volunteering/
- The Summer Reading Challenge 210 report showed that:
- 760,000 children took part across the UK in the 2010 Challenge, called *Space Hop* (35,000 more than in 2009)

- 97% of UK library authorities took part
- 220,000 children attended *Space Hop* events organised by libraries.
- Visit www.readingagency.org.uk/children/summer-reading-challenge for more facts and to download the 2010 *Space Hop* report.