

Monday 18 July

## Launch of the 2011 Summer Reading Challenge: Libraries unite to continue to tackle children's literacy

In a huge combined effort to encourage every child to enjoy reading, the public library network today launched **The Summer Reading Challenge** with an event at the House of Commons. Speakers included Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools, and author Michael Rosen. Ruth Mackenzie, Director of the Cultural Olympiad announced that the Challenge will be part of the London 2012 Festival. Guests gathered to show their support for libraries' contribution to literacy included some of the nation's best loved authors along with MPs, councillors, publishing industry figures, librarians and library campaigners.

Created and run by independent charity The Reading Agency with libraries, this year's Summer Reading Challenge has the highest rate of involvement ever. 97% of UK library authorities are participating and over 760,000 children are due to join in.

"It's every child's birthright to benefit from the public library's support for literacy. If you care about libraries, get involved in **The Summer Reading Challenge** and shout about the success of the new look library reading service and why we should all be fighting to develop it" says **Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency**. "Those taking decisions about the future of libraries need to hear the good news stories - it's remarkable that in these tough times, libraries are leading the UK's biggest and most successful reading promotion for 4 to 11 year olds, and we are immensely proud to be coordinating their work."

**The Summer Reading Challenge** has a proven impact on children's literacy and enjoyment of reading and is a pivot for developing better joint literacy work between libraries and schools. Research carried out by the UK Literacy Association shows that participating in the Summer Reading Challenge combats the 'summer holiday dip' in pupils' reading motivation and attainment, widen pupils' reading range and repertoire and boost their desire to read at home<sup>[1]</sup>. Children who use libraries are twice as likely to be above average readers (National Literacy Trust)<sup>[2]</sup> and Oxford University research shows that children who read for pleasure get better jobs than those who don't<sup>[3]</sup>.

**Michael Rosen, Patron of the Summer Reading Challenge**, says "If there's one thing families do in the school holidays, it should be joining the library to take part in **The Summer Reading Challenge**. Schools can't be the sole focus of our efforts to ensure all young people grow up to be skilled readers – libraries are crucial. The Challenge is a massive opportunity to understand, champion and join in what libraries do for young readers"

This year's circus-themed initiative focuses on reading for pleasure as a means of building literacy skills. It combines a personal challenge - to read six books over the summer holidays - with social activities, a creative online element and collectable incentives. Every child completing the Challenge receives a certificate or medal.

The Reading Agency is also coordinating Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities for young people in a growing number of local libraries. The work is supported by the John Laing Charitable Trust. Present at the House of Commons were representatives of the 3000 young people expected to volunteer this summer.

“We are calling for every Head Teacher to weave **The Summer Reading Challenge** into the school improvement plan and to ensure every primary school child is a member of their local library, every family knows the library is a free resource, and that class visits to the library happen throughout the year” says **Miranda McKearney of The Reading Agency**

Also present at today’s launch were children who had successfully completed the Challenge in previous years and will be signing up to take part again in 2011. **Ashviny from St Matthew Academy in Lewisham says:** “I find it really fun – my brother and I see it as a challenge and we work against each other to see who could read the 6 books the fastest”

### **Cultural Olympiad plans**

A key development in the future success of **The Summer Reading Challenge** is its selection to be part the London 2012 Festival. The Reading Agency will be working with libraries to stage a huge reading extravaganza all over the UK . The 2012 challenge aims to reach one million children with the fun and freedom of reading. Librarians, storytellers, writers, performers and teenage volunteers will inspire children to explore the transformational power of the world’s stories.

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### **Notes to editors:**

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It specialises in helping libraries make more social impact through reading. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. ([www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk))
- 97% of UK library authorities are taking part in this year’s Summer Reading Challenge. See [www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](http://www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk) for professional support materials. For more information about Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities for young people, please visit [www.readingagency.org.uk/young/volunteering](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/young/volunteering)
- **Resources:** the Circus Stars website for children supports the Challenge with games, author blogs, children's message board and live "book choice help" from real librarians: [www.circus-stars.org.uk](http://www.circus-stars.org.uk). 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“ full of advice and support on how to take part over the summer.