

Press Release
Under embargo
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2011 Summer Reading Challenge Results: A Stunning Illustration of Libraries' Role in Creating Young Readers

The huge public demand for libraries' work with young readers has been illustrated by the results pouring in from the 2011 Summer Reading Challenge, run by the library network with The Reading Agency. 780,000 children participated in this year's challenge across the country - an increase of 20,000 children from last year.

"The Summer Reading Challenge is a blazing beacon in the library gloom" says Miranda McKearney, Director of the Reading Agency. "Those who say we no longer need libraries should get real and take a long hard look at the huge public response to the programme. Children who use libraries are twice as likely to be above average readers, and we can't afford to lose the creativity, passion and massive community mobilization libraries bring to the task of turning children into readers for life."

The scheme looks set to account for 20% of all books issued to children in a year. 53,000 children have newly joined their local library to take part, and boys look set to account for 44% of the total who have participated. Many were supported by teenage volunteers from secondary schools, such as Louis Howell from Lewisham libraries, who has built up a big following and motivated many reluctant boy readers. *"I didn't have to think twice about volunteering for the SRC, it's an outstanding idea...When you sit down with children and talk to them they do genuinely enjoy the books they get to read. I can recommend taking part and volunteering for the SRC - children don't deserve to be deprived of the chance to enjoy reading."* The Summer Reading Challenge volunteering project for young people, coordinated by The Reading Agency and supported by the John Laing Charitable Trust has seen over 3000 young people volunteer across all authorities throughout the summer.

Insight into Children's Reading Passions

Since the children who participated in the challenge were able to choose the books that they read, the 29,000 children who registered on the website offered a useful insight into the books that children most enjoy reading. Top Ten most popular authors during the challenge included Jacqueline Wilson, Roald Dahl, Daisy Meadows (Rainbow Fairies), Francesca Simon (Horrid Henry), JK Rowling, Jeff Kinney (Diary of a Wimpy Kid), Enid Blyton, Michael Morpurgo, Cathy Cassidy and Jeremy Strong. Titles from these hugely popular authors accounted for 4500 (27%) of the books registered on the Summer Reading Challenge website (www.circus-stars.org.uk). The remaining 73% of the books registered covered an amazing range of titles from over 2300 authors, including classics such as *Treasure Island*, *Little Women*, the *Horrible Histories* series and Carnegie Medal winners such as Philip Pullman, Anne Fine and Berlie Doherty. The website also featured 14 author spotlight videos, and authors such as Malorie Blackman and Cressida Cowell have played a huge part in interacting with children and answering their questions.

Maggie O'Farrell, novelist and mother says:

"I'll come clean straight away: I'm a bit of an evangelist when it comes to the Summer Reading Challenge. We've done it in our house since my son was tiny; it's as much a part of our summers as sun cream and paddling pools. Saul has always loved books and becomes so obsessed by certain stories that he can't talk about anything else while he works his way through them. Reading by himself, however, has been more problematic for him and a recent diagnosis of dyslexia came as no surprise. This year's Summer Reading Challenge was a huge watershed for him: it got him reading on his own. Within the carefully encouraging

structure of the scheme, he was able to choose books that partnered words with illustrations (dyslexics can be intimidated by big blocks of text) and it was nothing short of incredible to see his confidence build as he worked his way towards his medal. The SRC is a wonderful initiative: what could be better than getting our children into libraries? I can't recommend it highly enough. My son has always been a listener but now he's also a reader."

Saul, aged 8, Edinburgh says:

"I love the Summer Reading Challenge; it's something I look forward to as part of the summer holidays. I do it every year. The cardboard circus stage they gave us this year was great and the hologram card was really good. The Summer Reading Challenge gets to you read towards something - the medal and the certificate. I've kept all mine. I chose my own books as I like the free range to decide on your own books and sometimes the librarians help me. I am dyslexic and dyspraxic and I think the Summer Reading Challenge is really good for people with these: since doing it, I've found it easier to read."

Saul's six recommendations:

Tintin and the Lake of Sharks - Hergé
Asterix the Gaul - René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo
Asterix and Cleopatra - René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo
Cartoon Kid - Jeremy Strong
Mr Majeika - Humphrey Carpenter
Horrible Histories: Bloody Scotland - Terry Deary

Joanna Briscoe, novelist and mother says:

"This is a truly wonderful scheme, and more urgently needed than ever. Its success this year speaks volumes. Reading is one of the most intense and magical experiences of childhood, and I would hate a generation of children to lose out on this. Getting children to read sometimes requires extra help, and at a time when libraries are suffering such cuts, it's all the more inspiring that this scheme exists and is flourishing. It's a fun, exciting and original way to approach reading for children. Computer games, a recession and library cuts all mean that this scheme is vital to our children's cultural lives".

Theo, aged 11, London says:

'It was raining for half our holiday, and it was brilliant to have good books to read, and to have this challenge. I worked out I read over three thousand pages! I beat everyone in my family with the most pages read. For once, I didn't miss my X-Box! I thought they were really great books. They're the top books and series I'd recommend for people my age.'

Theo's six recommendations:

The Passage - Justin Cronin
I Am Number Four - Pittacus Lore
The Cherub series - Robert Muchamore
The Percy Jackson series - Nick Riordan
The Enemy - Charlie Higson
The Hunger Games series - Suzanne Collins

**For further information please contact Fiona McMorrough or Jessica Axe at FMCM
on 0207 405 7422 or fionam@fmcm.co.uk; jessica@fmcm.co.uk**

Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It specializes in helping libraries make more social impact through reading. It is funded by the Arts Council. (www.readingagency.org.uk)

- 97% of UK library authorities took part in this year's Summer Reading Challenge. See www.summmerreadingchallenge.org.uk for professional support materials provided. For more information about Summer Reading Challenge volunteering opportunities for young people, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk/young/volunteering
- The Circus Stars website for children supported the Challenge with games, author blogs, children's messageboard and live "book choice help" from real librarians: www.circus-stars.org.uk. A link to www.storiesfromtheweb.org provided children with on-line reviewing opportunities and a further range of reader development activities.
- The Summer Reading Challenge in Scotland was sponsored by Tesco Bank
- A full range of individual case studies, including photos and videos of volunteer Louis Howell, are available on request
- Book borrowing lists from individual local authorities can also be supplied if necessary