Running the Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge is about reading for the pleasure of reading. Stories are important because they nourish us and broaden our thinking. Librarians and all those involved in the huge success of the Summer Reading Challenge know how important this is and seek to change lives one book at a time."

Lauren Child, Author, Illustrator, and former Waterstones Children’s Laureate

“The Summer Reading Challenge is a sign post pointing the way to an enduring relationship between schools and libraries.”

Baroness Estelle Morris

Volunteer managed and/or run libraries
The Reading Agency is supportive of both volunteer/community run and volunteer/community managed libraries, which work alongside the UK public library services.

Ethos of the Summer Reading Challenge
The Summer Reading Challenge is about encouraging and providing opportunities for children to “read for pleasure” rather than a focus on “teaching reading” or reading instruction.

Reading for pleasure is recognised as an important influence on young people’s life chances and in recent years there have been many reports and initiatives to reinforce this.

Research shows that taking part in the Challenge can:

- Increase children’s confidence and enjoyment of reading
- Open up reading choices
- Offer opportunities for children to share their reading experience
- Raise the status of reading as a creative activity
Things we ask you to do if you’re running the Summer Reading Challenge

Free to access

- A principle of taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge is that it is free to access, so you may not charge parents/carers/children to take part or charge for the core materials (collector folder and sticker, certificate, medal etc.) or incentives received for completing books.

- You may charge for library events to cover the costs of activities/materials.

- Some library services have also chosen to sell the Summer Reading Challenge kit bags; we recommend a price point of £1.25 per bag, which approximately covers the cost of the bag plus one core pack.

Safeguarding children

- It is essential that volunteer staff have appropriate training around safeguarding children.

- Volunteer staff must meet the requirements around safeguarding children which we would expect of the statutory library UK library network (DBS disclosure barring service checks and safeguarding children training).

- This should also include training around the safety of children online.

- If you require information about these areas, please contact your local authority for training opportunities.

Local delivery partnership - collaborative ways of working with public libraries

- Volunteer run and managed libraries should, where possible offer the same incentives, and use the same start and finish dates as the authority in which they are based. This is important so messaging in schools and local press is consistent.

- Please don’t contact schools to visit or promote the Challenge without first checking with the local library service. This is important because if a public library service is organising pre-or post-summer holiday school visits or has a working relationship with the local SLS provider (for which schools pay a subscription), it’s for the local service to lead on this in the first instance. The Reading Agency can provide contact details for your local Summer Reading Challenge coordinators.

Quality of delivery

We ask all participating libraries to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding and we ask you to confirm your agreement when you place your order. This document will be available in December when the order information for the following year’s Challenge is released.

Signing the MOU will also give you access to a wide range of online resources to support you in running and enhancing the Summer Reading Challenge locally.

For training, the best option is that the community run/managed library volunteers are offered training alongside the local authority library service. This is happening in several areas.
Ordering materials
The order form is available in January each year through The Reading Agency website.

Some people are asking us about funding or grants towards free Summer Reading Challenge materials. We’re afraid we can’t help. For now, we’re expecting people running different kinds of libraries to purchase the materials at the same price as the public library services and in the same size packs.

Most items are in packs of 100’s. This is often too big a pack size for small community libraries, so we’re encouraging you to collaborate with other volunteer managed libraries in the same area as that may provide economies of scale e.g. by sharing packs of materials.

Please note, all our costs are net, so we have to add VAT.

Book stock
- Poor book stock and guidance can easily put children off reading, so this is an area where we hope you will get support from your local public library service if you need it.
- The Reading Agency has useful free information and resources including Chatterbooks packs for year round reading groups for children: www.chatterbooks.org.uk
- The Book Sorter on our children’s website can help children choose books based on recommendations from other children. They can also leave messages and book recommendations themselves. The website is re-skinned in May to reflect the new Summer Reading theme and reverts back to the generic look in October.

Evaluation
At The Reading Agency we are working with the library networks to see how best we can capture everyone’s data, and whether we include that regionally or by type of library. We will update information as decisions are taken with the public library network.

Finally, we’re passionately committed to doing all we possibly can to support people in every kind of community, and to working towards a fairer society by helping people become confident readers; we look forward to working with you. We’d welcome feedback from community libraries that are experiencing any difficulties accessing relevant materials or training.

Useful links:
readingagency.org.uk/children/quick-guides/summer-reading-challenge/
readingagency.org.uk/children/
locality.org.uk/ Locality is the national network of community-led organisations, working together