

*Reflections on Reading: Benjamin Hulme-Cross

THE PLEASURE OF READING

NEWSFLASH: reading is simply not pleasurable for some people!

As teachers, librarians, parents and writers, many of us are aware of the long-term benefits to a child of nurturing in them a love of reading, or at the very least a sense of reading being pleasurable. Report after report from governments, education agencies, literacy charities and even UNESCO reminds us that children who read for pleasure are statistically likely to grow into adults with more curious minds, better job prospects and a deeper capacity for empathy than those who do not. So we steer children towards reading challenges, we restrict screen-time, we dress up for World Book Day and we worry about whether reading is seen as too girly by the boys, too nerdy by the cool kids, or plain hard work by those who struggle a little with the mental processing of words.

Yet there is nothing wrong with the reality that sitting down and decoding combinations of letters is seen as a bit of a chore by some, just as stacking dishes is not everyone's idea of a good time. The truth is that for most of us, the act of reading is not pleasurable in itself. The pleasure comes from the way what we read stimulates our imagination. Who doesn't want to imagine themselves at the heart of the most exciting story ever told? Who doesn't want to learn more about their heroes? Who doesn't want to laugh out loud?

Some of the books I write are intended to be read by young people who find reading difficult. In a way they're a tough crowd, but time and again I hear from people who say that they don't like reading but they did like a story I wrote. And that's more than good enough for me! Kids who don't like running will still do it to get to the ice-cream van.

These days the array of books for young people published each year is simply vast. From hilarious adventure stories, to exquisitely illustrated non-fiction books to profoundly original fictional masterpieces, there has never been so much on offer. There really is something for everyone. Our jobs at home, in schools, libraries and bookshops, is to put the right reading material in front of the right young people. Let's forget about how they will benefit from reading for pleasure, and think instead about thrilling their imaginations.



Growing up in London, I spent a lot of time sitting on the Underground, daydreaming and reading books. Historical adventures in far-flung lands were always my favourites, and I used to love visiting castles and ruins. After I left home, I lived in Japan for a while and learned all about the Samurai.

Now I've swapped the city for the countryside and as well as reading books I also write stories and plays for young people. The thing I like most about being a writer is playing around with ideas for stories in my head, which is daydreaming really so not much has changed!

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