



News from Whitchurch C of E Primary School

As I write this, we are fresh into the new Autumn term with all the changes that it brings. Last year, I wrote about the 'new' things – new shoes, new school bags, new uniform, new classmates, new class adults, new stationary...and so on and so forth! This is an exciting time in school as we look forward to what the year will bring and talk to the children about the next steps in their learning, the challenges they will face, the chance to learn from new mistakes and the to grab hold of every opportunity presented to them. It is a time to reflect on last year and think about what we didn't do – any opportunities missed – and how we can change that for the coming year and make sure that we embrace every moment when opportunity knocks.

In school this week, we have introduced a new initiative for our Key Stage 2 children – a twenty-minute morning read. This is additional to the usual reading they do in class each day through their literacy and...well...pretty much every other subject! This session is one in which a class adult reads aloud to the class, modelling reading fluency, expression and occasionally pausing to explain a new word or an author's use of literary devices (simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration etc). All of the children, thanks to our amazing PTA – FOWPS (Friends of Whitchurch Primary) who have funded this – have a copy of the book in front of them & follow along as they are read to. Unlike when we are teaching, there is no Q&A in this session; purely the teacher reading aloud to the children.

Research has shown that reading aloud to children helps improve their reading skills. It builds vocabulary by allowing them to encounter new words they may not be able to read themselves, modelling how to pronounce those which are unfamiliar and contextualise through hearing them in the sentence without trying to 'decode' them. In listening to text, the mind concentrates on both the sounds words make and their meaning – this strengthens comprehension. Being read to cultivates active listening skills, allowing us to collect information deeply enough to analyse and reflect on it – & the bonus is that we are learning to listen better – a hugely valuable (and often underdeveloped!) skill. Listening to stories also has a measurable mental & emotional health benefit – it shows we are investing time in their enjoyment, increasing happiness, self-worth and reducing stress. Finally, research shows reading aloud to children improves their reading fluency – meaning they begin to read more effortlessly and allowing them to concentrate on the enjoyment of the book.

As the adults selecting the books for the children to read, we've also had a lovely time! Each teacher copy of the book is annotated for key words to define & literary devices. How fabulous to indulge in reading such amazing books & being allowed the time to do so...that can hardly be defined as work! So far, on popping into these sessions and from the feedback given, the children are thoroughly enjoying their morning read session – there is a focused engagement and silence in each room, with children eagerly waiting for the next section of the story, so they can enjoy the wonderful imagery created and the sense of being transported to another time and place, with incredible characters, emotional rollercoasters, fabulous colours, and all the awe and wonder that stories bring.

