



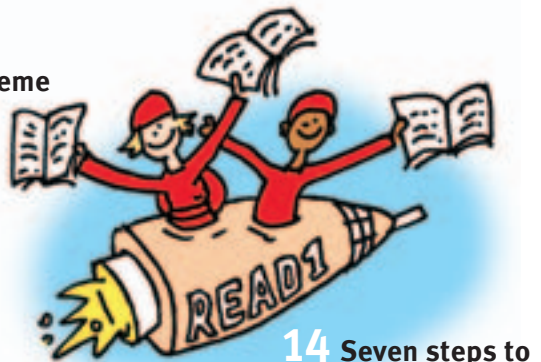
**READ
ANYTIME
ANYWHERE**

a literacy toolkit
for ULRs



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14 Seven steps to reading heaven

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Reading makes a difference

Today’s workplaces demand we process a massive range of written information: we need to understand everything from health and safety notices and building signage to emails and circulars, and many of us must have the skills to read reports, understand technical documents and research online.

In addition, we all need to be able to ‘read’ situations and people, recognise rhetoric and see through persuasive writing, and understand other people’s points of view – all skills that we hone through reading.

Reading develops our English skills, whether or not English is our first language. There are other important benefits, too. Adults who regularly read for pleasure are better prepared for life’s ups and downs, according to research for Quick Reads, the publishing initiative that supports emergent adult readers.

Adults who read for half an hour a week are 52 per cent more likely to feel socially included than those who haven’t, 57 per cent more likely to

have a greater awareness of other cultures and 72 per cent more likely to possess greater community spirit.

By contrast, adults with lower literacy, language and numeracy skills are most likely to end up in low-paid, low grade work; twice as likely to have been made redundant or sacked from their first job; and four times more likely to have known long-term unemployment first-hand.

For all of these reasons and more, many UNISON branches have been running Reading Ahead (in its original guise of the Six Book Challenge), promoting Quick Reads, working with their local libraries and setting up workplace reading groups.

There is a huge appetite out there. In our Skilled For Work survey of UNISON members, a quarter of the respondents said they wanted to improve their literacy skills, more than a third admitted they found it hard to read longer documents and one in eight revealed they didn’t relish speaking in groups.



JASON SENIOR, REDPIX

Learning and Organising Services have put together this toolkit to help encourage more branches to set up reading initiatives that can help address all these issues and more. We hope the combination of practical tips, useful resources and detailed case studies will inspire you to start your own workplace reading group or Reading Ahead challenge. You will be making a big difference to your members’ lives when you do.

How to get ahead with Reading Ahead

Challenge your members to pick six reads and review them in a diary. They get more confident with reading and your branch raises its profile. Everyone's a winner!

It's pretty straightforward to run Reading Ahead in your workplace. All you do is challenge your members and co-workers to finish six reads (books, poems, newspaper/magazine/online articles) and record, rate and review them in a diary supplied by The Reading Agency (which organises the programme every year).

Readers who complete the challenge on time can enter The Reading Agency prize draw – a trip to London for the winner and e-readers for the runners-up. Organisations can win awards or even a visit from a best-selling author.

“Reading Ahead is not complicated but it does take time to get it all up and running: it took us about three months to put it all together, but now that we have done it once we are going to be in a much stronger position next time,” says UNISON learning rep Evan Peck, who encouraged Newcastle City Branch to run the scheme for the first time in 2015.

The branch partnered with its local library to run the challenge, so it was open to council staff and members of the community. Around 100 people in total enrolled in spring 2015, with two-thirds of them completing by the summer.

“The general feedback is that those who have taken part have enjoyed the challenge, and, more importantly, lots are now giving themselves the time to read, which they had not prioritised before,” explains Newcastle City Branch Education Officer Wendy Aitman.

“One reader got her eight-year-old daughter involved and they did the challenge together, and someone else commented that they had been reading to their children but had not read anything for themselves until the challenge and would now carry on.”

Running Reading Ahead has really helped the branch increase its visibility

in the workplace, Wendy says. “All the publicity and information has been positive, as we have shown another side of UNISON that many people still don't know about,” she says.

“As a result, we have had direct contact with those we may not have been able to reach before and had an increase in the number of enquiries on learning and about being a ULR,” she says.

The branch and the library gave UNISON goody-bags to every challenge finisher, with a mug and pens from the library and a Quick Read title courtesy of the branch. The branch also donated a Kindle Fire in a prize draw for all branch finishers (branch prizes can really help incentivise participants).

“Working with the library opens up the possibility of more people hearing about the challenge and taking part,” Evan says.

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

top tip

Create a buzz: Reading Ahead is a fantastic way of building a sense of community in the workplace.

Confidence boost

Mark Bailey had never finished a book as an adult before he discovered Quick Reads through his Merseylearn tutor, who then encouraged him to enrol on Reading Ahead (when it was still called the Six Book Challenge).

“My attitude to reading has changed: I feel more confident and I like dipping in and out of magazines and newspapers,” says the Merseytravel cleaner. “I can find out more about things that interest me such as classic cars and football.”

Taking the challenge helped Mark pass his Functional Skills English Level 1 exam. “I would advise anyone who wants to improve their reading to find out more about Reading Ahead and join in,” he says.



Building your branch through books

Running Reading Ahead in the workplace can help you build a bigger and more effective branch.

All the extra publicity that you can generate by running Reading Ahead can only be good for the branch.

Posters and workplace noticeboards, articles in staff newsletters and magazines and updates on your branch website about the initiative – all spelling out UNISON’s leadership/ involvement – can significantly raise your branch’s profile.

But that’s not all. Organising a launch event to get everyone talking about the challenge, inviting an author to talk to participants and throwing a celebration event for finishers will all help raise awareness not only of the challenge but of all aspects of the union among members and potential members alike.

And visibility is vital for engagement and recruitment: when potential members can see you are organising



“When potential members see you are organising something interesting and enjoyable they can take part in, that increases their chances of engaging in other branch activity”

something interesting and enjoyable they can take part in, that increases their chances of engaging them in other branch activity.

Literacy initiatives can also help change and update people’s

perceptions about what the union is and how it can work for them.

Instead of thinking about the branch simply as somewhere to go when they run into problems at work, members and potential members realise that UNISON can also offer them a wide range of learning opportunities they might not have known about before.

A higher profile on a broader range of issues can also help you connect with potential new activists. People who might not usually attend branch



meetings may well be interested in joining a reading scheme.

Once you get the chance to connect with them about branch activity around reading, they may turn out to be interested in becoming a Reading Ahead champion, and after that a union learning rep. And many ULRs then put themselves forward to become workplace reps and stewards.

Reading initiatives are also very effective ways of engaging with new employers. It would be a hard-hearted boss who refused union access to the workplace to organise an enjoyable reading scheme that would only have positive benefits for everyone taking part.

How to do it: Reading Ahead

- 1 Start with your branch education committee or ULR team: get everyone excited about Reading Ahead.
- 2 Run a launch event to raise the profile of the scheme and get everyone interested in taking part. Invite your employers to take part and see how they can help promote it to all staff. Think about inviting a local author to help raise the profile of the launch: your library and/or The Reading Agency may be able to help you do this.
- 3 Talk to your local library and see what help they can offer – and how you can help them in return by demonstrating the value of the service they provide.
- 4 Order your campaign resources from The Reading Agency. There are promotional packs to suit different numbers of participants that all include reading diaries, plus you can buy mugs, pens, tote bags, wristbands, notepads and keyrings as well.
- 5 Use social media, online forums and workplace intranets to remind everyone of the scheme and encourage participants to keep going. Tweet using the hashtag #ReadingAhead and the handle @readingagency
- 6 Organise a celebration event when you finish. Invite a high-profile guest speaker to hand out certificates to completers. Take some good photographs to record it for your branch newsletter, UNISON’s learning publications or unionlearn’s *Learning Rep* magazine.

www.readingahead.org.uk

top tip

Use your local library. They will be delighted to help, and you will be supporting UNISON’s libraries campaign

Go your own way

Reading Ahead is designed to be flexible, so do what works best for your workplace. Six reads in six months – the rest is up to you.

Six Books for UNISON

Six Books for UNISON features suggestions that address issues of concern to many union members, such as the role of public services, the impact of austerity and the way power works. Here are half a dozen from the list, with reviews by UNISON members.

Call The Midwife, by Jennifer Worth

“A great example of how far we have come and the necessity of good public services.”



Animal Farm, by George Orwell

“Easy read and a good introduction to power.”

Delete This At Your Peril: The Bob Servant Emails, by Neil Forsyth

“If ever a book would spark interest in reading, it's this.”

The Folded Man, by Matt Hill

“A disabled man tries to negotiate the near-future, when austerity has obliterated public services and the city is a lawless free for all.”



Girl Meets Boy, by Ali Smith

“Quirky and thought-provoking, it challenges homophobia and capitalism but is heart-warming at the same time.”

Harry's Last Stand, by Harry Leslie Smith

“Short, clear, beautifully written, passionate and moving.”



Find the full list of suggestions on **Learning.UNISON**

Mood-boosting Books

how to

Reading more is not just good for our literacy levels: it is scientifically proven to help us feel better. If you are feeling under strain, spending just six minutes reading can reduce your stress levels by up to 68 per cent, according to a 2009 study by the University of Sussex.

Reading can also help when we're coping with illness, dealing with depression or struggling to feel positive during the long dark nights when winter comes. That's where the Reading Agency's Reading Well Mood-boosting Books lists really come in handy, since they feature novels, non-fiction and poetry that readers have all recommended as uplifting.

They include well-known novels such as Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾* and best-sellers such as *A Street Cat Named Bob* by James Bowen.

In addition, there are less familiar but equally uplifting titles such as the once-forgotten 1930 fairy story, *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* by Winifred Watson.

Find the full lists at <http://reading-well.org.uk/books/mood-boosting-books>



top tip

Need more reads?
Take a look at <http://readingahead.org.uk/find-a-read> to search by reading level or subject matter

Using shorter texts

It's easy to use smaller texts such as magazine articles or poems as part of the challenge.

Offer readers a selection of popular magazines with interesting articles. Make a range available covering hobbies, travel, lifestyle and sport.

There are many good anthologies of poetry. Your local library will be able to suggest some options and advise on the reading levels they would require.

A good place to start:
Essential Poems from the Staying Alive Trilogy, edited by Neil Astley;

100 poems about love and loss, hope and belief, war and death, family and memory crammed into a pocketbook travel companion. This is an anthology that many people may know as it was a World Book Night selection in 2015 and features on one of the Reading Agency's Mood-boosting Books lists.

Icebreakers

There are many different ways you can help people warm up at the beginning of a Reading Ahead session or book group meeting.

Story cubes

Story cubes are sets of dice with icons or images on each face that are designed to inspire a story in different ways.

The icons are deliberately open to interpretation. If you roll a fish, you could start a seaside story, or choose a character who is a big fish in a small pond, or open on a trawler in a huge storm: start with ‘Once upon a time ...’ and after that there are no limits.

Keep everything moving quickly: if people start thinking hard in a bid to come up with something brilliant, the game will lose momentum and players will feel inhibited.

Using story cubes may feel a little strange at first, since as we grow older,



many of us lose the creativity we all enjoyed as children. But people will soon start laughing and enjoying the tale they are all working together to tell.

You can use story cubes in lots of different ways to get people’s creative juices flowing. In a group, you could go round the circle with each member rolling their own story cube to pick up from where the last player left off by adding a new line or paragraph or event based on the icon they have thrown.

Or you could roll all the dice in one go at the beginning and let people work out a way of linking all the icons together by taking it in turns to pick one that inspires them. You can also work in pairs or groups of three, using the same approach of taking it in turns to roll the dice and move the story on.

You can buy Rory’s Story Cubes online or download the smartphone/tablet app, which is available for both iOS and Android devices.

Opening lines

What makes these opening lines effective? People do not need to know where they come from or try to guess: the idea is to get everyone talking about their first impressions of the style and content.

Choose your own opening sentences at www.openingsentences.com. Or download the Quick Reads first line/cover image quiz from the BBC Skillswise site: www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/learners/quick-reads

- **It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.** (Jane Austen, *Pride And Prejudice*)
- **Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.** (Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*)
- **My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973.** (Alice Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*)
- **The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.** (L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*)

Anagrams

How many names of famous authors, living and dead, can you find in these anagrams?

- Tap Majors Teens _____
- Get Pink Hens _____
- In Mink Saab _____
- See Shark Pea _____
- Bold Ninety _____
- A Hard Doll _____
- A Sadly Month _____
- Will Withdraw Rooms _____
- Checkers Island _____
- Rich Hag Is At Tea _____

Anagram solutions: James Patterson, Stephen King, Dylan Thomas, William Wordworth, Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie, Roald Dahl, Iain M Banks, Shakespeare, Enid Blyton.

More suggestions

- **How do we choose the books and magazines we read?** Go round the group to find out how members make their choices: recommendations from friends, reviews, the image on the cover, special offers in a shop?
- **What do we read at the moment and how?** In pairs, ask people to discuss their current reading habits – books, newspapers, magazines, comics, online – it all counts: on your own or with your children, on your lunch-break or last thing at night?
- **Passion swap.** Divide the group into two smaller groups, or work in pairs. Each person takes a turn to talk about something they feel passionate about for a set short period of time (eg, one or two minutes on a phone timer). Music, hobbies, sports, TV, crafts, DIY, cooking, travelling, collecting ... whatever they love to do, and what they get out of it.

Make a splash ... and go for a big finish

Organising fun and enjoyable events to launch Reading Ahead and to celebrate when everyone finishes will help you get the most out of the challenge.

UNISON's De Montfort University (DMU) Branch came up with an original way of launching Reading Ahead in 2015: they invited local workplaces also running the challenge to join staff, academics and students to read an inspirational poem together at a special lunchtime event on campus.

They all read a line each of Tony Walsh's poem *Until You Try*, which appropriately finishes with the line: "Try passion, try living, try reading."

Everyone who took part enjoyed what was a memorable day. "I think everyone went away from here with a smile

"When participants have made the effort to finish their six reads within the deadline, it's good to mark their achievements with a special occasion"

on their face," said Andrew Jennison, who has recently stepped down from his role as ULR at the university.

By coming up with an original way to launch the challenge, the branch secured online coverage from the university, The Reading Agency, UNISON and unionlearn, as well as boosting its profile on the ground.

A resounding celebration event is just as important as an impactful launch. When participants have made the effort to finish their six reads within the deadline, it's good to mark their achievements with a special occasion.

Everyone who completes the challenge should receive a certificate at the celebration. And make sure you get a good photograph of the whole group with their certificates. If the local newspaper or The Reading Agency is attending the event, one of them may well supply a professional

photographer. If not, find out if you have any keen photographers in the branch who could help out.

And once you get the pictures, share them wherever you can: the UNISON ULF e-bulletin, ULRnet, branch website/newsletter, staff newsletter and via social media: a Facebook post or a Tweet with a picture usually attracts more interest.

It's a good idea to invite a high-profile guest speaker who can hand out certificates to all your finishers. When Derbyshire UNISON planned their celebration in October 2015, the branch not only invited a local poet but also included a performance by their recently-formed UNISON Choir.

When inviting authors, remember to point out that attending your event will help them attract a new audience. And ask them to sign some of their books to offer as prizes/rewards.

JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE

top tip

Use your links to The Reading Agency, your employer and UNISON to promote your events and the achievements of everyone who takes part.

Event checklist

- Invite a guest of honour to your Reading Ahead launch or celebration. In local government, it could be the mayor of your council; in the NHS, a senior manager of your Trust; or you could invite a local author.
- Organise refreshments for the number of people you estimate will take part.
- Organise someone to take photographs to help promote the event in staff newsletters, UNISON bulletins, etc. Make sure pictures are taken on a good quality camera, using the highest quality setting (usually 300dpi) so that they reproduce well in print and online.
- Bring a quiz that is related to reading, eg anagrams of the names of famous authors.
- Grow a book tree. Use an A1 sheet of paper to print or draw the outline of a tree with many branches and hang it on a wall at your event. Supply post-it notes for people to write down the name of a favourite book that they can then stick as a 'leaf' on the tree.

Seven steps to reading heaven

The heroes and heroines of many famous stories are often on a quest of some kind. Dorothy is trying to escape from Oz and return home to Kansas. Harry Potter is on a mission to defeat Lord Voldemort. In Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, Hamlet has vowed to avenge his father's murder.

When you, your ULRs and the rest of the branch team set out on a Reading Ahead challenge, you too are on a quest of your own: to encourage the maximum number of people to join you on the journey and discover the joys of more stories, memoirs, poems and magazine features.

Whenever you launch your reading quest, you can reach for the stars by following the journey mapped out here. Three ... two ... one ... we have lift-off!

Enrol your participants

- Issue their reading diaries



Make a plan

- Sort out your funding
- Check out resources



Launch your campaign

- Run a launch event
- Promote Reading Ahead



Encourage everyone to keep going

- Keep in touch
- Feedback and share comments

Celebrate your achievements

- Hold a celebration/certification event
- Share photos, write up the event



Evaluate what you've done

- Build on what you have started
- Get ready for your next challenge!

Diary dates

Brighten your journey with a poem on National Poetry Day (8 October)
www.forwardartsfoundation.org

Mind your head on World Mental Health Day (10 October) with the Reading Agency's Reading Well: Books on Prescription list
www.reading-well.org.uk

Snap up one of the latest Quick Reads (always launched in February)
www.readingagency.org.uk/quickreads

Collect great books to distribute for World Book Night (23 April)
www.worldbooknight.org

Run reading activities and events during Learning at Work Week in May
www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learningatworkweek/

Maintain your momentum

It's essential to help your participants keep going and access all the funding you can.

1 Involve key people in your workplace. Not only your ULRs but all your branch reps, the manager of your learning centre, senior staff in HR, training and development and occupational health and senior managers. The more people you engage, the more effective you will be.

2 Reach out to external partners. Your local library will be able to access resources and offer staff expertise to help you make the best of the challenge. Contact other local UNISON branches in your region about running the challenge together.

3 Publicise your timetable. Some workplaces run the challenge from January to June, others choose to start in September, while some design their schedules around big dates such as the launch of Quick Reads (February), World Book Day (March), World Book Night (April) or Learning at Work Week (May). Choose what

will work best in your workplace with an end-date participants can aim for. Six months from launch to finish is usually about right to maintain momentum. Congratulate early completers and regularly remind everyone else how long they have left via email, text, Twitter and Facebook – whatever works. Keep in touch with participants via email/online forums: encourage people by sharing their reviews (with permission) or offer suggestions for their next read.

4 Take the opportunity to launch/relaunch a bookswap shelf or reading area. Use it to hold short book chats.

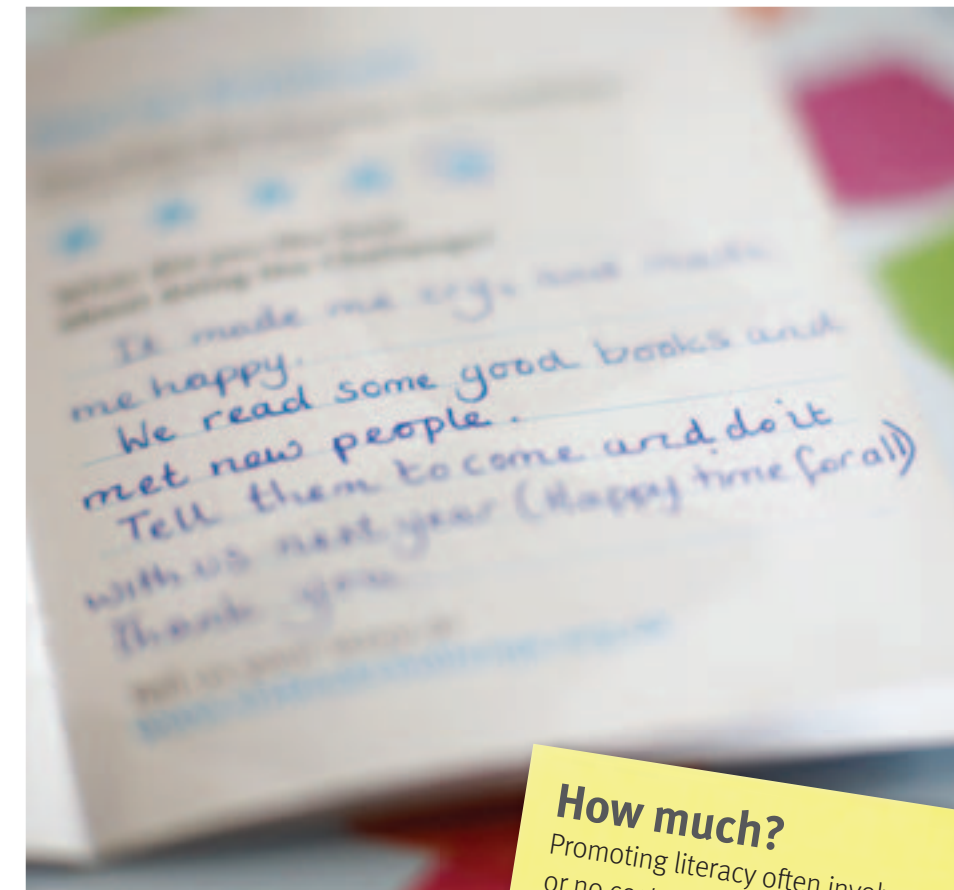
top tip
Ask people to become Reading Ahead Champions in the workplace. Promoting the challenge could encourage them to think about becoming a UNISON learning rep.

Funding checklist

- Ask the branch to cover the costs of refreshments at your Reading Ahead event or to pay for promotional materials available from The Reading Agency.
- Contact your regional learning lead to find out if they can identify any potential funding sources.
- Contact Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to see if there are funds available from the Inclusive Learning Project to support Reading Ahead events or purchase resources.
Email: learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

5 Encourage everyone to use their reading diaries. They are an essential part of the challenge, as they help participants improve their writing skills and sharpen their judgements. But only distribute them to people you are sure are committed to taking part, and ensure you have their vital registration information. "When participants start using their diaries, at first they often write quite short entries, but as they grow in confidence through the duration of the challenge, they start writing more detailed entries that show real insights into the books they have read," says East Midlands Regional Learning and Development Organiser (RLDO) Gavin McCann.

6 Use incentives. Reading Ahead-branded freebies will encourage people to keep going. Organise local incentives – eg free gym sessions, local cinema tickets, or vouchers for a local restaurant. Set up author visits, library tours or quiz nights. Offer prizes such as books, e-readers or tablets. Use social media to congratulate finishers: Facebook posts and Tweets gain more traction with a photo (and use a Reading Ahead/UNISON background!).



JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE

How much?

Promoting literacy often involves little or no cost. A book group only requires a room to be booked and a title to be chosen and you're up and running. For larger-scale events such as Reading Ahead launches or author visits, your branch can often fund promotional materials and refreshments, and you can also talk to your regional learning lead or Learning and Organising Services at UNISON Centre.

7 Support your participants. Encourage more confident participants to help less confident people to complete their reading diary entries, and offer alternative suggestions to anyone struggling to keep going with any particular title: there is always something else they will enjoy more.

Extending your reach

There are many programmes that can help you promote reading in your workplace and encourage everyone to read with all the family at home.

Breaking down the barriers with Quick Reads

When people say books are difficult, boring or just not for them, it's often because they have trouble with reading. Quick Reads are titles specifically written to engage emergent adult readers who have missed out on the pleasures of reading up to now.

Every year, the initiative publishes six new titles by big-name authors, all of them specifically written for adults less confident of their reading skills.

And they work. 95 per cent of respondents to a recent survey said

that Quick Reads were effective in improving learners' literacy skills, and 54 per cent said that at least half of their learners enrol on other courses after reading Quick Reads.

Originally launched by a group of publishing houses ten years ago, Quick Reads is now part of The Reading Agency.

The six new titles for 2017 include a special Quick Reads edition of one of the best-selling self-help books of all time: Susan Jeffers'

Big night for books
World Book Night is the annual event on 23 April, UNESCO International Day of the Book, when union learning reps and other registered volunteers give out free books to share their love of reading with people who don't own books or read regularly for pleasure.
You can apply to be a volunteer on the World Book Night website: www.worldbooknight.org



landmark publication *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*.

The other five are a gritty new novel by Dreda Say Mitchell; a romantic novel following the fortunes of a Syrian refugee on a remote Scottish island by Jenny Colgan; Amanda Craig's re-imagining of the Beauty and the Beast fable; best-selling dyslexic writer Rowan Coleman's Poldark-themed tale; and a collection of short stories from top-drawer crime writers.

Find out more:
www.readingagency.org.uk/quickreads



Family reading

Reading to your children is always going to be a good thing, but to convince them that being a reader will make a positive difference to their lives, they need to see the adults around them reading too, and enjoying it as well.

This kind of family reading is a great way in for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners as well as other under-confident readers.

Local libraries have a great range of picture books for younger readers, and if your local library is taking part in the annual Summer Reading Challenge, they will have lots of good ideas about possible books your children will enjoy.

But family reading should also include your older children, which is great because some of the most exciting contemporary fiction aimed at young adults – such as *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins or *The Divergent Trilogy* by Veronica Roth – is also enormously enjoyed by adults of all ages.

The themes of many of these young adult books and the issues they raise should also make for interesting family discussions. Just remember to follow the same rules about respecting everyone's experience and point of view as you would in your workplace group!



DAVID LINDSAY

top tip

Ask your regional learning team and/or Learning and Organising Services in UNISON Centre if they have any Quick Reads you could use for Reading Ahead, your reading group, bookswap shelf or learning centre.

Book for free

Books for Free rescues unwanted books so they can be redistributed by Healthy Planet throughout its 30-plus Books for Free centres on high streets across the country and Books for Free stands at festivals.

Find out more at:
<https://beta.healthyplanet.org/what-we-do/sustainable-community/books-for-free>

A new chapter with a reading group

Running a reading group at work gives people the chance to get together to discuss their ideas, sharpen their critical thinking and practise speaking in public among friendly faces.

UNISON learning rep Mayank Pandit launched a reading group at the Leicester City Council transport depot in autumn 2013.

“When I first heard about the Six Book Challenge (now Reading Ahead) two years ago, I talked to the librarian at St Barnabas Library, which is a five-minute walk from where I work,” Mayank recalls.

“We came up with the idea of a reading group, so I advertised in the building asking if members and non-members would be interested in joining a group and about 20 enrolled in October 2013.”

For the first six months, Mayank borrowed Quick Reads titles from the library, getting enough copies of each book for everyone to read their own, and collected feedback on what the reading group members liked and didn’t like.

One of the most popular titles was former SAS soldier Andy McNab’s

Today Everything Changes, which tells the story of how the one-time young offender with poor literacy skills learned to read as a teenage army recruit.

Mayank then used the momentum generated from the reading group to launch the Six Book Challenge in March 2014, enrolling 36 participants in the first week, including some colleagues from the social care department, who share the building with the council’s transport staff.

Another ten participants had enrolled on the programme by the end of June, when The Reading Agency told Mayank that they were bringing a very well-known author to help celebrate the success of the challenge.

“As most of the participants of the reading group had read his book, they were thrilled when Andy McNab arrived”

Even though the writer’s SAS career meant Mayank could not reveal their identity in advance, he thought the visit would be a success given the popularity of one particular army-related Quick Read in the book group.

But he didn’t imagine the event, held in a packed room onsite, would be standing room only by the time the mystery author walked in.

“Everyone was thrilled when the visitor turned out to be Andy McNab, as most of the members of the reading group had read his book,” Mayank

Driver Liz Reed was so excited that she asked Andy to sign her high-vis vest afterwards. “Normally I read romances but I read some of his books as part of the challenge: they’re brilliant,” she says. “He’s better than all the movie stars because he has actually been there, done that, got the T-shirt, but he was down to earth and on our wavelength.”

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



top tip

Apply for funding to buy Quick Reads so you have enough copies to give away to promote Reading Ahead or your book group.

Resources

To help you run Reading Ahead you can order promotional resources from the Reading Agency shop:

- Reading Ahead diaries
- bookmarks
- certificates
- advocacy leaflets
- A3/A4 posters.

Promotional packs come in 50s, 100s, 150s or 300s and if you run out of anything in particular you can order top-up packs.

The larger the quantity you order, the cheaper it works out per participant, so consider teaming up with other branches and libraries to reduce costs.

Check whether LAOS plans to order any packs or if they can link you up with other branches taking part in your area.

Email: LearningAndOrganising@unison.co.uk

You can also order a range of branded incentives, including mugs, pens, keyrings and tote bags.

www.readingagency.org.uk/shop

Running your book group

It's easy to set up a book group in the workplace. All you need is about 45 minutes and a space for everyone to meet and talk about their experience of reading the chosen book, every four to six weeks.

Setting up

Setting up a book group at work can help people to develop their critical thinking, overcome anxieties about speaking in groups or meetings, and improve their ability to read between the lines.

“Being part of a book group in the workplace can build people’s confidence, encourage them to ask questions and help them say Yes to taking part in activity in their branch, their work and their communities,” says UNISON ULF Project Manager Martin Russo.

Decide on a minimum number of people you need to take part. Make face-to-face contact with people you think might be interested. And publicise the group by putting up a poster and adding details on the branch website.

You can borrow books from your local library, or people can use their own. Quick Reads are often a good place to start because they don’t take so much time to finish as a full-length novel.

You can set up an open-ended book group if you already know there are enough people to take part. Or you could kick things off by deciding to read six books and link it in with Reading Ahead.

“Quick Reads are often a good place to start because they don’t take so much time to finish as a full-length novel”



First meeting checklist

- Find a room/book a room
- Organise refreshments.
Can branch or employer help cover costs?
- Get some books
- Choose a suitable time
- Publicise with a poster/notice on branch website/work intranet
- Speak to people and personally invite them to join
- Plan what records you will need to keep, including feedback

Kick off your first meeting by discussing everyone’s current attitudes to reading. Do they read on holiday, occasionally or all the time? Is there anything they find off-putting such as jargon, long words, or particular genres? Do they prefer fiction or non-fiction?



Just a few rules ...

It's worth setting out how the group will be run, just so everyone knows what taking part will and won't be like. So think about:

- How will we pick each book?
- How long will each session be?
- Should we still come if we haven't read or finished the book?
- Who will facilitate the meetings? Same person every time or everyone who wants to on rotation?

Agree a few ground rules for discussion: no interruptions, everyone's opinion is valid, how late is too late.

Set up or promote your reading room, bookshelf or book-swap station.

When you are facilitating/ chairing the meeting, it's good to prepare a few questions to focus the discussion and keep everything flowing nicely. Good jumping-off points include:

- Did the plot keep you interested?
- Were the characters believable/ interesting/sympathetic?
- What was your favourite bit?
- What themes stood out?
- What messages do you take away from the book?
- Would you recommend the book to friends?



top tip

Set up a book review board where people can post their comments about the book if they can't make the meeting. People can also use it to post recommendations.

Pit-stop book group

Really pressed for time? Try a pit-stop book group in your learning centre, by your bookshelf/book-swap station – or anywhere there are books. This way, people write a comment about a book on a post-it note and then stick it on the cover to help other people decide if they would like to try it or not – or add their own review if they disagree.



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Putting the value in evaluation

Evaluating Reading Ahead or your reading group will help you give a more compete experience to your members. It's vital to identify both what works in your workplace and what doesn't – so you can see what just isn't right and what might work if approached in a different way.



JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE

- 1 Keep records. Make a note of how many people take part/complete (Reading Ahead) or how many attend each meeting (reading group) and what books they read or would like to try in future. For more tips, see 'Keeping records' opposite.
- 2 Collect feedback from participants on how their experiences have impacted on their lives and their jobs (eg, improved their self-confidence, encouraged them to speak up in meetings, improved their ability to deal with paperwork, etc.) Use the evaluation checklist

opposite, choosing 'Reading Ahead' or 'the reading group' depending on what you are evaluating.

- 3 Use ULRnet to share experiences and discuss ideas with other branches running reading initiatives.

- 4 Include positive quotes/feedback in branch/staff newsletters and publicity and share them with your employer: demonstrating the impact of your initiative can help you gain further support in future.

top tip

Tell The Reading Agency how many participants have completed Reading Ahead in your workplace to be entered for their awards.

Keeping records

Keeping records of who is taking part in Reading Ahead or your reading group is essential. Numbers and feedback from participants show funders such as the Union Learning Fund how effective union learning is and help The Reading Agency track the success of its initiative.

When you run your launch event, or promote Reading Ahead in any way, make sure you print off/ photocopy enough copies of the Registration Form which you can download from the Reading Ahead Resources section on The Reading Agency website. That way you can encourage people to enrol on the challenge there and then.

Keep all your completed forms somewhere central so that one named person in your branch (such as a ULR, Lifelong Learning Coordinator or Reading Champion) can keep tabs on exactly how many people will be taking part.

Regularly transfer the names of every participant from their individually completed forms to the Participation Record (also

downloadable from the Reading Agency website) so that you can keep an overall record of participants' progress for evaluation purposes.

The Reading Agency will ask you to send in quantitative data on participation by using an online survey. Please also encourage your participants to complete the pre- and post-Reading Ahead surveys available online or in print versions so that the agency can gain a clear picture of the impact of the programme.

The results in your online survey will allow The Reading Agency to decide if you are eligible for one of their awards, which are based on the number of people in your workplace who complete Reading Ahead. Workplaces that run Reading Ahead and mark Learning at Work Week can also enter a national draw to win an author visit, courtesy of Transworld Publishers.



Evaluation form

- 1 What have you most enjoyed about Reading Ahead/the reading group?
- 2 What have you least enjoyed?
- 3 Has taking part changed what you read? If so, how?
- 4 Has taking part changed how much you read? If so, how often do you read now compared to before?
- 5 Has taking part changed your attitude to reading? If so, describe how you feel now compared to before.
- 6 Has Reading Ahead/the reading group improved your self-confidence at work and/or at home? If yes, please include an example.
- 7 If you have any suggestions for improving Reading Ahead/the reading group, please list them here.
- 8 Can we use your feedback in future publicity?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Yes, but don't use my name
 - ☐ No

So what comes next?

Running Reading Ahead, starting a workplace reading group or promoting Quick Reads is just the beginning. You can encourage participants to further improve their English skills on a UNISON course, enrol on Return to Learn or even join a creative writing group.

Start a creative writing group

Newcastle City Branch have started a creative writing group to build on the success of running Reading Ahead for the first time.

Branch rep Anne Clark, who is also a published author as well as a transport planner at the authority, offered to run the group after seeing the branch's commitment to the challenge and promoting literacy.

"We have not been able to run a creative writing group for many years: it was very popular last time and members have been asking us if we could run another one, so Anne's offer was ideal," explains Branch Education Officer Wendy Aitman.

Organised by the branch and run by Anne, the writing group started meeting in October 2015, with the participants deciding how they will organise themselves.

"We hope that the group will evolve into a writers circle in time, and make information available about how members can get their work published too," Wendy says.

"The creative writing group was very popular last time and members have been asking us if we could run another one"

UNISON courses

Many UNISON regions run our effective and successful Return to Learn courses, which can build people's confidence about speaking in groups and critical reading, while developing essential study skills that will support them through any further learning they wish to embark on afterwards – as so many do.

To find out more about Return to Learn, contact your regional learning team.

UNISON also offers a range of courses to help members improve their Functional Skills.

Dealing with Paperwork is designed to help activists who have to read large amounts of information.

Report Writing shows you how to set out information in a logical order using everyday language to produce a simple easy-to-read report.

Find out how to run these courses at your workplace by talking to your regional learning team.

THE READING AGENCY

The Reading Agency is a national charity whose mission is to create and deliver reading opportunities that:

- inspire more people to read more
- encourage people to share their enjoyment of reading with others, and
- celebrate the difference that reading makes to all our lives.

Its work with adults includes Reading Ahead, World Book Night, Reading Well, Reading Groups for Everyone and Quick Reads.

For further information please email: info@readingagency.org.uk

Main site: www.readingagency.org.uk

Online shop: www.readingagency.org.uk/shop

Quick Reads: www.readingagency.org.uk/quickreads

World Book Night: www.worldbooknight.org

To find out more and how to join contact:
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textphone users FREEPHONE **0800 0 967 968**
Lines open: 6am – midnight Monday to Friday,
9am – 4pm Saturday

Email: **LearningAndOrganising@unison.co.uk**

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