



Winter Warmers and Summer Sizzlers

An activity designed to encourage parental involvement in their children's reading

The aims are to:

- encourage reading for pleasure
- support the school message on the importance of reading
- encourage parental involvement in their children's reading
- promote new authors and titles to expand the range of books being read
- show that enthusiasm for reading is just as important as reading ability.

“Research shows that Reading for Pleasure can promote better health and wellbeing, aids in building social connections and relationships with others and is associated with a range of factors that help increase the chances of social mobility” The Reading Agency 2022

The session is designed to inform parents on the benefits of reading and to give them some tools for helping their children enjoy reading more. It should be very informal in nature with the talk to parents being fun as well as informative. Parents often are not aware of the range of books available, but it should also be about showing that reading should be fun and not a chore.

Preparation

- Are you going to target a particular age group? Are you going to invite specific families? Decide how you want this to run and what you as a school want to get out of the event.
- Think about a maximum number to make the event work when sending out invitations. Usually no more than 40 adults is a reasonable number. Space and childcare are the main considerations.
- Pick a date, time and theme, allowing plenty of time for publicity. Do you want it to be during school time either at the beginning or end of the day? Alternatively, you could do it in the early evening when parents may be available after work.
- Do you want other siblings attending? Smaller children may be a distraction but may also add to the ambience.
- Consider tying in the event with other events such as book week, or a parent open day.
- Decide on a location in school and try to make it as intimate as possible, without distractions, decorated appropriately. If doing a summer event, it could be on the field or playground if the weather allows.
- Decide if the children will be dressing up for the event – dressing in pyjamas for a Winter Warmer or shorts / beach wear for a Summer Sizzler
- Provide some refreshments appropriate to the theme, e.g. hot chocolate or fruit kebabs! It all adds to the novelty and makes the event special. Alternatively, send the children home with a goody bag.
- To publicise the event, ask the pupils to write an invitation to their family member asking them to join them for stories in school. This can be an exercise in persuasive writing. Ask them to include RSVPs to give you an idea of expected numbers.
- Promote the event on the school website, notice board or newsletter.
- Spread the word in the playground.
- Staffing is a consideration. You will need staff to do an activity with the children while the talk is taking place as well as for serving refreshments and meeting and greeting.

On the day

- Make sure you have enough chairs for parents to sit on with enough for the numbers expected.
- When parents and children are reading, you may want to make it more informal by using PE mats and bean bags for seating. Some adults will still need proper chairs however so a few of these should be available.
- If a summer event and weather permitting, you could ask people to bring a picnic blanket and sit outside for the reading together element.
- Position a couple of tables to display books at the front so that people can choose a book. Make sure there is plenty of room for browsing.
- A member of the school staff needs to be ready to launch the event, briefly explaining the purpose of the session.
- The chosen speaker will briefly explain their role, plug the value of sharing books with children, read and recommend a variety of books appropriate for the age group.
- Time is allowed to provide an opportunity to browse and share and possibly borrow items at the end. The logistics of this need planning. Often all that is required is a simple note of child and title of book borrowed.
- If books are from the SLS, ask that these are issued to the school first. Books can then stay in school for later use.
- Generally it works best if the talk to the adults is first lasting about 20 minutes, followed by families sharing books together along with refreshments. Children will need to be occupied elsewhere while the talk is taking place – staffing needs to be planned in for this and an activity e.g. making bookmarks
- A brief, simple questionnaire asking for feedback on the event and suggestions for future sessions/themes etc can be circulated at this point.

General comments

- If the children in the target age group are to have a special time with their adult family member, ideally any siblings of different ages should be excluded where possible. This has implications for the timing of the event. For instance, if it is held during the last period of the school day, other school age family members will be occupied and can go home with their parent as usual at the end of school. Some schools have provided a crèche for preschool children for the period of the activity, but where this is not practicable you have to allow for the presence of babies and toddlers.
- Another point relevant to the timing of the event is the possible exclusion of working parents. Early evening sessions, e.g. 6 to 7 pm, allow parents to join their children at the end of the working day. With sufficient notice this has not generally been seen as a problem within schools.
- The target audience can be varied and this will influence the choice of theme, as will the season. Examples of successful events include Teddy Bear's Picnic for Year R, bedtime stories for Year 1- 2, Summer Sizzlers or Winter Warmers for Year 3, Cool Reads for Yrs 5-6.
- The ideal size of group to maintain an intimate story session is a class size.
- Be aware of other events which may compete for parents' attention, such as school open days etc which may result in a poor turnout. To make it easier for people to attend, either the first session of the day eg 'Books for Breakfast', 9 to 9.45 am, or the last period of the day means parents can come along without an extra trip to school. These considerations can increase attendance.
- For events taking place during the school day, consideration needs to be given to children who have no adult coming to join them. Children could be withdrawn from class if their parent / carer is attending the event. Otherwise, they could stay in class to have special activities and refreshments. This maintains the special nature of the activity, but avoids children missing out if they have no one joining them.

Conclusion

This format has been very successful in a large number of schools, with parents coming into school, and children enjoying listening to stories with an adult family member, The emphasis is on the importance of reading for pleasure and everybody having a part to play and this informal approach can be less intimidating for some parents.

It also allows school staff to see how parents and children react to reading together which may confirm or refute parental engagement.