

A large, faint pencil drawing of a hand holding a pencil is visible in the background, spanning across the cover.

● Curated by Lauren Child

Drawing Words

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Introduction

Welcome to the Family Reading Toolkit, which has been developed by the British Council and the Family Arts Campaign to help and inspire you to find more opportunities to support families to read together as part of the international Drawing Words exhibition.

Drawing Words is a new exhibition of children's book illustration commissioned by the British Council and curated by the UK Children's Laureate, Lauren Child. The exhibition features ten illustrators from across the UK whose work makes an important and original contribution to contemporary British picture book illustration.

For more information, please visit:
<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/project/drawing-words>

Section 1: Why is reading together as a family important?

There are many benefits associated with parents and children reading together, through reading to children at an early age and by encouraging ongoing reading as a family.

Reading can improve educational attainment, language and literacy skills, strengthen vocabulary, and support better relationships and parent/child bonding through empathy and understanding. Also, more recently, reading has been linked to establishing better levels of mental well-being and mindfulness.

It is important that young people are continually encouraged to read for enjoyment, and sharing reading experiences as a family can help to build positive associations towards reading both at home and at school.

What evidence do we have on the benefits of shared reading?

Research shows that shared reading can lead to better educational attainment and outcomes for children.

Shared reading early in a child's life can give them a better start in their education. Recent studies have suggested that children aged up to five who are read to regularly at home begin school with improved skills in language, literacy, comprehension and vocabulary.¹ This early shared reading can have longer-lasting benefits, where research has shown that children aged four to five who are read to regularly tend to perform better at school up to the age of 16 in reading and cognitive tests.²

However, regular reading is not always maintained as children get older, and so it is important that parents continue to encourage shared reading and promote independent reading. Children who read for pleasure at age ten have greater vocabularies in later life than those who do not.³ Better scores in reading performance in the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were linked to children reading more regularly for enjoyment.⁴ And, in addition, a recent study in the UK determined that regular reading for pleasure is more strongly linked to young people's overall progress in vocabulary, spelling and maths than their parents' education or socioeconomic status.⁵

Shared reading is also important as it contributes positively towards social behaviours, bonding and relationships.

1 Mol et al., 2008; Mol and Bus, 2011; Hood et al., 2008; Hutton et al., 2015; Kloosterman et al., 2011; Hartas, 2011.

2 Kalb and van Ours, 2013; Save the Children, 2014; Sullivan and Brown, 2013.

3 Sullivan and Brown, 2014.

4 OECD, 2016.

5 Sullivan and Brown, 2015.

Research shows that sharing books and stories can strengthen emotional bonds in families, and establishing shared reading with young children at home can promote better socioeconomic outcomes, including better social skills and reduced negative behaviour.⁶

Shared reading doesn't have to stop as children get older. Indeed, there is a great amount of research that suggests that positive and social interactions with reading can lead to better social, educational and personal outcomes. Building positive associations with reading is important to help engage older readers. Children and young people with more positive attitudes towards reading are also more likely to read daily outside school.⁷

Research also suggests that a young person's interest in reading can be increased through opportunities to discuss what they are reading in playful ways with peers or family members in inclusive environments.

Benefit of public libraries

Libraries can support children and families to read together. Research shows that young people who use their public library are nearly twice as likely to read outside of school every day.⁸

Having continued access to books and supporting resources is crucial to help families read together and build enthusiasm for books outside of educational settings. Children who have books available at home tend to enjoy reading more and, as a result, read more frequently.⁹

Given that shared reading is important at all stages of a child's development, it's important to support parents and carers to engage in shared reading throughout their child's life. We know that reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships and communities – particularly those between teachers and children, but also children and families.¹⁰

Libraries are a great way to build and sustain communities of readers that can help to inspire young people to read more. Parents who are seen as active readers can become reading role models who are likely to inspire their children to read at home. We know that children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where reading and books are valued and, therefore, building positive associations with parents is just as important as working directly with children and young people.¹¹

You can find out more about the benefits of reading for pleasure in the additional resources section at the back of this toolkit.

6 Swain et al., 2016; Audet et al., 2008; Baker, 2013.

7 Clark, 2013.

8 Clark and Hawkins, 2011.

9 Clark and Poulton, 2011.

10 Cremin et al., 2009.

11 Clark and Rumbold, 2006.

Section 2: What makes a great family reading event?

Hosting social, creative and interactive reading experiences for families can help to build positive associations towards reading and help to strengthen familial bonds and relationships. Family reading events may also inspire parents to continue shared reading at home, which can lead to more of the educational, social and cultural benefits associated with reading for pleasure.

What should we consider when hosting a family event?

All families are different and have diverse needs and interests. That's why the Family Arts Campaign has developed a set of Family Arts Standards – a set of guidelines to help cultural institutions to reach and engage more families. These guidelines are followed by over 700 organisations in the UK. Based on a recent independent evaluation, organisations that actively followed these guidelines were twice as likely to see an increase in family engagement than those who didn't.¹²

Here are some areas to consider when planning your family reading events.

Programming and promotion

- 1) Offer programming and activities for a range of ages to meet the needs of families of all ages.
- 2) Take practical steps to make activities accessible to as wide an age range as possible, so appropriate events can be enjoyed and appreciated by all members of the family group taking part.
- 3) Provide clear guidance on age appropriateness and sensitive issues, where needed, so families can decide if an activity is suitable for them.
- 4) Consider the needs of families and take into account transport issues when planning dates of activities, start and finish times, length of activity, and length of intervals or breaks.
- 5) Take into account the diversity of families in terms of family sizes, ages and family make-up when considering your offer for families. You may also wish to consider this if you decide to create family ticket packages for your events.

¹² Rose et al., 2015.

Consultation with families

- 6) Proactively consult with families to help inform the content and setup for your family reading events. Encourage regular feedback; ensure families know their views have been considered. Highlight changes that have been made and any barriers to achieving other suggestions.
- 7) Have a clear public policy for addressing complaints.
- 8) Reach out to and welcome all families to enjoy your reading events and try new experiences.

Staff training

- 9) Understand the needs of families of different ages and from different communities, and remain flexible and responsive to them.
- 10) Ensure staff are trained to be aware of the barriers that may exist for families that include disabled adults and children, including those with complex needs and/or behaviours. Also, be sure to consult policies around child safeguarding ahead of planning your family events.
- 11) Have helpful staff who can respond to families' questions and needs.

Facilities

Provide clear and honest information in print and on the internet about the facilities you have available, while ensuring they provide:

- Clean and safe facilities.
- Suitable access for wheelchair users and buggies.
- Advice if spaces for wheelchair users and buggies are limited and/or advance booking is required.
- Appropriate seating for children and those with limited mobility.
- Accessible toilet and baby-changing facilities that both men and women can access.
- Free drinking water.
- Healthy food and drink options suitable for families (if refreshments are available).
- Comfortable seating for feeding babies, including breastfeeding.
- Clear signage and easily identifiable staff/personnel.
- Clear travel information.

Tip: On the Family Arts Campaign website, you can find a checklist to help you to assess how well you are meeting these standards, and to support you to explore ways in which you can improve your family provision. Download online via the Guidance for Organisations: www.familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards/

Section 3: How can I start my own family reading event?

What is a family reading event?

A family reading event can range from a storytime session, a book-themed craft activity or a social event that brings families together and celebrates the importance but also the joy and pleasure of reading.

After you have considered the points in the Family Arts Standards and the needs of your family groups, you may consider trying one or more of these activities to link to the books that feature within the *Drawing Words* exhibition:

Activity idea 1: Celebrating reading together event (0+)

Invite families to visit your venue to enjoy a 'reading together' event.

- Create a display with the *Drawing Words* exhibition books and any other books you have available that you think may appeal to families.
- Begin the event by hosting a short introduction to your event. Use this as an opportunity to tell families more about your venue, what you can offer families and what other activities you have available that may interest them.
- You can explain some of the benefits of reading for pleasure, but you want the event to be light, fun and appealing so make sure you use accessible and engaging language when talking about reading.
- Run through the different books you have available – with a short introduction for each book/a selection of books – and make it clear who they might be suitable for (in terms of interest/age level).
- Using sites like booktrust.org.uk or lovereading4kids.co.uk can help to provide book summaries, extracts and reviews. These sites also provide indicators for both interest and reading levels.
- Make it a fun and social occasion. Set up some refreshments and invite families to try one of the games or book-specific activities (see the following pages) and to explore the books together.

Activity idea 2: Create a thinking and talking about books worksheet (6+)

Preparation:

- Create a one-page A4 template that includes space for: name, age and (if you like) space to doodle a self-portrait.
- Then include some questions on reading and books that may include:
 - What sort of books do you like? (Mystery/Horror/Adventure/Action)
 - What words come to mind when you think about books?
 - What books have you loved/hated? Why?

Activity:

- Ask parents/carers and children to interview each other to find out the answers.

This can be a quick way to help parents and children find out what sort of books they may enjoy. This worksheet can also be used to gain advice/support from a librarian to find a book to meet their interests.

You can amend this activity to create your own reading avatar and ask young people and parents to invent and draw their own avatar with particular reading tastes. Give young people the task of finding a book that will meet the needs, tastes and interests of their avatar.

You can even make this into a display to attract new families to future events.

Activity idea 3: Storytime event (0+)

Reading stories aloud can be a great way to break down barriers and help give parents ideas and confidence to read aloud to their children at home.

- Invite an author, actor, local celebrity or an active and enthusiastic parent/carer to take part in a storytelling session.
- Choose a storybook you think will appeal to families and be clear about the age it will be suitable for.
- You can make the session more fun and interactive by adding soundscapes (i.e. noises for your audience to make at particular or reoccurring points in the story) or by using props/hand signals for actions that younger children and parents/carers can follow.
- You can also hand out the BookTrust 'Advice for reading at home' sheets to inspire parents to read aloud to their children at home too. These are available online: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/tips-and-advice/reading-tips/how-to-read-with-your-child/>

Activity idea 4: Who am I? game (5+)

What you will need:

- Pack of sticky notes.
- Pens/pencils.
- Space for families to sit together.

Activity:

- Write down each of the names of the *Drawing Words* books (or any books you have available) on a sticky note and hand one to each family member (face down).
- Ask them to stick the note to their forehead and begin a game of 'Who am I?'
- Each family member must ask a series of questions about their book, i.e. "Am I a short book?" 'Am I set in space?' 'Do I have a monster on the cover?' The first person to guess their book wins. Encourage the game to continue until all family members have guessed their book correctly.

Enjoying fun book-themed games as a family can start to build familiarity and positive associations around books. Encourage family members at the end of the game to reflect on whether they'd like to read their book, why, who they may recommend it to, etc.

Activity idea 5: Make your own world flag with *A World of Your Own* (1–10)

A World of Your Own by Laura Carlin is a great book to encourage shared reading as it includes lots of interaction and space for creativity.

To make it even more interactive, try the following:

What you will need:

- One copy of *A World of Your Own* by Laura Carlin.
- Blank A4 paper booklets with the front cover title – *A World of My Own*.
- Some coloured pencils, felt tips or paints.
- Space available with tables/chairs for families to work together.

Activity:

- Ask a family member (parent/carer/older child) to read the book *A World of Your Own* aloud. Each page asks a question, e.g. What gets you out of bed in the morning? Could you invent an alarm clock that you can see, hear or even smell?
- Encourage family members to draw/write/scribble answers to each question. You can also include some cues to help families interact with the activity, e.g. What would it look like? How would it work? Can you draw it? What noise would it make?
- Repeat for each activity in the book.
- Families can either take their personalised books home or you could use them in a display.

Tip: if you want to create a shorter activity, why not focus on the ‘Make your own world flag’ section of the book? For this activity, you could create blank flag templates and ask families to decide what their family flag would look like.

Encourage parents to think about ways that they can explore interactive reading at home. Other great books to try that have a sense of interactivity include:

- *You Choose!* by Pippa Goodhart and Nick Sharratt (Corgi Children’s Books, 2004)
- *Just Imagine* by Pippa Goodhart and illustrated by Nick Sharratt (Corgi Children’s Books, 2013)
- *Press Here* by Herve Tullet (Chronicle Books, 2011)
- *Open Very Carefully* by Nick Bromley (Nosy Crow, 2014)

Activity idea 6: Make your own 'Thing' monster with *Emily Brown and the Thing* (ages 1–10)

In this book, Emily meets a monster called 'The Thing' who keeps her up all night asking for help to get back to sleep.

Why not create a family craft activity to ask children to create their own Thing monster? It's key here to involve parents/carers in the activity and encourage them to guide and interact with their children during the activity to build up engagement with the story and some key techniques in shared reading.

What you will need:

- One copy of *Emily Brown and the Thing*.
- Paper worksheets – leave space for children to write their name against the title so it becomes 'NAME and The Thing'.
- Pencils/pens.
- Glue.
- Foil/crêpe paper/glitter/paint.
- Space available with tables/chairs for families to work together.

Begin by reading the book aloud, or asking a family member to read the book aloud.

Ask children to create their own Thing monster using the materials you have available. Encourage families to ask questions like:

- What would they look like?
- Would they have a name?
- What can't they sleep without?
- What do they want to eat/drink before going to bed?
- What would its medicine look/smell like?

You could use the Thing monster sheets as part of a family-themed display to welcome families to visit the library/venue more in future.

For middle grade/early teenagers... Activity idea 7: New book cover/film poster competition for *Tinder* by Sally Gardner (13+)

Competitions are a great way to engage young people in reading. This sort of activity can be a light and fun way to start talking about books and build up excitement and motivation for reading.

What you will need:

- One copy of *Tinder* by Sally Gardner.
- Short blurb of the summary of the book for those who have not read it (you can find summaries on either booktrust.org.uk or lovereading4kids.co.uk).
- Blank sheets of A4 paper.
- Pens/pencils/felt tips/paint, etc.

Ask parents to work with their children to design a new book cover or a film poster to help publicise the book to other young people. Cues to help the process may be:

- Who is the book for? What might people want to see? How can we make it look like a book you'd want to read?

Ask families to submit their design and host a competition to decide the winner. You could elect local members of the community or other young people to judge whose book cover is the best.

You could even host a mini award ceremony. Try to keep the prize book-themed, if possible, to keep the enthusiasm for books connected, as research has shown that book-themed awards are more likely to develop reading motivation.¹³

You might also like to recommend the following to families if they are interested in this book:

- *The Wolf Wilder* by Katherine Rundell and illustrated by Gelrev Ongbico (Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2016)
- *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd and illustrated by Jim Kay (Walker Books, 2012)
- *Grimm Tales for Young and Old* by Philip Pullman (Penguin Classics, 2013).

13 Clark and Rumbold, 2006

Activity idea 8: Robert the Bruce Challenge (11+)

In this challenge, families will need to work together to create their own imaginary museum about Robert the Bruce.

What you will need:

- One copy of *Robert the Bruce – King of Scots* by James Robertson and illustrated by Jill Calder.
- Blank worksheets.
- Pencils/pens, etc.
- Space for families to work together.

Read through *Robert the Bruce* by James Robertson to learn about the history and information displayed in this book.

The challenge is to make a museum blueprint to help other people learn about the history told in this book.

Families will need to think about:

- What are the key bits of information we'd like to include?
- What sort of artefacts would we want to use?
- How could we guide people round the museum?
- What would we call it?
- How would we tell people about it? Would we use posters? A film? Storytellers? Music?

Again, a competition would really help to build excitement and enthusiasm around this activity. You could also consider working with a local museum to help build connections with other family events.

Note: you may wish to check the themes and images in this book and be mindful of the age suitability.

This activity should help families to read both for fun and for information – which are key skills that parents can help to develop through reading together at home.

Non-fiction titles can be a great way to engage reluctant readers or those who might not be interested in reading fiction but who are interested in particular themes, e.g. sport, science, animals, etc.

Some non-fiction books to recommend to this age group are:

- *Women in Science: 50 Fearless Pioneers Who Changed the World* by Rachel Ignotofsky (Wren and Rook, 2017)
- *The Awesome Book of Awesomeness* by Adam Frost and illustrated by Dan Bramall (Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2014)
- *Wild Animals of the South* by Dieter Braun (Flying Eye Books, 2017)
- *Corpse Talk: Ground Breaking Scientists* by Adam and Lisa Murphy (David Fickling Books, 2017).

Section 4: What's next?

There are lots of ways you can continue to inspire family reading once the *Drawing Words* exhibition has finished.

Why not try...

- Building links with local institutions, including libraries, schools, cultural venues, arts organisations and children's bookshops in order to build a family reading alliance. You can work together to build a programme of events across the year to provide ongoing opportunities to welcome and engage families in literature.
- Find your own reading ambassador – a reading champion who will work with families and children as well as local schools as an advocate for family reading. The ambassador could be a local celebrity/writer, or a member of the community who is passionate about books.
- Or, can you find a group of family ambassadors who can help to shape the programme of events and activities for your venue and help to give insights into what family reading means for them. You could invite families to apply for the ambassador post and even host a mini-ceremony to award families with their new accolade.
- Work with other arts organisations and work on events and activities that can create joined-up experiences for families, e.g. if your local theatre is showing a rendition of *Pinocchio* – can you create a reading event themed on puppetry and storytelling that families can attend?
- Continue gaining insights from families, be it through an online survey or through working in collaboration with other family-friendly organisations to ensure that you can continue to meet the changing needs and interests of family groups.

- Start a social media campaign to keep track of your reading events and ask families to join in and talk about their family reading experiences at the event and at home with a new hashtag. Keep track of key dates such as World Book Day to join conversations and make connections with other events.

Keeping it fun...

- It is proven that children are more likely to read if they are intrinsically motivated to do so. Creating fun and light activities that focus on the positive associations of books and storytelling will help children and families to associate reading with something fun and enjoyable.

Fun activities could include:

Guess the book

Try wrapping up books in paper and including a short description on a tag, e.g. 'would suit a reader who likes history and wants to know more about soldiers' or 'A book for someone who loves fantasy stories and a great romantic tale'. Ask families to talk about what the books might be and see if they can recommend it to someone in their family who may like it. When they open the books – are they pleased/excited/annoyed? Ask them to think about why this is and what book they would like – this can help to find the right books for budding readers.

Hosting a book competition

Try giving away free or even signed copies of books and invite families to take part in a competition to win them. You could host a ceremony in your venue with an ambassador/ local celebrity to give out the books.

Create storytelling sessions

Work with people from the community or local theatre groups/storytellers who can read a favourite story aloud.

Continue to encourage home reading

Reading outside of school is crucial to children's intellectual and social development. Keep encouraging parents and carers to read with their children through:

Book talk

- Talking about books at home can help. BookTrust has some great online resources that provide advice and support for parents to read together with their children.

Supporting children's choice

Children are more likely to read a book of their choosing. Don't worry about levels and difficulties of the book: let young people and children choose what types of books suit their interest. Daniel Pennac's *The Rights of the Reader* is a great handbook for helping to understand and guide children's reading choices.

Create a reading-friendly zone

- Encourage parents/carers to think of spaces at home that are quiet and comfy for reading with shelves for their own/library books.

Encourage parents to read too

- Ask parents and carers to become active readers. You could print some quick and easy signs such as 'I am reading...' or a family reading chart where family members are encouraged to keep track of what they are reading, if they like it, love it, hate it, etc.

Create reading campaigns

- Ask parents, carers and families to help you to spread the word about the importance of reading and involve families in your campaign. You could even encourage families to help create signs, posters or banners with catchy phrases about reading to post on the walls of your venue.

Section 5: Additional resources

There are lots of great resources available online to help you to continue to engage families with books and reading.

Evidence and research

BookTrust, National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency are excellent sources to find out more about reading for pleasure and can signpost you to the latest research and reports around reading.

Additional material on reading for pleasure

The Rights of the Reader by Daniel Pennac and illustrated by Sir Quentin Blake (Walker Books, 2006)

Reading for pleasure: A passport to everywhere by Kenny Pieper (Crown House Publishing, 2016)

Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for Pleasure by Teresa Cremin et al. (Routledge, 2014)

Help Your Child Love Reading by Alison David (Egmont, 2014)

Free downloadable activities for children's books

Macmillan Books

<https://trade.panmacmillan.com/activity-sheets>

Has lots of free downloadable activity sheets for children including games, cut-out masks, recipes, puzzles – all related to popular children's books.

Penguin Children's Books

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/find-your-next-read/games-and-activities/>

Support for parents to read with their children

BookTrust provides top tips on how to read together with your child, with additional guidance available for different ages and needs: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/tips-and-advice/reading-tips/how-to-read-with-your-child/>

This information is also available to download in over 30 languages to support reading in different languages.

Help in finding the best children's books for your library

- lovereading4kids.co.uk is a fantastic recommendations site that includes book lists and reviews for thousands of children's books. Each book will include a reading and interest age, plus reviews from children and families.
- BookTrust's Bookfinder enables you to select the right book for the right reader by entering your choice of age and theme.

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/bookfinder/>

The BookTrust website also includes a range of reading lists around different themes and books.

More information:

Egmont books

<https://www.egmont.co.uk/research/>

Egmont has a number of articles and summaries of latest research relating to the benefits of reading for pleasure for children and families. Some useful articles include:

- *Help Your Child Love Reading*– www.egmont.co.uk/help-child-love-reading/
- 'The Reading Magic Project' – exploring barriers for reading with younger children aged three to four <https://www.egmont.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-Reading-Magic-Project-2018.pdf>

The Reading Agency

<https://readingagency.org.uk/>

The Reading Agency is an excellent source for evidence and research on reading for pleasure. It also has lots of useful downloadable resources for libraries, including activities for the annual Summer Reading Challenge.

<https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=src>

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Family Arts Campaign

The Family Arts Campaign, led by The Albany, is the largest, fully cross-artform, collaborative initiative to support cultural engagement among families. As one of Arts Council England's Sector Support Organisations, the Family Arts Campaign guides and advises cultural organisations on ways to reach and engage families. For more information and resources, visit www.familyarts.co.uk

You can also find on the Family Arts website an evaluation checklist where you can assess your current family provision: www.familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards/

Toolkit written by Anna Dever, Family Arts Campaign.

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The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

The British Council believes that all children have potential and that every child matters – everywhere in the world. The British Council affirms the position that all children have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse as set out in article 19, UNCRC 1989.