



Inspiring 'Reluctant' Readers

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Arthur Shenton on how reading for a purpose hits the spot.

Teacher **Arthur Shenton** on TV guides and the world of magic which have persuaded his reluctant reader son that reading is sometimes worth the effort. <!--break-->

Our youngest child, Tom, was diagnosed as dyslexic when he was eight. He was brought up in a household immersed in text with teacher parents and two elder sisters constantly involved in reading and writing activities with homework tasks and their own personal reading. We had also built up an extensive library of picture books and children's stories, which we regularly read with Tom. Just like his sisters Tom loved stories, loved being read to, loved listening to story tapes. He was articulate, could talk about the stories read to him but his own efforts to read were laboured and largely unsuccessful.

The intensive teaching and support he has received since being statemented both in his primary and current secondary schools have resulted in impressive progress in the development of his literacy skills. He still loves fiction but his access to it is mainly through video because he remains a very reluctant reader. His schools have tried hard to encourage him, even buying in special sets of easy reader/high interest texts in genres which he likes ? adventure, horror, science fiction. We have encouraged him to read them at home but with little or no success. Can you blame him? Reading is and will continue to be hard work for him. He has been doing it and sometimes failing at it all day. He doesn't want another dose when he gets home.

However, we have noticed recently that Tom has started to build on his hard earned reading skills without any prompting from his teachers or us. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is non-fiction texts that have aroused his interest and he has discovered something very important about reading ? that if you are reading for a purpose then it's worth the effort. We first noticed this when he took to skimming and scanning the week's TV guide so he could mark his favourite programmes. He further realised that if he read the writing underneath the programme titles he could find out about the contents of the programmes, whetting his appetite even more as he looked forward to watching his favourites.

He discovered an even more important purpose for reading on a recent school visit to London. During a long bus journey one of the boys performed card tricks to entertain Tom and his friends. He was hooked and over the next few days he insisted we visited all our local bookshops for books on magic. These he pored over only occasionally leaving his books to show us a trick he had learnt. There are two added dimensions from a teaching perspective; he does not want help with this reading because then we would know how the tricks were done, and assessment of how well he is reading is easy, as he demonstrates his understanding in his performance of, for us, mystifying magic.

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