

READ FOR MY SCHOOL LAUNCH - www.readformyschool.co.uk

I'm very fortunate that my work as a children's author takes me into schools up and down the country. And what often strikes me when I talk to children that read a lot is that they do so because it's fun and they do it for enjoyment. I wouldn't sell many books if children were only reading because it was useful or because they'd been told to by their teacher. So this is why I think **Read for My School** is a brilliant initiative and I am so pleased to support it. It's based on that idea that the more you enjoy reading – the more it inspires you, makes you guffaw, or cry, or exclaim, or scratch your head – the more you'll want to read.

These are ideas that I believe in myself. In fact I have just come from three days at the Isle of Man Book Festival, where various sponsors, parents and teachers and even one grandfather were independently telling me how important it was to let children experience the pleasure of reading. There is a growing chorus asking for more pleasure in children's reading - but who are they asking? The answer is all of us, authors, publishers, teachers, the whole education system and of course, parents. Those encounters at the festival were very encouraging as you can imagine, knowing that I would be here today speaking to all of you about **READ FOR MY SCHOOL**, which will be helping to do just that.

Being able to read and enjoy reading is probably the most important and useful tool you can give a child - it will be with them for the rest of their life. This is why I write funny stories for those just ready to become independent readers - because I believe that they make learning to read more fun, and therefore more enjoyable and easier. Certainly this is what many teachers and parents have told me and what I observed when I was teaching primary children.

I guess that as a writer one expects to receive a bit of fan mail from children and of course I do, though it can be a bit suspect - I received a letter last week that began, Dear Jermy, *I think your book KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD is the best book in the world.* The next sentence was: *I haven't read KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD yet but if I did etc etc.*

However, I never expected to get mail from parents, and teachers too, but it comes in regularly, all on the same theme. My child wasn't reading. Wasn't interested. Thought it was boring or a chore. Then they picked up one of your books and they were off. Thank you so much. Obviously this must happen to other writers too but for me this kind of reaction is as important and valuable as getting paid for making things up. (I do have the best job in the world!) As an ex-teacher it is SO rewarding and encouraging to be told this and it's one of the main reasons why I write the way I do.

We know that reading is the greatest foundation stone to learning throughout one's education years, and therefore we stress the importance of learning to read. But children learn to read faster when they read for pleasure - and the starting point for that is listening for pleasure - at bedtime, with Mum or Dad, partner or step-parent - whoever - listening without the threat of 'now it's your turn to read' hanging over them. Our island is small but I believe it not only produces more books than any other country in the world, including the USA, but also the majority of the best children's books in the world. We have an amazing resource for our children to tap into, through schools, libraries and books at home. No matter what the digital age brings us by way of entertainment and so on our children will always need to read, and if we can make that reading pleasure then their lives will be so much the richer, wiser and more informed. So getting good books into schools is of paramount importance.

Even a few words can have a profound effect. Take this poem by Ogden Nash for example:

Reflections on Parsley

Parsley
Is gharsley.

That's it. Brilliant! It showed me how you could play with words, spelling etc. That poem was only three words long but it changed my life and if I hadn't read it maybe I wouldn't be standing here today evangelising about reading.

Now it just so happens that I was planning my own initiative on reading. I was going to print 100,000 leaflets with Ogden Nash's 'Reflections on Parsley' printed on them and was going to drop them by air over the entire UK. Indeed - so that's yet another reason why I am so pleased I don't have to do that now because **Read For My School** is such a fabulous and important initiative.

When I was a teacher every school I worked in was always short on books. There are so many claims on the school budget and books often get overlooked so if I was still a teacher the chance to win FREE books for my school would get me signing up to **Read for My School** at once. And, if I was still a kid (well in truth I probably am inside,) if I was a kid I'd be jumping at this chance to Read for My School with my friends and win prizes. One hundred thousand free books - that's an awful lot of pleasure! I'm delighted to endorse this project.

Jeremy Strong