

Launching A School Magazine

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Background:

Sadie Phillips is a Key Stage 2 English Teacher in East London, she has experience as Literacy Lead for Writing and also writes a blog to share her creative ideas, practice and pedagogy on her journey as a Literacy for Pleasure teacher. She is also participating in the creative writing pathway of the MA Children's Literature at Goldsmith's University.

Principle(s) in focus:

1. Purposeful & authentic writing projects
2. Building a community of writers
3. Setting writing goals

I wanted the children in media club to produce a magazine that was genuine, of a high quality and for the local community. I wanted the children to run the magazine as authentically as possible. This required them to work as a community of writers as children had to take on different roles for the magazine to be successful. Finally, it was interesting to see how children responded to being set specific deadlines and having to complete certain parts of the writing process on time – so that their writing was ready for the publishing deadline. This is something that could be transferred to class writing projects.

Aims:

The aim for this project was to encourage children to take on the responsibility of assuming various writer identities in terms of the roles they were to play in the whole project (editor-in-chief, sub-editor, proof-reader, graphic designer, content writers). I was also interested in how they would, as a small community, collaborate in a context where they would have complete agency over content and production.

Description:



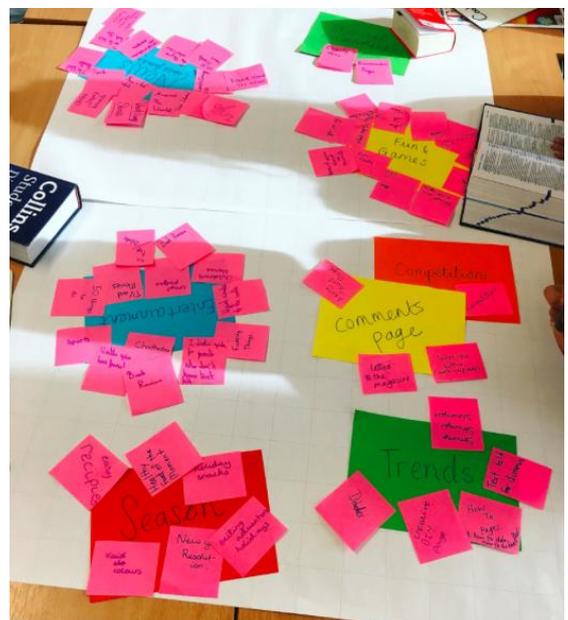
At the beginning of the year, it became clear that many of my class shared a passion for magazines. We immediately set up a magazine rack in the class book corner with some of their favourites, which proved incredibly popular, and the children now regularly donate magazines from home.

I soon realised that I had hugely underestimated the power of magazines. Not only were they hooking in even my most reluctant readers but they were also engaging my readers socially with 'magazine talk'. When I started thinking about the potential, it was a bit of a light bulb moment.

And, just like that, the idea of Media Club was born.

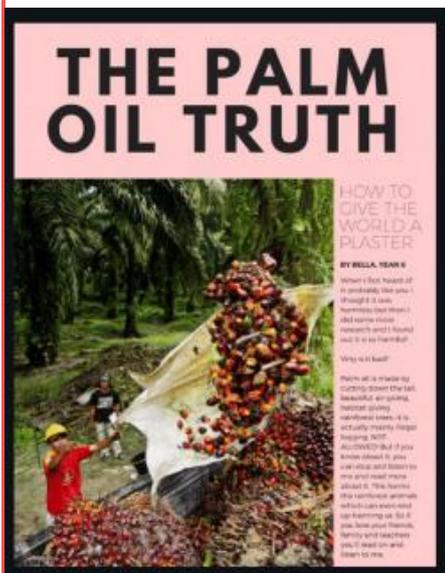
My career history lies within in Public Relations and journalistic writing is something I have always enjoyed. There is an unmatched feeling of accomplishment and pride when you see your own writing in print and I wanted children to experience that. I also wanted to share my experiences as a teacher-writer and show them how to run their own publishing house.

The Media Club concept was two-fold: I wanted to combine reading for pleasure *and* writing for pleasure. I was looking for a way to get the whole community engaged in reading for pleasure and I wanted to inspire writing through authentic purpose and audience. I was also searching for a platform upon which they could share their voice, ideas and creative writing with the wider community – and what better way to so than through the pages of their own publication?



Media Club met once a week with the end goal of producing a termly school magazine that could be read and enjoyed by everyone. They brought in their favourite magazines and snippets of articles that interested them and we explored our personal preferences and reading identities. We made recommendations to each other and began to pull together content ideas for the magazine that we all enjoyed. The children were given complete freedom over editorial decisions and we elected an Editor and Deputy Editor to help make key decisions.

Every time I passed a member of the Media Club in the hallway or in class, they would strike up a conversation about an idea they'd had for a feature or something that they thought would be an interesting read for others. We had such a range of features – from interviews and book reviews, to jokes pages and photo quizzes, to articles about Palm Oil and a debate about Pigeons (based on some writing we had done the previous year). Ownership over editorial content was key.



They'd even considered children lower down the school – producing colouring pages and simple word searches. They were excited and engaged by the project and during each Media Club session you'd see children both reading (and writing) for pleasure. It was incredible.



I tried to make the writing environment as authentic as possible, with magazine mock ups on the wall for proofing, laptops and iPads for research. Children typed up their articles in Word and we then pasted them into the magazine templates on canva.com to create a professional-looking magazine. The children were thrilled with the end result.

Much of the magazine content revolved around books and authors, with reviews and recommendations taking up a large proportion of the magazine pages. One of the biggest perks was that they succeeded in setting up interviews with some of their favourite authors. Inevitably, this led to a further reading frenzy as children swotted up on the authors' books and biographies prior to each interview.

The best bit: Launch Day!

Although the club had only been running for a matter of weeks, a sort of giddy anticipation had begun to build around the school as we neared publishing day. The excitement surrounding the launch was palpable.

We took full advantage of the hype and began to add to the excitement with posters, teasers in the school newsletter and a special assembly led by the children to officially launch the magazine. We also had a VIP launch party for the magazine and invited parents and teachers along to celebrate the magazine.



On the actual magazine launch day, there was a real buzz around the school. As children filed through the corridors to assembly, you could hear them whispering “The Canary Crunch, it’s out today! The Crunch, The Crunch, it’s out today!”

The Media Club members delivered the Autumn Issue to all classrooms at lunchtime and children could be seen reading it all around the school that afternoon, as well as teachers in the staff room. Parents even emailed me to express how much they’d enjoyed reading it at home!

Impact:

The Canary Crunch had been distributed to families in every single book bag and placed in all of the book corners throughout the school, as well as a few copies for the school library and main entrance hall. Several children, who hadn’t previously shown much interest in reading, had chosen to read the magazine. I also received positive comments and emails from parents who had continued to read the magazine at home too.

“We would like to congratulate you all for your fantastic work. The magazine is amazing! We could see the immense amount of work. Yesterday, we had a great time reading it together. We are looking forward to reading the next issue! Keep working hard and believe in yourself. Thank you very much.”

“Thank you so, so much for the launch party today. We all had a great time. Child D has loved media club so much. She’s so enthusiastic about it every week. She didn’t really enjoy reading or literacy until recently but has really changed over the last term – I’m sure that her involvement in media club has a huge part to play in this. Thank you so much.”

Reflection:

Marrying reading and writing for pleasure through fun, engaging projects where children are given choice, purpose and audience has been so successful that we’re already diversifying into other clubs that will hopefully have the same impact as the magazine. We’ve introduced a **Blogging Club** for the Spring Term and, next term, I’ll be introducing **Comic Book Club** in which I hope to produce the school’s first comic!