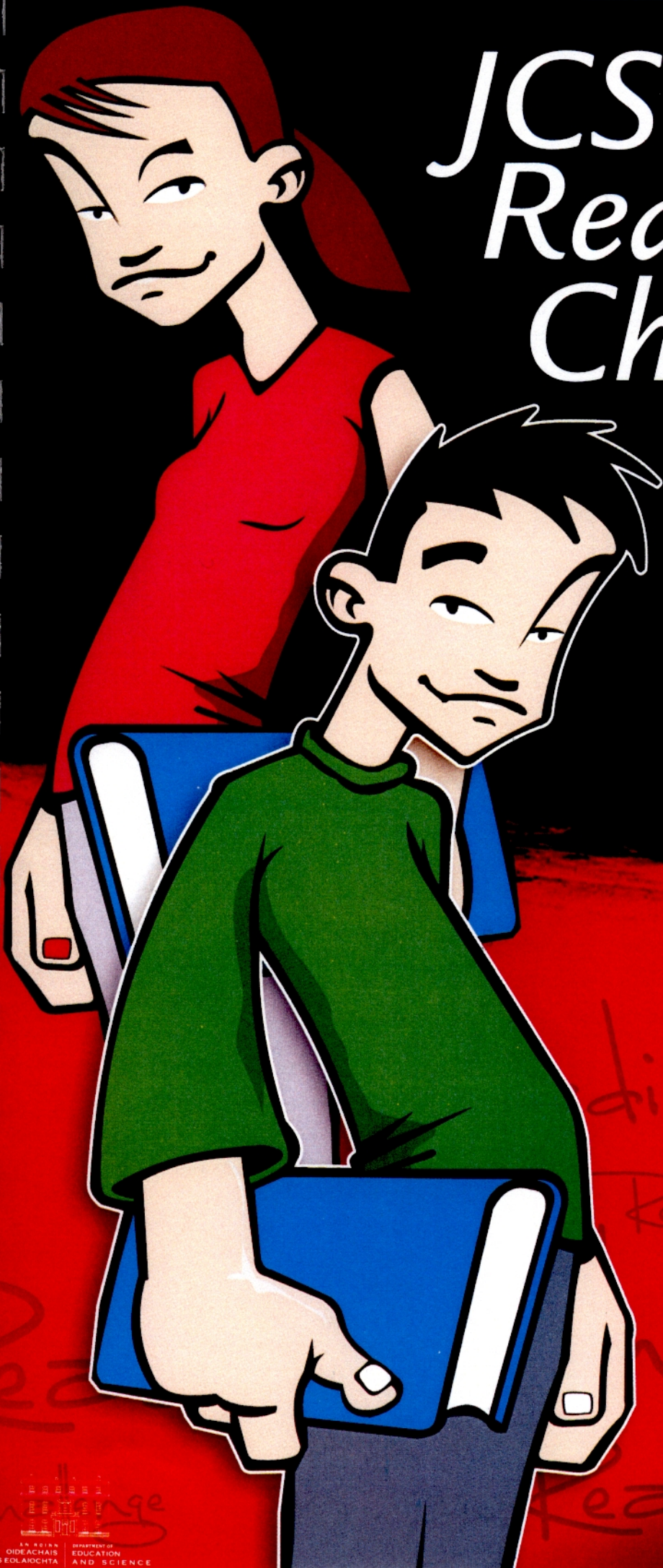


JCSP Reading Challenge

TEACHER BOOKLET



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Junior
Certificate
School
Programme



Reading Challenge

I n t r o d u c t i o n

The aim of Reading Challenge is to improve reading skills. What actually happens in the process is that the students' self esteem and self-confidence improves enormously. There is an improvement in communication and relationships between students, parents and teachers.

The Reading Challenge is suitable for small or large groups. It is based on the premise that every student can improve their skills through reading for pleasure. It provides extrinsic motivation to succeed for students who lack intrinsic motivation to improve their reading skills. Parental involvement is a big element in the success of the challenge. A group of students is "challenged" to read a book a week for a given period. Five to six weeks is good. It can be for a shorter or longer period, there are no hard and fast rules.

Organising the Reading Challenge

Parental involvement:

- Write to parents explaining what is proposed and how important their role is in the success of the Reading Challenge. Outline what is required of them what the outcome is likely to be.
- Invite parents and students to a meeting to discuss the roles of parents, teachers and students and to view the books, if the school is acquiring extra books.
- Display the books for the Challenge and the Student Review Booklets. Explain the purpose and the importance of the Student Review booklet.
- Request their help with covering the books. Go over what ever was mentioned in the letter home. Be very positive and emphatic about the importance of their role in supporting their child and the staff, in the initiative to improve reading skills.
- Explain about the difference between chronological age and reading age. Assure them that their child's reading age will be



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made available on receipt of a written request from them and posted home in a sealed envelope.

Plan for success for the student and for their parents:

- Fix a date to celebrate that success - e.g. a Reading Challenge running from mid-Jan to early March could have the celebrations planned for the St. Patrick's Day weekend.

Student involvement in decisions:

- Involve the students in deciding what they would like for prizes - mobile phone gift vouchers for credit; gift vouchers for the "chipper" and vouchers for the video shop are very popular.
- Ensure that every student who takes part gets a prize - even if they read only one book. If this time round it is a positive successful experience they will want to do better the next time.
- Consult them about the distribution of the books - when would they like to get their new book? Friday or Monday or whatever day in between. Teachers reported that during the Reading Challenge students were eager to read their book in school, especially during "free classes", in order to get their target number of pages read as quickly as possible.

Target to be read each day:

This proved to be a key factor in the success of the Reading Challenge. On the first page of the student booklet is an instruction, which reads:

To decide how much to read each night I will look at the last page to find out the number of pages in the book and I will divide that number by 7. The number I get will be the number of pages that I will read each night to get the book read in a week.

This puts the student in control of deciding what target to set themselves. It follows the J.C.S.P. philosophy of recording and rewarding small increments of success.



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Some students decided to read on seven nights while others decided to read for five nights. The important thing is that they made the decision *and* felt very proud of themselves at the end of the week, when at the end of the week they did a very simple review. (copy in appendix). They then read:

I am a WINNER this week because I have read my book and improved my Reading Skills. I am on my way to earning a ticket for the prize draw.

Congratulations! I am very proud of you.

Signed _____ Parent or helper

Materials:

Suitable books - class sets for large groups or individual books for smaller groups.

Selection of books - do some market research with the students! Ask the target group what T.V. programmes they like and what stories they can remember. This will give a good indication of the type of book, to select - horror, mystery, adventure, comedy etc.

Guidelines for choosing books:

It is important to give careful consideration to the " readability" of the books selected. Questions to ask -

- Will the books selected hold their interest?
- Are the books selected suitable for the Reading Age of the target group?
- The gender of a group needs to be taken into consideration; boy orientated books are much more likely to hold the interest of boys and vice a versa. Some books appeal to both.
- Is the story good?



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- Books that have Irish names and are written by Irish authors are considerably easier for reluctant readers to identify with, because names, turns of phrase, idioms and colloquial expressions and settings are familiar. This is a factor in the success of the Reading Challenge in our school. Choosing books by Irish authors also opens up the possibility of having the author of the favourite book to come to the school and visit with the students. Books that have won awards in children's literature or have been nominated for prizes are good choices when buying books.

Covering and numbering of books:

It is advisable to cover the books with "Contact" in the case of class sets. Number the books from 1-20 - glue the numbers on with Pritstik before covering with 'Contact'. This helps students to be accountable for the return of their particular copy of a book. It keeps administration time to a minimum, as it is very easy to put the number of the book opposite the student's name on a class list. It also enables the teacher to see at a glance if the student has received a book, returned a book or is reading with such enthusiasm that he or she is requesting books in advance of the planned week of distribution.

READING CHALLENGE CLASS LIST

	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	WK5	WK 6
	Book No.	Book No.	Book No.	Book No.	Book No.	Book No.
Robert T						
Tony I						
Tom B.						
John G.						
Susan S.						
Sarah T.						
	Name of book	Name of book	Name of book	Name of book	Name of book	Name of book
	Kirsten	Unreal	Skellig	I was a rat	The giggler treatment	Luke's Heroes



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Reading Challenge Student's Booklet

Production of Booklet:

The Reading Challenge booklet helps students keep a record of their progress, as well as reviewing the book. It is signed each week by the parent or guardian.

The booklet can easily be designed and produced on any computer to suit each school's situation. It consists of:

- a front cover with the school's name, a place for the student's name and self-esteem builder sentence e.g. "I'm a Winner".
- a page for every week of the duration of the "Reading Challenge" and a back cover.

I produce them in school by using packs of pre-cut coloured card for the front and back covers. I colour-code the class sets of booklets by using a red front cover for one class and blue for the next, etc. To give it a professional look I staple all the pages together between the coloured covers and put a black plastic spine (cheap and readily available from the bookshop) on each one. The students do a lot of the assembly work under my supervision and it is an important part of the process of anticipation of the "Challenge".

The booklet is a valuable asset for students, parents and the organiser of the Reading Challenge

Benefits for students:

It functions as a self-esteem builder in that it replicates the target statements that are familiar to J.C.S.P. students- recording their success and progress in their reading in incremental steps. It has the self-esteem builder "I am a Winner!" on every single page. Most of the students have never experienced the feeling of being a "winner". Completing a book is a major achievement for most of these students and acknowledging it is an important part of building their confidence in their ability to succeed. It also



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functions as their "ticket" for the draw for the big prize. Therefore it is important for them to take care of it, record their progress by writing up their review each week and have it signed by their parents.

Benefits for parents:

Comments on the booklet have shown that it is often an important tool in communication between child and parent. Each page has '**Congratulations! I am proud of you,**' just above the line for the signature of the parent or helper. Experience of reading the comments and feedback from parents has indicated an unforeseen benefit for both parents and child, in that it offers parents an opportunity to affirm their child. It is therefore of value in building up the relationship between parent and child.

Communication with the child and school is improved. It is a helpful vehicle in establishing and/or continuing good positive relationships between home, child and school. Parents are written to, or phoned where there may be a doubt about the literacy level in the home, to request their co-operation and involvement in improving their child's reading skills. Sometimes we have a meeting at which 'Reading Age' is explained to the parents and they are made aware (very gently) that their child's reading age is below their chronological age. Parents are very willing to help their child in this situation, especially as it is for a short specified time and the emphasis is on reading for pleasure. Parents are asked to help by just supplying the unknown word and keeping the continuity of story. At the end of each week there is the satisfaction of signing the booklet to verify that their child has read the book.

Benefits for Teachers:

Teachers' benefit from the Reading Challenge because of the students improved reading skills and interest in reading. Communication between teachers and students improve because of the eagerness of the students to talk about it and show their booklets to the teachers. It is an opportunity to interact with students in a friendly, interested manner without either being under pressure to perform i.e. to produce work or to correct it.



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Pre Testing and Post Testing

Why test? Advantages and Disadvantages:

Testing is an important part of the process of raising awareness among students and parents of the importance of improving Reading Skills. Pre and post-testing is a powerful motivating factor for students and parents. It is helpful to parents and students alike to be aware of the difference between the test results and the chronological age of the student. It gives both an added incentive and motivation to improve the situation. It gives the "Challenge" importance and status in school and at home, as tests are a recognised way of measuring progress. It is a record of a student's improvement, especially if it is run with a particular set of students, each year, for the three years of the Junior Cycle.

Other advantages:

Students get more attention in school and at home because parents are interested in the tests and students respond well to positive attention, feedback and comment. Most parents and students want to know what the results are. This can be provided in a confidential manner to both parents and students by a short, private meeting with individuals, a phone call or a note home. In the beginning I was very reluctant to let students know their results but I have changed my approach because parents who requested the results, invariably discussed the results with their child and used the results to motivate their child to improve their reading skills.

This year it is working like a dream as we have results for two years for 3 Elm and last year for 1Oak. It is a great motivator for the students as they decide to practise their reading skills to improve performance. I talk to them and compare reading skills to the star footballers! Practise, Practise, Practise. They decide to take control and do something about improving their reading. It is interesting and very rewarding, watching them decide on where they want to be. Initially the motivation is to work toward a chance to win the big prize. This motivation becomes stronger as they improve their reading skills. Time spent talking about the importance of reading, with the promise and assurance that their textbooks become eas-



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ier to understand is worthwhile. Discussion on how it will be easier to do their exams and that they can educate themselves on any subject under the sun that they are interested in, as good reading skills enables them to access information for the rest of their lives, is time well spent.

Disadvantages:

While the tests are valuable it is important to bear in mind that they give only a general indication of the child's level of reading ability at that particular time and under those conditions. A child who is upset by problems at home or at school will not perform to their true ability. The time of day chosen for testing is an important factor, in performance. Too early or too late in the day, the student may be in "still in bed" mode, "too hungry" mode, if it is the class before lunch or "absolutely focussed on going home" mode, if testing is done in the last class!

Tests used:

NFER Nelson Forms "A","B","C", " D" or "X" and "Y".

The first four are Sentence Completion Tests and are suitable for readers, where Reading Age is expected to be below nine years. Forms "X" and "Y" are Context Comprehension Tests and are suitable for students whose Reading Age is expected to be above nine years. The marking manual is also required. No special training is required before giving the Reading Age tests as very clear instructions for administering the test and a marking key for each test are in the Manual. None of these tests need to be timed. A class period is usually more than sufficient time to administer them. For first time users of the tests it is advisable to do a practise run with two or three students before attempting to administer them to a large class, in order to become familiar with what is entailed.

The tests mentioned above fall into two categories "A", "B","C" and "D" measure reading ability only - decoding. They are Sentence Completion Tests where the student is asked to match five picture with words and forty two small simple "stand alone"



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sentences, where they are asked to select the correct word from a list of five words.

The form "X" and "Y" are Context Comprehension Tests in which four separate lengthy "cloze" like passages of ten sentences each, are required to be read and the correct missing word is to be selected from a list of five words. This tests both reading and comprehension. Experience has shown that these tests give a truer reading of actual ability than the others mentioned. Form "X" seems to be slightly more difficult for students than form "Y". For both test the passages become progressively more difficult as the test progresses.

A, B, C, D are for very weak readers only. They are very useful for giving a reading age for anyone who scores below nine years on the "X" or "Y" tests.

Form "X" and "Y" give a score of -9 (under nine years) for a score of from 1 to 13 correct answers. In effect a student with a score of only one correct answer gets the same reading age as a student who has scored thirteen correct answers! It is useful to make a note of the Raw score for these students as each correct answer increases Reading Age readout by three months. It seems reasonable to assume that a student with a score of 13 has a Reading Age of between eight and nine years while one with a score of two correct answers has a much lower Reading Age.

(Forms available from ECT Consult see appendix for details)

Selecting and Involving students:

- Decide on the target group or groups. Most students who meet the criteria for being included on the Junior Certificate School Programme would benefit from doing the Reading Challenge.
- Target groups where the parents have been reluctant to engage with the school can be rewarding. It can be used as a fresh opportunity to bring them on board. The commitment required is short, specific and there are concrete, measurable rewards available for students and parents within a specified time. Good



Reading Challenge

communication is essential between parents, student and school, to establish good friendly co-operation between all parties to the Reading Challenge.

- Talk to the students, involve them in the decision making, the preparation of the materials, the selection of their books, keep the parents informed of what is happening, detail what help and co-operation the school needs from them in order to help their child.
- Create a team atmosphere, at home and in school by informing, involving and encouraging everyone who can be of assistance.
- Class groups work well, even if there are varying levels of reading ability. Students know themselves that some members of the class are more proficient at reading than others. They readily accept that everyone is working on moving their own reading skills to a higher level. They are very tolerant of other students getting "easier books".
- Decide on a starting and finishing dates - e.g. mid Jan to mid March - students are more likely to read, as outdoor activities are limited.
- One week before the Challenge is due to start pre - test their reading.
- Five/Six weeks of reading - six weeks is better for results but it is more difficult to sustain interest and enthusiasm than on a five week Reading Challenge.
- Letter home praising and encouraging parents and students efforts, (always post letters - well worth the expense - as they come to parents' attention and are not "lost" in the bottom of the schoolbag!)



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Success factors

The success factors are many and varied and will differ from school to school. Essential to the success is good communication between all involved, good planning and good follow through and follow-up. Everyone is "A Winner" when reading skills are improved! It is easier for the students to read their textbooks. Teachers and students benefit. Oral work improves because the class are reading the same book at the same time. Some teachers of English use the book being read for discussion in class or a bit of writing on what was the best book or scene in a book.

- Enthusiasm and encouragement from teachers and parents is invaluable and will bring rewards in improvement in skills and motivation.
The 'feel good factor':
- It helps students feel good about themselves as they experience success. Celebrations: the anticipation of the celebrating of their success adds to the "feel good factor".
- *Prizes:* Consultation about the prizes is important. The size of the prize tends to reflect the importance the school puts on improving Reading Skills.
- *Status of Project:* the status of the project is enhanced by the pre and post testing and mention of research for the JCSP and the Department of Education and Science.

Principal:

The support, interest and encouragement of the Principal is invaluable. Principals may need to be encouraged by being asked to visit the classes, before testing starts, when the books are distributed and when the post testing is taking place. Regular announcements on the school intercom encouraging classes to read and specifying the prizes can serve as useful encouragement.



Reading Challenge

Class Diary:

This idea is a direct result of the request from the JCSP to keep a detailed record on how the Reading Initiative was progressing in each school. All documents relating to the Reading Challenge are kept in a folder, e.g. letters to parents, receipts for books and prizes and "goodies" for the Celebrations. It contains photographs of teachers and co-ordinator meeting the parents and students, pictures of the student doing their reading test, pieces of writing from the classes on what the Reading Challenge is and how they are getting on. Photographs are tangible reminders of the success achieved and students love to revisit them, especially after a year or two. Then they see how they have grown and changed.

If there is a Newsletter in your school that has news of the Reading Challenge included in it, that goes in the "Class Diary" also, cuttings about the Reading Challenge from the local newspaper, if it appears in that. Take photographs and record the process of the "Challenge" as it progresses to its conclusion - the Celebration of their success.

Planning for success:

Plan for success by having, good, new books, if possible. Plan to have a good communications system in place for the J.C.S.P. team meetings, the school newsletter, and staff notes. For parents letters home up-dating them on the 'challenge', keeps them informed and involved. Visits to the classrooms from Principal, Vice- principal and Co-ordinator helps maintain student enthusiasm for the project. All visits can be done individually and should be short, encouraging and friendly.

A big part of the success of the Reading Challenge is the involvement of the parents, teachers and students in an activity that is pleasurable and rewarding for all concerned. Success is guaranteed even if the student reads only one book he or she will get a prize, there are no failures

J.C.S.P. Team and the Reading Challenge:

The J.C.S.P. team plays a vital part in the success of the Reading Challenge. Positive interaction between students, generated by an oppor-



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tunity to talk about the "Reading Challenge", is of great benefit for building up confidence and self-esteem for students. Subject teachers can ask how they are getting on with their reading. Different teachers might take responsibility for keeping up the momentum of the reading by encouraging the students. Asking on a casual, friendly basis how they are getting on with the "Reading Challenge". If they are supervising a class when the "Challenge" is on they could encourage the students to read their books. Talk to their class about the importance of improving their reading skills.

Ask for a slot at the Staff Meeting to remind teachers of when the "Reading Challenge " will start and ask them to talk to their classes about it and enquire about their progress. In schools where there is a whole school approach to literacy, this is a very straightforward request, as every teacher takes responsibility for literacy .

Ideas for follow up work:

- Run an essay competition: "The book I liked best". Give a prize for the best in each class.
- Write about the experience of the "Reading Challenge", then have the students type up their work, put suitable borders on it using "Insert" borders and shading" facility on the computer, insert some Clip Art and put the finished work in the "Class Diary".
- Arrange for the most popular author to visit the school. Prepare the students by talking about the visit, the book and what questions they might have for the author. Then, role-play the visit. Take photographs of the visit and of the students with the author. Make a "Class Diary" as explained above.
- After the visit ask the students in each class to write about the visit. Provide a writing frame if needed. Give a prize to each class for the essay. Have the Principal present the prizes and take photographs of the presentation.

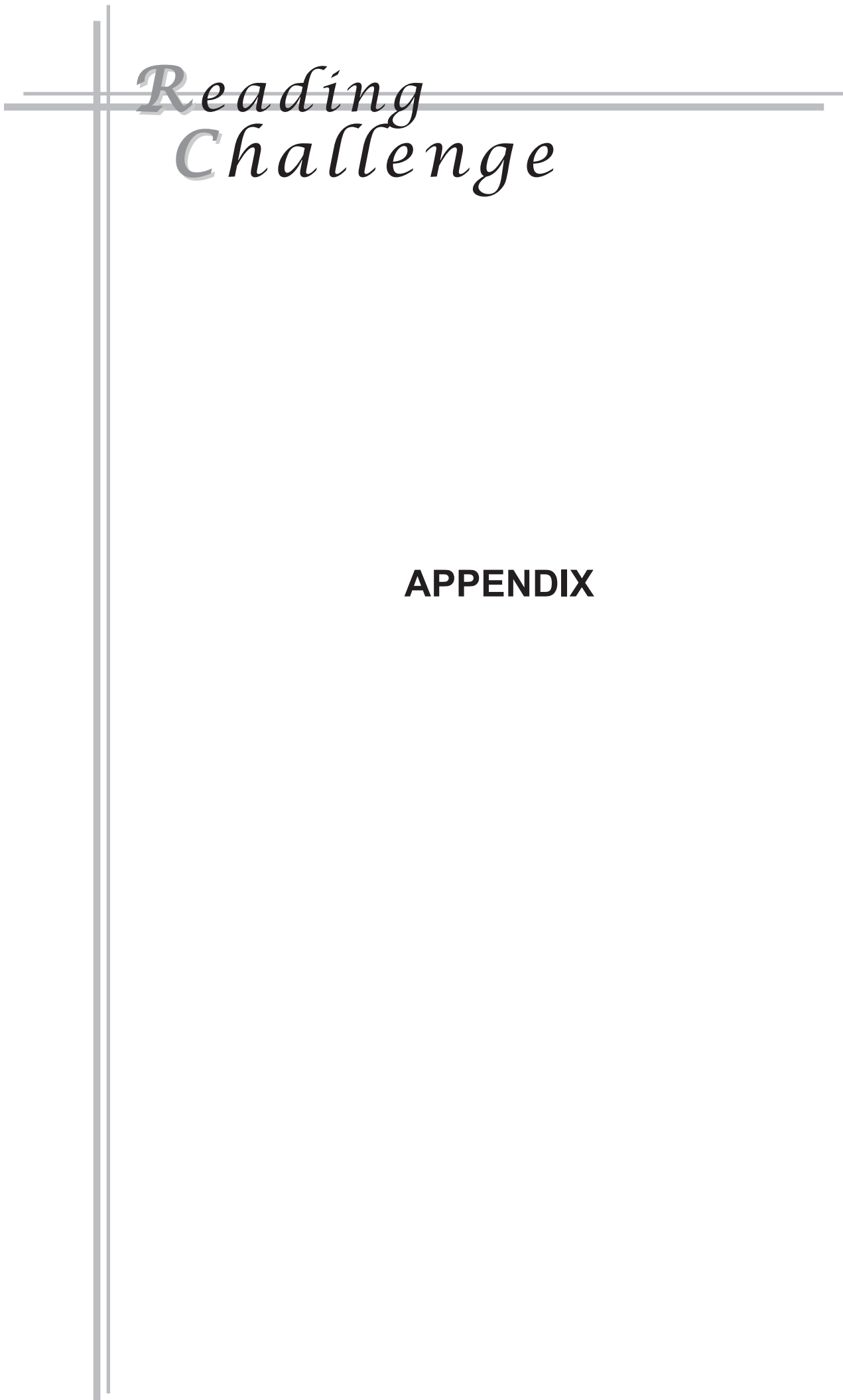


Reading Challenge

Conclusion

The process is the most important aspect of the whole undertaking. It is essentially a small journey of discovery and empowerment for students, parents, and teachers. Improvement is not only in the results but also in what all concerned learned in the process of getting to the final celebrations.



A decorative graphic consisting of a vertical line on the left and two horizontal lines intersecting it, forming a cross-like shape. The vertical line is on the far left, and the horizontal lines are positioned near the top of the page.

Reading Challenge

APPENDIX

Reading Challenge

I am a Winner!

My name is

My class is

- ☐ My aim is to read FIVE books in FIVE weeks.
- ☐ I will be given a new book for every week, by my teacher.
- ☐ I will read my book every night.

How much will I read ?

To decide how much to read each night I will look at the last page to find the number of pages in the book and I will divide that number by 7. The number I get will be the number of pages I will read each night to get the book read in a week.

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THE NAME OF MY BOOK IS

IT WAS WRITTEN BY

IT IS A STORY ABOUT

THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE BOOK IS

THE BEST PART OF THE STORY IS WHEN

I am a winner this week because I have read my book and improved my Reading Skills. I am on my way to earning a ticket for the prize draw.

Congratulations ! I am very proud of you.

Signed: -----

Date: -----

Parent or helper.

Reading Challenge

Abbey Community College
Wicklow

14th January 2002

Dear Parents

Announcing an exciting new "Winner's List" initiative! Following the success earlier in the year of our winners List, every child being a winner, we are delighted to tell you that there will be success, prizes and Certificates of Achievement for every student taking part in the Reading Challenge.

Abbey Community College has been asked by the Department of Education, through the Junior Certificate School Programme, to do a research on reading.

Classes 1 Elm, 2 Ash and 2 Rowan have been selected to take part in the Reading Research Project. We write to ask for your co-operation with it.

The teachers involved, Miss Marie Breen, 1 Elm, Mrs Marie Fidgeon, 2 Rowan and Mrs Rita Vidal, 2 Ash, invite you to a short meeting in the school in room 15 at 8.00 pm on Tuesday 22nd January to meet you and tell you what is involved and also to answer any questions you may have. This is a very important project, as done well, it will greatly improve your son's reading skills and this will be of considerable benefit to him.

The project will last for six weeks and will involve reading a book a week for each of the six weeks. We will be giving out the first book on Friday so we ask you to get him started on it over the weekend and come and meet us on Tuesday night to hear about and discuss the project, the prizes and how you can help your son.

This is a very important meeting, your interest in the project is vital to its success, so please give us and your son your support and do your very best to come along

Looking forward to seeing you.

Co-ordinator JCSP

Winners List / Reading Research Project meeting on Tuesday 22nd January 2002.

Please sign and Return:

I will attend the meeting on Tuesday 22nd January 2002

I will not attend the meeting.

Signed: _____

Reading Challenge

Useful Addresses:

- **STA Ltd., (Surgi-Sales Teaching Aids Ltd.),** 252, Harold's Cross Road, Dublin 6W.
Tel: 01 496 6688 / 496 6593. Fax: 01 496 6899.
E-mail: info@staeducational.com
- **STA Ltd., (Surgi-Sales Teaching Aids Ltd.),** Westcourt Business Park, Callan, Co. Kilkenny
Tel/Fax: 056 775 5161.
E-mail: callan@staeducational.com
- **STA Ltd website:** www.staeducational.com
- **Michael A.O'Brien, Library Supplier,** 14, Beechlawn, Dundrum, Dublin 16.
Tel/Fax: 01 - 298 7342
- **ETC Consult,** 17, Leeson Park, Dublin 6.
Tel: 01- 4972067
- **Mentor Books,** 43, Furze Road, Sandyford Industrial Estate, Dublin 18.
Tel: 01-2952112 / Fax: 01-2952114
E-mail: admin@mentorbooks.ie
Website: www.mentorbooks.ie
- **Kieran O'Regan,** Educational Agencies, Ladysbridge, Co. Cork.
Tel: 021 466 7284. E-mail: dkoregan@eircom.net
- **The O'Brien Press Ltd.** E-mail: books@obrien.ie
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