

# Brilliant Book Blogs - a free and easy way to enrich your own knowledge of children's books

I haven't met you, but I'm betting that we have some things in common.

We'd love the children we work with to buzz with excitement about reading.

In fact we *ourselves* would rather like to buzz with excitement about books!

But reading more widely and developing our own knowledge of children's books? Whilst it sounds like a great plan, how to actually go about it?

We need time, obviously, but I haven't yet invented a way of creating it from thin air. (When I do I'll see if English 4-11 can do a free giveaway...)

We need ways of finding out about the range of children's books out there we could share with the children we work with, but also ways of navigating the forest of pages, to find the most beautiful, the most interesting, the most engaging books, or indeed, just that one book which will be the right one for the child you've got in mind.

We can visit bookshops, libraries, talk to our peers, read journals like this one, Springboard Stories, or Teach Primary, peruse the lists created by charities such as Booktrust, the National Literacy Trust or the Federation of Children's Book Groups. Professional children's book review websites such as Carousel, Books for Keeps or Armadillo Magazine are great resources. We could even turn to book reviews in the national newspapers, although less than 2.5% of review space in them is dedicated to books which make up almost 25% of UK book sales i.e. children's books.

But there's another place you could go. Somewhere that's open whenever you have the time to visit, somewhere peopled by readers passionate about spreading the word about the very best of children's books. A place which is free, and ripe for opportunities for discussion and engagement, should you want to ask advice or talk about books. It's a place where 100% of review space is dedicated to children's books, often with additional bonus material such as linked texts, creative activities and author interviews.

## Welcome to the Kidlitosphere!

In the Kidlitosphere, the online world of children's books, encompassing blogging, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and more, you'll find enthusiastic communities who love nothing more than to chat about children's

books, to ransack their brain cells to help you track down a book you can only remember from a few details, to come up with ideas of books related to specific topics or themes. Whilst not all members of the kidlitosphere population are professionally engaged with children's books, what they do all share is a voracious appetite for children's books and an infectious passion.

For professionals working in primary schools my tailor-made tour around this warm and welcoming land would include stop-offs at the following oases:

**Library Mice** <http://librarymice.com/> @librarymice  
Library Mice is all about sharing one school librarian's enthusiasm for children's literature and showcasing titles that stand above the rest. It covers a wide age range - from books for babies to older teenagers, with frequent author interviews, guest posts, and a regular focus on books translated from French.

**The Book Sniffer** <http://booksniffingpug.blogspot.co.uk/> @maybeswabey  
This blog is written by a children's publishing undercover insider and thus has unique access to some of the world's best authors and illustrators with a specialist insight into the content and design of a new wave of incredibly exciting picture books. If you want to keep your finger on the pulse, this is a great blog to follow.

**Playing by the book** <http://www.playingbythebook.net/> @playbythebook  
I have to admit that this is my own blog, but you would indeed be very welcome to visit this curated space where I focus on books for the under 10s, always linking them to activities - from science to sticking and gluing - and music. I love to take the content out of the book and bring it into the fabric of our lives.

**Read It, Daddy!** <http://readitdaddy.blogspot.co.uk/> @readitdaddy  
This blog is (unusually) written by a dad-daughter combo, and encompasses a vast range of books from self-published authors looking to make a break, to big brand picture books via more unusual and quirky treats.

**Rhino Reads** <http://rhinoreads.wordpress.com/> @CarmenHaselup  
This blog highlights big books for little people-, books that treat them as children not consumers and help them to find out who they are and who they could become. If you're looking for books that inclusive and celebrate diversity this blog is a great place to start.

## ENGLISH 4-11 - WEBSITE EXTRA

### Story Seekers <http://storyseekersuk.wordpress.com/> @StoryseekersUK

On this blog a family shares their thoughts about the books and reading experiences that have moved them as a family, as well as their plans for how they can share this joy with others.

If you're feeling adventurous and want to travel overseas I'd recommend **Seven impossible things before breakfast** (<http://blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings/>), with a focus on the most stunning of picture books this blog will inspire art teachers as well as anyone who loves words, **The Book Chook** (<http://www.thebookchook.com/>), particularly good at comics' resources and the best online literacy games and activities, and also **Anita Silvey's Children's Book-a-Day Almanac** (<http://childrensbookalmanac.com/>) which delivers one book each day of the year, on a day related to that book's content. There are also blogs with a focus in non-fiction (eg **Simply Science** <http://simplyscience.wordpress.com/>), poetry (eg **Poetry for Children**, <http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.co.uk/>, and song-based books (e.g. **Sing Books with Emily** <http://singbookswithemily.wordpress.com/>), to name but a few.

### But why visit these children's book blogs?

These book blogs have no limit on space; the reviewer can talk at any length about a book, without being restricted to only 250 words, or just enough space to give only a plot summary. You'll get much more of a feel for a book than from the one inch reviews common in much of the printed press.

Book blog reviews are free, available 24/7, published regularly (and more more frequently than in printed media) and over time form a rich, easily searchable back catalogue.

Book blogs (and their social media companions such as their linked Twitter, Facebook and/or Pinterest accounts) offer opportunities to engage and discuss in a friendly, non intimidating environment, an especially important activity if we wish to boost our own passion for books (Cremin, 2011). Social media also taps into a massive brain pool which can be so helpful when looking for specific suggestions or titles.

Book bloggers are an openly enthusiastic bunch of readers, making for reviews which ooze infectious passion, whilst reviews in printed media, or given by professionals in work places are often more restrained.

The architecture of blogs means that reviews can be delivered directly into the hands of anyone interested; email subscriptions save you the job of having to search for reviews. Instead they get delivered straight to your

inbox, saving you time.

Many blogs offer added bonus content - not just reviews, but interviews, activities, and even giveaways for you, your classroom, or school library.

A good review contextualises the book you're reading about, and online reviews in blogs can take that contextualisation further by really utilizing the linked network of the world wide web; book bloggers often link not only to author / illustrator / publisher websites, but also to other reviews and relevant articles.

Book blogs can help you build bridges with parents: Find some you love and suggest them in your school newsletter. Many book bloggers are parents of young children themselves and Book bloggers are normal people - not literary critics - many of us are parents with primary aged children and we understand difficulties in getting kids excited about books [lol]

Book blogs are not just about adults reviewing children's books. I'd also like to make a special mention of a couple of classroom based book blogs, where school children' get to have their say:

### East Boldon Bookworms

<http://eastboldonbookworms.primaryblogger.co.uk/>  
This blog is written by "a group of KS2 children who love to talk about books." with a little bit of help from their teacher.

### WEJS Book Blog

<http://wejsbookblog.blogspot.co.uk/>  
Reviews from a junior school book club

I'd love to see more blogs like these two.

My thanks go to all the bloggers I've mentioned in this article. All links mentioned in this article can be found at <http://www.playingbythebook.net/english-4-11-links/>. It would be great to hear what you'd like to see in children's book blogs and what the kidlitosphere could do to help you - do get in touch!

### Biography

Zoe Toft is a part-time librarian in an infant school in Birmingham, and has been blogging about books and the play they inspire in her family since 2009. <http://www.playingbythebook.net/@playbythebook>

### References:

Cremin, T. (2011) 'Reading Teachers/Teaching Readers: Why Teachers Who Read Make Good Teachers Of Reading' pgs 11-16, English Drama Media, February 2011.