

Circular Letter M16/99

To : Boards of Management/Authorities of Second Level Schools

Guidelines for reading at Second Level Schools

Further to the issue of the Library Books Grant the Department wishes to advise Management Authorities of voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education scheme in relation to the purchase of books and other materials designed to improve reading standards.

Reading in Adolescent Years

Reading is an important element in personal and intellectual development in adolescent years. About the age of 11 or 12 the reading habit may be left behind as a childhood pastime. The gap between childhood reading and adult life is either bridged or broken during second level education.

The Role of the School in Reading

The second level school has an important role in promoting reading. The role of the school can include the following:

- To sustain, foster and develop the reading habit in order to lead the student to the adult world of books.
- To instill the idea of library membership.

- To make reading as integral and normal a part of the student's activities during the week as sport/T.V./computer. Many activities, with significant commercial funding, compete for a student's time in these years. If reading, as part of the daily/weekly schedule is deeply ingrained, then the adult reader will emerge.
- The Junior Certificate programme recognises the importance of fiction in the literary education of 12-15 year olds.
- The **new Leaving Certificate programme** gives a new emphasis to the "broad reading and liberal approach" briefly mentioned in the old syllabus. This approach is now being promoted both in the examples of classroom practice encouraged at inservice and in the format of the final examination.

Both of these two English programmes require that schools should have more books and a greater variety of reading materials than they have had heretofore.

Reading and Personal Development

Young people use reading in a very personal, even therapeutic way. They like to observe how characters in literature handle their lives. They like books that see the world from an adolescent's point of view (viz. the enduring popularity of books written by young writers, e.g. Ann Frank or Susan Hinton ("The Outsiders")).

Of course, they may still enjoy adventure stories, but they are also becoming interested in issues such as family life, emotional or social problems. They may think these issues through in a comfortable way through reading suitable fiction.

Reading and Language Development

Habitual reading arouses curiosity about, interest in and confident command of language. The reader takes delight in language and is versatile and comfortable in speaking and writing. These are the factors that develop the more able Leaving Certificate examination candidate.

Active Encouragement of Reading as School Policy

The school can offer:

- Suitable reading material. Teenagers need the guidance of an informed teacher who knows what is available in current publication. The role of the teacher is to offer challenging reading matter which will enable the student to advance. They know what they like, but they do not always know that they are capable of liking.
- A forum for discussing books. Students will bring to school the books they are reading if interest is shown and book activities are part of classroom practice.
- A physical environment which promotes reading as an attractive, modern pastime. Books, posters and book extracts displayed on classroom walls are essential stimulants to reading.
- “Time to Read” as part of the curriculum. Silent reading may not otherwise be part of a student’s life; school can offer it.
- Reading aloud is still very important in English in second level. Short stories are ideal here and a regular “slot” (e.g. Friday fortnightly) is an excellent idea. A book on tape is an ideal variation. **Videos** of quality contemporary novels are also good, e.g. the B.B.C. version of Nina Bawden’s “Carrie’s War” for first year second-level students.

Parental Involvement

Requests for lists of suitable books for teenagers are often made at parent/teacher meetings. There is a need for schools to have such lists to hand, either to give on request or to issue as part of the school bulletin at regular intervals. Many homes have little printed material so it is only in school that some adolescents are aware of and come to experience the beautiful world of books.

Fundamental Principles

While all students should be helped with their reading, priority should be given to those students who have not yet become competent readers;

Students should be taught how to keep reading-journals;

Students should be taught how to transfer acquired key reading skills to personal reading;

Buying whole sets of novels is not a good idea ; 3 or 4 copies of quality books should be sufficient in the school library;

Books bought for the school library should have at least some literary merit;

Books bought for the school library should be student –orientated.

Quality Books

Teacher could

- Seek advice in catalogues from quality publishers.
- Seek advice from buyers in good bookstores. They are anxious to liaise with teachers and often advise on readings / writer appearances / competitions in the bookstores.
- Subscribe to the Children's Literature magazines for good updates on what is currently available.

Use of Books

First year in second-level education is an ideal time to give classes on library classification - local librarians are very helpful here. Students could be introduced to such concepts as index, contents, preface, glossary, etc. First year students are still curious and they readily absorb any information about books and the world of publishing.

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