



Date	April 2015
Key stages	KS1-KS3
School type	Primary and secondary, LA maintained and academy
Themes	Literacy, transition

Raising standards of literacy: The Words in the Wood project

Borehamwood, Shenley and Elstree Schools

Context

Borehamwood is a town in southern Hertfordshire, bordering on London boroughs. Shenley and Elstree are neighbouring villages which share the same secondary schools as Borehamwood. The schools in the project are in the Hertsmeire district which includes 12 primary and 3 secondary schools. All 12 primary and 1 Hertsmeire secondary school took part.

Brief description

The Borehamwood, Shenley and Elstree Literacy Project was created three years ago as a result of concerns about literacy levels within the Borehamwood community.

As part of this year's Words in the Wood project, the schools all focused on the same text *Where the Poppies Grow*, written by Hilary Robinson and illustrated by Martin Impey. Literacy coordinators from each school came together to organise this event and create ways to make the text, which was aimed at Key Stage 2 children, cater to a wider age group. Pupils from the ages of four to twelve created artwork and produced their own interpretation of the text, which was displayed in an exhibition. Schools arranged for Martin Impey, as well as the town mayor to open the exhibition, which was then open for parents and the public for a couple of days.

The project

Each year the project begins on Children's Book Week when all students are taught the same text. During this week, teachers embed literacy into all lessons as well as focusing on the main themes of the chosen book, which this year included World War One and the celebration of friendship.

Each school received a visit by Martin Impey who spent time in all classes speaking to the children about the book, teaching them how to draw in his style, and inspiring them to create work for the exhibition.

In the lead up to the exhibition, children began producing art work and interpretations of the text. Although the main focus of the project is to celebrate reading, children made their interpretations of the text in different forms of art and writing, including writing in French. This is an example of how a project can be made cross-curricular, allowing children to learn in different ways.

Impact

Raised the profile of reading within the school and within the wider community

The Borehamwood, Shenley and Elstree Literacy Project is an example of how schools, both primary and secondary, can work together to help raise the achievement of their pupils and increase the profile of literacy.

This project is a celebration of literacy, where students and schools work together to produce something positive. Teachers reported that this project not only raised the profile of reading within the school, but also within the wider community. Pupils could talk about this project and share ideas with their friends and family of a similar age who attend other schools in the community. Claire Williams, Literacy Coordinator at Kenilworth Primary School, stated that 'it really does make literacy a conversation in the community'.

This project also increased links between local schools and the local library and museum, where the final exhibition was held. The library ordered in several extra copies of the book and more children visited the library when they came to see their work in the exhibition.

Raising literacy levels within the school

Promoting and celebrating reading was the way in which Borehamwood schools decided to overcome problems that they were facing with literacy levels a few years ago. There is evidence that most primary schools in the community have had an increased percentage of children making the expected progress in reading and writing since 2012. However it may not be accurate to assume that this is primarily due to the Words in the Wood project.

Between 2012 and 2014 the amount of primary school children making the expected progress in English, reading and writing increased by 3 percentage points nationally and by 4 ppts in Hertfordshire. Half of all the primary schools (6 schools) in Borehamwood showed a greater increase than both national and local authority figures, with one school improving by 29 ppts in the percentage of children making the expected progress in English, reading and writing between

Improved home-school links

Literacy co-ordinator at Summerswood Primary School in Borehamwood, Pamela Young, talked about how this project has been a great way of forging good home-school links. Parents at the school remained well informed throughout the project and are expected to attend the exhibition, with 500 having attended last year.

'It really does make literacy a conversation in the community'

Improved communication between schools in the community

This project improved communication between schools who met regularly to plan the project. These meetings led to further collaborative work between participating schools, including organising further shared events in the future such as a debating competition.

Overall literacy coordinators had valued the opportunity to network with coordinators from other schools where they could also discuss literacy problems each school was facing.

Helped raise aspirations

As part of this project Martin Impey visited each school before the exhibition. Teachers thought his visit increased enthusiasm and was very impactful, with several students even saying that they wanted to be illustrators when they grew up! This is an example of how school practice can help raise motivation and aspiration.

Teachers agreed that having an exhibition as part of the project was particularly effective as it gave students an interesting purpose for learning; where the end result was having their work displayed to their parents, the public, the town mayor, and the illustrator of the book Martin Impey.

Contact	Laura Edgar, Project organiser/ Headteacher at Hertswood Academy
Related documents and links	http://www.monksmead.herts.sch.uk/our-photos/school-gallery

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing exchanginglexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk



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