



# THAT READING THING

literacy for teens and adults wherever they are



## CHOOSING TEXT

### INTRODUCTION

The practice texts included in That Reading Thing are fine for reinforcing a lesson but they aren't enough. Whether you call it 'authentic text' or 'real reading', choosing reading material for your TRT students is an important part of their TRT experience. The further they get in TRT, the more time should be taken up with reading.

This document will help you make decisions but, as always, we are recommending 'books like these', not these books exactly. The vast range of students going through TRT means that we can't possibly have set texts that work for everyone. As I type, our youngest student is 11 and the oldest is 86. TRT learners are in schools of every description from tiny alternative provisions to big high schools. Some students are in college, in prison, in the world of work and some are in none of the above. Some of them are reading very slowly, still working on saying sounds and listening. Others are flying with large sight vocabularies and quickly decoding unfamiliar words.

Personally, working with young people outside the school system, I loved using newspaper and internet articles. I didn't mind typing them up in a larger font size and printing them off, but I had the time to do that. I often found things that chimed with conversations we had in our sessions. Talking about wildlife in Canadian cities led me to bring in an article about Vancouver police trying to arrest a person at night, but it turned out to be a bear. Talking about jaywalking being illegal in many countries prompted a session reading about what happened to a British journalist in LA. Read about that here: [Where reading can take you](#). Both those articles touched on something they knew about (being arrested) but took them somewhere else. A lot of the language was familiar but some of it was new and we could talk about it.

When there was no obvious prompt, I'd bring in an article that interested me but still touched on something they knew about like an article remembering a family's experience of the Blitz in Liverpool. I no longer have the original article but here's a website I would use now, perhaps copying text into a Word doc to read but looking at the photos on the site: [Human stories behind the blitz](#). (Liverpool Museums).

For young people in school, I always had a couple of tried and tested books which I had chosen for their age and general reading resilience. My preferred were a book from the Dorling Kindersley Unexplained series and a book of short stories. [Read more about those here](#) .

**Getting started:** Use the student section as the basis for a quick chat about what they might like to read.

# TUTOR

## WHAT AFFECTS YOUR CHOICES?

- Love searching for great text or exhausted by the thought of searching for text
- Access to a printer or need something all ready to go
- Reading time - how many weeks will you have together and how long each week?
- Budget or no budget. Do you have a school library to help?
- Expectation - keep it high but some students need a simpler start because they have never read a lot of text before, never mind a book. Find the balance between too easy and frustrating.
- Access to an online device
- Work on your own or for an organisation/school etc

# STUDENT/LEARNER

## THERE'S A LOT TO CONSIDER

### **TRT Level: Foundation or Advanced**

If your student is working slowly through Foundation levels then you need to pay attention to decodability and always keep The Deal in mind. Look for books with little bits of text that you can talk about.

Once a student is working at the Advanced levels, the world of reading opens up. Every time I say something about what works best, someone proves me wrong! People do get through Harry Potter even though I didn't manage it.

### **Age & Maturity**

- An 11-year-old and 15-year-old are unlikely to want to read the same novel but they might be happy reading the same non-fiction book. A mature 13-year-old will likely have less tolerance for a young book than a more childlike 13-year-old.
- Adult learners might want to read to their own children or have a book in mind that they've wanted to read since childhood.

### **Reading resilience**

- Please don't assume this is always low.
- Tutors get through whole novels with students who start off reading a paragraph at a time and work up to pages at a time. Remember to tell them that you'll read as much as they read. Sometimes, of course, you'll read several pages to their one, depending on the length of the book.

## Background knowledge

- I personally love text that starts with something familiar but takes the reader into the unfamiliar. The ‘familiar’ might be where they live or experiences they’ve had. The ‘unfamiliar’ might be an historical event set in the place your student knows well. A teen and his elderly Gap Project tutor both grew up in the East End of London and ended up reading local history books together.
- The familiar might be something they know about like fishing or running or getting arrested. The unfamiliar might be the setting or the time in history.
- A simple story well told might not require much background knowledge. True Mysteries, mentioned below, is a great example. Terry Deary makes imagining the story easy.

## Interest in a subject

- They might not want the act of reading anywhere near the things they love. On the other hand, they might not mind at all and enjoy sharing their expertise with you.
- Sometimes your own love of a subject can be contagious but check as you go to make sure your student is at least enjoying it a little. When I brought the article (mentioned above) about the Blitz in Liverpool, I was a bit unsure about whether my student would even engage. His response was that he thought he'd heard his nan talk about it and was going to ask her.

## Humour/horror/violence/ other triggers

- Always check whether you think the humour in a book could be offensive to your learner (or you). Ditto upsetting or triggering.
- If you’re the least bit uncertain about the suitability of a text, read it before you bring it to a lesson.

## Fiction/non-fiction preference

- Sometimes they don’t know so you can introduce one or the other.
- Sometimes they have a clear preference so go with that.

# A NOTE ABOUT WHAT FOLLOWS

I’ve taken some of these titles from conversations, emails and recommendations on the Facebook tutor group. Others are books I’ve found recently that look like good examples of ‘books like xxx’ but they haven’t been tried with learners.

You can sometimes preview the beginning of a book on amazon or use the kindle app (no kindle required) to request a sample.



Barrington Stoke lets you read the first chapter on their website.

Before you pay for a new book, search on abebooks in your own country. You can then exclude countries to avoid expensive postage charges. I understand that you might not find these books in your country, so let's work together to find great and affordable alternatives for your students.

# BOOK IDEAS

Depending on where you live and the needs of your students, the books in this section might be perfect but if they're not, **look for 'books like these' rather than 'these books'**. Let us know your favourites so we can grow our collections for teens and adults all over the world.

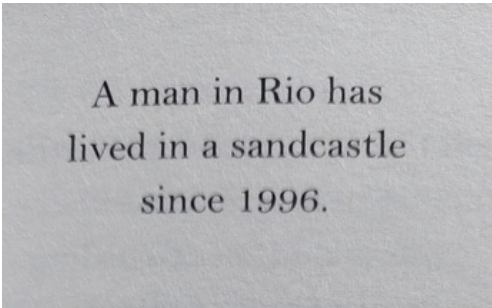
## 1. ALL DONE FOR YOU - WITH A COST

St Albans Girls' School has been using TRT for several years with their students aged over 11 with reading ages below 6 years. In the interest of consistency across all adults delivering TRT, for 'real reading' they have paired TRT with the Rapid Plus Reading Programme. This consists of fiction, non fiction and plays as well as comprehension and discussion questions. There are probably other packages available.

## 2. START A BOOK COLLECTION

### WORKING THROUGH FOUNDATIONS

This is by far the hardest group to find mature authentic text for. Explore some of the other small format books in the sections below. Move through the foundations as quickly as possible.



A man in Rio has  
lived in a sandcastle  
since 1996.

#### 2,024 QI Facts

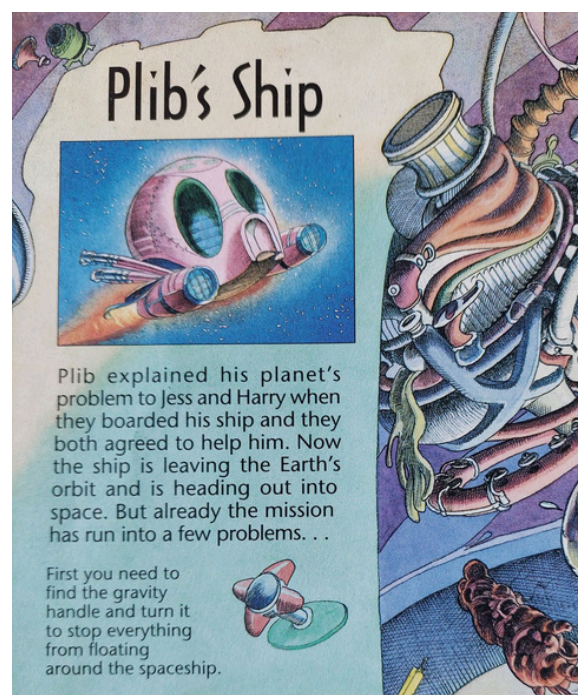
(Number 7 in the QI series), Faber & Faber, 2018

This is the most recent Qi (British tv show) trivia book. Perhaps better for older learners. Would work well as an e-book. I tried an older version and this one was better.

My old favourite for a young 11-year-old working through Foundations is:

**Star Quest** by Andy Dixon, Usborne, 1999

There are currently several used copies on abebooks. Plib's Ship provides some excellent decoding practice but only for the youngest TRT students.



## ADVANCED LEVEL FICTION

Here are novels by two authors recommended by a TRT tutor.

They have published books in both regular long format and for Barrington Stoke which are shorter and easier to read. However, the longer novels have been used to great effect with young people in special settings so don't discount them for your students who are past the Foundation Levels of TRT.

If you want to explore the Barrington Stoke website, [here are the books for readers aged 13+](#). There is also an 11+ category. You can read the first chapters of books on the Barrington Stoke website and get a sample on the Kindle app. Many Barrington Stoke books are available on amazon and abebooks.

### Keren David:

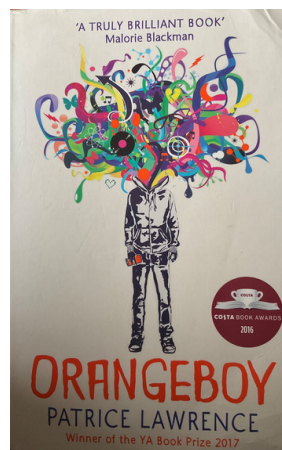
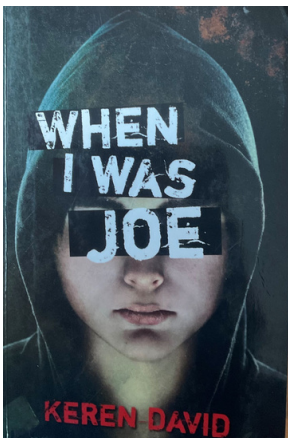
**When I was Joe**, Francis Lincoln Children's Books, 2010. This is the first in a 3-book series.

**The Disconnect**, Barrington Stoke, 2019 (edited to a reading age of 8)

### Patrice Lawrence:

**Orangeboy**, Hodder Children's Books, 2016

**Needle**, Barrington Stoke, 2022 (edited to a reading age of 8)

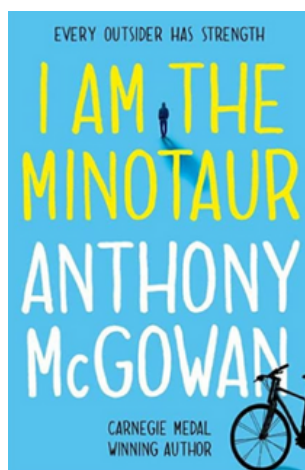


There are thousands of books that might be great for your students. Check out this brilliant collaborative project hosted by Jennifer Webb of funky pedagogy. [The Reading List Project](#) has a whole section of books with teen protagonists, each one summarized and reviewed by the teacher who recommended it. Explore the other categories for inspiration.

Two of the three books recommended for less confident readers are by Anthony McGowan.

**I am the Minotaur**, Oxford University Press, 2021

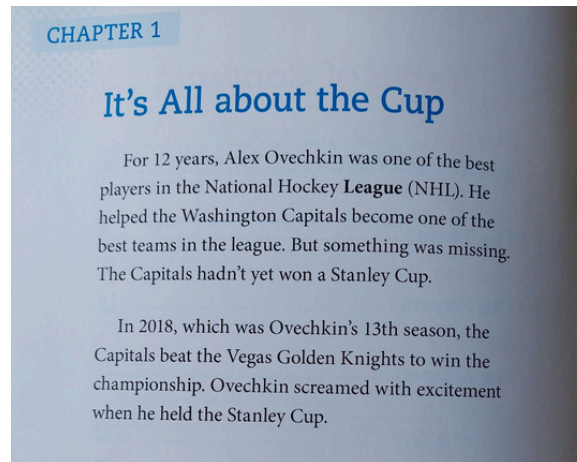
**The Truth of Things** (3 short novellas), Barrington Stoke, 2019



Click on the cover photo to take you to the review page at [funkypedagogy.com](http://funkypedagogy.com)

# ADVANCED LEVEL NON-FICTION

The strength of these types of books (not these books exactly) is that you can dip in and don't have to read cover to cover. You might pick three topics and let the student choose which one they want to read. We want to give them agency even when they haven't chosen the book.



## The Stanley Cup

Capstone Press, 2019

Pick your sport or other interest. This format is good for very reluctant readers who might be put off by a thick book. I've found similar material on CBC Kids. I'm still looking for an equivalent series in the UK or Australia.

## Stolen History by Sathnam Sanghera, Penguin, 2023

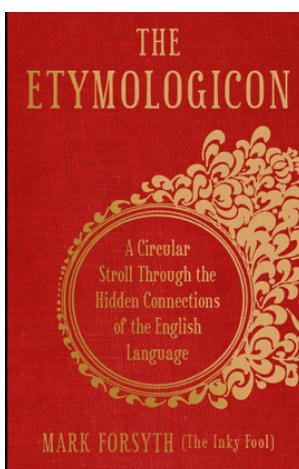
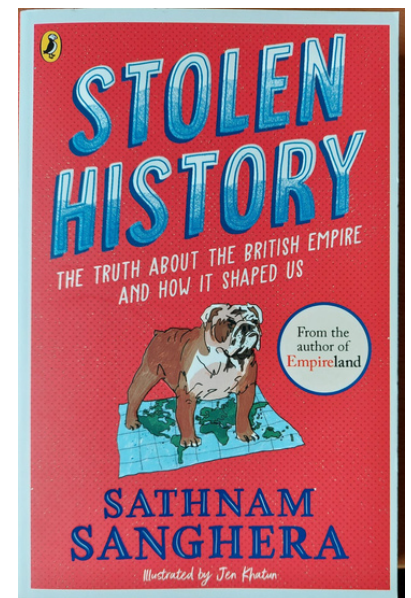
**The truth about the British Empire and how it shaped us.**

"You've probably heard the word 'empire' before. Perhaps because of the Roman empire. Or maybe even the Star Wars films. But what about the British Empire? Why don't we learn much about this? And what even is an empire, anyway?" Lots of different subjects to dip into.

## Etymologicon by Mark Forsyth, Icon Books, 2011

**A Circular Stroll Through the Hidden Connections of the English Language**

Sometimes you get a student who is fascinated by words. Here's an excerpt about why 'pool' is a gambling word. Susie Dent is another author of accessible books about English words. [View her Bluesky feed](#) for examples.



That's how the French played a game of chicken. The French, though, being French, called it a game of *poule*, which is French for chicken. And the chap who had won all the money had therefore won the *jeu de poule*.

The term got transferred to other things. At card games, the pot of money in the middle of the table came to be known as the *poule*. English gamblers picked the term up and brought it back with them in the seventeenth century. They changed the spelling to *pool*, but they still had a pool of money in the middle of the table.

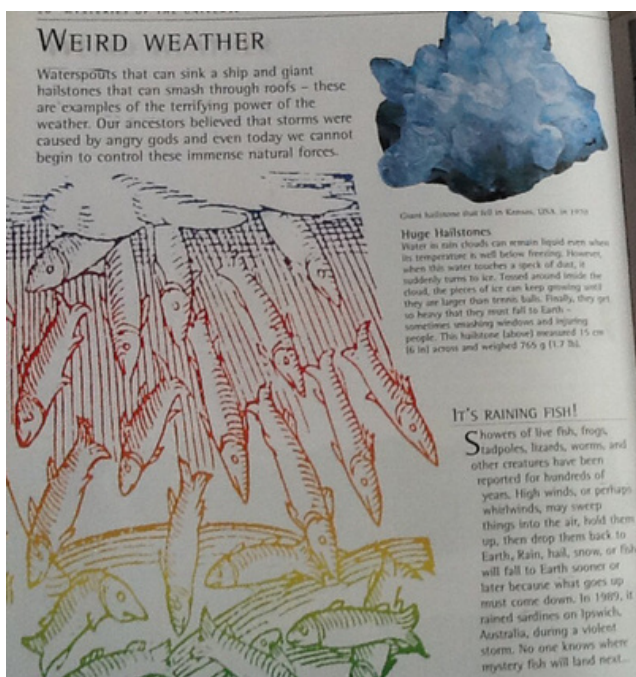
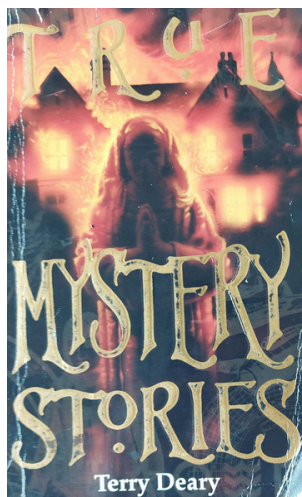
It should be noted that this pool of money has absolutely nothing to do with a body of water. Swimming pools, rock pools and Liverpools are utterly different things.

I have books like this on my tablet which is great for the option to change fonts and font sizes as well as spacing. You can save short passages as photos and use a stylus to mark them up while reading. Not for everyone, but it might suit you and your student.

## True Mystery Stories

Terry Deary, Scholastic, 2000 These are the 'ghostly stories' my 14-year-old reluctant decoder wanted to read every week. Still available used on abebooks.

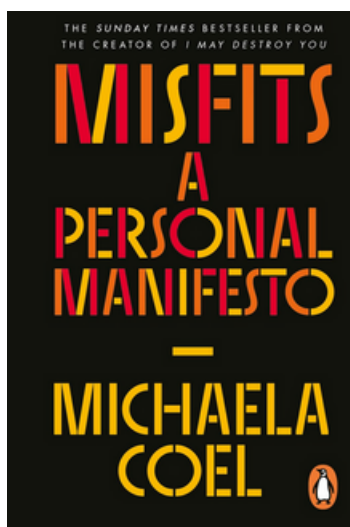
Explore both fiction and non-fiction short stories on amazon and read free samples on the kindle app (no kindle required).



## Misfits

### A Personal Manifesto

Michaela Cole, Penguin, 2021. For adults and older teens. You might want to read it and pick out sections so your learner can decide if they want to read the whole thing. It's a nice small format but lots is packed into the short book. Quite swearsy.



## Local history books - often true crime

A bookstore near you will probably have a section on local history. As always, pre-read for offensive language and stereotypes.

It was one of those quiet nights when you think nothing will happen. That's exactly the time when something unexpected can always catch you out.

The A229 road towards Maidstone was quiet. It was just gone midnight and most of that corner of England was asleep in bed. The moon glimmered on the road and it stretched out like a silver ribbon in front of Ian Sharpe.

Ian yawned and stretched and settled back in the seat of his car. He pressed the accelerator gently and sped past the limit. But the tyres were new, the brakes effective and the road empty. It was perfectly safe.

Ian chuckled to himself. "No law against doing 85 miles an hour ... just a law against getting caught!" The road was straight and clear and he didn't expect to see any police cars.

The car raced under the bridge and past Blue Bell Hill. When he saw the turning to Aylsford he knew he'd just four miles to go to home. He'd be in bed in ten minutes.

He was dreaming of slipping beneath the electric blanket when it happened. One moment the road was empty. The next a pale shape was there at the side of the road. His foot covered the brake as the shape rushed closer.

## Dorling Kindersley or similar books.

See what's available in your library or local bookstore. You can also find used out-of-print books on abebooks.com including my old favourite, **Mysteries of the Universe** by Colin Wilson which I like for its format of both larger and smaller print on the same page.

In the process of writing this, I searched online what being 'an outsider like her' might be like 'in that place'. The website for a giant hair company came up first, the specific page: 'How To Bleach Hair: The Ideal Technique'. And I quote: 'Your hair is not really blonde? This is true for 95 per cent of all people ... nature has given only very few of them blonde hair. All but these few women have spirited the natural pigments out of their hair. Among the colour treatments, bleaching is still number one on the list.'

I wondered why, if 95 per cent of us didn't fit something, we would encourage each other to aspire to it, to emulate it?

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Mahahaa, Inhabit Media Inc, 2022

I would love teachers of indigenous young people to help fill this section. Here's a traditional tale in English and Inuktitut. It has a picture book format but there's lots of text and dramatic illustrations. It's a book I would read with the Grade 7s I worked with in Nunavut even though it's not in their dialect. It's a gory book and some would find it very sad.

This story begins in the High Arctic of Canada, in the early spring. This is the time in the Arctic when the wind is getting warmer and the days are growing longer, but the ground is still blanketed with snow and ice.

Somewhere on Somerset Island there lived a young girl and her father. The girl's name was Aulaja and she was nine years old. Her father's name was Kudloo and he was a good hunter and father. Aulaja's mother had become sick and died during the winter. It was a very sad and hard winter for the family. Aulaja spent much of her time alone because her father had to find food for them and the dogs. Every time her father left to go hunting, he told Aulaja the same thing: "Be careful and cautious while I am gone; there are things that live on this land that would do you harm. Keep the dogs close by and listen to them, for they can sense more than we can."



## ESOL LEARNERS

I came across these British Council resources looking for text for a teen who is doing TRT but also learning English. We know that TRT doesn't teach English but, if you have a learner who is working through TRT with a tiny vocabulary then these are worth a look. Do them online or download and print.

<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading/a1-reading>

## WISDOM- INSPIRATION

The Comfort Book, Matt Haig, Canongate, 2022



Your value never needs to be justified. You aren't valuable *because* you work hard or earn a lot or can jump high or have a six-pack or you built a business or you are kind or look good in selfies or present a TV show or can sit at the piano and play 'Für Elise' off by heart. Your value has no *because*. You are the right quantity. You are a full cup. You are worth yourself, and that is always enough.

## BOARD GAMES

St Albans Girls' School has fun with a board game called **Stupid Deaths** which requires the reading of cards. **Trivial Pursuit** cards can also be good for adults though probably not with playing the game.

## OTHER TEXT SOURCES

**Newspaper articles** - maybe typed in a larger font & perhaps edited for decodability. The added bonus of this more time-consuming approach is that students can take the text home if they want.

- Revisit page 1 of this document for a couple of examples.
- See <https://thatreadingthing.com/decodable-text-for-teens-and-adults/>

**Websites** - thinking of the student who would read nothing until her tutor found a soap opera plot spoiler website.

- If you have a tablet and capacitive pencil/stylus, take a screen shot and read from that.
- Give student the link so they can read more. The caveat here is obvious; be wise about websites.

**Graphic novels**

**Comic books**

**Manuals**

**Driver handbook to pass test to get a learner's permit** - different in every country.

**Joke books** - I confess to being too afraid of this challenge, especially something for adults.

**Books for parents to read to their children**

This is a living document. Please email or post books, articles, websites etc that you and your student have enjoyed so we can add them to the list. Tell us a bit about your students: their age, reading confidence, TRT level and maybe one other fact about them.

## IMPORTANT LAST WORD

Due to the diversity of TRT learners and tutors as described on pages 2 and 3, it's up to each of you - tutor/organisation/school/prison etc - to do further research when making final decisions about texts for your students. Feedback is always welcome.

**Our wish is that every That Reading Thing student  
experiences reading something they enjoy.**

**The TRT 'rule' is that they should be reading something they wouldn't be  
embarrassed for their peers/friends/family to see them with.**

**And finally, after a bit of trial and error, you will find a couple of books  
that you just love to work with and your enthusiasm will be contagious.**



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