



Young Teen Fiction book award in Staffordshire

The Young Teen Fiction book award promotes reading for pleasure and the work of school and public libraries to 11 to 14-year-olds. This key stage 3 age group nominates the best fiction for their year group for the award. The voting process and the award events and debates in schools and countywide enhance literacy, citizenship and social skills.

"Staffs Young Teen Fiction award isn't about getting it right – it is about getting excited."

Helen Emery, Librarian and Resource Centre Manager, King Edward VI School, Lichfield

"The Young Teen Fiction award has the potential to reach every 11 to 14-year-old in Staffordshire through schools, school and public libraries and the award website, www.staffordshire.gov.uk/ytf."

Staffordshire library services

The effects

In this countywide book award, 11 to 14-year-olds nominate and vote for the books they love. It was set up in response to English teachers' and literacy consultants' concerns about a perceived decline in reading for pleasure among KS3 pupils, particularly in Year 8. The Young Teen Fiction award values students' reading choices, promotes public and school libraries, encourages schools to make full use of their schools library service and develops students' sense of citizenship and social skills by providing opportunities to lobby for and debate their choices. It helps schools fulfil at least two aspects of the Every Child Matters agenda ('Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a positive contribution') which complements the work of the national strategy for secondary schools. Participation and library loans of the shortlisted books have increased steadily over the three years of the award.

The experience

Sue Ball, Service Development Officer: Children & Young People, Staffordshire CC Library & Information Services

We want these young people to award this prize for a book they have really enjoyed reading. We want to value their reading choices and promote public and school libraries for recreational reading. Promotion in schools is key to reaching large numbers of our target audience. Publicity materials are sent out to all eligible schools and public libraries at the start of the award process in September and schools are invited to register to take part in the award and to attend the award's Celebration Day the following July. Students can nominate any novels written for 11 to 14-year-olds in English and published in the previous calendar year. A shortlist of the nominated books is announced in February. Public library staff visit schools to help organise reading clubs and other reader development activities. The award was set up in 2004 after consultation with English teachers and Literacy Consultants had identified concerns about the decline in reading for pleasure amongst KS3

pupils, particularly those in Y8 (12-13 year-olds) and a need to engage pupils in this age group in wider reading.

All public libraries in Staffordshire actively promote and support the award. This provides an alternative environment in which young people can access books and the award process and includes young people whose schools are not participating. The activities build up to a Celebration Day in July where young people get to vote in person for the winning book, after they have spent a day discussing the six books on the shortlist. In 2007 200 young people from 27 schools attended. Then there is another ceremony with the winning author in the autumn.

Various schools give presentations during the day to champion the shortlisted titles. At the 2007 Day imaginative performances ranged from a quiz show promoting Lemony Snicket's **The End** to readings of sombre and thoughtful poems written by the young people themselves championing **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas** by John Royme. Students can buy books from Waterstone's, borrow books from the public library service and comment on public library collections, activities they would like to see in public libraries and the library environment they would like.

Staffordshire SLS produce Reader Development boxes, which are three half termly packs of fiction eligible for the relevant year's Staffordshire's Young Teen Fiction Book Award. There are 20 books per pack and the cost to middle and high schools is £75. The SLS promotes the Award on their web site and provides support for administering the award: one of the Advisers is responsible for checking the eligibility of nominations and compiling the short list and one of the Advisers is also responsible for counting the votes at the end.

Outcomes

From September 2006 to March 2007 425 eligible nominations were received from young people. In total 98 different eligible titles were nominated for the Award during 2007, a 77% increase on 2006 (75 titles) and a 73% increase on 2005 (72 titles). 200 young people from 27 schools attended the Celebration Day. During the day 134 books were issued to the young people. During the period when the shortlist was being considered, the shortlisted books were borrowed from public libraries between two and seven times more than equivalent titles.

Comments about the YTF Award -

"The time leading up to the Award day was as important as the day itself – with young people across Staffordshire coming together into reading groups and refining, clarifying or defending their views and opinions, likes and dislikes. It was fun but also challenging and totally absorbing – precisely the kind of experience that will encourage and motivate young people to sustain the reading habit."

Bill Lockwood, County Inspector for English

"Staffs YTF isn't about English lessons. It isn't about grades. It isn't about giving into peer pressure and being told what you should like. The YTF validates their choices – what they choose wins. In my experience, most of the work of promoting the award goes on in libraries – not classrooms. YTF isn't about getting it right – it is about getting excited."

At King Edward VI, Lichfield, the YTF has not only stretched my more ardent readers, it has encouraged those who might not read as much. It has given me opportunities to work with staff from our local public library. It has raised the profile of the Library within school, and – now in it's third year – the YTF has

created a contagious buzz amongst our students which will undoubtedly continue in the future."

Helen Emery, Librarian and Resource Centre Manager, King Edward VI School, Lichfield

“The School Improvement Division became involved in YTF in order to support schools in developing wider reading for pleasure. The approach of the Award enables youngsters to develop key and basic skills, it provides learning opportunities that are different to those provided through the national curriculum and it builds upon the learning experiences that are offered through statutory schooling. It is an inclusive process which helps schools to fulfil at least two aspects of the Every Child Matters agenda ('Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a positive contribution') and which complements the work of the Secondary Strategy.

The project can potentially reach all 11-14 year olds who have access to the local public library. This and the website dimension make it accessible even for those youngsters who are not in schools. It is flexible enough to allow teachers and librarians in school to use it in different ways and, although the emphasis is very much on reading for pleasure, some schools manage to use the Award as part of a wider reading strategy. Schools have devised all sorts of creative ways to encourage and reward participation.”

Diane Gaunt, Secondary English Consultant, School Improvement Division

Comments from students and school librarians:

“... this set of books has brought back my love of books”

Jonathan

“It’s the best one out the lot and one of the best books I’ve read in a while all my friends agree. I’m not the biggest fan in books but I just couldn’t put it down”

Lucy

“I have loved being able to express my opinion”

Student

“Just dropping you a line to say how much the pupils and I enjoyed the YTF day last week. The kids are still buzzing - they are all busy reading the fiction box of books I had from SLS and there seem to be more pupils who want to join in which can only be a good thing. One boy said this morning to me that he can't wait for the shortlist next year! And this is a boy who said that he didn't like reading.”

School librarian

“I just wanted to tell you how much our group enjoyed the YTF Award Day. The car was silent on the way home — they were all reading their new books!”

School librarian

Resources and staffing

The awards committee consisted of:

- The Library and Information Services Service Development Officer for Children & Young People
- The LIS district manager
- Three LIS children’s team leaders
- The schools library service secondary adviser
- Staffordshire’s School Improvement Division secondary team leader

The 2007 YTP Celebration Day cost £3,482.71. This included:

- Showground hire
- Catering
- Promotional materials
- Fee and expenses for two guest authors
- IT support
- Equipment
- Prizes.

The cost was met by a successful bid to Staffordshire LIS Reader Development Bid Initiative and the Schools' Library Service.

Partners

- Staffordshire Library and Information Services
- Staffordshire School Library Service
- Staffordshire School Improvement Division
- Waterstone's

Challenges/ lessons learnt

Planning up to a year ahead is essential to book a venue large enough to meet demand from schools for the Celebration Day and book guest authors for the Celebration Day. Several months' notice is needed to ensure the winning author can attend the awards ceremony. Schools need to be kept well informed and given plenty of notice and constant reminders to ensure involvement. Good publicity is vital and the website plays a crucial role as is the key method of communicating with participants.

The future

The aim is to get public libraries more actively involved in the award and to continue to increase the number of nominations and votes received and the number of participating schools.