



## Reading buddies project

**A secondary school library project to improve literacy levels and self-esteem for a group of Year 8 students involved three age groups, two schools and a crime-fighting mouse. The Year 8s worked with their Year 10 reading buddies to produce their own books with help from Rastamouse author Michael de Souza, then were coached by a children's librarian to read their stories aloud to a delighted primary class.**

*"We learned to be brave and to look outside the school for partners to extend students' literacy"*

## The effects

Young teenagers' literacy and self-esteem have been boosted in an exciting collaboration between two schools and three age groups, based around local author Michael de Souza's character Rastamouse. The school library at Capital City Academy invited the author and illustrator Genevieve Webster to join a literacy intervention programme for Year 8s. The 25 students were inspired to work with Year 10 reading buddies to write their own Rastamouse tales, with help from Michael de Souza and illustrator Genevieve Webster. Then, after coaching from a children's librarian, they read them aloud to Year 4s at their partner primary school.

## The experience

Pauline Guiney, Learning Resource Centre manager, Capital City Academy, London Borough of Brent

We started this very successful project by inviting local author Michael de Souza to the school library share the tales of Rastamouse and his crime-fighting mouse crew with 25 Year 8 students (13 girls and 12 boys). We had selected the students for a whole-year literacy intervention project because they had low reading ages and had arrived at the school with low SATs scores. We had paired them with reading buddies from Year 10 who had been trained by Community Service Volunteers to work with them throughout the year so the buddies attended the reading too. We also invited a Year 4 class from nearby Donnington primary school.

Michael de Souza's first visit for two hours launched work on Rastamouse for the middle term of the year. After the reading, the Year 8 students were inspired to work with their reading buddies to create their own picture books using the Rastamouse characters. Michael de Souza came back for a day workshop with Rastamouse illustrator Genevieve Webster, when they did a lot more intense work on the text and illustrations. We invited a Brent children's librarian into school to help the students prepare to read their stories aloud to the Year 4s. The students then made a return visit to the Donnington Year 4s to share the finished books in a story-time session. It was a huge achievement for these students, who have literacy difficulties, to stand up in front of a whole class of primary children and read aloud stories they had written themselves. Michael de Souza and Genevieve Webster were

able to make another surprise visit to see them. Later, they made recordings of each other's readings which were uploaded on the school website. The head of Year 8, who joined the students on their visit to Donnington, described their progress as 'miraculous'.

## Resources and staffing

- 2 librarians, Capital City Academy
- Literacy co-ordinator, Capital City Academy
- Lots of A3 paper
- Crayons and felt pens

## Partners

- Michael de Souza
- Genevieve Webster
- Donnington Primary School, Brent
- Brent Libraries
- Community Service Volunteers

## Outcomes of project

*"Miraculous"*

Head of Year 8

*"That's the best thing I have ever done."*

Year 8 student

*"Our students loved working with the CCA's Year 8 students and were inspired to write their own Rastamouse picture books."*

Year 4 teacher, Donnington Primary

*"Irie, Irie, Irie!!"*

Michael de Souza

## Challenges/lessons learnt

Preparing students with low literacy levels and low self-esteem to write and share their own picture books with Year 4 students was challenging. This project has encouraged the school librarians to look outside the school for partners to extend students' literacy.

## The future

This was such a successful project that Capital City Academy plans to repeat it with a Year 7 literacy intervention group.