



School-based reading challenge in Stockport

A competitive sports theme, imaginative promotion and investment in great prizes ensured maximum participation for a Stockport secondary's latest key stage 3 cross-curricular reading and research challenge.

"It works! Students will work for great prizes. Staff will give time to an initiative that they see is working"

The effects

The Formula 1 reading and research challenge, based on the previous year's successful World Cup Challenge model, supports all 700 key stage 3 students in programmes of study across the curriculum. The librarian and literacy co-ordinator are bursting with creativity in the activities they devise and their promotion strategy. A competitive sports theme, an inclusive team system based on form groups and investment in good prizes keeps students motivated through the summer term. Form tutors were co-opted to set their team challenges and the school leaders turned into F1 commentators to show their support.

The experience

Nikki Heath, Librarian and Sally Westrope, Literacy Co-ordinator, Werneth School, Stockport

We ran the Formula 1 Challenge throughout summer term 2007 as a school-wide competitive reading and research project for key stage 3 students (11 to 14-year-olds). Twenty-seven form groups (around 700 students in all) worked as teams to solve challenges based on the 2007 Formula 1 racing season.

Each form sponsored a driver, which encouraged competition and discussion about the challenge and about Formula 1. The teams had to complete the series of challenges within 10 weeks. Most forms used their weekly literacy time to work on some challenges with individuals sent off to do certain tasks in their own time. For example, in one of the challenges we placed the drivers' photographs around school and a form tutor would ask every student to find out three facts about a different driver each and report back. The challenges covered summarising, research, creative writing, comprehension, performance, debate, numeracy and designing a racetrack and racing car (most forms voted for the best entry to represent them).

The form that made the best team effort went bowling and laser shooting, while the student who made the best individual effort from each year group received an iPod Shuffle.

The literacy co-ordinator made a Formula 1 Challenge DVD to show in assemblies for the launch. This featured a 'book race': we got students to write one-minute race commentaries for their favourite books. They pitted the books and authors and had to describe the race just like the commentators do. Then the headteacher and one of the deputy headteachers read the complete commentary on film, set to Formula 1 music.

The DVD also included footage of students taking part in our other book events, including Drop Everything and Read and The End to End Challenge, where the main school corridor was lined with books. With the students turned into celebrities, reading was shown in a credible light. The DVD reached students whom the staff sometimes struggle to engage through books.

Resources and staffing

- The school literacy budget paid for the winning form's trip (£300) and covered the considerable photocopying costs
- The iPod Shuffles were donated
- Consultation with pupils had revealed that great prizes were the best motivator
- The resources for the whole competition came to approximately £70

Partners

This was a school-wide initiative but the resources, ideas, and impact have been shared with the Northern Achievement Network of schools, other librarians and literacy co-ordinators and Reading Connects.

Outcomes

"The Formula 1 Challenge has been a great use of form time and has made my form work as a team."

Form tutor

The impact of projects like this on literacy had been proved through a similar initiative, World Cup Challenge 2006. While the skills developed were deliberately included to support students across the curriculum, the F1 Challenge wasn't designed with individual schemes of Work or programmes of study in mind. Its predecessor, The World Cup Challenge of 2006 was a similar challenge but was mapped across the school's schemes of work, so that the challenges directly related to homework and classwork.

Links to the National Literacy Strategy Framework for English:

Year 7

Sentence Level 13b, 15, 16, 17

Reading 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13

Writing 1, 2, 9, 10, 11

Speaking & Listening 2,3,5,13,16,17

Year 8

Sentence Level 7, 9, 11, 12

Reading 1,2,3,4

Writing 1,2,5,6,7,8,

S&L 1,2,4,15,16

Year 9

Sentence Level 3, 5,6,9

Reading 1,2,3,4,7,

Writing 2,5,6,7,11,12,

S&L 2,12

School library loans were up by 5 per cent by the end of the project while visits to the library hit 500 a day: an increase of 3 per cent. We were happy with this, as many of the challenges did not directly involve the library's participation. The competitive sport element created a buzz, allowing students to get involved who had previously considered themselves 'too cool' to read.

The team approach meant that weaker students were not pitted against the much more able: instead, everyone had something to contribute. Students worked to their particular strengths and the winning team happened to have many students who would be considered less able readers. Confidence among these students, who were publicly rewarded for their efforts and achievement, rapidly increased.

Challenges

The challenges were finding a suitable reward for a good price, ensuring that all students of all abilities were catered for and ensuring full participation of staff and pupils. The winner must be as easy to assess as possible: we rewarded the best entry rather than giving a prize to a first correct entry because once students feel the prize has been awarded, they soon give up.

The future

Olympic Challenge 2008. All year groups will be involved this time as Werneth now has mixed age form groups.