

THE  
**READING**  
AGENCY



UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP  
UNITED KINGDOM

# READ to the BEAT



## Information for Schools

Illustrations © Harry Woodgate 2026. Read to the Beat © The Reading Agency 2026,  
registered charity number 1085443 England and Wales.



## Pick up the tempo with your pupils' reading this term!

We are facing a national crisis in children's reading. Recent research shows that only 1 in 3 children and young people now enjoy reading ([Clark, et al., 2025](#)), and **1 in 4 children in the UK cannot read well by age 11**.

The Reading Agency and public libraries are working to change this with the Summer Reading Challenge – a **FREE**, UK-wide programme. Last year, over **575,000** children took part with **nearly 12 million books** being read. Sing from the rooftops! We're so thrilled that the theme for the Summer Reading Challenge 2026 will be music.

Our exciting partnership with [Universal Music Group UK](#) will open doors for children to explore the creative power of reading and music. The link between music and storytelling runs deep. Think rhythm, self-expression and creativity. Children will have the opportunity to hear from inspiring musicians at the top of their game, championing the joy of reading. This year's Challenge will harness the universal appeal of music to inspire the next generation of readers in the UK.

The official **[Read to the Beat Collection](#)** is available for purchase via library suppliers (including [Peters](#)) or on [Bookshop.org](#). [Discover more about the books on our resources database](#). The Collection includes books about musicians, characters discovering music, sound science, cultural traditions, rhythm, storytelling through sound, breaking down barriers to music, creative expression and following your dreams.

Please note these titles have been broadly divided into age categories for the Summer Reading Challenge Book Collection but you can find more specific age ratings, including any relevant content warnings, on publisher websites to ensure a title is suitable for the child reading it.

2026 is [The National Year of Reading](#), the biggest campaign in a generation designed to help more people (re)discover the joy of reading and make it a part of their everyday lives. We are asking you to Go All In by supporting the Summer Reading Challenge and encouraging children to join in the Challenge at their local library and celebrate the books in the Read to the Beat Collection.

**Together, we can make 2026 even bigger and get even more children fired up about reading!**



The Reading Agency is partnering with Spotify for the National Year of Reading to bring a free audiobook playlist to families and teachers. A selection of Summer Reading Challenge books will be available via audio for free and info will be available via the School Zone. We have an audiobook resource to support coordinators with ideas of how to use audio in a learning setting.

## If you haven't already, head to the School Zone and register your email to receive:

- 'Presentation slide deck' for assemblies, Parents' Evenings and other events
- Invite to Summer Reading Challenge to share with parents and carers
- Copy template for newsletter, website, WhatsApp groups, emails

Plus, more ways The Reading Agency can help support you for the rest of the year.



## Benefits for pupils, families and your school



Significantly **improves** children's reading **skills**, **confidence** and **enjoyment**



During last year's Challenge, children read **almost 12 million books**



Prevents the summer 'dip' in reading and aids the **successful transition** to new year groups and key stages

**FREE**

It's simple and **free for every child** to take part, and libraries run **free activities** for families throughout the holidays



Develops **stronger links** between your school, local library and the wider community



Contributes to all pupils' achievement and encourages **extra-curricular activity**

# READ to the BEAT

## The Read to the Beat theme and interest pathways

**Sing from the rooftops! We're so thrilled that the theme for the Summer Reading Challenge 2026 will be music.**

Our exciting partnership with **Universal Music Group UK** will open doors for children to explore the creative power of reading and music. The link between music and storytelling runs deep. Think rhythm, self-expression and creativity. Children will have the opportunity to hear from inspiring musicians at the top of their game, championing the joy of reading. This year's Challenge will harness the universal appeal of music to inspire the next generation of readers in the UK.

The official Read to the Beat Collection is available for purchase via library suppliers, including Peters) includes books about musicians, characters discovering music, sound science, cultural traditions, rhythm, storytelling through sound, breaking down barriers to music, creative expression and following your dreams.

## How reading and music connect

Music has been linked to enhanced reading ability in struggling children (Register et al., 2007; Ahokas et al., 2024), and more widely has been shown to be an effective complement to teaching reading (Pearman and Friedman, 2009). Music can also be an entryway into the world of stories and books, whereby references in lyrics can prompt seeking out the literary inspiration behind them (The Guardian, 2026).

Read to the Beat is particularly suited to diverse reading formats such as audiobooks, where music can further enhance stories, or lyrics can come to life through sound. Around 2 in 5 children say that listening to audio has sparked an interest in reading books (Clark et al., 2025).





## Easy steps to get your class reading this summer

Get parents and pupils engaged in the Challenge before the holidays start!  
Remember to register to receive the digital assets.



### Talk about the Challenge in your school

- Put up posters in your classroom and around school
- Use our assembly presentation for children, parents' evening or other events.  
Why not play our short animated video to grab children's attention?
- We will be hosting virtual events in the summer term — keep an eye on our events page for more information



### Make the most of the Read to the Beat Collection

- Our official Read to the Beat Collection of 55 books which has something for every reader to enjoy! Find out more about each book here
- If your school has any budget for purchasing books, you can purchase some of the titles from the Collection to build your class or school library (either from a library supplier or Bookshop.org). With a mix of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and graphic novels, it has been carefully curated to hit the right notes with young minds and support your school's reading culture (the books should also be available to borrow for free from you local library)
- You may want to pick one of the book as your summer class book and read or listen to an extract with the class every day and get them excited to take part



### Tell parents and colleagues

- Use the handy copy templates to tell parents and carers about the Challenge and encourage them to take their children to the library over the holidays. You can also use the templates for newsletters/emails, the school website or even class WhatsApp groups
- Tell other school staff about the Challenge with our other ready-made template!



### Get in touch with the library

Contact your local library service to find out what's on offer to your pupils.  
You can **book a librarian visit** for your class or special assembly for the whole school!

## National Start dates\*

Scotland & Online: **Saturday 20 June**

England & Wales: **Saturday 4 July**

\*Start and finish dates may vary. Please confirm with your local library service.



### Super Sign-Up Saturday!

Ask your local library if they are running a launch event for children & families - fun and easy.

Let's get as many children reading as possible!



### Get your whole school involved!

Can your school top last year's number of Challenge completers?  
Many libraries offer **prizes to schools** with the highest participation!



## Keep the music flowing by celebrating your pupils' summer reading achievements!

Ideas for what to do in September:

- **Host a special assembly** to present Summer Reading Challenge certificates!
- Download or **collect certificates** for free from your local library
- Recognise participants in your school newsletter or display their photos/work
- Celebrate in the classroom and have a book talk area - children can share new favourite books, fun events they've been to and what they're looking forward to reading to kick off the new year by **building your school's reading culture**



**73%**  
read more over the  
summer

## About the Challenge

### What is the Summer Reading Challenge?

The UK's **biggest reading for pleasure programme** for primary school children in libraries, encouraging children to **read for fun** during the school holidays.

### Who can take part?

The Challenge is open to all **children aged 4–11**, and it's designed to be **accessible for all** reading levels. Some library services also offer activities for younger children.

### When does it start and how can children sign up?

The Challenge takes place during the summer holidays in most UK public libraries. Children can **sign up in-person at their library** or **online** at **[summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk)** at any time during the Challenge. Check local start and end dates with your library service.

### What does the Challenge involve?

#### At the library:

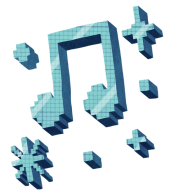
- A child visits their library to sign up and pick up a Summer Reading Challenge booklet.
- They set a reading goal and borrow books of their choice.
- They collect bespoke stickers and incentives from the library for their reading, including  
a certificate for reaching their reading goal.

#### Online:

Alternatively, children can take part in the Challenge online at **[summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk)** where they will set a reading goal and unlock digital rewards including a PDF certificate. They'll get book recommendations and tips for accessing books for free at home.



Available all year  
round for **FREE**



## How can the Summer Reading Challenge support my class?

The Summer Reading Challenge 2026 offers a powerful, ready-made framework to support your class by having an official [Read to the Beat Collection](#) of 55 titles you may want to use to nurture reading for pleasure both in and beyond the classroom. The theme this year combines storytelling and music which adds a creative, cross-curricular dimension. The Challenge in libraries or on the website encourages children to set their own reading goals which promotes autonomy and motivation before they come back to school in September.

## Can I buy the Collection for my class?

Yes the Collection is available for purchase via library suppliers (including [Peters](#) who have some discounted packs available) or individual books can be bought on [Bookshop.org](#). [Discover more about the books on our resources database](#).

## Why is reading choice vital for children during the Challenge?

This crisis is impacting on classrooms, communities and families. Research shows that **reading by choice is the single biggest indicator of a child's opportunity and future success**; it can mediate socio-economic status, increase future earnings and employment opportunities and may help address endemic inequalities ([OECD 2021](#); [Taylor et al. 2011](#); [British Land, 2021](#); [Rodriguez-Cabrera et al. 2024](#)).

When children and young people enjoy reading, they read more often, helping to build vital reading skills and bringing wider benefits for mental wellbeing, self-confidence and learning ([Sullivan and Brown, 2013](#); [Sun, et al., 2023](#)). Throughout the year you can encourage choice by regularly visiting the school library (if you have one available) and by having free choice for guided reading books or the class read.

## What can children read for their Challenge?

**Anything they enjoy!** The Challenge is all about reading for fun, so all reading counts, from fiction and non-fiction to audiobooks, comics, graphic novels, e-books, and poetry. Library staff and volunteers are on hand to help each child find books that match their interests and reading level. Remember to use the [Read to the Beat Book Collection](#) as inspiration and for choosing your summer term class book.



## More from The Reading Agency

**The Reading Agency** is a UK charity that inspires social and personal change through the proven power of reading. We work with individuals of all ages, communities and trusted partners to share the transformative benefits of reading for happy, healthy and thriving lives.

### Did you know?

- We regularly have free display materials, activity packs and book club sets of books available to schools throughout the year. [Sign up to the newsletter](#) on our website to check these out!
- You can find [thousands of book resources](#) for primary school children through us - from fun activity sheets and classroom guides on [summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk) to all sorts of reading activity packs available on our website

## Other programmes

### Teachers' Reading Challenge

The [Teachers' Reading Challenge](#) is an opportunity for school staff to expand their knowledge of contemporary children's books and develop their skills in teaching children to read for pleasure. Run in partnership with The Open University and sponsored by HarperCollins, the Challenge invites participants to join a supportive and inspired community of educators and readers, set their own reading goals, share recommendations, discuss best practice, access resources, and record their feedback.

[teachersreadingchallenge.org.uk](https://teachersreadingchallenge.org.uk)



# Winter Mini Challenge

A winter version of the Summer Reading Challenge! This is an online reading challenge running between December-February, encouraging children to keep up their reading through the winter break and into the new term. It's free to take part at **wintermini.org.uk**, where children can log and review books and earn rewards, e.g., a certificate & limited-edition digital badge.

## Reading Well

Reading Well for children provides quality-assured information, stories and advice to support children's mental health and wellbeing. Books have been chosen and recommended by leading health professionals and co-produced with children and families. The booklist is targeted at Key Stage 2, and includes titles aimed at a wide range of reading levels.

**[readingagency.org.uk/reading-well](https://readingagency.org.uk/reading-well)**



The Book Club Hub is a platform connecting readers and book clubs of all ages across the UK. It is managed by national reading charity, The Reading Agency. It offers book teachers and librarians the support of providing free copies to your clubs in return with reviews and the latest news and resources to support your meetings. Visit **[bookclubhub.co.uk](https://bookclubhub.co.uk)** and [discover how you can make the most of the platform](#).

