READ - Engage Students with High Interest/Low Readability Books

National Behaviour Support Service
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the report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools (2006).

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Introduction

Behaviour, Adolescent Literacy and Learning

Adolescent literacy is the term increasingly used to describe the literacy development of young people engaged in second level education. It recognises the unique literacy needs of second level students from acquiring and practicing mechanical decoding skills to active and independent reading to learn. While literacy is broadly associated with the individual’s ability to read and write, a more thorough definition includes the degree to which one is able to analyse, synthesise, assess and communicate information across an increasing range of media, in different formats, for an extensive array of purposes and audiences.

“Students who are not able to independently learn from reading by the end of primary school will not be prepared for the pedagogic mode of secondary schooling and will immediately begin to experience failure” (Rose, 2005).

“...early reading problems and embarrassment in class consistently were identified as leading to disengagement with school and subsequent behavioural difficulties” (Spruck Wrigley & Powrie, 2004).

Research, Behaviour and Literacy

The relationship between reading difficulties and problem behaviour has been well documented internationally (Kos, 1991; McGee, Share, Moffitt, Williams & Silva, 1988), but the exact nature of that relationship is unclear.

Research in Ireland has also explored the link between reading and behaviour. For example, “Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools” (Eivers et al., 2004), a study of the reading skills of over 6,000 primary pupils in Ireland stated that “…across all grades, pupils whose behaviour was rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ had significantly lower scores than pupils whose behaviour was rated as ‘good’”.

Current NBSS research (Henefer, 2008) analysing some of the reading ages of students in receipt of NBSS and school support, also suggests that there is a link between behaviour and reading. For instance, of the 192 students assessed:

- 68.2% had a reading age of 6 years to 10 years, with an average reading age of 9 years
- 81.7% of the 192 students at the time of the assessments were aged between 13 years to 15 years
- Of those students who had reading ages from 11 - 15 years only 3.65% were reading at or above their chronological age.
Reading and Learning

Students acquire most knowledge through reading. A lack of adequate reading skills inhibits academic progress in all subjects. Struggling readers need frequent and sustained periods of reading, such as opportunities to read uninterruptedly from books, newspapers or magazines, for at least 15 to 20 minutes a day (Hansen, 1987). Students also need opportunities to talk about ideas in texts in order to move their comprehension beyond the word level (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997).

Clary (1991) suggests six possible strategies to get adolescents to read: (1) capitalise on interests; (2) make reading material accessible; (3) build a conducive environment; (4) allow time to read in school; (5) provide significant adult role models; and (6) use motivational techniques.

Choosing the right type of material can spark the enthusiasm of students who are reluctant to read. It may take some trial and error and creativity to find books that will appeal but the key is to choose books that match the students’ interests and reading level. High interest/low reading level books aim to capture and hold student interest while building essential reading skills.

This resource describes a selection of some of the Hi-Lo fiction and non-fiction books currently available in Ireland. These titles are written for students who are reading at levels below their chronological ages. Many of the books have additional materials such as workbooks, teachers’ guides, software and audio recordings.


Barrington Stoke are an award-winning publisher. They were the winner of the Lightning Source Children's Publisher of the Year in 2007. They specialise exclusively in books for ‘reluctant, dyslexic, disenchanted and under-confident’ readers.

**Fiction and Non-Fiction Titles**

**Barrington Stoke Fiction Series**: Written with a reading age of 8+ for students ranging in age from 8 - 16 (some books are suitable for adults).

**4U2read.ok**: Written for 8 - 12 year olds with a reading age of 7, by award winning authors such as Jeremy Strong, Malorie Blackman and Michael Morpurgo.

**GR8reads**: Written for 12 - 16 year olds with a reading age of 7+. They look like ‘real’ books with attractive jackets and will appeal to teenagers (all books are illustrated).

**FYI**: Written for 10 - 14 year olds with a reading age of 8+. These are fiction books but with facts for readers who prefer to read non-fiction – especially suitable for boys. Fun, with illustrations on most pages.

**Reality Check**: Written for 10 - 14 year olds with a reading age of 8+. They are true stories, yet stranger than fiction!

Some features of Barrington Stoke books:
- Written by top authors
- Printed on cream or off-white paper, which is more restful on the eye
- Specially modified font to encourage a smooth read
- No right-hand justification: varied length of lines helps readers to keep their place while reading
- Clear and direct language structure.

Website - www.barringtonstoke.co.uk
Badger started out supplying only Reading Boxes for the classroom but now publish books across the curriculum, including a range of titles for “reluctant readers”. They also publish Polish/English dual language books.

**Full Flight Series**

Full Flight is written for 11 - 13 year olds with a reading age of 7.5 to 8+. There are a variety of genres in the series - fiction, non-fiction, poetry and play scripts. They are illustrated 32-page books with around 2,000 words of text bound in colour covers. There is a teacher book available with suggested activities related to each title.

**Dark Flight Series**

Dark Flight is written for 10 - 14 year olds with a reading age of 6.5 to 7. This series is similar to Full Flight, but the reading age is lower and the interest age higher. Dark Flight books are designed for young people, particularly boys. A teacher book is also available with related activities and exercises for each title.

**Rex Jones Series**

Rex Jones series are written for 10 - 13 year olds with a reading age of 6.5 to 7. They are action-adventure hero books, approximately 32 pages in length. A teacher book is also available with related activities and exercises for each title in the series.

**Polish/English Dual Language Books**

A series of 8 books written originally as Hi-lo books have been translated and published in dual-language (Polish / English). Written for students aged 9 - 14 years old, with age appropriate stories of 1500 - 2000 words per book (32 pages). One side is written in Polish with illustrations and then repeated on the opposite page in English.

**Website** - www.badger-publishing.co.uk
Ransom books are specifically written and designed for struggling and reluctant readers. Many of their titles also have CD-ROM and workbooks with activities. The *Dark Man* series of books, won the UK Educational Resources Book Award in 2006.

### Dark Man Series

*Dark Man* is a fiction series for teenagers and young adults, with a reading age of approximately 5 to 8. The books are broadly graded across a range of reading abilities, so that readers can start with a book that reflects their reading level. The stories are each between 200 and 400 words in length (36 pages). There are graded workbooks for the *Dark Man* series, containing cloze and open-ended activities. The *Teachers’ Guide* includes curriculum links, key information on the individual books, evaluation and assessment tools. A CD-Rom is also available which provides a talking book version of each title, as well as other activities.

### Siti’s Sisters

*Siti’s Sisters* Series are fiction books designed to have particular appeal to girls aged 10 - 14 with a reading age of 7 to 8 years. They are light-hearted, multicultural and each story has around 1200 - 1500 words (approximately 36 pages). There are also student workbooks with book related activities and exercises.

### Trailblazers Series

The *Trailblazers* series is written for older children and young adults with a reading age of 5 to 8. Each book is on a popular topic, with a colourful layout, combining fact and fiction. Each book has a non-fiction and a fiction section. The fiction story appears in two formats - one with simple texts for struggling readers; the facing pages contain an illustrated “speech bubble” version of the same story, for those who are just starting to learn to read. There are workbooks available for each reading book, with a selection of worksheets and detailed teachers’ notes. Also available is Trailblazers Interactive Software that includes a talking version of each of the Trailblazers fiction stories.
The story is read out with every word highlighted and voiced. These are configurable so aspects like the font, size of text and screen colour can be changed. The **Create a Book Software** allows students to create their own work using text, images and sound files. It includes sentences and suggestions with themes, as well as spell checkers and a speech synthesis to read what the student writes.

**Jo Gentle**

*Jo Gentle* is a fiction series written for teenagers and young adults with a reading age of 6 to 8+. Each book in the series is designed in the style of a graphic novel with illustrations. The use of speech bubbles can make it easier for struggling readers.

**Boffin Boy**

The *Boffin Boy* series of 12 books is designed for young, independent readers, as well as struggling readers aged 8 to 14. The first six books in the series have a reading age of 6 - 7 and the second six have a higher reading age of 7 - 8. The use of speech bubbles and a simplified Manga style ensure the books have simple language and low word counts that are ideal for lower reading ages. It is a comic graphic-style series with funky artwork. The **workbooks** provide book related activities and exercises.

Ransom supply a **Secondary Library pack** for reluctant or struggling readers. This pack includes all the books published by Ransom in the *Dark Man*, *Trailblazers*, *Boffin Boy* and *Siti’s Sisters* series.

**Website** - [http://actinic.thwd.co.uk/acatalog/About_Us.html](http://actinic.thwd.co.uk/acatalog/About_Us.html)
Penguin Active Reading Series

Penguin Active Reading is a series of graded readers, which provides reading and language learning at five levels, from Easystarts to Level 4. As you move up the levels, more and more words and more complex grammar and language structures are gradually introduced. They are full-colour illustrated readers.

As well as stories and non-fiction texts, each book provides a range of integrated activities designed to develop reading skills and consolidate vocabulary, and offers personalised project work. Each book is supported by an interactive CD-ROM, which contains additional activities and a complete audio recording. Listening to audio recordings can help to improve a learner’s understanding and fluency.

The Penguin website contains downloadable teacher notes, activity worksheets, progress tests and answer keys for every title.

Penguin Readers Series

Penguin Readers are graded at seven levels of difficulty from Easystarts to Level 6. As you move up the levels, more words and complex grammar and language structures are gradually introduced.

Titles cover a particular subject or genre, for example, adventure, culture, non-fiction, plays, science fiction etc. Many are written by well known authors, for example Dickens, Austen, Steinbeck, Dahl etc.

Every Penguin Reader is also available as an audio CD pack. Listening to audio recordings can help to improve the learner’s understanding and fluency.
Every title has its own activity worksheet – extra background information, photocopiable activities, teacher notes, answer keys and progress tests for every title. **Teacher Guides** contain ready-made activities and photocopiable worksheets. Six free Teacher Guides with lesson ideas, advice and ready-made activity worksheets are on the Penguin website available to download.

Website - www.penguinreaders.com
Macmillan Graded Readers

Macmillan Graded Readers are graded by level from Starter to Upper Intermediate. Each reader has eight pages of additional exercises and an **Audio CD** that can help develop understanding and fluency skills.

This series of simplified readers includes stories from both contemporary and classic authors, and also contain Shakespeare Readers at Pre-intermediate level. Other titles include James Bond 007 and Meg Cabot’s *The Princess Diaries*.

There are many free resources including: worksheets, test sheets, points for understanding and extra exercises, all with or without answer keys, on the Macmillan website. The site also contains author information sheets, sample chapters, sample audio clips and a downloadable guide to ‘Using Graded Readers in the Classroom’.

Heinemann-Raintree publishes two series of Hi-Lo non-fiction and differentiated texts: Freestyle and Freestyle Express. They can be used across subject classrooms as the titles cover many topics in the curriculum.

Freestyle and Freestyle Express Series

Freestyle and Freestyle Express are parallel series’, designed to be used alongside each other. This structure provides resources for two reading ability levels, but with the same high interest content, so they can be useful in a mixed ability setting.

Freestyle is written for 11 - 15 year olds with a reading age of 11+ and offers readers books with images to help them decode information, short sentences with simple vocabulary, clear sequencing of ideas, and information presented in bite-sized chunks reinforced with vocabulary support. All titles include plenty of white space, sub-headings, and one key visual element on every page. Books cover a wide range of subjects for all reading levels and interests, such as science, history, multicultural studies, contemporary issues, geography, nature, health, teen issues etc.

Freestyle Express is a range of books tailored for 11 - 15 year olds with a reading age of 8 years. The range uses a simplified version of the “Freestyle” layout, making it easier for the less confident reader to follow. Each book in this series incorporates a lowered level text that allows struggling readers to access the curriculum basics, but also features a glossary bar at the bottom of each page to help explain difficult words.
Titles cover a wide range of subject areas such as science, history, multicultural studies, contemporary issues, history, geography, nature, health, teen issues etc. History titles, for example, describe the sequence of events in a clear, accessible manner; include a timeline spread, summary of key events and a ‘new words’ box at the foot of each spread; they use primary and secondary source material in a range of text types from newspaper reports, diary/journal extracts, eyewitness accounts, quotes and excerpts from important speeches.

Classical Comics

Classical Comics are graphic novel adaptations of classical literature. Each classic is available in ‘Original text’ and ‘Quick text’ versions, while Shakespeare titles are also available in ‘Plain text’ format, catering for readers of varying ability.

‘Original text’ versions replicate, as closely as possible, the original dialogue within the confines of the comic format; the Shakespeare titles follow the full original script.

‘Quick text’ versions feature distilled dialogue, allowing readers to absorb and enjoy the essence of the stories quickly.

‘Plain text’ versions (Shakespeare only) are reduced versions of the original script in modern English and can be ideal for students who need help to understand the original text.

Titles available in the Classical Comics series are:

- Henry V (Original, Plain and Quick text versions);
- Macbeth (Original, Plain and Quick text versions);
- Jane Eyre (Original and Quick text versions);
- Great Expectations (Original and Quick text versions).

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Levelled Biographies Series

*Levelled Biographies* is a high-interest series looking at eminent figures within specific fields, with progressive levels of reading difficulty within each grouping. By raising the bar within each group of titles, the series aims to motivate students to push themselves to read at a higher level.

This series sets out to improve literacy skills while simultaneously teaching students about key figures in History, Geography and Science. There are four titles and four reading levels, grouped under the sub-headings of:
- Great Women Leaders
- Naturalists
- Great Scientists.

Heinemann English Readers

*Heinemann English Readers* is a collection of 90 levelled readers for students aged 7 - 17. The readers are aimed at language learners aged seven and above, but could also be used for motivating reluctant readers. The books are levelled into bands of Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced.

As well as fiction and non-fiction titles, a science strand of readers supports the teaching of science. These readers reinforce the vocabulary and concepts of some aspects of the science curriculum. There is page-by-page language support and activities to develop the skills of language learners.

A Programme Organiser is available with the books, which offers advice on getting the most out of the books. This includes photocopy masters as well as key guidance for the teaching of English as an additional language.

Website - [www.heinemann.co.uk/Library/Library.aspx](http://www.heinemann.co.uk/Library/Library.aspx)
LDA Learning provides education resources for both primary and secondary school across subject areas. They carry several titles that are aimed at engaging reluctant readers.

**5 Minute and 10 Minute Thrillers Series**

*5 Minute Thrillers* are aimed at students aged 11+ with a reading age of 9+. The stories have clear language with simple sentence structure and are approximately 12 pages long. The books can be used alongside the CDs or tapes to help develop understanding and fluency.

*10 Minute Thrillers* are aimed at students aged 9+ with a reading age of 9+. They are eerie stories with unexpected twists-in-the-tale for your teenage readers: they are approximately 28 pages long. The books can be used alongside the CDs or tapes to help develop understanding and fluency.

*Thrilling Comprehension* are support materials for use with Five and Ten Minute Thrillers. Each story has its own illustrated and photocopiable page with a simple plot summary, comprehension questions and trigger questions. It contains 32 A4 photocopiable pages of activities and includes answers for teachers to refer to.

**Lightning Reads 1 & 2**

*Lightning Reads 1* is a collection of high interest-low reading stories that are aimed at 10 - 12 year olds, with a reading age of 6 to 8. This collection covers a range of genres including sport, thriller and fantasy. Book 1 includes: 8 cartoon strips, 10 one-page stories, 10 two-page stories and comprehensive questions for each story.

*Lightning Reads 2* is aimed at 12 - 16 year olds with a reading age of 8 to 12. The collection is designed to extend attention spans and reading abilities, as well as motivate readers. All the short stories are linked by a theme, leading to a final climactic chapter.

**Website** – [www.ldalearning.com](http://www.ldalearning.com)
Sports Zone Series

*Sports Zone* is a series aimed at 10 - 14 year olds with a reading age ranging from 6.5 years to 9.5 years. There are 18 books at three levels using sporting themes. It features short, highly illustrated chapters and provides support material online, including downloadable worksheets, extra stories and interactive activities.

**Level 1** is suitable for reading age 6.5 to 7.5 and contains 6 titles, *Up for It* (Football), *Trail Bikes* (Mountain Biking), *Snow Trek* (Snowboarding), *Hot Skates* (Ice Hockey), *Head to Head* (Athletics) and *A Crazy Sport* (Triathlon).

**Level 2** is suitable for reading age 7.5 to 8.5 and contains 6 titles, *Rock Face* (Rock Climbing), *Speed Bikes* (Speedway), *Running into Trouble* (Marathon Running), *Skating to Danger* (Ice-skating), *Hit It!* (Water-skiing), *Goalie’s Nightmare* (Football).

**Level 3** is suitable for reading age 8.5 to 9.5 and contains 6 titles *Match Ref* (Football), *Dive and Survive* (Diving), *Pit Stop* (Formula 1), *Deep Trouble* (Potholing), *In at the Deep End* (Swimming) and *Close to the Wind* (Windsurfing).

Spirals Series

*Spirals* is an established series published by Nelson Thornes for reluctant readers. It is aimed at 11 to 19+ year olds with a reading age of 6.5 to 9.5. The series offers a selection of fiction, non-fiction readers and plays. There are short but substantial chapters in each book. The books have clearly laid out text without illustrations.
A CD-ROM is available that provides a bank of editable worksheets to use alongside each *New Spirals* title. *Teacher Notes* are included.

**ZONE 13 Series**

*Zone 13* is aimed at 11 - 14 year olds with a reading age of 6.5 to 9.5. There are 18 books at 3 controlled levels of reading difficulty. The stories have supernatural themes and are fast-moving narratives with cliffhanger endings.

All the titles mentioned can be ordered directly from the publishers’ websites. Many of the titles are also available on Amazon and can be purchased at a reduced cost as “used”. Alternatively, the following suppliers carry many of the titles mentioned, as well as other books and materials for reluctant readers.

**Surgisales Teaching Aids Ltd.**
252 Harolds Cross Road, Dublin 6W
Tel: +353 (1) 496 6688
Westcourt Business Park, Callan, Co. Kilkenny.
Tel: +353 (56) 775 5161
Website: [www.staeducational.com](http://www.staeducational.com)

**IES School & Library Suppliers**
Weston Industrial Estate
Salmon Leap, Leixlip
Co. Kildare
Tel: +353 (1) 621 0310 /621
Fax: +353 (1) 621 0188
Email: info@iesltd.ie
Website: [www.iesltd.ie/about.php](http://www.iesltd.ie/about.php)

**Carroll Educational Supplies Ltd**
Unit 5 Western Industrial Estate
Phase 2
Naas Rd
Co Dublin
Tel: +353 (1) 456 72 79
Fax: +353 (1) 456 99 98
Website: [www.carroleducation.ie/index_flash.php](http://www.carroleducation.ie/index_flash.php)
While there is no one way to organise reading and learning materials in the classroom, the following checklist could help in evaluating and planning your resources.

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<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>Do the reading and learning materials reflect the range of reading levels in the classroom, so all students can find reading and learning materials that are appropriate to their independent reading level and learning style?</td>
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<td>Are there a variety of reading and learning materials available: books, magazines, catalogues, books on tape/CD/computer, computer software, educational games and art supplies to respond to reading and learning activities, etc.?</td>
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<td>Are the reading and learning materials categorised and arranged in a logical and clear manner: authors, themes, series, topics, subject/topic based software, subject/topic games, etc.?</td>
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<td>Do the students have a voice in recommending learning materials and books?</td>
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<td>Are the reading and learning materials located in one area of the room?</td>
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<td>Are there multiple copies of popular titles and other materials, so that students can read together or do group activities?</td>
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<td>Are old, irrelevant, torn, and damaged resources removed on a regular basis?</td>
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<td>Are most of the materials arranged with their learning materials covers/lids facing outward?</td>
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<td>Do the reading and learning materials reflect cultural and linguistic diversity?</td>
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<td>Is there a minimum of 8 to 15 books per student?</td>
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<td>Is there a balance between the fiction and non-fiction books?</td>
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<td>Do the books represent a wide variety of genres and types: novels, comics/graphic novels, poetry, folktales, joke books, historical fiction, mystery, science fiction, fantasy, biography, classics, series, multicultural, topic-specific non-fiction books, etc.?</td>
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<td>Are the books and resources attractive and in good condition?</td>
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<td>Have at least 40% of the books been published in the last 5 to 10 years?</td>
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