

# QUEST SEEKERS

The Summer Reading Challenge in libraries

The Summer Reading Challenge is a major initiative between schools and libraries to maintain reading levels over the summer holidays and it is organized nationally by The Reading Agency. 98% of all local authorities run the challenge in their libraries throughout the summer.

In 2008 nearly 3000 children aged 4-11 in Plymouth took part in Team Read, and in 2009 they were invited to embark on a fantastical adventure and become a Quest Seeker at their local library.

Quest Seekers was all about the power of the imagination, taking young readers into a mysterious and wondrous land where children could discover the joy of reading and nurture a life-long love affair with books. All children received a Quest Seeker Card and poster upon joining and were encouraged to read 6 books to complete the challenge, collecting stickers as they moved through three exciting stages on the journey: Firebird Rising, Mountain Mission and Dragon's Lair.

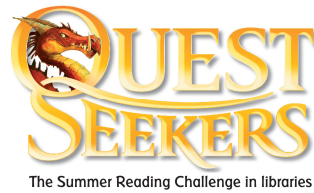


*Winnie the Witch and Quest Seeker volunteer at Plymouth National Play Day 2009*

It's a simple challenge and children were rewarded with small prizes as they progressed until reaching the end and finding the golden book. The role of the libraries is much more than just handing out incentives however; staff and volunteers helped children find new books, encouraged them to talk about the books they've read and gave them new reading ideas.

*"Thank you and your staff for a wonderful time you give to our children. It has encouraged my daughter to come to the library and enjoy reading her books. She looks forwards to it each time we come"*  
Parent of Five year old at Crownhill Library

Children received a gold medal for completing and received a certificate in their school assembly when returning in the autumn term to give them a real sense of achievement.



*"I thought Quest Seekers was good because you got rewarded for reading and it encourages people to read more. It was also fun to read books I haven't read before." 12 year old girl, Devonport library*

- 4009 children joined the Quest Seekers Summer Reading Challenge (an increase of 41% on the previous year)
- 1818 boys took part (45% of total amount of children)
- 2606 children read 6 books as or more as part of the challenge over the summer holiday period (a completion rate of 65%)
- 452 children took out library membership for the first time to join the Quest Seekers Summer Reading Challenge
- Over 4000 children attended events held at libraries over the summer
- 156, 656 library items were issued to children over the summer holiday period

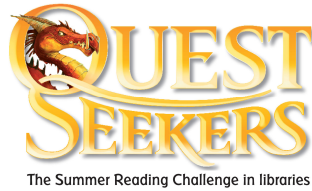
*"Quest Seekers has made a difference to my child reading she probably wouldn't have bothered during the school holidays if it wasn't for Quest Seekers" Parent of 11 and 9 year old North Prospect library*

The Quest Seekers Summer Reading Challenge was launched at the Big Arts Festival on 6 July in the Sherwood Centre, where children from local primary schools joined performance poet Lucy Brook to make magical word spells.

In total there were 94 events across the 17 branches during the summer holiday period. These included arts and crafts such as making dragon models and fairy wings, visits from Oxford University Press' Winnie the Witch character and writing workshops with award winning children's author Tanya Landman. The Libraries Quest Seeker team took a chillout tent to Plymouth's National Play Day at West Hoe Park for storytelling and a colouring competition.



For the first time this year, Summer Reading Challenge volunteers were sought to support activities were sought from V-involved, the national volunteering scheme for young people aged 16-25. As a result, 2 young people assisted at Central, St Budeaux and Plymstock libraries



events, helping out with craft events and listening to children reading and discussing their books. A 16 year old volunteer from Efford's HeadSpace library project requested she complete her 2 week work experience in the library and also helped out at National Play Day. Plymouth libraries will continue advertising opportunities on the V-involved website for next year's challenge and encourage those taking part to gain accreditation for their experience.

### **Children and families**

The majority of children taking part (2564) found out about the Reading Challenge from school. Most Plymouth primary schools are visited by library staff in assembly or class and all received invitations to join Quest Seekers to take home with them. The school with the highest proportion of children joining as a percentage of the school roll were Hyde Park Infants school who will receive a £50 voucher from the library service to spend at Plymouth School Library service.

Some schools ran their own incentives to encourage children to take part and avoid the 'summer dip' that puts children's reading back over the summer if they don't read regularly e.g. Marlborough Primary school in Devonport gave each child that finished the challenge a £5 gift voucher.

3 children with visual impairment also took part this year, using the new Large Print materials, borrowing audio books and receiving their certificates in Braille.

The Summer Reading Challenge has a key role to play in stimulating reading enjoyment and supporting reader development – including a large number of boys. 45% of children taking part in Quest Seekers were boys.

*"I thought Quest Seekers was very good as the variety of books was brilliant. All of the books I read were amazing especially the ones with the quest seekers sticker on." Scott age 9, Plympton Library*

*"Was great to see Cameron pick up a book and read it. He has never read at home unless it was a school book" parent at Plympton library.*

Children taking part in the Challenge read more books, read more widely, enjoy reading and recognise authors more than children who did not take part.

*"I thought that Quest seekers was a brilliant scheme to involve and encourage my children to read. It gave them something to aim for during the holidays and made a difference to their reading skills." Parent at Plympton library.*

*"My son discovered he likes 'fun' books on maths by Johnny Ball. I have ordered copies from Amazon so he can have his own copies. We hadn't*



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*thought about reading books like this before.” Parent of 7 year old, Plympton Library*

Library staff reported that the theme and resources were well received and had particular appeal to boys and girls. The most popular items were the book bags and magic pens. The biggest challenge this year was the increase of uptake of the challenge which resulted in shortages and running out of some materials, meaning some children did not receive all of the incentives. All children that completed the challenge did however receive the medal and certificate. The materials were funded by the Libraries’ promotions and outreach budget and additional sponsorship was made by Plymouth Europe Direct.

*“...the take up on this challenge exceeded expectations. The topic was good for both boys and girls and this year far more children actually completed. The materials were of good quality. A shame that we ran out of some posters because some of the children were disappointed.”*

Staff comments, St Budeaux library.

### **Conclusion**

This year’s summer reading challenge was the most successful yet for Plymouth. Most libraries considerably increased their numbers joining and completing Quest Seekers. More evaluation with children after the challenge would be useful in ascertaining if they feel their reading improved and their reading choices increased. Closer working with schools to track children before and after the summer also needs to be undertaken, to raise the profile of the scheme as part of the school year and emphasise the benefits of taking part to children’s achievement and enjoyment of reading.