A Reading Journal provides pupils with an opportunity to reflect upon and respond to text; they provide teachers with useful information about pupils’ thinking processes and comprehension as they interact with text. Journals also offer opportunities to develop a written response to text, a skill which pupils will need to develop for their end of key stage tests and during the KS3 curriculum.

The format of a reading journal will vary depending upon the age and experience of the pupils and personal preference: it might be kept as an audio diary, a written journal or accessed via a computer screen. Although much of the work will relate to fiction and poetry teachers will also recognise the benefits of providing opportunities for pupils to respond to non-fiction texts and media texts. Throughout the NLS framework there are a number teaching objectives which specifically relate to this aspect of reading. A selection of these is included in Appendix 1, pages 6 – 7.

The value and purpose of reading journals has been well documented in a number of publications such as The Fiction Project at KS3, Part 1, DCS publications and the Reading Resource Book in the First Steps series, Rigby Heinemann 1997. The purpose of this folio is to consider how teachers can manage the use of reading journals within the Literacy Hour. Two case studies and extracts from reading journals are included as illustration.

**What is a reading journal?**
The First Steps Reading Resource Book helpfully lists a range of suggestions as to how reading journals might be used and developed:

- A journal could include:
  - A set of personal goals for reading
  - A list of texts read with commencement dates, this is usually kept separated from other entries
  - Thoughts or feelings, recorded in response to reading
  - Drawings of settings, characters or events
  - Phrases or words that have excited or puzzled the reader
  - Predictions
  - Suggested changes readers would have made if they had been the author
  - Comments on characters, illustrations, diagrams, layout or language used.’

During the Literacy Hour there are a number of opportunities for reading journals to be used in shared, guided, and independent time. Journal work can also provide purposeful homework activities.

**Introducing reading journals in shared reading and writing.**
During the shared part of the Literacy Hour the teacher is able to introduce, teach and model the various ways that reading journals can be used. It is important that both teachers and children are clear about their purpose. The work in shared time will concentrate initially on familiarising the children with the range of responses.
which might form part of a reading journal. Much of the work will be oral and discursive, with the teacher modelling a personal response to a text and justifying her reasons. Children will be given plenty of opportunities to respond in the same way.

With younger children or less experienced writers, the reading journal develops initially as a shared whole class book with the teacher taking most of the responsibility for the writing process. Even with more experienced writers, teachers will need to demonstrate how to construct a written response to a text, paying attention to the purpose, organisation and language features that are most appropriate. The shared writing will develop from the shared reading and teachers should make this link clear by frequently referring back to any text model.

**From journal entries to reviews**
Entries in a reading journal provide wonderful raw material for book reviews. Children can be made familiar with book reviews so that they can see how writers express and organise their views formally about books in print.

Fortunately a number of books and videos have been produced over the past few years which provide valuable starting points and useful text models for children to use when writing a review or response to a text. A list of helpful titles and websites appears in the appendix at the end of the folio (see Appendix 2, page ).

**Guided Reading and Writing**
Guided reading and writing sessions provide teachers with opportunities to scaffold the use of reading journals. They can be used as a starting point for a guided session or to follow up issues and responses made during a previous session. Work from the guided session can be continued and extended as an independent activity or, with older pupils, be developed independently as part of their homework. The work is then ‘picked up on’ at the next guided session.

**Group journals**
In some classrooms each guided group has their own group journal to which the children contribute collaboratively. This can be especially beneficial when children are first introduced to journals and have not yet developed the stamina or confidence to maintain individual journals.

This approach can also be considered where the teacher has decided to group children on a ‘mixed ability’ basis for some of their guided sessions and independent work. A mixed ability group for guided reading/writing can be useful with older children who are able to contribute well orally but have yet to develop fluent recording/decoding skills. Key Stage 2 teachers have found that some of the graphic novels, and ‘picture books’ such as those written by Anthony Browne, are especially useful for developing personal responses with mixed ability groups.

**Links to guided reading**
In many Key Stage 2 classrooms, with fluent readers, the reading journal approach is now used to underpin guided reading and writing sessions and incorporates responses to fiction, non-fiction, poetry and media texts. Teachers might already be aware of the one-year project undertaken by the University of Brighton, *Creating a Community of Readers*. The project was undertaken in the early 1990’s, thus pre-dating the Literacy Strategy, and a video of the work carried out with two schools was produced as training material for teachers. Teachers who are less confident about developing book discussion during guided time will find this video provides useful insights into how to manage and structure sessions. A copy of the video is available at the Literacy Centre for viewing. Folio 23, *Guided Reading, The*
*Fluency Model*, contains a number of examples of how teachers can structure their questioning and suggests activities to further pupil’s responses to texts.

**Independent Work: responding individually, in pairs and in groups**

Independent work clearly offers an ideal opportunity for pupils to respond to texts through the use of the reading journal. This can be undertaken as an individual response activity, as a collaborative activity with a shared journal, as an activity undertaken with a response partner or ‘book buddy’ or as an independent discussion group using individual journals for recording.

In guided and shared time teachers not only model and structure how to respond to and read texts, they also model how to take part in discussion and manage contributions from all group members. When children are familiar with this way of working it is possible for them to operate their own group discussions and be responsible for identifying the focus for discussion or continuing a focus identified by the class teacher. Through group discussion they are able to identify for themselves the journal activity they will undertake. The *Community of Readers* video referred to earlier, exemplifies this.

Clearly it is not possible or desirable for all independent sessions to be linked to the reading journal; there are other activities that we will wish children to experience in order to develop a range of skills in relation to literacy.

**Homework**

This can be a valuable time for the development of reading journal response work. However teachers will need to give careful consideration to the frequency of such home tasks. If the reading journal becomes just a standard homework activity it may be perceived as an activity which has been relegated to the sidelines and undervalued.

Homework activities of this kind are most productive when there are links to work in class, for instance preparation for discussion at the next guided, shared or plenary session. If this isn’t the case, we are in danger of isolating readers rather than enabling them to participate in the ‘wider community of readers’. Children should also be confident and practised in the use of the journal during school time before it goes home. If sent home too early after introduction, and with insufficient modelling or support, teachers may well find that they are disappointed with the quality of the child’s response.

It is also helpful to have had an opportunity to talk to parents/principal carer or to send a note home to explain the purpose of the journal and the use and value it will be accorded in school. Hints on how to support their children at home might also be productive. Some schools have extended the reading journal approach to include the viewing of certain TV programmes and developing a response. Many parents would be happy to watch TV with their child and discuss it briefly afterwards (e.g. a film of the book, TV adaptations such as *The Borrowers* etc).

**Case study 1: Year 5/6 class, 40 children.**

**Background and context:**

- Group sizes were no larger than 6 as larger groups become less inclusive. This meant that there were groups of 6 x 6 and one group of 4 pupils.
- Each group worked with the teacher for twenty minutes each day and the timetable rolled over a seven day period. This was not a problem as most of the blocks of work identified on the medium term plan were of a two week duration.
This meant that where the guided work was closely supporting the teaching objectives of the shared work, all groups could be seen and supported during the block of work.

Where the guided focus was devoted to reading journal work which did not closely follow the focus of the shared work, all groups could be worked with and three days remained to support guided work which addressed other issues or the shared work.

The most fluent readers and writers maintained individual notebooks from the beginning; less fluent children started with a group journal which included some collaborative writing, some scribed writing and individual contributions which were ‘stuck’ in as with a scrap book.

In the first instance the teacher decided to use the class novel *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks as the basis for the reading journal work. This made it manageable for the teacher and also led to a lot of discussion which was not restricted to the guided group ‘membership’. The book had a very high profile within the class. Some of the art work for the term borrowed from the theme of the book: children produced life drawings, with various children in the class dressing in close approximation to the characters from the story and acting as ‘life models’.

The teacher was conscious of the need not to ‘overuse’ the book and finally decided to use it at three points over the course of the term during guided reading time. The book was also used as the main text during a fiction block, the teaching objectives being selected from Y5 T1 as part of a 2 year rolling programme, as follows:

**Reading comprehension Y5T1**

9 to develop an active attitude towards reading: seeking answers, anticipating events, empathising with characters and imagining events that are described;

10 to evaluate a book by referring to details and examples in the text;

11 to experiment with alternative ways of opening a story using, e.g. description, action, or dialogue;

**Writing composition**

13 to record their ideas, reflections and predictions about a book, e.g. through a reading log or journal;

14 to map out texts showing development and structure, e.g. its high and low points, the links between sections, paragraphs, chapters;

15 to write new scenes or characters into a story, in the manner of the writer, maintaining consistency of character and style, using paragraphs to organise and develop detail;

1. **Introducing the journal during shared work.**

The teacher introduced the idea of a reading journal during shared time and showed her own notebook to the children and examples of journals kept by other children. She made the critical distinction between responding privately to a text and the more formal public response of a book review, pointing out as well that what often purports to be a review is in fact a sales pitch on the part of the publisher.

During the course of the week children were introduced to a wide range of book reviews from publications such as the TES, book blurbs, promotional material from book retailers/publishers and book reviews written by famous personalities. By the end of the week the children had had a thorough immersion in reading such materials and had thought about the way people responded to books and the type of language that is used by writers whose purpose it is to persuade them to read and buy books.
2. Developing the work in guided sessions.
During the next seven days the teacher worked with groups during guided time to establish the purpose of the reading journal and to provide a framework and structure to ‘get them going’. Some of the materials from the ‘Fiction Project’ were used for this and glued into their books to provide useful prompts; some of the groups also had a go at developing their own writing frames.

The first guided reading session was based on anticipating events; the teacher was keen to use the session to ensure that every pupil was well motivated and had a clear understanding of the story so far. At a midway stage the focus shifted to character study. A fiction block in which the shared work concentrated on character, dialogue, and story openings complemented this. The final guided journal session, towards the end of the book, focussed on mapping the narrative structure [objective 14].

As an independent group activity the children wrote a collaborative review of the book when the novel had been finished; some children worked on this as individuals.

By the end of the term the teacher was starting to see evidence which encouraged her to believe that the children would be able to manage book group discussions as an independent activity, without an adult presence. A spin off from working in this way has meant that a group of children now also run their own lunch time book club group. An adult book circle has also been started and the group meet in the local pub once a month …

Case Study 2: Key Stage 1 Reading Journals - R/Y1 class, 27 children.
Background & context
Children in this rural primary school often start school with noticeably low levels of spoken English. It is not unusual for the children to arrive in school having already been drawn to the attention of the speech therapist. Many of the children are unfamiliar with books and stories other than those encountered at playgroup. Adult literacy levels in the area are low, unemployment levels are high and a significant number of children come from single parent families. Public transport has until recently been restricted to a couple of buses a week.

The school had decided to introduce reading journals with the KS2 pupils in a bid to raise reading for enjoyment and create a reading culture. It was decided to extend the work into KS1 but clearly it was inappropriate to expect the youngest children to respond in the same way as their elder peers.

1. Preparing the children
Using the NLS framework, a programme of activities was devised to develop speaking and listening skills through response to text. Much of the work was developed through role-play, the use of puppets and the listening corner. In addition the learning and play environment was given close attention in order to maximise the opportunities for informal response.

2. Introducing journals in shared work
With the introduction of shared text work, oral response levels rose rapidly and the class teacher considered that the YR/Y1 children were ready to be introduced to a reading journal approach through shared writing. This was not so very different from the class books that they had made in the past. The main difference was that the teacher used the strategy document to provide a clearer focus for the aspect of
the text to be addressed and was more explicit in her teaching of how to read and write such a text.

3. Developing journals in guided sessions
As with the Key Stage 2 model described above, the children were introduced to the idea of producing smaller group and individual journals through guided reading and writing. The teacher saw each group of children twice a week for guided work, once for reading and once for writing. The sessions focused on reading journal work three times a term.

The introduction of this was staggered across the spring and summer terms when the teacher felt the children were ready to adopt this approach. In working with the children in this way the teacher demonstrated high expectations of her children while being aware of their developmental needs.

During the guided sessions she was creating a climate where children saw it as natural to want to talk about books and share stories they had heard. What was noticeable was how carefully the children listened to each other and learnt the behaviours and vocabulary of a book discussion group.

At this stage of the children developing as active readers, the written outcome was of secondary importance, although some responses involved writing, for instance pictures with simple captions, scribed writing, making charts with ‘star ratings’ etc. By the time the children entered the Y2 class they had developed a thorough enjoyment of books, were well motivated independent readers and had improved their speaking and listening skills considerably.

Appendix 1: examples of response objectives from the NLS

The following are a sample of objectives from across the NLS Strategy document which might be used as a basis for reading journal work. Teachers should not feel that they have to restrict their selection of teaching objectives for reading journal activities to the particular year and term they are working with on their medium term planner. It is important to work from the developmental stage of the group of children the teacher is supporting. It is therefore entirely appropriate that a Y5 pupil might work from a Y3 objective if they are being introduced to an unfamiliar text type or if they are a less experienced/fluent reader. The list below is by no means exhaustive.

Y1T1.5 To describe story settings and incidents and relate them to their own experiences.

Y1T2.3 To choose and read familiar books with concentration and attention, discuss preferences and give reasons.

Y1T3.10 To compare and contrast preferences and common themes in stories and poems.

Y2T1.5 To identify and discuss reasons for events in stories, linked to plot.

Y2T2.3 To discuss and compare story themes.
6  To identify and describe characters, expressing own views and using words and phrases from texts.

Y2T3.6  To read, respond imaginatively, recommend and collect examples of humorous stories, extracts, poems etc.

Y3T1.8  To express their views about a story or poem, identifying specific words or phrases to support their viewpoint.

Y3T2.3  To identify and discuss main and recurring characters, evaluate their behaviour and justify views.

13. To discuss the merits and limitations of particular instructional texts, including IT and other media texts, and to compare these with others, to give an overall evaluation where appropriate.

Y3T3.9  To be aware of authors and to discuss preferences and reasons for these.

Y4T1.1  To investigate how settings and characters are built up from small details, and how the reader responds to them.

Y4T2.15  To appraise a non-fiction book for its contents and usefulness by scanning, eg. headings, contents etc.

Y4T3.8  To write critically about an issue or dilemma raised in a story, explaining the problem, alternative courses of action and evaluating the writer’s solution.

Y5T1.12  To discuss the enduring appeal of established authors and discuss ‘classic’ texts.

Y5T2.19  To evaluate texts critically by comparing how different sources treat the same information.

Y5T3.2  To identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects the reader’s response.

Y6T1.5  To contribute constructively to shared discussion about literature, responding to and building on the views of others.

Y6T2.5  To analyse how messages, moods, feelings and attitudes are conveyed in poetry.

Y6T3.19  To review a range of non-fiction text types and their characteristics, discussing when a writer might choose to write in a given style or form.

Appendix 2: resources

The Pleasure of Reading, Antonia Fraser, Bloomsbury, ISBN 0 7475 08135, is similar in its conception but is a far more lavish publication and entries are considerably longer.

Telling Tales, Mammoth 1999, is a new series of interviews with well known children’s authors. Six authors are covered in the series: Gillian Cross, Michael Morpurgo, Theresa Breslin, Michelle Magorian, Jenny Nimmo and Anne Fine. The authors talk about their career as writers as well as books that have influenced them and they have enjoyed at various stages in their lives. Each title costs £1.99.

Appendix 3: useful website addresses:

A starting point for using the Web to research book reviews and information about children’s books:

- www.puffin.co.uk
- www.barefoot-books.com
- www.writerswrite.com/books/rchild.htm
- www.achuka.co.uk
- www.penguin.co.uk
- www.cbcbooks.org (children’s book club)
- www.yearofreading.org.uk (go to Reader’s Exchange)
- www.randomhouse.com/kids
- www.dkonline.com/dkcom/dk/1kids.html
- www.harperchildrens.com
- http://208.240.91.202/ (North/South books)
- www.scholastic.com
- www.underdown.org

To research websites for authors, use a good search engine e.g. www.dogpile.com or google.com and type the name of the author in quotation marks.

Appendix 4: developing ‘talk’ about books during shared and guided work.

Offer your own personal response and speculate aloud.
- Encourage children to share their responses, even if they differ from yours.
- Show that you are really interested in their views.
- Avoid inquisitions or lectures – real discussion happens most naturally around rich, many-layered texts, where there is plenty to argue about.
- Challenge children to justify their opinions by reference to text.
• Make connections between reading and writing – talk about how texts are constructed.
• Use specialist terminology to provide a language for talking about literature.

Use questions and statements that are genuinely exploratory in tone.
• What makes you think that?
• What do you think?
• How do you feel about?
• Can you explain why?
• Do you agree with …’s opinion?
• Do you like the bit where…?
• I wonder if…?
• Is there anything that puzzles you?
• I’m not sure what I think about …, I wonder what the writer intended?
• This bit reminds me of.
• I would hate to have that happen to me – would you?
• Are there any patterns that you notice? (familiar story structure, images)
• I like the way the writer has…
• I wonder why the writer has decided to…?

(From: Module 5, Shared & Guided Reading and Writing at Key Stage 2, page 26)

The most comprehensive guidance on helping children to reflect on their reading of stories and poems is provided by Michael Benton and Geoff Fox in *Teaching Literature Nine to Fourteen* (1985). Below is a summary of the activities they describe for working with novels and poems; most of them can be adapted for younger children.

- **Portrait gallery** – writing cameos of characters plus sketches
- **Book covers** – redesigned cover, plus spine and blurb etc.
- **Letter exchange** – pen-friend letter about a favourite book, possible use for ITC ‘e’ mail or INTERNET discussion areas.
- **Dear author** – letter to the author via the publisher.
- **Wall frieze** – journey/quest novels displayed in sequence or mapped.
- **Strip cartoon** – story retold on a long roll of paper.
- **Front page** – newspaper report on events in a novel.
- **Book programme** – taped or live broadcast promoting a book.
- **Radio playlets** – short extract from a novel reworked as a play for radio.
- **Sound track** – of short action packed extract from a novel.
- **Hype** – publicity for a paperback version of a book.
- **Readers ask** – ‘phone the author’ to ask about character’s motives, actions etc.
- **Would it make a movie?** – group employed by film company to ‘vet’ novels for possible film.
- **Puppet play** – retell short story using puppets.
- **Worth borrowing?** – one child is librarian, others are borrowers asking questions.
- **Truth telling** – characters from a book express their thoughts and feelings in a circle.
- **Between the lines** – explore fictional encounters not directly reported in the text.
- **Film of the book** – poster of the film with critic’s comments.
- **Chapter titles** – invent titles for numbered chapters.
- **Chapters 2** – titled chapters shuffled and re-sorted by other children.
- **Liaisons** – diagrams drawn of relationships between characters.
- **Who said it?** – groups prepare a character quiz.
Appendix 5: examples from Reading Journals

Year 3 pupil - Autumn Term.

*Gorilla Granny*
by Frank Rogers.

This was the first term for using a reading journal. This entry represents a personal response to the character of Suzie. It was carried out during independent time subsequent to a guided reading session focussed on character. This pupil is a fluent NC level 3 reader, girl, and is now broadening her experience by reading a wider range of texts.

*The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*
by C.S.Lewis.

Personal response to the class novel by Y3 boy using a simple writing frame as a prompt sheet which had first been constructed and modelled in shared time.
Why the Whales Came by Michael Morpurgo.

This is the second entry in a reading journal of a Year 3 boy responding to a book of his own choice - started in independent time and completed for homework. The pupil has expanded on the previous entry but retained the format. He has decided to give the book a score and is clearly starting to ask questions and become involved in the story. He decided to illustrate his work at home to remind himself about the “special” whales mentioned in the story.

The book Why the Whales Came tells the story of Gracie, her dad, her mother, and Daniel and the Birdman. Once they lived on Samoa and all the whales were killed by the towns people, and the island was closed. All the ships crashed on the rocks and then the well were dry. Gracie lies on Briger. I enjoyed the book because it is exciting and because you dont know what is going to happen. The best bit was when the whales came and the towns people decided to help. I thought those the part when Gracie went to Samoa and was lost in the boy was a good bit because I didn’t know where she would land.

I would give it 9/10.

In a subsequent entry, made after a guided reading session focussing on ‘things that puzzle me’, he tries to work out the meaning of the dream which the character Gracie has. He says “Gracie’s dream is about her father dying, she saw a unicorn in the sea and her father’s hat fell off. Her father is laughing because when he was young he liked to go out fishing on the sea. His hat in the water is like his ship sinking. Even though he is drowning he is trying to say he is alright. I think the unicorn is sort of magical because they don’t exist, but it is protecting him and taking him to another place away from the world.”

The pupil has worked this out for himself as the extract had not specifically been looked at during the guided work. He has realised that there is more to this section of the story than at first meets the eye.
Someone came knocking by Anne Merrick

Three entries from a reading journal of a Year 6 pupil raise questions as she tries to make sense of a text which she says 'isn't my type of book'. These entries illustrate the potential that a reflective reading journal has for use in guided reading: the questions provide an excellent starting point for discussion, with the agenda for that discussion being shaped by the pupils.

I was right, this isn't
my type of book, but it is quite good.
This chapter is quite
descriptive, but at times can be hard to imagine.
Who is the man that isn't Mort?

I like red and I am glad I found out his name. I am
beginning to quite like Tod and Min now
especially Min.
Why is the book called someone came
knocking?
Why is Tod afraid of having a bath?

Min is telling the
story, and it is real.
Is the story made
up by Min?
If not how does
she know it?

AN APPROACH TO READING JOURNALS

Shared Work
Teacher modelling responses to text; producing a shared reading journal

Guided Work
Reading journals completed in guided group with teacher support.

Guided Work
Reading journals used to prepare for guided group discussion.

Independent Work
Reading journals used to prepare for and record independent group discussion.