

Ready to Read

Promoting the use of
Quick Reads in the
workplace



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What are Quick Reads?

Quick Reads are short, engaging books for adults without the more difficult vocabulary and long sentences that unconfident readers can find off-putting. The Reading Agency has been producing them regularly since 2006, generating a wide variety of titles to pick from. All are written by best-selling authors such as Ian Rankin, Andy McNab and Jojo Moyes.

As well as supporting unconfident or emerging readers, those for whom English isn't their first language or those who have simply lost the reading habit, Quick Reads can be enjoyed by everyone.

How do I get hold of them?

- Books cost only £1 each from online retailers and bookshops.
- You can borrow them from your local library.
- Your union or unionlearn may also have stocks.



Inspirations
Why do people read?

“ I read to escape.

“ I read to travel.

“ I read to stretch my mind.

“ I read for the challenge.

“ I read to learn more, to learn all the things I never learnt at school.

“ I read for the fun of it!

“ I read to hear the voices of people long gone.

“ I read to find peace.

“ I read for company.

“ I read to pass the time.

“ I read because it makes me smile.

“ I read because it makes me think.

“ I read for the chance to stand in another person's shoes.

“ I read because it helps me understand my own life better.

“ I read because now I can.

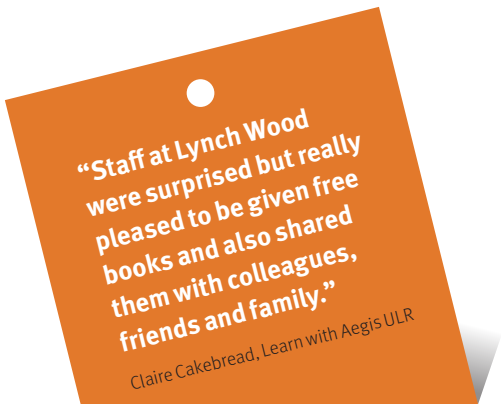
Quick Reads and literacy

Around one in five adults in England can be described as having ‘very poor literacy skills’, according to the National Literacy Trust. This means that reading information from unfamiliar sources, or on unfamiliar topics, could cause them problems. Poor literacy is linked to unemployment, low wages, poor health and lower life expectancy.

Adults can feel a real stigma around poor literacy skills, as well as a genuine fear of losing their jobs. This is where union learning reps (ULRs) come in. You can support workplace colleagues to pick up the reading habit through fun, interesting and motivating ideas. Quick Reads is an ideal way to kick start workshops, challenges and reading groups. This can make a real difference in literacy confidence.

A report by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC)¹ found that reading for pleasure helped adults develop a wider vocabulary and improved their confidence in reading. Reading for pleasure also develops skills in critical literacy – the ability to interpret what has been read, to think about it and to question the writer’s viewpoint.

¹ Dr Sam Duncan, NRDC, Institute of Education, University of London 2010.



“Staff at Lynch Wood were surprised but really pleased to be given free books and also shared them with colleagues, friends and family.”

Claire Cakebread, Learn with Aegis ULR



Rewards of reading for pleasure

- ✓ improvements in reading and writing attainment
- ✓ vocabulary development
- ✓ positive attitudes towards reading
- ✓ confidence in reading
- ✓ expanded general knowledge and cultural awareness
- ✓ increased understanding of others and greater community participation.

The National Literacy Trust (Clark & Rumbold 2006)

Health benefits

Good health and wellbeing are strongly linked with literacy confidence as people feel more able to:

- look after their homes and support their families
- access information and services for a healthy lifestyle
- help with schoolwork and encourage children to read
- support elderly relatives
- have a fulfilling social life.



Photo: John Birdsall photo library

“Reading a book is a bit of escapism. If you haven’t read for a while, you could easily get through one in an afternoon,” says Learn with Aegis project worker Colette Bracewell. Improving health and wellbeing is a main motivator for Colette and her colleagues at Learn with Aegis. “We work in a customer service environment and are in the process of setting up a book club – we even give our customers Quick Reads.”

“They can open the conversation about what people are reading. For instance, we had two members of staff sat side by side who enjoyed reading books about the second world war but didn’t know until we got talking about what we read for pleasure.”

Sean Dixon, Usdaw ULR Coordinator at DHL

Wider benefits

Research indicates that reading for pleasure has a positive impact on community and cultural participation, *“A connection, or connectedness, to the book, to the characters in the book, to a circle of readers, to wider circles: to all the other readers of that particular book, a link to those talking about it on*

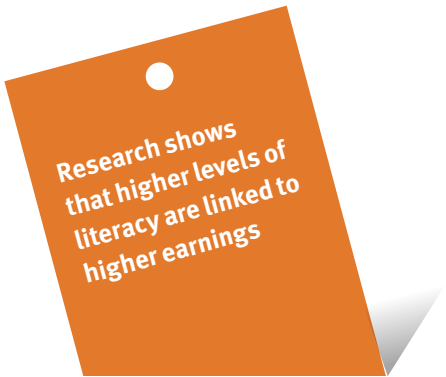
*the radio, a link to a global community of people concerned with, for example, animal welfare, or racism in schools, and to all those around the world who also take pleasure from reading.”*²

Heightened reading skills and improved self-confidence can unlock a whole new world for adults

Reading can help people feel they are in control of their own education and make them more likely to become politically engaged. Improved reading skills give people greater power to access information and understand what is happening in their workplaces, in their community and in wider society. Heightened reading skills and improved self-confidence can unlock a whole new world for adults, providing access to learning, greater opportunities at work and increased participation in union activism.

² Dr Sam Duncan, National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), Institute of Education, University of London 2010.





Research shows
that higher levels of
literacy are linked to
higher earnings

Union support for Quick Reads

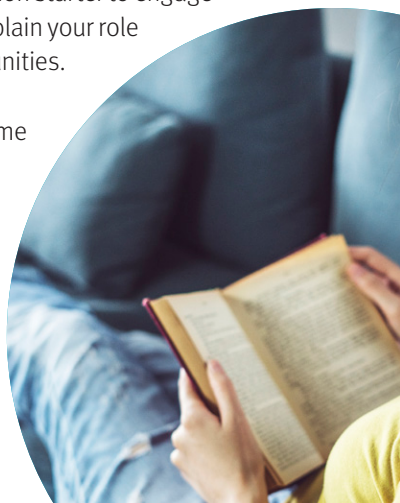
For over a decade, unionlearn has distributed and promoted Quick Reads to support literacy development and introduce reading for pleasure in the workplace. The ability to read, write and speak English is a social justice issue and is therefore supported by the union movement.

As a ULR, you can use the books as a conversation starter to engage with existing and potential new members

Good literacy skills are necessary for people to do their jobs safely and confidently and to progress in their careers, especially if a new role involves reading and responding to written texts such as reports or emails. Developing

literacy skills through reading can increase resilience to cope with new technology or redundancy, as changes often require confidence in reading and understanding instructions, unfamiliar texts and new vocabulary.

As a ULR, you can use the books as a conversation starter to engage with existing and potential new members to explain your role as a ULR and begin discussing learning opportunities. Promoting Quick Reads at events can provide a chance to speak to members who want to become more confident readers or get back into the reading habit or to discuss the benefits of reading for enjoyment. Whether members are avid readers, non-readers, reluctant readers or occasional readers – Quick Reads have something to offer.



Get your workplace reading

There are so many things you can try to bring reading into your workplace. Sometimes they can take a while to establish – the important thing is to give your ideas an airing and then get feedback from colleagues on what works and what might need to change for the idea to take hold.

Unions and ULRs are supporting reading in a wide variety of ways, helping members to:

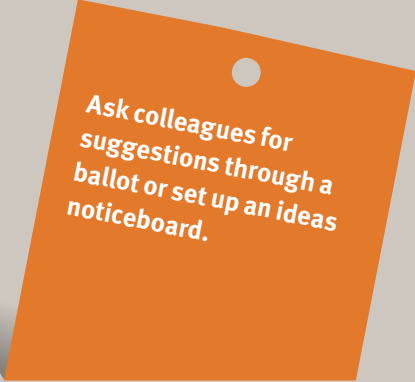
- feel confident in reading
- feel confident in speaking in a group
- develop a wider vocabulary
- foster a love of reading
- build work relationships in and across teams
- progress into learning
- progress at work.

Unions have come up with lots of ideas to promote Quick Reads in the workplace, ranging from arranging access to books through workplace libraries to getting colleagues together to discuss books in a group.

ULRs at Usdaw make their own resources to support Quick Reads, adapting them from the Reading Agency's website.

"Quick Reads give the ULR team an opportunity to engage with our colleagues, helping them progress to a more formal Functional Skills qualification," says Usdaw ULR Coordinator Sean Dixon.

Every month, union reps from Learn with Aegis make vibrant seasonal flyers that



Ask colleagues for suggestions through a ballot or set up an ideas noticeboard.

READING AHEAD

A reading group has potential to improve morale at work and can develop job-related skills

have raised the profile of their union. The flyers are sent to all members and ULRs also pin them on noticeboards. These have generated lots of interest in Quick Reads and requests for books from members. Feedback from staff shows they have also been used to get teenage children reading as well as to help elderly parents born overseas to develop their vocabulary and confidence in English.

Reading Ahead

This programme is also run by the Reading Agency. Formerly known as the Six Book Challenge, Reading Ahead aims to change perceptions of reading, build confidence and develop a love of reading by getting adults to sign up to read six books of their choice. Usdaw rep Sean Dixon says: *“There’s something very fulfilling about completing a book, and they only take the average reader a few hours to finish.”*

“I love these books as there are never enough hours in the day so it’s hard to find time to read a book. But with the Quick Reads if you have a hour or so spare you can sit down and read these in one go from start to finish. It then encourages me to try to make time and read the full book and gets me back in the habit of reading.”

Julie Snell, First Line Manager, DHL Supply Chain – Sainsbury’s Argos

Many unions run Reading Ahead, where participants record, rate and review six books (newspapers and magazines can be included). The Reading Agency produces materials to support the scheme, and participants gain a certificate to validate their efforts. Since launching in 2008, Reading Ahead has reached well over 1,500 people in workplaces, helped chiefly by trade unions such as UNISON and Usdaw.

An evaluation of Reading Ahead has found that it:

- ✓ boosts confidence in reading
- ✓ increases enjoyment in reading
- ✓ increases library use
- ✓ results in people reading more.



Reading groups

A reading group is a social activity to meet other readers, share ideas and build relationships. The rules are set by its participants.

A reading group has potential to

improve morale at work. It can develop job-related skills such as reading; speaking in a group; creative, independent and critical thinking; the ability to compare and contrast information as well as the ability to question what has been written and read between the lines.

Anyone can lead a book group and the more democratic they are the better

Reps from Learn with Aegis run successful book clubs at the Yorkshire and Skipton Building Societies, creating “friendly, informal communities of people who love – or used to love – reading”. They propose a list of books and vote on a title each month. These include Quick Reads, general fiction and non-fiction books.

Virtual reading groups

To accommodate so many people working across different sites, Learn with Aegis union project workers and ULRs also run a virtual club, with book selection and discussions taking place online. There are lots of different types of software you can use for online discussions that use video and/or audio, such as Zoom, Google Docs, FaceTime, Skype and Zoho. Your online book group could be synchronistic (where everyone logs on at the same time) or asynchronistic (where people can log on at different times) to contribute to the discussion. This can be useful for organisations with different shift patterns or multiple sites.

Anyone can lead a book group and the more democratic they are the better. A good way to start is by agreeing rules group for your group.



5

reasons to join
the book group

1. Meet people with the same interests.
2. Meet people with different interests.
3. Get back to reading or read more often.
4. Stretch your reading muscles by reading books you wouldn't usually select yourself.
5. Discover something new.

Discussion starters

- What did you like about the book?
- What didn't you like about the book?
- What genre was it? (historical, romance, thriller etc.) Did the genre appeal to you?
- How important was the plot?
- Are there any messages that resonated with you?
- What about the characters – were they believable and could you relate to them?
- How important was the setting to the story?
- Were the themes timeless?
- What did you learn?



Reading buddies

Unite South West is growing a network of volunteers to be reading buddies in its Bristol learning centre. This includes retired members who want to give something back to their community.

Reading buddies provide one-to-one support for learners to gain confidence in reading through meeting regularly with their buddy to read and share books. There is lots of enthusiasm to share the love of reading and volunteers can work with people indefinitely, helping to develop their confidence over time.

Regional Learning Organiser Tazim Ladhu came up with the idea as she used to be a reading and numbers buddy in schools as part of a business in the community project. She explains: *“People gave their time to support local children needing help with maths or reading. Our reading buddies are Unite members and find this new role supporting other union members with reading both exciting and rewarding. We are looking forward to this initiative developing within our community groups and workplaces.”*

Ideas to bring people together

- regular book groups
- a one-off book group on a particular topic of interest
- a reading workshop to stimulate interest in reading
- a creative writing workshop
- ‘lunch and learn’ sessions
- reading surgeries – to give people ideas on how to get reading or improve their reading
- a Facebook group to review and share Quick Reads.

“Helping someone to read is a priceless gift. It opens up great avenues for all, whether it’s reading menus or War and Peace. Quick Reads are ideal for learners and their reading buddies. There are also titles by many authors and something to suit everyone.”

Tazim Ladhu, Unite, Regional Learning
Organiser UNITE South West

Things to do throughout the year

- Promote romantic Quick Reads for Valentine's Day.
- Celebrate events such as World Book Day, World Book Night or National Poetry Day.
- Start a Twitter feed for your workplace linking to themes throughout the year, eg horror stories for Halloween, summer reads, Christmas stories etc.
- Get beach ready – swap ideas for books to read on holiday.

Ideas for your workplace

- Carry out a survey on reading habits to kick-start a conversation.
- Start a reading chain where a book is passed from one person to another.
- Start book swap groups: generic, fiction, non-fiction, self-help etc.
- Set up a library of donations in relaxation areas.
- Create a reading corner where staff can relax.
- Collect book reviews and display them to inspire others.
- Make links with your local library.
- Set up a book sale.



Libraries stock Quick Reads and often have free sets of books to lend to reading groups.

Resources



BBC Skillswise has plenty of resources to support reading for pleasure
bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/reading-for-pleasure/zj37cq1



The Reading Agency has resources and support
readingagency.org.uk



Quick Reads toolkit
<https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=quick-reads>



Reading Groups for Everyone
readinggroups.org.uk



Reading Ahead
readingahead.org.uk



National Poetry Day
<https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/>



World Book Day and Night
worldbookday.com/ and <https://worldbooknight.org/>



UNISON Read anytime anywhere – a literacy toolkit for ULRs
<http://bit.ly/unisonread>



Unionlearn has information and support for literacy and reading
unionlearn.org.uk



Search Quick Reads case studies for inspiration
unionlearn.org.uk/case-studies

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