

## Griffydam Gladiators- Blog Post

We have been running Reading Gladiator sessions for two years, here at Griffydam. I started the sessions at my previous school and absolutely loved the variety and challenge within the texts. I also saw how much the stories improved confidence and positivity around reading so was keen to get the programme underway here. I'm extremely glad I did!

Last year, the sessions were delivered during the school day but this year we are running the group as an after-school activity. It seems to work really well as the children value the session and see it as something very special. There are 8 children in the group and the group is led by me, the Headteacher. We always start with a drink and a chat before we begin and always finish with 10 minutes of imaginative play. It's surprising that the books can often be found as props or stimulus for the play!



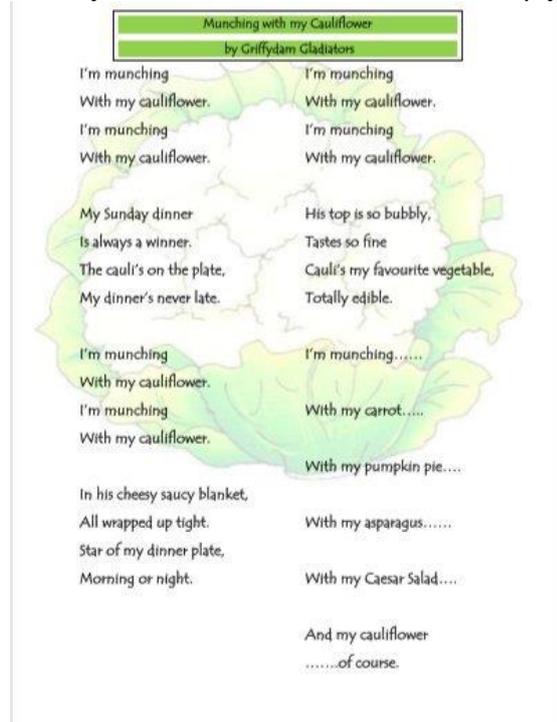
A 2018 Gladiator with a 2019 Gladiator reviewing a book for the Royal Society.

We completed the independent reading questionnaire at the beginning of the academic year and were pleased to see that positivity around independent reading really is growing. Some children still are hanging on to the usual authors when talking about 'favourite books' but an increasing number are referencing a broader range. We are also seeing more children reading for pleasure at playtime and invested in some wooden seating so that children can sit comfortably with their books when the weather is warm! We've been fortunate enough to be able to purchase £2500 worth of books this year, due to a grant from a local charity and this has completely restocked our class library shelves with the most up to date and wonderful fiction. We've also won lots of books from Just Imagine too (thank you very much!) and our Gladiators have reviewed books for 'The Royal Society' and The National Literacy Trust'. The children's positivity and enthusiasm for reading is often commented upon by visitors to the school.



The Reading Gladiator Handbook structures our weekly sessions and are full of ideas. However, we use the supporting resources as a springboard for our discussions and often will let the sessions take their own path. We decided to use Brian Moses anthology very broadly and took inspiration from the children's favourite poems. This resulted in a wonderful poem, based on 'Walking with my Iguana', which we performed together using instruments.

The children love to hear about the Reading Gladiators (or Glads) in assembly. When we shared the Brian Moses poetry, we noticed that one of the poems really linked well with the Reception Class topic, and so went into the class to read aloud the poem to them. Our Year 3/4 children have also participated in activities that the Reading Gladiators have particularly enjoyed, such as taking a section from 'The Bird, the Boy and the Coffin Maker' and drawing a shared story board in response. It's fantastic to see the confidence of the children growing as they share their ideas and delve deeply into the text.



Once we've finished a text, it transfers straight into the class reading areas. The children from the class are usually clamouring to read the books and the Reading Gladiators are always on hand to recommend and support the children with their new books. We have found that the books have prompted the children to seek out further titles by the author; such as James Patterson's Word of Mouse, and so this has enabled us to tailor our libraries to really meet the developing needs of our young readers.

As a school, the Reading Gladiators programme has had a profound and positive effect upon 'reading culture'. Children across the school see reading as a valued and valuable activity and have a real love of books. We have seen an improvement in standards right across the school, as children are talking more readily about their reading choices.



Reading Gladiators led our Christmas session which used 'How Winston Delivered Christmas'. Their confidence has grown so much since starting the programme!

It has been so pleasing to see the positive impact of the programme on our children. Last year, we ran a Year Six group and saw all our children reach the expected standard in Reading by the end of the year. This resulted in us being named in the top 1% of schools nationally for reading. We attribute our success to the improved confidence within the Gladiator group, seeing some children flourish as readers throughout the year. This confidence had a knock-on effect to all other aspects of the curriculum, seeing some of the children exceed all expectations in relation to their writing as well.

This year, we've loved reading 'Town is By the Sea'. It captured the children's imagination and we had such brilliant discussions about the child and his dad's experiences. Living in an ex-mining community, the children were able to link the book to the experiences of their grandparents, which they'd previously seen in old photographs.

Our parents at Griffydam are really supportive and so have supported the Gladiator group throughout their journey. We tend to text parents to let them know about the books coming home and ask the children to share the books with their parents. Some of our parents have enjoyed the books even more than their children, with one mum in particular who eagerly waited for the next book to be sent home!

And as for the future of reading at Griffydam, well there's no stopping us. As one child said, 'Before I came to Griffydam, I didn't like reading as I didn't think that it was for me but now I can see that reading is for everyone.'

Claire Coates

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