

BEING A READER IN NEWHAM

HOW DO WE FIND BOOKS THAT MEAN SOMETHING TO US?

RANDOM READING

'I like mysteries. I like mystery stories. I've just read 'The Spy Who Came In Out Of The Cold'. Now I'm 100, I have difficulties getting down to shelves. Somebody has made a selection on a particular shelf I can reach.

I choose them more or less at random, you could say, although if I do come across a favourite author, I will, you know, get it from there. And that's interesting, because you do read books that you might not otherwise have done.'

ADA VARLEY

WHEN TEACHERS READ TO US

'The best part of school reading was when we had some lovely teachers who used to read to us. One English teacher would always have a lesson a week where he'd read, and he read lots of interesting things.'

DAVID CEEN

READING AT HOME VS READING AT SCHOOL

'I couldn't always relate to reading in school. I could relate to my Mum's stories. I would have run home just to listen to the stories my mum had, of the village, and the gurus and the stories about Guru Nanak and the Sufi and all the stories they knew off by heart in the Guru Granth Sahib, because they just listened to them.

Sometimes you don't understand the teachers because a lot of our teachers would be, like, not from the East End, so they wouldn't have a cockney accent and they would be very posh. And you think 'Oh, they talk with a plum in their mouth'.

What engaged me was pictures, but also text. Pictures of buildings and architecture, because Whitechapel Library had a wonderful collection of Art History upstairs. I think a lot of people think that reading and writing is just all about text, but you can read buildings and see text in shapes and geometry.'

SURESH SINGH

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SALVAGING BOOKS FROM NEAR-CERTAIN DESTRUCTION

'I used to get books for Christmas, usually those kind of 'Children's Classics' like Treasure Island, Robinson Crusoe, Robin Hood... that sort of thing.

I remember once finding a whole stash of books that someone had thrown away down the chute, and we climbed into the bin and pulled out all these books! And amongst those were some Enid Blytons, that I've still got. And I've still got books from my childhood that my uncle gave me - Pelicans and Penguin Classics and things.'

JOHN NEWMAN

READING DIFFERENTLY TO PARENTS

'My dad was illiterate, couldn't really read, so books were not really on his agenda. My mum could read but - you know - she was raising kids and it was very difficult for them to prioritise that. It's possibly endemic of a lot of Asian families from that period, immigrant families I mean, first generation families into the UK where the understanding was that the parents would work hard, and they would like their kids to get educated. Textbooks, all of that kind of thing - my Dad was happy to spend money on that. But because money was tight, he worked in a factory, if I were to go to him and ask for fiction books, that wasn't really something he could understand.

The idea that I would want to spend money on stuff that people had made up ... it didn't really compute with his way of thinking.

I remember, as maybe a fourteen or fifteen year old, I came across the Terry Pratchett 'Discworld' novels in my local library, and it was then Plashet Library, which has since closed down.'

VASEEM KHAN

READING TO CALM THE MIND

'It's just important for that mental stimulation. I find when I read it's like an escape for me. It's like how some people decide to go and have a drink, or meditate, or have a bubble bath. You know, reading is exactly the same thing. It relaxes you, it takes your mind elsewhere, you imagine...

It gets your mind flowing, because you imagine all these things.'

MAYURI GAJJAR