



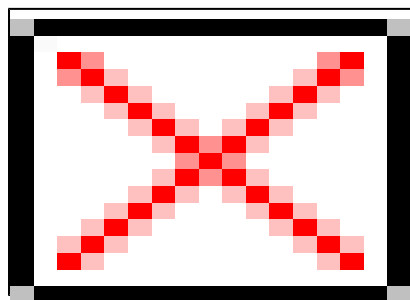
## 20 years of Summer Reading Fun

[237](#) [1]

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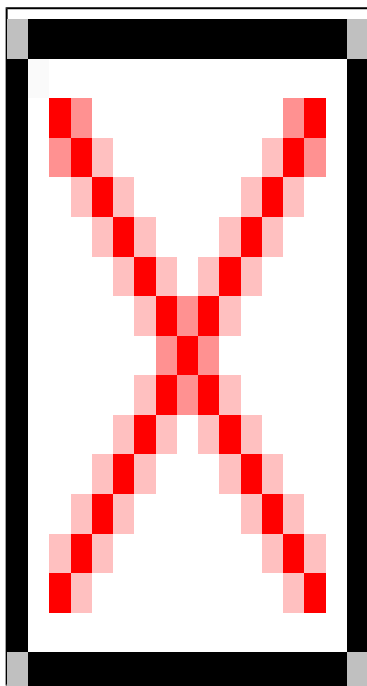
**Anne Sarrag** looks back over 20 years of the **Summer Reading Challenge**

This summer, the **Reading Agency** and libraries will be taking children across England, Scotland and Wales on a journey into space for the 20th anniversary of the **Summer Reading Challenge**. The Challenge is an annual event aimed at 4-11 year olds, and gets hundreds of thousands of children reading every summer. The format is simple: children are encouraged to read six books of their choice during the summer holidays with collectable incentives and rewards, plus a certificate for every child who completes the challenge.



Inspired by the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, this year's theme, **Space Chase** will take young readers on an out-of-this world adventure with super space family, The Rockets. The Challenge touches down in libraries across the UK this summer and features bespoke artwork from top children's illustrator Adam Stower. Children can sign up for the Challenge at their local library at the start of the summer holidays ? and as always it is completely free.

Twenty years ago, whilst sitting around a kitchen table, **Anne Sarrag MBE** developed the Challenge to help tackle the



?summer slide?, a decline in children's reading ability over the long summer holidays. Her experience with earlier publisher supported library initiatives such as the **Big Idea** competition in 1997, organised

as part of **National Libraries Week**, demonstrated the benefits of a centrally organised national campaign and her conviction that reading could be a powerful equaliser for children of different backgrounds has helped make the Challenge an integral part of what the libraries offer people during the summer.

The first **Summer Reading Challenge** in 1999 was an instant success, with 440,000 children taking part in the first year. Since then, the Summer Reading Challenge has become one of the UK's biggest children's reading programmes: children have taken part in the Challenge over 13 million times. Many children love the Challenge so much they take part year after year and in 2018, just under 700,000 children took part.

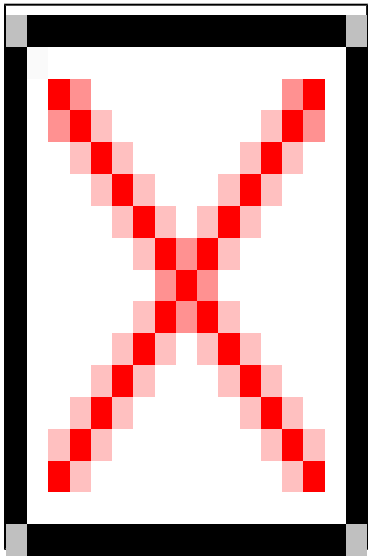
Supported by publishers from its first year ? David Fickling and Klaus Flugge were particularly enthusiastic - and with the backing of the library suppliers, the Challenge has also been particularly effective in encouraging partnership activity ? regionally, libraries often team up with local businesses, while on a national level, partners have included the **Beano**, **Tesco Bank** (in Scotland), the **BBC**, and the **Roald Dahl Story Company**.

Indeed, the Challenge has played a part in the lives of so many different people, that the **Reading Agency** are collecting memories, from librarians, parents and carers, and participants themselves. If you'd like to share your experience of the **Summer Reading Challenge**, [visit the website](#) [2].

While the central focus of the Challenge has remained unchanged ? incentivising children to borrow and read books over the summer holidays ? the Challenge has evolved and developed as Anne explains:

?In 2012, we went digital with the Challenge, and started a book sorter on the now year-round **Summer Reading Challenge** website. The Book Sorter is an evolving database of 905,000 favourite books added and reviewed for children by children, and this year we're hoping to get that figure to the big 1 million! The website also hosts a Reading Club, which includes videos from well-known authors, activity sheets, book reviews, and how-to videos from top children's illustrators.?

### **Tackling the 'summer slide'?**



?To help investigate the impact of the Challenge, we have been awarded a £120,000 grant from **Arts Council England** to undertake an independent, large-scale study of the **Summer Reading Challenge**. The research will be conducted in partnership with the **Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL)** and **Libraries Connected**. This funding will allow us to evaluate the impact of the **Summer Reading Challenge** on the 'summer slide' in relation to both reading skills and attitudes. A secondary aim is to explore the role a public library-based reading activity like the **Summer Reading Challenge** can have on building wider school and family engagement with reading.?

**"Reading is about enjoying books not just having to learn how to read"**

?Research suggests that reading for pleasure is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents'

level of education and is a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background. Children who read books often at age 10 and more than once a week at age 16 also gain higher results in maths, vocabulary and spelling tests at age 16 than those who read less regularly.

We surveyed 1,434 families about the impact that taking part in the Challenge has had on them and their children, and almost 80% of parents and carers said that they believed the Challenge encouraged children to read more over the summer.?

?**The Summer Reading Challenge** has been an excellent way to motivate my son to keep up with his reading and writing the reviews was good for handwriting. He is dyslexic so it is important we don't let his skills slip over the summer holidays. He has been very motivated, and we will use the library regularly from now on. I also intend to join too.? Parent of 4-7-year-old boy, Birmingham

?It has taught my son that reading is about enjoying books not just having to learn how to read.? Parent of 4-7-year-old boy, Kent

?The Challenge isn't about being the best reader, or even being a good reader, it's about exploring new ideas and having fun? Natalie Clark, former **Summer Reading Challenge** participant.

How to get involved:

You can sign up for the Challenge at your local library throughout the summer, and there are lots more fun children's activities on the [Summer Reading Challenge website](#) [3].

The Reading Agency is calling for parents and carers to make #SpaceforReading this #SummerReadingChallenge. Join the campaign by submitting a photo of your own reading den with the #SpaceForReading via social media and be in with the chance of winning a special prize.

[1]A. Sullivan and M. Brown (2013), <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1473708/> [4] Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading

[2] OECD (2010), <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/48852630.pdf> [5] PISA 2009 Results: Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices, p.32-4

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**Links:**

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk-www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/237>

[2] <http://www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/20-years>

[3] <http://www.space-chase.org.uk>

[4] <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1473708/>

[5] <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/48852630.pdf>