

THE READING BUG

Ann Swarbrick began teaching French in 1979

The inspiration

I met a teacher of English from Denmark in 1985 who described her classroom as a place where pupils could always find stuff to read in English that they'd be interested in.

I wanted that for my French students! I wanted them to enjoy reading, not just be stuck on answering comprehension questions.

I started to hunt for French teenage-appropriate books, magazines, manuals, collections of stories, poetry, comic books - short and longer texts. With that collection we instigated a lesson of free reading every 2 weeks. They could read whatever they chose so long as it was in French. They kept a reading diary to record what they had read. It was never marked; it was personal to them to show them that they had read books of their choice in French – no pressure, but a huge achievement.

What came next

An increase in imaginative writing in French. I could see that both their vocabulary and vision was gradually

expanding. But their writing now had to have an audience. So they wrote for display, for parents' evening, for the local primary schools where they presented their French stories at assembly and left them there to be seen by the children. These were designed to show the children what they might be capable of doing, in

French, after 3 years studying in our secondary school.

Another creative writing was to write a series of poems for display in the school's Reception on the theme of War.



The Library link

My books and magazines needed to show that they were linked to real life and real French readers; not the classroom. The school Librarian gave us a section of the Library in which to keep the collection and booked us a regular slot for reading for pleasure. She also gave staff a small book allowance to spend when we went to France.

And then...

Four friends, my sister and I were commissioned to write a series of books expressly for adolescents learning French. La Série Rouge was a collection of fiction and non-fiction designed for 11-16 year olds.