

Exploring your reading culture

Secondary Reflection Guide



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National
Year of
Reading
2026

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Change your story

Exploring reading culture in your setting

Reading for pleasure is one of the most powerful drivers of literacy development, academic success and lifelong learning. When children and young people choose to read in ways that feel meaningful to them, the benefits extend far beyond literacy. They gain confidence, empathy and a sense of identity as readers. Yet research shows that many learners do not experience reading as a voluntary, enjoyable activity.

These reflection guides have been designed to help settings across all phases, from early years through to secondary, consider how their current provision supports reading for pleasure and fosters volitional reading. They offer a framework for thinking about the conditions that enable children and young people to develop both the will and the skill to read.

The guides recognise that reading today is multimodal and diverse. It includes books, magazines, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks, digital texts, gaming narratives, music and song lyrics. Meeting readers where they are means valuing these forms and understanding how they connect to interests, identities and sociocultural experiences. By embracing this breadth, we create inclusive environments where every learner can see reading as relevant and rewarding.

How to use these guides

These guides are supportive tools, not checklists. They are intended to:

- **Encourage personal and professional reflection** on your current practice and provision.
- **Stimulate professional conversations** within teams about what is working well and where there is room for growth.
- **Provide a shared language** for discussing reading for pleasure across different phases and roles.
- **Help identify priorities** for strategic planning, time and energy as part of the National Year of Reading and beyond.

Each guide is organised around key themes, such as leadership, choice, environment, time, social reading, role models and inclusive provision. Within each theme, you will find:

- **Overview statements** describing effective practice.
- **Reflect prompts** to help you consider your current position.
- **Refresh space** to inspire next steps and future planning.

You can use these guides flexibly:

- As part of staff meetings or CPD sessions to spark discussion.
- For individual reflection to deepen understanding of your own practice.
- To inform whole-school or setting audits and action planning.

The aim is not to judge but to support continuous improvement. By using these guides collaboratively, you can build a coherent, inclusive reading culture that values all forms of reading and meets learners where they are, helping every child and young person to experience reading as a source of joy, curiosity and connection.

Aspects of a Reading for Pleasure culture



Leadership of Volitional Reading

There is a commitment to lead a shared and valued reading for pleasure culture.



Social Reading

Students are given time and space to engage in social reading practices and connect with others in ways that are personally enjoyable and motivating.



Choice and Agency

Children are supported to choose personally meaningful reading material and develop their own reader identities.



An Inclusive Reading Culture

Students are supported to engage with a wide range of diverse reading experiences that reflect their own lives but also provide perspectives on others' lives.



Environment and Access

Students are supported to read within and beyond school and given access to a vibrant, engaging reading culture.



Stories are like footprints that can never be washed away... The story moves into someone else's head. It finds a new place to live.

Ellie McNichol



Wherever you can find a library, wherever you can find a book... you can find a friend! You are NOT alone.

Mychal Threets, Librarian.



I think you can tell that I'm a writer who grew up reading whatever was still left on the library shelves rather than the latest bestsellers; it made me very omnivorous.

Maggie Stiefvater



Young People's Literature will continue to become a landing place for young people to see themselves. A beacon that calls them home—whatever class, race, gender, etc. they might be.

Elizabeth Acevedo



A book written for every child may never be held and read by a child who cannot afford to buy it.

Sita Brahmachari



Read what you want, build your own personal canon.. The books that will change your life won't arrive when promised. They will creep up on you.

Nikesh Shukla



Exploring Our Reading Culture: Secondary

5 Golden Threads	Key aspects	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Leadership of Volitional Reading</p>  <p>There is a commitment to lead a shared and valued reading for pleasure culture</p>	<p>Volitional and agentic reading (RfP) is regarded as a whole school priority and a key aspect of the school's overarching reading strategy.</p> <p>The work on developing volitional reading is often led by an implementation team and advised and supported by senior leadership. Appropriate resources are made available to those leading on volitional reading.</p> <p>A strategic implementation plan is informed by research evidence and the relationship between reading proficiency and reading engagement is clearly understood.</p>	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a whole school understanding of the importance of volitional reading and its impact on cognitive skills, well-being, personal development and social skills. • An implementation team drives this work and is likely to consist of the T&L lead, the literacy lead, the librarian, the SENDCo, an EAL lead and subject teachers. • An overview of the implementation plan is shared with the whole school and there are planned opportunities for updates during the academic year. • All staff are aware of the contributions they can make to the strategic plan. • Barriers to volitional reading are carefully explored so that new strategies foster students' intrinsic motivation. • High-quality CPD is made available for practitioners. <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clark, C., Picton, I., & Cole, A. (2025). Children and young people's reading in 2025. London: National Literacy Trust • Cremin, T., & Scholes, L., (2024). Reading for pleasure: scrutinising the evidence base – benefits, tensions and recommendations. <i>Language and Education</i>, 38, 537-559. • Department for Education (2023). The Reading Framework London: Department for Education 	<p>Action Points</p>

5 Golden Threads	Key aspects	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Choice and Agency</p>  <p>Students are supported to choose personally meaningful reading material and develop their own reader identities</p>	<p>Students choose reading material that reflects their personal preferences and motivations.</p> <p>Students believe that all types of texts and reading formats are valued and validated, both within and beyond school.</p> <p>Evidence-informed routes into reading are appropriate for different age groups and support young people to enjoy personally meaningful reading experiences and develop confidence and autonomy as readers.</p>	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are surveyed each year to ensure the school provides reading material and makes recommendations that align with their interests and personal preferences. • Students are encouraged to 'go all in' and engage with a broad mix of age-appropriate texts (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, plays, graphic novels, digital texts and audio). • Students are explicitly taught how to choose reading material by school librarians and other practitioners. • Motivations for reading are shared with students and students are supported to see themselves as readers with their own reader identities – e.g., curious/mindful/social. • Evidence-informed routes into reading are promoted e.g., social media (BookTok and book influencers), film and TV, personal interests and role models. • Subject teachers are supported in learning how to source and signpost wider reading materials and formats and when and how to promote such reading material. • Subject teachers share a diverse range of texts for students to discover, without hierarchy or judgement, creating space for choice and curiosity, and showing that some choices may serve as gateways into wider reading. <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Literacy Trust case study https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/developing-a-culture-of-reading-for-pleasure-case-study/ • National Literacy Trust (2025). The future of literacy: Multimodal reading. Literacy for learning: Redefining literacy for the next generation. • Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L. G., & McGeown, S. (2023). Adolescents' perspectives on the barriers to reading for pleasure. <i>Literacy</i>, 58, 204-215. 	<p>Action Points</p>

5 Golden Threads	Key aspects	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Environment and Access</p>  <p>Students are supported to read within and beyond school and given access to a vibrant, engaging reading culture</p>	<p>Welcoming reading spaces, such as the school library, are carefully curated and maintained, offering vibrant displays and recommendations that reflect students' interests and identities.</p> <p>Fiction and non-fiction books, textbooks and digital texts are available across the school in places students naturally spend time, displayed in ways that encourage browsing and discussion.</p> <p>Easy access to both print and digital texts, within and beyond school, is prioritised so reading becomes a natural part of students' study and leisure time.</p>	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school library provides access to diverse reading material and formats, reducing inequalities for students who may not have reading material at home, and helping children and young people to engage in personally meaningful reading experiences. <li>• Students are frequently informed about online reading platforms, audio platforms, new book stock, events and reading challenges (e.g., library lessons/form time). <li>• Students participate in curating reading displays across the school that suit their interests and study needs. <li>• The implementation team tracks library loans, both digital and print, and uses this data to inform future purchases and plan reading events, such as themed reading weeks. <li>• Reading materials are highly visible in subject disciplines reinforcing the message that reading matters for learning, wellbeing and personal growth. <li>• The school library has strong links with the local public library, community partners, other school librarians and, where possible, popular authors and illustrators. <li>• Parents and carers are informed about routes into reading for young people and regularly updated on ways students can access texts within and beyond school. <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cole, A., Clark, C. & Teravainen-Goff. (2023). The impact of school libraries on children and young people's literacy outcomes: An evidence review. London: National Literacy Trust. <li>• Merga, M.K. (2021). How can Book Tok on TikTok inform readers' advisory services for young people? <i>Library and Information Science Research</i>. 	<p>Action Points</p>

5 Golden Threads	Key aspects	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>Social Reading</p>  <p>Students are given time and space to engage in social reading practices and connect with others in ways that are personally enjoyable and motivating</p>	<p>Students regularly talk about what they're reading, share views and recommendations, explore why certain texts resonate with them and feel that their opinions are valued.</p> <p>School and community events, such as Black History Month, World Book Day, reading groups, competitions and author visits, celebrate social reading practices and help to strengthen students' reader identities.</p> <p>Practitioners share personal reading preferences and practices, initiate conversations about reading and make recommendations that connect to students' interests and the wider curriculum.</p>	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are planned opportunities for students to chat informally about their personal reading preferences and recommend texts to their peers during curriculum time and in extracurricular activities. • Subject teachers and other practitioners are supported to know how and when to implement text talk opportunities in curriculum time. • Subject teachers and other practitioners are encouraged to make their own reading habits and behaviours visible to students in informal, everyday ways: to discuss what they read; signpost interesting texts and show that they value all types of volitional reading. • Students are invited to lead reading initiatives and taught how to engage in peer-led discussions. • There are planned opportunities for reading advocates (school librarians, subject teachers, family members, local and national figures, including social media influencers) to share how reading connects to their personal and working lives. • A range of vibrant and exciting reading events take place during the academic year and some are co-planned and co-delivered by students/reading ambassadors. <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loh, C., Cremin, T., Kuzmicova, A., McGeown, S., & Scholes, L. (2025). <i>The Decline in Volitional Reading: Evidence-Informed Ways Forward</i>. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. • McGeown, S., Errington, P., et al. (2025). <i>The Future of Books and Reading</i>. Literacy Lab, University of Edinburgh, UK. 	<p>Action Points</p>

5 Golden Threads	Key aspects	Reflect (what now?)	Refresh/Introduce (what next?)
<p>An Inclusive Reading Culture</p>  <p>Students are supported to engage with a wide range of diverse reading experiences that reflect their own lives but also provide perspectives on others' lives</p>	<p>Texts that enhance students' cultural awareness and empathy and challenge stereotypes are frequently promoted to broaden their understanding of different perspectives and foster critical thinking.</p> <p>Safe and inclusive spaces in the school, such as the school library, cater for students' diverse needs and provide access to inclusive reading material (in print, digital and audio formats) that reflect students' identities and interests.</p> <p>Texts that challenge assumptions, broaden perspectives on curriculum subjects and offer a wide range of cultural and social viewpoints are actively promoted by subject teachers and other practitioners.</p>	<p>Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student surveys and focus group discussions indicate that students have access to texts that cater for their diverse needs and interests. • Fiction books, both print and audio, reflect the diversity of the school community, offering stories by diverse authors that feature characters from different racial, ethnic, gender, religious or disability backgrounds. • Age-appropriate dual language texts reflect the school's demographic and are available in accessible formats. • High-interest, low-difficulty texts are readily available in different formats for those who need them and ensure students experience feelings of success when reading. • There are opportunities for students to help curate inclusive reading displays and participate in inclusive reading events and initiatives. • There are strategies in place, informed by current research, to motivate the most reluctant readers, such as the promotion of different routes into reading. • Robust partnerships with local libraries, community groups, local bookshops and cultural organisations contribute to the school's inclusive reading culture and widen access to diverse reading experiences. <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elliott, V., Watkis, D., Hart, B., & Davison, K. (2024). <i>The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot</i>. London: Penguin & Runnymede Trust. • Picton, I., & Clark, C. (2022). <i>Seeing yourself in what you read: Diversity and children and young people's reading in 2022</i>. National Literacy Trust. • Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. <i>Perspectives</i>, 6(3), ix-xi. 	<p>Action Points</p>

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Leadership of volitional reading

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Choice and agency

- National Literacy Trust case study: *Developing a culture of reading for pleasure: a school case study* | National Literacy Trust
- National Literacy Trust (2025). *The future of literacy: Multimodal reading. Literacy for learning: Redefining literacy for the next generation*
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Environment and access

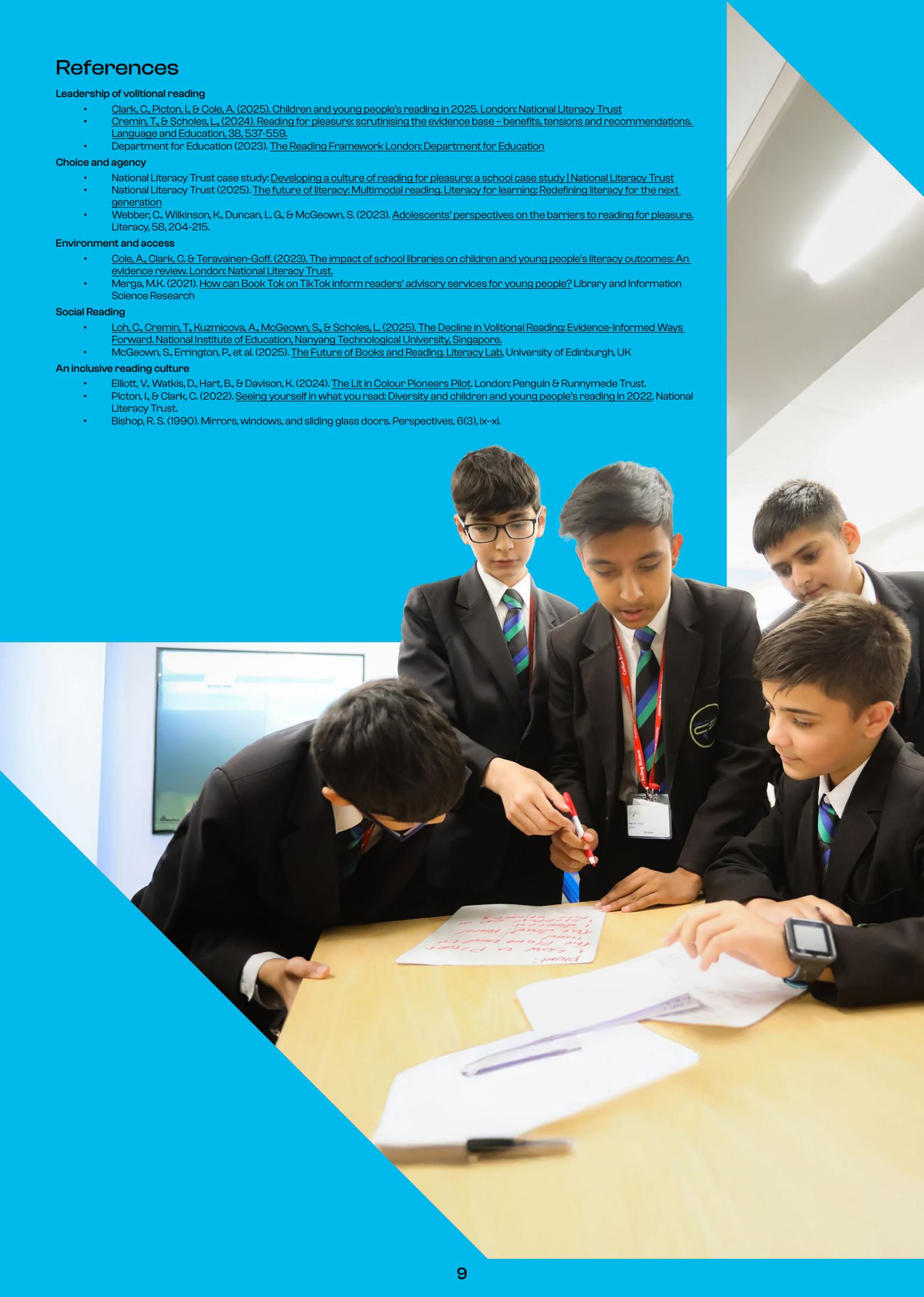
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Social Reading

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An inclusive reading culture

- Elliott, V., Watkis, D., Hart, B., & Davison, K. (2024). *The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot*. London: Penguin & Runnymede Trust.
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