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Trust The Beano to Make Reading Fun!

Mike Stirling, Editor of The Beano, explains why comics are the missing link in developing confident readers...

The Beano has successfully introduced children to reading for over 70 years. Endorsed by parents, guardians and grandparents, it's the nation's favourite comic. In 2011, snapping up The Beano remains a great way to establish a weekly reading habit in children.

Reading is a core life skill, but it can be difficult to convince children; especially when they're absorbed in television, video games or online. Primary school kids are the same age as Dennis and, like him, have loads to cram into their busy schedules. The Beano believes persuading children to read is best achieved by proving it can be fun, something we're experts in!

Every issue of The Beano delivers fresh vocabulary, perfectly pitched humour and entertaining storylines. The Beano is engaging for reluctant readers because it uses fewer words than a typical story book and scaffolds the experience with descriptive pictures. The Beano uses correct English to deliver the stories, a policy parents and teachers have congratulated us upon. Concern is growing over a generation of children who are disengaged from the pleasure of reading – diminishing their opportunities for success in adulthood. Comics can combat this effectively.

Our own survey, commissioned from research specialists BMRB Access

revealed intriguing differences between girls and boys' (aged between 7 and 11) reading habits and also concerns from parents about a noticeable reluctance to read.

Girls remained more than twice as likely to read chapter books and, perhaps unsurprisingly, parents were concerned that children generally spent insufficient time reading outside the classroom, especially when contrasted with the popularity of television.

Such concerns are merited from a developmental perspective; television is a passive entertainment, while reading requires active engagement and an investment of imagination. This 'effort' is sometimes perceived as an unwelcome chore by children who have failed to develop a reading habit.

Comics can subtly overcome negative perceptions of reading. The pure entertainment they engender can encourage children to overlook the effort involved because they're actually enjoying the process.

Primary boys are traditionally reticent readers and possibly the greatest potential beneficiaries of early literacy support. Comics afford an excellent opportunity to encourage boys particularly to enjoy reading as early as possible. Dennis the Menace enjoys comics!

A further advantage is that children are happy to undertake reading comics on their own. Instead of substituting formal children's literature, comics serve as a gateway to reading – creating interest and enthusiasm where so many other leisure options could otherwise divert attention elsewhere. Whatever way children, and boys in particular, get into reading, the most important thing has to be that it becomes a positive life experience and comics serve as a brilliant starting point.

The bottom line is that the enjoyment of reading can be encouraged by comics, regardless of whether children graduate to text only reading or not. They will be, after all, enjoying their reading experiences.

We already have over seven thousand subscribers to The Beano and our Dennis and Gnasher animation is the second most popular show on CBBC, having reached over 15 million viewers last year alone. This has raised awareness and interest in The Beano amongst an entire new generation of school children. The Beano brings these TV fans back to the reading experience in the original comic.

The Beano enjoys 73 years of heritage, which has helped build parental trust spanning generations. Trust The Beano to make reading fun!

The Secret Seven...don't tell kids, but comics are good for them!

❶ The Beano has successfully introduced a weekly reading habit in children for over 70 years. ❷ Comics boost literacy and engage reluctant readers. ❸ The Beano promotes reading in the classroom and the home. ❹ The Beano delivers fresh vocabulary and perfectly pitched humour within engaging stories. ❺ Literacy skills open the door to lifelong learning from an early age. ❻ The Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) reports that children with the most positive attitudes towards reading enjoy the highest reading achievement. ❼ DC Thomson Consumer Insight and Brand Development report that Beano readers enjoy an average of 14 chapter books per annum, suggesting The Beano is the 'missing link' that all parents who care about maximizing their children's life opportunities should be aware of.

