

No to Age Banding

Education Professionals

What concerns me in the debate is the apparent absence of acknowledgement of the enormous proportion of book sales in total which comes from the education and libraries markets. This great percentage of sales/monies/numbers of books, or however you calculate it, appears to be wholly ignored, or considered to be of far less importance to publishers than the possibility of selling individual books through supermarkets, other diverse outlets or indeed book-chains which pay staff ludicrously small salaries and therefore do not generally attract prolonged expertise on the shop floor.

As a headteacher I'd have deplored receiving books for children's pleasure-reading age-banded - I'd need to deface them with black permanent pen-blobs over the offending bit of the cover - and in selecting books on a limited budget on the whole I'd have avoided those known to be age-banded.

In the first couple of months of this year I wrote *Boys Into Books 5-11*, commissioned and published by The School Library Association and supported by the DCSF. The divisions I decided upon in this annotated listing of over 200 books was simply Youngest / The Middle Years 6 - 9+ / Older and More Confident Readers.

The opening of the Youngest section states, "There will be considerable overlap between each of the three divisions of this list. Many of the youngest readers will find they can read and enjoy some of the books in the Middle Years section too."

In the opening of the Middle Years Section I wrote, "The spread of ability broadens as children grow older. Confidence and reading readiness levels vary enormously too. A class of 8 year olds may well have a four-year range, or broader, in terms of reading ability. So these lists do not have age recommendations. Instead the number of pages in each book is given as that is a fairly reasonable, though not wholly accurate, indicator of the demands of the book."

For the Older section I put, "The headings for each title in this category also have the total number of pages as one measure of the challenge factor. Some books here will also be right for able and mature but slightly younger readers. Some will be demanding for many lower secondary readers. The trick is to feed the interest age without going too far into the particular concerns of the almost 'young adult' years, etc"

There are also three sections with no divisions at all, though again total number of pages is stated, FolkTales, Myths and Legends / Poetry / General Information Books.

In the conclusion of my 14 page Introduction to this *Boys Into Books* I wrote, "In recommending books to individual readers there is absolutely no substitute for being familiar with the youngster's own interests and abilities". And also, "Most regular, repeated, success in getting children and books to meld perfectly together comes from knowing both the books and the youngsters really well".

I should emphasise that these are my own views - not officially School Library Association, or indeed DCSF, opinions. But the main point is that the project is supported by the DCSF as a book-gifting initiative with around £4.5 million being spent on the purchase of books from the list for distribution to schools through library services. That is just a fraction of the annual value of the education / libraries market to the children's book trade.

Chris Brown, former primary headteacher and Review Editor for 'The School Librarian', has given us permission to reprint this portion of his letter to Notoagebanding.org

As a school librarian I run book fairs. I am convinced that if books were age banded it would cut sales significantly. Students would not want to be seen with a "baby" book with a low age band and might not try something with a high age band in case it was "too hard". We generate around £2000 a year in these sales.

It's hard enough getting some students to pick up a book at all. Any minor detail can turn some students off - the font, cover illustration, hardback or paperback. Age banding is absolutely detrimental to the work I do every day with students.

ED, School Librarian

I run two reading clubs in our secondary school. This week we informed them about the proposal (aiming to be impartial throughout) and asked them to write down on a post-it note the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme.

All the students wrote the same advantage in different words. (It's easier to buy a book for a child you don't know well.) Between them they came up with a myriad of different reasons against the scheme, some of which we hadn't even thought of before.

In the end we took a vote and all students voted against the proposal.

KG, Teacher

Will teachers get in trouble for trying to recommend books to kids of high reading ability?

CL, Teacher

I work with young people with epilepsy and we have many children with learning difficulties. I know many will feel uncomfortable and embarrassed if age banding is printed on their books. I believe this will destroy any motivation that they, and we, have worked so hard to instill.

NS

My work (in New Zealand) involves supporting teachers who refer students to our service with either learning or behaviour problems. Many of the students have delays in literacy development. According to our English Curriculum, literacy learners need to learn the code of written language, to make meaning from texts and to think critically.

At each year level students build on each of these at their own pace. We do have certain expectations of progress, but there is no way of knowing the capability of a reader when a book of their choice is in their hands. One book may help the reader to expand the ability to think critically while another may provide opportunities for increasing phonological awareness. Interest and choice are strong motivators for reading, not a label that attempts to match reading ability.

How dare an adult create a situation where books are labelled to match a Reading Age thus positioning and limiting budding readers' choices? I cannot think of one good reason for age banding books. Horrors! if this practice will include picture books as well as novels, and non-fiction. Leave the books alone.

Don't let the silly idea get off the ground because if it does it will probably travel to the other side of the world and we don't want it...

LC

I would like to register my objection as a parent, education advisor, teacher-educator and most importantly, as a reader myself. I fully endorse all the reasons listed on the website, which seem to me to be summed up in the 5th of Daniel Pennac's 'Rights of the Reader' - 'the right to read anything'.

EJ, Schools Advisor, Literacy

Having worked with learning disabled and dyslexic children I was horrified to hear of the plan to put ages on books. (Might as well stamp 'I am dumb' across the top of their foreheads for the impact it would have.)

Teaching Assistant

As a secondary teacher of 30 years I cannot agree more that it would be detrimental to students' reading, suggesting what age they have to be to read a particular book. Many tentative readers would be put off by this and worried about how others might see them.

CS

One of my responsibilities as a deputy head in a very large - and very successful- inner city secondary school was to work with what used to be called -in less politically-correct times - "more able pupils". ... We had a very large (500) 6th form and made available to them a series of online lectures by very eminent academics on a series of topics. These were originally made for and targeted at undergrads, but went down fantastically well with our 6th form students. ... Had age been the deciding factor (which it seems age-banding implies) these young people would have been denied this opportunity for enrichment because they would have been seen as too young - crazy!

I heard on one occasion, in another school, a teacher say to a bright 15 year old, who wanted to consult a text book targeted at 6th formers- 'Sorry. You can't have that. It's for 6th formers only'. I say no more.

Basing reading experiences (and hence of course, education) on a child's age would be a denial of the need for individualised learning - a central proposal in this government's education programme which aims to raise aspiration and achievement, particularly among pupils from less advantaged backgrounds. It would inevitably lead to the imposition of an artificial 'glass ceiling' on pupil achievement.

Please do all you can to prevent this crazy proposal.

PW, Deputy Head

We are concerned about stigmatizing disabled children further with age-banding.

SC, Scope

Many educational publishers spend a lot of time and effort creating 'Hi/Lo' books that have a high age interest but a lower reading age. ... Age-banding flies in the face of this as the moment an age is printed on a book, anyone above that age will be put off.

JM, British Dyslexia Association

Please ask them to consider the implications for children in inner-cities, often with English as a second language. Even the best are reading below their chronological reading ages. To discourage these children would be criminal.

As a school librarian for 28 years, I know the damage it could inflict. I work part-time in our local Junior Schools trying to encourage groups of students to read more ... running book groups and helping in general reading and library activities. I have never bought books with ages displayed, as I can only see it as detrimental to a child's love of reading, enthusiasm for all books and self-esteem.

HP, School Librarian

I could not, and would not, buy books with age-banding on the cover for my classroom, as the books my pupils can enjoy reading are aimed at a much lower age group. If my pupils felt humiliated by seeing a very young age-banding on a book's cover, how could I expect them to pick it up, give it a try and maybe discover for the first time some pleasure in reading?

Please rethink this foolish plan.

JM, Teacher

In the classroom, what is taught will remain, as it should, at the discretion of the teacher. But this discretion often involves presenting material to pupils which is either "too old" for them or "too young", depending on the educational requirements of the group. I can imagine pupils immediately feeling uneasy about being presented with an age banded book which is not directly related to their biological age. They may, for example, for genuine or spurious reasons, raise immediate objections to the teacher's choice of material. Parents too might object that more adult material is inappropriate on the grounds of content. In my experience, this kind of objection is relatively rare at the moment, often occasioned by religious principles, Age banding, however, might automatically raise doubts about the suitability of material which will add an unnecessary element of complication to the teacher's task.

AM, English Teacher (30 years experience)

I want to support the protest against age banding. In Victoria, this has led to wholesale education programs based on adults selecting books at "the right level" for children, with disastrous results. Children know their reading level as a number, and parents can compare children based on these levels. What happened to reading for pleasure?

FM, Teacher in Australia

Utterly ridiculous attempt to regulate even more of what we enjoy in life.

AM, Secondary English Teacher

We teach 11 - 16 year olds. Some students devour novels and quickly grow out of their recommended age group, and so they should ... One of our students was in the top five of literature students last year. This was out of 350,000 pupils, and guess what? She read constantly and not always books that were age appropriate ... We know which books to lend certain students; we know *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *The Color Purple* could upset certain individuals, but they could also enlighten and enthrall.

TT and GC, Teachers of English

As an English teacher, I have daily proof of the feelings of inadequacy which struggling readers go through. The proposed age banding of books will serve only to humiliate some readers and has the potential to restrict the progress of both more and less able readers.

MP, English Teacher

In addition to a host of other reasons for disliking age-banding, ... it is yet another feature of what could be called the pre-processing of a child's reading experience.

Parents should take responsibility for investigating the appropriateness of a book for their child, not publishers or whoever else will be determining what is "appropriate" for each age level. It is dangerous to subject books to immediate judgment based on an arbitrary number: age.

CC, Trainee Teacher

From stigmatising struggling readers who will give up rather than face the humiliation of reading "below" their age (because as we know, age defines everything about a person - doesn't it?) to discouraging parents, relatives, friends and guardians from getting actively involved in the reading process, this marketing stunt could not be more inappropriate for children.

AR, Trainee Teacher

I'm appalled at the idea of young readers being put off by age banding. It is unnecessary at best, and potentially narrowing of reader choice at worst.

SL, Secondary Teacher

As a child I was teased for my reading choices, and to provide more ammunition for the bullies is totally unacceptable.

SA, Teacher

The scheme is a ludicrous one and the reasoning behind it some of the worst rhetoric I have ever heard in recent years. If ever I have children of my own, or if ever I find myself recommending books to children of my acquaintance, their age will certainly not be the motivating factor behind the recommendation. My personal knowledge of the child's tastes and preferences, their interests, and their reading ability will all be the factors that guide my words. Not some silly little stamp with a number printed on it!

FM, Teacher

I am an English Teacher at a top Boys' Grammar school and I find this censorship morally repugnant.

HM Teacher

It is stupid to think you can put all the children of a same age in a same box! Same for adults too.

OT, Teacher

So what if a significant proportion of books are bought for children by parents and grandchildren. The best way to judge if a book is likely to be suitable for a particular child is to thumb through it. "Henry will enjoy this" is a far better test than an age indicator on the front cover.

LB, Special Educational Needs Consultant

I agree that the concept of age banding is fundamentally flawed and will do more to discourage than it could ever to encourage reading.

MH, English Teacher

I used to work with children with special educational needs - one of my most exciting moments was helping a 14 year old girl take her first steps in learning to read. She had thought she would never be able to read because she was "stupid". I needed to persuade her that she could, and help her develop lots and lots of confidence. To have age suitability printed on the cover of books would have been devastating for her and many, many children like her.

The heavy testing regime in schools and the dreaded "literacy hour" have done so much to turn children off reading - now it seems we have a method to reach them even in their leisure hours.

JM Educator

I totally agree with everything your statement says, particularly the risk of stigma and the fact that children are taught to analyse book covers carefully. I can see absolutely no benefits to age banding and much potential for harm. I hope your campaign succeeds.

TL, Teacher

I am fortunate in being a primary school teacher and so can work to inspire children to love the printed word, and get paid for it! No, no, no to any committee's well-meaning recommendations as to when a book is suitable for reading.

Dr D S, Headteacher

I am against age branding of books especially those for special needs pupils as they do not need to be reminded that their reading skills are way below their age. If the blurb and information on the cover is accurate as to content then the responsible adult can make a judgement about the suitability of the book for the reader they have in mind. Avid young readers often read books above their age range and enjoy them because they can access the content.

SM, Education Writer

The best judges of age appropriateness of books are children themselves and those adults who are close to them.

JE, Early Years Educator

I am a middle school teacher of gifted students. Age banding is a negative idea as my students will potentially pass over a good read if they sense that it is under their reading level because of the ages suggested on the book.

NS, Language Teacher

I am a teacher and think that the whole idea will be detrimental to all young readers but particularly to the less able.

KD, Teacher

Such a practice will deter reading.

FC, Teacher

I teach a class of teenagers and their interests and their reading ability varies enormously. I also have grandchildren and their reading ability is varied also, but funnily enough their interests are similar.

LB, Teacher and Librarian

"What age range is this book for?" is one of the few questions my students ask that I find meaningless, since it is not possible to provide any sort of productive answer. Instead, I fall back on Oscar Wilde's comment about his fairy tales, which he suggested were "for childlike people eight or eighty", or George MacDonald's "I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five." I hope that British publishers resist this deplorable policy of age labelling.

AHA, Professor of English

I am horrified at the thought of age banding books.

FN, Literacy Co-ordinator

I am a teacher and school librarian. We have been working for years to encourage children to read and enjoy books at their own level. The last thing we need is age labels on the covers of books. It is totally unnecessary and discouraging to many children rather than helpful - who dreamed it up and why?

SM, Teacher

It is a knee-jerk reaction to the problem of a decline in reading but it will not work as a strategy. The only thing that does work is adults leading by reading by example and enthusing about books.

AP, Headteacher

How can children reach for the stars if they aren't allowed to look at them?

GM, Early Literacy Advisor

I agree wholeheartedly with the proposal not to age-band children's books. I am a Brownie Guider for girls aged seven to ten and I know that age-banding on books would have a detrimental affect on many of the girls.

YM, Brownie Guider

As an academic with a research and teaching interest in children's literature, I want to indicate my wholehearted support for this movement, for all the reasons so clearly laid out, especially the first.

Children are people too.

Dr AP, Fellow and Senior Lecturer in English

It's an issue close to my heart. Only yesterday my eight-year-old neighbour came home in tears having been told that she could not take a particular book out of her school library because it was "far too old for her".

SD, Education Policy Adviser for Association of Teachers and Lecturers (rtd)

As a Speech Pathologist who works with both struggling and reluctant readers, age banding would be more than a catastrophe: it would spell the end of high interest /low vocabulary books for older readers. No self-respecting teenager will pick up a book that is age banded below them, and those who do, will lose a little piece of self-esteem each time.

JB, Speech Pathologist

I agree with the statement published on your website and wonder how publishers think this cannot affect sales. Surely no secondary school will be happy about ordering set books with a lower age printed on the book that is younger than the class for which the book is intended.

SW, Teacher

Of course we can always pick outside the "band", but it smacks a bit of buyer beware and stray outside the guidelines at your own risk. And it's also one more agency taking the role "Father Knows Best", telling me what's good for me and mine.

SC, Speech Pathologist

As a teacher in a comprehensive school with a very mixed-ability intake, this proposal strikes me as absurd. What qualifications will be required of those who will decide the age stickers for books? Will these people actually have to meet a variety of children? If they did so, they'd understand the futility of this exercise. I hope that this idea is treated with the ridicule it deserves and does not get off the ground.

RW, Teacher

This is a really crazy idea - another example of how interference with a long-established practice does more harm than good. I well remember, even after the passage of a very large number of years, how great were both the challenge and the enjoyment of reading, regardless of what age the book was supposed to be meant for. ... What worlds would we never visit if reading was to become so sanitised?

JD, Retired Teacher

I'm a psychologist. I have worked with all kinds of children, and when I found out that in Britain they want to do this I could find no psychological argument to support that idea.

M del MMJ, Psychologist

I agree with the aims of those objecting to age banding - a nonsensical proposal, potentially detrimental to readers of all ages.

HJD, Educational Advisor

As an educator, I think age banding is utterly unhelpful.

TH, Head of English

This is a decidedly retrograde step.

Dr S E, Educator

As a teacher who works with dyslexic children, I am conscious of the fact that teenagers do not want to be seen reading books which might be thought "too young". Let people make their own choices without this kind of pointless interference.

AT, Teacher

Stories should be a magical experience for children. They provide children with an escape and an experience well beyond the written word. They allow children to see beyond their own worlds and into others, to find the best and the worst of themselves. We must encourage children to read any and all books which appeal to them, we should encourage parents to read aloud to their children any and all books which appeal to them. All age banding will do is limit the reading experience for children. Who can begin to guess what individual children have experienced in their short lives? Let them decide. They are more intuitive than many an adult gives them credit for, and certainly more intuitive than money-seeking publishers.

SE, Teacher

How can we support those with poor literacy skills if you make books carry an age-range which older students struggling with literacy will be put off by?

SF, Director of Learning

Far from being a good idea, age banding will result in lost sales and a generation of kids put off some really great literature.

LB, Classroom Assistant

I wonder how many of the classics would be denied to children and to adults if this scheme had been in operation when I was a child and an adolescent. These artificial restrictions and suggestions will stultify readers and reduce choice.

PM, Educator

We disagree with age banding books. We believe that children should not be pigeon-holed by someone else's definition of appropriate content or the child's competence based on their age. Each child is an individual and reaches his/her level of competence and understanding separately.

Mr & Mrs S, Home-educating Parents

There is a real concern that "branding" a book with an age-range will serve to restrict severely the choices made by children and their parents. I can imagine the information overriding, in many cases, the use of the wealth of contextual clues that are so important (and generally far more accurate) when it comes to choosing books that a child will connect with.

JC, Headteacher

This is a terrible idea. As a child, the one absolute freedom I had was my choice of reading and it instilled in me a life long addiction to reading. I still approach each new book (or magazine, newspaper, website, crisp packet) with the same sense of curiosity and wonder (golden wonder in the case of the crisp packet). I think if I'd only read the books that had been designated appropriate it would have killed that sense of freedom stone dead.

TRT, Institute of Education, University of London

As a long-time teacher of literacy, mostly to children with learning difficulties, I find it outrageous that the idea should ever have been born. It will serve only to put more children off choosing suitable books, and in these days, when it's hard to get many kids to read at all, it's the last thing we need.

AG, Literacy Teacher

I am a literacy tutor working with adults with learning difficulties. It is already difficult enough finding appropriate reading books for adults whose ability is at a low level. Putting the age on a book will make this situation even worse and have a very detrimental affect on people who are already disadvantaged.

LM, Adult Literacy Tutor

I'm a Disability Equality Trainer who imparts to groups of all backgrounds that equality means accepting difference. As a child I was classed a "slow" reader. I grew to enjoy reading, as did my younger son who discovered books when he started reading to his own children, and it is now a job to get his head out of a book.

BM, Disability Equality Trainer

As an educational consultant and author working in Primary and Early Years education for over 40 years, with a passionate interest in developing true literacy in children, I totally deplore age banding of books.

CM, Education Consultant

I agree that age banding on books is worse than useless. It is likely to reduce the number of children and adults reading books.

CB, Educator

As Basic Skills and Literacy Adviser for our authority, I spend a lot of time and effort in trying to help children overcome a range of reading problems and develop a love of reading. Such children are easily stigmatised and are very sensitive about being patronised by adults. Developing their self-esteem and encouraging them to think of themselves as readers can be very difficult and I really feel that grading books by age will preclude some children from reading books which are appropriate for their ability. Peer group attitudes and opinions are amazingly powerful and book banding may leave the most vulnerable children open to ridicule, turning them from books and affecting their life opportunities.

Children only develop reading skills by reading, and to do that they have to want to read and they need the widest possible range of fiction to be available to them. Age grading will prevent this from happening.

EJ, Basic Skills and Literacy Adviser

I've been lucky to have been supported by good librarians who have provided a wide range of interesting and accessible books including easy readers to spark that important initial interest which can develop into a passion for personal reading. All of these pupils have been in their teens and all were prepared to attempt (at least in class) these shorter books aimed at their reading level. However, had these books been designated for younger readers they would not have touched them.

MJ, English teacher

Boys have enough problems without corporate statements telling them how and what to read.

AS, Poet (Visiting Schools)

I would also be very concerned that publishers labelled books without really knowing the contents - *The Jolly Postman*, for instance, is usually marketed as a book for younger readers and on a quick glance it would appear that it is, but once you open the envelopes and look at the letters you realise that many of them contain vocabulary and expressions that are very advanced and could not be accessed by young readers without adult help. Children and young adults should be free to feel they can read whatever suits them and not be swayed by an age-related tag.

CP, Primary School Teacher

Age banding is absolutely irresponsible. I teach at a Special Needs School where many valuable text books cannot be purchased as there are age or Key Stage indicators on the front. Pupils will not read or be motivated to learn from these texts. Publishers will actually be restricting sales if they go ahead with age bands - maybe that will make them think twice!

SC, Special Needs Teacher

I don't think we should stereotype children according to their age. Everyone learns at different stages and should have the opportunity to read what they want. Books should be enjoyed.

LG, Trainee Teacher

I think age banding is wrong - how will this encourage children to progress, push the boundaries, experience things, if they feel constricted by an age on the book? Similarly, how disillusioned will children who struggle with reading feel being "caught" by their peers reading a book for much younger children? Many books are written to appeal to a range of ages - how will these be classed?

VB, Teacher

I am totally opposed to age banding on any books. I can imagine few things more likely to discourage the reluctant reader in a secondary school class! A keen reader, however, will try anything and everything that attracts his or her interest, however "age appropriate". Whose daft idea was this anyway?

NK, Secondary Teacher

During my teacher training, great emphasis is placed on encouraging children to read anything at all which they feel comfortable with, whether this be below or above their expected level. I too agree that age banding will serve only to negatively stigmatise young readers and discourage rather than encourage readers. The proposed age banding of books is a typical example of large scale companies putting profit and sales over everything else.

CD, Trainee Teacher and part-time bookseller

Far too much interference over children's reading is counter-productive. I believe that children should find their own level of reading matter - which they certainly will if allowed to do so.

SB, English Teacher (rtd)

I am totally against age-banding and think it will prevent children from choosing books from across the diverse spectrum available.

KT, Museum Education Officer

To my mind, age-banding is no less an attack on liberty than detention for 42 days. It will affect far more people in the country and has been far less debated. Part of the joy of reading is the liberty to choose a book whose blurb, subject matter, title or author interests or excites.

DS, Educator

The only benefit I can see is that it might possibly help book store / warehouse staff place the books in the most appropriate place - but they do this successfully already ... Please, "don't fix what ain't broken!"

LR, Educator

This ridiculous idea of age banding would be terribly detrimental to the promotion of reading and must have been thought up by people who have no appreciation of the joy of reading, nor any experience of teaching children to love books. I cannot express my disgust in strong enough terms.

SC, Teacher

Do NOT age-band children's books! You will make smug the already gifted, and even more squashed the slower. Lead the way, please, not turn the clock back.

EH, Teacher

What a ludicrous proposal!

SG, Home Educator

I home educated two people from childhood into college. I am appalled at the idea of age banding books. What one person or committee can decide what is appropriate for another person's child? Let's not dumb down our children further.

KT, Home Educator

This is a ridiculous and potentially damaging idea and shows a complete lack of understanding for the way in which literature and reading works. It would prove disheartening and limiting for both able and less able readers and could stop many children from encountering books that they may love and learn from.

K O'H, Teacher

Most children's books include guidance in the blurb as to the likely age range, and I do not see the need for anything more rigid than this.

JH, English Teacher

Please add my name to support your objection to this example of disempowerment and bureaucratic limitation.

JG, Home Educator

As one who recalls the difficulties of borrowing books that were regarded as beyond my age-appropriate range when younger, I would like to register my opposition to the age banding of books.

KP, Teacher

Age banding is a foolish idea because it will discourage children from developing psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually at their own pace.

BA, Child Psychiatrist

This is another structure to worry people that everything must be done at a certain time. It is actual a regressive anti-learning measure that I fear has more to do with business issues than human beings.

LB, Home educator

I can't think of anything more discouraging for a child who finds reading difficult, or who is considering reading something even the least bit challenging, than seeing they do not fit into the appropriate age bracket.

SL, Literacy Co-ordinator

A child should read the books s/he wants to read, not the books that retailers deem to be appropriate. When I was involved in preparing book boxes for a class, I always took it for granted that there would be books at either age of the reading age spectrum within the box, and that these extremes would be far distant from the chronological age of the children for whom the box was intended.

MB, ex National Association for the Teaching of English

It will raise barriers to reading when the important task is to encourage people of all ages to read widely.

JS, Dyslexia and Education Consultant

This is nothing short of a disaster for those of us who spend our lives encouraging children to read. Suddenly certain books will be too babyish for some children, or too hard for others, just because some market research says so. Absolute rubbish.

GH, Teacher

The biggest harm I have ever seen is reluctant readers who feel ashamed when a book is banded for an age younger than they are. They feel stupid. They hate themselves and books ... Many children, when approached sensibly, will self-censor: "I don't think I'm ready for that yet."

SS, Teacher

Children of all ages need to feel free to enjoy all sorts of books. Older children can have huge fun with stories that they can read easily (I can read books within my "age band" easily!!!) and can look into the text, read between the lines, ask questions etc. and find great richness in the stories. Young children love to "act like readers" with books of all sorts of levels. Age banding would be a very detrimental step. Please don't do it!

SE, Headteacher

How to stigmatize children in one easy step. It is hard enough to get reluctant readers to choose a book. We don't need anything else to put them off.

JS, Primary Teacher

As a lecturer in childcare, one of the units I teach is about children and literacy. I am always stressing that reading for children should be fun, and I introduce my students to a wide variety of delicious material that is available. I never, but never, say: if you are with 4 year olds introduce this; 7 years old introduce this... The idea that a book is for a specific age is a nonsense: is that 4 years and 1 month or 4 years and 11 months? A big difference.

GE, Lecturer in Childcare

As a primary school teacher I encourage my young readers to read books that interest them. In my classroom I have picture books with no words, (Anthony Browne) picture books with some words, paperbacks and hardback books. I teach Year 6 aged 10-11 and try to encourage them to read all literature available to them from the picture books which are brilliantly illustrated to more complicated novels e.g. *Harry Potter* and *Northern Lights*. Children should not always be directed to reading material thought to be age-appropriate.

I personally enjoy reading children's books and sometimes prefer them to more grown up adult novels. I am not alone - many of my colleagues have libraries of children's books at home.

PS, Teacher

As an educationalist for children with learning difficulties, I would like to point out that age banding is the worst idea I've ever come across. Children with learning difficulties will feel uncomfortable and embarrassed with age banding printed on books. I believe this will destroy any motivation that they, and we, have worked so hard to instil. I will not be recommending any books with age banding to any of our children or their parents.

NS, Educationalist

Having worked as a primary school teacher I am fully aware how self esteem can be affected when a 9 year old child is reading books specifically for a 5 year old. Having this reinforced in large print on the back cover can only cause further problems.

TS, Primary School Teacher

Michael Rosen was on BBC television this morning saying that experimentation is important in reading - ABSOLUTELY! I'd go further and say it is essential... how many of us have felt the joy of reading something we first thought difficult or challenging and then discovering a whole new world opening up to us? I still love that feeling and always have. As a teacher of "books" I know just how precious that experimentation, exploration and the resulting excitement is to young readers.

We are not supposed to judge a book by its cover - so why make that impossible to avoid?! I don't know any English teacher worth their salt who would back this ridiculous idea.

SC, English Teacher

My sister-in-law works in unit for brain-damaged children. They have already put out a warning not to purchase, or to return for refund at once, any book they buy by accident that proves to have an age band on the cover.

RCW, Lecturer

As a teacher I feel that literacy is one of the most important tools with which we can equip children and young people. Indeed it is literacy that enables students to become more independent learners and hence lifelong learners. I am horrified by the idea of banding books. This will undoubtedly put children off reading excellent and enjoyable books because they are in the wrong band. Sadly those that are likely to be most affected are those whose reading ages are below their chronological age and who really need to be engaged not put off by the possibility of ridicule.

HW, Teacher

Why should children's reading choice be restricted? It's like taking someone to a restaurant and telling them they can only choose something from the top three items on the menu, no matter how appetising the other items sound!

As adults, we use a range of strategies to decide whether or not to read a book; why can't children be afforded the same right?

CT, Primary School Teacher

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