



Reading Group Round-up

Promoting reading and reading groups in prisons

HMP Wymott is a Category C Prison for men, with a capacity of over 1,100. Its reading groups have been transformed since librarian Ruth Packwood attended the 2014 Reading in Prison Day, organised by the Prison Reading Groups network.

In the final session that day a volunteer from HMP Wandsworth ran a workshop to encourage others to have a go with poetry in their groups.. “I was inspired,” remembers Ruth. “As well as trying out some poetry in the reading groups, I started ‘Poetry Corner’ in the library. I type up a poem each week, print it onto coloured paper and a background, laminate it and stick it on an up-stand on one of the library counters.”

Although this “ticked along quite nicely for about 8 months,” it was in the latter half of 2015 that Poetry Corner really took off. “Two men who are very keen on their poetry started to give me their poems, and I typed these up and displayed them. Now it seems to have snowballed and more and more men are handing in their poems.”

Ruth finds the most heartening thing about the success of Poetry Corner to be the engagement of men studying English at Entry level, with new writers submitting poems for display by dictating them to her for typing up. In addition, one of the keener members of the group has been compiling an anthology of inspirational and positive poetry to be kept at reception for new arrivals.

Poetry Corner has become so popular at Wymott that instead of displaying a poem by a published poet, Ruth reports that she now usually has one of the men’s poems on display instead. “Men take a real pride in seeing their poems on the Library counter.” The poems printed here were displayed recently.

Linguistically Disconsolate

By Nigel

*People think big words make them look smart?
Keep things simple, don't be a linguistic tart.
Long words are murky and full of mist,
It's not like we're all a sesquipedalianist.*

*Instead of dictionary why not use lexicon?
Three fewer letters, easy in the spellathon.
Life is not easy, in fact it's really hectic,
Not everyone you meet is etymologic.*

*A verb, or a noun is all we truly need,
Words that are big make my nose bleed.
Who cares about saying 'the homophones game'?
All we need is two words that sound the same.*

*Transmogrifying words is very ostentatious.
Let's keep it real and not get pretentious.
Use of small words puts many in linguistic exile.
That's OK though, not everyone is a lexophile.*

The Library

By Peter

*With books by our side and a gleam in our eyes
Off through the concourse we thundered.
We have no time to lose and novels to choose
In a library ripe to be plundered.*

*So we daren't dilly dally and we shan't shillyshally
We've got a mere twenty minutes at max
It's the Joy of Six, it's pick and mix
As we rifle the library stacks.*

The Wymott groups are part of the Prison Reading Groups (PRG) network, sponsored by the University of Roehampton and generously supported by charities including Give a Book www.giveabook.org.uk. If your prison doesn't have a reading group, encourage your librarian to have a look at the PRG website www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk. PRG also worked with National Prison Radio to set up their book club. If you have access to NPR, listen out for details and ways to take part