



*Treasure Island:*  
The Great Reading Adventure 2003  
**Evaluation Report**

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## Introduction

On 6 March 2003, World Book Day, Bristol launched its first citywide reading project – the Great Reading Adventure. This community-focused cultural initiative aimed to bring people together and raise standards of literacy by encouraging everyone in the city to read the same book at the same time. It was part of the build-up for the bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2008, and was organised by the Bristol 2008 team and their partners.

Andrew Kelly, director of Bristol 2008, had witnessed the impact of such projects when visiting Chicago in 2001. The city seemed gripped by Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the book chosen for the first One Book, One Chicago project. 'I was taken by the idea of a single book capturing the imagination of an entire city,' he said. 'I could imagine total strangers discussing this book on the bus; schools involved with it for literacy and arts projects; and local businesses setting up reading groups to debate the same book.' The Great Reading Adventure was the first time a citywide reading project on this scale was held in the UK. It is now an annual event.

The book chosen for the Great Reading Adventure 2003 was *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, a thrilling tale of piracy and adventure that can be enjoyed by both children and adults, and has key scenes set in Bristol. Acclaimed local author Helen Dunmore, winner of the first Orange Prize for Fiction, said: 'The *Treasure Island* project is a wonderful idea. I can't think of a better book to choose. It's a superb, gripping story which appeals to readers of all ages, and has compelling links with Bristol's past.'

On launch day, actors from the street art company Desperate Men, disguised as marauding pirates and accompanied by a giant Puffin, illustrated the support given to the project by Penguin Books, sailed to the heart of Bristol's Harbourside in the replica of John Cabot's ship the *Matthew*. Here they were greeted by hundreds of local schoolchildren, who received copies of the book and were entertained with juggling, sea shanties and cannon fire. Paul Henderson, Chair of World Book Day, said: '*Treasure Island* is a great initiative, and we're delighted that it is happening around World Book Day.'

A central element of the Great Reading Adventure was the distribution of thousands of free copies of *Treasure Island* to schools, libraries, the business community and members of the general public. Penguin Books Ltd supplied 8,000 copies of the Penguin Classic edition of the book. Publishing director Nigel Wilcockson said: 'Penguin has always prided itself on bringing classic works of literature to as wide a readership as possible, and this seems a perfect way to share one of the most outstanding of all adventure stories with the people of Bristol.'

To accompany the project, a high-quality illustrated readers' guide was produced and also distributed free of charge. A programme of film screenings, lectures, competitions and puppet shows was mounted, and people were encouraged to organise their own piratical happenings and reading groups. Bristol's *Evening Post* serialised the book in 51 instalments, each illustrated in colour with pictures submitted by local school children. A teachers' pack, partly based on material produced for the Tobacco Factory adaptation of the book in 2002, was distributed to all schools in the city, and there was a project website which included an on-line *Treasure Island* web game.



Pirates in *Matthew's* rigging on launch day

The key objectives of the Great Reading Adventure were:

- To promote Bristol as a centre for literature.
- To promote Bristol 2008.
- To encourage learning about Bristol.
- To promote debate about the future of Bristol.
- To help develop standards of literacy.
- To get more people reading and writing.

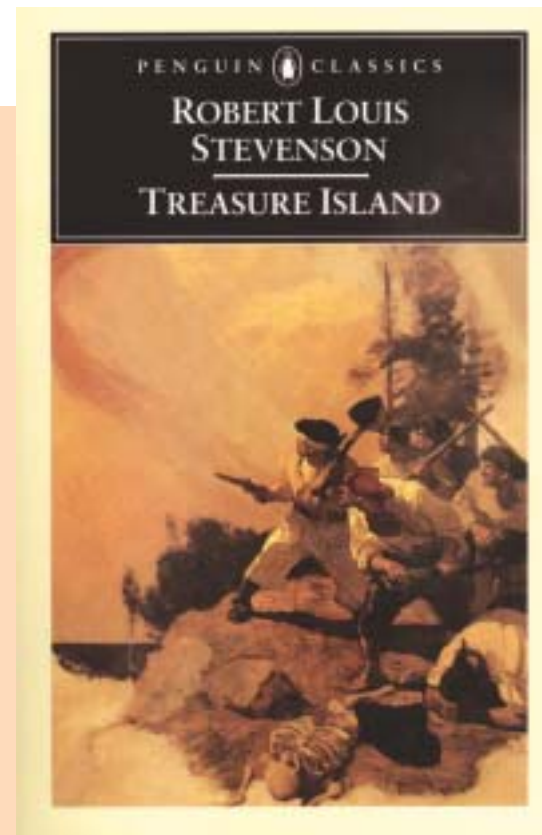
It was decided at the start of the project to evaluate in detail. This report presents a summary of findings from the evaluation of the project. It uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data derived from monitoring undertaken by the Bristol 2008 team and its partners, interviews with sponsors and participants, letters and emails, and self-completed reader questionnaires. It was disappointing that only around 160 questionnaires were returned, but nevertheless the comments and statistical information they provided was of value in compiling this report and it is assumed that they were representative of general reactions to the project.



Scene from *Treasure Island* (1950)

## Key statistics

- 8,000 copies of the Penguin Classic edition of *Treasure Island* and the special readers' guide were distributed free of charge.
- 1,650 requests for a copy of the book were received from members of the public.
- 222 teachers' packs were distributed to schools.
- Over 1,100 people borrowed *Treasure Island* from the Bristol library service during March.
- The serialisation in the *Evening Post* is estimated to have had a potential readership of around 168,000 a day.
- *Treasure Island* was in the top 10 best sellers list at Blackwell's Bookshop on Park Street throughout March – topping the list in the final week, beating books by Jamie Oliver and Michael Moore.
- All ages and all socio-economic groups embraced the project across the Bristol city-region.
- The project was the topic of 17 national media stories, widespread trade and professional media coverage, over 40 features in the Bristol press, extensive local radio coverage, BBC Points West and HTV news items, and a feature on Radio 4's *A Good Read*.
- Nearly 96 per cent of those who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent were interested in participating in future events.



Penguin Classic edition cover, as used in publicity



## Distributing *Treasure Island*



Image of policewoman, as used in publicity

Penguin Books donated 8,000 free copies of the recently reprinted Penguin Classic edition of *Treasure Island* to the project. These were distributed as follows:

- 2,000 to libraries
- 1,500 to schools
- 2,200 to the business community
- 100 to Bristol City Council members
- 1,650 to individuals on request
- the rest to reading groups, colleges and others

In addition, 340 Puffin and 145 Ladybird editions of *Treasure Island* and 56 Captain Pugwash books (for very young readers) were bought by the Bristol 2008 team for free distribution. Penguin also provided 75 copies each of the Puffin, Ladybird and audio editions for the launch event. Bristol libraries purchased 35 large print, 10 video, three DVD and five European language editions (they were unable to obtain any community language editions).

The project was publicised by:

- 8,000 promotional leaflets using an image of Wallace and Gromit dressed as pirates that was especially designed for the project by Aardman Animations.
- 8,000 postcards in four designs using the Wallace and Gromit image, a N C Wyeth illustration from an early edition of the book, and photos of a father and policewoman reading the book to children.
- 32,000 bookmarks using an image of a pirate drawn by a pupil from Hannah More Primary School.
- 12 on-street posters, based on three of the postcard images and displayed at Adshel sites.
- 1,000 small posters of the Wallace and Gromit image for display on noticeboards.

- Extensive media coverage, particularly in the local press and on BBC Radio Bristol and including the *Evening Post* serialisation.
- Personal contact by members of the Bristol 2008 team and project partners.

The self-completed reader questionnaire asked where people had first learned about the project. Of those who responded, 38 per cent had found out about it from the local press, 20 per cent from local radio, 12 per cent from personal contact, 11 per cent from the leaflet and six per cent from posters in the library. The rest had learned about it from the on-street posters, their school, local television, and other sources.

A total of 1,650 requests for the book were received from members of the general public: around 13 per cent were received on the booking form from the leaflet, 34 per cent on the form in the *Evening Post*, 47 per cent by telephone (of which 553 were the result of radio coverage) and six per cent by email. Requests came from all over the Bristol city-region including Abbots Leigh, Almondsbury, Alveston, Ashton, Bath, Bedminster, Bitton, Brislington, Chard, Cheddar, Chipping Sodbury, Cleeve, Clevedon, Clifton, Coalpit Heath, Downend, Dundry, Easton, Eastville, Fishponds, Frampton Cotterell, Frome, Hanham, Hartcliffe, Henbury, Henleaze, Horfield, Keynsham, Kingswood, Knowle, Malmesbury, Montpelier, Nailsea, Oswestry, Patchway, Paulton, Pill, Portishead, Redland, Shirehampton, Southmead, Spike Island, St George, Stapleton, Stockwood, Stoke Gifford, Thornbury, Warmley, Westbury on Trym, Weston-Super-Mare, Whitchurch, Winterbourne, Wraxall and Yate. There were also requests from further afield including Taunton, London, Poland and Houston, Texas.

Using the ACORN consumer classification system, it has been possible to identify the socio-economic backgrounds of individual recipients of

the book, based upon postcode analysis. In total, postcodes of 1,300 recipients of the book in Bristol (those who requested that a copy of the book and guide be sent to their home) were analysed. *Table 1* provides details.

*Table 1: ACORN postcode analysis of book recipients*

It should be noted that there were more people participating from social groups D, E and F than ABCs.

Category	Percentage
A: <i>Thriving</i> (wealthy achievers, suburban areas; affluent greys, rural communities, prosperous pensioners, retirement areas)	21.2
B: <i>Expanding</i> (affluent executives, family areas; well-off workers, family areas)	12.2
C: <i>Rising</i> (affluent urbanites, town and city areas; prosperous professionals, metropolitan; better-off executives, inner city areas)	15.1
D: <i>Settling</i> (comfortable middle agers, mature home; skilled workers, home owning areas)	25.9
E: <i>Aspiring</i> (new homeowners, mature communities; white collar workers, better-off)	16.3
F: <i>Striving</i> (older people, less prosperous areas; council estate residents, better-off homes; council estate residents, high unemployment; council estate residents, greatest hardship; people in multi-ethnic, low-income areas)	8.9
G: Unclassified	0.4

Source: Bristol 2008

Of those who returned a questionnaire, 78.4 per cent had received a free copy. The rest had borrowed a copy, had it already, bought it specially or read the *Evening Post* serialisation. All groups were represented in the age analysis of respondents, although the greatest concentration were those aged 36 and over, with nearly 30 per cent of those being over 65. *Table 2* provides details.

*Table 2: Age of questionnaire respondents*

Age Group	Percentage
Under 10	2.2
11-14	2.2
15-18	1.4
19-25	0.7
26-35	9.3
36-45	13.7
46-55	23.0
56-65	19.4
Over 65	28.1

Source: Bristol 2008

A number of the over 65s indicated that they were over 80.

The age distribution illustrated above is reflective of those completing the questionnaire, rather than of participation in the project. It does not include all the children who participated in school activities, for example.



Pirate picture by pupil at Hannah More Primary School

## Reading *Treasure Island*



Wallace and Gromit image created by Aardman Animations

The main focus of the project was encouraging people of all ages to read *Treasure Island* and the choice of book was greeted with almost universal praise. Typical of the comments received from the reader questionnaires are the following:

*The best book I have ever read.*

*Simply brilliant.*

*Excellent read – very exciting. Suitable for all ages.*

*A very enjoyable read. Long John Silver is a fantastic character.*

*I found it gripping, well-written story of adventure and full of colour.*

*A thundering good yarn. The story races along.*

*A really good story line and good cliff hangers.*

*Thrilling – enjoyed ev'ry page. Avast! Me hearties!*

*Brilliant! Although I knew the story from the film *Treasure Island* (1950) and possibly a children's Sunday tea-time TV serial, I had never read it. It was compulsive – it had adventure, suspense, super description.*

*I enjoyed the intrigue. There was a lot of action and I was making time to read – always a good sign in my busy life.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. It was very exciting. The kind of book you didn't want to put down, and then couldn't wait to pick up again.*

*An exciting story, well told with fascinating details of the period and lives of the characters and the sea and what it was like to sail at that time.*

*A rattling good yarn, full of splendid characters both evil and saintly.*

*Fabulous. An action packed book, adventure at every turn. Has the ability to keep you on edge – a page turner. Packed with colourful characters and very descriptive.*

*It was very good. It was exciting. I always wanted to keep reading the next chapter. It was also a bit scary at times but that just made it more exciting. I had just seen *Treasure Planet* which was good but I liked *Treasure Island* better.*

*It had something for everyone – a great read for all. Enjoyed it very much.*

*It was a cracking good yarn!*

Some readers found the old English language, nautical terminology, colloquialisms and small print (of the Penguin Classic edition) daunting, but most seem to have overcome these potential barriers and thought the effort worthwhile.

Of those who returned a questionnaire, around half were first time readers of the book. For some of these, the project introduced them to a book they might never have considered reading before or thought they were too old to enjoy. Comments included:

*I found the book very easy to read and highly enjoyable. It would have never crossed my mind to choose this book, but I'm very glad I had the chance to read it.*

*I did not expect it would be "my cup of tea" being written primarily for boys or men, I felt, but I really enjoyed it – a real page turner... A thoroughly good read.*

*It's one of the ones I always meant to read and now I have I'm very pleased. It's a riveting read. As an adult reader of a book written for children, it held my interest completely, especially Silver's complexities of his 'dooty'.*



Some of the most evocative comments came from older readers who had read the book in their youth and welcomed a revisit. These included the following:

*Excellent! The story has all the ingredients for a first class adventure. I had it read to me by my elder brother over sixty years ago and the memory has stayed with me. My wife has often told me of how she read Treasure Island to her young cousins and frightened themselves so much on a dark winter's night that they locked all the doors and hid, fearing the 'tap tap' of Blind Pew on the stairs.*

*From my boyhood, always loved it. A sense of adventure. The feeling, all those years ago, of being on the old harbourside at Bristol at the time, almost seeing the Spyglass and the Hispaniola!*

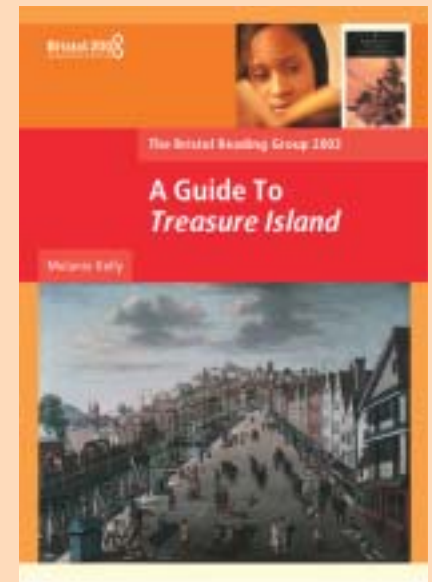
*Very exciting story. Very frightening. Very blood thirsty. Absolutely terrifying for young children. It was read to me when I was nine years old and I had nightmares. But I loved it even so.*

*A very good story – it was lovely to read it again (I'd previously read it at school). It was my late mother's favourite book from her childhood – she'd been quite a sickly child and was kept indoors, so devoured books!*

*This is a story that has stuck in my memory for over 60 years and reading it again now that I am living near Bristol rekindles the excitement of a stirring adventure story.*

The questionnaire asked whether the project and its associated activities had enhanced the experience of reading *Treasure Island*. Of those who expressed an opinion, nearly 89 per cent felt it had and nearly 57 per cent said it had increased their interest in reading generally. The majority of those who felt it had made no difference to their interest in reading added the comment that this was because they were already keen readers. Similarly, 86.6 per cent

of respondents who expressed an opinion said that the project had made them more aware of Bristol's history, and most of those who said that it had not added the comment that this was because they already knew a lot about Bristol. Bearing this in mind, these are gratifying results.



Cover of the readers' guide

## Support material for readers of *Treasure Island*

A 44-page illustrated readers' guide was produced for the project. It was sent out to accompany all of the free Penguin Classic editions, and was distributed to libraries, schools and businesses. The guide gave information about the plot of *Treasure Island*, the life of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the book's principle characters, background material and suggested topics for discussion. Of those who returned a questionnaire, around 68.5 per cent had used the guide and, of those who expressed an opinion, nearly 97 per cent found it useful or very useful. Comments on the guide included the following:

*Very good! ... And, I would suggest, a very useful acquisition for some young readers, and could even point some adults in the right direction.*

*Beautifully produced booklet that contained a lot of interesting information to supplement the book.*

*A good insight into the characters, the period and human nature and Bristol's history.*

*Enjoyed all content. Illustrations very good, content was thought provoking. Added more to the experience of reading the novel.*

*I thought the layout and information was well considered and informative. Good to have mix of author's background as well as those of the characters and historical perspectives. A useful booklet to keep.*



Captain Smollett



Doctor Livesey



Squire Trelawney

*This is such a great idea and takes away the terror of reading a classic and helps focus your reading on other issues not just the story.*

*Extremely well put together with many references to follow up. Interesting to read in its own right. Liked learning about local history/connections. Encouraged me to think about the book in different ways. Very much increased sense of participation in the project.*

*It is beautifully produced booklet and such a good précis, it encouraged me to read more. I thought the character analysis and pictures were excellent. Very interested in the influence of other writers and traditions in Stevenson's story.*

*Brought the characters and story to life with very interesting historical detail. Good information about the author and how he worked at his story. Particularly enjoyed the illustrations.*

There were some requests to make future guides longer, and to produce a separate guide for younger children.

A PDF of the guide was included on the *Treasure Island* website. The site also provided an expanded bibliography and resource section, details of the programme of events for *Treasure Island* week, information on the project competitions, the PDF of the teachers' pack, and an on-line web game. The site had 2,241 views in March and 771 in April with an average viewing time per page of 34 and 19 seconds respectively. Of those who returned a questionnaire, 17.5 per cent had visited the website. Nearly 92 per cent of those who expressed an opinion found the site easy to navigate and 71.5 per cent felt it had helped in their enjoyment and understanding



Long John Silver



Billy Bones



Mr Arrow



Alan



Doorman



Blind Pew



Ben Gunn



Jim Hawkins



Mrs Hawkins



Israel Hands



Dick

of the book. Anecdotal evidence from the Library Service suggests that having a website meant that children could acquire ICT skills for a purpose and become familiar with using the web as a source of information. Comments about the website on the questionnaires included:

*More Treasure Island games, please. They were good. Treasuretastic.*

*I like the layout – compact and not fussy.*

*Useful in similar way to the readers' guide.*

*Thought the booklet subsequently received did the job as effectively.*

There was some criticism that the site was not clearly signposted from the Bristol 2008 or Bristol City Council websites nor from the daily serialisations. There was a disappointing response to the competitions: only three colouring competition entries and one short story were received.

The web game was one of the most expensive single elements of the project, costing around £7,000. It ran for eight weeks with each player required to perform tasks to complete each level, the script, locations and visual elements changing in relation to the development of the book's plot. A total of 157 users registered, playing over 600 times between them. Approximately one in three of all those registered completed level one, and of these about one in five dropped out at each subsequent level. Ten players managed to complete all eight levels. Unexpectedly, the majority of those who took part and completed the game were in the 18-30 age group.

Lack of publicity and promotion of the game was believed to be the main reason for the disappointing number of users, along with the low value of the prizes on offer (Virgin Megastore vouchers and book tokens). However, the designers know of several individuals who had not heard of the *Treasure Island* project prior to discovering the game and who were induced to read the book or serialisation in order to complete the various levels. Children taking part in the Horfield library homework club were also said to have 'loved the game'. It helped to keep them engaged in a book they would not normally have attempted to read because they would have considered it too difficult.

Animated characters from the web game

## Treasure Island and school activities

To help teachers organise *Treasure Island* themed activities in the classroom that would enable children to participate in the Great Reading Adventure, special packs were distributed to 222 local schools. These were:

- 166 state junior or secondary schools
- 38 state nursery or infant schools
- 18 private schools

The teachers' packs contained:

- A teachers' guide based upon educational material produced for the 2002 Tobacco Factory adaptation of *Treasure Island*.
- Copies of *Treasure Island* in an edition most appropriate for the age of the children (Penguin Classic, Puffin or Ladybird) or a Captain Pugwash book.
- Bookmarks, posters, postcards.

Bristol 2008 team members met with staff from Bristol Education during the early stages of planning, hoping that this would facilitate school involvement with the project. Unfortunately, they achieved limited success. The only practical help provided came from staff at the Literacy Centre who included a brief reference to the Great Reading Adventure in their January newsletter and wrote an introductory page for the teachers' guide. Early plans to involve the Bristol Education Action Zone – who were keen for all their schools to take part – ended when Bristol Education requested that they lead. Ultimately, Bristol 2008 prepared the whole pack and distributed it (with the help of GWR).

As a result of the general lack of publicity and school contact, it was felt that teachers were given too short notice to plan classroom activities effectively. In addition, pupils in Years 2 and 6 take SATs

in March, which limited the opportunity for getting involved. The unabridged *Treasure Island* was also too difficult for some age groups to read themselves or be read aloud to, although one school commented that they appreciated being included in the send-out of material even if they could not use the book itself.

Despite the difficulties some schools did enjoy participating in the project. Among those who gave feedback were the following:

- Elmfield School for Deaf Children: The book was used as a class reader and made into a play using British Sign Language. The pupils were aged between 11 and 14. They liked being involved with the project and particularly enjoyed the game on the website.
- Hotwells Primary School: The 34 Year 6 pupils took part in the illustration competition for the *Evening Post*, and designed treasure maps and wanted posters.
- Ilminster Avenue Primary School: The whole school (aged from four to 11) discussed the book and why it was of relevance to Bristol. Some children sent in pictures to the *Evening Post*. The Literacy Cluster Group in the Knowle/ Knowle West area have planned a series of events and activities to link in with the materials supplied, which will cut across most curriculum areas.
- Lower School of Bristol Grammar School: Twelve pupils aged between seven and 10 took part in art and craft activities linked to the pirate theme and in a combined puppet workshop with the Bristol Children's Hospital. The pictures in the resource pack were found particularly useful.
- St George CE Primary School: Eighteen children aged between nine and 11 used *Treasure Island* for literacy work, writing character descriptions and diary entries, and dressing up.

- Summerhill Junior School: Year 6 pupils (approximately 90 in total) studied chapters of the book during Literacy Hour for a week. This will be repeated in the autumn term. One class emailed Bristol 2008 requesting a free copy of the book and were excited when they received one each.
- Tynning Hengrove Junior School: All of the 185 pupils took part in a *Treasure Island* week, with the timetable collapsed to make room for pirate-related activities that covered the disciplines of history, art, design/technology, physical education, ICT and English. These included researching about pirates; making salt dough islands, fabric pirate flags, treasure maps, pop-up books and costumes; playing 'shark infested water' and 'pirates'; finding pirate names on the web; designing wanted posters and advertisements; and writing an on-board rule/punishment book and instructions to find buried treasure. The school also bought additional copies of the book to be used as a class reader. On the final day the children dressed as pirates and sang sea shanties, danced hornpipes, painted seascapes, did orienteering to find treasure, made boats and used semaphore.
- Upper Horfield Primary School: All of the 144 pupils read the book in Literacy Hour and saw a film adaptation. Pupils at KS2 completed individual *Treasure Island* booklets, there were corridor displays based on pirates and the Easter Fair had a *Treasure Island* theme. A spokesperson wrote: 'Whole-school shared focus weeks are always well responded to by all – *Treasure Island* and Pirates was a tremendous basis for lots of activities.'

Some of those who did not take part this time have kept the material to use on another occasion. This includes Knowle Park Infants School who hope to incorporate some of the *Treasure Island* activities when their new sea/island themed playground opens.

One boy wrote on his personal evaluation form that he was grateful that we had chosen *Treasure Island* because an extract from the book featured in one of this year's Keystage 3 exams.



Shogun players reading to schoolchildren

## Treasure Island and Bristol libraries

A key target of the project was to encourage people to make more use of libraries. Bristol Library Service was involved with the project from the outset. The service monitored loans of all editions of *Treasure Island* across the city and reported a marked increase in the level of interest following the launch of the Great Reading Adventure. Table 3 provides details of loans prior to February 2003.

Loans of the adult version during this period were limited; children borrowed more copies, though the highest monthly total of loans achieved was seven. The Great Reading Adventure had a significant impact on *Treasure Island's* loan performance. Table 4 provides details of loans from February 2003 (displays of the book were set up in the latter half of the month) with a weekly breakdown for March.

Remarkably, 1,117 copies of the Penguin Classic edition of the book were borrowed in March. Interest was still higher than usual in May, with the Central Bristol, Bedminster and Knowle branches all recording loans in double figures for that edition. As a spokesperson commented: 'There's life in the old sea dog yet!' There was an

Table 3 Loans of *Treasure Island* July 2002 - January 2003

Format	July '02	Aug '02	Sept '02	Oct '02	Nov '02	Dec '02	Jan '02
Adult	0	1	2	1	2	2	4
Children	2	5	4	7	6	3	7
Large print	2	1	1	1	3	2	2
Audio	2	5	3	2	5	2	4
Video	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Table 4 Loans of *Treasure Island* February - May 2003

Format	February	1-6 March	7-13 March	14-20 March	21-27 March	April	May
Penguin	32	191	584	186	156	217	109
Puffin	20	20	25	12	6	24	15
Ladybird	14	21	25	13	9	27	19
Large print	7	12	12	6	2	12	10
Audio	6	6	11	7	2	21	14
Video	3	5	7	6	5	17	11

Source: Bristol Library Service

increase in loans of editions for younger people, and most of the large print and audio versions were taken out during the course of the project. One of the lessons learned was that more Puffin editions could have been used: the text may be the same but the print is bigger and therefore more suitable for children than the Penguin Classic.

A member of the Library Service who had been involved with planning the project said:

I know staff really enjoyed being part of such a big project – it was great to know that there are other people out there too wanting to share the joy of reading, so to work with partners like [Bristol] 2008 and the *Evening Post* was really good. Staff enjoyed the challenge of promoting the book to users. Some told me they were amazed how well the book was going out – much better than they had expected. Lots of staff read the book themselves (often for the first time) because the project had sparked their interest – and told me it was much better than they had thought... All in all it gave me a real lift to see so much effort going into promoting the joy of reading. The death of the book has been greatly exaggerated.

Prior to World Book Day, and as a run-up to the official project launch, Captain Barnacle's Pirate Puppet Show for children aged four to 10 visited libraries in Central Bristol, Eastville, Henbury, Marksbury Road and St George during February half-term week. A total of 140 children accompanied by 60 adults took part, and the events sold out quickly.

Displays of *Treasure Island* material included a glass case of books and mementos from the personal collections of the reference staff at the Central library, and boards providing information on the project, the possible Bristol connection, film and stage adaptations, and book illustrations. Reading groups were provided with a pack that included 10 loan copies of the book. A spokesperson said:

I spoke to several reading groups about reading it and... I found that people enjoyed the idea of being part of a big project – they wanted to join in and do their bit for Bristol. Through the project we made contact with several new reading groups across the city, and we hope to build on this.

As part of ongoing work with Social Services that aims to make libraries more accessible to children who are looked after, the Library Service provided around 50 copies of the book on request to children's homes and foster carers. Although the book itself may have proved too difficult for many of the children to read, it was felt to be important that they could be part of a citywide initiative, as they can sometimes feel marginalised. Copies were also given out via the Youth Offending scheme. As the project winds down, surplus copies of *Treasure Island* are being donated to the Books for Africa project. Thirty copies of the book are being left in different countries by participants going on holiday so that others around the world have the chance to participate. Each will contain a bookplate requesting emails to be sent to the project organisers so that the books can be tracked. For future projects, all participants will be asked to pass their books to friends and family or to leave them around for others to pick up.



Captain Barnacle in performance

## Evening Post serialisation

The *Evening Post* began its illustrated serialisation of *Treasure Island* on World Book Day. It ran for 51 editions, with three separate pages published of additional pictures. With an average circulation of around 70,000, it is estimated that each night's edition of the paper was read by about 168,000 people.

In an editorial launching the project, the paper urged parents to 'unplug the computer, switch off the TV and hide the Gameboy' so that their children could discover the joy of reading. This was linked to a front page story, using the picture of Wallace and Gromit, exhorting people to join in the Great Reading Adventure. Stan Szecowka, deputy editor of the paper, said:

We are delighted to be involved in such a pioneering project.... *Treasure Island* is a classic tale and just the sort of book which could help bring people together through the enjoyment of reading.

Comments received on the value of the serialisation included the following:

*It was certainly a good idea to serialise the book in the Evening Post and to publish local schoolchildren's pictures. This must have helped the project a great deal because although some people may never read a book, I know of several who are actually reading the serialisation.*

*Thought the Evening Post serialisation was a good way for someone to have a read each day.*

*The Evening Post ran it very well. Indeed, it was great. It meant that the children could sit around the table and either Mum or Dad could read the story to them or they could read it themselves.*

*The illustrated serialisation in the Evening Post... made the project very accessible.*

The paper received around 280 pictures, including drawings in pen and ink, crayon and felt tip, watercolours, oil pastels and collages. It printed 92 of these in full colour. It is estimated that around 10 schools took part in the illustration project, including Redland High Juniors (independent), Gay Elms in Withywood, Winford (North Somerset) and Hanham Abbots (South Gloucestershire), with ages ranging from four to 12. Eight pictures were sent in directly by children, including one from a Canadian boy visiting his granny in Bristol.

The arts co-ordinator at Hillfields Primary in Fishponds said:

*I was very impressed by the pictures accompanying the *Treasure Island* chapters. I have sent in some really super entries from our school that have been completed using oil pastels, I hope you enjoy them as much as we do.*

An independent contributor said:

*I am a volunteer reader at St John's Primary School and over the last few weeks I have been discussing *Treasure Island*, the book and its characters, with an eight-year-old... He has thoroughly enjoyed the adventure and over the last two sessions he has drawn the attached picture, which I promised I would send on to you. I have read the book for my book group and have to confess to never having read it before, although, like most people, I vaguely knew the story. I have very much enjoyed it.*



Illustration of Billy Bones and Jim Hawkins used in guide



## Treasure Island and bookshops

It was disappointing that involvement with the project on the part of Bristol bookshops was minimal, but this was perhaps inevitable considering how many free copies of *Treasure Island* were in circulation in the city. However, it was interesting to note that Blackwell's Bookshop in Bristol was selling *Treasure Island* in sufficient numbers for it to be in its top ten throughout March, topping the list in the final week where it outsold Jamie Oliver and Michael Moore. The Arnolfini bookshop sold 22 copies of the Penguin classic and all their stock of the Puffin and Ladybird editions.

## Reading groups and reading schemes

*Treasure Island* was used by Bristol reading groups and within targeted reading schemes. Those who took part in such group activities included the following:

- Arts & Business South West, an organisation involved in enhancing private sector involvement with the arts, chose *Treasure Island* as the first book for their newly formed office reading group (the organisation also sponsored the project). The group has five members and plans to spend two months on the book – they had not completed reading it by the time this evaluation was undertaken. A group member read the book to his son so could also provide a parent's perspective on the Great Reading Adventure. He thought the choice of *Treasure Island* was a good one as it was a recognisable book which spanned all age ranges. The project had led his family to think about Bristol's past in a slightly different way, and this had added a new dimension to their visits to local museums.
- Another reading group read the book in January and February in anticipation of the project. There are six members, aged between 25 and 45, and they meet once a month. A member of the group enjoyed *Treasure Island* 'very much' and felt it had 'wide appeal', was 'widely accessible' and 'a quality easy read'. This was the first time the group had read a classic together – they normally read 20th century literature, particularly Booker nominees – and as a result of the project now intend to return to a classic every four months. The discussion points in the readers' guide were felt to have been helpful as they provided a 'more structured' means of debate.

- A long-running Bristol book group comprising six female members, all retired, also took part in the Great Reading Adventure and provided feedback. The group meets once a month, taking it in turn to host the meeting and select that month's title. Although they would not normally have chosen to read *Treasure Island*, to their surprise, all members of the group enjoyed the novel and felt it was 'a rollicking story' which moved at a good pace.
- The Paired Reading Scheme (or Reading Buddies) is coordinated by Business in the Community. Volunteers from local businesses assist with classroom reading, working with children who have either low reading ages or are particularly advanced. There are currently 203 adults involved in the scheme working with 166 children. The *Treasure Island* project will be evaluated in the summer. In the meantime, interviews were conducted with the scheme's coordinator and one of the volunteers.
- The coordinator, who had been involved in planning the project, commented after the event that she thought *Treasure Island* was inappropriate for the children on the scheme as it was too complex, and was hard for girls and people from different ethnic backgrounds to relate to. She also thought that schools were to have been more involved with the project, which would have helped the volunteers. She thought the best thing to have come from the project was that the children now had a copy of the book to keep: many of them do not own books. The volunteers had overcome some of the problems posed by the difficulty of the text by listening to the audio version, reading aloud to their children, referring to the dictionary and using the teachers' pack. One volunteer who was interviewed thought the project had been good for making his child feel part of the 'collective idea'. He himself found the book 'quite fantastic'. He normally only reads non-fiction but as a result of the project is more inclined to approach classic literature.



Singing shanties on launch day

- The Youth Education Service (YES) provides opportunities for young people and adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Staff do not normally dictate what the pupils will read, but decided to join in the Great Reading Adventure. A spokesperson said *Treasure Island* was far more complex than the material they would normally tackle, but with help from the film and audio versions, and their group reading activities, they managed to derive a great deal from the project. The project had broader impact upon the participants which is still 'bubbling through' and YES plans to make a scrapbook of their involvement.

## Events in *Treasure Island* week

A series of special events were held in *Treasure Island* week, which marked the beginning of the Great Reading Adventure.

On World Book Day, a free public lecture was held in the Wills Building at the University of Bristol. Professor David Punter talked about fictional islands. Around 75 people attended.

On Saturday 8 March there were matinee and evening screenings at Arnolfini of the 1950 Walt Disney version of *Treasure Island*, starring Robert Newton and Bobby Driscoll. A total of 196 people attended these shows. These included a group of 19 from YES, guests of Bristol 2008. A mother who was part of this group wrote:

I am writing a letter to say 'thank you' for the tickets to *Treasure Island* that you gave us... The film was very good... I know my children will be drawing pictures... It was the first time I'd been out with my children for over a year – thank you for making it possible... A lot of us will be reading the books you gave us for ourselves and the story will be more real now we have seen the film.

A spokesperson for YES said that although not all their students could read the book, by attending the screening they were able to feel part of the project – and of the city – which was important to them. For many, it was their first visit to Arnolfini, a place that they might previously have felt excluded from, and the project might therefore have boosted their confidence to go to other arts venues.

Before the evening performance of *Treasure Island*, Claire Harman, an award winning biographer who has edited Stevenson's work and is now writing his biography, was interviewed by Andrew Kelly. Nearly 80 people attended this session.

On the afternoon of 9 March, there was an illustrated talk by pirate expert David Cordingly called 'Pirates, *Treasure Island* and Bristol' which was followed by a screening of the 1934 MGM version of *Treasure Island* starring Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper. Nearly 60 people attended.

In the evening, Professor Sir Christopher Frayling – historian, critic, broadcaster and rector of the Royal College of Art – gave an illustrated talk on Stevenson and horror, and this was followed by excerpts from the silent version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, with live piano accompaniment, and the full version of *The Bodysnatcher*, an adaptation of a Stevenson short story. Nearly 140 people attended. The British Film Institute sent a poor copy of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which meant that the impact of the evening was diminished for some participants.



Claire Harman



David Cordingly



Christopher Frayling

## Other activities



Readers at Filton College

### Among other activities linked to the Great Reading Adventure were the following:

- Filton College staged a photo-shoot showing students dressed as pirates on a virtual treasure island to publicise their involvement in the project. Approximately 200 Filton students from over 40 nations participated in the Great Reading Adventure. The book was used in English classes at A Level and First Level, and given to international students. A spokesperson thought the project was 'brilliant' as it was applicable to all ages and abilities, and created a sense of community spirit in the college. The project will now be used in the college's international marketing material.
- Mark Steeds, a local landlord and amateur actor, visited Hawkesbury Primary School with fellow actor, the taxi driver Herbie Hire, where they read an abridged version of *Treasure Island* and sang songs. Comments received in thank you letters written by children included:
  - *It was really good, I loved your impressions of the pirates.*
  - *It was an exciting experience for I have never read the book myself. It has made me think I might read it someday.*
  - *I thought it was great – especially your hat.*
  - *When you were reading the story I liked the funny voices you used. Treasure Island is an exciting story and I would like to read the book!*
- Bristol Royal Children's Hospital decided that 'a more creative approach to the adventure would be great for recovering patients'. The hospital invited the puppet theatre group, Fly in the Pie, to hold workshops throughout World Book Day. The patients were joined by nine children from Bristol Grammar School in creating props and puppets before staging a performance of the show 'A Pirate Adventure'. Copies of *Treasure Island* were handed out to patients and excerpts from the book were broadcast on hospital radio. There was also a book reading session in conjunction with Barefoot Books.
- The Royal West of England Academy (RWA) held a book reading by the actress Kim Hicks, which opened the project up to many exhibition visitors and to RWA members. Free *Treasure Island* books and tapes were also distributed at the event, which formed part of an exhibition of art works by young people. A spokesperson from RWA said that *Treasure Island* was an excellent choice for the Great Reading Adventure as it spanned all age groups. He continued: '*Treasure Island* is not a book that I have read before, neither is it a book that I would normally be inclined to read, however I did enjoy the story.'
- On 9 June to celebrate European Year of Disabled People 2003, Elmfield School for Deaf Children performed in British Sign Language their favourite characters from *Treasure Island* on College Green.

## Sponsors

The Great Reading Adventure was sponsored by Aardman Animations, Arts & Business, Arts Council England South West, Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative (BCCI – now Business West), Bristol City Council, Bristol Evening Post and Press Ltd, GWR Radio, Penguin Books Ltd and the Society of Merchant Venturers. Around 60 per cent of questionnaire respondents said they recalled sponsors. Bristol Evening Post had the highest level of recall, followed by Penguin, Bristol City Council, Aardman, BCCI, GWR, Arts Council England South West, Arts and Business and the Merchant Venturers. A number of companies were wrongly identified as sponsors, including Hyder Consulting whose name had appeared on the franking mark on the envelopes containing the free books (Bristol 2008 uses office space at Hyder's Bristol site).

Feedback from the sponsors included the following:

- Aardman Animations felt that the Great Reading Adventure presented them with an opportunity to be involved in the Bristol 2008 bid and that it was a 'really good project' for the campaign. They felt that the project 'must have been really successful' and that it was 'lovely to see Wallace and Gromit out there'. It was also an excellent chance to create something 'new and bespoke' for a specific organisation. The sponsorship demonstrated the company's role in Bristol, and highlighted the strength of filmmaking in the South West.
- Arts & Business felt that the Great Reading Adventure was exactly the kind of partnership that the organisation wishes to help facilitate, particularly as it has 'such poignant educational values'. The main benefit to them of being involved was the logo enhancement and the development of recognition and recollection of their brand. They were a little disappointed that the *Evening Post* only used their logo, rather than including the text 'sponsored by...' to increase awareness, and that the logo failed to appear on occasion.
- Arts Council England South West described the Great Reading Adventure as 'a brilliant concept' and an excellent means of uniting the people of Bristol. As a 'tactic for demonstrating how a city can be brought together', it reflected some of the council's goals. *Treasure Island* was thought to be a good choice because of its wide appeal and its status as 'a well established classic' although the Bristol connection was tenuous.
- Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative's spokesperson thought that the Great Reading Adventure was 'wizard' and that it was highly appropriate for the 2008 bid and for Bristol itself. It made 'a delightful connection with Bristol's key cultural asset'. The book was a 'stunningly good read' and the serialisation in the

*Evening Post* provided a marvellous continuity. The project was 'a wonderful thing to attach your name to'.

- Bristol City Council Arts Development Unit had reservations about the choice of book, but thought the Great Reading Adventure 'was a good concept'. It succeeded 'in securing a citywide profile involving private, public and voluntary sectors and contributing to promoting the 2008 campaign'. Concern was expressed that the libraries may not been involved at an early enough stage, but, in fact, the planning committee had a library representative from the outset. The council thought 'it would be good to ensure broader "soundings" about which book to promote' in the future.
- Penguin said: 'We were absolutely delighted to be involved in this wonderfully exciting project.' The Great Reading Adventure came in a year when Penguin was embarking on 'a hugely ambitious relaunch' of its world-famous Classics list. The venture therefore 'also offered people a wonderful reminder of the wealth and variety of great literature of the past'. Negotiations are currently taking place with Penguin to provide books for the next three Great Reading Adventures.
- The Society of Merchant Venturers provided support because they were inspired by 'the whole initiative of bringing the city and its communities together' in the context of the 2008 bid. It was 'a dangerous game to try to measure the impact' of the sponsorship, but it had been an enjoyable experience, particularly the quayside activities on launch day. It is unlikely that the society could commit to long-term annual funding for future Great Reading Adventures as there will be other city initiatives which would be more appropriate to support in a given year, such as the proposed Brunel and slavery themed activities in 2006 and 2007.



Reading at the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative

## Media coverage

The national media campaign for the project resulted in 17 national media stories. In addition, widespread trade and professional media coverage included features in the *Times Educational Supplement*, *The Bookseller*, *Arts Professional* and *UK Press Gazette*. The *Australia Sunday Age* also picked up the story.

The focus of the coverage was the World Book Day activities at the Harbourside and a pre-project survey – initiated by Strategy PR (media consultants to Bristol 2008) – on parents' views of children's reading habits. This was not intended to be a scientifically balanced survey, but it proved to be useful in generating news coverage. Based on on-line responses from more than 2,000 parents across the UK, the survey showed that 78 per cent of respondents believed their children were not being introduced to traditional literary classics. In the light of this finding, the Great Reading Adventure could be marketed as a way of encouraging people to read a wonderful old book, suitable for all ages, that was in danger of being lost to a generation of children.

There were over 40 features on the Great Reading Adventure that appeared in the Bristol press, in addition to the serialisation. Stories were linked to the reading survey, the World Book Day launch, the speakers who appeared at Arnolfini, the library puppet show, support of the project from the Bristol Shoguns and GWR Radio, and other news items.

Broadcast coverage included features on BBC Points West and HTV on World Book Day, extensive local radio coverage – which included readings of extracts of the book – and a feature on Radio 4's *A Good Read* in which Rosie Boycott interviewed Helen Dunmore about the book and the project.

Overall, it was disappointing that there was no national television coverage of the launch – or, indeed, the project. Every attempt was made to create publicity that lent itself well to television.

## Treasure Island – continued

Though the project ended officially in April 2003, activity continued in schools and in reading groups. It was also reported that there would be a *Treasure Island* map distributed at the Harbour Festival, and the reading of the book continues across the city.



Illustration of Long John Silver used in guide

## Budget

The Great Reading Adventure cost just under £68,000 to run. Table 5 provides further details of the expenditure and income.

Table 5: Great Reading Adventure 2003

Expenditure	Amount
Management and evaluation	£ 13,282.00
Marketing	
Posters and postcards	£ 5,240.00
Leaflets and distribution	£ 1,021.00
Media work	£ 7,500.00
Launch Event	£ 2,910.00
Website	£ 3,720.00
Books and guides	£ 21,674.00
Webgame	£ 7,000.00
Film day/talks/events	£ 2,000.00
Postage and telephone	£ 3,500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 67,847.00</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>£ 68,000.00</b>

Source: Bristol 2008

It should be noted that some of these costs – for management and evaluation, the writing of the guide, the provision of 8,000 copies of the book, and the delivery of packs – were covered free of charge by Bristol 2008 staff and partners (the financial equivalent of this support has been included in the table). Some additional investment will be needed in future years for administrative support.



## Did the project meet its objectives?

Although the *Treasure Island* Great Reading Adventure was deemed a success by participants, did the project meet its key objectives? We look at each in turn below.

- **To promote Bristol as a centre for literature.** It is debatable whether in general terms Bristol's standing as a centre for literature could be promoted through a single project and it is, in any case, probably too soon to judge this level of impact. However, the Great Reading Adventure, as part of a jigsaw of initiatives, did raise awareness of Bristol as a city that engages with literature, and an accumulation of such impressions over time can only help to enhance the city's literary reputation. The thriving community of reading and writing groups in the city along with successful literacy schemes, library-based events, in-school literature projects, and publishing and bookselling activities are all part of the picture. The planned celebration of Creative Bristol throughout 2005 will include a local author as the subject of that year's Great Reading Adventure and provide an opportunity to increase awareness of the literary heritage of the city. This will further develop the image of Bristol as a centre for literature.
- **To promote Bristol 2008.** The Great Reading Adventure was the highest profile public event to come under the Bristol 2008 banner. Evidence suggests that the extensive media coverage, wide-spread distribution of 2008 badges and newsletters, pre-event talks from the bid's director, partnership links with the bid team, and logo placement succeeded in raising awareness of the campaign to be European Capital of Culture. It was the first time for many local people that they felt part of the bid as participants and contributors. The project provided 1,643 new personal contact details for the Bristol 2008 mailing database. The Great Reading Adventure impressed the judging panel. Most panel members were invited to participate during one of their visits to Bristol and questions about the impact of the project were raised in the final meeting.
- **To encourage learning about Bristol.** Although some felt *Treasure Island's* link to the city was tenuous, the story did allow the exploration of issues related to Bristol's seafaring past, including the still controversial topic of slavery. The readers' guide, teachers' pack and *Treasure Island* week events all helped to develop knowledge about the city, and the Great Reading Adventure proved to be a useful tool for the delivery of historical information.
- **To promote debate about the future of Bristol.** Other than the promotion of plans for Bristol 2008 – and the discussion of further Great Reading Adventures – the project did not provide a means of promoting debate about the future of the city. However, this was because of the historical perspective of much of the support material, which primarily examined eighteenth century life in the port. Other Great Reading Adventures may have more scope for debating the city's future, particularly the planned science-focused events for 2004 and the theme of innovation in engineering for 2006, linked to the Brunel celebrations.
- **To help develop standards of literacy.** As with the promotion of Bristol as a centre for literature, one project is unlikely to have made a substantial difference to standards of literacy in the city and it is too soon to identify the level of impact in what is a long-term process. However, the Great Reading Adventure did succeed in getting a broad range of people in Bristol talking and thinking about, and engaging with, literature. The serialisation of a work of classic fiction in the *Evening Post* was key to this as it made literature part of the everyday life of people.

- **To get more people reading and writing.** From the data received it is hard to say whether more people are now reading than were before the project took place. However, there is convincing anecdotal evidence that some people's reading habits have been changed: some participants have been inspired to read classics as well as modern novels, to read fiction as well as non-fiction or to tackle more difficult books than is usual. The Great Reading Adventure has succeeded in making reading feel like a collective act that can bring people of all ages and social backgrounds together. Little has been produced by way of new writing as a result of the project, but this aspect could be developed with more proactive initiatives in future Great Reading Adventures.



Helen Dunmore reading *Treasure Island* on launch day

## Conclusions

The *Treasure Island* Great Reading Adventure demonstrated that Bristol is able to run a citywide project that engages a wide range of people in a classic book, inspires discussion and debate, encourages literacy development, and enhances social capital through the building of networks. It was also fun for all those involved. Nearly 96 per cent of questionnaire respondents who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent were interested in participating in future projects.

The Great Reading Adventure is now an annual event. Reactions to the 2003 project suggest that it is not necessary – and would, indeed, be too restrictive – to find a direct link to Bristol for each year's chosen title in terms of plot and setting (some people remarked that, although the project was enjoyable, the Bristol connection to *Treasure Island* was flimsy, not least because Stevenson had never visited the city). What is needed is to identify titles whose themes and subject matter are of relevance to Bristol, in terms of the work that is done here and the debates that should be promoted, or which are written by local authors. *The Day of the Triffids* has been chosen for 2004, with activities and debates related to Bristol's status as a centre of science, discovery and green initiatives, as well as wider literacy work.

Although many participants liked the fact that everyone in the city was united in reading the same story, albeit in different editions, it would be difficult to find another relevant book that had such universal appeal. It has therefore been suggested that future Great Reading Adventures should have two books: one suitable for adults and advanced readers, the other for younger children. For 2004, for example, a book for children will be chosen that can be used to explore similar environmental themes within a science fiction context to those raised by *The Day of the Triffids*. Support material can be aimed at the two audiences but every effort will be taken to make the project as inclusive as *Treasure Island* was, for this was the key to the Great Reading Adventure's success.

In the promotional leaflet for the Great Reading Adventure Bristolians were encouraged to read the book that everyone in Bristol would be talking about and join their family, friends, neighbours and shipmates in the discussions and events. From the evaluation of the project it seems clear that thousands of people took up this challenge.

## Recommendations



Image of father reading to children used in publicity

The key recommendations are:

**Clarification of objectives:** as some of the objectives chosen for the project are difficult to assess because of their intangible or long-term nature, more focused objectives will need to be devised for future Great Reading Adventures.

**Book distribution:** less copies will be needed by libraries, but the ones that they get should include a greater percentage of books suitable for younger readers.

**Bookshops:** there needs to be more work with bookshops to encourage them to stock copies and actively sell these. Special Great Reading Adventure dump bins should be used.

**Business involvement:** consideration should be given to setting up a membership scheme for the project by which businesses can purchase bulk copies of books for distribution to employees.

**Publicity:** greater reliance should be placed on publicising the project through local radio and the *Evening Post*. Leaflets will still be needed, though perhaps not in the quantities used for this first project.

**Earlier planning:** in planning the 2004 project it is noticeable already how many more projects are possible. Each reading adventure needs a 12 month lead time to prepare the partnerships and material.

**Greater arts involvement:** some of the planned arts projects did not take place in 2003. Greater time devoted to planning will help in 2004.

**Events:** related events are popular, but it is suggested that in future they take place in Watershed Media Centre and that there is a greater quality control of films shown.

**Data collection:** though this project was evaluated extensively, better methods of assessment need to be developed, especially those that look to long-term development. In addition, questionnaires should be sent after the project – not with the books.

**Website:** a discussion page should be added.

**Education involvement:** earlier planning is essential, but also better involvement from the education department of Bristol City Council.

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Publicity still for *Treasure Island* (1950)

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