POLYGON SCHOOL

Key Stage 3 Reading Spine

READ THE WORLD

Adventure • Survival • People • Places • Animals • Courage • Choices

1. Rationale

This reading spine is designed for KS3 pupils at The Polygon School where reading attainment, confidence and motivation can be low. Its primary purpose is to create successful reading experiences and develop a culture in which pupils begin to see themselves as readers. The spine deliberately combines high-quality literature with short, visual, factual, graphic and highly narrative texts. It uses shared themes so pupils can access ambitious ideas even when their independent reading level is significantly below age-related expectations.

The central principle

Start with curiosity and high-interest stories, not with texts chosen simply because they are 'worthy'. Build confidence through success, then increase complexity. A pupil reading at a Year 4 level should still be able to participate in a Year 8 lesson about survival, friendship, displacement or morality.

The journey

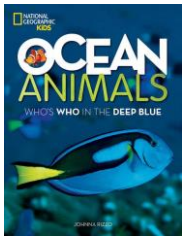
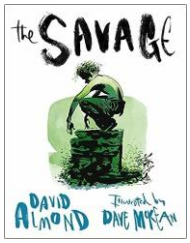
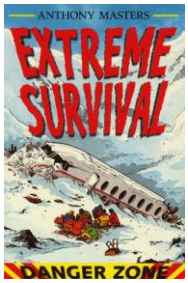
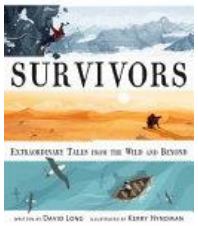
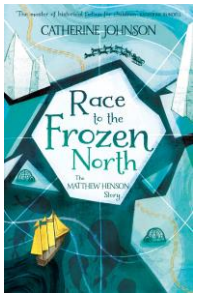
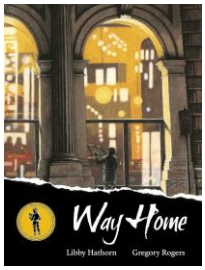
- Year 7 – DISCOVER: 'What is out there?' Curiosity, animals, danger, exploration and survival.
- Year 8 – EXPERIENCE: 'What would you do?' Friendship, belonging, choices, consequences and courage.
- Year 9 – UNDERSTAND: 'Why do people make the choices they do?' Identity, displacement, conflict, morality and redemption.

2. The three-layer reading model

Layer	Purpose	Typical texts	How to use
GREEN – I CAN READ THIS	Independent success	Way Home; Ocean Animals; Survivors; Illegal; When Stars Are Scattered; factual books	Choice reading, short independent tasks, paired reading
AMBER – I CAN READ THIS WITH SUPPORT	Shared experience and discussion	Boy at the Back of the Class; Framed; Cloud Busting; Whale Boy; The Savage; Boy in the Tower	Teacher read-aloud, supported reading, extracts, audio
RED – I CAN READ THIS WITH DETERMINATION	Sustained challenge	Once; The Breadwinner; Refugee Boy; Tsotsi; Jackdaw Summer	Whole-class reading with scaffolding; independent extension

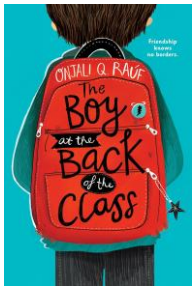
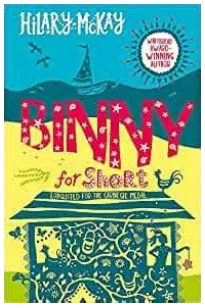
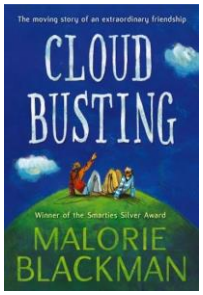
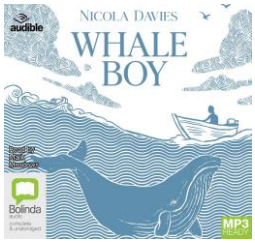
3. Year 7 – DISCOVER

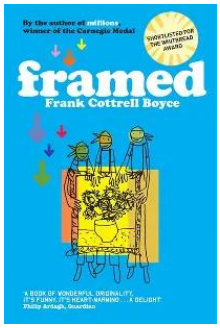
Big question: WHAT IS OUT THERE?

Term	Theme	Core text	
Autumn 1	Wild & Wonderful	Ocean Animals – Johnna Rizzo	
Autumn 2	The Wild Inside	The Savage – David Almond	
Spring 1	Danger	Danger Zone series – Anthony Masters	
Spring 2	Extreme Survival	Survivors – David Long	
Summer 1	Explorers	Race to the Frozen North – Catherine Johnson	
Summer 2	Home	Way Home – Libby Hathorn & Gregory Rogers	

4. Year 8 – EXPERIENCE

Big question: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

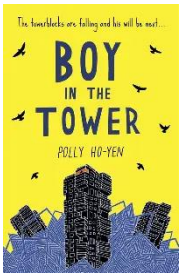
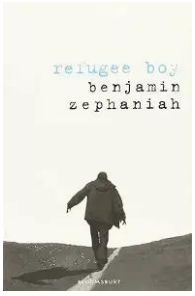
Term	Theme	Core text	
Autumn 1	Friendship & Difference	The Boy at the Back of the Class – Onjali Q. Rauf	
Autumn 2	Adventure & Christmas	A Boy Called Christmas – Matt Haig	
Spring 1	Family & Belonging	Binny for Short – Hilary McKay	
Spring 2	Friendship, Bullying & Identity	Cloud Busting – Malorie Blackman	
Summer 1	Animals & Courage	Whale Boy – Nicola Davies	

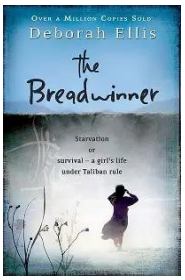
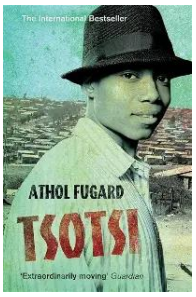
Summer 2	Crime & Consequences	Framed – Frank Cottrell-Boyce	

5. Year 9 – UNDERSTAND

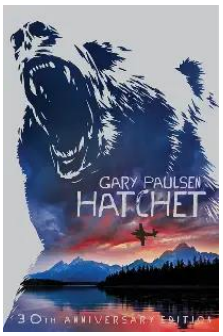
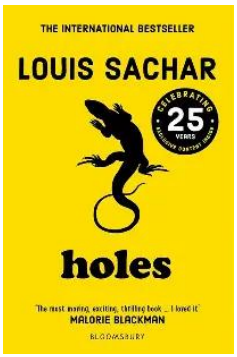
Big question: WHY DO PEOPLE MAKE THE CHOICES THEY DO?

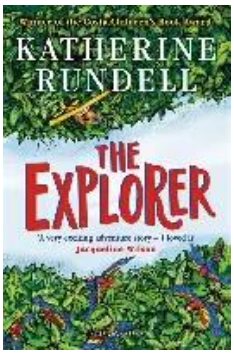
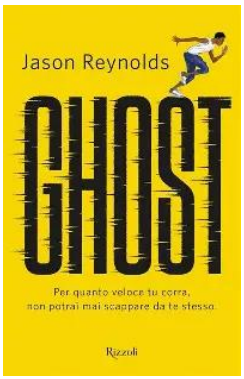
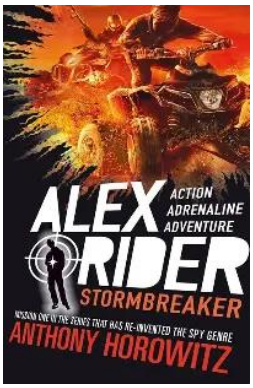
Engagement hook: Moral questions / real-world relevance

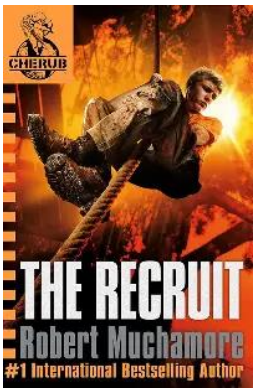
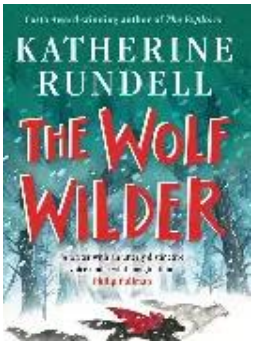
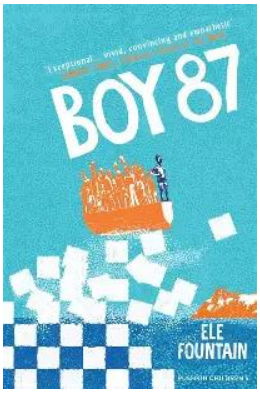
Term	Theme	Core text	
Autumn 1	Fear & Survival	Boy in the Tower – Polly Ho-Yen	
Autumn 2	Home & Displacement	Refugee Boy – Benjamin Zephaniah	
Spring 1	War & Childhood	Once – Morris Gleitzman	

Spring 2	Conflict & Courage	The Breadwinner – Deborah Ellis	
Summer 1	Crime & Redemption	Tsotsi – Athol Fugard	

Books that link to the themes and can be borrowed from our library:

Text	Theme	
Hatchet – Gary Paulsen	Survival *Top-priority gateway novel: plane crash, wilderness, survival.*	
Holes – Louis Sachar	Adventure / crime *Humour, mystery, boys, punishment, friendship and consequences.*	

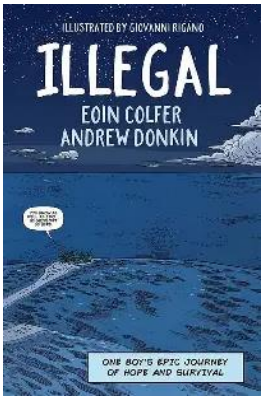
The Explorer – Katherine Rundell	Exploration / survival *Amazon rainforest survival; natural link from Race to the Frozen North.*	
Ghost – Jason Reynolds	Identity / sport *Running, anger, family, poverty and talent; strong Year 8/9 gateway.*	
The Outsiders – S. E. Hinton	Friendship / gangs *Boys, loyalty, violence, family and belonging; strong Year 9 option.*	
Alex Rider: Stormbreaker – Anthony Horowitz	Action / espionage *Fast-paced 'I just want something exciting' reading.*	

The Recruit – Robert Muchamore	Crime / espionage *Teenage protagonist, action and crime; stronger Year 9 readers.*	
The Last Bear – Hannah Gold	Animals / environment *Links Ocean Animals and Whale Boy to climate and conservation.*	
The Wolf Wilder – Katherine Rundell	Adventure / animals *Action, danger and resilience for stronger readers.*	
Boy 87 – Ele Fountain	Displacement / survival *Strong companion to Refugee Boy.*	

Illegal – Eoin Colfer & Andrew Donkin

Migration / graphic novel

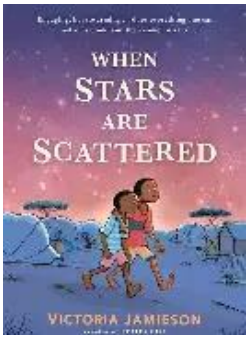
Graphic format with serious themes; high-priority text.



When Stars Are Scattered – Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed

Refugees / graphic novel

Friendship, resilience and displacement in accessible form.



The Arrival – Shaun Tan

Migration / visual literacy

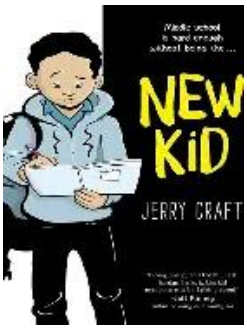
Powerful wordless/near-wordless graphic text; ideal for inference.

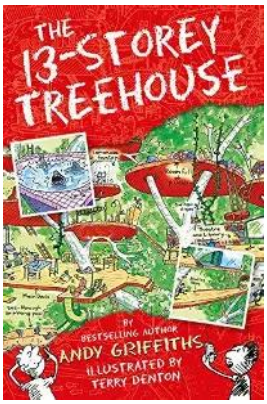


New Kid – Jerry Craft

Identity / school

Graphic novel, belonging, friendship and identity.



The 13-Storey Treehouse – Andy Griffiths	Humour / gateway reading *Very accessible, visual and funny*.	

We aim to building a culture of reading by:

- giving every pupil access to books they can successfully finish
- using audio/read-aloud alongside print
- keeping books visible and easy to borrow
- using a 'book of the week' and an author of the term
- celebrating finishing, recommending and discussing books rather than only reading age gains
- allowing pupils to abandon a book after a reasonable trial and choose another
- providing graphic novels, factual books, magazines and record books alongside novels.

What success will look like:

Stage	Pupil identity	Evidence
Year 7	'I will try a book.'	Increasing willingness to read, stronger oral vocabulary, successful completion of short texts.
Year 8	'I know what sort of books I like.'	Pupils identify genres/themes, make choices and sustain reading with support.
Year 9	'I can choose a book for myself.'	Greater independence, stamina, discussion and willingness to tackle challenging texts.
Long-term	'I read when nobody is making me.'	Voluntary reading becomes part of pupil identity and school culture.