

The Irreverent Guide for Patrons of Reading **by Chitra Soundar**

Don't worry! This guide will not be serious. This guide is neither full of practical tips nor amazing ideas. It's just another writer, avoiding the work-in-progress, hoping to rescue thousands of children from forced learning of subjunctive clauses and modal verbs.

Patron of Reading is a bonkers idea from headteacher Tim Redgrave and author Helena Pielichaty. And more crazy people like authors, illustrators, teachers, headteachers and librarians joined up and made this bonkers idea more brilliant. Who would have thought reading for pleasure was a thing? DoE haven't heard of it, it seems! But we don't worry much about them when we have wonderful characters and amazing facts in so many books.

To me, being a Patron of Reading is an adventure. By adventure, I mean I have no idea what I've got myself into and I figure out as I go, guided by the children and the teachers who have invited me in.

So how does this adventure start? Like all adventures, it starts with a tall man with a big heart and almost no hair. He checks you out with his Twitter thermometer and measures your ability to read for pleasure. You write children's books? Then don't worry – most probably you're already afflicted with this condition.

Then you get listed on the Patron of Reading website. Think match.com, except it matches hibernating authors with super-humans like librarians and teachers. Like in any dating profile, just reveal enough of your reading for pleasure tendencies and the general neighbourhood where this affliction affects you – and I mean more than your own room – like a city where people live and schools are run.

Then the tall man (also known as Jon Biddle) tweets out your patron profile to a legion of followers who retweet it as if they are cute cat pictures, until an eager school spots you and goes 'Aha! We would like that one please – yes, that author with the yellow shirt, long hair, standing next to a stack of books and a pile of laundry'. Is that you? Then you've been matched.

Once you're matched, the above-mentioned tall man will approach you with details of your suitor. Where is the school? Who will be in touch with you? Who is this teacher who, on top of everything they do, has agreed to be the Patron of Reading coordinator?

Like in any self-respecting matching situation, you get to talk (and by talk I mean, by email or phone or Skype or telepathy, whatever suits) with the potential school you will be patronising.

Here is the thing – this is where you reveal your reading habits – poetry? Ghost stories? Adventures set in abandoned islands? Don't be shy. You'd be surprised when you listen to their choices.

This is where you find out what does your potential suitor want? What kind of school is it? What motivates the children? Why did they choose you? What could you bring to the table (other than a chair of course)?

You have questions? You are too shy to ask your potential suitor? Shoot it across to the matchmaker. He has weathered every what, why and when.

Well – what do you think? Have you agreed the terms and conditions of patronising? Do you have a date setup? Ooh! That's exciting, isn't it?

Hold fire! Don't relax yet. Plan the first visit as you would plan any school visit – except you're not going to be running creative writing workshops. You're going to find ways to promote reading for pleasure. The keyword as you might have noticed is PLEASURE!

Like in any first date, take it slow. Don't overwhelm the school with your enthusiasm. I've been there! Both in life and in schools. Figure out what they need from you and what level of enthusiasm. You might have time between two book projects and want to run a competition for the children (or you just want to procrastinate). Teachers, as you might have guessed from EduTwitter, are an overworked bunch. They might not have time to jump into every rabbit-hole that the patron wants them to. So KEEP CALM and READ FOR PLEASURE.

Then agree frequency of visits. Ask them how, and how often, they'd like to stay in touch when you've returned to your cave after inspiring them with the love of reading. Maybe the things you initiated on the first visit don't fully pan out. Don't fret. You get to go back, build relationships and try new things.

That's it – there is no secret handshake (well, I'm not telling you if there's one), there is no heavy manual in all European languages (Brexit means Brexit, didn't you know?) And there are no set rules about how you patronise reading. Standing up, sitting down, upside down, reading poetry, non-fiction, stories, picture books, newspapers and cereal boxes - it's all up for grabs.

Willing to take the plunge? Reach out to the tall man at [@patronofreading](#) and leave the rest to the universe.

[Chitra Soundar](#) is Patron of Reading at West Earlham Junior School in Norwich, where she brings stories from different countries into the classrooms. She gets on their radio show, teaches them voice modulation and tells them stories from brilliant books. And when she's not patronising, find out more about what she's up to [here](#). Have questions? Shoot her a tweet at [@csoundar](#).