

## Case Study: Markway School, Andover

### Who was the project for?

The Pageturners Project at Markway School was run for a group of year 7, 8 and 9 young people (boys and girls) who attend this special school in Hampshire, for pupils with moderate learning disabilities and those on the autistic spectrum.

### What did we do?

A series of six one hour sessions were run for the group as an after school project. The aims of the project were to

- To promote emotional literacy in line with SEAL outcomes
- To engage the group with a book and with literacy in general
- To provide activities which promote self-esteem for the young people
- To develop group work skills

The group chose a book from a selection of three by voting on different aspects of each book (cover, blurb and extract) and the 6 sessions were then based around the book they selected. The group had low levels of literacy and were not expected to read the book in between sessions although all of the group received a copy of the book and several of the young people did start to read the book at home during the 6 weeks. To make sure everyone could engage with the book, extracts were read aloud each week in short bursts followed by a range of related interactive games and art-based activities.

The book that was selected was Holes by Louis Sachar and many of the group had seen the film, which is partly what attracted them to the book. We used aspects of the film to help bring the book to life and I made lollipop stick puppets of all the main characters which we used each week as a visual aid. I also used other pictures and scenes from the film to help visually. Some of the activities we undertook were:

- Creating the landscape of Holes and making clay characters and wildlife from the story (lizards etc).
- Making survival shelters from scrap – this was very challenging for some of the group members but they all did really well and the group were very proud of what they produced.
- A Holes board game which comprised of a series of team challenges, Holes quiz questions and Holes related “what would you do questions” to make the young people think more about themselves and their individual responses to situations.

- Listening to the story each week whilst working on a group mural.
- A Holes themed party, which we had on the last session to celebrate their achievements over the six weeks. We had a running theme of gold and treasure throughout the whole 6 weeks which culminated in a treasure box of activities and rewards in our party at the end. The items in the treasure box were chosen to aid reflection, celebration and evaluation of the project.

### **What were the challenges?**

The individual learning disabilities and consequent behaviour of group members was a challenge – activities could sometimes prove daunting for some group members it was never clear what reaction there might be, so flexibility was very important. Some of the group members could become upset or agitated with each other, which made dynamics tricky at times. The low literacy levels were also part of the challenge. Although it was a challenging project, it was also very enjoyable. It worked very well and the group engaged with the story and the activities – they also got better at working with each other and being in the group every week.

### **What were the outcomes/feedback?**

As a group we read through most of the book. The story was also highlighted through the games and activities also. One of the group read the book at home and finished it within the six weeks, another of the group was reading it himself and really enjoying it and another couple said they were reading it too (though much more slowly).

The English Teacher who was involved in setting up the project and also sat in on the sessions felt that the project had been successful in engaging the the young people and felt that they had enjoyed listening to the story, doing the arts based activities, playing the games and that they had enjoyed the style of the project.

The group particularly enjoyed the activities which involved linking aspects of the book to their own lives – these activities were designed to address the emotional literacy aims of the project and they worked very well. Halfway through the project I asked the group to draw a face to indicate how they were feeling about the project - all but one of the group drew a happy face. The other one drew an “okay” face. However, he happened to be the young person who came to meet me at the school doors every week asking when we were going to start the session!

At the end, I did some evaluation with the group and asked them to create a postcard which highlighted their favourite part of the project. The Holes Board game came out very strongly as a group favourite, although one young man liked the clay modelling best of all. The group said they had enjoyed it and had enjoyed the story too. I very much enjoyed working with the group and felt it was an ambitious but successful project.