



HOW TO... Make your Book Bonanza a Sickcess

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Article Category:

How to...

Byline:

David Bennett, Head of English at the George Spencer Comprehensive School in Stapleford, Nottingham, describes their **Fungus the Bogeyman Book Bonanza**.

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I'd anticipated the excitement that Fungus might create when I first persuaded the librarian to place a few copies on library reserve in each of our two Resource Centres. I also tried some copies in the Bookshop. When you begin to hear Fungus jokes around the school, and one child calling another 'Mildew' or 'My Drear', then you know that you're on to a winner. Accordingly Raymond Briggs' deliciously unwholesome creation became the coathanger upon which we hung our planned November book fair.

Everyone was delighted. Within weeks of the decision having been made Fungus invaded the school, especially the Lower School where his Book Bonanza was to be held. Portraits of Fungus's illustrious ancestors were dredged up by the Art Department, plus a wall of assorted Bogeys some 20 feet by 10 feet in area. In English, Bogeyman Recipe Books and Menus were being lovingly (and sickeningly) compiled, whilst walls blossomed with adverts for Bogey products (Dirtmestos puts back all known germs). A Bogey Newspaper was issued and a sticky, slimey, very sludge-brown model of a Bogey Backyard appeared at the same time as a rash of Bogey Board Games. Some dedicated Bogey addicts created dozens of imaginative creepy crawlies, who lurked amongst a fringe of crepe paper slime that dripped from the low ceiling. Finally, when your graffiti bears the legend 'Fungus was here' you know that you've sold the idea to your pupils and you have a gripe sickcess on your hands.

The opening day arrived and the £1,500 worth of books supplied by a local bookseller were ready for the deluge - spread out, according to broad subject areas, on tables covered with suitably muddy-coloured cloths. Our stock ranged from picture books to adult paperbacks, both fiction and non-fiction. This reflects our general policy which is to invite everyone connected with the school to our events, including our feeder primaries.

The Bonanza went on non-stop for three days during school time and we had a Parents' Evening when we opened from 6.30 to 8.00. Every child came in once with his form during an English lesson and then again during an allotted lunch-hour. They browsed; they used their saved-up book club money; they bought outright and they reserved until the next day. There were competitions laid on by the Maths., Humanities, Science and English Faculties and there was music organised by the Music Department, but best of all there was colour, excitement, involvement and the tremendous experience of being amongst hundreds of books, including Fungus, who sold no fewer than 54 copies. I had to dash into Nottingham to get fresh supplies after the first day.

Most of the staff assisted in one way or another or else were seen alongside the cleaners and dinner ladies to be browsing and buying. Two mums worked the cash register and a bevy of pupils assisted - children make by far the best

detectives. One of the mums was so good at selling raffle tickets on the parents' evening that we made an enormous profit which offset the loss on the film, which we showed in two lunch hours.

At the final exhausted count we had taken just over £700 - roughly £1 per pupil on roll - from which we will receive 10% in cash with the help of Fungus, who himself made £72.90, small beer perhaps to his publishers Hamish Hamilton. When I wrote to them in early October asking for some publicity help I received no reply whatsoever. It is as well that schools are dedicated enough to run their bookshops and bookfairs despite such a lack of support and interest from some publishers; that they are committed to creating the book buying public of the future in the face of such little regard or recognition from those who will derive the most gain, when our pupils become the paying customers in tomorrow's world.

It is as well that financial gain is not uppermost in our minds. Our gripes pale into insignificance beside the continuing enthusiasm for books that Fungus's Book Bonanza has given the school. However, he was a great financial success and a jolly good slime was had by all so next year we're cashing in. Tentative plans are afoot for the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica Book Bonanza' - not quite the same ring to it perhaps, but think of the educational value. I wonder if they'll give us a set!

Fungus the Bogeyman

Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10198 0, £1.35

Post script: A second letter to Hamish Hamilton *after* the event did provoke an apologetic response. Apparently the Fungus Bonanza coincided with 'necessary changes in the children's books publicity department'. Juliet Nicolson, who is now in charge, promises full support in the future. Take note anyone who is thinking of taking up the idea.

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Source URL (retrieved on Dec '20): <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/6/childrens-books/articles/how-to/how-to-make-your-book-bonanza-a-sickcess>

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