



Ideas into Action, Level 5, Sheffield's Favourite Reads Project Project Brief

Name of organisation: Reading Sheffield, Sheffield

Website: <https://www.readingsheffield.co.uk/>

Purpose of organisation/background: Reading Sheffield is a small community history group. Over the years we have developed a linked group of projects – oral history, research, artwork and poetry - gathering and connecting the experience of reading in Sheffield during the last three hundred years. We welcome volunteers to work on current projects or suggest new ones. We are all Sheffield readers: we first got together in 2010 to share memories of how we treasured the time to read. We all found in reading a pleasure that changed how we lived. Our backgrounds differ but we nearly all came from homes where neither parents or grandparents had any education beyond their teens. Most of the group had long worked to foster a love of reading: by teaching, broadcasting, working in libraries or writing books themselves. Though not all from Sheffield, we all love this city where we have spent most of our working lives. Our projects are a contribution to the social history of the people with whom we have lived and worked.

At the heart of Reading Sheffield is a set of 60+ interviews about reading with Sheffielders born between 1920 and 1945. These are available in [transcript and audio](#) on our project website, along with the [interview guides](#). 'Reading journeys' (or histories) have now been written for almost all the interviewees, to introduce them and cover the key points of their reading lives, and these can be found by searching our [blog](#).

We are also researching the development and contribution of libraries in Sheffield, from the 18th century onwards, and this too is recorded on our blog.

Project Brief Description:

You will work by yourself and in pairs/small groups (COVID permitting) to produce:

Task 1: Your own reading journey

Task 2: A blog (that is, one from each student) based on research on popular fiction.

We may ask to publish one or both blogs on our website (anonymously, if you prefer).

Task 1. An individual account of your own reading history/journey (Wordcount: 900-1000.) Your journey should be similar in format to those on the Reading Sheffield site blog. You may choose to cover reading experiences throughout your life, or to focus on a particular period.

We strongly suggest you compare and contrast your experiences and views with those of the Reading Sheffield interviewees, most of whom belong to different generations and perhaps cultures. While the writing of the reading journey will be personal, you will be encouraged to work together

as a group and in pairs to develop the task (e.g. thinking about the topics and questions to ask yourself) and then to produce the reading journey (e.g. helping each other to develop it by asking questions, seeking clarifications, giving feedback etc). We welcome images (used with permission) to illustrate your reading journey.

Task 2. A blog (that is, one from each student) based on research on popular fiction. (Word count: 750-1000.) In your blog on a Reading Sheffield novel (see the list of possible choices below), we would like you to write about your chosen novel as a reading experience. To do this, you should use both your own experience of reading your text as a contemporary reader, and whatever you can find out about reading experiences of that text and/or that author by readers in the past (including from Reading Sheffield interviewee transcripts, and in newspaper reviews from the past). In much literary criticism, there is most stress on the author and the text, while the role of the reader has been under-emphasised. For the Reading Sheffield project we want to put the reader at the centre, which is why we want to commission you to do this work which looks at how an individual novel might work (or not) for different readers at different times. We will offer further guidance in a workshop on how to talk about a novel from a reading experience point of view.

We welcome images (used with permission) to illustrate the blog.

Books for Task 2

Here is the list of novels from which to choose. Most of these writers were popular in their day, and are still read. The attitudes and behaviours they explore may be unfamiliar to us today. Most but not all are mentioned by the Reading Sheffield interviewees, although it is worth noting that in the mid-20th century the diversity of British reading was very narrow across the nation and that opportunities to read about different cultures were very limited.

- Nevil Shute: *On the Beach* (1957)
- Jean Plaidy – *The King's Secret Matter* (1962)
- Winifred Holtby – *South Riding* (1936)
- Dennis Wheatley – *The Man who Killed the King* (1951)
- L M Montgomery – *Anne of Green Gables* (1908)
- Jean Rhys – *After Leaving Mr McKenzie* (1931)
- Dorothy L Sayers – *Gaudy Night* (1935)
- John Buchan - *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915)
- Chinua Achebe - *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
- H G Wells - *War of the Worlds* (1898)
- C S Forester – *The Happy Return* (1937)
- Ethel M Dell – *The Way of An Eagle* (1911)
- E M Hull – *The Sheik* (1921)
- Zane Grey – *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912)
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- A novel from the Readerships and Literary Cultures 1900-1950 special collection (your choice to be agreed with Dr Sanchez-Arce).

It should be easy to find copies of the titles above. Almost all are available as e-books and in hard copy, from booksellers, including second-hand. Subject to access, the Adsetts Library holds copies of some, including in the reference-only 'Readerships and Literary Cultures 1900-1950' Special Collection.

As noted above, the key to this task is to write about your reading experience. You may also want to keep in mind:

- the context of the book/author in the reading history of any Reading Sheffield interviewees who read it, or other books by the author. For example, the gender and age of the interviewee (roughly) when the book was read; the response it provoked
- the cultural context. For example, how was the book reviewed? Who was it aimed at?
- social attitudes: How does the book approach e.g. politics, race, religion, gender and how does the depiction compare with you/today's attitudes?
- the 'cultural life' of the book since publication. For example, has it been filmed or televised? Is it representative of a particular genre or set of values.

General advice: Your projects will draw primarily on your own experiences and reactions to the Reading Sheffield material and to the books chosen for the second task, but they will also be informed by work already carried out by Reading Sheffield. You can draw on resources such as:

- the Reading Sheffield website
- SHU resources on oral history and ethnography research methods
- online archives of The Times, Sunday Times, Guardian, Observer and TLS which will have reviews materials for some of the novels and topics
- Archive of the Sheffield Telegraph and Independent (available on the British Newspaper Archive)
- print and online resources on popular culture and popular fiction at SHU libraries
- SHU's 'Readerships and Literary Cultures 1900-1950' Special Collection
- Sheffield Libraries and Archives (Covid permitting).

We would be happy to brief on the projects, give feedback and answer questions, as you would find helpful.