

2013

**“Jack and Tom”
- From Reluctant Reader to
Reading for Pleasure**



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“Jack and Tom”

I'd heard people talking about 'lightbulb moments' but I wasn't certain I'd ever seen one, not a real one. Not one where a 9 year-old boy stood up from the carpet as if compelled by some other force, and pointed at the whiteboard and said 'I can READ it! Let me read it today, I CAN READ IT!'

Jack was a reluctant reader. And a reluctant speaker. Quiet and withdrawn, he struggled with most things, but plodded ever on, 'trying hard' but often not getting it. His carer worked hard, the teaching assistant worked hard, everyone worked hard to cajole and encourage, to keep up spirits and to keep moving forward in tiny steps.

Then a literacy project – author Tom Palmer was speaking at a book festival close to the school. Tickets were booked and we got stuck into his Football Academy series as a class. It was football everything, and we loved it! We found a short story written by the author which was set in the same town as our school.



The screenshot shows the National Literacy Trust website. The header includes the logo and the text "Words for life". Navigation links include Home, Contact us, Register, and Log in. A secondary navigation bar lists: Schools and teaching, Early years sector, Communities and local areas, Libraries, Adult, Resources, Conferences and training, Projects/network, News, and Policy and campaigning. The main content area features a photograph of a young boy reading in a library. Below the photo, the text reads: "Resources Our resources Downloads Videos Links Tom Palmer short story: The Character Strikes Back. Years 4, 5 and 6 Download our free five-part short story for Years 4, 5 and 6, written for us by children's author Tom Palmer." A list of links follows: Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4, and Part 5.

Written in five instalments to be read to a class over a week, we loved every word of it. We were on the edge of our seats and the lines between reality and fiction blurred because we KNEW these places. Jack was gripped.

The following Monday he came into school, slapped 'Boys United' down on the table and said, 'I read it'. I assumed his carer had read it to him over the weekend, so we chatted about it while he beamed at me, unaware that I had not yet cottoned on to the fact that he really HAD read it!

Next came the carpet moment. A whoop and a cheer from his peers greeted his clear reading of the words on the whiteboard. He seemed to stand up a bit taller, to join in with the banter a bit more, to be at the centre of play on the playground that day. We felt aglow with his new-found success.

Then came the blow. They'd found a foster home for him, he was moving from our school. He would be going shortly after the Tom Palmer event. That would be our last trip with him in our class.

Jack bought the whole series of books, and even managed to pluck up the courage to ask Tom to sign them. I had a quiet word with Tom... could he possibly do us a favour? A photo was taken of Jack and Tom. On Jack's last day, there was a buzz on our Skype connection. Curious, the children gathered round. I asked Jack to answer, but Jack couldn't speak – there was Tom Palmer, calling to wish him good luck and offer him our (now signed and framed) photo of author and reader together.

Apparently he's made a good new start. And in his new bedroom, in his new home, there's a photo which perhaps he'll treasure as much as I will treasure my memories of him, forever.

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