Within education, reading groups form part of a larger move to encourage ‘reading for pleasure’, with the concern that this has been displaced by an emphasis on ‘functional literacy’ and the focused reading of literary extracts rather than whole books. The perceived value of reading groups, however, has to do not only with individual reading but also with the benefits (educational, social, personal) attributed to talk about reading.

This paper reports on an evaluation of a school reading groups initiative in Liverpool, which had the aim of promoting ‘a sustainable enthusiasm for reading for pleasure amongst children and their families’. I shall focus particularly on children’s, teachers’ and sometimes parents’ contributions to the discussion of a graphic novel, *The Savage*, written by David Almond and illustrated by Dave McKean. In this case groups were run initially by a trained facilitator, and teachers also attended training in reading group facilitation. The talk is of interest in that it was explicitly designed to be non-hierarchical, encouraging and valuing contributions from all participants, although it took place in a context in which hierarchical relationships were embedded. Building on insights from interactional sociolinguistics, I shall discuss how, in this context, participants constructed interpretations of a literary text; the location of such interpretive work within ongoing interpersonal activity, and the construction of particular reader identities; and some of the tensions evident in the management of potentially conflicting roles and relationships (such as teacher/facilitator). I shall draw on this analysis to consider the potential impact of applied linguistic research both on theory (e.g. of literary reading/reception) and on educational policy and practice.