



Early reading throughout the first year of school

One of the great appeals of school is the promise of learning to read. Take home readers, early readers, sight word activities and making sense of the black squiggles on the page and in the environment are to become meaningful. Knowledge becomes power.

The issue for parents and carers becomes high stakes with the myriad activities that come home for homework, or as records of achievement. These can appear to be random, with no relationship to anything that might look like learning to read or write. It is even more challenging if your child's interest has waned.

How can parents support the excellent work that teachers are doing?

- Be informed. Always check with your child's teacher to find out how you can assist. Check the *NSW English syllabus K-10*, for early reading content (from <https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/download/>). You don't have to become an expert, but you can get an idea of the intricacies and complexity of the reading process. Ask the teacher for explanation of how you can assist.
- Have a range of books on hand. These can be the latest award-winning picture books, books picked up at second hand shops, library books, or hand-me-downs. Little Golden Books have been staples for decades, and have recently been re-published. Be prepared to read and re-read the favourites, exactly as the authors wrote them. This confirms that the printed word is secure, and that 'Once there was a boy ...' always says just that.
- Read to your children every day. They are learning to read, of course. But it is your modelling of reading that shows skills of understanding text, how to begin a story by looking at the pictures and reading the 'blurb' and asking questions like 'Who are the characters in this story?' 'I wonder what will happen?' Talking about the events; drawing attention to the words that said the character was unhappy, etc. These are the beginnings of comprehension.



NSW English syllabus:

Reading and viewing 1: Outcome ENe-4A

A student: demonstrates developing skills and strategies to read, view and comprehend short, predictable texts on familiar topics in different media and technologies - use comprehension



strategies to understand and discuss texts listened to, viewed or read independently

This basically gives us permission to read, view and talk about text as much as we like.

- Read with your children every day. When they are learning, they need many opportunities to practise. That's why 'take home readers' are used. The reading of these is not intended to be a chore. You can share the reading. Set your child up with a favourite toy, the family cat, dog or budgerigar, or a supportive family member. What is important is the practice. Absolute accuracy is a long-term goal, and will not be achieved immediately – in the early stages what is needed is a listener. Supplement the take-home readers (which are usually purpose-built and plot-light) with the child's own books.
- Model pleasure and enjoyment, and the persistence required to read an entire story with some tricky words.
- You don't need practice workbooks or worksheets from the supermarket. The volume and hard sell of the products available can be overwhelming. Ignore them. They are not necessary. They will do little to develop skills and pleasure in reading to make meaning in your child's life.

The following are skills and understandings that you can support at home with every text you read – including shopping lists, catalogues and birthday cards and invitations:

NSW English syllabus:

Reading and viewing 1: Outcome ENe-4A

Respond to, read and view texts

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- *predict meaning using elements of texts prior to reading* – model how to use pictures, photographs, illustrations, sequences such as 1.2.3., titles, headings and sub-headings, the size of letters in signs, signs on shop windows, 'key' words like 'special'
- *make connections between a text and own life* – encourage by adding comments such as 'Do you remember when we went to the beach and it was so windy? This book reminds me of that day ...'; 'They are looking at the timetable just like we do when we catch the train.'
- *interpret meaning by responding to an inferential question* – such as: 'Do you think the dragon was frightened?' 'Is that price really cheaper lower than usual?' ie something that is not directly stated in the text, but you can use pictures, words and real life knowledge to get hints at an idea.



- *retell a familiar story in sequence and identify main idea* – encourage the reader to tell others what they have been reading/viewing; they can make a video of the story or reading to share with grandparents
- *create visuals that reflect character, setting and events* – encourage originality and the use of interesting materials to make pictures, maps, models using playdough or Lego
- *use context to predict meaning in written texts to supplement decoding attempts* - help by talking about the setting and situation to familiarise the students to the text and possible content and vocabulary as a model for them to use

Food labels are a great source of ideas for talking about text. These are some of the proposed food labels for use in Australia. *What does the yellow ruler mean? Why does it say 'sample?'*



Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, Australia:
<https://www.business.gov.au/products-and-services/selling-products-and-services/country-of-origin-food-labelling/what-the-new-labels-look-like>
(Accessed 10/09/2018)

References

NSW Board of Studies (2012) *English Syllabus for the Australian curriculum K-10* Sydney <https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/download/>