

## Bargain resources and being resourceful



A strong professional library is an ongoing asset for all teachers.

We need a bank of resources that we know well, to draw on as models for the features of English that we want to develop in our students. This includes a stock of story books to read to, and with, students.

The NSW English syllabus requires that children interact with a variety of texts, including digital texts. While our students need the hands-on of print text, to be able to manipulate documents, and handle the paper/card/ etc, and to build their own versions, a common lament is the cost of quality books for our own libraries.

It can be expensive, but every teacher K-6 is an expert at locating bargains.

## Cheap books

- Free resources include those handouts and travel brochures we pick up while on holiday, advertising placards, art show booklets, catalogues, food packets, labels and instructions, magazines, newspaper articles, as well as the apparently infinite resources available on the net. Many of these may not be curated as effectively as we might wish, and care needs to be taken with quality. But even poor models provide opportunity for effective teaching – students can become effective at providing a critique as they compare information and presentation.
- Bookshops and supermarket chains often have sales of books as part of special deals. Check for quality – if books have won a Children’s Book Council mention, or are by well-known authors, snap them up. Garage sales are often the place to pick up other families’ discards that their children have outgrown. In the last six months Aldi have had the classics of Little Golden Books, and a range of big books – both fiction and non-fiction. There is often limited supply, so you need to get in quick.
- My local Australia Post outlet is getting rid of ‘Special Gifts Book Packs’ for \$10, originally \$16.95 – even that was a good price. This is excellent value for excellent texts for younger readers, and to use with younger students.
- Better Reading, ‘a community of over 150,000 book lovers’ gives special recognition to this title in this month’s in their regular newsletter. Their recognition and celebration of Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury’s *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* is excellent. This wonderful book is now 30 years old, and it was in the pack of Walker Books from Australia Post. It makes a fabulous performance piece for small children as it is such fun. Join Better Reading. The resources are free. <https://www.betterreading.com.au/kids-ya/happy-30th-birthday-dear-bear/>
- Another online site is ‘Storyline Online’ – *‘Where the world’s best storytellers inspire a love of reading in children ...’*. Stories are read from the book by both well-known and unfamiliar US actors on video. This is a good resource to access for group work, and when you don’t have time to read the six texts a day that we recommend. You can subscribe to their online newsletter. Unfortunately Australian children’s books don’t have a strong presence overseas, despite us publishing more of them per head of population than any other country. <https://www.storylineonline.net/>



## Being resourceful

### Author study

Australian Post is currently honouring children's writers Morris Gleitzman, Leigh Hobbs, Alison Lester, Shaun Tan and Mem Fox. 'Legend' stamps feature a portrait and a photograph of one of their favourite publications. This is an ideal opportunity to have a focus on the range of texts each author has created. This could include comparative study, themes of the texts, features of each author's writing, and structure of biography, as presented at:

See <https://australiapostcollectables.com.au/articles/australian-legends-of-childrens-literature>

### Working with text

Walker Books are always of high reading and literary quality. Theirs is one of the Australia Post's book packs. It contains *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne, *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson, *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?* also by Martin Waddell, with illustrations by Barbara Firth. The final gem in this bounty is Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury's *'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'*.

*Handa's Surprise* has many features that can be used effectively in the classroom. It features children from the Luo tribe of south-west Kenya. The joke of the story is entertaining, and bears repeated reading with younger children.

- **Vocabulary:** the names of the fruits are introduced on the pages before the title page, and the animals involved are on the last two pages, after the end of the story. Some of these may be unfamiliar to students. Before reading, the fruits can be introduced by having real examples, or plastic versions, and pictures/video footage can provide introduction to the animals.
- **Noun groups:** each fruit is described using appropriate adjectives to building simple and appropriate noun groups – 'soft yellow banana', tangy purple passionfruit' – with both familiar and some extended vocabulary. These provide clear models for students to develop their own, paying attention to the characteristics of the article they are describing.
- **Verb groups:** the illustrations and text provide contrasting story lines.
  - Thinking verbs: The text of the story is Handa's thinking as she makes her way to the village, predicting the response of her friend. Thinking verbs can be introduced and taught – *think, reflect, predict, hope, consider, wish, anticipate*, etc. Handa is *unaware* of what is happening around her as she is concentrating so hard. At the end, Handa and Akeyo are both *surprised, shocked, delighted, amazed*.
  - Action verbs: The illustrations provide the second storyline, where the action is. Each animal appears and removes a fruit from the basket – *removes, steals, takes, sneaks*. The key incident with the goat can be described.
- **Innovation on the text:** examples include Mum or Dad in the ute with a variety of foods for the stock in the back; Mum or Dad's shopping trolley with a child putting items in, unknown to the parent.



- Opportunities for acting out the story: This makes a great performance piece. A script can be developed with the students. Each page can be easily adapted to direct speech for Handa – *Will Akeyo like the spiky-leaved pineapple? Or will she like the ...* etc as Handa crosses the performance space. Other children play the part of the animals. This is where the comparison of action and thinking verbs can be brought out for the students.



## Being creative

I have picked up Goosebumps books for \$2.50 at Aldi. These may not be to every child's taste, but their reading by children can become a fad. Like many series, they are sometimes of dubious or limited intellectual or literary value. **DO NOT READ THESE BOOKS TO YOUR STUDENTS.** They are designed for students' own reading. So encourage it – they make excellent practice for your developing readers.

But we cannot leave our students with what they can read easily. Your skill and knowledge of texts means that you can be ready to provide the more 'nutritious' alternatives when they get

tired of the current fad. The books you read to your students must be more difficult than the ones they can read themselves, and the school's librarian and stocks of library books will ensure an increasing complexity of texts as your students build their increasingly complex reading skills.

One example of how to move early readers on from such 'fun' reading (and reading should be fun!) was demonstrated by a Year 4 teacher I knew. The kids were reading Goosebumps books constantly. While literary texts were being used and modelled and drawn upon for learning about text, the kids simply would not let the Goosebumps books go. With so many volumes in school bags and under desks, the teacher decided to meet the challenge head on. He cleared the window sill shelf, which ran the length of the room. He set the class the challenge of filling the shelf with as many Goosebumps books as they could read. Time was allowed for 'free' reading in class to help meet the challenge.

It lasted several weeks. At the end, the students were over it. The formulaic *Setting > Complication > Build to terrifying climax > Resolution – or not* became transparent and tedious.

The relief of reading texts with an extended vocabulary, in stories that encompassed a less anxious reality, meant that the quality and tone of the discourse and learning around books and reading became rich. The rest of the year's in-class reading had a strong baseline for a measure of quality.

## Where does it fit?

These activities sit firmly in the NSW English syllabus K-10:

### *Responding and composing*

*In the English K–10 Syllabus, the study of English is an active pursuit where students use language to learn about language. The key processes of responding to and composing texts are central to students using language purposefully and meaningfully and **engaging with a wide range of texts.***



*‘Responding’ is the activity that occurs as students read, listen to or view texts. It encompasses the personal and intellectual connection a student makes with texts. It also recognises that students and the texts to which they respond reflect social contexts.*

*Responding typically involves:*

- *identifying, comprehending, selecting, articulating, imagining, critically analysing and evaluating.*

**NSW English Syllabus** (emphasis added)

## References and resources

Australia Post: <https://australiapostcollectables.com.au/articles/australian-legends-of-childrens-literature> accessed 02/03/2019

Better Reading: <https://www.betterreading.com.au/kids-ya/happy-30th-birthday-dear-bear/> viewed 02/03/2018

NSW Board of Studies (2012) NSW English Syllabus K-10 at <http://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10>

Storyline Online at <https://www.storylineonline.net/> accessed 202/03/2019