

## Reading aloud



One of the easiest and most effective ways of raising reading levels and interest, and other aspects of literacy in your classroom is to try to read at least six times a day to your students.

The neat descriptions of literacy behaviours in the [ACARA Literacy Learning Progression](#) (2017) make it easy to observe and identify the changes that can result from this practice. It would be a perfect action research project for a teacher keen to see effective literacy in practice.

### Why should we read to our students?

Our students don't necessarily know what reading sounds like.

*When a child has little or no experience with books, it is impossible for him [sic] to have a concept of them and the pleasure they afford.*

Trelease, 2013 p.36

For students who are not read to at home, who do not see or hear any other text than narrative at school, there can be gaping holes where literacy experience and learning should be.

Students need the models of text we can provide as expert readers to be able to apply their own understandings.

We often read a text as part of the reading lesson, to teach book knowledge, conventions of written text, word level analysis, and at a whole text level. These are all important as our students develop knowledge and mastery of the conventions and structures to use in their own writing.

But these must not be the only reasons to read to our students.

Text is about making meaning, and making it accessible to others. Every author has a message to a reader or listener. Each message is unique.

## **Who should we read to?**

All students can appreciate and use the learning that being read to makes accessible.

*The first reason to read aloud to older kids is to consider the fact that a child's reading level doesn't catch up to his listening level until about the eighth grade*

Trelease in Korby, 2013

All students in NSW schools K-6 are required to:

*read, listen to and view a variety of texts that are appropriate to their needs, interests and abilities. These texts become increasingly sophisticated as students move from Kindergarten to Year 6.*

BOS Syllabus English p.24

We know and work with the reading skills of our students. That's fine in reading lessons. But, as Trelease points out, students can understand a lot of text that they may not be able to read for

themselves. We can open the world of increasingly sophisticated and engaging texts for our students to aspire towards, by reading them to our students

- *Across a stage of learning, the selection of texts must give students experience of:*
- *texts which are widely regarded as quality literature*
- *a widely defined Australian literature, including texts that give insights into Aboriginal experiences in Australia*
- *a wide range of literary texts from other countries and times, including poetry, drama scripts, prose fiction and picture books*

BOS Syllabus English p.24

This variety may not be included in the first choices our students take from the library shelves to read for themselves. We can make the unfamiliar and challenging accessible.



## What do we read?

**Poetry:** The rhythm, the rhyme, the ballads, the perfection of the haiku, all support the listener, and the reader, to make meaning, and to appreciate the richness of the English language (as well as meeting syllabus outcomes).

- Explore modern Australian and international poets.
- Avoid the ditty and the jingle – they have their place but they are not poetry.
- Poems work at numerous levels of meaning and language use, and utilises those features of figurative language that we may even find difficult ourselves.

**Novels:** Every class ‘does’ a novel. This is often linked to areas of study, such as about World War 1 around ANZAC Day.

- We can also read for the sheer pleasure of the story and the adventures of its protagonists.
- Explore the classics.
- Don’t read the books your students can easily read themselves unless you know your own reading will help with insights and understandings.
- Be wary of the early ‘chapter’ books that have more than half of each page as a blackline image, and simple, spoken text. These are perfect for children learning to read for themselves.

Our role is to show our students where reading can take us.

**Fables and myths:** These classic tales hold truths and insights into the human condition, reflecting our best and worst characteristics – Greek, Australian Aboriginal, Indian, Norse, Roman stories, such as Midas and his golden touch, Icarus and flying too close to the sun, Tiddalik and his greed, Narcissus and his vanity, Aesop’s tales of the dangers of greed, avarice and jealousy.

These are short, too, so are easily included in the day’s activities.

**Non-fiction:** Model the reading of factual texts of every type. Provide a copy to each student if it is something complex, or if there is interesting formatting. Our students need to hear what the reading sounds like so they can apply it when they are reading for themselves.

## Reading aloud to explore who we are

Cultural references are important to members of any social group. We build our sense of social and cultural identity through references that are based on shared texts and experiences. This can be through TV commercials like the classic ‘[Louie the Fly](#)’, to the [Logies](#) and all they represent, to the latest flavour of the month TV show that everyone is watching, and to the most popular people on Instagram this week.

But at school we are more than that.

Literature has its place here – Roald Dahl and his iconic characters, Shakespeare’s songs, Harry and Hermione and Ron, Lochie Leonard, Abel in Winton’s ‘Blueback’, Leslie Burke, Peter and Susan and Edwin and Lucy, Max and his monsters – these characters and situations help to build our students’ knowledge of who they are and how they fit into this world.

Non-fiction has its place. Signs and symbols, metaphors and representations.

*You have to hear it before you can speak it, and you have to speak it before you can read it.  
Reading at this level happens through the ear.*

Trelease in Korby, 2013

Postscript:

Mr Reid was my Year 5 teacher. I remember nothing of the other learning that must have happened that year, but he read poetry to us as a regular part of our daily activities, and much of it has stayed.

Lawson’s [Ballad of the Drover](#), where we met young Harry Dale and his tragic end; Coleridge’s [Rime of the Ancient Mariner](#), (it took years before I understood the pun of the ‘rime’); [The](#)



**Highwayman**, by Alfred Noyes and the courage of Bess as she saved her lover; an introduction to Slessor's **Five Visions of Captain Cook**; passionate hymns to Australia and the bush by Henry Kendall (**Bell Birds**), Judith Wright, Dorothea Mackellar and Kath Walker.

Thanks Mr Reid.

## References

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Trelease, J. (2013) The Read-Aloud Handbook (7th Edition) Penguin Books: New York HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

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