



Reading to your students

A principal friend insists on teachers at her school starting the year working up to reading to their students six times a day.

If every teacher in every classroom read aloud to their students this frequently, students would hear thirty pieces of text in a week. That's 1360 over a 42 week year, and nine and a half thousand models of reading over the seven years of primary school. 'There's not enough time' is always the cry.

Reading a piece of text that's 12 lines long, with about 12 words in each line, takes less than a minute. The equivalent of spending 6-10 minutes a day, 50 minutes a week, shows our students why reading is such an amazing skill.

It really doesn't take a lot of time, considering its value.

1. Learning how reading sounds – text becomes more accessible when we know how different kinds of writing work. This is useful for students' own reading experiences later.



2. Discovering what print can do – the squiggles on the page are more than isolated collections of sounds; the listener can hear characters speak, experience events and emotions, enjoy word play, explore the obtaining of information, and follow patterns of thought.
3. Broadening knowledge and thinking - the listener is exposed to the development of ideas that may never have been considered before. New texts and ideas provide opportunity to reconsider and reframe thinking, to build their own knowledge and understanding of the world. More ‘hooks for new learning’, the things children already know, are created. (Mackenzie 2019)
4. Hearing language that is too hard to read – new vocabulary and concepts are embedded in context that is engaging and relevant, with opportunity for clarifying talk. Students can engage with text that may always be out of their reach – read skillfully and thoughtfully by a teacher.
5. Stimulating interest – the reading of a segment from a text can provide enough impetus for a student to tackle the whole text.
6. Sharing experience – there is great satisfaction to be had in the achievement of participating in the physical and emotional adventures of a story’s hero. The power of collaborative thinking is demonstrated when solving a mathematical challenge, working through a scientific text together to get to meaning and significance, or reading a map to find the way home. Based on Chambers 1992 pp 53-57

Do

- Enjoy the reading. If you are not confident, practise the text before reading to the students.
- Choose texts that are highly engaging, which ‘communicate substantive ideas and give students a lot to think about’ (Burkins & Yaris 2016 p.50). Librarians help here.
- Read many different types of text. Each has its own reading characteristics – a poem can be read with flourish and drama, a scientific inquiry topic may need re-reading for clarification; a graph, map or timetable could require both hands to navigate; a magazine article can include interpretation of an illustration.
- Focus on the appreciation of the content of the text. This is not the time for instruction.



- Set up a structure for responding to texts. At points in the text, or at the end, ask students what they are thinking, and get them to share with a talking 'buddy'. Share thoughts to develop ideas, and to help with making connections and implicit meanings.
- 'Re-purpose' texts by using them as source material in subjects other than English, as examples of literary devices, as models for writing.
- Give your students a copy of the text for a re-reading. Use short poems for handwriting – demonstrate the letter shapes and construction. Students can create an anthology in a term.

Don't

- Start with six texts. Work up to that number. One or two to begin with is fine. Re-reading is OK too.
- Expect to get it all happening smoothly from the start. You need to get used to having a number of texts ready to read, and to know when in the day to read them. Your students will take time to get used to your reading too. Some won't be as successful as others.
- Be unprepared. Choose books or short pieces of text that illustrate something you want to share. This may be part of a particular topic, or a description that has a feature or quality you admire. It might be just something that you notice is interesting. Build a 'bank' of texts to share.
- Read without enthusiasm. If you don't care about the text, it will show.
- Rush. Take extra time to talk about ideas worth sharing.
- Use gimmicky texts. You are modelling the reading of strong texts with important ideas.
- Use really difficult texts. You should be able to concentrate on the reading and the ideas, and your students' thinking. You don't have time to spend on detailed explanations.

The *Australian Curriculum*: English F-6's Literature strand provides the structure to support our students F-6 as they learn about text:

Sub-strand: Expressing preferences and evaluating texts

Expressing personal preference for different texts and types of texts, and identifying the features of texts that influence personal preference

Australian Curriculum: Sequence of content p.9



When we are spending as little as 50 minutes a week and our students have the potential to access nine and a half thousand modelled texts, expertly read over their primary years, there will be plenty for them to choose from, to be able to express their personal preferences.

For you and your students – get in quick!

Book it in – Australian Reading Hour Thursday 19 September 2019

(NSW Department of Education) *Secretary Mark Scott said Australian Reading Hour and other activities such as the Premier’s Reading Challenge and Book Week helped young people discover the joy of reading and could contribute to improved literacy.*

“Grab a book and make a special time to just relax and read,” Mr. Scott said. “Reading can take you into different worlds.”

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/announcements/book-it-in-australian-reading-hour-is-coming>

References

ACARA (2015) Australian Curriculum www.australiancurriculum.com.au December 2015 v8.1 at https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/English_-_Sequence_of_content.pdf accessed 16/09/2019

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