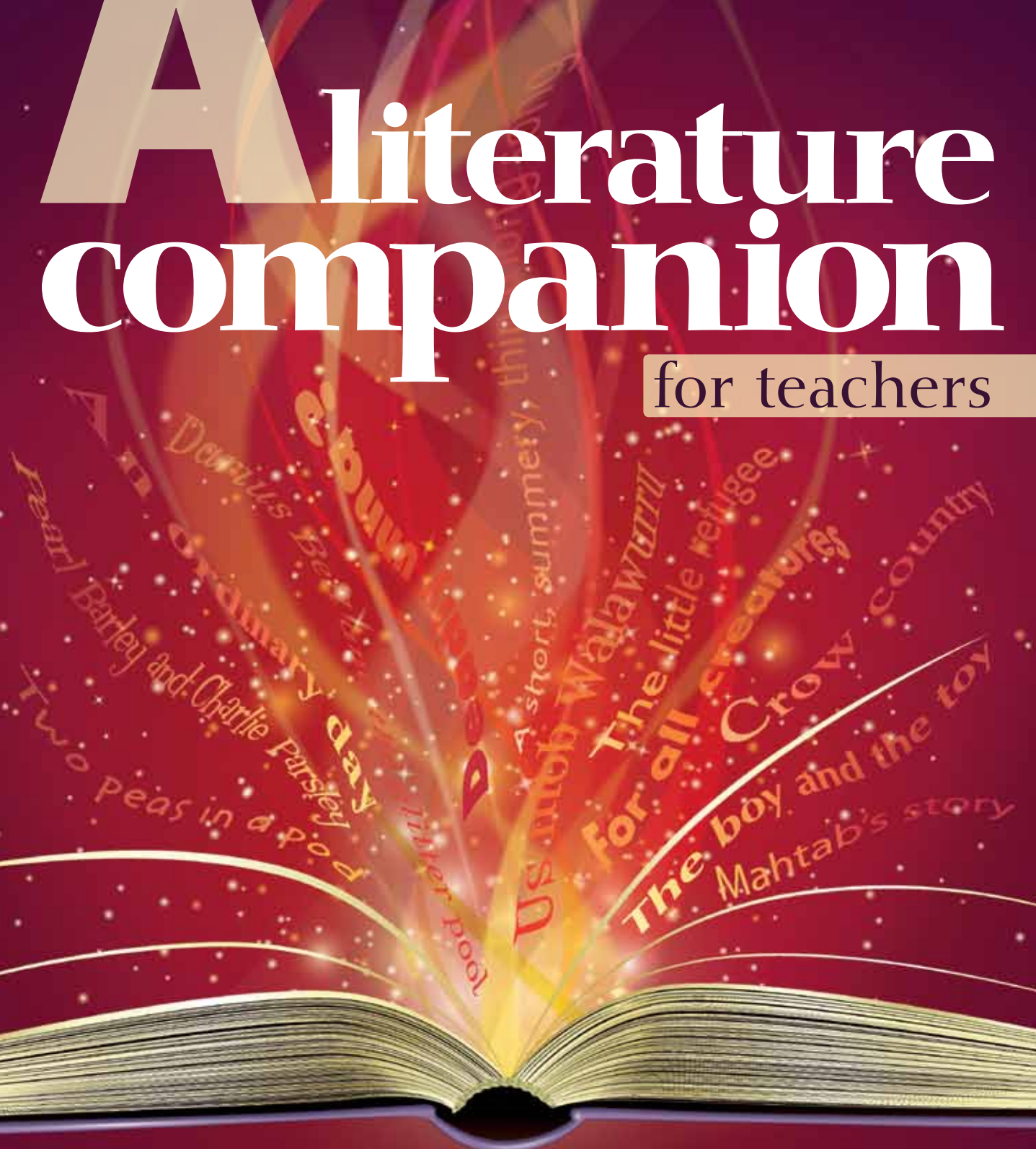


A literature companion

for teachers



Lorraine McDonald

A literature companion

for teachers

Lorraine McDonald

Contribution by Maureen Walsh



Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the students I have taught at Australian Catholic University, Sydney Campus. I learned so much from your questions, challenges, and responses. This book is the result of everything you all taught me.

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Foreword

A companion is someone who travels with you; a guide who has gone before and therefore knows how to prepare you for the journey and what to highlight on the way. This companion text shows you the way to travel in the literary landscape, providing signposts so you look around with increased awareness but also stepping back so you can make your own discoveries. It sets high expectations of its readers but offers practical advice to pre-service and in-service teachers, to support them in their independent explorations of classic, current and future literary forms. Written by an academic who speaks with the authority of many years of experience working with pre-service teachers in Australia, the US and the UK, the book offers a clear lens through which the reader can view a familiar scene and see things differently.

The text is supported by a strong theoretical framework and a logical rationale that underpin not just every word but the order in which the chapters appear. The structure of the text is meticulously planned to lead the reader along a pathway of learning about literature that is challenging as much as it is rewarding. Readers are reminded first and foremost to read literature for enjoyment, for wonder, and then to reread it to appreciate the skills that authors and illustrators employ to create literary texts. Education systems round the world that trumpet the importance of standardised testing would suggest that, as wonder and enjoyment cannot be measured, they should not be valued. This author knows better than to fall for such a hollow version of what learning to read is about. Here is a book that understands the imperative of teaching children to read for reading's sake as much as for what it can teach about reading and writing. It is an important book that aligns itself with current curriculum standards and the four resources model of reading, but, due to the socio-cultural philosophy that runs through its veins, the book also positions teachers to see literature in its rightful context as impacting on students' lives – not just their hours in school.

The titles featured in the book are predominately Australian, whether they are picture books or novels or poetry. The author chose them deliberately, to showcase the wealth of literature that teachers may select from to meet the requirement for students to read Australian literature and acknowledge their literary heritage. Driven by the author's extensive knowledge of the linguistic constructions of meaning, there is a heavy focus on language as well as literature in the analysis of text samples and the exercises set for readers to complete. Most chapters include some commentary that points back to the Beverly Derewianka text, *A new grammar companion for teachers*. When partnered with a selection of literature the two texts will work in tandem to inform any teaching/learning sequence and plans for units of work. For while many templates and scaffolds have been presented in the book, as exercises for the reader to try out ideas, the strength of the learning will be best realised when the reader takes a concept from the companion and applies it to a book they wish to teach.

The inclusion of literature as a strand in the *Australian Curriculum: English* has provided the impetus for all teachers to include a focus on literature in their planning. *A literature companion for teachers* provides them with the handbook they need to achieve this. The introduction of the text states that the book is intended as 'a reference book to enhance practising and pre-service teachers' knowledge about how literature may be responded to, examined, analysed and created'. These words do not do the book justice. It is an important book that is almost encyclopedic in its attempt to cover narrative theory, literary genre, curriculum strands, poetry, linguistic analysis and text construction, response theory, visual literacy, e-literature and more. For each of these topics, literary texts form the basis of discussion so the reader is constantly reminded that good teaching must be underpinned by the reading of quality literature.

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Literature for children and young adolescents

1

Introduction

The young of birds are fed with the blossoms of trees whereas the young of humans are fed with words.
Samoan saying

The *Australian Curriculum: English* defines literature this way:

The term 'literature' refers to past and present texts across a range of cultural contexts that are valued for their form and style and are recognised as having enduring or artistic value. While the nature of what constitutes literary texts is dynamic and evolving, they are seen as having personal, social, cultural and aesthetic value and potential for enriching students' scope of experience.

Texts, Content structure, *Australian Curriculum: English*

The value of narrative

Literature and narrative hold privileged positions in our educational culture. Narrative's importance to human life is captured in the well-known observation that narrative is 'a primary act of mind' (Hardy, 1977). It is through narratives, Hardy argues that we live our lives: 'For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative ... we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future' (p. 13). Hardy contends that narrative is the core of our lived experience, our human way of knowing who we are.

French literary theorist and philosopher, Roland Barthes, affirms the primacy of narrative this way:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation ... Narrative is present in every age, every place, every society; it begins with the very history of mankind ... it is simply there, like life itself ...

Barthes, 1977, p. 79

Here, the narrative form is seen to permeate every aspect of our lives, in words, images and speech – and has always been inherent to our human nature from the beginning of human history.

Narrative re-imagines the world for young people and, in so doing, suggests ways of thinking about the attitudes, values and beliefs of the culture presented in the text. Clare Bradford, an Australian scholar, examines what kind of society, behaviours and attitudes our contemporary narratives are imagining for the future. Her studies (2007, 2008) reveal that many stories around race and immigration reproduce Anglocentric and colonial beliefs and attitudes, which become naturalised and normal ways of thinking in contemporary children's literature. Narratives have the power to be subtle game-changers in how the beliefs and attitudes they espouse contribute to the ways young people form their identities; teaching awareness of how narratives re-imagine the world is crucial to the way literature is approached for Australia's future citizens.

Other Australian scholars such as Alyson Simpson have highlighted the need for being 'excited about reading', which encompasses much more than 'learning to read' (2008, p. 6). She states, 'the effect of ... staged learning [as in reading programs] is that it kills enthusiasm for reading' (2008, p. 6). Students need to choose and read a wide range of quality literary texts and, when supported by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable adult, the learning to read and reading excitement will merge, as this is 'how texts teach what readers learn' (Meek, 1988, p. 1). However, as Maureen Walsh reminds us, today's digital technologies create 'the challenge of maintaining students' motivation to continue to read books and to engage in sustained reading of ... literature' (2011, p. 7).

In Australia, as in other Western nations, the narrative form is one of the text types that students learn to compose from a very early age, despite being the most complex of text types for young people to write. The comparatively simple narrative structure students are asked to follow is intended to support developing writers to use language in imaginative ways. While the simple structure is evident in quality narrative/literary texts, the structure is somewhat reductive when equated to the nuanced complexities of an award-winning novel or picture book for young people. When teachers share quality narratives with their students they offer models for what is possible and together they can consider how the writing techniques and language use offers insights into what counts as a quality story.

It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations – something that will help them make sense of their own lives and encourage them to reach out toward people whose lives are quite different from their own.

Paterson (1995)

The teacher's role

Literature has always been used as reading material in Australian schools and teachers are the interpretative authority on the literary text – the literature is filtered through the way teachers talk about it. Teachers mediate the text to their students and shape it through the kinds of questions they ask. Longstanding Australian research points to

teachers' 'running commentary' (Luke, de Castell & Luke, C 1983, p. 118) – meaning that the text is interpreted to students in particular ways, whether intended or not. Typically, students are 'asked to look through the text into the story, and through talk into the world' (Baker, 1991, p. 176). Thus both the literary text and students' own knowledge of the world become resources for their interpretative responses (Heap, 1985).

Guided talk about books is an important strategy for teachers to develop comprehension of literary texts. Daly (2012) notes the need for frequent opportunities for 'talk around text' to enable students to understand structural connections within texts, leading to comprehension of more complex reading material (also see Munro 2011; Lemke, 1988; Chambers, 1985). Daly's (2011) research has found significant correlations between the amount of complexity in students' spoken language and their reading comprehension scores.

One way of thinking about guided talk is as a literary conversation. Conversations can be teacher-led class discussion, or peer-led as in literature circles (Daniels, 1994, 2002; Day, 2003; <<http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/bookzone/rdrcl.html>>). In good conversations participants take up another's comment and develop the topic or challenge the remark, so asking general questions about the scene, the chapter, the page of a picture book is one way of getting started. For example, inquiring if students were puzzled by any aspect and/or if they can see any patterns in the text (Chambers, 1994) usually arouses interest, focuses students' attention and includes their opinions without using the more obvious 'What did you like/dislike about the story' question. More specific questions can seek references to similar texts, probe features of the literature, and draw attention to the language of the text. Developing quality 'book talk' in the classroom will take time but with consistent opportunities to discuss literature students will gradually become a community of readers. This book suggests multiple ways of guiding focused literature discussions.

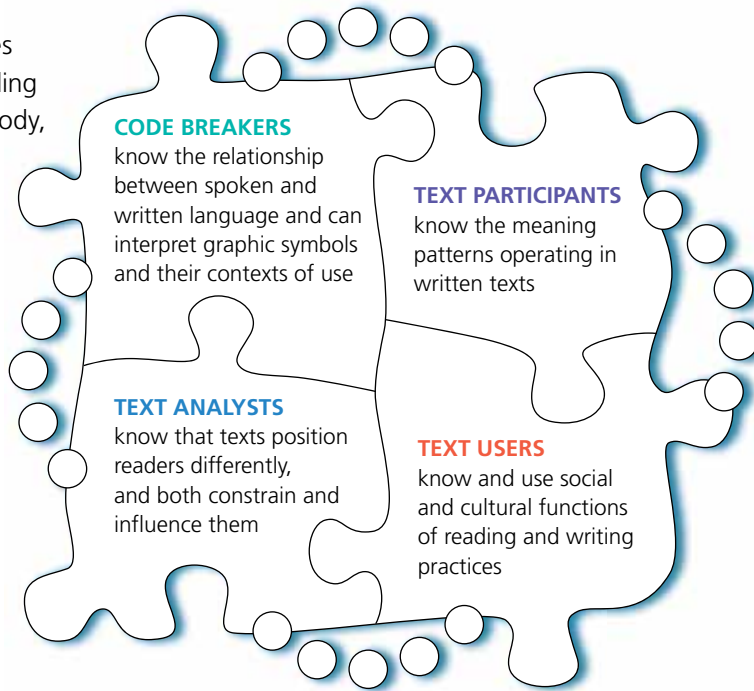
Becoming a community of readers means that students learn to listen to each other and build on each other's responses, so their understanding of the text grows richer and more comprehensive as the book talk continues. If teachers focus on the unique qualities of the literary text they can support students in their awareness of context, in their responses, in their examination of the text, and in techniques for creating their own texts. Research has found that young students respond positively to an awareness of narrative strategies, the use of language and the (often subtle) contexts and discourses of history, culture, race, society and gender that are present (McDonald, 1999). This focus on talk around the text promotes enriched comprehension, enjoyment of what the story 'means' and an admiration for how these meanings are crafted by the writer.

'Four Resources' model of reading

The 'Four Resources' model of reading offers a valuable framework for how teachers may broaden the kinds of questions and tasks they engage students in, with literary texts. This model is well reported so only a very brief overview will be given here. Figure 1.1 on page 4 indicates the nature of the model as 'inter-related and independent' (Luke & Freebody, 1999, in Healy & Honan (2004)).

Figure 1.1

Four Resources
model of reading
(Luke & Freebody,
1999)



The metaphor of a jigsaw represents well the intention of its authors: readers may take up these individual ways of reading but they will need to take up the other reading practices as well, to gain full meaning. For example, a focus on breaking the code of the text (identification of letters, sounds, words, phrases, literary elements etc) will not, by itself, be sufficient to comprehend the text's patterns of meaning (text participant), or its social purpose and use (text user), or the ways of thinking about the world that it embeds (text analyst). For Luke and Freebody the model is 'a map of possible practices' (Luke & Freebody, 1999), which, crucially, can be applied 'to literacy educators' reading of their own classroom practice' (Freebody, 1997). In other words, teachers can reflect on their pedagogy with such questions as: 'Which of these "jigsaw pieces"/ways of teaching do I favour? Which "jigsaw piece"/teaching focus do I "lose"/forget about/ignore? How can I ensure I incorporate all the "jigsaw pieces"/reading practices in my work with literature?'

There is much application of this model available in teacher resource texts, for example, the PETAA publication *Text next New resources for literacy learning* (Healey & Honan, 2004). Online and various State Curriculum resources give good explanations and related tasks; some Australian sites that provide more information are listed below:

Further notes on the Four Resources model

<http://www.readingonline.org/research/lukefreebody.html>

Making sense of literacy

<http://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/53>

MyRead Strategies for teaching reading in the middle years

<http://www.myread.org/what.htm>

The Australian Curriculum: English

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English>

The *Australian Curriculum: English v3.0* states in its **Rationale** that it ‘helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience’. One of its **Aims** is to ensure that students ‘develop interest and skills in inquiring into the aesthetic aspects of texts, and develop an informed appreciation of literature’.

To achieve this, the Content Structure of English is organised into three interrelated strands:

Language: knowing about the English language

Literature: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature

Literacy: expanding the repertoire of English usage.

While these strands are listed as separate domains, success in one strand one cannot be achieved without engaging both other strands in the teaching/learning experiences. This is apparent in the sub-strands, presented below in Table 1.1 from the curriculum:

Language (code ACELA)	Literature (code ACELT)	Literacy (code ACELY)
Language variation and change	Literature and context	Texts in context
Language for interaction	Responding to literature	Interacting with others
Text structure and organisation	Examining literature	Interpreting, analysing and evaluating
Expressing and developing ideas	Creating literature	Creating texts
Sound and letter knowledge		

This book focuses on the centre strand, Literature, which is positioned as the link between Language and Literacy. Each strand has a code, as displayed above. As the Literature sub-strands are examined in this book, integration with the Language and Literacy strands will be evident in the way that the literary texts are approached and in the kinds of tasks that are suggested. The **language processes** of listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing are inherent in all the tasks, linking the language modes to the Literature strand.

The teaching content for each year level – **Foundation to Year 10** – is made explicit in **Content Descriptions** for each sub-strand: ‘These describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and processes that teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn, but do not prescribe approaches to teaching’. More specific information is contained in the **Elaborations** that are matched to each Content Description to ‘illustrate and exemplify content and assist teachers in developing a common understanding of the content descriptions’.

Explicit links to the Literature Content Descriptions and Elaborations across the Year levels F–8 are made throughout this book. Look for the blue boxes in each chapter, which suggest Content Descriptions relevant to the specific focus (though not all options could be included and I have attempted to avoid repetition). The Content Descriptions are presented in their code form, with a sub-strand number to indicate the specific Content Descriptor followed by the Year to which each applies. For example, the three codes below are listed as useful Content Descriptions for working with synonyms when building vocabulary (Chapter 8):

ACELA1512 Y5 *Australian Curriculum: English: Language Content Description 1512, Year 5*

ACELT1581 Y1 *Australian Curriculum: English: Literature Content Description 1581, Year 1*

ACELY1650 F *Australian Curriculum: English: Literacy Content Description 1650, Foundation*

The codes can be typed into the search tab on the Australian Curriculum website and the details will appear, with the Elaborations for that Content Description. Some Elaboration codes have also been included as references.

What this book is about

This book is intended as a reference book to enhance practising and pre-service teachers' knowledge about how literature may be responded to, examined, analysed and created. It presents literary writing as both an 'art' and a 'craft' and explores aspects of the 'craft' of writers' 'artistry'. The book takes the *Australian Curriculum: English* as a starting point and offers explanations, interpretations and examples for each of its four Literature strands, as well as exploring related aspects such as poetry, picture books and digital narratives. Each chapter presents exemplars of quality literature, offers models for teaching the literary content and ideas for student tasks. The student tasks emphasise cooperative 'book talk', seeking evidence from the text: across the chapters there is a consistent focus on how language constructs meanings in texts.

Chapter 2, *Types of literary texts*, is a general look at the different potentials of literary texts, including innovative texts such as graphic novels and manga. Using picture books and novels as resources, a range of literary genres is explained, highlighting their unique characteristics. In Chapter 3, *Literature and context*, ways of analysing historical, cultural and social contexts draw on aspects of critical theory and are demonstrated with reference to literary excerpts. In Chapter 4, *Responding to literature*, well-established research is applied to observe some of the strategies writers employ to involve their audience. In Chapter 5, *Examining literature*, the particular elements that give literature its distinctive structure are highlighted with literary examples.

Creating literature is explored across Chapters 6, 7 and 8, where some specific techniques for understanding grammatically i) how dialogue constructs relationships (Chapter 6), ii) how description is constructed (Chapter 7) and iii) how to build vocabulary (Chapter 8) are examined. The writing of successful authors is studied as a

model for teachers to guide students towards developing their own creative writing. The grammar is explicitly unpacked to examine how the authors have constructed these aspects of their literary texts.

Chapter 9, *Cross-curriculum priorities and literature for young people*, surveys groups of literary texts that can be integrated into the three cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' histories and culture, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. How literary texts have changed their focus towards these priorities across the eras highlights current issues and opens up opportunities for discussion, especially in identifying ways of thinking in these priorities.

Using figurative language in literature is the focus of Chapter 10. It is intended as a glossary where different types of figurative language are explained and demonstrated with excerpts from narratives. Chapter 11, *Poetry*, displays examples of some different poetic techniques. The chapter suggests ways of approaching poetry that helps tease out the language that is evidence for the poet's use of imagination, projection of emotion and the poem's complexity. *Reading and viewing picture books* is the emphasis in Chapter 12. Simple ways of noting the relationship between the verbal and visual – the multimodal – features of a picture book, and their combined contribution to making meaning is presented. How illustrations make their impact is identified through adapting and applying a widely used set of criteria (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to examples. Finally, the most recent form of literary texts, *Literature in a digital environment*, is the focus of Chapter 13, not as an afterthought, but because it draws on knowledge presented in the previous chapters. Written by my colleague Maureen Walsh, it surveys what counts as quality digital narratives and explains features of this constantly changing environment.

The book is intended as a 'Companion' for teachers to revisit and clarify particular points with relevant examples of questions and tasks, though it is not by any means a 'Compendium', that is, a 'complete' response to all aspects of literature. It is intended to provide definitions and explanations based on the demands of the new *Australian Curriculum: English*. It is intended as an overview of what counts as literature and what may contribute to the development of students' learning in this field. It is intended to introduce, or re-introduce, a focus on how writers' deploy language to move readers towards particular ways of thinking. It is intended to inspire teachers to try some new approaches.

I am also sure that I have unknowingly omitted ideas that would be useful. The paths I have taken have been influenced by my love of language and my delight in each new discovery of how writers creatively construct meaning through grammatical relationships. This attention to language is my way of making explicit what is often an implicit understanding of how literary texts work. For those not of a literary 'bent', I hope that the book offers practical insights into how literature is created and into the joy of discovering the artistry in the crafted quality literary texts teachers read with their students. For those who are lovers of literature I hope that the book offers some fresh ways of welcoming the next generation into richer awareness and a lifelong pleasure in literary texts.

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For ease of location, these references are in three groups: Professional references, Web references and Literature references.

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A Literature Companion for teachers is an essential reference for practicing and pre-service teachers who want to explore literature with their students. Based on the *Australian Curriculum: English's* Literature strand and sequence, the book presents comprehensive criteria tables, suggests guided discussion questions and outlines possible teaching tasks. Literary excerpts from a variety of quality picture books and novels are presented as practical examples of contextualising, responding to, examining and creating literary texts. The texts and tasks are appropriate for a range of students, from Foundation to Year 8.

While ***A Literature Companion for teachers*** is based in the Literature strand, the Language strand receives in-depth attention through a focus on how literary language constructs meaning and how literary texts provide models for creating dialogue, description and vocabulary building, with a glossary on figurative language. The Literacy strand is at the core of the book with an emphasis on structured talk around the text, close reading for higher-order comprehension and critical analysis, and guided writing. Cross-Curriculum Priorities are included, presenting literature about and by Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, about Asia and Australia's relationship with Asia, and about Sustainability.

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- how readers respond to literature through their background experiences, authorial gaps in the story and emotions
- literary elements such as setting, characterisation, plot, theme, style, symbols, mood and vocabulary
- approaches to appreciating poetry
- a visual grammar for reading images in picture books
- working with digital narratives.



About the author

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The Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), founded in 1972, is a national professional association supporting primary school educators in the teaching and learning of English and literacies across the curriculum. For more information about PETAA, membership and to view professional learning resources, visit the website.

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