

Using Children's Literature in a literacy rich classroom

Preamble

In a recent address to principals in the South-Western Region, Regional Director, Sharyn Donald reiterated how important it was for children to be able to read independently by the age of eight. (refer to the quote below) There is nothing new in this, it was a fact that underpinned the work of Early Years co-ordinators and teachers in schools from the 1990s. It is refreshing to hear it emphasised again today. Hopefully instructional leaders in schools will recognise the need not only to ensure reading fluency in the early years but also emphasise the need to use quality children's literature to engage students and enrich their lives.

John Hattie in "Visible Learning for Literacy" 2016 states that literacy is important because:

Literacy is among the major antidotes for poverty; literacy makes your life better; literate people have more choices in their work and personal lives; literacy is great at teaching you how to think successfully; and literacy soon becomes the currency of all other learning. If we are to ensure that every child across our region can read independently by the age of 8 years we must do two things: deliver a comprehensive reading program with close monitoring of progress and implement effective interventions.

Sharyn Donald
Regional Director
South-Western Victoria Region
16/03/17

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) recognises literacy as an essential skill for students in becoming successful learners and as a foundation for success in all learning areas. Success in any learning area depends on being able to use the significant, identifiable and distinctive literacy that is important for learning and representative of the content of that learning area.

Australian Curriculum Website: <http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/literacy/introduction/introduction>

In this paper I am

- Highlighting the importance of studying quality literature in the Early Years as well as later primary years and secondary school (Ages 5-8)
- Providing scope and sequence charts for Literature from the Victorian Curriculum F-10 for level 1-3

- Providing an outline of why using classic literature to teach literature in the primary classroom.
- Provide sample unit plans using Blooms taxonomy planning for quality children's literature.

The purpose of studying literature

As well as the explicit teaching of English (Text knowledge, grammar knowledge, word knowledge and visual knowledge and the use of guided reading texts and levelled take home texts) it is important to engage students in reading through the use of quality children's literature.

In the Victorian F-10 Curriculum, Literature is a sub-strand. Within it students are required to:

- learn how events, issues and characters are shaped by the social, historical and culture they inhabit.
- identify personal ideas, opinions and experiences in texts to recognise how conflicts, arise and how mutual agreements can be found through discussion and debate.
- learn how to explain and analyse the ways in which stories, characters, settings and experiences are reflected in particular literary genres, and how to discuss the appeal of these genres. They learn how to compare and appraise the ways authors use language and literary techniques and devices to influence readers. They also learn to understand, interpret, discuss and evaluate how certain stylistic choices can create multiple layers of interpretation and effect.
- learn how to use personal knowledge and literary texts as starting points to create imaginative writing in different forms and genres and for particular audiences. Using print, digital and online media, students develop skills that allow them to convey meaning, address significant issues and heighten engagement and impact.

Studying Literature

The Literature strand aims to engage students in the study of literary texts of personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value. These texts include some that are recognised as having enduring social and artistic value and some that attract contemporary attention. Texts are chosen because they are judged to have potential for enriching the lives of students, expanding the scope of their experience, and because they represent effective and interesting features of form and style. Learning to appreciate literary texts and to create their own literary texts enriches students' understanding of human experiences and the capacity for language to deepen those experiences. It builds students' knowledge about how language can be used for aesthetic ends, to create particular emotional, intellectual or philosophical effects. Students interpret, appreciate, evaluate and create literary texts such as short stories, novels, poetry, prose, plays, film and multimodal texts, in spoken, print and digital/online forms.

The Literature strand also gives students the opportunity to study the processes by which certain literary works become recognised, and why it is that most cultures have works they cherish.

There are many approaches to the study of literature. In the English curriculum, the sources drawn on most substantially include:

- *close reading to develop a critical understanding and appreciation of the aesthetics and intellectual aspects of texts*
- *cultural studies, with emphasis on the different ways in which literature is significant in everyday life*
- *structuralism, with its emphasis on close analysis of literary works and the key ideas on which they are based; for example, the detailed stylistic study of differing styles of literary work*
- *comparativism, with its emphasis on comparisons of works of literature from different language, ethnic and cultural backgrounds*
- *historicism, with its emphasis on exploring the relationships between historical, cultural and literary traditions.*

Studying texts

Texts are the basis for study across the three modes of Reading and Viewing, Writing and Speaking and Listening. Texts can be written, spoken or multimodal, and in print or digital/online forms. Multimodal texts combine language with other means of communication such as visual images, soundtrack or spoken word, as in film or digital media. Texts provide important opportunities for learning about aspects of human experience and about aesthetic value. Many of the tasks that students undertake in and out of school involve understanding and producing imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, media texts, everyday texts and workplace texts.

Texts are drawn from world and Australian literature. They include the oral narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, texts from Asia, texts from Australia's immigrant cultures and texts of the students' choice.

Literature refers to past and present texts from 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. Literature includes a broad range of forms such as novels, poetry, short stories and plays, fiction for young adults and children, multimodal texts such as film, and a variety of non-fiction. Literary texts also include excerpts from longer texts. This enables a range of literary texts to be included within any one level for close study or comparative purposes.

Through the selection of appropriate texts, students develop an awareness and appreciation of, and respect for, the literature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, including storytelling traditions (oral narrative) as well as contemporary literature. Students develop understandings of the social, historical and cultural contexts associated with different uses of language and textual features.

<http://victorianscriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/english/introduction/learning-in-english>

Literature Scope and Sequence

Scope and Sequence available from:

<http://victorianscriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/english/introduction/scope-and-sequence>

Level 1

Creating literature	<i>Creating literary texts</i> Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication <i>Experimentation and adaptation</i> Build on familiar texts by using similar characters, repetitive patterns or vocabulary
Literature and context	<i>Literature and context</i> Discuss how authors create characters using language and images
Responding to Literature	<i>Expressing preferences and evaluating texts</i> Express preferences for specific texts and authors and listen to the opinions of others <i>Personal responses to the ideas characters and viewpoints in texts</i> Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with own experiences
Examining literature	<i>Features of literary texts</i> Discuss features of plot, character and setting in different types of literature and compare some features of characters in different texts <i>Language devices in literary texts</i> Listen to, recite and perform poems, chants, rhymes and songs, imitating and inventing sound patterns including alliteration and rhyme

Level 2

Examining Literature	<p><i>Features of literary texts</i> Discuss the characters and settings of different texts and explore how language is used to present these features in different ways</p> <p><i>Language devices in literary texts</i> Identify, reproduce and experiment with rhythmic, sound and word patterns in poems, chants, rhymes and songs</p>
Creating literature	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i> Create events and characters using different media that develop key events and characters from literary texts</p> <p><i>Experimentation and adaptation</i> Build on familiar texts by experimenting with character, setting or plot</p>
Literature and context	<p><i>Literature and context</i> Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created</p>
Responding to Literature	<p><i>Expressing preferences and evaluating texts</i> Identify aspects of different types of literary texts that entertain, and give reasons for personal preferences</p> <p><i>Personal responses to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts</i> Compare opinions about characters, events and settings in and between texts</p>

Level 3

Examining Literature	<p><i>Features of literary texts</i> Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative <i>Language devices in literary texts</i> Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader's reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose</p>
Creating literature	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i> Create imaginative texts based on characters, settings and events from students own and other cultures including through the use of visual features <i>Experimentation and adaptation</i> Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts</p>
Literature and context	<p><i>Literature and context</i> Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors' reasons</p>
Responding to Literature	<p><i>Personal responses to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts</i> Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others <i>Expressing preferences and evaluating texts</i> Develop criteria for establishing personal preferences for literature</p>

Teaching Classic Literature

What is a *classic*?

Everyone has in his or her mind what a classic book is.

It's a book that contains important messages, vivid characters some of them loved and others loathed, exciting plots, deep insights, history, poetry, imaginative fantasy, and witty satire, surprising twists, unique personalities not found in our real lives, profound meanings and noble spirit.

Classics are irresistible books that you are ready for when you are little, such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, and there are the irresistible classics that you can become ready for later in life such as *Oliver Twist*.

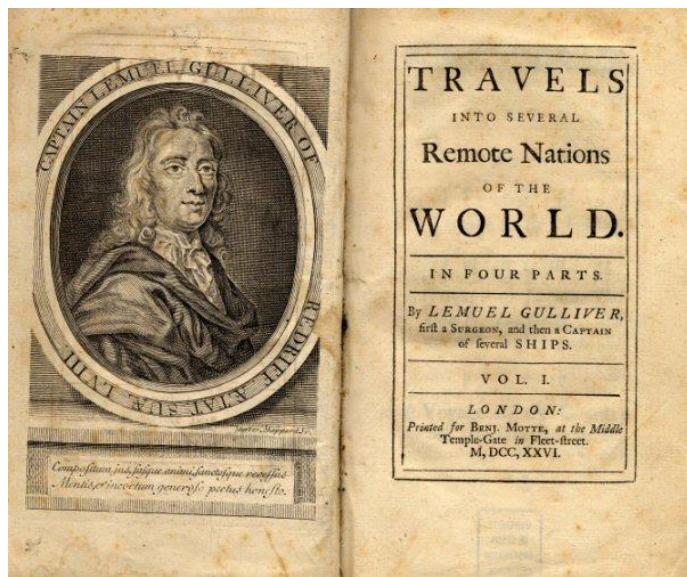
Sometimes these books are easy to read and sometimes they're damn near impossible (Try reading the original version of *Gulliver's Travels*)

Sometimes these books can change you, uplift you, inform you and inspire you.

Everyone knows what a classic is.

Classics are the few books that never vanish. Books vanish off the shelves every day in bookstores and libraries never to be seen again. Classics are seemingly always in print or always accessible. Sometimes they don't vanish because teachers and academics keep ordering them and sometimes it's because the public keeps buying them or because they've been 'discovered' by Hollywood.

The bottom line is that classics are classics because they have a meaning and quality that appeal to readers.



A first edition of Gulliver's Travels.

Intellectual classics such as, *Moby Dick* in the US, *Canterbury Tales* in the UK are a part of our heritage and our legacy to future generations.

To be ignorant of the world's great stories is to rob yourself of enlightenment, the vagaries of human nature as well as its triumphs and it deprives us of the joy or lively

characters and unique settings. Our world is changing so fast that we need to stop and remind ourselves of our own cultural heritage. (Tom Sawyer conning his pals into whitewashing his fence is a charming example of less complicated times. What boy reading that for the first time wouldn't have sniggered and 'tried it on' himself or the kids setting out on a five-day hike by themselves in Eleanor Spence's *Patterson's Track*. What girl wouldn't have seen herself as the hero in that book? Imagine children today setting off on such a perilous trek without an adult!) through classic literature lost worlds and lost civilizations, manners and morals live on. Most classics are complex and profound, far beyond our ability to analyze them completely. It's hard to get to the bottom of a great book. We respond to it in ways we know but also in feelings and ways we can't say. It is difficult to rely on a book's critical reputation when deciding if it is a classic or not.

What do the critics say?

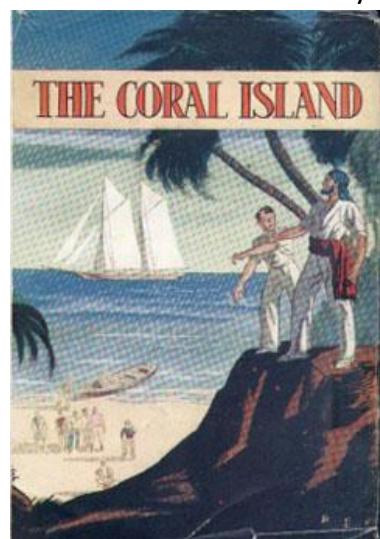
Critical reputation is unsteady and dependent on prejudice, intellectual climate and simply the times in which it is written. Many books have great merit but fail to impress critics (The initial mixed critical response to *Moby Dick* is a good example of this.) Some books are also highly praised and then wither and disappear. (Simply winning a literary award is not a recipe for a non stop print run.)

There are books that have run into critical problems such as, *Lord of the Flies* but continue to be read. I tend to believe that readers have noted a quality in the book that critics have missed. Likewise, critics were high in praise of *The Coral Island* the book that inspired *Lord of the Flies* but today they would say it is corny and contrived. (Children still love it and it can still be bought.)

What critical literature will last the next 100 years? Will *Harry Potter* be read as intensely as it is today or will it only have a niche market or benefit from the occasional nostalgic re-print like the *Wizard of Oz* sequels? If we knew what it was that made a book sell generation after generation we would all quit our jobs and become publishers.

In a sense the conventional wisdom about popularity needs to be looked at carefully. The best sellers are not necessarily the *best sellers*.

Classics are the best sellers! A classic may not be the number one book for a winter, but it may continue to sell for 30, 50 even one hundred or more years, long after that number one paperback and its author are forgotten. (Some books defy my notion of a classic. Enid Blyton's continued success always surprises. I read The first *Famous Five* novel along with *The Railway Children* and *Swallows and Amazons* as part of a classic English Children's literature unit several years ago and I was amazed that the children didn't bat an eyelid when I was reading out 'golly', 'by Jove' and 'I Say old boy'. You can love the classics and promote the classics but that example taught me not to be a 'classics snob'.)



In twenty years of reading classics to children and encouraging them to read them for themselves I have reached the conclusion that children love classics. They generally prefer them to forgettable formula books even though they may have some short-term book club inspired interest.

Using classic literature

Once children are sufficiently exposed to classics they become more comfortable with three-dimensional characters, vividly described settings and richly, textured prose.

These classics loving children delight and expect from their reading – sound ideas, characterization, depth, and complexity, cleverness, stimulating language, originality and meaning. (All the things adults look for in a good book!)

Classics educated children take pride in having read books that the whole world loves. They find quality exciting. They know when a book is worth reading.

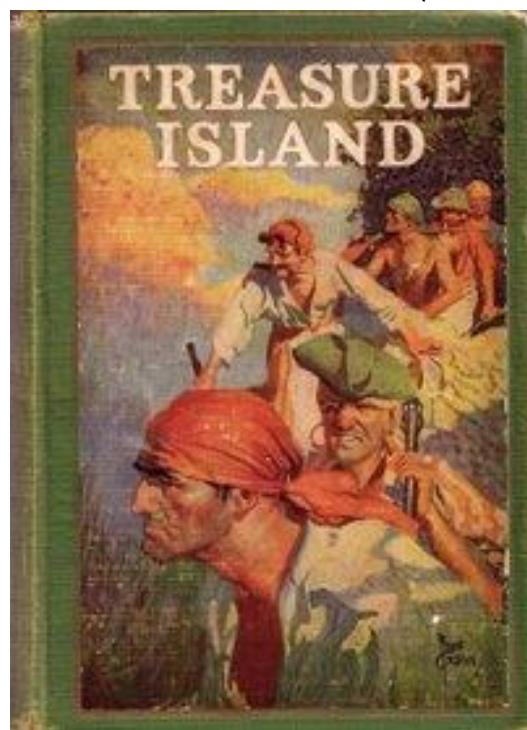
Sometimes children need to be lead to the classics. Publishers in the past packaged their books most unattractively. Children today need a bold statement made on the cover to entice them in but once they read the quality they are hooked. (I found this recently with Lillith Norman's *Climb a Lonely Hill*. The novel I had was tattered and moth-eaten with a dreary 1970s cover illustration but once I started to read it they were engrossed.)

Children are seemingly inherent bibliophiles; even small children love being read to and love their favorites. If adults model the love of good literature, then children should follow suit and imitate that. Teachers and more importantly parents must be readers if they want children to be readers. Sometimes parents and teachers just think that children are not ready for the classics'. *They are books best left to high school or elite readers*. This is nonsense. Having taught in multiage classrooms for nearly 25 years I can comfortably say that children are always receptive to classic literature especially if it is sensitively abridged to make it accessible to them (It should not be sanitized just simplified).

Even then it's hoped that some of the rich language of the original is not totally lost.)

The classics can provide all readers with the greatest gift of all, our magnificent language.

A reader exposed to classic literature can't help but be exposed to a huge vocabulary, at a time when children seem to be coming to school with an increasingly limited vocabulary, exposure to the rich language of the classics is essential. Open *Treasure Island* and let the words sweep over you like the waves on that deadly island itself (you will read words like: accoutrement, acquiescence, disquietude, emissary, obsequious, niggardly, truculent, sojourn and more. Most teachers would need to look them



up with their students. I only wish I could remember to 'drop them into' conversations more often!)

Classics are of course international. They tell of the human spirit and can be told in many languages for many cultures. I have recently been reading classic French literature to my students (*The Three Musketeers*, *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*) all of which became firm favorites.

Children should never be complacent about learning new words and re-discovering old ones. The English language is a wonderful thing when children are encouraged to use it.

Exposure to and encouragement to use intelligent vocabulary is important but more important is the rich ideas contained in classic literature.

Thinking skills are essential in helping children to identify, empathize and learn from the ideas found in books. They need exposure to rich ideas not insipid, homogeneous gruel served up in textbooks, readers compiled by committees, 'celebrity books' or formula books. Some of the greatest and keenest minds in the world have contributed some of the world's greatest literature and the great minds have been inspired by ideas in the classics (John Stuart Mill read Plato) Finely tuned thinking skills are needed to get the most from those keen intellects. (H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Mary Shelley, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Homer were all great thinkers and observers and commentators on the great events and great creations of their time as well as renowned authors of classics.) I believe the teaching of classics and thinking skills goes hand in hand. Why read *Frankenstein* and not brainstorm the role of misfits in our community or alternatively waste your time developing Venn diagrams to compare frivolous uninspiring characters from trashy book club and book store display fodder books.

The classics and thinking skills are inseparable.

We read great literature for a number of reasons. One reason is simply to read a novel to be entertained and educated. We can read a series of books by the one author or variety of authors to gain an appreciation of character progression, style and substance. (Hemingway apparently said that all modern American literature is based on Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.) I tend to teach units of work that contain books that 'compliment' each other and provide wide scope for comparison. (I recently taught a unit on American classics and I'm reading *Tom Sawyer*, *Moby Dick*, *Call of the Wild*, *Red Badge of Courage* and selected stories from Edgar Allan Poe. So far these books are working well together and complimenting each other and providing me with the



opportunity to explore American colonialism, the Civil War and civil rights, life on the Mississippi, and ancient American cultures.)

Contemporary works

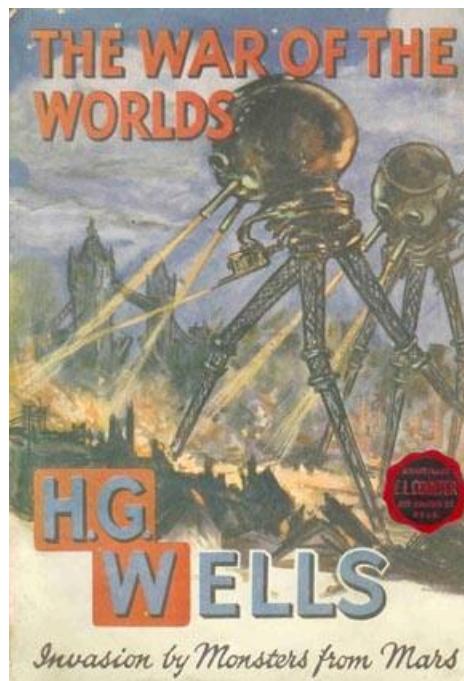
It is important to expose students to contemporary writing. Not every great book was written 100 even 50 years ago (it just seems like it sometimes.)

Teachers should be able to converse with all students about literature. They need to be familiar with *Harry Potter* and the *Series of Unfortunate Events*. Reading the classics as well as current works gives students greater depth of understanding; they can perceive the foreground and the background. To appreciate *Hatchet* it's important to know about *Robinson Crusoe*. To appreciate *The Day of the Triffids* it's useful to have read *War of the Worlds*. To understand *Playing Beatie Bow* it's desirable to have also read *Tom's Midnight Garden* or even *Stig of the Dump*. It's clear that many of these current works are also classics or will become classics in the future.

Reading the classics is the start of a joint pursuit of the truth for students and teachers rather than the endless 'ticking off' of perceived achievements without any identified connection to life and all its richness. The classics can form the background to all our learning.

Teaching Australian Classics

Every year I read a classic Australian novel as part of a theme on Australia. I choose fiction from world-renowned Australian authors such as Colin Thiele, Ivan Southall, Eleanor Spence and many others. I feel it is important for children to learn of their own rich traditions and heritage through classic tales such as *Storm Boy*, *They Found a Cave* and *The February Dragon*. At a time when the bookshops are filled with generic potboilers, pale imitations of other people's work and 'celebrity' written drivel it is important to also expose children to their timeless literary heritage. Sadly, so many of them are out of print but second hand book stores are rich source for them.



Goal of teaching classics

What is the goal of teaching with classic literature? Simply to encourage a love of reading and to use it as the glue that holds all or most of our learning together (Integrated studies)

The classics have proved to be a great motivation for reading in my classes. They encourage the suspension of disbelief (Horror, fantasy and science fiction.) and to trust in original sources. The classics started it all (*The War of the Worlds* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*) Others including Hollywood versions have come later, sometimes much later.

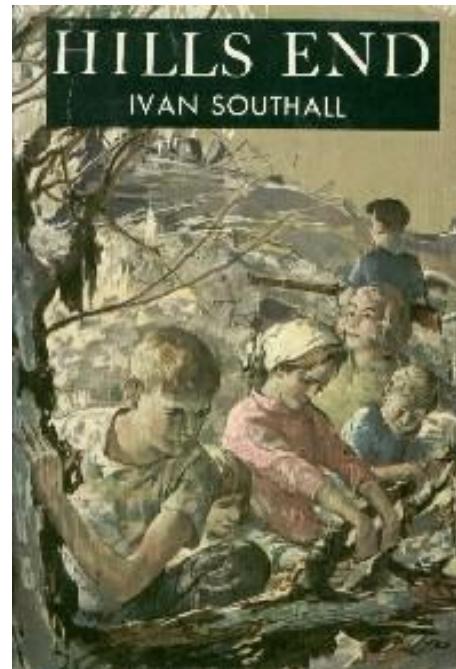
Over the last 20 years I have developed at least 100 literature units comprising 3-5 classic books. The units are determined by genre (Westerns, Science fiction, Mystery etc) Author profiles (Colin Thiele, Robert Louis Stevenson, H.G. Wells etc) or sub-genres / compilations (Classic Science fiction, 'Time Shifting' novels, Mad Scientists) I have collected examples of the classic literature used in the units, either as original texts, abridged texts and increasingly now audio books and graphic novels. Books can be bought new off the shelf, ordered in, bought off the net or often found in libraries gathering dust or at flea markets.

I develop a reading / writing unit using Blooms Revised Taxonomy and encompassing higher order thinking, creativity, selected rich assessment tasks as well as skills required to be taught by the curriculum. The children are given copious opportunities to use the Internet for research, use the library to find other supporting literature or non-fiction as well as the chance to develop their ICT skills in responding to tasks.

As well as reading and writing I attempt to incorporate history, geography, science and technology into an integrated unit. (I.e. in a study of Lilith Norman's *Climb a Lonely Hill* this year we also studied deserts, Australian inland explorers, temperature, Australian native animals, droughts, aboriginal art and bush craft) During the teaching of the unit (usually 5-6 weeks) I read classic literature as a serial every day (I usually have 3 or 4 different versions of the text available for children to also read simultaneously or after I finish) and then we discuss what we've read and respond through a reading or writing activity (Activities can consist of reading comprehension, cloze exercise, word search, crossword, designing an alternative book cover, comparing characters using a Venn diagram, dissecting a scene using a 'Y chart' or writing a sequel. The activities that can be used are only restricted by the teacher's imagination) Sometimes mathematics can also be linked in as well as art and music, science, values, technology and Humanities. Great literature can also be a catalyst for imagination and creativity through art, dance and drama. I try to show children a movie version of the books we're reading, as they are a useful comparison (was the book better than the film? What did they leave out or add in? Was that character or setting the way you imagined it while we were reading the book? etc.)

The children are not restricted in their free reading to just reading the classics. A child who has read all kinds of things will become an adult who can read all kinds of things (I still can't follow a DVD instruction manual) the goal is not to tell people what to read but to empower them to read anything easily enough so that they can make choices.

You can't understand ideas that you have never learned to understand (i.e. racism in *Huckleberry Finn* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) we can make students free and discerning readers by exposing them to all literature including the classics. What better way to encourage



higher order thinking than to read about higher order thoughts and values? Selected rich learning tasks are assessed and the children are graded accordingly (i.e. the children's ability to write a factual piece of writing might be inspired by writing a newspaper story describing the events leading up to and immediately following the flooding of *Hills End* inspired by reading that part of the Ivan Southall novel.) The children's work is laminated and displayed, work samples are put into their 'Show portfolio' and art work or particularly praise worthy work (that is determined by the children) can be scanned into their Digital Portfolios. The children are very proud of their work, proud of their knowledge of authors and characters from classic literature (they love to show off to there often less literate parents) and they show a great love for and appreciation of quality literature. We often write to authors (ie Tim Winton) and often receive treasured responses from them. I love reading the classics for them and to see the enjoyment they get from listening to them and reading them themselves. I think they have enhanced their thinking skills and ICT skills and they enjoy the integrated curriculum approach I have adopted. I believe the children are becoming gifted and divergent readers who can read anything but also know what they love to read.

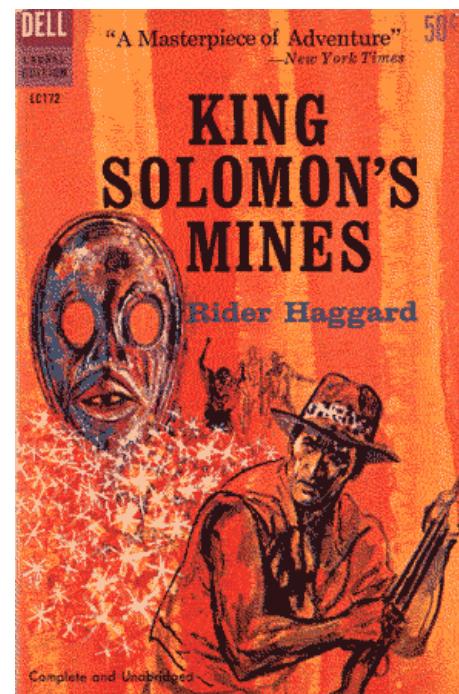
Classic Literature

Below is a list of the classic literature I've read and created unit plans for 2000-2017

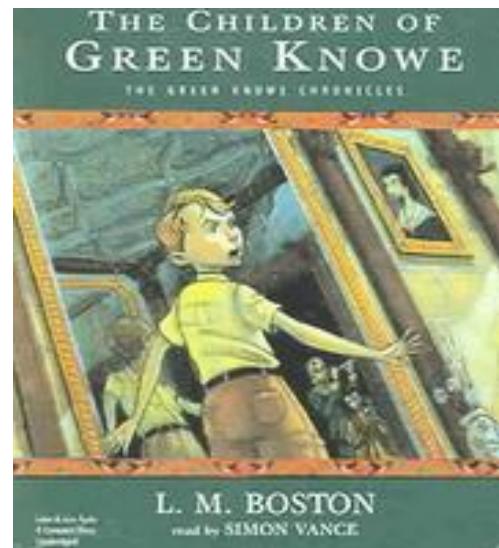
*Only original texts could be sourced (as opposed to abridged versions) or hard to access books.

Books that have PG or G rated videos or DVDs

- *Black Beauty*#
- *Tom Sawyer*#
- *Huckleberry Finn*#
- *Around the world in 80 days*#
- *20 000 leagues under the Sea*#
- *Mysterious island**#
- *The Time Machine*#
- *Swiss Family Robinson*#
- *War of the Worlds*
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
- *Kidnapped*#
- *Treasure Island*#
- *The Coral Island*
- *The Wind in the Willows*#
- *Lord of the Flies*
- *Shane**#
- *The Cay*
- *Holes*#
- *Island of the Blue Dolphin*
- *The Borrowers*#
- *Incredible Professor Branestawm*



- *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*#
- *Mary Poppins*#
- *Le Miserables**#
- *The 3 Musketeers*#
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles*#
- *Jane Eyre*
- *Stuart Little* #
- *The Mouse and his Child*
- *The Rescuers*#
- *The Rats of NIHM*#
- *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*#
- *Danny the Champion of the World*#
- *Tom's Midnight Garden*#
- *Stig of the Dump**
- *39 steps**
- *King Solomon's Mines*#
- *Tarzan**#
- *The Lost World*#
- *The Call of the Wild*#
- *Moby Dick*
- *Frankenstein*
- *Dracula*
- *A Series of Unfortunate Event (Books 1-3)s*#
- *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*#
- *Playing Beatie Bow*#
- *Hills End*
- *Storm Boy*#
- *Blue Fin*#
- *Climb a Lonely Hill*
- *A Little Fear*
- *Walking the Boundaries*
- *The Nargun and the Stars*
- *Bread and Honey*
- *The Fox Hole*
- *The Spiderwick Chronicles*
- *Children of Green Knowe*#
- *Swallows and Amazons*#
- *The Famous Five*#
- *Five Children and It*#
- *The Railway Children*#
- *Aesop's Fables*
- *The Iliad*#
- *Wizard of Oz*#
- *Jason and the Argonauts*#
- *Alice in Wonderland*#



- *The Red Badge of Courage**
- *Gulliver's Travels*#
- *Robinson Crusoe*
- *Peter Pan*#
- *The Moonstone*
- *Lord Jim*
- *The White Mountains*
- *Little Women*#
- *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*#
- *The Indian in the Cupboard*#
- *The Silver Sword*
- *White Fang*#
- *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*#
- *The Hobbit*#
- *The Secret Garden*#
- *Hatchet*
- *The River Kings*
- *The day of the Triffids* * #
- *Ramose and the Wrath of Ra*
- *Jack Black and the Ship of Thieves**
- *Robin Hood*#
- *A Christmas Carol*#
- *Oliver Twist* #
- *Captains Courageous**#
- *The Spiderwick Chronicles (Books 1-3)*
- *101 Dalmatians*#
- *Howl's Moving Castle* #
- *Beyond the Deep Wood*
- *Marianne Dreams*
- *Dirty Magic*
- *Jack Black and the Ship of Thieves*
- *Under the Hill*
- *Rowan of Rin*
- *The Wreckers*
- *Bridge to Terabithia*#
- *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*#
- *How to Eat Fried Worms*#
- *HOOT*#
- *Nims Island*#
- *Heidi*#
- *Prince Caspian*#
- *Coraline**
- *Giant Under the Snow*
- *Patterson's Track*
- *They Found a Cave* #

- *Bleak House* #
- *Pulp Fiction books (Phantom, Conan the Barbarian etc)* #
- *Captain Pugwash* #
- *Woman in Black* *
- *Northern Lights* #
- *Leviathan*
- *Pride and prejudice* #
- *The Spy Who came in From the Cold*

And more.

Reading in a multi-age classroom

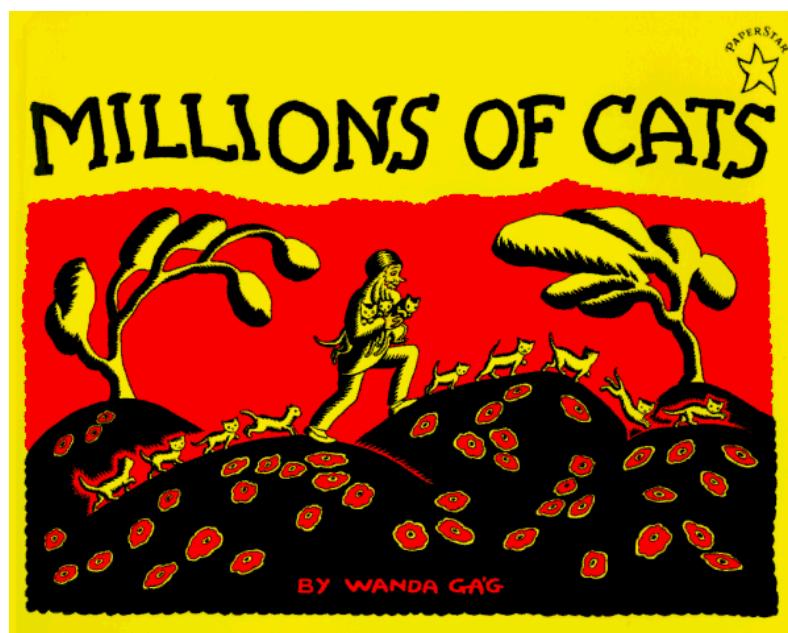
Having taught multi-age classes for the last 23 years I appreciate the importance of an early introduction in the classroom to quality literature.

Children love being read too right from the time they are born. As they grow they love to manipulate books (turn pages, tear pages, eat covers!) and soon learn to love and ask for their favorite books. (My son loved a book called *Goodnight Gorilla*. I think it was as much the way I read it as the content of the story)

By the time they reach kindergarten and school they are ready and eager to read. In the Early Years grades most time is devoted to learning the mechanics of reading (learning high frequency words, learning sounds and how sounds can fit together to form words) and children are introduced to leveled readers and participate in letter/word study activities. (The two-hour literacy block, which extends across the school, incorporates reading, writing and speaking/listening activities.)

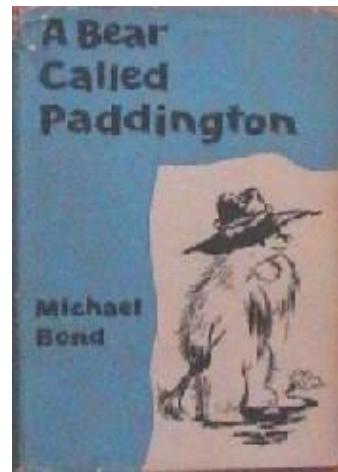
They are regularly assessed to determine their progress and teachers develop individual programs to facilitate their continued learning. (Some children may come to school already able to read, others may no all their sounds while others may not know any of their sounds. In a small school it is easy to cater learning for individual needs.)

While learning how to read, children from the very start can be introduced to classic picture story books (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Where the Wild Things Are, Where's Spot, The Enormous Turnip, Millions of Cats etc*) At this stage I also use nursery rhymes to read together and enjoy. (They are short self-contained stories and refrains, which give children the opportunity to join in with a line or a



verse. They can be used to enhance memory, articulation, accuracy and choral reading skills.)

By grade two I introduce the children to fables and fairy / folk tales. (These are ideal to highlight desirable behavior, to entertain, introduce new ideas and provide examples of problem solving and difficult concepts.) They are also ideal for introducing characterization often by attributing human qualities to animals such as in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* and reinforcing the structure of a good story and the impact of an interesting and detailed setting onto a narrative. By early grade two children should ideally be able to read quality junior novels/picture books such as *Ping*, *Harry the Dirty Dog*, *Curious George*, *The Story of Ferdinand* etc).



The **shared book experience** is one that can start in Prep and continue for as long as the children want. (Many of the first 'big books' such as *The Tale of the Three Blind Mice* by Scholastic are too wordy for Preps but ideal for grade 1-3 children and there are many excellent non-fiction big books older children can spend ages exploring.) These books are ideal for introducing concepts of print' such as letter shape, left-right progression, words, punctuation etc (For older students you can introduce glossaries, index, contents, introductions and conclusions etc) many quality stories can be purchased in big book format. They can be used to discuss the importance and relevance of illustrations and font and the role of language to early readers. Shared reading also reinforces a positive social attitude toward reading. It can also lead onto children sharing their ideas to create their own big-book stories. The big book experience can also serve to introduce wider reading and help to launch children into independent reading of familiar material.

By grade 3 students should be beginning to read short novels independently as take-home readers as well as readers from reading schemes. (There are some excellent titles from renowned authors in the *Aussie Nibbles* and *Aussie Bites* series) I would start introducing these children to popular classic short fiction such as *The Shrinking of Treehorn*, *Flat Stanley*, and the *Tashi* books as well as continuing to explore Fairytales or 'everlasting' stories such as *The House That Jack Built*.) Children this age are also still interested in picture books with excellent books available at reasonable prices all the time. Junior fiction series such as *Paddington* are also read as part of mini-units which incorporate many of the activities that older children (grade 4-6) complete in their literature responses such as cloze activities, literary sociograms and story maps, rating scales, word play and word exploration etc), which prepare them for the serious study of the 'classics' in late grade 3-early grade 4 or whenever they are ready.

I would like to feel that by the end of grade 3 the children I've taught realize that literature is important, that some literature is better than others, that you can respond to literature in a variety of ways and that you can become personally involved in literature.

A multi-age class has the advantages of children seeing older children reading for enjoyment and therefore adopting positive role models, having the opportunity to listen to and read the books enjoyed by older children, having older children read to and prepare books for younger children, having a ready audience for plays and choral reading experience and encouraging older and younger children to tell each other stories and to talk about books and book characters.

Establishing a positive attitude to reading in the class

With so many children coming to school recently without the kindergarten experience and with an inferior vocabulary it is essential to establish and sustain a positive attitude toward literature through example and enthusiasm. This can be achieved by:

- Reading to the children every day
- Reading with the children every day
- Having children read to each other
- Involving children in the *Premier's Reading Challenge*
- Chatting to children about the books they read
- Buying specific books that individual children or groups of children would enjoy.
- Discussing personal responses to reading. (I chose to read this book to you because I read it as a child and loved it...)
- Respecting children's personal responses to literature.
- Encouraging children to share their responses with others
- Rewarding home reading with prizes for milestones being reached.
- Encouraging the children to set up book displays or create displays to promote authors or books
- Encouraging children to use the library
- Inviting parents and preschoolers in to use the library (Creating a dedicated parent library and a 'teen library')
- Contacting writers
- Providing quiet reading time (30-45 minutes every morning)
- Encouraging children to be authors.

Children who read widely for pleasure at the end of primary school will invariably continue the practice in later life.

Early Years literature and the use of picture-story books

Stories shared in a warm atmosphere at an appropriate pace are a great way for children to learn how to read and to learn about their world.



With books competing against the *helter skelter* impact of television, the internet and computers young children can be inundated with too much information that they have no hope of processing in a meaningful way (This is also true for older children and some adults) The message is too rapid, lacking subtlety, humour and emotion.

Books and literature play a major role in a child's development. When children come to school already reading or with a deep interest and liking for books they already have a huge advantage over their peers who don't. Young children need experiences with print that let them hear, tell, create and explore their world and find meaning in that world. It is during these early years that the foundations are laid for future positive attitudes toward reading and education in general.

The 'slow learning' associated with reading books allows for deep learning and greater understanding. Books can keep introducing new topics, characters, concepts, settings and ideas. They encourage children to ask questions and seek more answers and ideas. Many children's books explore the idea of self-concept (so important for young children) many address this as an issue of developing relationships amongst peers and siblings. (often a difficult ask given the ego-centric nature of infants.) Good literature provides a teaching tool for developing tolerance and acceptance of others by learning how characters develop solutions to social problems and hold a mirror up to their own lives and problems with their own self-esteem and self-image.

Young children are of course very curious about the world. A literacy program which includes a sound read-aloud program will help to encourage success in their future education. Books keep introducing new and fascinating topics. They encourage children to ask more questions and seek more answers. If children are to succeed in their later schooling it is critical that they learn and succeed. While children can be forced to learn bits and pieces of unrelated and isolated reading skills, no amount of pressure can force children beyond their capability and interest. Exerting this pressure can be destructive to their desire to learn and read. Tedious and dull reading can stifle genuine curiosity and enthusiasm.

It is desirable for teachers and parents to focus on sharing appropriate stories that foster self-esteem, tolerance and curiosity about life. Sharing quality literature is a positive experience for both adult and child. It creates a human connection and personal interaction between readers. The sharing experience is a great bonding tool between teacher and children. The teacher is there to answer questions, expand on

HARRY the Dirty Dog



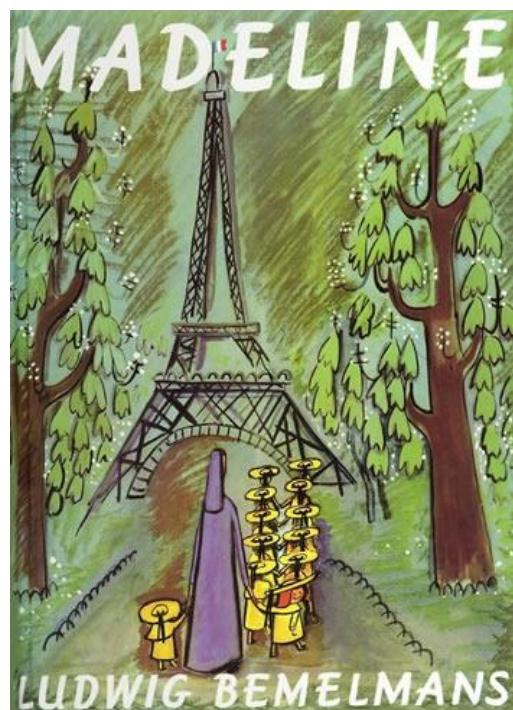
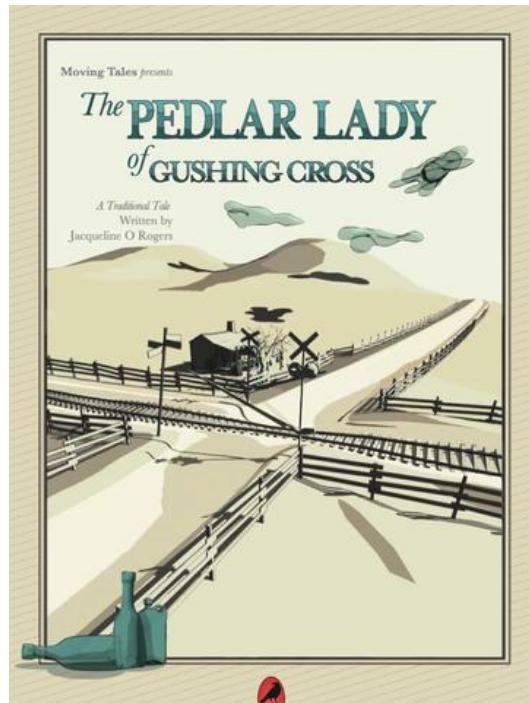
what is read, introduce follow-up reading and allow for children to touch, study and discuss the literature and illustrations.

The ideal literature class contain an environment rich with literature. From the first day of school they should be read to and encouraged to take home books to share as well as properly levelled books from quality reading schemes to take home as 'readers'. Children will start school with different entering behaviour (some will be able to read and write when they come to school while others may not be able to hold a pencil and have no concept about print.)

A holistic approach to teaching beginning reading uses real words in real books written by real authors. The skills of reading are taught in the context of literature. It is unfashionable and unrealistic not to teach word attack skills, phonic sand comprehension skills but they should be covered not in isolation but taught meaningfully within the context of quality literature. (I must admit that I often teach initial sounds and some phonics in isolation with children who have limited literacy skills and limited support from home. This lasts as long as necessary. High expectations are placed on those who are ready to read and eager to read when entering school.)

A typical literature session for infants will consist of an individual guided reading experience with each infant child using their chosen levelled readers. The children have silent reading using a wide range of library books both fiction and non-fiction and are then read too. (This can include audio books on a listening post.) That could include nursery rhymes, big books, quality picture story books and their own stories written in class. Literature should be a joyful experience so art and literature responses to quality literature should allow for creativity and critical thinking.

There are some excellent computer programs supporting reading. You may still be able to find some of the excellent 'Living Books' programs. Unfortunately, software like this is not profitable and nowadays it's hard to find. There are lots of books available via iPads and more

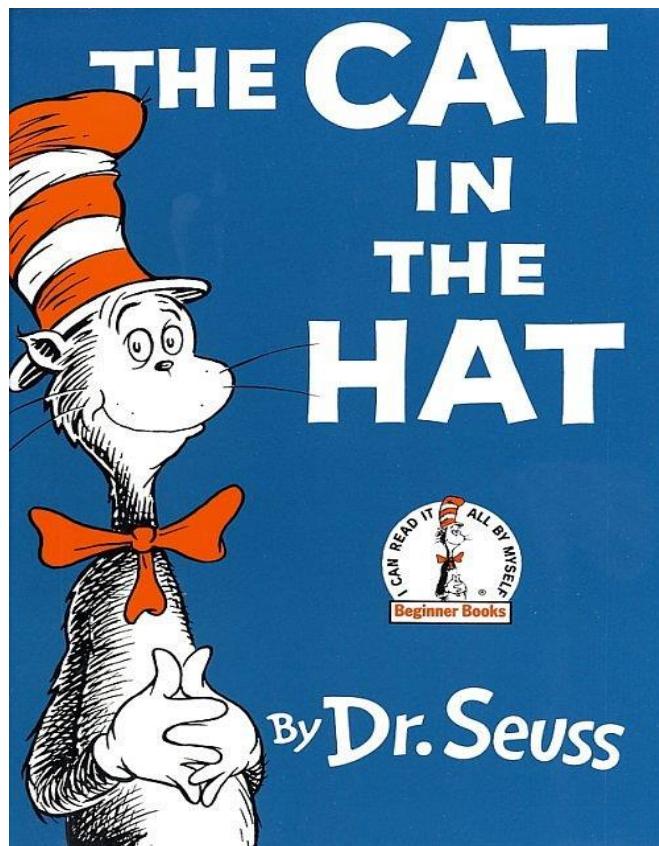


being added all the time. Some are interactive and very engaging. (Refer to '*The Pedlar Lady*' by Moving books.)

It should be a great opportunity to explore language in a comfortable and dynamic reading environment where they are not passive listeners but part of the process. (There is a lot of great humour in picture story books which coincides with the children developing their own sense of humour. They love zany humour and respond confidently to it.)

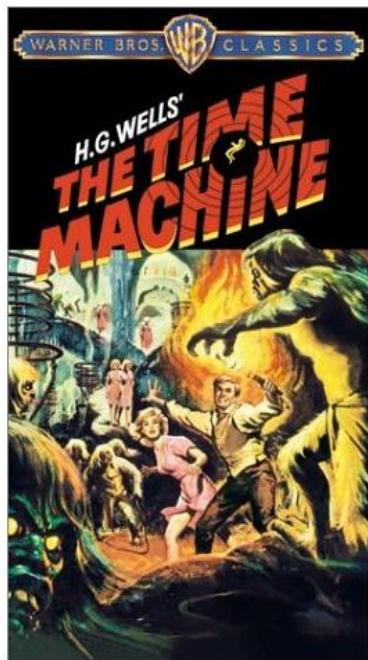
Choosing the best books to read is critically important. Since children are forming their thoughts and opinions about almost everything. The teacher needs to encourage children with useful, fun, sensitive and thought provoking ideas. Exposure to the best available literature and illustrations will help give them an appreciation for quality literature. (They will know it when they read/hear it.) Ideally the teacher should seek out the best children's books and the best authors and illustrators. (In my experience children enjoy reading the works of particular authors, novelty books, folk tales, fables, fairy tales, alternative versions, historical and fantasy fiction and counting / alphabet books.)

It is important to expose children to a wide range of literature. The purpose of reading to infants is to help them gain meaning and to expand their opportunities to use and acquire language. This is an important step on the road to independent reading. Even if children are not reading they will benefit from seeing a book read. The literature can be used to reinforce literature responses / reading activities (cloze, crosswords, craft, shared writing, sequencing, pen portraits etc) or it can serve as a starting point for an activity or it can simply be read for fun and enjoyment but should help create meaning and reinforce sense of self and enjoyment of life.



The Classics and DVDs

Movies and video documentaries can be indispensable for motivating learners, engaging their curiosity, and embedding concepts that might otherwise slip away. Even reading and literature can be enhanced and strengthened through the use of DVDs. I use DVD versions of the books I read as serials whenever possible. (Some don't have a film and some are hard to access. I.e. it took years to get the old black and white version of *Red Badge of Courage* and the 1960s version of *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has never been released on DVD but can often be found on iTunes and YouTube.) I sometimes show the film in 'chunks' over weeks as I'm reading the book especially if I think it will help children to understand the era in which the book is set or if it helps them to de-code the text. (We watched the DVD version of *Bleak House* from the BBC as we listened to the story because it helped the children to understand the book better.) Usually I show the film when the book is completed to act as a comparison for the book. (Is it the same as the book? Are the characters similar to how you imagined them? Which did you prefer the book or the film? Did they leave anything out or insert anything into the film?)



Children may have problems getting started in a book, but a movie or DVD can motivate them to learn more and entice early readers to dig into a book. If they have basic reading skills that need exercise and motivation, then a movie can get their momentum up to speed. For example, The Chronicles of Narnia, a children's classic, are available in both on DVD. Play the first of the trilogy, "*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*", to get the children intrigued. Then let them know there are more books in the series, "*Prince Caspian*" and "*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*" and "*The Silver Chair*". I often put books out on display with the support of an accompanying DVD or movie poster to illicit interest.

A number of great children's authors have had only a single movie made from their large collection of written works. Use the movie to entice your young reader, and then show them the other books by the author. Some excellent examples of movies that lead to additional books are *The Little Princess* or *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Black Stallion* by the prolific Walter Farley, and *James and the Giant Peach*, *The BFG* or *Matilda* by Roald Dahl.

Reading or watching a movie with children shouldn't be passive. Make it thought provoking and inquisitive. Stop at major points and ask children what they would do if they were in the character's position, then continue the movie to see what the character does.

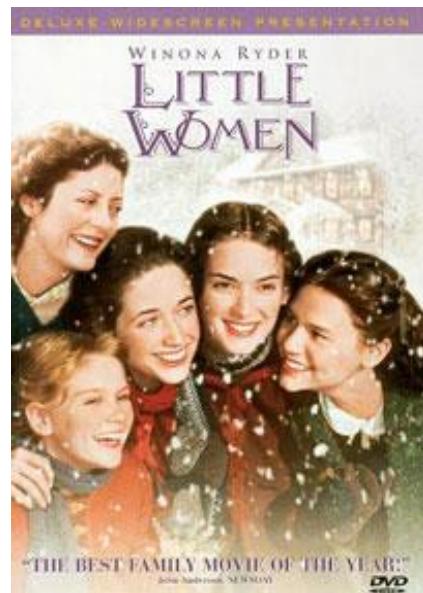
You might create interactive checklists that keep your kids thinking as the movie progresses. For example, in "Prince Caspian and the Voyage of the Dawn Treader" the characters change their behaviour and personality as the story progresses. Have your children create a Character Report Card that helps them learn about character traits, character depth, and character analysis. Comparing the book with the movie (something adult readers do often) using a Venn diagram is another great activity promoting comprehension and higher order thinking.

Teaching Classic Literature with Movies

A number of literary works have been turned into movies that will support their reading of the book or your reading of it as a serial. Movies enable them to see the clothes, hear the music, and listen to the dialect of the time period. Here are a few movies based on classics that might entice upper primary readers into reading the full book, an abridged version or other books by the same author:

- *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott (Columbia Tristar)
- *Moby Dick*, by Hermann Melville (MGM)
- *Time Machine* by H.G. Wells (MGM)
- *Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo* by Andres Dumas (Disney Touchstone)
- *The Mysterious Island*, By Jules Verne (MGM)
- *Heidi* by J. Spyri (Umbrella)
- *King Solomon's Mines* by RS Haggard (Warner Brothers)
- *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (Reel DVD)
- *Kidnapped* by RL Stevenson (Disney)
- *39 Steps* by RS Haggard (ABC)
- *Hound of the Baskervilles* by C. Doyle (Hammer)

These are just a few of the great film versions of classic literature available on DVD.



Some movies, especially those by Disney and their adult movie producer Touchstone, are loosely based on the book. In those cases, use the movie as a base to discuss why the producers made changes and how the book provides more detail, more character insight, and is more faithful to the real historical events.

Children may feel that the book topic is old fashioned and hard to relate to. However, I have found that children respond well to the themes in classic literature because their feelings were the same as those felt by the characters in the classics. The heartaches felt in *Little Women* and the feelings of revenge in *The Count of Monte Cristo* haven't changed through time.

Note that some recent movie versions of classic books are not appropriate for younger audiences. For example, I would show the 1960 version of *The Time Machine* rather than the 2002 version. Sometimes short segments of recent movies can be shown (I showed some bits of the recent *War of the Worlds*) but not all of it. You need to use your discretion and view the film first! If in doubt, do not show it or have a strict policy of only showing G rated films. I showed a modern version of the *Lost World* (BBC 2005) but sought permission notes from the parents to do so.