

Picturebooks and The Primary Language Curriculum

Picturebooks are of particular use in the primary classroom, for a variety of pedagogical purposes. Picturebooks facilitate an integrated approach to literacy instruction and when used effectively can act as a valuable support to children’s language, literacy, and knowledge development. Through visual and / or verbal narratives, high-quality picturebooks are effective, purposeful, and meaningful vehicles to support the development of children’s knowledge, thinking, listening, and observations in relation to learning outcomes of the PLC and the Primary Curriculum Framework.

‘Great picturebooks ask the reader to think, question, delve into worlds and ideas that may often be beyond the realms of their experience and imagination. They encourage the reader to think and build meaning, to play and imagine, to reflect and enrich.’

(Tobin, 2015)

Picturebooks:

Provide a meaningful and contextualised entry point into much of our curricular learning

- ✓ Act as a springboard into many of the learning outcomes of the PLC across stages 1 – 4
- ✓ Can be used as a stimulus to contextualise many key literacy skills
- ✓ Immerse readers in rich, sophisticated language
- ✓ Facilitate rich opportunities for dialogic learning

- ✓ Are useful in the development of children’s critical thinking and visual literacy skills
 - ✓ Are designed to be revisited, enjoyed and shared multiple times
 - ✓ Create opportunities for playful, integrated, differentiated and engaging teaching and learning experiences across stages 1 – 4 of the PLC
- Picturebooks are for everyone:

Picturebooks are for everyone:

A common misconception is that picturebooks are only suited to younger readers or junior primary classrooms. Picturebooks with their “universal appeal” can be a “genre for all ages” (Beckett, 2021, p111). Picturebooks possess an unusual but powerful potential in attracting readers of all ages. There is an endless array of high- quality picturebooks suited to all ages and stages of the primary school years. Additionally, many crossover texts exist, demonstrating how texts and illustrations often transcend and break free of the restrictive boundaries of age-categories and constrained levelling of children’s literature. Crossover picturebooks (Becket, 2021) are of particular use in the primary classroom, providing rich opportunities for inclusive, differentiated, and engaging learning experiences across the primary years.

‘Contemporary picturebook artists have long since breached the confinement of picturebooks to a particular age group and the genre has become increasingly sophisticated and taken more seriously.’

(Haynes & Murriss, 2017, p. 3)



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Picturebooks and Literacy Skills:

The Learning Outcomes of the PLC emphasise children’s development of both constrained and unconstrained skills (p.18). Constrained skills (such as letter knowledge and conventions of print) are essential, measurable skills which develop in a relatively short period of time due to the concrete limit to the understanding required for their mastery (Teale, Paciga & Hoffman, 2010). Unconstrained skills (such as comprehension, knowledge, and vocabulary) develop across our lifespan because they are unlimited in the understanding encompassed by these skills. Unconstrained literacy skill instruction is embedded in authentic language and literacy practices and can be perceived as more challenging to teach, learn and measure. Progression and development of these skills require children to engage with and create increasingly-complex oral and written texts (PLC, 2019, p.18). Picturebooks are of significant use in creating meaningful, authentic learning experiences for the development of both constrained and unconstrained literacy skills.

Picturebooks and Learning Outcomes:

Picturebooks are useful in supporting the web of interconnectedness across our strands, elements, and learning outcomes within our integrated language curriculum.

When it comes to literacy skills and concepts it is in the application where the learning sticks (Blevins, 2016). It is crucial that we offer the children opportunities to apply their new learning to meaningful, authentic reading experiences. Due to their brevity, we can utilise a wide variety of picturebooks across the school year to provide engaging and meaningful opportunities for children to apply their literacy skills to authentic reading contexts. The learning can be multifaceted and the texts can be multifunctional.

Let’s take comprehension for example:

Reading comprehension is a ‘process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.’

(Snow, 2002)

Learning Outcomes:

‘A combination of concepts, skills, and dispositions; aspects of which can be achieved over shorter or longer periods of time.’

(NCCA, 2021)

Reading – Stage 1

Exploring and Using	
LO 9: Comprehension:	
PLC, Reading, Stage 1: LO 9: Comprehension: “Recall, discuss and sequence significant details and identify key points of information in text.”	PLC, Reading, Stage 1: LO 9: Comprehension: “Draw on background knowledge as well as a range of comprehension strategies to engage with and create meaning when working with a range of texts independently or collaboratively.”
What this looks like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent read-alouds’ ✓ Interest-led text choice ✓ Rich discussions & ‘book blether’ ✓ Repeated reads ✓ Vocabulary study ✓ Explicit instruction (e.g. recount, sequencing, summarizing, connection making) ✓ Humorous, entertaining, emotive texts ✓ Access to high-quality children’s literature ✓ Reading across genres ✓ Locating literature at the centre of practice 	What this looks like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frequent read-alouds’ ✓ Explicit instruction (e.g. comprehension strategies) ✓ Accommodation of prior knowledge ✓ Monitoring knowledge development ✓ Repeated reads ✓ Rich discussion & ‘book blether’ ✓ Meaningful and high-level questioning ✓ Access to high-quality children’s literature & reading across genres ✓ Seizing opportunities to explore intertextuality

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Picturebooks provide authentic opportunities for comprehension development:

“When a child is listening to a story being read and, when she has the luxury of having time to dwell on the pictures and talk about them and has time to discuss the book and to co-construct knowledge with peers in a safe and interactive social setting; a whole new sense of making meaning comes into being.”

(Mary Roche, Developing Children’s Critical Thinking Through Picturebooks, 2015, p33)

Shanahan (2019) reminds us that there is much more to comprehension teaching than just building enabling skills. By exploring picturebooks in depth and creating interactive, dialogic reading

experiences with picturebooks, teachers enable children to develop a range of comprehension competencies and systems for understanding.

Microprocesses	Identifying idea units	What does this word / phrase / sentence mean? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which / who / what is this about? Why / where / how / when?
Integrative	Integrating ideas between sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do the ideas in these sentences connect? Are there words that are clues to these connections and what do they mean?
Metacognitive	Monitoring understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I understand what I am reading? Are there gaps in my understanding? What else do I need to do to be sure I understand what I’m reading/seeing?
Elaborative	Integrating prior knowledge and inferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do I know that connects to what I am reading? How will that help me to understand what the author meant but did not say?
Macroprocesses	Organising overall understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did the author want me to understand from reading this text? What are the big ideas? What am I taking away from this text?

(Fiorentini, 2023; Hennessy, 2020; Irwin, 2007)

Building good picturebook ‘habits’:



Explore the book as an object



Read the pictures and explore illustrations in detail



Help the children to associate picturebooks with talk, discussion and dialogue



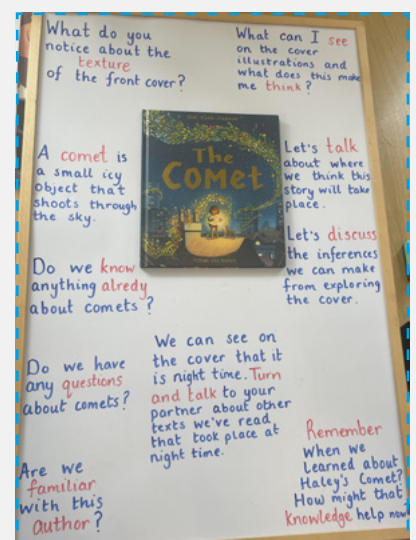
Explore, collect, study and use the key vocabulary



Share & develop previous related knowledge



Read connected or similar themed texts to facilitate opportunities to explore intertextuality



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'When we hold a picturebook, we have in our hands a pictured world full of ideas. We play with these ideas and play with our own ideas around the pictured world. The more skillful we are, and the more ideas the picturebook contains, the more the ideas go on bouncing. And in the process, we create something of our very own.'

(Doonan, 1992)

Preparing for an increasingly visual world:

Picturebooks have a part to play in supporting the development of the skills required to navigate an increasingly visual world. In a world saturated with "images, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid combinations with texts and sounds", it has become increasingly evident that "competence with images is now a prerequisite of competence in life" (Lewin, 2001, p. 59-60). Skills such as analysing, inferring, critiquing, and interpreting

images are more essential for children than ever. Deep thinking about visuals and illustrations contribute to the development of creative, critical thinkers (Pantaleo, 2020). As teachers, we can use illustrations to teach children about the language of visuals and to engage in slow, deep thinking and exploration of illustrations to support the development of key skills such as observing, noticing, comparing, and connecting.

Build good illustration habits:



Explore the **colours**



Explore the **viewpoint**



Explore the **frames**



Explore the **spread**
(full-page / double page)



Explore the **positioning and size** of objects and characters

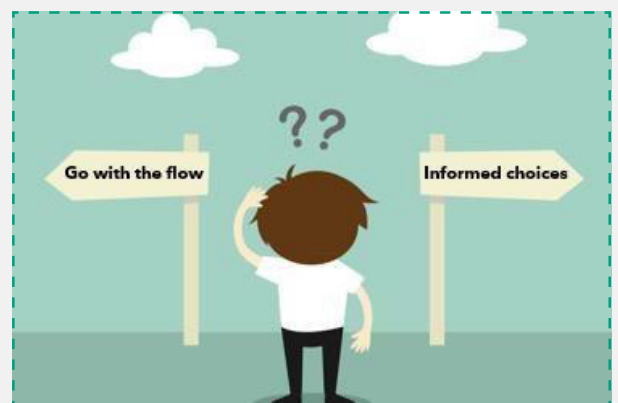


Explore the **diminishing returns** of characters and objects (how often they appear on a spread)

Choosing & using picturebooks:

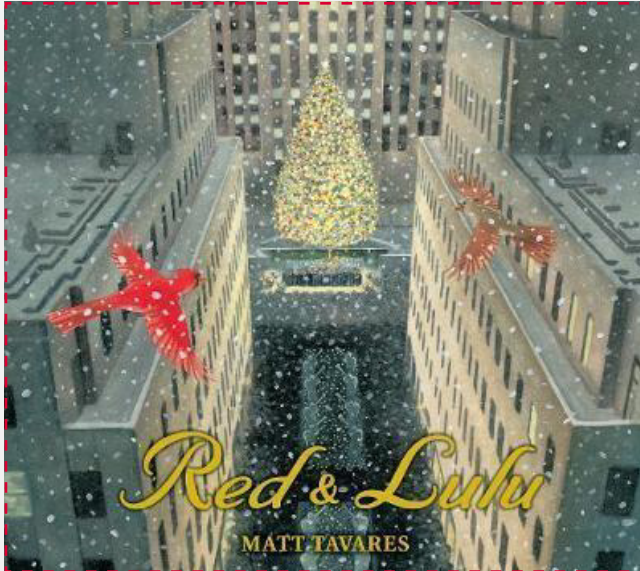
To make meaningful choices and use of picturebooks it is beneficial to reflect on the motivation and purpose of reading a particular picturebooks with children.

- **Why** am I reading this?
- **What** are my intentions?



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Example:



Red & Lulu by Matt Tavares is an example of a crossover text which can be read, studied, and enjoyed by a range of ages and stages through appropriate differentiation.

Why am I reading this text?

- Exploring concept of separation and unity
- Seasons & seasonal changes
- Connected to seasonal theme of Christmas
- Compare & contrast with connected text: The Christmas Pine by Julia Donaldson

What are my intentions?

- Vocabulary instruction: miracle, evergreen, chirped, marveled, cardinals, needles
- Recount skills (sequencing & summarizing; story mapping 'Red's Journey')
- Developing inference skills
- Traits of writing (voice)
- Narrative Writing ('Lost & Found')
- Integration of SESE: New York; Seasonal Migration of Birds; Famous Christmas Trees; Compare & Contrast: Christmas Tree and Jesse Tree

Reflecting on existing practice:

The more reflective you are, the more effective you are!

It is helpful to reflect on our existing practice and explore the potential for developing picturebook practice in our classrooms in terms of the quantity and quality of picturebook use for teaching and learning experiences.

Example:

Quantity and frequency of picturebooks reading experiences

- **How often** are picturebooks being read?
- **When** are picturebooks read?
- At what point of the day are picture books most likely to be used?
- Is there room for increased use of picturebooks?
- What learning experiences could be enhanced or developed through incorporation of picturebooks?

Quality of picturebook reading experiences

– discourse, degree of autonomy afforded to the child, nature of interactions between adult and child, child & child.

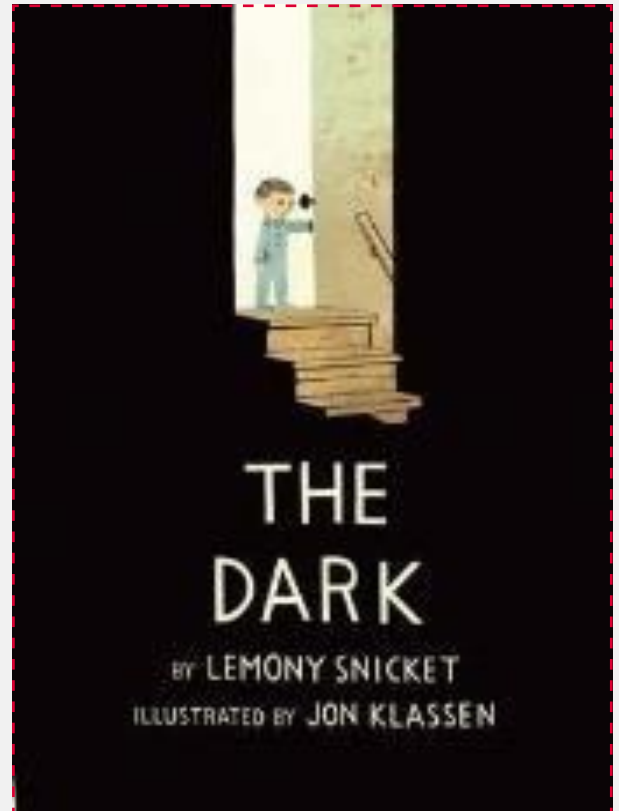
- Are they isolated reads or are opportunities provided for repeated reads?
- Are they connected to literacy instruction / curricular learning?
- Do readings include opportunities for dialogue / discussion / child voice?
- Is it obvious to the children why the picturebook is being read?

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Repeated reads:

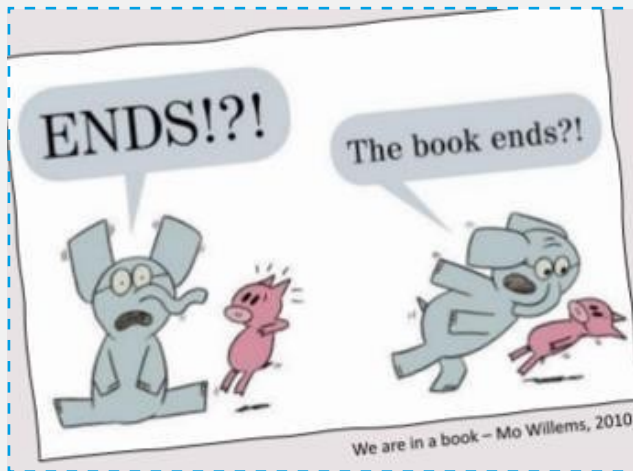
High-quality picturebooks require more than the ‘one-and-done’ approach to reading. The best picturebooks require multiple reads to ensure readers truly engage with the text, the vocabulary and the learning opportunities uncovered through discussions stemming from the text and illustrations. Regardless of the text type; picturebook, novel or poetry; rereading supports fluency development and enables readers to devote more attention to making sense of what has been read (Rasinski, 2010). Rereading leads to deeper and more sophisticated discussions. It creates opportunities for readers to understand how a text is constructed and the decisions writers make as they use print to convey meaning. Rereading also supports the development of children’s confidence as readers and encourages readers to read deeply, read responsibly, and read for purpose (Beers & Probst, 2013). There is often a concern that readers may become bored or disengaged during repeated reads, however the key here is to ensure that each repeated read brings the experience and the learning a little further than the previous read.

Example:



The Dark Lemony Snicket & Jon Klassen	Key vocabulary	Key question(s)	Talking points	“I wonder...”	Extending the learning
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> creaky several basement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you think Lazlo is feeling? Where is Lazlo? What time of day do you think it is? 	<p>“Come Closer” said the Dark.</p> <p>Discuss with your partner what you think Lazlo should do.</p>	I wonder why Lazlo doesn’t like the dark?	<p>Summarising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who? What? Where? When? Why?
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> distant peek gazing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think Lazlo is brave? What tells you this? 	Talk with your partner about why you think we need the dark.	I wonder why we need the dark?	<p>Recounting & sequential language – first, next, then, last</p>
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> damp spread bothered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why didn’t the dark answer Lazlo in the morning? 	Talk to your partner about something that used to bother you but doesn’t anymore.	I wonder why Lazlo sleeps well at the end of the story?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing & contrasting: light & dark Integration of Science

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Repeated reading is an academic practice that leads to improvements in word reading, oral reading fluency and reading comprehension (Shanahan, 2017). Due to their brevity, picturebooks lend themselves well to opportunities for repeated reads. With picturebooks, repeated reads can be organised in different ways. Providing opportunities where the teacher reads the text aloud across multiple occasions invites learners to become familiar with the flow, vocabulary and the sequence of the text

Picturebooks & Writing Instruction:

'The writing in a classroom can only be as good as the literature that supports and surrounds and buoys it up. Reading aloud is an essential way to build vision in your students for what strong writing looks like, sounds like and feels like.'

(Fletcher, 2015, P. 76)

'Mentor texts are pieces of literature that you – both teacher and student – can return to and reread for many different purposes. There are texts to be studied and imitated. Mentor texts help students to take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats.'

(Dorfman & Cappelli, 2017)

'Re-reading helps students to develop a deeper understanding of what has been read.'

(Roskos & Newman, 2014)

'Opportunities for re-reading matter for you, for your students and indirectly, for the author and illustrator who toiled over each word and every image that lies on and between the covers of a book.'

(Fiorentini, 2023; Walther, 2019)

and facilitates opportunities for deeper engagement in comprehension skill development. Having access to multiple copies of particular texts is also beneficial as it facilitates meaningful opportunities for repeated reads of picturebooks by the children through planned and incidental reading opportunities. Repeated reads also increase the likelihood that children will connect with a text and that the literature will have a more lasting impact.

Picturebooks serve a valuable role as mentor texts for writing instruction. Picturebooks provide succinct, meaningful examples of how literary elements work across the genres of writing. Picturebooks can be used as a stimulus for:

- ✓ Writing for purpose & pleasure
- ✓ The writing process
- ✓ Writing 'craft' lessons
- ✓ Vocabulary development
- ✓ Genre study
- ✓ Traits of writing
- ✓ Writing fluency
- ✓ Spelling instruction & word study
- ✓ Conventions of print & sentence structure
- ✓ Writing motivation and engagement

Access mentor text lesson examples for Infants – 2nd class here ([insert hyperlink](#)) Access mentor text lesson examples for 3rd – 6th class here ([insert hyperlink](#))

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Building classroom collections:

When choosing texts to use and offer in the classroom, the following points should be considered:

- ✓ Will this picturebook appeal to the children?
- ✓ Does this picturebook have adequate depth and substance to warrant revisiting and rereading the text?
- ✓ Does the language and art within this picturebook offer various lenses for multiple visits?
- ✓ Are the literary elements strong enough to support focused exploration?
- ✓ Will this picturebook serve as a lens for thinking about reading other texts?
- ✓ Will this picturebook help build reading insights that can be flipped into writing opportunities?
- ✓ Does this picturebook afford opportunities for cross-curricular learning?

(Adapted from Laminack & Wadsworth, 2015)

Considerations for classroom picturebook collections:

High-quality picturebooks	Diverse picturebooks	Wordless Picturebooks
Picturebooks with high-quality text and illustrations	Picturebooks representing diversity in cultures ¹ , families, and characters.	Picturebooks with high-quality illustrations and no accompanying text.
Non-fiction / Informational Picturebooks	Picturebooks connected to curricular learning	Picturebooks connected to the children's interests
Non-fiction picturebooks written about educational or informational topics	Picturebooks connected to the subject or topic being taught	Picturebooks connected to current and evident interests of the children
Picturebooks in a variety of languages	Picturebooks by Irish authors	Contemporary picturebooks
Picturebooks reflecting the heritage languages of the children in the classroom and languages taught in the classroom	Picturebooks written, illustrated, or published by Irish Authors, illustrators, and publishers.	Picturebooks focused on problems or scenarios facing children's lives today.



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