For many people, the pleasure gained from reading is its own reward. For children and young adults, the rewards of reading widely move far beyond pleasure. Being an active, engaged reader is a powerful support to other learning and to the development of literacy skills. Literacy and numeracy skills provide the foundation for lifelong learning, rewarding and satisfying work, and a fulfilling personal life. Being literate and numerate are critical factors in improving students’ ability to learn at all stages of schooling and are essential skills for accessing opportunities beyond school. Research shows that to improve student reading literacy, schools need to increase student engagement with reading as well as develop their cognitive skills.

Developing student engagement with reading is an important aspect of curriculum planning and provision for literacy. Strategies, events and activities that increase student interest in and engagement with reading are appropriate across all areas of the curriculum. The Victorian Premier’s Reading Challenge is one such strategy. It can encourage students in the early years of schooling to make their first attempts at independent reading as well as encourage confident middle years students to branch out and try a new genre.

Schools build active, engaged readers by:
- building a culture of reading,
- exploring the teaching and learning possibilities inherent in print texts, and
- building an extensive and accessible collection.

Motivating students to read and engaging them in reading as a pleasurable activity is the main aim of the Victorian Premier’s Reading Challenge.
‘What is it that enabling adults, teachers especially, do? They provide, stimulate, demonstrate and respond.’ – Aidan Chambers

Building a reading culture

Research for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has found that ‘Students who read well tend to be active readers. They gain in terms of both motivation and experience from reading regularly outside the context of schoolwork… The results show how important it is not just to teach students to read but to engage them in reading as part of their lives.’

These findings have been replicated many times across various studies. The amount of free reading done outside school has consistently been found to relate to growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and levels of general knowledge. ‘In other words, how well children read is related to how much they read.’

Practising reading improves skill levels and improved reading ability assists and extends learning in many other areas. To ensure that reading becomes a regular activity in students’ lives, schools need to find ways to increase the level of engagement experienced by students. Schools can do this by offering students:

- a wide and varied choice of reading materials,
- time to read for pleasure,
- welcoming, student-centred reading spaces,
- assistance in finding the right book at the right time, and
- opportunities to talk and think about what they have read.

Building a resource collection

To facilitate a reading-centred curriculum, classrooms, school libraries and shared spaces need to be full of texts of all kinds. Text and ‘print-rich environments lead to more reading’; ‘children with more access to books read more’; and better classroom collections and better school libraries result in more reading amongst students.

To create a text-rich classroom that recognises the varied interests, strengths and abilities of a diverse range of students, schools must provide a variety of genres and formats.

Surrounding students with quality texts, involving them in exploration of what these texts mean to them and supporting their efforts to learn about themselves and the world around them are basic activities of a school classroom or library. The Victorian Premier’s Reading Challenge provides an added incentive to read more.

‘If children are to become lifetime consumers of books then their own reading preferences must be known and accepted and used as the basis for encouragement. They need reader role models, easy access to books in a wide variety of styles and genres, and recommendations personally tailored to them.’ – Claire Senior
**A varied and comprehensive resource collection**

When purchasing resources to build a varied and comprehensive collection schools should consider the following areas, amongst others:

**Reading to find out, reading for information**

Some readers find that make-believe stories are not for them, they prefer something factual, something they know is true. This may be true of even very young readers. Keying into their particular interests – the topics creating interest in class and in the playground, and the tried and true subjects that always capture student imagination, such as sport, animals and heroes – will support these students.

‘Information books are most often used for finding out about a subject under study...but less often are they promoted, or valued, as pleasurable, recreational reading. But for many readers, including children, books that present information about actual events, lives, voyages, discoveries, science, sport, dinosaurs, space or the past are what motivates their interest in reading.’ – Susan La Marca and Pam Macintyre

**Reading pictures**

Visual texts come in many forms and are appropriate for all ages. Picture books and illustrated stories have a place in every school library or resource collection. Much of the information we encounter every day is visual. Encouraging students to read images critically, and to explore and examine images to enable them to create meaning is an important aspect of their overall literacy development and an essential part of a thinking curriculum.

**Reading about ourselves**

During the years children attend school they experience physical and emotional changes that can be both rapid and confusing. Older students are moving from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Students are working out who they are and who they may want to be. Reading can offer examples: experiences and options that help them discover who they are in relation to a wider world. Reading offers puzzles, ideas and new ways of looking at the world that encourage critical thought about the big questions of life.

**Other times, other places, other cultures**

Understanding the way we see the world is an important part of the thinking processes described in the Interdisciplinary Learning strand of the VELS. Both fact and fiction offer a window into the experiences of others that can help to make abstract ideas and concepts more easily understood. Our view of history and other parts of our world can come alive when we empathise with characters we come to know through the experience of reading.
Other realities

The worlds of fantasy, myth and legend offer us escape and imaginative interaction with worlds unlike our own. As well as offering us magic, imaginary creatures and incredible places, these reading experiences can delve into important questions about good and evil, power and love and the very meaning of existence.

‘Great fiction proceeds by making the familiar and the ordinary strange again. It offers alternative worlds that put the actual one in a new light...It explores human plights through the prism of imagination.’ – Jerome Bruner

Off the wall: alternative styles

Alternative styles of text are often cutting edge in format and content. Consequently, they can offer edgy, interesting approaches that work to engage young people in reading. Graphic novels, illustrated texts and books that play with language and form can be both creative and thought provoking. They can offer readers opportunities to critically analyse form and structure as well as content.

Rhyme and verse

The wonderful way that words sound as they roll off the tongue in memorable rhyme can increase enjoyment of reading as well as teaching about sounds and rhythm. A good verse, well read, can have great impact and encourage children to pick up a book and experiment with sound and language. Verse texts for older students offer a fast and engaging way into a story through fewer, but carefully chosen and arranged, words on a page.

‘I hope they fall in love with the sound of words the way I did at school with Shakespeare and Gerard Manley Hopkins. That they feel the danger and playfulness of words, how they can thrill you and stab you, and make you laugh all at the same time.’ – Paul Kelly

Our heritage: old and new classics

‘Classics’ are books that have remained popular over a long period of time. They are often stories that deserve to be read by countless generations and which deal with timeless or universal themes or experiences. Reading them helps students understand references in everyday life and popular culture. Fairytales, nursery rhymes, creation stories and other classics are all part of our reading history and our reading culture.

Laugh out loud

Humour is one of the most effective genres in engaging students in a world of story. We all love to laugh. Humour crosses boundaries and helps the reader empathise with characters. It entices readers into a text – they read on looking for the next big laugh.
Building a curriculum that promotes reading

‘The experience of literature is fundamental to the wellbeing of all people, not a luxury item to be sampled by a select few. It sustains and nourishes us while educating us for life and about life. It enables us to explore who and what we are, our strengths and our flaws, our past and our future.’ – Susan Clancy

A reading curriculum is one which explores the teaching and learning possibilities inherent in written and visual texts. Schools can plan to incorporate the Premier’s Reading Challenge and other activities promoting reading for enjoyment into the curriculum and other classroom activities. Engaging students in reading as a lifelong, pleasurable activity supports efforts in the classroom to improve literacy and learning standards.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards encourage active engagement with a variety of texts. ‘Our world and the world of the future demand that all students are supported to become effective and skilful thinkers. Thinking validates existing knowledge and enables individuals to create new knowledge and to build ideas and make connections between them. It entails reasoning and inquiry together with processing and evaluating information.’ (Thinking Processes, Interdisciplinary Learning, Level 6).

Schools can meet the requirements of the Interdisciplinary Learning strand through engaging students with a range of quality texts. Supported by good classroom practice, texts of all kinds encourage reasoning and inquiry as they pose questions about who we are in the world, how we behave, what has come before and what the future may be like.

The reading dimension of the English strand of VELS involves students understanding, interpreting, critically analysing, reflecting upon, and enjoying written and visual, print and non-print texts.

Encouraging students to work with a wide range of texts is a crucial part of how teachers fulfil the role of assisting students to interpret, critically analyse and reflect.

The Premier’s Reading Challenge encourages students to enjoy texts of all kinds. Through promoting student engagement with text it provides opportunities for teachers to involve students in deeper, more analytical reflection.

Creating a classroom that enables quality interaction between students and well-chosen texts impacts upon all areas of learning. At the same time, supported explorations can add to students’ enjoyment of a particular text and help stimulate interest and engagement in reading.

The following websites are useful resources for teachers:

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Victoria learning and teaching resources:

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Strategies for supporting reading in the middle years:
- Department of Education, Science and Training http://www.myread.org/

Teaching strategies

Classroom activities and experiences related to Nodelman and Reimer’s book The Pleasures of Children’s Literature
- http://io.uwinnipeg.ca/~nodelman/resources/class.htm

Three previously published booklets for parents, ‘Books for Kids’, and ‘Books for middle years kids (Years 5–9)’ have now been made available at www.education.vic.gov.au/prc/parents. These booklets include lists of texts arranged thematically by age group to assist parents who are looking for the next great book for their child.
Resources – books for children and young adults

**Victorian Premier’s Reading Challenge**

The Victorian Premier’s Reading Challenge booklists provide a diverse selection of books across genres for students in Prep to Year 10.


**Education Network Australia (EDNA)**

This site offers an extensive collection of online resources for teachers in schools and across the Key Learning Areas. The English area includes links to teaching units, strategies for reading and viewing texts and a section on Australian literature.


**Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA)**

The CBCA runs Book Week in August each year and presents the Australian CBCA Book of the Year Awards.

www.cbc.org.au

**Young Australians’ Best Book Award (YABBA)**

YABBA was established in 1985 to promote Australian children’s fiction. Students can nominate and vote for the best book of the year.

http://home.vicnet.net.au/~yabba/

**Centre for Youth Literature (CYL)**

CYL runs a year-long program of events aimed at promoting youth literature. It is also the home of the ‘Inside a dog’ website which offers young adults a forum for all things about teenage reading.


**Dromkeen Children’s Literature Collection**

Dromkeen houses a collection of contemporary and historical illustrations from Australian children’s books and provides workshops and structured school programs.


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Endnotes:


