

About the Series – Phonics and Decoding – Non-Fiction Readers

Criteria

Both series, Sustainability and Celebrations and Events, are examples of excellence in early readers. They raise the bar in terms of teaching and learning materials for early literacy acquisition as they are designed to both support foundational reading skills as well as develop key content knowledge. The readers provide accessible reading material for young children and work to bridge the gap between Learning to Read and Reading to Learn.

In the crowded marketplace of both early readers and educational resources, the Sustainability and Celebrations and Events series of readers stand out. With originality of concept and innovative features and design, the readers provide opportunities for young children to develop deep content understandings around contemporary issues in Australia.

Each title, although able to stand alone, is designed to build upon and deepen understandings in the area. The creators understand how concept understandings evolve and develop over time. Hence, rather than create one book about a topic and placing it in a collection with many other topics, we were committed to developing 20 readers with a fine gradient of difficulty that would layer meaning around a single topic.

As an example, the Sustainability titles lead students from early understandings of carbon and electricity (in the titles Carbon and Electricity) and use these as the basis, to build a deeper knowledge around sustainability and sustainable environmental practices.

Similarly with Celebrations and Events we strived to instil in the narratives the opportunity for readers to develop an appreciation of the difference within other cultures while at the same time, highlighting the similarities with contemporary Australia today. For example, gift giving, family get-togethers around special meals and the veneration of elders are depicted in many of the titles allowing similarities to be drawn between birthday celebrations and Eid celebrations.

We acknowledged that the concepts and themes presented in the texts, though relevant and topical, are possibly unfamiliar to young learners. We also acknowledged the content, whilst familiar to teachers, may not be material they had previously taught to this young age group. This was our challenge when developing these texts. We had to think creatively! To ensure successful implementation we have wrapped support around the texts and provided for the teacher:

- Comprehensive inside front cover notes that detail how to introduce the texts, conduct follow up word work and writing and list key words.
- Comprehensive teacher workbooks with engaging, age appropriate phonic and early learning worksheets.
- QR codes for each reader which the teacher can scan that takes them to further child friendly information online.

National Curriculum

The guidelines are clear that in the busy and loaded curriculum any opportunity to meet key criteria using a comprehensive resource, linked to state or national curriculum is welcomed. This series addresses the crowded curriculum by having both multiple points of register regarding literacy skills as well as by treating key learning areas for the Early Childhood subject areas.

The creators have worked to ensure both series of readers and all supporting materials are aligned closely with the Australian National Curriculum. By addressing the cross-curriculum priorities - Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia and Sustainability - the series work to provide another resource for teachers when meeting the ACARA educational outcomes.

To support planning and assessment, links to the national curriculum are made throughout the series:

- The inside front cover of each reader has a quick reference to the cross curricular priorities being addressed.
- The Word Maps in each teacher manual provide a comprehensive overview of the words in each series. Linking the words to the Phonic Knowledge and Word Recognition (PKW) and Phonological Awareness (PhA) indicators gives teachers an overview that supports their vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment.
- Each worksheet identifies the PKW, PhA and Understanding Text (UnT) indicators being addressed.

Learning Outcomes

The Sustainability and Celebrations and Events series of readers supports improved learning outcomes by providing a resource that is highly relevant in content, engaging and age appropriate to young learners, pedagogically rigorous and comprehensive in content, supporting documentation and materials.

At the forefront of our minds when working on both series were the learning outcomes, we wanted to help nurture in young children - both in literacy foundations, English, Humanities and Social Sciences. In the case of Sustainability, the importance of helping students develop an understanding of the fragility of our environment and a passion for taking care of it was important. An example of how the readers work towards achieving this is in Sustainability 2 which takes a more global view of the environment. We take students on a journey from very early understandings of the element carbon and electricity and use these as the basis for building a deeper knowledge around carbon sinks and their importance to the environment and the imperative to source alternative energy sources.

When working on the Celebrations and Events series we wanted readers to develop an appreciation of the difference within other cultures and societies while at the same time highlighting the similarities with contemporary Australia today. In each text we highlighted examples of gift giving, family get-togethers around special meals and veneration of elders. By glimpsing these aspects of other cultures, we hope students will not only see contrasts with themselves but also similarities.

At the heart of a dynamic learning environment is a teacher who is able to cater for various levels of fluency within the one classroom. To achieve this the teacher needs relevant, cohesive and suitable resources. The Sustainability and Celebrations and Events series of readers and accompanying

support documents provides a cohesive and comprehensive programme that is also flexible in use, allowing the teacher to easily modify for appropriate use within that specific classroom.

The Sustainability and Celebrations and Events series is not a collection of isolated text titles and phonics worksheets. It is a cohesive, integrated reading program, with links between all components. Each series comprises:

- 20 titles designed with a gradient of difficulty. Each title is designed to extend and achieve fluency at that level.
- Teacher Resource books which have both teaching and learning suggestions and suggestions for teachers in ways they can use the readers in the classroom including in guided reading, shared reading or independent reading.
- worksheets designed to build independence. In terms of suitability for use with young children, the brightly coloured, glossy images engage students without being distracting to the text. The readers are printed on high quality paper and card and are in a manageable size for little hands to manipulate and engage with. The worksheets within the workbook are printed single sided which allows for clean reproduction of each worksheet. This ensures young children, who are learning to look at print, are not distracted with shadows or visual clutter.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Classrooms today are diverse learning environments where teachers must cater for multiple entry points for students. This program supports a variety of learning opportunities and adaptations as the text titles and worksheets allow teachers to easily modify for appropriate use within the classroom. It is not a lockstep programme, but a broad reading program with a comprehensive series of activities that not build upon foundational reading skills but deepen content knowledge.

Flexibility is built into the programme with readers, worksheets, word maps and Running Records complementing each other and forming a fully integrated programme of work. The readers themselves are designed to be returned to often, either independently by the students or with teacher support. With each re-reading, we anticipate a deeper level of understanding would evolve.

The worksheets and readers are designed to complement each other and reflect a fine gradient of difficulty. Each reader has a detailed inside front cover with additional information for teachers such as word counts, and word lists as well as suggestions for implementation and extension.

Consistent activities within the workbooks build familiarity for the students which in turn builds their independence.

The series are designed to be used in a variety of teaching and learning modes such as :

- Initially with teacher support in guided reading then followed up in independent reading.
- Initially with teacher support in shared reading in big book form then followed up in independent reading
- Initially with teacher support then followed up in partner or paired reading

Consistent activities within the workbooks build familiarity for the students which in turn builds their independence.

Design, Clarity and Engagement

The level targeted in the series is Preschool to Grade 1. This is typically the time of heavy focus on the foundational reading skills of decoding using phonics and alphabetic knowledge. Typically texts in these early stages are fiction and designed with a singular focus in mind - that of Learning to Read.

We wanted to develop a series, still with a focus on building strong foundational reading skills but within the nonfiction genre. We were eager and committed to developing resources that could support teachers to balance Learning to Read alongside Reading to Learn, earlier in a young student's reading journey.

Each text demonstrates text that is age appropriate through:

- Sentences with natural language patterns. Young children are supported by natural language structures that help them predict using their oral language as information.
- Almost all vocabulary is familiar to students with new vocabulary embedded in known words
- A gradual gradient of difficulty is reflected in sentence length, punctuation use, text placement and picture support.

Each text demonstrates design that is age appropriate by:

- Attention to font style and size. The font was a deliberate and conscious decision that ensured legibility and readability for young learners, some of whom will be learning about directionality across both a word and a line of print.
- Ample space between text and between lines - leading size was important to us. We wanted to make sure that young readers who were sorting through what constitutes a letter and what constitutes a word were helped by having ample space between words and lines of text.
- The size of the book being child friendly. We wanted to ensure that little hands with developing fine motor skills could open the book and turn the pages with relative ease.

Each text is designed to engage young children by:

- Having children of a similar age depicted in the texts. This is important as children are Children depicted are same age, diverse
- Looking at camera to invoke engagement
- Not stereotypical - diverse socioeconomic, cultural, physical

Conclusion

Resource Development: Carole, a Literacy Specialist and Suzanne, a designer, are sisters with a close relationship. This allowed for a greater level of interaction between author and designer giving Suzanne opportunity to problem solve design challenges thus ensuring that Carole's vision for the books was realised.

Non-Fiction genre - The use of non-fiction topics at such an early level is novel. The publisher and creators were committed to developing a series of nonfiction readers that were aimed at readers in acquisition, yet that did not fall into the trap of being labelling, repetitive pattern books.