

# BOOKS THAT BUILD LANGUAGE, KNOWLEDGE & VOCABULARY

— By NZ School Year and Genre —



## WHY READING MATTERS

Reading storybooks or chapter books is one of the most effective ways to grow your child's:

- ✓ Oral language
- ✓ Vocabulary
- ✓ Background knowledge
- ✓ Reading comprehension
- ✓ Writing skills
- ✓ Critical thinking

The more language and knowledge children have, the easier it is for them to understand what they read and express themselves through speaking and writing.

Whether you're reading at home or in the classroom, this supports your child using elements of a Structured Literacy approach by connecting spoken language, reading, and writing in meaningful ways.



## THE MORE GENRES CHILDREN READ...

Different books expose children to:

- Different sentence structures
- Rich vocabulary
- New ideas and knowledge
- Stronger oral language
- Critical thinking

The more genres children read, the more tools they have when it is time to write stories, reports, speeches, and poems.

## WHY DIFFERENT GENRES MATTER

MYSTERY	• Inference • Problem solving • Prediction
BIOGRAPHY & NON-FICTION	• World knowledge • Real people • Real events
FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION	• Imagination • Creativity • Flexible thinking
HISTORICAL FICTION	• Empathy • Understanding the past • Different perspectives
POETRY	• Vocabulary • Rhythm • Language play
SPEECHES & PERSUASIVE TEXTS	• Critical thinking • Communication • Influence



## ACCESSING GREAT BOOKS MATTERS

Children with dyslexia may find reading difficult, effortful, or tiring, but this should never prevent them from accessing rich stories, knowledge, vocabulary, and ideas.

- Audiobooks, family read-alouds, classroom read-alouds, shared reading, and listening to chapter books are all valuable ways to expose children to quality literature and age-appropriate content.
- The goal is not simply decoding words on a page. The goal is building language, knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, imagination, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of reading.
- For many children with dyslexia, listening to books allows them to engage with texts that match their age, interests, and intellectual ability while continuing to develop background knowledge and language comprehension.

★  
Reading difficulties should never prevent children from accessing quality books, rich language, and knowledge.



## YEARS 1–3



### FICTION PICTURE BOOKS

- A Boy and a Ball – Phil Cummings
- A New Coat for Anna – Harriet Ziefert
- Anzac Violin – Jennifer Beck
- Bess the Brave War Horse – Susan Brocker
- Chinese Myths – Various
- Elephant Man – Mariangela Di Fiore
- Extraordinary Mr Qwerty – Karla Strambini
- Fire – Jackie French
- Flood – Jackie French
- Harmonica – Dawn McMillan
- Lucy Goes to the Lighthouse – Grant Sheehan
- Make Way for Ducklings – Robert McCloskey
- Mirette on the High Wire – Emily Arnold McCully
- Mrs Katz and Tush – Patricia Polacco
- Old Man – Sarah V
- Peter Pan – J.M. Barrie
- Peter Rabbit – Beatrix Potter
- Rotten Island – William Steig
- Sulwe – Lupita Nyong'o
- Sylvester and the Magic Pebble – William Steig
- Ten Pound Pom – Carole Wilkinson
- The Bantam and the Soldier – Jennifer Beck
- The Dragon Hunters – James Russell
- The Dragon Riders – James Russell
- The Dragon Tamers – James Russell
- The First Dog – Jan Brett
- The Golden Rule – Ilene Cooper
- The Mousehole Cat – Antonia Barber
- The Proudest Blue – Ibtihaj Muhammad
- The Story of Ping – Marjorie Flack
- The Terrible Suitcase – Emma Allen
- They Were Strong and Good – Robert Lawson
- Three – Stephen Michael King
- Three Names – Patricia MacLachlan
- Wind in the Willows – Kenneth Grahame
- Wisp: A Story of Hope – Zana Frailon



### EARLY READERS

- Aussie Nibbles series – Various
- Bad Guys series – Aaron Blabey
- Beast Quest series – Adam Blade
- Billie B Brown series – Sally Rippin
- Boys vs Beast series – Mac Park
- D-Bot series – Mac Park
- Mighty Robot series – Dav Pilkey
- My Father's Dragon trilogy – Ruth Stiles Gannett
- Ninja Kid series – Anh Do
- The Kingdom of Wrenly series – Jordan Quinn
- The Magic Tree House series – Mary Pope Osborne
- Zac Power series – H.I. Larry



### HISTORICAL PICTURE BOOKS

- Dinsoaur Hunter – David Hill
- First to the Top – David Hill
- Greyfriars Bobby – Ruth Brown
- Herbert the Brave Sea Dog – Robyn Belton
- Hero of the Sea – David Hill
- Home Child – Dawn McMillan
- Kate Sheppard – Maria Gill
- Madeline – Ludwig Bemelmans
- Sky High – David Hill
- Speed King – David Hill
- Taking the Lead – David Hill
- The Secret of the Kelpie – Lari Don
- The Snow Dragon – Abi Elphinstone





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## YEARS 4–5



### HISTORICAL FICTION

- Olaf the Viking – Martin Conway
- Against the Odds: Pompeii – Rachel Smoke-Richardson
- Against the Odds: San Francisco Earthquake 1906 – Mary Colgan



### MYTH & LEGEND

- Aesop's Fables – Aesop



### POETRY / CLASSIC

- The World of Christopher Robin – A.A. Milne
- Jabberwocky – Lewis Carroll



### ADVENTURE

- Choose Your Own Adventure series – Various Authors
- Against the Odds: Crashed! – Eleanor Campbell
- Kensuke's Kingdom – Michael Morpurgo



### BIOGRAPHY / NON-FICTION

- Martin's Big Words – Doreen Rappaport
- Long Walk to Freedom – Chris van Wyk
- Who Was / Who Is series – Various Authors



### REAL-LIFE STORIES

- Heroes: Inspiring True Stories of Courageous Animals – David Long
- Rescue: True Stories of Courageous Animals – David Long
- Survivors: Extraordinary Stories of Survival – David Long
- Against the Odds: Hurricane Katrina – Eleanor Cardell
- Against the Odds: Animal Attacks – Mari Bolte
- Against the Odds: Winter Whiteouts – Krista Suprenant



### FICTION

- The One and Only Ivan – Katherine Applegate



### HUMOUR / ADVENTURE

- Danny the Champion of the World – Roald Dahl
- Fantastic Mr Fox – Roald Dahl
- James and the Giant Peach – Roald Dahl
- The BFG – Roald Dahl
- Matilda – Roald Dahl
- The Twits – Roald Dahl
- The Roald Dahl Collection – Roald Dahl
- The Brilliant World of Tom Gates – Liz Pichon



### MYSTERY

- Famous Five series – Enid Blyton
- Nancy Drew series – Carolyn Keene
- Secret Seven series – Enid Blyton



### BIOGRAPHY

- The Story of Helen Keller – Margaret Davidson
- The Story of Marie Curie – Rachel A. Koestler-Grack



### FANTASY

- The Faraway Tree Collection – Enid Blyton
- The Harry Potter Series – J.K. Rowling
- The Magic Tree House Collection – Mary Pope Osborne
- Wings of Fire series – Tui T. Sutherland
- The Dragon Defenders – James Russell





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## YEARS 6–8



### GRAPHIC NOVELS

- *I Survived Graphic Novel Series* – Lauren Tarshis
- *Muhammad Ali (Graphic Novel)* – Saddleback Educational Publishing
- *T-Minus: The Race to the Moon* – Jim Ottaviani & Zander Cannon
- *The Boy Who Didn't Want to Die: A Graphic Memoir* – Peter Lantos



### HISTORICAL FICTION

- *Refugee* – Alan Gratz
- *Once* – Morris Gleitzman
- *War Horse* – Michael Morpurgo
- *Private Peaceful* – Michael Morpurgo
- *The Great Gallipoli Escape* – Jackie French
- *When Fishes Flew* – Michael Morpurgo
- *Canterbury Quake* – Desna Wallace
- *Children of the Rush (trilogy)* – James Russell
- *Chinatown Girl* – Eva Wong Ng
- *Dawn Raid* – Pauline Vaeluaga Smith
- *Mission Girl* – Brian Falkner
- *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* – John Boyne
- *The Wahine Disaster* – Sharon Holt



### ADVENTURE

- *Choose Your Own Adventure series* – Various Authors
- *Against the Odds: Crashed!* – Eleanor Campbell
- *Kensuke's Kingdom* – Michael Morpurgo



### ADVENTURE

- *Kensuke's Kingdom* – Michael Morpurgo
- *Robin Hood: Hacking, Heists and Flaming Arrows* – Robert Muchamore



### CONTEMPORARY FICTION

- *Pig-Heart Boy* – Malorie Blackman
- *Wolf* – Gillian Cross
- *Framed* – Frank Cottrell Boyce
- *Wonder* – R.J. Palacio
- *Boy Overboard* – Morris Gleitzman



### CLASSIC CHAPTER BOOKS

- *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* – Jules Verne
- *Alice in Wonderland* – Lewis Carroll
- *Around the World in 80 Days* – Jules Verne
- *Black Beauty* – Anna Sewell
- *Charlotte's Web* – E.B. White
- *Gulliver's Travels* – Jonathan Swift
- *Huckleberry Finn* – Mark Twain
- *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* – Jules Verne
- *King Arthur* – Retold by Various Authors
- *Oliver Twist* – Charles Dickens
- *The Railway Children* – E. Nesbit
- *The Secret Garden* – Frances Hodgson Burnett
- *Treasure Island* – Robert Louis Stevenson



### FICTION

- *The One and Only Ivan* – Katherine Applegate



### HORROR

- *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – Robert Louis Stevenson
- *Oxford Tree: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – Retold from Robert Louis Stevenson



### MYTH & LEGEND

- *Greek Myths* – Retold by Various Authors
- *Norse Myths* – Retold by Various Authors



### SCI-FI / FANTASY

- *The Wild Robot* – Peter Brown
- *The Hobbit* – J.R.R. Tolkien



### MYSTERY / FANTASY

- *The House of One Hundred Clocks* – A.M. Howell



### SURVIVAL

- *Hatchet series* – Gary Paulsen



### DYSTOPIAN

- *The Giver* – Lois Lowry





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## WHY READING MATTERS

Reading aloud helps children build:

- ✓ Oral language
- ✓ Vocabulary
- ✓ Background knowledge
- ✓ Reading comprehension
- ✓ Writing skills
- ✓ Critical thinking

Reading aloud exposes children to language and ideas that are often far beyond what they can read independently.



## TIPS FOR CHOOSING BOOKS

- ✓ Choose books that match your child's interests.
- ✓ Look for rich vocabulary, engaging characters, and interesting ideas.
- ✓ Balance fiction with non-fiction.
- ✓ Don't worry about the level – books read aloud should be a little challenging.
- ✓ Visit the library – librarians love to help!

### Good books:

- Spark curiosity
- Build knowledge
- Introduce new vocabulary
- Encourage conversation



## READ TOGETHER AND TALK ABOUT IT

Reading together builds language, knowledge, vocabulary, and understanding.

### GREAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What do you think will happen next?
- Why do you think the character did that?
- How would you feel if you were that character?
- What do you think the author is trying to tell us?
- What was your favourite part? Why?
- Can you think of a time when something like this happened to you?
- What did you learn from this book?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?

★ **Remember:** There are no perfect answers. The goal is conversation, thinking, and building understanding.



## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

**Read-Aloud Routine**  
Zaner-Bloser

**Maximise Your Read-Alouds to Build Language Comprehension**  
Maria S. Murray

### Study Guides

Many of the recommended books also include downloadable study guides, discussion questions, and activity ideas that can help support vocabulary development, comprehension, critical thinking, and background knowledge.

These resources can be found on DEB under **BOOKS THAT BUILD LANGUAGE, KNOWLEDGE and VOCABULARY (By NZ School Year and Genre)**

They provide practical guidance for parents and teachers on getting the most out of read-alouds, building language comprehension, and encouraging rich discussions about books.



## FINAL MESSAGE

The goal is not simply teaching children to read. The goal is helping them build language, knowledge, vocabulary, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the world around them.