



Books That Build Language, Knowledge, and Vocabulary (By NZ school Year and Genre)

Reading storybooks or chapter books is one of the most effective ways to grow your child's oral language (both understanding and speaking), expand their vocabulary, and build background knowledge about the world. This matters because the more language and knowledge children have, the easier it is for them to understand what they read and express themselves in writing.

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

When people say book **genres**, they simply mean the different *types* of reading like adventure, mystery, nonfiction, poetry, or fantasy. Each genre offers something unique, whether it's an exciting story, real-life facts, or powerful words that make us think. Each genre helps children develop different reading and thinking skills:

- **Mystery** help children notice clues and figure things out., problem-solving, and inference.
- **Biography and nonfiction** teach real facts about people, places, and history, expand their world knowledge and introduce real-life heroes.
- **Fantasy and science fiction** stretch their imagination and help them think outside the box.
- **Historical fiction** helps children understand what life was like in the past, encourages empathy and a deeper understanding of history and people's experiences.
- **Poetry** develops a love of language, rhythm, and creative expression.
- **Speeches and persuasive texts** teach how words can influence others or make big changes

The more genres of books children read or are read to them, the more tools they have when it's time to write, different books will expose them to different sentence structures, vocabulary, and ideas help them express themselves in different ways whether they're writing a story, a report, speech or poem.

[Zaner-Bloser](#) has released an incredible information sheet on how to set a routine for parents and teachers to use to make sure you are getting the most out of your read-aloud. The two-page document also includes a list of questions to ask for fiction books and a separate list for non-fiction. This list is really helpful if reading aloud doesn't come naturally to you or if you are a teacher, it's a great handout for parents. It is also a great resource to help children who have language delays.

You can download the document [here – Read-Aloud Routine](#) to use with any of the books suggested below.

Many of the books below also come with their own study guides if you would like some questions and activities to work through.

I would also recommend the webinar Maximize Your Read-Alouds to Build Language Comprehension by Maria S. Murray, Ph.D. who is the founder, CEO and President of The Reading League. This is a great information for parents and teachers starting out their journey.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqL-NSRQLcQ>

Years 1–3 – Fiction Picture Book

- 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 Fraillon

Years 2–4 – Early Reader

- 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

Years 2–4 – Historical Picture Book

- Dinosaur 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

Years 3–5 – Historical Fiction

- Olaf the Viking – Martin Conway

Years 3–5 – Humour/Adventure

- Olaf the Viking – Martin Conway

Years 3–6 – Myth & Legend

- Aesop's Fables – Aesop

Years 3–6 – Poetry/Classic

- The World of Christopher Robin – A.A. Milne

Years 4–6 – Adventure

- Choose Your Own Adventure series – Various Authors

Years 4–6 – Biography/Non-fiction

- Martin's Big Words – Doreen Rappaport (storybook)
- Long Walk to Freedom – Chris van Wyk (storybook)

Years 4–6 – Fiction

- The One and Only Ivan – Katherine Applegate

Years 4–6 – Humour/Adventure

- Danny the Champion of the World – Roald Dahl
- The Roald Dahl Collection – Roald Dahl

Years 4–6 – Mystery

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

Years 4–8 – Biography

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

Years 4–8 – Biography/Non-fiction

- Heroes: Inspiring True Stories of Courageous Animals – David Long
- Who Was/Who Is series – Various Authors

Years 4–8 – Fantasy

- The Faraway Tree Collection – Enid Blyton
- The Harry Potter Series – J.K. Rowling
- The Hobbit – J.R.R. Tolkien
- The Magic Tree House Collection – Mary Pope Osborne
- Wings of Fire series – Tui T. Sutherland

Years 5–7 – Adventure

- Kensuke's Kingdom – Michael Morpurgo

Years 5–7 – Biography/Non-fiction

- Muhammad Ali (Graphic Novel) – Terry Collins

Years 5–8 – Biography/Non-fiction

- Survivors (Blue Peter Award Winner) – David Long

Years 5–8 – Classic Chapter Book

- 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

Years 5–8 – Graphic Novel / Biography

- Muhammad Ali (Graphic Novel) – Saddleback Educational Publishing

Years 5–8 – Historical Fiction

- 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

Years 5–8 – Horror

- Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – Robert Louis Stevenson

Years 5–8 – Myth & Legend

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

Years 5–8 – Sci-fi/Fantasy

- The Wild Robot – Peter Brown

Years 6–8 – Historical Fiction

- Once – Morris Gleitzman
- War Horse – Michael Morpurgo

Years 6–8 – Horror

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

Years 6–8 – Mystery/Fantasy

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

Years 6–8 – Survival

- Hatchet series – Gary Paulsen

Years 7–8 – Dystopian

- The Giver – Lois Lowry

Created by Sharon Scurr

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