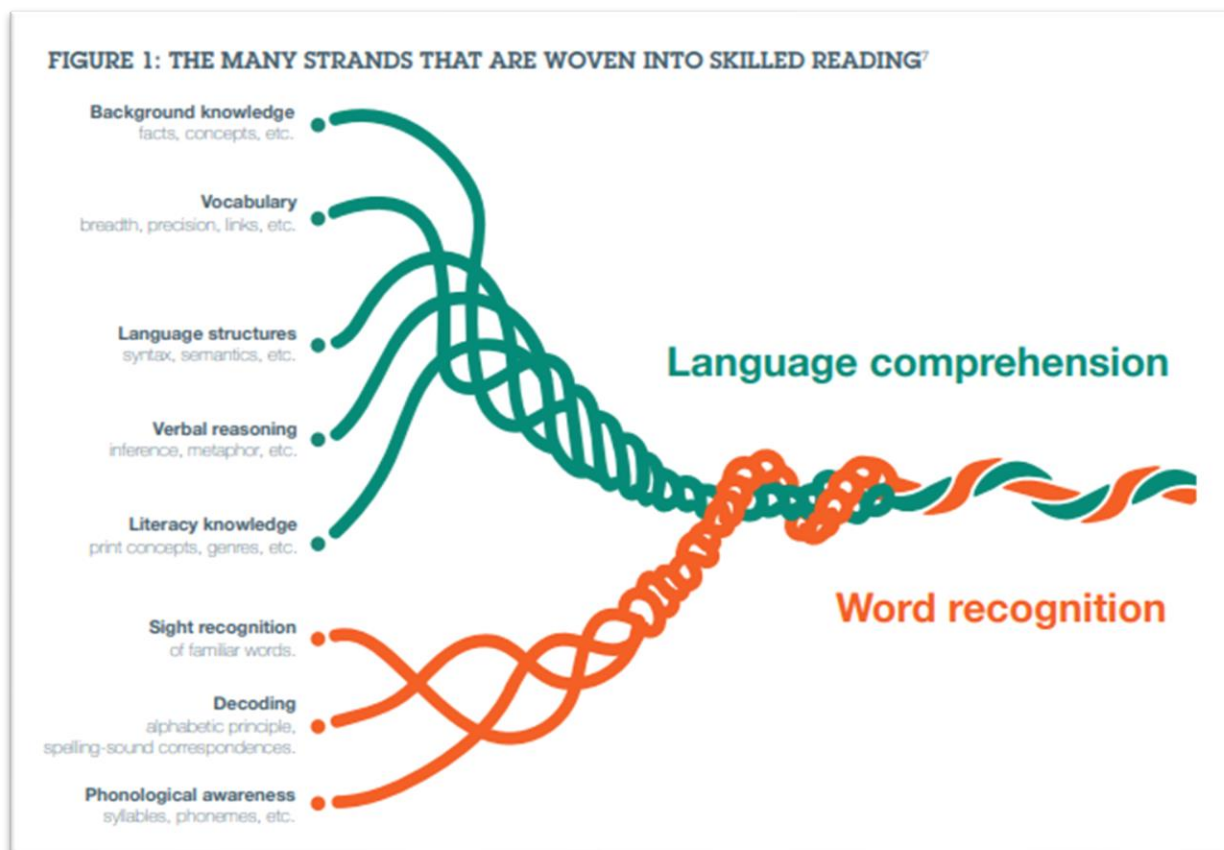


Why do we need a reading canon?

In the 2014 National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) progression in reading is driven by the challenge of the texts pupils read; reading skills do not grow more challenging, instead the skills and strategies contained in Scarborough's rope model (Scarborough, 2001) are applied to texts that increase in challenge year on year. The National Curriculum (NC) Programme of Study for Reading in LKS2 identifies that pupils should be reading non-fiction in a wide range of subjects and that pupils should be learning to justify their views about what they've read at the beginning of Y3 and be able to do so increasingly independently by the end of Y4. In UKS2, they should be reading widely and fluently for pleasure and information; their reading should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the demands of the Y7 curriculum. The NC does not include a hierarchy of reading skills or at any point suggest reading lessons should centre around practicing particular skills. Instead, it focuses on the range of texts studied, the importance of secure decoding skills, and building vocabulary breadth and depth and knowledge.



(Image source: EEF Improving Literacy at KS1 report)

Our DEMAT Reading Comprehension guides ([KS1](#) and [KS2](#)) outline how we teach reading based on the Science of Reading and our KS1 and KS2 Reading Comprehension CPD videos cover the research evidence and provide detailed examples of how to teach reading for Years 1-6. Daily, rigorous, high-quality phonics teaching must take place from Reception following the school's chosen phonics programme; the Trust's Education Team strongly recommend a linguistic approach to SSP, and most of our schools follow the

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Sounds-Write programme. It is imperative that all pupils are reading at an age-appropriate level in KS1 and that any pupils not making expected progress receive additional decoding and fluency lessons daily to catch up and keep up with their peers. Once a pupil can decode the words on the page, they can read any age-appropriate text with scaffold, as necessary.

Who chooses the texts? Which are ‘the right texts’?

Choosing ‘the right texts’ sits at the heart of an effective (English) curriculum, so it is important to establish our criteria for this. Firstly, our pupils will be reading for a range of purposes; there will be texts read in reading and writing lessons, texts read in other curriculum subjects, texts read aloud in the daily ‘story time’ for all year groups, and texts read independently purely for pleasure. The purpose of reading a text helps us to define whether it is ‘the right text’. Creating a distinction between texts to study and texts to read for pleasure is, of course, an artificial distinction as we want our pupils to develop a love of reading for life, but it does help us to distinguish between the texts we choose and the ones pupils choose for themselves.

One of the overarching aims of the National Curriculum is for pupils to develop their love of literature through widespread reading and enjoyment. Reading cannot be taught in a vacuum of isolated, unconnected texts; pupils need plentiful opportunities to practice and develop as readers by becoming immersed in complete high-quality, inspiring texts as well as supplementary non-narrative non-fiction. The NC states that pupils should read a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books and that these should include myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions. It therefore matters which texts we choose to share with our pupils; we have a responsibility to broaden our pupils’ horizons by introducing them to the richest and most beautiful texts possible. We want every single pupil (not just the higher attainers) to have the opportunity to read and study both the great classics of children’s literature as well as some of the fantastic contemporary fiction and non-fiction. Every text we chose must be worthy of its place, both in terms of vocabulary, level of cognitive challenge and importance for cultural capital.

This is a huge undertaking, both in its enormity and responsibility, and we cannot possibly introduce pupils to all the texts we’d like to; we therefore need to create a narrative for our reading canon that will help us to make these choices. The texts we choose must have high leverage, for example building on a concept or, in the words of Christine Counsell, a golden thread running through our curriculum, they need to prepare pupils for what is coming next in secondary school, and they need to include the text types outlined in the NC at the very least. We need to consider the texts that educated people have read, the texts that will build cultural capital and the texts that will help pupils make connections across time and subjects. For example, if we introduce pupils to some of Aesop’s Fables in Reception or KS1 we can then remind them that Aesop was a Greek slave when we study ancient Greece in KS2. We can begin to explore why the original fables were no more than 800 words long and trace their origins back to the ancient Sumerian proverbs. Developing this narrative will help us to then place Greek myths in their cultural context and then when pupils come to read *The Percy Jackson* or *Harry Potter* series, they will appreciate how these authors have been influenced by the classics. As Daniel Willingham (2009) points out, ‘Deep learning is understanding the relationship among the parts.’ While we cannot introduce pupils to all the texts we may wish to in the short years they are with us, having a clear narrative to our canon ensures we build richness and depth to our pupils’ reading journey.

Picture books provide an excellent starting point to explore complex or emotive subjects; however, they do not provide our pupils with the vocabulary to explain and describe their responses or provide opportunities to build reading miles. The research evidence clearly indicates that our best bet to close the reading gap is through building vocabulary and schemata (Didau 2019, Lemov 2016, Wexler 2019, Willingham 2009). We therefore use picture books in PSHE lessons where we provide word banks and create speaking and listening tasks to develop and deepen pupils' understanding but not for our reading or writing lessons.

In order to accomplish this, it is vital that the English Subject Leader has the overview and final decision on the texts studied in all year groups. The canon is not, and should not be, a static document. It will be reviewed annually with staff and suggestions for text changes will come from year group teachers, however in order to maintain the integrity of the school's canon narrative, the English Subject Leader needs to have the overview and make the final decision of what is in and what is out. The outline planning format will begin to guide our thinking around the types of texts to include and should be read in conjunction with the Challenging Read document that outlines the five text types that are complex beyond a lexical level, which we need to equip our pupils to read by the time they begin Y7: archaic texts, texts with non-linear time sequences, narratively complex texts, texts with complex plots and symbols and resistant texts. Some schools may also choose to select year / phase group authors and poets that pupils will engage with to develop in-depth knowledge of the author's life and context as well as their work.

Independent choice

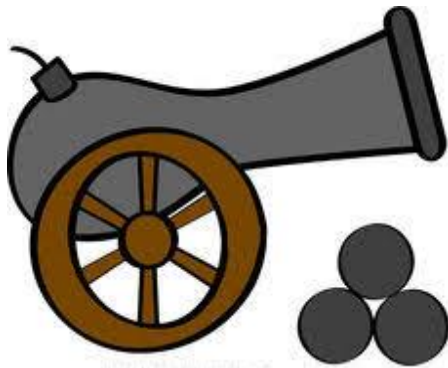
If we are going to select all the texts chosen for study in school, it is imperative that pupils have the freedom to choose their independent texts from a carefully curated school stock. We do not want to put glass ceilings on our pupils by restricting them to only choosing books at a certain level or colour band once they have learnt the full phonic code from the school's chosen phonics programme, and, equally, we need to monitor their independent reading choices to ensure they are not coasting along and continually choosing 'holiday' reads. Timetabling one session a week (this could be one of your 15-20 minute daily read-aloud times) to read blurbs and recommend books to each other will help foster pupils' appetite to explore new texts. Research shows that giving children agency over the books they read (Clark and Pythian-Sence, 2008) is a huge motivator and by introducing them to a wide range of quality texts through the school's reading canon we will have opened the door to a world of possibilities.

Timetabling and organisation

When thinking about timetabling, we need to decide at a school level how texts will be linked within a year / phase group as well as across year / phase groups. Some schools may decide to read and study a class novel daily in the reading lesson and weave linked texts throughout the unit and then have a second reading for pleasure text that is read during the daily 'story time'. Other academies may prefer to read the same text in the daily 'story time' as the one studied in the daily reading lesson. A third model may be to read the class novel daily during 'story time' and to close-read sections during reading lessons on Monday and Friday and then to allocate Tuesday to Thursday for linked texts. Time must be allocated for in-depth poetry studies and for pupils to learn to recite poems off by heart and perform them to an audience. Linked texts will be used to build background knowledge and develop pupils' schemata to enable them to engage with texts at a deeper level. Some schools will choose to link their writing to their reading (this is the optimum option as it allows for overlearning the text and vocabulary structures through repeated

analysis, however the text being read must be the best model for the chosen writing task). Other schools will prefer to use separate texts as writing models. This is necessarily context dependent.

Reading Spine or Canon?



A Reading Spine is a list of texts that have been selected and categorised in order of increasing challenge; the early texts would be considered easier to read than the later texts. An 'easier read' may be lexically less challenging than a 'harder read'. Equally, a 'harder read' may be as lexically challenging as an 'easier read' but may have more complex themes. When choosing texts to read from a spine, people are often guided by the level of challenge and how the text will support the readers' interests, which will often include the topics being studied. The texts on a reading spine are usually carefully chosen to ensure they are a rich source of Tier 2 vocabulary and have rich concepts and themes to explore. By their nature, spines do not build a curriculum narrative so have the potential to create a disjointed reading experience with missed opportunities to build pupils' schemata and thus deepen their learning. A reading spine has the potential to resemble the shot fired from a cannon ball.

Canon, as defined in the Cambridge English Dictionary, is a noun that can refer to a Christian priest with special duties in a cathedral; is a rule, principle, or law, especially in the Christian Church; is the writings or other works that are generally agreed to be good, important and worth studying; all the writings or other known works to be by a particular person. A carefully built reading canon will contain the writings or other works that are generally agreed to be good, important and worth studying, which have been curated to support the curriculum narrative.

Love
Community
Respect
Trust
Ambition



Example canon structure

Key

fiction	poetry	plays	non-fiction	archaic texts	non-linear	narratively complex	complex plots & symbols	meaning resistant	year / phase author	year / phase poet	
myths & legends	traditional stories	modern fiction	literary heritage	other cultures & traditions	narrative theme: famous people from history	narrative theme: e.g. conflict / war	narrative theme: e.g.	narrative theme: e.g.			

Year Group	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2	Poet	Author
EYFS Core								
EYFS linked texts								
Y1 Core								
Y1 linked texts								
Y2 Core								
Y2 linked texts								
Y3 Core								
Y3 linked texts								
Y4 Core								
Y4 linked texts								
Y5 Core								
Y5 linked texts								
Y6 Core								
Y6 linked texts								