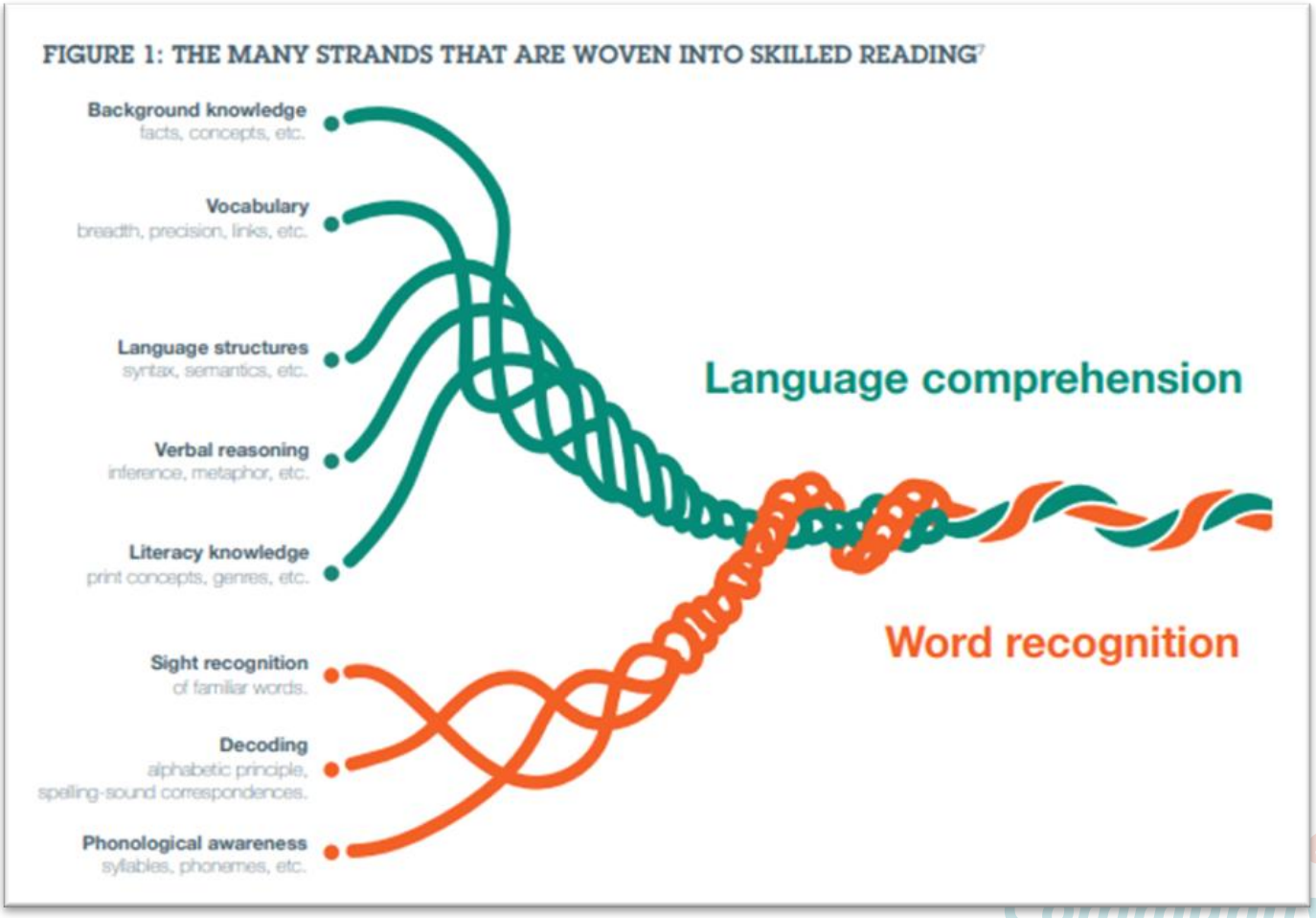
Trust reading canon rationale

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; theTrust's Education Team strongly recommend a linguistic approach to SSP, and all our schools follow the 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 Phythian-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 decide at academy level how to organise reading lessons. Pupils will have daily reading lessons using Reading Reconsidered techniques. Lessons will be a combination of FASE reading, fluency practice, implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction, close reading and accountable independent reading. The majority of the time will be spent reading and re-reading texts. Teachers will read aloud the core class novel or another text (time-permitting) in a ring-fenced daily session to model expert reading. During this time, pupils will listen to the story and not be expected to analyse it; this is a time for pupils to become immersed in the story.

Two weeks every term are allocated for in-depth poetry studies and for pupils to learn to recite poems by heart and perform them to an audience. Linked texts will be used to build background knowledge and develop pupils' schema to enable them to engage with texts at a deeper level. Core poetry is identified in our trust reading canon and academies choose additional poems to study and learn. We do not teach pupils to write poetry. When studying poetry in reading lessons, pupils are taught to write non-fiction texts linked to previously taught foundation subject content.

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' schema 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.

See the English subject community folder for our DEMAT:

- Reading canon with core themes
- Reading progression document (progression of text analysis)
- Key Learning Indicators (KLIs), sit behinds and subject knowledge packs
- Reading Reconsidered techniques training materials
- Reading planning support documents including videos of teachers using Reading Reconsidered techniques

Schema Theory

The term schema was first used in psychology by Jean Piaget in 1952. It is a way of organising knowledge about a specific object, event, concept or situation. Our brains create mental structures of already learned knowledge, skills and ideas which we use to organise and perceive new information (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020).

If you have a rich schema about a subject or situation, you can understand and respond to new information quickly. If your schema is less developed, you don't have this rich web of connected knowledge to draw from and it is much harder to understand and respond to new information quickly.

For example, in EYFS children will build their schema of typical story structures and learn that most stories have a protagonist (goodie) and antagonist (baddie). As they build their schema, they will learn to look out for these character types when we introduce them to new stories. With each new story, they are building and reinforcing their schema or simple story structures. This type of schema building is called assimilation. They are assimilating new knowledge to reinforce this structure.

As children mature, we are likely to introduce them to more nuanced stories where we don't have clear protagonists and antagonists. At this point, their schema of typical story structures deepens and develops. They now know there are nuances. This type of schema building is called accommodation. They are adding to their schema and refining the criteria they had for typical story structures.

In summary: Our brains favour narratives (stories). This is because stories make connections to events and the more connections we have about something, the easier it is to remember. This is schema theory in action.

Building vocabulary knowledge

In the 1990s, Hart and Risley published a study which identified children in professional families heard on average 11 million words a year in comparison to approximately 3 million words for children in families on welfare. (Hart & Risley, 1995). This study was the first of its kind to explicitly link vocabulary size to socioeconomic status. Subsequent studies have not identified as a large a gap as that in the Hart and Risley study (and this study has been widely critiqued). But subsequent studies have all reported noticeable vocabulary gaps in their overall findings (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013). And, as Alex Quigley argues, further research prompted from Hart and Risley's original work has taught us that early language exposure matters (Quigley, 2022). Children who have not had plentiful exposure to rich language may find it difficult to engage with the more academic language used in schools. Whereas children who have heard a lot of rich, discursive language are more likely to experience this academic language at home. Law, et. al. identified in their research that children with language difficulties upon entry to Year 1 are four times more likely to have reading difficulties in adulthood than those who don't (Law, et al., 2017).