

CONNECTIONS

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Is your library the window and mirror all children need?

For children to succeed academically, personally and socially, they must feel a sense of belonging. Sadly, for many children in colonised countries, the world of school is built around systemic inequities and assumptions about what children know and should learn.

However, while educators may feel powerless to change social inequities or the curriculum, they can make their classrooms more inclusive and welcoming and connect to children's lives through culturally responsive use of authentic diverse literature. Such practice can truly transform lives.

Books can empower, include and validate the way children see themselves. But books can also exclude, stereotype and oppress children's identities. Culturally and racially minoritised groups are at particular risk of misrepresentation and stereotyping in books, as are LGBTQI+ individuals and families, and those with diverse abilities.

First Nations groups are also often notably absent from children's books. Excluding the viewpoints, histories and suffering of First Nations Peoples can misrepresent history and teach children a white-washed version of the past. Furthermore, failing to represent the thriving, contemporary lives and cultures of First Nations Peoples risks their continued stereotyping and misunderstanding in the minds of others.

Many books promote stereotypical, outdated or exotic views of underrepresented groups. This can damage outcomes for children from those groups while children from dominant cultural groups can view themselves as 'normal' and others as 'different'.

All children deserve to see their lives, cultures and families reflected in truly authentic and affirming stories – the mirrors.

All children deserve and need to see the lives of those different to themselves affirmed and reflected too – the windows.

All of society benefits when this takes place. The challenge is to access suitable children's books and share them with children. We can use these as a foundation for conversations about children's lives, cultures and communities. Currently, children from minority backgrounds rarely see themselves reflected in books. The world presented in most children's books is overwhelmingly white, male and middle-class.

This is not to say that any of the books we choose are lacking in quality or should not be shared with children. However, it is important to be aware that a world of children's books dominated by white authors, white images and white male heroes, can create a sense of white superiority. This is harmful to the worldviews and identities of all children. So, it is vital that librarians, educators and caregivers can all identify and access quality authentic diverse books to share and put in the hands of children.

A starting point

When considering how to diversify book collections, a good place to start is to use a survey such as this one by [Lee and Low](#). This can easily be adapted for the Australian, New Zealand or other regions.

Working through this survey can help you identify the scope and breadth of your existing book collection and identify possible patterns of exclusivity or stereotyping.

Where to next?

Next, seek out books that reflect our diverse and thriving communities and

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Connections

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ESA wishes to acknowledge the Kulin Nation, Traditional Custodians of the land on which our offices are located, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands across Australia, their Elders, Ancestors, cultures and heritage.



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www.scisdata.com

Professional learning

Term 2 Webinars

What's in a SCIS record?

Tuesday 9 May 2PM (AEST)

In this one-hour introductory webinar, SCIS will provide an overview of SCIS records. We will discuss how the different aspects of cataloguing enhance resource discoverability, and how SCIS Data can be used to support your staff and students.

Call numbers, Dewey and SCIS

Tuesday 6 June 2PM (AEST)

In this one-hour webinar, SCIS will provide an overview of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and book numbers as applied in SCIS records. Useful for school library staff that are not trained in cataloguing or would like a refresher on DDC, this webinar will help you understand the role of a call number in organising your information resources for effective retrieval.

15-Minute Video tutorials

Need shorter, more concise professional learning? Our on-demand tutorials are designed to fit around your busy schedule and only cost \$12 each!

- **Covering a book:** Ever struggled covering a book? Cataloguing Team Leader Ceinwen Jones shows you her top tips for making book preservation a breeze!
- **Searching in SCIS:** SCIS Content Manager Renate Beilharz shows you how to search the SCIS database with confidence.
- **Genres in SCIS:** This tutorial will describe the genre headings used by SCIS, and explain how they are used in catalogue records.
- **Series headings and authorities:** This tutorial covers how series authorities can assist with searching and the difference between heading and series statements in SCIS records.
- **4 free digital collections to import to your catalogue:** This short tutorial demonstrates how to import free eBooks, websites and apps into your LMS.
- **SCIS doesn't have a record for my resource – what now?** This tutorial presents three ways to place cataloguing requests to SCIS.

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scis Schools Catalogue
Information Service

Cultural Diversity Categories Framework

(Adapted from the work of Bishop: see online reference list for details.)

| Categories | Indicators |
|---|--|
| culturally authentic/ specific/ conscious | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'illuminate the experience of growing up as a member of a particular, non-white cultural group' (Bishop, 1992) • have potential to increase appreciation and understandings of those not from this culture • books are written by people of the culture reflected in the book* • 'written with a primary goal of speaking to and representing the experiences of underrepresented/marginalized groups' (Crisp et al., 2016, p. 34) |
| culturally generic/ socially conscious | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'featuring characters who are members of so-called minority groups, but contain few, if any specific details that might serve to define those characters culturally' (Bishop, 1992) • assumed audience is white • themes often present white European/American/Australian values and activities • characters may be portrayed in stereotypical ways in illustrations • 'written with a social agenda, intended to promote acceptance and harmony, or at least tolerance of different groups' (Crisp et al., 2016 p 34) |
| culturally neutral/ melting pot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'feature people of colour but are fundamentally about something else' (Bishop, 1992) • 'cultural authenticity is not likely to be a major consideration' (Bishop, 1992) • character/s of 'colour' could be replaced with a white character with no impact on the overall story • 'presenting a colour-blind view of the world and/or depicting people across the rainbow of cultural identities without acknowledging it explicitly' (Crisp et al., 2016, p. 34)) |
| solely Caucasian | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all humans/characters are Caucasian |
| Non human | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-human characters or no characters at all, for example, animal stories, concept books |

*Some books have been written as a collaboration between an author and members of an underrepresented group. Such books usually contain an endorsement or a statement of permission or collaboration from the member/s of the underrepresented group.

Note: in nonfiction/informational texts rather than look at 'characters', look at the representation of people.

families. Advocates for children's literature are increasingly publishing resources to help with book selection. Two examples freely available are [the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature \(NCACL\) Cultural Diversity Database](#), and the [NCACL Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Resource](#). These are updated regularly as new titles become available.

However, it is important not to simply rely on these resources and assume authenticity and positive reflections of

diversity. Some books portraying diversity, even with positive and well-intentioned themes, can still position underrepresented groups in background or supporting roles and some can reflect inaccurate or stereotypical representation and viewpoints.

One tried and tested way to overcome this is to use Bishop's categories of cultural diversity. Bishop developed these categories in the 1990s, and they have stood the test of time with many researchers.

This framework can be used to

interrogate more deeply the representation of diverse people in individual books. The books least likely to be found in collections are those classified as culturally authentic/specific/conscious. These are the books to seek out to extend your collection, as they contain the voices and authentic stories of the communities reflected in the book.

Considering viewpoints and ideologies

Lastly, authors often use animals or other anthropomorphic creatures to tell stories with positive social messages. However, over-reliance on these books will not help increase the visibility of diverse groups and often the storylines tend to reflect culturally dominant lifestyles all the same. One way of identifying this is to use this **Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework** (adapted from the work of Boutte et al., 2008). This framework guides you through considering the racial, cultural and social demographics of the main characters as well as underlying viewpoints and ideologies presented in the book. This can be used with all books. For anthropomorphic characters, ask yourself, 'if I replace this character with a person with no impact on the storyline, what would that person look and act like?'

You can freely access this framework in my co-authored article, [The challenge of monoculturalism: what books are educators sharing with children and what messages do they send?](#) (Adam and Barrett-Pugh, 2020). This framework is also included in my book *Transforming practice: transforming lives through diverse children's literature*.

A closing word

In my work with educators, I always find great passion for children's books and the importance of finding books for all children. However, I also find uncertainty and a lack of confidence in knowing what books to select to truly make this difference to those whose representation is commonly excluded. I hope the tips and resources presented here can help you locate and present a truly diverse library to the children in your care.

References

See online version of article for reference list.

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SCIS is more

Welcome to the Term 2 edition of *Connections*.

It's hard to believe that Term 1 is already behind us, I guess time flies when we're having fun. At the start of Term 1, SCIS welcomed our new SCIS Program Director, Product, Data and Insights in the Digital Services, Colin McNeil. Colin has a background in health technology, STM (Scientific, Technical and Medical) and educational publishing. Before joining Educational Services Australia (ESA) Colin was a Senior Product Manager at Elsevier Health where he worked on a portfolio of online solutions for clinician reference, decision support and professional learning.

A shout-out to Australian and New Zealand publishers. It may sound obvious, but SCIS can't do what we do without the publishers who supply us with resources to catalogue. SCIS has cataloguers around Australia and in New Zealand, who work creating high quality catalogue records that reflect the SCIS Cataloguing Standards, so that school library staff can simply download the catalogue records with a click of the mouse.

SCIS works closely with our colleagues across the publishing industry to ensure that their titles, targeting schools, are included in the SCIS database. Some publishers send us physical copies of their books (our preferred method) while others send us digital versions or provide us with online access to their content, so we can create accurate catalogue records. The more we catalogue, the richer our database becomes, and the more catalogue records schools can download – saving them lots of time.

For publishers wanting to check if we have your titles in our database, or who haven't been providing SCIS titles for cataloguing, please contact our new Publisher Relations Officer Ximena Peinado at help@scisdata.com. It is free to have your titles catalogued and included in SCIS Data. More than 80% of Australian schools subscribe to SCIS, so if your titles are listed, they'll be discoverable by literally thousands of schools in Australia, New Zealand, UK and other international markets.

Do you know that ESA also manages Educational Lending Rights (ELR) survey each year? ELR is a great way of ensuring



that Australian creators are rewarded for their efforts from books which are held in school libraries. Each year ESA works with the Office of the Arts to ensure that they have accurate data to base the ELR payments on.

Thank you to those schools who completed the 2022/23 survey, whether directly or by authorising your library management system vendor to do so on your behalf. The Great Aussie Book Count, as its also known, provides essential data for the Office of the Arts. Without the support of the Office of Arts, many contributors would struggle to make a viable living from the books they create or contribute to. In this issue of *Connections*, we've published some early results of the 2022 survey, showing the most commonly available titles and authors.

Have a fantastic Term 2. We hope that you continue use SCIS Data to provide greater resource discoverability for your students and deliver better learning outcomes for them.



Anthony Shaw
SCIS Product Manager

Anthony Shaw has had more than 25 years' experience within the book industry across a wide range of roles; working in bookselling, buying, publishing and supporting libraries. In his most recent role before joining SCIS he was working with collectionHQ as Sales and Account Manager, helping public libraries deliver better collections for their communities across Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. He lives in Melbourne with his wife, 10-year-old daughter and slightly crazy 2-year-old border collie Rudy.

WEBSITE + APP REVIEWS

Nigel Paull reviews the latest educational websites and apps you can use in your library. The websites and apps selected for review are often of a professional nature and should be initially viewed by teachers and library staff to determine suitability for students. The links, content and address of these sites are subject to change.

ATHLETE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

<https://www.ais.gov.au/career-and-education>

PE teachers and talented Year 12 athletes will find authoritative information on this Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) website. Content includes: career paths for athletes; criteria for obtaining AIS and university scholarships; navigating the US collegiate system; and funding for coach development.

SCIS no: 5437008

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN STEM EDUCATION @ VICTORIAN SPACE SCIENCE EDUCATION CENTRE

<https://www.vssec.vic.edu.au>

The Victorian Space Science Education Centre (VSSEC) focuses on teaching and learning across the STEM subjects of science, mathematics, engineering and technology. Primary and secondary curriculum programs centre around a variety of space themes and are available online or as outreach programs.

SCIS no: 5398146

MOAD LEARNING

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/learning/>

On this Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) site, the connection to Old Parliament House forms the basis for exploring Australia's political and social history. The Learning section offers F-12 teachers details of onsite programs and digital excursions, curriculum aligned resources, and professional development opportunities.

SCIS no: 1982042

FIRST NATIONS ARTS AND CULTURE

<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/first-nations-arts-and-culture/>

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. It directly supports young, emerging and established artists, as well as new and established organisations. The Council is committed to supporting First Nations art and culture. The *First Nations Arts and Culture Strategy 2023-27* is available for download. Secondary art teachers can access information regarding protocols and intellectual property, arts awards, the foundation of culture in Closing the Gap, and news.

SCIS no: 1243663

FUTURE FARMERS: AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/future-farmers-australian-agriculture/101729002>

In this series of short videos, the young host visits several Australian farms, meets young farmers, and explores their agricultural pursuits. Students are shown how different food types are grown and how to cook the produce. Discussion points are available for each video.

SCIS no: 5437080

EXOPLANET EXPLORATION: PLANETS BEYOND OUR SOLAR SYSTEM

<https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/>

Exoplanets are planets beyond our solar system. NASA has combined the knowledge and talents of scientists, futurists and artists to create a captivating educational website that encourages students to explore what can be found outside our solar system.

SCIS no: 1837870

SHAKESPEARE UNBOUND

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/shakespeare-unbound/101750462>

ABC Education and Bell Shakespeare have produced a video series of scenes from *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*. Additional content includes discussion points for each scene, a PDF synopsis for each play, and related links.

SCIS no: 5437118

STELR

<https://stelr.org.au>

A project of the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering, STELR aims to enhance the participation rate of senior secondary students in STEM across three content strands: Science Inquiry Skills, Science as a Human Endeavour, and Science Understanding. Curriculum links, resources and career profiles also feature.

SCIS no: 5437123

STUDIES OF RELIGION RESOURCES

<https://reonline.sydcatholic.schools.nsw.edu.au/studies-of-religion-resources/>

This resource was created to support students preparing for the Studies of Religion HSC Examination. Content includes Aboriginal spirituality, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, non-religion, religion and peace, post-1945 Australian religion, and HSC tips.

SCIS no: 5437135



Nigel Paull
Teacher Librarian
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LOVE AND AUTISM

Kay Kerr is an autistic author and journalist from the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.
Her latest book, *Love & Autism*, is out now.

Love and autism is your third book and the second book you've written covering romance and attraction. What drew you back to the subject?

I love love. I grew up loving rom-coms, reading stories that had romance in them. I think there's also an element of being drawn to relationships of all types, communication styles between people, whether that's family relationships, romantic relationships, friendships. Autistic people are told that we have communication deficits, so I'm really interested in examining communications between people through that lens.

Then, the more I sort of explore that area, the more I realise and understand that autistic people have a different way of communicating, but not a lesser way of communicating. There is research around this idea of 'the double empathy problem', which basically outlines that communication with autistic people needs to be looked at a little differently. It is this two-way street, and non-autistic people probably have to come to the table a little bit more in terms of learning to communicate in a style that works for autistic people. Autistic people often put in so much effort to communicate in a neurotypical way so that they are understood and can have those connections, those relationships, and it should really go both ways.

The book tells five true stories of neurodivergent life and love. Earlier this year you tweeted, 'When so much of what is written (and shown on screens) is looking from the outside in, I want to share #ActuallyAutistic stories through the lens with which I see them – not as other but as kin.' Can you tell us a bit more about what that means to you?

I think just speaking in really general terms about the level of understanding around autism in our culture, there still seems to be quite a limited scope of what people perceive autism to be. It is often this narrow window, a fraction of the full picture of the autism spectrum as a whole. I think by having five stories as opposed to writing just my story about my life, I've been able to represent five lives – and they're all vastly different. By weaving these stories together, I feel like it gives readers a chance to see difference in these experiences, but also the similarities and the way that autism can present for different people based on the different circumstances of their lives.

So much of what autism is for me and for so many people is the inner workings that happen at a level that people aren't necessarily going to be able to see, like the way we process and move through the world at an emotional and intellectual level.



When people think of autistic people they might think of meltdowns or stimming or those outward presentations. These, of course, are real and valid, and part of being autistic as well for a lot of people. But exploring the feelings and what happens internally for autistic people helps bridge a gap in understanding for readers. I hope it also makes autistic or neurodivergent people who read it feel affirmed and represented.

What do you hope that a young adult audience might find in your writing?

Autistic people will regularly flag with me that their teen years were some of the trickiest times, and not just in the

teen sense, but also for reasons specific to being autistic. It's such a time of transition, and transitions are really tricky. Social hierarchy in traditional schooling can be really hard to navigate, especially when others are so attuned to any sense of difference in the way you exist. I wanted to explore all of the feelings and the things that happen in that time of change.

In writing my first book, I wrote myself towards my own diagnosis – I was unpacking and processing all of my own feelings about how I moved through the world and what I struggled with. That was a big part of why I set it at the end of Year 12 – those last three or four months, where you have exams, graduation, schoolies. All this in one little period of time felt like such a distilled version of what is hard about being a teenager, and specifically an autistic teenager.

So I ended up getting an autism diagnosis as I was completing my first book. I think that transitional time period is always going to be a major draw for me to write about. I want to make sure that people who read my books feel affirmed and feel like they're not alone in that time, because I definitely felt like I was very alone in those years. So, I would love to think I can provide a little bit of comfort for readers there.

How did you find the stories that you've included in the book?

I found the stories through a range of methods. I wanted to make sure that the people that were involved were really comfortable and only sharing as much as they wanted to share because it's a very vulnerable place to be in, to share your life in such an open way.

I reached out to one person over social media and a few others came through an autism support agency that I've done a bit of work with. I approached someone else based on an article they had written for SBS, and then another is a friend

I made in the writing community when I published my first book. And, finally, I reached out through the producers of *Love on the spectrum* to ask one of the participants to be involved.

It feels like it all fits now, but it was very much all fluid and up in the air until it was all coming together. The process filled me with anxiety at the time, but now I'm so happy with how it came together because it represents such a wide range of people and experiences.

As our society continues to have conversations about diversifying the voices and perspectives in our storytelling, what role do you see school library staff playing in educating young people when it comes to not just neurodiversity, but diversity in general?

I've actually just started my Master of Children's Librarianship and I'm the biggest fan of school libraries. I can still vividly picture my primary school library. It was incredible. It had this sunken reading den that the librarians and the staff always decorated in different themes. As a lot of neurodivergent people will attest, the library is a safe space in a lot of ways. It's sensory friendly, airconditioned, quiet. And full of the most incredible books, with so much to explore, whether that was novels and fiction or whether that was exploring interests in an animal that I was really interested in, or a country or whatever. The library just provided respite.

I think library staff have this very, very unique role in being able to place the right stories in the right hands. That's something

that can't be replaced by technology or anything else. It has to be humans in that space, connecting with young readers, because I do think that the right book can change your life. The right book at the right time can change your life.

Seeing different perspectives is so important in terms of giving readers the building blocks towards empathy and understanding. I think that school library staff have a role that I don't think anybody else can really fill. They put diversity on the shelves and school libraries seem to me to be at the forefront of telling diverse stories and making sure those stories are in the hands of readers, which is really positive.

Do you have any words of wisdom for neurodivergent young people who might be struggling with love in the same ways that you have?

The world can often tell you that you're doing things wrong, because there's a dominant way of doing things. In that context, loving yourself and self-acceptance are radical acts. I hope that young people who might be struggling in any way can see how much strength there is in our differences, because when we figure out how to lean into those differences and to celebrate them, everything just seems to get a lot easier and a lot better.

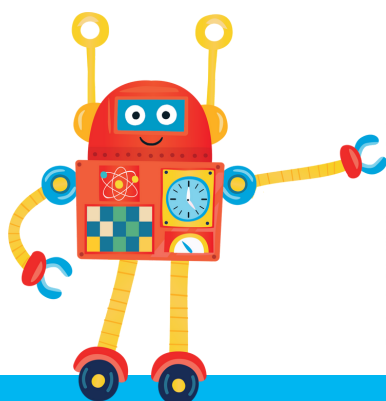


Kay Kerr

Author and Journalist
Sunshine Coast

Kay's latest book, *Love & Autism*, is out now

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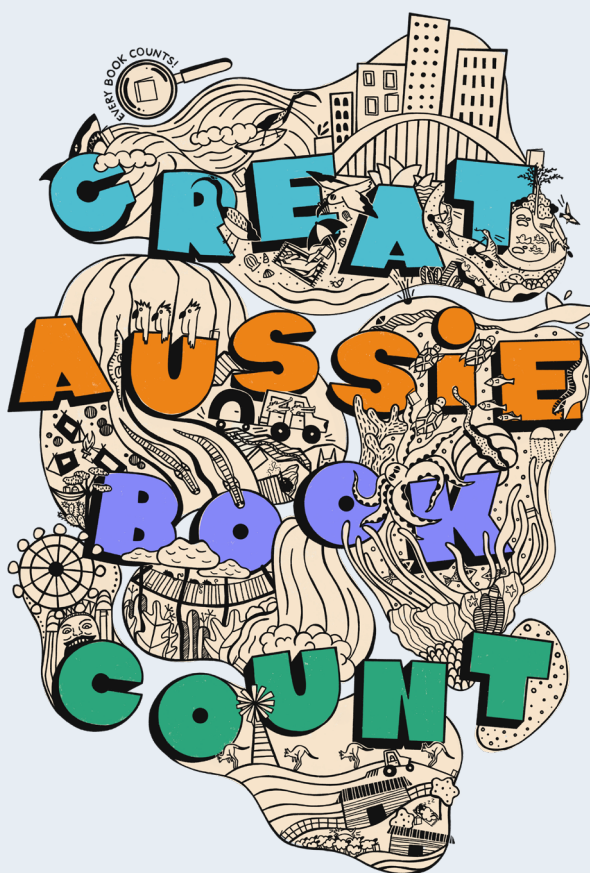
The Australian Lending Right Schemes are important programs that ensure Australian creators and publishers receive compensation for the free use of their books in Australian public and educational lending libraries. The Schemes, managed by the Australian Government's Office for the Arts, have two components, Educational Lending Right (ELR) for school, TAFE and university libraries, and Public Lending Right (PLR), for public libraries.

To break it down, the *Great Aussie Book Count* is a survey, but it is not surveying your school or your school's student body. Instead, it is estimating how many books by Australian authors are held across Australian schools. It starts with a list of eligible book titles, which are then cross-referenced with the book counts from participating school libraries, and then it is extrapolated how many copies of that title there would be across all schools.

This benefits your school library in that the ELR Scheme helps financially compensate Australian content creators, so they can continue to create more amazing books to help shape the minds of future generations. Last year, \$12.7 million was paid to 10,813 publishers and creators through the ELR Scheme.

Which books are in your collections? The most popular Australian books and authors in educational libraries are:

1. *Possum magic* by Mem Fox
2. *The very cranky bear* by Nicholas Bland
3. *Boy overboard* by Morris Gleitzman
4. *Who sank the boat?* by Pamela Allen
5. *Pig the Pug* by Aaron Blabey
6. *Rowan of Rin* by Emily Rodda
7. *Tomorrow, when the war began* by John Marsden
8. *Where the forest meets the sea* by Jeannie Baker
9. *Our granny* by Margaret Wild
10. *WeirDo* by Anh Do



Each year, those schools that participate in *Great Aussie Book Count* are also asked for their feedback. From the feedback received, we learnt that 27% of staff that completed the survey were library officers, 26% were teacher librarians and 20% were library technicians. Others who completed the count included librarians and school administrative staff.

The feedback from participants showed that 100% of respondents said that the *Great Aussie Book Count* was not time-consuming, and that 37% were able to complete the book count survey in less than five minutes. We also discovered that 61% of respondents were already familiar with the ELR program.

One of the great perks of providing feedback is that your school goes into the running for a \$150 voucher. Congratulations to The Cathedral School, Townsville, and their library officer, Kim Kasteel, who won the 2022 prize. This was Kim's first year doing the Count.

ESA is always keen to hear suggestions from library staff about how ELR's *Great*

Aussie Book Count can be improved. If you would like to offer any advice, please get in touch with us at: elr@esa.edu.au.

Resources for the [Great Aussie Book Count](#) can be found on the ESA website. The [Australian Lending Right Schemes](#) website provides details on how the survey supports book creators.

If your school is selected to participate in the 2023 *Great Aussie Book Count*, we do hope you'll take part and help us support Australian book creators so they can continue to do what they do best: make great books!



Amanda Shay
Manager of Subscription Services
Education Services Australia

8 CONNECTIONS 125 TERM 2 2023

FINDING JUST THE RIGHT RESOURCE

Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman on how the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) can help guide your resource selection.

Here's the challenge: finding the right book and related resources for a particular child, group or particular topic from the many available. The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) is tackling this challenge. Our mission is to share our collection through exhibits, events and outreach activities, databases, bibliographies, and through our website and social media platforms.

Established in 1974 by the ACT Branch of The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA), the centre is a national collection holding more than 55,000 Australian children's books with 5,600 of these in 69 different languages. We hold large collections of authors' papers and manuscripts, illustrators' artworks, research files with information on more than 550 authors and illustrators plus ephemera. With such a rich collection of material, we pondered how we might promote our collections virtually to help people build and diversify their collections. Our solution came in the form of databases. In 2019 we launched our NCACL Cultural Diversity Database and received widespread positive comments. We then created our NCACL Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Database, an Australian Verse Novels Resource, and in July this year we will launch our latest database, NCACL Picture Books for Older Readers.

Our databases feature succinct annotations, searchable subjects and links to related resources. On our databases, the Australian Curriculum and all related information can be routinely searched for by specific interests then search findings delivered in seconds via our website anytime, anywhere, to anyone interested.

NCACL Cultural Diversity Database

NCACL's [first created database](#) featured books relating to cultural diversity. We sought books that explored our shared cultural similarities and differences. This database of more than 400 annotated books can be searched by author, title, publisher and date, as well as by key concepts such as 'refugees', 'war', 'courage' and 'empathy'. Titles can also be searched by the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

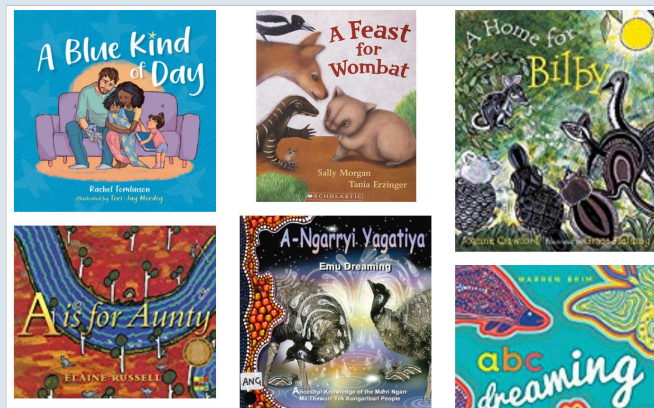
NCACL Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Resource

Following on from the success of our Cultural Diversity Database, the Australian Government funded the centre to create a free [database of books by and about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples](#). Experienced experts, including First Nations people, across Australia contributed. We included annotations, creators' cultural backgrounds, story locations, curriculum links to the Australian Curriculum, as well as resources to complement each book. There are now more than 560 books in this database, and it continues to grow.

NCACL Australian Verse Novels Resource

We discovered a niche area infrequently promoted and relatively unknown – Australian verse novels. We admired the unique features of Australia's 60-plus verse novels – often short in length,

and featuring multiple viewpoints, emotive issues, humour and heart. Too small in size to take advantage of a database's unique strengths, this resource uses Microsoft Sway, which provides similar features to our databases.



Picture Books for Older Readers Database

In July we will launch our latest database, Picture Books for Older Readers. These books offer multiple layers of meaning, sophisticated plots, wide-ranging artistic styles and techniques, metafictional devices, and more. They invite various interpretations and wide-ranging responses. Collectively, they feature some of Australia's most creative authors and illustrators.

Benefits and rewards

We aim to promote and inform people about the wealth of Australian children's literature. Capitalising on our expertise and in-depth knowledge, we offer:

- books with authenticity and child appeal
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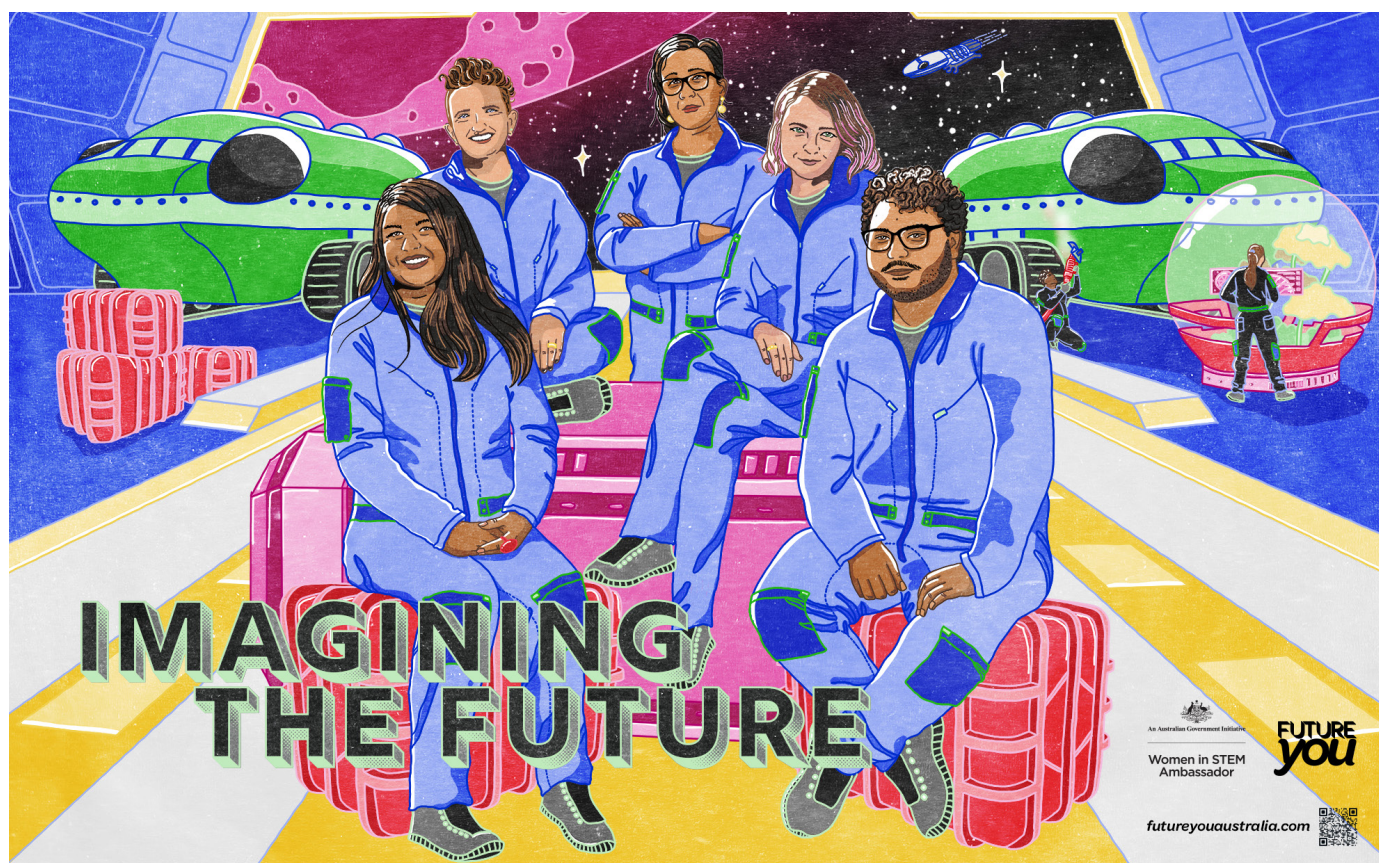


Dr Belle Alderman AM

Emeritus Professor of Children's Literature
Director, National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN STEM THROUGH STORYTELLING

The Women in STEM Ambassador Office on how they're recruiting authors to help change the narrative around STEM careers.



From left to right: Melissa Keil, Alison Evans, Rebecca Lim, Lili Wilkinson and Gary Lonesborough

Future You, the STEM careers education initiative from Australia's Women in STEM Ambassador, is going deeper into space this autumn with the launch of two new stories by leading Australian Young Adult (YA) authors as part of their new fiction program, *Imagining the Future*. (Editor's note: see the article written by Lili Wilkinson in *Connections*, Issue 122.) The STEM-infused stories come with a suite of strikingly attractive collateral, which will add a splash of colour and science-fiction adventure to classrooms and school library walls into the near future.

Hot on the gravity-booted heels of story one, *Far Out!* by Lili Wilkinson, come stories two and three from *Imagining the Future*'s first series. *Calculating Apple Pie* by Melissa Keil, and *Semper* by Rebecca Lim incorporate STEM elements into the heart of their plots, adding a unique and exciting aspect to the stories. *Calculating Apple Pie* explores future food production and coding and how tampering with it can cause serious real-world problems. *Semper* delves into the world of artificial intelligence (AI) and raises important questions about the impact it can have on our lives.

Both stories are set in the interlinked future story world of *The Callistan Cycle*, named after the moon of Jupiter around which the stories unfold. An important aspect of the *Imagining the Future* program is the diversity of the cast, which aims to reflect Australia's multicultural identity in its storytelling, and across its range of resources to address the current and future inequity in the STEM workforce in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and location.

Melissa and Rebecca are among Australia's leading writers for young people. Growing up, both were big fans of science fiction, but neither ever saw themselves in the characters, which is why they were so excited to be involved in *Imagining the Future*.

'Young me didn't need to see any particular "diversity" angle explored – I just wanted to see someone with my hair and skin colour flying in a spaceship,' said Melissa.

However, once Melissa sat down to write her story, she realised it wasn't enough for the characters to look like her, they also needed to think and feel like her, so she began to think about the smaller, more personal impacts one might experience on an



Author Melissa Keil



Author Rebecca Lim

interstellar journey. Melissa wanted readers to reflect on basic human emotions – homesickness, nostalgia, fear of the unknown – that guide the human experience.

She drew upon her own family’s stories about how exciting it was when extended family would visit from Sri Lanka, because their suitcases would be full of delicious foods that weren’t available in Australia. This meaningful act would bring a small taste of home across the ocean for the family to enjoy and reminisce about.

‘Food is such a fundamental part of everyone’s life experience, and even though my family loved their adopted country and were making a very happy life here, it was hard to imagine them leaving behind a whole world of foods for a totally foreign, unknown one.’

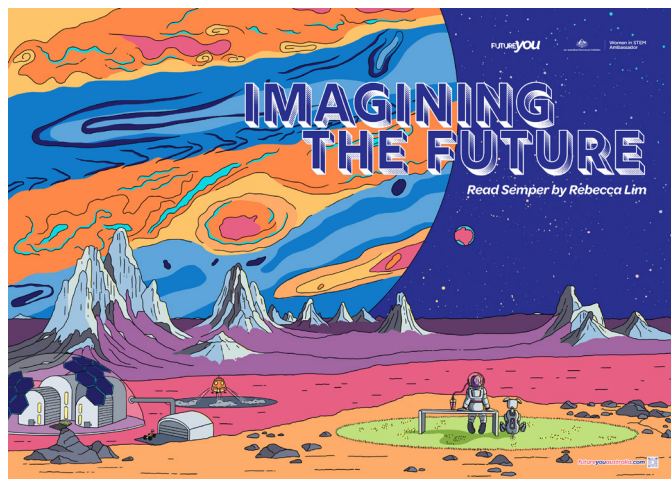
Growing up in the ’70s and ’80s, Rebecca said sci-fi and fantasy books were more diverse than other genres, but were still awash with harmful tropes, such as the colonisers versus the colonised, the high-born versus the savages, and heroic men saving dainty women.

‘I never saw people like me in the children’s books I was told to read, or that were available in the ’70s and ’80s, and I only saw suggestions of people like me as “baddies”, the colonised, or the exotic “other”, all written by people outside my lived experience,’ said Rebecca.

A guiding principle for Rebecca’s writing is empathy, and at the heart of her story is a fraught relationship between the main character and her AI robotic animal that has been built to protect her and keep her going through the tough terrains of outer space.

‘I wanted readers to explore the boundaries of what it means to be human if the non-human thing you’re dealing with is “nicer” and more selfless than you are and would literally destroy itself to protect you.’

Melissa and Rebecca’s contributions to the Future You program are invaluable. Their stories provide a fresh take on the STEM genre and encompass the rich diversity of people who study and work in STEM, which will inspire more young people to consider and explore the possibilities of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the future.



A cover artwork for a story by Rebecca Lim.

Get involved

Encourage your students to read the *Imagining the Future* stories and delve into the suite of bespoke resources developed to support engagement with the STEM sector explored in each tale.

These resources are great for use in schools, in the library, and at home. Beautiful posters, student activity packs, teaching resources and careers information are all available free to download and use.

Stories four and five from *The Callistan Cycle* will launch later this year – keep an eye out for *Proof* by Gary Lonesborough and *Earth Bound* by Alison Evans. Follow Future You on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [subscribe to the Future You newsletter](#), to be one of the first to know when these new stories launch.

To explore *Imagining the Future*, head to the [Future You website](#). See YOU in the future.

Article by the Women in STEM Ambassador Office

SCHOOL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT: EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

Natalie Otten speaks to SCIS about the new position she's taken up in her school library, as well as her library's role in the school community.

What is your job title and what does your role entail?

This year my job title is Future Focused Learning Executive Coach. I've not stepped out of the library, but sideways into a coaching role in the school, but still managing the library with a library tech (teacher in library) coming on board three days a week to assist me because we're going to share the teaching load while she completes her masters. I'll be mentoring her into the teacher librarianship role, sharing the teaching in the library space and sharing the management of the library, as well as doing my coaching role with our future focus on the (Future Focused Learning pedagogy) learning pedagogy here at the school.

What is the most rewarding aspect of working in a school library and why?

I think, for me, it's the opportunity to work with all learners across the school from preschool to Year 10 here at Evelyn Scott School – we've just opened our senior site now. One minute you might have preschool learners who are just learning to love books. And then the next minute you're talking to a senior student about the latest graphic novel or wanting more of a particular type of book in the library.

I think just being able to work shoulder to shoulder with teachers as well and build their capacity with literacy and information, which we call information fluency. Here we follow Lee Crockett's work, which covers solution fluency, information fluency, and media fluency. This approach is about defining what your leading question is, then discovering information relating to it independently, and developing research and source authentication skills through that process. In this process, there are five stages: ask, acquire, analyse, apply and assess. A student asks themselves what are my questions? Where am I going to acquire the information? How do I then analyse that? Then, how will I assess if I answered my initial question?

It's about the learners owning the fluency, not about the teacher directing. Particularly in my role, information and

media fluencies are where the teacher librarian really has an impact on supporting learners to find the right information and utilise it well.

What do you see as the most important part of the library's role in the school community?

I think the libraries are the hub or the heartbeat of the school. They're a space for wellbeing, community and belonging. Particularly at our school, the library space is a place where a lot of disengaged learners or the learners that need the quiet space gravitate.

Are there any current issues or challenges facing your library and how are you working to overcome those?

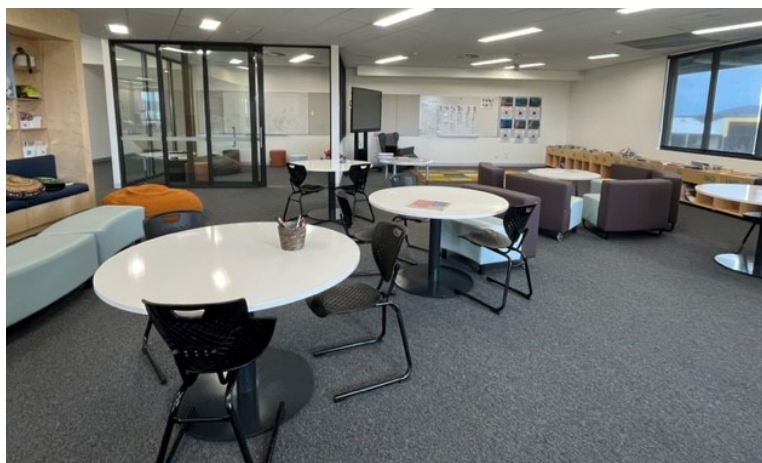
Two things: the first one is the best kind of challenge to have and that is that as a new school, not having as many books on the library shelves as the learners want. We're deliberately taking our time in developing our collection because student agency or learner voice is important to us. We spend a lot of time with our learners. They have a lot of choice and voicing what goes into the library. I often get the books on the shelf, and they're gone immediately. We just can't keep up with the interest that students have in books, which is also a great challenge. Sometimes, a learner might want a book and it's not quite catalogued.

In that case, I'll just let them borrow it anyway because it's more important to me that the learner actually has access to the book, instead of waiting for two weeks because I don't have time to catalogue it. So that's the first one.

The second challenge is getting families back into the school community after COVID. For so long, our families have not been allowed into the school grounds, and now that things are opening up, building up again those kind of activities that we did prior to COVID is challenging. COVID really squashed a lot of those connections that schools had with community and family. We've found a simple way to address this is by picking one thing and focusing on connecting families and the community with it. For example, we chose 2022 Book Week. It was the first big event we had with all our kids and their families. It was so exciting to see all the kids parading in their costumes, and great to feel that we were getting back to normal.

How do you promote reading and literacy in your school and are there any challenges in doing so?

We have a really strong literacy focus here. Our kids read independently for 20 to 30 minutes every day, and that's not even including their reading for pleasure. I mean, they obviously choose books that they're interested in, but the 20 to



Evelyn Scott School library



Evelyn Scott School library

30 minutes is targeted silent reading time where the teachers are conferencing with the learners and challenging them. For example, if a kid in Year 6 is still reading *The Hotdog*, by Anh Do, we try to get them in to a more complex text. Cultivating the culture of reading with practices like that, and making sure classes have scheduled library visits, is really important to us.

Also, this could be controversial but I don't actually have a rule about how many books learners can borrow. For example, some schools might say that those in kindergarten can only have one book, but I don't do that. Why would we limiting the number of books that our learners who are learning to read, who need to be exposed to multiple books can borrow? They're the ones that should be borrowing as many as they can. Borrowing lots of books helps them get exposure to different literature, which helps develop their reading skills. I also don't enforce library bags. We encourage them as part of our positive behaviours for learning, but if they forget their library bag, they're still allowed to borrow a book because our focus is on getting books in the hands of the kids.

How do you promote an interest in STEM/STEAM areas in your school? Are there any challenges in doing so?

We have LEGO in our library and the kids absolutely love it, so they use that to build and create. We also have our podcasting equipment in a little room at the back of the library for some of our learners who've shown an interest in sharing their learning in that way.

Where we're situated in the school is joined to the STEM space, so we are actually a part of that whole building, which is shared between the senior and junior schools. This means that those spaces are accessible for learners right across the school and its year levels. The connection that creates between the library and STEM spaces means there's a sort of natural connection between the two in the way they're used.

What is your favourite thing about SCIS?

I really love *Connections* school library magazine. I love reading the stories you print in it – they're always good. Sometimes, I find myself flicking through when it first comes in, then going through and having

a deeper read later when I have the chance or something will spark and I'll think, oh, I read that a couple of articles ago, and I'll go back and pick it out again. It might be useful for my library team.

What would you like to see SCIS do more of?

I had trouble with this one. I get everything that I personally need at this point. I don't know whether that's selfish of me to say, because I'm at that point in my career where, you know, somebody else who's new to the game might say they'd like to see more of this or that. I find that SCIS complements my skills well. It complements the work we do in the library as well. It's a really good resource.



Natalie Otten

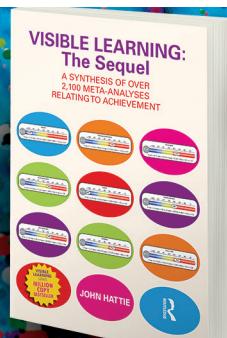
Future Focused Learning Coach
Evelyn Scott School

Natalie Otten is the Future Focused Learning Executive Coach at Evelyn Scott School in the ACT. Her role includes leadership of the library space and working closely with the library team. As a teacher librarian Natalie is passionate about embedding strong literacy practices across the school.

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THE QUESTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

With debate raging about the impacts of generative AI on learning, Catherine Barnes suggests some ways that it might impact teaching practices.

With all the talk of artificial intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT and its implications for education, many of us have started consider our own roles in the school. As school library professionals, we are often at the forefront of many of the technological, ethical and moral issues that arise. However, while many in education are worried about the future, the currency and publicity of the topic should prompt us to consider our past and current practices.

Some of us would remember a time when school library staff searched databases and the internet for students through the use of complex Boolean queries we developed, and then retrieved the resources for students. Others would remember a time when we used dot commands to query databases in a command line format, with a cost associated with each query. Happily, we moved on from this to teaching our students to create search queries and search for themselves. We then worked with students to refine their search skills to improve not only the recall, but the precision of their results. Now, we have moved onto the next step, that is, students creating search queries and refining their own queries through artificial intelligence.

“Artificial intelligence may be able to write an essay at the touch of a button, but it cannot determine if the essay is relevant, biased, creative or even ‘good enough’.”

However, school library staff still have an important role in all this. The use of natural language processing (NLP) models, such as ChatGPT, involves an understanding of how to use prompts to refine and further build one’s query. Just as we once taught lessons on ‘how to Google’, we need to work with students to develop their questioning skills, not just their search skills.

As a teacher of secondary students, I have spent recent weeks engaging with students to develop research questions, and sub-questions, for a major assessment task. This is the bread and butter of the teacher librarian, enabling students to develop powerful questions which are personally relevant, manageable, interesting and ethical. Working with students to build topic knowledge to phrase the question, refine purpose, and define audience. These are the same skills required to effectively use conversational AI tools, such as ChatGPT.

While much of the discussion of ChatGPT has related to plagiarism, due to the technical ability of the AI tools to write an essay, unless students ask the ‘right’ questions and provide prompts which accurately articulate the assessment criteria, it is likely a ChatGPT-generated paper will miss the context.

ChatGPT Prompt Strategies

Define purpose

What is the purpose of what you want the AI to generate, what is the length, tone and format?

State application

How will this information be applied?

Supporting information

ChatGPT only has access to material published prior to 2021 and even then, this might not be relevant to your context.

Keep it concise

Avoid unnecessary words which will slow the response, it is more effective to refine the question after feedback.

Avoid open-ended questions

If there is no clear answer, ChatGPT will often create one, even if it is irrelevant or confusing.

When we consider the scope from which we teach question design, there are two vectors: knowledge and skills. Students need to develop topic knowledge, through teaching or pre-research, to use the right vocabulary in the questions. They then need to use skills to develop questions and refine them for purpose. This is our role, as school library staff, working with the students to develop information-seeking skills, rather than information-production skills. Now that it’s possible for a machine to produce a document of information, we need to focus on the unique attributes of our learners as curious and critical information seekers. Artificial intelligence may be able to write an essay at the touch of a button, but it cannot determine if the essay is relevant, biased, creative or even ‘good enough’. The ability to determine this is far more powerful than the act of writing, and our assessment tasks need to reflect this.



Catherine Barnes

Information Management Lecturer/School Library Manager
Adelaide, South Australia

THE EVER-RISING POPULARITY OF GRAPHIC NOVELS

Graphic novels continue to become more and more popular. However, some still doubt their validity as true literature. Community librarian Michael Jongen and teacher librarian Helen Kain reflect on the contribution graphic novels make to the richness of reading.

Lesmurdie Community Library is a joint Education Public Library. When we met to discuss a rearrangement of the library floor plan, one of Helen's concerns was the graphic novel section, which had outgrown its allocated space and warranted greater prominence. Graphic novels were also issuing particularly well, but the collection's shelving had become cramped and there was no front out display. Helen wanted to build up the collection and give it a more prominent position and display with the library.

Such expansions of graphic novel sections are not uncommon. Over the last ten years, school libraries have been focusing much more on their graphic novel collections. They have gained in popularity as schools and libraries have become more open to them, and are among our most highly circulated genres. Educators have used them as curriculum material and librarians are using them with reluctant readers.

We have also found that the genre is very inclusive and appealing to a diverse readership. Writers of graphic novels are exploring content that deals with issues of bullying, LGBTIQ+ and gender issues, suicide, self-harm and body image problems at the requests of their target audience, and educators are using these stories for teaching purposes. There are so many genres that they can link to readers' interests through a combination of escapism and current social issues. The diversity of themes, content and style also encourages creativity and non-linear thinking in our students.

In 2014 [Karen Gray wrote an article for *Connections*](#), demonstrating how graphic novels can be successfully used across the curriculum and arguing that teacher librarians need to advocate for their value. She illustrated how visual literacy has become an important part of the English Curriculum and how graphic novels can add value to the school library collection. Karen supplied an [extensive bibliography](#).

As we enter the 2023 school year, the academic question of the role of graphic novels in education is settled, so it saddens us that we still have to justify to some colleagues and parents the value they add to our collections. A quick Google search shows that many libraries now happily incorporate graphic novels into their collections and see the benefits to circulation.

Graphic novels help libraries and teachers find reading material outside the option of the classic novel or the textbook. For many reluctant readers, they can feel more approachable. Visual elements break up the text, making the story less dense and the student can feel more confident to get through the story. Students with reading difficulties may be visual learners and the images in the panels will give them clues as to the meaning of the text. A struggling reader may be able to finish a graphic novel much more easily than a regular novel and feel a sense of achievement. Graphic novels can help make reading more enjoyable, while still ensuring students are still developing

skills in text analysis such as understanding storyline, plot development, character and resolution.

“Visual literacy, the art of understanding and talking about images is becoming much more important and valued in the Digital Age.”

Graphic novels are high-quality reading material, they just have pictures to support the development of their themes. Visual literacy, the art of understanding and talking about images is becoming much more important and valued in the Digital Age. Reading graphic novels helps students develop verbal and visual literacy, as well as stimulating the imagination. The point of a graphic novel is that the reader must search and interpret the images as well as the text for meaning. The images provide clues on character, mood and plot development. The reader can then synthesise all the available information.

It should also be reiterated that graphic novels are full of text. Readers are still decoding and analysing the story. Moreover, graphic novels often used advanced vocabulary as well as the reader having to search their own vocabulary to describe the image. Fewer words does not necessarily mean simpler words.

After expanding and rearranging the graphic novel section, Helen received feedback that students found a more prominent graphic novels section made resource selection easier. We loved hearing that increasing the display space for literature that features strong visual elements helped students engage with more graphic novels.

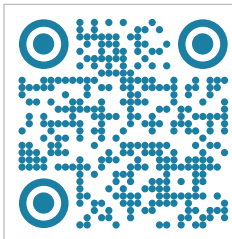


Michael Jongen
Community Librarian
Lesmurdie Community Library



Helen Kain
Teacher Librarian
Lesmurdie Community Library

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