

CONNECTIONS

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Can a chatbot write like an Aussie?



Can a chatbot write like an Aussie?

Over the past few months, supported by a Reading Australia Fellowship, I have started researching how generative AI might be used to interrogate the notion of an Australian literary voice. Through my inquiry, I have gained not only a greater appreciation of the computational might of these tools, but also a clear sense of how we might make their limitations and cultural bias apparent to students.

What is the Australian voice?

Although there is a multiplicity of Australian voices, my discussions with Australian YA authors revealed a few common threads. There is a certain informality in the way Australians speak and write. This may be apparent in a looser sentence structure, and our preference for abbreviation, informal language

and vernacular. According to one author, Australians have a directness that contrasts with an American earnestness and fear of offending. There is perhaps also greater tolerance for flawed characters, who lie and transgress. Our unique landscape looms large in many Australian works, offering a clear sense of place to the point where the landscape is almost a character itself. Then there are the references to food, which often reflect our rich migrant heritage, as well as references to music and outdoor lifestyle, all of which make our Australian stories distinct. Importantly, First Nations' knowledge and culture are becoming increasingly prominent in Australian YA, as greater numbers of works authored by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are published.

With the advent of ChatGPT, AI-generated fiction threatens to flood the literary market with low-quality, derivative

work. In February 2023, the editors of three science fiction magazines reported being overwhelmed by short stories authored by chatbots, forcing them to pause and refuse submissions.¹ At the local level, content generated by large language models (LLMs) has seeped into most facets of Australian communications, whether it be the humble school newsletter, real estate ad, corporate email or parliamentary speech.² The profusion of chatbot-authored texts threatens to dilute our distinctive Australian voice with a bland, culturally homogenous alternative that is compromised by embedded values regarding gender and cultural identity that are far from the national ideal of 'a fair go'.

The Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools stipulates that students should learn about how LLMs work and their limitations. It is through the

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Connections

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prism of Australian voice in youth literature that many of these biases and limitations can be made plain for students. By using AI-generated texts as a foil against authentic Australian literature, students can come to appreciate the nuance of stories created in their own locale. This involves the teacher librarian selecting passages from Australian YA novels and using a series of prompts prescribing equivalent settings, characters and scenarios to create an AI-generated text that has a similar length and premise. Upon comparison, students might uncover the following limitations of LLMs.

LLMs present an outsider view of Australian culture

The datasets that power LLMs often contain American biases and stereotypes, despite their broader use internationally³. This is due to a combination of inputs and filtering. Dodge et al. found that over 50% of websites in the Colossal Cleaned Crawled Corpus (C4-English) – a primary dataset for training many LLMs – were hosted in the USA. Websites hosted in the next four most populous English-speaking countries – India, Pakistan, Nigeria and the Philippines – consisted of a mere 3.6% of the dataset collectively. Furthermore, when datasets are filtered, the process disproportionately removes text about people from minority backgrounds.⁴ These factors contribute to the monocultural nature of LLMs. In fact, when Jill Walker Rettburg, a Professor of Digital Media in Norway, experimented with ChatGPT, she found that although the chatbot could converse in Norwegian, it had limited knowledge of Norwegian life and culture.⁵ Similarly, AI-generated fiction set in Australian locations often lacks culturally or geographically specific references. A generic reference to ‘the Melbourne skyline’ does nothing to create a sense of place compared to the vivid rendering of familiar settings, shops and food in authentic Australian YA.

LLMs often lack a distinctive voice

Large language models often struggle to maintain a unique narrative voice and the writing can be bland and prescriptive. This is because LLMs are designed to select the most likely word in a sequence, the measure of which is called ‘perplexity’. However, to avoid boring prose, there needs to be an element of ‘burstiness’ in written expression, which is the unexpected or creative use of language. As one might expect, LLMs value predictability over burstiness, prioritising safety and

correctness.⁶ To compound the issue, LLMs are strictly trained to avoid profanity or potentially offensive terms, sometimes overcompensating and removing unlikely or interesting words. This can result in characterless yet correct prose.

Their preference for predictability, together with their lack of cultural nuance, means LLMs often struggle with slang, which is inevitably regionally distinct. Moreover, the filtering of datasets tends to result in the removal of non-American English dialects. Slang is important to cultural expression; it literally means ‘on the margins’, which points to its subversive qualities and culturally distinctive characteristics.⁷ Students might explore the use of informal language or Australian vernacular by comparing dialogue in Australian YA and AI-generated texts. The different style of humour might also be evident. One Australian author noted that Australian fiction is decidedly less ‘saccharine’ than US fiction.

LLMs revert to tropes

The safety mechanisms designed to prevent large language models from generating inappropriate content can also result in conservative plot choices. In a study of professional writers using chatbots as writing aides, one author observed that the chatbot ‘seemed very reluctant to generate people doing mean things’.⁸ Yet literature explores the wide gamut of human experience, representing human frailties as well as strengths. Similarly, authors noted chatbots were predisposed to revert to tropes and archetypes (particularly from the fantasy genre) in their plot suggestions.⁹ Such a tendency hinders creative progress and undermines authentic exploration of the human experience.

In her recent report on generative AI, Stefania Giannini, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Education, insisted that ‘language matters’ because it is ‘at the heart of identity and cultural diversity’.¹⁰ This is why it is imperative for students to be exposed to quality Australian texts that reflect their unique experiences of culture and place. Through the process of comparing passages from Australian YA novels with AI-generated equivalents, the limitations of generative AI can be made explicit to students while fostering a love of Australian stories that are about them and for them.

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SCIS is more

Did you know that there is a very special birthday this year? No, I'm not turning 21 again, SCIS is turning 40! That's right, SCIS has been serving the school library community for four decades this year. Keep an eye on our social media for posts highlighting our rich history and for details about how SCIS will be celebrating such a momentous birthday.

As Term 2 kicks off across Australia and New Zealand, albeit at different times depending on whether the holidays coincided with Easter or not, SCIS is embarking on our annual customer satisfaction survey. SCIS wants to hear from you!

Why does SCIS survey its customers? Because we value your feedback. We want to understand how our users are making the most of SCIS; what you like about our services; what improvements we can make to our products, services and communications; and better understand the needs of school libraries. It's also a great way for us to ensure that our development and product enhancement plans are in line with what you, our customers, are needing.

In 2023 we had an unprecedented response to our customer survey. The positivity of the responses we received was a clear indication of how SCIS is valued by the school library community.

The 2023 customer survey revealed to us that customers believed that we needed to make our online product-based professional learning more affordable. We have listened and in 2024 our product training is now free for all subscribers.

SCIS has been overwhelmed by the response to this change and literally hundreds of users who had never attended a SCIS professional learning session have now done so in Term 1. Thanks for your feedback via the survey – we're thrilled to be connecting with more users.

While I'm mentioning our free professional learning sessions, here is a plug for the three upcoming Term 2 sessions. Session 1 is 'Free digital resources in SCIS', which we're running twice (Tuesday 14 May, 10:00 am AEST and Wednesday 15 May, 3:00 pm AEST). Session 2 is 'What to do when SCIS doesn't have it' (Tuesday 4 June, 2:00 pm AEST) and Session 3 is 'Unlock the potential of SCIS: Check your set-up'



SCIS Product Manager Anthony Shaw and Colin McNeil, Program Director, Product Data and Insights at the School Library Association of NSW Professional Learning Summit in March.

(Tuesday 11 June, 2:00 pm AEST).

To book your spot, click on the link and sign up for one, two or all three sessions. Remember, all webinars are recorded and registered participants will be able to access session recordings and any associated handouts.

With the 2024 survey open for responses until May 22, we invite all users to tell us what we're doing well, what we can do better and what you would like us to be doing in the future. Please scan the QR code or click the link at the end of this article to complete the survey. We will share what you have told us later in the year.

Last year our catalogue team integrated AustLang headings to SCIS Authority Files. AustLang is an extensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language database utilising the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) catalogue of language terms. The inclusion of AustLang terms means that school communities will see search results categorised by terms that appropriately name languages, helping users understand how to respectfully refer to the resources they are looking for.

At SCIS we are committed to fostering diversity and respect within the educational community. The SCIS cataloguing team has recently started to include AustLang terms within catalogue records. You will soon start to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language codes in MARC field 041

as a subfield \$2. Please talk with your library management system vendor to ensure that the language field, including subfield, are being imported and can be displayed in your catalogue.

During Term 1, we had the pleasure of attending the **SLANSW professional learning summit, Piecing it together: Voice, choice and connection**. It was a fantastic day with engaging presenters and workshops. As always, it was wonderful to connect with so many SCIS users and learn more about how you're using SCIS to promote better outcomes for your school communities.

Have a wonderful Term 2 and we look forward to meeting you in person at TLPLC, SLANZA, SLAV and other conferences throughout the year.



Anthony Shaw
Product Manager, SCIS

As well as being SCIS Product Manager, Anthony is the proud parent of a recently anointed Grade 6 Library Captain.

Complete the 2024 SCIS survey. Scan the QR code or go to: www.scisdata.com/scis-survey-2024/



AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S LAUREATE 2024–25: SALLY RIPPIN

SCIS talks to Sally Rippin about her appointment as Australian Children's Laureate, discussing her theme 'All kids can be readers', which emphasises the critical role of tailored teaching methods, embracing various storytelling mediums, and fostering an inclusive reading environment for children with diverse learning needs.

Congratulations on your appointment as the Australian Children's Laureate 2024–2025. Your theme as Laureate is 'All kids can be readers'. Can you share what this theme means to you?

What I'll bring to my term as Laureate is the idea that reading isn't something we're all born with the capacity to do. It's a skill that needs to be taught.

We have brains that are wired at birth to be able to speak and to hear, but reading is a skill which we need to be explicitly taught and that requires rewiring of part of our brain. For some children, this is something that will appear to happen quite quickly and effortlessly. I was lucky enough to be one of those children, as were my two older sons. But other children will need to be explicitly taught and will potentially need extra support during those important formative years, and that was the case for my third son.

Over these two years I really want to focus on the importance of ensuring kids receive the correct instruction that they'll need for those early years. To help them avoid falling through the gaps, we need to really understand that there are many ways in which children can be included in hearing, sharing and telling stories. It could be through audiobooks, potentially, for people who are vision impaired with Braille, or comics or car manuals! Whatever it is that engages kids with language and storytelling so that we ensure that all kids can be readers.

You've mentioned wanting to highlight that stories can be accessed in numerous ways as part of your role as laureate. Is this perspective influenced by the evolving ways people engage with stories in 2024?

To give you a little bit of a background, when my youngest son was in Grade 3 he really started to plateau in reading. This is quite common for children who have learning differences – it's often



not until about Grade 3 that it really becomes evident. Often, children can memorise enough words to look like they're reading for those first few years and then it's not until their peers start to move ahead to more challenging books that they will plateau and sometimes their behaviour will change. This was the case for my youngest son.

He started saying things like 'I hate books' and 'I hate reading' and 'I hate school' and I didn't really understand how to properly support him back then. His dyslexia diagnosis really made me understand the importance of how reading isn't just about engaging with great stories, which is what we want for all our children, but how you engage with school.

For the first three years of school, we're being taught to read. Then, after that, we're expected to read to learn. My son is quite bright, but he's wasn't really able to keep up with or engage with the traditional classroom. As a result, his self-esteem and his mental health deteriorated. By the time he got to high school, it was a complete disaster.

I learnt a lot through that experience and started to heavily research what we can do to ensure children don't fall through the cracks. I did a lot of interviews with specialists and people who went through school who were neurodivergent or dyslexic and wrote a book about this subject. It's essentially the book that I needed when my son first started school and was written to

give to parents about to start the same journey. It's called *Wild Things: How we learn to read and what can happen if we don't*. The things that I want to bring to my role as Laureate are about the importance of early identification of learning differences and intervention, where possible. Also, how to create a supportive environment for kids who may be neurodivergent.

“ I think libraries and librarians are vital. I know for all my children, even my younger son, who wasn't a reader, that libraries are a safe space. ”



Sally Rippin

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Australian Children's Laureate 2024-2025



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One of the things that I had to learn to better support my son was to get over my snobbism around reading books. I found reading easy and accessible, and so I had a very narrow idea of what reading was. But because we now have access to incredible technology, including the internet, my son was able to access information in a way that he wouldn't have been able to, had he grown up in the era that I did, where I would have just had to take out an encyclopedia to get information. For example, he had begun teaching himself university-level calculus by the time he was in Year 10, by learning through YouTube clips and watching Neil deGrasse Tyson talking about astrophysics. From this, he was able to see that he is intelligent, that he does have interests and that he is engaged with things in the world. But he wasn't able to pass Year 12 because he wasn't able to write an essay on Shakespeare.

“For the first three years of school, we're being taught to read. Then, after that, you're expected to read in order to learn.”

In what ways do you believe teachers can be equipped to better support neurodivergent students, particularly when it comes to reading and engaging with stories?

A message that I am really hoping to get across over my two years as Laureate is that there's often too much expected of our teachers. Not only are they expected to work with kids who may struggle with reading, but there might be a child whose parents have just separated, and there might be child who hasn't had breakfast or a child who has just lost a grandparent. Every classroom is going to be full of children with different needs. So, the number one thing that all the teachers whom I've spoken to have told me is that they need a lower student-to-adult ratio. They need more support in the classroom to be able to give children the individual attention they need.

That support might be literacy experts, it might be mental health support, potentially. I know of one school who had engaged a social worker. There might be all kinds of community support that we can bring into schools so that we're not expecting teachers to be everything for every child. We also need to recognise as parents that, in the end, we are our child's most important advocate, and so we are the one who is going to be the communication line with the teachers. This means understanding

that teachers are juggling a lot of different needs and that your child is not the only child in the classroom. It also means thinking about how you and their teacher can work together to better support a child and seeing yourself as a team with the teacher.

What do you consider the biggest challenge in getting children interested in reading currently, and how do you think it should be addressed?

I think there are a few challenges. Insisting on what our children should read can be problematic, because ideally we should want children to be able to choose their own reading matter in the same way that we're allowed to. So, I think helping kids find things that they're interested in reading is a really great way to encourage it. This could be cookbooks, gardening books or car manuals.

The Grattan Report (2024) also recognised that there have been teaching reading methods that don't work for all children, more so that around one-third of kids leave primary school with reading skills that won't set them up for adult life. It recognised that language needs to be broken down into a code and put back together again. The premise of this being that once we have reached a certain level of reading where we can no longer read by memorising, we instead begin to understand how letters placed together form sounds and those sounds when placed together form words which we may not have previously read. It's really exciting that this might prompt an overhaul in our education system and hopefully mean that all children will get the teaching they need.

With some school libraries experiencing budget and staffing reductions in 2024, as well as some being dissolved into classroom libraries, do you believe libraries and librarians retain a crucial role in a digital era? If so, what role do you envision for them?

Libraries and librarians are vital. I know for all my children, even my youngest son, who wasn't a reader, that libraries are a safe space. Libraries are a place where children who may struggle in the classroom or in the playground can go. Librarians are neutral and are not usually their classroom teachers.

I remember my sons would come home from high school and describe the librarians as having a magical ability to know exactly the book that they'd want to read next. The fact that librarians can have these individual connections with students can be an extraordinary support for kids who may find school a challenge.

We also keep talking about the importance of children growing up in households full of books, but not all households are going to be able to afford to buy books. So, the number one thing that we need to do is to support school and public libraries so that children can have access to books.

Interview article by the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS)

A WAY HOME: EMILY BREWIN'S HEARTFELT DIVE INTO YOUTH AND RESILIENCE

In a conversation with SCIS, Emily Brewin shares her thoughts on what shaped her latest novel, *A way home*. It's her first YA book, and explores the impact of mental health on families, the resilience and vulnerability of youth, and the search for belonging and identity amid adversity.

Your new book, *A way home*, came out in April. Tell us a little about its story.

A way home is told from the point of view of Grace, who is 16 years old and living under a bridge in Melbourne's CBD. She's experiencing homelessness and we discover that she's there because she's grown up with a parent with bipolar disorder and that experience has set off a series of events that has led her to be homeless. It's centred around her experience of living on the streets, the people that she meets, the kind of things that happen to her, but also her attempts to really find her way home again and discover what we mean by 'home', which becomes quite a broad idea for her through the story.

This is your first YA book. What inspired you to write for this audience?

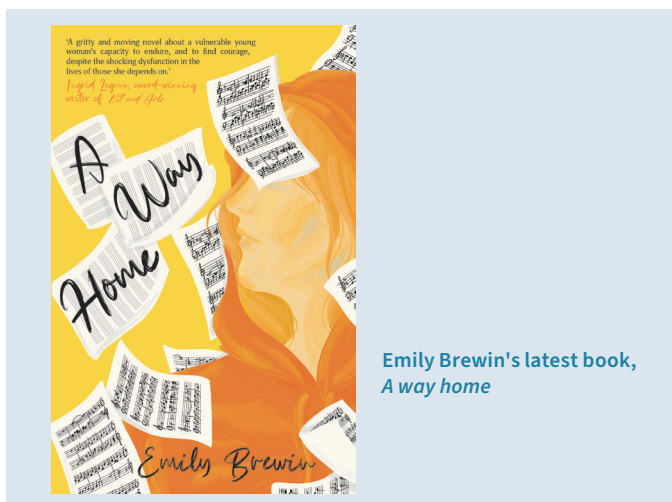
I had been teaching for a long time, working with young people, seeing young people in the street and being aware of homelessness being an issue. The experience that incited me to write the book was actually when I was at the City Library in Melbourne reading. There's a community piano on the second floor and there was a woman who pulled a trolley up to the piano; she was quite elderly. She had very long grey hair, she looked sort of bedraggled and I just assumed that she may have been homeless. I was curious to see what she was going to bang out on the piano. To my surprise, she sat down and started to play the most beautiful classical piano and the whole place just stopped and listened. In that moment, I became super curious about who she was and what her background was and where this came from and how she ended up where she was, which was obviously not a great place.



Emily Brewin, author

“Young people, and especially young women, are vulnerable and often youth homelessness is very complex.”

I started to do a bit of research and was able to discover who she was and that she, at times, did suffer homelessness. It turned out that she searched out pianos in the city – she'd been classically trained – and she would go around to these pianos in shops or public spaces and she'd play. I also found that she had suffered a mental illness and that this contributed to her ending up on the street. So, even though she wasn't a young person, I suppose Grace and her mum kind of represent parts of that experience in that Grace suffers homelessness and her mum has had a mental illness.



Emily Brewin's latest book, *A way home*

Why were you drawn to writing about these issues in particular?

Young people, and especially young women, are vulnerable and often youth homelessness is very complex. Homelessness is a very broad term. It doesn't just refer to people that are living on the streets. It can be people that are in transient accommodation or people that are couch surfing on friends' couches. There's a lot of 'invisible' homelessness and I wanted to bring attention to that. I tend to write in a genre called social realism, which looks at real issues through the lens of fiction, and I have a background in journalism. It's really important to me to really make sure that what I'm writing is authentic and contains an aspect of social care.

On your website, the book is described as 'big-hearted'. Tell us a bit more about what that means.

I think another major theme of the book is friendship. Even though it deals with serious topics like homelessness, it does have a light touch, especially in the friendship that Grace has with another kid who's living on the streets, Louie. They have a very playful friendship and tease each other, and they look out for each other because they're two people on their own. Grace is missing her family, who for her is essentially her mum, but through the other people she meets she forges relationships that essentially become home for her, and that's where the book's heart lies.

What do you want a YA audience to take away when they read *A way home*?

I hope it gives them a bigger, broader perspective of homelessness. I hope it sparks their curiosity so that they are willing to dig a little bit deeper and to maybe see someone that's not having a great time and really think about what that person is going through on a deeper level. And then, possibly, 'How can I, as a member of society, connect with people like Grace?' I want young people to walk away from this book with a window into a community that's bigger than them alone, that involves a whole lot of different people from different backgrounds, and with a sense that we all have a story and we're all important.

Emily Brewin
Author

A way home (MidnightSun Publishing) is Emily Brewin's first YA novel. Her adult novels, *Hello, goodbye* and *Small Blessings*, are published with Allen & Unwin.

Accessit ROADSHOWS

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WEBSITE + APP REVIEWS

Nigel Paull reviews the latest educational websites and apps you can use in your library. Use the web address to view the resource, download the SCIS record by using the SCIS number or the QR code.

BIG WEATHER (AND HOW TO SURVIVE IT)

www.abc.net.au/education/digibooks/big-weather-and-how-to-survive-it/101749988

Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods and bushfires are the focus of this ABC resource. Students in Years 5–10 are encouraged to research and discuss our changing weather and what we can do to survive it.

SCIS No: 5484257



NUCLEAR EDUCATION

<https://www.ansto.gov.au/nuclear-education>

Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation's education team has developed primary and secondary teaching resources focusing on nuclear science and technology. Details about tours of facilities in Sydney and Melbourne are also available.

SCIS No: 5484393



RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA: EDUCATION

<https://www.rba.gov.au/education/>

The role of the RBA and its impact on Australia's economy is covered here for teachers and secondary students of economics and commerce. Content includes resources, teaching materials and professional development information.

SCIS No: 5484419



HOUSE OF SCIENCE

<https://houseofscience.nz>

The House of Science aims to enhance the professional development of teachers and raise scientific literacy in New Zealand schools. One subscription-based part of the program involves sending experiment kits to schools.

SCIS No: 5484331



JEWISH MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

<https://www.jewishmuseum.com.au/learn/>

The museum offers primary and secondary school students resources and tours that align with the Victorian Curriculum and Jewish Studies curricula from Prep to Year 12. Resources cover topics such as multiculturalism, identity, community, migration and world religions.

SCIS No: 5484357



MYFUTURE

<https://myfuture.edu.au/home>

Careers advisors, teachers, secondary students, and parents and carers are catered for with this portal. The impressive array of content includes career profiles, university open day dates, employment prospects, industry webinars, VET pathways and lesson plans.

SCIS No: 1101253



DARE MIGHTY THINGS

<https://www.jpl.nasa.gov>

Content on this comprehensive NASA website includes the solar system, life beyond Earth, robotics, and technology for use on Earth. The Education portal offers teachers a variety of related classroom activities.

SCIS No: 5484296



PODCASTS FOR THE CLASSROOM

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/podcasts-for-the-classroom/103069690>

A variety of pertinent topics are covered in this series of ABC podcasts, ranging from science to ethics. Teachers should initially review each podcast to determine suitability for their own classroom use.

SCIS No: 5484410



FOREST LEARNING

<https://forestlearning.edu.au>

This comprehensive K–12 website provides teachers with a variety of curriculum-aligned resources relating to Australia's forests and sustainable timber products.

SCIS No: 1799587



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.



Nigel Paull
Teacher Librarian
North Coast, NSW

JOIN THE EDUCATIONAL LENDING RIGHT SURVEY: SHAPE THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE AND LEARNING!

Unveiling the impact of school libraries on the livelihoods of authors.

Lending rights payments are a significant part of my income and go a long way towards me being able to earn a living as a writer.

– George Ivanoff

Source: Public Lending Right Committee: Annual Report 2021-22.

Here in Australia, we are lucky to have a government-funded Educational Lending Right (ELR) scheme that sees Australian authors, illustrators and publishers compensated for the free use of their books held in school libraries.

As a library professional, consider the impact of your collection on readers. Evaluate whether your library houses books that not only inspire but also foster transformation in readers, playing a pivotal role in their intellectual, emotional, and social development.

Libraries allow students of all backgrounds across Australia to broaden their literary horizons, to accumulate knowledge and enrich their minds (intellectually and emotionally) for free. In turn, Australian authors and publishers love and support Australian libraries, as – thanks to ELR – they are compensated for the lost sales of their books loaned out by libraries for free.

ELR is a crucial cornerstone for school libraries in Australia, reinforcing their role in shaping learning experiences, through its support of Australian creators and publishers. ELR enables Australian writers to keep writing, and Australian publishers to keep publishing Australian content and stories, without which the school curriculum and our school libraries would be far less relevant to our students.

The next time you host an author at your school, ask them what they think about ELR payments, and what impact it has had on their career.

As someone with about 18 books on the survey list now, lending rights makes up about 25% of my annual income. It is hugely important and I probably wouldn't have been able to sustain a career without it.

– Meg McKinlay

Source: Public Lending Right Committee: Annual Report 2021-22.

What can your school library do to help support Australian creators?

ELR is delivered by ESA on behalf of the Australian Government's Office for the Arts in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts. In Term 3, we invite a random sample of schools to participate in the ELR survey, calling on library staff to run a quick automated book-count report in their library management system.

This data is matched against a list of books by Australians; it is then collated at a national level, and the estimates are used to determine payments to Australian creators and publishers.

Keep an eye out to see if you're invited to participate in

this year's ELR survey. Your involvement keeps the ELR scheme flowing, allowing authors and publishers to continue creating the books that you and your students read and love.

Just wanted to say thank you all so much for this service! It helps so many writers and often comes just when it's needed most! I truly appreciate all that goes into this scheme.

– Frances Whiting

Source: Public Lending Right Committee: Annual Report 2021-22.

2023-24 ELR participation survey competition

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on the ELR participation survey. The competition closed on 5 Feb and the winner was drawn.

Congratulations to Anna Dugandzig, a library officer at Coolbellup Community School, who won a \$150 gift card. Anna opted for the Dymocks gift card and plans to use it to purchase books for her school. Well done, Anna!

Below is a picture of Anna and her response to winning.



'I was happy to participate in the Educational Lending Rights (ELR) survey. With the guided instructions received from our library software program Oliver, it was easy task to complete though it at first seemed daunting!

Our school is a small school and so the book voucher received for doing the survey was an added surprise bonus.

As librarian at Coolbellup Community School, I am always promoting Australian authors, new and old.'

INCREASE YOUR DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR FREE WITH THE SCIS COLLECTIONS

SCIS enables subscribers to effortlessly integrate collections of free, quality-assured digital resources into their library management systems. Find about the collections we offer, and how you can download them today.

Schools Catalogue Information Services (SCIS) subscribers can now add entire collections of free digital resources to their library management system (LMS). These curated collections include high-quality resources available for the education sector at no cost. By having access to these collections, subscribers can easily add records for various resources to their LMS with just one click. When you import these records to your collection, students gain direct access to an extensive array of quality-assured resources in multiple formats, enhancing the research they can undertake via the library catalogue.

National Library of New Zealand

The EPIC and Topic Explorer collections are managed and curated by the National Library of New Zealand, although their topics are relevant to school students in Australia and all over the world. The [Topic Explorer](#) collection, for example, contains websites, images, videos, books and more content on current curriculum topics.

National Library of New Zealand

Name	Records	Status
EPIC Resources	43	Published
Topic Explorer	148	Published

Resources from the National Library of New Zealand.

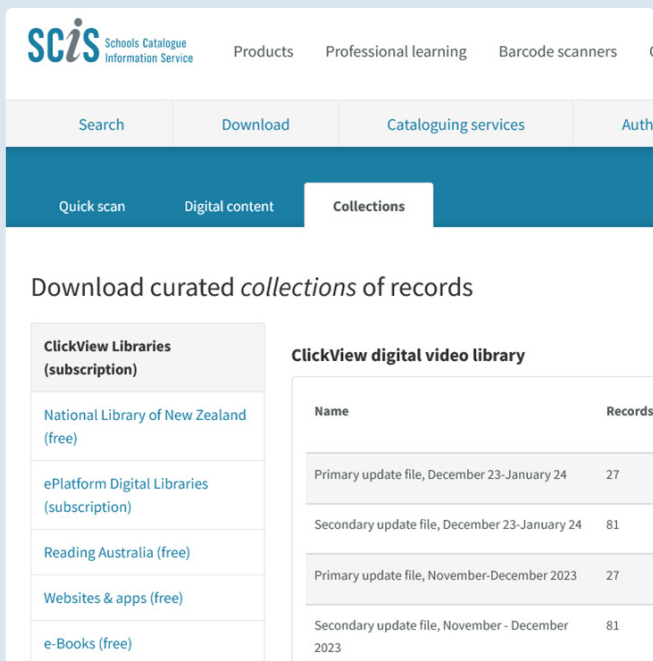
Connections website + apps

Each term, the *SCIS Connections magazine* includes a regular segment called 'Websites and app reviews', in which free educational apps and websites are recommended to schools by teacher librarian Nigel Paull. Each term there is a new list, and current or past lists can be downloaded through our collections page.

Websites & apps (free)

Name	Records
Connections term 4 2023	8
Connections term 3 2023	9
Connections term 2 2023	9
Connections term 1 2023	11
Connections term 1 2024	8

Free websites and apps.



The tab in SCIS where you can download digital collections.

SCIS constantly updates and curates collections of free digital resources available on our website. Currently, there are eight different sets of collections that subscribers can download. Many of the collections have been provided by reputable not-for-profit organisations, while others have been thoughtfully created by SCIS staff or companies that provide education resources at no cost. Here we showcase some of the freely available collections.

e-Books

The e-Books category includes the Interactive fiction and Gutenberg e-Books collections. The Interactive fiction collection includes 35 free fiction titles in which the player can control the main character and the narrative. The Gutenberg collection is a curated selection of some of the 70,000 free ebooks provided by [Project Gutenberg](#) online, most of which are classic titles outside copyright.

e-Books (free)

Name	Records
Interactive fiction	35
Gutenberg e-Books	414

Free ebooks.

Reading Australia

These collections include work units created by teachers for teachers.

The different work units introduce classrooms to a selection of local titles, which range from classics to modern award-winning novels.

Other categories available to SCIS subscribers include the ClickView Digital Video Library (subscription) and Wheelers ePlatform One (subscription) collections. Although these are available to all SCIS subscribers, it is recommended that schools download these only if they have a subscription to the corresponding platform.

The SCIS team is always on the lookout for new collections, and welcomes any suggestion about what to add next. If you have any feedback, please email the team at help@scisdata.com. With your feedback, you can help expand the number of free digital resources available to students and enrich their study experience.

Reading Australia (free)	
Name	Records
Teacher resources for texts - Primary	114
Teacher resources for texts - Secondary	130
Garret podcast teacher resources	26

[Free Reading Australia collections.](#)

Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS)

To download collections into your library's LMS, subscribers should take the following steps:

1. Log in to www.scisdata.com.
2. Navigate to *Downloads – Collections*.
3. On the left you will see the categories of digital collections curated by SCIS.
4. Click on a category, for example, e-Books (free).
5. Select the collection of interest and click *Download*.
6. A list of the records in the list appears for you to evaluate their suitability for your clientele. Clicking on the SCIS number opens the SCIS record. Clicking on the title opens the digital resources.
7. Select resources to be removed from the download list by ticking the square box(es).
8. Click *Remove selected # records* for any resources not relevant to your school community.
9. When you are happy with these records to be added to your catalogue, click *Download records*.
10. The catalogue records will be downloaded and saved to your computer.
11. Go to your LMS and use the file import process to import the records into your LMS (contact your LMS vendor for further assistance with this step).

James Bennett Books

YOUR **SCHOOL LIBRARY** SOLUTIONS

Streamline and Upgrade your Library

- **Save your school time and money**, so your Teachers and Librarians can focus on student wellbeing and learning.
- **Discount on books**; available from our convenient online buying platform with access to over 10 million in-print titles.
- **Collection and Resource Support** – benefit from our Specialised Collection Team's recommendations, themed selection and key title lists, and access to **pre-published content** so new titles arrive in your library at the same time as they do in bookstores.
- **Shelf Ready Solutions** – books can arrive ready to go; covered, labelled and catalogued for your system.
- **Digital Resources** – ask about our extensive suite of digital resources designed to foster engagement and learning.

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Global eNewspaper & eMagazine platform
7000+ publications; excellent content topic diversity to encourage reading, media comparison; translate articles into 18 different languages



Australian-produced & Expert-led
short videos on parenting and wellbeing for adolescents; research-based, relevant (and at times, difficult) topics in conversational and relatable tone

SCHOOL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT: STRATHTULLOH PRIMARY SCHOOL

SCIS talks to Krista Thomas about her multifaceted role in Library and Resources at Strathulloh Primary School.

What is your role in your school library?

I am a library technician at Strathulloh Primary School in Victoria. My role title is Library and Resources, so I am in charge of getting resources for the library, as well as some whole-school resources. It's my job to make sure that the resources are then all catalogued and ready for students and staff to use. Just to give you some background, we are a very new school. We opened in 2022 and I started in August of that year as a full-time library technician. We opened with 719 students, more than the 545 students our facilities were built for. We now have around 1200 students.

To source books for the library, I read trade publications – I'm a member of the CBCA, I'm a member of ALIA and SLAV, I subscribe to lots of podcasts, I subscribe to lots of blogs, and we also have standing orders with some publishers. So, lots of books from varying sources. All of that is my responsibility to get in, get catalogued, get covered, and get out on the shelf.

We also use our library management system as an asset register. We catalogue things like our iPads and technology on there. At the moment I am cataloguing a ride-on mower, as well as some graphic novels.

What are the most rewarding aspects of working in a school library?

The students. Absolutely, the students. They're also some of the most challenging aspects, but when you get a student who says, 'I don't like reading' or 'There aren't any books that I like' and you say, 'Oh, OK, but have you tried this?' and they come back to you two weeks later and say, 'Have you got any more books like that?' – that's the best bit. Just seeing the joy on their faces. You can't beat that. You go home and you just say 'my bucket's been filled today.'

What kind of challenges do you encounter in engaging kids with reading?

That it's not cool. I think they get to a certain age and they don't think it's cool anymore. Although we have changed that culture here, I think, quite dramatically. It kind of stops being cool when screens take over. So, we support lots of things to help keep them reading, like online books, supporting reading in the classroom. Frequently we find that some students stick to one particular type of book and don't want to branch out. And if there's nothing new in certain series, for example, they won't read anything.

That's why I've genrefied our collection. I've genrefied collections in my last three

libraries – it helps students find the type of thing they're looking for. I can now say something like 'Everything with the orange tag on it is Humour', and it's all in one spot, which has really helped prompt them to explore more, because books like the ones they enjoy are clearly marked.

I think that Dewey is the original genrefication. I don't want to reinvent it. I admire it greatly. I think it's really useful and increases the borrowing, but adding some extra signage through genrefication helps adapt to students' needs.

The other challenge is resourcing, especially with an increased need for dual-language resources due to more multicultural students speaking English as an additional language. I'm lucky right now in that I'm well supported, but funding is still an issue because the money's got to go all around the school and support everybody.

Recently, you won our SCIS monthly book giveaway, which was for a box of CSIRO Publishing resources. Can you tell us a bit about how your library resources and supports STEM subjects?

We have technology classes, we have science classes, we have kitchen garden classes, we have art classes, so we're quite



A student in Krista's library opening their box of books giveaway prize from SCIS.

“ We opened with 719 students, more than the 545 students our facilities were built for. We now have around 1200 students. ”

“ I’ve genrefied collections in my last three libraries – it helps students find the type of thing they’re looking for. I can now say something like ‘Everything with the orange tag on it is Humour’, and it’s all in one spot, which has really helped prompt them to explore more, because books like the ones they enjoy are clearly marked. ”

involved in STEM. We’re doing Science Week. The teachers are actually planning at the moment for some of that, so I support them by putting STEM books on display, promoting those books, and actively looking for new STEM books.

CSIRO Publishing has such beautiful books. I love the fact that they’re often in a picture book format. It’s stunning to display them! Having come from a library that was 50 years old and seeing what STEM books used to look like, and now what CSIRO STEM books look like, and having all these beautiful new STEM books, it’s just so exciting to see. They’re so engaging with the big pictures, with the short, sharp

facts. That’s a hook for my reluctant readers – they’re just so engaged with them now, which is wonderful.

What is your favourite aspect of SCIS?

One of the things that I really like is if I get those books that are crossovers – it’s a humorous book and adventure book – and I don’t know where to put it. Having genres within SCIS is something that I use quite regularly to help if I’m confused about where a book fits. I mean, if I’ve got some magical adventure books. Are they more magic? Are they more adventure? Having that info in SCIS is really useful. That, and I love the fact that I can just scan an ISBN and there’s the

catalogue record. It’s all there for me. I don’t have to spend the time cataloguing myself. I used to work at two schools simultaneously and both of them asked me when I left, ‘Do we really need SCIS?’ And I said that it just saves your life. It saves so much time, saves so much effort.

What would you like SCIS to do more of?

I think probably I’d like to see SCIS do some more free webinars. I have attended a couple of them. They’re always useful in reminding users of what SCIS does for us. So I think that’s really good. I’d like to see SCIS promote what they do a bit more as well. I think there’s a lot that I could do with SCIS, but I don’t know all of that to use it. So, I’d like to see more regular free webinars, especially ones that are recorded so I can watch them when I’m at home or wherever. And more on-demand stuff that’s already online that we can just watch quickly, in the 10 minutes while we’re cooking dinner or something like that.



Krista Thomas
Library Technician
Strathtulloh Primary School

Krista won the February 2024 monthly SCIS book giveaway. If you’d like to enter our monthly giveaways, scan the QR code below and follow our social media pages.



Win a box of books every month.

Follow us on socials and take part in our monthly giveaways.



Did you know that SCIS sells barcode scanners?

Bundle deal



Nexa Bundle Deal – 1600 and 2951
Scanner bundle

\$550.00



Cipherlab 1560P
Portable scanner

\$649.00



Nexa BL-8060
Hands-free scanner

\$329.00



Cipherlab 1500P
Corded scanner

\$269.00



MST – XL1
Portable bluetooth scanner

\$499.00



Cipherlab 1663
Portable pocket-sized bluetooth scanner

\$369.00



Nexa ZED 1600
Laser barcode scanner

\$169.00



Nexa ZED 2951
Cordless 2D barcode scanner

\$399.00

Our plug and play barcode scanners are perfectly tailored for your school library Barcode scanners purchased from SCIS are:

- Shipped ready to use, with a USB cable and full user instructions
- Supported by free technical support from All Barcodes Australia (our partners and quality local barcode scanner supplier since 1995)
- Pre-configured to read ISBNs and a wide variety of universal barcodes.

