

Books and story

Lili Wilkinson

Author, YA advocate,
Book Week maven

Campbell Whyte

Graphic novelist, art
school director, vocabulary
enthusiast

Megan Daley

Educator, writer,
busy bee

Serena Bourke

Teacher librarian, reader
(aloud and otherwise)

Georgia Wignall

Pedagogy and curriculum
developer, future-literate
professional

+ SCIS news,
new websites
and apps,
and this term's
recommended
reading



In this issue

SCIS: News for subscribers	3
The art of inclusive storytelling with Lili Wilkinson and Campbell Whyte	4
The power of reading aloud: why it matters for every child, no matter their age	8
Megan Daley, busy bee	10
AI Insights	13
New websites and apps	14
Educational Lending Right scheme: why is it important?	15
The Last Word	16

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the Traditional Custodians of Country across
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Term 3 webinars

Genrefication: practical approaches for school libraries

Tuesday 11 August | Free | 2pm AEST

Genrefication is one of the most talked about trends in school libraries – and for good reason. This webinar explores the benefits and challenges of organising your fiction and non-fiction collections by genre. Learn practical strategies for meeting the needs of your school community, including the best ways to improve discoverability, maintain useable space for particular user groups, and support reading engagement.

Collection development made easier with SCIS

Tuesday 18 August | Free | 2pm AEST

Looking to grow, refine and fill gaps your library collection? This webinar shows you how to use some of our SCIS website tools to support collection development. Learn how to search for new resources, create and manage lists, and leverage SCIS features to make informed decisions about what to add to your library. Perfect for anyone wanting to streamline their selection process and keep their collection fresh and relevant.

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Library love letters

In this section we share readers' thoughts, opinions and feedback on topics that matter most to them. To join the discussion, send your letters to connections@esa.edu.au with the subject line **Library love letter**.

Editor's note: I found this letter on my desk one day last term, with no further contact details. I'm publishing it here because I'd love to know how these folks with suspicious pseudonyms found out about the genre stickers we have planned. Alex and Libris, if you're reading this, please get in touch!

And to our other *Connections* readers: yes, the rumour is true. Stay tuned for more details about SCIS genre stickers!

– CJ

Dear *Connections* Editor,

We heard a rumour that SCIS were considering making genre stickers for library books, using the SCIS fiction genre headings list.

If this is true, it will be an excellent resource for us in school library land!

It will enable us to use consistent, recognisable labelling for resources that correspond directly with their SCIS catalogue record.

It will also save us time, because we can use the SCIS record to identify genres for newly purchased fiction resources instead of having to spend time analysing the work and making decisions for every title.

Can you tell us when these stickers will be available, and how we can get our hands on some?

– Alex and Libris



SCIS: News for subscribers

Welcome to Term 3 and to Issue 138 of *Connections*.

The results of the 2025 NAP-ICT have just been published and they don't make good reading. Based on 10,000 Australian Year 6 and Year 10 students, they show that while students are spending more time on devices, their digital literacy is at the lowest levels since testing began in 2005.

In a report by the ABC, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) CEO Stephen Gniel is quoted as saying, '**The 2025 results show a decline in student proficiency in ICT literacy and continuing gaps between different groups of students.**' He continued, '**It's our lowest levels since testing began in 2005. We can see the kids are using devices more and more [but] that's not translating into them having the proficiency skills that they need.**'

Professor Therese Keane, a former ICT high school teacher, suggests, '**You have to be able to make sure you can use systems critically and safely. You have to understand the bias and manipulation.**' Sound familiar? It's probably something that you try to do every day, between all the other tasks you're doing to keep the library functioning. That should be the core role of trained teacher librarians but without them, how can we expect students to learn digital literacy?

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare has said, '**It begs the question: what is going on here?**' He has charged Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) to investigate the results. I hope the AERO team consider the correlation between the decline in trained teacher librarians in our schools and the decline in student proficiency in ICT literacy. Mandating

for, and guaranteeing, funding of teacher librarians in every school nationally would be a good start, Minister Clare. I know I'm preaching to the converted but it shouldn't require another [Karmel report](#) to understand the key role school libraries and teacher librarians play in (digital) literacy.

You can read the [ABC report](#) [here](#).

This issue of *Connections* is focusing on books and stories. As a lover of both, I am often immersed in numerous worlds at one time, learning more about people and their lives.

Have a wonderful Term 3.



Anthony Shaw
Product Manager
SCIS



The art of inclusive storytelling with Lili Wilkinson and Campbell Whyte

If we broaden what we mean by storytelling, we broaden who can be included. Lili Wilkinson and Campbell Whyte explain how diverse storytelling formats can make storytelling accessible to a wider audience.

Before reading and writing, there was storytelling. Ever since people began gathering together, storytelling has been used as a way to communicate moral, social, educational and cultural messages. In whatever form they come, stories invite readers into other lives and perspectives. Library staff can maximise accessibility to stories by providing opportunities for students to interact with a range of storytelling forms. Offering a variety of formats is not just about preference, but also about equity; and promoting storytelling in diverse formats validates and endorses diversity itself. This includes validation of diverse creative processes, diverse preferences and diverse readerships.

Storytelling and words

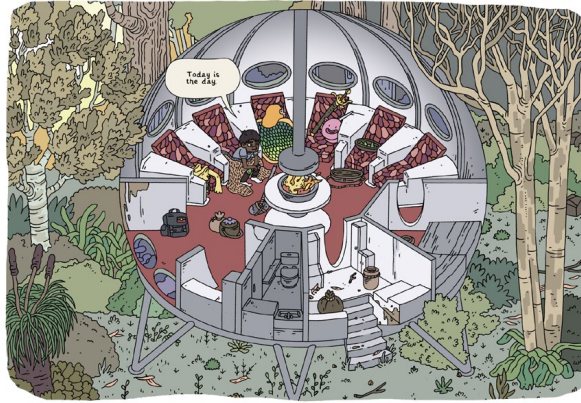
Thinking about the history of letters and words, the first iterations of these were often pictorial – Egyptian hieroglyphs, Chinese and Japanese characters, and so on. Campbell Whyte, a graphic novelist, explains ‘if we look throughout the history of the civilizations, the image has been the primary communication tool. It predates the written form in any sense. It predates especially print type. When books were handwritten, you know, there was still about half imagery. If you look at illuminated manuscripts throughout Europe, or texts that were hand transposed, they still had huge amounts of imagery in them. It’s only once typesetting became a thing in the printing press that we went, oh, let’s just like go full text! And so I think the graphic novel, or the comic, is almost a much truer form of writing.’

In this sense, we can see that reading a comic or graphic work has an intuitive logic to it, though Whyte cautions that this shouldn’t be mistaken for simplicity. ‘I think definitely in the West, we historically have always treated images in literature as sort of a training wheel for literacy, where, as you get older, you require the training wheels of imagery less and less until finally we reach literature’s “final form”, which is just pure prose. But I think that’s really a narrow and backwards way of thinking about it.’ Whyte emphasises that just as a prose text for a younger reader may be laid out or sequenced in a simple, clear way, often graphic novels and comics for younger readers are too; but graphic works for older readers and adults can be quite complex.

‘A friend of mine was showing one of their friends the comic that they were developing and this person had never really read a comic before and they had to ask, “which order do I read the panels in? And with the speech balloons, which order do I read them in?” And this was an adult. And so, there are reading conventions that are required, and we encounter people who are not comics-literate ... I think when you’re reading comics, there



is a lot of what Scott McLeod calls “closure” that’s required for the reader to engage in. And that’s where you have one panel, and then you have a second panel, and between those panels, there’s a gap of time and space in what’s depicted in them. And so the reader has to close that gap between the two. There’s this active imagination that’s required. And sometimes the gap between the two panels in time and space is quite small and quite obvious. And other times it’s larger and requires more of a creative leap in terms of the reader’s active role in it, and so you’re having to parse not just the written form, but also a visual language at the same time. So it definitely sparks and requires a different type of reading. And I think it’s because it’s this sort of transliterary form, I think it’s really engaging for a lot of people. You know, it kind of engages multiple parts of your brain in the way that often children’s books for children do, where there’s this text and there’s imagery.’



Pages from *Home Time* by Campbell Whyte

“Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas, and content together to make reading comprehension possible for children.”

– University of Oregon, Center on Teaching & Learning

Storytelling in comics and graphic novels can be quite poetic, in the sense that as in a poem, word choices have to be succinct, precise and curated. Unlike prose, comic text is limited. In terms of word count, a graphic novel may contain the same number of words as a short story, but it may encompass or express a novel-sized concept.

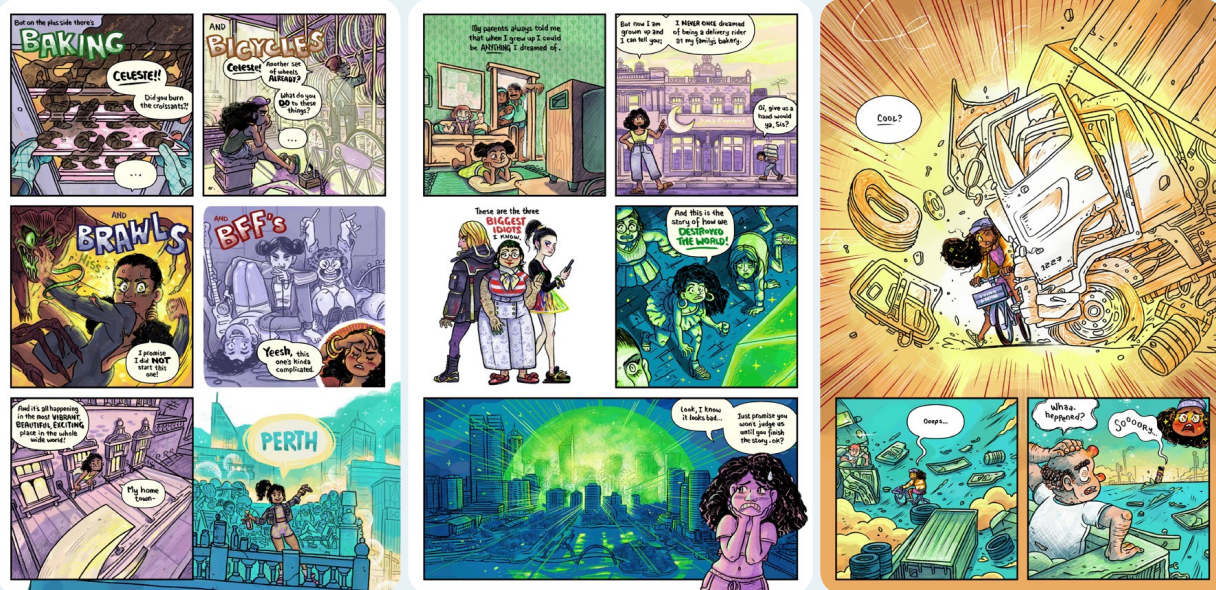
Whyte says, ‘I also do things that I kind of refer to as comics poems, which is kind of an exercise both in text and imagery in terms of how much I can pare back and still communicate an idea. So that’s really like an active exercise in cutting everything right down. And that’s really informed both practices. It’s informed the long form work as well, because ultimately it is this act of refining things down. And there was a research project at the University of Oregon¹ a while ago trying to look at the use of words in comics and they were comparing comics, children’s books and adults books and they were wanting to look at the “rare word per thousand ratio” – that’s the linguistic importance or uniqueness of words that are in a text. And children’s books were averaging 30.9 rare words per thousand. And adult prose books were 52.7, but comic books were averaging 53.5. So they found comic books were averaging a higher rare word per thousand count than adult prose novels. And I think it’s because of exactly what you’re saying. You know, you’ve got so few words,

you’ve really got to choose them. And if you’re choosing them ... so specifically, you’re going to choose interesting ones generally.’

Multimodal literacies

Graphic narratives, in particular, also remind us that reading is not only about decoding words. Readers today need to be versatile in applying their skills to both print and digital texts; they must interpret images, infer meaning between panels or text boxes or sections on a website, and often navigate multiple modes simultaneously. These days, storytelling is used to engage consumers in advertising, gameplay, current affairs – and even onboarding new clients or filling out forms – by positioning the reader or viewer as the ‘protagonist’ on a ‘journey’ or quest, fulfilling tasks to complete a mission or narrative arc. Often storytelling in one format borrows techniques and ideas from another: for example, graphic novel writing can be like making a movie, says Whyte. ‘Oftentimes what people will do is they’ll write a script, which is sort of like a movie script in terms of it’s got some stage direction, but it’s mostly dialogue and it’s broken down into scenes. That’s a really common way for comics to get made ... so they start from a prose foundation. I don’t do that. My process is a lot more kind of intuitive and iterative – usually my projects start with a few key ideas and I spend a long time developing up the visual language because that’s primarily how I think. I spend a long time developing up imagery, developing up characters, developing up key plot ideas. And then once they are kind of starting to solidify and become a bit more firm, that’s when I sit down and I start mapping out like a story structure, like a narrative structure. And then once I’ve got that narrative structure really firm, then I start with the storyboards ... but I won’t actually write the dialogue until ... the artwork’s finished. So, I know what the characters are saying, but because I do the

¹ Whyte is referring to a commonly cited statistic from the University of Oregon’s Center on Teaching & Learning. Donald Hayes and Margaret Ahrens introduced the idea of ‘rare words per thousand’, beginning with their 1988 paper and extended upon in their later works.



Pages from *Luna Express* by Campbell Whyte

art and the writing, I actually really enjoy that process of visually working through a scene with the characters, and it sounds a bit crazy, but it feels ... like working with actors, where, like, I'm visually drawing them. And as I'm drawing them, I'm like, "oh, actually, they would enter the room like this, and that's going to change the scene in this way". Or the visuals start communicating with me in the way that the characters are engaging and interacting with each other. So that can change the story, and that can change a scene.'

When it comes to engaging students with stories, novelist Lili Wilkinson says we must be open about the possibilities of what 'storytelling' can mean. 'I do some freelance writing for gaming, and those stories are carefully crafted as well. And whenever I do a writing workshop, I often start by asking the kids to share a story that they enjoyed recently and to tell me about it. And I make sure at the beginning to [stress that] story is anything with a narrative. It doesn't have to just be a book. So if you haven't read a book lately, tell me about a movie, tell me about a great video game you played that had a story that engaged you. And it's amazing how more responses you get.'

"As long as I can remember reading, I remember reading comics: they're not separated from other reading practices for me. It's sort of all the one thing."

– Campbell Whyte

Wilkinson also feels strongly that engaging storytelling gives students an understanding of concepts and ideas that traditional school texts may cover, but in a less appealing or contemporary way. 'It's about meeting kids where they are. Yes, you want all

of those opportunities to be able to analyse texts, but I feel like engaging kids and developing a love of reading, that lifelong love of reading, should also be in the mix.'

Expanding our idea of what storytelling can look like and be in these ways gives us many more chances to engage students with literature and respond to their particular interests. Graphic novels and comics are a huge part of this. Whyte says, 'There was a great research project recently that was supported by Creative Australia called *Folio*, where they were looking at Australian comics across the country, and they did a roundtable with four librarians from across the state. And, [these librarians], they were responsible for multiple libraries, most of them reporting, graphic novel collections are by far the most borrowed part of all of the collections. And then the next thing was children's books, you know. So if you look at like, what the public is actually engaging with.'

Engaging not just students but the whole school community with story and storytelling can be very powerful too, says Wilkinson. 'I love the [CBCA Children's Book Awards] shadow judging. It's the closest thing we have to the Inky Awards. I love having young people have a bit of agency. It gives libraries a way to participate as well, like school libraries, public libraries. Having their own shadow judges, going through that process themselves, [and saying, this] school has picked this winner. There's an enormous amount of value in that. It brings those awards back into relevance. When I was a nerdy tween, it was like the Oscars for me, waiting for that shortlist to come out. These days, there's so much competing for a child's attention, you've got to find ways to keep it dynamic, to keep it participatory.'

Storytelling as a way to communicate political and social ideas

In her PhD, Wilkinson looked into how we communicate ideology to young people, while still leaving them space to come to their own conclusions. In her work, she says, 'I try not be didactic.

There's nothing that kids hate more than being told what to think. So I try to create a space that encourages them to ask questions. A reviewer once said, if Lili Wilkinson's books have a theme, it's to never trust authority. I hadn't thought about it that way, but I guess it's true. Never accept anything blindly. Always be a critical thinker. Engaging young people and giving them agency over what they read is so important.'

Storytelling also allows people to engage with creativity in a joyful way that counteracts the social perception we develop as adults that we must only pursue activities that we are 'good' at, says Whyte. 'When [we're children], we all dance and we all sing and we all play make believe and we all dress up and we're at our most honestly weird and interesting. And over time, that sort of gets suppressed a little bit – for all sorts of reasons, like often in a classroom environment, there's one person who's the one that's good at singing, and there's the one that's good at sport, and there's the one that's good at maths, and there's the one that's good at art. And oftentimes within that competitive social environment, people perceive that there's only space for one.' Storytellers allow us to step back into that creative space and engage with it again.

Dystopian storytelling can be appealing, especially to young people, because the characters have agency in disastrous situations, whereas in everyday life, kids may feel they have little or no agency. Dystopian stories help with processing this reality. Wilkinson observes, 'High school is kind of like a dystopia. You have to dress a certain way and you are told what to think. All of your movements are controlled by the ringing of bells. I think that it is always going to be a bit of a touchstone for teens.'



Book Week as a celebration of storytelling

Wilkinson describes Book Week as a way of celebrating storytelling that can involve everyone in the school community, but that it can be especially powerful for those students who may not connect as well with other aspects of school life. 'The dress-up parade works really well. I see less of them in high schools, but teenagers love an excuse to dress up. Author visits

work really well, too. I think the best model is where the author speaks to a large group of kids, and then does a workshop with self-selected students. The ones who really want that experience. Once at a public school in Cairns I did a full day workshop with self-selected kids. And this Year 10 boy said to me at the end, 'I am not a sporty kid. I'm not particularly musical. I don't act. This is the first time there's been something special at school that was for me.' Right in the feels!' She goes on to say, 'We don't often celebrate reading. I go to the assembly at our kids' school and they talk a lot about sporting achievements and stuff. How do we celebrate reading in that way? I think Book Week is really good for that. Maybe some reading challenges over the year, how many books can you read or how many words can this class read? And then give out prizes for the best ones. Find some ways of celebrating writing and reading in a way that everybody can contribute to ... It's important to highlight books, but if you lower the barrier for entry – if you make it storytelling – then you can include narratives in games and in film and TV. There are ways to do that that allow everyone to participate but still hold books up as being both important and fun.'

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Lili Wilkinson
Australian children's author and educator

Lili Wilkinson is the award-winning author of more than 20 books for young people, including *A Hunger for Thorns*, which won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award, and was a CBCA Honour Book. Lili has a PhD from the University of Melbourne, and is a passionate advocate for YA and the young people who read it. Her latest books are the *Bravepaw* series and *Unhallowed Halls*.



Campbell Whyte
Graphic novelist
Co-founder, milktooth school of art and stories

Campbell Whyte is a passionate comic creator, educator and community builder. His award-winning graphic novels *Home Time* (2017) and *Luna Express* (2026) boldly blend auto-fiction with pop-genres, embedded in a uniquely Australian cultural landscape. He is the co-director (with Elizabeth Marruffo) of the milktooth school of art and stories (Perth), where he teaches comic courses to over 400 students each year, and is also the co-founder and current Chairperson of the Perth Comic Arts Festival.



The power of reading aloud: why it matters for every child, no matter their age

Reading aloud has benefits beyond those we already recognise in the early years. Serena Bourke explains the many secret bonuses of reading aloud, for primary- to secondary-aged students.

We all know the feeling, that special moment when reading aloud to a class takes hold; they are engaged, engrossed and just want to hear more of the story. It doesn't matter if it is a kindergarten class being read to for the first time, or a Year 6 class being held in thrall by the latest mystery, clamouring at the end to be the first to borrow the novel; reading aloud is one of the most powerful literacy practices available to teacher librarians. In fact, it is one of the most powerful literacy practices available to the whole school and community.

The benefits of reading aloud transcend age or reading ability. Current research consistently establishes that reading aloud to a child, no matter what their age, supports language development, comprehension, engagement with literature, and social-emotional learning (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Trelease, 2019). Reading aloud is not merely something 'to do', it is a fundamental component of literacy.

When discussing the benefits of reading aloud, the most significant one cannot be overlooked: the impact it has upon language and vocabulary development. Barone, Fougère, and Martel (2024) found that children who were read aloud to showed measurable improvement in their receptive vocabulary gains, which persisted even six months after the trial ended. They

also noted that the benefits were quite strong for those from disadvantaged families, as well as boys. Written language is more complex than the spoken word. Exposure to new sentence structures and vocabulary builds a child's own vocabulary and deepens their understanding of language and how it works. This in turn allows students to learn new grammar patterns, unfamiliar vocabulary and sophisticated ways of expressing new ideas (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Australian literacy resources also highlight that reading with children allows them to encounter new concepts, ideas and cultural perspectives while learning how language communicates meaning in increasingly complex ways (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2022). Within a library setting, it means that students who may struggle with reading independently can still engage in and be engulfed by rich language. This allows them to participate in class discussions about what they are reading and learning about without the added pressure of not being able to read that text in that moment.

Reading aloud is one way that we, as teacher librarians, can critically support and assist with a student's comprehension. When a skilled reader models fluent reading, students learn how punctuation, expression, pacing and pausing can add to the meaning of a text. When a teacher librarian actively interacts with students while reading aloud – asking questions, getting students to predict what will happen next in the story, examining what motivates characters to make their choices – these conversations help develop deeper comprehension strategies, which are vital when reading and analysing more complex texts. Interactive reading not only allows a teacher librarian to gauge their students' understanding, but also significantly improves students' engagement with a text and improves their comprehension (Fisher et al., 2004). Reading aloud strategies, using the skills of predicting, questioning, analysing and summarising, can be seen in Australian classrooms every day and help students build the comprehension and thinking skills required for successful independent reading.

Other benefits of reading aloud include creating, building and fostering an innate love of reading. Many students find reading a daunting task. In the digital age we find ourselves in, it is so much simpler to 'swipe' rather than to read and comprehend – why wouldn't a student choose the easier option? Not realising that this is a slippery slope, they may miss a key reading building block because of an 'easier' choice. Reading aloud provides a different experience, one that isn't focused on word or sentence formation but enjoyment, imagination and shared storytelling, one of the oldest traditions in every culture.



“Trelease (2019) states that ‘reading aloud is one of the most effective ways to create lifelong readers because it helps children associate books with pleasure rather than obligation.’”



A study by Ledger and Merga (2018) found that many Australian primary school students appreciated being read to at school, and asserted that being read aloud to made the stories more enjoyable and engaging. This research also indicated that continued reading aloud beyond the early years can strengthen students’ connection to literature and sustain their reading motivation. This is obvious to any teacher in the library who has read aloud a snippet of a chapter book to an older year group and suddenly every student is eager to borrow it first!

A common mistake made by parents and teachers alike is that once students can read on their own, they no longer see a need to read to them. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Reading aloud benefits even the most confident of readers. Comprehension develops earlier when young readers are listening to a text as opposed to reading it (Trelease, 2019). This means students can understand complex language, ideas and content when listening more quickly than when reading independently. It also means that teachers who read aloud to their students can introduce new texts with enriched vocabulary, complex narrative structures and more mature themes, which in turn broadens students’ literary experiences and exposes them to books they may not be able to read independently.

Ultimately, reading aloud is a profoundly effective literary practice. It not only creates comprehension building blocks and strengthens language skills but also supports students at their reading level and continues to foster a love of reading. Most importantly, it creates a shared experience with other students about stories that have been made accessible to everyone, no matter their reading ability. As teacher librarians, it is imperative that we continue to read aloud to students of all ages. When reading aloud, we have the opportunity to ensure that every student has the chance to experience the joy, love, engagement and connection that books can provide.

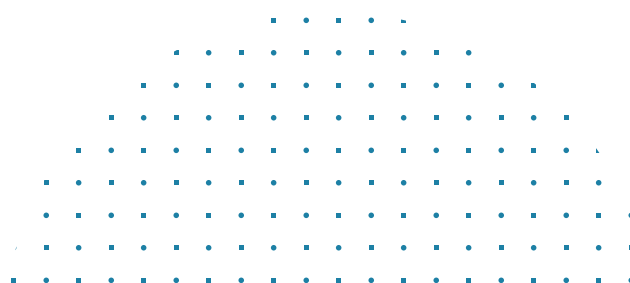
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Serena Bourke
Teacher librarian
Glendenning Public School

Serena Bourke, teacher librarian for over 10 years, passionate reader and dedicated champion of children’s literature. I strive to inspire young readers to discover stories, build lifelong literacy skills and find joy in the world of books.





Megan Daley, busy bee

I sat down with Megan Daley to learn about her hacks for stealth-marketing reading to children.

“A perfect day would have some writing, some reading and some talking.”

I spoke to Megan Daley first thing on a Wednesday morning.

Megan Daley: Hi, how are you?

Ceinwen Jones: Hello, good! How are you?

MD: Yeah, I'm good. Good ...

Actually, I had a weird morning. I just, I woke up at 3 am with a bug in my ear and I've just been to the GP and had it removed. Like, I've literally just walked back in from the doctor. So that was my morning.

CJ: Oh! Wow, that's so random!

MD: I know, so weird. And I've got one meeting after another today and I just feel a bit weird. I'm just ... anyway, I managed to get a coffee on the way back from the doctor, so that's good.

CJ: Oh. So things are looking up?

MD: Yeah, that's right. How are you?



At this point, I was kind of wondering if I should ask Megan if she wanted to reschedule ... was she really OK? She seemed OK, and they'd got the bug out. I pressed on.

CJ: Oh, I'm fine. But, while preparing for this interview, the overwhelming thing I wanted to ask you was, have you somehow found some way to put more than twenty-four hours in a day? Because it seems like, you have four kids, you're a writer, you're a speaker, a podcaster, an artistic director of a festival, you have a website, you're part of publishing a series. I don't understand.

MD: And I work for StoryBox Hub [as Head of Education] three days a week now as well.¹ I've left my teaching job. That was my three days. And then I'm Storyfest one day a week, and then I'm author, publisher one day a week, and then I'm podcast one day a week, which leaves one day for parenting and children. But that's fine.

CJ: But what about personal care?

MD: Who needs that? I've just been to the GP to get a bug removed. That was my personal care.

CJ: That's right. Did they get it out with the tweezers?

MD: A tiny vacuum.

CJ: And what kind of bug was it?

MD: They couldn't tell, something very little. When I said my husband was a beekeeper, they were like, oh, we hope it's not a bee.

CJ: A bee would be a bit big though to get out – it could get stuck.

MD: A native bee. A native bee would get down your ear pretty easily. Yeah, I've swallowed one of those recently. I was talking at a school about native bees and about my book [The Beehive] and I was opening up their beehive as I was talking and one flew into my mouth and I swallowed it in front of 200 kids!

CJ: Oh, did it bite you on the way down?

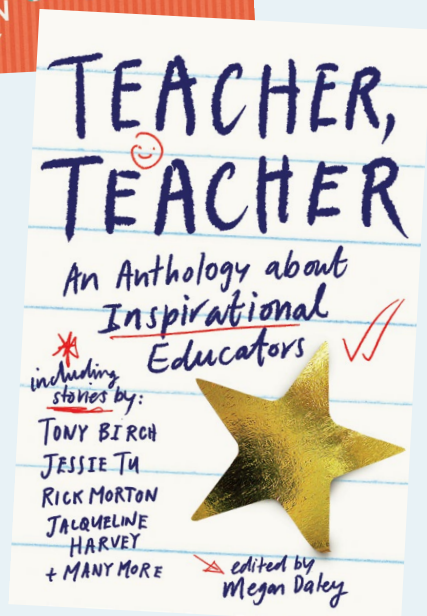
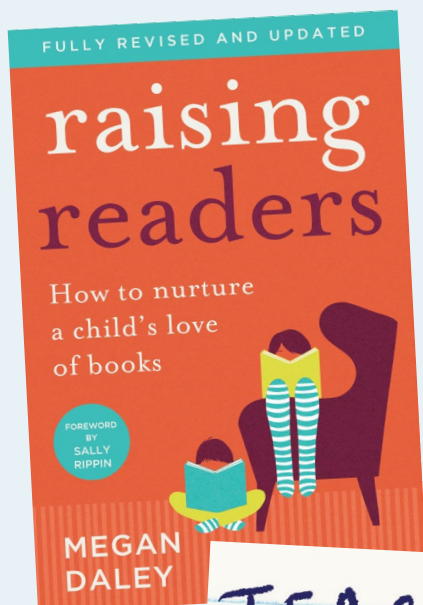
MD: No, they [native bees] don't bite. They don't have a stinger. Just didn't taste very nice! And I traumatised all of the prep children in front of me.

CJ: Well, you taught them that it's OK to swallow a bee, and you'll survive. But I guess the events leading up to the survival might have traumatised them a bit if you were distressed, I suppose.

Now you may be wondering, did I talk to Megan about anything other than insects? The answer is, yes, mostly. We also talked extensively about reading.

Megan has a lot to say about the importance of reading for pleasure and its far-reaching benefits. But you may be surprised at her take on it.

¹ ... well, that's it, isn't it? She's definitely gotten hold of a Time-Turner, right?



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MD: I've really changed my thinking around ... that our kids should just want to pick up a book. I've given up on [the idea that] my kids are just going to naturally want to fall into reading. I think it's a discipline to be able to read a book, but also it's a slowness. It's a stillness in your mind. It's a 'the answer's not coming straight away' kind of feeling. It's a really important thing for children to experience and go through.

Megan talks more about reading as a discipline in terms of her expectations as a parent and as a teacher: she has an expectation that her four kids will read every single day. It doesn't always work out that way, but the expectation is there in the same way as PE teachers insist on exercise and piano teachers insist on practice. Reading is a skill, just like playing sport or playing an instrument is a skill, and it's not necessarily something that a child will naturally just do, but it's important to have the expectation that they'll practise it and persevere with it.

Parents and teachers and library staff can also take advantage of other methods to supplement the disciplined expectation that

children get into reading as a habit. 'Fake it till you make it' may be apt in this case: I know at least one child who has followed BookTok influencers and gotten into the *aesthetic* of identifying as a reader before actually becoming a reader for real.

The same goes for the children who enthusiastically and excitedly borrow books from the library for a term without reading any of them, just carrying them around as an accessory; or those who will happily read low-quality series, much to the chagrin of all the adults in their lives, but nothing else. Perhaps you have children coming into the library to read a book because it was written by their parents' favourite celebrity. All these behaviours are like gateways leading towards the habit of becoming a lifelong reader-for-pleasure, and should be encouraged, and scaffolded upon.

This philosophy may be akin to prioritising quantity over quality – that is, prioritising the habit, rather than the books or reading materials themselves – but when it comes to scaffolding, are we really, as educators, doing enough of this next step, Megan wonders.

MD: The other thing that I think is happening is with the decreased attention spans of children – or the assumed decrease in attention spans – a lot of middle grade books are now being studied in senior secondary. Books that were intended as YA books are almost considered too long to study in a school and they are studying shorter books with shorter chapters. And you know, that worries me as well because I think children need to develop their reading stamina. And I hope that schools are making decisions based on the quality of the book, not just the length of the book.

Unsurprisingly, Megan is a wealth of knowledge about stealth (and not-so stealth) marketing for books and reading. You may have a friend who's expert at sneaking vegetables into their children's food. You may have another friend who's really good at gamifying chores or boring tasks so that their housework gets done. Well, Megan is really good at carving out time to read, and at getting other people to read. Here are the top tips I gleaned during our chat.

- Carry books around with you, so you can read in the little pockets of time afforded to you (for example, when you're at the GP, waiting for a bug to be removed from your ear).
- Bonus: if you carry picture books, in particular, around with you, people will often ask you why. And then you've started a conversation – more stealth marketing.



- Audiobooks can be an incredibly motivating tool to get through
 - ▶ housework
 - ▶ road trips (if she can find something that suits everyone, Megan claims all four of her kids won't argue in the car)
- Leave picture books on the kitchen table all the time. Megan says, 'I find when I first get up in the morning and I'm having my first cup of tea or coffee for the day and I'm waking up, a picture book isn't taxing on time [or energy], and because I have them physically in front of me on the kitchen table, it's easy.'
- This works on others too: 'If I want the kids to read something, I just leave it around. And then they just 'accidentally' come across it.'
- When kids are borrowing from the library, before they leave, get them to *start* reading the book they've borrowed before leaving. '[When I was a teacher librarian], I always allowed time for borrowing where afterwards I made the kids sit down and start reading the book they're going to take home, because once you start a book, you're more inclined to finish a book.' While they may forget about the book if they're rushing to borrow and just throwing it into their library bag, if you start them reading that book, well, as Megan says, 'Authors are very clever at hooking people in.' Your job is to get them to start.
- Use books as decor: 'I don't know. Other people put flowers on their kitchen table. I decorate my kitchen table with picture books.'

So maybe the aesthetic of identifying as a reader never really leaves you?

We finished the interview with Megan describing her perfect day, and I'll leave you with it too.

"Oh, the perfect day would be a coffee first up and some sourdough fruit toast, and reading some of the picture books on my kitchen table. If it was a weekend, I would then go through my recipe book collection and read all of the recipes that I really, really like and meal plan and then I would be left alone to do some writing. At the moment I'm writing a book for the 'Your Next Read' series [but] I've always got a writing project underway. And then I'd probably like to talk to Allison Tait and record an episode of the podcast because we talk every single week and it's like therapy. [When] we record the podcast, it doesn't feel like we're recording it for anybody else. It's just a conversation. So I really enjoy that. And definitely honey. There's honey on everything. In fact, there's honey on the sourdough fruit toast. There is honey in most of my recipes 'cause I try to replace sugar with honey. Always some honey."

Megan Daley is Head of Education at StoryBox Hub, co-founder of Your Kid's Next Read and Artistic Director of Somerset Storyfest. An award-winning teacher librarian, author and speaker, her books include *Raising Readers*, *Teacher*, *Teacher* and *The Beehive*.





AI insights

A new regular column with contributions from experts in learning, pedagogy and AI. In this issue, Georgia Wignall discusses AI and assessment design.

A version of this article first appeared in the QSLA Term 2, 2026 newsletter.

In the age of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), teacher librarians are uniquely positioned to lead whole-school conversation about information integrity, digital fluency and assessment design that cultivates authentic learning.

Recent research on student voice across three Brisbane state high schools¹ revealed students wanted partnership, not policing, from their teachers. They are seeking clear guidelines, modelled use, practical demonstrations and non-judgemental support from their educators. Students want teachers to be transparent AI co-learners who provide guidance rather than suspicion (Wignall, 2025). For library staff, this presents a powerful opportunity for the school library to become the safe, expert-guided space where students learn to use AI ethically, responsibly and effectively.

In practice, we are asking teachers to redesign assessment to either embrace GenAI safely, or to intentionally require students to demonstrate their understanding or judgement while using this tool (Lodge et al., 2023).

Embracing AI safely and intentionally can involve the following:

- **AI use declarations + artefact portfolios:** require students to submit *prompt logs*, *iteration snapshots* and a short *method note* explaining how AI shaped their draft – assessed for process quality (not just product polish) (Corbin et al., 2025).
- **Library facilitated miniclinics:** teacher librarians teach or co-teach short workshops on *fact-checking*, *bias detection*, *source triangulation* and *citation of AI assistance*, paired with task-specific checklists (Lodge et al., 2023).
- **Feedback-first cycles:** build in mid-task check-ins where students *explain* their choices (including AI use) and act on feedback to demonstrate their evolved understanding (Corbin et al., 2025).

To support teaching teams to rethink assessment, consider using the following methods:

- **Process + performance triangulation:** pair a written artefact with short oral storyboards or annotated think-alouds where students explain *how* their ideas evolved – including where AI helped and where they overrode it (Corbin et al., 2025).
- **Localised, data-informed contexts:** use school-specific datasets, site visits or community briefs that AI cannot fully ‘know’ without student input, shifting value to interpretation and justification (Lodge et al., 2023).

- **Sequenced tasks with checkpoints:** design semester-long micro-deliverables (proposal → prototype → peer review → refinement) creating multiple evidence points and reducing opportunities for AI substitution (Lodge et al., 2023).

Why school libraries are central to this shift

School libraries already steward information ethics and research literacies, and in a GenAI era, this responsibility expands rather than diminishes. Library staff are uniquely positioned to anchor whole school confidence, capability and integrity in using AI for learning. As educators and students navigate new technologies, the school library can become the most stable and future-focused learning environment within the school.

Teacher librarians and library staff could lead this work in three interconnected ways:

- **Support academic integrity:** teach and model the core habits of academic integrity through fact-checking, tracing source origins, validating information, recognising AI hallucinations and interpreting algorithmic limitations.
- **Broker staff capability through PLCs:** create safe, collaborative spaces where teachers can experiment with AI tools, trial redesigned assessment tasks and interrogate examples of student AI use. These professional learning communities ensure that AI-aware assessment practice grows in a supported and sustainable manner.
- **Model transparency and ethical practice:** demonstrate AI use openly in inquiry lessons by generating search strategies with students, comparing AI summaries to authoritative sources and inviting students to critique the accuracy, bias or omissions in AI responses. This modelling reinforces transparency, integrity and critical thinking.

As AI becomes a daily part of how students learn, create, revise and question, school libraries can become the intellectual centre of gravity around which ethical, informed and future-ready learning develops. Just as libraries evolved from book-centred spaces to multimedia learning hubs, they now have the opportunity to grow again into AI-literate inquiry centres, equipping young people with the dispositions they need for a digitally complex world.

References

References are in the online version: scisdata.com/connections.



Georgia Wignall

Senior Education Office – Pedagogy
Department of Education and Training – MetroSouth, Qld

¹ 711 participants: 352 female, 318 male, 14 non-binary, 27 unidentified.



New websites and apps

Download the entire collection of records for these digital resources, plus a few more, which you can upload directly into your library management system. Select 'Connections Term 3 2026' and click on the Download button.

Big ideas in Beginning Reading

Type: Website	SCIS ID: 5569632
Audience: Teachers	
URL: reading.uoregon.edu	
This website contains information and resources for teachers about the science of reading, with details about the five essential components of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It contains downloadable infographics, videos with teaching examples, and links to further professional reading and resources.	

Madison's Library

Type: Website	SCIS ID: 5569552
Audience: Library staff	
URL: madisonslibrary.com	
This website is a portal for resources, book reviews, reading and school library news, created and curated by Madison Dearnaley, an Australian teacher librarian. Madison has created an online community hub for teacher librarians, and you can stay updated by subscribing to her free blog.	

SPELD SA free resources

Type: Website	SCIS ID: 5569639
Audience: Parents, teachers	
URL: www.speldsa.org.au/SPELD-SA-Phonic-Readers-New-Series	
This page contains links to SPELD's free phonics readers range from the Sounds-Write and Jolly Phonics codes. They can be downloaded as PDF, PowerPoint or text (no images). SPELD's site also contains free teaching resources, professional reading, and links to literacy, phonics and reading workshops and webinars – some of which are free.	

Readaloud.org

Type: Website	SCIS ID: 5569665
Audience: Parents, teachers	
URL: www.readaloud.org	
This website contains resources, information and activities to encourage regular reading aloud. It's curated by a nonprofit organisation that aims to make reading aloud every day for at least 15 minutes the new standard in childcare. There are downloadable graphics and tips, suggested reading lists for reading aloud, as well as a subscription newsletter.	

Vision Australia Library

Type: Website	SCIS ID: 5569653
Audience: Students, teachers	
URL: www.visionaustralia.org/services/library	
The Vision Australia Library is free to join for Australian residents with a print disability. It includes many resources, including audiobooks and podcasts and other digital resources, which are available immediately online. For children, there are decodable and e-Braille books, Lego Braille Bricks kits available for loan, as well as online resources to support their use.	

Eleven reader

Type: App	SCIS ID: 5569675
Audience: Students, teachers, parents	
URL: elevenreader.io	
<i>Note: This app requires a subscription, including for the free trial period, but is free for students and educators for the first year.</i> This app contains free audiobooks and free text-to-speech converters with an AI reader available in many different voices. Voices are natural-sounding and there are a wide range to choose from – including voices of actors as well as AI native voices – and they can be filtered for age, gender, accent and affect (friendly, dramatic, etc). PDFs, books, websites and scanned pages can be read aloud through the app, which also offers real-time word highlighting. Bookmarks and annotations can be added while listening.	



Educational Lending Right scheme: why is it important?

In Term 4, your school may receive an email from Education Services Australia (ESA) inviting you to participate in the 2026–27 Educational Lending Right (ELR) scheme. This survey, delivered by ESA on behalf of the Australian Government’s Office for the Arts, invites around 1,000 Australian schools to participate by providing a list of how many copies of specific book titles their libraries hold.

Faced with an email inbox already bursting at the digital seams, you may be tempted to ignore or hit ‘delete’, thinking it’s not important. But, in fact, ELR is one of the vital ways Australian ‘kid lit’ creators are able to earn a living income and build sustainable writing careers.

Here are some key reasons why you should fill out the ELR survey if the invitation lands in your inbox.

It compensates authors for the free use of their books in school libraries

You may have one or two copies of an author’s book in your school library, but it’s been borrowed hundreds of times, used for classroom study, and generated important discussion. Most importantly, it may have got children and teens excited about reading. However, the author was only paid once for the hard-copy items on the school shelves.

It’s easy, simple and safe

For most schools invited to participate, the process is simple: just export the library data from your library management system (LMS) and attach the results to the survey link provided. Your invitation will include a supporting letter from the Australian Government’s Office for the Arts, details of the permission provided by your governing jurisdiction, and important details on how to complete the survey (it takes only around 5 to 10 minutes!). The survey does not audit your school or school’s student body; its sole aim is to estimate how many books by Australian authors are held across Australian schools.

You can win prizes

One of the great perks of providing feedback is that your school goes into the running for a \$150 voucher or book pack.

It sends a message that reading, children’s authors and school libraries are important

By getting involved, you are becoming part of a greater discussion about literacy, education and imagination. Need more inspiration? Take it from some of our best-loved authors:



“I love that I’m doing the most important job in the world. I’m helping to shape the minds and ideas of our future leaders. I’m sharing big ideas, like how to be courageous, and how failure is part of success, and how important it is to take action and do the things that scare you, so that your world grows bigger as you grow stronger. The Educational Lending Right program helps support all authors to keep creating quality stories for all Australian children.”

– Cristy Burne

“If we do not pay book creators a proper income, then only those from privileged backgrounds will have the means to create and share stories and the literary scene will lack diversity. Our children will miss out on many wonderful and important stories.”

– Katrina Nannestad

Hear more from Australian creators on our [website](#). Find out more about ELR at [Office for the Arts](#).
Got questions? Email us at elr@esa.edu.au.

The Last Word

This regular column brings you school library news, research, and resources to add to your professional reading list.

Read the whole lot.



- ☒ Devour the latest Connections
- ☐ Coffee
- ☐ Further reading – The Last Word

The Conversations's slightly cynical take on children's book prizes

The Conversation.

Talking about Australian children's book prizes and their importance

Binks, D. 2025.

Australia Reads 'Understanding Australian Readers' report about recreational reading in Australia

Australia Reads 2025.

I ♥ BOOKS

Announcement of the Children's Booker Prize and the discussion about Australian students' reading engagement

The Children's Booker Prize.

A brief backstory about reading aloud

Goldin, H.L. May, 2026.

UK National Literacy Trust report on children and young people's reading in 2025

National Literacy Trust 2025.



Margaret Merga on fostering student reading engagement

Merga, K.M. & Roni, S.M. 2025.



Information literacy in the age of AI – some practical tips on how to teach kids to evaluate information

Goldin, H.L. April, 2026.

