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Let's look at spelling

Dr Lorraine Beveridge and Jane Lieschke

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are the views of the authors and not necessarily those of their employer, the New South Wales Department of Education.

Significance

We work in a shared space supporting schools in literacy. Most schools in which we currently work and have taught in, use spelling text books and commercial programs to teach spelling in a structured and sequential way, based on the work of Gentry (1982) and development stage theory, which outlines that spelling is learned in a defined set of developmental stages. However, emerging research suggests that the acquisition of spelling competence is not a sequential process of hierarchically ordered sub-skills demonstrated in linear stages, building towards writing competence (Daffern, 2016a; Adoniou, 2016). Rather, students use a broad range of spelling skills recursively as the need arises for them to communicate effectively, based on the overlapping waves theory of spelling acquisition (Siegler, 1996). It is not our intent to discuss the vagaries of the ubiquitous practice of using spelling texts and commercial programs to teach spelling in this paper. We wish to raise awareness that the quality texts that teachers use in their literacy classrooms, and the words that students use in their own writing, are incredibly powerful tools to teach spelling in context, drawing on the reciprocity of the reading-writing connection. Explicit teaching is necessary in order to ensure that students develop a deep knowledge and understanding of this complex aspect of literacy (NSW Department of Education, 2016c).
The **English K-10 Syllabus** and the National Literacy Learning Progression (NLLP) (ACARA, 2018), outline what good spelling looks like in practice, drawing on student work samples as evidence to scaffold teachers in identifying what students can do and providing suggestions for where to next in their spelling instruction. These resources work in tandem to support teachers in teaching spelling, as a tool for writing, in the writing process.

Introduction

The four forms of spelling knowledge

Spelling is a tool for writing, and when we spell words, we draw on the four forms of spelling knowledge, these being:

- Phonology - how words sound
- Visual - how words look
- Morphology - parts within words that signify meaning, grammar
- Etymology - the historical, cultural origin of words.

English is said to be a morphophonemic language because it represents information at both the phonological and morphological level. Applying phonological information is essential for early reading and writing acquisition. We start by teaching spelling through drawing on students' growing phonological knowledge, and as they progress through the grades, students increasingly draw on other forms spelling knowledge. Phonology is but one part of the spelling story. In addition to phonology, students draw on their visual spelling skills, morphology and etymology in order the build their orthographic skills.

The process of developing spelling knowledge is a recursive one. For example, during a recent primary English lesson, we were talking and writing about students' future career aspirations, linked to the current class text, 'Mechanica: a Beginner's Field Guide' by Lance Balchin, a picture book for older readers, which the class enjoy.

Figure 1: Balchin (2016)

Students were keen to write their draft, and eager to record their thoughts on the whiteboards. This particular class clearly understand that the purpose of writing is to convey meaning to the reader and were not 'hung up', worrying about correct spelling in their first draft. They have a deep, shared understanding of the importance of drafting in the writing process, and know that before they achieve their penultimate writing sample, they will write and polish many drafts. Writing is a work in progress. The students' miscues (Figure 2 below) show them drawing on a range of spelling knowledge, including phonology (actor, zoo keeper, designer), morphology (keeper, photographer), etymology (Olympian), and demonstrated growing orthographic knowledge, for example, doubling the final consonant before adding the suffix, 'er'

(swimmer). They are engaged in and excited by the writing process and see writing as an opportunity to share the ideas that they are passionate about.

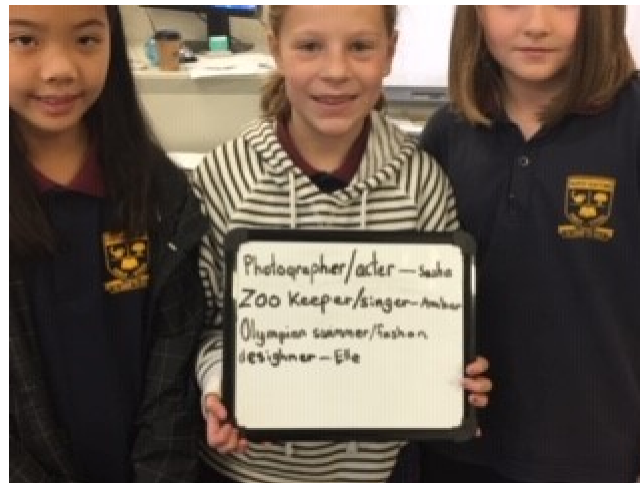


Figure 2: Evidence of emerging spelling knowledge

As students' progress through the grades, and write more complex words, sentences and stories to an increasingly wider audience, they draw on a range of spelling knowledge as most of the words in English are not phonetically regular. Students require explicit instruction in a range of spelling knowledge in order to understand how words work. They need to know how to spell them correctly, as orthographic knowledge (correct spelling) is a highly valued skill in society (Crystal, 2012; Daffern, 2016a; Adoniou, 2016). As they move into primary, students' alphabetic knowledge no longer suffices to satisfy their growing hunger for words. It is estimated that by about Year 3, around 75% of words that students encounter in texts are not phonetically regular, so students need to draw on all four forms of spelling knowledge to read and write words (Carlisle, 2010).

Figure 3: Student drawing on environmental print as an authoritative spelling source.

English K-6 Syllabus focus on spelling

We can see evidence of the privileging of phonological skills in the early grades in the English K-10 syllabus document. While the outcomes for Stages 1 to 3 are quite similar, the content points provide the depth of learning to support students to deepen their spelling knowledge, skills and understanding. Spelling falls under **Objective A** in the English syllabus, which relates to communicating 'through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing'. In Early Stage 1, sound-based spelling approaches dominate. There is an emphasis on the constrained skills, those skills which students usually master early as a basis for further literacy learning. Letter- sound knowledge is a highly constrained skill. Constrained skills are those reading skills, like phonemic awareness, which are learned quickly and once mastered, do not usually need to be further addressed (Paris, 2005). Students are learning to hear, then read and write sounds to make words.

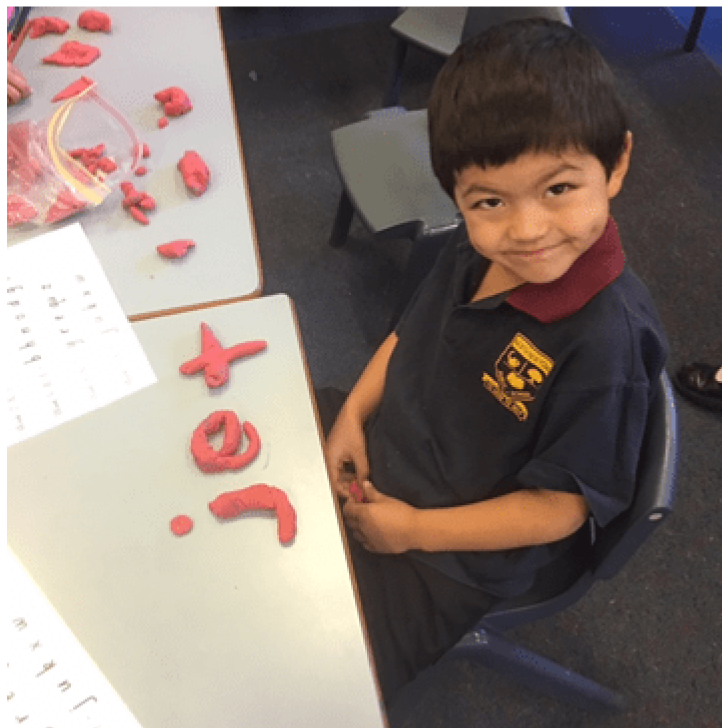


Figure 4: Early reader demonstrating growing knowledge of the alphabetic principle

More than half of the content dot points in Early Stage 1 in the **English K-10 syllabus** relate specifically to phonology and approximately a quarter relate to morphology (p.40). The remaining content points relate to known words in addition to high frequency and sight words, those words that make up more than half of all words in print, many of which cannot be blended or segmented (Adoniou, 2016). Through early writing, students make connections between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters), providing opportunities to practise and apply their growing awareness of language and how it works. It is tricky terrain trying to decipher students' early independent writing attempts. However, it is important that we try hard to do so because by seeking to understand students' intended written messages, we are valuing their work, and encouraging them to produce further writing. By also providing opportunities for students to read their written messages to others, we are teaching them to '*make meaning through language*' in their texts, the key underpinning of our **English K-10 Syllabus** (p.24).

In Stage 1 (S1), there are thirteen spelling content dot points. The skills build on the phonology and morphology introduced in ES1 to include increasingly specific dot points relating to morphology in S1. For example, 'recognise common prefixes and suffixes and how they change a word's meaning' (**English K-10 Syllabus**, p.63). In S1, students are using their knowledge of letter-sound correspondence and combining their growing awareness of regular spelling patterns and sight words, to create texts. Etymology is introduced in the content dot points of Stage 1, demonstrating the importance of knowing how English has been influenced by other languages from around the world and the necessity for teachers to explicitly teach this knowledge to students, to support both spelling and vocabulary development. The history of English is a high interest historical narrative that should be shared. The NLLP sub-element of Spelling provides detail to support the teaching of this content in the classroom. It offers specific observable behaviours that we can look for in work samples to determine student progress. To support effective knowledge integration, students should be exposed to explicit and systematic teaching by way of the modelled, guided and independent teaching outlined in the teaching and learning cycle (NSW Department of Education, 2016a). The Gradual Release of Responsibility model provides a framework for supporting students through its four interrelated components:

- Modelled – 'I do'
- Guided – 'We do'
- Collaborative – 'You do' (in pairs or small groups)
- Independent – 'You do' (alone)

(Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Bengisu & Ates, 2016)

In Stage 2, students move from using their visual knowledge to spell familiar words, to developing a range of strategies to support them in spelling less familiar words. There is a focus on spelling rules while also investigations into regular and irregular spelling patterns. The use of context to support spelling is also recognised, particularly in relation to the use of homophones. There is a continued focus in the syllabus on the value of students' understanding the etymology of words to continually deepen their spelling knowledge and build their love of the English language. At the completion of Stage 3, we are aiming for students to draw on a variety of strategies that are based on the four forms of spelling knowledge when creating texts.

In summary, spelling instruction in Early Stage 1 begins with a strong phonological focus which Stage 1 then builds upon this while moving towards an emphasis on morphology and the introduction of etymology. Stage 2 emphasises the development of a broad range of strategies for students to use when creating texts and Stage 3 brings all prior learning into practice through the use of integrated strategies that draw on all four forms of spelling knowledge. This is evidenced in the table below:

Forms of spelling knowledge	ES1	S1	S2	S3
Phonological	→	→	→	→
Visual	→	→	→	→
Morphological	→	→	→	→
Etymological		→	→	→

Table 1: Syllabus content dot points referencing the four forms of spelling knowledge

Table 1 above shows that phonological, visual and morphological spelling skills are referred to across all syllabus stages K-6. Etymology is a focus from S1 onwards, demonstrating the importance of integrating all forms of spelling knowledge from an early age.

Let's talk about sight words

Some teachers and education source books use the terms 'high frequency words' and 'sight words' synonymously. However they are not the same. High frequency words can be phonetically regular, meaning that they can be blended and/ or segmented. They are those words which occur frequently in reading and writing. Juxtaposed to this, sight words cannot be easily blended and/ or segmented, and need to be recognised on sight. Sight words originate from a particular time and place in the history of the English language and the way they are spelt is a reminder of this. Students need to know both high frequency words and sight words to become fluent readers and writers, as it is estimated that high frequency words and sight words constitute about half of the words that we encounter in texts (Adoniou, 2016). Sight words and high frequency words need to be taught explicitly alongside letter sounds when teaching reading and writing in the early years (Konza, 2010; Ehri, 1997; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Figure 5: Explicit teaching of sight words and high frequency words

Morphology

When we use morphemic knowledge to spell words, we are drawing on meaning cues. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning within a word. Words can consist of only one morpheme, or can be made up of multiple morphemes. Root words and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) are the most common types of morphemes that make up our words in English. For example, to draw on morphological knowledge to teach the word 'disappointment', teachers would isolate the root word 'appoint', which is a French word, meaning 'to arrange or resolve'. The Latin prefix, 'dis' means 'lack of' or 'not'. The Latin suffix, 'ment' denotes an action, and changes a verb to a noun, in this case from 'disappoint', to 'disappointment'.

When students understand how words are constructed from morphemes, their spelling and vocabulary improves (Apel et al. 2013; Siegel, 2008; Adoniou, 2016). Reliance on phonological knowledge alone can be problematic for students when attempting to spell unfamiliar words. For example, when only using phonology, students may write 'walkt' to indicate the past tense of 'walk'. However, being able to draw on the morphemic knowledge that the suffix '-ed' indicates past tense, they would be able to correctly add '-ed' instead of the 't' that they hear when they say the word. It has been suggested that morphemes, rather than syllables, could be a more effective tool for students to use when spelling an unknown word (Apel et al. 2013; Siegel, 2008; Adoniou, 2016, Daffern, 2016a). This is because syllables break words down into isolated sound parts, rather than morphemes, which are meaningful units of a word. Morphemes generally retain their spelling, even when pronunciation changes, such as in the words 'sign' and 'signal'.

Etymology in English

Spelling in the English language is not random as many people think, but a system based on morphology (units of meaning) with a captivating etymological history. Etymology is defined as 'the historical and cultural origin of words' (Daffern, 2016b, p.22). Familiarity with the origin of words provide useful clues as to how to correctly spell them. We will now outline a brief summary of the English language.

Following the Roman exodus from Britain around 55 CE (Common Era), when Celtic languages predominated, the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jute Germanic tribes contributed simple, practical words to English; like parts of the body, household items and food words. Next, the missionaries brought their Latin words to the English language. Latin was regarded as the language of Christianity. Words like 'martyr', 'bishop', and 'font' were integrated into English at that time, as was the Bible. Next, the Vikings invaded England from C8 - C11 and added words that described their warrior traditions and invasions of England; including 'ransack', 'drag', 'thrust' and 'die', helping to further shape the English language. These were but a few of the words attributed to the Vikings at that time.

A significant historic event that impacted the evolution of English was the invasion of England by William the Conqueror in 1066. William the Conqueror and his Norman warriors brought with them a plethora of French words. French was regarded as the language of power and their additions to the language reflected this, including 'judge', 'jury', 'justice' and 'evidence'. Latin was the language of the church however in contrast, the commoners spoke Anglo-Saxon. English farmers contributed words like 'pig', 'sheep', 'cow', and 'swine', whereas the upper classes, who chose to speak French, preferred the terms 'beef', 'mutton' and 'pork'. Although Anglo-Saxon and French merged to form the basis of the English language we use today, many words have held their French traditions and spelling. French words continue to dominate restaurant menus to this day. It is estimated that the Norman conquest of England contributed 10 000 French words into English. Following the 100 Years' War (1337- 1453), England took back the language of power from the French, reflected in words like 'army', 'navy' and 'soldier', entering the language (OpenLearn, 2012).

William Shakespeare is credited with contributing over 2000 words and phrases to the English language. Through his plentiful plays and poetry, he widely demonstrated to the world the capacity of the English language to engage the emotions.

Many of his famous works, for example 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate' (Shakespeare, 1564-1616), have been absorbed into everyday English language that we use today. As with the revised King James Bible, many metaphors contained

therein shape the 'metaphor and morality' (OpenLearn, 2012) that reflect how English is spoken and written today (British Council, 2011).

English scribes looked to ancient Latin and Greek words to describe new scientific discoveries as these were widely regarded as the academic languages. This practice continues today, for example the word 'phishing', related to stealing computer passwords, originates from the word 'fishing', meaning 'waiting for something to be taken'. The 'ph' at the beginning of the word, instead of an 'f', is a Greek language feature, giving the new word technological kudos from an ancient language (OpenLearn, 2012; Adoniou, 2016). Other scientific and academic words that stem from Greek include android, philosophy, politics and technology.

The English began exploring the world, spreading their influence due to England's growing global power and an accumulation of 'loanwords' (Crystal, 2011) flooding the language from other countries. From the Caribbean came the words 'barbeque', 'canoe', and 'cannibal'. From India, 'yoga', 'cummerbund' and 'bungalow'. From Africa, the words 'voodoo' and 'zombie' came to be added and from Australia, the words 'nugget', 'walkabout' and 'boomerang' were further colourful cultural additions to the English language.

The introduction of lexicographers and their production of dictionaries resulted in some standardisation of English spelling at last. Doctor Johnson authored, 'A Dictionary of the English Language', in 1755. This dictionary, although not the first, was widely regarded as influential, as was the first 'Oxford Dictionary' which was issued in instalments from 1884 to 1928 and was estimated to contain 42 000 entries (Wright, 2007).

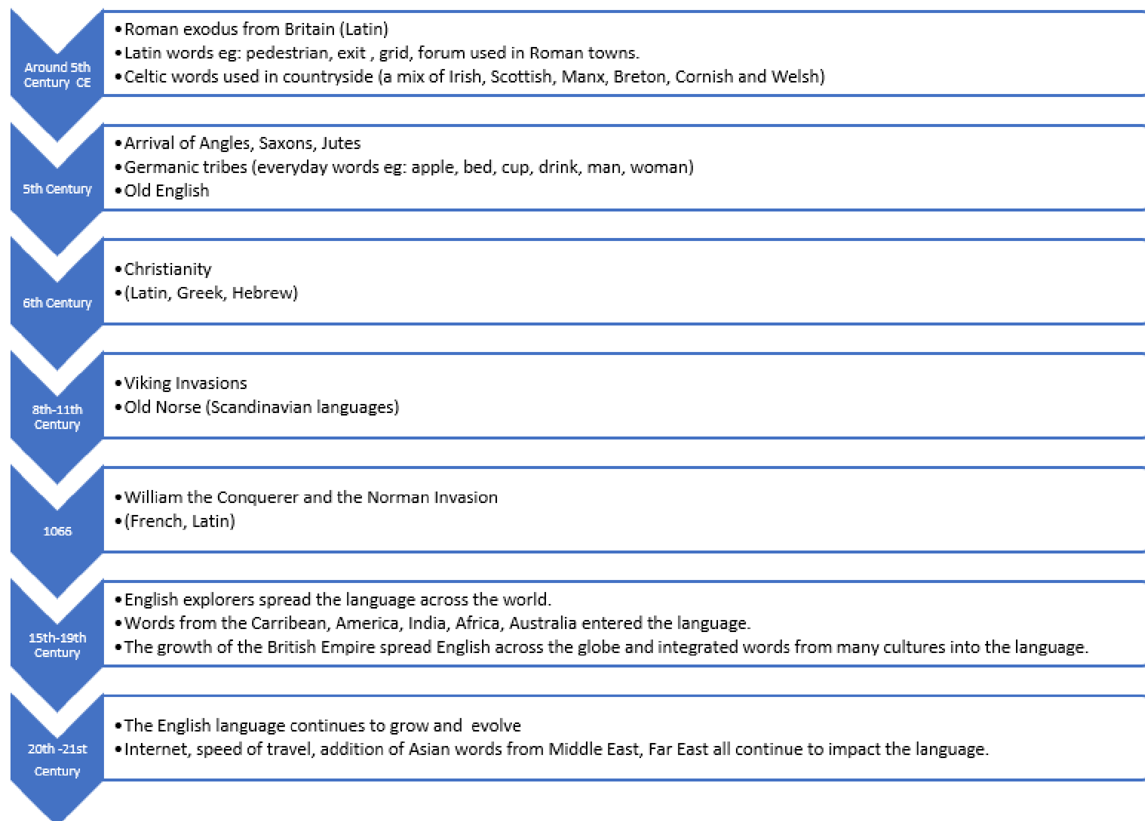
'**The history of English in ten minutes**' by OpenLearn (11:20) takes a look at the history of the English language.

Waves of immigrants to England fed their hunger for words. As a taster, from America, we had 'cookies', and the language of capitalism including 'mergers' and 'downsizing'. The Germans added 'pretzels', and the Italians, 'pizza' and 'canneloni'. The Americans adopted their own version of the English language with alternate words for a range of nouns and different spellings from standard English, for example 'color', 'theater', 'center' and word endings -ize instead of the standard English –ise. The differences in standard English and American English are widely attributed to Noah Webster of Webster's dictionary fame (1806), who believed that American English should be different from British English, demonstrating America's wish to be independent of Britain and the spelling of 'American English' words are claimed to be more closely linked to pronunciation (Crystal, 2012).

The introduction of the internet and emails from 1972, brought with it its own language, including 'download', 'toolbar', 'firewall' and a range of abbreviations including the ubiquitous 'IMHO' (in my humble opinion), 'UG2BK' (you've got to be kidding) and 'LOL', which commonly means laugh out loud, denoting humour, firstly in electronic communication but now adopted into everyday speech.

New words continue to be added to describe new inventions, creations and social trends in addition to the increasing inclusion of 'loanwords' from other languages. English has evolved through invasion, absorption and addition and has grown into a fully-fledged language, spoken by 1 500 million people across the globe. Many of the words and how they are spelt reflect where they come from and by teaching students the morphology and etymology of words, we are providing them with a range of spelling skills to draw on, and sharing the fascinating history of English, encouraging students to love language and use it well throughout life.

A brief timeline of the history of the English language summary can be seen below:



(Adapted from Crystal, 2012)

Implications for teaching spelling

Teachers require a deep knowledge of the English language, including morphology and etymology, in order to teach spelling well to their students. (Carreker et al, 2010; Daffern, 2016a; Adoniou, 2016). An understanding of the metalanguage of spelling, as well as the ability to identify the specific spelling needs of students using student writing samples and drawing on the syllabus and NLLP, assists teachers in accurately identifying where students need to go next in their spelling development and how to get them there.

Teacher modelling of spelling strategies through the use of 'think-alouds' when writing, encourages students to incorporate these strategies into their own writing. Additionally, the availability of resources such as word walls and personal dictionaries assist students to locate correct forms of words to use in their writing when they need them. Many teachers use individual spelling diaries in their classrooms, in which students record new and unfamiliar words that they access when they wish to use them in their writing, fostering writing independence and use of correct forms of words.

There exists a plethora of websites and apps to support teachers in teaching the various forms of spelling knowledge. The NSW Department of Education (2016b) website, '**Identifying patterns and syllables in words, morphemic knowledge'**, provides a range of strategies and current links of useful teacher and student spelling resources.

Other resources for teachers that may be useful to teach morphemic knowledge can be found at the following websites:

- Goldup, W. (2010). **How words work: Morphological strategies**.
- The Linguistics Channel. (2013). **An introduction to morphology**.
- Stowe, M. (2010). **Teaching morphology: Enhancing vocabulary development and reading comprehension**.

We thoroughly enjoyed discussing the title of Gentry's (1982) spelling paper, interestingly called 'Gnys at Wrk', and rose to the challenge of collaboratively viewing the title through a morphological lens. The meaning of the word 'genius' has become more nuanced over time. It is now regarded as meaning 'possessing exceptional natural ability'. The word once had a more mystical meaning (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). It originates from Latin, and stems from the word 'genie', a type of spirit. The suffix 'ius' is thought to be used in a similar way to 'ious', which changes a noun to an adjective, and means 'made of' or 'belonging to', think luxurious, made of luxury; and gracious meaning full of grace. So, genius comes from the root word genie, a clever, spiritual creature. It is commonly used today as both a noun and an adjective. We decided that 'wrk' was a 'graphological pun', an example of Gentry's (1982) early phonetic spelling stage, a window into his work. We include this example to show how discussions about metalanguage leads to fascinating collaboration both in the classroom with students and outside the classroom with peers, moving everyone's spelling knowledge forward. Talking about morphology in spelling contributes to building a genuine and lasting love of language.

Adoniou (2016) provides a useful list of common English morphemes for teachers, including prefixes, suffixes (together called affixes) and root words. These are further examples of how to use morphemic knowledge to spell words (p.100-110). Additionally, she provides a series of useful questions for teachers to assist them in scaffolding students in drawing on the four forms of spelling knowledge to spell unknown words:

Student: How do you spell, "direction"?

Teacher: What does the word mean?

- Is it made of any morphemes? Can you see any meaningful parts in the word?
- Is it from another language?
- Are there any spelling rules in the word that might help join the morphemes together?
- What sounds can you hear in that word? Can they help you to spell the word?
- Look at the word? Have you seen it written that way?
- What other words have the same etymological, morphological or orthological similarities to this word? Act- ion, elect- ion, select – ion. ..

(adapted from Adoniou, 2016, p.50-51)

Conclusion

It is vital that students are provided with frequent opportunities to see, and hear their teachers using and explaining the forms of spelling knowledge during class writing lessons, explicitly modelling for students how to spell words. Students benefit from targeted class time to consolidate their growing spelling skills through authentic writing tasks and interactions with quality texts. Students need to write every day including a variety of writing activities in a range of contexts, leading to the ultimate goal of becoming better spellers and writers. Increased time to

write enhances students' spelling skills, at the same time increasing both their reading and writing performance (Beveridge, 1988). Student spelling skills do not improve through disconnected weekly spelling lists (or tests). It is also unlikely that students benefit much from commercial spelling programs that teach spelling out of context, in a sequential way, even though these practices are omnipresent in our education culture and have been the norm for a long time (Graham, Harris & Chambers, 2015; Graham, et al., 2012; Adoniou, 2016; Daffern 2016b; Beveridge, 1988). Spelling is a tool for writing and this is the best place to teach spelling, in the reading-writing classroom, not in a separate spelling lesson that often consists of drill and practice of words that have little significance for students (NSW Department of Education, 2003), separate from their current literacy learning.

Our English K-10 Syllabus, and the NLLP, are authoritative, useful sources that support teachers to plan, implement and assess the spelling skills that students demonstrate they have achieved in their writing, and move them forward in their learning. By using the quality texts that students enjoy in their class literacy programs, and the words that students use in their own writing to explicitly teach spelling, the words are meaningful to them and they have a personal incentive to learn to spell them. By basing classroom spelling programs on student spelling needs identified through their writing samples, the teaching of spelling is individualised and contextualised. There is a clear purpose for students to learn to spell, so they can use the words that they know and love in their writing and share it with the world. Students are learning to spell the words that are important to them, growing an enduring affection for the English language and its rich, fascinating history. Spelling is a tool for writing, and as such, students become better spellers by increasing the time that they spend actually writing.

Dearest creature in Creation,
Studying English pronunciation,

I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse and worse.

It will keep you, Susy, busy,
Make your head with heat grow dizzy;

Tear in eye your dress you'll tear.
So shall I! Oh, hear my prayer,

Pray, console your loving poet,
Make my coat look new, dear, sew it?

Just compare heart, beard and heard,
Dies and diet, lord and word,

Sword and sward, retain and Britain,
(Mind the latter, how it's written!)

(Abadi, 2017)

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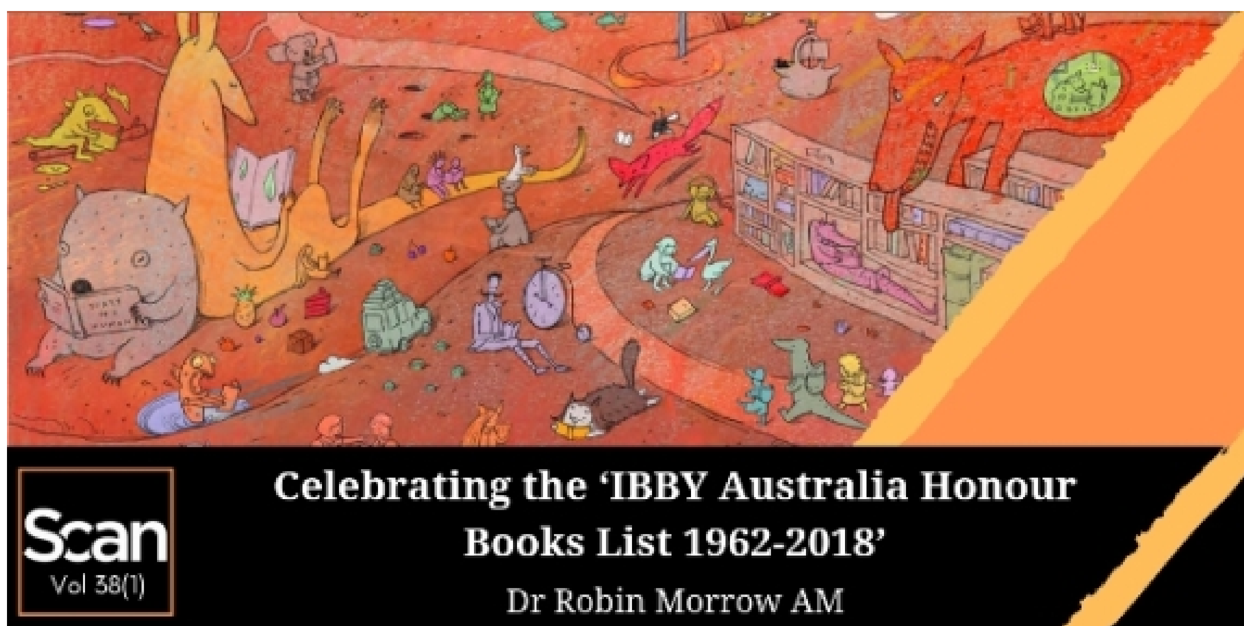

Celebrating the 'IBBY Australia Honour Books List 1962-2018'

Dr Robin Morrow AM, President of IBBY Australia from 2008–2018

Introducing the list

This digital publication presents 48 outstanding books, from 'Tangara' (1962) to 'The Bone Sparrow' and 'Teacup' (2018). Annotations that succinctly place each book in its context, and biographical information about the writers and illustrators, add to the value of this unique resource. The publication is unique, in that while there are many booklists serving varied purposes, this list has a specific tale to tell: the story of IBBY Australia's selection of these books, every two years forwarded to IBBY headquarters in Switzerland, to become part of a collection of books 'characteristic of their country and suitable to recommend for publication in different languages'.

The Sharing Stories Exhibition

In October 2018, IBBY Australia Inc and the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) proudly announced the **Sharing Stories** exhibition which opened in the Woden branch of Libraries ACT. The exhibition included copies of each of the IBBY Australia Honour Books, even those most elusive titles that had taken some sleuthing to track down, sitting on the shelves and inviting browsers to pick them up, to smile in recognition of old favourites, and to explore those not encountered before. And alongside these Australian books was a collection, for the first time ever hosted in our country, of all the international IBBY Honour Books for 2018: 191 books from 61 countries, providing a snapshot of the best publications worldwide at this moment in time.

Appreciating the history and value of the list

The collection of 48 Australian Honour Books provides not a snapshot, but something akin to a moving picture, as the viewer moves through time, meeting highlights in the development of Australian books for the young. The list begins with Nan Chauncy's 'Tangara', one of just 15 titles honoured by IBBY in 1956 (albeit entered by the publishing country, the UK). From one general category, the list changed to include in an 'Illustration' category in 1974, and a 'Translation'

category in 1978. Ursula Dubosarsky, herself an Honour Book writer ('The Golden Day'), speaking at a preview of the exhibition in Canberra, pointed out that the Australian list is 'not only of literature but also of changing social circumstances, values and preoccupations over the 55 years'.

IBBY was founded in postwar Europe by the visionary Jella Lepman, who worked to build bridges to international understanding – and thus, peace – through children's books. IBBY claims that the publication of the biennial **honour lists** is one of the most effective ways of furthering these objectives. Ena Noël, first president of IBBY Australia, and many others here have contributed over decades to the work of IBBY, including faithful selection of these books. As I set about the task of writing these annotations, I was aware of the palpable presence of earlier selection panels, and was especially alert to traces of the judgment of Ena and of Maurice Saxby.

At a celebration of IBBY Australia's Golden Anniversary in 2016, Mark MacLeod said of the Australian Honour List that the strongest impression created by it is its support of excellence in writing and illustration:

'the list of recipients is like a gold-lettered rollcall, gracing the foyer of Australian children's literature'.

While asking challenging questions about the diversity of the list, MacLeod noted the emphasis on the child as outsider and agent in books such as 'I Own the Racecourse!'; and on the power of changing the way we see in 'Banjo and Ruby Red', 'My Place', 'Playing Beatie Bow', 'Where the Forest Meets the Sea' and 'The Incredible Here and Now'.

Dubosarsky, in her preview speech, called the Australian Honour list 'remarkable in that just about every name on the list since 1962 continues to be held in high esteem. IBBY Australia should be extremely proud of having such a record of what appears to be most excellent and perspicacious judgment'.

The IBBY Australia Honour Books list tells a unique tale, but it is not a finished one. The two-yearly process of selection and annotation will continue, and Australian children's books will develop in directions we cannot predict. I hope IBBY's selection panels will continue, with 'excellent and perspicacious judgment,' to add to this 'gold-lettered rollcall'.

It is a pleasure to see this publication reach fruition, so that it can be an accessible tool for professionals such as teacher librarians, for parents and children, and for anyone who wants to learn more about Australian children's literature for academic or recreational purposes.

Special thanks to Dr Belle Alderman, Justine Power and the NCACL for enabling this publication as part of the 'Sharing Stories' project; to IBBY Australia committee members for their contributions; and, of course, to the writers, illustrators and translator whose works appear on this important list.

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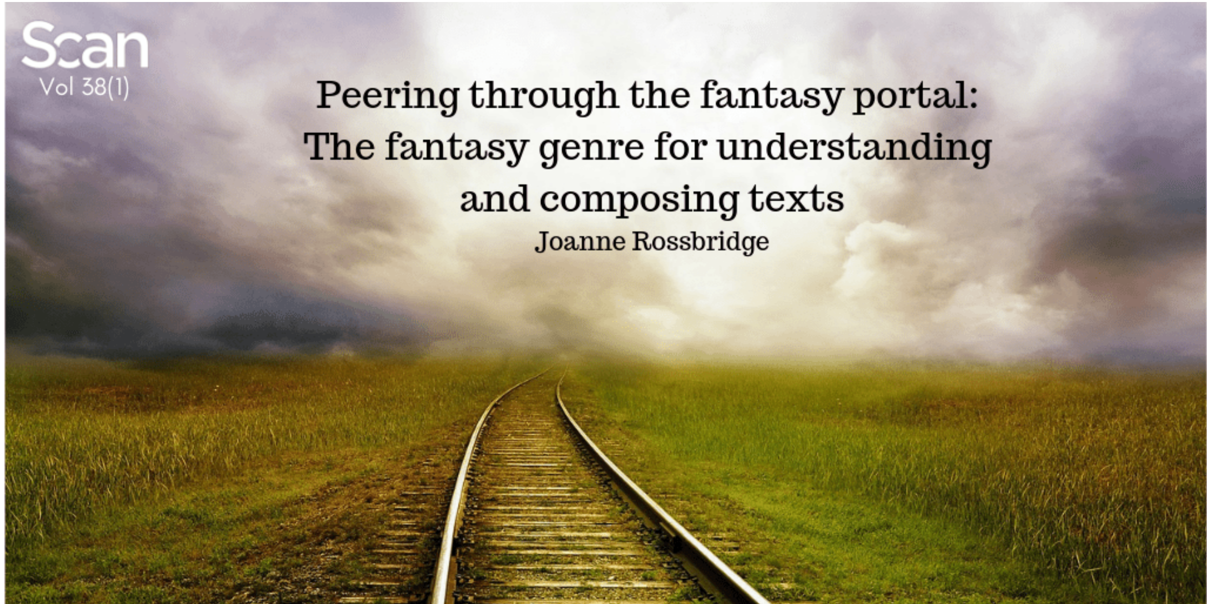


Peering through the fantasy portal : The fantasy genre for understanding and composing texts

Joanne Rossbridge, an independent English, EALD and Literacy Consultant

The following discussion and strategies concentrate on the fantasy genre as a necessary ingredient when engaging in the English subject area through both print based and multimodal literature. The teaching and learning examples have been used in several teaching contexts and reflect the content of the NSW **English K-10 Syllabus** with a particular focus on Stage 3. The fantasy genre will be explored for developing not only skills, knowledge and understanding about texts and language, but also thinking in creative and reflective ways.

Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living. Dr. Seuss.

Overview

In recent times, since the introduction of the NSW English K-10 Syllabus, many teachers have felt constrained by the terms imaginative, informative and persuasive types of texts when looking at literacy and, in particular, when teaching writing or composing. As the syllabus states, these are only general classifications of texts. Further discussion around such types of texts should be carried out with reference to the definition in the syllabus **Glossary** where the potential purposes of each type of text are unpacked in greater detail.

The term ‘genre’ is used in the English K-10 syllabus. Genre is defined as, ‘The categories into which texts are grouped. The term has a complex history within literary and linguistic theory and is often used to distinguish texts on the basis of, for example, their subject matter (detective fiction, romance, science fiction, fantasy fiction) and form and structure (poetry, novels, short stories)’ (NESA, 2012). The syllabus, developed from the Australian Curriculum, draws upon the functional linguistic and genre theory approach to learning about texts and language in context whilst also valuing the role of literature in the English subject area (Derewianka, 2012 & 2015).

By considering multiple theoretical influences on the design of the NSW English Syllabus, teachers can move deeper within the three types of texts to delve into a range of texts for a range of purposes from authentic contexts. This is a key focus across syllabus outcomes and requires the

use of authentic literature from the past and present. The range of purposes and text forms under the imaginative banner, opens up a world of literary genres and imaginative worlds for both responding and composing.

When focusing on any literary genre (for example, fantasy, realism, mystery, humour) many typical narrative conventions can be identified. However, certain features are particular to certain genres. To broaden student knowledge and engagement with literature, representations of the fantasy world have been investigated and used as models for students composing their own texts. The following strategies have been planned and implemented within the teaching and learning cycle (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015). This involves field building through speaking and listening and reading and responding, modelling or text deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction. During a focus on writing, students were involved in reading and viewing a range of fantasy texts including a shared novel with the whole class; students' independently reading fantasy novels of choice, engagement with a range of picture books and viewing of short films. In addition, as models for writing, students developed conversations around the choices made in extracts from a range of texts.

Context and features of fantasy texts

The fantasy genre has evolved over more than three centuries (Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016; Saxby & Winch, 1991) and has often been a response to the social and cultural concerns related to the role and importance of imagination at any given time in history. One could even say the current English Syllabus is a similar response with the inclusion of **Objective C** and the 'think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical' outcome. There are many perspectives on the value, interpretation and features of fantasy in both children's and adult literature (Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016).

In order for students to build field knowledge and tap into existing knowledge around the concept of the fantasy genre, a range of quotes related to fantasy can be provided from a website such as **Goodreads**. Students can use quotes, like the example below, to begin to discuss the purpose, possible audiences and features of fantasy narratives.

Fantasy is silver and scarlet, indigo and azure, obsidian veined with gold and lapis lazuli. Reality is plywood and plastic, done up in mud brown and olive drab. Fantasy tastes of habaneros and honey, cinnamon and cloves, rare red meat and wines as sweet as summer. Reality is beans and tofu, and ashes at the end. George R.R. Martin.

Students can also be involved in sorting a range of picture books, novels, films, poetry, cartoons, graphic novels and so on based on narrative genres such as fantasy, realism, mystery, humour. They can also come up with their own way to classify a range of texts. Fantasy texts can then be distinguished and be placed on a timeline based on when they were composed. This may even include the 'disneytization' (Bryman, 2004) of some classic texts such as 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' first published in 1865 and 'Peter Pan'published in 1904.Such classics have been themed into fantasy worlds of Disneyland as well as various aspects of globalised culture. Students may be surprised to realise how old some texts may be, leading to conversations about longevity and influences over time.

McDonald (2017) provides a comprehensive description of the general types of fantasy and typical fantasy conventions in children's literature. Types of fantasy tend to reflect the nature of the setting or worlds created. These choices impact upon the connection between worlds, choice and

features of characters, role of magic and the journey to be undertaken. Typical types of fantasy can include:

- The fantasy set in the real world with magic.
- The fantasy beginning and ending in a fantasy world.
- The fantasy starting in the real world and moving into a fantasy world.

By first considering the broad fantasy world, the focus in this case is placed on appreciating and engaging with fantasy texts that move from the primary to the secondary world.

Beginning to peer through the portal

In the examples shared, texts were chosen particularly due to their shift from the real or primary world construction of character and movement across settings. A significant aspect of such texts is the movement of the main character/s from the primary to the secondary world through some type of portal. For example Alice, from 'Alice in Wonderland' (Carroll, 2015), falls down a rabbit hole to Wonderland and Lucy, from 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' (Lewis, 2001), enters Narnia through the back of a wardrobe.

Students can investigate a range of texts through both shared and independent reading and viewing, to identify movement between worlds, by identifying portals through which characters travel. Viewing short films is particularly useful for identifying the movement between worlds through a portal of some form.

Adventures are the pits by Esquirebob (2:13) demonstrates a soft play slide portal.

Something fishy by Jiyoon Jeong (2:20) demonstrates how a washing machine is the portal.

Crayon Dragon by Toniko Pantoja CalArts (3:13) uses a painting as the portal.

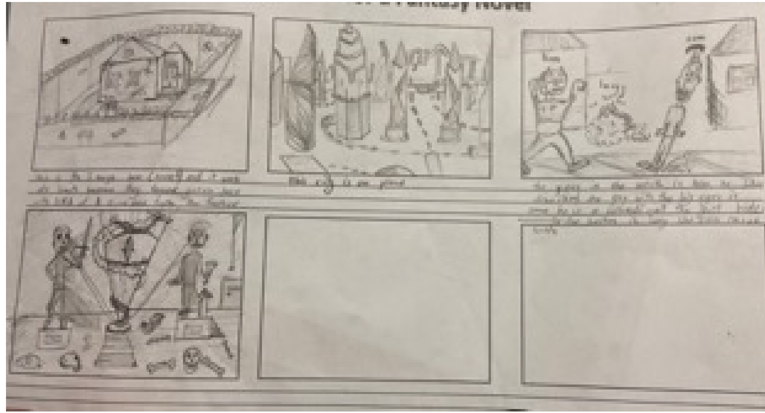
Dream Giver by Tyler Carter (5:54) turns a night of dreams into a literal nightmare when an orphan's book of Ancient Aztec Mythology comes alive.

By recording the portal and other features of the fantasy narrative, students become familiar with the genre and tools for creating their own fantasy texts. They also become involved in conversations about both character and setting choices made by authors, particularly reflecting the outcomes and content descriptors for **Outcome EN3-5B** and **Outcome EN3-7C**.

Based on engaging with multiple texts, possibilities for portals and other features can be recorded for future use when constructing own texts. Recording features in texts read and then for planning own writing can be guided by identifying the following features:

- name and description of the real/primary world,
- name and description of the real characters,
- portal to fantasy world,
- name and description of the fantasy/secondary world,
- name and description of the fantasy characters, and
- complications/quests in the fantasy world.

Students can then beginning planning their own texts using storyboards (see examples below) in order to structure their narratives while incorporating fantasy conventions.



Student storyboards

Moving through the portal

When reading a range of texts with a close focus on the shift through the portal, it becomes apparent that authors often foreshadow the shift from the primary to secondary world or highlight the actual setting shift through use of words to ‘trigger’ to the reader that something different is about to occur. The picture book, ‘Isabella’s Bed’ (Lester, 2007), is an effective text for showing a subtle move through a portal through both words and images. The main characters, Anna and Luis travel on a magical journey on their grandmother's bed entering a fantasy world through a picture of the sea on the bedroom wall.

The transition of the characters through the portal is conveyed to the reader with *adverbials* and **connectives** placed at the beginning of clauses to hint at something new to come.

As I drifted into sleep …
Suddenly I awoke …
Then *slowly over a desert plain* we rolled, …
Silently we drifted …
(Lester,2007).

Often these ‘triggers’ are at the beginning of a clause and may consist of one or more groups before the main subject and verb of the clause. They can flag circumstances of the experience through adverbial groups or are connectives often highlighting shifts in time. The group or groups before the main verb in a clause are referred to as ‘theme of clause’ (NESA, 2012b; Derewianka, 2011; Humphrey, Droga & Feez, 2012).

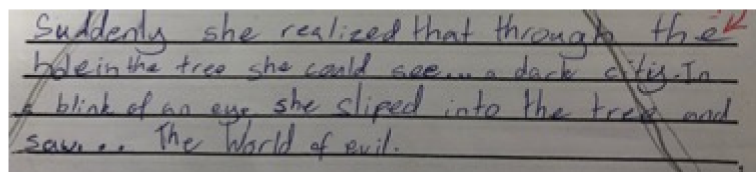
These grammatical themes function to alert or flag to the reader that something different, unusual or extraordinary is about to occur. Significantly, these choices help to not only guide the reader through the character’s journey but also to creative cohesive ties and to structure the unfolding narrative. The Reading and Viewing **Outcome EN3-3A** contains the content descriptor, ‘understand that the starting point of a sentence gives prominence to the message in the text and allows for prediction of how the text will unfold (ACELA1505)’, which reflects the focus on choices relating to theme of clause. By identify such features in variety of texts, students are able to develop a list of possibilities to adapt and apply to their own writing.

The implied entry

The following is an example of part of a joint construction written by a teacher and students. ‘The large book appeared to sink back into the wall as the children approached the portal. The book appeared to be yellowing on the open pages and the writing was a script that was quite foreign to our heroes’ eyes. They could glimpse strange bubbles exploding out of an opening in the book’.

As this was an early joint construction with much input from students, it can be noted that students were effectively engaging with descriptive language to establish the setting and portal. However little was left to the imagination for the reader in regards to implying that the character was approaching a portal. Additionally, characters are stated as heroes before even moving into the fantasy world and experiencing the upcoming adventures and quests.

This was also evident in students’ initial independent writing (Draft 1), particularly with the explicit view of the actual secondary world in which characters were entering, for example, ‘The World of evil’. This provoked a return to looking at model texts where focus was placed on how authors subtly guide the reader through the portal without using the word portal or stating the name of the world as this would be unknown by the character upon first entry. **Outcome EN3-2A** contains the content descriptor ‘create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors’ (ACELT1798) showing the need to use model texts to focus on features employed by authors of the fantasy genre.


Suddenly she realized that through the hole in the tree she could see... a dark city. In a blink of an eye she sliped into the tree and saw... The World of evil.

Draft 1

When looking at Harry Potter’s (Rowling, 2018) transfer to Platform 9 ¾ there is a great focus on escalating action as he speeds up yet closes his eyes while moving through the barrier to suddenly see the Hogwart’s Express steam engine. Similarly, Blyton’s ‘The Adventures of the Wishing Chair’ (2012) is action based as the chair takes Mollie and Peter on a range of adventures to fantasy lands. In ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’ (Lewis, 2001), Lucy’s experiences are of perceiving and feeling as she shifts between worlds. This is similar to the ‘Jumanji’ picture book (Van Allsburg, 2017), where the characters perceive or see a change in surroundings as they are transported by the board game. In ‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’ (Carroll, 2015), there is a

combination or action and perceiving as Alice falls down the rabbit hole yet notices features on the walls of the well. Clearly, authors draw on both action but also sensory processes as the characters shift between worlds. In early writing students were focusing particularly on description of the secondary world rather than processes undertaken by the character. They also tended to take the reader on a very quick movement into the fantasy world resulting in the reader needing to make few inferences about the transition. By slowly taking the reader on the journey there is a greater need for inference on the part of the reader.

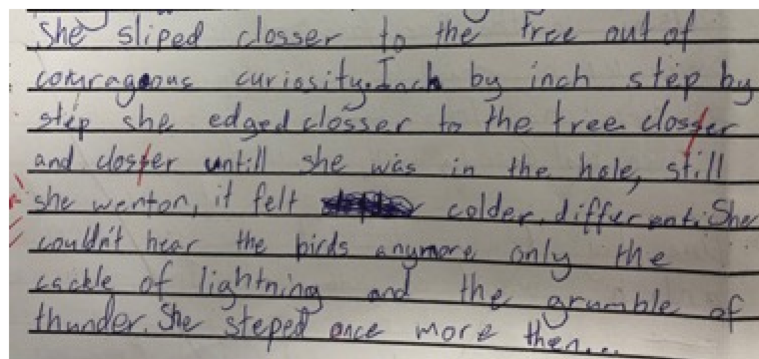
As a way of placing themselves in the shoes of the character and considering both actions and sensory experiences, students were involved in drama strategies such as walk in role and tap in (Dutton, D'Warte, Rossbridge & Rushton, 2018; Ewing, Simons, Herzberg & Campbell, 2016). This consisted of students being in the role of characters from texts or as their own character for writing. Students would act out the entry through a portal into the fantasy world and be tapped on the shoulder by peers who asked questions regarding the action and sensory experiences. Questions include:

What are you doing now?
What can you feel beneath your feet?
What do you see around you and in the distance?
What can you hear or smell?

From this, a range of processes or verbs (Derewianka, 2011) could be recorded for use in writing. For example,

Action verbs/processes - trip, cascade, tumble, drift
Sensing verbs/processes:
Thinking - wondered, thought, imagined, realised
Feeling and wanting - feared, wished, desired
Perceiving - see, notice, glance, scan, smell, hear

In this way students had banks of words and also synonyms to draw upon in their own writing. In one conversation students made the connection to the bread crumbs left by Hansel and Gretel in that the choice of a range of processes in the transition is like the bread crumbs slowly scattered which act to take the character and reader through the portal often in a subtle manner rather than a sudden leap into an obviously new world (Draft 2).


She sliped closser to the tree out of
comragous curiosity. Inch by inch step by
step she edged closser to the tree closser
and closser until she was in the hole, still
she wenton, it felt colder, different. She
couldn't hear the birds anymore only the
cackle of lightning and the grumble of
thunder. She steped once more then...

Draft 2

Character encounters

Once inside the fantasy world, 'real' characters begin to encounter fantastical characters. Initial physical description of the fantastical characters is critical in giving insight into not only characters but also the secondary setting. This serves to create believability about all characters in the fantasy world and upcoming quests. In some cases the character development may draw upon other known mythological creatures, possession of magic powers and objects or clothing which are unusual in the primary world (McDonald, 2017).

In 'The BFG' (1982, p24) Roald Dahl clearly describes the appearance of the BFG through extended noun groups (Derewianka, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2012). Students were asked to draw a picture of the BFG based on the description with detail from the noun groups removed. In the first drawing below, a student drew the image, including the shirt, waistcoat, green shorts and sandals. When the original text, containing extended noun groups, was then read aloud, detail appeared in the second drawing including 'a sort of collarless shirt and a dirty old leather waistcoat that didn't seem to have any buttons, the shorts that were *far too short in the legs and* a pair of ridiculous sandals that for some reason had holes cut along each side, with a large hole at the end where his toes stuck out' (Dahl, 1982). This task highlighted for students the need to develop description through the extended noun group in order to show, in this case, the unusual yet subtle differences in clothing of the character as Sophie began to engage in the fantasy world.

Student pictures of the BFG

Knowledge of the noun group is also useful in planning to develop characters. The potential of the noun group can be seen in the table below as detail can be added both before and after the main noun.

Which one? (pointer)	How many? (quantifying adjective)	What's it like? (describing adjective)	What type? (classifying adjective)	Who or what? (noun)	What else?	
					(adjectival phrase)	(adjectival clause)
a		glowing	mystical	creature	with a golden mane	
	four	scaly wagging		tails		that caught the speckled sunlight
her		long sharp		nails	with serrated edges	that scratched the paint off the walls

Students can use this table to not only unpack the language choices in the texts they are reading but also to plan for their own written descriptions. They can also trial the effectiveness of descriptions by repeating the above listen and draw activity with a peer and receive feedback on the power of the description in building a picture for the reader. The Grammar, Punctuation and Vocabulary **Outcome EN3-6B** highlights the importance of looking at the extended noun group with the content descriptor, 'understand how noun groups/phrases and adjective groups/phrases can be expanded in a variety of ways to provide a fuller description of the person, place, thing or idea (ACELA1508).'

Unlike the fantasy characters, the real world character/s are not as dependent on being described physically. Generally the reader already has some experience of real world knowledge to apply to the image of a character once some traits are revealed such as gender, age and the time period of the setting. Of greater importance, for the believability of the fantasy journey, is the initial description of the character, usually the main protagonist, in terms of sensory details. Again this can be a planning tool for students as they decide on their own characters and what they think, feel, want and perceive in the real world and how these traits may be applied or indeed impacted upon as they move into the fantasy realm. The main character is the readers' connection between the real and fantasy world and it may be that the character's thoughts and feelings are challenged as they move through the journey.

One particular group of students came to the conclusion that the main protagonist has to be curious and willing to take risks in order to either move through the portal or commit to moving through the fantasy world upon entry. They made the connection to the well-known line 'Curiouser and curiouser!' (Lewis, 2001) from 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' as Alice showed her inquisitive yet surprised reaction during her quest through Wonderland.

Conclusion

The strategies described are only a few aspects implemented when engaging with the fantasy genre. There are also many more fantasy texts available for use, both print based and multimodal. Choice of texts can be based on the needs and interests of particular groups of students. Regardless of texts chosen as models, students need access to a range of such texts for independent as well as shared reading and deconstruction. The ideal ingredients for engaging with both fantasy and life consists of close connections between reading and writing layered with creative and analytical conversations around language choices and their relationship to context and purpose.

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