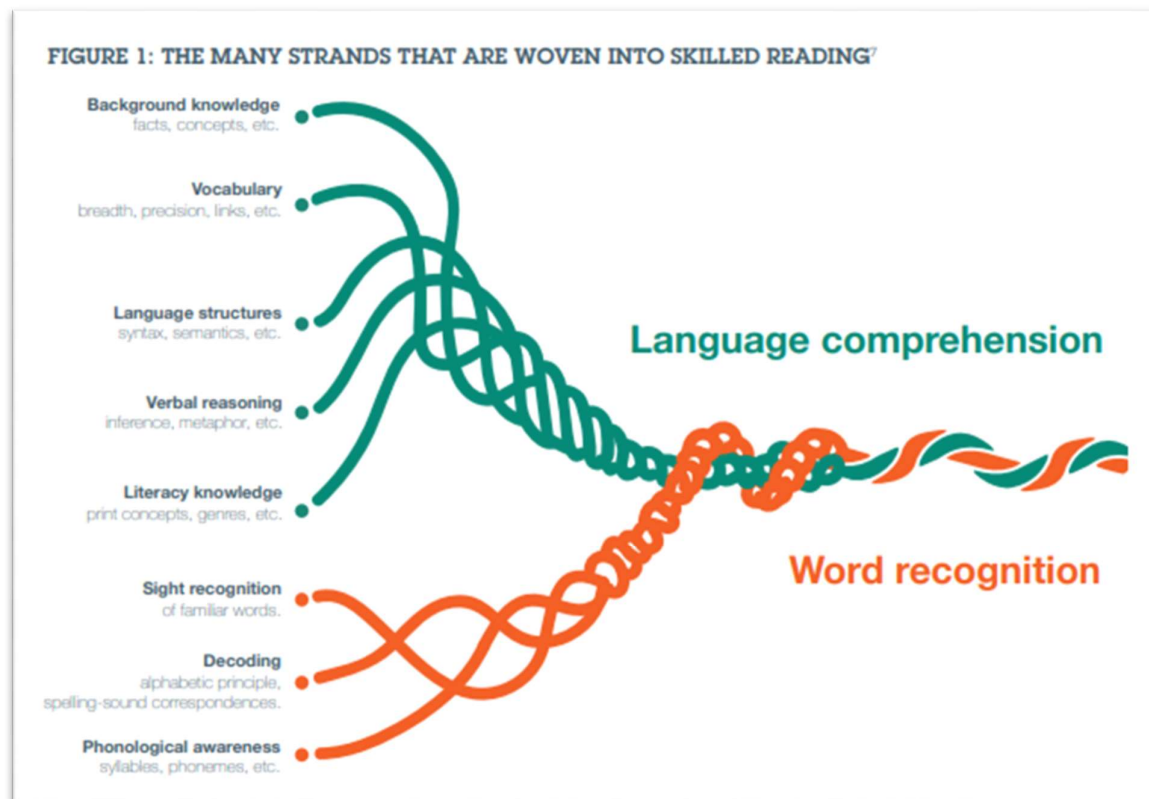


Milton Primary School

Reading canon rationale

In the 2014 National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) progression in reading is driven by the challenge of the texts pupils read; reading skills do not grow more challenging, instead the skills and strategies contained in Scarborough's rope model (Scarborough, 2001) are applied to texts that increase in challenge year on year. The National Curriculum (NC) Programme of Study for Reading in LKS2 identifies that pupils should be reading non-fiction in a wide range of subjects and that pupils should be learning to justify their views about what they've read at the beginning of Y3 and be able to do so increasingly independently by the end of Y4. In UKS2, they should be reading widely and fluently for pleasure and information; their reading should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the demands of the Y7 curriculum. The NC does not include a hierarchy of reading skills or at any point suggest reading lessons should centre around practicing particular skills. Instead, it focuses on the range of texts studied, the importance of secure decoding skills, and building vocabulary breadth and depth and knowledge.



(Image source: EEF Improving Literacy at KS1 report)

Our KS1 and KS2 Reading Comprehension guides outline how we teach reading based on the Science of Reading. Daily, rigorous, high-quality phonics teaching takes place from Reception following the 'Sounds Write linguistic approach. It is imperative that all pupils are reading at an age-appropriate level in KS1 and any pupils not making expected progress receive additional decoding and fluency lessons daily to catch up and keep up with their peers. Once a pupil can decode the words on the page, they can read any age-appropriate text with scaffold, as necessary.



Who chooses the texts? Which are 'the right texts'?

Choosing 'the right texts' sits at the heart of an effective (English) curriculum, so it is important to establish our criteria for this. Firstly, our pupils read for a range of purposes; texts read in reading and writing lessons, texts read in other curriculum subjects, texts read aloud and texts read independently purely for pleasure. The purpose of reading a text helps us to define whether it is 'the right text'. Creating a distinction between texts to study and texts to read for pleasure is, of course, an artificial distinction as we want our pupils to develop a love of reading for life, but it does help us to distinguish between the texts we choose, and the ones pupils choose for themselves.

One of the overarching aims of the National Curriculum is for pupils to develop their love of literature through widespread reading and enjoyment. Reading cannot be taught in a vacuum of isolated, unconnected texts; pupils need plentiful opportunities to practice and develop as readers by becoming immersed in complete high-quality, inspiring texts as well as supplementary non-narrative non-fiction. The NC states that pupils should read a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books and that these should include myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions. It therefore matters which texts we choose to share with our pupils; we have a responsibility to broaden our pupils' horizons by introducing them to the richest and most beautiful texts possible. We want every single pupil to have the opportunity to read and study both the great classics of children's literature as well as some of the fantastic contemporary fiction and non-fiction. Every text we chose must be worthy of its place, both in terms of vocabulary, level of cognitive challenge and importance for cultural capital.

This is a huge undertaking, both in its enormity and responsibility, and we cannot possibly introduce pupils to all the texts we'd like to; we therefore needed to create a narrative for our reading canon that helped us to make these choices. The texts we chose must have high leverage, for example building on a concept or, in the words of Christine Counsell, a golden thread running through our curriculum, they need to prepare pupils for what is coming next in secondary school, and they need to include the text types outlined in the NC. We needed to consider the texts that educated people have read, the texts that will build cultural capital and the texts that will help pupils make connections across time and subjects. For example, if we introduce pupils to some of Aesop's Fables in Reception or KS1 we can then remind them that Aesop was a Greek slave when we study ancient Greece in KS2. We can begin to explore why the original fables were no more than 800 words long and trace their origins back to the ancient Sumerian proverbs. Developing this narrative will help us to then place Greek myths in their cultural context and then when pupils come to read *The Percy Jackson* or *Harry Potter* series, they will appreciate how these authors have been influenced by the classics. As Daniel Willingham (2009) points out, 'Deep learning is understanding the relationship among the parts.' While we cannot introduce pupils to all the texts we may wish to in the short years they are with us, having a clear narrative to our canon ensures we build richness and depth to our pupils' reading journey.

Picture books provide an excellent starting point to explore complex or emotive subjects; however, they do not provide our pupils with the vocabulary to explain and describe their responses or provide opportunities to build reading miles. The research evidence clearly indicates that our best bet to close the reading gap is through building vocabulary and schemata (Didau 2019, Lemov 2016, Wexler 2019, Willingham 2009). We therefore use picture books in PSHE lessons where we provide word banks and create speaking and listening tasks to develop and deepen pupils' understanding but not for our reading or writing lessons.





The canon is not, and should not be, a static document. It is reviewed annually with staff and suggestions for changes come from year group teachers, however in order to maintain the integrity of the school's canon narrative, the English Subject Leader needs to have the overview and make the final decision of what is in and what is out. as well as their work.

Independent choice

If we are going to select all the texts chosen for study in school, it is imperative that pupils have the freedom to choose their independent texts from a carefully curated school stock. We do not want to put glass ceilings on our pupils by restricting them to only choosing books at a certain level or colour band once they have learnt the full phonic code from the school's chosen phonics programme, and, equally, we need to monitor their independent reading choices to ensure they are not coasting along. We ensure children get opportunities to read blurbs and recommend books to each other will help foster pupils' appetite to explore new texts. The children also fill in class reading records to record reading miles and star grade books to show the books they would recommend to others. Children can take books home from their classroom book corner or the school library that is sorted by author if it is fiction and subject if non-fiction. Other Research shows that giving children agency over the books they read (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008) is a huge motivator and by introducing them to a wide range of quality texts through the school's reading canon we will have opened the door to a world of possibilities.

Timetabling and organisation

At Milton, we have chosen to link our writing to our reading canon texts. This allows for overlearning the text and vocabulary structures through repeated analysis. We have also chosen the best model for the chosen writing task. We also write separate model texts to use as writing models. In KS2, we read the same text in read aloud time as the one studied in the daily reading and English lessons. In KS1, we use our phonics book for our FASE sessions (reading aloud to develop fluency) and also have reading for pleasure texts that are read during 'story time'. Time is allocated for in-depth poetry studies and for pupils to learn to recite poems off by heart and perform them to an audience. Linked texts are used to build background knowledge and develop pupils' schemata to enable them to engage with texts at a deeper level.

Reading Spine or Canon?

A carefully built reading canon will contain the writings or other works that are generally agreed to be good, important and worth studying, which have been curated to support the curriculum narrative. A reading spine is a list of texts that have been selected and categorised in order of increasing challenge. We allow children in EYFS and Year 1 to choose a good quality, modern texts from our reading spine to supplement their phonics books. The texts from our reading spine are a rich source of Tier 2 vocabulary and have rich concepts and themes to explore, which will often support the readers' interests.

