

# CHOOSING & USING HIGH-QUALITY CHILDREN'S TEXTS

## What we know works

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education



CENTRE FOR LITERACY  
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION



# Choosing & Using High-Quality Children's Texts

## What works?

CLPE is an independent charity that was established over fifty years ago. We work alongside schools both nationally and internationally, supporting teachers to develop their literacy teaching and provision through our high-quality and trusted professional development programme, resources, publications, and renowned classroom-based action research. We are steadfast in our commitment to ensuring the best possible start and outcomes of children in the primary phase of their schooling, and we believe that high-quality literature plays a crucial role in ensuring this.

Through our work we recognise the value of literature in supporting children to become confident, happy, and enthusiastic readers and writers. The advocacy of books is therefore central to all that we do. In the heart of our building, we house an in-print reference library of over 25,000 in-print titles for readers within the primary age range. We also hold two extensive archive collections: one of children's poetry and the other of traditional tales.

The Core Booklist launched in 1996 and was a biennial CLPE publication, which since 2015 has been a freely available online resource. It is a selection of carefully chosen texts for teachers to use when they are developing collections for their classrooms and schools as part of their reading and literacy programmes. The list demonstrates the key role that children's literature can play across the curriculum, supporting children's progress as readers. The books are chosen because they support children learning to read and in their development as readers. Corebooks Online contains books that have been tried, tested,



and found to work successfully in classrooms, providing children with broad, memorable, and positive reading experiences. The collection is curated and updated by our highly experienced Librarian in partnership with our teaching staff.

We believe that the use of high-quality books within the reading curriculum is at the heart of a school's successful approach to engage and support children to become motivated and independent readers. If children enjoy reading, they read more frequently and become better readers. If teachers and those who work in schools know about the best children's literature available, they will be able to share that with the children they teach and encourage them to be inspired as readers and motivated to read for themselves.

Each year at CLPE we work face to face with more than 1000 teachers from across the country and many thousands more use our resources. We use our knowledge about children's literature to choose high-quality texts to underpin all our training and courses. Through an ongoing dialogue with the teachers who participate in our teaching and research programmes, we continue to learn more about the defining features of high-quality texts and their transformative potential. In this booklet which forms part of our 'What we know works' series, we are sharing with you ten key things that teachers have told us about choosing and using high-quality children's literature in their schools and classrooms. We hope you find it useful.

## Farrah Serroukh

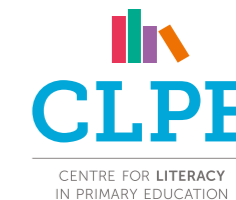
Executive Director of Research and Development, CLPE

## Find out more about...

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Core Booklist

<https://clpe.org.uk/corebooks>



## 1 Curate a class collection of books from a wide and diverse range of authors, illustrators and forms

Teachers with an extensive knowledge of children's literature can create a classroom book stock that reflects and extends their children's reading preferences, supports a culture of recommendation and encourages children to read for pleasure. Regular opportunities for children of all ages to hear books read aloud will enable access to a wider range of text types, authors and styles of writing. Hearing a text read and re-read aloud often draws out elements that go unnoticed when you read inside your head. Well-chosen texts expose children to a wider range of language and vocabulary than they would hear in spoken language in a supportive context.

- Provide a variety of texts that enable children to extend their reading experience and inspire them to read for purpose and pleasure; picturebooks, illustrated novels, engaging non-fiction titles, poetry, comics and magazines, pop-up books and graphic novels.
- Choose and read aloud high-quality texts that support children to hear and appreciate a wide range of voices and writing styles and experience the impact of language choices.
- Support children's reading enjoyment by building collections that appeal to their interests and preferences.



*"Children have a real love of reading. They understand that staff have very carefully chosen the very best books for them and they really appreciate that. They get excited for the new text each half term."*



[Learn more](#)

Search CLPE's monthly Top Picks for recommendations from our Librarian of the latest children's literature

## 2 Provide contemporary texts in which every child can see themselves and that broaden their view of the world around them

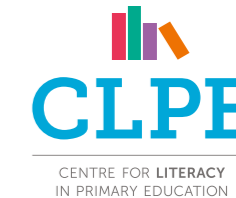
Every child has the right to make connections with high-quality texts, building their identity as readers and affirming their sense of self. The value of children seeing themselves and the world in which they live reflected in the books read and discussed in the classroom cannot be underestimated. We know that, for many children, there is a disconnect between themselves and the books available to them; books should reflect and celebrate their lives, their heritage, their place in society as well as their understanding of others and the world around them.

- Provide a bookstock that reflects the realities of your children; that exemplifies quality portrayals or presence of characters from a range of backgrounds and experiences.
- Choose books that reflect both contemporary society and that accurately reflect the past and build children's awareness of the wider world beyond their immediate sphere of experience.
- Seek out authors who are writing from authentic lived experience and knowledge.
- Value your children's home languages throughout their education; provide bilingual texts and resources which will meet the language needs of learners.



[Learn more](#)

Read CLPE's Reflecting Realities reports to learn about the extent and quality of representation in children's literature



*"I have more appreciation for how texts are – or are not – representative of our children and their lived experiences. This has made me much more intentional about the books that make up our curriculum; not choosing books because they fit what we have always done but choosing books that are most meaningful and engaging for our children."*



### 3 Become familiar with how different books can be used to support a variety of reading experiences

With knowledge and experience of children's literature, teachers can build up a bank of books that offer different opportunities and experiences for young readers that support their development as readers. These will include books which lend themselves to reading aloud, support sustained study or deeper response, that can be used to support children's next steps in reading, which inspire group or social reading experiences and those that encourage independence or speak to individual interest. Regularly reflecting on bookstock, removing tatty or unsuitable texts and introducing new choices will ensure all children feel connected to the reading routines and experiences you offer.

- Choose books in all forms that read aloud well, supporting rich and varied exposure to language structures and new vocabulary, and promoting increasing intertextuality.
- Read and revisit books that encourage shared interest in and discussion around new vocabulary and concepts and develop deeper reader response to both text and illustration.
- Seek books with features that support you to develop reading knowledge, skills and strategies and increase confidence, fluency and stamina.



*"I feel more knowledgeable about what makes a 'good' book for my year group to engage them and act as a vehicle for improving oracy, literacy and writing. It has given me confidence to try new books and authors and use new teaching approaches."*



[Learn more](#)

Search CLPE's Corebooks for recommendations for each Key Stage, across three categories – 'Literature', 'Learning to Read' and 'Information'

### 4 Build an English curriculum rich in challenging literature

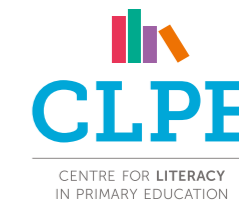
Planning a sequence of work around a high-quality book immerses children in the world of a text, deepens reader response, interest and engagement and builds on prior knowledge and vocabulary. Sustained work with books can increase engagement and close the disadvantage gap in attainment. By engaging in a purposeful and authentic writing process, they are more likely to develop understanding of how books work to engage a reader and produce high-quality outcomes.

- Build an English curriculum around well-crafted books which demand to be read aloud, re-read and revisited in a range of interesting ways.
- Slowly reveal the content of a book to captivate and hold interest and engagement, allowing children to use a wider range of reading skills and strategies to make meaning together.
- Draw out meaning through rich discussion, encouraging children to make connections with personal experience, their understanding of the world and intertextual knowledge.
- Use creative teaching approaches like response to illustration, art, drama and storytelling to enhance enjoyment, deepen reader response, build vocabulary, and inspire and scaffold writing outcomes.



[Learn more](#)

Engage in CLPE's Power of Reading to build a high-quality book-based English curriculum across your whole school



*"The Power of Reading approach has brought stories to life and – apart from improving children's reading and writing skills – it has created lasting memories for the children and developed a lifelong love of reading for so many."*



## 5 Select texts that present information in a variety of interesting ways

Access to high-quality non-fiction texts is important as part of a broader curriculum, in feeding children's fascinations, developing critical thinking, and in expanding their reading diet. Discussions about reading for pleasure too often focus exclusively on fiction, but high-quality information books, which present facts in an interesting and informative way, are a key part of any classroom collection. Non-fiction texts are often excellent examples of how text and image can work together to provide comprehensive information and an enjoyable reading experience, particularly if created by an author with understanding of and experience in their subject.

- Recognise the place of high-quality non-fiction texts as part of a classroom culture of reading for interest, purpose and pleasure.
- Read aloud a range of non-fiction to build understanding of the voice, tone, language and grammatical structure of different forms of information writing.
- Appreciate the demands of non-fiction texts and the specific reading skills and strategies that they require, supporting understanding through creative approaches.
- Introduce non-fiction in a variety of formats and those that play with convention; narratives, illustrated, digital and film.



*"We're really focussing in on the importance of using high-quality non-fiction texts; considering and seeking these out when planning. Also valuing them in the book corner. We've bought more accessible and appropriate books for our year group."*



[Learn more](#)

Explore CLPE's Information Corebooks Information collection for recommendations of engaging non-fiction texts

## 6 Choose books and multimodal texts with quality artwork which complement, support or extend the story

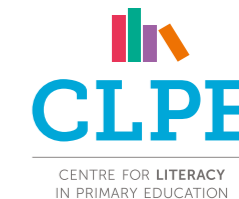
Picturebooks are an important genre of literature for children of all ages and not just a step on the route to chapter books. They support the development of sophisticated reading skills, enabling children to develop deep comprehension skills and to learn about narrative structure and character development in an accessible way. Giving time and space for children to read, respond to and discuss the themes and structures of different picturebooks provides children with a strong understanding of how to construct a compelling narrative in an accessible way, including characterisation, setting, plot, creating empathy, pacing and structure.

- Reading picturebooks develops pupils' language and vocabulary, comprehension, understanding of narrative structure and ideas for composition across the primary years.
- Picture cues can be used to support less experienced readers; but beyond this illustration helps readers of all ages and abilities interpret meaning and extend understanding.
- Wordless books have an important place enabling a high level of interpretation and inference.



[Learn more](#)

Find out more about CLPE's Power of Pictures Continuing Professional Development, resources and outcomes



*"From a teaching point of view, picturebooks elicit deeper and more thought-provoking responses from children. They are able to draw on the 'extra' story depicted through the pictures. This creates more talk, which in turn promotes ideas for writing."*



## 7 Provide children with regular exposure and access to poetry from a range of poets, in a range of voices and in a variety of forms

Poetry provides the gateway for so many young readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate, delighting, supporting and engaging children as they build a love of literature. It is a crucial genre for bridging common gaps in children's learning; understanding language and vocabulary, reading fluency, inference and deduction, expanding the range and breadth of children's reading, pupil's ability to respond to texts, and their use and application of phonics.

- Stay up to date with published poetry, so that children are exposed to poets of different backgrounds and lived experience, whose poetry brings to life a range of worlds, languages, dialects and accents.
- Create a poetry-friendly classroom in which children can hear poetry read regularly by you or the poets themselves, as well as reading it for themselves.
- Choose poems that demand to be read, re-read and performed, to support the development of reading fluency.
- Plan for children to work with poems in depth so that they can move from listening, to reading and responding, to performing, then to writing poetry of their own.



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*"Poetry is an exciting way to engage children in the power and beauty of language. Having the opportunity to read different poems gave me direction in which way to look to find quality poems and has also changed my perception about what was an effective poem to support learning."*



[Learn more](#)

Explore CLPE's poetry books recommendations and resources to use in the classroom

## 8 Select books that encourage and promote social reading experiences and build a classroom reading community

When teaching children to read, we need to show children the pleasures reading can bring from the very beginning of their reading journey, sharing the intrinsic value of being a reader. For children to want to read independently, they first must make a connection with both the books and the experience of reading itself. Children who read independently, widely and for pleasure often connect reading with a social or emotional experience. Teachers can create a classroom reading community by planning reading routines that strengthen social relationships and build connections between the children, the books and the act of reading.

- Be enthusiastic about the books you introduce so that children can share in this enthusiasm and form their own relationships with them.
- Read aloud well-crafted books and spend time talking about how illustration and language choices impact on you and the children as readers.
- Choose books with strong structures, rhythms and patterned language, which encourage children to chime in together, including rhyme, songs, poetry and traditional tales.
- Choose funny books with which the class can build a genuine shared connection.



[Learn more](#)

Read about the impact of social reading experiences in our Power of Reading impact reports



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*"Central to the CLPE approach is the importance of making space for the responses of individual children and creating a culture of book talk. This has developed a culture in which the children offer unprompted responses to texts. This sense of agency and the energy it brings to our discussions is often tangible."*



## 9 Select real books that provide opportunities for children to develop phonological awareness and use and apply their phonic knowledge in real reading experiences

We can support all our children to become skilled and well-rounded readers through the provision of high-quality books and activities that enable children to explore written language, expecting that the words on the page will carry meaning. They need to be able to develop phonological awareness, practise and apply effective reading strategies through real reading experiences, which helps them to learn and experience the language of story and text and the pleasures this brings.

- Choose books which allow you to draw attention to written language and help the children tune in to the alphabetic code; books that explore, describe and encourage the articulation of a variety of sounds; books that include word play and rhyming; books with strong rhythm and syllabic beat.
- Choose real books that provide meaningful opportunity for children successfully to apply the skills of segmenting and blending and consolidate word recognition, thus developing their comprehension skills by connecting print with meaning.
- Choose books with rich narrative and language which support children's interest, engagement and independent reading, applying the same criteria to choosing decodable readers.



*"We loved using high-quality, meaningful texts to support teaching of phonics, especially for applying knowledge of sounds reading sentences from said texts as opposed to a bland sentence without context."*



[Learn more](#)

Search CLPE's Learning to Read collection for books to support children's independence as readers

## 10 Provide opportunities for children to choose books that foster their experience of literature as well as supporting their interests and preferences

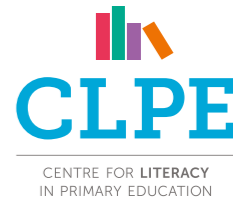
It is really important to listen to and respect children's choices while helping them to broaden their reading range. Children can be easily put off then they feel adults are making judgements about their reading choices so, to help children move forward in their reading, allow them to have say in the selection of books for the book corner and library. This might include funny books, comics and graphic novels, picturebooks and poetry. Children are more likely to finish a book that they have chosen for themselves.

- Get to know your children's background experiences and tastes and be sure to tailor the bookstock to suit these interests and reading preferences.
- Support children in the specific skills of browsing and choosing, deciding whether a book is right for them or when it might not be.
- Value children's enjoyment of all types of reading material. Funny books, books in series, comics, magazines or graphic novels can draw children in, providing reading practice and encouraging reading for pleasure.
- Use your knowledge of contemporary children's literature to make recommendations about other texts they might be inspired to try.



[Learn more](#)

Search a wide range of recommended books to meet the needs and interests of your children



*"Children are more enthused to read and access the books available to them. Having books that match their interests helps them to engage."*



# Choosing & Using High Quality Children's Texts

## What we know works

1. Curate a class collection of books from a wide and diverse range of authors, illustrators and forms.
2. Provide contemporary texts in which every child can see themselves and that broaden their view of the world around them.
3. Become familiar with how different books can be used to support a variety of reading experiences.
4. Build an English curriculum rich in challenging literature.
5. Select texts that present information in a variety of interesting ways.
6. Choose books and multimodal texts with quality artwork which complement, support or extend the story.
7. Provide children with regular exposure and access to poetry from a range of poets, in a range of voices and in a variety of forms.
8. Select books that encourage and promote social reading experiences and build a classroom reading community.
9. Select real books that provide opportunities for children to develop phonological awareness and use and apply their phonic knowledge in real reading experiences.
10. Provide opportunities for children to choose books that foster their experience of literature as well as supporting their interests and preferences.



## CLPE's Corebooks for Primary Schools

CLPE's Corebooks list helps primary schools choose the very best children's books for their school or classroom libraries. Selected by our dedicated Librarian, this database contains more than 700 quality books to suit readers of all ages and stages of reading development. The Corebooks selection comprises of three collections for each phase of children's learning, including:



### The Learning to Read Collection

These are books which are particularly supportive to children learning to read. This collection supports children in EYFS to Key Stage 2.

Find out more:



### The Literature Collection

This collection has been designed to introduce children to a wider range of titles, authors and genres.

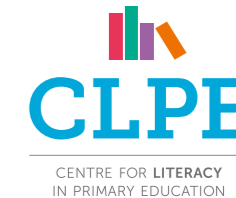
Find out more:



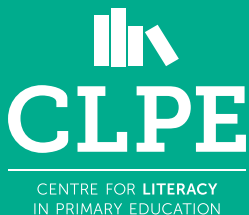
### The Information Collection

These are high-quality information texts to show how text and pictures can work together to provide comprehensive information and an enjoyable reading experience.

Find out more:







A charity transforming  
lives through literacy

Working with schools to provide training and resources to raise outcomes for all children. Please visit CLPE's website for the most up-to-date information.

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*"CLPE is one of the most wonderful places in London, full of hope, thought, expectation, experience, research, inspiration, belief, follow-through, commitment."*

MICHAEL ROSEN,  
AUTHOR, POET AND CLPE PATRON

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