Text selection

Of all the strategies, assessment, ideas, resources and support that surround the day to day discourse of teaching English and literacy, the most interesting are the conversations around text selection. The NSW English K–10 syllabus has 1006 content points, all of which rely on the careful selection of texts for teaching. The degree of quality for which the content of the syllabus is taught, depends upon a teacher’s understanding of what the content is asking, what the students need to learn and the teacher’s professional knowledge in choosing texts to exemplify and teach the syllabus content.

Text selection is a process that benefits from professional discussion and requires time and thought. It is a contextual decision that teachers make on a daily basis. Selecting texts for student learning necessitates teachers to consider the student as a learner across all the modes. It entails the examination of student competencies and needs, as a listener and speaker, a reader and viewer and as a composer of texts. This understanding of student competencies and knowledge of what students need to learn next informs text selection.

New learning

When selecting texts, teachers should choose texts that are the most powerful example of what a student needs to learn at that particular time. Selecting a text that takes students from their current competency, and stretches them to the cusp of competence and beyond, is important for scaffolding students in new learning. A well-chosen text enables students to practise and transfer the knowledge and skills they already have and apply new learning. New learning occurs in a supported environment when a text challenges a student at their cusp of competence and they tussle with new thinking. It is the interplay between the knowledgeable adult, the student and the text that envelops the student in new learning.

Text requirements

The syllabus’s Rationale defines English as the study and use of the English language in its various textual forms (BOSTES). Therefore, textuality and texts are the content of English. The syllabus mandates the use of...
of quality literature in all forms. Understanding the text requirements in the syllabus is the obligation of all teachers and schools. Book rooms and classrooms should encompass the texts that make up these requirements. A pdf of *Suggested texts for the English K–10 syllabus* is a starting point.

Table 1 highlights some of the text requirements from the syllabus common to all stages of learning. The left hand column states the requirements as written in the syllabus and the right hand column contains some of the textuality considerations when selecting texts for teaching or when purchasing texts for school resources.

The right text, selected because it is the best illustration of what students need to learn at a particular point in time, supports teachers to delve deeply into a text and go beyond what the text is about. The right text makes teachers consider the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus text requirements</th>
<th>Textual features to consider when selecting texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Across a stage of learning, the selection of texts must give students experience of:</td>
<td>Choose texts that:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• texts which are widely regarded as quality literature</td>
<td>• are widely regarded – award winning texts, texts that are loved through the ages, texts of critical acclaim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a wide range of literary texts from other countries and times, including poetry, drama scripts, prose fiction and picture books</td>
<td>• are quality literature, rich in language, innovative, popular over time, complex and have meanings on different levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a widely defined Australian literature, including texts that give insights into Aboriginal experiences in Australia</td>
<td>• create a tension between the words and pictures, which use devices such as word play, imagery or humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• texts written about intercultural experiences</td>
<td>• use different modes – film, speeches, poetry, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have interesting textual devices such as point of view, to convey the idea</td>
<td>• are written by Australian authors, filmmakers, poets, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• vary in structure and make the reader think about where they are being taken</td>
<td>• are unique in their style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use metaphor and imagery to convey ideas</td>
<td>• demonstrate intertextuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can be used to demonstrate different methods and techniques of composing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• texts that provide insights about the peoples and cultures of Asia
  • are beautiful to hear aloud
  • invite discussion about the features, language and ideas being conveyed
  • subvert expectation.

• a wide range of factual texts that present ideas, issues and information
  • have interesting methods of presenting ideas and topics
  • structure the narrative in an unusual way
  • use imagery and wordplay to engage the reader
  • use argument, theme or perspective as a device to illustrate and idea or information
  • reveal the factual information issues and ideas better than others.

• texts that include aspects of environmental and social sustainability
  • have interesting characterisation
  • use imagery or word play to present an idea
  • present arguments in a different form

• everyday and community texts.
  • can be examined for their textuality, which may include authority, context and symbol.

Safety town website

Table 1 English syllabus text requirements and textual features to consider when selecting texts

Text as a construction and makes them uncover what the author/poet/filmmaker has done to make us engage with or question the text’s effectiveness. Together, teachers and students can explore and analyse the tools an author has used to compose a text. When students understand the tools authors use to compose interesting and creative texts, they have the scaffolds to experiment with using those tools in their own composing.

Some suggested sample texts are included in the Year 1 and Year 2 texts lists. These, and Using quality literature springboards, can support the approach outlined in this article, in keeping with the selection criteria outlined.
Text selection tools
Here is a list of questions to guide teachers when selecting texts for teaching.

Where are my students in their learning?
What can my students’ do?
What is their knowledge about how texts work?
What do my students’ need to learn next?
What are my students’ needs when responding and composing texts?

What should I look for in a text?
Is the text the most powerful example of what my students need to learn at this point in time?
Will the text deepen student understanding with enough intellectual challenge?
Will the text stretch the students to grow?
Could the text be used as a mentor text for student writing?
Is the text for wide reading?

Not every text is suitable for teaching at the same point in time. Some texts may be texts that are read to students, but the explicit teaching may occur at a later time. Some texts may not have examples of textual devices that are strong enough to sustain engagement for teaching.

What are the textual features?
Does the text have good examples of textual features such as metaphor, atypical or unexpected structure, a distinctive voice or point of view?
Is it a good example of genre?

What is it about?
What is the story or what are the ideas and information?
Does the text have recognisable themes that students can explore or question?

What do we learn about how texts work?
How do the different modes work together?
Is there tension or synergy between the images and words or sounds and speech that creates a level of sophistication?
How are the ideas represented?
Is the language or structure used in a compelling way to create effect?
How can the students use a feature of this text as a basis for experimentation with their own text creation?

Why is this important? Why does it matter?
Is the text important in a social context? Is the text widely regarded as quality and needed for students to understand other texts?
Is the text contemporary and of social importance?
What does it say about the world?

References and further reading