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K.O.A.L.A Awards promotes children’s reading choice

Alyson Simpson

The Kids Own Australian Literature (KOALA) Awards is a volunteer association that supports children’s reading choice. Founded in 1986 the awards aim to promote the enjoyment and critical appreciation of Australian literature by involving young readers from NSW in in the process of selecting their favourite books through nominating and voting processes. The awards give recognition to Australian authors and illustrators.

The first awards ceremony was held at Taronga Zoo in 1987 and the awards have run continuously ever since. The award categories now include picture books, fiction for younger readers, fiction for older readers and fiction for Years 7-9. KOALA has online voting through the **KOALA website**. KOALA also has a blog, and maintains a social media presence through its **Facebook page** and **Twitter handle**.

Children’s choice: Why is choice so important?

KOALA is a great example of student centred learning. Giving children choice about what they read is a crucial strategy that ‘encourages personal agency, supports the emergence of critical appreciation, seeds literary behaviours, and improves literacy skills’ (ILA, 2018, p.8). Because greater engagement with learning, increased confidence in reading and better learning outcomes are associated with free reading choice, teachers and librarians have a responsibility to build reading for pleasure into children’s experience with books (Cremin, 2014).

Children's choice awards like KOALA are a valuable corollary to the testing culture that 'dominates so much of a child's reading life' (Chiariello, 2018, p.10). This premise is strongly upheld by results for Australia in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) study (Thomson et al., 2016). The results show that the more opportunities students have for extended, free choice reading, the steeper the engagement with books becomes, resulting in more productive learning outcomes.

The use of literature to promote student motivation and engagement requires careful support from teachers who commit to creating a culture of reading in their classrooms (Cremin, 2014). Studies show the benefits of children's choice are far ranging when incorporated into a structured approach to reading for pleasure (Safford, 2014). This makes KOALA a valuable pedagogic resource.

How does KOALA address English syllabus outcomes?

The Australian curriculum requires teachers to provide opportunities for students to 'engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment' (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2018). The value of establishing reading for pleasure underpins the NSW K-10 English syllabus (BOS NSW, 2012, p13). The KOALA Awards helps students achieve positive reading outcomes because the nomination and voting processes promote and encourage an active engagement in, discussion of, as well as a love of reading for pleasure.

For example, the objective, outcomes and content for Early Stage 1 and Stage 3 include:

Stage	Objective	Outcome	Content
Early Stage 1	Reading and viewing 2	ENe-8B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in shared stories and join in shared book activities on familiar and imaginary books • Responds to texts, identifying favourite stories, authors and illustrators • Share picture books and digital stories for enjoyment and pleasure • Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences
	Thinking imaginatively and creatively	ENe-10c	
	Expressing themselves	ENe-11D	
Stage 3	Reading and viewing	EN3-3A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss aspects of literature that influence personal choice in reading • Recognise how aspects of personal perspective influence responses to texts • Recognise the techniques used by writers to position a reader and influence their point of view • Think critically about aspects of texts such as ideas and events
	Responding and composing	EN3-5B	
	Thinking imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically	EN3-7C	

Why take part in KOALA?

A **survey of international book awards** noted that KOALA is 'democratic in nature' (Day, 2018), supporting student agency.

Teacher librarians and teachers are quite vocal in their support for KOALA. Typical comments remark on how the KOALA Awards:

- gives students an opportunity to respond to literature, developing their own opinions about books and sharing recommendations with peers
- supports development of ability to discuss and differentiate between different types of literature
- exposes students to quality children's literature
- encourages students to develop critical appreciation through the experience of making a critical judgement
- assists all students achieve their English outcomes because they read, review, discuss, think about, compare and ultimately enjoy great stories
- helps students make their reading experiences and pleasures their own.

As one librarian states, 'unlike book awards that are judged by adults such as the Newberry, Caldecott, CBCA, and others, children's choice awards are judged by children. Children's choice awards, like KOALA in NSW and the SMARTIES in the UK, demonstrate the passionate

enthusiasm of young readers involved in a voting process that results in nominated books winning highly valued awards’.

The data collected over the last six years consistently shows that KOALA helps to introduce students to books they might not have otherwise read. Students often say it’s hard to know which books to read (Simpson, 2008) and note how important peer reviews are to them. That is why they find the KOALA shortlist so helpful as they discover new authors.

Authors and illustrators love KOALA too. One of the KOALA legends, **Bob Graham, writes**: ‘Somebody once said: reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. The KOALA Awards encourage reading, and young minds to be exercised (let off the lead and raced around the park, even). Please support these awards – they deserve it.’

How does KOALA run?

Joining KOALA is easy. Schools, public libraries, organisations and individuals can become friends of KOALA. The membership form can be mailed to KOALA at PO Box 279 Annandale NSW 2038 or emailed to **contact@koalansw.org.au**

Term 1 is nomination time

In Term 1, students nominate for book titles to go onto the short list. To help teachers advertise the awards category posters, nominating post it notes, video interviews with authors, and links to author websites are made available on the KOALA website. Teacher librarians make displays using all sorts of KOALA materials.



Selection criteria for nomination.

- The book must be Australian.
- The book must have been published in the last ten years.
- The book must not be a previous winner.
- Nominations must be for a specific title, for example, Selby Surfs not Selby books.
- Students may nominate up to four titles.

Forming the shortlist – KOALA nominations are pooled with interstate partners such as YABBA and KROC to create a national shortlist with 4 categories. Members can download category shortlist posters, receive shortlist stickers for book covers and an invitation to awards day.

Terms 2 and 3 are for reading, enjoyment and voting

KOALA provides lots of resources on its website to encourage voting. There is an online voting portal through Survey monkey. Other resources include downloadable voting slips, advice on voting strategies, and results spreadsheets. The official REAL (Reading and Enjoying Australian Literature) poster is designed each year by a featured Australian illustrator that shows images of all the books shortlisted that year.

Term 4 is when KOALA celebrates

In Term 4, the KOALA Awards Day is held at a school venue. It is a very special day when students meet authors and illustrators, and authors and illustrators meet their fans. All the authors and illustrators give a short speech and, every year, a feature illustrator creates an image live on stage during the awards ceremony so students can watch the process from start to end. A lucky school is given the artwork to take home. Students report that KOALA Awards Day is one of their favourite events of the year.

KOALA NSW in **KOALA Awards Day Preview** (2 mins 35 secs) provides some highlights of past Award days.

In 2019, the awards will be held on Wednesday 13 November at Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Primary School in North Strathfield, Sydney.

Strategies to encourage students' nominations

To encourage nominations teacher librarians use strategies including:

- demonstrating the nomination process
- displaying library circulation records to help students recognise the most popular Australian titles
- providing resources for nominating near displays of KOALA books

- showcasing previous winners of CBCA and KOALA to prompt comparison
- discussing favourite Australian books with groups of students
- showing students ways of identifying Australian books and authors
- providing teachers a bulk loan of Australian books to read to their class
- giving students a KOALA bookmark or I Love Reading sticker for nominating
- creating an online survey of student opinions with fields for evaluative comments
- creating KOALA displays or **Kahoot! quizzes**.



Get students reading

Teachers use a range of strategies from simple to complex to encourage students to read books on the shortlist including:

- reading the KOALA titles and discussing authors' writing styles
- adding KOALA titles to Premier's Reading Challenge logs to broaden the genre base
- asking students to rank the first lines of KOALA books in order of most enticing to read and persuade a listener that their choice should win
- playing guess the book using the first lines of KOALA books to compare narrative orientations and write alternatives
- studying publishers' book trailers, noting the impact of multimodal resources to introduce story boarding
- exploring shortlisted author and illustrator websites with students as preparation for an author study
- analysing book covers to explore how the illustrative design foreshadows the plot.

Students experiment with technology for deep engagement

To encourage deep engagement with the KOALA books they have read, students can be invited to experiment creatively with technology. The following list has suggestions for encouraging student engagement.

- Book trailers – students can use software such as Animoto, Microsoft Sway, iMovie book trailers or Claymation to create simple book trailers for titles they have read. This process helps them develop new literacy skills as they adapt monomodal print text into multimodal compositions. NB: The use of storyboard planning in the early stages is recommended.
- Game based learning – working in pairs, students create Kahoot quiz to share their knowledge about a book. They then share game online to increase others' motivation and engagement with the shortlisted books.
- Coding – students can use software such as Minecraft Education Edition and Code Connection or Scratch to explore different viewpoints by creating story settings and characters with simple animation.
- Blogging – sites such as **Kidblog**, SeeSaw and BlogEd/Blogger are suitable for students to set up a blog where they can post book recommendations. This activity promotes the use of critical and persuasive language.
- Recording – students can create podcasts of read alouds to share with younger students or students struggling with their reading. This process supports reading fluency and encourages comprehension as correct intonation depends on understanding the text.
- Interviewing – students, in the role of journalists preparing KOALA Awards Day news reports, can use Scratch Junior on iPads/ or Scratch Offline Editor on PCs to create question and answers for authors.
- Sliding books – students can experiment by writing alternative endings or prequels to a book they have read. This work depends on deep understanding of plot development in order to provide a logical extension of the original.
- Shelfies – students take a photo of themselves with a favourite KOALA book and post it to a protected class intranet Face+Book profile page to update reading status. This task encourages students to make use of simple digital skills to create a dynamic reading journal. The journals can be shared with others for the purpose of commentary and feedback.

KOALA's children's choice awards, underpinned by the ethos of by kids for kids, not only gives students agency as they learn that their opinions matter, but also offers them opportunities to read across a wide variety of

literature. Involvement with KOALA can contribute to the establishment of lifelong, independent reading habits. **Explore the website** and find out what it offers.

Interested in becoming a **KOALA member**? It's easy or email: **contact@koalansw.org.au**

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Tailored professional learning – It works!

Monica St Baker

The road to achievement

In 2018 at Hanwood Public School, for the first time since the inception of the **National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**, Year 5 students achieved an average of a Band 6 in writing and were placed above the national average.

We were able to achieve this by changing the mode of teacher professional learning. We came to realise that best practice for students was also best practice when teaching educators. For our school, this means point of need relevant content that is then modelled in context.

Professional learning journey

Two years ago at Hanwood Public School we embarked on a professional learning journey. We live in a rural area where it is difficult to access quality professional learning for teachers. The cost is also prohibitive as, not only do we pay for casual costs and course fees (like all other schools), we also have the added complexity of travel (often flights), accommodation and food costs. This then takes up a vast portion of our professional learning budget.

We decided to try a new model. We brought the experts to Hanwood!

We soon realised that this was cost effective. We were able to expose the entire staff to the learning, which alleviated the need to decide who would attend the courses. This was an ideal solution because the ‘teach the teacher’ model doesn’t work in our school context.

The model

The model we adopted utilises the two last professional development days scheduled at the end of the scholastic year. Let me explain.

All teachers, and interested school learning support officers, attended four three-hour sessions that were presented after school hours throughout the year by an expert in their field. We focused on metacognitive teaching and learning with an emphasis on increasing students' writing skills and outcomes.

Metacognition involves students focusing on their thinking, that is, students actively thinking about their thinking and understanding what they do not know. This is a powerful skill which supports students to use higher levels of thinking and increasing proficiency with problem solving.

Dr Kate Bricknell from Crossroads Education presented this concept to teachers and showed them what it looks like in classrooms from kindergarten through to Year 6. We also focused on the 'end game' in Year 12, and the importance of our students being proficient as they leave us for high school. As a staff, we have a shared commitment to K-12 student learning, not just infants and primary.

Think it–write it

Dr Bricknell commenced with her first presentation on Think it - write it, which was 'designed to support the development of autonomous writing skills by guiding students through metacognitive processes as they develop into independent and mature writers' (Bricknell, 2017, p.5). To begin this process, all teachers needed to know what they did not know, when considering high quality instruction on writing. There were many lightbulb moments at this beginning point.

During the next three days following her presentation on the theory of metacognition, Dr Bricknell team taught, coached and mentored all teachers at their individual levels of need. Essentially, it was imperative that teachers could see this theory in practice, in their classrooms, with their students. It also negated the teachers' preconceived attitudes like:

- this will not work in my class
- I have a low achieving class and this is too complex
- I teach kindergarten and this is too higher order.

The work the students produced during these sessions was nothing short of outstanding. The students called Dr Bricknell 'The Writing Doctor'.

Key to success for teachers

The most valuable component of the changes we made was to acknowledge that all teachers have different levels of knowledge and expertise. Consistent teacher judgement is hard, if not impossible, to attain if our teachers have a varied knowledge bases. We set about growing all our teachers, starting at their instructional level, which for beginning teachers is vastly

different to that of experienced teachers. This was the key to our success. It proved unequivocally that tailored, differentiated professional learning works.

In the past year, professional learning with Dr Bricknell has specifically focused on teacher need.

What about our students?

Focused metacognitive teaching and learning with an emphasis on increasing students' writing skills and outcomes has resulted in measurable improvement. Students are expected to develop skills at automaticity. Once a skill is learned and developed, the expectation is that it will be maintained with 100% accuracy in all written tasks. The skill moves from the short term memory, which can only hold from seven to nine pieces of new information, to the long term memory which has an infinite capacity.

Our school-based assessments are demonstrating great success as we triangulate our data. Our frustration is still demonstrating this consistently with external-based assessments such as NAPLAN. Our continued goal is to reduce the gap between the two.

We will be very interested to see our NAPLAN results later in the year!

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SPaRK – A Patch from Scratch

Gaye Braiding

Resource overview

Set in a suburban backyard, 'A Patch from Scratch' by Megan Forward describes a family's journey in transforming their yard into a productive garden in which they grow and produce their own food from paddock to plate. Written through the voice of a young child, the children are actively involved and help in the design, planning and construction of the chicken coop and garden beds. Constantly researching information and problem solving challenges, the family make their own compost, propagate seeds, care for seedlings and sustainably manage pests. Drawings, labelled sketches, maps and notes are used by the children to record their observations and document changes in plants whilst the detailed illustrations in the text provide visual 'how to' guides of the processes involved in vegetable gardening and hands-on activities for children in food production. Concluding with a harvest feast shared with friends and family, this picture book presents a closed loop approach to local food production – seed to seed for plant growth and returning organic waste into the garden.

Educational significance

Reinforcing the design and production process, and demonstrating physical activity, healthy eating and personal wellbeing, 'A Patch from Scratch' supports the science and technology Living world strand and the PDHPE Healthy, safe and active lifestyles strand. It strongly supports the food and fibre content of the science and technology syllabus, particularly for Early Stage 1 to Stage 2.

With a focus on gardening, the text promotes outdoor learning in an authentic context and the enjoyment and satisfaction of physical and collaborative activities working towards a common purpose. Modelling closed loop systems and organic gardening principles, 'A Patch from Scratch' also strongly supports the learning across the curriculum priority of sustainability.

Suggestions for using this text

Find a leafy spot outside in the school grounds to share the book with the students. After reading, use small sharing circles for students to share text-to-self connections of personal experiences of gardening, growing food and eating freshly picked produce. Revisit the illustrations and list the fruits and vegetables grown in the backyard garden. Make text-to-world connections of those found in fruit and vegetable aisles and shops and their uses. Make connections to nonfiction and fiction texts about vegetable gardening, such as 'Oliver's Vegetables' by Vivian French and Alison Bartlett.

Explore the school's vegetable gardens and look for living and non-living elements described in the text. Provide guided tasting or scrunch and sniffing of some edible leaves and herbs in the school's gardens. Pick some mint, lemon-grass or lemon verbena to add to students' water bottles as an infusion.

Sequence the design and production process used by the family in creating their patch. What did the family want to achieve? What steps did they take to achieve it? What skills did the various family member use in building their productive garden? Using process drama strategies, guide students to step into the story and create freeze frames of favourite tasks and activities represented in the illustrations.

Examine the double-page spread of the shared harvest meal. Name the foods on the table. What would the people see, smell, taste, feel and hear while sitting at the table? Role-play conversations between the family members and friends while sharing their meal.

Use the text as a stimulus and guide for planning and producing an edible garden at school.

Teaching activities

1. How can we grow our own fruit and vegies at school?

Using the design and production process in 'A Patch from Scratch' as a guide, list the research, planning, producing and implementing

steps to establish and manage a food garden at school. Work through the process from conception to harvest.

2. Where can we put our vegie patch?

Recall the needs of plants outlined in the text. Take the students outside to examine the features of the school's existing kitchen gardens or to consider suitable locations to establish a class food garden. Research images of school food gardens. These can vary from re-used containers and wicking beds on a veranda, to raised garden beds or plots dug into the school grounds.

Nominate vegetables and herbs for planting from the **Gardenate** planting guide and research planting requirements. Older students can create a grid map of the garden beds and use a legend to plot positions of plantings.



Raised vegetable garden beds at Oxley Park Public School, 2019

3. What is compost?

Recall the ingredients and layers of the compost system described in 'A Patch from Scratch'. Take the students outside to investigate the school's compost bins and worm farms. Shovel a scoop of each layer of compost separately onto a tarpaulin for students to closely examine. Students smell and touch the bottom soil layer – the compost. They use sticks to separate the decomposing layers and magnifiers to examine the living and non-living components. Students draw and label their observations.

4. How can we propagate seeds?

Re-read the pages in 'A Patch from Scratch' that describe the family's visit to the plant nursery and the method used to propagate snow-pea seeds. Follow the instructions on the video and fact sheet **Newspaper pots** (2:53) to make newspaper plant pots using folded newspaper rolled around a narrow container. Working outside, students fill their pots with seed raising mix, plant two seeds per pot, label and water them. Place the pots in trays in a sunny outdoor spot, or in a greenhouse, watering regularly. Students observe and record stages of growth using a plant diary or garden journal. Once they have grown into seedlings, the whole pot can be planted directly into the ground.



Seedlings propagated in hand-made newspaper pots, St Clair Public School, 2019

5. How does the garden make us feel?

Revisit the illustrations in 'A Patch from Scratch'. How did the family members feel about their garden? What did they enjoy doing alone and together? How did the garden make them feel? Take the students outside into the school's vegetable garden or into a natural area of the school grounds. Students find their own spot in the garden and sit still and silently for about five minutes, looking around them, listening to sounds and reflecting on how it makes them feel. They use a Y chart to sketch or write what they hear and see and how they feel.

6. How can we prepare veggie dip cups as a healthy snack?

Harvest vegetables and herbs from the garden and use with vegetables such as celery, carrots, capsicum and cucumber to make a healthy snack of vegetables with hummus dip. Name the vegetables and their parts and discuss fruits and vegetables as healthy food choices. To prepare the veggie dip cups, place a scoop of hummus into each student's re-usable cup. Students add one of each of the pre-cut salad vegetable fingers standing upright in it and sprinkle some cut herbs on top. Seated in groups or a circle, students eat their veggie cups, reflecting on the flavours and textures. Compost organic waste for re-use in the garden.

Syllabus links

Early Stage 1 Science and technology – **Living world**

A student:

- develops solutions to an identified need STe-2DP-T
- explores the characteristics, needs and uses of living things STe-3LW-ST (**ACTDEK003**).

Early Stage 1 PDHPE – **Healthy, safe and active lifestyles**

A student:

- identifies actions that promote health, safety, wellbeing and physically active spaces PDe-7 (**ACPPS006**).

Stage 1 Science and technology – **Living world**

A student:

- uses materials, tools and equipment to develop solutions for a need or opportunity ST1-2DP-T
- identifies how plants and animals are used for food and fibre products ST1-5LW-T (**ACTDEK003**).

Stage 1 PDHPE – **Healthy, safe and active lifestyles**

A student:

- explores actions that help make home and school healthy, safe and physically active spaces PD1-7 (**ACPMP030**).

Experimenting

Produce compost. Research a recipe and apply the principles of **ADAM**(aliveness, diversity, aeration, moisture). Dig the compost through the soil in the school's kitchen gardens prior to planting.

Design and produce a sustainable planter pot. Re-purpose containers or objects for growing food plants. Discuss the sustainability benefits of re-using and re-purposing things. Establish the design criteria relating to size, volume, portability, soil-holding and water drainage. Students plant fruit and vegetable seeds or seedlings into their re-purposed pots, select suitable locations and care for them, solving problems as they arise, such as managing pests and providing plant supports.

Syllabus links

Stage 1 – Science and technology

A student:

- STI-2DP-T uses materials, tools and equipment to develop solutions for a need or opportunity (**ACTDEK003**)
- STI-4LW-S describes observable features of living things and their environments.

Stage 1 – Mathematics

A student:

- **MA1-9MG** measures, records, compares and estimates lengths and distances using uniform informal units, metres and centimetres.

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