

**DIVERSE READING IN SCHOOLS
ACROSS AGE-RANGES**

**A
TEACHERS' READING GROUP PAPER**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	2
Diversifying reading	3
Seeing reading	7
Hearing reading	9
Creating reading	10
Engaging reading	11
Reading three texts	12
<i>Milo Imagines the World</i>	12
<i>Corey's Rock</i>	14
<i>The Key to Flambards</i>	15
QUESTIONS	18
ACTIVITIES	20
REFERENCES	25
SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES	27

INTRODUCTION

This paper stems from our teaching and writing about English and literacy, both in school settings and at the university where we worked, across the early years, primary and secondary age-ranges. Mary Anne has experience working in early years and primary settings; Gabrielle has experience working in secondary settings. But we are both really interested in the relationships across all three. Our main audience for this paper is **Teachers' Reading Groups** such as those supported in the United Kingdom by the Open University (OU) and the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) and in the United States of America by the **Bank Street Children's Book Committee** (hereafter referred to as BSCBC), but our ideas will be of interest to other discussion groups as well (e.g. teachers working together in professional development, subject association or unit/department meetings). However, we particularly hope our work will be of benefit to teachers discussing reading across different age groups. Here, we mostly confine ourselves to reading across age-ranges from 5- to 13-year-olds.

Our musings began when we worked together on a Masters of Education (MEd) elective called 'Planning for Innovation in the English Curriculum'. It was offered to anyone working towards an MEd in the early years, primary or secondary age-range, thus bringing people together from across all phases. Important learning for us and for the participants stemmed from sharing ideas. There were constant discussions about ways of teaching reading or writing and, of course, about literature. Participants were often astonished to learn what other teachers in different phases were doing; it was by no means always what they expected. In addition, there were frequent practical exchanges of ideas such as when a secondary English teacher re-organised the layout of her

classroom along lines suggested by a primary colleague, establishing a pupil-run hot-desk as the first port-of-call for students experiencing difficulty with their work. Channelling problems through students first before taking them to the teacher led to interesting discussions about which the school's headteacher was extremely positive when she happened to visit a lesson where this approach was working successfully.

In *Reading and the Reader*, Philip Davis (2013) writes about reading as 'a holding-ground for thinking thoughts' (p. 13). A 'holding ground' is the part of an ocean floor with which a boat's anchor engages, steadying the boat to allow the crew to work or rest or undertake repairs. If Davis is right, readers not only need diversity of reading material, but also to experience it as a holding ground, offering them a chance for things like investigation or contemplation. How and when might reading in the classroom afford such opportunities? Teachers' Reading Groups provide an opportunity to share ideas about texts for class, group or independent reading, and for various purposes and pleasures (Cremin and Moss, 2018). However, Teachers' Reading Groups may also provide a holding ground for thinking thoughts about texts, readers' responses and classroom activities.

In the first part of this paper, we outline some of the theoretical perspectives and research which have informed our thinking. We also touch on general ideas about reading that, we argue, may be of relevance to readers across different age-ranges. Some of our ideas have been shared at UKLA International Conferences; others have grown out of our ongoing collaboration. Finally, we discuss three texts to illustrate some of the points we are making. In the remaining parts of the paper, we provide questions, activities and references as well as selected online resources. To summarise, the four parts of the paper are:

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES for teachers to read independently. We also outline ideas to help readers connect with challenging texts using three selected books as examples.

QUESTIONS for Teachers' Reading Groups to debate, making connections between theoretical perspectives and classroom experience.

ACTIVITIES for teachers to try out and then discuss in future Teachers' Reading Group meetings.

REFERENCES/SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES to enable teachers to find out more about the theoretical bases on which our ideas rest and discover further reading should they wish to.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In addition to our own research and thinking (e.g. Cliff Hodges, 2016; Wolpert in Wyse *et al.*, 2018), our work is deeply informed by influential educational reading researchers and writers such as Margaret Meek (1983; 1988; 1996; Meek *et al.* 1977). Like Meek, we argue that all readers of whatever age are entitled to learn that reading – whether undertaken as a shared experience or independently – is a dynamic, creative and often pleasurable process which may broaden horizons, provoke different ways of thinking, activate the imagination and offer diverse emotional nourishment.

Another ongoing influence on our thinking has been the **Teachers as Readers research** (see also Cremin *et al.*, 2014; Cremin *et al.*, 2015) which has done much to broaden reading teachers' horizons and those of young readers. This paper aims to explore some of that thinking further.

Since individual readers' tastes are often very different, reactions to class or group reading as well as to choice of independent reading will vary greatly. Discussion in classes or groups is one approach which may help to reconcile such

diversity. However, some readers also have similar tastes. For example, many people love series fiction and with good reason for, as a Year 6 child explained to Victor Watson:

when you begin a new novel ... it is like going into a room full of strangers, but reading the latest book in a series which you already know is like going into a room full of friends (Watson, 2000 p. 6).

Whatever readers' likes or dislikes, classrooms are places for talking about reading and – perhaps – encouraging new departures. As the Teachers as Readers research has stressed, it is also important for teachers themselves to be keen readers who can recommend varied texts and develop interesting ways of helping readers engage with them.

Reading is, of course, a vast area. We can therefore only focus on just a few aspects in this paper. We have divided them into five sections:

- Diversifying reading
- Seeing reading
- Hearing reading
- Creating reading
- Engaging reading

Then, in a section called 'Reading three texts', we write about three specific fiction texts, suggesting how and why reading, discussing and working in classes or groups might enable readers to deepen their insight into what this kind of reading can be like. The three texts we have chosen are: *Milo Imagines the World* (2021) by **Matt de la Peña** illustrated by **Christian Robinson**, *Corey's Rock* (2018) by **Sita Brahmachari**, illustrated by **Jane Ray**, and *The Key to Flambards* (2018) by **Linda Newbery**. We know that teachers will want to explore other texts for themselves but may also wish to try out some of our suggestions.

DIVERSIFYING READING

Texts for young readers span a very wide range so there are numerous ways to diversify reading. Nonetheless, what is read in schools is sometimes still overly homogeneous, arguably constrained by curricular and assessment pressures or, indeed, by teachers' own knowledge of what is available. However, there is rich diversity within literature for young readers so a Teachers' Reading Group can be a place to share ideas about how and why to acknowledge it. Support is at hand from resources such as the [OU Reading for Pleasure website](#) with its [Texts and Authors](#) recommendations. The BSCBC [Best Children's Books of the Year](#) lists (including the [2022 list](#)) also provide a rich range of reading reviews covering material of all kinds and for all ages, as does [Books for Keeps](#). In this paper we focus on just two examples of diversity: firstly, **representation** within texts; secondly, variety of **text types**. We recognise, though, that Teachers' Reading Groups will want to extend these ideas in many different directions.

REPRESENTATION

Arguments for diversity within reading material often focus on representation. For example, Rudine Sims Bishop's foundational article, [Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors](#) (1990), stresses the importance for readers of colour of being able to read widely about people with whom they identify. More recently, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) in [Reflecting Realities](#) (2021) has shown how under-represented Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) characters still are in United Kingdom children's literature, a situation their research reports urgently seek to change. Other distinctive identities are also under-represented in children's literature, for example people with a disability; people who are neurodivergent; people living in rural poverty; those who identify

as Lesbian, Gay, Binary, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ). We feel it is important to recognise the voices and cultures of all kinds of readers in books shared with young people.

Given the tremendous variety of languages readers bring to many classrooms, it is also vital that the texts and discussions shared in all schools acknowledge and champion linguistic diversity. Language is inextricably linked to a person's sense of identity, their home environment, culture and self-esteem. Reading offers a way to cross cultural boundaries, through the sharing of languages, histories, myths, legends and stories.

However, diversity of representation in itself is not sufficient; texts still need to be readable and nourishing, not merely tokenistic. Moreover, as teachers we should not necessarily assume that all readers wish to read about those who are like them. Jia Wei Lim's small-scale research with post-16 readers studying for a Literature in English qualification in Malaysia found that students sometimes preferred reading English rather than Malaysian literature. As Lim (2021) suggests, the issue is complex, not least – perhaps – because of how and why different literature is included in curricular and examination specifications as well as how it is taught and assessed. More than three decades ago, Susanna Scafe (1989) was arguing that **all** literature, not just some, should be subjected to comparable critical, cultural and artistic analysis rather than merely being used as a vehicle for learning what certain people or places are like. That still remains the case.

TEXT TYPES

It is important to consider diversity in other ways as well, for example variety of text types. Teachers' Reading Groups will have their own recommendations to make. Below, in no particular order, are a few which interest us.

▪ Graphic novels

Graphic novels may be popular for some but are not often read as class or group readers because of their perceived challenges. How can pictures be read aloud? In Planning for Innovation in English Teaching (Cliff Hodges, Binney & Evans, 2010), Alison Binney explores the affordances of a wordless graphic novel, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006), as a class reader for a group of 13-year-olds, arguing that 'every picture tells a story' (Cliff Hodges, Binney & Evans, 2010, pp. 17-26). The BSCBC provides recommendations of graphic novels appropriate across age-ranges.

▪ Comics

Lucia Cedeira Serantes' research, 'The possibilities of comics reading' (2018), reminds us that comics can present tricky decisions for reading such as what order to read image, text or graphics in, and what difference such choices make. Nonetheless comics are much-loved, often intricate, culturally significant and, for all these reasons, very important.

▪ Magazines

Many readers prize magazines which, as well as being a text type themselves, contain numerous different text types within them e.g. feature articles; letters; interviews; stories. Studying magazines in groups or classes, as we have described in our vignette of an English trainee teacher working with 11- to 12-year-olds (Pollard, 2019),¹ is an ideal opportunity for readers to learn about how their own preferred

magazines work, as well as 'about different magazines than those they read themselves' (*ibid.*, p. 344). It is also, of course, a way for teachers to learn about individual readers' diverse interests.

▪ Multimodal texts

Multimodal texts – whether filmic, televisual or digital – can make for powerful reading through which readers enhance both their literacy and their learning. Power-up Literacy: Technology and Multimodality within the Extended Classroom (2018) by Petula Bhojwani and Craig Wilkie offers a range of thoughtful suggestions for teachers wanting readers in their classrooms to respond to multimodal texts or create their own for other readers. Chapter 16 in *Teaching Primary English: Subject Knowledge and Classroom Practice* by Eve Bearne and David Reedy (2018), 'Multimodal, Multimedia and Digital Texts',² also makes clear why it is so important to incorporate work on multimodal texts in classrooms, as does Eve Bearne and Kat Vallely's UKLA Occasional Paper: Multimodality. The following understanding is key: 'The multidimensional texts that children are familiar with are constructed in different ways from print texts and so have different affordances and demand different ways of making sense of them. In terms of communicating meaning, affordance is about what it is possible to do with one mode or another, or with a combination of modes. Getting a message across clearly and effectively means choosing combinations of mode(s) and media according to what they afford, or make possible' (Bearne and Vallely (n/d, p. 4).

▪ Information texts

Another text type is the information, or non-fiction text. Zoe, a secondary school science

¹ This chapter, Chapter 11 'Pedagogy', in Pollard (2019) was jointly written by Gabrielle Cliff Hodges and Mary Anne Wolpert.

² There is a whole chapter on multimodality in Bearne, E. & Reedy, D. (2023 forthcoming). *Teaching Primary English: Subject Knowledge and Classroom Practice 2nd edition*. London: Routledge.

teacher, explains the pleasure and value she found in such reading material as a young reader:

I started to understand the rules which governed non-fiction books. The inaugural contents page which would set up my expectations as a reader and the terminal index provided me with easy access to the secrets within. Glossaries in particular hold a revered position in my memories. Upon reading a new word for the first time I would refer to the glossary to elucidate the meaning and then in my head I would roll the word around on my tongue manipulating it like a small child with a building block. Frustrated with the lack of similar signposts in fiction works I listed new words on the pasted down endpaper of fiction books. (Pollard, 2019, p. 387).³

Zoe is by no means alone in her enthusiasm for information texts, but we wonder where, when and how often whole groups study their multi-faceted appeal. 'Reading for information ... is about thinking, wondering, and sometimes understanding, with the ever-present possibility of being unsettled ... The real problem is an intellectual one' writes Meek (1996, p. 12). Readers may not realise the intellectual challenges afforded by such texts (or by other types of reading) unless there is a chance to share and talk about them explicitly and, indeed, for learners to realise that their teachers may well read information texts for pleasure, not just fiction as is sometimes assumed. At a Reading for Pleasure Conference held in June 2022, a leader of a Teachers' Reading Group who is an avid **Reading Teacher**, shared how her class did not perceive her as a reader of information texts, despite her enthusiasm. In addition, it may be valuable for readers (not least teachers) to learn that not everyone reads these – or any texts, for that matter – in the same way. Dara

McAnulty, for example, in *Diary of a Young Naturalist* (2020), comments tellingly on why information texts are important to him as someone with autism. From a young age he used to wake early and enjoy hearing a blackbird singing, but the bird's song never lasted for very long and the interruption always threatened to unseat him completely until he realised that reading might offer an answer. The books he read, he says:

had to have accurate illustrations and lots of information. The books helped bridge my blackbird dream. They connected me to the bird, physically ... reading taught me that the blackbird would come back (p. 16).

▪ Poetry

Poetry is a vital form of literature in which both writers and readers have a crucial role to play. As David Constantine (2013) argues:

The poem, not there even to the poet until its realization in a particular rhythm, is still only latently there when it appears in print on a page. The reader is a vital participant in the making of a poem ...

Realization – making real and, as part of that, having things dawn on you as you read or write – is a fair word to describe a good deal of what goes on in the writing and reading of a poem (p. 8).

Moreover, Simon Armitage (2021) insists on the need to find

the equilux between writer and reader, when the amount of daylight in a poem – that which is clear – and the amount of night-time in a poem – that which must be imagined or figured – correspond (p. 304).

Put another way again, this time by Seamus Heaney (1995), poetry offers the chance

within our individual selves [to] reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the

³ This chapter, Chapter 12 'Communication', in Pollard (2019) was jointly written by Gabrielle Cliff Hodges and Mary Anne Wolpert.

practical and the poetic; to affirm also that each form of knowledge redresses the other and that the frontier between them is there for the crossing (p. 203).

Heaney writes about just such frontier-crossing in his poem 'Lightenings viii' (1991). A ship appears in the air above monks praying in an oratory. Its anchor becomes hooked into the altar rails, bringing the ship to a standstill. Rather than finding a 'holding place', though, the anchor endangers the life of the crewman who shimmies down a rope to try and release it.

'This man can't bear our life here and will drown,'

The abbot said, 'unless we help him.' So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man
climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it (p.62).

Members of Teachers' Reading Groups can share their own experiences of poetic frontier-crossing between the practical and the marvellous and what kinds of 'holding places' may (or may not) be created for contemplation of poetry in the classroom. New poetry publications may also make for interesting discussion, for example *Be Thankful for Trees* (2022) by Harriet Ziefert, illustrated by Brian Fitzgerald, an information book written in rhyming couplets, or Dara McNulty's book, *Wild Child: A Journey through Nature* (2021), an information/guide book – with glossary – written in poetry and prose and illustrated by Barry Falls. In a different vein, an anthology such as Sarah Crossan's *Tomorrow is Beautiful: Poems to Comfort, Uplift and Delight* (2021) makes poetic diversity accessible, not only because it comprises such a variety of poems and poets, but also because it includes the anthologist's own comments, almost as if she is sitting beside the reader. On the other hand, readers may prefer the performances of rappers or poets like Kae Tempest e.g. [Salt Coast](#), or hearing the

words and rhythms of song lyrics. Whatever readers' preferences, though, classroom sharing and talk may spark new affiliations.

SEEING READING

The phrase ‘seeing reading’ invites teachers to view their classrooms as others may do, whether they be the readers who learn in those classrooms or adult visitors who might come in for any number of reasons. The central purpose of this section on ‘seeing reading’ is to encourage teachers to analyse reading from others’ perspectives, in particular thinking about what visible messages – both overt and subliminal – the readers and any visitors might glean.

▪ Addressing stereotypes

It is thought-provoking to discuss with groups or classes what someone reading might look like. Reading is an activity which is all too easy to stereotype. If young people are asked to draw or imagine a person reading, what might they conjure up in their mind’s eye? Quite often, they might respond with a conventional image of someone wearing glasses, sitting silently absorbed in a book rather than outside playing sport, despite what they actually do themselves or see happening around them. In coming up with a stereotypical image, they are likely to be creating what James Gee has termed ‘figured worlds’ (Cliff Hodges, 2016, p. 117) i.e. perspectives which simplify, rather than represent, reality. If you press them further, the figured worlds may start to unravel, not least if the speakers themselves are readers. For example, they may make exceptions of themselves, admit they do enjoy reading and often go on to describe where and how they prefer to read out of school. If any one of them is courageous enough to say what they really think, others may follow.

▪ Making funds of knowledge visible

The idea of funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), i.e. the knowledge which students bring from home to school and which

therefore has the potential to support their learning, has become widespread in recent years. In Cremin *et al.*’s study (2015), teachers and researchers undertook what they called Learner Visits to some of the children’s homes and were astonished to see for themselves the funds of knowledge there were to support literacy in school. For example, they could see ‘the range of reading material on nature and the countryside scattered around the house’ (p.77), just some of the texts that 5-year-old Cole was drawing on to support his fascination with birds, wildlife and the natural world but of which they had hitherto been unaware. They also observed 10/11-year-old Idris and his parents and siblings sharing books and reading together in their home (pp. 101-104). If Learner Visits are not feasible, readers could create rivers of reading collages⁴ instead as another way to ‘see’ the reading young people do.

▪ Young people’s views of how reading is taught

Researcher and former teacher, Veronica Hanke (2014), worked with 4- to 7-year-olds to demonstrate the rich insights of readers (even the very youngest) making visible how they perceive reading being taught. Hanke photocopied simple sketched outlines of a group involved in guided reading and gave them to children she observed being taught in this way. She asked them to develop, annotate and discuss their drawings, making their perceptions visible to help her understand. ‘The study highlights the importance of gaining pupil perspectives ... [which] ... may not be those which a teacher or researcher might expect, but can provide important insights into how they engage with classroom-based literacy practices’ (p. 142).

⁴ You can find more information about rivers of reading in Cliff Hodges (2010) and Little (2021), as well as how to create them on the [Lost Wor\(l\)ds website](#).

- **Designing reading spaces**

Making visible the variety of spaces in which people read can be instructive across age-ranges, enabling teachers to learn more about children as readers. Work undertaken by architecture and education PhD researcher, Emma Dyer, has influenced our thinking and would make a topic for discussion in Teachers' Reading Groups. In [**A Tiny Clinic for the Soul? Beginner Readers and the Reading Nook**](#), Dyer explores her prototype for a reading nook for beginner readers in primary schools, drawing on her expertise in both architecture and early years education. What work such as this does is foreground some of the taken-for-granted features of reading spaces within schools. Ideas on the OU [**Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy**](#) site also provide rich examples of how teachers, with their pupils, can conceptualise reading spaces.

- **How different readers see what they are reading**

Another interesting point for discussion in the classroom is for teachers to encourage readers to share what they see in their mind's eye when they are reading for themselves or being read to. It is common to assume that everyone sees pictures of some sort in their mind's eye, but that is not necessarily the case. Some people see colours or shadows rather than pictorial images, something which is likely to have a significant impact on how readers are asked to talk or write about their reading.

HEARING READING

In this section we explore the ‘sounds of reading’ we might expect to hear when texts are being read aloud in classrooms across the age-ranges. We discuss how hearing reading may make a positive difference to readers, for example hearing the drama of texts when they are being read aloud, or the characteristic rhythms of stories being told in different languages. We also refer to aspects of audible reading such as the interpretation of texts through reading aloud; the sound of poetry being spoken or read; and readers listening and responding to one another’s stories. In order to provide such a rich diversity of sounds, the texts available to readers need to be as varied as possible, in terms of the people and places they are about, the languages they are written in, and the types of texts they are.

▪ Reading aloud

What is heard in the classroom while a text is read aloud: the richness of the text; readers’ responses such as laughter, gasps of horror; a quiet so profound you can hear a pin drop? What makes a great ‘read aloud’: the text; the reader; the performance? At its best, reading aloud can provide holistic experiences with language, giving readers experiences with different genres, authors and illustrators, promoting dialogic discourse, reading-writing connections and sociocultural interactions (Sipe, 2008). It is also instructive to consider what can be heard when listening to readers discussing their reading and debating different viewpoints. Does/could this include a variety of languages?

▪ What gets read aloud?

A discussion topic for Teachers’ Reading Groups is *what* gets read aloud, not just published work of all kinds (e.g. fiction, non-fiction, poetry), but also young people’s own writing which can showcase the languages they may prefer to

write in and make audible how listeners respond. Many young people like writing to entertain others. Reading their work aloud allows them to hear whether they are succeeding.

▪ Reading poetry

Hearing poetry read aloud can help make *meaning* audible. Seamus Heaney once said he did not understand T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* until he heard their rhythmic quality: ‘What I *heard* made sense’ (Heaney quoted in Cliff Hodges, 2011 p. 95). Readers across the age-range can benefit from hearing parts of unfamiliar texts read aloud so that for them, too, what they hear makes sense. For the youngest of readers, listening to and participating in the musical quality of rhymes and rhythmic texts is an early step into reading, and for bilingual and multilingual readers across the age-ranges, hearing the ‘sounds of reading’ through patterns and structures of language across a variety of poetic forms is a way of making sense of text.

▪ Hearing text structure

Research into the impact of teachers reading whole texts aloud rapidly on secondary age readers’ comprehension is also instructive. Westbrook *et al.* (2018) found that the teacher reading aloud a whole text in consecutive lessons without any intervening questioning or discussion had a noticeable impact on adolescent readers, especially those who were less confident: ‘in a faster read, the text becomes coherent, reading experienced as a collaboratively constructed, active and engaged process’ (p. 67). Readers are not only given a chance to immerse themselves completely in the narrative, but also to hear how the overarching structure of a text is shaped, able to make sense of it as if they are listening to a fully orchestrated musical score, not simply individual instrumental lines.

CREATING READING

This section provides an opportunity to reflect further on what readers learn from creating texts themselves. Such texts enable them to draw on their own lives and funds of knowledge or, if they prefer, on imagined worlds. Creating and presenting their own texts also involves thinking about their audience's responses to what those texts are actually about, not merely to surface features such as handwriting or spelling.

▪ Writing texts

Writing texts involves authors in all sorts of decisions about how to arrange, organise and present their material and to learn what effects their creative decisions have on readers, listeners or viewers. How other people respond – both at the drafting stage and when a text has been completed – is often a crucial part of the creating reading process. Decisions about what mode(s) to adopt and seeing what the challenges are from a maker's perspective, are also very important. Donald Graves's book, *Writing: Teachers & Children at Work* (1983), remains a significant text (old but gold!) for teachers who want to encourage young people to write. Graves is renowned for taking a workshop approach to writing and, crucially, talking (or conferencing, as he called it) with young writers about all aspects of the texts they create.

▪ Embodying texts

Improvisation and drama can be effective ways to create texts to be 'read' by classroom audiences. Many students of all ages also relish the chance to re-create scenes from existing plays, thinking about how to stage them in the classroom. As already discussed in *Researching and Teaching Reading: Developing Pedagogy through Critical Enquiry* (Cliff Hodges 2016), the banquet scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is

particularly productive for debating staging since students have to decide whether the part of Banquo's ghost is going to be embodied by an actor or evoked in imagination only e.g. via Macbeth's gaze and other characters' reactions to it. Either way, the issue cannot be evaded. Related discussion, to decide on things like staging, costumes, make-up, props or lighting (using whatever may be to hand e.g. mobile phone torches or window blinds – nothing fancy) also has to be held in the light of the text since that is all that the playwright left us.

ENGAGING READING

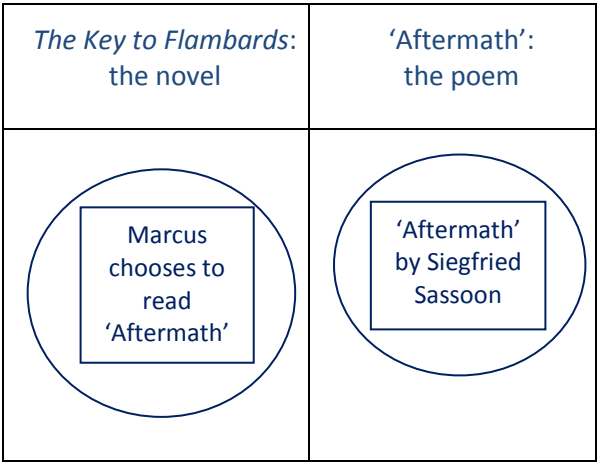
One element that is important in classroom reading is how to help readers engage with an unfamiliar text and what may also be the unfamiliar worlds they encounter within it. The word ‘engagement’ is pertinent in this context because it has a number of nuanced meanings all of which suggest some kind of contract or affiliation between two or more parties, as – of course – is the case with reading when reader and text meet. Engagement can be pleasurable or sad, formal or informal, aggressive (as in fighting when two parties clash) or compliant (as in building when two components interlock). In relation to any texts, readers are required to engage with features such as narratives, rhymes, characters or settings. At times, too, however, readers are required to engage with other texts within and beyond the boundaries of the one in front of them, consequently becoming acquainted with other worlds which they may not initially have felt were for them.

In this section, we wish to outline three particular elements of reading which we have found productive to discuss with others and between ourselves as facets of reading engagement. They are intertextuality, microtextuality and transtextuality.

Intertextuality

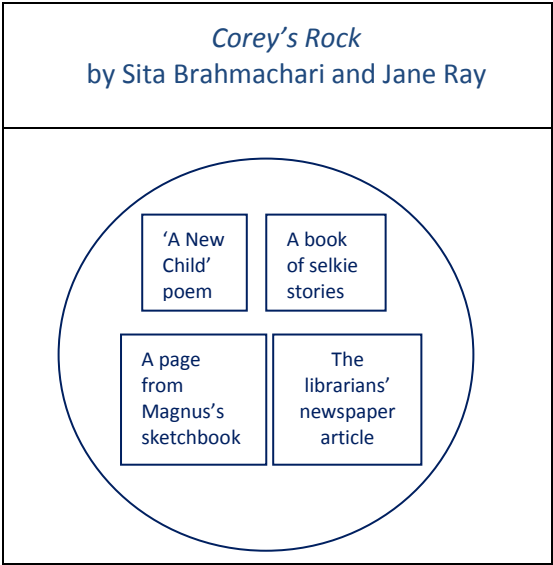
Intertextuality – a powerful form of reciprocal relationship between texts – is, we would argue, a particular strength of many kinds of reading because it expressly encourages readers to make connections **between** diverse forms of textuality. It is, of course, a key way in which reading one text can lead on to another. Exploring how a text may be related to other anthologies, novels, plays, films, pictures, comics (the list is endless!) could encourage the diversity of reading we discussed at the start of this paper, an approach which is purposeful in

itself as well as fostering a reader’s engagement with whatever text is being read.



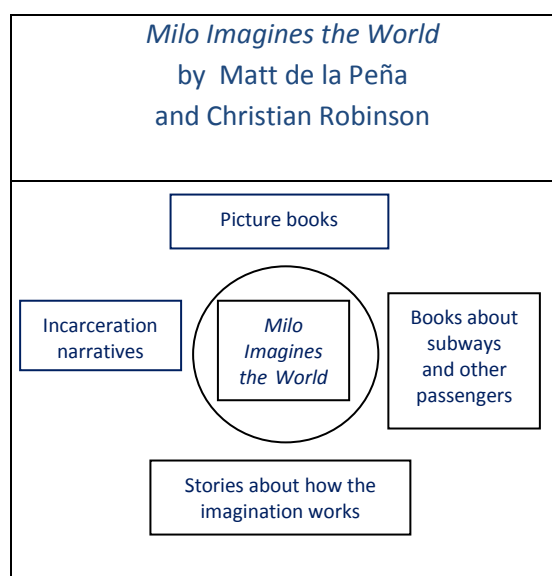
Microtextuality

Microtextuality is a term we have coined to describe the many types of texts which are included **within** a main text and help to move it forward e.g. letters, poems, emails, advertisements embedded within a novel, say. Microtexts offer rich potential for discussion but also show how the text within which they occur is a complex construction, fashioned out of multiple other texts.



▪ Transtextuality

Transtextuality is the term we decided to use in general to refer to text types or themes which connect readers with other texts **beyond** the one being read.⁵ However, the concept of transtextuality relies on having some breadth of textual knowledge. Readers discussing transtextuality when reading *Milo Imagines the World*, for instance, might be thinking about it as an example of the genre of picture books, comparing it with others they have read; alternatively, they could be thinking about its transtextuality in generic or thematic terms e.g. as a narrative about incarceration or about how the imagination works.



⁵ In case you are wondering, we are not using the term 'transtextuality' in the same way as the French literary theorist, Gérard Genette, used it. We mean something rather simpler. Nor do we feel that a comparable term, 'extratextuality' has quite the same meaning as we want either. It was kindly suggested by Australian colleagues in our UKLA International Conference presentation in 2019 – 'Read, write, think: How reading literary writing develops thinking, imagining and understanding' – but we feel that the prefix 'extra' suggests detachment rather than an extended (and connected) reach.

READING THREE TEXTS

MILO IMAGINES THE WORLD

In Matt de la Peña's and Christian Robinson's picture book, *Milo Imagines the World* (2021/2), a young boy, accompanied by his older sister, people-watches on a regular subway journey and speculates about other people's lives. Milo's destination is initially unknown to readers/viewers, although a sense of an impending, suspenseful climax builds from the start.

These monthly Sunday subway rides are never-ending, and as usual, Milo is a shook-up soda.

Why the 'monthly'? Why is Milo 'shook-up'? And, later, why is Milo's sister 'a shook-up soda, too'? To pass the time on the journey while his sister is absorbed with games on her phone, Milo observes fellow passengers and uses a notebook to sketch the places he imagines they will be going to after they reach their stop. He draws scenes inspired by the people around him, making 'pictures of their lives'. But when he sees his own reflection in the subway window, he begins to wonder what others must think when they see him – and what others *don't* see when they look at him – for example, the volcano poem he recites in class; his mum reading him a bedtime book over the phone; his auntie cooking for him in her apartment near the cemetery. These are deeply personal moments for him, but ones he realises define him. He starts to reconfigure his sketches: a lonely-looking man could have a wife and two children at home; a woman in a wedding dress could be marrying another woman; a crew of break dancers could be welcomed back home in a 'fancy neighbourhood' rather than being met with angry faces. De la Peña and Robinson grapple with issues of race in their treatment of the break dancers. When Milo imagines the

break dancers' life outside of the subway, he imagines that 'even after the performances are over, faces still follow their every move'. Milo revises and reimagines the stories he has seen everywhere on his journey. He is learning that he should not pass judgement on people based on their exterior appearance.

On a pivotal spread, Milo locks eyes with a boy in a suit whom he saw earlier had boarded the train with his dad. Robinson shows both boys looking out of the subway window with a direct gaze at the reader. Milo initially noted that the boy's hair is 'a perfect part and there's not a single scuff on his bright white Nikes'. He had imagined the boy being driven by carriage to his castle and met by a butler, two maids and a gourmet chef (with crust-free sandwich squares). However now, as he exits the subway, he sees the boy a few paces ahead of him at their joint destination. In the final subtle and poignant spreads, it is revealed that both boys are on a journey to visit their incarcerated mothers as they line up to pass through the prison's metal detector. Finally, Milo flips through his notebook to find the picture he hopes will bring a smile to his mum's face. The book begins and ends with his own drawings of joy. Milo gets the last word.

This is a picture book that sees individuals in their complicated totality, not reducing them to a narrative convention. In Freire's often-cited idea, there is a dynamic relationship between 'reading the word' and 'reading the world' (Freire quoted in Kesler *et al.*, 2020, p. 209) in which the two exist in a constant feedback loop of one affecting the other. De la Peña and Robinson seem to argue that it is dangerous to try to read the world because the world is not built on narrative tropes; rather, it is a network of complex individuals with unpredictable characteristics.

Milo Imagines The World has been marketed as a picture book for 4- to 10-year-old readers, but for readers of any age, what are the intertextual connections that can be made? This is a book that was created by an American author and American illustrator of different heritages. The setting is a New York subway ride with a Black boy, encountering characters of different identities, visiting his incarcerated mother. How does this resonate with readers of different ages and cultural backgrounds? The illustrator, Robinson, himself was unfamiliar with the distinct setting (he lives in Los Angeles) and researched extensively to ensure that his images were authentic.

The book offers interesting examples of intertextuality and microtextuality on many levels. We start with the artwork. Robinson uses blunt strokes that evoke young children's crayon drawings for Milo's sketches and colourful paint and collage art to illustrate the journey. Chunky, brightly-coloured geometric shapes depict the humans Milo encounters *en route* against the various subway stations' industrial colour schemes. Readers, with their teachers, could explore different urban settings and transport systems depicted in a range of picture books and also texts that are illustrated with child-like drawings. Where do Milo's narrative tropes evoked in his sketches come from? Which texts is he drawing on when he includes castles, carriages and drawbridges? He realises that his drawings (which act as their own picture book) do not live up to the complexity of what he is trying to illustrate or that he is starting to see within himself. In Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) terms, Milo sees windows into the lives of people who are different from him, and also mirrors of his own experience and sliding glass doors between different worlds.

Milo Imagines the World is shelved under the vast category of picture books but opens up the possibility for broad discussion about the purpose and audience for this genre. How can/should/could books in the overarching category be marketed, but more importantly, appreciated? In this particular instance, for example, a theme of the book is the visit of Milo to his incarcerated mother. Discussions around transtextuality might lead in this direction and to ideas about family and, as we hear about Milo's mother reading him a bedtime story over the phone, the importance of reading in any space and situation.

COREY'S ROCK

Sita Brahmachari's and Jane Ray's illustrated story, *Corey's Rock* (2018), told in 96 pages with poetic language and soft wash illustrations, is a poignant tale for our times. It evokes the plight of migrants and refugees drowning at sea and reflects on grief, loss, family, togetherness and healing. Ray's endpapers perfectly capture the essence of the story. The first is of a beautiful, yet empty horizon and the final an image of a family embracing, looking out to sea – a liminal space for the reader to contemplate. The sea is ever present – textually and visually – in the story.

Ten-year-old Isla is struggling to cope with the death of her beloved younger brother Corey, her mother's heartbreak, and the move within Scotland from Edinburgh to a small island community in the Orkneys with her parents and dog. The book opens with Isla and her parents standing on a grey rock they name after Corey, scattering five rose petals out to sea, a petal for every birthday they had with him. 'Time to say goodbye,' Mum says. Yet saying goodbye is hard. Every day, Isla and her father sit on Corey's rock while her mother is too traumatised to join them. Starting a new school,

Isla feels everything is wrong, despite the thoughtfulness of a particular friend, Magnus. Her classmates question her origins: 'But where are you really from?' Isla is a child of an inter-racial marriage. Both her parents are Scots; her white mother's family is originally from the Orkneys, her black father's originally from Africa. As Isla considers her identity and the grief her family feel, transitions between folklore and personal experience are interwoven in story and art.

As with *Milo Imagines the World*, intertextuality in this book has a visual, as well as a textual form. Ray draws on ancient Celtic knot design, including it, in her words on the dedication page, as 'symbolic of the Orcadian culture that Isla's mother was born into'. In her research, she found that the same design features in the traditional beadwork of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, where Isla's grandparents on her father's side originate: 'Such connection across continents and cultures seemed to sum up completely the message of Isla's beautiful story'.

Brahmachari's text is imbued with references to selkie stories, marine legends that tell of people who are half seal and half human. Isla dreams of the selkie, imprinted in her mind from the selkie story her father has told her. Visiting the local library, kind librarians, aware of the family tragedy, help Isla find books about selkies, and she reads about how Celtic tales say they are the souls of those who have drowned and sometimes these lost souls are permitted to leave the sea for just one night and return to their human form. The legend, the sea and Corey converge in her grief-ridden dreams and, as she imagines her dead brother swimming freely in the sea, she slowly starts to be able to come to terms with her loss.

Corey's Rock is written in poetic prose and, during Isla's dream sequences, in free verse. The

latter is the over-riding example of microtextual types within this narrative. However, there is also an explicit reference to a particular text which informs the story. As Isla's mother starts to find some peace in her new environment, through returning to her original work as a midwife, we learn about the poetry book she is reading and a particular poem within it, *A New Child* by George Mackay Brown, which is sung by Isla's father. It evokes the 'beautiful tale of Magnus' who is a 'good angel'. Magnus is also the name of Isla's new, gentle friend at school and, as Isla discovers on her visit to the library, he has already painted a picture of Corey's rock which hangs on the wall there. Microtextuality can take textual and visual forms.

This illustrated book also offers many opportunities for transtextual discussion. There is currently an increasing plethora of published free verse novels, especially for older readers, and *Corey's Rock* provides a welcome transitional read, in addition to being a high quality text for readers across the 8-13 age range. The book's rich themes include, to name but a few: displacement from the urban to the rural; alienation; the power of storytelling and myth; the power of image with word.

THE KEY TO FLAMBARDS

The Key to Flambards draws on the Flambards series of novels (1967-1981) written by K. M. Peyton. In their time, they were very popular with many young readers, especially – but not solely – any who loved horses. *The Key to Flambards* is a sequel to Peyton's novels, but also stands alone in its own right. There are several reasons why, in our view, it offers opportunities for engaging classroom study (though Teachers' Reading Groups may disagree!). It is set in a large old fictional house called Flambards situated in a rural part of Essex in southern England. Generations of a family

called Russell have lived there. Now, though, the original Russells have long gone and Flambards has become a charitable centre for short courses like art, dance or photography. The centre is financially hard-pressed and under threat of closure.

A teenage girl called Grace and her recently-divorced mother, Polly, (twenty-first century descendants of the Russells) spend the summer at Flambards in order for Polly to work on publicity for the centre. Early on in the novel, it gradually emerges that Grace has recently been hit by a car and has had her lower leg amputated. Previously, she had been a keen runner so is deeply dispirited about not being able to continue with that particular passion. While at Flambards, she makes friends with Marcus and Jamie, two cousins who live nearby and go to the local comprehensive school where Jamie's parents teach. Grace is lent a pony which she learns to ride, enabling her to regain some of her former freedom.

Grace and Polly are aware of, but not very knowledgeable about, their Russell ancestry. Roger, the Flambards centre manager, uses genealogy resources like Ancestry.com to research the Russell family history. Gradually, connections are made between earlier generations of the Russell family and the people who live and work at Flambards in 2018. For example, readers learn that early twentieth-century Russells were killed or bereaved in the First World War. In one case, a man was horribly wounded, losing half his face: not only did he subsequently have to live with this dreadful injury, but his situation is one with which Grace cannot help but compare her own.

2018 was the centenary of the First World War Armistice. Newbery imagines Roger organising an event to commemorate it. Grace agrees to read from Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*

(1933) and Jamie from E. M. Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). Marcus reads Siegfried Sassoon's First World War poem, 'Aftermath' (1919/1983), an especially powerful choice since much of the novel is, in fact, about aftermaths: not only is Grace contending with the aftermath of her amputation and her parents' divorce, but also Adrian, Marcus's father, is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as an aftermath of serving in Afghanistan.

The Key to Flambards offers plenty of opportunities to work with the concepts of intertextuality, microtextuality and transtextuality. In terms of intertextuality, for example, (in addition to the examples already given above) Jamie is passionate about wildlife and anxious about loss of habitats if the proposed new housing on Flambards land is agreed by the centre's trustees to solve their financial difficulties. Overt intertextual references position Jamie as an admirer of [Chris Packham](#), the BBC's [Springwatch](#) presenter whom many young readers will already know. Chris Packham has publicly been very open about having Asperger's Syndrome and what being neurodivergent means within his life. He is also a high-profile campaigner and activist on numerous issues related to wildlife, the environment and climate change.

The Key to Flambards is dependent on a wide range of microtexts to support and propel the narrative. For example many different types of texts such as family history records, war memorials, letters and poetry are not only mentioned but play a part in furthering the plot as well. Grace and her best friend, Marie-Louise, exchange text messages and emails which enable readers to remain abreast of their friendship. Genealogy websites and radio interviews are introduced as a way for contemporary characters to reflect on the past.

As the sequel to a series of existing novels *The Key to Flambards* provides opportunities for transtextual discussion. However, since the original Flambards series is now quite old, many readers may not have encountered it. That does not matter since other more recent young adult reading is mentioned in the text, for example the novels of Anne Cassidy and Patrick Ness which Grace and Marie-Louise have been reading and which provide opportunities for transtextual consideration.

Finale

It is instructive to remember that future readers of *The Key to Flambards*, who might well have read *Milo Imagines the World* or *Corey's Rock* when they were younger, will not be encountering ideas about how people imagine the world for the first time. On the contrary, readers across the age-ranges should all be able to state from their prior reading experiences that 'Maybe you can't really know anyone just by looking at their face' when they read how Grace imagines other people's perspectives or thinks she knows how they see her.

Indeed, when these same readers – at post-16 or university level – read Virginia Woolf's short story, 'An Unwritten Novel' (2001), in which the first-person narrator mis-imagines the life of a fellow traveller on the train, they will not be encountering this trope for the first time either. Nor will they be encountering concepts such as intertextuality or microtextuality anew. Rather, they will be revisiting them in a different context and, perhaps, experiencing a sense of familiar concepts in new places. For example, if readers of *Milo Imagines the World* have been encouraged to see 'individuals in their complicated totality ... not reducing them to a narrative convention' (see our section about *Milo* on p. 12), or if readers of *Corey's Rock* have discussed what 'the purpose of art and stories' might be in relation to selkie stories (see our

section on *Corey's Rock* p. 14), then such concepts will be recognised when they are once again encountered in *The Key to Flambards* and beyond.

The three texts we have chosen to discuss in this document, like almost all good literature for young readers, contain ideas and themes which some young people will find challenging and – possibly – upsetting. They are a poignant reminder of our responsibilities as teachers to read in advance the material we intend to share with our classes so we are aware of what lies ahead. They also remind us of the need to know as much as we can about the children and young people in our classes (although we can never, of course, know everything) in order to make appropriate decisions about what and how we read together in school.

QUESTIONS

The following questions are suggested for teachers to address in Teachers' Reading Groups, as well as any of their own they might also wish to explore.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DIVERSIFYING READING

- What would be three of your **Top Texts** for diversifying reading in your own work context?
- What experience are you able to share of working with one of the text types discussed in this paper (pp. 4-6), or with a text type not featured here?
- What, in your experience, are young readers' responses to texts perceived as relevant to them e.g. those which **reflect their realities**?

QUESTIONS ABOUT SEEING READING

- If you ask young readers either to draw or describe a 'typical reader' what are the results and what further conversations might then take place?
- What difference do individual reading choices seem to make to what counts as reading, especially when readers are asked to bring their own reading matter into school?
- What is your experience of sharing YouTube films with readers e.g. **Michael Rosen's performance of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*** or **Kae Tempest's *Salt Coast***?
- What, in your own work context, might an ideal **reading nook** in school look like?
- What do your students see in their mind's eye when they read? What difference does what they say make to the way you teach?

QUESTIONS ABOUT HEARING READING

- How and why do the sounds of reading support developing readers in your teaching?
- What might you hear in your classroom when you listen to children reading and talking about texts? How might hearing talk and conversations about reading be important?
- What might children learn from listening to you as the teacher reading and talking about texts?
- When a class or group is talking about reading, who is doing the talking, and are the readers talking with each other? To what extent are their thoughts controlled by, and channelled through an adult? What impact might this have?
- What, in your experience, have been the results of reading a whole text through without stopping to discuss any of it until it is finished?
- In English, literacy or any lesson, how much variety is there in what is read aloud? Do you re-read texts aloud (for example poems), or is a single reading deemed sufficient?
- Is the reading aloud usually done by the teacher? How often do students read their own work aloud to a friend, a small group or the whole class, giving them, as authors, a chance to hear their peers' responses?

QUESTIONS ABOUT CREATING READING

- What have been your most, and least, productive experiences of young people creating texts for others to read? Why do you think that was?
- What are some of the pros and cons of young people creating traditional texts such as print-based and illustrated books or picture books versus newer texts like blogs and websites?

- What benefits or disadvantages do you observe when writers read their own work aloud to listeners, either face-to-face in pairs or to a larger group?
 - What experiences have you had in the classroom of occasions of embodied reading visibly supporting understanding? (As already suggested on page 10 of this document, by ‘embodied reading’ we mean using bodies and physical space to understand the meaning of a text. Embodied reading may be realised not only through improvised or rehearsed drama but also through aspects of it such as staging or use of props.)
 - A related question for older readers might be to ask whether they recollect reading *Milo Imagines the World* when they read other texts on related themes such as Sarah Crossan’s Young Adult novel, *Moonrise* (2021), about a boy whose brother is on death row.
- not to do so (or indeed would choose not to read the book with a whole group)? The United States has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world, and the number of women in prison is not often talked about. As Robinson says, these stories matter. Do you agree?

QUESTIONS ABOUT ENGAGING READING

- What evidence can you share of a reader in your class or group engaging with what they are reading, whether independently or as a class or group (i.e. what does engagement look or sound like?)
- How might any, or all, of the three terms we have used in this paper – intertextuality, microtextuality, transtextuality – be useful or otherwise in engaging readers in your classroom with particular texts? (For our discussion of the three terms, see pages 11-12.)
- How might you engage with challenging themes in a book your class have read? A theme of *Milo Imagines the World* is the visit of Milo to his incarcerated mother. How many, if any, children to the best of your knowledge have similar experiences (of parental imprisonment) and what issues might such experiences present when sharing a book like this in your classroom? Would you tell children that Christian Robinson’s own mother was in prison when he was a child, or about being raised by his grandmother and visiting his mother in prison? Or are there occasions when you would choose

ACTIVITIES

The following activities are suggestions for teachers to discuss in Teachers' Reading Groups or try out in school. Teachers will come up with many more suggestions themselves in the light of their own reading and classroom experiences.

ACTIVITIES FOR DIVERSIFYING READING

▪ Try something different

Challenge readers in your class or group to try reading something different from what they like best. Ask them to exchange thoughts with a partner and/or group about their respective choices. Do the same yourself!

▪ Reviewing your collection

Conduct an 'audit' of the books available in your classroom/teaching space. How diverse is the collection in terms of representation and text type?

▪ Reviewing the profiles

Consider the profiles of the young people you teach. (For some examples, see p. 3 of this paper.) To what extent does the literature you share represent and celebrate the experience they bring to school?

ACTIVITIES FOR SEEING READING

▪ An outsider visits

In pairs in your Teachers' Reading Group, imagine an outsider coming into your teaching space (e.g. classroom, library or corridor) during a reading session. Tell your partner what the visitor might actually see e.g. whether the text is being read by the teacher from a single copy or whether each reader has their own copy of it and what difference that might make; what individual readers choose to read when independent reading happens such as magazines or comics, or (non-) fiction books. Swap over and listen to your partner telling you

about their teaching space. If they talk about ideas that seem interesting to you, not least if they work with a different age-range to you, try one or two of them out yourself and bring your experiences back to the Teachers' Reading Group next time.

▪ Reading together

Tell your partner how students are seated for reading e.g. in rows one behind the other or in small groups facing each other. Consider, if they are in rows, how well readers can see or hear others who may be reading aloud. Are they always seated? Does reading together take place outside the classroom? What might be the benefit of different spaces for seeing reading?

▪ Reading across age-ranges

Exchange ideas about what might be seen in a reading class or group of 5-year-olds, 9-year-olds and 13-year-olds, both differences and similarities, and whether there is continuity or progression between them.

▪ Visible messages about reading

Take a few photos or make a quick pencil sketch of your teaching space when it is empty.⁶ Capture things such as: how the furniture is set out for reading; what reading material is included in displays of work or on noticeboards; whether there are any shelves with books or magazines for students to browse; what overt or subliminal messages about reading the space provides. Consider what readers of different ages see of one another's work and what messages they might glean from it. Share your images with one another and discuss how far the space is conducive to reading.

▪ Visual research

As in Veronica Hanke's research described earlier in this paper (p. 7), ask students of any

⁶ A fuller outline of this activity exploring 'how we picture [a] subject' can be found in Cliff Hodges, Binney & Evans, 2010, pp. 5-8).

age to sketch a typical reading lesson. Drawing helps make their perceptions of reading lessons visible and enables both readers and teachers to see how they might adjust their approaches, as necessary.

- **Rivers of reading/funds of knowledge**

Make visible some of the reading young people do at home, using rivers of reading collage-making (footnote 4, p. 7) to see whether and how they relate to their funds of knowledge.

- **Reading and the mind's eye**

Discuss any experiences you may have had in the classroom of readers reporting that they do not see pictorial images in their mind's eye when they are reading. Talk about how such reports have affected your teaching.

ACTIVITIES FOR HEARING READING

- **Conversations about texts**

One way to encourage small-group conversations about texts, with or without a teacher, is to use cards with questions or statements on them. The cards can be colour-coded (e.g. according to whether they are about themes; characters; information; being a reader). The cards are placed upside down on a table. In turn, readers pick a card, read aloud the words on it and the group responds. Cards across the full colour range should be chosen to ensure diversity of question and statement types. This approach (gleaned from former English teacher, Richard Bain, for encouraging talk during inspection interviews) is intended to ensure interviewees talk rather than clam up. The prompts appear to be selected by the readers who, consequently, appear to ask the questions or make the statements, and the order is not pre-arranged so no one (including the teacher) knows what is coming next.

- **Conversations between poems and their poets**

Nancy Willard (2008) takes one of her poems and imagines having a conversation with it, the poem saying to the poet, 'there are a few questions I have always wanted to ask you,' and the poet replying, 'Ask away. I also have a few questions I'd like to ask you' (p. 94). The poem, for example, asks the poet what gave her the idea of writing it; in turn, the poet asks the poem why it seemed to want to rhyme. Such discussions taking place between pairs of young poets in the classroom – one embodying the poet, the other embodying one of their poems – might sound similar to many conventional question-and-answer sessions, but they *are* different, not least because they are centred on young poets as writers of their own reading matter. In addition, for those in role as the poem, they are required to think about writing choices (e.g. rhyme, diction, metaphor) from a reader's perspective.

- **Reading poetry aloud**

As author Matt de la Peña has stated in [a recent conference for Bank Street](#), (BSCBC) *Milo Imagines the World* is influenced by spoken word poetry and the musicality in picture books where every syllable counts. The opening lines illustrate the rhythm of the language:

What begins as a slow, distant glow
grows and grows
into a tired train that clatters down
the tracks.

Links can be made with other picture books and poems that feature similarly powerful use of pared-down language and the potential for embodiment. For a good example of the latter, see [Michael Rosen's YouTube performance](#) of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury 1989).

ACTIVITIES FOR CREATING READING

■ Making books

Paul Johnson, author of *Making Books* (2000), shows readers how to make small books quickly and easily, providing simple instructions (e.g. **Make Your Own Book**). Once made, the books can be used for creating different text types: recipes; autobiography; wildlife notes. When completed, the books can be read aloud and projected onto a screen (e.g. using a visualiser) to make them easy for a whole class or group to see. Those listening or reading can ask follow-up questions of the author. The finished books can then be displayed in the classroom. (For an account by trainee teachers of making books, click **here**. They can work with all ages!)

■ Expert talks

Many young people across the age-range are often authorities on topics that their peers and teachers know little or nothing about. Asking them to create a short talk to give to the rest of the class or group about a particular interest places them in role as information text authors. Any questions from their audience may help them deepen their own understanding of aspects of their topic which require further explaining for the uninitiated. In addition, it may help them to think explicitly about readers from the perspective of being an author.

■ Translating and creating poetry

The activity (on the **Lost Wor(l)ds website**) involved in **translating and creating poetry** offers opportunities to think about many of the affordances of different languages.

■ Talk about texts

An in-role activity to encourage students to discuss their reading, is suggested by Katie Kibbler in her idea for a **Fantasy Dinner Party**. It was designed as a creative way to motivate a post-16 Advanced Level English Literature class

to talk. Embodying authors, characters, critics and theorists, gathering round an imagined dinner table, provoked the kind of animated discussion Kibbler had hoped for. Teachers could adapt the activity for younger readers attending different sorts of parties or social events (e.g. **Queen Elizabeth II taking tea with Paddington Bear** as part of her Platinum Jubilee celebrations) to achieve equivalent effects.

ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGING READING IN RELATION TO THREE TEXTS

MILO IMAGINES THE WORLD

■ Investigating journeys

In *Milo Imagines the World*, Milo encounters many characters on his journey. His experience leads him to question and process his conception of reality through art and text. Recommending other texts that involve journeys (which readers might want to connect with this one) could provide a fruitful discussion activity. An example is the author's and illustrator's previous collaboration *Last Stop On Market Street* (2015). Alternatively, *I Am the Subway* (2021) is a recent book by Korean author and illustrator, Kim Hyo-eun, (translated by Deborah Smith) in which a subway train shares its thoughts while transporting passengers around Seoul. In it is this sentence: 'The unique lives of strangers you may never meet again are all around you every time you take the train'.

■ Being a detective

There are rich opportunities for young readers to be 'detectives' and spot microtexts in *Milo Imagines the World*. For example, environmental print helps locate the first spreads in the world of an urban subway. Signs, adverts, a variety of reading materials populate the first pages. Readers do not need to be familiar with the New York subway (in fact the illustrator is not!), but there are multiple images online that can be easily accessed. Readers can

also move backwards and forwards between the sketches Milo includes in his notebook and identify how they change as his journey, both literal and metaphorical, progresses.

- **Imagining the world**

Milo's sketches drive the narrative of this picture book. What endpapers might readers sketch for it, or for their own narratives of journeying?

COREY'S ROCK

- **Researching Selkie stories**

Corey's Rock is imbued with intertextual links to story and legend. The traditions run deep within the family through their loss. In exploring the text, readers could enjoy finding more about selkie, Celtic and Yoruban tales.

- **Singing and story telling**

Musicality resonates throughout this book. How might musicality be brought alive through other tales and legends that resonate with the young people with whom you work?

- **Space and time**

A powerful element of the story are the dream sequences. How might these be conveyed through reading aloud, drama, chorus reading, quiet reading?

THE KEY TO FLAMBARDS

- **Researching environmental campaigners**

Some readers of *The Key to Flambards* will enjoy making intertextual connections with the work of actual personalities referred to in the novel such as [Chris Packham](#). Alternatively, or in addition, they can explore biographies of other environmental campaigners such as the Swedish activist, [Greta Thunberg](#); wildlife and science TV programme presenter, [Liz Bonnin](#); [Dara McAnulty](#), a wildlife campaigner, climate-

change activist and award-winning writer from Northern Ireland; [Megan McCubbin](#), zoologist, conservationist, *Springwatch* co-presenter and co-author with her step-father, Chris Packham, of *Back To Nature: How to Love Life – and Save It* (Packham & McCubbin, 2021).

- **Jamie's presentation**

One microtext in *The Key to Flambards* which some readers would enjoy engaging with is the powerpoint presentation which Grace persuades Jamie to give. She suggests he puts his wildlife notes to practical use in a trustees' meeting about the proposed housing development on Flambards land. Readers are told that his presentation successfully draws attention to how important the area is but are not actually shown it so there is scope for them to create just such a presentation and to draw on what they know he has discovered (e.g. the specific birds, animals and plants he has noted down), adding further species they may already know about. The activity might engage young people with similar interests, perhaps also living in rural areas, who may not often find their realities reflected in what they read.

- **Readings for remembrance**

In *The Key to Flambards*, readers do not read about Roger's Armistice Day commemoration event. However, something of the kind could be enacted in the classroom, providing a reason to create new memorial texts or engage with any which are already published such as Siegfried Sassoon's 'Aftermath' which haunts its readers and listeners with repeated urgings about remembrance such as: 'Do you remember ...' and 'Have you forgotten yet ...'. Sadly, there are all too often likely to be times when such urgings continue to give rise to impassioned discussion and response in the classroom e.g. in relation to the war in Ukraine begun in 2022, and there is no shortage of other material

through which classes or groups might create their own readings for a remembrance event.

- **Ghost soldiers**

A way to embody ideas in the novel could be based on Newbery's reference to 'ghost soldiers' and the 2016 [#wearehere](#) event (Newbery, 2018 pp. 188-9). This was a real event which took place 100 years to the day after the start of the battle of the Somme. The event comprised thousands of ordinary people dressed as First World War soldiers walking round different venues in major cities. Each 'ghost soldier' embodied one of the soldiers who died on that day in 1916. Instead of (or as well as) embodying soldiers, readers could embody other characters from the different times and spaces within the novel and explore what they might say to one another e.g. Grace and one of her long-deceased Russell ancestors.

- **War poetry**

Only Remembered (2014), published to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War, is a collection of words and pictures edited by Michael Morpurgo (a writer with whom many students will already be familiar as author of several novels such as *War Horse* (1982) and *Private Peaceful* (2003), likewise set during the First World War). In *Only Remembered*, diverse contributors select their favourite words or images so the collection includes a rich variety of perspectives. In a poem by Carol Ann Duffy called 'Last Post', Duffy muses in a startling multimodal image on what would happen if you could re-wind history, if poetry – like film – could be re-wound to tell the story of war backwards, the dead rising up to be alive once again (a text which would make an interesting starting point for drama).

Other well-known writers for young readers such as Jamila Gavin and Bali Rai contribute different perspectives again, discussing for

example the significant number of Indian soldiers involved in the First World War. The penultimate piece in *Only Remembered* is a Welsh poem written by Hedd Wynn (Ellis Humphrey Evans) a young shepherd and poet from North Wales who was killed in the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917.

- **Writing future footnotes**

Writing future footnotes is an activity which can be adapted for readers across age-ranges to help them recognise the extent to which their reading is dependent on contextual knowledge. Originally recommended for GCSE and A Level students (Ogborn & Webster, 2000), it has the potential to work with all age-ranges. Readers are asked to imagine a contemporary text being read fifty years hence. They consider how the text might need to be annotated for readers in the 2070s. In *The Key to Flambards*, for example, it would mean considering that by then programmes such as *Springwatch* (probably even television itself) would be long gone so references to them would need footnote explanations. Readers might also want to consider climate and environmental issues that are touched on in *The Key to Flambards* (such as endangered species or the fight for land on which to build affordable housing) and predict what readers in the 2070s would need help to understand.

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SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES FOR DIVERSIFYING READING

Bank Street Children's Book Committee

The aforementioned Bank Street Children's Book Committee (BSCBC) [Best Children's Books of the Year](#) lists are an extremely valuable resource.

Books for Keeps

[Books for Keeps](#) (BfK) is an online Children's Book Magazine containing many relevant articles and reviews.

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

The [Centre for Literacy in Primary Education](#) (CLPE) is a rich source of reading recommendations in general and diverse reading material in particular.

English and Media Centre

The [English and Media Centre](#) has a number of valuable resources for secondary age readers e.g. [Iridescent Adolescent: Diverse Literary Short Stories](#), an anthology of short stories with free downloadable classroom resources to accompany it.

National Association for the Teaching of English

The [Global Learning in English](#) section of the [National Association for the Teaching of English](#) (NATE) website has further reading about diversity within the subject.

United Kingdom Literacy Association

The [United Kingdom Literacy Association](#) (UKLA) [Book Awards Longlists](#) and the [Diversity and Inclusion](#) sections of the UKLA website provide a selection of diverse reading choices, including fiction, information texts, poetry and picture books.

The UKLA Viewpoints series includes one called [Teachers and Reading](#) which Teachers' Reading Group members may wish to explore.

The list of [UKLA Ambassadors](#) (for example the work of Marilyn Brocklehurst, Joseph Coelho and Daniel Hahn) offers different approaches to diversifying reading.