Alexandra Primary School
Aspire, Perform, Succeed

The High Quality Text Based Curriculum
at Alexandra Primary School

Why We Use a Text-Based Curriculum at Alexandra Primary School

Stories help us understand words, ideas, other people and the world.

At Alexandra Primary School, **high-quality texts sit at the heart of our curriculum**. We deliberately use carefully chosen stories, books, poetry and other rich texts to support teaching and learning across the curriculum because they provide children with something powerful on which to build: **language, knowledge, imagination and shared experience**.

Why story?

Research across cognitive science, psychology and education shows that narrative provides a powerful structure through which people can organise information and make meaning. Stories connect ideas to characters, experiences, emotions, causes and consequences. They give abstract concepts a context and create shared experiences to which teachers and children can return.

A rich text therefore does much more than support the teaching of reading. It creates opportunities for **talk, questioning, vocabulary development, retrieval, inference, critical thinking, imagination and the building of knowledge**.

This approach reflects the **DfE Reading Framework**, which identifies *talk, stories, vocabulary and knowledge* as central to language comprehension. The framework emphasises language-rich environments, high-quality adult–child talk, explicit vocabulary teaching, daily story experiences and rereading texts to deepen children's understanding and enjoyment.

Why is this particularly important at Alexandra?

Our children bring **many cultures, languages, experiences and different starting points in learning** to our school. We see this diversity as a strength.

Carefully chosen literature can provide children with both **mirrors and windows**: mirrors in which they recognise themselves, their families, cultures and experiences, and windows through which they encounter different lives, places, perspectives and possibilities.

The Reading Framework specifically asks schools to select texts that **reflect children's own lives and widen their horizons**. For our children, this matters. A shared text can create a **common starting point without assuming a common starting experience**.

Through discussion, explanation, rereading and the deliberate revisiting of vocabulary and ideas, teachers can help children connect what they already know with new language, concepts and knowledge.

Reading is also about belonging and pleasure

Our text-based approach is not simply about what books can help us *teach*. We want our children to experience what books can help them **feel, imagine, question, understand and enjoy**.

Professor **Teresa Cremin's Reading for Pleasure research** reminds us that developing successful readers involves nurturing both the **skill and the will to read**. Her research highlights the importance of teachers knowing children's literature and knowing children as readers, alongside reading aloud, informal book talk, independent reading and creating socially engaging reading environments.

Reading is a **social and relational experience**. When adults and children talk enthusiastically about books, recommend texts to one another, share responses and develop a repertoire of stories in common, we build communities of readers.

For Alexandra, Reading for Pleasure is therefore also connected to **equity and social justice**. Every child should have access to rich, diverse and engaging literature and the opportunity to develop an identity as a reader, irrespective of their starting point or their experiences beyond school.

Texts connect our curriculum

High-quality texts provide meaningful contexts through which children can encounter ideas across the curriculum and speak, listen, think and make connections.

We see this particularly clearly within **PSHE**. In Nursery and Reception, **Think Equal** uses stories to develop social and emotional learning, including empathy, self-regulation, positive identity, collaboration and conflict resolution.

From Years 1–6, our trial of **The Story Project** similarly uses high-quality literature to explore PSHE and RSHE. Stories create a degree of emotional distance: children can first explore complex or sensitive ideas through characters and situations before considering what those ideas might mean for themselves and others. Literature can therefore provide a **safe space for discussion, empathy, critical thinking and new thinking**.

Our commitment

We choose texts deliberately, not simply because they fit a topic.

Across Alexandra, we seek high-quality texts that:

- **build vocabulary, knowledge and understanding;**
- provide rich opportunities for purposeful talk and discussion;
- reflect our children and communities **and widen their horizons**;
- introduce children to experiences, perspectives and language they may not otherwise encounter;
- help children make connections within and across subjects;
- encourage curiosity, empathy, imagination and critical thinking;
- contribute to a shared culture of stories and reading across our school; and

- above all, enable children to experience the **pleasure, power and possibility of reading**.

Our ambition

At Alexandra, texts help us create shared experiences from diverse starting points. Through stories, we build language; through language, we build knowledge and connection; and through reading, we open doors to worlds beyond our own.

Books provide mirrors and windows

At Alexandra Primary School, our children bring **many cultures, languages, experiences and different starting points in learning**. We see this diversity as a strength, and the texts we choose should both celebrate who our children are and open up possibilities beyond what they already know.

Books provide mirrors and windows.

They are **mirrors** when children can see themselves, their families, languages, cultures and experiences reflected and valued in the books they encounter. This supports identity, belonging and the powerful message that **"people like me belong in books and stories."**

They are **windows** when they enable children to look beyond their own experiences and encounter different people, places, cultures, perspectives and possibilities. Through these windows, children can develop curiosity, empathy and a richer understanding of the world and the people within it.

This is especially important at Alexandra. A shared text creates a **common starting point without assuming a common starting experience**. Through stories, discussion, explicit vocabulary teaching and rereading, we can connect what children already know with new language, knowledge and ideas.

The DfE Reading Framework reinforces this principle: texts should **build vocabulary, reflect children's own lives and widen their horizons**.

Our ambition is therefore for every child to encounter books in which they can **see themselves, see others and see further**.

Research informing our approach

Our approach at Alexandra Primary School is informed by research and national guidance about reading, language, storytelling, representation and Reading for Pleasure.

Department for Education (2023), *The Reading Framework: Teaching the Foundations of Literacy*.

The Reading Framework emphasises the importance of **talk, stories, vocabulary and knowledge** in developing language comprehension. It advocates high-quality adult–child talk, explicit vocabulary teaching, reading aloud and rereading. It also states that texts should **build vocabulary, reflect children's own lives and widen their horizons**.

Cremin, T. et al. (2009–present), *Teachers as Readers / Reading for Pleasure*. Teresa Cremin and colleagues' research demonstrates the importance of developing children

who **want to read as well as know how to read**. Their work highlights teachers' knowledge of children's literature and of children as readers, alongside **reading aloud, informal book talk, choice and socially supportive reading environments**. These practices help create strong, reciprocal **communities of readers**.

Bishop, R. S. (1990), *Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors*.

Rudine Sims Bishop's influential work describes books as **mirrors**, in which children can see their own lives and experiences reflected, and **windows**, through which they encounter the lives and experiences of others. This principle informs our commitment to selecting literature that reflects the cultures, languages and experiences of our community while also **widening children's horizons**.

Research into narrative and storytelling.

Research across psychology, cognitive science and education indicates that narrative provides a powerful structure for making meaning. Stories organise information through characters, events, intentions, causes and consequences, providing meaningful contexts in which children can connect new ideas with existing knowledge and experience.

What this means at Alexandra

Our text-based curriculum is therefore about far more than using a book to introduce a topic. **High-quality texts create shared experiences from diverse starting points.** They help us build vocabulary and knowledge, stimulate talk and thinking, nurture empathy and imagination, and develop children's identities as readers.

Books enable our children to see themselves, see others and see further.

Curriculum Texts

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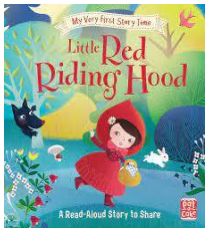
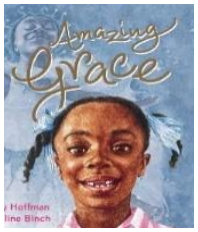
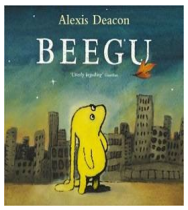
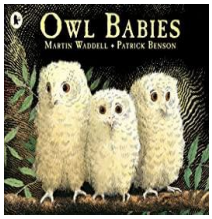
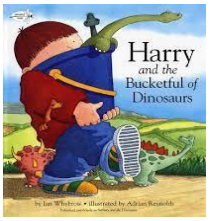
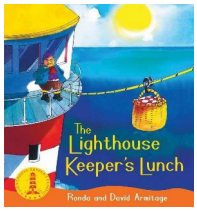
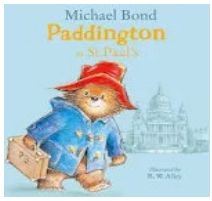
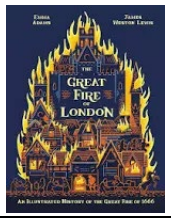
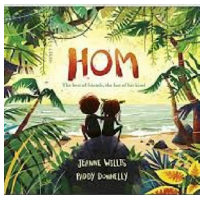
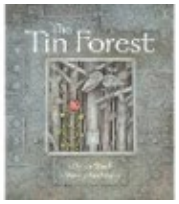
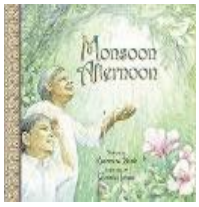
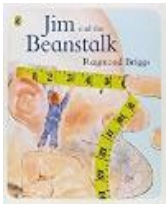
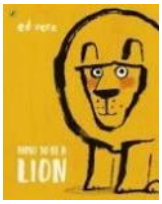
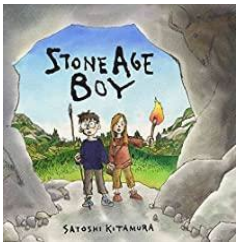
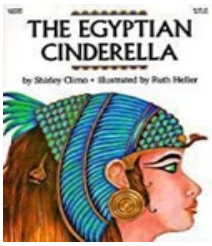
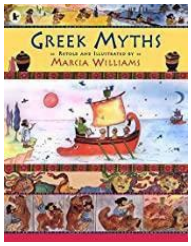
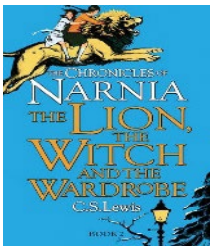
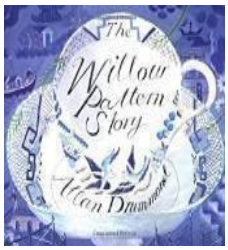
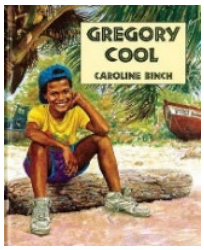
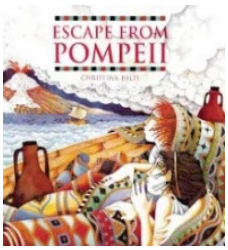
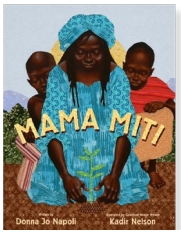
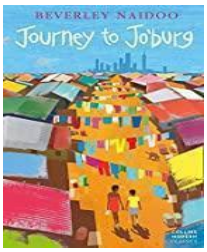
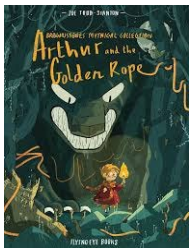
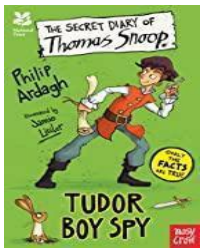
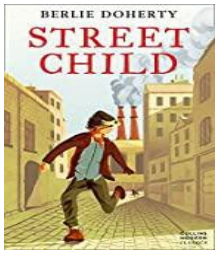
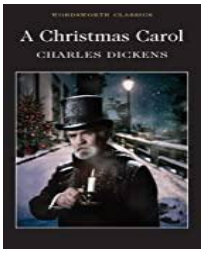
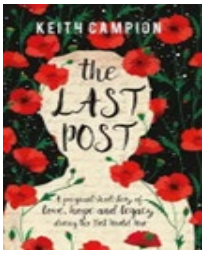
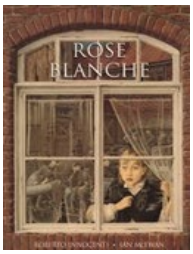
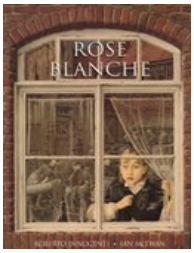
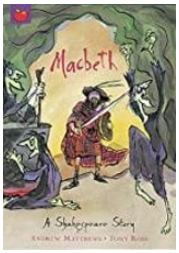
Year 1	 	 	 
Year 2	 	  	 
Year 3			
Year 4		 	 
Year 5			
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