

Melbourne Grammar School: Year 9 Wide Reading Program

By Dr Robin Zeidler

As Director of Library Services at Melbourne Grammar School (MGS) commencing in 2009, I was aware that the excellent Years seven to eight Wadhurst wide reading program, based on the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge (VPRC), was not continued at Year nine level. I soon met with both the Head of English and Year Nine English Coordinator, to express the need to implement a wide reading program at Year nine level and its possible topics and format. This was followed by a one to two page report outlining the purpose, structure, visiting authors and curriculum integration.

Outline of Year Nine Wide Reading program

The program began the next semester with six Year nine English classes booking into the outstanding MGS Nigel Peck Centre for Learning and Leadership, a joint library and ICT centre, officially opened in April 2008. Classes have one wide reading class per seven day timetable cycle and the focus is on two genres explored per term or four genres each semester. The program is a continuation of the successful, enriching Years seven and eight wide reading structure which implements the VPRC, a Readers' Cup, House Points for the total number of books read; all culminating in a presentation in a Wadhurst Assembly and a celebratory Pie Day.

Themes or genres

The themes or genres for the Year nine wide reading program, decided in conjunction with the Year 9 English Coordinator, consist of:

- **Australian Literature** is often an introductory genre for four weeks, to support the set Year nine English novel for 2014, *Riding the Black Cockatoo* by John Danalis. John Danalis has spoken several times at MGS, was our guest author in Semester 1, 2014 and again for Children's Book Week on Tuesday 19 August, 2014.
- **Fantasy and Science Fiction** in which the skilful balance between the novel's credibility and imaginary worlds is examined.
- **Personal Journey** to include biographies and autobiographies with an emphasis on individual development in both a physical and psychological sense. Sports biographies, in particular, are popular at MGS.
- **International Perspectives** where the emphasis is on understanding other cultures apart from our own.
- **Graphic Novels**, a new genre for MGS in 2013 which is very much enjoyed and popular amongst Year 9 boys. Interrelationships between text and illustrations are explored.
- **War Novels** was a previous genre 2009-2012 but has since been removed as the School no longer studies as a Year 9 English prescribed text, Michael Gerard Bauer's *The Running Man*.

The structure of the Year 9 Wide Reading program

Each genre is studied for four weeks over a three to four week period. The lessons comprise:

An introductory lesson

This is given by the teacher-librarian on the purpose of the wide reading program to encourage a love of reading, improvement in expression skills, imagination and creative writing as included in the Year nine English curriculum. Reference is made to transference of skills as outlined in research studies demonstrating the link between school library programs, literacy skills and academic attainment (Hay, Lyn & Todd, Ross Dr, 2010, p.4; Klinger, 2006). The first genre is explored with the class, that is, its meaning, characteristics and techniques used by the authors. A trolley of selected, relevant novels has been prepared from which the teacher librarian reads excerpts and discusses up to six to eight novels. Boys select novels from the trolley and must borrow at least one book to read for at least thirty minutes each day. It is important that boys read the first few pages and back cover of several novels to gauge their interest level and preparedness to 'live with' the selected novel, complete the reading and write answers on the set assignment. Reading occurs on lounge chairs for comfort and relaxation.

The second lesson – individual meetings and introduction of the assignment

This lesson is quiet reading while the teacher-librarian listens to individual boys read; records the book's title, each student's progress, reading fluency and comprehension. She notifies the English teacher of any concerns. The printed assignment sheet is distributed and instructions for the completion of the work outlined. The work requirement is placed online on the MGS portal under the faculty and may comprise short answer questions, extended responses, an oral presentation or a book review.

The third lesson – consolidation, discussion and progress

This lesson is again quiet reading, but does include a short discussion with the class about student progress and enjoyment of their novels. The teacher-librarian completes hearing individual reading. Time permitting, the teacher-librarian models quiet reading, intellectual inquiry and discussion of text (Routman, 2014 as cited on www.slav.org.au).

The fourth lesson – finalising the assessment

This lesson involves any completion of the assignment which is mainly done as homework together with its submission. The finished task is either posted online on the portal for online correction as well as group reading/discussion or is printed for assessment in relation to the

marking criteria rubric. Likewise, a rubric is used to mark oral presentations. The Library webpage has a section for posting and sharing book reviews.



SUBMIT YOUR WORK

Submit your book reviews, essays, stories and more to share with the MGS community.

[\[more\]](#)



Here are the latest books to arrive at the library, including books by authors Stefan Bachmann, Rick Riordan, Iain M. Banks, Terry Pratchett, Maggie Stiefvater, Hannu Rajaniemi, Elspeth Cooper, Tara Moss and William McInnes.



TO READ

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CURRENT COMPETITIONS

The trivia competition shall be held once again in the library during August 2014.

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MGS ARCHIVES

Melbourne Grammar School has taken care to preserve the many photographs and records taken and kept over the years.

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AUTHOR VISITS

During Terms 2 and 3, 2014, Scot Gardner (pictured) and John Danalis shall visit for lectures and workshops.

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INSIDE A DOG

Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside a dog, it's too dark to read.
- Groucho Marx

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Assessment of Year 9 Wide Reading

The teacher-librarian designs and compiles the assignment for each genre. In addition, the teacher-librarian corrects all wide reading class work, completes the criteria sheet, and grades the work, comments and returns assignments to the Year nine English teacher. The grade given for wide reading is included on the semester report. Secondly, individual, online student progress reports include the teachers' comments on progress with wide reading. Work is often posted on the MGS portal under the subject code for students to read about other novels and student work. This encourages a sharing and collaborative learning experience.

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Visiting authors

Visiting authors support and enrich the Year nine wide reading program, with at least one author presenting each term for one half day. Such authors who have visited MGS for the Year nine students, usually more than once, include: Michael Bauer, Bernard Caleo, John Danalis, Scot Gardner, Neil Grant, Jack Heath, David Metzenthon and Michael Pryor, all of whom are excellent speakers. They give a lecture and slide show on their writing and lives as authors, followed by two creative writing workshops where the boys have hands on experience of introducing suggested techniques into their own writing.

Conclusion

The Year nine wide reading program is a valuable student learning component of the Year nine English curriculum and a collaborative venture with the School English staff. The teaching role of the teacher-librarian is enhanced with the assessment design and marking of the project. At MGS, each of the three teacher-librarians teaches a core

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curriculum subject including, VCE Geography, Year nine History and Year eight English as well as being associated in a pastoral care role with a House, as a House Tutor. The rich, diverse and curriculum integrated Year nine English wide reading program encourages a passion for fiction reading, and the further development of literacy skills. The operation of the program also highlights the significant role of the teacher- librarian in devising and successfully implementing such a successful curriculum-based initiative.

Mentor teacher and instructional coach Regie Routman believes that sustained time for reading and writing meaningful text must be our first priority to turn students into readers, writers and thinkers (Routman, 2014 as cited on www.slav.org.au).

References

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