

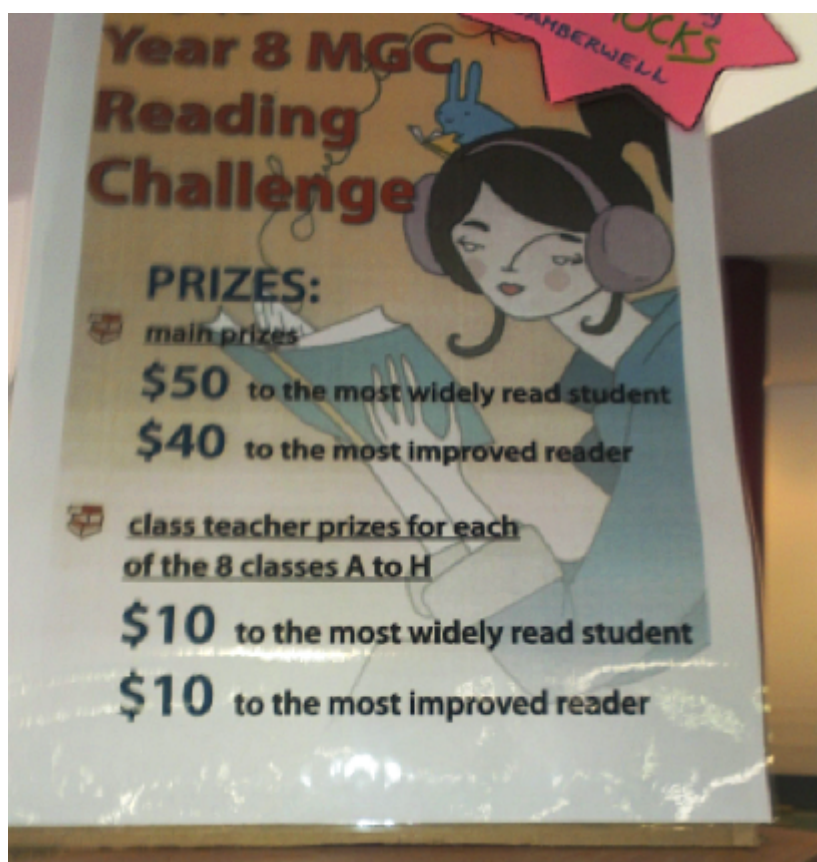
# Melbourne Girls' College Reading Challenge

*By Sally Sutherland*

In 2013 Melbourne Girls' College instigated a Reading Challenge to take place from March to September, parallel to the Premiers' Reading Challenge (PRC). Prior to this, all year 8 students had completed the PRC, an activity that had been run at the school for more than 15 years. Perhaps it was time for a change.

We made this change in response to our girls' need for a more differentiated book list specifically designed for and by our own students. Our students felt stifled by the limited choice in the PRC lists that was tempered by the need to supply 'suitable' titles to a range of schools. Also, the PRC site has not been maintained and updated over the years and is a poor cousin to the NSW Premier's Reading challenge site or any of the new reading sites on the wider web such as Good Reads.

Contact was made with the Premiers' Reading Challenge Office and they were asked if we could still be included in their registered schools list even though we were doing the challenge in a more tailored manner to meet our school's needs. It was disappointing that this request could not be considered at this time. I think this could be a more flexible model for the Premiers' Reading Challenge in the future and it is a shame that our school is now not included in the participating schools list.



The booklist for our challenge was chosen to extend and interest our most able girls and also cater for underachievers. The Library and English staff worked together in the writing of units, development of reading lists and the purchase of texts.

Given reading is a social activity, we aimed to give students the power to recommend titles to each other and further develop the reading lists themselves. Updated and bound reading lists were remade a number of times during this Challenge.

Our students are of advanced ability and have wide interests, so our diverse titles were developed from teacher-librarian interviews with many of the year 8 students who had completed the Challenge the previous year. The titles for our list were also created by consulting our students' five star ratings in their reading logs and by further student recommendations. We also added to the list using input from our data collected on our most borrowed titles from our OPAC Oliver, our own reading, Dymocks and Readings bookseller recommendations, new Standing Orders and professional reviews.

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Students were given a paper-reading log that mimicked the PRC log. Their tasks included reading five titles of their own choice and also ten titles from the list that were of varied genres. We allowed the class texts to be two of the titles included to give some girls a necessary lift and sense of accomplishment.



The purpose of mandating reading from the set list was to offer students an opportunity to taste many styles of writing and give them a wider reading experience. This list was negotiable in order to ensure all girls felt positive, in control and a real sense of personal achievement.

Students were able to complete as many reading log sheets as they wanted. Each time they completed a log sheet of 15 books a raffle ticket was placed in their class jar. A small prize such as a squiggle pen was the class participation award. (Chocolate frogs were originally placed in the jars, looked great, but I thought it may not be such a good idea to reward with food). Prizes were generously donated by Dymocks for the most widely and deeply read and most improved in each class. Class teachers made their choice of winners; this gave the teacher a sense of involvement, and there was also an overall Librarian award. Certificates of achievement were presented at assembly.

Year 8 Melbourne Girls' Reading Challenge		Name		Form
Date	Book Name	Author	Genre	Star rating from 1 – 5 (low – high)
	FREE CHOICE			
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6	With a sword in my hand		Historical fiction	
7	Midsummer night's dream		Graphic novel	
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

## General Overview of the Reading Programs: Year 8 – Library Program 2015

All classes are booked into the library for fortnightly reading and Information skills lessons. These include:

### ***Wider Reading and Personal Writing***

The reading area is in a private, gently lit corner of the library with standard lamps and fairy lights illuminating the area. The reading area is surrounded by bookshelves and includes soft chairs and pink beanbags.

Teachers allow students to read silently in their library period and use some of the time to work on their personal writing at tables nearby. The English staff and teacher-librarian are of the belief that students need time to read in class. They are so busy after school and there are so many other activities vying for their time that they must be given an opportunity to read deeply and get immersed in a book in order for this task to

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become pleasurable and a part of their daily lives. The wider reading program includes the Melbourne Girls' College Reading Challenge March – September, parallel to PRC. This Reading Challenge includes all Year 8 students in their English classes.

### **Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Graphic Novel Unit**

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* Graphic novel unit was an innovation initiated in 2010 for all year 8 students and continues to be exciting and popular with the girls. The graphic novel ensures an easy entry to Shakespeare through the use of both original and plain text versions of the play. The Classic Comics version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is beautifully illustrated and most accessible. Class sets were bought as the books are very expensive at \$32.95 and are lent to the class by the Library.

Students read and review Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to acquire an understanding of the Renaissance world, while focusing on the language and traditions of Shakespearean times. Students gain an understanding of the genre of the graphic novel, while developing an appreciation of the interplay between image and text. Students demonstrate their understanding of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the creation of their own response. This may be visual, written or oral. Students also research one aspect of Renaissance history in detail.

This has been a most successful unit of work as the girls love the challenge and feel very grown up studying Shakespeare. They feel really proud of their work that is displayed in the library.

### **Poetry Anthology**

All year 8 girls develop their own poetry anthology, which includes student written poetry and published poetry of their choice.

Students demonstrate their understandings through performing their poems in front of their peers and by compiling a poetry anthology which includes: a biography explaining what inspired the student's poetry; at least eight poems – three connected to visual images; notes explaining why each poem was included in the anthology.

Students attend a poetry workshop which is then enhanced by the library's development of an extensive poetry book collection that supports differentiation in the classroom. Poetry books are collected for their artistic merit in order to help the girls present their own poems artistically and for the quality of the poetry. Poetry ranges from young children's poems through to adult and includes free verse novels such as Herrick and Bateson. The student anthologies are displayed in the library display cabinet.

### **Classic and Modern Comparative Study – Book Collections in the Library**

The teacher-librarian's role in this unit is to supply all year 8 students with paired classic and modern novels to study. We require 220 pairs of classic and modern novels at a variety of reading levels. Students work in pairs and choose a modern novel and a classic to compare. The differentiation in this unit is broad, with girls choosing to compare *Lord of the Flies* with *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Charlotte's Web* with the junior version of *Mao's Last Dancer*.

In this unit of work, students explore the differences and similarities between classic and modern literature. They form their own hypotheses about what they will discover, and then prove or disprove them. They engage with literature that has been previously unknown to them and with literature with which they are familiar.

#### **They develop skills to compare and contrast various aspects of literature . . .**

Students develop their analytical and evaluative skills of the ways in which literary worlds are created. They develop skills to compare and contrast various aspects of literature e.g. social worlds, character development, and language use. In addition, they develop their interpersonal skills while working in pairs or groups of three and their negotiation skills when creating their own individual response to the texts.

### **Literacy Support**

Students with literacy needs are catered for through our collection including materials such as The Fitzroy Readers and our Quick Reads spinner.

## Year 7-10 - General Programs

- Monitor program
- Book Club weekly lunchtime meetings
- Manga Club – weekly meetings
- Staff Book Club support
- Student Excursions – Writer’s Festival, Reading Matters students from 7-10 self-selected
- Guest author program, Years 7-12
- Wider Reading for staff and students
- Literacy support and development
- Writing Competitions
- KLA text selection, ordering and processing

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