

**Let's begin...**



**...embarking on the reading journey with  
Kindergarten and Pre Primary students**

*Let's begin... embarking on the reading journey with Kindergarten and Pre Primary students*, writer Kate Mullin, AISWA, Advisor Wendy Gorman, AISWA. Booklet prepared for the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia Targeted Programs, Osborne Park WA.

# index

Who is the focus of this booklet? . . . . .	3
What is the focus of this booklet? . . . . .	4
Why is reading <u>to</u> students important? . . . . .	5
What should I read <u>to</u> my students? . . . . .	6
How should I read <u>to</u> my students? . . . . .	7
What can I do after reading <u>to</u> my students? . . . . .	9
Recommended reading . . . . .	11
Reading <u>with</u> students . . . . .	12
Playing with language . . . . .	14
What reading research says about Phonemic Awareness . . . . .	15
What is the best way to develop Phonemic Awareness . . . . .	16
Practical activities which nurture Phonemic Awareness . . . . .	17
In conclusion . . . . .	22
Other useful resources and links . . . . .	23
Bibliography . . . . .	25





## Who is the focus of this booklet?

**The focus of this booklet is Kindergarten (Kindy) and Pre primary (Pp) Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ILSS) and their teachers.**

Many classrooms catering for the needs of Indigenous students in remote locations are organised on a multi age group basis and in some instances one teacher may be responsible for teaching all students of primary school age. It may also be the case that such teachers find themselves in classrooms where they have had limited experience. Many teachers, teaching Kindy and Pp Indigenous students have been trained to teach at other phases of schooling. This booklet is designed to support the work of such teachers, and indeed all teachers, who although teaching across multiple age groups want to ensure that they keep a focus on the understandings and skills their Kindy and Pp students need to develop in order to learn to read.

This booklet has been designed to provide such insights and to suggest a range of activities that can be undertaken in Kindy and Pp classrooms that will enhance English language literacy skills and prepare students for the kinds of academic discourse they need to develop, if they are to successfully negotiate the school curriculum.

The Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Education Science and Training, provides discrete funding for Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ILSS) newly arrived at school. The purpose of this funding is to target the English language needs of such students. **Let's Begin** supports that endeavour.



# What is the focus of this booklet?

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## Listening, looking and speaking

The focus of this booklet is to apprentice students as readers by ensuring that their exposure to the English language provides them with comprehensible input and allows them to use language to engage in interesting and pleasurable activities and tasks. Thus in Kindy and Pp classrooms the process of acquiring a second language should proceed at an unconscious level and should mirror the way in which students acquire their first language – that is in a fairly naturalistic way. As a result, lessons which focus on the rules that govern English language literacy usage may, at best, have limited value and could possibly be counterproductive in such settings.

However simply immersing students in a new language and discourse and hoping that the learning will take care of itself is not a particularly productive approach either. In early childhood classrooms the focus needs to be on planning lessons which have a particular language focus and which provide opportunities to ‘play with language’ or ‘to be read to’ in the classroom. The formality occurs only at the point of planning, the delivery presents as fairly informal and naturalistic.

## Key literacy practices in Kindy and Pp classrooms

Separating modes of language and discourse always creates artificial divisions and these are unnecessary at Kindy and Pp level. When opportunities do present themselves to focus on the form of the language, or particular conventions, teachers need to ensure that skills developed are applied to authentic reading experiences.

For the purposes of this booklet the focus will be on the development of three key literacy practices:

- ***Reading To Students***
- ***Reading With Students***
- ***Playing With Language***



# Why is reading to students important?

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**Access to the curriculum, and indeed the whole of our education system, is predicated on the understanding that students have literacy skills in English. As students progress through school they need to use these reading skills not only to learn but also to demonstrate outcomes.**

Many students come to school having had access to books and having been read to for hundreds, if not thousands, of hours. In this instance their attitude to, and the value they place on books largely mirrors that of the school. Other students have had limited access to books and hearing books read. For such students it is imperative that teachers provide opportunities so that these students may also develop appropriate and productive responses to books i.e. those which will allow them to progress successfully in the school setting.

Students need to be introduced to traditional stories and narratives. Both story genres are highly regarded in lower primary settings and form the foundation of much language work. Students need to become familiar with the structure of the story genres so that they become familiar with how such stories are typically staged. This enhances their ability to predict, a critical skill, if students are to develop as readers.



## **What should I read to my students?**

- Books written in literate language, - rather than language, which although written, sounds oral. For this reason books produced in the community, describing events meaningful to the community may not be the books to choose when reading to students. Sentence readers also have limitations.
- Books which are engaging rather than meaningful (have significant moral themes or valued embedded), although many books achieve both.
- Books about things students may be interested in.
- Books that will introduce them to particular story structures and features e.g. fables – animal characters/ behave like humans/moral at the end.
- Narrative and traditional tales.
- Whole text.
- Books that you enjoy so that you can model this enjoyment through reading aloud to students.





# How should I read to my students

**Students who have had limited access to books before coming to school will have limited capacity to predict what might happen in a story from the book cover or even from the pictures inside. Therefore in ILSS settings prediction does not feature in the early stages of reading to students but rather it is a skill to be developed as a result of extensive reading and drawing parallels across books read. In this way students come to understand that many books deal with the same themes and deal with them in a similar way. For example in western narrative, children who get lost are generally found by the end of the book, bullies get their comeuppance, etc.**

When reading to students the teacher may be the only person with a copy of the book, if it is not available in Big Book form, which whole narratives rarely are. In this instance it is imperative that students can view the pictures.

- Narrative - **Orient students to the story before reading** by using the pictures in the book. Explain not only what the story is about but the setting, the characters, the problem and how it is resolved. Spend time developing relationships between the characters in the story and between these characters and the reader (you and your students). This focus on the development of interpersonal relationships is what young students find intensely satisfying about story and it is this which engages them.
- **Model active reading.** Stop to **think aloud** about what the result of actions might be, or how characters might be feeling, or what they might be thinking. Compare the size of creatures in a story with the size of items in the classroom. When you stop to think aloud not only are you modelling active reading but issuing an unspoken invitation for students to join in.
- Use the opportunity to **build common knowledge** in your classroom so that both you and your students understand the story in the same way. Using think aloud techniques is one way of doing this but building on the responses of students is another way. Make sure that discussion about the book does not result in a dialogue between you and one other 'knowing' student. Open up discussion so that it is accessible to all students in your classroom.

- Once the story has been told using pictures, read the text to the students.
- Non narrative text. Use the same process but in this instance you will need to draw out other text structures (procedure/report/explanation) and how each stage brings different information to bear e.g. 'The first part tells us what kind of animal... is'

Research on reading shows that the teacher's reading style has a significant impact on student comprehension, so if you need to, seek help from audio books or CDs.



# What can I do after reading to my students?

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**Research shows that retelling stories aids comprehension development. It requires students to integrate information and to relate this information to their own background and experience. In this way students personalise information.**

However model the outcome you want before asking students to retell a story. Talk them through the process, using a story that you have just read to them.

Teachers who have limited help in their classrooms will have to consider ways in which a retelling activity can be managed. AEWs could be trained to listen to students retelling a story, or Kindy and Pp students could be 'buddied' with older students who could listen to a retell. In both instances AEWs and buddies would need to be familiar with the story so that they could guide students who need redirecting. They would also need some training so that everyone is managing the activity in the same way.

## **Other activities which involve a retell aspect are:**

- Sequencing pictures and then using them to talk about the story
- Drawing pictures and using them to talk about the story
- Using puppets for either an individual or group retell
- Creating props and then role playing the story

These activities allow for multiple opportunities to revisit the story and enhance students understanding of it. Students who have taken on your reading of the story in the early stages will modify it in the light of discussions and role play so that they understand it in their own way.

Re reading favourite stories and discussing them once common knowledge has been built, is always a pleasurable activity for young students. This does not mean that teachers have to dwell on one story book for weeks at a time but rather that links are made across books. This provides opportunities to make students aware that an author may like to write about particular kinds of characters or settings, or that here is another story with a familiar theme and then have students recall where they first encountered this theme.

Repeated readings of books encourages students to adopt an 'active' mindset to books and see themselves as readers. As importantly, it allows teachers to exploit students' memory using it to assist in the decoding process when students reach that stage of the reading process.

Book boxes or baskets are a favourite way of making books, both read to, and with, students constantly available. Having ready access to books is critical and teachers can model handling and care of books as well as their enthusiasm for their favourite stories. Lack of experience with books, and lack of exposure to books are not reasons why books need to be withheld from Indigenous students. The opposite argument holds true. All young children can be careless with books but they can be encouraged not to be. The attitude of the teacher to books will influence how students deal with books. When shown how to care for and value books, Indigenous students, like all other students can learn how to value them too. Valuing books is fundamental to the discourse of school, so it is something ILSS student need to be taught to do.



# Recommended reading

## Traditional tales

This will include not only traditional tales from Western cultures like The Three Bears and Little Red Riding Hood but those from other cultures, like The Mouse deer and The Crocodile

## Narratives

In particular the work of:

John Burningham

Eric Carle

Pamela Allen

Rosemary Wells

Maurice Sendak

Jez Alborough

Janet and Allan Ahlberg

Mem Fox



# Reading with students

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**Reading with students is best done from a Big Book and provides a link to both Playing with Language and Reading To Students. Reading with students, particularly when it involves books with predictable patterns and/or rhyme, allows them to participate in the reading experience while Playing With Language. It also allows students to encounter the world of language written down in books without yet having to learn about the written code. It allows the teacher to introduce in an ordered and systematic way key understandings that students need to develop if they are to understand the purpose and mechanics of reading.**

## **What should I read with my students?**

- Books with rhyme and repetition
- Books with predictable story patterns
- Community produced books

Students need to view the book being read. When students can see the book being read, the teacher is then in the position to use the book for a number of purposes. One of these is to introduce students to **Concepts About Print**. As students view the book being read, the teacher has the opportunity to deal with, and model concepts such as:

- front cover-back cover of the book
- title, author, illustrator
- directionality in reading – front to back, left to right and top to bottom
- one to one correspondence-concept of word
- names of things to do with language written in books and illustrations. These will be introduced during the first year or two of school. Words, spaces, letters, capital letters, pictures, punctuation.

### **A simple entry point to reading with students is to:**

- Write down rhymes they are already familiar with
- Use community produced books which they already know off by heart
- Use stories produced jointly with the class
- These can then become resources for teaching Concepts About Print.
- Books with predictable patterns and repetition invite choral reading through their use of naturally occurring repetitive language structures. Students get the opportunity to become part of the **act of reading** and enjoy this involvement enormously. It is important however that when students engage in choral responses that these responses are appropriate to the task. Shouting out a response which should be given in hushed tones is not appropriate.
- Repeated readings of such texts with students will have the effect of developing a bank of sight words. It will also give teachers the opportunity to focus on **intonation and stress, phrasing and rhythm**. These are critical for all students and particularly so for second language learners.
- Pattern books have a structure which ends with a culminating event, - both necessary and satisfying if students are to learn about story structure while enjoying the experience of reading. E.g. The Very Hungry Caterpillar, who after a series of meals, manages to transform itself into a beautiful butterfly.

### **Recommended reading**

Brown Bear  
Polar Bear  
Hairy Maclary  
Mr McGee  
Who sank the boat  
Dear Zoo  
Hattie and the Fox  
Where is the green sheep  
I went walking  
Edward the emu  
The Very Hungry Caterpillar  
Owl Babies  
We're going on a bear hunt  
Where's my teddy

Bill Martin and Eric Carle  
Bill Martin and Eric Carle  
L. Dodd  
Pamela Allen  
Pamela Allen  
Rod Campbell  
Fox and Mullins  
Fox and Horacek  
S Williams  
Knowles and Clement  
E Carle  
Waddell and Benson  
Rosen and Oxenbury  
J Alborough



# Playing with language

**When second language students come to school they need to be given opportunities to focus on the sounds of the new language in a way that is fun, and which will later provide them with access to the sound symbol relationship of the English language (the grapho-phonetic system). However, before getting to this stage students initially need to be able to hear individual sounds within words. They need to develop phonemic awareness.**

## **Why do I need to develop my students' capacity in this area?**

When students are phonemically aware they understand that words are made up of sounds and that these sounds can be assembled in different ways. Phonemes are small units of sound in spoken words that are represented by either single letters or pairs of letters, when written down. Students do not need to have knowledge of words in print to engage in phonemic awareness activities.

Mapping sounds to print is a fundamental skill that students need to develop if they are to become successful readers. Helping students become phonemically aware is the first step in this process, teaching them to attend to sounds in the language. Being able to hear sounds within words is a skill students need to start developing in Kindy and Pp classes. Later students can be shown how to connect these sounds to letters or groups of letters to develop their decoding skills. As students progress through the primary school, and as their automatic word recognition develops, they come to rely on higher order strategies to decode words. However at Kindy and Pp level, being able to hear individual sounds within words is a critical skill that needs to be developed.





# What reading research says about Phonemic Awareness

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**Kindy students who lack phonemic awareness often experience difficulty in learning to read as they struggle to develop an understanding of letter-sound relationships. Recent research suggests that being phonemically aware is an important precursor to learning phonics and to learning to read. Students who lack phonemic awareness have been shown to be at risk of not learning phonics.**

Children who have developed phonemic awareness learn to read with more certainty and when given opportunities to read are in a position to gain greater benefits from those opportunities. So developing phonemic awareness and reading have a reciprocal influence on each other. Developing phonemic awareness leads to improvement in reading and reading increases phonemic awareness.

The ultimate aim of developing phonemic awareness in young students is to support them to make a successful transition to the world of reading. **Developing phonemic awareness alone will not bring this about; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition, for learning to read. Skills development in isolation will have limited benefit in helping students read. These skills must be transferred to the world of print in the context of the text currently being studied.** Phonemic awareness also has a vital part to play in the early writing and spelling of Kindy and Pp students.

Developing an understanding of sound/symbol relationships is an important step for very young students in learning to decode but teachers should not rush to this stage without giving students the necessary resources to work successfully. Teachers need to consider the following questions when charting a path into the world of phonics.

- Can their students hear sounds within words?
- Have their students developed the capacity to break up and analyse words into sounds, as well as manipulate these sounds?

In the context of this booklet teachers are encouraged to promote phonemic awareness in Kindy and Pp students through 'play' and when the opportunity arises, in books being read. In this way students will be given the opportunity to focus (incidentally) on language by focusing on activities that are enjoyable. The task becomes the focus of attention not the underlying reason for it.



# What is the best way to develop Phonemic Awareness

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**Phonemic awareness comprises a battery of skills and understandings and in keeping with all activities in a Kindy/Pp environment these skills should be nurtured:**

- in a spirit of play and exploration
- in daily sessions of about 10-20 minutes each x each week of the school year
- after students have been through their **BBC** 'workout'.

<http://www.nexus.edu.au/TeachStud/arera/Otitis/App1s4.htm>

<http://www.earhealth.org.au/docs/June%20Doyle.pdf>

Fluctuating hearing loss can militate against any focus on language activities which require students to attend closely to sound. Teachers of Indigenous students are encouraged to minimise the effect of fluctuating hearing loss in their students by giving them the opportunity to exercise after which they need to:

**B**= breathe

**B** = blow (their nose into a tissue)

**C** = cough

This helps clear any potential blockages in the ears and prevents build up of mucus which can affect hearing. Undertaking tasks which require careful listening can be difficult enough in a Kindy/Pp classroom so it is critical that teachers enforce the BBC routine daily (at the beginning of every teaching session would be ideal)- first thing in the morning, after recess and after lunch.

If students are to become adept 'listeners' they need opportunities to play with and explore language in the following ways. The list below is roughly ordered in terms of increasing complexity.

- Rhyme-having an ear for, and remembering rhyming words
- Matching-identifying components of sound which are the same or different
- Blending- using a series of sounds to form a word
- Segmenting-separating words into their component phonemes
- Manipulating- deleting or moving phonemes from a word and/or generating other words



# Practical activities which nurture Phonemic Awareness

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## Rhyme

**Attention to rhyme can be fostered not only inside but outside of the classroom. Physical education equipment and visuals can be used to great effect during rhyme focused activities.**

- Bring out the skipping ropes, hoola hoops and other pieces of equipment. There are countless skipping rhymes that work in conjunction with the beat of feet and ropes which make for an enjoyable and natural entry to the world of rhyme. Teach rhymes to your students as they skip (have them teach you the ones they already know). Refer back to the activity later in class to introduce the concept of rhyme to your students. *'When we were skipping this morning and we said ????. What word/s sounded the same as ????. That word rhymed with ????'* In this way the concept of rhyme can be introduced and reinforced and introduced into other conversations about rhyme.
- Singing and choral chants can be used to introduce students to rhymes. Most children like singing. You may not be a musician but singing and chanting activities simply need someone to keep the beat, so that all singers/chanters sing or chant in unison. After the activity focus on what rhymed with *????* Choral chants are also a really good way to target phrasing (useful later when your students encounter punctuation), intonation and stress patterns in the English language system, as they provide valuable opportunities for second language learners.
- Finger rhymes can be also be used for the same general purpose. Teach the rhymes first and then reflect on words in the rhyme that sound like *????*
- Tongue twisters are another fun way to approach rhyme
- Use poetry and verse for the same purpose
- Once the concept of rhyme is embedded you can encourage students to play with rhyme by changing some of the words in the original rhyme. This might result in nonsense words but it doesn't matter as long as the words still rhyme
- An extension of the above activity is to work with a buddy to create a series of new rhyming words using a known rhyme on which to text pattern

- Create Hinky Pinkies. A hinky pinky is a riddle, the answer for which is two or more rhyming words. For your planning purposes start with the answer and then work back to the clue. 'I'm thinking of a really little cat' (a bitty kitty). These are a more sophisticated development of rhyme but worth working on to challenge students, once they are really clear about rhyme and can create words that rhyme with????

## Matching

**(always have the student articulate the sounds in each of these activities)**

- I spy games
- Use simple visuals to have students identify the odd man out e.g. using three simple pictures for bat, car and ball get students to tell you which start with the same sound. Make sure students can articulate the sound in question. (If you do this work be sure to laminate the pictures so that they can be used again in other combinations)
- An extension of the above-minimal pairs work. This encourages students to identify the odd man out. Which of these words have the same sound at the beginning- bat, car, ball? What is the sound? Which is different? What sound does it begin with?
- Direct the student to pick a picture (from a selection provided) that starts with the same sound as bus, or cat, or whatever sound you want the student to focus on
- Direct the student to pick out a picture that does not start with the same sound as bus, or cat, or whatever sound you want the student to focus on. Ask the student what sound the object in the picture begins with.
- The same kind of games can be played but with a focus on word endings e.g. 'which words have the same sounds at the end -cat, pot, car.' Or if preferred visuals can be used
- The same game, but this time with a focus on sounds in the medial position of words like cat, cut, mat

- Use sets of pictures and have students categorise them in terms of sound i.e. groups of things that all begin with the same sound, groups of things that end with the same sound. Have students articulate why things belong in each category-remember the focus of this activity is sound

Make sure when you do minimal pairs work that you change the order in which you introduce the words in the game i.e. don't always have the odd man out word as the middle word in the sequence.

## Blending

**Once students have developed an understanding of the grapho-phonetic system we often ask them to use this strategy to read unfamiliar words. However students don't need to be able to read for teachers to have a focus on blending activities in their classroom.**

- Present the student with a range of pictures (an orange, a banana and an apple) ask the student to pick the appropriate one when you blend the sound of a *p* / together
- Introduce students to a series of coloured blocks each of which has a particular sound attributed to it. Blue=s, Red=t, Green=a, Black=g. Once students are clear about what phonemes are represented by each colour they can be guided by the teacher to place the blocks in a particular order and then blend sounds e.g.

Black	Green	Blue	(= gas )
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Red	Green	Black	(= tag )
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As the object of the exercise is to blend sounds it is also possible to create nonsense words. If teachers do this they should make sure that students develop the concept of 'made up' or 'nonsense' words

Red	Green	Blue	(= tas )
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- Present the students with a particular range of sounds and ask them to blend them together. Give student a clue about the word they need to decipher.

"I'm thinking about a kind of fruit"    a p l    *apple*

"I'm thinking about an animal with four legs found on a farm"    she e p    *sheep*

Adapt this activity to books being read in class, so that the sounds being blended relate to characters, places, things. In this way the teacher can model connections from skills development to real books and reading.

"I'm thinking about one of the animals who was in Mr. Gumpy's boat"

g o t. "So which animal am I thinking about?"    *goat*

"And Mr. Gumpy warned the goat about his behaviour. He told him not to k i k."

*kick* "Why did he warn the goat not to kick?"

## Segmentation and Manipulation

**These skills focus on students being able to discriminate each sound within a word.**

When developing this capacity with students always start with short two sound words and work from there. Words like *me, he, on, at* are good starting points. It has been suggested that if students are to develop both the skills of segmentation and manipulation they will need to receive formal instruction. Both skills are quite abstract in nature and do not belong to the range of language play activities in which children would normally engage.

Using concrete objects when developing these skills is advisable (as with blending).

- Students are provided with counters and a series of 2 or 3 box grids



Students listen while the teacher says a word and as they hear each sound or phoneme in a word they put a counter in the box, - left to right. As students' skills develop and they listen for a greater number of phonemes within words the grids they are provided with will need to reflect this development.

- Coloured blocks can be used in order to segment and manipulate phonemes within words and then these can be blended

Black	Green	Blue
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 (= gas )

Ask student to blend the sounds left when they remove the Black block? (as)

What sounds are left to be blended if they return the Black block and remove the Blue block? (ga)

If the Black is placed at the end what sounds are there to be blended? (asg)

By having multiples of four or five coloured blocks teachers can create countless opportunities for students to segment, manipulate and blend sounds. Such activities allow for a concrete approach to sound segmenting, manipulating and blending which is critical in the early stages of word building.

- Students can graduate from concrete manipulatives to simply focusing on, remembering and manipulating **sounds** they hear in words.

*"If I take b from bin what am I left with?"*

*"What do I get when I add r to at?"*

*"If I take the a from tan and add an i, what do I get?"*

*"If I take the n from tan and add a p, what do I get?"*

Key content words from texts read in class can be used for segmenting and manipulating and blending. Using words from a familiar context creates a bridge between skills development and authentic reading by providing context, and therefore enhancing comprehension.



## In conclusion

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**Providing Indigenous students will opportunities to hear and play with English is crucial to their development of English language literacy skills. As teachers plan activities they need to be aware of the need for language to accompany action in second language junior primary classrooms. Engaging Indigenous students in fun filled language activities will only develop their English language skills if these activities are focused towards particular language outcomes, otherwise their impact may be reduced to little more than busy work.**

Teachers need to recycle language activities daily so that students not only get the opportunity to take on new understandings but also to put them into practice. Whenever possible, skills and understandings should be developed in context. Skills and understandings developed through phonemic awareness activities should be applied to books which have been, or are currently being used in class. In this way both teacher and student jointly construct, and share, the experience of reading.





## Other useful resources and links

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Andrew Wright. [1000 pictures for teachers to draw.](#) Collins

Love.E and Reilly.S. [A Sound Way.](#) Pearson Education Australia

Pinnell. G and Fountas.I [Sing a song of poetry: A teaching resource for phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency.](#)

Check booksellers' websites for all other works of Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas.

### Finger rhymes

Angus and Robertson

<http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/search/results.asp?searchbycriteria=finger+rhymes&searchby=title>

Amazon

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_ss\\_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=finger+rhymes](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=finger+rhymes)

### Playground chants

Angus and Robertson

<http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/products/detailed.asp?bookid=9781557992666&db=au>

Amazon

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_ss\\_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=playground+chants](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=playground+chants)

## **Skipping rhymes**

Angus and Robertson

<http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/search/results.asp?searchbycriteria=skipping+rhymes&searchby=title>

Amazon

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_ss\\_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=skipping+rhymes](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=skipping+rhymes)

## **Choral chants**

Angus and Robertson

<http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/search/results.asp>

Amazon

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_ss\\_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=jazz+chants&Go.x=9&Go.y=8](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_b/105-3433521-8947615?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=jazz+chants&Go.x=9&Go.y=8)

Other 'On line' stuff

<http://www.storylineonline.net/>

<http://www.nesbitt.com/poetry/>



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Writer: Kate Mullin, AISWA

Advisor: Wendy Gorman, AISWA

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For further information please contact:

KATE MULLINS

Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia



PO Box 1817, Osborne Park WA 6916

Telephone: (08) 9441 1620. Facsimile: (08) 9244 2786

Email: [rgorman@ais.wa.edu.au](mailto:rgorman@ais.wa.edu.au) Website: [www.ais.wa.edu.au](http://www.ais.wa.edu.au)

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