

SELECTIVE READING CANON (YEARS 4-6)

Parents stop guessing; follow the list.

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INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS LIST

Aim for 1 "canon" book every 2–4 weeks during Years 4–6.

Mix:

- 60–70% **story** (novels, short stories, visual texts)
- 30–40% **non-fiction** / poetry / essays

For each book, try to do at least one discussion:

- What is the big idea?
- What choices do characters face?
- How does the writer make us feel a certain way?

I've marked **(AUS)** for Australian texts.

Rough guide: **Y4 / Y5 / Y6+** is "best fit", but strong kids can read up or down.

CHAPTER 1: CORE STORY CANON

Big, sticky middle-grade reads (1-20)

1. Blueback – Tim Winton (AUS, Y4–6)

Why it matters: Short, lyrical novel about a boy, his mum and the sea; perfect for environmental themes, symbolism and rich description – Winton also turns up constantly in NSW exam extracts.

2. Once (Felix series) – Morris Gleitzman (AUS, Y5–6)

Why: Gripping Holocaust story told through a child voice; builds empathy, historical context and inferential reading. (If they love it, continue with Then, Now).

3. Boy Overboard – Morris Gleitzman (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Refugee journey from Afghanistan to Australia; very good for discussing perspective, fairness, policy, resilience.

4. Two Weeks with the Queen – Morris Gleitzman (AUS, Y5–6)

Why: Blends humour with serious issues (cancer, AIDS); perfect for tone shifts and identifying author attitude.

5. A Waltz for Matilda – Jackie French (AUS, Y5–6+)

Why: Federation-era historical fiction around "Waltzing Matilda"; rich for Australian identity, gender, land and power.

6. Hitler's Daughter – Jackie French (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Framed story that asks "What if Hitler had a child?"; great for ethical questions, unreliable narration, multiple time frames.

7. Tom Appleby, Convict Boy – Jackie French (AUS, Y5–6+)

Why: Convict journey; gives background knowledge for any colonial/convict extract.

8. Dragonkeeper (Book 1) – Carole Wilkinson (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Ancient China, fantasy + history; tests ability to follow quest structure, world-building and character growth.

9. Hating Alison Ashley – Robin Klein (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: School rivalry, jealousy, status; excellent for character contrast and internal vs external conflict.

10. Storm Boy – Colin Thiele (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Classic coastal novella, boy and pelican; used often in schools for visual imagery and emotional ending.

11. Holes – Louis Sachar (Y4–6)

Why: Twisty plot, multiple time lines that knit together; great for practising cause/effect across chapters and motif spotting.

12. Wonder – R.J. Palacio (Y4–6)

Why: Multiple narrators; perfect for voice, empathy, point of view – ties directly into the "kindness / inclusion" exam themes.

13. Skellig – David Almond (Y5–6+)

Why: Strange, poetic, semi-fantastical – teaches kids to handle ambiguity, symbolism and open endings.

14. When You Reach Me – Rebecca Stead (Y5–6+)

Why: Newbery winner, time-travel puzzle + friendship; brilliant for close reading, clue hunting, and structure.

15. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – C.S. Lewis (Y4–6)

Why: Core fantasy archetype; great to refer back to when exams use allegory, sacrifice, hero's journey.

16. The Hobbit – J.R.R. Tolkien (Y5–6+)

Why: Rich language, long sentences, detailed world; good stamina builder for complex syntax and descriptive passages.

17. The Giver – Lois Lowry (Y6+)

Why: Dystopian "controlled community"; perfect for higher-order thinking about memory, freedom, conformity.

18. A Wrinkle in Time – Madeleine L'Engle (Y5–6+)

Why: Sci-fi + family story; flexible for theme questions on courage, love, individuality.

19. Bridge to Terabithia – Katherine Paterson (Y5–6)

Why: Realistic friendship + grief; supports character development, foreshadowing, dealing with death.

20. The Girl Who Drank the Moon – Kelly Barnhill (Y5–6)

Why: Lush fantasy, shifting perspectives; strong for narrative voice and motif (magic, sacrifice, stories).

CHAPTER 2: AUSTRALIAN VOICE & IDENTITY

Books 21-28

Lean extra into these for NSW exam flavour.

21. Blueback – Tim Winton (AUS, Y4–6)

(Already listed; keep it as a "non-negotiable".)

22. The Silver Donkey – Sonya Hartnett (AUS, Y5–6)

Why: WWI deserter + two sisters; layered questions about truth, courage, war stories.

23. Nanberry: Black Brother White – Jackie French (AUS, Y6+)

Why: Early colony through the eyes of an Aboriginal boy; teaches multi-perspective Australian history.

24. Blueback + Storm Boy pairing (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Read them together to compare land/sea, family, environmental ethics.

25. Boy Overboard + refugee non-fiction articles (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Use the novel + real news pieces to practise synthesising fiction and non-fiction.

26. Young Dark Emu: A Truer History – Bruce Pascoe (AUS, Y5–6)

Why: Reframes pre-colonial Australia as complex agricultural societies; exactly the kind of truth-telling / First Nations history kids will meet in modern tests.

27. Come Together: Things Every Aussie Kid Should Know About First Nations Peoples – Isaiah Firebrace (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Bright, accessible overview of First Nations culture, history and language; perfect non-fiction balance to the above novels.

28. A Boat of Stars: New Poems to Inspire and Enchant – eds. Natalie Jane Prior & Margaret Connolly (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Modern Australian poetry anthology for children – helps kids cope with poem comprehension, imagery and sound devices.

CHAPTER 3: NON-FICTION, BIOGRAPHY & "BRAIN STRETCH"

Books 29-34

You want kids reading arguments, explanations and lives, not just stories.

29. Young Dark Emu (again – counts as both Australian identity and core non-fiction)

30. Girls Think of Everything – Catherine Thimmesh (Y4–6)

Why: Short profiles of female inventors; great for informational text features, cause/effect and innovation themes.

31. The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (Young Readers Edition) – William Kamkwamba (Y5–6)

Why: Memoir of solving a village problem with science; good for narrative non-fiction and grit.

32. The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded – Jackie French (AUS, Y4–6)

Why: Animal-centred WWI narrative; introduces ANZAC history in a child-friendly way.

33. One or two Horrible Histories / Horrible Science titles – Terry Deary / Nick Arnold (Y4–6)

Why: Funny but fact-heavy; teaches kids to read dense, quirky non-fiction with sidebars, captions and diagrams.

34. Annual Guinness World Records or similar fact book (Y4–6)

Why: Excellent for practising skimming, scanning, tables, charts and short info bursts – exactly what shows up in multi-text reading exams.

CHAPTER 4: POETRY, SHORT STORIES & VISUAL TEXTS

Books 35-40

Selective/OC love short, dense texts: poems, extracts, picture-books, graphics.

35. A Boat of Stars (already listed) – for poetry.

36. Revolting Rhymes – Roald Dahl (Y4–6)

Why: Twisted fairy-tale poems; good for tone, parody, point of view and spotting how a writer plays with reader expectations.

37. Tales from Outer Suburbia – Shaun Tan (AUS, Y5–6+)

Why: Surreal short stories + art; brilliant for inference, symbolism, figurative language and visual literacy.

38. The Arrival – Shaun Tan (wordless graphic novel, Y5–6+)

Why: Entirely visual migrant story; forces students to "read" images like text, a key exam skill.

39. A fables collection – e.g. Aesop's Fables (any good edition, Y4–6)

Why: Short moral stories; good for themes, morals, allegory and comparison ("How are these two fables similar/different?").

40. A "classic short story treasury" (kids' edition) – any reputable collection (Y4–6)

Why: Exposure to short, tight narrative structures; lets students practise comprehension on complete stories in one sitting, not only novel extracts.

CHAPTER 5: HOW TO "WORK" THE CANON

(without making it school)

For each book you actually use:

Before reading

Ask: "What do you think this will be about? Where is it set? Who might this be written for?"

During / after

3 questions is plenty:

- "What surprised you?"
- "What was unfair in this story?"
- "What decision would you have made differently from the main character?"

Once a fortnight

Pick one book and do a quick exam-style task:

- 3 comprehension questions
 - **OR** a short writing prompt based on the theme or character.
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If a Year 4-6 child reads even 15-20 of these 40 titles, with light discussion, you've built:

- a big bank of background knowledge,
- comfort with complex, layered texts, and
- exactly the kind of reading "muscle" OC / Selective / Scholarship exams quietly assume.

**That's how the Selective Reading Canon (Years 4-6)[™] delivers on its promise:
parents stop guessing and simply work through a proven list.**

SELECTIVE READING CANON (YEARS 4-6)

40 carefully curated books to build the reading foundation your child needs for NSW selective, OC, and scholarship success.

Stop guessing. Start with this proven list.