

## ***Making the Most of The School Magazine: A Guide for Teachers***

**2009 edition**

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### **Part One: Outline of *The School Magazine* and its *Teaching Units***

#### ***What is The School Magazine?***

*The School Magazine* is a literary magazine for children that has been published continuously by the NSW Department of Education and Training since just after Gallipoli, in 1916! For over 93 years *The School Magazine* has been making Australian children laugh, hold their breaths, sigh and delight in the simple lifelong pleasures of reading good quality texts.

*The School Magazine* is in fact four different magazines. We publish four age-differentiated titles: *Countdown*, *Blast Off*, *Orbit* and *Touchdown*. Each title is published 10 times a year, from February to November.

Every magazine is lavishly illustrated in colour by leading Australian artists and also includes striking photographs. Each magazine has editorial characters, or mascots, who provide a fictional focus for the magazines. The new mascots introduced in 2008 have proved wildly popular with readers, judging by the hundreds of emails and illustrated letters the mascots receive from children across Australia.

#### **More about our four titles**

##### ***Countdown (Year 3)***

This magazine introduces newly independent readers to the pleasures of short, interesting texts, all supported by a wide variety of appealing and colourful illustrations. The editorial mascots for *Countdown* are animal characters: meet Yakka (the sulphur-crested cockatoo) and Yip (a pygmy possum) as they fly around Australia gathering stories, poems, plays, articles and activities. Read the first episode of a two-part serial featuring Yakka and Yip in Part Two of this



guide . Simply go to <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/notes/index.htm> and click on Part Two). This episode is published in *Countdown* issue 1, 2009.

## ***Blast Off (Year 4)***

Hamlet the chameleon (he changes colour to match the mood of the texts he reads) and his companion Little Squirt (a very well-behaved stink bug) search out texts that will make Year 4 readers (ages 9–10) laugh, think, empathise and want to write. Again, striking photos and original illustrations are used throughout *Blast Off*. A two-part serial featuring Hamlet and Little Squirt in their own adventure appears in *Blast Off* issues 3 and 4, 2009.

## ***Orbit (Year 5)***

*Orbit* readers (aged 10–11) meet Mungo, a keen green gardener, composter and hybridiser, and his coop full of entertaining chooks, each with its own personality. Mungo and the chooks introduce students to examples of literary texts which will appeal to their need for excitement, action, depth of emotion and realism, all beautifully illustrated. And the chooks have their own late night adventure in a two-part serial in *Orbit* issues 4 and 5, 2009.

## ***Touchdown (Year 6 and early high school readers)***

Readers of *Touchdown* (ages 11+) never really meet the mysterious 'Ed', but they'll get to know the three stringers (correspondents) the Ed relies on to provide content for the magazine: the dreamy Beyonce Horizons (stories and poems); the seasoned world traveller Phyllis Wong (nonfiction); and the slightly unreliable 'Pencils' Barrymore who sometimes provides plays—jelly crises permitting. Material in *Touchdown* fulfils the independently reading child's need for intellectually challenging texts of an appealing and appropriate nature. A three-part serial featuring Beyonce, Phyllis and Pencils appeared in *Touchdown* issues 8, 9 and 10 in 2008.

## **The role of our editorial characters**

The editorial characters exemplify literary techniques in action, as they perform the following functions:

- the characters stimulate our readers' imaginations: readers become intrigued by the lives of our characters, and are drawn into their fictional worlds.



- the characters provide a focus for readers' empathy and identification, and establish a continuity and coherence for each title, especially thanks to the wonderful illustrations provided by Kerry Millard, Peter Sheehan and Andrew Joyner.
- the way we create characters and develop their personalities and interactions across time is an example of how writers create fiction. So, we're showing readers how to have fun making things up.
- the characters appear in the margins of many texts, to explain words or expressions, to comment on texts, or simply to tell riddles and jokes. This models an interactive approach to reading, where we encourage our readers to interact with, respond to and question the texts they read.
- the characters are funny, quirky, engaging and culturally diverse, and reading about them provides a small taste of the rich pleasures that literature offers.

We encourage our readers to write to the editorial characters by post or email (details are on pages 4 and 5 of each issue). We respond to all letters/emails, although we can only publish a handful each month.

## Contents of each magazine

In its 36 pages, every one of the 10 issues of each title offers around a dozen accessible and engaging texts across many topics and themes. In every issue, in every title, you will find a selection of the following text types, drawn from work by Australian and international authors, present and past:

- Poetry
- Stories
- Plays (in every even-numbered issue)
- Nonfiction articles: explanations, features, procedures, historical recounts ...
- Book reviews and extracts from a recommended book (download our *Bookshelf List 2009* from <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/bookshelf/index.htm>)



- Stand-alone cartoons with humorous captions or punch lines
- Several cartoon serials: in 2009 we introduce *The Nelly Gang* by Stephen Axelsen (set on the Australian goldfields in the 1850s) and *George Underpits* by Aaron Blabey (a boy with a bump on his head meets a talking fish and has to save the world ...)
- Crosswords, puzzles, riddles and other word play activities.

## How we choose what gets published

The editorial team at *The School Magazine* chooses texts against a range of literary criteria. All the texts we publish:

- have literary merit: i.e. each text uses language in interesting, effective ways.
- develop non-trivial themes and messages: each text is 'worth reading' for what it says about childhood, life, problems, family, fun, the past, the future, the value of imagination ...
- express credible plots, characters we care about, and authentic thoughts and feelings.
- avoid simplistic outcomes, questionable ethics, and clichés at all levels (in plot, character, language, emotions ...).
- reflect and value the socio-cultural diversity of contemporary Australia.
- are accessible and of some interest to at least some of our readers at that level.

We can't please everyone all the time, but there's always something in each issue that stimulates each student's interest and imagination.

## How to use *The School Magazine* in the classroom

*The School Magazine* is an excellent resource to complement your existing English program as the texts are short and easily accessible, yet challenging. *The School Magazine Teaching Units* (described in detail in the next sections) give you classroom-ready activities based on the texts.

The editorial team at *The School Magazine* take the hard work out of finding age-appropriate and well-written texts across the range of text types you want to introduce young readers to.

For example, poetry is a regular feature of *The School Magazine*, so you will always find a range of poems to choose from and to compare and contrast. Comparisons can also be made between and among the plays published across the year or across different titles. Students can explore how characters are represented, as well as learn the structures and features of scriptwriting. The information texts provide well-written examples of mixed text types for a young audience and can serve as springboards for further research as well as writing activities.

Each month, the *Bookshelf* section in each magazine offers a short review and extract from a recommended published book. These *Bookshelf* segments help you to encourage wider reading and to teach your students how to construct reviews. You can download the *Bookshelf List 2009* from:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/bookshelf/index.htm>

Both the magazines and the *Teaching Units* are available on subscription. Call us on (02) 9886 7754 or download the subscription form from:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/subscribe/index.htm>

## *The School Magazine Teaching Units: classroom-ready teaching sessions*

*From 2009, Teaching Units are published with every issue of every magazine.*

*The School Magazine Teaching Units* are designed to capitalise on what the magazines offer, with a deliberate focus on the teaching of reading in Stages 2 and 3. Special attention is paid to 'learning about' reading, critical literacy and strategies to extend the students' repertoire. Some connections are made with talking, listening and writing (space permitting), and these could be exploited further, depending on student need and interest.

*The School Magazine Teaching Units* are available on subscription only, but sample Teaching Unit sessions can be downloaded:

- Download a sample **story** with its accompanying **teaching session** from:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/samplestoryandteachingunityyy.pdf>



- Download a sample **poem** with its accompanying **teaching session** from:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/pelicanchorustextandsession.pdf>

## What you'll find in each *School Magazine Teaching Unit*

Each *Teaching Unit* contains four complete classroom 'sessions', with worksheets, based around texts from that month's magazine.

Each of the four sessions is designed to focus on specific NSW English K–6 curriculum outcomes and indicators by close reading of one or more texts. While most sessions follow a sequence that moves from whole class towards independent reading, the structure allows for maximum flexibility and can be adapted to suit the needs of your class.

Each *Teaching Unit* also contains 'Text Tips': short explanations written by staff at *The School Magazine*. These Text Tips are designed to help you appreciate the distinctive visual and verbal characteristics of the texts published in each issue. For example, the issue 1 2009 *Teaching Units* contain Text Tips about:

- the visual literacy demands of the different cartoon serials in the magazines
- how to approach teaching particular poems in the magazines.

## How each teaching session is structured

Each of the four teaching sessions that make up a *School Magazine Teaching Unit* follows these stages:

### 1. Session Focus

Here you'll find a statement of which NSW Board of Studies English K–6 Syllabus outcomes are addressed by the session, and in particular, how the work on the text(s) in each session relates to clearly stated indicators.

### 2. What you will need

We tell you exactly what resources you'll need to teach the session. Often you only need to make photocopies of the session's worksheet. Sometimes internet access for the students is recommended, and we often suggest optional resources for extension activities.

### 3. Setting the scene

In this stage we help you orient your students to the text by making connections with their experiences (text to self), to other texts read (text to text), or to new information (text to world). This is particularly important if the context of the text is removed from students' prior knowledge and experience (e.g. it is set in an unfamiliar country, or it uses colloquial language the students may not have heard). Rather than 'tell the students everything they need to know', the aim is to encourage curiosity and problem-solving skills.

The sample teaching unit from *Countdown* #1, 2009, Session 2 uses the text *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos* by Geoffrey McSkimming. Download the sample session from: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/samplestoryandteachingunityyy.pdf>

As you'll see from that sample session, the students are asked about what Australian slang they may already know before colloquial language is explored in further detail.

### 4. Modelled Reading

In Modelled Reading, the focus is on the teacher presenting aspects of the text, new skills or concepts in a purposeful way. For example, an information text may offer opportunities to explore the techniques the writer has used to create interest and engage the reader, e.g. headings that pose questions, interesting facts in text boxes, use of pictures and captions.

In the sample unit based on *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos*, Modelled Reading revisits the structure of the narrative. It then identifies how characters are represented using language—through their names (alliteration) and what they say (dialogue).

### 5. Guided Reading

The focus here is on the reinforcement and application of new learning. Students may be continuing what they did in Modelled Reading with less teacher guidance; they may be asked questions to explore this learning in greater depth. They may also be reinforcing concepts taught, or applying their new learning to other texts read.

In the sample unit based on *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos*, students further explore language in Guided Reading by identifying similes and the more interesting 'saying' verbs.



## 6. Independent Activities

The aim of the Independent Activities stage is to offer opportunities for students to 'show what they know', always in relation to the outcomes and indicators that are the focus of the session. Students can transfer their new knowledge to another context, independently of the teacher. They may be working individually or in small groups and making connections with writing, talking and listening. This is an important aspect of learning for all students, but particularly in Stages 2 and 3 where they are required to respond to and innovate at a more sophisticated level.

In the sample unit based on *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos*, students are encouraged to transfer their knowledge about character and dialogue to present the text as Reader's Theatre. How well they present the characters will show what they have learned in Modelled and Guided Reading.

## 7. Worksheets

Each *Teaching Unit* contains around four worksheets, based on the texts covered in each session. You are free to make multiple copies of the worksheets. Worksheets may relate to any stage of the session. For example, a basic comprehension worksheet may be useful for Guided Reading; a more grammatically-based one for Modelled Reading; and an extension writing one for Independent Activities. Of course, you will adapt these worksheets to suit the ability levels of your students. See the sample worksheet based on *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos*.

### Ways of using the *Teaching Units* in your classroom

Here are some ideas for incorporating *The School Magazine Teaching Units* into your classroom program:

- Work through the *Teaching Unit* session by session with the whole class. Depending upon the rest of your English program and student need/interest, these sessions may cover a week, a fortnight or perhaps longer. The Guided Reading activities could be offered to all students or to a group of students requiring reinforcement or extension. Alternatively, you may work through these sessions with one group of students only, and other groups will be using other texts.
- Choose sessions by the type of text. For example, you may choose all the sessions that focus on poetry across issues or across titles, i.e. *Countdown*



and *Blast Off*. This is an excellent opportunity to explore texts in depth and provide students with a wider range of texts that they can draw upon for their own writing. By comparing texts, students can better identify how writers use different structures and features for effect.

- Choose the sessions by focus outcomes. Each session is designed to focus on specific aspects of English and these are identified in the Outcomes and Indicators at the beginning of the session. Choosing sessions by Outcomes and Indicators offers the opportunity to focus on discrete areas of student need, such as recognising the basic stages of a narrative, or differentiating between different types of sentences.
- Choose the sessions by author/illustrator. *The School Magazine* makes it possible to study in depth a range of texts by the same author/illustrator. Several of the authors and illustrators are published elsewhere, so this work can be extended with texts from the school library and internet.

## More resources

- Download a sample **story** with its accompanying **teaching session** from:  
<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/samplestoryandteachingunityyy.pdf>
- Download a sample **poem** with its accompanying **teaching session** from:  
<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/pelicanchorustextandsession.pdf>
- Download here Part Three of this guide: **Suggestions for teaching different text types in *The School Magazine***:  
<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/services/schoolmagazine/assets/pdf/teachersguide2009part3.pdf>