



**EMMAUS**  
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL CANBERRA

Teaching & Learning Policy TL1-3  
*Literature Policy*

Updated  
April 2017

# Vision/Purpose

Emmaus exists to partner with parents, in providing a Christ-centred, Biblically-grounded and academically-rigorous education, which enables students to grow in wisdom and character, to the glory of God.

## Values

### 1. Caring for Others

At Emmaus, we value, care for and respect each other because we are all made in the image of God. We partner with parents to care for and develop the whole person- body, soul and spirit. We foster a sense of belonging, celebrate one another's achievements and choose to be grateful for our school and each other. We are a community that learns in a fun, creative, encouraging and generous environment.

### 2. Striving for Mastery

At Emmaus, we encourage students to strive for excellence in all aspects of life: in study, work, and in relationships with God and with people. We believe God equips every person with gifts and abilities. We seek to instill in our students a strong desire to apply their utmost to what they do, an attribute that will long outlive their school years. Students are encouraged to master and apply academic and life skills in order to make the most of their opportunities in later life. Our goal is to equip students with the necessary skills and understanding to make wise and Godly choices, and to live resilient, fulfilled, and productive lives.

### 3. Equipping for Service

At Emmaus, our motivation for service is the love that Christ has shown us: his life of servant leadership is the example we seek to follow. Staff at Emmaus model integrity, accountability and the value of excellence in our work. We strive to equip students with both the desire and the skills to make a difference in the lives of others. We aim to grow students who are rich in Godly wisdom and noble character, and find their security in the love of Christ.

# Teaching & Learning Policy TL 1-3 Literature Policy

Prepared by	Paul Marshall & Marcia Melville, Board Member
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## Version History

Version	Date	Notes
1.0	Jan 2014	Created by Paul Marshall & Marcia Melville, Board Member
1.1	June 2014	Updated from review by Primary Coordinator (Rachel McClure), Secondary Coordinator (John Jenkins), Curriculum Committee
1.2	April 2017	Updated to new format, TL number assigned by W.Morris, reviewed by R.McClure

## Important related documents:

Teaching & Learning Policy suite:

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## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Explain the value of Literature.
- Provide a framework for Biblical discernment when deciding what books to include and what books to avoid at Emmaus.
- Outline the procedure for addressing concerns with the choice of literature at Emmaus.

The role of the Board through this policy is to ensure that the teaching staff, curriculum, activities and resource base of Emmaus Christian School maintains a consistently balanced and Biblical direction and flavour.

## The Policy

### The Value of Fictional Literature

*Literature is a form of discovery, perception, intensification, expression, interpretation, creativity, beauty and understanding. These are ennobling activities and qualities. For a Christian, they can be God-glorifying, a gift from God to the human race to be accepted with zest.* (Ryken)

In other words:

1. It can help us explore abstract human experiences.
2. It can deepen our appreciation for concrete and human experience.
3. It expands our range of experiences.
4. It provides beauty and creativity to be enjoyed.

### Types of Literature

Christopher Booker, in his book, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, argues that there are seven meta-narratives that we can find in literature. These seven categories help us see some of the similarities and differences in the expansive literature that is available to us:

1. **Overcoming the Monster** - The protagonist, sets out to defeat an antagonistic force which threatens the protagonist and/or protagonist's homeland. Examples: Perseus, Theseus, *Beowulf*, *Dracula*, *War of the Worlds*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *Seven Samurai* and its Western-style remake *The Magnificent Seven*, *James Bond*, *Star Wars: A New Hope*.
2. **Rags to Riches** - The poor protagonist acquires things such as power, wealth, and a mate, before losing it all and gaining it back upon growing as a person. Examples: *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*.
3. **The Quest** - The protagonist and some companions set out to acquire an important object or to get to a location, facing many obstacles and temptations along the way. Examples: *Iliad*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Watership Down*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Lord of the Rings*
4. **Voyage and Return** - The protagonist goes to a strange land and, after overcoming the threats it poses to him/her, returns with nothing but experience. Examples: *Odyssey*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *Orpheus*, *The Time Machine*, *Peter Rabbit*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Third Man*.
5. **Comedy** - The protagonists are destined to be in love, but something is keeping them from being together, which is resolved by the end of the story. Examples: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *Bridget Jones Diary*, *Music and Lyrics*, *Sliding Doors*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Mr Bean*
6. **Tragedy** - The protagonist is a villain who falls from grace and whose death leaves readers with a challenging or thought-provoking perspective of human experience and decision-making. Examples: *Macbeth*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Carmen*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Jules et Jim*, *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*.

- 7. Rebirth** - The protagonist is a villain or otherwise unlikable or struggling character who redeems him/herself over the course of the story. Examples: *Sleeping Beauty, The Frog Prince, Beauty and the Beast, Frozen, A Christmas Carol, The Secret Garden*

### The Bible – The Greatest Story of All

*“I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller.”* (GK Chesterton)

The Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

The best thing about this Story is – it's true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the centre of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture. And this is no ordinary baby. This is the Child upon whom everything would depend.

The Heavens are singing about how great God is;  
and the skies are shouting it out,  
“See what God has made!”  
Day after day... Night after night...  
They are speaking to us.  
**Psalm 19:1-2 (Paraphrase)**

Through the Bible we discover that the gift of literacy is more profound than merely mastering literacy techniques, improving comprehension, and learning to speed-read. Fundamentally, literacy is a spiritual discipline that must overcome the darkness that veils us. If we ever hope to spiritually benefit from our reading, the Holy Spirit must intrude upon our lives and remove our blindfolds so that we can behold the radiant glory of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). Once we see His glory, our literacy – *how* we read books – is permanently and forever changed.

## A Framework for Biblical Discernment

### What types of books should Christians read?

1. Scripture is the most important book, and the highest priority in our reading.
2. Other *Christian* books and texts can teach us valuable lessons about God, the world, our sin, and our Saviour. These can include biographies, Bible study guides and references, topical books, historical and other novels, blogs and webpages.
3. There is also great value in reading *non-Christian* books. Non-Christian literature, at least the best of it, is a gift from God to be read by Christians. These again range in scope from reference material and books covering details of every aspect of human history and every form of human endeavour, to biographies, newspapers, blogs and novels.

Non-Christian literature that deals honestly with sin and evil can be useful. It can help us better understand issues of the human heart and it can help all Christians sympathise with the despair of those who are enslaved to sin and remain under God's wrath.

Yet stories do more than entertain and inspire us. Stories make claims about the world in which we live. To an undiscerning reader, literature can twist truth and expose young readers to harmful concepts and values. As a result, Emmaus uses the following three principles when selecting literature.

## Books to Avoid

### 1. Avoid certain Books because of Timing

It is wise not to read some books because of their timing, not merely because of their content. So often in our post-modern society children are losing their childhood by regularly being exposed to adult and inappropriate themes. We chose to limit young children's reading for the same reason that we don't send young boys into war. For a young man to develop into a warrior, he first must learn the tactics of battle and develop the muscles and instincts of a warrior. So, too, our children – and those who are children in the faith – need time to grow the deep roots of a biblical worldview before being called to exercise that worldview against the force of culture displayed in non-Christian books.

This conviction does not prevent adults from reading spiritually challenging fiction books to our children verbally. In those settings a teacher or parent can stop and address concerns as we go along. Whether it is a book, movie, computer game etc, our literature policy is to look at each one individually on its merits.

In the Primary years, any movie that is rated PG, must have written parent approval before being viewed in the classroom. Similarly, some parents might write or speak to the teacher and request that a certain book not be used in the classroom. In most cases, the teacher will seek to protect a child's innocence and not expose the child to inappropriate themes. However, at times, the Principal might use his discernment in approving a controversial book in these younger years if it meets a greater educational purpose and is used in a way that the school's Statement of Faith continues to be honoured. Primary students may ask to borrow books for older students from the Library provided they have their parents' and teacher's permission.

Conversely, the adolescent years are marked by a coming of age. In the Secondary years, some books will be deliberately chosen for their controversial worldview. Students are encouraged to question, examine, critique and debate the issues and worldview raised in the text. The classroom is one of the ideal environments for addressing these issues. Examples of such texts might include *Animal Farm, 1984* or *The Hunger Games*. These are deliberate steps towards our students becoming discerning adults.

### 2. Avoid certain Books that Glorify Evil

Many of the greatest works in literature are written from a perspective that captures the dark realities of life. This makes it impossible to reject books merely because they include bloody violence, illicit sexuality, scornful unbelief, or dark witchcraft. The Bible includes stories of all four.

The important questions are these: How is the violence, sexual sin, and skepticism presented? Is it presented as evil? Is fornication celebrated, or are the consequences of sin made obvious? Does the book celebrate sin, or leave evil unresolved?

Deciding what not to read is a matter of discernment, writes Peter Leithart:

*No reader, of course, has a red phone to heaven, or is there an inerrant and infallible Index of Forbidden Books. Yet God has passed judgment on certain things, and it would be remarkable arrogance for a Christian to disagree. We know that books are bad if they pattern our desires to hope for anonymous sex, if they encourage imitation of characters who scorn God, if they invite us to see the world as a cosmic toilet.*

We approach all books with a discerning mind and a guarded heart. If the author intends to glorify sin and unbelief, we should not read the book, unless our goal is criticism. Scripture clearly forbids Christians from being captivated by human philosophy, by a way of thinking that is hostile to God and to his will (2 Col 2:8). But Scripture does not forbid us from reading books that include descriptions of evil.

There are an increasing number of 'children's books' that we do not consider at all suitable for children. In the past, we were told that as a Christian school we would receive a 'modified' selection of books for sale at a Book Fair we hosted. However, our staff still managed to find more than twenty titles in our selection

that we considered quite unsuitable. These included stories that go beyond the 'Goosebump' 'spooky' level into a more serious obsession with sinister concepts and activities. They include **going mad** (*'Nightmare Hall'*), **psychic power** (*'The Healer'*), **being subjected to voodoo** (*'Cold'*), and **murder** (*'The Ripper, 'Let Me Tell You How I Died,' 'The Waitress'*) among others.

As a result, a discerning member of our staff (or nominated discerning education committee members) will veto all books that are introduced to our School Library and sold at the Book Fair. At times, the broader parent community may point out an inappropriate book in our Library and we are happy to review it and remove it if necessary.

### 3. Avoid certain Books for Conscience's Sake

Conforming to non-Christian thought patterns is dangerous to our souls (Rom 12:2). So how much error and sin should we endure in the name of cultural appreciation? Where is the line? Even if evil is presented, how much adultery and fornication and violence and deceit should we tolerate in our search for goodness, truth and beauty.

This is a matter of conscience for each believer. And while there are no rigid rules for what Christians should or should not read, we must be sensitive to our own consciences and the consciences of those around us. As we establish our own understanding of what books we will and will not read ourselves, we must respect the parameters that other Christians have chosen to set for themselves and for their children.

This matter of conscience applies to a number of popular books, such as the Harry Potter series. Our school community represents a spectrum of views about these. Some parents encourage their children to read them and others prohibit them. As a school where parent views are respected and reinforced, Emmaus walks the wire by not having these books available for Primary Students, but allowing Secondary students to borrow them from our library, and allowing Primary students to read them if their parents supply the books.

## Conclusion

As a school our basic attitude toward literacy is: **a child has hardly enough time to read every good book, let alone the rest.** So we focus on giving children the opportunity to read or hear as many widely lauded titles as possible. We should not encourage the reading of poorly written books no matter who their author or what their worldview is. Apart from the content and worldview of a text, we want to inspire and model to our students:

- Well researched and interesting content
- Flowing and grammatically correct prose with accurate spelling
- Broad and specific vocabulary
- Creative and relatable characters who are developed well
- Exciting and engaging plots

God is into rich quality and diversity not monotony and poor quality. Our current reading goal is that by the time students finish Year 6, they are reading at least 400-800 pages of good quality literature per term. Students in the secondary school continue this reading at a rate appropriate to their ability.

## References

- Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004).
- Peter J. Leithart, "Authors, Authority, and the Humble Reader" in Leland Ryken, ed., *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw, 2002), 218.
- Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Zonderkids, 2007).
- Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Crossway, 2011)
- Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR wipf and Stock, 2000), 176.
- Jim Trelease, *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin Books, 2013).

## Associated Forms

- In 2010, the minds at Google Books calculated that in human history 129,864,880 different books have been published in various languages. Assuming that we only read in English, we can whittle this number down a bit. Currently, the Library of Congress houses eighteen million books. American publishers add another two hundred thousand titles to this stack each year. This means that at the current publishing rate, ten million new books will be added in the next fifty years. As a result, there is **NO RECOMMENDED READING LIST** attached to this policy, rather we encourage parents and staff to use the biblical discernment that has been outlined instead. The policy has been littered with many examples in an attempt to wet the reading appetite. *The Read-Aloud Handbook* also includes a giant treasury of great read-aloud books.