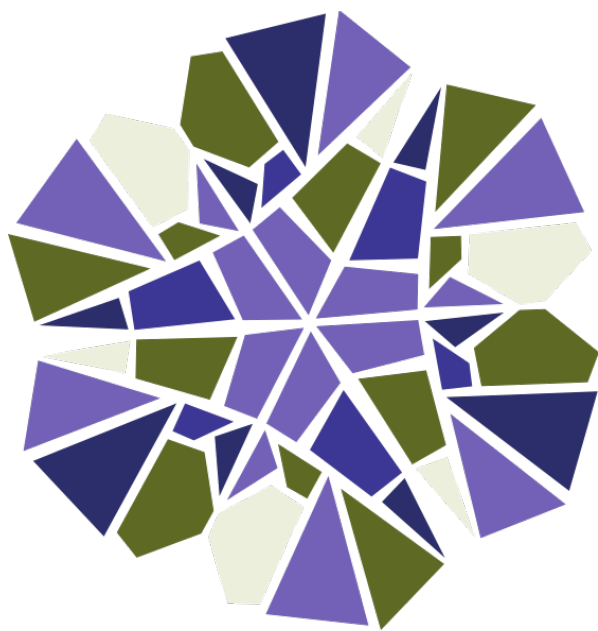


What do you mean?



Comprehending and Composing Written, Visual and Multimodal Texts (Years 3-9)

**Friday 4 September 2026
(9am-4pm, AEST)**

**One Day Literacy Conference presented by ALEA Victoria and ACMI
at ACMI (Fed Square, Melbourne) or Online**

Meaning making and building understanding are complex challenges for students in all subject areas. A quick look at any text – from picture books, novels, textbooks to websites, videogames, film, advertisements, TV and social media – shows the multiple layers of meaning and potential for interpretation. Join us for an inspirational day of professional learning, sharing evidence-informed and practical literacy strategies for teaching students in **Years 3-9** to confidently interpret, question and communicate ideas through diverse text types and modes of communication.

A strong emphasis on critical literacy will support participants to guide learners in analysing perspectives, questioning messages, recognising gaps and in doing this, to become thoughtful, capable interpreters and creators of meaning.

Engage with leading researchers, skilled teachers, and creative thinkers for a day of thought-provoking presentations and workshops, where you can strengthen professional connections, take away practical curriculum-linked teaching ideas, and refuel your passion for teaching literacy.

Join us in person at ACMI, Fed Square Melbourne, or online from anywhere in Australia.

Keynotes:

Dr Sally Humphrey

(Teacher, Teacher Educator, Researcher & Author, Sydney NSW)

Grammar and Meaning: Designing Task-based Resources to Support Teachers' Knowledge of Language in the Middle Years of Schooling



Dr Helen Cozmescu

(Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne, Teacher, Teacher Educator, Researcher & Author)

Reading for Meaning, Reading for Power: Criticality and Comprehension through Systemic Functional Linguistics and Multimodal Texts



Christine Topfer

(Literacy Consultant, Teacher & Author, Tasmania)

The Power of Connection, Context and Meaning in Spelling



Workshops (choice of 2):

- **Robyn English** (Teacher Leader and Coach, Department of Education Victoria)
Teaching Reading Comprehension is no Laughing Matter... or is it?
- **Rhianna Stewart** (Creative Learning Lead, 100 Story Building)
What Am I Trying to Say? Borrowing words through blackout poetry and collage
- **Kate Fikai and Garry Westmore** (ACMI Education)
Teaching with Videogames: Storytelling Through Friendship, Objects and Time (Years 7-9)
- **Bridget Hanna** (Education Manager, Australian Children's Television Foundation)
Finding meaning in the gaps and making sense of the unexpected with *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (Years 5-8)

Plenary:

Danny Forrest (Principal, Wedderburn P-12 College)

Looking for Meaning and Connection Through Indigenous Art: a school community's story

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION COST (full day program)

***Early Bird rate is available until 5pm, Thursday 30 July 2026 (AEST)**

Registration type	Full rate	Early Bird rate*
Full Individual Member cost (Including GST)	\$190	\$152
Institutional/School Sub-Member cost (Inc. GST)	\$240	\$192
Student/ Retired Member cost (Inc. GST)	\$100	\$80
Non-member cost (Inc. GST)	\$300	\$240
ONLINE Member (Including GST)	\$100	\$80
ONLINE Non-Member (Including GST)	\$199	\$159

ALEA MEMBERSHIP

Save money! If you are not yet an ALEA member, *before* you register, **check** the [ALEA website](#) for the mid-year **low-cost half yearly membership rates**, available NOW.
(Yearly membership is **1 January - 31 December** with pro rata rates in between.)

Find out more: the [benefits of joining ALEA](#).

Please note: **Student membership of ALEA is free** during an initial Teacher Education degree.

REGISTER HERE:

REGISTRATIONS CLOSE 5:00 p.m. Friday 21 August 2026 (AEST)

* 20% EARLY BIRD (EB)

This will be deducted from the total payable amount when you submit your form.

Please Note: EB pricing is available until **5pm, Thursday 30 July 2026 (AEST)** and cannot be applied retrospectively.

INQUIRIES:

Dr Annemaree O'Brien, State Director, ALEA Victoria: aobrien.alea.victoria@gmail.com

Please note: Professional learning guidelines, privacy statement, refund and cancellation policies apply to this event. See www.alea.edu.au/about/alea-policies-and-procedures/

This conference will NOT be recorded.

KEYNOTE Abstracts and Bios

**Dr Sally Humphrey****Grammar and Meaning: Designing Task-based Resources to Support Teachers' Knowledge of Language in the Middle Years of Schooling**

Functional approaches to language have long influenced the development of curricula in Australia and internationally. However, supporting teachers to develop and apply language knowledge for learning has proved challenging. Firstly, selecting and organising content for an effective language toolkit depends very much on the context in which teachers are teaching and learning! Secondly, there is limited time in university courses or workshops to integrate knowledge about language and literacy with relevant curriculum content across levels of development.

In this presentation I present three frameworks for organising and applying professional learning that have sought to address these issues to better support middle years teachers. Each of the frameworks responds to different teaching and learning contexts and can be described as:

- top-down, starting from the whole text purpose;
- middle ground, starting from discourse patterns across texts;
- bottom up, starting from grammatical systems and structures.

However, all are closely connected to the context of language use for learning in the Middle Years. In addition to outlining the benefits of the three ways of selecting and organising content, I will also demonstrate activities from the task-based pedagogic approach that we have adopted to support teachers effectively to build and apply their knowledge with colleagues and independently.

Dr Sally Humphrey has worked for many years as a teacher, teacher educator and researcher of TESOL and English. She has worked closely with teachers in Australia and internationally to describe and address the literacy demands of educational and social contexts. Sally has also co-written a number of teacher education textbooks to introduce teachers to Functional Grammar and Discourse systems including *Building a Language Toolkit for Teachers. A Functional Approach* (2026), Routledge; *Investigating Model Texts for Learning* (2020), PETAA; *Grammar and Meaning* (3rd Edition) (2024), PETAA.

**Dr Helen Cozmescu****Reading for Meaning, Reading for Power: Criticality and Comprehension through Systemic Functional Linguistics and Multimodal Texts**

The textual worlds of students from Year 3 to Year 9 include books, films, advertisements, artworks and everyday written and multimodal texts. These are never neutral. Every text makes choices that position readers, amplifying some voices and silencing others. Criticality, the habit of questioning claims, evaluating evidence and recognising how texts position audiences, is essential; so too are robust comprehension skills that enable students to understand and interpret what they read. Teaching criticality and comprehension strengthens literacies, content understanding and civic engagement, yielding academic gains that can improve media savvy and ethical awareness.

Dr Helen Cozmescu continued:

This session places critical literacy and comprehension at the heart of practice by pairing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with multimodal literacy research. Using concise, classroom-friendly metalanguage and classroom-tested tasks, participants will learn how to identify whose interests a text serves and how language and semiotic choices construct authority and persuasion. Participants will see how comprehension strategies can be addressed in tandem with SFL meta-functions to deepen student understanding, to redesign texts and learning tasks and to reveal alternative perspectives while supporting comprehension for diverse learners.

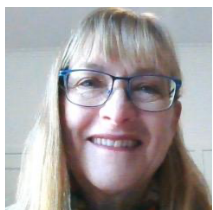
Dr Helen Cozmescu is a senior lecturer in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne. Helen's research interests are critical literacies, early years education and teaching First Nations texts. Her current projects investigate teacher professional development in literacy education, dialogic encounters with picture books, and phonics and pronunciation. Helen's research is situated in socio-cultural perspectives, and she employs qualitative methodologies. She has published peer-reviewed journal articles, teacher units of work, and chapters in edited collections in the fields of literacy and early years education. Her forthcoming book, *Critical Literacies, the Early Years of Schooling, and Teaching First Nations Perspectives* will be published in October 2026.

**Christine Topfer****The Power of Connection, Context and Meaning in Spelling**

English orthography (spelling) is multilayered: phonology, morphology and etymology interact as a system. The primary job of spelling is to represent meaning. In this session, we will go beneath the surface of words and explore how explicit instruction about units of meaning (morphemes) that repeat throughout the writing system can transform learning for students of all ages in all subject areas. Participants will learn how to start with meaning (context) and prime students to think structurally about words as they engage with texts in different curriculum learning areas. Connection and context are critical components in effective spelling instruction making the learning memorable and transferrable. Spelling is about knowing and understanding language and how it works (not memorising lists of words).

Christine Topfer is an experienced teacher, literacy coach, school leader and curriculum writer. She spent most of her career working for the Department for Education, Children and Young People in Tasmania. She currently works as a literacy consultant across Australia. Christine has a special interest in sharing how the writing system works with all learners. She has co-authored several publications including, *Exploring Literacy Learning in the Early Years. Guiding Thinking for Effective Spelling* (2nd Edition, 2018) Nelson/Cengage; and *Effective Spelling Teacher Resources Series F-6*, Cengage.

WORKSHOP Abstracts and Bios

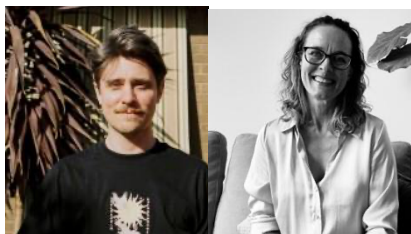
**Robyn English**

(Victorian Department of Education)

**Teaching Reading Comprehension is no laughing matter...
or is it?**

This presentation considers the close links between humour and higher-level comprehension, and explores some of the ways that a classroom teacher can use humorous texts as a resource to explicitly teach the reading behaviours associated with meaning making. Considering the elements that make a text funny can shine a light on the way language is used playfully or with careful consideration for an author to share a meaning that is not explicitly stated. Many teachers wonder how to teach students to infer – to ‘read between the lines’. How do you teach what isn’t there? Moving from literal to inferential comprehension is just that – using clues, background knowledge and knowledge about how story and language work to create deeper meaning.

Robyn English is a Victorian Department of Education Teacher Leader and Education Coach working in primary and secondary schools in central Victoria, supporting school leaders and teachers to plan and implement engaging, curriculum-based learning. Her passion for children’s literature infuses all learning contexts. Robyn is a co-editor of *Practical Literacy*, the ALEA Primary and Early Years teachers’ journal and has a personal aim in life to inspire all teachers and students to be active readers and writers.

**Kate Fikai and Garry Westmore**

(ACMI Education)

**Teaching with Videogames: Storytelling Through
Friendship, Objects and Time**

ACMI’s Game Lessons Library provides teachers with free lesson plans that use digital games to engage students with learning of all kinds. In this presentation you will hear how videogames provide a springboard for integrating English with Media, while getting your students engaged and excited. Workshop participants will play the hit Australian Indie game *The Gardens Between*, a time-bending tale that asks you to reflect on how friendships, memory and objects can tell our stories. In the lessons, students analyse a different method of storytelling, they reflect on personal connection with objects and memories and fill the narrative gaps with their own ideas. Don’t miss the chance to bring play into your English classroom and expand your teaching repertoire.

Kate Fikai is a Creative Learning Designer at ACMI, she facilitates the Game Lessons program and supports learning and media literacy with students and teachers. Kate is a Primary trained teacher and held numerous roles with ACMI, ATOM and Human Rights Arts & Film Festival, developing quality screen education resources and events that leverage her former career in the film and television industry.

Garry Westmore is a qualified teacher and senior producer of school programs at ACMI, with 18 years’ experience in the education sector and over a decade’s worth of experience designing learning programs and resources for museums. He is an avid gamer and has a particular love of story-driven games, cosy games and creative videogame worlds that can be shaped together.

**Bridget Hanna**

(Australian Children's Television Foundation)

Finding meaning in the gaps and making sense of the unexpected with *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (Shaun Tan)

This workshop invites teachers into the familiar, yet strange world of *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, where everyday streets reveal the unexpected. It explores how this picture book by Shaun Tan can spark curiosity and deep thinking, while the animated series shows how these ideas shift and grow across forms. Together, they open space for students in Years 5–8 to interpret, question and become intelligent, creative dreamers. Participants will explore practical strategies that build reading comprehension, visual and media literacy, and purposeful writing. A critical literacy lens supports students to notice perspectives, sit with uncertainty and find meaning in what is left unsaid.

The workshop includes writing prompts and classroom activities inspired by Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* "recipe" of blending the ordinary with the extraordinary. Participants will leave with adaptable ideas that connect texts, supporting students to become thoughtful, creative interpreters of the worlds they know and the ones they imagine.

Bridget Hanna is the Education Manager at the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF). With a background across education, digital practice and curatorial work in leading arts and cultural institutions, she brings a rich understanding of how young people learn with screen stories. Bridget's Masters research examined screen literacy and intertextuality, and she champions collaborative approaches that help learners connect their hands, head and heart.

**Rhianna Stewart**

(100 Story Building)

What Am I Trying to Say?

Borrowing words to create blackout poetry

What are you trying to say? Something important, always, but who has the words? In this workshop we'll borrow them. Through blackout poetry and collage, we'll coax meaning out of found texts and visuals, making a small keepsake for your workspace as a reminder of your intentions as an educator. You'll leave with the precious piece itself and a handful of skills and activities ready to use with your students. No poetry experience required!

Rhianna Stewart is a Creative Learning Lead at *100 Story Building*, a creative arts practitioner and printmaker with over a decade of experience across arts education, community arts and cultural programs. Rhianna began her career as an atelierista in early learning, designing and delivering Reggio Emilia-inspired arts programs that placed children's curiosity and creative voice at the centre of every experience. This foundation, the belief that every child is already a maker, a thinker and a storyteller continues to shape everything she does. Her career has taken her across Australia, including several years working with Martu artists in remote Western Australia, where she witnessed firsthand art as language, storytelling, community connection and cultural expression. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Art (Printmaking) from the Victorian College of the Arts and a Master of Therapeutic Arts Practice (Community Arts) from The MIECAT Institute.

Plenary:



Danny Forrest

Principal, Wedderburn P-12 College

Looking for Meaning and Connection Through Indigenous Art: A School's Story

Wedderburn P-12 College in rural Victoria worked with First Nations artist Tobie Cameron over an extended period of time to raise the profile of Country to become a clear and integral part of school culture. Tobie, a proud Kalkatungu man, worked with students at the school to build the concept, design and process stages of creation. One large artwork co-created with students led to a further collaboration in which the town's focus on large murals featuring birds led to a huge banner across a building overlooking the learning and play spaces.

In this presentation, principal Danny Forrest will share the story of this work and the joy of having Bunjil the creation eagle flying across the school and wider community, demonstrating how the power of image and symbolic representation can create meaning for all.

Danny Forrest is the Principal of Wedderburn P-12 College, a government school of around 200 students an hour north of Bendigo in central Victoria. In his six years at the school, Danny has enacted programs and projects that reflect his belief that every student deserves to be known, valued and supported to achieve success regardless of their chosen educational pathway. Danny's work and passions have always involved the wider community, with the school at the heart and centre. His passion to engage his teachers to creatively embrace the whole town in educational work has led to several creative initiatives including the Reading Olympics and a partnership with Indigenous artist Tobie Cameron to communicate respect and connection to Country through large scale visual art.

P R O G R A M	Registration 8.40am- 8.55am	ACMI Foyer, enter from Fed Square Tea/Coffee available for purchase from the Coffee Cart inside ACMI	
	Session	Swinburne Studio ZOOM STREAM A	Gandel Digital Future Lab 2 ZOOM STREAM B
	Conference opens 9:00am – 9.10am	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT and INTRODUCTION: Dr. Annemaree O'Brien, ALEA Vic State Director	
	9.10am - 9.20am	ACMI SPOTLIGHT: Christine Evely, ACMI Head of Education	
	Session 1 9:20am – 10:10am	1: KEYNOTE: Dr Sally Humphrey (Teacher Educator, Researcher & Author) Grammar and Meaning: Designing Task-based Resources to Support Teachers' Knowledge of Language in the Middle Years	
	Session 2 10:15am -11:05am	2: KEYNOTE: Dr Helen Cozmescu (University of Melbourne) Reading for Meaning, Reading for Power: Criticality and Comprehension...	
	BREAK 11:05am -11:30am	MORNING TEA	
	Session 3 11:35am – 12:25pm	3: KEYNOTE: Christine Topfer (Literacy Consultant, Teacher & Author) The Power of Connection, Context and Meaning in Spelling	
	Session 4 12:30pm – 1:30pm	4A: WORKSHOP: Kate Fikai and Garry Westmore (ACMI Education) Teaching with Videogames: Storytelling Through Friendship, Objects and Time (Years 7-9)	4B: WORKSHOP: Rhianna Stewart (100 Story Building) What Am I Trying to Say? Borrowing words to create blackout poetry
	LUNCH 1:30pm – 2:20pm	LUNCH	
	Session 5 2:25pm - 3.25pm	5A: WORKSHOP: Bridget Hanna (Australian Children's Television Foundation) Finding meaning in the gaps and making sense of the unexpected with Tales from Outer Suburbia (Years 5-8)	5B: WORKSHOP: Robyn English (Teacher Leader, Department of Education, Victoria) Teaching Reading Comprehension is no Laughing Matter... or is it?
	Session 6 3:30pm – 3.50pm	6: PLENARY: Danny Forrest (Principal, Wedderburn P-12 College) Looking for Meaning and Connection Through Indigenous Art: a school community's story	
	3.50pm – 4.00pm	7: REFLECT & RESPOND CONFERENCE CLOSE	
	4.00pm – 5.00pm	NETWORKING Social Event Finger food provided, purchase own drinks.	

Our annual one-day conference forges important connections between traditional and screen, media and digital literacies.