

The Importance of Student Literacy

The advent of NCEA and standards based assessment has significantly increased the importance of acquiring good literacy skills if students are to achieve academic success. Being able to accurately interpret assessment instructions and examination questions, and write detailed answers specifically tailored to the question asked, are essential skills. Assessment in subject areas where the literacy requirements were traditionally less demanding, such as Mathematics and the Sciences, has changed to more and more resemble the type of assessment customarily encountered in English and the Social Sciences. This means that the development of student expertise in terms of literacy is essential.

The acquisition of these skills for young men at Palmerston North Boys' High School is supported by a number of school wide initiatives. The most important, and most visible, of these initiatives is our SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) programme. For 15 minutes each day at the beginning of period five all students and teachers read an extended text – either fiction or non-fiction - of their choosing. An extended text is defined as a book or novel that is read over a prolonged period of time and excludes magazines, newspapers and comic books as well as non-fiction manuals such as the road code. There is a large body of research internationally that links academic progress and academic success to reading 'mileage' – the total amount of time spent reading – and that high achieving students read for 65 minutes daily, while low achieving students read for only one minute. SSR audits are carried out several times a year to check that students have an appropriate book. These audits also gather information for the school library so we can ensure the most popular books are available for our young men.

Parental support of the SSR programme will help your son to take the maximum benefit from it. Encouraging your son to spend additional time reading, especially on days when he has less homework, and role modelling good reading habits, are powerful ways you can assist your son to build his vocabulary and literacy skills. Asking your son questions about the book he is reading - Who are the main characters? What happened in the pages you read today? Why are you enjoying the particular book? Who is your favourite author, and why? – is another simple, but effective, way you can support him. Suggested reading lists can be found under the Library tab on Stratus (stratus.pnbhs.school.nz) and may assist students who are struggling to find a suitable book. The librarians are also available (before school, morning interval, lunch time and after school) to assist young men to find a suitable book for SSR.

Other initiatives include weekly book reviews at assembly, where young men and staff members briefly review a book they have recently read to raise awareness of different authors and genre of texts. The school library obtains copies of the books reviewed so they are available for interested students to read. Subject departments have also created vocabulary lists of terms specific to, and important for, their subject. This helps ensure students develop the appropriate vocabulary for success in that subject, and also helps to develop each young man's overall vocabulary. We have a regular 'Word of the Week' chosen to extend students' vocabularies. Students are made aware of the word and its meaning during Form Time and the Rector uses it at some stage during assembly on Friday. The first young man to raise his hand when the word is used is rewarded with a canteen

voucher. As parents you can support this initiative by regularly asking your son about the word of the week, what it means and for an example of how it could be used in a sentence.

Writing is a core component of literacy and an essential skill for academic success. Students are taught a common structure for writing paragraph answers: Point, Example, Comment (PEC). In this format the first sentence of the paragraph outlines the main point of the paragraph, the next sentences provide some examples or specific information to support the main point or theme of the paragraph, and the final sentences of the paragraph link the examples to overall question that is being answered. This simple structure assists young men to better organise the content of their answers, and consequently improve the quality of their writing.

Regular vocabulary testing is undertaken to monitor the effectiveness of the SSR programme and associated literacy strategies. The results of this testing are reported to parents, and this information, alongside specific NCEA literacy data and overall NCEA results, continue to provide a strong endorsement of our literacy initiatives. Should you have any questions about the schools literacy initiatives, please contact Mrs Kathryn Rankin.

Year 9 Reading Challenge

The Year 9 Reading Challenge is an initiative intended to encourage young men to read and reward them once they reach milestones in terms of the number of books read. Once young men have logged 15 books the Bronze Challenge will be marked as complete. They can carry on and add more books to finish the Silver (30 books) part of the Challenge, and then the Gold (60 books).

Students who have logged 15 books (Bronze section) will receive a certificate at assembly and a morning tea shout from the Rector. Students who attain the Silver and Gold sections, will receive additional certificates and morning tea shouts from the Rector. Students can check in with Mrs Langley (Library) or Dr O'Connor and Mrs Rankin from the English department on Monday mornings during Form Time from Week 4 onwards.