

Reading the right quantity of suitably stretching literature within the context of a rigorous, knowledge-based curriculum is the key to addressing the imbalance between the socially advantaged and the socially disadvantaged. Schools have no more fundamental responsibility than teaching children to read. Children who can read are overwhelmingly more likely to succeed at school, achieve good qualifications, and subsequently enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding career. The number of words we read and understand, more than any other factor, predicts social mobility. In addition to its substantial practical benefits, reading is one of life's profound joys.



DEAR is a central feature of our knowledge-rich and word-rich curriculum. Reading aloud to children has a profound effect on their reading ability. With the spoken word, we hear the expression and intonation that is essential for language learning and vocabulary acquisition. The emphasis and inflection implicit in the spoken language communicates a large amount of additional information about a word. However, as children get older, most vocabulary learning shifts to the written form (as opposed to what they hear.) Of course, written language contains far more vocabulary than oral language. The solution is to hear those words read aloud by a competent adult.

Motivation to read is closely related to reading ability. Consequently, we model effective reading so that all students can participate irrespective of their starting points. We make reading something that all students can access both physically (i.e. the same time and place each day) and emotionally (i.e. made to feel like a valued member of a reading community).

By reading novels that are culturally enriching, we also expose students to powerful contextual knowledge. We transport them to new and exciting places beyond the realms of their everyday lives. In effect, they develop not only knowledge of words, but also knowledge of the world. Once beyond the novice stage of decoding, reading ability mainly depends on how many words we know and our wider background knowledge.

Our DEAR programme guarantees that all AGS students read three to five high-quality texts every year. We provide teacher guides, explaining and outlining the core themes of the books. For example, atavism, anthropomorphism and social Darwinism in *Call of the Wild*; or civil liberties, government control and historical revisionism in *1984* and *The Giver*. Together with the themes and questions, the guides include lists of complex vocabulary to teach and explain. The teacher, thereby, supports the students by ensuring they have a complex and sophisticated understanding of the book. Reading together in the manner of a shared journey, and supported in this way by the teacher, we help children to make sense of the world around them. It improves their ability to empathise with and relate to others, which has positive implications for mental health and behaviour.

In his book *The Reading Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding How the Mind Reads* (2017) Willingham pinpoints four attributes of successful readers:

1. Reading attitudes – having a positive emotional attitude to reading.
2. Motivation to read – having a belief that reading is worthy and a belief that you will succeed at reading.
3. Choosing to read – being in an environment that facilitates reading.
4. Reading self-image – seeing yourself as a reader.

DEAR is key to building a genuine reading culture and instilling in all our students a life-long love of literature. Reading for pleasure leads to students wanting to read more – the desire to read separates the 'haves' from the 'have nots' when it comes to educational outcomes and life chances.

**Allerton Grange School**  
Aspire, Grow, Succeed