

# **Title: Our Roadmap to Develop Students' Reading Capacity: From Learning to Read to Reading to Learn and Reading across the Curriculum**

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## **Introduction**

"To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark" - a well-known quote by Victor Hugo, which among others, accentuates the beauty of reading and points to the utmost importance of reading in one's life. Every syllable can be a little spark that lights our life, ignites our imagination and injects energy to lead a fulfilled life. As language teachers, we all agree to the importance of reading and the benefits reading brings to the learning of a language. Hence, one of our missions is to enable our students to read and make reading beneficial to their learning. Nevertheless, teaching of reading is something easier said than done!

As early as the 70s to 90s last Century, researchers revealed to the education circle that teaching of reading rarely happened in the first language classrooms. Durkin (1978, p.520) found that 'practically no comprehension instruction was seen. Comprehension assessment, carried on for the most part through interrogation, was common. Whether children's answers were right or wrong was the big concern'. From what Durkins observed, the reading classrooms followed a question-and-answer flow while teachers seldom explained or modeled the process that the learner engaged in when comprehending a text. Pressley (Pressley, et al, 1998) conducted a similar research after two decades in five US states and shared similar observation. He and his colleagues observed that there was very little comprehension instruction taking place in reading lessons while post-reading comprehension questions were common aiming to assess how well students understood the texts. What about the situation in Hong Kong in the other part of the world?

When it comes to Hong Kong, an ESL context, a similar flow is often observed in the teaching of reading. The reading lessons look more like assessment than teaching in that students are often asked to read the text at home and complete the reading exercise that follows. Answers are then checked in lessons and teachers focus on the questions

that students do not get the right answer. The teaching part falls into explaining why that is the right answer. For some schools, teaching of reading means heaps of reading comprehension exercises and postreading checking of answers. Many teachers have grumbled upon the poor student performance on reading exams yet finding it clueless to remedy the situation. English teachers of S.K.H. St. Joseph's Primary School shared similar observation and decided to work on this several years ago. The following is their journey over the years to renovate the teaching of reading with the mission of enhancing students' interest in reading as well as their capacity in decoding and making meaning of reading texts.

## **The School**

S.K.H. St. Joseph's Primary School is a small school in Kam Tin. Due to the small premises, the school can only accommodate twelve classes at maximum. Students come mainly from the neighbouring villages. They are mostly children of working parents, who are either too busy at work or lack rich background of English learning. Thus, their support to their children's learning of English is far from sufficient. Community resources are very limited as well in supporting English learning. There are not any bookshops around or community centres selling English books or promoting reading in English. Students in general are weak in English and lack motivation in learning the language.

We have a team of devoted English teachers in the school, who are passionate in helping students to learn and are willing to commit time and effort in improving the English lessons. They have collaborated with various institutes and our collaboration began in 2016-17. Given the situation described above, we commenced our work on shaping a school-based English curriculum using textbooks as the main source of teaching materials. In our course of work, we found the reading texts in the textbooks were not fully utilized for the teaching of reading. Here is where we start the renovation.

## **From Learning to Read ...**

I came across a genuine piece of reflection from a teacher of another school about how the reading texts were treated in the past - simply skip them and straight into the teaching of vocab and grammar. What a shame that we do not maximize the materials at hand! As aforementioned, the students in S.K.H. St. Joseph's Primary School do not get a lot of support from family or community in learning English, leaving the textbooks almost the only resource which they make most of their learning out from. In this regard,

teachers started the teaching of reading from the reading texts there. Besides making it a valuable input for writing, the texts were maximized to help students learn to read. The texts are basically written for pedagogical purposes, which means the vocab are toned down to cater for students' abilities. This was one of the favourable conditions for us to embark our work on the teaching of reading skills in KS2. The following shows **the integration of reading skills into the English curriculum.**

Reading skills	P4	P5	P6
Understand the information provided on the book cover, spine or blurb, index and glossary	✓		
Use known parts of words to work out the meaning of unknown words by using visual clues, context and knowledge of the world	✓		
Read written language in meaningful chunks	✓	✓	
Locate specific information	✓	✓	
Scan a text to locate specific information by using strategies such as looking at headings and repeated phrases	✓	✓	
Recognise the presentation of ideas through headings, paragraphing, spacing, italics, bold print and punctuation	✓	✓	
Skim a text to obtain a general impression and the gist or main ideas		✓	✓
Identify details that support the gist or main ideas		✓	✓
Understand intention, attitudes and feelings conveyed in a text by recognising features such as the choice and use of language and images		✓	✓
Find the main ideas of a paragraph	✓	✓	✓
Recognise the format, visual elements and language features of a variety of text types (e.g. journals, menus, reports and etc.)	✓	✓	✓
Predict the likely development of a topic by recognising key words, using personal experiences, and making use of the context and knowledge of the world	✓	✓	✓
Make inferences	✓	✓	✓

Figure 1: A framework of reading skills in KS2

Durkin (1978) observed that the reading classrooms were full of assessment while teaching was lacking. As reflected by teachers, the English classrooms in S.K.H. St. Joseph's Primary School resembled the flow in the past. Therefore, we introduced explicit teaching of reading strategies in 2016-17 that helped students to decode meaning of vocab and make meaning of the texts. We took Durkin's advice and first modeled on how the strategies were used and enabled students to follow the steps to practice and apply the skills. To make the modelling more explicit and attractive to the P3 students' attention, a teacher, as seen below, wore a pair of 'scan glasses' to show how scanning was done. Teacher read the text with the students and stopped at the word or phrase that was identified as the piece of information the question required. Teacher would monitor the progress to see if students stopped at the right word or phrase. Students were found motivated and committed full attention in class. This helped them understand how scanning was done and their confidence was much enhanced.



Figure 2: Teacher using a pair of 'scan' glass to demonstrate the skill of scanning

Besides teacher modeling, student engagement was essential in providing practice for students to use the reading skills. For instance, the KWL (K-what I Know; W-what I Want to know; L-what I have Learnt) approach was used to help the P5 classes to gain a better understanding of the text they read. Introduced by Donna Ogle (1986), KWL was first intended to help students organize their knowledge. It was also a comprehension tool to guide students to gain a better understanding of a text. We borrowed the idea to engage the P5 students in tackling a reading text. The passage was about an accident happening on Sunshine Street. The story was rather funny, and teachers wanted the students to unfold the story themselves. Language was a problem for the students as they did not have the necessary proficiency to tell what they knew about an accident. Hence, we narrowed the topic to 'an unlucky day'. It was found that the students had lots to tell about the topic. For instance, their previous 'unlucky' experience included 'falling bird droppings' and 'twisted ankles'. Teachers were amazed at students' commitment in the brainstorming process and the rich vocabulary their students had. Then came the W column which was even a bigger challenge for the students who were too used to waiting for being spoon fed and hence found it difficult to act pro-actively to think of what they wanted to learn. Hence, we linked this part closely with the K column by telling them that they were about to read an unlucky incident and that all they needed to do was to think of questions to unfold the story. They immediately related the task to the story frame learnt in writing and came up with several WH-questions. To the teachers' surprise, students were very serious about the process. A pair of less able students insisted that the teacher should not 'rub' their question off though it was apparent to the teacher that their question was a near duplication of their classmates'. Teachers were very worried if their students could speak or write about their learning in English. Thus, we toned it down to elicit students' answers to the questions they posted in the W column in the first place and details other

than that in the second. In this way, all students of different ability groups could get a general picture of what the accident was about - when, where and how it happened and who were hurt lastly. Students were seen very engaged in the process. Teachers found that their students could express their ideas when the task was interesting as well as manageable for them.



Figure 3: Teacher adopted the KWL approach in guiding students to read

Besides the teaching of reading skills, teachers introduced buddy reading and group reading of the texts inside and outside classrooms. This was one of the strategies we used to build language sense among students in the hope of minimizing the negative effects of insufficient support from the family and community in learning English. . The practice facilitated peer learning and shifting the responsibility of learning more to the learners. Students learnt from each other in a relatively low stake situation.



Figure 4: Buddy reading and Group reading

Teachers' time and effort bore fruit. Students were found much more willing to read. This could be reflected in their attitude in attempting the reading comprehension questions in classrooms and exams. Many of them have developed interest in reading especially reading stories. Nevertheless, they still found it hard to tackle non-fiction texts. This phenomenon prevailed in KS2 classrooms. This triggered a lot of reflections among the English team and we all deemed this high time to go one step forward to open up students to the world of information, hoping to broaden their width of reading and deepen their learning of new knowledge.

### **... To Reading to Learn and Reading across the Curriculum**

Having grasped some reading skills, students got the first keys to open into the world. They were getting ready to read to learn. We took the advice from the Central Curriculum that we could focus on learning new knowledge through reading across the curriculum (RaC). The English Language Education Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2017) encourages teachers of English to:

- identify reading materials in both print and non-print forms with suitable entry points (e.g. themes, text types, language features and vocabulary) for connecting students' learning experiences in different KLAs;
- help students develop the reading skills and strategies necessary for understanding and analyzing language use in English texts written for general or academic purposes (e.g. text structures, rhetorical functions and vocabulary);
- design reading activities that reinforce students' ability to integrate the knowledge, skills and learning experiences gained in different KLAs; and

- collaborate with teachers of other KLAs to develop learning activities that provide students with opportunities to consolidate the knowledge and skills acquired across KLAs, and develop the essential attributes that go beyond individual subjects or KLAs such as humanistic qualities and entrepreneurial spirit.

The suggestions above point to two dimensions we can work on – the first one on enabling reading across the curriculum within the English curriculum while the second one encourages collaboration with other KLAs to promote reading. The second dimension means the involvement of a lot of human resources, which teachers had little space to deal with two years ago. Therefore, we opted to start small to promote RaC within the English KLA.

First comes first are the resources – the reading materials. The School applied for the PEEGS to purchase 3300 English books, which covered 122 titles. Teachers decided to pick physical books on their own instead of purchasing an e-book platform, which teachers were satisfied with neither the variety of books nor the appropriacy of vocab difficulty to their students. We picked the books for two purpose, one for intensive reading occupying class time while the rest are for home reading, which were leveled to suit three batches of students of different abilities.

To enable better support to students in terms of vocab and language difficulty, we matched the books to the themes of the learning modules. To broaden students' exposure to a wider variety of reading materials, we picked a large number of non-fiction titles while retaining a certain percentage of fictions so as to strike a balance on students' exposure. The following table shows how we matched the books with the learning modules. For instance, there were 8 learning modules in P5 and so 8 intensive readers (IR) were integrated into the timetable while 3 leveled home readers (HR) were assigned for home reading. Among all the added readers, quite a large number of non-fiction books were picked, which are marked yellow in the table.

P5 Modules	IR	HR			Skills/Values/Knowledge
Caring for Others: Be Considerate	Helping Others	Mai's Bus Ride	Duck Feet	Samantha's Brother	Find the main ideas Be considerate
Language Arts: Fun with Plays	Costumes On Shows	The Gingerbread Man	The Frog Prince	The Elves And The Shoemaker	Understand the information provided on the book cover, spine or blurb, index and glossary Enjoy different language arts
Happy Days: Entertainment and Leisure	Markets Around The World	Introducing Australia	Our Day In The Big City	Let's Go Camping	Locate for specific information Respect the differences in the world
People and Places Around the World: Wonderful People	Martin Luther Great Inventors	People Who Made A Difference	Who Was Steve Jobs?	Who Was Mother Teresa?	Find the main ideas and the supporting details Successful paths of a person
Happy Days: Fun with Making Things	Making A Clown Pinata	A Home For Tiny Turtle	Making A Mobile	Race Through Space	Locate specific information Be creative
We Love HK: Travelling Around	Our Trip To The City Looking At Maps	Travelling Around The City	The World Of Transportation	Journeys: Land, Air, Sea	Find the main ideas Get more information about the world
Caring For Others: News and Events	Reading The Newspaper	An Exciting Outing	Carla Crocodile's Adventure	Legends(crimebuster)	Recognize the key concepts of different textual features
Connecting with Other People: Visiting the Doctor	Out And About At The Hospital	Mr Bean(toothache)	Smile! A Trip To The Dentist	Health Online	Know more about the hospitals Be respectful

Non-fiction books
  Fiction

Figure 5: Integration of Intensive Readers (IR) and Home Readers (HR) into the P5 curriculum

To provide better support to comprehend non-fiction books, a set of Reading tools was designed, which included some common features of an informational text like headings, subheadings, diagrams and photographs. These are helpful clues to help students to comprehend the informational texts.

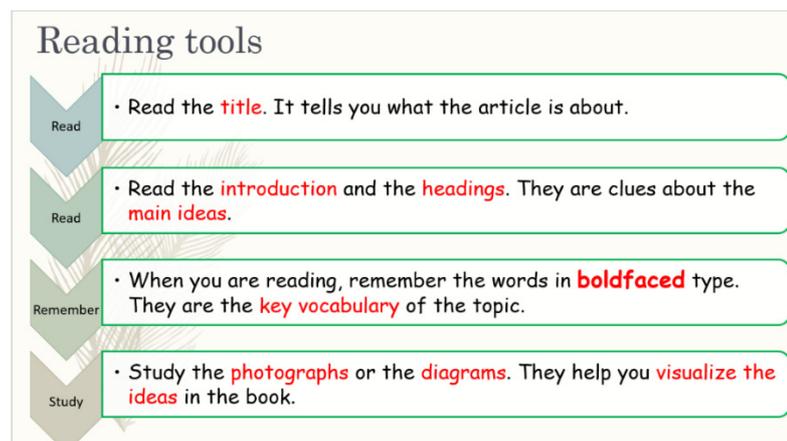


Figure 6: Reading Tools – used when each IR was introduced

The intensive readers (IR) would occupy four English lessons each month according to the plan. The books we picked are all rich in content and contain a lot of flavour. Hence, we needed to well-plan our teaching so that our students could maximize their learning while enhancing their interest in reading. In this regard, we confined our learning targets into several areas – 1) enabling students to acquire new knowledge about the topic; 2) introducing the features of informational texts / compare and contrast the features of a

story and an informational text; 3) raising students’ awareness of the text grammar of informational texts; 4) facilitating the learning and application of reading skills and strategies; 5) building word banks on the topics covered; and 6) fostering values education.

The following shows an example on how we structured the 4 lessons for the teaching of the intensive readers. This is the first learning module of P6. The theme is Jobs. *Wildlife Scientists* was integrated into the module as intensive reader while three leveled readers, *Legend-Chaz Superchef*, *Players Around the World* and *Young Artist* would be read at home.

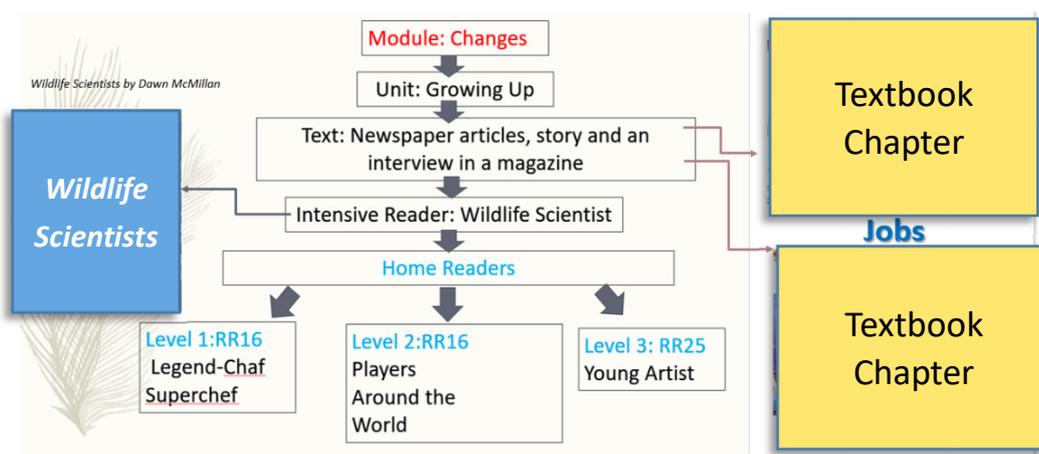


Figure 7: A diagrammatic representation of how an IR was integrated into a learning module

Among all the possible learning objectives, we picked the following four for learning in class

*Wildlife Scientists*

Lessons	Class activities	Learning Objectives
1	Warm up and lead in – use KWL predict what the book is about	- prediction skill - skim for the gist
2	Grasp a general understanding of the work of wildlife scientists	- scan for specific information - get the main idea
3	Grasp a deeper understanding of the work of the two wildlife scientists and the two endangered animals	- scan for specific information - interpret graphs and diagrams
4	Build a vocab bank on endangered species	- dictionary skills - let students have free choice to pick the vocab to learn

Figure 8: An example on how the 4 lessons were utilized based on an IR

What about other learning objectives? The followings show how these learning objectives were integrated into the teaching of the intensive readers.

**Learning new knowledge**

One of our ultimate goals of promoting RaC is to enrich students' knowledge about the world. Hence, we picked books of various disciplines to expose students to the world of knowledge. For instance, the P4 students learnt from *How is it made? Chocolate* how chocolate is made from the plant to the finished product and the adjectives and verbs used to describe chocolate and the process of chocolate making.

**How is it made? Chocolate**

S.K.H. St. Joseph's Primary School  
2019-2020 P4 Intensive Reader Worksheet 4\_Answers  
Module 2 Title: How is it made? Chocolate  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Read different pages of the book to find out the main steps of making chocolate. Then fill in the blanks in the flow chart below.

```

    graph TD
      A[Grow cocoa beans (P.6)] --> B[Ferment cocoa beans to make them sweet (P.8)]
      B --> C[Roast cocoa beans (P.11)]
      C --> D[Crack open cocoa beans to make nibs (P.13)]
      D --> E[Grind cocoa beans into a paste (P.14)]
      E --> F[Add other ingredients (P.17)]
      F --> G[Pour chocolate into a mold (P.20)]
  
```

Chocolate is:-

Adjectives:-	Is it about taste / texture / appearance?:-
1) <del>sweet</del>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
2) <del>smooth</del>	<input type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
3) <del>crunchy</del>	<input type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
4) <del>recognizable</del>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
5) <del>flavourful</del>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
6) <del>shiny</del>	<input type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Appearance-
7) <del>snap</del> (This is not an adjective)-	<input type="checkbox"/> Taste- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Texture- <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance-

Figure 9: An example to show how the learning of new knowledge was facilitated based on an IR

The P6 students learnt what it means by global warming from *Global Warming* and the three causes for the phenomenon.

# Global Warming

are different causes of global warming. Read *Global Warming* and find out the causes.

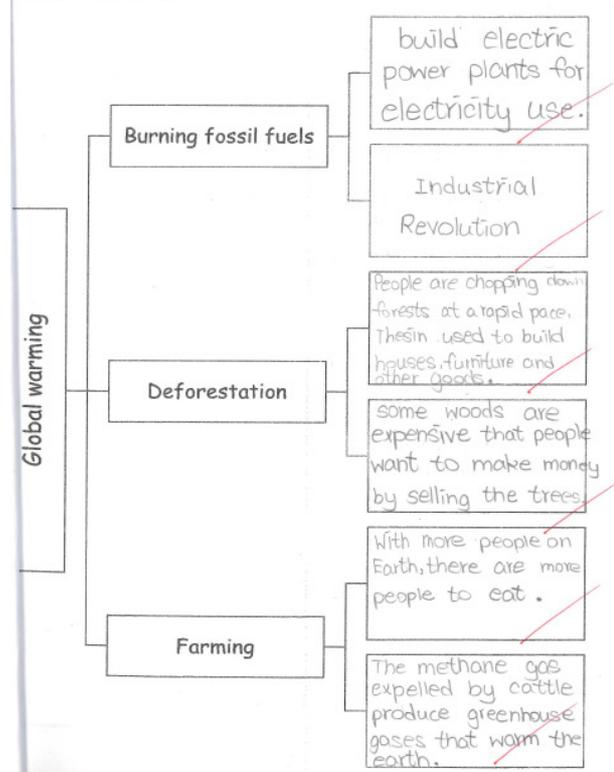


Figure 10: An example to show how the learning of new knowledge was facilitated based on an IR

Besides learning new knowledge from the readers, the P4 students were encouraged to extend their knowledge scope through the use of the internet. This is one of the key messages conveyed by *How Much Screen Time?* that students can make use of screen time to explore the world and search beyond the world of possibilities. Students were also given choices to pick and share what they learn.

# How Much Screen Time?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose one of the topics below. Then watch one of the two videos by scanning the QR code with your electronic devices.

Sports	Language	Arts
Video 1 - Rope jumping  <a href="https://shorturl.at/dgqwM">shorturl.at/dgqwM</a>	Video 1 - Japanese  <a href="https://shorturl.at/mzF6Z">shorturl.at/mzF6Z</a>	Video 1 - Quick drawing  <a href="https://shorturl.at/BGJRV">shorturl.at/BGJRV</a>
Video 2 - Dodgeball  <a href="https://shorturl.at/cFJRX">shorturl.at/cFJRX</a>	Video 2 - Korean  <a href="https://shorturl.at/fvxE1">shorturl.at/fvxE1</a>	Video 2 - Polymer clay  <a href="https://shorturl.at/npYI9">shorturl.at/npYI9</a>

1. What is this video about?  
 This video is about \_\_\_\_\_

Do you like this video? Why or why not?  
 I like / don't like this video because \_\_\_\_\_

2. What did you learn from this video?

Figure 11: An example to show how the learning of new knowledge was facilitated based on

an IR

**Learning the textual features of informational texts**

When the P4 students were focused on the verbs used in *Play Sport!*, they discovered that Simple Present Tense is often used in informational text to state general facts.

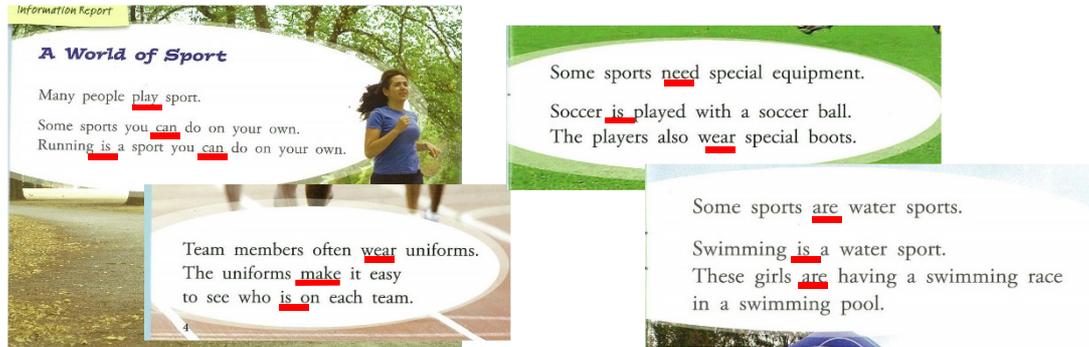


Figure 12: An example to show how the learning of textual features of informational texts was facilitated based on an IR

They also learnt about the good and bad effects of screen time in *How Much Screen Time?* and how the information is organized through the use of topic sentence, headings and details like examples.

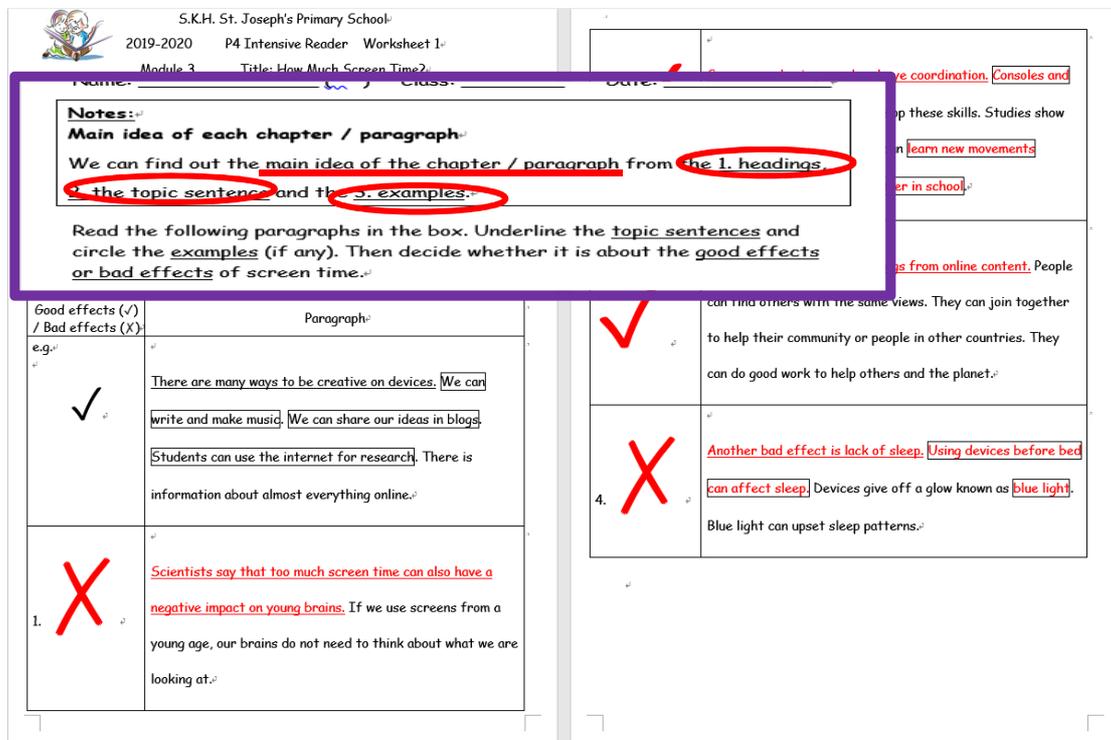


Figure 13: An example to show how the learning of textual features of informational texts was facilitated based on an IR

## Nurture virtues and values

Through the use of the intensive readers, we hope to help students to reflect apart from focusing on their cognitive development. For instance, when the P5 students read about what the kids around the world did to help the people in need, they were inspired to think what they could do to help the people around. They wished to help the sick people, their classmates and the homeless.

**Main Message of the book:**  
Kids can help.  
Kids can ~~make~~ the world better.  
Helping others can make us feel good.  
(can make)

**Take Actions:** What's your action? Let's plan and write your ideas below.

Who  
Me

→

HELP

→

Whom  
Sick people

What can I do?

- Give them blood.
- Give them toys to play.
- Give them books to read.
- Draw cards for them.

**Main Message of the book:**  
Kids can help.  
Kids can do a little work but change a part of the world. EXCELLENT

**Take Actions:** What's your action? Let's plan and write your ideas below.

Who  
Me

→

HELP

→

Whom  
classmates

What can I do?

- teach them homework
- talk to them when they are sad
- play with them
- listen to them

EXCELLENT

12/4

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**Main Message of the book:**  
Kids can help.  
Kids can help to make the world a better place.  
~~right is their own backyards.~~

**Take Actions:** What's your action? Let's plan and write your ideas below.

Who  
Esther

→

HELP

→

Whom  
Homeless

What can I do?

- donate some old clothes
- donate money
- give them some sleeping bag
- provide lunchbox

EXCELLENT

EXCELLENT

Figure 14: An example to show how the learning of textual features of informational texts was facilitated based on an IR

## **Reflections and the way forward**

Time is a big problem when we implement our plan. We did have a lot of struggles on what to discard. When we realized how important reading was and would be to the learning of our students, we took a proactive action to re-organize the school-based curriculum in KS2 to create space to accommodate the readers. Besides, we also re-thought the approach adopted in the teaching of grammar, which was found deductive, time-consuming and ineffective. Hence, the teaching of vocab and grammar was made a part of scaffolding using the reading texts as the context.

There witnessed a change of mindset among teachers in the course of implementation. A lot of discussion was spent on what to teach and how to teach. We had a lot of struggles on shifting from teaching the meaning of every word to developing the skills and values while leaving a certain part of the books untouched. The implementation encouraged teachers to free themselves from the traditional way of teaching everything in the book when they found students loved the intensive reading lessons much more than the GE lessons though the content of the Intensive Readers (IR) was not easy at all.

What we have done so far is on promoting reading across the other disciplines. We look forward to further enriching students' learning through the collaboration with other KLAs on promoting reading.

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