

# Teaching Critical Reading

By Leone Westenberg

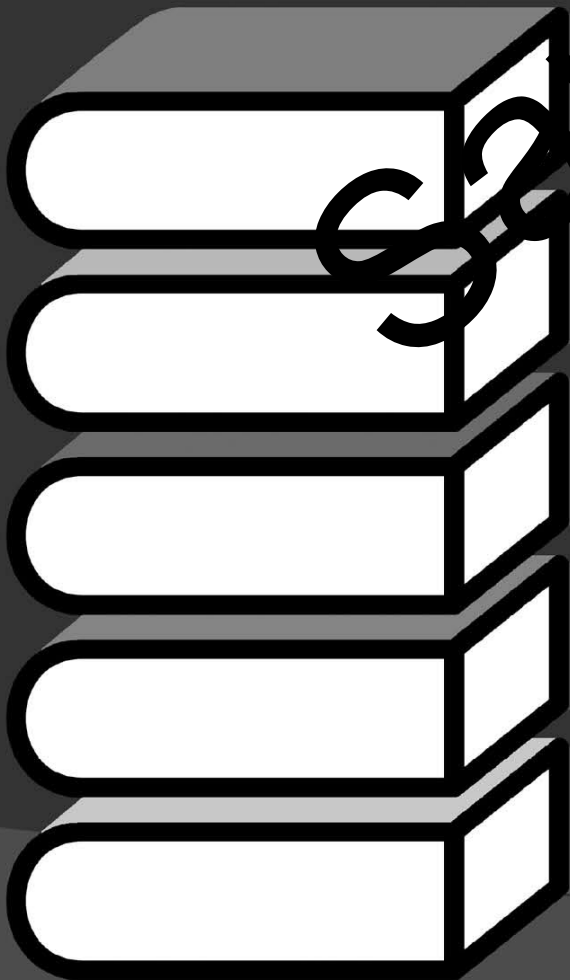
Biographies

Narratives

Greek Myths

News Reports

Opinion Pieces



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# Teachers' Notes

To be able to think critically is essential for students in our contemporary society which exposes them to a multitude of sources, including technology, print and visual texts. The Australian curriculum identifies Critical and Creative Thinking as a General Capability, signifying that the skill of critical thinking should be developed across all curriculum areas and at all curriculum levels. This book is written with the intent to facilitate the growth of critical reading and thinking skills through a variety of texts, to allow learners to 'develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems' (Australian Curriculum v8.1, Overview Critical and Creative Thinking, General Capabilities, 2015).

Critical reading and thinking requires engaged learners who think broadly and deeply. Critical reading and thinking uses skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, discussion, debate, analysis, summation, imagination and innovation. This book provides texts and activities that develop these skills, using content and experiences that are applicable for learning at school and in lives beyond school. Some activity sheets suggest an Extra Activity that includes research, use of ICT, small group and partner based learning tasks with differentiation for diverse learners.

## Section 1: Reading Biographies

This section centres on a biography of Edith Cowan - a pioneer woman in the Western Australian Parliament. This section could be introduced with a discussion on famous Australian women and on women in Australian politics. It has links with the Humanities and Social Sciences Level 6: Description of 'Australia in the past and present and its connections with a diverse world' (Australian Curriculum v8.1, HASS Overview, 2015). It asks the inquiry question: How have key figures, events and values shaped Australian society, its system of government and citizenship?, and develops critical thinking and reading skills through summation, analysis of language and structure of texts, comparison and contrast and understanding of cause and effect.

## Section 2: Reading Narratives

This section is built on a narrative of contemporary realistic fiction. This section is relevant to other in-depth reading and discussion of fiction in the classroom. It has links with the Health and Physical Education Level 5: Description of students developing 'knowledge, understanding and skills to create opportunities and take action to enhance their own and others' health, wellbeing, safety and physical activity participation' (Australian Curriculum v8.1, H&PE Overview, 2015). It develops students' skills to manage conflicting emotions, to understand their physical and social changes and examine the changing nature of their relationships with learning experiences involving making connections through the use of inferences and predictions while encouraging students to discuss and examine personal, family and community values and beliefs.

## Section 3: Reading Greek Myths

This section is built on a re-telling of an ancient Greek myth that fosters discussion on ethical decision-making. This section can be introduced via discussions on change, with links to the Level 6: Science curriculum and can form part of a unit on stories and storytelling in Australian society and in other cultures. It has links with the General Capability of Ethical Understanding in assisting students to build 'a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviours have on others' (Australian Curriculum v8.1, GC: Ethical Understanding, Overview, 2015). It enables students to develop ethical understanding as they read and analyse a Greek myth to explore ethical issues through interactions with others and the discussion of ideas. Learning experiences include use of visualisation and graphic organisers to develop critical reading in understanding conflict and developing their personal opinion.

## Section 4: Reading Non-Fiction

In this section students read, discuss and analyse a news report. This section is ideal for use in class discussions on current issues in the news, and for a discussion on change relevant to the Level 6 Science curriculum. On completion of this section, students could be involved in creating and publishing a class newspaper, news report or blog/vlog. This section has links with the General Capability ICT which requires 'students learn to use ICT in effective and appropriate ways in order to access, create and communicate information and ideas, in collaborative work' (Australian Curriculum v8.1, GC: ICT, Overview, 2015). Students develop skills in ICT while analysing the provided news reports for information and meaning.

Also in this section students will read an opinion piece that presents a different viewpoint on the issue to that expressed in the news report. This task is ideal for use in class discussions on current issues in the news, and for a discussion on government processes and systems in the Level 6 HASS curriculum. On completion of this section, students could be involved in creating op-eds for a classroom newspaper or blog/vlog. Students will develop critical reading and thinking skills while analysing this opinion piece and investigating the use of statistics and intentional/unintentional bias.

# V8.1 Curriculum Links

## Year 6

**Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects (ACELA1518)**

Elaborations

- exploring a range of everyday, community, literary and informative texts discussing elements of text structure and language features and comparing the overall structure and effect of authors' choices in two or more texts

**Understand that cohesive links can be made in texts by omitting or replacing words (ACELA1520)**

Elaborations

- noting how a general word is often used for a more specific word already mentioned, for example 'Look at those apples. Can I have one?'
- recognising how cohesion can be developed through repeating key words or by using synonyms or antonyms
- observing how relationships between concepts can be represented visually through similarity, contrast, juxtaposition, repetition, class-subclass diagrams, part-whole diagrams, cause-and-effect figures, visual continuities and discontinuities

**Identify and explain how analytical images like figure, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to our understanding of verbal information in factual and persuasive texts (ACELA1524)**

Elaborations

- observing how sequential events can be represented visually by a series of images, including comic-strips, timelines, photo stories, procedure diagrams and flowcharts, life-cycle diagrams, and the flow of images in picture books.
- observing how concepts, information and relationships can be represented visually through such images as tables, maps, graphs, diagrams and icons

**Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)**

Elaboration

- recognising the influence our different historical, social and cultural experiences may have on the meaning we make from the text and the attitudes we may develop towards characters, actions and events

**Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse (ACELT1617)**

Elaboration

- identifying how language choice and imagery build emotional connection and engagement with the story or theme

**Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text (ACELY1711)**

Elaboration

- comparing the structures and features of different texts, including print and digital sources on similar topics, and evaluating which features best aid navigation and clear communication about the topic

**Select, navigate and read texts for a range of purposes, applying appropriate text processing strategies and interpreting structural features, for example table of contents, glossary, chapters, headings and subheadings (ACELY1712)**

Elaborations

- bringing subject and technical vocabulary and concept knowledge to new reading tasks, selecting, evaluating and using texts for their pertinence to the task and the accuracy of their information.
- using word identification, self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies

**Use interaction skills, varying conventions of spoken interaction such as voice, volume, tone, pitch and pace, according to group size, formality of interaction and need, and expertise of the audience (ACELY1816)**

Elaboration

- participating in pair, group, class, school and community speaking and listening situations, including informal conversations, discussions, debates and presentations

**Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and digital texts (ACELY1713)**

Elaborations

- asking and answering questions
- finding the main idea of a text
- summarising a text or part of a text
- making connections between information in print and images
- using prior knowledge and textual information to make inferences and predictions
- making connections between the text and students' own experience or other texts
- finding specific literal information

**Analyse strategies authors use to influence readers (ACELY1801)**

Elaboration

- identify how authors use language to position the reader and give reasons.

**Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots (ACELT1614)**

Elaboration

- exploring texts on a similar topic by authors with very different styles, for example comparing fantasy quest novels or realistic novels on a specific theme, identifying differences in the use of narrator, narrative structure and voice and language style and register

**Understand the uses of objective and subjective language and bias (ACELA1517)**

Elaboration

- differentiating between reporting the facts (for example in a news story) and providing a commentary (for example in an editorial)

**Compare texts including media texts that represent ideas and events in different ways, explaining the effects of the different approaches (ACELA1517)**

Elaboration

- identifying and exploring news reports of the same event, and discuss the language choices and point of view of the writers

# A Biography

- A biography is an account of somebody's life, written by another person. It is informative. Read the biography below about Edith Cowan written by Leonie Westenberg. When you have finished reading the text, complete the activity pages that follow.

## A Tireless Woman by Leonie Westenberg

She wiped her hands nervously on her dress. Having removed her gloves, she realised just how sweaty were her palms. This was a big day. A big day for her. A big day for women. A big day for the Child Protection Society. She was the first woman elected into Parliament in Australia . . .

Have you ever looked at a \$50 note? Have you ever seen the picture of the woman on the back? That's Edith Cowan - the first woman elected into Australian Parliament. The year? 1921.

Edith Cowan was 59 years of age when she was elected into the Western Australian Parliament. When elected she said, "I stand here today being in the unique position of the first woman in Australian Parliament. I know many people think perhaps that it was not the wisest thing to do to send a woman into Parliament, and perhaps I should remind Honourable members that one of the reasons why women and men also considered it advisable, is because men need a reminder sometimes from women beside them that will make them realise all that can be done for the race and for the home."

Cowan faced some obstacles as a female Member of Parliament. One of these obstacles came in the form of a newspaper article, written by a male journalist, who criticised Cowan for neglecting her home and family. However, Edith Cowan's husband, James Cowan, whom she had married at the age of 18, was a strong supporter of his wife's career. As Master of the Supreme Court himself, he saw the need to encourage women to enter all professions in life and worked to have his wife elected.

Once an MP, Edith Cowan fought for the right for women to enter all professions. In doing this, she was opposed by Charles Latham, another Member of Parliament. Unlike



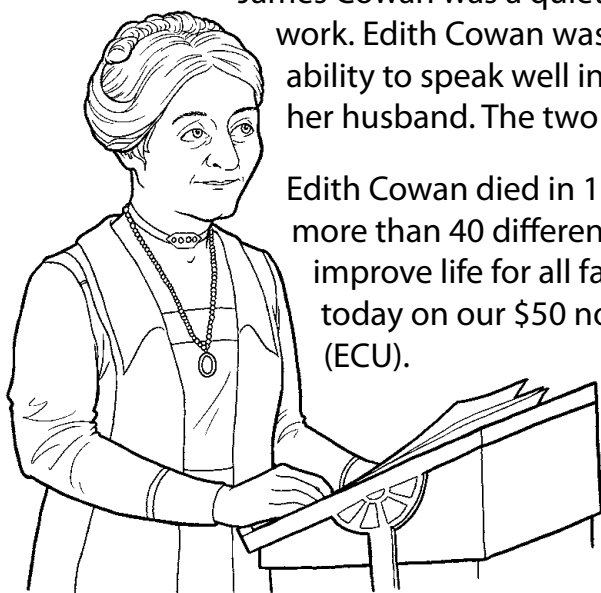
Edith Cowan, who had been involved in volunteer work in societies for the protection of women and children and had seen first-hand some of the difficulties faced by women with no money, and had witnessed children forced into the workforce at an early age, Charles Latham had experienced a more privileged life. He was considered a conservative who wanted to make sure that the social aspects of life, including the role of women at home rather than in the workforce, were not radically changed. Cowan's different upbringing, in an often troubled home rather than a wealthier established home, gave her different insights into the legal status of women. She argued with Charles Latham, claiming that if women could do housework then they were fit and able to take on other work. In reply, Latham said, "You would not suggest a man do that sort of thing (housework)?" To which Cowan replied, "Why not? They are as capable as we."

While Cowan was an MP, the then Railway Minister, William Hill, put in place a tax of one shilling (equivalent to \$5.00 in today's currency) for every pram on a tram or other means of public transport. As a mother of five, Cowan knew the difficulty of travelling, even for a day out in the city, with several children. She also knew that a tax on prams would be something poorer mothers could not afford. Soon after entering Parliament, Cowan opposed the 'pram tax' and had it successfully removed.

Through her husband's work in the court, Cowan witnessed how women and children suffered when their husbands/father were in gaol. She set up charities and volunteered in organisations to help these women and this became the driving force of her work in Parliament - to improve the personal and professional lives of women and of families. She also argued for a maternity and child endowment - money given to help expectant mothers and families with young children.

The Children's Protection Society that Cowan set up has now become our Children's Court. Having seen families suffer and children turn to crime to help their families, Cowan made sure that children were not tried as adults but treated differently and with more compassion and care in court.

Cowan's husband James worked alongside his wife in helping the poor and needy. James Cowan was a quietly spoken man but was not afraid of hard work. Edith Cowan was known for her sense of humour and her ability to speak well in public. She was a more social person than her husband. The two worked well together.



Edith Cowan died in 1932, at the age of 71. She was a member of more than 40 different volunteer organisations, working strongly to improve life for all families. As you now know, she is remembered today on our \$50 note and has had a university named after her (ECU).

That woman who nervously wiped her hands when being sworn into Parliament as our first female representative is our example still today of how care and compassion can work in government.

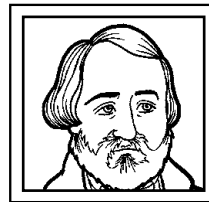


## ● Making Comparisons 2

- After reading the biography entitled *A Tireless Woman*, complete this activity sheet.

Graphic organisers can help readers make meaning of texts by showing differences and relationships in texts. Sometimes a graphic organiser can help a reader compare and contrast ideas or the people in a text. They can help readers answer questions like, "How are the people the same?" and "How are the people different?"

- Look at the people pictured below from the text *A Tireless Woman*. Complete the graphic organiser to compare and contrast.



*Edith Cowan & William Hill*

*One way in which they are similar:*

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*One way in which they are different:*

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- Use your graphic organisers on this page and on the previous page, to answer the questions below.
1. In many text types, there are heroes and villains. Who do you think you are positioned to see as heroic in the text?

Why? Think about what makes a hero. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who do you think we are positioned to see as the antagonists in the text?

Why? Think about what makes a character unlikable. \_\_\_\_\_



### EXTRA ACTIVITY

Imagine that the life of Edith Cowan is going to be the subject of a film. Create a promotional movie poster which celebrates the achievements of Edith Cowan. Depict her as heroic in your poster.



# A Greek Myth

- Greek myths were created by ancient Greeks a long time ago and have been passed on from generation to generation. Greek myths can explain the ancient Greeks' beliefs, their gods, heroes and origins of the world. Read the Greek myth below, then complete the activity sheets which follow.

## Daedalus and Icarus retold by Leonie Westernberg

Daedalus (Ded-a-lus) stared at the blue sky. The sun was warm on his back. Crete was a beautiful island, with its rocky landscape, mild weather and inviting waters. Yet Crete was not his home. He and his son Icarus (Ick-ar-us), were prisoners on Crete - forced to remain there by the king, King Minos (My-nos), to serve a prison sentence. Daedalus longed for Greece, his home. So how did he become a prisoner in Crete? This is the story...

Daedalus was a fine architect. In Greece, he had designed many beautiful buildings. He had been invited to Crete as a guest of King Minos, to build a maze or labyrinth (lab-er-inth) for the King's pet. And a very strange pet it was! A minotaur (min-oh-tore)! A horrible monster, with the head of a bull on a human body. Yet, King Minos deeply loved his pet and so Daedalus came to Crete to build the maze. He brought his son Icarus with him for a holiday.



Daedalus built a magnificent maze, complex and appealing. He was full of pride and secretly thought of himself as holding god-like status. Icarus enjoyed swimming and playing with the other children on the island of Crete. He enjoyed doing what he wanted, when he wanted. King Minos was happy with the maze; the minotaur was safe and happy too. So, Daedalus decided to stay awhile in Crete for an extended holiday. Little did he know that it was to become his prison!

One day, a group of Greek children came to Crete and captured King Minos' daughter - a young girl full of beauty. And, horror of horrors, the Greeks had managed to find their way through the labyrinth and kill the King's beloved pet - his minotaur.

The King believed that Daedalus had helped the Greeks through the maze. Daedalus was innocent, but the King ignored Daedalus' cries of innocence. King Minos, in his anger, refused to believe Daedalus and planned a punishment for what he believed was Daedalus' crime. The punishment became imprisonment; Daedalus and his son Icarus were forced to remain on the island of Crete as prisoners.



Daedalus longed for home and spent many hours plotting an escape. Then, one day in the sun, Daedalus watched the birds fly away, "I wish I was like those birds, easily able to escape the prison of Crete," he said. And then the idea came to him! Wings! He and Icarus could make wings and learn to fly like the birds. He knew he was talented, he knew he could defy nature.

The father and son collected many bird feathers. Over time, they gathered enough to

construct wings. They made light-framed wings for their arms, gluing the feathers together with wax.

The day of their planned escape came. Daedalus warned Icarus to fly low, away from the hot sun. Father and son ran together, leaping off the rocky cliff in sync. They flapped their wings. They curved their arms. They were flying!

The clear blue sea sparkled beneath them. The piercing blue sky was all around them. The sun warmed their bodies. "Fly low, fly low, Icarus," repeated Daedalus. Icarus grinned and shook his head. Enchanted by the glorious feeling of flight, he was tempted to soar and imitate the birds.

Ignoring his father's warning, Icarus flew high, straight towards the sun. As he travelled closer and closer to the heat of the sun, the wax on Icarus' wings began to melt. Frantically, Icarus attempted to flap his wings faster and move away from the sun. But it was too late. The remaining wax melted and Icarus fell into the sea.

Daedalus, though full of sorrow, could do nothing to save Icarus. He flew on, regretting the day that he had agreed to come to Crete and work for King Minos.



*The story of Icarus has been told and re-told, as part of legendary Greek myths. It is often said that there is a lesson to be learned from this story. A lesson involving pride and temptation, humility and punishment. And – it's an interesting story, too!*

## ● Visualisation 2

- After reading the Greek myth entitled *Daedalus and Icarus* complete this activity sheet.

As we read, the images in our minds change. Sometimes, our ideas about words affect our mental images. These ideas are known as connotations. Thinking about the vocabulary that is used in a text and our mental images can build our understanding of the text. This helps us to think about how we make meaning.



- Make a list of words and phrases from the text that create images.

### List of Words

*e.g. inviting waters*

- Choose four words/phrases from the list. Write each one at the top of each cloud below. Now draw and write what you see when you think of these words.

*e.g. inviting waters*

*A turquoise/blue pool of water*

*flat water - no ripples*

*transparent water - can see fish  
and rocks below the surface on  
the sand*



### EXTRA ACTIVITY

Find somebody who wrote down one of the same words/phrases as you.  
Are your mental images the same?