



# Using structured literacy approaches with CHAPTERS

This guide explores ways to use CHAPTERS to teach the three strands in phase one of the refreshed [English Learning Area \(ELA\)](#): oral language, reading, and writing.

CHAPTERS books are designed to help students build reading stamina and develop confidence and motivation for independent, personal reading. They support students' transition from short texts to the longer format of chapter books. Books in the CHAPTERS series have audio files and digital versions for flexible use with students.

CHAPTERS are developed primarily for year 3 students, and have the following characteristics:

- the format of a chapter book, including a blurb on the back cover, a contents page, and chapter headings
- a mix of explicit and implicit content that requires students to make connections between ideas in the story and their prior knowledge (including knowledge from reading previous chapters)
- several pages of text with few or no illustrations
- some unfamiliar words and phrases, including colloquial language and figures of speech
- frequent use of dialogue, much of which is not explicitly attributed
- shifts in time and place, and several characters and events
- a variety of sentence structures.

Regardless of decoding proficiency, all students need to access year-level texts to develop literacy skills and knowledge alongside their peers. Ways to remove barriers to texts include providing audio versions, working with small flexible groups to explore the content of the text together, and using print-to-speech software. The refreshed [ELA](#) provides further guidance on noticing, recognising, and responding to students' strengths and needs.

## Structured literacy approaches

Applying structured literacy approaches to CHAPTERS is an effective way to build students' essential literacy knowledge and skills. The table below offers ideas for how you could use books in the CHAPTERS series to teach elements of structured literacy approaches. These ideas come from the phase one progress outcomes and teaching sequence of the refreshed [ELA](#). Use the refreshed [ELA glossary](#) to find the meaning of any unfamiliar words and phrases.

**Important note:** For students who need additional teaching to accelerate their decoding skills, continue to provide frequent, explicit practice of targeted knowledge and skills in small flexible groups. Use detailed diagnostic assessments to find out what students already know and need to learn next, this will help you to form small flexible groups around specific decoding needs.

## Vocabulary

Support students to:

- understand new words by giving them student-friendly definitions that connect to their experiences
- hear, pronounce, read, and write new words correctly
- ask questions about unfamiliar words and use knowledge of context clues, prefixes, and root words to understand new vocabulary.

**Teaching tip:** Before reading with students, select 3-5 useful words from each chapter. Explicitly teach these words before, during, and after reading.

## Morphology

Support students to:

- recognise how some words can be broken down into meaningful parts by identifying affixes and base words
- notice how base words become new words with the addition of different affixes and understand the meaning of common affixes, for example: re-, un-, dis-, -er, -est, -ly, -less, and -ful.

**Teaching tip:** Identify a prefix or a suffix on a page of the text, tell students to find a word with that affix on the page. Then work with the students to use other affixes with the base word to create new words.

## Syntax

Support students to:

- understand the building blocks of simple, compound, and complex sentences, and find examples of different sentence types in the books
- identify and explain the purpose of punctuation features such as speech marks, commas, exclamation marks, and question marks
- explore how varying sentence lengths help to create pace, tension, and drama in a story.

**Teaching tip:** Write out compound and complex sentences from the books you read. Cut them into individual words, scramble them, and ask students to reassemble the words in the correct order. Students could be supported to colour-code the subject, verb, and conjunctions.

## Fluency

Support students to:

- read year-level texts accurately, with expression, and at appropriate oral-reading fluency rates for their year-level
- respond to punctuation in texts and group words into phrases for expression, stress, and intonation
- develop fluency through choral reading, echo reading, partner reading, and repeated reading
- increase their time in text through rereading the books independently or with the support of audio files.

**Teaching tip:** Model phrasing and expression by reading a sentence or short passage to show students what fluency sounds like. The audio files for CHAPTERS can also be used as examples of fluent reading.

## Text structure

Support students to:

- explore features of CHAPTERS books including:
  - the cover design, contents page, and chapter headings
  - descriptions of setting, actions, thoughts, and feelings
  - event sequences with the use of transitional words to signal event order
  - a problem and solution with a sense of closure
- notice how some chapters end with a cliffhanger or teaser to create suspense
- understand how dramatic punctuation helps to make the story exciting, for example, having some words all in capital letters.

**Teaching tip:** Encourage students to summarise each chapter in their own words, focusing on the characters, setting, and major events. Use the chapter titles as a guide.

## Comprehension

Support students to:

- read and hold meaning across longer sentences and between sentences
- monitor their understanding of CHAPTERS books and repair meaning by adjusting reading speed, rereading, visualising, checking, decoding, and asking and answering questions about the text
- describe the key ideas and events in each chapter, and how they contribute to the CHAPTERS story as a whole
- make use of stated and implied information or ideas to draw inferences and make meaning
- discuss how language, text features, and visual images are used to influence feelings, thoughts, and actions.

**Teaching tip:** Create prompts to help students form opinions, make connections and inferences, and identify perspectives. For example:

- › “I think ...”
- › The clue I used was ...”
- › “The character felt ...”
- › “I think that means ...”

## Oral language

Support students to:

- participate in extended discussions to share opinions, personal thoughts, and feelings about the story
- use precise vocabulary to describe story events and character traits and qualities
- summarise chapters or the whole story using narrative elements and sequential details
- experiment with adjusting tone, volume, and pace as they read extracts of the story out loud.

**Teaching tip:** Explicitly teach and reinforce guidelines for participating in book discussions. For example:

- › use eye contact and body position to show attention to the speaker
- › take turns talking and listening
- › identify what the conversation topic is, and how to continue with that topic
- › know when to stop talking.

## Writing processes

Use excerpts from CHAPTERS as writing models.

Support students to analyse:

- the features of narrative texts including the functions of dialogue and narration
- how an author has chosen words and phrases that give clear details
- taught language features such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, and simile
- sentence construction and the use of different sentence types
- the use of punctuation.

**Teaching tip:** You may find it helpful to project the PDF version of the book onto a screen so that you can zoom in on relevant sections of the story during writing lessons.

## Supporting early chapter-book reading

Chapter-book reading is a big step in a student's literacy journey with increased cognitive demands. Use the following tips to help students transition successfully to the CHAPTERS series and build their reading mileage, engagement, and independence:

- Use a mixture of reading to, and shared reading to help students who need extra support to access the CHAPTERS series.
- Introduce new CHAPTERS books by clarifying who, where, when, and what. Prompt students to generate questions and predictions about each story.
- The first chapter of a book is often a hurdle for newly independent readers and requires more focused discussion before and during the reading.
- For students who are new to chapter-books, read and discuss the story with them chapter by chapter.
- More proficient readers might read the book independently with regular teacher check-ins and on-the-spot explicit instruction as required.
- Remind students of decoding strategies they can use to solve words and clarify meaning. For example, they can adjust decoding attempts by varying pronunciation, and find morphemes and vowel patterns they know to help them decode longer words.
- Encourage the use of self-monitoring processes. For example, students might use sticky notes to mark challenges in the text or aspects that they find interesting to discuss afterwards.

## Resources coming soon

Ministry of Education resources published in 2025 to support teaching using structured literacy approaches include:

- › revised teacher support materials to help you use structured literacy approaches with the Instructional Series
- › teacher manuals on structured literacy approaches
- › phonics cards for the Māhuri | Sapling phase and more Ready to Read Phonics Plus student books
- › CHAPTERS, Junior Journals, and School Journals.

These resources will be distributed to schools and/or made available on [Tāhūrangi](#) in 2025.

Find more information and links to resources at [Structured Approaches to Literacy – New Zealand Curriculum – Tāhūrangi](#).



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