



Teacher Notes

Alphabetter

by Maura Pierlot, illustrated by Jorge Garcia Redondo

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Publication details

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About the Book

Being better and creating a better world is as easy as A, B, C in this new book by ethicist Maura Pierlot.

Here is an alphabet that teaches us positive qualities and values to embrace a kinder, compassionate and more inclusive world. Being better is easy as A, B, C – adventurous, brave, considerate!

In *Alphabetter*, ethicist Maura Pierlot presents fun, realistic scenarios and thought-provoking questions that will encourage children to grow in their mindset, make good choices and learn new words along the way!

About the Author and Illustrator

Dr Maura Pierlot (author) is an award-winning author and playwright based in Canberra. When she's not busy writing, Maura visits schools and libraries as a guest reader and speaker, serves as a Role Model for Books in Homes Australia, and contributes reviews for the Children's Book Council of Australia's online magazine, *Reading Time*. In an

earlier life, Maura was an ethicist, business owner and Editor of *Australian Medicine*. She has a Ph.D. in philosophy, specialising in ethics.

Jorge Garcia Redondo (illustrator) is a designer and illustrator who began drawing as soon as he could hold a pencil and hasn't stopped since. Inspired by a weird mix of elements, such as 90s cartoons, comics, mid-century design and street photography, he works both traditionally and digitally for both publishing and a wide range of commercial projects. His work is character-based, colourful, whimsical, and always tells a story. When he is not drawing or designing, he can be found lost in a bookshop buying more books to read, sketching people in coffee shops, or trying to befriend each cat he finds. Jorge lives in Spain.

From the Author

Values and ethics are at the core of who we are and how we engage with each other and the world. It's never too early to have meaningful discussions with children about values to help them navigate life's challenges. I wrote *Alphabetter* to provide a useful and relatable resource to empower children to make good choices and grow into the kind of people they would like to be. Featuring relatable scenarios, definitions, synonyms and questions, *Alphabetter* is a unique 'character-building' resource for parents, caregivers and educators and children. I hope the book sparks many important conversations that encourage children to grow in their mindset, make good choices and learn new words along the way!

Themes

- Personal development and growth
- Personal characteristics and character traits
- Values

Key Learning Outcomes

- Expand vocabulary and understanding about self-identity and values
- Identify human characteristics and traits in ourselves and others
- Reflect on human values and traits and identify how they are applied to improve and grow

Key Curriculum Areas

- English: Language; Literature; Literacy
- Health and PE: Personal, Social and Community Health (Identities and change, Interacting with others, Healthy and safe choices)
- Science: Science as a Human Endeavour (Use and influence of science); Science Inquiry (Questioning and predicting)
- Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS): Knowledge and Understanding (History, Geography); Questioning and Researching
- The Arts: All subjects in The Arts (Develop Practices and Skills, Creating/Making, Presenting and Performing)
- Design and Technologies: Processes and Production Skills (Design, Make, Appraise)
- General Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding; Literacy; Personal and Social Capability
- Cross-curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

You can find a summary of *Alphabetter* curriculum connections by year level (F-6) [HERE](#).

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER READING (BDA)

The activities in this section are generic in terms of year level. Teachers should explore components relevant to the stage and ability levels of their students.

To track student predictions, observations and opinions about *Alphabetter*, you can use a BDA chart. Students can add their ideas and thoughts to the chart at each step of the reading process. The types of questions you may consider include:

- Who was *Alphabetter* written for?
- Why did Maura Pierlot write *Alphabetter*? What was the author's purpose?
- What are the 'big ideas' (themes) in *Alphabetter*?
- What connections are you making? (Consider text-self, text-text and text-world connections.)

Before Reading

Titles and subtitles

Explore the title.

- What sort of word is 'alphabetter'? Is it a 'real' word? Is it a portmanteau or compound word?
- What part of speech might 'alphabetter' be?
- What do think 'alphabetter' means?

Explore the subtitle, *A Better You and Me, from A to Z*. Does this give you more information about the meaning of 'alphabetter'?

- What do you think the book might be about?
- What type of book do you think *Alphabetter* is?

Explore the internal subtitle: An ABC for good choices.

- What does this mean?
- What is a 'good choice'?
- How might this subtitle confirm or change your initial thoughts about the type of book *Alphabetter* is? How might it confirm or change your predictions about the content of the book?

Discuss 'Ready, Set, Grow!'

- What is the purpose of this page?

Illustrations – cover and endpapers

Take time to look carefully at the individual illustrations of the children on the front cover and endpapers of *Alphabetter*.

- Which illustrations resonate with you? Do you 'see yourself' in any of these illustrations? What connections can you make? (e.g. I love gardening too.)
- Brainstorm word lists based on these illustrations (e.g. What activities are the children engaged in? What emotions or feelings do you notice?)
- How might the illustrations confirm, change or add to your predictions about the content of the book?

During Reading

Questions

When looking at each of the A-Z words, direct students to the question written at the bottom right of each page. These questions can be addressed in a variety of ways, including:

- peer discussion (e.g. Think, Pair, Share);
- artistic response (drawing, painting, collage, sculpture);
- visual or symbolic response (e.g. a photo of an award received to symbolise engagement; photo of a pet to symbolise dependability; trinket/memorabilia from a holiday to symbolise joy);
- written response in an *Alphabetter* journal;
- written recount or narrative; and
- individual spoken response in an oral journal.

Definitions via anecdotes

At the bottom left of each page, you will see a short definition with a single example of each word in action.

- Discuss these definitions – 'Being [friendly] means ...' Add to them or rewrite them.
- Discuss the examples – 'Like when you...' Add your own.

After reading

General reflections

- Did you enjoy *Alphabetter*? What did you like the most? What did you like the least?
- What questions do you have for the author?
- Write a letter to the author about your experience with the book, your thoughts and your take-aways.
- What would you add to *Alphabetter*? What might you change?
- What other topics or themes would you like see the author write about in an alphabet book? Suggest a title for these new books.

WHOLE BOOK ACTIVITIES

Alphabet Books

- 'The title and subtitles all suggest that *Alphabetter* is an alphabet book.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- Discuss existing knowledge and opinions about 'alphabet books'.
 - Who are alphabet books written for?
 - Why are alphabet books written?
 - What alphabet books do you know?
 - Have you ever read alphabet books? Do you read them now? Why?
- Go to the library and search for alphabet books.
 - Make a list of alphabet books you find (photographic or written).
 - Categorise the alphabet books – by target age and by topic.
 - Discuss and list the similarities and differences between the alphabet books you found.
- After looking at different alphabet books, has your opinion changed about them? Think about the following questions: Are they only for young children? Are they always simple? Do they ever tell a story?
- What sort of alphabet book do you think *Alphabetter* will be?

Brainstorming an A–Z list

Based on the theme ‘A Better You and Me’, brainstorm a class alphabet list of words.

Word familiarisation

Select at least one of the following activities for each letter to explore and reinforce the meanings of words and that enable students to use them in context as appropriate. These activities may be undertaken word-by-word or after a set number of pages.

- Y-chart to symbolise what a word looks, feels and sounds like (or other categories).
- Drama ‘Freeze Frame’ – students pose in a scene to represent the chosen word.
- Compose a short piece of music to represent the chosen word.
- Create an artwork to represent the chosen word (e.g. Taking from Picasso’s ‘Blue Period’, what colour represents the word?).
- Search media for stories, articles and images that represent the chosen word.
- Create a multi-media representation of the chosen word.
- Create a ‘wordle’ with the chosen word at the centre (surrounded by related words and phrases).
- Develop and perform a short skit that demonstrates the meaning and essence of the chosen word.

Word and meaning revision

There are a number of ways you can assess student understanding of the words and concepts covered in *Alphabetter* that don’t involve a written quiz.

- Play charades (students have to act out and guess the words).
- Play ‘celebrity heads’ but use the words rather than names of people.
- Challenge the students to use the words in their daily interactions, in context. One point for each

time a word is used correctly.

- Personal checklist of each of the traits; students identify when they have been ‘tolerant’ and tick this word off after describing how they were ‘tolerant’.
- Vocabulary-building activities: Each letter has a key word followed by two synonyms (e.g. A: adventurous – bold, daring)
 - Brainstorm other synonyms for each word.
 - Use your list of synonyms to create a word cline where you list the words in order from least [adventurous] to most [adventurous], e.g. fun-loving, adventurous, bold, risk-taking, daring.
 - Make an alternative list of antonyms for each word.

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

The following activity suggestions are not specifically tied to any particular year level. Teachers should explore components relevant to the stage and ability levels of their students, adapting or modifying activities according to their professional judgment.

You can find additional SUBJECT/WORD-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES for each of the following subjects plus mathematics [HERE](#).

English

The following English-based activities are divided into activities that focus on examining and analysing; responding; and creating.

Examine and analyse

Text features

- Identify the different parts of the book, (e.g. title, subtitle, endpapers, author’s note, text etc).
- Identify the language features of the text (e.g. headings, narrative, definition, questions etc).
- What type of text is *Alphabetter*? How do you know?

Make a list of books that are similar in one or more of the following: genre, target audience, theme, author.

- Compare *Alphabetter* to one or more of the books on your list.
- For texts that have a similar theme or topic, discuss how the information is presented (e.g. a narrative versus an alphabet book).
- Discuss the effectiveness of differing ways of presenting information and story.

Examine other texts written by the author.

- How might you describe her 'author voice'?
- How would you describe her 'style'?
- Are there patterns or trends in her themes?
- What do you think the author's purpose was? Why did she write *Alphabetter*?

Respond

- Keep a journal of your answers to the question on each page.
- Draw a picture of yourself. Surround it with words and images from the pages that most represent you.
- *Alphabetter* is categorised as a picture book. Discuss whether picture books are 'only for children'. (Present ideas in a class discussion, speech or as a debate topic.)

Create

- Using the structure in *Alphabetter*, students write their own definitions and examples for the synonyms of selected words. e.g. Being [polite] ... Like the time I ...
- 'Interview' peers, students from other classes, teachers, parents or even book characters. Ask them some of the questions from *Alphabetter*. Present the interview as a report, a recount or a digital presentation.
- Select between 6 and 10 of the characteristics from the book and create a 'mini book' with the same theme. Think about layout as well as the information you need to include.

Health and PE

Values

The core theme of *Alphabetter* focuses on values (or virtues) and personal strengths.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your values?

Dear reader

At the start of *Alphabetter* the author has written a letter to the readers. This letter explains what the book is about, why she wrote the book and how to use it.

What does the author mean when she says: 'You can become the person you would like to be'?

- Do you like who you are? What would you like to change about yourself? (Note: teachers should carefully guide this conversation, noting it is about values and strengths, not body image.)
- Draw the person you would like to be. Label this drawing with words and sentences that show your desired values and strengths.
- What can you do to achieve these goals – one step at a time?

What does the author mean when she says, 'Enjoy your journey!'?

- What is a journey?
- How is personal growth a journey?

Write a reply to the author's letter.

Identity

Once you've read through the book, select some or all of the features and use these to:

- describe who you are as a person;
- create a visual or written representation of your identity.

Science

The author wrote *Alphabetter* to encourage children to become better people. Scientists have many of the qualities covered in the book, plus a drive to make the world a better place.

Scientists

What does a scientist look like?

- Draw a picture of a scientist or put together an image database of 'people who look like scientists'. Write a caption or a list of words that describe your scientist.
- Compare your picture and descriptions with those of your peers. What do you notice? Are there any stereotypes?

Investigate scientists of today. What qualities do you think you might need to become a scientist?

- How do your initial thoughts and ideas about 'what a scientist looks like' compare with what you know now?

HASS

The author wrote *Alphabetter* to make us aware of the strengths, values and virtues of ourselves and those around us. These activities are designed to delve deeper into the human qualities of people in the past and present, and how this affects and impacts Australian life.

History

Look back into your family history.

- Where did your family members come from?
- What did they do? How did they live?

Once you have collected information about your family members, choose some of them and determine what their qualities, strengths and values were.

- Have any of these carried on to your family today?

Geography

The identity of Australian First Nations Peoples is closely linked with country.

- Examine these links and explore what it means to 'Walk on Country'.
- What values are held by First Nations Australians with regard to Country and Place?

The Arts

Any of the subject areas in The Arts (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts) can be used for students to express their ideas and understandings from sections of *Alphabetter*. Some suggestions include:

- choreographing a dance sequence with movements that represent each letter in the book;
- performing *Alphabetter* as a play or Readers' Theatre;
- putting together a digital presentation to teach other classes or parents about the concepts covered in the book;
- selecting music to represent each letter in the book, then bringing it together in a soundscape;
- working together on a class mural (using paint, collage, tiles etc.) that represents and explains the letters in the book.

Reflecting on works

After completing an artwork, project or performance, have students reflect on their achievements in the task.

- Make a list of the qualities you demonstrated during the task.
- Reflect on how completing this task made you feel.
- Set goals for your next task.

Design and Technologies

Many of the concepts and values covered in *Alphabetter* could be further explored and actioned using the Design, Make, Appraise process.

Friendship space

Discuss the need for a 'friendship space' in the school.

- Where would it go? What would it be? Who could use it?

Design and build

- In groups, design your ideal friendship space and build a model.

Appraise

- Present your proposal to the class.

Extend

- The class may vote on one of the friendship spaces to actually build as a project.

Appraise

- Which qualities discussed in *Alphabetter* are you applying in these processes?

INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES

These activities may cover a number of subject areas and values from *Alphabetter* depending on the focus.

Buddy classes

There are many ways you could use *Alphabetter* with 'buddy classes' or cross-age learning. Some suggestions include:

- based on *Alphabetter*, create an alphabet book with your junior school buddies on the theme of wellbeing, self-identity or resilience.
- use the questions in *Alphabetter* as a prompt for discussions and activities with your buddy classes. For example:
 - draw you and your buddy being adventurous;
 - help your buddy deliver a 'random act of kindness' to another person;

- work with your buddy to plant and grow a flower from seed;
- spend time with your buddy doing something you both love (being zestful or engaged).

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

For additional SUBJECT/WORD-SPECIFIC activities, click [HERE](#).

For additional LETTER-SPECIFIC (A-Z) activities, click [HERE](#).