

CARS & STARS Online and the Victorian Curriculum

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D I G I T A L

Introduction

CARS & STARS Online is a **digital reading comprehension program** based around the repeated application of twelve core reading strategies to make students better readers who can analyse and interpret any text at a high level of understanding. The strategies that underpin the program represent distilled elements of word and reading comprehension that carry across all year levels. They are introduced in basic forms in Foundation Year and expanded upon throughout each level of the program.

The multi-level program is designed to be entirely paper-free, with all student answers entered directly into the software, and results being instantly recorded and corrected automatically, requiring no teacher marking. Students work at the level of their understanding, rather than year level.

In large part this is possible because CARS & STARS Online is not tied directly to any single curriculum – rather it’s designed to be able to **complement any existing literacy program or English subject plan**, as it focuses directly on reading skills and growing comprehension ability, regardless of student’s actual year level. Students are engaged at their point of need and instruction is provided directly at their current skill level, with multiple students undertaking CARS & STARS Online in the same classroom often being at different levels in the program at the same time – something for which the program is actually designed.

The Victorian Curriculum: English

While CARS & STARS Online is not specifically tied to it, the program directly complements the focus of the Victorian Curriculum: English, that “It is through the study of English that individuals learn to analyse, understand, communicate and interact with others and with the world around them.” The twelve core reading comprehension strategies that underpin the entirety of the CARS & STARS Online program are all – explicitly or tacitly, directly or indirectly – concerned with the process of analysing and understanding texts better, creating readers and students whose depth of understanding and ability to process information, both in English and consequently as learners in all subjects, will be of benefit to them throughout their lives.

Language Modes

The Victorian Curriculum: English organises English instruction into three Language Modes: Reading and Viewing; Writing and Speaking; and Listening.

As a digital reading comprehension program whose entire goal is the development of more capable readers who are able to engage with any text at an advanced level of understanding, the “Language Mode” of the Victorian Curriculum: English that most directly aligns with CARS & STARS Online is “Reading and Viewing”. The twelve main reading strategies of CARS & STARS Online (Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising) all tie directly into this Language Mode, with each representing a different aspect

of textual analysis applicable directly to the “Reading” element (and equally useful and useable when “Viewing” texts, though CARS & STARS itself is mainly text-based).

According to the Victorian Curriculum: English, “Reading involves active engagement with texts and the development of knowledge about the relationship between them and the contexts in which they are created. It also involves the development of knowledge about a range of strategies for reading.” This statement could not more directly align with the approach of CARS & STARS Online, which throughout the program introduces readers to elements of lower-order textual analysis concerned with concrete textual elements – through strategies such as Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence, etc – that they will later be using, unconsciously, as the foundation for strategies that require them to engage in more higher-order thinking and analysis in a more abstract mode – namely Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language and others.

It is of course obvious that a reading comprehension program like CARS & STARS Online would most directly correlate to the “Language Mode” of “Reading and Viewing” in the Victorian Curriculum: English, because both are directly concerned with “students understanding, interpreting, critically analysing, reflecting upon, and enjoying [...] texts.”

However as the curriculum itself states, “The language modes are interrelated and the learning in one often supports and extends learning of the others.” This is especially true with CARS & STARS Online because, while the program is primarily concerned with reading comprehension, it also

incorporates elements of “Writing” and “Speaking and Listening”, depending on how the program is taught and to an extent based on the discretion of the administering teacher.

While the CARS section of CARS & STARS Online is based around multiple-choice questions, both STARS and the recently added FOCUS Reading module require written responses that tie into the “Writing” element of the Victorian Curriculum: English, specifically reinforcing the sub-strands of “Creating texts”, “Text structure and organisation”, “Expressing and developing ideas”, “Word knowledge” and “Creating literature”, as well as (due to the program’s entirely digital nature) engaging directly with elements of the curriculum concerned with digital literacy and keyboard skills, among others. Additionally, the kind of deep-focus reading analysis and instruction that is fundamental to CARS & STARS Online necessarily reinforces teaching and learning about writing as well, because it is inherently concerned with the application of the written word and how it is used across a range of contexts and purposes. A student who becomes a better reader through CARS & STARS Online will therefore have a better grasp of skills and practices that will make them a better writer, too.

While CARS & STARS Online is primarily about reading text, the way in which it can be taught also correlates with elements of the “Speaking and Listening” Language Mode from the Victorian Curriculum: English, particularly when reading the exercises to a class as a group, getting them to respond or allocating students to read texts out to the class or groups themselves.

Additionally, a recent update to CARS & STARS Online is the Read Aloud feature, which allows students to hear stories read directly to them by the

program at every level. This feature has been particularly valuable for students with word-processing variances, or even those who just prefer to hear something read to them first before they read it themselves.

Strands and sub-strands

Language

In the Language strand, students develop their knowledge of the English language and how it works, something that is fundamental to CARS & STARS Online (and becoming a literate and capable student, reader and thinker).

Language variation and change

Language for interaction

These sub-strands are primarily present in CARS & STARS Online through the variety of styles, genres and subject areas touched on in the different stories featured throughout the program. Stories present changing language and contexts to students, so that a student who has undertaken CARS & STARS Online will have been faced with writing from a wide variety of different viewpoints, building an appreciation of the changing nature of English – and how its usage is often determined by who is using it, and for what ends.

These sub-strands are touched on across the program, but the strategies that engage with them most specifically are: Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language

Text structure and organisation

This sub-strand is fundamental to all areas of reading, and so is ultimately one that is present – and engaged with – across every aspect of CARS & STARS Online.

Specific strategies that are concerned with this sub-strand are: Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language

Expressing and developing ideas

Phonics and word knowledge

How authors express and develop their ideas is one of the fundamental areas of concern in high-level textual analysis, and so a dominant and fundamental part of CARS & STARS Online instruction. This sub-strand therefore can be said to be manifested in all twelve core strategies throughout the program.

Similarly, while CARS & STARS Online is NOT intended as a phonics program and is primarily concerned with students making meaning from text, the concept of “word knowledge” is present throughout the program, most specifically in questions about “Finding Word Meaning in Context” and “Interpreting Figurative Language”.

Literature

As a reading program, the Literature strand of the Victorian Curriculum: English is the one that most closely aligns with the goals and scope of the CARS & STARS Online program.

Literature and context

Because CARS & STARS Online is primarily concerned with making students into readers who can engage with any text at a high level of analysis and understanding, being able to interrogate the context of a piece of writing – and the person who created it, as expressed in the text – is fundamental, and as such this sub-strand is present in every CARS & STARS Online strategy, progressing from simpler, lower-level knowledge of texts (Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect) and escalating through to more higher-level, abstract examination of meaning and creator (Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising).

Responding to literature

Examining literature

As with the previous sub-strand, “responding to literature” and “examining literature” are essentially the central focus of the CARS & STARS Online program, built as it is on students becoming readers who can both critically evaluate a text as a piece of writing, recognising the way it has been constructed to serve a purpose, but also engage and analyse the ideas presented within it. Stories in CARS & STARS Online incorporate a number of different genres and forms, exposing students to the conventions of many different types of texts.

As such, these sub-strands touch on all twelve of the core reading strategies in the program: Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising.

Literacy

The Literacy strand goes to the heart of CARS & STARS Online's central mission – to create capable readers who can interpret and analyse texts at a high level of understanding, both for school and in life more generally.

Texts in context

Being able to interrogate the context of a piece of writing – and the person who created it, as expressed in the text, as well as the influence of place and time period – is fundamental to being a truly engaged reader, and as such this sub-strand is present in every CARS & STARS Online strategy, progressing from simpler, lower-level knowledge of texts (Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect) and progressing through to more higher-level, abstract interrogation of meaning and creator (Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising).

Interacting with others

How a person chooses to use language, and for what purpose, is central to understanding a text and why it was written, as well as how students can do the same in their own lives as writers and speakers within classrooms and in the wider world.

CARS & STARS strategies that specifically tie in with this sub-strand include those that are concerned with higher-order thinking and abstract textual analysis, such as: Making Predictions; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; and Interpreting Figurative Language

Interpreting, analysing, evaluating

As expressed in the Victorian Curriculum: English, this sub-strand encapsulates the purpose and goals of the entirety of the CARS & STARS Online digital reading comprehension program, namely its ultimate aim of creating readers who can do just this: interpret, analyse and evaluate any text to a high level of comprehension.

As such, every one of the core reading strategies in CARS and STARS Online directly ties into this sub-stand, including: Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence; Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising.

Conclusion

CARS & STARS Online is designed to be able to **complement any existing literacy program or English subject plan**, as it focuses directly on reading skills and growing comprehension ability, regardless of student's actual year level. As a digital reading comprehension program its applications and benefits are primarily found in the areas of textual analysis, which has flow-on effects for the entirety of English subject instruction but specifically those concerned with reading and the context of language use, primarily in regard to the written word.

It's important to note that with both specific content descriptions and precise details of the Victorian Curriculum: English, a student who is at year level with CARS & STARS Online might actually be slightly ahead of stated goals (at least insofar as they are concerned with reading comprehension and general literacy) because they have been introduced to elements of textual analysis that are only explicitly stated in curriculum documents at a later level.

As outlined above, CARS & STARS Online strategies and the program as a whole will have direct and indirect correlations to a wide swathe of elements in any English program, but the extent to which they align with specific standards or content descriptions will vary. The centrality of the skills of reading and textual analysis to instruction, as well as the shared goal of helping students to become readers who are both more engaged and more able to respond to any text with high levels of comprehension, mean that CARS & STARS Online can complement any English curriculum or learning plan to an extent determined by the discretion of the teacher.