

Chapter 1



About the PM Literacy Series



The PM Story is a result of a unique collaboration between Australian and New Zealand authors, educators, publishers and teachers that began over 50 years ago. From the beginning, the PMs were created for one purpose – guided reading.

Our philosophy is success, enjoyment and understanding. Our mission is for students to read for meaning and enjoyment.

At Nelson, we believe that the **PMs** are not a literacy program – we believe they are the resources for your literacy program. In the hands of skilled teachers, the **PMs** provide opportunities to scaffold students' reading development by providing the right level of challenge to build on each students current ability.

Our levelling system is the most trusted system across the world. It is the most finely graded levelling system and is frequently used as the benchmark against which other publishers compare their books. We don't see any reason to compare our books against any other levelling system.

A snapshot of the history and philosophy behind the **NUMBER 1** Guided Reading series

The New Zealand Ministry of Education asked publishers to write readers that used “the same basic vocabulary as the twelve Ready to Read introductory books”, which used natural language and reflected the real experiences of children.

1960s



Uses the same basic vocabulary as the twelve **READY TO READ** introductory books.

First Edition **1960s**

Wellington-based publisher Price Milburn created 120 **PM Story Readers** and teachers and students around the world loved them.

1960s

There was a dramatic change in reading instruction with the introduction of whole language and the **PMs** fell out of favour.

1980s

Annette Smith approached Nelson and suggested that the **PM Story Readers** should be updated to reflect contemporary classrooms and students.

1991



Second Edition **1990s**

THE **PM LIBRARY**

The publication of 120 new **PM Story Books** soon form part of the **PM Library**, written by Beverley Randell, Annette Smith and Jenny Giles.

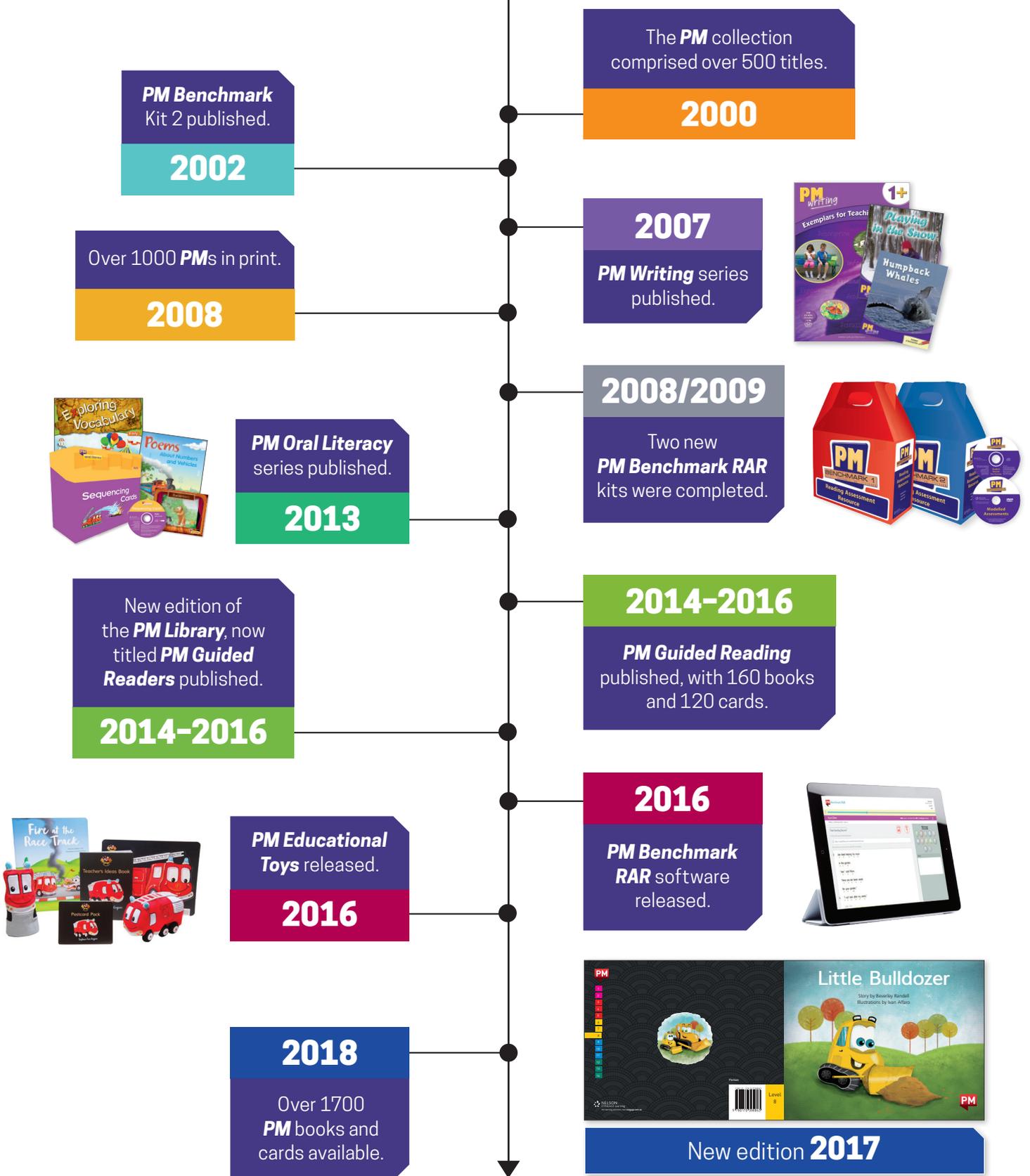
1990s

PM Benchmark Kit 1 published.

1998

PM Plus series published.

1995-1998



FOUNDING AUTHOR TEAM:

Annette Smith is an educator, author and consultant with a deep understanding of how children learn to read. She has led the author team for the **PMs** since the late 1990s and has written well over 500 texts in the **PM Collection**. In January 2016 Annette was made an **Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit** for services to children's literacy.

Beverley Randell is a teacher, author and editor who wrote the original **PM Story Readers** that began the **PM Story** in the 1960s. Beverley and her husband, publisher Hugh Price, are responsible for over 400 **PMs**, many of which are in their second and third editions. In 2004, Beverley was invested with a **New Zealand Order of Merit** for services to children's literature and education.

Jenny Giles was an experienced educator and colleague of Annette Smith in Hamilton, New Zealand. Jenny and Annette worked with Beverley Randell on the **PM Library**, the 1990s update of the **PM Story Readers**. Jenny went on to write many books in the **PM Collection**.

HOW THE PMs GOT THEIR NAME

'PM' stands for **Price Milburn**, the original publisher of the **PMs**.



The PM Philosophy

The philosophy that underpins much of the **PMs** is based on the teaching and writings of Dame Marie Clay, the pioneering work of Myrtle Simpson and Pat Hattaway at the Department of Education, New Zealand, and Warwick Elley's research on words children use in their writing. The three principal PM authors — Beverley Randell, Annette Smith and Jenny Giles — have brought their extensive, hands-on classroom experience in teaching beginning readers to the writing and final shaping of the books.

Simply expressed, the PM philosophy is this:

- children learn to read well if they are encouraged to use a variety of skills, processes and behaviours, rather than a particular method or approach
- when children are learning to read they should be given materials that have been carefully crafted to meet their needs; books that give them, from their earliest experiences with the printed word, **success, enjoyment and understanding**.

– Beverley Randell, founding PM author

Success, Enjoyment and Understanding

On every page in every book, care is taken with the sentence structures; the choice of words; the clear, well-spaced type; and with the meaningful, accurate illustrations. The books are easy to read as well as interesting, so children are able to practise a variety of reading skills and enjoy the feedback of success.

Each **PM Story Book** has classic story structure and deals with concepts and experiences children can understand. It is a real reading experience and has an intrinsic worth because it offers children traditional story structure with tension, climax and resolution. **PM Story Books** tempt children to re-read. They want to revisit the text in order to recapture the success and enjoyment they experienced the first time the stories were read.

Some children prefer reading non-fiction. It fascinates them. Each PM non-fiction text is carefully researched and accurate. Clear and logical presentation of the facts, coupled with superb photography and realistic illustrations, make the books relevant, satisfying and enjoyable to read. A delight in truth and a respect for the real world in all its diversity are very much part of the PM meaning-driven philosophy. The same respect for truth underpins the **PM Story Books** in which real animals appear.

All the PM titles from Levels 1–24 have been written using carefully selected vocabulary. In each successive book in the series beyond Level 5, there is a very low ratio of new word introduction (at most 1:20). Each title is completely child-centred and full of meaning. Meaning is paramount in the **PMs**. The **PMs** will open up children's minds, challenge their thinking and stir their emotions.

– Beverley Randell, founding PM author



The PM Levels

Right from the very beginning, the **PMs** were created for one purpose – guided reading. For guided reading to be successful, books need to be consistently levelled. While there are many myths and misconceptions about levels for guided reading, the underlying principle is relatively simple: levelled book collections are organised according to a continuum of increasing difficulty. Some teachers, schools, organisations or publishers determine the “levels” of published levelled books by placing them into a continuum of increasing difficulty and by referring to a set of criteria.

At Nelson, we don't take this approach. We don't “level” texts – we write books according to our own levelling criteria. This levelling criteria is designed to gradually release control of a set of variables. The gentle increase in complexity helps to scaffold children's reading development from the very first year to the final year of primary school. In order for children to master reading without confusion or frustration, we need to keep their learning in the “zone of proximal development”, so that the degree of challenge represented by each new level is a small step forward rather than a leap!

Some of the variables that we control include:



Vocabulary and
high-frequency words



Word count



Print and
layout



Sentence
structure



Punctuation



Text type



Print
concepts



Illustration/
text match



Recurring
characters

Many of the variables that we control can be described as objective variables – where the variable is measured against a standard. An example of an objective variable is word count – we can be certain that a PM Level 3 text will be shorter than a PM Level 4 text. A further example of an objective variable is the correlation with Fry Readability scores after Level 15.

Other variables can be described as subjective variables – where human input and judgement are more apparent. Examples of subjective variables that we control when writing **PMs** are concepts that may be appropriate to the target reading age – for example, PM Level 15 and 16 is

written to a reading age of 6.5 to 7.0 so the concepts in these books will be suitable for this age group. Similarly, PM Level 30 is written to a reading age of 11.5 to 12.0 so the concepts in these books will suit 11 and 12 year olds rather than 7 year olds.

In addition to these variables, the final piece of our levelling control relates to our PM Consultant and authors. We maintain a small stable of experienced authors who thoroughly understand the PM philosophy and levelling criteria. Our publishers work with the PM Consultant, Annette Smith, and the small group of authors to ensure that each PM is produced according to our rigorous standards. The results are the most carefully levelled books, ideal for guided reading.