

Monsoon Flood

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Readability (based on noun frequency) 8.5–9.5 years

Overview

“Monsoon Flood” tells the dramatic fictional story of a young boy who is swept away in a flood and then rescued by an elephant.

Told in the present tense and the first person, with vivid use of language, this is a story you may want to read aloud (or have students read aloud) for enjoyment and to prompt creative responses before doing any detailed examination of the text.

This text includes:

- some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses;
- some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations;
- a straightforward text structure;
- figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification;
- some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students’ prior knowledge;
- some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information.

Reading standard, end of year 4

Options for curriculum contexts

English (level 2, language features)

- Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

The arts (level 2, dance, Developing Ideas)

- Use the elements of dance in purposeful ways to respond to a variety of stimuli.

The arts (level 2, visual arts, Communicating and Interpreting)

- Share the ideas, feelings, and stories communicated by their own and others’ objects and images.

Key competencies

- Thinking
- Using language, symbols, and texts.

For more information refer to *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

The following example explores how a teacher could use this text, on the basis of an inquiry process, to develop a lesson or series of lessons that supports students' learning within an **English curriculum context**. Depending on the needs of your students, another context might be more appropriate.

Suggested reading purpose

To explore how an author uses language features to create strong sense impressions in the text

Links to the National Standards and the Literacy Learning Progressions

Your students are working towards the reading standard for the end of year 4.

By the end of year 4, students will read, respond to, and think critically about texts in order to meet the reading demands of the New Zealand Curriculum at level 2. Students will locate and evaluate information and ideas within texts appropriate to this level as they generate and answer questions to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum.

Reading standard, end of year 4

Students can:

- meet their purposes for reading by employing specific comprehension strategies, such as:
 - identifying and summarising main ideas (using their knowledge of text structure)
 - making and justifying inferences (using information that is close by in the text)
 - making connections between the text and their prior knowledge to interpret figurative language;
- discuss their responses to a variety of texts (for example, by evaluating the effectiveness of a particular text for a particular purpose).

Reading progressions, end of year 4

Key vocabulary

- Words and phrases, including “monsoon”, “temple”, “Lord Buddha”, “trumpets”, “teak”, “foreleg”, “brow”, “bristly”, “awash”, “porridge”
- The rich descriptive language especially the verbs, – “lapping”, “snatches”, “grab”, “sail”, “pokes”, “hoist”, “steer”, “wobbles”, “crunch”, “gaze”, “breaks out”, “marches”.

Refer to Sounds and Words (<http://soundsandwords.tki.org.nz>) for more information on phonological awareness and spelling.

Prior knowledge

Prior knowledge that will support the use of this text is:

- **personal experiences:** floods or heavy downpours
- **topic knowledge:** elephants and their behaviour

- **knowledge of the world:** Asian countries
- **literacy-related knowledge:** language features, including verbs.

Features of the text

These features may support or challenge the students, depending on their prior knowledge.

- The beautiful illustrations, which give strong support to the words
- The use of alliteration (“sudden swirl of water snatches”, “tiny twig”), assonance and alliteration (“feel my feet”), and similes (“as if I am a tiny twig”, “like a smile”, “like thick, black porridge”)
- The use of the present tense and first person, which together give the story impact and immediacy
- The use of commas to list things (“Branches, tree trunks, roofing iron, and a dead buffalo”)
- The use of short sentences for dramatic effect (“I grab at it. It pulls me under, but I hold on.”)
- The facts about elephants in the middle of a very dramatic story
- The remote setting (a river in Burma) and the concept of a monsoon flood
- The utterance “Maung!” by the mother, which could be the name of the narrator or an exclamation
- The ending, which does not say explicitly what happens next.

Suggested learning goal

To identify and explore the language that creates strong sense impressions in the text

Success criteria

To support our understanding of the text, we will:

- focus on what we feel, see, and hear as we read the text
- identify the language that helps to create the images and feelings
- discuss the impact of the language on the story.

A framework for the lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning goal?

Preparation for reading

English language learners

Remember that English language learners need to encounter new vocabulary: many times; before, during, and after reading a text; and in the different contexts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. You will need to decide on the specific vocabulary and language structures that are the most appropriate in relation to the purpose for reading and explore these with your students before they read the text. Scaffold the students’ understanding of the context by providing some background to

the text and any necessary prior knowledge. Also support the students with some pre-reading experiences, such as jigsaw reading, partner reading, or specific activities to explore and develop vocabulary. For more information and support with English language learners, see ESOL Online at www.esolonline.tki.org.nz

Before reading

- Encourage the students to think, pair, and share their experiences of rivers or flooding.
- Share the purpose for reading, the learning goal, and the success criteria with the students.

Reading and discussing the text

Refer to *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4* for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

Pages 2–3

- Read pages 2 and 3 aloud to the students. Have the students close their eyes and focus on what they hear, see, and feel as you read. Have them briefly share their thoughts.
- Clarify what's happening: explain what a monsoon is; relate monsoons to floods and what happens in a big flood; clarify the setting and what the family is doing.
- Explore the pictures and how they illustrate what's happening compared with what we may have visualised when we listened to the story without seeing the pictures. "How do the small images on page 3 add to the story?"

Pages 4–5

- Identify the senses that are evoked: feelings, sounds, the force of the river, sights, and emotions (wet, warm, sound of river, fear).
- On page 5, clarify the actions and feelings of the boy: his mental picture; his self-questioning. "I've noticed that at the bottom of page 5 there are a lot of short sentences. Turn to a buddy and tell them how they make you feel." (The short, choppy sentences help convey the sense of his building panic. He has moved from worrying about his family to worrying about himself.)

Pages 6–7

- "I gaze at ...'. What does 'gaze' mean? I wonder how it is different to just looking?"
- "I've noticed the dramatic descriptions of the elephant arriving." Discuss the expressive verbs that are used. (It breaks out of the forest, raises its trunk, trumpets loudly, marches, squirts water.)
- "I wonder what the description of the elephant swimming tells us about the river?" (It must be very deep.)
- "I've noticed that the author has used short sentences again as the boy walks up to the elephant. I wonder what effect these have?" (The sentences add drama and indicate he is being brave by not saying much.)

Pages 8–9

- Discuss the description of the elephant (“feel her ears ...”, “twin humps of her brow”, “bristly hairs”). “What impression do we get?” (It gives us a sense how big she is and how close he is to her.)
- “I’ve noticed some great language on page 9.” Discuss the use of simile and alliteration (“like thick, black porridge”, “delicately down”, “slow, steady pace”, “swaying from side to side”) and the expressive verb “jerk”.
- “The story ends quite suddenly. “Where is the elephant taking him?” “Do we need to know what happened next?” “Why do you think the author chose to end the story like this?” (The open ending is part of the effect of the story and leaves more to our imagination.)

After reading

- Encourage the students to read back through the story. On photocopies of the text, have the students underline words and phrases that convey images, sounds, and feelings. Prompt them to look carefully at the language. “Does anything about the language strike you as being particularly interesting or effective?” They may notice features such as the expressive verbs (“lapping”, “gathering”, “floating”, “snatches”, “swept away”, “tossing”, “sail”). Encourage them to also think about features such as the alliteration (“sudden swirl of water snatches”, “tiny twig”) and assonance and alliteration (“feel my feet”). Depending on your students’ needs, you may need to identify some of the key features for them.
- Refer to the students’ highlighted texts. Discuss why and how the author uses language. Show that the strong impressions are not overdone: they are scattered through the story, but the different features (use of verbs, sentence lengths, alliteration, and so on) have an overall impact.
- Reflect with the students on how well they have met the learning goal and note any teaching points for future sessions. For example, “How easy was it to identify the ways the author conveyed sense impressions in this story?” “Did this use of sense impressions add to the story? How?”

Further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate their new learning?

- Look at how the illustrations work with the text: how does the visual language enhance the story? Would the story have more impact if it didn’t have illustrations?
- Explore other strong descriptive texts from the *School Journal*, such as “Red Flags” (SJ 1.5.08) or “As Smooth as Silk” (SJ 3.3.09), and make comparisons with “Monsoon Flood”.
- Use the text as a basis for creative responses, including:
 - writing (poetry, stories, plays);
 - music (compose a soundtrack for the story, write a song);
 - dance (respond with movements to the ideas in the story);
 - art (capturing the moods and emotions with visual images).
- Use the text to support descriptive writing.