

Egbert and the Princess

by Katie Furze

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Year 6



Overview

This amusing story takes standard fairy tale characters and turns them on their heads. The author uses the readers' prior knowledge of Western dragon-princess stories to create humour by changing the stereotypes, which in turn upsets the readers' expectations of events and reactions.

It is an excellent text for helping students to understand how authors use knowledge of their audience to achieve their purpose.

Students who do not have experience of stories of this kind will need support. Some students may be able to contribute parallel stories from other cultures and languages. Encourage them to share these to help the class build a repertoire of "stock characters" to use in new stories.

Texts related by theme

"The Goldilocks Story" SJ 1.4.10 | "The McGoodys" SJ 2.4.09

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

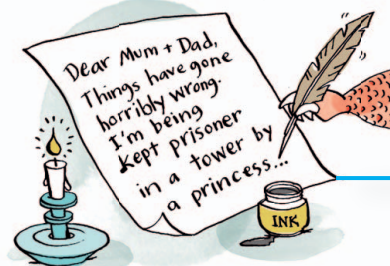
some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

The next morning, the princess left early to explore a new section of the forest. Unexpectedly, she came across a binner of knights on steeds. **They looked tired and depressed.**
"What on earth are you doing out here?" she asked.
"The king sent us to rescue you," said the knights, "but we got lost."
"I don't need rescuing," said the princess irritably, "although it's a good thing I've found you. **I'm keeping a ferocious dragon in that tower back there – and I get the feeling he's planning to escape. You might like to help.**"
"Of course, Your Royal Highness," said the knights.
The princess pointed the way and returned to her hunting.

Meanwhile, Egbert had finished washing the dishes and scrubbing the floors, and he was about to leave the tower. **Forever!** But when he opened the door, knights barred his way with their lances. The princess was onto him!
Egbert lay on the cold stone floor to think. He was trapped. **When would this nightmare end? When the princess returned that evening, she was her usual self-obsessed self.** I had a wonderful day today, hunting wild boars on the far side of the forest. What's for dinner? I'm famished."
Egbert shook his head sadly. **Who would have guessed it would work out like this?**

Later that night, when the princess was asleep, he had an idea. He took out a feather quill, a jar of ink, and a piece of parchment – and he began to write ...



illustrations by Kat Chadwick

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some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy an amusing twist on a familiar story genre
- To identify how the author has created the humour in her story
- To explore stereotypes in stories.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To write a fairy story for an older audience
- To retell a fairy tale in a humorous way
- To write a story in which stereotypes are changed.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possibly unfamiliar words or phrases, including “frolic”, “craggy peaks”, “siblings”, “scaly”, “snarly”, “wafting”, “elocution”, “glistening”, “hesitantly”, “conveniently”, “flanks”, “soared”, “secret hideout”, “arrangement”, “cooped up”, “plucking his pheasant”, “irksome”, “pigsty”, “distracted”, “narrowed eyes”, “steeds”, “depressed”, “irritably”, “ferocious”, “barred”, “lances”, “self-obsessed”, “boars”, “famished”, “feather quill”, “parchment”
- Colloquial expressions, including “Playing the bad guy”, “drop the idea”, “kept on at him”, “exact same”, “the last straw”, “I’m out of here”, “onto him”
- The names: Egbert, Edmund, Evelyn
- The use of comparative adjectives, such as “longer”, “lonelier”, “messier”, “bossier”
- The simile: “nestled like a jewel”
- The literal and figurative meaning of “fabulous”
- The collective noun: “a banner of knights”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify any words and phrases that might be unfamiliar or used in a less-familiar way. The colloquial expressions may be challenging for some students. Select some of the key vocabulary, including the colloquial expressions, to teach before reading. Give pairs of students two or three vocabulary items, with an example sentence, a definition, and a translation (where appropriate) for each item. Ask them to prepare to act out, illustrate, or explain their items. Then give the students copies of all of the vocabulary items and definitions (jumbled). Allow the pairs time to match each item with the correct definition. Then have each pair act, illustrate, or explain their items without saying the word or phrase – while the other pairs try to guess. Confirm the correct definition for each vocabulary item.

The text contains good examples of the changes that occur in a word family, and these could be explored after reading. For example, you could ask students to complete lists of comparatives (bossy, bossier, bossiest) or explore the word family for “irritate” including “irritably”.

Students could explore collective nouns, starting with the unusual noun (“banner”) for a group of knights.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with the features of stories that involve dragons and princesses
- Knowledge of the stereotypical roles taken in many fairy and folk tales
- An ability to see the humour in role reversals
- The meanings of the colloquial expressions – for example, “I’m out of here.”

Possible supporting strategies

Review dragon and princess stories. Students could make notes under the headings Typical Characters and Typical Action/Plot Features. Students who are familiar with them could make notes about dragon and princess stories; students who aren’t could make notes about a similar type of story they know. The students could then compare their notes, especially if they can make cross-cultural comparisons. This activity would also establish a shared prior knowledge base.

Gather and share some variations on folk and fairy tales, in particular those in which characters and events are changed for humorous effect.

Talk about the concept of a stereotype and the humour that can be found when stereotypes are upset.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Features typical of folk and fairy tales – for example, “Once upon a time”
- The use of alliteration, such as “a particularly prickly princess”
- The humour derived from playing with stereotypes
- The use of colloquial language and sentence structures that will be familiar to older (rather than younger) children.

Possible supporting strategies

If students are familiar with Western folk and fairy stories, review the way such stories usually start and finish. Compare these with stories from other cultures or traditions.

Review the use of stereotypes. Talk about the ages of the usual audience for these types of stories and the way an author can reverse the stereotypes to make a story funny for an older age group.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “Egbert and the Princess”

Once upon a time, a young dragon named Egbert lived with his family high in the mountains overlooking a kingdom. Egbert’s life was happy. He especially liked to frolic up and down the craggy peaks with his many siblings. But one day, Egbert’s parents called him over. His life was about to change.

Egbert landed beside her, his red scales glistening in the sun. “A dragon!” the princess cried. “How fabulous!” She patted Egbert on the head.

This made Egbert feel even less fierce than before. “I’ve come to capture you and take you away,” he said hesitantly. “If that’s all right?”

“It’s more than all right,” cried the princess, jumping on Egbert’s back. “Where are we going?”

He was too distracted by his angry thoughts to notice the princess watching him with narrowed eyes.

...

“The king sent us to rescue you,” said the knights, “but we got lost.”

“I don’t need rescuing,” said the princess irritably, “although it’s a good thing I’ve found you. I’m keeping a ferocious dragon in that tower back there – and I get the feeling he’s planning to escape.”

Students (what they might do)

*The students use the text and illustrations to **make connections** with folk or fairy tales they know. They also use their own knowledge of the kinds of stories found in School Journals to **infer** that this will not be an ordinary story. They **hypothesise** that the story they are reading will be funny and that Egbert will not be the usual fire-breathing dragon.*

*The students identify the familiar scene of a dragon–princess encounter by using their prior knowledge of typical folk or fairy tales. They locate ideas in the text and **integrate** this with their knowledge of typical tales to **infer** that the author has created a princess who does not fit the stereotype. They compare and contrast typical events in folk or fairy tales with the events here and **hypothesise** about what might happen. The students draw on their knowledge of language use to add to their understanding of the characters of Egbert and the princess, identifying how the author is making the story humorous.*

*The students **make connections** between the text and their knowledge of human facial expressions to **infer** that “with narrowing eyes” means the princess does not trust the dragon and is plotting something bad for him. They read on and **integrate** this inference to understand that her plan is to have the dragon dealt with by the knights. They **infer** that she probably knew knights would come to find her.*

*The students identify further contrasts between this and typical fairy stories and use their connections to **hypothesise** what might happen next.*

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

DIRECT the students to read the story independently, but ask them to pause at specific points to discuss the text with a partner or the group.

PROMPT the students to consider the story’s audience and purpose.

- What kind of story usually starts like this?
- What age group are those stories told to? Why?
- Why might an author write a story like this for students your age?

Start a chart to list Typical and Not typical features during reading.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to make inferences.

- How is the start of this story typical of folk or fairy tales?
- What seems different? Why might it be different?
- What reading strategies are you using here?
- What do you hypothesise will happen in the story?

PROMPT the students to pause and consider the author’s purpose and audience.

- What clues in the text show you that the author is not writing for very young children?
- What does the author expect you to know?
- Why has she changed the usual characters in this way?
- What might happen next? Why do you think that? What evidence did you use?

DIRECT the students to add to the chart about typical fairy stories.

DIRECT the students to identify clues in the text.

- What clue does the author give about the princess’s plans?
- What might the princess’s plan involve?

ASK QUESTIONS about the author’s purpose.

- Why is the author changing more of the folk or fairy tale stereotypes?
- What kind of person is the author making the princess? How does this help the author’s purpose?

DIRECT the students to make new entries in the Typical/Not typical chart.

- How do you think the story will end? Why?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I could tell from your smiles that you found this story funny. That shows me that you’ve used your knowledge of folk tales to understand what was happening. That helped you enjoy the story.
- When you came across unfamiliar words, you asked a partner to help you. Together, you checked a dictionary and tested the meaning in the context. Those are very important vocabulary skills.

METACOGNITION

- Which strategies helped you most as you read this story? Can you explain how you used them and why?
- How does thinking about an author’s purpose and audience help you to understand a story? Would that work for regular fiction too? Why do you think that?
- How did making connections with familiar stories help you understand the twists in this story?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from
“Egbert and the Princess”

Examples of text
characteristics

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Egbert scratched his scaly head. “What do dragons do?” he asked.

...

“Oh,” said Egbert, dragging one claw through the dirt. Playing the bad guy didn’t really sound like his idea of fun.

...

Egbert was a little shocked. He really had no interest in capturing a princess ...

DEVELOPING CHARACTERS

Writers use dialogue, physical descriptions, and behaviour to show what a character is like. Keeping the character consistent throughout the story helps the audience understand the differences between characters and the reasons characters behave the way they do.

One evening, after dropping her dirty hunting gear on the bathroom floor, the princess pushed things too far. “This tower is a pigsty!” she said. “We’re not going flying again until you tidy up!”

“That’s not fair,” said Egbert. “I do all the work while you go off to hunt all day – and in the evenings, you do whatever you like!”

CONNECTING WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Using details that your audience will recognise serves two purposes. It is an excellent way of showing a lot about a character or event without having to describe it in great detail.

In addition, when your audience can make connections with things they know, they are better able to make inferences about events and people in the story.

Meanwhile, Egbert had finished washing the dishes and scrubbing the floors, and he was about to leave the tower. Forever! But when he opened the door, the knights barred his way with their lances. The princess was onto him!

SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Using different lengths and kinds of sentences can build suspense and convey a character’s feelings.

METACOGNITION

- What planning strategies helped you most?
- How did considering your audience’s knowledge, age, and experience help you select details?
- How do you want your readers to respond to your writing? How can you help them respond in that way?

ASK the students to clarify their writing intentions by sharing them with a partner or the group.

- Who are you writing for? What do you need to consider for your audience? Think about their ages, their experiences, and their cultures.
- Will they have the same background knowledge that you have? If not, how can you make sure they will be able to make connections with your story?
- What is your purpose? If it is to make your audience laugh, how will you achieve that? What will your audience find funny? How do you know?

MODEL using a character map to plan writing.

- I like to use a graphic organiser to help me plan how to write each character. I check it during writing to make sure that the things a character does, says, or thinks are consistent. I want my audience to feel they know the character and can predict how he or she will react.

Looks like	Sounds like	Moves like	Behaves	Feels	Thinks

DIRECT the students to share their planning with a partner.

- How can you make sure each character is distinct?
- What do you want your audience to know about each character?
- How will you show this?

PROMPT the students to identify ways they make connections in their writing.

- Review the thinking you did about your audience as you planned your writing.
- Can you identify places where this audience can make connections with your text?
- If not, how can you fix this?
- Remember to use details, ways of talking, relationships, and other details that will be familiar to your audience.

MODEL the way the author has constructed this extract for a purpose.

- The first word tells me that this will describe what’s happening while the princess is out hunting. The compound sentence tells what Egbert has done and indicates a big change between the first part and the last part. The next (incomplete) sentence has just one word, which makes his decision to leave the tower more dramatic. It makes a strong statement: Egbert will not return! The last sentence gives his reason and uses a colloquial expression that you or I might use ourselves – it helps us to make connections with Egbert.
- As you revise your work, look carefully at the way you could make your sentences work harder to support the meaning. Can you add suspense, determination, shock or other feelings by making changes to your sentences?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I can see that you’re thinking about the audience for your story. You’ve shown that you are thinking about what they will already know by ...
- This part shows me that you’ve used dialogue to show us what the character feels. You didn’t need to tell me he was scared, I could tell from the words you gave him.
- I laughed when I read that part about ... It showed me you understand how to use a small detail to add humour to the story.

 Writing standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions