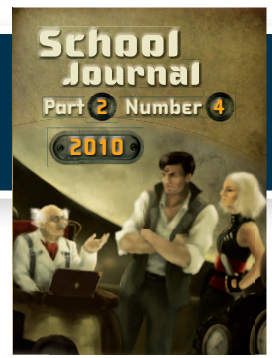


In a Chinese Garden

by Bill O'Brien

School Journal
Part 2 Number 4 2010
Noun frequency level: 9–10
Year 4



Overview

Bella Lau loves the Chinese Scholar's Garden in Dunedin. This article describes the garden and why and how it was made. Drawing together history, architecture, and the importance of place and traditions, the article gives students opportunities to make connections with places that are special in their lives.

Texts related by theme

“Celebrating Matariki” SJ 2.2.05

| “Taonga Puoro” SJ 2.2.09

| “Building a Fale” SJ 1.4.08

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

some abstract ideas that are supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

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 context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

“Before I first came to this garden, I'd heard a lot about it from my parents,” says Bella. “They told me that everything in the garden has a special meaning.” For example, the lotus flower represents purity and the struggle with hardship, because it grows up through the mud and yet comes out looking clean and beautiful. Rocks are like the bones of the earth, and water represents life. The ways in which water and rock are combined are very important for the garden's design. Nine hundred and seventy tonnes of large rocks were brought to the garden from Lake Taihu near Shanghai. A senior Chinese craftsman decided where each rock should be placed.

The bridges and pavilions in the garden were all built in China by skilled craftspeople. All the timber was sawn and finished by hand. No nails or bolts were used. The timber was fitted together using traditional mortise and tenon joints. Once the buildings were completed, they were taken apart, carried by ship to Dunedin, and put back together again. The terracotta roof tiles – all 380 000 of them – were made by hand in China. “If you placed all the tiles end to end,” says Bella, “they'd stretch from Dunedin to Christchurch.”

Shanghai
Dunedin

mortise piece
tenon piece

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES

LEVEL 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out about how and why a special garden was made
- To explore how cultural heritage is passed on
- To explore a place that is special to Chinese people.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To describe a place and explain why it is special to you
- To describe places that were important to your ancestors
- To research and describe how your cultural practices or celebrations are passed on.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Words or phrases that may be unfamiliar, including “relaxed”, “Scholar’s Garden”, “great-grandparents”, “heritage”, “represents”, “purity”, “hardship”, “represents life”, “craftsman”, “pavilions”, “memorial”, “Otago Gold Rush”, “ancestors”
- Technical vocabulary, including “sawn”, “by hand”, “mortise and tenon joints”, “terracotta”
- Modal verbs that indicate possibility, including “might” and “could”
- Use of the simile “like the bones of the earth”.

Possible supporting strategies

Provide opportunities for students to encounter and practise unfamiliar words such as “scholar”, “heritage”, and “ancestors” before and after reading.

ESOL Online has examples of strategies and approaches for focusing on vocabulary. See [Pedagogy](#).

Specialist terms, such as “mortise and tenon” may need extra support during reading. Before reading, use the diagram and, if possible, show students joints of this kind. Show students terracotta plant pots or tiles, and discuss the meaning (cooked earth) of “terracotta”.

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

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with gardens, including public and formal gardens
- The cross-cultural context of the story
- Knowledge of New Zealand history, including the Otago Gold Rush
- Some familiarity with types of plants and building materials
- Experiences of people, places, and times in history that have special significance within a community or family.

Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, discuss any special and/or public gardens, particularly those with a memorial purpose.

If students are not familiar with the history of Chinese people in New Zealand, explore this before or after reading.

For students with limited experience of gardens or building materials and methods, provide them with opportunities for some first-hand experience.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Specific example of a girl and her special place
- Use of a map (as a globe) image to show the journey from Shanghai to Dunedin
- Use of a labelled diagram to illustrate a mortise and tenon joint
- Photographs that support the text, including detail of roof tiles
- A combination of description, report, and recount that includes related information about history (including family history), gardening, and building
- A large number of passive verb forms
- A range of verb forms, including simple present (“goes”), simple past passive (“were born”, “were brought”), present perfect passive (“have been built”), simple past (“came”), past perfect (“I’d heard”)
- A range of sentence structures.

Possible supporting strategies

If necessary, support students to use the map, the diagram, and the close-up photograph to help them understand the concepts they illustrate. Show students how to locate the information in the text that these features support.

Support the students with noticing, understanding, and using the passive voice. The voice shows whether the subject of the verb is acting (active) or being acted upon (passive).

Active voice: “Sam (subject) kicked the ball (object).”

Passive voice: “The ball (subject) was kicked by Sam.”

When looking at a passive sentence, ask the students what the main action is and who did it. Prompt them to identify that the subject of the passive sentence above (the ball) is being acted upon. (This would usually be the object, as in the active sentence above.) Explain that in the passive sentence the object (the ball) has become the subject. It uses the correct form of “to be” (was) and a participle (kicked). Discuss **why** the passive is used. The passive construction is commonly used in scientific or academic writing, where we need to know what happened but not necessarily who did it.

Instructional focus – Reading

Science (Level 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

Text excerpts from “In a Chinese Garden”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

In a Chinese Garden by Bill O’Brien

Do you have a special place? Somewhere that makes you feel relaxed and at home – as if you belong there?

Students read the title and text, look at the photos, and use their general knowledge to predict that the story is probably set in China. They ask themselves the questions posed in the text and use them to make predictions about what the article will be about.

MODEL your thinking about how you begin to read a text.

- When I start to read this text, questions pop into my mind, such as “Who is this girl?” and “Where is this article set?”. From the photos, I think it might be in China, but I will have to read on to find out.
- I also respond to the questions posed in the text and think about my own special place.

For Bella Lau, it’s the Chinese Scholar’s Garden in Dunedin. Everything in this garden comes from China – even the roof tiles and the rocks beside the pool.

Bella’s great-grandparents were born in China. Bella’s parents often bring her to the garden to help her understand more about her family’s Chinese heritage.

Students identify the main idea that Bella’s special place is a Chinese garden in New Zealand. They ask questions about the name, connecting “scholar” with “school” and “scholarship”. Students make hypotheses about why the materials have all come from China.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to make connections that clarify their understanding.

- What words do you know that could help you work out what a “scholar” is? Why might scholars have special gardens?
- It says the materials for the garden all came from China. Why do you think they didn’t use local materials?
- How many of you have great-grandparents from other countries or other parts of New Zealand? Do your families have strong connections with the places they came from? Why do you think they do this?
- What do you understand “heritage” to mean? How important is it? Why?

Before reading the next paragraph, introduce new vocabulary, such as “timber”, “sawn”, “nails”, “bolts”, “fitted together”, “joints”, and “taken apart”. For many ELL students, there will be too many new words to work out the meanings from the context. You could talk about the images and diagrams and label them before attempting this paragraph.

Students use the information about Bella’s family to understand what her “heritage” means. They make connections with their own families and their heritage and discuss and evaluate the importance of heritage.

MODEL the way you integrate information.

- The first time I read this, I wasn’t sure what it meant. I went back and reread slowly, thinking hard about what I already know about buildings. I know you usually use nails to join wood, so when I reread this and looked at the diagram, I could see the timber was cut to slot together. I think that these joints must be very strong.

All the timber was sawn and finished by hand. No nails or bolts were used. The timber was fitted together using traditional mortise and tenon joints. Once the buildings were completed, they were taken apart, carried by ship to Dunedin, and put back together again.

With support, the students integrate the information in the words and diagram to understand the processes involved in making the buildings. They link this to other ideas in the text to evaluate the importance of the garden to the Chinese community in Dunedin.

PROMPT students to understand the importance and impact of this technique.

- I wonder why they built the buildings in China first? What can you infer about the technique from this paragraph?
- What does this imply about the methods used by the Chinese craftsmen?
- What other structures can be built, taken apart, then put back together again?

It is a memorial to the Chinese who came to New Zealand in the 1860s during the Otago Gold Rush. Many of them stayed on in Dunedin and built up successful businesses there.

Students draw together the information from the text and their general knowledge to understand why the special garden was made. They evaluate this to make inferences about the values of the Chinese community and why their traditions continue today.

PROMPT the students towards an overall understanding of the importance of the garden to the Chinese community in Dunedin.

- Let’s bring together our ideas about why the gardens were built. I wonder how important they are for the Chinese community?
- In pairs or small groups, discuss how important it is for a community to celebrate and share its heritage.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your evaluation of the article is interesting. You’ve drawn on your own experiences as well as the information in the story.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage students to reflect on their thinking.

- How were you able to achieve your purpose for reading the article? What strategies helped you?
- What connections and experiences came to mind as you read the article? How did these help you to understand the text?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “In a Chinese Garden”

Do you have a special place? Somewhere that makes you feel relaxed and at home – as if you belong there?

It might be a beach where your family goes for camping holidays. It could be a marae or a church. Or it might be a place in the mountains or bush.

For example, the lotus flower represents purity and the struggle with hardship, because it grows up through the mud and yet comes out looking clean and beautiful.

Rocks are like the bones of the earth, and water represents life.

“I love coming here because it makes me think about my ancestors,” says Bella. “I like thinking that they might have gone to a garden just like this one, long ago in China.”

Examples of text characteristics

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

One way of starting an article is by posing questions and answers. The questions make a reader want to find answers so he or she keeps reading. Sometimes, questions will be answered in the text, or they may be left open for a reader to think about.

USING EXAMPLES

Examples help the reader to understand an idea or a topic. Like photographs, examples can add information that helps the reader connect with the text.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Simile – “like the bones of the earth”

Similes compare two things that are not usually linked. A writer implies they are alike, and this allows the reader to make an inference.

A carefully chosen simile is a way of describing something without spelling it out in detail.

ENDINGS

Writers sometimes finish their writing with a sentence or two that makes a connection with the beginning. It’s like completing a circle so it leaves the reader feeling satisfied.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage the students to think more deeply about their writing.

- How well have you met your purpose for writing? Has your purpose changed along the way? If so, why and do you want to do anything about it?
- The simile you’ve used is very effective. How did you think of making that comparison?
- How do you keep your audience in mind as you write? Do you think about the audience all the time or just at certain points?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

MODEL the way questions and suggestions can help set a purpose for writing.

- The questions at the start made me think about places I love, and the suggestions on the next page gave me some ideas for writing. My special place is a wooden seat on the wild south coast. I’d like to write about the reason it’s there and how I feel when I’m sitting there. Writing helps me to think about something more deeply.
- What people, places, or traditions are special for you?
- If you choose to write about a special place, who would you be writing for? What would you want your audience to know or understand?

Point out to students that sometimes they may want to write just for themselves, for a specific purpose. They will be their own audience with their own needs. As for all writing, the purpose and the needs of the audience will guide their decisions about text and language features.

Some students may need support with understanding that the modal verbs “might” and “could” suggest possibilities and that they are added to another verb (in this case, “be”).

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage students to add examples to their writing.

- Where you can add an example in your writing?
- How would the example help the reader?
- Check with a partner to see if they agree with your example.

EXPLAIN the difference between literal and figurative.


- The text says rocks are like the bones of the earth. They are not really (literally) bones, but they act a bit like bones. They are strong and they support us.
- Similes and metaphors are examples of figurative language: they give the reader an image that is not real but that helps the reader to understand an idea. They can be a short-cut way of describing something without spelling it out in detail.
- Find a place in your writing where a simile would be more effective than a detailed description. Check with a partner to see if it has the effect you want.
- Support students who know another language as well as English to understand the concept of a simile. Ask them to think about figurative language in other languages they know. How does it work? How is it used? What are some examples? If possible, allow time for them to discuss this in groups who share the same language.

PROMPT the students to think about how they will end their writing.

- How will your readers know it’s really the end?
- What feeling do you want to leave them with?
- Ask a partner to read your writing and say if it has a good ending. If not, how could you improve it?

GIVE FEEDBACK to affirm students’ writing decisions and guide their learning.

- You’ve given me a lovely picture in my mind of your family’s bach. The details about the sounds of the sea help me to understand why it’s so precious to you.
- Now I’ve read your detailed description, I know why you wear your hair in those amazing braids. I didn’t realise how long it took to braid your hair or what braids meant in your culture.

 Writing standard: by the end of year 4

 The Literacy Learning Progressions