

Dogs

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Overview

This witty, free-verse poem from the 2003 Te Mata Estate New Zealand Poet Laureate is loaded with quintessential icons of New Zealand life.

Suggested Teaching Purpose

Based on the information I have about my students' learning needs, what would be an appropriate teaching purpose for this session?

Examples of an appropriate teaching purpose are listed below.

•	To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of making connections, inferring , or analysing and synthesising
•	To explore how the text and illustration work together to build meaning.

Features of the Text to Consider in Context

What features of this text would support the teaching purpose?

•	The way the poet implies meaning through the layering of images
•	The structure of the poem as (mostly) one long, complex sentence with conjunctions (despite, who, with) that link the ideas
•	The humour in the connections between the ideas—the image of the driver-farmer-ex-All Black as a dog (“barking”, “with a bit of the mongrel in ‘im”) and of the dogs as rugby players forming a “ruck”
•	The strong connection between the text and the visual language and the extra ideas suggested in the illustration and layout, for example, the rugby jersey worn by the farmer, the dogtag with “Buck” on it, and the multiple, overlaid versions of the word “DOGS” for the title, suggesting the idea of a ruck of rugby players (or dogs)
•	The strong evocation of rural New Zealand life through the use of Kiwi rugby and farming terminology and colloquial language
•	The use of the metaphors, “the barking from the one behind the wheel”, “a ruck forms” and the simile “like dominoes”
•	The pace and life in the poem and illustration (“up and down like dominoes”, “barking”, “they all pile off and a ruck forms”).

What other features of this text might constitute challenges for my students? (For example, features that may require a prompt or a brief explanation.)

•	The missing “h” in “im”
•	The complex structure of the first sentence
•	The words and concepts: “Battered ute”, “despite”, “a bit of the mongrel in ‘im”, “ruck”.

What prior knowledge would support my students in reading this text?

•	Familiarity with free-form verse
•	Awareness of rugby and New Zealand rural life.

Sharing Learning Outcomes with Your Students (select one or two)

I will be able to:

•	use the clues in the poem and my awareness of New Zealand life to infer what the writer wants us to think about;
•	identify the connections between the ideas in the text and the illustrations;
•	identify how the author has conveyed his ideas.

A Framework for the Lesson

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

In the sections below, particular comprehension strategies, reading processes, and links to other aspects of literacy learning have been identified in brackets. Many of these relate directly to the highlighted teaching purpose, but others have also been identified where appropriate.

Before reading

•	Have the students study and discuss what they can see in the illustration. Help the students to develop the idea that there are certain features and images that are distinctive to New Zealand and that this poem is likely to focus on some of these. (Making connections)
•	Explain to the students that this is a cleverly crafted poem that combines ideas that don't usually belong together. Tell them that identifying and connecting the ideas will help them infer the author's meaning—and increase their enjoyment of the poem. (Inferring; making connections)
•	Clarify the learning outcome(s) with the students.

Reading and discussing

Select from these suggestions according to your purpose for the reading and what you observe about the students' needs as they read.

•	Lead the students in a shared reading of the poem then have them read the poem again with a partner. Have the students clarify the literal sequence of events. (Inferring; summarising)
•	“A poem about a farmer driving his dogs around in a ute doesn't sound very exciting to me, but I think this poem is pretty special ...” Ask the students to reread the poem with a partner and to identify the deeper ideas in the poem. Come together as a group to share, discuss, and explore their ideas. Record their ideas on a chart or word web. Explain any terminology they're not sure of, for example, what it means to “have a bit of the mongrel in ‘im’” or what a ruck is. (Inferring)

Inference	Why I think that
The driver is a farmer	He's driving a ute There are lots of dogs on farms The illustration looks like a farm These dogs look like sheep dogs and there are sheep in the picture.
The driver used to be an All Black	He “used to play the national game” and that's rugby He's wearing a rugby jersey I think he's supposed to be Colin Meads

The driver is like one of the dogs	He barks He has a bit of “mongrel” in him
The dogs are like rugby players	They pile off like rugby players and they form a ruck at the end One of them is called Buck and there was an All Black called Buck
•	Encourage the students to make connections between the ideas. You could write some of the key ideas (for example, rugby, dogs, farm, dominoes, ute, bark, ruck) onto individual cards and have the students think, pair, and share their thoughts about the links between these ideas. For example, the links between the dogs and dominoes include: the dogs are black and white like dominoes, the All Blacks wear uniforms that are mostly black with just a bit of white, tipping dominoes over is a bit like making a tackle, and the sound of the dogs’ claws on the back of the ute is like the noise of dominoes clacking on a table. (Making connections; inferring)
•	You could prompt the students to take these ideas to a deeper level of meaning. “If you make connections between these inferences about rugby and dogs, what ideas do these suggest to you?” For example, the students could infer that there is a close relationship between the farmer and his dogs: they are like a team, and the farmer is the captain (or leader of the pack). Draw out the idea that by providing all these ideas, and leaving it to the reader to make their own connections, the poet creates layers of meaning and humour. (Making connections; analysing and synthesising)
•	Ask the students to share and explain their opinions of the poem, for example, whether they liked it and what worked or didn’t work for them. Draw out the idea that texts, especially poetry, can often be interpreted differently according to what the reader brings to the reading and that taking the time to think more deeply about the ideas in a text can increase the reader’s enjoyment. (Evaluating)

Reflect with the students on how well the learning outcome has been achieved and note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate and/or extend their new learning?

•	As a group, select an iconic New Zealand feature and have the students brainstorm associated ideas. Have them create an illustration that suggests the connections between their ideas. (Making connections)
•	Explore the use of New Zealand images in other <i>School Journal</i> poems, for example “Digging for Pipi” in 4.3.05; “Swing Bridge” in 4.3.01; “On the Train to Tangiwai” in 4.3.00; or “Robin” in 4.1.99.
•	Read other poems by Brian Turner or other well-known New Zealand poets, such as Sam Hunt, Glenn Colquhoun, Denis Glover, or James K. Baxter.

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