

# The Tail of the Gecko

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## Overview

This two-page report describes the special features of a gecko's tail. The information imbedded in the text offers many opportunities for making inferences about the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary and for summarising. It's ideal for use as either a shared or guided text.

## 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 <b>inferring</b> or summarising
•	To practise the strategies and processes for inferring the meanings of key words
•	To build vocabulary.

## Features of the Text to Consider in Context

*What features of this text would support the teaching purpose?*

•	The topic-specific vocabulary
•	The strong context clues for unfamiliar words and concepts
•	The focus on one particular aspect of the gecko
•	The extra, general information about geckos at the end of the text
•	The features of report writing: the introductory sentence and the paragraphs with a main idea followed by supporting detail; the use of the third person, the generic singular ("a gecko"), and the continuous present tense
•	The clear structure of the paragraphs
•	The meaning of the suffix "less" in the words "tail-less", "bloodless", "painless"
•	The humour in the double meaning of the title.

## Readability

Noun frequency level: 10–12 years

This report includes words that may be unfamiliar to some students, but the strong contextual support means that you can use this text with students reading at a range of levels by varying your teaching approach.

*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 words and concepts: "built-in safety device", "severed arteries", "sealed", "larder", "scarce", "absorb".
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What prior knowledge would support my students in reading this text?

•	Familiarity with the features of a report and with inferring word meanings
•	The use of exclamation marks and dashes to create a conversational tone so the text seems more “friendly”
•	Knowledge of lizards or geckos.

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

I will be able to:

•	infer the meaning of words I don’t know by using surrounding information and what I already know;
•	confirm my inferences by reading on and checking that any new information matches with my inference;
•	identify the main idea in each paragraph and summarise the supporting detail.

Note that “inferring” word meanings is different to “predicting”. When readers come across an unfamiliar word, they draw on a range of information to attempt, cross-check, and self-correct or confirm their prediction. In the early years of reading instruction, students are quite likely to know the meanings of the words they manage to predict, but as students read increasingly complex texts, they will encounter more and more unfamiliar words. Students may be able to decode and even recognise these words but often, they won’t know what they mean. Readers need to learn strategies for unlocking and confirming meanings of such words.

## 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 preview the text to identify the topic and the text form. Ask the students to explain how they made their decisions. (Summarising; making connections)
•	If necessary, briefly review the features of a report. Explain to the students that there are a lot of technical words in this text but no glossary, so they will need to infer the meanings of the technical words using information from the surrounding text and what they already know about word structure. Ask the students to explain how they will check their inferences (for example, rereading, reading on to the end of the sentence or section of text and checking whether their ideas still “fit”, or using a dictionary). (Inferring, cross-checking, confirming)
•	Focus on the title. Observe whether the students notice the play on the word “tail”. (Making connections)
•	Brainstorm to find out what the students already know about geckos. If necessary, explain that many of the New Zealand skink and gecko populations are under threat of extinction and that they’re not allowed to be kept as pets. (Making connections)
•	Clarify the learning outcome(s) with the students.

## During reading

•	Make sure that the students have notepads so they can jot down words they're not sure of. Have a dictionary handy to use for checking at the end of the lesson.
•	Read the first paragraph and discuss the main idea (that it's about geckos keeping themselves safe). Draw their attention to the word "timid" in the first line. "How did you/could you work out what this word means?" Prompt them to reread the second sentence. "What two ideas does this suggest about the word 'timid'?" (It's not clear at this point whether "timid" means to run fast or to run away.) This is an opportunity to discuss the importance of the strategy of reading on. Have the students reread the rest of the paragraph and discuss which meaning seems most likely. (Making connections; inferring; summarising)
•	"Are there any other words that are new to you in this paragraph?" Briefly discuss how the students could or did infer meaning. If they're not sure about the meaning of "detachable", prompt them to read the following paragraph. (Inferring)
•	Have your students continue to read through the text, noting any new or difficult words. Direct them to read each paragraph and reflect on the overall meaning <i>before</i> they focus on inferring the meanings of individual words. Depending on their level of reading confidence, they could do this by themselves or in pairs. Monitor how the students are using their notepads and use your professional judgment about how often to stop for discussion. If you find they're identifying more difficult words than expected and that it's interfering with the flow of the text, check whether they're finding the text too difficult or they've lost the focus on the overall meaning. If you feel they're struggling with the text, switch to a shared reading approach and provide more direction about which words they focus on.
•	If your purpose is to have the students practise summarising or you feel they need a greater level of support with inferring word meanings, select from the following suggestions.
•	Have the students read the second paragraph on page 20. "What are the clues here about the meaning the word 'detachable'?" Check that the students have made connections to the idea of the tail coming off. If that's a new and strange idea to them, ask them to find a word in the last line ("tail-less") that confirms their inference. (Inferring, cross-checking, confirming)
•	Ask the students to identify the main idea in the second paragraph on page 20. Discuss how the first sentence provides a very clear signal to the reader about what information to look for. Ask the students to identify the two ways the gecko uses its detachable tail. "How do the ideas about the detachable tail link with the main idea in the first paragraph?" (Summarising; making connections)
•	Read the top paragraph on page 21 and have the students identify the main idea (that losing its tail doesn't hurt the gecko). Ask the students to identify the information in the text that confirms this idea, for example, that it's quick and (almost) painless. (Summarising, cross-checking, confirming)
•	Have the students read to the end of the text, paragraph by paragraph, inferring or summarising according to your teaching purpose. Feed information as you judge necessary, for example, you may need to explain what a rudder is or the meaning of "absorb". (Inferring; summarising)

## After reading

Select from these suggestions according to your purpose for the reading and what you've observed about the students' needs during the reading.

•	As a group, summarise the main points of the report and record these points on a graphic organiser. (Summarising)
•	Have each student choose one interesting new word or phrase to focus on and to articulate how they inferred and checked its meaning. Use the dictionary to confirm the students' inferences. (Inferring; cross-checking)
•	Explore the use of suffixes to change word meanings. List words from the report that use the suffix "less" and draw out the idea that it means "without". Discuss the idea that the hyphen in "tail-less" shows that it's a made-up word. Have the students add other examples to the list. You could explore the links between words that end with "less" and those that end with "ful" or you could focus on words with the suffix "able". Remind them that they can apply their knowledge of the meaning of these suffixes to other unknown words. (Building vocabulary)

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

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