

Nobody Laughed

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School Journal
Level 2, September 2014
Year 4

SCHOOL
JOURNAL
September 2014

LEVEL
2



Overview

“Nobody Laughed” is the humorous story of what happens when a class arrives back at school after the summer holidays and each child has the same bright-green bag. The bags get muddled and the only way to find out who owns which bag is to open them. The main character is really worried about how the others will react when they see the “secret favourite thing” in his bag. It soon becomes clear that everyone has their own secret item.

This narrative:

- includes themes of tolerance and understanding of differences
- provides the opportunity to explore the issue of bullying and to promote the acceptance of diversity
- provides opportunities to make and justify inferences and to evaluate the thoughts and actions of the characters.

There is a PDF of the text and the audio version as an MP3 file at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme “Uncle Tino” SJ L2 Oct 2012 | “Pet Day” SJ L2 Aug 2013

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

from their run.

“Put that down. It’s mine!”

“No, this one is yours. Mine wasn’t that heavy!”

“Give it here!”

“Let it go!”

“This one’s mine!”

“Not even!”

“What are we going to do?”

Aiden said nothing. He’d already guessed what would happen next, and *that* had him worried. **Sure enough, Mr Chalmers suggested the only possible solution.**

“We’re just going to have to open up the bags, one by one, and look inside.”

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

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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

Of course, there was a mix-up. It happened while the class was out running laps of the field. (Mr Chalmers called it PE.) **The school caretaker decided that it would be a good day to finally replace some broken hooks, and to do that, he had to take down all the bags and put them in a pile - a great big, fluorescent green, Bigbarn store-special pile.**



some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

Aiden waited for people to start laughing at Helen, but nobody did.

Not even Sefton Johnson. It was turning out to be one of those **upside-down, impossible-to-predict days.**

“How about this?” Mr Chalmers held up a plastic bag containing an **egg beater**, a ball of string, a rubber band, and a calculator.

“I’m making a rocket,” said Nathan Fine.

“When I find the right fuel, it will travel to the moon.” Nathan was full of **big notions** that never worked out. Mostly, people laughed at his ideas, but not today.



some words or phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by illustrations and/or written explanations

Reading Standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Personal Health and Physical Development)

Level 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.

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 read a story about the first day back at school and what the children have in their bags
- To evaluate why characters in the story don't laugh at each other's secrets
- To explore the effective ways the writer uses humour and creates tension.

Possible writing purposes

- To describe your favourite (but not so secret) item and what's special about it
- To recount an event when someone laughed at you
- To explain what we could do if we are made to feel embarrassed, or are bullied by others.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases: “a spring in his step”, “coincidence”, “tarnished buckle”, “fluorescent”, “solution”, “impossible-to-predict”, “egg beater”, “old-fashioned calculator”, “notions”, “sprig of parsley”, “revealed”, “satin cape”, “lock of hair”
- Descriptive phrases: personification – “full of big notions”; common sayings – “a spring in his step” “die of embarrassment”; colloquial language – “Not even!”
- The names: “Toeiva”, “Charlotte”, “Mr Chalmers”, “McDowell”, “Sefton”, “Asafo”, “Ma'a Nonu”, “Courtney”
- The word “amaryllifolius”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Some of these suggestions may be more useful before reading but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.
- Support the students to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases by reminding them to use strategies they know.
 - Provide a list of the less familiar words with tricky digraphs and have the students work in pairs to identify the ones they know and apply their decoding strategies to work out the others.
 - It is not important that students know the meaning of “amaryllifolius”. Prompt them to use their decoding skills to attempt to pronounce the word. Encourage those students who are curious about the word to research its meaning and share it with the group.
 - For students who may find it difficult to enjoy the story because they do not know enough of the vocabulary, select key words and preview them before reading. See ESOL Online, Vocabulary, for examples of strategies to support students with vocabulary.
 - For students who need to expand their vocabulary, you could select a relevant vocabulary learning focus as part of your work with the text (for example, descriptive adjectives, ways of describing feelings). *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- First person narrative with an open ending
- Humorous tone created by a variety of elements, including the dramatic expressions and sense of foreboding in the narration, the repetitive pattern of sentences and phrases, the diversity of the secrets, and the unexpected responses
- Use of unattributed dialogue
- Words listed in sentences and in brackets to add detail and description.

Possible supporting strategies

- Review the students' knowledge of narrative structure. Ask them to share how they expect a narrative to end. Don't disclose the open ending – leave it for them to discover as they read. For students who are less familiar with the classic narrative structure in English, you could use a graphic organiser like the one below to help identify the structure.

Orientation	Who, what, where?
Issue	What's the problem or question?
Main events	What happens?
Resolution	How is the issue or question resolved?

- During a subsequent reading, support the students to explore how the writer has made the story humorous. Support the students to find clues that imply that something is likely to go wrong. Draw their attention to examples and the clues. Explore the impact of the main character's observations and feelings – for example, pages 20–21, “only possible solution”, “die of embarrassment”, “shameful moment”, “but nobody did”.
- There are several characters trying to identify their bags on page 20. For those having difficulty with the dialogue, encourage them to visualise what is happening. Some students, particularly English language learners, may be better able to understand the sequence by hearing the dialogue as they read it.
- Discuss how the information in the brackets provides background detail. Encourage the students to picture the adjectives in sequence to help visualise the description “a great big, fluorescent green, Bigbarn-store special pile.”

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Development

(Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

First reading

- Support the students to make connections to the theme by reminding them to keep the title in mind as they read and think about what happens and how the characters respond.
- Prompt them to visualise the scene to help make sense of the unattributed dialogue on page 20.
- Draw their attention to the reason “amaryllifolius” is used in the story and decide if they can still make sense of the sentence without knowing what it means. Remind them they can make a note to explore the word later if they want to.
- Ask questions to help the students reflect on what happened, for example, *How did the title help you as you read what happened? What did you notice about Aiden’s feelings? How did you expect the story to end? Why do you think the writer didn’t tell us?*

If the students struggle with this text:

- Ask questions to support them to make inferences as they are reading, for example: *Why do you think Aiden is so worried about the bags being opened? Why do you think nobody laughed at Helen or Nathan?*
- Remind them they have a range of strategies they can use to try and solve the meaning of a word or a phrase.
- Encourage the students who have trouble with the meaning of the sentence describing the pile of bags, to visualise each adjective to help build up a picture of the pile.

Subsequent readings

The teacher:

Ask questions to help students find clues in the opening paragraph that show how well Aiden’s day started.

- What is Aiden doing and thinking as he walks to school?
- What words and phrases show how he is feeling?
- What happens on page 19 to show that things might be changing?
- Reread Mr Chalmer’s comment. What else might that be telling readers?

The students:

- reread and discuss the clues in the opening paragraph
- make connections with the images across the paragraph to decide Aiden is happy about heading off to school
- use the information across the paragraph to work out the meaning of the phrase “a spring in his step”
- notice that things are changing for Aiden when everyone arrives with the same new bag
- reread Mr Chalmer’s comment about not mixing up the bags, and reflect on what they know happens next. They conclude that the writer was giving the audience a warning that the bags would get muddled up.

The teacher:

Prompt the students to make connections with their own experiences as they think about why Aiden feels the way he does and why he changes his mind at the end.

Where necessary, guide the discussion so students focus on why nobody laughed.

The students:

- identify how worried Aiden is about the others seeing his special thing
- make connections between his thoughts about being “embarrassed” and “bowing his head” to infer he doesn’t want to be laughed at when his “secret favourite thing” has to be shared.
- connect the repetition of “no laughing” as the others explain their special things to predict that they might be feeling worried too
- read that Aiden finally smiles and shares his own special thing, and they infer ...
- discuss why Aiden isn’t embarrassed and why nobody laughed at anyone else.

The teacher:

Support the students to read and identify the special things the children in Aiden’s class have brought to school.

- What did you notice about the special things?
- What did you think about the used tea bag?
- Did you think any of the choices were odd? Why?
- What is this telling you about the choices in Aiden’s class?

Have the students think about the different choices that were made and what that means for their own classroom.

The students:

- use the story to identify the special things and discuss how each one is different
- ask questions and use prior knowledge to clarify some things they are not sure of, such as who Ma’a Nonu is and what a sprig of parsley is
- discuss their opinions about some of the choices. For example, some students might think it would be great to have Ma’a Nonu’s tea bag and others might think that’s quite odd
- think critically about the different choices, what they thought of them, and how they respond to classmates who like different things from them.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I heard you explain to your partner who Ma’a Nonu is. That was really helpful to him as he thought about why the tea bag was special to Asafo.
- I noticed you rereading the text to work out some words. Reading the sentence, and the sentences around a word, is a good strategy for working out the meaning.

METACOGNITION

- Why did you choose the three sentences about Aiden on the bottom of page 22 as his worst moment?
- What did you do to understand who was speaking when the speakers’ names were missing?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 4

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Development

(Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.)

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

Text excerpts from “Nobody Laughed”

Asafo had a tea bag flattened out to fit inside a small picture frame. It had once been inside Ma’a Nonu’s tea cup when he had visited Asafo’s auntie.

At first, they were so busy telling each other their holiday stories (new house, new hill, new bike, missing tooth) that they didn’t even notice they had the same bag.

She had made a hobby of collecting long words that she didn’t understand (“amaryllifolius” was her favourite).

His bag was black and battered, with a tarnished buckle that had once been gold.

... he had to take down all the bags and put them in a pile – a great big, fluorescent green, Bigbarn-store special pile.

Examples of text characteristics

PLANNING FOR A DESCRIPTION

When planning a description, it helps if the writer has thought about how to introduce the item and what characteristics will create a detailed picture for the reader.

USING BRACKETS

One of the ways brackets can be used is to add more information about something that was just mentioned.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Adding descriptive detail helps the reader visualise what is being described, adding meaning and interest for the reader.

Descriptors in these extracts include precise verbs and adjectives and an adverbial phrase.

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Ask questions to guide the students to write a description.

- Why is a description needed?
- What does the audience need to know at the beginning of the description?
- Discuss the characteristics and think about what the writer’s plan would have looked like.
- Brainstorm characteristics that describe what makes their items special.
- Prompt for features such as what it looks like, where it came from, why you chose it, what makes it special, what it can do, where you keep it.
- Remind them they need to choose characteristics that suit the special item they are describing.

Explain the use of brackets.

- Compare the sentences with and without the additional information in the brackets, and describe the difference.
- Prompt the students to notice that although the sentence still makes sense without the words in brackets, the added detail provides more information.
- Have them share their writing with a partner and discuss where they could add more information. Encourage them to try using brackets to do that. Ask the students to consider whether the brackets improve their sentences or not.

Prompt the students as they consider using descriptive detail.

- Have them reread the first sentence in this extract and discuss with their partner a simple way to write the sentence. Prompt for basic words like “bag”, “black”, “used” or “old”, and “buckle”. Write these ideas into a simple sentence.
- Ask them to discuss which sentence carries more meaning and interest for them as readers.
- Have them reread the second sentence in the extract and discuss how the writer has built up the picture of the pile. Ask them why they think the writer only used a sentence like this once in the story. For English language learners, you may need to note that lists of adjectives in English should generally be in a particular order (British Council: Learn English, order of adjectives).
- Ask them to revisit their writing to see if they can add more detail by using more precise verbs and adjectives, and perhaps adding an adverbial phrase.
- For English language learners, build word banks of adjectives and adverbial phrases, perhaps grouped into categories or topics. Support the students to learn these words by drawing attention to them in their reading and listening and prompting them to use them in their speaking and writing. You may want to select groups of descriptive words and phrases for specific tasks and provide the students with these in word banks. Encourage them to take risks and experiment with the vocabulary and give feedback on how they use it (remembering to give lots of praise for experimentation and risk taking even when it leads to errors – these errors are precisely what helps them to acquire a good understanding).

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Our detailed planning and your choice of characteristics helped the reader to ...
- You tried brackets and you were right to remove them and make a new sentence because what you had added didn’t tell the reader more about the topic of the last sentence.

METACOGNITION

- What did you find hard about choosing the right words to describe your item?
- As you revised your writing, what changes did you make? Why?
- How did your changes improve your writing?



Writing standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions