

Erosion

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SJ 1.2.09

Overview

This poem describes the effect of erosion on a New Zealand farm. The unknown narrator questions why Uncle Tom would want to stay on as the farm slowly deteriorates. Depending on your students' prior knowledge of erosion, they may need support with this concept. We suggest reading the poem more than once to gain a deeper understanding.

Suggested reading purpose and teaching purpose

Based on the information I have about my students' learning needs, what would be appropriate reading and teaching purposes for this lesson?

- To read and discuss a poem that portrays strong ideas and feelings about connections to the land.
- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of **asking questions** and inferring.

Suggested learning goal

We are learning to ask questions to help gain a deeper understanding of what a poem really means.

Success criteria

To support our comprehension of the text, we will:

- use our knowledge of erosion to help us understand its effect on the land and the people who live there
- ask questions that the text raises for us
- draw conclusions about why Uncle Tom stays on his farm.

Readability

Noun frequency level: N/A

What features of this text support the reading and teaching purposes?

- The phrases associated with erosion, including "sliding down hillsides into the sea", "washing away"
- The vivid descriptions, including "white bones rattle", "stone storm beach", "clouds are crying", "cabbage trees are dying"
- The photograph clearly showing erosion on the hillsides
- The structure of the poem, which suggests that the narrator is speaking to Uncle Tom
- The ending of the poem with a question.

What prior knowledge or experience might help my students to read this text?

- Knowledge of erosion, especially on farms
- Experience of stony beaches
- Experience of making inferences
- Experience of reading and discussing poetry.

What text features might challenge my students and require a prompt or a brief explanation?

- Particular words and phrases, including “boulders”, “scree”, “stone storm beach”, “the clouds are crying”.

Preparation for reading

The day before you introduce this poem, have the students read “The Sands of St Clair”, *Connected 1* 2006, to become familiar with the effects of erosion. This article is also included in *Design in Action, Selections 2007* (see *Teachers’ Notes* for support for English-language learners).

A framework for the lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the reading purpose and learning goal?

Before reading

- Briefly revisit the text the students read the day before. Discuss the causes of erosion and the effects they have on the land.
- Share the reading purpose and briefly introduce the poem.
- Tell the students that, as they read this poem, you want them to be thinking of questions they may have about what is happening in the poem. Explain that: asking questions is a comprehension strategy to help the reader gain a better understanding of the ideas in a text; that their questions may not necessarily be answered at the end of the reading; and that they may lead to further questions.
- Share the learning goal and success criteria with the students.

Reading and discussing the text

Refer to Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8 for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

As your students read through the text, support them with any unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar, and concepts as necessary.

- Have the students read the whole poem or read it to them. Alternatively, you could have an enlarged copy of the poem to share and then write questions the students have beside each stanza to revisit after the reading.

1st stanza

- If necessary, clarify the meaning of “boulders and scree”. Have the students look at the photograph to get a better understanding of what the farm would look like. Draw out the idea that the land is steep and there is very little vegetation. Ask the students to share any questions they may have. You may need to model your own questions. “I’m wondering who Uncle Tom is. What is happening to his farm?” You might need to prompt the students to think about other possible questions, such as wondering about the effect of the land falling away on animals or plants, what Uncle Tom could do to stop the hillsides crumbling away, or who the narrator is. Record the students’ questions. (Asking questions; inferring)

2nd stanza

- Discuss the use of the phrase “stone storm beach” to help students visualise what the beach looks like. Encourage the students to think of questions. “I’m wondering why the bones are on the beach.” Some students may make connections back to the first stanza and suggest that the cattle may have fallen down the hillsides. Have the students think, pair, and share their questions and record them. (Asking questions; inferring)

3rd stanza

- “What might be meant by ‘the clouds are crying’?” Draw out the idea that this could be metaphorical (plight of the land) or literal (rainfall). Also highlight the fact that although there is rain, it might not be enough to sustain the trees and in fact will be contributing to the erosion of the land. “Why do you think the poet uses the word ‘even’?” Record any questions the students have. (Making connections; asking questions; inferring)

4th stanza

- Briefly revisit all the things that are happening on the farm and why. If necessary, prompt the students to think of further questions. “How do you think Uncle Tom feels about his farm?” (Inferring; asking questions; evaluating)

After reading

- Discuss the ideas in the text about the effects of erosion on the farm. Revisit the students’ questions for each stanza. “Have we found the answers to all our questions?” You may need to reiterate that it is acceptable not to have found answers but that the act of thinking about the text and raising questions helps readers to understand the ideas in the text. “Why do you think Uncle Tom stays?” Draw out the implied ideas, such as that Uncle Tom is very old and has lived on the farm most of his life. (Inferring; evaluating)
- “What evidence can we find in the text about how the narrator feels about Uncle Tom staying on the farm?” If necessary, prompt the students to make connections to the bleak descriptions in each stanza and the narrator’s final question. (Making connections; inferring)

- Discuss the last stanza. “What do you think Uncle Tom would have said in response to the last question?” (Inferring)
- Briefly discuss any words or phrases that the students found difficult and the strategies they used (or could have used) to work them out.
- Reflect with the students on how well they have met the learning goal and how the success criteria helped them. “How did thinking of questions help you have a better understanding of what was happening in the poem? How will what you learnt today about asking questions help you next time you are reading a poem or story by yourself?” 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?

- Have the students read other poems, such as “Power” (SJ 1.3.08), that require the reader to ask questions and to think about the ideas in the text.
- Ask the students to share with a partner how they were able to ask questions to help them understand a text when reading independently.