

# Feathers First

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**SJ 2.3.08**

## **Overview**

The birds are holding an election. All the candidates are gathered together to give their speeches. This play is a rich text that provides plenty of opportunities for exploration for students at all levels.

**Note:** An audio version of this story is available on *School Journal Part 1 and Part 2 CD 2007–2008* (item number 33360).

## **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 enjoy a humorous play based on the characteristics of New Zealand's birds.
- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of summarising and **inferring**.

## **Suggested learning goal**

We are learning to identify key information in a play in order to make inferences about the characters.

## **Success criteria**

To support our comprehension of the text, we will:

- make connections to what we know about some New Zealand birds
- identify key words or phrases that show the characteristics of the birds
- summarise the characteristics of the birds in our own words.

## **Readability**

Noun frequency level: 9.5–10.5 years for guided reading

*What features of this text support a range of reading and teaching purposes?*

- The dialogue that reveals the birds' characteristics
- The humorous illustrations that reflect some of the birds' traits
- The topic-specific vocabulary about elections
- The play on words – such as “fly past the fence post/first past the post”, “propulsionaly/proportionally”, “United, we flap. Divided, we flop.”
- The spoof of electoral candidates' speeches
- The use of onomatopoeia for the birds' sounds.

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

- Knowledge of New Zealand's former "first past the post" (FPP) political system and the change to a mixed member proportional (MMP) system
- Knowledge of New Zealand birds and their characteristics
- Experience of reading and taking part in plays
- Experience of reading stories or poems that include wordplay
- Experience of inferring characteristics from dialogue.

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

- Particular words and phrases, including the names of the birds, "feathered citizens", "weka-kicking", "propulsionally", "proportionally", "feathered fervour", "unanimously"
- Colloquialisms, such as "stuff ourselves", "Goody".

### ***A framework for the lesson***

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

#### **Before reading**

- Share the reading purpose and briefly introduce the play.
- Discuss students' prior knowledge of New Zealand birds' characteristics and habitats. (Making connections)
- Remind the students about the strategy of inferring. Explain that a key part of inferring is identifying and interpreting clues from a text. Inform them that they will be looking for information about each bird's characteristics, using clues from the dialogue in the play. (Inferring)
- 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.

- Discuss with students how a good story (or play) "shows" rather than "tells" and that we can find out a lot about a character from what they say and do. (Making connections)
- Give each student a copy of a character chart like the one below (with only the birds' names filled in). Then have the students read page 25. Model looking for clues in the text and add them to the chart. "I wonder what Kea is like? What can you tell from what Kea says?" "Kea likes eating out of rubbish bins and destroying cars. I think Kea is a mischievous bird." (Inferring)

- Have the students complete the chart (individually or in pairs). (Inferring)

| <b>Bird</b> | <b>Habitat/characteristics</b> | <b>Evidence from text</b>  |
|-------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Kiwi        | nocturnal                      | “night games”, “floodlit by the moon”  |
|             | flightless                     | “special sloping rows of seats for the flightless”, “not all of us birds can fly”        |
|             | lives in forest; self-centred  | wants to turn forest into stadium  |
| Tūī         | loud call                      | “got the loudest voice”  |
|             | leader                         | “Let’s vote on this.”  |
| Kea         | mischievous                    | “bendy car aerials”, “rubbish bins full of fast food”, “fun park”                        |
|             | diurnal                        | “kea shrieks in the middle of the day”   |
| Pūkeko      | lives in swamps; self-centred  | “flood the forest and turn it into a bog”  |
|             | diurnal                        | “pūkeko and kea shrieks in the middle of the day”  |
| Weka        | flightless                     | “that includes you, Weka”, “Hear, hear!” (agreeing with Kiwi that not all birds can fly) |
| Hawk        | can fly                        | “high-diving boards at the top of the kauri tree”, “Most of us can”                      |
|             | diurnal                        | “silly night-games idea”   |
|             | aggressive                     | “have you noticed just how big my beak is?”, “See my beak?” “boy skydivers like Hawk”    |
| Kererū      | likes eating                   | “stuff ourselves”  |
|             | can fly; lazy                  | “go to sleep on a strong branch”   |
| Kākāpō      | flightless                     | “new track built”, “thundering past”   |
|             | large                          | “heavy”, “thundering”  |
|             | slow                           | “That’s not fair!”   |
|             | nocturnal                      | “us nocturnal birds”   |
| Sparrow     | plentiful                      | “You’re just a common sparrow”, “there are more sparrows”, “lots of sparrow votes”       |

|      |           |   |
|------|-----------|---|
| Ruru | nocturnal | “a bit early for me”                      |
|      | clever    | “Not if we all club together against her” |

### **After reading**

- Briefly discuss any words or phrases that the students found difficult and the strategies they used (or could have used) to work them out.
- Revisit the character charts. Have the students put into words a description of one of the birds and share it with the group. (Note that some birds have more information about them in this text than others.) They could then write a sentence or two to describe each of three birds from the play, using the information from their charts. (Summarising; inferring)
- Have the students discuss with a partner the elements that make this play funny. Get them to focus on the characterisation of the birds and how this creates some of the humour. (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
- Study the illustrations and discuss how they support each bird’s characteristics. (Making connections; inferring)
- Reflect with the students on how well they have met the learning goal and how the success criteria helped them. “How did using the character chart help you to summarise the main points about each bird?” “How will your learning about summarising support you when you are reading another funny story or play?” 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 perform the play, using their knowledge of each bird to develop their character. (Making connections)
- Have the students complete a character chart when reading other texts and then write a character summary from their information. (Summarising; making connections)
- Ask the students to share with a partner how summarising helped them to better understand a character in a text when reading independently.