

Overview

The students of Bombay School in Northland became keen unicycle riders when their school caretaker introduced the cycles a few years ago. Rather than having the usual sporting heroes, these students' heroes are two young Māori from Northland who have achieved international success in unicycling.

The topic will be particularly engaging to students who enjoy sports and physical activity, especially activities like BMX or skateboarding. The familiar school setting will support readers at this level.

This article:

- supports the theme of practising to develop skills
- includes the profiles of two successful unicyclists
- has a sidebar about different types of unicycles
- includes a labelled photograph of a unicycle
- has a thematic connection with “Jump!” and “Leap” (trying a new physical activity).

Texts related by theme “The School of Juggling Unicyclists” SJ 4.2.05 | “Red Surfer Riding” SJ 4.3.06 | “Hooked on Hockey” SJ 1.1.07

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

At Bombay School, the students' interest in unicycling continues to grow. Mr Rob has raised funds to buy more unicycles for the school. The students are so keen on the sport that Mr Rob and his wife took nearly thirty of them to the Manukau Unicycle Club. “We invaded it!” Mr Rob says proudly. “The students had a great time, and they were able to show the club members a few new tricks too.”

The students say that they really enjoyed the visit. “Mr Rob is my hero,” says Abbey. “Yeah ... Chris, Sam, AND Mr Rob!”

a straightforward text structure, such as a structure that follows a recognisable and clear text form

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

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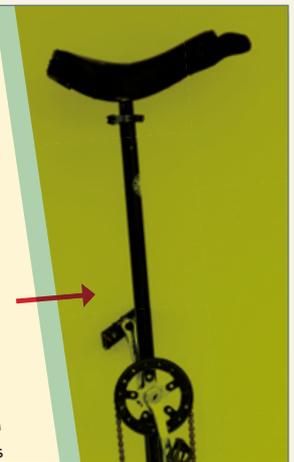
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some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

Types of Unicycles

Giraffe unicycles have a chain like a two-wheeled bike, so they can be much taller than other unicycles. (Most unicycles don't have a chain, which means the seat can only be as high as the length of the rider's legs. The seat on a giraffe unicycle can be up to 3 metres high!)

Trials or street unicycles are made very strong so that they can handle long jumps and big drops. Many of the tricks unicyclists do on trials unicycles are moves that riders



other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Personal Health and Physical Development)

Level 2 – Regular physical activity; Safety management.

ENGLISH (Reading)

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

Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Structure: Organise texts, using a range of structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To read about the unusual cycling activity that students at a Northland school have taken up
- To discover interesting information about unicycles
- To identify how one person's passion can inspire others to try something new.

Possible writing purposes

- To compare unicycles with bicycles
- To describe the benefits of learning a new skill
- To list and explain the safety measures required for cycling.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and terms, including “unicycling”, “unicycle”, “World Championships”, “freestyle”, “high jump”, “cross-country”, “ledges”, “handrails”, “health organisation”, “circus festival”, “world title”, “invaded”, “chain”, “Trials”, “BMX bikes”, “skateboards”, “revolution”, “related”
- The technical vocabulary, most of which is explained in the glossary
- A number of less-familiar names and place names: “Bombay”, “Huriwai”, “La Hood”, “Ashton”, “Kaikohe”, “Italy”, “Canada”, “Manukau”, “Abbey”, “Te Hau Ora O Kaikohe”.

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.

- Identify the words that may challenge some students and use word analysis and contexts to help explain them. For example, discuss the differences in the words “tricycle”, “bicycle”, and “unicycle”. Prompt students to make connections with other words that use root words for numbers (unicorn, bivalve, tripod, quad bike).
- Write “unicycle” on the board and ask the students to predict its meaning. Ask them to think about what a person who rides a unicycle would be called. Create a word family for unicycle. Ask what words they associate with unicycles and place them on a semantic web or [concept map](#).
- Chart words that are specific to the story and support students to make connections between them and other sports or activities.
- Check the pronunciation of Māori place names and, if necessary, support students to use correct pronunciation.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Experiences with wheeled vehicles, including different kinds of bikes, scooters, or skateboards
- Some knowledge of the possible challenges involved in riding a bike
- Some knowledge of competitive sports and the concept of championships
- Experience in reading mixed text types, especially in reading diagrams.

Possible supporting strategies

- Encourage a discussion about bikes and other (non-motorised) wheeled vehicles the students have used, for example, scooters. Ask the students to share their experiences and challenges of riding each vehicle. Remind them to include the trikes and bikes they had as small children to support the concept of increasing challenge, matched by their increased age, size, skills, and confidence.
- Invite students to share their knowledge of competitive sports, including world championships. *What qualities would people need to compete in the world championships?*
- Ask students to work in pairs to discuss what information the diagram gives them.
- How does the diagram help your overall understanding of the article?

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- A straightforward account of how unicycles became popular with the students of Bombay School
- The use of photographs that support the text
- The labelled photograph that shows the parts of a unicycle
- The verb and noun forms of “practise” and “practice”
- The “maths fact”
- The glossary of specialist vocabulary
- The use of pronouns (Pronoun references can be difficult for English language learners. See page 4, “When I saw one,” says Ashton and “It took a while, but all of a sudden, I could ride it.” Check students' understanding of “one” and “it”.)
- The use of relating verbs (which can be problematic for English language learners). Relating verbs link two pieces of information where there is no action, speaking, thoughts, or feelings, for example, page 9 in the Types of Unicycles text box, “Giraffe unicycles have a chain”, “Trials or street unicycles are made very strong”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Skim and scan the text with the students, prompting them to point out specific features and name them if possible (sidebars, labelled photograph, glossary). Discuss the function of each feature, leaving the content until the students read the whole text.
- For some students, you could select short sections to study one at a time and allow students to put the sections together over several sessions.
- During and after reading, check the students' understanding of the various types of information: the school students' use of unicycles, the two profiles, and the information about types of unicycles. You could use a concept map to show how the different types of information are connected.
- For students who may need support with understanding the structure of information reports, provide [sentence frames](#) like the following to scaffold independent writing.
 - Giraffe unicycles have a chain like a two-wheeled bike.
 - ... have a ... like a ...
 - Street unicycles are made very strong.
 - Unicycles are ...
 - Bicycles are ...



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Regular physical activity; Safety management.)

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

First reading

- Before reading, tell the students they will be reading an informational text with descriptions, photos, and diagrams. Ask them to skim the text to gain a general idea of the topic. *What do you expect to learn when you read this text? How do the different features help you to get a sense of the text?*
- *What knowledge of your own will be useful as you read this text? How might it help?*
- *What might be challenging, and what might be easy for you to understand? Why? What reading strategies are likely to help you as you read?*
- Draw a concept map on a chart and ask students for contributions. Then ask them to add ideas to the chart as they read (See “Vocabulary” on page 2 of these notes for more about concept maps.)

If the students struggle with this text

- You may need to unpack each sentence in the first paragraph. Prompt students to think about their own responses to the question, then compare those with the Bombay School students’ heroes. Encourage students from diverse backgrounds and cultures to name their sporting heroes. Then support the students to work through the rest of the paragraph to understand why the Bombay students would give that reply.
- Prompt the students to ask questions about the introduction before they continue reading. Provide support to students to ask and answer questions as they read.
- Students can work in pairs or small groups, sharing their experiences as they make connections between what they already know and what they are learning. Be mindful that some children may not have ridden a bike and may not be able to draw on the experience of maintaining balance.

Subsequent readings

The teacher

Direct the students to reread the first paragraph aloud.

- *Who does the author mean by “your” in the first sentence? Who are “they”?*
- *What are the All Blacks and the Silver Ferns?*
- *Who are Chris and Sam? Why does the author say they are not very well-known in New Zealand?*
- *Why do you think the author chose to start the article in this way? What ideas are introduced in this paragraph?*

The teacher

Prompt students to draw on their prior knowledge. Students could complete this as a **Think, Pair, Share** activity.

- *Have you learnt to ride a bike, scooter, skateboard, or other set of wheels? What was it like?*
- *Find a place where your own experience is similar to the Bombay School students’. Tell a partner about your connections with the text: what is similar and what is different?*
- *Can you visualise riding a unicycle? What would be hard? What would be easy?*
- *What kinds of tricks could a unicyclist do that you can’t do on a two-wheeled bike?*

The teacher

Direct the students to reread the sidebar on page 9. Have them work with a partner to make a Venn diagram to compare types of unicycles with types of bicycles.

(Some students may be able to compare them with skateboards or scooters too.)

Write sentence frames to support the use of the relating verbs “have” and “are”. (See “Possible supporting strategies” for “Text features and structures” above.)

- *What can you write in the middle of the diagram? Why?*
- *What can you write on each side of the diagram?*
- *How can you find out about different types of bicycles (skateboards or scooters)?*
- *Which type of cycle would be most fun? Which would be safest? Why?*

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You used your own cycling experiences to help you compare the safety risks of riding a unicycle. Good luck with trying one out!*
- *Your Venn diagram showed me that you’d read the article carefully and selected appropriate details to make comparisons. What is your conclusion?*

METACOGNITION

- How did the structure of this article help you to stay on track? How did the writer use the structure to make the ideas and information clear?
- Tell your partner how you worked out the meaning of “fired his imagination”.

The students:

- reread the opening paragraph and use their knowledge of sentence structure to identify the author’s voice and the intended audience
- make connections between the text and their knowledge of sports and sporting heroes to infer that Chris and Sam compete at the same international level as more familiar sporting heroes
- use words in the text and their knowledge of school and hobbies to form hypotheses about why Chris and Sam are heroes to the students of Bombay School.

The students:

- think about and share experiences that help them make connections with the text
- use the photograph, the text, and their own experiences to visualise riding a unicycle
- form hypotheses about the kinds of tricks that would be possible (or impossible) on a single-wheeled cycle.

The students:

- draw on their knowledge of types of bicycles to make comparisons with unicycles
- make and justify statements about similarities and differences, for example, by using a starter such as “They both have ...” or “Street unicycles have ... but street bicycles have ...”
- use their comparisons to evaluate the relative fun or safety of various unicycles or bicycles and explain their reasons.



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Education (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Regular physical activity; Safety management.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics; Structure: Organise texts, using a range of structures.)

Text excerpts from “Just One Wheel”

“I kept falling off,” says Miles. “I got lots of grazes, and I had to go to the sick bay a few times. I felt like giving up. But then I took a unicycle home for the weekend so that I could do some more practice. It took a while, but all of a sudden, I could ride it! I was so happy!”

Examples of text characteristics

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A personal story gives your audience an insight into one person’s experience. This is a good way to convey an unusual or new idea to readers.

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Ask questions to help students think about ways to communicate their ideas.

- How can you help your readers understand the impact of ...?
- Can you provide a personal story about one person’s response to ...?
- How would a quote from someone who has tried ... help your readers to understand how easy or difficult it would be to learn something?

If necessary, students can ask someone about their experiences so they can give their own writing more impact.

Chris Huriwai

Chris lives in Kaikohe, Northland. He bought a unicycle in 2006, when he was fourteen years old, and taught himself a few tricks. Then one day, he saw some videos on the Internet of what other riders were doing. This fired his imagination – he was inspired to try to do what they were doing. Four years later, Chris was the world champion!

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

A short profile or biography uses key details in chronological order to describe a person’s life or a specific part of their history.

SEQUENCE WORDS

- when
- Then
- Four years later

Explain the ways a short profile or bio can help carry ideas.

- In this extract, the author tells us how Chris got started as a unicyclist. By selecting a few key points in Chris’s life, she outlines his journey from his first unicycle to world champion.
- If you are writing about a famous person, how would a profile help your readers understand how they became famous?
- What information would you need?
- Which key details would be most effective?

Prompt students to check their use of words that show sequence.

- Reread your writing to find the places where events happen in a sequence.
- How will your readers know what comes first, next, later ...?
- Select words that help make the sequence clear and that add interest to the writing.

A paragraph text reconstruction will support students to notice the use of sequence words.

Types of Unicycles

Giraffe unicycles have a chain like a two-wheeled bike, so they can be much taller than other unicycles. (Most unicycles don’t have a chain, which means the seat can only be as high as the length of the rider’s legs. The seat on a giraffe unicycle can be up to 3 metres high!)

MAIN IDEA AND SUPPORTING DETAIL

In an informational text, writers often put the main idea at the start of a paragraph or new section. Then they give details that explain the main idea.

Remind students to use what they have learnt about paragraph structure.

- The first sentence is often called the topic sentence. It tells your readers what the paragraph is about.
- It is followed by one or more sentences that explain the main idea.
- In this example, the writer explains why having a chain allows the unicycle to be very tall.
- Review your paragraphs: do your topic sentences contain the main idea for each paragraph?
- Have you included some details that support the main idea? How do they help your reader understand the main idea?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You planned your writing carefully before you started. The structure works well for your topic: each section tells readers about a different aspect of ...
- The story of your cousin’s first try really added interest to your article about rugby. It showed me how exciting rugby is for a young player.
- When you went back to edit this section, you added some sequence words that made the order clearer.

METACOGNITION

- Tell me about the planning and writing process you used, from start to finish. Is this how you usually work, or have you tried something different this time? What have you tried and why? How has it worked out?
- I’ve noticed it takes you a while to come up with ideas for writing. If you were the teacher, what would you do or say to help children get started with writing?
- Why did you use these words showing the order of events? How did they improve your retelling of this event?



Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions