

A Small Footprint – A Big Impression: Elsie Locke 1912–2001

by Maureen Birchfield

Overview

Some students may already know of Elsie Locke, an esteemed writer for children and regular *School Journal* contributor. To understand her role beyond her writing, however, your students will need to have some understanding of the time in which Elsie lived and the causes she fought for. For this reason, allow for a session to gather historical background information.

The lesson below focuses on the use of summarising; therefore, students will need to have read the text beforehand to explore the content, history, and sequence of events. This will also allow English language learners an opportunity to discuss the vocabulary and grammar (this could be done as a jigsaw activity).

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 the lesson?

- To explore the life and contributions of an important New Zealand woman
- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of **summarising**, evaluating, and analysing and synthesising.

Suggested learning goal

We are learning to identify key information in a biographical text.

Success criteria

To support our reading and understanding of the text, we will:

- use our knowledge of text structure to identify the key sentence for each paragraph in the text
- justify our choice of sentence
- decide how effective our choice was.

Features of the text

What are the potential supports of this text in relation to my students' learning needs and to the reading and teaching purposes?

- **Text form:** A biography, with the associated use of past-tense verbs.
- **Structure and organisation:**
 - The way the information about Elsie is arranged sequentially (in the sections Early Years, Women's Work in Wellington, and A Home in Christchurch) and thematically (in the sections Novelist and Historian and Her Pen Was Her Weapon, which are, nevertheless, sequential internally)
 - The subheadings that guide the reader.
- **Language choices:**
 - The multiple meanings in the title (the footprint represents Elsie Locke's size, refers to her carbon footprint, and is also a type of impression)

- The unexpected meaning of the subheading Women’s Work in Wellington (work related to women’s rights rather than work in the home)
- The paradox in the subheading Her Pen Was Her Weapon (since Elsie campaigned for peace)
- The quote *from* Elsie – “To burrow in the library for me is an adventure” – and the quotes *about* Elsie (including one from David Hill, another *School Journal* writer).
- **Specific vocabulary:**
 - The expressions “on the go”, “Things looked up”, “full to bursting”, and “look up to”
 - The interesting verbs, for example, “roam”, “dubbed”, “rummaging”, “burrow”, “mused”.

Readability

Noun frequency level: 10–12 years for guided reading

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

- Particular words and concepts, including “impression”, “causes”, “activist”, “campaigned”, “social justice”, “dubbed”, “on the go”, “Great Depression”, “social injustice”, “social inequalities”, “disillusioned”, “family planning movement”, “government benefits”, “Things looked up”, “full to bursting”, “disrupted”, “spinal tuberculosis”, “rummaging”, “archives”, “bicultural”, “consulting”, “stature”, “mused”, “In many respects”
- The references to historical events and organisations, which require a level of prior knowledge
- The varied, complex, and dense (in terms of the amount of information) sentences.

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

- **Topic/content knowledge:** Their knowledge of Elsie Locke, including through stories she has written
- **World knowledge:** Their knowledge of the times in which Elsie lived and the issues she fought for
- **Personal experience:** Their familiarity with biographies
- **Literacy-related knowledge:** Knowledge of finding main ideas and key vocabulary.

Preparation for reading

These pre-reading activities could be carried out either independently or in pairs or with support from the teacher.

- A week before reading the text, bring in journal stories, books, and articles that Elsie Locke wrote. You could also gather simple texts about the times in which she lived (such as the Great Depression) or causes that interested her. Books by Kevin Boon, including the series *Developments in New Zealand History* (which won the Elsie Locke Award) would be particularly useful as they are aimed at young people. Copies of the timelines from the four centenary issues of the *School Journal* (SJ 1.3.07, SJ 2.2.07, SJ 3.2.07, and SJ 4.2.07) would also be useful. “Next week, we’ll be reading about Elsie Locke. Who has heard of Elsie? What do you know about her?” Introduce the texts you have gathered and allow the students to browse

through them. Then have them share with a partner or small group what they have read and discovered. (Making connections)

- Have the students read the Elsie Locke article to confirm who Elsie was and how she contributed to New Zealand society.

A framework for the lesson

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

Before reading

- Briefly have the students recap what they know about the period in which Elsie lived and how she contributed to society. Focus on the title of the text. "The title has various meanings. Let's keep it in mind as we read, and we'll discuss the meanings later." (Making connections)
- Remind students of the features of a biography and how the information might be organised (especially the use of subheadings). Review what is involved in the summarising process and highlight that they are working on one key aspect of summarising, that is, identifying key sentences. In this case, they are looking for key sentences that show what was important to Elsie and how these ideas shaped her life. (Making connections; summarising)
- Share the learning goal and success criteria with the students.

During reading

Refer to Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8, pages 80–93, for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

Page 8

- Read this page to the students. Tease out the meanings of words and phrases like "fighter for many causes", "activist", and "campaigned". (The words "trying to make New Zealand a better place" may help the students to infer the meanings.) Clarify who Elsie was and what were the important things in her life. Also discuss what "social justice" is versus "social injustice" (be aware that these can be culture-specific concepts and that students may hold differing ideas). (Inferring; building vocabulary)

Page 9

- Read the first paragraph and model identifying the key sentence for the students. "Remember that we are looking for information that leads to the person that Elsie Locke became." Introduce the graphic organiser below and add the sentence to the first column. Model your thinking when filling in the second column of the organiser. "I have selected this sentence (She always loved nature ...) because for me it shows that this is where 'Elsie the environmentalist' stemmed from." (Summarising; evaluating)
- Have the students identify the key sentence in the second paragraph and add it to their organiser. Get them to share the justification of their choice of sentence with a partner and then share back with the group. (Summarising; evaluating)

Pages 10, 11, and 12

- Have the students work to complete the organiser (either individually or in pairs), adding one sentence per paragraph. Leave the last section, "A small footprint – a big impression", for analysis as a group at the end.

- Have the students share their summaries with the group, including their justifications. Discuss any differences that may arise in the students' selection of sentences and justifications. (Summarising; evaluating)
- Discuss the introduction on page 8 and the conclusion on page 12. "Did either of these have one key sentence or did they repeat information included in the other sections?" (Analysing and synthesising; summarising)

Key sentence selected from paragraph	Reason for selecting this sentence
<p style="text-align: center;">Early years:</p> <p>She always loved nature and used to roam the hills and swim on the wild west coast.</p> <p>The Depression made Elsie aware of social injustice ...</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Women's work in Wellington:</p> <p>She ... helped found the family planning movement.</p> <p>With no government benefits for solo mothers, Elsie struggled to support herself and Don.</p>	

After reading

- In light of the final section, turn your attention to the title and unpack its meaning. Draw out that "A small footprint" refers to Elsie's size as well as to how environmentally friendly she was (her carbon footprint). "How would you describe what 'a big impression' means?" Elicit that, in this context, "impression" refers to the effect that Elsie had on others. Also discuss how the word can refer to an indentation or mark. "What sort of mark did Elsie leave on New Zealand?" Notice the link with "footprint", which is also a type of impression or mark. (Analysing and synthesising; building vocabulary)
- Review the graphic organisers. "Do you agree with how other students have summarised the sections? Is there anything you would like to change?" Prompt the students to explain their thinking and debate the points. (Summarising; evaluating)

- Discuss how summaries can be different lengths – and how the text is, in itself, a summary of Elsie’s life. “How would the writer have chosen what to include? What do you think her purpose was? What might she have left out and why?” Discuss why, if the writer’s purpose was to convey Elsie’s importance as a New Zealander, she included personal information. To further explore the idea of summarising, you could challenge the students to come up with a sentence or two (or even one word) that sums up Elsie. “Was Elsie someone to look up to? Why or why not?”
(Summarising; identifying the author’s purpose and point of view; evaluating)
- With the students, review the learning goal and success criteria and reflect on how well the learning goal has been achieved. “How has our work today helped you to understand Elsie Locke’s life and her contributions? What did you need to do in order to summarise the events and decisions in your own words? How will this help you when you are reading by yourself?” Note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate their new learning?

The students could:

- explain and share, with a buddy or group, following silent or independent reading, how and where summarising helped them to better understand a text
(Summarising)
- read one of Elsie Locke’s works (Making connections)
- brainstorm possible topics for the Elsie Locke Writing Prize (anything from a specific cause to a person who has fought for something important) and write on one of the topics (Making connections)
- further research aspects of the text that they found interesting or confusing
(Making connections)
- write a short biography of a famous person. (Making connections)