

# The Old Trunk

by Gregory O'Brien

School Journal  
Level 2, August 2015  
Year 4



## Overview

The old trunk of the title is filled with Jill McDonald's illustrations. The article explains how the illustrations ended up in the trunk and describes why Jill is one of New Zealand's most well-known and successful children's illustrators.

The text describes how Jill became an illustrator and what inspired her drawings, the characters she liked to draw, and the whimsical style of her art work. Some of the journals and picture books she has illustrated are referred to in the text and illustrations. The students are likely to be familiar with some of them.

This article:

- links to Margaret Mahy and Jill McDonald's work with her, including the well-known picture book "A Lion in the Meadow"
- provides an opportunity for students to discuss illustrations from an art perspective
- shows how Jill McDonald interpreted stories through her art
- provides the opportunity to explore other ideas, such as using your imagination and moving to another country
- includes a historical lens on illustrating texts in the time before computers.

Texts related by theme "Bringing Stories to Life" SJ 2.3.02 | "Artists at Work" SJ 2.1.20 | "Born to Weave" SJ 2.2.04 |  
"From Corned Beef to Captain Cook" SJ 2.2.08 | "Wired" SJ 3.3.08

## Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

a young, unknown writer came through the name was Margaret Mahy. Like Margaret, Jill believed that life was exciting and great fun. Together, they made some very famous books, including *A Lion in the Meadow*. The stories they worked on are filled with their love of adventure and imagination.

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

animals. She knew a lot about them because her children often brought home stray chickens, mice, and rabbits they'd found on their way home from school. Jill and her family always made room for new arrivals. Glen says that life with Jill was always interesting. At home, Jill would read books to her children and draw with them. She encouraged them to use their imagination and she would often get ideas from the things they did. Glen remembers that she once made a "stuffy cat" out of sock. Jill then wrote about the cat in the *School Journal*.

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

**The Old Trunk**  
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There is an old trunk in the hall at

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, copies of art work, art patterns, book covers, and book illustrations

**Her Favourite Subject**  
Jill drew thousands of illustrations for the *School Journal*. She used pens, pencils, crayons, stencils, inks, paints, and dyes. She also made collages (pictures made from a number of different materials) by cutting up printed words and pictures. This was in the days before computers, so Jill did everything by hand.

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

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

# Possible curriculum contexts

## THE ARTS (Visual Arts)

Level 2 – Share ideas about how and why their own and others' works are made and their purpose, value, and context.

## ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Processes and strategies: recognises connections between oral, written, and visual language.

## ENGLISH (Writing)

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

## Possible reading purposes

- To find out about one of New Zealand's famous illustrators
- To identify what made Jill McDonald a successful illustrator in New Zealand and overseas.

## Possible writing purposes

- To describe your favourite drawing by Jill McDonald and explain why you like it
- To describe the process for creating one of your own illustrations, drawings, or paintings
- To describe what your family or friends could say about you if they looked through a chest full of your art work.



# Text and language challenges

## VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and/or specialist words, including “trunk”, “illustrators”, “design”, “illustrations”, “art editor”, “imagination”, “stencils”, “collages”, “astronauts”, “stray”, “beady”, “published”, “illustrated”, “captivating”
- Phrases such as “never looked back”, “did everything by hand”, “her favourite subject”, “room for new arrivals”
- Titles, including names of book series, such as “School Journal”, “Puffin books”, “Ready to Read”; book titles, such as *A Lion in the Meadow, Number One*
- Proper names, including “McDonald”, “Margaret Mahy”, “Captain Cook”, “Jesse James”, “Quentin Blake”, “Joy Cowley”.

## 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 by using strategies they know, particularly rereading and reading for clues in the surrounding text, as well as using word knowledge
- Remind the students to use the context and the illustrations to help clarify challenging phrases and ideas.
- Before reading, identify and write down unfamiliar names and briefly discuss who they are.
- *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

- Some awareness of the process involved in publishing a book
- Awareness of the illustrator's role in interpreting stories and articles
- Knowledge of art techniques (stencils, inks, paints, dyes, collages)
- Knowledge that Puffin is a large book-publishing company
- Some knowledge of Margaret Mahy's writing.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Have the students describe the classroom process for publishing stories – drafting, editing, publishing. Help them to make links between this process and what they think is involved in publishing the *School Journal*. Record their ideas using a [concept map](#). Prompt them to think about the people involved in publishing it, particularly the writers, illustrators, designers, and editors.
- Discuss techniques they have used to illustrate their writing and look at the *Journal* to see what they can tell about the techniques used by the illustrators. Alternatively, you could provide a range of illustrations and discuss the different techniques.
- Share a familiar picture book or *Journal* text and discuss how the illustrator is showing the reader what is happening and telling more about the characters.
- Find books published by Puffin in the school library.
- Some students, especially those who are new to New Zealand, may be unfamiliar with Margaret Mahy. You could choose one of her stories illustrated by Jill McDonald and read it to the class as a shared book.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- An explanation that includes description, with subheadings to signpost the content
- Shifts in time, beginning in the present, moving to the past, and working chronologically to the present in the conclusion
- Language tone reflecting the style of the illustrations, for example, “exciting and great fun”, “filled with their love of adventure and imagination”, “making things up”, “freshness and wonder”, “friendliest lizards you'll ever meet”
- A variety of compound and complex sentences, several starting with a noun phrase such as, “As a child”, “Like Margaret”, “In 1965”, “All her life”
- Punctuation including dashes, an ellipsis, brackets, and a semicolon
- Speech marks to show emphasis (“stuffy cat”)
- The use of pronouns, which can be especially problematic for English language learners.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Before reading, have the students review what they expect from an article that divides the information into sections with subheadings.
- For students who find the shifts in time confusing, prompt them to notice:
  - the change between the present and past tense
  - the use of time markers, such as dates and connectives
  - phrases indicating the chronological order of events, such as “born in Wellington”, “At primary school”, “when Jill left school”
  - For English language learners and other students who may have difficulty with connectives, copy part of the text and cut it into paragraphs. Ask students to work in pairs to reconstruct the text. This helps them to notice the connectives and time markers.
- To support students to track information in a sentence with a noun phrase, prompt them to:
  - remember a comma means a pause and is used to indicate the writer is adding details to a main idea, separating ideas, or listing information
  - apply the questions “who?” or “what?” to the noun phrase, and “did what?” to the next part (of the clause).
- Model how to identify pronominal reference chains in a paragraph by drawing a circle around the characters' names. Use a different colour for each. Then, underline the pronouns in the paragraph using the appropriate colour for its subject. Point out that the pronouns for each character sometimes change, for example, “she” and “her”.



# Instructional focus – Reading

**The Arts** (Level 2 – Visual Arts: Share ideas about how and why their own and others’ works are made and their purpose, value, and context.)

**English** (Level 2 – Processes and strategies: recognises connections between oral, written, and visual language.)

## First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Tell the students to read the title and the first paragraph to infer the significance of the trunk and to get a sense of where the ellipsis at the bottom of the first paragraph might be leading them.
- Remind them to use the subheadings and the illustrations to help clarify meaning while they are reading and to use a “post-it” or a paper-clip to mark anything they may need to come back to later.
- Prompt them to make inferences by using information close by in the text. For example, ask them to read the first paragraph and then answer the question: *What does Glen think of her mother’s illustrations?*
- Ask questions to support the students to reflect on what they have learnt. For example: *What did you find out about why Jill and Margaret Mahy worked well together? Share something you clarified by using the illustrations. What do you still need to clarify?*

### If the students struggle with this text

- At the beginning of the first section, remind students how the heading and the first sentence may give them clues about the content to follow. *Think what the heading is suggesting. How does the first sentence help clarify your ideas about the following section?*
- After the introduction, support students to notice the shifts in time by drawing attention to the change from present to past tense with words like “is” and “was” and references to the timeline with phrases such as “in 1927”, “At primary school”, and “when Jill left school”.
- Prompt them to use strategies to work out the meaning of sentences with less familiar structures, particularly the use of punctuation and applying the thinking words “who?” or “when?” to the opening phrase, and “what?” to the following part of the sentence (or clause).
- Remind them to use the strategies of reading on and checking the illustrations to help work out some of the tricky ideas in the text, particularly the indirect quote on page 23.

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Have the students work with a partner to look for information to clarify their thinking about the ideas they are uncertain about. Ask questions to support them.

- *What helps you confirm your ideas about the sentence? What could it be saying about Jill McDonald’s choice to work as an illustrator instead of designing houses?*
- *What clues explain the phrase “Jill did everything by hand”? How do you publish your writing when you can’t use the computer?*

### The teacher

- After the students reread the section “A Talent for Drawing”, have them search for information that helps them to describe Jill McDonald’s art work. Enlarge one of the illustrations and record their observations as they share their ideas.
- Remind them to use the text and the illustrations.
- Prompt them to notice references to her imagination, her use of pattern, and her sense of fun.
- Following the analysis, support them to select their own one-word summary of what makes Jill McDonald’s art work special.
- Have them explain the words they came up with to describe the special style of her art work.

### The teacher

Prompt the students to think critically about what Jill McDonald’s great-grandchildren might learn about her from the trunk.

- *Why do the family call the trunk a treasure chest?*
- *How does her art tell them about her?*
- *What might it tell them about the places she worked and the people she worked with?*

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You managed to answer your own question about Jill McDonald’s work when you read further on in the paragraph. Reading on and rereading are two useful strategies for checking on information or looking for answers to a question.*
- *It was interesting to hear you share what it was like to move to a new country. That helped the group think about what it might have been like for Jill McDonald.*
- *You’ve told us why the family call Jill McDonald’s drawings their treasure. Remember to use evidence from the text to support your point of view next time you are sharing ideas about what something means.*

### METACOGNITION

- What sentences did you find difficult to understand? What helped you to work them out?
- What connections did you make between the text and the illustrations to identify how Jill made her subjects look both real and made-up?
- What helped you decide on the word “magical” to describe Jill McDonald’s art work?

### The students:

- use the information in the paragraph and their own ideas to discuss what the sentence “She never looked back” means. As they read on, they identify ideas from the text, such as working with Margaret Mahy and with “famous illustrators” to confirm their thinking.
- reread the sentence and make connections with their classroom experiences to confirm their interpretation of “doing everything by hand”.

### The students:

- make connections between the information in the text and the illustrations to describe the art work
- identify and share information, such as the list of materials, doing illustrations by hand, faces in letters, mathematical patterns, detailed patterns, and animals that looked mostly real but with made-up features such as “beady eyes” and “curly hair” and that smiled like people
- think, pair, share words they have come up with to describe her art.

### The students:

- use their prior knowledge to infer what a treasure chest contains and to make connections with the text to infer why the family describe the illustrations as treasure
- review the section “Jill and Margaret Mahy” and make inferences about why Jill McDonald drew the lion for “A Lion in the Meadow” with curly hair.



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**The Arts** (Level 2 – Visual Arts: Share ideas about how and why their own and others' works are made and their purpose, value, and context.)

**English** (Level 2 – Ideas: select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

## Text excerpts from “The Old Trunk”

Although she could draw pictures that looked very real, Jill loved making things up most of all. She drew red rabbits and snails with patterns on their shells. She drew owls with beady eyes and lions with curly hair. She also drew some of the friendliest lizards and insects you'll ever meet.



Jill drew Captain Cook and Jessie James, the outlaw; she drew schoolchildren and astronauts. But her favourite subject was animals. She knew a lot about them because her children often brought home stray chickens, mice, and rabbits they'd found on their way home from school. Jill and her family always made room for new arrivals.

## Examples of text characteristics

### CHOICE OF VOCABULARY

*Choice of vocabulary needs to support the writer's purpose so that readers are able to understand the content.*

### ELABORATING ON AN IDEA

*Writers need to think like readers in order to provide details that will help readers see what they mean.*

*To think like a reader, writers need to ask themselves questions about their ideas using who? what? where? when? why? and how?*

### PRONOMINAL REFERENCE

*Pronouns need a clear line of reference to the names they are representing. Their use in writing can be problematic, especially for new learners of English.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Ask questions and prompt students to make connections between their art work and their plan to select vocabulary that clearly describes their art work.

- *What is the writer's purpose here?*
- *What information and ideas has he included about the art work?*
- *Notice the precise nouns and adjectives he used to describe what you see on the cover of the book.*
- *Remember to check your art work to help you think about the best words to use in your writing.*

Support students to think like readers by exploring the use of detail in the text and then applying the questions to their own writing.

- *What is the topic of this paragraph?*
- *How do we know?*
- *Why were animals her favourite subject?*
- *How did she learn so much about them?*

Have the students work with a partner. Explain that they as writers can help themselves and their partners to think like readers.

- *As your partner reads you a paragraph from their writing, think of a question to ask to get a better idea about what they are saying.*

Record the words “who? what? where? when? why? and how?” on the board. Encourage the students to record the questions in the margin of their draft writing to remind themselves to ask “reader questions” as they write.

Identify the pronouns used in this paragraph and to whom or what they refer. Model writing a descriptive text using the person's actual name every time. Read the text aloud and see how repetitive it is. Show how to replace the names with pronouns to improve the writing style.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You've given me a clear idea of why you like drawing cartoons. Now it would help me as a reader if you said something about subjects you like to draw and why.*
- *You've used some precise nouns and adjectives to describe your painting. If I couldn't see the painting, I would still have a clear picture of it. Now reread your writing to see if there are some adjectives that you don't need.*

### METACOGNITION

- How did asking questions about your partner's writing and “thinking like a reader” help you with your writing?
- I notice you have more detail in your paragraphs. What difference has this made to your writing?



Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions