



Overview

In a realistic story set in the not-too-distant future, Paul Mason conveys a message that has increasing relevance today. The plot involves a family that cannot afford to buy water during a severe drought. Through implication, it appears that a single company owns the water and employs the parents of the family. When their neighbours receive a delivery of water, Ryder decides to take matters into his own hands.

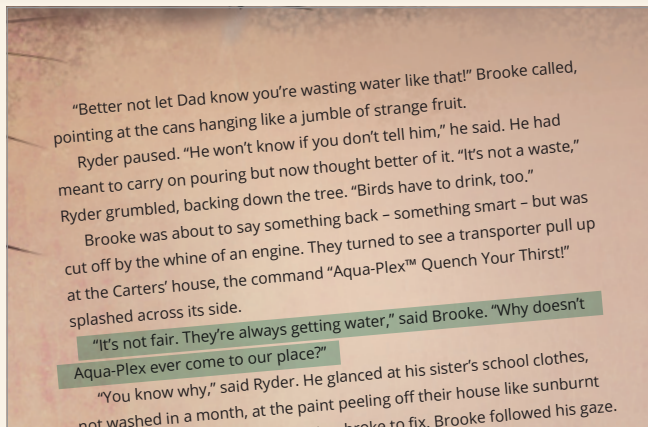
The story has subtleties that may be challenging for some year 6 students, but they provide excellent opportunities for close reading and rich discussions.

This narrative:

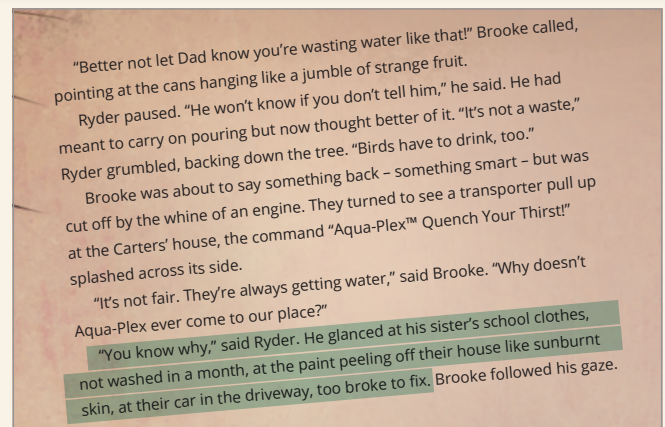
- requires students to consider the rights and wrongs of a bold decision
- has an underlying theme of fairness when sharing a scarce and essential natural resource
- provides many opportunities for students to infer meaning and consider more than one interpretation
- has an open ending that can be used as a starting point for discussion and writing.

Texts related by theme **“Kahawai”** SJ L3 Oct 2013 | **“Water Worries”** SJ L3 April 2012 | **“Close to the Edge”** SJ L4 Nov 2014

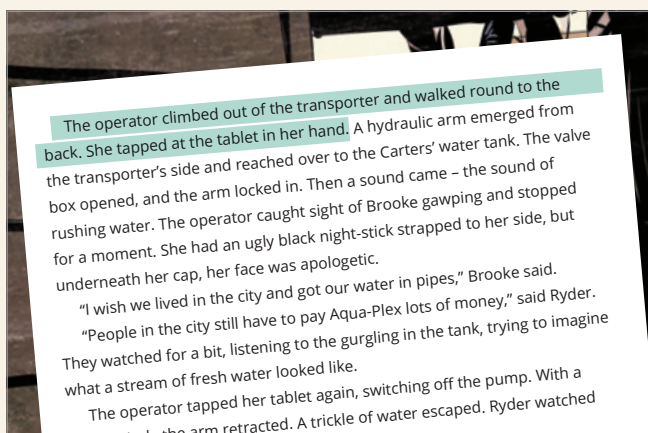
Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard



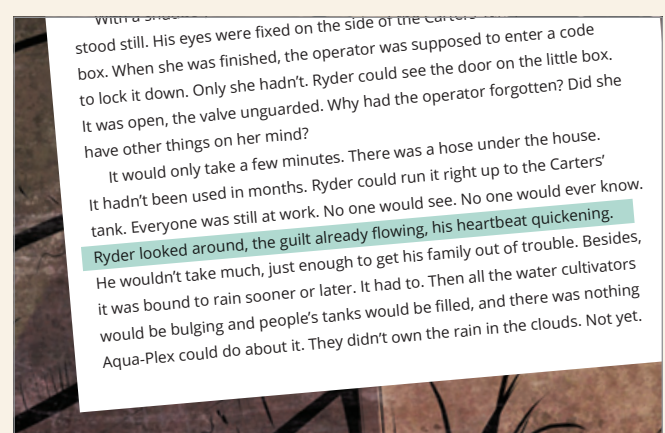
abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students’ understanding



some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text



some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions



figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 3 – Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate text structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out how Ryder solves a problem that his family is facing
- To discuss and evaluate the decision made by Ryder and suggest possible outcomes resulting from his decision
- To think critically about a situation where essential resources are scarce.

Possible writing purposes

- To write the next instalment of “Thirst”
- To write an alternative story in which Ryder makes a different decision
- To argue for or against Ryder’s decision in a debate, giving reasons for your stance
- To create a story in which a different essential resource has become scarce.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words or terms, including “water cultivators”, “drought season”, “transporter”, “Quench”, “broke”, “hydraulic arm”, “valve”, “night-stick”, “apologetic”, “unguarded”, “hollow shell”, “parched”, “boiler suits”, “mini-console”
- the use of the TM trademark symbol on the company names, Aqua-Plex™ and Work-Plex™
- interesting verbs: “hailed”, “growled”, “grumbled”, “gawping”, “gurgling”, “retracted”, “rasped”, “jammed”, “babbling”, “twitched”, “slumped”, “rumbled”, “scattering”, “perched”, “quenching”
- personification: “the afternoon sun doing its best to beat him back”, “the transporter came to life”
- similes: “like a jumble of strange fruit”, “like sunburnt skin”
- colloquial expressions: “too broke to fix”, “in a bit”
- metaphor: “the guilt already flowing”, “a torrent of words”, “catch my breath”
- words and expressions that have a double meaning and/or connection with the idea of water and drought: “the guilt already flowing”, “a torrent of words”; the ambiguous use of “broke” to imply poverty as well as in need of repair.

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 any words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to students and plan ways to teach this vocabulary before, during, or after reading. The story has a large number of interesting verbs that many students, especially English language learners, might find challenging. You could teach the meaning of the words and then have students act them out while the other students try to guess them.
- Point out the use of the trademark symbol ™ on the names Aqua-Plex and Work-Plex. Prompt students to recall where they have seen this symbol, and discuss its purpose (to prevent other companies from using the same name). *Why do you think the author used it in this story? What might it add to the story?*
- Explain that some words and figurative expressions have a kind of double meaning linking them to the ideas of a drought or water. Students could identify examples and discuss the effectiveness of the writer’s choices.
- *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 experience of reading stories with a futuristic setting
- Understanding of the critical importance of water and the need to conserve it
- Some knowledge of the causes and effects of drought
- Some experience of facing moral dilemmas, either personally or through reading, hearing, or watching true or fictional stories
- Some understanding of how decisions are made about the supply and use of natural resources.

Possible supporting strategies

- Support students to identify the setting as they read, if necessary. Point out one or two clues and ask them to find more, explaining why they are clues.
- Discuss some issues associated with the use of water: there may be issues specific to your area, for example, local farmers experiencing drought; restrictions on watering gardens. *Who decides how water is supplied to houses, farms, factories, and other places? Who pays for the water?*
- In small groups, have students share any experiences of droughts so that they build personal connections with the ideas in the story.
- Discuss how the artist has conveyed the drought in the illustrations, for example, in his use of colour. This also provides an opportunity for students to reuse drought vocabulary.
- Pose some dilemmas for students to discuss in pairs or small groups, for example: *You left your jacket at home and you’re freezing. Is it OK to take a jacket from the lost property box? Why or why not? Your friends are teasing a child who has fallen over – do you join them or tell them to stop?*

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Fiction, set in an unspecified future time
- Told in third-person, past tense
- Some inverted and dense sentence structures, such as the opening sentence
- The change in time from afternoon to evening.

Possible supporting strategies

- Have the students review the various kinds of fiction they know, for example, fantasy, adventure, superhero, and realistic stories. Prompt them to discuss the features of stories that are set in the future. Note that even in one kind of fiction, there are many variations with different features. This story is “realistic” as well as being set in the future.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Level 3 – Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts; Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.)

First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Skim and scan the text for clues about when the story is set and what problem the main character is facing.
- After the first reading, briefly clarify any points of confusion, and then direct the students to use a think, pair, share to discuss their initial responses to the story.

If the students struggle with this text

- Identify the aspects of the story that may be challenging: for some, you may need to pre-teach vocabulary; others may need support to infer the futuristic setting.
- Provide a rich introduction to the story, presenting the problem and the characters.
- Work through page 20 together, identifying the clues that show the story is set in a future time and that there is a serious water problem. Students can list the clues about the time and the problem.

Subsequent readings

The teacher

Reread the opening paragraphs together with the students and prompt them to identify the ways the writer has implied meaning.

- *What personal connections can you make with Ryder?*
- *What do you know about drought and how communities deal with it? How do you know this?*
- *What do you think water cultivators are? They have sails – why? Is there anything in the illustrations to help you work this out?*

The teacher

Direct the students to work with a partner to discuss the futuristic setting of the story.

- *At what point did you start wondering about the time setting? When did you know for sure that it was set in the future? What were the clues?*
- *How did that affect the way you read the story? Did you need to adjust your thinking? If so, how did you do this?*
- *Why do you think the writer has used this setting? Would the story be as effective for his purpose if it were set in the present time? Why do you think that?*
- *What do you think is the writer's message, or purpose? How do you know?*

The teacher

Support students' thinking about Ryder's actions and his parents' response by using a "Somebody Wanted But So" framework.

- *Why didn't Ryder's family get a water delivery? What clues and knowledge helped you infer that?*
- *What was the result or response?*
- *Think about each character and complete the chart.*

Somebody	Wanted	But	So
Ryder			
Brooke			
His parents			

Alternatively, you could create a three-level thinking guide to help students to infer from text.

The teacher

Explain that the problem for Ryder and his family is not a simple one and that when resources are scarce, people have to make hard decisions.

- *Why was Ryder's father angry about Ryder's actions?*
- *Who was right – Ryder or his dad? Why?*
- *Think about how we share resources now. Would it be fair if access to water depended on how rich you were?*
- *What might be a fairer way to make sure everyone could get the water they needed?*

As an additional activity, you could set up a continuum of opinions on the issue of access to resources. Tell the students to form a line across the classroom.

- *One end of the line supports Ryder's actions; the other end of the line thinks its OK that people with more money can have more water.*
- *Place yourself somewhere along the line – how strongly do you support one end or the other?*
- *Now turn to a person who is in a different position and explain why you put yourself where you are on the line.*
- *What can you conclude about sharing a scarce resource?*

For English language learners, you could provide some sentence frames to use when providing their opinion, such as: I think that ... because when ... Therefore ... In conclusion ...

If writing an argument, explicitly teach the text structure required if students are not familiar with this. You could provide some appropriate sentence starters and suitable text connectives, especially cause and result connectives such as: so, therefore, then, consequently, as a result, for that reason, due to, because of this, in that case, in conclusion.

The students:

- make connections between the text and their own experiences of being hot and tired to understand (visualise) how Ryder felt
- make connections between the text and what they already know about drought to infer that the water shortage in the story must be very serious
- ask themselves questions about water cultivators and try to make connections between the name, the reference to sails, and equipment they are familiar with to try to understand how the cultivators might work.

The students:

- identify the clues that helped them understand that the story was set in the future
- integrate the information in the text by making connections and answering questions to infer that the story is set in some future time
- adjust their reading to the future setting and allow for wider possibilities than those that actually exist now
- form and support opinions about how well the setting conveys the author's purpose.

The students:

- combine clues in the text (the neighbours get water, his sister's dirty clothes, the peeling paint, the broken car) with their own knowledge of signs of poverty to infer that Ryder's family can't afford to buy water or fix their car
- identify Ryder's motivation (what he "wanted")
- identify what the problem or difficulty was for him ("but")
- identify his action ("so")
- complete the chart for Brooke and their parents.

The students:

- integrate information in the text with their own beliefs about right and wrong to decide whether Ryder or his dad were right
- extend their thinking about how decisions are made and how resources are shared as they think critically about the issue in a wider context, for example, after an earthquake or a disaster
- form and defend opinions and consider the opinions of others.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You noticed the trademark symbol and used what you know about trademarks to infer that the water company owns the water. You used Ryder's comment about them not owning the clouds to confirm your inference. It's good to look for extra evidence to confirm your ideas.*
- *You inferred that Ryder's concern about water for the birds showed he wasn't just being greedy. You believe this shows he cares about looking after everyone fairly. You've supported your opinion well.*
- *I noticed you looked puzzled as you came to the end of page 26. Wondering what might happen next is a great way to get ideas for your own writing.*

METACOGNITION

- How does rereading help you clarify ideas in a text? What is it you're doing or looking for when you reread? Show me an example.
- Writers often get across an important idea by using believable characters we can identify with. Tell me how the connections you made to the characters and events helped you understand the bigger issues of the story.



Reading standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Level 3 – Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics; Structure – organise texts, using a range of appropriate text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Thirst”

“You know why,” said Ryder. He glanced at his sister’s school clothes, not washed in a month, at the paint peeling off their house like sunburnt skin, at their car in the driveway, too broke to fix.

He looked up at the worn-out trees, where he’d tied his collection of old tin cans. He grabbed his drink bottle and started to climb a lower branch. It was the drought season, and the birds needed water just as badly as people. But he would only pour a little into the cans. He couldn’t spare any more.

Dad shouted once more. His voice rumbled through the trees, scattering the birds that had been perched at the cans quenching their thirst.

Examples of text characteristics

SHOW, DON’T TELL

Writers often choose to show an important idea rather than telling the reader directly. One way of doing this is to use many details that build a picture in the reader’s mind. The writer respects the reader’s ability to infer meaning from these details.

FRAMING THE TEXT

Starting and ending a story with a strong visual image can show how something has changed between the start and end. It’s an effective way to engage the reader and highlight the writer’s message.

OPEN ENDING

An open ending leaves the reader wondering what happened next. It gives the reader the opportunity to think about possibilities. In a chapter book, it gives the writer a good reason for writing the next chapter and can make the reader want to keep on reading.

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Model the way this extract has been constructed.

- Ryder tells his sister she knows why they don’t have water. The writer uses Ryder’s “glance” to show us what he sees. The three features he looks at have one thing in common: they could be fixed if they had more money. If Ryder had told his sister “We’re too poor”, it would not have the same impact. We can “see” they are poor because the writer gives us the evidence.

Tell the students to try this themselves.

- As you write, consider ways you could “show” your readers something instead of simply telling them.
- Try several different details and check that you’re letting your readers use them to work something out for themselves. Ask a partner for feedback and suggestions if necessary.

Ask the students to compare the two extracts of the story.

- Notice the strong visual image in the first and last paragraphs. What has changed?
- What is the effect of using the birds twice?

Explain that framing the story in this way can highlight an important change that has taken place.

- Like framing a picture, it’s a technique that can give your writing a clear shape. This can help readers to follow your ideas from the start to the finish.
- As a writer, ask yourself if it’s a structure you could consider using. Would it add impact? Would it help readers get your message?

Prompt the students to review the ways they end their stories.

- What do you want your readers to think when they reach the end?
- Do you want to have a neat and tidy ending, or do you want to leave your readers wondering what happened next? Why?

Explain that there’s a difference between leaving your readers “wondering” and leaving them dissatisfied and confused. A good way to tell the difference is to ask for feedback.

- Ask your peer reviewers to tell you how they felt – do you need to tell readers everything or just give a hint?
- It’s always good to experiment and try things out with writing. Successful writers will often try many different endings before they publish their writing.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The details about the house, the swimming pool, and the holidays overseas build a great picture of how the family in your story is living. You showed their situation clearly without having to tell me they were very rich.
- I can see you’ve made three different drafts, each with a slightly different ending, and you’ve got feedback on them: your good story will now be even better when you’ve made the final changes.

METACOGNITION

- What strategies help you with your writing? Which ones would you recommend to others writing fiction?
- Tell me why you decided to write a sci-fi story. How will sci-fi help get your message across to your audience?
- You and your partner worked together to produce quite different stories. How did you help each other? What tips would you give to other pairs of writers who want to work together?

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions