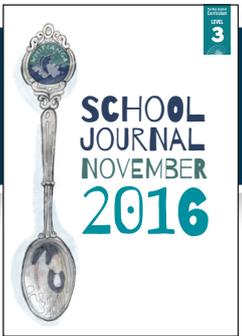


Cancel the Invasion

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Overview

“Cancel the Invasion” is a funny and original fantasy story. Ash is an alien who has been sent to Earth as an advance scout for a planned invasion. He meets some young humans, and we follow his internal musings as he struggles to understand the complexities of their (English) language. We infer that Ash’s knowledge about life on Earth has come from fiction books, many of which will be familiar to readers. Despite his differences (for example, a titanium skull and a brain under his rib cage) Ash has many identifiable human qualities such as courtesy, anxiety, and self-reflection.

The humour in the story comes from Ash’s confusions and his literal interpretations of “human books”. Although the story is complex, the illustrations provide strong support for inferring meaning. A surprise ending leaves readers wondering about what is real and what is fiction. This story provides opportunities for rich discussion of the story’s meaning and of the uses of language.

Texts related by theme

“Not So Normal” SJ L3 Sept 2014 | “Olden Days” SJ L3 Nov 2014

This story:

- is a narrative that has a fantasy character in a familiar, realistic setting
- draws humour from the complexity of the English language, such as the fact that many words have multiple meanings
- requires students to make connections between human and alien qualities
- requires students to make connections between the text and characters from familiar fiction (for example, “young boys with lightning bolts on their heads”).

A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

He took another deep breath. One of the strolling humans, a craggy-nosed man with white hair sprouting from his jaw and none on the top of his head, was getting rather close. Ash ignored him.
“Lies are things that are not true. Sometimes humans say ‘I am a vampire,’ which means an awful human bat. Or ‘I can fly faster than a speeding bullet.’ Or ‘I have a magic wand. It will turn you into a frog.’ Almost all the humans’ books about their children celebrate these horrible powers. When anything can be a lie, anything can be true!”

The man with the hairy jaw and the curious nose was looking at him. He was leaning on a stick. He had bright blue eyes. Ash hurried to finish his message before the man could try to talk to him. Delay now would be disastrous.
“Mighty leader, it is not for me to direct your path. But I beg you to consider this vital news. Great warriors may be hidden in every playground on this planet. Imagine young boys with lightning bolts on their heads and wands in their hands with canes and laser eyes! If our armies come here,

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

Probably his smile had been a little off. But really, she had no cause for concern. Ash’s skull was made of titanium, and in any case, his brain was under his rib cage, next to his heart. A much more sensible place than in his head. So the cricket ball could not have hurt him, and the girl had no need to feel bad. He could not tell her this. It was kind of her to worry. (But what if she was a vampire? This could all be a plan to get close to him so she could suck his blood. Not that he had any blood. But still. It was alarming.)
“Your teeth!” said the girl, getting up. Ash had forgotten about the teeth. Human ones were not quite as pointy or as blue as his. “I’m sorry, that was rude,” she went on. “I didn’t mean to jump. Are you OK?”

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

even when a bat was a weapon and not a flying mammal. So why call dances balls? Human languages were as strange as humans.

“I wasn’t looking. Dad always says I have to look, I just hit the ball as hard as I could, are you OK?” The young human was looking at him with wide eyes. Could this young human be a vampire? She had a bat. Perhaps she was a vampire! It was entirely possible.

Ash attempted a reassuring smile. He was not sure he had mastered smiles. The young human yelped and leapt backwards and fell over.



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

about, but there were none of the... to calm his thoughts. “Mighty leader,” he began. That was the proper tone. I was sent among the leader, this least of your servants writes in greatest urgency. I have studied them. humans to learn their ways and prepare for your conquest. I have studied them. They are far more deadly than we supposed. They have a secret weapon, which I fear we cannot match. It is called fiction.”

He paused. This was the hard part. It was like trying to explain that water was no longer wet. It made his head hurt. But his duty was clear. He pushed on. “Fiction is kept in things called books, which in turn are kept in buildings known as lie-berries. This is partly because fiction is a sort of fruit for the mind and partly because it is full of things called lies. We do not have lies. They are difficult to explain.”



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



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

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

– Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

– Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

Possible first reading purposes

- To enjoy a science-fiction story that is funny and has a clever twist
- To understand the purpose of the alien's visit and why he did not carry it out
- To understand what confused the alien and why.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To identify the ideas and the connections between them that make the story funny
- To identify the clues the writer provides for inferring meaning.

Possible writing purposes

- To deepen understanding of using implication (by showing rather than telling) to create interest and humour
- To write dialogue that portrays a character's personality through what they say, how they say it, and what they do
- To improve character description by identifying the features that make a character special
- To explore the use of language features to maintain interest and create humour.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

(Some of the suggestions for possible supporting strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.)

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “invasion”, “esteemed”, “projectiles”, “reassuring”, “titanium”, “advance scout”, “garments”, “wheeled round”, “strolling”, “urgency”, “conquest”, “craggy-nosed”, “vital”, “vast”, “underlings”
- Deliberate plays on words with more than one meanings, including “bat”, “ball”, “fine”
- Made-up words to suit the theme: “padlet”, “lie-berries”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Invite responses to the made-up word “padlet”: *What other words is this word made up from?* Provide an opportunity for the students to deduce which words the author is likely to have combined.
- Have students create their own made-up words by joining parts of words they know.
- Discuss words with multiple meanings, such as “bat”, “ball”, and “fine”, and share some different contexts for how they could be used.
- *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

- Familiarity with the fantasy or science-fiction genre
- Words in the English language that have multiple meaning, such as “bat”
- Familiarity with books, movies, and other media that involve vampires, superheroes, and wizards
- Knowing how to use background knowledge and clues in the text to infer meaning.

Possible supporting strategies

- Lead discussion around the typical features of aliens in comics, books, and movies. Prior to reading, familiarise English language learners with fantasy and science-fiction texts by reading them stories and discussing the characters and vocabulary (See “Texts related by theme” for some examples).
- Discuss the features of narrative, including setting, characters, and plot. Identify the setting (Earth) and the characters (humans and an alien).
- With the students, compile a list of English words that have multiple meanings. If possible, find nonsense poems or jokes that use the multiple meanings of words for humour.
- Support students to make connections between the story and their own knowledge, for example, of how you play the game of cricket and of the ideas and themes in fantasy fiction.
- Remind students of the fantasy characters they have read or seen on screen, including vampires, superheroes, and wizards. Discuss whether or not they are real and how we know.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- The use of internal dialogue to reveal a character's thoughts
- Some direct speech – interrupted with internal musings
- Illustrations to support the narrative.

Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt students to recall narrative structure and features. *What do we expect to find in a story?* Have the students discuss the question with a partner.
- Direct the students to one or two sections of the text when Ash's thoughts are written as narrative. Discuss the clues that tell the reader that they are reading his internal dialogue.
- Talk about the characters in the story and how the writer conveys their various ways of speaking.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts; Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

First reading

- Set the purpose for reading. This may simply be to enjoy the story, then to look to clarify meanings and events as they reread.
- Prompt prior knowledge of fantasy stories (including Harry Potter, vampire, and superhero stories) and invite students to discuss them briefly with a partner. *How do you know what's real and what's not real in a story?*
- Direct students to read the first paragraph and share any questions.
- Prompt discussion about inference: *Who is this character that we meet in the first sentence? Why would he just blink when a cricket ball hit him?*
- Allow the students to read the rest of the story without interruption.
- Remind them to use the illustrations to support meaning and to make connections between the words in the text and the illustrations (for example, on page 19).
- Some English language learners may find this text very difficult because of its abstract ideas, the use of words with several meanings, the complex sentences, and the need for prior knowledge of fictional characters and texts. They will require careful scaffolding at all stages of the reading process.

If the students struggle with this text

- Examine the illustrations on pages 18–21. Use these before and during reading to identify the characters and their features and to show what the alien is thinking.
- Model the use of questioning and predicting to support reading, using one or two examples.
- Pre-select points in the story to pause so that you can check that students are getting the gist of what is happening.
- Remind the students of strategies they can use when they are lost or confused. Unpack inferring and provide support for the students to do this themselves with other examples.
- Have students work in pairs to discuss and record the words that have multiple meanings. English language learners may find the play on words challenging. They may be able to offer their own experience of confusions with the English language.

Subsequent readings

How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. Use information from the students' responses to the first reading to identify areas to focus on, for example, the word plays and multiple meanings, the internal dialogue, or the cross-purposes of the characters.

The teacher

Check that the students got the gist of the story and could see the humour.

- *What was the main reason for Ash's confusion and fear of the children?*
- *How did you work this out?*
- *What is the result of his fear and confusion?*
- *Did you find that funny? Why or why not?*

You could use a [three-level guide](#) to help students learn how to infer.

The teacher

Prompt the students to make connections as they reread.

- *What connections can you make between your own experiences and those of the characters in the text? What connections can you make with your own knowledge of fantasy?*
- *How can you use these connections to understand Ash's confusion?*

The teacher

Check that the students are clear about the use of internal or implied dialogue, for example, on page 19, the information Ash gained from books is written as if he is "saying" or recounting it to himself.

- *Who is making these statements and asking these questions?*
- *What does this tell us about Ash?*
- *What does it tell us about the perspective the writer has used for the narrative?*
- *Was this a successful technique? Why do you think this?*
- *What is Ash's relationship with the "person" he is writing to on his padlet?*

If students find this challenging, you could have them work in pairs and use highlighters on copies of the text to show what is actually being spoken and what is just being thought.

The students:

- integrate information from the text and their knowledge of fantasy to infer that Ash thinks the children will harm him because he believes that the fiction books he has read are true
- identify the main idea that Ash's fear of the children (based on his misunderstanding of fiction and confusion over word meanings used in different contexts) prevents an alien invasion of Earth
- understand the humour of fictional characters indirectly prevent a global catastrophe.

The students:

- draw on their knowledge of fiction to recognise the fantasy elements in the story
- use their connections to infer meaning (for example, to infer that Ash believes stories are true) and to see this as humorous.

The students:

- ask questions and locate answers as they identify the speakers (in direct speech), the thoughts (in implied speech), and the ongoing narrative
- identify that the narrative is told from Ash's perspective and that this shows what he is thinking
- integrate information across the text to evaluate the effectiveness of the author's use of internal dialogue to let the reader into Ash's thoughts and fears
- draw on the way Ash is composing his letter to infer that the leader is powerful and Ash is in awe of him/it.

Subsequent readings

The teacher

Lead a discussion about Ash's response to fiction.

- *Why does Ash think that fiction is a secret weapon?*
- *Do you agree that fiction tells lies? How could you explain fiction?*

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You and your partner made a list of the words and ideas that confused Ash. That's a good way to unpack what the writer did to make the story funny.*

METACOGNITION

- Show me a place where you had to stop and think about what was going on. What strategies helped you to work things out?

The students:

- ask and answer questions to evaluate Ash's conclusion that "fiction is a sort of fruit for the mind ... full of things called *lies*"
- think critically about the differences between lies and truth and how these are reflected in fiction.



Reading standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences; Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

Text excerpts from “Cancel the Invasion”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 19

Ash attempted a reassuring smile. He was not sure he had mastered smiles. The young human yelped and leapt backwards and fell over.

IMPLICATION

Writers sometimes give clues and expect readers to use those clues and their own knowledge to infer additional meaning. One way writers do this is by showing what occurred as a result of the action rather than describing the action itself.

Remind students that it is often better to show than to tell.

- In this example, the writer doesn't need to tell us Ash's smile was scary: he implies it by letting us know Ash hasn't mastered smiles and by showing what happened.

Use memorable and amusing classroom moments to model writing by showing rather than telling. Students could then work in pairs to write another example based on a shared experience.

- Implication makes your writing more interesting and can be a powerful way to convey humour: most jokes rely on implication rather than direct telling.
- Look for places in your writing where replacing a description (telling) with a clue could help you “show” the reader what happens.

Page 20

He was going to have to talk to her. He was very bad at this part. Probably the invasion committee should have sent a different advance scout. “I,” Ash said. He took a long breath. “Am,” he added. Almost there, almost there ... “Fine!” he finished. A sentence! He had managed a full sentence!

USE OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue and monologue can help the reader understand how a character speaks, as well as what he or she says or thinks.

Explain how dialogue can show how a character speaks.

- Breaking up the sentences into separate words shows the reader that the character can't get his words out easily.
- You can show what's slowing the speaker down, for example, by the verbs and adverbs you use or by the words you add when you interrupt the dialogue.

For additional support, you could have the students create a class list of sensing verbs that describe what is going on in the minds of the characters, for example, “think”, “know”, “reflect”, “comprehend”, “feel”, “love”, “believe”.

Direct the students to find other examples of where the writer shows how Ash speaks and to look for similar examples in other stories.

- Use the examples of other writers: reading is the best preparation for writing!
- Think about what you want your readers to know about your characters and how you can show this when you write dialogue for them.
- Ask your writing partner to give feedback on the dialogue you've written. Does it sound real? Does it help the reader understand what the character is thinking, feeling, or doing?

Page 22

Ash rose to his feet, folding the padlet in two and slipping it into his sleeve-pouch. His scout garments had been carefully designed to cover his double set of knees, but he hoped none of the young humans noticed his legs were bendier than theirs.

DESCRIPTION

When writers describe a character, they usually provide details of the physical appearance and tell the reader about the way the character behaves. Some things about a character can also be inferred from speech and from clues.

Invite students to share their descriptions of characters with the group.

- How have you shown their physical appearance?
- What particular features will help your readers “see” the character?
- What can you add (or take away) to help your readers make an inference about the character?

In pairs or small groups, students could read their character description aloud and the other students could draw a picture of that character. The students could then discuss how the written description could be improved.

Lead a guided revision with students to identify details in their writing that describe the physical appearance of their characters.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You've revised the dialogue to show us how your character speaks. Changing the verb and adding a comment about her breathlessness made her more realistic.

METACOGNITION

- What is the hardest thing for you about writing in English? How does it compare with writing in your home language? How could we help you?

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions