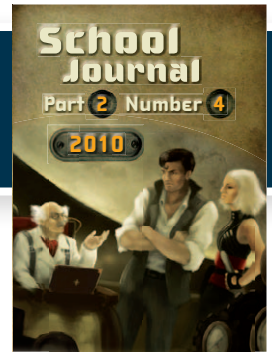


The Ant Army

by Val Neubecker

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Noun frequency level: 10–12
Year 5



Overview

This amusing fictional story is told from the ants' point of view. An "army" of ants, under the command of their "serge-ant", raid a schoolbag to find food to take back to the colony. When interrupted by a school siren and the sound of running feet, they rush back to their colony, suffering minor losses on the way. The clever illustrations add to the fun. Within this talking-animal story, the author conveys accurate information about ant behaviour.

The story connects with the facts and vocabulary in the non-fiction article "Ants on the March" (SJ 2.4.10), allowing students to gain a different perspective on the survival skills of these amazing insects. The story uses rich language and includes features such as word play, the use of upper-case letters for emphasis, and jokes that require interpretation.

Texts related by theme "Survivor" SJ 2.2.09

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

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

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Below the schoolyard, a group of female worker ants hurried through the tunnels of the colony and gathered together, waiting for their scout to return.

When the scout arrived, the serge-ant listened closely to her report. She nodded and then addressed the other ants. "Company, fall IN!" she commanded. The worker ants formed a long line. "ATTENTION!" The serge-ant looked them over and nodded. "Company, quick MARCH!"

The ants set off. They marched up through their tunnels, out of the ground, and into the schoolyard. They marched across the playing field towards the classrooms.

Rows of schoolbags were hanging in the corridor outside the classrooms. They were all on hooks on the wall – except one. It had dropped to the floor and spilled open, just as the scout had reported.

"Bag AHEAD!" The serge-ant pointed the way. The ants marched up the steps and straight towards the bag on the floor. They could see books, a few marbles, a ball, one sock, and a muddy, rolled-up jumper. They marched inside the bag.

The serge-ant looked for what the scout had reported. "LunchBOX!" she shouted, pointing to a yellow plastic box. What luck. The lid was loose. "Company, heads DOWN!"

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

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

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences:
Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences:
Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

SCIENCE (Living World)

LEVELS 1 AND 2 – Life processes: Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive.

Possible reading purposes

- To explore and enjoy a humorous text about ants
- To add to our knowledge about ants
- To identify how the author created humour in her story.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To describe some humorous episodes in our lives
- To add humour to our writing
- To explain particular animal characteristics through narrative.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “colony”, “inspected”, “pinhole”, “CASUALTIES”, “ma’am”
- Army terminology and phrases, including “scout”, “Company”, “fall IN”, “AttenTION”, “quick MARCH”, “At EASE”, “ant-ennae”, “BASE”, “a private”
- Play on words: “serge-ant”, “inf-ant-ry”
- Word families: “report/reported/reporting”
- Words with double meaning: “addressed”
- Descriptive verbs: “hurried”, “gathered”, “addressed”, “commanded”, “marched”, “peering”, “mumbling”, “tugged”, “flexed”, “shrieked”, “thundered”
- Figurative language, including “eyes lit up”.

Possible supporting strategies

Discuss the kinds of words that might be used in the army, such as those for giving orders and naming different ranks. Build knowledge if necessary, using reference materials for support. Talk about the army hierarchy and how people at different levels address each other. You could start a list or concept map for army vocabulary as part of a discussion of the title, then have students make predictions about the story.

Explain any words or terms that may be challenging, modelling ways to work out the meanings.

For ELLs, you may want to help them identify the syllables and word stress in multisyllabic words, for example, **co**/lo/ny, a/**tten**/tion (even though the command stress is given in the text), re/**por**/ted. Word stress is important in English pronunciation and not very important in some languages. (Many have equal stress in each syllable.) One rule is that the syllable before “tion/sion” is always the stressed syllable.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge about ants and how they live
- Knowledge of schoolbags, lunchboxes, and school routines (including sirens)
- Army terminology
- Familiarity with ripple-soled shoes.

Possible supporting strategies

Read the article “Ants on the March” and use it to build knowledge about the way ants live and work together. Discuss the ways that ants find food and what they do with it – especially in an urban environment.

Point out the dog tags in the illustrations of “Ants on the March”. Students may already know that these are army nametags.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Humorous fiction, with ants as talking creatures
- Story told from the ants’ point of view
- Use of upper case and exclamation marks for emphasis
- Use of dialogue, including orders
- Past verb forms, nearly all simple past (“hurried”, “gathered”), but also past continuous (“were hanging”) and past perfect (“had dropped”)
- Time and sequencing language, especially in the dramatic section on page 12 (“At once”, “A moment later”, “Almost immediately”, “As”, “Then”).

Possible supporting strategies

Review how emphasis can be conveyed through punctuation and changing fonts and case.

Preview the story together by examining the illustrations to help students understand the point of view.

Ask questions to help students identify when events happen, for example, “Did the ants finish what they were doing before they headed for the colony?” Prompt the students to identify the words and phrases that give them that information and discuss how time and sequence are often important in narratives and how, in this case, they add to the drama.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The Ant Army”

“Company, fall IN!” she commanded.

The worker ants formed a long line.

“ATTENTION!” The sergeant looked them over and nodded.

“Company, quick MARCH!”

Students (what they might do)

Students use the emphasis and punctuation to “hear” the dialogue. They use what they know about ants and the army to understand the humour in the text.

The ants marched up the steps and straight towards the bag on the floor. They could see books, a few marbles, a ball, one sock, and a muddy, rolled-up jumper. They marched inside the bag.

With support, students locate and integrate information from the text, the illustrations, and their own knowledge to infer that the artist has drawn things as they would be seen from the ground. They use the details to visualise the inside of a schoolbag from an ant’s perspective.

The ants flexed their muscles. Then each ant took a crumb of doughnut, a grain of sugar, or a blob of jam. Each piece could weigh more than the ant itself. But the ants were strong. They were determined.

Students make connections with their own experiences of flexing muscles to enjoy the humour, comparing ants with humans. With support, they evaluate and integrate what they know about ants with the information from the text about the weight ants can carry and the way they take food to the colony.

Backwards and forwards they marched across the schoolyard, taking the pieces of doughnut down to the colony.

“Reporting all OK,” she said as the rest staggered to their feet. “Seems they were ripple soles, ma’am.”

Students “get the joke” by making connections between the illustration, the number of casualties, the text, and their understanding of “ripple soles”. They infer that some ants would escape by being in between the ripples on the shoe’s sole.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to make the strategies explicit for the students.

- How did you work out what the shrieking siren was? What strategy did you use?
- What do you do if you’re not sure who’s talking when you’re reading dialogue?
- Did the author’s use of humour help you to understand more about ants? If so, how?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT students to unpack and understand the humour in the text.

- Is this how people talk in the army? How do you know?
- What makes this humorous?
- It’s a one-sided dialogue (or monologue). Why is that?
- Why do you think the author chose to put the ants in an army?

ASK QUESTIONS to help students understand the point of view.

- When you walk down the corridor, what items are at your eye level? What items would be seen from floor level?
- How do the author and illustrator help us to see through the eyes of the ants?
- How is this different point of view amusing? How does it help you to understand more about ants?

MODEL to support students to understand the humour but also to see the underlying facts and information.

- When I read about ants flexing their muscles, it makes me laugh because they are so small. I can just see an ant posing like a body builder.
- I can also see that the author wants me to think about how strong ants are by adding “Each piece would weigh more than the ant itself”. Also “They were determined. Backwards and forwards ... down to the colony” tells me that they work together to support the colony.

EXPLAIN what ripple soles are if students are not able to work it out. For some students, you may need to demonstrate by using a ripple sole to make a footprint (in sand or after walking in a puddle) that shows the areas that do not touch the ground.

PROMPT the students to notice that the first sentence is a complex sentence by asking them questions to help them identify who did what and when. Look for other sentences like this. Co-construct some complex sentences as a group, perhaps describing what happened after the end of the story.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- By your smiles and laughs, I can tell you’re enjoying this story.
- When you read the dialogue aloud, your intonation showed that you understood how the author meant it to sound. Remember to do that in your head when you read.
- I noticed the way you made connections between this story and “Ants on the March”. That is an excellent way of building your knowledge about ants.

 Reading standard: by the end of year 5

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The Ant Army”

Below the schoolyard, a group of female worker ants hurried through the tunnels of the colony and gathered together, waiting for their scout to return.

When the scout arrived, the serge-ant listened closely to her report. She nodded and then addressed the other ants.

At once, the ants headed for their colony. They knew their serge-ant wouldn't have ordered them back unless they were in danger.

A moment later, a siren shrieked through the air. Almost immediately, the sound of running feet thundered down the corridor.

“Report CASUALTIES,” she ordered, looking back.

“Nine down, ma'am,” replied a private.

A couple of ants rose unsteadily to their feet.

“Just a scratch,” said one.

“Minus a leg, but otherwise OK,” reported another.

The private took another look. “Reporting all OK,” she said as the rest staggered to their feet.

Examples of text characteristics

FACT AND FICTION

Humour can often come from an unexpected mix of facts with fiction. When a reader expects to read a factual account, unexpected characteristics or events can be used to create humour.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

Action verbs – headed, ordered, shrieked, thundered

Alliteration – siren shrieked

Time markers – At once, A moment later, Almost immediately

DIALOGUE

The words that people say and how they say them can add to the humour in a story.

Dialogue is an excellent way to “deliver” humour, as well as to convey character and relationships.

METACOGNITION

PROMPT students to share their writing with a partner and ask each other questions about their thinking, such as:

- What did you want your readers to feel? How did you help them to do that?
- Why did you choose that word to describe ...? What effect did you want to create?
- Why did you choose to use humour? How did you choose where to use it?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

MODEL your thinking for students as you read the text.

- When I looked at the illustrations and then read the first few sentences, I could sense that this might be a humorous story. You can create humour in your writing by doing something unexpected. In this extract, I noticed the way the writer used a hyphen in the word “sergeant” to make a pun on the word “ant”. Then, when I realised the ant was about to talk, I knew this would be fiction and possibly humorous.
- Let's think about how and where humour would enhance our shared writing.

EXPLAIN to the students that words and phrases that indicate the passing of time help a reader to follow the action. When they are placed at the start of a sentence, these words can give the writing a sense of urgency.

Ask students who know other languages to think about how time and sequence are signalled in their languages. Are they similar to or different from English?

PROMPT students to review each other's writing.

- Are there places where a more interesting verb would help the reader see the humour or understand the action?
- Is it easy to follow the order of events? Would different time-sequence words help a reader's understanding or build suspense or humour?

PROMPT students to examine a small piece of dialogue.

- What makes this humorous?
- Look over your own writing and think about places where you could use dialogue to help show what your characters are like or to improve the humour.

GIVE FEEDBACK to affirm students' writing decisions and guide their learning.

- You've used an interesting mix of facts in your story. Your audience will learn something new about ...
- You've achieved your purpose well. I understand more about ... and you made me laugh by using clever puns.
- You've used dialogue to introduce humour. How can you write the dialogue between ... and ... to sound more like the way you and your friends would talk?