

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing some understanding of their effects.

MATHEMATICS

LEVEL 2 – Number knowledge: Know the basic addition and subtraction facts.

Possible reading purposes

- To learn about the possible consequences of poor maths skills
- To read a play and enjoy acting in it
- To find out how maths can be used for humorous purposes
- To learn about the structure of plays.

Possible writing purposes

- To write a short play
- To practise writing dialogue
- To write a story or play in which one character tricks another.

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

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and concepts, including “fish seller”, “fisher”, “fish buyer”, “wharf”, “tidying”, “fish stall”, “caught”, “bait to load”, “lines to hook”, “life jackets to stow”, “decks to swab”, “sniffing”, “ladle”, “offstage”
- The colloquial expressions “Keep your boots on”, “No worries”, “heaps”, “miracle”
- “catch” used as a noun.

Possible supporting strategies

- Identify any words or phrases that may be unfamiliar. Discuss words associated with boats and fishing to elicit some of the terms used in the text.
- During the discussion, tell the students that some of this vocabulary will be in the text they are going to read, and start a vocabulary list of key words. Help the students make notes about the words and phrases, for example, definitions, translations (if appropriate), example sentences, word families, and words that go together (collocations). Note that while they may need to understand words such as “swab” for this story, you may want to prioritise higher-frequency words to add to their list.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, includes useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of plays and play scripts
- Experiences of going fishing and/or buying fish
- Experience of counting people
- Familiarity with the idea of people playing tricks on others
- Knowledge of the maths involved in adding money and giving change.

Possible supporting strategies

- Discuss plays that students have already read or seen. Discuss the broad differences between a play and a narrative.
- Discuss boats and fishing and some of the associated vocabulary.
- Review students’ experiences of using money, especially when deciding which items to buy and when giving change.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The features of play scripts, for example, a list of characters; scene descriptions; stage directions that use mainly partial sentences in italics and parentheses; the way dialogue is set out with the speaker’s name in capitals; the movement of characters onstage and offstage
- Use of the present tense to show actions as they happen in the play
- Sentence fragments that use ellipses to follow from the stem of “Yeah – we’ve got”
- Use of ellipsis to show pauses while counting.

Possible supporting strategies

- Review the special features of play scripts by sharing some examples from other *School Journals*. Start a chart of these features and add to it during the reading.
- Check the students’ familiarity with the use of ellipses in written speech. Help them to understand their meaning on page 3 and to notice other examples. Tell them that an ellipsis is a typical feature of spoken English because we often pause or stop and start when we’re speaking.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Fish for Dinner”

CHARACTERS
FISH SELLER
EIGHT FISHERS
FISH BUYER

Scene: A wharf. The FISH SELLER is tidying the fish stall. There are some paper fish and a large soup pot on the stall. The FISHERS are busy getting ready to go out fishing.

3RD FISHER. Yeah – we’ve got bait to load,
4TH FISHER. ... and lines to hook,
5TH FISHER. ... and ropes to knot,
6TH FISHER. ... and life jackets to stow,
7TH FISHER. ... and decks to swab,
8TH FISHER. ... and nets to mend.

FISH SELLER. I can sell you some hot fish soup for \$3. (The FISH SELLER lifts the lid off the pot.)
FISH BUYER (holding up a \$5 note). That smells great! But I only have \$5. If I buy your soup, I won’t have enough left for the fresh fish.

1ST FISHER. If you could do that, we’d give you our whole catch of fresh fish!
FISH BUYER. Right, then. Everyone line up. (Counts the FISHERS.) One ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight!
The FISHERS look at each other, shocked.

Students (what they might do)

Students **make connections** with their prior knowledge of plays to identify elements of the play’s structure. They **locate** the list of characters and the scene directions that state who and what will be on stage. They use this information, together with the title and illustrations, to **hypothesise** that the play will be about different ways of getting fish for dinner.

Students identify further elements of the play’s structure: the way each character’s name is in upper-case letters and the lack of speech marks. They **make connections** with what they already know about boats and fishing to understand the terms used. They **make connections** between their prior knowledge of text structures and of natural speaking patterns to identify the purpose of the ellipsis on each line.

Students use their prior knowledge of play structure to interpret the stage directions. They use their maths knowledge to work out the calculations done by the buyer and the seller.

The students check their hypotheses about what might happen and make adjustments if necessary.

They use their maths knowledge to **evaluate** the way the fishers counted and **infer** that the buyer saw an opportunity to trick the fishers out of their fish.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

For students who are not familiar with the format of plays, explore this before you start reading. Have students look at the text in pairs and identify the different features, then discuss and label them as a class.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to make connections between the title, the illustrations, and the text.

- Thinking about everything we’ve seen in the play up till now, what have we learned so far?
- What do you think will happen? Why do you think that?
- What typical play features have you noticed so far?
- Why do you think the names of the characters are in capital letters?

ASK QUESTIONS to help students clarify their understanding of text written in this format.

- What would this section sound like if you read the dialogue as one long sentence? Would it make sense?
- When you think about the text as one long sentence spoken by different people, does that help you understand the use of ellipses?

PROMPT students to use what they already know about boats and fishing to work out each activity.

- If there are terms you don’t understand, how can you work them out?

ASK QUESTIONS to help students clarify their understanding.

- Why can’t the buyer have hot soup *and* fresh fish?
- How could the buyer have soup *and* fish for dinner? What choices does the buyer have?

Have the students make predictions about what’s going to happen. Write them on the whiteboard to check after reading.

If necessary, write the calculations on the board to clarify the transactions that the buyer is contemplating. Support students to apply their counting knowledge to understand the buyer’s choices.

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students clarify what happened.

- What did the fishers get wrong?
- How were they so easily tricked?
- Did you guess that the story might have a twist like this?
- What do you think might happen next?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The way you shared your knowledge of boating terms helped us all work out that part. Now we all know about swabbing decks!
- You went back to the part where you got confused and reread. That’s an excellent strategy to use when you’re reading independently.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to make the students’ strategies explicit for them.

- How do structural features of a text help you when you’re reading?
- Plays are written to be performed. How well were you able to visualise what the play would look and sound like in performance? How does visualising help you to understand the characters and actions in a play?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 2 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing some understanding of their effects.)

Text excerpts from “Fish for Dinner”

Keep your boots on. We’re going as fast as we can. Maybe you should wait a bit.
No worries.

The FISH BUYER hands over the \$5 note and gets \$2 change. The FISH SELLER starts to ladle out some soup. As the FISH BUYER begins to eat the soup, the FISHERS arrive back onstage. Each one is carrying a paper fish. The FISH SELLER takes the pot and goes offstage.

4TH FISHER. It’s a miracle!
5TH FISHER. We’re all together again.
6TH FISHER. We were only seven, and now we’re eight.
7TH FISHER. Here’s your fish. The FISHERS all give the FISH BUYER their catch.
8TH FISHER. But I still don’t know which one of us went missing!

Examples of text characteristics

COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

Because the dialogue in a play has to sound real, writers often use the words, phrases, and language structures that people use when they speak. Other examples of colloquial language in the play include: “I reckon”, “Not a bad catch”, “We could have caught heaps more”.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

In a play, the stage directions have to be very clear and brief. Writers use the present tense and may omit unnecessary words such as “a” or “the”.

IMPLICATION

The writer implies that the fishers are not very clever without saying it directly. She expects the reader to know what the fishers did wrong when they counted, but she shows that the fishers themselves haven’t worked this out. This leads the reader to infer that the fishers are not good with numbers. Their confusion over the “lost” fisher makes the play funny.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

EXPLAIN that plays are meant to be read as if the characters are speaking. Writers need to be able to capture the features of spoken language so that the characters sound natural when they speak the lines aloud.

MODEL saying something aloud in two different ways. For example, you might say to a friend, “Looks like rain, eh?”. But a weather forecaster on TV might say, “There is a possibility of rain tomorrow.”

- What differences do you notice when you speak to friends compared with speaking to the school principal?
- How could you capture these differences in your writing?

Ask students who have knowledge of other languages and cultures to think about how this works in those languages and cultures. Students who share knowledge of another language could talk about it together and then share with the class. This could be a good time to develop or reinforce the concept that different language is needed for different purposes.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students as they write directions that help their readers know what to do when they perform the play.

- What information will you need to give the actor who plays each character as the play progresses?
- How can you make sure every person in the play knows what to do and when to do it?
- What props are needed? How will you help your readers get them into the right place at the right time?
- How can you make your directions both brief and clear?

EXPLAIN that writers can create humour by expecting the reader to infer meaning. This is often done by having characters do something we (the audience) know is wrong.

- The writer expects us to know how to count correctly. She doesn’t need to tell us this: she shows it by letting us see the fishers’ confusion.
- How could you do something similar in your own writing?
- What information can you assume your readers will have that your characters don’t have?

GIVE FEEDBACK to affirm students’ choices in their writing.

- Your plan clearly shows what each character will do. How will you let the audience know the relationships between the characters?
- You’ve captured the way this character would talk really well by including some everyday language.
- These stage directions will ensure that the dog leaves the stage before the cat comes on. That’s an important detail and shows that you are thinking of the audience.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students think more deeply about the language features they use when they write.

- Why did you choose to write this as a play rather than a straight story?
- How did you decide on the kind of language each character would use?
- How did the play you used as a model help you to write your own play?
- How has your experience of performing plays helped you think about how to write one?
- Have you noticed any differences between plays in English and plays that you’ve read in another language?