

I Want to be the Fox

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Overview

In this narrative, Josh is disappointed to be given the part of the rabbit in the school play, but no one seems to understand his problem. Finally, Josh does some hard thinking and comes up with a way to make the best of the situation. There is an audio version of this text on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2006*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of inferring, summarising, and identifying the author's purpose. It's a useful model of a narrative with a satisfying and positive conclusion. The lively dialogue encourages expressive reading. This text is also useful for monitoring children's integration of reading strategies at the end of the Green level.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the themes of co-operation and determination, of overcoming challenges, and of self-discovery
- the relationships between the characters and the different points of view
- the way Josh resolves the situation
- the high proportion of dialogue
- the strong narrative structure and the satisfying ending
- the indicators of time – “The next day”, “That evening”, “When”, “On the night”, “Soon”, “Later”
- the change in pace from page 8 once Josh has made his decision
- the large number of lively verbs – “talked”, “hopped”, “bobbed”, “flapped”, “tricked”, “laughed”, “cheered”, “clapped”
- the imperative verbs “Hop”, “Make”, “Try”
- the variety of words ending in “ed”, “ing”, and “er”
- the comparative adjectives “higher”, “faster”, “Later”
- the irregular past-tense verbs “had”, “said”, “chose”, “put”
- the contractions – “couldn't”, “didn't”, “don't”, “That's”, “I'd”, “I'll”, “you'll”, “you're”
- the singular and plural forms on page 4: “that” and “those”, and “this” and “these”
- the initial consonant blends “cl”, “fl”, “pl”, “sch”, “sm”, “st”, “tr”
- the digraphs “ch” – “chose”, “children”, “cheered”; and “gh” – “laugh”, “laughed”, “laughs”
- the doubled consonant in “hopped”, “bobbed”, “flapped”, “clapped”
- the possessive apostrophe in “Josh's”
- the “y” with an “ee” sound in “funny”, “Everyone”, “silly”; and with a long “i” sound in “Try”, “why”
- the “ight” rime in “right” and “night”.

Setting the scene

Think about a time when you had to do something that you really didn't want to. Remember how you felt... You may need to give a personal example to stimulate the discussion. This is a story about a boy who solves a problem of having to do something that he doesn't want to do.

Discuss the cover. Read the title and establish that the children are putting on a play. *Who do you think is saying this?* Prompt the children to use the illustration to clarify that it isn't the fox. Ask the children to predict what the problem might be. *Let's read and check.*

The first reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – Use the illustration to start a discussion about the children's experiences of being in plays.

Listen to the children read the text themselves, offering support as necessary. Allow plenty of opportunities for discussion.

Page 2 – If necessary, reassure the children about the end sound in "laugh". Have the children review their predictions about the problem. *Why would he want to be the fox and not the rabbit?* Refer to "tricky fox" stories like The Gingerbread Man and Brer Fox.

Page 3 – *What does Emma think?* Have the children talk with a partner about what might happen next.

Page 4 – Ask the children to read this page in their heads. Talk about how they worked out the teacher's name. Remind them of the strategy of looking for the biggest familiar chunk in an unknown word. *What is Mrs Maxwell trying to do? How would she say this?* If necessary, model her imperative tone, *I'm imagining how Josh might be feeling...*

Page 5 – *Think about how Mrs Maxwell might say this.* If necessary, read the dialogue expressively together.

Page 6 – *What time is it now? How do you know?* Help the children draw on their knowledge of spoken English to work out or cross-check "chose". *Do you agree with Dad?*

Page 7 - Ask the children to read this page in their heads. *What's happening here?* If necessary, chunk "fan-tas-tic" on the whiteboard. *I wonder if Josh's idea will work?*

Page 8 – *How is Josh feeling now? Is his idea working?*

Page 9 – Check that the children understand that time has passed (the play is now being performed) and that they know the meaning of "stage". *What do you notice about what Josh is saying?* If necessary, prompt the children to refer back to his comments on page 2. *Is Emma right?*

Page 10 to 12 – You may need to clarify that "on stage", not "on the stage", is correct. *What did everyone think? How did you infer that? I wonder if Josh would still like to be the fox?*

Support the children to think critically and explore the themes in this text. *Why do you think the author wrote this story?* You could touch on the author's messages about solving problems and overcoming challenges and about co-operation and determination. You could discuss the way everyone but Josh seems to have recognised his talent for entertaining people and the implication (from page 9) that Josh has realised this, too - and started to value it. *So perhaps the author is suggesting that other people can help you to do things you didn't know you could do...?*

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their fluency and expressiveness, especially as they read the dialogue. If the children are managing well and show a good understanding of the text, they are probably ready to move on to the Orange level. A running record will confirm this.

Focus on the characters and the relationships between them. *What sort of person is Josh? Emma? Mrs Maxwell? Why do you think that?* Record and discuss the children's ideas.

Identify the indicators of time in the text. Talk about how they help the reader and record them on a classroom chart as models for the children's writing.

Ask the children to work in pairs and retell the story. After they've practised this, invite them to share their retelling with the group so that you can record the main events on a chart. Use the chart to identify the turning point: *When do you think things changed in this story? Was Josh's idea a good one?*

Reread pages 7 and 8 to the children and discuss the contrast in pace. Explore how the author creates a feeling of speed and action once Josh has made his decision, for example, the use of repetition, the series of short, snappy sentences, and the lively verbs on page 8.

If you have ESOL children in the group, you could collect together some small objects and practise the use of the terms (determiners) "that", "those", "this", and "these". Explain and model the correct use, for example, "This car is red" for a single object that's close to the speaker and "These cars are red" for a group of objects. Have the children select objects and practise creating oral sentences. then practise using "that" and "those" to refer to objects that are further away. Finish by rereading page 4 together and discussing the characters' use of these terms.

Focus on any of the initial consonant blends or digraphs that the children may have been unsure of. List others that start the same way. You could talk about the "f" sound for "gh" in "laugh" and briefly mention some other examples, such as "enough" or "tough".

On the whiteboard, list the verbs in the text that end in "ed". Help the children identify the root words. Circle those verbs that double the consonant when "ed" is added. Start a list so that the spelling rule of doubling the consonant after a short vowel can be explained when the pattern is apparent.

Focus on the irregular past-tense verbs. Explain that some verbs can't have "ed" added to them and that the children need to use their knowledge of spoken English to help them when they're reading. *Does "putted" sound right? Do we say "choose-ed"?* For ESOL children, who are less likely to be able to draw on their knowledge of English, try to use these verbs often in subsequent conversations and reading and writing sessions.

Talk about the contractions used in the dialogue. Review the idea that they make speech sound more natural.

Write the words "faster", "higher", and "Later" on the whiteboard. *What's the same about these words?* Identify the root words and make up oral sentences together to draw out the idea of comparisons - "I can run fast, but Sam can run faster."

Write the words "every", "funny", and "silly" on the whiteboard. *What do you notice about the sounds at the ends of these words?* Make a list of other words they know that end with "y" as an "ee" sound. You could compare these words with "Try" and "why", where "y" has a long "i" sound.

Ask the children to spell "night" or "right" from memory. Locate "night" and "right" in the text to verify their attempt, and isolate the "ight" rime. *If you can spell "night", can you work out how to spell "tight"? What about "flight"?* Encourage them to learn the "ight" rime off by heart.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2006*.

Read and discuss other stories about a tricky fox, for example, "Why the Crocodile Has No Tongue" in *Junior Journal 24* or the traditional story of The Gingerbread Man.

Practise Readers' theatre with groups of five children (a narrator, Josh, Emma, Mrs Maxwell, and Dad). Have the children take turns in each role. (Readers' theatre is where the children, with teacher support, take a narrative text and turn it into a script. A narrator is needed to link the action. Each child reads their character's dialogue aloud with appropriate expression. After rehearsals, the group may perform the reading for an audience.)

Have the children illustrate a key part of the story and write or dictate a caption saying why that part is important.

Create a timeline together of the events in the story and add descriptions of Josh's feelings to show how they changed.