



Overview

This seemingly simple historical story carries an important message about discrimination. It is set in a goldmining town in Otago during the 1860s gold rush. Jacob's mother is glad to buy bok choy (Chinese cabbage) from Ah Sum, but Ah Sum's presence brings out the worst in their neighbour Mrs Bishop and her son, William. William taunts Ah Sum and leaves Jacob feeling confused about his loyalties. When Jacob slips into the river while fishing, it is Ah Sum who rescues him. The story shows how Jacob becomes aware of the realities of Ah Sum's life. The ending is left open for readers to infer the long-term impact of Jacob's encounter with Ah Sum.

You may wish to read use this story in a broader health or social studies context. The issue of racism and the history of goldmining both provide rich material for discussion and research. If discussing racism, please be sensitive to the feelings of any students who may have experience of this.

Texts related by theme

"Bok Choy" SJ L3 May 2015 | "Being Kiwi" SJ 4.2.10 | "In the End" SJSL 2014

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

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

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

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)

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



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Relationships with Other People)

Level 3: Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Identify ways in which people discriminate and ways to act responsibly to support themselves and other people.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3: Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy a story in graphic novel format
- To use the story as a springboard for discussing issues, such as racism
- To learn about life in New Zealand in the past, including goldmining
- To understand and develop skills and strategies for reading a graphic text.



The Writing Hub

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “hauls”, “bows”, “beats their carpet”, “sneers”, “sniggering”, “urge”, “casts out”, “current”, “turquoise”, “flails”, “downriver”, “loom”, “slams”, “darkened”, “tending”, “busies”, “Best”, “gazes”, “Ancestors”, “ushered”, “insist”, “daf”, “ha’penny”, “marooned”
- Possible unfamiliar Chinese names and words
- The use of grammatically incorrect sentences in Ah Sum’s speech
- The connotations of “Chinaman”
- The meaning (in context) of “drawing the covers”
- The name: “New Gold Mountain”
- The figurative language, including “as if Ah Sum isn’t there”, “for the river to steal Jacob”, “the unkind water”, “warmth floods his chest”, “feels his stomach twist”, “sell his own mother for a ha’penny”, “a lifetime away”
- The colloquial language, including “keep to themselves”, “fix you up”, “Look what the cat dragged in”, “would you believe”, “muck”
- Onomatopoeia: “Thwack”, “Fwiiiiip!”
- Ellipses: “... and he is up to his waist in the unkind water.”
- A lack of time signals – the passage of time is inferred from the illustrations
- The incomplete sentences referring to what Jacob is thinking: “the offerings to the ancestors” and “The lonely, old man marooned in New Gold Mountain, a lifetime away from the family that he dreams of seeing again”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary that may be challenging for your students, and decide which words or terms need to be introduced before reading. Remind students to use strategies for working out unknown words, such as:

- reading on to see if the meaning becomes clear
- looking for known base words, chunks, or word families
- using a dictionary.

Give pairs or small groups of students selected illustrations from the story. Have them talk about what they can see and what ideas they have about the plot and setting. Have the pairs share their ideas and create a mind map.

Before and after reading, discuss the words and expressions that have colloquial, figurative, or connotative meanings. Make sure the students understand these words and how they change in different contexts. English language learners may benefit from exploring and comparing examples of similar words in their first language. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Some awareness of racism, past and present
- Awareness of the gold rush in New Zealand and that many Chinese came here to search for gold
- Some awareness of the physical and cultural distances between China and New Zealand
- Awareness that learners of English language may not always use correct grammar
- Some experience of reading graphic texts
- Familiarity with a variety of vegetables
- Some understanding of door-to-door or street selling.

Possible supporting strategies

Provide materials that will help students to imagine the time and place in which the story takes place. Before, during, and after reading, offer support to help students make connections between ideas in the text and their prior knowledge of vegetables, door-to-door selling, goldmining, Chinese in New Zealand, and discrimination. If necessary, help them build their knowledge using other stories and materials. Invite any students who have families or ancestors from far away to share what they know about why they moved to New Zealand and what they found on arrival.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Graphic novel format, where meaning is carried by the illustrations as well as the words
- Use of speech and thought bubbles and narrative boxes
- Told in the present tense
- Set in Otago, 1865, in a goldmining area
- The use of simple, compound, and complex sentences
- A sequence of events that take place in different settings over a single day
- The unexpected use of metaphor when Jacob falls into the river
- The need to make inferences, for example, about the boys’ attitudes, the changes in setting and time, and the information Ah Sum shares with Jacob
- The statement used near the start and at the end of the story: “It’s called bok choy.”
- The additional factual information and photograph of Chinese miners in New Zealand (page 12).

Possible supporting strategies

Skim the opening pages with the students to identify the illustration style. Point out the date at the start, then prompt the students to identify the characters and the setting.

Check that all students understand the differences between speech bubbles, thought bubbles, and narrative boxes.

Some students may need to use a story-map graphic organiser to identify and record the sequence of events.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Relationships with Other People, level 3 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Identify ways in which people discriminate and ways to act responsibly to support themselves and other people.)

English (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

First reading

- Before reading, make use of the background information on page 12 to support the students' knowledge of Chinese miners in New Zealand in the 1860s. Find Canton, China, and New Zealand on a world map.
- Support the students to use their knowledge of text types to identify the layout of a graphic text, working out the use of the narrative boxes and the speech and thought bubbles.
- Have the students ask questions about New Zealand's early history and make connections between the date and what they know of history to infer that the characters are early settlers.
- To check the students' understanding, have them either act out the story, sequence selected frames from the story in pairs, or draw a four-square storyboard, where they draw the four main events in sequence and then use their storyboard to retell the story to a partner.

If the students struggle with this text

- Prompt the students to use their knowledge of how to read a graphic text. *What do you read first, the narrative text or the speech bubbles?*
- Make sure that they can identify and name all the characters. *What is the relationship between the characters?*
- Encourage the students to use a story-map graphic organiser to identify and record the sequence of events.
- Support students to use information in the illustrations, in particular, to identify the changes of setting and time.

Subsequent readings

The teacher

After reading page 2, ask questions to support the students to think more deeply about the text.

- What do you think Mother and Mrs Bishop think about Ah Sum and his vegetables?
- What will Jacob "get more of" at school? Why? How did you work that out?
- What have you learnt about each boy?
- What do you think about their attitudes to Ah Sum?
- How does Jacob feel about William's behaviour?
- How would you feel if you were being hassled by William?

Fill in the first two columns of the graphic organiser and complete it after reading the whole text. You could model this first using one character as an example.

	What is the character like at the start of the story?	Evidence from the story to support your statement.	How has the character changed?	Evidence from the story to support your statement.
Jacob				
William				
Ah Sum				

The students:

- use their knowledge of graphic texts to associate each character with the thoughts and actions
- infer that the two women have very different opinions of Ah Sum and his vegetables
- ask and answer questions about each boy's motivation, making inferences based on information in the text and their own experiences of interactions with peers
- infer that William has a very negative attitude towards Chinese people
- infer that Jacob has been teased by William before
- make connections between Jacob's feelings and their own experiences of being teased to infer that Jacob might have mixed feelings about Ah Sum
- think critically about the ways the different characters respond to Ah Sum and integrate their ideas with what they believe about treating people fairly.

Monitoring the impact of teaching

- The students could act out (role play) the scene on page 2. Ask two students to take turns being each character, then share their feelings as they played each role. Help the students explore these feelings to understand why Jacob wants to get away.
- Some students may have difficulty understanding the concept of discrimination in this context. Support them to explore times in their own lives where they were made to feel bad. Talk about the ways people can make others feel bad about themselves. *Is it OK to treat people badly because they are different? Why do you think that?*

The teacher

Explain the importance of keeping track of the events in a narrative (the time and setting shifts on page 5). If you've used a graphic organiser or similar support, review it to ensure students have followed the events.

- What clues (words and illustrations) help you to work out what is happening?
- What things from your own life helped you to understand what happened?
- Did you think that Jacob would survive when he fell in the river? Why or why not?

Model unpacking a complex sentence. Write the sentence from the third box on page 5 on a whiteboard in one long line, including the punctuation.

- First, I look at the commas. They tell me where to take a little pause when I read. They also mark off different parts of the sentence. They also indicate where the author is including extra detail to support the main clause of the sentence.
- The first part is a phrase that tells us something about "where".
- What does "gloom" mean? Why might Jacob be "in the gloom"?
- The next part is a clause: it makes sense by itself. The main verb is "sees" – this clause tells us that Jacob sees a man. The illustration helps me to work out what "hunched over" means.
- The last part is tricky, but it's just a description of what the man is doing and what the fire is like. The verb "tending" relates to "the man" in the main clause. "Tending" means looking after. What is he looking after?
- The next word, "that", is often used to connect ideas in a sentence. Here it shows that I'm going to learn something about the fire.
- Finally, I connect the information about the fire with the word "gloom". That's what it would be like in a hut with a smoky fire. You'd be "in the gloom".

Direct the students to work with a partner to unpack the complex sentence at the end of page 5 ("Ah Sum busies himself ...").

The students:

- use what they know about story structure to understand the time shift between this and the previous events. They locate and use information in the text and their prior understanding to infer that someone has rescued Jacob and taken him to a hut. They ask and answer questions as they predict that Ah Sum saved Jacob
- use their knowledge of sentence structure and punctuation to unpack the complex sentence
- draw on prior experience of fires to visualise the room being filled with smoke from a fire that isn't going very well
- draw on their prior knowledge about English language learners to understand why Ah Sum speaks the way he does. They use the language knowledge to complete Ah Sum's sentence. (For example, "Your mother will be coming soon.")

Note: Be sensitive to ELLs as they may be upset that they are not yet speaking "correct" English. Provide them some reasons for this. Research suggests that it takes at least 5–7 years to learn a language.

Monitoring the impact of teaching

- Some students may need to be guided through the frames of the story, alongside a list of the events. Check that they understand what each frame shows and how the text relates to the images. You could put some times against the events to show how they followed the course of one day. For example, the first scene might have taken place at 9 a.m., the river scene at 10 a.m., then the hut scene a little later. Or get them to sequence a selection of frames in pairs, as this will cause them to discuss and look for clues within each illustration.
- If students need more practice with reading complex sentences, construct some examples together. Start by writing a simple sentence, then add clauses and phrases one at a time to build a complex sentence. Next, provide some complex sentences from other readings and work together to deconstruct them. Highlight features that help, including commas, verbs, and signal words at the beginning of phrases.
- You could ask the students to notice complex sentences in other texts they are reading, for example, during independent reading. They could mark one or two with stickies and talk with their partner about how they worked it out.

The teacher

After reading page 11, ask questions to support the students as they integrate information and ideas across the text.

- What does Jacob think about the paintings now? How did he respond to Mrs Bishop's words?
- How have Jacob's feelings about Ah Sum changed? When did they change? What caused these changes?
- How would you feel if a stranger said nasty things about you or your family?
- Read the three sentences at the top of page 11 again carefully. What do you notice as you read the last two. Read them aloud to your partner, if you need to. Do they sound right? Why or why not? Why do you think the author wrote them this way?
- Explain that sometimes authors break the "rules of grammar" for particular effect.

Ask questions to support the students' critical thinking.

- What do you think about the attitude of Mrs Bishop and her son towards Ah Sum? Why do you think they felt like that?
- What have you read or heard about, or experienced yourself, that has helped you to identify the issues in this story?
- Why do you think the author wrote this story? What message does he want to convey?

Direct the students to share their questions.

- Share any questions you have about the setting and the issues in this story. How can we find answers to your questions?

The students:

- make connections between the text and earlier events in the story to infer that Jacob's ideas about Ah Sum have changed. They make inferences to follow Jacob's change of heart from being embarrassed and annoyed by Ah Sum, to being scared in Ah Sum's hut, then to being grateful for Ah Sum's kindness
- make connections between what Jacob is seeing and thinking and their own family relationships. They infer that Jacob is imagining how hard it must be for Ah Sum to be so far from his family. Along with Jacob, the students use their personal connections with the text to visualise how they would feel in Ah Sum's situation
- notice that the last two sentences don't sound right, as though something is missing, making them trickier to read. They use what they know about complex sentences and the context (the sentences express Jacob's thoughts) to infer why the author has done this
- integrate (with support) the inferences they have made with the words in the text to understand that Jacob now realises how wrong and cruel Mrs Bishop is. The students may think critically about the author's purpose and form a hypothesis about it, for example, that the author wanted to show how cruel it is to treat people badly just because they are different
- ask questions about what goldmining would have been like at the time of the story and search for answers.

Monitoring the impact of teaching

- To support students who struggle to identify how Jacob changes, ask them to examine the illustrations. Tell them to name his emotion in each drawing. Write these on the board, then model how you relate each one to what is happening in the story. Share an example of a time when you had to change your opinion of a person as you got to know them better.
- After reading, check to ensure the students have formed a hypothesis about what might happen next for Jacob. Point out that the illustrator shows the back view of Jacob and his mother. Ask questions to elicit ideas.
- What might Jacob and his mother say to each other about Mrs Bishop or about Ah Sum?
- Will anything change in Jacob's relationship with Ah Sum?
- Will anything change in the way Ah Sum is treated in the town?

Give Feedback

- This is a tricky part of the story. The author makes us work hard to understand Jacob's mixed feelings about Ah Sum. You've brought together the words, the images, and your own experiences to understand that Jacob is feeling angry and confused.
- You've used the commas, the words, and your knowledge of the parts of sentences to explain the sentence to your partner. These are good strategies to remember whenever you're confused by a complex sentence.
- Your experiences of being teased when you arrived in New Zealand must have been very hurtful. Thank you for sharing this. You've helped us to understand how harmful discrimination and racism are.
- You've pointed out the way the illustrations show the characters' emotions and attitudes. You have used them well to add meaning to the words.

METACOGNITION

- A graphic text has very few words, so you have to fill in the gaps yourself. Show me a place where you had to do that. Explain what you did.
- Show me where you had an "ah-ha" moment – where you could link two ideas across the text or with something you already knew. Explain how this happened for you.
- What strategies do you use in a graphic text that you can't use in a words-only text? What reading strategies don't work so well in a graphic text? Why not?
- What ideas about text structure and format did you notice that you would like to use in your own writing?

Suggestions for writing instruction

Students may choose to:

- write or role-play some conversations between the characters after the story ends, for example, Jacob and his mother, Jacob and William, Jacob and Ah Sum, or Jacob's mother and Mrs Bishop
- discuss and work together to make a chart or a poster that shows some of the ways people can support themselves and others in the face of discrimination
- retell another story as a graphic novel.

English language learners might sequence the main frames from the text and retell the story orally (this could be recorded), and then retell it in a written form (or create a digital version of the story). If the students wish to attempt a graphic novel, provide support to help them break a known story into the separate events or scenes that carry the most important ideas. Each of these can then be further broken down into the frames. Use a storyboard template (you can fold an A4 page to give nine or twelve rectangles, then mark black lines along the creases). Alternatively, cut the paper into rectangles that can be rearranged as the students make and amend their plan.

- Use a pencil to make a brief note or rough sketch in each frame as you work out how your story will be illustrated. You will probably need to rearrange these as you go to make sure the story works.
- Remember to add dialogue and narrative boxes if necessary.
- Ask a buddy to read your first draft. Does the story make sense? Do you need to add or clarify any illustrations? Would another speech or thought bubble or narrative box help make the meaning clear?

Continue to support students as they develop their writing, showing them strategies they could use as they move from their plan to the first draft and then through their revision.

Scaffold students to build on their writing strengths, giving stronger support where needed and reducing it as they take control of strategies for themselves.

Allow plenty of time (within agreed targets) for thinking, planning, reworking, and polishing their writing.



Writing standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks