

Big Blue Whale

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OVERVIEW

“The big blue whale is not a fish. You couldn’t keep it in a dish.” So begins this playful rhyming poem, which explores simple truths about whales in a fantastical way.

The poem’s humour depends on students visualising the whale in various unlikely contexts. Encourage them to use their imaginations. Round off the lesson by having the students speculate on why the author wrote the poem. You can read and enjoy this poem with students at any reading level.

There is an audio version of the text on the *Junior Journal 40 and 41* CD.

CROSS-CURRICULUM LINKS

- Science (levels 1 and 2, ecology) – Recognise that living things are suited to their particular habitat.

RELATED TEXTS

- Poems about whales or other sea animals: “At Sea” (JJ 20), “Big Black Whale” (JJ 37)
- Nonsense poems about animals: *A Book of Milliganimals* by Spike Milligan, the poems of writers such as Edward Lear and Jack Prelutsky

TEXT CHARACTERISTICS THAT RELATE TO THE READING STANDARD FOR AFTER THREE YEARS AT SCHOOL

- Some unfamiliar (and humorous) imaginary settings and contexts
- A mix of explicit and implicit content within text and illustrations that requires students to make connections between ideas in the text and their prior knowledge in order to infer (visualise) what is in the author’s mind and appreciate the humour in the poem, for example:
 - the way the enormous size of the whale is conveyed through comparison with small things (which get bigger as the first verse progresses)
 - the use of modal verbs to indicate the imaginary contexts listed in the text (“couldn’t”, “would not”).
- Some unfamiliar words and phrases, the meaning of which is supported by the context, for example: “pay the bill” and “krill”
- the use of “It’s” (contraction) and “Its” (possessive) in the final verse
- The structure and layout of the text as a poem
- A variety of sentence structures, including the long, complex sentence which comprises the entire second verse, and which tumbles along (as if in one big breath), adding to the humour.

SUGGESTED READING PURPOSE

(What can the students expect to find out and/or think about as a result of reading this text?)

- To enjoy the humour in the poem and think about why the author may have written it

SETTING A LEARNING GOAL

(What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to “read, respond to, and think critically about” texts?)

To meet the reading purpose, students need to draw on a range of comprehension and processing strategies, often simultaneously. Select and adapt from those below to set your learning goal. Be guided by your students’ particular needs and experiences: who they are, where they come from, and what they bring (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8*, Knowledge of the learner, page 6).

This text provides opportunities for students to:

- visualise the imagery in the poem to appreciate the humour
- infer the author’s purpose
- practise fluent choral reading.

Introducing the text

- Tell the students the title of the poem and find out what they know about blue whales, especially about how big they are.
- Share the reading purpose and the learning goal (how they will achieve the reading purpose, for example, by visualising).

READING AND DISCUSSING THE TEXT

Below are some behaviours you could expect to see as the students read and discuss this text. Each example is accompanied by suggested instructional strategies you can use to scaffold their learning. Select and adapt from the suggestions, according to your students’ needs and experiences.

The students make connections between the ideas in the text and what they already know about whales to visualise (and build on) the authors’ ideas.

- Have the students read the first verse and share an image this creates in their minds. Encourage them to use their imaginations, adding detail to the author’s ideas. For example, *I can see the whale diving into the pool and all the little children trying to jump out.*
- Have the students read the second verse. Establish that the structure has changed (four sentences and ideas in the first verse; one sentence and one main idea or image in the second verse). If the students get stuck on “krill”, prompt them to use context to infer the meaning (something a whale would need a lot of every day). Later, discuss the image of “40 million little krill” – *How little must they be?*
- Have the students read the final verse and enjoy the image of the whale stuck in the doorway. Note the further clues to the meaning of “krill”.
- On a second reading, the students could sketch the images in their minds as a way of better appreciating the humour. Pictures of the first verse should show a clear and absurd difference in size between whale and dish, bathtub, and swimming pool. If necessary, prompt them to consider this difference. Encourage the students to add imaginative elements beyond those stated in the poem.

The students say why they think the author wrote this poem.

- Prompt a discussion about the author's purpose by asking the students to share their responses to the poem. *Did you find it funny? Why or why not?*
- Also encourage them to think about the audience: *Would the author write this sort of poem for an older audience?* Draw out the idea that the purpose of the poem is to entertain through humour.

After reading

- Further discuss the humour in the poem and how the unlikely contexts and comparisons help to convey it. Draw out other effective features of the poem. *How is the second verse different from the others? What effect does this have? How would you read this verse?*
- The students can reread the text while they listen to the audio version on the *Junior Journal 40 and 41* CD. Using the audio as a model, they can practise choral reading for fun and to gain fluency.
- Have the students share with a partner any words they found difficult and the strategies they used to work them out. Listen to the discussions. Do you need to follow up on any decoding strategies, particular words, or features of words (for example, "It's" versus "Its")?
- The students can compare the writing style and the illustrations in this text with those of "Big Black Whale" by James K. Baxter (JJ 37).