



Overview

In this humorous play, Professor Clever becomes irritated with the mess that trees make when they drop their leaves, so he comes up with an invention to solve the problem. When his children discover his invention, they are shocked and present an opposite point of view. Students will enjoy the contrast between the sensible children and the foolish adult characters. As well as providing opportunities for students to enjoy expressive oral reading, this play can be used to explore ideas about the environment and scientific thinking.

The text requires students to “confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about” text (from *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

A PDF of this play and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Humorous plays: “Landing a Job” (JJ 30); “Tricky Jack Rabbit” (JJ 31); “Fearless” (JJ 35); “Saving Planet Stripe” (JJ 36); “Lucky Dip” (JJ 40); “Frog School” (JJ 41); “Invisible” (JJ 47); “Kele’s Car” (JJ 49); “Buried Treasure” (JJ 53); “Stop, Thief!” (JJ 55)

Texts about trees or plants, including some with an underlying message about their importance: “Pōhutukawa” (JJ 45); “Rongoā Māori” and “Helpful Trees and Plants” (JJ 49); “I Spy”, “Kākano” (a poem), and “Seeds” (JJ 50); “Rātā me te Rākau” (JJ 57)

Texts about scientists and/or scientific thinking: *Will They Float?* (Ready to Read, shared); *The Impossible Bridge* (Ready to Read, Gold); “Garden with Science” and “Winning the Bledisloe Cup” (*Connected* L2 2014); “New Zealand Dinosaurs” (*SJ* L2 Nov 2017)

Text characteristics

“Professor Clever” includes the following features that help develop the reading behaviours expected at Gold.

A mix of explicit and implicit content that requires students to make connections between information in the text and their prior knowledge to make predictions and inferences

The humour in the contrast between the title of the play and the characterisation of the professor and between the professor and his sensible, environmentally aware children

Some unfamiliar words and phrases, the meaning of which is supported by the context, sentence structure, or illustrations

The underlying ideas about the importance of trees

Several characters and events and shifts in time

Professor Clever
by Trish Puharich

ASSISTANT ONE PROFESSOR CLEVER

ASSISTANT TWO **DEBRA** (daughter) **TREVOR** (son)

Scene one. *The professor's laboratory. PROFESSOR CLEVER is looking out the window and scratching his head. ASSISTANT ONE and ASSISTANT TWO are working on inventions.*

PROFESSOR CLEVER (*sounding cross*). What a mess out there in the yard. It's those stupid trees! They're a real problem!

ASSISTANT ONE. Why are they a problem, Professor?

PROFESSOR CLEVER. They're always dropping their leaves and making a mess.

ASSISTANT TWO (*looking out the window, too*). I see what you mean. Someone should do something about them.

PROFESSOR CLEVER (*suddenly smiling*). I have a great idea. (*He shouts.*) Trevor! Debra!

TREVOR and DEBRA arrive on skateboards.

TREVOR and DEBRA. Yes, Dad?

PROFESSOR CLEVER. I want you to go outside and rake up the leaves.

TREVOR and DEBRA. Yes, Dad.

They go to rake up the leaves.

ASSISTANT ONE. Was that your great idea?

PROFESSOR CLEVER. No, I have a brilliant idea for a new invention. I'm going to get rid of one of the biggest problems around.

The structure of the text as a play, which relies on dialogue and stage directions to tell the story and convey characterisation

The print conventions of a play, for example, coloured upper-case letters for character names and italics for stage directions

A variety of sentence structures and some adverbial phrases within the stage directions (for example, “sounding cross”, “suddenly smiling”, “looking smug”, “sounding hopeful”)

English (Reading)

Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Level 2 – Language features: Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

Level 2 – Processes and strategies: Selects and reads texts for enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Science

Levels 1 and 2 – Nature of Science: Understanding about science: Appreciate that scientists ask questions about our world that lead to investigations and that open-mindedness is important because there may be more than one explanation.

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8, Knowledge of the Learner, page 6*).

Possible reading purpose

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

- To find out what Professor Clever's problem is and how he will try to solve it
- To think about Professor Clever's ideas
- To use the play's format to find clues to help read this play to an audience

Possible learning goals

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

This text provides opportunities for students, over several readings, to:

- **make connections** between their prior knowledge and information in the text and illustrations to **make predictions and inferences**
- **make connections** between explicit and implicit information to **infer** how the characters might act and speak
- **identify the author's message**
- **monitor** their own reading and, when something is unclear, take action to solve the problem, for example, by rereading a sentence or looking for clues close by.



Text and language features

Vocabulary

Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases:

- "Assistant", "Professor", "daughter", "Scene", "laboratory", "inventions", "brilliant", "a cure for hiccups", "endangered", "smug", "hopeful", "global warming", "huddle", "frowning", "proudly", "concrete", "fabulous", "created", "cyclone", "famous", "sounding really surprised", "oxygen", "breathe", "planet", "design"

Possible supporting strategies

(Use these suggestions before, during, or after reading in response to students' needs.)

Prompt the students to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- when **decoding**:
 - recognising words, word chunks, or syllables within a word (for example, "Pro-fess-or", "in-ven-tions", "brill-i-ant", "en-danger-ed", "hope-ful", "con-crete")
 - drawing on their knowledge of variations in the sounds of some letters and letter combinations (for example, "warming", "huddle", "created" – with the "e" and "a" as separate vowels, "cyclone") and that some letters can be silent ("daughter", "Scene", "design")
 - using context and sentence structure to confirm decoding attempts
- when **working out word meanings**:
 - using the context of the sentence and the unfolding storyline
 - looking for supporting information, such as illustrations and/or the stage directions
 - reading on to look for further information, including looking at the next word or words to help clarify a noun phrase.

Have a dictionary available for students to confirm or clarify word meanings, but remind them that they can make a best attempt at a word and come back to it later.

Readers are able to use strategies for working out unfamiliar words only when they know most of the vocabulary in the text. For English language learners who need support with vocabulary, introduce and practise selected items before reading.

Text features

- The play format
- Stage directions in parentheses, often using adverbial phrases
- See "Introducing the text".
- To support the students with the syntax of the stage directions, explain that these phrases tell the reader *how* the character is speaking or what they are doing as they speak.



Introducing the text

A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>

Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that your introduction to the text is effective in activating their prior knowledge and providing appropriate support for a successful first reading. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions.

- Expect the students to infer from the text layout that this is a play and to predict from the style of the illustrations that it will be humorous. Draw out the idea that a play is a story told mostly through dialogue. Review their understanding of the features of a play: the character names (in capital letters) that show who is speaking and the stage directions (in italics) that give extra information about the character and describe the setting and context. Read the title, the character names, and the page 26 stage directions together to clarify the initial setting.
- Ask the students to use the title, the character labels, the stage directions, the illustration on page 26, and any prior knowledge from stories or films (such as the Harry Potter stories) to clarify what a professor is, and what Professor Clever's job might be. (The laboratory setting and his white coat suggest he is a scientist.) Ask the students to share what they know about what scientists do (for example, they ask questions, think, solve problems, do research, experiment, make discoveries, and invent things).
- Prompt the students to infer (from the illustration of the professor scratching his head and looking thoughtful) that he is thinking about a problem. They might notice the tree and leaves falling. Encourage the students to predict (from the style of the illustrations) that the professor may not behave exactly as a normal scientist might.
- Explain that you want them to read the whole play to find out what happens before any roles are assigned to individual students.
- Together, set a reading purpose. Share the learning goal(s).
- Provide sticky notes for the students to record ideas they have as they are reading or to mark parts they might want to return to later.

Reading and discussing the text

Suggestions for ways that you can support the students to achieve the learning goals are in the right-hand column of the table below. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions according to your students' needs.

Encourage the students to read the text by themselves, intervening only if it's clear a student needs help. During the first reading, the focus is on students experiencing and enjoying the storyline, following the events, and making and reviewing predictions (forming and testing hypotheses). Much of the processing that they do is "inside their heads" and may not be obvious until the discussion after the reading. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word-solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

Student behaviours

Examples of behaviours that will help the students achieve their learning goal(s).

Deliberate acts of teaching

Examples of how you can support individual students (if needed).


The first reading

- The students use explicit and implicit information in the text and illustrations to identify the professor's ideas and begin making inferences about what the professor is like. For example, he calls trees "stupid" and "messy". As they read on, they notice more instances of his silly thinking. (He doesn't listen to his assistants, and he thinks that messy trees are a bigger problem than global warming.)
- At the end of page 27, they draw on their thinking so far to predict that the professor's invention will be something unexpected (and possibly silly).
- On page 28, the students notice and enjoy the humour in the discrepancy between the professor's suggestions, the assistants' suggestions, and their own ideas about what they consider "one of the biggest problems around".
- They use the illustration on page 29 to confirm that the professor has invented a tree of some sort, and they use the additional information on this page (the references to messy trees dropping leaves) to refine their predictions about what sort of tree he has invented. (This is revealed by Debra at the end of the page.)
- The students infer from Debra's reaction that the children don't share their father's opinion about trees. They begin to notice the contrasting role of the children as the "clever" and sensible characters.
- As they read Scene two, they may also notice the assistants have become caught up with the professor's ideas, even though they were not sure about them to start with.
- On page 31, the students notice how the professor is not fazed by his failed idea. They predict from his accident that his next "brilliant idea" will have something to do with skateboards (and will probably be silly).
- Prompt the students to keep the reading purpose in mind. *What are you noticing about the professor?*
- Remind them that making and testing predictions as they read will help them to understand and enjoy the story. You could have the students pause at the end of page 27 to write their own prediction about what the professor's "brilliant idea" might be.

- The students demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving, for example:
 - They break longer words into chunks.
 - They make connections to familiar phrases they have heard (for example, “endangered animals”, “global warming”) though they may not totally understand their meaning.
 - They reread the Professor’s fourth piece of dialogue on page 28 (which includes stage directions) to clarify which bits are stage directions and which bits are spoken by the professor.
 - They use the stage directions and the context of the unfolding story to infer that the bold print for the words “What”, “us”, and “will” (on pages 28 and 30) shows that these words should be emphasised.
 - They mark words or phrases they are not sure of.
- As they read pages 30–31, where the characters present their various points of view, the students make connections to their own opinions about trees and begin to think about the author’s message.
- Remind the students to think about the strategies they can use when meaning is unclear, for example, rereading or reading on, using their knowledge of familiar words or word chunks, and noticing the use of italics to show stage directions.
- There are several big, new ideas on page 28 as the assistants try to guess the professor’s brilliant idea. Reassure the students that it’s fine to reread if they feel they need to check the meaning and that you will discuss the play together after the reading.
- Encourage the students to think about what they know and think about trees. *Who does the author want you to agree with?*

Discussing the text

You can revisit this text several times, focusing on different aspects and providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions according to your students’ needs and responses to the reading. Some of the suggestions overlap, and several can be explored further as “After reading” activities.

 For some suggestions, you may find it helpful to project the PDF of the article so that you can zoom in on relevant sections.

- The students share their responses to the play.
 - They identify humorous aspects, such as the characterisation (and name) of the professor, his silly ideas, the dialogue, the differences in the opinions of the characters, and the illustrations.
 - The students discuss how they used clues in the dialogue, illustrations, and stage directions to make inferences about what the characters are like. They think critically about the roles of the characters and how they contribute to the storyline.
 - They draw on their thinking about the characters to practise speaking their dialogue.
 - The students think critically about the author’s purpose. They find examples of the characters’ opinions about trees and make connections to their own knowledge and opinions.
 - Enjoy the students’ reactions to the ending. *What do you think of Professor Clever and his ideas? What are some ways the writer has made the play funny? Draw out the idea that much of the humour depends on the professor being silly rather than clever.*
- The ironic humour may need to be made explicit for some English language learners. You could ask: *Do you think the professor is clever?*
- Discuss the characterisation. *What helped you to work out what the professor was like? When did you begin to notice that the professor’s ideas were silly? Brainstorm words that describe the professor. You could ask similar questions about the assistants too. What did you notice about how the assistants changed during the play? What clues helped you find out what they think of Professor Clever’s ideas? Why do you think they start to agree with the professor?*
 - Have the students read sections of the play aloud together. *What helps you to know how to read it?* If necessary, explain that the stage directions next to the characters’ names in the dialogue, for example, “PROFESSOR CLEVER (*sounding cross*)”, are there to give information but are not meant to be read aloud. You could model how the stage directions or the use of bold print might affect the way a character speaks. Have the students act out expressions such as “smug” and “puzzled”.
 - Prompt the students to think about the author’s purpose. *What does the author want you to think? How does she make her point about the value of trees?* Either now or as an After-reading activity, you could have the students summarise on a T-chart the positive and negative ideas about trees in the play. They can also add their own ideas.

How you can support your students to be metacognitive

Here are some ways you can build students' awareness of the processes and strategies they are using as they make meaning and think critically.

With support, the students reflect on their learning.



- The students identify a word, phrase, or idea they found challenging and how they worked it out (or tried to).
- The students reflect on how the information in the dialogue, the stage directions, and the illustrations helped them to infer what the characters are like and how they might speak.

Remind the students of the reading purpose and learning goal(s).

- Ask the students to talk with a partner about a challenge they had when reading and how they solved or attempted to solve it. Listen in and note anything you might need to follow up on.
- *What helped you to understand what the characters were like?*

After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students' needs during the lesson and provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. Where possible, make links to other texts, including texts generated by the students, and to the wider literacy programme (oral language, writing, handwriting, and word games and activities) and other curriculum areas.

- The students can reread the play as they listen to the audio version, which provides a model of how readers can interpret and perform a play for an audience. The audio version also provides English language learners with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Have the students reread the play independently and also aloud together, taking the roles of the different characters. You can provide extra support by reading along with the students and/or taking on the role of narrator (reading the stage directions). Refer to the earlier discussion during the reading to decide how each character would speak. Rereading plays is of particular benefit to English language learners because it provides opportunities to practise and learn about the prosodic features of English, such as tone, intonation, fluency, and stress.
-  The students could record their reading of the play on a phone or tablet.
- Provide further opportunities for students to reread other humorous plays and stories that have foolish characters or texts with information or ideas about trees (see Related texts).
- The students could make a positive–negative T-chart about the things the children liked about trees and the things about trees that annoyed Professor Clever.
- They could draw and write about three or four facts about trees.
- Encourage the students to draw and label some other silly ideas that Professor Clever might come up with, such as a chocolate kettle, a net roof, a feather umbrella, and so on.
- The students could draw one of the characters and write descriptive words from the play around their drawing. They could use a different coloured pen to add words of their own, for example, Professor Clever – cranky, inventive, crazy, mad, absent-minded, nutty; or the children – sporty, wise, caring of the environment.
-  The students could use Google Drawing to do this.
- Have the students work in pairs to place the professor, the children, and the assistants on a continuum according to the students' assessment of how clever each character is. Ask the students to add at least one piece of evidence from the text to support their decision for each character.

