

## ILLUSTRATING THE READING STANDARD

**“Survivor”** *School Journal*, Part 2 Number 2, 2009

*Noun frequency level: 9–10*

By the end of year 5, students are required to use a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts to locate, evaluate, and integrate information and ideas in order to meet the reading demands of the curriculum, drawing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes described for the end of year 5 in the Literacy Learning Progressions. The curriculum tasks will involve the students in generating their own questions as well as answering questions from the teacher.

The students in a year 5 class are involved in an inquiry about pests, integrating science and English. As part of the English focus, the students are developing an understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences; they are identifying particular points of view in texts and beginning to recognise that authors use a variety of ways to engage the reader with their point of view.

“Survivor” is a fictional text written from the perspective of an anthropomorphic cockroach. The author is trying to influence the reader to consider a positive view of cockroaches. The text is well supported by illustrations that add depth and mood to the story.

This text has connections to the key competencies of thinking and using language, symbols, and texts.

The teacher chose “Survivor” because the text includes a range of features, such as descriptive and explanatory language (including factual information) and humorous, idiosyncratic language to engage the reader. Students are required to make connections between their prior knowledge and the information in the text to understand key scientific content (facts about cockroaches). They are also required to think critically and evaluate information in order to distinguish these facts from competing information that is part of the fictional story but is irrelevant to their purpose.

*The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the reading demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.*

“So I’m a cockroach,” I thought. “Big deal.”  
You know, the city can be a lonely place. The lady and I had been sharing the same kitchen for months, and yet I was a stranger to her.

The student locates language suggesting that the text is written from the main character’s point of view. With prompting, she infers the author’s deliberate intent to present a positive view of cockroaches, in contrast to the usual negative opinion that they are revolting pests. The student evaluates the author’s use of anthropomorphism, humour, and direct speech and with prompting identifies these as a deliberate attempt to engage the reader.

It’s no secret that us cockroaches are the cheetahs of the insect world. Fastest things on six legs ... I can cover fifty times my own body length in a second. It might not sound like much, but if a human did the same thing, they’d be running over 300 kilometres an hour.

The student evaluates and integrates the ideas the author presents about the cockroach’s remarkable abilities. She concludes that the information is intended to inspire some admiration for the little insect. She infers that the author’s purpose is to persuade the reader that cockroaches are, in many ways, more impressive than humans. She asks questions about whether this information is likely to be true or not.

My thorax swelled with pride. We cockroaches are the survivors of the animal kingdom ...

She didn’t even have a shiny, brown exoskeleton to protect her.

The student uses prior knowledge of insect parts, as well as knowledge of affixes, to work out the content-specific vocabulary “thorax” and “exoskeleton”. She is able to identify a scientific fact about cockroaches (they have a shiny, brown exoskeleton), even though the information is not directly stated.



Each of us thinks we’re the brightest and the best. But the truth is, there’s a place for each of us, no matter how many legs or wings we have. We just need to try and see things from another species’ point of view.

The student evaluates the language used to express the cockroach’s point of view and concludes that the author’s chatty, conversational style helps to engage the reader. With prompting, the student finds and explains specific examples of language the author has used to suit her purpose, for example, “infested with humans”, “gave him the creeps”, and “I tried to tell him they had thoughts and feelings just like us”. With teacher prompting, she makes connections to her prior knowledge of insects and other animals and decides that the cockroach narrator expresses thoughts and feelings that are typical of humans rather than insects. Nevertheless, she thinks the idea that “there’s a place for all of us” may be a sound one. The student revisits and integrates examples within the text to evaluate the effectiveness of the author’s decision to anthropomorphise the cockroach. She asks questions such as “Was this text interesting enough to make me think differently about cockroaches and change my views about them?” The student concludes that the text was successful in engaging her in learning about texts and cockroaches and in altering her initial feelings about cockroaches.

He told me about a place he used to live that was infested with humans. It gave him the creeps. I tried to tell him they had thoughts and feelings just like us.