

ILLUSTRATING THE READING STANDARD

“Richard Henry: Protector of the Kākāpō” *School Journal, Part 4 Number 3, 2006* Noun frequency 12–14

By the end of year 8, students are required to use a range of fiction and non-fiction texts to locate, evaluate, and synthesise 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 8 in the Literacy Learning Progressions. The curriculum tasks will also involve the students in generating their own questions as well as answering questions from the teacher.

The students in a year 8 class are involved in a social sciences inquiry to discover how people participate individually and collectively in response to environmental issues. In the students' own community, a proposal has been made to cut down a large area of native trees to make way for a new housing development. The students are investigating the ways in which people make decisions and take action on environmental issues, so that they can understand the actions for and against the local proposal.

The article “Richard Henry: Protector of the Kākāpō” describes Richard Henry’s life and how he worked to save the kākāpō (and other native birds) from extinction. The text makes links to a later conservationist, Don Merton, who also helped to save the kākāpō from extinction. The article is supported by photographs and illustrations.

The teacher chose “Richard Henry: Protector of the Kākāpō” because the text requires the reader to locate and evaluate information about the actions Richard Henry took to preserve the kākāpō, the effectiveness of the actions, and the personal characteristics that enabled him to take those actions.

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.

Richard Henry wasn't frightened of solitude. In fact, he was happiest when living close to the wild birds he loved, learning about their habits and doing his best to protect them.

Henry was fascinated by wildlife, and he especially loved studying creatures in their natural habitats.

Henry set about educating the public about the plight of the kākāpō. He wrote a natural history column for a local newspaper as well as articles about the deadly impact of introduced species on native wildlife. Henry also photographed the birds, taking the first known photo of a kākāpō chick.

But rain or shine, Henry worked on.

Despite the often miserable conditions, Henry still managed to rescue hundreds of birds, rowing them to safety in his boat.

His ability to write about the things he saw provided valuable information that is still used by conservationists today.

At last, people started listening to what Henry had to say.

But Henry's work wasn't for nothing ... fellow conservationists, like Don Merton, took up where Henry left off.

The student reads the text to identify the challenges Richard Henry faced in his quest to save the kākāpō, the personal characteristics that equipped him to meet those challenges, the actions that he took, and the effectiveness of those actions. The student locates information about the challenges (the events leading to the near extinction of the kākāpō) and about Richard Henry's personal characteristics. He evaluates and synthesises information from within the text to conclude that Henry was a very remarkable man, whose dedication, perseverance, and lack of concern for comfort were essential to the task he undertook. He also concludes that Henry was a loner with a great love of the outdoors and of nature. The student hypothesises that Henry's “loner” disposition was a necessary quality that enabled him to dedicate his life to saving native birds. He makes connections to other texts he has read, such as those about the work of Dian Fossey, to compare Henry's qualities with those of other conservationists.

The student locates facts about how Richard Henry informed others of the need to save the kākāpō, how he was given an opportunity to create a sanctuary, and how he worked alone to do so. The student compares Richard Henry's dedication and actions with the actions undertaken by people in the student's own community who are trying to preserve a part of the natural environment. He concludes that, while individual dedication and perseverance are admirable and do have an impact, working together for a cause can make the job easier and is more likely to get “buy-in” from the wider community and to lead to a positive result.

The student finds evidence that the actions Richard Henry took have had some positive effects but notices that Richard Henry himself died believing it had all been for nothing. He returns to his earlier hypothesis (that perhaps Henry's “loner” disposition was a necessary quality), and in light of the disappointing result from Henry's perspective, the student evaluates and synthesises information to make a new hypothesis – that people need to work with others to achieve the environmental outcomes they believe in. The student decides to check this hypothesis by finding out whether Don Merton worked alone or with the “fellow conservationists” referred to in the text.

