

Clever Cats

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Overview

In this humorous play, the hungry neighbourhood stray cats hatch a plan to fool the local people into feeding them. This play offers students an opportunity to dig under the surface of a text to explore the author's point of view about cats and consider her purpose for writing.

Suggested teaching purposes

- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategy of **inferring** and identifying the author's purpose and point of view.
- To enjoy reading a humorous text about cats.

Suggested learning goal

I am learning to infer the author's purpose and point of view.

Success criteria

I will be successful when I have:

- made connections to what I already know about cats and plays
- looked for clues in the text to help me infer what the author thinks about cats
- thought about why the author has chosen to write a play about cats.

Features of the text

What features of this text support the teaching purpose?

- The conventions of a play, for example, characters' names in capital letters and stage directions in italics
- The narrative structure (the initial problem, the series of incidents, and the humorous ending that suggests that the cats will continue to trick people into giving them food)
- The repeated incidents, with three different sets of people being tricked
- The clues to the author's purpose and point of view in the title of the play and the characterisation of the cats
- The humorous contrast between the scheming and manipulative cats and the caring but gullible human beings
- The cats' ability to speak (anthropomorphism).

Readability

Noun frequency level: 8.5–9.5 years for guided reading

What prior knowledge or experience might help my students to read this text?

- Knowledge and experience of cats
- Knowledge and experience of human behaviour around cats
- Knowledge of the conventions of plays.

What text features might challenge my students and require a prompt or a brief explanation?

- The concept of manipulation
- The use of "old trick" and what this means

- Particular words and concepts, including “moggy”, “wailing”, “coax”, “tear-tab”, “Delicious”, “congratulate”.

A framework for the lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning goal?

Before reading

- Tell the students you have a play about some cats for them to read. Encourage the students to share their knowledge and experiences of cats. Record a list of words or phrases that describe cats in the group reading book. (Making connections)
- Tell the students that while this is a fun play, the author might still have a point of view that they are trying to get across and that is what you want the students to think about as they read. (Identifying the author’s purpose and point of view)
- Discuss how reading a play is different from reading a story, for example, how you know who is talking and why some sections of the text are in italics. (Making connections)
- Share the learning goal and success criteria with the students.

Reading and discussing the text

Refer to Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8 for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

- Have the students read the scene directions on page 20. “Why might a rubbish tin be important to the stray cats?” (Making connections; forming hypotheses)
- Ask the students to read to the end of page 21. (For the first reading, have all the students read the text rather than allocating parts.) Discuss what the cat’s plan might be. “What clues in the text show you that it might be a sneaky plan?” (For example, they “gather together and whisper” and Stray Cat 1 is told to pretend). (Forming hypotheses; inferring)
- Remind the students of the learning goal. “What are you noticing about the cats so far? How does that fit with the ideas on our list? I’m wondering what the author thinks about cats ...” (Making connections; inferring)
- Encourage the students to predict what will happen next and then read page 22 to check. “Does this fit with what you predicted? How will this help Cats 2, 3, and 4?” (Forming and testing hypotheses)
- Ask the students to read page 23. “Do you think the plan is going to keep working? Why/why not?” Prompt the students to draw on what they’ve learnt about the personalities of the cats and the response of the human characters so far. (Making connections; forming and testing hypotheses)
- Ask the students to read to the end of the play. Discuss the ending with the students and encourage them to predict how “the old cat’s stuck down the hole trick” will work. “What helped you work that out?” (Inferring; forming hypotheses)
- “The people in the play are pleased to help and think they have done a good job. What does this say about the human characters in the play? What does this suggest about the cats?” (Inferring)
- Have the students think, pair, and share their ideas about what the author

thinks about cats, using evidence from the text, including the title. “Why has she chosen to use cats as the main characters in this play? Would it work as well with dogs as the main characters?” Discuss the opportunities for humour and drama in the idea of the cats looking cute and helpless (and therefore appealing to the kind humans in the play) but actually being tricky and manipulative. “Do you think she has a serious message or is she just wanting to entertain us?” (Inferring; analysing and synthesising)

- “Do you think the author likes cats?” (The use of the word “clever” in the title suggests that she probably does). Discuss what possible events may have led the author write this play. (Inferring)
- Briefly discuss any words or phrases that the students found difficult and the strategies they used (or could have used) to work them out.
- Reflect with the students on how well they have met the learning goal and success criteria. For example, “What are some of the clues that helped you to work out what the author thinks?” Note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate and/or extend their new learning?

- The students could perform the play, focusing on the characterisation of the cats to convey the author’s point of view. The audience could be challenged to think about this as they watch so they can participate in a discussion afterwards. (Identifying the author’s purpose and point of view)
- The students could read other texts that portray cats in a particular way. For example, “The Cats and the Cheese” (SJ 1.3.02), “The Bone Garden” (JJ 27), or “Home Comes the Hunter” (JJ 25). (Making connections; identifying the author’s purpose and point of view)