

Purr-fect!

by Dot Meharry

illustrated by Peter Campbell

Overview

This moral tale about a beautiful but vain and gullible bird and a clever cat has a dramatic ending that is sure to stimulate lively discussion. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2005*.

Suggested purposes

This book supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, forming hypotheses, inferring, and identifying and summarising main ideas. This text provides many opportunities for children to practise their decoding and cross-checking strategies. It's a useful text for monitoring children's integration of reading strategies and their comprehension at the end of the Yellow level.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the range of high-frequency vocabulary
- the initial consonant blends "cl", "fl", "pl", "tr"
- the digraphs "sh" — "she", "washed"; and "th" — "that", "The", "the", "feathers"
- the verbs ending in "ed" — "fluffed", "jumped", "liked", "pleased", "wanted", "washed"
- the forms of the verb "to fly" — "flew", "fly", "flying"
- the irregular past-tense verbs "could", "flew", "said", "sang", "saw"
- the use of the pronouns "he" and "she"
- the play on words in "Purr-fect"
- the use of direct speech
- the use of the ellipsis to indicate a pause
- the feeling of anticipation
- the gory (but unspecified) ending
- the characterisation
- the implied moral about the perils of flattery
- the visual language features — the changing perspective, the way the bird moves closer to the cat, the increasing dominance of the cat, the movement lines, and the recurring feather motif, especially the single feather on the title page and page 8.

Setting the scene

Have a brief discussion about cats and birds. Draw out the idea that some cats hunt for food and will eat birds. Tell the children that you have a story for them to read that has a message. *See if you can work out what the author's message is.* It's best if you don't make the audio version available until after the children have read the text.

The first reading

The children may realise the cat's intent at different stages, so give lots of opportunities for prediction without giving the ending away!

Look at the title. *Who can you see in the illustration? What do cats say?* Some children may recognise "Purr" from the Greedy Cat big books. Support the children in sounding out "fect". Articulate the whole word and enjoy the play on words. *What would be "purr-fect" for a cat? How would the cat say this?* Spend a few moments practising a cat-like "Purr-fect", savouring the rolled "rr". *Why do you think the author chose this title?* Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page — Read the title again. *Why do you think there is just a feather here?* Accept the children's suggestions but don't give away the ending. *Let's read and find out.*

Listen to the children read the text themselves, offering support as necessary.

Page 2 — Note that this page establishes the time, the setting, the characters, and the fact that the cat and the bird can talk. If any children confuse "saw" and "was", prompt them to cross-check the syntax and visual information: *"The bird saw pleased" — does that sound right? Check the first letter and read it again.* If necessary, clarify that the pronoun "she" refers to the cat.

Page 3 — The children may need help to sound out "pleased". Check that they understand what it means. Reassure them about the irregular past-tense verb "sang". If necessary, prompt the children to cross-check "feathers" using the illustration. Check their understanding of the pronouns: *What do the words "she" and "he" tell us about the cat and the bird?*

Page 4 — Compare this illustration with that on page 2. *What do you notice about the cat and the bird?* (They're much closer, and the bird has fluffed up his feathers.) *Why has the bird fluffed up his feathers?* If the children say "flied" for "flew", encourage them to cross-check. *Does it sound right? If it was "flied", what letter would you expect to see at the end of the word?* You could tell them that the "ew" sounds like "new" or "few". If they're unfamiliar with the irregular verb form, tell them the word.

Page 5 — *What do you think will happen next?* If the children haven't cottoned on yet, don't tell them!

Page 6 — Compare this illustration with the one on page 4. The bird is now much closer to the cat. *Why is the ellipsis there?* Draw out the idea that this indicates a pause while the cat thinks up his next move.

Page 7 — *Why did the cat jump?*

Page 8 — *What happened? Is this what you thought would happen? What do you think of this ending?* Reflect on the main idea of the story: *Is this story just about a cat and a bird, or does it have another meaning?* Talk with the children about fables and how they are like stories but have a message or moral.

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their integration of strategies and their use of expression (a good indicator of comprehension). Those children who are managing well and have good understanding are probably ready to move on to the Blue level. A running record will help to confirm this.

Talk about the characters. Track the cat's actions together. *What was she thinking every time she said "Purr-fect" to the bird? How would you describe the cat? What do you think of the bird? How do you know the bird is "silly"? Finish the discussion with an evaluation: Which character do you prefer? Why?*

Focus on the narrative structure. Identify the introduction, the problem, and the ending. Talk about how the illustrations and the repeated dialogue build a sense of anticipation.

Focus on any of the initial consonant blends or digraphs that the children had difficulty with. Locate examples in the text and list other words that start the same way or that contain the same digraph. Read the list together, carefully articulating the common sound.

List the verbs that end in "ed" on the whiteboard. Experiment with adding other endings to the root verbs ("jump", "jumps", "jumping", "jumped") and use the words orally in sentences.

Focus on any of the irregular past-tense verbs that the children had difficulty with. Explain that some verbs can't have "ed" added to them and that the children need to draw on their knowledge of spoken English to decide what sounds right. Identify the three forms of the verb "fly" in the text. Focus on "flew", using it orally in a variety of sentences.

Talk about the purpose of the speech marks and reread the dialogue, encouraging expressive reading. Use a modified form of readers' theatre, with the teacher as the narrator and the children reading the dialogue together.

Focus on the use of the pronouns "she" and "he" to refer to the cat and the bird. Write sentences related to the text on the whiteboard and have the children practise replacing the subjects with the appropriate pronoun, for example, "The cat saw the bird" or "The bird flew down." This would be especially helpful for ESOL children.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2005*.

Practise readers' theatre with groups of three children (a narrator, a cat, and a bird). Have the children take turns in each role.

Ask the children to add thought bubbles to the illustrations of the bird and the cat on pages 6 and 8.

Practise identifying and summarising main ideas by reading and discussing other fables, for example, "Little Donkey" in *Junior Journal 25* or "Two Trees" in *Junior Journal 27*.

Read other tales about tricky characters, for example, *Two Tiger Tales* (Purple), "How the Crocodile Lost His Tongue" in *Junior Journal 24*, or the story of The Gingerbread Man.