

Night is a Blanket

by Barbara Hill

illustrations by Clare Bowes

Overview

In this poetic story within a story, a grandfather makes up a bedtime story for his grandchildren to explain how the moon was formed. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2008*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of visualising, summarising, and analysing and synthesising. It provides opportunities for children to practise storytelling and for comparing ideas about the moon across texts.

Text features

(Note that this information is intended as a prompt for teachers rather than as a list of teaching points.)

- the story within a story
- the features of a traditional tale or legend:
 - the explanation of the phenomena of the moon and night
 - the setting in a distant time – “long, long ago”
 - the elements of magic
 - the heroic main character
- the features of traditional storytelling, such as:
 - the dramatic poetic phrases, such as “the highest mountain in the land”, “A great white hawk”, “until his feathers were torn and his wings worn out”
 - the use of repetition for emphasis – “still far, far above her”, “fl ew and fl ew and fl ew”, “higher and higher”, “Sometimes”
 - the accumulation of verbs within a sentence “... wanted to hold and feel and touch”
 - the sense of mystery and possibilities – “No one knows ...”, “Perhaps”, “Only one person ever did”
 - the repeated attempts to reach the blanket of night
 - the refrain “Wind blow me. Push me higher. Carry me up ...”
- the poetic language that supports visualising:
 - the metaphor “night is a blanket”, “the blanket of night”
 - the simile “like a kite”
 - the adjectives, sometimes used in combinations – “ deep”, “soft”, “great white”, “torn”, “worn old”, “young”, “bigger”
 - the alternatives to said – “called”, “gasped”, “cried”
- the use of italics to indicate the story within the story
- the clear paragraphing
- the warm relationship between the children and their grandfather
- the supportive but not overly explicit illustrations, which encourage readers to visualise.

Introducing the text

Tell the children you have a text for them to read about night and tell them the title. *What does this title suggest to you?* Check that the children know what a blanket is. Draw out the idea that this title is a metaphor and encourage the children to speculate about how night could be like a blanket. The children may be able to make connections to other texts from the *Night is a Blanket* miscellany.

During the reading

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties. Encourage them to note any words they are unsure of for discussion after the reading.

Page 18 – Have the children read this page and then discuss the situation. Draw out the idea that Grandfather is telling stories to his grandchildren.

The illustration, the fact that Grandfather is speaking very softly, and Grandfather's references to the current situation ("up there", "Those stars you see") support the idea that it is night and this is a bedtime story. Encourage the children to make connections to their experiences of being told bedtime stories. Clarify the expectation that this is likely to be a magical story, like a fairytale.

Encourage the children to visualise Grandfather's description of night. You could use a blanket or a piece of black paper and a torch to show the children how night could be a blanket. The children could also make connections to the idea of curtains shutting out the light.

Page 19 – Encourage the children to enjoy visualising the giant and the bird. (They may have noticed the illustration of a bird on the cover of the miscellany.) Discuss the idea that storytellers use words rather than pictures to help their listeners create pictures in their heads. Explain that you want the children to do this as they read.

Briefly discuss the relationship between the children and their grandfather. The children could infer from the conversation that there is a strong sense of trust and belief in what the grandfather is saying.

Page 20 – Before reading, have children scan the page so they notice the change to italics. Ask them to read the first two paragraphs to find out the reason for the change. Check that they're clear about the focus of Grandfather's story – *What happened long, long ago?* Ask the children to explain what the grandfather is going to describe (How we got our moon).

Have the children read to the end of the page. Ask the children to predict what will happen. Discuss that these predictions may change through the reading as they gain more information from the text. *I'm thinking that the words "thought" and "would" in that last sentence are suggesting that the girl was wrong ...*

Page 21 – Review the children’s predictions and draw out the idea that the task is turning out to be much harder than anticipated. *This is like a fairytale, when the characters have to try again and again to do a task ... Read me some parts of this text that tell us what a hard task this is. Do you think the wind will be able to get them up high enough?*

Page 22 – Check the children’s predictions. *How did the wind help the bird?* Focus on the simile “like a kite”. Allow the children time to explore how a hawk would fly like a kite, with their arms spread out and soaring. Emphasise the idea that they are very high up. *What clues in the text tell us the blanket of night is a long way away?*

Encourage the children to make a connection between the purpose of the story and the actions of the girl. *What happened when the girl touched the blanket of night? I wonder why Grandfather has included this dramatic moment in his story.*

Page 23 – Encourage the children to use the top left illustration of the ripped blanket to help them make connections between the moon they see and the tear in the blanket.

Explain that the speech marks after “Goodnight” are closing off the speech Grandfather began on page 20, when he started the story. Read the name of the illustrator.

Ask the children to evaluate the text. *Why did Grandfather tell the story? Do you think the children will remember it?* Discuss the idea that perhaps someone may have told the grandfather the story long ago when he was a young child.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing their fluency and use of expression for the poetic language.

Focus on the style of writing. *What language choices has the author made to convey the idea of storytelling?* For example, the children could:

- identify some phrases that indicate traditional storytelling. *What are some others that you know?* Write up some of these ideas. Have the children share with a partner as to whether any of the others could be as effective.
- find some sentences that include repetition, such as in the phrases “long, long ago”, “far, far above”, “fl ew and fl ew”, “higher and higher”, to build a sense of mystery and suspense. Reread the sentences without the repetition to show the difference.
- discuss the use of the alternatives to “said” and what they convey about the situation and the feelings of the characters.
- select their favourite image from the story and explore how the writer has created the image – for example, through the use of metaphor, rich adjectives, repetition, or the poetic sentence structures (“I can take you no further”). You could record the children’s ideas on a chart to refer back to for their own writing.

Discuss the use of paragraphs to focus on one main idea or action. Reread some pages with more than one paragraph and identify the purpose of each one.

Study the illustrations and discuss how effective they are in helping the reader to visualise the story.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2008*.

Read “The Story of Rona” in *Night is a Blanket* or reread the Ready to Read text *Māui and the Sun* (Purple) and compare them as examples of stories that explain everyday phenomena.

Retell Grandfather’s story using some of the storytelling techniques from the text.

Create a bedtime story or retell a familiar tale together during shared writing, incorporating some examples of the language of storytelling. They may want to share a story told in their family.