The Red Ball
by Renata Hopkins
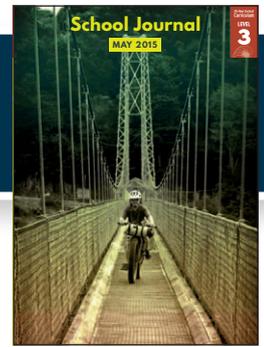
Overview

"The Red Ball" is a contemporary story, with elements of fairy tales and cautionary stories. Students will enjoy reading about a fairy who helps to get rid of a girl's high-achieving sister.

As with many traditional tales, "The Red Ball" incorporates a problem with a test and a dilemma for the main character. Students can innovate to create their own stories with similar structures or plots.

Allow students to skim and then read the story themselves so they can enjoy the plot before analysing it.

Be aware that some students' families may prefer their children not to be exposed to stories that involve magic and a good versus evil plot.

This narrative:

- has an implied message of "be careful what you wish for"
- provides a good model for writing
- has many features that allow students to make connections with their prior knowledge
- provides opportunities to make and justify inferences about the characters' thoughts and actions.

**Texts related by theme**   "Egbert and the Princess: A Fairy Tale" SJ L3 Aug 2013 | "Not So Normal" SJ L3 Sept 2014

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

"It's easy," the girl replied. "Just say these words: *Fairy folk, so wild and free, take my sister away from me.*"

Ida felt a twinge of fear, but she said scornfully, "I don't believe in fairies."

The stranger smiled, although there was nothing friendly about it. "Perhaps I should ask your sister instead," she said.
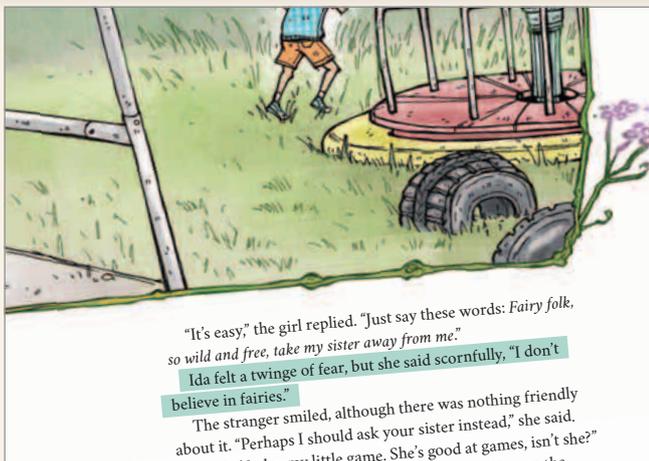
abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

"What's your name?"

Ida jumped. A girl was sitting on a swing. Ida was sure she hadn't been there a moment ago. The girl wore a sparkly, floaty dress, as if she'd been to a costume party. Ida thought she looked too old to play fairies.

"Well?" asked the girl. "Have you forgotten your own name?"

Her eyes were very green.

"Ida," said Ida. She sat on the other swing and pushed off.
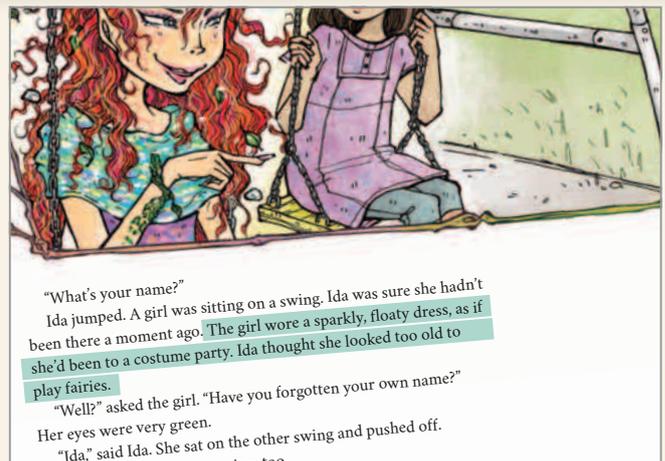
some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

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The fairy girl began to swing, too.

"Is that your sister?" she asked, pointing at May.

The snake in Ida's stomach coiled tight. "Yes," she replied.

"But I wish she wasn't."

The girl's green eyes glittered. "Perhaps you wish she would just …

disappear?" she suggested.

"So? Wishing won't make it happen."

"If you wish in the right way, it could."

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps the students to understand

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation
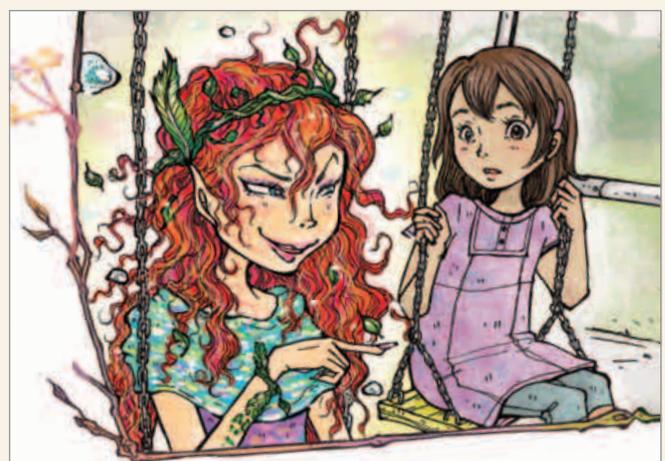
Reading standard: by the end of year 6

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy a modern fairy tale
- To find out what happens when a sister's envy leads her to make a terrible mistake
- To explore the writer's ideas by making comparisons with similar stories.

Possible writing purposes

- To use the text as a model to create a modern fairy tale
- To write a different ending or new chapter to the story
- To write mock-serious safety signs for the playground
- To retell this story or a different familiar fairy tale, particularly for English language learners.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words, including "envy", "bounded", "schedules", "twinge", "scornfully", "retorted", "crossbars", "roundabout", "winding", "clearing", "enchanted", "sneered", "Begone", "treacherous", "imposters", "hesitate", "flinched", "cowered", "clasped"
- The vocabulary of fairy tales: "like a snake made from ice", "dark mood", "like the wind"
- The colloquial expressions: "could take no more", "no doubt about it", "take it all back", "knew in her bones".

Possible supporting strategies

- Identify any words that some students may find challenging and provide opportunities for them to encounter and practise them before reading.
- Create a list of fairy-tale words and phrases that you can introduce if students are not familiar with the genre.
- Identify the colloquial or figurative language and explain these to those students who may need extra support. With students who know other languages, encourage them to think about how idiomatic and figurative language work in those languages.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction,* pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also ESOL Online, Vocabulary, for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Familiarity with fairy-tale language and conventions ("Once upon a time", "happily ever after", "enchanted", "Begone!", bad fairies, magic spells, tests, the narrative voice: "You might think …")
- Knowledge of the metaphor that associates green eyes with jealousy (green-eyed monster)
- Understanding of the ambivalent relationships that siblings can have.

Possible supporting strategies

- After the students have read the story, review their knowledge of fairy tales as a subset of general fiction. Ask them to share the typical features of fairy tales, including the language, settings, characters, and plots. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds could share similar stories and characters from their cultures.
- If necessary, explain the association between green eyes and jealousy.
- If students are unfamiliar with fairy tales, read some as shared reading texts before reading this story. Discuss the structure and language of each tale.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Narrative in a contemporary setting but with fairy-tale features and magical elements
- Straightforward structure and plot
- Use of third person, past tense
- Use of dialogue
- Good versus evil contrast, with the character tested by the "evil" or dark side
- The time and location shift to another world.

Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt the students to make connections to the sibling rivalry, the fairy-tale elements, and the (unstated) theme of being careful about what you wish for.
- Remind them of similar stories (for example, some myths and legends) where a character has to show their skill and intelligence by performing a task or solving a puzzle.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

First reading

- Direct the students to skim the text to establish the setting and to make predictions about the features and structure.
- Prompt them to use the illustrations to identify the fairy-tale elements.
- Have them read the story independently then retell it to a partner.

If the students struggle with this text

- Review the illustrations with the students, prompting them to notice the characterisation and to make connections to similar stories.
- Prompt them to identify the initial problem: that Ida feels jealous of her sister. *What happens next?*
- Support the students to outline the sequence of events, using a graphic organiser or template.
- Discuss causes and effects at each point in the story.

Subsequent readings

The teacher
Ask questions to help students identify why Ida has a problem.
- *What is the relationship between the sisters like?*
- *Reread the simile at the bottom of page 20 ("like a snake made from ice") – is this a good way to describe her feelings?*
- *Why does Ida's action of throwing the ball away surprise both of them?*
- *How does the writer set the scene for what happens next?*

The students:
- make connections between the text and their own experiences to understand how Ida feels
- evaluate the simile "like a snake made from ice" by visualising how envy feels
- use information in the text about the sisters and the word "Finally" to infer that Ida had never expressed her feelings of jealousy like this before
- use information in the last paragraph of page 21 to understand that as well as being glad, Ida still wants to stay with her sister.

The teacher
Ask questions to support students to outline the sequence of events.
- *You know that Ida's problem is her jealousy. How does the girl on the swing offer to solve the problem?*
- *How can you tell Ida has mixed feelings about this? What makes up her mind?*
- *What is the effect of her decision?*
- *For each action or event in the story there is a cause and an effect. What is the effect of May's sudden disappearance?*
- *What does Ida do next?*

For students who find this difficult, you could use a verb story strategy. First, list all the verbs from all or part of the story. Then have the students take turns to use each verb in order to retell the story orally, prompting them as required.

The students:
- identify what the girl offers Ida
- make inferences about her conflicting feelings – feeling glad that she had been mean to May and yet having a sense of responsibility for her welfare
- identify the cause and effect in the story.

The teacher
Ask questions to support the students to identify the moral of the story.
- *What did Ida wish for at the start of the story?*
- *Why did Ida want May back so quickly?*
- *What does this tell you about her feelings for her sister?*
- *How does Ida feel about May in the end?*
- *Apart from simply wanting to write a fun story, what message do you think the writer wants readers to take from the story?*

You could use a three-step interview in order to activate prior knowledge. (For information on three-step interviews, see "Preparing Learners: Activating Prior Knowledge").

The students:
- compare the sisters' relationship at the start and end of the story
- make connections between the story and their own experiences of changeable feelings for a sibling or close friend to infer that a love–hate relationship is not uncommon in friendships and between siblings
- infer that the moral or message could be "be careful what you wish for". (However, they may also come up with other less obvious interpretations.)

GIVE FEEDBACK
- *The chart you made was a useful way to follow the sequence of events.*
- *You knew that jealousy is often known as "the green-eyed monster", and you connected that with the description of the fairy. From your responses, I can see how you figured out that she was a bad fairy.*
- *When you reread the last line, you inferred that the sisters could both remember the fairy events. That's an interesting point of comparison with some other fairy stories in which people don't remember what happened to them.*

METACOGNITION
- What kind of prior knowledge helped you understand this story? Were you surprised that it turned into a fairy story? Why or why not?
- When we read stories like this, we have to "suspend disbelief". What do you think that means? Is it something you notice yourself doing?

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from "The Red Ball"	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

	IDEAS
	Writers sometimes find ideas by innovating on another writer's story. By changing the setting, characters, or aspects of the plot, a story can be changed into something new.
		Prompt students to discuss where they get ideas for stories. Once again, you could use a three-step interview to involve all students and activate prior knowledge.
		• *How do you come up with ideas?*
		• *How can other stories trigger an idea for your writing?*
		• *What do you do if your mind is blank?*
		Model ways you could innovate on "The Red Ball".
		• *I'm thinking of ways to use this story as a starting point for new ideas. These are two ideas I've had.*
		  – *I could write another chapter with May as the main character, using magic to help Ida get better at sports.*
		  – *Imagine Ida chose the wrong girl: I can write about what happened next.*
		• *Can you think of some more?*

Once upon a time – but not a long time ago or very far away – there lived two sisters. … Fairy folk, so wild and free, take my sister away from me. … Ida found herself in a forest.	**GENRE-SPECIFIC FEATURES** *Writers play with their readers by using features from a familiar genre or type of story in an unexpected way.*	Ask questions to support students to use specific features in their writing • *As you develop your ideas, how do you make decisions about the way you will communicate them to your readers?* • *What is the impact you want to have? How will the features you choose help achieve this?* • *Will you give your readers some surprises, or will you "play it straight"?* • *How can you adapt fairy-tale features to fit a modern-day story?*
And what then? Were the sisters always good to each other? Did they find no reason to envy each other's gifts for as long as they lived? Did they live happily ever after? Of course not.	**ENDINGS** *There are many ways of ending a story, including:* • *an open ending, where the reader has to imagine how the story worked out* • *a fairy-tale ending, in which the good characters live happily ever after* • *a satisfactory ending, where the loose ends are tied up and the reader feels satisfied with the outcome* • *a surprising or contradictory ending, where the story doesn't quite fit with what the reader expected.*	Direct the students to reread the ending of "The Red Ball" and research other stories. • *Using other writers' ideas is a great strategy as long as you don't simply copy them. How have you made the story your own?* • *From your research, choose one or two kinds of endings to try out.* • *How hard or easy is it to give your story a different ending?* • *How does the ending help you communicate your message to your readers?* **GIVE FEEDBACK** • *Your brainstorm had some great ideas, and I see you've chosen three to tease out some more. That's a useful strategy because it helps you to choose the best idea.* • *Your story started out as a simple narrative, then you added some sci-fi features. I didn't expect to suddenly be in outer space, but it works really well. Surprising your readers like that helps to keep them interested and engaged.*

METACOGNITION
- What ideas did you discard before you settled on this one? Why was this idea better than the others?
- What part of the writing process do you enjoy the most? Which part is hardest or least fun? Why is that?
- How have you used illustrations to help communicate your ideas? What impact or effect did you want to achieve?

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions