



### Overview

*Breathless* is a fictional, first-person narrative about a boy who suffers from asthma. His friends use humour and adventure to help him cope with the disappointment of not being able to play an important rugby game because of his illness.

This is a rich text that you can revisit many times for different purposes.

### Key competencies

Key competencies explored through this story include: relating to others, managing self, and participating and contributing.

**Texts related by theme** "Clowning Around" SJ L3 August 2015

### Themes and ideas

Themes and ideas explored in this story include:

- the importance of friendship and loyalty between friends
- how shared challenges can strengthen a team bond
- the moral ambiguities associated with lying and breaking rules
- dealing with the debilitating effects of a chronic illness, such as asthma
- coping with making mistakes
- humour's role in helping people deal with difficulties
- the storytelling technique of using shifts in time.

## Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

might not have been seen.  
The man groaning was Darrell. Everybody knew Darrell. He had wide shoulders, a small head, and mean little eyes. The skinny winger was his younger brother, and people said Darrell was the reason the winger had learnt to run so fast. Darrell was groaning because he was in the club's weights room. He had chosen a weight so heavy it was nearly killing him. I think it was his choice of weight that saved our lives.  
"Oi, you!"  
"Run!" Asafo shouted.

Some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information



The "careful way" meant running through a field. It involved climbing two fences and disturbing three dogs. It was getting cold, but we didn't complain. Lotu spent the whole time crouching in the shadows to spot like a goofy

Some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

## Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

From the outside, the Bay Tigers' clubrooms were...  
backdoor was unlocked. We thought that was just our good luck. We tiptoed across the floor, trying not to make the floorboards creak.  
Then we heard the noise. It was sort of like a groan, the kind you hear in a horror movie. We all froze. There was another sound, like someone taking a long, slow breath. Then the groaning again.  
"Oh, no!" Lotu said, louder than he should have. If he'd stayed quiet, we might not have been seen.  
The man groaning was Darrell. Everybody knew Darrell. He had wide shoulders, a small head, and mean little eyes. The skinny winger was his younger brother, and people said Darrell was the reason the winger had learnt to run so fast. Darrell was groaning because he was in the club's weights room. He had chosen a weight so heavy it was nearly killing him.

Sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

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

## Making meaning: Supports and challenges

### VOCABULARY:

- Possibly unfamiliar words and topic-specific vocabulary, including “asthma attack”, “no-look pass”, “winger”, “under the posts”, “oxygen mask”, “no exceptions”, “takeaways”, “pastor”, “trophy”, “mascot”, “sideline”, “jersey”, “tingle”, “speeds up your pulse”, “reflector strips”, “disturbing”, “goofy Samoan ninja”, “tiptoed”, “floorboards”, “groaning”, “weights”, “barbell”, “barefoot”, “massive”, “shove”, “multi-coloured Afro”
- Samoan words and names: “pālagi” (pah-langee), “Asafo” (ah-sah-fo), “Lotu” (law-to), “Tala” (tar-lar), “Rupi” (roo-pee), “Tesa” (teh-sah)
- Colloquial language: “no big deal”, “take a look”, “all good”, “because I’m a pro”, “Oi, you!”
- The use of contractions and grammatically incorrect sentences in the boys’ conversations: “‘Couldn’t find them,’ I said”, “‘where’re”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary that may be challenging for the students. Pay attention to the correct pronunciation of the Samoan names and words.

Before and after reading, discuss the colloquial language. English language learners may benefit from exploring and comparing examples of words with similar meanings in their first language.

*The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

The grammatically incorrect sentences and contractions may be challenging for some English language learners. Consider discussing these with students before they begin reading. Encourage them to talk about why the author decided to include this language (that is, to create authentic character voices).

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Understanding of how friends support each other when someone is feeling low
- Awareness of the ambiguity of personal value systems/moral standards – with everyone choosing different ways of reacting and interpreting what behaviours are right and wrong for different circumstances
- Some awareness of the chronic illness asthma, its treatment, and its impact on people’s lives
- Some knowledge of competitive team sports, particularly rugby
- Some understanding of the supports offered in different communities (sports communities, cultural communities, etc.)
- Awareness that authors can strategically manipulate features of narrative writing for a specific purpose, such as using shifts in time to heighten intrigue and provide important background information without distracting from the main flow of the story.

### Possible supporting strategies

Help the students make connections between the themes in the story and their own experiences of supporting friends, or of being supported during a difficult time, such as an illness.

Some students may have direct experience of themselves, or a family member, suffering from chronic asthma. Encourage them to discuss what it is like for them when a relative is chronically ill or how they themselves cope with chronic illness, including how people treat them.

Introduce the concept of personal value systems by facilitating a discussion about lying. Encourage students to share times when they have lied, the reasons they decided to lie, and whether or not they think it was the right thing to do.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Narrative text, told in the first person
- Engaging hook in the introduction
- Mostly sequenced events, although for the first half of the story, there are time shifts on each page (with most shifts clearly indicated by time sequence markers, for example, “I came home from hospital on Thursday night”, “The game was two months ago”)
- Some long action sequences
- Dialogue that provides insight into each of the boys’ characters
- Mostly past tense – though present tense used for comments and responses to events and actions: “It’s hard to steer a shopping trolley from the outside. It’s impossible from the inside”, “I love adventure”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Read the ‘hook’ together as a class. Discuss how it sets up the reader and motivates them to read the rest of the text to find out what happens, as well as letting the reader know that the story is going to jump around in time. It might be helpful to develop a chart together that highlights the structural features of the text.

Encourage the students to form opinions of the characters based on the dialogue in the text. Discuss how inferences can be made about how a character is feeling based on the language they use when they are speaking.

Scan the text with the students to identify the time shifts backwards and forwards. It may help to chart these shifts with the time indicator phrases or words. Discuss why an author might choose to use this technique.

Some students may benefit from reading along with the audio for the first reading.



## Possible curriculum contexts

**HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION** (Personal Health and Physical Development)

Level 3 – Personal growth and development: Identify factors that affect personal, physical, social, and emotional growth and develop skills to manage changes.

**ENGLISH** (Listening, Reading, and Viewing)

Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

**SOCIAL SCIENCES** (Social Studies)

Level 3: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.

**SOCIAL SCIENCES** (Social Studies)

Level 3: Understand how cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes.

### Possible inquiry questions

- How do I support my friends and team members?
- How does it feel to be part of a social group?
- Is it ever OK to lie or break rules? How do I decide when it's OK for me to lie or break rules?
- What can I do to make myself feel better when I have made a mistake?
- What would it feel like to live with an illness like asthma or diabetes?

### Possible reading purposes

- To find out what happens when an adventure doesn't run exactly to plan
- To see how a humorous event can help a boy forget about his difficulties with asthma
- To identify some of the effects of living with asthma
- To explore the importance of friends when dealing with an ongoing health condition
- To identify the particular techniques that an author can use to create a humorous, interesting story
- To identify the moral decisions raised in the story and the ambiguities of those morals.

### Possible writing purposes

- To describe what it would be like to live with a chronic illness
- To persuade readers of the important role of friendships and team bonding
- To use humour to engage readers in a story or recount.



The Writing Hub

## Instructional focus – Reading

Use this text to develop the students' metacognition. At all stages, encourage the students to vocalise their ideas and thought processes, supporting each other to justify their ideas with reasoning.

### Introducing the text: Paving the way for successful readers

#### Before reading

Note: This story contains multiple shifts in time. Some students may have difficulty with the associated changes in tense and setting.

- Introduce *Breathless* and share the purpose for reading, briefly explaining that it is a fictional story about a boy who suffers from asthma and can't play an important rugby game. Tell the students that, for this first reading, they will focus on enjoying the story and making sure they have a good understanding of what they are reading. Because the story jumps right into the action, you may wish to provide a brief synopsis to set the scene prior to the first reading. This may be particularly helpful for English language learners.
- Use a group discussion to draw out background knowledge about the themes and ideas listed on page 1.
- Establish a strong link between the students as readers and the author by discussing what the author's purpose might be in writing this text (for example, *to share an experience that contains a message – the importance of friendship and the variable dynamics of lying*). Challenge the students to justify each idea they present.
- Draw upon the students' background knowledge to develop a brief explanation of asthma as a medical condition.
- Elicit from the students what they know about regular narrative structure and, as a result, what they might expect to encounter in this story.
- Point out the changes in time and setting across the story, and discuss possible reasons for these changes and the effect they have.
- The text includes some Samoan words and names. In particular, introduce the main characters of Asafo and Lotu, making sure that the students become familiar with these names and will be able to recognise them as they read the story.
- Some students may not be familiar with the rules and positions associated with rugby. Facilitate a class discussion where students who are familiar with the sport can help others understand the basics.
- Explore with the students some useful strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words or ideas that they might encounter as they read the text.

## First reading

- Simply read the story through for the enjoyment of discovering what it is about. Some students may be able to read the whole story independently. Others may benefit from share-reading some of the text with you, following the text with their eyes.
- Some students may need to silently read the text in chunked sections and discuss what they're reading with a partner or whole group (think-pair-share). Suggested chunks: pages 2–4, 5–6, 7–9, and 10–12.
- Use this time to listen in to student discussions and get a sense of how well the students are reading and understanding the text.
- If you are unsure about a particular student's reading and understanding, ask him or her to quietly read you a few lines and have a brief discussion to establish how well that student is coping with the text challenges. This may be a good opportunity to provide specific feedback and prompt the student to articulate a specific strategy they have used.

### If the students struggle with this text

Remind students of strategies that are particularly useful on a first reading, such as reading on, rereading, and making connections with their prior knowledge. Use one of the following approaches, depending on students' needs:

- Use group discussions around the key themes and ideas listed on page 1 to draw out more specific background information that relates to the story.
- Instigate a discussion that makes connections between the students' own experiences and the ideas presented in the text. Where necessary, prompt the students' thinking with questions. *Can you think of a time when you or someone you knew couldn't do something because of an illness? Have you ever felt better because of something your friends did for you?*
- Use discussion to draw out key words from the text that can be seen as useful clues to determine what the story is about.
- Encourage the students to make links to other similar texts they have read.
- Share-read pages 2 and 3 and then pause to discuss how the author has set up the story.
- As you read, model 'pondering' questions about the text and searching for information or ideas relating to those questions.
- Deal with specific vocabulary challenges before reading.
- Use the audio as necessary to support students' during this first reading.

## Subsequent readings

Use subsequent readings to focus on particular themes and ideas described in the text. Support the students through modelling, thinking aloud, prompting, and explaining, to link and synthesise ideas across the text in order to interpret those ideas and the text's themes. See suggestions for possible reading purposes on page 3.

- Model or prompt the students to make inferences and think critically about a particular theme from the story. If modelling, use thinking aloud to show the students how you integrate ideas and information from across the story. If prompting, remind them to use their own experiences and what they have read so far, or what they know about stories in general, to help them find the ideas that will support their thinking. For example:
  - Morals and the ambiguity of moral choices: Ask the students to read the story again, looking for different instances where characters lied or broke rules (including the younger brother, Tala). Then ask them to discuss what they would have done in each situation and why. Once they have developed a solid idea of the narrator's morals and why the narrator might be comfortable lying or breaking the rules in these situations, ask them go back to the start and consider the statement "Going to hospital is no big deal to me" on page 3. The students could discuss whether this might be another lie. Encourage them to support their opinions with what they have learnt about the narrator from their analysis of the story.
  - The importance of friends: Prompt a discussion about how Lotu and Asafo cheered up the narrator and why they chose this particular adventure. Then encourage the students to consider what they would do to help cheer up friends who were unhappy.
  - Making mistakes: As a group, discuss how it feels to make mistakes and possible strategies for dealing with and rectifying them.
  - How to develop and strengthen team bonds: Have the students consider their own experiences of being part of a team, prompting them to think about how that team is strengthened by shared experiences.
- Encourage students from other cultures to share their opinions on the choices made by the characters in the story. How do the characters' morals compare with their own?
- Draw out the students' understanding of the author's messages. What does the author want us to know about living with asthma? Why did he make the adventure humorous?
- As a group, evaluate the actions of the characters in this story, including Tala and Darren, and look for the students to challenge each other and support their opinions with examples from the text and their own experiences.
- Return to the chunked sections you used in the first reading, or ask the students to chunk the text into chapters, and have them create appropriate headings for each chapter. Prompt them to justify how their chosen headings support the reading.
- Encourage the students to identify the shifts in time (flashbacks) and the related tense changes throughout the first half of the story. Ask them to consider why the author chose to make each change. Ask the students to consider using this writing technique in their own work. If the students don't identify the shifts in time and place, scaffold them to identify the sections where changes take place. Why are these sections difficult? Why might the author have chosen to change the tense here?
- Support the students to identify and explain strategies they use to deal with reading challenges, such as complex sentences, or to access the story's ideas and themes.

## Monitoring the impact of teaching

As the students read and discuss the text, take particular note of the following:

- Can they identify and discuss the main themes of the text?
- Can they use strategies independently for:
  - working out unknown vocabulary?
  - making sense of ideas when meaning has broken down?
  - making connections to their personal experiences?
  - making inferences about the characters' actions and decisions?
- With support, can the students:
  - link ideas and information across the text?
  - use these ideas to draw conclusions about the characters' actions and decisions?
- Do they transfer skills and knowledge from your modelling to their reading?
- Do they use evidence from the text to explain their responses?
- Do they transfer features of good writing shown in this text to their own writing?
- Can they articulate and justify their use of particular features in their writing?

## Providing feedback and supporting metacognition

Provide explicit feedback and support the students to develop their metacognition. Both strategies support students' growing independence and confidence as proficient readers. An example of each is provided below.

### Providing feedback

*I noticed you went back to page 4 to establish that the rugby game happened two months ago. The time shifts are a bit tricky in this story, so well done. Remember that rereading an earlier section can clarify confusion in any kind of text.*

### Supporting metacognition

*How did you know that the boy wanted to be just like his friends? Show us the parts of the story that helped you to reach this conclusion.*

## Suggestions for writing instruction

Students may choose to:

- recount a personal experience (either an event or an interesting moment in time), using flashbacks and an engaging hook in the introduction. Remind the students to include enough descriptions to keep their readers engaged
- prepare the story as a readers' theatre to present to their classmates
- retell the story as a graphic novel
- write a moment-in-time description of:
  - Darrell's perspective of the boys coming into the clubrooms and the succeeding chase
  - Tala's perspective of his brother lying.

Scaffold the students to build on their writing strengths, giving stronger support where needed and reducing it as the students become confident in using and developing the strategies themselves. Help them to see the connections between their reading strategies and their writing strategies (for example, implying as writer, inferring as a reader). Also, it might be helpful to revisit the particular features of the text that the author has used to relate this story. Allow plenty of time (with agreed targets) for the students to think about, plan, rework, and polish their writing.

Writing standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks