

# Dangerous Games

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## Overview

This TSM contains information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The materials provide multiple opportunities for revisiting the text several times.

After successfully capturing Mirtha Dare-Sweetly in “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” (*School Journal*, Level 3, May 2017), super-sleuth kid-detective Minnie Sharp is back on the trail. In “Dangerous Games”, a masked protester has interrupted a television broadcast and a bodyguard is in critical care after being poisoned with a strange new bacteria. Is Mirtha Dare-Sweetly at it again? Can Minnie’s contacts at Topplabs help? Can Doctor Topp be trusted, or does she have something to hide? It’s up to Minnie Sharp to find out.

This story:

- references an earlier Minnie Sharp story
- has fast-paced action and examples of quick thinking
- uses a “detective noir” voice
- uses dialogue to keep the story moving
- is set in a futuristic society on Mars.

A PDF of the text is available at [www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz](http://www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz)

Texts related by theme “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” SJ L3 May 2017

## Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

We have retained the links to the National Standards while a new assessment and reporting system is being developed. For more information on assessing and reporting in the post-National Standards era, see: <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-and-reporting-guide>

I go over and fish the mask from the bin. “Doctor Topp, an explanation, please.”  
Doctor Topp groans.  
“You were the masked protester,” I say.  
“I was,” she admits. “Someone had to do something! Someone has to protect this planet – but I’m a respected scientist. I have to disguise myself.”  
“So just how radical was this protest?” I ask. “You have access to the toxic bacteria. And you got very close to Bertha’s water ...”  
Doctor Topp looks snocked. “Minnie! You can’t be suggesting ...”  
The prison visitor photos start flashing up on the transmitter screen. Bertha is in one. Interesting. And a man I’m sure I’ve seen before – but where?  
I recall the on-stage tussle between Rio and the protester and Rio’s sunglasses falling off. Just for a moment, I saw his eyes.  
I zoom in on the visitor’s face. It’s definitely him. Rio. But the name under the photo? Dario Dare.  
None of this is making sense. My imagination is failing. Maybe the chief is right. I’ve been working too hard. I need a break. I should go on holiday, see my family ...

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students’ understanding

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I zoom in on the visitor’s face. It’s definitely him. Rio. But the name under the photo? Dario Dare.  
None of this is making sense. My imagination is failing. Maybe the chief is right. I’ve been working too hard. I need a break. I should go on holiday, see my family ...  
Family. That’s it!  
“Doctor Topp, is there another bacteria that causes instant coughing?”  
“Absolutely.” Topp’s answer changes everything.  
“We need to get to the hospital – fast!”

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

She’s wearing thick glasses, and her hair’s bleached blonde – but I know who that is: Mirtha Dare-Sweetly, the criminal scientist who froze her Topplabs colleague to stop him from protesting against her brother’s tour business, which was going to destroy Mars’s precious cave ecosystem. The criminal scientist who I thought had been jailed for twenty-five years.  
How had she escaped?  
Mirtha adjusts her microphone and fills her glass of water. At last, she takes a deep breath. She beams. “Hello, everyone! My name is Bertha Dare-Sweetly.”  
Wait. Bertha?  
“I know my family is unpopular here on Mars,” she continues, “but I assure you, I never work with my half-brother, Dario Dare, or my twin sister, Mirtha.”  
Interesting!  
“My consortium is planning the solar system’s first-ever low-gravity games.”

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)

cave three years ago. When we realised how dangerous it was, we sealed it in a vault. Only two of us had the key: me and –”  
“Mirtha?” I supply.  
Doctor Topp nods.  
It’s starting to make sense. Mirtha stole and hid the bacteria while she worked here. Then, from her prison cell on Earth, she hired someone to poison Bertha. Mirtha’s in jail, after all, while her sister runs a successful business. A classic case of sibling jealousy. But whom did she hire?  
“Doctor Topp, could I use your transmitter to call Earth?”  
When the interplanetary corrections department answers my call, I tell them I need the identity of every person who has visited Mirtha Dare-Sweetly since she was imprisoned.  
I hold while they consult their database.  
As I wait, I spot something in Doctor Topp’s rubbish bin. The red mask.  
Incriminating evidence if ever I saw it.

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

## VOCABULARY

### Possible supporting strategies

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “tournament”, “bleached”, “ecosystem”, “assure”, “canyon”, “merely”, “vault”, “transmitter”, “incriminating evidence”, “disguise”, “radical”, “tussle”, “despised”
- Hospital-related terms, including “paramedics”, “toxic bacteria”, “life-support machine”, “antidote”
- Broadcasting terms, including “Breaking news!”, “cross live”
- Work-related terms, including “colleague”, “off-duty”, “charge”, “leave”
- Some uncommon verbs, including “crows”, “flock”, “lunges”, “unfolding”, “whirls”
- Collocations, including “bleached blonde”, “criminal scientist”, “precious environments”, “a natural wonder”, “classic case”, “sibling jealousy”, “respected scientist”, “sole boss”, “public revenge”, “sibling loyalty”
- Some unusual names of organisations and places, including “Mars Games Consortium”, “Valles Marineris”, “Interplanetary Corrections Department”
- Some idioms, including “out cold”
- Adverbs, including “obviously”, “lately”, “furthermore”, “luckily”
- An object-case pronoun “whom”
- Words with more than one meaning, including “cases”, “beams”, “figure”, “cries”, “notice”, “charge”, “sole”
- Identify any words that some students may find challenging and, if appropriate, provide opportunities for them to encounter and practise them before reading.
- Prompt prior knowledge of strategies to work out unknown words, such as slowing down, thinking about the surrounding information, inferring meaning from the context, and using parts of the words they recognise.
- Collocations are two or more words that often go together. Some of the collocations in the story will be unfamiliar even for first-language speakers of English, for example, “sibling jealousy”. Others will come naturally to native English speakers because we learn to speak and store vocabulary in “chunks”. In this story, the writer has played with opposite collocations for effect (“criminal scientist” / “respected scientist” and “sibling rivalry” / “sibling loyalty”).
- Explore the idea that many adverbs are formed by adding -ly to the end of an adjective. When the adjective ends in -y, you need to change the “y” to an “i” before adding “ly”
- Words that have more than one meaning can be confusing for English language learners. Often they will only know the more common meaning of a word. Discuss alternative meanings and help them to use context clues to predict the word’s meaning in this text.
- *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

### Possible supporting strategies

- Some knowledge of what detectives do and how they work
- Some understanding of bacteria – what it is, how it grows, and what it does
- Some knowledge of paramedics and hospitals
- Some understanding of protests and the concept of “radical protest”
- Some familiarity with noir genre detective stories
- Before introducing “Dangerous Games”, read the first Minnie Sharp detective story “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” (*School Journal*, Level 3, May 2017). Discuss the potential uses of bacteria the Topplabs scientists are exploring and ways that bacteria can harm or enhance human life.
- Explore some examples of environmental protests and the concept of radical protests. The students could place various protests on a continuum from least radical to most radical.
- Prompt the students to make connections to scenes they have seen on TV or in movies, for example, of life-support machines in a hospital.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

### Possible supporting strategies

- Several references to characters and events from a previous Minnie Sharp story
- A futuristic sci-fi detective story
- Short, very pacy paragraphs
- Short staccato sentences in keeping with the noir flavour
- A first-person narrator with a distinct (noir) way of speaking
- Use of dialogue, some of which is unattributed, to keep the story moving
- Before reading “Dangerous Games”, have the students read “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” (*School Journal*, Level 3, May 2017). Build up a character profile of key characters.
- Discuss common characteristics of detective stories, for example, a red herring (a suspect who is a good match for the crime but is innocent), a double identity (someone who goes by another name or is wearing a disguise), clues, and hidden motives.
- Have pairs of students identify what makes Minnie’s voice distinct, for example, the use of short phrases (“It’s definitely h.”), occasional unusual use of word order (“His name, I’m told, is Rio.”), and repetition of key words (Interesting).
- Remind students of clues they can use to identify who is speaking when dialogue is unattributed, for example, by looking at the text that comes before or after the spoken text.



Sounds and Words

## Possible curriculum contexts

### ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Language Features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

Level 3 – Processes and strategies: Integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies with developing confidence to identify, form, and express ideas.

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

### ENGLISH (Writing)

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

Level 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

### Possible first reading purpose

- To find out how Minnie Sharp solves another mystery on Mars.

### Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To identify characteristics of detective stories, including the use of twists and turns that keep the reader guessing
- To examine Minnie’s particular way of speaking and how this adds to the story
- To evaluate the impact of using precise verbs to describe actions.

### Possible writing purposes

- To create a plot for a detective story
- To write an action story that uses precise verbs and short dialogue
- To write a comic piece using a Minnie-Sharp-style voice.



# Instructional focus – Reading

**English** Level 3 – Language Features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts; Processes and strategies: Integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies with developing confidence to identify, form, and express ideas; Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

## First reading

- Before reading, spend time familiarising the students with key characters and events from “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” (*School Journal*, Level 3, May 2017). Build up character profiles of Minnie, Dr Topp, Mirtha Dare-Sweetly, and her half-brother.
- Share the purpose for reading with the students. Provide opportunities for the students to read without interruption and follow the case to its dramatic conclusion.
- Ask students to note sections they found challenging or that they had to reread.
- Have pairs of students discuss which parts of the story they enjoyed and whether they had guessed who the masked protester was.

## If the students struggle with this text

- Prompt students to use the illustrations as well as words to support their understanding.
- Have students read parts of the dialogue aloud in pairs to become familiar with Minnie’s way of talking.
- Get pairs or groups of students to devise questions for each other using the question starters “who, what, where, when, and why”.
- Give pairs or small groups of students selected illustrations. Have them talk about what is happening in each scene and who each character is.

**Subsequent readings** How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. Where possible, have the students work in pairs to discuss the questions and prompts in this section.

### The teacher

Ask the students to identify ways that the writer keeps the reader guessing.

- *What examples can you find of Minnie heading down a wrong path while trying to solve the mystery? How do we find out about her hunches?*
- *See if you can find any hidden motives in the story, for example, for Dr Topp’s actions? With your partner, discuss why motives are important in stories.*

In pairs, the students could complete a story map that identifies the characteristics of detective stories present in “Dangerous Games”.

### The teacher

Prompt the students to explore how the author uses dialogue.

- *What helps you identify the speaker if the author doesn’t tell you who is talking?*
- *Does the dialogue tell you what is happening?*
- *Could this story be told without dialogue? How would it be different?*

If students are having difficulty identifying speakers in unattributed dialogue, take a section of text with dialogue, copy it, and cut it into separate paragraphs. In pairs, have the students reassemble the text in the correct order, then compare their text with another pair’s. If there are differences, they can discuss them and try to reach agreement on the correct order. This helps the students to notice clues and connections. When they have finished, they can compare their text with the original version.

### The teacher

Clarify that the students understand what verbs are. Give pairs of students sentences from the text and have them circle the verbs. Choose sentences with interesting or precise verbs, for example: “Breaking news!” crows the presenter.

Have students discuss the effectiveness of the verbs at helping the reader to visualise what is happening.

### The students:

- identify and evaluate the various devices that the author uses to create a sense of mystery
- make comparisons with similar devices in “Who Froze Farrell Flint?”
- in pairs, identify the characteristics of detective stories in the text and use these to complete a story map.

### The students:

- identify who is speaking by using their knowledge of the conventions of writing dialogue, such as a new line for a new speaker, opening and closing speech marks to signify the words being spoken, and use of present tense
- reread sections of unattributed dialogue to get the meaning and identify the speaker if they are unsure of who is speaking
- visualise the events that are conveyed through dialogue.

### The students:

- identify and evaluate key verbs and discuss their impact
- identify that some of the verbs relate to animals, for example, “crow” and “flock”
- make inferences and draw conclusions about why the author has used verbs that relate to animals.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *The way you answered your partner’s “who, what, where, when, and why” questions showed that you have kept up with all the twists and turns of the story. I think you’d make a pretty good detective! Asking ourselves questions like that when we read can help us to keep track of what is happening.*

### METACOGNITION

- *Is Minnie Sharp a comic character or a serious character? What makes you think that?*



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; Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

## Text excerpts from “Dangerous Games”

Page 8

... “Fine! You’re right – but you’ll never catch me!” She leaps for the door.

Doctor Topp dives after her and throws powder in her face. Bertha collapses, coughing.

## Examples of text characteristics

### PRECISE, ACTIVE VERBS

*Using precise verbs can add power and pace to writing, giving stories a sense of action and high drama.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)


Give groups of students sets of phrases and have them discuss whether the verbs used are “precise” or not, for example:

- she sat down / she threw herself down
- she reached for the door / she lunged for the door
- he called out / he screamed
- the cat looked at me / the cat glared at me
- they ran down the street / they stampeded down the street.

Give pairs or groups of students photocopies of sections of text and have them circle the verbs. Ask them to look for examples of precise verbs.

Give pairs of students a piece of writing and ask them to replace some of the verbs with precise verbs. Pairs can compare their altered text with that of another pair and together evaluate the impact of using precise verbs in writing.

Have the students write their own action or detective story. When they have finished, have them review their writing paying particular attention to the verbs they have used. Ask them to consider if they might replace any of those verbs with more precise ones.

 The students could use Google Docs for this task.

Page 4

I introduce myself. Then I say, “I believe that Rio was poisoned. Furthermore, I believe that poison was meant for you, Bertha.”

“What?” she gasps. “Why?”

A very good question, but before I have time to answer, a doctor enters. “We have test results. Rio’s body is under attack from a strange, new bacteria.”

### DIALOGUE

*In writing, dialogue can be used to move the action along. Using unattributed dialogue can speed up the action, add interest, and stop writing from becoming repetitive.*

Explain that using dialogue can speed up the pace of what is happening, especially when phrases are short and to the point.

- *How does this dialogue keep the story moving along? Which parts are important to the plot? Which parts help us to get to know a character better?*
- *Did you notice the way the writer gets straight to the point with Minnie’s spoken dialogue? What effect does this have on the pace of the story? Can you find any spoken dialogue that is not directly related to the plot?*

Have the students change a section or sections of their writing so that part of the story is told using dialogue. Discuss the changes with a partner to decide if the new version is more effective.

Page 7

I zoom in on the face. It’s definitely him. But the name under the photo? Dario Dare.

None of this is making sense. Now my imagination is failing. Maybe the chief is right. I’ve been working too hard. I need a break. I should go on holiday, see my family ...

Family. That’s it!

“Doctor Topp, is there a bacteria that causes instant coughing?”

“Absolutely.”

Topp’s answer changes everything. We need to get to the hospital – fast!

### VOICE

*Voice is the characteristic speech and thinking patterns of the narrator of a story.*

Discuss the characteristics of Minnie’s way of speaking, for example, the use of short phrases (“It’s definitely him.”), occasional unusual use of word order (“His name, I’m told, is Rio.”), and repetition of key words (“Interesting”).

- *Is there any difference between Minnie’s spoken dialogue and her inner dialogue (thoughts)? What effect does this have on our impression of Minnie?*
- *Is Minnie’s voice consistent throughout the story? What about in “Who Froze Farrell Flint”?*
- *How does Minnie’s way of speaking relate to her character? How does it enhance the story?*

Have the students write a short addition to the story as if it were told by Minnie.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve included lots of dialogue in your story, but sometimes I got a bit lost as to who was speaking. How about getting someone else to have a read to see whether you need to provide some more clues for your readers.*

### METACOGNITION

- *How do you write a good detective story? Can you apply those same ideas to other types of writing? How?*