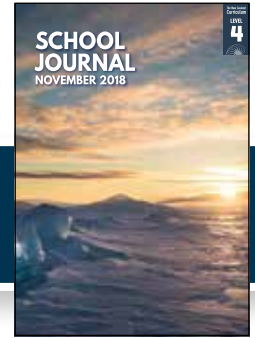


How to Be Normal

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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 material provides many opportunities for revisiting the text.

Charley is working hard at being “normal”. Then she won’t be noticed by her classmates, leaving her free to focus on what really matters: her drawings and her dreams. Charley is acutely sensitive about her place in class; even crossing the room to reach her desk is a source of anxiety and stress. And then there’s the new girl, who is disrupting Charley’s efforts to be normal. This sensitive portrayal of social anxiety challenges readers to think deeply about the different ways people experience the world.

This story:

- has themes related to social anxiety, isolation, and aloneness
- invites readers to empathise with a complex character
- is told in the third person in the present tense, with a narrative voice shaped by the inner world of the central character
- contains some unattributed dialogue
- has an unresolved ending that some readers will find challenging.

A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme

“Six” SJ L3 May 2016 | “By the River” SJ L4 Nov 2016 | “King Street Bridge” SJ L4 Oct 2013

Text characteristics from the year 8 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>

kids have done the same. She’s improving herself. This week, she’s fixing her habit of being back at her desk too soon. It’s unnecessary, and it singles her out. Once Charley’s made herself less weird in every way, the others won’t notice her. Then she can concentrate on what’s important: her drawings and her dreams. Last week, she taught herself to eat apples without chomping. Already she’s feeling more relaxed.

The bell rings, but she’s feeling good. Things are always better when you have a plan. She counts the seconds on her fingers and watches the others go inside. After thirty seconds, Charley stands and brushes herself off. She wants to jog but forces herself to walk. When she gets nearer to the classroom, she sees the door’s shut and walks quicker. Now she can see through the windows: they’re all at their desks. Her heart pounds.

elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas

“If you need first aid, go to the office,” Mr Bennett says with careful patience.
“Can someone come with me?”
“No.”

The door opens and shuts. There’s a muffled laugh as a boy pulls his chair back and sits down with his friends. Sounds like Flynn. Charley made good progress while the others were watching the micro-drama between Michaela and Mr Bennett, but now she feels their eyes swivelling back to her.

“Maybe Charley should apologise?” says Trinity.
Charley’s at her desk, finally. Her chair scrapes when she pulls it out, but that’s fine. It’s over.

worse than Charley. She’s far from normal and she’s extremely short L...
Charley needs to draw a line down the middle of her page before she can start.
The page needs to be divided into columns, but she can’t do it with Amy in her face.
Amy makes a choking noise, then speaks up. “Don’t be a sook, Michaela.”

complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments

through water. One is part of a herd with a foal by its side. Each horse has a different marking on its face. She shades in their muscles and gives them little patches of shine on their hooves. After a while, she feels better. Charley’s secret is that she’s part horse. Not in an awful, childish way, or really, it’s not as childish as it sounds. It’s just that her soul is like a horse’s soul.

She looks down and realises that one of the drawings is the best she’s done in her life. It’s the horse in the forest glade, a scene she’s drawn more times than she can count – but in this one, she’s captured the animal’s essence.

are and how they should be. She needs to show it to somebody right now. She might never draw anything this good again.

Charley stands up, holding the picture, and looks around. The librarian who usually looks at her drawings is helping some kid in the reference section, and it’s a sunny day. Everyone’s outside. Charley’s out the door and across the field before she knows it.

Amy hasn’t moved from her spot in front of the tree. She’s reading. She puts her book down and looks at Charley’s picture a moment before taking it. “Wow. That’s amazing,” she says. “Thanks so much.” She runs a finger lightly over the horse’s back and down the

sentences that vary in length, including long, complex sentences that contain a lot of information

“OK.”
“So, look, Amy. I don’t need anyone to stick up for me, ever. Especially not you.”
Amy looks surprised. “Um, sure. OK.”
“Yeah. Well.” Charley walks off to go sit in the library.

She draws horses. She draws horse after horse. Some are in forest glades or wading through water. One is part of a herd with a foal by its side. Each horse has a different marking on its face. She shades in their muscles and gives them little patches of shine on their hooves. Al...
Not in an awful, childish way, or really, it’s not as childish as it sounds. It’s just that her soul is like a horse’s soul.

Charley’s secret is that she’s part horse.
She looks down and realises that one of the drawings is the best she’s done in her life. It’s the horse in the forest glade, a scene she’s drawn more times than she can count – but in this one, she’s captured the animal’s essence. It looks right at her with real intelligence. It’s a horse that really understands things: how they are and how they should be. She needs to show it to somebody right now. She might never draw anything this good again.
Charley stands up, holding the picture, and looks around. The librarian who usually

metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation



Reading standard: by the end of year 8

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “chomping”, “screeches”, “chewed-up”, “rammed”, “micro-drama”, “swivelling”, “enunciating”, “smugly”, “hushes”, “glades”, “wading”, “essence”, “reference section”, “intently”, “infinitely”
- Colloquial language, including “singles her out”, “far from normal”, “in her face”, “sook”, “sticking up for her”, “in-joke”, “long gone”
- Figurative or connotative language, including “brushes herself off”, “weave [her way]”, “lost her final shot at”

Possible supporting strategies

- Identify words or phrases that may be unfamiliar. English language learners may struggle with some of the colloquial or figurative language and the range of verbs.
- Remind students of effective word-solving strategies, such as looking for root words and affixes, rereading to better understand the context, linking to their prior knowledge, and inferring the meaning and reading on to check.
- Direct students to make a note of unfamiliar words and spend time later clarifying their meaning.
- Play charades using key vocabulary. One student selects a word and acts out the meaning while the other students try to guess the word.
- *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

- Some understanding of anxiety and that there are people who experience anxiety more acutely than others
- Some ability to empathise

Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt students to make connections with times they have experienced a sense of aloneness, anxiety, or isolation. Discuss what social anxiety is, being mindful of students who may find this a sensitive issue.
- Remind students that stories help people to understand how other people feel and think. Discuss what it means to empathise with someone and why it is important to be able to see the world through someone else’s eyes. Role playing and games like [Say It](#) or [Hot Seat](#) can help students to understand the character’s point of view and develop empathy.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- A fiction story told in the third person, with a narrative voice that expresses how the main character experiences and interprets the world
- Present tense with moment-by-moment narration
- Some unattributed dialogue
- The use of dialogue to reveal group dynamics
- Some sections of short, crisp sentences
- An unresolved ending

Possible supporting strategies

- Remind students of the differences between first-person and third-person narratives. Discuss how the writer emphasises Charley’s perspective even though the story is a third-person narrative.
- Prompt students to recall ways to identify which character is speaking when dialogue is unattributed.
- Identifying [pronominal reference chains](#) can help students who have difficulty following who is speaking or being referred to in a text. Have the students identify the names of the characters, then circle all the pronouns and draw arrows from each pronoun to the character they refer to. (See [ELIP, Stage 2 Reading, section 11 \(c\)](#), for an example of a pronominal reference chain.)
- Discuss the significance of the descriptions of how things are said (for example, “smugly” or with “careful patience”), as well as the words the characters use.
- Have students predict what happens next in the story, for example, how the relationship between Amy and Charley might (or might not) evolve.



Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Level 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Level 4 – Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Relationships with other people)

Level 4 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Recognise instances of discrimination and act responsibly to support their own rights and feelings and those of other people.

Possible first reading purpose

- To understand the challenges one student faces at school.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To find out how Charley copes with feeling different from her classmates
- To explore Amy's role in the story
- To identify the writer's purpose.

Possible writing purposes

- To rewrite the story from the perspective of another member of the class
- To write about a time you felt alone, anxious, isolated, or different
- To write a persuasive response to the question: "What does it mean to be 'normal'?" or "Is there such a thing as 'normal'?"



Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts; Ideas: Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

First reading

- Share the reading purpose with the students.
- Have the students read the first page and then discuss in pairs what they have learnt about Charley from the introductory paragraphs. Encourage them to make predictions about how the rest of the story might unfold.
- Provide opportunities for the students to read the rest of the story without interruption. Prompt them to keep their predictions in mind and adjust them as they learn more about Charley and her experiences at school.
- Ask the students to use sticky notes or highlight any parts that they don't understand and to note any questions they may have.
- Have pairs of students discuss any aspects of the story they found hard to understand.

If the students require more scaffolding

- Discuss the concept of “normality” before reading the story.
- Remind the students to make, check, and revise predictions as they read.
- If necessary, break the story into sections. As the students read each section, ask questions to help them make predictions and inferences. *Why does Charley's heart start pounding when she sees that her classmates are all at their desks? Why does Charley find it hard to reach her desk? What does the conversation between Mr Bennett and the students show us? Why is Charley angry with Amy? Why is drawing so important to Charley?* Have the students work in pairs or small groups to find answers to these questions and to their own questions.
- Remind the students to make connections within the text and to their own experiences, for example, times that they have felt anxious, isolated, angry, proud, or misunderstood.

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

Revise the difference between first-person and third-person narratives.

Have the students work in pairs to identify ways that the writer helps the reader to view the world through Charley's eyes even though the story is written from a “she/he/it/they” perspective rather than an “I/we” perspective.

- *How does the writer give Charley her own voice? What helps us to understand how Charley thinks and feels?*

Working in pairs, have students identify one thing that Charley thinks, believes, wants, and feels.

Each statement needs to be supported by examples from the story. Have pairs share their ideas with another pair. Ask them to discuss what these statements tell the reader about how Charley feels about school and her classmates.

- *What do these things tell us about how Charley copes with her feelings?*

If the students need extra support, they could complete a three-level guide comprehension activity (see the example at the end of this TSM). Three-level guides help students to develop their comprehension skills.

The teacher

Prompt the students to explore how the author uses dialogue.

- *What helps you to identify the speaker if the author doesn't tell you who is talking?*
- *What do we learn about different characters through what they say and how they say it? Why can the way things are said be as important as the words that are used?*

Have pairs of students write a sentence summarising what they can infer about other characters in the story, for example, Michaela, Mr Bennett.

The students:

- use their knowledge of sentence structure to identify the third-person narration
- identify ways that the writer anchors the narration to Charley's perspective, for example, by describing events based on what Charley can (or cannot) see or hear
- identify places in the text that show what Charley thinks, believes, wants, and feels
- make inferences about Charley's inner world using the text to support their ideas
- synthesise information across the text about the challenges Charley faces and how she copes with feeling different.

The students:

- identify who is speaking by using their knowledge of the conventions of written 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 speakers if they are unsure of who is speaking
- identify the words used to describe how people speak (for example, “smugly” or “with careful patience”) and the significance of these descriptions
- make inferences about the dynamics in Charley's class, using the dialogue in the story
- draw conclusions about the impact of the class dynamics on Charley's thoughts, behaviour, and feelings
- synthesise information and infer the author's purpose.

Subsequent readings (cont.)

The teacher

Direct the students to work in pairs to analyse the role Amy plays in the story, for example:

- *What clues does the writer give us about what Amy is like and what motivates her?*
- *How do you think Charley sees Amy? How do you think Amy sees Charley? What parts of the text make you think that?*
- *Did the relationship between Charley and Amy surprise you? If so, in what way?*

Some students, especially English language learners, may have difficulty identifying when Amy is being referred to. Help them by drawing a word chain together, noting the various ways Amy is mentioned, for example, Amy, “new girl”, “never talked”, “worse than Charley”, “far from normal”.

METACOGNITION

- *What helped you to relate to the way Charley feels at some level? Why is it important to be able to relate to what a character feels when it comes to understanding a story?*

The students:

- locate and evaluate places where the writer provides clues about Amy’s character
- integrate information they find to form an opinion about what is important to Amy and what she is like as a person (Students can work in pairs to complete a character trait graphic organiser using information they have gleaned from the text.)
- discuss ways that Charley and Amy interact, making connections between the text and their own experiences of the ways people relate.

Note: Say It or Hot Seat role plays can help students to understand the perspective of each character.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *When we first read the story, you said that you thought Charley was being mean to Amy and that is wasn’t fair of Charley to get angry at her. Your close reading and rereading critically helped you to understand how strong Charley feels about not wanting to be noticed and why she reacted to Amy the way she did.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics; Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

Text excerpts from “How to Be Normal”

Page 34

“Owww!” It’s Michaela. This is the worst thing that could’ve happened. “Mr Bennett! Charley just rammed my desk and hurt my foot!”

Mr Bennett turns from the whiteboard. “I’m sorry to hear that, Michaela. Will you be OK?”

“How would I know? Owwww!”

“If you need first aid, go to the office,” Mr Bennett says with careful patience.

“Can someone come with me?”

“No.”

Examples of text characteristics

DIALOGUE

Dialogue can be used to reveal people’s characters and the ways that they relate. The way that people speak can be as important as the words they say.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Refer students to the dialogue on page 34 and have them discuss how a few words can reveal so much about characters, relationships, and the dynamics of a group of people. In particular, have them focus on the author’s use of language.

Check that students are confident about how to write dialogue, including embedded dialogue.

Discuss the difference between what people say and how they say it and have students provide examples.

Discuss ways that a writer can add other details or layers to a dialogue, for example, by describing someone’s facial expression, the tone of their voice, or the look in their eyes.

Brainstorm words that can be used to describe tone of voice, for example, “coldly”, “enthusiastically”, “sharply”, “sweetly”.

Have students revise their own writing to describe in more detail the way people speak.

Page 34

Her classmates laugh and chat, but as she passes each group, she feels them go quiet. Someone throws a piece of chewed-up paper, and it hits her leg. She can’t look up to see if it was aimed at her. All she has to do for everything to be all right is put one foot in front of the other.

PERSPECTIVES

Telling the story from one character’s point of view shows what the character is seeing, feeling, and thinking. However, it means the reader doesn’t always know what is happening elsewhere or what is driving the other characters – the reader often has to infer that and fill in the gaps.

Discuss how stories can help us to understand how other people see or experience the world. Have students swap examples of stories that helped them to understand someone else’s perspective or make connections with another piece of writing you have explored together.

Identify gaps in the story that the readers have to fill in for themselves. For example, how do we know that Michaela isn’t being sincere about being hurt? Was the paper thrown at Charley deliberately?

Explore what the story might be like if told from someone else’s perspective, for example, from Amy’s perspective.

- What might Amy have seen that Charley did not (including seeing Charley herself)? What might Amy have been thinking or feeling while events unfolded in the classroom or during the lunch break?
- What is school like for Amy? How might we view Charley differently if we see her through Amy’s eyes?

Have the students retell the story from Amy’s perspective.

Page 36

“OK,” Charley says, realising she’s not going to get her picture back. She’s sure she’ll never draw a better horse, ever, and she studies it carefully. Then she sees what’s special about it. Something in the horse’s eyes. They’re clear and infinitely deeper than the paper.

After she’s looked at the drawing for long enough, she nods goodbye to Amy and walks back to the library.

OPEN ENDINGS

An open ending leaves the plot or problem unresolved. Readers need think for themselves about what the outcome might be. An open ending can encourage deeper thinking about an issue or problem.

Have the students share with a partner their thoughts about the ending.

- Were you satisfied with the ending?
- Was it what you expected?
- What questions did it leave you with?

Explain the difference between a carefully crafted ending that leaves readers with questions and a story that ends prematurely because the writer doesn’t know how to finish it. Make connections between the purpose of a story and the way it ends.

Direct the students to review their writing.

- How does your story end? If you’ve created a problem for a character, is it resolved? Does it have to be?
- Think about your purpose, then try out different ways of ending your story. Which is most effective?

METACOGNITION

- What are the strengths and limitations of telling a story from one person’s perspective? How does perspective influence how you write a story?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’re experimenting with giving your story an open ending, but I was left feeling like things were cut off a bit too soon. Can you think of a final action or statement that can wrap up the story while still leaving your reader wondering what will happen next?

Three-level guide

Decide whether you agree or disagree with each statement below. Then add supporting evidence from the text. When you have finished, discuss your answers with a partner. If you have different answers, discuss your reasons and try to reach an agreement.

LEVEL 1: LITERAL STATEMENTS (WHAT THE AUTHOR SAID)

Does the text say this? What words support your answer?

1. *Charley doesn't like to be noticed.*
2. *Charley is glad that Amy tried to stick up for her.*
3. *Charley often spends time drawing in the library.*

LEVEL 2: INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS (WHAT THE AUTHOR MEANT)

Does the text give you this idea? What words and phrases support your answer?

1. *Michaela is showing bullying behaviour towards Charley.*
2. *Amy wants Charley to be her friend.*
3. *Charley doesn't need other people.*

LEVEL 3: APPLIED STATEMENTS (WHAT THE AUTHOR WOULD AGREE WITH)

Do you agree with this? Why? Be prepared to share your reasons.

1. *There's no such thing as normal.*
2. *It's important to stick up for people, even when they say they don't want your support.*
3. *Everyone knows what it's like to feel different.*