Top Bear
by Bill Nagelkerke

The Learning Progression Frameworks describe significant signposts in reading and writing as students develop and apply their literacy knowledge and skills with increasing expertise from school entry to the end of year 10. This teacher support material describes the opportunities in "Top Bear" for students to develop the behaviours expected when reading at Gold.

Overview

This lighthearted, humorous story is set during the time of the March–April 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. It describes the antics of two bears who appear to be competing to become the most popular bear in Lockdown Street. The story is told in the form of a television news report and includes social media posts and many entertaining word plays. It ends with a series of questions that invite readers to speculate about what might be behind the bears' antics.

"Top Bear" requires students to "confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about" text (*The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

There is a PDF of this text and an audio version as an MP3 file at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Stories with odd or unexplained events: *Scarlett's Scarf* (*RTR* Purple); "The Desk" (*JJ* 38); "Taniwha Trouble" (*JJ* 40); "Missing" (*JJ* 42); "Marcus and the Wind" (*JJ* 47)

Texts involving the use of signs to influence people: "A School Comes Home", "Making a Sign" (in this journal); "Reading a Boat" (*SJ* L2 Sept 2014)

Stories about bears, for example: *Winnie the Pooh* by A. A. Milne, *Paddington Bear* by Michael Bond, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen, *Peace at Last* by Jill Murphy, *The Best-Loved Bear* by Diana Noonan

Text characteristics

"Top Bear" includes the following characteristics that help students develop the reading behaviours expected at Gold and build their awareness of the features and purposes of different text forms.

A mix of text forms – a television news report and social media posts

A mix of explicit and implicit content, including mystery elements, that require students to make connections between information in the story and their prior knowledge to make predictions and inferences

Visual language features including enlarged pop-out illustrations of the screens the families are looking at (indicated by arrows) and conventions of social media posts (such as icons, upper-case letters, punctuation used for effect, and acronyms)

Vocabulary, including word plays, that may be unfamiliar (for example, "received", "sparked", "'bear-faced' rivalry", "social media", "rug-BEAR supporter", "Mountain-BEARing", "peak", "BEAR-O-PLANE", "ASTRO-BEAR", "new heights", "A-DORA-ble", "not to be outdone", "surrounded", "deny all knowledge", "antics", "remarkable"), requiring students to apply their reading processing systems

Language features that enable students to apply and extend their vocabulary knowledge:

- the contrasting language styles of the news report and the social media posts
- humorous word plays, drawing on word similarities, word associations, and double meanings
- indicators of time (for example, "lately", "first appeared", "in March", "A few days later", "Next")
- noun phrases (for example, "strange events", "'bear-faced' rivalry", "social media", "Rug-BEAR Supporter", "new heights")

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Cross-curriculum links

English (Reading)

Level 2 – Processes and strategies: Selects and reads texts for enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Level 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.

The New Zealand Curriculum

Suggested reading purpose | Possible learning goals

What can the students expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?

- To find out who the bears are and how they are getting attention
- To think about what is really happening in this story
- To think about what makes this story fun to read

What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to "read, respond to, and think critically" about texts?

The goals listed below link to the descriptions of reading behaviours in *The Literacy Learning Progressions* and the Learning Progression Frameworks. **Select from and adapt** them according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 7).

This text provides opportunities for students, over several readings, to:

- use information in the text and visual language features to track ideas and events **(summarise)**
- **make connections** between their prior knowledge and clues in the story to **make predictions and inferences**
- identify and discuss **(analyse)** some aspects that add humour and mystery to the story
- **monitor** their reading and, when something is unclear, take action to solve the problem, for example, by checking further sources of information, rereading, and/or reading on.

Sounds and Words

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Introducing the story

Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that your introduction builds or activates their prior knowledge and provides appropriate support for a successful first reading. Several options are provided below for you to **select from and adapt**. A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at https://vimeo.com/14244657

> For English language learners, you could discuss the story before the whole-group session to build confidence with the text format. Viewing a video clip of a televised news report and discussing its features (such as reporters introducing the topic, showing examples, linking to a reporter at the scene) may be one way to do this. You can find further information about features of texts that may need support at ELLP.

- Begin with a discussion of the students' recollections of window displays during the COVID-19 lockdown(s). For students without this experience, you could show media clips of the window displays.
- Have the students use the title and illustrations on pages 10 and 11 to make predictions about who, what, where, and when, then read page 10 to review their predictions. Prompt them to notice that the story is in the form of a TV news report.

- Draw attention to some key words that set up the idea of the bears competing ("top bear", "rivalry", "trying hard to get the most attention", "competition", "social media"). You could point out the use of inverted commas in the phrase "'bear-faced' rivalry". Explain that the reporters are making a joke and that "bare-faced" means bold, very confident, even a bit cheeky.
- Check that the students realise that the images showing the bears' posts are larger versions of what the families are looking at on their screens. Point out the use of arrows to show the links. Have the students look closely at the bears' posts to spot clues to this being a competition, for example, the number of likes and the positive comments. Prompt them to notice the play on words in Ted's "rug-BEAR" post and tell them that there are further jokes in this story. Reassure them that if they don't get the jokes at first, you will work them out together later on. This will be particularly important for English language learners, who may have difficulty with colloquial English.
- Together, set a reading purpose. Share the learning goal(s). Give the students sticky notes to mark new words or questions and ideas that arise as they read.

Reading the story

Observe the students as they read the story by themselves, intervening only if it's clear a student needs help. During the first reading, the focus is on students following and enjoying the story rather than on totally accurate word-solving. Much of the processing that they do at this level is "inside their heads" and may not be obvious until the discussion afterwards. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word-solving (including the word plays) and comprehension on subsequent readings.

Student behaviours

Examples of the sorts of behaviours (often overlapping and developed over several readings) that will help students achieve their learning goal(s).

The students use information in the text and visual language features to track ideas and events.

- They use the illustrations on pages 10 and 13, references in the text ("TV News", "our reporter", "Kia ora, everyone"), and their knowledge of television news reports to clarify that the TV news reporters are telling the story.
- They make connections between the body text, the illustrations, and the text within the illustrations to track what is happening.
- They use clues such as the words in capital letters and the use of hyphens ("rug-BEAR", "mountain-BEARing", "A-DORA-ble") to locate the jokes within the bears' posts.
- They draw on their knowledge of social media features, for example, comments in note form, the use of dashes to join ideas, the acronym ("lol"), and icons to track the responses to the window displays.

They make connections between their prior knowledge and clues in the story to make predictions and inferences.

- They make connections between the illustrations (including the bears' signs), the social media comments, and their prior knowledge to infer the meaning of some of the jokes.
- They infer from the increases in the number of likes that the competition is escalating.

- On page 13, they infer from comments such as "deny all knowledge", "could not say", "as surprised as anyone" that there is some uncertainty about how the events are occurring.
- They begin forming an opinion about what is really happening (whether there is some sort of magic involved or whether people are responsible for the bears' posts).
- They make predictions in response to Nellie Ready's questions.

They demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving.

- They use a range of word-solving strategies, for example:
  – they break longer words into chunks or syllables ("ri-val-ry", "at-ten-tion", "Sup-por-ter")
  – they use print features such as the hyphens and words in capital letters to help identify key words within longer words
  – they make connections to their knowledge of similar-sounding words to work out the humorous word plays ("rug-BEAR", "mountain-BEARing", "BEAR-O-PLANE")
  – they use their knowledge of the suffix "able" to help solve "A-DORA-ble" and their knowledge of the various sounds that "y" can have to help solve "deny".
- They mark words or phrases they want to come back to.

Deliberate acts of teaching

- Remind the students of word-solving strategies they can use (for example, looking for the biggest known word chunk and applying their knowledge of letters, sounds, and word structure) and for clarifying meaning (rereading or reading on, referring to the illustrations, and thinking about the overall meaning of the sentence). If necessary, provide specific support, for example, prompting the students to think about words that sound similar to help them work out the word plays.

Discussing and rereading the story

You can revisit this story several times, providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions according to your students' needs and responses to the reading. Some of the suggestions overlap, and several can be explored further as after-reading activities. **DIGITAL TOOLS** 💻 For some suggestions, you may find it helpful to project the PDF of the article so that you can zoom in on relevant sections.

- Enjoy the students' responses to Nellie Ready's questions in the final paragraph.
- Support the students to think critically: *What do you think is really going on in this story? Are the bears setting up their own window displays?*
- Discuss what makes the story fun to read. For example:
  – presenting it as a news report
  – showing the social media posts
  – the humour in the names "Lockdown Street", "Bubbletown", and "Nellie Ready"
  – the word plays
  – the mystery element (encouraging readers to use their imaginations)
  – the humorous comments on social media
  – the illustrations
  – the silly things the bears do.

- Have the students reread the story, stopping to discuss points of interest, including those they have marked with sticky notes. Suggestions are listed below.
  - Discuss who is telling the story. *How do you know?* You could model how to read as a reporter.
  - Have the students summarise what the bears did (in sequence). You could help them to show this on a simple timeline.
  - Explore the jokes in the word plays. You could start a chart such as the one below to identify the clues to the meanings of one or two examples and have the students complete it as an after-reading activity.

Example	Sounds like	Word clues	Picture clues
"bear-faced" rivalry	bare-faced rivalry	– trying hard to get the most attention – become the street's top bear – competition – Not to be outdone – trying to outdo each other	– the number of likes – the social media comments
rug-BEAR supporter	rugby supporter	– with a rugby ball and wearing a striped scarf	– striped scarf, rugby ball
mountain-BEARing	mountaineering	– climbing a rope – reached your peak – Edmund Hillary	– rope – mountain
BEAR-O-PLANE	aeroplane	– flying bear – taking off – that's plane to see	– Ted wearing flying goggles
ASTRO-BEAR	astronaut	– astro (means "to do with stars") – new heights – Twinkle, twinkle – You are a star	– stars – Dora wearing a space helmet

Note: In some cases, English language learners may need to hear the words pronounced by a native English speaker to appreciate the word plays.

  - Discuss how the students worked out (or tried to work out) unfamiliar vocabulary. You could draw attention to such aspects as:
    » the clues in the text and illustrations to the meanings of words and phrases such as "'bear-faced' rivalry", "ASTRO-bear", "reaches new heights", "Not to be outdone", "deny all knowledge", "antics", "outdo each other". Also, demonstrate how to use a dictionary to clarify word meanings.
    » the importance of reading on to get the full meaning of a noun phrase. Explain that nouns are often combined with adjectives or other describing words (for example, "Top Bear", "strange events", "lockdown walks", "'bear-faced' rivalry", "social media", "rugby ball") to provide more information for the reader. Reread some of the sentences that include noun phrases with and without the descriptors to show the impact on meaning.

Provide support as required and note any aspects you might want to follow up on later, perhaps as a mini-lesson or as an after-reading activity.

After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students during the lesson and provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. Where possible, make links to other texts, including texts generated by the students, and to the wider literacy programme (for example, oral language, writing, handwriting, spelling) and other curriculum areas. **Select from and adapt** these suggestions according to the needs of your students.

For English language learners, SELLIPS and ELIP also have ideas for purposeful and relevant tasks.

- Provide many opportunities for the students to reread this story and other related texts, including picture books.
- The students can build their comprehension and fluency by rereading the text as they listen to the audio version.

Audio versions are particularly supportive for English language learners because, as well as clarifying pronunciation, they provide good models of the prosodic features of English, such as intonation and phrasing.

- Use the text for a version of readers' theatre with students taking on the roles of the reporters and voicing the bears' signs and the social media comments. The students could also "interview" residents of Lockdown Street.

- Print off and display copies of the bears' posts and have all the students in the class add likes and their own comments. Make it into a competition by counting up the likes from the class.
- The students could draw and write about their own experiences of window displays during the COVID-19 lockdown. Alternatively, they could set up their own bear displays, including signs. (The article "Making a Sign" in this journal has some handy tips.) Provide sticky notes for other students to add comments.
- Have the students work in pairs to complete the chart about clues to the jokes. They could illustrate their favourite examples, or they might like to make up and illustrate their own.
- Support the students to research some fun facts about the origins of teddy bears or about favourite bear characters in stories. The "Bear facts" could be displayed (and liked) around a bear image.