



Overview

“The Bullet” has been adapted as a graphic text from the story of the same name in *School Journal* 4.3.08. In both versions, the story is about a boy who is bullied in his new school and faces decisions that could change the course of his young life.

The graphic text format is more accessible and engaging, and provides multiple opportunities for readers to access the sophisticated themes and abstract ideas of the original story. The illustrations use a gritty, raw style that highlights the sense of danger and risk. The text offers opportunities for students to build on the key competencies of managing self and relating to others.

There is an audio version of this text on the *School Journal Story Library Years 7–8 2011 CD*.

Texts related by theme

“The Bullet” SJ 4.3.08 | “Eyewitness” SJ 4.1.10

Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

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

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

non-continuous text structures and mixed text types



illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content

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

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Personal health and physical development)

Level 4 – Safety management: Access and use information to make and action safe choices in a range of contexts.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Structure: Show an increasing understanding of text structures.

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To think critically about the important decisions a character has to make that will affect his life
- To evaluate the author's purpose
- To explore how a story can be told in pictures as well as words
- To evaluate the effectiveness of using graphic features to tell a story.

Page 4 has suggestions for writing instruction.

For more support and suggestions for accelerating students' writing, see *Accelerated Writing Progress in Years 7–8* on the Writing Hub.



The Writing Hub

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words or phrases, including “section”, “overtake”, “alongside”, “battered”, “bitter”, “trailing”, “intently”, “crayon”, “glints”, “dangerous”, “jealous”, “tough”, “shades”, “not worth it”, “hedge”, “remembers”, “relieved”, “kerb”, “lights flashing”, “what lies ahead”
- The names Charmaine and Rodney
- The figurative language: “grateful hours of freedom”, “the afternoon stretches for miles and miles”, “burning a hole in his pocket”, “like he will explode”, “she doesn't know her brother any more”
- The colloquial language: “Wanna buy a smoke?”, “burns off”, “So what?”, “act cool”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary, phrases, expressions, and figurative language that may be challenging or unfamiliar to your students. At the same time as working on forming hypotheses, give students these words or phrases and a simple example sentence for each item (and a definition, if appropriate). Tell them this vocabulary is in the story. Have them look at words or phrases and the sentences in pairs and discuss what they think each item means – and what it will refer to in the context of this story. Provide bilingual dictionaries if appropriate (keeping in mind these won't be useful with the figurative or the colloquial language). Tell them that as you read them, you will discuss and confirm the meanings in the text.

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

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with comic strips, cartoons, and graphic novels, where stories are told in words and pictures
- Familiarity with the problem and resolution structure of many narrative texts
- Familiarity with the setting of the New Zealand neighbourhood shown in the illustrations (small wooden houses, sections, wide empty streets)
- An understanding of the issues that can arise at times of major change, such as relocating to a new school
- Knowledge of unsafe items and behaviours
- An understanding that people make decisions and choices that can have a major impact on the direction their lives will take.

Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, ask students to share their comic-reading experiences. See *Text Features and Structure*.

Ask students to share their experiences of moving to a new neighbourhood or a new school. Identify some of the issues that can arise, especially if the new place is very different from what they were used to.

Discuss other texts students have read in which characters have to make a decision or choose a course of action that requires them to distinguish between safe and unsafe or right and wrong. Ask the students to think about what they can learn from reading stories about other people's lives and decisions.

For students who share knowledge of a language other than English, provide opportunities for them to explore the topic and key concepts in this language.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Graphic novel style, where meaning is carried by the illustrations as well as the words
- Words in the form of captions (narration) and speech bubbles
- Narrative text with a setting, characters, a problem, climax, and resolution, and a theme
- The need to infer meaning, using illustrations, the written text, and students' own knowledge
- The gritty, raw style of the illustrations
- The use of ellipses to show uncertainty.

Possible supporting strategies

List some of the features and examples of favourite comics or other graphic texts.

If students have little or no experience of comic-style texts, provide some examples including short comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels.

Skim the first few pages of the text together to identify the illustration style and the mood it evokes.

Review the common narrative features, identifying and listing them. For some students, it may be useful to explicitly identify (or prompt them to identify) the issue and resolution structure typical of a narrative in English. Many languages and cultures may also have this narrative pattern, but some may not.

Point out the different sizes, shapes, and orientation of the illustration frames and talk about the ways we could read them.



Sounds and words

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Personal health and physical development, level 4 – Safety management: Access and use information to make and action safe choices in a range of contexts.)

English (Level 4 – Structure: Show an increasing understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from *The Bullet*

Their new house is different from what they'd hoped for. It doesn't have a very big section, but it is just a few streets away from their new school.

"I like your hair."

"You should sit with us at lunch."

Charmaine's class is friendly.

"Who's the new kid?"

"Looks like a loser."

Rodney's is not.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- ask questions and search for answers
- identify and match speech to characters
- compare Charmaine's and Rodney's different school experiences
- form hypotheses about what might happen in the story.

Students
(what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

Students use their prior knowledge of narratives to identify the setting and the characters. They make connections between this and other graphic texts they have read to identify the mood conveyed by the illustration style.

Students make connections between the text and their own experiences to infer that Charmaine and Rodney used to live somewhere better.

The students compare the lower two frames and ask questions to understand the different treatment Charmaine and Rodney receive. They form hypotheses about what might happen for Rodney as the story unfolds.

"Leave it, Rodney. It's dangerous!"

"So what? It's mine."

"Mum won't like it."

"You better not tell her.

You're just jealous!"

"I am not! I just know it's something bad."

Charmaine wonders what ... or who ... the bullet was meant for.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- use the words and illustrations to determine each character's feelings
- understand the use of ellipses
- infer the attitudes and possible motivations of the characters
- ask questions and form hypotheses.

They make connections between the text and their own experience of sibling or peer disagreements and ask questions about Charmaine's motivation. They infer that she is concerned about safety and doing the right thing.

Students use their prior knowledge to understand "jealous". They integrate what they know so far about Rodney from the illustrations (his head down, hands in pockets) and his language ("Dunno", "So what?") and ask questions of the text to form hypotheses about what he might do with the bullet.

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to make connections to help them understand the text.

- Think about other comics or graphic texts you've read. How do you usually read a graphic text? How do you think you'll read this one?
- What mood are you getting from these illustrations?

Students who are new to New Zealand may find it difficult to pick up all of the information conveyed in the illustrations.

EXPLAIN that a useful reading strategy is to ask questions as you read.

- The questions you have in your head while you're reading help you to think about deeper levels of meaning as you try to work out what's going on for a character or in the plot.

MODEL some possible questions, for example:

- I'm wondering how Charmaine and Rodney are feeling about the move – I infer that they're disappointed. I wonder where they lived before?
- Why are the girls nice to Charmaine and the boys nasty to Rodney? Maybe Rodney met up with the wrong guys. I wonder if he really is a loser and if he's going to get bullied.

PROMPT the students to form their own questions. Have them record their questions to refer to as they read or co-construct questions and record them on a chart or whiteboard.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You made some great connections to your own experiences of moving to a new area and a new school. Thanks for sharing those, they helped us to understand how Rodney must have felt.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

- If students are not following the frames in a logical order, read along with them, pointing to the frames as you go. If students are reading slowly and not picking up on meaning, support them with use of the audio CD or a shared reading.

PROMPT the students to again make connections.

- Remember that making connections can help you understand what's happening.
- Have you ever claimed a found object as your own?
- If you were Rodney, what would you do? Tell your partner.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to think more deeply about what is happening.

- Based on what you've learned about Rodney so far, what do you think he might do with the bullet?
- Why does Charmaine think it's something bad? What does she mean?
- Why do you think the writer shows us what Charmaine was thinking?
- What do the ellipses indicate?
- Do you think Rodney cares who or what the bullet was meant for? Why do you think that?
- What might happen next?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- By asking questions as you read, you were actively looking for answers, which helps to deepen your understanding. This strategy helped you understand the characters and their actions.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

- If students are not able to integrate the ideas in the text and the illustrations, model your thinking for them as a process. Talk about how you "read" the illustrations to understand how Rodney is feeling (how his shoulders are slumped, his eyes are down, and how he is lagging behind Charmaine) and then add this to what is happening in the text and the dialogue.

A few weeks later, they see a police car parked against the kerb, lights flashing.

It's the guy with the black curly hair and shades. He doesn't look cool now.

"Guys like him are always in trouble."

Rodney doesn't need to see any more to know where the boy is going. Rodney knows what lies ahead.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- draw on any prior knowledge of police actions
- make connections across the text
- infer the meaning of Charmaine's words
- infer the meaning of Rodney's thoughts
- locate, evaluate, and synthesise information across the text to reach conclusions about the decisions people make.

METACOGNITION

- How did you work out the meaning of "grateful hours of freedom"? What experiences of your own helped you?
- Did you use any different strategies to read this text compared with the ones you'd normally use? What did you do differently? Why?
- What makes graphic texts harder or easier to read? Which do you prefer? Why?

The students make connections between the text and their knowledge of police procedures to infer that the boy is in serious trouble.

The students make connections across the text to work out that the person is the same one who approached Rodney on page 3. They synthesise pieces of information from several parts of the text (including Charmaine's words on page 5: "I just know it's something bad") to conclude that the boy has committed a crime and been caught.

The students analyse Charmaine's words and make connections with their own (direct or indirect) experience of people who get into trouble. They synthesise these ideas to conclude that certain behaviours can lead to criminal activities. They evaluate this idea against their own sets of values and beliefs.

The students analyse Rodney's reactions and compare his behaviour with their own experiences and attitudes to formulate a personal response to the text.

MODEL analysing and synthesising.

- When I read a good story or an interesting article, I often pause to examine the text closely, ask questions in my head, and think about it from my own point of view. This is called analysing.
- As I do this, I often find I'm learning something new, changing my opinions, or seeing something in a different way. I bring together my ideas to create new understanding. This is called synthesising. When I do this, it usually leads me to draw conclusions about an idea or information or to identify a "big message" or theme in a text.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to analyse and synthesise information and ideas.

- Look back at the page where we first met this guy. What was he doing? What did he have in his car? What questions did you have about him then?
- What clues can you find in the text that will help you to understand why the boy might be with the police now?
- Why doesn't he look cool any more? What has changed?
- What's your opinion of the guy? Was he cool?
- What is Charmaine's opinion of the boy? What does she mean by "guys like him"? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- How does Rodney know where the boy is going? Do you think he is right?
- Does the last sentence refer to what lies ahead for the boy or Rodney?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students as they synthesise information and respond to the text.

- What do you think Rodney has learned from the events in the story?
- What conclusions can you draw about his attitudes and behaviour?
- What do you think the author's theme or message was? What is your response to this?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You synthesised all your ideas about Rodney to reach your own conclusion that ... This allowed you to extend your thinking beyond the text and think about the author's purpose.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

- Support those students who are having trouble synthesising and developing their own ideas from the text. Use a graphic organiser to record the characteristics and behaviours of the main characters from throughout the text. Model for students how you bring together your thinking about one character and what you can conclude from this. In pairs, have the students do this with another character.
- For further information on synthesising, refer to *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8*, page 150, and *Teaching Reading Comprehension* by Alison Davis, pages 175–179.

Suggestions for writing instruction

Students could respond to this story by:

- planning and writing a graphic text that is based on *The Bullet*, for example, telling the story from Charmaine's point of view
- exploring other "big ideas" they want their readers to understand (for example, crime and punishment, dealing with a major life change or challenge, living in a new country)
- writing a poem to express Rodney's feelings.

Support students to form their intentions for writing.

- A good way to start writing a fiction story is to consider an idea or message you want to convey. Spend some time working out the simplest way to express the message, then write it down to remind you of your purpose as you plan and write.

- Think about the audience you'd most like to get your message to. Who are they? What age are they? What are they interested in? Write some notes about the audience and refer to it when you're writing: this will help you stay on track with the style and language you use.
- Now think about the best way to get your message across to your audience: what kind of structure will you use in your writing? Why?

Continue to support students as they develop a plan for their writing, showing them strategies they could use such as mind maps, storyboards, and graphic organisers. Students will probably need support to move from the plan to the first draft and to revise their writing. Scaffold students to build on their writing strengths, giving stronger support where needed and reducing it as they take control.