

ILLUSTRATING THE READING STANDARD

“A Flying Ostrich” *School Journal*, Part 3 Number 1, 2005

Noun frequency level: 10–12

By the end of year 6, students are required to use a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts to locate, evaluate, and integrate information and ideas in order to meet the reading demands of the curriculum, drawing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes described for the end of year 6 in the Literacy Learning Progressions. The curriculum tasks will also involve the students in generating their own questions as well as answering questions from the teacher.

The students in a year 5 and 6 class are involved in a technology unit in which they are required to work in groups to plan and prepare a display for a technology expo being held at their school. This unit supports the key competency of participating and contributing.

“A Flying Ostrich” recounts stages in a technological process and describes what a museum teacher did when deciding on and preparing an exhibit for a museum classroom. The text begins with an engaging dialogue and then becomes a recount that includes

a lot of description. It is supported by a sequence of photographs. Key facts and information are implied rather than directly stated, requiring students to integrate information and make inferences in order to understand important aspects of the process.

The teacher chose “A Flying Ostrich” because, as well as requiring students to draw on prior knowledge and integrate pieces of information, the text would help them consider the decisions they would need to make when they planned their own displays.

The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the reading demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.

Ostriches can't fly, so why would a museum display a flying ostrich skeleton in its classroom? Lloyd Esler, who was a museum teacher, explains.

In the end, I decided that a skeleton would be more useful to the museum classroom than a stuffed ostrich.

We had thought about having a skeleton on a stand, but that would have meant a heavy base, a welded framework, and a museum exhibit that was always going to be in the way.

But how do you convert a dead ostrich into a skeleton?

It involves a lot of sitting around waiting for things to happen.

Every week I would check him ...

The vertebrae were threaded onto a steel rod bent to shape. The ribs, wings, pelvis, and sternum were wired and glued together. The legs were hinged onto the main skeleton with Number 8 wire.

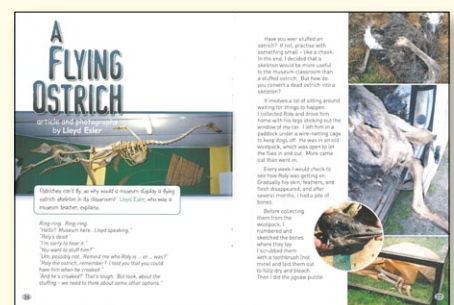
Now, when schools visit the museum classroom, the children say “look at the pterodactyl!”

Then they remember that an ostrich has two [toes] on each foot. “Wow,” they say, “a flying ostrich!”

The student considers the introductory question, previews the text including the photos, connects to her prior knowledge about museum displays, and forms hypotheses about why the museum would display a flying ostrich as a learning and inquiry object.

The student asks questions about the process involved in displaying an ostrich skeleton, such as how you end up with a skeleton after beginning with the dead bird and how you would display it. She considers why a skeleton would be more useful than a stuffed ostrich, then scans the text and locates information that answers her question, on the following page. She infers that the teacher chose to display the ostrich in a flying position because it was going to take a lot of work to create a large display on a stand and because the stand would take up too much room.

The student uses her prior knowledge to understand that “convert” means to change. She makes connections between her prior knowledge, the text, and the sequence of photographs to infer that this change takes place through the process of decomposition. Using information from the text (“sitting around waiting”, “Every week”), she also infers that this part of this technological process was slow.



The student locates content-specific words (for example, “vertebrae”, “pelvis”) and technological vocabulary (for example, “wired and glued”, “hinged”, “Number 8 wire”), and makes links to the photograph to understand the complexity of the display process and the challenges in achieving this.

The student asks questions and evaluates information about the effectiveness of the display, using the students’ responses in the article to support her answers. With prompting to compare the initial conversation and the final one, she also infers that the teacher has a sense of humour and that the flying ostrich is a way of engaging students in learning more about birds. She integrates information across the whole text to draw conclusions about the time, patience, and skill needed to create the display. She evaluates information about the processes involved in creating the flying ostrich in relation to the processes, skills, and knowledge that her group needs, and the decisions they need to make, in order to create a display for the technology expo.