

Nana's in the Plum Tree

by Jan Cartwright

drawings by Murray Grimsdale

Overview

In this dramatic personal experience narrative, Hine describes the frightening experience of watching her grandmother move a swarm of bees. The text includes information about bees and bee-keeping. There is an audiotape of this text.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of identifying main ideas, inferring, analysing and synthesising, and identifying point of view.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the engaging style:
- the dramatic nature of the text:
- the information about bees and bee-keeping
- the subject-specific vocabulary
- the collective noun “swarm”
- the clear descriptions of the bees and of Nana's actions, including the use of adjectives, onomatopoeia (page 9), and a simile (page 3)
- the Māori words
- the different uses of the apostrophe in the title and on page 9
- the irregular sound for “o” in “front”, “other”, “others”, and “oven”.
- the intriguing title
- the use of a first-person narrator
- the conversational style, including contractions and the use of idiom
- the use of a question to open the story
- the risky nature of Nana's activities
- the inclusion of the narrator's fears
- the contrast between Hine's fears and Nana's calm behaviour
- the characterisation of Hine and Nana
- the expressive illustrations
- the lively verbs
- the inclusion of dialogue
- the use of repetition for effect on pages 3, 5, and 7 (and emphasised by the very short sentence on page 7)

Possible challenges

- the Māori words “E Hine” (“Eh Hin-eh”) and “Āue!” (“Oh-weh”), all with a short “e”
- the words “combs”, “hive”, “nectar”, “queen”, “swarm”, and “swarming”
- the passive verb “eaten”.

Introducing the text

Open the book so that the children can see the whole cover. *What clues in the illustration tell you why Nana’s in the plum tree? Draw attention to the anxious look on the girl’s face and Nana’s protective clothing. Why is the girl worried? Find out what the children know about bee-keeping. Explain that a large group of bees is called a swarm and include the words “comb”, “honey”, and “nectar” in the discussion. Encourage the children to share any experiences they may have had with bees. If possible, bring in some honeycomb to show the children.*

During the reading

Check that the children realise that the contraction in the title is short for “Nana is”. Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties.

Pages 2 and 3 – Clarify who is telling the story. *Why doesn’t Nana hear Hine? What are the bees doing? What is Nana trying to do? How is Nana keeping safe? What do you think it means if the bees are “swarming”?*

Pages 4 and 5 – If necessary, model the pronunciation of “E Hine” and reassure the children about the syntax of the passive verb “eaten”. *How does Hine feel? How do you know? Note the repetition of “I didn’t want” for effect. What does Nana want Hine to do?*

Pages 6 and 7 – Ask the children to identify the parts that tell the reader how Hine is feeling now. Draw out the idea that Hine’s feelings are conflicting. *Have you ever felt like that?*

Pages 8 to 13 – *What is Nana doing?* Clarify that the children understand that Nana is trying to start up a new beehive. *How did you know which one was the queen bee?*

Pages 14 and 15 – *Why does Nana “hiss”?* *What would you do if a bee landed on you?*

Pages 16 and 17 – Clarify that “combs” is short for honeycombs and, if necessary, reassure the children about its silent “b”. You may need to tell them the word “Āue”.

Pages 18 and 19 – Savour the mouth-watering ending to the story! Encourage the children to infer by asking them *Where would the honey have come from?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen in while the children reread the text with a partner. Observe the strategies they use to manage challenges in the text.

Focus on the author’s style. *What makes you want to keep reading this book?* You could talk about the intriguing title, the slightly scary topic, Hine’s expressive use of language, and the way the author creates tension in the mind of the reader by having

Hine share her worries that something may go wrong. Focus on the opening sentence. Draw out the idea that the use of a question helps to hook the reader into the story.

Explore the author's use of descriptive language. On page 3, Hine tells the reader what she can hear and see the bees doing and uses a simile to clarify the description. You could talk about the onomatopoeia on page 9 for impact and the slightly scary detail of the bees flying around Nana's hat. *How do the illustrations support the author's ideas?*

Explore Hine's feelings. *How does the author let you know how Hine is feeling?* There are clues on pages 5, 7, 11, and 15 and in the illustrations. Ask the children to focus on the last line on page 2, the top paragraph on page 5, or the bottom paragraph on page 7. *Do you think Hine should be worried? Why isn't Nana worried?* Review what the children have learned about bees and create a mind map of the information.

Talk about the characters in the story. *How would you describe Hine (or Nana)? What makes you think that?*

Have the children reread the sentence containing the word "oven" on page 17. *How did you work that word out? How did you check it?* Write the words "front", "other", and "oven" on the whiteboard and ask the children to read them out loud. *What is the same about all of these words?* Talk about how "o" can have more than one sound and that when the children come across unfamiliar words in their reading, it helps if they know to try more than one sound when they're trying to decode.

Talk about the use of the word "swarm" to describe a group of bees. Start a class chart of collective nouns.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audiotape of the story.

Find out more about bee-keeping and making honey.

Draw a picture of Nana and add labels describing her safety equipment.

Design a safety poster using the information given on page 15.

Find other examples of illustrations by Murray Grimdsdale, for example, *Paru Has a Bath* (Turquoise) and talk about how the illustrations support the ideas in the text.