The Stowaway

by Katie Furze

Overview

Walter is a cat who catches mice at the factory next door to his home. He has friends at the factory who, like his family, are very fond of him. When he doesn't come home for his dinner, the family is worried and checks with the factory workers. Where can Walter be? The story shifts back in time to show the reader that Walter has been accidentally trapped in a shipping container. He arrives in Australia many days later and, thanks to a kindly quarantine officer, he is returned to his family. A page at the end of the story includes a map, a photo, and some information about the real cat that "The Stowaway" is based on.

"The Stowaway" requires students to "confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about" text (from *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14). The characteristics of this text provide opportunities for the students to make connections between clues in the text and the illustrations and their own experiences to make simple inferences.

There is an audio version of the text on the *Readalong 2012: Ready to Read and Junior Journal 44 and 45* CD as well as on an MP3 file at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Text characteristics

Key text characteristics relating to the reading standard for after three years at school are shown in the boxes with a solid outline.

Shifts in time and/or place

Some unfamiliar words and phrases, the meaning of which is supported by the context or illustrations

After lunch on Tuesday, Walter had stretched, licked his paws, and gone back to work. He heard a rustling sound behind some boxes and went to investigate. A mouse darted out of the shadows and scampered into a shipping container that some men had been loading. Walter crept in.

He saw the mouse hiding in a corner. Just as Walter was about to pounce ... BANG! Everything went black.
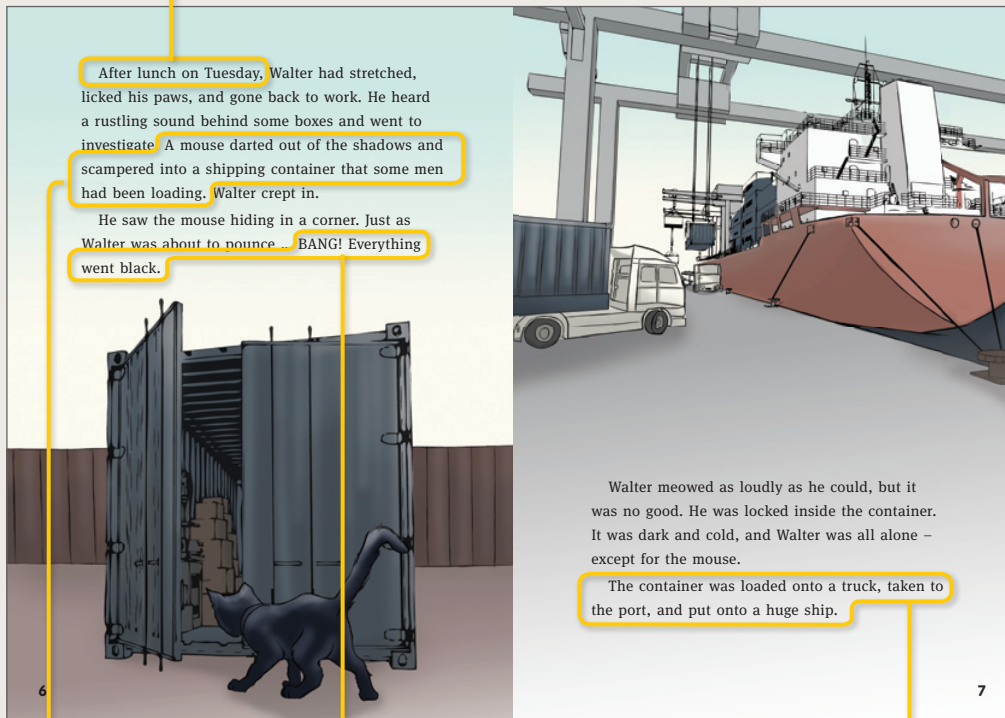
Walter meowed as loudly as he could, but it was no good. He was locked inside the container. It was dark and cold, and Walter was all alone – except for the mouse.

The container was loaded onto a truck, taken to the port, and put onto a huge ship.

A variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences

A mix of implicit and explicit content within the text and illustrations that requires students to make connections between ideas in the text and their prior knowledge in order to make simple inferences, for example, what happened to Walter

The possibly unfamiliar contexts and settings of a port

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Reading standard: after three years at school

Possible curriculum contexts

English (Reading)

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

Reading purposes and learning goals

Suggested reading purpose

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

- To find out who the stowaway is and what happened to him

Suggested learning goals for this text

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

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8*, Knowledge of the learner, page 6).

- The students make connections between clues in the text and the illustrations and their own experiences to make simple inferences about Walter.
- They use multiple sources of information to clarify meanings of unfamiliar words and ideas.

The New Zealand Curriculum

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Text and language features

Vocabulary

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, such as "Stowaway", "working cat", "scraps", "rustling", "shipping container", "crept", "quarantine officer", "machinery", "overjoyed", "passport"
- The use of words and phrases to signal the passage of time, such as "Then, one Tuesday", "On Tuesday evening", "On Wednesday", "After lunch on Tuesday", "Finally, after many days" and the verb forms, such as "had happened", "had stretched"
- Verbs for different kinds of movement, for example, "prowling", "snuggle", "stretched", "darted", "crept", "pounce"
- The collocation "searched high and low"
- The metaphor "Light flooded into the container".

Possible supporting strategies

Identify, illustrate, and record key vocabulary during pre-reading activities.

For students who are likely to find the time shifts (including the time phrases and verb forms) challenging, use a timeline to support them.

To support the students with "searched high and low", draw out the idea that it means to search everywhere.

You may need to explain the concept of the light flooding into the container by discussing what happens when water floods and rushes into a space.

Monitor the students' **decoding** attempts by noticing their use of words from the text during discussion. Prompt them to remember strategies they can use, for example:

- breaking words into familiar chunks ("sand-wiches", "fact-ory", "pass-port", "over-seas").

Monitor the students' use of **word-solving** strategies to work out the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases. Prompt them to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- using the context and their prior knowledge to work out the meaning of descriptive verbs, for example, "darted"
- drawing on their knowledge of common prefixes ("dis-appeared").

Have a dictionary available to confirm or clarify word meanings. Have bilingual dictionaries, where appropriate, available for students who have a first language other than English.

Specific knowledge

- Some knowledge of cats and their behaviour and habits
- Some understanding of the work done in factories and ports, including the use of shipping containers between New Zealand and Australia
- An understanding of the distance to Australia and how long it might take to travel there by sea
- Understanding what a passport is and that you need one to travel to Australia; understanding quarantine regulations.

For students who are not familiar with:

- cats: have other students share information about the habits of their cats, including the ways they make friends and how they move and behave. For students who need support with the vocabulary associated with cats and cat movement, draw out key words as part of this discussion (using actions or pictures as appropriate) and record these words.
- factories, ports and shipping, and travel: use the illustrations to support them with the required vocabulary and knowledge. You could also have additional photos of ships with containers to support the students' understanding.
- passport and quarantine procedures: share your own or others' experiences of travel outside New Zealand to explain why a passport is needed and why quarantine procedures are needed. If possible, have a passport available for students to look at. If necessary, explain its purpose. This will support them with the joke on page 10. Some students may have seen related TV programmes. So as not to give away the ending, you might want to leave this discussion until the end of the story.

Sounds and Words

Metacognition

Effective readers are metacognitive. They are aware of the processes and strategies they draw on and are able to explain how they use these to successfully make meaning and think critically. Examples of metacognitive behaviours, or strategies teachers can use to promote metacognition, are threaded through the notes and indicated by M.

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS TO READ, RESPOND, AND THINK CRITICALLY

M Ask questions: *How did you know that bit was wrong?* Or: *I noticed that you reread that bit when you got confused. How did rereading help you?*

M Use prompts: *How did you know that bit was right? Think about the strategy you used. How did it help you?*

Introducing the text

- Have the students read the title. You may need to supply the meaning of "stow" (something hidden from others), then discuss the reasons people and animals might stow away – deliberately or by accident. Have the students share any examples they know. *I'm wondering who the stowaway might be in this story*.
- Briefly, discuss what "based on a true story" means. You could explain that the writer has used a real event and has made up some details.

- If necessary, discuss and label the illustrations on pages 2 and 3 to clarify the factory setting. You may need to talk about the shipping container on page 3 and explain that some factories send things to other countries. To do this, they use containers like the one in the illustration. Avoid going right through the story because this would give away the ending.
- Share the reading purpose and the learning goal(s).

Reading and discussing the text

Instructional strategies you can use to support the students to achieve the learning goals are in the right-hand column. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions below according to your students' needs.

What to look for, prompt, and support as the students work towards achieving their learning goal	How you can support students to read, respond, and think critically
Pages 2–3 The students identify that Walter catches mice. They use clues in the text, for example, the information about the factory workers talking to Walter and feeding him scraps, to make simple inferences that Walter is well liked. As they read these pages, the students use the context (including the illustration) and their knowledge of animals to work out the word "prowling". They use similar strategies to work out "snuggle". The students make a prediction about where Walter may have gone. They use evidence from the text, for example, that he chases mice, the illustrations, and their own experience to justify their predictions.	If necessary, support the students to work out what "a working cat" means. Model reading on. *The next sentence may give more information to help me understand what "a working cat" means.* *When Walter is working, what does he do?* *I'm thinking that Walter is well liked. What do you think? What evidence in the text supports your ideas?* If necessary, clarify that the "scraps" the workers give Walter are from their lunches, not rubbish. *I wonder where he might have disappeared to.* At this point, you could have the students think, pair, and share about what they have found out so far. *Based on what we know so far, where might Walter have gone? What makes you think that?* Have the students predict what might have happened to Walter. Encourage the students to make connections to their prior knowledge of cats to help them.
Page 4 The students keep track of the time frame from page 3 and understand that it is still Tuesday. They identify the change in setting and characters. They use evidence from the text ("Usually" and "That's strange") to infer that it is unusual for Walter not to come for his dinner. They make connections to their own experiences of a missing pet or person, the information about the children searching for him, and Mum saying "Don't worry" to infer that Jason and Amelia are concerned.	If necessary, draw attention to "On Tuesday evening" and check that the students have followed the change in time and setting. *I know that it's evening now and Walter hasn't come for his dinner. What words can you find that tell the reader it is unusual for Walter not to turn up at dinner time? How are Jason and Amelia feeling? What clues in the text help you think that?*
Page 5 The students establish that it's the next day and Walter is still missing. They use the information in the text and their knowledge of searching to infer that everyone is worried. They confirm their inference that Walter is well liked and cared for and would not just run off. The students use word-solving strategies to work out that "scratching his head" shows that Ernie is puzzled. The students keep track of information to follow the events leading up to Walter's disappearance. They refine their hypotheses about what might have happened to Walter and provide evidence for their predictions. The students identify that the two questions and the change in font is a signal that the story goes back in time to describe what happened to Walter.	After reading this page, ask: *How are Walter's family and friends feeling? How do you know?* If necessary, model how you made an inference about this. *I used clues from the text and made connections to what I know. I read that Jason, Amelia, and Mum went to the factory, so they must be worried. I know this because I would feel this way if it was my cat. It says that Ernie was worried, too.* If necessary, support the students to understand Ernie's action of scratching his head. *Imagine you're thinking about something you don't understand. Show me what that looks like. Why do you think Ernie was scratching his head?* If necessary, clarify that searching "high and low" is another way of saying that they looked everywhere. *Now we know that Walter hasn't been seen since Tuesday lunchtime. What else do we know?* Have the students think, pair, and share their ideas. *Have there been any further clues to help us work out what has happened to Walter?* Have the students read the last two sentences on page 5. *I'm wondering why they look different. What do you think we are about to find out?* Have the students think, pair, and share their ideas before turning the page.

Page 6

The students confirm by using the time phrase "After lunch on Tuesday", that the story has now gone back in time.

They use clues from the text and their prior knowledge of cats to determine that Walter was stalking a mouse. The students use their knowledge of the words "Everything went black" and their prior knowledge to infer that the container door has been closed and Walter has been trapped inside.

The students review their predictions.

If necessary, discuss the time phrase "After lunch on Tuesday". Confirm that the story has gone back to the time when Walter disappeared. Note the verb phrases "had happened" and "had stretched" and that they signal a shift further back from a past point in time.

What have we learned about what happened to Walter?

Have the students revisit their predictions. *Think about the prediction you made on page 5. Is this what you thought had happened to Walter?*

Page 7

As the students read page 7, they infer that Walter is unhappy about being locked in the container and that he is probably scared. They make connections between the text and title to confirm he is the stowaway.

They predict what might happen next.

Support the students to identify clues in the text to help them infer how Walter is feeling.

Who do you think the stowaway is? What might happen to him now?

Pages 8–9

The students use context clues and any prior knowledge of border controls to work out what a quarantine officer does.

Students use the text and their understanding of time to visualise what the journey must have been like for Walter. They infer it would have been frightening and Walter would have been relieved to get out.

The students identify that the officer is kind and cares for Walter. The students make connections across the text (that Walter was loved by his family and the factory workers) to predict that Walter will return to New Zealand.

Prompt students to monitor their understanding of the text. *I've read the word "quarantine", but I'm not sure what it means. I'll read on to see if I can find out more information.*

Support the students to visualise what it was like for Walter by having them close their eyes and imagine they are in a dark and cold place.

How will Walter be feeling? Why do you think that?

Why does the quarantine officer say she's found a stowaway?

What do you think will happen to Walter now?

Page 10

The students revisit their predictions and confirm them by reading the text.

They use any knowledge they have of travelling overseas to understand Ernie's joke.

Is this what you thought would happen? Why or why not?

Explain that a passport is a travel document that everyone needs when they travel to Australia, but don't interrupt the flow of the reading.

Page 11

Students compare the fictional version with the true story, making connections between the two texts. They use information about how long Douglas was shut in the container to better understand how amazing his adventure was.

Have the students look at the map and the photograph and read the information on this page. *I'm thinking this was an incredible journey for the cat. What new information do we learn about the stowaway?*

M With support, the students reflect on their learning. They revisit the reading purpose and learning goal(s) and explain what they did to meet them, for example, using the clues about Walter's relationship with other characters, his disappearance, and the setting to work out what had happened.

M The students identify some challenges in the text and how they worked (or tried to work) them out.

Revisit the reading purpose and learning goal(s).

M Ask questions: *How did using the clues in the text and the illustrations help you to work out who the stowaway was and what had happened?*

M *What strategies did you use to help you solve any difficulties in this text?* If necessary, model or explain some strategies the students could use.

After reading

- Students can reread the story as they listen to the audio version on the *Readalong 2012: Ready to Read and Junior Journal 44 and 45* CD or the MP3 file. Audio versions also provide English language learners with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Provide opportunities for the students to practise and consolidate their skills of making connections between clues in the text and illustrations to make inferences.
  - Provide photocopies of pages 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 of the text. Have the students add thought bubbles to the characters on these pages to show what they are thinking and feeling. Then ask them to write two or three sentences to summarise what has happened to make the characters feel this way. Remind the students to reread each page before they complete their thought bubbles and sentences. If necessary, model an example first, such as page 3. Read the page aloud and model your thinking. *It says that the workers talked to Walter and gave him food. Sometimes, he would sit on Ernie's lap. So I know from this information that they really liked Walter.* Draw a thought bubble for one of the factory workers: *He's a good cat. I wonder if he would like a bit of ham from my sandwich.* Your modelled sentences might say: *The factory workers like Walter. They feed him ham and scraps from their lunches.*
- Provide opportunities for the students to practise and consolidate their skills of making connections between clues in the text and the illustrations to make inferences across other texts. See the Related texts section below for examples of texts you could use in a guided reading session.

Related texts

Texts that require students to use clues in the text and illustrations to make inferences: "Missing" (JJ 42), "Taniwha Trouble" (JJ 40)