



Overview

This beautiful poem by one of New Zealand's best-known poets, Denis Glover (most famous for "The Magpies"), describes objects drifting on the ocean. The deceptively simple poem has a tight structure, building the mood and movement of objects that drift on water. This is done through a sonnet of seven rhyming couplets that use the classic poetic devices of alliteration, repetition, rhyme, and meter (rhythm).

The poem makes an interesting coda to the article "59.5 Degrees South", which describes the high-tech floats that scientists deliberately release to drift on the oceans' currents. You may wish to read the poem aloud (or have the students read it to each other) several times before you begin teaching.

Texts related by theme

"Awa" SJ L2 Aug 2012 | "Rain" SJ L3 Feb 2012

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand

DRIFT

Drift drift upon the beach
Dead Man's Bay and Dead Man's Reach
Driftwood dunks and driftwood rides
Inert upon the endless tides
Debris down the river drifting
Debris of the ocean's sifting
Sullen log, the sodden boot
Tangled in the mangrove root
Upturned boat and empty tin
Drifting out and drifting in
One storm took them one storm more
May drive them to the indifferent shore
Castaways of wind and weather
Drifting aimlessly together.
~ Denis Glover

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abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy a poem and the mood it creates
- To explore one person's way of describing something
- To analyse the way a poem is created to achieve a specific effect.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To express an idea through poetry
- To explore the use of different structures for poetic writing
- To use aspects of a poet's work as a model for writing.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possibly unfamiliar words, including “dunks”, “Inert”, “Debris”, “sifting”, “Sullen”, “sodden”, “mangrove”, “indifferent”, “Castaways”, “aimlessly”
- The place names: “Dead Man's Bay”, “Dead Man's Reach”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify words that will be unfamiliar to your students. Research suggests that students need to know about 98 percent of the words to understand a text. If students know nearly all of the words, then this text allows them to use vocabulary strategies to help them work out the unfamiliar words. If students know less than 98 percent, they probably need support before they read or listen to the poem. For these students, particularly ELLs, you could give them jumbled words and definitions. Have the students work in small groups to match the words and definitions. Provide resources to support them, for example, bilingual dictionaries, pictures, or example sentences.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with reading and writing poetry
- Experience of seeing logs and other objects drifting in a river or the sea.

Possible supporting strategies

After reading, remind the students of the features they have previously encountered in poetry.

Ask students to share their experiences of objects drifting in a river or the sea, describing their movement and where the objects may have come from.

The students may like to share examples of poetry from their own cultures and languages: remind all students that we can often gain a sense of a poem by hearing it read aloud – even if we don't understand the words.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Sonnet (fourteen lines, in two verses of six and eight lines)
- Alliteration: Drift, Dead, Debris; Sullen, sodden; wind, weather
- Repetition: drift, drifting, driftwood; Dead Man's, debris
- Meter: the lines are roughly in iambic pentameter
- Rhyme: each pair of lines has an end rhyme (rhyming couplets)
- Personification: “driftwood rides”; “the ocean's sifting”, “Sullen log”, “Drifting aimlessly together”
- The lack of punctuation (apart from in the place names) and the upper-case letters at the start of every line.

Possible supporting strategies

After reading, use charts or other references that list the various poetic devices. To support students' understanding of these, have them listen to a sensitive reading or read the poem aloud to them.

Meter is likely to be very difficult for ELLs. The main factor in meter is word stress (stressed and unstressed syllables), which can be very challenging for learners of English. Many languages do not have stressed and unstressed syllables. Display a copy of the poem and model saying and marking the stressed syllables in the first verse. Listen to the verse together, following the stress in the marked-up copy. (You may find it useful to model and then have students tap their desk or clap their hands on the stressed syllables.) Ask the students to listen for the stress and mark it in pairs. Then listen together and mark (and tap or clap) the stress. Repeat this with further examples. Have ELLs continue to mark and learn the word stress in any new vocabulary. For example: u/ ' pon, i/ ' nert. This can benefit their listening comprehension and their pronunciation. This BBC site has some good explanations and examples of word stress.

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/word-stress> <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/word-stress>

This British Council site has some games and activities related to word stress.

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/category/pronunciation/stress-intonation/pronunciation-word-stress> <http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/category/pronunciation/stress-intonation/pronunciation-word-stress>

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Drift”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Drift drift upon the beach
Dead Man’s Bay and Dead Man’s Reach
Driftwood dunks and driftwood rides
Inert upon the endless tides

*The students **make connections** between the text and their experiences of watching objects drift onto a beach to **infer** that the poet is fascinated by the way things drift about on the sea. They may also make connections with their experiences of drifting on a boogie board or similar, letting the waves carry them along to visualise the feeling of drifting.*

*They use their knowledge of place name conventions to **infer** that Dead Man’s Bay and Dead Man’s Reach are places on the coast, probably where a dead man had been found.*

The students use their vocabulary knowledge from other contexts to understand the words “dunks” and “inert”.

ASK questions to generate discussion of the text’s topic and structure.

- How do you know this is a poem? What features did you use to identify it?
- The topic is clear, but what was Denis Glover’s purpose?
- What is the main feeling he has communicated?
- Looking at the first few lines, what language features have helped him get this feeling across?

DISCUSS the place names.

- How do you know these are the names of places?
- Do you think they are real places? How could you find out?
- Why did Glover use these particular places? What do they add to the mood of the poem?

MODEL using vocabulary knowledge to work out word meanings.

- I like to dunk a biscuit in my tea. When I saw “dunk” here, I used my experience of dunking a biscuit to form a mental image of a piece of driftwood dipping in and out of the water.
- We’ve learnt about inert gases and metals in science. They don’t react with any other elements. So I applied this meaning to the poem to understand that Glover is suggesting the driftwood doesn’t react or change, it just goes along with the water.
- Remember that knowing a word in one context can help you understand what a writer means in a different context.

PROMPT the students to identify their connections with the poem.

- What experiences have helped you to understand this poem? Tell us about them.
- When might someone be described as “sullen”? Why do you think Glover used this word?
- What kind of rubbish are you likely to see drifting at a beach or river?

PROMPT the students to share their thoughts about the poem.

- Read the poem to yourself again, then think about the overall response you have to it now. Is this the same as your first impression? If not, why has it changed?
- Now share your thoughts with a partner. Tell each other what your first impressions were and how (if at all) they have changed.

DIRECT each pair to share their responses with the wider group.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed you read the poem aloud softly. That’s a good way to try to understand a poet’s intentions and to work out how they were achieved.
- You’ve integrated your own experiences of watching driftwood float down a river with the poet’s descriptions to evaluate the poem. How did this compare with your partner’s evaluation?

Sullen log, the sodden boot
Tangled in the mangrove root
Upturned boat and empty tin
Drifting out and drifting in

*The students **make connections** between the text and their knowledge of rubbish to **infer** that the items described (boot, boat, tin) are ones that humans have discarded. They use vocabulary knowledge to understand “sullen” and knowledge of poetic devices to **infer** that the poet intends readers to imagine that the log shares the human characteristic of moodiness and an unwillingness to go somewhere.*

Castaways of wind and weather
Drifting aimlessly together.

*The students **integrate** the ideas and the images presented in the poem with their own experiences of driftwood and of poetry to **evaluate** how well the poet has communicated his ideas.*

METACOGNITION

- What reading strategies helped you as you read the poem? How did they help you?
- How did thinking about your own experiences help you to understand the poem?
- How did your knowledge of other poems and how they are written help you to understand this poem?
- How did comparing the rhythm of this poem with a poem in your first language help you understand how the writers achieved their purposes.

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.)

Text excerpts from “Drift”

Driftwood dunks and driftwood rides

Inert upon the endless tides

Debris down the river drifting

Debris of the ocean’s sifting

Examples of text characteristics

RHYMING COUPLETS

A rhyming couplet usually has two lines with the same meter and the same end rhymes. They can sometimes have the effect of slow movement as each line moves towards the end rhyme at the same pace.

REPETITION, ALLITERATION

Repeating a word or sound draws the reader’s focus to the words. Writers use these devices carefully so as to put the emphasis on key words.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

In poetry, writers often stretch, condense, or change sentences from what we expect in prose. The writer might not use the usual conventions of punctuation, but knowledge of how parts of speech work together (for example, subject-verb-object) helps the reader to follow the meaning. The line breaks, rhymes, and meter also help indicate the start and end of sentences.

Upturned boat and empty tin

Drifting out and drifting in

One storm took them one storm more

May drive them to the indifferent shore

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

EXPLAIN that a writer can communicate a mood or a feeling by using rhyme and rhythm.

- Say these lines aloud, stressing the “beat” or meter of the lines.
- What feelings did it give you?
- As you consider the effect you want to achieve in your writing, think about how you could use meter and rhyme. Be wary though. If the words don’t appear to flow easily, the rhyme will sound forced and unnatural.

Note that hearing and analysing the rhythm of the poem is likely to be challenging for ELLs. See page 2 for suggestions on how to support ELLs. They are likely to need a lot of support with using meter in particular.

PROMPT the students to consider their word choices.

- Read your work aloud, sentence by sentence. Are the words you’ve emphasised (with rhyme, alliteration, repetition, or other devices) key words for carrying the meaning?
- If not, are there other ways to give the emphasis?
- Look carefully at some of the examples in “Drift” to identify how Glover has used repetition and other methods to focus attention on key ideas.

MODEL your thinking about sentence structure.

- In the poem, the ideas flow into one another, imitating the drift of water. I use my knowledge of sentence structure to work out what the lines mean, even though there is almost no punctuation.
- In these two lines, “drifting” refers to the items in the previous lines. The verb, “took” has “one storm” as its subject and “them” as its object. When I draw on my knowledge of grammar (how sentences work) the meaning is clear, even though there is no punctuation.

DIRECT the students to review each other’s writing.

- Choose a part of your writing that you feel works well.
- Tell your partner your purpose and the reason you used a particular sentence structure.
- Exchange work with your partner and read through the work carefully, focusing on the selected parts. Ignore small errors and focus on the poetic devices.
- Give your partner written or oral feedback, suggesting ways of changing or improving their writing.
- With your partner, discuss what you have both learnt about the ways you can use poetic devices to achieve an effect.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your rhymes work very well – the rhyming words are key to understanding the meaning.
- When I read this aloud, I had to slow right down: the repetition and alliteration gave the poem a lovely sleepy feeling.
- I could hear from your feedback discussion that you had each learnt more about the effective use of ... and revised your work to improve it.

METACOGNITION

- Why did you choose to use these poetic devices? How did they help you achieve the feeling you wanted to convey?
- How did using other poems as models help you?
- What devices from poems in your own language help you understand devices in English?

Writing standard: by the end of year 5
The Literacy Learning Progressions