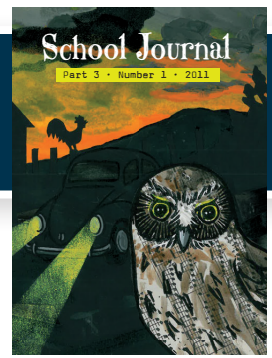


The Race

by Rose Quilter

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Noun frequency level: 8.5–9.5
Year 5



Overview

“The Race” appears to be an exciting story about a girl who is running a race – competing against her brother, with encouragement from Dad. As the story progresses, though, some details show a different scenario. By the last page, it is clear that this is no ordinary race: the family is running to escape a tsunami that destroys the area where they have been. The fast-paced narrative builds tension while, at the same time, it raises questions that will encourage students to infer meaning.

The story gives opportunities to explore the author’s techniques. It could also be used to introduce students to tsunami and their impact on communities.

You will need to be aware of, and sensitive to, students who have lost family in tsunami or who have had to escape from frightening situations.

Texts related by theme “Sprint” SJ 4.3.09 | “The Journey” SJ 3.3.10

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

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

THE RACE
by Rose Quilter

Dad yells, “Go!” – and we hit the ground running. In three paces, Matt is ahead of me. I see the sand spurt away from his toes. His footprints are churning up the beach.

“Go, Ellie, go!” Dad is almost screaming at me. Another six paces, and Matt is really starting to pull away. His head is down, his shoulders bunched, no looking back.

“Faster, Ellie.” Dad is somewhere behind me, and I stretch out, straining for more speed, trying to reach my full stride.

Matt is crossing the road, and even as I notice it, I’m on the road myself. In less than two seconds, I’m off the other side, running so fast that I don’t feel the change in surfaces beneath my feet.

Back on the sand. Through the trees.

My heart is a hammer, pounding a hole in the wall of my chest. My breathing is hoarse, filling my head. But I can still hear Dad’s voice. “Come on! Keep going!”

One of my jandals flies off. I keep running, just a few steps, then I spin around and go back for it. I don’t know why – I don’t even like those jandals. Dad is yelling at me. He can’t believe his eyes. But I’ve turned and I’m running again, with my jandal back on. I can see Matt. I’ll catch him. I always have.

There are other runners around me. They’re a blur. I can see them and not see them. I’m running in a tunnel, and they are on the walls – like the trees and the houses. Matt is the only person I can see clearly. Dad’s voice is the only one I can hear. “Run, Ellie, run. Don’t look back.”

Of course I look back. Am I ahead? Can I do it?

“Run,” Dad yells. “Run, run, run.”

Beneath my feet the ground begins to slope upwards. In front of me is a wall of green. There’s a roaring in my ears. Is it a real sound? It should give me strength – and I need strength to win this race – but instead, I’m weakening. Beneath my pounding heart, beneath my gasping breath, I am weak.

I can’t do it. Have to stop.

“Climb, Ellie, climb.” Dad’s voice is like a hand in my back, and I’m climbing now, jandals in one hand, grabbing at trees, clawing at rocks, scrambling hand over hand upwards. “Faster!”

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

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and Audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and Audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To discuss how a fictional story helps us to understand real events
- To analyse how the author has built the tension in the text
- To explore the author's use of language
- To identify why the author has chosen this topic.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To use features of the text to write a story about escaping from danger
- To share a family story with the class
- To build tension in a fictional text.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and concepts, including “paces”, “spurt”, “churning”, “bunched”, “straining”, “full stride”, “surfaces”, “hoarse”, “jandals”, “blur”, “clawing”, “scrambling”, “whack”, “recognise”, “tourists’ fale”, “surges”, “debris”
- The colloquial expression: “hit the ground running”
- The extended metaphors: “My heart is a hammer ...”, “I’m running in a tunnel, and they are on the walls ...”
- The simile: “like a hand in my back”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify any words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to your students and plan ways to address this vocabulary before, during, and after reading.

You could create word maps to explore connections between words (for example, those associated with running and speed). For more information about and examples of word maps see ESOL Online at: <http://englishonline.tki.org.nz/English-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/Cross-curricular-strategies/Teaching-approaches-and-strategies/Vocabulary/Word-clusters-maps>

You could link to vocabulary and concepts about races. Explore the students’ expectations about a “normal” running race to help them notice what goes against these expectations in the story.

Some students may need support to understand the colloquial and figurative language. Allow opportunities for them to encounter these through oral language before reading. Ask students who know other languages to make connections with how figurative language works in those languages.

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

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of running in a race
- The concept of running away from danger
- Familiarity with stories that build tension and drama towards a climax
- Knowledge (from news items and elsewhere) of tsunami and the damage they can cause.

Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, allow students to share their experiences of running.

- Why were you running?
- What were you feeling, physically and emotionally?
- How would you describe the feeling of reaching the end?

Also talk about races and what they include.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Dramatic first-person, present-tense narrative
- The use of both external and internal dialogue
- The use of self-questioning, including “Am I ahead? Can I do it?”
- The speed of the race conveyed through the use of descriptive language and short sentences
- The use of clues to help the reader infer the context
- The need to make inferences about the purpose of the race, then the revelation through the illustration and the final paragraph
- The supportive illustrations.

Possible supporting strategies

As students begin to read, support them to identify the setting and the characters. Check that they understand the use of the first person and the present tense to give drama as if it is happening in real time.

Some students may need support to pick up on the clues that this is not a normal race. Rather than spoil the drama, use a second reading to locate clues and make inferences. A lot of students’ initial inferences will turn out to be false once they have read the text.

Review the use of quotation marks to indicate dialogue and discuss the concept of internal dialogue.

Create a graphic organiser to help students keep track of the clues in the story, to focus on the language, and to record any difficulties they have. The graphic organiser could include setting, Ellie’s feelings, Dad’s feelings, and evidence from the text. Give the students time to fill in the graphic organiser for sections of the text. They could do this with a partner and then share their ideas with other pairs. Allow students who share another language to work together and discuss their ideas in that language.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Purposes and Audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The Race”

Back on the sand.
Through the trees. My heart is a hammer, pounding a hole in the wall of my chest. My breathing is hoarse, filling my head.

One of my jandals flies off. I keep running, just a few steps, then I spin around and go back for it. I don't know why – I don't even like those jandals.

I whack my knee on a rock and drop my jandals. Don't care now. Let them go.

“Come on, Ellie, higher!”

Am I high enough? How high do I need to go?

Students (what they might do)

Students use what they know about how language works to *infer* the meaning of the sentence fragments, supplying the missing parts as they read.

They **make connections** with their experiences of running and breathing hard and use the metaphor “My heart is a hammer” to **visualise** what the narrator is feeling and hearing.

Students **ask questions and make connections** with their own running experiences as they try to understand why she would be running in jandals, why she would go back for a dropped jandal, and why Dad “can't believe his eyes”. They use these connections and other information in the text to **infer** that this is not a normal running race. Students **form hypotheses** about why Ellie and her family are running so desperately.

Students draw on and **integrate** several related pieces of information to **infer** that Ellie is now in pain and too tired to care about her jandals. They use this information to **visualise** the pain and tiredness she must be feeling.

The students use their knowledge of punctuation (speech marks) to **infer** that Ellie's father is the speaker. They **ask and answer questions** that parallel those Ellie asks herself. They **integrate** information from the text and the illustration to **infer** that the family has been running to escape a tsunami.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to develop students' awareness of the strategies they used as they read and responded to the text.

- How did making connections with factual articles about tsunami help you to understand the text?
- What have you learnt about how an author can shape a text to achieve their purpose?
- What helped you to connect with Ellie, Matt, and Dad?
- How did you deal with the confusing information, such as the fact that she was running in jandals?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to identify the features of the author's writing.

- Who is telling the story? How do you know?
- The story is in the present tense. What effect does this have?
- Why do you think the author used so many short sentences?
- How is Ellie feeling? Why do you think that? How does the author achieve that effect? What other ways does the author communicate the drama and mood of the race?

EXPLAIN that visualising is a good strategy to use when reading.

- When you can imagine what a person is thinking, seeing, and hearing, you're visualising. Visualising helps to deepen your understanding of a character or a situation. Authors know this and give details that develop a mood and help their readers to visualise. As I read this paragraph, the short sentences help me to visualise a girl running with real urgency.

EXPLAIN that a useful reading strategy is to ask questions as you read. The questions you ask help you to find information.

MODEL some possible questions:

- Why is she running in jandals?
- Why is Dad yelling at her, and why can't he “believe his eyes”?

ASK QUESTIONS to support those students who may need help to make connections and inferences about the race.

- What connections can you make with your own experiences of running?
- Are there things that are the same as and different from the races we discussed earlier? What questions are you asking yourselves now?
- What inferences can you make about the race?

PROMPT students to help them integrate information across the text.

- The jandals have been mentioned before. I wonder why the author does this.
- I wonder what the author achieves by letting us see Ellie's thoughts.
- What do you think “enough” refers to? High enough for what?
- The author repeats the word “higher”. How does this help you to understand the situation?
- What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this story?
- What other stories have a “twist” like this?

Encourage students to share other stories they know that are like this, including movies, oral stories, stories in other languages, or stories from other cultures.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You've asked great questions while you were reading, such as ... They really helped you to think about what was happening because you were looking for answers as you read on.
- You've used your own experiences well to help you understand what Ellie was going through.
- You've made strong connections to the tsunami we've all heard about in the past few years. I can see that you now understand how terrifying a tsunami can be.

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Purposes and Audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The Race”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

AUDIENCE

Writers always have an audience in mind when they are writing. This audience can determine the style that the writer uses.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students as they form their writing intentions.

- How will you make decisions about your topic, purpose, and audience?
- What “voice” will you use? Why? What tone or level of formality will be best for your purpose and audience?
- How will you keep your audience in mind as you write? Will you work with a buddy to give each other critical feedback?

MODEL reading this part of the text, putting emphasis on the dashes.

- Listen to me when I read this part. What do the dashes do? What effect do they have?
- Look at your story and think about where dashes could add extra emphasis.

EXPLAIN that authors can use different techniques to influence their readers and achieve their purpose.

- Think about your overall purpose and the way you want your readers to experience the text at key points. For example, in this extract “strength” is repeated, emphasising what the speaker needs. “Beneath” and “weak/weakened” are also repeated, letting us know that although Ellie is still running, deep down she’s worrying that she doesn’t have the strength she needs.

ASK QUESTIONS to help students review and refine their writing to meet their purposes.

- Focus on a key part of your text. What do you want your readers to feel or understand at this point?
- What changes could help your audience to “get the message”?
- Why might you choose to use incomplete or unusual word order? How can you be sure your readers won’t mistake this for bad grammar?

EXPLAIN the difference between implicit and explicit.

- Good authors expect their readers to work some things out for themselves. In this extract, the author shows what has happened. She gave clues, but she didn’t need to use the word “tsunami”. The description of the devastation and the words “torn away by the sea” show me what has happened. The illustration supports my inference.

PROMPT the students to review the ways they have shown their readers important ideas and information.

- Look at your ending. Have you left your readers with a satisfying resolution?
- Does peer feedback suggest you need to add, delete, or change anything to achieve your purpose?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The changes you’ve made to achieve your purpose will help your readers to understand why ...
- Your use of repetition is very effective. You’ve helped me to see that this is a key point.
- You’ve given your reader clues to help work out what has happened without giving it away completely. This builds up the suspense well.

It should give me strength – and I need strength to win this race – but instead, I’m weakening. Beneath my pounding heart, beneath my gasping breath, I am weak.

TEXT STRUCTURE

Dashes can serve different purposes. In this extract, the dashes are like pauses for the “speaker” to catch her breath.

Placing the main clause after two subordinate phrases also slows down the reader, giving emphasis to the ideas.

REPETITION

Repeating an idea or a word draws the reader’s attention. It’s a clue to its importance and can also slow down the reading for effect.

Upwards, higher and faster. Reach. Pull. Heave. Up, up, up.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Short snappy sentences or sentence fragments convey a sense of urgency. They act like a kind of shorthand, letting the reader know that there is no time to fill in the details. The writer expects the reader to fill in the details.

We turn and look down through the trees, to the village, to the tourists’ fale, to the beach. All gone. All completely gone, smashed up and torn away by the sea – by the water that still surges over everything. Fast-flowing, brown, grey, black water, full of debris.

IMPLICATION

In order to get readers to infer, authors need to imply information or ideas. Authors can give clues throughout the text that culminate in a revelation, or they may continue to show rather than tell the reader the information.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage students to think more deeply about their writing.

- What did you want your readers to think? What were you trying to say? How did you achieve this?
- Why did you use the present tense? What effect were you trying to achieve?
- What experiences or knowledge do your readers need to have to pick up on the clues you’ve given them? Are you expecting too much or too little from them?

Writing standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions