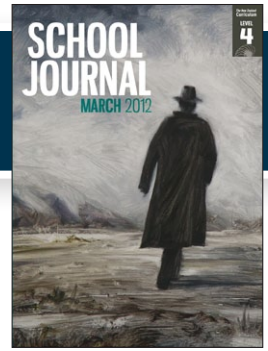


The Squash Club

by Hinemoana Baker

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Year 8



Overview

Hinemoana Baker's poem reflects on childhood memories of waiting for her father while he played squash. In short stanzas, she recalls the sights, feel, and smells of those times.

In the accompanying prose text, Hinemoana talks about these memories and how she crafted her poem to convey the sense "that the nothingness would never end". Her explanation gives an insight into her craft as she shares details about the way she shaped her poem.

The poem and the prose provide opportunities to explore themes of memory and childhood, and they support the key competencies of using language, symbols, and texts and managing self.

Texts related by theme "My Grandad's Hands" SJ L3 Nov 2011 | "Ink wells" SJ 2.4.10

Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

sentences that vary in length, including long, complex sentences that contain a lot of information

academic and content-specific vocabulary

HINEMOANA BAKER ON "THE SQUASH CLUB"

I never forget the way that time slows down when you're bored as a child. Children are so dependent on other people for the quality of their day-to-day lives.

When I was younger, my father would often take me to the local squash club on the weekends. I'd drift around upstairs while he squeaked and slammed his way through a game or two in the echo-chamber courts below. I think maybe this was his way of spending time with me.

Even though a game only lasted about 40 minutes, it seemed like years to me. There was a sense that the nothingness would never end, and I think this focused my senses on the fixtures, fittings, and furniture around me. I discovered every possible way of climbing up and down the two shallow flights of stairs.

As the poem says, I also did a lot of searching for 20-cent pieces, which were a good deal larger in those days. If I ever found one, it meant I could buy a packet of chips – or maybe even activate the thunderous roll of the heavy, cold balls in the belly of the pool table. I am still taken back to those days whenever I see those hanging blue cubes of chalk, and I have to resist the urge to scrape some out with my fingernail and use it as blue eye shadow.

When writing about all this, I tried to focus on the senses (always a good place to start in a poem). I also tried to slow the poem's time down to the same rate as time seemed to pass when I was a child at that squash club. I tried to make sure that the pace at which the images appear, the length of the lines, the size of the stanzas, and the overall voice or tone of the poem were all in a kind of slow motion, too.

... I also did a lot of searching for 20-cent pieces ... If I ever found one, it meant I could buy a packet of chips ...

If I'd tried to cram more memories in, the poem might have seemed less spacious – perhaps even a bit more stimulating than the experience itself was. I had to choose which memories were still the most vivid for me. I notice I don't directly refer to the squash games at all in the poem. I think this is because the games are often very fast, and this could have detracted from the slow-motion effect I was trying to achieve.

adverbial clauses or connectives that require students to make links across the whole text

complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments

Reading standard: by the end of year 8

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy and relate to a poem about a childhood memory
- To learn how and why a poet has written a poem.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To capture a personal memory in a poem
- To explain how and why you wrote a particular piece of writing
- To shape a piece of writing for a specific purpose and audience.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “squash club”, “pool-table”, “palm”, “felt”, “gearbag”, “wash-house”, “dependent”, “echo-chamber”, “nothingness”, “fixtures”, “activate”, “thunderous”, “stanzas”, “cram”, “spacious”, “stimulating”, “detracted”.

Possible supporting strategies

Many students should be able to work out the words in the texts, but some may need support with the ways that some words are used.

If necessary, provide support for subject-specific vocabulary such as those words related to sports (“squash club”, “pool-table”, “gearbag”, and “echo-chamber courts”).

See the suggestions below under Specific Knowledge Required. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Childhood memories of waiting for others
- Knowledge of squash and where it is played
- Experience of crafting writing to meet a purpose
- Familiarity with reading poetry and with the way information can be compressed in a poem.

Possible supporting strategies

The poem and explanation convey ideas that will be familiar to most readers, although some students may need support to visualise the squash club and the sights and sounds found there. Although the poem is not about a squash club, it relies on the reader’s ability to visualise the sights, sounds, and smells. For students who don’t have experiences of squash courts, you could play a brief video clip and discuss what you see and hear. At the same time, you could discuss and record key vocabulary.

Some students may need support to understand the writer’s explanation of the inspiration for her poem and the way she wrote it.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A free verse form
- An explanation by the writer of how she wrote the poem
- Use of poetic language features such as internal rhyme (“piece”, “crease”) and metaphor (“the warm hairdryer air”)
- Condensed sentences in the poem, where verbs or subjects may be omitted
- The line breaks, with sentences in the poem split over two stanzas
- The use of metaphor and simile in the writer’s explanation, including “time slows down”, “he squeaked and slammed”, “the echo-chamber courts”, “seemed like years”, “the belly of the pool table”.

Possible supporting strategies

Prompt the students to recall the features they expect to find in poetry and how they can distinguish a poem from a prose text.

Support students if necessary to follow the poem’s pattern, in particular the links between the stanzas. Students can read the poem aloud, trying out different ways of showing the pauses and links between stanzas.

Discuss features of an explanation, and support students to follow the connections between the poem and the explanation, for example, prompting them to notice the parts of the poem as they are discussed by the author.

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “the squash club” and “Hinemoana Baker on ‘the squash club’”

Students (what they might do)

When I was a girl I had a choice: wait in the car or wait in the Squash Club.

Students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences of waiting for a parent or other adult. They **infer** that the narrator was bored and that the poem's title implies she chose to wait in the squash club rather than the car.

The whole place smelled like my father's gearbag his headbands left overnight in the wash-house.

The students **make connections** between the images and their own experiences to **visualise** the smell of the squash club. They **evaluate** the idea to **infer** that the smell might not be entirely unpleasant because it reminds her of her father.

When writing about all this, I tried to focus on the senses (always a good place to start in a poem). I also tried to slow the poem's time down to the same rate as time seemed to pass when I was a child at that squash club.

Students **locate, evaluate, and synthesise** information from the poem and the poet's explanation to appreciate how and why she created particular effects. They also **make connections** with their own experiences to **visualise** the sense of time slowed down.

There was a pool-table.

My palm on the green felt my finger tracing the black

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to generate discussion of the writer's purpose and audience.

- What is the purpose of the first stanza? What did you think when you first read it?
- What personal experiences helped you understand the poem?
- Why do you think Hinemoana wrote the poem? Who do you think she wrote it for?
- What is the main feeling she has communicated in the poem? How has she done this? Share some examples with a partner.

Discuss the way our senses help us to make connections.

- Would the smell be good or bad or something in between? Why do you think that?
- How does Hinemoana use sensory details to convey her ideas? Find other examples in the poem and share them.
- Why do you think our senses help us make connections with people, places, and times?

PROMPT the students to identify connections between the poem and the explanation.

- How does the explanation affect your interpretation you got from the poem?
- Does it deepen your understanding?
- Does it make you appreciate the poem more or does it spoil the poem for you? Talk to your partner about this.
- Why is Hinemoana explaining how she wrote?
- Who is she writing this explanation for? Why do you think that?

You could use a graphic organiser to support students to understand the language in the poem and/or the effects of the language. Guide students to explicitly identify each word or phrase and its purpose or effect and to record this information, either in two columns in a table or in categories in a mind map. This can give these students opportunities to clarify their understanding, to experiment with identifying language, and to discuss any issues.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed you turned back to the poem as you read Hinemoana's explanation. You've integrated information from both sources to understand why she wrote the poem the way she did. How did that help you?
- You've used your own experiences of waiting in the car to gain insight into the feeling of time slowing down and to help you understand the feelings Hinemoana wanted to communicate. What other techniques did the author use to convey her boredom?

METACOGNITION

- What reading strategies helped you as you read the poem the first or second time? Why?
- What did you gain from the poem when you read it again after reading Hinemoana's story? How did it help?
- How did thinking about your experiences help you to understand the poem or the story, or both?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 8

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Text excerpts from “the squash club” and “Hinemoana Baker on the squash club”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

- the warm hairdryer air
- time slows down
- he squeaked and slammed
- the echo-chamber courts
- seemed like years
- the belly of the pool table

METAPHORS AND SIMILES

Authors can use metaphors or similes to communicate an idea, a feeling, or a mood.

EXPLAIN that a writer can communicate an idea, a feeling, or a mood through using a simile or metaphor.

- Could you almost smell the air in the dressing room?
- Could you picture the squash courts? Think about what the author did to create that image.
- As you revise your writing, think about how you can deliver strong images to your readers.

For students who would benefit from more explicit focus on metaphors and similes, you could make charts of examples, grouping them according to facial expressions or body language, speech or sounds, and so on. If appropriate, provide opportunities to explore metaphors and similes in other languages – noting that it often doesn't translate well so is a challenge in language learning.

wait in the car or wait in the Squash Club.
...
my finger tracing the black semi-circle, the dent in the blue chalk.

LINE BREAKS

A poet selects where to insert line breaks, and this affects how people read a poem.

PROMPT the students to cover the poem and then uncover and reread it line by line.

- What do you notice?
- What does covering the text draw attention to? (the line breaks)
- What is the impact of the second line break in the first stanza? (it gives a sense of anticipation about the alternative and emphasises the subject of the poem)

MODEL your thinking about particular line breaks.

- When I read the line “my finger tracing the black”, I thought that the poet was talking about the black ball used in a game of pool. And the line break after “the dent” made me visualise a well-worn pool table that had seen a hard life.
- Have a look at your poem. How might your line breaks affect how a reader engages with it?

I tried to make the sure the pace at which the images appear, the length of the lines, the size of the stanzas, and the overall voice or tone of the poem were all in a kind of slow motion, too.

If I'd tried to cram more memories in, the poem might have seemed less spacious – perhaps even a bit more stimulating than the experience itself was. I had to choose which memories were still the most vivid for me.

DETAILS

Authors select details to support their writing purpose. Details can help a reader to understand, visualise, empathise, and gain an insight into the author's (or character's) thinking.

Sometimes authors remove details to achieve their writing purpose: in poetry especially, every detail must be there for a reason, so the selection of details becomes very important.

MODEL the use of focussed feedback by reviewing a volunteer's writing, as suggested below. You may need to provide training to support students in giving and receiving peer feedback, keeping in mind that students need to use feedback as a way of developing their metacognitive awareness of quality writing.

DIRECT the students to review each other's writing.

- Choose a place in your writing where you have described or explained something or given directions for doing something.
- Tell your partner what your purpose was and who you were writing for (audience).
- Exchange work with your partner and read through the work carefully, keeping the purpose and audience in mind. Ignore small errors and focus on the extent to which the details help it meet the expressed purpose.
- Give your partner written or oral feedback, suggesting ways of improving their writing by adding or removing details.
- With your partner, discuss what you have both learnt about the ways you can develop your writing to better meet your writing purposes.

Note that English language learners may need a lot of guidance in providing feedback. Written criteria they can refer to and a manageable number of things to look at will support them. Learners who share a language other than English will benefit from reviewing and discussing their writing in this language.

METACOGNITION

- Tell me how Josie's comment helped you to revise your writing. What insights did you gain?
- How can you be sure you're meeting your writing purpose? How can your partner help you?
- What do you think your audience will bring to their reading of your work? How did you work that out? How has this influenced your choices during writing?
- How did thinking about examples of metaphors and similes in your first language help you understand the concept in English?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The clue you've included here suggests that Jonah knew where the money had gone. This makes me want to keep reading to find out more. It's more like a mystery now.
- When you discussed your feedback, you were able to reflect on the things you learnt about your own writing as well as your partner's. Often another pair of eyes can help you to see your work more clearly.