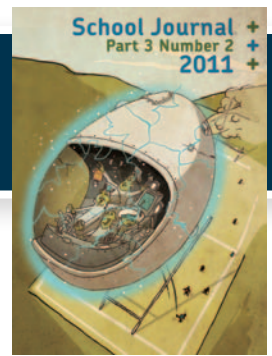


A Rock and a Hard Place

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Noun frequency level: 9–10
Year 5



Overview

Through this fictional story, readers can gain an appreciation of what it must be like for a rugby-mad boy to move to the country of his team's fiercest rival. He has to adjust to living in New Zealand and supporting the All Blacks when his loyalty has always been to the Springboks. This story deals sensitively with competing loyalties and a changing sense of identity as the boy asks his coach, his father, his sister, his friend, and his cat which team he should support. The final decision is implied, leaving readers to decide for themselves which team he will support.

Many children in New Zealand classrooms have lived in other countries and will be able to identify with the boy's dilemma even if they are not rugby fans. The story uses rich descriptive language to convey the comparisons between the two countries, giving readers opportunities to infer the reasons the family left South Africa. The text offers opportunities for students to build on the key competencies of relating to others and participating and contributing.

Texts related by theme

"The Big Game" SJ 3.1.07

| "A Tour like No Other" SJ 4.2.11

| "Game Over!" SJ 4.2.11

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

mixed text types (for example, a complex explanation may be included as part of a report)

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

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

The image is a composite of two scenes. The top scene shows a rugby match in progress, with players in green and white uniforms on a field, and a crowd in the background. The bottom scene shows a boy in a purple shirt washing dishes in a sink, with a man in a blue shirt and yellow gloves standing next to him. Several text boxes with blue borders are overlaid on the image, highlighting specific phrases from the text. The text on page 30 is on the left, and the text on page 31 is on the right. The text boxes contain the following phrases: 'So what if the All Blacks end up playing the Boks in the final?', 'As I help Dad with the washing up, I screw up my courage.', 'Dad?' I ask, oh so casually. 'Who do you think I should support in the World Cup?', 'Dad snorts. 'That's easy, Boetie. You'll support the Boks till the day you die, same as me. It's in your blood. They're the best team in the world.' He hands me a plate to dry. 'Remember when we went to Ellis Park that time?', 'It was my birthday treat two years ago. We battled through jam-packed streets, our car doors locked and windows closed, until we eventually found a park and paid a guy to watch the car.', 'Dad held my hand extra-tight as we wound our way towards the stadium through crowds of yelling, jostling street vendors, over footpaths littered with rubbish. 'Stay close, Boetie,' Dad said.', 'Inside the stadium, it was different. Dad bought me a Springbok flag. We found our seats, right behind a sea of Afrikaners in Springbok tops eating biltong and drinking beer. Before the match, there were Zulu dance s and drums that beat to the rhythm of my heart.', 'When the teams ran out, the crowd cheered - a half-hearted cheer for the All Blacks and a roar that shook the sky for the Springboks. Then came the anthems. Dad brushed a tear away as he sang 'Die Stem' very loud and out of tune. I pretended not to see. He stood with his arms folded and a face like stone while the All Blacks did the haka. I stood that way, too.', 'The Boks won the game by a whisker thanks to a brilliant interception by my hero Bryan Habana. 'Don't you ever forget this, Boetie,' Dad yelled above the din. 'You keep that flag always, hey?' I didn't know he and Mum were already planning to leave South Africa.', 'I dry the plate carefully and put it away. 'Ja, Dad, I remember.'

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps 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

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

(Personal Health and Physical Development)

LEVEL 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

Possible reading purposes

- To consider a boy's struggles with team, family, and country loyalty
- To understand the feelings of people who have moved to New Zealand from another country
- To understand why people support different national teams.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To recount how a person (real or imaginary) faced and resolved a problem
- To describe a time when you felt “between a rock and a hard place”
- To describe why you support a particular sports team.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “casual glance”, “overthink”, “switches”, “no easy answer”, “lose-lose”, “razor wire”, “burglar bars”, “nightmares”, “supported”, “Springboks”, “Boks”, “eventually”, “street vendors”, “Afrikaners”, “biltong”, “Zulu”, “rhythm”, “anthems”, “Die Stem”, “pretended”, “brilliant”, “interception”, “din”, “Ja”, “bookmark”, “mouthful”, “muesli”, “guaranteed”, “ginger”, “win-win”, “realise”
- The use of metaphor: “between a rock and a hard place”, “filling the gap”, “the Mount Everest”, “screw up my courage”, “in your blood”, “shook the sky”, “by a whisker”
- The use of simile: “a face like stone”
- The descriptive verbs and adjectives: “flicking”, “booting”, “slants”, “evil”, “screaming”, “bulging”, “jagged”, “electrified”, “soppy”, “looming”, “pops”, “snorts”, “battled”, “jam-packed”, “jostling”, “littered”, “half-hearted”, “scowling”, “slitted”
- The use of hyperbole: “best team in the world”, “till the day you die”
- The colloquial language: “no-brainer”, “oh so casually”, “Aussies”, “thump you”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify any words or phrases your students will need support with. Decide which words should be introduced before reading and which are better left for during reading. For example, discuss words that give clues to the boy's country of birth as they arise rather than revealing too much before reading.

Discuss the expression “between a rock and a hard place”, prompting the students to work out its meaning. Model a situation where you might use it. For students who are unfamiliar with the colloquial expressions, select some to focus on before reading. Give pairs or individuals expressions along with one or two examples of sentences using them. Have them write what they think the expressions mean, then share their ideas with the rest of the group. Record these suggested meanings in a table under the heading “What we thought it meant before reading”. As the whole group comes across each expression in the text, confirm the correct meaning and write it in the table under “What it means”. If appropriate, this could be the third column and you could have a second column – “What we think it means during reading” – for students to record their ideas as they read the expressions.

Identify new vocabulary that students should prioritise for learning. Have them record this vocabulary. Plan for ways to ensure that they have opportunities to encounter this vocabulary often and in many contexts. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Experience of supporting a sports team
- Knowledge of rugby
- Knowledge of the fierce competition between major rugby-playing countries
- Some knowledge of what life is like in modern-day South Africa.

Possible supporting strategies

Tell students to discuss their team allegiances with a partner, sharing the sports and teams they support. Ask them to try to explain what it would be like to have to support another team.

If any students have first-hand knowledge of South Africa, be sensitive to their feelings. Ask them if they would like to share any experiences that are relevant to the story.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The multiple time frames (past, present, and future) and the language that signals them, including a range of verb forms and the phrases and clauses “On the bike ride home”, “As I help Dad ...”, “once we've finished our chapter ...”, “At breakfast the next morning”
- The inclusion of a flashback supported by an illustration
- Clues that help readers to infer that the boy is from South Africa and the reasons the family came to New Zealand
- The use of highly descriptive language, including verbs, adjectives, and figurative language that help the reader to visualise and infer meaning.

Possible supporting strategies

Review the features of a narrative, prompting the students to identify the typical features of characters, setting, plot, and a problem to be resolved. Remind the students to keep these in mind as they read. Prompt them to think about other narratives they know. Refer to charts of features you have co-constructed with the class or create one. This is particularly important with students who have little experience of narratives. Keep in mind that narratives in other languages may or may not share the same features. Encourage students to make comparisons between the features of narratives in English and narratives in other languages they know.

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “A Rock and a Hard Place”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

I've supported the Springboks forever. Since before I was born, Dad says. They're my team. My heroes. But the problem is, every single kid in my class supports the All Blacks – and these days, when someone asks, “So who's your favourite rugby player?”, the first name that pops into my head is Richie McCaw.

*The students **make connections** across the text, linking the ideas in the title, in the opening sentence, and in the excerpt from the fifth paragraph. They **integrate** this information with their own rugby knowledge to **infer** that the boy is from South Africa. They identify the **main idea** that he doesn't know which team to support. They use this information, along with their vocabulary knowledge, to **infer** the meaning of the title.*

MODEL the use of clues, connections, and questions to make inferences and identify the main idea.

- I've picked up clues so far about the boy and his problem. I made connections between the text and what I know about different rugby teams and countries, so I was guessing that maybe he's new to New Zealand and he might be from South Africa. The word “Springboks” and the phrase “since before I was born” confirm my inferences.
- I wonder why Richie McCaw is his favourite player if he supports the Springboks?

It was my birthday treat two years ago. We battled through jam-packed streets, car doors locked and windows closed, until we eventually found a park and paid a guy to watch the car. Dad held my hand extra-tight as we wound our way towards the stadium through crowds of yelling, jostling street vendors, over footpaths littered with rubbish. “Stay close, Boetie,” Dad said.

*The students **make connections** between the father's question and this extract to identify the change in time. They confirm this by using the illustration. Students use the descriptive language to **make connections** with any similar experiences they have had. They **integrate** these ideas to **visualise** the scene and **infer** how the boy might have felt.*

PROMPT students who may need support with the shifting time frames to combine semantic, grammatical, visual, and world knowledge to identify the time frame, visualise the scene, and infer how the boy felt.

- Look at the first sentence. When was his birthday?
- Look at the verbs in the paragraph. What do they tell us about the time frame?
- What did his father ask him just before this section?
- What does the picture tell us? What are the two time frames in the picture? What is this section of text about?
- Look at the second sentence. Why did they have their car doors locked and windows closed? What words describe the streets and the crowds? Let's list some of these words on our descriptive language chart.

Then came the anthems. Dad brushed a tear away as he sang “Die Stem” very loud and out of tune. I pretended not to see. He stood with his arms folded and a face like stone while the All Blacks did the haka. I stood that way, too.

*The students **make further connections** between different parts of the text and with their own experiences to **infer** that “Die Stem” is South Africa's national anthem. They use clues (“a tear”, “face like stone”) to **infer** the father's feelings. The students **make connections** between the text and the **main idea** to **infer** what has changed for the boy and his father.*

Note that with students who need time to work through these kinds of questions, it may be beneficial to provide the questions in writing and give them time to think, pair, and share (rather than conducting an open question-and-answer session).

EXPLAIN how readers integrate ideas as they read.

- When we read, we integrate ideas from the text and from other things we know. This means we combine many ideas and pieces of information to understand what the author is telling us.
- Writers expect their readers to do this, so they give clues and don't spell out everything.

“That's a difficult question,” she says, reaching for the bookmark. “I know how you and Dad feel about the Springboks. But in New Zealand ... Well, we're Kiwis now ...”

*The students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences to **infer** how the boy is feeling. They **evaluate** and **integrate** this information to **infer** that the mother's attitude is different from the father's. They **form hypotheses** about the decision the boy will make.*

PROMPT the students to form hypotheses.

- Now that you know more about the boy's background, think about his mother's words.
- What would you do in his situation?
- What decision do you think he will make?

METACOGNITION

- How important was your knowledge of people's ideas about sports teams for helping you to understand this story?
- Show me where you were able to bring ideas from other stories to build on the main idea.
- What helped you to understand the ending? What clues or knowledge did you use?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Several of you have told us about similar problems you had when you moved to New Zealand. Making connections to your own experiences is a good way to understand a text.

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Education (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 3 – Personal identity: Describe how their own feelings, beliefs, and actions, and those of other people, contribute to their personal sense of self-worth.)

English (Level 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.)

Text excerpts from “A Rock and a Hard Place”

I’m getting used to the weather here: the storms of screaming wind instead of bulging mushroom clouds with jagged lightning and thunder that shakes the house. I’m even used to the houses made of wood instead of bricks – and I like having no wall with electrified razor wire around the garden, no burglar bars on the windows, and no nightmares.

When the teams ran out, the crowd cheered – a half-hearted cheer for the All Blacks and a roar that shook the sky for the Springboks.

He stood with his arms folded and a face like stone while the All Blacks did the haka.

I don’t need to ask my mate James. He tells me himself. “I hope you’re planning to support the All Blacks in the World Cup,” he says, scowling at me. “If you don’t, I’m going to have to thump you. And I don’t want to thump you because you’re my best mate.”

Students (what they might do)

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

“screaming wind”
“bulging mushroom clouds”
“jagged lightning”
“electrified razor wire”

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

“a half-hearted cheer”
“a roar that shook the sky”
“a face like stone”

MAKING LINKS

Writers help their readers to make connections by using ideas or pieces of information that can be linked together. Links can help readers to understand an important idea by showing different examples of the same concept.

METACOGNITION

- How do the language features you’ve used help you to meet your purpose for writing?
- How much background knowledge will your readers need to understand the big idea of your story? How can you help them to imagine these feelings?
- How do you check that your writing is meeting your purpose and that your readers will understand it? What methods of checking these things are the most useful?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT students to experiment with adding drama and precision to their writing.

- How could adding vivid adjectives help your readers to visualise a place or a feeling?
- How could descriptive language help your readers to understand differences between people, places, feelings, or events?
- Are there places where more interesting or precise adjectives could help your readers to visualise or understand something you’re describing?

MODEL adding to and subtracting adjectives from a selected text and discuss the effects. (Clarify with students that while descriptive language can add to a text, overuse of adjectives can have the opposite effect.) Give pairs of students a section of text and a list of adjectives (using some of the language you’ve looked at). Ask the pairs to add the adjectives in the way they think creates the best effect. Have the pairs share their texts and discuss their use of adjectives (also possibly adverbs).

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

- Could you almost hear the difference between the crowd’s responses in this sentence? How could you use language to help your readers understand an important comparison?
- Could you “see” his father’s face? Show me what he looked like. Think about what the author did to achieve 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 figurative language, you could make charts of figurative language, grouping them according to facial expressions or body language, speech or sounds, and so on. If appropriate, provide opportunities to explore figurative language in other languages – noting that it often doesn’t translate well so it is a challenge in language learning.

EXPLAIN that this is an example of how the writer makes a link that helps the reader to understand the main idea.

- James (just like the narrator) wants to do two different things. He wants to thump his friend, and not thump him. The writer uses this as a link to help us understand what it’s like to have conflicting feelings.
- Check your writing to see how you can include links that will help your readers understand an important idea.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve added some strong adjectives here, and so I now have a much better idea of what the place looked and felt like.
- When you described how Joe felt about leaving home, I was able to make a connection to the father’s role. He seemed so tough, but this helped me to understand how he must have felt when ...

 Writing standard: by the end of year 5

 The Literacy Learning Progressions