A Bit of a Laugh

by David Hill

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Year 4

Overview

Two brothers laugh about a friend who is mad about science. When their great-grandfather quizzes them about their laughter, he recalls a young man he and his friends laughed at during the war. The boys are astonished to learn who the young man was, and the great-grandfather's final comment reflects the theme of the story: respecting others and their differences. A person who is "mad about" an interest or activity may seem different, but their passion may lead them to achieve great things.

The story lends itself to considering the key competency of relating to others.

There is an audio version of the text on the *2012 School Journal and School Journal Story Library Audio* CD as well as on an MP3 file at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

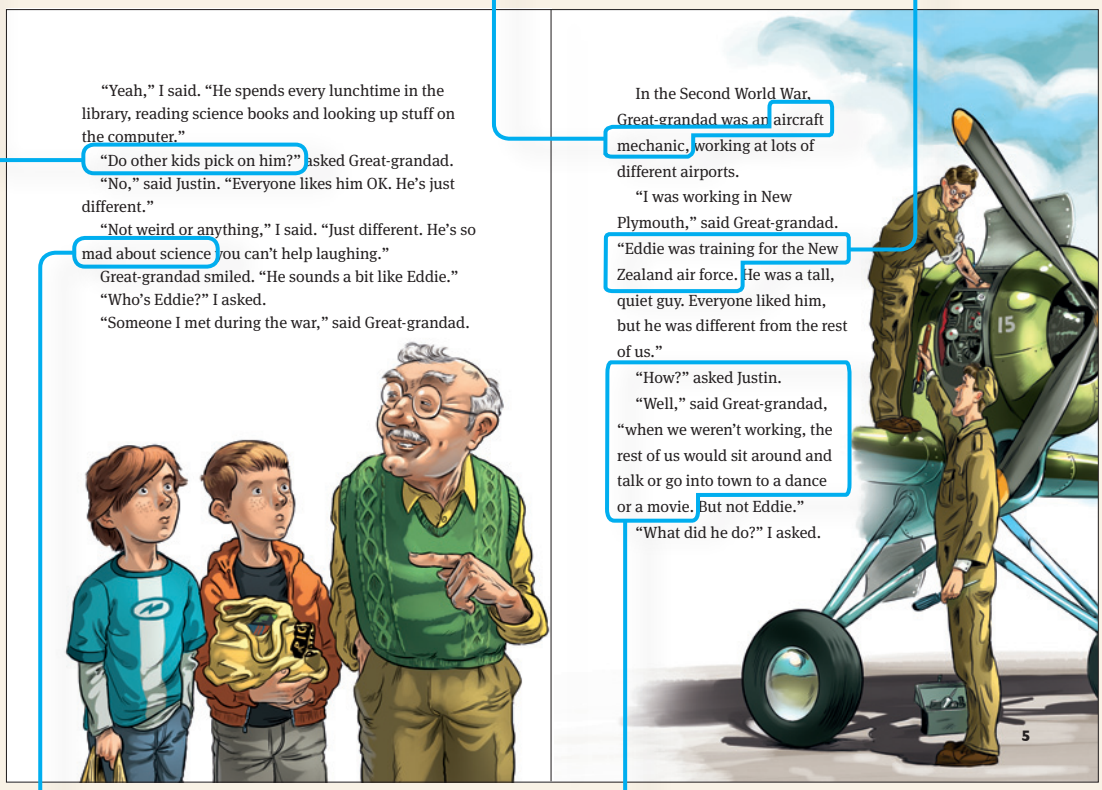
Texts related by theme **"More than a Mountaineer"** SJ 3.3.03 | **"Losing Nemo"** SJ 4.1.11

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information



"Yeah," I said. "He spends every lunchtime in the library, reading science books and looking up stuff on the computer."

"Do other kids pick on him?" asked Great-grandad.

"No," said Justin. "Everyone likes him OK. He's just different."

"Not weird or anything," I said. "Just different. He's so mad about science you can't help laughing."

Great-grandad smiled. "He sounds a bit like Eddie."

"Who's Eddie?" I asked.

"Someone I met during the war," said Great-grandad.

In the Second World War, Great-grandad was an aircraft mechanic, working at lots of different airports.

"I was working in New Plymouth," said Great-grandad. "Eddie was training for the New Zealand air force. He was a tall, quiet guy. Everyone liked him, but he was different from the rest of us."

"How?" asked Justin.

"Well," said Great-grandad, "when we weren't working, the rest of us would sit around and talk or go into town to a dance or a movie. But not Eddie."

"What did he do?" I asked.

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

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Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Relationships with Other People)

LEVEL 2 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Describe how individuals and groups share characteristics and are also unique.

ENGLISH (Reading)

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

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To explore and enjoy a humorous story
- To find out how two boys learnt to respect people with different interests from their own
- To explore how the author created humour in his story.

Possible writing purposes

- To recount a time when you learnt something important from an older relative
- To research and write about the childhood of a famous person
- To retell a humorous (oral) story in writing.

See Instructional focus – Reading for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See Instructional focus – Writing for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including "downtown", "great-grandad", "staggering", "laughing", "science mad", "the Second World War", "aircraft mechanic", "training", "a dance", "pushbike", "tracks", "summit"
- Colloquial language, including "Hey", "Yeah", "stuff", "pick on", "mad about", "OK", "guy"
- The names of people and mountains
- The double meaning of "funny"
- The use of the contraction "he'd" for "he would".

Possible supporting strategies

Identify any words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to your students. With some students, it may be useful to discuss and explain these terms briefly as they arise, prompting students to draw on strategies such as context, prior knowledge, or word families. For the word "staggering", ask students to use the context and the illustration and then act out the word to understand the meaning.

For students who need extra support with the vocabulary (including colloquial language and the names of people and mountains), ensure that you plan structured pre-reading activities to support them. Ensure all students have multiple opportunities to encounter and practise vocabulary that they need to learn. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

Explain the use of "he'd" on page 6, which lets the reader know Eddie did these things many times rather than only once – expressing that something was habitual.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Experience of the way people may be "different" from others
- Knowledge of New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War, including the air force and the kind of work people may have done
- Knowledge of Sir Edmund Hillary and his and Tenzing Norgay's conquest of Mount Everest.

Possible supporting strategies

Discuss the interests, hobbies, or sports that many people enjoy and the interests that only a small number of people might share. Guide them to understand that some people have an especially strong interest in something that others may not share.

Introduce or review terms or concepts that may be unfamiliar, such as place names, the Second World War, training for the air force, aircraft mechanics, mountain climbing, and Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Short, humorous narrative
- Present-day setting with realistic characters and events
- Told in the first person by an unnamed character in the story
- The use of dialogue
- The inclusion of a brief flashback as Great-grandad remembers the past
- The unexpected revelation in Great-grandad's story
- The implied meanings, conveyed by the use of ellipses and unfinished sentences, for example, "You mean …?", "Yes, we used to laugh at Eddie …"
- The theme of accepting people's differences and understanding that some people's interests can take them a long way.

Possible supporting strategies

During reading, ensure the students can identify the narrator and his relationships with the other characters.

Support students to follow the story from the past and to understand the identity and importance of "Eddie".

Provide modelling and guidance as students make inferences to understand the story and to form hypotheses about the meaning of Great-grandad's story.

Sounds and Words

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Instructional focus – Reading

Health and Physical Education (Relationships with Other People, level 2 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Describe how individuals and groups share characteristics and are also unique.)

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

Text excerpts from "A Bit of a Laugh"	Students (what they might do)	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
When Miles had gone, Justin and I looked at each other and started laughing. "Someone from your school?" asked Great-grandad. "That's Miles," said Justin. "Something funny about him?" asked Great-grandad. "He's science mad," said Justin. "He talks about it all the time." "Do other kids pick on him?" asked Great-grandad. "No," said Justin, "Everyone likes him OK. He's just different." "Not weird or anything," I said. "Just different. He's so mad about science you can't help laughing."	*Students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences of sharing a joke to **infer** that the boys were laughing about Miles because he was different.* *As they read, students use their knowledge of oral language and of sentence structure to mentally supply the omitted words in what Great-grandad says ("Is he", "Is there"). They use their vocabulary knowledge to understand the two meanings of "funny"– it can mean amusing or odd.* *The students **make connections** between the text ("science mad") and their own interests to **infer** that the boys think Miles's interest in science is weird and not to be respected.* *The students review their inferences and clarify that the boys do not in fact think Miles is "weird". The students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences of people who are "different" to understand that Miles's fascination with science is amusing to his schoolmates.*	**PROMPT** the students to make connections as they read. • Think about times when you've laughed with a friend about someone. • Why do the boys laugh about Miles? What's funny about being "science mad"? **EXPLAIN** double meanings of words. • Many words in English have more than one meaning. For example, "light" can mean "not heavy" or it can mean "not dark". Double meanings can lead to confusion, and as readers, we have to think about which meaning the writer had in mind. • What can "funny" mean? Which meaning does Great-grandad use? • Which meaning do the boys have in mind? • What do they mean by "science mad"? **DIRECT** the students to discuss with a partner why we sometimes laugh when someone is different. • Why do you think we laugh when someone is different from us? **ASK QUESTIONS** to clarify the students' understanding of the story. • Were you right about why they laughed at Miles? • Why would being "science mad" make them laugh at Miles? • How do you think Miles feels about their behaviour?
In the Second World War, Great-grandad was an aircraft mechanic, working at lots of different airports. "I was working in New Plymouth," said Great-grandad. "Eddie was training for the New Zealand air force. He was a tall, quiet guy. Everyone liked him, but he was different from the rest of us."	*Students **make connections** within the text to predict that Great-grandad's story will teach them something about people who are "different from the rest of us".*	**PROMPT** the students to make connections. • Remember to think about what you already know to help you understand more about the text. • For example, in this extract, what connections can you make that help you understand what Great-grandad was doing in the war and why? **PROMPT** the students to think critically about what they have read. • Discuss with a partner what you think it means to be different. • Is it OK to laugh at people who are different? Why do you think that? • What did you learn about being "different" from the story?
Great-grandad looked back at where we'd passed Miles. "Yes, we used to laugh at Eddie ..."	*Students **make connections** within the text to understand that Great-grandad's story is about a person who was similar to Miles. They use these connections to **infer** that a person who is "mad about" something might one day become famous for their particular interest. They **integrate** what they have learnt in the story and **evaluate** what it means to be different.*	**GIVE FEEDBACK** • You've shown through your discussion that you understand this is more than just a funny story. Talk to your partner about how you know this or why you think it. • When you made the word chart, I could see you were able to extend your vocabulary knowledge from the root word "air". You will be able to use that strategy with other words you find.

METACOGNITION

- You've made great connections here, both between the text and your own experiences and between different parts of the text. How does this strategy help you when you're reading?
- Show me a place where you made an inference or a prediction that you could check later. Were you right? What information helped you?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

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Instructional focus – Writing

Health and Physical Education (Relationships with Other People, level 2 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Describe how individuals and groups share characteristics and are also unique.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from "A Bit of a Laugh"	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
Justin and I were downtown with our great-grandad when we passed Miles. He was with his mum, and he was staggering under a huge pile of library books.	**OPENING SENTENCES** *The first sentence or two of a story can let readers know a lot about its time, place, and characters. Clear, succinct opening sentences help readers to "position" themselves quickly and be ready to go into the plot.*	**PROMPT** students to review their writing. • How have you started your stories? • Think about your readers: what do you want them to know quickly so that they can get on with the events in the story? • How much and how little information do your readers need? • Are there details in your opening sentences that don't need to be there? Students who find this challenging may benefit from using a writing frame for all or part of their narrative. For example, you could analyse the first paragraph of the reading, prompting the students to identify who, what, and where. Tell them that this is the orientation, a common feature of a narrative, which includes the essential information about who, what, where, and/or when. Point out that this information can be in a different order and in different combinations. Create a writing frame like the example below and support the students to identify and then write the orientations for their narratives.
"Do other kids pick on him?" asked Great-grandad. "No," said Justin, "Everyone likes him OK. He's just different." "Not weird or anything," I said. "Just different. He's so mad about science you can't help laughing."	**DIALOGUE** *Dialogue lets writers show characters and their thoughts quickly. Using natural speaking patterns can help readers empathise with characters. Dialogue between different characters in a story also helps readers to understand the relationships between them.*	**TELL** the students that dialogue is a good way for an author to connect with readers. The way the characters "speak" helps readers learn more about them. • Review the conventions you've used for writing dialogue. How will your readers know which words are spoken and who is speaking? • In spoken language, people don't often speak in complete sentences. Ask a partner to read you the dialogue you've written. How do your characters "sound"? Would real people speak like this? • If necessary, make changes to ensure your dialogue is easy to follow and that it sounds natural.
"What happened to him?" asked Justin. "Did he keep on climbing mountains?" Great-grandad smiled. "I guess he must have. He was in the news a few years later, when he was the first person to get to the summit of Mount Everest." Justin and I both stared. "You mean ...?"	**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. This can be used to build suspense and/or humour in a story.*	**EXPLAIN** the difference between explicit and implicit. • Good authors expect their readers to work some things out for themselves. In this extract, Great-grandad gives a big hint about who Eddie was, and the author expects us to take the hint too. He has already given us clues about Eddie and his passion for mountain climbing. The author uses the ellipsis to imply that the boys got Great-grandad's meaning, and as readers, we get it too. This means you need to know your audience and make assumptions about what they know. What does this author assume about his readers? **PROMPT** the students to review the ways they give readers important ideas and information. • Look at the way your story builds to an exciting event or a revelation. What clues about the event or revelation did you give your readers? What did you expect them to work out for themselves? • Ask your partner for feedback about this: have you given too much information or not enough? • What can you add, delete, or change to imply meaning rather than giving it directly?

Orientation	Who? What? Where? When?	

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your opening sentences tell me a lot about the time, place, and characters. This helped me know what to expect.
- The changes you've made to the dialogue in your story help me follow it better. The dialogue sounds very real: I get a real sense of the characters.

METACOGNITION

- Why did you start your story like this? What did you want your readers to know right from the start? How well have you achieved this?
- What knowledge helped you write dialogue in your story? How did it help? For example, how did using other texts as examples help you get the conventions right?
- What knowledge or experiences do you expect your readers to have to pick up on the clues you've given them? Are you expecting too much or too little from them? Who are you writing for?

Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

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