

Birthday Visit

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Overview

Jemma and her mother are apprehensive about visiting Tim in prison. This narrative explores family relationships and fears about the unknown. Be aware that this text may raise painful issues for some students.

Suggested Teaching Purpose

Based on the information I have about my students' learning needs, what would be an appropriate teaching purpose for this session?

Examples of an appropriate teaching purpose are listed below.

•	To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of inferring , making connections, or identifying the author's purpose.
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Features of the Text to Consider in Context

What features of this text would support the teaching purpose?

•	The opportunities to infer meaning
•	The background information provided in Mum's speech on page 2
•	The opportunities to empathise with the position and feelings of the characters
•	The sensitive nature of the issues explored in the text
•	The change in Jemma's and Mum's expectation of what the prison and the prison personnel will be like and their realisation that they are just like anyone else
•	The change in Jemma's perception of the prison as a "spooky castle" at the beginning of the text to a less scary one at the end
•	The ideas that things aren't so scary when you know more about them and of learning from mistakes
•	Tim's speech of apology on page 5, which indicates a change in his attitude and suggests a brighter future
•	The relationships between the main characters
•	The illustrations which support the idea of Gemma's growth in confidence as the story proceeds. (In the earlier illustrations, she is always close to a family member and looks apprehensive, but in the final illustration, she is standing alone and smiling at the prison guard.)

Readability

Noun frequency level: 9–10 years

What other features of this text might constitute challenges for my students? (For example, features that may require a prompt or a brief explanation)

•	The guard's abrupt questions ("Prisoner's name?", "Name?")
•	The use of "ly" adverbs, for example, "especially", "nervously", "firmly", "tightly", "brightly"
•	The colloquial language, such as "Howzit?", "Boy, I've missed you two heaps", "I reckon".

What prior knowledge would support my students in reading this text?

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| • | Awareness of the seriousness of drink-driving, for example, through television advertisements. |
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Sharing Learning Outcomes with Your Students (select one or two)

I will be able to:

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| • | read between the lines and use what I know about people and the world to infer how the characters are feeling and why they act as they do; |
| • | explain why I think the author wrote this text. |

A Framework for the Lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning outcomes?

In the sections below, particular comprehension strategies, reading processes, and links to other aspects of literacy learning have been identified in brackets. Many of these relate directly to the highlighted teaching purpose, but others have also been identified where appropriate.

Before reading

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| • | Be aware that this text may raise sensitive issues for some students. Some may be apprehensive about prisons as a result of watching dramatic prison dramas on television, so you may need to clarify that this is a story about a low-security prison. |
| • | Tell the students that you have a tough, gritty narrative about a prison for them to read and that it has a conflict, a climax, and a resolution. Explain that you want them to look for information that is not stated explicitly in the text to understand what is going on in more depth. (Making connections; inferring) |
| • | Discuss the students' understandings about the types of crimes that can result in prison sentences. (Although you probably won't want to reveal too much of the story at this point, you could feed in the idea of drink-driving if the students don't mention it.) Encourage them to consider if people change when they are in prison. (Making connections) |
| • | Remind the students that authors have a purpose in mind when they write a text. Ask the students to consider what the purpose of this text is as they read and explain to them that later, you want them to share and justify their ideas. (Identifying the author's purpose) |
| • | Clarify the learning outcome(s) with the students. |

During reading

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| • | Ask the students to read page 2. Clarify that Mum and Jemma are going to visit Jemma's brother in prison. "How are they feeling?" "How do you know?" (Inferring) |
| • | "I wonder if Mum is right and it's her fault that Tim is in prison." Prompt the students to consider the ideas of personal responsibility and parents' love for their children. The students may realise that generally people only receive a prison sentence if they've been caught drink-driving more than once so in fact, although Mum is feeling responsible here, it was Tim's ongoing behaviour that caused him to be sent to prison. (Making connections; evaluating) |
| • | Discuss whether Jemma has been to the prison before, asking the students to support their inferences with evidence from the text. (Inferring) |
| • | Prompt the students to think about Jemma's emotions as they read the story. (Inferring) |
| • | Have the students read page 3. "I wonder why Mum is joking ..." Draw out the idea that nervousness often makes people say inappropriate things in an attempt to relieve tension. "Why doesn't the guard find it funny?" (Inferring) |

•	Discuss the illustration. “What ideas do you think the illustrator is trying to convey?” (Inferring)
•	Have the students read page 4 and discuss the atmosphere that has been built up so far. “Do you think the guard really is a ‘grouch’?” “I wonder why Jemma can’t give the card directly to Tim ...” (Inferring)
•	Have the students read page 5 and ask them to share their impressions of Tim. “How do you think Tim feels about being in prison?” (Inferring)
•	Review how Jemma is feeling. “What makes you think that?” (Inferring).
•	Have the students read to the end of the text. “Why doesn’t the prison look so scary to Jemma now?” (Inferring)

After reading

Select from these suggestions according to your purpose for the reading and what you’ve observed about the students’ needs during the reading.

•	Discuss how the tone of the narrative lightens after Tim says he’s sorry and starts describing his life in the prison. Draw out the idea that Jemma’s expectations about the prison have changed. Discuss how the writer has broken down Jemma’s (and the readers’) stereotypes about prison. “What could happen in the future for this family?” (Inferring; forming hypotheses)
•	Ask the students to explain how the author has conveyed Jemma’s changed feelings and her opinions about prisons and prisoners. For example, Jemma’s comments about the prison as a castle at the beginning and end of the narrative, the “hard rock” in her stomach on page 4, the way she keeps close to Mum and looks at the floor on page 5, and the contrast with her looking around and smiling on page 7. (Inferring; analysing and synthesising)
•	“Have your ideas about prisons changed now that you’ve read this story?” Encourage the students to share their ideas about why the author might have written this text. (Evaluating; identifying the author’s purpose)

Reflect with the students on how well the learning outcome has been achieved and note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate and/or extend their new learning?

•	The students could read “Baked Beans on Toast” in SJ 3.3.05. This is another narrative by Steven R. Storer that explores family relationships in the face of adversity.
•	The students could read “No Joke” in SJ 4.3.00 or “The Argument” in SJ 4.1.04. Both are powerful texts and explore similar issues to those in “Birthday Visit”.

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