

# Did You Say, “Fire”?

by Joy Cowley

pictures by Penny Newman

## Overview

This text innovates on the structure of the traditional tale *Henny Penny*. A small incident is misunderstood, and the misunderstanding spreads to involve a large number of colourful characters. Children love the repetitive text structure, the mix of fantasy and reality, and the underlying humour in this story. The text contains a number of challenges and should be introduced to children through a shared reading approach before they are asked to read it as a guided text. An audiotape version of this text is available (item 89157).

**Curriculum links:** health and physical education social studies, mathematics (probability)

## Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the repeated use of the initial letters “c”, “d”, “f”, “m”
- the initial consonant blends “bl”, “cr”, “sn”, “squ”
- the digraphs “ch” – “children”, “watch”; and “sh” – “shouting”, “she”
- the words ending in “ed” – “sniffed”, “squeaked”, “raced”
- the irregular verbs “blew”, “cut”, “sat”, “said”
- the compound words “away”, “everyone”, “birthday”
- the pronouns “it”, “they”, “she”, “everyone”
- the repeated sentence structure on pages 3–9
- the use of direct speech
- the impression of haste conveyed through the language and illustrations
- the text in the illustrations
- the use of exclamation marks.

## Setting the scene

Discuss fire safety. *What would you do if you noticed a fire in your house?* Show the children the illustration on page 10. *What’s happening here? What are the people shouting?* Draw out the idea that this is not what you would expect to see if there was a fire. *Some very strange things happen in this book!*

Read the children the stories *Chicken Licken* or *Henny Penny*. Talk about how the main character got the wrong idea. *The story we are going to read is a bit like this one.*

## The first reading

Introduce the book as a shared text so that the children can focus on and enjoy the action, speed, and humour of the story.

Focus on the cover illustration. *Why are the children running?* Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – Draw the children’s attention to the cat sleeping. *Why isn’t he running? Let’s read and find out.*

Page 2 – Closely examine the illustrations. Point out the cake in the top right corner. *What sort of cake is this?* Track the path of the smoke from the candles. *What is the mouse thinking? Can you read the words by his mouth?* Listen to the children read the body text. If necessary, use the whiteboard to help the children sound out “Maggie Mop”. Show the children how to break the words “sniffed”, “squeaked”, “raced”, and “shouting” into manageable chunks for decoding. Talk about the clues on this page that suggest this is not a “true” story. For example, the mouse can talk, and Maggie Mop is apparently five years old but lives alone.

Page 3 – Encourage the children to predict what will happen next.

Listen to the children read pages 4–8 for themselves, offering support as necessary.

Page 8 – Some children may notice the word “off “ in “officers”.

Page 9 – The children may need support with “television crew”. Focus on the first part of the word (“tele”) and then on the “v” for “vision”. They may recognise the initial blend “cr” for “crew”.

Page 10 – Discuss the illustration. *Who can you see?* Draw out the idea of lots of people or “everyone”. Encourage the children to verbalise the initial “ev” sound. Write “every” and “one” on the whiteboard and explain that this is a compound word.

Page 11 – *What did Maggie Mop do while everyone else was racing around?* The discrepancy in the time frame adds another element of fantasy.

Page 12 – *How did Maggie Mop know there was a fire?*

Encourage the children to think beyond the text. *Could this be a true story? Why do you think that?*

## Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their integration of strategies. A choral reading allows children to enjoy the repetition and humour of the story together.

Focus on a particular initial letter or blend or the digraph “sh”. Ask the children to find examples in the text. List other words that start the same way.

Focus on the digraph “ch” in “children”. Ask the children to tell you other words that start the same way. *Can you find a word on page 11 that ends with “ch”?* (“watch”) Make a list of words that end with “ch”.

Look at the word “shouting”. Write it on the whiteboard and then erase the “ing”. *What is the word now? Can you add any other endings to make new words?*

Focus on the words ending in “ed”. Write them on the whiteboard and erase the “ed” (or, in the case of “raced”, the “d” ending) and read the root words.

Look at the verbs “sniffed”, “squeaked”, and “raced”. *What other words could the author have used?* Encourage the children to use a variety of verbs in their personal writing.

Draw attention to the pronouns in the text and list them on the whiteboard. Read the text on any page from page 3 to page 9 and insert the name of the character (or characters) instead of the pronoun. Draw out the idea that pronouns are used as another way of describing a character or group of characters. Let the children hear how much better the text sounds if pronouns are used for variety.

Locate the compound words in the text and list other examples on the whiteboard.

Discuss the ending of the story and its implications.

## Suggestions for further activities

Listen to the audiotape.

As a group, innovate on the text, substituting the children for the characters or creating another chain of events.

Turn the story into a play with the parts shared among the class.

Retell the story to a friend or onto a tape for the listening post.

As a group, develop a further episode of the story or rewrite the ending.

Write a news item about the events described in the story.

Write the report that the firefighters might make when they return to the station.

Be alert for opportunities to encourage the children to use pronouns as well as proper nouns in their writing.