

Blackbird's Nest

by Olive Harvey

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Overview

This fact-based poetic text describes the development of a blackbird chick from hatching to maturity. The adjectives in the text invite an emotional response from the reader. Some children may need a high level of support with their first reading of this text because of the challenges of the descriptive language and poetic structure. Once they are secure with these aspects, the children will find the rhyme and rhythm a support in subsequent readings.

Curriculum link: science

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the initial consonant blends “bl”, “fl”, “gr”, “sp”
- the use of adjectives – “speckled”, “small”, “bare”, “big”, “dead”, “lonely”, “empty”
- the irregular verbs “sat”, “grew”, “fed”, “flew”
- the use of alliteration
- the use of rhyme
- the possessive apostrophe in “blackbird’s”
- the use of commas
- the poetic structure
- the rhythm and repetitive structure of the text
- the use of a question on page 8
- the concept of time passing.

Setting the scene

Look out of the classroom window or take a walk around the school. Talk about the birds the children can see. *What sorts of birds do you see in your garden?* Focus the discussion on common birds like sparrows and blackbirds. *Where do blackbirds live? Where would you find their nests?*

The first reading

Look at the front cover. *What can you tell me about this nest? What would have been in this nest earlier?* Draw the children’s attention to the hatched eggs on the back cover. Look at the title. *What sort of bird does this nest belong to?* Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – *What do you notice about the two birds on this page?* (The brown bird is the female blackbird.) Ensure that the children realise that they are both blackbirds. Tell the children that the book they are about to read is a poem. An initial shared reading will enable them to appreciate the rhythm and the poetic structure. Then encourage them to read the text themselves, offering support as necessary.

Page 2 – *What can you see in the nest? How are these eggs different from the ones you buy at the supermarket?* Write the word “speckled” on the whiteboard and help the children to sound it out.

Page 3 – You may need to reassure the children about the repetition on this page. Draw the children’s attention to the commas. When they have read the page themselves, read it again with them, emphasising the poetic rhythm of the text.

Page 4 – *What has happened to the eggs? Where are the baby birds’ feathers?*

Note that from this point on, significant time passes between the events depicted on each page.

Pages 5 and 7 – Some children may still be developing their understanding of the irregular verbs used on these pages. For example, they may want to say “feed” or “feeded” for “fed”, “growed” for “grew”, or “flied” for “flew”. Ensure that they are attending to the visual features of the words and, if they still feel uncertain, you could suggest some examples of less poetic sentences, such as “I fed my cat this morning” to make them feel more familiar with the syntax.

Page 8 – Note the use of the word “Now” to bring the events back to the present. *What is the author asking us on this page? Can you read this page and answer the question?* Some children may need to be supported by another shared reading of this page. You may need to tell them the word “lonely” because it is challenging to decode and the idea of an inanimate object feeling lonely may be difficult for some children to predict.

The inside back cover – The birds on the ground underneath the “lonely, empty blackbird’s nest” suggest the next part of the cycle. The children could compare this illustration with the one on the inside front cover.

Explore the children’s response to the text. *Is this a happy or a sad poem?*

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text. Observe their attempts to self-monitor, cross-check, and follow the rhythm of the text.

Focus on any of the initial consonant blends that the children may have been unsure of. Locate the words in the text and make a list of other words that start the same way.

Draw the children’s attention to the use of adjectives in the text. Talk about how the adjectives on page 8 develop the ideas about the deserted nest. Think of adjectives that could describe the nest when it had the baby birds in it.

Locate examples of alliteration in the text (for example, “bare babies in a blackbird’s nest” on page 4 and “big babies in a blackbird’s nest” on page 6) and enjoy reading them together with emphasis on the initial “b” sounds.

Study the rhyming words “grew” and “flew”. List other rhyming words, noting how other combinations of letters, such as “ue” or “oo”, can have similar sounds.

Discuss the use of the possessive apostrophe.

Have another look at the irregular verbs in the text (“flew”, “grew”, “sat”, and “fed”). Make up sentences using these words on the whiteboard. For children who find this concept difficult, focus on only one irregular verb at a time.

Suggestions for further activities

As a class, write some alliterative sentences similar to the sentences on pages 4 and 6.

Draw the life cycle of the blackbird chick from hatching to maturity.

Read other Ready to Read books about birds, such as *Snap! Splash!*; *Wibble Wobble*, *Albatross!*; and *Pukeko Morning*.

Have a display on the nature table of a nest, labelling all the items the bird has used to make the nest.