

Skipper's Happy Tail

by Sharon Holt

illustrated by Marjorie Scott

Overview

In this humorous narrative, Skipper's tail causes all sorts of trouble but finally comes in useful. The dramatic events and lively dialogue encourage expressive reading. This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, forming hypotheses, inferring, and analysing and synthesising. It's useful for monitoring children's integration of reading strategies at the end of Blue level. There is another book about this character, *No, Skipper!* (Green, also available as a big book) and an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2004*.

Curriculum links: science

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the variety of initial consonant blends
- the digraphs "ch" in "children"; "ph" in "Sophie"; "sh" in "brushed", "Crash", "shed", "shopping", "shouted"; "Th" in "The", "There", "They"
- the repeated rimes in "here", "There"; "Get", "wet"; "flicked", "pick", "tickled"; "out", "shouted"
- the strong narrative structure
- the dramatic style:
- the characterisation of Skipper
- the expressive illustrations
- the possessive apostrophes in "Greg's", "Skipper's", and "Sophie's".
 - the lively verbs
 - the expressive dialogue, including imperative language
 - the use of exclamation marks for emphasis
 - the use of onomatopoeia – "Crash!"

Setting the scene

The children may be familiar with Skipper through reading the big book *No, Skipper!* Tell the children you have another book for them to read about this character. Review what the children know about him. Talk about the children's experiences of pet dogs. *What does your dog do when it sees you coming home? How do you know when it's happy?* Look at the cover illustration. *What might Skipper be thinking?*

The first reading

Ask the children to read the title. *Use one of your arms to show me what a happy tail might be like.* Encourage them to predict what might happen in the story. Read the

names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – *What’s happening here? Does this fit with your ideas from the cover?*

Listen to the children read the text themselves, offering support as necessary.

Pages 2 and 3 – *Where have the family been? What’s Skipper doing?*

Page 4 – Observe how the children attempt the interest words, prompting them if necessary and encouraging them to cross-check. You may need to reassure them about the “illed” sound at the end of “tickled”. You could link the “le” in “tickle” to the children’s knowledge of the words “little” or “apple”. *Why is Skipper wagging his tail? What does Sophie think of that?*

Page 5 – *What’s the problem here? What will Dad say?*

Page 6 – *Is Dad really mad? How do you know?*

Page 7 – Some children may say “come” for “came”. *Does “come” sound right? Does it look right? What do you think is going to happen this time?*

Page 8 – *How would Greg say this? How is Skipper feeling now? How do you know?*

Page 9 – *What are they all looking at? What is it doing?* Check that the children are saying “around”, not “round”. *What would you do if a bee was buzzing around you? What might happen next?* Note whether the children make the link back to the title page.

Page 10 – Encourage expressive reading!

Page 11 – If necessary, prompt the children to attend to the “fl” blend and the “ick” rime in “flicked”. *Show me how you would flick a bee away. Were you right about Skipper?*

Page 12 – *How is Sophie feeling now? What will Skipper do next? What does the family think about having Skipper as a pet?*

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing their attention to visual information and their ability to read fluently and expressively.

Focus on any initial consonant blends or digraphs that the children may have been unsure of. Locate examples in the text and make a list of other words that start the same way. Look at the use of the digraph “sh” as a medial and final sound in “brushed” and “Crash”.

Write the words “flicked”, “pick”, and “tickled” on the whiteboard. *What is the same about all of these words?* Show the children how they can generate other words using their knowledge of the “ick” rime. Repeat the activity with other rimes from the text.

Focus on the narrative structure of the story. Identify the introduction, the problem, and the happy ending. Talk about how the repeated examples of the problems caused by Skipper’s tail (like the repeated incidents in a fairy tale) make the story more exciting because the reader starts to anticipate what will happen next.

Talk about how the writer makes this story sound exciting. You could talk about the lively verbs, the expressive dialogue, the imperative language, the use of exclamation marks for emphasis, and the use of onomatopoeia.

Focus on the illustrations, particularly those of the characters, and talk about how they support the ideas in the text.

Reread page 3 to the children. *What sound can you hear at the end of “helped”?* Write the word “help” on the whiteboard. *Show me how you would make “help” into “helped”.* Confirm the children’s attempts by referring back to the text. Repeat the activity with the words “brushed”, “flicked”, “landed”, “shouted”, or “walked”.

Look at the word “Skipper’s” in the title. Explain that the possessive apostrophe is there to show that the tail belongs to Skipper. Find other examples of possessive apostrophes (on pages 4, 8, 10, and 12) and talk about why they are there.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2004*.

Reread the big book *No, Skipper!*

Reread other Ready to Read books about dogs, for example, *Training Ruby or Dog* (Red) or *Walking the Dog* (Yellow).

Have the children think, pair, and share about what they would do if a bee landed on them.

Add thought bubbles to the illustrations of Skipper on pages 3, 8, or 12.

During shared writing, construct a narrative based on an incident involving a pet. Make it more dramatic by incorporating such features as lively verbs, onomatopoeia, or dialogue. Encourage the children to use these features in their own writing.