

I'm the King of the Mountain

by Joy Cowley

illustrated by Dick Frizzell

Overview

In this lively, rhythmic text, suitable for sharing across all levels, a flea boasts that he is King of the Mountain, only to have the title snatched from him by a bigger, more threatening neighbour. The title is repeatedly relinquished as bigger, more intimidating animals come along, but the clever flea, using a little trickery, wins back the day. This text has particular appeal for children because of the underlying theme of a small person outwitting a bigger person who presents a threat. This text is available only as a big book, and these notes are for using the text for shared reading.

Suggested purposes

This text supports a wide range of purposes, from developing early concepts about print to exploring more sophisticated ideas about narrative. It supports the comprehension strategies of asking questions, forming hypotheses, analysing and synthesising, and summarising. The plot structure of this text, where the story ends in a way that is similar to the beginning, is humorous, satisfying, and just right for dramatising. The sing-song refrain draws children into the reading and encourages participation and fluent reading.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

•	the theme of cleverness triumphing over bullying
•	the sing-song, rhythmic nature of the text
•	the repetitive and circular narrative structure
•	the similarities in the illustrations on pages 2 and 15 that reinforce the circular structure of the narrative
•	the repeated high-frequency words “said”, “the”, “went”
•	the initial consonant blends in “cried”, “Flea”, “ground”, “Stop”, “stopped”
•	the digraphs “sh” – “shook”, “She”, “she”; “th” – “that”, “the”, “then”, “there”, “this”, “with”
•	the variety of upper-case letters
•	the verbs ending in “ed” – “cried”, “hopped”, “looked”, “stopped”
•	the contractions – “I’m”, “Who’s”
•	the use of the honorific “O”
•	the use of direct speech
•	the use of italics to denote sung speech
•	the poetic phrase “shook with fear”
•	the text layout on page 14
•	the changing perspective of the illustration on each double-page spread
•	the music on page 16.

Introducing the text

Discuss the cover illustration. *Who do you think this might be?* (Note that Flea’s name isn’t revealed until page 2. You could tell the children his name, or you could give them some “inside information” to help them work it out.) Draw the children’s attention to his six arms and legs. *That’s right, he’s an insect, and his name starts with “Fl”*... Encourage the children to share what they know about fleas. *How big would*

Flea be in real life? Establish the idea that fleas are very small.

I wonder what Flea is standing on ... It looks like it's something high up because I can see sky and clouds around it. Draw out the ideas that he is on top of something and that he is happy to be there. Look at the title. *What might he be saying?* Accept the children's suggestions. If necessary, prompt the children by singing "I'm the K ...". See if they can come in with the rest of the word or phrase. Note that each animal encountered is bigger than the previous one and whether they can use that understanding to predict what will happen next.

Page 13 – The pattern of the text changes here, and there is a lot of text on the page, so you are likely to need to provide more support. Dramatise Cow's actions (looking "this way" and "that way") as you read. Slow the pace on the last two lines so that those children who recognise the familiar structure of this section can join in. Encourage the children to predict how this story might end.

Page 14 – You could use the illustration to support the children with the idea of Flea hopping over Cow's back.

Page 15 – Read this last page triumphantly, encouraging the children to join in.

Review the children's predictions and check their understanding of the ending – *Where did the ghost come from? Who was the ghost? How did Flea get to be King of the Mountain all over again?* If necessary, refer back to pages 13 and 14 to clarify what has happened.

Read through the book again together, without stopping for discussion, so that the children can relish the rhythmic nature of the text.

The first reading

Vary the level of support according to the needs of the children. The first shared reading of this text should be as uninterrupted as possible so that the children can savour the rhyme, rhythm, and anticipation of the story. It can be revisited many times to focus on particular text features.

Read the title of the book with the children and the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – Listen to the children read the title again. *I wonder where he's going ...*

Pages 2 and 3 – Briefly draw attention to the visual features of Flea's name. If they're not too sure about the "ea" digraph, remind them of the "ea" sound in "tea" or "sea". Discuss the illustrations. *What is Flea doing? I'm wondering who he's met up with. That creature looks a bit scary ...*

Use a pointer to read these two pages. Sing the refrain, encouraging the children to join in with you. If the children make predictions other than "Beetle", prompt them to cross-check using the visual information. *Could this be "Cricket"? How do you know?* If the children don't know what a beetle is, tell them the word.

Pages 4 to 11 – Continue to read each page of the text with the children, encouraging them to join in as they become familiar with the text pattern. Read the text expressively, varying your voice to convey the imperative "Stop!", the threatening "Who's the King of the Mountain?", and the shaking, timorous "You are, O ...".

Use think-alouds to model asking questions or forming hypotheses (predictions) about the text. *I can see a pattern here. I'm thinking about what creature Lizard will meet ...* Note whether the children work

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two ideas per session.)

When the children are familiar with the text, choose members of the class or group to lead the reading with a pointer.

Explore and discuss the illustrations, for example, the different perspective on each page of the double-page spreads and the facial gestures and body language of the characters. *Think about why Beetle looks so big on page 4 and so small on page 5. How does the illustrator show you that the animals are frightened?* Get the children to imitate the stances and facial gestures of the characters. Have them work in pairs to select a double-page spread to act out.

Draw attention to the circular nature of the plot. Draw a large circle on a chart. Write “Flea” at the top and “King of the Mountain” in the middle. Ask the children to recall the order in which the creatures became the king of the mountain. Record the names in a clockwise direction around the circle, with arrows leading from one to the other, ending up back at Flea.

The almost identical illustrations of Flea on pages 2 and 15 also reinforce the idea that Flea is back where he started.

Use pages 12 and 13 to examine the use of speech marks. Explain that the speech marks show what a character actually says. Make speech balloons from the text and attach them to the illustrations of the cow.

Focus on the use of contractions in the text. Write “I am” on the whiteboard or use cards with “I”, “am”, and an apostrophe on them to show how the apostrophe replaces the “a”. Explain that contractions are a quick way of saying two words together. Sing the refrain together using “I am” instead of “I’m”. *Does this sound good to you?* Draw out the idea that contractions help to make speech sound more natural. Repeat the activity with “Who’s”.

Have fun with the honorific “O”. Use it in the classroom with the children’s names – “*O Taylor, please bring me some crayons.*”

Ask individual children to locate high-frequency words on any double-spread page of text. *Can you find the word “the”? Can you find another one?* For those children who need it, using a page of text in this way helps to reinforce the constancy of a word.

Locate some of the pairs of upper-case and lower-case letters that appear on most pages. For example, “Flea” and “fear”. Remind the children of the convention of writing names with capital letters. Link this to their own names.

Focus on any of the initial consonant blends that you feel the children need to work on. Locate examples in the text and list other words that start the same way. *What two letters go together to make the “gr” sound at the beginning of “ground”? Can you think of other words that start this way?*

Locate words that start with the digraph “th” on page 13 and revise “th” as an initial or final sound. Practise saying the words, with tongues out, to enunciate the sound clearly. List the words on the whiteboard and have the children underline the “th” in each one.

Focus on the “ed” verbs on pages 13 and 14. Reread the first four lines on page 13. *What did Cow do? That’s right, she stopped, and she looked.* Write the word “look” on the whiteboard. *This word says “look”.* *Show me how we can make this word into “looked”.* Encourage the children to refer to the text if necessary. Read the word “looked” together. Write the words “stopped”, “hopped”, and “cried” and read them together. Have the children underline the “ed” ending in each word.

Suggestions for further tasks

Draw a favourite character from the story to add to a group illustration of the plot circle diagram.

Put an enlarged copy of the words of the refrain on the wall so that the children can return to it many times independently.

Using the music on page 16, teach the children how to play the refrain on chime bars or a glockenspiel.

Have the children act out small vignettes in pairs, taking turns to be the animal taking the threatening

stance.

Use the text for Readers' Theatre. This involves turning the narrative into a script, with the children taking on the roles of the characters and reading their dialogue. The teacher (or a child) takes on the role of a reader or narrator to link the action. Readers' Theatre is a purposeful and enjoyable activity that encourages repeated reading, discussion, and deeper comprehension.

Make finger puppets or masks and then use them to dramatise the text.

Read the Ready to Read poem card *The Most* with the children. Its refrain, "I'm carrying the most", can be read with the same sing-song chant.

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