

# The World Will End, Said the Cat

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School Journal  
Level 4, November 2016  
Year 8



## Overview

This is a fantasy story with a serious flavour. The indirect unfolding of the story allows students to make their own way through the text, piecing information together as they go. The opening two paragraphs are a good example of this: nothing is overstated or explained, every detail has a certain amount of mystery until things begin to add up. Readers will enjoy the central conundrum (to touch or not to touch the mysterious egg), and it will provoke thoughtful responses and good conversation. Implied themes include the difficulty of making good choices and the consequences of decisions.

Possible curriculum contexts for subsequent readings could relate to aspects of health and physical education and social sciences.

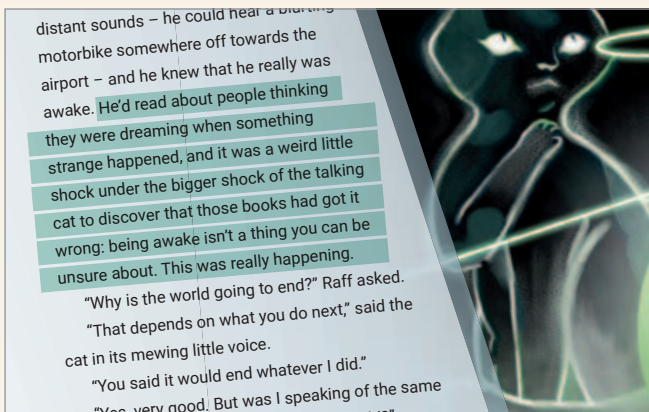
This story:

- sets a fantasy within a realistic local setting
- uses an intelligent talking cat as a main protagonist
- requires readers to apply patience and inferential thinking
- allows students to use what they already know about fantasy to support understanding.

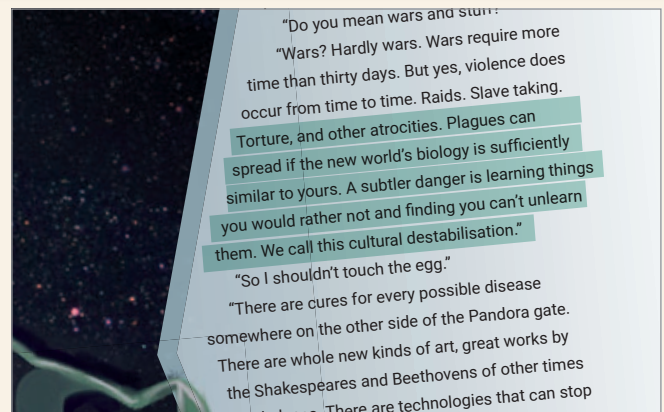
A PDF of the text is available at [www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz](http://www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz)

Texts related by theme "MeMe and Me" SJ L4 May 2016 | "Fever" SJ L4 May 2015 | "The Gatherers" SJ L4 Oct 2011

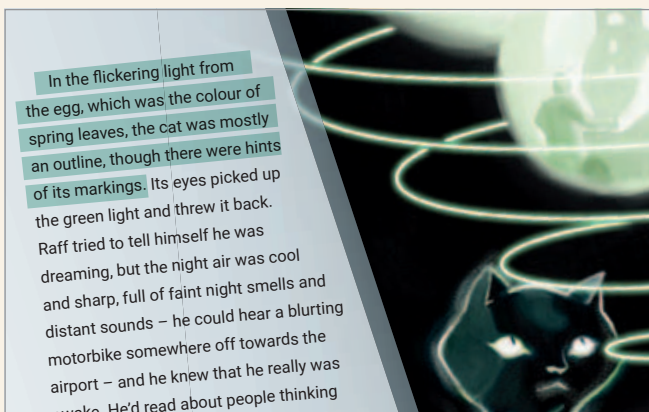
## Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard



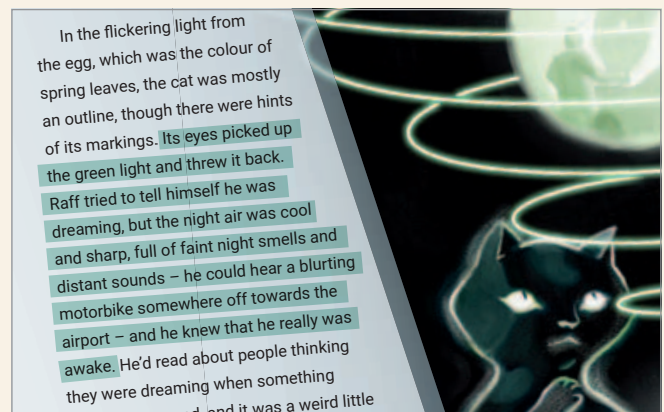
elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas



complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments



sentences that vary in length, including long, complex sentences that contain a lot of information



words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

Reading standard: by the end of year 8

## Possible curriculum contexts

### ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

### ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

– Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

### Possible first reading purposes

(These could be combined into one reading purpose.)

- To read a fantasy story about making a deadly choice
- To decide which choice Raff should make.

### Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To explore what the cat's language tells us about his character
- To identify the features and characteristics of a fantasy story
- To identify how authors encourage us to suspend our disbelief
- To analyse the writer's craft.

### Possible writing purposes

- To write a fantasy story based on the same setting
- To write another chapter to the story
- To write arguments for and against the choices that the cat offers Raff.



The New Zealand Curriculum

## Text and language challenges

(Some of the suggestions for possible supporting strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.)

### VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “calico cat”, “raspy”, “dormant”, “dimple”, “deep back country”, “penetrating analysis”, “emissary”, “ambassador”, “bound by”, “griffin's egg”, “haunches”, “tendrils”, “geothermal energy”, “subtler”, “cultural destabilisation”
- The use of figurative language: “as though the cat badly needed to clear its throat”, “like ripples in a pond”, “a blurting motorbike”, “like little bubbles in an endless sea of foam”, “like soft green fire”.

### Possible supporting strategies

- Although some words may be unfamiliar, most students will be able to make sense of the text without pausing to work out every word. Direct students to make a note of unfamiliar words and spend time later clarifying them.
- After reading, discuss the differences between an emissary and an ambassador, explaining what the words mean and supporting the students to understand the way they are used by the cat.
- Support the students to identify the somewhat formal or archaic use of language by the cat, including its sarcasm (“penetrating analysis”) and rhetorical questions (“But was I speaking of the same end, and was I speaking of the same world?”)
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Familiarity with reading fantasy stories and/or seeing fantasy movies, games, or videos and knowledge of mythological creatures and objects, for example, griffins, calico cats, and Pandora's box
- Familiarity with fantasy ideas, such as talking cats, other universes, and other forms of time and space
- Familiarity with geological features, including hills, craters, and dormant volcanoes
- Some knowledge of events of the past, such as war, slavery, cannibalism, plagues, technologies, great works of art, Beethoven, and Shakespeare
- Knowledge of the extinction of the moa and the dodo.

### Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt students to share what they know about fantasy fiction, including titles and authors they have read and the concept of other universes. Chart the typical features of the genre and add to the chart after reading this story.
- Some English language learners would benefit from viewing and discussing images of griffins and calico cats. Some students may know calico cats as tortoiseshell cats. Share the legend of Pandora as well if they are unfamiliar with the story. Some students may need support to make connections to the historical events (page 31): take one term and prompt the students to share any connections they can make, giving brief information to build prior knowledge if necessary.



Sounds and Words

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Third-person narrative with a present-day setting
- Fantasy elements: a talking cat, a mysterious glowing egg, a momentous choice to be made, and the possibility of accessing alternative universes
- The puzzling opening and the open, unresolved ending
- The use of dialogue to reveal characters
- The need to make meaning from hints and clues as the story opens
- Complex sentences and layers of meaning
- The use of modal nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that give information about the degree of obligation or certainty involved in an action, for example, “perhaps”, “pretty sure”, “hardly”.

### Possible supporting strategies

- Discuss why writers write different kinds of stories. Ask them to share the kinds of fantasy stories they enjoy and to explain what they like to feel or experience as they read.
- Discuss the ways writers build a fantasy “world” or situation, using examples from books students already know.
- Select one or two sentences that have a complex structure and model how to read them, using punctuation and knowledge of phrase, clause, and sentence structure. Unpack each part to uncover its meaning, then put it together again to show how the writer has conveyed an idea, description, or event.
- Some English language learners can find it difficult to identify who a pronoun refers to. Have them identify pronominal reference chains in the text. The students underline the noun and then put a circle around each pronoun on a copy of the text. They then create the chain by drawing arrows to link each pronoun to its noun. Developing word cluster maps can help students to develop a deeper understanding of the characters or concepts in the text. For example, they could map the attributes of the calico cat, words that describe how the cat talks, and so on.
- Some English language learners find modals difficult to comprehend. Help these students to notice the use of modals and discuss with them the effect that they have on the meaning.



Sounds and Words

# Instructional focus – Reading

**English** Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

## First reading

- Set the purpose for reading.
- Explain that this story gradually unfolds and will require some persistence.
- Based on your knowledge of the students, you may ask them to read the story right through before discussing it.
- Alternatively, introduce the story with a brief discussion of fantasy fiction, then read the first page aloud. Check that the students have identified Raff and the cat as the characters, Māngere Mountain (in Auckland) as the place, the present day as the time, and a large glowing egg as the potential problem. The students can read independently from that point.

### If the students struggle with this text

- Read the story aloud, pausing if students lose meaning or are confused. Encourage them to suspend judgment until you are at least halfway through, explaining that the writer has deliberately taken time to make sense.
- Alternatively, read aloud to the end of page 27, then stop to discuss the setting, the characters, and what has happened so far. Unpack the last sentence on page 27 both to demonstrate the cat's style of speaking (vocabulary and structure) and to make predictions about the "chat" the cat is proposing. Students can read on from this point, with pauses to share and clarify their understanding at the end of each page or double page.

**Subsequent readings** How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. You can use more than one rereading to allow you to focus on different purposes.

### The teacher

Ask the students to reread page 28 to consider the point at which Raff realises he is not dreaming: the things he is seeing are real.

- *Have you read, or written, stories in which terrible things happen to a character, then he wakes up to find he was only dreaming?*
- *What are the "weird shocks" he experiences? How do they contribute to his change of mind about what's real?*
- *How does this change Raff's relationship with the cat?*

### The teacher

Ask the students to evaluate the way the Pandora will respond to Raff's touch.

- *What is the connection between the Pandora and the dormant volcano?*
- *How does this relate to things you already know about hatching and growing? Now connect this to what you know about geothermal energy.*
- *Why do you think the writer uses these connections? What is the effect of using them? Do they help you gain a clearer understanding of the power of the Pandora? How can you relate this to other fantasy stories you've read?*

### The students:

- locate examples in the text that identify the changes in Raff's thinking
- make connections between these examples, the abstract ideas of the "shocks", and their own experiences of dreaming and waking to understand Raff's changing thoughts as he realises he's not dreaming
- evaluate Raff's thinking in terms of the plausibility of the talking cat and the egg and in terms of what they know about fantasy fiction
- make connections within the text to identify the change in the way Raff now addresses the cat and to infer that he is now prepared to engage with the cat.

### The students:

- identify the natural features of life on Earth that are used in the text
- make connections between their own knowledge of those features and the ways they are used in the story to understand how the Pandora hatches
- infer that the writer has used these known processes to create a believable fantasy
- evaluate the writer's use of fantasy in a realistic setting and synthesise this with their other reading experiences to infer that good fantasy writing needs to be plausible.

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Lead a discussion about the risks and dangers the cat outlines to Raff by asking one or more of the following guiding questions.

- *In outlining the risks of entering new universes, the cat uses some interesting words. Why does he use the word “subtler”? What do you understand by “cultural destabilisation”?*
- *What connections can you make between the cat’s words and things you know about human history?*
- *Do the comparisons the cat makes help us understand what might happen if we could enter different universes?*
- *What choice would you make? Why?*

Completing a [three-level reading guide](#) task can help students to develop inference skills. Once the task is completed, students work with a partner to reach agreement on the answer to each true or false statement.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You compared the gateways the cat described with the “windows” between worlds in the Philip Pullman fantasy novels. That connection also helped you imagine the risks and rewards of travel to other universes.*

### METACOGNITION

- How did you go about finding facts to compare with the people, places, and events in the story? How did the facts help you understand the story?

### The students:

- use strategies such as context, inferring from the known to the unknown, and applying their knowledge of roots, prefixes, and suffixes to work out the meanings of words
- evaluate the impact of these words as they read the story
- engage in discussion by sharing connections they can make to the text, for example, comparing the idea of travel to other universes with the plight of Syrian refugees in Europe, the impact of colonisation on indigenous peoples, or the rivalry between sports teams to make inferences about potential problems
- evaluate the comparisons made by the cat in terms of their own knowledge and beliefs.



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**English** Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences; Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

## Text excerpts from

“The World Will End, Said the Cat”

## Examples of text characteristics

## Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 26

“If you touch that, the world will end,” said the cat. “Just so you know.”

### DRAMATIC OPENING

A strong opening sentence or paragraph will hook readers and make them want to keep reading. Depending on the kind of story, the opening can be mysterious, challenging, intriguing, confusing ...

Explain how writers choose the opening lines of a story carefully to create an impact.

- *What impact do you want to have on your readers? Can you make a stronger impact?*
- *Use this excerpt and other examples as models to revise your opening.*
- *Try your opening out on a few other students. What kinds of changes are most effective?*
- *Check that the opening you decide on is a good match for the rest of the writing. How can you keep up the interest you generated?*

Page 29

“Let us suppose,” said the cat calmly, “that this is a moment when things can change. Perhaps I was sent here from somewhere else. Another universe, perhaps. Perhaps there are many of them. Perhaps universes are like little bubbles in an endless sea of foam. Let us suppose that in some other bubble of time and space, on a planet very like this, people learnt to open gateways from their bubble to another. Are you following me?”

### FANTASTICAL IDEAS

Writers of fantasy need to “show” that their ideas are plausible so readers suspend disbelief. One way is to let readers “see” that all kinds of ideas could be possible.

### SIMILE

A carefully chosen simile can help readers to understand a complex idea.

### MODALS

The use of a modal word can create a sense of choice in the reader’s mind or show how likely it is that an action will take place.

Explain the concept of “willing suspension of disbelief”.

- *When we read a fantasy book or watch a movie, if the story’s a good one, we stop thinking about whether we can believe it or not. We temporarily give up (or suspend) our ideas of what’s believable. This is known as the “willing suspension of disbelief”.*
- *In this extract, the writer is playing with us by suggesting a lot of different ideas. Because the cat is suggesting anything is possible, we are encouraged to believe it, too. What might the writer have done that wouldn’t have worked so well?*
- *How can you make your readers suspend disbelief? Make sure you don’t go too far and make the situation implausible.*
  - *Can you use a simile or metaphor that will help to do this?*
  - *Can you use a modal word to suggest how certain the action is?*

Page 31

“I didn’t say that.” The cat settled down comfortably on all fours. “The choice is yours.”

In the darkness, the egg glowed like soft green fire.

### OPEN ENDING

An open ending leaves the plot or problem unresolved. Readers must think for themselves about what the outcome might be. Writers may use this if their purpose is to encourage deeper thinking about an issue or problem.

Direct students to review their writing.

- *How does your story end? If you’ve created a problem for a character, is it resolved? Does it have to be?*
- *Think about your purpose, then try out different ways of ending your story. Which is most effective?*

### METACOGNITION

- When you start with a great idea, how do you make sure it follows through to the end? What goes through your mind while you’re getting the detail down?

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *The description you wrote and the great simile you used are very convincing. I can visualise the place, even though I know it can’t possibly exist on Earth. I suspended my disbelief!*



Writing standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions