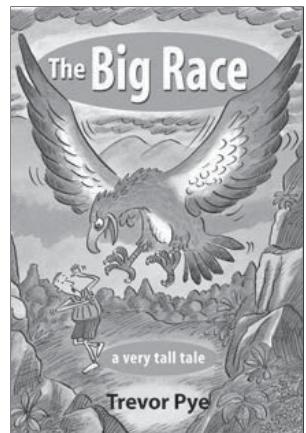


The Big Race

by Trevor Pye



Book Summary

Duck Lake Elementary has only eleven students, so it's a problem choosing the best runner to represent the school in The Big Race. Trevor is picked because he has the longest legs in the school – but can he run?

Features of the Book

- Tall tale genre – an unlikely story
- Speech and thought bubbles
- Changes in typeface in the illustrations
- The map of the race
- The humor in the text and illustrations
- Similes – *as strong as an ox; legs like an antelope; a body like a beanpole*
- The information in the illustrations
- The growing sense of exaggeration
- The use of descriptive language – *a fate worse than death; butterflies in my stomach*

Purpose

The Big Race can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- recognizing the first person point of view;
- using graphic sources of information;
- predicting probable outcomes;
- identifying the use of figurative language, such as similes;
- comparing texts on similar themes in different genres.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- Recognizing the first person point of view
- Using graphic sources of information
- Predicting probable outcomes

Introducing the text

Brainstorm all the kinds of races the students have been in – cross-country, track and field, interschool competitions, three-legged race, and so on. Discuss the vocabulary often associated with races (starting line, lanes, runners, track, training, starter).

- *What does the starter usually say to begin a race?*
(On your marks, get set, go!)

Look at the cover of the book with the group.

- *What can you tell about the story from this?*
- *What kind of race do you think it is?*
- *Where does the story take place?*
- *What do you think "a very tall tale" means?*
- *What can you tell from the expression on the runner's face?* (cover and title page pictures)

Based on the text and the illustration on the cover, ask the students to make predictions about what might happen in the story. Write these down to refer to later in the lesson.

Before reading the text, show and discuss with the students the way the author has set out the book, using speech bubbles to give more information. They need to understand that the text and written speech work together.

Reading and discussing the text

Read the first chapter aloud to the group. Model reading the bubbles in the right sequence with pace and expression to add to the excitement.

- Who is telling the story? How can you tell? (the author, Trevor Pye, is the narrator and the main character)

Explain that you can tell because he says “I” and “my” in the story and the principal says, “Pye it will have to be you.”

- Why did the author write from that point of view? (It gives the impression that the author is talking directly to the reader; and so the reader feels closer to the events of the story.)
- What do the illustrations tell you about the main character? (he's worried and scared)
- Why is that?
- What is the author trying to do in the first chapter? (to get the reader interested, excited, and wanting to read on)

When you are confident that the students have a good understanding of the beginning of the story line, encourage them to read the rest of the story independently. You could use a purpose-setting question, such as:

- How does the author make you want to read the next part of the story? We can talk about this when you've finished.

When the group has finished the story, ask them for feedback. Encourage the students to back up their predictions with reasons.

- I thought it was scary in places because of all the things that happened to Trevor.
- I thought it was funny. I liked the illustrations and the characters' expressions.
- It was exciting. I like the way the author keeps the story going. Just when you think it's all right, something else terrible happens.

The story is a good example of the use of suspense to keep the plot moving at a quick pace. Discuss how the narrator struggles from one disaster to another and just manages to escape each time.

- How does that make you feel?
- Do you think Trevor will want to take part in the race next year?
- What makes you think that?

Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

- Identifying the use of figurative language, such as similes

Look at page 9 of the story together.

- Can you find a sentence that tells you that something is like something else?
- Why does the author say “with legs like an antelope”? What does that mean? Why would it make Trevor feel worried?

You could introduce the students to the term “simile” and give them other examples from pages 10 and 47. (my body looked like a beanpole; He ran like the wind)

- Look at the illustrations. Can you see what the author is saying by using these expressions?
- Can you find another example of a simile on page nine? (“as strong as an ox”)

✎ Ask the students to write down some of their own similes using the illustrations in the book as starting points.

- Comparing texts on similar themes in different genres

Read *The Desert Run* by John Bonallack to the group or the class as an example of a race that really happened. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two texts. Focus on the authors' intentions in writing the two books.

- What things happened in The Big Race that couldn't have happened in The Desert Run?

✎ Use the blackline master on page 66 to list the distinctive features of the two books.

