

Beating the Drought

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Book Summary

In an effort to keep his prize pumpkin alive during the water restrictions, Grandpa carries the art of water recycling to an extreme, driving his family mad in the process.

Features of the Book

- The humour in the illustrations
- The twist in the story on page 30
- The use of inference – *“That’s it,” said Mum, gazing at the television. “Everyone has to share the bathwater.”*
- Compound words – *bathwater, wheelbarrow, everything, everyone*
- Contractions – *that’s, we’re, can’t, there’ll*
- Verbs – *groaned, switched, mumbled*
- Specialised vocabulary – *drought, sprinkler*

Purpose

Beating the Drought can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- S** using prior knowledge to anticipate meaning and to make sense of the text;
- S** recognising the distinguishing features of narratives – plot, characters, setting, and theme;
- S** demonstrating comprehension by identifying answers in the text;
- S** exploring the conventions of direct speech;
- S** recognising the main idea and retelling the events of the story in order.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Using prior knowledge to anticipate meaning and to make sense of the text
- S** Recognising the distinguishing features of narratives – plot, characters, setting, and theme
- S** Demonstrating comprehension by identifying answers in the text

Introducing the text

Brainstorm, using a star diagram, to find out what the students already know about drought. Discuss their ideas and encourage them to reflect and to clarify their ideas by asking each other questions.

- What do you mean by ...?
- Tell me more about ...
- Can you give me an example to show ...?

Show the group the title of the book but cover the illustration.

- What do you think this title means?
- How could you “beat” a drought?
- What kind of story do you think this will be?

Now show the whole cover and the title page. Help the students to think critically about the information on these pages and to predict a possible plot.



Reading and discussing the text

Ask the group to read the first chapter of the book. You could read the first sentence to motivate them.

- *As you read, think about why Mum has said that everyone has to share the bathwater.*

As the students read independently, note any difficulties they may be having and offer help where it is needed. Encourage the students to clarify the meanings of new vocabulary by asking you, marking the word with a sticky note and returning to it later, or using a dictionary.


When the students have finished this section, you could quickly explore the main features of narrative writing shown in the chapter.

- *Who are the characters?* (All the characters are introduced – the narrator, Mum, Grandpa, Pete, and Melanie.)
- *Can you recognise the main idea?* (There is a drought and everyone will have to help to save water.)
- *Can you add supporting details?* (Everyone will have to share bathwater. They can't water the garden. You can be fined for wasting water. Grandpa needs water for his pumpkin patch.)
- *What is the setting?* (The first chapter all takes place in the family home.)
- *Can you retell the main events of the chapter in sequence?*

You may wish to model an oral summary for the group and point out the features mentioned above.

When you are confident that the students have a good understanding of the beginning of the storyline, encourage them to read the rest of the story independently. You could use one of the following purpose-setting questions:

- *What were some of the ways Grandpa collected water?*
- *How did they manage to get the huge pumpkin into the wheelbarrow?*
- *What made the boy change his mind about being hungry?*

 As the students finish reading, they could make brief notes in answer to one of the purpose-setting questions. Give everyone the opportunity to share and discuss their ideas.

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.


S Exploring the conventions of direct speech

Model the format for writing direct speech on the board using a sentence from the book. For example:

- “That’s it!” said Mum, gazing at the television.
“Everyone has to share the bathwater.”

Say what you are doing and explain why.

- *The exclamation mark takes the place of the comma here.*
- *I leave a space between the full stop and the next set of quotation marks.*
- *At the end of the sentence, the full stop comes before the set of quotation marks.*

 Do another example co-operatively with the students and then give them a sentence to punctuate independently.

S Recognising the main idea and retelling the events of the story in order

Encourage the students to place the main events of the story in order. Ask them to do this orally from memory and then to use the sentences below, which are reproduced out of sequence on the blackline master on page 63.

- Mum heard the news about the drought on the television.
- Grandpa collected used water from his family to put on his pumpkin plant.
- Grandpa collected water from the neighbours and from others in the neighbourhood.
- The notice about the garden show was in the supermarket window.
- The pumpkin was loaded into the car.
- Grandpa won a red ribbon for his pumpkin, even though there was a drought.
- Mum used the prize pumpkin to make some soup.
- She made tomato soup as well.

When they have an order they are happy with, they could check this with the book. Ask them to think about the following questions:

- *Is there another order that works?*
- *Can you think of a better order of events for this story?*