

A Close Call

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Book Summary

When Harry “borrows” his father’s mobile phone for the day, the result is a sequence of events involving Harry, his father, and Harry’s pet rat. Despite Harry’s mistake, the story shows that there is a strong bond between him and his father and that Harry learns from his actions.

Features of the Book

- The pun in the title
- The use of metaphor in the opening paragraph
- The third person point of view
- The range of verbs – *spooned, dangled, swung, flipped, blurted, lunged, thundered*
- Alliteration – *clatter of cutlery and crockery*
- Informal language – *yeah, bye*

Purpose

A Close Call can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- S** exploring how the author sets the scene and introduces characters;
- S** predicting outcomes of characters’ actions;
- S** discussing how characters change as the result of experience;
- S** examining the use of metaphor;
- S** investigating the use of verbs.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Exploring how the author sets the scene and introduces characters
- S** Predicting outcomes of characters’ actions
- S** Discussing how characters change as the result of experience

Introducing the text

The action in this story revolves around the fascination of the mobile phone. Many students will have had experiences with mobile phones – their parents may own them or they may have seen them being used by others.

Show the students the cover of the book and discuss the title and the illustration.

- What kind of animal is this? What is it sitting on?
- Look at the title of the book. What do you think “A Close Call” could mean? (Some students may see the double meaning in the word “call”.)

Discuss the reasons why people use mobile phones.

Ask the students to read the blurb on the back cover. Discuss the second paragraph.

- How could Dad end up with a pet rat instead of a cell phone?

Discuss getting things mixed up. The fact that the unintentional swap is of a rat with a mobile phone (rather than of a mobile phone with a hand-held computer game, for instance) is a clue to the tone of the story.

- Can you predict what kind of story this is going to be? (The cover illustration and some of the text in the blurb gives the impression that it may be a humorous story, but the topic sounds serious.)

Reading and discussing the text

Ask the students to read chapter 1 independently.

- *As you read, think about how the author describes the setting and starts to introduce you to the characters.*

When they have finished reading, record the students' ideas on a chart under the headings Who, What, Where, and When. Invite discussion about the opening scene.

- *Is this what happens in your house at breakfast time?*

The first chapter includes Harry's action, which sets off the unfortunate sequence of events. Ask the students what they think about Harry taking the mobile phone.

- *Was it a sensible thing to do? Why/why not?*
- *What might happen when Harry gets to school?*
- *What might be the consequences for Harry's father?*

The students can now read the rest of the book independently.

- *As you read, think about the way Harry's first action has started a chain of events.*

When the students have finished reading, discuss how taking the mobile phone caused all kinds of trouble for Harry and for other characters. Revisit the purpose-setting questions above to confirm or modify the predictions made by the students.

- *What did Harry learn from his experience? How does the writer show this?*

Ask the students to back up their suggestions with examples from the text and illustrations, such as Harry's conversation on page 30 and his body language on pages 30 and 31.



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 Examining the use of metaphor

Reread the first paragraph of the story and discuss how the author has described Harry eating his breakfast.

- *Why do you think the author has described the breakfast like this?*
- *What does the description make you think of?*
- *Can you point to the words the author has used to create that picture?*

Ask the students to share their own stories of pretending with food – making castles and moats with potato and gravy or islands with porridge and milk.

 Ask the students to write a short, similar account of another mealtime scene using a metaphor to describe playing with food, such as a child using a fork as a crane or a parent pretending that a spoon is a plane to entice a baby to eat its food.

The students can use the blackline master on page 61 to write their metaphor and a paragraph that uses it to describe a scene from mealtime.

S Investigating the use of verbs

The author has used a number of interesting verbs to describe the action in the story (spooned, dangled, swung, flipped, blurted, lunged, thundered).

Look at the first example in the third paragraph on page 4. Ask the students to think of other ways to describe the action. The verb “spooned” is a shortened way of saying “used his spoon to put”. It also makes the text sound more interesting and evokes an image where there is no supporting illustration.

Ask the students to find other examples of interesting verbs in the story and discuss these in the same way. You could follow up this discussion by taking some examples of sentences and asking the students to choose alternative verbs that they find more interesting or descriptive.