

# Is that an Earthquake?

by Alan Bagnall

illustrated by Jennifer Cooper

## Overview

A young boy wonders anxiously whether the movements and noises around his home could be an earthquake, and then, suddenly an earthquake does happen. The story incorporates a recount and an explanation and is told entirely through dialogue. There are safety instructions inside the back cover. It's also available as a big book, and there is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2004*.

## Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections and analysing and synthesising. It includes a high number of descriptive verbs that encourage attention to initial blends, onomatopoeia, and rhyme and that provide a vibrant model for writing.

## Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the use of dialogue to tell the story
- the portrayal of the characters' feelings through the text and the illustrations
- the repetitive text structure and the dramatic change on pages 8 to 11
- the change in tense on page 11
- the lively, descriptive verbs
- the imperative verbs on page 9 and in the safety instructions inside the back cover
- the use of italics and exclamation marks for emphasis
- the use of rhyme
- the personification on pages 3 and 6
- the inclusion of the family dog in every illustration
- the speech bubble on page 12
- the instructions inside the back cover
- the many examples of verbs that involve dropping the final "e" before adding "ing".

## Possible challenges

- the use of dialogue to tell the story
- the poetic language
- the term "goods train" on page 5.

## Introducing the text

Talk about the children's experiences of earthquakes. *What would you do if there was an earthquake at school? This book is about a boy who is a bit worried about earthquakes. Have you ever heard a noise and thought it was an earthquake but it wasn't?* Draw out the children's ideas of things that could sound or feel like an earthquake at school or home.

## During the reading

The following notes are suggestions for using this book for guided reading. If you are using the big book for shared reading, encourage the children to read along with you and increase the level of support.

Read the title and the names of the writer and the illustrator.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties with the reading.

Page 2 – *What is the problem? Who is speaking here? Is Mum worried? Why is the house shaking?*

Page 5 – You may need to clarify what a goods train is and explain the meaning of the word “trundling”.

Pages 6 and 7 – Check that the children realise it's always the boy asking the question. *Who's answering the boy on page 7? How do you know?* Note that the rhyme pattern changes slightly on page 7.

Page 8 – *What has changed on this page? What should they do?*

Page 9 – *How do you think Mum would say this? Why is Mum telling the twins what to do?*

Draw out the idea that this is an emergency and people have to act quickly. *What has the writer done to make pages 8 and 9 sound exciting?*

Page 10 – *How does the writer want you to read this page?* Encourage the children to speculate about who's speaking. (There's no “right” answer. The CD has Dad speaking these lines.)

Page 11 – Note the change from “is” to “was” now that the earthquake is over. Clarify that the boy is speaking to his little sister. *How do the rest of the family feel?*

Page 12 – Draw attention to the speech bubble. *Have you ever felt like this after an earthquake or after something frightening has happened?*

Read the instructions inside the back cover together.

## After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen while the children reread the text with a partner, observing how they manage the challenges of the poetic language. Note those children who use expression and appropriate phrasing.

Focus on the feelings of the characters, especially the boy and the dog. *How can you tell how they're feeling?* The illustrations convey the idea that the boy is nervous of earthquakes and that there is a strong bond between the boy and the dog. Study the

illustrations on pages 8 to 11. *How are the children feeling? What are Mum and Dad thinking? How would you feel?*

Talk about how the family kept safe during the earthquake. *What would you do if there was an earthquake at your house?* Reread the text inside the back cover and practise carrying out the instructions.

Focus on the format of the instructions. *Why are they set out in this way?* Draw out the idea that safety instructions must be easy to read and that leaving spaces and using bullet points are ways of doing this.

Read pages 3 to 7 together, savouring the poetic language. Draw out the idea that the rhyme feels good to read out loud and adds impact and excitement. Talk about the words that almost rhyme. *What makes the words “trundling” and “rumbling” (or “rattling” and “chattering”) sound similar?*

Talk about the writer’s use of personification. *Find the word that makes the truck sound like a person on page 3. What is the wind doing on page 6?* Draw out the idea that personification adds life and interest.

Write the word “shake” on the whiteboard. *How would you write “shaking”?* Remind the children that they need to drop the final “e”. Ask the children to find the words in the text that end with “ing” and identify the root words. Sort them into words that end in “e” and those that don’t. You could extend this activity by talking about “ed” endings. Draw out the idea that if the root word ends in “e”, the children only need to add “d”. The children are likely to notice that some verbs, such as “shaking” and “blowing”, change to a completely different form in the past tense.

## Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2004*. Draw attention to the sound effects and the readers’ use of expression.

Read the story and article about earthquakes in *Junior Journal 8*.

Read the article about Alan Bagnall, “Stories in My Head”, *School Journal*, Part 4 Number 2, 1997, to the children.

Find other stories or poems by Alan Bagnall.

Write some earthquake safety rules and have an earthquake drill.

Create thought bubbles for each character on pages 8, 9, or 11 or for the dog on page 12 to show how they are feeling.

Use the text as a model for poetic writing about noises round the school that may sound like an earthquake.

Read *When Disaster Strikes* on the inside back cover of the *Yellow Pages*.