



### Overview

*Frogs* is a graphic text that tells the story of Tane, a boy struggling to survive in a world where drastic environmental changes mean that humans need to protect themselves from the heat of the sun. Tane is forced to scrounge for anything he can sell to charge his chip, and his search leads him into dangerous territory, controlled by a gang known as the Mutts.

An unexpected find won't help Tane charge his chip, but he is determined to protect this unlikely discovery from the Mutts – at the cost of his life if necessary. Although the graphic style is accessible and engaging, the story requires careful reading to uncover the deeper implications of Tane's find. It offers opportunities for students to make connections as they explore the theme of survival in a changed environment.

Texts related by theme

"Frogs" SJ L4 May 2013 | *The Bullet* SJSL L4 2011 | *The Bittern* SJSL L3 2012

### Text characteristics from the year 7 reading standard

metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation

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

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content



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

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

## Possible curriculum contexts

### SCIENCE (Ecology)

Level 4: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.

### ENGLISH (Reading)

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

### Possible reading purposes

- To explore how a story can be told in pictures as well as words
- To evaluate the effectiveness of using graphic features to tell a story
- To explore how a writer can use science ideas in a fictional text
- To consider how environmental changes might affect survival in the future
- To think critically about a character's decision that is possibly life-threatening.



The Writing Hub

## Text and language challenges

### VOCABULARY:

- Possibly unfamiliar words, including “sludge”, “circuit board”, “chip”, “cooling towers”, “abandoned”, “navigate”, “maze”, “glove box”, “sat-nav”, “protein shake”, “creatures”, “thumbnail”, “dart”, “extinct”, “survivors”, “squats”, “plank”, “bounced”, “credits”, “maxed”, “fragile”, “gasps”, “pass out”, “in spite of”, “covered”, “flexes”, “wail”
- The made-up terms, including “rad-monitor”, “sun suit”, “maxed”
- The metaphors: “car graveyard”, “holds his breath”, “blown away”
- The colloquialisms: “mess with”, “make a few bucks”, “sat-nav”, “Plus”, “be OK for a bit”, “coast is clear”, “bounced”, “beaten all the odds”
- The simile: “like silent, concrete giants”
- The descriptive verbs, such as “sneak”, “navigate”, “shoves”, “shuffles”, “dart”, “pool”, “flexes”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary, phrases, expressions, figurative language, and visual clues that may be challenging or unfamiliar to your students. At the same time as forming hypotheses before reading, give students these words and an example sentence (and a definition, if appropriate). Tell them this vocabulary is in the story. Have them look at the words in pairs and discuss what they think each item means – and what it will refer to in the context of this story. Provide bilingual dictionaries if appropriate (keeping in mind these won't be useful with the figurative or the colloquial language). Tell them that as you read them, you will discuss and confirm the meanings. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with sci-fi stories
- Familiarity with comic strips, cartoons, and graphic novels where stories are told in words and pictures
- Understanding of the concepts of survival, fear, and hope
- Knowledge of what humans need to survive
- Knowledge of the life cycle and environmental needs of frogs
- Understanding that people sometimes have to make decisions for the greater good, even at a high personal cost.

### Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, ask students to share their comic-reading experiences. See Text Features and Structure.

If students are not familiar with the setting, help them identify TV shows or movies that have a futuristic setting. Explain that in many futuristic stories, authors present a world in which catastrophic changes have taken place and survival has become a constant battle. Review the “necessities of life” for humans. Discuss what would happen if one or more of our environmental conditions changed, for example, if we had greatly reduced or increased hours of sunlight each day. Ask the students to hypothesise about extreme climate changes and the impact they would have on living things.

Use the cover as a prompt for discussion of the futuristic setting. “Is this scenario believable? Why or why not?” Have students discuss the illustration and make notes in pairs about elements that look familiar and elements that seem different. As the pairs share their ideas, feed in, explain, and record key vocabulary for the story.

Discuss other texts students know in which characters have to choose between right and wrong actions. Ask the students to think about what they can learn from stories about other people's lives and decisions.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Graphic novel style – meaning carried by illustrations and words
- Words in the form of captions, speech bubbles, and thought bubbles
- Narrative text with a setting, characters, a problem, a theme, and an open (unresolved) ending
- The narrative told in mostly present verb forms, with past verb forms when Tane is remembering events before the start of the story
- The need to infer, using the illustrations, the written text, and the students' own knowledge
- The use of colloquial and abbreviated language.

### Possible supporting strategies

List some of the features of favourite comics or other graphic texts.

If students have little or no experience of comic-style texts, provide some examples including short comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. Review the common narrative features, identifying and listing them.

Point out the different sizes, shapes, and orientation of the illustration frames, and talk about the ways we could read them.

For students who find this text challenging, have them think, pair, and share about the illustrations before reading. During the discussions, record their ideas and feed in key vocabulary.



Sounds and Words

## Instructional focus – Reading

**Science** (Ecology, level 4: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.)

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

### Text excerpts from *Frogs*

Tane checks the rad-monitor on his sun suit. It's in the yellow – but creeping closer towards orange.

The smell from the sludge in the ditch fills the air.

The car graveyard spreads out on the other side of the ditch. Cars from ages ago when regular people still drove them. The graveyard belongs to the Mutts.

You don't mess with the Mutts, everyone knows that.

#### DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- identify the text format and how to read it
- ask questions and search for answers
- make connections between the text and their own experiences
- form hypotheses about the setting and what might happen in the story.

### Students

(what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

*The students use their prior knowledge of graphic texts and narratives to identify the setting and the character. They make connections between this and other futuristic texts or movies to identify the mood and the setting conveyed by the illustrations.*

*The students make connections between the text and their experiences of life on Earth to hypothesise that in this future, life has changed greatly for the worse. They ask questions and search for answers to work out what a rad-monitor is and what it does. They also ask questions about the Mutts and hypothesise that they are dangerous.*

### Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**EXPLAIN** that asking questions as you read is a useful reading strategy.

- Asking questions while you read helps you to think more deeply about what's going on in a story. For example, I'm wondering why Tane is dressed like that. Why does he need a sun suit?

**EXPLAIN** that along with asking questions, good readers try to hypothesise about what will happen. They can then check their hypotheses as they read on.

- Often, a question will lead to a hypothesis. When I asked myself what a rad-monitor was, I hypothesised there might be something bad in the environment so he needed a monitor to stay safe. When I find the answer, I'll also be able to see if my hypothesis was correct.
- Looking at what Tane is wearing, what can you hypothesise about the environment?
- What other hypotheses do you have?

You may want to chart the students' questions and hypotheses and add answers as they find them during reading.

Questions	Hypotheses (include evidence)	Answers

**PROMPT** the students to make connections to help them understand the text.

- What do you already know about texts that look like this? How do you read them?
- What feeling do you get about the time and the setting?
- What do you think a "rad-monitor" could be? Could rad be short for something? Why might Tane need one?

**MODEL** the way your connections can help answer questions as you read.

- When I wondered what a rad-monitor was, it reminded me of Geiger counters that monitor radioactivity. I know scientists have been using them in Japan since the big earthquake. So I wondered if a rad-monitor could be checking levels of something. My next question was what would a rad-monitor be monitoring?

#### GIVE FEEDBACK

- You're asking some excellent questions already. Your hypotheses are helping you think about the answers as you read.
- Your connection between the car graveyard and the wrecker's yard has helped us understand that the setting is in a time when people don't use cars any more. I wonder why not.

#### MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

- If the students are not making connections that could help them identify the setting and make hypotheses, help them to list familiar versus unfamiliar things, then compare them, for example, the clothing, the wrecked cars, the sky. Continue doing this as the students read. (For students who are likely to struggle, begin this before reading.)

## Text excerpts from *Frogs*

**Students**  
(what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

**Teacher**  
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Frogs? They are frogs!

Aren't they on the extinct list?

Tane remembers Mr Nicholson talking about them in class. He'd said they'd been important, something about the web of life. Tane can't really remember.

### DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- identify thoughts and narrative text
- identify the flashback
- make connections with prior knowledge
- ask questions and form hypotheses.

*The students check their hypotheses about the story, confirming or changing them as they read on. They use their knowledge of graphic texts to understand that the bubble shows what Tane is thinking and the caption continues the narrative. They **infer** that the narrative also shows Tane's thoughts, including the question he asks himself.*

*The students **make connections** between the text and their knowledge of frogs to **infer** that the story is set in a time when many species are extinct. They **ask questions** about the reasons for this and **hypothesise** that the presence of the frogs is a hopeful sign of life.*

**PROMPT** the students to check their hypotheses.

- Did you hypothesise these were frogs?
- What do you already know about frogs?
- How do your connections help you hypothesise what might happen next?

**ASK QUESTIONS** to help the students navigate the text.

- Why are some words in bubbles? How did you know that?
- What is the meaning of the image of the man with a book?
- How does the caption connect to the illustrations?

**PROMPT** the students to identify the connection between the thought bubble, the image, and the caption.

- What was Tane remembering?
- Who is asking the question in the speech bubble?
- Who does "He'd" refer to in the caption?
- What do you think the "web of life" means?
- Think about the grim setting. Is the discovery of frogs a good sign?
- What might happen next?

Draw a simple timeline for students who are struggling to identify the flashback. Put a circle on the timeline indicating when Tane entered the car graveyard. Add another circle after that and label it "Tane remembers". Draw a line and arrow from "Tane remembers" to a point earlier than the start of the story and label this "Mr Nicholson talking". Prompt the students to identify that "He" refers to Mr Nicholson not Tane. If necessary, explain that the verb forms "He'd said" (had said) and "they'd been" (had been) refer to the past – before the beginning of the story.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- You're using what you know about comics to work out how to read this text. Understanding how a text structure works helps you to read any text.
- Your own experiences of learning things at school are helping you here. I can see you're making good connections with the text.

### MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

- The use of thought bubbles and narrative text to show what Tane is thinking may confuse some students. Read the caption aloud with them and remind them of other texts they've read where the "voice" is very close to the character it is describing.

## Text excerpts from *Frogs*

Tane thinks of the fragile frogs – their tiny legs, their gasps of breath – how they’ve beaten the odds to stay alive.

### DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- draw on their knowledge of sentence structures and punctuation
- integrate information across the text
- ask questions
- make hypotheses.

## Students (what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

*The students draw on their knowledge of punctuation to identify the use of dashes to insert descriptive details of the frogs. They integrate information about Tane, the Mutts, and the frogs to infer that Tane is trying to make a big decision about survival.*

*The students use their knowledge of the metaphor (“beaten the odds”) to infer that the frogs have survived despite the “odds”, which were changes to their habitat.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**PROMPT** the students to consider how Tane feels about the frogs.

- I wonder how Tane feels about the frogs. Tell your partner what you think.

**PROMPT** the students to consider the word “fragile”.

- What does “fragile” mean?
- What other information helps you understand what it means here?
- Why do you think there are two dashes in the sentence?

**EXPLAIN** that the dashes act like commas to mark off a clause or phrase. A dash usually carries more importance than a comma.

- In this example, the words between the dashes give readers extra information about the frogs. These details help us understand why they appear “fragile”.
- If the frogs have survived in this awful place, do you think they are fragile?
- Can something be fragile and tough at the same time?

**PROMPT** the students to make an inference.

- Tane is thinking about how fragile the frogs are. He is also thinking how amazing it is that they have survived. When you combine what you know with information in the text, you can “read between the lines” to understand a message the writer wants you to get. What is the message?

**ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students to integrate information across the text.

- What connections can you make between earlier information and the text in this frame?
- What is happening for Tane right now? What might happen next?
- What makes you think that?

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your questions keep coming, and I can see you’re really thinking about what’s happening.
- You’re putting together the reading strategies of asking questions, making connections, and making predictions: your thinking is really humming!

### MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

If the students are not able to integrate the ideas in the text, model your thinking for them. Talk about the connections you make between each frame and the rest of the text to understand that Tane thinks about the frogs, then he thinks about himself, then he shows he is determined not to let the Mutts harm the frogs. Explain that when you put these ideas together, you understand that Tane is trying to decide whether to save the frogs – or himself.

## Text excerpts from *Frogs*

The sun beats down. The heat inside Tane's suit climbs higher and higher. His head begins to ache. Not long now, and he'll pass out. But in spite of that, he smiles. There are frogs, real frogs, and he's covered for them.

Tane flexes his fingers and fights to keep his eyes open. The distant wail of a police siren reaches his ears.

### DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- visualise
- infer the meaning of Tane's smile
- integrate and synthesise ideas and information
- form hypotheses about the fate of the frogs and of Tane
- draw conclusions about the use of an open ending
- evaluate Tane's actions.

## Students (what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

*The students draw on their knowledge of language usage to understand the expressions, "beats down", "pass out", "in spite of", and "covered for them". They use the descriptive language to visualise how Tane feels physically, and they integrate information across the text to infer that Tane is proud he has saved the frogs.*

*The students make connections between the Mutt's reference to Mr Nicholson "covering" for Tane and Tane's "covering" for the frogs. They synthesise these ideas and information to conclude that Tane realises the significance of the "real frogs" and is prepared to sacrifice himself to save them.*

*The students form hypotheses about the future for the frogs and for Tane, drawing conclusions about Tane's survival by inferring that the police siren may signal a rescue for Tane.*

*The students evaluate the ideas, asking themselves if they would ever be prepared to make the choice Tane made.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students to make connections within the text.

- What have you learnt about the heat and the sun suit? What does this mean for Tane?
- Where else in the text has "covering" been mentioned?
- How do these connections help you understand why Tane is smiling?

**PROMPT** the students to begin integrating and synthesising.

- There aren't many words in this story, but they carry some big ideas. When I put pieces of information together, refer to the illustrations, and think of what I already know about environments and survival, I'm integrating the ideas. As I do this, I consider my opinions and my purpose for reading to draw conclusions about the meaning of the story.

Ask the students to co-construct a mind map of the different elements, (for example, plot, setting, and so on) and use this in a discussion of how the elements relate to the deeper themes. After the first reading, the whole group could work on one element, looking through the text for information and examples. Make notes on the board, then assign one element to each pair of students.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students to synthesise ideas and respond to the text.

- Why does Tane smile?
- Why are the frogs so important to him?
- What conclusions can you draw about the kind of person he is and the decision he made?
- The author doesn't tell us what happens to Tane and the frogs. What do you think might happen? Why do you think that?
- Why didn't the author tell us what happened?
- What do you think the author's purpose was? What is your response to this?

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- You synthesised all your ideas to reach your own conclusion. You could extend your thinking beyond the text and think about the author's purpose.

### MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

Support those students who are having trouble synthesising their ideas. First ensure that they are able to make connections: across the text, with their own experiences, and with other texts they have read. Using a graphic organiser, guide the students to integrate the ideas. Discuss their ideas, prompting them to draw conclusions.

For further information on synthesising, refer to *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8*, page 150, and *Teaching Reading Comprehension* by Alison Davis, pages 175–179.

### METACOGNITION

- How did you work out the meaning of "I'm almost maxed!" on page 10? What connections helped you?
- Were the strategies you used different from those you'd normally use? If so, what did you do that was different, and what was the same?
- What makes a graphic text hard or easy to read? Which kinds of texts do you prefer? Why?

## Suggestions for writing instruction

The students could respond to this story by:

- planning and writing a graphic text that is based on *Frogs*, for example, telling the next or previous chapter
- exploring the idea of environmental change in another futuristic story, for example, showing the impact of changes on a different living thing
- researching and comparing the habitats of a species that is a good survivor with a species that has become extinct.

Support the students to form their intentions for writing fiction on a science or a social topic:

- What big idea do you want your readers to understand?
- What kind of plot could you develop, based on this big idea?

Once they have found the idea they want to explore, students could use a “Somebody wanted but so” framework to plan the plot for their writing. You could demonstrate how to use the framework by showing how “Frogs” fits the pattern:

Somebody	Wanted	But	So
Tane	to protect the frogs	the Mutts wanted to know what he had found	Tane allowed himself to be tied up rather than tell the Mutts about the frogs.

The students can use this framework alone or with a partner to develop characters, a setting, and a problem around the big idea they want to convey.

Continue to support students as they develop a plan for their writing, showing them strategies they could use, such as mind maps, flowcharts, and sketching out each section of the plan. The students will probably need support to move from the plan to the first draft and to revise their writing. Scaffold the students to build on their writing strengths, tailoring your support as they take control of strategies for themselves.

You could provide or co-construct writing frames to support students. (See ESOL Online <http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Writing/Writing-frames-or-text-frames>) You can provide differentiated levels of support with writing frames, from simple prompts for the type of content needed to sentence starters for each paragraph or section. It is often useful to model using the frame to plan and co-write a text before asking the students to do it.

### Graphic texts

If the students want to create a graphic text, be aware that they may need extra support and peer feedback to plan the outline (using storyboards or a grid of frames). At the writing stage, they will need support to write short, concise captions and dialogue or thoughts. They may need to write some pieces of narrative and dialogue in full before deciding which words to keep. In a graphic text, the narrative has to be carried by images and brief pieces of dialogue. The text will be hard to understand if there is too little information. It can be difficult for writers to achieve the right balance on a first attempt. Provide plenty of models that will help students understand the need for this balance.