

The Queen of Spain

by Alan Bagnall

illustrated by Freya Blackwood

Overview

This recount of an imaginary trip on Grandpa's boat *The Queen of Spain* mixes fantasy and reality. It links well with *Dragon* (Orange), also by Alan Bagnall. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2007*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of visualising, inferring, and identifying the author's purpose.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the imaginary situation created by the characters
- the clever illustrations that interpret the children's imaginings
- the first-person narrator
- the vivid present-tense verbs – "beats", "calls", "climbs", "dreams", "shouts", "steers", "whips", "yells"
- the nautical words and phrases – "All aboard", "ashore", "going to sea", "Land ahoy!", "keeps a lookout", "out at sea", "put up our sail", "sail on", "set sail", "steers the boat", "work the engine"
- the poetic images:
 - "around the world and back again", "no land in sight", "The hot sun beats down", "The storm whips our hair", "the sunny land of Spain", "swishing and splashing all around"
 - the simile "the sea is wild like a dangerous monster"
 - the metaphor "The sea is a flood of dolphins"
- the exaggerated indicators of time – "At last, after many days", "Day after day"
- the ideas about Spain – "castles", "oranges on the trees", "sunny"
- the name of the boat in italics.

Introducing the text

Open out the book so that the children can see the front and back covers. Read the title. *This doesn't look like a book about a queen. I'm looking for clues in the illustration ...* Guide the children's attention to the name on the boat. Draw out the idea that names for boats are often fanciful and poetic. *Where is the boat? How can you tell it's not on water?* Draw out the idea that the children in the story must be pretending to go fishing. Discuss the children's experiences of imaginary games. Explain that the children in this book go on an imaginary journey on this boat. You could link this to the book *Dragon*, where the real story is about children going to the library but the imaginary story is about a dragon. *Let's look for the real story and the imaginary story while we read this book.*

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

During the reading

Pages 2 and 3 – *What do these pages tell us about the boat and the characters? Clarify that the children understand that this is where the game starts. What's the girl holding? Draw out the idea that she's pretending to be using a loudhailer to call out to a whole crew of sailors. Are they really going to go around the world?*

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or clarification.

Page 4 – Have the children use clues in the text and illustration to identify who's telling the story.

Page 5 – *What part of this is real?*

Page 6 – Draw out the idea that the characters are forming their ideas in response to weather changes. Prompt the children to draw on their own experiences of storms. *What happens to the sea in stormy weather? How are the children in this story imagining it?*

Page 7 – The children may notice a link here to the illustration of the yacht on page 4.

Page 8 – Briefly discuss any ideas the children have about Spain. *What's Miri looking at? I wonder where Kane's idea about oranges in the trees came from ...* The children may notice that a plate of oranges has appeared and that Kane has a piece of orange in his hand.

Page 9 – *What might you see if you looked over the side of a boat that was really in the water?* Clarify with the children that the running and barking dogs are the dolphins "swishing and splashing".

Page 10 – *What's given Kane the idea of a whale?*

Page 11 – If necessary, clarify the meaning of the words "ahoy" and "ashore". Draw out the idea that the game is coming to an end because the children are referring to real not imagined things.

Page 12 – *Does Grandpa really think the children went to Spain?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing their use of expression and how they manage the unfamiliar vocabulary.

Together, plot the parallel timelines in the story to show how the game actually takes place over one afternoon (suggested by the reference to "dinner cooking" on page 11) and includes afternoon tea, while the imaginary story is a long and eventful journey. Find the markers of time that indicate this.

Look through each page, taking note of which person has each new imaginary idea. Draw out the idea that all the characters are involved in the game and that when one person has an idea, the others join in.

Discuss the author's purpose and point of view. *Why do you think Alan Bagnall wrote this text? What message does he have for us about playing imaginary games?* Explore other writing by Alan Bagnall (the book *Dragon*, the Ready to Read poem cards "Footprints" and "Scarecrow", his poems "Endangered Bird" in *Junior Journal 29*, and "Patterns" in the big book *Splish Splash!*). Draw out the

idea that he often writes pieces that require the reader to consider things in a new way or to use their imaginations.

Focus on any of the writer's images and discuss what the children can see, hear, feel, and smell when they think about them. Discuss his use of poetic language. *Why has he described the sea as "wild like a dangerous monster"? Or the dogs as "a flood of dolphins"? Draw out the idea that these images make the game seem very exciting.*

Focus on some of the vivid present-tense verbs and discuss how verbs that end in "s" describe things that are happening right now. Choose a sentence that includes one of the verbs. *How would this sentence be different if they had played the game yesterday?* (There are other present-tense verbs in the text, for example, "can see", "can work", "barking", "are swishing and splashing", but the grammatical explanations of these are quite complex for children at this level.)

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2007*.

Read other stories that mix reality and imagination, for example, *Dragon* (Orange) or books by John Burningham, such as *Time to Get Out of the Bath, Shirley* or *Come Away from the Water, Shirley*, both published by Red Fox.

Have the children act out the trip to Spain or make up an imaginary game using the adventure playground.