

“Our Hero” – the Story of George

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Year 4



Overview

“George was a small dog with a lion’s share of courage”. This article tells the true story of how George bravely risked his life to save five children from an attack by two large, fierce dogs. The injuries he sustained could not be mended and he was put down by a vet, but his story lives on and spread far and wide.

The retelling of George’s story provides opportunities to discuss bravery and heroism, but it also carries a strong message (and clear guidelines) about keeping safe around dogs.

Texts related by theme

“More than a Mountaineer” SJ 3.3.03 | “Meeting George” SJ 4.1.08 | “Hero” School Journal Story Library 2006

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

a straightforward text structure, such as a structure that follows a recognisable and clear text form

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students’ prior knowledge

On their way to the dairy, the children were attacked from behind by two pit bull terriers. The dogs went straight for the smallest boy. The pit bull terriers were much bigger than George, but he barked a warning and then charged straight at them.

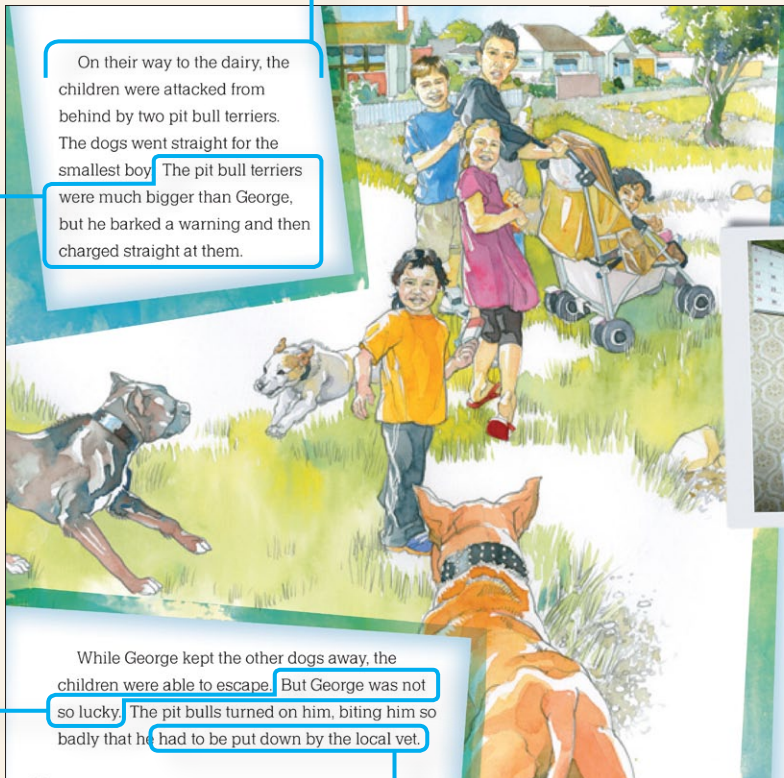
The story of George’s bravery was in the newspapers, on the radio, on the Internet, and on television all around the country. His owner’s phone rang non-stop. There was no doubt about it - George really was a hero.

While George kept the other dogs away, the children were able to escape. But George was not so lucky. The pit bulls turned on him, biting him so badly that he had to be put down by the local vet.

In Wellington, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) announced that George would be awarded the SPCA’s medal for bravery. This medal is usually awarded to people for acts of bravery towards animals. But this time, it was the other way around.

some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations



Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

HEALTH AND PE (Personal Health and Physical Development)

LEVEL 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out in what way George was a hero
- To understand more about bravery and heroism
- To learn about safety around dogs.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To write a story (true or fictional) about another animal's heroic actions
- To retell the story from the children's point of view
- To write a set of safety guidelines.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

 The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “Jack Russell terrier”, “attacked”, “pit bull terriers”, “straight”, “charged”, “escape”, “vet”, “bravery”, “Internet”, “announced”, “awarded”, “acts of bravery”, “Austin, Texas”, “Marine Corps”, “received”, “Purple Heart medals”, “Vietnam War”, “in memory of”, “Britain”, “injured”, “afford”, “statue”, “Director”, “Governor-General”, “permission”
- The colloquial expressions and phrasal verbs – “Luckily for them”, “not so lucky”, “turned on”, “put down”, “rang non-stop”, “no doubt about it”
- The words and phrases that signal time – “One Sunday”, “Two years later”
- The names and acronyms of organisations – “SPCA”, “PDSA”
- The metaphor “a lion's share”.

Possible supporting strategies

Divide the students into two sets of groups (of two or three). Have one set of groups create a concept map for heroes and the other set create a concept map for dogs (both on chart-sized paper). Provide time, resources, and support for the students to discuss the concepts and find the vocabulary they need. Ensure that students who share a first language other than English can discuss the concepts in this language. Prompt the students in the hero groups to think about and list words for the qualities, actions, and recognition of heroes. Prompt the other groups to think about dogs as pets, what dogs do, what people think about dogs, and what people do with dogs. Have the groups share their concept maps. For students who need a lot of support, you could provide cut-up key words. Have them research these words and create a concept map showing the relationships between them. As the groups present their concept maps, discuss their ideas and vocabulary, feeding in key words if necessary and getting the students to add them to the concept maps. Display the concept maps and refer to them during and after reading and when working with these topics in the future.

During reading, list the colloquial expressions and offer support with any that are new to the students. Explain unfamiliar names and acronyms as they occur, prompting students to make connections where possible. For example, many students will be familiar with the work of the SPCA, and they can use this knowledge to understand the work of the PDSA.

Students may benefit from advice on which vocabulary they should prioritise for learning. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of dogs, dog breeds, and dog behaviours
- Knowledge of the need to stay safe around dogs
- Understanding of systems and criteria used to recognise bravery or special achievements.

Possible supporting strategies

Review what students know about safety around dogs.

Ask students to share stories of their own pets or of encounters with dogs.

Provide materials such as books, magazine articles, and photographs of honour rolls that will support the students to understand the role of awards and recognition for bravery. Discuss these with the students, eliciting the kinds of actions that are considered brave or heroic in a variety of contexts.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A recount of true events that made a dog famous
- The use of the simple past tense and a chronological order of events
- A style of writing that uses a familiar tone and colloquial language
- Additional information in the form of guidelines for keeping safe around dogs
- A website readers can go to for further information
- The combination of photos and drawings to illustrate the article.

Possible supporting strategies

Locate Manaia on a map. Tell students it is a small rural town near the south coast of Taranaki.

Preview the text with the students, asking them to suggest reasons for the combination of drawings and photos.

Point out the medal, the statue, and the photo of the children with the former Governor-General. Invite the students to make predictions about the article.

During reading, make a timeline to show the order and timeframe of the events in the article. Note that the original event happened 2–3 years ago.

For students who need a lot of support, you could provide a timeline with spaces to fill in.

 Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Health and PE (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.)

English (Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “Our Hero” – the Story of George

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

One Sunday, the five children who lived next door went for a walk to the dairy. Luckily for them, George went along, too.

The students recognise the phrase “One Sunday” as a signal that something happened on this particular Sunday. They make connections within the text to infer that “next door” implies the children lived next door to the dog. Students notice the phrase “Luckily for them” and ask questions to determine why this was lucky. They make predictions about what would happen on the walk.

MODEL the way readers use clues to make predictions.

- When I read “One Sunday”, I recognised an opening that usually means it’s going to be a significant day. This is how many stories – fiction and factual – start. The writer gives us a clue that this day is going to be different.
- When I read the words “Luckily for them”, I recognised another clue. Using “luckily” makes me ask the question “Why was it lucky?” Now I’m expecting something to happen that involves the dog.
- What questions did you have when you read this paragraph?

While George kept the other dogs away, the children were able to escape. But George was not so lucky. The pit bulls turned on him, biting him so badly that he had to be put down by the local vet.

The students use the construction of the first sentence (subordinate clause, main clause), with its subordinating conjunction “While”, to understand that the actions happened at the same time. They use the construction of the second sentence to infer that the pit bulls had inflicted mortal wounds. They make connections with their knowledge of phrasal verbs to understand the meaning of “put down”.

PROMPT the students to use their knowledge of sentence structure to work out meaning.

- How did the children escape? How does the author tell us that?
- What does “not so lucky” mean? Compare it with the use of “luckily” on page 27. What is the author telling you?
- What does “put down” mean? What does the author expect you to know here?

For students with limited knowledge of complex sentence structures, you could rewrite this paragraph as several short sentences, each containing one main idea. Demonstrate the way the author has combined these ideas by using conjunctions (*While, But, so ... that*).

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students identify the author’s audience.

- What clues help you work out the kind of reader the author was writing for?
- What did she expect her audience to know already?

The medal was hung on a statue of George, which stands in the centre of the town. “George was a small dog with a lion’s share of courage,” said the Director of the PDSA.

The students review the information about the medals and awards George received. They make connections between this information and their own ideas of bravery to evaluate the idea of the dog’s heroism in relation to their purpose for reading.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to think more deeply about the idea of a hero.

- What do you think the author wanted her readers to understand about the qualities of a hero?
- Think about some of your heroes. What have they done to become a hero?
- Do you agree that a dog can be a hero? Why do you think that?

And what about the children whom George rescued? “He’s our hero,” they said.

Students use what they know about animals and figures of speech to infer the meaning of the metaphor.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The questions you asked yourself about the opening of the story helped you understand what came next. That’s a very useful reading strategy when you are working out what’s happening at the beginning of a text.
- Going back and rereading to find where the medals came from was a good way to help you understand how famous George had become.

METACOGNITION

- Tell me about the way you worked out what was happening in that paragraph. What clues helped you?
- Your purpose for reading the article again was to understand how the author shaped the text for her audience. Show me some of the examples that helped you to understand this.

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Health and PE (Personal Health and Physical Development, level 2 – Safety management: Identify risk and use safe practices in a range of contexts.)

English (Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “Our Hero” – the Story of George

In Wellington, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) announced that George would be awarded the SPCA’s medal for bravery.

ACRONYMS

Long or technical names for organisations or groups are often referred to by the initials of their main words. The first time the name is used, it is written in full with the acronym in brackets after it.

The statue of George with his medals. With George are his owner, the five children, and the Governor-General of New Zealand, Sir Anand Satyanand.

CAPTIONS

The purpose of a caption on a photo is to give the reader information about the photo. This can include the names of people, places, or things in the photo.

How to Keep Safe around Dogs

...

When permission has been given, stroke only the dog’s chin, chest, or shoulders. Always be gentle.

INSTRUCTIONS

*Instructions or guidelines tell the reader what to do. They may use conventions such as imperative verbs (**stroke, be**), the simple present tense, and adverbs or adverbial clauses or phrases that tell how or when to perform an action.*

METACOGNITION

- Tell me about the barriers you encountered when you were writing. How did you overcome them?
- Show me a place where your partner’s feedback helped you to make changes.
- Describe the experiences that helped you come up with this idea. How close is your writing to your own story?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to notice the way the long and short versions of this organisation’s name are written.

- Find another long name and acronym in the article.
- Use these examples to work out the way to use acronyms in writing.
- Check that whenever you need to shorten a long title or name in your writing, you use this method.

Provide further support by working through more examples with students, in the article and in other sources such as newspaper articles.

DIRECT the students to review any images they have used and decide whether a caption is needed.

- Will your readers know how the photo relates to the main text?
- Are there people or places in the image that you need to name?
- Use models from this and other articles when you write and edit a caption: remember that captions often use short, clear statements. Sometimes a name is all that is needed. Sometimes they are in note form, for example, they may not have “a”, “the”, or “this is”.

MODEL identifying the conventions for writing instructions.

- The instructions or guidelines on page 32 are a good model – I see there is a title that states the purpose clearly.
- Each instruction is in a separate box (the author could have used bullets instead of boxes).
- The author uses the simple present tense (because it’s talking about any time) and imperative verbs.
- The instructions tell readers what they should and should not do. The author uses words such as “Never”, “When”, “Don’t”, and “If” to show whether to do something and how and when to do it.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to write instructions.

- What are the main directions or guidelines you want to give your audience?
- Do the instructions have to be in order? If so, have you used sequence words to help your audience to follow the order?
- Have you followed a model, or do you have a good reason for writing your instructions in a different way? Tell me about it.

For students who need more support, you could first provide a writing frame with a level of support that meets the needs of the students. The highest level of support could be instructions with gaps for the students to fill in from a bank of words and phrases. The bank could include imperative verbs and/or sequencing words or phrases. For less support, you could provide a writing frame with instructions about the necessary components (title and so on).

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You two worked well together as writing partners. I heard you giving each other clear, constructive feedback then making your own decisions about the changes you wanted to make.
- The photos are great, but I wasn’t sure who was who until you put the captions on. They’ll be a big help to your readers.