



Overview

This is the story of a button that was sewn onto the jacket of a First World War soldier. After the war, the soldier returns to New Zealand and wears the jacket to annual Anzac Day parades. Many years later, Ella, the soldier's great-granddaughter, discovers the jacket. She sews the button onto a ribbon and proudly wears it to another Anzac Day parade. The story ends with a factual note about the meaning of Anzac Day.

Although the story is straightforward, readers need to infer meaning about many details. The text provides an excellent opportunity to study the use of personification. It also develops the theme of remembrance.

Be aware of possible sensitivities around this subject, especially for those students who may have personal experience of war.

Texts related by theme

“Poem for Anzac Day” SJ L2 Feb 2012 | “Anzac Biscuits” SJ 2.3.07 |
“The Long, Long Night” SJ 2.1.04

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

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

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

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

The Anzac Button
by Judy Raymond

A long time ago, the button had been important. It was sewn carefully onto a **khaki** jacket and polished until it shone. Its shiny surface reflected **the soldier's pride** as he marched on parade.

The button dodged bullets on the battlefield. Buried face-down in a muddy trench, it felt the soldier's heartbeat and sensed his fear.

Then the war was over, and the soldier returned home. He pushed the khaki jacket deep into a wardrobe. There, it rubbed shoulders with coats and shirts that seldom saw the light of day.

One April morning each year, the soldier took out his jacket. He brushed off the dust and mildew, polished the buttons, and marched silently with other soldiers in the pre-dawn darkness.

Once again, the button heard the wail of the bugle and the slow, sad beat of the drum. Then it was back to the wardrobe for another year of waiting.

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES

LEVEL 2 – Social studies: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To identify how specific items become treasured in families
- To follow the journey of a button through generations of a family
- To make connections between present-day Anzac Day parades and the past events they commemorate
- To reflect on themes of remembrance and continuity in our lives.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To recount a story about a family member or other important person
- To tell the story behind an item that has been in a family for a long time.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and concepts, including “khaki”, “pride”, “dodged”, “battlefield”, “trench”, “mildew”, “pre-dawn”, “wail”, “bugle”, “hanger”, “chest”, “regiment”, “rummaged”, “snipped”, “gleamed”, “pride of place”
- Words used with unfamiliar meanings, including “reflected”, “shell”, “glanced”, “polish”.

Possible supporting strategies

Use the illustrations on pages 2 and 3 to support discussion about soldiers and their uniforms. Introduce the word “khaki” and talk about the items of a soldier’s uniform, such as boots and brass buttons.

Prepare a vocabulary list of key words in this text. For each word, write a simple definition and an example sentence. Have the students use this list in conjunction with pre-reading tasks that focus on building prior knowledge. Cut up the words, definitions, and example sentences, and ask students who have some knowledge of the vocabulary to match them.

Offer the students guidance on which words are most important for them to learn (and which are low frequency and not such a priority). *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of Anzac Day, including the relevance of the date, what it commemorates, the dawn parade, and the use of a bugle and drum
- Experience of handling brass buttons and of using polish to clean metal items
- Understanding of the passing of time, shown by successive generations in a family and by the decay of the jacket
- Knowledge of war, specifically trench warfare during the First World War
- Knowledge of the ways communities commemorate people and events.

Possible supporting strategies

Check for prior knowledge of the reasons we commemorate Anzac Day. Provide extra information, where needed, to help students understand the significance of references in the story. Refer to the note on page 7 of the Journal. Before reading the text, it may be useful to show photos or video clips of Anzac Day parades.

Ensure that students who have a first language other than English have opportunities to explore the topic in this language. Have the students work in pairs or small groups to create word maps using words or phrases that describe what they see, for example, people, clothes, and actions. Encourage the students to make links to and share what they know about other commemorations, including those from other countries or cultures.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The use of personification on pages 2 and 3, where the button and the jacket are referred to as if they are characters in the story
- The straightforward narrative structure, in which a button creates the link through the different time periods of the story
- Multiple time frames and the associated range of verb forms, for example, “had been”, “was sewn”, “shone”, “was changing”, “look”, “hadn’t been”, “wouldn’t be”, “would have liked”
- Time markers, including “A long time ago”, “Then”, “One April morning”, “Once again”, “The years passed slowly”, “April came and went”, “One day”
- Implied meanings, for example, the rituals of Anzac Day parades, the death of the old soldier, the red ribbon to display the buttons
- The change in tone and the use of dialogue when the story reaches the present day
- The way the last line refers to the start of the story to emphasise the themes of remembrance and continuity
- The additional note on page 7, which provides brief information about Anzac Day.

Possible supporting strategies

Discuss the use of personification in this story. For example, on page 2, the jacket “rubbed shoulders with coats and shirts”.

As the students start reading, guide them to use the illustrations to identify the setting. Help them to identify the button and jacket, as well as the unnamed soldier who wore them, as “characters” in the story.

Encourage students who need support with identifying and understanding the time frames within the text to use a graphic organiser to record the times and main events during reading. Use this information to create a timeline that tracks the key events in the story.

Discuss with the students how each time period is identified in the text.

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Level 2 – Social studies: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “The Anzac Button”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

The button dodged bullets on the battlefield. Buried face-down in a muddy trench, it felt the soldier’s heartbeat and sensed his fear.

*The students use information from the text, the illustrations, and their own prior knowledge to **infer** the setting and what is happening.*

*They **locate** the use of personification and **evaluate** its effectiveness in conveying the key ideas in the story.*

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students make connections within and beyond the text and to use these to make inferences.

- What connections can you make with things you have read about or seen on TV or in movies, about uniforms and wars? How can the illustrations help you?
- What can you infer about the setting? What is happening here?

ASK QUESTIONS to clarify the students’ understanding.

- What does “dodge” mean?
- How can a button dodge bullets?

EXPLAIN that the author is using a language feature, personification, to illustrate what is happening to the soldier.

PROMPT discussion about the use of this language feature.

- I wonder what the author is trying to do here?
- Think, pair, and share about why the author has used personification in the story. Why do you think she did that? Do you think it is successful?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to infer.

- What is the significance of the April morning? How does the illustration help you work this out?
- What is the time setting now? How can you tell that?
- What connections can you make between your knowledge of Anzac Day and the events in the story? What does “pre-dawn” mean? What other words do you know that start with “pre-”?
- What is the mood at the parade? Why do you think there is that mood? How has the author shown this?

PROMPT the students to recall any prior knowledge about Anzac Day.

- Consider why the author decided Ella should find a bright red ribbon. What is the significance of the colour?
- If you had medals or buttons from a relative who had been to war, how would you feel about wearing them on Anzac Day? Discuss with a partner.

MODEL working out the meaning of “pride of place”.

- I used my understanding of the concept of pride to work out that this button means a great deal to Ella – it saved her great-grandfather’s life. She has already realised that if he had died in the war, she wouldn’t be here! So I think “pride of place” means the best or most important place.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students’ understanding of the remembrance theme.

- Why is it important for the button to be on parade again?
- How has the author used the button to represent key ideas in this story?
- What is the author implying about the people who have gone before us and about the importance of remembering them?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I could see you were wondering about how the button would figure in the story, but you kept reading and worked it out.
- I noticed you were asking interesting questions about the war the soldier fought in, and making connections with wars you had heard about. That’s an important strategy to help you make inferences.

One April morning each year, the soldier took out his jacket. He brushed off the dust and mildew, polished the buttons, and marched silently with other soldiers in the pre-dawn darkness.

*Students draw on their prior knowledge and **make connections** with the text to **infer** that the April morning is Anzac Day and the soldier is going to a dawn parade.*

*They **visualise** the actions of the soldier and the state of the jacket as the soldier prepares for the parade.*

The students again notice the use of personification as the button takes on the senses and feelings of the soldier.

*They use the words “silently”, “darkness”, “wail”, and “slow, sad beat” to **visualise** the sombre mood of the occasion.*

Once again, the button heard the wail of the bugle and the slow, sad beat of the drum.

Then Ella looked in her mother’s sewing drawer and found a length of bright red ribbon. Carefully, she sewed the buttons onto the ribbon, with the scratched and dented neck button in pride of place in the centre.

*The students **make connections** between ideas within, across, and beyond the text to **infer** the significance of the red ribbon, likening it to the red Anzac Day poppies.*

Students use their vocabulary knowledge to work out the meaning of “pride of place”.

*The students **locate** and **integrate** information and ideas in the last sentence and at the start of the story to understand the theme of remembrance and the idea that even a small, seemingly insignificant item can have an important role.*

At last, the button would be on parade again.

METACOGNITION

- What knowledge of your own helped you make connections with this text?
- Tell me about a place in the text where using what you already knew helped you to infer meaning.
- What strategies did you use when you weren’t sure what a word or phrase meant? How effective were these strategies?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Level 2 – Social studies: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from “The Anzac Button”	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
<p>A long time ago, the button had been important. It was sewn carefully onto a khaki jacket and polished until it shone. Its shiny surface reflected the soldier’s pride as he marched on parade.</p>	<p>SETTING THE SCENE <i>Ideas expressed at the start of a story often indicate an idea or theme that will continue through the story. Sometimes these ideas foreshadow events to come.</i></p> <p>PERSONIFICATION <i>A writer can communicate ideas by using figurative language such as personification. The use of a non-human object can help the reader understand how characters feel or what they experience.</i></p>	<p>ASK QUESTIONS to help the students decide how they will introduce the important ideas in their own writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the main ideas and/or feelings you want to communicate to your audience?• Do you want to give them hints or clues early on, or will you reveal your message later?• Will the ideas you introduce at the start carry right through the story? Why or why not?• Could the use of figurative language help the reader to understand your ideas? <p>EXPLAIN that writers don’t need to tell readers everything. Sometimes they show rather than tell something important.</p> <p>MODEL making an inference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The writer shows me that the jacket stays in the wardrobe. From this, I infer that the soldier has died. I know he was very old, so I think the author has implied his death without “telling” us.• Have a look at your writing and identify if there is a place where you could give clues to help your readers infer the meaning.
<p>The years passed slowly. The world was changing. The soldier was now a very old man. April came and went, and the soldier did not come for his jacket.</p> <p>One day, the door flew open, and light flooded into the wardrobe.</p>	<p>IMPLICATION <i>The writer needs to give clues to help the readers infer information. The writer expects the reader to make connections with their own knowledge and “read between the lines” to understand the implied meaning.</i></p> <p>MOOD <i>Word choice and sentence structure help to convey a mood in a text. A change in mood can be made even clearer for the reader when the writer makes strong contrasts, for example, between darkness and light.</i></p>	<p>EXPLAIN how the writer introduced dialogue to reflect the change in the setting to the present day.</p> <p>PROMPT the students, working in pairs, to experiment with establishing mood and mood changes in their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify an event or situation that has a particular feeling about it.• How can you reflect mood in your writing? How can you describe or imply a sombre mood? A happy mood?• How does changing the sentence structure (for example, using short, abrupt sentences or longer, flowing sentences) help you? <p>EXPLAIN one purpose for which dialogue can be used.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writers can use dialogue as a way of getting a message across to their readers without going into a lot of detail. Dialogue can show exactly what a character is thinking.• Review your writing and see if you can find any places where some dialogue would be a better way of helping your readers to understand your message.
<p>Ella stroked the button. “If this button hadn’t been there, I wouldn’t be here either,” she said. “And nor would I,” said her mother. “Can I keep the buttons?” “Of course. Your great-grandad would have liked that.”</p>	<p>DIALOGUE <i>Writers can use the words of their characters to convey ideas about the theme of a story. When a character reflects on an idea, the reader is prompted to consider what it means.</i></p>	<p>GIVE FEEDBACK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I like the way you’ve dropped a hint here. It makes me want to read on and find out why a dead rabbit will be important to the story.• Using words like “grey” and “threatening” helps me feel the atmosphere on the beach. I can imagine Jacob is getting pretty worried now!

METACOGNITION

- Why did you choose to use a metaphor here? How will it help readers understand your ideas?
- When you use implication, what do you assume your readers will already know? How can you help them to “read between the lines”?