

# Fantail, Fantail

by Margaret Mahy  
drawings by Bruce Phillips

## Overview

This very “New Zealand” text is written as a conversation between a fantail and an unidentified person, and it informs the reader about the food that Fantail prefers. The companion text *Old Tuatara* ends with the same climax – the demise of an unwitting fly.

## Suggested purposes

This book supports many comprehension strategies, but these notes focus on summarising, inferring, and analysing and synthesising (the poetic aspects of the text). It provides opportunities for practising directionality, return sweep, and one-to-one word matching. The strong storyline, repetitive structure, and rhythm of the text encourage the development of smooth, fluent reading. Subtle text changes make this an ideal text for monitoring children’s attention to print at the end of the emergent level.

## Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the repeated high-frequency words “I”, “like”
- the strong storyline, creating opportunities for prediction and discussion
- the repetitive structure of the sentences
- the repetition of words and phrases for effect
- the subtle text shift from “some” to “this”, “like” to “want”, and “this” to “that”
- the repeated initial letter “p” in “peas”, “pie”
- the initial consonant blend “fl” in “fly”
- the digraphs “ch” in “cheese”; “th” in “that” and “this”
- the upper-case letters in “Fantail”, “Goodbye”, “No”, “Yes”
- the high proportion of one-syllable words that support one-to-one word matching
- the opportunities for practising the return sweep on pages 2 to 10
- the rhyming words “cheese”, “peas”, “fly”, “pie”, “Goodbye”
- the compound words “Fantail” and “Goodbye”
- the opposites “No” and “Yes”
- the use of speech marks
- the use of an exclamation mark for emphasis on page 11
- the contraction “don’t”
- the person in the picture, identified only by a hand
- the humorous ending.

## Introducing the text

*Tell me what you know about birds. What do birds eat? Do all birds eat the same things?* Record the children's ideas so that you can return to the discussion later.

Discuss the cover. *Do you know the name of this bird? Here are some clues – the title tells us this bird's name, and the picture shows us; have a look at its tail.* If the children don't know the word "fantail", tell them. You could also tell them its Māori name, "pīwakawaka". *Why do you think it's called a fantail?* Show the children how to fan their fingers to imitate the shape and movement of the fantail's tail. Read the title together, pointing to each word. Very new readers may be confused by the two syllables in "Fantail" or the repetition of the word. Observe their finger-pointing and help them to practise in preparation for reading the text.

Read the names of the author and the illustrator. Tell the children that Margaret Mahy is a famous New Zealand children's writer and remind them of any other Mahy stories you may have enjoyed together.

## The first reading

Title page – Listen to (and watch) the children read the title again.

Remind the children of the strategies you want them to focus on during the reading. Be prepared to share or model the reading on pages 2 and 3 to establish the rhythm and pattern of the text and to help the children to realise that the book is a conversation between the unidentified person and the fantail.

Page 2 – *I'm thinking about what's happening here. There's something yellow on a plate, and I can see a hand. The speech marks on this page tell me that someone is talking – so I think that a person is talking to the fantail. What do you think the person might be saying to the fantail?* If necessary, confirm the sound of the digraph "ch" for "cheese".

Page 3 – *I wonder if the fantail likes cheese.* Note how the fantail's body language supports the text. *What is the fantail saying?* Encourage the children to predict what will happen next.

Listen to the children read the text themselves, providing support and feedback as necessary.

Pages 4 and 5 – As the children read, observe their attempts at one-to-one word matching and their return sweep. Note whether they've picked up on the pattern of the text. *What would you offer the fantail to eat?*

Pages 6 and 7 – Encourage the children to cross-check with the initial consonant "p" if "pie" is unclear from the illustration.

Page 8 – Observe whether the children notice the subtle text shift from "some" to "this". *How did you know that that word couldn't be "some"?* You may need to model the pronunciation of the digraph "th".

Page 9 – Note the fantail eyeing the fly intently! *What will the fantail say this time?* If some children read "this" for "that", draw their attention to the "at" rime and support them to cross-check. Encourage the children to predict what Fantail will do next.

Pages 10 and 11 – *I'll have to think about that some more. I thought that Fantail was going to eat that fly, but instead he's talking about this other food. I have a pretty good idea what he might say!* Observe how the children manage the change in the text pattern from “like” to “want”. If necessary, encourage them to cross-check using the initial letter. *Could that word be “like”? How do you know?* Draw the children’s attention to the exclamation mark on page 11 and support them to read this page expressively.

Page 12 – *I wonder who is talking ...* Note that it could be either the unidentified person or the fantail. *Why do they say “Goodbye, fly”? Tell me why you think that.* Point out to the children that they have used clues in the text and what they already knew about birds to **infer** that the fantail ate the fly.

Read the text again together, savouring the rhyme and rhythm.

## Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their attempts at one-to-one word matching, their use of the return sweep, and their self-monitoring of the text changes. Those children who are managing confidently and have a good understanding of the story are probably ready to move on to the Red level. Take a running record to confirm this.

Summarise the information in the text. Draw a “Like/Didn’t Like” or “Yes/No” chart on the whiteboard. Support the children to draw some conclusions and generate new ideas. *If fantails like flies, what else might they like to eat?*

Analyse the poetic features of the text. *What makes this book so much fun to read?* Ask the children to listen for the rhyming words, find the repeated phrases, and practise reading the text rhythmically.

Demonstrate on the whiteboard how “do not” becomes “don’t”. Explain that the writer has used the contraction to make the talking sound more natural and to keep the rhythm of the text. You could try reading “don’t” as “do not” to demonstrate how the extra syllable disrupts the rhythm.

Have the children locate some high-frequency words. *Find the word “like” on page 3. Can you find it on the next page? Tell me the letters in the word. Can you write it on the whiteboard?*

Focus on any initial consonants or upper- case letters that the children may have been unsure of. *Show me a word that starts with “p” on page 5. What sound does that letter make? Find another word that starts with “p” on the next page. Show me the word “No” on page 2. What letter does it start with?*

Write “Fan”, “tail”, “Good”, and “bye” on cards and show the children how they can join them together to make compound words. Discuss other compound words they may be familiar with, for example, “birthday”, “hedgehog”, “myself”, “rainbow”, and “sunhat”.

## Suggestions for further tasks

Encourage the children to read the text to a friend who is unfamiliar with the story and to explain what is actually happening on page 12.

Innovate on the text by substituting the names of children for “Fantail”, for example, “Morgan, Morgan, have this cake.”

Share a book or an Internet site about fantails. Write simple facts about fantails on a wall chart.

The support offered by the rhythm, repetition, and rhyme in this text means that you could use it for Readers’ Theatre, where the children read the book in pairs, with one child taking each role. This draws attention to the purpose of the speech marks and supports fluent reading.

Read or reread *Old Tuatara* and search the illustrations for the characters that are the same in the two books.