

## Overview

The container ship *Rena* went aground near Mount Maunganui in October 2011. This article describes the impact of the event through the eyes of a young girl. She uses information from the news as well as her family's observations to describe the damage done to the beaches and wildlife. The text is a straightforward recount of what the girl and her family saw, heard, or read about and how they responded to the disaster.

The article conveys the theme of human impact on the environment by using a recent, real example that most students will know about.

There are also thematic links with "Kūtai" about the importance of caring for our coastal environments

Texts related by theme

"Tiakina a Tangaroa: Protect Our Seas" L2 Oct 2011 | "Flood" SJ 2.2.04

## Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

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

There were lots of other people on the beach. Some of them looked angry. Some of them were crying. We were disappointed that we couldn't play in the sand or go swimming, and Dad was annoyed that he couldn't go surfing.

We kept away from the beach for the next few days. Instead, we walked around Mauao (the mountain at Mount Maunganui). From the walkway, we could see splashes of shiny black oil on the rocks.

"That's very dangerous for the seals and seabirds," said Nana.

We watched the news about the *Rena* on TV every night. It showed pictures of dead birds, their feathers glued up in a sticky black mess. That made all of us very sad.



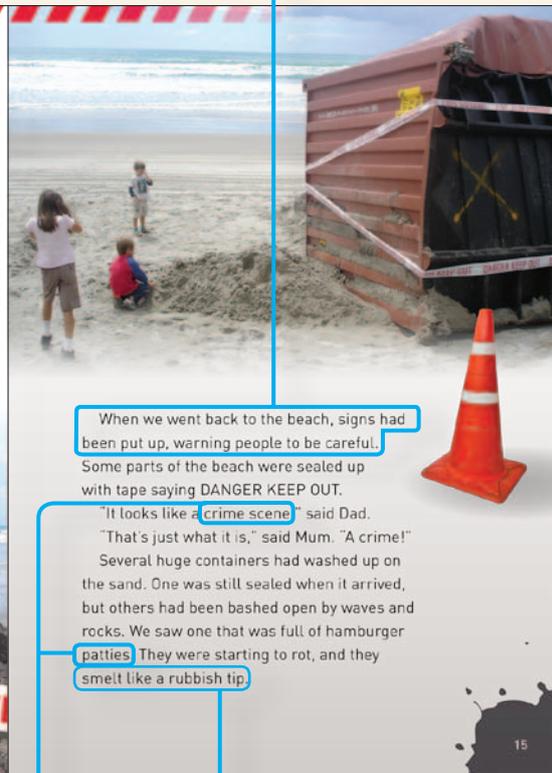
some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

When we went back to the beach, signs had been put up, warning people to be careful. Some parts of the beach were sealed up with tape saying DANGER KEEP OUT.

"It looks like a crime scene," said Dad.

"That's just what it is," said Mum. "A crime!"

Several huge containers had washed up on the sand. One was still sealed when it arrived, but others had been bashed open by waves and rocks. We saw one that was full of hamburger patties. They were starting to rot, and they smelt like a rubbish tip.



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

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

## Possible curriculum contexts

### SCIENCE (Planet Earth and Beyond)

LEVEL 2 – Interacting systems: Describe how natural features are changed and resources affected by natural events and human actions.

### 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 identify how a writer reports on a current event
- To learn about the impact of human actions on a natural environment
- To understand what happened in a recent environmental disaster in New Zealand and how local people reacted to the disaster.

### Possible writing purposes

- To report on another topical event
- To write about this or a similar event for a different purpose and audience.

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

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

## Text and language challenges

### VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “container ship”, “toxic”, “dangerous goods”, “blobs”, “tar”, “specks”, “walkway”, “crime scene”, “sealed”, “patties”, “protective gear”, “sifting”, “debris”
- Emotive language, including “horrible smell”, “disaster”, “disappointed”, “annoyed”, “sticky black mess”, “very sad”, “crime scene”, “smelt like a rubbish tip”
- The adjectives in “worst-ever maritime environmental disaster”.

### Possible supporting strategies

With the students, brainstorm some of the words they can recall being used in relation to the *Rena* disaster. Prompt them to recall images of birds and beaches covered in oil and to come up with words used to describe them.

Identify key words that will be unfamiliar to the students and introduce them before reading. For example, you could prepare group or pair tasks based on images and/or audiovisual material and use these tasks to elicit and introduce key vocabulary.

Help students prioritise vocabulary for learning, for example, “blobs” and “specks” of oil. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Experiences of visits to the beach
- Familiarity with news about this or other shipwrecks
- Understanding of the impact of oil spills on land, sea, and wildlife
- Knowledge of community clean-up efforts.

### Possible supporting strategies

Review what the students remember about the *Rena* disaster and support them to make connections between the coastal areas affected and coastal areas they are familiar with. Before and after reading, students who have first-hand knowledge of the shipwreck could share their feelings and observations.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A recount from a young girl’s point of view, with a factual report at the end (in the text box)
- Multiple time frames with associated verb forms (“live”, “we’d been looking forward to”, “arrived”, “heard”, “had happened”)
- Words and phrases that signal the sequence of events (“All term”, “just before we arrived”, “As soon as we got to”)
- The expressions of personal feelings and opinions
- The comparisons “like the smell at a petrol station”, “like the lumps of tar you see”, “like a crime scene”, “smelt like a rubbish tip”
- Photographs that support the text
- Concluding text box, which gives a brief summary of the facts
- Some passive constructions: “signs had been put up”, “others had been bashed open by waves and rocks”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Support the students to identify the structure of the text, including use of the first person, the setting, and the time frames.

Co-construct, or support the students to create, a timeline consisting of the main events and, if appropriate, the associated verb phrases and signal words. Note that identifying the sequence of events when they aren’t in chronological order can be challenging. For example, in “we heard on the car radio that something terrible had happened”, the “something terrible” happened before they heard it. This is expressed with the verb form “had happened”.

During and after reading, check the students’ understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships in the article, drawing a cause-and-effect flow chart if necessary.

If students need support to understand the relationships, spend time helping them to draw on or build their prior knowledge.

# Instructional focus – Reading

**Science** (Planet Earth and Beyond, level 2 – Interacting systems: Describe how natural features are changed and resources affected by natural events and human actions.)

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

## Text excerpts from “What a Disaster!”

## Students (what they might do)

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Our nana and grandad live near the beach at Mount Maunganui. All term, we'd been looking forward to staying with them for the holidays. But just before we arrived, we heard on the car radio that something terrible had happened. A container ship called the *Rena* had crashed into Astrolabe Reef on its way into the port of Tauranga.

*The students make connections between the text and their knowledge of school terms and holidays to make inferences about the family relationships. They use their knowledge of geography to identify the places named, and they make connections between the text and their knowledge of recent events to predict that the article will recount the disaster.*

*The students further infer how the disaster might impact on the family's holiday plans.*

Read the first two paragraphs with the students. Then ask one or two students to retell the information.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to ensure the students understand that the first part of a recount is typically the orientation and to activate the students' prior knowledge. For example:

- Who is telling this story?
- Do you think it's going to be a true story? Why do you think that?
- Where will the events take place? Can you find these places on a map?
- What do you know about this event?
- How do you know about it?
- Based on what you've read and what you already know, what do you predict this article will be about?

Support any students who may find the time frames and sequence of events in these first two paragraphs challenging. You could begin a shared (and/or pair or individual) timeline, recording the main actions and noting the verb forms and time and sequencing language (“All term”, “just before we arrived”).

**EXPLAIN** that we can learn new things from what we experience ourselves and from what other people experience and then tell us about. Give an example, such as splashing through puddles in the rain or reading about someone else doing this.

**MODEL** the way you determine which are an author's personal experiences and which are not.

- The text describes what they saw on the rocks. That's the narrator's own experience.
- Next, we learn they watched the news on TV. This is how they saw the dead birds. They didn't actually see the birds on the beach themselves, so this is someone else's experience.

As the students read the article, direct them to pause at each new piece of information and decide if it is the narrator's personal experience. Students can do this in pairs or with your support. Encourage them to use both kinds of information in their own writing.

Discuss how words can have literal and figurative meanings.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to prompt the discussion:

- Does Dad mean it really is a crime scene? Why does he say it looks like one?
- When Mum says it is a crime, what does she mean?
- Why do you think she says that?

**GIVE FEEDBACK**

- I heard how you used your memory of this event, and what you know about oil damage to birds, to make good inferences about the impact of the wreck on the environment.
- Your chart entries show me you've understood the difference between your own experiences and those of others. How will you use this in your own writing?

From the walkway, we could see splashes of shiny black oil on the rocks.

“That's very dangerous for the seals and seabirds,” said Nana.

We watched the news about the *Rena* on TV every night. It showed pictures of dead birds, their feathers glued up in a sticky black mess.

*The students use the descriptions to visualise the scene, and they compare Nana's words with their own knowledge of conditions that could harm sea life. They infer the cause-and-effect relationship between the spilled oil and the danger to wildlife.*

*Students identify the different sources of information: they recognise that the words “we could see” signal a description of what the narrator saw (personal experience). The words “We watched the news” signal the information gained from TV (other people's experience).*

Some parts of the beach were sealed up with tape saying DANGER KEEP OUT.

“It looks like a crime scene,” said Dad.

“That's just what it is,” said Mum. “A crime!”

*Students make connections between the text and their own direct or indirect experiences of dangerous sites to infer the way tape was used and the use of words as commands.*

*They use knowledge of forms of speech to infer that Dad is using a simile (figurative meaning) and that Mum uses his description literally. They infer that she means the wreck of the *Rena* was a criminal act.*

## METACOGNITION

- Show me a place where your own connections or knowledge helped you to understand why something happened.
- Talk with your partner about how you worked out some of the unfamiliar vocabulary. What strategies did you use? Did you try anything that wasn't helpful or didn't work?

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**Science** (Planet Earth and Beyond, level 2 – Interacting systems: Describe how natural features are changed and resources affected by natural events and human actions.)

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

## Text excerpts from “What a Disaster!”

As soon as we got to Nana and Grandad’s place, we noticed a horrible smell – like the smell at a petrol station. It made us feel a bit sick.

We all went down to look at the beach. There were lots of sticky black blobs of oil in the sand. They looked like the lumps of tar you see on the road when it gets hot in summer.

They were starting to rot, and they smelt like a rubbish tip.

## THE RENA OIL SPILL

The *Rena* hit Astrolabe Reef on 5 October 2011. The ship later broke in half. Oil and debris from the wreck were washed up on the coast as far away as Gisborne and the Coromandel.

According to the Minister for the Environment, this was New Zealand’s worst-ever maritime environmental disaster.

## Examples of text characteristics

### COMPARISONS

*Comparing something with things the readers already know helps them to understand. Comparisons work especially well for descriptions of things we can see, smell, hear, touch, taste, or feel.*

### COMPOUND SENTENCES

*A compound sentence joins two clauses that could stand alone, using a conjunction between them.*

### SUMMARY

*Summarising the most important ideas in a paragraph tells readers what happened in a few short sentences.*

## Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Ask the students to tell their partners about their next piece of writing, explaining what it will be about and how they will plan it.

**SUPPORT** any students who need your guidance to plan their writing, by encouraging them to use a graphic organiser or strategies such as key headings to organise their ideas.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to help the students consider their audience.

- What will your readers need to help them understand the event?
- How can your explanations or descriptions make this clear?

**EXPLAIN** that making a comparison with something your audience knows can help. Unpack the comparisons in this extract, showing how comparing the smell with a petrol station gives you a good idea of what it was like at the beach. To support students who find this challenging, choose one or two (simplified) sentence structures to create a writing frame. For example:

noun phrase	verb (looked, smelt, felt, sounded)	like	noun phrase
They	looked	like	lumps of tar

Put the sentence from the text into the writing frame, if necessary, in a simplified form. Think aloud about how you could support your description with a comparison and then create a sentence using the writing frame. Co-construct a few more sentences with your students and then support them to use the sentence frame to help them with their writing.

**EXPLAIN** the use of conjunctions in compound sentences.

- Conjunctions like “and” are used to join main clauses in a compound sentence. You’ve already learnt that running a lot of ideas together with “ands” can make your writing confusing.
- But a compound sentence can work well: in this example, it shows the relationship between the two ideas.
- Read your compound sentences aloud to a partner. Do they sound right? Would it be better to split the long sentence into two shorter ones?

**PROMPT** the students to make use of a summary.

- In a personal recount, you’re able to give your own opinions of an event. A summary can help your readers to understand the key facts.
- Review what you know about writing a summary. If you want to use a summary, remember to choose the most important ideas only. This might mean leaving out some interesting details, but remember that the purpose of a summary is to give only the important facts.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- This comparison is great – it will help your readers to understand just what the band sounded like.
- You’ve added details that help me see several different opinions about the event you’ve described.
- It was useful to read the summary of the important facts. It will help your readers to remember what happened.

## METACOGNITION

- What guided your thinking as you decided on the audience? What would you do differently for a younger or older audience? Why?
- How did you shape your writing to engage your audience? Do you think they will understand how important it is to protect the environment? Why or why not?

 **Writing standard: by the end of year 4**  
 **The Literacy Learning Progressions**