



Overview

Author Greg O'Brien tells the story of Jeff Thomson, the sculptor of a chicken that O'Brien and his brother bought as a birthday present for their mother. The chicken was made of corrugated iron. O'Brien describes Thomson's inspirations, his training, the work that goes on in his noisy workshop, and the many and varied objects and animals that he has made from iron over the past thirty years. The text is well illustrated with photographs of these sculptures. O'Brien adds his own responses to them, providing insights that may motivate readers to consider unusual materials or subjects for their own artworks.

There is an audio version of this text on the *School Journal Story Library Years 5–6 2011 CD*.

Texts related by theme

From Corned Beef to Captain Cook: The Art of Michel Tuffery SJ 2.4.08
Wired! SJ 3.3.08 | Bringing Stories to Life SJ 2.3.02

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

Between 1977 and 1981, Jeff studied painting and printmaking at Auckland University. He believes that the work he is doing now is partly because of the skills and ideas he picked up there.

In the middle of his university studies, he took a year off. Jeff spent most of that time walking around the South Island. He started making letterboxes and other things for people he met along the way. That was when he "discovered" corrugated iron. He's never stopped using it since.

Jeff likes old, beaten-up, weathered sheets of iron – they contain history. The iron has been places and has stories to tell. Yet it's not the easiest material to work with. Jeff says a day in his studio is always very noisy and exhausting. The machinery is loud, and he has to wear a face mask. The work takes a lot of patience and is very physical. Also, there are plenty of sharp edges, so he has to be careful.

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

THE ARTS (Developing Ideas)

Level 3: Visual arts – Develop and revisit visual ideas, in response to a variety of motivations, observation, and imagination, supported by the study of artists' works.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3: Ideas – Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out about what influences and motivates a New Zealand artist
- To identify the different ways that Jeff Thomson uses iron for artistic works
- To identify the challenges that Jeff Thomson has faced during his career.

Page 4 has suggestions for writing instruction.

For more support and suggestions for accelerating students' writing, see *Teaching Writing across the Curriculum in Years 4–6* on the Writing Hub.



Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar and/or topic-specific words and phrases, including “corrugated iron”, “a cross between”, “snags”, “herd”, “ostriches”, “towers”, “sculptures”, “gigantic”, “forklift”, “saxophone”, “inspired”, “watercolour”, “boot polish”, “unlikely”, “tin-snips”, “rivet gun”, “pair of pliers”, “printmaking”, “beaten-up”, “weathered”, “sheets”, “exhausting”, “patience”, “physical”, “exhibits”, “stencils”, “images”, “cast in lead”, “ornaments”, “overhead”, “rooftops”, “cluttered”, “warehouse”, “panelbeater’s workshop”, “gallery”, “exhibitions”, “Rolls Royce”
- Footnotes that explain “lichen”, “dyslexia”
- The use of figurative language, including the personification of the iron and of the sculptures (“he can make it dance and sing”, “His sculptures say a lot”).

Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary, phrases, expressions, and figurative language that may be challenging for students. Use strategies to support students to understand these words and terms, such as:

- pre-teaching specific words using relevant contexts and connections
- providing opportunities for students to meet words through oral language before reading
- reviewing how to use footnotes, including strategies such as rereading the sentence after reading the footnote then checking for meaning
- discussing words, concepts, and terms to clarify meaning and dispel any misunderstandings
- brainstorming topics and/or concepts to elicit topic-related words from students and co-constructing word lists and word webs
- helping students make notes in their own (or the group’s) vocabulary learning notebook about key words and phrases, for example, definitions, translations (if appropriate), word families, synonyms, and/or collocations (words that go together)
- identifying, discussing, and clarifying the use of figurative language.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of corrugated iron and its common uses
- Knowledge of sculpture and different styles
- Knowledge of common New Zealand items, birds, animals, and vehicles
- Experiences with Jeff’s work (especially the Holden and gumboot).

Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, ask students to brainstorm and record the different materials that artists use in their work. Steer the discussion towards sculpture and unusual materials. Elicit concepts and vocabulary that are important in reading this text.

Provide resources such as art magazines, books, DVDs, or online clips that show use of a variety of materials, including iron. Include material on art and artists from a range of backgrounds, particularly those that might interest the students. Focus discussion on New Zealand sculpture and the subjects that artists choose. Explore why artists choose certain materials.

Discuss texts such as biographies, supporting students to identify the purposes and features of such texts. Provide resources such as texts that describe a person’s life and work, including biographies, retrospectives, art catalogues, and artists’ websites.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The personal anecdote that introduces the artist and his work
- The inclusion of biographical details
- The use of simple, compound, and complex sentences
- The use of connectives to signal relationships within and between sentences (“Most of the time, *however*, he likes what happens to his sculptures”, “*Also*, there are plenty of sharp edges ...”)
- The use of negative constructions in understatements (“It’s not ... with”) using “not” plus the superlative.

Possible supporting strategies

Review with students the features that they might expect to find in a text about an artist (for example, some biographical details, descriptions of the artist’s work and influences, responses to or evaluation of the work, and photographs of the work). During reading, remind students to notice these features as they come across them.

Read and discuss the first two pages together to set the scene and generate discussion about the text style and subjects the students will be reading about. This might be a good point to do some of the “pre-reading” activities suggested in the first two sections. You could do this work over one or more lessons and then move into reading the rest of the text. Point out the footnotes and explain how they can be used.

Provide explicit instruction as necessary to support recognition and understanding of sentence structures. If students need support to understand the use of conjunctions, talk about words that connect ideas within and between sentences. Go through a few examples as a group, explaining the meanings and the structures. Ask students to look for more examples in a selected section of text. Start keeping charts of connecting words, organising them according to the types of relationships they can signal. (Note that connectives can signal different meanings in different contexts. Also, meanings can be signalled in many different ways – It’s important to approach connecting words in this way and not just create tidy decontextualised lists.)



Instructional focus – Reading

The Arts (Developing Ideas, level 3, visual arts – Develop and revisit visual ideas, in response to a variety of motivations, observation, and imagination, supported by the study of artists' works.)

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “Any Old Iron”

My mother grew up on a farm in Taranaki but has lived most of her life in Auckland. One year, my brother and I wanted to give her something special for her birthday. We bought her a life-sized chicken. The artist Jeff Thomson had made it out of corrugated iron. The chicken looks like a cross between a rusty old tin shed and a bird. It reminded my mother of her Taranaki childhood. And it made her laugh.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- identify the speaker
- draw on their knowledge of articles to identify that the birthday story is a way of introducing the artist but is not the main topic of the article
- understand the vocabulary.

Students

(what to prompt, support, and look for as the students are reading)

Students ask questions and cross-check with the title page to identify that the speaker is the author, Greg O'Brien. They identify the birthday present story as a way of introducing the artist but is irrelevant to their purpose for reading.

The students make connections within the excerpt and with their knowledge of people and presents to infer why the author chose this present. If the phrase “a cross between” is new to students, they use their knowledge of vocabulary, sheds, and chickens to infer the meaning and to visualise what it looks like.

Students make connections within the passage to understand why the present “made her laugh”.

Students use the descriptive language and the photos to understand the kind of iron Jeff prefers. They ask questions and make connections with their knowledge of old things to interpret the metaphor “they contain history”.

The students infer the meaning of the next sentence, making further connections with the ways iron can be used and reused.

Students use their knowledge of conjunctions and sentence structure to work out the meaning of “yet” and “not the easiest”.

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

The students need to have prior knowledge about and make the connections between the farm, the chicken, corrugated iron, and the rusty old tin shed. Look at pictures or the real thing beforehand. You could begin to explore the cultural resonance of corrugated iron – for example, by looking at some of its uses over different time periods.

ASK QUESTIONS and **PROMPT** students to use specific strategies to work out vocabulary, implications, and overall meaning.

- Who's speaking here? I wonder why he is telling us about his mother?
- Is the present a real, live chicken? How do you know that?
- What does “a cross between” mean? Explain what the author means. Do you agree with his description?
- Why did his mother laugh? I wonder what she was thinking?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed you used the name of the author from the title page to confirm that the author was not the artist. That helped you make sense of that first paragraph and set you up for the rest of the article.
- Making connections to your own family's birthday celebrations allowed you to understand why his mother laughed. Thinking about your own experiences is a good way of making strong connections with the author's meaning.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

Have the students talk in pairs to clarify who is telling this part of the story, why they gave their mother a chicken, and who the artist is and what he made. If students are confused about who is talking, direct them to the “people” references and the pronouns “I” and “My” to work it out.

PROMPT the students to focus on the descriptive language and photos.

- What do you think the old iron was used for before Jeff used it? What happens to iron when it's been exposed to the weather for a long time?

MODEL questions to help students understand the use of metaphor.

- Can an object “contain” history? How?
- Can iron actually tell stories? How?
- What is the author trying to tell us when he describes the iron this way?

EXPLAIN the use of the negative construction.

- Authors sometimes use “not” (which is negative) along with a positive word (“easiest”) to make a negative statement. The statement actually means the opposite of the positive word or idea. Why do you think they do this?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed that you slowed down your reading to make sure that you understood the negative construction of the last sentence. Remember that you can also reread a part of the text if it does not seem to make sense.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

If students show confusion in understanding the meaning beneath the personification, break the paragraph into three sentences and explore the meaning of each. Model asking questions for students to clarify the meaning.

If students find the last sentence difficult to understand, work through the sentence word by word and find a way to say the same thing in a simpler way.

- What word could you use instead of “yet”? What is another way of saying “not the easiest”?

Jeff likes old, beaten-up, weathered sheets of iron – they contain history. The iron has been places and has stories to tell. Yet it's not the easiest material to work with.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- understand the vocabulary
- infer the meaning of the personification – The iron ... has stories to tell
- understand the meaning of the negative construction.

Text excerpts from “Any Old Iron”

Students
(what to prompt, support, and look
for as the students are reading)

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Corrugated iron is Jeff Thomson's life – he can make it dance and sing and tell us things. His sculptures say a lot about New Zealand and the world beyond.

Students evaluate and integrate information within the text and with their prior knowledge to infer the meaning of the figurative language. They consider the final sentence in the light of the whole article and consider the author's response to Jeff Thomson's work.

DEMANDS OF THE TEXT

Students need to:

- make connections with their own experiences
- evaluate and integrate information within the text
- understand the metaphor and personification used
- think critically about the text.

METACOGNITION

- Show me some places where you made connections with things you already knew. How did that help you to understand the text?
- What questions were going through your head as you were reading? Is this a strategy that you use a lot? Why or why not?
- What did you do to work out unfamiliar words? Tell me about one thing that helped you.

PROMPT the students to work out the meaning of the figurative language.

- The author says corrugated iron “is” Jeff Thomson's life. Does he mean that literally? What do you think he means by it?
- Does the metal really dance and sing? Why does the author say this?
- In what sense can his sculptures “say a lot” about anything? What do they “say” to you? Refer to the work you did on art materials and corrugated iron before reading.

ASK QUESTIONS to support students as they evaluate and integrate ideas in the text.

- The author has told us what he thinks of Jeff Thomson's work. What evidence has he given for his opinion? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The connections you made with your own artworks really helped you to understand this text. Bringing your own experiences to mind as you read is a powerful way to make sense of texts.
- I noticed that you connected back to the author's previous use of metaphor in the text to help you to understand this sentence. By evaluating his use of language, you were able to understand his ideas.

MONITORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHING

If the students need more support to understand the figurative language, make your own thinking explicit. Show them how you worked out what the author is saying. Support students to work through another example and discuss how they did it.

If students are confused by the last sentence, refer them to the work you did on art materials and corrugated iron before reading. Also refer them back to the earlier metaphor discussion to help them understand the last sentence.

Suggestions for writing instruction

Students could use all or parts of the text as a model for writing about another artist.

- Think of an artist you could write about. For example, you could explore an artist from your cultural background and explore their use of materials.
- What biographical details would you need to include?
- Where could you find the information about the artist and their work?
- What kind of structure and language will you use? Why?
- What photos or illustrations would help your writing?

Support students as they develop a plan for their writing, showing them tools they could use such as a biography graphic organiser.

Provide scaffolding to help them build on their writing strengths, giving stronger support where needed and reducing it as they take control.

Encourage students to use writing as a way to clarify their ideas for art projects.

- What ideas for your own artwork occurred to you as you read this book?
- Take one of your ideas, use a mind map to extend it, and then write up a plan you could follow.
- What would you need to do to carry out your plan?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks