



Overview

The boy in this humorous narrative is ready for school but fears he's going to be late (again) because Mum is *not* ready for work. The boy, who is also the narrator, drops intriguing hints about what Mum does for a living. Readers have many opportunities to identify clues and speculate about Mum and her work and to enjoy the irony in the contrast between her motto ("Always great, never late") and her actions. This narrative also includes snappy dialogue, jokes, and plays on words.

"Always Great, Never Late" requires students to "confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about" text (from *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

There is a pdf of the text and an audio version as an MP3 file at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Humorous texts with an underlying message: "Missing" (JJ 42); "Ring! Ring!"; "No More Warts", "Kele's Car" (JJ 49)

Mystery texts: "Something Strange" (JJ46); "Marcus and the Wind" (JJ47).

Text characteristics

Key text characteristics relating to the reading standard for after three years at school are shown in the boxes that have a solid outline.

A mix of explicit and implicit content within the text and illustrations that encourages the students to make connections between ideas in the text and their own experiences to form and test hypotheses and make inferences, for example, about Mum's job and the appropriateness of her motto

A variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences and deliberate repetition of some sentence patterns

Frequent use of dialogue, some of which is not explicitly attributed, and more than one character speaking on a page

"Is your bag ready?" my mum asks me.
 "Have you packed your lunch?"
 "Yes, Mum," I say.
 "And your exercise books?"
 "Yes, Mum."
 "And your library book?"
 "Yes, Mum."
 "And your tablet?"
 "Yes, Mum."
 "Is it fully charged?"
 "Yes, Mum."
 Then it's my turn. "Is your bag ready?" I say to her. "Have you packed your handkerchiefs?"
 "Yes," she says.
 "And your ribbons?"
 "Yes," she says.
 "And your eggs?"
 "Yes," she says.
 "Have you packed your lunch?" I finish.
 "Whoops!" she says. "I almost forgot. (The eggs are not her lunch.) There are lots more things my mum takes to work, but these are some of the things she needs the most."
 "Are you fully charged?" I ask.
 "One hundred per cent," she replies.



Ideas and information organised into paragraphs

Some unfamiliar words and phrases, the meanings of which are supported by the context and/or illustrations, including jokes and plays on words

The humorous conversational style of the narration, with the boy talking directly to the reader and including such features as:

- repetition
- the pattern of statement and contradiction ("That makes my mum sound like a courier, but she's not a courier")
- the section of quick-fire dialogue (shown here) where the boy and Mum mirror each other's questions and answers
- extra information included in brackets

English (Reading)

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

Level 2 – Language features: Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*The New Zealand Curriculum Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8*, Knowledge of the Learner, page 6).

Possible reading purposes

(What can the students expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?)

- To find out what kind of work Mum does.
- To consider if Mum's motto suits her.

Possible learning goals

(What opportunities does this text provide for the students to learn more about how to "read, respond to, and think critically" about texts?)

- The students **make connections** between clues in the text and illustrations and their own experiences to form and test hypotheses about what Mum's job is.
- They **make inferences** about what Mum is like and form an opinion about whether the motto suits her.
- They **monitor their reading**, for example, noticing when something is unclear and using a range of strategies, such as reading on, rereading, or looking for clues close by, to clarify the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.

**Text and language features****Possible supporting strategies**

(These suggestions may be used before, during, or after reading in response to the students' needs.)

Vocabulary

- Possibly unfamiliar words: "motto", "uniform", "waistcoat", "handkerchiefs", "courier", "bumper", "ajar", "Marvellous", "Magician", "extraordinaire"
- Commonly used words that have multiple meanings ("funny", "tablet", "bonnet", "magic"); or that are used in a less familiar way ("makes her sound like", "fully charged", "may turn into")

Readers are able to use strategies for working out unfamiliar words only when they know most of the vocabulary in a text. For students who need support with vocabulary, introduce and practise selected items before reading. See [ESOL Online: Vocabulary](#) for suggestions. For example, to support the students with the descriptive vocabulary, have them reread the third paragraph on page 2, which describes Mum's clothing. Ask the students to sketch and explain the items of clothing. Encourage them to use the descriptive language and model how to do so to help them become used to the structure of the noun phrases and the meaning of the adjectives.

Prompt the students to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- when **decoding**:
 - breaking words into smaller chunks ("hand-ker-chiefs", "mar-vel-lous", "waist-coat"); looking for root words and familiar parts of words, including prefixes and suffixes ("dis-appears", "main-ly", "spark-ly", "exact-ly")
 - using their knowledge that letters can have more than one sound ("magic", "magician")
- when working out **word meanings**:
 - using the context of the sentence and surrounding sentences
 - using the illustrations, the unfolding meaning of the story, and their prior knowledge
 - reading on to look for further information.

Have a dictionary available for the students to use to confirm or clarify word meanings, but remind the students that they can make a best attempt at a word's meaning and come back to it later. Have bilingual dictionaries available, where appropriate.

Text features

The conversational style of the narration

The section of quick-fire dialogue on page 4

Key information given in phrases containing general nouns, pronouns, and demonstratives that refer back to information in the previous sentence (*My Mum wears funny clothes ... you'd think they were funny ... I'm used to them. It's ...*)

If necessary, help the students notice the conversational style by reading aloud some sections.

Support the students, particularly English language learners, to hear the pattern of the dialogue by reading page 4 aloud to clarify who is speaking and the expression they are using.

Provide support for students, including English language learners, who find it challenging to follow the backwards references to pronouns. You could select a paragraph and have students circle the pronouns. Give students a table like the example below (for paragraph 3, page 2). Model filling in the first row then have them work in pairs to complete the table for the paragraph.

Phrase	Pronouns or determiners	What it means
Well, you'd think they were funny.	you'd they	Me, the reader clothes
I'm used to them.	I them	The narrator clothes

**Metacognition****HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS TO BE METACOGNITIVE**

Here are some ways you can build your students' awareness of the processes and strategies they are using as they make meaning and think critically. Examples of metacognitive behaviours are threaded through the notes and indicated by **M**.

M I noticed you went back and read the end of the last paragraph. How did that help you with the message?

M That was an odd way for that word to be used. How did Mum's questions to the boy about the "tablet" help you work out what "Are you fully charged?" means here?

Introducing the text

- Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that the introduction to the text is effective in activating their prior knowledge and providing appropriate support for a successful first reading.
- Ask the students to read the title and think-pair-share what the motto might mean. Support them to make connections to their knowledge of other familiar mottoes or slogans, such as school, church, or club mottoes or an advertising slogan or jingle. Encourage students who know mottoes in other languages to share these too.
- Have the students read page 2 for further information. If appropriate, use strategies like the one suggested under Text features under 'Text features' to support them to support them to recognise the references back to previous sentences. They will find out that the motto is Mum's and that this is a text with secrets! Confirm that the students will need to find clues to work out what is Mum's job.

- You could begin a graphic organiser like the one below to support students with identifying and synthesising the clues about Mum's job.

Page	Clue	What I think it means

- Share the reading purpose and learning goal(s).
- You could provide the students with small sticky notes to mark places in the text that they are not sure about or that have clues they want to remember and come back to.

Reading and discussing the text

Suggestions for ways that you can support the students to achieve the learning goals are listed in the right-hand column of the table below. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions according to your students' needs. These suggestions may apply to the first or a subsequent reading of the text.

Give the students the opportunity to read the whole text by themselves before you gather them together as a group for discussion. Only intervene on the first reading if it's clear that a student needs help. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word-solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

Student behaviours

Examples of what to look for and support as the students work towards achieving their learning goal(s). Much of the processing that students do at this level is "inside their heads" and may not be obvious until after they have read the text and you are discussing it as a group.

The first reading

- The students find clues about Mum's work in the text and illustrations. They question the odd assortment of items she needs and make some tentative predictions about her work, and look for further clues as they read.
- They notice examples of the mismatch between the words "never late" in the motto and Mum's actions.
- They use information in the text (for example, the phrase "far too long" on page 3) and make connections to their own experiences to visualise how the boy feels about his mum making him late for school. On page 8, they may infer from the boy saying "Please don't be late" that Mum is often late picking him up as well as dropping him off.

- The students notice when they are unclear about the meaning and use a range of strategies to fix the problem. For example, they use the punctuation, the names within the dialogue, and their own experiences of packing school bags to track who is speaking in the extended section of question-answer dialogue on page 4. They may reread or read bits aloud to support their understanding. They may reread the final question and answer to try and work out the unusual use of "fully charged" and "One hundred per cent". On page 7, they may use the previous sentence and the illustration of the boxes to work out the meaning of the word "courier".

- As they read, the students note aspects they are not sure about and might need to come back to, for example, the messages on the van listed on page 8.

- The students use the information on pages 8 and 9 to test and confirm their hypotheses about Mum's job. They may review their earlier ideas (including those in their graphic organiser if they used one) about the boy's feelings in light of the new information here, which clearly conveys his pride in his mum and her work.

Teacher behaviours

Examples of how you can support your students as they work towards achieving their learning goal(s). Often this will involve individual students rather than the whole group.

- The humorous details in this text mean that discussion is likely to develop spontaneously as the students share their responses to the reading. The notes below highlight some key ideas. If you are using a graphic organiser to record the clues, you could select times to have students think-pair-share and enjoy each other's responses and ideas.
- Model your thinking by asking questions about the odd things Mum is doing: *I wonder why Mum spends so long in front of the mirror?*
- Prompt the students to make connections to their own experiences of getting ready for school.

- Encourage the students to look at the first question in each paragraph to establish who's starting the conversation, to help keep track of the speakers. They could read the dialogue aloud to better appreciate the repartee.
- Remind the students of the strategies they can use when they are not sure of the meaning (see 'Possible supporting strategies' above).

- Remind the students that they can use sticky notes to mark aspects to come back to.

- Remind the students of the reading purpose and review how and when they worked out what Mum's job is. If necessary, clarify what a magician does and demonstrate the link between the words "magician" and "magic".
- You may need to model the pronunciation of the word "extraordinaire". Explain that it's a French word and prompt the students to notice its link to the English word "extraordinary".

Discussing the text after the first reading

- The students use the information about Mum’s actions to build a picture of her personality. For example, she plays tricks (page 3), almost forgets her lunch (page 4), apologises for running late (page 6).
- Prompt the students to think critically about whether Mum’s motto seems right for her. *We know that Mum works as a magician. What else have you learned about Mum from reading this story?* Ask the students to go back through the text to check and summarise the evidence they have gathered.
- Support them to notice less obvious information, for example: *What can you learn about Mum as they are driving to school?*
- The students discuss the inferences they have made about Mum. They share and justify their opinions about the suitability of her motto.
- Encourage the students to share and justify their ideas about the suitability of the motto, using evidence from the text and making connections to their own experiences.

Supporting metacognition

With support, the students reflect on their learning. They revisit the reading purpose and learning goal(s).

📖 The students explain how making connections to their own experiences helped them to visualise how the boy feels about his mum.

📖 The students identify some challenges in the text and how they worked them out (or tried to work them out).

Remind the students of the reading purpose and learning goal(s).

📖 Prompt the students to make connections to their own experiences: *How did picturing Mum leaving the house (on pages 6–7) help you decide if the motto was right for her? Did your thinking change as you read about their ride to school?*

📖 Ask questions: *What did you use to help make sense of who was speaking when the speakers’ names were missing?*

After reading

- The students can reread the story as they listen to the audio version. Audio versions can provide English language learners with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Provide further opportunities for the students to reread this story as well as other mystery texts or humorous tales about family dramas (see ‘Related texts’ above).
- Have the students identify the mottoes and slogans in the text and start a classroom chart. Add to it as the students notice new mottoes and slogans and discuss what each one means. Encourage the students to write their own slogans, using patterns from the text: Always _____, never _____ . If your students can provide them, include mottoes in other languages. You may want to provide resources to support students who know other languages to find mottoes in those languages.
- If the students completed a sketch of Mum’s clothing (see the Vocabulary section above), they could now draw their own character and add phrases that describe the character’s clothing.
- Have the students identify the synonyms for “marvellous” within the text and prompt them to suggest further examples. Display the synonyms as a chart or word web and encourage the students to incorporate the words into their writing.
- You could explore the phrase “magician extraordinaire”. Explain that in English, we would say “extraordinary magician”. Have the students practise the jingle at the end of the text, trying out each version of the phrase. Draw out the idea that the use of “extraordinaire” adds panache and flair!
- Ask the students to brainstorm words (including words that may not be in the text) that describe the boy and Mum. Use these words as starting points for writing sentences about the characters.
- Collect and share jokes and riddles.
- Build awareness of word meanings by having the students work in pairs to review words from the text that have common prefixes and suffixes.

Find these words in the story.	What is the root word?	What words in the text help with the meaning?	What do we think it means?
magician	magic	My tricks, your treats The clues about Mum	Someone who does magic
exactly			
already			
mainly			
disappears			