



Overview

The adventures of Torty, the tortoise started in Greece during the First World War when she was rescued by Stewart, a New Zealand stretcher-bearer. Stewart took Torty back home to New Zealand at the end of the war and looked after her until he died. Torty is still alive and is cared for by Stewart's family. This true story is told through a variety of text forms including two pages of graphic layout.

This text is full of engaging but complex information, including information about the First World War and tortoises that is likely to be unfamiliar to the students. You may want to revisit this text several times for different purposes.

"Torty, the Lucky Tortoise" requires the 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

Texts about unusual pets: "The Pet Day Problem" (JJ 40); "Ebony Beanie" (JJ 42)

Texts about rescued animals or animal adventures: "Wild Orphans" (JJ 41); "The Stowaway" (JJ 45); *Duckling Palace* (Ready to Read, Purple); the poem "Tortoise" (JJ 48)

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 requires the students to make connections between the ideas in the text and their prior knowledge to summarise their ideas and make inferences, for example, about why Torty is described as being a lucky tortoise

The mix of text forms and the graphic layout on pages 12-13

Shifts in time and place and many time and sequence relationships signaled by words or phrases. There are also shifts in the narration, including the past ("named", "was"), the present ("Now Torty is"), and the future ("Torty will become").

The unfamiliar settings and context of the First World War

Torty, the Lucky Tortoise

by David Chadwick



This true story was told to David by Torty's owner, Beth.

During the First World War, a young man named Stewart was a **stretcher-bearer** in the New Zealand Army. He moved sick and wounded soldiers from the **battlefields** to places that were safe. One of these places was the port of Salonika in Greece.

While he was there, he made an unusual friend ...

The First World War

The First World War began in 1914 and took place mainly in Europe. It was called a "world" war because a lot of countries became involved. New Zealand soldiers went to fight on the same side as Great Britain. More than 18 000 New Zealanders lost their lives, and over 40 000 were wounded. The war ended in November 1918.

There were many wild tortoises around Salonika. One day, Stewart saw a tortoise crossing a track.



As he watched, he was horrified to see the tortoise run over by a gun carriage.



Stewart thought the tortoise would be squashed flat - but amazingly, it wasn't!



Luckily the ground was soft.

The tortoise had two deep **grooves** in its shell and had lost some toes and a small piece of its shell, but it was still alive.



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

Visual language features (including subheadings, illustrations, photographs, bold print to indicate glossary words, a map, and a text box) that are clearly linked to the body text

The pattern of topic sentences and supporting details within and across paragraphs. For example, the second sentence on page 14 says that Torty had many more adventures, then markers signal each one in the text: "One year", "Another time", "had another close call". The last paragraph states that Torty likes company, and then gives examples of this.

English (Reading)

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

Level 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures

Science

Level 2 – Life processes: Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*The New Zealand 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 consider why Torty is a lucky tortoise.

To find information about tortoises.

Possible learning goals

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

- The students **make connections** between the text and the visual language features to support their understanding and track the information in the text.
- They **identify and summarise** main points.
- They make connections between information in the text and their prior knowledge in order to **make inferences** about why Torty is lucky.
- They use a range of strategies (for example, rereading a sentence, looking for clues close by in the text, or referring to the glossary) to clarify the meaning of unfamiliar words and ideas.

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

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

Vocabulary

- Names that may be unfamiliar to the students: “Salonika”, “Greece”, “Europe”, “Great Britain”, “Dunedin”, “Boomerang”
- Subject-specific words and phrases: “stretcher-bearer”, “wounded”, “battlefields”, “countries”, “hibernation”, “reptile”, “dandelion”, “temperature”
- Other possibly unfamiliar words and phrases: “involved”, “horrified”, “amazingly”, “grooves”, “adventures”, “scuttled”, “daughter-in-law”, “close call”, “wandered”, “recently”, “ripe old age”

Use the map on page 11 to discover the significant place names in Europe that relate to the setting for the First World War.

Support the students' **word-solving** attempts by prompting them to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- when **decoding**:
 - breaking words into syllables or familiar chunks for example: “Sal-on-i-ka”, “No-vem-ber”, “a-maz-ing-ly”, “ad-ven-tures”
- when **working out word meanings**:
 - using prior knowledge and the context of the sentence or paragraph
 - looking for an explanation or definition close by in the sentence and/or using the glossary for words in bold print
 - looking for supporting information in the visual language features.

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

- For students who will find the vocabulary challenging, introduce key vocabulary (up to 10 items). Copy some images from the text, give a different image to each pair of students, and ask them to write notes on what they see and what they think the text will be about. The pairs could then show their images and share their ideas. During the discussion elicit, feed in, and explain key vocabulary. And see [ESOL Online: Vocabulary](#).

Specific Knowledge

- Knowledge of the First World War
- Knowledge of reptiles
- Knowledge of having pets

Make connections to what the students already know from their experiences, previous reading, and topic studies.

**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 reread that sentence when you got stuck. What helped you to work out what that phrase means?

M What helped you to realise that Torty was a female?

M I noticed you spent quite a bit of time on that paragraph. Tell me how you worked out what “scuttled” meant.

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.
- Have the students read the title and the introductory statement, look at the map and subheading, and make predictions of what the story will be about. Confirm that this is a true story of how a tortoise was rescued during the First World War.
- Clarify that this story is not *about* the war but that it starts during the war so it's important to know something about what was happening. Have the students read the page 10 text box and, together, find the places on the map that are mentioned on page 10. You may need to explain the concept of Europe being a group of countries. Allow plenty of time for discussion, encouraging the students to make connections to what they already know about the First World War. Some students may make a link to Anzac Day.
- Briefly look through the article and discuss the different text forms, including the non-fiction text features and how they help the reader.
- Review how the illustrations and captions on pages 12–13 work together to tell the story and how the thick, black lines show the correct sequence of the story panels.
- 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 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.

This text is full of engaging but complex information, so allow plenty of time for discussion to enable the students to build their understanding of unfamiliar ideas. You could break the first reading into sections, as indicated below.

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 identify the initial information about who, where, when, and what in the first paragraph and infer from the ellipsis that the story will be continued. They make connections between the title and the phrase "unusual friend" to predict that Stewart is about to meet Torty.
- The students find information in the second sentence to help them work out the meaning of "stretcher-bearer". They may also check the glossary.
- The students infer how dangerous it was for the soldiers and notice how long ago it was.
- *What important information are you finding out in this paragraph? If necessary, prompt the students to predict how the information could link to Torty. (You may need to remind some students that many texts provide orientation in the first paragraph – who, where, when, what – before introducing the main topic.)*
- Remind the students of the strategies they can use, for example, reading on or using the glossary (and see 'Possible supporting strategies' above).
- Remind the students that they can use sticky notes to mark sections of text that they are not sure of or that they think might be important so that they can come back to them later.
- The students infer from the illustrations on pages 12–13 that the setting is from a long time ago and that the tortoise in the illustrations is Torty.
- After reading the story panels on page 12, they identify Torty's first piece of luck. They infer from the expression of horror on Stewart's face (panel 2) and his expectation that the tortoise would be squashed that the gun carriage would have been very heavy and that it was Torty's hard shell and the soft ground that saved her.
- The students may infer that this first piece of luck is the reason for the title (and adjust their inference later as they read about Torty's other lucky escapes).
- The students notice the reference to the tortoise's age.
- The students use clues on page 13 (in particular the "ZZZ" in the illustration and the phrase "woke up") to infer the meaning of "hibernation" and may check the glossary to confirm.
- Ask questions to focus the students' thinking as necessary:
 - *What would you expect to have happened to Torty?*
 - *What was Torty's piece of luck?*(Note that, although this support material refers to Torty as "she", at this point in the story, neither Stewart nor the reader know the gender of the tortoise.)
- You could prompt the students to use a sticky note to mark this fact about her age because it will become more significant as they read on.

- The students use the heading on page 14 to confirm that the story is now set in New Zealand.
- They infer from the heading and first paragraph that this section is going to be about more of Torty’s adventures and they use markers such as, “one year” and “another time” to track the adventures.
- They may notice in the second paragraph that Torty’s gender can be inferred from the use of the word “her”.
- The students use markers (such as, “many years”, “When Stewart died”, “Now”) on pages 14–15 and the fact that Torty is now around 200 years old to infer that a lot of time has passed.
- The students identify Torty’s lucky escapes. They may also infer that she is lucky to have met Boomerang and to have laid some eggs.
- The students infer from the word “Now” and the change to the present tense that the writer is describing Torty’s life in the present day (and that she is still alive).
- They notice the change in text form and topic on page 16.
- They make connections between the information about hibernation and what they have read to clarify why Torty was able to sleep for five months on the journey to New Zealand and why she nearly got burnt with the leaves.
- If necessary prompt the students to notice the change of setting: *How does the heading help you?*
- Prompt the students to notice the words that indicate the passing of time in the first sentence of each of the next four paragraphs.
- If necessary, prompt the students to recall the mention of Torty’s age on page 13.
- Enjoy the students’ delight as Torty’s luck continues – and their discovery on page 15 that she is still alive.
- You could prompt the students to notice that the time period has changed: *I’ve noticed that page 14 was all about things that happened to Torty a while ago, but there is a change on this page*
- Remind the students to read the heading on page 16 so that they will know what the paragraph is going to be about.
- Encourage the students to make connections: *Think about why Torty was under the leaves.*

Discussing the text after the first reading

- The students summarise the main events in Torty’s story.
- Remind the students of the reading purpose. Have them review the events in Torty’s story, referring to the text to clarify information. You could record the students’ responses on a summary chart.
- The students share and justify their opinions about why Torty was lucky (or not) and if they think her life is amazing.
- *Do you agree that Torty has had an “amazing life”?*

Supporting metacognition

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

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

📖 The students describe some ways in which they tracked information in the text.

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

📖 *Tell me what you did to work out what a stretcher-bearer does?*

📖 *What are some things you did that helped you keep track of Torty’s adventures on page 14?*

After reading

- The students can reread the article as they listen to the audio version. Audio versions also provide English language learners with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Provide further opportunities for the students to reread and discuss this article as well as other related texts such as stories about unusual pets, rescued animals, or animal adventures (see ‘Related texts’ above).
- Ask the students to summarise information about some of Torty’s lucky escapes. Provide a framework such as the table shown below. Remind the students to reread the text and check the information before they write their summaries.

What happened?	When and where did it happen?	If Torty was not so lucky, what could have happened?
	During the First World War in Salonika	
	After the war, in New Zealand	
	After Stewart died, in New Zealand	

- Provide opportunities for the students to practise strategies for working out word meanings. The students can choose some less familiar words from the text and list the clues to the words’ meanings that they found in the text. Have them share their examples with a partner.

New word	What clues helped me work out its meaning?	Meaning
stretcher-bearer	Page 10: He moved sick and wounded soldiers from the battlefields to places that were safe. The glossary	Someone who moves hurt people to safety
gun carriage		