

Old Tuatara

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drawings by Clare Bowes

Overview

This very “New Zealand” text features a tuatara who appears to be asleep but who is, in fact, waiting to catch a meal. It has strong links to *Fantail, Fantail*.

Suggested purposes

This book supports the comprehension strategies of forming and testing hypotheses and identifying and summarising the main ideas. It provides opportunities to practise one-to-one word matching, directionality, and recognising high-frequency words.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the high-frequency vocabulary “and”, “in”, “Not”, “said”, “sat”, “the”
- the use of words starting with “s” – “said”, “sat”, “sun”
- the upper-case letters in the name Old Tuatara
- the one line of text on each page and the large spaces between words
- the irregular past-tense verb “sat”
- the repetition of “sat” to indicate time passing
- the use of speech marks
- the use of “gull” rather than “seagull”
- the repetitive pattern of the direct speech on pages 4 to 7
- the strong storyline, which builds to a climax
- the subtle changes in the illustrations as they lead up to the climax.

Introducing the text

Show the children the cover and find out what they know about tuatara. Record their ideas on a chart to refer to after the reading. If they describe the tuatara as a lizard, talk about how the tuatara is different. It has a thick tongue and grabs or bites prey rather than flicking out its tongue the way a lizard does. Tuatara have been in New Zealand for a long time and can live to be very old. They stay still for long periods.

It may be useful to browse through the illustrations together, using them to support a discussion about tuatara – what they look like, what they like to do, and what they might eat. Make sure you don't show the children the last page.

Focus on the title and ask the children to find the word “Tuatara”. *What letters helped you?* Ask them to look at the first word in the title. *This word describes the tuatara, and it starts with “O”.* *What do you think it could be?* Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.

The first reading

Title page – Ask the children to reread the title.

Remind the children of the strategies you want them to focus on. Listen to them read the text themselves, providing support and feedback as necessary.

Page 2 – Discuss where Old Tuatara is and what he's doing. (The sun in the top left-hand corner is a useful support for the text.) List the children's predictions (hypotheses). Listen to them read the page. They may read “is sitting” for “sat”. *Did your finger fit the words?* If necessary, tell them the irregular verb “sat” and ask them to reread, pointing carefully to each word.

Page 3 – Observe which children notice the repetition of the word “sat” and attempt to read this page themselves.

Page 4 – Have a copy of *Fantail, Fantail* handy (if the children are familiar with it) to help them identify the fantail in the illustration. They may need support with the syntax of this page. *What does Fantail think Old Tuatara is doing? He's been sitting for a long time and not moving.* Slowly articulate the sounds of “Asleep” and see if the children come in with the rest of the word. *Do you think he's asleep?*

Page 5 – If the children read “seagull” for “gull”, prompt them to cross-check using the initial letter.

Page 7 – Old Tuatara's head is raised towards the fly, indicating interest. *Does Old Tuatara look as though he's asleep? I'm wondering what will happen next ...*

Page 8 – *Who is speaking on this page? What is he saying?* Check that the children have worked out what has happened to the fly. Review the children's earlier predictions.

Ask the children to summarise what has happened. *Was Old Tuatara asleep? What was he actually doing?* Encourage them to generalise (identify the main ideas) about tuatara. Refer to the chart from the introductory discussion. *What have we found out about what tuatara eat? What could we infer about what they **don't** eat? What about how they catch their food?* Add to or revise the ideas on the chart.

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their one-to-one word matching and how they manage the changes in the text pattern on pages 3, 4, and 8.

Reread pages 2 and 3. *What did the tuatara do? Focus on the repetitive use of “sat”. Why do you think the author wrote this word so many times? Read it slowly and expressively, drawing out the idea that it implies the passing of time. This is supported visually by the sun's gradual movement.*

Look closely at the illustration of the tuatara on each page. *Is he sitting in the same place each time? Compare the way Old Tuatara is sitting on pages 6 and 7. How can you tell that he's going to snap at the fly?*

Locate some of the high-frequency words in the text. *Find the word “the” on page 4. Can you find “the” on the next page?* Practise making the word with magnetic letters.

Find all of the words in the text that start with “s”. *What other words start this way?* Display the list and encourage the children to add to it as they discover more “s” words in their reading.

Draw attention to the capital letters for Old Tuatara's name. Write down the names of the children in the group, reinforcing the idea that names start with a capital letter.

Discuss the purpose of the speech marks on pages 4 to 7.

Suggestions for further tasks

Read or reread *Fantail, Fantail*.

Create a mural, with the children drawing themselves in place of the creatures. Add captions, using speech marks, following the speech pattern introduced in the text. ("Asleep," said Awhina.) Draw attention to the use of capital letters for names.

Find out more about tuatara from a library book or an Internet site. Make a chart of tuatara facts.

Have the children create their own warnings to the fly!

Read other books about catching prey, such as *The Praying Mantis*, *Snap! Splash!*, *The Shag Goes Fishing*, or *The Water Boatman*.