

My Name Is Davy Lowston

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School Journal
Level 2, May 2016
Year 4



Overview

This text is a fictionalised recount. Davy Lowston was among a group of sealers set down on the Open Bay Islands (off the west coast of the South Island) in 1810. The ship that was to pick them up sank in a storm, and the men were marooned for four years. Their story is the basis of one of the earliest folk songs in New Zealand.

Little is known about Davy Lowston, so the writer has invented a background story from what is known about sealers and whalers of those times. Verses of the song are interspersed throughout the story. The narrator comments that some of the verses exaggerate what happened for dramatic effect.

This recount:

- requires some knowledge of whalers and sealers and their part in New Zealand's history
- implies an understanding of what life was like in the early nineteenth century, especially in regard to employment, communication, transport, press gangs, poverty, and the slums of England and Australia
- includes illustrated verses from the folk song that provide extra information
- is an example of fictionalised history
- implies knowledge of folk songs – what they are and how they were transmitted orally
- includes poetic conventions and language.

A PDF of the text and audio versions of the text and the song as MP3 files are available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme “Hūria Mātenga – Hero of Whakatū” SJ 3.3.03 | “Ika Moana” SJSL 2009

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

ringing a bell and shouting
Hear ye! Sealing party returns from the dead!”
The town crier made our story into a kind of chant.
An American whaling ship was docked at the wharf,
and the crew heard the town crier's chant. They liked it so
much that they began to sing it to the tune of a popular song
They changed my name from Lowrieston to Lowston to
make it fit better. They also said that some of us died.
It wasn't true, but it made a better story!
Those American whalers spread the song all around the
Pacific. When I heard that it had arrived in New Zealand,
I knew our story would be remembered long after we

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

onto it. We were lucky. The sailors
Bligh saw the smoke, and we were rescued. We would not
die on those terrible islands after all!
The Governor Bligh took us back to Sydney. We had been
gone so long that everyone thought we'd died. Suddenly
our story was in the newspapers, and we were famous.
But a lot of people in Sydney were like me. They had
come from the slums of London, and they couldn't read.
They relied on the town crier for their news. The town crier
was a man with a loud, booming voice. He walked the streets
ringing a bell and shouting out the latest stories: “Hear ye!
Sealing party returns from the dead!”

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

and they were surrounded by
were home for thousands of seals and screeching
We were set down in Open Bay, were set down, were set down.
We were set down in Open Bay, were set down
Upon the sixteenth day
Of Februar-aye-ay
For to seal, for to seal, for to seal.

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

The captain promised he would be back
and other supplies. Then he left for Sydney.
The Open Bay Islands were often swept by rain and sleet.
There was little protection from the cold and the wind,
so we built huts for shelter. They were tiny, with walls
of stone and roofs made from tussock grass.
Our team worked hard. We killed and skinned ten
thousand seals. Every day we kept a lookout for the Active,
but in vain. We didn't know that the ship had run into a
terrible storm and sunk on the way back to Australia.

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES:

Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

ENGLISH (Reading)

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

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Possible first reading purpose

- To find out why a song was written about Davy Lowston.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To find out what was real and what was imagined in the story
- To compare the differences in style between narrative and song
- To evaluate the language of the song to understand why that form of communication was appropriate for the time.

Possible writing purposes

- To write the Davy Lowston story as a newspaper article
- To write an imaginary interview with Davy Lowston
- To write a song or a poem about a true event.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

(Some of the suggestions for possible supporting strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.)

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including topic-specific vocabulary: “sealers”, “scrub”, “sleet”, “skinned”, “putrid”, “brackish”, “foundered”, “seal” (as a verb), “bleak”, “bare”, “set down”, “hear ye”, “in vain”, “swept”, “town crier”, “sealing party”, “docked”, “took on”, “remote”, “docks”, “cabin”, “port”, “brig”, “whale oil”, “sealskins”, “schooner”, “went down”
- Language of the song: “’Twas”, “’twould”, “gallant”, “cured”, “putrid”
- Use of emotive adjectives that help to paint a vivid picture of the conditions on the islands: “wild, stormy ocean”, “terrible islands”, “screeching sea birds”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Before reading the text, pull out the song and read it separately. You could also play the audio version to hear it in context. Highlight the parts that are unfamiliar and discuss them further.
- Look at words in context to model making inferences about word meanings. Remind students of the word-solving strategies they can use to help comprehension.
- Direct students to the glossary at the back of the book.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also *ESOL Online Vocabulary*, for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Familiarity with whalers and sealers and their part in New Zealand's history
- Awareness of what life was like in the early nineteenth century, especially in regard to employment, communication, transport, press gangs, poverty, and the slums of England and Australia
- Familiarity with the genre of fictionalised history
- Knowledge of folk songs and the fact that they were transmitted orally (the abstract idea that the song was spread across the Pacific and then returned to New Zealand may be difficult for some students)
- Familiarity with the idea of lives “costing” something.

Possible supporting strategies

- This text will be more successful if used within a wider historical enquiry about the context (nineteenth century life in New Zealand).
- Make links to other texts to provide historical contexts.
- Show clips from films of Charles Dickens's stories to help the students visualise what life was like in nineteenth century London. See also series 1, episode 4, of *First Crossings* (TV1), which tells the story of Davy Lowston.
- Discuss the term “fictionalised history” and what it means.
- Draw connections to other legends and folklore that originate from true events.
- Use a map to show students where the story is set.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Illustrated verses from the folk song that provide extra information
- Distortion of facts and an unreliable narrator: “[...] but this is what I remember.”
- Archaic language: “’Twas in”, “’twould”, “set down”, “gallant”, “foundered”, “Upon”, “Februar-aye-ay”
- Mixed text types: narrative text, rhyming verses, explanatory text box, and a glossary
- A paragraph at the end of the text that jumps to the present to talk about the continued existence of the folk song
- Sentence structures that set up comparisons and contrasts. For example, the use of “but” to contrast Davy Lowston's positive and negative experiences.

Possible supporting strategies

- Listen to the audio recording of the song and explore the old-fashioned terminology.
- Where “but” separates a positive and a negative experience, have the class make predictions about what an unfamiliar word may mean based on the sentence structure.
- Ask students why the paragraph at the end of the text explaining the song “Davy Lowston” has been included.
- Have students retell the story orally while you listen for their use of the correct tense and their use of interesting details and descriptions. Identify the narrative structure of the story and the time, place, and characters. Discuss what complications took place and how these were resolved.
- See *Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools (SELLIPS): Years 3 and 4*, pages 15–19, for scaffolding ideas suitable for English language learners.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

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

First reading

- Explain what folk songs are and how they were used to tell stories and spread news.
- Read the introduction and listen to the audio recording. Discuss the song and have the students predict what the text will be about based on what they have heard.
- Ask the students to use the context to figure out the meaning of “remote”. Remind them of word-solving strategies that they already know.
- Chunk the text into sections. Have students read through to page 29. Ask them to make predictions about what will happen next. Monitor if they have understood what has happened so far and are using what they know (from the song and the text). Ask them to check or revise their predictions as they read on.

If the students struggle with this text

- Listen to the audio version of the text to help students follow the story.
- Build more context about the setting. For example, find and discuss the places in the text where the author describes the setting. Draw out or feed in background knowledge about the hardships of living and working as a seaman nearly 200 years ago.
- Model how to work out unfamiliar vocabulary using word-solving strategies and context to interpret difficult phrases and archaic language.
- Chunk the text to set shorter reading goals. Have students discuss sections of the text with a partner and talk about what they found difficult. Listen in to the students' conversations and provide support where necessary.
- Identify and discuss the old-fashioned terminology and difficult phrases prior to reading.

Subsequent readings

How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your chosen reading purpose.

The teacher

Ask students to re-read the story, then discuss it in pairs. Support their discussions with questions.

- *What was the real event that actually happened? How do you know?*
- *Why was a song written about this event?*
- *Which parts of the story are real? Which parts are imagined? How do you know?*
- *Why do you think the author imagines he is Davy? Was this a good idea? Why/why not?*

The teacher

Ask the students to work in pairs to consider the similarities and differences between the text and the song lyrics. They could draw up a chart like the one below to match up lyrics from the song with lines from the text.

Verse	Text
'Twas in eighteen hundred and ten we set sail, we set sail.	So, I joined the <i>Active</i> , and we set sail for New Zealand.

Have the students work in pairs and direct them to compare the features and purposes of the story and the song.

- *What do you notice about the words and sentences in the song? How are they different from the words and sentences in the story?*
- *What if stories were all written like the song? Would that make them harder or easier to remember or understand? Why/why not?*
- *Now that you have heard the story being told in two different ways, which way do you prefer and why? Why do you think both versions are here?*
- *Why do you think the song has been interspersed through the text?*

The teacher

Have the students read the last paragraph on page 31.

- *What does this part tell us about how people living in the early 1800s received news? How is it different from the way people receive news today?*

Build on what the students know about life in the early 1800s. Draw out the idea that communication was far more limited in the days in which the events happened.

- *Why was a song a good way to communicate?*

You could make links to Māori waiata and oral legends.

- *Think about a waiata or a Māori legend. How does the language sound different from the songs we sing and the stories we read today? Why?*

If you have students from other cultural backgrounds in your class, they might be able to relate “Davy Lowston” to an oral legend or a song from their culture.

METACOGNITION

- Show your partner how the chart helped you to see the links between the song and the story more easily.
- Share how you identified what was true and what was imagined.

The students:

- locate the paragraph at the top of page 27, where the author explains that the event is true but some parts are made up
- make inferences and find evidence that the writer is imagining he is Davy Lowston telling the story
- identify and explain the features of fact and fiction
- locate information that explains that the song was written after the men arrived back in New Zealand.

The students:

- compare the story in the text with that in the song
- identify places where the story differs from the song, for example, the song says that some of the men died but the story says that they were all rescued
- note that the text adds a lot more background detail but that the song includes detail that isn't in the text, for example, that they landed on 16 February
- understand that the songwriter has used “poetic licence” so that the song is more dramatic and memorable and that it keeps to the verse form necessary for a song (such as consistent line length, rhyme scheme, and repetition)
- describe their preference between the two forms but understand that the two forms have different purposes and features and are a product of the time they were written or composed
- notice that the song verses are interspersed through the text because they link to episodes at those points.

The students:

- draw on what they know about society and communication in the time of Davy Lowston to conclude that an important function of folk songs was to tell stories and spread news
- make links to how waiata and oral legends transmitted stories and history in Māori and other cultures.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You made a good point by linking the idea of a town crier to the fact that not many people could read well and there was no radio or television in those days. That shows me you were using your background knowledge. That's a good way of making sense of something unfamiliar.*
- *I heard you mention how repetition and rhyme in modern songs make it easy to remember the lyrics. That was a good way of linking to “Davy Lowston” and how the song structure made it easier to remember the story. Good connection!*



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

English Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Text excerpts from “My Name is Davy Lowston”

“Hear ye! Hear ye! Sealing party returns from the dead!”

Examples of text characteristics

SUMMARISING

In the same way that the town crier used to ring a bell and call out, newspapers often employ catchy hooks in their headlines. They don't include unnecessary details.

Our Captain, John Bedar, he set sail,
he set sail.
Yes, for Port Jackson, he set sail.
“I'll return, men, without fail!”
But she foundered in a gale
And went down, and went down,
and went down.

VERSE STRUCTURE

Songs and poetry often use set formats, rhythms, metres, and language features. “Davy Lowston” includes repetition, poetic language, two short lines and three longer ones, and a rhyming couplet in each verse. These combine to give the song its own rhythm and flow.

The Open Bay Islands were often swept by rain and sleet. There was little protection from the cold and the wind, so we built huts for shelter. They were tiny, with walls of stone and roofs made from tussock grass.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

Writers choose their words carefully when describing a scene. They pick out specific details and use particular adjectives to convey the impression they want to get across. They sometimes include imagery to help the reader visualise the scene.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Have the students write a news report that includes an engaging headline and a summary of the Davy Lowston story.

- Notice how the town crier engages people by going straight to the most important piece of information: the sealers have returned from the dead.
- Is your headline engaging? Does it go straight to the main idea?
- Does it summarise what the report is about?
- Does your report include all the main details in the story?
- Have you included any details that are not necessary?

Ask the students to write a short verse about something they are interested in.

- Are you going to have rhyming lines?
- Have you included repetition or any other particular language devices?
- Do the verses have the same rhythm when you clap it?
- Have you included the main details?
- Did writing the story in verse make it more difficult to write? Did you need to change anything to fit your verse?

Take out a passage from the story, such as the description of Open Bay Islands, and prompt the students to think about the words the writer has used and what effect they have.

- What picture of the islands do you see when you read the words “swept by rain and sleet”? Why does the author say they are “swept”?
- What other words make you think the islands were not a very comfortable place for the sealers to live?
- Which descriptive techniques could you use in your writing?

You could take a group of students through a guided writing session. Direct them to write the first few sentences for a scene. Then ask them to add further details and descriptive language. Have the students provide peer feedback on each other's writing, such as the images and adjectives used.

- How could your partner improve their description?
- Could they add a detail or choose a more accurate adjective or verb?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Adding “chilly and dark” to your description of the cave helps to make it sound like a more frightening place. That was a careful choice of words.
- Your headline is quite long. Headlines don't have to be a proper sentence and are usually shorter. How could you make it shorter? Try looking for the part of the sentence that contains the main idea.

METACOGNITION

- Choose a part in your writing where you added words to improve your description. Tell your partner why you chose them.
- How did you choose that headline for your report? Tell your partner what made you change it from a whole sentence to a short phrase.

Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions