

Low Tide

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Overview

This TSM contains a wide range of information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The materials provide multiple opportunities for revisiting the text several times.

This short story describes what happens during the hour that Manu and his father have to rescue what they can from their ruined home. A storm accompanied by a high tide has breached a seawall and sent seawater through their house. With a king tide due the following night, the house will have to be abandoned, but the two have been allowed to return briefly to collect things of value.

An underlying theme of the story is how Manu reacts to the situation. The author implies that Manu may have an anxiety disorder and displays some obsessive behaviours. Suggestions for understanding Manu's behaviours are included in the reading and discussion sections. However, there may be some sensitivities related to this topic, so you should use your knowledge of your students as you address this aspect of the story.

This story:

- includes a believable situation that is based on extreme weather caused by climate change
- requires the reader to infer meaning, for example, about the reason for Manu's reactions
- requires repeated and/or close reading to fully appreciate the nature of the situation and the characters involved
- has an underlying theme of increasing climate change.

A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme

“Thirst” SJ L3 Aug 2015 | “Kahawai” SJ L3 Oct 2013 | “Losing Nemo” SJ 4.1.2011

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

“Mikey!” he called, searching the rooms before checking the back garden and then the front. No response. “Mikey!”

“He’ll be hungry,” said Dad. He watched as Manu peered into the once-shiny broadleaf. “Why don’t you put out some food? I’m going to take this next load up to the car. Wish me luck!”

That didn’t make sense. You didn’t need luck to climb a hill. It was merely a matter of energy and physiology. But all the same, Manu said good luck and went to find some cat food. He searched the kitchen until he found a single-serve can of skipjack tuna – the one with the yellow label. It was tucked away on a top shelf. He pulled the tab, and it snapped off too soon.

What to do? Manu remembered the night of the big storm last year, when the power was out and the electric can opener wouldn’t work. Dad had shown him how to use an old-fashioned opener on a can of corn.

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

nothing. Eight minutes. Manu went to his bedroom and carefully set the plate down on his favourite duvet cover, right in the middle of Jupiter. The duvet showed the view of the planet from its biggest moon, Ganymede. Manu wanted to go there one day. In the next room, he could hear Dad on the phone talking to Mum. She would be working late at civil defence again. Manu wouldn’t get to say good night. He got up to shut the door and sat back on the bed.

The edge of something poked out from under his bed. Manu reached down and pulled it out: his tablet, damp and grimy. He tried to turn it on and got no response, but a faint noise came from right above his head. He looked up. At the top of the wardrobe, a small, pointed face looked hungrily down.

some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

it was awkward turning the wheel; the opener kept slipping, but Manu persisted, and he was able to slide the tines of a fork under the ragged edge and prise it up. The smell of tuna rose from the can. Surely it would tempt Mikey out of hiding.

Thirteen minutes to go. Dad was back. Manu scraped the fish out of the can and onto a dinner plate – Mikey’s bowl was gone – then he walked around the house, calling the cat’s name.

Eleven minutes. The ruined lounge. No sign of Mikey. No one would ever sit on this furniture again. Bathroom, toilet, kitchen, laundry – all the rooms, nothing. Eight minutes. Manu went to his bedroom and carefully set the plate down on his favourite duvet cover, right in the middle of Jupiter. The duvet showed the view of the planet from its biggest moon, Ganymede. Manu wanted to go there one day. In the next room, he could hear Dad on the phone talking to Mum. She would be working late at civil defence again. Manu wouldn’t get to say good night. He got up to shut the door and sat back on the bed.

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)

wouldn’t let him go until the doors were locked. Mikey slinked under a damp sleeping bag. He stayed there all the way back to the school.

That night, the wind blew, flapping the canvas above their heads. It took Manu a long time to fall asleep. He woke later to a familiar voice. Mum was back. Reassured, he drifted off again. A small, furry figure pressed against his side. As they slept, the king tide slowly receded, taking everything it could find: a gold earring ... the sleeve of a record ... an empty tuna can.

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



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

VOCABULARY

Possible supporting strategies

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “hi-vis vest”, “abandon”, “low tide”, “trashed”, “tidal pool”, “whiff”, “subtler smell”, “sodden”, “wasteland”, “silt”, “refuge”, “jewellery box”, “surged”, “hoodie”, “time was ticking by”, “broadleaf”, “physiology”, “skipjack tuna”, “persisted”, “tines of a fork”, “prise”, “duvet”, “Ganymede”, “civil defence”, “tablet”, “not exactly purring”, “seawall”, “breached”, “king tide”, “trudged”, “engineers”, “squirming”, “slinked”, “Reassured”, “receded”, “sleeve of a record”
- Colloquial language, including “to get their stuff”, “wasn’t having it”, “the entire garden was trashed”
- Metaphor: “It was a different story when Dad unlocked the ranchslider”, “bang on”, “time was ticking by”, “drifted off”
- Most of the vocabulary will be familiar to students through their oral language, but some may not have met specific words in their reading. Identify words that will be unfamiliar and decide on the strategies you will use to provide support.
- During reading, provide brief explanations where necessary, for example, the “records” Dad wants to rescue are LP (vinyl) recordings of music, and they are held in cardboard “sleeves”; “skipjack” is a kind of tuna often used for catfood; “Ganymede” is a moon of the planet Jupiter, so prompt students to infer that Manu’s duvet cover features a scene from outer space.
- Collocations are two or more words that often go together. They come naturally to native English speakers because we learn to speak and store vocabulary in “chunks”. There are several examples based on the word “tide” in this story (“low tide”, “king tide”, “tidal pool”). English language learners might not be familiar with these, so you may need to explicitly teach them, which will help their spoken English sound more natural and fluid. You could introduce other examples as well, for example, “rockpool”, “swimming pool”, “car pool”.
- *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

Possible supporting strategies

- Experience with reading stories that require the reader to infer meaning, for example, about a character or events
- Awareness of extreme weather situations, such as storms, floods, and rising sea levels, and of climate change
- Awareness of the role of civil defence in New Zealand
- Prompt students to share any personal experiences they have of extreme weather or similar situations. *What happened? What decisions did your family have to make? How did you feel?* For some students, this will be a real experience, so some sensitivity will be necessary.
- Lead a discussion (after the first reading) on climate change. *What do scientists believe causes it? What impact is it having on our weather? What do you know about the damage it can cause?*
- Discuss the role of civil defence in New Zealand. *Why do we need CD people and systems? What experience do you have of this, for example, through the ways we prepare for emergencies at school?*
- Remind students of the need to use comprehension strategies as they read, in particular, making connections with the text and things they already know, finding clues to help infer meaning (reading between the lines), and evaluating ideas during and after reading.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

Possible supporting strategies

- Narrative text, in a contemporary setting
- Use of the third-person, past tense
- Mostly chronological with reference to recent past
- The use of dialogue to reveal characters and relationships
- Some events, characters, and the bigger context of the story set outside the time frame
- Explain to the students that they will need to read this story carefully to understand what is happening and to learn about the main character, Manu. Remind them of the strategies they can use if they are confused, including rereading, reading on, and going back to check.
- Print copies of the story so students can mark any places that they need to return to for rereading and discussion.
-  Alternatively, the students could highlight sections on the PDF of the text using a PDF annotator such as [Kami](#), a Google Chrome app.



Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

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

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Relationships with Other People)

Level 2 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Describe how individuals and groups share characteristics and are also unique.

Level 3 – Identity, sensitivity, and respect: Identify ways in which people discriminate and ways to act responsibly to support themselves and other people.

Possible first reading purpose

- To read a realistic story about the impact severe weather has on a family
- To read about the stress involved when a family has to evacuate their home.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To identify Manu's character traits
- To consider the impact of changes in weather patterns on coastal properties
- To identify ways we can connect with the story.

Possible writing purposes

- To write a narrative story based on the theme of climate change
- To describe a time when you experienced an extreme weather event or other natural phenomenon (storm, flood, fire, earthquake)
- To write a character study of Manu
- To develop an emergency evacuation plan for home or school, including a list of things you would rescue.



First reading

- Share the purpose for reading, and provide a brief overview of the story.
- Direct the students to read the first three paragraphs (down to “sodden wasteland”) of page 44 silently, using the illustration to support their understanding.
- Briefly check for understanding. *What’s happening here? Who are the main characters? Why do they have to “get their stuff”? What are you predicting the story will be about?*
- Direct the students to continue reading the rest of the text silently, keeping their predictions in mind and adjusting them as they learn more about the situation and the characters.

If the students struggle with this text

- Explain the setting for this story: it concerns a family that lived in a house by the sea. A storm and high tide flooded their house, and they had to evacuate (leave) in the middle of the night.
- Examine the illustration together and read the first paragraph aloud. Ask questions to clarify the sequence of events so far. *What happened “eighteen hours earlier”? What happened next? What are they doing now? What do you think will happen next?*
- Direct the students to continue reading, pausing at the end of each page to discuss events with their reading partner. Listen in on the discussions and offer support where needed to ensure that the students get the gist of the story.
- Invite students to recount parts of the story to check for overall understanding.

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

The teacher

Direct the students to work in pairs to identify places in the story where they were able to make connections with events, responses, or wider contexts.

- *The connections we make can help us find deeper meaning from a text. Are there places in the story that reminded you of something you know or experienced personally or of things you’ve read, seen, or heard about? Are there other connections you can make between the writer’s ideas and the wider world?*
- *Are you able to make connections within and beyond the text to infer meaning, for example, about Manu’s character or his relationship with his cat?*
- *How do these connections deepen your understanding? Talk to your partner about your thoughts as you read.*

The teacher

Lead a discussion about the writer’s purpose.

- *What big idea sits behind the events? (The impact of climate change)*
- *How has he used that idea in this story? Did the story make you think some more about the impact of climate change on our day-to-day lives?*
- *What other stories could you develop from this big idea?*

The students:

- identify places where they can make connections between the text and their prior knowledge or experiences, such as being in a big storm
- draw on words in the text and their personal experiences and connections and integrate this information to deepen their understanding of the writer’s ideas. (For example, they connect what they know about rising sea levels with the details in the text – “The tide had drained away, leaving behind a stinking, sodden wasteland”. They then infer that an unusually high tide, possibly due to rising sea levels world-wide, had flooded the property.)
- use these connections to infer underlying meaning and explain these to a partner.

The students:

- locate and integrate examples across the text that help them to infer the writer’s big idea and think critically about his purpose in writing this story
- evaluate the text in the light of this big idea and their own understanding of the text to form an opinion about the writer’s achievement
- formulate other scenarios that could be used to illustrate the same big idea.

Subsequent readings (cont.)

The teacher

Explain that the writer gives clues to Manu’s character. Model identifying an early clue and the inference you can draw from it.

- On page 44, Dad says “Look at the mud!” and Manu corrects him. Manu tells Dad that it’s silt and explains what silt is. I wondered why he would waste precious time like this, then I wondered if Manu might be a person who needs facts to be precise and accurate – some people I know are a bit like that.

Direct the students to work in pairs to reread the text carefully, noting other places where the writer gives us clues about Manu.

- When you put these all together, what can you say now about Manu? How do you think he will cope with losing his home? What factors could help him cope?

The students could complete a character-trait graphic organiser for Manu. In the left-hand column, they write the character traits he displays in the story and in the right-hand column, they list how the trait is revealed in the text. Traits can be revealed by events, actions, speech, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings. Model one or two examples using the character of Dad first, such as:

- Dad gives in easily – this is revealed by, “Dad tried to negotiate, but the man wasn’t having it. ‘Five minutes gone, fifty-five minutes left,’ he said. So Dad gave up and parked the car.” He also knows Manu well and is alert to how Manu is feeling – “Dad recognised it. ‘Right, then,’ he said, ... ‘You’re in charge. How long have we got?’”

Character: Manu

| Trait | Revealed by |
|-------|-------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

Be sensitive to negative stereotyping. If necessary, guide students to the understanding that whether a trait is seen as positive or negative often depends on the situation or a person’s point of view. For example, you could also say that Dad doesn’t argue because he is practical and arguing will only waste what little time they have.

METACOGNITION

- What clues in the text and experiences or knowledge of your own helped you to infer meaning? Talk me through an example of that.

The students:

- locate and evaluate places where the writer gives clues about Manu
- bring the clues together and integrates this information with their own understanding of people to form an opinion about Manu’s character
- form hypotheses about Manu’s ability to deal with the loss of his home and apply what they have learned about him to suggest factors that will help him, for example, identifying his need for his parents and his cat, a place of refuge, and clearly spelt-out decisions
- use the information they have gleaned about Manu to complete a character trait graphic organiser. (Students could do this in pairs.)

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your close reading and rereading helped you to understand more about Manu and the way he deals with stress. You’ve worked out that he needs order and structure in his life. Sometimes things are only hinted at by the writer, so it’s good practice to read closely and reread if you’re not sure that you have got the full meaning.



Reading standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Text excerpts from “Low Tide”

Page 44

Now it was bang on low tide, and from the outside, things didn't look so bad. The entire garden was trashed, of course, and Manu's old sandpit was now a tidal pool – but their house was still standing, and only one window was broken.

It was a different story when Dad unlocked the ranchslider.

Examples of text characteristics

IDEAS

A “big idea” or theme, such as an important issue, can generate many specific ideas for writing. The “big idea” provides the underlying foundation or background for a story, article, poem, play, or visual representation.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Explain that the background theme for this story is the threat of climate change.

- What other ideas could you make from this theme?
- How will you decide on the structure or format?
- Will you base your writing on something you've experienced yourself?
- How will you help your readers to make connections between your writing and the theme?
- Work by yourself or with your partner to find ideas for a story that has a similar theme to “Low Tide”. Use this discussion to choose one idea, then plan your writing.

Page 44

He let out a low noise. It wasn't quite a sob, but Dad recognised it.

“Right then,” he said, pressing something round into Manu's hand. “Mum's stopwatch from athletics. You're in charge. How long have we got?”

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Showing what characters are doing often tells more about them than explaining what they are thinking or feeling. Their actions can form clues that together help readers form an opinion or understand a more complex idea or character.

Explain the difference between “showing” and “telling”.

- The writer doesn't tell us directly that Manu is a person who needs a lot of security and familiarity. But at one point, he shows us Manu not quite sobbing. Dad's words and actions show us that he understands how distressed Manu is, and he gives Manu a special task to focus on. When we add this to other clues in the text, we can form an opinion about this aspect of Manu's personality.
- Look for places where you can use “show, don't tell” in your own writing. How will you do it? Will you use one example or can you weave in several clues through a story (as Tim Jones has done) to let your readers build up a picture?
- Read your work aloud to a partner. Ask for feedback on the impact of the clues that you have provided. Is your meaning clear but not stated directly?

METACOGNITION

- Do you find it helpful to use another writer's ideas to get you thinking? What's the difference between being inspired by another writer and copying their idea? Does it matter?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- This idea should work well – a play about students on a school camping trip who are trapped by a sudden storm will be very dramatic. How will you develop the idea into a realistic plot?



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions