



The Learning Progression Frameworks describe significant signposts in reading and writing as students develop and apply their literacy knowledge and skills with increasing expertise from school entry to the end of year 10. This teacher support material describes the opportunities in “The Competition” for students to develop this expertise.

## Overview

Messy City has a big problem – it’s too messy! A group of superheroes are invited to take part in a competition to find a solution to the problem. In addition to providing opportunities for expressive oral reading, this humorous, light-hearted play can be used to consider ideas about caring for the environment, problem solving, and the power of cooperation.

The text requires students to “confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about” text (*The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

There is a PDF of this text and an audio version as an MP3 file at [www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz](http://www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz)

## Related texts

Plays with environmental themes: “Professor Clever” (JJ 57); “Space Rubbish” (JJ 58)

Other humorous plays: “Landing a Job” (JJ 30); “Tricky Jack Rabbit” (JJ 31); “Fearless” (JJ 35); “Saving Planet Stripe” (JJ 36); “Lucky Dip” (JJ 40); “Frog School” (JJ 41); “Invisible” (JJ 47); “Kele’s Car” (JJ 49); “Buried Treasure” (JJ 53); “Stop, Thief!” (JJ 55)

Stories about working together: *A Good Idea* (Ready to Read, shared); “Our Gifted Garden” (JJ 49); “The Green Team” (JJ 52)

## Text characteristics

“The Competition” includes the following features that help develop the reading behaviours expected at Gold.

A mix of explicit and implicit content that requires students to make connections between information in the text and their prior knowledge to make predictions and inferences

Narrative conventions (such as a problem to be solved, a series of repeated events, and the least likely character turning out to be the hero) that enable students to draw on and build their knowledge of story structure

The structure of the text as a play, which relies on dialogue and stage directions to tell the story and convey characterisation

The print conventions of a play, for example, upper-case letters for character names and italics and the use of the present tense for stage directions

A variety of sentence structures, including adverbial phrases in the stage directions, requiring students to notice and use linking words, phrases, and punctuation to clarify the connections between ideas

Some vocabulary that may be unfamiliar (for example, “Scene”, “Mayor”, “Assistant”, “Muscles”, “Bluster”, “items”, “great honour”, “gather”, “frustrated”, “raises”, “strength”, “make mincemeat”, “pounds”, “solution”, “blustery”, “blown”, “control”, “gentle waves”, “cooperate”, “local”) requiring students to use their processing system



Language features that provide opportunities for students to apply and extend their knowledge of vocabulary and word structure, for example:

- figures of speech (“far and wide”, “make mincemeat”, “pulling our legs”)
- the comparative adjectives (“messier”, “strongest”, “biggest”, “tiniest”, “silliest”)
- words with silent letters (“Muscles”, “Scene”, “honour”) or unusual spellings (“Mayor”, “ocean”, “cooperate”)
- the component words in “Superhero”, “eyebrows”, “mincemeat”, “everyone”, “themselves”, “superwand”, “forever”, “superpower”

## Cross-curriculum links

### English (Reading)

Level 2 – Processes and strategies: Selects and reads texts for enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Level 2 – Structure: Recognises an increasing range of text forms and differences between them.

### The Arts (Drama)

Level 2 – Developing Practical Knowledge: Explore and use elements of drama for different purposes.



The New Zealand Curriculum

## Suggested reading purposes | Possible learning goals

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

- To find out what the competition is and who will win
- To use the play's format to find clues to help read this play to an audience
- To think about the underlying ideas or author's message

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

The goals listed below link to the descriptions of reading behaviours in *The Literacy Learning Progressions* and the Learning Progression Frameworks. **Select from and adapt** them according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity. (*The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 7)

This text provides opportunities for students, over several readings, to:

- **make connections** between their prior knowledge and information in the story to **make predictions and inferences**
- use information in the dialogue, the stage directions, and the illustrations to **visualise** and track events (**summarise**)
- **make inferences** about how the characters might act and speak
- **analyse** (identify and discuss) some aspects that make this play funny
- **form an opinion** about the author's message
- **monitor** their reading and, when something is unclear, take action to solve the problem, for example, by checking further sources of information, rereading, and/or reading on.



Sounds and Words



The Literacy Learning Progressions

## Introducing the play

Use your knowledge of the students to ensure that your introduction to the text is effective in building or activating their prior knowledge and providing appropriate support for a successful first reading. A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>

Several options are provided below for you to **select from and adapt**.

For English language learners, you could discuss the title, the illustrations, and the list of characters before the whole group session to build confidence and provide support with vocabulary and text features that may be unfamiliar. You can find further information about features of texts that may need support at [ELLP](#).

- Expect the students to infer from the text layout that this is a play and to predict, from the style of the illustrations, that it is humorous. Remind them that a play is a story told mostly through dialogue. Briefly review their understanding of the features of a play: the character names (in capital letters) that show who is speaking and the stage directions (in italics) that give extra information.
- Read the title and the characters' names. If necessary, explain what a mayor is. Read the stage directions on page 26 together, then give the students time to explore the illustration. To draw out the idea of superheroes, prompt them to predict from the names, clothing, and other clues in the illustrations what sorts of characters Water Wizard, Maxi Muscles, Tiny Tot, and Big Bluster might be. Encourage them to make connections to their knowledge of cartoon superheroes and their superpowers.
- Remind the students of the title and have them predict what the competition might be. Expect their predictions to include the idea of the city being messy. Explain that making predictions (or asking themselves questions) is a good way of helping them to think about what they are reading.
- Together, set a reading purpose. Share the learning goal(s). Explain that you want the students to read the whole play themselves to find out what happens before any roles are assigned to individual students. Remind them that this is a humorous play and to expect silly things to happen.
- Provide sticky notes for the students to record any questions or ideas they have as they are reading, and to mark aspects they might want to return to later.

## Reading the play

For the first reading, encourage the students to read the whole play by themselves, intervening only if it's clear a student needs help. During the first reading, the focus should be on students following and enjoying the storyline rather than on totally accurate word solving. Much of the processing that they do at this level is "inside their heads" and may not be obvious until the discussion afterwards. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

### Student behaviours

*Examples of the sorts of behaviours (often overlapping and developed over several readings) that will help students achieve their learning goal(s).*

#### The students use information in the text and illustrations to visualise and track events.

- They use the character names and the stage directions in parentheses to track who is speaking, what they are doing, and/or how they are feeling.
- They use the text on page 27 to identify the problem the city is facing and the reason for the competition and to confirm or clarify that the four caped characters are superheroes.
- They use key words to visualise the attempts of the first three superheroes (and why their ideas don't solve the problem).
- On page 31, they use the names and the dashes in Tiny Tot's dialogue to track the specific instructions that Tiny Tot is giving to each character.

#### They make connections between their prior knowledge and information in the play to make predictions and inferences.

- On pages 26 and 27, they make connections between the reference to "rubbish everywhere" and the actions of the crowd in throwing items into the air to infer that it's the people of Messy City who are causing the problem.
- They use Maxi Muscle's name, the humorous illustration, the repetition of "strong", and his reference to his eyebrows to make connections to their prior knowledge of boastful superheroes.
- After Maxi's plan fails, they draw on their awareness that this is a humorous play and their knowledge of similar stories to predict

more failures ahead and (possibly) that the smallest superhero will solve the problem and win the competition.

- On page 28, they use the illustration and surrounding phrases (for example, "strong winds", "blow your rubbish", "one big blustery breath of air") to infer the meanings of "Bluster" and "blustery" (and confirm this when reading page 29).
- They use the context of the unfolding story to infer that the bold print for the words "everyone" and "together" on page 30 might hint at an author's message.

#### They demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving.

- They use a range of word-solving strategies, for example:
  - on page 27, they draw on their awareness that "h" can be a silent initial letter (as in "hour") to work out the phrase "my great honour"
  - they use the known words "mince" and "meat" to read "mincemeat" (though, at this point, they may not be sure what "make mincemeat" means).
- They reread the Water Wizard's dialogue on page 29 and/or Tiny Tot's instructions on page 31 (which both include stage directions) to clarify which bits are stage directions and which bits are spoken by the character.
- They mark words or phrases they are not sure of or that they want to come back to.

### Deliberate acts of teaching

*How you can support individual students (if needed).*

- Remind the students of strategies they can use for solving unfamiliar words (for example, looking for the biggest known word chunk and applying their knowledge of letters, sounds, and word structure) and for clarifying meaning (rereading or reading on and referring to the illustrations and stage directions). If necessary, provide support with specific words, for example, reminding them that "c" can have a "sh" sound to help them solve "ocean" or reassuring them about the pronunciation of "cooperate".
- If necessary, explain how the adverbial phrases in italics add information about the characters' actions or feelings.
- Encourage the students to note things they are not sure about or that are of particular interest.

### Discussing and rereading the play

You can revisit this text several times, providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions according to your students' needs and their responses to the reading. Some of the suggestions overlap, and several can be explored further as after-reading activities.

 For some suggestions, you may find it helpful to project the PDF of the play so that you can zoom in on relevant sections.

- Remind the students of the reading purpose and have them briefly summarise the storyline (what the competition was for, who won, and why).
- Encourage them to share their responses to the play. Discuss ways that the writer and illustrator have made the play funny, for example:
  - the names of the superheroes
  - the boastfulness of Maxi Muscles (especially about his "strong eyebrows")
  - the silly "solutions" of the first three superheroes and making the smallest and least likely character the hero
  - the crowd falling over after each demonstration
  - the silliness in the idea of the people of the city not realising they were causing the rubbish problem (for example, throwing rubbish in the air on pages 27 and 28)
  - the change in the city sign from "Messy" to "Tidy".

- Encourage the students to think critically:
  - *What happens in the real world when people don't pick up rubbish?*
  - *What does the phrase “small solutions to big problems” mean?*
  - *Was Tiny Tot right when he said he was “not really the winner”?* Together, identify vocabulary the author has used to convey ideas about cooperation and shared responsibility (“our problem”, “everyone can win”, “together”, “cooperate”, “you are all the local superheroes”).
  - *How is Tiny Tot different from the other superheroes?*
- Have the students reread the play, stopping to discuss points of interest, including aspects they have marked with sticky notes. For example:
  - predictions or inferences the students made (or changed) as they were reading and the clues that helped them
  - the use of the present tense for the stage directions. Read some examples together and explain that they are describing what the characters are doing *as* they are talking (like instructions for the students to help them perform the play). Encourage the students to “act out” some examples.
  - how the students worked out (or tried to work out) unfamiliar words or phrases. Discuss interesting or unusual word features, such as:
    - words with silent letters or unusual spellings (for example, “Mayor”, “Muscles”, “Scene”, “honour”, “ocean”, “cooperate”)
    - the figures of speech “far and wide”, “make mincemeat”, and “pulling our legs”. Reread the sentences where they occur and discuss their meanings.
    - the component words in “Superhero”, “eyebrows”, “mincemeat”, “everyone”, “themselves”, “superwand”, “forever”, “superpower”
    - the adjectives “messy”, “smelly”, “blustery”, and “watery”. Identify the root words and experiment with creating new examples, for example, wind-y, Muscl-y, nois-y, shak-y. Discuss the need to remove the final “e” when the root word ends in “e”.
    - the “er” and “est” suffixes in the adjectives “messier”, “strongest”, “biggest”, “tiniest”, “silliest”. Together, identify the root words and the comparative and superlative forms (messy, messier, messiest; strong, stronger, strongest, and so on).
- Have the students read the play aloud, taking the roles of the various characters. Prompt them to look for clues about how the characters might speak. Remind them that the stage directions next to the characters’ names in the dialogue are not meant to be read aloud.

## After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should provide purposeful practice and reinforcement of learning goals and address the needs you have noticed from your monitoring of the students. Where possible, make links to other texts, including texts generated by the students, and to the wider literacy programme (for example, oral language, writing, handwriting, and word games and activities) and other curriculum areas. **Select from and adapt** these suggestions according to the needs of your students.

For English language learners, [SELLIPS](#) also has ideas for purposeful and relevant tasks.

- The students can build their comprehension and fluency by rereading the play while listening to the [audio version](#), which provides a model of how readers can interpret and perform a play for an audience.
- Provide many opportunities for students to reread this play and to read other related texts. They could also read the play aloud, taking the roles of different characters. Rereading plays is of particular benefit to English language learners because, as with the audio version, it provides opportunities to learn about and practise the prosodic features of English, such as intonation and phrasing.  The students could record their reading on a phone or tablet.
- Have the students summarise the actions of the main characters – the superheroes’ ideas and the outcomes.
- The students could draw before and after illustrations of the city or illustrate a favourite scene and add descriptive words, phrases, or sentences from the play as well as ideas of their own.
- The students could work in pairs to think of a situation (real or imaginary) where one of the superheroes’ powers would be useful. Have them describe the problem and explain how the superpower could solve it.
- Build the students’ confidence in reading and writing complex sentences by using the participial phrases in the stage directions to create sentences together, for example:
  - “That’s true!” yelled the crowd, holding their noses.
  - “And the rubbish isn’t gone”, said the Mayor, dusting herself off, “it’s just in smaller bits”.
 The students could work in pairs to create their own sentences.
- Give the students a table like the one below listing comparative adjectives from the play (with one row completed for the students to use as a model). Have them fill in the missing words and then choose four words to use in sentences.

| <b>big</b> | <b>bigger</b> | <b>biggest</b> |
|------------|---------------|----------------|
| messy      | messier       |                |
| smelly     |               |                |
| tidy       |               |                |
| strong     |               | strongest      |
| tiny       |               | tiniest        |
| small      | smaller       |                |
|            |               | silliest       |