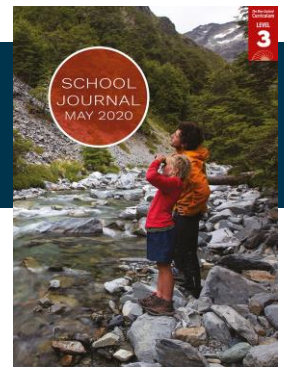


A Mugging in Maths

by Cassandra Tse

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Year 6



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.

Overview

This classroom mystery is solved by Ruby, a student who loves detective novels and who has honed her skills through reading. The author delights in mysteries and plays – and works both forms to their advantage.

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

Themes

- Humour
- Mystery
- Problem solving

Related texts

“Last Match” SJ L4 May 2020 | “Who Froze Farrell Flint?” SJ L3 May 2017 | “Dangerous Games” SJ L3 Nov 2018

Strengthening reading behaviours (what to notice)

Text structure and features

- Metaphor, other figurative or connotative language, and colloquial language
- Competing information
- Some long compound and complex sentences as dialogue
- The narrator speaking directly to the reader

Requiring students to:

- draw on their prior knowledge of colloquial language and language features in order to interpret the humour and the intended meaning
- determine its relevance to the overall problem in the play
- identify the main idea and supporting information in clauses to track the sequence of events and follow the complex plot
- engage with the information Ruby provides to solve the mystery.

Vocabulary

Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases	blackmail, air horn, confiscated, suspects, narrating, interrogator, corridor, accidentally, enthusiastically, mode, zooming out, goody-good, prank, Sruthi
Colloquial and figurative language	The floor was lava!, smashed right into, I didn't want to lose my record, it was gold, gonna, You could give Sherlock Holmes a run for his money, Oh, man!
A pun	A Mugging in Maths

Helpful prior knowledge (pre-reading and introducing the text)

- Detective noir has a particular form, with the jaded but wise narrator who's seen it all before.
- “Whodunnits” are a common genre in books and movies.

Possible reading and writing purposes

- Find out how a student solves a mystery for her teacher
- Identify, analyse, and record the twists and turns deliberately provided by the author to create a humorous mystery
- Analyse the particular language and structure features used in the play

See *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5–8* for information about teaching comprehension strategies ([Teaching comprehension](#)) and for suggestions on using this text with your students ([Approaches to teaching reading](#)).

Possible curriculum contexts

This text has links to level 3 of the New Zealand Curriculum in: **[ENGLISH](#) [THE ARTS: DRAMA](#)**

Understanding progress

The following aspects of progress are taken from the [Learning Progression Frameworks](#) and relate to the specific learning tasks below. See the LPFs for more about how students develop expertise and make progress in these aspects:

- Reading for literary experience
- Making sense of text: using knowledge of text structure and features
- Making sense of text: reading critically
- Reading to organise ideas and information for learning
- Using writing to think and organise for learning.

Strengthening understanding through reading and writing

The *School Journal* provides rich texts that can be returned to many times. The following suggestions are based on the premise that rereading the text is a fundamental part of developing students' understanding and reading skills. **Select from and adapt** them, according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences.

Note: Most of these activities lend themselves to students working in pairs or small groups.

- Ask the students to storyboard the play using the **Storyboard** template provided, adding details to represent the characters and any twists and turns.
- Have the students compare this play with another "whodunnit", for example, "Who Froze Farrell Flint?" (see Related texts). Identify common elements, such as character types, the lead detective, word choices, how the detective engages with the audience, and how the author creates confusion.
- Ask the students to write a play about Ruby solving a different mystery, using the same techniques as Cassandra Tse. Brainstorm other things that could happen in a classroom with reasons why people might not own up.
- Identify and evaluate the language features that create the sense of mystery and humour in the play. Discuss the meaning of any unfamiliar words or phrases, such as "No one! I'm narrating", "The floor was lava!", "a little crush on Ms B".
- Chart each character. Decide on information to profile such as gender, age, personality, appearance, the way they speak, and special skills. The students could include a sketch of the character and describe how they are a suspect in the crime.
- Have the students respond personally to the play, identifying what they liked or disliked or found funny or confusing. Encourage them to suggest any alternative words, phrases, or outcomes that would improve the play.
- Analyse the types of questions used by Ruby. Pull out all Ruby's questions, sorting them according to thick or thin questions (open or closed questions). Reflect on how the question types affected the types of answers and how sometimes more information was given than was needed. Have the students play a game of twenty questions, ensuring that they answer only yes or no to closed questions.
- Have the students rewrite the play as a narrative, using the conventions of dialogue. Discuss the type of dialogue that moves the story along.
- For more ideas and strategies to support English language learners, see [ESOL Online](#).

“A Mugging in Maths” Storyboard

Writing with twists and turns – a “whodunnit” planner

