



Trouble in the Foodlands

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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 detective story is another instalment in the Minnie Sharp series, the only continued storyline at this level. The distinctive tone – hard-boiled detective noir – ensures the story has an entertaining surface, and this is matched with an equally satisfying plot: Minnie is required to solve conflict in the Foodlands, the main farming district on Mars. The character, setting, voice, and themes will be familiar to those who've met Minnie Sharp, allowing for reading activities across multiple texts – but the story also stands alone.

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

Themes

- Mystery
- Problem solving
- Science fiction
- Detective work

Related texts

“Who Froze Farrell Flint?” SJ L3 May 2017 | “**Dangerous Games**” SJ L3 Nov 2018 | “**Mugging in Maths**” SJ L3 May 2020

Strengthening reading behaviours (what to notice)

Text structure and features

Requiring students to:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implied information
<i>The situation played right into Wagener's hands!</i> • Figurative language
<i>seethed with unrest</i>
<i>As if on cue</i> • Humour
<i>“Doctor Wagener sees no one without an appointment? Well, I'm No One. Hello.”</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use several sources of information in the text, such as the context and the sequence of events, with their knowledge of figurative language to infer how Wagener benefited from the situation • use their knowledge of literary language, the context, and vocabulary knowledge to understand the meaning the phrases convey • use their knowledge that words can have different meanings depending on context and how they are used to identify the humour and ambiguity in the meanings of “no one” and “No One”. |
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Vocabulary

Possibly challenging words

seethed, robotics engineer, harvesters, preservative, sauerkraut, stockpiled, bolster, fermented, fertilise, manure, permaculture, delusional, gapes, cue, scuttles, artificial intelligence, humiliated, sidle, vault, crudest, profitable, directive, nuanced, conscience, thwart, achieving, taunt

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

- Previous reading of one or both stories in the series
- Some knowledge of science fiction
- Some knowledge of the kinds of occupations that are mentioned in the story
- Some knowledge of the limitations of robots
- Knowledge that apples can be made into cider vinegar and cabbage into sauerkraut.

Possible reading and writing purposes

- Find out how a young detective on Mars solves a mystery
- Identify and evaluate the humour and other features used by the author
- Explore and describe particular features of a detective story
- Compare the plot and characterisation of Foodlands with the previous two Minnie Sharp stories.

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](#)

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; Reading to organise ideas and information for learning
- Making sense of text: using a processing system; using knowledge of text structure and features; using vocabulary knowledge; reading critically
- Creating texts to communicate current knowledge and understanding; Creating texts for literary purposes.

Strengthening understanding through reading and writing

Select from the following suggestions 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.

- Share-read page 1, then stop and ask the students to make predictions about what is going to happen. Give them some stickies and ask them to note any changes they make to their predictions as they read. Alternatively, ask the students questions when they have finished reading. *When and how did you work out the setting? Who did you think was tied to the chair? Who was Sally? When did you work out the answer to the mystery?* Ask them to complete the **Making predictions** template at the end of this TSM.
- Have the students create a timeline to determine important information and the sequence of events. If your students require more support, you could have a discussion first and identify some key events to put in a timeline, such as "Phone call from chief", "Dr Topp using Martian bacteria as a preservative", and "Man tied to a chair". Have them share their timelines and clarify any confusion.
- Challenge the students to summarise orally in one minute how Minnie Sharp solved the mystery. They could do this in pairs or one at a time to the group. Before they start, give them a few minutes to think about what they will say and note down some key words. Then time them. They must stop speaking when a minute is up.
- Discuss what is meant by implied information, figurative language, and humour. Ask the students to locate examples of each in the text and record them using a simple table. Some English language learners find it difficult to identify humour, especially in unfamiliar contexts or when plays on words are involved. You could pair English language learners with native speakers of English for this task. If the students continue to struggle to understand the humour, provide explicit explanations.
- Identify and discuss any challenging words.
- Ask the students to identify the clues the author provided to help readers solve the mystery. If necessary, you could prompt them with questions that direct them to relevant parts of the text. *What do you think Doctor Wagener had hoped for in the story? Did his plan work? Why not? What kind of character is Minnie? What role did the Red Planet Police have on Mars? On page 34, when the robots began working on Doctor Wagener's farm, the other farmers crops failed – why do you think this happened? On page 38, Minnie referred to herself as "No One" – why? What were the clues that something other than chickens had destroyed the crops? On page 36, Minnie thinks to herself about acting quickly before there is a second crisis. What was the first crisis?*
- Have the students create a graphic organiser showing the relationships between the characters. Ask them to place Minnie in the middle with the other characters around her and then draw lines to those characters with whom she has connections. Ask them to explain the nature of those connections in note form by writing on the lines.  The students could take screen grabs of the illustrations of each character from the online PDF of the story and use them to create their graphic organiser.
- The students could use "Trouble in the Foodlands" as a starting point to write on one of the following topics:
 - What would life be like if robots with artificial intelligence took over the school, country, or world?
 - What would you use a robot for if you were given one?
 - What would life be like if you could travel between planets?
 - Write about a mystery that you solved.
 - Write a new ending to "Trouble in Foodlands".
 - Write your own mystery.

“Trouble in the Foodlands” Making predictions

Finish these sentences to record how your predictions changed as you read “Trouble in the Foodlands”.

At first I thought

but when I read

I changed my mind/didn't change my mind because

When I read

I thought.....

Then I read

and I thought.....

I changed my prediction on page ... because the text said.....

so I thought.....

because.....