



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 story has a mission: to shed light on the concept of algorithms, in particular the ways in which they influence our access to news. Bernard Beckett takes the Covid-19 lockdown as his starting point, using this shared experience to provide humour and appeal. This relevant context also allows students to explore the idea that people have different interests and perspectives and that news on social media has been curated for the user and may not represent all aspects of current events.

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

Themes

- Algorithms
- Online news
- Influencing
- Online safety

Related texts

“Suckered” SJ L3 Nov 2018 | “As Easy as One, Two, Three” SJ L2 June 2018 | “Amazing Algorithms” *Step by Step* Connected L2 2018

Strengthening reading behaviours (what to notice)

Text structure and features

- Abstract ideas
“Whenever you visit my site, the algorithm looks at all the things you’ve been doing on your computer ... Then it finds people with similar tastes and looks at the stuff they click on and that’s what the algorithm will also offer you. It’s found a reliable pattern, which solves the problem of what you want.”
- Dialogue, including questions on behalf of the reader
*How come we were on the same site but seeing different stuff?
What did news have to do with winning chess?
How will we know if we’ve missed stuff that really matters?*

Requiring students to:

- use linking words, key words, and sentence structure to track the information as the explanation sequence builds over several sentences to understand how algorithms work
- understand that the questions are a device used for conveying important information for the reader. The students may recognise that they had similar questions while reading Andrew’s algorithm explanation.

Vocabulary

Possibly challenging words

appalled, vaccine, unicycle, profiles, footage, conceded, plausible, algorithms, mercenary, banal, shrugged

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

- Lockdown experience and the concepts associated with it (flattening the curve, developing vaccines)
- The main news stories during the Covid-19 lockdown
- Some understanding that algorithms influence news and information on social media.

Possible reading and writing purposes

- Find out how everyone gets the news they want during lockdown
- Identify and explain how algorithms work
- Discuss the negatives and positives of having the news shaped for individuals
- Identify the author's message.

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](#) [TECHNOLOGY \(DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES\)](#)

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 a processing system; using knowledge of text structure and features; vocabulary knowledge; reading critically
- Creating texts to communicate current knowledge and understanding; creating texts to influence others.

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.

- Have the students discuss the story and clarify anything that is unclear. Prompt them to make connections and respond to the text. *How did your family keep up to date with the news and other information during the Covid-19 lockdown? What routines did you have? How did you communicate with friends, your extended family, your teacher? What news would you get on Big News and why? What is something in the story that you don't understand?*
- Have the students complete the **PMI** template at the end of this TSM, noting down plus, minus, and interesting things about the use of algorithms on people's personal devices.
- Ask the students to identify any words that they didn't understand and clarify their meaning. Remind them that the author's word choice is deliberate to convey a particular message or to create a specific effect, for example, the words describing Calvin on page 45 create a vivid picture: "He especially loved footage of people flipping off jumps while they clung to their handlebars like frogs". Have the students choose some phrases from the story and substitute some of the words to see how the sense or message is altered. For example, "Andrew shrugged", "Andrew smiled"; "looked unimpressed", "looked fascinated"; "terrible idea", "great idea".
- Review features of narrative structure (such as setting, character, plot, POV) and then have the students analyse the use of those features in the story, for example, this story uses the third person.
- Have the students highlight dialogue, including questions, about algorithms. Discuss how each example helps the reader understand what algorithms are and how they work.
- Ask the students to match the characters with what they saw on Big News. Discuss why there were differences and what it means for viewers. *What did Lucy not want to see? What other things might have been on the news at the time that were not mentioned? Was what each person saw "false"? How does viewing only one aspect of the news make you see the world? Does it matter? How does the message about social media, algorithms, and only seeing what you want to see relate to you?* Ask the students whether they think that the use of algorithms in social media is good or bad. Give them time to consider their opinion and the reasons why, and then have them form a continuum to show where they stand. Ask them to justify their position on the continuum.
- Prompt the students to identify what they think the author was trying to say. *What was the author's message, and how do you know? What evidence of this is in the text? How did the author convey this message to you?* (For example, by using a familiar setting [school], believable characters, and an authentic, current situation [lockdown].)
- Ask the students to write:
 - an explanation of how algorithms work (allow them to choose the form in which they present their explanation)
 - a persuasive response on the topic of whether the use of algorithms by social media news is good or bad (Provide differentiated sentence starters or writing frames to scaffold English language learners.)
 - about their own experiences during lockdown.

“News for You” PMI

In the chart below, record the positive, minus, and interesting things about the use of algorithms on people’s personal devices.

P	M	I

How does the author’s message relate to me?