

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 “Now We're Talking” for students to develop the behaviours expected when reading at Purple.

Overview

In this humorous science-fiction play, a computer virus causes problems at an interplanetary planning meeting for the Space Games. Students will enjoy the misunderstandings between the characters as they attempt to make sense of the nonsense created by a faulty language translation program.

“Now We're Talking” 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). It also provides many opportunities for students to experiment with language and to practise and enjoy expressive oral reading.

There is a PDF of this text and an audio version as an MP3 file at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Humorous science-fiction stories or plays: *Fleeb Makes Scones* (RTR Green); *Fleeb Watches TV* (RTR Orange); *Kara's Music* (RTR Turquoise); “Saving Planet Stripe” (JJ 36); “I Spy” (JJ 50); “Zapped!” (a story published in four chapters in *Junior Journals* 52–55); “Space Rubbish” (JJ 58)

Plays that involve mix-ups and misunderstandings: “Fearless” (JJ 35); “Buried Treasure” (JJ 53); “Professor Clever” (JJ 57)

Books that feature mixed-up or made-up language: *Don't Forget the Bacon* by Pat Hutchins; books by Dr Seuss; *The BFG* by Roald Dahl

Text characteristics

“Now We're Talking” includes the following features that help students develop the reading behaviours expected at Purple and build knowledge of the conventions of plays.

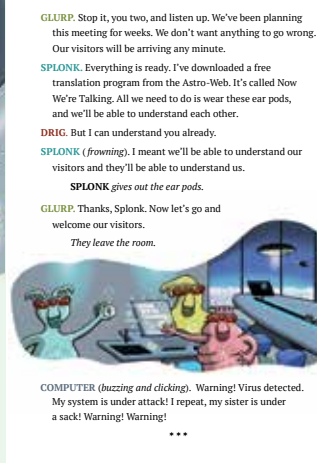
The format of the text as a play, which relies on dialogue and stage directions to tell the story and convey characterisation

Conventions such as coloured upper-case letters for character names and the use of italics and the present tense for stage directions

A mix of explicit and implicit content, requiring students to make connections to their prior knowledge to make predictions and inferences

Many humorous mixed-up phrases and some vocabulary that may be unfamiliar (for example, “Characters”, “Scene”, “host”, “Zero-gravity”, “shot-put”, “Lunar”, “hurdles”, “translation program”, “Astro-Web”, “Warning”, “Virus detected”, “system”, “puzzled”, “custard”, “mention”, “sighs”, “staring”, “interrupting”, “genius”, “anti-virus software”, “Dodgy”, “Detector”), requiring students to use their processing systems

A variety of sentence structures, including adverbial phrases in the stage directions and statements used as questions, requiring students to attend to linking words and punctuation to track events and clarify connections between ideas



Language features that enable students to apply and extend their vocabulary knowledge and processing systems:

- the figure of speech “now we're talking”
- the characters' mixed-up language
- noun phrases (for example, “planning meeting”, “Space Games”, “Zero-gravity shot-put”, “Lunar long jump”, “Space rock hurdles”, “translation program”, “sports centre”, “anti-virus software”) requiring students to read on to get the full meaning
- the playful use of punctuation

Cross-curriculum links

English (Reading)

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

Level 2 – Language features: Show some understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

Level 2 – Ideas: Uses their personal experience and world and literacy knowledge to make meaning from texts.

The Arts (Drama)

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



Suggested reading purpose

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

- To find out what happens in the space games planning meeting
- To use the play's format to find clues to help read this play to an audience

Possible learning goals

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:

- use information in the dialogue, the stage directions, and the illustrations to track ideas and events (**summarise**)
- **make connections** between their prior knowledge (for example, of humorous plays and science fiction) and information in the play to **make predictions and inferences**
- **make inferences** about how the characters might act, speak, and think
- discuss how the writer has made this play fun to read (**analyse**)
- **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.



Introducing the play

Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that your introduction builds or activates their prior knowledge and provides appropriate support for a successful first reading. Several options are provided below for you to **select from and adapt**. A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>

For English language learners, before the whole-group session, you could use the title, character list, and the illustrations to discuss the setting and context and introduce some key vocabulary. You can find further information about features of texts that may need support at [ELLP](#).

- Expect the students to notice from the text layout that this is a play. Briefly review the features of a play: the story told mostly through dialogue, the character names (in capital letters) that show who is speaking, and the stage directions (in italics) that give extra information.
- Use the title, the list of characters, and the illustrations on pages 26 and 27 to generate discussion of the setting and possible context. You could introduce the term “science fiction” and briefly explain that it involves stories (or plays) about an imaginary world that are often set in the future and in space and are based on ideas about science and technology (for example, *Kara's Music*, RTR). Encourage the students to make connections to other examples from books, games, television, or films.
- Together, read the Scene One stage directions and the dialogue on page 26. Clarify what “shot-put” and “hurdles” are, and enjoy speculating about what these sports might be like in a space setting.
- If necessary, explain what a meeting is. Support the students to infer that Glurp, Drig, and Splonk are hosting the meeting and that the characters shown in the bottom row on page 26 are the visitors.
- Remind the students of the title. Explain that usually we say “Now we're talking” when people understand each other and are working well together. *I wonder if that's what will happen here?* Have the students read page 27 then think, pair, and share their predictions. Clarify what a “translation program” is and prompt the students to infer why it is needed (because the visitors may speak a different language). Expect the students to notice a problem developing at the end of page 27 and to predict or wonder why the computer is speaking nonsense.
- 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 individuals.
- Give the students sticky notes to mark new words or questions and ideas that arise as they read.

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. 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 track ideas and events.

- They use the character names and the stage directions in parentheses to track who is speaking and what the characters are doing or thinking.
- They notice the three stars at the end of page 27 to indicate the end of this phase of the play (Scene One), and on page 28, they use the illustration and the information in the stage directions to clarify that the hosts have now collected the visitors and taken them to the meeting room.
- From page 28, they notice that the word mix-ups are affecting all the characters, not just the computer.
- They notice the use of question marks to change statements into questions, for example, "We need some ripe pears?", "A sports centre on a spoon?"
- They notice the link to the title in the name of the translation program on page 27 and Glurp's dialogue on page 32.

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

- They use the stage directions and dialogue, including punctuation such as question marks and exclamation marks, to infer how the characters are feeling and how they might speak.
- They visualise and enjoy the humour in the mixed-up messages.
- They infer from the reactions of the characters that they don't realise that the computer program is mixing up their words.

- They use their knowledge of narrative structure and humorous plays to predict that there will be a series of misunderstandings and that the characters will eventually work out the problem and try to fix it.
- They predict from its name that Dodgy Dirk's Almost Perfect Nearly Working Probably OK Virus Detector won't fix the problem, and they confirm this when the computer starts to mix up its words again at the end of the play.
- On page 32 (where there are no "correct" versions of the mixed-up words), they use the context and their knowledge of spoken language and rhyme to infer what the computer is trying to say.

They demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving.


- They look for the biggest known chunk within unfamiliar words, for example, "As-tro Web", "down-loaded", "trans-la-tion", "men-tion".
- They make connections between their language knowledge, the context of the conversation, and the similarities in the sounds of the mixed-up words to identify the differences between what the characters say and what the other characters hear.
- They use their awareness that the words are supposed to be mixed up to check their decoding so that they avoid automatically self-correcting and missing the humour, for example, "better" not "better", "pea" not "me".
- They mark words or phrases they want to come back to.

Deliberate acts of teaching

Examples of how you can support individual students (if needed).

- Clarify that the adverbial phrases (stage directions) in italics add information about what the characters are doing and thinking while they are speaking.
- Remind the students of word-solving strategies they can use (for example, looking for the biggest known word chunk and applying their knowledge of letters, sounds, and word structure) and for clarifying meaning (especially in regard to the mixed-up phrases) by rereading or reading on, referring to the illustrations and stage directions, and thinking about what would make sense if the language wasn't mixed up.

Discussing and rereading the play

You can revisit this play 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 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.

- Enjoy the students' responses to the play. Ask them to share their favourite word mix-ups. If necessary, work through the first one together ("ideas"/"ripe pears"/"white ears") to make sure they have got the idea. You could start a T-chart to record other mix-ups and how the words are changing. The students could complete it as an after-reading activity.
- Have the students summarise what happened in the play. Begin by asking them to identify the setting, the context, and the two sets of characters (the hosts and the visitors), then move on to the problem and attempted solution. Ask them to locate evidence in the text to support what they say. If necessary, clarify aspects such as the purpose of a translation program and the risks involved with downloading free software (especially software that has the word "Dodgy" in its name).

- Prompt the students to think critically about how the writer and illustrator have made the play funny. For example:
 - the names of the characters
 - the illustrations
 - the idea of games in space where there is zero gravity
 - the muddled language
 - the characters not realising that what they’re saying is not what the other characters are hearing
 - the joke in the title (because most of the time, the conversations are not going well)
 - the idea of the characters trusting the “Dodgy Dirk” software.
- Have the students reread the play, stopping to discuss points of interest including aspects they have marked with sticky notes. Suggestions are listed below.
 - Ask the students to share predictions or inferences they made (or changed) as they were reading.
 - Identify clues in the text and the illustrations about how the characters might act and speak. Encourage the students to read sections of dialogue and act out the accompanying stage directions (for example, “buzzing and clicking”, “puzzled”, “frowning and touching his ear pods”, “helpfully”). Explain that these provide information but are not meant to be read aloud. Follow up by having the students read the whole play aloud, taking the roles of the various characters. You can provide extra support by reading along with the students, modelling intonation and phrasing.

Gaining control of these prosodic features of language is particularly important for English language learners.

- Draw attention to the use of the present tense for the stage directions. Read some examples together and explain that, in contrast to stories (which are often written in the past tense), the stage directions are describing where the characters are and what they are doing right now.
- Discuss how the students worked out (or tried to work out) unfamiliar words or phrases. You could draw attention to word features such as:
 - » the impact on meaning of the prefix “anti” in “anti-virus”
 - » noun phrases, such as “planning meeting”, “Space Games”, “Zero-gravity shot put”, “Lunar long jump”, “Space rock hurdles”, “translation program”, “sports centre”, “antivirus software”. Explain that nouns are often combined with adjectives or other descriptive words to provide more information for the reader. Remind the students of the importance of reading on to get the full meaning.
 - » the vocabulary associated with the various contexts in the play (as shown below). Choose one of the contexts and support the students to identify relevant words and discuss their meanings. The students could explore the other contexts as an after-reading activity.

meetings	meeting room, host, planning, visitors, listen, table, discuss, ideas, mention
sports	Space Games, shot-put, long jump, hurdles, sports centre, course, banned
space	planet Gloop, zero-gravity, lunar, space rock, moon, sun,
technology	computer, downloaded, translation program, Astro-Web, ear pods, virus, detected, system, buzzing, clicking, anti-virus software, keys, lights


- » how, in the mixed-up phrases (including those of the computer on page 32 that are not linked to a “correct” version), different spellings can have similar sounds, for example: ideas, pears, ears; agree, pea, me; moo, you; kite, right; trouble, bubble; sister, system; eight, great; grow, go. Enjoy generating further examples together.

Provide support as required and note any aspects you might want to follow up on later, perhaps as a mini-lesson or as an after-reading activity.

After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students’ needs during the lesson and provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. 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, spelling) and other curriculum areas. **Select from and adapt** these suggestions, according to the needs of your students.

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

- Provide many opportunities for the students to reread this play and to read other humorous plays or stories (see Related texts). They can build their comprehension and fluency by rereading the text as they listen to the audio version.
- Encourage the students to perform the play.  They could record their performance on a phone or tablet or on the school’s sharing platform.
- The students could write and illustrate another scene about what happens after the play ends, or they could work in pairs to design and describe other events for the Space Games.
- Have the students complete the language mix-ups chart started when discussing the play. They could illustrate their favourite examples. Alternatively, they could experiment with changing initial letters and blends or substituting similar-sounding words to create their own mixed-up phrases.
- To build vocabulary, create a sorting game by writing all the words in the text related to meetings, sports, space, or technology on cards, (see the lists in Discussing the play) turned face down. Have the students take turns to take a card and say which of these contexts it belongs to and why it belongs there.



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