

Save the Earth Song

by James Brown

School Journal
Level 4, May 2021
Year 7



The Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) 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

Poet James Brown explores the perils of inertia and disassociation when it comes to climate change. Implicit to the poem is a fundamental question: Why do so many people do nothing when we know the stakes are so high? This is a companion text to recent level 4 journal articles about climate change.

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

Themes

- Climate change
- Responsibility
- Human behaviour and group psychology

Related texts

“Climate Change: Our Biggest Challenge” SJ L4 June 2018 | “Feedback” SJ L4 May 2020 | “Reducing Our Footprint” SJ L4 May 2021

Strengthening reading behaviours (what to notice)

Text structure and features

- Implied ideas
and says nothing
but is telling us everything
so we know what we have to do but
- The significance of the form (billed as a song)
People often sing in unison, implying the author’s hope that we join forces to harness our energy and affect change (Also the rhythm in the first stanza could be seen as an ironic kind of lullaby)
- Cyclical structure (last line links back to the first line)
so we know what we have to do but (last line)
our thoughts give in to our ease (first line)
and last word in each line repeated in the following line
- Final stanza disrupts the rhythm

Requiring students to:

- use prior knowledge and the context to infer that apathy is one of our biggest enemies and that we are the problem but also the solution
- synthesise information across the poem, including the effect of the form and structure, to infer the author’s message
- use knowledge of poetic structures and features to notice that the first line seems sudden and disjointed, requiring rereading
- recognise and analyse the author’s deliberate use of structure and form and synthesise this with the ideas and features to understand that he is telling us to not be lulled by the music: to wake up, take action, do something, and break the cycle.

Vocabulary

Unusual use of otherwise familiar verbs give in, shrugs, flaps, wheeze, tunes in, play, drift, cry, taps, turns

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

- Climate change is a major issue.
- Climate change has been caused by human behaviour (but we can also provide the solution).
- Even when people know a situation is dire and action is required, they do nothing – for a variety of reasons.
- There are many kinds of cycles (or feedback loops).
- Poems use particular language devices.

Possible reading and writing purposes

- Enjoy and respond to a clever poem with a strong message
- Analyse and evaluate the structures and features the poet uses
- Synthesise the poet's ideas to develop our own interpretations of his message and his purpose
- Compare the poet's ideas and message with other *School Journal* articles about climate change.

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 4 of *The New Zealand Curriculum* in: [ENGLISH](#) [SOCIAL SCIENCES](#)

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: reading critically; using knowledge of text structure and features
- Reading to organise ideas and information for learning
- Creating texts: for literary purposes; 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 read the poem to themselves several times and then ask them to read it aloud. Prompt their partner or the rest of the group to notice where they put emphasis or expression as they read. *Does the way they read the poem show an importance of particular words or a connection to particular ideas?* Discuss how and why poetry makes connections for us.
- Pose the questions: *What do you think is the message in the poem? What was the poet trying to tell us? How did he do this? Do you agree or disagree with the poet's message?* Allow time for the students to reflect, and then have them share their ideas.
- Ask the students to reflect on the poet's purpose and the way he has used language to achieve it. *How does the poem make you feel? Who does it speak to? What techniques does the poet use? What images are in the poem? What words or phrases are particularly effective and why?* (For example, "and the clouds cry into the rain" – the poet has used personification to suggest the clouds are full of thoughts about what is happening in our environment and the rain is their tears. The clouds are sad about what is happening on Earth.) Provide a scaffold chart for English language learners to refer to when they are thinking about this question. The chart should include the names of the poetic devices along with a definition and an example for each. Some students may benefit from teacher modelling of each poetic device prior to reading the poem.
- Have the students record their initial ideas individually, adding bullets to the left-hand column of the **Give one, get one** template at the end of this TSM. Provide the subheadings suggested or just ask them to record what they noticed. When ready, ask them to pair and share with three or four other students, one at a time. They each share their "Give one" side, ticking the idea if they already have it and adding one new idea (if they agree with it) to the "Get one" side. Once they have a new idea, they raise a hand to show they are ready to pair and share with another person. They repeat this process until they have three or four new ideas from others. On their own again, the students write a summary statement about the message with at least two pieces of evidence showing how the poet conveyed this.
- Have the students read another *School Journal* article about climate change (see Related Texts on page 1). They could record the key messages and make comparisons, using a Venn diagram (or another graphic organiser), to show ideas that the two texts have in common and ideas that are different.
- The students could record themselves reading the poem aloud, with appropriate music and sound effects added.
- The students could use the poem as a model to write their own climate song.

