



LEVEL 1 2 3 4 5

The Diving Board

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This teacher read “The Poison Ladies” by H. E. Bates to her class as a model of writing. This story describes a child being urged to do something that he is frightened of. The students listened to and followed the text and then discussed the story. The teacher asked the students:

- How does the opening sentence set the mood?
- How do the first and last sentences hook or link to each other?
- How does the use of dialogue add to the characterisation?
- How does the author use “the senses” in the story?
- How does he use devices such as similes?
- What sort of figurative or descriptive language does he use to show that the boy is frightened?

After sharing relevant personal stories, the students each selected a significant personal experience to write about and aimed to use the literary devices that they had identified in the model.

The students shared their first drafts with each other and conferenced with the teacher. Anna’s piece has been edited with the teacher, and she now needs to proofread it for spelling and punctuation independently, before publishing it.

Teacher-student conversations

During conferencing with Anna’s teacher

Teacher: Read me your first sentence ... Now, your last sentence ... What have you done?

Anna: I’ve hooked the first sentence to the last one.

Teacher: I think it’s effective in your story. Have you written exactly what you meant to say?

Anna: I don’t need “like” in the first sentence, then it’s exactly the same as the last one.

Teacher: Can you find the part in “The Poison Ladies” where we can tell that the little boy was frightened? What has the writer done?

Anna: He’s given clues without saying that he was frightened.

Teacher: I can imagine that you would have felt really nervous making your way up to the top of the diving board!

Anna: Yes.

Teacher: How did you feel when you were actually going up the steps?

Anna: It was like I was in slow motion, ‘cos I didn’t really want to go up.

Teacher: How could you show your readers what that was like?

Anna: ... I could say something about going up the steps.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

During close reading, teachers can encourage students to identify language features and literary devices that would enhance their own writing. Teachers can direct students to appropriate texts, for example, *School Journal* stories or extracts from novels, and give them such specific tasks as finding examples:

- of a simile describing movement;
- of direct speech that gives clues to character.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Anna towards the next learning step, the teacher could help her to focus on:

- ideas: developing interpretive comments, evaluations, and observations (for example, details of what was happening and how Anna felt);
- language features:
 - using other features (such as metaphor and personification) to amplify content and give the reader clues
 - using dialogue when appropriate to add to the characterisation;
- sentence structure and punctuation: looking at the work of published authors to see how listing sentences can be written;
- spelling: doubling some consonants when adding a suffix (for example, grab, grabbed).

The teacher could do this by:

- modelling texts that contain clear examples of particular language features, discussing and identifying how the literary devices are used;
- “walking Anna through” the experience to be written about to help her focus on details.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Level 4: Writing Functions

Poetic Writing: Students should write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing, and reworking texts in a range of genres, expressing ideas and experiences imaginatively and using appropriate vocabulary and conventions, such as spelling and sentence structure.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should identify, discuss, and use the conventions, structures, and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

Thinking Critically: Students should discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35–36

LEVEL 1 2 3 4 5

The Diving Board

STUDENT’S SECOND DRAFT

When you’re just a short person the ~~the~~ diving board looks like a million miles high. I was only five but Lucy was ~~and~~ and that was practically an adult ^{ten} to me, because she was so much bigger ^{than} me and because she could jump off the diving board. I thought I’d never be able to do that even if I lived be a billion years old. I wouldn’t even of gone up to see except for the fact that Lucy promised me the rest of her ice cream if I did it. So I was standing up there all alone my heart practically jumped out of my chest my fists clenched tightly. When I got to the end ^{of the board} I really didn’t want to do it, but I wanted Lucy to think I was cool. ^{& I wanted the ice cream.} So I stood at the end, toes over the side. Shut my eyes, held my nose, and jumped ^{PW} when I got out of the water I couldn’t believe I’d done it because when you’re just a short ~~small~~ person, the diving board looks a million miles high.

* As I made my way towards the steps everything else was in fast forward or I was in slow motion. I grabbed the hand rail and headed ^{to the top.} The steps seemed to go on forever. Each step I took the more my legs trembled.



Poetic Writing: Personal Experience

LEVEL 1 2 3 4 5

What the Work Shows

Anna explores a personally significant event in some detail. She successfully engages the reader by using a deliberately conversational tone, sharing her thoughts and feelings clearly, and by building up a strong sense of tension. Much of this build-up is achieved by using a range of sentence lengths and structures. Everything in this piece leads to the satisfying ending.

STUDENT'S SECOND DRAFT

DEEPER FEATURES

Voice

Personal voice apparent – conversational tone.

Ideas

Explores a personally meaningful event and uses substantial illustrations to support the theme.

Structure

Shapes ideas for a meaningful effect, for example, repeating the first sentence as a closure.

Organises ideas into paragraphs.

Sentences

Uses a variety of sentence structures for effect.

Vocabulary

Selects words that clearly convey her story and feelings to her audience.

Uses verbs that capture the action.

Language features

Makes some attempt at imagery.

When you're just a short person the diving board looks a million miles high.

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I thought I'd never be able to do that even if I lived be a bizillion years old. I wouldn't evenof gone up to see exept for the fact that Lucy promised me the rest of her ice cream if I did it.

As I made my way 2wards the steps everything else was in fast fowrd or I was in slow motion. I grabed the hand rail and headed to the top. The steps seemed to go on 4 ever. Each step I took the more my legs trembled.

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When I got out of the water I couldn't believe I'd done it because when you're just a short person, the diving board looks a milloin miles high.

SURFACE FEATURES

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions accurately.

Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words correctly.

Punctuation

Uses appropriate punctuation independently, including commas and apostrophes.

REFERENCES

Bates, H. E. "The Poison Ladies" in Abbs, Peter and Richardson, John (1990). *The Forms of Narrative – a Practical Guide for English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.