

Teacher talk *Faraway Places*

Read about evidence-based theories that underpin best teaching practices. By learning more about the theory behind teaching strategies you will develop a deeper understanding of what 'works best' for the students in your classroom.

Teacher talk will help you to understand the pedagogic practices surrounding the '[Big Six](#)' focus areas. You will discover a range of instructional strategies that integrate these core elements of reading development.

Inclusive teaching and learning opportunities that build on the Big Six as well as students' needs, strengths and interests are vital for building student capacity in learning English. This can be a complex and challenging task. Teacher talk offers instructional strategies aimed at scaffolding the learning of a diverse range of students, including English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Try these strategies as you share *Faraway Places* with your class, and use them in other aspects of your reading program. Discuss with your colleagues the instructional practices that resonate with you, and those that have been effective in your classroom.

Scaffolding student learning

Faraway Places is a poem with three verses. The first verse is about the moon and outer space, the second verse presents the concept of being under the sea with marine life, and the last verse introduces the environment and wildlife of Antarctica. It's important to scaffold your students' experiences as they explore each verse so they can make meaning, understand new language, and further develop their oral language and vocabulary.

Making meaning

As you revisit the poem, verse by verse, allow for extended conversations around the concept of being able to explore different environments. Offer opportunity and time for students to have a personal response to the poem, either through talking or drawing.

During these discussions you can scaffold and support students' understandings by:

- finding out students' prior knowledge
- encouraging students to make connections to their personal experiences
- explaining important concepts such as 'no gravity', 'leap', 'soar', 'schools of fish', 'icebergs' or 'glaciers'
- exploring the use of verbs or nouns.

Talking about the poem

Talking about literature provides many learning opportunities. It allows students time to share ideas and opinions, and to listen to others. Sharing and discussing poems exposes students to a type of text they may not be as familiar with, and to a range of vocabulary.

Use *Faraway Places* to engage students in class, small group and partner discussions. Ask students to talk about interesting words in the poem, describe places they have visited and discuss or share other poems they know.

Social talk

It is important to remember the use of talk time with peers when building students' vocabulary and developing their understanding of a text, as studies have shown 'children, especially English learners, learn best when they are able to talk about what they are doing and learn from each other' (Cecil, 2011, p. 174).

Allow students time to talk about the different environments and the landforms and wildlife that are presented in *Faraway Places*. Each verse explores different environments (outer space, sea/ocean and Antarctica), and two verses explore wildlife that can be found in these environments.

Visualising and drawing

The instructional practice of helping students create mental images and supporting them to visualise what is happening within a text helps them to engage with the content presented by the author and assists understanding (Gambrell and Koskinen, 2002). The poem *Faraway Places* offers the opportunity to use your students' prior experiences and knowledge, as well as new learnings, to create mental images that they can then express through drawing.

Visualising and drawing is a great way for students to express what they have learnt. Guide your students through this process to help them create mental images which they can then use for drawing. Set aside time to revisit each verse separately. This can be done as a whole group or in small groups according to student needs.

For each verse you can follow these instructional steps:

1. allow students time to hear, talk about and use the language phrase by phrase
2. explore and talk about the illustrations within the text
3. view and talk about related images and video clips of the different environments represented in the poem
4. encourage students to notice particular aspects about the different environments and the animal features: *What do you notice about ...?*
5. use the 'think aloud' process to demonstrate how to create a mental image of one of the environments or the wildlife in the poem such as 'a green turtle swimming in the sea', 'bright schools of fish' or 'glaciers, icebergs and penguins': *Describe what you are 'seeing in your mind' or visualising...*
6. have students close their eyes and create mental pictures in their heads
7. have students talk in pairs or in groups to describe their mental images.

Reflecting by drawing

Once students have practised visualising in their mind they can create drawings. These drawings can be used as a stimulus for talking or writing to help students make meaning about what they have learnt. Providing time, opportunity, encouragement and resources for students to draw and then talk and/or write about their drawings allows students to make meaning (Mackenzie, 2018).

When using drawing as a strategy for reflection you can help students to:

- express their visual images
- show what they know or have learnt about each environment or particular wildlife
- talk about their drawings with their peers as they create
- use digital technology tools to reproduce their drawings or create new digital images to talk about
- use digital tools to create voice recordings to describe their illustrations.

Drawing to express learning

Artwork can be used as a way for teachers to understand students' experiences and knowledge. Meaning-making through non-textual elements is particularly useful in diverse classrooms where the linguistic and cultural resources of students may be limited (Binder, 2011). Encouraging students to communicate their thoughts, understandings or learnings through drawing supports students whose home language is not English.

Use the poem *Faraway Places* as an opportunity to combine literacy, drawing and other art mediums. The students' drawings and/or artwork will demonstrate their understanding of each environment or the features of the wildlife that live in a particular environment.

You can:

- observe the detail of the artwork produced by students
- acknowledge the information presented through the artwork
- appreciate what the students have expressed
- make informed judgements about what your students know
- think about elements or concepts that may require further growth in understanding.

More information on children's art and literacy can be found in [this article](#).

Vocabulary building

Illustrating words or phrases

Embedding art into vocabulary instruction can be an engaging way to target growth in vocabulary and concept development. Explicitly teaching vocabulary through art helps clarify student misconceptions of word meanings and results in improved growth of vocabulary knowledge (LaBrocca and Morrow, 2016).

Faraway Places offers the opportunity for students to select words or phrases from the poem to illustrate. Using this strategy allows students the freedom to express meaning through drawing. These illustrations can be used to create a word wall or used by students in small-group discussions.

Here are some examples of words and phrases from *Faraway Places* that can be used for concept and vocabulary development:

- speed off in my rocket
- explore
- no gravity here
- leap and soar
- marvellous
- bright schools of fish
- magical
- Antarctica
- seals on ice
- penguins abound

Descriptive language

Descriptive language can make a story come alive or transport a reader to a real, factual place. Building a student's understanding of adjectives and adverbial phrases and how to use them will help their language development. The more exposure students have to examples of descriptive language, the more confident they will become to use it, both orally and in their writing.

Use *Faraway Places* to assist your students to recognise descriptive language. As you read the text, point out and discuss the words and phrases the author uses to describe the settings and actions of the girl. Talk about the visual images these words create. Use these illustrations as a stimulus for discussion and as a time to revisit and use the language.

Some examples of descriptive language in *Faraway Places* include:

- it's magical under the sea
- far, far away
- dive deep down under the sea
- a most marvellous place
- huge glaciers
- birds soaring around.

Fluency and choral reading

Teaching and practising elements of fluency are important aspects of learning to read. The poem *Faraway Places* provides an enjoyable context for students to practise reading aloud using phrasing, expression and intonation. Additionally, students can be encouraged to listen for rhyme in the poem.

Choral reading is beneficial for hearing and using rhythm, phrasing and expression of the English language and can be used as an instructional strategy for less fluent readers and students for whom English is an additional language (Cecil, 2011).

After you have modelled how to read *Faraway Places* revisit the poem verse by verse using the following steps for a fun shared choral reading experience:

1. select either verse 1, 2 or 3 to view on screen
2. tell the students the focus is rhythm, phrasing and expression
3. explain and demonstrate rhythm, phrasing and expression using each line of the verse
4. read aloud each line several times
5. students repeat aloud the line with teacher guidance
6. students repeat aloud the line independently
7. continue until the end of the verse
8. now read aloud two lines in order for students to hear the rhyme
9. students repeat two lines with teacher guidance
10. students repeat two lines independently
11. as the students become more familiar with the text they can read aloud the whole verse
12. record the students so they can listen to themselves or record different groups of students.

For more ideas on using poetry with your students, go to [Australian Children's Poetry](#).

Phonemic awareness

When learning to read and write it is important for your students to be able to hear in sequence the individual sounds within a word. Some students may need additional support to do this. The following task will support them to hear and isolate phonemes within words.

Isolating sounds

Use words from *Faraway Places* to support students in isolating individual sounds within words. Teach students how to use sound boxes as a supportive framework for isolating phonemes.

Use the word 'moon' and the sound boxes to isolate the word's three individual phonemes (this can be done with one student or in a small-group setting).

1. Slowly articulate the word for the student to hear: 'mmm-oooo-nnnn'.
2. Ask the student to say the word slowly.
3. Use boxes and three counters as a visual model for the sounds articulated.



4. Demonstrate the procedure for the student. Say the word slowly for the student and push the counters into the boxes, sound by sound.
5. Now ask the student to do this independently.
6. If the student finds this challenging support them by sharing the task. The student says the word while you push the counters up into the boxes, and/or you say the word slowly and have the student push the counters into the boxes. You could further support the student by guiding their hand to push the counters up into the required boxes.

Use other words in the text that are suitable for your students to revise and reinforce phonics concepts they have learnt.

Some words to consider include:

- Verse 1 - fly, land, jump, speed
- Verse 2 - deep, swim, fish, free, yellow
- Verse 3 - see, fun, sun, cold

Australian Curriculum links

Foundation: [AC9EFLY10](#), [AC9EFLY12](#)

Year 1: [AC9E1LY09](#), [AC9E1LY11](#)

References

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