



ALPAA Text Notes

James and the Giant Peach

by Roald Dahl (2007: Puffin Books)

Text notes written for use with the Accelerated Literacy teaching routine, written by Wendy Cowey and Margaret Graetz for ALPAA

These notes have been developed by AL practitioners and are offered in good faith for other AL teachers to use as a resource for their own classroom teaching.

Notes on this site presume that the people who use them have some training in the Accelerated Literacy teaching method. This knowledge could include professional development such as the Accelerated Literacy Intensive or state or territory school based training.

More detailed notes as well as Accelerated Literacy Practitioner Guides are available on the National Digital Learning Resources Network (NDLRN) http://www.ndlrn.edu.au/using_digital_resources/accessing_resources/accessing_resources.html. The notes on this website are detailed and provide additional information on how to teach Accelerated Literacy. Reading at least some of these notes will provide a background to the notes that follow on the ALPAA site.

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James and the Giant Peach

Dahl, Roald (2007). James and the Giant Peach. Puffin Books

Year Level: Years 3-7

Synopsis of the story

James is an orphan, forced to live with his two heartless aunts after an escaped rhinoceros from the London Zoo ate his parents. His aunts treat him badly, making him do all the work and not letting him out of their yard.

One day James comes across an old man in the garden of his aunt's house. He gives James a bag full of 'green things' and promises him wonderful experiences if he can use them. In James's excitement to get them inside he drops the bag under the peach tree. Almost instantly a peach began to grow on the tree. It was not an ordinary peach, however, but one that grew to an enormous size. Not only did the peach grow to massive proportions, but so too did the creatures that lived below the tree.

James and the creatures became friends as the peach rolled off into the countryside with them and thus began an amazing journey full of adventure.

Website information: There is a Roald Dahl website www.roalddahl.com which has interesting information on Roald Dahl and his stories.

Themes

One of the most poignant themes of this book is that of friendship. James is has been abandoned to the care of his evil aunts on the death of his parents and he is routinely abused by them without an obvious way out of his predicament. When, magically, he enters the stone at the centre of the giant peach he makes friends with an assortment of unusual creatures each with different qualities and attributes.

By cooperating they are each able to contribute to getting themselves out of the problems that result from being caught inside a giant peach that rolling across the countryside and floating on the sea. Their cooperation and kindness to each other is rewarded when they finally reach safety.

The abusive aunts on the other hand receive appropriate justice for their cruel and greedy behavior.

Why use this story?

James and the Giant Peach was the first narrative for children written by Roald Dahl. It is typical of the books he continued to write in which he exaggerates the good and bad qualities of his characters.

Teachers who have taught passages from other Roald Dahl books such as 'George's Marvellous Medicine', 'Fantastic Mr Fox' and 'Matilda' would find this book supports the teaching they have done on the others.

The story can be used to teach about how authors use physical descriptions to influence readers to like or dislike characters. The descriptions of the two aunts provide resources for teaching about how to exaggerate physical traits to influence readers to dislike characters in the story.

Roald Dahl also describes contexts or locations particularly effectively. The location of the house James lives in with his aunts is on the top of a hill where James can see for long distances but is never allowed out of the yard.

The passage that will be discussed in more detail in these notes describes an every day setting in a mysterious and magical way. The effect of this description is to heighten a reader's anticipation of what is to come in the story. It marks a turning point in James's life. Knowing how abused he is in his ordinary life makes the possibilities for change that present themselves even more exciting. He probably feels he has nothing to lose as he contemplates the possibilities presented by the giant peach.

Study passage

Chapter 9 (A Strange Feeling). Pages 34-36

Hungry and trembling, James stood alone out in the open, wondering what to do. The night was all around him now, and high overhead a wild white moon was riding in the sky. There was not a sound, not a movement anywhere.

Most people – and especially small children – are often quite scared of being out of doors alone in the moonlight. Everything is so deadly quiet, and the shadows are so long and black, and they keep turning into strange shapes that seem to move as you look at them and the slightest little snap of a twig makes you jump.

James felt exactly like that now. He stared straight ahead with large frightened eyes, hardly daring to breathe. Not far away, in the middle of the garden, he could see the giant peach towering over everything else. Surely it was even bigger tonight than ever before? And what a dazzling sight it was! The moonlight was shining and glinting on its curving sides, turning them to crystal and silver. It looked like a tremendous silver ball lying there in the grass, silent, mysterious, and wonderful.

And then all at once, little shivers of excitement started running over the skin on James's back.

Something else, he told himself, something stranger than ever this time, is about to happen to me again soon. He was sure of it. He could feel it coming.

He looked around him, wondering what on earth it was going to be. The garden lay soft and silver in the moonlight. The grass was wet with dew and a million dewdrops were sparkling and twinkling like diamonds around his feet. And now suddenly, the whole place, the whole garden seemed to be alive with magic.

288 words

Specific language features and/or writing techniques

Structural Organization of text	Why language choices are made in this text
<p>The character (feelings and location) Hungry and trembling, James stood alone out in the open, wondering what to do.</p> <p>Threatening description of the location The night was all around him now, and high overhead a wild white moon was riding in the sky.</p> <p>There was not a sound, not a movement anywhere.</p>	<p>The character (feelings and location) By placing 'hungry and trembling' first in the passage, the author foregrounds James's plight. He is abused, 'hungry' and frightened, 'trembling' He is ordered outside to pick up rubbish for his aunts, without being able to have dinner first.</p> <p>Next, readers find that James stood 'alone' which implies that he has no help, or anyone to turn to.</p> <p>The addition of, 'wondering what to do' provides information about how uncertain James felt. By adding this extra information the author lets readers share James uncertainty. Although James just 'stood' outside, he was thinking and feeling afraid.</p> <p>Threatening description of the location 'The night was all around him,' implies that there was no artificial light. He had no torch, and no lights were on. He had been sent outside without any support at all. By adding 'now' the author emphasises the moment that James stood outside. He has obeyed his aunts' commands and as a result was alone in the night.</p> <p>The description of the night is then expanded with 'and high over head and wild white moon was riding in the sky'.</p> <p>'high overhead' is placed first in the clause to emphasise the distance and remoteness from James.</p> <p>'a wild white moon' is also a disturbing image. It isn't a providing a gently kindly light lessening James' aloneness. Light isn't mentioned yet in connection with this wild white moon.</p> <p>'riding in the sky' adds to the frightening image. The moon is not described as shining this time but is riding high in the sky remote and almost hostile.</p> <p>'There was not a sound, not a movement anywhere.' By adding this clause, the author emphasises the silence and lack of activity also surrounding James. It is not only night, with a little moonlight, but there is not a sound or movement. This quiet stillness is often described in stories to precede change. It is suspenseful. As yet, James hasn't moved. He is sensing his surroundings.</p>

Aside (elaboration of the character's feelings)

Most people – and especially small children – are often quite scared of being out of doors alone in the moonlight.

Everything is so deadly quiet, and the shadows are so long and black, and they keep turning into strange shapes that seem to move as you look at them and the slightest little snap of a twig makes you jump.

Character's feelings and reactions

James felt exactly like that now. He stared straight ahead with large frightened eyes, hardly daring to breathe.

Aside (elaboration of the character's feelings)

Here, the author leaves James standing outside and steps aside from the progress of the story by drawing a comparison between the way James feels and the way most people feel in a similar situation. He is not leaving readers' understanding to chance. This aside has the effect of enlisting readers' sympathy for James by relating it to their own experience. It's as if Roald Dahl is taking them into his confidence.

'Most people – and especially small children – are often quite scared of being out of doors alone in the moonlight.' This statement serves not only to enlist readers' sympathy for James but to make his anxiety seem normal.

Elaboration

If readers were in any doubt why being alone in the moonlight is scary, this expansion makes it even more clear.

'Everything is so deadly quiet,' with the word deadly adding menace to the already threatening silence.

'and the shadows are so long and black', tells readers what was menacing about the appearance of the night. The unknown quality of the shadows is frightening.

'and they keep turning into strange shapes as you look at them,' expands further on the menace of the shadows.

'and the slightest little snap of a twig makes you jump', adds a very slight sound to the silence which is even more frightening because the shadows prevent you from seeing what might have made the snap.

Character's feelings and reactions

'James felt exactly like that now.' This sentence brings James back into the context. Having made his feelings like everyone else's frightened feelings on a similar moonlit night, the author returns to James with readers able to empathise with him in his lonely plight.

'He stared straight ahead with large frightened eyes,' makes clear where he was looking. As yet he was not aware of what he could see. The noun group, 'large frightened eyes' provides a clear description of how afraid he is. To emphasise that fear even more, the author adds, 'hardly daring to breath.' At this point readers are aware that James is still standing outside alone. They know what he feels and can sense and see thus far and can share his terror. Now comes a change as the author shifts readers' focus to what James becomes aware of as he

<p>What the character could see Not far away, in the middle of the garden, he could see the giant peach towering over everything else. Surely it was even bigger tonight than ever before?</p> <p>Description of the special object And what a dazzling sight it was! The moonlight was shining and glinting on its curving sides, turning them to crystal and silver. It looked like a tremendous silver ball lying there in the grass, silent, mysterious, and wonderful.</p> <p>Character's physical and mental reaction And then all at once, little shivers of excitement started running over the skin on James's back.</p> <p><i>Something else, he told himself, something stranger than ever this time, is about to happen to me again soon.</i></p>	<p>stares straight ahead.</p> <p>What the character could see A change in the scene takes place next as the focus shifts to what James could see. 'Not far away, in the middle of the garden' locates exactly where James was looking. Then, readers find out what 'he could see'. It is 'the giant peach towering over everything else.' This noun group reminds readers that the peach was enormous and to expand on that size the author adds 'towering over everything.' And so readers learn that the peach was bigger than everything else in the garden.</p> <p>The next sentence "Surely it was even bigger tonight than ever before,' illustrates that the peach seemed to have kept growing since it first appeared. The word surely shows some uncertainty though.</p> <p>Description of the special object Overall impression: 'And what a dazzling sight it was!' Notice the change in emphasis from the dark containing frightening shadows to the 'dazzling sight' James now noticed.</p> <p>Details: 'The moonlight was shining and glinting on its curving sides,' describes the peach's general appearance with the curving sides being the most important feature. The author then expands on how the moonlight changed the appearance of the peach from the way it looked in the daylight. 'turning them to crystal and silver'. Both crystal and silver are beautiful and valuable. We know the peach didn't actually change but this description is a metaphor to show the peach's beauty.</p> <p>To emphasise the beauty of the peach still further the author adds a further expansion on its appearance. 'It looked like a tremendous silver ball lying there in the grass, silent, mysterious and wonderful.' The author has continued with the silver appearance of the peach which is consistent with it being seen in the light of the moon and adds this simile to help readers imagine how it looked. He adds 'silent, mysterious and wonderful' to indicate a shift in feeling from fear to awe. The silence is no longer threatening.</p> <p>Character's physical and mental reaction At this point James is no longer afraid of the night. The author signals the moment of change with 'And then all at once.' It is as if there has been a switch thrown that changes James's perception completely. 'little shivers of excitement started running over the skin on James's back.' This description of his physical reaction is</p>
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<p>He was sure of it. He could feel it coming.</p> <p><i>Something else, he told himself, something stranger than ever this time, is about to happen to me again soon.</i></p> <p>He was sure of it. He could feel it coming. He looked around him, wondering what on earth it was going to be.</p> <p>A transformation of the location The garden lay soft and silver in the moonlight. The grass was wet with dew and a million dewdrops were sparkling and twinkling like diamonds around his feet. And now suddenly, the whole place, the whole garden seemed to be alive with magic.</p> <p>288 words</p>	<p>consistent with excitement and lets readers know just how James felt.</p> <p><i>'Something else, he told himself, something stranger than ever this time, is about to happen to me again soon.</i></p> <p>He was sure of it. He could feel it coming. He looked around him, wondering what on earth it was going to be.'</p> <p>This insight into James feelings at this time refers back to the point at which he met the funny little man in the green suit who gave him the magic crocodile tongues. Something very mysterious had already happened to him earlier and now he realises that he is about to experience something even stranger than that.</p> <p>A transformation of the location James now views the garden that was previously so threatening with different eyes. Now it 'lay soft and silver in the moonlight'. This moon is not the wild moon of earlier in the passage but one that makes the garden beautiful.</p> <p>Expansion 'The grass was wet with dew' narrows the focus from the whole garden to the grass. Then the author makes the scene even more beautiful with, 'and a million dewdrops were sparkling and twinkling like diamonds around his feet.'</p> <p>Finally, in this passage, the author summarises the overall scene that James can view and thus completes the transformation. 'Suddenly' so it is a quick shift in his perception. 'the whole place, the whole garden, seemed to be alive with magic.' By repeating the whole place and whole garden the author returns to the overall scene which rather than being dark and shadowy is 'alive with magic.'</p> <p>Note that throughout this whole passage, James has been standing still. He has looked around and experienced a range of emotions but he has not moved forward. In the next passage, he starts his adventure by moving towards the peach.</p>
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Teaching Sequence

Low order literate orientation

In low order literate orientation the teacher provides an overview of the purpose of the lesson. This overview could include a brief summary of the whole story, then

the segment that will be studied or read to the class that day. The purpose of the overview is to focus students on the important meaning that they need to attend to when the story is read to them.

Another focus of low order literate orientation is to make sure that all students understand what it is they are learning about the writing techniques the author used to construct parts of the text. In the course of a study of this book, there are many possible options. The one suggested here relates to the text analysis above.

For example, when Roald Dahl wanted to write about how James started on his adventure, he described how frightened and lonely James was when he was living with his cruel aunts. To help readers identify with James even more he inserts an extra paragraph into the description to show that anyone in the world would feel like James in a similar situation.

Then, James looks ahead and sees the giant peach in the moonlight and at once, James perception of the scene changes from one of fear to one of awe and excitement. It is from this point he leaves his old life and steps forward into a new one.

The technique of describing a scene through a character's contrasting feelings and reactions to the same setting is a dramatic method of building excitement and anticipation.

High order literate orientation

Use the text analysis as a guide to carry out the high order literate orientation which shifts the students' focus to the actual wording of the text.

For example, to carry out the high order literate orientation on the passage analysed above, you could start by briefly revisiting the reason for studying this text. For example, explain that you are first of all going to look at how Roald Dahl tells us about how frightened James was. Explain that Roald Dahl doesn't tell us the character's name first but tells us how he was feeling and how his body was reacting. Then students would then look for the words 'hungry and trembling' and underline them. Follow up by discussing how frightened James was at being sent outside to pick up rubbish, how hungry he was and how that made him feel and how mean his aunts were to treat him like this.

Continue to follow the guidelines in the text analysis to choose words or phrases to underline and reconceptualising to draw out meaning.

Transformations

Perhaps, carry out Transformations on this passage a paragraph or section at a time. Then identify the structure of each of the paragraphs and discuss how it helps us write like Roald Dahl by finding out the order in which he introduces information.

The text analysis above provides an outline to the structure. For example:
Paragraph 1:

In the previous chapter of the book, James was sent outside by his aunts to pick up the rubbish left by the people who had come to see the giant peach. James

protested that he had had nothing to eat and that it was dark but it was no use. Outside he had to go and the door was locked behind him with no chance of escape back inside.

Chapter 9 then starts by telling us how James felt at that moment as well as what he did. From the way Roald Dahl starts this chapter we can learn to introduce a crucial moment in a character's life.

Possible structure:

The character (feelings and location)

Hungry and trembling,

James stood alone out in the open, wondering what to do.

Threatening description of the location

The night was all around him now,

and high overhead a wild white moon was riding in the sky.

There was not a sound, not a movement anywhere.

Activities

After cutting the text into meaningful segments (e.g. *Hungry and trembling/,/*

James/ stood/ alone/ out in the open/,/ wondering what to do/./)

Rearrange the text to place 'hungry and trembling' after 'alone' to read '*James stood alone, hungry and trembling out in the open, wondering what to do*'.

Discuss how the change in word order changes the emphasis from his mental and physical state being most important to James himself. This order makes his distress less prominent in the statement.

Remove 'hungry and trembling' altogether and discuss how without it we would just have James standing there looking a bit puzzled.

Remove 'wondering what to do'. Without having James's thoughts stated, he might just be standing outside the door. He would be alone and in the open but we wouldn't know that it bothered him.

These activities provide a context for discussing not just the meaning of the words but why they are used as well as for a deeper discussion about the author's writing technique.

Deal with the other sentence in the paragraph and the other paragraphs in a similar manner basing the segmenting of the text on the text analysis and your writing goals.

Spelling

Base the words you choose for spelling on the year level of the students and on the type of spelling knowledge appropriate for this level. The National Curriculum document for spelling provides information about the spelling knowledge for

different year levels. For example, Year 3, 'Understand how to use sound-letter relationships and knowledge of spelling rules, compound words, prefixes, suffixes, morphemes and less common letter combinations for example 'tion'. (ACELA 1485)

With these suggestions in mind the compound words, overhead, everything, and moonlight would be suitable for spelling.

Words with the suffix –ment as in movement and excitement would be appropriate.

In addition, choose words that relate to or add understanding about previous words you may have studied with the class.

Writing

It is not necessary to use the whole study text as the focus of a writing workshop. Teachers may choose to use the first paragraph or two paragraphs to teach students how to use Roald Dahl's strategy of building atmosphere through describing a character's physical and mental feelings as they observe their location and notice its most threatening attributes. It could also be used to describe happy or exciting occasions in a welcoming location.

For example:

Teachers could also choose to go further to teach children how to move aside from the story and compare the character's experience with 'most people'.

There would also be scope to continue in the way Roald Dahl did to transform the scene from awful to awe inspiring but it is not necessary to go that far.

The description of just the garden when it looks beautiful bathed in moonlight could be used as a model for writing about a special place. There is scope for several writing workshops based on the writing techniques used by Roald Dahl in this passage.