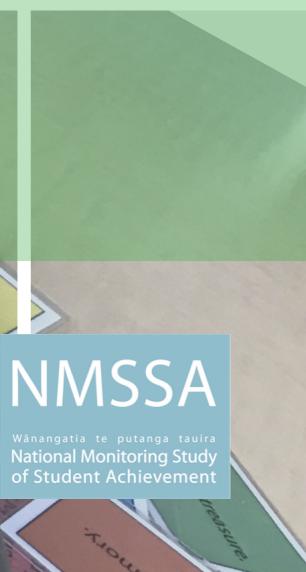
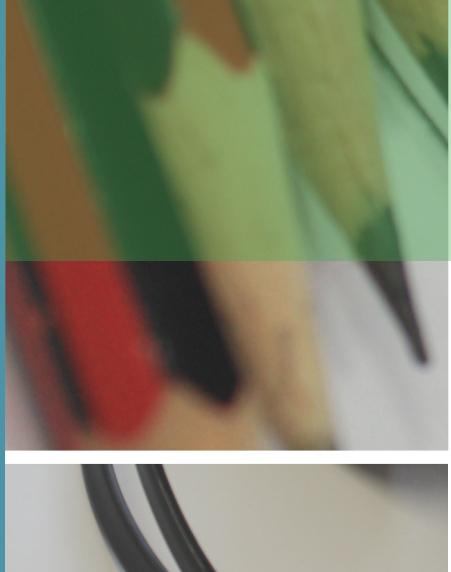




NMSSA English 2019

MAKING MEANING



INSIGHTS FOR TEACHERS

2

PLEAS

STOP



NMSSA

Wānangatia te putanga tauria
National Monitoring Study
of Student Achievement



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
TE TĀHUHU O TE MĀTAURANGA



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The purpose of this report

This report is designed to support the teaching of English in primary and intermediate classrooms. It draws on insights generated from the assessment of the English learning area by the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) in 2019. The report focuses on the making meaning strand of the English learning area. It is complimented by a separate report that considers insights associated with the creating meaning strand (*Insights for Teachers 1 - NMSSA English 2019. Creating Meaning*). Both reports will be useful to teachers and curriculum designers working with the English learning area of the New Zealand Curriculum.

The report is organised into two parts.

Part 1 briefly introduces NMSSA and the NMSSA assessment of the making meaning strand.

Part 2 presents insights about teaching and learning associated with making meaning across reading, writing, and viewing in English.

PART 1: The NMSSA English Assessment

What is NMSSA?

The National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) is designed to assess student achievement across the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC), (Ministry of Education, 2007) at Year 4 and Year 8 in New Zealand English-medium state and state-integrated schools. Each year, nationally representative samples of students from 100 schools at each of these two year levels are assessed in one or more learning areas. Components of the English learning area were assessed in 2012 (writing) 2014 (reading), and 2015 (listening and viewing). English was assessed as a single learning area in 2019.



The 2019 NMSSA English assessment

To assess the English learning area in 2019, the NMSSA project team developed a multi-part assessment focused on the two English strands – making-meaning, and creating-meaning. The assessments included multi-choice and short answer questions, extended response items, one-to-one interviews, and individual and paired performance tasks.

Central to the study of English are literary texts (fiction and creative non-fiction) which use language in aesthetic, imaginative and engaging ways to entertain, engender emotion, express identity and invite reflection. The NMSSA study focused on student interpretation and creation of written, oral and visual language ‘literary’ texts. This included interpretation of extracts of fiction texts (such as novels, short stories, plays, poems, picture books) presented in different forms (print, audio, static image, film) and creation of written, spoken and visual texts with an emphasis on purpose and audience.

An assessment framework encompassing the indicators from the English learning area in the New Zealand curriculum provided a guide for the development of tasks, see Table 1.1 on the following page.





Table 1.1: Constructs for the making-meaning and creating-meaning strands for assessing the English learning area

Making meaning Reading • Listening • Viewing		Creating meaning Writing • Speaking • Presenting	
Construct	Definition	Construct	Definition
Locate and recall*	Can identify the information, ideas and features of print, oral and visual texts.	Construct and convey ideas	Can convey ideas and information through print, oral and visual texts for a range of purposes and audiences.
Interpret*	Can interpret print, oral, and visual texts by integrating text features and ideas, considering the relationship between ideas and text features, and by making inferences.	Express ideas with detail and colour	Can integrate text features and ideas when creating written, oral and visual texts. Can engage the reader, listener or viewer through use of communicative features specific to the mode. Can employ imagery and allusion.
Critically analyse*	Can critically analyse print, oral and visual texts by questioning texts rather than taking them at face value. This involves considering the construction of texts; questions of inclusion, exclusion and representation; and the ways in which texts can position a reader.	Critically analyse	Can analyse their own processes and impact of presentations, questioning the features used, and evaluating their effectiveness. Can make deliberate choices of text structure, register and tone and use specific oral, visual or written language features to position the reader, viewer or listener.

* These constructs were adapted (in a minor way) from the constructs used in Cycle 1 English assessments



Reading, listening and viewing: the assessment approach

Reading, listening, and viewing were assessed separately using different combinations of approaches.

The NMSSA reading assessment

English reading was assessed in two parts. The first part required the students to read a selection of fiction, literary non-fiction, or poetry passages, and complete some questions using selected-response or short, constructed-response formats. Some students later participated in a one-to-one interview (Part 2) to discuss their understandings further.

The NMSSA listening assessment

Students listened to recorded oral texts and answered selected-response and short constructed-response questions that followed each text. A range of fiction and literary non-fiction texts were used, including extracts from novels and plays, scripted conversation, expository texts and memoirs.

The NMSSA viewing assessment

English viewing was assessed in two parts. In the first part students responded to visual texts with static images from picture books and graphic novels. In the second part they viewed a selection of moving images (short film clips) presented on laptops and answered questions with short constructed responses. The moving images included an adaptation from a novel, animated fiction, and a short live-action narrative.

Reading, listening and viewing scales

The student responses to the reading, listening and viewing assessments were used to construct a series of measurement scales.

These were called the

- Reading in the English Learning Area (RELA) scale
- Listening in the English Learning Area (LELA) scale
- Viewing in the English Learning Area (VELA) scale

The scale descriptions are a direct reflection of what was assessed, and how relatively hard or easy students found the content of the assessment. The descriptions show how students' skills increase in sophistication as the scale score increases. They also outline what the students typically know and can do when they score in each part of the scale.

The scales descriptions were produced to give a strong sense of how the English learning area was assessed in each mode.

The scales can be viewed in the Appendix on page 34.



How did students do on the assessments?

Reading

Figure 2.1 shows how the students achieved on the 2019 NMSSA reading assessment.

The study found that over half of the students (63 percent at Year 4, and 56 percent at Year 8) were achieving at or above the expected curriculum level. There was no statistically significant change in scores in reading between 2014 and 2019.

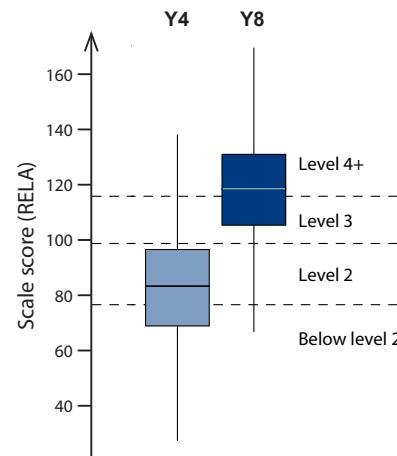


Figure 2.1: Distribution of scores on the Reading in the English Learning Area (RELA) scale

Listening

Figure 2.2 shows that about three quarters (76 percent) of the Year 4 students achieved at curriculum level 2 or above and at Year 8 about two thirds (65 percent) of the students achieved at curriculum level 4.

There was no statistically significant change in scores in listening between 2015 and 2019.

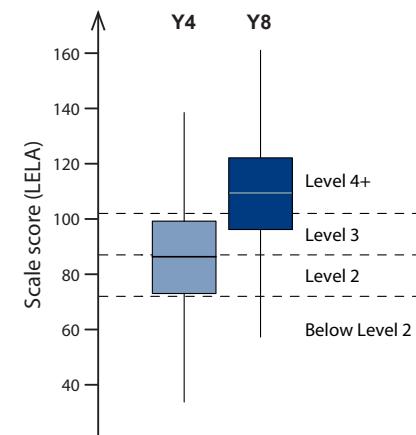


Figure 2.2: Distribution of scores on the Listening in the English Learning Area (LELA) scale

Viewing

Figure 2.3 shows how the students achieved on the 2019 NMSSA viewing assessment.

The study found that 78 percent of Year 4 students achieved at curriculum level 2 or above.

At Year 8, 65 percent of students achieved at curriculum level 4 or above. We were not able to compare 2015 and 2019 scores for viewing.

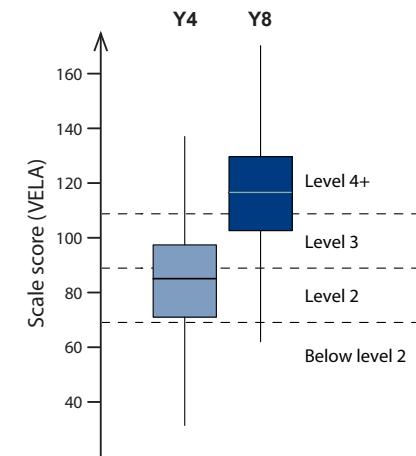
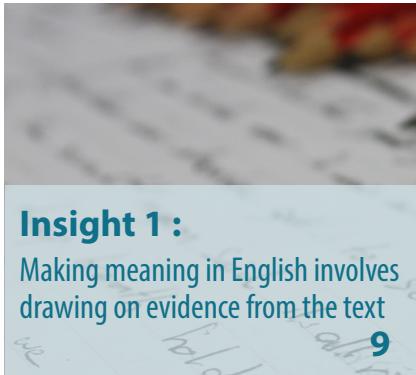


Figure 2.3: Distribution of scores on the Viewing in the English Learning Area (VELA) scale

PART 2: Making Meaning

Part 2 presents two insights related to teaching and learning about reading, listening, and viewing in the English learning area. Insight 1 looks at the importance of drawing on evidence from the text when making meaning. Insight 2 focuses on the need to attend to the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of the text. Each insight focuses on core understandings and strategies that students apply across these meaning-making modes. Throughout the insights, annotated examples of students’ responses are used to illustrate students’ strengths and weaknesses. Each insight concludes with some practical information about how teachers can address these insights in the classroom.



Insight 1 :

Making meaning in English involves drawing on evidence from the text



Insight 2 :

Making meaning in English involves attending to the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of text

19



1 INSIGHT

Making meaning in English involves drawing on evidence from the text

Introduction

Making meaning of text in the English learning area involves making inferences, predictions, hypotheses, and evaluations supported by evidence from the text. This meaning-making process may involve considering alternative views based on the evidence and changing or rejecting one's initial view as a result.

What follows is an analysis of student capacity to form and communicate evidence-supported inferences, predictions, hypotheses, or evaluations in response to text across a range of viewing, listening, and reading tasks. Each section begins with a description of the text and the task followed by an analysis of the student responses.



1**Using evidence to make meaning of visual text**

- Using evidence to describe the personality of a picture book character

Text: *Cinderella: An Art Deco Love Story*. L. Roberts and D. Roberts.¹

Students at both Year 4 and Year 8 viewed an image from a picture book of three women sitting at a table playing cards. Students were asked:

What kind of person is the woman with the green eyes and the red hair?
What do you see that shows you this?

Student responses could score a 0 or a 1.

Students scored a 1 if they supported their opinion of the character with evidence from the text.

Approximately one-third (36 percent) of the Year 4 students scored a 1. The Year 8 students found this task easier with approximately two-thirds (65 percent) scoring a 1.

Of those students who scored a 0, most provided plausible descriptions of the personality of the woman holding the cards but failed to provide evidence from the text to support their view. A small proportion described what they saw in the image but failed to describe the personality of the woman holding the cards.



¹ Roberts, L. (Writer), & Roberts, D. (Illustrator). (2001). *Cinderella: An art deco love story*. London: Pavilion Children's Books.



Examples of student responses. Score = 1

Snark, not very smart, rich
her sparkling Jewelly showing her wealthy
her upside/wrong way cards show her intellegence
her smirk/smile...

Y8

I think she is kind of careless ~~and~~
gumby.
She has half of her sc card facing her
and the other half is facing the opposition.

Y8

she looks like she is a bit of
a cheater. She looks like she is planning something
her hand is raised to her mouth.
Her mouth is got a devious smile.
Her eyes are looking at her cards.

Y8

She looks very mysterious and
very cunning
her smile and her hand on
her mouth looks like she is
grinning or laughing

Y8

1**Using evidence to make meaning of oral text**

Expressing an evidence-based evaluation of a memoir read aloud

Text: *Toast – The Story of a Boy's Hunger*. Nigel Slater²

The Year 8 students listened to an extract from a memoir being read aloud in which the author reflects on his childhood experience of having burnt toast for breakfast. Students were asked:

The author wants you to enjoy this text – he wants to entertain you.
Did the author entertain you? Explain why you think this.
Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Here, students are asked to evaluate the entertainment value of the text supported by evidence.

Student responses could score a 0, a 1, or a 2.

Responses scored a 1 if they supported their evaluation with a *general* reference to the text.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

Yes, because he's explaining what burnt toast tastes like every morning

Y8

Yes because he used very good ~~deser~~ word to describe what's happening.

Y8

yes the author did entertain me because it was funny and it was pretty detailed.

Y8

² Slater, N. (2004). *Toast: The story of a boy's hunger*. Great Britain: Harper Collins Publishers.



Responses scored a 2 if they supported their evaluation with reference to specific aspects of the text.

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

kind of I only got hungry when he said "once the warm, salty butter hits your tongue, you are smitten."

Y8

Yes, the author entertained me because of the burnt toast in the window and the butter with black specks in it.

Y8

The author entertained me with the "fun" use of language like "Smitten" and how he described his mother.

Y8

I found the text weird because of the detail the text put into toast.

Toast is good but not that good. Every movement doesn't have to be documented

Y8

Just under half (48 percent) of the Year 8 responses scored a 1, while just over one fifth (22 percent) scored a 2.

Of those students who scored a 0, most used synonyms for the word 'enjoy' – essentially repeating the question being asked of them. These students gave answers such as: 'Yes, I liked it'; 'Yes, it was funny'; 'No, it was boring'; or 'Yes, it made me laugh'. Some of the students scored a 0 because they used information about themselves to support their opinion, without linking this information to evidence in the text, giving responses such as, 'No, I don't like toast'.

1

Expressing an evidence-based evaluation of a poem read aloud

Poem: Apple: A Poem. Lauris Edmond³

Year 4 students listened to a poem about an apple in which the apple is personified. An extended metaphor is used to compare the apple's tree with a house. Students were asked:

The writer wants you to enjoy this poem – she wants to entertain you. Did the writer entertain you? Explain why you think this. Use what you heard to support your answer.

Student responses could score a 0, a 1, or a 2.

Student responses scored a 1 if they supported their evaluation with a general reference to the text.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

yes it is che're full and
happy sounding

Y4

they did nice words with the apple
poam and good explaining tho words
In the poam.

Y4

The writer did entertain me because there was a lot
of ryming.

Y4

I enjoyed this Poem because it had
funny parts in it and it really looked
me in.

Y4

³ Edmond, L. (1988). Apple. *When I was a Bird: School Journal, Part 2, Number 4*



Student responses scored a 2 if they supported their evaluation with reference to specific aspects of the text.

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

Yes because I like the way it describes itself and uses nature for things it needs like the wind as a towel and the sun as its clothes leaves as its ground. ~~and~~

Y4

It was amusing because he thought that the night sky has his blanket!

Y4

She did because she made the apple say "go ahead eat me!"

Y4

Just over one-third (39 percent) of the students scored a 1. A small proportion (10 percent) scored a 2, showing how difficult it was for Year 4 students to support their evaluation with specific evidence from the text.

As with the task described above, the main reason students scored a 0, was because their answer consisted of synonyms for the word 'enjoy' – essentially repeating the question being asked of them. And some of the students scored a 0 because they used information about themselves to support their opinion, without linking this information to evidence from the text.

A small sample of the Year 4 students also had the opportunity to read the poem and to answer the same question in the context of an interview with a teacher assessor. Two student responses are transcribed below. The interviewer prompts are shown in brackets. Note how much fuller an explanation is provided orally than in the written responses awarded two marks above. With the written text in front of them to refer to, along with the teacher prompts, the students draw on multiple pieces of evidence, including reference to the 'content', and also to the language features of the poem, such as rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, and symbolism/representation.

Yes because, well, I thought the apple would be scared to get eaten but he sounds happy when he's getting eaten. [Was there anything else that entertained you?] In the poem the apple is speaking fast. [How do you know that?] Because I read it fast and it sounds good when I read it fast. Cos when I read it slow it doesn't sound like the words are rhyming. And when I read it faster it sounds better. [Any other examples?] How it's saying that the tree is a house, although the tree is not shaped like a house. And it's saying 'a leafy door' So the leaves are the door. And 'the door is open' so they're happy to let us read the poem. And the branches are under the leaves so that's the floor, where the leaves are growing on it. It makes it like the door is growing on the floor.

Y4

Yes. Um, 'The bath is rain from the sky'. Like that kind of entertains me. Like where's the rain coming from? It's from the sky, but it's kind of like from the clouds – dropping down. [Is there any thing else that entertains you?] Um, 'I wear the sun. It's warm and silky on my skin' – like silky on his red, flat, round, apple skin.

Y4

The reading task for Year 8 students described next was also given to students in the context of an interview with a teacher assessor.

1

Using evidence to make meaning of print text

Expressing an evidence-based opinion about the fairness of an event in a narrative

Text: *The Silent One*. Joy Cowley⁴

Year 8 students read a narrative describing a pig hunt that the main character, Jonasi, had been looking forward to participating in, and his feelings on being left behind. Jonasi expresses his disappointment about being left behind, and his resentment that other boys he considers less able than himself, have been included in the pig hunt. The text is written from the main character's limited point of view and there is not enough information in the extract to determine how reliable his point of view is.

In an interview with a teacher assessor, students were asked:

How do you feel about what has happened to Jonasi? Explain why you feel this. Use your opinions and evidence from the text to support your answer.

Student responses could score a 0, a 1, or a 2.

Students scored a 1 if they provided evidence from the text to support their opinion but did not acknowledge that the reader has limited information from only one character's perspective.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

Y8

Oh that's just sad, like. It's sad because he's been waiting for his whole life and his little brother got to go instead of him. And he tried to run up to them, and he did, but they just pushed him back with the other people. And like it says they pushed him back. And he'd been dreaming of it his whole life. And he'd watch them eating it. And he'd have to share the leftovers with all the children.
Yeah.

⁴ Cowley, J. (2000). *The Silent One*. Auckland: Puffin Books.



Students scored a 2 if they provided evidence from the text to support their opinion, while also acknowledging that there could be a different explanation for what happened.

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

Y8

Furious. That's not fair. But I'm also not sure, cos he's not like talking about why. Like is he big enough to throw his own spear? Is he big enough to carry his own stuff? Maybe he is? Maybe, or maybe they had the reason, like he was worse at throwing spears than the other kid, or he was smaller than the other kid? [So that wasn't clear in the text?] Yeah.

I feel like he might have done something to cause it but I, the reader, don't know, so I think it's unfair on him. He should be able to go on the hunt. [Is there anything from the text to support your answer?] Yeah. They pushed him away, they took his older foster brother. They just didn't want him so... [Not very fair?] Yeah, not very fair.

Y8

I have mixed feelings. I feel like he should have been taken, especially as there were those that were weaker than him and younger than him. [Is there evidence from the text?] I'm not sure how you say his name – Eitika, his arm was apparently so weak he couldn't hit a canoe at ten paces. But apparently, Jonasi could. So there might have been something. That maybe he wasn't there early enough. There must be something that might make the men not want to bring him. Maybe he was irresponsible. So... I have mixed feelings – like he should have gone, but there's always a reason why they didn't take him.

Most responses (72 percent) scored a 1 and 16 percent scored a 2 illustrating how much more difficult it was for the students to recognise and explain the possibility of an alternative explanation given the limited information at the reader's disposal.

The three responses above suggest that the students intuitively recognised the limited point of view of the main character and tried to describe what they noticed in everyday language. It would have been easier for them to recognise and describe

succinctly and with precision what they intuitively knew if they had at their disposal meta-knowledge and meta-language related to the concept of point of view or perspective. The concept of point of view, or perspective, is an important one in the discipline of English, and one that can be difficult for students to comprehend and express, without the necessary meta-language.

1**Summary for Insight 1****What do these findings illustrate?**

Overall, the findings from the tasks presented here, and across the NMSSA making meaning tasks more generally, suggest that:

- many students can make inferences, predictions, hypotheses, and evaluations about texts they view, listen to, or read
- fewer students can support their view with reference to specific aspects of the text
- it is difficult for students to identify the limitations of their interpretations or to express the possibility of alternative interpretations of the evidence at hand
- students tend to provide a wider range of evidence and more comprehensive explanations when given the opportunity to do so orally, supported by teacher prompts.

What can teachers do in the classroom?

To support students to engage in extended, analytical, evidence-based conversations about text, teachers can:

- set up a classroom environment in which students have opportunities for extended discussions about text, and opportunities to revisit texts and discussions about text over time
- choose texts which lend themselves to discussion or debate, for example about characters, events, or themes that are open to different interpretations
- pose spacious, interpretive questions of texts which students see as important to answer and that require students to engage in critical analysis (and encourage students to pose such questions themselves)
- encourage students to share their differing interpretations supported by evidence from the text, in student-directed but teacher-supported conversation with peers
- encourage students to expand on their ideas with statements such as 'Tell us more about that'
- model and provide overt instruction in how to make an evidence-based claim; how to listen to, and respond to, alternative interpretations; how to defend or alter an interpretation in the face of competing evidence; and how to build on the interpretations of others in a process of collective meaning-making
- give students opportunities to practise these skills in authentic contexts.

2 INSIGHT

Making meaning in English involves attending to the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of text

When making meaning in the English learning area, students need to consider not just what a text is saying (its ‘content’), and why (its social purpose or function), but also how authors and designers construct meaning for certain purposes and audiences (its form). This involves attending to the language or design features, the structure, and the organisation of the text.

In written text, devices such as repetition, rhetorical questions, imagery, alliteration, personification, metaphor, and simile are used to achieve certain effects, as are vocabulary choice, sentence structure, and paragraphing. The use of these language features can also be found in oral text, along with the use of intonation and prosodic features such as pitch, volume, tempo, and rhythm. Similarly, in visual texts design techniques such as the use of line, colour, perspective, foregrounding, and backgrounding are used to achieve certain effects.

What follows is an analysis of students’ capacity to identify how the language or design features of a text support the purpose of the text and contribute to the meanings which can be made of it. Each section begins with a description of the text and the task, followed by an analysis of the student responses.



2



Attending to language features when making meaning of print text

- Attending to vocabulary choice in a memoir

Text: *Piano Rock: A 1950s Childhood*. Gavin Bishop⁵

Year 4 students read an extract from a memoir in which the author reflects on his happy childhood experiences of school in the 1950s. The extract describes a cold classroom heated by a pot belly stove, long-drop toilets, and playing under the pine trees. It describes peanut brownies, ANZAC biscuits, marmite sandwiches, and being given hot malted milk at playtime.

The students were asked:

In paragraph 1, the words 'gobble', 'clutching', and 'munch' are used to help the reader imagine kids with lots of

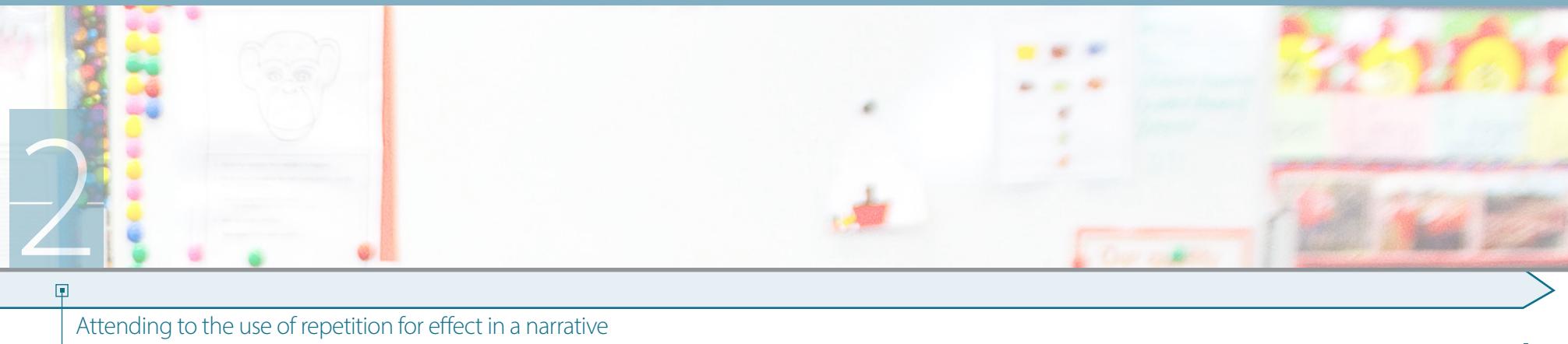
- A ideas
- B energy
- C lunch money
- D free time

This question focuses on the effect of vocabulary choice. The author makes use of onomatopoeia, choosing words that sound like what they mean, such as 'gobble', 'clutching', and 'munch'. This careful choice of vocabulary helps convey the author's memory of how active and energetic he and his schoolmates were. The task is highly scaffolded through the selected response options, making it easier than an open-ended question about the effect.

The correct answer is 'B: energy'. Only around one-third (38 percent) of the Year 4 students got this correct. The most frequently selected incorrect answer was 'A: ideas'.



⁵ Bishop, G. (2008). *Piano Rock: A 1950s Childhood*. Auckland: Random House New Zealand.



Text: Honeyjoy and Cocoa-Pops. John Henderson⁶

The Year 4 students read an extract from a story about a hen taken from its happy, free-range life and put into a factory farm. At the beginning of the story, the author makes a list of all the things the hen lacks in her factory farm life, repeating the word 'no' throughout the list to emphasise how little the hen now has, and how impoverished her life has become.

The students were asked:

In the first sentence the writer uses the word 'no' three times to help us understand an important idea. What is the important idea the writer wants us to understand?

Students were given space to write a short response to the question and could score a 0 or a 1.

Responses scored a 1 if they referred to the idea of the hen's factory farm life as being empty or impoverished.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

The hen does not have a lot.

Y4

How poor the hen was.

Y4

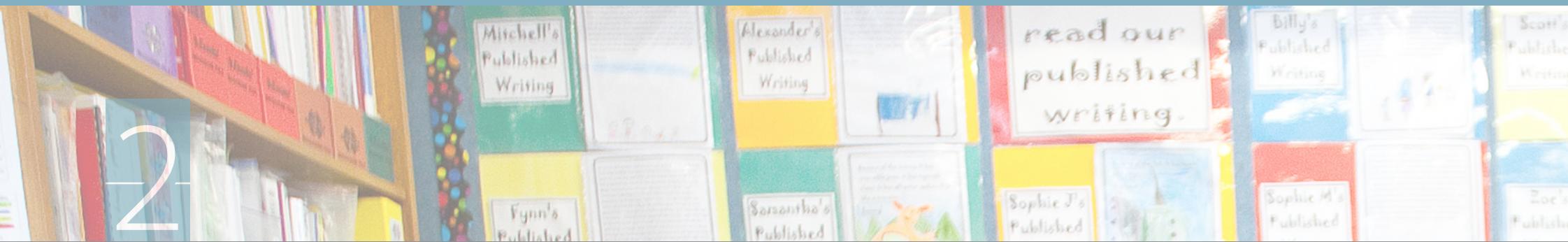
The hen doesn't have a nice life. She has a boring life.

Y4

In general, students found this task difficult. Only around one-third (37 percent) scored a 1 for this task. Students who struggled with this question (scoring a 0) often identified just one specific aspect of the hen's life that was bad such as, 'The hen had no friends', rather than making an evaluative statement about the quality of the hen's life in general.

⁶ Henderson, J. (2011). Honey Joy and Cocoa-Pops. In Else.B. (Ed.) *Great Mates: 30 New Zealand stories for children*. (pp. 125-128). Auckland: Random House New Zealand.

2



Attending to the effect of the use of rhetorical questions in a poem

Poem: Acrostic Poem. Tim Upperton⁷

The Year 8 students read a poem that uses an extended metaphor to compare ideas or words escaping from the constraints of the poem's acrostic form, with wild animals escaping from a cage. The poem addresses the reader directly with rhetorical questions such as: 'Can you hear it as you write?' and 'What will they eat?' An implication of these questions is that the ideas or the words (wild animals) will consume (or eat) you, the reader. The effect is to immerse the reader in the world of the poem and provide a sense of immediacy. The effect can be interpreted as threatening, either in a serious or a playful way.

The students were asked:

The poem addresses the reader directly with questions like: 'Can you hear it as you write?' and 'What will they eat?' What is the effect of addressing the reader directly with questions?

Students were given space to write a short response to the question and could score a 0 or a 1.

Responses scored a 1 if they described the effect as providing a sense of immediacy and immersion in the world of the poem (as with the first two examples), or as providing a sense of threat (as with the third and fourth examples).

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

The writer is trying to give the effect of the animals being near us.

Y4

I think it's putting the reader in the story and making me, the reader, feel like they are there in the story.

Y4

Threatening and trying to make it dangerous.

Y4

Intimidating and scary.

Y4

Only around one-half (49 percent) of the Year 8 responses scored a 1 for this question.

⁷ Upperton, T. (2018). Acrostic Poem. *School Journal*, Level 3, August 2018 (p.14).



 Attending to the effect of directly addressing the reader in a poem

Poem: *Ecology*. C.K Stead⁸

Year 8 students read a poem about the destruction of a habitat resulting from the development of a new sports field. The poem addresses the reader directly with the imperatives, 'look' and 'think', and appeals directly to the reader with the use of the word 'you'.

Students were asked the following question in the context of an interview with the teacher assessor:

In verse three, the reader is addressed directly – 'When you run on the new sports field'. What is the effect of addressing the reader directly?

Responses scored a 1 if they referred to effects such as making the reader feel as if they are there at the bay or on the sports field (as in the first example), or making the reader feel culpable for, responsible for, or complicit in the destruction of the habitat (as implied in the second and third examples).

Note how in the last example the response refers not just to the use of 'you' but also, implicitly, to the effect of the poet's use of the present tense. The student does this by providing a hypothetical alternative in the conditional tense ('If you were to run on the sports field') to exemplify how this conditional tense language choice would be less effective.

Just over one-half of the Year 8 responses (54 percent) scored a 1 for this question. A common error was to repeat – rather than answer – the question, with responses such as 'It's telling you to look and think'.

 Y8
I feel like when it goes, 'Look there', it's like you're supposed to do it. So, when it goes you do it, it gives you the idea that you are actually running on it.

 Y8
Well you kind of get them - Well, if I was a writer and I did that – You want them to think of themselves running on that sports field, and then it really kind of touches them. Cos they have to think about themselves running on the field, and then the emotions they would feel if they think of those lives that have just stopped six feet under where they're walking – and running, and jumping, and stuff.

 Y8
Um, cos it makes you feel like if you were to run on the sports field. It's just when you say, 'When you', it instantly makes you think. And you think, 'What me?' And it makes you start thinking – about what they're actually saying. Instead of if they were just to say, 'If you were to run on the sports field...'

⁸ Stead, C. K. (2008). *Ecology*. In C.K Stead Collected Poems, 1951-2006. Auckland University Press.



2

An open-ended opportunity to comment on the use of language features in a poem

Poem: *Ecology*. C.K Stead⁸

A small sample of the Year 8 students had the opportunity to re-read the poem described above and to answer the following additional question in the context of an interview with a teacher assessor:

The writer wants you to think more deeply about the environment.

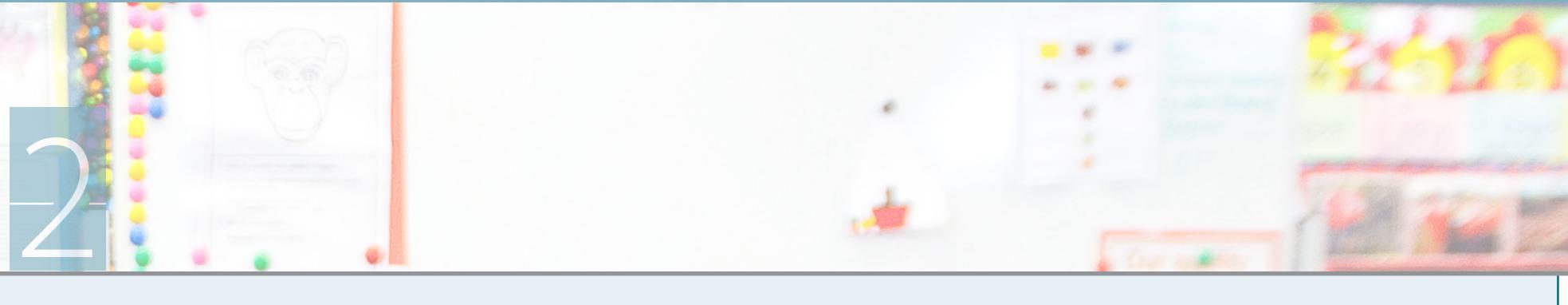
- a) Do you think he has achieved this?
- b) Explain why you think this. Use your opinions and evidence from the text to support your answer.

Responses providing at least one piece of supporting evidence from the text were scored as a 1. Some students provided evidence based on the ‘content’ of the poem, and some provided evidence in terms of the language features. The student responses transcribed below refer to both as they describe the poet’s use of contrast to influence the reader. Both scored a 1.

Y8

Very much so, because when you think of nature, like in the first two sentences, 'Look there down in the bay where the blue heron is wading', you are thinking of the beautiful blue heron – if you know what it looks like. You're thinking of this beautiful blue heron just wading around. And then there's dump trucks and bulldozers 'filling the edges with clay'. And you suddenly think, We're destroying where he is or she is just wading around peacefully, thinking, living their life to the fullest. And suddenly we're here. And we're just destroying that. And then it goes, 'Soon the mangroves will be gone and the heron will fly away', and it's like he's saying that the heron will be gone, and then there will be nothing. To say that the heron was there, to say that nature was there. And then it's like, 'When you run on the new sports field think of the lives that stopped six feet under the clay'. Yeah.

⁸ Stead, C. K. (2008). *Ecology*. In C.K Stead *Collected Poems, 1951-2006*. Auckland University Press.



Yes I do because like if you were reading it just from the start, 'Look there down in the bay where the blue heron is wading', you'd think, 'Oh, it's like a nice happy poem about the environment! But then it goes like how the heron and the creatures have to move, and about how they have to go and leave their homes and stuff. And when they go and say that, it like makes you think about the environment and how actually, like maybe what I'm doing is, like how it is actually effecting us. Like it's not just affecting the trees – it's like also affecting the lives of animals. And how they might still be alive, but they have to move and they have to adapt. And that's hard.'

Y8

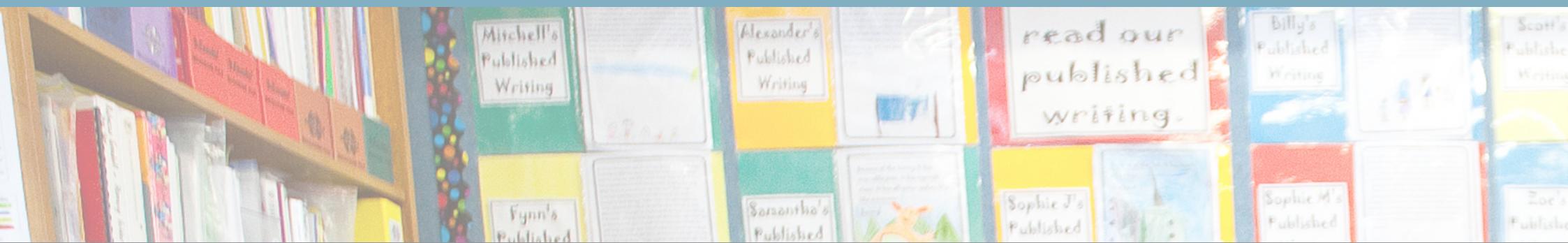
Both students demonstrate an implicit understanding of the poet's use of contrast for effect. Both are struggling to put their knowledge and understanding into words. If these students had opportunities to learn the concept of 'contrast' as a literary technique, they would have had less difficulty conveying their understanding succinctly. Their answer could have been shorter, more precise, and easier to understand.

It might have looked more like this:

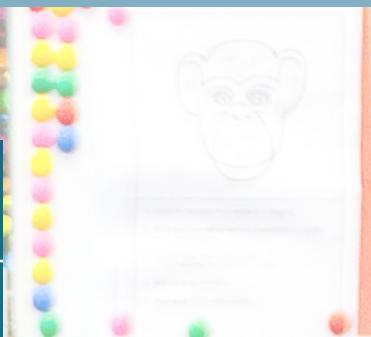
One of the ways the poet makes me/the reader think more deeply about the environment is by using contrast. In the first verse the poet contrasts an image of beauty, 'a blue heron wading' in lines 1 and 2, with an image of destruction, 'dump trucks and bulldozers', in lines 3 and 4. In the third verse the poet contrasts the image of running on a new sports field with the image of dead animals, 'six feet under the clay'. This use of contrast has the effect of surprise and shocks the reader into awareness of our impact on the natural world.

This would free up the cognitive load and enable the students time and space to comment on some of the other devices the poet has used to make the reader reflect more deeply on the environment, such as the poet's use of imperatives, the poet's use of the present tense, and the poet's direct addressing of the reader.

In general, it was easier for students to identify the effects of the design features of visual texts than the language features of written texts, as illustrated in the three viewing tasks that follow.



2



Attending to design features when making meaning of visual texts

- Attending to colour, line, and perspective/camera angle in a graphic novel illustration

Text: *The Bullet*. Sarah Penwarden (writer) & Andrew Burden (illustrator)⁹

(Task name: The New Town)

Year 8 students viewed four panels depicting in words and images an extract from a graphic novel/story about a family moving town.

The students were asked:

In panel one, the new neighbourhood looks unfriendly.

What do you see that shows you this?

There is little in the literal 'content' of the illustration that depicts unfriendliness other than the lack of people out on the street. Rather, the connotation of unfriendliness is depicted through design features such as the use of colour, space, line, and perspective. Panel one is a long, low shot of an empty street with two children, viewed from behind and at a distance, looking over the fence of a house. The image is a grainy line drawing depicted in a limited colour palette and is dark, dull, and muted.

Students were given space to write a short response to the question and could score a 0 or a 1.

Responses identifying at least one design feature as contributing to the unfriendly look of the neighbourhood scored a 1.

Note the reference across these responses to colour, such as 'muted'; spatial aspects such as 'things clustered together'; and the style of drawing, such as 'roughly drawn'. Note also how these responses link the design features with the look or feeling of unfriendliness.

Examples of student responses.

The picture itself is grungy and roughly drawn showing an unfriendly place - there is also all dull and dark colours and the lighting lighting is poor adding to the unfriendly look.

Y8

it looks dark and forbidding for bidding, and things are clustered together

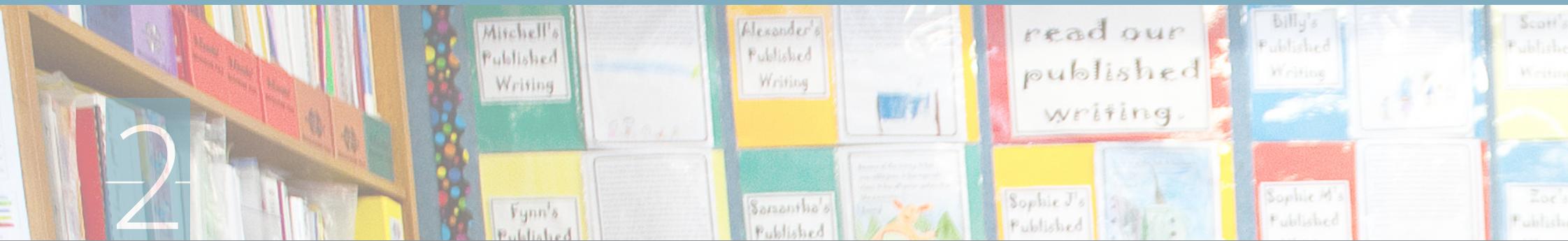
Y8

- It looks run down
- The colours are muted
- It looks like the houses are rotting

Y8

Just over two-thirds (70 percent) of student responses scored a 1 for this question.

⁹ Penwarden, S. (Writer) & Burden, A. (Illustrator). (2011). *The Bullet*. School Journal Story Library: Years 7-8.



Attending to the use of colour and size in a picture book image

Text: *The Rabbits*. John Marsden (writer) & Shaun Tan (illustrator)¹⁰

(Task name: The Ship)

The Year 8 students viewed an image from a picture book depicting a ship landing and its occupants disembarking and invading the land. The ship is stylised in terms of design and colour and exaggerated in size. The sky on the right side of the ship is black.

The students were asked:

The sky to the right of the ship is getting darker.
What is the effect of this?

Students were given space to write a short response to the question and could score a 0, a 1, or a 2.

To score a 1, responses needed to demonstrate an understanding that the illustration represents a dynamic event unfolding, such as a storm coming or night-time approaching. (Responses that did not demonstrate this understanding, such as 'It is night-time' or 'It is cloudy', were scored as a 0).

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

Theres gonna be a big storm coming

Y8

it looks like day is turning into
night

Y8

Responses demonstrating an understanding of the symbolic nature of the ship and its relationship to the sky scored a 2.

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

that they have come
to somewhere darker
and somewhere that they
shouldnt be because something
bad will happen.

Y8

The effect is that they are heading to
a dark/bad place.

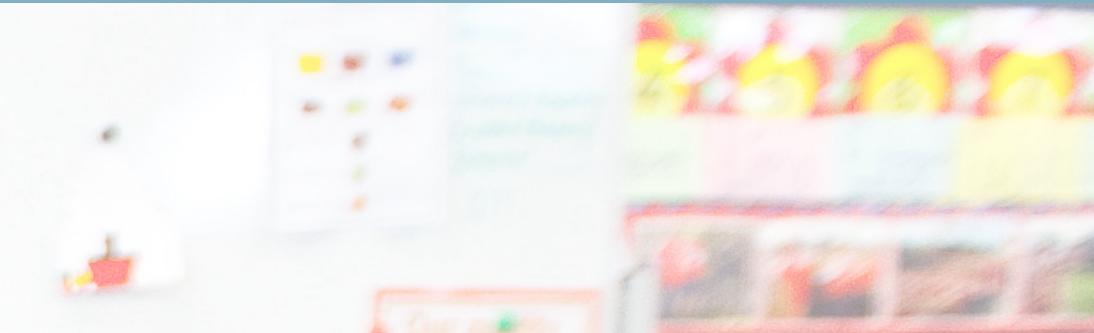
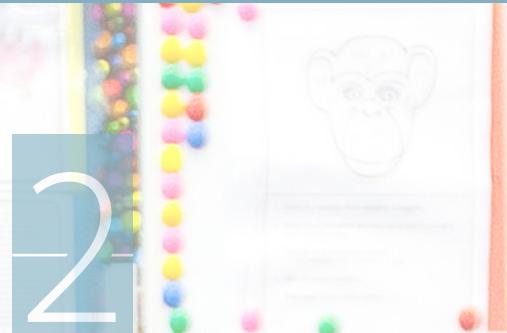
Y8

Possibly that 'dark times' are just around the corner.

Y8

Less than one-half of student responses (42 percent) scored a 1. A small proportion (12 percent) scored a 2.

¹⁰ Marsden, J. (Writer), & Tan, S. (Illustrator). (1998). *The Rabbits*. Sydney: Hachette Australia.



The students were also asked of the same image:

The ship takes up a lot of space on the page. What is the effect of this?

Student responses could score a 0, a 1, or a 2.

Responses describing what is literally happening in the image – a ship landing – scored a 1.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

Well... the title is 'The Ship' so I think the reason why its so big is because it is the main attraction.

Y8

Responses describing the effect of the oversized ship as overpowering the page or the viewer, or as representing the importance, power, or dominance of the ship or its inhabitants, scored a 2.

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

to make the reader awestruck
or to intimidate

Y8

Examples of student responses. Score = 2

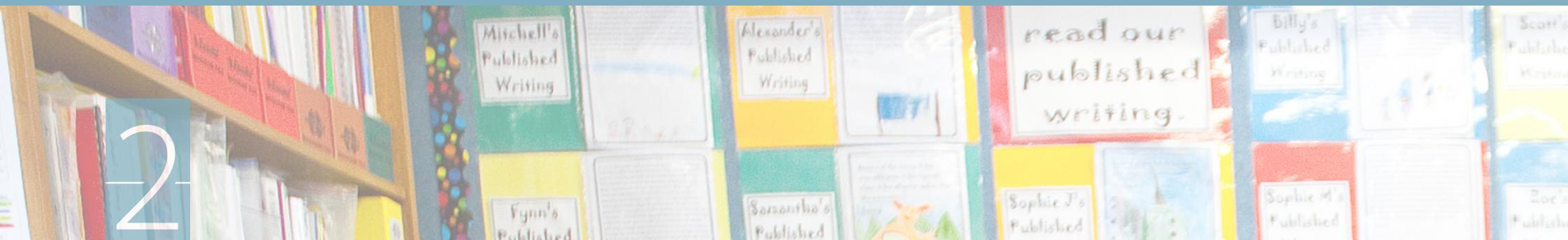
It makes you think that the ship is really ~~imposing~~
imposing and important.

Y8

I think that the effect of this
is how big the settlers where

Y8

Students found this question more difficult than the one just described, suggesting that the concept of size representing power and domination is more difficult than the idea of darkness representing evil. Only around one-third (36 percent) of Year 8 responses scored a 1 and a very small proportion (6 percent) scored a 2.



Attending to the use of colour in a picture book image

Text: *One Gorilla*. Anthony Browne¹¹

Year 8 students viewed a picture-book image depicting a mother orang-utan cradling and looking lovingly at her baby. The two orang-utans are coloured a bright, unnatural orange. The students were asked:

In nature, the orang-utan's hair is orange-reddish brown.

In this image it is bright orange. What is the effect of this?

Students were given space to write a short response to the question and could score a 0 or a 1.

Responses scored a 1 if they either implicitly or explicitly identified the orange colour as representing warmth, friendliness, happiness, or love.

Only around one-half (52 percent) of the Year 8 responses scored a 1. A common error was to repeat aspects of the question with responses such as: 'They do not look realistic' or 'To make them look colourful'.

Examples of student responses. Score = 1

to make them seem loving, and radiate a warm friendly glow.

Y8

It is orange because it makes the orangutans look warm because if you hug someone it feels warm so it gives that effect

Y8

The effect of this was maybe showing that this moment was happy.

Y8

In the responses to these questions – and to all the other visual questions – students identified the use of symbolism to represent an abstract concept: low camera angle with muted colours and use of rough lines to represent unfriendliness; dark colours used to represent evil; size to represent power or domination.

The terms 'symbolism' and 'representation' help explain what students identified in precise and accurate language, easily understood within the discourse of English literature. Yet very few of student responses make use of this language, both in these examples and across all the NMSSA responses.

¹¹ Browne, A. (2012). *One gorilla: A counting book*. London: Walker Books Ltd.



2

Attending to form when making meaning of oral texts

Compared with the reading and viewing tasks, the questions in the listening tasks focused mainly on the ‘content’ of text. There were therefore fewer opportunities in the listening assessment, for students to demonstrate their capacity to use language features to make meaning of text. The task described below is one example of a listening question in which students needed to consider the delivery of the text, as well as the ‘content’ to answer it correctly.

Attending to tone in an oral narrative text

Text: *Snake and Lizard*. Joy Cowley¹²

Year 4 students listened to a narrative about two friends, Snake and Lizard, talking about their views of human beings. Lizard tells Snake that she should not hiss at human beings but be kind to them. After some further argument, Snake:

curled up amongst the corn, muttering, ‘I will be kind. I will be kind’ while Lizard went away to hunt for flies in the lettuce patch. (Cowley, 2007, 21)¹

The students were asked:

When snake mutters, “I will be kind, I will be kind”, she sounds

- A friendly
- B grumpy
- C worried
- D confused
- E calm

The correct answer is B. To get this correct answer, students needed to consider both the character’s actual words, ‘I will be kind, I will be kind’, and the low and tense delivery of the words (along with the context in which the words are spoken).

In this instance students are not asked directly what the effect of the low and tense delivery is, but rather need to apply this understanding to get the correct answer.

This was one of the more difficult listening questions, with only 37 percent correctly selecting ‘B grumpy’.

¹² Cowley, J. (2007). *Snake and Lizard*. Wellington: Gecko Press.

2

Summary for Insight 2

What do these findings illustrate?

Students find analysing and describing the 'how' of a text difficult

The findings from the NMSSA: English show that it is difficult for students to use language or design features to make meaning of text. This is true across all modes of meaning making – reading, listening, and viewing.

Why does this matter?

Knowledge about the language or design features of a text and a meta-language to describe these features empowers the reader. Such knowledge enables the reader to:

- work out what the text is doing to them, how, and the possible reasons why
- choose how to read and respond to the text on their own terms

It also enables the reader to make informed choices about the use of language features in their own texts they create. It enables them to:

- describe, discuss, and analyse their own use of language and the language of others
- think critically about the effectiveness of their own language and the language of others

What can teachers do?

One of the ways to raise students' awareness of the language or design techniques used in the texts they read, watch, or listen to, is using meta-language for talking about how language works. Overall, we found little use of meta-language in students' responses to the making meaning questions.

Meta-language is important in that it raises awareness of how language is being used and for what purposes. Many students (and adults) do not notice the subtle effects that the use of language has on them as a reader, listener and viewer. Learning

meta-language raises reader awareness of what a text is doing and how it is doing it. An aware reader is less likely to be manipulated by text, and, in today's world, this awareness is more important than ever before.

Teachers can help students to build a meta-language for analysing and discussing language by:

- using meta-language in context as part of everyday programmes (modelling)
- encouraging students to discuss and describe their own use of language or design features and the language or design features used by others
- providing students with opportunities to explore language as an integral part of working with all oral, written, and visual texts in authentic contexts
- providing students with opportunities to explore specific aspects of language as a topic in itself.

To help students analyse the use of language and design features we can support students to consider the following questions:

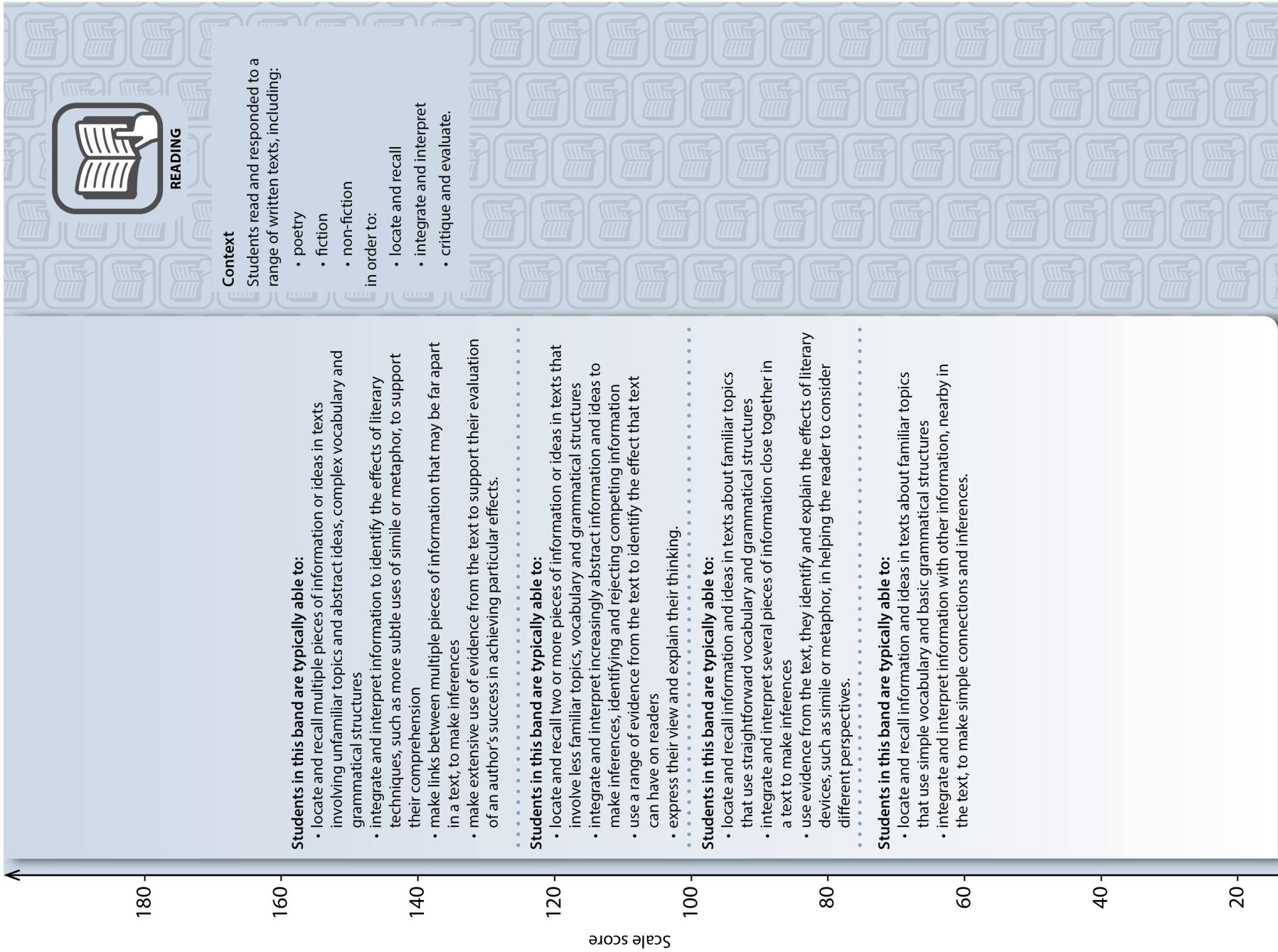
- What might this text be saying?
- What language or design features has the author or designer used?
- What effects do those features have on me/the reader?
- How might the use of language features support or undermine the meanings we can make of this text?
- How can I use this knowledge when I am the author or designer of my own texts?

Appendix



Scales for reading, listening and viewing



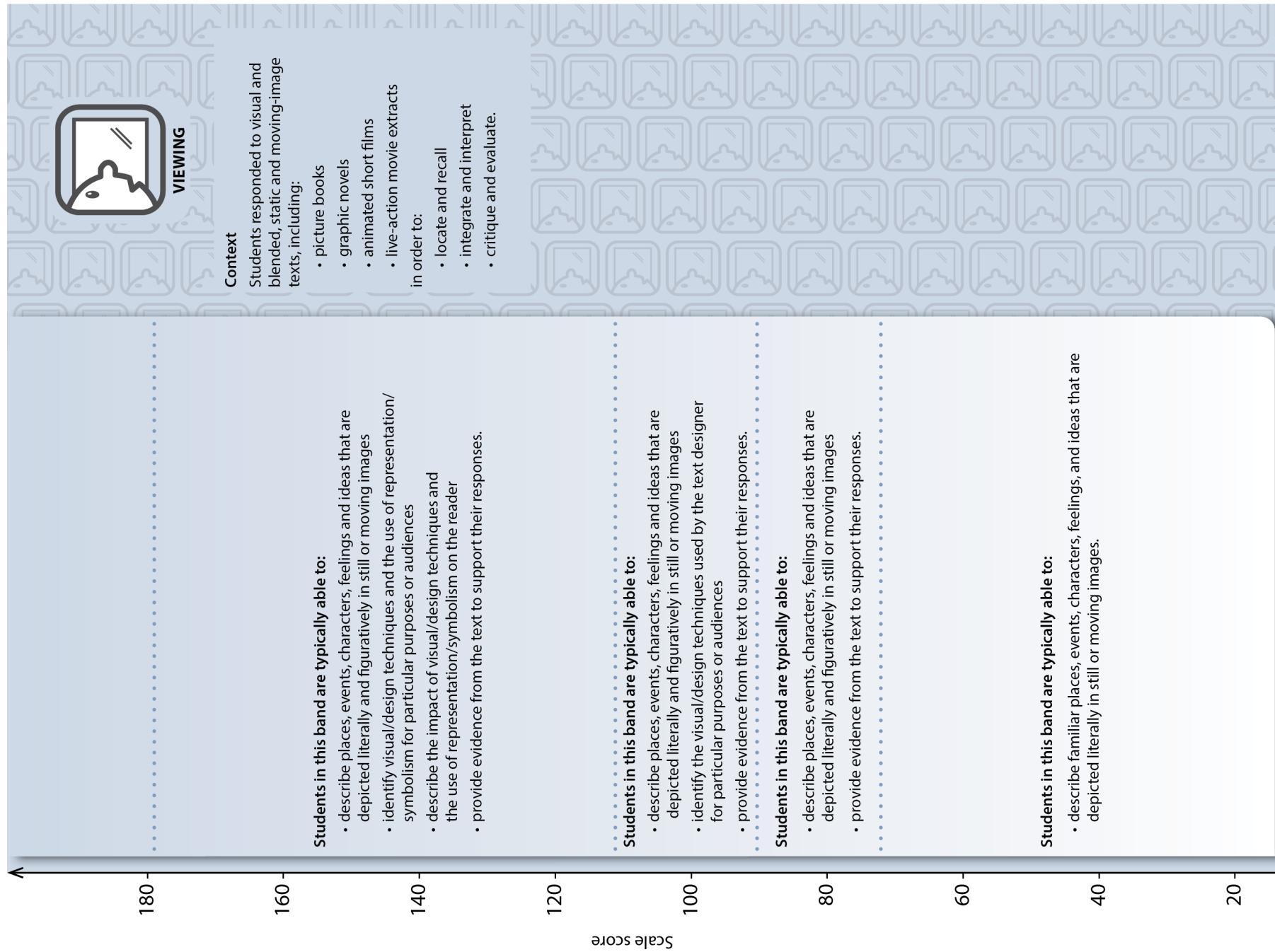


Note: Descriptors in each band are non-hierarchical

Figure 1: A description of the Reading in the English Learning Area (RELA) scale



Figure 3: A description of the Listening in the English Learning Area (LELA) scale



Note: Descriptors in each band are non-hierarchical

Figure 5: A description of the Viewing in the English Learning Area (VELA) scale

