

'How Gilbert Died' Lesson Plan

Teaching focus

- Narrative structure – puzzle-solution pattern.

Engagement

- Explain that you are going to show students the first two lines from a poem: students have to work out what the lines are referring to. Write on the board: 'There's never a stone at the sleeper's head; There's never a fence beside.' Prompt question: What kind of sleeper would have a stone at his head?
- Explain that sometimes writers set up puzzles at the beginning of a text which are answered later in the text: we have to read on to find out the answer. Add the next two lines from the poem: 'And the wandering stock on the grave may tread, Unnoticed and undenied.' (You may need to explain undenied).
- Explain we now know it's a grave. Ask, 'What assumptions would you make about a person buried in such a grave: it's unmarked and uncared for and cattle and sheep are allowed to walk over it?'
- Write next two lines on the board 'But the smallest child on the watershed Can tell you how Gilbert Died' – point out the puzzle established: Gilbert's grave is unmarked and uncared for but everyone in the area knows how he died. Why might that be?

Scaffolding the reading

Scaffold the reading purpose

Set reading purpose: to find out what was so special about Gilbert's death that everyone remembers it even though his grave is unmarked.

Scaffold background knowledge

- Bushranger/outlaw with 'thousand pounds on their head' - see teachers notes.
- 'a black that tracked': see teachers notes

Scaffold the language

- Grandsire - grandfather
- rifle breech – where rifle is bent for loading
- watershed: area between two rivers; in this case between the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan rivers, NSW

Reading

Explicit teaching

Review the idea that writers establish puzzles for readers to solve. Point out that that the poem doesn't explicitly state what it is that people remember about Gilbert's death. Readers have to decide that themselves.

Exploration

Students brainstorm reasons why Gilbert's death is remembered even though his grave is not marked.

Application

Set the ask

Ask students to imagine someone has asked them to explain why 'the smallest child on the watershed can tell you how Gilbert died'. Students are to write the explanation they would give.

Scaffold the task

Teach structure of an explanation with emphasis on topic sentences and supporting evidence.

Supervise the task

Monitor work; praise good efforts; occasionally interrupt class to read out good examples.

Sharing the results

Volunteers read their work aloud to class.

Review

Tell students that next time they read a story or poem and find the beginning confusing or puzzling, they shouldn't automatically assume that the text is stupid or they are. It may be that the writer has established a puzzle for them to solve by reading the rest of the text.