

Finding Out

Worksheet: [Plan a letter from Uncle Fred](#)

Understanding

[ACELA1490](#) | [EN2-8B](#)

Narrative Text Structure

A Narrative's purpose is to Entertain. It's a fictional tale that has characters, a setting, orientation, problem and a resolution to the problem. It can also have illustrations or photographs, which add additional information to the story, often alluding to something else that is happening in the background.

Finding Out, is bordering on historical fiction, due to the factual information about World War 1. In this story, as far as the reader knows, Uncle Fred, the boy and his family, are fictional characters.

View the title and the overall layout of the story, including the illustrations, without reading the written text. This will activate students' prior knowledge of symbols, colour and codes of visual elements in the story.

Discuss using the question prompts below.

- What is the purpose of this image? What are the most [salient](#) (important) parts of the image?
- What is the overall mood of the image? What techniques contribute to this mood?
- How do the visual elements make you feel? How do we crack the 'codes' - the meaning embedded in elements such as the colours, textures, lines, postures and facial expressions of the characters, the style of the images? and point of view? How have the elements been arranged?
- Are any ideas in this image reflected in other parts of the written text? Is the meaning changed when the images are compared to the written text?

Write responses to the classroom discussion in students' journals.

Identify Narrative language features.

The introductory paragraph 'hooks' the reader into the story, which makes them want to read on. It usually introduces the setting and the main character.

Prompt Questions

- What do we know from this beginning? Who are the characters, what is the setting, the problem and possible resolution?

- In Finding Out, the first paragraph is only two lines. We find out that Uncle Fred has been dead a long time. We hear the voice of the narrator, immediately. Unapologetically blunt, and self-focused.
- 'We saw him two him two or three times a year. He was boring.'
- The term boring and the short sentences places the voice as a child. Yet Uncle Fred died fifty years ago. So how old is the narrator now?

Ask students to predict what will happen from this beginning, and from the title. What will the boy Find Out? What will we as readers Find Out? Students can also revisit their predictions after reading the text.

The table below shows some of the narrative language features in Finding Out. Some are completed for teachers' information.

Complete this table in student journals.

Narrative Language features	Explanation	Examples in this text
Dialogue.	Paragraphs without dialogue are easy to identify, as they are just indented. In areas of dialogue, it can be hard to work out who is speaking. Follow these rules for paragraphs and dialogue.	
Descriptive Language	to live a quiet, ordinary life	
Past Tense	Was, did, bravest	
Action verbs	Attacked, shooting,	
Personal pronouns	He, she, they, them	
Linking words to do with time	Once upon a time, then, after that, the next day	
Vocabulary specific to an era identifies the time a scene is set.	Colloquialisms - Cobber – slang for 'friend' used in a previous era.	'the best and bravest cobber a bloke could ever have.'
	Different measurements for area	Their machine guns covered every inch of ground.
Similes	A figure of speech that directly compares two things	great barriers of barbed wire, with spikes as thick as a man's thumb.
Point of view	First person, using the boy's point of view. His voice as narrator.	If my uncle's history was as boring as he was, I didn't want to know about it.

Historical elements and
expert language

No-man's land, trenches,
corporal, platoon

Engaging Personally

[ACELT1605 EN2-10C](#)

This text is written initially from the point of view of a young high school student. The language choice of short, confident statements of fact sets the tone at the beginning of the story. He states that Uncle Fred was boring and repeats the word several times, which reinforces that point of view. However, as the story unfolds, and the boy hears anecdotes about Uncle Fred's wartime experiences and his kind nature, the boy's sentences become longer, his language more thoughtful. This signifies the personal growth of the character.

Discuss the underlying theme of the story. The title, Finding Out, gives an important clue to what the story is really about.

What did the boy find out that changed his mind about Uncle Fred being boring?

What did the boy find out about himself?

Have you ever been in a similar situation, where you thought you knew a person by their age or appearance?

The boy said he was smart.

'I was at high school, and quite good at my subjects. All my uncles and aunts thought I was clever. It used to embarrass me, but I felt pleased about it too.'

However, his uncle did not have the same opportunity to have a high school education, because he had to earn a living and left school when he was thirteen.

Does Uncle Fred's short education mean that he was less intelligent than the boy?

Is there a difference between a 'boring' life and a quiet, ordinary life?

Everyone has personal strengths and preferences. People may be recognised as being 'smart' in many different areas.

Which areas interest you the most? Are you interested in multiple areas, are the boundaries blurred for you or is there one area that you feel suits you best?

Create class Point of View podcasts. You may like to use the ideas at [Podcasts: The Nuts and Bolts of Creating Podcasts](#) instructions. Students could interview a relative or older citizen to uncover stereotypes.

Our views are formed from belief systems in the societies in which we live; our family background; our religion and our politics. This affects the way we look at things, our point of view. A simple analogy is Person A has a flying fox accident in the past, sees flying foxes as very dangerous. Person B has had no frightening experience with flying foxes, so it just looks like fun. Both people will approach the event with a different point of view, one with trepidation, the other with excitement. Even the words we use have different connotations, for example elder vs old person. One is a term of respect for the knowledge they have gained throughout a long life, the other is a label.

Questions to ask may be:

- How do you view life?
- What is the difference in your opinion, between life as it is now, compared to when you were the same age as us?
- What were the major influences on your life?

Students can develop their own questions, covering a range of topics, such as schooling, transport, family structures.

Complete a plenary; a quick report to the whole class about what they have learned so far.

Plenaries act as a debrief at the end of a unit of work or an activity. Students draw together their ideas about their learning and summarise the process. They can then focus on what was important and what they need to learn next.

Connecting

[ACELT1603 EN2-11D](#)

Text to self.

Text-to-self connections occur when we make connections between personal experiences and the text.

Write responses to these prompts in students' journals.

- Stories can make a reader reflect deeply about their beliefs. They may identify with characters and the resolution to the story may give them ideas on where to go next with their thinking. Do you relate personally to the text? Have you ever been in a situation where you made assumptions about a person's character and were proved wrong? Has this situation ever happened to you? Did you feel misunderstood?
- Are there other people you know, who may have had this happen to them?
- What else does the text remind you of?
- One day, we will all be old people. What do you think it will be like to be an old person? What do you think your young relatives will believe about you? What will your response to those impressions be?

Text to text

Text-to-text connections occur when we make connections between other texts in relation to the texts we are reading and viewing.

There are other texts in this issue of Blast Off along the same theme as Finding Out.

Locate texts written with a similar theme in this issue.

Get Moving is an article written by the same author, David Hill, on animals like the sloth that are perceived as being lazy because they aren't moving around very much. What ARE They? is a story from the viewpoint of sharks who think humans are disgusting and terrifying predators. Darcy Does Things Differently is about an old dog in a dog pound, who is constantly overlooked because of his age and retiring demeanor.

Text to World.

Historical Fiction is a popular genre that takes many forms from short stories and novels to multimodal texts such as, movies and plays. It's important because studying the past helps us to make informed decisions about where we need to go in the future. Students can think that history is dry and there are many facts to memorise, but a story carries the reader along so they can imagine what it was like being there. The written and visual text 'paints a picture' where readers can connect with the events using their five senses. In their imaginations, readers see, hear, smell, taste and touch the events as they unravel.

Write a response about this statement in students' journals.

Use this [Making Connections](#) graphic organiser to ask targeted questions about this text.

Engaging Critically

[ACELY1692 EN2-4A](#)

Students need to analyse sections of written text in order to understand that texts can position and influence readers. They may find it easier to locate information stated directly in the text, but other times the information is inferred rather than stated. Consequently, they need exposure to texts like Finding Out, in order to learn how to 'read between the lines.'

Reading Comprehension, inferred meanings.

Quote

Questions about the text

'MY UNCLE FRED died fifty years ago. We used to go and see him two or three times a year. He was boring.'

How old is the boy now?

'When he retired, he played lawn bowls all the time. That was even more boring. He had a funny way of standing and walking, with one shoulder sort of bent over. So, he looked silly as well as boring.'

Do you agree with the boy that the uncle would have looked silly? That he appeared boring? How does this quote make you feel about the uncle? About the boy?

'Your uncle Fred has a real history,' Mum used to say.

'Get your dad to tell you about him, some time.' *Huh*, I thought. If my uncle's history was as boring as he was, I didn't want to know about it.'

Does the boy want to learn about Uncle Fred? Why not? What do we learn about the boy from this quote?

Uncle Fred 'thought all war was wrong, that people shouldn't kill one another for any reason. But in the end, he decided to join the army.'

Why did Uncle Fred join the army when he didn't believe in war?

'He didn't want you to know about the things that happened to him in the war, son,' Mum said. 'He didn't want anyone to know.'

Why didn't Uncle Fred want to tell anybody about his experience of war?

'One of his best friends was killed in another battle a year later. After he heard, Uncle Fred threw the medal away. When he got home, all he wanted was to live a quiet, ordinary life.'

Uncle Fred wanted a quite simple life, but the boy thought he was just boring. Why did the boy change his mind about Uncle Fred when he started finding out more about him?

So, I learned the truth about my uncle and his history. And some truth about myself, I suppose.

What 'truth' did the boy learn about himself? How do you feel about the boy at the end of the text?

Reading Comprehension, information located directly in the text.

When and where did Uncle Fred fight?

1916 Battle of the Somme.

What country did the battle take place?

'He trained in Australia, then travelled by troopship to Europe and took part in some of the terrible battles in France.'

How big were the spikes of barbed wire?

'spikes as thick as a man's thumb'

Who were the Allied forces?

'Each time they attacked, the Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, British and French soldiers were shot down in their thousands.'

What happened to Uncle Fred's shoulder?

A piece of shrapnel hit Uncle Fred in the shoulder, ... For the rest of his own life, he couldn't move his shoulder properly, and of course, that was why he stood and walked the way he did. (In this last question, students will need to be scaffolded in order to understand that the ellipses indicate text that has been left out in order to place emphasis on relevant parts of the text.

Why didn't Uncle Fred want people to know about his experiences? Do you think that people should talk about these experiences?

'he came back saying that nobody ever again should have to go through what he and his coppers had to.'

Viewing Comprehension, Visual analysis

Question Prompt for whole class discussion.

Why do illustrators use shades of brown in historical images?

For teacher reference: Before the invention of colour photography, images were mostly black and white, or photographers would use ‘sepia tone’ over the image to give it a brown tinted hue. Using this effect made skin colour more realistic and they could then add extra watercolour for a more lifelike effect, particularly in eyes or to give a rosy blush on the cheeks. So, the restriction of colour to browns, is a historical reference back to times pre colour photography. The colour brown is now used as a symbol which refers to the past and is also used when a character reminisces about past events.

The following activity may be modelled as a whole class activity on large sticky notes or recorded as a PowerPoint during classroom discussion for future reference.

Refer to [tool for analysing visual images](#) when deconstructing the meanings of images.

Use the gradual release model – I do - we do – you do when scaffolding students to analyse visual imagery. The first one is done for you.

Visual analysis of the illustrations in Finding Out

Illustration 1 Expression on the boy’s face. Fake smile to be polite. Hand on chin – propping himself up because he is so bored. They are having a game of battleships, which the boy would consider boring in a world of digital games. Uncle Fred looks happy as he goes to make a cup of tea, but his colouring is brown (representing a past era and that he is old, and he blends into the background. The framework around Uncle Fred also recedes into the background and visually separates him from ‘the present,’ represented by the boy and the more colourful foreground.

Illustration 2 Question: How would Uncle Fred feel if he knew what the boy really thought about him?
Discuss the setting. Look at the background information. What does the window – the stained-glass, the arch, the symbol of the cross, and the wood panelling refer to?

Illustration 3

Illustration 4

Further comprehension questions.

Interestingly, we never find out the name of the boy in the story. This is a deliberate decision by the author and students need to ask why he did this using the prompt below.

- Uncle Fred's character is 'fleshed out' through the anecdotes of people who knew him. The boy, however, is young and still learning about life and how to respond to it. At the end of the story, he calls himself boring as way of apology for the way he responded to Uncle Fred.
- Do you think he was 'boring?' Or was he being hard on himself as a young person learning about life?
- Uncle Fred did not tell anybody about his war experiences. Did he do the right thing? The boy was smart, he was just uninformed. Telling him about past experiences may have brought them closer together.

Debate topic. War movies inform people about the horrors of war vs war movies glorify violence.

Is it better to know all the details or to be blissfully unaware? How can we change something if we aren't fully informed? What do you think?

Further research and resources

[The Four Resources Model](#) (Freebody and Luke, 1990) can be used for analysing images as well as written texts.

[My Place website](#) rich educational material to support primary and lower-secondary teachers using the My Place TV series in the classroom.

[Australian History Mysteries.](#) – is a subscription-based website containing inquiry learning case studies that are directly relevant to the Australian Curriculum.

Further activities on this topic can be found at [Classroom Activities for Multiple Intelligences.](#)