

Maggie Magpie

Story by Liv Visser | illustrated by [Peter Sheehan](#)

[EN2-11D](#) | [ACELT1596](#)

Design a poster persuading people to protect magpies.

Before reading the story, explain that from the front to back of the classroom will be used as a positive to negative scale. Delegate the front of the classroom to positive feelings and the back of the classroom to negative feelings. The space between the back and front is a scale, with those near the front close to, but not quite, 100% positive, and visa versa for the back. The exact centre is neutral. Ask students to stand in a space in the room depending on how they feel about magpies. Those who have been swooped and hurt by magpies might go straight to the back of the room. Those who feed magpies each evening and have a good relationship with them might go straight to the front. Some students won't mind one way or the other and will hover around the middle. Select a few students from each side to talk about their experiences with magpies.

After students return to their seats, read the story aloud. Ask if any students have changed their minds about how they feel about magpies since reading the story.

View the following YouTube videos in this order:

[Magpie Attack](#)

[Magpie Hangs Upside Down](#)

[Baby Magpie Falls in Love with his Rescuer's Cat](#)

Discuss the videos. Has anything viewed or read so far influenced them one way or another? Explain that magpies are incredibly intelligent creatures that can be fun, friendly and silly. It's during swooping season that some magpies become aggressive and territorial. Understandably, students who have had negative encounters with magpies may find them frightening.

Students are to go on a fact-finding mission, using laptops or tablets to write down a few interesting facts about magpies. Ensure students are searching for Australian magpies only.

Some useful websites:

Australian Geographic's [four facts about magpies](#)

Kidzoo.org's [Australian magpie quick facts](#)

The Australian Museum's page on the [Australian magpie](#)

Repeat the first activity of students choosing a space in the room depending on how they feel about magpies. By now, hopefully most students will be at the front of the room. If any students are still around the back of the room, ask if they can at least list one or two positive facts about magpies.

When the class returns to their seats, explain that some people hate magpies and want to chase them away. Some people even think magpies in populated areas should be shot. Students are to get into pairs or groups of three and design a poster persuading the community to protect magpies. Encourage them to include the positive things they've discovered about magpies as well as the facts they've found in their research. Example titles: Give Magpies a Chance! Magnificent Magpies! Let's Protect our Maggies!

Success criteria for the poster:

- uses bright colours
- keeps it simple
- writes large
- illustrations support the text
- includes positive magpie facts

Comprehend it

Read 'Maggie Magpie' and answer the questions below.

1. What type of text is 'Maggie Magpie'?

2. What are the names of the author and illustrator of the story?

3. Suggest another title the author could have chosen.

4. Explain the problem or complication in the story.

5. Explain why the family stopped feeding the magpies.

6. Why do you think Jedda the dog disliked Maggie so much?

7. How did the family know when Maggie Magpie had been around for a visit?

Chaser, the World's Smartest Dog

Article by [Kate Walker](#) | Photos courtesy Dana Cabbage

EN2-4A | ACELY1680

Analyse texts using literal and inferred comprehension.

Read the article 'Chaser, the World's Smartest Dog.' Discuss the article to ensure student understanding. Watch the Youtube video [Chaser the Dog Shows off her Smarts to Neil DeGrasse Tyson](#).

On the contents page of Countdown you will find the word of the month. This month it is 'proficient.' Use a dictionary or the [online dictionary](#) to discuss the meaning of proficient.

Ask students whether they think Chaser is proficient at something. What do they think it is? What evidence do they have from the text and video? (Chaser is proficient at learning and remembering the names of over a thousand toys.)

In small groups, students go through several articles in this issue of Countdown to complete the chart below.

Magazine piece	Character	What are they proficient at?	Evidence from the text and your own explanation
Maggie Magpie	Maggie		
Shudder	Shudder		
Stripes in the Sky	Teacher		
Tadpoles Can't Talk	Tom		

Answers may vary. Example of answers below.

Magazine piece	Character	What are they proficient at?	Quotes from the text and your own explanation
Maggie Magpie	Maggie	Stealing dog biscuits/feeding her chicks dog biscuits	"We caught her strutting out of the garage one day with her beak full of dog biscuit!" = Maggie had been stealing dog biscuits "We reckoned that Maggie must have been the only magpie mum in the world to have raised her chicks on 'Canine Crunchies!'" = Maggie was feeding her chicks dog biscuits, which are called Canine Crunchies
Shudder	Shudder	Scaring people	"He'd had a great laugh with Mrs Parsley in Unit 2, by hiding in her nightdress, then springing out just as she was about to put it on. Shudder thought Mrs Parsley's scream was one of the best he'd ever caused." = Mrs Parsley had screamed because he had scared her. "He had a few favourite pranks, and one of these was the Toothbrush Trick. ... This had produced spectacular results with Mr Pedrotti in Unit 12, who had not cleaned his teeth since." = Mr Pedrotti was so frightened by the trick that he couldn't bring himself to pick up his toothbrush anymore.
Stripes in the Sky	Teacher	Ancient history and Egyptian hieroglyphics	"Usually I teach ancient history and Egyptian hieroglyphics." = to be a teacher of these subjects means to have studied them specially.
The Rock-Throwing Chimp	Santino	Catching tadpoles/speaking frog	"Tom had been catching tadpoles. He had a jam jar full of them." = if he has a whole jar full of them, he must be good. "I don't think it's a proper cough,"

			<p>said Dad. 'I think Tom is speaking Frog.'</p> <p>'Don't be silly,' said Mum. 'Boys can't speak Frog.'</p> <p>'And tadpoles can't talk,' said Dad." = everyone kept saying 'tadpoles can't talk' during the story and they were wrong. Dad repeats this phrase to remind Mum that she could be wrong when she says 'Boys can't speak Frog.'</p>
--	--	--	---

A beginner's guide to dog training

The article 'Chaser, the World's Smartest Dog' explains how Professor Pilley trained Chaser to recognise words. Is dog training hard? What do you need? And how do you even start? Use this page to write your own Beginner's guide to dog training.

Equipment required:

Hints for training a dog:

Warnings:

Steps:

Cats and Dogs

Poem by [Caroline Tuohey](#) | illustrated by [Ana Maria Méndez Salgado](#)

[EN2-9B](#) | [ACELA1484](#)

Create a short text and illustration using an idiom.

Read the poem aloud to the class. Direct students to the last line and explain that 'when it rains, it pours' is a common saying but the last word is a clever homophone using paws, which relates to cats and dogs, instead of pours. Ask students if they've heard the expression 'raining cats and dogs' and where they think it comes from. Does it really make sense? There aren't actually cats and dogs falling from the sky. Explain to students that this type of language is called an 'idiom.' It's a common phrase that makes no literal sense. See if students can name any more idioms, then visit the [idiom title page](#) on idioms.com to read a few.

Students use laptops or tablets to research idioms and find one they like. They need to make note of the metaphorical meaning so they can use it in a short text. A recount or story of two to three lines is sufficient, as long as students have demonstrated their understanding of the idiom. Students create a poster with the text at the bottom and draw a picture that relates to the literal meaning of the word (as the illustration in 'Cats and Dogs' did).

Examples:

My grandmother loves me best of all. I'm the apple of her eye!

(Illustration shows an old lady with an apple instead of an eye)

Today I did my maths homework. It was a piece of cake!

(Illustration shows student eating a cake with easy algorithms on the icing)

Shudder

Story by Katie Aaron | illustrated by [Aśka](#)

[EN2-10C](#) | [ACELT1594](#)

Investigate connecting themes between two texts.

Read 'Shudder' to the class. After reading, ask students the following questions as something to silently contemplate, but don't have them answer aloud.

- What does Shudder's actions tell us about his personality?
- What happens when Shudder tried to scare Claire?
- What do you think Shudder learns from this experience?

View the YouTube video on [Athena and Arachnae](#).

After viewing, ask students the following questions as something to silently contemplate, but don't have them answer aloud.

- What does Arachnae's actions tell us about her personality?
- What happens when Arachnae boasts about being better than Athena?
- What do you think Arachnae learns from this experience?

Students form pairs. Hand out one large piece of butcher paper or A3 paper to each pair. Students draw a profile (side on) outline of their face about a third of the way in, one on each side of the page. Inside the left profile, students write the answers you asked for the questions about Shudder, along with any other thoughts. Inside the right profile, students write the answers you asked for the questions about Arachnae, along with any other thoughts. In the middle, they need to brainstorm the answer to the question: Why did the author make these choices for the character and plot? (You can give the students a hint: think about the purpose of this text.)

By comparing Shudder and Arachnae's flaws (pride) and understanding that both characters learnt a lesson, students may find that the two narratives were not just written to entertain, but to give a moral as well. The connecting moral is: pride comes before fall.

An example of what student work should look like is below.



Good Manners for Little Monsters

Poem by [Jill McDougall](#) | illustrated by [Greg Holfeld](#)

[EN2-2A](#) | [ACELY1682](#)

Create a recipe based on the poem.

View the YouTube video for this poem if you are a digital subscriber. Ask students to identify what makes the poem funny. Is it really good manners to use your helmet as a plate, or to wipe your mouth on your sister's hair? Explain that the humour in this piece comes from its unexpectedness.

Direct students to the line

Gobble up your spider pie with crunchy bits of dragonfly.

Has anyone heard of spider pie before? It's a fake food to go with the poem. What might the recipe for this pie look like?

Model a recipe for spider pie on the board, taking student suggestions for ingredients. Make a note at the top about the purpose of a recipe. Ask students why the ingredients list goes first (so people can gather the ingredients at the start) and what kind of word comes first for each step (a verb). If possible, use any measuring cups and teaspoons available to give students an idea of portion sizes.

An example recipe is below.

Purpose: To teach people how to cook spider pie.

Spider Pie

You will need:

1/2 cup of spiders, dead

3/4 cup of flour

1/4 cup of water

1 cup of cockroach stock

2 tablespoons of dried dragonfly, chopped

1 teaspoon of salt

Pepper (to taste)

Steps:

1. Beat spiders in with flour until it makes a fine paste.
2. Simmer water and stock on the stove on a low heat until it starts to bubble.
3. Add spider and flour paste and boil for ten minutes.
4. Sprinkle dragonfly into mixture.
5. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Cook for another twenty minutes.
7. Transfer mixture into casserole dish and bake in oven for half an hour.
8. Take casserole dish from oven and leave to cool for five minutes.
9. Enjoy!

Ask students to check you've used all the ingredients. Include a simple illustration of the pie beneath.

Students brainstorm other foods that a monster might eat. Examples could be a mud cake (with real mud), booger biscuits, insect icy poles, cockroach sandwich. Encourage lots of answers.

Students choose one monster food and write the recipe for it, using the modelled recipe on the board as a template. They must have a title, ingredients list, steps in the correct order and an illustration at the end. A [marking rubric for recipes](#) can be found on Read Write Think.

T is for Trouble

Poem by Monty Edwards | illustrated by [David Legge](#)

EN2-7B | [ACELA1477](#)

Analyse the way modality word choices characterise the letter T.

Read the poem aloud to the class. Ask if they understand who the poem is talking about. Ask students if they've ever heard a letter being given a personality, making it human-like. What kind of personality does the poem suggest the letter T has? What words tell students this?

Draw a line along the front of the classroom. This can either be on the board or along the floor with masking tape. On the far left is low modality words. These are words that show uncertainty about something happening (it **MIGHT** rain today). On the far right are high modality words for certainty of something happening (it **WILL** rain today). Choose some of the following words to write on cards:

always never clearly absolutely undoubtedly certainly may might not might couldn't could can	maybe sometimes rarely chance slight possibility occasionally certainty definite certain probably possibly possible	tends to often regularly unlikely frequently likely probable will will not usually possibility doubtful high possibility
---	--	--

Give a card to each child to stick somewhere along the line. If it's a word that means something is more likely to occur, they should put it closer to the right. If it's less likely to occur, it should go towards the left. Students should discuss their choice of the degree of modality as they're putting the card down. Some cards may go in the same spot. Other children may disagree with the answers – use this as an opportunity for discussion.

As well as a selection of the above, choose some of the following to write on cards:

might

must

should

could

may

may not

would

would not

has to

must not

Explain that these are a range of words that tell us whether something is an order or a suggestion. High modality words from this list include "must", "has to". Low modality words include "might", "could". For further examples, visit the page on [Identifying and Using Modality](#) on the NSW education website.

If you have a digital subscription, go to the interactive to practise modality words in use.

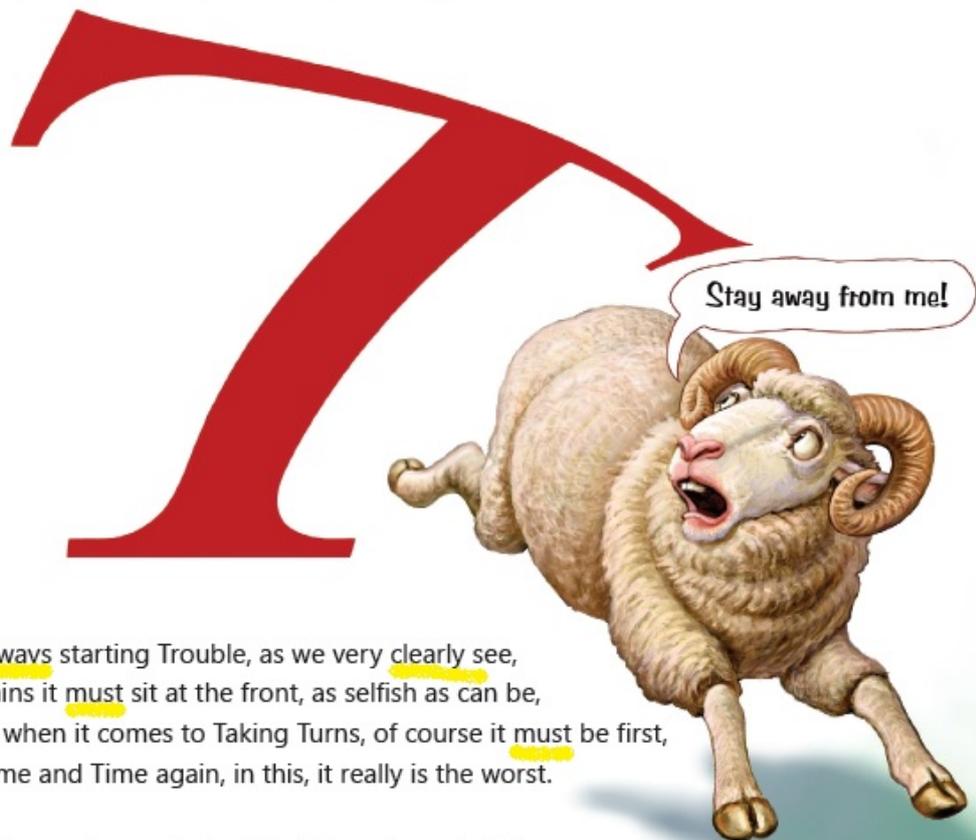
Return to the poem 'T is for Trouble.' Ask students to highlight all modality words in the poem. See if anyone can figure out "bound to" is a modality word, and if there

are any clever students who can work out I'd is short for "I would" and therefore another modality word. An answer guide is provided below

Students do a **think, pair, share** discussing how they think these modality words help characterise the letter T. Do they think the use of high modality words makes this character worse, or not as bad? Would they feel differently about T if the modality words were changed or taken out of the poem?

T is for Trouble

poem by Monty Edwards | illustrated by David Legge



T's **always** starting Trouble, as we very **clearly** see,
In Trains it **must** sit at the front, as selfish as can be,
Then when it comes to Taking Turns, of course it **must** be first,
As Time and Time again, in this, it really is the worst.

Its influence is very bad, of that there is **no doubt**,
For when there's work for it to do we find it **backing out**.
A man named Ben was joined by T and instantly was Ben**T**,
So gained a reputation that was **never** his intent!

Now people sometimes tell you, you should **'mind your Ps and Qs'**,
But when it comes to letters there's another that I'd choose.
Its awfully bad behaviour's **bound** to lead you into error,
So I'd advise: 'Beware of T!' It truly is a Terror.

Have a rhyme of a time

Words rhyme when they have the same ending sound.

Part A

Below are some words taken from 'T is for Trouble'. Write a rhyming word for each one.

see	then	tell	choose
train	bad	you	bound
course	out	should	lead
time	Ben	mind	trouble

Part B

For every word in the table, write a rhyming word.

1. start	
2. very	
3. clear	
4. name	
5. beware	
6. turn	

Part C

Use any of the rhyming pairs above to create your own short rhyming poem about a letter of the alphabet.

Stripes in the Sky

Play by [Philippa Werry](#) | illustrated by [Cheryl Orsini](#)

EN2-6B | ACELY1677

Design and **present** a story map.

As a class, read through the play. Ask students for a short summary of the plot. See if the class discussion can boil it down to a single sentence, such as, “a relief/supply teacher tries to get students enthusiastic about science, and the elements of the weather help to inspire them by making a rainbow.”

Students independently fill out a story map. An example [story map template](#) can be found on the Reading Rockets website. For more information on story maps, or other templates, visit their page on [story maps](#).

In pairs, students compare their completed story maps. They should have the basic information on the characters, setting and plot progression (problem and solution). Students then transfer this information using information from both their own map and their partner’s map onto either a digital format such as [Microsoft PowerPoint Online](#) or onto a hardcopy A3 or butcher paper. Encourage them to visually represent the plot using arrows and illustrations in a flow chart, with the beginning introducing the characters and setting.

Groups show their story maps to the class as an oral presentation. They should be able to explain the characters, the setting, a basic sequence of events and the resolution.

Rainbows KWL

A KWL chart is a tool used to organise your thoughts and knowledge on a topic.

KWL is an acronym:
K: What you know already
W: what you would like to know
L: what you have learned.

First, read the play 'Stripes in the Sky'. Then use this KWL chart to organise your knowledge on rainbows. The first line has been done for you.

K(now)	W(ant to know)	L(earned)
I know that rainbows have more than seven colours.	I would like to know how many colours a rainbow really has.	I learned that rainbows appear in the sky.

Captain Ahab's Weird Wide World: The Rock-Throwing Chimp

Article by Cheryl Bullow | Photo by Wikimedia commons

[EN2-12E](#) | [ACELT1598](#)

Investigate criteria for making personal judgements about the article.

Read the article. To check student understanding, ask who the article was about, and what made this creature special.

In small groups, students answer the following questions:

- What kind of text is this?
- Who is it about?
- What did the creature do?
- Is the accompanying picture a photograph or illustration?
- How long is the text?
- Where is it taking place?
- Are there any tricky words in the text?
- Are there any interesting words in the text?

In the same groups, students complete a [T-Chart](#) categorising why people might like 'The Rock-Throwing Chimp' on one side, and why people might dislike it on the other. They can use their personal preferences to guide them, but they should remember there are two sides to the argument. They can use the answers to the questions above to help them.

Some examples of why someone might not like the text:

- They aren't interested in news articles and prefer fiction texts
- They don't like chimps
- They think the chimp was mean
- They prefer illustrations to photographs

Some examples of why someone would like the text:

- They're interested in real-world stories
- They love chimps
- They think the article was funny
- They like to read about other places in the world

Students put their names on the bottom of the chart on the side that they agree with – either liking or disliking the story. They can put their name in the centre if they think there are good arguments to both sides. Students verbally explain their reasons as the teacher goes around to check work.

A Pledge

Poem by [Neal Levin](#) | illustrated by Amy Golbach

EN2-8B | ACELA1483

Analyse and **evaluate** choices made by the illustrator.

Before reading any part of the poem or talking about the title the title, project the illustration below for students to see



Students spend three minutes silently writing down everything they see. Encourage them to think of colours, angles, what the creatures in the illustration are doing and how the illustration makes the students feel.

When the three minutes are up, ask students to share their answers. Question why the illustrator made these choices:

- Why is the human so far in the background, walking away and not looking towards the viewer?
- Why are the colours so gentle?
- Why does it feel like the viewer is up in the trees with the birds?

Visit the [Visual Techniques](#) page on the Visual Literary Skills website to help students complete the activity below. All definitions are on the webpage, as well as some examples if you scroll to the bottom. At this point, students still shouldn't know anything about the poem, including the title. The first line of the activity has been done as an example. Answers will vary.

Technique	How it's used in the illustration	Why the illustrator made this choice
Offer	The bird is looking at the human, encouraging us to look at the human too	There might be a link between the bird and the human in the poem
Saliency		
Framing		
Perspective		
Vertical axis		
Colour		
Space		

Encourage students to use their own thinking and connections to prior learning. Their answers may be very different and that's fine, as long as they can explain their thinking. Possible answers may include soft colours to give us a gentle, safe feeling. The human is in the background facing away from us, perhaps giving them a sense of mystery or perhaps because they are a safe distance from the animals. The vertical axis shows the left as known (the bird) and the right as unknown (the human), as the human leaves the forest without impacting it.

When students have completed the table, ask them what they think the poem will be about. They may assume it's about the bird, as it is the salient feature.

Read the poem. Were students surprised by the content? Ask them to revisit their answers in the table. Has it changed their views at all? Why do they think the human – who is supposed to be the narrator of the poem – is so distanced from the viewer? Some students might understand that the illustration is portraying the safety of the forest by having the human be a background figure. Other students might think it detracts from the poem.

Students write a short answer as to whether they think the illustration is an effective accompaniment to the poem, and why.

Tadpoles Can't Talk

Story by Lyn Hackles | illustrated by [Anna Bron](#)

[EN2-2A](#) | [ACELT1601](#)

Rewrite the story as a recount from Taddy's point of view.

Read through the story. Discuss the main events and write them on the board for the next task. For example:

- Tom caught Taddy and put him in a bowl, where they started talking to each other
- Taddy talked to people at the school
- Taddy got famous and went on TV
- Taddy turned into a frog and moved into the pond, where Tom talked to him in Frog

Ask students what a recount is (text about past events) and the purpose of a recount (to entertain and inform). Explain that students will be writing a recount of the story as if they are Taddy the tadpole. It will help to study the story for clues as to how Taddy is feeling during the events. For example, Taddy smiles a lot, which means he's probably happy to be with Tom.

To prepare for writing a recount, students will need to have

- a clear title,
- the orientation (who, where, what),
- the chronological order already sequenced and
- a final evaluative comment.

Remind students to use first person point of view (I, we) as they are pretending to be Taddy writing about his experience. They need to use verbs in the past tense (jumped/swam) and think about time connectives (first, second, next, then, finally). Each plot point should be a new paragraph.

You can use an online [slideshow](#) available about writing a recount to share with the class, along with several [examples of recounts](#) on Professional Development Service for Teachers.

An example beginning:

Let me tell you about my fifteen minutes of fame. It all started when I was still a tadpole and a boy called Tom caught me from a pond. I was so happy when he took me home and kept me in a nice, safe bowl! We started talking to each other, and that's when things got interesting. Apparently, humans don't think tadpoles can talk.

First, Tom went to school on his own, but the next day he took me to his classroom. I spoke to the teacher and she fell on the floor!

And so on.

Success criteria:

- Clear title
- First paragraph has who, where, what
- Correct chronological order
- Each event is a new paragraph
- Uses and maintains first person point of view
- Verbs are in past tense
- Uses time connectives (first, next, then, finally)
- A final evaluative comment

Further resources: [A Week Worth of Recount Lessons](#) from Australian Curriculum Lessons.

Reporting the facts

Read the story about Tom and his talking tadpole called Teddy. In the table below, write down important information from the story. Then use these facts to write a newspaper report about the incident.

What happened?	
Who did it happen to?	
Where did it happen?	
When did it happen?	
Why did it happen?	

List any other important facts from the story on the lines below:

Now use this information to write your report for the local paper. Remember to start with the most important information first. Give your article a catchy headline so that others will want to read it!