

The Siren's Mirror

Story by [Geoffrey McSkimming](#) | illustrated by [Gabriel Evans](#)

EN3-CWT-01 | AC9E5LY06

Learning Intention:

I am learning to identify ways in which authors create excitement and suspense in texts so that I can use some of these strategies in my own writing.

Success Criteria:

- I can identify where authors have chosen to reveal snippets of information to build reader interest
- I can annotate key details in a narrative
- I can discuss how characterisation works to further the plot in a narrative

Essential knowledge:

More information about narrative structure can be found in the English Textual Concepts video [Narrative](#).

Prior to reading the story draw students' attention to the title of the story, 'The Siren's Mirror'. Ask students the following question:

What is a Siren?

You can read another story in which sirens feature from a past issue of Countdown: [The Sirens of Sigsbee Deep \(part one\)](#). In this story there is a short description of the mythological creature:

Shasta took him gently aside and said, 'In ancient Greek stories, the Sirens were women who appeared on the seas and oceans, and sang such beautiful songs that sailors who heard them became hypnotised. The Sirens kept singing to the mesmerised sailors, causing them to sail their boats onto the rocks, or into colossal whirlpools, and be destroyed. Many sailors drowned because of the wicked, haunting Sirens ...'

You may like to visit [Metkids](#) to find out about sirens using a collection item from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Understanding text

Read the story as a class, pausing in the following places for discussion:

His song and his delving were interrupted by a loud whoooooosh, and a sudden thump on the garden bench. Mr Erasmus, who was a serene and thoughtful sort of chap, jumped at the unexpected intrusion. 'Howdy, hidy, hody!' came the shrill, swift voice of his friend, Sylphie Quicksilver. '

Mr Erasmus and Sylphie Quicksilver are good examples of contrasting characters. This means that they do not have many similarities. Discuss the differences in character demonstrated in this excerpt.

Why do you think having contrasting characters like this is effective in a narrative? (suggested answer: choosing to have characters who do not have many common character traits can add interest and excitement to a story. Mr Erasmus is quiet and without the excitement and enthusiasm of Sylphie, the story would be much more slow moving.)

'What do we have here?' muttered Mr Erasmus, squinting at a strange-looking long, curved object. 'It looks like a horn,' said Sylphie. 'It does indeed,' Mr Erasmus agreed. He handed it to Sylphie. 'Where do you imagine that came from?'

We know from the title of the story 'The Siren's Mirror' that the story will not be focused on this 'strange-looking long, curved object.' Why do you think that the author chose not to reveal the most interesting and significant item first? (suggested answer: This helps develop suspense and greater interest in readers as they want to know what else is in the treasure trove, just like the characters in the story)

'What else is in there?' she asked, putting down the horn-trumpet. 'Hmm ... let's see.' Mr Erasmus turned over some papers and a roll of purple velvet material and some small, strangely-shaped bottles of green glass. 'Oh, look, here's a book!'

In this story, dialogue between Mr Erasmus and Sylphie is used to gradually uncover interesting objects from Mr Erasmus' Treasure Trove. In both this example and the previous example there is a pattern used. Firstly one of the characters asks a question, then there is an action described before the other character speaks to identify an item from the treasure trove.

Discuss why dialogue between characters is a good way to reveal information to readers. (Suggested answer: As the characters ask questions and talk about their discoveries, the

reader feels as though they are making the discovery at the same time as the characters in the story. It gives a sense of immediacy.)

'A mirror?' Sylphie queried. "Oh my stars!" gasped Mr Erasmus, looking so amazed he began to wobble. 'What's made you so amazed you're wobbling, Mr Erasmus?' 'Ooh ... ooh ... could this be ... the siren's mirror?'

What is the effect of the ellipses (...) in the final line of this extract? (suggested answer: The three dots indicate a pause in Mr Erasmus' speech. He is so overcome with wonder and amazement that he is having difficulty speaking. It gives a build up to the final part of his dialogue where he identifies the object as the siren's mirror. The ellipses essentially create drama for this key discovery.)

Creating text:

As a class, look at the illustration on page 9 of this issue of Orbit magazine. Highlight and read the following passage from page 9:

...one day at a bazaar in Morocco, my Great-Great Uncle Delineus found a mirror that was supposed to have been owned by such a creature. He purchased it and brought it home.

Discuss the following questions:

- What is a bazaar? (This description of a bazaar in the Sydney Morning Herald's Traveller magazine may be useful for students to get a sense of what it is like to visit a bazaar in Morocco: [Tips for visiting a bazaar in Morocco: There's more to it than shopping](#) by Brian Johnstone, December 9, 2022).
- Where is Morocco? (you may like to project a world map onto the board and zoom in on the northwest corner of Africa where Morocco can be found)

Students write a narrative in which they retell the story of Great-Great Uncle Delineus purchasing the mirror in the bazaar in Morocco. Include the following:

- A description of Delineus entering the bazaar and moving through the busy marketplace
- Delineus noticing the mirror and going to take a closer look

- The conversation between the shop keeper and Delineus about the origins of the mirror
- The reason why Delineus decides to buy the mirror. Think about what Sylphie notices when she looks in the mirror.

In their writing, students should think about the way that narratives can draw readers in by gradually revealing more information. As Delineus wanders the bazaar in Morocco, students can try to create excitement by gradually revealing more details about the bazaar before he notices the mirror.

Encourage students to use sensory writing, dialogue and characterisation to influence the way that they would like readers to feel about Great-Great Uncle Delineus' purchase of the mirror.

Assessment for/as learning:

Encourage students to complete a self-assessment by annotating their story. Ask students to:

Circle or outline an extract where they have developed the character of Delineus OR the shopkeeper who is selling the Siren's mirror.

Underline an example of where they have used dialogue to reveal information to interest readers.

Highlight an extract from their own story showing how two characters interact in an interesting way.

Put an asterisk next to a paragraph where they have developed some suspense or excitement.

Hat Chatter

Poem by Jesse Anna Bornemann | illustrated by Lesley McGee

EN3-VOCAB-01 | AC9E5LA08

Learning Intention:

I am learning to identify and understand how word choices relating to dialogue can convey emotion so that I can manipulate my word choices to create emotion in my own writing.

Success Criteria:

I can identify alternate words for 'said'

I can make connections between the alternate words for 'said' and the emotion associated

I can create writing in which the words relating to how a character speaks conveys a particular emotion

Essential knowledge:

Information on word associations or connotations can be found in the English Textual Concepts video [Connotation, imagery and symbol](#). View from beginning to 1:51.

Vocabulary

Begin by writing the word 'said' on the board. Ask students to complete a think, pair, share activity in which they write down other words that can be used to replace 'said' (examples include: growled, shouted, whispered, mentioned, answered, hollered). As part of the 'pair' part of the activity, ask student to consider what kind of emotion might be related to the words they have on their lists. Give students the example of 'growled' and connect it with the feeling of grumpiness or anger.

When the sharing begins, ask the first pair willing to share an idea for their 'said' word and the emotion that they associate with that word. Now focus on the emotion and ask the class if other students have different 'said' synonyms which convey the same or similar emotion. Continue doing this until the board is full of synonyms for 'said' grouped by emotion.

Understanding text:

Read the poem, 'Hat Chatter.' Ask students to circle or highlight the synonyms for 'said' in the poem. For each annotate the emotion it conveys.

Ask students to answer the following questions.

- Which character is **most excited about the hat?** Why do you think this is the case?

- Which character is the calmest about the hat? Why do you think this character seems to be calm?
- Can you describe the mood or feeling of this poem? How is the mood created?
- How does the mood or feeling of the people in the poem make you feel when you read the poem?

Discuss the following: How would this poem be different if there was no dialogue?

Creating text:

Ask students to draw or find a photograph or image of a very different hat. They then connect the hat image with one of the emotions from the board full of synonyms for said.

Students use that image as stimulus for their own short poem in which a range of people comment on the hat through dialogue. Students will try and make their poem convey the chosen emotion. Students should use a variety of words to describe how each person speaks. Avoid using the word 'said' or 'says.'

Encourage students to use the structure of the poem 'Hat Chatter' by beginning with the question 'Is that a hat?' my _____. Every second line should finish with a word describing how the dialogue is delivered, follow the pattern in 'Hat Chatter.'

Examples of hats from the State Library of NSW website:

[Millicent Preston-Stanley, Mrs Crawford Vaughan, 1950
Hats made from vegetables & fruit
Bicorn hat belonging to Matthew Flinders](#)

Assessment for/as learning:

Students share their poem with a partner and complete a peer-review checklist:

My partner's poem:

- Uses a range of synonyms for 'said'
- Conveys a particular emotion through the choice of words relating to dialogue
- Describes a hat using dialogue
- Follows the pattern used in hat chatter (every second line ends with a word describing how the dialogue is delivered)

Sylphie's Squizzes – Lion Dancers

Article by [Zoë Disher](#) | photo by Alamy

EN3-RECOM-01 | AC9E5LY03

Learning Intention:

I am learning about the structural and stylistic features of non-fiction texts so that I can compose my own short non-fiction, information texts.

Success Criteria:

- I can identify structural and stylistic features of non-fiction texts
- I can compare non-fiction texts to understanding common features of the text type
- I can discuss the purpose and effect of the identified features of non-fiction texts
- I can create my own non-fiction text

Essential knowledge:

Find out more about non-fiction writing, from Zoe Disher by watching her videos on the School Magazine Website: [The world of Zoe Disher and Articles](#).

Understanding text:

Read the text as a class. After reading, ask the following questions:

- Is it fiction or nonfiction? (Nonfiction)
- How do you know? (It contains the true account of a girl's discovery and is full of facts.)
- Is this article similar or different in style to 'Think Like a Skink' (on page 20 of this issue). (Similar: Both include similar signposting features such as headings and sub-headings, both include visual images (specifically photographs) to support the factual information provided in the text. Both texts draw the reader in by directly addressing them – for example 'maybe **you'll** have the good fortune to see these lucky lions in action!' and 'Are there skinks in **your** garden?')

- Why do factual texts such as Sylphie’s squizzes: Lion Dancers and ‘Think Like a Skink’ use features like headings and subheadings? (It helps readers to skim for the information they are looking for, it divides the article up into distinct sections each with a different focus.)
- Why do these texts also use direct address? (The audience of the magazine is children and asking questions or writing directly to children includes them in the story and creates interest.)

Creating text:

Show Zoë Disher’s [Vox Pop Video Part One: Writing Nonfiction](#) as a starting point to prepare students for writing their own non-fiction texts.

Ask students to choose one of the subheadings from the article Lion Dancers (either Let’s dance!, Showing off or Lucky lions. This subheading will become the main heading of their own article. Their article can be about any topic that could suit the chosen subheading. For example, Lucky Lions could be an article about a pair of lions at a zoo.

Students are to work in pairs and follow the steps below as they create their own non-fiction texts using the features they have learnt about in this lesson.

- Choose one of the subheadings as the new main heading for your article
- Have a brainstorming session in which you create a mindmap of all the possible topics that could relate to this heading
- Select the best topic and then conduct some research
- Decide on the message you would like to send about your topic
- Work together to write an article using subheadings and direct address to interest your reader

Assessment for/as learning:

The School Magazine’s [Informative text assessment and evaluation rubric](#) can be used for planning and assessment either formally or as a peer or self assessment.

Earth Can Wait

story by John O'Brien | illustrated by Queenie Chan

EN3-UARL-01 | AC9E5LE02

Learning Intention:

I am learning to analyse how the emotions of characters are conveyed so that I can understand how this influences the emotions of the readers

Success Criteria:

- I can identify how emotions are conveyed through characterisation in a narrative
- I can locate evidence to support my ideas in a text
- I can express my reactions to and opinions about a narrative text

Essential knowledge:

Information on characterisation in narratives can be found in the English Textual Concepts video [Character](#) on The School Magazine website.

Understanding text:

As a class, read the beginning of the story up until the end of page 15.

Discuss how Cooper is feeling in this part of the story. Consider the following moments:

- When Cooper discovers the new volcano
- When Cooper is reminded that he must start packing
- When Cooper thinks about life on Earth

For each emotion identified, highlight or underline a sentence that shows he is feeling this way. Suggested answers:

Excited: 'His heart thumped with excitement.'

Sad: 'Suddenly he felt a hint of sadness.'

Excited: 'In truth he could hardly wait to go.'

Discuss the following:

- How can one person feel both excited and sad at the same time?
- Have you ever experienced a time when you have felt two strong emotions simultaneously?
- In a story, is it better to show a character with mixed emotions, like Cooper, or develop a character who displays just one strong emotion?

Continue reading the story up until 'Sadly, you'll now have to spend another year with that piece of machinery.' (at the top of page 17).

Ask students to complete the following table comparing Cooper's feelings about EB8 with Aunt Dalla's feelings about EB8. Where possible, students are encouraged to give evidence in the form of quotes from the text.

	Cooper's feelings about EB8	Aunt Dalla's feelings about EB8
Description of each character's feelings		
Evidence from the text		

Ask students to write down their own perspective of EB8, and then consider if their feelings correspond to Cooper's or Aunt Dalla's feelings about EB8.

Before reading the end of the story, ask students to vote on whether Aunt Dalla's news was bad news or good news for Cooper. Tally the results on the board.

(Note for the teacher, it is probable that your students will vote that Aunt Dalla's news is good news for Cooper as readers of this story have been positioned to see things more from Cooper's perspective than Aunt Dalla's. Students also have been able to identify that EB8 has played an important role in Cooper's life and therefore they will likely feel affection towards EB8 as well.)

Continue reading the story until the end. Discuss the following questions as a class:

- How did Cooper feel after receiving Aunt Dalla's news? (he was relieved and happy)
- How do you know that he is feeling this way? (he was sprinting through the wrecked spaceship, filled with delight.)

- As a reader, how do you feel when you find out that Cooper is going to be able to share another year with EB8?
- Why do you think that readers are able to form an emotional connection with Cooper? (Authors help the reader to develop empathy with the characters they create in their stories. Readers feel the way that Cooper feels because readers understand that bonds between children and the people who raise them are strong and filled with love.)

Creating text:

Give students the following task:

Write a review of the story 'Earth can wait.' In your review, outline what you thought about the story, with a particular focus on the characters and the way that readers can connect with characters through shared emotions.

Extension: Students can be extended by being encouraged to use persuasive techniques in their writing to convince others to also read the story.

The following scaffold may be helpful for students:

Headline	
By-line	
An introduction to the context and plot of the story	
A discussion of the characters in the story	
An opinion on how enjoyable the story is for readers	
A rating out of 5 stars	

Assessment for/as learning:

Ask students to complete a peer review by forming pairs and reading each other's review. Once students have read their partner's review, encourage them to discuss each other's work. Some useful discussion questions include:

- Did the review show what the story was about?
- Did the review give a clear opinion about the story?
- What other information could have been included?
- Are there any problems that can be fixed together?

The Talkative Wind

poem by [Kristin Martin](#) | illustrated by [Marjorie Crosby-Fairall](#)

EN3-CWT-01 (Imaginative) | AC9E5LY06

Learning Intention:

I am learning to explain how word choice and language features can convey emotions so that I can analyse a poem

Success Criteria:

- I can identify personification in texts
- I can connect vocabulary with associated emotions
- I can compare examples from different texts
- I can make a judgment about the use of personification

Essential knowledge:

An introductory lesson for teaching personification can be found on the [NSW Department of Education website](#).

The [personification matchup](#) worksheets may be a good introductory activity prior to reading the poem.

Vocabulary:

Revisit the alternative words for 'said' as explored during the lesson on the poem 'Hat Chatter' on page 12 of this issue of Orbit. Discuss how the alternative words for 'said' suggested the type of emotion with which each character spoke.

Circle the words in 'The Talkative Wind' that describe the way that the wind speaks.

(Answers: whispers, moans, groans, whimpers, yells, shouts, murmurs)

Use the illustrated side of the [emotion cards](#) to connect the words circled in the poem with a more specific emotion that the wind is feeling. Does everyone agree?

Understanding text:

Use a Venn Diagram (digital template can be found on the [digital learning selector website](#)) to compare the personified wind in the poem 'The talkative wind' with Sutai the snow spirit in the story 'Chai Li's Panda' (pp. 25-28).

(suggested ideas: Common features shared by the wind and Sutai: both show emotion, both can be noisy, both impact people's lives. The wind differs because it has more than one emotion, whereas Sutai seems to only show anger.)

Creating text:

Reflect on the personification used to describe weather events in both 'The Talkative Wind' and 'Chai -Li's Panda.'

Write 1-2 paragraph(s) explaining why both the poet and author might have decided to use personification to convey weather-related events. Consider:

- How the personification makes readers feel
- The images that personification conjures up in the minds of readers
- Why weather is often described using personification
- Do you think it is effective

Assessment for/as learning:

Form small groups and compare paragraphs. Groups write a list of common ideas in each individual student's paragraphs and report back to the class. Discuss why students may have had similar ideas and explore any ideas that were less common.

Think Like a Skink

article by [Zoë Disher](#) | photos by Alamy

EN3-OLC-01 | AC9E5LY07

Learning Intention:

I am learning how to prepare information and images for an engaging and informative spoken presentation so that I can deliver an interesting presentation for a specific audience and purpose.

Success Criteria:

- I can research and prepare the information required for my presentation
- I can create a slideshow of visual images to support my presentation
- I can use appropriate word choices, rhetorical techniques, body language and gestures in my presentation

Essential knowledge:

A series of digital public speaking resources can be found on The Arts Unit website. [I have confidence](#) and [Speaking styles](#) provide a great introduction to public speaking and give some excellent activities to teach students how to deliver an engaging spoken text. Select some of the activities from these digital resources to use in class while students are preparing their presentations.

For teachers, the [Public speaking in primary schools](#) resources is a valuable source of information for teachers wishing to build their students' confidence with public speaking.

Understanding text:

Read the article as a class.

If you have a digital subscription complete the true/false digital interactive.

As a group discuss and annotate the features of the article. Including the headline and subheadings, photographs, the use of questions to engage the reader and the use of direct address ('you') throughout. Ask students to contribute ideas as to why these features are used in a non-fiction text.

(suggested answers: A non fiction text is designed to give true information and so the photographs and the subheadings help readers find and understand the information easily. The direct address and questions draw the reader into the text and make them feel involved, which makes readers more likely to finish reading the article.)

Oral language and communication:

The article 'Think like a skink' suggests that an

'important thing to do to make skinks welcome is to spread the word about lizards in the garden or schoolyard or park, so that everyone can look out for them.'

Give students the following task:

All wildlife in your area could do with some support in spreading the word about how to best keep them safe. Choose a species native to the area in which you live and learn. Conduct some research on your chosen native species and their specific needs. Prepare a spoken presentation in which you will explain to your audience the ways in which people can help keep your chosen native species safe. To accompany your presentation, prepare a slideshow with images to support your ideas.

A sample scaffold:

<p>Introduction Talk about the chosen species of animal – describe it and its habitat. Is it endangered and why?</p>	
<p>Give 3 ways that every day people can help this animal thrive in your local area</p>	
<p>Conclusion – give a call to action</p>	

Assessment for/as learning:

After completing their presentation, ask students to complete an 'exit slip' style reflection. Use the following:

From 1 (not at all) to 5 (aced it), how do you feel about your wildlife presentation?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Explain why you feel this way?

What might you do differently next time you deliver a presentation?

Pronking

Poem by Diana Smith | illustrated by Michel Streich

EN3-UARL-01 | AC9E5LY03

Learning Intention:

I am learning to analyse how similes and metaphors can enhance meaning so that I can use them in my own writing.

Success Criteria:

- I can understand the difference between a simile and a metaphor
- I can identify metaphors in a text and discuss the effect of this technique
- I can create my own similes and metaphors

Essential knowledge:

The NSW Department of Education has provided an extensive set of activities about similes and metaphors, which is available as a PDF on the [website](#).

The slides provided in the [Week 4 Learning Pack: What is a metaphor?](#) is a great introductory lesson.

Prior to reading the poem, ask students to complete *Activity Sheet 2: Venn diagram* (on page 5 of the PDF resource in the link above.)

Creating text:

On the board, compile a list of the native wildlife species students researched and spoke about in the activity inspired by the article 'Think like a skink' in this issue of Orbit.

Organise the class into small teams (5-6 students maximum) and prepare them to compete in a simile and metaphor contest. The rules of the contest are as follows:

- Teams are to write a simile or metaphor for as many of the native wildlife species listed on the board as possible.
- Teams will be given 15 minutes only to prepare as many similes or metaphors as they can.

- Each team will be given a set of sticky notes (a different colour per team) and each simile or metaphor should be written on a different post it note.
- Teams do not have to work through the list in order.
- Teams may have more than one person working as a scribe. Teams may divide into sub-teams in order to cover more of the wildlife species.
- When the timer finishes, all teams must put their pens down and similes and metaphors must be submitted.
- The winning team is the team with the MOST similes and metaphors – but a quality control check must be completed to ensure that the similes or metaphors created make sense and are, by definition, considered to be similes or metaphors.

After the competition, organize students to stick each sticky note simile or metaphor on the board next to the name of the wildlife species so that the sticky notes are gathered together with their associated species. Some species may not have any sticky notes, those species may be removed from the list now.

Organise the class into pairs. Assign pairs one wildlife species from the board. Each pair collects the sticky notes associated with their wildlife species and uses these as a starting point to create their own poem based on that species.

Pairs can prepare a dramatic reading of their poem to share with the class.

Assessment for/as learning:

After students have shared their poems with the class, they form pairs and complete a peer assessment using the **two stars and a wish** scaffold for feedback.