# Telling tales

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Guiding readers

Well-written stories are full of signposts that direct readers on their journey. The signposts might be:

- phrases or descriptions that suggest the type of story—for example, an opening paragraph describing a haunted house
- words that signal a change or turn in the story—for example, however or but
- details about characters’ appearance that suggest what sort of people these are and therefore what to expect of them.

Reading the signposts

This is a popular Maori legend.

Maori moon story

Rona was very much loved by her husband and her sons but, unfortunately for them all, she was very quick tempered. From time to time, and with little or no reason, she would flare up and scream and shout and become very abusive. Her husband was sad about this and though he loved her dearly, sometimes even he wanted to get away from her, to escape her lashing tongue.

One night, when the moon was full, Rona’s husband announced that it was a good night for fishing and that he would go to an island, not far away, with his two sons, and they would fish and would not return until the following night. ‘When we do return,’ he told Rona, ‘it will be just at dusk and we would like you to have the meal ready.’

So Rona said goodbye to her husband and her sons and settled down to wait for their return.

The following day she made preparations for the meal. She lit the fire early and placed stones on top. As the sun was going down it was time to sprinkle water on the hot stones, lay the food on top and cover it all with leaves and earth. Just then she heard, in the distance, the sound of fishermen chanting as they made their way back home.

Suddenly she remembered that she had not fetched the water so she rushed down the path towards the spring with a gourd in each hand. Darkness had fallen and as she ran the moon slipped behind a heavy cloud. Rona stumbled and fell, but she picked herself up and found her way to the spring where she filled up the gourds.

On the way back it was still pitch black and she fell again and the water sloshed out of the gourds. Not only had she spilt the water but she skinned her knee badly as well. The pain and the exasperation she felt were too much for her and she lost her temper. She opened her mouth and screamed abuse at the moon.
‘You’ve withdrawn your light, how dare you! Pokokohua! Pokokohua!’*

The moon was normally serene and detached, but he could not ignore such an insult. He spun down and caught Rona in his hands, intending to snatch her up into the sky. But Rona caught at a branch of a ngaio tree and held on for dear life. The moon, however, was extremely strong and as Rona clung to the tree he pulled and pulled until the roots of the tree were torn out of the ground. Then he swept Rona high up into the sky and placed her on the surface of the moon.

When Rona’s husband and sons returned they found the stones still glowing and the uncooked food still lying beside the fire. But there was no sign of Rona. It was not until he looked up at the moon and saw the shape of a desolate woman holding two gourds that Rona’s husband realized that she had cursed and screamed one time too many. His poor hothead of a wife would remain there, floating across the sky on the face of the full-bodied moon, for the rest of her life.

from Land of the Long White Cloud by Kiri Te Kanawa

*Pokokohua means ‘cooked head’: in other words, something very filthy. In Maori culture, swearing at a god in this way is a terrible thing to do.

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**Exercise 4.1 Unpacking ‘Maori moon story’**

1. List the main events in the story.
2. How did Rona’s bad temper bring about her undoing?
3. Do you feel sorry for Rona? Why or why not?
4. What do you learn from this story about traditional Maori ways of cooking?

**Exercise 4.2 Following the signs**

1. What is a legend? How does knowing that ‘Maori moon story’ is a legend work as a signpost?
2. The author of ‘Maori moon story’ makes it clear in the opening paragraph that Rona’s bad temper will be central to the story. List all the words that refer to Rona’s bad temper in this paragraph.
3. How has the author positioned you to feel towards Rona in the opening paragraph? Why do you feel this way? How does this prepare you for what happens later?
4. Text connectives signal the direction events are taking in a story. For example, ‘Suddenly’ at the beginning of the fourth paragraph signals a change in the happy relaxed mood. What does ‘normally’ in the first sentence of the seventh paragraph signal?
5. Write an opening paragraph for a story about a person with a bad temper. Your paragraph should provide readers with important signals. Then ask someone to read your paragraph and predict what might happen in the story. Use this feedback to improve your opening paragraph, then finish the story in no more than 300 words. Finally, choose an image to go with your story. The image should be a useful signpost for readers.
Matter of opinion

People have opinions and attitudes, and they make judgments about things.

That’s a big present. He only ate a little bit of cake.
The sports hero gave an inspiring speech. I quite liked that movie.
I think she’s incredibly clever.

These statements are evaluations, because they express the speaker’s opinion and judgment on something, such as a present, cake, speech, movie or person.

**Evaluative vocabulary**
The metalanguage term *evaluative vocabulary* refers to words used to express an opinion or make a judgment.

Imagine that four friends have read the same book. They all liked it, but some liked it more than others. The feeling or intensity gets stronger with each statement.

*It’s a good book.*
*It’s a very enjoyable book.*
*It’s a fantastic book!*
*It’s the best book I’ve ever read!*

Evaluative vocabulary also makes statements about quantity—how many and how much. Adjectives and adverbs are particularly useful evaluative words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements of quantity</th>
<th>Statements of quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not many people liked the film. (adjective)</td>
<td>The poem is a little bit funny. (adverb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few people liked the film. (adjective)</td>
<td>The poem is quite funny. (adverb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people liked the film. (adjective)</td>
<td>The poem is pretty funny. (adverb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of people liked the film. (adjective)</td>
<td>The poem is very, very funny. (adverb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone liked the film. (pronoun)</td>
<td>The poem is the funniest thing that I’ve ever read. (adjective + adjectival clause)</td>
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**Exercise 4.3 Using evaluative vocabulary**

1. Copy out these sentences and underline the evaluative vocabulary in each.
   Example: I *quite* like chocolate cake.
   - a Most people voted for Sumithra.
   - b Fiji is a great place to go for a holiday.
   - c We sometimes eat at the Thai restaurant.
   - d I definitely want to see that movie.

2. Write down whether each evaluative word is an adjective or adverb.

3. Rewrite each of the four sentences from a–d above, changing the evaluative vocabulary in order to express a stronger or weaker point of view.
   Example: I *absolutely love* chocolate cake.
The power of words

The retelling of ‘Maori moon story’ on pages 44–5 comes from a collection of stories, *Land of the Long White Cloud*, compiled by the famous New Zealand soprano, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. In the preface to the collection, Dame Kiri explains how she came to gather and publish the stories.

Family reunion

Late in 1987 there was an enormous gathering of all the Te Kanawas at our ancestral home in Te Kuiti. My father was brought up there and the Te Kanawa’s own marae, our meeting ground, is situated on a hill outside of town.

The wonderful celebrations lasted for three days with feasting, dancing and singing. Over two hundred of my family joined in and most slept on the floor of the meeting house in sleeping bags. It was an unforgettable reunion of the Te Kanawa clan.

For me, it was particularly nostalgic. In that warm atmosphere, as we swapped stories and caught up on news of so many old friends, powerful memories of my childhood came flooding back and old familiar stories came to mind. I suddenly felt an urge to put pen to paper to share some of those stories that meant so much to me.

By a stroke of luck the illustrator, Michael Foreman, was in New Zealand at the same time and was with us for part of the festivities. He met my family, enjoyed Maori hospitality and in this way had a rather special introduction to Maori culture and the Maori love of story-telling. I was thrilled that he was there and therefore able to translate something of the atmosphere of that occasion through his unique illustrations.

from *Land of the Long White Cloud* by Kiri Te Kanawa

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**Exercise 4.4 Analysing evaluative vocabulary**

1. Explain how Dame Kiri came to retell the traditional Maori stories. What did she want to achieve?
2. Why was it fortunate that Michael Foreman attended the reunion?
3. What three evaluative adjectives does the author use in the first two paragraphs to describe the family reunion? What emotions is she expressing in these evaluative words?
4. Identify the evaluative words she uses in ‘powerful memories of my childhood came flooding back’ (third paragraph).
5. In the second paragraph she writes ‘Over two hundred of my family joined in’. How would the meaning have been changed if she had written, ‘Fewer than three hundred of my family joined in’? Describe the effect of evaluative vocabulary in both of these sentences.
6. What do you think that Dame Kiri wants to communicate to her readers in this extract? How does she use evaluative vocabulary to achieve this?
7. Write a paragraph for a website advertising Dame Kiri’s book. Use evaluative vocabulary that appeals to readers’ emotions and makes them want to buy the book.
What do you think?

Well-written stories do more than help readers pass the time. They also raise questions that readers think about long after the last page has been read. Not all readers come up with the same answers to these questions because issues are not always clear-cut. For example, the story of Robin Hood asks whether it is acceptable to rob the rich in order to feed the poor. Good arguments can be presented on either side.

**YES**
- The poor people were starving under the cruel rule of the Sheriff of Nottingham, and they had no way of helping themselves.
- The rich people had more money than they knew what to do with, and would not have missed the money taken from them.
- The rich people should have been taking better care of the peasants themselves because they were the leaders of the society.

**NO**
- It is never acceptable to take other people’s property against their will.
- When society decides that robbery is acceptable, other excuses will soon be found to rob people, and law and order will break down.
- Robin Hood should have thought of another way of helping the peasants, without breaking the law.

**Raising questions**

*Holes* by Louis Sachar is a modern American novel, written for young adults. Most of the action takes place at Camp Green Lake Juvenile Correctional Facility in Texas. The hero, Stanley Yelnats, is sent to Camp Green Lake after being wrongly accused of stealing.

*Holes* raises questions about the values in modern American society and how people relate to each other.

This first extract from the novel describes Stanley’s character and background. It also raises questions about how people behave towards each other and what responsibilities people have to each other.

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**Camp Fun and Games**

Stanley and his parents had tried to pretend that he was just going away to camp for a while, just like rich kids do. When Stanley was younger he used to play with stuffed animals, and pretend the animals were at camp. Camp Fun and Games he called it. Sometimes he’d have them play soccer with a marble. Other times they’d run an obstacle course, or go bungee jumping off a table, tied to broken rubber bands. Now Stanley tried to pretend he was going to Camp Fun and Games. Maybe he’d make some friends, he thought. At least he’d get to swim in the lake.

He didn’t have any friends at home. He was overweight and the kids at his middle school often teased him about his size. Even his teachers sometimes made cruel comments without realizing it.

*from Holes by Louis Sachar*
In this extract the camp ‘counsellor’, Mr Pendanski, introduces Stanley to Squid and some of the other ‘campers’.

X-Ray and co.

Squid returned with four other boys. The first three were introduced by Mr Pendanski as José, Theodore, and Ricky. They called themselves Magnet, Armpit, and Zigzag.

‘They all have nicknames,’ explained Mr Pendanski. ‘However, I prefer to use the names their parents gave them—the names that society will recognize them by when they return to become useful and hardworking members of society.’

‘It ain’t just a nickname,’ X-Ray told Mr Pendanski. He tapped the rim of his glasses.

‘I can see inside you, Mom. You’ve got a big fat heart.’

The last boy either didn’t have a real name or else he didn’t have a nickname. Both Mr Pendanski and X-Ray called him Zero.

‘You know why his name’s Zero?’ asked Mr Pendanski. ‘Because there’s nothing inside his head.’ He smiled and playfully shook Zero’s shoulder.

Zero said nothing.

from *Holes* by Louis Sachar

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**Exercise 4.6 Responding to a text**

1. Mr Pendanski wants the boys to become ‘useful and hardworking members of society’. Explain what he means in your own words. Do you agree that this should be the main aim of young people growing up? Why or why not?

2. Describe or draw X-Ray, using your imagination and what you can interpret from the extract.

3. Write a plot outline for a story about what happens to X-Ray when he leaves Camp Green Lake. Your plot should raise questions that your readers need to think about.
Shaping responses

Traditionally, picture books have been written for children, who learn from the stories how to behave and what to value. In recent times, picture books have been created for wider audiences. *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker is one of these. It shows how people who live in very different cultures can nevertheless share many values.

Here is the cover of the book.

![Cover of Mirror](image)

When readers open *Mirror*, they find that it contains two stories told completely in pictures and designed to be read side by side. The two stories are about what happens in one day in the lives of two families. One family lives in Sydney, Australia; the other family lives in the Valley of Roses, Morocco.

These words, written in Arabic and English, introduce the otherwise wordless texts:

**Arabic cover**

Text in Arabic:

- تضم أحداث هذا الكتاب ولدين وعائلتين.
- يعيشون في مدينة بأسكتلندا.
- يعيشون في الأكاليل الأخرى في جزء من المغرب.
- تبدو حياة الأولدين والأطفال مختلفان جداً عن بعضهم البعض وهذا الباحث واضح.
- ولكن هناك بعض الأشياء التي تربط بينهما...
- تتناول بعض الأشياء بالنسبة لجميع الآسر.
- يفسر النظر عن المكان الذي يعيشون فيه.

**English cover**

Text in English:

- There are two boys and two families in this story.
- One family lives in a city in Australia and one lives in Morocco, North Africa.
- The lives of the two boys and their families look very different from each other and they are different.
- But some things connect them ... just as some things are the same for all families no matter where they live.
Here are the first wordless pages of *Mirror*, showing the morning routines of both families.

**Exercise 4.7  Reading the cover**

1. Carefully examine the cover of *Mirror* and briefly explain how it is designed, remembering that Arabic books are read from what readers of English would call the back to the front.

2. List three similarities and three differences between the two pictures on the cover. For example, both boys are looking out at the same full moon, but the Moroccan boy lives in a rural area, while the Australian boy lives in a city.

**THINKING CHALLENGE**

Think of two communities within Australia that, though different in many ways, share important values. Plan a picture book similar to *Mirror* that tells a story about these communities, showing how they are different, but also highlighting the values that they share.

**Exercise 4.8  Looking into Mirror**

1. List three similarities and three differences between the early morning routines shown on the two pages from *Mirror*.

2. Choose one frame from the Australian story and one frame from the Moroccan story. Examine the design and layout of each frame, and write about how the following design features help to shape the meaning in each frame:
   - people and things included (and excluded)
   - clothing
   - body language
   - background and foreground.

3. How do salience and vectors direct viewers’ attention in each frame? What effect do these techniques have on the meaning that viewers take from the frames? Check the meaning of ‘vectors’ and ‘salience’ in the glossary.

4. What are the mothers in the two communities doing at the start of the day? What social values do these activities reveal?
Words in picture books

Writing a picture book is like writing poetry. Every word counts.

What do children enjoy in a good picture book?

- Lots of action involving people or animals who go on amazing adventures—and come home safely.
- Characters who are loveable, scary, annoying, brilliant—and whom young readers can identify with.
- Invitations to ‘guess what happens next!’
- Rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, onomatopoeia and repeated words.
- Illustrations full of colour, imagination and happiness, with a little scariness, too, when absolutely necessary.
- Wise advice subtly given about getting along in an ever-widening world.

Words in Mr McGee and the Biting Flea

Here are the opening words of Mr McGee and the Biting Flea by Pamela Allen. Read them aloud!

Mr McGee went out to play,
down to the beach one windy day.

Mr McGee was running along,
fly ing his kite and singing a song.

Just then a dog came racing by,
frightening the birds up into the sky.

These 39 words are placed over three pages because:
- the storytelling is shared between words and pictures
- the words are printed using a very large, easy-to-read font
- placing text on different pages means that readers naturally pause—allowing young listeners to look at and enjoy the words and pictures, and allowing readers to talk to the children about the story and what is on the page.

This extract contains both the orientation (who? what? where?), and the complication—the character’s bad behaviour.

THINKING CHALLENGE

- Write the sequel to a traditional story or fairytale. The children in the story are a generation older than in the original story. For example:
  - Hansel and Gretel have grown up but their early experiences shaped their adult selves.
  - Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella have been married to their Prince Charmings for 20 years.
  - Red Riding Hood has left the forest and moved to the city.
A few pages into the story, these pages appear.

‘SOMETHING BAD IS BITING ME!!’

It wasn’t a fly and it wasn’t a bee.
It was as small as small could be,
so small it was too small to see.
It was a jumping, biting flea.

‘OOOOOO!
OWWWW!
EEEEEE!’ cried Mr McGee.

Exercise 4.9  Analysing and creating

1 Write notes in point form about the way Pamela Allen has written for children.
   a Does she use simple or complex words? Note three examples.
   b Children love action in their stories. What two action words does she use here?
   c Where does she repeat words? How does this help children follow the story?
   d Children who cannot yet read love to fill in words as they hear the story. How do rhyming words help them do this? Give an example from the extract.
   e How many beats are there in each line of the story? Read the lines out loud and clap each beat in each line.

2 Examine the double-page spread and write short answers to these questions:
   a Two words are printed in italics. What is this telling readers to do? How does the rhythm of the line help them do this?
   b Where do punctuation marks help readers read the story with expression?
   c What information does the picture add to the story that is told in the words? Hint: The words do not describe Mr McGee’s actions or appearance.

3 Design and write the text for a double-page spread of a picture book for young children. Review what you have learnt about how picture books are written. Then:
   • Think of a simple situation that would make a fun story for a picture book.
   • Select one moment in your story and, using the same rhyme and rhythm that Pamela Allen uses in Mr McGee and the Biting Flea, write two lines for that moment.
   • Do a rough design of the picture that goes with your two lines of text. Your picture should contain some information that is not in the two lines of text.
   • Decide where you are going to place your two lines of text, and how big the letters will be.
   • Turn your rough design into the finished double-page spread by drawing your own artwork, finding images from elsewhere, or using graphic design software to generate your double-page spread on computer.
Making a speech

The thought of making a speech in public strikes terror into the hearts of 75 per cent of the population. Read this opening from a speech about this common fear.

Glossophobia

Did you know that most of us suffer from glossophobia? ‘What is that?’ you ask. I’ll give you a hint. It comes from two Greek words. One is phobos, which means fear. Fear of spiders is arachnophobia, and fear of death is necrophobia. But more of us suffer from glossophobia than either of those fears. So what is the meaning of the Greek word glossa?

Tongue.

Fear of tongues? What are we, ice-creams?

Just think laterally for a moment. Fear of tongues. And it’s not fear of being licked by droopy dogs, although that’s pretty gross.

Glossophobia is the fear of public speaking. Three out of four people say they’d rather die than give a speech.

Let me tell you about a time when I had to give a speech in front of ...

Structuring a speech

There are three parts to a speech: the opening, the body and the closing.

- **Opening**—You must ‘hook’ your audience in the first 30 seconds. You could start with a question, quotation or joke. You could also start with a strong, sharp statement, question or command containing powerful words or figures of speech: ‘It’s five minutes to midnight. Is it too late to save our planet?’

- **Body**—The body, the longest part of your speech, needs careful planning and preparation. One point should flow on to the next, linked in a way that the audience can easily follow. You need to take your audience with you as you tell your story or present your facts.

- **Closing**—The closing should be as short and punchy as the opening. Briefly sum up your main points, give your audience something to think about, and leave a strong impression. You could use a joke, a quote or a strong, simple sentence that your audience will remember.

Exercise 4.10  Hooking your audience

1. How does the speaker grab the audience’s attention in the opening sentence of ‘Glossophobia’?
2. Find one place in the speech where the audience might laugh. Why do speakers use humour in speeches?
3. How would you describe the tone of this speech? Does it sound formal? Warm? Relaxed? Uncertain? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
4. Draft a 30-second opening to a speech about facing a fear.
Delivering a speech

These tips, hints and strategies will help you whenever you have to give a speech in public.

Rehearse and refine

Read your speech aloud several times. Practise in front of a mirror, or use family members or friends as a test audience. If possible, record your speech and listen to yourself.

Redraft your speech. Most people use too many words at first. Remember: ‘When in doubt, cut it out.’ Which parts do you stumble over? Choose different words. Which parts lost your test audience? Rephrase those, vary the tone or delete those parts.

Decide when to pause during your delivery. Pauses give your audience time to think and react, and give you time to think forward to your next point. Practise hand gestures that work naturally for you.

Vary your tone

Speak in a strong, clear voice. Speak slowly and vary the tone of your voice. Aim for a conversational tone. Listen to a few conversations and notice the different tones speakers use depending on whether they are feeling excited, amused, warm, forceful, sad, puzzled or strong. Try out different tones for different sections of your speech.

Stand and deliver

Stand tall but relaxed. Face your audience and look up and out. Move your gaze to different sections of the audience. Eye contact is very engaging. If you find this too scary, aim your gaze just over the heads of your audience. This also helps you to project your voice.

Do not read your speech. Write a few points as memory joggers on a palm card. Practise your speech enough so that you do not have to read it.

Stand with your feet slightly apart, feeling well balanced. Do not fidget, sway, jiggle on the spot or make nervous movements with your hands.

Be yourself

Let your personality shine through to your audience. They want to hear you speak. Some people who suffer badly from glossophobia find it helpful to imagine they’re an actor performing a role. You may not feel confident, but you can pretend you are!

Remember that 75 per cent of any audience suffer from glossophobia, so they think that you are a hero!

Exercise 4.11 Making a speech

Your task is to tell the class a tale. You should speak for between one and two minutes. Choose one of the following topics or think of a topic of your own.

- Facing a fear
- Retelling one of Aesop’s fables
- A myth or legend about an animal
- An exciting moment from a film or book

Make notes, plan, rehearse, refine, practise—then stand and deliver! The only aid you can use is one palm card—no slides, no props, and definitely no large pieces of paper.
Assessment tasks

**SPEAKING**

Prepare and present a two-minute speech in which you argue for or against the proposition: ‘There are no fairytale endings in real life’.

You will be assessed on the way you structure your argument, and make contact with and persuade your audience.

**READING AND VIEWING**

Outline the plot of a story for your own age group that asks readers to consider the question, ‘Do the ends justify the means?’ Your outline should contain:
- a list of events
- names and descriptions of the two main characters
- an explanation of how the events in your story relate to the question you are asking your readers.

You will be assessed on your ability to create a well-structured story outline that leaves readers wondering whether the ends justify the means.

**WRITING**

1. What do these pages tell children about what happens on Anzac Day?

2. If you were reading these pages to young children, how would you explain the medals, the graves and the red cross on the nurse?

3. What would you say if the children asked why all the people are old?

4. Use what you have learnt about writing for children to comment on the words. Are they suitable for a children’s story? Why or why not?

You will be assessed on your ability to interpret words and images, and make inferences about ideas in the text.