Lower Primary

These notes have been written to help teachers use the Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies in Year 4. However, they could also be used in Year 3 and up to Year 5 where students have difficulties with reading.

Outcomes of the teaching sequence

At the end of this teaching sequence, students should be able to:

- read the passages studied fluently and with a high level of inferential comprehension
- discuss the story: give opinions about the author’s language choices; identify the story’s structure, theme and ideology
- spell chosen words and understand related spelling strategies
- use the story as a model for writing.

Notes

- The following notes have been written for teachers who have attended professional development workshops in teaching Accelerated Literacy. The notes presume some understanding about how to teach the program.
- For a detailed explanation of how to implement the teaching sequence, please refer to the teachers’ handouts from the first professional development workshop. Additionally, you could refer to http://www.nalp.edu.au.
- It is also assumed that teachers have read the text on which these notes are based and have a detailed understanding of the text before beginning a teaching sequence.
- Teachers are responsible for ensuring the suitability of the text on which these notes are based for their particular teaching context.

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Using this resource
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The text

*Fantastic Mr Fox* by Roald Dahl. Published 2001 by Penguin Books. Page numbers provided here refer to this edition. The title is also available on tape and CD.

Go to http://www.roalddahl.com for information about the author and his books.

Teaching DVDs

*Fantastic Mr Fox: Teaching Notes* are supported by a teaching DVD.

Teaching DVDs are designed to support classroom teaching by demonstrating best practice for the program. They are video clips of real teaching in real classrooms, shot so teachers can watch Accelerated Literacy teaching in practice. They provide authentic examples of the negotiation roles taken by one teacher and a class and are not all that could be said. Refer to http://www.nalp.edu.au for further information.
Fantastic Mr Fox
Fantastic Mr Fox

Synopsis of the story

Fantastic Mr Fox and his family live a happy life filled with all the chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys they can eat, all stolen from three nasty farmers: Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean. These three farmers hate Mr Fox because of the way he steals their poultry so effortlessly. They try every way they can think of to kill the Fox family, but whatever they do, fantastic Mr Fox is able to outwit them. The story is gripping: Mr Fox fights for his life and the lives of his family and friends against the combined strength of three angry farmers.

Themes

Themes in Fantastic Mr Fox include:

- good triumphing over evil
- the importance of courage in adversity
- the importance of friendship and caring for one’s family.

Why use this story?

Fantastic Mr Fox is an ironical narrative in which the hard-working farmers are evil, and the fox who steals from them is the hero. Roald Dahl depicts each of the farmers as disgusting, both in appearance and behaviour, with no redeeming features whatsoever. Mr Fox, in contrast, is fantastic in every way. He is a wonderful husband, father and provider, as well as a friend to almost all other animals. The ability to turn an established point of view on its head is typical of this author.

Structure of the text

The structure of Fantastic Mr Fox is as follows.

Orientation: Chapters 1–2

The peaceful valley, the villainous farmers and the heroic fox and his family are introduced. The characters and relationships are described.

Complications: Chapters 3–8

Starting with Mr Fox getting shot, these chapters each involve new complications in the dispute between the disgusting farmers and the ingenious Mr Fox.
Resolution: Chapters 9–18

Chapter 9 begins the resolution of the story, as Mr Fox devises a plan. The following chapters record the efforts of the Fox family as they start to outwit the farmers. In the final resolution not only has Mr Fox solved his own family’s problems, but he also generously shares his good fortune with all the animals (except the rats).

An element of tension is introduced in Chapter 16, but all is resolved by the final chapter. The animals look forward to a safe and well-fed future, while the farmers devote themselves to the futile task of catching the foxes.

Structure – Passage one

Passage one (Chapter 1) briefly describes the setting of the story and introduces the three human characters. It is part of the orientation to the narrative.

Setting
Down in the valley there were three farms.

Additional information about the setting and its inhabitants
The owners of these farms had done well. They were rich men. They were also nasty men. All three of them were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet.
Their names were Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean.

Description of character 1
Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered with dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and supper.

Description of character 2
Bunce was a duck-and-goose farmer. He kept thousands of ducks and geese. He was a kind of pot-bellied dwarf. He was so short his chin would have been under water in the shallow end of any swimming-pool in the world. His food was doughnuts and goose-livers. He mashed the livers into a disgusting paste and then stuffed the paste into the doughnuts. This diet gave him a tummy-ache and a beastly temper.

Description of character 3
Bean was a turkey-and-apple farmer. He kept thousands of turkeys in an orchard full of apple trees. He never ate any food at all. Instead, he drank gallons of strong cider which he made from the apples in his orchard. He was as thin as a pencil and the cleverest of them all.
Summary

‘Boggis and Bunce and Bean
One fat, one short, one lean.
Those horrible crooks
So different in looks
Were none the less equally mean.’

That is what the children round about used to sing when they saw them.

Structure – Passage two

This passage (lines 1–5, page 7) opens Chapter 2. It is interesting to contrast it with Chapter 1, where the author briefly establishes the setting and quickly introduces the characters in detail. In Chapter 2 readers are introduced to the main animal characters. The setting is described in more detail and, while the characters are named, they are not described physically. The technique the author uses to write this description is a useful one. It is a little like a photographer taking a wide-angle photograph and then zooming in on the important part of the larger picture. For example:

• Take an overview of the setting.
• Focus on one feature in the setting.
• Choose one part of that feature.
• Focus on a smaller part of that feature and examine it.

Structure – Passage three

Passage three (pages 11–13) describes a dramatic event in the story sequence: Mr Fox loses his beautiful tail. This is the first major engagement in the war between Mr Fox and the three farmers.

Character’s actions in small steps:

Step 1: Mr Fox crept up the dark tunnel to the mouth of his hole.
Step 2: He poked his long handsome face out into the night air
Step 3: and sniffed once.
Step 4: He moved an inch or two forward
Step 5: and stopped.
Step 6: He sniffed again.

Explanation: He was always especially careful when coming out from his hole.

Step 7: He inched forward a little more.

Explanation: The front half of his body was now in the open.
Step 8: His black nose twitched from side to side,
Step 9: sniffing and sniffing for the scent of danger.

Reflection: He found none, and he was just about to go trotting forward into the wood.

What the character sensed: when he heard or thought he heard a tiny noise, a soft rustling sound, as though someone had moved a foot ever so gently through a patch of dry leaves.

Step 10: Mr Fox flattened his body against the ground
Step 11: and lay very still, his ears pricked.
Step 12: He waited a long time,

What the character sensed: but he heard nothing more.

Reflection: ‘It must have been a field-mouse,’ he told himself, ‘or some other small animal.’

Step 13: He crept a little further out of the hole …
Step 14: then further still.

Explanation: He was almost right out in the open now.

Step 15: He took a last careful look around.

Description of setting: The wood was murky and very still. Somewhere in the sky the moon was shining.

Step 16: Just then, his sharp night-eyes caught a glint of something bright behind a tree not far away.

Explanation: It was a small silver speck of moonlight shining on a polished surface.

Step 17: Mr Fox lay still,
Step 18: watching it.

Reflection: What on earth was it?

Explanation: Now it was moving. It was coming up and up … Great heavens! It was the barrel of a gun!

Step 19: Quick as a whip, Mr Fox jumped back into his hole

Outcome: and at that same instant the entire wood seemed to explode around him. Bang-bang! Bang-bang! Bang-bang!

Language features of the text

Roald Dahl tells the story from the perspective of an outside narrator relating the story of Fantastic Mr Fox and interpreting the characters’ actions and thoughts for the reader.
Passage one

Roald Dahl starts the story with a simple but effective technique. By describing the setting briefly, and then placing the characters in it, the author allows readers to discover where the story takes place and who it is about very early in the book. The first characters to be introduced are the villains.

Because the structure of the passage is so clear, it is an ideal passage to use to teach students how to introduce characters into a story.

In this passage Roald Dahl also very effectively influences readers’ views of the three farmers. Roald Dahl does not describe the appearance of Mr Fox when he introduces him in Chapter 2. He does, however, describe the appearance and habits of each of the three farmers in detail in Chapter 1. Everything about each of them is unpleasant. We can teach students that authors are able to influence readers’ perceptions of their characters by describing them in certain ways.

Passage two

The characters introduced in Chapter 2 are not described in the same way as the farmers in Chapter 1. Here the author describes the locale in which the characters live, beginning with an overview of the setting and then narrowing to a description of the characters’ home, where the action begins.

Passage three

Chapter 3 demonstrates the way an author can build suspense, making readers want to read on to find out what happens next. In this case, we want to find out whether Mr Fox has been too cocky and whether the farmers’ plan to kill him works this time. Readers expect Mr Fox to escape, but when he does it is not without a cost.

Books with similar themes

Students who have studied passages from ‘Spooks Incorporated’, ‘A Good Tip for Ghosts’ or ‘Lighthouse Blues’ by Paul Jennings will have some experience with writing to achieve suspense. The second passage suggested here builds on those studies, although it could also be used alone.

Authors describe their characters in ways that influence readers’ attitudes to them. In books for young children, illustrations perform this function. The outstanding feature of Roald Dahl’s descriptions in Fantastic Mr Fox is the complete worthiness of the worthy characters and the complete villainy of the villainous ones (see also The Witches, Matilda and George’s Marvellous Medicine by Roald Dahl).
Accelerated Literacy teaching
Teaching the sequence

The National Accelerated Literacy Program consists of a cycle of interrelated activities based on a sequence beginning with literate orientation and focused on one selected text. The text may vary from a short, illustrated story written for early childhood students to several carefully selected passages from a longer book intended for older students.

Teachers spend, on average, an hour and a half a day teaching Accelerated Literacy. The total number of weeks spent on a text across a sequence of consecutive lessons will vary according to the age of the students and the complexity of the text.

Low and high order literate orientation are carried out before reading. The other strategies use the students’ fluent reading of and common knowledge about a text as teaching resources for extending their literacy competence.

Further information on the teaching sequence can be found at http://www.nalp.edu.au.
In the classroom
The teaching sequence on *Fantastic Mr Fox* aims to teach:
- how to read the passages studied at 90 per cent accuracy or above
- how to discuss the passages studied, including its theme, structure and ideology, and the meaning and inferences contained in the author’s language choices
- how to use the story as a model for writing, including appropriate language choices for the story type.

**Literate orientation**

Literate orientation is a pre-reading strategy that prepares students to read the study text fluently, accurately and independently. The teacher models a literate orientation to the text and discusses why the author made certain language choices. Literate orientation consists of two components: low order literate orientation and high order literate orientation. Both are equally important.

In low order literate orientation the teacher starts the process of ‘pointing the students’ brains’ at the text by modelling a literate interpretation of the text, including its illustrations when necessary.

In high order literate orientation the teacher shifts the students’ focus from general considerations to a close examination of the author’s wording in the text. The teacher systematically models how to attend closely to the language features of the text and how they construct meaning.

**Low order literate orientation – Whole book**

The first object of low order orientation on *Fantastic Mr Fox* is to read the whole book to the class in stages, providing an orientation to each chapter before reading it. This is a short book and students will enjoy hearing it read in as few sessions as possible.

**Teaching focus**

**Illustrations**

There are illustrations throughout the book, but as these differ in each edition they will not be discussed specifically in these notes. Use the illustrations to support the low order literate orientation discussion. For example, the illustrations reinforce the descriptions of the farmers by emphasising their disgusting appearance.
**Low order literate orientation**
Discuss some of the following points, choosing what to say about the book according to the specific needs of your class. Examples of what you could say are provided for Chapter 1 only.

**General points about the author and the book**
Explain that *Fantastic Mr Fox* is a book by Roald Dahl, who liked to write books in which children are clever and inventive and adults are stupid or even downright wicked. In *The Magic Finger*, for example, the protagonist is a little girl who makes some adults see that duck shooting is cruel. In *Matilda* the protagonist is an exceptionally clever girl by that name, whose parents are utterly stupid, while the school principal is wicked and her friend and teacher, Miss Honey, is rather weak.

In *Fantastic Mr Fox* the hero is Mr Fox, an animal who steals and eats the poultry raised by three farmers. These three farmers are rich and successful. They are good at running their farms and they don’t like having their animals stolen by Mr Fox. The farmers set out to kill Mr Fox and his family and will go to any lengths to do so. The smart and fantastic Mr Fox sets out to keep himself and his family out of the clutches of the frenzied farmers.

*Fantastic Mr Fox* is exciting and funny. It allows readers to see how Roald Dahl constructs a world in which established social beliefs are turned on their heads.

**Teaching focus**

**Orientation**
- Roald Dahl introduces us to a peaceful valley and to three farms.
- He then introduces us to the owners of these farms, who are rich and horrible men.
- We find out how horrible each farmer is as he is introduced.
- Each farmer is a different shape and size and has different disgusting habits.
- No one likes these farmers, as the mocking refrain sung by the children who live in the valley shows.

**What you could say**

In the first chapter of *Fantastic Mr Fox* Roald Dahl tells us some very important things. He tells us first of all that the story takes place in farming country. Then he tells us who the villains in the story are. There are three of them and they are truly horrible. They each have very nasty habits. They are not at all likeable.

Listen while I read the story and see if you can hear what Roald Dahl tells us about these three nasty farmers.

*Read Chapter 1 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*
Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 1

Roald Dahl has described for us three revolting people.

- Discuss what is horrible about each farmer.
- Why might Roald Dahl want us to dislike them so much?

What you could say

Now we know that no one likes the three farmers. The children who know them certainly don’t.

**Preformulation**

We know that the farms are down in a valley and that a very fat farmer owns one of them.

**Question:** Can anyone remember what his name was?

**Preformulation**

There was something special about his size, wasn’t there?

**Question:** Can you remember what Roald Dahl told us about his size?

**Reconceptualisation**

That’s right, and he got that way because he ate too much. He had greedy habits. The author wants us to realise that Farmer Boggis wasn’t just enormously fat; he was greedy and had disgusting manners.

Teaching focus

- In this chapter Roald Dahl introduces the hero of the story, Mr Fox.
- We find out where he and his family live and who is in the family.
- We also find out why the three farmers hate Mr Fox so much.
- This chapter is still part of the orientation of the book, where we find out about the important characters, where they live and what their relationships are.
- Notice that Mr Fox and his wife and children are very nice to each other. They are as nice as the farmers are nasty.
- Notice that the Fox family act like people in that they dress in clothes, use plates and sit on seats. They are like human adversaries to the three farmers.
- The Fox family has no money. They take the food they want and the people they take it from are the three farmers, Boggis, Bunce and Bean.

*Read Chapter 2 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*
Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 2

In this chapter Roald Dahl makes Mr Fox sound clever and competent and a good husband and father. How does he do this?

- Mr Fox speaks politely.
- He cleverly avoids the farmer who intends to shoot him.
- He has a good understanding about where to find food so that, if access to one place is cut off, he knows where else he could go. This spatial knowledge becomes important later when he has to locate places from beneath the ground.
- He provides everything his family needs.

Roald Dahl makes the farmers sound even more terrible. How does he do this?

- They speak rudely.
- They have nasty habits (e.g., Bean picks his nose).
- They are too stupid to hunt Mr Fox effectively.
- They quarrel with one another.

Teaching focus

Complication

- In this chapter, Mr Fox has a terrible shock.
- He has been overconfident and so has underestimated the farmers. He doesn’t realise that they know where he lives and that they are planning their revenge.
- Although he is always very careful when leaving his burrow, this day something terrible happens.
- Lucky Mr Fox. He managed to survive the first attack by the farmers.
- The battle between Mr Fox and the three farmers is just beginning!

Read Chapter 3 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 3

What do we learn about Mr Fox from Chapter 3?

- He can be cocky.
- Even though Mr Fox is fantastic, he does have a flaw in his character. He underestimates the farmers and their ability to plan.
- However, he is, as usual, so careful in leaving his hole that his slight error of judgement is not fatal.
- He speaks to Mrs Fox lovingly, and cares about her tastes.
What do we learn about the farmers?
- Their repulsiveness is revealed again by Mr Fox's description of their smell.
- Even three of them together could not shoot Mr Fox.
- They are evil and they are determined. Their hatred for Mr Fox is so great that they will not give up trying to kill him.

What do we learn about Mrs Fox?
- She is concerned about her husband and children.
- She knows how much food they all need: she is a good housekeeper.
- She gives good advice (eg to watch out for the farmers).

Teaching focus
- In this chapter Roald Dahl describes how much Mr Fox misses his tail.
- However, because he is such a good and resilient character, he makes the best of the situation. He is, after all, still alive.
- Fortunately, he has Mrs Fox to help him.
- It is also fortunate that because the pain in the stump of his tail keeps him awake, he is alerted to something terrible: he hears digging!

Read Chapter 4 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 4

What do we learn about Mr Fox in Chapter 4?
- He acts as a true hero.
- A tail is a beautiful part of a fox, being long and bushy and tipped with white. To lose such a tail would be a terrible blow.
- He is initially glum about his tail, but quickly copes with this loss.
- He doesn't keep everyone else awake just because he is in pain.
- Despite his pain, he instantly formulates a plan when he hears the farmers.
- He is able to allay his family's panic and lead them in digging to escape the farmers.

What do we learn about the farmers?
- They appear in this chapter only through their digging, but their decision shows their determination to get rid of Mr Fox and his family.

What do we learn about Mrs Fox and the children?
- Mrs Fox is the stereotype of an attentive wife.
- She comforts Mr Fox and attends to his tail stump.
- She is practical and matter-of-fact about the loss of his tail.
- However, she panics and looks to her husband when there is an emergency. She cries and clings to her children.
- When Mr Fox decides what to do, she rushes to support him.
- She gives the credit for their safety to her husband.
The children
- The children are at first helpless and afraid.
- They help by digging when they are needed.
- The family works as a team, with Mr Fox as their inspirational leader.

**Teaching focus**
- Roald Dahl has made every chapter a new complication in the battle between the farmers and Mr Fox.
- The Fox family escape the terrible shovels, but the farmers do not give up.
- This time, the farmers fetch their tractors with mechanical shovels (*murderous, brutal-looking monsters*).

**Teaching focus**
- Now there is a desperate race between the machines and the foxes.
- While we could expect the tireless machines to win, these are exceptional foxes.
- The illustrations are integral to the story, as the text refers to them to show how the hill where the Fox family lived is completely dug away.
- Although all the people in the village think they are quite mad, the three farmers won’t give up.

*Read Chapters 5 and 6 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*

**Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapters 5 and 6**

**What do we learn about Mr Fox from Chapters 5 and 6?**
- He leads his family without hesitation. He always has a plan.
- He speaks encouragingly and politely to his family, even during a crisis.

**What do we learn about the farmers?**
- Roald Dahl refers to them by their disgusting appearances.
- Their language is rude and uncouth.
- They are rude to each other.
- They are becoming insane in their determination to catch the foxes.

**What do we learn about Mrs Fox and the children?**
- They are still dependent on Mr Fox for their courage and guidance.
- This quality shows them as obedient, and helpless without him.
Teaching focus

- Although the frantic action of the race stops, the farmers persist in pursuing Mr Fox.
- Although they have utterly destroyed a whole hillside, they won’t give up.
- The farmers haven’t been able to dig out their enemy, so they make a new plan.

*Read Chapter 7 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*

**Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 7**

- The three farmers’ determination is unrelenting.
- The farmers’ disgusting habits remain the same.

Teaching focus

- At the start of this chapter, Roald Dahl reminds us that the farmers are not simply insane; they are revolting because of the food they eat and their disgusting behaviour.
- They are so determined to kill the foxes that they employ their 108 farmhands to circle the hole to ensure that no fox escapes.
- Roald Dahl describes how the foxes suffer down under the ground.

*Read Chapter 8 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*

**Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 8**

What do we learn about Mr Fox from Chapter 8?

- He leads at all times.
- When the Small Foxes want to sneak out to get food, he understands the farmers’ plan and keeps them safe.
- He is patient and intelligent. He may be starving, but he can survive.

What do we learn about the three farmers?

- Their mean natures are consistent.
- They torment the foxes with food smells.
- They bring all their workers to watch the site.
- They have little imagination; they can’t conceive of anything Mr Fox could do from his seemingly helpless situation.

What do we learn about Mrs Fox and the children?

- They never doubt Mr Fox.
Teaching focus

Resolution

- This chapter marks the start of the resolution of the story.
- Just when it looks as though the fantastic Mr Fox is not quite fantastic enough, he comes up with a plan.
- We don’t know what it is yet, but the family keep digging at his request.
- Mrs Fox is now too weak to dig, but Mr Fox and the children find a tiny reserve of strength to keep going.

Teaching focus

- The children follow Mr Fox.
- He won’t tell them what they are trying to do, but they trust him and keep digging.
- At last they have a wonderful surprise.

Read Chapters 9 and 10 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapters 9 and 10

What do we learn about Mr Fox from Chapters 9 and 10?

- He continues to be an inspirational leader.
- He thinks of a plan, which everyone accepts without question. He doesn’t have to explain it.
- He has an amazing sense of direction.
- His plan works against all odds.
- When he kills the chickens, he does it quickly and humanely.
- He always thinks of the welfare of his family.

What do we learn about Mrs Fox and the children?

- They continue to fulfil their stereotypes.
- Mrs Fox is too weak to dig and is very apologetic about this.
- Even the Small Foxes are stronger than their mother, and a male Small Fox is strongest of all.

Teaching focus

- In the next five chapters, Roald Dahl describes the scope of Mr Fox’s plan and the details of its execution.
- Having reached Boggis’s chicken house, the family drink some water before killing three of Boggis’s chickens.
- The oldest Small Fox takes the dead hens back to Mrs Fox, so she can prepare a feast.
Teaching focus

- They discover that other animals have been caught by the farmers’ plan. It is not only the foxes who are suffering.
- Being the fantastic animal that Mr Fox is, he helps the others too. There is enough food for everyone.

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapters 11, 12 and 13

What do we learn about Mr Fox?

- He is very clever. The farmers are waiting for him to starve, but he is able to outsmart them by using their determination to exact revenge for robbing them to steal even more.
- He thinks of others. When he finds that other animals are starving, he acknowledges that they are in trouble because of him and doesn’t hesitate to help them.
- He takes for granted that Mrs Fox will be able to prepare and deliver a feast for everyone, despite having almost starved to death herself.
- The other animals would all have died if Mr Fox hadn’t helped them. (Then again, they wouldn’t have been in this predicament if not for his actions.)

What do we learn about Mrs Fox?

- When her oldest child tells her that Mr Fox wants her to prepare a feast, she doesn’t eat first, but immediately and happily starts to prepare the chickens, praising Mr Fox as she does so.

Teaching focus

- Each storehouse Mr Fox and his band access holds wonders and delights and new taste treats.
- However, in this chapter Roald Dahl introduces a note of morality, as Badger reminds Mr Fox that they are stealing.
- Mr Fox justifies his theft by referring to the farmers’ wickedness and the fact that it is a life or death situation: steal or starve. This reasoning makes stealing seem defensible.

Read Chapter 14 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.
Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 14

What do we learn about Mr Fox?

- He has an interesting view on stealing. When Mr Badger queries him about the morality of stealing, Mr Fox justifies it by saying that anyone would steal *if his children were starving*. He defends his actions further by pointing out that the farmers were trying to kill him and his friends, but he isn’t stooping to their level.
- Mr Badger seems satisfied by this justification, although he doesn’t really have a choice because he is dependent on Mr Fox for his survival.

Teaching focus

- They don’t find food in Bean’s cellar, but they do find something else that is delicious.
- Just when everything seems to be going well, they hear someone coming.

*Read Chapter 15 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.*

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapter 15

What do we learn about Mr Fox?

- Another side to Mr Fox emerges in this chapter. Rat claims that the cider cellar is his territory. Mr Fox ignores that claim. He also menaces Rat by threatening to kill him. However, because Rat initiates the rude behaviour, it seems excusable for Mr Fox to threaten him.

Teaching focus

- Roald Dahl brings tension back into the story in this chapter. The plan had been going very well, but now Mr Fox and his cohorts appear to be in trouble.
- Even though the farmers and farmhands are occupied with watching out for Mr Fox, some people are still on the farms.
- Mr Fox needs to be careful and remain vigilant.

*Read Chapter 16 to the class.*

Teaching focus

- The last two chapters can be read together, as they contrast the success of Mr Fox’s plan with the failure of the three farmers.
- The fact that the farmers are sitting waiting at the hole they’ve dug means that they have no idea what Mr Fox and the other animals are doing.
- The animals plan a wonderful future for themselves, full of food and happy living.
Teaching focus

- The farmers find that their plan is a failure, but they can’t admit this.
- In contrast to the animals, the farmers’ futures seem very grim.

Read Chapters 17 and 18 to the class and then briefly discuss the following inferences.

Inferences that could be drawn from reading Chapters 16, 17 and 18

- This story is full of contradictions. We know it is wrong to steal, but Roald Dahl makes it seem all right under certain circumstances.
- Mr Fox is vain, cocky and rude to animals he considers beneath him, but he is the hero of this book.
- The three farmers worked hard, did well, but have disgusting personal habits and appearances. Roald Dahl makes it acceptable to treat them badly.

Read the story aloud

Having read the whole book, sections at a time, you may choose to read the whole book or parts of it again, particularly the sections that include the study passages. This rereading will help keep the study passages in context.

Refine the focus to the study passages

Once you have made a start on reading the book and have read at least the first four chapters, return to Chapter 1 to start looking at the author’s language choices in closer detail. Then spend some of each lesson reading the book to students. Use the remainder of the lesson working on the study passages.

Low order literate orientation – Passages one and two

The purpose of studying these passages is to:

- teach students to read and write character descriptions that create mental images and evoke emotional responses from readers.
- teach students to read and write settings appropriate to the needs of the plot.
Teaching focus – Passage one

- Roald Dahl tells this story from the perspective of an outside narrator relating the story of Fantastic Mr Fox and interpreting the characters' actions and thoughts for the reader.
- Authors often set out to influence the way their readers think about their characters.
- In *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Roald Dahl is particularly careful to construct the farmers as nasty and mean, while Mr Fox and his family are fantastic.
- We are going to find out how Roald Dahl chooses certain words to create this effect.
- First we will look at how Roald Dahl introduces the three farmers. We can immediately tell that they are going to cause problems for someone.
- Then we are going to find out more about how to make characters appear unappealing by looking at the words Roald Dahl uses to describe Farmer Boggis.
- Roald Dahl describes some features of Farmer Boggis's appearance and makes fun of, or caricatures, them. The result is that we come to dislike Farmer Boggis. It is unfair to dislike someone based on their appearance, but this dislike serves its purpose in this book.

You may choose to move to high order literate orientation on passage one at this point, or you may complete the low order literate orientation on passage one and all or part of passage two before beginning the high order literate orientation.

Teaching focus – Passage two

The way authors describe settings for their characters is very important.

- Roald Dahl describes the place where the farms are as *down in the valley*. A detailed description isn’t necessary. He describes the farmers themselves much more vividly than where they live.
- When he introduces the hero of the book, Mr Fox, he describes the location of his home in detail.
- We are going to look at how Roald Dahl wrote about where Mr Fox lived.

Complete the teaching sequence, high order literate orientation, transformations, spelling and writing on the chosen parts of passages one and two before beginning work on passage three.
Low order literate orientation – Passage three

The purpose of teaching this longer passage is to show students how an author recounts an exciting incident. In this passage, the author builds suspense by breaking Mr Fox’s progress out of his hole into very small steps. He not only describes what Mr Fox did at each step, but explains what Mr Fox was thinking, feeling and sensing as he emerged from his hole. Additionally, Roald Dahl describes the setting so that readers can imagine the context for the action. Readers can imagine the scene vividly, and can identify with Mr Fox as he does something that he has done every evening until this particular evening, when something unexpected and terrible happens.

Teaching focus

- Explain that, now you have worked on learning how Roald Dahl introduces his characters, you are going to look at how he introduces the complication or problem dealt with in the rest of the story.
- In this passage Roald Dahl describes Mr Fox losing his tail.
- Remind students of the importance of the tail: Mr Fox is vain. He thinks his tail is beautiful and makes him handsome, and without a tail a fox would look quite odd.
- This chapter describes the start of the war between Mr Fox and the farmers.
- The farmers are furious that they just missed killing Mr Fox and become determined to catch him.
- Roald Dahl shows how to build suspense in writing by recounting what happens and by including details about the setting (eg what Mr Fox was seeing, hearing and thinking, and how the scene around the hole looked).

To write this story, Roald Dahl would have had to think about how a fox would come out of a hole carefully, then break the fox’s movements into small steps and write about each one.

High order literate orientation – Passages one and two

As there are many layers of meaning in any one story, decide on the focus of each lesson and the language features important to that focus. For example, in *Fantastic Mr Fox* you might focus on the farmers in some lessons and on Mr Fox in others.

Identifying language choices that influence readers to construct characters in a good or bad light is important in this book.

The main points are provided in the table below. Examples of what you could say are provided for the first sentence to illustrate the Accelerated Literacy questioning techniques.
### Teaching focus – Passage one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of text and wording</th>
<th>Why language choices were made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Down in the valley there were three farms.</em></td>
<td>The author starts the book with <em>Down in the valley</em>. It is appropriate to start the story with this phrase because the valley is central to the setting for the whole book. The feature of the valley that the author then identifies is the <em>three farms</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who lived in this setting?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The owners of these farms had done well.</em></td>
<td>Having identified the farms, the author introduces the farmers, but not by their names. First, he identifies them as <em>The owners of these farms</em>. They are grouped together, as they will be for the rest of the story. The author says that these are prosperous farmers: they <em>had done well</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of these people and their names</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They were rich men.</em></td>
<td>The author reinforces the fact that the farmers have done well by adding that <em>they were rich men</em>. There is nothing wrong with doing well and being rich, and so the author adds some more information about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They were also nasty men.</em></td>
<td>The word <em>also</em> tells us that there is something else important about these men. <em>They were nasty men</em>. The author does not identify what is nasty about them yet; he intensifies their nastiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>All three of them were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet.</em></td>
<td><em>All three of them</em> groups the farmers together as a unit. Roald Dahl then tells us that they <em>were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet</em>. ‘Meanness’ has been added to how nasty they are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Their names were Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean.</em></td>
<td>Finally, when we feel our skin creep with the realisation that the story will involve three extremely mean and nasty farmers, Roald Dahl tells us their names.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Description of character 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and occupation</th>
<th>Roald Dahl names each farmer and describes his qualities so that readers are left in no doubt about why each of them is an unpleasant character. By not using a title or a first name (eg Boggis, not Mr Boggis or Bob Boggis), we can tell that this character is not going to be described sensitively. Each of the farmers has a different kind of farm. Boggis is a chicken farmer.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boggis was a chicken farmer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Details of occupation | The author adds this information about the approximate number of chickens kept by Boggis for several possible reasons:  
- A farmer would need to keep *thousands of chickens* to be rich.  
- A farmer who kept *thousands of chickens* might have trouble keeping track of the exact number he had. It would be hard for the farmer to notice when Mr Fox had taken one or two.  
- A farmer who did notice when one or two chickens were missing would be meticulous, and more likely to be rich. |
<p>| He kept thousands of chickens. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Appearance | It is through each farmer’s appearance that Roald Dahl shows each one as being revolting. While being <em>enormously fat</em> is not a characteristic that is repulsive in itself, the way Boggis had become fat is. |
| He was enormously fat. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Why | The author starts with <em>This was because ...</em> Readers know that a reason for his appearance is about to be provided. Boiled chickens are pale and unappetising, but that doesn’t worry Boggis. He eats three at each meal. That is very eccentric, as well as very unhealthy. These chickens are <em>smothered with dumplings</em>, meaning that Boggis ate a large number of dumplings with his chickens. Dumplings are filling, fattening and not very nutritious. There are no vegetables in Boggis’s diet. Even more unbelievable and horrible is that Boggis eats the same food, in the same amounts, every day for breakfast, lunch and supper. |
| This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered with dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and supper. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of character 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name and occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bunce was a duck-and-geese farmer.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Bunce keeps ducks and geese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Details of occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He kept thousands of ducks and geese.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunce keeps <em>thousands of ducks and geese</em> for the same reasons as Boggis keeps chickens. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t be able to run a prosperous farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He was a kind of pot-bellied dwarf.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The description of Bunce is challenging because he is described as a <em>kind of pot-bellied dwarf</em>, which is an unpleasant and prejudiced set of descriptors. Being like a pot-bellied dwarf is no one’s fault and yet Roald Dahl uses the term in a derisory way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He was so short his chin would have been under water in the shallow end of any swimming-pool in the world.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roald Dahl then expands on Bunce’s shortness by using a comparison. The description of Bunce’s size is similar to that of the farmers being as nasty as any men you could meet. Bunce is described as being as short as any adult could be. Once again, there is nothing wrong with being short. It is a physical feature determined by heredity, not a matter for scorn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>His food was doughnuts and goose-livers.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roald Dahl has chosen the characters’ diets as a feature of their nastiness. Bunce eats doughnuts, which are not intrinsically nasty (although they are unhealthy), but to combine them with goose-livers is very unusual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Habits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He mashed the livers into a disgusting paste</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunce makes his food disgusting through what he does with it. A paste of mashed goose-livers would not sound appetising to most students reading this book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>and then stuffed the paste into the doughnuts.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunce’s next action adds to the unpleasantness being presented. The word <em>stuffed</em> suggests unseemly haste and greediness. Bunce tries to fit as much paste into each doughnut as possible. The unhealthy combination of tastes and ingredients make this diet a disgusting feature of Bunce. No normal person would eat like this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>This diet gave him a tummy-ache</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make sure that readers fully understand the implications of Bunce’s diet, Roald Dahl adds, <em>This diet gave him a tummy-ache.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and a beastly temper. The second consequence of this diet is a beastly temper. A beastly temper is a very bad temper, like a wild beast might have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of character 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name and occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bean was a turkey-and-apple farmer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Details of occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He kept thousands of turkeys in an orchard full of apple trees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He never ate any food at all. Instead, he drank gallons of strong cider which he made from the apples in his orchard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He was as thin as a pencil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and the cleverest of them all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bean is unusual because he never eats any food at all. He does not die of starvation because, instead of eating, he drank gallons of strong cider. Cider is a drink made from the juice of apples. Bean has an orchard full of apple trees, so it is easy for him to make cider. Cider, as described here, is an alcoholic drink. Bean exists on a very unhealthy diet, as do the other two farmers.

Boggis was fat, Bunce was short, and now we find that Bean was as thin as a pencil. Roald Dahl has caricatured the appearance of all three farmers. Roald Dahl’s description of the farmers is based on their looks as much as their habits. He wants them to have no pleasant or endearing qualities whatever. Their appearance and their diets signify their meanness and nastiness.

The final feature that the author gives Bean is cleverness. While cleverness is not in itself a negative quality, in conjunction with Bean’s other characteristics it becomes slyness or craftiness, rather than intelligence. By contrast, Mr Fox is clever in a fantastic way.
Summary

‘Boggis and Bunce and Bean
One fat, one short, one lean.
These horrible crooks
So different in looks
Were nonetheless equally mean.’
That is what the children round about used to sing when they saw them.

The village children know about the farmers. They mock their appearance, their dishonesty and their meanness in their rhyme. Singing mocking songs about people is usually unacceptable behaviour, but here Roald Dahl makes it seem perfectly reasonable.

What you could say

Preformulation
We already know that this story is about three nasty, mean farmers. Roald Dahl starts his story by telling us about them, but first tells us where their farms are.
Question: Can anyone read the words that tell us the setting of the farms?

Reconceptualisation
Good. They were Down in the valley. Would you like to underline those words? Well done. So now we know where the farms were. Not on the hill, but down in the valley where rain would fall and the ground would probably be fairly level. A good place to have a farm.

Preformulation
Next, Roald Dahl tells us how many farms there were.
Question: Can anyone see the words that tell us that?

Reconceptualisation
Good, can you come and underline three farms. That makes one for each farmer, doesn’t it? So while we don’t know much about where the valley was or what it looked like, we can now expect that the three farms are going to be important in the story.
Teaching focus – Passage two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of text and wording</th>
<th>Why language choices were made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview of setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a hill above the valley</td>
<td>Previously we learned that <em>Down in the valley there were three farms</em>. Now the focus of the story shifts to a <em>hill above the valley</em>. Roald Dahl reveals the significant parts of the setting of this story in stages. First we learn of the valley and the farms. Then we are introduced to the farmers. Now another part of the setting is described before we find out who lives there. The descriptions of the setting are not at all detailed, which allow readers to imagine their appearance. For example, a <em>hill</em> and the <em>valley</em> are very general features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on one feature in the setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there was a wood.</td>
<td>The focus narrows to a <em>wood</em> on the hill. Once again, there are no more details provided. Readers can fill these in using their imagination. As we generally don’t talk about woods in Australia, teachers should be prepared to display pictures of an English wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choose one part of that feature</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the wood there was a huge tree.</td>
<td>The author narrows the readers’ focus still further by selecting one tree in the wood, and provides only one detail: it is a <em>huge tree</em>. Teachers could provide an illustration or photograph of a huge tree (eg an oak tree) in a wood to support the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on a smaller part of that feature</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the tree there was a hole.</td>
<td>The author directs the reader’s attention to <em>under the tree</em>. Readers have to imagine a tree that shelters a hole. We are not told how big the hole is or what it looks like. It is simply a <em>hole</em> under the tree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who lived here?

In the hole lived Mr Fox and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes.

Finally, the author tells readers who lived in the hole: a family of foxes. The author’s strategy of taking a broad view of the setting and narrowing down to one part of it mirrors what we normally do. We look at a whole scene and then focus on a particular aspect of it.

Roald Dahl does not follow the description of the setting with a description of each member of the Fox family, as he did with the farmers. Instead he describes their speech and actions. This technique brings them far closer to us as characters. We feel we know them, whereas the farmers are kept at a distance.

Complete the teaching sequence, transformations, spelling and writing on the chosen parts of passages one and two before beginning work on passage three.

High order literate orientation – Passage three

Passage three describes an important point in the story, when the conflict between the farmers and Mr Fox becomes very serious. An important part of becoming a good reader is being able to interpret important events. Part of becoming a good writer is being able to write about them vividly. Both these dimensions are important in this part of the teaching sequence for Fantastic Mr Fox.

Teaching focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of text and wording</th>
<th>Why language choices were made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Character’s actions in small steps (each step numbered) | The first part of Mr Fox’s progress into the open is to reach the entrance of his hole. The author’s use of the word crept indicates that even when he is still in a safe place, Mr Fox is careful. He doesn’t risk making the slightest noise that could alert the farmers to his movement. He knows they want to kill him.
Mr Fox creeps up the dark tunnel, the darkness protecting him from being seen.
At the end of the dark tunnel, he comes to the mouth of his hole. He has reached the limit of the safety provided by his dark hole. |
2. He poked his long handsome face out into the night air
   His next action does not put his body in danger. It shows the care he is taking. He poked his face outside, so he would be able to pull it back in quickly if he sensed danger. He is described as having a long handsome face. Not only is he clever and careful, he is also handsome. We are also told that he poked his face out into the night air. Even though it is dark, he is still being careful leaving his hole.

3. and sniffed once.
   Sniffing does not require Mr Fox to move further into the open, and a single sniff would make very little noise. Mr Fox is using his sense of smell to check for any trace of the farmers.

4. He moved an inch or two forward
   When Mr Fox does move forward, it is only an inch or two, which is about two to four centimetres. Even though he doesn't smell anything, he continues to move with great care.

5. and stopped.
   Mr Fox is not taking any chances.

6. He sniffed again.
   Mr Fox sniffs again to catch the odour of anything suspicious. So far, only his face is in the open, so he could still retreat into his hole easily if he had to.

**Explanation**

*He was always especially careful when coming out from his hole.*

Always being especially careful when coming out from his hole emphasises Mr Fox’s attention to his safety. This care is to be expected in a fox who has not been caught by the farmers over a long period of time.

7. He inched forward a little more.
   Instead of telling us that Mr Fox moved forward an inch or two, this time the author tells us that he inched forward. The author has turned moved an inch into inched. In breaking up the action into such small steps, the author conveys Mr Fox’s careful, painstaking movement out of the hole.

**Explanation**

*The front half of his body was now in the open.*

Once again, the author allows us to imagine the scene. Rather than writing about Mr Fox’s next movement, he tells us how much of his body has emerged from the hole. This image also builds suspense, as Mr Fox is now halfway out of hole, and so is less protected.
8. His black nose twitched from side to side,

Next, the author focuses on one part of Mr Fox’s body, *his black nose*. He has not yet moved any further into the open. Rather, his black nose *twitched from side to side*, so this is a sideways movement, not a forward one. It is also the slightest of slight movements.

9. sniffing and sniffing for the scent of danger.

Still detailing each tiny movement, the author tells us that Mr Fox is *sniffing and sniffing*. He explains why he is doing this. Mr Fox is sniffing *for the scent of danger*, which here would be the scent or smell of the farmers.

**Reflection**

*He found none, and he was just about to go trotting forward into the wood,*

The author stops the action sequence again to tell us what Mr Fox is thinking. Although Mr Fox has tried to detect the scent of danger, *He found none*. He has not yet smelt anything out of the ordinary.

Because there appeared to be no danger, *he was just about to go trotting into the wood*. He hasn’t done any trotting, *he was just about to*. This delays the action and heightens the suspense. We know that Mr Fox is in danger, but we can’t warn him or do anything about it.

The word *trotting* also heightens suspense because it suggests carefree movement. When Mr Fox is sure he is safe he will trot, not creep or move carefully.

The wood that he is about to trot into is a dangerous location.

**What the character sensed**

*when he heard or thought he heard a tiny noise, a soft rustling sound, as though someone had moved a foot ever so gently through a patch of dry leaves.*

Next, we read about why *Mr Fox waited*. Just as he was about to leave his hole, something made him stop. It was not something he smelt, but what *he heard or thought he heard*. Mr Fox has used his nose to check for danger; now he uses his ears. The suspense is further heightened by the uncertainty about whether he really has heard anything. Then the author describes the noise.

First, it was a *tiny noise*. It would have been hard for Mr Fox to be sure he wasn’t imagining it. Then the author describes what the tiny noise sounded like: it was a *soft rustling sound*. Such a sound could be made in many ways, but this one sounded as *though someone had moved a foot ever so gently through a patch of dry leaves*. Through these words we infer that a person has made the sound, rather than the wind or an animal. We know that the foot belongs to one of the farmers, but Mr Fox does not.
| 10. Mr Fox flattened his body against the ground | With his body flattened against the ground, Mr Fox would be harder to see. Even though he is not certain that he has heard a noise, he is taking extra care. |
| 11. and lay very still, his ears pricked. | Staying very still makes him even more difficult to see. Mr Fox also has his ears pricked, meaning that his ears are standing straight up so he can catch any noise at all. |
| 12. He waited a long time, | Flattening his body, lying very still and waiting all imply that Mr Fox is being extremely careful. Readers know that the three farmers are hidden outside the hole, waiting to kill Mr Fox. |

**What the character sensed**

| but he heard nothing more. | Still Mr Fox does not move. Instead, the author lets us share what Mr Fox senses. First we read that he heard nothing more. |

**Reflection**

| ‘It must have been a field-mouse,’ he told himself, ‘or some other small animal.’ | To convince himself that the sound is nothing dangerous, Mr Fox thinks about what it could have been. One possibility was that it was a field-mouse or some other small animal, which would not threaten Mr Fox. The author says that Mr Fox told himself, which is another way of saying that Mr Fox is thinking. He doesn’t speak. |
| 13. He crept a little further out of the hole ... | Satisfied that the sound does not represent a threat, Mr Fox now makes his next movement out of the hole: He crept, so we know he was being very quiet. He progressed only a little further, so he did not move far. |
| 14. then further still. | He seemed safe, so he crept further still. The suspense builds as Mr Fox moves out of the hole, because we know that the farmers are waiting with their guns. |

**Explanation**

| He was almost right out in the open now. | This explanation helps us visualise Mr Fox and his position in relation to the safety of his hole. Now he is almost right out in the open. He is not right out, but almost out. He is not yet an easy target. |
15. He took a last careful look around.

The word *last* indicates that Mr Fox has decided to leave the hole. He is finally satisfied that he is safe. Even so, he does not relax his vigilance; his last look is also careful.

**Description of setting**

The wood was murky and very still. Somewhere in the sky the moon was shining.

Now Roald Dahl turns from the action of the sequence to describe the setting. This adds to the suspense as we wait to read of Mr Fox’s fate. We read how Mr Fox used his nose to smell for danger and his ears to listen for danger, and now the use of the word *murky* draws attention to another of the senses: sight. Roald Dahl introduces some light from *somewhere in the sky*. The light from the moon benefits the farmers in particular, as they will be able to see more clearly. Foxes have good night vision, so the light is not an issue for Mr Fox.

16. Just then, his sharp night-eyes caught a glint of something bright behind a tree not far away.

The next sentence introduces another of Mr Fox’s features, *his sharp night-eyes*. They caught a glint, which indicates that it was only a slight glimpse of *something bright*. We know that, because it was behind a tree not far away, it is probably a gun belonging to one of the farmers. Mr Fox, however, does not know this.

**Explanation**

*It was a small silver speck of moonlight shining on a polished surface.*

Here the *something bright* is expanded on: *It was a small silver speck of moonlight shining on a polished surface*. This is a detailed description of what Mr Fox has seen, although he still does not know what it is. The word *small* tells us that it would have been difficult to see, and *silver* is the result of the moonlight *shining on a polished surface*. While readers know it is the metal of a gun, Mr Fox would find it more puzzling.

17. Mr Fox lay still, watching it.

Fortunately, the glimpse of something unexpected causes Mr Fox to stop moving and lie flat again (*lay still*).

18. quite still, watching it, Mr Fox looks at the glint. He is very suspicious and so continues to be careful.
Reflection

What on earth was it?
The author poses the question that was in Mr Fox’s head.

Explanation

Now it was moving.
The author keeps the focus on the glint. First, we find that it was moving.

It was coming up and up …
Then, continuing to describe each tiny step of the action sequence, the author indicates that the glint is becoming threatening. It was coming up and up.

Great heavens! It was the barrel of a gun!
Finally, Mr Fox realises that the glint is coming from a gun barrel. Great heavens! allows us to share in Mr Fox’s shock and dismay. Readers can imagine what thoughts must be rushing through Mr Fox’s mind. He now also knows what the noise was, and realises the danger he is in.

19. Quick as a whip, Mr Fox jumped back into his hole
The simile quick as a whip tells us how quickly Mr Fox moved as he jumped back into his hole. Because Mr Fox has come out of his hole very cautiously, he is now able to spring back to safety very quickly.

Outcome

and at that same instant the entire wood seemed to explode around him.
At this point several things happen at once, or at that same instant. Mr Fox realises the danger and jumps back into his hole as the entire wood seemed to explode around him. Once one farmer shoots at Mr Fox, the other two join in. So many shots are fired that the entire wood seemed to explode. The wood doesn’t literally explode, but the noise and smoke and flying bullets all give Mr Fox that impression.

Bang-bang! Bang-bang! Bang-bang!
To emphasise the noise, confusion and panic caused by the shooting, the author adds the repeating sound of the guns.

Teachers may add The smoke from the three guns floated … We got the tail but we missed the fox to the above passage if they think it would add to the coherence of the teaching sequence for their class.
What you could say

**Preformulation**
We know how much these three farmers want to kill Mr Fox, but we also know that Mr Fox knows this and that he is very careful whenever he leaves his hole to hunt.

**Question:** So in this part of the story, can anyone read the word that tells us how quietly and carefully Mr Fox moved as he got ready to leave his hole?

**Reconceptualisation**
Good. He crept, didn’t he? Would you like to underline the word? Well done. So if he crept, it would make it hard for the farmers to know he was moving. He would be quiet, wouldn’t he?

**Preformulation**
Next Roald Dahl tells us about where Mr Fox crept as he got ready to leave his hole. First he had to get to the entrance of his hole.

**Question:** Can anyone see the words that tell us where he crept?

**Reconceptualisation**
Good, can you come and underline up the dark tunnel? Why do you think it was important that the hole was dark? Yes, no one could see in.

**Preformulation and question**
When he had crept up the dark tunnel, where did he end up?

**Question:** Can you read the words Roald Dahl uses?

**Reconceptualisation**
Yes, it was the mouth of his hole. Can you underline that? It’s not a real mouth; it’s the entrance of his hole in the way that our mouths are the entrance to our stomachs. So he isn’t outside yet, is he?

**Transformations**

Transformations is an activity designed to change students’ orientation to the text under consideration, from that of a reader looking for meaning to that of a writer learning how the author used various literary techniques to achieve a particular effect or purpose.

In addition, transformations provides a key opportunity for ‘handover’ of understanding about the language choices in the text. The questioning techniques in this part of the teaching sequence reflect the growing common knowledge shared between class members, and between class members and the teacher.

A successful handover might mean, for example, that there is less need for preformulation.
Transformations – Passage one
Transformations – One
Text (pages 1–2)

*Down in the valley there were three farms. The owners of these farms had done well. They were rich men. They were also nasty men. All three of them were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet. Their names were Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean.*

Goals of the transformations

**Comprehension**
The first paragraph of the story is part of the orientation to the narrative. It sets the scene for the story and introduces the farmers, the evil protagonists. It is important for students to be aware of all the information contained in this paragraph, as well as to understand the inferences of the author’s language choices.

**Word recognition leading to spelling**
The main spelling focus for these transformations will be engaging in joint reconstructed writing so that students can take on the role of the author to consider the language choices that are important in the narrative.

**Writing**
Joint reconstructed writing on this passage will prepare students for other writing exercises in which they experiment with using Roald Dahl’s technique for writing an orientation for a narrative. In this story Dahl has given a bare minimum of information about the setting, choosing to spend more time orienting readers to the characters.

Example of text segmentation

Initially, the sentences could be segmented in the following way. Other segmentations may also be used.

*Down in the valley / there / were / three farms / . /
The owners of these farms / had done well / . /
They / were / rich men / . /
They / were / also / nasty men / . /
All three of them / were / about as nasty and mean / as any men / you could meet / . /
Their names / were / Farmer Boggis / , / Farmer Bunce / and / Farmer Bean / . /
Teaching focus

- Authors sometimes begin stories with a reference to the setting, although they do not always describe it in detail. There is no reference to when this story took place.
- The farmers are first introduced as the owners of these farms.
- Then they are introduced as rich men.
- Next, we find that they are nasty and mean as well, and not just slightly nasty and mean but extremely so.
- Finally the author reveals their names. This is an unusual way to introduce characters.

Points for discussion

Setting
First, the author describes the setting in very general terms, as though the reader is already familiar with the valley. The use of the definite article (the) gives this impression. We are given no temporal location for the story apart from its being told in the past tense (were).

Readers are left to imagine for themselves what the valley and farms look like, where the valley is and when the story happened. This technique allows the author to make the characters more colourful and important than the setting in which they are found.

Who lived in this setting: their characteristics and names
The author delays telling readers the names of the characters, instead introducing them as the owners of these farms. By introducing the characters in stages, the author creates suspense.

Roald Dahl uses the words had done well to tell us that the people he is about to introduce are successful. He has not yet called them farmers, but he wants us to think of these people as being good at what they do.

Next we find that they are rich men. This information reinforces the term done well. Roald Dahl is making their success and wealth important characteristics.

Authors have to consider how to reveal their characters to readers. Roald Dahl reveals information about these characters little by little.

Roald Dahl uses the word also to tell readers that there is another thing we need to know. He has saved this thing for last, and it is a crucial piece of information. They are nasty men. We can now foreshadow that one of the important topics of this story will be the nastiness of the owners of the three farms in the valley.

This sentence expands on the nastiness of the characters. It would be almost impossible to meet any men who were nastier and meaner than these three people.
At this point readers are ready to imagine some very unpleasant characters. And now, at last, Roald Dahl tells us their names. He introduces them by their occupation and their family name. We never learn their given names, which is a device that distances them from the reader.

Transformations – Two

Text (page 2)

_Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered with dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and supper._

Goals of the transformations

**Comprehension**
The author describes each of the farmers in a biased way. Students need to understand how this is done and what it means, and why the author might have felt it was necessary to write like this.

**Word recognition leading to spelling**
The main spelling focus for these transformations will be engaging in joint reconstructed writing so that students can take on the role of the author to consider the language choices that are important in the orientation to the narrative.

**Writing**
Joint reconstructed writing on this passage will prepare students for other writing exercises in which they experiment with Roald Dahl’s technique for writing the orientation for a narrative. From this passage students can learn to describe characters in ways that will influence readers’ feelings.

Example of text segmentation

Initially, the sentences could be segmented in the following way. Other segmentations may also be used.

_Boggis / was / a chicken farmer / . /

_He / kept / thousands of chickens / . /

_He / was / enormously fat / . /

_This was because / he ate / three boiled chickens / smothered with dumplings / every day / for breakfast / , / lunch / and / supper / . /

_T heir names / were / Farmer Boggis / , / Farmer Bunce / and / Farmer Bean / . /_
Teaching focus

- Authors sometimes introduce characters by describing their appearance.
- If they want readers to dislike these characters, they describe unpleasant features or behaviours.
- When authors describe a character, they use the verb ‘was’ to identify qualities and attributes of the character.

### Points for discussion

**Description of character 1: name and occupation**
The topic of a sentence usually comes first, so we expect this sentence to tell us something about Farmer Boggis. Roald Dahl identifies Boggis by telling readers his occupation.

**Details of occupation**
This and the following sentence start with *He* and provide readers with more details of Boggis's attributes. The first picks up on his occupation and tells us how many chickens he kept. If we add that to what we already know, it tells us that Boggis must be a successful farmer.

**Appearance**
Next, the author provides readers with a second detail about Boggis, relating to his appearance.

**Why? (food)**
The sentence starts with *This was because*. This refers to Boggis being enormously fat and the author is about to tell us why this is. It is because of his behaviour: he eats an enormous amount of food. The author is explicit about the exact amount so that readers understand the full extent of Boggis’s gluttony.

That he *ate three boiled chickens* already shows the farmer’s greed, but Roald Dahl adds to this by saying that the chickens are *smothered with dumplings*. He further expands on the quantity by saying that he eats that amount *every day*. Then, to reinforce Boggis’s extreme gluttony, he adds *for breakfast, lunch and supper*.

Teachers may continue to carry out transformations on the appearance and habits of the other farmers. The consistent structure of the text makes prediction easier for students once they are aware of it.
Transformations – Passage two

Text (page 7)

On a hill above the valley there was a wood.
In the wood there was a huge tree.
Under the tree there was a hole.
In the hole lived Mr Fox and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes.

Goals of the transformations

Comprehension
The author describes the setting for Mr Fox and his family in detail. Roald Dahl has already introduced the valley in which the three farms are located. The focus of the story now moves to a hill above the valley.

Word recognition leading to spelling
The main spelling focus for these transformations will be engaging in joint reconstructed writing so that students can take on the role of the author to consider the language choices that are important in the orientation to the narrative.

Writing
Joint reconstructed writing on this passage will prepare students for other writing exercises in which they experiment with using Roald Dahl’s technique for writing an orientation for a narrative. From this passage students can learn to describe a context for characters by starting with a broad view, then narrowing down to one feature.

Example of text segmentation
Initially, the sentences could be segmented in the following way. Other segmentations may also be used.

On a hill / above the valley / there was / a wood / . / 
In the wood / there was / a huge tree / . / 
Under the tree / there was / a hole / . / 
In the hole / lived / Mr Fox / and / Mrs Fox / and / their four Small Foxes / . /

Teaching focus
- The author used an interesting writing technique in describing the setting for the Fox family.
- Notice that each sentence ends with a part of the setting, which then becomes the start of the next sentence.
- This writing technique means that there was is in the middle of the sentence rather than at the beginning, as might normally be expected.
Chapter 2: Mr Fox: overview of setting
The author introduced the valley to readers in the first sentence of the book. Now he returns to this setting and takes a feature of it to start the sentence, On a hill. Several hills surround a valley. This part of the story involves a hill above the valley.

Focus on one feature in the setting
In this sentence there was has been used to identify part of the scene. The author could have omitted the word there and the sentence would still have made sense. However, there serves to emphasise its place in the setting.

Choose one part of that feature
Having identified the wood, the author takes us into it and leads us to the next important feature, a huge tree.

Focus on a smaller part of that feature
The author now zooms under the huge tree and directs the reader to the location of a hole.

Who lived here?
The structure of the sentence changes as we reach the final focus. The author has led us to the home of the Fox family. Unlike the three farmers, the members of the Fox family are accorded dignity through their titles; Mr Fox and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes. These respectful titles indicate their status as important characters. Other animals that enter the narrative are not given similar respect.
The author does not describe the Fox family physically in the way that he described the farmers; he writes about what they said and did.
At this stage of the story, the author has introduced all the main characters.

Transformations – Passage three
Authors describe actions carefully when they write to create an atmosphere of suspense. They also describe thoughts about and provide explanations for these actions, which heightens the anticipation.

Text (page 11)
Mr Fox crept up the dark tunnel to the mouth of his hole.
He poked his long handsome face out into the night air and sniffed once.
He moved an inch or two forward and stopped.
He sniffed again.
He was always especially careful when coming out from his hole.
Goals of the transformations

Comprehension
Until now (Chapter 3) Roald Dahl has described the farmers as unpleasant characters and Mr Fox as the ‘fantastic’ good character. He has also described the reasons for the conflict between the farmers and the fox. In this part, he describes a critical incident in the story. During this incident the farmers almost kill Mr Fox. However, the extreme care the latter exercises in leaving his hole allows him to escape alive, albeit without his tail. The author builds suspense by describing each tiny movement Mr Fox makes as he prepares to leave his hole to go hunting. The suspense is heightened by the knowledge that the farmers are hiding, ready to shoot Mr Fox, and he doesn’t know this. His eventual escape enragers the farmers to the point where they lose all perspective in their determination to kill Mr Fox and his family. Transformations one can be used to show students how the author begins to build suspense by describing Mr Fox’s movements and the reasons for them.

Word recognition leading to spelling
The main spelling focus for these transformations will be engaging in joint reconstructed writing so that students can take on the role of the author to consider the language choices that are important in building suspense.

Writing
Joint reconstructed writing on this passage will prepare students for other writing exercises in which they experiment with using Roald Dahl’s technique for constructing a suspenseful description of an important event.

Example of text segmentation
Initially, the sentences could be segmented in the following way. Other segmentations may also be used.

Mr Fox / crept / up the dark tunnel / to the mouth of his hole / . / He / poked / his long handsome face / out into the night air / and / sniffed / once / . / He / moved / an inch or two forward / and / stopped / . / He / sniffed / again / . / He / was / always / especially / careful / when / coming out / from his hole / . /
Teaching focus

- Authors have to decide how to write about important events in their narratives. Roald Dahl chose to make the farmers’ attempt to kill Mr Fox exciting and important by creating an atmosphere of suspense.
- First he creates suspense by describing each tiny movement Mr Fox makes as he prepares to leave his hole. He does this almost as slowly as Mr Fox would have moved.
- The subject of each sentence in this part of the description is Mr Fox (or He), because each sentence tells us about one of his actions or thoughts.
- When authors write to create suspense they often include the reasons for the characters’ actions.

Character’s actions

The word *crept* is a careful choice to describe an action. It means stealthy movement by someone who does not want to be heard.

The phrase *up the dark tunnel* conveys an atmosphere of danger and foreboding with an element of concealment.

The metaphor *to the mouth of his hole* relates the entrance to the hole as a part of the body.

The word *poked* is a strong, almost aggressive term. From its use we understand that Mr Fox is quite determined to enter the outside world, despite his caution.

Authors need to be consistent in their descriptions of characters. Roald Dahl has described Mr Fox as being fantastic, and *his long handsome face* continues this theme. Mr Fox is proud of his appearance.

The phrase *out into the night air*, locates us in both setting and time.

The words *sniffed once* convey atmosphere as well as describing an action.

They imply that Mr Fox is taking care in coming out of his hole. The author has already told readers that Mr Fox knew the smell of each farmer very well. He, therefore, only needs to sniff once to detect whether one of them was there.

Authors can build suspense by breaking action into carefully defined stages so that the end result of the purpose of the action is withheld from readers for as long as possible. Here, the author keeps readers in suspense as Mr Fox, who has just poked his nose into the open, *moved an inch or two forward*. This attention to the tiniest degree of movement forward is agonising for the reader who knows that the three farmers are waiting with guns trained on the Fox family hole.

Just when it seems that Mr Fox is about to come out of his hole he stops. The author has slowed the action sequence down again.

Mr Fox has already sniffed the air once, and now he repeats the action. In this way the author emphasises the care with which Mr Fox leaves his hole.
**Explanation**

Authors often explain why their characters behave the way they do. Roald Dahl makes clear that Mr Fox was *always especially careful* about venturing into the open. The explanation also further delays the description of Mr Fox’s exit. This technique is widely used by authors as they build suspense and anticipation in their readers.

**Spelling**

The spelling segment of the Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence follows transformations once the teacher is reasonably sure that students are able to recognise many of the words from the text out of context. Teachers are then able to use the students’ ability to hold a stable image of a word in their memory to show how that word can be broken into letter pattern chunks. Spelling activities include joint reconstructed writing.

**How to choose spelling words**

Keep the following points in mind when choosing words to work on in spelling:

- Are there any words that have patterns (or letters) that students have worked on before?
- Are there any new patterns that occur more than once or are commonly occurring?
- Are there any words that have interesting origins or roots that will help students develop an understanding of English?
- Which words will help students with joint reconstructed writing?
- Which words that students have already been taught need revision?
- Consider students’ age and stage of spelling development.

**Suggestions for spelling**

This text has been benchmarked at Year 4 level and students studying this text would be well into negotiating the transitional stage of spelling. Consequently, work on words that help students use visual strategies to notice larger chunks of letters that go together to make orthographic patterns.

The focus of spelling examples from the transformations is to learn to spell words that will help with joint reconstructed writing. Prepositions, for example, are used precisely in these passages to describe the setting and the locations of features of the setting, and these are identified.

Words to do with the farm and farmers are also suggested, as they are commonly used in the two passages. These words include the names of the poultry kept by the three farmers and the cider produced by Farmer Bean.
Examples from passages one and two

- Point out that prepositions that identify *where* are important in this part of the book (eg *down*, *under*, *into*, *above*).
- Remind students that the *all* eye is an important location in this story. The word contains the *all* pattern, which occurs very commonly in English.
- Note also that the *arm* pattern occurs frequently in English and some of these words occur in this story (eg *father*, *mother*, *arm*).
- Review the characteristics of the farmers, who are *ast* and *ean*. Emphasise the –*ean* combination of letters (eg *meat*, *beauty*, *head*).

Examples from passage three

- Review the spelling of parts of the body (eg *body*, *nose*, *ears*, *face*, *mouth*).
- Review the spelling of verbs (eg *sniffed*, *sniffing*, *stopped*, *flattened*).
- Review long vowels with single consonants (eg *poked*, *moved*, *moving*).
- Explain that some words change to make the past tense (crept, not *creeped*).
- Discuss words with the –*ight* pattern, including compound words (eg *right*, *night*, *light*).
- Discuss words with the –*oo*– pattern (eg *wood*, *foot*, *moon/light*).

Etymology

Etymological information on selected words is always interesting for students. Many websites, as well as dictionaries and other books, provide etymological information. Two informative websites are [http://www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com) and [http://www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com).

Examples


chicken: O.E. *cycen* ‘young fowl,’ which in M.E. came to mean ‘young chicken,’ then any chicken

duck: O.E. *duce* (found only in gen. *ducan*) ‘a duck,’ lit. ‘a ducker,’ presumed to be from O.E. *ducen* ‘to duck’


cider: Meaning gradually narrowed to mean exclusively ‘fermented drink made from apples’, though this sense was present in O.Fr.

handsome: c.1400, *handsom* ‘easy to handle, ready at hand’; sense extended to ‘fair size, considerable’ (1577), then ‘having fine form, good-looking’ (1590). Meaning ‘generous’ (in *handsome reward* etc.) first recorded 1690
Joint reconstructed writing

Joint reconstructed writing provides a transition from spelling activities to writing activities and works best when taken from transformations. Joint reconstructed writing involves the teacher and students working together to reconstruct the text using the same words as the author. It successfully reduces the stress associated with working out what to write about, what to write and how to write it. Stress associated with spelling is greatly reduced, giving students the mental space to think about subject matter and language choices.

The teacher ‘thinks aloud’ to reconstruct a passage with the students, using the writer’s language choices. This is a culmination of all the shared knowledge built up so far about language choices used in the construction and positioning of particular phrases and includes the dimensions of letter formation, the role of initial consonants and blends, and visual patterns.

In this story, reconstruct sentences, paragraphs and sections of text as appropriate. For example, how Roald Dahl:

- introduces the farmers into the narrative of Fantastic Mr Fox
- describes Farmer Boggis as an unpleasant character
- introduces the Fox family into the narrative.

Example – Passages one and two

This example is based on passages one and two.

Teaching focus

- The setting is introduced first; knowledge about the whereabouts of the valley is assumed.
- The farmers are introduced by their occupations and their wealth.
- Suspense is built up in the introduction of the farmers as significant information about them, their nastiness and meanness, is saved till later in the paragraph.

What you could say

Now we’re going to try and write part of the orientation in the same way as Roald Dahl did.

Can you remember how he starts the story? He tells us where it happens, doesn’t he? Can you remember the words he used to tell us where the characters lived?

Yes, Down in the valley. Good, let’s see if we can remember how to write the words that tell us where the farmers lived.
Remember to start with a capital letter and remember to write it down in its chunks. How did it start? That’s right, /d/. Then what was the next chunk? /own/, that’s good. Remember to say it under your breath in those chunks as you write.

(Continue with Down in the valley)

Can anyone remember why Roald Dahl started the book like that? He didn’t really tell us much about the valley, did he? Just that there is one, a place surrounded by hills with lower ground in between them.

Now we have written where the story takes place, what do we write next if we are writing like Roald Dahl? What was there, Down in the valley?

Good, there were three farms. Let’s see if you can write that. You can try by yourself or wait and do it with me.

Now Roald Dahl doesn’t tell us who lives on those three farms yet, does he? What does he call the people who live on those farms?

That’s right, the owners of these farms.

I wonder why Roald Dahl doesn’t tell us their names. Can anyone remember?

Continue like this, mixing a discussion of the meaning of the text with reasons for writing it like this together with how to spell the words.

Example – Passage three

Teaching focus

- The passage describes a suspenseful and significant incident in the story.
- The author has described each tiny movement made by Mr Fox.
- He writes about what the character did, what he sensed, what he thought.
- He also explains Mr Fox’s actions.
- When we write like Roald Dahl we need to include similar information.

What you could say

Now that we know so much about how Roald Dahl chose his words to write about Mr Fox leaving his hole, we can practise writing just like he did. If we look at our plan of how Roald Dahl wrote this passage, we can see that he described each tiny movement Mr Fox made.

In this first part of the description we can write about the first moves Mr Fox takes as he prepares to go out into the darkness of the night to hunt for food.

Can you remember what Mr Fox did first, before he even got to the mouth of his hole?

That’s right, Mr Fox crept. I wonder why we need to use the word crept to tell how Mr Fox moved?

He wouldn’t want to make any noise at all would he? Not even in the safety of his tunnel.
Let’s write those words then: *Mr Fox* first, then *crept*. Remember that ‘Mr’ is a short way to write the word ‘mister’. So we write the name of the character first then what he did.

When we write, can you remember how we learned to spell the word *crept*? You can try to write it by yourselves, if you like, or wait and write it with me. (Wait until the students writing it independently do so.) Who can remember the letters that *crept* started with? That’s right, so let’s write cr then ept. Good work.

Continue reconstructing the text to the end of the transformations passage, discussing meaning, and the mechanics of writing and spelling.

**Writing**

Writing activities should not be based only on patterning, but on a principled understanding of why writers use specific techniques. For example, it is not much use substituting words to write a ‘new’ sentence or paragraph if students do not know what the skill they are learning is about or when to use it.

Writing goals consist of goals for the whole teaching sequence (overall goals), as well as goals for individual lessons (short-term goals).

Goals for *Fantastic Mr Fox* would include:

- **Overall goals**, such as writing a story where good characters are pitted against bad characters and win.
- **Short-term goals**, such as writing short descriptions of characters that construct them as either good or bad; writing paragraphs that introduce characters, saving what is good or bad about them until the end; writing descriptions of settings that start with an overall view then narrow down to a smaller part of the whole; writing short action sequences that include details of the characters’ movements, thoughts, feelings and reactions; and writing a suspenseful part of a story where a character moves slowly and very carefully towards a goal.
Activities – Passages one and two

Workshop one

**Task:** Describe Mr Fox as though he were a villain. This description would be from the viewpoint of the farmers whose produce he stole. This example would also serve to emphasise how Roald Dahl was challenging the conventional world view of storytellers when he constructed a fox as such as good character.

**Process:** Imagine the physical appearance of a fox. Use an illustration from the book or a photograph of a real fox. Discuss the usual role of a fox in stories as being sly and crafty (as in ‘Why the Bear has a Stumpy Tail’). Discuss what physical characteristic could be used to illustrate those qualities. Then discuss why that quality is significant.

**Example:** Mr Fox was a sneak thief. He stole chickens, ducks and geese from the farmers nearby. He was very cheeky. This was because he could take the farmers’ animals for his family and friends to eat whenever he felt like it. He knew the farmers could never catch him, however hard they tried.

Workshop two

**Task:** Describe Farmer Boggis as though he were a kind farmer. This description would be from the viewpoint of the other farmers. Again, this example would also serve to emphasise how Roald Dahl was manipulating readers when he constructed the farmers as such vile men.

**Process:** Look at the picture of Farmer Boggis and imagine him through the eyes of people who love him: his children perhaps. How could he be described as a pleasant person?

**Example:** Jimmy Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was rather round in shape. This was because he loved to party with his many friends and family and they all really enjoyed eating delicious chicken nuggets and chips with gravy when they had party dinners.

Workshop three

**Task:** Describe another character to influence readers to like or dislike him or her. The teacher could provide illustrations or the students could invent their own character.

**Process:** Think of a character from a book you know, from an illustration or use your imagination. Think of his or her occupation and appearance. Decide whether you want readers to like or dislike the character. Choose a distinguishing feature of the character and explain why it is a good or a bad feature.

**Examples:** Jill was a shopkeeper. She worked in the supermarket in the main street in town. She was full of fun. This was because she gave sweets to all the...
children who said thank you when they came into the shop to do the shopping for their families.

Jill was a shopkeeper. She worked in the supermarket in the main street in town. She was the grumpiest person in the community. This was because she hated children and couldn’t stand the noise they made when they came in asking for all sorts of silly little things from the bottom of the freezer.

Workshop four

**Task:** Write a suspenseful part of the story where a character moves slowly and carefully towards a goal.

**Scenario 1:** A burglar entering a room where someone is sleeping and creeping across to the bedside table to steal some precious jewellery from it without waking the sleeping person.

**Process:** Work out what movements the burglar would make to get to the bedside table and to pick up the jewellery. List them, then add what the character did but also what he or she thought, saw, smelled and experienced during the experience.

**Example:** Jenny slid through the window onto the floor and stood absolutely still. She looked about as her eyes adjusted to the dim light in the room. She was always very careful when she first entered a strange room.

She eased one foot forward and moved her weight onto it. She barely breathed, she was so afraid of waking the woman asleep in the bed.

She took another small step and then another. She froze as the woman in the bed snored slightly, moved, and then settled again.

The light from the street was dim but adequate, although the shadows cast by the furniture and the curtains were eerie and made it more difficult to see. Slowly, Jenny reached the bedside table and saw the diamond necklace lying carelessly to one side. She reached out towards it, hoping that the noise of her thudding heart wouldn’t wake the woman up.

**Scenario 2:** Matilda, creeping across the floor of her parents’ bedroom to replace her father’s hair treatment with bleach.

**Process:** Watch that part of the movie *Matilda* or discuss it, if relevant. Discuss the sequence of movements she took to carry out her plan. Then work out what Matilda may have felt or thought as she crawled across the floor.

**Example:** Matilda eased herself through the bedroom door, hoping it wouldn’t squeak. She was clutching the bottle of bleach and the last thing she wanted was for one of her parents to wake up and catch her.

She decided to crawl past the bed to the bathroom so that if one of them opened their eyes they had less chance of seeing her.
She set out across the floor that now seemed to stretch away for ever, trying very hard not to make a sound.

Just then, her mother sat up. Matilda froze. She felt as though she had turned to stone, she was so still. She frantically tried to think of what she could say to explain what she was doing there. As luck would have it, Mrs Wormwood was wearing a sleeping mask over her eyes. She lay down again and went back to sleep.

Matilda was almost too weak with relief to carry on.

**Joint construction of a narrative**

Work through the following steps before asking students to write narratives individually, or in a group.

- List some situations. For example, environmentalists trying to stop developers from cutting down trees, building roads, dams, wind farms and so on. Each group can be constructed as good or bad, depending on the circumstances (eg loggers cut down trees, but they make their living doing so).

- Work out who characters might be.

- Work out how to make one group seem unappealing and the other appealing using Roald Dahl’s techniques of caricaturing personal appearance, behaviour and habits.

- Draw possible locations for settings and work out how to describe them using Roald Dahl’s writing techniques.

- Think through the complication and how you could reach a resolution. Decide on an exciting incident where the two groups work against each other.

- Discuss thoroughly before starting to jointly construct a class story.

- Use writing workshops to practise writing strategies.

These steps must precede asking the students to write a narrative themselves.
Sample weekly plan

The following weekly plan is included as a guide only to the way teachers could move through the teaching sequence over a period of time. The plan’s content has been condensed. In reality, working through this text will take some weeks, and the following one-week plan could actually take two or even three weeks to complete. Parts of a session that are not finished in one lesson can be picked up in the next. Teachers will need to introduce the subsequent lesson/s carefully so students know what to expect, what the purpose of the lesson is, and where they are in the teaching sequence.
Class: Year 4  
Week: 1  
Term: 3

Text: *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl

**Teaching focus:** How to write a character description to influence readers to like or dislike that person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson focus</td>
<td>How the story starts. How a writer uses descriptions to influence readers.</td>
<td>How farmer Boggs is constructed in the wording of the story.</td>
<td>Contrast Boggs with Mr Fox. In high order literate orientation revise the wording and structure of the description of Boggs.</td>
<td>Joint reconstructed writing that reconstructs the description of Boggs.</td>
<td>Writing different descriptions to influence readers jointly and independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low order literate orientation</td>
<td>Introduce the story and read the first chapter. Discuss the farmers, the locations of their farms and their work.</td>
<td>Discuss the farmers and their farming ability. Focus on the personalities of each farmer.</td>
<td>Reread Chapter 1 and the bad characteristics of each farmer. Read the description of Mr Fox in Chapter 2 and note the extent of his goodness.</td>
<td>Ask students to read the part of the text that describes the location of the story and the description of Boggs.</td>
<td>Discuss the purpose of the descriptions of the farmers and Mr Fox, with the emphasis on influencing readers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>High order literate orientation</td>
<td>Work on language choices in the first paragraph. Discuss the location of the farm (use illustration or draw). Discuss the three farmers, why they would be rich, what this meant about their farming ability. What does knowing they were mean lead us to expect in the coming story?</td>
<td>Reread the first paragraph then discuss the language choices used to describe Boggs. Why is it so important to make him seem unpleasant?</td>
<td>Reread the description of Boggs and discuss the wording that makes readers dislike Boggs. Encourage students to explain.</td>
<td>Turn over parts of the transformations to give students opportunities to explain their function.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformations</td>
<td>Boggs was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens/smothered in dumplings/every day/for breakfast/lunch/supper/</td>
<td>Continue with the transformation, discussing the effect of each part of the wording and relating it to the structure of the passage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>ch/ick/en farmer</td>
<td>revise chicken farmer, then work on th/ous/and/s and e/norm/ous/y. Discuss the pattern ou.</td>
<td>Revise previous words and spell /bl/ed, sm/o/ed. Discuss the work that the –ed ending does.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint reconstructed writing</td>
<td>Discuss the structure of the description of Boggs. Note how each description tells readers the name of the farmer and something about his job. Then describes the unpleasant characteristics of each farmer.</td>
<td>Reconstruct Name and occupation Boggs was a chicken farmer.</td>
<td>Jointly reconstruct the whole paragraph describing Boggs: name and occupation, details of job description Why (reason).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint construction of a description of Mr Fox that constructs him as bad. Then try to describe Boggs as good. Finish with students who feel able writing a description of another character.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Read story with the class. Students join in when they can.**
Down in the valley there were three farms. The owners of these farms had done well. They were rich men. They were also nasty men. All three of them were about as nasty and mean as any men you could meet. Their names were Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce and Farmer Bean.

Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered with dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and supper.

Bunce was a duck-and-goose farmer. He kept thousands of ducks and geese. He was a kind of pot-bellied dwarf. He was so short his chin would have been under water in the shallow end of any swimming-pool in the world. His food was doughnuts and goose-livers. He mashed the livers into a disgusting paste and then stuffed the paste into the doughnuts. This diet gave him a tummy-ache and a beastly temper.

Bean was a turkey-and-apple farmer. He kept thousands of turkeys in an orchard full of apple trees. He never ate any food at all. Instead, he drank gallons of strong cider which he made from the apples in his orchard. He was as thin as a pencil and the cleverest of them all.
‘Boggis and Bunce and Bean

One fat, one short, one lean.

These horrible crooks

So different in looks

Were none the less equally mean.’

That is what the children round about used to sing when they saw them.
On a hill above the valley there was a wood.

In the wood there was a huge tree.

Under the tree there was a hole.

In the hole lived Mr and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes.
Mr Fox crept up the dark tunnel to the mouth of his hole. He poked his long handsome face out into the night air and sniffed once.

He moved an inch or two forward and stopped.

He sniffed again. He was always especially careful when coming out from his hole.

He inched forward a little more. The front half of his body was now in the open.

His black nose twitched from side to side, sniffing and sniffing for the scent of danger. He found none, and he was just about to go trotting forward into the wood when he heard or thought he heard a tiny noise, a soft rustling sound, as though someone had moved a foot ever so gently through a patch of dry leaves.

Mr Fox flattened his body against the ground and lay very still, his ears pricked. He waited a long time, but he heard nothing more.

‘It must have been a field-mouse,’ he told himself, ‘or some other small animal.’
He crept a little further out of the hole . . . then further still. He was almost right out in the open now. He took a last careful look around. The wood was murky and very still. Somewhere in the sky the moon was shining.

Just then, his sharp night-eyes caught a glint of something bright behind a tree not far away. It was a small silver speck of moonlight shining on a polished surface. Mr Fox lay still, watching it. What on earth was it? Now it was moving. It was coming up and up . . . Great heavens! It was the barrel of a gun! Quick as a whip, Mr Fox jumped back into his hole and at that same instant the entire wood seemed to explode around him. Bang-bang! Bang-bang! Bang-bang!
These notes have been written to help teachers use the Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies in Year 4. However, they could also be used in Year 3 and up to Year 5 where students have difficulties with reading.

Outcomes of the teaching sequence

At the end of this teaching sequence, students should be able to:

- read the passages studied fluently and with a high level of inferential comprehension
- discuss the story: give opinions about the author’s language choices; identify the story’s structure, theme and ideology
- spell chosen words and understand related spelling strategies
- use the story as a model for writing.

The following notes have been written for teachers who have attended professional development workshops in teaching Accelerated Literacy. The notes presume some understanding about how to teach the program.

For a detailed explanation of how to implement the teaching sequence, please refer to the teachers’ handouts from the first professional development workshop. Additionally, you could refer to http://www.nalp.edu.au.

It is also assumed that teachers have read the text on which these notes are based and have a detailed understanding of the text before beginning a teaching sequence.

Teachers are responsible for ensuring the suitability of the text on which these notes are based for their particular teaching context.