Secondary

These notes have been written to help teachers use the Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies in Year 7. However, they could also be used in Year 6 and up to Year 8 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.

The National Accelerated Literacy Program is jointly funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education Science and Training, and the Northern Territory Government through the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and supported by Charles Darwin University.
Teaching Notes

Bridge to Terabithia
Secondary
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Using this resource
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The text

*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson. Published 2005 by Penguin Books. The title is also available on tape and CD. Page numbers provided here refer to this edition.

Go to [http://www.terabithia.com](http://www.terabithia.com) for information about the author and her books.
Bridge to Terabithia
Synopsis of the story

This is a story of an unlikely friendship between a young boy from an impoverished farming family and a young girl from a professional family that has moved to rural Virginia for a ‘lifestyle change’. Loners both, they create an imaginary world, Terabithia, to which they retreat in difficult times.

Leslie’s role in the story is to present a ‘bridge’ across which Jess can venture into other worlds – of imagination, of creativity and, eventually, of maturity. When she dies in an accident, it seems that Jess’s bridge might be broken.

Themes

The novel’s themes include:
- coming of age
- the importance of imagination
- the isolation that results from ‘being different’
- friendships and their power to transform lives
- the effect of loss and how it transforms lives
- the significance of the family unit to the wellbeing of the individual.

Why use this story?

Packed with positive messages, this coming-of-age story celebrates the importance of close personal relationships and an active imagination. Paterson wrote Bridge to Terabithia, the first of her Newbery Medal-winning books, while battling cancer. It was inspired by the accidental death of Lisa, a friend of her young son David, and is dedicated to them both.

Structure of the text

- Orientation: An unusual device is used to introduce, and build, the key character, Jess.
- Foreshadowing of minor complications.
- Series of minor complications plus evaluations: Jess loses the race to Leslie, finds her a Christmas present when the family has no money, and feels uncomfortable around Leslie’s father (a situation that could potentially damage their friendship).
- Series of resolutions to minor complications.
• Major complication revealed as disruption of expectation: Leslie’s death comes at a point in the story when the expectation is for ‘brighter times ahead’.
• Resolution: Leslie, in a sense, lives on through Jess, as he reveals how much he has grown from their friendship, and introduces May Belle to Terabithia.

**Language features of the text**

**Passage one**

Passage one introduces us to the main character, Jess, by taking us straight inside his head.

- The reader is instantly intrigued with words that require explanation (eg Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity).
- The author delays providing information so that the reader has to read on to understand what is happening.

**Passage two**

Passage two features an unexpected happening. This creates a temporary complication that is played out in later pages.

- One of the features of narrative writing is that the natural order is disrupted in some way by an unforeseen event, and the resulting situation then needs to be resolved. In the first paragraph, Paterson manages to confirm in our minds the ‘natural’ order; that is, that Jess will win the race.
- The opening sentence of the second paragraph foreshadows the complication: *He felt it before he saw it*. Paterson doesn’t name ‘it’ right away, so as to further build the tension.
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 *Bridge to Terabithia* aims to teach:

- how to read the study passages at 90 per cent accuracy or above
- how to discuss the passages, including the meaning and inferences contained in the author’s language choices
- how to spell fluently and write clearly the words taught as part of the teaching sequence
- how to write, with appropriate teacher support, using passages from the story as models for writing strategies including how to develop characterisation, delay actions and creating intense action/reaction sequences.

**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**

It may be worth approaching this book in two sections – one for the story up until Jess hears of Leslie’s death and the second from that point until the end of the book. This would be in keeping with the life-changing nature of this event in Jess’s life. Teachers need to make this decision in line with the age and maturity levels of their class and based on a thorough knowledge of the book and its issues.

**Teaching focus**

*Bridge to Terabithia* is about a ten-year-old boy and his special friendship with Leslie, a young girl who comes to live nearby. It is about both the happy times they have together and the sadness that later ensues – and about what Jess learns as a result.
Jess is the central character in the story and Paterson makes sure that we get his perspective on everything. In this way we get a very subjective view of events.

Illustrations accompany each chapter, but may differ in different editions of the book. Use the illustration on the front cover to support discussion during the low order literate orientation if this seems appropriate.

**Teaching focus**

We meet the Aarons family.

- Jess is the only boy in a rural family of five. He feels isolated at school and even in his own family.
- He trains hard at running in order to win the acceptance he craves from his classmates.
- New people move next door.

**What you could say**

Jess and his family live in Lark Creek, Virginia, in the USA. Jess, and his four sisters, mother and father live on a small farm. However, the family is not well off. The farm doesn’t make enough money to keep the family in food and clothes and so Jess’s father has to go into the nearest big city, Washington, to work. This leaves Jess as the only ‘man’ about the place. As a result, Jess has to do many of the chores that his father used to do.

Jess feels that he doesn’t fit in. His teacher, his parents and his older sisters don’t seem to have time for Jess, and the things that are important to him don’t seem to be important to them. Other kids react negatively towards Jess.

Katherine Paterson writes about things that happen to Jess in a way that we can understand, so that we, the readers, can empathise with him.

One very important thing in Jess’s life is running. The boys at Lark Creek School have regular running competitions and Jess has been training hard so that he can win them. It is not just the win that is important but the value that the other kids at the school place on winning. Winning the running races offers Jess an opportunity to gain the respect of kids who generally don’t have much time for him.

While Jess is working in the vegetable garden, May Belle arrives to tell him that a family is moving into the farm next door. Jess doesn’t pay much attention to this event at the time. What Jess doesn’t realise is that this family will enrich his life and change it forever. But at this point in the book it is an event of very little consequence to him.

*Read Chapter 1 to the class.*
Teaching focus

We meet Jess’s special teacher and Jess meets Leslie.

- We learn more about the importance of art to Jess and about how it offers him opportunities to escape day-to-day life at the farm.
- We learn that Jess craves a closer relationship with his father.
- We meet Julia Edmunds, the only teacher who seems to have time for Jess. Like Jess, she is different and doesn’t fit easily into Lark Creek School.
- Jess meets Leslie for the first time. She seems very different. In fact, she is dressed like a boy.

What you could say

We learn a bit more about Jess’s life family and get a sense of the pressure that his mother is under trying to hold the household together. When things become unbearable, he retreats into another world through his art. However, as art in general is deemed to be a waste of time in Jess’s family and at school, it becomes a solitary pursuit for him, something he mainly does in secret.

Miss Edmunds, the music teacher at Lark Creek School, is a special adult in Jess’s life. Miss Edmunds is different too. She is a bit too modern in her dress and attitude to fit into such a conservative community.

Jess doesn’t have a particular friend at school until Leslie enters the story. But at this stage of the story we have no inkling that they will become friends. Leslie also doesn’t look or dress like the other girls. However, she is friendly and introduces herself to Jess when she finds him out running one morning. Jess is a little overcome by Leslie’s manner and trots off to finish off his chores.

Already we begin to see a theme emerging: many of the characters are coping with ‘being different’.

Read Chapter 2 to the class.

Teaching focus

Leslie thwarts Jess’s plans.

- Leslie arrives at school and immediately stands out because she is so different.
- Leslie runs in the race and beats all the boys.
What you could say

Leslie arrives for the first day of school in her usual clothes and immediately causes a bit of a stir. It is obvious, even at this stage, that Leslie is not going to be part of any ‘girls’ group’. She simply wouldn’t fit in.

Jess is tense and excited about the races, and is particularly interested in the performance of his archrival, Gary Fulcher. Jess finds himself asking Leslie if she would like to race too. Never before have girls run in the races at Lark Creek Elementary School, but Gary Fulcher agrees to let Leslie run, rather than look bad to the other students.

The race is very important for Jess. He has practised for it all summer and if he wins, will be the talk of the school. How good would that feel for a kid who is a bit of an outsider with no real friends? Katherine Paterson makes sure we understand how much this means to Jess in the opening chapters.

Jess becomes even more of an outsider after he loses the race because, by pushing for a girl to be included, he is responsible for the way that racing changes in the school from that day on.

*Read Chapter 3 to the class.*

Teaching focus

Jess and Leslie’s friendship develops and Terabithia is born.

- Jess makes a conscious decision to be Leslie’s friend and the friendship grows, despite teasing from family members and kids at school.
- At Leslie’s instigation, they create an imaginary kingdom into which they can retreat from the world around them. The only place where Jess is comfortable with Leslie is Terabithia.
- Leslie opens up the world of literature and imagination to Jess.

What you could say

In deciding to befriend Leslie, Jess overcomes his resentment about the race and the fact that he will likely be teased by his family and other kids. Paterson is very careful to point this out, so we can appreciate Jess’s depth of character.

To Leslie, Jess is a friend who doesn’t judge her the way the other kids in Lark Creek School do. For example, he doesn’t care that her family don’t own a TV. Little by little, Katherine Paterson builds Jess as a very likeable character for whom we want good things.
Jess and Leslie create an imaginary kingdom down in the woods by the creek near where Leslie lives, a place *just for the two of them*. They call it ‘Terabithia’ and become its rulers. Leslie shows Jess how to use his imagination so that when he goes to Terabithia he can forget, for a while, the real world he lives in.

Events at school also provide the opportunity for Leslie and Jess to deepen their friendship. When Janice Avery steals May Belle’s Twinkies, Leslie and Jess concoct a scheme to avenge the act. At this stage of the story, neither has any sympathy for Janice, but this will change as the story progresses.

*Read chapters 4 and 5 to the class.*

**Teaching focus**

Happy times for Leslie and Jess. Leslie befriends the school bully, Janet Avery.

- Christmas draws near and Jess gives Leslie the perfect present. Her response makes Jess approach Christmas with his family in a positive way.
- Christmas Day for the Aarons family is less than perfect and emphasises the gulf between Jess and his family.
- Jess gets to know Leslie’s family better while renovating their house and begins to feel comfortable around them. The fact that he has skills that they lack helps him to feel valued.
- Jess and Leslie find the school bully in tears, and do their best to help her out.

**What you could say**

Money is short and Jess is in a quandary about what to give Leslie for Christmas. He knows she wouldn’t want anything expensive but he can’t think what she would like, until one day he spots a sign offering free puppies. In that instant, Jess knows that he should give Leslie a puppy. Leslie is ecstatic and Prince Terrien, as the dog becomes known, becomes a regular visitor to Terabithia.

Leslie’s reaction buoys Jess but it also serves to highlight the general air of unhappiness and want that surrounds the Aarons’ Christmas.

The Burkes embark on a decorating project in the old Perkins place and Leslie spends more time with her father and less with Jess. Jess feels intimidated by Mr Burke. Leslie’s parents are nothing like his own. He is forced to reassess his beliefs about parents.

The decorating at the old Perkins place gains speed when Jess helps out and he is gratified to realise that he has skills which the Burkes don’t possess and which they value greatly. The praise meted out by Leslie and her father makes him feel on top of the world.
Leslie finds Janice Avery in tears one day at school because she has been teased about her father. Leslie offers her advice and in the process acquires a new friend.

Paterson has slowly built up a state of affairs where Leslie and Jess have built a firm and satisfying friendship and things really couldn’t get that much better. As readers, we are delighted with this turn of events and feel a sense of satisfaction about the way things are turning out. Both Leslie and Jess are good kids and deserve to be happy. However, no story is complete without a complication of one sort or another, and in the following chapters Paterson starts to build in this element.

Read chapters 6 and 7 to the class.

Teaching focus

Leslie goes to church with the Aarons and they discuss religion.

- Things go from bad to worse for the Aarons family when Mr Aarons is laid off work.
- The weather is dreadful and the creek is higher than it has been in years (which will prove significant later in the story).
- The Aarons family make their annual pilgrimage to church. Leslie accompanies them and is told that, if she doesn’t believe in the Bible, she will likely go to hell. The discussion about hell has significance to the developing story.

What you could say

Things go from bad to worse with the Aarons family when Mr Aarons is laid off work. This seems to make little difference to the older girls, who are still as demanding as ever.

The big ‘social’ event at this time of year is the once-yearly visit to church by the Aarons. Leslie dumbfounds Jess by asking to go with them. She’s never been to church before. Jess’s mother isn’t keen to take Leslie.

The ride to church is pleasant and, after church, a discussion ensues about having to believe in the Bible or else you will go to hell when you die. May Belle is concerned for Leslie.

The significance of the bad weather and the discussion about hell is not evident in this chapter, but will become clear later.

Read Chapter 8 to the class.
Teaching focus

The rain builds, along with Jess’s gloomy mood.

- It is the Easter holidays and the rain has begun in earnest. The incessant rain affects the mood of Jess and Leslie.
- There is so much rain, in fact, that accessing Terabithia has become more dangerous.
- Paterson builds a mood of foreboding and sets the scene for the disaster that will strike later.

What you could say

During the Easter holidays, the weather turns very wet and spoils the holidays for all the kids. This rain does much to create a feeling of being fed up and restless. To relieve the boredom, Leslie and Jess head for Terabithia, which they haven’t visited for some time.

The heavy rain has dramatically enlarged the creek bordering Terabithia, making it a raging river.

Jess’s mood becomes increasingly gloomy as the chapter progresses. His feelings are to some extent shared by Leslie, who suggests that their kingdom has been cursed. For Jess, the feeling goes deeper, leaving him anxious and fearful. Paterson is building a mood of foreboding and setting the scene for the disaster to come.

*Read Chapter 9 to the class.*

Teaching focus

Jess has an almost perfect day.

- Jess’s mood is more upbeat.
- Jess gives Leslie little thought as he goes off on a surprise outing with Miss Edmunds.
- This is part of a deliberate strategy by Paterson to create contrast – create a ‘high’ before plunging her characters into the depths of despair.

What you could say

This chapter presents a strong contrast to the gloom of the previous chapter: something nice happens to Jess. Miss Edmunds phones to invite him to go into Washington with her so that they could do something special. The rain has been depressing her too and she feels the need for a change of scene to cheer herself up.
Because Paterson has written about the rain for so long and the general air of gloom it has created, we are really relieved for Jess when Miss Edmunds phones. We start to feel hopeful, more optimistic. This makes what happens a little later in the story come as a huge shock.

As Jess and Miss Edmunds leave the art gallery, the weather clears a bit and the sun comes out. This change in the weather makes us feel more cheerful, and hopeful that things will improve.

However, when Jess arrives home and enters the kitchen he finds silence and despair. While Jess has been away in Washington with Miss Edmunds, Leslie went to Terabithia alone. She fell off the rope crossing the creek, hit her head on something hard and drowned.

Jess’s parents are absolutely distraught by the time he gets home. They didn’t know that he was in Washington with Miss Edmunds. They thought he had been with Leslie and drowned too!

*Read Chapter 10 to the class.*

**Teaching focus**

Jess struggles to come to terms with Leslie’s death.

- Jess has entered a world of grief and his reactions are a maelstrom of disbelief, numbness, guilt and anger.
- His family, who until now have seemed tiresome and unsympathetic, are concerned and supportive.

**What you could say**

Jess’s reaction to the news is naturally one of shock. He doesn’t want to believe that Leslie is dead and feels guilty for not asking if she could come along with him to the museum. If he had done, then she would still be alive.

This is probably Jess’s first time dealing with the death of someone close to him. His reactions fluctuate between being dimly aware of things happening around him to being alarmed by the strength of emotion evident in the Burke household when his family visit to pay their condolences. Mixed in with this is the feeling that, at some time, Leslie will walk into the room and everyone will see that she is still alive and it was all a trick.

The Burkes move out of the old Perkins place to take Leslie’s ashes to their home in Pennsylvania.

*Read Chapters 11 and 12 to the class.*
Teaching focus

Jess finds a positive way of dealing with Leslie’s death and grows perceptibly as a person.

- Jess says goodbye to Leslie in his own way.
- He realises how much Leslie has taught him and how much stronger he is as a result of the friendship.
- Jess moves on to initiate May Belle into the land of imagination and wonder.
- The bridge is a metaphor symbolising the bridge Leslie created to link Jess to the world of imagination.

What you could say

It takes Jess some time to come to terms with Leslie’s death and, as he does, he changes and matures. As a result, his relationships with the people around him change too. He begins to see and respond to them differently. His friendship with Leslie has changed him for the better.

He now begins to share with May Belle the world he and Leslie created. He takes some old lumber from the old Perkins place and builds a bridge across the creek into Terabithia. It is a concrete symbol of the bridge that Leslie created for Jess into the world of wonder and imagination.

*Read Chapter 13 to the class.*

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 passage one to start looking at the author’s language choices in more detail. You can then spend some of each lesson reading the book to the students and some of the lesson working on the study passages.
Low order literate orientation – Passage one

Teaching focus

Before beginning a study of passage one, carry out a more detailed literate orientation to the whole of chapter one than was done earlier in order to provide the students with the background they need to understand passage one.

When commenting on passage one, make sure you note the author’s:

- attention-grabbing way of writing an opening paragraph
- skill in building a character through indirect means. We can infer that Jess is (a) male, (b) living in the country, (c) poor, (d) keen to avoid his dad, (e) fond of his sister, and (f) tough and determined, without the author spelling any of this out.

In the opening paragraph Paterson introduces Jess in terms of his running because she wants readers to understand the huge importance of running in Jess’s life. Only later in the chapter do we come to understand that it is not running per se that is motivating Jess, but the prospect of becoming the fastest kid in the fifth grade and the attention and respect this will bring him.

Later in the passage, we are introduced directly to May Belle and indirectly to Jess’s mother. We can infer from this paragraph that Jess and May Belle get on well and that Jess’s mother can be bad tempered at times and shouldn’t be trifled with.

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

Teaching focus

Before beginning a study of passage two, carry out a literate orientation to the story up to this point in order to provide the students with the background they need to understand the study passage. Include such points as:

- School life for Jess has little meaning. The race is the only exciting thing that happens.
- The author has portrayed Jess as determined and modest, not loud-mouthed or cocky, thus ensuring that the reader likes Jess and wants him to win. We have watched him train, we have glimpsed his unhappy home life and feel it is only right that something good should happen to him.
- In Lark Creek Elementary, boys and girls have expected roles. Even Jess has shown that he is clear about what girls can/cannot do. So it comes as a bit of a surprise to us, and to Jess, that he allows himself to be goaded into defending Leslie’s right to run in the races even though racing is considered to be an all male pursuit.

Everything we have read until this point has led us to believe that Jess will win the race and, in paragraph one, it seems like things are going to plan.

By not naming Leslie, and referring to her only as it, the figure and the faded cut-offs, Paterson creates suspense without diluting the shock of what is to come.

High order literate orientation – Passage one

Text (pages 1-2)

Teaching focus

In passage one, Paterson introduces us to her main character very indirectly. We are left to infer things about Jess from his actions, thoughts and reactions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of text and wording</th>
<th>Why language choices were made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of character and place within family</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Oliver Aarons, Jr</td>
<td>If there is a Jesse Oliver Aarons Jr, there must be a Jesse Oliver Aarons Snr. Although it is easy to overlook the title, it is significant because it points to the traditional values and conservatism that form the backdrop for the story. Might there be an expectation that Jess will think and behave just like his dad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An unusual way to start a passage</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, barpity, barpity, barpity –</td>
<td>The repetitive nature of the words makes us increasingly impatient. How many times does the noise have to be repeated? What is causing this noise anyway? It sounds like some old bomb of a car. The fact that the engine takes so long to start suggests it is an old, sluggish vehicle. Perhaps the Aarons aren’t particularly well off?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character’s thoughts about the noise</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good.</td>
<td>Good, has a ‘thank goodness’ feel about it. Someone sounds relieved. But why be so pleased that a vehicle is driving away? It seems that now the person driving the vehicle has got it started, someone else can get on with their day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His dad had got the pick-up going</td>
<td>Pick-ups are often used by farmers or tradespeople. The wording suggests that getting the pick-up going is a regular event that requires an effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He could get up now</td>
<td>Who is the he being referred to? Is it Jesse Oliver Aarons Jnr? The he has obviously been awake for some time but has deliberately stayed in bed. Why? Does the fact that he is pleased his father has gone, and only now feels able to get up, suggest that there is tension between them? Perhaps he doesn’t want his father to know what he is going to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of character by name</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>Now we know that he and his refer to Jess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slid out of bed</td>
<td>He gently and quietly eased himself out of bed, perhaps so as not to disturb anyone. He may also not want people to know why he is getting out of bed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**What the character did and didn’t wear**

| and into his overalls. | Overalls are generally hard-wearing work clothes. They are usually not as expensive as other clothes so maybe the family is not particularly wealthy. |
| He didn’t worry about a shirt | Why isn’t Jess getting properly dressed? Paterson wants us to think about this. |

**Expansion that accounts for what he did and didn’t wear**

| because once he began running | Now we understand. Jess is going for a run. He obviously enjoys running to get up so early to do it! This has little meaning at this stage of the book but it later has great significance – the race at school. |
| he would be hot as popping grease even if the morning air was chill, | The simile not only conveys a sense of heat, but has a rural, farming feel. Clearly, Jess is planning to run very hard if he’s going to get that hot. This image of heat also creates a nice contrast with the words which come later in the sentence. Things would appear much hotter against a chilly background. If the morning was chill, there is a suggestion that the temperature will rise later. |

**What the character did and didn’t wear**

| or shoes | These two words really link up to the part of the sentence which starts with ‘He didn’t worry about a shirt…’ The author didn’t just add or shoes to the original sentence because she wanted to write a little more to explain why he didn’t bother with a shirt. |

**Expansion that accounts for what the character did and didn’t wear**

| because the bottoms of his feet were by now as tough as his worn out sneakers. | Once again Paterson uses a simile to explain how one thing is like another – the bottoms of Jess’s feet are as tough and hard as the soles of his sneakers. This information suggests that Jess had been running (and in bare feet) for a long time, and that his family is, indeed, poor. Or perhaps they haven’t bought him new shoes because they don’t think running is a worthwhile activity? |

**Dialogue with another character**

| ‘Where you going, Jess?’ | Here we are introduced to another character. Someone else is awake at this time of the morning. |
May Belle lifted herself up sleepily from the double bed where she and Joyce Ann slept. These girls obviously share the bedroom with Jess, so they are probably his sisters. Another indication that the Aarons family are not wealthy, as Jess would not share a room with his sisters unless he had to. Even though Jess got out of bed and dressed really quietly. May Belle has just woken up. She moved sleepily.

‘Sh.’ He warned. Jess didn’t want anyone else to wake so he tried to make May Belle be quiet. He is probably older than her if he feels that he can boss her around.

The walls were thin. If a little girl talking sleepily could be heard in other parts of the house, then it would be difficult for anyone to do anything without the whole family knowing about it.

Momma would be mad as flies in a fruit jar. We are introduced to Jess’s mother in terms of her bad temper through another colourful, and vaguely rural-sounding simile. All we know about her at this stage is that she gets very angry like ‘flies in a fruit jar’. This simile suggests that Jesse’s mother goes on and on when she gets cross just as the buzzing flies do.

This time of day suggests that it is really still very early. Jess must be very keen to go running.

He patted May Belle’s hair. Obviously Jess and May Belle get on well. This is something only a loving brother would do.

and yanked the twisted sheet. This is another sign of affection. He straightens the bedclothes.

up to her small chin. We know it is likely that the morning will still be chilly, and he doesn’t want May Belle to catch cold.
"Just over the cow field," This is the answer to May Belle’s question about where he is going. Now we can be almost certain that Jess belongs to a farming family.

he whispered. Jess doesn’t want to wake anyone else up, especially his mother, so he whispers.

May Belle smiled May Belle and Jess are clearly good mates. He pats her head and tucks her in and she smiles.

and snuggled down under the sheet Further confirmation that it is chilly, and quite early in the morning. May Belle isn’t going to get up.

‘Gonna run?’ You wouldn’t normally ask some one who had got up early if they are going to run. May Belle probably knows that this is why Jess gets up early. He has probably done this many times before.

‘Maybe.’ Jess is just teasing May Belle here, as the next sentence confirms. Of course he was going to run.

What you could say

Preformulation
Paterson uses the sound of Jess’s dad’s vehicle starting up in the first sentence, then we hear what Jess thinks about that.

Question: Can anyone remember one word that sums up what Jess thinks when he hears his father’s pick-up start?

Reconceptualisation
That’s right. He thinks, ‘Good.’ Now, he could be pleased that his father isn’t going to be late for work, or just relieved that the pick-up has started at all, but those aren’t the reasons he thinks, ‘Good’.
**Preformulation**
The reason has more to do with what Jess can do now that his father has left for work.

**Question:** Can anyone remember what Jess feels he can do now that his father has gone?

**Reconceptualisation**
That’s right. *He could get up now.* But why would he feel he couldn’t get up when his father was still around? Perhaps he wants to do something he doesn’t want his father to know about, or that his father wouldn’t approve of?

**Complete the teaching sequence, high order literate orientation, transformations, spelling and writing on passage one before beginning work on passage two.**

---

**High order literate orientation – Passage two**

**Text (pages 29-30)**

**Teaching focus**

Passage two centres on a significant event for Jess that foreshadows a temporary complication.

**Structure of text and wording**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise</th>
<th>Why language choices were made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>At the bang</em></td>
<td>Paterson doesn’t tell us what bang. She is counting on readers knowing that all serious races begin with a starter’s gun, though presumably in this school one of the kids just yelled ‘bang’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reaction – Physical**

| Jess shot forward. | The word *shot* is a nice accompaniment to *bang*: both words make us think of bullets travelling fast and straight. Jess is off to a good start. Things are going to plan. |

**Reflections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>It</em></th>
<th>The author is referring to running or racing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>felt good</em></td>
<td>It sounds like Jess is running well and feels good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- even the rough ground against the bottom of his worn sneakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He was pumping good.</th>
<th>Jess was looking forward to showing what he could do so even the rough ground he was running on didn’t disturb him. We know he would be used to rough ground anyway, as he has trained all summer in the paddock at home, and in bare feet.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He could almost smell Gary Fulcher’s surprise at his improvement.</th>
<th>Jess is clearly very excited and feels that everything is going very well. This image indicates Jess’s excitement. Of course, he can’t actually smell Gary’s surprise and so the author says could almost. Because we have been reading about Jess’s racing, we know that his ‘improvement’ here must refer to his running.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| The crowd was noisier than they’d been during the other heats. | This is an important heat. Jess is one of the favourites. He is challenging Gary Fulcher to be the fastest runner. The kids are excited and noisier than ever, probably jumping up and down and shouting, and Jess assumes this is because his running is so much better than last year. |

### Explanation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maybe they were all noticing.</th>
<th>At this point, we are led to see things from Jess’s perspective. He thinks that all the other kids are admiring him because he can do something they think is important. Early in the book Jess only got noticed for being that crazy little kid that draws all the time. Winning the race gives Jess the opportunity to change all that. We only see the significance of the word Maybe in hindsight.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He wanted to look back and see where the others were, but he resisted the temptation.</th>
<th>Jess really wanted to look back and he had to force himself not to, he had to resist the temptation. Runners should never look back because it might slow them up or they might even trip. Not that he would have expected to see anyone close to him. However, after we know the outcome of the race we might ask ourselves ‘how different would the story have been if Jess had looked back?’ It is a ‘what if’ kind of sentence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
It would seem conceited to look back. | In his own head, Jess has already run the race: he hasn’t even considered the possibility of not winning. That said, he intends to be a modest winner: Paterson wants us to like her main character.

**Action – Mental**

He concentrated hard on the line ahead. | The end of the race must be within sight. Maybe he is hoping that if he focuses hard on the line, it will help him run better.

**Reflection**

It was nearing with every step. | Jess is still feeling strong and there is no question in his mind that he is going to cross the line first. Often runners talk about the final stages of the race being particularly difficult as they feel like they are running on the spot because they are so tired. It is a measure of Jess’s physical strength that he can maintain his speed even in the final stages of the race.

‘Oh, Miss Bessie, if you could see me now.’ | This is a thought that runs through Jess’s mind. He doesn’t say it aloud. The cow has been the silent witness to Jess’s training. She knows how much hard work he has put into his running and he would like her to be able to see him win now. It is interesting that, at a time when Jess feels triumphant, he doesn’t think of sharing that feeling with any member of his family.

**Senses unknown threat**

He felt it | We don’t know what this sentence means, but it doesn’t sound very good. Things may be changing.

before he saw it. | As readers, we are left to figure out what it might be, which adds to the suspense.

**Unknown threat**

Someone was moving up. | Some other runner is catching up but Jess can’t see clearly. The suspense builds, along with the confusion. The only runner Jess fears is Gary Fulcher and he isn’t in this heat.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction to threat</th>
<th>Expansion (Unknown threat)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>He automatically pumped harder</em></td>
<td><em>Jess immediately responds to the challenge. Things may not be as bad as we fear. Jess still has something in reserve, so he isn’t beaten yet.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expansion (Unknown threat)</th>
<th>Reactions – physiological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Then the shape was there</em></td>
<td><em>Jess didn’t want to turn around and see where the other runners were, but now he can see a shape nearly beside him.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>in his sideways vision. Then suddenly pulling ahead.</em></td>
<td><em>The challenger must be beside him and then gets ahead of him. These two sentences leave the reader with the impression that there is absolutely nothing Jess can do.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reactions – physiological</th>
<th>Expansion (unknown threat)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>He forced himself now. His breath was choking him.</em></td>
<td><em>Jess was so much in control of himself but now he is reduced to a wreck. His breathing rhythm, so essential to runners, has completely gone.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>and the sweat was in his eyes.</em></td>
<td><em>We are left to wonder if this is sweat from the exertion of the race or the fear of losing it.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expansion (unknown threat)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>But he saw the figure anyhow.</em></td>
<td><em>Now Jess knows who is beating him. We, as readers, still do not. Paterson is drawing out the suspense as much as possible.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The faded cut-offs crossed the line a full three feet ahead of him.</em></td>
<td><em>Finally, the mystery is solved. Only one student at Lark Creek Elementary dresses in cut-offs. Of course, Leslie is blithely unaware of the importance to Jess of winning this race and so she does her best to win as any runner would do.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Goals of the transformations

Comprehension
The first paragraph of passage one is also the first paragraph of the book and, as such, part of the orientation to the narrative. While, as readers, we can infer quite a bit about Jess from this short paragraph, Paterson’s primary goal is to pique our interest by keeping information in reserve.

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 constructing an orientation that engages readers by:

- introducing a character or setting
- building the main character by implicit means – physical description, surroundings, dialogue, actions and reactions, and so on.
Transformations – One

Text (page 1)

_Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, barpity, barpity, barpity, barpity – Good_. His dad had the pick-up going. He could get up now. Jess slid out of bed and into his overalls. He didn't worry about a shirt because once he began running he would be hot as popping grease even if the morning air was chill, or shoes because the bottoms of his feet were by now as tough as his worn-out sneakers.

Example of text segmentation

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

_Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, barpity, barpity, barpity, barpity / – / Good / . / His dad had the pick-up going / . / He could get up now / . / Jess slid out of bed / and into his overalls / . / He didn't worry about a shirt / because once he began running / he would be hot as popping grease / even if the morning air was chill / , / or shoes / because the bottoms of his feet / were by now / as tough as his worn-out sneakers / .

Teaching focus

- The choice of noise to create an unusual and dramatic opening to the novel.
- Writing about people and things before actually naming them.
- Inferences about Jess’s character from the manner of his actions, his interests and his interactions with May Belle.
- Inferences about setting and the Aarons family’s economic circumstances.

_Dramatic/unexpected start to the story_

**Noise**

Authors don’t become successful unless people want to read their books. One way to pique a reader’s interest is to open with something that they can’t quite make sense of. If something remains unexplained for too long, however, readers might just give up. Paterson has written the first sentence of the first paragraph in this way so that we are anxious to get on with the story. The words themselves are meant to resemble the sound of a car engine and are onomatopoeic.

**Character’s reflection about the noise**

The author has added _Good_ to the end of the noise to indicate that someone is pleased that it has finished. Paterson maintains the intrigue. We have to read on to make sense of all of this.
This sentence solves the first mystery (we now know what was making the noise), but introduces a second – two characters we still know nothing about. A pick-up is a work vehicle typical of what would be found on a farm. What we would call a ute. So the character only known as his dad lives in a country area, maybe even on a farm. But why would his dad be leaving home at this time of day?

We still don’t know who he is. The word now suggests that he had been awake for some time and has been waiting for his dad to go. Why couldn’t this character get up before? The author hints at secrets/private things that are part of the story.

**Introduction of character by name**
All of a sudden ‘he’ becomes Jess. Having been a little intrigued about who ‘his’ and ‘he’ were, we are now satisfied that we know.

**Action**
You only slide out of bed when you don’t want to make a noise. We are given some hints about Jesse but things are still unclear.

**What the character did/didn’t wear**
Overalls are work clothes. Like the word pick-up, the word overalls helps to paint a picture of Jess’s background. Perhaps he lives or works on a farm. But things still aren’t clear. We need to read on.

Another intriguing oddity: why wouldn’t he bother to put on a shirt? This is where the author begins to build the image of Jess as a dedicated runner.

**Expansion that accounts for what the character did/didn’t wear**

**Use of simile**
His reason for getting up is explained and so is his reason for not wearing a shirt. The author has chosen a simile, a way of describing one thing by comparing it to another, because she wants to create a vivid picture of this boy, a boy who is just bursting with energy and enthusiasm for running.

The author is working hard to make us see Jess not just as a child, but as someone who is disciplined enough to get up early every morning and go running. He isn’t a stay-in-bed little boy who wants to creep further under the blankets on a chilly morning. If we were talking about the morning air being cold, we would say that it was chilly, but Paterson has chosen to write chill because it is short and sharp, a bit like the effect the cold would have on someone who just walked out into it. It is invigorating – unlike chilly which conjures up images of people wrapped up and hugging themselves to keep warm.

These words go with ‘He didn’t worry about a shirt’. He didn’t worry about his shoes either.
Expansion that accounts for what the character did/did not wear

Use of simile

Here is further evidence of Jess’s dedication to running. Jess must have been running for a long time, if his sneakers are worn-out. Paterson uses another simile to create a vivid image. Jess must often run without shoes if the bottoms of his feet are as tough as the soles of sneakers. It also again says something about the financial circumstances of the family if Jess wears worn-out sneakers.

If teachers chose to also use paragraph 2 of passage one in transformations the emphasis should be on how the author uses dialogue to give the reader more information about Jess’s passion for running, about the family house, about the character of Jess’s mother and about Jess’s relationship with May Belle.

The use of simile is evident in the description of Jess’s mother’s temper.

Transformations – Passage two

Transformations – One

Text (page 29)

At the bang Jess shot forward. It felt good – even the rough ground against the bottom of his worn sneakers. He was pumping good. He could almost smell Gary Fulcher’s surprise at his improvement. The crowd was noisier than they’d been during the other heats. Maybe they were all noticing. He wanted to look back and see where the others were, but he resisted the temptation. It would seem conceited to look back. He concentrated on the line ahead. It was nearing with every step. ‘Oh, Miss Bessie, if you could see me now.’

Example of text segmentation

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

At the bang / Jess shot forward / . / It felt good / – / even the rough ground against the bottom of his worn sneakers / . / He was pumping good / . / He could almost smell Gary Fulcher’s surprise at his improvement / . / The crowd was noisier than they’d been during the other heats / . / Maybe they were all noticing / . / He wanted to look back and see where the others were / , / but he resisted the temptation / . / It would seem conceited to look back / . / He concentrated on the line ahead / . / It was nearing with every step / . / ‘ / Oh / , / Miss Bessie / , / if you could see me now / . / ’
Teaching focus

Throughout the book, Paterson has built up an expectation that Jess will win ‘the big one’, and this opening paragraph gives the impression that everything is going to plan. It provides a sharp contrast to paragraph two – we are totally unprepared for Leslie’s win. All of Paterson’s language choices are directed to these ends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points for discussion</th>
<th>Language choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noise</strong></td>
<td><strong>At the bang / Jess shot forward / . /</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reaction</strong></td>
<td><strong>It felt good /</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These short, sharp sentences convey the pent-up energy released as the runner sprints from the blocks. The language is clear, uncluttered and decisive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflections (series of)**

Authors sometimes use characters’ reflections to slow the action down, and thus build tension. In doing this here, Paterson also gives us the impression that things are going to turn out as we expect.

Unlike the short, sharp, ‘action’ sentences, Jess’s reflections are conveyed in long sentences. This is another device authors use to slow things down and thus build tension. It keeps the reader waiting for the outcome.

The author repeats that Jess is running well, assuring the reader that all is going to plan.

Gary is the person that Jess wants to beat in the final and he is aware that Gary is watching this heat. You can’t smell surprise but the author has used this metaphor to show how strongly Jess feels. The author has allowed us to become involved in Jess’s feelings by writing the story from his perspective.

Jess notices the increased noise of the crowd and probably assumes that this is because he is running so well.

This is a clever use of *Maybe*. In a paragraph full of decisive action and clear reflection, it is the only word that conveys a lack of certainty. Was it because Jess was being modest? In the next paragraph, we understand why. *Maybe* was used to foreshadow a complication.

**Explanation**

**Reflection**

Here Paterson reverts to the previous pattern of longer sentences, drawing out Jess’s reflections, so the disruption is even more dramatic when it happens.

- He wanted to look back and see where the others were / , / but he resisted the temptation / . /
Transformations – Two

Text (pages 29–30)

He felt it before he saw it. Someone was moving up. He automatically pumped harder. Then the shape was there in his sideways vision. Then suddenly pulling ahead. He forced himself now. His breath was choking him, and the sweat was in his eyes. But he saw the figure anyhow. The faded cut-offs crossed the line a full three feet ahead of him.

Example of text segmentation

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

He felt it before he saw it / . / Someone was moving up / . / He automatically pumped harder / . / Then the shape was there / in his sideways vision / . / Then suddenly pulling ahead / . / He forced himself now / . / His breath was choking him / . / and the sweat was in his eyes / . / But he saw the figure anyhow / . / The faded cut-offs crossed the line / a full three feet ahead of him / . /

Teaching focus

Paterson uses six short, sharp sentences to open the next paragraph in order to create a sense of urgency and panic. She also holds off from identifying it and, by keeping the reader waiting, she adds to the anxiety and tension.
Senses unknown threat (first time)
This mysterious, and vaguely ominous, opening foreshadows what happens next. Not only do we not know what it is, but we don’t know what it is doing. Neither Jess nor the reader expect it to be another runner.

Senses unknown threat (second time)
It is another runner. What more is there to say? The elation of the race up until this point is washed away with these four simple words. They do not require any embellishment.

Reaction to threat
Paterson allows us to hope that, even at this stage, Jess’s determination will see him over the finishing line first.

Sensing threat again
It is now described as the shape. By calling the threat by a number of other names rather than identifying it, Paterson is seeking to make it unreal and mysterious. We don’t quite know who or what the shape is and this maintains the suspense.

The use of the word then at the beginning of both sentences creates a sense of inevitability. It seems as if Jess cannot win.

Reactions
Paterson provides a contrast. After feeling so good, Jess is now a wreck. The cumulative effect is created by the use of and. Not only was he choking but the sweat was in his eyes too. Paterson’s language choices have helped bring about this change in the space of this one short race.

Seeing the threat for the first time
Now it is the figure. The runner is still not identified. But and anyhow add to the sense of inevitability that Jess will lose.

Description of threat
Sprints are not usually won by very much, but Paterson has Leslie beat Jess by a full three feet. Jess feels humiliated. All that training, all summer long – to no avail! Paterson distinguishes the person winning the race by her dress. This adds to the sense of mystery, while at the same time confirming for those who have been paying attention in the early chapters who the runner might be. No wonder Paterson went to such trouble to describe how Leslie dressed earlier in the book. Nobody in Lark Creek Elementary dresses in cut-offs, except Leslie. At this point, a friendship between Leslie and Jess seems highly improbable.
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 upper primary level, so it would be reasonable to assume that students would be well into negotiating the conventional 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 from the transformations is to learn words that will help joint reconstructed writing. It may be worth focusing on words that have double consonants in the middle.

There are a few general principles to keep in mind when cutting words into chunks for spelling. Endeavour to get to each root word by:

- removing tense endings
- removing suffixes and prefixes
- making an onset/rhyme cut (ie letters up to, but not including, the first vowel form the onset. The rest is the rhyme)
- treating compound words like overalls as two separate words before making an onset and rhyme cut
- words with double consonants in the middle should always have the consonants grouped together (eg running, popping).
Examples from passage one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>could</td>
<td>c/ould</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overalls</td>
<td>overall o/ver/all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>running</td>
<td>runn/ing r/unn/ing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grease</td>
<td>gr/ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chill</td>
<td>ch/ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tough</td>
<td>t/ough</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples from passage two

Letter clustering around prefixes/roots etc.
Sometimes the clustering of letters is a little trickier, requiring the use of a dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>concentrated</td>
<td>con/cen/trate/d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If necessary, the word can be broken into smaller clusters still:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concentrated</td>
<td>con/cen/trate/d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceited</td>
<td>con/ceit/ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automatically</td>
<td>auto/matic/ally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This word has been clustered around component roots, but could be further broken down into smaller clusters of letters: auto/mat/ic/ally

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 from passage one

could: the Old English spelling of coude was deliberately changed to bring it into line with ‘would’ and ‘should’
Examples from passage two

consented: from the Latin originally, *concentrare*, with the prefix *con-* came to mean to focus attention or the mind, to come together.

conceited: the original meaning of *conceit* is a witty or clever notion or thought but now it commonly means *vain*. It has changed its form from a noun to an adjective. The prefix *con-* is used as an intensifier meaning *very* and comes from Latin. The past tense is marked by *–ed*.

automatically: an English word with a Greek influence, *auto* meaning ‘self’ or ‘one’s own’ and ‘matic’ meaning mechanically, without thinking too much about it.

**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.

**Examples**
- How Paterson introduces a character without naming him.
- How we learn more about Jess’s character from his thoughts and actions.

**Teaching focus**

Concentrate on drawing on the common knowledge students have developed about this part of the story. Encourage them to contribute their understandings about how and why Paterson wrote this text.

- The story is introduced dramatically through the use of sound.
- The main character is mentioned in terms of his thoughts – *Good* – and the pronouns *he* and *his*, before he is named.
- We can start to infer aspects of Jess’s character from the things he does.
Spelling

What you could say

Now we are going to try to write some of the orientation to the story of Bridge to Terabithia in the same way that Paterson has. Can you remember how she starts the story? It starts in a most unusual way. Yes, ‘Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, barpity, barpity, barpity, barpity’. It is the sound of a vehicle engine starting. They are words that try to copy the sound that the engine makes.

Let’s see if we can think about how to write those words. Remember to start with a capital letter, and remember that the first chunk makes a ‘ba’ sound and the next chunk would be ‘–room, r/oom’. Let’s start with the ‘ba’ chunk. That’s right, it is a ‘ba’. Then the next chunk? ‘Room’. Remember to say ‘r/oom’ under your breath in those chunks as you write.

Can anyone remember why Paterson started her book like that? It doesn’t really introduce us to the setting or the characters, so why do it? That’s right, it excites our interest as readers. We have to read on to find out more and have the sound explained. There are quite a few ‘ba-rooms’ and ‘barpitys’. Does that say anything about the age of the vehicle? Only an older vehicle would take so long to get going.

So now we know why Katherine Paterson has started her book with these unusual sounds. She follows it with someone’s reaction to the sounds. Can you remember what the reaction was? That’s right, it was Good. But as yet we don’t know who is thinking this. It could very well be the driver of the vehicle, so we need to read on to see. That’s exactly what Katherine Paterson wants us to do.

Let’s write Good next. Remember it is the start of another sentence, so it starts with a capital letter and we chunk it ‘g’ and ‘/ood’. The ‘/ood’ forms a chunk all of its own.

The next thing we find out is that the person who said or thought Good was not the driver of the vehicle. How do we know this? That’s right. Because His dad had got the pick-up going. So now we know why he was pleased, but we don’t yet know who he is. Once again, Katherine Paterson is encouraging us to read on and find out. Let’s write that now.

Continue like this, mixing discussion of the meaning of the text with the reasons for writing it and how to spell the words.
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 *Bridge to Terabithia* would include:

- overall goals such as writing a series of paragraphs devoted to the development of the main character through implied/indirect representation
- short-term goals such as using a dramatic device to enable the reader to enter the ‘possible world’ of the story; writing a series of sentences that introduce a character or event but do not name the character or event explicitly; developing attributes for a number of different characters; experimenting with dialogue; building expectation, only to dash it; and foreshadowing a complication that does not get resolved immediately.

Activities

Workshop one

Write a series of sentences that introduce a character or event without explicitly naming the character or event. This activity should be preceded by a discussion about developing characters and setting.

Workshop two

Develop attributes for a number of different characters. For example, the hero in an adventure movie, the school bully, or a nervous business person who is about to defraud his or her company. List the character’s attributes and then discuss how some of these might be inferred through the character’s actions or words, or through descriptions of her or his appearance and surroundings.

Workshop three

Use dialogue to convey the relationship between characters. You will need to set up a series of possible relationships and scenarios for discussion. For example, write a conversation:

- between best friends walking home from school about …
- between sisters to reveal that they do not like each other
- in which the writer explains that he has lost his football boots to reveal that he is talking to his grandparents who gave him the boots.
Workshop four
As Paterson does in the first paragraph of passage two, build tension in an action scene by slowing down the action and inserting a character’s thoughts. The action sentences are short and sharp. The reflections are longer sentences about thinking and feeling. They include expansions and explanations.

Workshop five
As Paterson does in the second paragraph of passage two, build tension in an action scene by writing about, but not naming, a looming threat.

Discuss:
- the effect on the reader of delaying naming the threat
- how to incorporate a piece of information that allows the reader to infer the identity of the, as yet, unidentified threat
- the way in which the staccato nature of sentences can reflect growing anxiety and convey tension.

Joint constructed writing
Working towards the overall writing goal for passage one would entail the following steps.

Identifying how Paterson builds Jess’s character through:
- his thoughts and actions
- his clothing
- his surroundings
- his dialogue with May Belle
- May Belle’s reactions to him.

Look at other study texts for examples of how authors develop their characters. It would also be useful to use the outcomes of the workshops as the basis for discussion about how much information about a character should be embedded in a text, and so inferred by readers, and how much should be described directly.

A further point for discussion could be how much dialogue is too much: sometimes authors leave gaps in the dialogue between characters.

These steps must precede asking students to write, independently or in groups, a passage of several paragraphs focusing on characterisation.
Appendices
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 plan could actually take three or more 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 7  
**Text:** *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson  
**Week:** 1  
**Term:** 1  

**Teaching focus:** To identify what resources authors use to develop characterisation and to use them selectively in workshop writing.

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| **Lesson focus** | To orient students to the first part of the story.  
To build a clear picture of the main character.  
To consider why a story would start with a noise. | Discuss what we know about Jess from Chapter 1 – his family relationships, his passions.  
How his interests position him as different. | Discussion of work to date:  
What art and running mean to Jess.  
How Jess and Miss Edmunds are alike.  
Getting to know more about Leslie. | Does Jess’s defeat mean that the story is over? Where can Paterson go from here?  
How is Jess going to deal with this disappointment? | How has Jess’s break of convention positioned him with the other boys? Loss of face and social isolation. |
| **Low order literate orientation** | Low order literate orientation up to the point before Jess goes to Washington with Miss Edmunds.  
Introduction to the major theme of difference and the significance of running in Jess’s life.  
Low order literate orientation to Chapter 1. Read Chapter 1. Jess encounters Leslie at a distance. | Low order literate orientation to Chapter 3 and in particular all the ways in which Paterson constructs Jess as different in both chapters. How the only person he relates to outside his family is the music teacher at school.  
Low order literate orientation to Chapter 2. Read Chapter 2. Jess encounters Leslie at closer range. | Low order literate orientation on Chapter 3.  
How Jess’s love for running brings him into close contact with Leslie.  
How Leslie unwittingly shatters Jess’s hopes and dreams.  
How Paterson has deliberately set up this potential conflict – the complication. Read Chapter 3. | Low order orientation on Chapter 4. Read Chapter 4. | Jess and Leslie become friends in Chapter 4. Discuss the aspects of both their lives that make their friendship so unlikely, the creation of Terabithia and the start of Jess’s induction to the world beyond Lark Creek.  
Discuss our feelings about this friendship and how they link back to the initial characterisation of Jess. |

**Read story with the class. Students join in when they can.**

| High order literate orientation | Passage one: Focus on the unusual start to book and character’s thoughts and reactions and the actions it prompts. | Passage one: Focus on what paragraph one tells us about Jess’s character.  
What he did or didn’t wear and why and how this relates back to one of his passions. | Passage one: Focus on the introduction of new characters, May Belle and Mrs Aarons. Introduced through action sequences and dialogue. | Passage one:  
How Paterson describes her characters so that they are viewed positively or negatively.  
What the similes used in this passage imply about Jess and Mrs Aarons? | **Transformations**  
How and why the author uses this particular device to start her story. Focus on the dramatic impact and how it intrigues readers  
How the author has used this information to have us infer things about Jess and to build his character so that we can begin to understand his passion for running. Mention of simile.  
What inferences can be made about Jess’s relationship with May Belle and his mother?  
Review the resources Paterson uses to build Jess’s character by indirect means. (Refer to the writing activities for passage one.)  
Focus on author’s purpose in using simile. How does it contribute to the character development of Jess and Mrs Aarons? |
### Sample weekly plan

**Class:** Year 7  
**Text:** *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson  
**Teaching focus:** To identify what resources authors use to develop characterisation and to use them selectively in workshop writing.

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| **Spelling** | c/ould  
gr/ ease  
/ unning  
p/ opp/ing | / unning  
/ opp/ing | ch/ill  
t/ough  
Jointly reconstruct paragraph one of passage one. | Students revisit spellings.  
Say each word to students and have them segment each orally and then write spellings on whiteboard.  
Jointly reconstruct paragraph two of passage one. |  |
| **Writing** | Choose writing workshop activity from short term writing goals. Use appropriate piece of text as model for planning.  
Discuss detail. Jointly construct. |  |  | Additional workshop activities which could contribute to short and long term goals – jointly construct similes around other characters in the story (eg Leslie, Miss Edmunds, Jess’s father).  
Independent construction of text based on yesterday’s modelling in line with writing goals incorporating similes. |  |  |
Photocopiable masters
Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, barpity, barpity, barpity, barpity – Good.

His dad had the pick-up going.

He could get up now.

Jess slid out of bed

and into his overalls.

He didn’t worry about a shirt

because once he began running

he would be hot as popping grease

even if the morning air was chill,

or shoes

because the bottoms of his feet were by now tough as his worn-out sneakers.

‘Where you going Jess?’

May Belle lifted herself up sleepily from the double bed

where she and Joyce Ann slept.

‘Sh.’ He warned.
The walls were thin.

Momma would be mad as flies in a fruit jar

if they woke her up this time of day.

He patted May Belle’s hair

and yanked the twisted sheet up to her small chin.

‘Just over the cow field,’

he whispered.

May Belle smiled

and snuggled down under the sheet.

‘Gonna run?’

‘Maybe.’
At the bang Jess shot forward.

It felt good – even the rough ground against the bottom of his worn sneakers.

He was pumping good.

He could almost smell Gary Fulcher’s surprise at his improvement.

The crowd was noisier

than they’d been during the other heats.

Maybe they were all noticing.

He wanted to look back

and see where the others were,

but he resisted the temptation.

It would seem conceited to look back.

He concentrated on the line ahead.

It was nearing with every step.

‘Oh, Miss Bessie, if you could see me now.’
He felt it before he saw it.

Someone was moving up.

He automatically pumped harder.

Then the shape was there in his sideways vision.

Then suddenly pulling ahead.

He forced himself now.

His breath was choking him,

and the sweat was in his eyes.

But he saw the figure anyhow.

The faded cut-offs crossed the line a full three feet ahead of him.
These notes have been written to help teachers use the Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies in Year 7. However, they could also be used in Year 6 and up to Year 8 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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