

The Old Tin

Fiction

Content domain focus:

- 2b** retrieve and record information/identify key details from fiction and non-fiction
- 2d** make inferences from the text/explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text
- 2e** predict what might happen from details stated and implied

Extract summary

The Old Tin was written by Judith Heneghan, lecturer and programme leader for the MA Writing for Children course at the University of Winchester. It tells the story of the discovery of a tin on a beach and explores the local villagers' predictions about what the tin might contain. Much is made in the story of the local villagers trying to guess what is in the tin. They use their own particular skills: the baker smells it, the postman's wife and daughter weigh it and listen to it as it's shaken. Jem, the finder of the tin, ultimately decides to leave it unopened so it is left for the reader to predict what might be in the tin.

This short story was written specially for a book called *WOW! 366* which was published in the National Year of Reading in 2008. Every one of the stories in the book is exactly 366 words long.

Unit summary

The unit offers a mix of literal and inferential questions. The inferential questions involve the children 'reading beyond the lines' and using their own knowledge and experiences from life, books, films, etc. Finally, the children are asked to make a prediction based on what they have read in the passage. Once again, they need to draw on previous reading and knowledge of stories in general to help them to respond to this question.

Teaching prompts

- Prior to reading the story, introduce the idea of trying to guess what is in a sealed tin or box by bringing in a mysterious parcel. Ask the children how they would try to work out what was inside it. Establish that they could use their senses, e.g. holding it, shaking it, smelling it, looking at it.
- Discuss techniques and strategies they can use to make sense of what they are reading, e.g. looking for clues left in the text by the author, thinking about how they would feel in a certain situation.
- Establish that, at the end of a story, some authors leave the reader guessing what could happen next. If this is the case, the reader needs to think about what happened in the story and use this knowledge to help them make predictions about future events. They can also make connections with other stories they have read, or films they have seen, in order to help them make predictions.

Revisiting the text

Ask the children to:

- describe the old tin to each other, embellishing the description given in the text
- draw a picture of the old tin using whatever art techniques they wish
- work in small groups and role-play the events described in the text

- freeze-frame the scene where Jem's ticket is drawn
- add speech and thought bubbles to the characters in the freeze-frame
- hot-seat characters from the story, exploring their thoughts on the raffle and the box
- write an alternative ending, in which Jem decides to open the tin
- work in small groups. Each child should draw a picture of what they think is in the box. They can share and discuss their drawings, giving reasons for deciding on the contents of the box.

Answers

Links to content domain requirements are in brackets after the answer.

1. It was half-buried in the pebbles by the shore. [2b]
2. It had been worn away by the sea/waves. [2d]
3. Because she could charge for the raffle tickets and get some money. [2d]
4. Because it was heavy. [2b]
5. Because it was too light to hold coins. [2b]
6. Because of the rustling sound it made. [2d]
7. Jem [2b]
8. Because they didn't get to see what was inside the tin.
They may have felt cheated of their money too. [2d]
9. Because he preferred to imagine what might be inside it. He might
have been disappointed with what was inside it if he had opened it. [2d]
10. It could be washed back into the sea by the waves. Someone else might find it. [2e]

Assessment

The children are secure in their ability to retrieve information if they can identify key words in the question that help them to look for words and phrases in the text. Explore whether they are able to visualise where in the text they might find the answer, e.g. near the beginning/towards the end.

They are able to make reasonable inferences if they can empathise with the characters and think about how they would have felt if they had discovered the tin.

If the children have been able to make connections between the story, or parts of the story, and any other stories or films they have seen, it will have helped them with question 10, which asked them to make predictions.

Next steps

Use book talk to explore the children's responses to the story. Discuss their likes and dislikes, then explore and unravel any confusions or uncertainties. Establish whether there were any misunderstandings about the story and discuss these.

Develop the children's inferential skills by asking them to look closely at photos and paintings of faces. Encourage them to 'read' the faces to explore how the subject of the image is feeling, what they are thinking, etc.

Use short stories to explore reasons behind characters' actions and feelings. Develop story graphs to plot how key events trigger certain feelings and emotions (and vice versa). Encourage the children to think about how characters feel at certain points in a story, in order to develop empathy. Establish that these activities help to make inferences from texts.