

Johnny Swanson: Athletics, Autumn 1929

Fiction

Content domain focus:

2a give/explain the meaning of words in context

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

2f identify/explain how information/narrative content is related and contributes to meaning as a whole

Text summary

The passage is taken from the first chapter of *Johnny Swanson* by Eleanor Updale. The story is set in the aftermath of the First World War, and follows the experiences of the central character, Johnny, as he attempts to deal with his own lack of self-confidence and increasing challenges within his family.

Unit summary

The unit looks at how authors establish character through description.



Teaching prompts

- Ask the children if they enjoy taking part in sports.
- Ask: *If you don't enjoy it, should you still be made to do it?*
- Explain that the passage they are about to explore is set in the past, when attitudes were somewhat different from those of today.

Revisiting the text

- When the children have completed the task, and you have had an opportunity to view their responses, return to the passage and read it aloud to them. As you do so, ask the children to imagine themselves as witnesses to the event.
- When you have finished reading, divide the children into groups of three. Their task is to view the passage through the eyes of three characters: Johnny; Mr Murray; Taylor, the football captain. Ask children in each group to choose a different character.
- Using a jigsaw technique, ask expert groups to work together to discuss their chosen character. What was their character thinking as events took place? What did they see and how did they feel?
- Ask home groups to reassemble. Ask them to take it in turns to share their thoughts about the incident as seen through the eyes of their character.
- Ask a volunteer to be hot-seated in role as each of the characters, answering questions from the audience about their part in the episode.
- Once you have explored the scene in this way, return to the questions, and use them to check the children's understanding of the passage.



Answers

- 1. the high jump [2b]
- 2. Of course he would fail. [2b]
- 3. a) He is trying to put him off. [2d]
 b) He calls him "Squirt", and he calls out while Johnny is running up to jump. [2d]
- 4. a) He behaves as if it is a joke, swaggering and grinning.
 b) He feels humiliated and wants to cry. [2d]
- 5. He is more athletic than Johnny (he is described as muscular, and he is the captain of the football team). From what Mr Murray says, he expects him to set an example. [2d]
- 6.

smile (" <i>Johnny forced a smile</i> ") snigger (" <i>... he really was sniggering</i> ") smirk (" <i>It's nothing to smirk about ...</i> ") grin (" <i>... swaggered to the back of the line, grinning</i> ")		An unpleasant, offensive kind of smile. A broad smile, often showing teeth. A pleasant expression made with the mouth. An unpleasant giggle, perhaps at someone's expense. [2a]
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- 7. He was wounded at the Battle of the Somme. [2b]
- 8. It gives him a permanent sneer. [2b]
- 9. No. Look for reference to Murray's treatment of Johnny, and his favouring of some boys over others. [2f]
- 10. Accept answers supported by reference to the text, e.g. Yes. We feel sorry for him because he is being picked on, and because is trying to fit in, but failing. [2f]



Assessment

Look for evidence that the children can read beyond the literal and can develop an understanding of Johnny's feelings, e.g. in questions 4 and 10. Confident attempts at 2d and 2f questions will demonstrate that the children are working securely at the expected standard, as will an ability to support answers with relevant reference to the text.

Next steps

Regular practice in reading and responding to passages such as this, including the use of role-play, will help less-experienced readers to visualise events better and understand characterisation by putting themselves at the scene.

It is also useful to use such passages as models for the children's own writing, where they either recreate events in a slightly different setting, e.g. transferred to a girls' school, or see them from a different point of view, e.g. through the eyes of a different character – in this instance, Mr Murray or Taylor.