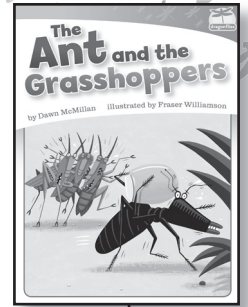


# The Ant and the Grasshoppers

by Dawn McMillan

illustrated by Fraser Williamson



## Overview

In this fable, retold as a play, Ant busily stores corn for the winter while the grasshoppers sing and dance in the sunshine, only to be caught out when winter strikes.

## Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making and confirming predictions and summarising the main ideas. You can use this text to familiarise the students with the format of a play and to encourage fluent, expressive reading. Please note that the word count for this play is high because there are character names and stage directions.

## Text features (Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the conventions of a play – the list of characters, the role of the reader, the stage directions (written in the present tense and in italics)
- the use of colour coding and upper-case letters to indicate the speaker
- the repetition
- the indicators of time – *a long time away, day after day, the next day, winter is here*
- the use of italics (page 8) and exclamation marks for emphasis
- the sense of tension as the grasshoppers' predicament unfolds
- the lively illustrations
- the cross section of Ant's home on page 6
- the word endings – *-ing, -er, -y (as an "e" sound)*
- the "k" sound for "ch" in "characters"
- the compound words – *grasshoppers, everywhere, pancakes*
- the contractions – *didn't, don't, I'll, I'm, it's, she'll, we'll, where's*

## Setting the scene

Discuss the cover illustration. *What are the grasshoppers doing? What is the ant doing? Why?* Talk about the things that many animals do to prepare for winter. Tell the students you have a play for them to read. Remind them of other plays they have read or seen. Discuss how a play is different from a story.

## The first reading

Ask the students to read the title. Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

**Back cover** – Read aloud the preview question. Discuss the students' predictions.

**Title page** – Focus on the illustration of the ant. Draw out the idea that carrying corn is hard work.

Have the students read the whole text the first time through rather than assign roles so they are able to focus on the challenges of the new format.

**Page 2** – Study the list of characters. Point out the "k" sound for "ch" in "characters". Explain that the reader is like a storyteller. Read this page with the students.

**Page 3** – *Which character is going to speak first? How do you know?* Remind the students that plays don't include speech marks. Listen to the students read the text themselves, providing support as necessary. Explain the purpose of the stage directions. *Why doesn't Ant sing and dance?*

**Page 4** – Allow time for the students to savour the humour of the break-dancing grasshopper! Draw out the idea that time has passed. *When is this happening? How do you know?*

**Page 5** – *Why has the word "grasshoppers" been written in three colours?* Have the students think, pair, and share their ideas about the points of view of Ant and the grasshoppers. *Should they go with Ant and collect the corn? Should Ant play with the grasshoppers? What would you do if you were a grasshopper? Why?*

**Page 6** – *Is this what you would have done?* Clarify that "day after day" means a long time is passing. Focus on the illustration. *How do you know the days are getting colder?* Discuss the cross section of Ant's house.

**Page 7** – *What has happened? What will the grasshoppers do? Will Ant help them?*

**Page 8** – *What happened? How do you feel about that?*

Ask the students to read the text again with a partner and to think about the main ideas. Record the students' ideas on the board. Together, make up a sentence that captures the message of the tale.

### **Ideas for revisiting the text** (Choose only one or two per session.)

- Assign roles (to individuals or small groups), and encourage a spirited reading of the play. Draw the students' attention to the use of exclamation marks and the italics for "do" on page 8. How does the author want you to read this?
- Have the students read the text again, focusing on how the illustrator adds life and humour. Enjoy the details, such as the differences between the grasshoppers.
- Create a mind map of the ant or a grasshopper with a picture in the middle and descriptive words and phrases around it.
- Find the indicators of time and record them on a classroom chart as models for the students' writing.
- Talk about the contractions. Review the idea that they make speech sound more natural.
- Make a list of the compound words in the text and split them. Remind the students of the strategy of looking for the biggest "chunk" when they're trying to work out new words.
- On the board, list the verbs in the text that end in "ing". Help the students to identify the root words. Talk about how "come", "dance", and "take" drop their final "e" when "ing" is added.
- Write "colder", "dinner", "grasshopper", "reader", "summer", and "winter" on the board. *What's the same about these words?* Remind the students to use their knowledge of word endings such as "er" to help them work out new words.
- Write "happy" and "hungry" on the board and read them together. *What do you notice about the sounds at the ends of these words?* Have the students find the other words in the text that end with "y" as an "e" sound (on pages 3 and 5).

### **Suggestions for further activities**

- Perform the play for an audience or record it on audiotape.
- Reread the Dragonflies early play *Don't Forget Grandma*.
- Explore other examples of Fraser Williamson's illustrations, for example, in the Dragonflies emergent titles *Bubbles* and *The Picnic*.

- BLM word activity: split compound words; split contractions

The students can find three compound words from the text and split them. They can then split the contractions from the text.

- BLM comprehension activity: retell the story by summarising the main ideas

The students can cut out the finger puppets and stick them with sticky tape along the sides. In small groups, they can then practise retelling the story using the puppets. They can also innovate on the story to create their own versions.