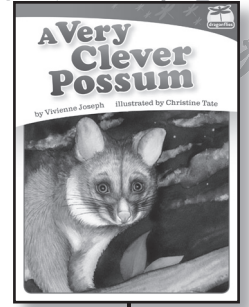


A Very Clever Possum

by Vivienne Joseph

illustrated by Christine Tate



Overview

This narrative describes how Mr Lees sets a trap to save his favourite rosebush from a hungry possum. Night after night, the wily possum manages to get the food out of the trap and escape. Information about possums is included on page 12.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making inferences, drawing conclusions, and understanding the author's purpose.

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

- the narrative structure
- the way the possum outwits Mr Lees
- the open ending
- the fact that the possum is never actually seen by the characters
- the possum "thought bubble" on page 12
- the information about possums on page 12
- the indicators of time – *at last, after a while, in the morning, that night, the next morning*
- the use of a first-person narrator
- the relatively long sections of direct speech
- the poetic language on pages 2, 3, 6, and 8
- the irregular verbs – *heard, hid, lay, ran, woke*
- the verbs that involve doubling the final consonant – *slammed, stopped*
- the verbs that involve dropping the final "e" – *dancing, shaking, using*
- the use of onomatopoeia (page 2)
- the image of the possum dancing (pages 3 and 6)
- the use of personification (page 8)

Possible challenges

- the ideas of the possum and the branches "dancing" and the wind "singing"
- the reasoning behind Mr Lee's solution to the problem (on page 11)
- the reason for the possum "thought bubble" on page 12

Setting the scene

Read the title. *What do you know about possums?* Check that the students understand that possums are nocturnal. *Do you think that possums are clever? What problems might a possum cause in someone's garden?* Explain that the girl in this story has a neighbour who has a problem with a possum.

The first reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Back cover – Read aloud the preview question. Lead a discussion to build the students' background knowledge.

Ask the students to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties with the reading.

Page 2 – *Who is telling this story? How do you know?*

Page 3 – *What did Dad mean when he said “dancing on the roof”? Discuss the setting. When is this taking place?*

Page 4 – *Why is the girl lying awake?*

Page 5 – *Who is this man? What is he telling the girl? You may need to explain the meaning of the word “shoots”.*

Page 7– *Study the illustration and discuss how the trap might work.*

Page 9 – *Why is Mr Lees shaking his head? Do you think the trap will work next time?*

Page 11 – *Why did Mr Lees stop using the trap?*

Page 12 – *Why do you think Mr Lees said the possum was clever? Why is the possum in the illustration? Clarify that the possum illustration is like a thought bubble belonging to Mr Lees. The “darkness” around the illustration supports the idea that the possum is not present. What do you think of the ending? What do you think about the possum?*

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

- Read the information on page 12 with the students. Talk about why possums are such a threat to the environment. *Why do you think the author wrote this book?*
- Listen while the students reread the text with a partner, observing their use of strategies and how they manage the dialogue.
- Study the narrative structure of the story. *What was the problem in the beginning? Has the problem been resolved at the end?*
- *Are possums clever?* Discuss the title and encourage the students to present and listen to different points of view.
- Draw attention to the poetic language on pages 2, 3, 6, and 8. *Why does the author say that the wind is singing? Can possums and branches dance?* Talk about the impact of the onomatopoeia on page 2.
- *What words tell you when things are happening on page 8? What about on page 9?* Ask the students to find other phrases that indicate time. There are examples on pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 11. Draw out the idea that phrases like these help the reader.
- Focus on the dialogue on pages 5, 6, 9 and 12. *What did Mr Lees and the girl say?* Draw out the idea that “said” will not always come at the beginning or end of a section of dialogue.
- Focus on the sentences that include irregular verbs. Remind the students that some verbs can’t have “ed” added to them and that they need to use their knowledge of spoken English to help them when they’re reading. *Does “heard” sound right?* For students whom English is a second language, who are less likely to be able to draw on their knowledge of English syntax, model the use of these irregular verbs in subsequent conversations.
- Write “slammed” and “stopped” on the board. Identify the root words. Draw out the idea that words with a short vowel before the final consonant need to have the final consonant doubled before adding “ed” (or “ing”).
- Write “dance”, “shake”, and “use” on the board. *How would you write “dancing”?* Explain the need to drop the “e” before adding “ing”. *Show me how you would write “shaking” and “using”.* Think of other verbs that end in “e” and have the students practise adding “ing”.

Suggestions for further activities

- Read other articles and stories about possums.
- Use the text as a stimulus for modelling persuasive writing about whether possums should be trapped and killed.
- Write a letter from the possum stating its point of view.
- In pairs or as a group, make a poster with information about possums.
- Use this text as a model for using alternatives to “and then” in the students’ writing.
- BLM word activity: practise writing word endings

The students can write the past tense for the verbs listed. They need to remember when to double a consonant before a word ending.

- BLM comprehension activity: draw conclusions

The students can identify why Mr Lees says the possum is very clever.