

# Going beyond the surface: Exploring gender stereotypes using The Tunnel (Anthony Browne)

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The following series of questions provides a starting point for exploring *The Tunnel* and using this wonderful picture book to explore gender stereotypes still so typical in our community. They are followed by a sequence of drama lessons developed by Carol Miller and Juliana Saxton around the theme of relationships.

## Questions: getting into the text

- What does the cover suggest about the story?
- What do you think the end papers could be?
- Who do you think could be the main characters?
- Where could the tunnel lead to?
- Can you think of any tunnels around here? Where do they lead to?

## Questions: going back to the text

- Why did the brother and sister fight all the time?
- Do you have a brother or sister who is different than the brother and sister in this story?
- Do you fight with you brother(s)/sister(s)? What do you fight about? Why?
- Are you very like you sister/brother?
- What are you favourite things to do? Do you like indoor or outdoor things best? Why?
- Focus: the sister's bedroom. What reminders of other stories can you see in the sister's room? Make a list. Choose one of the stories with two other students and make a still image of the most exciting part?
- Where do you think the tunnel led the children to?
- What brought the brother back to life?
- Why do you think the children's names aren't given until the end of the story?

## Activities: going beyond the text

- Making a model of a tunnel – with the book corner at the other end!
- Painting/sketching a portrait of a sibling with an accompanying description (It would be helpful to study the descriptions of the children in the text and construct some as a class first).
- Improvising around sibling conflicts.
- Painting our versions of beyond the tunnel.

- Intertextuality: making a list of related stories, eg. Princess Pearl; Grimblegraw and the Wuthering Witch;
- Researching about tunnels, eg. the Sydney Harbour Tunnel.

*Sample lesson sequence: The Tunnel*

This sequence of drama lessons was written by Associate Professor Carole Miller and Professor Juliana Saxton, Victoria University, British Columbia.

**Theme:** Relationships

**Literary Source:** Browne, A (1989) The Tunnel, London: McRae Books.

**Drama Strategies:** Guided imagery, voice collage, movement, soundscape, games, story-telling, writing in a role, tapping in (reference: Cusworth, R & Simons, J (1997) Beyond the Script, Sydney: PETA).

**Educational Focus:** an exploration of feelings. The students will discover that feelings about self and others can change.

**Grade Level:** Stages 2-3 (years 4-6)

**Context:** This lesson will investigate thoughts and feelings at three different points:

1. the girl crawling through the tunnel
2. the boy running through the woods and the sister's response
3. the girl and boy writing in their diaries just before they fall asleep

**Group Size:**

- The class will work on an individual basis, in pairs and in large groups
- In the group storytelling, the class will be divided into four groups
- In the forest, half the class will be trees (in attempt to create a frightening atmosphere for the girl) and half the class will be soundscape.

**Special Requirements:**

- 2 coloured felt pens
- 2 large poster sheets with a human outline on each
- red gel
- paper and pencils
- pictures from the book

**Description:**

1. Warm up

Tell students they will soon be listening to a story but first a game will be played:

- Streets and Alleys –

The teacher explains grid rules with students standing in equal lines, arms out from shoulders This is the *Streets* position. At signal of *Alleys* from teacher, all turn a quarter right and thus block the progress of the robber or the cop. Have a practice. The teacher

selects a cop and a robber. The cop must chase the robber through the grid but they can't tag or crash through a blockade of arms or cut through a street or alley. First play with eyes open with the teacher signalling changes. Then play with no voice, just clapping.

And then play with eyes closed. Ask the students what strategies were used?

*\*Strategy Rationale* – When the students later make a forest they will be used to this spacing. It is also possible to make the streets and alley somewhat frightening.

## 2. Storytelling

Write on the board '*I knew you'd come*' but don't say the words. Number the students off into four groups and tell them that they will each receive a picture to observe.

Each group must make up their own story using the picture and the phrase on the board.

The stories are told to the class and students comment on their similarities and differences.

- Question: In your story, do you think the boy/girl thinks differently about his/ her brother/sister?

*\*Strategy Rationale* – The students are engaged in a cooperative imaginative activity and determine their own story outcomes.

## 3. Story Reading / role on the wall

Read the book up to the words '*He went off to explore.*' Then ask half the class to write words to describe how they see the boy and the other half to write words to describe the girl. If it is a large class the teacher can put them on the board. If they do it in two groups, they can switch to add any other word. Use two colours to distinguish the boy and girl.

*\*Strategy Rationale* – This is a period of reflection, finding out what we know so far about the boy and girl. It is also a (contextual) language lesson with adjectives.

## 4. Re-read

Read up to where the girl goes through the tunnel with the students sit on the floor.

- Question: What might the girl be hearing, feeling, smelling? (students close their eyes to try to feel like the girl and keep answer in head)

## 5. Tapping in

Teacher selects random children, tapping each on the shoulder, asking them their answers to the question (NB. The teacher must be prepared to deal with any response).

*\*Strategy Rationale* – The responses cumulatively build a picture of what it feels like to be in a tunnel.

## 6. Continue reading...

The teacher continues to read to the point where the girl is running through the forest

- Question: I wonder if we can become that scary forest?

## 7. Movement

Half of the group will stand in the same positions as in the streets and alleys game. The students standing still and only use their upper bodies, explore grotesque, frightening and slow movements as the woods soon turn into a dark and terrifying forest.

- Questions: Can we create thought twisty and scary woods? Lets become the forest that Rose moves through. Do we have a volunteer to be Rose? Lets assume that Rose can't see. How might we deepen the fearful quality of the woods?

#### 8. Soundscape

We will create the sense of her being in that forest. She may even feel something brushing up against her, a touch, a sound. Teacher may use a weird sounding instrument to create the change of the forest.

- Question to volunteers: What were you thinking as you were moving through the forest? Would you want to go back?

*\*Strategic Rationale* – Movement and sound exploration. To gradually build atmosphere, the teacher can lower lights and use red gel, play scary music and finally encourage students to make the weird sounds of the forest.

NB. It is important to do this seriously. If you feel your class is not ready for this kind of work, you wouldn't utilise this strategy.

#### 9. Statues

Soundscape people will become the Jacks. What position would he be frozen in having just run through the forest? Forest people become the Roses and act out the ending.

- Question for Roses: How will you break the spell / What words will you use that will be powerful enough to bring Jack back? (Remind students that this is very difficult work and they must take it seriously in order for the drama to work).
- Questions for Jacks: When you feel that Rose has truly broken the spell under which you have been placed, you will say the line from the book, *'I knew you'd come.'*

Act it out. Repeat it a few times and get the students to swap roles.

#### 10. Storytelling

Jack, tell Rose what happened to you after you came through the tunnel.

- Question: I wonder how the Jack's story would be different if he were telling it to his mother, father, teacher or friend?

#### 11. Story Reading

Read the story to the conclusion.

#### 12. Writing in Role

Students choose a role of the boy or girl. The teacher has them imagine that they're sitting in their bedrooms writing in their diary about the events of the day.

*'I'd like you to imagine that it is now bedtime and since this experience both children are thinking about the day. Each of you take out your diary and begin to write about your day.'*

- Questions: What have you to say about this experience? What have you learned about yourself, your brother or sister? What might they say? Will it relate to your fears, decision, courage?

NB. You should allow only about 5 minutes for this.

Have them choose their most important sentence, underline it and memorise it.

*\*Strategy Rationale* – Writing in a role. Disciplining their thoughts.

### 13. Tapping in – Voice collage

Students in turn give voice to their memorised words. Before they fall asleep, is their anything they want to say to each other?

*\*Strategy Rationale* – taking a point of view, students hear their peers thinking about the story.

### 14. Role on the wall

Add any new words to the children, in a different coloured ink.

*\*Strategy Rationale* – reflection

### 15. Reflection

The teacher then examines with the class the ‘transformation’

- Questions: How has your view of Rose changed? How has your view of Jack changed? What would make you change your feeling and thoughts about someone or something?

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

The criteria that would be concentrated on in order to assess the students work could include:

- a. Group storytelling – Does the student listen to and contribute ideas?
- b. Movement – Is the student able to concentrate and move expressively?
- c. Writing in a role – Does the student’s writing reflect and understanding of the themes of the story?

### **Means of assessment**

- By observation of the student’s participation, involvement and focus.
- A simple 1-3 checklist could be used:
 

1 = not achieved	2 = working forward	3 = achieved
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- By collecting diary entries and analysing children’s writing and understanding of themes.