

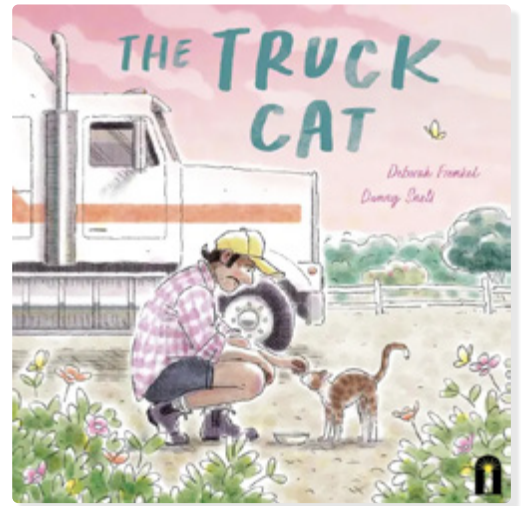
THE TRUCK CAT

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READING AUSTRALIA

Upper primary resource

About the book

Title	<i>The Truck Cat</i>
Author	Deborah Frenkel
Illustrator	Danny Snell
Publisher	Hardie Grant Children's Publishing
Date of publication	2024
ISBN	9781761215766
Category	Picture book
Pages	32



About this resource

Suitable for	Years 3 to 6
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relationships• Belonging• Trucks• Travel• Friendship• Immigration• Identity• Home
Content descriptions	English – Year 4
General capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical and creative thinking• Intercultural understanding• Literacy• Personal and social capability
Unit writer	<p>Libby Baker is a classroom teacher, teacher librarian, and literacy consultant. Her research and consultancy focuses on teaching functional grammar for critical literacy using multimodal texts in the primary years. Libby has taught across all age groups in the primary years during her 14 years of teaching, and has worked as a literacy and EAL/D specialist. She is currently a TL, a classroom teacher, and an ALEA ACT Local Council executive. © ALEA 2025</p>

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Literature and context

Connecting to prior knowledge

Should I become a truck driver?

Pose the following question to the class:

Should I become a truck driver?

Once students are engaged with this question, create a [plus and minus chart](#) with two columns: one for positives and one for negatives. Initially, ask students to share their thoughts on the benefits and challenges of being a truck driver. List these in the corresponding column. Also ask students if they know anyone who is a truck driver.

Then show students the following videos to gain further insight about truck drivers:

<p>Behind the News – Women Truckies</p>	<p>This video demonstrates the value of truck driving in Australia and highlights the enjoyable aspects of driving trucks.</p>
<p>ABC News (Australia) – Research finds driving trucks is a job that seriously challenges physical and mental health 7.30</p>	<p>This video highlights the difficulties of truck driving and its effect on drivers' health (physical and mental) and relationships.</p>

After watching these videos, invite students to suggest more ideas for the plus and minus chart about truck driving. Focus on the language that is subjective or objective and how language can frame a viewpoint as positive or negative.

AC9E4LA02

A house is not a home without ...

Prompt students to consider the theme of belonging in *The Truck Cat* by challenging them to complete this sentence:

A house is not a home without ...





Brainstorm possible words to complete this sentence, such as:

a cat	a dog	chocolate
Sunday dinner	family	fun
the stories of our ancestors	the spirit of our culture	the laughter of cousins

Encourage students to contribute ideas to this brainstorm, drawing on their own experiences and situations. Remind them that they will have to justify their completed sentences.

Invite students to explain their ideas to a partner or small group. Allow time for them to write their own sentence and consider justifications. Then invite them to share their sentence and explanations with the rest of the class.

AC9E4LE02

Exploring the text in context of our community, school, and ‘me’

Trucks in my community

NOTE: For the purpose of tracking page numbers, the first page of the story is considered p. 3.

Display the front cover of *The Truck Cat* and discuss the work of trucks in Australia. On the board, begin a [KWL chart](#) titled ‘Trucks in Australia’.

Begin by filling in the ‘Know’ column. Ask students to [think-pair-share](#) ONE fact about the work of trucks in Australia.

Next, ask each student to write a wonder question on a sticky note and place it in the ‘Wonder’ column. Encourage student questions with these prompts:

- Why are trucks so common in Australia?
- Where do you mostly see the sort of truck pictured on the front cover of *The Truck Cat*?
- What is the purpose of large trucks?

Visit the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator's (NHVR) [National Network Map](#). This map lists the routes that different classes of trucks can travel on, and provides insight into how far they travel.

Search the map based on the description of Yacoub's truck: a B-double tri-axle (p. 5). Change the map view ('Vehicles') and vehicle type ('B-double'), then enter some keywords ('tri-axle'). Select the different maps and notice the routes these trucks take around Australia and in your local area.

Add to the 'Know' column any information the class has gained from this exploration. This might be related to a specific truck type OR truck distances.

AC9E4LY05

***I'm Australian Too*: text-to-text connection**

Read *I'm Australian Too* by [Mem Fox](#), illustrated by Ronojoy Ghosh. At the end of the read aloud, ask students if they know where their family is from (answers may range from a town/city, a state, or a country). Using a similar poetic structure to *I'm Australian Too*, students can write about one of their family members. To assist students with this writing task, provide them with this stanza scaffold:

I'm Australian too

My (mum/dad/nan/grandpa/aunty) came from (home/place of origin)

Now we/they live in (current home/place)

How about you?

Afterwards, ask students to share their stanzas in a circle. Discuss the rhyme at the end of the first ('too') and fourth ('you') sentences. Reflect on the homes/places of origin of the families represented in your class. Following this, share the author Deborah Frenkel's note on the inside back cover of *The Truck Cat*. Conclude by reflecting on how the families represented in your class have made new places feel like home.

AC9E4LE01 AC9E4LE04



Responding to literature

Responding to the text

Inside/outside circles

Read *The Truck Cat* to the class. Explain that you will now have a class discussion to respond to the text's themes. Arrange students in two circles, facing each other, for an [inside/outside circle](#) discussion.

Pose a question to the class such as:

- What does the quote 'Tinka lived everywhere' (p. 3) mean?
- Why did Tinka and Yacoub remember their memories together (pp. 12–13)?
- What is the problem in this story?
- Do you think Tinka and Yacoub were happy at the beginning of the story? Why/why not?
- Did Tinka and Yacoub's friendship change in the story? Why/why not?
- Why was it important that Mari found Tinka before meeting Yacoub?
- What problem was resolved at the end of the story?

Allow students to share their thoughts with the person opposite them for one minute. Then ask the outside circle to move to the left or right and discuss the same question (or a new one) with a new partner.

At this point, discussion of the text should focus on questions that illicit students' initial reactions to key themes in the text.

[AC9E4LY02](#)

Five-word summary

After reading *The Truck Cat*, tell students that you are going to challenge them to summarise the story in just FIVE words. Explain that they can use the fingers on one hand to help them count out the words. The five words can summarise different plot points, themes, or character attributes. For example:

1. Truck
2. Missing
3. Alone
4. Friendship
5. Home





Give students time to think of their own five-word summary. Allow them to write it down and edit it. Once students have chosen their five words, ask them to share their summary with as many classmates as possible. Each time they do so, they should place a tick next to any words that are similar to their peers’.

To conclude this activity, invite students to share the most frequently used words from their summary by asking:

Which word received the most ticks?

Create a [word cloud](#) with these words to provide students with a visual representation of their summaries.

[AC9E4LY05](#)

Exploring plot, character, setting, and theme

Tinka’s thoughts

Throughout the story, Tinka experiences a range of emotions. By examining his inner dialogue, students can understand his emotional journey.

Print and cut out SEVEN thought bubbles using the template on p. 8 of this resource. Provide students with whiteboards OR paper (they can work as individuals or in pairs).

Reread *The Truck Cat*, pausing on the pages that reflect Tinka’s mood:

p. 7	Tinka looks out for interlopers
p. 13	Tinka remembers his old home
pp. 16–17	Tinka chases the butterfly
p. 20	Tinka ducks under the car
p. 21	Mari rescues Tinka
p. 23	Tinka worries about Yacoub
p. 26	Yacoub finds Tinka

Ask students to consider what Tinka is thinking and feeling at each of these moments. Once they have reflected, they can write their ideas on their whiteboard/paper.

Invite students to share what they have written with the rest of the class. For each moment from the story, summarise one or two of the students' ideas and write the summary in a thought bubble.

Once you have filled in all seven bubbles, display them for the class and ask students to reflect on the emotions Tinka shows throughout the story. Label each bubble with the emotion Tinka experiences at that point in time.

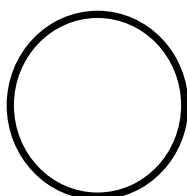
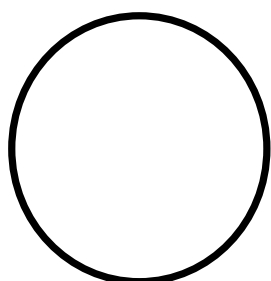
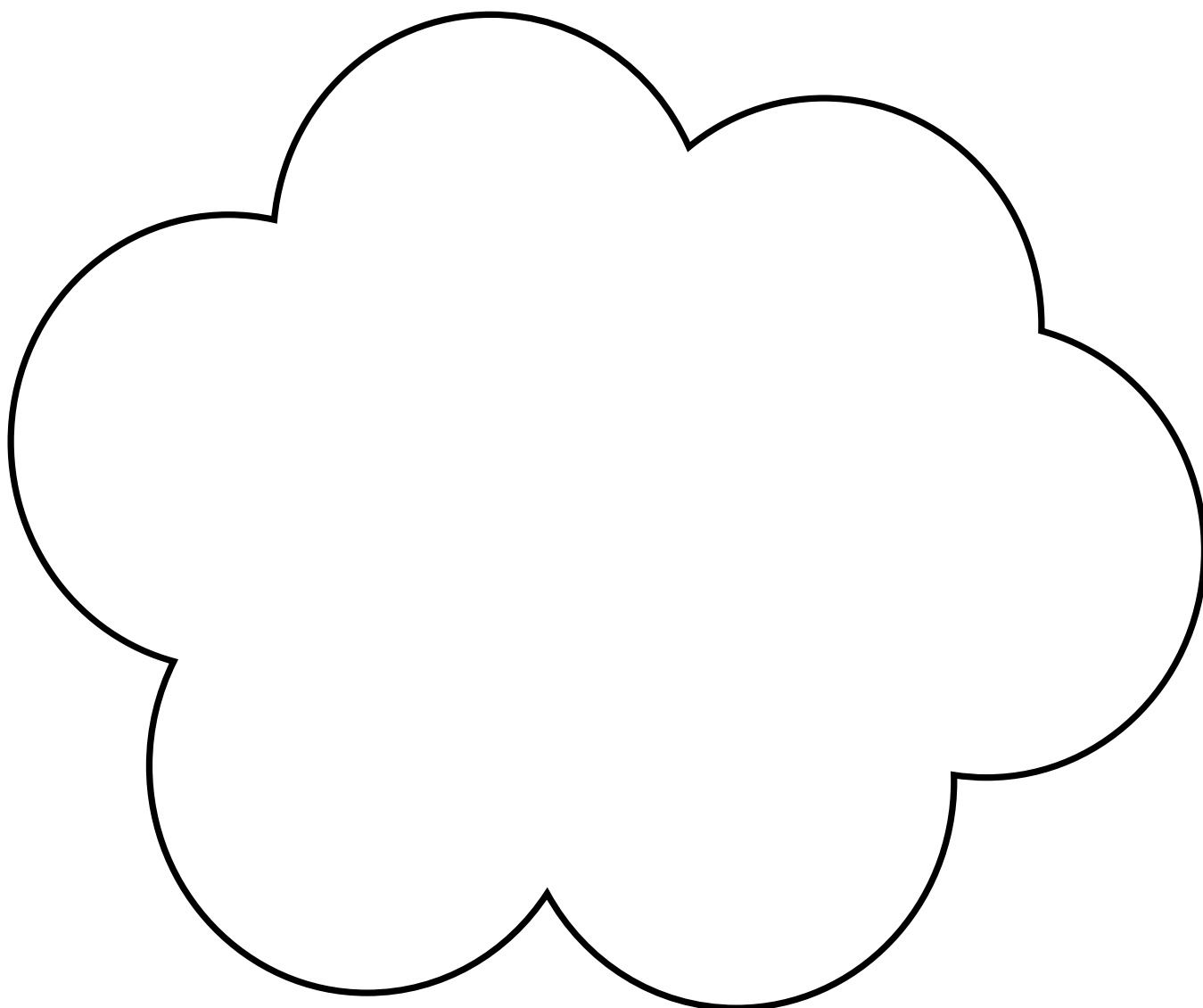
To summarise the activity, ask students to reflect on why Tinka must show a range of emotions in the book. Possible responses might include:

- to show his relationship with Yacoub and Mari
- so that we can understand his character
- to show the effect of the events in the story on a character

AC9E4LE03 AC9E4LY03



Template for Tinka's thoughts



Choose your own adventure

Write the names of the three main characters on the board: Tinka, Yacoub, and Mari. Explain that these characters make decisions that move the plot along, and that we can also infer previous decisions that have led to their current circumstances.

Draw a [flow chart](#) under Tinka's name to explain the decisions he made that moved the plot along. Each decision should be placed in a box, with a line connecting that box to the next one in the sequence. Model constructing a flow chart for Tinka's decisions as follows:

1. Tinka leaves his home and family
2. Tinka meets Yacoub and becomes a truck cat
3. Tinka travels in the truck with Yacoub
4. Tinka chases a butterfly
5. Tinka gets lost
6. Tinka decides to stay at Mari's bakery
7. Tinka sees Yacoub through the bakery window
8. Tinka reunites with Yacoub
9. Tinka lives with Yacoub, Mari, and their child

After modelling the construction of this flow chart, collaboratively construct two more to illustrate Yacoub and Mari's inferred or described decisions that move the plot along.

Now invite students to change ONE of Tinka, Yacoub, or Mari's decisions. For example, instead of letting Tinka chase the butterfly, they might have him return to Yacoub's truck. Students can write the alternative decision in a new branch of the flow chart and continue this process to see how subsequent decisions change. This will result in a choose-your-own-adventure-style flow chart and allow students to comprehend the author's plot decisions.

Give students time to write their own alternative plots for *The Truck Cat* based on this exercise. Allow them to share their plots in pairs, groups, or a whole class discussion.

[AC9E4LE03](#) [AC9E4LE05](#)





Examining literature

Examining text structure and organisation

Proximity and gaze

Explain that in illustrations the relationship between characters – and their relationship with the viewer – is described using two visual features: proximity and gaze. Tell students that you will be exploring proximity and gaze cues to better understand the relationships between characters in the text.

Define proximity and gaze by first asking students to suggest a working definition. After they have contributed ideas, use formal definitions to refine the explanations:

Proximity	Refers to the distance between elements on a page. We can interpret a relationship between two characters depending on their proximity. The closer the characters, the closer their social relationship. Additionally, characters that are positioned higher on a page have more authority. When characters are on the same level, they are seen as equals.
Gaze	Refers to where a character is looking. When a character is looking directly at the reader, it is called a demand and the reader is drawn to look back at them. When a character is looking at another object or to the side, it is called an offer, meaning that the reader can choose to look at anything on the page. Gaze acts as a vector/reading path in many images, affecting the order in which we look at objects on a page. It also provides clues about the relationship between characters: when they gaze into each other's eyes, it suggests a demand from one to the other.

Next turn to p. 22, where Mari gives Tinka a fish head. Use this page to model concepts of proximity and gaze. Explain that on this page Mari and Tinka are looking at each other. This is a type of demand and they are forming a friendship. However, we can see from their proximity that there is still some distance between them, demonstrating that they are not close friends yet. Comment also on Mari's positioning: she has come down to Tinka's level but is still slightly higher, making Tinka look up at her and giving her a position of authority.

Now turn to p. 26, where Yacoub reunites with Tinka. Ask students what they notice about the gaze and proximity between these two characters. Write their observations and ideas on the board.

Finally, ask students to divide a page or blank sheet of paper into six sections. Using their knowledge of proximity and gaze, they will comment on the final six pages of the book (pp. 27–32). Turn through these pages slowly, allowing time for students to record their observations. As you do so, prompt them with questions such as:

- What does Mari and Yacoub's gaze tell you about their relationship?
- How does the proximity change from one illustration to another?
- What does the gaze draw your eyes to?
- What does the proximity tell you about the characters' relationships?

AC9E4LA10

Day to night

Discuss the contrasts between day and night. Begin by drawing a table with two columns, one labelled 'Day' and the other 'Night'. Ask students to suggest differences between day and night and record their ideas in the relevant column. Focus on contrasts such as 'light' and 'dark', or 'quiet' and 'loud'. Then explain that in books day and night are often used to contrast information.

Reread pp. 12–15, from when Yacoub and Tinka remember their memories together, to the double-page spread of the nighttime rest stop.

Ask students to suggest any contrasts between day and night in *The Truck Cat*. Add their ideas to the table using a different coloured marker. Prompt students to notice the contrasts by asking:

- When do you think Tinka and Yacoub feel most connected?
- When do you think they feel most alone?
- When are they busier?
- What words and images give you an idea of stillness at night?
- What words and images give you an idea of busyness during the day?

Finally, discuss how the illustration on pp. 12–13 positions Tinka and Yacoub apart from each other, whereas the nighttime scene on pp. 14–15 demonstrates their close relationship.

AC9E4LA11





Examining grammar and vocabulary

Repeating themes

Reread the beginning of the story (p. 3). Ask students if they notice a pattern in the words at the top of the page (i.e. 'some' is repeated). They might also note that the word 'cats' is omitted in the second, third, and fourth sentences to make them less repetitive; however, we infer that in each instance 'some' is referring to cats.

Explain that 'some cats' is the theme (i.e. the starting point) of each of these sentences. Ask students to predict why the author might have repeated this theme. Explain that repeated themes make texts cohesive (i.e. make sense as a whole). In this instance, it also reinforces the message that cats can live anywhere.

Ask students why the author might have started with this theme. Explain that they can use the change in the fifth sentence as a clue. What is used in this sentence to refer to the 'who' (i.e. Tinka)? Explain that Tinka isn't just 'some cat' – he is unique as he is described by name.

Now flip to the end of the book and reread pp. 30–31, which explain that Tinka is no longer just a truck cat. Ask students if they notice a repeating theme here. Finish by asking them to describe the effect of this repeating theme, contrasting it with the repeating theme at the beginning of the book.

AC9E4LA04

Interlopers: morphology study

Reread the sentence on p. 7 that describes Tinka keeping watch for interlopers. Focus on this word and ask students to predict what it means. Record their predictions.

Next, ask students if they can locate the meaningful parts of this word. Explain that there are three parts and write them spaced out on the board: 'inter', 'loper', and 's'.

Ask students if they can think of other words that use the 'inter' prefix. Make a list of these on the board. Suggestions may include 'international', 'interview', 'interact', 'internet', and 'interest'. Once you have a list, ask students to use the brainstormed words to predict the meaning of the prefix. Once they have made their predictions, [share the definition](#).

Now ask students if they have any predictions regarding 'loper'. This is a less common base. If students are struggling with ideas, ask them if they have heard the expression 'loping along' to describe a casual or relaxed movement. Explain that this base describes someone moving around with nowhere to go. It comes from an older word, '[landloper](#)', meaning 'vagabond' or 'wanderer'.

Explain that 's' is a suffix and makes the word plural, meaning more than one.

Now that they have completed the word investigation, allow students to change their initial predictions about the word 'interlopers' if they wish. Summarise this task by providing a [dictionary definition](#) of an 'interloper'.

[AC9E4LY09](#)





Creating literature

Conflict catalyst flip book

Reread *The Truck Cat*. Tell students to take note of the butterfly during this reading. Prompt them to notice the following:

- When does the butterfly appear?
- What occurs after the butterfly appears?
- When does the butterfly stop appearing?
- What might the butterfly symbolise?

Once you have reread the book, discuss these questions as a class. Possible responses are listed below.

When does the butterfly appear?	In the front endpapers (foreshadowing the complication), on the pages when Yacoub and Tinka remember their memories (pp. 12–13), during the complication (pp. 16–19)
What occurs after the butterfly appears?	Tinka gets lost and is separated from Yacoub
When does the butterfly stop appearing?	Once Mari rescues Tinka and takes him to her bakery
What might the butterfly symbolise?	The complication, playfulness, a need to explore, curiosity

Explain that the butterfly acts as a catalyst for the complication in the story. Ask students to suggest other bugs or animals that could legitimately have been used as a catalyst for the complication.

Following this, students will select a bug or animal that could lead Tinka astray and develop a flip book. Show them [this tutorial](#) so they can learn how to make one. Explain that the drawings of Tinka and the bug/animal will need to be simplified to make them easy to draw repeatedly.

Students can share their flip books with peers and narrate the action.

AC9E4LE05

Character backstory podcast

This task will challenge students to develop a backstory for Yacoub or Mari. They will start by drafting a backstory for their chosen character, then use this as the basis for an interview podcast.

Students should select either Yacoub OR Mari and consider the following prompts to write a short backstory (individually or in pairs).

- Why did they leave their home country?
- What made them choose to come to Australia?
- What was life like in their home country?
- What did they leave in their home country (family, house, job)?
- How did they decide on their jobs when they came to Australia?

Encourage students to use text clues to infer the backstory of their chosen character. For example, we know that Mari owns a bakery; perhaps she learned to bake in her home country.

Once students have written a short backstory, guide them to create a podcast script. They may decide to use the prompt questions for their interview OR formulate their own. See [Buzzsprout's blog](#) for different script templates and helpful tips.

Students can record their podcasts and play them back in class, OR perform them as a live reading.

AC9E4LE05

* Reading Australia resource available



More resources

About the book, author, and illustrator

- *The Truck Cat*:
 - » [Hardie Grant Children's Publishing](#)
- Deborah Frenkel:
 - » [Hardie Grant Children's Publishing](#)
 - » [Website](#)
 - » [Instagram](#)
 - » [Facebook](#)
 - » [Australia Reads](#)
- Danny Snell:
 - » [Hardie Grant Children's Publishing](#)
 - » [Website](#)
 - » [Instagram](#)

Related texts

- *I'm Australian Too* by [Mem Fox](#), illus. Ronojoy Ghosh
- *My Two Blankets** by Irena Kobald, illus. Freya Blackwood
- *Teacup** by Rebecca Young, illus. Matt Ottley
- *Songbird** by Ingrid Laguna
- *Way Home** by Libby Hathorn, illus. Gregory Rogers
- *Stay for Dinner* by Sandhya Parappukaran, illus. Michelle Pereira
- *Words That Taste Like Home* by Sandhya Parappukaran, illus. Michelle Pereira

Books about special friendships with animals

Lower primary (F–2)

- *Come Down, Cat!** by Sonya Hartnett, illus. Lucia Masciullo
- *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat** by Jenny Wagner, illus. Ron Brooks
- *Boss Cat* by Sarah Speedie, illus. Tom Jellett
- *When Billy Was a Dog* by [Kirsty Murray](#), illus. Karen Blair
- *Eat My Dust!* by Neridah McMullin, illus. Lucia Masciullo

Upper primary (3–6)

- *Loyal Creatures** by Morris Gleitzman
- *Fog a Dox** by Bruce Pascoe

* Reading Australia resource available





Curriculum summary

English – Year 4 (Version 9.0)

Language		
Language for interacting with others	identify the subjective language of opinion and feeling, and the objective language of factual reporting	AC9E4LA02
Text structure and organisation	identify how text connectives including temporal and conditional words, and topic word associations are used to sequence and connect ideas	AC9E4LA04
Language for expressing and developing ideas	explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image and salience on composition of still and moving images in texts	AC9E4LA10
	expand vocabulary by exploring a range of synonyms and antonyms, and using words encountered in a range of sources	AC9E4LA11
Literature		
Literature and contexts	recognise similar storylines, ideas and relationships in different contexts in literary texts by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors	AC9E4LE01
Engaging with and responding to literature	describe the effects of text structures and language features in literary texts when responding to and sharing opinions	AC9E4LE02
Examining literature	discuss how authors and illustrators make stories engaging by the way they develop character, setting and plot tensions	AC9E4LE03
	examine the use of literary devices and deliberate word play in literary texts, including poetry, to shape meaning	AC9E4LE04
Creating literature	create and edit literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings	AC9E4LE05
Literacy		
Interacting with others	listen for key points and information to carry out tasks and contribute to discussions, acknowledging another opinion, linking a response to the topic, and sharing and extending ideas and information	AC9E4LY02
Analysing, interpreting and evaluating	identify the characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text	AC9E4LY03
	use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, to expand topic knowledge and ideas, and evaluate texts	AC9E4LY05
Phonic and word knowledge	understand how to use and apply phonological and morphological knowledge to read and write multisyllabic words with more complex letter combinations, including a variety of vowel sounds and known prefixes and suffixes	AC9E4LY09