

MY LIFE AS AN ALPHABET: EXPLORING NARRATIVE

THINK ALOUD: EXPLORING PLOT AND THEME

Before reading the text aloud, consider the salient points to highlight. Plan your comments and identify the reading strategy you will be modelling.

Text extract taken from *My Life as an Alphabet*, (Jonsberg, 2013, pp. 55 – 56) Reproduced with permission from Allen and Unwin Publishing House.

Introduce and contextualise the reading. For example:

‘This is a very sad and confronting part of the book. Candice is recalling the night her baby sister died and we gain an insight into how Candice is battling with a sense of guilt and the impact that Frances’s death has had on the family’.

What the text says	What I say	The comprehension strategy I model
No one talks about that night. I suppose there isn’t a great deal to say. Many months later, Mum and Dad took me to a man who tried to get me to say something about it, but I’d lost interest in talking by then. After a while, we carried on as a family. Not like everything was the same. It wasn’t and we knew that. But we carried on because ... well, what choice do we have?	<p>Is the author suggesting here that Candice’s odd behaviour is due to this traumatic event? She tells us that she lost interest in talking. That might be why she continues to write notes to people instead of talking.</p> <p>This paragraph also connects some of the earlier hints in the book that infer there is something wrong in Candice’s family, that there is a sadness hanging over their house. For example, her parents seemed to pay her little attention; Mum was often in her room; her father worked in the shed and Candice ate her meals alone.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author’s purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
I’m twelve years old and smart, apparently. I know what people think. That I blame myself for what happened to Sky and that my strange behaviour stems from guilt.	<p>Again, Candice’s strange behaviour is mentioned, but here we see it directly linked to the guilt and trauma felt when her sister died. It seems that Jonsberg has developed this theme of Candice’s odd behaviour; her obsession with her pencils and her literal interpretation of everything. Sometimes those scenes have been humorous, but not here.</p> <p>I think that Candice’s odd behaviour, guilt and sense of loss are important themes in the story.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author’s purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>

<p>I'd put pressure on Mum and Dad to let Sky sleep in my bedroom. Would she have died if she'd stayed in Mum and Dad's room?</p> <p>Was it all, in some peculiar fashion, a way of punishing myself for imaginary crimes? It would explain a lot. My writing of notes, rather than talking to people I don't know well. Some of my ... obsessions.</p>	<p>The sentence that stands out to me here is Candice questioning whether she is punishing herself for imaginary crimes. Candice is also being very self-reflective, questioning her own behaviour and 'obsessions'. It makes me wonder how she really felt about the way the other students treated her, for example when they call her SN – for special needs.</p> <p>I wonder how often Candice's character narrates with this serious tone.</p> <p>Now I understand a little more about those scenes when Candice would write notes rather than talk, like when she first met Douglas.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author's purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
<p>But I don't blame myself. It wasn't my fault. Sky died of cot death. Sudden infant death syndrome is the medical term, though that explains nothing because no one knows why it happens. It just does. For no reason. No one's to blame.</p>	<p>Here the author is giving us more information about Sky's death. Cot death, or SIDS, is tragic and that question, "Why?" would be very real.</p> <p>This gives us insight into the way Candice's family operate, "carrying on" but it would seem with very little happiness.</p> <p>The Red Nose Day is to raise awareness and money for SIDS research.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author's purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
<p>Unfortunately, the human mind doesn't work that way. Logic is not good here. Candice feels she is to blame and that is the important thing. But all I can do is repeat: <i>I know it wasn't my fault.</i></p> <p>But it is unbearably sad.</p>	<p>I wonder why Jonsberg switches the narrative here to third person.</p> <p>"Candice feels she is to blame and that's the important thing." I feel like the concept of guilt and blame are important to this story. Do Candice's parents also feel guilt and blame?</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author's purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
<p>Families are fragile. Mine did not die when Sky did, but it took a battering and came out bruised and limping. It was the start of when things fell apart.</p>	<p>I think families and family relationships are also important themes in this book. Candice recognises that things are not OK in her family and she is determined to do something about it.</p> <p>The way Jonsberg uses personification to describe the family is very effective; battered, bruised and limping. We have a growing sense of how unhappy Candice, and her parents are.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author's purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
<p>Mum's breast cancer. Dad's increasing distance from everything except computers in his shed and a faintly buzzing silhouette in the sky.</p>	<p>Here we find out extra information that explains the sadness and distance that is constantly inferred.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Synthesising</p> <p>Author's purpose</p> <p>Monitoring and clarifying</p>
<p>That is not my fault either.</p>	<p>Happiness too is a constant theme throughout this book. Candice is fighting against her</p>	<p>Questioning</p>

But maybe I can do something about it. Before the last traces of warmth flee my family too.	family's unhappiness, wanting a different life for herself and her parents.	Inferring Synthesising Author's purpose Monitoring and clarifying
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This passage stands out to me. It is very serious and has none of the humour of Candice's usual first-person dialogue. Candice is also being very self-reflective, questioning her odd behaviours and her feelings about Sky's death. Importantly, she is laying claim to the right to be happy, despite the tragedy that has befallen her family.