

Session 6: *The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh* by Helen Rutter

Learning aims

- To **give and explain** the meaning of words in context.
- To **use your word detective skills** to understand new vocabulary.
- To **retrieve** key parts of an extract.
- To **compare key elements within the text**.

These are key skills required for the SATs. Pupils should be familiar with these skills as we will be exploring them in detail throughout this session.

Activity 1 Vocabulary warm-up

Common

Popular

Isolated

1) The words above will appear in today's session. Can you use these three sentences, to discuss their meaning in your groups?

Playing skipping was a **common** game on the playground during breaktime.

The new superhero film with flying cats was the most **popular** choice at the movie theatre this weekend.

The old lighthouse stood **isolated** on a rocky cliff, facing the vast ocean.

2) Can you write your own sentence for one of the words?

Using your previous learning, which group of synonyms do you think best matches the word '**isolated**'?

Lonely
Withdrawn

Popular
Celebrated

Engaged
Occupied

Activity 2 Pre-reading

Read the blurb of today's extract. A blurb is a short and exciting description that gives you a taste of what a story is about, without spoiling the whole thing!



Tutors must read this blurb out to the pupils.

Buckle up, because Billy Plimpton has a HUGE dream: becoming a world-famous comedian! He's got so many jokes in his head, but there's one tiny problem – his stutter sometimes throws him a curveball. At his new school, Billy decides silence is his best bet. No talking, no stammering, right? Wrong! Turns out, being isolated isn't exactly laugh-out-loud funny (and how can you tell jokes if you never speak?). Billy's about to discover there's a much better way to deal with his stutter, one that might even turn him into a schoolyard superstar! This story dives into Billy's world, where he shows us the wacky (and sometimes not-so-wacky) ways people react to his stutter.

Discuss with
your tutor



- What does Billy want to become?

A comedian

- What are two things that we learn about Billy?

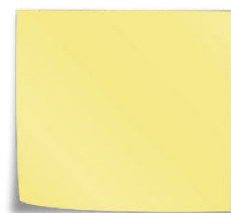
He has a stutter and he is starting a new school.

(Stuttering is a speech problem where a person repeats sounds, syllables, or words, stretches out sounds, or has pauses (blocks) when trying to speak. The person knows what they want to say but has difficulty speaking smoothly.)

- Can you predict some of the ways people might react to Billy's stutter?

Activity 3 Reading the extract

Where you see the sticky notes, pause and annotate your ideas.



Your tutor will read the story to you. Listen carefully so that you can answer the discussion questions and fill in your sticky notes.

1. The Encouragers

They have calm, smiley expressions and constantly say things like, "Go on", "Interesting" and, "I understand." Encouragers are OK. Although they can be annoying when they go too far and say things like, "Take a big breath in," and, "Relax." Telling someone to relax when they are clearly struggling is like shouting, "Run faster!" at someone being chased by a tiger. They would if they could.

Pause here. Why might an 'encourager' be annoying?



2. The Mind Readers

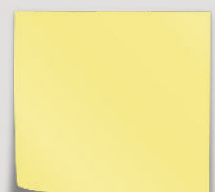
This is the most common category and a very annoying one in my opinion. A lot of adults do this to kids anyway, even kids without a stutter, but they REALLY do it to me.

Pause here. What do you think Billy means by this statement?



This is the category who think they know exactly what I'm trying to say and so "helpfully" finish my sentence for me. They usually say something completely wrong. Most of the time I just go along with their version of the conversation, because I can't be bothered trying again. I ended up going to the toilet once, when I didn't even need a wee. The lady at the cinema ticket office obviously thought I was going to ask, "Can you tell me where the toilets are?" when I was actually trying to say, "Can you tell me where the popcorn is?". She took me right to the toilets, even though there was a huge sign and an arrow, so I thought I should go in. I didn't even end up buying any popcorn. I told Mum I had changed my mind when I slid back into my seat and she called me a "strange fish". That's the other thing that happens when you have a stammer. People think you're either thick or strange.

Pause here. Why might this category of people be most annoying?

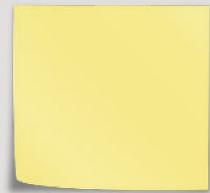


3. The Jokers

The most upsetting category. The grown-ups who don't know what to do and so choose to mimic me "as a joke". Believe me, this happens more than you would think. The other day I went to the shop and had to ask an old man in a brown cap to reach the chocolate milkshake for me. He responded by saying, "Y-y-y-y-y-yes, of course I can!" and then laughed at how funny he thought he was.

I'm not sure why any grown-up would do this. It's almost too confusing to be upsetting. I still felt bad, though.

Pause here. What does the word 'mimic' mean? Why might this be particularly hurtful to Billy?



4. The Waiters

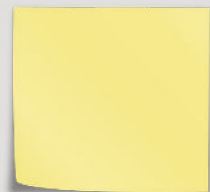
The best category and the one which you should try and be a part of, should you meet a stammerer. These are the rare people who don't mind waiting and will stay there for as long as it takes for me to spit out whatever piece of information I'm stuck on. Usually a new joke. You could be waiting a long time until I get to the end of a new one-liner. That's kind of how it works. The more I want to say something, the less my voice allows me to say it. It's like a sick joke in itself.

Pause here. Why might this category of people be best?

Obviously some Waiters are not so good. You wouldn't believe how obvious it is when someone's waiting but they don't really want to be. That's tough. I want to say to them, "Don't worry. Just go and do whatever it is that you would rather be doing. This is no fun for either of us." But I don't, as that would take even longer than whatever it is I'm stuck on.

As I turn back towards the mirror for another attempt – "My name is B-B-B-B..." – Mum pops her head round the door.

"Who are you talking to, Billy?" she asks.



“N-N-No one,” I say, pointing to my reflection.

“Gosh, if only that mirror could talk. It must have heard all sorts from you!”

“Wh-wh-what’s said to the m-m-mirror, stays in th-the m-mirror, all right?” I say in my best gangster voice. Mum’s a pretty good Waiter. I suppose she has had plenty of practice.

“Well, you and your mirror can carry on chatting for ten minutes, then it’s bed, OK? It’s a big day tomorrow, you need your sleep.” She winks at me and her head disappears from the doorway.

Pause here. What can you infer about Billy and his mum’s relationship from this short conversation?

If only I could be normal then starting Bannerdale High School would be easy. I’m going to try everything I can think of to get rid of this stammer, and become just like everyone else. Maybe even better than everyone else. Imagine that, I could be the most popular boy in school.

“You know that Billy Plimpton, he’s the best and he’s SO funny.”

“Yes, everyone wants to be friends with Billy Plimpton. I think he’s going to be famous.”

“Tell us another joke, Billy, go on!”



Activity 4 Quickfire race around the text

Ready, set, listen! In this fast-paced game, your tutor will read a question. Be the first to answer using only the text in front of you!

Top tips!

1. Use your sticky notes to easily find information.
2. Skim the text to find the key information that you need to answer the question.
3. Shout your name and then the answer!





1) Find and shout one phrase that suggests having a stammer is difficult to overcome.

Telling someone to relax when they are clearly struggling is like shouting, "Run faster!" at someone being chased by a tiger. They would if they could.

2) Find and shout one word or phrase that Billy uses to describe the 'Mind Readers.'

Common; annoying

3) Who are the 'Jokers' – children or grown-ups?

Grown-ups

4) Find and shout one phrase that tells us that not many people fall into the category of the 'Waiters.'

Rare

5) How do we know that Billy's mum is part of the 'Waiters' category?

Mum's a pretty good Waiter. I suppose she has had plenty of practice. (You can also accept that Billy's Mum waits for him to give her a response, even though he stutters.)

Activity 5a Comparing ideas



Today, we are going to focus on a new skill. This is the skill of **comparing** ideas in a story.

Comparing is like playing a detective game for things that are similar or different! Imagine you have two mystery texts on your desk. To compare them, you'd be a detective looking for clues.

- **Similarities:** These are the clues that show the ideas or characters in a text are alike in some way.
- **Differences:** These are the clues that show the texts, ideas or characters are not exactly the same.

Let's try to put this skill into practice.



How is pizza similar to cake?

Accept answers such as both are delicious. Both can make you feel very full!



How is pizza different to cake?

Pizza is usually a main course whilst cake is often a dessert. Pizza is usually savoury whilst cake is often sweet.

Activity 5b Comparing ideas example

This is the type of question that might appear on a SATs paper. We are going to walk through a response together first, and then the pupil will independently respond to a similar question. Read the question out loud to the pupils.

How does Billy feel about 'The Jokers' compared to 'The Waiters?'

1 mark

In this section, we will walk through specific steps and guidance that a pupil can take with a question of this kind. Take your time dealing with each step.

Step	What to do
1	Read the question carefully and highlight the key words.
2	Find in the text where the writer mentions 'The Jokers' and 'The Waiters.' Using your sticky notes, write down one key word that Billy uses to describe 'The Jokers' and one key word for 'The Waiters.'
3	Use this sentence scaffold to complete your response: In the text, Billy says that the Jokers are '.....' whereas he describes the waiters as '.....'



How; Billy; feel; Jokers; Waiters

Upsetting (Jokers) Best (Waiters)

Discuss this with your group. Your tutor will write your group response in the space below:

Activity 6 Your turn!

Pupils should try this exercise independently, with limited group discussion.

1) In the text, Billy lists all the different ways that people react to his stutter. Give one way that the 'Encouragers' are:

- a) Similar to the 'Waiters'.
- b) Different to 'The Jokers'.

1 mark



This is an independent thinking task. Complete your answer independently before discussing your ideas. How do I approach this kind of question? It's time to be a **word detective!**

Pupils should use this scaffold to guide them to an answer.

1	Read the question carefully and highlight the key words.
2	Find in the text where the writer mentions 'The Jokers' and 'The Waiters.' Using your sticky notes, write down one key words that Billy uses to describe 'The Jokers' and 'The Waiters.'

Write your response here:

a) They are also a positive and kind group.

b) They aren't upsetting or unkind to the person with the stammer, whereas a Joker is.



The key to success in this question is to keep the main comparison as the focus. Here, your main focus is 'The Encouragers' and you are finding similarities and differences to the other two groups. This should help you to organise your thinking!

Activity 7 Discussion task

Let's move on to another skill!

Sometimes, we are asked to use information from a text, to give an opinion or idea of someone. This can sometimes be a bit difficult! But, we will get the mark for our idea, as long as we have used a sensible suggestion that is based on evidence from the text.

What kind of person do you think Billy's mum is? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. **2 marks**

In this section, we will walk through specific steps and guidance that a pupil can take with a question of this kind. Take your time dealing with each step.

Step	What to do
1	The focus on this question is Billy's mum. Underline and words or phrases that are about Billy's mum.
2	Look at the phrases that you have underlined. Using one or two words, write down a suggestion about what kind of person you think Billy's mum is.
3	Use your sticky notes to help you.
4	Your response should have two sentences: your first sentence should give your impression of Billy's mum. The second sentence should present your evidence.



Let's look at the section on Billy's mum and work through these steps together.

The tutor should work through these steps together with their group. This is a discussion activity. Use the box to fill in the groups ideas about Billy's mum.

As I turn back towards the mirror for another attempt – “My name is B-B-B-B...” – **Mum pops her head round the door.**

“Who are you talking to, Billy?” she asks.

“N-N-No one,” I say, pointing to my reflection.

“Gosh, if only that mirror could talk. It must have heard all sorts from you!”

“Wh-wh-what's said to the m-m-mirror, stays in th-the m-mirror, all right?” I **say in my best gangster voice. Mum's a pretty good Waiter. I suppose she has had plenty of practice.**

“Well, you and your mirror can carry on chatting for ten minutes, then it's bed, OK? It's a big day tomorrow, you need your sleep.” **She winks at me and her head disappears from the doorway.**

Fill in your group's ideas here: Suggested adjectives for Billy's mum:

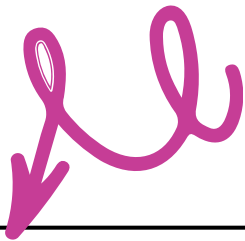
Calm, patient, encouraging, kind, supportive.

Activity 8 Your turn!

2) What kind of person do you think Billy is? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. **2 marks**

This is an independent thinking task. Complete your answer independently before discussing your ideas. How do I approach this kind of question? It's time to be a **word detective!**

Pupils should use this scaffold to guide them to an answer.



1	The focus on this question is Billy. Underline and words or phrases that are about Billy.
2	Look at the phrases that you have underlined. Using one or two words, write down a suggestion about what kind of person you think Billy is.
3	Use your sticky notes to help you.
4	Your response should have two sentences: your first sentence should give your impression of Billy. The second sentence should present your evidence.

Write your response here:

Your answer could have suggested that Billy is:

Funny, resilient, kind, able to not take himself too seriously.

Your response could have looked something like this:

I think Billy is a resilient person, who doesn't take himself too seriously. For example, when the text says 'As I turn back towards the mirror for another attempt,' this shows that Billy is trying really hard to communicate clearly in his new school.



Make sure you have used evidence to support your idea, to get the full two marks

Activity 9 Optional challenge

Can you write one short paragraph, that predicts what will happen on Billy's first day at school?

Activity 10 Reflection

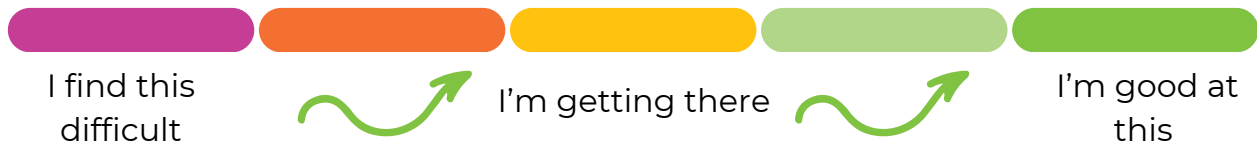
Today you have:

- **Given and explained** the meaning of words in context.
- **Used your word detective skills** to understand new vocabulary.
- **Retrieved** key parts of an extract.
- **Compared key elements** within the text.

For each bullet point, discuss how confident you felt during the session. Use the scale below to help you.

Don't forget to record your marks on your tracker!

Trackers are available at the back of the pupil workbook.



About the author (optional discussion)

About this author

Helen Rutter is an author and comedian. *The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh* was her first novel, and won the Waterstones Children's Book of the Month, as well as being nominated for a number of other awards. Helen took inspiration for her book from her son who has a stammer, as she wanted to write something that he would enjoy reading and would be able to relate to.

Have you enjoyed today's book?

Perhaps you could read the full book? Or you could take a look at some other books written by the same author!

If there is time, discuss the point above with pupils. Reading for pleasure empowers pupils to make significant strides in their literacy journey.