



World Words

The Same Earth

Kei Miller

Teacher's Notes

The Text

This extract from Kei Miller's novel, *The Same Earth*, tells the story of Jonathon and his supposed drowning in the river. The children of the village rush back to report Jonathon's disappearance, with just his shoes by the river bank. Local legend seems to dictate what happened. The story, as the novel, is set in Jamaica, and some of the language reflects the way that English is spoken in parts of the Caribbean.

Method

It is important that the students do some creative thinking before they engage with the text, either by listening or by reading. Use the Pre-listening 1 activity first. As the text will be heard as part of a longer broadcast, prepare students for the interview part as well before they listen to it – Pre-Listening Activity 2.

When they have had the opportunity to explore the theme of the text and have contributed some of their own ideas, then they are ready to listen. There is no 'best' way to do this, but the authors would suggest the following method:

1. Students listen to the whole broadcast, checking their activity 2 charts while doing so. Ask them to recall, orally, any words or phrases from the extract after the listening has finished. Write these on the board.
2. Use the words on the board to orally reconstruct the story, as a class activity.
3. Hand out the text and read through. Interrupt with questions if appropriate.
4. Allow the students to listen again, this time with the text in front of them.

Now the students are ready to move onto the final part of the activities. These consist of following through ideas or themes.

Pre-Listening Activity 1

This pre-listening activity consist of a an exercise which might at first appear to be counter-intuitive: the students are being asked to answer questions about a story that they haven't yet heard or read. However, the answers they need are in their imaginations and if they discuss and find their own possible answers then they will construct their own story. Of course, their stories will differ from the one that they will hear even though the basic framework will be the same.

Students should work in small groups and suggest possible answers, and should be reminded that some of the answers might be suggested by later questions. They do not need to write the story down, though they may wish to make notes. Once their stories are agreed upon the group should agree how they will tell their story to the rest of the class.

Pre-listening activity 2

Give students the second pre-listening activity. Ask them to read through the quotations from the radio broadcast and decide who is saying what - writer or student. Then they must choose which category the quotation comes from and to write the appropriate letter in the appropriate square (see answer key below). They then listen to the broadcast to check their answers. The listening activity will have been made easier by this process of identification first.

- a. "First of all they live in a rural area and that's why they just run from the river to tell the mother that he's drowned in the river."
- b. "I've moved all around the world and I found, eventually, that we all the same people"
- c. "She comes into Jamaican folklore partly from Africa, from the character called Water Mumma, and partly from the English mermaid. She becomes a combination of both."
- d. "I know people like Jonathon and I know people like Miss Dorcas. In a way they are all invented, but then they're invented because we all are, in a way."
- e. We know legends don't exist, or they're not true so I'm just wondering why you use something like this to write a story."
- f. "I try to make (the children's) voices texture the story, so they say that *he was drowned* rather than *he drowned* and when they ask the question they said *don't they all had told him* which is how kids in that area would speak.
- g. "I think Jonathon is a risk taker, a very naughty boy. We all know who because we're all one of those."
- h. "We all have the same concerns and conflicts. By the end all the characters in the village, they realise that even though life had taken them to all kinds of different places, no matter where they were, they were always on the same earth."
- i. "When the children were talking we found that a lot of their words were put in ... wrong, the tense was off or they used *don't* at the wrong place."

	language	description	characters	River Mumma	'The Same Earth'
The author	f		d	c	b, h
The students	i	a	g	e	

During Listening

1. While you listen to the broadcast the students should check their chart from pre-listening activity 2.
2. Ask them to feed back any words or phrases they remember. It doesn't matter how disjointed they are. As a class activity they will try to rebuild the text from collective memory. Some students will remember parts that others didn't.

Write what they feedback (and is collectively agreed on) on the board - writing the words or phrases in more or less the position on the board to correspond with where it occurred in the text. Gradually a patchwork of remembered phrases will appear. When the ideas stop flowing, prompt the class to paraphrase the story, using what they see on the board as notes.

Now play the recording again and then repeat the activity to see how many more of the gaps can be filled in.

3. Hand out a copy of the text. Allow a few minutes for the students to check what they have recalled with what is on the page.

4. Students read through the story. Check comprehension by a few questions as they do this. For example:

- 'Drowned' is a colloquial version of which verb? (*drown = drowned*)
- Who is Jonathon's mother? (*Miss Dorcas*)
- What game were the children playing (*Hide and seek - all children except one hide and the one has to find the others*)
- What was it in Jonathon's character that made the children believe he had gone into the river?
- What is the significance of the (imagine) golden comb? (*a legend where children are lured into the river by the promise of a gold comb on a rock*)
- What were the men and women doing in the river with their trousers and skirts tucked up? (*Looking for Jonathon's body*)
- What did Jonathon think his fate would be?

5. Now play the audio again. The students have the text in front of them.

After Listening Activity

A. A prank is a practical joke. Sometimes, as in Jonathon's case, they have unexpected and unpleasant outcomes. Students are asked to quiz each other to see if they, or people they know, have had spranks go wrong.

B. The students are given some pranks played by some people for April Fool's Day (April 1st, a day when traditionally pranks are played on friends and family). The students are being asked to consider the pranks and choose one or two or three and decide what might go wrong - what unforeseen consequences could make an

innocent joke into something that wasn't fun. Students to work in groups. Feedback can be shared orally or can be written as homework.

C. The language points to be picked up are mainly pronunciation or grammar changes, and are used in the text where speech is indicated. Point out that these are variations of English, not 'wrong' English. The points that might be picked up are:

drownded

Don't it?

Don't they had all seen....?

And don't they had told him....?

Dat him luck was going to run out

drowned

Doesn't he? / Do they?

Hadn't they all seen?

And hadn't they told him ...?

That his luck was going to run out

The Same Earth

River Mumma had taken her poor brother – Miss Dorcas' son. Just like the legend. Tempted him with the golden comb. Now he was drowned. And when Miss Dorcas heard this, she too collapsed without anyone to catch her. Flat out on her doorstep. The other children who had been playing by the river soon arrived – they had not run as fast as the little girl who was energized by a grief she should not have known at that young age. They backed up her story. Yes Miss Dorcas. Yes, is true. Her little boy was drowned. No. They didn't see exactly how or when. They was just playing a game of hide and seek by the river and everybody know Jonathon was a boy who loved to play it dangerous – loved to go into the river and hide. Hold his breath under water whenever someone came near, for who would look for him in the waters? Don't it? Don't they had all seen him do that before? Yes. Yes they had. And don't they had told him, him play too dangerous. Dat him luck was going to run out – don't they had told him? Yes, the children all agreed with each other. They had told him. Well, sure as fate, this time the worst had happened. They found his shoes by the river, but nothing else. All the children called and called. They went into the water. His sister called and called. And it was over an hour. The sun was about to set, and all of them had looked up just in time to see the light glinting off of a rock. And didn't all of them see it? Yes – all the children nodded that they had – glinting on the stone, something that looked like a golden comb – a sure sign of the River Mumma who tempts children her way, then drowns them.

...

Soon everybody was walking down to the Rio Bueno with candles and lamps. They had to hold Miss Dorcas up and carry her the whole way. The children were all silent and serious as they made up the rear of the procession. At the river, men rolled up their pants to their knees and women tied their skirts up high. ...They all walked into the water, slowly down and around it, feeling the bottom with their feet, searching for something softer and larger than simple river stones.

All this time little Jonathon watched from on top of a mango tree fearing what was surely going to happen to him for he realized he had taken a joke too far this time. He was in trouble and he knew it. If Miss Dorcas beat him all the way into next year, he would count himself lucky.