

Language and text features, comprehension

Collections 1: Use It Again “From Corned Beef to Captain Cook: The Art of Michel Tuffery”

From Corned Beef to Captain Cook:

The Art of Michel Tuffery

by Iona McNaughton



Imagine a bull made out of three hundred empty corned beef tins. Now imagine ten of them – all the size of real bulls that you see in paddocks. That's a lot of tins.

Michel Tuffery is the artist who made the bulls. Once he even made two bulls with motors inside them. The bulls paraded through the streets of Christchurch, and at the end of the parade there was a bullfight. Flames and fireworks shot from their mouths and lit up the night. Everyone clapped and cheered.

Michel got the idea for his fighting bulls from stories his mother had told him about celebrating Christmas in Sāmoa with faga'ofe (home-made fireworks). “I decided to make a New Zealand version of faga'ofe,” he says.

Michel has also made giant fish out of squashed tuna tins and life-size baby turtles out of herring tins. Like the bulls, the turtles had motors inside them. He made them for the Sydney Olympic Games held in 2000, and Michel's daughter, Tiare, remembers riding on the back of one of the turtles when she was four.



This paragraph gives more specific information about the bulls mentioned in the first paragraph. It confirms the important idea that it was Tuffery who made the bulls.

Ideas are clearly linked from one paragraph to another. The inspiration for the bullfight and fireworks mentioned in paragraph 2 is explained in paragraph 3.

The brackets indicate that this is an explanation of the Samoan term faga'ofe.

The word “also” signals a link to an earlier idea (making large animals out of tins).

The repeated word “tins” is a further link to the ideas introduced in paragraphs 1 and 2.

The word “like” clarifies the link to the idea of the motorised bulls in the previous two paragraphs.

The commas indicate that Tiare is the name of Michel's daughter.

The repeated word “imagine” links the ideas in the first two sentences. This link gently leads the reader into visualising how dramatic the bulls would look. (The photograph adds visual support.)

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Tiare was mentioned for the first time at the end of the previous paragraph. She then becomes the link to lead into the ideas about her father's motivation for his art.

The last sentence of this paragraph leads directly into the first sentence of the next paragraph. This structure is repeated in many of the following paragraphs. Some examples are highlighted.

Tiare loves the bright colours that her father uses in his work. “A lot of the things that Dad makes are about his culture and his family. He also talks about how important it is to look after the sea and the earth. I like the way Dad uses painting to explain things that people usually write about.”

Michel reckons that being an artist is like being a journalist. First, he does some research. He talks to people and asks a lot of questions. Then he makes a painting or a sculpture or a video, that includes some of the answers to his questions. That's what a journalist does with words in a newspaper, on the radio, or on television.

Michel says that art was his first language. It was the way he told stories. When he was six, he couldn't read, spell, or write. He drew instead – and he knew he was much better at drawing than he was at writing.

“I remember sitting at my desk at school. My book had all these pages with lines on them. I didn't know what the lines were for, and so I did drawings on the pages instead of writing words.”

At weekends, his mum and dad often took the family to the museum. Michel still remembers gazing up at the giant, life-size moa on display in the museum. “Wow,” he thought. “That's so cool.” That memory helped to inspire him to make his bulls the same size as they are in real life.

This links back to the main ideas about the tin bulls on the previous pages.

