

1999 Was a Strange Year

A story teaching months forwards and backwards

by Alex Case

Possible activities

Difficult vocabulary in the story which you might need to change or use pictures to illustrate includes:

(January) sales

traffic jam

exam

typhoon

acorns

relieved

As you read the first half of the story, elicit the next month and things that he might do in that month, read out the page, and maybe ask students whether the things that he does each month going forwards are strange or (probably) not. Most of the pages have accompanying actions to make the meanings clear and get the students involved, namely:

waking up

taking down decorations

trying on clothes (or holding them in front of you)

patting the snow as you make a snowman

one hand being a flower coming up from under the other hand and getting larger

putting an umbrella up and rain coming down

holding a steering wheel, looking bored, and maybe beeping the horn

studying hard and holding your head as you try to remember

writing quickly

cutting and diving

hand and/ or mouth showing wind, then hands showing things falling

catching something that drifts back and forth as it comes down

searching on the ground and picking things up

putting things up on the wall and looking happy as you rip open a present

When you reach the 11 chimes part in the middle of the book, elicit what is strange.

In the second half of the book, elicit the next month (going backwards each time) and what the opposite actions might be, maybe reminding them of the forward part by re-reading the forward part page, repeating the forward part action or doing a backwards action.

In the final part, elicit why he is running down stairs, what he sees on the calendar and/ or how he feels.

Reading a second time, you can get students to do the actions, or you can do the actions and get students to say what you are doing.

After reading, you could elicit other seasonal things for each month, including ones which are more relevant to the students.

As a project, students could draw the pictures for this story and/ or write their own similar stories with different forwards and backwards actions for each month.

1999 Was a Strange Year

a story teaching months forwards and backwards by Alex Case

Two-page version

1999 was a strange year for Alex.

In January, he jumped out of bed, ran down stairs and looked up at the new calendar that his dad had brought back from work. Then he took down the Xmas decorations and his mother found him some nice new clothes in the January sales.

In February, he made a nice fat snowman and gave chocolates to the prettiest girl in school.

In March, he saw flowers coming out from under the snow.

In April, he put his umbrella up as he rushed to school in the cold spring rain.

In May, his family had a picnic after sitting in traffic jams for two hours.

In June, he stayed up late trying to remember everything in his exercise books.

In July, he rushed to write as much as he could in his end of year exams.

In August, he sliced up the watermelon and then dived into the pool.

In September, a typhoon blew all the apples off the tree and onto the ground.

In October, he caught an autumn leaf as it fell off a tree.

In November, he went into the woods to find acorns on the ground.

In December, he put the decorations up and got presents from Santa.

And on New Year's Eve he heard Big Ben's bell bong 11 times.

So, what's so strange about that?

Well, just before bong number twelve, the whole year started going backwards.

In December, he took the decorations down and gave presents to Santa.

In November, he put acorns on the ground and walked out of the woods.

In October, he threw an autumn leaf into a tree.

In September, a typhoon sucked all the apples off of the ground and onto the tree.

In August, he jumped out the pool and stuck a watermelon back together.

In July, he rushed to erase all his answers off his exams.

In June, he stayed up late trying to forget everything in his exercise books.

In May, his family packed up their uneaten picnic and drove backwards out of the traffic jams all the way home.

In April, he put his umbrella down as the cold spring rain shot up into the clouds.

In March, the flowers hid under the snow.

In February, he flattened his snowman and took chocolates away from the prettiest girl at school.

In January, he put up the Xmas decorations and his mother took his clothes to the January sales.

And when it got back to January first, he jumped out of bed, ran down stairs and looked up at the new calendar. It said January 2000, so maybe time hadn't gone backwards, he'd just fallen asleep watching New Year TV. Feeling relieved, he walked backwards out of the room and up the stairs, and got back into bed.

Page by page version

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