

Figure 31.3

Text for Cooperative Comprehension Lesson

(McEwan, 1994)

I leaned over to pick up my bike, and a flutter of movement at that upper-story window caught my eye. I gave a cry of surprise. The windows were covered with grime, but I could see a shadowy outline of someone standing there. I gave a half wave of my hand, but the person dropped the curtain and vanished.

I was curious. Maybe I could pretend to be selling magazines and ring the doorbell. But what if the door opened and the mysterious figure grabbed me and pulled me inside? I shivered, picked up my bike, and headed for town.

Back in familiar territory again, I waved to the mailperson. (I have to call him that, even though he's a man, because my friend Tracy at school insists on it.)

"Hi, Joshua," he called. "Sorry I didn't deliver any important mail to your house today."

Last spring I'd written to the governor, and everybody in town seemed to know about it.

"Hey!" I called to him. "Wait up." I pushed my disabled bike as fast as I could down the sidewalk.

"That tire looks as flat as a pancake!" He laughed uproariously at his humor. It was a good thing he was delivering mail for a living and not telling jokes.

"Do you know who lives in that big house on James Court?" I asked. "The one with the jungle in the front yard?"

The mailperson pushed back his safari hat and wiped his brow with a grimy red bandanna.

"Shore do," he said. "I been deliverin' mail on this route in Grandville for twenty-five years." He turned and started to push his cart on down the sidewalk.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Who?"

"Who what?" he asked.

I was beginning to feel as though I were talking to a five-year old.

"Who lives in the house?" I asked.

"Aw, shucks, Joshua," he replied. "I can't tell you that."

"Why not?"

"Confidentiality," he said softly.

"What's that?"

He lowered his voice still further. "Can't talk about people on my route."

"I don't get it."

"Well, how would you like it if I blabbed all the secrets I know about you to the neighborhood?"

"Whaddya mean?" I asked.

"Well," he drawled, "We mail carriers know an awful lot about the people we deliver mail to. We know where your relatives live, how often they write, if you haven't paid your bills, and where you keep your money. It's all stored up here." He tapped the hard surface of his safari hat.

I wondered if he remembered that I'd only gotten three letters from my dad in the whole year we'd lived in Grandville.

"And that's where it's going to stay," he affirmed, smacking his hat once more for emphasis. "You'll have to find out who lives at 816 James Court from somebody else."

"What if I asked you a question, and you could blink once if the answer's yes and twice if it's no?" I suggested. "You wouldn't have to say a word."

"I wasn't born yesterday, Joshua," he said. "My lips are sealed."