



### About the Book

Text Type: Fiction/Personal Recount    Page Count: 26    Word Count: 1,617

### Book Summary

In *The Trouble with English*, readers meet a young girl named Ting Yao who has moved from China to the United States. Written in first person, Ting tells about her difficulties learning to read, write, and speak English. Her humorous appraisal of some of the nonsensical parts of the language is sure to strike a familiar note with many readers. Her dogged determination will inspire readers who may themselves be struggling to master our oftentimes confusing language.

### About the Lesson

#### Targeted Reading Strategy

- Connect to prior knowledge

#### Objectives

- Connect to prior knowledge to understand text
- Analyze a character in the story
- Identify and use compound sentences
- Understand, identify, and use idioms

#### Materials

**Green text** indicates resources available on the website

- Book—*The Trouble with English* (copy for each student)
- Chalkboard or dry erase board
- Foreign language audiotape or CD
- **Analyze character, compound sentences, idioms worksheets**
- **Discussion cards**



Indicates an opportunity for students to mark in the book. (All activities may be demonstrated by projecting the book on an interactive whiteboard or completed with paper and pencil if the books are reused.)

#### Vocabulary

\*Bold vocabulary words also appear in a pre-made lesson for this title on [VocabularyA-Z.com](http://VocabularyA-Z.com).

- **Content words:**

Story critical: **accent** (n.), **confused** (v.), **expressions** (n.), **idioms** (n.), **language** (n.), **pronounce** (v.)

### Before Reading

#### Build Background

- Play a short portion of a foreign language audiotape or CD, or a foreign language radio station. Ask students to tell what the person said. If playing a tape or radio is not an option, ask students if they have ever heard or tried to speak a foreign language. Have them talk about what it feels like to not understand what another person is saying and what it feels like to not be able to make themselves understood.
- Discuss how easy or how difficult students think it would be to learn a new language. Ask how long they think it would take.

## Preview the Book

### Introduce the Book

- Give students a copy of the book and have them preview the front and back covers and read the title. Have students discuss what they see on the covers and offer ideas as to what kind of book this is and what it might be about.
- Direct students to the table of contents. Remind them that the table of contents provides an overview of what the book is about. Each chapter title provides an idea of what they will read about in the book.

### Introduce the Reading Strategy: **Connect to prior knowledge**

- Explain to students that thinking about what they already know about the topic of a book as they read helps them understand and remember what they read.
- Model using the table of contents as a way to connect to prior knowledge.  
*Think-aloud: The first two chapters have something to do with a new country and a new language. Years ago I traveled to Paris, where everyone speaks French. One day I tried to go grocery shopping. I couldn't read any of the labels on the cans, so I had to act out things so the clerk could help me. Everyone in the grocery store was laughing, including me. You should have seen me trying to buy chicken! (Tailor comments to fit your personal experience.)*
- Show students the title page. Talk about the information on the page (title of book, author's name, illustrator's name).
- Have students preview the rest of the book, and look at and discuss what they see in the illustrations. Ask if any of the illustrations remind them of experiences they have had or have heard about from friends.
- As students read, encourage them to use other reading strategies in addition to the targeted strategy presented in this section.

### Introduce the Vocabulary

- Remind students of the strategies they can use to work out words they don't know. For example, they can use what they know about letter and sound correspondence to figure out the word. They can look for base words, prefixes, and suffixes. They can use the context to work out meanings of unfamiliar words.
- Write the following story-critical words from the content vocabulary on the board: *accent*, *confused*, *language*, and *pronounce*.
- Explain that these four words can be found in the story and that knowing what these words mean will help students better understand events of the story. Divide students into groups. Give each group of students four pieces of blank paper, and have them write one of the four vocabulary words on each page. For each word, have them write or draw what they know about the word. Create a definition for each word using student's prior knowledge.
- Give each group of students a dictionary. Have a volunteer from each group locate the word *accent* in the dictionary. Invite a volunteer to read the definition for *accent*.
- Have students follow along on page 11 as you read the sentence in which *accent* is found to confirm the meaning of the word. Repeat the exercise with the remaining vocabulary words.

### Set the Purpose

- Invite students as they read the book to think about what they know about learning to read, write, and speak English properly.


## During Reading

### Student Reading

- **Guide the reading:** Have students read pages 5 through 12. Ask them to pay special attention to words or phrases in the book that remind them of experiences they have had or have heard about from people they know. If they finish before everyone else, ask them to go back and reread.
- When they have finished reading, have students tell any experiences that came to mind while they were reading. Prompt as needed with questions about experiences in unfamiliar surroundings or about skills that were new to students.
- Model making connections to prior knowledge.

**Think-aloud:** *Ting's story reminds me of a word that I have trouble pronouncing correctly. It's the name of a woman I used to work for—Lois. No matter how hard I try, I stumble over the middle sound. If I break it into its syllables, I can see that it's LO-IS, but I keep getting it mixed up with other words that have the same spelling in the middle, like choice and noise. Even though I know English very well, I still stumble over some words sometimes.* (Tailor your comments to fit personal situation.)

- Have students read the remainder of the book, continuing to connect experiences in their own lives with the events in the story.

 Have students make a question mark in their book beside any word they do not understand or cannot pronounce. Encourage them to use the strategies they have learned to read each word and figure out its meaning.

## After Reading


- Ask students what words, if any, they marked in their book. Use this opportunity to model how they can read these words using decoding strategies and context clues.

### Reflect on the Reading Strategy

- Discuss how making connections with what they already know about the topic of the book keeps them actively involved in the reading process and helps them remember what they've read.

### Teach the Comprehension Skill: **Analyze character**

- **Discussion:** Ask students if they were reminded of other experiences in their own lives as they read the rest of the story. Ask if any students had a challenge similar to Ting's that they had to face or master. Ask how the experience was for them and if the situation continues to be challenging. Remind students that everyone has challenges throughout their lives and that each success builds courage to face other challenges.
- **Introduce and model:** Review or explain that the characters in a story are the people or animals in it and that some may be more important than others. Review that Ting, the person telling the story, is by far the most important character in this book.
- Review or explain that some writers let their readers get to know a character through the character's words, thoughts, and actions. Have students turn to page 10 in the book. Read the paragraph. Ask students what they learn about Ting from her words. (She feels alone and confused because she doesn't understand the language.)
- **Check for understanding:** Have students read page 11. Ask them to tell what else they learn about Ting. (She is trying to learn to speak the language but knows that her accent makes her words sound different.) Have them find the sentence that tells them this information.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [analyze character worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their responses.

 Have students use the last page of their book to write a short paragraph telling what they might do to help a foreign student who does not speak English well. Have students share their paragraphs with the group.

## Build Skills

### Grammar and Mechanics: Compound sentences

- Write the following sentence on the board: *I am nine years old, and I came here with my mom, dad, and little brother from Shanghai, China.* Have students turn to page 5 and locate this sentence in the text. Ask students to identify two separate sentences within this longer sentence. (*I am nine years old. I came here with my mom, dad, and little brother from Shanghai, China.*)
- Point out that the original sentence is an example of a *compound sentence*. Review or explain that a *compound sentence* is a sentence consisting of *two or more simple sentences separated by a comma and a conjunction*.
- Review examples of conjunctions with students (*and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*). Write these examples on the board. Ask students to identify the conjunction that joined the two parts of the original sample sentence (*and*).
- Discuss why the author chose to join two sentences of similar content together (compound sentences with conjunctions help writers make their writing more fluent and interesting).
- Ask students to read page 11 and locate two compound sentences in the text: *I'm trying very hard to learn to speak well, but my Chinese accent makes some words I say sound different. Most of my friends understand how difficult it is, and they try to help me pronounce the words correctly.* Ask a volunteer to identify the conjunctions in each sentence (*but, and*). Ask a different volunteer to break each compound sentence into two simpler sentences.



**Check for understanding:** Ask students to reread page 16 and identify the compound sentence (*I got up to pull together with the others in class, but no one else got up.*) Have students circle the conjunction in the compound sentence and rewrite the sentence as two simpler sentences at the bottom of the page.

- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [compound sentences worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their responses.

### Word Work: Idioms

- Have students turn to page 13. Read the page with students. Explain that some writers use special phrases called *idioms* to make their writing more interesting and less formal.
- Direct students to page 14. Have them find the phrase *pulling the wool over my eyes*. Tell students that this is an idiom because the meaning can't be figured out by looking at the meaning of each word. The meaning comes from the group of words, and it means *to deceive*. It dates back to the early 1800s and comes from a time in history when men wore powdered wigs. Pulling the wool down over a man's eyes blinded him temporarily. Explain that readers don't need to know the origin of an idiom to understand its meaning.
- Have students find another idiom on page 14 (*put me on*) and ask a volunteer to tell in his or her own words what the phrase means.
- **Check for understanding:** Write the following idioms on the board: *Hold everything. Pull yourselves together. Don't get carried away. Stop beating around the bush.* Have students work with a partner to discuss what they think each idiom means. Discuss each group's response as a class to determine the meaning of each idiom. Then ask each pair of students to think of two other common idioms and share them with the class.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [idioms worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their responses.

## Build Fluency

### Independent Reading

- Invite students to read their book independently. Additionally, invite partners to take turns reading parts of the book to each other.

### Home Connection

- Give students their book to take home to read with parents, caregivers, siblings, or friends.

### Extend the Reading

#### Writing Connection

Have students pretend they have moved to a country where no one speaks their language. Tell them to write about an imaginary experience at school, while shopping, at a sporting event, or at another place of their choice. Tell them to include how they feel and how they handle the situation. Have students share their stories with the group. Discuss the ways in which different students responded to the challenge of not speaking the language.

#### Social Studies Connection

Provide resources for students to research the buildings, art, dress, and geography of another country. Have them also research several words of that country's native language, such as counting from 1 to 10 or saying, *My name is \_\_\_\_\_. What is your name?* Have students report their findings to the group in poster form.

#### Skill Review

**Discussion cards** covering comprehension skills and strategies not explicitly taught with the book are provided as an extension activity. The following is a list of some ways these cards can be used with students:

- Use as discussion starters for literature circles.
- Have students choose one or more cards and write a response, either as an essay or as a journal entry.
- Distribute before reading the book and have students use one of the questions as a purpose for reading.
- Conduct a class discussion as a review before the book quiz.

### Assessment

#### Monitor students to determine if they can:

- consistently use the strategy of making connections to prior knowledge to understand text
- accurately identify a character's thoughts, feelings, and actions in discussion and on a worksheet
- consistently recognize compound sentences in discussion and on a worksheet
- consistently identify and use idioms in discussion and on a worksheet

#### Comprehension Checks

- **Book Quiz**
- **Retelling Rubric**