TEACHER: Oh, tell me a little bit about what you know.

STUDENT: Meerkats stand up to look... ...to help them look for predators.

TEACHER: Oh, OK. Do they have predators? What...what sort of animal might be a predator to a meerkat?

STUDENT: A jackal.

TEACHER: OK. Anything else you already know about them?

STUDENT: That they... That they dance around a scorpion and then bite off its tail so they don't get stung.

TEACHER: Oh, goodness gracious. They're pretty clever, aren't they? OK. Off you go again. We'll start from the beginning.

STUDENT:

"Dash was a young meerkat

no bigger than a squirrel.

"He lived in a hot desert...

"..dry desert with

the rest of his family.

"At night they all slept in a burrow

under the ground.

"When the sun rose

in the early morning,

"the meerkats went to look

for tiny animals to eat,

"but there was danger all around.

"Foxes, jackals and eagles

were always out hunting.

"So the older meerkats took it

in turns to watch for danger.

"Dash and the other young meerkats would come out of the burrow when they knew that it was safe.

"The meerkats on watch always stood upright.

"When they were standing straight and tall,

"they could see a long way into the distance.

"They were the guards.

"One guard would watch from the top of a rock.

"Another would balance on a high branch of a bush.

"Dash the young meerkat learnt to listen for danger.

"If the guards made a soft little chirp...

"..little chirps, he knew that it was safe to be above ground.

"But if the guards saw an enemy, they made a loud warning call.

"Then Dash would race for the safety of the burrow with all the other meerkats.

"Each young meerkat had a special teacher.

"An older meerkat called Sandy took care of Dash.

"She was not his mother but she took him into the desert every day.

"Once Dash wandered, Sandy ran after him and caught him.

"Then she picked up...

"..him up by the neck and brought him back.

"Dash learnt that he must never go out of her sight."

TEACHER: Why do you think Sandy ran after Dash when he wandered off?

STUDENT: Maybe she saw a predator? Or maybe she just wanted to look after him?

TEACHER: And why do you think it said he must never go out of her sight?

STUDENT: In case there's a predator and he could hurt himself or die.

TEACHER: OK. Keep reading.

"After that, Dash stayed close to Sandy all the time.

"Her job was to teach him how to hunt for food.

"One morning, Sandy showed Dash the best places to find spiders and grubs.

"She worked very fast indeed, digging lots of holes with her front paws.

"Dash watched her and soon he started to dig too.

"They were both very busy.

"At last Dash found a fat spider all by himself.

"He was learning fast."

TEACHER: Alright, we might just move along a little bit. And Sandy was teaching Dash how to catch lizards. Why would Dash need to learn how to catch lizards?

STUDENT: Because they're another thing that a meerkat eats.

TEACHER: Mmm. And, oh! There's a scorpion. My goodness. So in this story, Sandy teaches Dash about scorpions too.

STUDENT: Mm.

TEACHER: OK, let's read on from here.

STUDENT:

"All at once, Dash and Sandy...

"..heard a warning call.

"Suddenly every meerkat was racing for the burrow.

"Dash and Sandy did not wait to see what was coming. They ran.

"And that was just as well because they were in real danger.

"An eagle was swooping down towards them.

"They could hear it coming as they rushed through the air.

"The eagle tried to grab them with its claws

"but Dash and Sandy tumbled into the burrow just in time."

TEACHER: Oh, my goodness. That was lucky, wasn't it? Keep going.

STUDENT:

"All the meerkats were safe once again

"because the guards had kept watch, and now safe in their...

"..in his busy... After his busy morning, Dash was very tired.

"The whole family was tired. They flopped down for a sleep.

"The meerkats were all together inside the burrow and away from danger for a while."

TEACHER: Here it says, "The meerkats were all together inside the burrow and away from danger for a while. What do you think the author meant when he said "Away from danger for a while"?

STUDENT: Because in the morning there will be danger.

TEACHER: What sort of danger might there be in the morning?

STUDENT: There might be eagles.

TEACHER: So the eagle might come back? What else might there be?

STUDENT: There might be a jackal again.

TEACHER: Mmm. What else?

STUDENT: And there might be... ...scorpions.

TEACHER: Maybe. Yeah. So all those things that he learned about, he has to know how to deal with, doesn't he? Tomorrow and the next day and the next day. So they were safe now in their burrow, but only for a while.

STUDENT: Yeah.