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Hello!



It seems that not a month goes by where we don't hear of one 'major overhaul' or another in education. Whilst there is certainly a lot of progress to be made, and efforts to improve outcomes – for both teachers and pupils – are generally welcomed, the constant change can feel a bit overwhelming.

So, just as the dust is beginning to settle from the Curriculum and Assessment Review (hear what veteran teacher and leader Kevin Harcombe has to say on that on page 13; spoiler – he's not impressed), the SEND review is on the horizon. At the time of writing, the white paper has yet to be released, and so we wait with bated breath. As soon as we have more information, rest assured we'll be hard at work parsing what it means for those of you on the front lines, but for now, Penny Whelan is here to share her tips on how to make assessment processes a bit smoother for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (see page 52), without adding a ton of work to everyone's slate.

Speaking of assessment, if just the thought of a lesson observation is making you sweat through your shirt, we have the article for you. Alan Shields delves into his years of experience – both good and bad – to bring us practical ideas on how to get through obs without breaking down (page 34), and don't worry, there are no 'deep breaths' in sight.

On a more adventurous front, our book topic this month takes on Holly Webb's fantastic historical caper, *A Girl's Guide to Spying*, following a fictionalised account of the real-life impact that the Girl Guides had on World War 1. Literacy expert Kate Heap provides some marvellous activities to help explore the book, including solving ciphers and questioning gender stereotypes by way of the Suffragettes. Read all about her ideas on page 63.

As always, thanks for reading, and remember – if you can get through January, you can get through anything. See you soon,

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor
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Don't miss our next issue, available from 13th April

POWERED BY...



DANNY NICHOLSON
 on how you can use AfL techniques to stop guessing what your pupils know in science

“Get instant insight into how well your children understand key ideas”

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PHILLIP CAVENEV
 shares activity ideas for crafting better (and more thrilling) writing, with help from Charles Dickens

“Classic literature can teach us many things – not least the art of the exciting story”

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SAM MARSDEN
 shares some simple games to help pupils get in touch with their surroundings, regulate and develop focus

“Through shared play and gentle movement, pupils can reset their nervous systems”

p78



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We're all ears!

We want to make sure our magazine is a brilliant resource for teachers and are always striving to improve. We love hearing from real teachers about what they liked and what they would change. Got feedback about this issue? Contact us via the details in the yellow box below – we'd love to hear from you!

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PRIMARY**

We want to hear from you!

Get in touch with your rants, comments, photos and ideas.



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†AI - Image modified with AI assistance



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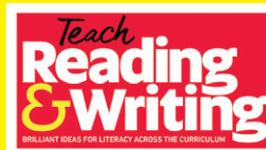
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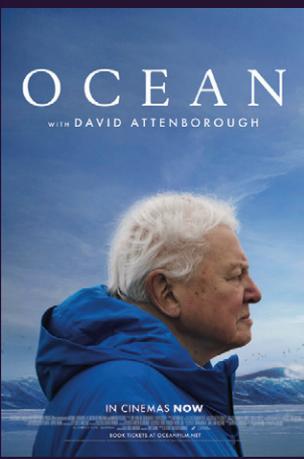
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INTO FILM

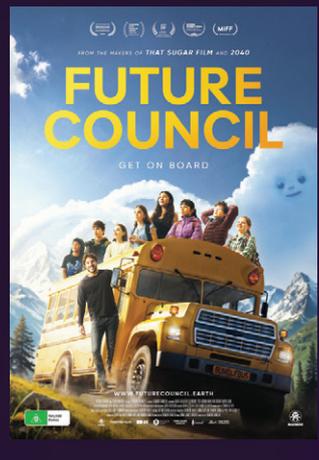
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Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research



Count your Carbon

Eco-Schools and Keep Britain Tidy have launched the first national Count Your Carbon report to give schools a new opportunity to take measurable climate action. The report highlights that the daily school run is the single biggest source of carbon emissions associated with England's schools, with the hot dinner one of the most significant contributors to emissions within the school gates, accounting for around 16 per cent of a school's carbon footprint.

Drawing on data from more than 1,600 schools across the country, the Count Your Carbon report also shows that pupil commuting accounts for 21 per cent of a school's total carbon footprint, making it the largest

individual contributor – ahead of electricity use, which represents 11 per cent – and any other single emission category.

When expanded to include staff travel, school vehicles and school trips, transport generates around 40 per cent of total school emissions. Taken together, this means that the full transport footprint of a school now outweighs the emissions from heating and powering its buildings, which together make up 27 per cent.

Read the full report at tinyurl.com/tp-CountYourCarbon

3 INSTANT LESSONS... (You're welcome)



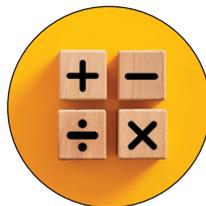
POETRY BY HEART

Poetry by Heart, the nation's poetry speaking competition and poetry teaching website, is extending, and launching a new timeline of poems to help KS1 pupils to discover the joy of poetry and speaking it aloud. Find poems, plus full teaching notes, from names such as Joseph Coelho, at tinyurl.com/tp-PbH4plus



MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

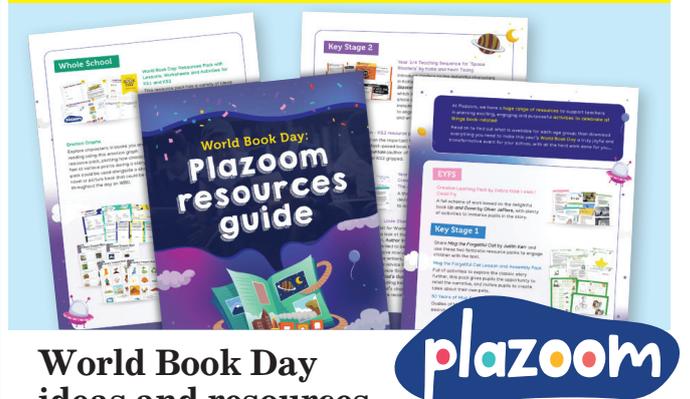
The Daily Mile Foundation, in collaboration with Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH), has launched a free mental health toolkit to help schools support confidence, resilience and self-esteem through daily physical activity. Learn more and register at tinyurl.com/tp-MHtoolkit26



POSITIVE PLAY MATHS STARTERS

Primary teacher Sophie Watkins has created an interactive site for KS2 SATs maths practice, including free maths starters, paper trials, worksheets, question sets and more. Subscriptions are also available for extended content. Take a look, at ks2satsready.co.uk

→→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**



World Book Day ideas and resources

Plan exciting, engaging and purposeful activities to celebrate all things book-related with this free guide, where all the hard work involved in hunting for suitable resources, activity ideas, worksheets and more has been done for you! Download your free copy at tinyurl.com/tp-PlzWBD26



AI goals

At this year's Bett show (21-23 January), the education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, addressed the crowd for the official opening, announcing the government's "five goals for AI in education", which include "support [for children] to achieve and thrive in the digital world"; giving schools' workforces "the confidence and the expertise to make the most of digital and AI"; "safe and effective" edtech and AI tools for

teaching and learning; a "data-driven school system"; and "safe and reliable connectivity and infrastructure" for schools.

The education secretary was keen to make it clear that this wasn't any kind of bandwagon-jumping, saying: "AI can deliver the biggest leap forward for learning in centuries. Perhaps even since the invention of the printing press, when knowledge began to flow from the few to the many. And AI has shown its power for progress. Professor Demis Hassabis and Professor John Jumper used it for their revolutionary work on proteins. The work for which they won a Nobel Prize. If AI can help us to understand the building blocks of life, imagine what it can do for education. But it's my job not just to champion AI, but to make sure it's used safely and responsibly in education."

To read the speech in full, visit tinyurl.com/tp-BPbett



Mel Taylor-Bessent

Author and founder of Authorfy

What was primary school like for you?

I was a very quiet kid at school. English was my favourite subject; I loved it. If I was asked to write a page, I would honestly write 12, and that is no exaggeration. But I wasn't great at speaking up in class. However, one of my favourite memories is of my Year 3 teacher, who used to read to us. One day, while talking about books she loved as a child, she mentioned *The Enchanted Wood* by Enid Blyton, which was my favourite book. I told her it was my favourite, and she asked me to bring in a copy, and the next day I did, and she stopped the class early to read a chapter to us all. It was magical, and I felt so seen.

Tell us about School Readers...

The National Year of Reading is a campaign to address this steep decline in reading for pleasure. Only one in three children enjoy reading in their free time, which is the lowest level of reading for pleasure since recording started in 2005. School Readers is the largest school literacy charity in the UK, and it provides volunteers to listen to children read in primary schools. The programme is provided at no cost to schools, and for the National Year of Reading, they've pledged to deliver 1.5 million one-to-one reading sessions.

How can folks get involved?

School Readers is currently recruiting more volunteers, which is crucial for its plans, and it's also currently fundraising for a few initiatives. You can find more info about how to get involved – either as a volunteer or a school – at schoolreaders.org, email office@schoolreaders.org or call 01234 924111. You can also head to the website to hear from some of the children who have benefitted from the programme.

Read more about School Readers' pledge for the National Year of Reading, and how to get involved, at tinyurl.com/tp-SR26

OUP Word of the Year

Oxford University Press (OUP) has announced that the Oxford Children's Word of the Year for 2025 is *peace*.

AI was runner-up for the second year in a row, while *six-seven* was overwhelmingly voted as children's slang word of the year.

The research, which was carried out in 2025 and surveyed opinions from almost 5,000 pupils across the UK aged 6–14, highlighted children's awareness of current affairs. One in 10 children mentioned war when asked why they chose *peace* and highlighted specific conflicts such as Ukraine and Gaza. Words such as *need*, *want*, and *should* were frequently mentioned in their answers when calling for peace across the world.

To mark National Year of Reading, and in partnership with National Literacy Trust, OUP will be holding school events across the country, to encourage children to engage with different forms of reading and reflect on the words they read, hear, speak and learn about. Find out what's happening near you at tinyurl.com/tp-YoR26events



72% of school leaders face recruitment and retention challenges*

*ParentPay

Look ahead | Book ahead



HEDGEHOG WALK

From 30 March – 30 April, The

Wildlife Trust and Aardman Animations are encouraging pupils to walk, wheel, crawl or roll 3km – how far a hedgehog wanders in a single night – to raise vital funds for nature. Learn more at tinyurl.com/tp-HW26

EARTH DAY

Falling on 22 April, Earth Day raises awareness of the need to protect Earth's natural resources for future generations. The National Literacy Trust has free related resources for ages 3-14, including how to talk to pupils about the climate, at tinyurl.com/tp-NLtearth





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6 ways to encourage self-belief in kids

Celebrating grind, as well as greatness, is the beginning of the perfectly imperfect path to confidence

1 | CELEBRATE THE WOBBLE

Brilliance often lives in the wonky bits. Teach kids that the wobble is where the magic begins. Mistakes? They're not failures, they're feedback in fancy dress. Whether it's a backwards 'b' or stage fright in a drama lesson, show them that every stumble is a step towards becoming braver. Share your own glorious flops and laugh at them together. Kids don't need polished superheroes; they need real-life role models; sidekicks with muddy knees and a sparkle in their eye. Let's normalise trying, not just triumphing. Because self-belief doesn't grow in the winners' circle, it grows in the "Oops, let's try again".

2 | DITCH THE LABELS

Quiet, Hyper, Disruptive. Labels stick like Velcro, and kids wear them like itchy school jumpers. Instead, help pupils rewrite their story. That 'daydreamer'? Maybe she's a future poet. The 'fidgeter'? Perhaps a kinetic genius-in-waiting. Children become the words we feed them, so choose yours like they're golden tickets. Better yet, hand over the pen. Invite pupils to describe themselves using words that make them grin: *curious, kind, unstoppable.*

Build a classroom where quirks are currency and individuality is celebrated like it's Christmas morning. When a child starts to believe they are *enough* – just as they are – that's when they soar.

3 | BIG UP THE EFFORT

Praise is powerful, but only if it's aimed in the right direction. Swap "You're so clever!" for "You worked your socks off on that!" Focus on the *how*, not just the *what*. When we glorify the grind, we teach kids that their effort matters more than instant brilliance. It's the difference between building confidence and building pressure. Turn your classroom into a celebration of sweat, not just sparkle. Hang up 'Epic Effort of the Week' awards. Share stories of famous folk who flopped before they flew. Remind them: it's not about being the best, it's about being *better than you were yesterday*.



GAVIN OATTES is a motivational speaker and author. His latest book, *Confidently Lost: Finding Joy in the Chaos and Rediscovering What Matters Most in Life* (£12.99, Capstone), is out now.

4 | LET THEM LEAD

Hand over the steering wheel once in a while; let pupils lead something that matters. A book review, a morning warm-up, a class mascot's weekend diary. When a child sees that their voice, their ideas, their *presence* can shape the world around them, they start to believe they belong in it. Leadership isn't about loudness, it's about ownership. So make space for quiet leaders, creative leaders, kindness leaders. Kids don't need to wait until they're grown up to have influence, they just need someone to hand them the mic and say, "Go on, we're listening".

5 | MAKE ROOM FOR THE REAL STUFF

Sometimes self-belief starts with simply *being seen*. In the whirlwind of assessments, targets and deadlines (deep breaths, teacher friend), don't forget to ask: "How are you today?" and mean it. Let them know it's okay to have off days, slow days, "can't find my socks" days. Build rituals that allow kids to check in with themselves and each other, like feelings jars, morning doodles and gratitude walls. When children feel safe enough to show up as they are – messy emotions and all – they begin to trust themselves. And when they trust themselves, they back themselves. That's the real secret sauce of self-belief.

6 | BE THEIR MAGIC MIRROR

Ever noticed how children look to you like you're a walking, talking crystal ball? They study your reactions like detectives sniffing out clues. So give them gold. Show them what you see – not just the jumper fluff or forgotten homework, but the potential ready to burst out of them. Say things like, "I noticed how kind you were today," or "That was brave". Become the mirror that reflects their brilliance, especially on days when they can't quite see it for themselves. Self-belief often begins in the eyes of someone else. So be the grown-up who sees their spark, and keeps reminding them it's there.

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TICKETS





‘Well, that wasn’t worth waiting for’

The latest curriculum review has promised a shakeup, but just like its predecessors, is offering precious little for teachers to get excited about

The first duty of any government is the safety and security of its citizens. The second, it seems, is to undertake a curriculum review. Governments delight in tinkering with what poor teachers have to teach increasingly beleaguered children, and shoehorning in whichever of society’s ills currently need addressing. Inevitably, no curriculum survives first contact with the enemy, aka subsequent governments.

From 40 years in education, I observe the pattern thus: phase one, review the curriculum; phase two, ignore teachers’ reasonable reservations and implement regardless; phase three, re-review and conclude the previous review got it badly wrong; phase four, rinse and repeat. The only consensus in terms of curriculum is how to spell it.

All content

In the latest review, Professor Becky Francis states, ‘The KS1 and 2 curriculum... struggle(s) to cover all content with sufficient depth and negatively affect(s) pupils’ ability to master foundational concepts.’ Well, who’d have thought?! By the way, ‘all content’ is stuff piled on by successive governments since the national curriculum was first introduced in 1989, like the Spanish Inquisition – an early form of Ofsted for ‘heretics’ – piling on weight after weight to slowly crush their enemies in a dungeon press.

I started teaching just before the first national curriculum was introduced in an orgy of deforestation to provide paper copies for all the sad teachers who had to

‘deliver’ it. Note the word ‘deliver’ – teachers were consigned to the role of post person, all autonomy gone, reduced to knocking on the doors of children’s minds with stacks of random and often useless junk mail. Pre-national curriculum, schools decided what to teach, within certain parameters of common sense, of course. You couldn’t spend all day, every day teaching, say, basket-weaving or folk dance, though some teachers of my acquaintance had a good try.

Francis offers greater emphasis on oracy, grammar in writing rather than theory, more creativity and arts, and RE brought into the curriculum. All laudable. There is lots of handwringing about SEND, but not much to suggest practical improvement to provision. Oh, and KS2 SATs remain, though they may fiddle with the SPaG test to make it slightly less useless.

But it isn’t going to happen till 2028 and it’s all a bit flat, envisioning learning with all the joy and exuberance of a speed awareness course in a

portacabin in Slough. Without joy in learning you have Dickensian, Gradgrindian misery. Happily, Francis’s review sends the boot in on Michael Gove’s joyless and culturally barren changes of 2014: ‘Primary English contains a high volume of grammatical content and terminology. ... this content is... overly theoretical..., disengages pupils and, crucially, does not help them to write well.’ Thank goodness for recognising the bleeding obvious.

One in, one out?

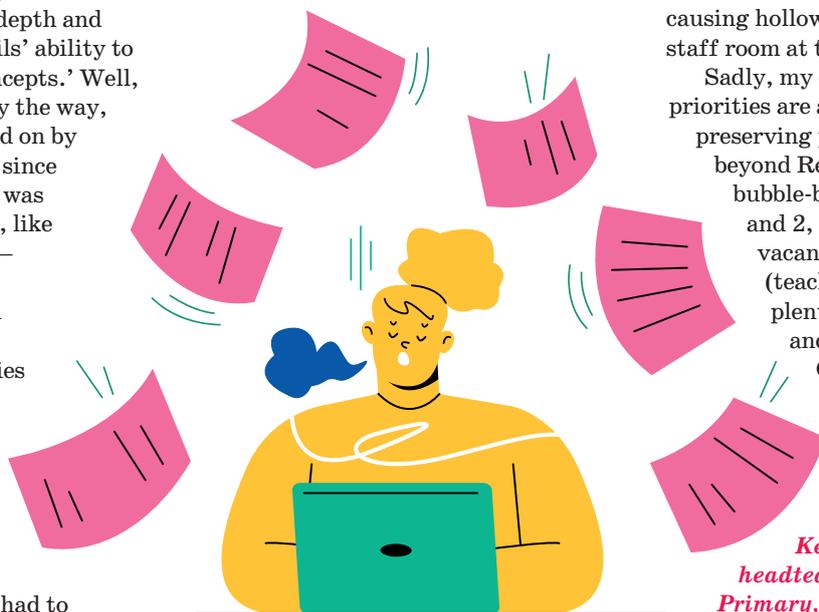
It’s probably in the small print, but nothing is said about what to remove from the curriculum to make time for the new stuff – AI, citizenship, financial and media awareness, identifying fake news, climate change and sustainability, and no doubt nuclear fusion and solving the Middle East conflict all to be rammed in before morning break on a wet Wednesday.

At which point, let me introduce Estonia, according to PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment, not the wonky tower), the most successful education system in Europe. Who knew? Estonia promotes ‘a culture of trusting and empowering teachers’. Its curriculum merely ‘sets the results children should know... while teachers decide how to achieve those results’. Its pupils – the happiest in the OECD – are ‘active participants in their learning rather than passive recipients of facts’. None of this is new. As Bernard Shaw observed a century ago, ‘What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, not knowledge in pursuit of the child’. To be fair, Francis does assert the curriculum ‘should ensure the professional autonomy of teachers is maintained’ – an assertion causing hollow laughter in the staff room at that final word.

Sadly, my own curriculum priorities are absent: nothing about preserving play-based learning beyond Reception, compulsory bubble-blowing throughout KS1 and 2, regular time to stare vacantly out of the window (teachers and pupils), and plenty of chat, stories, singing and joke-telling.

Quiet corridors and similarly oppressive nonsense to be banned. I await the Secretary of State’s phone call. **TP**

Kevin Harcombe is former headteacher of Redlands Primary, Fareham.



Making sense of **THE MAYA**

There's no better way to introduce your pupils to this fascinating ancient civilisation than with a trip to Cadbury World, says **Ruth Astley** . . .

As a passionate teacher of history, even I have found teaching ancient civilisations such as the Maya a challenge. The KS2 history curriculum specifically references 'a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history', with the Maya a suggested focus. This supports understanding similarities and differences across societies, and developing historical enquiry skills.

With their hard-to-imagine timeframes, unfamiliar cultures, and distant locations, it's difficult to make ancient peoples and their achievements seem tangible to our pupils. The Maya, in particular, can feel hard to reach from the world children know.

Yet, making ancient civilisations come alive is vital to fostering historical enquiry, empathy and, most importantly, a love for one of the most exciting subjects in the curriculum! Teaching the Mayan civilisation offers us a unique opportunity to enrich pupils' understanding of world history and diversity. The Maya were an advanced society whose achievements spanned mathematics, astronomy, art, and even the origins of chocolate. Exploring their rise and fall encourages critical thinking and historical enquiry, while their myths capture children's imaginations.

Rich learning opportunities

Choosing the Maya as a topic brings a host of positives to our history curriculum and



the learning of our children, including:

- **Global perspective:** Learning about the Maya introduces pupils to a non-European civilisation, broadening their understanding of world history and diversity.
- **Critical skills:** Exploring the rise and fall of the Maya encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and the analysis of sources.
- **Cross-curricular links:** The Maya offer opportunities to delve into geography, maths (through their advanced numerical systems), art, science (such as astronomy) and even PE (through their interesting leisure activities, including the world's first team sport).
- **Engagement:** The myths, legends, and achievements of the Maya – from chocolate to pyramids – capture children's imagination.

The question, therefore, is how best to do it? One innovative way to bring their story to life is through a school trip to Cadbury World. While at first glance a chocolate-themed attraction may seem an unlikely candidate for historical learning, Cadbury

World offers a unique and engaging experience that connects modern life with the legacy of the ancient Maya. On a school trip to Cadbury World, children are treated to a range of interactive, hands-on experiences that make learning both fun and memorable.

Getting hands-on with the past

At Cadbury World, children can follow the fascinating journey of chocolate from the rainforests of Central America – where the Maya first cultivated cacao – to modern-day Birmingham, drawing direct connections between ancient civilisations and their own lives. Engaging activities include handling real cacao pods, grinding cocoa beans, and immersive insights into chocolate manufacturing, which bring history to life through taste, touch, and exploration. There's even a dedicated Mayan workshop, which immerses children in the myths, rituals, and daily practices of the Maya, highlighting the sacred significance of chocolate

and its role in their culture. These experiences not only spark curiosity but also help pupils see the Maya as a vibrant and innovative society, making the past feel immediate and relevant.

A visit to Cadbury World supports the KS2 history objective of studying a non-European society that provides contrast with British history. It also offers rich opportunities for cross-curricular learning, e.g:

- **Geography:** mapping the journey of chocolate and exploring the Maya's home.
- **Science:** understanding plants, food production, and the properties of materials through the chocolate-making process.
- **PSHE and citizenship:** exploring fair trade, cultural appreciation, and the global significance of chocolate.

By linking classroom learning about the Maya to real-world experiences like those offered at Cadbury World, teachers can make ancient civilisations feel relevant and exciting. Such trips both deepen historical understanding and ignite curiosity, providing a springboard for further enquiry and appreciation of our global heritage. For teachers seeking to inspire their pupils, Cadbury World offers a surprising way to make history come alive. **TP**



Ruth Astley is a freelance educational writer and former

assistant head and SLE. To find out more about school trips to Cadbury World, visit cadburyworld.co.uk



How do you support military children in school?

Providing a regular safe space for pupils with serving families should be a must for every setting

littletroopers.net

Every Tuesday lunchtime, a group of children at my school pull on matching hoodies and head off together. To anyone passing, it looks like just another club – but for those pupils, it's one of the highlights of their week.

This started a few years ago, when we noticed that some children were arriving at school feeling sad, lonely or unsettled. As teachers, we knew this could be for many reasons, but upon closer examination, we discovered that many of these children had parents serving in the Armed Forces. This meant that these pupils were having a particularly hard time when their parent was deployed or away from home for long periods of time, often without knowing when they would return.

Coming from a military family myself, this really resonated with me, and I realised that our school needed to do more to recognise our military children – many of whom can go under the radar for years. Working with the school's leadership team, we started by

identifying all our children with parents serving in the military; determined to find ways to ensure they received the right emotional and pastoral support.

When researching practical ways to do this, I discovered Little Troopers, a charity dedicated to helping military children navigate their unique circumstances. Using its resources, I set up a Little Troopers Club for all military children from Reception to Year 6, to give them the opportunity to get together and celebrate their experiences as part of the Armed Forces community. For some, this was the first time they found out that some of their peers also had serving parents, helping them feel less alone.

For the past three years, every Tuesday lunchtime, the Little Troopers Club has been a chance for military pupils to talk to each other about their days, have lunch together, or take part in activities using the charity's resources. One of their favourites is making a gift for their serving parent to take away when deployed, which brings them a

lot of joy, knowing their crafts will be taken by their parent overseas and will keep them connected. The club has also helped children mark special occasions, for example, through organising a group cinema trip for Christmas when one of the pupils had a parent who was overseas during the holiday.

The impact has been transformational, with military children looking forward to getting together every Tuesday. Parents have equally welcomed the club, feeling confident and relieved that the school recognises their children's experiences and provides a safe space where they can open up. It has also increased the children's visibility within the school – wearing their Little Troopers hoodies each Tuesday has sparked interest from other pupils and helped start conversations. Many of the children now take a more active role in school life, from leading a poppy assembly for Remembrance Day, to performing pieces about Christmas during wartime.

Other local schools have reached out to ask for guidance on how they can better support military children in their own settings. My advice to them – and to any teacher reading this – is to start by identifying their military children and reaching out to their families. After this, creating a regular space where they can come together, talk openly and feel understood can make a real difference. Routine is especially important for children whose lives can feel unpredictable, and something as simple as a weekly lunchtime club can provide a sense of stability.

I would also advise teachers to lean on the wider community, as local businesses, Armed Forces organisations and charities are often keen to help. For example, our club has partnered with a local pottery place where children made Christmas gifts for their parents, and we also organised a visit to nearby RNAS Culdrose, where many parents serve.

Supporting military children takes time, but it is always worth it. These pupils relocate frequently, so it is crucial for all schools to consider what they can do, so our little troopers can access the same level of care wherever they are. By taking the time to recognise their experiences and create space for them to connect, schools can make a lasting difference that stays with them beyond the classroom. **TP**

Anna Broughton is a Year 3 teacher at King Charles C of E Primary School. For more info on free resources, contact info@littletroopers.net



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A letter to...

My former self

The introduction of Pupil Premium funding was a positive step – but here's what I wish I'd known as a teacher and school leader back in April 2011



Dear 2011 me... I know you're hugely excited about the additional funding that's just been announced, to support schools in raising

achievement for disadvantaged learners. The gap is far too wide between these learners and their non-disadvantaged peers, but I want to warn you: 15 years later, in 2026, it has become clear that this funding has failed to close the attainment gap, and, if anything, the gap has widened even further in recent years. Let me explain...

The pace at which schools move makes it difficult for me to remember exactly what was going through my mind at any particular time, let alone 15 years ago. But I do know we could have used the funding more wisely and effectively – and this has been brought home to me by the research recently undertaken by NACE, where I am now CEO (yes, you'll move out of the classroom).

In your world (2011), folks tend to view disadvantaged learners as a homogenous group, rather than taking the time to investigate the specific barriers faced by each child. If you only knew what I know now...

For example, we've learned that the language used around disadvantage has (often unintended) consequences. Using the word 'disadvantaged' to label these learners, while seeking to close gaps, has often contributed to a relatively narrow focus, and a lack of nuance in response. I wish, when I

was in your shoes, that I had understood that there are many disadvantages, both visible and hidden, that can affect learners from all backgrounds in myriad ways.

We've found that an essential shift for more effective support is the move away from labelling learners as 'disadvantaged' to a focus on identifying the specific barriers these pupils may face; obstacles that make accessing or succeeding in education difficult. Such barriers can place limits on learning, lead to disengagement, and act as a ceiling on the development of potential or capabilities. But, importantly,

“Young people don't want labels; they want to be recognised for their ability to grow”

once identified, barriers can be diminished or removed. When a school links an understanding of disadvantages to educational inequity or learning barriers, then curriculum planning, teaching and learning can be reshaped to serve all children well, no matter their background. Case studies published in NACE's 'Making Space for Able Learners' research show what we can achieve when we change our perspective (see tinyurl.com/tp-NACEremovingbarriers).



A second, related, shift is to move from a deficit position to focus on what learners can do. We have a responsibility to identify and nurture potential abilities and talents; to celebrate the capabilities and skills of each individual; and to provide all learners with a rich tapestry of experience and opportunity. A key message for me has been that young people want to be recognised for their ability to grow and improve, rather than being constrained by fixed labels.

Last but not least, I wish I had got the nurture side of things right, too – whilst I certainly did my best, it is too easy to focus on what is directly in front of you. Carefully directed strategies for nurture can make learning truly more inclusive and engaging. At its best, this doesn't just support learners in the present; it prepares them for an aspirant, resilient and successful future.

So, to my past self, I know you did your best with what knowledge and resources you had. But as I move forward, I hope that research – done by NACE and other organisations – can help us improve support to make a real difference to this attainment gap, and ensure I'm not writing this letter again in another 15 years.

From,

Rob

Rob Lightfoot is CEO of NACE (the National Association for Able Children in Education), with over 30 years' experience in teaching and leadership. Thanks to all the NACE Challenge Award-accredited schools which contributed to this project; our research partners at York St John University; and the project funders, York St John's Institute for Social Justice and the Mawdsley Family Fund.



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ENGAGE LEARNERS

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Set course for the cosmos

Journey into *Space*, discover the inner workings of the digestive system and explore forces, electricity, light, sound, matter and maths on a trip to the Science Museum. . .

10.15 – Space

Get ready for lift-off at the new, free *Space* gallery. Explore real spacecraft and extraordinary space objects, including a three-billion-year-old piece of the moon and a spacesuit worn by the first Briton in space, Helen Sharman. It's recommended for both KS1 and KS2.

11.00 – A Beautiful Planet 3D (U)

Follow your visit to *Space* with a trip to the International Space Station as you journey into orbit in *A Beautiful Planet 3D (U)*. This educational documentary covers topics including space, climate and understanding humanity's impact on Earth. Recommended for KS2 upwards.

13.20 – It Takes Guts

Go on an adventure inside the human digestive system with the Science Museum's squirm-inducing show for KS2. Led by Explainers who facilitate pupil engagement, the museum's live school shows bring science topics to life outside of the classroom.

14.15 – Wonderlab

Ignite curiosity in science and maths in the museum's hands-on gallery, which is packed with immersive experiences. With over 50 exhibits and live experiments at the Chemistry Bar, the gallery enriches learning across the themes of forces, electricity, light, sound, matter, space and maths. Best of all, KS2 group visits are free on weekdays during term time.

15.15 – Goody bags

Take home a memento of your visit to the Science Museum with a pre-booked goody bag for each child in your group. Simply add goody bags to your itinerary when booking your visit on the museum's group booking portal and collect them at the end of your visit.

Home time

Extend the learning experience with *Wonderlab+*, the museum's online learning platform for curious minds. With experiments, videos and quizzes to explore on themes such as space, climate, artificial intelligence and more, it's the perfect way to embed the learning from your trip when you return to the classroom.

BEFORE YOU GO

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BOOK ONLINE

With the Science Museum's easy-to-use online group booking portal, you can plan your itinerary and manage your booking hassle-free. It'll even recommend the best learning resources to download for your visit.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Science Museum Group Academy hosts CPD training courses for teachers on-site and online. These cover a range of topics, from *Exploring Science Through Play* to setting up your own *Exploration and Discovery Club*.

UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

Are these crippling night-before and day-of nerves here to stay, or will I get used to supply teaching and no longer feel like an ECT, every single time?

I wake up early. Way too early. Like not-even-1am-yet early. I check my phone just in case I've had a missed call or an email asking me to come in. Of course I haven't. No one in the agency or at a school would even know what their staffing requirements would be for the coming day at this time of night, let alone be making calls or sending emails.

I manage to get back to sleep, but soon wake up again. And again.

I am clearly on edge. Is this what it's like for all supply teachers, or is this just because it's my first time?

The alarm wakes me for the day at six. I actually get up on time and go downstairs to make a cup of tea, which I end up leaving because I can't stomach it. Were the pains I had yesterday because of my nerves about today? I shower and take the dog out – I know I've got to be up and ready, with all the key jobs done at home, for when (or if?) the call comes.

And it *is* like waiting for The Call from Ofsted – the anticipation of which every school leader and teacher holds deep in the pit of their stomach. I'm sure you're more than familiar with that horrible feeling: when you know you're in the window, and every day that they could call, you have that heavy tummy until lunchtime.

So, I wait. I sort of help my kids get ready for school. I do a few household jobs half-heartedly – I may not be able to do them today after all.

The agency I'm signed up with has checked I'd be able to make it to a school by 8:15am – I've said yes, and ensured that it will only deploy me at schools within a very small radius. That cutoff time creeps ever closer, and I experience the strange simultaneous sensation of becoming more and more relieved and more and more stressed. Stressed, because if they call now, I've hardly any time to travel. Relieved, because, I don't know, I'm deferring the first time I walk

through that door of a random school and become the nobody supply teacher.

I'm definitely not relieved because I didn't want to do the teaching – that bit I can handle. I think it's the newness of everything else that gets to me. Of not knowing the routines (I love a routine in the classroom). Of not knowing where things are or where to go at break time. Not because I'd have to pick up someone else's planning and resources and teach a class from that, but because I might have to travel a potentially unknown route, and what if I'm late (I hate being late)?

And now it's 8:30 and the phone still hasn't rung. Could they call this late? A last-minute sickness? A teacher turns up, pukes, and then has to go home?? Perhaps.

But my thoughts are turning to a day which is now probably available to me. What should I do with it? Blitz the house? Start some DIY? Take the dog for the extra-long walk he's been craving? Do some work? I'll figure it out.

So, if you're a supply teacher – know that you're not alone. And if you're not, next time a newbie walks into your school, spare a thought for them. Maybe they do

go through this every time – imagine dealing with first-day-of-the-job-nerves every morning (and every evening before). The journey they've taken to your setting might have been as tricky as they thought – rushed and unfamiliar. And they did it all yesterday and will do it all again tomorrow. Or they could be seasoned pros, and what I'm experiencing now is because I'm a beginner again. Either way, a friendly smile and a quick intro to the school – where the toilets and the staff room are, what time lunch is, and any necessary safety information – will go a long, long way. **TP**



“It’s like waiting for The Call from Ofsted – the anticipation of which every teacher holds deep in the pit of their stomach”

The writer is a supply teacher in England

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- Farmer Bean →
- Grandpa Joe →
- The Trunchbull →
- Danny's/father →
- Mr Twit →
- Mrs Twit →
- The BFG →
- Miss Honey →
- Farmer Boggis →
- A Complete Wonka →
- A Human-sized duck →
- Mrs Silver →

"It's easy to say 'use your imagination' but this has given me the tools to do that." *Teacher*

- Old Green Grasshopper →
- The Grand High Witch →
- Danny →
- A Vermicious Knave →

...ures in Africa... short
...ut. Inspired by a...
...e Royal Air Force. In 1939 he made
...to enlist and within days was
...s first flight.

...officer advised him that his 6'5 3/4"
...ould make flying difficult, Roald Dahl
...e a pilot. On his first flight, with his
...out of the cockpit in the slipstream,
...the and almost suffocated. He was
...ugh and soon found that a scarf
...outh solved the problem.

...life-sized Roald Dahl - who do
...?



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MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2
HISTORY

BEYOND LIVING MEMORY: THE TITANIC

LINDSEY RAWES



The sinking of the Titanic is an iconic moment in history that continues to capture the imagination of young and old alike. It is one of the most represented historical events in popular culture, with countless films, TV series and novels focusing on its fate. A study of the Titanic affords pupils the opportunity to examine an event beyond living memory by examining what happened and when, as well as key historical concepts such as similarity and difference, and the use of evidence. Alongside the wider story of the ship, this unit provides opportunities to explore the human experiences of people connected to the Titanic.



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tinyurl.com/tp-Titanic

template in the downloadable resources – L1). Encourage pupils to use the word bank to say a sentence about each event using chronological vocabulary.

You might record this by photographing completed timelines or capturing short oral retellings. Conclude the lesson by inviting pupils to retell the events in their own words using the chronological language.



Assessment

Can pupils recall the date the Titanic sank? Can they sequence and retell the key events of the Titanic's voyage?



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- What can we find out about the Titanic from evidence?

Begin the lesson with a short retrieval task, asking pupils when the Titanic sank and what they remember about its voyage. Discuss the learning objective and introduce the lesson vocabulary (see the slides for each lesson in the PowerPoint for vocab), asking pupils to repeat the words. Focus on evidence and repeat the definition together: *evidence is something that shows something happened, or is true.*

Explain that being a historian is like being a detective; we rarely have the full story and use clues to work out what happened.



WEEK 1

Learning objective

- What happened to the Titanic and when did it happen?

Begin the lesson by showing pupils an image of the Titanic (see slide 2 in the downloadable PowerPoint – link above). Ask: *What do you think this is? What can you see?* Encourage pupils to share their ideas and record responses as a whole class on the interactive whiteboard or a flipchart. Explain that this is an image of a ship called the Titanic and ask pupils to repeat the name aloud. Invite children to share anything they already know about the Titanic and add their ideas to the class record. Emphasise that this was a real ship and that the events they will be learning about happened to real people.

Explain that the events pupils are going to study happened over a short period of time in April 1912.

Introduce the vocabulary for the lesson (slides 4-5). Ask pupils to read the words aloud together: *first, next, later, before, after, finally*. Clarify that these words help us talk about events in order. Introduce the word *chronology* and explain that it means putting events into time order. Ask the children to repeat the definition to help consolidate their understanding.

Look at slides 6-13 and talk through the key events of the Titanic's journey in order. Explain that the ship did not sink immediately, but over around two and a half hours. Model reading each sentence using chronological language and ask pupils to repeat each sentence with you.

Give children time to work in pairs to sequence the events of the Titanic's journey using pre-cut event cards (see a

Clarify that there are no photos or films of the Titanic sinking and ask pupils what evidence might help us understand what it was like.

Gather pupils' ideas and explain that these are all examples of evidence.

Introduce the wreck of the ship as a piece of evidence. Show an image of a model of the wreck (**slide 19**) and explain that this is what it looks like underwater. Ask pupils how we know this and explain that scientists and historians have dived to take photographs.

Show the first image of the wreck itself – the ship's bow (**slide 20**) – and ask: *What can you see? What do you think this was used for? What does this tell us about the Titanic?* Pupils should discuss in pairs and share their ideas with the class. At each stage, ask: *What made you think this?* Compile a class list of answers on the whiteboard.

For independent work, children can continue as detectives; give each pair a pack of photos and prompt questions (**L2**). Get pupils to examine the images, recording words and phrases on sticky notes to display around the images. You can then photograph the work to keep as evidence for books.



Assessment

Can pupils make inferences about what the Titanic was like by looking at photographs of the wreck?

.....



WEEK 3

Learning objective

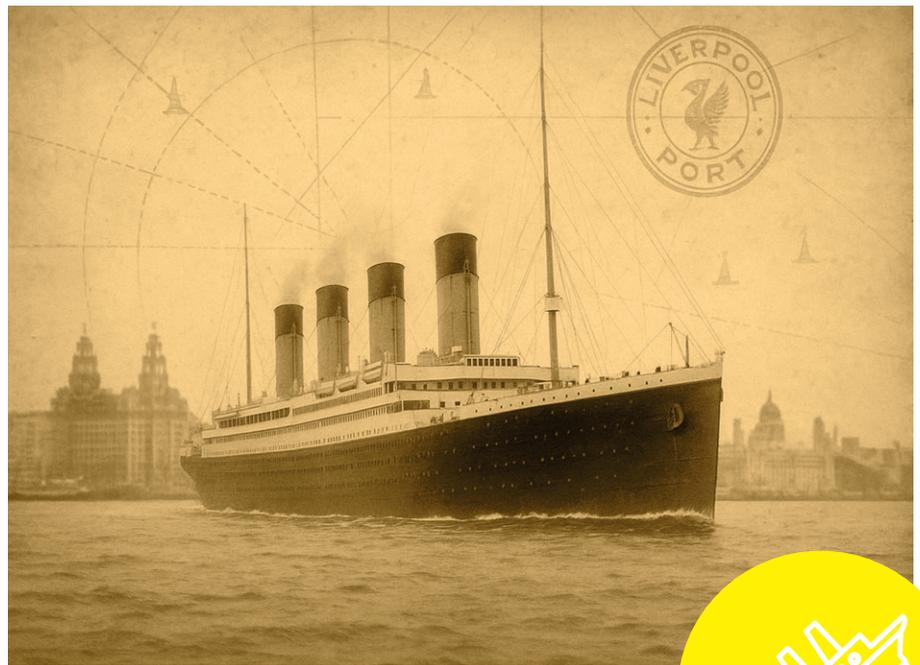
- What was similar and different for first- and third-class passengers on the Titanic?

.....

At the start of this lesson, revisit the word *evidence* (**slides 26-7**). Ask pupils to explain what it means to their partner and share responses with the class. Get children to repeat the definition shared last week. Share the vocabulary for this lesson (**slides 29-30**) and discuss what *similarity* and *difference* mean: repeat the definitions as a whole class.

Explain to pupils that the Titanic was a huge ship with around 2,200 people from different backgrounds on board. The passengers paid different amounts to travel on the Titanic and were divided into first-, second- and third-class, which affected where they stayed and what facilities they could access.

Show children an image of a first-class cabin (**slide 32**) and ask: *Do you think*



this would have been used by first- or third-class passengers? What do you notice? Why? Give children time to discuss their ideas in pairs and then report them back to the class.

Explain this was a room where the first-class (often the wealthiest) stayed. Repeat this process with the next slide (**33**) and discuss how the third-class cabin was similar and different.

For the main task, guide pupils to work in pairs, sorting images of different rooms on the Titanic into first- and third-class (**L3**). Encourage the children to explain why they think each image belongs in what category, and what they can see that tells us this.

Bring pupils back together and discuss what they found out. Ask them, *What was the same about the first-class and third-class parts of the ship? What was different?* Look at the menus and watch the selected sections of the virtual tour (**slide 35-7**). Make a class list together of similarities and differences. Share the stem sentences with pupils (**slide 38**) and get them to write one or two sentences in their books explaining their reasoning.



Assessment

Can pupils identify areas used by first- and third-class passengers? Can they explain how conditions on the ship were similar and different for them?

.....



WEEK 4

Learning objective

- Why was the Titanic a disaster?

Begin the lesson with retrieval practice, asking pupils to remember why the Titanic sank. Introduce the vocabulary, explaining what a *disaster* is and getting pupils to repeat the definition. Explain that the Titanic was a disaster because around 1,500 out of 2,200 people died – more than two thirds! Explain that although the Titanic hit the iceberg, lots of mistakes were made, which meant that the disaster was worse than it might have otherwise been.

Read through the narrative about the sinking of the Titanic as a whole class (**slides 44-6**), asking pupils what mistakes were made and what caused passengers to die. Then explain that pupils are going to work in pairs to decide which events were most important in causing the disaster. Show children the 'zone of relevance' task (**slides 47-9**) and explain that they are going to sort the statement cards into which zones they think they belong in: most important, important and less important (**L4**). During this task, pupils should discuss with their partners and explain why they are placing a card in a certain zone. The other partner is allowed to move that card as long as they can give a reason why.

Once children have finished this task, come back together as a whole class and ask pupils which cards they put in which parts of the zone of relevance (note there is one decoy card – The voyage was very long – that belongs outside the

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zone). You might hear responses such as: *The iceberg is the most important because that's what the ship hit; If there had been enough lifeboats people might not have died.*

Remember, there is not one correct answer for this task and it is about getting pupils to communicate their opinions by using historical evidence.

Conclude the lesson by sharing the stem sentence on the board, and having pupils write a short response in books.



Assessment

Can pupils give reasons why the Titanic was a disaster? Can they explain which events they think were most important in creating the disaster and explain their reasons?



WEEK 5

Learning objective

- Who was Violet Jessop and why was she significant?

Begin the lesson with the short retrieval practice task (slide 51) asking children to identify first- and third-class areas of the Titanic. Allow children to discuss in pairs and then explain why they know each room belonged to this class. Introduce the key vocabulary for this lesson, focusing on the word *significance*. As in previous lessons, children should repeat back the definition to consolidate it.

Explain that in this lesson, we will be learning about a real person who survived the Titanic disaster. Introduce Violet Jessop and read through her story together (slides 55-61). Emphasise throughout that Violet was a survivor and that her story is one of resilience. When done, ask the children to discuss what sort of person they think Violet was and why. Responses might include that she was kind, brave or resilient, and that she helped other people. Be sure to ask the children to explain why they formed these impressions. Then ask, *Why do you think she was significant?* Use the stem sentences (slide 62) to get pupils to orally rehearse their answers before completing the independent task.

Pupils should annotate a photograph of Violet Jessop by writing words around it to describe her (L5). They

should then write one or two full sentences, explaining what she was like and why she was significant. Bring the class back together and discuss what pupils came up with; get them to share their sentences, particularly focusing on why Violet was significant.



Assessment

Can pupils describe what sort of person Violet Jessop was? Can they give reasons why she was a significant person from history?



WEEK 6

Learning objective

- How do we remember the Titanic today?

Begin the lesson with retrieval practice asking children to discuss if the statements about the Titanic are true or false (slide 63); ask them to explain why the false statements are incorrect.

Discuss the vocab for this lesson, focusing on the term *remembrance* (slides 65-6). Ask pupils what historical events we remember (e.g. WW1, the Great Fire of London).

Invite pupils to discuss why we should remember the sinking of the Titanic, and to share their responses. Show the graph of how many people died (slide 68) and ask children what they notice. Draw their attention to the fact that many more crew and third-class passengers died than first- or second-class passengers. Ask them to reflect on this and ask, *Why do you think this happened? Do you think this is fair?* Explain that unfortunately,

throughout human history – and still now – wealthier people were often treated differently from poorer people, and that many of the third-class passengers were emigrants leaving the UK to go and live in America. Show the children the different memorials to the Titanic (slides 69-74) and explain that people have created statues, buildings and even made films to remember the event. Pupils should discuss how they would choose to remember the Titanic, and why, using stem sentences (slide 75).

Children should then draw their own memorial to remember the Titanic and write a sentence using the stem sentence underneath (L6). Conclude the lesson by asking pupils to share their ideas and show what they have drawn and written. This work could be extended as a display of history and art where pupils sketch their memorials.



Assessment

Can pupils explain why we remember the Titanic? Can they draw a memorial and explain why they would remember it this way? TP



Lindsey Rawes is a primary teacher and history lead. She is also a chartered teacher of history for the Historical Association.

 theprimaryhistorian.substack.com

 @LindsRoars

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Reclaim YOUR LIFE

Small changes in how you work can transform how you live – and it all starts with protecting your time, says **Johannes Ahrenfelt**

Years ago, as a middle leader in a large high-performing academy, I was drifting towards burnout. Late nights bled into weekends. My week filled with emails, marking, meetings, paperwork, and more meetings. However much I did, I still felt behind. I loved teaching, but my focus had shifted from the classroom to an endless task list. My mental health suffered. I wasn't fully present for my partner or our children, and I felt as though I was letting everyone down.

One Sunday evening, after yet another 'catch-up' weekend that didn't catch me up, I realised the pace wasn't sustainable. If I wanted to stay in the profession I loved, something had to change. The solution wasn't working harder – it was protecting my time, on purpose.

But burnout isn't only about volume of work; it's about the quality of time we leave for ourselves. If our best hours are poured into tasks that drain us, there's little left for the moments that restore us. My regrets were rarely about what I didn't achieve, but about what I didn't notice: shared meals, unhurried conversations, even the quiet between tasks. You don't need a grand overhaul to begin recovering. Small, consistent choices create the breathing space where energy and joy return.

Small wins

About two and a half years ago, I started experimenting with early AI-assisted tools for routine admin. I wasn't outsourcing teaching; I was removing friction from repetitive jobs that pulled

me away from people and work I value. At first, I saved minutes; over time, minutes became hours. Two tiny shifts made the biggest difference – one in planning, one in meetings.

I stopped spending whole evenings designing scaffolds, sequencing questions and polishing model texts. Instead, I'd feed objectives, curriculum points and success criteria into an AI like ChatGPT to draft a rough framework, then shape it with professional judgement.

A task that once took two hours now took 30 minutes. The first evening I tried it, I didn't use the extra 90 minutes to do more work; I cooked, we ate together as a family, and we laughed. That's when it hit me: time saved only matters if you spend it on what matters.

I also began recording brief meeting notes and turning them into action points within minutes. One Thursday I used the extra half-hour I'd saved to walk through the park before heading home. The air felt different when I wasn't rushing.



Three gentle habits

1) The 'close the day' ritual

At the end of work, do one deliberate act to mark the boundary: tidy your desk, make a cup of tea, step outside for five minutes. Teach your mind and body that school has finished.

2) Mindful use of tech

Let tools shorten dull admin – planning, summaries, tidying notes, worksheets – not human connection. Keep the conversations, creativity and care analogue and unhurried. *Two quick ChatGPT saves you can reuse:*

• Lesson skeleton in one go (copy/paste prompt):

"Create a 45-minute Year 4 maths lesson on column subtraction with exchange. Include: 5-min retrieval, clear modelling steps, guided practice with worked examples, independent practice with three tiered tasks, and a 5-min exit ticket with two hinge questions. Return as a simple table with timings, teacher talk, pupil tasks and success criteria. Keep language accessible for 8–9-year-olds."

• Meeting notes into actions (copy/paste prompt):

"Turn these notes into a concise summary plus an action list with owners' initials and deadlines. Add unanswered questions as a checklist. Keep to bullet points and 150 words." *Note: always anonymise these – no pupil names or sensitive details.*

3) Non-negotiable connection time

Protect a short daily window – even 20 minutes – to be fully present with someone you care about. No screens. No multitasking. Just attention. **TP**



Johannes Ahrenfelt is a former deputy headteacher who now works supporting

schools with professional development, teacher wellbeing, and practical, teacher-led AI workflows. You can access Johannes' free guide to classroom-safe AI prompts via teachertips.timbl.io/download

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Stroke
Association

Finding **strength**
through **support**

Positive EDUCATION

With personal development front and centre, the Honeycomb Trust is delivering the knowledge and skills for young people to become responsible citizens...

JIM NICHOLSON

BUILDING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Honeycomb Trust is rooted in the aspiration of an illiterate yeoman farmer, Thomas Walklate, leading to the development of a free grammar school in the Stockport area in 1639. Walklate, who lived around Stockport, bequeathed £160 in order to build a place for the education of young people, irrespective of their background, to enable them to be ready for Oxford or Cambridge universities. The aspiration to improve learning outcomes for all children, whatever their background, runs deep throughout the Trust – and we see personal development education as underpinning everything we do.

Whilst Honeycomb was officially launched as a Multi-Academy Trust in February 2025 with two primary schools (Mellor Primary and Bolshaw Primary) after a period of working together in successful partnership,

the concept of what we stand for was originally developed by the trustees of Stockport's first primary academy, Mellor.

We believe in the power of education to change lives. The aspiration to improve learning outcomes for all children, irrespective of their background, runs deep throughout our Trust. We do this with an unrelenting focus on positive education.



international research on this, and partnered with psychologist Julie Hurst. As a result, we became the first recognised positive education school in the country. We have implemented techniques such as breathing exercises and emotional regulation strategies to help children understand that there is a space between stimulus and response where they can choose how to react. This supports the development of self-awareness and mutual respect.

We have opted to embed the five principles of wellbeing into our curriculum: giving, connecting, being active, taking notice, and learning. For example, the 'taking notice' element led us to adopt Forest School in both Trust schools.

GETTING STARTED

When I started leading a single academy trust, and especially just before the pandemic, I became interested in Martin Seligman's PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) model of positive psychology – which has since evolved into PERMA-V, with the 'V' standing for Vitality.

I was particularly drawn to the idea of positive education, which is rooted in helping children build resilience, grit and determination. We explored

We are creating a culture that supports the whole child. As well as internal initiatives, we drive collaborative networks linking different schools – urban, rural, ethnically and socially diverse – because we want children to understand and appreciate the communities around them.



MOVING PAST TECH

The main challenges we see, both around positive education and personal development, is the impact of technologies on children and young people. Childhood has changed, and over the past 15 years, that change has been faster than ever before.

This is having a significant influence on pupils' everyday experiences, and their lived understanding of societal norms is different from how it used to be.

Indeed, there is even evidence suggesting that the latest technological advances are

damaging our youngsters' cognitive development, leaving them increasingly unable to make reasoned decisions at the right time in their lives

(tinyurl.com/tp-DecisionsTech).

Right now, although it is referenced in the national curriculum, there is no statutory responsibility to prioritise critical thinking and responsible decision-making, and yet it is arguably more relevant than ever. If positive education became a core element of the curriculum and schools were actually assessed on how well they support it, rather than just SATs results or phonics scores, we might see a shift towards more holistic person-centred education.

Our children quickly learn what they think should be the right answer to give, but being put into real-life situations they may not feel comfortable saying it out loud. There lies the real issue that the curriculum does not address.

“There is no statutory responsibility to prioritise this kind of learning, and yet it is arguably more relevant than ever”



MORE THAN ACADEMICS

We're trying to counter the focus on qualitative over quantitative learning outcomes at Honeycomb, focusing more on personal development, which is essential for today's world. For example, our curriculum includes community engagement, such as tending to local parks, charity work, and even running a refill shop, which not only builds economic understanding but also a sense of contribution. I organised the first children's climate summit in Stockport in partnership with the University of Manchester, and we brought in councillors and MPs, leading to an annual opportunity for pupils to debate climate issues in the Council Chamber. Thanks to this, child-led motions now become Council policy. And it's not just about soft skills. Evidence shows that in schools using PERMA, wellbeing-focused approaches improve academic outcomes by around 11 per cent.

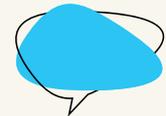
All our children are given opportunities to undertake adult roles to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the world that they want to create in the future. If they feel they have that ability to make the world a better place, as young adults they are surely going to be better equipped to make the right decisions.

What we have come to value most in our education system is whatever can be measured – whatever fits neatly into a metric. But ultimately, as a Trust, what we really want is to champion young people – to prepare them holistically for life.



ISABELLA, YEAR 4

“Positive education helps me notice the good things in my day. I've learned how to calm down, celebrate small wins and feel proud of myself when I try my best.”



BRANFORD, YEAR 4

“I like it when we do activities that make me focused and excited. I have learned in positive education lessons that when I'm really into something, time goes fast and I feel like I can learn anything.”



SOPHIE, YEAR 4

“Positive education teaches me how to be kind and work with others. It helps me make friends more easily and understand how other people feel, so our classroom is happier. We've learned how to work together as a team.”



Jim Nicholson is CEO of The Honeycomb Education Trust and until July

2025 was headteacher of Mellor Primary School for 18 years.

honeycombeducationtrust.org

AT A GLANCE

AGE RANGE
3-7

SONGS
7

DURATION
25 MINS

SPEAKING PARTS
24

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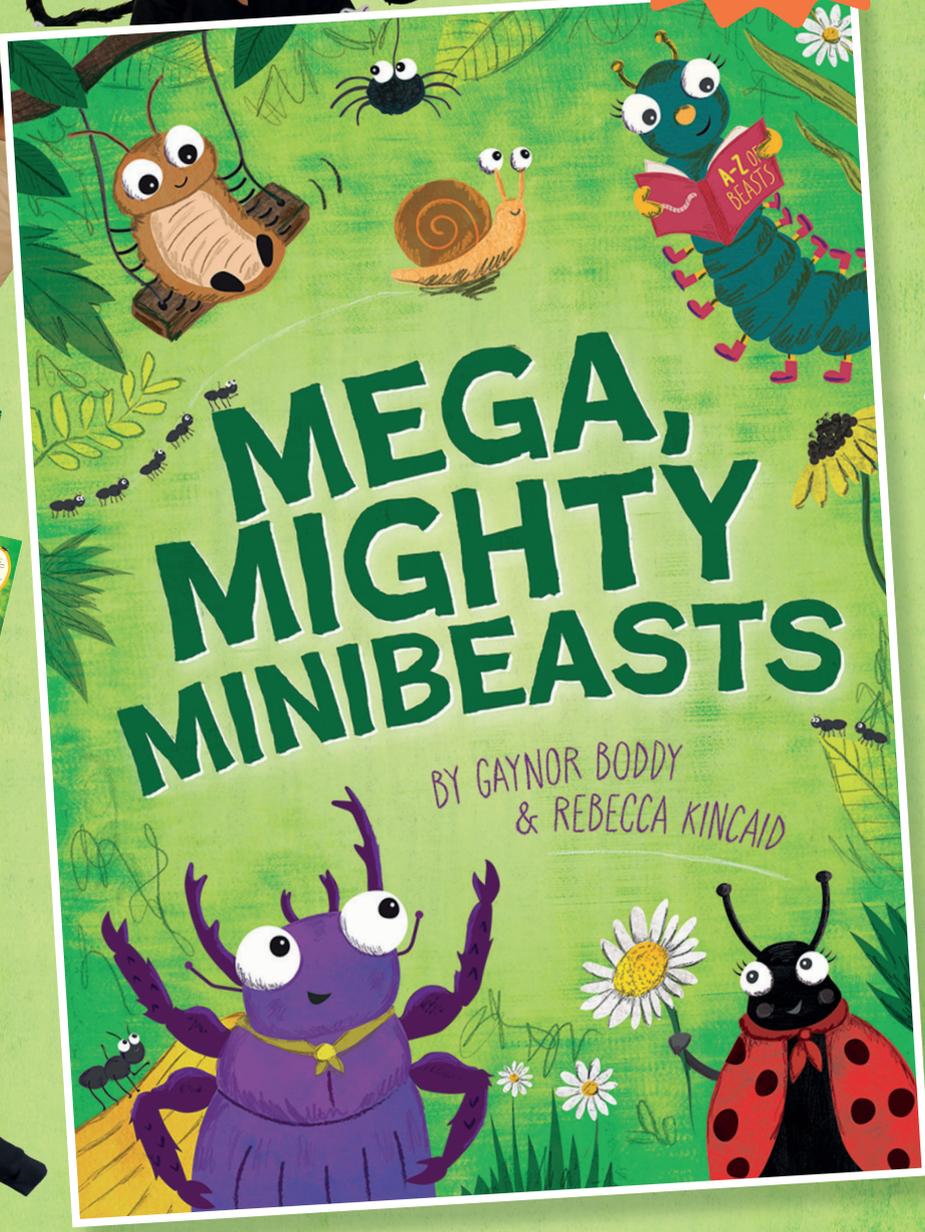


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STAG



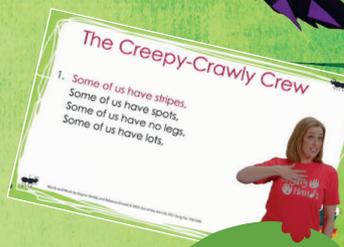
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BY GAYNOR BODDY & REBECCA KINCAID

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AND FRIENDS

LADY B



TERENCE



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How I do it

Explore what we can learn about ourselves through art, with this study of historical works

KATY HESSEL

Artists tell a story of who they were and the world they lived in through the work they make – so looking at art from throughout history is like finding clues to the past. Through art, we can understand how someone felt, what they saw, and what happened when they were alive. Then, when we make our own art inspired by their art, we can also think about who *we* are and the world *we* live in. We can create on our own, or in groups. It can lead to interesting conversations with our classmates, and amazing pictures (or sculptures, or photos) of our hopes and dreams...

1

Explain that artists have been painting themselves ('self-portraits') for hundreds of years. Show a self-portrait by Artemisia Gentileschi (*Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria, 1615–17*), and tell them that Artemisia lived in Rome in the 1600s, and has pictured herself as Saint Catherine.

Explain that artists often liked to paint themselves as someone else in self-portraits.

Ask the class to each draw themselves as someone else. It could be a singer they admire, a character from a book or TV show, or someone from history.



Ask children what they see when they look at *Still Life with Flowers and Gold Cups of Honour* (1612) by Clara Peeters, who lived at the same time as Artemisia. It looks like a 'still life' – a picture made up of man-made or natural objects.

Encourage them to discuss what objects from the classroom they'd use if they were to make their own still life. Maybe an apple, scissors, paper cup...

Next, explain that despite first impressions, Peeters' painting is not just a still life. Look closely at the gold goblet on the right-hand side and hidden in the reflections are 11 self-portraits! Why do you think she's done this? What does this tell us about the time in which she lived? Explain that in the past, it was much harder for women to become artists. They didn't have access to education, and, when they did, sometimes male artists would scratch out their names and replace them with their own!

2

Next, discuss the fact that art can be a great way to express ourselves. It's always interesting when artists, working across different disciplines (including drawing, painting, dancing, singing, acting, etc), join up and make work together.

Task children with having a go at drawing their favourite poem, or a class poem. What might the words look like? Do they think different pictures about the same poem will look the same, or similar? Why? You could show Joan Mitchell, *Daylight*, with the poem by James Schuyler, c. 1975, as an example of this kind of collaboration.

3

4

Finally, make a 'wish tree' inspired by the Japanese artist, Yoko Ono. She grew up during the Second World War in Japan. Life was difficult, and art materials were

limited. But Yoko was good at using what was around her. She knew that if we all dreamed together, and made art to show this, that it might inspire others and offer hope in hard times. Try it with your class. You'll need a pen or pencil, hole-punched tag, and a piece of string:

1. Make a wish. Write it down on a piece of paper.
2. Fold it and tie it around a branch of a wish tree.
3. Ask your friends to do the same. Keep wishing, until the branches are covered with wishes.



Talk with your class about what they wished for. Why did they choose that wish? What does it say about who they are, or the world that they're living in? Remember, 'wish trees' can be seen by lots of people. If someone were to look at their wish, how might it help them? At the end of the lesson, go out and find a tree in your playground, or make one in your classroom (maybe out of old coat-hooks). Look at all the wishes together and ask your class how they're inspired by them, and who else might be inspired by them.

5



Katy Hessel is a bestselling author and art historian from London, UK. She has written books for adults and children about the wonderful world of art. Her latest book, *The Story of Art Without Men: An illustrated guide to amazing women artists* (£20, Penguin) is out now.

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Spring school trips

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We offer creative cross-curricular enhanced activities for KS1 and 2. 'Discover Workshops' link to art and design, history and STEM. Enjoy hands-on activities, creative experiences and trails and quizzes, in our inspiring galleries.

A Y5 teacher at Cherry Orchard Primary said, "Thank you for making our visit excellent. The children are excited to see the results of their artwork on the glazed and fired plates."

Find out more museumofroyalworcester.org/education



4

Bring Viking history to life

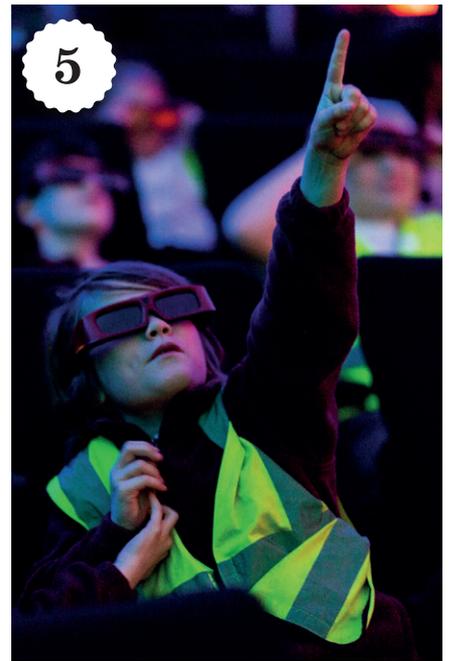
Step into the world of the Vikings this spring! Vikings: The Immersive Experience opens 12 March at Dock X, Canada Water, London. Combining immersive technology, huge installations and replica artefacts, the exhibition transports students straight to the golden age of the Vikings. Perfect for inspiring curiosity and bringing curriculum topics to life, covering the story of Queen Kraka and King Ragnar Lodbrok, Viking invasions, daily life and Norse mythology. School groups enjoy special rates which are available from Monday to Friday during term time. You can reserve now and pay later. Learn more at vikings-immersive.co.uk/london

Visit the stars

How do rockets get to space?
Why is light so fantastic?

If you're looking to spark curiosity in STEM this winter, check out Bristol's science centre We The Curious, home to the UK's only 3D planetarium and two floors brimming with over 200 things to do, including interactive exhibits exploring space, sound, illusions, food, animations and much more. Combine a visit to the exhibition floors with a mesmerising trip around the winter night sky in the planetarium, and a choice of curriculum-linked live science shows and workshops on everything from fossils to forensics, chemistry to climate change. Visit wethecurious.org or email education@wethecurious.org to find out more and book your most surprising science experience, yet.

5



6

Unbeatable residentials

Porthpean Outdoor is Cornwall's leading outdoor activity centre. Set overlooking the stunning Cornish south coast, we offer schools an unbeatable residential experience that inspires learning beyond the classroom. Thanks to being just a five-minute walk from our beach, we provide exciting water, beach and land-based activities, such as kayaking, coasteering, stand up paddleboarding, climbing, archery, and bushcraft, with opportunities to build confidence and resilience every step of the way. The cosy onsite accommodation at our secure site, as well as full catering facilities means we take the stress out of your residential. With safety, inclusivity, and education at the core, Porthpean Outdoor gives teachers peace of mind and pupils memories that last a lifetime. You book the coach – we'll do the rest. Visit porthpean.com or call 01726 72901 for more info and to book your place. We can't wait to welcome you!



7

Cleopatra: The Experience is coming to London!

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Visit cleopatraexperience.co.uk/london/groups

KEEP CALM, and carry on

Lesson observations can be stressful for all involved, but three simple steps can take some of the heat off

ALAN SHIELDS

There is something in the DNA of teachers that dictates that, while we are happy to perform – sometimes quite theatrically – in front of 30 little people all day, the thought of being observed by another adult can strike abject fear into us. Like a regular visit to the dentist, we know that it is something we *should* do, but it's not something many of us *want* to do.

Well... I can let you into a secret from the head's side of things: lots of us don't look forward to lesson observations, either. Most senior leaders love spending time in classrooms, but we know that can be stressful for our teachers, and we don't want people to feel under more pressure than they already do. So, how can you as a classroom teacher successfully navigate a lesson observation and come out the other side with something useful?

Plan

While every headteacher will have their own expectations, I always suggested to staff that they avoided 'show piece' lessons with lavish resources that took weeks to create. This type of lesson does not reflect the daily realities of learning and teaching. Instead, I encouraged staff to show me

a strong example of what a typical lesson might look like.

If your head is open to the possibility, it can be helpful to briefly discuss, and agree, what the focus of the observation will be beforehand. If you get the chance to propose an area you would like feedback on, I'd suggest something that you have been trying to develop or improve. Whilst heads always enjoy seeing staff showcase their strengths and talents, it's probably more useful to try and get some feedback on an area that is still under development.

“As part of their training, teachers are encouraged to be self-reflective, but this is different from being self-critical”

As you plan your lesson, it's probably best to avoid any approaches that are completely new. As well as being a 'high risk' strategy in terms of whether it will work, there is always the danger that your pupils will 'out' you. One of my own daughters, when she was around seven, was in a class when the teacher was delivering an RE lesson in

front of inspectors.

The inspector asked her what RE topics they had covered that year. She, quite matter-of-factly, replied that this was only the second RE lesson they had ever had... and the first had been the week before!

Perform

People have often asked me about how much they should tell their pupils about a forthcoming lesson observation. My advice is this: tell your pupils, but don't over-egg the pudding. It's helpful for children, particularly neurodivergent learners, to know that someone else will be



in the room and why they will be there, but don't over-hype it.

When the actual lesson comes around, try and approach it as normally as possible; nothing will spook your children more than you behaving in an unusual way. Remember that your observed lesson is like any other; some things will go well, some things won't. The more important issue is how you respond to these things. Don't be afraid to stop something if it's not going well and alter the task. Similarly, if children are racing through something and finding it too straightforward, why not set them an extension task? The person observing you will understand that challenges occur during lessons; it's how you deal with them that matters.

HOW TO SURVIVE OBSERVATIONS

PLAN

- If it's possible, identify an aspect of teaching you would like feedback on.
- Avoid 'show piece' lessons full of strategies you don't normally use.
- Think carefully about how you will differentiate and meet the needs within the class.

PERFORM

- Pay particular attention to how you will begin and end your lesson.
- Try and interact with your pupils as you always do; don't 'spook' them with different behaviour.
- Don't be afraid to adapt your plan as things crop up during the lesson.

PROGRESS

- Listen out for feedback on generic learning, teaching and assessment issues that you can apply to lots of lessons.
- Don't be too self-critical.
- Be prepared to explain your thinking and to put the lesson in a wider context.

It's sometimes said that "Good musicians begin together. The best ones finish together." In lessons, as with songs, it's important to think about the beginning and the end. At the start of the lesson, how will you hook the children's interest, link to real life contexts and to previous learning? At the end, how will the lesson be summarised, learning checked, and the next steps identified? A bit like a song, a lesson can have a few 'ragged'

bits in the middle, but a solid beginning and end always leaves a good impression.

Progress

Hopefully, your head will have arranged a time for a feedback discussion. It's my experience that teachers are often much harder on themselves than the observer. As part of our training, we're encouraged to be self-reflective, but this is different from being self-critical; try and avoid worrying yourself sick before the feedback.

While the feedback may contain some comments on the lesson *content*, try not to get too bogged down in this. After all, it may be another year before you do a lesson on air-raid precautions in the Second World War!

Instead, listen out for comments on more generic learning, teaching and assessment issues that you can apply to lots of lessons.

Whilst it is important to read the room when getting your feedback, at times you may want to explain why you chose a particular approach or give some context in terms of previous lessons or pupil issues. Although your head will have lots of insight, they will not know everything about your class and their previous learning.

Heads can find feedback sessions difficult, too. If the lesson hasn't gone as well as the teacher would have hoped for, a good head will always try and find positives and suggest possible next steps. Similarly, even if it has been a top-notch lesson your head will try and suggest some potential next steps. No matter what the circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that the feedback should focus on helping you continue to progress. **TP**



Alan Shields is a local authority inclusion officer and former primary

head with almost 30 years' experience in the state and independent sectors.

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THIS WAY!

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Family engagement: WHAT'S THE STORY?

“The social contract between home and school has been fractured,” claimed the former head of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, commenting on the challenges schools faced following the lifting of lockdown restrictions in 2023.

Here we are, three years on, and for many schools that fracture has never fully mended.

But what stops schools from engaging parents? And how can leaders support their teaching staff to improve parental engagement?

How manageable is parent contact?

The good news is that, overall, most teachers say the amount of contact they had with parents in the Autumn term was manageable. According to a TeacherTapp survey, this was true for 81 per cent of both primary and secondary classroom teachers.

However, when we break this down by seniority, the toll on senior leaders becomes more apparent. Just 71 per cent of primary senior leaders describe parent

contact as manageable, and the same is true for 77 per cent of secondary leaders.

This is a problem that needs to be addressed, particularly because as a profession, teachers are facing a retention crisis – and particularly, a shortage of headteachers. Failing to address the additional stress caused by poor parental communication will only lead to more teachers being either pushed out of the classroom, or put off pursuing additional responsibilities.

Phone calls

A phone call home can be a quick and high-quality way of communicating with an individual parent. It's not always possible to speak face-to-face, letters take time, and a note passed via a student isn't always appropriate. But the thought of calling home

worries some teachers more than others. To explore this, we ran a small experiment with our Teacher Tappers. We asked half of them how they felt about making a positive phone call home, and the other half about making a negative one. This allowed us to unpick whether the barrier was the phone call itself, or the nature of the message.

When sharing negative news, 72 per cent of teachers said they would feel confident picking up the phone. When sharing positive news, this rose to 93 per cent.

But 6 per cent of teachers described themselves as “not at all confident” when sharing negative news over the phone, compared with just 1 per cent when calling home to share positive news.

Which teachers don't like phone calls?

At the most extreme end, the 1 per cent of teachers who are “not confident at all” even when making positive phone calls are more likely to be early career teachers (3 per cent compared to 1 per cent overall).

Teachers who describe themselves as “not very confident” are also more likely to be younger – 10 per cent of teachers in their 20s fall into this group, compared with just 4 per cent of teachers aged 50 and over.

Could training help?

The majority of teachers have not had any training on communicating with parents. Only 7 per cent of classroom teachers and 10 per cent of senior

leaders report having received training in the last 12 months. A further 19 per cent of classroom teachers and 26 per cent of senior leaders say they have had training in the past, but not recently.

The rest? Nothing. This means that 74 per cent of classroom teachers and 65 per cent of senior leaders have never had training on parental communication.

Because relatively few teachers report having had training, it's difficult to draw firm conclusions about its impact. However, we do see a difference in confidence. Among teachers who have never had training, only 60 per cent say they feel very confident about phoning home. Among those who have had training, this rises to 68 per cent.

Parental expectations 'unrealistic' say six in ten school leaders

Parental involvement is essential in any school's success story. But what happens when the partnership starts to feel more like pressure? According to new research from ParentPay Group, 61 per cent of school leaders say parental expectations have become “unrealistic”. Behaviour, SEND support, and teacher availability are now flashpoints – shifting the relationship from collaborative to combative.

And that's a problem. Not just for leaders, but for the whole school community.

Engaging parents has always been a balancing act. Families want the best for their children. Schools want to create calm, focused environments where all students can thrive. But when communication systems are clunky, resources are stretched and leaders are overwhelmed, that balance breaks.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

When schools get parental engagement right, it becomes a source of strength. Parents become advocates. Pupils feel supported. Leaders are backed to lead. In order to work, engagement has to be strategic, not sporadic. And it needs to be manageable – not just another task added to the pile, especially as school leaders told us they spend over a third (36 per cent) of their working week on managing or worrying about budgets alone.

A well-run school is, at its heart, an engaged community. Leaders describe them



as places that “communicate well to staff, parents, and pupils,” where communication “runs through all levels” and everyone feels “welcomed and supported”. In these schools, trust, culture and connection flourish – not through one-off updates, but through clear, consistent communication that listens as much as it informs.

So how do we move from friction to focus? Here's what the leaders who contributed to the report had to say:

- 1. Set shared expectations.** Start each term by clearly outlining how your school communicates and how parents can raise questions constructively. This helps everyone align and prevents future misunderstandings.
- 2. Simplify the experience.** Too many platforms lead to confusion. There are tools that combine messaging, payments, attendance, and more – giving parents a single place to engage and staff a way to reduce admin and regain time to lead.

- 3. Make feedback a habit.** Small check-ins matter. Quick polls and surveys help families feel heard and highlight what's working (and what's not).

- 4. Use data to improve.** Look at which messages land and which go unread. Engagement metrics help schools refine their approach and reach harder-to-engage families.

When communication is smart, simple and supportive, engagement becomes the heart of a well-run school.



Lewis Alcraft is chief executive of ParentPay Group.

parentpaygroup.com/whitepapers/well-run-schools



“74 per cent of classroom teachers and 65 per cent of senior leaders have never had training on parental communication”

The angry parent

One reason some teachers are reluctant to pick up the phone is the fear of facing an angry parent. Whilst we might hope all communication will be professional and collegiate, the reality is that this isn't always the case.

So how prepared are teachers to deal with these situations? The answer depends on the role. Around half of senior leaders say their school has clear guidance on how to respond to inappropriate parent communication. Among classroom teachers, only a quarter say the same – suggesting the guidance may exist, but isn't as clear or accessible as it could be.

The good news is that clear guidance appears to make a difference. Among classroom teachers who say their school has clear guidance, 23 per cent feel completely confident dealing with inappropriate parent communication.

In schools without clear guidance, that figure almost halves. Just 13 per cent of classroom teachers in these schools say they feel completely

confident. So, what should leaders take away from this?

If parent engagement is something you would like to improve in your school, before you make changes, ask yourself the following:

- 1 Do you already have guidance in place for how to deal with parent communication? If yes, how easy is it to find, and are you confident staff know where it is and find it helpful?
- 2 What do you have in place for your least experienced members of staff? Is there an opportunity for phone calls to be made *with* another more experienced member of staff?
- 3 What training have your staff had on parental communication, and how useful did they find it?
- 4 How many channels of communication do you use between home and school, and how is each channel used? Can staff limit the time messages are sent, and are expectations about contact communicated with parents?

Small changes can make a big difference, and huge overhauls to existing communication systems aren't always the best approach; generally, the problem isn't the channels themselves, but rather how equipped and supported teachers feel when communicating with parents.



Grainne Hallahan is a former teacher, who now writes and analyses daily questions at Teacher Tapp.

onelink.to/teachertapp



Repairing family-school conflict

Parents rarely become frustrated with their child's school overnight. Subtle signs often appear before families disengage completely.

Negativity soon develops when parents don't feel listened to. This might simply be because nobody in school is available for a conversation, but everyone, – SLT, teachers, SENCOs and pastoral leaders – has a role to play. Some schools share the load by having two deputy heads, so someone is always there to address parents' concerns.

Donna Faley, headteacher at St Thomas More Catholic Primary, has developed a whole team of staff who support parental engagement within their specialist areas, including a phonics lead who is responsible for engaging with parents about children's phonics learning. This means parents get quick answers to their questions and are better equipped to support their child's education.

Some parents want to engage but can't, because English is not their first language. When communications are inaccessible, families can feel excluded or may even switch off completely.

Emma Darcy, consultant and director of technology for learning at Denbigh High School, uses simple AI translation tools in Canva to remove language barriers. This keeps parents informed, so they have more confidence in supporting their child's progress from home.

Face-to-face meetings help build relationships, but not all parents can attend due to work or other commitments. Staff at St Thomas More Catholic Primary avoid this by keeping track of parents who haven't engaged for a while, catching them in the playground to share details of workshops or events that are likely to interest them.

Short daily meet-and-greets at the school gate and flooding social media with positive news about school life also help keep families up to date. These opportunities encourage parents to feel valued and included, and help build stronger relationships, so there is less chance of them breaking down in times of increased pressure.

Cassie Higgletton is a former teacher and senior leader at VenturEd Solutions.

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Onward and UPWARD

Amy Husband explores what the new Ofsted framework updates mean for primary education

Primary leaders know that every decision in the classroom can ripple through a pupil's development. With Ofsted's updated inspection framework now in place, priorities are evolving. Inspectors will now examine a wider range of distinct areas – from inclusion and curriculum quality to wellbeing and leadership – rather than a single overall grade. There is of course great emphasis on safeguarding and the individual child's experience. While these changes apply to all primary schools, they also have implications for how schools use alternative provision (AP) to support their pupils.

Early intervention

Inclusion is now a standalone focus, as inspectors require evidence that schools are supporting all pupils, particularly those with SEND, disadvantage, or social and emotional barriers. For many younger children, these challenges can affect confidence and engagement long before assessments take place.

High-quality AP is increasingly recognised as an effective early intervention mechanism, but this support must be holistic.

At Academy21, we offer personalised teaching based on relational pedagogy and adaptive technology that supports engagement. All our lessons are delivered live and done so by caring teachers who build positive relationships and understand what makes pupils thrive.

Pupil journeys

Inspectors are paying closer attention to the journey of



each pupil. Schools need to show that placement decisions are carefully considered, evidence-based, and should be regularly reviewed for their impact.

We support schools in making progress visible. Through our mentor portal, schools have real-time access to attendance, engagement, and academic outcomes. But more than this, we will make your young person thrive, motivate them to engage and produce work of which they are proud. This level of insight and positive student sentiment helps schools articulate why a placement was chosen, how it is monitored, and how it meets the needs of each child, ensuring that they remain at the centre of every decision.

Curriculum and teaching quality

The updated framework evaluates curriculum and teaching as an integrated area, considering sequencing, delivery, and alignment with national expectations. Pupils need a curriculum that develops core academic skills while meaningfully embedding social and emotional learning.

For example, our Key Stage 2 programme integrates overarching PSHE objectives, wellbeing, and oracy throughout the week. Activities such as circle time, teamwork exercises, movement-based learning, and speaking and listening opportunities ensure pupils develop academically while building resilience, confidence, and collaboration skills. It is about relationships and enjoyment.

Engagement and safeguarding

Attendance and engagement reveal how a child is connecting with learning. Inspectors now look closely at how schools monitor participation and respond to challenges. We have found that clear, timely data can make all the difference alongside positive student and parent/carer feedback, because they are enjoying the provision and feeling motivated.

Safeguarding, of course, remains non-negotiable. Our staff are carefully recruited and fully trained in safeguarding and child protection, and any concerns are logged and reviewed

immediately by our DSL and safeguarding team. This ensures pupils are safe, supported, and that schools can confidently demonstrate how wellbeing and protection are integrated day-to-day.

Leadership and communication

Leadership and governance now cover strategic oversight, accountability, and continuous professional development. Schools must show how AP supports wider school aims and how decisions are evidence-based. For AP, it's critical that school leaders ensure clear communication and collaboration. From onboarding to ongoing mentoring, our teams guide schools on how to monitor progress, support reintegration, and respond to emerging challenges. This partnership approach allows schools to evidence strong governance and proactive engagement during inspection.

Strengthening education

High-quality online AP offers schools a flexible way to support each child's learning journey, helping pupils consolidate academic skills while building resilience, motivation, and social confidence. At Academy21, we work alongside schools, through live lessons and personalised plans, to make this support visible and meaningful. **TP**



Amy Husband is executive headteacher at Academy21.

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ASSESSMENT SPECIAL

44

Stop guessing what pupils know...

Use hinge questions to check for understanding in science lessons instead

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Stop guessing what PUPILS KNOW

Use hinge questions to check for understanding in science lessons instead, says **Danny Nicholson**

We often use formative assessment, or ‘assessment for learning’ (AfL) techniques to help us gauge where our pupils are in their understanding. One of the methods I find most useful when doing this in science, is the hinge question.

A hinge question is used to check for understanding at a ‘hinge-point’ in a lesson. This is a point, often in the middle of the lesson, where the teacher might move on from one key idea or activity to another, and understanding the first

with other AfL techniques, such as mini whiteboards, so you can scan the class and immediately get a feel for whether everyone really understands.

One of the most famous proponents of hinge questions is probably Dylan William, who recommends that every child should be able to answer a hinge question within two minutes, and that it should take no more than 30 seconds for the teacher to collect and interpret the responses.

Imagine a Year 3 lesson on plants. You’ve explained the importance of sunlight and water, but before moving on

into how well your children understand key ideas. In a lesson about the water cycle, for example, you can pose a hinge question like: “What happens to water vapour in the air when it cools down?” Based on class responses, you can tell if they understand the concept of condensation before moving on to precipitation.

The results of hinge questions also allow you to make on-the-spot adjustments to your lesson. If a significant portion of the class struggles, you can revisit a concept or use a different teaching method to solidify understanding before progressing. Additionally, they keep children actively involved in their learning

“Dylan William recommends that very child should be able to answer a hinge question within two minutes”

concept is a prerequisite for the next chunk of learning. Hinge questions allow the teacher to check whether the children have any misconceptions about the topic.

This is a snappy bit of formative assessment, which enables us as teachers to know whether it is appropriate to move on, or whether we need to briefly recap, or reteach a concept. Hinge questions should be closed questions, so that you know exactly what the possible answers should be. This could be coupled

to how roots absorb water, you stop and use a hinge question such as “Where do plants get the energy to make food?”. If the majority of children write down ‘sunlight’ you can move on. If not, it is time for a quick review or a different explanation.

Deeper insight

But hinge questions are more than just quick checks. They serve several crucial purposes, including immediate feedback, providing instant insight



process. They shift the focus from passive listening to active participation, encouraging pupils to think critically about the concepts being presented.

Crafting hinge questions

Creating effective hinge questions requires a thoughtful approach. Here are some steps to help:

- 1. The learning objective:** identify the specific learning objective of your lesson. What key concepts should children have grasped by the end? Align your hinge questions directly with these objectives. For example, in the Year 4 states of matter unit, a lesson objective asks for children to 'observe that some

materials change state when heated or cooled'. A hinge question might be to show an image of an ice cube on the whiteboard and ask the class:

"What happens to this ice cube when it gets warm?"

- 2. Clarity is key:** frame your question in clear, concise language that your children can easily understand. Avoid scientific jargon or complex sentence structures.
- 3. Anticipate responses:** consider the range of possible answers and what they would reveal about the children's understanding. Are they on track, or are there misconceptions requiring clarification? For instance, in a lesson about magnets,

you might anticipate the misconception "all metals are attracted to magnets" and target a question to check if the children still think this. For example: *Billy thinks that all metals stick to a magnet. Is he right or wrong? Close your eyes. Put your hands on your head if you think he's right. Fold your arms if you think he's wrong.*

Top tip: the Knowledge Matrices on the PLAN Assessment website cover common misconceptions for every unit in the science national curriculum: tinyurl.com/tp-PLANmis

Real-world usage

Now that you have your hinge questions, consider how you're going to implement them. For example, don't leave hinge questions as an afterthought. Incorporate them during lesson planning, strategically placing them after a key concept has been introduced, but before children are asked to apply or extend their knowledge.

It's important to be clear and direct when stating your hinge question. Give children a moment to think about their answer before prompting for responses. There are also various ways to collect these responses. Show-of-hands is a simple option, but some pupils might wait and copy others. Mini whiteboards might work better in a 'one-two-three, show me' situation.

And, essentially, have a plan for what you will do if the children show they require further support.

By incorporating hinge questions into your primary science lessons, you unlock a powerful tool for supporting learning. As Dylan William has said, by planning a few key questions carefully, it's possible to get an understanding of what the class can and can't do in time to do something about it. **TP**

Additional techniques

Hinge questions work best in concert with other teaching strategies to build a rich and dynamic learning environment. Consider incorporating them alongside other questioning techniques such as:

 **Turn to your neighbour:** children discuss the question with someone sitting nearby.

 **Cold calling:** ask the question and then choose a child to answer without using hands up. It's important to ask the question first before naming a pupil. If you use a name first, the rest of the class will switch off and not listen to the question.

 **Bounce it:** choose a child to answer, but if they don't know they can choose to 'bounce' it to another pupil. That child explains it to them, and the original child has to then tell the teacher the answer.

 **Agree, build, challenge:** once a child answers the question, another can say whether they agree and why. Someone else might then build upon this answer or challenge it.



Danny Nicholson is an independent primary science consultant

and initial teacher trainer. His book on primary science teaching, Science Fix (£22.99, Corwin UK), is out now.

 @dannynic

 sciencefix.co.uk



Smooth MODERATOR

Try these simple steps to make cross-school English moderation run like clockwork – and get real value from the process

SARAH FARRELL

When done well, writing moderation sessions can be a powerful, valuable use of time; however, when not planned properly, they can become tick-box exercises that don't lead to any meaningful output. If teachers are told to simply swap books and decide on a level, discussions about work can't take place and judgements are likely to be based on a gut reaction rather than on evidence.

The main goal for any moderation session is for teachers to leave feeling confident in the writing judgements and empowered to act on identified next steps.

Getting started

Before a writing moderation session, it is important for whoever is running it (usually the English lead) to consider several things:

- When is the best time for a moderation session? If possible, it should tie in with any data deadlines so that teachers can feel assured in their judgements.
- Who will be working together? In a one-form entry school, teachers may work together within a key stage. In a multi-form entry school, the majority of the moderations may include two or more teachers from a year group to ensure consistency in expectation across the classes; however, there may be times when working across year groups (such as multiple UKS2

- teachers) may be useful.
- What will the focus of the moderation be? As not all children can be looked at in one session, and to ensure a wide variety of work is considered across the year, it can be useful to select a certain group of work for teachers to bring, such as children working between WTS and EXS. It may also be a useful exercise to moderate by looking at a genre (e.g. narrative) across the school to identify general strengths and weaknesses that can be used to inform CPD.
- Which pieces of work will be moderated? It is important to communicate

to assess children working below the objectives for their year group.

Structure breeds confidence

In order to ensure that a writing moderation session can run smoothly, clear rules and structures should be put in place. Moderation can feel very personal, so trust needs to be built, and teachers need to be confident that the professional discussions will be constructive and focused on the work rather than the teacher.

A set structure can also keep a moderation session on track and ensure that

it is beneficial to everyone involved. For example:

- 1) Start with silent reading time, during which, teachers sit in pairs and read the work in front of them, highlight evidence on a given assessment framework, and assign the judgement they feel fits best.
- 2) Next, move to discussion. Teachers can share their judgements and evidence using the language of the assessment framework.

“The main goal for any moderation session is for teachers to leave feeling confident in judgements”

- clearly the quantity and type of work, e.g. a sample of three to five pieces of photocopied work for three different children. Although some scaffolded work may be used, it is ideal to have some pieces of more independent writing in order to get a clearer picture of what children can do when not supported.
- What will be used to moderate? Having a clear framework that teachers are familiar with is crucial for ensuring that assessments are based on evidence. This should also include guidance for how



The class teacher can contextualise the writing and give information about which parts were independent and which were more supported. Based on the discussion and evidence found, moderators then agree on and record a level for each child, along with particular strengths and weaknesses.

- 3) Finally, you can identify patterns. Look for trends across a group or class, such as a general weakness with speech punctuation. This provides a useful next step for the class teacher to work on in order to help their class improve.

To structure these professional discussions, particularly for staff

members new to moderation, you could provide sentence stems like these:

Identifying strengths:

- Although _____ is not consistent in this piece, it is generally consistent in the other pieces.
- I can see evidence of _____ here to show that the objective has been met.

Identifying weaknesses:

- Although this child has started to use _____, it is not yet being used consistently correctly.
- I can see that the child could use _____ at the time of teaching, but they are not yet confident when using it independently.

Explaining why a child has not met a standard:

- Overall, although this child has met several of the objectives, they are not yet

able to _____.

- The child can use _____ in places but is not yet able to use it consistently which is preventing them from being _____.
- I don't think there is enough evidence to say that they are _____ because _____.

Collaborative practicalities

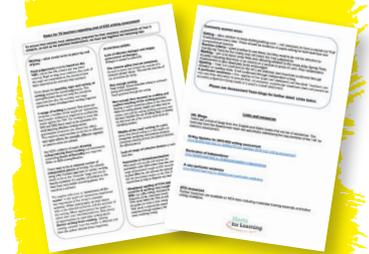
Working with teachers from other schools can be a really useful way to get external opinions and suggestions; however, there are several things that must be considered and set in place to make it successful, such as:

- Assessment differences. Schools assess in a variety of different ways, and so it is important to set a clear structure for how writing moderation will work. Some schools may use a system of *emerging, developing, secure and greater depth*, while others may use a *working towards, working at and working above* system. Some schools assess by using the end-of-year standards throughout the year, and others work on a flight path model assessing only the content covered. In order to ensure that an inter-school moderation is useful, there needs to be an agreement

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tinyurl.com/tp-EngModCheck

about how work will be assessed to avoid miscommunications.

- Established routines and ground rules. Keeping a similar structure to in-school moderations means that teachers will be familiar with the format, and the time spent moderating can be maximised. If a group of schools regularly moderate together, it may be useful to create a shared structure and assessment framework.
- Scheme differences. Schools using very different writing schemes can make moderation more difficult as it is less clear which pieces may be a very close imitation of a written text. **TP**



Sarah Farrell is a **KS2 teacher in Bristol** who makes and shares resources

online.



@SarahFarrellKS2



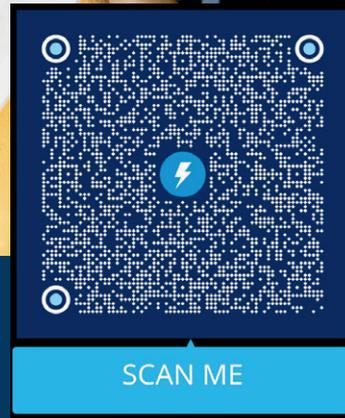
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5 REASONS TO TRY... NTS assessments

National Test-Style Standardised (NTS) assessments for maths track progress and help children build familiarity



30 SECOND BRIEFING

NTS maths are standardised termly maths assessments for learners aged 5-11. Available as National Test-style papers with free reporting and test data analysis. Summer papers in March 2026.

1 RELIABLE OUTCOMES

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4 BENCHMARK ATTAINMENT AND TRACK PROGRESS ACROSS SCHOOL

The access to performance data not only allows you to compare your

learners' performance against national averages, but it also provides useful reference points when discussing performance with parents. You can also compare attainment within your school by syncing your Boost Insights account with your chosen management information system or your pupil tracker, resulting in gaining a more holistic understanding of your whole school.

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KEY POINTS

Standardised termly mathematics assessments for learners aged 5-11.

New edition fully aligned with the latest White Rose Maths primary schemes of learning.

Designed to predict performance and familiarise learners with national curriculum content domains.

Benchmark attainment and track progress across your school against national averages.

5 REASONS TO TRY... MELVA

Develop pupils' emotional literacy, resilience, and confidence with this whole-school programme



30 SECOND BRIEFING

MELVA is a whole-school wellbeing programme using storytelling, games and digital resources to help primary pupils develop emotional literacy, resilience, self-management and confidence while supporting teachers to deliver PSHE effectively.

1 A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO WELLBEING

MELVA brings wellbeing into everyday school life, using the character Melva Mapletree to help pupils build emotional literacy, resilience and self-management. "It's brilliant to have a shared language for feelings across all year groups," says one teacher. Designed for all pupils, not just those struggling, MELVA fosters a preventative culture. A MELVA license, worth £1000 per year to a school, is currently free for a limited time.

2 ENGAGING STORIES THAT OPEN UP CONVERSATIONS

Through storytelling, animation, games and an illustrated novel, MELVA can explore anxiety, grief, friendships and peer pressure. Humorous, lovable characters, give children a safe space to reflect and discuss feelings. "The children really engage and open up in ways you don't always see," reports a Key Stage 2 teacher. MELVA is a creative way to embed PSHE in a fun and engaging way.

3 GROWING WITH PUPILS

MELVA evolves with pupils from Key Stage 1 to Year 6. Younger children focus on emotional literacy, while older pupils explore self-image, transitions, worries and grief. Consistent use builds



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familiarity and a shared vocabulary. "We can see real improvements in confidence and how children handle tricky emotions," says a Year 5 teacher. Year-on-year engagement fosters

empathy and problem-solving and brings wellbeing into everyday learning, equipping children with skills they can carry throughout life.

4 SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM LINKS

MELVA supports staff as well as pupils. The curriculum-linked activities help deliver PSHE by meeting wellbeing learning objectives. Based on frameworks including the NHS 5 Steps to Wellbeing, lessons are structured yet flexible, supporting literacy, oracy, resilience, empathy and teamwork. Drama-based activities develop children's focus, self-awareness and confidence, so teachers can embed wellbeing with minimal prep.

5 EVIDENCE-LED, CREATIVE AND PRACTICAL

Co-created with teachers, mental health professionals, parents and children, MELVA embeds wellbeing consistently across the curriculum. The portal tracks progress with pupils showing strong improvements in understanding mental health topics and in practical self-management techniques. "It's amazing to see children applying what they've learned to real-life situations," says a Year 6 teacher.

KEY POINTS

CREATIVE APPROACH TO WELLBEING EDUCATION

Teachers choose from our episodic film, games, book and animated series, to tailor lessons to meet wellbeing outcomes confidently.

ADAPTABLE LESSON PLANS AND RESOURCES

Each lesson plan with resources can be adapted to a range of settings, including assemblies, intervention groups and weekly PSHE classes.

TEACHER TOOLKIT AND CPD

Annual CPD sessions digitally and in person to support all teaching staff to deliver wellbeing outcomes while keeping well themselves.

AWARD-WINNING PROGRAMME

Finalist Wellbeing Resource at Bett Awards, Winner of PSHE Education award at Children & Young People Now Awards.

Assess for **SUCCESS**

Having a robust structure to weed out maths misconceptions before they stick will set pupils off on the right path, says **Laura Elliott**

As a teacher, I have a wealth of data at my fingertips, but the real challenge is how to use it effectively to ensure that it supports my teaching. I recognise how important it is to know my pupils, the curriculum and what has been taught in previous years.

However, ensuring that I'm up to date with exactly what my pupils do and don't know in maths is quite the undertaking, since there are so many layers to the subject; it is quite possible for pupils to have significant strengths in one component and weaknesses in another. It is therefore important that assessment is not just used to track pupils' learning but also provides up-to-date and accurate information about the specifics of what pupils do and do not know. This allows teachers to adapt their teaching so it builds on pupils' existing knowledge, addresses their weaknesses, and focuses on the next steps that they need to make progress.

Approaching any lesson, I try to think explicitly about adaptations that can be made before, during and after the lesson to support the needs of all my pupils. Below is a quick guide to the structure I use, to ensure I can nip misconceptions in the bud.

1. Before teaching

Before I start the lesson, I provide pupils with a quick, low-stakes quiz to check for specific misconceptions.

This reflects on Recommendation 1 of the EEF's Improving Mathematics in Key Stage 2 and 3 Guidance Report, which states: 'Assessment should be used not only to track pupils' learning but also to provide teachers with information about what pupils do and do not know.' For my Year 6 class, I know from summer transition meetings that the children aren't too confident in dealing with fractions. Therefore, this is what my quiz targets. I present one question to the whole class, giving them plenty of time to answer and reassuring them that the test won't be graded; I'll just be using it to help me design the best lesson I can. The question in this case is $2 \times 2/3 = ?$

When attempting this question, many pupils multiply both the numerator and denominator by the integer 2. I therefore learn that a significant proportion of the class have a lack of conceptual understanding around multiplying a fraction by an integer.

Listening to the children's discussions after the

task also informs me that they are trying to remember a procedure or a 'quick trick' to solve the problem, rather than having clear mathematical understanding.

It also highlights that key mathematical vocabulary isn't well understood, and instead more informal language is being used, e.g. 'top number' and 'bottom number' rather than 'numerator' and 'denominator'.

The information gained from the low-stakes quiz therefore enables me to adapt the sequence of learning for the forthcoming lesson, considering the children's starting points.

2. During teaching

During the fractions lesson, to scaffold the pupils' learning I use a knowledge organiser, which has worked examples of how to multiply fractions by an integer, as well as showing clear mathematical representations. I also model the examples within the knowledge organiser during whole-class teaching, including key mathematical vocabulary.

The knowledge organiser is also linked to the whole sequence of learning within the fraction unit.

I make sure, too, that there are regular opportunities for feedback during the lesson, by asking pupils to talk through the process for multiplying a fraction with an integer. Opportunities to hear pupils' thought processes – making learning visible – ensure responsive and timely feedback.

3. After teaching

After the lesson, each pupil adds their knowledge organiser to their workbook. This then acts as further support if children need to clarify thinking or revisit key vocabulary or methods later. To ensure the learning sticks, I plan retrieval tasks to recall this learning, such as quick 'show me' activities using mini whiteboards at the beginning of subsequent maths lessons.

Using this sequence as part of my in-class assessment helps me to better adapt my teaching to meet the needs of all learners in maths, and pinpoint specific misconceptions before they become too embedded. **TP**



Laura Elliott is a Year 6 teacher at Tyneview Primary School in Newcastle, and blogs for the Research Schools Network.

Testing the LIMITS

One assessment doesn't fit all, but with a few practical adaptations, pupils with SEND won't be held back

PENNY WHELAN

The curriculum can be hugely overwhelming for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers need to create a completely different, adapted and personalised curriculum for some children – others would benefit from only minimal additional support, whilst still others need intense intervention alongside adaptive teaching approaches in the classroom. No two pupils are the same, whether they have SEND or not, so it makes sense that we need to employ a range of strategies to support our learners, benefitting all, not just a few.

Once you know your pupils' needs, it is necessary to find suitable approaches to assess and measure progress. This is no easy task, but there are things you can do to make it simpler for all.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment can look different for every pupil, and when a young person has special educational needs, particular attention needs to be paid to the way in which they learn and how you monitor their progress.

One of the main approaches used to decipher what children do and don't know through formative assessment, is questioning. Like any approach, questions need to be adapted to best suit each child, so the teacher can fully understand how they are progressing.

Some pupils will need focused questions based on their individual target areas, encouraging them to make inferences and deductions – a good scaffold for this is Blank Levels. These are specific questions you can ask your pupils, to encourage more cognitively demanding answers. Levels include children being able to talk about things that are in front of them, including non-verbal communication such as

pointing (Level 1); being able to tell basic stories, make predictions and define words (Level 3); and being able to make inferences and deduce conclusions, as well as understanding basic cause and effect (Level 4). So, if you're assessing to see if a child has progressed to Level 3, you may show them an incomplete series of pictures showing a particular scenario, and ask them, "What do you think happens next?". If you're assessing for Level 4, you may ask them about something they can't currently see or hear, and guide them to explain how to reach a goal, using a question such as, "What could we use to cook scrambled eggs?"

You can find a full explanation of Blank Levels from the NHS at [tinyurl.com/tp-NHSBlankLevels](https://www.nhs.uk/tp-NHSBlankLevels)

Summative assessment

Summative assessment typically takes the form of a test where you measure learning after it has happened against a benchmark. There are various reasons why this can be tricky for pupils with SEND.

Some may be academically

more difficult. For others, even the knowledge that they will have to sit an assessment is enough to set off anxiety and fear that they will fail, or that they won't do well in comparison to their peers.

Whilst as teachers, we are encouraged to assess

"It's best to have open and honest conversations with parents and carers, inviting their observations and opinions"

behind their peers in terms of their development and would struggle accessing an assessment for their chronological age. It would make sense to give them a test that is from an age group or curriculum level in line with their learning. This gives a more accurate idea of where progress lies and what pupils can achieve, and gives them opportunities for success that they otherwise might not experience.

Traits of a child's specific special educational need may also make test situations



children's development according to their age, for many of our pupils, this simply doesn't work. Instead, it's useful to measure them against criteria that are more appropriate for their current stage. For example, if a child is working below the level of the curriculum, you could use a different set of criteria, such as the pre-key stage standards ([tinyurl.com/tp-PreKS1](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-PreKS1) and [tinyurl.com/tp-PreKS2](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-PreKS2)) or the engagement model ([tinyurl.com/tp-EngagementModel](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-EngagementModel)).

It's also important to keep pupils in the loop. If they feel you're being open with them, their anxiety might lessen. Be honest with children about the expectations of an upcoming assessment, praise their efforts, and discourage themselves to others.

Reporting to parents

When it comes to reporting a SEND pupil's progress to their parents, there are

many things to consider. Parents want to know about the progress their child is making, they want to help them achieve, and they have the right to have this reported to them in a supportive manner.

However, the language of assessment can be confusing. Make it clear and concise – avoid jargon and acronyms. Translate reports if necessary, using free tools such as Canva's AI translation, which offers 134 languages ([canva.com/translate](https://www.canva.com/translate)).

It's also best to be open and honest. For some families, navigating a special educational need or disability can be an extremely emotional and difficult process, so it can be tempting to tiptoe around the issue. However, if you suspect a child has a special educational need, it's best to have open and honest conversations with parents and carers, inviting their observations and opinions.

Having a special education need or disability often requires adaptations in schools, but doesn't have to get in the way of an ambitious education. Showing that you care and that you want their child to achieve, and will support them to do so, can put parents at ease.

Demonstrating that you aren't limiting the progress you think they can make goes a long way – informal, regular signposts such as certificates and stickers work well, or you can include goals and achievements in reports.

Assessment and wellbeing

It's important to consider the impact that assessment can have on pupils, particularly tests and summative assessment methods. They can provoke anxiety and cause children to withdraw or refuse to participate. In some cases, their fear response can lead to extreme behaviours.

However, we know that assessment needs to happen. If you can prepare your pupils, encourage them and build their confidence, and if you can use appropriate resources and tools to support them, you can make it a far less scary experience. Find more examples at [tinyurl.com/tp-AssessmentWellbeing TP](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-AssessmentWellbeingTP)



Penny Whelan is a primary assistant headteacher SENCO and senior

mental health lead.



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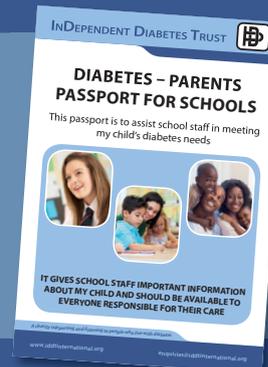
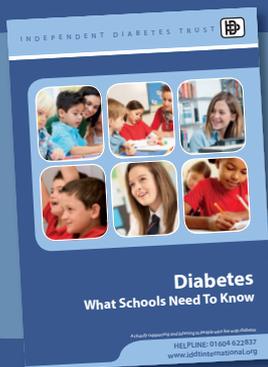
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Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom



1

Hands-on STEM

CREST is British Science Association's education programme that brings STEM to life for young people aged 3-19 of all abilities through hands-on challenges and long-form projects.

On the CREST website you'll find a

resource library full of activities and project ideas for all levels, free to download. Children typically aged 3-11 can take part in Star and SuperStar challenges – once six challenges are completed, they earn a Star or SuperStar CREST Award, rewarded with a nationally recognised CREST Award certificate. Find out more at crestawards.org Contact crest@britishscienceassociation.org



2

Wear purple for stroke awareness

Every day in May, another 240 people will face the life-changing impact of a stroke.

This Stroke Awareness Month, we are asking schools across the UK to Make May Purple. You could organise a 'Wear Purple Day', host a bake sale with delicious purple treats, or even decorate your classrooms and corridors in purple to raise vital funds and awareness.

These activities also give pupils the chance to learn about what a stroke is, the warning signs and how to build stroke-friendly communities.

For more information on how to get involved and to order your fundraising pack, please visit stroke.org.uk/sam

4

Introducing online SEND CPD units

Whole School SEND, through the DfE-funded Universal SEND Services programme, offers free online SEND CPD units to strengthen inclusive practice for learners with SEND.

The offer includes 20 inclusive practice units, alongside five autism units focusing on communication, sensory differences, and supportive learning environments.

Designed to fit around busy schedules, each unit takes around one hour to complete and is presented in clear, manageable sections. Units can be completed individually or shared as part of wider CPD, with certificates available to evidence professional development.

Find out more at wholeschoosend.org.uk or contact info@wholeschoosend.org.uk



3

Spring film screenings

Into Film's spring screenings offer primary teachers a free, shared cinema experience for their pupils. Classes can watch carefully selected films on the big screen, helping children engage with stories, characters and themes in a memorable way. Screenings are supported by our review-writing competition and special events such as Q&As or guest speakers. Spring screenings support learning across the curriculum while building confidence, encouraging discussion and fostering a love of film. It's a simple, inclusive way to enrich learning beyond the classroom and give pupils an experience they'll remember.

Find out more at intofilm.org/events



5



Snap!

The Enormous Crocodile is weaving his way across the UK in search of delicious little fingers and squidgy podgy knees... Only the other jungle creatures can foil his secret plans and clever tricks, but they're going to have to find a large amount of courage to stop this greedy brute. This mischievous musical based on Roald Dahl's snappy book is heading out on its first UK tour in 2026. Perfect for those aged 3+, The Enormous Crocodile offers a wickedly funny musical adventure for those of nursery and primary school age.

Find out more at enormouscrocodilemusical.com

This is what real reading **LOOKS LIKE**

You don't need a big, showy initiative to revolutionise reading. It's the small, everyday changes that make the biggest difference, says **Jonathan Kennedy**

When a group of pupils told me that reading was the one thing that helped them feel calm when life got noisy, I realised how much we underestimate the emotional pull of a good book. Their honesty became the spark behind the BDAT Big Read, a Trust-wide initiative to bring pupils together through stories, and embed a love of reading.

The Big Read is not a one-off celebration, but a conscious attempt throughout the academic year to make reading visible, valued and shared. While our launch event created excitement, the real impact has come from how schools have continued the work, weaving reading into the daily rhythm of school life.

Inside the Big Read

Our Big Read launch day saw thousands of pupils simultaneously take part in activities designed to celebrate reading. Shaped by our student wellbeing ambassadors, the day aimed to get children of all ages excited about books.

Schools welcomed authors Sairish Hussain and Ryan Vernel, who read from their work and spoke about their writing journeys, and we held competitions for things like photography and poetry. Representatives from local sports teams, including Bradford Bulls, also joined pupils to talk about how reading influences their lives in sport.

Individual schools ran their own activities, too. Some hosted mystery masked-reader sessions or invited former pupils to read with Year 6 classes. Others welcomed the Bradford Stories Bus, a mobile reading space run by the National Literacy Trust, to promote reading and wellbeing. Pupils also performed spoken-word poetry at Darley Market, drawing positive reactions

schools have introduced various initiatives.

In one school, teachers now read class books for half an hour every afternoon. In another, every class has daily ERIC (Everybody Reading In Class) time, alongside a dedicated 15-minute class story session that pupils help choose via half-termly voting. Staff have reported that pupils now talk about story time as something they look forward to, and

engagement has increased across the school.

These routines sit alongside weekly library visits. In one school, one year group's slot is positioned at the end of ++the day so families can join pupils.

Reading together

Because of all this, reading is becoming more visible across BDAT primaries; not through elaborate displays, but through practical

“A strong reading culture doesn't come from one big initiative, but from steady, everyday activities”

from shoppers who praised the emotion in their performances.

The day was further supported by donations from Little Bookshop Skipton and The Reading Agency. Many pupils said meeting authors and visitors encouraged them to read more widely and explore new types of writing.

Creating time and ownership

A frequent challenge in primaries is finding time for reading that isn't rushed or overshadowed by assessment pressures. To tackle this, some of our



activities that bring staff, pupils and families together.

Termly reading picnics are now embedded in some schools, including early years. These sessions create a relaxed, shared space where pupils choose a book, read with friends or teachers and enjoy stories outdoors. Others run book fairs and in-school bookshops during World Book Day to widen pupils' access to texts.

In another school, a drive-side lending library has been relaunched, making it easier for families to take books home at the end of the week. One school has also introduced regular non-fiction reading sessions to help pupils connect subject content with real-world texts.

These small, consistent actions help pupils see

reading as part of the rhythm of the school day and something shared by the whole community.

Linking with wellbeing

One example of these initiatives across BDAT is The Story Project, introduced at Lady Royd Primary, which uses high-quality texts to explore PSHE themes, with daily teacher read-aloud sessions and structured discussions. Each pupil is also given six books each year, giving them ownership and familiarity with the texts used in class.

The impact has been significant. Reading outcomes at Lady Royd rose from 55 per cent to 85 per cent at expected standard

in one year, and from 11 per cent to 49 per cent at greater depth. Inspectors also noted how confidently pupils articulated protected characteristics and themes such as fairness, identity and equality, crediting the strength of reading culture as a key driver.

Developing pupil leadership

Pupil-led initiatives are also shaping reading culture. In several schools, KS2 librarians support younger pupils with book choices and monitor borrowing, while wellbeing ambassadors run lunchtime reading sessions. Partner reading is widely used, with pupils using scripted prompts to explore vocabulary and meaning.

To broaden reading experiences further, schools use initiatives such as the KS2 100 Book Challenge, whole-school book swaps and links with local libraries to help pupils discover what they enjoy reading and establish regular habits. These approaches give children more opportunities to find books that interest them and gain confidence as readers.

It's in the everyday

What we've seen across BDAT is that a strong reading culture doesn't come from one big initiative, but from the steady, everyday activities.

The Big Read created excitement, but it's the routines that schools have built since, that are building momentum and helping reading take root.

When reading becomes woven into school life, pupils begin to see it not as something they do in a lesson, but as something that is theirs to enjoy, explore and talk about. **TP**

5 IDEAS TO REIGNITE RFP

1 Storytime that sticks: Dedicate time each day for everyone – staff included – to read together. Even if it's only 10 minutes, the focused time still adds up. Keep it predictable and communal; consistency builds the habit.

2 Let pupils influence book choices: At our schools where pupils vote on class stories at the start of each half term, this has increased engagement and made story time something pupils actively look forward to, because it is relevant and relatable to them.

3 Use libraries as shared spaces: Regular library visits, with front-facing displays and inviting furniture, have increased the number of books taken home for leisure. In one school, scheduling library time at the end of the day allows families to join in.

4 Develop pupil reading leaders: KS2 librarians, wellbeing ambassadors and partner-reading routines help pupils support each other and take ownership of reading culture.

5 Embed reading in wellbeing: Our schools use carefully chosen texts to explore PSHE themes. Coupled with daily teacher read-alouds, this has strengthened both wellbeing and academic outcomes.



Jonathan Kennedy is student voice lead at Bradford Diocesan Academies

Trust (BDAT).

bdat-academies.org



The pilfered porridge OF POETRY

We can get our teaching ‘just right’, says **Jonny Walker**

Go with me on this... As teachers of poetry, we are a bit like Goldilocks. Not because we commit crimes of trespass and theft, but because, just like that flaxen intruder, we are searching for something that feels ‘just right’.

Poetry teaching is a game of balance. On one end of our pedagogical seesaw, we have the desire for children to know, to comprehend, to analyse and perhaps to memorise poetry. We want them to understand poetic devices: what they do, and how they do it.

On the opposite end, we have the desire for children to *feel* something through poetry, to use it to know themselves differently, to leave their own mark on the page and to create something meaningful.

Too much weight on the first side, and children miss that chance to see poetry, language and writing as a place of self-expression, as something alive that can do things for them. But make the opposite side too heavy, and poetry becomes just the shapeless transcription of whatever thoughts pop into pupils’ heads.

And then there’s us, bumbling wildly back and forth, trying to maintain the balance. This, friends, is teaching: making sure the porridge is neither too hot nor too cold – getting it ‘just right’.

Balancing theory and practice

Theory needs practice, and practice needs theory.

Knowing something about poetry and feeling something about poetry are not separate processes. Each feeds the other.

Imagine two classes of eight-year-olds are learning to ride bikes. The teacher of the first class decides the children should learn through theory. Pupils watch videos of people cycling. They learn the names and functions of the handlebars, the gears, the chain, the saddle and the spokes. A bicycle is brought in for them to look at and draw. This teacher says to the children: “I love cycling and I

“On one end of our pedagogical seesaw, we have the desire for children to know something about poetry. On the other end, we want them to feel something”

hope you will too.” But once they actually hop onto the saddles, they quickly find themselves on the concrete weeping over their grazed knees. Knowing what handlebars are doesn’t necessarily help you to steer.

The teacher of the second class thinks the children should learn through practice alone, so off to the top of a hill everyone goes. Bums are on saddles before a word is spoken; it’s one gentle push and down they go. Nobody knows that the thing near their hands is called ‘the brake’, and so they cannot stop.

The children’s legs are a blur

as they go faster and faster.

“Please clap for Karolina and Abdulkarim, who managed to get to the bottom without falling off. Perhaps we can try and do it a bit more like them when we try tomorrow?”

And please stop crying, you’ve got a plaster now!”

The same tool would have benefited both these teachers and their unfortunate classes: stabilisers. Pupils would have been able to pedal with abandon, safe in the knowledge that they weren’t about to collapse into a heap on the floor.

The stabilisers on a writing lesson allow the children to apply what they know, and embrace the beautiful risk of writing. They can maintain their balance, safe in the knowledge that they won’t completely miss the mark.

What are the stabilisers in poetry teaching?

Stabilisers in a poetry lesson are whatever conditions you place on the writing. After balancing theory and practice, the next thing is to maintain equilibrium between constraint and

freedom. If we restrict children’s creative writing too much, we are essentially ‘stabilising’ them into stasis. They’re not falling, but they’re not moving, either. Does this sound familiar?

“I want you to do your own work, but remember, it needs to rhyme. Make sure you use your best handwriting, and check your spellings and grammar... I want you to use all those ‘wow words’ we shared, and it needs to stay on topic...”

If we apply too much constraint to what children write – this is true regardless of genre – then we should not be surprised when they show a lack of care or interest. We are essentially tricking them into writing exactly what we want them to write, whilst also trying to deceive them into thinking that this is what they wanted to do.

I’ll never forget the words of a Year 6 child I taught a few years ago. We were celebrating his writing, which was lively and interesting, and had a bit more of a ‘spark’ to it than other children in the class. I said to him, “Wow, Eesa. That is really brilliant. Do you like writing?”. I was asking this hoping to co-opt him to be my ally in the We Love Writing parade. He replied, “I really like writing, but I hate having to do it the way you all make us do it.” Ask an honest question, you get an honest reply. Speaking to him more about it, this was a child who

wrote for fun, for meaning, for self-care, in his own time. For him, the excessive constraints and limitations of 'schooled writing', were an intense frustration.

But here is something interesting: most children, in my modest experience, prefer too much control to too much freedom. If children feel as though they are floating in the uncertainty of our expectations, not sure in

even a small sense of what they are being invited to do, they experience a real sense of fear.

Put yourself in their shoes: imagine you come along to one of my workshops, and I share a poem with you: let's say Ted Hughes' poem *Hawk Roosting*. I read it aloud for you, we chat about it for five

minutes, and then I say, "OK, now it's your turn. Write a poem inspired by it. I'll be asking four of you at random to get up and share your poems to the class in 20 minutes before breaktime. Let's go, poets! Crack on!"

It's too much freedom.

Children and adults alike want to know the parameters. They are stabilisers that help those of us who need to rely on them, but do not inconvenience those of us who are confident and skilled enough to race ahead.

Freedom liberates, but so can constraint. **TP**



Jonny Walker is a children's writer and

specialist teacher of poetry, mythology and creative writing, working in primary schools worldwide. He created the teaching notes for 12 new Big Cat Poetry books with Collins.

How to get your poetry teaching 'just right'

● Balance freedom and constraint

If you limit one aspect of pupils' writing, liberate another. So, if you're focusing on their ability to use rhyming couplets (limiting the form), let them write about a topic that interests them (liberating the content). If you want to task children with writing meaningful poetry about emotions (limiting the content), allow them to write poetry in whichever forms most appeal (liberating the form).

● Talk is comprehension, talk is writing

The poetry classroom should be a place of free-flowing discussion. Poetry is about interpretation – what you take from a poem may be different from what I take from it. Let's talk about that. Poetry is social – expecting something great to grow in silence is like expecting a houseplant to grow without sunlight. Talk nourishes thought.

● The figure of eight

Often, our poetry teaching follows a linear path. We read, then we write, then we perform. Interrupt that: instead of a straight line, think of there being a figure of eight weaving around reading, writing and talking. Performing it aloud might help a child to edit their writing, for example.

● Be a poet with them

Don't just whack a model text on the whiteboard. Write alongside the children, as a writer. Join them in the joys, pleasures, frustrations and challenges that poetry writing can engender.



WAGOLL

Dragonborn by Struan Murray

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a big transition scene



Dragonborn, by Struan Murray (£8.99, Puffin), is out now

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Download your **FREE**, exclusive teaching pack to help you explore both this extract and the rest of the book with your class.

You can also find a podcast interview with Struan, complete with teaching pack, at tinyurl.com/tp-AIYCStruanMurray

tinyurl.com/tp-TransitionWriting

Just as we all go through big changes in our own lives, so too do the characters in novels. These changes often happen towards the climax, when our hero must find the strength to overcome whatever has been holding them back, so that they might save the day.

In *Dragonborn*, Alex Evans makes an incredible discovery: she is a dragon.

Ever since her dad's death, Alex's overprotective mother has smothered her with unbreakable rules. When the frustration inside Alex finally gets too big to bear, it rushes to the surface... and flames spill from her mouth. Now, Alex must travel to the legendary island of Skralla, one of the last surviving dragon havens, and learn how to control the incredible power that lives inside her: a power that is frightening, painful and thrilling all at once. But transforming into a dragon is no easy feat, and Alex will need all her courage and strength if she is to embrace the fire within.

Of course, Alex's change is a very physical one, but it is emotional too: she has spent the whole novel afraid of embracing her new nature,

for fear it will mean moving on, and letting go of her dad's memory. Now, when everything depends on it, Alex masters her feelings, and the dragon in her wakes at last...

The extract on the next page shows the very first moment that Alex transforms into her dragon form. It is a moment of *transition* in every sense: from human to dragon; from fear to confidence; from childhood to something bigger and more dangerous. As she changes, Alex must let go of the body she has always known, and trust herself to survive what comes next.

When writing this scene, I wanted the reader to feel the transformation happening from the inside out; not just to *see* it, but to experience it alongside Alex. The language focuses closely on physical sensation, emotion and rhythm, so that the change feels intense, overwhelming and unforgettable.

FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A BIG TRANSITION

1. MAKE IT EMOTIONAL

Big changes always come with big emotions. Sometimes these emotions might even be at odds – like fear and excitement. Build such clashing emotions into your writing to help the moment feel real and relatable.

2. CONTROL THE PACE

Major changes might happen in seconds, while feeling like lifetimes. Varying sentence lengths help mirror

what your character is experiencing emotionally – short sentences can speed things up, while longer ones can build pressure.

3. USE THE BODY

Transitions in life, even those that don't change us physically, are often felt inside before they happen. Describe physical sensations – heat, pressure, pain, relief – so the reader is right there with your character at this critical moment, feeling what they do.

4. ENGAGE THE SENSES

The great thing about books is that a writer can draw on all five senses, not just sight. Consider sound, touch, taste and smell. Sensory details help pull the reader into the moment and make the transition vivid.

5. END WITH CONSEQUENCES

Ask yourself what your character is losing and gaining in this moment. In *Dragonborn*, Alex isn't just changing shape, but letting go of her old life. She is being irreversibly changed on an emotional level.



Extract from

chapter 27-28,
pages 327-329

Here we see how emotion is tied to her transformation: thinking of her dad gives her courage, which immediately sparks a change.

A short sentence here for emphasis, marking the fulfilment of Alex's emotional journey: she has finally found the courage to change.

The repetition here emphasises Alex's pain, mimicking how everything in her seems to hurt at once.

This simile makes something fantastical easier to imagine by comparing it to something familiar.

Temporarily removes the reader's sense of sight, creating suspense and leaving them to wonder what they'll see next.

This marks the turning point of the scene — the instant where pain finally gives way to transformation.

She thought of her dad, and a shiver travelled over her skin. 'I am the sunrise.'

She held up a hand, watching as it turned to smoke.

Alex was not afraid.

The first thing she noticed was the swirling heat in her belly, the tingling up her spine. Her teeth hurt, her fingernails hurt. Her bones hurt. Suddenly her body felt too small for her, like she'd been trapped, wound up tight in a little cage for years and years. Her arms and legs were squeezed in at odd, painful angles, her neck bent as if she'd slept on it funny. Her wings were bunched like paper fans in her shoulders, her tail digging into her back like a chain of spikes. She felt the pressure was about to pull her apart.

Smoke swirled across her eyes, and for a moment her world was entirely black.

Thunder growled in her ears, and then –

THUD-THUD, THUD-THUD.

All at once, she unravelled.

The pain was gone, as if it had never been there to begin with. The smoke was swept away, the field exploding around her in streaks of grass and fire. She was still running, yet her body felt sluggish, unbalanced, so she threw herself on to all fours, the ground trembling under her hands and feet. The world sang in her ears. She heard the insects clicking in the grass, the billion tiny gusts of wind crashing against her scales. She heard the furnace she now had instead of a heart – *THUD-THUD, THUD-THUD* – filling her veins with fire.

The sunrise is a symbol we can all understand, suggesting beginnings, change and rebirth — mirroring Alex's transformation into something new.

A focus on physical sensation, helping the reader feel the transformation happening throughout Alex's body.

This simile highlights that, although painful, Alex's transformation is also a release from years of feeling physically (and emotionally) constrained.

This reflects both physical strain and emotional tension as Alex reaches breaking point.

The onomatopoeia here mimics the sound of a powerful heartbeat, reinforcing Alex's new strength.

The use of the word 'sang' here suggests heightened senses and a deeper connection to the world, showing how much Alex has changed. The positive associations with singing almost feel like a reward after all her suffering.

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A Girl's Guide to Spying

Travel back in time and find out how the Girl Guides helped the UK and other Allied Powers win the First World War, with Holly Webb's historical adventure...

KATE HEAP

A *Girl's Guide to Spying* is a completely captivating First World War mystery for readers aged nine and over, celebrating the history of Girlguiding. The resilience, strength, courage and intelligence of young girls take centre stage in a time of uncertainty and fear. This story proves Girlguiding is so much more than camping and badges – it's an organisation that gives girls and young women the tools and confidence to do anything they set their mind to.

The first in a new series, *A Girl's Guide to Spying* introduces readers to 13-year-old Phyllis and her younger sister, Annie. Looking for adventure and fun, they're thrilled to be asked to join the 1st Holburn Guide Company. Their parents worry the Guides are unladylike, but they soon see how much their daughters gain from being a part of the group. Recognised for their abilities, some of the girls are recruited to work at Watergate House – headquarters of MI5. Surrounded by spies and

war secrets, this is serious work, and Phyl is thrilled to be offered the job of messenger at Watergate House. With her older brother fighting at the front, she really wants to do something to help. Thoughtful and intelligent, she's a fast learner and a quick thinker. When a man goes missing, along with an important document, she must use everything she's learned at Guides to find clues, unscramble ciphers and reveal who's to blame. Could there be a spy at Watergate House?



With its wonderfully engaging mystery full of secret codes and double agents, this adventure will have independent readers from Year 4 onwards completely engrossed.

Activities

Decipher a message at GCHQ

During the First World War, Watergate House in London was the headquarters of MI5 and GCHQ (from 1919); home to the War Office, military officials and codebreakers. Guides were recruited to work as messengers. Honest and reliable, they could be trusted to keep the Official Secrets Act and support the war effort.

Deciphering foreign messages helped the British combat air raids and learn about German naval movements. They were able to gain intelligence about their enemies, intercept telegrams and protect British communications. This led to future success in codebreaking during WWII. GCHQ is still active today, and it even holds a Christmas Puzzle Challenge each December, which can be downloaded at gchq.gov.uk

In *A Girl's Guide to Spying*, Phyl, Annie and their friend Ruby use a Vigenère Cipher to decipher a hidden message. This type of cipher requires a key word and a secret message (the ciphertext). Why not try it yourself, and task your pupils with trying to figure out the message below using the Vigenère Cipher? You can find the

G	U	I	D	E	S	G	U	I	D	E	S	G	U
H	Y	W	Q	X	Z	K	F	W	R	O	G	A	N

Fig 1.

cipher in the book, or download a free copy at tinyurl.com/VigenereCipher

keyword: GUIDES
ciphertext: HYWQXZKFWROGAN

Begin by writing the keyword above the ciphertext. Repeat the keyword until every letter is covered. (Fig 1.)

Now, take the first pair of letters (G,H). On the Vigenère Cipher table, go down the left column of letters to 'G' and then across until you get to 'H'. The letter at the top of this column (B) is the first letter of your deciphered message. Repeat this with each pair of letters until you have the entire message (U, Y is next then I, W and so on).

Try again with the following:
keyword: LONDON
ciphertext: ZTSLQVLZ FHQEPHF DQG

You can find the deciphered messages at the end of this article.

The history of Girlguiding

In 1909, a small group of determined girls attended the first ever Scout rally. Desiring the same opportunities for adventure as the boys had, they demanded there be "something for the girls". In 1910, Girl Guides was formed. Over more than 100 years, countless girls have come together in a unique movement that promotes kindness, citizenship and personal growth.



From traditional games that test observation and memory skills to tracking activities, knots, morse code and first aid, Webb's fictional story allows its characters to learn so many skills that allow them to contribute to the war effort and their community. Over the years, the real-life Girlguiding programme has changed with the times. What remains the same is girls' strength and resilience, proving again and again just how capable and independent they can be.

Try some traditional Girlguiding activities with your pupils:
Play Kim's Game: Develop observation skills and memory with this classic game. Arrange a selection of objects on a tray. These may be a random

Take it further → → →

SUFFRAGETTES & STEREOTYPES

When Phyl and Annie first meet the Guides, they aren't sure their parents will approve of them spending time with such bold girls.

Spend some time defining 'gender stereotype' and identify modern examples, such as that girls are more emotional, or boys are better at science. Help children understand that gender stereotypes are overgeneralised or exaggerated, and are often inaccurate beliefs about someone that do not consider individual interests or abilities. Explain that stereotypes can greatly

limit someone's self-belief and interests, and discuss the idea that there are things we can do to combat them.

Read the prologue of *A Girl's Guide to Spying*. In groups, discuss how girls were expected to behave in 1914 London. How were the Girl Guides different? How have expectations changed in the past 100 years?

During the First World War, Suffragettes paused their campaign for Votes for Women in order to help with the war effort. Find out what kinds of jobs women did during the war while men were

away fighting. How did women participating in these new roles change society's perception of what women are capable of? What impact might this have had on women being granted the vote in 1918?

You can find more information on this on the UK Parliament website: tinyurl.com/tp-ParliamentSuffragettes

HISTORIC TEXTS

The values and traditions of Girlguiding are cleverly woven into the story. Each chapter begins with a quotation from an historic text: newspapers, letters, government warnings, documents from MI5, The



collection or based on a theme. Give players 30-60 seconds to look at the objects and try to memorise them. Cover the tray and give players one minute to write down as many objects as they can remember. Alternatively, remove one (or more) objects and have players guess what's missing.

Learn Morse Code: Find out a little bit about the history of this system of long-distance communication that uses a series of electrical short dot and longer dash signals. Practise tapping out letters and words on the table. Can your partner write the word you are signalling? Make name bracelets using beads and short lengths of paper straws. Swap bracelets and work out the names. Try to send your messages

across a further distance by using torches in a dark room. Use short and long flashes of light to signal letters.

Tie a Reef Knot: Each pupil needs two lengths of string or rope – this works well with two different coloured skipping ropes or even two different coloured strawberry laces sweets. Line up the ropes next to each other. Place the right-hand rope over the left one and tuck it under, pulling the two lengths outwards. Then repeat, this time placing the left-hand rope over the right one. Tuck it under through the middle of the knot and pull.

Zeppelin attacks

The First World War was the first major battle where airplanes and other flying machines were used. The Germans used huge hydrogen-fuelled airships called Zeppelins to drop bombs on their enemies. These Zeppelins were stationed in Belgium and could reach the east coast of England. Cities such as London, Edinburgh and Hull were targets.

In October 1915, a German Zeppelin dropped a bomb near the Lyceum Theatre in London. This frightening event is included in *A Girl's Guide to Spying*. Phyl, Annie and their family must choose between taking shelter in their cellar or going to the nearby Russell Square underground station, where they will be safe.

Research the types of aircraft used in the First World War. They can be categorised into three types: reconnaissance, bombers and fighters. Draw sketches of different types of aircraft and add some notes.

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Spies* by David Long & illustrated by Terri Po (non-fiction)
- ❖ *Time School: We Will Remember Them* by Nikki Young
- ❖ *Daisy and the Unknown Warrior* by Tony Bradman & illustrated by Tania Rex
- ❖ *I, Spy: A Bletchley Park Mystery* by Rhian Tracey
- ❖ *The Bletchley Riddle* by Ruta Sepetys & illustrated by Steve Sheinkin

Consider how quickly aircraft technology advanced during the war: the Wright brothers made their first flight in 1903; planes were basic at the start of the war but then were adapted and advanced quickly to meet need. By 1918, there were many types of planes and the Royal Airforce (RAF) was founded. Use paired talk to discuss which types of aircraft had the greatest impact and why technology needed to advance so quickly. **TP**

Cipher answers: 1. *Be on the lookout*
2. *Official Secrets Act*



Kate Heap is a primary English consultant, children's book reviewer, and author of the Developing Reading Comprehension Skills series (£21.99 per book, Brilliant Publications).

scopeforimagination.co.uk

Handbook for Girl Guides and others. These reveal opinions of the time, and some are shockingly outdated in their portrayal of women.

Look at a selection of these quotations. Identify the type of text they come from and the point of view of the text's author. Which texts present facts and which are biased in their opinions? What do they tell us about societal views of the time?

Choose an event from the story (real or fictional), such as the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the break-in at the Hoffman's shop, the recruitment of Girl Guides as messengers at Watergate House, the Zeppelin bombing of the Lyceum Theatre,

or even the possibility of a double agent working at Watergate House. Discuss the facts of the event and any potential for bias. Consider multiple points of view. Challenge pupils to each choose a different text genre and recount the event in different ways. When the writing is complete, compare texts and consider which are the most reliable or factual and which are full of bias.

HIDDEN MESSAGES AND DOUBLE AGENTS

In *A Girl's Guide to Spying*, the girls discover a secret message in a dog collar, hidden between two layers of leather.

Where else could secret messages be hidden? Think of everyday objects from the early 1900s that could have secret compartments or be altered in some way to hide small pieces of paper: perhaps a matchbox, book, pencil, pen, shoes or even an imitation hollow battery.

Look at real examples of these objects. Where could a message be hidden? Sketch and label a design for your own object that includes a hidden compartment. Then, use your plan to either alter an existing object or make a new object and add a secret message of your own. Can a partner find your hidden compartment?

What the **DICKENS?**

Today's children might balk at the thought of reading Charles Dickens, but the way he constructed and told his stories carries enduring lessons in writing, argues **Philip Caveney**

In all honesty, if I were tasked with introducing a class of children to the work of Charles Dickens, I would begin by showing them *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, which is – in my humble opinion – the best adaptation of the story ever made. And I'll set Miss Piggy on anyone who says differently!

But in all seriousness, I think Dickens' work is still eminently relevant for our young readers, and it's just a case of approaching it in such a way that illuminates that relevance. Let's take one of his most famous novels, *Great Expectations*, as an example; the characters stay with you for life and – here's a rare admission – the book so impressed me as a child that I actually made my parents and my friends call me Pip, in a weird kind of tribute to it.

So how would I introduce Dickens to primary-aged children in this day and age? I think I'd read them those opening chapters of *Great Expectations* and then set some exercises to get them thinking about *how* Dickens made his work so enticing.

Here are a few examples:

1. Copy-changing

Copy-changing is the art of using someone else's words and altering them slightly to create your own version. It's a useful tool for exploring how a writer crafts their sentences and serves as a way into the complex language used by classic

authors. Let's take the opening two sentences of *Great Expectations* as an example:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

Young children's mispronunciations often become part of family lore. Apparently, the late Queen Elizabeth II was known as 'Gary' because Prince William couldn't say 'Granny' when he was small.

My own daughter, Grace, thought that Parma Violets sweets were called 'Farmer Violets' so that's how we always refer to them in our house.

Your pupils are sure to have plenty of examples of their own, so ask them to share any stories like this from their families. Then it's time for them to copy-change Dickens. Using the template below (or the worksheet version in the download link on the right), they should replace the blanks with the details

of their own experiences (or make one up, if they prefer).

My _____'s name being _____, my infant tongue could make of it nothing more explicit than _____. So, I called _____.

2. Creating characters

In the second paragraph of *Great Expectations*, we learn that Pip does not remember his parents because they died when he was very young. He spends a lot of time in the graveyard looking at their tombstones, imagining what they were like (find the

image is buried there. Guide them to think about what's written on the stones, as well as any fonts, images or statues used. Next, they should stick their notes to the appropriate images.

Now discuss their responses. Are there any images that have produced very similar responses from multiple pupils? Any that are wildly opposed? Can we really deduce anything about a person from the writing on their tombstone?

Third, children should each choose their favourite tombstone and, using the adjectives to guide them, write a paragraph about the person it commemorates, adding as much detail as possible. Imagine the person at a particular stage of their life. How old are they? What do they look like? Do they have a job? Do they enjoy it? What are their likes and dislikes? Do they have a family? Friends? Hobbies? Are they happy? If not, why not?

3. Subverting expectations

In Chapter 8 of *Great Expectations*, Dickens describes Pip's first meeting with Miss Havisham. The image is one of the most famous in English literature, but why? I think it's because it subverts our expectations. We all know what a bride 'should' look like: weddings are supposed to be happy occasions; the participants are supposed to be celebrating, the dress worn once and then put

“Dickens’ work is still eminently relevant, and it’s just a case of approaching it in such a way that illuminates that”

away. At first glance, this is what Pip sees – the beautiful white gown, the sparkling jewels. But, in the next paragraph, Dickens upends this image, revealing the shocking and unexpected truth that this particular bride is not what she seems.

After reading this description, you should draw pupils' attention to the structure: the description comprises two paragraphs, the first based on initial

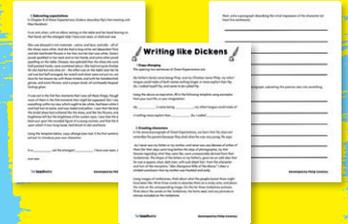
impressions and the second contradicting these. Talk them through another example, e.g. perhaps you see Santa Claus walking towards you. However, as he gets closer, you realise that the person approaching is just a poor bearded old man wearing a shabby red duffle coat and bobble hat – and the sack over his shoulder is nothing but a bin bag full of rubbish. Can pupils think of any other ideas like this? Once they've

shared a few examples, it's time for the children to try to write their own subversive character descriptions, as follows:

- Copy-change (see task 1) the first sentence of the extract:
In a _____ sat the strangest _____
I have ever seen, or shall ever see.
- Write a paragraph describing the initial impression of the character (at least five sentences).

**DOWNLOAD
RESOURCES AT**

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worksheets at

tingyurl.com/tp-Dickens

- Write a second paragraph, subverting this positive view into something more peculiar.

These exercises will hopefully go some way towards showing your pupils that just because Dickens was writing a long time ago, about places and things that might not be immediately familiar to us in the modern world, it doesn't mean there aren't plenty of things we can learn from this kind of classic literature. Not least, the art of the exciting story! **TP**



Philip Caveney is the author of many books for adults and children, including

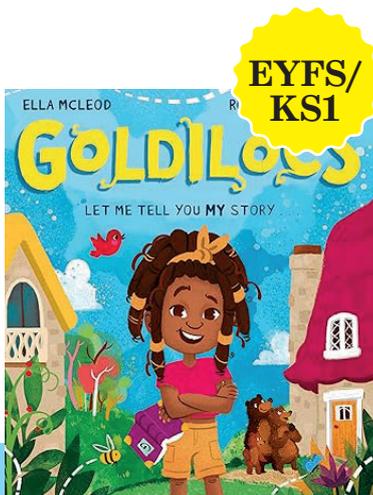
the Sebastian Darke novels. His new book, Flipped (£7.99, Fox & Ink Books), inspired by Dicken's Great Expectations, is out now.

 philip-caveney.co.uk

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love

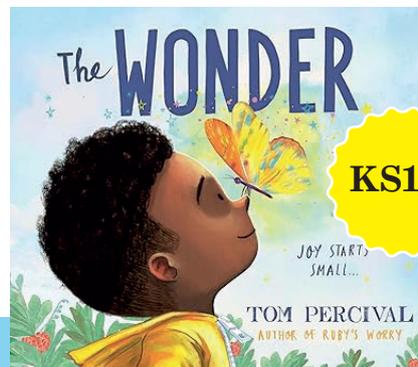


Goldilocs

by Ella McLeod, ill. Rochelle Falconer

£7.99, Scholastic

Goldilocs is a wonderfully modern twist on a favourite traditional tale. Determined to tell her true story, this Goldilocs, with her golden style, golden beads and golden smile, is out to challenge the fairytale stereotypes about what girls can (and can't) be. She doesn't want to be a wicked witch, an evil queen or a royal princess – she just wants to be herself. By using her voice and making decisions for herself, Goldilocs proves a heroine can be so much more. Empowering, fun and inclusive, this delightful picture book for readers aged three and up is sure to prompt thoughtful discussion and plenty of giggles as a part of a traditional tales unit, PSHE lessons or assemblies.



The Wonder

by Tom Percival

£7.99, Simon & Schuster

Daniel is having a bad day, and things just keep getting worse. Then, suddenly, something happens that changes the way he sees the world. The faintest whisper of music and a beam of sunshine show him there is wonder all around. Gradually, he begins to smile and soon Daniel is noticing moments of wonder everywhere. As his outlook changes, his joy becomes infectious and he's able to share his positivity with others. Uplifting and full of hope, this bright spark of a story will encourage a shared positive outlook in families and classrooms as readers work together to notice these special moments of wonder. As they stop to enjoy them, their moods will change and everything will seem brighter. *The Wonder* is perfect for whole-school assemblies, and when you need help to look on the bright side.



Tree Thing

by Piers Torday, ill. Matthew Taylor Wilson

£14.99HB, Hachette Children's

Inspired by the illegal felling of the Sycamore Gap Tree at Hadrien's Wall in Northumberland in 2023, *Tree Thing* is an uplifting story exploring the vital importance of trees and our duty to protect them. Instead of seeing trees as something for humans to use, readers are challenged to cherish them and think carefully about preservation and growth. With the classic feel of a traditional fable and a clear lesson about our place in nature, Piers Torday's enchanting language combined with Matthew Taylor Wilson's magical illustrations will draw readers right into the heart of this uniquely beautiful story of a boy's brave quest to protect the majestic Tree Thing and fill the valley with life.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED**
RESOURCES



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Meet the author

PHIL EARLE
ON UNDERDOG STORIES,
AND WHY WE SHOULDN'T BE
SNOBBY ABOUT BOOKS



Tell us about Finn.
Finn has just started Year 7, and he's a little fish in a big pond. His full name is Finn Neville

Oliver Hope – or Finn NO Hope, and he feels like his life is festooned with cow pats he's destined to step in. He's got an evil older brother, Jonah, and a unicorn-obsessed five-year-old sister, who just talks drivel. His dad wears nothing but Lycra because he's having some sort of mad, post-divorce midlife crisis. His only saving grace is his two best mates – Laszlo, and a very intelligent young woman they call Google. He's just trying to make sense of his life, basically, and trying to record it for posterity so other people can learn from the horror show that is his existence.

What inspired you to write this book?

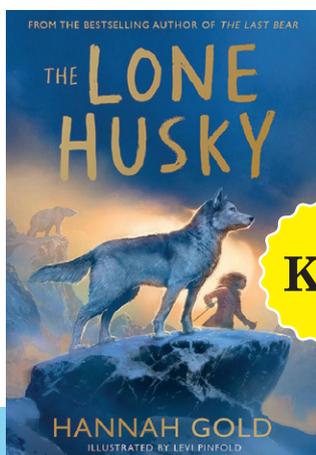
There's a universality to feeling this way – like you want to figure out who you are as an individual, but also not stand out so much you embarrass yourself. Also, we love underdog stories. There's a lightheartedness to it, but also there's a solidarity. I think that carries real power for kids – when they feel seen and recognised – and so I wanted to write something where there's a good redemptive arc.

How would you like teachers to use your book in the classroom?

If teachers want to teach it, great, and I think there is a lot of stuff in there about empathy and resilience. But when I was writing, I just wanted to make myself laugh. So, all I really want is for kids to read it and enjoy it. Studying a book shouldn't be about what it means, but how it makes you feel; I think that's one of the reasons why we're losing readers; because 'reading for pleasure' is a term that's banded about a lot, but we need to think about what it really means. We need to dispense with some of that snobbery.



Finn's Epic Fails (£7.99, Simon & Schuster Children's), by Phil Earle, is out now.



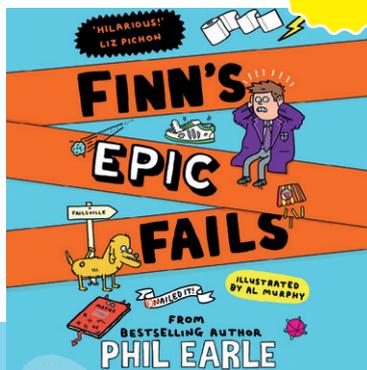
KS2

The Lone Husky

by **Hannah Gold**,
ill. **Levi Pinfold**

£14.99HB, Harper Collins

As the polar night closes in, April is helping to train huskies for the Polar Race, a challenging long-distance dog sled race. Stakes are high as April and her friend Hedda must balance their desire to win with caring for the dogs and building teamwork, strength and resilience. When a new husky joins the pack, April longs to offer it friendship while helping it heal from past hurts. *The Lone Husky* is a compelling story of connection, healing and the power of nature. Through April and her passionate bond with animals and the environment, Gold highlights essential issues of animal welfare, global warming and community. Readers will be empowered to believe anything is possible as strength grows from within.



KS2

Finn's Epic Fails

by **Phil Earle**, ill. **Al Murphy**

£7.99, Simon & Schuster

In this warm-hearted, comedy delight, Finn is struggling with Year 7. Lessons are boring, friendships are challenging, and life at home is rubbish. Since his parents' divorce, Dad just gets more and more embarrassing while his little sister, Maisie, harasses Finn with her unicorn obsession and older brother, Jonah, is just plain mean. Every page is comedy genius, full of crazy secondary school situations – including mortifying moments, daft pranks and disastrous supply teachers – as well as brilliant best mates who always somehow manage to save the day. *Finn's Epic Fails* deserves a place in every UKS2 and KS3 library. Children will be queuing up to read this epic book!

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5 WAYS... Academy21 can help you meet new Ofsted demands

Seamlessly meet the new Ofsted Framework requirements without the stress



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Academy21 provides high-quality online alternative provision for primary pupils who need additional support. Through live teaching, real-time progress data, and strong safeguarding, we help schools meet the updated Ofsted expectations around inclusion, attendance, curriculum quality, wellbeing, and leadership oversight.

1 MEETING INCLUSION WITH EARLY SUPPORT

With inclusion now evaluated as a standalone area, primary schools must show they can intervene early and adapt provision to individual needs. Academy21 gives schools an immediate way to support young pupils with emerging attendance, anxiety, behaviour or SEND-related barriers. Our onboarding process takes as little as 48 hours, and because we're fully online, we have the capacity to support students as and when they need it the most. We also offer flexible commissioning options, and our solutions are tailored to each student.

2 PROVIDING AN EVIDENCE TRAIL

One of the biggest shifts in the updated framework is the expectation that leaders justify every commissioning decision and demonstrate its impact. Academy21 makes this straightforward: schools receive real-time attendance, engagement and understanding indicators for each lesson, plus detailed teacher feedback and regular PDF reports that map a child's development from day one. This creates a clear, continuous evidence trail for Ofsted inspections. It also removes the burden of manually collecting, interpreting and presenting data, making inspection preparation smoother and more robust.

3 HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Ofsted now evaluates how well curriculum delivery supports pupils' personal development. Academy21's Key Stage 2 programme is designed



Academy 21
The Online Alternative Provision Experts

Contact:
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with this in mind. Alongside reading, writing and maths, lessons incorporate PSHE themes, wellbeing activities and oracy-based tasks that help pupils build confidence and communication skills. With small class sizes and live specialist teaching, pupils can keep learning academically while developing the social and emotional skills they need for their academic journey and life ahead. This gives schools a practical way to show a joined-up approach to curriculum and personal development, even when pupils cannot attend in person, or when other resources are stretched beyond the school's needs.

4 IMPROVING ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

For many primary pupils, disengagement and low attendance stem from anxiety, overwhelm, or difficulties with the classroom environment. Ofsted now evaluates how well schools respond when attendance dips – not just how often it happens. Academy21 offers a calmer, more predictable setting with consistent routines that help children rebuild confidence. Because attendance is tracked for every single lesson, schools can identify patterns, celebrate improvements, and show inspectors how alternative provision helped re-establish learning habits and pave the way for reintegration.

5 STRONG SAFEGUARDING, OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE

Safeguarding remains a top priority under the new framework, and schools must be confident not only in their own safeguarding procedures but their partners' procedures too. This is critical to the work we do at Academy21. That's why we have fully qualified, DBS-checked teachers, clear oversight from our designated safeguarding lead, and structured procedures for reporting and responding to concerns. Schools receive timely updates on any issues and can easily see how each pupil is being supported. This approach gives leaders clear evidence of safe commissioning, proactive oversight, and effective collaboration.

KEY POINTS

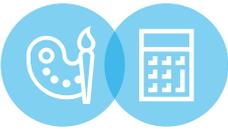
REAL-TIME ATTENDANCE
engagement and progress data give schools immediate visibility and inspector-ready evidence for every primary pupil.

LIVE LESSONS
delivered by caring, specialist teachers help younger children rebuild confidence, routine and motivation.

ROBUST SAFEGUARDING
safer recruitment and rapid escalation ensure pupils are protected and schools can evidence strong oversight.

DFE-ACCREDITED
high-quality provision supports inclusion and early intervention, helping schools meet Ofsted expectations around pupil need and curriculum continuity.

Art, maths



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- Key numeracy skills including measuring, ratios, proportions, and simple fractions
- Various 3D knitting techniques including finger knitting and slip knots to improve dexterity
- How to work out production costs
- How to make sustainable products using yarn from old clothes

Make your own scarf with recycled yarn



Bring new meaning to the phrase 'hand-made' and create an original textile piece with **Jolene Guthrie**

[@makemaniesto](#) [makemaniesto.com](#) [jo-ami.com](#)

This is a fun way to introduce numeracy and problem-solving into the classroom through craft and textile-making. Pupils will work individually or together to produce a 3D knitted fabric using a variety of techniques including finger knitting, chain stitching and braiding. They'll learn how patterns are linked mathematically through scale and repeats, and how repurposing old clothes and fabrics to create their own yarn can increase profit whilst also making their outputs more sustainable. This lesson is also a brilliant way to spark curiosity and creativity – enjoy!



START HERE

Start off the lesson with an introduction to knitwear, the design process, and a look at some of the different materials that are used to create knitted fabrics. You can either bring in some of your favourite knitwear (jumpers, scarfs, etc in different knits) or just show pictures. What are some of the children's favourite items of knitwear? Encourage pupils to think of ways that businesses can be sustainable (e.g. how might they save water, or use recycled materials?). Then ask the children to build a mood board to translate their preferences into possible designs for their own textiles (see a step-by-step video on constructing mood boards at tinyurl.com/tp-MoodBoard). Encourage them to think about colour, pattern, tone, and some of their favourite things that they might incorporate.



MAIN LESSON

1 | DESIGNING A PRODUCT

Begin the main lesson with some practical activities. Introduce the children to techniques such as yarn wrapping (see from 3:24 in this video: tinyurl.com/tp-MoodYarn) finger knitting, slip knots, and chain stitching (see tinyurl.com/tp-FingerKnit), and discuss the concept of a knitting pattern. You can use a simplified version of a pattern using just ratios and proportions (also a great link to maths); find an instructional video on this at tinyurl.com/tp-KnitRatios. Next, ask the children to draw

out their designs from the starter activity, using grid paper to imitate stitches. You can find a grid template, along with instructions and a glossary, in the pupil handbook download at tinyurl.com/tp-KnitScarf. As pupils draw their designs, encourage them to think about how they might make a pattern for their piece (e.g. how many stitches long and wide will it be? Will they use one colour of yarn, or different ones to make texture?).

At this point in the lesson, you can move the discussion to sustainability and repurposing of fabrics to create yarn. What do the children already know about recycling? Can they think of ways that they could use old



“This is a fun way to introduce numeracy and problem-solving through craft and textile-making”

fingers. Then, they pull yarn through the loop of the slip knot and repeat the process to form a series of connected loops, or a ‘chain’.

Once pupils have mastered the chain stitch, they are ready to move onto finger knitting: making fabric out of yarn using only their hands. The number of stitches in finger knitting is limited to four because this is the maximum number of fingers they use. Using the slip knot technique already mastered, pupils will cast a full row of stitches across all four fingers, starting with their index finger and ending with their pinkie. Once they have ‘cast on’ a full row, they repeat the exercise back and forth across their fingers, until they have successfully created the length they require for a knitted scarf, a shoulder bag handle, or shorter necklace.

Once the students are happy with their length, they are ready to ‘cast off’ by moving each stitch onto the next finger until the final stitch is only attached to their pinkie. At this point, they take the end of their yarn and loop it through the stitch to secure their final knitted row. At this point you can repeat the finger knitting video from the first section of the lesson to remind pupils of the process (tinyurl.com/tp-FingerKnit).

Once they master each part of the process, the children will be able to improve the look of their stitching by paying attention to the tension in their knitted piece. Since they’re making a small piece, if they’re not happy with how it turns out, it shouldn’t take long for them to unwind the

fabrics (e.g. old tea towels or t-shirts) to make new things?

2 | MAKE YOUR YARN

To demonstrate how simple it is to repurpose fabric, give pupils a 1m x 1m square of second-hand fabric (any fabric will do, but cotton is nice and easy to work with). You can either show them how to cut it up to make a ball of yarn, or prepare this in advance, depending on your class (see an instructional video at tinyurl.com/tp-MakingYarn). If the children are making the yarn themselves, guide them to use scissors to cut multiple strips of the same size, making sure the fabric is laid flat on their desks. They should stop an inch from the end, so that all the strips are still connected.

Next, show them how to attach fabric lengths together to make longer lengths and roll it into a ball, ready for the next step (see instructions at tinyurl.com/tp-FabricJoin).

3 | START KNITTING

Demonstrate how to construct a knit stitch using wire, so that pupils can easily see how each stitch overlaps and is joined together (see an example video at tinyurl.com/tp-KnitStitch). You can also explain the difference between plain and pearl stitching so they can identify how the stitches differ on each side of their knitted item.

Then, using the yarn they’ve made, show children how to make a slip knot. This creates the first loop of their chain stitch on their

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Cost up the production of creating a 3D piece from repurposed materials. Can pupils compare this to the cost of a new piece?
- Begin to work out how many items you need to produce to make a profit.
- Introduce a second colour to your finger knitted piece. See the videos linked in the main lesson for instructions.

stitches and try again. Emphasise that practice is a big part of every craft, and that making mistakes is an essential element of the learning process.

Jolene Guthrie is a Scottish knitwear designer with her own brand, Jo-AMI that aims to promote the iconic Scottish knitwear industry by creating garments and accessories that are cool, comfy and considered.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- How could textile skills such as finger knitting or stitching be useful day-to-day?
- What jobs can you think of that need good manual dexterity?
- How do we reduce the environmental impact and cost of making textiles?
- How are you going to use the skills you’ve learned? What will you make next?

You can't be what you can't see

At F4S, we bridge the gap between education and the world of work by providing you with a free, quick and easy tool to connect your students with business role models through virtual and in-person events.

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Q&A

“A calmer environment for learning”

Empower your colleagues with the ability to conduct brilliant lessons in nature with the help of Coventry Outdoors



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Coventry Outdoors – the dedicated Outdoor Learning Service of Coventry City Council – provides exceptional CPD and accredited Level 5 apprenticeships opportunities across the UK. We empower educators through Forest School, WILD Passport and therapeutic training, giving them the expertise to deliver high-impact, sustainable outdoor learning in any setting.

What range of qualifications does Coventry Outdoors offer?

We offer a complete suite of professional qualifications designed to suit different needs. Alongside popular options, like WILD Passport and Forest School Leader awards, we also offer specialised training in Wilderness Therapeutic Interventions and Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC). For schools looking to take a more strategic approach, our Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist apprenticeship is a brilliant way to develop a resident expert who can lead curriculum-wide change.

How does outdoor learning improve wellbeing and school behaviour?

Spending time outdoors lowers cortisol levels, gives physical and emotional space to pupils and provides a calmer environment for learning. This in turn leads to improved emotional regulation and behaviour, meaning schools can reduce the time and money spent on crisis management. Improved behaviour lets resources be reallocated into proactive teaching, making outdoor learning a preventative approach that can be used to support student mental health, while having a direct impact on school finances.

How can outdoor learning drive academic attainment?

Outdoor learning has been shown to assist in closing the academic gap for many students. By providing opportunities to contextualise classroom learning – measuring wood before it’s cut, identifying insects in their native habitats, exploring



ABOUT US:

Part of Coventry City Council, we provide expert-led outdoor education training and qualifications for schools nationally.

Contact:

outdooreducation@coventry.uk | coventry.gov.uk/coventryoutdoors

heritage skills – we’re helping to embed classroom knowledge, build deeper understanding and encourage greater curiosity. Better engagement inevitably leads to better classroom participation and improved performance in assessments.

Why should schools choose a council-run service for their CPD?

Partnering with Coventry City Council gives schools peace of mind. You aren’t

just getting a trainer – you’re getting a service that understands local authority safeguarding, health and safety, and curriculum standards. We’re not profit-driven, and therefore appreciate the need for long-term social and financial value, as well as educational outcomes. We want schools across the nation to develop a sustainable approach to outdoor learning.

How can schools apply for apprenticeships?

Whilst we are a Coventry-based service, we are actively expanding and encourage applications from schools across the UK to help form new apprenticeship cohorts. We’re currently recruiting for our major September intake, with dedicated cohorts already established in Coventry and Yorkshire. We also welcome interest from any national organisations keen to partner with us in creating new regional cohorts.

What’s the difference?

- +Trusted local authority expertise – we combine council-level quality assurance with years of practical, on-the-ground outdoor teaching experience
- +Specialist Level 5 apprenticeships – invest in placing a dedicated specialist at your school through our levy-funded, high level Outdoor Learning apprenticeship
- +Holistic qualification suite – from the WILD Passport to Therapeutic Interventions, we offer the full spectrum of outdoor professional development

Science



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- What happens physically in the body when we exhale
- What vital lung capacity is
 - The different factors that can impact vital lung capacity
- What we can do to improve vital lung capacity
- How to measure and record results carefully

How much air can you hold in your lungs?



Get hands-on with science, and make your own spirometer to measure pupils' lung capacity, with **Dr Paul Ian Cross**

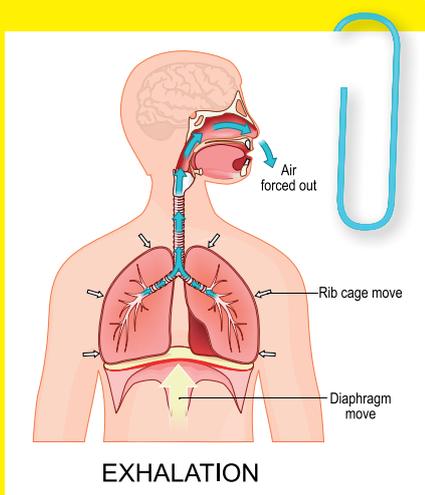
[@questfriendz](#) questfriendz.com

This year's British Science Week theme is 'Curiosity: What's Your Question?'. Encouraging children to ask questions is what I love about being an author. In *SuperQuesters Mission: Rainforest Magic*, the main characters encounter a guinea pig and a capybara who are both suffering from breathing issues and need help. This fictional scenario can be used to pose the questions: what is lung capacity? Why is it important? This practical lesson plan helps children understand key bodily processes and what can be done to improve them, while seeing science in action.



START HERE

Start by asking children to discuss what happens when we exhale. Once pupils have shared their ideas, explain that during exhalation the muscles between the ribs relax, which allows the rib cage to return to its usual resting position. The diaphragm relaxes and moves upwards, causing the volume inside the chest to decrease. As a result of the pressure inside the chest increasing, the air is pushed out of the lungs through the mouth. It is useful to share a visual at this point to support learners in their understanding, either as an image or as a short video.



MAIN LESSON

1 | INTRODUCTION TO LUNG CAPACITY

Explain to the children that a spirometer is a device used to measure the amount of air you inhale or exhale. During the lesson pupils will make their own spirometers, and predict and measure their own lung capacity. You can also make your own in advance to show them (there's a great step-by-step tutorial from the Glasgow Science Centre on YouTube at [tinyurl.com/tp-GSCLungCapacity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp-GSCLungCapacity)).

Explain that individual people's vital lung capacity can be different for many reasons. Ask pupils to discuss the factors that they think might affect vital lung

capacity with a talk partner. Children should share their ideas with the class, and you can note them on the board/working wall. Ensure that factors such as age, fitness levels and health conditions (including asthma) are included in the discussion.

2 | THE EXPERIMENT

For this section of the lesson, each group will need: a large empty 4L bottle, a clear length of plastic tubing, a large container with water, a measuring jug, a permanent marker, aprons, and a dilute Milton solution or other safe cleaning product. Tell children that they will make their own spirometers in groups. Each group should also have a recording sheet. The sheet should have four columns –



“Pupils will make their own spirometer and measure their vital lung capacity”

pupils’ names, prediction, vital lung capacity (in litres), and total lung capacity (in litres).

Begin by asking each group to check that they have all the necessary equipment. Model the first step for children, while explaining it. They will need to begin by measuring out 200ml of water and pouring it into the bottle. They then need to put a mark on the bottle, using the permanent marker to show the measurement. Pupils should repeat this until they have filled the bottle to the top with water and then place the lid on.

Once all groups have their measurements marked out, model placing the full bottle into the large container with water and removing the lid.

Emphasise that the bottle should remain full of water inside with no air bubbles. Explain that pupils will need to carefully place one end of the plastic tubing inside the bottle before carefully turning it upside down. Remind the children that they need to keep the neck of the bottle submerged and the bottle upright throughout the experiment and that it might be helpful to have someone holding the bottle throughout. You can show them the video from the Glasgow Science Centre (linked above) if you’d like a visual guide.

Explain that the final step is to take a deep breath and blow down the tube in one long breath, filling the bottle with air exhaled from your lungs. Before modelling this step,

refer to the recording sheet. Note your name and your prediction on the sheet before blowing down the tube. Model counting all the marks above the new water line in the bottle and multiply these by 200 (reminding pupils that each mark represents 200ml of water) to work out the vital lung capacity.

Explain that children will now take it in turns to predict and record their vital lung capacity results. Remind pupils that they need to refill the bottle after each person has a turn and that it is essential that they clean the rubber tubing between people for hygiene purposes.

3 | CALCULATIONS AND RESULTS

Once all children have recorded their vital lung capacity results, explain that vital lung capacity measures the amount that someone can forcibly exhale in one breath. However, some volume of air remains in the lungs, which is the residual volume. In adults, this is estimated to be approximately 1.2 litres.

Ask pupils to complete the final column in the table (total lung capacity) by adding their vital lung capacity result to 1.2L. Then get the children to discuss their results as a group, as well as what they think the benefits of larger lung capacity might be. Pupils should then feed back to the whole class, while you note down their observations on the board or working wall.

Paul Ian Cross is a scientist and author of the SuperQuesters Mission books River Crest Rescue (highly commended at the Teach Primary Awards 2025) Rainforest Magic and the upcoming Desert Danger (May 2026).

EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Children to do one minute of intense exercise (for example, jumping jacks or running on the spot) before repeating the experiment. Is there a difference in their results?
- Ask children what they think people might be able to do to increase their lung capacity. Children to share their ideas and teacher to note these on the working wall, beside factors which can impact vital lung capacity. Pupils can then design posters or leaflets (individually or in pairs) to help encourage others to improve their vital lung capacity and overall health.
- What changes would pupils make to the experiment to make it more accurate? What further questions might make their results more meaningful?
- Create a lung model! Instructions for this practical activity can be found in *SuperQuesters Mission: Rainforest Magic*.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Do you think your results are accurate readings? Why or why not?
- What can people do to increase their lung capacity?
- What impact might exercise have on lung capacity?



Can you see the wood and the trees?



© Rosalind Hobley

Use simple games to help pupils regulate and develop focus through play and shared awareness, with **Sam Marsden**

@pocketfulofdrama marsdensam.com

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to use listening and observation to improve focus
- How movement can support calm attention
- How shared play can build collective concentration

Focus is often treated as something pupils can produce on demand. However, attention can be closely linked to regulation. When children feel settled in their bodies, emotionally safe, and connected to one another, concentration becomes more accessible. Games offer an effective way to support this process. Through shared play, listening and gentle movement, pupils can reset their nervous systems and return to learning with greater calm and clarity. These simple activities will help your class regulate and practise focus in a supportive, low-pressure way.



START HERE

Begin by gathering the class in a circle for a game of Guess the Leader. Choose one pupil to be the detective and ask them to face away or close their eyes. Silently select another pupil to be the leader.

The leader begins making small, repetitive movements, such as tapping knees or wiggling fingers, which the others in the circle copy. Invite the detective back into the centre of the circle to observe carefully and guess who is leading. This simple game encourages stillness, observation and shared attention, helping the class settle before moving into deeper focus work.



MAIN LESSON

1 | TUNING ATTENTION: CIRCLES OF ATTENTION

Start with pupils either sitting or lying down with their eyes closed as you introduce the four circles of attention:

Small circle of attention – the self

Invite children to place their attention on themselves, imagining a small circle around them. They might notice their breathing, the feeling of their feet on the floor, their hands on the desk, the sounds inside their bodies, or their thoughts. The focus is very narrow, just on them.

Medium circle of attention – the room

With their eyes closed, guide pupils to gently widen their awareness to include the rest of the room. They might notice sounds, light, movement, other people nearby, or the feeling of the space around them, all while remaining calm and settled.

Large circle of attention – beyond the room

Now ask children to widen their attention further, still with their eyes closed. They might listen for sounds outside the classroom, footsteps in the corridor, voices in the distance, traffic, birds, or weather. Their awareness should now stretch beyond the walls.



“Through shared play, listening and gentle movement, pupils can reset their nervous systems”

One volunteer says a simple, everyday phrase such as, “I’m going to the shop”, using a chosen emotion; perhaps angry, sad, or excited. The rest of the class listens and guesses the emotion behind the words. Encourage pupils to notice clues such as pace, pitch and energy rather than the words themselves. Offer everyone a turn, but let pupils know that passing is allowed. This activity builds empathy, emotional awareness and focused listening, while keeping the atmosphere playful.

3 | WHAT IF...

This exercise is designed to lift energy and sharpen focus, which is especially helpful when the class feels tired or flat. Explain that you are going to offer a series of scenarios. When pupils hear each one, they respond immediately to play out the scenario. This can be done from the desk, in a circle, or moving around a room.

You can begin by demonstrating a few examples, so the children understand what is expected of them. Here are some prompts, though you’re welcome to invent your own. Give pupils 30 seconds to one minute for each one:

- What if you’ve just heard some very exciting news?
- What if you’re holding a baby bird and you’re afraid of hurting it?
- What if you’re trying not to spill your milkshake?
- What if you’re waiting to hear whether you’ve been chosen for something important?
- What if you’re making a sandwich?
- What if you’re sitting in the dentist’s waiting room and trying to be brave?
- What if someone has

Expansive circle of attention – everything connected

Finally, invite the class to imagine their attention expanding even further, beyond the building, beyond the town, to include the wider world, nature, and even the rest of the universe.

They might consider how they are connected to other people, to the Earth, to the stars, and to everything else around them.

You can stop the activity here, or move on to walking.

Walking with different circles of attention

Ask pupils to stand and begin walking slowly around the room. Invite them to walk while imagining each circle of attention in turn: walking with a narrow focus on

themselves; walking with a medium awareness of others and the room; walking with a wider awareness extending beyond the space; and walking with an expansive circle of attention, feeling a connection to everything. Encourage slow movement so they can really feel how their focus shifts. You can also ask them to imagine being different types of characters with these circles of attention, walking around the room. Use backing music if it helps to relax the class and break any awkward tension.

2 | EMOTIONAL LISTENING

Ask pupils to sit and explain that they are going to practise listening carefully to tone of voice.

EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Ask children to create characters from the circles of attention, and then you can hot-seat these characters. For example, a character created from a small circle of attention might be introverted, and a character created from a wide circle of attention might be extroverted.
- You can use the emotion listing exercise with lines from a class text or poem.
- You can use the What if game to inspire prompts for creative writing exercises.

annoyed you and you’re trying not to react?

- What if you’re peeling a banana?
- What if you’ve discovered a rare diamond?
- What if you’re reading a very scary book?



Samantha Marsden is a drama teacher and author. Her new book, Focus Games for the Classroom, is

out on 5th March, and will be available at morphopress.com/focus

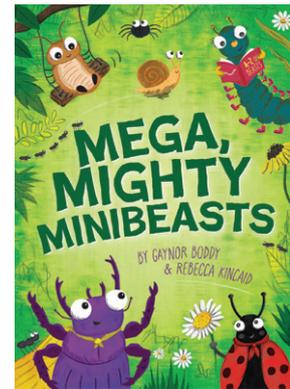
USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What helped you focus most today?
- Which circle of attention felt the most focused?
- Which circle of attention would be most helpful to be in when you’re trying to focus on some work?
- When might a wide circle of attention be more helpful than a small one?
- Do you notice any changes in your body or mind when you feel focused?

MUSICALS

Mega, Mighty Minibeasts

A joyful, science-rich musical that brings learning to life for early years and KS1, while making production planning refreshingly straightforward for teachers



AT A GLANCE

- Musical for ages three to seven
- Catchy songs with built-in scientific learning
- Fully editable script with flexible casting
- Includes sound effects, Makaton videos and a dance video
- Packed with cross-curricular classroom activities



REVIEWED BY: EMMA CATE THOMPSON

If you are looking for a musical that young children will absolutely adore while quietly reinforcing key learning, *Mega, Mighty Minibeasts* is a brilliant choice. Written for ages three to seven, this production strikes that perfect balance between being fun, memorable and genuinely educational, without ever feeling forced or heavy-handed.

The songs are an immediate highlight. They are incredibly catchy, perfectly pitched for the age group and full of personality.

We Are Minibeasts is the kind of song that will be sung on the playground long after rehearsals have finished, and honestly, I'm not mad about it being stuck in my head for weeks. What I love most is that the lyrics cleverly repeat core facts about minibeasts, helping children retain key scientific knowledge. As we know, music is powerful for memory, and this musical makes the most of that in a really meaningful way.

The script itself is warm, funny and full of heart. It follows Ramble the centipede and her fellow forest creatures as they discover that being small does not mean being unimportant. Along the way, children are introduced to ideas around ecosystems, pollination and decomposition in a way that feels completely natural and accessible. There are laugh-out-loud moments, plenty of charm, and just the right amount of emotional depth for young performers.

As always with Out of the Ark, the practical support for teachers is exceptional. You get a clear character list, a fully editable script, and a detailed props list, all designed to be adapted to suit your cohort. There are 24 speaking parts, but roles can easily be expanded or reduced, making it flexible whether you are working with one class or several. Nothing needs inventing or rewriting. Everything is ready to go.

The online platform is intuitive and easy to navigate. Lyrics can be displayed on the interactive whiteboard, audio tracks are simple to access, and there are even sound effects for certain minibeasts, which adds a lovely extra layer to the performance. Beyond the musical itself, the additional resources really shine. The minibeast trail document is packed with ideas for outdoor learning, role play and exploration, while worksheets and profiles can be used in class or sent home. The inclusion of Makaton signing videos, dance videos and downloadable backdrops makes the production feel genuinely inclusive and thoughtfully planned from start to finish.

Overall, *Mega, Mighty Minibeasts* is a joyful, well-thought-through production that children will remember long after the final song. It brings learning and performance together in a way that feels natural, engaging and genuinely fun.

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ A joyful musical that children genuinely love performing
- ✓ Songs that reinforce scientific learning through repetition
- ✓ Flexible casting that works for any cohort size
- ✓ Excellent additional resources for classroom learning
- ✓ A stress-free production package for busy teachers

UPGRADE IF...

You want a fun, inclusive musical for younger children that supports science learning, keeps pupils engaged, and gives teachers everything they need without adding to workload.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES 

YPO refillable whiteboard pens



YPO®

Economical, environmentally responsible dry-wipe markers for busy classrooms

AT A GLANCE

- Dry-wipe felt-tip pens for everyday whiteboard work
- Easily refillable using specially designed ink bottles
- Made from 90% recycled materials
- Robust and chunky enough to suit hands of all sizes
- Available in a range of colours and nib sizes



REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

I'm old enough to remember what a boon it was for classroom practice when individual dry-wipe boards became available. They were a great way to gauge understanding immediately without having to resort to targeting questions at the usual suspects, or impose the lottery of selecting names on lolly sticks at random. It might seem like a small thing to the uninitiated, but it was so useful to have the whole class simultaneously showing me their proposed answers to questions. Teachers being teachers, they could probably enthusiastically explain a hundred other ways in which they use them in their lessons.

The trouble was, the markers seemed to run out depressingly quickly. It took me back to childhood disappointments of getting a brand-new pack of felt tips only to find them drying to scratchy uselessness after what seemed like just a picture or two.

Similarly, as a teacher, I can remember my heart sinking, not just as my supply of replacement whiteboard pens steadily dwindled, but also as I noticed the frequency with which I was adding to the world's pile of discarded plastic. How soothed my conscience would have been if only we had been using YPO's refillable whiteboard markers!

First things first, they perform as well as any other dry-wipe marker I have encountered. The ink flows smoothly and whatever mark you've made wipes clear easily. The difference, as the name makes clear, is that their ink can be topped up as many as 35 times. That's 34 fewer plastic tubes

heading for landfill for every marker you use. When you think of how many classes they could be used in, that's a huge amount of waste avoided. And don't forget, they're already made of 90 per cent recycled materials to start with. Refilling is easy: open the bottle, pop in the pen, leave for an hour or so. No mess, no fuss, job done.

In a way, that's all you really need to know. Nevertheless, there are a few other features that might catch your eye. For a start, they come in four different colours: black, red, blue and green.

They also offer a variety of nib sizes and styles: chisel, broad, bullet and fine. What's more, these gauges are clearly marked on the outside so that you don't have to scabble through boxes, removing lids, to find the one you want. (Maybe it's just me, but I really appreciate thoughtful little design considerations like this.)

Now don't quote me on this, because I'm sure my quick internet price comparison isn't

foolproof, but from what I've seen, it appears that these YPO pens would be remarkably good value, even if you just used them once, let alone refilling 35 times. To give you some idea, a pack of 50 black fine tip pens is available from just £15.99 + VAT. With refill bottles which can be used up to 25 times, going for around £3 + VAT, it's not hard to see how they make good economic as well as environmental sense. And, at those prices, you can afford to check my figures and work out on a whiteboard how much you might save per pen.

“They work well, and help you avoid a huge amount of waste”

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Effective and comfortable
- ✓ Perfect for classroom use
- ✓ Easy to refill
- ✓ Refill up to 35 times
- ✓ Environmentally sound
- ✓ Great value
- ✓ No mess, no fuss
- ✓ Gauges clearly marked, so no searching through boxes for what you need

UPGRADE IF...

You want to continue enjoying the benefits of whiteboard work in a way that is environmentally more responsible and economically beneficial.

Q & A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

The feeling that you're making a difference. It's why I always wanted to be a teacher, and any glimpse of that happening remotivates me again and again. As I move further into leadership, making a difference to colleagues is just as gratifying as making a difference to the children. I try to acknowledge the difference others make, too.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

The sentence, "Can I have a quick word?". It's rarely quick and often throws a spanner in the works. The intensity of the fear is fully dependent on who is asking for the quick word: a child – the fear barely even registers; a colleague – a small shudder; the headteacher – a shiver down my spine; a parent – run and hide! Still, problem-solving is just one of the many skills teachers are fantastic at!

3 What is your current state of mind?

Right now I'm feeling motivated and optimistic. There's lots of positive change happening in our school at all levels and I'm excited to be part of it. I was once told "curriculum work is never done", but I think it applies to almost every area of school life: there are always things to develop and gains to be made. A positive mindset is the only way to deal with the constant change and development, as otherwise it can be overwhelming.

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

Working around the clock. Some colleagues wear it as a badge of honour, but it's not sustainable. Work smarter, not harder, accept that you'll never reach the end of your to-do list, and learn to prioritise.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

I like to purposely mispronounce what's in the zeitgeist. It allows the children to talk passionately about what I've "misunderstood" and creates a lovely bonding moment. My favourite right now is "Kerpop Vampire Slayers" instead of "K-Pop Demon Hunters".

6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

I have definitely gone through a whole host of catchphrases over the years. "Mr Betts is always right" has been

"I like to purposely mispronounce what's in the zeitgeist. My favourite right now is 'Kerpop Vampire Slayers'"

immortalised by a former pupil as a lovely, framed piece of art that remains in my classroom to this day. I quite like "You can't talk and listen at the same time" as it's a great lesson in meaningful conversation, as well as getting pupils to stop talking during a listening activity.

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

My proudest moment was when my former pupil sang and played guitar as my soon-to-be-wife walked down the aisle. All of my favourite moments have been encountering former pupils out in the wild. I was recently rescued by an AA worker who greeted me by saying "Hello, Mr Betts". He went above and beyond to get me where I needed to be and when I asked him why, he said "You were a nice teacher."

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

An Elderwand from Harry Potter. It's my conductor's baton, pointer stick for important information, and interactive whiteboard pen for when I'm feeling particularly fancy.



NAME: Ashley Betts
JOB ROLE: Music teacher, ADL, LKS2 phase leader
EXTRA INFO: You can keep in touch on Bluesky @abetts.bsky.social

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