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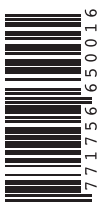
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# Hello!



**W**elcome back! How are you feeling? Raring to go? Tired already? Well, wherever your head is, I hope the following pages will help you out in some way. We've got a bumper issue lined up to start the year off with a bang, and it's packed to the rafters with advice and resources for 2025/26.

It wouldn't be a new academic year without a revised government scheme; behold, the new Writing Framework. Don't worry if you haven't had chance to pore through its 150 pages yet though, Lynn Sear breaks down the key points and how they will affect your teaching over on page 73.

Friend of the show and beloved poet Pie Corbett is back, too, this time with three new dragon poems, along with teaching notes on how to inspire your pupils to use these fiery creatures as the basis for their own verse. Check it out on page 78.

If you're keen on developing an oracy approach in your school, take a look at our profile of Rokesly Juniors, starting on page 53. I was lucky enough to visit at the end of last term, and met the team that has transformed the entire school's ethos through a seemingly simple focus on speaking – very inspiring.

We've also got a subject focus on the humanities this month, and learn how powerful your immediate area can be in engaging your pupils. Read about how one school took its entire cohort on a local pilgrimage to help understand religious journeys (page 60), and how understanding your community and your school's surroundings can provide children with a much broader geography curriculum than you might think (page 63).

Thanks so much for reading, and best of luck for your first term! See you next time,

*Charley*

Charley Rogers, editor  
 @TeachPrimaryEd1  @charleytp.bsky.social

*Don't miss our next  
 issue, available from  
 6th October*

## POWERED BY...



**NAILA MISSOUS**  
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*"This isn't about political correctness. It's about historical integrity"*

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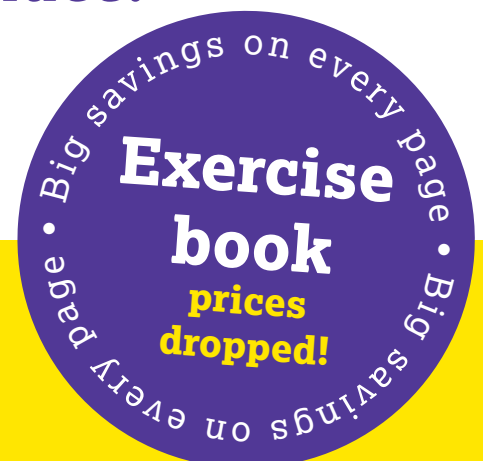
**Back  
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**Essentials**

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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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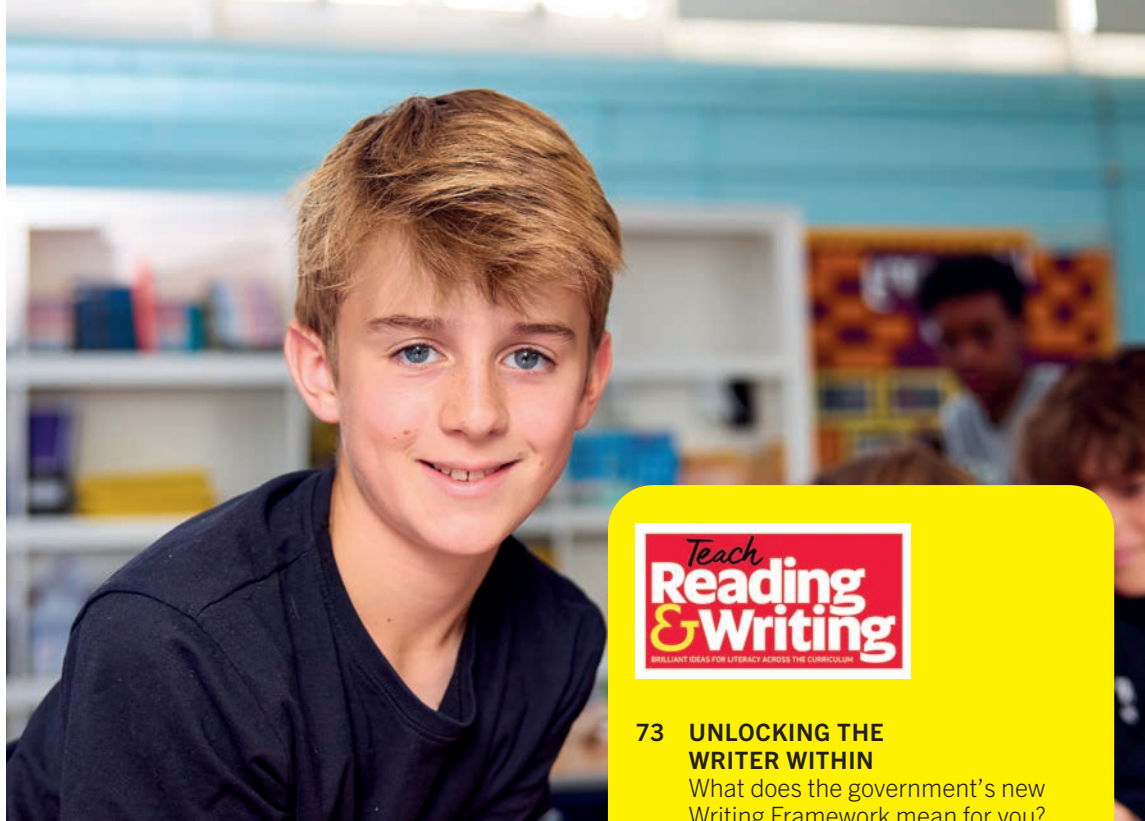
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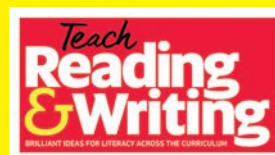
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# Breaktime

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## Library of the Year

The School Library Association (SLA) has announced the honours list for its Peter Usborne Primary School Library of the Year Award. The shortlist of three primary school libraries in Birmingham, Bristol and Northampton, showcases how ‘dedicated librarians, strong leadership support, and whole-school community engagement can transform library spaces into vibrant hubs that elevate reading culture, engage pupils and create measurable impact’.

Nicola Usborne, managing director of Usborne said: “It is a joy to read about the fantastic school communities across the country, who are working day-in, day-out, to find innovative ways to ensure their school library has a positive impact; inspiring curiosity, informing and delighting pupils. The passion shown by the three shortlisted primary libraries is truly an inspiration to all of us.” Read more at [tinyurl.com/tp-SLprimaryaward](http://tinyurl.com/tp-SLprimaryaward)

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



### FIRST ENCOUNTERS

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is kicking off its First Encounters programme this September, specifically for KS2 and KS3 pupils. Whether you're off to see a production on the tour, or just reading plays in class, you can find teaching packs at [tinyurl.com/tp-RSCresources](http://tinyurl.com/tp-RSCresources)



### ONLINE SAFETY

Oak Academy has released a series of KS2 units on online safety, including topics such as ‘What should I share online?’ and ‘Who should I talk to online?’. Units include worksheets, videos, slides and quizzes, and can be searched by topic and key stage. Find them at [tinyurl.com/tp-OakOnlineSafety](http://tinyurl.com/tp-OakOnlineSafety)



### LIVE LESSONS

Tes has teamed up with big names in entertainment and education such as Penguin, Disney on Stage, the Royal Mint and more, to bring free live lessons into your classroom. Covering topics such as PSHE, science and history, the lessons are available to watch at [tinyurl.com/tp-tesLIVE](http://tinyurl.com/tp-tesLIVE)

## →→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**



### Back to school

Make sure children's

transition between year groups, key stages and schools is as smooth as possible, with resources designed to boost confidence, build relationships and share expectations. From classroom rules to progress tracking, Plazoom has got your autumn term covered.

Download your resources at [tinyurl.com/tp-plz-bts](http://tinyurl.com/tp-plz-bts)







## Schools go from grey to green

Thousands of young people across England are taking part in the National Education Nature Park programme, and supporting global biodiversity research by mapping out the habitats on their school

sites. The National Education Nature Park, commissioned by the Department for Education and led by the Natural History Museum working with the Royal Horticultural Society and other partners, sees young people turning areas in their schools from 'grey to green' through creating new habitats such as ponds, green walls and grasslands. More than 1,000 schools are now creating a map of the habitats on their site, recording an area of over 11 million square metres, (equating to around 8,800 Olympic-size swimming pools!), working alongside the Natural History Museum to help inform decisions on how to improve biodiversity. Sign up at [educationnaturepark.org.uk](https://educationnaturepark.org.uk)

## What a good boy

Achilles, a Norwich Terrier from Danson Primary School in Welling, Kent, has just been crowned the UK's very first School Dog of the Year, receiving his award at a ceremony in the Palace of Westminster. The four-year-old terrier has been a much-loved presence and integral part of the school community at Danson Primary for the past three years. His responsibilities include taking centre stage at the school's weekly attendance assembly, where he hands out his very own 'Achilles Attendance' awards and other certificates. He also meets pupils at the school gate, helping children who find it difficult to attend school by accompanying them to their classroom. Throughout the day, he supports individual pupils, observing them as they play or read, offering a comforting, non-judgemental presence. Read more at [tinyurl.com/tp-SchoolDog2025](https://tinyurl.com/tp-SchoolDog2025)



**80%** of MATs report that they don't have enough funding for the SEND provision they need to provide.\*

\* IMP Software's 2025 MAT CFO Insights Survey

## Look ahead | Book ahead



**ON A BEAR HUNT**  
Run, don't walk, to Helen Oxenbury's first solo exhibition, opening 4 October at the Harley Gallery. Work includes her classic illustrations from *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Visit [Harleyfoundation.org.uk](https://harleyfoundation.org.uk)

**CHRISTMAS JUMPER DAY!**  
To celebrate Save the Children's annual Christmas Jumper Day on 11 Dec, 'Head of Wool' Shaun the Sheep is running a prize draw for schools to win model workshops with Aardman. Sign up at [christmasjumperday.org](https://christmasjumperday.org)



## Q & A



© Rich Lakos

## Danny Robins

Writer, broadcaster and journalist

### 1. Why did you decide to write a children's book?

It's something I've been thinking about for a while – we found we have lots of young fans of the *Uncanny* podcast and show, so it seemed like the natural next step. Ghost stories are almost universal, too; you could ask anyone of any age, anywhere in the world, and start an interesting conversation.

### 2. Aren't ghost stories a bit scary?

Absolutely not – as I explain in the book, there's a big difference between something being *scary* and being *spooky*. The book is definitely spooky – it encourages the reader to lean into that sort of tingly feeling you get when something is unknown, but it's not scary in that it'd make you want to close the book and run away.

### 3. What will children learn from this book?

There are so many teaching points in ghost stories – we look into the science of certain phenomena, and explain things like how human hearing works, and why we're afraid of the dark. We also learn about historical figures, from Queen Victoria I to Tupak Shakur, but all within the framework of ghost stories. Children can become detectives and investigate the evidence on both sides of the debate, and learn that disagreeing with someone doesn't mean we need to be enemies, so there's a critical thinking element too.

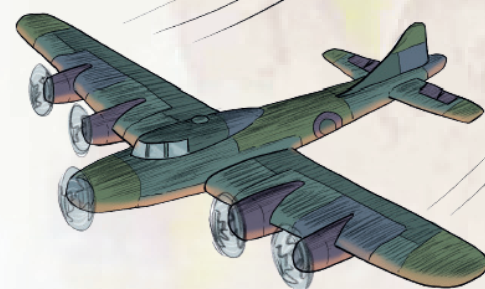
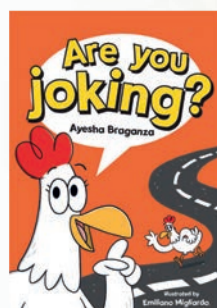
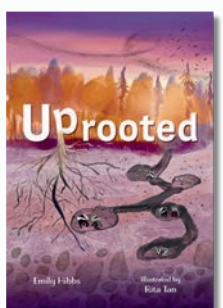
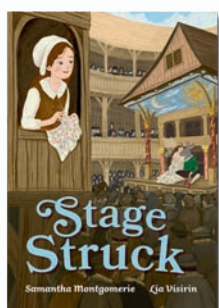
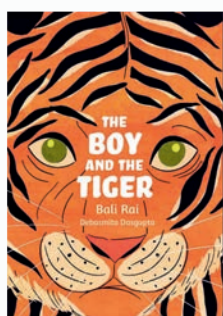
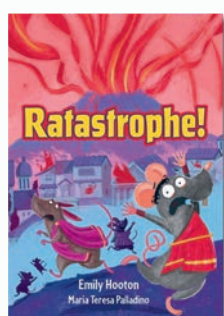
*Do You Believe in Ghosts?* (£8.99, Puffin) by Danny Robins, illustrated by Ellen Walker, is out on 25 September 2025.



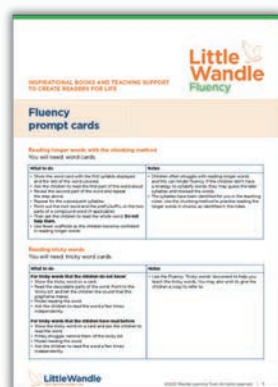
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# 6 ways to stop homophobia in its tracks

A one-off gay rights lesson won't do much, but showing that everyone is valued will make a big difference, says **Ian Timbrell**

## 1 | NAME IT TO TAME IT

You can't challenge what you don't name. Homophobia doesn't just mean loud insults – it also shows up in muttered comments, jokes at someone's expense, or phrases like "That's so gay." If we don't teach adults and children what homophobia looks and sounds like, they're likely to brush it off as 'just words'. Use class discussions and assemblies to help pupils recognise the full range of homophobic behaviour – and help staff feel confident addressing it.

## 2 | CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY

Every school needs a clear, inclusive anti-bullying policy that explicitly mentions homophobia – and every adult in the building needs to know how to act on it. That means training staff to recognise and respond to homophobic incidents with confidence. Develop a short script that empowers staff to know what to say in these situations. Make sure pupils and parents know the rules, too. When the message is consistent, children understand that all families are valued, and prejudice won't be excused – regardless of personal belief.

## 3 | USUALISE DIVERSE FAMILIES

Including a book with two mums, or reading a story where a child lives with their grandad, isn't 'special' – it's usual. We say *usualise*, not *normalise*, because the goal isn't to make people 'normal' – it's to make all kinds of families feel like a usual part of school life. The mistake schools often make is relying on a one-off 'gay lesson' to tick a box. But that approach sends the message that some people are different (or not normal) and need to be learned about separately. Instead, make sure children see a wide range of families – including same-sex parents – in everyday learning, from reading books to family tree activities. When difference is usualised, there's nothing left to mock or fear.



**IAN TIMBRELL** is a former deputy headteacher and is the founder of the not-for-profit More Than Flags and Rainbows. His book *It's More Than Flags and Rainbows* (£18.99, Independent Thinking Press), is out now.

## 4 | RESPECT, NOT TOLERANCE

We don't tolerate others – we respect them. When children say, "It's just a joke" or "My family says it's wrong", we must respond with clarity. Beliefs are personal. Behaviour is not. All children deserve to feel safe, valued, and accepted in school, regardless of their family background. Set a class agreement that unkind language has no place here, and model what it means to stand up for each other.

## 5 | BRING IN REAL PEOPLE

Meeting real people from diverse families – people who aren't celebrities or stereotypes – helps children build empathy and understanding. At More Than Flags and Rainbows, our workshops are based on showing that gay and bisexual people are real, with feelings, and deserve to be respected and treated with kindness. These sessions help pupils put a human face to the issues, ask questions in a safe space, and challenge any assumptions they might have picked up from media or playground talk. They also show children that there's nothing strange or unusual about the people behind the label.

## 6 | CELEBRATE A 'GOOD TO BE YOU' DAY

*A Good to Be You Day* celebrates the brilliant mix of people in your school – different families, cultures, and personalities – without singling anyone out. Invite visitors to talk about their lives, run mini presentations where pupils share what makes them proud, or host a story time featuring diverse families. Add joy with fun activities: a glitter station, badge-making ("I'm proud of..."), self-portrait walls and a compliment chain. You could even have a dress-to-express day or a classroom parade. The aim is to usualise difference and make every child feel valued, visible and celebrated – all while having fun.

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^Keep in mind that the value of your investments can go down as well as up, and you may get back less than you put in.

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## Q&amp;A

# Saving for your future is paramount

Glen Roberts, regional manager at Wesleyan, on how having good savings habits and working towards goals can give you the retirement you deserve



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Wesleyan's team of specialist financial advisers offers holistic financial planning for teachers and senior education leaders across the UK. From the start of your teaching career to planning for retirement, we can support you every step of the way, providing all the info you need.

### Why might primary school teachers wish to save?

There are many reasons why a primary school teacher, and indeed anyone, would benefit from setting savings goals. It may be that they wish to help their children onto the property ladder in the future, or it might be potential support for them to go through university. Or they may have other types of personal goals where parents may want to support.

### How can financial planning help with this?

A specialist financial adviser can help you to project future costs, calculate an approximate rate of inflation and then work backwards to draw some assumptions about how much per month you would need to put away into some type of savings vehicle and allow it to grow until such a time that you needed to draw on it for support in future projects. It's worth noting here however, that the first port of call would always be the recommendation to build an emergency fund – approximately six months' worth of expenditure, kept somewhere easily accessible for an emergency or a rainy day.

### Is it better to start sooner rather than later?

When it comes to saving towards future goals, the sooner you start, the better. If it is left too late, it can be quite challenging to save a significant sum of money over a shorter period of time. Going back to the previous example of providing financial support for children going to university – if your child is age 15



and about to do their GCSEs, there is not much time to start saving and allow that money to grow. If, however, you start putting money aside earlier, by the time your child does reach the age of 15, you're much more likely to already have a sizeable pot of money. And of course, the investment returns on this larger pot are likely to be significantly higher than the amount in your starting pot. This is due to effects of compound growth.

### How can specialist support help?

A good adviser should encourage you to consider whether or not you are being deliberate regarding where you're spending your money, and whether you are planning ahead and saving for the future. The most suitable savings vehicle will depend on your individual circumstances.



**ABOUT GLEN:**  
Glen Roberts is regional manager at Wesleyan Financial Services.

**Contact:**  
[wesleyan.co.uk/finances-teach-primary](https://wesleyan.co.uk/finances-teach-primary)

This is where the input of a specialist financial adviser can be invaluable, as they understand the career progression of a primary school teacher, are experts on the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and are able to assess your situation as a whole to ultimately ensure that you are informed to make the best possible decisions for your future.

**Bear in mind that the value of investments can go down as well as up and you may get back less than you invest.**

**If you would like support or guidance on understanding your financial position, speak to a specialist financial adviser at Wesleyan Financial Services for a financial review by visiting [wesleyan.co.uk/teachers](https://wesleyan.co.uk/teachers)**

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# Let's get Christingle in the calendar.

## Save the date for your Christingle!

Christingle is a candle-lit celebration that's perfect for bringing communities together. Whether you are new to Christingle or join in the fun every year, it's a wonderful opportunity to celebrate together.

**Christingle runs from Advent (1 December 2025) to Candlemas (2 February 2026), so why not get your date in the diary now?**

You can celebrate with your community, friends, and loved ones. We'll support you with lots of incredible free resources to help you get started. To find out how you can get involved, visit **[christingle.org](https://christingle.org)**.





# The early career framework needs an update

If we truly care about teachers, we need to prepare them with essential information on all their development options...

**H**aving worked as a career coach with hundreds of teachers and leaders across the country, it's my opinion that Initial Teacher Training programmes and the Early Career Framework are missing a crucial component...

Meaningful career planning. It's simple, but long overdue.

Before you roll your eyes and mutter something about 'yet another thing' to cram into an already overloaded, content-heavy framework, hear me out. This isn't just a 'nice-to-have'. It's an essential but missing piece in the way we prepare and support early career teachers. If we truly care about recruitment and retention, then we need this conversation.

Many of us make the jump straight from university into the classroom, swapping one side of the teacher's desk for the other without ever stopping to consider what kind of career we're stepping into, or where it might lead.

We need to equip new teachers not just to survive the job, but to actively shape a career that aligns with their values, goals, and aspirations; whether that's staying in the

classroom, moving into leadership, pivoting into SEND or pastoral roles, or transitioning into other sectors when the time feels right. We want to empower them to stay well, and to leave well (if that's their choice).

At present, they're expected to hit the ground running. Learn behaviour management. Become an expert in pedagogy. Understand safeguarding, SEND, and 17 different acronyms before Christmas. So, it's not surprising that 10 per cent of newly qualified teachers leave the profession after their first year. A third are gone by year five. And by the 10-year mark, 43 per cent have walked away (DfE, 2024). This trend will continue unless we start supporting teachers not just to survive, but to build sustainable, fulfilling careers.

Teaching is one of the most purpose-driven professions out there. But purpose without direction burns out fast. Too often, early career teachers find themselves stuck on an escalator of 'next steps' that they didn't consciously choose, moving

from ECT to middle leadership to SLT, simply because they were good in the classroom and it seemed like the natural progression.

So, what if we embedded structured career planning into ITT and ECT programmes, not as an afterthought, but as a key part of building long-term sustainable professional support?

Here's what I would include:

- **Values and identity:** Time and space to reflect on your own motivations, values, strengths, and non-negotiables as you enter the profession. Who are you, beyond your subject or phase? What matters to you, and how do you want your work to reflect that? What led you to teaching?
- **Career pathways:** A clear, non-judgmental overview of the diverse routes available within and beyond education. That means TLRs, leadership, SEND, pastoral, curriculum development, consultancy, edtech, education policy, L&D, youth work, and even roles in charities, museums, or coaching.
- **Transferable skills:** Practical guidance on how to articulate and evidence the skills – not just the Teaching Standards – you're developing. Because whether you're planning to stay in education or not, being able to name and showcase your value is a powerful act of self-awareness.
- **Wellbeing and boundaries:** Strategies for building sustainable habits, managing workload, setting boundaries, understanding contracts, and maintaining mental health, not just for training, but for the long haul. You can't have a career if you burn out in year two.
- **Professional growth:** How to set meaningful goals, engage in CPD that matters to you, and build a network that opens doors. Where to find community, resources and advice beyond your school.

Ultimately, this is about giving teachers permission to dream, explore, and take control of their futures. A career planning module won't fix everything. But it would be a bold step in treating teachers not just as deliverers of curriculum, but as professionals with long-term futures worth investing in. **TP**

*Mike Leaman a former deputy headteacher and the founder of Classroom Exit Coach®.*

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*Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send*

# A letter to...

## Bridget Phillipson and Becky Francis

This cringeworthy true story will convince you just how important knowledge-rich learning really is, says **Iain Lindsell**...



legend on the radio...

It happened during the late 2000s; I was the relatively new headteacher of a large primary school in Manchester, heading to London with a group of Year 6s. We stopped (again!) at a service station (because, apparently, coach toilets are merely decorative), and I offered to fetch coffee while my colleagues herded the kids to the loos. While paying for said caffeine, I heard a familiar voice behind me and, without turning, I knew right away... it was my hero, Guy Garvey.

Now, for the uninitiated, Guy Garvey is the poetic powerhouse behind the band Elbow. Their music had become the soundtrack to my life – and my office. I'd even used their lyrics to teach poetry. So, unusually for me, I was awestruck.

I said I was a fan; he was gracious. I told him I used his songs in school to teach poetry. Becoming genuinely intrigued, he leaned in, arms folded, and asked, "Really, which ones?" and, in that moment, two things happened simultaneously. First, a spectacular scenario emerged in my imagination; I could see it all: Guy visiting our school, inspiring children, laughing at my jokes, maybe inviting me round for tea...

And, at the very same time, my memory performed a full system shutdown. Instead of being able to name a single song, I stammered, "Erm... that one where the phone rings..."

**A**llow me to share with you a true story; one that still haunts me every time I hear the breathy Mancunian accent of a certain songwriting

"Oh, 'The Bones of You'?" he offered gently.

"No, it's not called that!" I shouted (It was – of COURSE it was.). Panicked, I ventured; "It's from your second album!"

He tried again: "Oh, that is from our second album."

Me: "No, it's not!" (It is. Oh, the shame!).

At this point, he began backing away. He graciously shook my (now very clammy) hand and made his escape, leaving me standing there, robbed of my dignity, my credibility, and a potentially amazing opportunity.

So, what went wrong?

I knew the songs; I loved the songs. But I'd been listening to them almost exclusively via a streaming service. I'd 'liked' tracks, shuffled albums, and rarely looked at the titles or covers. I could sing almost every lyric, but in that moment of high stress, I couldn't remember a single track title. The knowledge I needed in that moment wasn't secure; when I needed it most, it just wasn't there.

This, I believe, is a good metaphor for why a knowledge-rich curriculum really matters.

We talk a lot about 'cultural capital' in education, but this experience brought it home in a very real (very sweaty) way. Cultural capital isn't just about exposure, it is about secure, retrievable knowledge; about being able to confidently contribute to a conversation, to assert an opinion, to not see your apparent knowledge crumble when your hero asks a simple question.

When children are equipped with a solid foundation of knowledge, they're not just better prepared for exams, they're better

prepared for life. They can engage, debate, and grow. They can walk into a room (or a motorway newsagent's!) and feel like they belong there.

This is especially vital for children who haven't had the benefit of culturally rich upbringings. For them, school might be the only place where they encounter poetry, classical music, or the works of Shakespeare. If we don't give them this knowledge, we risk leaving them floundering in moments that matter.

Guy Garvey once spoke about how his youth was spent in record shops and music venues, places that nurtured his passion and built his knowledge. That immersion gave him confidence, identity, and ultimately, contributed to his career. Our job is to create similar opportunities for our pupils, through a curriculum that doesn't just skim the surface but dives much more deeply.

So, as you complete the curriculum and assessment review, I urge you to remember this: knowledge isn't elitist, it's empowering. It is the difference between a child shrinking in silence and one who speaks up with certainty; the difference between a flustered headteacher and one who confidently invites Guy Garvey to school and doesn't argue with him about his own discography (oh the pain!).

Let's give our children the tools to be confident, curious, and culturally literate. Let's build a curriculum that sticks – not just streams.

Yours, still cringing,

*Iain*

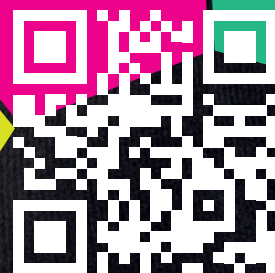
*Iain Lindsell is a former headteacher, now a leadership consultant and part-time teacher.*



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## UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

If you're dreading an inset day, read this first. As a headteacher, all the anxiety and planning is worth it for one thing...

**S**lides? Check. Smile? Check. Deep breath. "Good morning, everyone, great to see you again!"

Just like that, we're off for another year of school. Summer seems a distant memory: the relaxed state of mind, the carefree throwaway days and the lack of an alarm – times that seemed indelible and now are just fading impressions of the last six weeks.

I look up and every type of familiar September face looks back at me: a few smiles, a few people running to find their chair, a few who look like they have been woken from their summer-long hibernation in the last half an hour, and those who are buzzing with enthusiasm. Delivering inset is a lot like being in the classroom; the feedback you want is the same, and the anxiety you have about whether your content is landing is just as real.

It's my job to lead the way, be the voice of enthusiasm, and to drive the new day, the new week and the new year. The return to work has been a slow burn over the last week or so – thoughts of returning to school, the priorities and how to best deliver on them. The plan has shifted into focus, shaping itself from the blurry outlines of wondering what on earth I am going to say to all these people as they look expectantly at me on that first day. It's always a little bit daunting, mainly because you know almost everyone is thinking the same thing... *'I have 100 other things I could and probably should be doing right now'*. To be perfectly honest, I am thinking that, too. I am conscious of using everyone's time effectively, of making sure that people get something out of the morning and that they go into their lessons ready to roll. It's a fine balance; there is so much we must go through, and that's before we even get to setting out plans and the vision for the new year.

And so I remind everyone that they do an amazing job, and that they make a huge difference. This bit can never be too overstated. I do worry that it becomes a bit like a broken record when I say it, but it never gets any less true.

I always tell people that I have the easy job – the people in the classrooms are the ones who make the magic.

Through the day, one thing really sticks out. It blows my mind every year, and I love it every year. There are several points – and often it only happens at this one time of the year – where everyone is together and everyone is relaxed. The whole school team in one place: office staff, support staff, site staff, teachers and governors.

It is magic.

I love looking out over it. I love seeing the smiling, the laughing, the catching up, the scurrying from person to person, the hugs, the complimenting each other on tans and the inevitable *"I can't believe summer went so fast!"*.

And the reason I love it? The reason I do my job, and why, despite people wanting to just shut themselves away in classrooms and get their heads down, I want this time all together? Because this is

where I remember that this year, like every year, everything will be just fine. Not because of my slides, not because of any plans I might have, and not because of what I've said, but because in this team of amazing people, who care for each other and who work together day in and day out to make things as brilliant for the children as they can, there is everything this school needs to have a positive impact; to really achieve what we're all here for.

It doesn't matter what I say.

It matters that these people are here, doing what they do so well. **TP**



***"The people in the classrooms are the ones that make the magic"***

*The writer is a headteacher in England.*

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\*Tickets and lessons subject to availability



# Pitch perfect LESSONS

Leaning into digital tools and whole-school approaches can make even the least confident teacher a music maestro, says **Richard Busby**

**A**s a professional music teacher, I understand the challenges of delivering inclusive music lessons, especially for generalist primary teachers with minimal training in the subject. But when it's done successfully, the rewards are immense.

Seeing first-hand how influential music can be in children's development is incredibly powerful. To witness the impact when a musical concept clicks, highlights why it's so important for pupils to receive inspiring and effective music instruction.

All teachers want to deliver enriching lessons with clear progression routes, but this is only possible when *everyone* feels equipped to bring the curriculum to life.

Here are four key areas you can focus on to teach fun and engaging music lessons:

## Utilise digital tools

Lots of schools have access to digital tools, but knowing how to use them effectively is key. If you're not sure what's available, speak to your subject leader or SLT about the schemes you have access to, and do some searching to see if they offer music support. This research will not only increase your own musical knowledge, but also develop lesson plans that are exciting and relevant.

Whether it's activity worksheets, interactive videos or ready-made lesson templates, the more time you spend getting to know these resources, the more comfortable you will feel bringing them into your classroom. Organisations like the BBC have lots of free



videos you can incorporate into your lessons ([tinyurl.com/tp-BBCmusicvids](https://tinyurl.com/tp-BBCmusicvids)), and you can see a wealth of additional resources at [teachwire.net/primary/music](https://teachwire.net/primary/music)

## Encourage a whole-school approach

From my experience, the best way to embed music into school life is through collaboration. Sharing tips with colleagues creates a culture where everyone can contribute.

One idea you can share is how to link music to other curriculum topics. For example, pupils studying ancient Egypt could rewrite the lyrics of a popular song from the perspective of an ancient Egyptian, deepening their historical understanding through creativity. Similarly, musical performances (or even practices in class) can become a rich learning opportunity where students can imagine them as part of a world tour; planning stops and exploring geography, or even planning the tour's production budget to support numeracy.

## Assess progression

Assessing progression can feel daunting, but knowing what musical progress in the classroom actually looks like, makes it far more manageable.

Let's consider assessing children's ability to 'listen with attention to detail', as laid out in KS2 national curriculum. This could be broken down into observable skills that can be ticked off one by one: 'identifying the pulse of a song', 'identifying differences in tempo' and 'articulating what instruments they're hearing'.

To observe these skills, you can bring a variety of fun, musical games into your classroom. For instance, identifying the pulse of a song could be seen by playing a popular song and asking children to tap along to the beat. You could also play a 'guess the instrument' game, using simple clips from YouTube and asking pupils to raise their hand when they think they know what instrument they're hearing, and explain their thoughts.

Learning comes easiest when pupils are having fun,

especially for primary-aged children.


## Get involved

Collaborating with local music hubs also helps to elevate provision and bring more musical opportunities into schools. They offer a wide range of resources and services that can be tailored to the needs of your school and take on board factors such as available provision and budget. You can find your local music hub by heading to the Arts Council England website and searching for music hubs. **TP**



**Richard Busby** is a professional music teacher and head of curriculum

and teaching standards at *Rocksteady Music School*, which delivers in-school rock and pop band lessons to over 100,000 children in thousands of primary school every week.

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### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

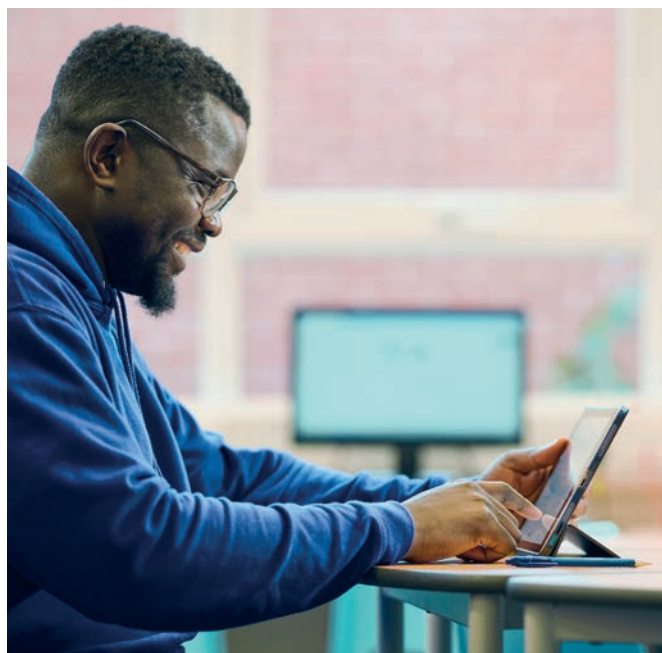
Everyone's knowledge and confidence levels are different. Both CPD courses for teachers and learning tools for pupils need to be fast, flexible and tailored, rather than based on a one-size-fits-all method. Now, through its partnership with a world leader in adaptive learning, Hachette Learning can replicate the approach of one-to-one tutoring while delivering personalised learning at scale. The teacher CPD courses, in partnership with Area9 Lyceum, have been designed to save teachers time by responding interactively to their input and focusing on what you need to know. Adaptive learning resources assess not only understanding but confidence, so teachers can identify and address any areas that require intervention in real-time, making learning more time-efficient.

### WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

The aim is for learners to reach 100 per cent 'conscious competence,' in the topic they're learning. Data from pilot studies of Hachette Learning Academy's short course for teachers on Using Questioning for Impact showed that, on average, teachers who completed this course improved their conscious competence by 33 per cent. The teachers in the sample had varying prior experience, from newly qualified teachers to senior leaders, so starting points therefore ranged from 13 per cent through to 75 per cent conscious competence in the strategies being taught through adaptive learning. All the teachers ultimately achieved 100 per cent conscious competence, showing that the course was successful in upskilling all participants, and all of them grew their awareness of their own competencies in the process.

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The aim of the two student and teacher wellbeing courses is for teachers to increase their confidence in embedding wellbeing practices into everyday teaching to improve learner engagement, emotional security and academic resilience.


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### Discover More...

Learn more about Hachette Learning Academy's courses at [hachettelearning.com/academy](https://hachettelearning.com/academy), and find the CPD that's right for you.

## GET INVOLVED

If you'd like to improve your confidence in key teaching competencies and receive immediate, actionable feedback without adding significantly to your workload or time commitments, get in touch with one of Hachette Learning's consultants to find out more or set up a trial.

# Emotional health WITH ELSA

This psychology-led intervention can let your pupils know that they are heard, and they matter, says **Penny Lasham**

**E**motional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) have many possible identities. They could be a teaching assistant, teacher, family worker, or hold another position within the school. But the one thing they all have in common is their support of individual children who may need a little extra attention.

ELSA is not an intervention used to manage pupils with challenging behaviour. What it can be used for is to help the child try to understand what is driving their behaviour and to look at their emotions. Behaviour is, after all, a form of communication, and it's our job to try to understand and support our pupils. Topics are varied and may include:

- Self-esteem
- Confidence
- Emotional regulation
- Anxiety
- Bereavement
- Friendship
- Social skills

## Be prepared

There are lots of things to think about if you are considering training staff to deliver ELSA sessions.

- Who will you train? Think about staff best placed to deliver sessions. They need to be appropriately experienced and able to be released to deliver sessions.
- Where will sessions take place? Think about whether you have space

you can dedicate solely to ELSA work, or a room you can timetable weekly for it. It needs to be somewhere quiet and confidential where sessions won't be disturbed, as sometimes they include delicate conversations with pupils.

- When and how often will sessions be held? Think about how often you can release staff, and which lessons you can spare adults and pupils from. ELSA work is incredibly important, but you don't want the child to always

why you feel their child would benefit from sessions. You can find a parent communication proforma at [tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAparentcomms](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAparentcomms)

- How will you feed back to parents and staff when sessions have concluded? Think about how you will tell teachers how sessions have gone and feed back anything relevant to parents, whilst also considering the child's confidentiality.
- Is everyone on board? Think about whether the

put forward for an ELSA and to ensure you make appropriate adjustments for them. Pupils with SEND often have additional difficulties linked to their everyday experiences, and it is important to address these and support them. For example, a child with autism who struggles to maintain friendships may benefit from individual or group sessions working on how to interact and converse with their peers, how to identify appropriate friendships, and strategies to help them start conversations with their classmates. A child with any additional need may experience low self-esteem as a result, and may therefore benefit from sessions focusing on building their confidence. These are hypothetical situations as examples; all interventions should be tailored to children's individual needs.

***“ELSA interventions can help children try to understand what is driving their behaviour and to look at their emotions”***

be missing core lessons or their own break times.

- How will you identify children in need of sessions? Think about who will identify the children in need and how they will bring them to the attention of the ELSA or the SENCo. Also consider whether ELSA is the right pathway for them or whether they need a different approach or alternative intervention.
- How will you inform parents before sessions begin? Think about how you will communicate with parents about what an ELSA is and

headteacher and senior leadership team are keen for ELSA interventions to happen, and how much they and teachers understand about what happens and why it's important. If you have everyone's backing, it's more likely to be a success and to keep happening.

## Tailor your sessions

Lots of people ask whether children with SEND can take part in ELSA sessions, and the answer is, of course, yes! It would be prudent to consider the individual needs of each pupil you

## Review and reflect

ELSA sessions should also be evaluated and monitored to record impact. This can be tricky, as much of what an ELSA does is





conversing with the pupil. There are no tests they can sit to see if the ELSA has helped them, no data to measure as you might for curriculum subjects, but there are things you can do to help evaluate your work.

- Pre- and post-session check lists – there are checklists available to fill out with the child to see how they feel about things before their sessions begin and after they conclude. See [tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAplan](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAplan) for examples.
- Visuals are useful to help a child identify how they feel without having to verbalise it. Things like blob tree posters and visual scales can be helpful here and can be revisited afterwards, too. E.g. [tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAvisual](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAvisual)
- Discussions – all evaluations and data you collect should be considered alongside discussions with staff around their observations of the pupil in school and parents at home. You can find an example ELSA record sheet at [tinyurl.com/tp-ELSArecord](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSArecord)

Think about where you will store evaluations and feedback about ELSA sessions. Will they be stored in the child's file? Will they be added to a system you already have that collects information about the children? Who can access the information?

### Practical room ideas:

- Think about resources you can use that will enhance sessions and allow conversation during activities. Sand and kinetic sand are great to use, as is water (if you have a suitable space) and Lego. The resources need to be of interest to the child.
- Think about where you can store resources that won't be used by others or will at least be returned to the same place and will be

there when you need them again.

- If you need to change locations, you could have a moveable display board with your posters, session rules and other information on. That way, you can take them with you wherever you go, and it will provide an element of consistency and familiarity, even if you are in a different room each time.
- Other things to consider in your space are lighting and soft furnishings. Do you have comfortable seats? Are the overhead lights harsh and distracting? Could you use lamps or open blinds to let in natural light? Do you want any soft toys, cushions or weighted blankets available? You might not feel you need these things, but there may be some children who would benefit from them.
- An ELSA space should be warm and welcoming, and one way in which to achieve this is to create displays. They don't need to be numerous or complex in nature, but thinking about cheerful and calm colours, mindfulness techniques, inspiring quotes and relaxing images may all help the overall experience (e.g. [tinyurl.com/tp-OKposter](https://tinyurl.com/tp-OKposter)). One display to have on show each week is the ELSA-pupil confidentiality agreement ([tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAconfidential](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSAconfidential)). This is drawn up between the ELSA and the child or young person at the start of the first session, and will set out the rules they agree upon for their sessions.

For more information and resources, see [tinyurl.com/tp-ELSA TP](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ELSA TP)



*Penny Whelan is an assistant headteacher and SENCO in a primary school.*



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# 3 stages of a perfect PARENTS' EVENING

When nerves abound, remember that three key steps can turn your dreaded appointments into productive meetings...

ALAN SHIELDS

**A**s a newly qualified teacher, I was fairly nervous before my first ever parents' night... and I didn't get nervous about much. But I was aware that all the parents were older than me, and I feared that they would see through my thin veneer of newly-qualified confidence.

This isn't an unusual feeling – even if you've been teaching for a while. But there are some simple steps you can take to quash the anxiety a bit, and make sure you're as ready as you can be.

## Before you start

Like most things, pulling off a successful parents' night begins long before the evening itself. Preparation is key. I would suggest that you take time to prepare for each child in turn. Make sure that you have all the important information at hand, including key attainment data, pastoral issues and additional needs considerations. A chat with the previous teacher/s may give you some helpful background, too. In particular, find out about any issues that have cropped up in previous years, and how they were addressed. For example, if the parent previously raised concerns about their child's reading level, what support was put in place, and what is the child's current level? Similarly, if there were friendship issues last year, are they still in the same class

as the children who were involved, and how are things going now?

Whilst it is important to be well prepared and have a clear idea of what points you want to get across, on the night itself it will be vital to remember that it is called 'parents' night' for a reason. It is a chance for families to ask questions that they may have, to raise any worries that may be troubling them and, importantly, spend some time with you. You are, after all, the person who cares for, and educates, their child every day.

## On the night

Given my extensive experience of parents' evening as both a teacher and a dad of six, I think I can be forgiven for admitting that lots of those conversations have merged into one in my mind, and it's fair to say that it is probably some of the more challenging chats that stick. I remember the mother in tears about her daughter's

reading difficulties; the parent who was convinced that I had a deep dislike for her child; and my own experience of cutting a forlorn figure at my eldest daughter's parents' night when she had 'crashed and burned' in her mock exams.

There is no doubt that you will find yourself in the middle of some difficult conversations, too, and there are few important thoughts to hold on to. First, try and



remain positive. Whilst it is important to be honest and realistic, all parents want to hear something positive about their child. As part of your preparation, it is worth making sure that you have at least a few positives noted for each pupil. For example, I can think of dyslexic learners who may have struggled with some written work but excelled with creative and aesthetic tasks. Similarly, I have worked with children

In other words, you may not be the only one who is nervous or apprehensive. In some cases, I have arranged for a translator to be present where English is not the parents' first language. Similarly, some people may benefit from being able to take your written notes home with them as a record of the main points of the meeting. For others, the formality of a whole-school parents' evening is overwhelming.

10-minute appointment is not going to cut the mustard, and everything else will get squeezed out. In a situation like this, planning a separate meeting in the week running up to parents' night may be much more appropriate. Sometimes, when in the midst of an appointment, it becomes clear that there is not enough time to unpack a particular issue. When this happens, I'd suggest that it is best to offer a longer slot at a more appropriate time.

One of the first lessons I learned as a young teacher was to get, and stay, on the right side of the cleaners and the caretaker. Never was this truer than on parents' night. You absolutely must stay on schedule and keep to the allotted time slots. It's worth remembering that, depending on the arrangements in your school, parents may well have other teachers to see, too.

### After the fact

Like most teachers, I was always delighted when parents' night was over; but some of the most important actions come afterwards. It's crucial that you follow through

who may have struggled to regulate their own feelings and emotions but could provide a calm, supportive, presence when working with younger children. Secondly, just as all children have different communication styles, needs and previous experiences, so do parents. For some families, coming to speak to you in school is not an easy thing to do; it may even be scary or overwhelming.

Organising a separate catch-up in the classroom at the end of a day may ultimately be more productive.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge that some conversations are just too 'big' for parents' night. For example, if there needs to be an in-depth discussion about a child's additional needs, a

## THE BREAKDOWN

### Before

- ✓ Take time to prepare
- ✓ Speak to previous teachers
- ✓ Try and anticipate issues

### During

- ✓ Give the parent the chance to raise issues
- ✓ Be as positive as possible
- ✓ Stick to time!

### After

- ✓ Follow through with agreed actions
- ✓ Record things appropriately
- ✓ Talk through any difficult situations with the leadership team

with the change to homework tasks, the rearrangement of seating, the check on reading fluency; whatever you offered or agreed to on parents' night. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it will help to build your credibility with the families.

If any appointments have been especially challenging, or if parents raised particular concerns, be sure to speak to someone within your school's leadership team. It's important, also, to follow your school's processes for recording outcomes and actions from your discussions.

I hope you are less worried about parents' night than I was. If you are well prepared, empathetic and stick to your schedule, you'll do well. **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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## WEEK 1

### Learning objective

- Character movement with user input: code a sprite to move using arrow keys

*Find example code for this week in the Scratch studio (link above).*

This first lesson is a good opportunity to demystify some of the new words we will be using. Begin by explaining that **sprites** are the 2D graphics that we program to move and interact in games. Pupils will be able to think of lots of examples! Explain that **input** is a means of giving instructions to a computer, and **output** is what the game shows or does in response. Or, more simply, input is what

the player does, output is what the computer does back.

Proceed to Scratch and explain the interface ([scratch.mit.edu](http://scratch.mit.edu)). On the left, we have the coding blocks, sorted into coloured categories. In the middle of the screen is the workspace, where we will drag blocks together to build a program. On the top right is the stage, where we can see the fruits of our labours. Below that, we have our banks of sprites and backdrops. Where possible, give children some time to explore before starting the project. You may also want to do some exploring yourself if you're unfamiliar with the platform – go to the tutorials tab on the homepage to see videos explaining how to use Scratch.

As we prepare to program our sprite



Computing is a complex subject, rich in specialised language and terminology. One of its most challenging strands is coding. But how do you deliver everything the national curriculum requires if you're not a specialist? This unit approaches this challenge by using video games as a contextual foundation. Video games are widely understood and relatable for most children, helping them make sense of key computing vocabulary. Over the course of six lessons, pupils will learn the core coding concepts needed to create a simple game, using MIT's free Scratch software. The code examples in the accompanying teacher's resources (link below) are annotated with comments, and could be shared with children who need a little extra scaffolding. Those pupils with more experience in Scratch can be encouraged to support their peers and, of course, to develop their own games beyond the objectives of these six lessons.

to respond to keystrokes, ask some recap questions to see how much the children can remember of the **X axis** (side to side) and **Y axis** (up and down) from their maths lessons. For the less confident, it may help to explain that the X axis goes across because it is itself *a cross*. Demonstrate the code for moving in one direction and give the class time to try and figure out the other three movements by themselves.



### Assessment

Can children add a sprite and code it to move left/right/up/down in response to keystrokes?



## WEEK 2

### Learning objective

- Add a star sprite and use 'Selection' (and collision detection) so the player can collect it
- Introduce debugging

In this week's code, we will add a new sprite (a star) and program it to vanish when the player's sprite touches it. Begin by recapping on X/Y axes and how we got our sprite to move. Ask children how they think we might add a second sprite. Then, ask how we could get the two sprites to interact. *How can the game tell if the player's sprite is touching the star? How can the game make a decision about what to do if that happens?*

Move on to explain conditional statements (**IF/THEN**), which are the computer's way of making decisions. Explain that conditional statements check if something is true or not. In our game, we are checking whether or not the



player's sprite is touching the star sprite. If it is, then we are going to hide the star sprite. Ask children if they can think of other instances of cause and effect. Discussing real-world IF/THEN statements can help them to grasp this new concept. Traffic lights are a good example: IF the light is red, THEN stop. There are lots of others. Show them the IF/THEN block and explain that this is how Scratch programs choose a course of action. Add the <Touching> block and choose **Sprite1** to allow us to check for contact between the two sprites.

The children will quickly find that this code doesn't quite work! **Debugging** is a key skill, so invite them to try and work out why. The program fails because we are only running the collision detection algorithm one time. When you click the green flag, it checks to see if the player's sprite is touching the star, and then it stops checking. For the game to work, that collision detection algorithm must be running constantly. That will bring us to the concept of **loops** in week 3.



### Assessment

Can children offer real-world examples of IF/THEN logic?  
Can children build a conditional statement in Scratch?  
Can pupils explain what debugging means?

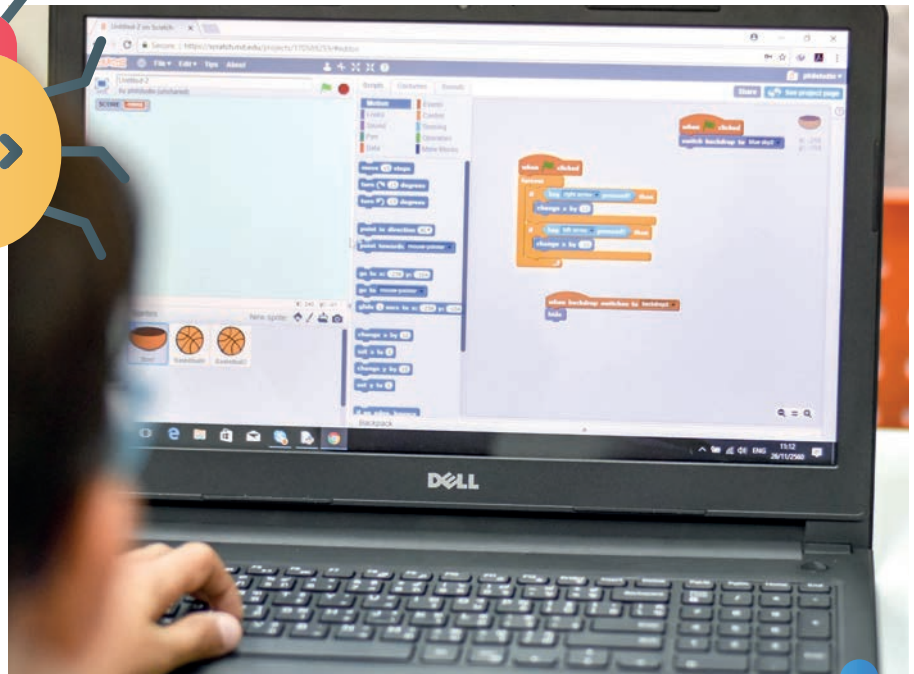
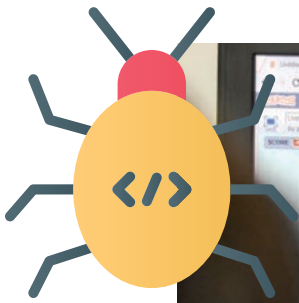


## WEEK 3 Learning objective

- Use loops to check for collisions, and to create multiple stars

As before, it is worthwhile recapping on the key vocabulary we have covered so far: X/Y axes and IF/THEN statements. Reintroduce the concept of debugging and reflect on the code from lesson 2. *Did we figure out why the code didn't work? How many times is the star checking to see if it is being touched by the player's sprite?*

Now, we can fix the code for the star sprite. Explain that loops are blocks that enable us to repeat instructions in our code. Instead of writing the same code lots of times, we use a loop to repeat it for us. There are different kinds of loops, but in this game we are only going to use the **forever** loop.



Show the children how the code flashes once when we click the green flag. If we put the IF/THEN block inside a forever block, it will remain lit when we run it. That means it is continuously checking to see if the two sprites are touching.

Explain that if we **hide** the star sprite when it comes into contact with the player's sprite, the star will remain invisible even if we re-start the game. Scratch sprites don't automatically reset or become visible at the start. If you hide something, Scratch assumes you intended to keep it hidden. The solution is to make sure we **show** the star sprite when the game starts.



### Assessment

Can children make predictions based on their existing understanding of creating sprites? Can they explain why we might need to use loops in our code?



## WEEK 4 Learning objective

- Create a variable to keep track of our score

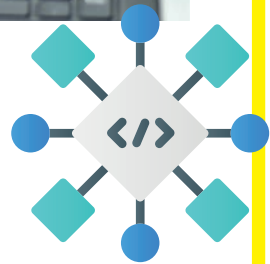
Begin with a recap of loops. Questions might include: *What does a loop do? Why do we use them?* Revisit the code from lesson 3 and review our progress so far. For this to be a real game, we need to keep score. This brings us to the introduction of **variables**.

Children encounter variables in science, so they may already understand

that variables are things that we can change. In coding, a variable is like a box with a value stored inside. Imagine a box labelled 'score', and inside we have a value of 0. If we earn a point in our game, the name of the variable remains the same, but the value inside increases by 1. This can be a difficult concept for children to grasp, so encourage plenty of discussion and lots of real-world examples, such as keeping score of team points on sports day: the variable is the team name – like Red, Blue or Green – and the value is the number of points they have, which goes up as they win events. The name doesn't change, but the value attached to it does.

To create your score, go into the 'Variables' section and choose **Make a Variable**. Variables should always have meaningful names, so we will call it 'Score'. We will then add a new **[when green flag clicked]** event block and connect **[Set my variable to 0]** to it. With the drop-down arrow, select 'Score'. Now that we have our score on the screen, we need to add some code to increase our score each time we catch a star.

Go into the code for the star sprite. Explain that we are going to add the **[change my variable by 1]** underneath the **[hide]** block, remembering once again to click the drop-down arrow and select 'Score'. Run the game and demonstrate that the score changes when the player's sprite touches the star.





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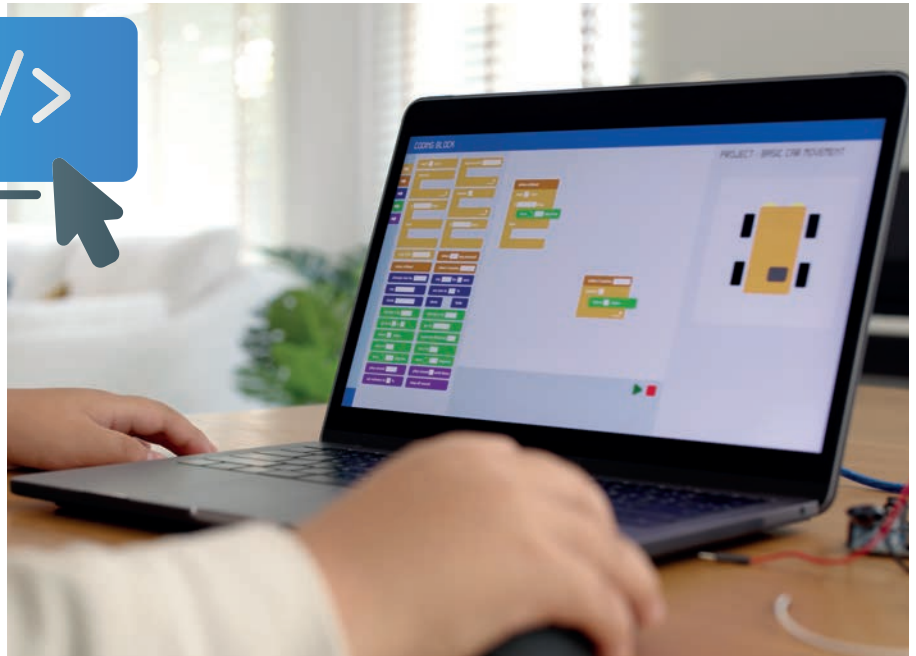
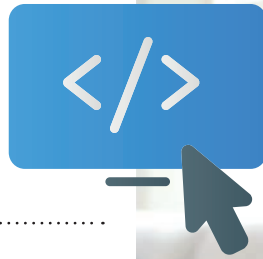






## Assessment

Can children create a variable, with a meaningful name, and manipulate its value in their code?



## WEEK 5

### Learning objective

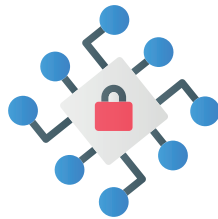
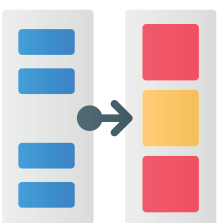
- Clone the star sprite
- Make clones vanish when the player touches them

After recapping key vocabulary, discuss the idea that catching a single star is not much of a challenge: *How could we add more than one star? Could we add more stars without adding and coding more and more sprites?*

Introduce the **[create clone of myself]** block. This block duplicates a single sprite, so we don't need to add (or program) more and more characters. Explain that clones are exact copies of something and then explore the concept of broadcasting and receiving **messages**. Explain this in terms of your particular routine for calling a class to attention – a bell, a clapped rhythm, etc. You send a message/signal, and the children respond. Similarly, in Scratch we can broadcast a message to trigger something happening. Our player's sprite will broadcast a message to the star, and the star will respond.

Find the broadcast/receive message blocks at the bottom of the 'Events' section. Go into the code for the player's sprite and add **[broadcast message1]** underneath the **[set Score to 0]** block. Now we need to program the star to receive that message and react to it. Go into the star's code and add the **[when I receive message1]** event block, then attach a **[forever]** loop. Inside the loop, add a **[wait 1 seconds]** block, and then a **[create clone of myself]** block. This is a good moment to ask the children to re-explain the forever loop: *What does a loop do?*

Finally, we will change part of the star code that we first wrote in week 2 and then debugged in week 3. Check the example code for week 5 to see the



differences. The key change is that we are replacing the **[when green flag clicked]** event block with a **[when I start as a clone]** event block. Discuss the **[go to random position]** block and show what it does. For a bit of

fun, temporarily remove the **[wait 1 seconds]** block and watch what happens!



## Assessment

Can children explain, either through their code or through discussion, how the sending/receiving of messages enables us to control events in our programs?



## WEEK 6

### Learning objective

- Consolidate learning and apply coding concepts by refining a playable game

This final lesson provides an opportunity for the children to consolidate their learning by completing and refining their games. Begin with a brief recap of key concepts through guided questions such as: *What does a loop do? What is a variable? What happens when we broadcast a message?* Revisit the idea of debugging and encourage the children to swap computers with a partner to help identify and fix any remaining issues in their code.

For more confident children, this lesson offers scope to extend their

projects with additional features. So far, the game has run indefinitely, so you can challenge the children to introduce an **end condition**. For example, they could count how many stars appear on screen and end the game once a certain number is reached.

Prompt them to think creatively: could they add a time limit, or change the backdrop to signal a new level, or even introduce objects that *reduce* the score if touched?

These enhancements will deepen their understanding and encourage them to apply their knowledge in different ways. And, of course, they allow the children to add polish and personality to their final product.



## Assessment

Can children independently apply coding concepts to complete a functional game?

Do they demonstrate understanding of movement, interaction, loops, variables, and cloning through their final project? **TP**



*John Bolton is a computing teacher in a primary school in the South West.*

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# A month is NOT ENOUGH

Black history should not be a footnote, relegated to a four-week ‘celebration’. There are plenty of inspiring figures to thread throughout the curriculum, says **Naila Missous**...

**E**ach October, classrooms across the UK dutifully turn their attention to Black History Month. Posters go up, assemblies are held, and lesson plans shift, if only momentarily, to highlight the lives and achievements of Black individuals. And whilst these efforts are often well-meaning and rooted in a desire to celebrate diversity, the uncomfortable truth remains: when the month ends, so too does the visibility of Black narratives in the curriculum.

But Black history is British history. It is not a footnote, nor should it be confined to a single month. The stories, struggles, and triumphs of Black Britons are woven deeply into the fabric of this nation, from its colonial past to its multicultural present. To relegate these stories to a four-week window each year is not only inadequate, but also a disservice to our children, to our collective understanding of history, and to the very fabric of British society.

## Moving beyond America

Much of the content that surfaces during Black History Month in UK schools is imported from across the Atlantic. Students learn about Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and the Civil Rights Movement, who, undeniably, are all important figures and moments. But this focus subtly reinforces the notion that Black history

is something that happened ‘over there’; that racial justice struggles are an American problem, and that Britain remains somehow untouched.

This is not only inaccurate, but also erases the legacies of those who have shaped our own shores. The British Empire, after all, was deeply complicit in the transatlantic slave trade. Our ports – from Bristol to Liverpool, from London to Glasgow – prospered through the trafficking of enslaved Africans. Buildings still stand, built on profits derived from exploitation. Yet, how often are these uncomfortable truths taught, not as an aside, but as central threads in our national story?

Children in Britain deserve to know about **Olaudah Equiano**, whose compelling autobiography helped turn the tide against slavery. They should learn about **Claudia Jones**, the political activist and founder of the Notting Hill Carnival, who championed both civil rights and Caribbean culture in Britain. They should recognise the name of **Mary Seacole**, a British-Jamaican nurse who cared for soldiers during the Crimean War, and understand why her contributions were long overlooked in favour of more palatable, white-centric narratives.

## Past, present and future

Representation matters, and we have been shouting this from the rooftops for a while now. When Black students

see themselves reflected in their curriculum, they are more likely to feel seen, valued, and inspired. Equally, when white students engage with the stories of Black Britons, they are given a more accurate, inclusive version of the nation’s past and present.

This is not about political correctness. It is about historical integrity. British history is not complete without acknowledging the **Windrush generation**, those who journeyed from the Caribbean to rebuild post-war Britain, only to be met with hostility, systemic racism, and (more recently)

scandalous deportations. Nor can we ignore figures like **Diane Abbott**, the first Black woman elected to Parliament, whose political career has paved the way for others while often exposing the deeply ingrained racism of British political life.

Teaching these stories is not only about the past. It is also about equipping our students to engage with the present. When we illuminate the struggles and contributions of Black Britons, we offer our children the tools to better understand contemporary debates around immigration, inequality, and justice.





## It's not radical

Incorporating Black history across the curriculum is not and shouldn't be a radical overhaul. Of course, the history classroom is an obvious starting point. A curriculum that truly reflects the breadth of British history must include units on colonialism, the British Empire, slavery, resistance, and the fight for civil rights. Not as optional add-ons, but as core content.

But Black history does not belong solely in the history classroom.

In primary schools, this can begin with accessible and inspiring figures such as **Mary Seacole**, the nurse who cared for soldiers during the Crimean War, often taught alongside or in contrast to Florence Nightingale. Children can also learn about **Ignatius Sancho**, the writer, composer and abolitionist who was the first known Black Briton to vote in a parliamentary election. **Walter Tull**, one of the first Black British professional footballers and an officer in the First World War, offers opportunities to explore

bravery, perseverance and fairness. More recent figures like **Baroness Floella Benjamin**, a familiar face to generations of children from her time on children's television, help bring discussions about representation, diversity and the Windrush generation into modern, relatable contexts.

Black history can also be brought into other subjects. In English, pupils might explore poetry by **Grace Nichols**, whose lyrical writing introduces young readers to themes of identity, culture and belonging. In music, they could listen to and learn songs influenced by Caribbean rhythms, or explore how migration brought new sounds and styles to Britain. In art, children could be introduced to artists like **Chris Ofili**, using colour, symbolism and storytelling to spark creativity. In geography, learning about the countries and cultures from which Black Britons have migrated can help broaden worldviews.

Even in the Early Years, introducing Black history can be meaningful through



stories, songs, and play. Picture books featuring Black protagonists such as *Look Up!* by Nathan Bryon or *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne, can spark conversations about identity, family and culture. Celebrating different hairstyles, foods, and traditions through role play or themed days helps build appreciation for diversity from the very beginning of a child's learning journey.

## Education as justice

Education, at its best, is transformative. Whilst the spotlight of Black History Month can be valuable in drawing attention, it must never be the end point. It should be a springboard to weave these narratives into the everyday fabric of school life and learning.

This means moving beyond tokenistic gestures or performative allyship. It means investing in teacher training that enables staff to approach Black history with confidence and sensitivity. It means consulting with communities, parents, and

students to understand which stories need to be told. It means listening (and I mean, *really* listening) to the experiences of Black pupils and teachers, whose voices are too often marginalised within the very institutions meant to uplift them.

By embedding Black British history across the curriculum, we affirm that these stories matter. Not just in October, but always. And in doing so, we plant the seeds for a future that is more honest, more inclusive, and more just. Because Black history is not a once-a-year lesson. It is an everyday endeavour. And it is long past time we treated it as such. **TP**



**Naila Missous** is a dedicated teacher and leader of humanities and RE, and

the author of *Bloomsbury Curriculum Basics: Teaching Primary RE (£20, Bloomsbury)*.

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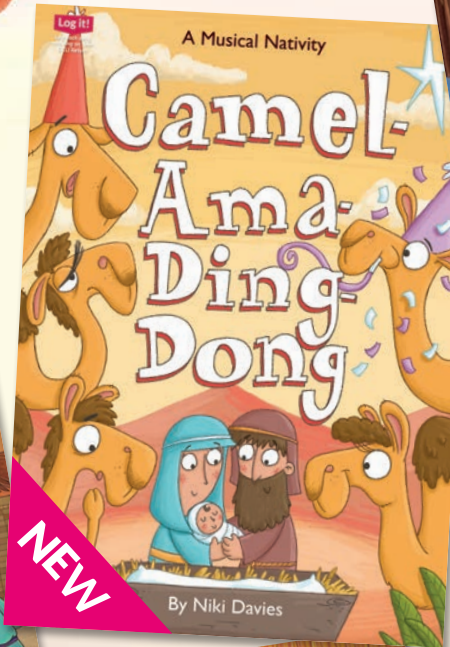
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# How I do it

Combine patterns and printing techniques to help pupils create their own leporello book

GILL THOMPSON

# 1

Guide children to place small blobs of light-coloured paint on the surface of the gel plate or alternative. Gently spread the paint evenly with the roller. Press one of the textured materials on the paint, then gently remove it, leaving a pattern. Carefully lay a piece of copy paper on top of the paint and smooth with your fingers. Peel the paper away, again very carefully, and leave it to dry on a flat surface. Repeat, so you have two printed papers. You can practise this as a separate art lesson before this activity if you like – there are plenty of variations.



Using a combination of basic mark-making and printmaking methods, this lesson lets pupils create their own concertina or 'leporello' book. Each child will need: A gel printing plate (these are quite expensive, but there are alternatives – e.g. [tinyurl.com/tp-PrintAlts](http://tinyurl.com/tp-PrintAlts)), a roller, acrylic paint, copy paper, textured materials (e.g. bubble wrap, corrugated card), a piece of soft-cut lino (get these online or in craft shops), a pencil, scissors, a V-shaped carving tool, ink pads, 2 pieces of card (12X12 cms), glue, and a long strip of cartridge paper folded into a concertina.

Next, draw around the lino block on a piece of copy paper and draw a simple image within the outline – this could be related to a class theme or an area of interest – e.g. a leaf, or a cartoon character. Scribble over the back of the drawing with a pencil. Place the paper over the lino block, with the pencil scribble facing down onto the block, and the drawing facing up. Draw firmly over the picture, transferring the image onto the lino. Use the carving tool to cut around the image, into the surface of the lino. Take care with sharp edges.

# 2

Cut away the remaining lino from around the outsides of your drawing. Dab a bold-coloured ink pad over the carved lino, and press the block down onto the paper printed with the light-coloured paint multiple times to make a pattern. You can use just one colour or different colours for this section.

# 3

# 4

Cover one side of each piece of card with printed paper – spread glue on one side of the card, place glue-side-down on the back of paper. Trim the edges, leaving 1cm all around. Cut diagonally across the corners of the edging, glue the edges and fold neatly around to the back of the card to make the book covers. Repeat with second piece of card.





Finally, take the long strip of cartridge paper and fold it into a concertina pattern. Glue one end of the paper to the inside of one card cover, and the other end to the other card cover. You should now have two pieces of card, covered in your beautiful prints, with folded paper inside. Leave to dry and, *voilà!*, your book is ready. Use as an art sketchbook or to record creative writing. This is perfect as a gift for the children's families at the end of the year.


# 5



*Gill Thompson is a former head teacher, and author. Her book, [Exploring Printmaking](#) (£22, Bloomsbury) is out now.*

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Our new On Tour offer from the International Slavery Museum and Maritime Museum brings inclusive and thought-provoking sessions into schools and community settings while the museums undergo redevelopment.

Whether you're looking to inspire young scientists, explore global histories, or encourage creative expression, we're here to support you with engaging experiences, expert guidance and a commitment to making learning meaningful and inclusive for each of your students.

Find out more and book your session at [liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learn](http://liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learn)

## *For mountain-top moments*

CYM's Basecamp is a unique, adventure-based activity programme nestled in the heart of rural Suffolk. Reimagine residentials through meticulously designed trips to strengthen confidence, teamwork and build a wider understanding of the world around us, all whilst meeting key national curriculum learning objectives.

When visiting a Basecamp, you will enjoy the team's complete undivided attention being the only group on site, meaning you can fully immerse into the experience. It's a fun, safe space to try new things, reaching for those mountain-top moments.

Contact CYM using [bookings@c-y-m.org.uk](mailto:bookings@c-y-m.org.uk) or **01473 487031**.

2



3



## *Have fun, make memories*

Gulliver's Theme Parks offer unforgettable school trips across four UK locations: Warrington, Milton Keynes, Matlock Bath, and Rother Valley. Discover educational workshops such as Swings and Roundabouts and Reptile Encounters. Whether your class is coming for an action-packed day trip or an exciting, themed sleepover, Gulliver's dedicated groups booking team is ready to help plan every detail. With rides, attractions, and hands-on learning experiences, Gulliver's school trips are designed to spark curiosity, teamwork, and lasting memories for pupils and teachers alike.

Visit [groups.gulliversfun.co.uk](http://groups.gulliversfun.co.uk) to find out more.





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### Accredited adventures

For over 30 years, JCA has delivered safe, high-quality residentials that build confidence, communication and teamwork in young learners. Their activity centres – Conderver Hall (Shropshire) and Croft Farm (the Cotswolds) – offer all-inclusive packages featuring accommodation, meals, and onsite activities designed for KS2 pupils. Holders of the LOTC Quality Badge, BAPA members, and with Archery GB, Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), and British Fencing, JCA instructors take the experience to a new level of adventure. Book your 2026 adventure by calling 01273 647 200, emailing [enquiries@jca-adventure.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@jca-adventure.co.uk), or by visiting [jca-adventure.co.uk](http://jca-adventure.co.uk)

### Experience the magic

Bring the magic of the Roald Dahl Museum's award-winning schools programme to your class. Whether you visit the Museum in Buckinghamshire, or visit virtually from your classroom, your students will gain skills and confidence in literacy while learning about the creative processes of the world's number one storyteller. Suitable for Years 2 to 8, these hands-on sessions help develop children's positive attitudes to reading and writing, as well as supporting you in teaching your pupils to draft, edit and evaluate. Pick from a range of exciting, facilitated sessions and find out about Roald Dahl's life while exploring the interactive galleries. Visit: <https://bit.ly/4obxdry>



5



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### Ignite curiosity in science

Fuel imaginations with a KS2 trip to the Science Museum in London. Visit the popular Wonderlab gallery and watch live experiments at the Chemistry Bar, get hands-on with over 50 curriculum-linked exhibits and meet brilliant Explainers who facilitate engagement. Groups can also discover the inner workings of the human digestive system in an It Takes Guts show and see iconic spacecraft up close in the exciting new Space gallery. With free admission to the museum and free entry to Wonderlab for schools, the Science Museum is on a mission to inspire the scientists, engineers, technicians and innovators of the future.

Visit [sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups](https://sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups) or email [info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk](mailto:info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk)



7

### Transformative education

Immerse your class in a vibrant world of creativity and expression with the FRAMELESS Schools' Programme. FRAMELESS London is an accessible, multi-sensory immersive art experience that offers pupils unique, transformative learning opportunities. Through four stunning galleries, pupils will engage with some of the world's greatest masterpieces like never before, exploring, learning, and finding inspiration in the power of art. Choose from mainstream tour options, including guided and flexi, or opt for our relaxed tour, depending on your educational needs. FRAMELESS also offers dedicated chilled sessions, specially designed for SEND visitors (including sensory lighting, ear defenders, easy-read/visual guides, Makaton cards and more), available in February, April, May, and August. For more information, please visit [frameless.com/schools-programme](https://frameless.com/schools-programme)

# Start your journey to **EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH**

Inspire writing, clarify curriculum and lead with impact

**W**ith expert support, high-quality resources and a focus on sustainable change, Leading English helps schools raise standards in writing and reduce workload – all through a trusted, collegiate partnership.

In-school support is partnered with over 200 medium-term units, pedagogical tools and curriculum-aligned assessment material to transform English provision.

We're focused on one thing: sustainable, school-wide impact. Leading English is a practical and reflective approach that responds to your school's unique needs. Successful implementation of school improvement takes careful consideration and planning, and we are there to help you on each stage of the journey.

Our role is to walk alongside your team – it's not a handover and a goodbye. We help build clarity, capacity and confidence, working with leaders and teachers to make a difference to provision and practice.

## **What working with us looks like**

### **Step 1: Getting to know you**

The process begins with a short video call with your dedicated school improvement partner. Together, you will:

- walk through the implementation project
- explore how to access and use the teaching materials
- share key documentation (e.g. SEF/SDP)
- set visit dates and prepare for launch

### **Step 2: Explore and prepare**

This is the first of three in-school consultancy days. It's held anywhere between one to three months ahead of the project launch and focuses on vision and planning. During the day there will be:

- a strategy session with the headteacher
- planning and co-design with the subject lead
- pupil voice sessions
- CPD for the implementation team (slides provided)

A key focus is placed on how the curriculum should not be viewed as documentation only; it is what's taught in the classroom that's key. 'Lived not laminated' is our curriculum mantra. We help leaders to foster genuine alignment between what's written and what's taught – as research shows this is critical to pupil outcomes.

We advocate for curriculum-embedded assessment that helps teachers adapt in real time. It's assessment that feeds forward, not data that sits in a file.

We also support schools in embedding spoken language across the curriculum. Too often, oracy is treated as incidental. Pupils need explicit teaching, high-quality modelling and progression in speaking and listening if they are to thrive. Our units ensure oracy is part of English, not an optional extra.

When it comes to writing, we focus on clarity and control. The new Writing Framework echoes our belief: emphasis should be on less hurried writing and more meaningful drafting. Modelled writing, sentence-level work, and purposeful redrafting sit at the heart of our approach.

### **Step 3: Deliver**

The second consultancy visit takes place one to two months after the project launches and centres on implementation. Here we will:

- hold a review session with the subject leader
- operate co-planning, team teaching and drop-ins
- organise pupil voice sessions and feedback
- lead a CPD session (INSET or after school)

Implementation is not intended to result in perfection overnight. We encourage iterative improvement: small tweaks, informed by staff voice, lesson observation and reflection. We believe in the importance of manageable,

***“Leading English aligns with the new Writing Framework”***

**Ready to start your journey?**

Visit [leadingenglish.co.uk](https://leadingenglish.co.uk) or email [adam.lowing@leadingenglish.co.uk](mailto:adam.lowing@leadingenglish.co.uk)



meaningful practice including modelling and more sentence-level control. We help you to bring this thinking into the classroom through practical strategies and supportive coaching.

#### Step 4: Sustain

The third and final visit in the first year takes place three to six months post-launch and supports sustainability. It includes:

- a final review of the implementation plan
- pupil voice and classroom observation
- strategic CPD and leadership guidance
- evaluation of impact and next steps

#### Ongoing support

Ahead of each project day, you'll receive a 30-minute planning call. CPD slides and visit notes are provided. Schools are encouraged to form an implementation team to embed change and trial approaches.

We're here for the journey. From regular planning calls to email support, we act as thought partners to help refine your strategy, troubleshoot challenges and celebrate success. We want to help you achieve real impact – not through shortcuts, but through structure, support and care.

## WHY LEADING ENGLISH WORKS

#### Clarity and coherence

200+ units structured to develop vocabulary, grammar and composition in small, purposeful steps.

#### Model texts that inspire

Written by Jon Mayhew, Joshua Seigal, Ross Montgomery and more. These texts are crafted to engage pupils and annotated to support confident, high-impact modelling.

#### Support for everyone

Leading English helps pupils write with confidence, teachers teach with clarity, and leaders lead with impact. Everyone benefits because everyone is supported.

#### Pedagogy

Through coaching, CPD and co-planning, we help you build pedagogical approaches that lift quality, reduce workload and improve consistency.

#### Flexible integration

Our materials offer structure without straitjackets and freedom without confusion.

#### Context-sensitive

We appreciate that every setting is unique.

#### Built for real classrooms

We know that even the best curriculum needs to be lived out in practice. That's why our units include guidance on modelling, scaffolding, oral rehearsal and vocabulary teaching – all grounded in what works day-to-day.

#### Improvement that sticks

We don't chase gimmicks. We support leaders to take a long view, building processes, not just products. Our partnerships focus on what matters most: great teaching, aligned leadership, and better outcomes for pupils.

## HOW THE NEW WRITING FRAMEWORK ALIGNS

The Writing Framework sets clear expectations. Leading English helps schools meet (and exceed) these by offering:

- A strong focus on technical accuracy and clarity in writing
- Expert modelling using high-quality, annotated texts
- Emphasis on planning, redrafting and sentence-level control
- Teaching writing as a process, not just a product
- Purposeful, manageable assessment that informs teaching

 **Leading English**

to book a short call, discuss your context and find out how we might work together.



# Unlock the power of plants for your pupils

## WITH THE RHS SCHOOL GARDENING AWARDS

- Earn **free** seeds, books and vouchers
- Develop new skills for life
- Improve pupil mental health and wellbeing
- Increase environmental awareness and nature connectedness
- Celebrate growing success

START  
GROWING  
TODAY



[rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards)





# 5 REASONS TO TRY... The RHS School Gardening Awards

Free support to help your pupils get growing



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

This free, five-level, flexible awards scheme offers achievable goals to help pupils of all ages experience benefits of gardening – from boosting wellbeing and gaining new skills, to supporting the environment and forging community links.

### 1 GET FREE RESOURCES

As you complete each of the five School Gardening Award levels, you will receive free resources, including seeds, books and National Garden Gift Vouchers, to help you continue your school gardening journey. You'll also receive a certificate and digital award logo to share your achievements.

### 2 BOOST WELLBEING

Connecting with plants and nature has a powerful impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. A recent RHS report found that 96 percent of teachers observed a positive effect on young people's wellbeing through gardening. Taking part in the awards will support pupils to connect with others and feel more in tune with the natural world. Schools tell us that they see a real difference as children smile, breathe and relax when they are in the garden spaces.

### 3 DEVELOP SKILLS

The awards are designed to build and grow a wide range of skills that young people can carry into their lives beyond school. As well as learning hands-on gardening skills such as sowing seeds, nurturing seedlings, and taking cuttings, they will also develop teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills. Gardening can also help build confidence, patience, and resilience.

### 4 SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT

Through the School Gardening Awards, pupils can learn how small, simple actions can help protect the planet.



#### Contact:

Email: [schoolgardening@rhs.org.uk](mailto:schoolgardening@rhs.org.uk)

### 5 CULTIVATE COMMUNITY LINKS

The final award level includes a focus on building connections beyond the school gates. Whether it's gardening with family members, past or future pupils or welcoming community volunteers, gardening can unite people of all ages.

## KEY POINTS

Give your pupils the chance to develop green fingers and learn new skills while enjoying the great outdoors; start your school's gardening journey today at [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards)

100 per cent of schools that have taken part in previous years stated in a recent survey (July 2025), that they would recommend the awards to other schools.

Grow your teaching with free eLearning - build confidence, skills, and plant power in your classroom. Start today: [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/training](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/training)

Find out more about the RHS School Gardening Awards, and sign up to receive our monthly newsletter packed with tips, advice and school case studies at [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/signup](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/signup)

# It's a SIGN

This is your cue to expand the horizons of all your pupils – deaf or hearing – with BSL, says **Aaron King**...

One of my favourite questions to ask to get to know my pupils is the 'magic wand' question: "Imagine I gave you a magic wand. You can use it to change anything about your life. What would you wish for?"

I've asked it many times, and got all sorts of wonderful answers, but one deaf Y3 child's answer was simple, yet a little bit heartbreaking: "I wish **everyone** knew how to sign."

We might not be able to make his wish come true,

## One language, many variations

We all manage variation in English every day (e.g. *yes, yep, yeah*). When you look up words via online BSL dictionaries, you'll also discover variations. Simply pick the first option for the word you want, as it is likely that it's one of the more universal signs.

If you have a sharp eye, you might also spot other variations, such as where deaf people position their fingers when they are signing vowel letters. You might also spot that left-handed people use a

## BSL vs Sign Supported English

BSL focuses on key words and, when you ask a question, you omit unimportant words (*is, did, be*, etc). For example, "What is your name?" becomes "Name you what?" or simply "Name... what?"

If you are new to signing, you may find BSL grammar difficult. Fortunately, Sign Supported English (SSE) comes to your rescue. SSE uses the word order of spoken English alongside BSL signs. Because it uses BSL signs, SSE is often referred to as BSL or BSL/SSE.

Unless your school has a resource provision for deaf children, it's likely that you'll communicate using SSE.

*"Learning sign language can enhance children's concentration, social skills, and empathy, for a start"*

but we *can* take simple steps to help that boy and many others in our classrooms.

Deaf children would benefit, of course, but there are plenty of pros for hearing children, too. Learning sign language can enhance children's concentration, social skills, and empathy, for a start.

Most of us weren't lucky enough to learn sign language at school, so let's quickly cover the basics before we dive into how you can fire up your children's learning...

mirror image of some right-handed signs.

Trying to teach such variations to your children can quickly overcomplicate things. Remember: keep it simple and keep it fun.

## BSL vs Makaton

Let's clear this up quickly. BSL, used by deaf people, is not the same as Makaton. Invented 50 years ago, Makaton helps children with learning difficulties and does incorporate some BSL signs (e.g. thank you, good morning). But Makaton also has many of signs of its own. Both have value.

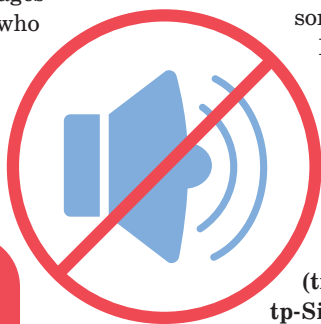




## Facial expression is part of BSL

Facial expressions add meaning to your signs, like tone of voice in speech. Sign 'finished' with a smile and it conveys a job well done (when you've finished a long assignment). But if a relationship has finished, the same sign is accompanied by a glum-looking face.

If you are signing 'sad', show your sad face. This really engages children, who will adore copying your facial



expressions for emotions such as *sad*, *sorry*, *surprised*, *scared* and *confused*!

## BSL and assemblies

The first steps that you take to introduce BSL can be through simple, no-extra-work steps.

Most schools play music as pupils enter assembly.

Pick a song from YouTube that has accompanying BSL.

The best choices are calmer songs such as 'A Million Dreams' from *The Greatest Showman* or 'What Do I Know?' by Ed Sheeran. The charity Sing Up also has some song videos on its website ([tinyurl.com/tp-SingUpVids](http://tinyurl.com/tp-SingUpVids)).

For your singing assembly, check out Christian BSL's website, especially if you work in an Anglican or Catholic school. You'll find loads of free worship songs with BSL signs. It also has Christmas favourites like 'Silent Night', 'Little Town of Bethlehem', and 'Joy to the World'.

If you have a careers week, invite someone from your

council's service for deaf children to your assembly. They can talk about how and when they learned BSL and show their favourite signs. The service has both hearing and deaf adults, so email them and ask who would be happiest to come.

## BSL and literacy

For younger children, hold a weekly BSL story time. Search YouTube for *Leanne Signed Stories* to find videos of an expert signing your children's favourite books (like *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, *The Snail and the Whale*, or *Rainbow Fish*) as well as stories about deafness (*Oliver Gets Hearing Aids*; *Dachy's Deaf*).

For older children, could your class write persuasive texts to convince adults to teach BSL to every child? Most pupils will argue that it is fun to learn, makes it easier to be friends with a deaf child, or makes the world fairer. Some children will add extra creativity (such as BSL means that you can talk underwater)!

## Teaching BSL

To teach BSL in class time, you'll need agreement from your school leadership team.

Alternatively, how about teaching BSL as an extra-curricular club: Sing and Sign Choir, anyone?

Spend half the session learning BSL and the other half singing with BSL. When the children are ready, perform your songs for families or the rest of school.

You can find introductory resources from the National Deaf Children's Society ([tinyurl.com/tp-NDCS](http://tinyurl.com/tp-NDCS)), and there are plenty of YouTube videos to teach yourself finger spelling (i.e. spelling words using the BSL alphabet). Finger spelling is useful, because you'll need it to sign your name!

When learning new signs, use videos from the BSL dictionary website ([signbsl.com](http://signbsl.com)). These short

## 4 BSL GAMES FOR YOUR CLASS



Spelling test in BSL: use last week's spellings, and in pairs, get one child to read out the word, while their partner spells it using finger spellings.



Hangman: a classic with a twist; play the game as usual, except that guesses can only be made using finger spelling.



Word searches: BSL word searches show an image of the finger spelling of each letter instead of the actual letter. Google images will help you to find BSL word searches. Alternatively, make your own by Googling BSL wordsearch maker, using words from recent topics (e.g. Great, fire, London, flames, smoke).



Times tables: Once you've taught BSL signs for numbers, teach the signs for multiplication, then allow pairs to sign times tables sums to each other. How many can each child answer (using BSL) in 60 seconds?

clips show the hand movements clearly.

You don't need to be fluent to make a difference. Start small. Whether it's introducing BSL in assembly or persuasive letter writing, every step takes the world forward. **TP**



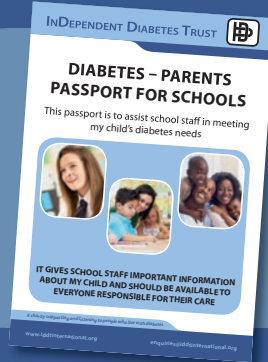
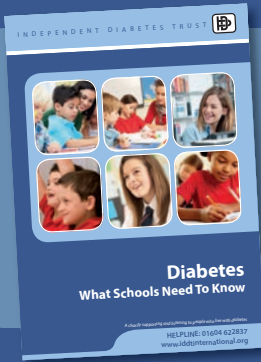
**Aaron King** is a SEND advisor who helps schools, trusts and councils to

improve inclusion. He also teaches Y6 on Thursdays.

 @9000lives.org



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"Our pupils are much more engaged now we've switched to Sing Up."

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# THIS WAY!

School improvement advice  
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## Do you know how your pension is CALCULATED?

I have lost £70,000 from my pension. No, it wasn't down to Trump, and it wasn't down to May, and it most certainly wasn't down to risky investments or any banking crisis. In fact, I have lost £70k from one of the best and most secure pensions available in the UK – the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

The bad news is that I am not alone; take a look around your staffroom and anyone who has been in the same post for eight or more years has probably lost a similar amount, or even more if they have longer service at the same pay scale.

*[Editor's note: always check with your financial adviser before making any changes to your pension.]*

### Are you joking?

The problem was that I fell for the lie that so long as my pay kept going up and I kept paying in to the scheme, then my pension must get better. That is almost true. But it is in that gap left by the 'almost' that I have lost out so badly. If my pay had kept going up by more than inflation, then that is when the lie would have been true. But as we know, teachers' pay has been in decline compared to inflation for decades.

A UPS3 salary outside of London is, at the time of writing in

*"It's not too late  
to do something  
to stop the rot"*

2024/25, £49,084. Back in 2005/6 it was only £32,628. But if you were to increase that in line with inflation, it would, in April 2025, be equivalent to £56,153. That is 14.4 per cent higher than the actual current pay.

Would I have liked my pension to be 14.4 per cent higher than it is now? Of course I would. So, why isn't it? The 'final salary' pension is based on, unsurprisingly, the salaries at the end of your career and not the salaries you were on 20 years, or more, ago. The TPS does have some protection against this below-inflation pay decline; it does get to use salaries from the

past 10 years. But even so, my pension is down over 10 per cent from what it might have been.

### Learn the rules!

But it's not too late to do something to stop the rot – and you may even have already done it without realising.

In England and Wales there is a rule that when you take a break from the pension scheme, your salaries in the years leading up to that break can be used forever in the calculation of your pension (in Scotland and Northern Ireland you need a break from



employment). Not only can they be used, but inflation is then added from the date of the break – and so the pension gets full protection against below-inflation pay rises. Had I done this back when I became a head of year for the first time, my pension now would be 10 per cent higher, and that would mean £7,500 more



## How do you want to feel?

First, let me say that I know I'm fortunate. When I decided to retire, I'd been a primary teacher for 38 years, spending 26 of those as a headteacher. I'd made the decision to go before others decided I ought to, I'd worked with a brilliant financial adviser for a number of years, who helped me plan my post-work life, and I was healthy.

All that to say, there is a bit of advice I was given that really influenced my retirement, and I think it's a useful nugget for almost any teacher planning their next steps. So, let me tell you what happened...

My last day of term as a headteacher, back in July 2022, was followed by what felt like a normal summer holiday, (aside from the 'formal' handover to my successor halfway through). But once September rolled around, I was no longer bound by school, so my wife, Sue, and I headed off on a glorious six-week trip around Scotland.

But on our return, the 'what next?' feelings started looming. A friend of mine (not in education) had warned me of doing too much of what you love straight away – he loves golf, and had taken to playing three times a week when he retired, soon finding that when he actually wanted to do other things, he felt obligated to his golfing buddies.

So, heeding that advice, I made sure my interests remained varied, and stayed on as a governor at my local primary school, and on the committee of my NAHT branch, joined a gym, bought a bike, and set to my allotment. As time has gone on, I've steadily added areas of interest – I'm now a governor in two primary schools and a trustee of a MAT; I'm a churchyard gardener, I'm on the Allotments Association committee, I volunteer for Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, and I play

golf and tennis each week. I also host the annual West Sussex Leadership Conference, and I'm the (very part-time) locality lead director for West Sussex's Teaching School Hub. Importantly (I think) I've entrusted a close group of former colleagues to tell me when my time is up in these latter roles – I definitely don't want to be the old ex-headteacher who stays around too long.

So, the message – if you're lucky enough to be able to – is to do what a very wise and wonderful woman (Jaz Ampaw-Farr) said to me: "in retirement don't just focus on what you want to do but how you want to feel."

*Education Support is the only UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health of teachers and education staff. Their emotional support helpline is free, confidential and available 24/7 on 08000 562 561. Or learn about their funded Staff Wellbeing Service for schools in Wales: [educationsupport.org.uk/wales](https://educationsupport.org.uk/wales)*



John Gadd is a former primary headteacher.



[educationsupport.org.uk](https://educationsupport.org.uk)





## Pensions in numbers

**23.68%** – the employer contribution to a Teacher's Pension Scheme (TPS) pot.

**7.4%** – the starting employee contribution to a TPS pot.

This rises to a maximum of **11.7%**, depending on your earnings. You can also make voluntary additional contributions to the pot.

**1/57th** – the amount teachers will add to a TPS pension pot, depending on the amount of earnings each year. See the index figures at [tinyurl.com/tp-EdHubPension](https://tinyurl.com/tp-EdHubPension)

**2015** – the year the government introduced reforms to public service pension schemes, including the Teachers' Pension Scheme, which meant some members receiving Transitional Protection remained in the final salary scheme, while others entered the career average scheme. These changes have since been deemed discriminatory on age grounds. Speak to your financial adviser or pension rep to see how this affects you.

*All numbers are correct at the time of writing in July 2025.*

Source: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/11/teachers-pensions-what-you-need-to-know/>

Please note this column is meant as a summary only, and is not intended as professional financial advice or information.



*“Yes, I got angry at losing out, but I also realised that I could do something positive to try and help others out”*

in my tax-free lump sum and an extra £2,500 a year on my pension. Assuming I take my pension at 60, and live to an average age, that would have seen me gain £70,000 over what I can expect now. The rule is known as the ‘hypothetical calculation’. For more on that see [tinyurl.com/tp-Hcalc](https://tinyurl.com/tp-Hcalc)

I am not alone, and I have most certainly not lost as much as many others. I have seen ex-heads who have stepped back into the classroom after years in the top job getting their pensions slashed because they didn't have a break to protect their final salary pension; including one head whose final salary has dropped from the equivalent of £74,000 to £50,000. If they had taken a break from the pension scheme at the right time, then their pension would be around 50 per cent higher than it is going to be as a result. Their lump sum has dropped from £79k to £53k and they will be getting a pension that is £8,500 less a year as well.

### Angry losers

As a head of year, I was often involved with angry young people;

I have no problem with anger – only with what it leads to. If it leads to something destructive, I have no tolerance for that – anger when you see something that is wrong is fine, but you have to do something constructive with that energy. So, yes, I got angry at losing out; but I also realised that I could do something positive. That's why I have put years into learning about the rules of the scheme and how they can trip the unwary, but also how they can help maximise the benefits.

Getting to know the rules can help you determine the best course of action, but **remember to check with your financial adviser before making any changes** – the ideas in this article would work for me, but it's always best to be sure!



*David Fountain is not a financial adviser, but a teacher with almost 30 years of experience.*

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*Amy Earl, teacher, Newport Primary School*



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## School profile



**Name:** Rokesly Junior School  
**Headteacher:** Bola Soneye-Thomas  
**Location:** Haringey, London  
**Size:** Three-form entry  
**Extra info:** Adjoined to Rokesly Infant School, which shares an SLT

FEATURES REAL SCHOOLS



*Bola Soneye-Thomas, headteacher*

# “Our job is hope”

What started as a focus on oracy has blossomed into a whole-school ethos, building confidence and curiosity, finds **Charley Rogers**



The sounds of school are joyful; yells of games in the playground, chatter in the hallways, and the din of a class just let out for lunch. But if you zoom in on these sounds, what will you hear? Well, that depends on the children, and on the school. For Rokesly Juniors, it wouldn't be unusual to overhear cogent, well-constructed arguments and points of view. Because, you see, Rokesly is firmly an oracy-forward school.

It all started post-lockdown. The teachers at Rokesly Junior School in Haringey weren't too concerned about academic performance; they'd been teaching online throughout the school's closure, and pupils were advancing through the curriculum well. However, when the school opened up again, it was general life skills that the children were lacking.

"Socially, they were isolated," explains Joanna Neilson, the school's inclusion manager. "They lacked the communication and social stamina they once had."

Various initiatives followed, says headteacher Bola Soneye-Thomas: "We added afternoon play and introduced Zones of Regulation to help children identify and manage their emotions. But we noticed a gap in communication skills."

Bola decided then and there to do something about this; there needed to be a focus on oracy, and on encouraging pupils to talk to one another, as well as to their teachers. "I appointed an oracy lead," she explains, "because reading and writing are essential, but school should be about more than that. If students aren't emotionally settled or socially skilled, they'll struggle in the real world."

## Real talk

It's the pursuit of this real-world skillset that continues to propel the leadership team and teaching staff at Rokesly towards developing their oracy focus. First stop: Madeleine Clinton, the oracy lead (and Y3 teacher) appointed by Bola. "I took on the role of oracy lead around two years ago," Madeleine tells me, "and the idea was to develop an approach that wasn't just about encouraging communication and speech skills, but about explicitly teaching them". The first step in building this teaching framework was to create 'talk rules', says Madeleine, that help children stick to certain etiquette while conversing. "The rules include things like disagreeing kindly, and listening to the speaker," Madeleine explains, "and they're the same throughout the school, so that the children can develop under a framework with which they're familiar".

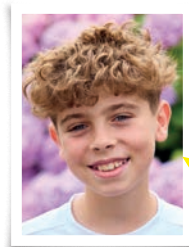
The framework also allows the children to have debates, even arguments, without them descending into chaos, says Bola. "We expect disagreements; that's life. But we want



pupils to be able to explain their points of view, and discuss them calmly and fully with people who may not agree." The proliferation of misinformation is a key aspect of this skill, as well. With all the different information available online, the nature of 'fact' can appear to be much more debatable these days. That's why, Bola says, for Rokesly, "it's essential we teach children to think critically, ask questions, and evaluate what they're told. Too many people still believe whatever suits them."

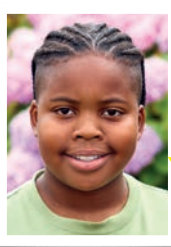
Rokesly is also incredibly multicultural, explains Bola, and this informs its teaching, too. Strong oracy skills help with social cohesion between pupils from very different backgrounds. "Some children have never been to Oxford Street; others go skiing," Bola says of Rokesly's cohort. "They learn side by side, and that diversity teaches them to value different perspectives."

## Pupil Voice



Theo

"Teamwork and learning with others have become easier since we started using the oracy tools."



Zayn

"Talk trios are more fun than just working in our books, because we get to talk about what we think with others."



Bilan

"We've learned how to speak up for ourselves, and share our ideas. It makes it easier to talk to friends and family, as well."



Margot

"I like that if you don't agree with something, it's not a big deal; we're still encouraged to say what we think."





***“We encourage students to connect knowledge with their own opinions and discuss them openly”***

There are also children who share classes, and come from countries that are historically hostile to one another. “We don’t shy away from difficult conversations,” adds Joanna. “We address them head-on and move forward together. It’s essential for building healthy relationships – not just professionally, but personally.”

### Tell me more...

However, it’s not just rules for conversation that comprise the oracy focus. Rokesly teachers – under Madeleine’s guidance – provide sentence stems modelling enquiry, to help pupils cultivate their own curiosity and information literacy. “We embed big questions into our curriculum,” says Joanna, “in every subject, but especially in disciplines like history and geography, where there’s typically more room for discovery. We encourage pupils to connect knowledge with their own opinions and discuss them openly.” Debate also lends itself to nurturing curiosity, tying in the children’s perspectives of what they’re learning, along with important information literacy techniques. To this end, discussion is built in across the curriculum. Joanna explains: “You’ll see it in RE and history – like when children debate who was the greatest queen in British history; it’s not just about facts, but about understanding perspectives, and how narratives change over time.”

### OUR ROKESLY FAMILY

Having the opportunity to hear about different cultures and languages is a central part of the celebration of all things oracy at Rokesly. This includes the children having the chance, twice a year, to take part in a class assembly that celebrates their family’s culture and language. The assemblies are presented to the whole school, and families are invited along, too. Sometimes, the children will start by saying hello and good morning in their home language, so it truly showcases all the wonderful cultures that make the school such a vibrant place.

“I really wanted children in our school to have an appreciation and understanding of different dialects, languages and accents,” says oracy lead Madeleine Clinton, “because so many of our children have very different backgrounds. That’s part of what makes our school amazing.”

Nurturing curiosity nurtures creativity, too, argues Bola, and all the staff in school are keen to remind the children that learning is a lifelong process; not something that stops when you leave school. That also requires teachers to be OK saying they don’t know something, Bola says. “Sometimes we’ll check answers later or research together with the pupils, depending on the context,” she explains, noting that the former option requires stringent rules about turning off the class screen before Googling anything, just in case something untoward slips through the school’s filtering system. But as long as those measures are in place, Bola continues, “admitting uncertainty is powerful”.

It takes a certain amount of confidence and security in your own knowledge and identity to admit that you don’t know something, especially when you’re in a position of authority like a teacher. But this is part of the oracy focus, here. Not only are children taught how to be polite, respectful and coherent in their arguments, but they are supported to have the confidence to speak up in the first place. And it seems that pupils are certainly not afraid to say what they think. “I had a great example the other day,” says Joanna. “We’re a very multicultural school, and one of our displays shows a map of the world with pins in it to show the countries that our pupils and their families come from. I was fixing a pin on it, and a Y4 child came up to me and explained that we didn’t have a pin for Columbia, and then started telling me all about his views on America and Columbia.

His opinions were shaped by family and home life, and he felt confident sharing them. It shows children are listening, absorbing, and forming ideas early on.”

### Walk the talk

It’s easy to see this kind of learning in practice, too. Walking through classrooms at Rokesly, it’s clear that children are engaged, and – mostly – genuinely interested in what they’re being taught. A science lesson in Madeleine’s Y3 class sheds light on how the sentence stems and talk rules work in real life. Children are shown three images on the board – one of a spider on a flower, one of a ladybird perched on a petal, and one of a butterfly, also on a flower. Referring back to

their previous science lesson on pollination, Madeleine asks the children which image they think might be the odd one out. Pupils have time to discuss the question in their ‘talk trios’ (another feature of the oracy framework based on feedback from the children – some felt pairs put too much pressure on them to say a lot) and then Madeleine brings them all back together to discuss. Hands shoot up when asked to explain what they think, and we hear from a few pupils, all of whom use the sentence stems that are stuck to the wall under the board to structure their arguments, including things like “I think... because”, and “I can see why

[X child] said... but I disagree because... ". The lesson allows for pupils to air their thoughts freely, while also being supported by a framework of suggested wording. This setup also allows for discussions to be more balanced, says Madeleine: "When children are sharing their ideas, they will often use language like 'I agree with so and so', and 'I would like to add', so it's influenced classrooms beyond the talk rules, to really giving the children more confidence to explore subjects."

But what about children with additional needs, particularly those who may have speech delays, or are speaking English as a second (or third, or fourth) language? Everyone is catered for, explains Bola. "We have a diverse cohort, not only in where the children's families are from, but in terms of language, and additional needs," she says. Hand gestures are an important part of the oracy approach, and children include signs, such as putting one fist on top of the other to indicate they want to build on someone else's point. This, in combination with sign language lessons, gives children another outlet for communication beyond verbal speech. Lots of the class teachers also make use of tokens, which gives pupils who may have trouble saying they want to contribute, a physical object to put on the table when they want to speak in their talk trios. Tokens also help balance the discussions, as once a child has 'spent' their token, they've had their turn, which prevents groups from relying on one speaker, and allows everyone a chance to say something. Teachers find this benefits all the children, not only those with additional needs.

## Listen up

There is, then, a community feel to the way oracy is used and taught at Rokesly. And that doesn't stop at the school gates. Madeleine, in particular, has been working towards building connections with the children's families. "One thing I've been focusing on this year is building that link between school and home," Madeleine explains. "I introduced oracy homework, so every two weeks, the children are given a discussion statement. For example, 'Playing a game is only fun if you win'. Children are then asked to discuss this statement with their families, and report on what opinions were shared." The same



## Meet the staff



CHAWAHIR YUSUF,  
Y6 TEACHER

"Oracy helps with all subjects. It helps with writing, obviously, but also with things like vocabulary and reasoning skills in maths. The children are now able to explain how they came to a particular answer more thoroughly and accurately, and it stretches pupils of all abilities."



JOANNA NEILSON,  
INCLUSION MANAGER

"We really encourage the children to share any worries they may have, and to use different strategies to deal with them, depending on what works for each individual. We don't want to shy away from difficult conversations, but instead make sure that there's space to talk it out."



MADELEINE CLINTON,  
Y3 TEACHER AND  
ORACY LEAD

"The oracy approach has really helped the children be more confident. I've noticed that they can then transfer their verbal skills into writing, too, and use the sentence stems to become more sure of themselves when expressing what they think. It's wonderful to see, and it really opens up discussions in the classroom."

discussion statement is used across the school, so that families with more than one sibling at Rokesly can have just the one discussion, says Madeleine. Children are also encouraged to share their report in whatever format they choose – it could be a written explanation, a picture, or even a recording – and they can do so in their mother tongue, whether that's English or another language. This has really helped to bring the school community together, says Madeleine, and is the perfect opportunity to put into practice the idea that all points of view, and all voices (including different accents and languages) should be respected.

This whole movement – the communication skills, confidence building, and community links – represents the kind of education that Bola and her team want to keep evolving. "The world has changed so much; what we teach children today is completely different from what was needed 30 or 50 years ago," Bola says. It's comforting to hear that, although so many of today's young people are burdened by worries about the future of the planet, and even supposed basics such as food security, Rokesly aims to make sure that all its children can speak up for themselves, respect others, and maintain a curiosity about the world. Bola's own words sum it up beautifully: "Our job is hope". And what a job they're doing. **TP**



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## Q&amp;A

# “Make sure AP is everyone’s business”

Amy Husband, executive head, on how well-designed alternative provision can transform lives



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

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### Why is early intervention so important?

Research shows that younger pupils in Alternative Provision (AP) are more likely to reintegrate into mainstream education than older pupils. That’s why high-quality AP should focus on early intervention with clear pathways for, when possible, returning to mainstream education. Effective AP at this stage focuses on broader needs and avoids sole focus on attainment as the only success metric. Instead, it values improvements in attendance, behaviour, engagement, and participation as the foundations for future success and reintegration.

### What does effective primary AP look like?

Supportive relationships, high expectations, and gradual independence. We work with many settings, and the most successful often have these key features. Staff should be trained in relational teaching and self-scaffolding strategies to reduce over-dependence on adults. The best APs support both academic and personal development with a structured environment, routines that make sense, and clear reintegration pathways. Professional development and a whole-school understanding of AP as an intervention, not a destination, is vital.

### What role does communication play in AP success?

It is so important. Strong communication between the commissioner, the AP and others,



including parents/carers, is critical to AP success. Maintaining inclusive, two-way communication builds trust and encourages shared goals, and ensures that each party can fulfil their monitoring responsibilities. APs must feel collaborative, transparent, and inclusive, especially when supporting children with complex additional needs or those in vulnerable circumstances.

### What should schools consider when using external APs?

First, focus on how the AP is quality assured. In the case of online education, verify that the provider is DfE-accredited to ensure a high-quality offer and safeguarding. Then, assess whether the provision meets pupils’ academic and pastoral needs. Questions to ask include: Do staff

### Contact:

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### ABOUT AMY:

**Name:** Amy Husband

**Job title:** Executive head

**Area of expertise:** Primary and secondary alternative provision, SEND, inclusive practice

have appropriate expertise and qualifications? Are success metrics clear? What is the level of service from the provider? For schools using online or off-site AP, ensure your internal team maintains regular contact with the AP provider, parents, and pupils, and continually tracks engagement and progress.

### What advice would you give to schools designing their own AP?

Start with your vision: What should the provision achieve, how will you measure success and who is accountable for it working well? Ensure your internal AP is inclusive by design and can support varying needs from the onset, using modelling, scaffolding, and routines that rebuild confidence in learning. Make sure it is everyone’s business – build in engagement from staff across the school.

## What’s the difference?

- + Enables schools to establish inclusive, high-quality internal AP with clear reintegration goals, progress tracking, and continuous support.
- + DfE-accredited KS2 education, with live adaptive teaching tools to boost engagement.
- + Support is rooted in trauma-informed and relational practice, so pupils feel safe, heard and valued.



# HUMANITIES SPECIAL

## 60

### Journey to understanding

Taking on a whole-school pilgrimage allowed the pupils of a Durham primary school to think about their place in the world...

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# A journey to **UNDERSTANDING**

Taking on a whole-school pilgrimage allowed the pupils of a Durham primary school to think about their place in the world

ANDREA YOUNGMAN AND DONNA DONAGHY



## WILL THIS WORK?

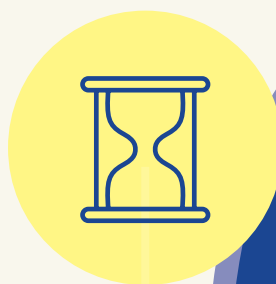
“Am I crazy?” This was the first thought that Donna Donaghy, RE co-ordinator at Blue Coat Primary School, had when the idea of a whole-school walking pilgrimage originally popped into her head. After seeing waymakers appearing locally, and teaching about pilgrimages, Donna wondered if she would be able to take Blue Coat on its own journey. Having discussed it with her headteacher and other school staff, she contacted Durham Cathedral and asked about how it could work.

The logistics were huge: 280 primary school children, staff and parents walking 2.5 miles along the Camino Ingles pilgrimage way, plus toilet stops and transport connections at each end. As it happened, Rev Canon Charlie Allen had been exploring the possibility of encouraging whole-school pilgrimages. Durham Cathedral has been an important part of pilgrimages for

centuries, being a destination in its own right, as well as being part of the famous Santiago de Compostela route in Spain. The monastery of Finchale, just outside Durham, is the starting point for the Camino Inglés, leading to the pilgrimage of Compostela.

### FOR EVERYONE

Pilgrimages can be made to many places, not just churches. Even a short walk to a war memorial or holy well can be a pilgrimage. It is a common element in all religions.



rapid transport if needed. The deputy head, typically responsible for risk assessments, took on the task of dealing with safety concerns.

Each child had a pilgrimage passport, for stamping at stopping points. And, just as medieval pilgrims to Compostela used a shell as symbol of their visit, the children created shell key rings.

“The children wrote prayers that could be used at different stopping points, and created a prayer book for use on the walk,” explained Donna.

“Walking past the prison allowed children to think about how you learn from mistakes, dealing with sins and overcoming them,” said Rev Canon Charlie Allen.



## FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

The first priority was to decide a date for the pilgrimage. June was chosen because it offered the greatest chance of suitable weather conditions, and enough time to create a multi-disciplinary approach. A team was set up within the school to oversee the event. Different teachers took responsibility for certain aspects; for example, it was decided to have some teachers driving to each location so that cars were available to provide

### WORTH IT

Going on a school pilgrimage brings the concept alive to children. A multi-faith and cross curricular approach takes time to organise, but provides maximum learning outcomes.





## PRACTICALITIES

Having settled on a route, Donna walked it herself over Easter to check timing and accessibility. "I made a short video of the route to show the children where they were going and what it would be like," she said. A total of eight stopping points were created: Finchale Priory, a Camino Ingles signpost, a prison, Frankland Farm, Crookland Garden, the pilgrim bridge, and the cathedral green, before the group finally entered the cathedral itself. Toilet points were located at Finchale Priory and Crookland Garden.

Knowing that not all children were accustomed to walking longer distances, physical education classes leading up to the pilgrimage incorporated

walking timed laps around the grounds while carrying the equipment they would need en route. Pupils were warned to wear suitable clothing and shoes, as the walk would go ahead even in light rain.

Donna also wanted all aspects of the pilgrimage to be accessible to everyone, including pupils with additional needs. Two children travelled the route by car; they were able to participate fully at each location and take part in discussions with their teacher en route.

### RAIN CHECK

Adopting a whole-school approach to a day-long pilgrimage requires lots of organisation and preparation over a long period, in order to ensure success. Have alternative dates available in case the weather makes the event impossible.

*"Children acquired a sense of achievement and greater understanding of pilgrimage"*



## A MAGICAL EXPERIENCE

Looking back on the day, Donna says, "It went really well and worked out timewise. We had no significant problems, and I would like to make this an annual event."

"Learning outcomes were excellent, too. It provided an experience that the children might not otherwise have had. They learned to work as a group, and about their place in the wider community. We found that pupils acquired a sense of achievement and showed greater understanding of the nature of pilgrimage."

"Rev Canon Charlie Allen also came into the school and helped children think though the subject of pilgrimages, including the idea of our life journey as a pilgrimage."

Most importantly, reactions from participants were positive. "The children really enjoyed it and said it was a magical experience," commented Donna. "They wanted to do it again and

felt they had achieved something. Everyone was moved by the day's events and the resilience of the children. We have also had people from the Camino Ingles in Spain contact us for information about what we had done."

### LET'S DO THAT AGAIN!

Blue Coat Primary School's pilgrimage has provided a clear success case and a proforma, which both Donna and Durham Cathedral intend to reuse for future pilgrimages.



Pupils from throughout Blue Coat School had the opportunity to reflect on what pilgrimages mean to them, and what they gained from taking part in their own journey. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and comments included:



#### PUPIL 1

*"It was truly amazing walking in the paths of faith. Now I am not just a pupil, I am a pilgrim. I am proud of that."*



#### PUPIL 2

*"The pilgrimage made me think about who I am and what I believe."*



#### PUPIL 3

*"I felt connected to God, happy, and full of joy."*



*Angela Youngman is a freelance journalist. Donna Donaghy is RE co-ordinator at Blue Coat School.*



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# You are **HERE**

Forget flying off to faraway lands in geography; take a look at what's around you, and you'll be surprised at how much more engaged your pupils are, says **Rebecca Leek**

**I** am writing this article broadly from a geographical perspective. However, the ways we can build meaning into what we do every day at school are generally applicable across the board. After all, our pupils do not segment their knowledge into subject-sized boxes; they are making connections all the time. So, if I refer to areas of the geography national curriculum more than others, then it is simply that geography has been especially on my mind. And you will find that geography overlaps with pretty much everything anyway.

## **'I've heard of Ipswich'**

Back when I was a headteacher at a primary school in Ipswich, I brought in an enormous map of the town. I think it was about three metres wide, and two-and-a-half metres high, and it met every visitor full

on as they came through the main entrance; you couldn't miss it. One particular six-year-old, arriving mid-morning from a dentist appointment, gazed up at it with me and decoded the word in the middle. I-p-s-w-i-ch. Ipswich.

"I've heard of Ipswich!" he said.

This was a child who had been born in Ipswich, had probably rarely left Ipswich, and who attended a school that was Ipswich Town mad.

It was a timely moment; one of those professional

flashpoints that admonished me gently but deeply. There we are, I thought, preparing schemes of work for young brains, that punch out facts about countries and continents, when these children still have a very green understanding of where they even live. Is it a town? What actually *is* a town? Do they understand that their street links with another street? Incredibly basic, seemingly very small, trivial stuff. However, throwing at them abstract facts about oceans faraway, that are

beyond what they have yet to make sense of, is lost time in the classroom, really, unless handled in the right way.

This does not mean we can't be ambitious. Of course a child in KS1 can conceptualise a town in comparison to a village, or what it is like to live at the seaside versus an old port town like Ipswich. But if we do not find their hooks, and their points of reference, then will the learning stick? Probably not.

## **Local links**

First of all, what are the most familiar points of reference for your children in the locality? Recently, I have had the pleasure of working at a school in Kelsale, near Saxmundham, that has a very remarkable lych gate. This is a landmark in the pupils' lives there. They walk through it for church services, which, as theirs is a church school, happen relatively regularly. And it is a very astonishing thing in itself. In fact, it is listed. Look it up!

***"If we do not find hooks, and children's points of reference, will the learning stick? Probably not"***





## COME ALIVE WITH POETRY

Live up your teaching with related and relatable poems like these:

☁️ 'Clouds', by Barbara Bleiman – for teaching about weather  
[dirigibleballoon.org/poem/Clouds](http://dirigibleballoon.org/poem/Clouds)

🎈 'How Far Can a Balloon Go?', by Angela Marinelli – for map-making, travel and scale  
[dirigibleballoon.org/poem/How-Far-Can-a-Balloon-Go](http://dirigibleballoon.org/poem/How-Far-Can-a-Balloon-Go)

✉️ 'Email', by Martin J Elster – for changes in transportation over time  
[dirigibleballoon.org/poem/Email](http://dirigibleballoon.org/poem/Email)

This architectural phenomenon provides the perfect hook to start linking what the children might already recognise and understand, with what we want them to learn about. What gates exist in the world? What are they for? How about the boundaries of private or municipal gardens, churchyards, towns, parishes and so on? If you use a familiar and unique piece of architecture such as this, pupils will not only start building a sense of place – *'this is my village, and this is what makes it special'* – but you are threading the weft into the warp of what they already understand.

Have you walked your locality? Do you know what your children see on their way to school? Always do this. And bear in mind that they see the world from far lower down than you do!

## Three dimensions

Another way to lift the curriculum off the page and directly into pupils' lives is to ensure you have something in 3D. This is as

simple as bringing an orange into the classroom. Pass it around. Smell it. Wonder at it. Peel it. Has anyone eaten one? Are oranges grown here in the UK? Why not? How might they get here?

This is you pre-heating the oven before you hit the required learning – be it climate zones, trade routes, or what have you. I know that many schools and trusts have invested in pre-written curriculums, so you might be grappling with ready-made lesson plans, but there's always an opportunity find something real to bring the learning to life.

## Poetry and stories

There is not enough space here to dig deeply into both of these. But, in short, if you can pull the learning out of a story – about a child in northern Scandinavia who wears thick boots for four to five months of the year, for example, and what that detail might tell us about where they live – then you will catch the children's imaginations and the

learning will happen more effortlessly.

Laura Theis recently won the Caterpillar Prize for children's poetry, for her poem, 'I Complain to My Friend Who Has Been Turned into a Tree' ([tinyurl.com/tp-LauraTheis](http://tinyurl.com/tp-LauraTheis)). This poem is gold dust if you want to teach pupils about the impact of urban development on biodiversity. 'What about soil compaction?' the tree says. 'Sometimes the dust on my leaves can get so thick I can no longer breathe.' Rather than clicking through some slides, this poem will do nearly all the work for you, and in a much more engaging way.

Poetry has a way of reaching in, deeper than anything else. Read lots of it. You can find a treasure trove of poems at [dirigibleballoon.org](http://dirigibleballoon.org), searchable by word. It is a wonderful resource and, with a little bit of hunting and evaluating, you should be able to find an accessible piece for nearly any lesson. Find some examples and

links for some suggested poems in the panel above.

The annual CLiPPA Awards also celebrates newly published poetry collections, written specifically for children. If you look at the list of nominated texts each year, then you will be able to keep your curriculum offer very fresh, as these books are hot off the press. The Centre for Literacy for Primary Education (CLPE) runs the CLiPPA, and its website also has a really great stock of films of many of the poets, reading their shortlisted (or winning!) poems, bringing them alive for your pupils. **TP**



Rebecca Leek has been a primary and secondary classroom teacher, head of department, SENCo, headteacher

and MAT CEO. She is currently the executive director of the Suffolk Primary Headteachers' Association and works as a freelance speaker, trainer and writer.

✉️ @rebeccaleek

🌐 [rebeccaleek.com](http://rebeccaleek.com)



A group of children are seen from behind, leaning over a trench filled with brown soil. They appear to be engaged in a hands-on activity, possibly a simulation of an archaeological dig. The scene is dimly lit, focusing on the children and the trench.

# DIG

A collage of two images. On the left, a group of children are looking intently at something off-camera. On the right, a young woman with red hair and glasses is wearing a traditional Viking-style red tunic with a beaded necklace. The background is a blurred museum setting.

**JORVIK  
VIKING  
CENTRE**

A group of children wearing pink hats are sitting at a long wooden table. They are looking at a large, colorful mural on the wall behind them. The mural depicts a historical scene with figures and a crown. The room has a warm, historical atmosphere.

# BARLEY HALL



# *Past lives,* **PRESENT LESSONS**

Highlighting underserved voices in history doesn't mean wiping out the entire curriculum, but there are plenty of opportunities to expand, says **Lindsey Rawes**

If you could invite any person from history to a dinner party, who would it be? The usual suspects cropped up when I asked my Y5 class: Winston Churchill, Elizabeth I, Rosa Parks, Florence Nightingale.

These individuals – many of whom are taught at KS1 – are memorable for good reason. However, there is a vast spectrum of historical lives still overlooked in primary teaching, which offer rewarding opportunities, both in KS1 and beyond.

## Not just for KS1

When building our school's curriculum, we decided that we wanted pupils to have opportunities to encounter a diverse range of people from different cultures and backgrounds as part of their history learning – with the aim of challenging societal 'norms' and enriching pupils' knowledge by linking history with other subjects such as science, geography, art and music. For example, Rudolf Nureyev, Betty Campbell, Alan Turing, Isabella Bird, Hatshepsut, Walter Tull and Maria Telkes – all carefully mapped out across the curriculum – are just some of the individuals our pupils study during their historical journey through school.

This approach means that, even during science or geography-driven topics, pupils are still engaging meaningfully with historical disciplinary knowledge. These sessions are not just about children making a timeline of a person's life

or being able to recite facts about them. By focusing on the concepts of significance, impact and legacy outlined in the national curriculum, they can apply their skills as historians and offer explanations for their answers. Children are better able to understand core historical vocabulary,

## The selection process

You may be wondering how and where to select significant people. There are, of course, the usual big hitters. It's important that we don't get rid of these well-known names – just because an individual was

live up to scrutiny? These are opportunities for pupils to examine a range of sources carefully and make up their own minds. It can also introduce older pupils to the concepts of perspective and propaganda.

Choosing your historical figures to study wisely also enables pupils to draw contrasts and make connections. For example, pupils in my Y5 class argued that they thought Alan Turing was just as important as Winston Churchill during World War II, as he was responsible for cracking the Enigma Code; some even argued that he was more significant, as the war might have had a different outcome without him. In Lower KS2, pupils were able to compare the lives of the pharaohs Tutankhamun and Hatshepsut. Looking at a less well-known figure alongside a more famous one means

*“There is a vast spectrum of historical lives still overlooked in primary teaching”*

reason why they think individuals were significant and discuss their impact, while being exposed to significant players in women's, Black and Asian, and LGBTQ+ history; this also aligns with the teaching of British Values and protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act.

a white, heterosexual male doesn't mean they should be banished from the curriculum forever. There's still merit in teaching pupils about Henry VIII and Winston Churchill. However, we also have a chance to reframe traditional narratives. Were these people really great leaders? Do their reputations





that children can ask and answer enquiry-led questions such as ‘Who was the most significant?’ or ‘Whose legacy had the most impact?’. Less obvious choices also get pupils questioning their preconceptions about what they already know. For instance, studying Walter Tull during Remembrance Week got pupils in Y3 discussing the fact that soldiers in World War I came from different backgrounds and that life for Walter Tull and other Black officers might have been more difficult at that time than it would be now.

## Resources

So, where to find out about these people? Much work has been done on individuals from Black History: David Olusoga’s picturebook version of *Black and British* is a fantastic resource for finding out about Black African people who built the history of our country. English Heritage has also provided detailed information on famous Black Britons who have Blue Plaques dedicated to them. Similarly, *Lands of Belonging* by Donna and Vikesh Amey Bhatt gives a good overview of South-East Asian history

and its contribution to our culture. The Proud Trust offers teaching resources that provide a good starting point for incorporating significant LGBTQ+ individuals (see the panel on the right for links).

Your locality should also be incorporated into studying significant historical individuals, which helps to make the content relevant. For example, in my school, children in KS1 study the iconic Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole but also look at Nellie Spindler, who lived in Wakefield. In KS2, they examine the Ivory Bangle Lady from York, and look at Sir Martin Frobisher: the last figure proved contentious when pupils discovered he was not just a hero of the Armada but was involved in the early slave trade and responsible for colonising an area of Canada, oppressing its indigenous people.

The Historical Association’s list of local significant individuals is an invaluable resource for this, split into lists of people by region. Getting in touch with your local museum service can also throw up some great suggestions – there may even be an exhibition or a visitor who will ignite pupils’ learning.

## Teaching approaches

Good history learning is not about long information texts or posters. Here are a couple of approaches that have worked well in my own classroom:

Pupils used Diamond Nine grids to rank given statements about a person and decide which was their most significant achievement. The emphasis was very much on discussion and children were allowed to move statements into different parts of the grid, provided they could justify their opinions. In Significance Knockout battles (where two individuals in the same field or period are compared) children studied two contrasting individuals and were split in teams to look at one in depth. They then argued why their individual was more significant. Both these activities got pupils looking at source material, reasoning and provided lively and thoughtful discussion.

Teaching about significant individuals is not about pupils regurgitating dates and facts; it’s about pupil dialogue, reasoning and creating

visibility for lesser-known narratives. Children are our future communicators and changemakers – the disciplinary knowledge they gain studying these figures is not only history, but a foundation for the citizens they’re becoming. **TP**

## 6 resources to support your diverse history roster:

**1** English Heritage – blue plaques for significant Black Britons: [tinyurl.com/tp-EHblueplaques](https://tinyurl.com/tp-EHblueplaques)

**2** The Proud Trust – primary resources for LGBTQ+ inclusion: [tinyurl.com/tp-ProudPrimary](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ProudPrimary)

**3** The Historical Association – list of significant individuals by region: [tinyurl.com/tp-HASigind](https://tinyurl.com/tp-HASigind)

**4** UK Museums – a list of local history museums in the UK: [tinyurl.com/tp-LHlist](https://tinyurl.com/tp-LHlist)


**5** *Newsround* – author David Olusoga talking about his book, *Black and British*: [tinyurl.com/tp-BlackAndBritish](https://tinyurl.com/tp-BlackAndBritish)

**6** Nosy Crow – a peek inside *Lands of Belonging*, by Donna and Vikesh Amey Bhatt: [tinyurl.com/tp-LoB](https://tinyurl.com/tp-LoB)



**Lindsey Rawes** is a primary teacher and history lead. She is also a chartered

teacher of history for the Historical Association.

 [theprimaryhistorian.substack.com](https://theprimaryhistorian.substack.com)

 @LindsRoars

 [lindsroars.bsky.social](https://lindsroars.bsky.social)

# Making meaningful CONNECTIONS

Introduce worldviews outside of the ‘Big 6’ religions, and use a compare and contrast approach to develop children’s critical thinking

MATTHEW LANE

**R**eligious education is a wonderful subject, as it allows us to explore the breadth of human belief within our classrooms. With more curriculums using a religion and worldviews pedagogy, we are invited to explore how different communities view the world. But where to start? How can we introduce multiple faiths in substantive, connected ways?

## The 2021 Census

One way to ground your teaching in local reality is to use data from the 2021 census. This showed some broad trends you might expect, such as the fact that Christianity is the most commonly stated religion, followed by No Religion. This second group also saw some of the largest growth compared to the previous census. However, as with all statistics, there are many more stories to be found within the numbers.

The data collected on religious identity goes into surprising detail, right down to the postcode the information was collected from. You can view all of this within the Office for National Statistics website using the interactive map ([tinyurl.com/tp-ONSmap](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ONSmap)). Alongside the ‘Big 6’ religions of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikhi, respondents could also reply with ‘other religion’. This

option was followed by a write-in space that recorded 58 different religious identities within Britain.

## Beyond token lessons

But what do we do with all this data? Before we consider a few ideas, it is important to look at what not to do. That is, making single, one-off lessons that give a token idea of what an ‘other religion’ is like without making any links

to the rest of the unit or topic. Instead, we should find ways to compare and contrast, blending in other religions as a point of comparison within a lesson.

The following examples are for Christianity and Wicca, but can be used for any of the ‘Big 6’ and ‘other’ religions.

## The nature of the divine

Christianity is monotheistic, believing in one God who is understood through the mystery of the Trinity as God the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. God is transcendent (beyond human understanding) yet also

imminent (close in everyday life), giving a complex and nuanced understanding of the divine that is principally defined and explained within the Bible.

Conversely, Wicca is primarily duotheistic, with two central deities – the Goddess (often understood in her Maiden–Mother–Crone aspect) and the Horned God – while some traditions embrace a broader polytheism. Within the duotheistic framework,

different covens or solitary practitioners may place greater emphasis on one deity over the other, and some feminist strands omit the Horned God entirely. At the same time, many Wiccans honour other pagan deities alongside the Goddess and Horned God, and some conceive of all gods and goddesses as manifestations of a single divine reality.

This substantive knowledge presents many points for comparison. Christianity defines its understanding of God through a codified doctrine; Wicca invites a range of personal interpretations. Wicca often has a female deity as the key divine, while

Christianity usually presents God as a male figure.

**Activity: Venn-diagram comparison.** Provide pupils with simple descriptions of the Christian Trinity and the Wiccan Goddess/Horned God on cards, and an A3 sheet with an empty Venn diagram (or do this as a class, and display the diagram on the board or via visualiser). Ask the children to place aspects that the religions share (e.g. both traditions speak of a higher power) in the overlap, and the differences in the outer sections. Encourage children to explain their choices.

## Sacred texts

Sacred texts are a wonderful way to explore any religion or worldview. They give a physical object for children to see and words that can be read and re-read to find deeper understanding of the religion and its worldview. They also give an insight into the history of a religion, as these texts are usually written in the earliest days of the faith.

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament (with much content shared with the Jewish Torah) and the New Testament. The text was codified in





the 4th Century AD and, bar nuances of translation, has remained unchanged. The Bible not only contains the theology, but also many of the liturgical traditions of the church, meaning there are many common forms of worship among the approximately 2.3 billion Christians on earth.

Wicca does not have a single, central sacred text like some other religions. Instead, it relies on a variety of texts and traditions, including

the Book of Shadows, the Wiccan Rede, and the Charge of the Goddess. These texts, while not universally agreed upon as scripture, are highly influential within Wiccan practice. The most common, The Book of Shadows, is added to by covens or individual witches, with a tradition of their book being burnt upon their death.

**Activity:** Compare the Bible to Wiccan texts. Think about how they are used and read.

Explore how Christians and Wiccans tailor their reading to their own lives and personal worldview.

### The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is one we teach children from the youngest age: treat others how you would like to be treated. It is a foundational rule of every society and human interaction. As you might expect, we can find an example of this within every religion and non-religious worldview.

For Christians, this is found in Matthew 7:12 “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”

For Wiccans, this concept is expressed in a line from the Wiccan Rede “An ye harm none, do what ye will”, or to take a modern translation, “If you do no harm, do what you will.”

These short phrases show different ways of being mindful of each other while also showing a deeper aspect of the worldview. Matthew 7:12 explicitly links to earlier Jewish Law while the Wiccan Rede emphasises individual freedom within a harm-none ethic.

**Activity:** Prepare cards with everyday school scenarios (e.g. ‘someone takes your pencil’, or ‘a friend falls over’). Get pupils to decide what a Christian might do (Matthew 7:12) and what a Wiccan might do (‘harm-none’ principle). Share choices and discuss how each religion cares for others.

When building these comparative units, framing each lesson around core themes ensures that every exploration of an ‘other’ faith feels integral to the wider narrative, sharpening pupils’ critical thinking, fostering mutual respect and preparing them to engage thoughtfully with a plural world. Ultimately, well-designed comparative lessons equip pupils not only with knowledge of diverse beliefs but also with critical thinking and empathy; key aims of religion and worldviews. **TP**



**Matthew Lane** is an RE lead and author. You can read

more comparisons of RE knowledge in his new book, *Religious Education: A Subject Knowledge Handbook*, coming soon from Bloomsbury.

[theteachinglane.co.uk](http://theteachinglane.co.uk)





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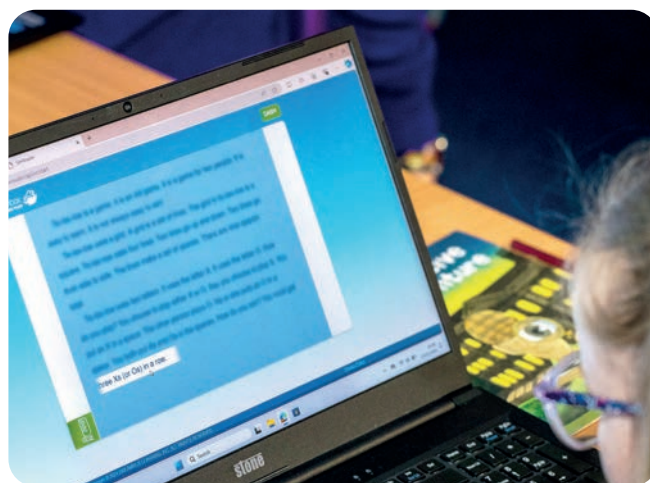
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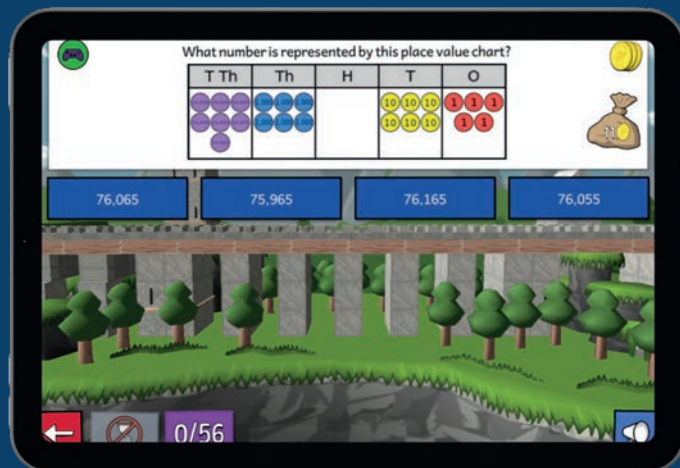


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# Unlocking the WRITER WITHIN

What does the government's new Writing Framework mean for primary literacy?

LYNN SEAR

**T**his July, the DfE published *The Writing Framework*, a landmark 150-page guidance document for primary schools in England. Following on from the Reading Framework in 2023, this non-statutory guide aims to transform how writing is taught in primary schools, offering practical, evidence-based strategies from Reception through Key Stage 2.

## The breakdown

### 1. Foundations first

At the heart of the framework is a recognition that writing is cognitively demanding. Pupils' working memory must manage letter formation, spelling, sentence structure and composition simultaneously, making automaticity in handwriting and spelling

essential. Through learning transcription early and well, children gain the mental space to focus on ideas. The framework advises explicit teaching of handwriting and phonics-based spelling from Reception, reinforcing these skills into KS1 and beyond. The result: automatic transcription skills that support fluent writing.

### 2. Sentences over grammar

Rather than teaching grammar in isolation, the framework recommends sentence-level instruction, using grammar and punctuation as tools to convey meaning within context. Pupils are encouraged to compose orally before writing, as they build transcription fluency. The process of writing is seen to be essential, with publishing or sharing identified as the final step.

### 3. The Reception year

The framework cites Reception as the most vital year for establishing strong writing foundations, where children learn letter formation, correct pencil grip and basic spelling or transcription skills. The framework is clear: quality

over quantity. Pupils should not be expected to write long pieces until their transcription skills are secure.

### 4. Encoding vs decoding

Building on the success of the Reading

Framework, the new Writing Framework frames phonics not just as a reading tool, but as a foundation for spelling, especially into Key Stage 2. It reinforces the Simple View of Writing, comprising of two equally vital components: transcription and composition.

Dictation is recommended weekly to solidify spelling and sentence structure.

### 5. Writing culture

Leadership plays a central role. Headteachers and literacy leads are expected to:

- Cultivate a positive writing culture, where pupils write meaningfully every day.
- Sequence a coherent curriculum from Reception to Year 6. This means schools should identify writing opportunities, map contexts and look at planned coverage.
- Ensure all teachers (not just subject leads) are trained to teach writing effectively.

This is not a prescriptive scheme or checklist, but a flexible, evidence-informed guide with reflection points for teacher development.

## Impact on teaching

### For Reception teachers:

- Prioritise handwriting posture, letter formation and grip
- Teach phonics-based spelling explicitly, from the outset
- Use oral composition to rehearse sentences before pupils write

### For KS1 and KS2 teachers:

- Sequence lessons so transcription remains

automatic, and fluency grows

- Continue phonics and dictation to consolidate spelling and sentence structure
- Embed grammar teaching within composition, not as isolated lessons
- Ensure audience and purpose sit at the heart of writing

### For school leaders:


- Designate literacy leads to oversee integration of reading and writing
- Promote writing across all subjects
- Offer CPD aligned to the framework so teachers can implement ideas confidently

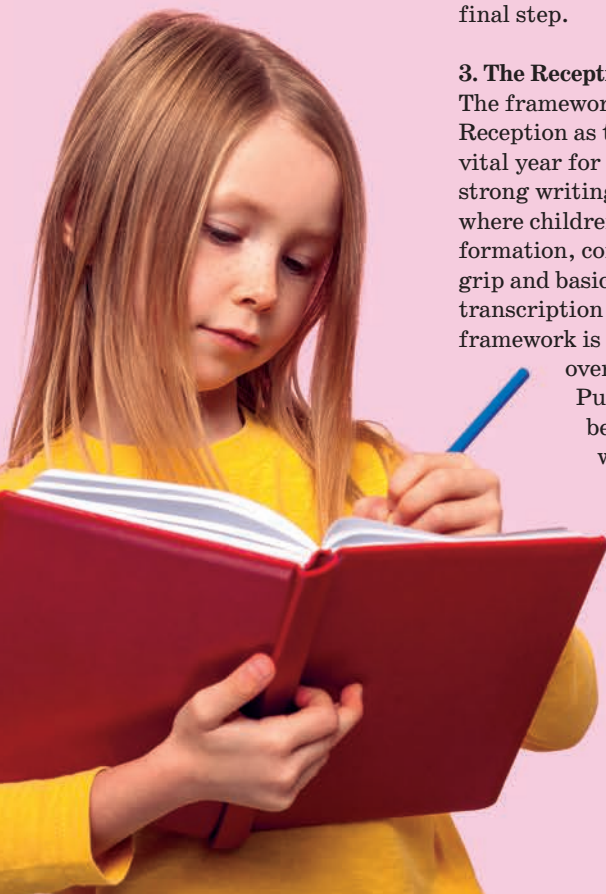
The Writing Framework represents a major shift in primary writing pedagogy. By centring transcription skills, emphasising oracy, prioritising sentence instruction, and weaving in phonics-based spelling through KS2, it offers a research-grounded roadmap to develop fluent, confident writers. Its layered approach, starting with Reception and coupled with a focus on equity, leadership and teacher training, aims to raise writing standards across England's primary classrooms. **TP**



*Lynn Sear is a former primary teacher and writing moderator, and is now*

*the co-CEO and co-founder of Literacy Tree.*

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THAT'S NOT...



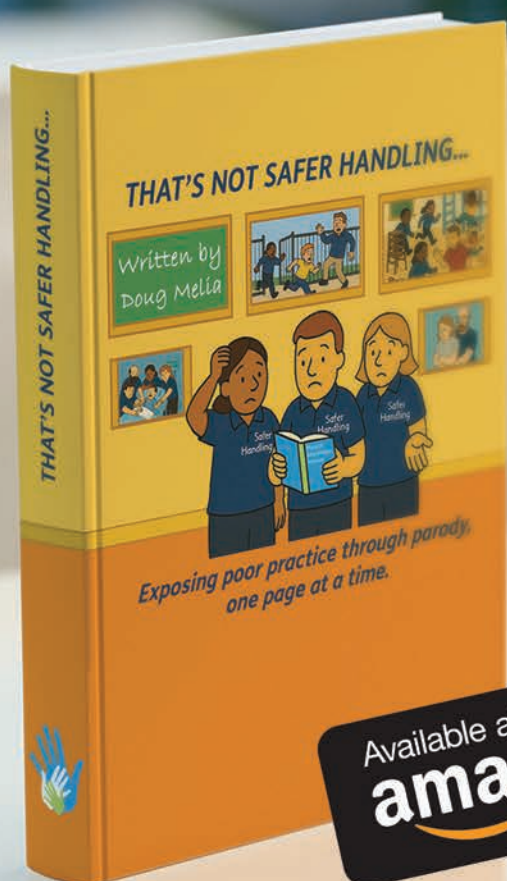
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PARTNER CONTENT

## ASK THE EXPERT

# “It’s time to talk safer handling”

Doug Melia, director of Safer Handling International, on navigating training, terminology and implementing appropriate strategies to protect pupils and staff

### To train or not to train?

In line with department guidance, it is the headteacher’s duty to ensure all staff understand their power to use reasonable force. This shouldn’t mean reactive training after harm has occurred, sending injured staff off on a local authority course. Schools need a proactive, whole-school approach. That includes regular incident debriefs, sharing of ‘near misses’, and performing a training needs analysis. This identifies which staff need support, what type, and why – creating a culture of confidence, accountability, and skill, not silence and blame.

### What’s in a name?

Whether it’s called ‘positive handling’, ‘safer handling’, ‘therapeutic holding’, ‘teamteach’ or ‘crisis intervention’, it all refers to the use of reasonable force. There is no regulatory body for physical intervention training, and the Department for Education and Ofsted do not recommend specific providers. The choice – and the liability – rests with the headteacher. What matters is not the label, but whether the training is evidence-informed, risk-assessed and tailored to the specific needs of your setting; not because they’re available for your INSET day or who boasts the lowest price.

### What training do we need?

Training should be effective, but some approaches are too reliant on physical skills. In schools there are alternatives to floor holds in the form of Safetypods or even containment. There are still providers teaching planned single-person holds (inconsistent with manual handling regs) and others deny the reality that these incidents do happen and fail to prepare staff with skills that work should they need to physically intervene. Strategies should be scaled to the size and needs of your pupils – especially in early years – and the physical capability of staff who are smaller



### EXPERT PROFILE

**NAME:** Doug Melia

**JOB TITLE:** Director of Safer Handling International

**AREA OF EXPERTISE:** Reasonable force

in stature expected to manage larger children. Training should prepare staff for real-life scenarios, including safe disengagement skills like bite and grip releases that actually work. It must promote alternatives and teach staff to critically assess where physical intervention helps, and where it is either not appropriate, ineffective or inflammatory.

### Does containment work?

Preventing exits from site or to restricted areas for those too vulnerable to be allowed to leave (generally younger children although this would apply to older SEN pupils), creating barriers, restricting access or locking a door, although contentious, may be a safer way of handling a child in crisis than staff placing hands. Seclusion can never be used as a punishment, also pupils don’t necessarily need to be confined to a certain room, as concentric layers of corridors, yards and open spaces should be considered in line with distraction and withdrawal strategies when dynamically assessing risk. When planned, risk-assessed and monitored appropriately, containment can reduce harm, escalation and intrusion. A blanket ban on seclusion can ironically lead to more holds, more upset and therefore more trauma. Schools should prioritise not just safe spaces, but consider safe faces – switching out to trusted staff who can better support children’s self-regulation in times of crisis.

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# Poetry > PANIC

We tell kids to stay in school, dream big, and plan for tomorrow, yet we hand them a world on fire. As a teacher, however, all is not lost. . .

JESSICA DE WAAL

If you've ever taken your class outside and watched a pupil marvel at a worm, a raindrop, or the swoop of a bird, you'll know that children *feel* nature deeply. These moments are more than just curriculum boxes to tick; they're opportunities to connect young minds with the living world. But in the midst of today's climate crisis, it's not all wonder and wide eyes. More and more, our pupils are expressing worry – sometimes even fear – about the future of the planet.

That's where literature, especially poetry and prose rooted in nature, can be a powerful ally. Ted Hughes, whose work thrums with the pulse of the natural world, offers a vivid, gritty, and often magical way into these big themes. His writing can help children articulate both their love for nature and their anxieties about its future. In particular, his poetic collection, *Season Songs* and novel *The Iron Woman*, are goldmines for rich classroom conversations and writing.

Here's how we can bring them to life...

## Start with wonder

Hughes's *Season Songs* is a short collection of nature poems that celebrate the shifting moods of the seasons: from frozen stillness to the riot of spring growth. It's beautifully accessible for younger readers, yet layered with vivid imagery and sound-play that invites deeper exploration.

### Activity: seasonal sounds

Pick a season and read one or two poems aloud (e.g. 'March Morning Unlike Others' or



'Sunstruck'). Ask children to close their eyes as you read and imagine the world of the poem.

Have them write their own 'soundscape' poem, focusing on what they hear in their chosen season – birds; wind; rain on leaves; even silence.

Encourage onomatopoeia and wild similes (*The wind whooshed like a fox in a feather shop!*). This gentle, joyful exercise helps pupils build emotional connections with nature, and explore how language can reflect mood and rhythm in the environment.

## From wonder to worry

*The Iron Woman* is a darker, more urgent tale than Hughes's better-known *The Iron Man*. Here, nature is being poisoned, animals are suffering, and a mysterious, mud-drenched figure rises up to demand justice. It's dramatic, angry, and completely gripping. Children often respond powerfully to this book because it doesn't sugarcoat the truth. It trusts

them with tough ideas, and that's empowering.

### Activity: wild voices

After reading a key scene (for example the animals' transformation or the Iron Woman's confrontation with the polluters), ask pupils: *If nature could speak, what would it say?*

Pupils should write short monologues or letters from the perspective of a river, a frog, a fish, or even a cloud. This can lead to a class anthology titled something like *Letters to the World*, which you can display or even send to a local MP or eco group. You'll be amazed by how passionate and poetic pupils can be when given this creative space. For many, it offers a cathartic outlet for their worries.

## Balance the scales

One risk of diving into eco-literature is tipping too far into despair. Ted Hughes's work, though dark at times, often carries a fierce sense of hope and

transformation. The Iron Woman fights back. The seasons turn. Life insists on growing.

### Activity: nature's future

Ask pupils to imagine the world 50 years from now, but in a positive light. What does the river look like? What animals have returned? What inventions have helped clean the air? Pupils can create eco-stories, comic strips, or posters that celebrate solutions and dreams. This helps counter eco-anxiety by encouraging constructive, imaginative thinking, and reminds pupils that their voices, creativity, and care for the Earth *matter*.

## Why now?

Ted Hughes was writing about ecological damage long before 'climate change' became a household phrase. His writing is alive with untamed magic of nature, but also an awareness of its vulnerability. That makes him a brilliant companion for children learning to navigate their feelings about the environment.

So, whether you're planting wildflower poems in spring or marching with the Iron Woman through toxic sludge, Hughes gives your pupils a language for love, rage, and hope, helping them become not just readers and writers, but stewards of a future they care about deeply. **TP**



Jessica de Waal is a writer and former deputy headteacher with a PhD in English Literature.



# Writing with DRAGONS!

Use these magical and mysterious creatures as a tantalising hook to get your pupils scrawling and scratching out their own monstrous poems...

**PIE CORBETT**

## **POEM 1** **Goblin Attack News Appeal**

GOOD EVENING – THERE HAS BEEN  
A DEVASTATING GOBLIN ATTACK IN  
THE LOCAL AREA. WE ARE SEEKING  
A GOBLIN HUNTER URGENTLY!

Everyone has seen the news of a severe  
goblin crisis. On Friday 28th April,  
a series of goblin attacks struck  
the town, claiming thousands of victims.

These goblins have carried out  
a series of goblin pranks.

They have:  
sung when babies sleep,  
stolen eggs from fridges,  
robbed supermarket freezers  
and shelves of fresh goods,  
tipped the helmets of police,  
flicked mud at windows,  
poked people in their ears as they slept,  
painted fire engines blue,  
tap-danced on café tables  
and stolen sugar lumps,  
poured pink paint into rivers  
ripped up park daffodils,  
bombarded shoppers with bluebells,  
used bad language in schools  
and burned the maths books.

Yes, thousands of people  
have been goblin-pranked!  
The toll is rising like a tsunami –  
millions have been left without self-respect.  
The police say that the toll to mental health  
will soon become a crisis.

Every minute counts and that is why,  
we are asking for your support today.  
Goblin tamers, whisperers and hunters please apply!





## POEM 2

### The Dragon Survey

*Dear pet owner,  
Have you just taken on a new pet dragon?  
If so, please answer these questions...*

Is your dragon a spy?  
Would it rather eat salt and vinegar,  
beef Monster Munch or cheese and onion crisps?  
Does your dragon hold a driving licence?  
Is it signed to a well-known football club?  
Has your dragon been on 'Strictly Come Dancing'?  
Will your dragon be made available in all bookshops?  
Has your dragon made a nest in the hedgerow?  
When will your dragon next go to the hairdresser's?  
Does your dragon need to refuel at the petrol pumps?  
Does your dragon help you with your homework?  
When do you take your dragon for 'walkies'?  
If your dragon fades, will you need a bicycle pump?  
Does your dragon hang out in art galleries?  
Is your dragon wearing a pink tutu?  
Does your dragon consider rats to be friends and cats  
to be something to avoid?  
What is your dragon's favourite film?  
What will your dragon say when offered  
peanut butter and banana sandwiches?  
Is your dragon famous for rapping with Stormzy?  
Does your dragon have its own legends?  
Does your dragon remember stepping into a swarm  
of bees one summer?  
If your dragon laughed, would its belly quiver like jelly?  
What is its favourite bedtime story?  
Is it taking its time to travel from Worksop  
to Wimbledon Common?  
Would it choose a Mars Bar or a Curly Whirly?  
Will your dragon become a couch-potato or a chilli-breather?

*Please send your response to us  
by dragon courier.*

## POEM 3

### What My Pet Frost Dragon Knows

where best to hide from the stinging fly,  
when the wind will blow from the cold north,  
why the shape-shifting clouds are restless,  
when the sun will unlock the dawn,  
how the blackbird hides as the falcon dives,  
why the smooth-snake sun-sleeps,  
why decay seeps into the rivers,  
when the seas will no longer throng with the mackerel-song,  
what time the cuckoo sings greedily for its supper,  
when the swifts arrive as Spring unbuttons  
the leaves from the trees.

My frost dragon knows who to fear,  
who to hold dear, who to ignore;  
why some die who should live,  
whether the minotaur's maze exists  
and if the salmon's milky eye can see;  
my dragon knows whether the answer is frost,  
the flower or the flame.

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## TEACHING NOTES

Any unit on dragons will involve children inventing their own species – hedge dragon, fire dragon, storm dragon, or even the rather small but popular pet, the pocket dragon! Of course, these units are not really about dragons at all – that is just the vehicle for teaching children how to express themselves in different forms. Your pupils may decide they'd rather write about unicorns, elves, goblins, ogres, trolls or gnomes, and they all work, too.

### Dragons sighted!

Begin the unit with a hook, based around the idea that the local area has been attacked by a swarm of dragons. Ask the children to write an appeal, seeking a 'dragon whisperer' to tame the dragons. To help them, show the model text 'Goblin Attack News Appeal', on the previous page.

As a class, brainstorm all the awful things that a dragon invasion might bring. This will mean that everyone has plenty of ideas for their 'dragon appeal'. These could be written, performed and filmed. Once the children have appealed for help, they could switch roles and write formal letters of application, seeking the new role of 'dragon whisperer'. Their letters should aim to persuade the local council that they have the skills to be given the job.

### Survey says...

Once captured and tamed, the dragons are given homes locally as pets. The local council decides to carry out a survey and find out information about the dragons. Spend time reading and rereading the model poem, 'The Dragon Survey'. Read through it several times and discuss. Start by getting the children to feed back any specific ideas or lines that they liked or disliked, explaining why. Focus on anything that is puzzling or needs further explanation.

It would be fun to create a response poem as a similar list, answering the questions. This could be written or just used as an oral warmup. Encourage children to avoid straightforward answers and to surprise the reader (see Fig.1).

Fig.1

Does your dragon hold a driving licence?	My dragon needs no licence to soar over the Pennine hills, swooping and looping the loop.
Is it signed to a well-known football club?	Man United were interested but unfortunately, in a burst of over-excitement several players were incinerated.
Has your dragon been on <i>Strictly Come Dancing</i> ?	No way! But she did appear in <i>Bake Off</i> and had a Hollywood handshake for a quality crème brûlée.
Will your dragon be made available in all bookshops?	Will your dragon be made available in all bookshops?

To help pupils write their own survey, spend time inventing all sorts of questions that might be asked. Generate lots of different ideas for the sorts of areas that questions might focus on, e.g. travel, cooking, education, forests, fish, sports, hobbies, shopping, etc. List question starters from the model such as – *would, should, could, why, where, when, what, how, will, does*. It adds to the fun, if you make the questions as varied and unlikely as possible. Before writing, get the children to carry out interviews in pairs.

### Did you know...?

The third part of this unit starts with the local TV station interviewing different dragons and their owners to find out 'what the dragon knows'. Of course, everyone knows that dragons are ancient creatures, many of them several hundred years old. Indeed, they have lived for so long that they have become very wise...

Read and discuss the model poem, 'What my pet frost dragon knows'. Make lists of the sorts of things that might be included – and raid the poem for those question starters – *how, why, where, when, what, whether, if, should, could, will, does*, etc. Here is the shared writing that the last class I worked with on this quirky unit wrote with me:

### What my pet frost dragon knows

*How the north wind carries the first flakes of winter south.*

*Why the holly is still green when the earth turns to iron and its berries paint red tears.*

*Where the sun goes when it eases its tired body over the horizon.*

*When King Arthur will awake and ride out from the Earth.*

*What the difference is between greed and gold.*

*Why the river snakes towards the sea and the salmon swims in watery shadows.*

*Whether the ant or the rat will take over the Earth.*

*What shape the clouds will take as they wander by forever mutating.*

*If the anaconda has a greater squeeze than a starving belly...*



**Further ideas for all types of writing can be found in *The Book of Dragons* by Pie and Melanie Corbett. Get your copy now at [tinyurl.com/tp-BoD](http://tinyurl.com/tp-BoD)**



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## KEY POINTS

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# FREE *the verse*

Pay attention to space, zoom in on words and lean into the light to show pupils that they already know much more about poetry than they think...

MEG GREHAN

**T**he first time I read a novel-in-verse was not, in fact, the first time I read a novel-in-verse. I *thought* it was. I had never seen a whole book written in poetry before; had never seen a book utilise so little space (or so I thought at the time). But the more I read the more comfortable and familiar I found it. It felt, almost immediately, absolutely perfect and absolutely *right*. I realised that I had encountered verse in my reading before, in many forms, I just hadn't recognised it. I'd read picture books, narrative poetry, even graphic novels. I'd read books that used space and shape in interesting ways. I just hadn't recognised it for what it was.

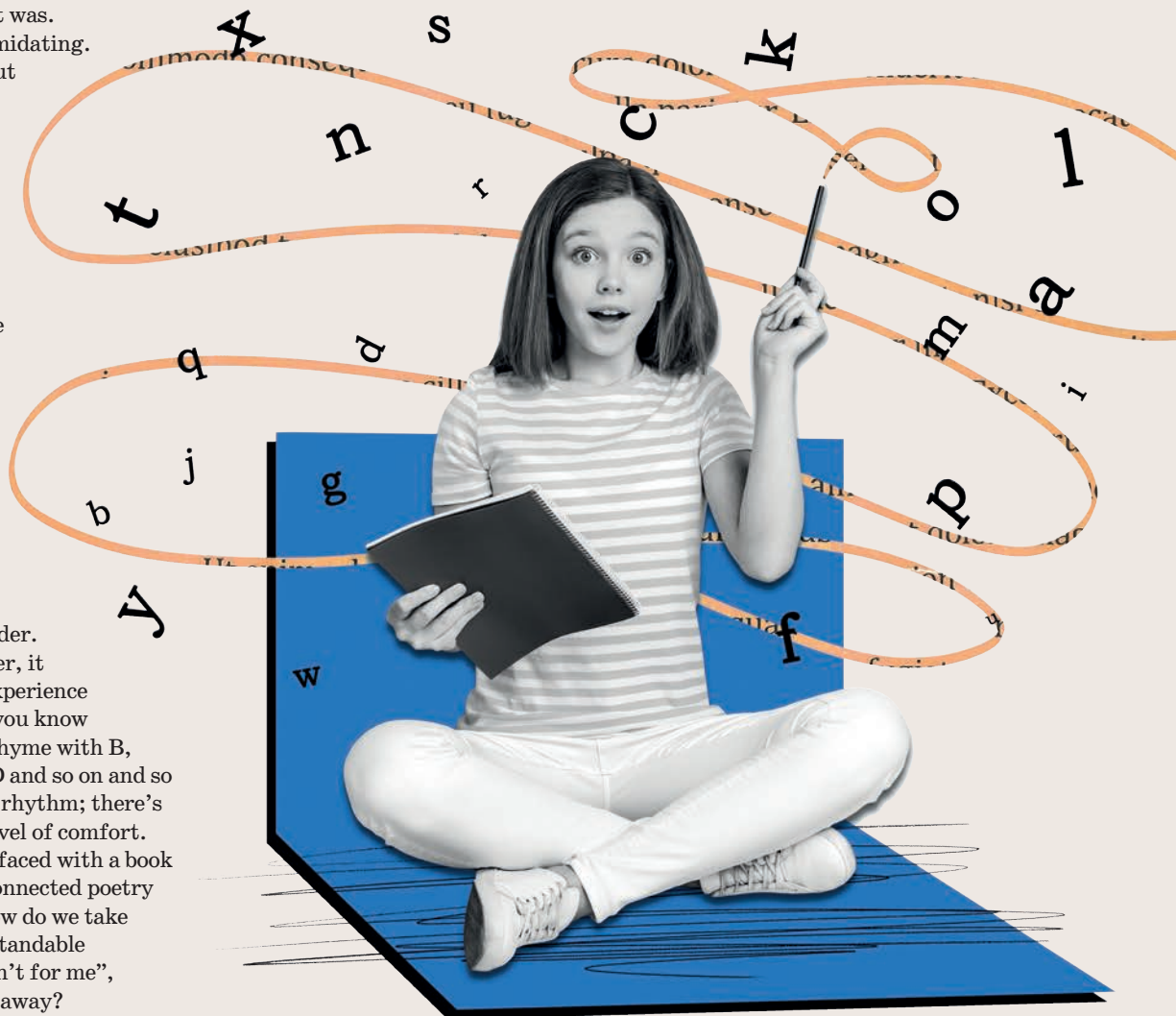
Verse can seem intimidating. It is poetry, after all. But verse is remarkably accessible; it's designed to be. So, how do we overcome this initial worry? How do we teach verse? One question I get asked quite often is 'does it have to rhyme?' and the answer is no, it doesn't *have* to. It can, if the author has the patience, skill and desire to make it rhyme, but it's not a requirement. Rhyme, to be oh-so-honest with you, is difficult for a writer and wonderful for a reader. It can help guide a reader, it can make the reading experience extra pleasant because you know what's coming, A will rhyme with B, and C will rhyme with D and so on and so on. There's an intrinsic rhythm; there's a predictability and a level of comfort. So what do we do when faced with a book made entirely of interconnected poetry that doesn't rhyme? How do we take away the totally understandable impulse to say, "This isn't for me", close the book and walk away?

## Space to breathe

For me, reading verse clicked the second I stopped wondering why they used so little of the page. The truth is that verse doesn't only use a little bit of the page – it uses every millimetre – it just doesn't feel the need to fill it with words. The white space is where we rest, it's where we breathe. It is where the unsaid hides and where we can find it if we want to. If you choose to see the white space as *everything* else, the page becomes easier to understand. My favourite way to show and explain this is to give readers a paragraph of text (usually something

they may be familiar with or are likely to have read already) and ask them to turn it into verse using line breaks and white space. I ask them to think about which words or lines they feel are the most important, which deserve extra space because they carry extra weight, which the writer might want to rush past, and which are so important they should be surrounded by white space, so they stand alone. Everyone ends up with a different piece of verse in the end, despite using the exact same chunk of prose.

This exercise is my favourite, because it shows readers (and writers) that they



do already understand verse. They know that a word given a whole line to itself must be important; they know that a shorter line carries a different weight from a longer one; and that shape affects how you read. We all know these things, whether we're aware of it or not, because from very early childhood we are told stories, and we tell our own. We know how to pause for effect, we know how to add drama, we know when to slow down and when to speed up, when to be loud and when to be quiet.

## Lean into light

Another way to teach this is to tell a story and ask pupils to write it as you tell it, as best they can. If you put a lot of emphasis on one word, how can they show that in writing? Do they make the word bigger? Do they give it a whole line to itself? Do they repeat it a few times? If you rush through a sentence to build drama, how do they show that? Do they write one long line, so the reader almost runs out of breath reading it? Do they give each word its own line, placing them one underneath the other so the reader is inclined to read quickly? What do their instincts tell them to do? This should be a quick exercise, without too much time to think; it's all about trusting yourself.

*“A common misunderstanding about verse is that it has to be serious; used only to explore heavy topics”*

A common misunderstanding about verse is that it has to be serious; used only to explore heavy topics. It is poetry and poetry is a serious form, surely? We are often taught serious poems. We all have that infamous last line of Seamus Heaney's 'Mid-Term Break' imprinted onto our minds, don't we? But I think a wonderful way to make poetry, and in turn verse, less intimidating, is to introduce young readers to lighter topics. There are many silly and hopeful poems out there, and they are just as important as the heavy, emotional and hidden-meaning-laden poems.




All poetry is important; all has its place and its value. But for those who find it difficult, it can be helpful to start with something that brings with it a giggle or a sigh of relief. Who hasn't read 'The Orange' by Wendy Cope and found themselves smiling when that final line arrives? It is lovely and uplifting and its use of simple language, shape and style make it so accessible. It is simply about joy, contentment and a very large orange – go and look it up if you don't know it; I challenge you not to smile. Finding poems and stories like that one, that lean into the light, can help demystify poetry. We've all been stuck wondering "OK, but what does it *mean*?". Maybe it would be more helpful to ask what it makes us *feel*,

what we imagine when we read it, how it affects us.

Verse is fun. It's about letting go of the rules and trusting your instincts, about doing what feels right, and above all, it is about expression. My final and truest piece of advice is simple: let your students go wild, there is no wrong way to write verse. **TP**



*Meg Grehan is the author of five novels in verse. Her latest book, **The Brightest Star** (£8.99, Little Island), is out now.*

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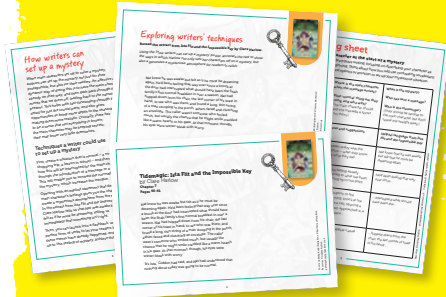


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[tinyurl.com/tp-Ista](https://tinyurl.com/tp-Ista)

**I**sta Flit and the Impossible Key continues the adventures of Ista and her friends, Nat and Ruby, in a world where magic ebbs and flows with the tide, giving people temporary superpowers every time the river rises. Having saved the city they call home, the heroes must now take on new foes called marsh spinners, who are enchanting people with the power of their sinister music. As with the previous book, mystery is what drives the story, and the titular 'impossible key' is merely the first of many clues that our intrepid trio must put together.



**Tidemagic: Ista Flit and the Impossible Key** by Clare Harlow (£7.99, Puffin), is out now

Image © Fraser Burrows Photography

When it came to choosing Ista's magic, I thought hard about what would be useful, but not too useful, for a character who often plays the role of detective. In the end I gave her the ability to transform herself to look like anyone she'd ever laid eyes on. This made it easy for her to sneak around, yet also provided dramatic potential by creating a danger that she might get caught behaving suspiciously, or bump into the person she was copying.

For me, the best mystery writing succeeds on several levels. First, the nuts and bolts of the plot must be in place. As anyone who has read the first *Tidemagic* book will know, I'm

a big fan of red herrings and dramatic twists, but to have maximum impact, these need to come out of the clues that have been laid, so that the reader is astonished but not baffled. On top of this, I'd say that at the heart of every good mystery are the characters. If we don't care about our heroes, we won't be fully invested in solving the puzzle alongside them. The twists and turns might satisfy intellectually, but they won't resonate. The same goes for the villain(s) and the supporting cast. Motivation and stakes are the keys here. Give everyone a good reason to do what they're doing, and something crucial that they stand to lose if they don't succeed.

## 5 TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A MYSTERY

### 1. ANCHOR YOUR READER

There's a fine line between mystery and muddle. Offer clarity when you can, and this will help your readers enjoy the bits of the story that are meant to be mysterious, rather than wondering whether they've understood the basics.

### 2. QUESTIONS ARE CRUCIAL

The spine of your mystery can probably be condensed to a series of questions; some big ('Who is the murderer?'), some small ('Who was hiding behind the curtains on

p.55?'). Decide how to fit these questions together, and in what order to answer them, and you'll have your basic structure.

### 3. CHARACTER IS KEY

Give everyone something to gain, and something to lose, and see if you can raise the stakes for your protagonists as the story progresses.

### 4. SOW YOUR SEEDS EARLY

Planning a big twist? See what clues you can weave in early on. It's a hard balance

to get right; you don't want to spoil the surprise. Reread a book that has surprised you and see if you can spot the hints and foreshadowing in the first half of the story.

### 5. SIGNPOSTING IS YOUR FRIEND

Everything a character notices, every question they ask, will point the readers' attention in that direction too. You can do this in dialogue and in the narrative. You can have fun misdirecting your readers, too, making them look away from the clues that are right under their noses.





# Extract from

pages 40-41

The book is written in a third-person narrative that mostly sticks to Ista's perspective, but a few sections are from the point of view of other characters. I've tried to anchor us clearly in Nat's head in this opening sentence. Note the tense shift, too. We join him at a point when he has received bad news, then go back further into the past to see his morning being disrupted.

The phrase 'the last corner' shows just how close Nat has come to having one normal meal with his newly reunited family.

The contrast between the simplicity of what Giddon says and the strength of Nat's reaction to it is meant to show that a) Nat and Giddon have a history and can communicate in more than just words, and b) the strength of Nat's feelings for Ista.

I've chosen to quickly recap this exchange rather than writing it in direct speech or with lots of detail, to highlight the fact that Nat's focus is no longer on his immediate surroundings or what he's saying to his mum.

This second time jump, which is shorter than the first, along with the fact that Nat and Giddon are now 'hurrying', is intended to increase the sense of urgency.

Nat knew he was awake but felt as if he must be dreaming again. He'd been feeling that way ever since a knock at the door had interrupted what should have been the Shah family's first normal breakfast in over a season. Nat had hopped down from his chair, the last corner of his toast in hand, to see who was there, and found a long, thin string of a man stooping in the porch, ashen-faced and clutching an envelope. The caller wasn't someone who smiled much, but usually the chance that he might smile crackled like a warm hearth in his gaze. At that moment, though, his eyes were winter-bleak with worry.

'It's Ista,' Giddon had said, and Nat had understood that nothing about today was going to be normal.

That was before he'd even read the letter.

After all they had been through, his mum and Ravi deserved every scrap of normal they could get. So when Priya called from the kitchen to ask who their visitor was, Nat held a hand up to Giddon and called in reply that it was someone looking for a house on the next street.

Approximately two minutes later, Nat popped his head back into the kitchen and said that he fancied a quick walk, actually, if that was OK.

Thirty seconds after that, he and Giddon were hurrying along the pavement.

Nat had read the letter twice by then, and he read it again as they went. The third reading, for some reason, made the situation both more and less real. Ista couldn't have left with so little explanation. She couldn't have. But she had. There was no secret message hidden between the lines.

At the end of book 1, Nat was finally reunited with his little brother, who had been missing for months. I put a reminder of that here, to emphasise what is at stake for Nat if he rushes off on a new adventure.

This is a callback to an identical phrase in book 1. Observant readers will guess, or perhaps even know, who the visitor is without me having to tell them. (I then confirm, a few lines down, that the visitor is Giddon.)

I've isolated these words on a line of their own to remind readers that the letters (which Ista has left for her friends) are the only clue Nat and Giddon have as to where she's gone and why.

During this two minutes, Nat would be reading the letter for the first time, but the reader has already seen it so there was no need to show it again. Instead, I've used a little time jump so that we can skip forward to the new information.

Nat's incredulity, as emphasised by the repetition of 'couldn't', shows how much he cares for Ista and how betrayed he feels by her unexplained and sudden departure. My hope is that this signposts to the reader that Ista's departure IS strange. Her whole arc in book 1 involved her learning that she didn't need to do everything alone and that she had lots of people she could depend on. So why has she run off now? Perhaps the strange key her father left behind is even more mysterious than it first appeared...



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Join Ronnie, Micky and Lugs as they navigate friendship, school, and peer pressure against the backdrop of war-torn London, with **Jenny Pearson**'s striking war novel...

**JON BIDDLE**

**W**riting a World War Two novel aimed at primary school pupils can be a challenge, as it needs to touch on the horrors of war without being too graphic. Over the past few years there have been some masterpieces from Tom Palmer, Sufiya Ahmed, Phil Earle and several others; *Shrapnel Boys* by Jenny Pearson, published earlier this year, definitely needs to be added to the list. It's a long book – just over 350 pages – but could work wonderfully as a class read. The

characters are beautifully written and relatable, the setting feels authentic, and the narrative is full of drama. The book touches on several themes including friendship, the complexity of family relationships, peer pressure and the difficulties of speaking out, even when you know it's the right thing to do. The occasional references to the threat of fascism (Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts are mentioned) give the writing a particularly pertinent feel right now.

With the historical setting, it's

quite a departure from Jenny's usual style. There are still regular flashes of her trademark humour (one of my favourite lines is when Mum says, "We're not going to be the family who burned themselves to death on the first day of the war! We'd never live it down!") but the overall tone is generally darker and more serious than her previous work.

*Shrapnel Boys* is a genuinely compelling read, following the story of a group of young boys who stay in London when the vast majority of





children have been evacuated. Ronnie, his brother Micky and his best friend Billy (nicknamed Lugs) gradually get caught up in a traitorous scheme involving smooth-talking villain, Johnny Simmons. To make the situation even more complex, Johnny is involved in a romantic relationship with Ronnie's mum, who struggles to see his true motivation behind the expensive gifts and flattering comments. As the boys' problems increase, they are forced to turn to an unexpected ally for help, their bullying and bad-tempered headteacher, Mr Etherington. The last hundred or so pages are some of the most dramatic I've read in the past few years, with a totally unexpected twist in the final few chapters.

## Activities Vocabulary

Lots of relevant World War Two vocabulary, including terms such as *evacuation*, *shrapnel*, *patriotism*,

*Anderson shelter*, *squadron* and *dogfight*, are introduced in the text. Create an individual – or class – glossary of terms that can be added to while reading, ensuring that the pupils understand how important precision is when explaining new words. Some of the terms could also be illustrated, for further clarity.

## Relationships

Ronnie's friendships with the other Shrapnel Boys (Micky and Lugs) and their rivals, the Wreckers (led by the bad-tempered Harry) evolve as the action develops. Sometimes the changes are brought on by choice and sometimes by necessity. Once the main characters have all been introduced – around 40 pages into the book – create a relationship chart to show the changes that take place and the reasons behind them. As well as his friends and classmates, ask the pupils to consider Ronnie's relationships with the main adults in his life – his mum, Mr Etherington and Johnny Simmons – which also change dramatically after certain events.

## Mr Etherington

The headteacher of the boys' school, Mr Etherington, is a fascinating secondary character. At the start of the adventure, when Freddie gets in trouble, Mr Etherington chooses to punish his friends instead of him. Freddie is outraged at the injustice, as are his friends, but he is told by his headteacher that it will continue to happen. Discuss with the class why they think this is and whether they believe it is fair to deliberately punish someone you know to be innocent. Return to the discussion near the end of the book, when Mr Etherington's background story and genuine



## Take it further → → →

### IDENTITY AND BELONGING

*Shrapnel Boys* provides a wonderful opportunity to deliver some RSHE lessons around how identity can be shaped by the groups people belong to. Discuss with the class the various groups that Ronnie is part of – his family, his school, the Shrapnel Boys, the Dead End Kids (the name given to children who remained behind in the cities when their peers were evacuated), etc. Ask pupils to think about which groups are part of their own lives, as well as which

they feel part of and which they don't. This could lead to a conversation about how Micky's underlying need to belong causes him to make certain decisions during the story, which would help introduce the concept of peer pressure. Comparisons can be made with life today and the pressure to belong to certain online communities and gangs. Children can create posters with slogans such as 'Think Before You Follow' and 'Right Isn't Always Popular. Popular Isn't Always

Right'. With sensitivity to the pupils and their lives outside school, it could also lead to further work around radicalisation (Micky attending a fascist rally with Johnny is a great example of this, and there are plenty of modern parallels) and the issue of County Lines.

### REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR

Looking at how different media were used to deliver certain messages during the war offers an interesting introduction to propaganda, advertising



*“The last hundred or so pages are some of the most dramatic I’ve read in the last few years”*

motivation have been revealed. Do their views on his actions change?

### The Blitz

Pupils can create their own Blitz survival guide, based on what they learn from reading *Shrapnel Boys*, plus their own independent research. Time should be spent exploring other examples of survival guides and modelling how to set out the writing (subsections, bullet points, organisation of information, etc). Sections could include:

- what to pack in your gas mask box
- how to find the safest spot in an air raid
- dos and don’ts in the blackout
- first aid tips for treating injuries

### Micky’s view

The book is written in the first person, from the point of view of Ronnie. There are several situations when he is in conflict with his younger brother, Micky (including when they argue about whether or not Johnny can be trusted, and when they’re not sure about whom to approach for help as events take a sinister turn). Pupils can re-write the same scenes from the point of view of Micky, who is generally more trusting and more likely to be led down

### Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Safiyyah’s War* by Hiba Noor Khan
- ❖ *When the Sky Falls* by Phil Earle
- ❖ *The Lion and the Unicorn* by Shirley Hughes
- ❖ *Peter in Peril* by Helen Bate
- ❖ *Digging for Victory* by Cathy Faulkner

the wrong path. It would also provide an opportunity for them to discuss what they would do if faced with a similar scenario.

### Create your own Anderson shelter

My class have always enjoyed building model Anderson shelters (detailed guides about how to do this can be found online). Designing and making a shelter can be planned as part of the D&T work for the year. Upon completion, the pupils could write a set of instructions or guidelines after looking at the key features of this type of writing. I know that some schools have actually worked alongside local organisations to recreate a full-size Anderson shelter on their school field, which would be an incredible experience for pupils (and staff). **TP**



*Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.*

and the importance of critical thinking. Showing the children propaganda posters and listening to examples of radio broadcasts (there are several on the Imperial War Museum website) will encourage them to think about the deeper messages behind the words and images, as well as who they’re aimed at and the emotions they’re designed to evoke. Pupils could create propaganda posters that support enlistment, encourage calm, or reinforce the importance of rationing, and then display them in a classroom gallery. Looking at the messages in

different types of media would also help reinforce RSHE sessions around critical literacy, and open up conversations about whether we should believe everything that we read or watch online, and why we need to check where our information comes from.

### POETRY WRITING

There are several descriptions of bombing raids throughout the book; some where the protagonists are in an Anderson shelter and some where they’re out on the

streets of South London. Reading through the passages again and recording the emotions felt by the characters, as well as noting what they see and hear when the bombs land, will provide some fantastic vocabulary, which can be used as a starting point for writing a poem about the Blitz. There are several excellent examples online which were actually written during the war by people who survived the bombing campaign; ‘That Night of Death’ by Jack Rattigan and ‘The Blitz’ by Jack Segal are two that I have used before.

# 4 REASONS TO TRY... a KS2 visit to the Science Museum

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**1 WONDERLAB**  
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**2 IT TAKES GUTS**  
Discover the inner workings of the digestive system in our *It Takes Guts* show for KS2. Continue a food-themed visit with our new *Future of Food* exhibition, exploring how science is creating more sustainable ways of growing, cooking and eating food.

**3 SPACE**  
See iconic spacecraft and out-of-this-world objects in our exciting new free gallery opening 20 September. Discover inspiring stories of human achievement in space travel and see the spacesuit worn by Helen Sharman, the first Briton in space, as well as a three-billion-year-old piece of the moon!

**4 BOOK ONLINE**  
With our online group booking portal, teachers can check availability, plan an itinerary and book. You'll just need the date of your visit, the number of adults and children in your group, their age range and any specific requirements.

## Contact:

Visit: [sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups](https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups)  
Email: [Info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk](mailto:Info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk)  
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## At a glance

+ Download activity sheets and gallery guides from our website before your visit.

+ Visit our 'Before you book' page for helpful guidance on completing a risk assessment.

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# How to teach the past PROGRESSIVE TENSE

Do your pupils know their ‘walked’ from their ‘was walking’ and their ‘ate’ from their ‘was eating’? Explain it all clearly and effectively with these simple games...

LAURA DOBSON

**S**ometimes the past progressive tense is known as the past continuous tense, which is probably a better term to help remember what it is referring to. Past progressive describes actions that were ongoing in the past. It is used to describe actions that were either interrupted or ran parallel to another action.

Let’s look at some examples to make this term clearer: They **were dancing** in the crowd while the band **was playing** their favourite song. He **was watching TV** when mum called him for dinner.

## Interrupted actions

When an action is interrupted by another action (the boy’s television watching was interrupted by his mum calling him for dinner) the other action is often described in the simple past tense, in this case ‘called’.

They **were eating** their picnic when the thunderstorm **started**. He **was playing** computer games when the fire alarm **started**. She **was crying** to her friend when her mum **appeared**.

The words in red are in the **past progressive tense**, and the words in purple are in the **simple past tense**.

## Parallel actions

When two things were happening at the same time in the past, past progressive is used to describe both actions.

The girls **were playing** football and the boys **were swimming**.

Consider how the meaning changes if this was written in simple past tense:

The girls **played** football and the boys **swam**.

If someone asked, ‘What were the girls and boys doing at 2pm yesterday?’ Past continuous tense would be the appropriate tense for the response. If a child was writing a postcard to their parents from a school trip and started with, ‘Yesterday was brilliant!’ The sentence that followed would be better in simple past tense – ‘The girls played football and the boys swam.’ Deciding on simple past or past continuous depends on what you are trying to say.

## Teaching strategies

The past progressive often stumps children when they are asked a question about it in grammar tests, but by teaching it through some of the ideas suggested below, you can help them come to understand the term.

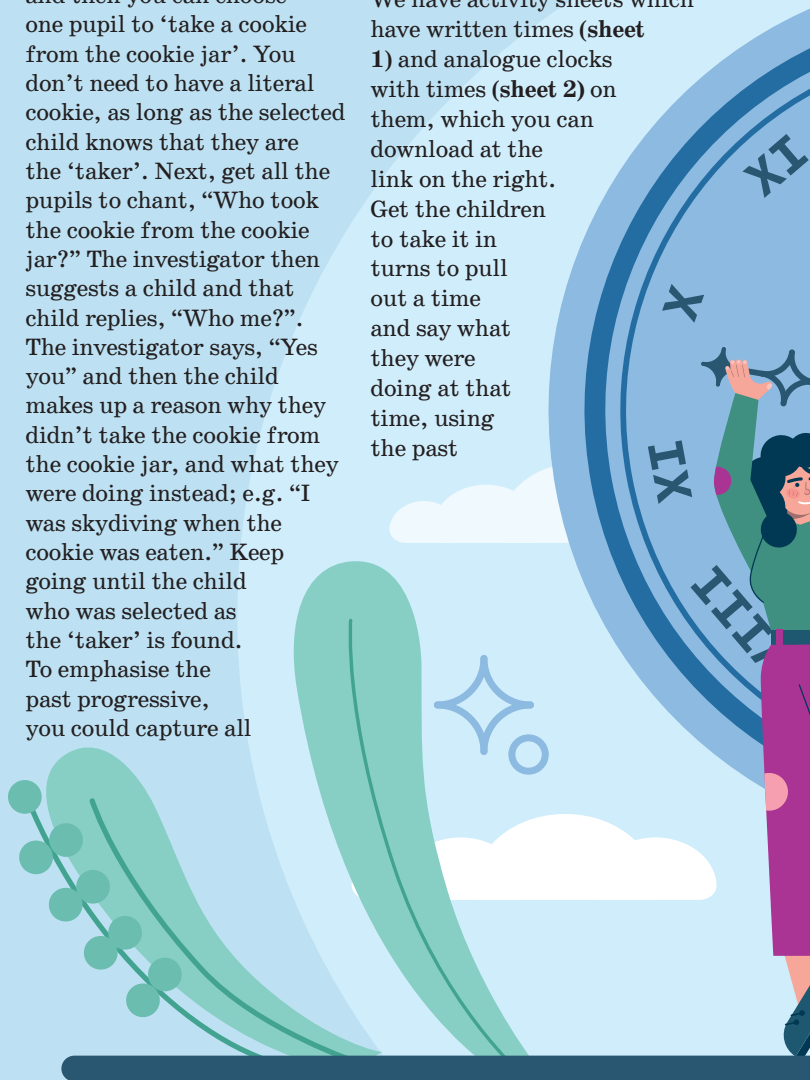
### Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?

If you have ever attended Scouts or Guides you may have played this game before. Select a child to be the investigator. Ask the rest of the class to close their eyes and then you can choose one pupil to ‘take a cookie from the cookie jar’. You don’t need to have a literal cookie, as long as the selected child knows that they are the ‘taker’. Next, get all the pupils to chant, ‘Who took the cookie from the cookie jar?’ The investigator then suggests a child and that child replies, ‘Who me?’. The investigator says, ‘Yes you’ and then the child makes up a reason why they didn’t take the cookie from the cookie jar, and what they were doing instead; e.g. ‘I was skydiving when the cookie was eaten.’ Keep going until the child who was selected as the ‘taker’ is found. To emphasise the past progressive, you could capture all

of the reasons children give, e.g. ‘was skydiving’, and add them to a working wall.

### What time is it?

This lesson covers grammar and maths! Put cards showing various times in a box or bag. We have activity sheets which have written times (**sheet 1**) and analogue clocks with times (**sheet 2**) on them, which you can download at the link on the right. Get the children to take it in turns to pull out a time and say what they were doing at that time, using the past





Use the grid below to refer to if you forget the different verb tenses. Filling in one of these grids is a nice starter activity for your class, too.

Verb	Simple past	Past progressive	Past perfect	Present progressive
walk	walked	was walking	had walked	am walking
fly	flew	was flying	had flown	am flying
eat	ate	was eating	had eaten	am eating

progressive tense. For example, if a pupil pulls out 6pm, they might say, "I was eating my dinner".

### People watching

There are various ways you can do this activity. You can either use our picture (sheet 3 in the resource download); find your own picture/video; or find a busy location to use. Ask the children to explain what the people are doing in the picture/place, using the past progressive tense. They

may say things like, "The old men were fishing", or "The mother was pushing her pram". As with *Who Stole the Cookie?*, draw attention to the past progressive children are using in the sentences.

### Let me finish!

You can use our action and interruption cards (sheet 4) for this one. First, one child acts out an action card and a second child 'interrupts' with their activity. The other children watch and write on their whiteboards what they think was happening e.g. 'Sam was hoovering when Thea started crying.'

Discuss which part of the sentence is in the past progressive.

### Tall tales

For this activity, you can organise pupils into pairs or groups. Children should

take turns starting a sentence with, "Yesterday, I caught you...". They should choose something silly to finish the sentence, e.g. "Yesterday I caught you... using your lunch plate as a frisbee". The other children in the group then have to make up 'tall tales' to explain why they did that. For example, "I was throwing the lunch plate like a frisbee because I noticed it had a deeply poisonous plant on it and throwing it was the only way I could keep my classmates safe." As with other activities, see if the children can identify the past progressive verb in the sentence.

### Homework challenge

Ask the children to keep a timetable of their week (again this could link to time in mathematics). Once pupils have completed their timetables, ask them to bring them in and give the children a list of questions (sheet 1). Ask pupils to write the answers in full sentences using the past progressive, using information from their timetables. For example, the

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**tinyurl.com/tp-PastProgs**

question 'What were you doing at 6pm yesterday?' might have the answer, 'At 6pm yesterday I was walking the dog with my mum'.

### Need some good old-fashioned practice?

Finally, if you want to build on from the activities, get your children to have a go at sheet 5. Give pupils sentences in either present tense or past tense, and challenge them to change the grammar to past progressive.

After trying out these activities, your children should not only have a better understanding of what past progressive is and how to use it, they will also know how it differs from simple past tense. **TP**



**Laura Dobson** is a deputy headteacher at a large primary school, and a former T&L consultant specialising in English and assessment.

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Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom



1

## Free Coding Adventures

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3

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2



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5



## Empower learners

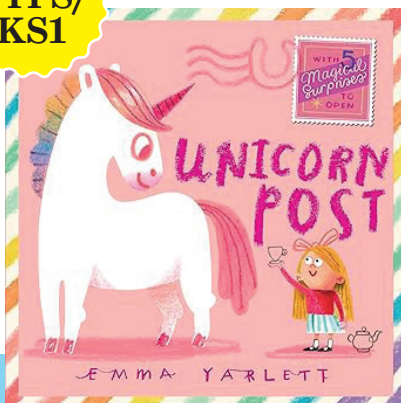
In 1843, Alexander and Daniel Macmillan opened their first bookshop, driven by a passion for reading, learning and discovery. Scientists, poets, authors, philosophers, and social reformers came together to push boundaries, and together, they created the Macmillan Education vision of today, inspiring a love of learning, and sharing knowledge and research across the globe. In 50 countries, we continuously adapt and innovate to meet the changing needs of the communities we serve developing print and digital solutions that help teachers deliver great, accessible education, and empower millions of learners to shape their futures. Visit [macmillanic.com](https://macmillanic.com) for more info.

# Book CLUB



*We review five new titles that your class will love*

EYFS/  
KS1



## **Unicorn Post**

**by Emma Yarlett**

**(£12.99HB, Walker Books)**

KS1

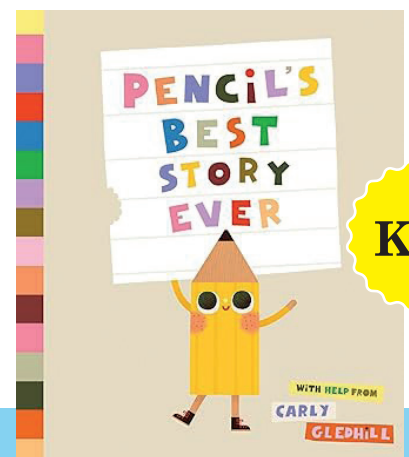


## **A Million Chameleons**

**by Rachel Morrisroe, ill. Aysha Awwad**

**(7.99, Hachette)**

KS1



## **Pencil's Best Story Ever**

**by Pencil (and Carly Gledhill)**

**(£12.99HB, post wave)**

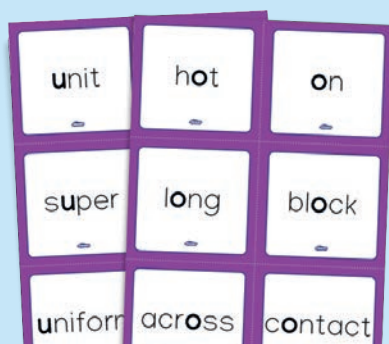
When our young narrator meets a unicorn while playing in her treehouse, she does her best to find it a new home... but where on earth do unicorns live? The narrator tries a pet shop, a farm, and even a carnival, but it's the regal castle that takes the unicorn's fancy. Although saying goodbye is very difficult when the unicorn finds its new home, the narrator learns that good friends always come back. With gorgeous, childlike illustrations throughout, and a first-person narrative, pupils will have no trouble connecting with the story. The interactive flaps add a sense of involvement, and there are cues for songs to sing along the way. A lovely read-aloud for EYFS, or story-writing prompt for older children.

There is something to be said for titles that are just plain fun. This is one of those books. Lighthearted rhyming text carries the reader through a series of bright and brilliant illustrations (the real stars of the show, here), introducing a litany of chameleons in different situations, from drinking tea (*loves-a-cup-of-tea-leons*) to lifting weights (*fitter-than-a-flea-leons*). If you're keen to use this book beyond story time, there are plenty of learning opportunities for pupils in recognising the rhymes, and coming up with their own, as well as storytelling through images; can children tell a story about the chameleons based on the pictures alone? As an extension activity for older children, research chameleons and their habitats, and challenge pupils to create their own fact files.

This innovative book is a metatextual delight of storytelling. Following Pencil as he tries to write a story about his friend Peanut, we witness Pencil attempting to keep the narrative flowing while battling sock-eating birds, wood-invading jellies, and Peanut's insistence that he doesn't want to get eaten or smushed. Collage-like illustrations add to the childlike feel, and could easily inspire a copycat art lesson. The cast of characters (including antagonist-turned-friend Bear) is endearing, and children will love Pencil's enthusiasm as he is determined to finish his story, no matter how many challenges he faces along the way. Now, who's ready for the next story? Guys?



## →→→RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



### BOOST CORE PHONICS SKILLS

Enhance your phonics teaching with these bright and engaging resources from Plazoom. They include word mats, flashcards and games, as well as comprehension worksheets, so your youngest readers can use their blending skills to understand sentences and craft responses in a range of ways, including drawing and writing. Browse resources at [tinyurl.com/tp-plz-phonics](https://tinyurl.com/tp-plz-phonics)



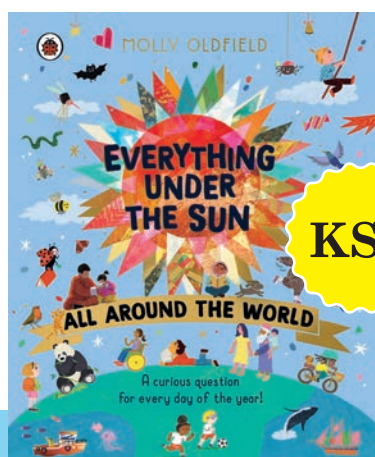
KS2

### *The Stuff That Stuff is Made Of*

by Jonathan Drori, ill. Raxenne Maniquiz and Jiatong Liu

(£16.99HB, Magic Cat Publishing)

Have you ever been elbow-deep in a crafts session in school, only for a child ask you “What’s cork made of?”, or “How do you make paper?”? Children’s curiosity knows no bounds, and encouraging them to wonder about the world around them is an essential part of teaching. Well, now there’s a book to help you answer these material enquiries. *The Stuff That Stuff is Made Of* is the new, beautifully illustrated tome from author and environmental trustee Jonathan Drori, and explores numerous plants, from wheat to baobab and dandelion (did you know that there’s dandelion in rubber?!). A great addition to science units on plants, or simply a volume to dip in and out of as questions arise, it’s a valuable addition to your bookshelf.



KS2

### *Everything Under the Sun: All Around the World*

by Molly Oldfield, various illustrators

(£27HB, Puffin)

If you’re a fan of Molly Oldfield’s books, or her *Everything Under the Sun* podcast, you’re in for a treat. The original *QI* Elf, Molly has spent years searching for answers to some of the world’s most curious questions, (Why is the sky blue? How do whales sleep?) and providing answers – sometimes with the help of experts such as physicist Jim Al-Khalili and the late great poet, Benjamin Zephaniah – to satisfy your little’s thirst for knowledge. Her latest book takes readers on a journey answering questions from children from all over the world. Discover if people can really read minds with Derren Brown, why we daydream with author and illustrator Lauren Child, and much more. It’s honestly a joy at any age.

## Meet the author

### MOLLY OLDFIELD ON FACTS, LIFE AT *QI*, AND THE JOY OF CURIOSITY



**What’s the best fact you learned when researching for *QI*?**

The first one that pops into my mind is that carrots were

originally purple, and we cultivated them to make them orange! I also learned a very cool fact about a language in the Amazon that was kept alive by parrots... Basically an explorer taught some of the language to a couple of parrots, and then use of the language amongst humans died out, but the parrots remembered it.

**Very cool. And what’s your favourite question that you’ve received from a child?**

There are so many. Children have an amazing capacity for asking questions. But there was one little girl that asked me about the fact that she had a mummy, and her mummy had a mummy, and her mummy’s mummy had a mummy, so who was the first mummy? I thought that was a great one. I’ve also been asked what noise a giraffe makes, and I was tickled to find out that they hum, but humans just can’t hear it.

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

Well, it’s designed to have a question for every day of the year, so you could always start on the first day of term and work through day by day, finding out all sorts of new things. Children also love looking up their birthdays and seeing what facts fall on those days, so that could be a fun way to celebrate birthdays together – every time someone has a birthday, look up the day in the book and see what you can find out!

Children can send questions to Molly for her podcast, *Everything Under the Sun* – find out how at [mollyoldfield.co.uk/copy-of-sun](https://mollyoldfield.co.uk/copy-of-sun) *Everything Under the Sun: All Around the World* (£27HB, Puffin) is out on 11 September 2025.





## WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

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- The importance of considering the needs of different groups within the population
- The importance of sustainability in town planning
- How to design a town map using symbols for features

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Promote creativity, critical thinking and sustainability skills through designing your own settlement, with **Paul Ian Cross**

[questfriendz.com](https://questfriendz.com) [@questfriendz](https://twitter.com/questfriendz)

Town design activities provide children with the opportunity to merge creativity with core STEM skills. The freedom to consider the ideal town design enables pupils to develop critical thinking skills and to reflect on the practical aspects of city planning, including the importance of meeting the population's needs, as well as the environmental challenges and demands involved. This lesson will also encourage pupils to engage in important conversations about sustainability and prepare them for future challenges by allowing them to connect theoretical concepts to real-world situations.



## START HERE

Start by asking children to consider what a town is. Encourage them to think about what key features or infrastructure we can find in towns, and what people might need. For example, does your town (or one nearby) have a supermarket, a school, a doctor's surgery or hospital, library, pharmacy, police station, fire station, etc? Allow children to discuss these with a talk partner and to consider why we need these features. Pupils should then share their ideas with the class, while you note the ideas on the board, on a working wall, or project them using a visualiser. Ensure these ideas remain visible to the class for the rest of the lesson, so pupils can keep referring back to them as they design their own towns.



## MAIN LESSON

### 1 | INTRO TO MAPS

Explain that children will be working in small groups to design their ideal town. You may choose to give pupils a specific location or allow groups to choose their own. Remind children that they will need to consider where the town is located, for example, near a river, forest, mountain, or the sea. How will the location affect their town design? Remind pupils to refer to the working wall (or board, or wherever else you have displayed the ideas they came up with in the starter activity) to ensure they include the key features discussed.

Encourage pupils to think about the facilities that people across the whole population might need. For example, what will they need to include for children and young families or the elderly? Remind them to also think about roads and transport. For example, they might include a train station, specific bus routes or perhaps they want their town to have a dedicated cycle route. Explain that children will also need to think carefully about where they place different features (for example, a fire station located near the river so it is easy to access water, a play park near the school, or the GP surgery near a bus stop so it is more accessible). Highlight potential dangers they might need to take into consideration,





***“The freedom to consider the ideal town design enables pupils to develop critical thinking skills”***

presenting their designs to the rest of the class, explaining the reasoning behind their choices.

Allow children to provide feedback on what each group has done well and what they could do to improve their town designs. For example, have they forgotten an important feature? Have they included sufficient green spaces?

### **3 | REVISE AND IMPROVE**

Explain that an important part of town design is to ensure that towns are sustainable. Check that pupils all understand what sustainable means.

Ask children to discuss what changes groups could make to their towns to make them more sustainable. For example, adding more public transport to reduce individual car use, ensuring houses have solar panels, including a recycling centre in the town, or having buildings that are made from specific materials. Can children also think about how they might use new technology to improve the town’s sustainability? They should then share ideas with the class, and you can add pupils’ ideas to the working wall as you go, for further reference.

Finally, provide groups with the opportunity to revise and improve their town designs based on their peers’ feedback, as well as looking for ways to make their town more environmentally sustainable.

***Paul Ian Cross is a scientist and children’s author. His first chapter book, SuperQuesters Mission: River Crest Rescue (£6.99, QuestFriendz), is out now.***

such as areas of potential flooding or overcrowding.

Ask children to consider natural habitats and open spaces for both wildlife and humans to enjoy. Can they share some examples (for instance, parks, woodlands, ponds, allotments)? Remind pupils of the benefits of including green spaces in their town designs, such as cleaner air, more habitats for wildlife and spaces for people to exercise, as well as community spaces for people to relax, learn new skills and interact.

Model drawing a simple map on the board, including common symbols and a key. Explain that children will need to use symbols to show where the features are, as

well as a key to show what the symbols mean. Model the placement of each building as you draw your map.

### **2 | GET DESIGNING**

Next, get pupils into groups of two to four to design their ideal town, ensuring that they include essential features, as well as using symbols and a key to complete their maps. Children can create their town designs on paper or via digital means (if these are available). Encourage groups to consider what features make their town unique and successful, as well as articulating the reasoning for their choices.

Once all groups have created a first draft of their town, they will take turns

## **EXTENDING THE LESSON**

- Groups can create physical models of their towns using a range of materials (e.g. LEGO bricks, cardboard, etc) to represent different types of building materials.
- Provide each group with a different environmental challenge. For example, one town in the Scottish Highlands, another town in Iceland near an active volcano, a different town in a rural community near a major city in England, and another town on a small island in the Pacific where there is high probability of flooding. How does the change in the physical geographical location impact the needs of the town? What additional considerations do groups have to think about?
- Ask children to think about what materials they could use to build their towns so that they are more environmentally friendly and sustainable for the future.

## **USEFUL QUESTIONS**

- What key infrastructure is needed for a town to be successful and meet the needs of everyone in the population?
- How can we design towns to become more sustainable?
- Why is careful town planning, including building materials, important?

## MATHS



## WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to identify the question or goal within a reasoning problem
- How to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information
- How to independently communicate a solution to a problem

# Clues, cards, and child-size Columbos...



Transform any routine revision lesson into interactive and worthwhile reasoning skills development, with **Marc Bowen**

[aglanciwwcprimary.co.uk](http://aglanciwwcprimary.co.uk)

This lesson, like many other reasoning activities I have developed over the years, was inspired by the book *We Can Work It Out* by Vickery and Spooner ([tinyurl.com/tp-WCWIO](http://tinyurl.com/tp-WCWIO)), which takes potentially mundane maths problem-solving and reasoning activities, and transforms them into captivating investigations worthy of Columbo or Jessica Fletcher (dating myself there!). The premise is simple: take any contextualised problem, break it down into individual clues or facts, throw in a few red herrings, spread them across a series of cards and set the children to work as your very own little maths detectives.



## START HERE

First, provide the children with 20 or so cards, each containing either a contextual fact, or a piece of useful information to

help solve the problem at hand. You'll also want to include a couple of red herrings, and of course the goal, or question, for the task. For example, I wanted to revisit children's bar graph skills, and decided on a context of insects, to correlate with our science topic. Our goal was to 'construct a bar graph of the insects found within the school grounds'. Some cards included '7 ladybirds were found near the pond', and 'Fewer wasps were found than any other type of insect'. You can either write your own card facts, or use AI (this will of course require fact-checking). If you'd like to use my insect-graph activity, you can download the cards and solution sheet at the link on the right.



## MAIN LESSON

### 1 | SORT YOUR CARDS

I always produce the cards for the children on a single A3 sheet. Not only does this make copying and preparation simple, as I'm not cutting out endless numbers of cards, it also means I don't lose any before the lesson! From the moment pupils spot the cards, they're rolling up their sleeves, eager to dive into the problem.

First, ask pupils to read through all the cards, while still as one complete sheet, to find the question/goal card. Then get them to colour in this card, or mark it in some other way to

make it stand out. In my experience, this can take an age for some children, but with repeated practice, my class are now adept at spotting the language 'signposts' of the question card.

Next, get the children to cut up the sheet into individual cards. At this point, I always emphasise that I'm not concerned about the quality of the cutting as we'll be recycling the cards at the end of the lesson; the outcome will be captured by the children in their books. This speeds up this stage and allows them to focus on what is on the cards. If, while working on a card, they spot a red herring (deliberately



***“From the moment they spot the cards, pupils are eager to dive into the problem”***



irrelevant information) they can immediately discard it. The result is that their pile of cut cards should then only contain relevant, helpful clues and facts.

## 2 | BEGIN REASONING

This when the real detective work begins. I typically always group the children in pairs or trios for this activity, as it provides opportunity for excellent reasoning dialogues between peers, whilst avoiding any ‘passenger’ members, who sit back and let the others do the work. This is also the point at which a purposeful hush tends to fall over the classroom, as the children start sorting through their

cards, thinking deeply about the problem and working collaboratively to discern the information that they need to reach a solution. This is also fascinating to observe, as I allow the children to employ any strategies that they feel

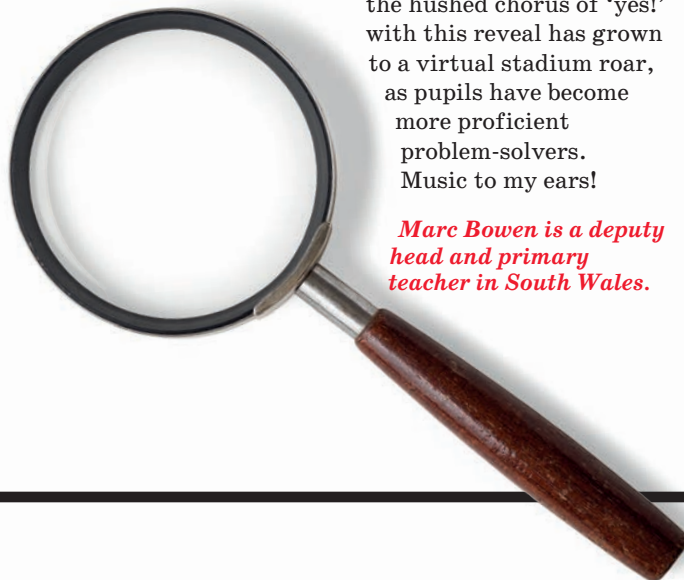
will help them: some draw diagrams; there are jottings; data tables appear; and calculations, scales and timelines often pop up! These are all really valuable problem-solving skills, which the children are purposefully applying with independence.

## 3 | PRESENT YOUR SOLUTION

The final stage is for the children to choose a way of clearly presenting their solution. In the case of this lesson, I wanted them to produce a bar graph of the most common insects found in our school grounds. This dictated the final presentation of the solution for our lesson, but in many cases, there is no preferred format. The only expectation is that pupils have to make sure they are clearly and coherently communicating their evidenced solution to the original problem.

Once everyone is ‘done’, we tend to hold a gallery session for the children to visit each other and compare solutions – often followed by a few tweaks or revisions for some, before we then reveal the correct answer. Across the year, the hushed chorus of ‘yes!’ with this reveal has grown to a virtual stadium roar, as pupils have become more proficient problem-solvers. Music to my ears!

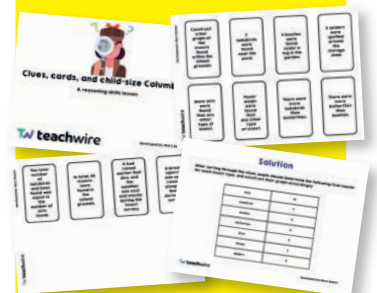
***Marc Bowen is a deputy head and primary teacher in South Wales.***



## EXTENDING THE LESSON

- If children arrive at a solution quicker than you expected, challenge them to rework their solution based on you changing some of the variables on the clue cards. Depending on their ability, this might be a subtle change or a significant one.
- You could challenge the children to make their own card sets, which their peers could then work to solve.
- Choose two different forms of presentation of the answer (both of which are correct) and evaluate as a class which might be more efficient, clear, and mathematical.

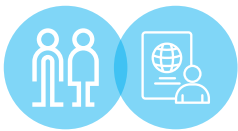
## tw teachwire



Download your **FREE** insect graph activity cards and solution sheet at [tinyurl.com/tp-ReasonCards](https://tinyurl.com/tp-ReasonCards)

## USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What punctuation might you look for to help you spot the question?
- Why have you chosen to discard this clue? Prove to me that it is irrelevant.
- What maths skills do you think you are going to need to solve this problem?
- Prove to me that your final solution is correct.



## WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- To explore and define real-world problems that matter to them
- To be inspired by children who are already creating positive change
- To identify key community issues and consider solutions
- To plan and carry out their own social action campaign
- To reflect on the impact of their actions

# You're never too young to change the world...



Show your pupils that even small steps can have big impact when you work together, with **Anoushka Freeman**



[Superkind.org](https://superkind.org)



[superkind\\_org](https://www.instagram.com/superkind_org)



[SuperKind](https://www.facebook.com/SuperKind)

In conversations with my kids and other young people, I kept noticing the same challenge: that despite their passion and brilliant ideas to create change, they lacked the right tools to make meaningful action. They wanted to fundraise, campaign and raise their voices, but the platforms available just weren't designed for them. So, this lesson grew out of the desire to help young people channel their ideas and their energy into actionable programmes that they can design, spearhead, and run themselves (with your expert oversight, of course). Let the children in your care know that they matter...



## START HERE

Begin with a big question: "If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?" Let pupils reflect individually, then have them

discuss in pairs or groups. Gather their ideas on sticky notes or on the board, and group similar themes together – these could become the seeds of future campaigns. Next, talk about what the children think a campaign might look like. As a class, or back in pairs and groups, ask everyone to discuss what change campaigns and organisations they've already heard of (e.g. Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, etc). What do these groups have in common? What do their campaigns look like?



## MAIN LESSON

### 1 | WHAT AND WHY

Kick off your journey with energy, and again invite pupils to imagine the kind of world they want to live in. Discuss what they'd change and why it matters to them. Next, explore the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (find them all at [superkind.org/causes](https://superkind.org/causes)). Can pupils match the issues they care about (that you gathered on sticky notes in the starter activity) to any of the global goals? For example, if they highlighted the wish for everyone to have equal access to the food they need, you could match this up with SDG 2 – Zero

Hunger. This sets the stage for meaningful reflection on causes that really resonate.

Next, ask the children another bold question: who has the power to make the world better? They might suggest leaders, celebrities, or even themselves. Talk about inspirational stories that they've likely already heard of, such as Greta Thunberg, as well as tales of less famous people who have made a big impact, and let them explore how kids just like them have already sparked real change. You can find a list of real-life stories at [superkind.org/change-makers](https://superkind.org/change-makers)

### 2 | TAKE ACTION

Now the inspiration's flowing, it's time to look at





## *“Help your children channel their ideas and passion into actionable causes and campaigns”*

kind of hands-on task helps pupils understand that action can start small, but ripple outwards.

### **3 | CELEBRATE AND SHARE YOUR WORK**

Now is the time to bring everything together. Have each pupil create a pledge card with a concrete action they’re committed to, to contribute to the class cause. For example, if the children have chosen to focus on reducing hunger, and have settled on setting up a small foodbank at school for local families, one child’s pledge card might read ‘create a poster publicising the foodbank’, while another might have ‘start a group to organise food donations’. Remind children that a little goes a long way, and that if everyone has a small, achievable action, together they can make a big change.

Take a class photo of everyone holding their pledge cards, film short videos of pupils explaining their pledges and the overall goal, or even host a mini changemakers assembly to tell your school community about your campaign. You can also hand out certificates to your pupils (you can make your own, or find pre-designed templates at [superkind.org/rewards](https://superkind.org/rewards)). This will reinforce the fact that they’ve already made a difference – and they’re just getting started.

*Anoushka Freeman is head of operations at SuperKind, where she leads on educational content.*

how change actually happens. Guide pupils through different types of action, including raising money, writing letters, and protesting. You can find a list of actions at [superkind.org/take-action](https://superkind.org/take-action). Can the children think of examples of when they’ve seen these things happen? As a class, discuss which issue you’d like to focus on, and then what kind of actions might best suit this cause. Empower the children to take ownership of their cause, too, writing down a wishlist for outcomes from their campaign. Encourage them to think about practical steps for achieving

their wishlist, whether that might be launching a club, starting a petition, or changing their own behaviour. Individually or in pairs, get pupils to write down a step-by-step plan to transform their ideas into action.

Once you’ve aligned your cause with some possible actions, you can try some out together, to see what feels right. You could practise writing letters, making posters and assigning roles for a committee. This



## **EXTENDING THE LESSON**

- Create a class newsletter or launch a blog to document your changemaking journey. You could include interviews, photos of materials you make, and if you’re fundraising, a regular update on your total, as well as thanks to donors.
- Revisit your action plans each term and set new goals. How far have you moved along your action plan? Is there anything you’d change next time? What could you do now to improve your campaign?
- Link with a local charity or community group for real-world impact. Research what organisations in your area are addressing similar issues, and have children send letters or emails to explain their campaign and propose collaboration. This is a great chance for pupils to practise persuasive writing and letters.

## **USEFUL QUESTIONS**

- What problems do we care about in our community?
- How can young people like us make a difference?
- What actions will have the biggest impact?
- How can we get others to join in?
- What worked well and what could we do differently next time?

## TEACHING SUPPLIES

# STABILO MARKdry flipchart and whiteboard markers



An economical, pencil-style alternative to liquid ink whiteboard markers

## AT A GLANCE

- Dry-wipe pencils for whiteboard and flipchart work
- A genuine, effective alternative to liquid-ink markers
- Pencils produce consistently strong marks to the very last stroke
- Robust and chunky enough to suit hands of all sizes
- Packs contain four coloured pencils, whiteboard, cloth and pencil sharpener



REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

Now and again, you come across a product that makes you cry, “Yes! Yes! Yes!” Meg Ryan-style. Watch *When Harry Met Sally* if you’re drawing a blank at this stage.

In case you think I’m being weird, let me give you some perspective. One of the greatest frustrations of my classroom practice was getting down to some whiteboard work, only to be confronted with a forest of raised hands: their whiteboard pens had run out. Again. So, I would issue replacements from my worryingly dwindling supply, only to have to repeat the process just a few days later. It seemed that these pens – which, let’s face it, were not cheap – dried up quicker than a puddle in the Sahara.

What’s more, for the five minutes when the ink did flow, it got all over their little hands and, inevitably, all over their school shirts. Before long, it looked like you were teaching not 30 children but 101 Dalmatians.

So, you’ll forgive my excitement at having been introduced to a genuine alternative to liquid ink whiteboard pens: MARKdry markers.

To introduce another ancient cultural reference, there used to be a story going round that NASA spent years trying to create pens that worked in space. The Soviets, on the other hand, saved themselves the bother by simply issuing their cosmonauts with pencils. Sadly, it would seem that this story is just a myth. Nevertheless, it almost exactly mirrors what Stabilo have done here.

*“Elegantly simple and efficiently effective...”*

Their new(ish) whiteboard pen is... a pencil! It works just like a traditional whiteboard pen: you write, you wipe, you write again (but not on glass, apparently). The pencils themselves are nice and chunky so all age-groups will be able to use them comfortably. Each pack contains a dry-wipe board and four pencils in black, red, blue and green. It also includes a wiping cloth and a suitably capacious pencil sharpener.

Goodness knows how long they actually last, but it’s bound to be a lot longer than the alternative. What’s more, the nature of the ‘lead’ means the marks will remain strong and

consistent until you can sharpen the pen no longer, as opposed to the liquid ink versions that tended to start fading before they eventually died.

Everyone will be glad to know that they are solvent-free and odourless.

Furthermore, the wood

enclosing the lead is sustainably sourced. The only criticism I can think of is the name. Call me picky but I don’t like the combination of upper- and lower-case letters in MARKdry. How does that help anyone, let alone kids who are just getting to grips with letter formation and basic punctuation conventions?

Rant over, let’s just celebrate a product which, like the best ideas, is elegantly simple and efficiently effective – unless, of course, you think you’ll miss the clang of dried up pens landing in the bin, or the thrill of finding countless pen lids under your drawer units at the end of term. In short, I love these. And I’m not faking it.

**teach  
PRIMARY**

## VERDICT

- ✓ Simple and effective
- ✓ Long-lasting
- ✓ Reliable
- ✓ Durable
- ✓ Economical

## UPGRADE IF...

...you want to wipe away your memories of leaky, short-lived liquid ink whiteboard pens and replace them with a more practical and cost-effective alternative.

RRP £15.49 [stabilo.com/uk/products/writing/markers-ohp-pens/stabilo-markdry/](http://stabilo.com/uk/products/writing/markers-ohp-pens/stabilo-markdry/)



## MUSIC



# Out of the Ark: *Groovin' – The Nativity*

An upbeat, feel-good Christmas musical for 7-11s that takes the pressure off teachers and brings the fun back to festive performances

Out of the Ark Music



## AT A GLANCE

- Flexible script with casting suggestions and adaptable group sizes
- Brilliant songs that are catchy, easy to learn, and joyful to sing
- Comes with prop and costume ideas that won't break the bank
- Packed with age-appropriate humour and standout characters
- Part of Out of the Ark's trusted collection of Christmas productions



REVIEWED BY: EMMA THOMPSON

Ask any teacher what the end of the autumn term feels like, and the words "exhausted" and "stretched" tend to come up a lot. Throw in a school nativity and you're in full-on survival mode. That's why *Groovin' – The Nativity* from Out of the Ark feels like such a win. It's a real lifesaver.

Written for KS2 and bursting with energy, this is a Christmas show that hits the sweet spot between fun and manageable. It's full of humour (honestly, some of the lines made me laugh out loud), the songs are a pleasure to sing, and most importantly, it's genuinely easy to pull off. Even if you're short on time and feeling the end-of-term fatigue, it just works.

One of the things I really appreciate about all of Out of the Ark's productions (and this one is no different) is just how teacher-friendly everything is. The website is very easy to navigate, and once you've picked your show, you've got everything you need.

There's a flexible script with clear casting options, including suggested numbers for each part (which is brilliant for a variety of cohort sizes, and works for casts with numbers from as low as 21 to as high as 58), a prop list, and simple costume ideas that feel achievable and cost-effective. This means happy parents, and no 2am sewing sessions required!

*"Even if you're short on time, and feeling the end-of-term fatigue, it works"*

The characters are written with real care, too. There's a great mix of lines and roles so all children can be involved in a way that suits them, and the script is filled with personality. Gabriel is gloriously sassy, the narrators have fantastic one-liners, and Darrell the Disco Donkey might just be my favourite nativity character ever.

Then there are the songs: catchy, joyful, and incredibly easy to teach. They're inspired by the groove-worthy tunes of the 1970s and 80s, and are pitched just right for KS2; they'll definitely get stuck in your head, and are a massive hit with children and adults alike. The pack also includes clear stage directions and optional choreography links, which makes everything feel structured but still flexible. The editable script is a nice bonus as well; it's simple to tweak if you want to personalise it for your school, or add in the names of children playing the characters. You get an

editable script with any package that includes an eSongbook.

All in all, *Groovin' – The Nativity* delivers exactly what busy teachers need at this time of year. It's stress-free to put together, filled with festive spirit from start to finish, and gives your students a real moment to shine. Like all of Out of the Ark's Christmas shows, it's a guaranteed crowd-pleaser and a genuine pleasure to put on.

teach  
PRIMARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Fun, flexible, and easy to stage
- ✓ Characters and songs that kids love
- ✓ Packed with personality and humour
- ✓ Helpful extras that save time and energy
- ✓ A go-to option for KS2 Christmas shows

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking to save time, cut the stress, and put on a brilliant Christmas show that children enjoy performing and families love watching.

# LITERACY

## Big Cat Read On

Collins  
**BIG CAT**  
Read On

A brilliantly inclusive and engaging series designed to bridge the gap between banded readers and longer chapter books

### AT A GLANCE

- 20 'free readers' for the transition to longer, more complex books
- Dynamic covers and clear genre labelling to help teachers and caregivers recommend reads
- Sophisticated vocabulary, plots, and structures to inspire reading and writing
- Inclusive stories with diverse characters and themes
- Variety of genres, from science fiction to historical fiction



REVIEWED BY: EMMA THOMPSON

Finding the right books to help children move from banded readers to longer, more complex texts can be tricky. You need something that challenges them without overwhelming them, while still keeping the excitement alive. That's exactly what the Big Cat Read On series achieves.

This series of 20 'free readers' is designed to bridge the gap, offering a selection of books that feel 'grown up' while still being accessible and engaging for developing readers. It's the perfect next step for children who are ready to take on more challenging texts.

One of the things I noticed immediately is how thoughtfully these books are presented. On the back of each title, you'll find the word count and a clear genre label, making it simple for teachers, parents, and caregivers to match children with books that suit their interests. The genres are wide-ranging: sci-fi, spooky mysteries, contemporary stories, historical fiction, mythology, and adventure are all available, ensuring there is something for every reader.

The books sit comfortably in the 10,000 – 15,000-word range, making it easy to help children progress incrementally.

The covers themselves are fantastic, modern, bold, and eye-catching, while the blurbs do a brilliant job of teasing what's inside without giving too much away. These little touches immediately spark curiosity and get children excited to dive in.

I found myself genuinely drawn in, especially by the science fiction titles, being a fan myself. *Leon and Asha Vs the Aliens* was a standout for me; I devoured it in one sitting. With its fast-paced plot about two friends stopping an alien invasion at their school, I could immediately picture which children would be desperate to get their hands on it.

But what really sets Big Cat Read On apart is

the quality of the writing. The vocabulary is rich, the sentence structures varied, and the plots are layered in ways that feel sophisticated without being inaccessible. These books don't talk down to young readers, and that's key. They encourage children to stretch their comprehension and critical thinking, all while enjoying stories.

The inclusivity and diversity of the series is another huge strength. Children will see themselves in these stories. *In the Castle Club*, by Helen Dineen, tackles friendship struggles in a sensitive and thoughtful way, while *The Secret Diary of Joynina K. Jones* offers a raw yet funny portrayal of living with a health condition. These books don't shy away from complex issues but approach them with warmth and honesty.

Historical titles like *Gold Rush*, set in the Wild West, and *Big News, Small World*, set during the Vietnam War, weave educational elements seamlessly into engaging narratives.

Another great touch is the excellent online resources. These can enhance the reading experience and help children think more deeply about the stories. They're ideal for guided reading, whole-class sessions, or independent follow-up activities, offering another way for teachers to get the most out of these high-quality texts.

Finally, the illustrations deserve a mention. While these feel like 'real' chapter books, the artwork scattered throughout enhances the stories and offers visual support for readers still transitioning from picture-heavy texts.

Big Cat Read On is flexible enough to work across different year groups, meeting children where they are on their reading journey rather than focusing on age. With its combination of thoughtful design, exciting stories, and educational value, it's an exceptional series for classrooms.

**teach  
PRIMARY**

### VERDICT

- ✓ Perfect for bridging the jump to chapter books
- ✓ Rich vocabulary and sophisticated themes
- ✓ Wide genre range to appeal to all readers
- ✓ Inclusive, engaging, and beautifully illustrated
- ✓ A must-have for school libraries and classrooms

### UPGRADE IF...

...you want to inspire confident, independent readers with high-quality books that will spark a lifelong love of reading.



CROSS-CURRICULAR ➔

# HUE Animation Toolbox

A super exciting stop-animation kit in a suitcase!



## AT A GLANCE

- A flexible and easy-to-use animation camera
- Supportive instructions and manual
- Easy to set up and control
- A vast array of additional animation resources
- Adaptable for different aged and skilled pupils
- Enticing and attractive packaging
- Compatible with Windows and Mac

REVIEWED BY: RUTH ASTLEY



If excitement for animation is something you want to encourage, HUE Animation Toolbox is definitely for you. The packaging of the kit itself creates a sense of awe and wonder with its brightly coloured and high-quality clay imagery. I can just imagine the faces of a class full of children staring back at me, eagerly, as they lay their eyes on the dinosaur-clad box!

The USB camera in the kit is great in its own right. It has a sturdy construction which makes it durable and value for money within the classroom. The strong, flexible neck makes it adaptable when used by pupils, as does the option of using it with the stable base and included USB cable, meaning pupils can use it hands-free or can easily create tracking shots.

The camera is suitable and accessible to a vast age range of pupils, and the flexibility of positioning and movement means it can be used with a variety of media in a number of ways, easily being manipulated to film flat 2D creations or 3D objects at different angles, or even used with a green screen.

More advanced filmmakers can explore the timelapse functions, playback speed, or even turn the camera upside down and mirror the image in the camera menu.

The quick setup guide supports teachers in understanding the functions of the camera and its uses, paired with the easy-to-use controls on the actual camera, such as the focusing ring and video feed indicator. The onscreen controls and project setting options make it easy for pupils to work independently to edit and add to their creations, taking advantage of the playback button which allows you to check your progress, and delete scenes frame by frame if necessary. You can easily

change the frame rate within the project settings. Adding music and sound effects to bring your movies to life also comes easily with the ability to use the software's included music and sound FX library, or record your own.

What sets this camera apart from others I've used in the past, is that the software allows you to introduce different ways to support pupils of different ages or abilities. For example, having taught clay animation to younger pupils, I know that it is often difficult for them to keep track of where they have placed their clay in previous frames. HUE's software has the option to use an 'onion skin' feature which means every time you move the clay, you see a 'ghost' image of where it used to be, enabling pupils to line up their old image with the new movement and keep their action smooth.

"But," I hear you say, "this is a toolbox, not just a camera," and you're right. In fact, it comes with a range of resources, such as a panoply of animation props, a green screen, animation storyboards and a clay mat. These are produced on high-quality durable card and laminated boards, and would make excellent teacher props to be used over and over again to model strategies in lessons for pupils. Copies of these additional resources are also available to print from the HUE downloadable animation activity pack.

With such high quality printed resources, it is easy to see how this toolbox could flexibly be used for a range of projects, whether it be claymation, cut-out animation or photo animation. The software also allows for more advanced skills such as rotoscoping and pixilation, making it an amazing all-rounder for a broad and balanced curriculum. The software also allows pupils to save, record and export their movies to a variety of platforms.

teach  
PRIMARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ High quality durable animation resources
- ✓ Easy to access software
- ✓ Adaptable devices to support a range of abilities
- ✓ Practical additional resources
- ✓ Highly flexible usage

## UPGRADE IF...

... you want to wow your pupils with an animation studio that does everything.

£99.95 (+VAT) [huehd.com/products/hue-animation-studio/](http://huehd.com/products/hue-animation-studio/)

# Jigsaw PSHE Primary

Everything you could ever need for the PSHE curriculum at your school



## AT A GLANCE

- A fully comprehensive whole-school PSHE curriculum
- Whole-school plans and PSHE lead documentation and support
- In-depth lesson plans and resources
- Enhanced with assemblies, celebration lessons, charters and intervention group planning
- Built-in assessment and reporting package and resources

REVIEWED BY: RUTH ASTLEY



Being the PSHE lead and planning a curriculum which meets the needs of your pupils and the requirements of current guidance can be a real headache, especially when that guidance – and the world – seem to be constantly changing. Never fear... the Jigsaw PSHE curriculum has it all in hand and can provide everything you need.

It has been a few years since I had delved into the Jigsaw PSHE curriculum and I was keen to see what had remained the same and what had changed.

The strengths of Jigsaw publications are there for all to see. The Jigsaw curriculum provides everything needed for a PSHE subject leader within a designated subject leader section. This is enhanced by whole-school provision, including the mapping of a whole-school curriculum, fully comprehensive assessment tools and documentation, support resources for teachers and CPD.

If you lead PSHE in a school where you're looking for your subject to be more than just a series of lessons, then Jigsaw PSHE is for you. Whilst Jigsaw has an extensive programme of fully planned lessons linked to learning objectives and continuously updated PSHE documentation, it also provides a whole-school ethos for PSHE. The breadth of teaching goes beyond statutory expectations and is progressive, supportive and inclusive.

The Jigsaw PSHE curriculum is about building community and an approach that integrates into whole school culture. It supports schools in developing their own Jigsaw Charter, leading assemblies that work with the curriculum, and building a community approach with a vast array of documents, strategies and

information to be shared and developed with children, staff and parents.

The learning journey is clearly mapped out into six jigsaw puzzle themes for each year. Each of these puzzle pieces is named and supported by a Jigsaw friend, with each class taking responsibility for a jigsaw piece, again creating a whole-school ethos and community.

The belief that promoting and supporting mental health is an essential part of learning is deeply rooted in the Jigsaw PSHE curriculum. Mindfulness practice scripts are provided for each lesson, alongside other resources and mindfulness strategies taught as routine. Emotional resilience intervention packages are also included.

The additional add-on of the Jigsaw outdoors curriculum is also noteworthy. Jigsaw have recognised the importance of nature and outdoor learning as key to PSHE learning and combined the two. Six outdoor learning lessons are provided for each year group, recommended to be used at the end of each puzzle piece scheme. Nature links and learning from nature have been linked to PSHE concepts, enriching and benefitting children's mental health, while learning from the outdoors, and linking nature as real-life examples of PSHE skills are taught. For example, learning about birds in their environment and how they build nests as a team, developing children's own teamwork, knowledge and skills through the planned activity.

Jigsaw PSHE is definitely worth a visit. If you are looking for a whole-school approach to PSHE which is progressive, accessible and celebrates the whole school community.

**teach  
PRIMARY**

## VERDICT

- ✓ Built in progression and skills
- ✓ Easy to access
- ✓ Whole school approach
- ✓ Practical resources
- ✓ Subject leader documentation and support

## UPGRADE IF...

... you want a programme for PSHE that does everything you'll ever need in one place.



GEOGRAPHY ➔

# Collins Primary Geography

A comprehensive package of resources for teaching geography in primary schools

# Collins

## AT A GLANCE

- A series of teacher guides, pupil books and workbooks covering ages 5–11
- Supported by a wealth of online teaching materials
- Created by experts and published by Collins, a trusted brand
- Provides full curriculum coverage and clear progression
- Includes new content presenting evidence for, and the consequences of, climate change



REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

I know there are exceptions to every rule, and one really shouldn't make sweeping generalisations. Nevertheless, here I go. Is geography not really seen as a priority in your school? Has subject leadership for geography been given to one of your less experienced members of staff, or perhaps as a second or even third subject leadership?

The fact is that the packed curriculum, together with the intense focus on results and core subjects, means that geography can be left feeling like it's fighting for scraps of time and budget. What it needs is a powerful ally in its corner. Thanks to Collins, it might just have found one.

The Collins Primary Geography scheme is a complete programme for pupils aged 5 to 11. Written by experts, it provides all the reassurance you need that this is built on a firm foundation, adding heft and credibility to the classroom practitioner's existing subject knowledge. It nicely balances knowledge acquisition and skills development whilst staying focused on key concepts and highlighting essential vocabulary. And, because it is a coherent, whole-school scheme, you can expect full curriculum coverage plus clear progression.

The programme is built on six sets of three books: a Teacher's Guide, a Pupil Book and a Workbook. These are numbered from 1 to 6 and, although Collins maintains that the books are not necessarily for specific age groups, they are suitable for ages which correspond to most schools' concepts of Year 1 to Year 6.

Essentially, the Teacher's Guide provides scheme information, planning notes and photocopiable resources. The Pupil Book sets out what you might call the content or taught concepts in a colourful and attractive way (which may include age-appropriate stories, especially for the younger ones). And, as you have no doubt already guessed, the Workbook enables pupils to apply their knowledge through various activities. There are also plenty of opportunities to explore subjects further through discussion and exercises in critical thinking.

All told, this programme offers pupils an inspirational introduction to the study of the world in which they live. As someone who is getting exasperated by the propagation of climate denialism by certain high-profile individuals, I was also pleased to see that Collins Primary Geography includes new content that begins to set the record straight about climate change.

Furthermore, the hard-copy books are supported by a wealth of online resources, such as editable plans, projectable slides and, for some of the books, relevant audio files. Of course, if you really wanted, you could work your socks off, writing plans from scratch and creating all your own resources. If, however, you have other demands on your time, you will probably find that this programme opens up a whole world of other possibilities, secure in the knowledge that you are doing justice to your pupils when it comes to their geography lessons.

## teach PRIMARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ A complete package for primary geography
- ✓ Well-presented materials
- ✓ Detailed yet accessible
- ✓ Authoritative and credible
- ✓ Saves teacher time

## UPGRADE IF...

... you want to provide your school with a ready-made credible, comprehensive and coherent programme for teaching primary geography without the effort.



# FlashAcademy® Primary

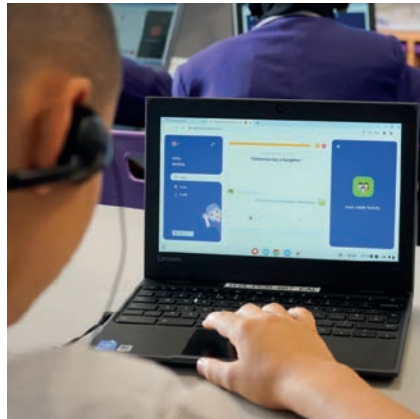
A comprehensive online teaching programme and app for pupils working across the EAL proficiency range



## AT A GLANCE

- An online EAL skills programme that progresses through levels of proficiency
- Suitable for use both at school and in the home
- Covers all four key skills for pupils with English as an additional language
- Includes a wealth of CPD packages and useful practical resources
- Built-in assessment and reporting

REVIEWED BY: RUTH ASTLEY



Are you a teacher trying to provide quality-first learning for children with English as an additional language? Are you trying to manage multiple language learners within your classroom?

As a class teacher, unlocking the world of learning for those children with English as an additional language is an essential task, but can be extremely workload-heavy. But FlashAcademy® could make a real difference.

FlashAcademy® is primarily an online teaching programme, with a comprehensive range of online lessons and skills for those pupils learning English as an additional language. It has the ability to set tasks, and a variety of skills for EAL learners, and build custom-made lessons at the touch of a button. However, it is much more than that, and has so many helpful and insightful resources and tools for teachers to use practically day-to-day in the classroom.

The primary version of the online app is extremely easy to navigate. It is bright, colourful and attractive to pupils. The layout and icons make it user friendly. An extensive package of lessons and videos are usable with early acquisition learners through to those with higher levels of proficiency. Whilst EYFS aligned content is currently under development, the programme is aimed to start with learners entering school at Year 2 and above, but would be suitable to begin with pupils at whatever point their early acquisition begins.

The learning journey is clearly mapped out to include necessary survival vocabulary and phonics learning. It is added to with a focus on handwriting and letter formation, and works chronologically, building on pupil's developing skills moving into curriculum-aligned vocabulary

which can be used for pre-teaching or supporting curriculum learning.

Sometimes programmes like this are hindered by the teacher dashboard, but FlashAcademy® is very user-friendly, with all the necessary admin controls and information you need to make setting tasks, lessons and homework as easy as possible. The assessment area of the programme is particularly insightful with the ability to baseline pupils, and then monitor their progress through proficiency bands. The AI marking aspect of this assessment ensures teachers are provided with highly detailed breakdowns of pupil's strengths and next steps of development. FlashAcademy® has also developed flexibility within the programme so that assessment can be tailored to the needs of the setting and the pupils. Grading systems are clear and precise, and could make a very valuable progress tracking tool.

The extensive additional material for teachers to use is also worthy of a mention. From the extensive array of training videos and materials that support you in accessing the system, to the translated parental instructions and printable resources to support lessons, all resources are of a high quality. The learner profiles developed for a huge spectrum of home languages are particularly useful. These profiles include background information about countries, cultural differences, key language concept differences between home languages and English, key difficulties in learning English linked to specific home languages and much more.

FlashAcademy® is definitely worth a visit! It could be the answer to so many of your pupils' needs, opening the way to their English learning – all within one app.

## teach PRIMARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Built in progression and skills
- ✓ Easy to access
- ✓ Bursting with CPD and support
- ✓ Practical resources
- ✓ Ideal for home or school

## UPGRADE IF...

... you want a programme for EAL learners that does everything you'll ever need in one place!



## MUSIC

# The School Musicals Company: Nativities

Three different, charming musical interpretations of the nativity story for younger children

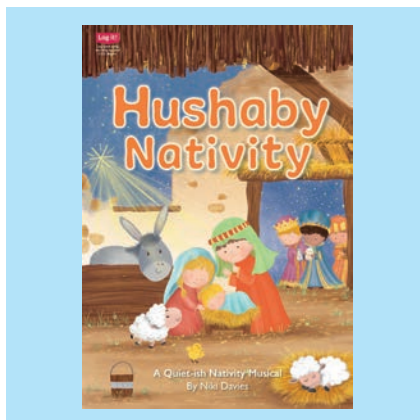
THE  
SCHOOL  
MUSICALS  
COMPANY



## AT A GLANCE

- Suitable for EYFS, KS1 and KS2
- Comprehensive booklets providing editable scripts, song lyrics and sheet music
- Includes detailed staging and casting notes
- Audio files featuring vocal and non-vocal versions of each song
- Enchanting adaptations of the festive tale

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



So, here we are, back to school. The memories of summer holidays are already beginning to fade, and if you're an Early Years or KS1 teacher, you don't need a herald angel to tell you what's plodding over the horizon like a fully laden camel. It's time to start thinking about your Christmas performances.

Luckily, The School Musicals Company is on hand to take the donkey-work out of creating a show that will inspire the children and delight the proud parental audience. What's more, they have three new offerings from their talented stable of writers and songsmiths to choose from.

For those who prefer a more traditional approach to the Christmas story, there's *Away on a Silent Night*. This is a simple retelling that remains respectful of this timeless tale's biblical origins, right down to Caesar Augustus's eccentric decision to make people travel to their ancestral town for a census. There are certainly moments of gentle humour in this show, but the overall mood is of reverence and the songs are accessible and sweet.

For a more anthropomorphic twist on the tale, there's *Hushaby Nativity*. Again, this stays fairly close to the traditional Bible story but views it from the perspective of the animals, who, for some reason, don't understand the need to be quiet around a sleeping baby. Every time the stable inhabitants manage to settle down, something else causes a rumpus and peace has to be restored. Be prepared for the adorable sight of young children spraying each other with saliva while they try to say 'Hush' with their raised index fingers not quite over

their mouths. All told, this is a gentle, calming production at a time when noise, chaos and excitement can overwhelm a school.

Unapologetic party animals, on the other hand, will probably go for *Camel-ama-ding-dong*. This upbeat musical focuses on those fun-loving, all-terrain vehicles of the desert because, as we all know, camels love to party! This fun and funky nativity bounces along very merrily, giving children the perfect opportunity to get all that 'it's-almost-Christmas' energy out, although the rather beautiful song, 'A Star Is Shining' provides a pleasant change of mood and tempo.

As existing fans of The School Musicals Company's award-winning output will confirm, they have really perfected the knack of crafting catchy, heartwarming songs, perfectly pitched for young voices. Simple lyrics with plenty of repetitive phrases make them easy to learn and the melodies often have a familiar feel without being too predictable. They have also taken care to ensure that the script is not over-complicated and thoughtfully shared out so that everyone who so wishes can have their proud moment in the spotlight.

All three productions come with two recorded versions of each song: one performed by children, and one as a backing track. Incidental music is also provided. There are comprehensive booklets, too, packed full of handy support materials such as scene breakdowns, staging suggestions and sheet music as well as a full script (an editable version of which can be obtained for a small charge). All you have to do is give your little angels the chance to spread their wings.

teach  
PRIMARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Well-pitched scripts
- ✓ Charming, catchy songs
- ✓ Speaking parts for 30+ children
- ✓ Sure-fire crowd-pleasers
- ✓ Reduces the stress of staging a production
- ✓ Options for different moods and tempos
- ✓ Simple lyrics that are easy to learn
- ✓ Multiple recordings of each song

## UPGRADE IF...

You want to take the stress out of staging an enchanting nativity production for younger children.

£27.95 RRP per show plus £27 performance licence. [theschoolmusicalscompany.com](http://theschoolmusicalscompany.com)

# 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?

Having a day where we are all just people learning, as a team, together. We might be knee-deep in a stream, finding things we haven't seen before, making up the most brilliant story or spending a whole afternoon focused on a DT project, but everyone is engaged, and we are thrilled with what we are doing. Those are the magical days.

## 2 What is your greatest fear at work?

My panic dream is always about not being ready or not being able to grab the attention of the class. But in my waking hours I worry about certain children, even years after I've taught them. My fear is that they'll get lost in the system or let down by life and, whilst I can build them up when they are in my class, I can't do that for them forever. My greatest fear is that certain children won't thrive; and I want them to.

## 3 What is your current state of mind?

I am dropping hours at school to spend more time being creative! I'm currently working on a graphic novel to explain the difference between melting and dissolving, with my fabulous illustrator Rufus Thomas at Artful Fox Creatives. I'm also working with the wonderful David Allen on a website full of drama ideas to put drama and oracy in every lesson. So, I'm feeling hopeful that my work-life balance might tip more into the 'only slightly bonkers' region soon, as it's been at 'overwhelm' for some time.

## 4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

What's a teacher virtue? Does it involve making 60 glue sticks last all year? I'm rubbish at that.

## 5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

There are moments when plans change – the guitar teacher doesn't turn up or we've had wet play and the children are wild. In those moments I say, "I know what we'll do..." I'm lying. I often have no idea at all, but somehow some words come out of my mouth, and we do that.

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

I think you'd have to ask them and it's different for every class. This year I feel I've said, "My mouth is still moving so it isn't your turn to talk," with alarming regularity. But apparently one local family still use something I said a lot to one class over 15 years ago... "My grandmother wears red knickers but is it relevant now?"

## 7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

When I meet a teenager in the shop and they come rushing up to say they are taking chemistry A Level or doing a degree in marine biology, I am always beyond delighted. That feels like a brilliant thing, especially when they are not from a science background. I've been a passionate promoter of science for the last 30 years, science for all, not just those with scientist parents and not just for boys.

## 8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

My Michael Rosen poetry books. I've had to replace *Quick Let's Get Out of Here* because I have read it to shreds. My best party trick is to read 'The Outing' and replace all the names with children in my class (and remember who I've replaced with whom as they are repeated later in the poem). Although, I also love my hand-held microscope – who knew my fingernails were so gross?



NAME: Jules Pottle

JOB ROLE: Class teacher (part-time), science co-ordinator, director of Storytelling Schools, author, primary science consultant

EXTRA INFO: Watch out for Let's Do Drama! (letsdodrama.com), coming soon.

*"When things haven't gone to plan, and I say, 'I know what we'll do...' I'm lying."*





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4



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5

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a reward trip or an extended  
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Teach children to make the most of their money through play.



**SCAN  
TO PLAY  
NOW**



**Give them a head start with smart money habits.**

Money Heroes is an award-winning free programme from Young Enterprise, supported by HSBC UK, seeking to transform financial education for primary children or those at a learning age of 3-11. Teachers can sign up for a free Money Heroes account and get access to lots of free activities, including the new online game.



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