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Hello!



And welcome to the depths of autumn. The nights are drawing in, and we're edging ever closer to Christmas. But don't worry, we're not going to bombard you with nativities and winter crafts just yet. The busy autumn term is still upon us, and we've got a fantastic maths focus this issue to help you get your pupils' confidence up, analyse where they are now, and what help and support they might need

going forward. Jo Austen delves into how to avoid common maths faux pas on page 53, while Kieran Mackle shares his pointers on how best to teach the complex concept of prime numbers to young learners (page 61). We also have articles from Gareth Metcalfe on breaking down the problem-solving process in maths (page 50) and from John Tomsett on helping children hold onto all that valuable knowledge once the lesson is over (page 58).

If you're looking for more of a chance to develop your foundation subjects before Christmas hits, we've also got a wonderful medium-term plan on encouraging composition skills in music, and guiding children through the process of writing their own simple songs. See page 26 for all six lessons, as well as a link to free video examples from Ben Connor. We also have lesson plans on developing French speaking skills and grammar knowledge, as well as an important focus on the French-speaking world outside of Europe, with a whistle-stop tour of Dakar Fashion Week (page 88); an exploration of the importance of Diwali in different religions and worldviews (page 92); and a rundown of drama games that can help children improve their communication skills and resolve disagreements (page 94).

With all this and more in the pages ahead, I hope you find something to inspire you during the chilly evenings. So grab a cuppa and enjoy!

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor

[@TeachPrimaryEd1](#) [@charleytp.bsky.social](#)

*Don't miss our next
issue, available from
10th November*

POWERED BY...



BECKY JACKSON

On how her school improved wellbeing *and* SATs results by investing in the arts

"We've found the creative arts not only open doors, but improve academic success"

p36



BETHANY WALKER

Explores the impact of an unreliable narrator in teaching children critical thinking skills

"Unreliable narrators help prepare pupils for a lifetime of misinformation"

p70



HAZELL MURRELL

Outlines how a simple library audit can transform the reading culture in your school

"Don't look at the limitations, but at the opportunities. Small changes make a big difference"

p81





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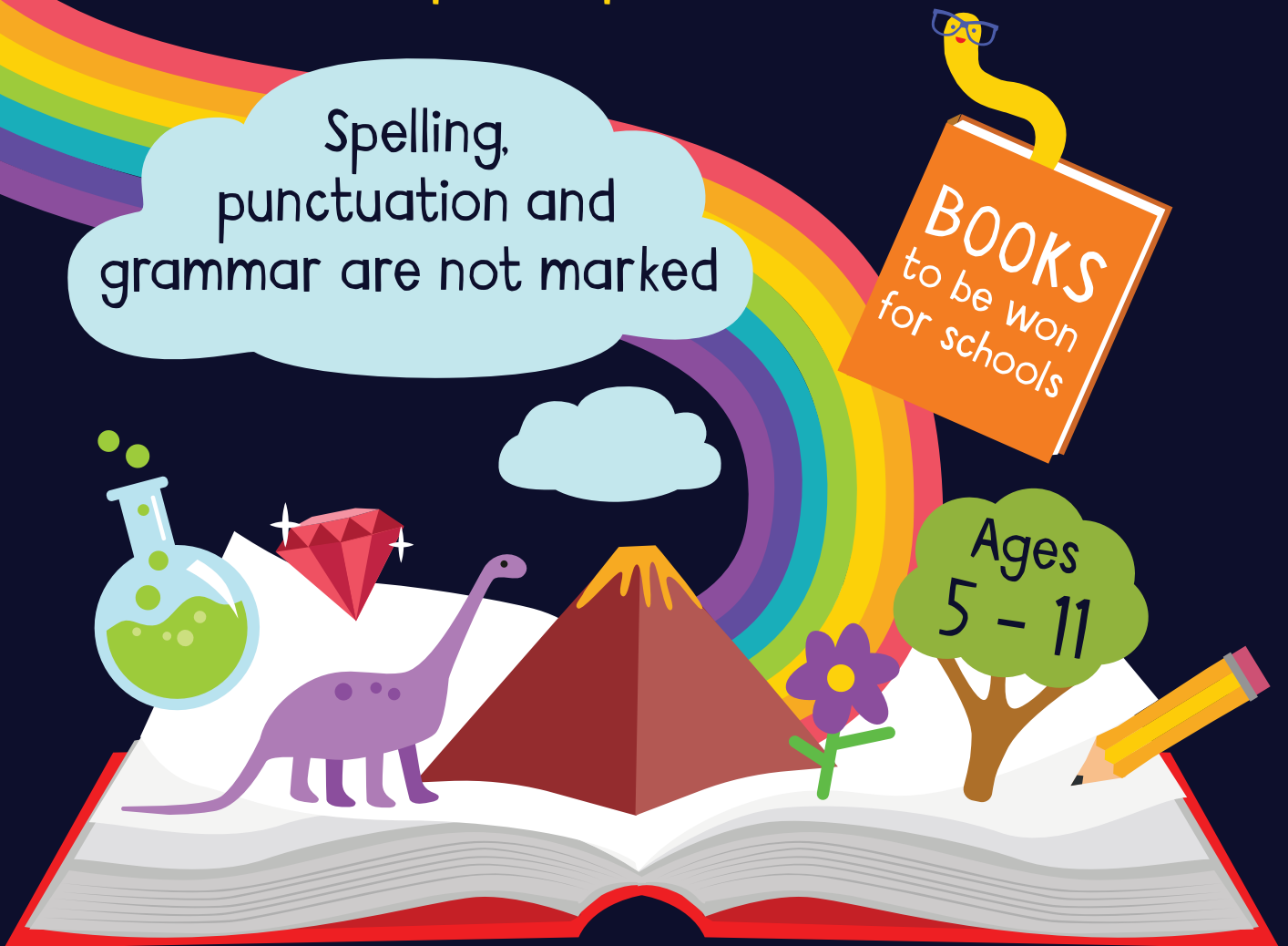


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We're all ears!

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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We want to hear from you!

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



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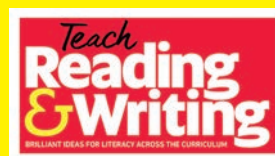
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An audit can make a world of difference to your school's reading culture, and help build a strong community

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Teach them to read between the headlines

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Mrs. Harmer, Year 6 Primary School Teacher

*First News survey 2025.

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framework



Based on frameworks created with the
Media and Information Literacy Alliance.



Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research



Adventures in nature

An independent children's video series, exploring the natural world, has been launched in the UK. The series, called *PocKit Robot: Nature Adventures*, is from Somerset-based hyper-mouse Films, and aims to inspire 3–8-year-olds and their families to connect with the natural world by looking at it through the eyes of an excitable pair of tiny aliens, who have never seen Planet Earth before.

The films are available on YouTube and on pockit.life, and the website will also host a free nature club newsletter and a resource hub with deeper dives into concepts such as how helping nature helps us too, as well as regenerative themes and food for thought, plus activities, downloads and more. Visit pockit.life for more info.

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



ALLERGY SCHOOL

Allergy School provides free lesson plans, films, assembly packs and accredited training, to help empower, include and protect children with food allergies. Aimed at children aged 3 to 11, resources are DfE-approved and mapped to the national curriculum. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-allergy to find out more.



R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Premier League Primary Stars is helping set the tone for a positive new school year with this free KS2 resource pack that supports pupils to explore respect, teamwork and managing emotions. The pack includes a short film, assembly and flexible activities. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-PTRW



TOO GOOD TO GO

The world's largest marketplace for surplus food has launched Next Gen, a new education programme designed to help children aged 6–11 learn how to reduce food waste. Games, activities and tips are all available for free via Too Good to Go's Education Hub at tinyurl.com/tp-2G2G

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The art of health and success

A research project from De Montfort University – Talent 25 – has found that early access to arts improves the wellbeing of both children and their

parents. The project, funded by Arts Council England and started in Leicester in 2019, works with arts practitioners to put on classes across the city, offering families with babies the chance to learn dance, music, arts and crafts. Some of the babies who first joined Talent 25 six years ago are now beginning their first years at school, and Professor Bertha Ochieng, principle investigator for Talent 25, said among these, there were no unauthorised absences. She said: “Of our families, around a quarter initially scored low for wellbeing, but after eight weeks of engaging with the project they are showing much higher scores. This suggests such engagement with the arts has the potential to reduce the impact on NHS services.” To read more, visit talent25.org.uk

Assessment without the stress

New online assessments to help pupils develop literacy and numeracy skills in UKS2 are now available across England.

NFER Online Assessments (NOA) cover the reading and maths curriculums across autumn, spring and summer terms, and aim to engage children while saving teachers time. The assessments, originally launched in 2024 to pupils in Years 3 and 4, offer interactive, standardised tests that are fun and appealing to use. The platform also delivers information to teachers for diagnostic and summative assessment purposes.

NOA also features interactive guides for children – Noa the Panda and Fern the Robot – who will be there to help them navigate through the assessments via videos and practice questions. Meanwhile, teachers facing workload pressures will save time, as 70 per cent of all NOA questions are marked automatically, leaving teachers to mark the ‘open-ended’ and ‘show your working’-type questions. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/tp-NOA25



NFER Online Assessments

38% of schools have a dedicated cybersecurity incident response plan*

*The State of School Cybersecurity report 2025

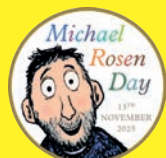
Look ahead | Book ahead



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suppliers at the Schools and Academies Show, 19-20 November at Birmingham NEC. Sign up at tinyurl.com/tp-SAAS25

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Q & A



Katherine Rundell

Author

1. What was primary school like for you?

My primary school was unusual; I went to school in Zimbabwe, because my father worked in international aid. I felt hugely lucky to be there; school ended at lunchtime, so we had a lot of time to run outside and create chaos in the garden. I loved my English lessons; teachers let us write long stories in class.

2. What's your fave childhood book?

I adored the books of Diana Wynne Jones, especially the Chrestomanci series. *Charmed Life* and *The Lives of Christopher Chant* are spectacular fantasy stories, with a glorious sardonic humour and a sense of urgency and delight.

3. Tell us about the Children's Bookshow...

Attending just one Children's Bookshow event can have a massive impact on children. It is a joy to see the faces of the children in the audience absorbing the atmosphere of the live theatre events. From the enthusiastic questions during my event in Blackpool, I could feel the depth of engagement and positivity around reading. The fact that every child goes home with their own copy of a book is such an important aspect of their work, too. For some children this will be the first book they have ever owned, and we know that can be transformational.

The Children's Bookshow is running a competition for pupils aged 11 and under, giving them a chance to win a visit to The British Library in London, plus £200 of free books for a school library – all you have to do is draw a tiger. Learn more and enter for free at tinyurl.com/tp-CB25

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6 ways to encourage younger pupils to share

Playing some simple games can help children in EYFS and LKS1 understand why taking turns is a key part of having fun

1 | THINK POSITIVE

Sharing is fundamental to our success in human groups and an essential skill that we'll continue to practise for the rest of our lives. From a very young age, children are encouraged to share – though often this comes with admonishment in the heat of the moment, rather than praise. Start instead by talking about how fantastic the children are at sharing already. Look around the classroom and point out all that we share – our desks, our colouring pencils, our rug, our bookshelf. . . Can the children think of brilliant ways they share at home?

2 | USE ROLEPLAY

Conflict often arises in situations that require sharing. Possessing a coveted item feels exciting and powerful. Being without feels unfair and frustrating. Help children explore these big emotions with a role-playing game. In 'Pen Pot Power', two children sit in front of the class, each holding a pen pot. Give six pens to one child and none to the other – then, taking turns, ask the children to add a pen to their pots. Every time a pen lands in the pot, the rest of the class cheer with gusto! Afterwards, discuss how the pupils felt. Then repeat, giving the children three pens each.

3 | WRITE IT DOWN

Successful sharing is built upon respect. In my new picture book, *Bert and the Bubble*, Bert the frog does not want to share the biggest bubble in the world because he doesn't trust his friends. All his other bubbles have been popped or eaten! It's normal not to want to share with someone who doesn't make you feel safe. A class contract is a great way to agree on the behaviours that make us feel safe and able to play and work together happily. Using their words, write children's suggestions on a large sheet of paper and ask them to sign their names at the bottom. Stick it up where all can see. Writing a new class contract at the start of each term is a great way to reconnect.



KIM HILLYARD

is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's picturebooks. Her latest book, *Bert and the Bubble* (£7.99, Ladybird) is out now.

4 | DEFINE BOUNDARIES

What does taking turns actually look like? "My go, your go," often fails, because no one has decided exactly what a 'go' means before starting to play. Give children an opportunity to problem-solve tricky sharing scenarios by showing pictures or using objects and asking them to suggest a plan for taking turns. For example: Two children and only one basketball? 'Three throws at the hoop, then pass it on' would work. A delicious cake at a birthday party? Equally sized slices for everyone! A new book on the class bookshelf? Group storytime.

5 | SLOW DOWN AND CONNECT

Appreciating our school friends for who they are and reminding ourselves of the value of friendship does more than foster moments of sharing at school; it builds community and teaches us that objects are never as important (or as fun) as time spent with our friends. Mirroring games, where we sit opposite our partner and mirror their movements, require us to slow down and respond to each other in the present moment. Learning to ask questions to find common ground or learn something new helps friendships blossom. Ask the children to interview a partner then present their findings. "This is my friend Anaya and today her favourite colour is . . . , and her favourite food is . . ."

6 | LEARN NEW THINGS

It's no surprise children feel hesitant to share when it usually means stopping their play and watching someone else have a go. Instead of thinking about what we give up when we share, encourage pupils to think about what we gain. To demonstrate, get children into a circle, and then place an object in the centre – a ball, a hula hoop or a beanbag. Moving around the circle, ask each child how they could play with the object. The catch? No two ideas can be the same. Encourage imaginative thinking; there are no wrong answers! At the end of the game, discuss all the brilliant ideas you now have.

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TEA AD 0088 04/25



Why our schools need more girl talk

Amplifying female voices in the classroom means more than encouraging them to speak; it's about respecting different ways of communicating

We can support all children by explicitly showing them how to participate in discussion, giving them language, strategies, and opportunities to practise speaking and listening in a safe environment. Practical strategies might include:

- Use sentence starters to clarify or hold space in conversation. For example, “*Can I finish what I was saying?*” or “*What I meant was...*”
- Ask open-ended, authentic, questions that encourage reasoning and explanation, and allow thinking time so responses do not always favour the quickest hand up. Challenge girls to reason aloud and show them that their ideas matter.
- Encourage all children to listen actively (being quiet is not the same as listening!). Praise both contributions and the ability to reflect on when to speak and when to listen. Involving children in reflecting on whose voices they notice builds awareness and supports the idea that every voice matters and that listening is as valuable as speaking.
- Encourage confident body language and volume, while recognising that quieter delivery does not mean weaker ideas. Provide opportunities to practise speaking with different volume and pace in low-stakes groupings.
- Structured routines such as turn-taking, rehearsal before feedback, or assigning a ‘discussion chair’ to ensure every child contributes can be helpful. Classrooms where girls’ voices are heard build confidence, agency and resilience.

Beyond school, the skills learned in primary carry into later life. When children understand that voice is linked to power, they are better prepared for leadership, democracy and community life. Making space for girls’ voices is not an ‘extra’. It is central to building richer, fairer learning environments, and to teaching every child that their voice matters. **TP**

Grace Barron has a background in teaching and school leadership, and advocates for oracy as a driver of equity and excellence.

in [linkedin.com/in/grace-barron-a94080130/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/grace-barron-a94080130/)

Student voice is vital to a thriving school culture. Without it, schools lose opportunities for engagement, wellbeing and pupil success. When children’s voices go unheard, their ideas, perspectives, and potential are lost. But whose voices are we hearing? Are we truly valuing every voice, or simply the loudest, the most confident? All too often, girls’ contributions are interrupted, overlooked, or filtered through unconscious bias. But by paying attention to whose voices are heard, teachers can create learning environments where talk empowers, confidence grows, and learning deepens for everyone.

Research has long shown that classroom talk is not equal. Boys are given more chances to speak, asked more complex questions and praised for their ideas, while girls are often asked closed questions, and praised for being quiet. Sadker, Sadker and Zittleman (2009) found that teachers are more likely to interrupt girls and spend more time prompting boys to seek deeper answers (tinyurl.com/tp-SadkerBias).

Over time, these patterns influence how pupils see themselves. Some come to expect their ideas will be heard, while others learn to hold back. Wilson (1991) found that at school, girls often gained approval through ‘*quiet diligence*’ whilst, later in life, what is demanded of them is often the opposite. Behaviours rewarded in school may leave girls less prepared for interviews, leadership, or civic participation (tinyurl.com/tp-WilsonM91).

This is why the primary years are crucial.

Children learn gendered norms for behaviour and language early. Labels like ‘bossy’ or expectations that boys are ‘confident’ while girls are ‘quiet’ are quickly absorbed in classrooms. If girls internalise that their voice is less valued at this stage, those patterns are harder to unpick later. These patterns define the status quo: the voices we hear most shape classroom culture, and those left unheard risk exclusion from shaping knowledge. If girls’ perspectives are missing, learning becomes narrower and less representative. Beyond school, silence can mean surrendering influence. Recognising who dominates discussion, and whose voices are absent, is the first step to building classrooms where every child can claim their voice – and their power.

Amplifying girls’ authentic voices requires more than creating space.





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We need to focus on phone habits, not bans

Keeping children from using smartphones in school altogether is just pushing the problem further down the line...



Around the world, schools are starting to ban smartphones – in fact, a survey of more than 15,000 schools found that 99.8 per cent of primary schools in England now enforce some form of restriction, often with the promise of better behaviour or improved learning (tinyurl.com/tp-PhoneBans). But this approach misses something important: instead of banning phones outright, these early years are the ideal moment to start building healthy habits.

Children today are growing up surrounded by technology; according to Ofcom one in five children aged three or four have a phone, and by age 11, it's nine out of 10 (tinyurl.com/tp-OfcomPhones). They didn't choose it – it's simply the world they were born into. Instead of making smartphones feel like something forbidden or dangerous, schools have a chance here to help children learn the basics of using them sensibly and with balance.

Balancing act

Of course, no one is suggesting six-year-olds should be glued to screens or scrolling social media. Safeguards

matter, and children need plenty of time to play, move, and learn face to face. Phones should complement real-life experiences, not replace them. An outright ban wastes the chance to start shaping healthy habits at the age when children are learning all their other daily responsibilities.

Primary is where children learn to cross the road safely, share toys, and tidy up after themselves. Phone habits can be just as simple: knowing when to put it down, how to focus on one thing at a time, and how to ask questions if something online doesn't feel right. These lessons, learned gradually, build a foundation for later life.

Intent over intrigue

Another risk of blanket bans is that if a child's first experience with phones at school is simply being told they're 'not allowed', the device becomes cast as the bad thing.

When schools treat phones as 'forbidden fruit', children only become more curious. They end up sneaking them under the desk, in their coat pockets, or at home in secret. That doesn't make phones less of a distraction, it just makes

them harder to talk about. Instead, children should learn to see phones as one tool among many: sometimes useful, sometimes not. The real lesson is helping them understand the difference.

Learning first

This doesn't mean giving children a phone all day. It's about showing them simple, age-appropriate ways technology can have a positive role. For example:

- Practising times tables with a maths app.
- Listening to an audiobook during reading time.
- Taking photos of nature on a class walk.
- Recording themselves reading aloud to track progress.
- Working together on a shared quiz or project with classmates.

By weaving in moments like these, phones stop being mysterious or purely about entertainment. They become tools children learn to pick up with purpose and put down again when they're no longer needed. In the process, they begin to understand boundaries and build a healthier relationship with technology that can support them well into adulthood.

Lead the way

The world outside education doesn't ban phones, so schools have a vital role and the responsibility in helping children learn how to balance technology with the rest of life, just as they do with any other skill or habit. That can look like:

- Modelling good use by showing when phones support learning, and when they become a distraction.
- Encouraging switch-off moments during playtime, lessons, and bedtime.
- Building healthy routines that make balance and boundaries feel natural from the start.

Primary school is where children build their foundations – in reading, writing, maths, and kindness. Digital responsibility should now be part of that foundation too. Since smartphones aren't going anywhere, the sooner children learn to use them calmly and confidently, the better prepared they'll be for secondary school and the wider world. **TP**

Phillip McKenna is the co-founder of SimpleStudy, the Duolingo of exam revision.

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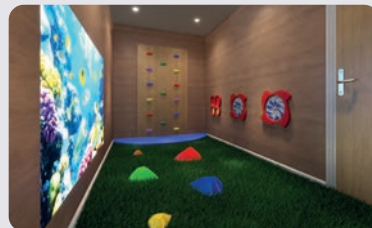
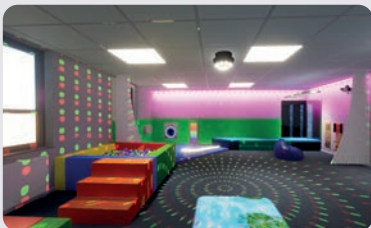
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Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send

A letter to...

Everyday heroes

When times feel tough, please remember you could be saving a child's life... just by being you, says **Jaz Ampaw-Farr**...



I know you probably don't feel like a hero. You came into this profession to make a difference – but somewhere between marking, policies and the endless requests for

data, it's easy to forget why you started. Some days it feels like no matter how much of yourself you give, it will never be enough.

So here's the truth. You are making a difference. I know, because everyday heroes like you literally transformed my life.

Statistically, I should be dead. Or lost in a world of exploitation. Or addicted to substances. I'm not, because teachers just like you chose to focus on what was behind the front I erected.

There's a huge disconnect between home and school for children with my background. Children (and adults) show up in school as either chaos navigators or order navigators. My own children have cosy beds, washed and (occasionally) ironed clothes, and parents who are available to read *You Choose* for the 14th time that week. They turn up at school with the equipment they need and ready for whatever challenges lay ahead of them.

In contrast, chaos navigators may have responsibility for getting younger siblings up, fed and off to school. They may be battling daily hunger or trying to avoid the pressure to sell drugs by a gang member on their estate. If they do turn up at school (which is a miracle

in itself) they're likely to be wearing the wrong clothes, having attempted to pull together something that resembles a uniform. I was a chaos navigator, and what I knew from a young age was that at school I wasn't a good fit. School was designed for order navigators.

At home, I became an expert in survival – how to fight, steal and lie to stay safe. School promoted a different set of values, including holding education in high esteem. Like Robin Williams in the restaurant scene in the film *Mrs Doubtfire*, I was running between each place trying to remember the exact

“Children don't need superheroes. They need you, showing up and fighting for them”

person I had to show up as in each place.

School felt more like home to me, but I struggled. One of the barriers to accessing belonging in school was language. The impact of seeing my records (or rap sheet as it felt like) at 16 was enough to make me decide I would never write any words about a child that I wouldn't be prepared to print on a T-shirt and ask them to wear.

Vulnerable. Disadvantaged. Challenging Behaviour.

These words are shortcuts for us as adults, but can be incredibly wounding when you're on the receiving end of them. For me,

as a chaos navigator, 'vulnerable' just wasn't accurate. I had exhibited more resilience by the time I was seven than many of the adults in my life ever had. In my keynotes, I've asked leaders what term they use for the children who aren't disadvantaged, and I've had replies like “non-disadvantaged” and even, “the normal ones”! ‘Challenging behaviour’ implies a Dennis-the-Menace-esque character lying awake at night thinking of ways to annoy the adults at school. A better phrase is ‘distressed’ or ‘safety-seeking behaviour’, or even ‘I find this child's behaviour challenging’.

It's the smallest things you do that make the biggest difference. It might not always feel like that, but I promise you this: there are young people alive today whose lives have been transformed because of you.

Full disclosure: being human in this job comes at a cost. It's tempting to armour up; but imagine what your life could look like if you were just 10 per cent braver. Children don't need superheroes. They need you, showing up as your full-fat self and fighting for their highest good!

So, thank you for your service to education. Please take care of your greatest resource – yourself. And never forget, because of you, children like me grow up to write letters like this.

From,

Jaz



*Jaz Ampaw-Farr is a former teacher, and a writer, international speaker and self-described ‘resilience ninja’. Jaz's book, *Because of You, This Is Me* (£16.99, Independent Thinking Press), is out now.*

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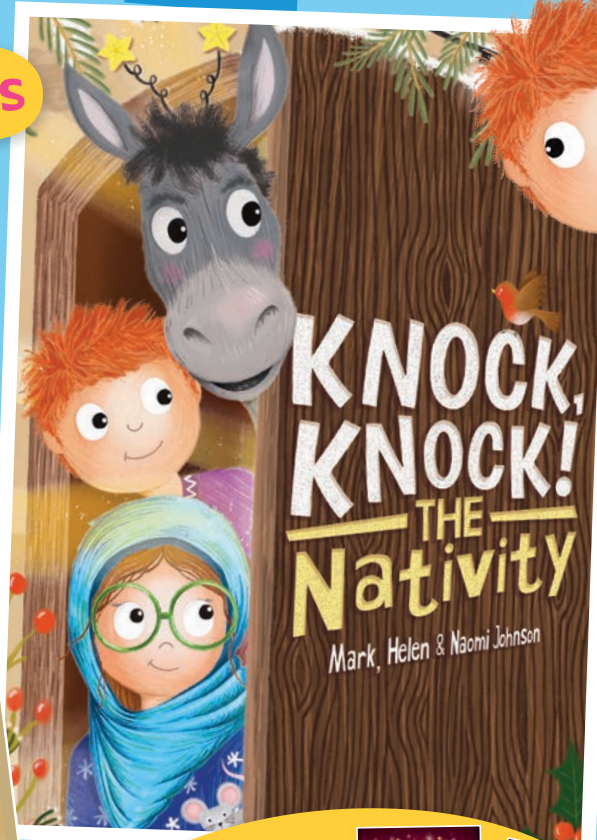
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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

Is the cost of leadership really a tug-of-war between transactional relationships and an unwavering commitment to pupils?

Being a primary school headteacher is about more than just leading an educational institution; it's like being the mayor of a small, demanding, and perpetually underfunded town. Your days are a relentless cascade of academic strategy, pastoral care, and crisis management, all conducted with a tepid cup of tea in one hand and a fire extinguisher in the other. In this pressure-cooker environment, every minute is a finite and precious resource – like the last biscuit in the staffroom – which creates an internal conflict over relationships that do not seem to offer a direct, tangible benefit.

The unfortunate truth is that a headteacher is forced to adopt a transactional mindset, with the question, “What does this do for my pupils?” shaping every decision. Time spent in political meetings with councillors or MPs often feels like a resource sink, a drain on a budget of time that could have been used in a classroom with a struggling pupil or in a meeting with a parent. There is an unshakeable belief that the most valuable use of time is in the service of the children, not in the service of abstract political goodwill. A headteacher is an educator, not a political operative, and their time should be for pedagogy, not for politicking.

This internal struggle is a constant back and forth between two distinct voices. The first, that of the dedicated headteacher, sees the time spent on relationship building as an extravagant luxury the school simply cannot afford. It argues that a successful school is built on strong pedagogy and a dedicated staff, not on charming a politician. This mindset is fuelled by a stretched budget and an ever-growing list of needs. It is not born of cynicism but of necessity.

However, a second voice presents a more complicated and pragmatic truth. It reminds you that a school does not exist in a vacuum, but is part

of a community. Ignoring the political sphere is not a luxury but a profound act of neglect. This voice argues that while the direct, tangible benefit may not be visible today, it is in these relationships that the school's future is shaped. A headteacher must be

a tireless advocate, and that advocacy requires allies. A local politician who understands the school's challenges is far more likely to listen and act when a funding crisis hits or a new policy threatens to destabilise the school. These relationships are the insurance for the school's future.

This dilemma is made worse by the need to manage your own authenticity. The public-facing part of the role can feel artificial, like a performance that takes you away from the more rewarding work of running a school, and the emotional and mental energy drain is a very real cost of the job. Ultimately, there is no right answer; both approaches are fraught with risk. The headteacher who refuses to engage in transactional relationships makes a principled stand for their students, but this also leaves the school vulnerable and isolated in a sea of political change. Conversely, the headteacher who cultivates these relationships makes a pragmatic, long-term investment, but lets go of a certain amount of idealism, and risks losing sight of the very pupils they are meant to be serving.

The choice isn't between a good option and a bad one; it's between two difficult truths. The transactional mindset is not a flaw; it is a necessary defence mechanism against a system that demands more than any single person can give. The inescapable reality is that the modern headteacher must be two things at once; the tireless advocate for their students today and the reluctant diplomat for their school's future tomorrow. And they must do so with the knowledge that neither path is perfect, and that the honest cost of leadership is the constant, nagging feeling that you are not doing enough, for anyone. **TP**



“A headteacher must be the tireless advocate and the reluctant diplomat”

The writer is a headteacher in England.

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Embracing INNOVATION

How hybrid approaches to Alternative Provision in the primary phase can support reintegration and unlock potential

AMY HUSBAND

In today's fast-paced world, online alternative provision is proving to be a game-changer for education, especially for primary students with a vast array of complex additional needs. With the rise in the number of primary students requiring extra support across the UK, hybrid and flexible online learning is stepping up to the plate. For many children across the UK, and indeed globally, a hybrid of onsite and online curricula is proving to be both engaging and effective. But what makes this approach so beneficial?

Early intervention is key

When dealing with challenges such as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) and other causes of absence, remember time is crucial. Delays in providing support can lead to increased anxiety and a deeper disconnect from learning, making it harder for pupils to reintegrate into the classroom. The longer we wait to intervene, the wider the academic gaps and this naturally has implications for a child's self-esteem and their sense of belonging. This is where online alternative provision (AP) shines. Using technology to support curriculum coverage offers a fast and flexible solution that can be implemented at any time during the academic year. With quick enrolment and setup, schools can provide live lessons and qualified teacher support, offering pupils the structure and flexibility they need, whether it's a temporary fix or a longer-term solution.



Engaging and tailored

Primary pupils thrive in environments that keep them active, curious, and engaged. Academy21's Key Stage 2 curriculum is designed with these needs in mind. Lessons are broken down into manageable chunks to suit developing attention spans, featuring interactive elements, regular breaks, and meaningful two-way communication with teachers. Delivered live by qualified teachers, the curriculum covers core subjects underpinned by three key pillars: social skills, wellbeing, and oracy. Schools have the flexibility to choose between morning or afternoon sessions, five days a week. Class sizes are small, and high quality, adaptive teaching comes as standard.

Calm and secure

For many children, the hustle and bustle of traditional classrooms can be overwhelming, leading to anxiety and dysregulation. Online AP offers a more relaxed setting, reducing these pressures while keeping

pupils connected to their education. This approach is particularly beneficial for internal AP settings, providing a consistent, lower-stress experience that helps children rekindle their propensity for curiosity learning, while still benefiting from in-person support from their school community. This connection is vital and plays a critical role in successful, full re-integration: a goal shared between all stakeholders.

Fostering holistic development

Academy21's primary offering goes beyond academics, focusing on the development of the whole child. Writing lessons are integrated with PSHE themes, turn-taking, circle time, and teamwork. Students engage in modelled and shared writing experiences, sharing their ideas with peers. The maths curriculum is centred around engaging tasks that promote sharing, movement, and confidence in key areas of the national curriculum. The reading curriculum equips students with skills

for fluency, comprehension, and inference, encouraging discussions about wellbeing, current affairs, and values.

Clear outcomes and effective reintegration

The ultimate goal of alternative provision is to prepare children to thrive in a physical environment. This involves not just academic learning but also building confidence, self-belief, and readiness to return. A combination of strong academic foundations with a focus on wellbeing and confidence, helps pupils develop essential skills and routines. Regular communication, reporting, and real-time engagement data keep schools informed and in control, allowing for responsive and effective reintegration planning. When pupils are ready to return to their mainstream or onsite classroom, the transition is smoother because they have remained connected to their school community.

In conclusion, online alternative provision is not just a stopgap solution; it's a transformative approach to education that meets the diverse needs of pupils. So, how can online learning transform primary education? The answer lies in its ability to adapt, engage, and support every child on their unique learning journey. **TP**



Amy Husband is executive headteacher at Academy21.

Behaviour THERAPY

Learn how to harness the ‘big quiet’, and you’ll improve focus in your classroom, says **Robin Launder...**

When it comes to behaviour, there are two key elements to master: presence and clarity. These facets work together to create the effect you want; when you have presence, your pupils are more likely to give you their full attention, and when you have clarity, they are more likely to understand what you’re saying. When the two are combined, children are more likely to behave as you want them to behave.

Primer and direction

A good default for giving instructions is to use a primer and direction. The primer gets the pupils’ attention while the direction tells the pupils what you want them to do. Make sure you put a brief pause between the two to give pupils a moment to focus on you. That way, they won’t miss or misunderstand the direction. Here are some examples:

- *Year 5s ... eyes on me.*
- *Acorns ... pens down.*
- *Haley’s group ... you may stand.*

You can also add a gesture for extra clarity and emphasis. For the examples above, respectively, that could be pointing to your eyes, putting down an imaginary pen, and raising your palms upward.

Exaggerated non-verbals

Non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial

expressions, physical movement, delivery pauses, body posture and eye contact. To be clear and compelling, these elements must be exaggerated. Subtle non-verbals are easily missed and misunderstood, so think of yourself as an actor playing to the cheap seats at the back of the theatre. That’s the level of exaggeration you’re after.

Big quiet

This is where you reduce your spoken volume but

“The ‘big quiet’ combination catches the pupils’ interest and prompts silent attention. You’re signalling that the content is so fascinating it demands their full focus”

exaggerate your non-verbal delivery. Specifically, you speak just above a whisper while amplifying your body language, particularly gestures and facial expressions. This ‘big quiet’ combination catches the pupils’ interest and prompts silent attention. In effect, you’re signalling that the content is so fantastically fascinating it demands their full focus.

Big quiet creates a chain reaction. Initially, a small group of pupils will quieten down and listen to you. Their

attentiveness, in turn, prompts a second wave of pupils to do the same. Very soon, silent attention has spread across the classroom. You now have all pupils attending to you.

Casual confidence

Most discussions about presence focus on its formal classroom elements, but you also need presence for less formal interactions, such as exploring an idea with pupils or having a class discussion. At those times, you need to

exude casual confidence.

The core elements stay the same. You still face the pupils square on, get eye contact and take up space, but you are more relaxed in how you do those things. You might lean against the side of your desk or perhaps even perch on top of it. Your body language will be more open and the way you speak more conversational. You’ll probably smile and nod more, too. Low-key humour might also feature. Yet, you are still very much the person in charge, orchestrating contributions and managing

behaviour. In fact, it is the casualness of your approach together with an abundance of confidence that tells the pupils that you are the boss.

Concise and precise

Use the fewest words possible and be exact in your word choice. Avoid jargon and technical vocabulary unless you’ve taught those words. Plain English is best. Do not let your word choice be a barrier to understanding.

Take small steps

If your instruction or explanation has any degree of complexity or difficulty, give only one item of information at a time. If it’s a very simple communication, then you can give up to three items, but no more than that. Most people can (with effort) hold four pieces of information in their working memory, so three is on the safer side of this cognitive limit.

Describe and demonstrate

Describe what you’re doing while you’re doing it. Whether it’s how to put the Lego neatly away, safely collect scientific equipment, or politely contribute to a class discussion, when you describe and demonstrate the process, you get two routes into your pupils’ working memory – auditory and visual. Hence, the pupils are clearer about what to do.



Display key information

Display the key information for your lesson visually, and then explain that information. Flow diagrams, numbered lists and bullet points work very well.

For example, here's a bullet point list instructing pupils how to use mini-whiteboards:

- Write your answer on the MWB.
- Turn the MWB over so it is face down.
- Put the MWB pen down.

- Don't look at anyone else's answer.
- On my cue, show me your answer.

Another benefit of displayed information is that it acts as an ongoing reminder of what to do.

Narrate compliance

This is where you publicly describe the actions of the pupils who are behaving appropriately. For example:

- *This group is silent and tracking me. As is this group. That's how we do things in this classroom.*
- *James is sitting with his book open, ready to learn. As is Chaya, as is Anita, as is Michael.*
- *The majority of you have already picked up your pens and are ready to work.*

Narrating compliance has three benefits. First, it has perfect timing. You're reminding the pupils at the precise moment they need to know. Second, it leverages social proof and thus prompts pupils to align their behaviour to those around them. Third, it helps to normalise appropriate behaviour so that it becomes a fixed feature of your classroom culture. **TP**

3 steps to better behaviour

Reduce wriggle room



Wriggle room is the gap between your clarity and the pupils' understanding. It's the space where pupils can claim, genuinely or not, that they don't know what to do. The less wriggle room there is, the less easy it is to make that claim. Presence and clarity will help you close that gap.

Just-in-time reminding



The best time to remind pupils of what to do is just before the required behaviour – this is called just-in-time reminding. Limit yourself to three pieces of information, so you don't cause cognitive overload.

Check for understanding



There are many ways to check for understanding (mini whiteboards, thumbs up or down, traffic lights, etc), but the most common is random sampling. That is, you get one or two pupils to explain in their own words what it is you've just said. It's helpful to choose a pupil who doesn't always pay as much attention as they might.



Robin Launder is a behaviour management trainer and speaker. His new

book, *Brilliant Behaviour in 60 Seconds or Less* (£18.99, Routledge), is out now.

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Reclaimed LESSONS

You don't need shiny new resources for an engaging and lively curriculum – all it takes is a bit of creativity with what you've already got, says **Anderley Hampson**

It was Christmas term 1988, I was in my probationary year at a primary school in Hounslow, and I was assigned management of the reindeer for the nativity play. I had thirty sets of antlers to conjure up. Cut to an afternoon of polythene sheeting on the classroom floor, overalls on, and sixty cardboard antlers cut out and painted by happy seven-year-olds; it was all sorted (or so I thought). However, it soon transpired that the weight of the paint on the slightly flimsy cardboard made the antlers bend and I was left with a class of children with dachshund-ear headbands instead of jaunty antlers. That night I dreamt the solution: drinking straws! Every day, each child had a carton of milk given to them at school – and with it, a drinking straw. Over the next two days, the children taped their drinking straws to their headbands and, hey presto, we had a full herd of smartly antlered reindeer.

Future years saw similar adaptations; like the rainforest of paper-feathered parrots made out of loo rolls; saucepan drum kits; and hobby horses crafted from donated broom handles with stuffed socks for heads. It was practical, cheap, fun, inclusive and educational.

Move forward a few decades to our world of tech and gadgets. The inventive and budget-aware teacher knows that, although it is essential to move with the times, traditional and practical core equipment is still at the heart of supporting healthy developmental skills.



“A little bit of imagination can transform much-loved staples”

With a little bit of imagination, already-on-hand resources can offer just as much excitement, play and exploration for learning across the curriculum as anything new.

For example:

- **Playground markings.**

A simple hopscotch grid, playground number square, Snakes and Ladders markings, or painted clock face is such a great way to get to grips with addition, division, multiplication, subtraction, and time through active play. All this learning is inspired by resources that the children associate with play and free-thinking, thus blurring the (sometimes daunting) distinction between formal lessons and playtime.

- **Readily available staples**

– like hoops, beanbags, jingle frogs, skipping ropes and balance benches – can have a second life as maths, creative writing and music resources. For example, can pupils describe the feeling and sounds of the

beanbag as they scrunch it with their fingers and let it thump on the floor? Or, try stamping a rhythm (choose a simple, well-known song) by jumping over a long skipping rope, and see if the children can embellish it with handclaps and jingle frog melodies.

- **A fixed trim trail** is also a common feature in primary school play areas, offering endless fun and helping children to develop their balance during breaktime. What if it were to become a treacherous Amazon rainforest rope bridge that needs to be traversed, or a rickety plank leading to a pirate ship, or a narrow path through crevasses in the Arctic? How amazing to experience the challenge before settling down to write about it, or sketch a map? Inexpensive portable sections plus mobile goal posts can be added (and used indoors) to refresh ideas.

- **The school hall** doesn't just have to be for PE, drama and lunch. Encourage

pupils to arrange the PE balance benches and floor mats as a maze, seats on a bus, islands in a lake, hot and cold zones, or different planets. This will inevitably involve teamwork skills; learning to articulate and share plans; development of spatial awareness; the improvement of practical gross motor skills; learning to look at things from a different perspective; and scaffolding imaginative ideas. Suddenly, there is a real purpose to creative thinking: maps become physically interactive, and each child can participate and contribute within their own capability, whilst learning by watching what others come up with.

This dynamic approach can engage the child who previously struggled with creative thinking, did not 'get' geography, or was limited by the confines of pen, paper, spelling and fine motor skills, while stimulating the already-thriving child to take their learning to the next level.

Whilst new equipment and the wonders of modern technology offer a multitude of benefits, don't forget to look at the resources your school already has, and breathe new life into these much-loved staples. **TP**



Anderley Hampson is a former teacher with 35 years' experience, and is now a

copywriter for Sportsafe.

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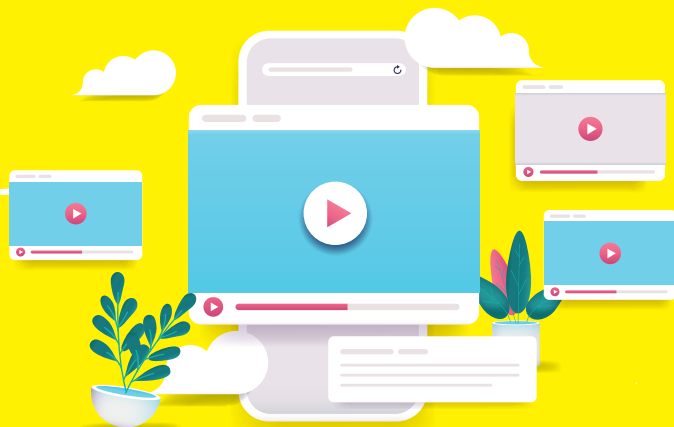
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WEEK 1

Learning objective

- Can children imitate a simple body percussion pattern?

Begin with a simple call-and-answer clapping game. This is an effective way to introduce the concept of rhythm and develop pupils' understanding of body percussion. Start by introducing a 'four-pulse rhythm'. This means counting four steady pulses out loud (1, 2, 3, 4). It is useful to stamp your feet, nod your head, or move side to side to keep these beats steady. Once the children are confident with moving/counting along with the pulse, clap

some rhythms for the pupils to copy. These can start as four steady beats, mimicking the pulse, but then bring in different, more complicated rhythms. Discuss rhythm being a mixture of 'long' and 'short' beats; when clapping, this means leaving a longer gap between claps. For example, start with four long beats (1, 2, 3, 4) and then mix in some shorter beats (1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and), etc.

Assess whether the majority of the class is comfortable copying these. If this is the case, expand the rhythms to including other body percussion rather than just clapping. Use knee taps, foot stomps, chest taps, or even cheek taps to make different rhythms.

If you want to extend the learning,



Composing music is no longer the reserve of conservatoire-educated classical musicians. The rise of music technology, as well as the popularity of social media, has created opportunities for bedroom musicians to become global superstars; composing music is a genuine career path, with the industry creating over £6bn for the UK economy. This means we need to teach our pupils about it. But don't panic if you're not a specialist! You can break the process down into simple steps; nobody is asking teachers to show their pupils how to create the next concerto or symphony and there is no expectation for every six-year-old to be as precocious as Mozart. However, these initial building blocks are vital for pupils to progress into secondary education.

try playing follow the leader: sit pupils in a circle and ask one child to be the 'leader'. They create a simple body percussion pattern for the rest of the class to imitate. The role of leader is then passed around the circle.



Assessment

Can individual pupils repeat simple body percussion rhythms? When the whole group is clapping, watch/listen out for each child and identify pupils not able to repeat the rhythm effectively.



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- Can children combine body percussion to create a simple composition?
- Pupils should also be able to work with a partner to take it in turns to perform their composition.

Start by reminding the pupils about the previous lesson's learning on pulse, rhythm and body percussion. Warm up by repeating the body percussion imitation game or the 'follow the leader'. Tell the children that a composer is someone who makes a brand-new piece of music and that anyone can be a composer; in fact, they are going to become one today and invent a piece of music that no-one else has ever written!

Put the children in pairs, and give each pair eight small pieces of paper. Ask them to write down or draw pictures for every type of body percussion they can think of.





If they run out of ideas, they can repeat some. Ask them to rearrange the pictures into an order. Can they ‘perform’ their composition? If they aren’t happy with their composition, they can just rearrange the papers, or turn them over to draw something new. Once they have agreed on an order, they can write the numbers 1-4 on the pieces (two sets).

Ask for volunteers to perform their composition. Count the four pulses with the rest of the class, while the ‘composers’ perform. Ensure that children are playing each beat to the pulse, as this is an important skill.



Assessment

Walk around the room as pupils develop their ideas. Listen in and ask questions about what decisions they’re making. Ask pairs to perform in this lower-risk environment so that you can listen to each pair in turn without the rest of the class listening.

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WEEK 3 Learning objective

- Can children combine four notes to create a simple melody?

.....

Using a glockenspiel or xylophone, demonstrate the difference between low

and high pitch notes. Explain that pitch is how high or low a note is and that vibrations make the pitch of a note. Larger keys or instruments make slower vibrations, which results in lower notes, and vice versa. It can help to hold the instrument on its end so that the shorter, higher keys are at the top and the longer, lower keys are at the bottom.

Next, provide one glockenspiel/xylophone per pair, and talk the children through the different keys. Whenever you give out any instrument, give pupils a chance to make noise! They will want to, whether you want them to or not. I always start every practical instrument lesson with ‘Seven Seconds of Noise’. The children have seven seconds to make as much noise with the instrument as they want, while you stand with your fingers in your ears! After those seven seconds, use a hand signal to stop the noise. From now on, they only play when you allow them to.

Now, back to the lesson! Point out the letter names (which are usually printed on the keys of the instrument). Ask pupils to play each note one at a time as you say the name. Once the children are used to the keys and the letter names, give them four pieces of paper. Ask them to choose four notes (notes could repeat) to make a four-letter phrase. If the letters are there, they could use their initials, pets’

names, favourite food, or just choose four random letters. They can rearrange these and try playing them. When in this exploration phase, I ask the children to turn their beaters the wrong way around, so they are playing with the thin ‘handle’, which makes a quieter sound. Watch out for children just hammering random notes and ensure that they are experimenting with their four notes. Once everyone is well practised, ask for volunteers to perform their ‘compositions’.

Get the children to write their names on the paper to save for next lesson. This is Melody A.



Assessment

Walk around as pupils develop their compositions. Listen in and ask questions. Correct any children playing without purpose and make suggestions to improve.

.....



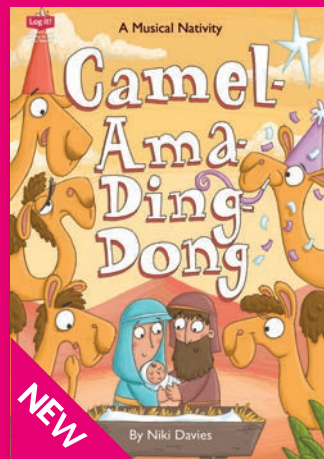
WEEK 4 Learning objective

- Can children perform a repeating pattern?

.....



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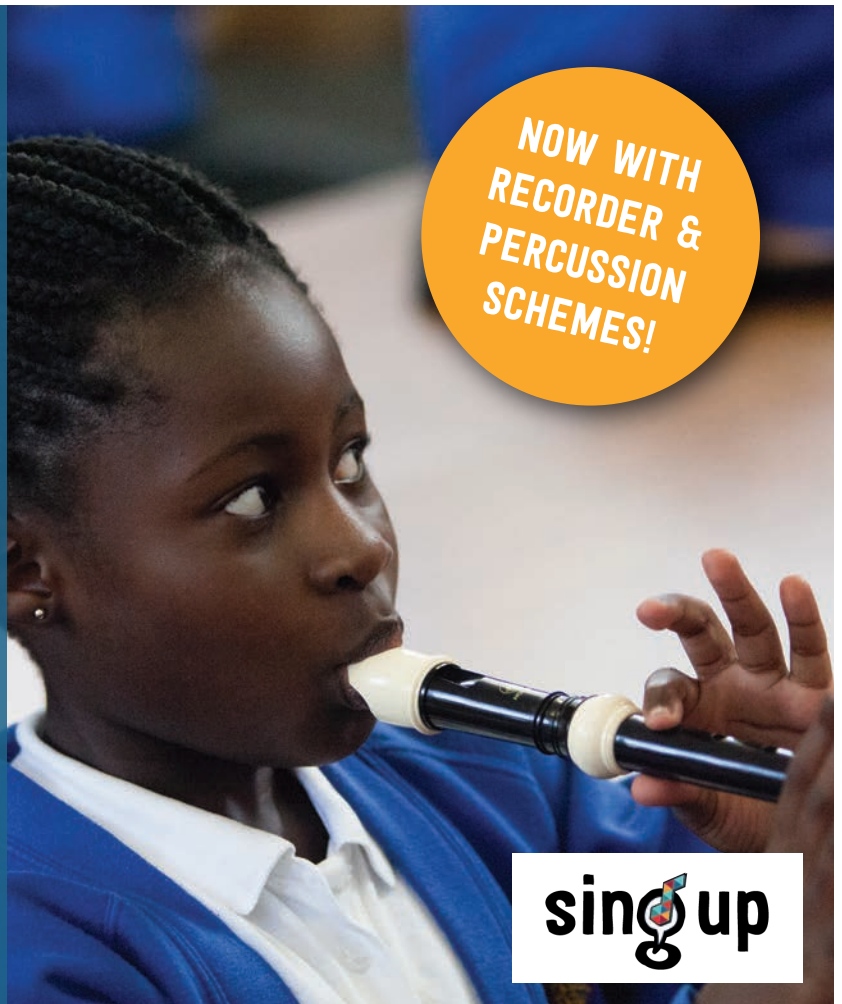
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Recap the previous lesson and the importance of pitch. Demonstrate again the high and low notes on the xylophone. Demonstrate

playing two different four-note melodies on the glockenspiel, for example **A, D, G, A** and **C, C, G, E**. Demonstrate moving between the first and second melodies (usually named Melody A and Melody B). Try to stick to a four-beat pulse. Ask the children to think about what is different about each (just the melody line). Explain that most pieces of music don't have just one melody, but often have at least two (ABA).

Provide four more pieces of paper. Ask the children to develop a new melody with four different notes. Challenge them to use notes they haven't used before. Once they have decided on four notes, have them write these down and number them 1-4. This is Melody B. Can the children now play Melody A (from last lesson) and then Melody B (their new composition)? Count 1-4 or have a metronome on a screen or interactive whiteboard so children can make sure their composition fits the four-beat pulse as introduced in Lesson 1.



Assessment

As with any practical lesson, listen in to their development phase and support the learning. Are pupils playing the 4/8 notes they have written down?



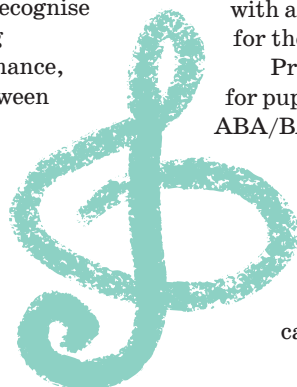
WEEK 5

Learning objective

- Can children practise their composition?

As children begin to build confidence in playing the glockenspiel, developing their composition and performing their compositions, they need to recognise the importance of practising to create a seamless performance, especially when moving between two different melodies.

Provide children with an extended period to practise. If pupils are struggling to comprehend the layers of melody, you can explain that they're like a sandwich – one melody is



the bread, and the other melody is the filling. Ask them to decide which melodies will be where in their 'melody sandwich'. They could play Bread (A) Filling (B) Bread (A), or vice versa.



Assessment

You've guessed it, listen in. This is a crucial part, as pupils need to make sure they are playing the same thing over and over to get consistency.



WEEK 6

Learning objective

- Can children perform their composition to an audience?

Tell the children that they will be performing their compositions to the class. Create a 'stage' at the front with a 'special' glockenspiel for the performers to use.

Provide a final opportunity for pupils to practise their ABA/BAB melodies.

When it comes to the performances, remind the children what a good audience looks and sounds like. Ask them to listen to each performance carefully, and to think about

a positive and an improvement for each pair. Have pupils draw their names from a hat or use a random name generator to decide in which order the pairs will play. You will know your class best on how to handle pupils who will find this performance hard – make adjustments where necessary. However, performance is an important part of the national curriculum, so try to give each child the opportunity to have a go. Ask each pair to perform, and then give a few children the opportunity to make their positive/improvement comments. If possible, record the performances as evidence or to share with families and carers.



Assessment

Use the performances or recordings to assess which children can perform a simple ABA composition, within a four-beat pulse. **TP**



has been teaching for 13 years in various schools.

Ben Connor is a deputy headteacher at a primary school in Bury, Greater Manchester. He is a trained music specialist and

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How I do it

Introduce pupils to felting – and develop teamwork skills – with this collaborative project

MANDY BARRETT

1

Show the children the size of the tuff tray and look at samples of felted fabrics. Explain that they are going to work collaboratively to create a piece of artwork using felt tops. Look at the fibres and use the senses of touch, smell and sight to describe the material. Discuss that natural felt tops are from a sheep fleece. The children can work together in groups to design a picture they would like to create, carefully considering colour choices.



Over the past few years, we have developed our textiles offer in school and linked this to mindfulness and wellbeing. Often, textile work is incredibly tactile and lends itself to contributing towards calming classroom moments, particularly with peers. It's with this in mind that we have made large-scale felt pieces using a tuff tray as a base for creating. These lessons have succeeded in teaching our children about the tradition of felt-making and collaboration, as well as the joy of making with your hands.

2

Line the bottom of a large tuff tray with netting. This creates a rough surface underneath the felt, which will help to fix the felt down, once pupils are happy with their pictures. Use a layer of felt tops to create a base for the image. We used a layer of white. Pull the fibres apart and gently layer the felt in different directions, this will help to give it strength. Ensure even coverage all over the tuff tray, creating a bouncy, fluffy layer approximately 10cm thick. Children took it in turns in small groups to do this part of the process.

Once the base layer is complete, use different coloured felt tops to create the desired image on top. Gently pull the fibres apart and layer to create the desired image, overlapping colours and twisting shapes where needed. The children can work in smaller groups to work on the detail in the image, looking carefully at the designs. We have created landscapes linked to geography topics and flowering plants linked to science.

3

4

Add another layer of netting to the top of the felt pile (which should be around 15cm tall, springy and fluffy)

and gently add warm water and washing-up liquid to the felt, ensuring all the felt tops are wet. Gently begin rubbing the felt to agitate the fibres. The children will notice foam and bubbles appearing on the surface of their image. They can work together to rub the felt in different directions, which can take up to an hour (they can listen to music while doing this). The net on either side of the felt will help the fibres to fuse together.



Test that the fibres have successfully felted together by carefully peeling back the netting and pulling the felt. It should feel firm and the fibres should feel bonded together. At this stage more rubbing may be required. If it feels ready, remove the large felted piece from the tuff tray, along with the netting, and rinse under cold water, until the bubbles disappear. Gently roll and rub the felt in a sausage shape until the water runs clear. Remove the netting, roll out the felt and leave the artwork to dry.

5



Mandy Barrett is an art specialist teacher working at Gomersal Primary School in Cleckheaton.

 gomersalprimaryschoolart.blogspot.com

 @arty_mandy

 @GomersalArt

Talk the TALK

Embedding oracy skills into history lessons will take enquiries to the next level (and support all your other subjects!), says **Stuart Tiffany**

Take a second and think back to your time in history lessons at primary school. Were you an active or passive participant? Something I frequently hear when lecturing or working with schools, is that those who had a negative impression of history during their own schooling remember it only as a load of facts and figures. Whilst dates and facts are important parts of studying the past, there is so much more to be gained from history than that. In fact, if we reduce the subject to a list of isolated numbers and rote details, we have very much missed the point.

Two key things we need to include to add meaning to facts and dates, are a narrative arc to provide a sense of cohesion and context, and a purpose to the event, e.g. what happened? How do we know? What impact did that have in the short or long term? Why is this event an important point in history? This is where history can come alive; where we can debate the narrative and purpose of our facts and figures, and work to fill in the gaps they leave.

What if...

This is exactly why oracy is such a fundamental part of effective history teaching. History has always been both a written and an oral medium, and our ability to discuss and debate is central to understanding. (The work of the Shanahans on disciplinary literacy identifies the nuances of communication in several foundation subjects if you'd

like to read more on the topic: tinyurl.com/tp-Shanahans).

Historical enquiry begins with a question or assertion. This provides learners with a clear emphasis on what they are endeavouring to find out; in the context of narrative, the enquiry question can be viewed as the title of the story we are trying to tell. We can then break this into sub-enquiries, which

On the record

The crux here is to make sure that children understand that differing interpretations are part of history, and therefore discussions and debates take place at even the highest levels of scholarship. This particularly comes to the fore when investigating evidence, because not all evidence carries equal weight. It is vital, then, that we teach our

pupils how to express their opinions, and that it is fine to be wrong, or to change their minds if someone else provides an evidentially stronger claim than they have. The key term I like to introduce to my classes in this instance is *discerning*; they need to be able to discern what information to express, and how.

This all leads to rich conversations, and the ability to use evidence to strengthen their claims or accounts. Your role as teacher is to

“If we reduce history to a list of numbers, we have very much missed the point”

function as the headings of the chapters of our story. However, if we're not careful, it's easy for children to veer away from a clear narrative and into boggy ground.

When posing the enquiry question, then, we need to actively encourage children to unpick it, to ensure that they know exactly what answers they're looking for. This provides an opportunity for pupils to think aloud in groups or pairs, and to work through their own narratives about what they think might have happened. Then, at various stages throughout the lesson, we can circle back to the enquiry question and review what knowledge children have acquired so far that might be pertinent to the answer. It's important that pupils understand that different perspectives are plausible from the current evidence base.



guide pupils to reflect on their learning, and to provide opportunities to deepen thinking by challenging them through questions, and playing devil's advocate (the fun part!) to outline the gaps in logic or evidence they might be able to fill with further research.

Oracy in practice

Over the last two years, I have been teaching in UKS2 at a school in North Leeds. Something we identified quite early on was that the children could state facts, but they didn't think to extend those facts by providing an explanation as to the power of the evidence. We found that we needed to scaffold

their thinking, and help them develop greater fluency to be able to answer questions in depth. Throughout the two years we've been focusing on an oracy approach, the children have improved their ability to go beyond a statement of fact. The school now uses the same model across every unit of history, and – where appropriate – in geography, too.

So, how did we develop this approach? It began with some reflections on the nature of history lessons. We realised that in English, we provided WAGOLLS to support pupils' understanding of a high-quality answer, and in maths, we used faded

scaffolds to progressively transfer the thinking from teacher to pupil. This led us to question why we weren't using this kind of support system across the foundation curriculum, too. The answer was simply that we hadn't considered doing so!

Now, the learning is heavily scaffolded early on in the unit, and guides children through each stage of answering their enquiry questions, including the vocabulary choice at both substantive and disciplinary levels. The scaffold is then faded away over time in a similar way to maths and English. Because this model is used across units and subjects, it provides ample opportunity for children to get to grips with both oral and written answers.

By seeking out these opportunities to engage with the contested nature of the past, and to support pupils to grasp meaning through the enquiry process, we can develop children's understanding of history as it's discussed and deliberated in the real world, and we get the added benefit of developing pupils' ability to express themselves clearly and sequence their thinking. This not only benefits children's understanding of history, but improves their engagement with the rest of the curriculum, too. **TP**



*Stuart Tiffany is a primary teacher, history CPD provider and consultant. He is also the author of *Mr T Does Primary History* (£21.99, SAGE).*

@Mr_S_Tiffany

mrtdoeshistory.com

ORACY ACTIVITIES



FIRE!

If you're teaching about the

Great Fire of London, there is a plethora of source material children can engage with beyond Samuel Pepys' diary. Why not place two paintings on tables and guide children to identify the narrative they can observe? You can find some paintings on the Fire of London site at tinyurl.com/tp-FoL. Then, get children to partner up with someone who studied the other painting to compare and contrast. Ensure pupils understand it is not a matter of right and wrong, but of different interpretations.



WRITTEN BY THE VICTORS

When teaching

about the Viking raid on Lindisfarne, begin by teaching the children about the raid itself, and then focus on who recorded the raid. Ensure children are aware we have a limited picture of this event. Then, break the class into different groups (monks, Anglo-Saxon kings, Vikings) and then discuss what their reaction to the raid may have been and why. Ensure children support their response with logical underpinnings.



MAKE YOUR CASE

Finally, my favourite is to

play the fool in the lesson and offer an assertion that is intentionally 'wrong' or a justification which is intentionally 'weak'. Children are then tasked to debate the weakness of my assertion and either challenge it or change the evidence to strengthen.

Q&A

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A not-so-trivial PURSUIT

What could we possibly learn about effective teaching from game design?
As it turns out, quite a lot, says **Shehneila Saeed**

As teachers, we often spend years chasing pupil engagement. But what if we could utilise the very thing we try to stop them doing? Play intrinsically motivates children to challenge themselves, solve problems, and build skills. But somewhere along the line, we decided that learning had to be serious to be valuable. Play became for playtimes only. The result? Generations of disengaged children.

From building blocks and dolls, to puzzles and video games, play is how children explore, destress, and engage. It's not a waste of time; it's the foundation of deep cognitive development. And not just for the EYFS; as we develop, we don't stop learning through play – schools just stop teaching that way.

So... what exactly is *play*? “To play is to engage,” writes Ackerman et al. (2010). It's not necessarily about outcomes; it's about exploration, experimentation, curiosity for its own sake. And that's good for everyone, not just children. The games industry excels at onboarding players into new systems without losing their interest. Imagine if education were designed like that – intriguing, exploratory, and rewarding.

You've likely all heard the terms play-based learning, game-based learning, and gamification, but what do they really mean, and how can we use them to interest our pupils? Here are some



activities I use to bring each approach into my everyday lessons:

- **Play-based learning** involves exploring and solving problems in playful ways.

Try this: pick a playground game or a board game, such as hide and seek, tag, hopscotch, or snap. Childhood games can teach computing, programming, creativity, systems design and more. Play a single round of the game with your children. Then discuss what specific rules and instructions were followed. It is helpful to write these down. Your instructions are the equivalent of a computer algorithm, which, programmed into a computer, would create a digital version of the game. Next, change three things about the game, modify your written set of rules and instructions and test them. Replay the game following the modified set of instructions. Did it work, or do the instructions need to be corrected? This is called *testing*; something all

programmers do. We test our algorithm to see if it produces the correct outcomes. When all tweaks have been made and the game works, you'll end up with a new game and your children will have learnt the basics of games design, programming, and computational thinking, alongside developing their creative problem-solving skills, and encouraging teamwork, communication and strategic thinking.

- **Game-based learning** uses actual games to teach. Think *Monopoly* for budgeting, *Minecraft* for creativity and collaboration, or *Assassins Creed Discovery Tour* for teaching ancient history in UKS2. Games naturally build skills such as logic, risk-taking, resource management, communication, and computational thinking.

Try this: the game *Just Dance* is widely available across multiple platforms. It's a great game to use to encourage physical fitness amongst children, and to

teach them about graphical algorithms. Challenge pupils to follow along with the dance, while paying attention not just to the characters on screen but the pictograms. Using your own version of pictograms, choreograph the next segment of the dance sequence to make an 'algorithm'. Good practice would be to test your algorithm, by dancing the steps, and checking how it looks and feels. If you don't like it, change your algorithm! This teaches algorithmic thinking – and the use of graphics bypasses any literacy challenges that some children may face. They will be able to grasp the concepts of design, programming and testing, all through dancing to a video game. Watch a walkthrough of this activity at tinyurl.com/tp-JustDance

- **Gamification** borrows elements of game design – points, badges, leaderboards, etc – and applies them to non-game contexts. Apps like Class Dojo use this to manage behaviour and motivation.

Each of these approaches has value, driving learning in different ways. **TP**



Shehneila Saeed is the programme director of Digital Schoolhouse and head of education at Ukie.

tinyurl.com/tp-DigitalSchoolhouse

Building an inspiring CURRICULUM

A new approach to the arts has not only opened up creative opportunities for children – it's transformed a school's entire outlook

BECKY JACKSON



HOW THE IDEA WAS BORN

Our vision at Cragside Primary is to provide children with an education that empowers them to change the world for the better. A fundamental part of this is making sure all our pupils have access to high-quality creative arts. This focus was inspired by the words of Durham University academic Professor Stephen Gorard, who said: "Schools, in their structure and organisation, can do more than simply reflect the society we have; they can be the precursor of the kind of society we wish to have."

This belief drives our commitment to ensuring that every child, regardless of socio-economic background, additional needs, or English as an additional language, should have equal access to meaningful creative arts experiences. For us, this means removing barriers, so

that every child, whatever their background, can realise their potential.

ALL ACCESS

At Cragside Primary School in Newcastle, the creative arts are available for everyone, regardless of whether they have cultural capital at home.



GETTING STARTED

In order to give creative arts access to as many pupils as possible, it was important for us to begin forging links across our region.

We began by getting involved in the North-East Creativity Collaborative, a three-year initiative launched in 2021 to foster creative teaching approaches across all subjects, funded by Arts Council England (tinyurl.com/tp-ACENecollab).

This involved us working in close collaboration with other schools.

As part of this collaboration, we embedded a new way of working, which centred on explicitly identifying and teaching creative habits in every classroom. To ensure consistency and shared understanding, staff meetings were led by the Creativity Team – one of the three school development

teams to which every teacher at Cragside belongs. These teams regularly take turns leading staff meetings, focusing on practical, hands-on explorations of what the approach will look like in day-to-day teaching, and ensuring all staff are actively engaged in shaping and implementing meaningful change.

EXPERTS ON BOARD

The school maintains strong connections with a wide range of artists and arts organisations such as Scottish Opera and Newcastle University.



VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Experiences are not limited to the creative subjects, either. Year 1 pupils have collaborated with architecture students from Newcastle University to explore the science of materials, while Year 6 used video production to capture their learning about the circulatory system. Every child experiences live theatre at least once a year, too, with Year 6 joining other local pupils on the stage to perform Shakespeare at an annual festival, and the school has a thriving music provision.

The curriculum was designed to offer children a comprehensive understanding of various art mediums and styles – including textiles, sculpture, and printing – and studying the

works of a wide range of artists and designers. Every child at Cragside now keeps a personal sketchbook that accompanies them throughout their school journey, creating a lasting record of the child's evolving skills, techniques, and creative ideas over time (full sketchbooks aren't thrown away, but are kept as records of the artistic process). These sketchbooks are not treated as pristine or untouchable; instead, children are encouraged to use them as working tools – authentic spaces for experimentation, practice, and artistic growth.

SINGALONG

The KS2 choir at Cragside is flourishing, with over 60 members now taking part.

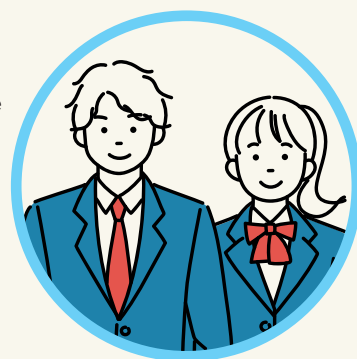
“Equal access to the arts means removing barriers, so that every child can realise their potential”



LEARNING OUTCOMES

We've found that the creative arts not only open doors for pupils in subjects like music, but that they enhance academic success, too; our summer 2024 Key Stage 2 SATs were significantly above the national average in maths, reading, writing, and SPaG.

Our approach has also improved student voice at Cragside. We actively gather feedback through discussions and initiatives led by our Art Ambassadors (a group of eight children from Years 3 to 6) and Creativity Champions (a group of 14 children from Reception to Year 6), ensuring that student perspectives shape our arts provision. Art Ambassadors meet regularly with the Year 4 teacher and art lead, Julie Westwood, to discuss how to improve the art offer across the school. Their input led to a school exhibition at a local arts venue, as well as the introduction of our own



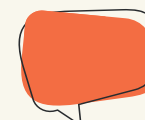
YEAR 5 PUPIL

“Singing with Scottish Opera was the best thing about this year. We sounded amazing!”



YEAR 2 PUPIL

“Art at Cragside is the best!”



YEAR 4 PUPIL

“Being a creative thinker means all sorts of things. It means you have to be imaginative, collaborative, persistent and disciplined... but you don't just do it by yourself; you have to be able to work collaboratively, too. It's not easy but everyone can be creative if they work at it.”

annual show, where we open our doors for a couple of hours after school so that the community can see all of the great work that has been created during the year – a wonderful way to celebrate pupils' hard work and creativity.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

We are confident that our children leave Cragside having enjoyed rich and diverse creative arts experiences, as well as with a clear understanding of what it means to be a creative thinker.



Becky Jackson is headteacher of Cragside Primary School in Newcastle.

She is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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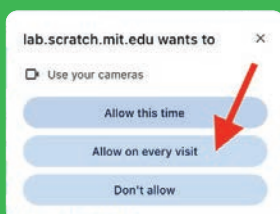
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Let's get started!

1. Open Scratch Lab: lab.scratch.mit.edu
2. Click on 'Face Sensing'
3. Click the 'Try it out' button
4. If you are asked for permission to use your webcam, click on 'Allow on every visit'.
5. You should now see a version of Scratch with special Face Sensing blocks. The view from your webcam will also be displayed on the Stage.

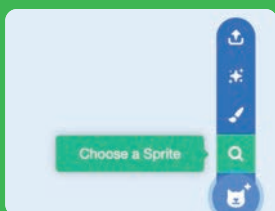
1



Move the cheese

1. Make your cheesy puffs move.
2. Delete the cat sprite.
3. Add a new sprite. You can choose an existing sprite, upload an image, or even paint your own sprite! We chose the Cheesy Puffs sprite.
4. Add some code to make the sprite move to random positions around the screen:
5. Test: Click on the green flag and check that your sprite moves randomly around the screen to different places.

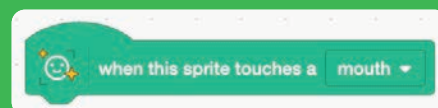
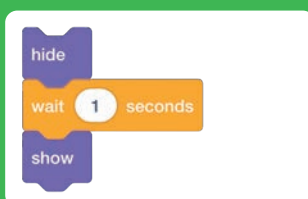
2



Chomp the cheese

1. In the Cheesy puffs sprite's code, add a Face Sensing block that detects when it touches a mouth.
2. Add some code blocks under the Face Sensing block to make the cheesy puffs disappear when they touch a mouth:

3



3. Click on the green flag and have fun trying to catch the cheesy puffs with your mouth!

Ready to try more projects with your learners?

Register your club on the Code Club website to access hundreds of free, ready-to-use coding projects and learning paths.

View this project at rpf.io/chompcheese

5 REASONS TO TRY... Code Club

Flexible coding clubs for every pupil



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Code Club is a global network of free coding clubs that make it easy for teachers to inspire learners with fun, ready-to-use projects. All resources are supported by the Raspberry Pi Foundation.

1 INDEPENDENCE AND REAL-WORLD SKILLS

Code Club isn't only about learning to code; it's about empowering young people to create with technology. In a relaxed and supportive setting, pupils are encouraged to experiment, follow projects that inspire them, and develop their own ideas without the pressure of formal lessons. Along the way, they build independence, resilience, and problem-solving skills, while also strengthening collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and communication.

2 OVER 200 READY-TO-USE PROJECTS

You don't need to start from nothing, as Code Club offers a library of free projects covering Scratch, Python, HTML/CSS, micro:bit, and more. By registering a club, teachers also gain early access to new resources and enrichment opportunities, while celebrating young people's progress through certificates and community events. The impact speaks for itself: in our 2025 annual survey, 96 per cent of clubs reported that attendees grew their skills in computing and digital making.

3 INCLUSIVE RESOURCES

Every resource is carefully designed by expert educators at the Raspberry Pi Foundation to be accessible and inclusive. Code Clubs provide safe, welcoming spaces where all pupils, including those with additional needs, can thrive. Projects follow a clear format with step-by-step instructions, making it easy to support learners of all abilities. Recent updates to the Code Club Projects site now allow children to search by interest,



Contact:
Visit: [Codeclub.org](https://codeclub.org)

whether that's sports, music, or games, as well as by software, hardware, or level of difficulty. Encouragingly, 43 per cent of Code Club creators worldwide are female, highlighting the role clubs play in broadening participation in computing.

4 BUILD CONFIDENCE

Running a Code Club is just as valuable for teachers as it is for pupils. It supports professional growth by building skills and boosting confidence in teaching coding within a fun, low-pressure setting. It's also a chance to explore new topics alongside your learners in an informal way; for example, getting started with AI is simple through our dedicated AI path.

5 ONGOING TRAINING & SUPPORT

You'll never be on your own when running a Code Club. The team offers guidance, free training, and access to a supportive global community of educators and volunteers. Throughout the year, there are webinars, training sessions, and community events to help you get the most from your club. Practical tips are also included in the Leader Guide, covering everything from setting up your space to engaging mentors and celebrating pupils' achievements. With Code Club, you'll be equipping pupils with digital skills for the future, while boosting your own confidence and connecting to a global network of educators.

KEY POINTS

Code Clubs provide a fun, informal space where children can create their own projects and explore technology at their own pace.

Code Club resources are created by expert educators to be accessible to learners of all abilities. With 200+ free projects, you can run sessions with minimal prep.

Code Club leaders don't need to be coding experts; you'll get free access to training, webinars and community events to help you out with everything you need.

Interested in exploring more? Try out Chomp the Cheese on the next page, a project that is great for both beginners and those looking to level up their coding skills.

Sticky NOTES

Pupils have a better chance of understanding and remembering information if they master note-taking, says **Angela Youngman** – but for children with dyslexia, this challenge can feel insurmountable...

Project work, comprehension exercises, and writing about events form part of the everyday experience of a primary school child. Learning to summarise information, identify points within a narrative, and to make notes helps develop this type of writing activity, and of course, are important transferrable skills in and of themselves. But how do you identify what the key points of the lesson are? What if you miss something important? How do you condense several sentences into just a few words? Learning to do this is hard for any child – but for those with dyslexia, the problems are often magnified.

For dyslexic children, the key problem when trying to take notes concerns the way they structure and process information. Dyslexic children struggle to read, write and concentrate all at the same time, and it can be especially tiring for young children, thus causing lapses in concentration. Pupils need to learn how to focus on key aspects of a subject, while also reading instructions and trying to write down information. Common abbreviations like *e.g.*, and *approx.* can add to the confusion, likewise with letters that look similar to one another, such as *b* and *d* or *g* and *q*.

Write it down

Learning to how to take notes at an early age ensures that pupils can summarise information, assess material from different sources, and develop better comprehension skills. Mastering this skillset can have long-term consequences, improving self-confidence and future academic performance.

This is a subject all too familiar to The Dyslexia Association, whose teachers help many young children

take extra time. Teaching note-taking techniques will actually benefit the whole class, simply because these are such essential skills. Creating a summary on the whiteboard of what has been taught during a class helps show the value of these skills. Highlighting key points also helps dyslexic pupils, because dyslexia can often affect working memory and processing speed.

The key is...

The first task is to show how to focus in on key

aspects of a project or piece of work, such as identifying and explaining any new vocabulary. Kay suggests that “teachers prepare word banks and visual information for new terminology or vocabulary”.

Encouraging children to approach a subject by asking

“Teaching note-taking techniques so that children can identify effective strategies will benefit the whole class”

cope with the problem. “Our organisation works one-to-one with students on note-taking techniques and strategies such as mind mapping, flow charts, and using software that can help organise information and thoughts,” says director Kay Carter.

All teachers are aware that every minute in the classroom is precious, but making sure that dyslexic pupils have a chance to practise skills doesn't have to



basic questions highlighting the *when, where, who, why, what* and *how* immediately zeros in on key points. Taking each in turn and identifying the answer allows pupils to create a basic informational structure. For example, when children are asked to create a story about animals, basic questions could cover: Where is the story based – in a zoo, the countryside, overseas? Who are the animal characters? Why are they important? What is the problem they have to solve? How do they solve the problem?

It's also beneficial to use wide-lined paper to assist with writing, along with providing clear headings for information you'd like pupils to cover. Once the child has become used to working with headings, they should learn to choose them for themselves.

The next task is to find a way to outline this key information within a written document. There are a variety of ways to organise the information the child has

identified as important, but since dyslexic children often have strong visual memories, it is worth starting with some visual techniques.

Let's take colour coding as an example. A different colour should be allotted to each specific theme or subject. For example, pupils could highlight key vocabulary in red, information on location in blue, historical time periods in yellow, environment in green, etc. Kay says, "this will help to reduce the cognitive load, because pupils are not writing long sentences, but are using key words, colours and images, which are quicker and less mentally taxing".

Matching labels can be placed on resources, or pages within project materials, enabling children to quickly identify those sections. As they create more work within those areas, they can file the material under the corresponding colours. Colour-coded cards or shapes containing very short notes

can also help children organise their written work. By manipulating and moving the cards around, they can create a list of notes organising their thoughts, which then just have to be copied out for later use.

Method and manner

Kay believes that the biggest problem dyslexic children face relates to the way in which they process information. The written word is much harder for pupils with dyslexia to manage, and can affect overall comprehension. They also find it hard to listen and write at the same time, often making it hard to concentrate and remember information.

"Children receiving specialist one-to-one tutoring at The Dyslexia Association, particularly those with working memory and processing difficulties, benefit greatly from targeted strategies such as mind mapping and flow charts," Kay adds. Teachers need to find ways to make connections on a step-by-step basis between what the child already knows and the new information. To do this, it is essential to identify what the child already understands, say, about fire engines, and then identify what information they need to add in order to create a project exploring the work of fire crews.

Break it down

There are many teaching strategies that we can utilise when teaching note-taking and information processing. Attempting to introduce dyslexic children to every technique in one lesson is likely to confuse rather than help, so it is better to deal with the subject over a period of weeks. This enables a

3 TOP RESOURCES FOR DYSPLEXIA



Downloadable top tips leaflet from Bradford Council on assisting dyslexic pupils in the classroom: tinyurl.com/tp-BradfordDyslexia



A five-minute film in which dyslexic children in KS2 and KS3 describe their troubles with writing. Plus, practical tips on how to support them, from BBC Teach: tinyurl.com/tp-DyslexiaWriting



An investigation into whether dyslexia overlays actually work, and how to use them for the best outcomes: tinyurl.com/tp-Overlays

different technique to be tried in turn, and for you to encourage children to focus in on the strategy that they find most effective.

"There are lots of assistive technology programs available for younger children, and the market is forever changing," says Kay. "At The Dyslexia Association we try to maintain a catalogue of available interventions that are technology-based. They all depend on the type of intervention the class are concentrating on – for example, it might be spelling or phonological awareness."

To get more information about the resources available from the Dyslexia Association, visit dyslexia.uk.net/services **TP**



Angela Youngman is a freelance journalist.



You've GOT THIS

Use your ECT year to build your craft and take the classroom by storm, with some simple but practical steps, says **Katrina Quick**

You have survived your initial teacher training (ITT) year, congratulations!

You are now officially an early career teacher (ECT). The next step is to complete your first year of the Early Career Teaching programme, where areas covered in initial training will be revisited in greater depth. You are no longer the fresh ITT turning up to school hoping for the best; you've done this before – this is time to finesse your skills and really shape the classroom atmosphere into a place where students can learn and grow.

Your training provider will have an overview of what's expected from you each term, and that will help you plan out your ECT year in the medium and long term, so that you can reach your professional goals and effectively transition from trainee to fully fledged classroom teacher. This may differ slightly for everyone, but one thing you'll have in common is the ECF. Every ECT training provider must align their Year 1 programme with the Early Career Framework (ECF), which defines what new teachers should learn and achieve during their first two years in the profession. Find the framework at tinyurl.com/tp-ECF

Plan your year

The big banner goals of the ECF are the core professional competencies that all ECTs are expected to develop over their two-year programme. The five key areas comprise behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and professional behaviours. Each of these areas is then broken down into actionable tasks.

In order to help you achieve these goals, your training provider will help you outline termly and weekly to-dos, and you will have regular check-ins with your mentor to ensure you're on

the right track. As everyone in the sector knows, teaching comes with a hefty workload outside of any professional development, so to help you keep your sanity, it's a good idea to get to grips with what's expected of you as early as possible. Here are some ideas I found helpful:

Start with goals

To implement the goals you want to achieve, I find it helps to break down the key areas into school terms, starting at the beginning: autumn, spring and summer. Within these terms, you can then create smaller goals and add examples

of how you can achieve them across the term.

Let's take the autumn term as an example. You could use the following layout as inspiration or to create your own for spring and summer, pulling from the ECF.

Autumn term breakdown

Focus: building foundations

Area 1 - Behaviour: Establish and reinforce routines to create a positive learning environment

Actions:

- Teach routines daily
- Use consistent language and signals
- Praise desired behaviours explicitly



These actions will help you welcome your class and begin establishing routines and expectations early on, using learning moments as an opportunity to set a positive example. From there, you can focus on making deliberate choices to deepen and develop learning throughout the following terms, building on the foundations laid in the autumn. For example, your focus in the spring term might be to observe and tweak what isn't working and expand on choices that are working well, and then in the summer term you can reflect on the past year, refine where possible, and look ahead to your second ECT year.

Utilise your mentor

Your mentor is your biggest asset during your ECT year. They've walked this path before and are there

to guide you, not to catch you out. Use your weekly or fortnightly meetings to ask honest questions, share challenges, and reflect on what's working – and what isn't. This isn't about perfection; it's about progress. Try to come prepared with something specific to discuss in each meeting, whether it's a behaviour issue, a nightmare

“Your mentor is your biggest asset; they're there to help you, not to catch you out”

lesson, or an approach you'd like to try. These conversations are where the real professional growth happens.

Don't forget the structured training sessions you'll attend as part of your provider's

programme, too. These are designed to connect the dots between theory and practice, and often offer time to collaborate with other ECTs. Take notes, ask questions, and look for one small idea to trial each week. Over time, these small actions will ~add up to big change. And remember, reflection is key. Build in time to pause, log

your wins and setbacks, and acknowledge the journey you're on. Having a dedicated notebook is really helpful.

Thrive, don't just survive

It's easy to get caught up in the daily demands of teaching, but pausing to acknowledge your progress is just as important as meeting your objectives. Growth in the ECT year isn't always linear, and some weeks will feel like breakthroughs, while others will make you question all your life choices (we've all been there). It's worth noting that even in those weeks you're still learning!

Small wins happen every time you reflect on a lesson that went well, handle a tricky moment with more confidence, or support a pupil more effectively than the day (or week) before. Keep a running record of these small wins, because they add up. Celebrate them with your mentor, colleagues, or

Early career must-haves



Keep a journal:

Logging just a few lines each week helps you track your progress and spot patterns over time.



Talk to others:

Fellow ECTs, your mentor, or even staffroom chats can be a lifeline when things feel tough. You aren't alone, and it's highly likely that every struggle you encounter has been encountered and surmounted before.



Set boundaries:

It's okay not to work every evening. Protecting your time is part of being a sustainable teacher, and you aren't any help to your pupils if you're burnt out.



Trust the process:

Growth takes time. Don't let perfect be the enemy of good; focus on the value of progress over instantaneous perfection.

even just for yourself. You're not simply surviving your ECT year, you're building the habits, instincts, and mindset of an experienced teacher.

With a clear view of the big-picture goals and a practical, term-by-term approach, you can move through your ECT year with confidence. Step by step, week by week, you'll begin planting the seeds to grow into a prepared, purposeful teacher who makes a lasting impact in the classroom. **TP**



Katrina is a qualified English teacher, and has a degree in journalism and a

master's in creative writing.

in [linkedin.com/in/katrinaquick](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katrinaquick)



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THIS WAY!

School improvement advice
for headteachers and SLT

MIDDLE LEADERS | CPD | SUBJECT LEADERSHIP

Reduce, reuse, **RECYCLE**

When we first decided to introduce sustainable options into our playground at West Coker Primary School, we thought we'd just be providing an interactive and engaging environment to allow our pupils to really enjoy their breaks and lunchtimes. We had no idea we'd also see improvements in behaviour (both inside the classroom and out) and a boost in social interaction and overall wellbeing.

The thing that made the biggest difference for us was our PlayPod,

which is essentially a secure outdoor structure filled with loose parts, including everything from cardboard tubes and ropes, to tyres, fabric, crates, and even old keyboards. You could definitely construct one of these yourself, using donated items (making sure they're safe and clean, of course); but we got ours from Bristol-based charity, Children's Scrapstore, which sources its materials from local businesses and industries.

The best thing we found about the loose parts is that there is no set way

to use them. A cardboard roll might be a telescope one day, a tunnel for toy cars the next. A pile of tyres can become a castle, a racetrack or even a spaceship to Mars. The materials invite children to use imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills to invent their own games and structures. It's a wonderful example of how sustainability and education can go hand-in-hand, and has been transformative for our children. Pupils now work together more, and the nature of the imaginative play has also



meant an increase in physical activity, meaning happier, healthier children.

Turning waste into play

The PlayPod is more than just a play resource, too. By repurposing materials that would otherwise end up in landfill, the initiative reduces waste and promotes a circular economy. Items such as carpet tiles, foam and surplus industrial components are given a second life as tools for play. This approach diverts waste from disposal while educating children about the value of reuse and recycling in a tangible, hands-on way. This ethos aligns perfectly with our

village school's broader sustainability goals, which include reducing our environmental footprint and embedding eco-conscious values into the everyday curriculum.

For this initiative to thrive, we need a steady stream of materials, as things like cardboard do get used up over time. Whilst Children's Scrapstore provides regular top-ups, we're keen to strengthen sustainability efforts by sourcing additional materials locally, not only improving our eco credentials, but bolstering ties with the local community as well. The idea is that we'll launch a 'Waste to Play'

campaign, inviting local businesses to donate clean, safe surplus materials. Many companies throw away items that are perfect for play and there's huge potential in diverting this waste to the playground. By partnering with businesses like these, we're hoping to reduce landfill waste by diverting reusable materials; foster a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability throughout our school and local community; and provide businesses with a positive social impact story, which will enhance their corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile. It's a win-win.

Small steps, big gains

We are all acutely aware of the challenges our planet faces, but as school leaders, it can be overwhelming thinking about where to start. The good news is that schools have a unique opportunity to model sustainable practices, inspire children, and ripple change out into families and communities. The even better news is that it doesn't have to be complicated.

When thinking about sustainability, it's tempting to dive in with grand plans; but the most effective changes are often small and manageable. Begin with one area of focus – energy, waste, or food – and build from there. Small changes add up, and they're easier for staff and pupils to embed into everyday routines. Here are some ideas...

RETHINK RESOURCES

Waste is often the most visible starting point. Could your school reduce single-use plastics in the canteen? Many suppliers are now open to conversations about more sustainable packaging and practices, and engaging children in waste audits, such as Trash Mobs (tinyurl.com/tp-TrashMob) can also be powerful. Pupils love counting crisp packets, and it's a great bit of citizen science, too! It sparks ownership and makes sustainability real rather than abstract.

Quick win: start with lunchtime – reducing packaging or swapping to reusable cutlery can make an immediate difference.

EMPOWER PUPILS TO LEAD

Sustainability works best when children feel part of the journey. Organisations like the Ministry of Eco Education (ministryofeco.org) offer structured ways for pupils to lead campaigns, resources to support teaching, and opportunities to take meaningful action.

From energy monitors in classrooms to litter picks in the playground, giving children responsibility builds not only awareness but confidence, too.

Pupil power: give children visible roles – eco-monitors, assembly speakers, or campaign leaders.

MAKE IT REAL

Link curriculum to sustainability wherever possible. Whether it's a science lesson on biodiversity, geography work on global responsibility, or art projects using recycled materials, sustainability can be woven into daily teaching. For those near the coast or rivers, outdoor learning can be a brilliant way to connect children with nature and nurture a sense of stewardship.

CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Sometimes schools worry they're not 'doing enough'. But progress matters more than perfection. Share updates in assemblies, newsletters, or displays so pupils can see the difference their actions make. Recognising effort builds momentum – and children often take those habits home.

LOOK OUTWARDS FOR SUPPORT

There are excellent organisations offering free resources, toolkits, and inspiration. Let's Go Zero is a great one-stop shop, signposting schools to a wide range of organisations

that can support them in becoming more sustainable, and you can join Plastic Free Schools for free (tinyurl.com/tp-PFS), to gain access to a multitude of helpful resources.

Big picture: every school is now expected to have a Climate Action Plan. Building sustainability into daily routines helps make real progress towards this.

Sustainability is not a 'nice-to-have'; it's a responsibility. With small steps, pupil leadership, and a willingness to rethink how we do things, schools can become powerful forces for change.



Lara Jeffries is education manager at Surfers Against Sewage and a former headteacher.

 sas.org.uk/education





“Loose parts play is a wonderful example of how sustainability and education can go hand-in-hand”

This campaign will take a bit of time and organising to make it work, but we're confident it will all be worth it. We plan to break the process down into four steps, making sure we address all the angles. The steps will look like this:

- 1. Identify potential partners:** we will approach local manufacturers, retailers and service providers; particularly those producing non-toxic, durable materials.
- 2. Communicate clear guidelines:** we'll also provide businesses with a simple list of what's safe and useful, taking the guesswork out of the donation process.
- 3. Saying thank you:** supporters will be celebrated in newsletters, social media posts and at school events to showcase their contribution to children's wellbeing and environmental stewardship.
- 4. Making it easy:** designated collection points or scheduled pick-ups will remove barriers for busy businesses, meaning organisations of all sizes should be able to take part.

The future is ours

Of course, sustainability isn't a one-time deal; it takes continued effort and adaptability to make sure the school is doing all it can to improve its eco credentials. For us at West Coker Primary School, the PlayPod is just the beginning. We aim to not

only keep it stocked with materials, but plans are also underway to integrate loose parts activities into our eco-club projects, and share best practices with other schools in Somerset.

Top tips

If you'd like to implement a sustainable loose parts station into your school, our top tips are as follows:

- 1. Embrace the mess:** loose parts play looks chaotic at first, but it's purposeful and deeply creative. Trust the process.
- 2. Get the whole community involved:** parents, local firms and pupils can all contribute materials and ideas.
- 3. Link it to your curriculum:** from science (forces, materials) to PSHE (teamwork, problem-solving), loose parts activities open up real learning opportunities.

Most of all, have fun with it! There is no limit to children's imaginations, and one of the greatest joys is turning up to school to see what they'll come up with next.



Philip Hyland is the headteacher at West Coker Primary School in Somerset.

-  westcoker.somerset.sch.uk
-  childrensscrapstore.co.uk

Big energy

Looking for ways to make your school more eco-friendly? Try these pointers from the World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) Schools Sustainability Guide:



Ask your pupils to design and put up labels for switches around school; one label for switches that should be turned off after use, and another for those that need to stay on permanently.



Keep temperatures steady and cool – set the ambient temperature at 18-20°C throughout the year.



Set the same default standby settings for all staff and student computers – instead of using screensavers, have them enter sleep mode after five minutes of inactivity.



Join UK schools taking on climate change. Let's Go Zero

(letsgozero.org) is the national campaign uniting teachers, pupils, parents and their schools as they all work together to be zero carbon by 2030. The campaign is also working with national government to ensure the right support is in place to help all schools reach this goal. Sign your schools up to the campaign to show your ambition to be climate leaders in your community.



Create a 'sharing is caring' school culture – provide a cupboard with reusable takeaway coffee cups and Tupperware containers for staff, and reusable water bottles for students to borrow if they don't have their own.



For more top tips from the WWF, see the Schools Sustainability guide at tinyurl.com/tp-WWFguide

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MATHS SPECIAL

50

What's the big idea?

Exploring complex concepts in maths shows pupils that there's often more than one way to find the solution to a problem...



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What's the BIG IDEA?

Exploring complex concepts in maths shows pupils that there's often more than one way to find the solution to a problem...

GARETH METCALFE

We want children to have opportunities to be playful in mathematics. We want them to experiment, persevere through challenge, search different possibilities and spot patterns. This is the true nature of what it means to be a mathematician.

How, though, can this be done in areas of maths that seem to be more procedural, like multiplication? And how can lessons be structured so that all children can engage in problem-solving, rather than just the highest attaining children?

Here, we will look at a 'big mathematical idea' and consider the different ways that it can be explored.

Then, we must check for understanding before the children engage in the main task. For example, "What is the sum of 5 and 3? What is the product of 5 and 3?". When children are secure with this terminology, we are ready to progress.

Next, we can give children these calculations and ask them what they notice:

$5 + 5 =$
 $6 + 4 =$
 $7 + 3 =$
 $8 + 2 =$

Of course, the sum of each pair of numbers is the same. When one addend increases by 1 and the other addend decreases by 1, the sum of the pair of numbers stays the same.

questions to test this theory. Or we could ask them to predict which calculation will have the larger product: 6×6 or 7×5 ?

Then, a more open challenge can be introduced. Usually, I would introduce the task in stages, so it's not too overwhelming when it's first presented.

Step 1:

I think of two numbers.
The sum of my numbers is 12.

What could my numbers be?

Step 2:

I think of two numbers.
The sum of my numbers is 12.
The product of my numbers is less than 30.
What could my numbers be?

Can children find an answer? A different answer? Or maybe even work systematically to find all the possible answers?

You can also create new follow-up questions, such as by changing the word in the question from 'less' to 'more'.

The same 'big idea' can be explored with older children, working in a larger number range. For example, when we look at this sequence of questions, the same pattern is revealed:

$10 \times 10 = 100$
 $11 \times 9 = 99$
 $12 \times 8 = 96$
 $13 \times 7 = 91$
 $14 \times 6 = 84$

"These tasks will enable pupils to experience what it means to be a true mathematician"

We will also consider how we can gradually sequence tasks so that all pupils can be supported and challenged.

The sum and the product

Before this task, we must ensure that children understand the terms 'sum' and 'product'. This can be done by giving an example: "The sum of 6 and 2 is 8 ($6+2=8$). The product of 6 and 2 is 12 ($6 \times 2=12$)".

Ask the children to consider these calculations. What do they notice this time?

$5 \times 5 =$
 $6 \times 4 =$
 $7 \times 3 =$
 $8 \times 2 =$

Now, the products are not the same. When a pair of factors increases/decreases by 1, the product becomes smaller! Is this always true? The children could create some of their own example

However, another thing can be drawn out. Consider how much **smaller than 100 each of the products is:**

$10 \times 10 = 100$
 $11 \times 9 = 99$ (1 less)
 $12 \times 8 = 96$ (4 less)
 $13 \times 7 = 91$ (9 less)
 $14 \times 6 = 84$ (16 less)

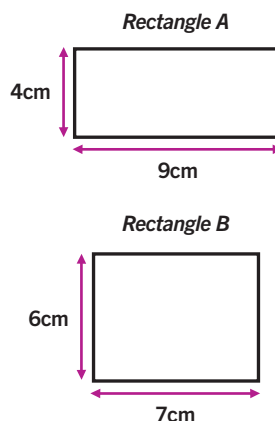
This reveals an amazing pattern: the products are decreasing in a pattern of square numbers! Does this work just for this example sequence? Or could it also be true for other sequences? Investigate...

Area and perimeter

One of the requirements from the Year 6 national curriculum is to 'Recognise that shapes with the same areas can have different perimeters and vice versa'.

In this statement, we are asking children to explore the same mathematical idea as we explored above. For example, children can be asked to calculate the perimeter and area of these two rectangles (Fig. 1):

Fig. 1



Whilst the rectangles have the same perimeter, they don't have the same area. Rectangle B has side lengths that are closer together in value, therefore it has a larger area. Children can create their own example rectangles to test this theory further.

The largest product

There is another way in which we can explore the same big mathematical idea. Consider this task (Fig. 2):

Fig. 2

Position the digits 0, 4, 5 and 8 to make the product as large as possible.

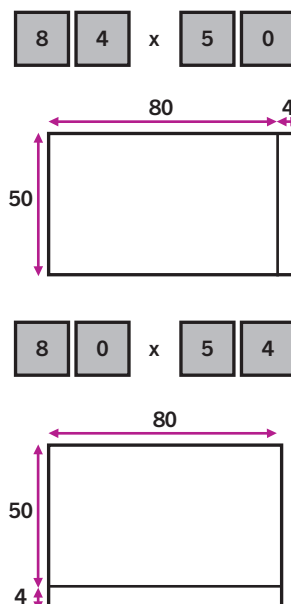
$$\begin{array}{|c|} \hline 0 \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline 4 \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline 5 \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline 8 \\ \hline \end{array} \times \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \\ \hline \end{array} =$$

To begin with, pupils can explore different possible combinations of multiplication calculations. Then, you can emphasise the first level of reasoning: to maximise the product, we must place our largest digits in the most significant columns. Put the digits 8 and 5 in the tens positions.

Does it matter which way around we position the digits 4 and 0? Yes! The product is maximised when the numbers being multiplied are as close together as possible. 80×54 has a

larger product than 84×50 . Why is this? The picture below demonstrates (Fig. 3):

Fig. 3



Both calculations include 80×50 . For 84×50 , we have 4 more lots of 50. For 80×54 , we have 4 more lots of 80. This gives us a larger product.

In exploring this big mathematical idea in any of these ways, children will be practising their calculation skills in multiplication. But they will get so much more from engaging in these tasks. They will have to spot patterns, test new ideas with their own questions and try different ways. Pupils will have a context in which to explain their thinking clearly, giving relevant examples and explaining what they have found. They will be stretched personally as well as mathematically, and it will enable them to experience what it means to be a true mathematician. **TP**



Gareth Metcalfe is the director of I See Maths and the author of the Deconstructing Word Questions, I See Reasoning and

I See Problem-Solving eBooks.

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Don't just ADD A ZERO!

Jo Austen makes the case for 'forward-facing' approaches in primary maths

**“What is 673×10 ?”
“Just add a zero!”**

Most teachers know this isn't a great idea; once decimals are involved, this 'quick trick' becomes a real problem (673.4×10 does not equal 673.40). 'Just add a zero' is probably the most infamous example of an approach that accelerates students towards the current objective but is not 'facing forwards' to their mathematical future.

In maths (and everything else), we should aim to be *forward-facing* – looking ahead to the more advanced concepts that pupils will encounter further down the line. I first came across this idea in Mark McCourt's excellent book, *Teaching for Mastery*, which reminds us that 'an effective mathematics education system is one that focuses on teaching approaches that maximise subsequent progression, rather than a pursuit of short-term, superficial success'. Essentially, we need to make choices that our students' future teachers will thank us for. Let's break this down into methods, models and examples.

Methods

We mustn't simply settle for children getting the right answers; not all mathematical methods are created equal, and moving to better methods matters. For example, a Year 1 child calculating $3 + 8$ by taking three blocks, then another eight blocks, then counting the whole lot to reach 11, is an important step, but not something we can settle for. It is a slow, inefficient method and would, if relied on in future, become a problem, clogging up the child's working memory. Instead, the forward-facing teacher knows the likely

progression of methods of early addition, recognising them as steps towards rapid, fluent calculation in future.

This is not to say that there is always one 'best' method to work towards mastering. Many primary children have the misguided idea that mastering formal written methods for the four main operations is the ultimate aim. Far from it! We should explicitly teach children to choose an appropriate method for the question at hand, depending on the numbers involved. For example, $400,000 - 26$ would be a very messy formal

column method but is straightforward for those with a sound understanding of place value. Similarly, doing 34×102 with a written method would seem unnecessarily slow to those who can use the distributive law of multiplication to do $(100 \times 34) + (2 \times 34) = 3400 + 68 = 3468$. Teachers need to explicitly model this kind of thinking, knowing that future, more challenging mathematical concepts will be far more accessible to students whose working memory is not consumed by calculation.

Models

The importance of physical manipulatives and pictorial models to develop deep conceptual understanding is now widely accepted in UK schools. However, the forward-facing teacher goes further, understanding the progression of mathematical concepts well beyond the year group they are currently teaching, and using this knowledge to inform their choices of models and manipulatives.

For example, a Year 1 teacher could rely solely on part-whole models to help their class solve simple missing number equations involving addition and subtraction. However, they might also introduce simple bar models, not because they are a necessity for the current objective, but because the teacher knows they will become extremely useful to pupils later on.

Similarly, a Year 4 teacher tackling two-digit times two-digit multiplication could use only a grid method and never show an area model.

“We mustn't settle for pupils getting the right answers; not all methods are created equal”



Fig. 1

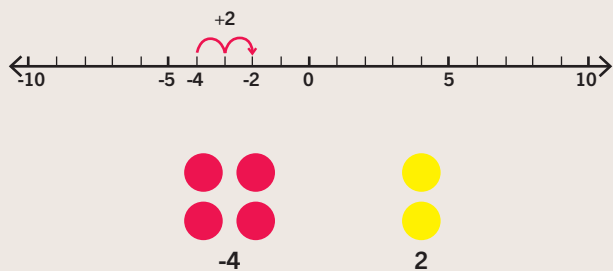
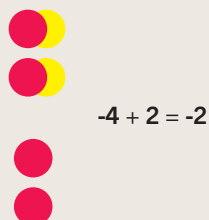


Fig. 2



However, a forward-facing approach is to invest time in exploring area models, first with physical dienes blocks, then with an easily adjustable virtual model (such as Mathsbot.com). This supports a much deeper understanding of multiplicative structure and allows children to make important connections when they use area models again in secondary to explore topics such as quadratic equations.

Finally, a Year 6 teacher working on negative numbers could rely entirely on number lines. However, they might also introduce two-colour, double-sided counters, knowing the power of these manipulatives for modelling 'zero pairs' in future. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)

Examples

The examples we choose should help us expose the full extent of each concept. If we don't, we risk children developing misconceptions, storing up trouble for the future.

A good example of this is the need to present equations in different forms. It is extremely common to see something like $2 + 4 = 6$ but do we see $6 = 4 + 2$ as much? Subtractions in this form are even less common: how often do primary teachers expose children to $4 = 6 - 2$?

Failure to face forward with an early maths concept such as this leaves secondary teachers to pick up the pieces, battling to reconfigure students' incomplete or incorrect mental models that have been embedded over many years.

This need to expose children to more 'unusual' examples is also apparent in our teaching of shape. What makes a triangle a triangle? What makes a hexagon a hexagon? Using shapes such as those in Fig. 3 will support fruitful discussion of key properties, developing a much fuller understanding. The same can be done for something less visual, like rounding numbers. What is 346 rounded to the nearest 20? Instead of following a fixed algorithm about which digits to look at and change up or down, exploring a question like that will help children to understand that the rounding question is really asking, "which multiple of X is Y closest to?"

A great place to start with this is by chatting to teachers in other year groups. What does the concept you're about to teach look like at their level? How might that affect the methods, models and examples you choose? Also, reflect on the whole-school culture around maths; all teachers need to feel responsible for all children's mathematical futures, not

3 STEPS TO FORWARD-FACING MATHS

1. Methods

Don't settle for children getting correct answers. Model and encourage increasingly efficient methods and increasingly fluent calculation.

2. Models

Choose powerful models that emphasise mathematical structure and will support the learning of more advanced concepts in future.

3. Examples

Include 'boundary' examples that expose the full extent of each concept, supporting future learning by avoiding embedding misconceptions.

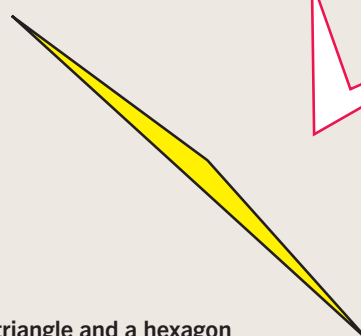
just for getting them to the expected standard for their current year group. Finally, keep investing time in developing subject knowledge; to make forward-facing choices, we must have a deep understanding of both the maths at hand and the maths our children will face in future. **TP**



Jo Austen is an assistant headteacher in East London. His book, Small Numbers,

Big Ideas: Essential Concepts for Teaching Early Maths (John Catt), is out now.

Fig. 3



A triangle and a hexagon



ASK THE EXPERT

Maths: problem-solving strategies

Parveen Akhtar, maths assessment lead from NFER, explores effective approaches to assess pupils' problem-solving skills

What are we trying to assess when we assess problem solving?

Problem solving encompasses a range of skills and is best assessed using a variety of formats. Commonly, it involves worded scenarios (either single or multi-step) which require children to employ known facts, skills or methods and choose which to use. Problem solving also includes non-contextual puzzles where children use their numerical or geometric understanding to find answers that fulfil certain criteria. Trial and improvement, a systematic approach, or alternative methods can be used. Crucially, in both situations pupils use what they do know to work out something they don't.

What can we learn from assessing problem solving?

A great way to assess problem solving and gain valuable insights into what pupils can and cannot do is through the use of multi-step worded problems which encourage pupils to show their working. These questions not only provide pupils with the opportunity to choose and demonstrate their methods, but they also allow teachers to identify errors within pupils' working to target appropriate support. During NFER Online Assessments' (NOA) standardisation trials, researchers and teachers analysed problem solving responses from a large, nationally representative sample of pupils. Pupil errors varied and included misinterpretation of the problem, calculation errors (either arithmetic or place value), or insecurities in one or more of the curriculum areas being assessed. Analysis of pupil responses is therefore not just about scoring the answer but about understanding the steps the child has taken and is one of the reasons why NOA includes teacher-marked questions.

How can we assess children's deeper mathematical understanding?

'Show your working' and puzzle-style questions provide valuable information about children's ability



EXPERT PROFILE

NAME: Parveen Akhtar

JOB TITLE: Maths Assessment Lead

AREA OF EXPERTISE: Primary Maths assessment development and diagnostic reporting

to reason their way through a problem. However, it's also an important part of the curriculum, and of their mathematical development, that they can explain their thought processes to demonstrate a secure grasp of mathematical concepts.

NOA's explain questions generate wide-ranging responses. Some pupils show deep understanding and explain concepts clearly; others demonstrate some understanding but struggle to justify it. Some responses may be detailed but use incorrect mathematical vocabulary, while others are well-expressed and justified but contain arithmetic errors. All these examples provide diagnostic information to teachers about what pupils can or cannot yet do and areas that can be worked on through targeted intervention.

How do I create a classroom that fosters problem solving?

While written assessments are valuable in assessing problem solving, on-going skills development can be enhanced through a culture of discussion and collaboration in the classroom. Problem solving and reasoning can be taught using paired, group and class discussions. Careful questioning can provide rich information about children's understanding. Children often find vocalising their thoughts difficult, but providing tools to help structure these, such as helpful vocabulary and sentence starters, can help them explain their ideas and give teachers insight into their understanding. When assessing problem solving, a focus on processes and approaches, not just the outcome, can help embed understanding.

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Making MATHS STICKY

Stop knowledge flying out of pupils' heads the second they leave the classroom with a couple of tried and tested methods

JOHN TOMSETT

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching and learning mathematics is *transience*. We've all been there... You've explained with utter clarity how to add mixed number fractions, but the moment you ask your Year 4 class to complete similar problems themselves, they simply cannot recall the process you modelled for them minutes earlier!

Generally, the effectiveness of pupils' classroom experiences relies

Heuristics

One way to address the issue of transience is to document the step-by-step process that you've outlined in your worked examples, using *heuristics*. A heuristic is a bullet-pointed, mental shortcut, commonly used to simplify problems and avoid cognitive overload.

At the St Bartholomew's Primary School in Royal Wootton Bassett, I witnessed a teacher and her teaching assistant (TA) show the children how to add mixed number fractions in a way

who was able to read the whiteboard and determine the teacher's progress in the process and correctly identify the next steps.

1,2,3, SHOW

One of the most effective ways of checking whether your class has understood what you have taught them is to use mini-whiteboards, or, as Dylan Wiliam says *ad nauseum* on Twitter/X, "[mini-whiteboards are] the most important development in educational technology since the slate!" When you use mini-whiteboards to demonstrate, you get an instant overview of your pupils' understanding, allowing you to determine where to go next.

However, using whiteboards can lead to confusion if not approached correctly. Before starting, explain their purpose and identify children who may struggle with certain questions. Emphasise that copying answers gives a false impression of understanding, which may hinder your ability to assist them later. Clear communication about this,

and monitoring the room to minimise copying, is crucial. Once you have some reliable data in front of you on the whiteboards, you can use it to inform the next stage of your teaching.

Another St Bartholomew's primary maths teacher I observed skilfully handled the responses she received during a whiteboard session.

"The success of the approach lies in anticipating the main misconceptions and adapting"

on both *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. For me, this is built on three elements – content, adaptive pedagogy, and assessment – which I call the *curriculum triumvirate*. When these elements work together in harmony, they create engaging learning experiences for all, ensuring no pupil is left behind.

When developing the curriculum, all three elements of the triumvirate need to be considered simultaneously. In the following two examples, the emphasis is upon clarifying pupils' mathematical thinking in real time.

that minimised transience for their pupils. The teacher used a visualiser, and modelled the process of adding mixed number fractions. Each step in the process she suggested was then written out clearly on the whiteboard by the TA (Fig. 1).

The TA's heuristic transformed the teacher's temporary metacognitive dialogue into something lasting. When the teacher demonstrated a subsequent example, she was able to ask the class what to do, step-by-step. This was particularly helpful for a pupil with additional needs,



Teacher on the visualiser

- Step 1: $3\frac{3}{8} + \frac{5}{8} =$
- Step 2: $3\frac{3}{8} + \frac{5}{8} = 3$
- Step 3: $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{5}{8} = \frac{8}{8}$
- $1 \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{8} = \frac{2}{8}$
- Step 4: $= 3 + 1\frac{1}{4}$
- Step 5: $= 4\frac{1}{4}$

TA on the whiteboard

1. Are the denominators the same? If yes, no change; if no, use LCD.
2. Carry the whole number across the = sign.
3. Add the fractions together: add numerators/ common denominator.
Is the sum an improper fraction? If so, make it a mixed number...
You may need to use the part/whole model.
4. Add the whole number and the mixed number together.
5. Write down your final answer.

Fig. 1

She began by writing the question on the board: $1\frac{1}{4} + 1\frac{1}{5}$. A strict 3-2-1 SHOW! revealed two answers... $2\frac{2}{9}$ and $9\frac{1}{20}$. She invited a pupil to explain how he came to the answer $2\frac{2}{9}$. He described adding numerators and then the denominators. In superb children's entertainer mode, she feigned amazement and declared that sounded right to her. She then asked another pupil how they ended up with $9\frac{1}{20}$, and responded positively to that

answer, too.

Seemingly confused – “Goodness me! Both those answers sound right...” – she gave the pupils time to think about the two answers, $2\frac{2}{9}$ and $9\frac{1}{20}$. She then asked them, in pairs, to decide whether the correct answer was $2\frac{2}{9}$ or $9\frac{1}{20}$, and, a minute later, every single pair had written $9\frac{1}{20}$ on their boards. She had bellwether pupils in the room and probed their reasoning, safe in the knowledge that if they could explain how to arrive at the right answer, it was likely all the pupils would be able to.

She then asked them to discuss in the same pairs why someone might have written $2\frac{2}{9}$. What she made sure not to do, was humiliate the pupil who had written $2\frac{2}{9}$ first time round.

The success of this teacher's approach derives from her taking the time in her planning to anticipate the main misconceptions and to have an adaptive plan for disabusing the pupils of each misconception. If they had all written $2\frac{2}{9}$ on their whiteboards, she was ready to reteach how to add fractions with different denominators.

The teacher said to me, “I'm working hard on addressing the pupils' mathematical misconceptions there and then, in the lesson. I'm trying to be more proactive in getting them thinking about how to improve their work in the moment, and giving oral feedback, having anticipated their possible errors.” **TP**



John Tomsett is a former teacher and head with over 33 years

of experience. He is also an education consultant, and the author of 13 books, including *Love Over Fear: Creating a Culture for Truly Great Teaching* and *Mind Over Matter: Improving Mental Health in Our Schools*.

johntomsett.com

Rethinking planning

Let's think about $1\frac{1}{4} + 1\frac{1}{5}$ in more depth. Determining how many potential answers might arise will help you anticipate pupils' misconceptions. Consequently, your planning time can be spent preparing clear explanations, so that your pupils understand their misconceptions and adopt the correct mathematical thinking to arrive at the right answer.

Here are 10 possible (but incorrect) answers to $1\frac{1}{4} + 1\frac{1}{5}$. I have explained the misconceptions for the first two. To prepare thoroughly for teaching $1\frac{1}{4} + 1\frac{1}{5}$, you should think about the implicit misconceptions behind all the incorrect answers and how you would explain each so that children don't make the same mistake in their mathematical thinking in the future. This is the best preparation for adaptive teaching.

I will leave the explanations for misconceptions 3-10 up to you!

1. $9\frac{1}{40}$: The pupil correctly finds the common denominator as 20 and converts the fractions to $5\frac{1}{20}$ and $4\frac{1}{20}$. However, instead of only adding the numerators and keeping the denominator as 20, they incorrectly add the denominators as well.
2. $11\frac{1}{45}$: The pupil simply combines the numerators to make 11, and combines the denominators to make 45.
3. $2\frac{2}{20}$:
4. $11\frac{1}{9}$:
5. $2\frac{2}{45}$:
6. $11\frac{1}{20}$:
7. $1\frac{1}{20}$:
8. $1\frac{1}{40}$:
9. 0.45 :
10. $11\frac{1}{40}$

No matter how many misconceived answers you anticipate, there will always be one that catches you out, because children's minds are fascinatingly unpredictable!





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Not just a classroom

CURIOSITY

The seemingly simple idea of prime numbers can have a profound impact on mathematical learning, says **Kieran Mackle**...

P rime numbers are fascinating, not only because of the roles they play in the world around us, but also because of the position they occupy in the broader story of mathematics itself. At first glance, primes may seem little more than a list to be memorised: numbers up to 100, identified and stored. But that perception conceals their deeper significance. Prime numbers offer a striking example of how seemingly simple knowledge can carry profound implications.

A meaningful exploration of prime numbers in the classroom should attend to three key aspects. First, the hinterland – the historical and conceptual narrative that surrounds them. Second, their definition and the properties that follow.

Third, the representations that help pupils build conceptual understanding. Weaving these threads together supports children in developing knowledge that starts in primary, but resonates throughout their entire mathematical journey.

The story

Like so much of mathematics, the story of prime numbers begins long before formal definitions

were established. Ancient civilisations such as Babylonia and Egypt certainly worked with number systems capable of recognising indivisibility, yet no surviving evidence shows a formal concept of prime numbers. That recognition, as far as we know, begins with Euclid.

In *Elements*, written around 300 BCE, Euclid offered two enduring insights: a definition of

prime numbers and a proof that there are infinitely many of them. His proof, by contradiction, is an elegant piece of reasoning that still underpins mathematical thought.

Not long after, Eratosthenes developed his sieve. This is a systematic method for identifying prime numbers, and it remains a fixture in classrooms today (tinyurl.com/tp-Sieve). The study of primes continued through the centuries, from India to Islamic scholars, through European thinkers such as Fermat, Euler, and Gauss, and into the modern age with Riemann and analytic number theory.

But the significance of primes is not just historical or theoretical. One of their most important contemporary

applications lies in cryptography.

Encryption methods rely on the fact that it is easy to multiply two large primes, but extremely difficult to reverse the process and break such a product down into its prime factors. This asymmetry underpins the security of our digital systems.

The study of primes, begun in antiquity, now lies at the heart of the internet.

“The study of primes, begun in antiquity, now lies at the heart of the internet”



Definitions and properties

A precise definition matters. The schoolroom formulation – that a prime number is divisible only by one and itself – is familiar but flawed. By that logic, one would be prime, since it meets the condition – but it is not. The definition lacks the clarity necessary to be useful.

Instead, we should teach that a prime number has exactly two factors. This excludes one, includes two, and reveals two as the only even prime. Every other even number has more than two

Representation and reasoning

Prime numbers should not be treated in isolation. Like Roman numerals, their power lies in the connections they illuminate across mathematics. We should define them, explore their properties, and revisit them whenever they appear.

Arrays are a powerful way to visualise prime and composite numbers. Take eight as an example. It can be arranged as two rows of four, four rows of two, one row of eight, or eight rows of one. These are multiple arrays, each showing a

This process is not simply a visual activity. It reinforces knowledge of multiples, factors, and the cumulative nature of elimination. When teachers accompany it with questions such as "Why isn't one prime?", "Are all odd numbers prime?", or "What's the largest prime under 100?", pupils are pushed to reason, reflect, and generalise.

Arrays and sieves do different things. One shows structure. The other shows process. Both are essential in conjunction. Other representations, including factor trees, Venn diagrams, and factor sorting, offer even more ways in. Each reinforces the same truth from a different angle.

The wider story

Ultimately, the question is not just what prime numbers are, or how we teach them, but why they matter. Where do they sit in the broader mathematical narrative? What do they unlock in pupils' understanding?

Mathematics is a story. It began at the dawn of the universe and continues with every child. When we reduce mathematics to disjointed procedures, we exclude students from that story. When we connect ideas meaningfully, we offer them a chance to enter it.

“Prime numbers are threads in the great tapestry of maths”

factors, since it is divisible by two. This clearer definition supports deeper mathematical reasoning, and encourages pupils to connect prime numbers with multiplicative relationships, divisibility, and fractions.

Understanding primes helps children compare fractions, simplify expressions, and identify common denominators. Prime numbers also often indicate a point of stability; the number is as simple as it can get, or the solution is nearly complete. In this way, primes shape learners' choices and reasoning.

factor pair. By contrast, three can only be shown as three rows of one or one row of three. This reinforces the definition: exactly two factors.

The sieve of Eratosthenes complements this structural view with a procedural one. Using a hundred square, children first remove one (not prime), then circle two and eliminate its multiples. The same is done with three, then five, then seven. What remains are the primes. These are the numbers with exactly two distinct factors.

Prime numbers at a glance



What is a prime number?

A number with exactly two distinct factors. This excludes one, and makes two the only even prime.



What do they do?

They underpin key mathematical concepts such as factorisation, fractions, and multiplicative reasoning. Beyond school, they lie at the heart of modern cryptography and data security.



More than a list

Prime numbers offer a perfect example of how apparently simple facts connect to deep mathematical structures. They form part of a narrative stretching from ancient civilisations to the digital world.

Prime numbers are not simply facts to memorise. They are threads in the great tapestry of mathematics. If we help children follow those threads, they will not only understand primes. They will begin to see the deeper logic and wonder of the subject, and they will, as is their right, have full access to the story of mathematics. **TP**



Kieran Mackle is the creator of *The Story of Mathematics*, the author of *Tackling*

Misconceptions in Primary Mathematics and Thinking Deeply About Primary Mathematics, and the host of the *Thinking Deeply About Primary Education* podcast.

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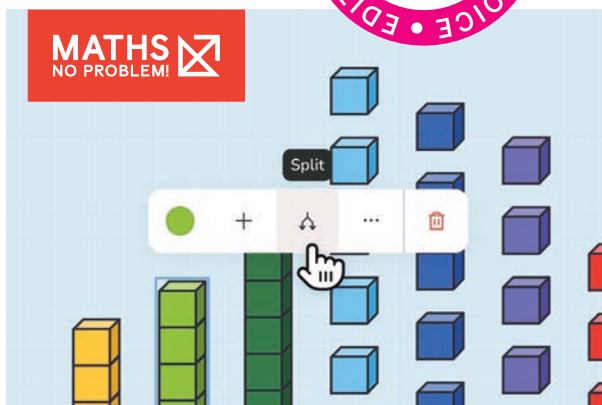
A roundup of tools and resources to take your maths teaching to the next level

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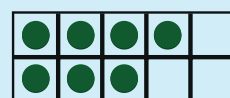
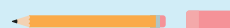
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Adaptive MATHS

How to plot a way in and a way forward for all pupils

CRAIG PARKINSON

Walk into any maths classroom and you'll see it: pupils starting from different points. Some race ahead confidently, others stall and wait for help, while many hover in between.

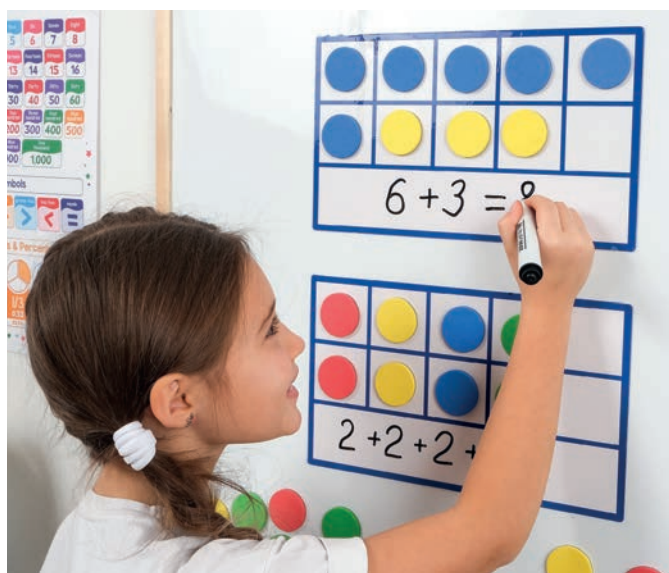
For years, 'traditional differentiation' – splitting the class into ability groups with separate worksheets and outcomes – was the go-to solution. Whilst designed to meet diverse needs, it can be hard to sustain, adds to workload, and may leave pupils labelled by fixed ability.

Whole-class differentiation offers an inclusive alternative. It starts with one rich problem everyone can access, then layers in talk, visuals, scaffolds, and challenges so all pupils have a way in and a way forward. The result is a shared journey where confidence grows, misconceptions are addressed early, and no one feels 'less than' in maths.

Exploration before explanation

When pupils explore before being shown a method, maths becomes theirs to investigate, not the teacher's to hand down. Prompts like "What do you notice?" invite multiple approaches – counting, drawing, modelling, or moving to equations. This builds resilience, curiosity, and validates the children's ideas.

In this phase, pupils can test strategies, make mistakes, and own their thinking. As the teacher, you can lend them a listening ear, help them connect threads, and guide the class towards an efficient method. For example, if the objective is to understand that fractions represent



equal parts, children might begin by exploring objects: can they divide them fairly? Try giving them first-hand experience by folding paper shapes or sharing food items. When you then introduce the formal method, it connects with what pupils have already discovered. Creating these small opportunities for exploration can enrich pupils' understanding and strengthen long-term learning.

Talk before textbook

Talking is a powerful whole-class tool. Explaining thinking aloud and hearing others' strategies expands problem-solving skills, and sentence stems like "I noticed..." or "I solved it by..." help all pupils to join in. In maths especially, giving children a chance to try out subject-specific vocabulary can help them connect abstract concepts with practical strategies.

Why not try grouping the class into pairs or threes (making sure to mix abilities)

and asking each child to take it in turns performing an action with manipulatives, while their teammates describe what they're doing. For example, one child could line up eight cubes in front of them, then split the cubes in half, putting four on each side of the table. Their teammates could narrate '8 divided by 2 is 4'. You can let children decide on their own strategies, or provide cards or prompts on the board to give them some ideas. Afterwards, discuss as a class what vocabulary the children used and heard, and whether any of the problems were particularly tricky to describe, and why. Small groups with mixed abilities will give all children a chance at exploring problems, without the pressure of solo work or whole-class scrutiny.

Depth before speed

While routine maths problems can build fluency and provide useful practice, for many pupils, long lists of questions can feel overwhelming – especially for

SEND learners. An alternative is to focus on five or six rich problems that highlight patterns and prompt questions like "What's the same?" and "What's different?" This creates space for depth, talk, and connection-making. For example, if the children need to practise subtraction skills, you can present pairs of questions that are minimally different in presentation (such as $6 - 4 = X$ and $2 = 6 - X$). Ask pupils to identify whether the questions are asking the same thing, and why. This can help pupils identify problems from different perspectives, and understand the essential mathematical principle that there is often more than one correct solution. This exercise also allows for simple differentiation, depending on the difficulty of the problem and the extent of difference between questions.

Slowing the pace often accelerates long-term progress, too; pupils understand, rather than recall mechanically.

Approaches such as these will help your children to explore the kind of maths skills that will benefit them throughout their education and into the real world, as well as introducing them to mathematical thinking. When pupils see themselves as mathematicians, confidence grows – and that's what underpins long-term success. **TP**



Craig Parkinson is a consultant and trainer for Maths — *No Problem!*

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Storytime SAVIOURS

Reading volunteers don't just help with decoding and fluency – they can transform children's attitudes to books and bring precious peace of mind for teachers...

TORI WATTS

I imagine you know it well – the common situation of having 30 children to teach, making it difficult to spend meaningful one-to-one time with each one, let alone providing additional support to those who need it most. Even with the support of a teaching assistant and daily whole-class reading sessions, hearing every child read individually is still a particular challenge; so for me, the introduction of a volunteer reader into the classroom was a potential game-changer. And I knew I'd made the right decision when one of my reluctant readers started to use new, expressive words in their writing. Such a small change in the classroom; such a huge difference.

Getting it right

Every week, those 10-minute sessions with the volunteer would be filled with patience, encouragement and a dictionary to hand. They empowered children who had often struggled to broaden their vocabularies and find the confidence to put them into practice. This made me incredibly proud and reassured; I would heartily recommend trying it. *But how?*, you ask. Well, first you need to get organised. I'm aware how tough that can be when time is scarce, but you will thank yourself later when you are truly reaping the benefits of having a volunteer reader.

A clear induction process, including the teacher, the volunteer and the pupils, is key. That means, for example, taking the time to clearly communicate expectations and provide the volunteer with information on how to handle

different situations.

It is important to reassure the volunteer and create an open environment for feedback, which in turn will allow you to make the most of their time.

Introducing the volunteer to the pupils is equally essential in establishing their role and making everyone feel comfortable, particularly for children who will be directly supported.

I created a list of the children who were going to benefit most from one-to-one sessions every week, prioritising those needing extra help with confidence and fluency. I also explained to the children why they were receiving extra reading time. This equipped them to have a better understanding of the situation, and made the sessions run more smoothly.

For many of the less confident children, reading wasn't their favourite activity. But once these

sessions became a regular part of the school week, they began seeing their time with the volunteer as a 'treat'. They valued the one-to-one attention of an adult, something to which they didn't always have access.

Practical planning also made the process smoother. Having the volunteer come at the same time every week, for the same amount of time, and using a designated area like the library to keep distractions to a minimum helped enormously. Using the library allowed for informal catch-up time, too, helping the children to settle before reading.

Situating the volunteer in the library also helped when pupils, more often than not, had forgotten their book. I asked the children to collect the next reader after their session, reducing interruptions and keeping my class's excitement in check.

No pressure

The main challenge I found was getting feedback from the volunteer. With most sessions occurring on teaching days, conversations often felt rushed. I addressed this by setting up dedicated feedback time between the volunteer and another member of staff, ensuring they didn't have to wait or interrupt my teaching.

The volunteer reader nurtured a genuine love for reading among my class. By listening rather than teaching, they removed the pressure often associated with reading at school and helped children to see it as a fun, life-enriching activity. It also gave pupils space to discuss the stories and ask questions. Volunteers definitely have more time for those 'silly' conversations, where children can let their imaginations run wild. This massively improved pupils' conversational skills and confidence.

Beyond reading, the volunteer became a valued part of our school family, helping out on Roman Day and school trips. They offered a new perspective – and above all, gave me the peace of mind that children who needed extra support were receiving it. **TP**



Tori Watts is a former primary school teacher, and is now

coordinator for national reading charity, **Schoolreaders**.

schoolreaders.org

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The unbelievable TRUTH

Unreliable narrators can be a barrel of laughs, but they're also great tools for critical thinking, says **Bethany Walker**...

Dear Teach Primary HR Team,
I would like to apply for the role of in-school liaison officer. I love *eating* working with people and I find children particularly *delicious* inspiring.
As you can see from Miss RR Hood's reference, I do have experience of working with children. I have been told my key attributes are:

- I have big eyes, which means that I am observant and always on the look-out.
- I have a big nose, so I can sniff out excellent opportunities.
- I have big teeth, proving I am hungry for this job.

I would very much like to discuss my suitability for this role with you at interview, and I look forward to *eating* meeting you then.
Yours sincerely
The Big Bad Good Wolf

As a children's author, I love writing funny stories, and I particularly love epistolary – also known as diary-style – books. One of the main pleasures of stories in these formats is that the protagonists easily get the wrong end of the stick. The viewpoint character may completely believe what they are writing, but the child reader loves spotting where that character is deviating from the truth. The humour we can get out of these situations, plus the joy children experience from being one (or many) steps ahead of the book, are two

very good reasons why stories with unreliable narrators are fantastic for children.

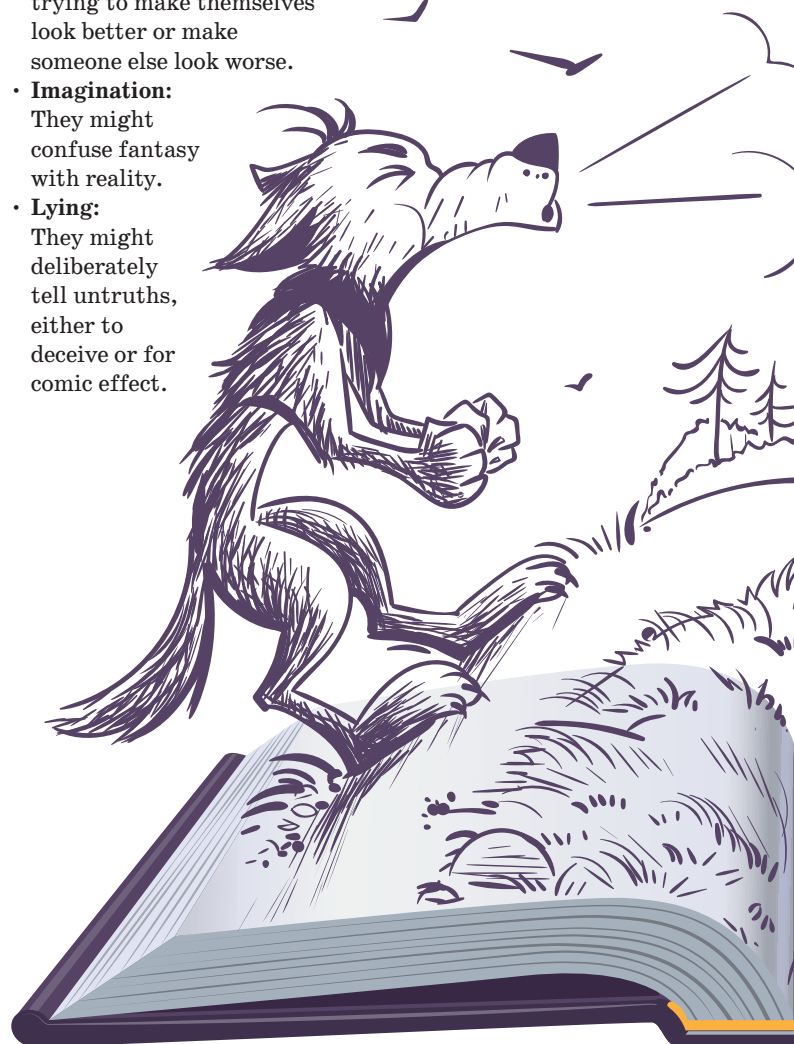
An unreliable narrator is a character who tells a story, but cannot be fully trusted to tell it accurately or truthfully. This may be because they are mistaken, forgetful, biased, or even deliberately lying. The narrator might misunderstand the world around them, or tell an outrageous version of events that readers are invited to question. In children's fiction, unreliable narrators can create humour, mystery, or surprising twists that help young readers think more critically about stories.

What makes a narrator unreliable?

A narrator may be unreliable for several reasons:

- **Lack of knowledge:** They might be too young or inexperienced to understand what's really happening.
- **Bias:** They could be trying to make themselves look better or make someone else look worse.
- **Imagination:** They might confuse fantasy with reality.
- **Lying:** They might deliberately tell untruths, either to deceive or for comic effect.

Books that include an unreliable narrator allow the reader to realise that all is not as it seems, thereby allowing them to feel like they've unlocked a special secret hidden within the text. In this age of mass, unfiltered communication and information, children's ability to spot an unreliable



narrator, and understanding that they have to question what is written, are two skills that are becoming ever more vital. Engaging pupils with books that employ an unreliable narrator actually helps prepare them for a lifetime of misinformation!

Where to start

• ***The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*** by Jon Scieszka
This book is a classic, but it stands the test of time as it encourages children to think about how stories can change depending on who tells them. In this retelling of the fairy tale, the wolf (Alexander T. Wolf) claims he was only trying to borrow a cup of sugar from his neighbours, the pigs. He insists the real story is a misunderstanding blown out of proportion by

the media. Readers quickly realise that he's bending the truth to make himself look innocent.

• ***Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Being Good (and sequels)***
by Louie Stowell

This series, starring the Norse god of mischief, Loki, is a fantastic spin on the idea of an unreliable narrator. Loki's entire personality is based around being untrustworthy and sly, yet as part of his way of learning to be better, he has to write a diary in which he can only tell the truth. Through Louie Stowell's hilarious writing, readers see the battle between Loki's true nature and his attempts to tell the truth and achieve his goals.

• ***This Is Not My Hat***
by Jon Klassen

In this darkly funny picture book, a small fish steals a hat and confidently tells readers why he'll get away with it. His smug claims contrast with the illustrations, which reveal the truth: he's being followed, and justice is coming. The unreliable narration creates tension and humour as readers piece together what's really happening.

Why use unreliable narrators?

Using unreliable narrators in the classroom helps children develop:

- **Critical reading skills:** They learn to compare what the narrator says with other clues.
- **Empathy and perspective:** They understand how people can see the same event differently.
- **Creative thinking:** They explore imaginative storytelling techniques.

Unreliable narrators invite children to question what they read with greater awareness – and it is also fantastic for children to bring unreliable narrators into their own writing. By playing with this technique, pupils can learn simple ways to add humour and interest to their work, while also gaining a deeper understanding of storytelling, voice, and perspective; skills that will benefit them both in literature and in life. **TP**



Bethany Walker is an author of children's books. Her latest book,

Medusa Gorgon's Bad Hair Day (£7.99, Scholastic), is out now.

bethanywalkerwriter.co.uk

FOUR WRITING TASKS TO TRY



1. I, monster

Task: Choose a well-known story (e.g. *The Minotaur* or *George and the Dragon*) and retell it from the monster's point of view. What is the monster like? Did they mean to cause a problem? Are they misunderstood? Was it all a big mix-up?

Learning focus:

Understanding point of view; using persuasive or biased language.



2. "It wasn't my fault!"

Task: Write a diary entry from a character who got into trouble – but claims they are innocent. Let the narrator make excuses or exaggerate. Then ask pupils to illustrate the 'real' events.

Learning focus:

Identifying exaggeration and truth; using voice and character in writing.



3. Detective story

Task: Write a mystery story where the detective makes lots of silly assumptions or misses obvious clues. Let the readers figure out what's really going on.

Learning focus:

Developing plot and inference; using humour and irony.

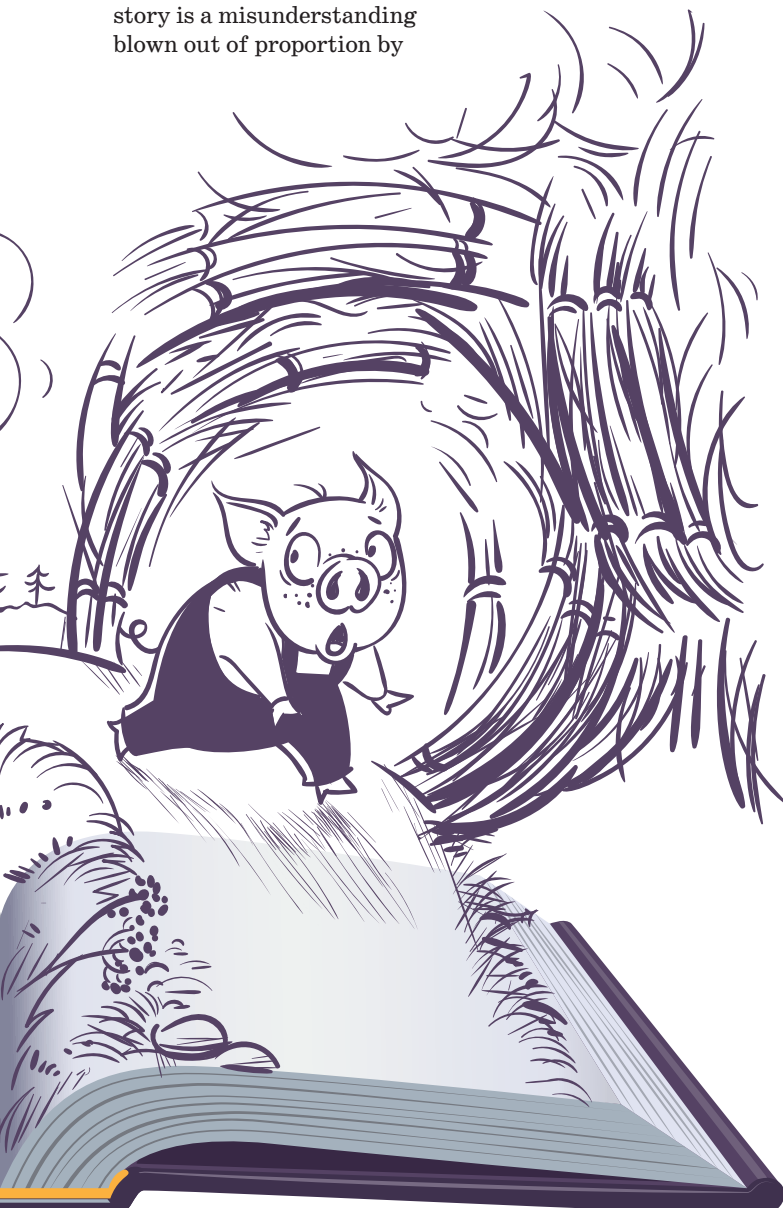


4. Two sides

Task: In pairs, one pupil writes a story from one character's perspective. Their partner writes the same event from another character's point of view. Compare the two and discuss the differences.

Learning focus:

Exploring bias; team writing and discussion.



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Wild

Explore the wildness within and without, using **Katya Balen's** beautiful picturebook as your guide...

KATE HEAP

October, *October*, a middle grade novel by Katya Balen, changed my view of children's books.

It showed me the true power of character and how children deserve the chance to explore their innermost feelings. It embraces nature, wildlife and the opportunity to be completely true to yourself.

In her picturebook, *Wild*, Balen explores these same themes. It's like readers have been given a precious chance to see October as a little girl;

whose joy in nature and wildness shines through her relationships with birds, trees, the sky and the Earth. This delightful character shows us just how beautiful it is to be wild. Gill Smith's gorgeous illustrations emphasise the light, warmth and peace of her woodland home.

One day, this little girl's family moves to the city. It is grey and solid. She misses the life and movement of the woods. The contrast is striking. Tall, straight buildings, dreary rain and dusty pavements cause the little

girl to wonder if she's lost her wild. When a bird calls out to her, there's a spark of hope. Following the bird through streets, parks and down to the river, the girl realises there is wild to be found, even in the city. She discovers ducks, herons, gulls and fish. She spots flowers growing in concrete cracks and whole worlds of insects hiding under rocks and leaves. As night draws in, the mystery of a fox and peeping stars confirm there is wildness everywhere – she just needs to know where to look.





Activities

Wild is an uplifting story, perfect for EYFS and KS1 classes exploring the beauty of nature, wildlife and growth. Children will be able to make comparisons between their own school grounds, the local community, the busy city and natural parks, woods and reserves.

Into the woods

Visit a local woodland or nature reserve to find 'wildness all around'. Encourage children to look at the sky and clouds, listen for birds, spot tiny insects and investigate signs of wildlife. Perhaps there are tracks in the earth, evidence of an animal home or signs of a tasty meal? Discuss what Katya Balen means by 'stories in the earth' and encourage the class to create their own woodland tales. Talk about lifecycles and ecosystems to encourage children to make connections. Help pupils focus on specific areas by

providing them with a cardboard frame; by holding it up to the sky and trees or laying it on the ground, they can zoom in on just one part of nature. While discovering the natural world, challenge pupils to consider why the wild is so important.

As children explore, ask them to collect natural objects from the ground – sticks, leaves, flowers, seeds and stones. Discuss colour, texture, patterns and how they are connected. Back at school, you can use these objects to create nature pictures, or combine them with a large tray and soil to build your own sensory woodland.

Making comparisons

Wild focuses on the differences between the woods and the city. Help children make these comparisons themselves by examining the natural and physical features of an urban area. Go for a walk through your local area. The cardboard frames could be used again to encourage careful observation.

Back at school, work together to make a list of everything you found in the woods then make a similar list for the urban area. What is the same? What is different? Focus on life and growth. Were there any signs of 'wild'?

In *Wild*, Gill Smith's beautiful illustrations emphasise the difference between the woodland and the city. Use watercolours to create a painting of two halves: woodland and city. Encourage children to carefully consider colour choices, with rich greens, earthy browns and sunny yellows on the woodland side and greys, blacks and brick red for the city.

Wild in the city

Explore the local urban area again, looking for glimpses of nature. Begin by examining a map: can children find



where the parks, green spaces, gardens and allotments are?

Go for a walk and focus on natural features. Are there plenty of trees and flowers? Are there planted bulbs or are the verges left to grow wild in support of insects? Are there signs of wildlife – birds, hedgehogs, foxes or even slugs and snails?

Challenge pupils to think about how they can increase the 'wild' within their city or town. Could they plant flowers or vegetables? Could they go litter picking? Could they write to local politicians about the protection of green spaces? When empowered to take action, children have the potential to have their voices heard.

Take it further → → →

RAINBOW WALK

Go on a rainbow walk. Using either sticky cards and sticky bracelets, or tablets to take photos, challenge children to find items from each colour of the rainbow. You could choose to start with natural features and then extend the challenge to take photos of physical features as well. Once the items (or photos) have been collected, children can work as a class or in groups to create a large rainbow collage. Photos could be used in a computing activity using an app like Pic Collage, Canva or similar,

to create a picture that reflects the variety of colours found in nature.

SOUND COLLECTOR

Spend time listening to the sounds of nature – the wind in the trees, the rustling of leaves as animals scurry across branches, the chirp of a bird and the buzz of a bee. Try to identify what makes up each instrument in nature's symphony.

Explore the characteristics of assorted items from nature. Challenge children to collect

sticks, stones, dry leaves, grass – anything that might make a sound. Then, in groups, give them the opportunity to explore the sounds they can create by scraping, hitting, tapping, crinkling or even blowing. Once they have a collection of sounds, they can create their own piece of music. Encourage them to think about the speed (tempo), volume (dynamics) and mood of their composition. How can they best represent their surroundings?

Put two groups together to listen to each other's sounds. If they close their eyes, can they guess what object is being used to make a particular sound? Now, use all the



“Wild is the perfect book to help pupils explore the wonders of nature”

about how they contribute to the local ecosystem.

Animals and humans

There are many wonderful stories in which wildlife interacts with humans. Holly Webb’s animal tales are fantastic examples of books that explore the delicate relationship between animals and humans. In each book, a child encounters a British animal, such as a fox, badger or owl, and must find a way to protect the creature and its habitat. These stories champion conservation, rewilding and respect for the natural world.

Encourage children to choose a British animal to research. They should consider appearance, adaptation to environment, habitat, diet, threats and relationship with humans. Once they become experts about their animal, they can present their findings in a format of their choosing. They could write and illustrate a picturebook, a poem, a non-chronological report or leaflet, a script for a documentary or even a play. Encourage them to focus on how humans can help this animal to thrive. Provide a purpose for the writing by sharing it with another class or with parents.

Finding our wild

Reading *Wild* also provides an opportunity to talk about what it

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *A Story of the Seasons: A Year in Nature* by Anna Wilson & Carolina Rabei
- ❖ *Betsy Buglove and the Brave Butterfly* by Catherine Jacob & Lucy Fleming
- ❖ *Willow Wildthing* by Gill Lewis & Rebecca Bagley
- ❖ *Greenwild* by Pari Thompson & Elisa Paganelli
- ❖ *The Beck* by Anthony McGowen

means to be ‘wild’ – to be ourselves and explore our world. There’s an incredible sense of freedom and peace to be found in nature. Encourage children to stop and feel the woods – to drink it in. Forest bathing is a Japanese relaxation technique; being calm among the trees, breathing deeply and observing nature can reduce stress and increase a sense of wellbeing.

When the girl in the story has to leave the woods, she feels like she’s lost her wild. Is it possible to lose who you are? What circumstances might cause this to happen? How can we find our way through difficult times to feel like ourselves again? **TP**



Kate Heap is a primary English consultant, author and children’s book reviewer. Her Developing Reading Comprehension

Skills series provides teachers with high-quality, engaging texts and thought-provoking questions that will inspire young readers.

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Down to the river

In *Wild*, the girl follows a bird to the river where she discovers the freshness of the water, the freedom of birds, the energy of fish and life everywhere. Beside the buildings, roads, vehicles and bridges, she discovers that there was wild there all along.

Visit a nearby river or canal or invite a speaker from a local charity such as the Canal & River Trust into your classroom (canalrivertrust.org.uk). Focus on the connections between physical and natural features. Find out more about the importance of the waterways and how nature is protected along their banks. Identify common birds, fish and insects while learning

‘instruments’ to create a new piece of music. Listening to each other and teamwork is key.

COMPANION TO OCTOBER, OCTOBER

Wild would be the perfect picturebook to pair with the middle grade novel *October, October*, also by Katya Balen. Exploring similar themes, these two books could be read together to reflect on the importance of nature, the contrast of physical and natural features, and the impact of moving to a new place, at a much deeper level. *October, October* is a powerful story of love, discovery, challenges, loss and

rebuilding. Eleven-year-old October lives in the forest with her father. They are wild and love everything about their off-grid existence, relying on themselves and the forest for life, joy and fulfilment. October thrives on their traditions and her close relationship with both her father and the natural world around her. She loves to find treasures and imagine their stories. Her collection of found things is precious to her, and she is happiest when exploring the forest after a storm. As the story begins, October discovers her most special treasures yet, and their stories become key to October’s future and the unexpected turns life takes.

Cleverly telling the tale through a first-person inner monologue, Katya Balen gives incredible insight into the thoughts and intense feelings of her character. The reader is drawn right into the powerful emotions October experiences as she attempts to navigate her way through an unknown world. Themes of letting go, dealing with change, loss and gain shape the story into something truly special. Readers are encouraged to really think about what it means to be wild and free and how to find their own perfect ending.



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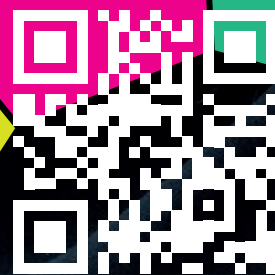
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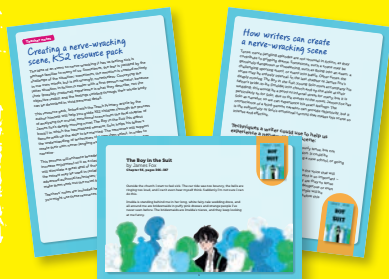
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WAGOLL

The Boy in the Suit by James Fox

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a nerve-wracking scene

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RESOURCES AT



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

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

The *Boy in the Suit* is a middle-grade novel which follows 10-year-old Solo Walker and his complicated mum, Morag, as they struggle through the cost-of-living crisis. As a means to survive, the duo sneak uninvited into strangers' funerals, seeking food, warmth, and somewhere to be. The title refers to the ill-fitting, second-hand suit Solo must wear to blend into the funeral crowd. Naturally, the pair are eventually caught gate-crashing, and their already precarious world is tipped on its side.



The Boy in the Suit (£7.99, Scholastic) is out now.

Solo, our main protagonist, must grapple with the impact of his parent's decisions, while learning that sometimes grownups have fewer answers than children do. Alongside their public shaming, he must learn to navigate family, school, and a budding friendship. Morag, embattled by failing mental health and media intrusion, is driven into hiding, leaving Solo to deal with problems that even adults scarcely know how to solve.

The story follows Solo and Morag as they transition from one normal to another, experiencing the good and the bad of the systems and community around them. There are unexpected kindnesses, thoughtful gestures, funny moments, and occasional

missteps and oversights by the people surrounding Solo. Ultimately, the same systems and community come to their aid and help clear the path forwards with humour and care.

While the story oscillates between serious and funny, there is plenty of nerve-wracking action. My personal key to create a nerve-wracking scene is to establish a character's comfort zone, then write the exact opposite. Solo's comfort zone is any situation where he is alone, not being perceived. He hates being looked at and speaking in public, often flushing bright red when simply answering a question in class. What better than a ceremonial role in a grand church wedding, then, to illustrate Solo's nerves and provide an opportunity for character growth?

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE A NERVE-WRACKING SCENE

REVERSE COMFORT ZONES

Get to know your character's safe space, then flip it upside down. If they love staying indoors, put them on a mountain during a storm. If they typically avoid the spotlight, put them on stage with a mic and a hostile audience.

AMP UP THE SENSES

Nervousness comes with distinct bodily sensations. Describe what your character is experiencing through sight,

sound, touch, and smell. Hone in on body parts that may betray nervousness: a churning stomach, trembling hands, a rapid pulse.

USE RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Express doubt and concern by using rhetorical questions in your characters' thoughts and dialogue. Will it be okay? What's going to happen? When will it be over? You can answer these questions in the action.

CHOOSE AN IMPOSING SETTING

Certain settings have anxiety built in. Choose one with an element of risk, danger, grandeur or tension to it. Describe it in detail and make it seem alien.

DESCRIBE THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Have your character ruminate on their biggest fear. Is it fainting? Falling over? Describe their most dreaded outcomes in detail to create a vivid sense of anxiety.



Extract from

Chapter 56,
pages 366–367

Churches can be daunting spaces – places of ceremony and grandeur, with an element of theatre. Large and imposing, the church contrasts with the meek personality and stature of the young protagonist.

Outside the church I start to feel sick. The car ride was too bouncy, the bells are ringing too loud, and I can't even hear myself think. Suddenly I'm not sure

The repetition of the adverb 'too' indicates the excess of Solo's sensory experience. His senses are overwhelmed beyond comfort by these unfamiliar surroundings.

Solo being perceived strangely by the bridesmaids adds a sense of awkward self-consciousness, adding to the overall discomfort of the scene and adding a 'fish out of water' feeling.

I can do this.

Imelda is standing behind me in her long, white fairy-tale wedding dress, and all around me are bridesmaids in puffy pink dresses and strange people I've never seen before. The bridesmaids are Imelda's nieces, and they keep looking at me funny.

Solo's attire is used throughout the book to represent his circumstances and state of mind. Here, a hot and sticky suit represents the formality of this occasion, a constraint that adds to the stress and bodily discomfort of nervousness.

True to form, Solo ruminates on worst-case scenarios through rhetorical questions.

I feel hot and sticky in my new suit, and a part of me wishes I was wearing my old baggy one instead. I shouldn't have eaten so much breakfast. What if I throw up and ruin the wedding?

A shaky hand starts to rub my shoulder.

"Bit nerve-wracking, isn't it, Solo?" Imelda says, bending down to whisper in my ear. She smells of flowery perfume and powdery make-up. She's trying to make me feel better but her voice sounds trembly and scared. "I feel the same, don't worry. I never actually thought this day was going to come!"

A key theme of the book is the imperfect nature of parents and adults, and this remains true in this scene. Although Imelda attempts to calm Solo's nerves through dialogue, her body betrays her trepidation, doubling the sense of unease in the scene.

Use of sound descriptors representing Solo's internal and external environments adds a sense of inescapable confusion and sensory overload that is common with anxiety.

I don't dare reply in case my breakfast reappears when I open my mouth, so I nod and focus on the stone floor, my heart pounding like an orchestra of drums in my chest. Organ music starts to blare out. My tummy somersaults and I plead with it to stay inside me where it belongs.

Imelda squeezes my shoulder even tighter now. "You've got this, Solo. Just like we practised. Pretend that nobody's here."

When calm, we mostly feel in control of our own bodies. By pleading with his body to play along, Solo narrates a lack of control and heightened nervousness. His tummy 'somersaulting' affords it agency and casts it as an opponent.



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Breathe new life into YOUR LIBRARY

An audit can make a world of difference to your school's reading culture, and help build a strong community, says **Hazel Murrell**

School libraries are full of surprises, and I am not necessarily referring to the chicken that once sidled up next to me as I tidied the bookshelves in a lovely school! I am talking about the untapped potential within your library space.

Setting aside regular time to stop, think and gather inspiration for your library is so important. Forget Instagram, it is your school community that will provide the best feedback and new ideas for your setting. Invite colleagues and pupils to talk to you about the library. What would pupils like to see more of? What do staff need to help them deliver the curriculum? Does the library feel accessible to the whole school?

While it's important to consider every aspect of the library, its heart is its book collection. I remember working with a school that had a gorgeous new library; the space was light, open and inviting, but a quick look through the shelves made it clear why it wasn't being used: the books were old, dusty, irrelevant and uninteresting to the pupils.

This was an extreme example of outdated stock, but it highlights the importance of regularly reviewing and auditing your book collections. Here's how to do it successfully:

Get tough

To do this properly, you will need time and space, so I recommend planning to conduct your audit at a time when pupils are not accessing the library.

As you are assessing each book, ask yourself: is it suitable for your pupils, their age and interests? Does it support the curriculum? Will it encourage reading for pleasure? Don't be afraid to weed – if you find yourself surrounded by piles of different books; one for discarding, one for repairs, one for re-shelving, then you're doing it right!

Don't be blinded by nostalgia, either. I completely understand the warm feeling created by books from our own childhoods, but those books will not necessarily inspire, excite and engage today's children.

Get some help

The more knowledgeable you are, the more impact you can have on your pupils. Take steps to actively increase

your book knowledge and seek advice and recommendations from suppliers, children's book bloggers and organisations like the School Library Association.

If you are tackling the audit yourself, make sure you are equipped with the right tools - an auditing spreadsheet is a must - and recruit some allies. Involving other staff members or capable parent volunteers can help you feel more confident in your decision making.

Sometimes the best investment is professional expertise. A specialist consultant can bring knowledge, speed and fresh eyes to an audit. They'll spot issues you might miss and suggest replacements you hadn't considered.

Budget for new stock

Your book audit will inevitably highlight gaps in your collection. Your school budgets should include ring-fenced funds to update the library books, but if not, speak to your PTA, start a wish list and share it with local businesses, make the most of discounts and sales, or see if you can team up with a local bookshop to accept donations on your behalf. No budget doesn't have to mean no books! Updating your school library with

fresh titles is a brilliant way to create whole-school excitement around reading. Take some of the new books to assembly and perform a live un-boxing, make displays sharing more information, or invite teachers to read and discuss their favourite books in the library.

The newly renovated library I mentioned earlier saw a huge increase in pupil visits after they updated their stock. The space became a hub of the school community, and the library experienced a steep increase in loans. Where there was once a beautiful space, there was now a real reading community, that grew from a collection review and audit.

Putting time and care into evaluating the books that are on your shelves can make an impact on your pupils that will last a lifetime. Don't look at the limitations – look at the opportunities. Small changes can make a big difference. **TP**



Hazel Murrell is community and engagement officer at the School Library Association.

sla.org.uk





The
Children's
Society

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**.

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom



1

Join the club

Looking for a fun and creative way to introduce coding to your school? Code Club is a global community of free coding clubs that help learners create with technology while building confidence, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. With 200+ ready-to-use projects across

Scratch, micro:bit, and more, sessions are easy to run and accessible to learners of all abilities. Whether your club is at lunch, after school, or during class, using the resources requires minimal prep and gives learners the tools and skills to shape the future. Code Club is part of the Raspberry Pi Foundation. Find out more at codeclub.org



3

Unbeatable residential

Porthpean Outdoor in Cornwall offers schools an unbeatable residential experience that inspires learning beyond the classroom. Thanks to being just a five-minute walk from our beach, we provide exciting water, beach and land-based activities, such as kayaking, coasteering, stand up paddleboarding, climbing, archery, and bushcraft, with opportunities to build confidence and resilience every step of the way. The cosy onsite accommodation at our secure site, as well as full catering facilities means we take the stress out of your residential. With safety, inclusivity, and education at the core, Porthpean Outdoor gives teachers peace of mind and pupils memories that last a lifetime. You book the coach – we'll do the rest! Visit porthpean.com or call 01726 72901



4

Holistic play therapy

Academy of Play and Child Psychotherapy (APAC) is the largest, most experienced and dedicated creative arts and play therapy training organisation in the world. APAC offers the Integrative Holistic Model of Play Therapy, which is uniquely validated through excellent clinical outcomes. This provides a solid foundation preparing students with the knowledge, skills and experience to work therapeutically with children, young people and adults using play and creative arts. APAC offers three routes to train to become a qualified play therapist, including funded, self-funded, and using the employer levy. Visit apac.org.uk to find out more.

2



Clear guidance for SEND

The Universal SEND Services programme offers free, flexible training around SEND to help the education workforce identify and meet learners' needs effectively, resulting in a more inclusive mainstream system. A range of opportunities are available, including an award-winning series of 20 online units exploring some of the most commonly observed barriers to learning, regardless of age, label or area of need. Each unit takes under an hour and provides clear guidance on adaptations to help meet the needs of all learners. There is no need to study in order, and each can be completed across a number of sessions. Find out more at <https://bit.ly/4nuwReD>



5

The magic of singing

What if singing could transform not just your music lessons, but your pupils' experience throughout the school day? Singing is such a powerful way to foster community, boost wellbeing and enhance wider learning. With Sing Up's unbeatable platform, you'll save hours of planning and access everything you need: a full primary curriculum for nursery to Year 6, cross-curricular learning, assembly plans, instrumental lessons and an award-winning song bank packed with songs from diverse genres and cultures – plus, it's non-specialist-friendly too! Discover why thousands of teachers all over the world love Sing Up at singup.org

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love

KS1



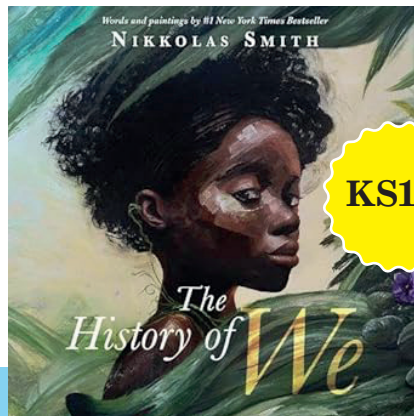
The Remembering Candle

by Alison Goldberg,
ill. Selina Alko

(£12.99HB, Barefoot Books)

The Remembering Candle tells the story of a little boy whose grandpa died the year before, and the boy is experiencing Yahrzeit for the first time. Yahrzeit is the Jewish tradition of lighting a candle for those you've lost on the anniversary of their death. The candle then burns consistently for a whole day and night, during which time, loved ones share their memories. The young narrator of the story learns that letting the candle burn for such a long time allows for the memories to return to loved ones, and gives them space to properly honour those who have passed. A great introduction to this element of the Jewish faith, or an interesting exploration of how different cultures handle death, this book is a strong addition to your RE shelf.

KS1/2



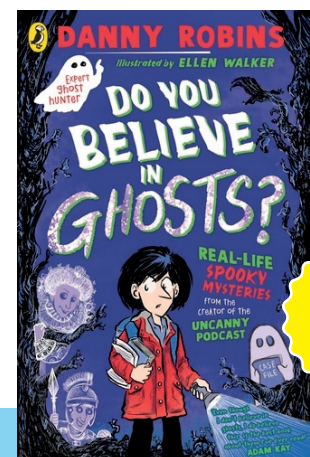
The History of We

by Nikkolos Smith

(£8.99, Rock the Boat)

Answering big questions from your little learners can be somewhat overwhelming, especially when they have long and complicated answers. If any of your pupils have ever asked you "Where do people come from?" or something similar, this book could be for you. Starting with humanity's origins in Africa, and exploring how mankind spread across the world, and how civilisation developed, this poem and accompanying paintings are a great way to delve into the story of the human race. The poem and art is also accompanied, in the book's final pages, by a timeline outlining key moments in our people's history, from some of the oldest human fossils in Ethiopia, dating from 233,000BCE, to the development of human shelter.

KS2



Do You Believe in Ghosts?

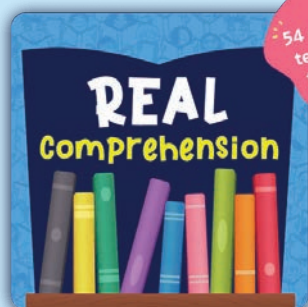
by Danny Robins,
ill. Ellen Walker

(£8.99, Puffin)

Danny Robins' beloved TV show and podcast (both titled *Uncanny*) draw large audiences of all ages, and now your favourite ghost hunter is back; this time, with a collection of tales specifically for younger readers. In this book, Danny dives right into real-life stories of spooky goings-on, from paranormal apparitions to mysterious poltergeists. But that's not all – alongside this insight into the unexplainable, Danny consults with experts to explore some of the scientific phenomena that might go some way towards interpreting these happenings. From how human hearing works, to why we've evolved to be afraid of the dark, there is plenty within these pages to spark a series of fascinating lessons. Spooky, but not scary, this is the perfect October classroom addition.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED**
RESOURCES

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Including 54 original texts on 18 themes, Real Comprehension is a unique and powerful whole-school reading programme for Years 1 to 6. It's designed to develop sophisticated skills of inference and retrieval, and build rich vocabularies. Pupils are also encouraged to make comparisons between different texts and identify themes within them. Visit plazoom.com/real-comprehension



KS2

Hansel and Gretel

by **Stephen King**,
ill. **Maurice Sendak**

(£20HB, Hachette Children's)

Are you ready for spooky season? You will be after reading this creepy and vivid reimagining of Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel* by the one and only Stephen King. Taking the original German tale and adapting it slightly for a modern audience (in his own words, taking the "good bits" and leaving the rest), King retains a straightforward storytelling style, while managing to pile on the tension. Accompanied by dreamlike (or nightmarelike) illustrations from Maurice Sendak (of *Where the Wild Things Are* fame), this one isn't for the faint of heart. An interesting starting point for lessons based around fairy tales, but be aware that it might not be right for your more sensitive pupils.



KS2

Midnight Treasure

by **Piers Torday**

(£8.99, Quercus Children's Books)

Opening with a nighttime march towards the edges of an empire from long ago, Piers Torday's latest triumph sets the scene straight away: we are in the world of the vampires, and there is a wealth of mystery, adventure, and treasure coming our way. In this fantasy epic, a werewolf named Tibor is on a deadly quest, along with his best friend Roza, to discover the elusive Midnight Treasure. But with bears – and yes, vampires – to battle along the way, the odds are stacked against him. Can he complete his mission in time? Gripping from the very first page, this is a wonderful read for lovers of fantasy and adventure, and a masterclass in captivating writing. A true treasure indeed (no hunting required).

Meet the author

**PIERS TORDAY
ON HIS TRANSYLVANIAN
FAMILY, AND THE LINK
BETWEEN VAMPIRES AND
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE...**

©David Shoukry



We love a book with a map at the beginning! How did you come up with your world?

My late dad's family are originally from Transylvania, and I wanted to explore that heritage. During lockdown, I found a map of a fantasy land he had drawn for my brother and me as kids, and it sparked my imagination! So when we could travel again, I took a train to Transylvania to research family history and folklore, blending real places with his map.

What made you want to write about vampires?

So many monsters and demons are often characterisations of our deepest fears – like being turned into a bloodthirsty wandering spirit during our sleep! I think it's best to approach our fears rather than run away or make them into something worse than they are. Vampires in my book are a tyrannical version of the traditional vampire that have been in power so long, they think they are immortal and unstoppable. But like all tyrants, they're actually not...

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

There is so much to learn from the folklore of vampires and werewolves, often used to demonise the vulnerable, migrants and the sick. Where do those stories come from, and who spreads them? The villain in the *Midnight Treasure* books is inspired by a real-life Transylvanian warlord, Vlad Tepes, also known as "Vlad the Impaler", often seen as the original inspiration for Dracula because of his bloodthirsty ways. He was ruthless, but he was also trying to defend his people against the mighty Ottoman Empire. So who might have spread the story that he was a vampire?



Midnight Treasure
(£8.99, Quercus Children's Books), by Piers Torday, is out now.



STABILO® MARKdry...

The **STABILO MARKdry** is a fantastic tool for teachers using whiteboards, chalkboards, glass, or flipcharts. This dry marker pencil offers vibrant colours and is environmentally friendly.

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French



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- The concept of *la francophonie* (the wider French-speaking world)
- The names of various items of clothing in French, including some that are typically West African
- The masculine and feminine indefinite articles (*un* and *une*)
- How to create sentences to describe what individuals are wearing

Peux-tu parler de mode en français?



Blend language, culture, and couture to explore the creativity of Dakar Fashion Week, suggests **Ellie Chettle Cully**

myprimarylanguagesclassroom.com [@ECCMFL](https://twitter.com/ECCMFL)

When teaching French, it is essential that even our youngest pupils understand the concept of *la francophonie*: the French-speaking world. It is important that we discuss its origins in colonialism and the fact that, although many of France's former colonies have fought for and gained their independence, the French language often continues to be widely spoken within particular institutions or social groups. Senegal was once part of French West Africa and although most of the population speak Wolof, French remains the official language of the country.



START HERE

Start by showing pupils some images of Senegal, for example: surfers on the beaches, the busy streets or markets of the capital Dakar, or the Lompoul Desert. Ask



the children to guess which country is represented by the images and give them opportunities to justify their answers. Video clips also work really well for this activity – just be careful to select sequences that don't reinforce unhelpful stereotypes. Once the children have had plenty of discussion time, introduce Senegal's geographical position, using atlases or Google Earth, explaining the country's links to France and the reason that French is still the official language of the country, although it is not spoken by all citizens.

MAIN LESSON

1 | NAME IT

Teach your pupils a range of nouns for different items of clothing, for example: *une robe* (a dress), *une jupe* (a skirt), *une chemise* (a shirt), *un t-shirt* (a t-shirt), *un pantalon* (a pair of trousers) and *un short* (a pair of shorts), using images, flashcards or real, tactile items. Kim's Game is an excellent way to embed this new vocabulary, where the teacher removes a flashcard or item from a set and pupils have to guess, in French, which item they think is missing. There is also a wonderful opportunity here for pupils to use their language detective skills and

identify *cognates* – words that share a common root and therefore look or sound the same or similar in different languages – that can help them make meaning and memorise words more easily. There is lots of great discussion to be had around links between the word *robe* in French and the word *robe* that we use in English, and 'loan words' that have been borrowed from English and are now used in French. Draw pupils' attention to the use of the indefinite articles *un* and *une*. Explain that, although in English we only have one way of saying 'a', in French there is more than one and that this is because of the concept of masculine and feminine. Monolingual English speakers can find the concept of



“It is essential that even our youngest pupils understand the concept of la francophonie: the French-speaking world”

masculine and feminine quite tricky, but it's helpful to explain that, in essence, it is a way of grouping nouns.

2 | SEE IT

Introduce the class to Dakar Fashion Week, an event which takes place in the Senegalese capital every year. Just like Paris, Milan and New York Fashion Weeks, this is an opportunity for designers to meet and show off their creations. Dakar Fashion Week draws designers from across the African continent, some of whom use traditional materials and processes to create masterpieces. Draw pupils' attention to the fact that many designers are inspired to create outfits that reflect their African heritages. For example, some

designers will incorporate the traditional West African head covering known as *un moussor*, whilst others may showcase an elegant, ankle-length robe worn by men and women for special occasions known as *un boubou*. These words need to be taught to the pupils, in addition to any previous vocabulary, to allow them to describe what individuals are wearing, and to enhance children's cultural understanding. Using BBC videos of Dakar Fashion Week, (like this one, starting at 6:05 [tinyurl.com/tp-BBCDakarFW](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-BBCDakarFW)), gives pupils a sense of the colours, shapes and movement of the different designs and helps to impart the energy of this amazing event.

3 | SAY IT

Using stills of various outfits from Dakar Fashion Week, model to the pupils creating sentences which reflect an aspect of the outfit, starting with *il porte* (he is wearing) or *elle porte* (she is wearing), describing individual aspects of the outfits and modelling the use of the conjunctions *et* (and) or *avec* (with) to extend sentences and add additional information to the sentence. *La Trappe* (Trapdoor) is a fun game to play, in which children build sentences using a grid. The children use the grid to secretly write a sentence, which their partner must guess, section by section. If they guess the section option correctly, they can move on to the next block, but if they fail, they must go back to the beginning and start again. These grids make excellent scaffolds for speaking, and later, writing, where children can create mini books with a different outfit on each page and a short, written description underneath. Find a template for Trapdoor at the link on the right.

Ellie Chettle Cully is a French teacher and languages and international lead at a Leicester primary.



EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Encourage children to bring colour adjectives into their sentences to add detail. Discuss the order of sentences in French and explain that the adjective comes before the noun. So, to describe a blue t-shirt you would say *un t-shirt bleu*.
- Ask pupils to express opinions about different outfits, using phrases such as *j'aime* (I like) or *je n'aime pas* (I don't like). They might extend using the phrase *parce que c'est* (because it's) and use dictionaries to add their own adjective to finish the sentence: *joli* (pretty), *moche* (ugly) or *coloré* (colourful).

tw teachwire



Download your **FREE** Trapdoor game template at tinyurl.com/tp-Trapdoor

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- *Qu'est-ce qu'il porte ?* *Qu'est-ce qu'elle porte ?* What is he wearing? What is she wearing?
- *Quelle est ta tenue préférée ?* Which is your favourite outfit?
- *Pourquoi ? Why?*
- *Can you extend your sentence with a conjunction? Can you add an adjective?*

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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 or email 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.

RE



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- The stories that inspire Diwali in Hindu worldview traditions
- How and why other Dharmic religions mark Diwali
- The festivals of light that other religions hold
- How to compare the theological and human aspects of different festivals

Beyond the lights: let's explore Diwali



Many religions find joy in celebrating this five-day festival. Learn all about their traditions with **Matthew Lane**

theteachinglane.co.uk

Religions and cultures around the world have a host of festivals that celebrate their cultures and ideas. Be it Christmas, Hanukkah, Yule or Yalda Night; many religions have a festival of lights that marks the triumph of light and good over darkness and evil. For some religions these are core festivals, intrinsically linked to faith. For others, they may be minor festivals but can be widely celebrated, even overshadowing those that are theologically more significant. The traditions and theology behind these celebrations are varied and make for a fascinating lesson or lessons.



START HERE

Begin with revisiting or introducing Hindu worldview traditions. It is important to explain that Hindu traditions are many

and varied, and the typical western notion of Hinduism is an oversimplification of a religion and worldview that has many different approaches to faith. This is important, as there are many different reasons for celebrating Diwali depending on which Hindu tradition a person is part of. You may wish to give a general summary, explaining that there is great variation in tradition and in the sacred texts that are used (e.g. there is no 'Hindu Bible' that gives common stories). You could also dispel a few common misconceptions, such as it being a strictly polytheistic religion.



MAIN LESSON

1 | DIWALI STORIES

Begin by exploring the reasons that Hindus celebrate Diwali. Some of these are associated with important sacred stories, including The Story of Rama and Sita, The Defeat of Narakasura, and The Return of the Pandavas. Introduce pupils to a couple of these stories (BBC Teach has a lovely video on Rama and Sita at tinyurl.com/tp-BBCramasita) and discuss what they notice. Can they link the name 'festival of light' to any elements of the stories?

Another reason to celebrate Diwali is worship of Lakshmi. The festival's main

day (known as Lakshmi Puja) is dedicated to the goddess Lakshmi, who is the goddess of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. The celebrations of Lakshmi Puja involve cleaning the house, setting up alters and offering prayers. How do pupils think the goddess of good fortune and prosperity links to the themes they have heard in the Diwali stories?

2 | DIWALI CELEBRATIONS

Having explored the stories and theology behind Diwali, we can now explore the human aspect. While there are many reasons Hindus celebrate Diwali, the manner of celebration is similar. Central is the lighting of rows of diya (earthenware oil lamps) or other lamps (Diwali means



“Many religions have a festival of lights, which mark a triumph of good over evil”

representations of each celebration. Pupils can use drawings, collage materials, and key words to bring their calendars to life.

3 | OTHER TRADITIONS

While Hindu traditions are most famously associated with Diwali, the festival is also celebrated by millions of Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists. For these faiths, the festival still carries the core message of the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil, but they relate it to key events and figures in their own histories.

For Jains, Diwali commemorates the nirvana (liberation) of their spiritual leader, Lord Mahavira, and is marked by prayer and solemn reflection. Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Divas (“Prisoner Release Day”), which honours the release of the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind, from wrongful imprisonment. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is famously lit up to mark his return. Some Buddhists, particularly in Nepal, also celebrate Diwali, which is often called Ashok Vijayadashami, in part to show a thankfulness for nature, and to ask for forgiveness.

Depending on age and ability, you could interrogate this information in a few

ways. Children could make a Venn diagram of Hindu traditions and Jain and/or Sikhi; comparing and contrasting the

‘row of lights’), which is a fundamental act symbolising the triumph of light over darkness, and which invites the deities into homes. Like many other festivals, during Diwali, homes and offices are cleaned and decorated; feasting and gifts are shared; new clothes are worn; and fireworks are lit.

Hindu Diwali takes place over five days. The five days of Diwali are known as Dhanteras, Naraka Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja, Govardhan Puja, and Bhai Dooj. Each day has a special focus, such as welcoming and then worshipping Lakshmi, purifying oneself or marking the bonds between brothers and sisters. Look at each day in turn, exploring what is celebrated on each day and

how it is done. You may wish to look at regional variations or how these days are marked outside of India, such as traditions by British Hindus. While the bright lights and feasting will attract children’s attention, ensure that they do not miss the theological and worship aspects of the celebrations, such as performing pujas (rituals and prayers) and chanting mantras. To solidify learning, try making a visual calendar, where children illustrate each day of Diwali on a calendar template with



EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Explore the history and theology behind Diwali in Jain, Sikhi and Buddhist traditions.
- Compare how one Abrahamic faith (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Hindus mark their festivals of light (e.g. Hanukkah, Candlemas, and Hijrah). What is the same and what is different or unique?
- Task children to write their own version of one of the Hindu sacred stories for a younger pupil.
- Compare how British and Indian Hindus mark Diwali.

stories’ contents. Children could also mix in some non-fiction report writing, and split into groups to create mini fact files for each religion’s celebration of Diwali, using images and perhaps even filmed segments explaining the festivals’ key features. The BBC has a great article on how four different people from around London celebrate Diwali, at tinyurl.com/tp-LondonDiwali

Matthew Lane is an RE Lead and author. His new book, Religious Education: A Subject Knowledge Handbook, is coming soon from Bloomsbury.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What does the word *Diwali* mean?
- Why do we say Hindu traditions and not Hinduism?
- Which religions celebrate Diwali?
- Which foods would you expect at a Diwali party?

Drama, PSHE



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- To problem solve through improvisation and role play
- To listen to different perspectives
- To develop empathy by listening and stepping into other people's shoes
- To build confidence by following intuition, expressing ideas, and making decisions

How do you solve a problem like...?



© Rosalind Hobley

Build key social-emotional skills through games that encourage communication and resolution, with **Samantha Marsden**

marsdensam.com [@SamMarsdenDrama](https://twitter.com/SamMarsdenDrama)

Improvisation and roleplay don't have to be reserved for the stage. Drama can help children learn about everyday skills such as problem-solving, and allow them to develop the ability to think on their feet when faced with challenges. I've also found that pupils discover that their intuition on how to solve a problem might be better than they thought when undertaking these exercises. Rehearsing problem-solving skills through drama can help children navigate conflicts, learn how to work more collaboratively, and approach difficulties with creativity...



START HERE

For a warm-up, ask everyone to walk around the room. Start with a neutral walk, and then move onto some acting. For example, instruct your pupils to

"Walk around the room as if it's very hot," and allow everyone to walk around for about 20 seconds, imagining they are very hot. You can add in questions to help prompt their actions, such as, "How do you move when you're hot? Slow, fast, heavy, light?" Next, move onto other prompts, such as "Walk around the room as if it's freezing cold, windy, or rainy." Or "Walk around the room as if you're late for school," or "you're lost in a forest," or "it's raining, and you don't have a brolly. You can then discuss as a class how the movements changed between prompts, and why."



MAIN LESSON

1 | THE MAGIC PROP

Ask everyone to sit in a circle. Place an object such as a wooden spoon, empty box, or a tennis racquet in the centre of the circle. Explain to the class that this isn't just any ordinary item, it's a magical tool that can transform into anything they need, and they have to solve an imaginary problem using it.

Demonstrate first, or ask a more confident pupil to volunteer and demonstrate. The player steps forward, picks up the object, and announces a problem they're facing. Perhaps they're stuck on a desert island, or their car has broken down, or they need

to rescue a cat from a tree. The children can think up problems as they go, or you can have some suggestions on slips of paper for them to choose from. Then they demonstrate how this magical object solves their problem; maybe the wooden spoon becomes a telescope to spot rescue ships, or it's a jump-start tool for the broken-down car, or it's catnip on a stick to tempt the cat down from the tree.

After about 20 seconds the player puts the object down, and the next child transforms the object into something completely different to solve a new problem. Continue around the circle until everyone who wants to participate has had a turn.



“Rehearsing problem-solving skills through drama can help children navigate conflicts”

different games at break time.

- Someone feels left out when their friend makes a new friend.
- Someone won't share the school computer.
- Someone borrowed something and accidentally broke it.

Each pair should then choose one scenario and improvise it twice: first showing how it might go wrong if people don't listen to each other or only think about themselves. For the second round, they should improvise differently using problem-solving skills, listening and compassion for a better outcome. For example, if they're using the 'someone borrowed something' scenario, their first improv can show what happens when the owner of the item flies off the handle and doesn't listen to the borrower's explanation, whereas the second improv can utilise better communication techniques (e.g. 'I do feel frustrated, but I can see you didn't mean to break it').

After each pair performs, you can ask the rest of the class questions such as, “What problem-solving strategies did you notice?” and “How did their solution help?”

*Sam Marsden is the author of 100 Acting Exercises for 8-18 Year Olds, and The Pocketful of Drama book series. She also runs courses on teaching drama. Teach Primary readers get 20% off all of Sam's courses by entering the code **TEACHPRIMARY20** at the checkout. See tinyurl.com/tp-SamM*

2 | THE MISSION

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Give each group a slip of paper with a ‘mission’ that requires creative teamwork to solve. Or you can orally tell pupils the mission. For example:

- Your class needs to convince the head teacher to let you have a school trip to the beach.
- Your group must organise a fundraiser to repair the school hall that got flooded.
- Your neighbourhood park is going to be turned into a car park; convince the council to change their minds.
- Your local museum has become ‘too boring’ according to visitors; make it exciting again.

- A group of friendly aliens want to attend your school, but don't understand human customs.

Give groups 10 minutes to discuss and develop their scene, then ask them to improvise and to play characters different from themselves. During their rehearsal time, make sure to circulate and ask questions. Then ask each group to perform their short scene to the rest of the class.

3 | RESOLVING A CONFLICT

For this part of the lesson, ask children to work in pairs to explore real-life social problems through drama. For example:

- Two friends want to play

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Assign different character profiles for different problem-solving personalities, such as the creative thinker, the peacemaker, the practical planner, and the empathy expert, and let pupils explore how different approaches can work to tackle challenges.
- Ask the children to solve problems while playing different emotions, such as being cheerful, worried, excited, scared, bored, or calm, to discover how feelings can affect our problem-solving abilities.
- Create a class problem-solving toolkit display where pupils can add new strategies they discover. Include techniques like *seeing a situation from someone else's point of view*, *finding the middle ground*, and *thinking outside the box*.
- Use drama scenarios to explore different subjects; perhaps pupils can role-play as historical figures negotiating a peace treaty, or as scientists collaborating to solve an environmental challenge.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- How might the other person be feeling in this situation?
- What would happen if you tried a completely different approach?
- What problem-solving strategy worked best in that scene?
- How does the way we communicate affect a conflict?
- How can we inflame, or calm, a situation when a problem needs to be solved?

MUSIC

My World: Singing Games

A collection of lively songs and interactive games to delight children from Nursery through KS1

Out of the Ark Music



AT A GLANCE

- 12 songs plus a bonus track designed for ages 3-7
- Available as eSongbook, CD, and book with audio, lyrics, and scores
- Teacher notes with clear instructions and extension ideas
- Activities suited to classrooms, halls, or outdoor spaces
- Supports EYFS and KS1 learning through music and play



REVIEWED BY: EMMA THOMPSON

Singing Games for 3–7 from Out of the Ark is a complete package designed for Nursery through to the end of Key Stage 1. It combines a collection of lively songs with interactive games that get children singing, moving and learning together.

Everything is delivered through the Words on Screen eSongbook (also available as a physical book and CD), which contains audio tracks, lyrics, scores and clear guidance, and the online portal is simple to navigate. For teachers, it is a genuine timesaver without sacrificing quality.

The songs themselves are a joy. They are instantly catchy, easy to pick up and created with younger children in mind. There is plenty of variety, too, from upbeat rhythms to gentler pieces, all designed to get children actively involved. Marvellous Machine is one I found myself humming days after I first listened to it, with fun lyrics and a steady beat that children will enjoy clapping along to.

The songs have lots of links to core learning areas. North, East, South, West is a standout for teaching positional language, with children clapping in the direction of each compass point as they sing. It is such a simple yet effective way to reinforce vocabulary and spatial awareness. Crossing the River encourages pupils to move together, listen carefully and work as a team. These kinds of activities show just how well the collection blends fun with learning.

The teacher support is another strength. Each game comes with clear notes that explain how it works, what equipment might be needed and which skills it helps to develop. That level of detail is invaluable when time is short, which it so often is for teachers. It removes the stress of extra planning by providing everything you need in a purposeful, high-quality way. Flexibility is also built in. The games can be played indoors or outdoors, in small groups or whole-class sessions, and there are always ideas for extending the activity further.

I Spy is a brilliant game for phonics because it is so adaptable. You can choose to focus on letter names, phonemes, or both, depending on the needs of your class. With a Year 2 group, you might emphasise letter names, while with a Nursery class, you could stick to phonemes to build early sound recognition.

Mirror My Moves, on the other hand, develops observation skills and turn-taking in a way that feels fun and collaborative. The fact that you can adapt the same material for different settings means this is not a resource you will use once and put away, but something you will return to again and again.

Singing Games for 3-7 manages to be practical, engaging and thoughtful all at once. It saves teachers time, supports classroom learning and gives children songs they will genuinely love to sing.

“The teacher support is another strength. Each game comes with clear notes”

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Combines fun with purposeful learning opportunities
- ✓ Adaptable across year groups and subjects
- ✓ High-quality production with resources that are ready to go
- ✓ A brilliant way to bring music and games into everyday teaching
- ✓ A thoughtfully designed package that saves teachers time

YOU'LL LOVE THIS IF...

...you want a ready-to-use, high-quality music resource that blends singing, movement, and learning in ways children enjoy and teachers can use straight away.

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

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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?

A perfect teaching day for me would definitely involve practical, hands-on learning with children – tools, woodwork, a splash of craft, or even a bit of sewing. When their hands are busy, the conversations just flow; you learn the most about the children when you're working side by side. To top it all off? An extended session with my chiropractor – absolutely my new best friend when it comes to curing the many aches and quirks of a teacher's body!

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Visiting performers who call for a 'staff volunteer'. Without fail, there's a chorus of "Mr B! Mr B!" and suddenly I'm centre stage with no idea what's coming. Over the years, I've danced with a giant leprechaun, wrestled an inflatable crocodile, and been vaulted over by an Olympian. It's traumatising... but the children (and staff) delight in reminding me about them for weeks!

3 What is your current state of mind?

This September marks my 25th year in education, and I've welcomed my 25th cohort of children. Amazingly, each year I still feel that same fizz of excitement and determination to do my best for every child I meet – but now with the wisdom of a quarter of a century at the chalkface. Bring on 2025/26!

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

That old "don't smile until Christmas" mantra is nonsense. Honestly, who thought that was good advice? My approach has always been about knowing children properly, showing a genuine interest in who they are, and modelling respect. Laughter, jokes, and a relaxed atmosphere go hand-in-hand with firm boundaries – and produce far less need for any vein-popping theatrics.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

Well, with the new year ahead, I'm bracing myself for the inevitable *K-Pop Demon Hunters* chat. When my Year 5s ask, I will absolutely deny knowing any of the lyrics or the dance moves. In truth, I know most of them – except for the Korean lines... though I'm working on that!

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

After I saw the footage from a recent classroom filming, I was horrified to discover how often I say, "So, ok..." It's like a compulsion – it never crops up in normal life, but takes over the second I'm teaching. Among colleagues, it's probably, "What is the point?" Not in a grumpy way – I just need to know if something has a genuine purpose. I'll happily flamenco barefoot over hot coals to make a meaningful change, but don't expect me to scorch my soles to the sounds of a Spanish guitar without good reason.

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

Staying in the classroom. After 25 years, I'm still here, still teaching. People assume being a deputy head is a stepping stone to headship, but that's not for me. I came into this career to nurture children and help them discover who they are. That passion has never faded – and I don't intend to let it.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

Easy. My copy of *Tuesday* by David Wiesner – a surreal, wordless book about flying frogs. It was the focus of my very first lesson, rescued from a heap of unwanted books in a university library. It's been with me ever since: a faithful, slightly battered companion that's travelled every step of my teaching journey.



NAME: Marc Bowen

JOB ROLE: Primary school deputy headteacher and Year 5 class teacher

EXTRA INFO: Author of *Brilliant Subject Leader*; passionate about curriculum design; avid reader of children's books; Pilates devotee; 80s cartoon and movie buff; younger in mind than my wrinkles (or lack of hairline) suggest!

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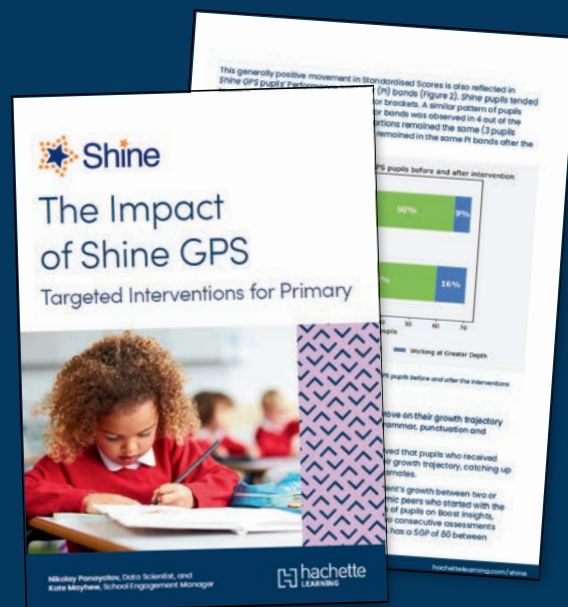
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