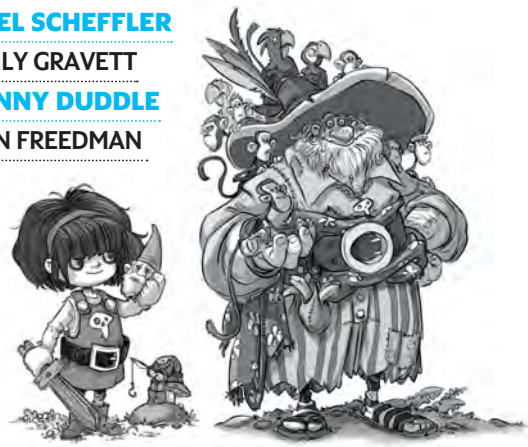
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The written life

AXEL SCHEFFLER
EMILY GRAVETT
JONNY DUDDLE
DAN FREEDMAN



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WALKER BOOKS

BREAKING NEWS

Welcome...

... once again to another issue of *Teach Reading & Writing*, a magazine that's wholly dedicated to exploring and celebrating the rich landscape of literacy learning, with all its thrills and challenges. Whether you are new to the chalkface or a seasoned veteran, we hope there'll be plenty of discoveries for you within these pages – and perhaps some surprises, too...

You may think, for example, that you've got the art of 'teaching children to read' pretty much wrapped up by now. Up until relatively recently, Christopher Such certainly thought he had – but a new understanding of cognitive science has led him to rethink his practice, taking into account how the process really works, and you can find out more about the changes he's made on pages 19-20. Meanwhile, Ruth Baker-Leask considers how we approach curriculum design for English – pointing out that even though it takes up the most timetable space, we still struggle to cover everything our pupils need to know in the time we have with them. Her solution is to "untether" the subject and let it "roam around the school, occupying all of those places and spaces where creative language skills are needed" – if that sounds like something you think you could be doing, turn to pages 24-25 to see what it might look like in action.

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Fantastic books are, of course, at the heart of every literacy journey, and as usual, we've fitted as many of them as possible into this issue. From Carey Fluker-Hunt's suggestions for activities linked to stories about growing up (pages 8-13), to our round up of the very best non-fiction titles for sparking pupils' curiosity (pages 67-69), there's no shortage of ideas for ways to take words and pictures from the page and use them as catalysts to inspire youngsters' own creativity.

Have fun!
Joe Carter & Helen Mulley
(associate editors)

"The written life"

EMILY GRAVETT
"I didn't do everything I was told" p6

AXEL SCHEFFLER
"Different illustrations can absolutely result in different stories" p30

JONNY DUDDLE
"I ended up with a mountain of rejection slips" p62

DAN FREEDMAN
"It was all about football for me" p74

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“I didn’t think I was creating a book”

Giving children the freedom to write and draw without judgement can unlock incredible creativity, says **Emily Gravett**...

I think I remember the moment that ‘reading’ started to make sense for me. When I was small, my mum and dad – who both really valued books – stuck a selection of flashcards showing different words around my bed, and I’d look at them as I drifted off to sleep. My favourite, for some reason, was ‘danger’; and I have a vivid memory of the excitement I felt when I spotted it in a Barbapapa album one morning, and made that connection.

I didn’t read properly until after I’d started school, though. My older sister had picked it up more quickly than I did, so I always felt a little ‘behind’ – although I don’t think I was, actually. I can’t remember the process of teaching reading in the classroom, but I definitely recall the books they used, which were those ones featuring all the different coloured hats. They weren’t especially thrilling stories, but I enjoyed the way you had to progress through the levels, eventually getting up to the dizzy heights of silver and gold. Competitive? Me? Well, maybe just a bit...

Escape routes

There were always books about at home, including lots with beautiful illustrations. One of my favourites was *The Giant Jam Sandwich* – my dad was a print technician at Brighton Art School, where John Vernon Lord taught, and so that was the first time I started to get an idea about what it meant to be an author, and an illustrator. Raymond Briggs also taught there, and *Fungus the Bogeyman* was another popular reading choice in our house.

When I was older, I got into the *Swallows and Amazons* books; I’m not entirely sure why – they don’t do a thing for me as an adult – but teenage me was a big fan. I’d read anything, though, pretty much. In part, I suppose books gave me a way to escape the rough, rather intimidating secondary school I went to after leaving primary. I had some great teachers there, but I hated the whole experience, which I found intimidating and impersonal. I got four GCSEs – three Cs, and an A in art – and made it through five months of sixth form before leaving to go travelling. I met my partner not long afterwards, and as we made a life together, I thought I was done with education.

Things changed when I had my daughter, at the age of 24, and started reading picture books with her. Suddenly, I realised that this was an art form that I

Three Emily Gravett treats for younger pupils

Meerkat Christmas
Like its predecessor, *Meerkat Mail*, this gorgeous festive package is full of flaps to lift, as Sunny the meerkat travels the world in search of the perfect Christmas. It’s a witty and heartwarming celebration of fun and family love that shows the season can be whatever you want it to be.

Tidy
Pete the badger likes everything to be neat and tidy at all times, but what starts as the collecting of one fallen leaf escalates – ending with the complete destruction of the forest. This is a cautionary tale, which delivers its message of environmental preservation with subtlety and humour.

Again!
It’s nearly Cedric the dragon’s bedtime – and so his mum reads him his favourite book. But then he wants it again, and again, and again; until she’s had enough, and he gets so cross he ends up burning a hole right through the pages! Funny and clever, this is definitely worth reading, um, again...

(all books published by Two Hoots)

could understand, and connect with. As well as reading, I'd never stopped drawing – and looking back at the pictures I produced as a child, right through my teens and into my early 20s, they always had a narrative aspect to them. Something clicked, and I thought, 'I could do this!' I badgered my way into Brighton University, despite having no A levels – a foundation course I'd taken in Wales, plus bloody-minded persistence got me a place, and whilst I found the first year and a half quite grim, once I realised that I didn't have to take everything I was told as gospel, and that it was ok for me to pursue the kind of illustrating that I wanted to do, I got on much better.

Free and easy

Wolves was a project in my final year. I didn't think at that time I was 'creating a book'; in my head I was putting together a portfolio which I could use to pick up illustrating work after leaving university. But it won the Macmillan Prize for Children's Illustration, and got published, and everything else sort of followed on from that. Despite my original intentions, I resisted offers to create images for other people's text for quite a while; it turned out that I really relish working with words as well as pictures, using both together to tell a story, and I didn't want to get my name too 'attached' to someone else's writing early on. However, I've since illustrated for both Julia Donaldson and A.F. Harold, and I've enjoyed that process, too.

I do think it's important to let children discover for themselves the kinds of writing and drawing they prefer. In my final year at primary school, we were all given a blank journal, and told that we would be writing a book. Once a week, for an hour or so, we'd work on our stories and illustrations; the teacher would look at what we'd done, and make a few corrections, but other than that, we were more or less left to our own devices. Giving young people that freedom to create for sheer pleasure, and without judgement, is really important – and I hope that today's teachers are able to find space in their timetables to do just that.

"I really relish working with words as well as pictures"

All illustrations: Emily Gravett

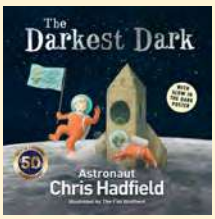
10 BOOKS TO TEACH ON *growing up*

Each of these stories exploring the complex sorrows and joys of getting older can spark a creative topic in your classroom

1 FOUNDATION STAGE

The Darkest Dark

BY CHRIS HADFIELD AND KATE FILLION (MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS)



What's the story?

"Nothing had changed. But Chris had changed..."

Chris is scared of the dark and still sleeps with his parents. But it's 1969 and a rocket is landing on the moon. Can Chris find the courage to stay in his own bed?

Cheerfully and imaginatively illustrated, this autobiographical story shows astronaut Chris Hadfield conquering his fear and dreaming of his next big step.

Thinking and talking

How do we know that Chris loves space? Spot the clues! What scares Chris? How does he overcome it? How could you help someone who was frightened?

Try this...

- Make a Chris-style rocket from cardboard boxes and imagine you're flying to the Moon.
- Move like weightless astronauts to starry music and draw what you can see in outer space. What happens when you get to the Moon? Tell your story.
- What kind of person would you like to be when you grow up? What would you like to do? How could you make those dreams come true?

Illustrations: The Fan Brothers

FOUNDATION STAGE

2

The Paper Dolls

BY JULIA DONALDSON AND REBECCA COBB
(MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS)

What's the story?

Ticky and Tacky and Jackie the Backie and Jim with two noses and Jo with the bow are all paper dolls. They're loved and played with until a boy comes along and cuts them up. "You're gone," he says, but they're not. They've flown into the girl's memory where they find a forever home alongside white mice, a butterfly hairslide and fireworks.

This powerful story uses rich, rhythmic language to explore ideas around loss, the passage of time and growth in an imaginative and enjoyable way. There's an intergenerational message about creating memories together, too.

Thinking and talking

What games do you play? What would have happened to the dolls if the boy hadn't cut them up? What has changed in your life?

Try this...

- Cut out paper dolls and name them. Tell and write stories about their adventures.
- What is tucked away in your memory? Working together, make a list - then read it aloud. Can you add to your list-poem, change the words or rearrange it so that it sounds better?
- Invite visitors to share childhood memories of games and activities. Have a go at them!

Illustrations: Rebecca Cobb

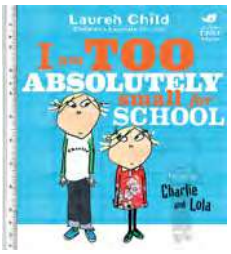
"Nothing had changed. But Chris had changed..."

3

FOUNDATION STAGE

I Am Too Absolutely Small for School

BY LAUREN CHILD
(ORCHARD BOOKS)



Illustrations: Lauren Child

What's the story?

Charlie's sister Lola would rather stay home with her invisible friend Soren Lorenson than start school, and counters Charlie's arguments with carefully considered objections. But Charlie is several (inventive and entertaining) steps ahead and knows just how to persuade Lola that school is worth attending.

Thinking and talking

How can you tell that Lola's worried? What do you remember about starting nursery or school? Is there anything you're worried about now? What would Charlie say about it?

Try this...

- Use collage and drawing to create Charlie-and-Lola-style portraits of everyone in class. Help children make thought bubbles recording a memory of starting school, and display.
- Which bedtime story would you read to the ogre, and why? Record an audio file of yourself reading to the ogre and add it to your reading corner.
- Practise counting with lots of different biscuits. Sort them into groups to help you. Can you count in 2s and 10s?
- Prepare Lola-style lunchboxes, then dress up and go on a Charlie and Lola story-picnic.

Illustrations: Kerascoet

4 Malala's Magic Pencil

BY MALALA YOUSAFZAI (PUFFIN)

KEY STAGE 1

What's the story?

Because she didn't have a magic pencil like the TV boy, Malala couldn't erase the poverty in her Pakistani village, so she decided to get an education and use this to change the world instead. Then girls were forbidden to go to school.

Malala spoke out and was attacked, but she could not be silenced.

Malala tells her story in an age-appropriate way, giving younger readers an insight into adversity, resilience and change, and inviting them to think about the differences they might make as they grow up.

Thinking and talking

How did Malala feel at different points in this book? What did she do because of those emotions?

What would you draw with a magic pencil? What would you like to change?

Try this...

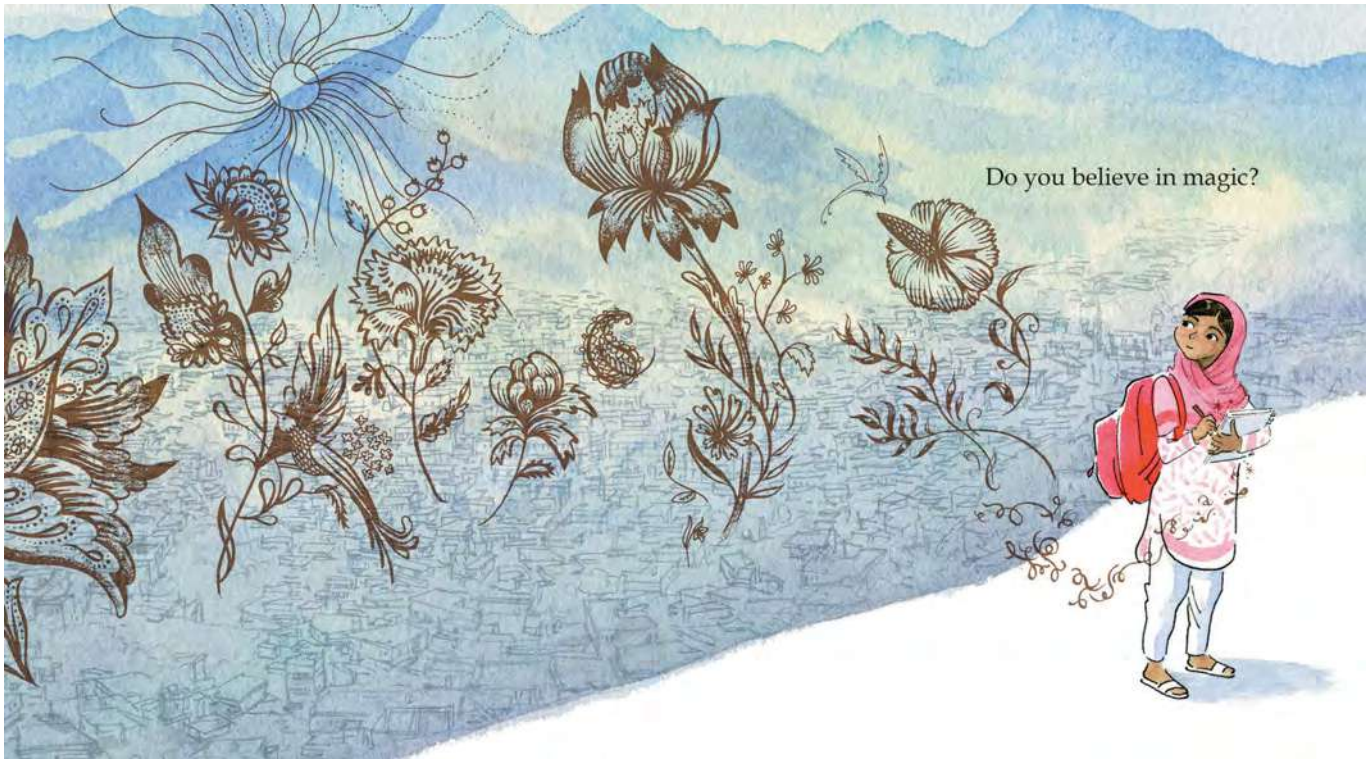
- **Explore the idea of magic pencils through roleplay, movement and drawing, then write stories inspired by your experiences.**
- **Create a classroom display about Pakistan.**
- **How could you make a difference in your neighbourhood? Choose a project and make it happen.**

5 Julian is a Mermaid

KEY STAGE 1

BY JESSICA LOVE (WALKER BOOKS)

Illustrations: Jessica Love



What's the story?

Julian is entranced by three mermaids he spots on the New York subway and imagines swimming underwater like a fish with his hair swirling out behind him. As soon as he gets back to his Nana's house, he dresses up. But what will Nana think of Julian's new look – not to mention all the mess?

Luckily Nana is wise and loving enough to understand. Giving Julian some beads to complete his outfit, she takes him to the Mermaid Parade and gently encourages him to join in.

This book explores some big ideas around diversity, belonging and self-esteem but does so with insight and restraint. Jessica Love's stage-set spreads are home to a cast of carefully-observed characters and her minimalistic text acts as a prompt to the visual and imaginative dramas that play out across every page.

Thinking and talking

Have you dressed up for a performance or special event? What did you wear and how did you feel?

Look at the picture that says "Oh!" What could Julian be thinking? How about Nana? And what about you? Did everyone read this picture the same way? How many different interpretations can you suggest?

Try this...

- **Explore moving like a fish, then find (or make!) some watery music and give a fishy performance.**
- **Choose an incidental character and invent a back-story for them. Who are they and how did they come to be in this picture? Tell the story of what happens next... or act it out!**
- **Assemble a dressing-up box full of fabulous colours and textures. Invite children to create outfits, then hold a parade.**

Illustrations: Lauren O'Hara

KEY STAGE 1

6 The Bandit Queen

BY NATALIE AND LAUREN O'HARA (PUFFIN)

What's the story?

A rumbustious bunch of bandits steal a baby from an orphanage and subject her to a life of joyful anarchy. At first the Bandit Queen enjoys the mischief - but as time passes, she realises that it might be better to work for what you want. Heading back to school, she tells her men to "struggle and fight to do what is right" and give up their hedonistic lifestyles. It feels scary to grow, but grow she must - and her bandits must change with her.

Told in verse with retro-style illustrations, this riotous story takes a fresh and entertaining look at the responsibilities of growing up.

Thinking and talking

How do the bandits amuse their queen? How do their antics affect other people?

What would you do if you were a bandit king or queen, and nobody could stop you? How might your actions affect other people?

Why does the Queen decide to go back to school?

Try this...

- **Examine the way the bandits are depicted. In a large, clear space, copy their gestures, postures and facial expressions. How would they move? Join your performances to create a bandit parade. Can you compose a bandit song? Add costumes to your performance.**
- **Choose one of their escapades and imagine you're stepping into the picture to join the bandits. What can you see, hear, smell and taste? If you could interview the characters, what would they say? Pretend you're a reporter and write about what happened. Then write about the escapade from the point of view of one of the people or animals involved.**

Illustrations: Susan Einzig

KEY STAGE 2

7 Tom's Midnight Garden

BY PHILIPPA PEARCE (OUP)

What's the story?

When his brother has measles, a cross and resentful Tom is sent to live with his relations who reside in a flat in an old house. One night, the grandfather clock strikes thirteen and Tom opens the hall door to find that everything has changed. Instead of a back yard, he steps out into a garden where he meets Hatty, a lonely orphan. Together they explore a timeslip world that changes every night. By the end of the summer, when old Mrs Bartholomew's true identity is revealed, Tom is beginning to see his own experiences as part of a wider picture of connection, insight and responsibility. First published in 1958, this is a classic story of time and change and growing up.

Thinking and talking

How does Tom know that he's travelled back in time? What part do dreams play in this story? How is Tom changed by his experiences in the garden?

Do you think this is a book about growing up? Why / why not?

Try this...

■ Hatty's hiding place becomes a time capsule when Tom discovers her skates. What would you put in a sealed box to be opened in a year's time? Five years? A hundred? Debate, then write about your choices. Assemble a time capsule to be opened just before your children move to secondary school.

■ Both Hatty and Tom are now part of history. What does this book tell us about life in Victorian times? What do we learn about Tom's world of the 1950s? Talk about the similarities and differences and create timelines.

KEY STAGE 2

8 Clare and her Captain

BY MICHAEL MORPURGO (BARRINGTON STOKE)

Illustrations: Catherine Rayner

What's the story?

Clare's parents are always arguing and she's dreading another summer at Aunty Dora's in the country. Then she meets a lonely and isolated old man, Thatcher Jones, and his horse, Captain, and an important friendship begins. As a result of loss and change, Clare is able to stand up to her bullying father and assert her own quiet independence.

Beautifully illustrated in colour throughout and published in an accessible format, this short novel was inspired by true events and creates an atmosphere and insights that stay with audiences long after reading.

Thinking and talking

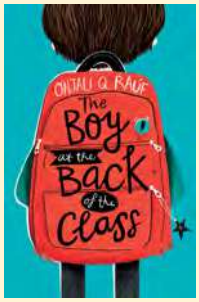
Talk about your pets and how you look after them. Is Thatcher Jones pleased to see the donkey?

What changes for Clare during this book, and how and why does it change? Should Clare have obeyed her father? Why / why not?

Try this...

■ Using a natural history handbook, identify the wildlife in the illustrations. Go for a walk to sketch plants, birds and other creatures from observation. Experiment with watercolours, inks, coloured pencils and pastels to create your own wildlife pictures inspired by Catherine Rayner.

■ There's a truth at the heart of this story, but Michael Morpurgo has added his own events and characters. Think of a real event that happened to you, then add to it to create your own Morpurgo-style tale.



KEY STAGE 2

9 The Boy at the Back of the Class

BY ONJALI Q. RAUF (ORION CHILDREN'S BOOKS)

Illustrations: Pippa Curnick

What's the story?

Nine-year-old Alexa's class welcomes a new arrival. Ahmet is a Syrian refugee who's lost his family as well as his home. Alexa and her friends decide to find them and a daring plan to enlist the Queen's help evolves.

Current events, ideas and attitudes are explored in a direct and timely way in this accessible and enjoyable tale. Alexa narrates her own story, but in line with the book's messages around diversity and inclusion, her name and gender aren't revealed until much later in the action. By helping Ahmet, Alexa learns much about herself and others - and readers, too, will have their assumptions challenged and be invited to consider new perspectives.

Thinking and talking

What do you recognize about Alexa's experience of school? In what ways does her school differ from yours?

What did you know about child refugees before you read this book? What have you learned? If you wanted to change something, what could you do?

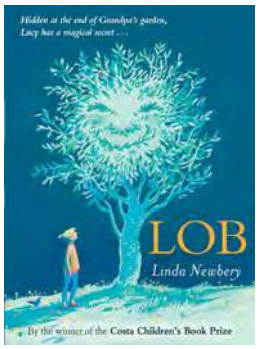
Try this...

- **How many languages are spoken in your school? Learn some words from each, then write or tell a story using them.**
- **Alexa and friends don't set out to start a campaign – they just want people to help Ahmet find his family. Research an issue you would like to support. How could you persuade others to help you? Write about how you collected your ingredients and what happened when you cast your spell.**

KEY STAGE 2

10 Lob

BY LINDA NEWBERY (DAVID FICKLING BOOKS)



What's the story?

Every year Lucy stays with her grandparents at Clunny Cottage where she works beside Grandpa in the garden and listens to his stories about Lob, who helps the plants grow. One summer she finally spots Lob hiding in the bushes... but then something terrible happens and everything changes. On top of all the loss and misery, Lucy worries about Lob. If he can't find her at Clunny Cottage, where will they meet? At last, a chance encounter at a city allotment brings Lob back into Lucy's life and she realizes that change can bring good things, too.

Embellished throughout by Pam Smy's observational line drawings, this engaging and affecting story about family relationships and the power of nature moves at a gentle pace, with narrative chapters interspersed by short lyrical passages describing Lob's journey from Clunny Cottage to the city.

Thinking and talking

What does Lucy lose in this book and what does she gain? How does she deal with the changes in her life?

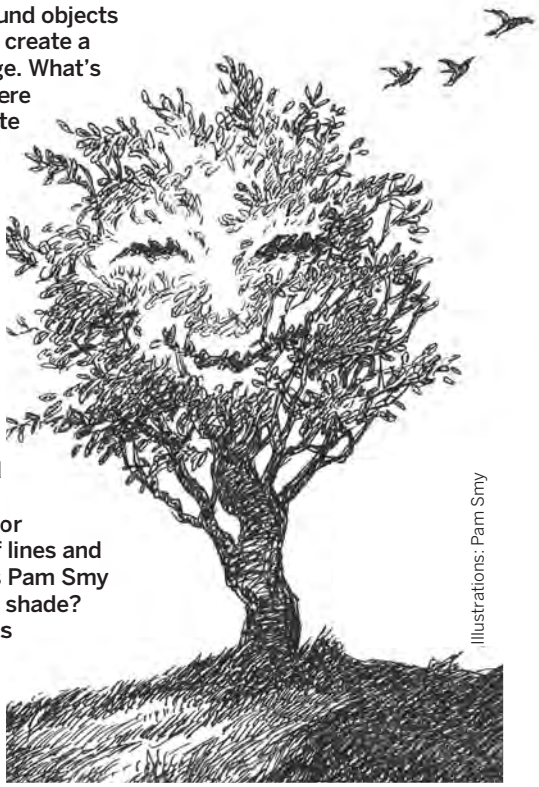
Do you know someone who likes gardening? Have you grown plants? Share your knowledge and stories.

How could you help Lob care for the natural world?

Carey Fluker-Hunt is a freelance writer, creative learning consultant and founder of Cast of Thousands (castofthousands.co.uk).

Try this...

- **Using paint, found objects and other media, create a Green Man collage. What's his name and where does he live? Write his story.**
- **Search for signs of Lob's green magic outdoors. Make notes, collect words to describe your experiences and use these to help you write reports and poems. Examine the illustrations for different kinds of lines and marks. How does Pam Smy capture light and shade? Take sketchbooks to a garden, allotment or park and draw from observation.**



Illustrations: Pam Smy

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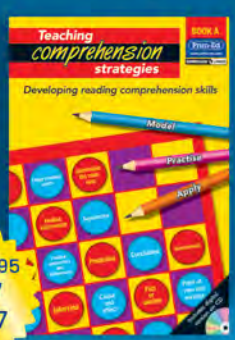

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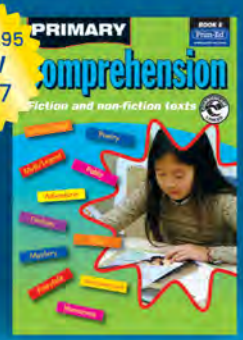

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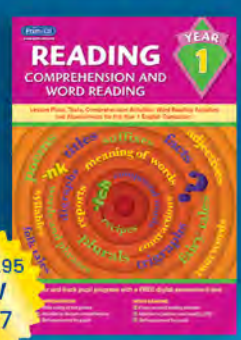

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WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ORACY

Silence isn't always golden, says **Nicky Pear** – and a curriculum that neglects spoken language risks leaving children voiceless, permanently

"Your children are very well behaved, but getting them to talk is like getting blood from a stone'. This was the stark feedback from a peer review process with leaders from local schools eighteen months ago. Our children were passive; there simply wasn't enough meaningful talk in our classrooms. This conclusion, which seems so obvious to us now, set in motion a process of change, the impact of which has taken us by surprise.

Many schools in Tower Hamlets work with a large proportion of children from backgrounds without a high-quality model of spoken English at home. Unfortunately, with so much to cram into the curriculum and the twin demands of improving results and being 'Ofsted-ready', there has been little room for robust teaching of spoken language and communication skills, known increasingly as 'oracy'.

This seems perverse, however, in light of research at the University of Cambridge revealing a direct link between oracy skills and academic outcomes. Add to this that employers now rate communication skills as the top attribute that they look for in candidates, and the case for oracy education becomes hard to ignore. We came to the conclusion that spoken communication skills were the missing link in our curriculum and decided to promote oracy to have equal standing alongside maths and literacy. In the middle of the 'Ofsted window', this was certainly a risk, but given that we felt it was what our pupils needed, one that we were more than willing to take.

A comprehensive approach

We first developed a comprehensive approach to teaching oracy. We decided that oracy skills should be taught in stand-alone lessons as well as being woven throughout the curriculum. Every class created discussion guidelines to hang on the wall to model the expectations of talk, including using positive body language, listening intently, taking turns and agreeing and disagreeing politely. Talk is now scaffolded in a similar way to writing, with sentence stems and word banks to support less confident speakers. Each classroom has an oracy display and we have termly school-wide oracy events such as persuasive speech competitions and poetry slams.

We have also replaced traditional assemblies (which seem not to have changed much since the Victorian times), with dialogic assemblies, carried out in circles. These are opportunities for children to consider philosophical ideas, debate topical issues or have discussions relating to a range of stimuli. Teachers and additional adults act as facilitators to the discussion and all children are expected to talk, in pairs, trios and to the whole group.

We knew that if we wanted oracy to be successfully embedded within our curriculum, we would need a whole-school approach. We ran two full-staff inset days, and have had numerous staff meetings exploring approaches to teaching oracy. These included support staff and midday meals supervisors, who had additional training on the language of conflict resolution. A collective consciousness about the importance of talk was beginning to grow.

Spreading the word

Oracy now sits alongside literacy and numeracy as an equal partner in our curriculum. The impact of this change has been dramatic. Pupil voice surveys point to an increase in confidence over the past year, with a significant jump in the percentage of children who identify as 'very' or 'extremely' confident in speaking to partners, in front of the class and in assemblies. This mirrors our own observations and those of external visitors, including Ofsted, who have commented on the confidence and impressive spoken language skills of our children. Quite a contrast from the passivity observed a year before.

Word has spread of our success, and this month we have launched an Oracy Hub in Tower Hamlets. Over twenty primary schools have signed up for a year of training, sharing practice and raising the profile of oracy education across the borough. Watch this space... or should I say listen?

Nicky Pear is an assistant headteacher and oracy lead at Cubitt Town Junior School in Tower Hamlet, who also recently helped to set up the Tower Hamlets Oracy Hub. @nickypair

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"IT'S HEALTHY TO CRY AT STORIES"

The best literature enables us to walk in shoes we'll hopefully never have to own, says **A.F. Harrold**

Can books help children faced with loss or the sudden awareness of mortality? A number of my novels take this fact-of-death-as-a-fact-of-life as a central premise, including my latest, *The Afterwards*, which involves a girl's literal journey into the afterworld to bring back a dead best friend, in the course of which she confronts her long-dead mother.

I am, however, in no way qualified to answer that question. I'm neither a psychologist or counsellor, teacher or parent. This sort of talk is best left to the experts, because, despite Mr Gove's feelings, that's what we have experts for.

I write these books with loss at their heart (*The Imaginary; The Song From Somewhere Else*) simply because those are the books I write. As an artist you find yourself exploring the same psychic landscape time and again, because that landscape is the one in which we live.

Two poems constantly circle in my head. One is Christina Rossetti's 'Remember' and the other is William Wordsworth's 'Surprised By Joy'. The former is spoken by the dead love. It says, 'Remember me when I'm gone, but if you forget for a bit, that's fine.' The latter is spoken by the living, who sees something wonderful and turns to share it with his daughter, and only in that moment remembers she is dead and berates himself for ever having forgotten that fact. This is what grief is, what living after death is: remembering and forgetting.

But I don't write books about that. The novels aren't handbooks to help the reader learn about mortality and how to cope with it. They are simply stories about characters interacting in the world they live in, and what children will take away first and foremost (and most importantly), is that they're exciting adventures.

The kid who is struck by bereavement — which takes many forms, not just the death of a loved one, but also loss of a country, a pet, a toy (*Dogger* is an unparalleled book) — is probably not the one who needs my books. In fact, it seems wantonly cruel to me: "Tommy, your mum's died. Here's a book about a dead mum." The rest of us are the ones for whom art is perhaps most important.

To be upset by a book is good. To cry at a book is good. To feel empty and broken at the end of a book is good. This is what the best art does. It beats us about the emotions — emotions that we borrow for the length of time we share the story: whether they're Conor and his dying mother's in *A Monster Calls*, or those of Michael and his sickly baby sister in *Skellig*, or of Jesse and Leslie in *Bridge to Terabithia*. We get to walk in shoes we hopefully will never own for a long time, but which will allow us to hold a hand out to those around us who are hurting; to say, "I get a bit of what you're going through." This is, of course, simply *empathy*, a thing the world can always do with more of.

Some poems, however, are distilled nuggets of time, feeling or emotion, designed to be carryable in the pocket of the mind. Look, for instance, at a poem from my collection *Things You Find in a Poet's Beard* called 'A Poem for My Mum'. It's a list made up of simple similes ('I miss you like the puddle misses the snowman it was'), but I've been told it strikes a chord with people. It, or a poem like it, may be a way to see the feelings the reader is unable to quite put into words him or herself.

If you read that poem, or maybe the Rossetti one mentioned earlier (which I read at my dad's funeral and put in the booklet for my mum's), it might be a comfort in time, or a way to reconnect with the feelings as they fade, or simply a pebble to stroke when the clouds are closing in.

My inexpert gut feeling suggests that (in the broadest of broad generalisations) novels are good for the general bolstering of empathy, while poems (which do that too, of course) can be talismen that speak to our specific ills. It is poems we return to. Poems we memorise. Poems that we share. There is a good reason, it seems to me, we usually read poems at funerals and not excerpts from novels.

A.F. Harrold's new book, The Afterwards, is published by Bloomsbury.

Illustration: Emily Gravett

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WHY I CHANGED MY READING LESSONS

Christopher Such hasn't always taught reading well, but practice, and a good deal of research, have helped him develop a far better approach

I'm pretty confident that for most of my teaching career I taught reading badly. My initial teacher training left me with scant knowledge of the science of how children actually learn to read. Although in hindsight such ignorance feels borderline unforgivable, I think this experience is all too common – something that explains the many similarly uncertain approaches I have observed over the years.

In the main, I have seen generic reading skills like comprehension and inference prioritised while reading fluency, background knowledge and vocabulary have been undervalued. Such teaching simply doesn't bear much resemblance to the recommendations made by cognitive scientists based on decades of studying how people learn to read.

It is the responsibility of every teacher to align their practice with the best available research in a manner that fits their unique classroom circumstances. What follows is an outline of my attempt to do this, written in the hope that it might assist yours.

1 Focus on fluency

I will begin the year by hearing each child read and assessing their fluency. (As a rule of thumb, I count children's reading as fluent when they can read aloud at more than 120 words per minute with good prosody from an age-appropriate text and then answer a basic comprehension question.) Where phonics is an issue, systematic interventions will be put into place.

If fewer than 80 per cent of the children are fluent, I will undertake daily fluency practice in mixed-ability dyadic pairs. This entails children reading to one another from the same text – which is pitched at the best readers in the class – for 20 minutes in short, alternating periods. Sometimes the text will be read aloud to the children beforehand; other times they will dive in without this assistance.

The children will read designated passages repeatedly – up to three or four times – aiming for fluency. The listening partner will keep track of where their reading partner is up to using a ruler and will be trained to offer support in decoding unfamiliar words. Where neither partner can decode a word, they will be expected to write it down for discussion later in the session.

All children will gain from explicitly developing their fluency in this way, but the dysfluent will gain the most. The final 10 minutes of these half-hour sessions will be spent sharing the knowledge and vocabulary underpinning the text and discussing questions relating to comprehension, inference and authorial intent.

If, however, more than 80 per cent of the children are fluent, I will undertake daily fluency practice in a guided group with the remaining 20 per cent. At the same time, the rest of the class will read longer texts - sometimes in silence, sometimes aloud with a partner - but without the need for repeated reading, as this is most useful for developing fluency. As before, the final third of the session will be spent discussing unfamiliar vocabulary and the knowledge underpinning the text.

If all children reach fluency, we will read a variety of texts together, sometimes in silence and sometimes aloud. At this stage, my key considerations will be mileage (the amount of reading my class is undertaking each day) and content (the knowledge of the language and of the world needed to comprehend the text).

Why focus on fluency?

Reading fluency is an important – and, in my experience, under taught – step between phonics and reading comprehension. It needs to be explicitly and regularly addressed. Reading fluency can be thought of as consisting of three elements: automaticity, accuracy and prosody (i.e. fluent readers read quickly, easily and with the patterns and rhythm of spoken language) and research suggests that it is best achieved through repeated oral reading in the manner described, using texts that are a little beyond the grasp of the children.

2 Focus on a variety of non-fiction

Through the school year, children will read various texts on subjects from across the curriculum and beyond. Texts might discuss marsupials, hurricanes, Gilgamesh, the history of flight or Mozart. Fiction will be included in reading sessions too – short stories mainly, but non-fiction will be prioritised.

Why focus on a variety of non-fiction?
Beyond the development of fluency, when children are reading, what is being learned is entirely contained within the vocabulary and knowledge inherent to the text itself. If the text is about volcanoes, then that day's lesson is about learning the background knowledge and vocabulary related to volcanoes (along with whatever syntactical structures are contained within the text). When a child asks where volcanoes are found and the teacher shows on the interactive whiteboard a map of the globe with the tectonic plate margins delineated, that is teaching reading as much as discussing why the author chose a specific simile. Teaching knowledge is teaching reading.

3 Teach spelling regularly

Spelling will be explicitly taught with a focus on morphology. The teaching of morphology will use words with which the class are already familiar to develop familiarity with the patterns of suffixes and prefixes they encounter frequently while reading. Word matrices will be used to show the common ways in which words are adapted in the English language for different meanings.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">un</td><td rowspan="3">help</td><td>ful</td><td>ness</td></tr>
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ing
s</td></tr>
<tr><td>er</td><td>s</td></tr>
</table>

A word matrix showing morphology

Why teach morphology?
Research suggests that the teaching of morphology assists the learning of reading, especially for weaker readers of all ages. We are, to borrow cognitive neuroscientist Mark Seidenberg's phrase, 'statistical learners', unconsciously finding patterns in the vast amount of word and sentence data that we read.

Showing the bound morphemes that can be added to a root morpheme (e.g. 'ing' added to 'help' in the word matrix above) teaches children about the similar patterns in other words, and in this way a little morphology teaching goes a long way.

4 Read fiction aloud every day

I will spend at least 20 minutes each day reading a story to my class. Sometimes I will pause to discuss the book's language and the background knowledge required for understanding, but more often than not the focus will be on the right pace to encourage enjoyment.

Why read fiction every day?
Nothing inculcates a love of reading better than setting aside a period every day to share brilliant books with a class, and if along the way they happen to learn some vocabulary and develop a collection of story structures and fictional worlds to advance their own reading and writing, then that's a pleasant bonus.

5 Encourage reading at home

For children who are already fluent, I will encourage independent reading at home by recommending books and keeping track of the reading being done. For children who are not fluent, I will use parents' evening to discuss how children's reading can be supported at home, including the basics of fluency practice and how to segment and blend words.

Why encourage reading at home?
There simply isn't enough time in the school day for children to build up the bank of orthographic knowledge that is a requisite of mature reading. Once children are fluent, independent reading is essential.

The way I teach reading will likely evolve through the academic year, but I am confident that interpreting the best available research to fit my context will lead to better outcomes than I would have otherwise achieved.

Christopher Such is a key stage one primary teacher and curriculum leader from Peterborough. He has worked in education for thirteen years, including spells in every key stage from foundation stage to A-Level, teaching mostly in upper key stage 2.

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The LOST ART of LETTERS

A beautiful new Paddington Bear book will help children discover the singular joy of writing and receiving messages in the post

How do you feel when a letter drops though the letterbox onto your hall floor? Clearly, I don't mean a bill or payment reminder (they make your stomach lurch!) but rather a letter from a friend or relative, a postcard from an exotic location or an invitation to a special event. I'm guessing you rather enjoy it; maybe you even feel excited.

The art of letter writing may be in decline, but this is all the more reason to explore the activity with children, so they don't miss out on the thrill we've all experienced each time an envelope or package has come through the door.

Paddington's Post is a delightful new publication aimed at children in Early Years and KS1 which celebrates the joy of sending and receiving letters. The book, which is based on the original stories by Michael Bond with new illustrations by R.W. Alley, includes envelopes of correspondence for children to open and read. Some of these envelopes contain letters, others greeting cards and maps. All are beautifully illustrated and are certain to be enjoyed by young readers.

Inspired by the collection, I've been thinking of ways to ignite a love of letter writing with children in Reception and KS1. To accompany this, we've created a Paddington-themed resource pack for you to download, completely free, which is full of templates for classroom activities.

© R.W. Alley, 2007

Prepare your post office

To get my letter writing project off to a good start, the first thing I'd do is set up a classroom post office and letter writing area. As is often the case in my teacher life, I'd need to draw on my friends, family and colleagues to supply me with bills and official looking letters: letters from friends and family, junk mail, fliers, invitations, greeting cards and postcards etc. I'd also begin a collection of stationery (that's not too hard, of course, because owning an inordinate amount of stationery is Teacher Rule #103). This would include paper and envelopes of varying sizes - suitable for letters from giants and invitations to fairies. I'd also ensure that surprise letters arrive in the post office from time to time, say from story book characters or from the headteacher. Doing this is certain to encourage children to write replies that they can post in the classroom postbox and even deliver to each other from the battered old satchel currently hanging in my cupboard under the stairs.

FREE RESOURCE PACK!

Download all the resources mentioned in this article for free from teachwire.net/paddingtonletters

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Wish you were here

In *Paddington's Post*, Paddington both sends and receives postcards. Ensuring the classroom post office and writing area contains plenty of postcards is a great way to inspire young writers.

As we all know, Paddington lives with the Brown family at 32 Windsor Gardens, London. And London is a place with lots of well-known sights suitable for writing about on a postcard. Why not consider asking Paddington to send a postcard (penned by you) to your class about one of the famous London landmarks he's visited (I hear he's willing to do this for the small fee of a marmalade sandwich)? Your children could then reply by sending him postcards about the places of interest in your locality - again, you can 'dispatch' the postcards on the children's behalf. It could be the beginning of an ongoing correspondence between your class and the small bear with a blue duffle coat.

In the pack: Postcard templates for children's writing, and templates you can use to create messages from Paddington.

Put your stamp on it

If you want your classroom post office to have an authentic feel, children will need to affix stamps to their letters before posting them in the classroom letterbox. Collecting stamps with children can be a fun way to find out about life in other countries as the artwork often depicts people, animals and landmarks that represent the stamp's place of origin (collections of used stamps can be purchased from eBay for just a few pounds).

Royal Mail also regularly produces stamp collections to commemorate events, people and literary characters (including Paddington Bear) which you may wish to explore with children, and of course, you'll want to draw children's attention to the stamps in *Paddington's Post*, which depict a Peruvian Llama, the Queen, and a jar of marmalade.

After looking at different stamps, encourage children to design their own, which you can then scan and print onto sticky labels for use in the classroom postage system. You could even sell these stamps to teachers and parents for use in the school Christmas postbox with the funds raised going to charity or the school.

In the pack: Illustrations of the stamps in *Paddington's Post*, and templates to help children come up with their own designs.

Message in a bottle

Paddington travelled from Peru to Great Britain as a stowaway on a ship. Whilst he was hiding, he wouldn't have been able to send letters to Aunt Lucy, but he might have been able to send her a message in a bottle. To spark some excitement about writing messages, collect empty water bottles and remove the labels (be sure to arrange for the bottles to be recycled and to discuss this with the class). Write messages in the bottles in role as Paddington and hide them around the teaching environment. When children find the bottles, they should read the messages and reply. We've provided a lovely scroll resource for you and the children to write your messages on.

In the pack: An authentic scroll template for your maritime messages.

Look after this bear

Depending on the children's knowledge of the Paddington Bear stories, they may or may not know that when the Browns found him, Paddington was wearing a parcel label written by his Aunt Lucy that read: *PLEASE LOOK AFTER THIS BEAR. Thank you.* In response to this, I'd ensure my letter writing area included plenty of parcel labels so that children could write their own messages asking people to take care of different toys in the classroom.

In the pack: A parcel label template that children can write on and tie to their toys.

He's in safe hands

As an extension to the parcel label activity, I'd encourage my class to consider how the Brown family cared for Paddington, e.g. taking him home, providing him with a bed, feeding him, introducing him to friends and neighbours etc. and then I'd introduce my class to their very own Paddington Bear (I've checked and they're fairly inexpensive when purchased online).

We'd then think of how we could look after Paddington at school, such as keeping him fit by taking him to PE lessons, making sure he eats healthy lunches in the school dining room and showing him where important places (such as Great Britain and Peru) are on the world map. I'd photograph these activities as reminders for the children and then model how to write a letter to Aunt Lucy explaining how we'd looked after Paddington.

In the pack: A letter writing template ideal for young children so they can write about how they've taken care of Paddington.

Rachel Clarke is director of Primary English.

Unleashing ENGLISH

Make language a key player in all aspects of school life, encourages **Ruth Baker-Leask**

English takes up more timetable space than any of the other primary subjects, yet we still struggle to teach it all. This being the case, why are so many children still struggling to read, write and talk at a level that is expected for their age?

To answer this question I would like to start by highlighting one of the key aims of our current English curriculum. It states in the opening paragraphs that 'the overarching aim for English in the national curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word.'

Bearing this in mind, I think that in an effort to 'cram it all in' there is little time given to help children embed the language skills we are teaching so that they may use them independently, effectively and with confidence. I would also suggest that in an effort to record what the children have learnt, we spend more time on the written word than the spoken, when we know children will struggle to write something that they can't say.

So how can we change this situation when we are all suffering from overcrowded timetables and regular work scrutiny and when English is predominantly taught in hour-long blocks and is then tucked away again until next time? Well, I suggest that English should be untethered and encouraged to roam around the school, occupying all of those places and spaces where creative language skills are needed. The following suggestions are not new ideas, but, in many settings, they have been overlooked due to the busy nature of school life or are considered a luxury when there are so many other things to think about.

In the spotlight

Drama supports children in speaking audibly and fluently as well as providing opportunities for participating in performances, both of which are statutory requirements in the spoken word section of the curriculum. It's also pretty good for increasing children's self-esteem, especially when they hear the applause of an appreciative audience. Here's some ideas to try:

- Start a drama club. These are ideal for those children who have a natural aptitude for acting but who may never get the opportunity to discover their talent.
- Put on a show. Does your school have an end-of-year production? Do you stage a nativity play or celebrate other cultural or religious events with a performance? Time-consuming though they are, the benefits are many, including supporting children's understanding of narrative or important events by experiencing them first-hand.
- Make class assemblies a learning experience. Many schools have ditched class assemblies due to the time constraints of the curriculum. However, with some careful planning, the English curriculum can be taught in the context of a class assembly. Activities such as scripting or directing performances will support children in widening their vocabulary, strengthening their composition skills and understanding the impact language and gesture have on an audience.

Healthy debate

Debating is a great way of developing children's language skills. Teaching the language of discussion and argument is difficult unless we give children authentic opportunities to talk about, debate and persuade people about the issues that matter to them. A debating society, children's parliament or school council can all provide pupils with this opportunity.

Too often school council meetings are rushed or over-managed by adults who are more interested in what playground games the children want to play or the colour of the new school badge than talking about real issues that affect their children's lives. In this age of renewed youth activism, I would love to see school councils that represent the authentic voices of their pupils and aim to make meaningful changes to the school, community and wider world. A good place to look for ideas is **esu.org**

A place for poetry

There are only a handful of requirements for children to learn about poetry in the national curriculum, and it's only a statutory requirement that children write poems in Y2. I often advise teachers to weave poetry into their English teaching whenever possible as it's the perfect vehicle to encourage children's love of language and appreciation of well-crafted writing. For students who have caught the poetry bug and who might enjoy writing their own verses, organise a poetry club at lunchtime or after school that gives children time to apply their language skills to expressing their inner thoughts and feelings.

Sniff out stories

We regularly ask children to write newspaper-style reports in English lessons, often unsuccessfully. This may be because many children don't read newspapers and are unsure of their style and purpose. If pupils had the opportunity to read and take part in writing a school newspaper, I think this could help. This was once a standard part of school life but seems to have dwindled. This is such a shame, especially when you consider how much more simple it is to publish children's writing in this age of electronic media.

Could your school start an e-newsletter devised, written and

published by your pupils? Are there children in your school who would jump at the chance of becoming newshounds, editors or agony aunts?

To spread the workload, could each class take it in turns to write the school's newsletter periodically?

Ruth Baker-Leask is a consultant, speaker, teacher and chair of the National Association of Advisers in English.

Love your library

So many libraries go unused during most of the school day, despite a further aim of the national curriculum being to develop our children's 'love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment.' One of my fondest memories of primary school was when I was chosen to be a school librarian. I would spend most lunch hours avoiding the chaos of a busy playground by stamping, tidying, sorting and reading books. Not everyone's idea of fun, you may be thinking, but I am sure there are many children out there who would relish such an opportunity, so find them! These are your reading ambassadors: the children who can keep your library tidy and well used; who will run book groups for others by reading stories and recommending books; who will be your greatest allies in the endeavour to get all children reading widely and often.

Admin apprentices

It always raises a smile when I hear a school's phone message has been recorded by one of the kids, or I am given a tour of a school by an articulate pupil who is relishing the opportunity to skip a lesson to show off the finer features of their school. So many simple day-to-day tasks are undertaken by adults that are perfect opportunities for children to practise their language and literacy skills. Pupil-led activities could include writing labels for displays, or even writing letters to parents about class trips. This gives children's writing a real purpose and audience, as well as saving valuable admin time for teachers and office staff.

Making it purposeful

Many of the experiences suggested above are the ones I recall from my own education. I don't remember much of the content of my primary lessons, but I do remember the play I wrote as part of my leavers' assembly or the book review that was published in the school newsletter.

By providing wider opportunities for children to apply their language skills in purposeful and inviting ways, schools will be in a better position to equip pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word.

"English should be untethered and encouraged to roam around the school"

How to lift poems OFF THE PAGE

Poetry should be celebrated in every classroom, says Charlotte Hacking - so here are some ideas to help you get started...

Poetry is one of the most important branches of literature, providing the gateway for so many young readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate. We are introduced to language and reading through the rhymes we hear and join in with as children - how well we travel along the road can be influenced by how exposed we are as we go to the joys and potential poetry offers to us as readers and writers.

There have, however, been tensions and issues around poetry's place in the curriculum. Ofsted's commentary on its Phase 1 curriculum review in 2018 mentions the narrowing of the primary English curriculum and suggests that this is leading to less poetry being taught, especially at KS2. CLPE's Power of Poetry research project in 2017-18 found evidence to support this. As one teacher noted:

"Unfortunately, our most recent curriculum does not promote poetry and this, coupled with most primary teachers feeling less confident about teaching poetry, means there is little exposure to poets and their work for many of our children, particularly in KS2. Whilst our youngest children in the Early Years are exposed to nursery rhymes and opportunities to memorise and recite them frequently, as they get older, they meet such opportunities far less often."

The wonderful thing about poetry is that it can be taught anywhere, at any time. Alongside planned units around a particular collection or anthology, regular opportunities for a range of essential experiences to develop children's knowledge of, engagement with and perceptions of poetry can be built in throughout the curriculum and school day, all year round.

Read aloud

The wonderful thing about poetry is that it can be dropped into any part of the school day. Read a poem to start the day, before break, while lining up for lunch or at home time. Let it sit in the air without expecting a response, but allow children to talk about what they like and dislike and how it makes them feel if they want to share this. It is important to introduce them to a wide range and breadth of poetry so that that they can be introduced to new poets, voices and styles they may not meet through their own reading; try not to be judgemental about what you think they will like or dislike, or might find too difficult.

Give time

Children need time to read, re-read and respond to poetry. However, we must make sure that we don't jump into trying to dissect the poem before giving the children the opportunity to internalise and respond to it at a personal level. A technique like 'poetry papering' works really well. Select a number of different poems, illustrating different poets, styles and forms, photocopy them, and pin them up around the classroom for pupils to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else. This encourages the children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge and emotional responses that poems invoke in them as readers. Let them look for connections, ask questions, explore what they like about poems and the use of language.

"Let them look for connections, ask questions, explore"

Encourage performance

Children need to feel the joy in reading poetry aloud, joining in, dramatising and performing poems themselves. If poetry

is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children. Find opportunities for children to perform poetry themselves, to shadow an award, like the CLiPPA, enter recitation competitions or simply perform poems they love in school.

Make curriculum links

Word play is one of the most basic pleasures of poetry, giving the opportunity for playing games with language so that the shapes, sounds, and rhythms of words are enjoyed as well as their meaning. Alliteration, assonance and nonsense words allow children to develop their knowledge of how letters and sounds are linked and explore spelling patterns on the page. Poems that link to specific aspects of the curriculum can be a wonderful way into asking questions or sharing prior knowledge of a theme or topic and they can also be used at the end of a unit of study as a way of summarising learning. For example, Rachel Rooney's poem *Six Facts About Light*, could be used as a stimulus to write 'Six Facts' about a topic that has been covered.

Watch professionals

It's so important for children to hear from, work with and watch professional poets – seeing a poet bring their own work to life and beginning to understand what that means in terms of the creation of poetry helps children to see themselves as writers. CLPE's free Poetryline website provides a range of poet performances and interviews for teachers to use in the classroom. A visit from a poet brings this experience directly to the children and can be hugely enriching and inspiring.

Embrace opportunities

Poetry gives you a voice to express what you want, in your own way. Children need the permission and opportunities to share and write about themselves, their feelings and important events. Through writing poetry, children are encouraged to reflect on their experience, to recreate it, shape it, and make sense of it, giving it form and significance and communicating this to the reader or to the listener. Poetry is powerful. Use it all year round.

Access CLPE's Poetryline website, which provides a wealth of opportunities for exploring poetry in schools, including videos of poets performing, free teaching plans for using high quality poetry collections and further ideas for embedding poetry into the curriculum at: clpe.org.uk/poetryline

Charlotte Hacking is the Learning Programmes Leader at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE).

5 brilliant collections of poetry to have in your classroom

A GREAT BIG CUDDLE BY MICHAEL ROSEN, ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS RIDDELL (WALKER)

A rich mix of poems that play with words and sounds, engage young readers with rhythms and rhymes and show that poetry can tell a story or share our feelings. Poems that children will want to join in with, move to and talk about.

THE DRAGON WITH A BIG NOSE BY KATHY HENDERSON (FRANCES LINCOLN)

This collection explores a range and breadth of forms and styles, taking them from the familiar comfort of rhythm and rhymes to the introduction of more sophisticated poetic devices such as assonance, imagery and metaphor. It's out of print, so you'll need to track down a preloved copy!

THINGS YOU FIND IN A POET'S BEARD BY A.F. HARROLD, ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS RIDDELL (BURNING EYE BOOKS)

A perfect KS2 collection with a mix of themes and poetic forms. The poems use clever humour and wordplay as well as evocative imagery, which enables children to visualise and feel like they are in the moments being described.

RHYTHM AND POETRY BY KARL NOVA (CABOODLE)

Hip hop artist Karl's poems are infused with the lyrical rhythms of his music, which makes them irresistible for children to want to perform, but this is also a book that could inspire many to take up writing themselves.

THE RAINMAKER DANCED BY JOHN AGARD

These rich and lyrical poems, set against striking illustrations by Satoshi Kitamura, invite us to consider our own impact on each other and the environment and to question, challenge and reflect. In the current climate of fake news, poetry such as this is essential in every classroom.

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Bringing books to life

Improve literacy in the classroom through outdoor learning

Abseiling down a viaduct. Honing archery skills to scare off the enemy. Building a raft to escape from a clever trap. Alex Rider, the star of Anthony Horowitz's bestselling series of spy novels aimed at young people, can do it all. But now, so can your class. YHA has teamed up with Walker Books to develop two residential packages which bring the thrilling books to life, immersing children in the adrenaline filled and secretive spy world.

These packages are more than just fun and energetic breaks from the classroom though. Outdoor movement and play are powerful learning tools for children, inspiring and motivating creative thinking, embedding learning from the classroom in real life environments, and developing bonds between their peers which can help increase resilience and engagement back at school.

Instantly hooked

The outdoor learning residential experiences which YHA offers are anchored in promoting reading through spy-themed activities and have been credited by teachers with getting their pupils reading. Andrea Fisher, Y5 class teacher at Stonelow Primary School, commented: "From the moment we arrived, the special agent mission and new agent names got the group instantly hooked. All the activities linked to the spy theme and gave the trip a new element.

> *"All the activities linked to the spy theme and gave the trip a new element"*

"The last day's activity, which led to the discovery of the Alex Rider books hidden in a room, was brilliant! It meant we had 30 copies of the book (a rare thing indeed) and we started reading as a class as soon as we got back. We are currently three chapters from the end and the children are as hooked now as they were at the start."

As well as taking part in a range of spy-themed activities, schools that book one of the Alex Rider packages are also gifted copies of the first book in the series, *Stormbreaker*.

A winning partnership

The Alex Rider series, which was first published in 2000, redefined the spy genre and is widely regarded as pivotal in getting a generation of young people, particularly boys, reading for pleasure.

The partnership between Walker Books and YHA aims to get even more young people turning pages and enjoying literature. YHA's Alex Rider packages are themed around the award-winning series, were originally launched in 2015, and feature activities ranging from high-energy outdoor sports to gadget design and code breaking.

YHA has more than 80 LOtC accredited sites, the greatest number accredited by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC) of any organisation nationwide. LOtC accreditation helps schools to identify good quality and safe providers, as well as reducing the red tape faced by schools when planning educational visits.

To find out more about YHA's cost-effective residentials, please visit https://groups.yha.org.uk/school-trips

Words and pictures

Could the art of illustration help your pupils with character development in their writing? *TR&W* spoke to **Axel Scheffler**, in search of the inside story...

TR&W How early in the story development do you get involved, as the illustrator?
AS Not until it's absolutely finished. For example, when I'm working with Julia [Donaldson], she sends the text to the publisher to be edited. Then the editor, Alison Green, sends me the final text, plus some notes. And then it's over to me. I don't have any say in the plot – quite rightly so! It's always been that way, and it works very well. Sometimes there might be little notes from Julia, saying what she imagines, but that's very rare, actually. Alison and her art director, Zoë Tucker, work out how the text should be divided up into separate pages, and they give me some suggestions on the page design to get me started. Then I begin developing the characters. I start sketching first, then there are conversations with Alison and Zoë about which way it might eventually go.

So, does the final appearance of a character often differ greatly from your original version?
Yes, sometimes! With the Gruffalo, I started sketching without thinking very much (as usual!), and I made him really quite scary, with tiny eyes and huge claws and fangs. Alison suggested that I should probably tone him down a bit, which is why he ended up being a rather more lovable monster than the one I first imagined. The old lady in *A Squash and a Squeeze* went through some alterations, too. I started out by making her very elderly indeed, and quite spiky, with a pointed nose and so on. After some nudges by the editor she became rounder, kinder and less wrinkly. So there are compromises; but publishers do tend to know what they are talking about (most of the time, at least), and I tend to listen to what they say. I still draw what's in my mind, but I know there are some broad rules you need to follow, and a few taboos to avoid.

Over the years you've been asked to develop characters who are human beings, farm and wild animals and sea creatures... not to mention giants, witches and other fantastical beings. Do you find it easier to start with someone or something that already exists in the world, or from scratch?
I suppose it's more fun to create a character from scratch – but of course, even when you are coming up with images of fantastic beasts and magical figures, there is often a whole range of culturally transmitted images that you need to take into consideration. For example, British readers would expect a witch to wear a pointy hat, but in Germany, she would more likely be in a headscarf.

In your latest collaboration with Julia Donaldson, *The Smeds and the Smoos*, there are very few textual clues as to the characters' appearances – so how did that process work?
That's right, there were only a couple of attributes in the text for each type of

alien: wild hair and sleeping in beds for the Smeds; wearing shoes and jumping like kangaroos for the Smoos. So I had a few constraints – I would normally draw aliens with eyes on stalks, which didn't work when they needed to have hair – but other than that I had free rein. I did lots of sketches before deciding on a direction, and it was nice to have such freedom.

Do you think, if you'd chosen different sketches to take forwards, it would have changed the story, even if the words stayed the same?

Different illustrations can absolutely result in different stories. Every time I'm approaching a new concept, I can see endless possibilities. When I do talks at schools I always show my original Gruffalo sketches, and talk about how I have to make decisions as an illustrator. From a very brief description, you can come up with a whole range of appearances for a character, and each one might highlight different qualities.

"Every time I'm approaching a new concept, I can see endless possibilities..."

What advice do you have for primary school teachers who would like to make more use of drawing in their literacy teaching?

Just as reading lots of books can help with writing, being exposed to all kinds of different illustrations can inspire children to draw – and give them an understanding of drawing. It's a good idea to get children to look at work by different illustrators and talk about what they do. You could discuss the various techniques and media they use – collage, watercolours, pencils – and encourage children to try them for themselves. It's important to think about how the illustrations work with the story – what are the overlaps between the text and the pictures? Is there anything that's in one and not in the other, or vice versa? And don't forget to introduce them to fine art – because really, that's illustration, too!

Try it in your classroom

Four Axel-inspired ideas to help children make links between illustration and writing

1) Read out a very short description of a character to your class, then ask them to draw the person or creature you have been describing. Collect in all the pictures, then hand them back out again, randomly. What differences do the children notice between their own work, and the illustration they are now looking at? Has everyone been true to the original description? What additional information has been added, and how?

2) As Axel points out, there are certain culturally transmitted expectations around the appearance of many legendary, fantastical and historical figures. Give each pupil, or group of pupils, an example (e.g. dragon, giant, troll, princess) and ask them to come up with a list of visual clues they think should definitely feature in its illustration. If they swap lists with another pupil or group of pupils, can everyone work out the character from the clues?

3) Show pupils Axel's original Gruffalo sketches (you can find them on his website at axelscheffler.com/books-with-julia-donaldson/the-gruffalo). How differently do they think the book might have turned out if he hadn't made the changes he did? Do they think the editor was right to advise those changes?

4) Display a famous painting that includes a human figure or figures (e.g. Renoir's *Luncheon Of The Boating Party*, or *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, by Vermeer) on your whiteboard, and tell pupils that it is, in fact, an illustration for a story that they are going to write. What clues can they take about the character/s from the picture, and how can they use the artwork to make their writing more vivid and powerful?

CORAL OCEAN

Help your class to write at greater depth with **Pie Corbett's** touching tale of two girls flung into unfamiliar surroundings

Amira's tongue seemed to be stuck in her mouth. They had practised saying 'good morning' in English so many times but now that she needed to speak the words, they wouldn't come out. She looked down at her scuffed shoes and said nothing. Nothing seemed easier. The teacher towered above her. He was taller than her one from home; home seemed like a lifetime ago.

The teacher walked her outside into the playground to be with the other children. A sharp wind blew across the tarmac and Amira shivered. She missed the warm scent of orange blossom; this new school just smelt of the city streets. She ached when she thought of her old friends; here, she knew no one.

Not quite knowing what to do, Amira wandered between the groups of children, dragging the school bag that she had been given. She could just see her little brother, Amir, in the other playground, surrounded by all the younger children. He stood still with his thumb stuck in his mouth, looking lost; everyone else seemed to be moving round him, weaving in and out as they played. She longed to go to him; she knew Mama would have. For a moment, the memory of her mother held her fixed, paralysed. Once again, she relived the moment when they had been running...

Mr Walker looked out across the playground. Shrugging his shoulders against the bitter wind, he hugged his mug of coffee and glanced at his watch. Ten minutes to go. He could see the new children, both uncertain how to break the ice. The Syrian girl, Amira, seemed transfixed. The girl from Cornwall had also not settled in and just looked angry. She had already been with them for a week and had yet to settle. He sipped his coffee and sighed. It was going to be a tough day.

Coral Ocean stood on the edge of the playground and waited. No one came near. All the other kids seemed to be absorbed in their own games. She gazed out through the railings and pretended to stare at something in the distance. Blinking back tears, she roughly rubbed her eyes and hoped that no one would notice.

"What's up?" A tall boy had come across and stood bouncing a tennis ball.

"Clear off!" snapped Coral, scuffing her shoe against the railings.

"Please yourself," muttered the boy. He spun round and raced back across the playground, bouncing his ball as he went. Coral could see him chatting to some other children and pointing at her. Everything seemed wrong.

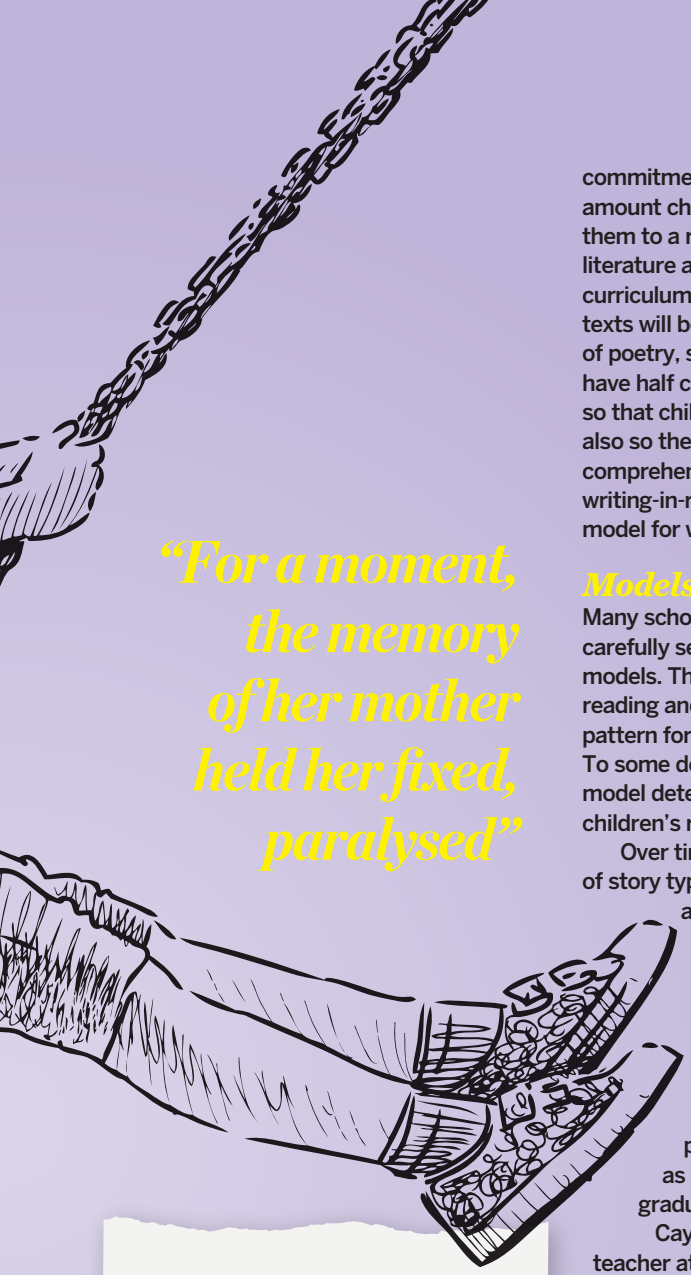
How she longed for her old school! Coral missed the sunlit playground in sight of the sea; her new school stood in the cold shadows of a tower block. She missed the thrill of playtime games; here, no one knew her. She missed the walk home along the cliff tops with Amy; here, she had to catch the bus, alone.

At that moment, there was a shout that brought Coral back to the present. Some of the children were standing round a girl she had not noticed before. One of them had grabbed the girl's school bag. Now, they were throwing it round the group. The girl had no chance of getting it back. They were laughing and shouting but the girl stood in the middle, her eyes full of tears. Coral dashed forwards, her fists clenched as she yelled, "Leave her be!" The group turned to stare.

A sharp whistle froze everyone in the playground to a juddering halt. Mr Walker stood with hands on his hips and waited. Some of the children hung their heads. "Line up," he snapped, "Now."

Back in the class, Mr Walker introduced the class to the newcomer. She was called Amira and had travelled all the way from Syria. The new girl stood at the front of the class, finding it hard to look at anyone, scrunching the hem of an ill-fitting dress. "Coral, I think you had better look after Amira," said Mr Walker, steering her towards where Coral sat. Shuffling her books to one side, Coral made a space. She glanced sideways at the new girl. Amira gave her a shy smile; Coral grinned back.

DOWNLOAD PIE'S STORY FOR FREE AT www.teachwire.net/coralocean



"For a moment, the memory of her mother held her fixed, paralysed"

Take reading into writing

When you look at genuine greater depth writing, it soon becomes obvious that these are children who read an enormous amount of quality literature. Constant reading builds their imaginative world so that they have more possibilities to draw upon when writing. It also strengthens vocabulary. The more children read, the more they internalise accurate use of punctuation, spelling patterns and flow of narrative; indeed, you can tell what a child reads as it will be echoed in their writing.

The Reading Spine

If reading is one key factor in determining writing, we need to ensure that we are working from high-quality books. The school's Reading Spine should identify the backbone of must-have read aloud texts that every child will experience. The choice should be clear – do we read Captain Underpants or Tom's Midnight Garden to the class?

Schools with high attainment - despite serving challenging areas - have a strong commitment to increasing both the amount children read and introducing them to a range of high-quality literature and authors. They have a curriculum map that identifies which texts will be used, ensuring a balance of poetry, story and non-fiction. Many have half class sets of the core books so that children can read along, but also so these texts can be used for comprehension work, drama, and writing-in-role – as well as providing a model for writing.

Models for writing

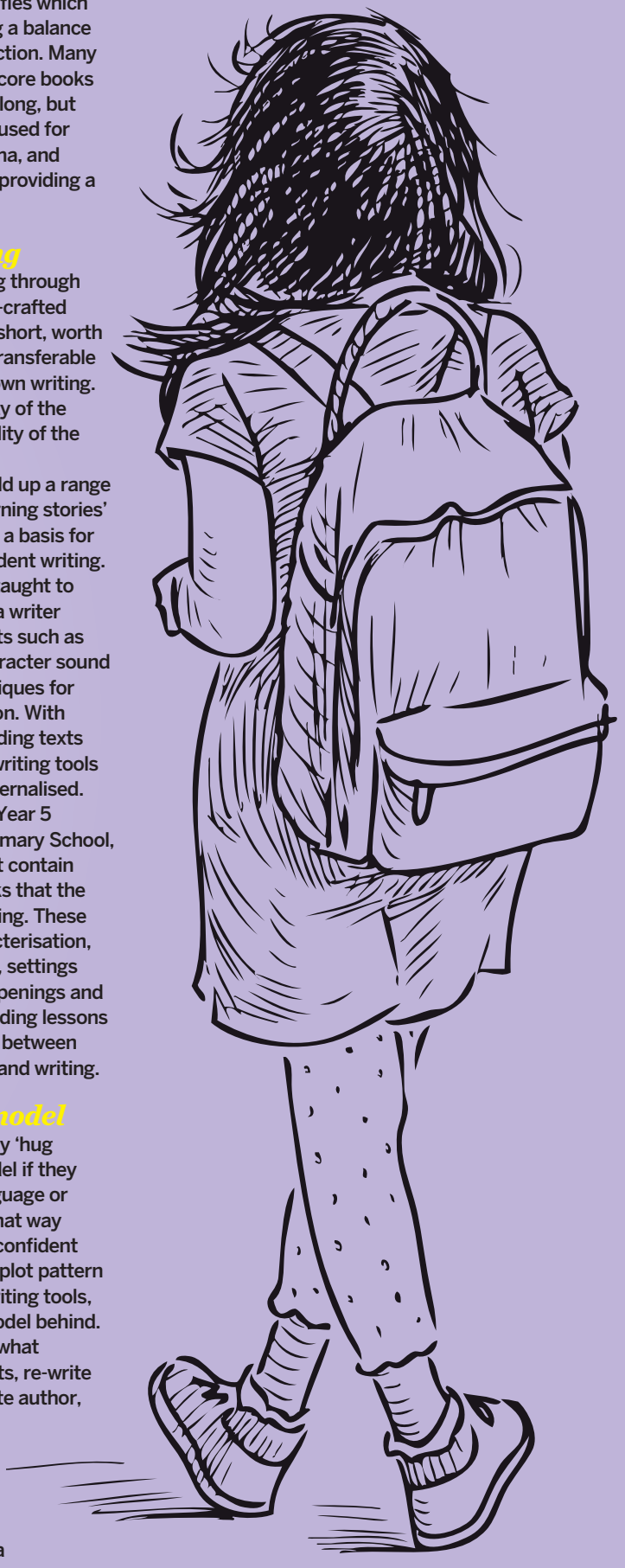
Many schools teach writing through carefully selected and well-crafted models. These need to be short, worth reading and have a clear, transferable pattern for the children's own writing. To some degree, the quality of the model determines the quality of the children's responses.

Over time, children build up a range of story types such as 'warning stories' and use these as a basis for their independent writing. They can be taught to identify how a writer creates effects such as making a character sound real, or techniques for building tension. With practice and reading texts as a writer, these writing tools gradually become internalised.

Caysie Freeman, a Year 5 teacher at Watermoor Primary School, has folders on the wall that contain snippets from quality books that the children refer to when writing. These contain extracts for characterisation, dialogue, action, suspense, settings for atmosphere, exciting openings and satisfying endings. Her reading lessons also act as a strong bridge between studying quality literature and writing.

Innovating on a model

In KS2, children should only 'hug closely' to the original model if they are new to the English language or have particular needs. In that way everyone succeeds. More confident writers use the underlying plot pattern (e.g. warning story) and writing tools, increasingly leaving the model behind. They may embellish, alter what happens, change viewpoints, re-write in the style of their favourite author, reset the story within the world of the class novel or begin to use flashbacks and time slips to alter the narrative pattern. In this way, the model is not a



constraint. Greater depth writers also draw on their own reading, as well as what the imagination offers.

Shared writing

The shared writing that the teacher leads, where the class co-construct an innovation, has to be pitched at greater depth. In this way the teacher is constantly engaging the class cognitively and linguistically in thinking and writing at that level. The teacher uses the underlying pattern and writing techniques from the model, showing how to create an imaginative and powerful text. The shared writing draws on the class's Reading Spine in order to make the link between reading and writing obvious.

It is essential to cultivate a love of words in the classroom. If children do not enjoy words then they will never become great readers, let alone be great writers. Word choice often ruins what might have been a great piece of work where children have been lead to believe that good writing consists of lots of 'big' words; a form of showing off with language. This leads to over-written, fanciful writing that detracts from the impact on the reader. Odd word choices stall the flow of the imagination as it responds to the writing. Each word has to earn its place and be carefully selected. Sometimes the simplest words create the right effect. In the same way, when children are asked to insert semicolons or examples of the passive this too can make composition harder and reduce the quality. The answer is to practise using semicolons until it becomes second nature.

Working with Coral Ocean

I wrote this story after visiting a local school and meeting some children who had come from Syria. The line, 'she relived the moment when they had been running…' is based on the story that a reception child told her teacher. This made me think about the challenge that new children have to fit into a new home, a new country and to make new friends. In terms of literacy, the story hinges around two key ideas. It is a 'wishing story' where the main characters really want something. It is also a character change story where the main character starts in a negative position but ends in a more positive situation.

Tune the children into the theme of the story by using Shaun Tann's wonderful wordless picture book *The Arrival*. Careful reading of the images and rich book talk develop a sense of how, when we become torn away from the familiar, the world looks different, perhaps more threatening. In Jamie Thomas's class, Max in Year 6 wrote this response to the early pictures.

Life drains away, plunging the world into solitude.
The colour that once flowed, now gone,
Receding into the distance like a fragment of memory.
Hands that were once tightly clasped, ache in defeat.

The line 'hands that were once clasped, ache in defeat', picks up on a detail from early in the book where the mother places her hand on top of her husband's, on top of his suitcase. The greater depth writer has a big vocabulary and the temptation is to write in abstractions, but it is the concrete image that is seen and experienced by the reader's imagination. Learning to suggest atmosphere, emotions and ideas through concrete description can have a powerful impact on the quality of writing. Use short-burst writing to train the children

"Word choice often ruins what might have been a great piece of work"

how to describe characters, objects, settings, events, or increase tension so that they become adept at writing accurate paragraphs that build pictures and ideas in the reader's mind. It is worth remembering that greater depth writers are very accurate at spelling and punctuation so that they are able to concentrate fully on the flow of composition and crafting the writing.

The lesson

The challenge with Coral Ocean is to write a short story or an opening chapter from a novel in which there are two contrasting characters that have both been flung together in a totally new setting. There needs to be a pivotal reason or event that brings them together. Furthermore, there has to be a shift in viewpoint between the main characters.

Read carefully with the class to consider the way in which the story is structured so that the second character does not appear until the second half of the story. Look at the sentences using semicolons and practise writing sentences that show contrasts that suggest how the character feels. Ask the children what books they might think about or draw upon as they write. Let them talk ideas through in twos and threes before they start.

Planning

Greater depth writers often do not need much in the way of planning as they have internalised a strong sense of structure through constant reading. They know that a narrative needs to introduce a problem and drive towards a conclusion. Over-planning often means that the writing becomes stilted as if the children are writing-by-numbers. Stronger writers usually are happier diving straight in so that their imagination takes over and the story emerges as they write. Having said that, the great children's novelist Joan Aiken once told me that she thought that it was always a good idea to write the last line first as that might stop rambling and provide a direction for composition. Greater depth writers may need more time for drafting as well as revisiting their writing, editing and developing through rewriting sections that seem weaker.

PIE CORBETT is an author, poet and former headteacher.

Fresh inspiration

Eight ideas for even better literacy teaching and learning, in every classroom...

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2 Get the power

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an independent UK charity dedicated to raising the literacy achievement of children by putting quality literature at the heart of all learning. It is a charity with a national and international reputation for providing excellent literacy training and resources for primary schools, based on extensive research and best practice.

CLPE provides a wide range of professional literacy training at an affordable cost. This includes their flagship Power of Reading programme and whole school membership, giving access to over 200 detailed teaching plans and resources to build their English curriculum.

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literarycurriculum.co.uk

5

The literacy company

The Literacy Company aims to inspire and support teachers in order for students to gain access towards the career of their choice. Its mission is to create strong programmes of support for teachers and students to develop the learning of English in primary and secondary schools, nationally and internationally.

It aims to bridge the gap between primary and secondary education. The training courses support teachers to engage with their students. A range of useful resources and an up-to-date brochure can be found on the company website.

Visit www.theliteracy company.co.uk or email admin@theliteracy company.co.uk.

7

The write stuff

Looking to improve writing outcomes in your classroom? *The Write Stuff* by Jane Considine reveals a step by step framework for strengthening the teaching of writing. Sharply focused on showing children how to successfully craft a piece of text, *The Write Stuff* will help your pupils to understand the rules to win as a writer. This book provides teachers with a clear way forward, explaining Jane's fundamental principles for teaching writing and how to use these to underpin a successful teaching sequence. *The Write Stuff*...clarity on a tricky subject that will convert struggling writers into successful writers!

www.thetrainingspace.co.uk/product/write-stuff

8

What time is it?

Learning to tell the time for most children is a challenge, and teaching time can be frustrating, but it doesn't need to be complicated. EasyRead Time Teacher has the perfect solution in its practical and cleverly designed range of time teaching products. The Classroom Set includes a classroom wall clock, a teacher demonstration clock and student practice clocks, which clearly present all the information children need to master telling the time. In just three simple steps and with a little practice, classes will be telling the time 'in no time at all.'

www.easyreadtimeteacher.com, sales@easyreadtimeteacher.com, 01684 566832

For the LOVE OF IT

Forcing children to finish books that don't interest them won't make them better readers, warns **Hayley Scott** – and it could hinder the rest of their learning, too...

'Let children read what they want!' 'Let them read for pleasure!' Writers say this all the time, and I agree with them. There's nothing quite like reading what you enjoy. It opens you up. It takes you places. It introduces you to people you'd never meet otherwise, ways of thinking you'd never find by yourself, and fills you up with beautiful images, making you excited, hopeful, less lonely and at its best, full of wonder. Who wouldn't want that for every child?

As a teacher and writer, I can see the disconnect between what we all *think* children should be having access to bookwise, and what is possible in the current education climate, budgetwise. Most teachers, given the choice, would have classrooms bulging with books, new and old, ready to be pulled from the shelves and delved into by enthusiastic pupils... but as we know, for lots of schools the money just isn't there, even when SLT really want it to be. And while plenty of us dip into our own money to buy books for our classrooms that might suit individual pupils – those who don't have access to books at home, or those who just can't get into the books in the school library or on the reading schemes – it's expensive and isn't always possible. Many would argue it shouldn't be necessary, of course. But we have to work with what we've got.

Good choices

What do *you* read? What don't you read? As an adult. As a teacher. Do you read current children's fiction, not just the bestsellers they sell in the local supermarket? What did you love to read as a child? Did you ever hear adults around you suggest some books are 'better' than others? Do you still have a voice in your head that tells you some reading choices are more valuable than others? Because the research says not. The research says that reading for pleasure makes the difference, not what the children read (bit.ly/trwlittrust). Reading for pleasure is what creates curious, engaged, happy, confident learners. And, on a basic, less poetic level, reading for reading's sake, without enjoyment, simply doesn't 'get the results'.

In the daily life of a school, it's so easy to forget that some children dread reading, will do anything to get out of it, will pretend to read just to keep the adults from their back. There are many reasons why, and it's not our jobs as teachers, or writers, to judge them or their families, or their teachers, even. But to expect a child who's never really read books at all, to come to school and make their way through the banded reading scheme just because it is 'good' for them, seems utterly counterproductive.

What if, as we all know when we think about our own lives, what children *should* be reading is a simple as what they are passionate about, what makes them laugh, what makes them feel hopeful or excited. What if they should be reading books that, when they talk to you about them, make their eyes light up the way they do when they talk about Pokemon cards, or YouTubers, or LOL Surprise Dolls?

Things they love

Nearly every teacher I've met in the thirteen years since I first stepped into a classroom as an adult cares deeply about the success and wellbeing of every child in their class. If you were a bookworm yourself, and so many teachers were, books were comfort, solace, excitement, adventure, friends even. But imagine something you hate doing now, something you struggle with – bills, paperwork, laundry... and then think about how it would feel if every day of your life, your success as a person were judged by how well and how often you did that thing. Reading is like this for many children, and we all need to remember that. Because, surely, how you feel about books, life, yourself, shouldn't come down to luck. Self-esteem is affected by so many different things. If we can use the things children love already to bring a love of books and narrative and creating worlds of their own, why wouldn't we? If my mum hadn't read to me every night, and taught me to read before I started school, my feelings about myself, and school, and what words and stories could do for me would have been so different. She gave me a magic gift; one that every child should be given, regardless of background. And it all begins with a book; so here are some things you could try in your school:

1 'Peer readers' – some schools encouraged paired reading, where a child who works beyond expected at reading reads to a child who is below. This doesn't have to be a formal thing, done at a set time.

2 Quiz children on what they love, and try and find books to match. There isn't time in a school day to do that, often – but greater links with local libraries could be a way forward. Is it possible for you to do regular trips with your class? With your school?

3 Have you got magazines, comics, graphic novels in your classroom? Can you get children who are into these things to talk to the class or groups about why they love them? Can you get books linked to the TV they watch, or the movies they love? Instead of thinking, 'Oh no not another Avengers costume' on World Book Day, can you engage with children's enthusiasms in ways that give opportunities for further reading?

"How you feel about books, life, yourself, shouldn't come down to luck"

Reading for pleasure – what works?

According to the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), the following strategies are proven to have a positive impact on children's attitudes to reading:

1 Developing an ethos and an environment that excites, enthuses, inspires

2 High quality texts with depth and interest in story, character, illustration, vocabulary, structure and subject matter

3 A read aloud programme

4 Teachers who are knowledgeable about children's literature

5 Creating a community of readers with opportunities to share responses and opinions

6 Planning for talking about books and stories, providing structures within which to do this

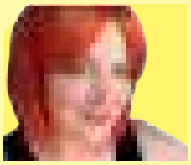
7 Understanding the importance of illustration in reading both in terms of creating a text and responding to a text

8 Using drama and role play to help children to understand and access texts

9 Working with authors and author/illustrators to understand the process of creating books

10 Using literature beyond the literacy lesson – cross-curricular planning with quality literature as the starting point.

clpe.org.uk



Hayley Scott is a primary school teacher and writer. Her Teacup House series for emerging readers is available from Usborne. One Christmas Night, a novel for adults written as Hayley Webster, is out November 14th with Trapeze books.

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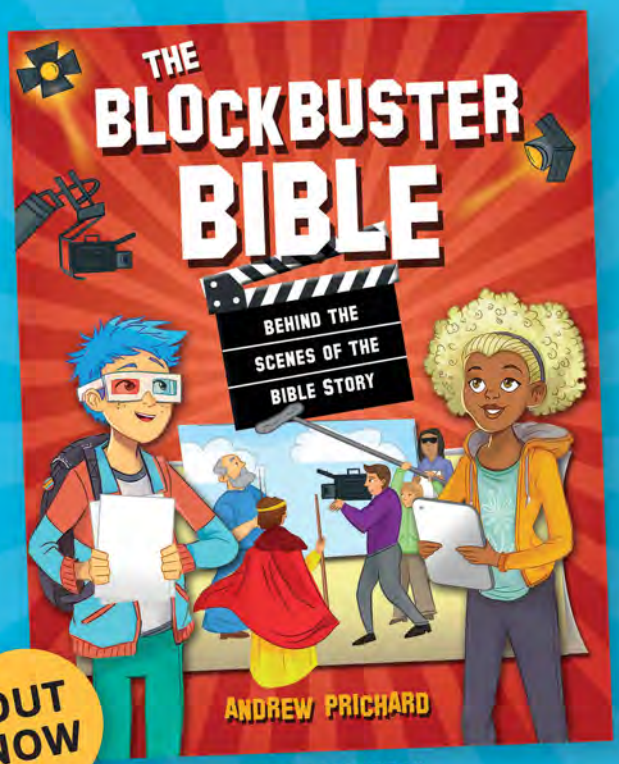

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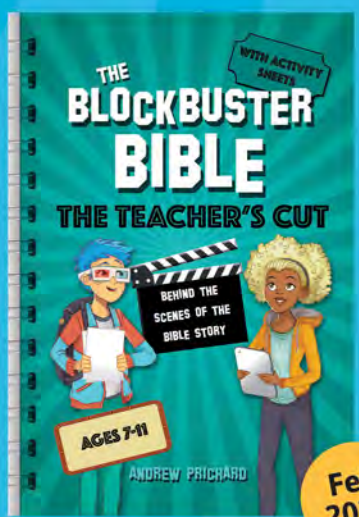

Feb 2020

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The Teacher's Cut is a companion resource to The Blockbuster Bible, supporting teachers in their planning and delivery.

LION HUDSON
www.lionhudson.com

Five books to support LGBTQ+ DIVERSITY

Reading material in your school library should reflect everyone's reality. Here are some suggestions to rejoice in love in all its forms

IAN EAGLETON

As a young gay man, I struggled to find books that I could truly indentify with. I wanted to read something that highlighted my experiences and made me feel less alone. This has made me aware of how important it is to have books in school that mirror everyone's realities. None of the books chosen here aims to indoctrinate children into the LGBTQ+ community; they all simply rejoice in love in all its different forms by recognising, normalising and honouring every relationship. It is of course vital you read these books before sharing them with your class and ensure they are appropriate and suitable for your pupils. But if teachers can sensitively direct children's reading then they will have the compassion and understanding they need to challenge inequality and replace the 'what is' with 'what ifs' and 'what could be'.

Emmett and Caleb

by Karen Hottois and Delphine Renon, translated by Sarah Ardizzone (Book Island)

Emmett and Caleb explores the relationship between the two main characters as they journey through birthdays, hard times and the beauty of the changing seasons. The two friends share precious moments together, such as watching a stunning sunset or waving goodbye to summer as autumnal leaves fall. Their relationship is never defined, leaving it open to interpretation, but it's lovely to share in their quiet, tender friendship. I look forward to *Le Grand Voyage*, their next adventure.

Julian is a Mermaid

by Jessica Love (Walker Books)

Julian's life is changed when he sees three enthralling women dressed as mermaids. Swishes of coral blue and intricately illustrated underwater scenes depict Julian's daydream of becoming a mermaid. When Nana sees Julian proudly transformed into his version of a mermaid, the empty space surrounding him and Nana's furious face suggest a devastating

reaction. Many children will recognise the notions of rejection and invisibility, but Nana gifts Julian a pearl necklace to complete his glamorous outfit. They join a procession of mermaids "like you, honey" and a riot of colour reflects Julian's feelings of joy as he finds his true place in the world.

Red: A Crayon's Story

by Michael Hall (HarperCollins)

Red crayon is not very good at being red. Every time he tries to draw strawberries, hearts and cherries, everything turns out blue! His teacher thinks he needs more practice, his parents feel he needs to mix with other colours and many berate him for his lack of effort – after all, his label says 'red' and that's the way he came from the factory! Eventually, a new friend offers Red the chance to be himself and Red discovers that he is, of course, Blue! A colourful, charming, witty picture book about the damage of forcing labels onto others and the freedom and delight that being yourself brings.

Heather Has Two Mummies

by Lesléa Newman and Laura Cornell (Walker Books)

Heather Has Two Mummies was first published in 1989 and while Lesléa Newman has talked about how lesbian mums were thrilled to see themselves in a children's book, there were a number of people who were disgusted by the inclusion of a different family unit. The book is a colourful, gentle exploration of what it means to be a family. Heather and her two mums picnic, play and bake together. When Ms Molly asks the class to paint a picture of their families, we see, through beautiful, child-like watercolour illustrations, how different every family is – a message that still needs to be acknowledged.

Jerome by Heart

by Thomas Scotto and Oliver Tallec, translated by Claudia Zoe Bedrick and Karin Snelson (Enchanted Lion Books)

This vivid picture book shows us the beauty of true friendship and the feeling of safety it engenders. Told simply in the first person, young Raphael shares with us his feelings of tender affection for his best friend, Jerome. With echoes of Walt Whitman's *We Two Boys Together Clinging* and Josh Gilgun's *The Way They Are*, the book sensitively considers how the day-to-day rhythm of life can be enriched by love. Despite his parents' disapproval, the story ends on a life-affirming note – Raphael's spirit cannot be vanquished and the boys' love remains "strong as a fortress".

Ian Eagleton is a teacher and English consultant, and creator of The Reading Realm iPad app, an educational resource to promote reading for pleasure.

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thereadingrealm.co.uk

FILL IN THE GAPS

We can't assume prior spelling teaching has been retained — we must look back to move forward, says Michelle Nicholson

Despite a greater focus on spelling, some children are still struggling to demonstrate that they are writing at the expected standard for their age because of gaps in their spelling knowledge. It seems there are pupils who are unable to retain and apply what has been taught, especially when it comes to the content of the Y5/6 spelling expectations.

I would argue that these children do not have the firm foundations of the previous year groups' spelling content on which to build. They do not seem to see any analogies between words, or patterns that appear across words. Instead, they view each word as a new and unique entity.

Conversely, we can all think of children who just know how to spell a word after first exposure to it — they even seem able to spell words they have never met before. One might question whether these children are visual learners with a phenomenal memory for individual words or whether they have actually got a very efficient scheme for sorting, grouping and storing words in their long-term memory. With thousands of words to assimilate and remember, perhaps all children need to be taught the most efficient way to organise their spelling knowledge, ready for access 'on demand'.

Gentle reminder-

Connections to existing knowledge should be supported by reminding children of what they already know. For example, if pupils are secure with the Y1 knowledge that the digraph 'oy' is found at the end of syllables such as 'boy' but that the same phoneme is spelt 'oi' when in the middle of a syllable like 'coin', they can also spell 'destroy' as well as 'embroiled'. If a child can articulate this knowledge, there is a good chance that she or he can apply it to unfamiliar words.

It is feasible that children who are confident spellers are creating a schema in their minds: new learning is assimilated and stored within the appropriate section. If a child is supported to remember the pattern or convention pertaining to a section, they have fewer facts to remember than if they are trying to remember each word individually. However, frequent recall of that pattern is essential to build this into the long-term memory.

Connection building shouldn't stop with KS1 phonics. At a glance, the Y5/6 spelling list seems to be a random collection of unconnected words, but can they be linked to prior learning in order to add to a child's internalised spelling schema? Let's take the first word on the list: 'accommodation'. If you give children this word to learn, they may well remember it for a test on Friday. Teach pupils a mnemonic such as 'there is room for two c's and two m's in accommodation' then they may well be able to recall the correct spelling when they need it. But, how often will they need it? Will the mnemonic be forgotten by the time the word is next employed? You could, however, teach children that a single consonant is generally doubled if it appears immediately after a short vowel sound. Then a pupil will not only know how to spell this word, but over 20 more that use this convention in the Y5/6 list alone, as well as hundreds of others.

Regular revisiting

The 'doubling after a short vowel' convention is a handy trick to have up your sleeve. The words that apply this principle range from two syllable words ending in 'y' such as 'happy' or 'le' such as 'middle', to adding suffixes for words such as 'dropped' or 'swimming', all the way through to multi-syllabic words such as 'disappeared'. When questioned, many children are unable to articulate the 'rule' of doubling and yet this is something that is taught in Reception, Y1 and then again in Y2. It stands to reason that regular revisiting of this convention would give children a much firmer foundation on which to add the Y5/6 statutory words that follow.

Clearly, to know whether to double a consonant or not is an essential piece of knowledge and that is why these conventions are introduced in KS1. Many of the early spelling statements are introduced in KS1 because they occur so frequently. However, many spelling schemes seem to ignore (or at best give scant notice to) the very first statement in each national curriculum spelling appendix, which clearly states that children should revise work done in previous years.

WHAT TO RECAP

Y2 About to teach the sound spelt 'ar' after 'w' in words such as 'war' or 'swarm'? Track back to prior teaching surrounding this sound, such as the graphemes or/ore/aw/au (for/more/saw/haunt).

Y3/4 Not many words use the grapheme 'ou' making the sound 'uh' ('touch', 'young', 'double', 'trouble', 'country'). Before tackling this objective, start with a revision of this short vowel sound spelt 'u' in words such as 'hunter', 'thunder', 'tumbler', 'jumper', 'Sunday' and words where the consonant is doubled after a short vowel, such as 'buzzer', 'hummed', 'sunny' or 'funny'. Next, revisit the short vowel pronounced 'uh' spelt 'o' before 'th': 'other', 'another', 'mother', 'brother', 'nothing' and before 've' and 'me': 'love', 'above', 'oven', 'come', 'some'. Practise the commonly used words 'Monday' and 'son'.

Y5/6 Words ending in 'cial' and 'tial' link beautifully to the prior teaching in Y2 surrounding adjectives ending in 'al', such as 'magical' or 'comical'. Before looking at words ending 'cially' and 'tially', track back to the Y3/4 teaching of adding 'ly' to words such as 'sad' and 'secret'. Explore what happens to words like 'magic' and 'comic' that end in 'ic'.

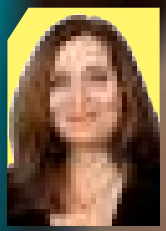
Knowledge gaps

In general, most schemes focus on age-related expectations, assuming prior teaching has been retained for good. However, if you have a child in Y6 who is still spelling 'hopeful' with a double 'l', then the chances are that he or she has forgotten all about the Y2 programme of study. Indeed, for some children, the Y2 programme of study may have eluded them altogether. Many of the suffixes such as 'ment', 'less' or 'ness' are requirements for children working at greater depth, so there is a good chance that some pupils may have never really been taught these conventions.

The 2019 GPS paper once again had a heavy focus on words from the Y3/4 programme of study, thus reinforcing the idea that prior learning needs to be revisited. However, if children have gaps in spelling knowledge pertaining to the Y2 programme of study, then even tracking back to Y3/4 may not be enough. There are few words that rely solely on one KS2 spelling pattern. For example, although the word 'thoughtful' was included with reference to the Y5/6 spelling words containing the letter string 'ough', children will also need to know the Y2 teaching of adding the suffix 'ful'. Similarly, the mark scheme refers to the Y3/4 suffix knowledge 'ous' for the word 'generous' but children will also need to know about the soft 'g' (/dʒ/) from Y2. As the Y2 spelling programme of study seems to form the bedrock of spelling in KS2, it is wise to allow time to revisit it as much as possible.

"If children have gaps in spelling knowledge pertaining to the Y2 programme of study, then even tracking back to Y3/4 may not be enough"

It seems to stand to reason that a systematic shoring up of the foundations of spelling knowledge, aided by strategies to secure retention, will help children with gaps in their spelling. Once these gaps are identified and closed, swift and confident progress should follow.



Michelle Nicholson is a primary English adviser for Herts for Learning Ltd, supporting schools around the county. Visit hertsforlearning.co.uk for 'Steps to Spelling' resources.

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UNSTOPPABLE PROGRESS

Using relatable fiction as a springboard for PSHE teaching can lead to children understanding both themselves and literature more deeply, says **Jen Crofts**

Blackpool FC Community Trust has long enjoyed a working relationship with Dan Freedman. So, when he announced the release of his latest book, *Unstoppable*, we were very keen to work closely with him to produce a new PSHE scheme of work for local Blackpool primary schools. As one of the physical education officers for the Community Trust, I was given the task of writing and delivering this. The Year 6 class chosen as the first to participate in the new Unstoppable PSHE programme at Westminster Academy in Blackpool was made up of a varied demographic, and the school itself is in one of the most deprived areas of Blackpool. These reasons contributed to the class being chosen for the trial. And it was at Westminster Academy where I met Kyle.

A matter of opinion

Kyle is an 11-year-old boy, a dominant member of the class, described by his teacher Miss Moore as a 'typical class clown.' Kyle would frequently play up in order to get a laugh out of the class, which in turn led to his removal. He would then be sent to the Focus Room, where students have a time-out session with members of senior management. Kyle was the first to admit that he was spending far too much time in there but couldn't explain the reasons he kept getting removed from class. "I just get bored and can't help myself," was the response he gave when questioned about his removal. Kyle also struggled academically and very rarely recorded his ideas through written work.

From my very first encounter with Kyle, I was able to form a bond of mutual respect and understanding. He had previously struggled to explain his feelings and give his opinion. When questioned later as to why he enjoyed the PSHE lessons so much, he replied, "I'm allowed to give my opinion, and nobody can say I'm wrong because that's my opinion." This is something that I reiterated throughout the lessons – there were no right or wrong answers. We were always respectful of others' ideas and thoughts.

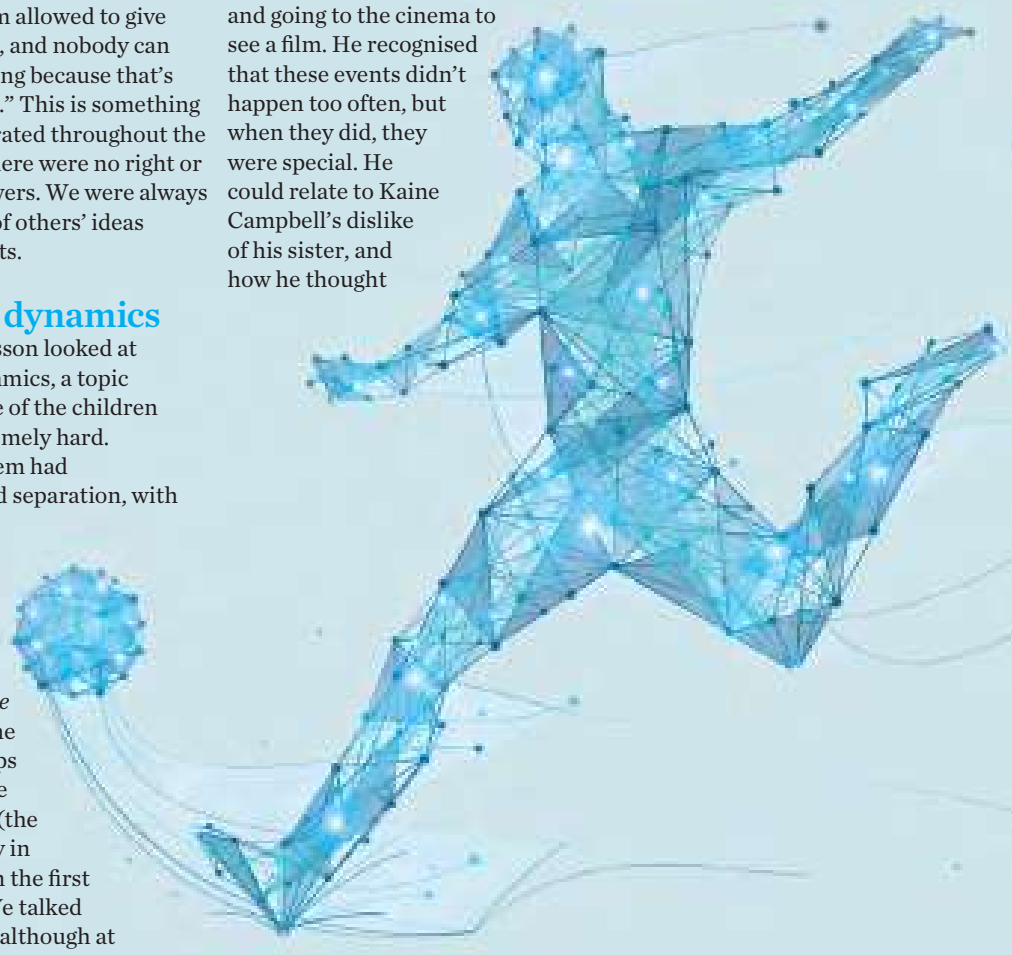
Family dynamics

The first lesson looked at family dynamics, a topic which some of the children found extremely hard. Many of them had experienced separation, with a parent or siblings living in different houses. We used *Unstoppable* to look at the relationships between the Campbells (the main family in the book) in the first instance. We talked about how, although at times they didn't like each other, it was still clear they loved each other. We also discussed the need to celebrate our differences, as well as our similarities.

The children were then asked to produce a collage of their own families. In the beginning, Kyle was reluctant – he has many siblings and was convinced they didn't have anything in common. However, after some discussion he realised that they enjoyed watching the football together and going to the cinema to see a film. He recognised that these events didn't happen too often, but when they did, they were special. He could relate to Kaine Campbell's dislike of his sister, and how he thought they had nothing in common with each other - yet that didn't mean that they weren't still a family. Kyle realised he needed to take more of an interest into his sister's life.

Positive attention

As the weeks progressed, Kyle became more confident and very insightful, answering questions in a way neither his teacher nor I had thought of. His classmates noticed a



difference in Kyle also, with one of them making a fleeting comment: "Kyle is always answering in these lessons, he's normally been sent out by now." For once, Kyle was getting attention for the right reasons, and the change in him was amazing; his behaviour was exemplary and his contribution to the class was more than he'd made all year. In one instance, when a fellow student was starting to distract him, he stood up and moved himself away in order to continue his work.

Throughout the scheme of work, there were several tough subjects and issues tackled: appropriate adult relationships, a five-step behaviour model, a three-step process to tackle difficult situations, good and bad secrets, fair and unfair behaviour and family dynamics. For each lesson, the structure was very similar; we would first discuss the topic using the characters and situations from the book before moving on to consider the issues raised in the context of the children's real-life setting. This made the learners feel safe and comfortable, as they were almost 'hiding behind' the characters at first, before having to talk about themselves. The end part of a session would look at signposting ways of dealing with any issues that came up. For example, what to do and whom to talk to if you felt you were getting involved in an inappropriate relationship with an adult.

Deeper insight

As Miss Moore, Kyle's class teacher, said, "The issues in the book are very current and relevant. The sessions have worked really well, and the children are all excited as it covers age appropriate issues. Being able to discuss those issues in a non-pressure situation has made them feel really comfortable."

An example of this was seen when we used the five-step model to recognise thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical responses to a situation. The students were given different scenarios from the book, for example, Kaine dealing with the death of his grandmother, and were asked to fill in the five-step template provided. We discussed the different scenarios as a class so that the children felt comfortable with the model.

"He's normally been sent out of the class by now"

We then asked the children to choose a situation from their own lives and again, to fill in the template. I always made it clear that nobody would be made to share anything they weren't comfortable with. Kyle shared with the class his thoughts and feelings on moving up into high school, a topic that was very relevant to the rest of the class – he was insightful on how he might feel, and how he planned on coping with the huge change in his life. With him sharing his thoughts it encouraged others to contribute to the discussion. This was often the case in the sessions. Once one of the students, (typically Kyle) started to open up about real-life personal issues, the rest of the class would follow.

The children have benefited greatly from the sessions, with some even being signposted for further support. Using a book like *Unstoppable* has been a great tool for the sessions, as the children are able to relate to the characters on a deeper level and it aids the discussion of tough issues.

Jen Crofts is a physical education officer for Blackpool FC Community Trust, with 13 years' teaching experience.

FREE RESOURCES!

To coincide with the publication of the paperback of *Unstoppable* by Dan Freedman in Spring 2020 (David Fickling Books, £7.99) Brenda Heathcote has created a set of teacher resources. These can be used across the curriculum, and the aim is to encourage young people to think and talk about the issues raised, to react to the characters, to enjoy and reflect upon the story.

To request a copy of the resources in advance of publication and be in with a chance to win one of 5 signed copies of the hardback edition of Unstoppable contact: pr@davidficklingbooks.com

(All emails will be entered into a draw to receive a signed copy of Unstoppable; for full terms and conditions, including David Fickling Books' privacy policy, see thephoenixcomic.co.uk/terms-and-conditions)

Relight THEIR FIRES

How great writing stimuli will get your pupils' creative juices flowing

Think back to your school days for a moment. Make a note of three writing opportunities you remember fondly. What made them memorable? It probably wasn't the ambitious success criteria or the time spent editing (although, no doubt, these things made you a more proficient writer). I would guess that they were memorable because of one or more of the following:

- You enjoyed them
- You took ownership over them and were proud of the outcome
- The writing had a real purpose
- You were inspired or engaged by the stimulus

In order to engage all children in the writing process, we have to create writing opportunities which allow children to feel one or more of the above.

Writing for enjoyment

If you spend the week in an excellent early years setting, you will see all children mark-making for pleasure. They want to write, not because that is the lesson objective, but because they have something they want to say, record or share. Often that writing is inspired by the continuous provision they are immersed in. They want to write a recipe, create a treasure map, invite Goldilocks for dinner or make a parking ticket for an illegally parked scooter.

As we journey up through the primary years, we often remove that level of choice. Children are regularly writing in the same genre, using the same stimulus or addressing the same audience. What would happen if we introduced writing for pleasure? What if children had a folder or a book where they could just create? What if we printed out a picture or found a video clip to support one child's story, while another pupil nipped to the library to do research for the fact file on dinosaurs they are creating? It would allow children time to practise skills taught and it would give us further insight into what they can really achieve if they are engaged. All the research indicates that reading for pleasure makes better readers; surely the same is true of writing too?

I often hear teachers say there isn't time for such niceties, but I would argue that there needs to be. The first aim of the national curriculum is to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement. What better way to appreciate human creativity than to be part of it?

Ownership and pride

Even within structured English sessions, there is still room for choice. If a child selects their own character, setting or animal to create a fact file about, they are more likely to take ownership over that writing, because the content is theirs. The choice may come in how the writing is presented or who the audience will be. The structure of the writing may still be the same for all, allowing the teacher to scaffold and teach the skills so everybody can achieve, but by providing choice, the children gain ownership. And with ownership and capability comes pride.

"A rich starting point nearly always leads to amazing writing"

Our education system is filled with external motivation, but to find ways in which children are internally motivated is a real reward.

Real purposes

Think about the writing you have done over the last 24 hours. Lists, letters, notes, instructions and maybe a card or two. I would expect that most of your writing was for a real audience. We write because we want to communicate. The best writing I have seen from children always happens when there is a real purpose or audience. A second-class stamp costs 58p. Sending a letter that a child has taken thought and time over is priceless. There are 2.2 billion children in the world, all having experiences that are sometimes similar and sometimes wildly different. Do your class have penpals to share and compare these with?

Children are impassioned beings. They are the first to complain if they are unhappy about something. Utilise this. Get them to argue, debate and write. Persuasion is so much easier when we genuinely want the person to be persuaded. Use national days, local events and school activities to make writing purposeful and fun.

Teachers are natural planners. We want to know in September what will be happening in December. But with the removal of the Primary Framework and the introduction of the 2014 curriculum, there is more freedom in English lessons than before. Plan the skills you want to teach, but utilise real purposes. There is nowhere that states Y2 must spend six weeks looking at poetry and Y5 must spend three weeks writing a balanced argument. These are all pressures we put on ourselves.

Amazing stimuli

Finding quality stimuli for writing is one of the biggest challenges for teachers. We've all been guilty of choosing a book because it matches the topic, even though it's as dull as dishwater. A rich starting point nearly always leads to amazing writing. Set up a crime scene and write witness reports; invite in a parent with an unusual job then write a job description for it; utilise freebies such as the Into Film Festival (intofilm.org).

It's hard to write about something you have not experienced. If you don't believe me, have a go at writing a diary entry imagining you are a Chinese ambassador. Our stimuli must provide children with enough experience that they can write. Vary it by trying books, experiences, art and film clips. The best writing diet is a varied one.

FIVE WAYS TO INSPIRE THEM

1 Take part in Collins' Big Cat Writing Competition (collins.co.uk). This year's theme is 'Our World, Our Home: Be a Big Cat Eco-warrior' and the closing date is Friday 20th December.

2 Write to somebody who inspires you. It is amazing how many people and companies write back (and you might receive some great freebies too!).

3 Find a school to twin with and become penpals. In doing so, you can cover much more than the English curriculum alone (art and geography, for example). Have a look at Connecting Classrooms, run by the British Council, to find out more (https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org).

4 Set aside half an hour every fortnight to allow the class to write what they want. Let them bring in things from home and decorate their writing folders. Set ground rules and join in!

5 Use a book that inspires you (even though it doesn't link to your curriculum). My current favourites are *Sky Song* by Abi Elphinstone, *Leon and the Place Between* by Angela Mcallister, *Once* by Morris Gleitzman, *The Elsewhere Emporium* by Ross MacKenzie and *Margaret and the Moon* by Dean Robbins.

Laura Dobson worked as a teaching and learning consultant for a large local authority before setting up Inspire Primary English earlier this year. She runs an OU/UKLA Teacher Reading group, is an active governor and still teaches. Find out more at inspireprimaryenglish.co.uk @inspireprieng

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Published by Templar, 2016

A River

Explore the landscapes in Marc Martin's inspirational picture book for observation, questioning, reflection and visualisation

CAREY FLUKER HUNT

From her bedroom high above the city, a girl sits looking at a river. It stretches away in both directions and she imagines herself swept along it "in a silver boat towards the horizon". Subsequent spreads show her boat following the river through different locations, from car-jammed city flyovers and smoke-filled factories to patchwork fields and waterfalls. Information mixes with dreamscape as the river takes her through jungles, past mangroves and out into the open sea.

Part exploration of the power of imagination and part introduction to habitats and the water cycle, this appealing picture book offers gloriously immersive, densely coloured artwork with a sophisticated edge. Martin's pared-back text leads us through each landscape, framing the reader's observations but leaving plenty of room for thinking, questioning and responding.

Book topic

Sharing the book and talking about it

Before reading, ask your children what they know about rivers and what experiences they can share.

Is there a river near your school? Where does it come from and where does it go? How do you cross a river or travel along it?

Look at the front cover. What kind of place is this, do you think? Does it look like anywhere you recognise? Who could be in the boat and where could they be going? What other questions does this cover raise?

Share the story, making sure everyone can see the pictures – you may need to use a visualiser or have extra copies available. Read the whole book for enjoyment, questioning and reflecting on individual illustrations but keeping the momentum going, then revisit each spread to look more closely and interrogate the images.

How is the river in this book similar to the one(s) you talked about earlier? How is it different?

Where can you see the sky in this book? Why do you think Martin didn't show more sky?

In this book, do you think Martin wanted to teach you facts, tell you a story or do something else?

If you had a little silver boat, where would you sail?

Building on your book experience

Where will your boat take you?

Find pictures showing the girl's boat and talk about what she can see, hear, smell and taste. How do you think she's feeling? List words to describe her emotions. If you had your own silver boat, what would it be like? Describe your imaginary boats, then imagine you're building them. What will you do, and what tools will you use? Mime actions like sawing planks and planing them; lifting them and hammering nails; dropping a heavy mast into place and tying a sail to it...

When your boat's ready, prepare to sail down river. Where are you heading and what happens along the way? Mime your actions and show your reactions to events as they unfold. Use your experiences to fuel creative writing – from descriptions of the boats to stories about your adventures.

A class-full of water droplets

If you were a water droplet, how would you drip and splash and flow? Observe water on the move (spouting from a tap, gushing along a stream, swirling down a plughole) and collect words to describe it. Using your bodies, explore these movements, discuss and try again.

How would a whole class of water droplets spout and gush and flood? Set your movements to music and give your best performance. How does it feel to act together as one big wave? Write descriptively about water on the move (and your part in it).

What happens to a single water droplet when it's alone? Observe one through a magnifier and talk about it. Try tipping the droplet to see what happens, then leave it alone. How long does it take to disappear? Where has it gone?

How long does it take a water droplet to evaporate from your school yard or classroom floor? Set up an investigation to time droplets in different locations.

Find out about the water cycle. As water droplets, can you act it out? Once you can remember everything that happens, draw diagrams showing the water cycle and present what you've learned to another class.

Car jam

Look at the traffic-jam cityscape – too many cars can certainly cause trouble!

Draw toy cars from life, then choose your favourite and turn it into a colourful Martin-style illustration. Cut out and

Take it further

SENSORY JUNGLE

Look closely at the night-time jungle illustration. How many eyes can you count? Can you identify the creatures? Find out about nocturnal jungle animals.

The colours in this spread are dense and dark. Investigate shades by adding small amounts of black pigment to coloured pigments. Record the increasingly dark colours you produce by painting sample squares along a strip of white card. (It's easy to overwhelm coloured pigments so add black pigment sparingly!)

Open a large cardboard box so it lies flat, then paint night-time jungle scenes over the inside surface, looking at the book for inspiration and using darker paint shades you've mixed yourselves.

Draw or paint animal silhouettes and collage onto your scene. Add eyes using luminous paint, then reassemble your box so the artwork is inside. Place the box upside down across the gap between two desks (so it can be safely accessed from beneath). Supervise children as they use torches to explore the scene within, then use as a stimulus for writing a report about what you've done, instructions on how to make a similar box, a description of the artwork you've created, and a poem about the animals.

FACTORY SMOKE

Look at the factory cityscape and talk about it. Why is there so much smoke? Is there any smoke in your town or city? Where does it come from?

assemble as a collage frieze showing a spaghetti junction of traffic jams.

How many cars pass your school? Do the numbers differ according to the time of day? Find out about air quality and design posters encouraging people to leave their cars at home.

Topsy-turvy

Look at the spread after the storm – what can you identify in the swirling darkness? How do these things relate to the rest of the book?

Talk about dreams and the kind of things that happen in them. Is this book about a dream? Why/why not? Write a story about a dream, including the phrase *"and as the clouds clear, I'm sitting in my room again..."*

Writing for a rainy day

Compare the first cityscape with the second. How are they similar and how do they differ?

In the second, it's raining – you can see the drops running down the glass.

Look out of your window at the rain. Talk about what you notice (use all your senses!) and collect words, phrases and images to describe it.

Listen to the rain and try to capture its rhythms using percussion instruments and/or found objects.

Have a go at dripping and dropping watery paint or ink onto paper and letting the droplets run, like the rain on your window. Add to your word-collection and use to help you write descriptively or poetically about your rainy day.

Mindful fish

Look at the picture showing the boat on the calm sea, then turn the page to look at the fish. Talk about both illustrations – what details do you notice? What colours have been used? How do these pictures make you feel?

Ask children to lie comfortably with their eyes closed and pretend they're in a silver boat that's floating on a calm blue sea. Describe the gentle breeze and the warmth of the sun, then ask them to imagine looking over the side of the boat and seeing lots of fish. What do the fish look like and how are they moving? What colours, shapes and patterns do children notice?

Allow time for relaxing and visualising, then hand out paper and drawing materials, and ask children to sit up and draw the fish they've been imagining.

How did it feel to be bobbing in an imaginary boat, surrounded by fish? Could you keep an imaginary boat in your mind and go there when you need some peace and quiet?

Paper wish boats

Use watercolours to decorate paper with washes and patterns. When they're dry, write your hopes and wishes for the future on them. Fold your papers into origami boats and set them sailing on a mirrored base.

River frieze

Examine Martin's artwork and discuss techniques to help you create a River-style giant frieze for a corridor or shared space:

- layering watercolour washes onto paper, and then cutting shapes to create boulders, patchwork fields or rolling hills;
- adding patterns with darker paint (or printing them);
- creating an impression of watery depths by allowing paint puddles to dry;
- adding brushstrokes of white paint to create spray and clouds.

Group children and allocate one of the landscapes or settings to each group. Paint your own papers, then cut and collage to create a river running across every section of the frieze, together with hills, rocks, patchwork fields, sky and clouds where needed. Add collaged trees and landscape features, plus free-painted vegetation and other details.

Find out more about the landscapes and geographical features depicted in your frieze, then write about them and display alongside your finished artwork.

Loved this? Try these...

- Once Upon a Raindrop by James Carter and Nomoco, Caterpillar Books 2018
- The Rhythm of the Rain by Grahame Baker Smith, Templar 2018
- Rain by Sam Usher, Templar 2016
- Float by Daniel Miyares, Simon and Schuster 2016

Carey Fluker Hunt is a freelance writer, creative learning consultant and founder of Cast of Thousands (castofthousands.co.uk), a teachers' resource featuring a selection of the best children's books and related cross-curricular activities.

Mix a variety of grey shades of paint and ink, and provide other black, white and grey media (charcoal, graphite, chalk, pastels, wax crayons). Use Martin's cityscape to help you paint montages of factory buildings and chimneys. Photograph your artwork, then obscure part or all of your picture with grey washes, splodges and lines representing smoke and pollution. Take photos to show your picture becoming more obscured.

Examine the "before, during and after" photos of your artwork and discuss. How did it feel to create your picture and what do you think of the end result? Write about what you did and display alongside your artwork and photos.

DESIGN AND BUILD A MODEL BOAT

Using found materials together with card, glue and sellotape, can you design and build a boat that will float? Construct your boats, then test using a water-filled paddling pool. How long does it take children to blow their boats across the pool? Write about what you've done and illustrate with labelled diagrams.

Sweet NATURED

30 years on, Percy the Park Keeper continues to be a breath of fresh air for children discovering the joyful contrasts of the seasons

Nick Butterworth's Percy the Park Keeper books are celebrating 30 years in print this year, with *One Snowy Night* first published in 1989. Having long been a favourite with primary teachers, this beloved series offers the perfect starting point for learning about wildlife and the seasons, which is why we've put together a selection of beautiful wall display resources with accompanying activities to help launch a Percy inspired topic.

One Snowy Night

It's winter in Nick Butterworth's first book of the series, but Percy the Park Keeper doesn't mind because he has a warm coat, scarf and woolly socks.

One evening it starts to snow heavily, so Percy gets ready for a warm night in bed. There's a knock at the door and Percy opens it to find a freezing squirrel, which can't sleep, because it's so cold - so he lets it inside to share his bed.

Other animals later arrive, until Percy's bed is so full that everyone falls out! Then they hear a scary sound from under the floor – a mole has arrived to shelter from the cold too. Luckily, the other animals have found safe places to sleep, and the mole snuggles up with Percy in his bed, with plenty of room to spare.

Introducing the book

Before reading the story, ask the children to think about wildlife, habitats and the seasons. Use these questions to guide you:

- How many creatures can the children name that live in parks and gardens?
- In what kind of homes do these creatures normally live?
- What food do they eat?
- Do they live in the same place all year round?
- What effect does the weather have on wildlife? Think about the seasons – what does wildlife do in spring, summer, autumn and winter?
- What happens to animals when it gets really cold? What problems might they have, especially if it snows?

Now look at the cover of the book. What do the children think the story is about, and how can they tell? What information does the title give them? Read the book and then use these questions as a guide for discussion:

- How does Percy keep himself warm in the winter?
- How do the animals know where Percy's hut is?
- What kind of person do you think Percy is? How do you know?
- Why does the mole appear from under the floor? Where do moles normally live?
- How many of the animals in the book have you seen?
- How many animals can you spot in the picture of Percy's hut at the end of the book?

Exploring the seasons

Talk with the children about the seasons. What do they know about that is special to each one? What makes winter different to other seasons? Think about:

- The weather we get in the winter months
- The effect of the cold on people and wildlife
- The methods people use to cope with cold
- What happens to plants and flowers in winter
- The difference between evergreen / deciduous trees
- The festivals that take place in winter

FREE WALL DISPLAY RESOURCES!

Don't forget to download your free pack of Percy the Park Keeper wall display resources, featuring iconic illustrations from Nick Butterworth. They make for an inspirational centrepiece on the seasons, and your children can add their own artwork to create a beautiful class showcase. Visit teachwire.net/percydisplay

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT TEACHWIRE.NET

Prepositions of place

Use the image on page 22 to practise forming sentences using different prepositions and prepositional phrases of place. For instance:

- "The badger is under a blanket."
- "The fox is on top of the cupboard."
- "The duck is inside the hat."

Keeping out the cold

Wildlife has adapted in various ways to survive the winter. Explore these adaptations with your children.

- Changes to fur / feathers - for instance a 'winter coat'
- Changes to animal colours for camouflage
- Storing food for the winter months
- Finding a safe place to shelter (often underwater or underground)
- Hibernation
- Migration

Passing the winter

Introduce the concept of hibernation to your children (the word comes from the Latin "hibernare" meaning 'to winter / pass the winter'), the main purpose of which is to get through a period of food scarcity.

Ask the class which foods would be scarce during the winter months and why? When animals hibernate, their heart rate falls and they can go without eating and drinking for long periods. Some bears that hibernate go without food or water for up to eight months!

Only one of the animals in this story hibernates – do the children know which one it is (the hedgehog)? How many British animals do the children know that hibernate? Hibernating wildlife includes: amphibians (frogs, toads and newts); bats; hedgehogs; bumblebees; ladybirds; dormice; reptiles (grass snakes, adders, slow worms).

Helping wildlife

Talk with your children about the different ways they might help wildlife to survive the winter. For example:

- Put food out for birds
- Make sure there is access to water when it is freezing, perhaps by putting out fresh water or making a hole in pond ice
- Build wildlife habitats, such as ponds, where creatures can hibernate
- Be careful around places where creatures hibernate (check bonfires for hedgehogs)
- Make winter homes for animals – create log piles, leave foliage on plants over winter and build bug hotels.

Inviting insects

A lovely idea for an outdoor project is to build a bug hotel. This is a structure made of recycled / natural materials where insects can overwinter. As well as providing a safe place for bugs, the hotel gives you opportunities to spot mini beasts. To build a bug hotel:

- Gather a range of materials – pallets, bricks, canes, sticks, twigs, hollow stems, roof tiles, etc.
- Choose a flat space to build where the structure will not be disturbed
- Pile up the pallets and fill the gaps with the materials you have to hand

You can make small bug hotels by stacking bricks and filling the gaps.

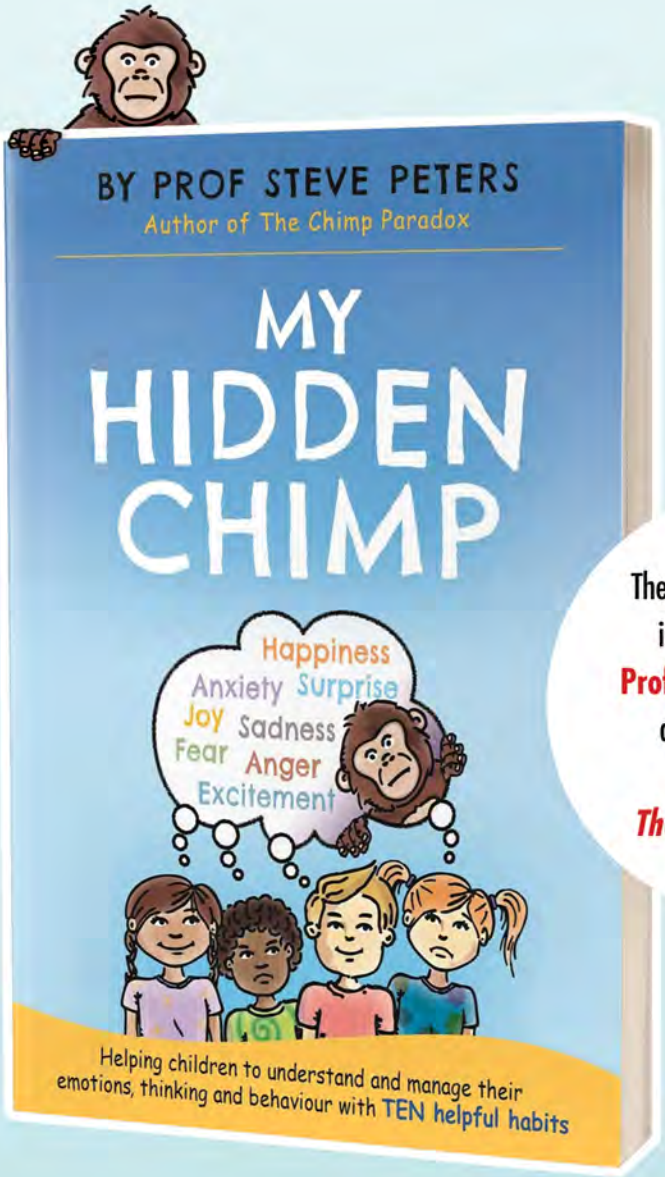
Winter art

Use the story to inspire winter art around the theme of animals and the winter:

- Create 'snowflakes' using the popular fold and cut technique
- Make hedgehogs using pine cones
- Collect twigs and leaves and create a 'Park in Winter' collage
- Make transient art in a garden or wooded area, for instance animals from leaves and twigs
- Use crayons to do rubbings of natural materials such as bark and leaves
- Get your children to make patterns in the snow using their bodies

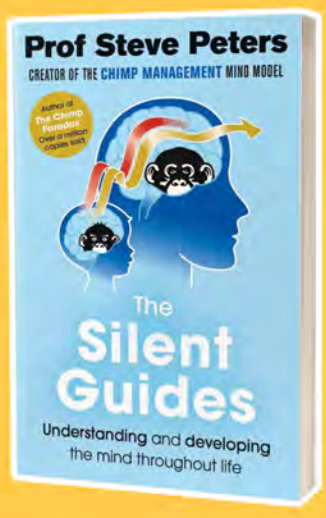
Sue Cowley is an author and teacher educator. She has helped to run her local early years setting for the last ten years.

An easy way for children to understand why they think and behave the way they do



The new book everyone is talking about by **Professor Steve Peters,** author of the no.1 bestseller, ***The Chimp Paradox***

Help your child to develop **TEN healthy habits for life,** with this fun-filled activity book for all the family.



Written as a companion to *My Hidden Chimp*, these two interconnected books tackle how we can best manage our mind from childhood and into adulthood.

Available from Waterstones

It's time to change THE NARRATIVE

Children are surrounded by stories of heroes, says **Vita Murrow** – but what are they really learning from them?

Heroes permeate our culture, throughout entertainment, media, and in the stories we retell. We cross paths with their narrative every day in cinema and literature, fashion and costume, hair styles, slogans and hashtags. Heroes are emblematic of the fortitude, risk taking and boundary breaking that is key to our survival and evolution. The arc of these stories shows the hero having impact, receiving recognition and fulfilling their potential.

As educators, we follow and help develop the arc of the stories of the young people with whom we work. We scaffold them so they may recognise and meet their potential. In this role, it's important to look at the hero stories that surround us, and ask how they might influence a reader's sense of self.

Beyond limits

The elevated status of heroes is seeded in their origin stories. Origin stories tell us where we have come from and show where we may be going. Hero stories pave this journey with the idea that we all have unique hidden powers waiting to be discovered. For children, discovering these stories can be tremendously powerful. Yet the representation and breadth of characters can also limit the range of who readers perceive can become heroes.

One of the limits that is most restrictive is the notion that hero status is reserved for one person, or one kind of person, and that this is written in one's destiny. I reject this perception, and in my work as a writer I've endeavoured to challenge it. I strive to put forth new and varied versions of heroes from fairy tales and lore, so that young readers can see themselves represented in these characters. They can then make connections and analogies between the esteem of the characters and their own self-worth.

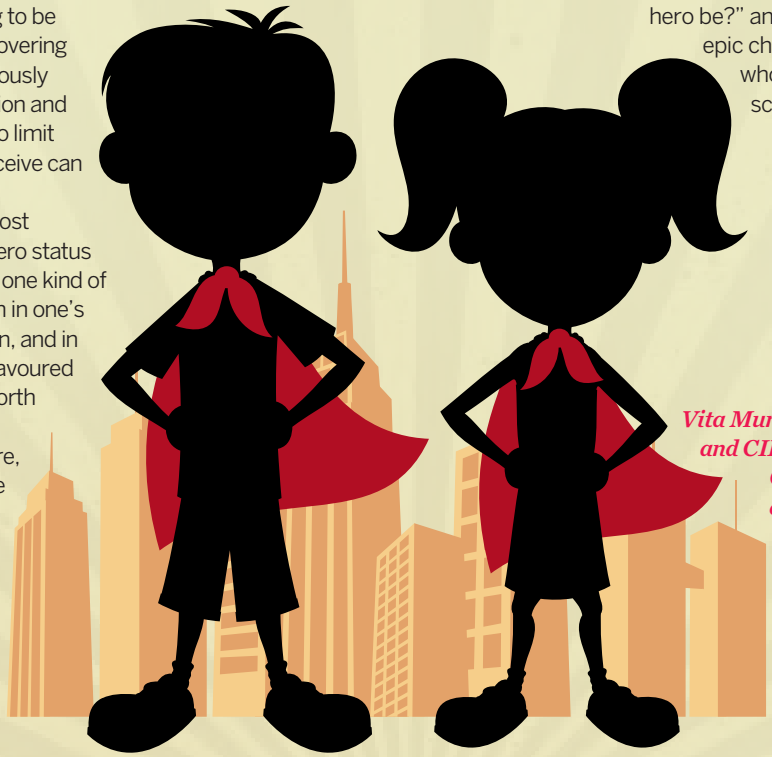
Sometimes being a child can feel small, and childhood full of limits – a constant stream of 'can't, 'mustn't' and 'when you're older'. I want to be sure that literature represents a place where readers challenge these sentiments. Where kids may feel aligned with great leaders, with seats of power, authority, wisdom and prominence. And that these are shown to be accessible to anyone regardless of where they come from, what they look like, or what their origins may foretell.

A bigger bubble

One of my favorite parts of unpacking this theme as a writer has been working directly with students and educators on author visits. It's in these moments that I'm able to see what my writing sparks in readers. I learn from their appraisals and reflections. With students I often discuss the concept of 'hero' as akin to blowing a bubble with bubble gum. I ask students to imagine blowing a simple bubble as their starting point, to represent an average hero story: King Arthur or Robin Hood or Prince Charming (from any number of stories). Then I ask the students; "are you satisfied with your regular size bubble, or do you think you can make it bigger?" I typically get encouraging nods. They want to go bigger.

"So," I ask, "if the bubble were bigger what could you fit inside? What traits, what characteristics, how might the idea of a hero be stretched?" That's when I hear from students that a hero character may be complex, lonely, maybe doesn't marry a princess. I learn from young voices that a hero can fail, can apologise, can rise up sooner, can fight smarter rather than dirtier, can even ask for help.

I hope as you read this you too are thinking of ways to expand seemingly cemented tropes and to be more inclusive of the broad human experience lived by your students. Maybe you know a kid like Pinocchio in your class, figuring out their identity. Perhaps you have a King Midas in the playground, who is learning that all that glitters is not gold. I urge you to put to your students the question "What more can a hero be?" and join me in reimagining these epic characters in ways that honour who young readers are as scholars, citizens, and friends.



Vita Murrow is an artist, educator and CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway nominated children's author. Her latest book, High-Five to the Hero (Frances Lincoln Children's Books) is a collection of 15 classic tales retold with added boy power.

The 7 deadly WRITING SINS

Tim Roach explains how to prevent bad grammar habits from taking hold, and how to fix them later down the line

As a Y6 teacher for many years, I constantly found myself grumbling about mistakes in pupils' writing. Children in the latter stages of KS2 might have been able to drop in the odd subjunctive, but their work was often riddled with other inaccuracies.

Moving to a younger age group, I reflected on the most common mistakes that have plagued my marking for years, thinking that if I could catch them earlier, I might be able to free up more time for pupils to focus on the rest of the grammar they need to learn before secondary school.

Often, the mistakes detailed below become habit in KS1. If pupils are still making these basic errors after nearly four years of KS2, then it's clear that something isn't working as it should. While there will always be children who haven't grasped some of the earlier age-related expectations, it shouldn't be the case that pupils can add to their writing repertoire throughout KS2 and clearly make progress, yet fail to apply these most basic of principles. Here's my list of seven deadly writing sins and what we can do about them.

1 Misspelled high frequency words

The fix: Test and re-test. This can be done systematically, by including these words in regular spelling tests, or it can be simple and ad hoc, on a mini whiteboard or verbally while you're standing in the corridor. Highlight misspellings in pupils' writing and insist upon them being corrected.

2 Unconnected fragments

The fix: Deal with phrases and clauses that are not coherently connected to main clauses with a quick mini whiteboard writing activity that involves putting a fragment into a sentence. Alternatively, try a more intense task based on spotting and correcting fragments within a section of real pupils' writing.

3 Missing capitals

The fix: Reading work aloud is the key to helping pupils spot where their sentences begin and end, and thus spotting where capital letters are required.

4 Non-capitalised proper nouns

The fix: Proper nouns, be they names, days, months, place names, famous events or titles, have that stand-out quality that almost demands recognition — there's something special about them. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many signs displayed around school (and in society in general) tend to be capitalised like proper nouns, even if they just say 'Glue sticks' or similar. Capitalisation is also often a default setting on word processing apps, especially when writing tables or lists of individual nouns. Don't leave these unremarked upon when marking — I put a big circle around missing or incorrect capitals.

5 Missing full stops

The fix: Missing full stops cause sentence splices (one sentence or clause abruptly continuing into another) or run-ons (the repeated use of conjunctions to lead from one clause to another). Sentence splices need to be addressed and vanquished without mercy. Train children to spot them in writing displayed on the visualiser. Shout out "Splice!" as you read through them. Encourage children to learn and recite the three simplest ways to fix them (full stop and capital letter; conjunction; semicolon). Pupils love playing the role of teacher and marking

someone else's work, so photocopy a piece with a load of splices and let them loose. Alternatively, type one up so that they don't try to play a game of 'Whose writing is it?'.

6 Misuse of commas

The fix: Comma splices (the demarcation of main clauses with commas rather than conjunctions, or commas and conjunctions) are the worst, and notoriously difficult to eradicate. Children think they're doing the right thing by popping in some punctuation.

> *"Sentence splices need to be addressed and vanquished without mercy"*

We need to stop telling children to punctuate where they take a breath. There are good reasons for using the breathing analogy when reading aloud with prosody, and for spotting places where complex sentences should be demarcated. However, children seem to reduce this to, "When I breathe, put a comma". It might solve run-ons in the short term, but it compounds misunderstanding with yet another error. A more dedicated focus on the sentence as the main component of writing is the way forward.

7 Apostrophe confusion

The fix: This particular plague takes many forms, including:

- placing incorrect apostrophes before the 's' in plural nouns (cats) or present tense verbs (she gets)
- omitting the apostrophe before the 's' to show possession (people's)
- omitting or misplacing the apostrophe for possession in nouns or proper nouns ending in 's' (dress's, Chris's)
- omitting or misplacing the apostrophe for possession in plural nouns ending in 's' (the troops' formation)
- omitting or misplacing the apostrophe for omission in contractions (don't, should've, I'd)
- the misunderstanding between 'its' (determiner for possession, confusingly) and it's (it is)

This sin is so endemic, so multi-faceted, so confusing, that eradicating it seems practically hopeless. The problem with apostrophes is that many pupils have not embedded the concept of omission in contractions. Therefore, they tend to put apostrophes in the wrong places or miss them out completely. And as for possession, some words have an 's' at the end for other reasons: verbs (the inflected third person singular present tense form, such as 'he runs') and nouns (the regular plural form of 'books' or 'dogs') have the same additional letter for two different things. As for 'its', well, it's no wonder it confuses children. I've lost count of the number of times I've written "it's' = 'it is" on the whiteboard. Repeated rehearsal is our only weapon in the fight to defend the honour of the maligned apostrophe.

Fitting it in

Of course, this list is entirely subjective, and for the sake of brevity I've also omitted anything to do with dialogue – there are simply too many ways in which children can make mistakes when writing speech. However, like any concept, deliberate practice and continual review are vital for children to hone their skills.

The problem, as always, is time. With a grammar curriculum groaning under the weight of technical jargon, it becomes an onerous task to teach your year group's age expectations, stretch into 'greater depth' and practise the year-upon-year backlog of previous years' content.

We must also be mindful of not turning the study of English into mere 'feature-spotting'. Children get turned off by this pretty quickly. The answer is to embed grammar, punctuation and spelling — as well as vocabulary, etymology, form, audience, effect and everything else — into the fabric of every reading and writing lesson. Don't do it just because of the test at the end of Y6; do it because it will free all pupils to express themselves with clarity.

Tim Roach is a Y3 teacher based in Oldham.

"I was scared of getting it wrong"

Jonny Duddle always knew he wanted to write children's books – but getting published meant learning a thing or two about resilience...

My early memories are all quite vague; my dad worked for a brewery, so we moved around quite a lot, which might be part of the reason why I don't actually remember the process of learning to read. I do remember the first book I properly loved, though – and I still love it: *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak. I can recall it being read to me as a very young child, and later, reading it for myself. The story and the illustrations drew me in irresistibly, and it's still an inspiration for me today.

I've always enjoyed drawing, but words are important to me, too, and I knew even when I was in primary school that I wanted to write children's books one day. The trouble was, growing up in the North of England, and in Wales, writing wasn't really seen as a 'proper' job, and nor was illustrating. My dad was very encouraging of my art generally – he enjoyed drawing too, and would spend time making pictures with me – but at no point did he see it as anything that could lead to a viable career option.

Growing obsession

During my A levels, I was obsessed with drawing. I had a friend whose uncle kept his static caravan outside his parents' house in the hills for the winter, and he and I would stay there for days, creating comics and inventing worlds. I was studying art at school, of course, plus geography, which I also loved because of my passion for maps. I wanted to take English as my third option, but dad made me do maths instead, for when the 'art thing' didn't work out. I'd been pretty good at maths up to then, but after being accepted at the local art school before myexams, I had little motivation to revise and I ended up with an 'N' at A-level.

I graduated in '93, but the trouble was I had no idea how to turn my degree into a job in 'books', so I moved back to Wales and tried to sell prints of dragons and goblins (it's a Welsh thing – you can't help but expect to find fairies and elves behind a tree at any moment). After a while, thinking there might be more opportunities in a big city, I moved to Bristol, where I somehow ended up working on a square rigged pirate ship, sailing around Britain, dressing up and showing parties of schoolchildren around the vessel. I loved working with the kids so much that I eventually applied for teacher training (after brief stints as a children's entertainer, teaching art in Botswana and working in a gallery), and while I was in my first classroom job I bought a computer and a copy of the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, and sent off about 50 letters and printed packs to publishers, agents, greeting cards companies and so on. I ended up with a mountain of rejection slips – and my confidence shot to pieces.

A rambling journey

I wanted a change, so a friend suggested I apply to his a computer games company, which was where I stayed for the next ten years. I was still drawing and writing in my own time, but it wasn't until my first daughter was born in 2005, and I realised how little I was seeing of her, that I went freelance, and started trying with the book stuff again. This time, it happened almost ridiculously quickly. I got myself an agent, and within weeks I had my first contract, with Templar, for *The Pirate Cruncher*.

I don't often do illustrations for other authors these days – producing one of my own books takes about a year, and I always seem to have ideas for about 20 that I want to write in my head at a time – but the Harry Potter gig wasn't one to be turned down.

"Growing up in the North of England, and in Wales, writing wasn't seen as a 'proper' job, and nor was illustrating..."

When my agent was asked if I'd be interested, I confessed that I hadn't even seen the films, let alone read the books. I did read the whole series once I was offered the contract, and Stephen Fry's audio versions were extremely helpful while I was working up my cover ideas. When children come to book signings now, they'll often bring Harry Potter as well as books I've written, and it feels good to think that my contribution to the series has been meaningful for them.

It's been quite a rambling journey, then, despite knowing where I wanted to be from the start. And even now, as a published author, I worry all the time about how good or bad my work is; that was why it took me so long to try again after that first round of rejections, and also the reason my agent and publisher tend to get fairly stressed when I'm due to send something in, as I always run it all the way to the line trying to get everything perfect. I used to be so scared of getting it wrong – I had to learn to keep ploughing on, and redoing the words and images, trusting that they'll go right in the end. I think that's an important lesson for all of us, really; and it's definitely one that children can start learning at school.

THREE GREAT JONNY DUDDLE TITLES TO SHARE WITH PUPILS...

The Pirates of Scurvy Sands
When Matilda goes on holiday with her friends, the Jolley-Rogers, to the island of Scurvy Sands, the swashbuckling residents are not too impressed; she's definitely no pirate. But then Matilda discovers the secret of the legendary treasure, and their opinions change...

The King of Space
Rex looks like an average 6-year-old, living on his parents' moog farm and going to mini galactic citizen school; but he's going to be King of Space one day – as long as his mum helps out...

Gigantosaurus
Young Bonehead is the original boy-dinosaur who cried wolf, or in this case, GIGANTOSAURUS! Finally, Bonehead's friends refuse to believe his warnings and the Gigantosaurus really turns up...

(All books published by Templar)

All illustrations: Jonny Duddle

WORDS TO LIVE BY

An unwavering focus on vocabulary has allowed our pupils to soar, says **Christabel Shepherd**

"They just haven't got the words!" This is something I have heard a number of times in my teaching career. As all teachers know, the consequence of children 'not having the words' means that they are unlikely to be able to express themselves clearly. They may not be able to get the most from the experiences we offer. They are often judged by individuals beyond the school as lacking ability. They may display frustration and a lack of self-belief which, in turn, can lead to low levels of resilience and, in the case of many of the children I've taught, a tendency to be passive learners.

Above all, the vocabulary gap exacerbates social disadvantage. We have all seen the effects that result when children don't have the words they need to truly express themselves, and to paint a true and vivid picture in the mind of a reader or listener. We also know that a focus on oracy and 'closing the vocabulary gap' opens the doors of opportunity for children and allows them to soar.

Challenge for all

At both the schools I lead, 'challenge for all' is a non-negotiable and at the heart of our ethos and vision. Both schools are members of NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education), and we believe that providing challenge for all our learners develops ability, raises aspirations, engenders resilience and is a key feature of a high-quality education.

Central to providing 'challenge for all' is a focus on high-quality language acquisition and use by pupils. How can we challenge learners effectively if there is a notable vocabulary gap, especially in terms of pupils' knowledge, understanding and use of Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary? How can we embed higher order questioning and higher order thinking skills if the children can't access the language?

Shades of meaning

I think most of us feel comfortable teaching Tier 3 vocabulary. It's usually technical, often subject specific, and we teach this in a very direct and focused way through a rich curriculum where key words and their meaning are explored and used in context.

Tier 2 vocabulary can be more difficult for children to grasp. It often expresses 'shades of meaning' which can be extremely subtle, and much of it relies on an experience and understanding of root words, prefixes and suffixes. As teachers, we are so used to experiencing these words or skilled at working out what they mean that we may assume they and their meaning are familiar to children too.

It is vital, therefore, if we want our children to engage effectively with the whole curriculum, articulate their thoughts, learning and aspirations, and access real challenge, that we have a whole school focus on closing the vocabulary gap. We must directly teach and promote the understanding and use of Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary.

"We must directly teach and promote the understanding and use of Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary"

If you visit Copthorne Primary, where this approach is fully embedded, you will find wonderfully articulate young people. Our children are confident, active learners who relish a challenge and are not afraid to question adults, direct their own learning and express their views and opinions. Just being in their company for a few minutes makes my day. Take a look at the Copthorne Pupil Parliament on YouTube (it's just four minutes). Most of the children you'll see arrived at the school with no English and are now able to think and speak fluently in at least two languages. Here's how we do it...

1 Five minute stories

Present children with three or four age/stage appropriate Tier 2 words. The words must be those they have met before or have roots, prefixes or suffixes which they have experience of. Give them five minutes to write an engaging short story which must include the given words. This gives children the opportunity to use these words in their correct context applying their developing knowledge of the shades of meaning, whilst developing long-term memory of the vocabulary. We adapted this idea from Chris Quigley who suggests using this strategy with words from year group 'spelling lists'. Similarly, Tier 3 vocabulary can be developed by asking children to use a given selection of words in a summary about their learning in a particular subject.

2 Silent discussions

Get learners to discuss a topic through written communication only, using given Tier 2 or 3 vocabulary.

3 Model the language

When modelling writing, act out how to 'think like a writer', justifying and explaining your word choice, especially around synonyms from Tier 2.

4 Talking school

Provide opportunities and groupings for talk in every subject to ensure it absolutely pervades the whole curriculum. For example, try talk partners, debating, school council, drama or film-making. Use the 'Big Questions' resources at oxplore.org to promote debate and encourage the use of high-level vocabulary in context.

5 Language-rich environment

On every display, pose key questions using the appropriate technical vocabulary. This includes a 'challenge' question using Tier 2 vocabulary. Expect a response to the questions from the children. Display an appropriately aspirational (Tier 2) 'word of the week' in each classroom. After they've worked out its meaning, encourage the children to use it in their talk and writing and find its synonyms and antonyms.

6 Weekly vocabulary lessons

Take an object or theme and, using pictures, sound and film, support children in developing their high-quality descriptions using Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, as well as more metaphorical language.

7 Reading across the curriculum

Maximise every opportunity in all subjects to teach reading skills and explore Tier 3 vocabulary in context. Use guided reading as an opportunity to really explore and pull apart those 'shades of meaning' for Tier 2 words in a range of text types. This allows for those rich conversations about specific word choice, meaning and effect.

8 Reciprocal reading

Introduce pupils to a whole class text in small, manageable chunks. At the same time, thoroughly explore all new Tier 2 vocabulary. Encourage the children to use the words' roots, context and any relevant existing knowledge to clarify meaning. Taking the time to explore misconceptions in reading and vocabulary use is a key feature of reciprocal reading and stops children from 'glossing over' words they don't recognise.

9 Headteacher's book club

Introduce extended guided reading groups for more able readers in Y5 and 6. Issue a challenging text to learners, along with an initial focus, and give pupils two to four weeks of independent reading time. Then meet together to share afternoon tea, discuss the book and explore new Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary. Encourage the children to use the new words in their writing and talk activities.

10 Year group writing events

Stage events such as an alien landing to stimulate pupils' imagination and provide a specific context for the use of given Tier 2 and 3 words.

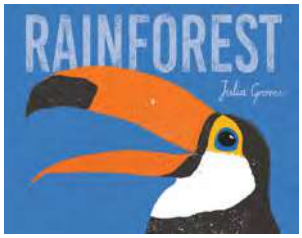
Christabel Shepherd is Executive Headteacher of Bradford's Copthorne and Holybrook Primary Schools. Copthorne is lead school for the Exceed SCITT. It gained NACE Challenge Award accreditation in 2016.

13 FACT-PACKED TITLES

to power up learning

November is national non-fiction month – so we've picked out some of our favourite books to kick-start children's curiosity and inspire activities for every classroom...

Reception



Rainforest

(Child's Play, paperback, £6.99)

A great picture book doesn't necessarily have to tell a story, and *Rainforest*, written and illustrated by Julia Groves, is a case in point. Readers are taken on a tour of the Amazon that introduces just a tiny number of its myriad inhabitants, including some familiar faces as well as those you might struggle to put a name to (helpfully, there's a detailed cast list at the back containing a wealth of information about the animals and their home). The stars of the show here are the colourful illustrations – simple, strong silhouettes, created using a printmaking technique, atop bold backgrounds that never fail to grab the attention. Each is complemented by a single line of text that, rather than naming the subject of the picture, describes their movement, appearance or activity. It captures the atmosphere of the forest wonderfully well – and as inspiration for some experiments with printmaking, it's hard to beat, too.

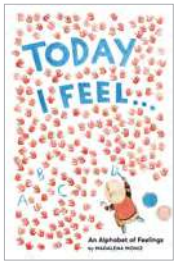
Q: "Do you think the images are realistic? Does it matter?"

Colours: Early Learning at the Museum

(Nosy Crow, board book, £6.99)

Produced in collaboration with the British Museum and based on its fabulous collections, *Colours* opens with a red, fluffy-toed Albanian shoe before serving up, amongst other things, a purple hairpin, ancient gold headgear and a pink pottery cat – a handy index details the provenance of every piece, and a QR code takes you to more information. It's a great way of communicating key learning concepts whilst sharing some of the diversity of the world's cultures.

Q "Why visit a museum?"



Today I Feel...

Abrams & Chronicle, hardback, £8.99)

This is an ABC book with a difference, in that instead of animals or vehicles, it takes readers through a whole range of emotions, from 'adored' to, well, 'zzzz'. The beautiful illustrations are a great starting point for gentle conversations about all the different feelings that are listed – including challenging ones, such as 'grumpy', and 'nervous', alongside more positive, but complex, examples, like 'victorious' and 'patient'. The last page asks readers how they are feeling today; an interesting prompt for art or writing?

Q: "How are you feeling?"

Key Stage 1

The Usborne Book of Planet Earth

(£14.99, Usborne Children's Books)

This book takes children on a tour of some of the most spectacular places on our planet, with a plethora of facts and stunning illustrations. Take in some European culture by enjoying a ride in a gondola along the canals of Venice. Or how about witnessing a stampede of wildebeest in the Serengeti? You can also take a dive into the deepest, darkest parts of the ocean or climb soaring mountain peaks with yak herders in the Himalayas. Science is covered along with geography, as children can learn about Icelandic volcanos and the secrets of what happens deep underground. An excellent accompaniment to this book is Usborne's *100 Things to Know About Planet Earth* (£9.99), in which valuable information is presented in an engaging way, with the help of fun characters and illustrations.

Q: "Where would you like to visit on Planet Earth?"

Through the Animal Kingdom

(£9.99, DK)

The animal world holds a fascination for pretty much every child, and this book is an invaluable companion for learning about all kinds of wildlife. *Animal Kingdom* takes the reader on a journey of 13 diverse habitats to discover the secrets of the animals that live there. Follow migrating wildebeests across the Serengeti as they attempt a dangerous river crossing, under the watchful gaze of hungry predators, or trace the tracks of the solitary amur leopard as it silently stalks its prey through the icy forests of the Siberian wilderness. The structure of each habitat is meticulously planned out, allowing young readers to navigate the pages in a way that resembles a journey, stopping off for information. Combining high-quality photography and rich illustrations, this is a truly inspirational book for children aged five and upwards.

Q: "What would be your ideal habitat?"

Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species

(£12.99, Puffin)

In 2016, trained biologist and artist Sabina Radeva launched a Kickstarter campaign to enable her to transform Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* into an accessible and engaging picture book format for younger readers, with the aim of remaining faithful to Darwin's original work but updating the science where necessary. The result is a perfectly pitched introduction to evolution for children aged six and up, with the theory clearly explained via stylish illustrations and simple, easy-to-understand text.

Q: "Can you explain evolution?"

Little People, Big Dreams: Stephen Hawking

(£9.99, Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

The Little People, Big Dreams series originally told tales of inspiring female figures such as Frida Kahlo, Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks. The publishers are now introducing positive male role models to the list, beginning with physicist Stephen Hawking. Although he was never top of the class, Hawking's curiosity took him to the best universities and led to him making one of the biggest scientific discoveries of the 20th century. Sharing this book's emotive message and compelling illustrations with your class is an excellent way of demonstrating what can happen if you work hard and dream big.

Q: "Do you have a big dream?"

We Travel So Far

(£12.99, Words & Pictures)

Every double-page spread in this beautiful book features information about the extraordinary journeys that different animals make during their lifetime, from familiar favourites such as whales and elephants, to fruit bats, desert locusts and Galapagos land iguanas. The language is poetic – "We are the humpback whales, the long-way swimmers, the ocean rovers", but also contains important facts about miles swum and hours flown. Madden's vivid illustrations bring each creature and their habitat to life, providing the perfect starting point for thinking about migration and what animals need to survive.

Q: "What's 'migration'?"

Key Stage 2

Strange but True: 100 of the World's Greatest Mysteries Explained

(£14.99, Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

From tales of UFO abductions to zombies in Haiti, to the disappearance of the plane MH 370, some of the most perplexing tales that have left people wondering and questioning for decades are explored here. Author Kathryn Hulick uses expert testimony, scientific knowledge and historical fact to posit theories about what really happened, inviting readers to question the evidence and discern from the available information.

Q: "What can we really believe?"

Space Kids

(£19.95, Little Gestalten)

This special book is written from the point of view of the firmament itself: "I am Space. I am everything, everywhere", and kicks off with a gorgeous double-page illustration of a child lying on the grass and looking up in wonder to the night sky. It's not all poetic prose and dreamy visuals though: the book also packs a punch in terms of delivering facts. Illustrations are labelled with easy-to-absorb information covering types of stars, the anatomy of our sun, the workings of rockets and whether extraterrestrial life exists. The final spread invites young explorers to continue their learning journeys – an irresistible call-to-arms for your most curious pupils.

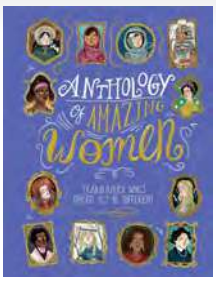
Q: "Is there life in space?"

50 Ways to Feel Happy

(£9.99, QED Publishing)

This feel-good book by psychologist Vanessa King is packed with activities that children can try out by themselves or in class. Each task is linked to one of the charity Action for Happiness' ten evidence-based ways to increase psychological wellbeing. These include doing things for others, living mindfully, finding ways to bounce back after setbacks and learning new things – all themes that should tie in nicely with your school values. Visit the charity's website for information about its Happier Living Toolkit for KS2 which has been awarded a PSHE Association Quality Mark and was put together by clinical psychologist Peter Harper and consultant and teacher Val Payne.

Q: "What is 'mindfulness'?"



Anthology of Amazing Women

(£12.99, Bonnier Publishing)

This beautifully illustrated collection begins with a great quote from author Sandra Lawrence about the fact that throughout history, women have achieved extraordinary feats "while dressed in long skirts, corsets and high heels." The book is split into eight sections: art and design; history; politics; science; sports; music, film and TV; literature and business – meaning there's an extraordinary woman for your students to look up to, no matter their interests. Some are names they will have heard of – Beyonce, Malala Yousafzai, Anne Frank, JK Rowling – while others, such as journalist Dorothy Lawrence and cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, will likely be new discoveries. Each of the 50 profiles is accompanied by a hand-drawn portrait by Welsh illustrator Nathan Collins, while the biographies themselves are factual, witty and warm.

Q: "Can girls be heroes?"

Son of the Circus – A Victorian Story

(£6.99, Scholastic)

Non-fiction is given a narrative twist in Scholastic's *Voices* series, which covers authentic, unsung stories of the past. In this title, readers meet a young mixed-race boy, Ted, living in Victorian Yorkshire. When a stranger appears in the kitchen, Ted is hit with the shocking revelation that he's his father – the first black circus owner in Victorian Britain, Pablo Fanque. This is a fine addition to the series and, like its predecessors, it brings real history to life in a personal, relatable and exciting way.

Q: "Could you live in a circus?"

Human SENTENCES

This low-stakes analogue grammar game sharpens pupils' minds and leads to greater engagement

Philip Pullman once wrote of an "attitude ... towards language" engendered when adults give time to sharing picture books with children, whereby "you trust it and find it exciting and full of possibilities and fun, something to play with and speculate with and take risks with and delight in."

We wholeheartedly agree with Mr Pullman's views on taking time over delicious picture books and want this feeling for language for all children; it inspires much of our work with schools. One way of enhancing this attitude – particularly but not exclusively for the growing number of children who don't have adult support like this at home – is through word games: low-stakes ways of trying out new vocabulary and grammatical structures, testing them for impact on meaning and delighting in outcomes.

Physical manipulation

A form of grammar and vocabulary play that encourages language manipulation in a very literal sense is the 'human sentence': a strip of paper onto which a main clause has been written, held at the front of the class by children, to which further words, phrases and clauses may be added (plus appropriate punctuation, of course). This practice was commonplace around 15 years ago, but when we model it now, colleagues tend to have never seen the strategy, or they remark, "Don't know why we stopped doing that!"

And we really shouldn't have. In our experience, the physical manipulation of sentences in this way leads to greater engagement, and better application in writing, than digital alternatives. Even when children come to the front to move parts of sentences on an interactive board, it just doesn't seem to have the same impact. And compared to written grammatical exercises? Well, there is no comparison.

The strategy takes a bit of in-class training, naturally. Children need to hold the paper strips fairly steadily, and they need to be ready to join the sentence with their suggestions promptly; they need to write clearly on mini whiteboards (until they can, you'll have to do this – see 'tips for success). And we find that these sessions run best when the class is clustered on the carpet, as it takes less time to swap and add children to the sentence at the front.

Meaning shifts

The crucial thing is that you take the time to explore the shifts in meaning that additions and swaps create. For example, imagine two sentence strips displaying a main clause each:

the Billy Goat tiptoed

the Troll heard him

Note that there is no sentence demarcation as this fixes the sentence. The children must now try out different coordinating conjunctions ('and', 'but', 'so') to join the two clauses, and you can lead the discussion on the impact of each. You might then extend this by looking at the use of subordinating conjunctions like 'because', 'when', and 'although': where would each of these work best for the meaning we're trying to achieve?

Similarly, the arrangement of adverbials around a main clause may be examined for emphasis and even ambiguity:

the wolf huffed and puffed (main clause)

in front of the door (adverbial for where)

while the piggies cowered (adverbial for when)

From this, we can arrange:

While the piggies cowered, the wolf huffed and puffed in front of the door.

And:

While the piggies cowered in front of the door, the wolf huffed and puffed.

Now explore the impact of a comma after 'cowered' in that

second sentence. Note also that the teaching of punctuation here is integral to the teaching of grammar and the teaching of meaning-making. Children can be creative in their options within the focus grammatical area, but we'd recommend sticking to that grammatical focus. The extent to which this sharpens the mind and develops creative thinking can take your breath away. Once, when asked for an adverbial to express 'when' as part of a ghost story, a child offered, "when they were least expecting it"!

Gimmick-free games

Why does holding bits of paper, moving positions, remembering to put punctuation marks in and arguing about the merits of a different word order seem to work so well in terms of memory and application? It's multi-sensory, of course, but not in a gimmicky, distracting way: everything is purposeful, and every addition and change must be considered for impact on meaning and context. And it's really, truly collaborative: lots of minds focussed on the impact of a single sentence, irrespective of individual 'writing ability'.

So why did so many of us stop using this strategy? Observationally, it seemed to disappear when interactive whiteboards reached ubiquity, around 2006. But we also wonder if it never received the promotion that more commercially-packageable grammar strategies have had. Human sentences, after all, require only big bits of paper, pens, good classroom management and sound grammatical knowledge.

Tips for success

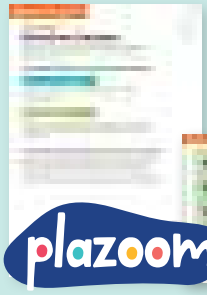
Select the grammar to be taught. Things that work well with this technique include clause structure (and using conjunctions to join them); adding a relative clause; adding and trying phrases in different positions (particularly how-when-where adverbials and avoiding ambiguity); adding adjectives and/or changing modal verbs. Human sentences lend themselves less well to changing tenses and exploring the passive.

Be clear about the grammatical feature you're teaching. And almost always stick to it. Allow children to try different devices in the sentence only once they have secured their understanding of clause structure and your main teaching point.

Have strips of paper ever-ready. A pile of them makes lesson prep quicker and easier – and they'll be there if you want to lead an impromptu session to explore a usage or address a misconception. One sheet of flip-chart paper with three vertical slices produces four perfect sentence strips.

GIVE IT A GO

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



Download this ready-made set of human sentence makers from **Plazoom.** The resource focuses on relative clauses with sentence fragments that can be cut up for children to reassemble - making both simple and more complex sentences. **plazoom.com**

Always start a session with a simple sentence. This reinforces the all-important sense-of-a-sentence and teaches children to start from a main clause and then make additions in their own writing.

Never use a capital or full stop on starting-point sentences. This fixes the sentence and means nothing can be added at either end. Instead, have the children holding the strips use a simple physical (and moveable) reminder, eg a fist for stop; a hand-on-head (a "cap") for a capital (note that this will require two children to hold even a short sentence). Other punctuation marks may be devised with appropriate hand positions!

Planning to 'drop in' a word, phrase or clause? Pre-doctor the sentence strip so that it may easily be split at the crucial part. Score it ready for tearing or cut it and lightly affix the pieces with small bits of tape.

Mini whiteboards are perfect for adding words and phrases. Model what you want so that children don't write too small, don't rewrite the whole sentence and don't capitalise or use full stops to demarcate. In classes where children are not yet ready to use mini whiteboards themselves, take oral suggestions and write them on boards yourself.

Keep circulating the children. Many will enjoy being at the front of the room, holding the strips and mini whiteboards, but when they are there they don't get to see the evolving sentence.

If working with a small group, use smaller paper strips. Move them around on the table, devising other moveable markers for punctuation. Children can still contribute their own words and phrases. Use extra small whiteboards or small blank paper strips.

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton are primary education advisers (primaryeducationadvisers.co.uk) supporting English development nationally.

A very GOOD BOOK

The Bible can represent a valuable source of inspiration for literacy teaching, says Andrew Prichard – especially if we take time to consider the whole story

"I always think that if an alien came down and you were the only person they met, and they said, 'What's life about? What's earth about? Tell us everything,' and you said, 'Well, there's a book here that purports to tell you everything. Some people believe it to be true; some people [do] not believe it [to be] true.' 'Wow, what's it like?' and you go, 'I don't know, I've never read it.' It would be an odd thing wouldn't it?"

So said author-comedian Lee Mack (BBC's *Not Going Out*), when interviewed for R4's *Desert Island Discs*. And it's a fair point. Why does the Bible matter, and how can we all benefit from it – including when it comes to supporting our literacy teaching? Well, surely the bestselling book of all time – over 6 billion copies – can relevantly inform how we and children engage with sources first-hand? It's a book and worldview that has shaped history, and the cross-curricular links are obvious. Ofsted recently expressed concern that RE is often isolated from the rest of the curriculum; using the Bible to teach literacy could help to address this.

The challenge for teachers is not just to use the Bible for literacy teaching; but to do it *well*. In our busy, Google-dependent and often divided society, we need to dig deep so as not to 'dumb it down'. In a survey, 40% of people (bit.ly/trwbible) agreed that the Bible is an influence for good in society, and even the atheist writer Philip Pullman campaigns to retain the teaching of biblical stories alongside popular folk-tales. There are treasures in the Bible that can inform more than our RE teaching alone, and the investment is worth it.

Common language

Culture expects a level of Biblical literacy. We are expected to understand 'David and Goliath contests', and references to tasks 'as hard as walking on water' and floods 'of biblical proportions'. Advertisers often use allusions to temptation that involve a woman and a snake in a garden. The Bible is not dead, and its rich use of literary devices and complex storytelling makes it an excellent teaching resource. Consider the reversal of fortunes found in the tale of Daniel and the lions' den. Or the promise-fulfilment narratives, like Abraham's search for a wife for his son. Or passages dripping with irony, like when the crowds call for

Jesus to save them by coming down from the cross. And it's important to use the original text or something close to it – this is where the juice is found. Great literature evokes great emotions, and the Bible, describing itself as sweeter than honey, is no different. But here's the nub: it's not enough simply to teach the texts on their own.

It's important to engage with the story behind the stories. CS Lewis based *The Chronicles of Narnia* on a complete view of the Bible. While characters like Aslan and Peter mirror Jesus and, well, Peter, his created world mirrors the biblical meta-narrative. Teachers need to take Eve out of Eden and consider the concept of sin across all Bible characters. They need to see Abraham not simply in Genesis, but every place where God fulfils the Abrahamic Covenant. Often people call this biblical theology: seeing the big story through scripture. And therefore the challenge for teachers is to see and explain the storylines that link this text that was written over 1600 years ago – the ideas of living with God, God's promises, and God's rescue.

Follow the map

This is what led me to write *The Blockbuster Bible* and *The Teacher's Cut*. It's my 'toe in the water' (cf Peter) to help children and teachers see the story behind the stories. In the end, however, teachers do need to explore the original text (or something very close), and avoid passing on a second-hand knowledge of them. Not doing so is like reading about Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* before teaching it, but not reading the book itself. Which is bananas (or peaches).

> *"Great literature evokes great emotions"*

Writing is so personal, so creative. So enjoyable! And using the Bible as a resource offers teachers the chance to open children's minds to a wide range of writing styles (e.g. poetry, prose, journalistic reporting, and modern rap), that they can use as they engage with the content. The original text is a map that enables us to explore millennia of history, and minds which shaped culture; let's get back to it.

TRY IT TODAY:

Five ways to boost literacy with the Bible

1 Tap into popular expressions
Create a display of biblical expressions that we use today – for example, 'The writing's on the wall' (cf Daniel), or 'Oh ye of little faith!' (cf Jesus) – and talk about the stories from which they come, and how the meaning has developed over time.

2 Go visual
Pictures give great stimulus material. Start a lesson by looking at an image of Eve in the Garden, and asking 'Who, What, Why, Where, When' questions, leading to a piece of writing that could later be compared with a Bible story.

3 Look at meta-narratives
What's the big story behind any story? Can your pupils tell a tale in just ten words? Or seven? What if you give them a prompt (e.g. heroes, enemies, problems and solutions)?

4 Build links across stories
The Bible is full of promises and fulfilments, flashbacks and flash-forwards. Talk about how God fulfils his promises to Abraham, in preparation for the children writing stories that feature ideas or problems to be resolved later.

5 Get descriptive
A pacey plot is great, but it's also good to slow down and pore over the details sometimes. I love how Genesis 24 (the longest chapter in Genesis) ekes out the story of a servant's search for a wife for Abraham's son Isaac. Share it with your pupils, and copy at will!

Andrew Prichard is a teacher, and author of The Blockbuster Bibleand companion book The Blockbuster Bible: The Teacher's Cut (Lion Children's Books)

"It was all about football for me"

As a former 'reluctant reader' himself, **Dan Freedman** writes stories that captivate literary resisters and bookworms alike

When I was really young, it was just me and mum in our flat, and some of my earliest memories are of sitting with her, insisting that she read certain stories over and over again. I enjoyed *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, but I think my favourite was *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* - we must have shared that one hundreds of times. Mum was a big reader; she still is, in fact. I know that she would have been hoping for her son to grow up loving books as much as she does... so it must have been really hard for her when, at the age of five or six, I basically refused to read any more. It was a 'phase' that lasted until I was 18.

I'm not really sure what was going on. Partly, I suppose, it happened because I am an extremely stubborn person. But with hindsight, I suspect it was also to do with the fact that I wasn't being offered the kinds of books that might have hooked me into the idea of reading 'for pleasure'. I remember being given *Goodnight Mister Tom* at school, for example, when I was ten; it was so depressing, and just too much for me. That said, I did enjoy Roald Dahl, and even picked up one of his books at home once, although I hid it under the pillow when my mum came into the room, as I clearly couldn't be caught doing the very thing I'd said I wouldn't!

Winning words

The thing is, though, I *was* reading; just not what I thought my teachers and mum wanted me to. It was all about football for me, and I couldn't get enough of the narrative surrounding it: commentaries, programmes, match reports and so on. There's a real art to that kind of writing, and the more I soaked it up, the more eloquent I became myself. I had an amazing vocabulary, too - because of the sporting context, I knew what words like 'apoplectic' and 'consolation' meant, and how to use them. So I was quietly developing a facility for language, and an enjoyment of it.

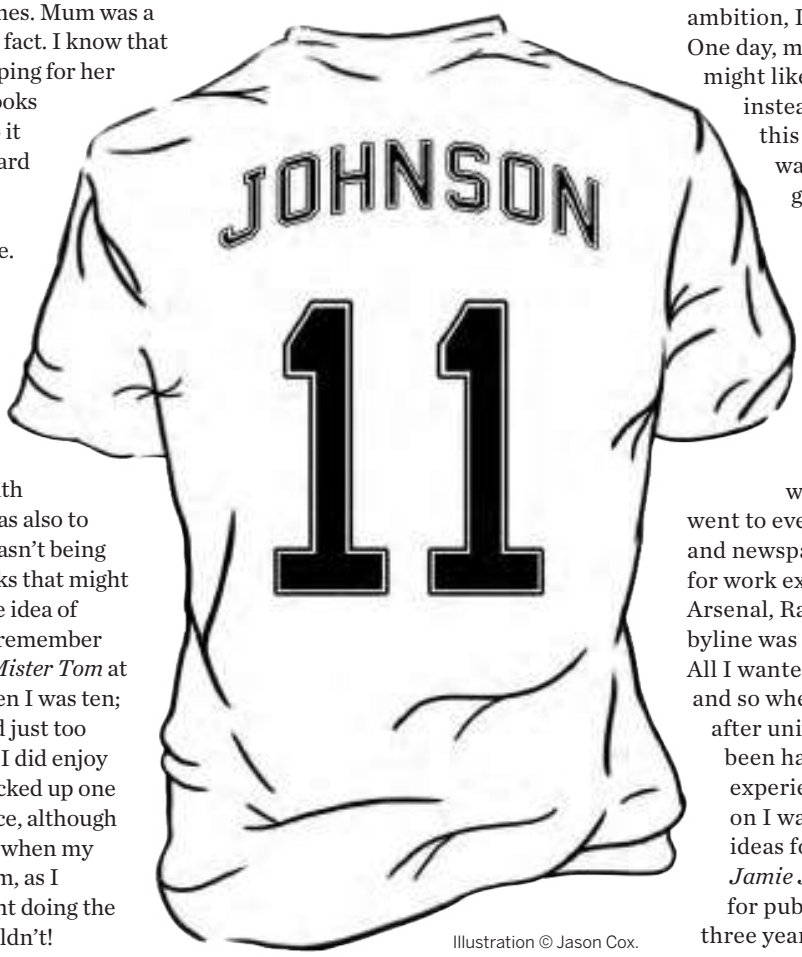


Illustration © Jason Cox.

I wanted to be a footballer myself, of course - but like 99.9% of kids with that ambition, I wasn't nearly good enough. One day, my mum suggested that I might like to be a sports journalist instead - and once I realised that this would mean getting paid to watch football, and that being good with words would help me get the job, that was it.

I say it to children in the schools I visit all the time: if you know what you want to do, that's a huge head start.

My first piece of published writing was a letter in Shoot magazine, when I was 13. After that, I went to every radio station, TV channel and newspaper I could think of, asking for work experience. I worked for Arsenal, Radio 5, ITV - and my first byline was for the Mail on Sunday. All I wanted was to get close to sport, and so when I landed a job at the FA after university, I couldn't have been happier. I had some amazing experiences, but as the years went on I was getting more and more ideas for stories of my own. When *Jamie Johnson* was finally accepted for publication by Scholastic, after three years of rejections (a painful,

Illustration: Joe Lillington © 2019

but valuable learning experience - again, something I always try to get across to the kids I meet), I decided to focus full-time on writing books.

Good choices

The popularity of Jamie Johnson has been amazing. I can't really explain it, but maybe the fact that I was a reluctant reader myself helps me to write in a way that grabs kids who are like I was. I explore a lot of themes that resonate from my own childhood, and I think children relate to those. And because of my experience, the footballing aspect of the books is as authentic as it could be, which is really important for fans, whatever their age.

My most recent book, *Unstoppable*, is for older readers, although I'd love Y6 children to read it, too (which is why there's no swearing in it). It deals with gang culture, and knife crime, and these are conversations we need to have with kids before they get to secondary school, because we want to inspire them to make good choices. And yes, there's sport in there, too. I'm sure I could write about something else, and probably will one day - but while it's still inspiring stories that children really want to read, I'm in no hurry to find a different topic!

"It was all about football for me"

Unstoppable: what's it about?

Your class will almost certainly already be familiar with Dan Freedman's *Jamie Johnson* series (scholastic) – and whilst his latest book is aimed at a young adult audience, it's definitely a story worth sharing with Y6 learners. Whilst the prizes dangled in front of twin protagonists Roxy and Kaine (Wimbledon success, and Premiership stardom respectively) would be out of reach of most youngsters, the challenges each must overcome in order to claim their reward are those that children will recognise from their own lives and the world around them. Bad choices lead to serious consequences; but the redemption, when it comes, is both credible and profoundly satisfying. And yes, the narrative contains descriptions of criminality and violence, but, as the author is keen to point out, no swearing.

To be published from February 2019, David Fickling Books

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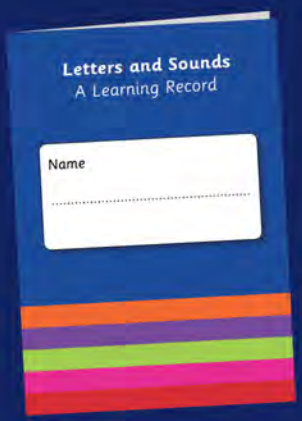

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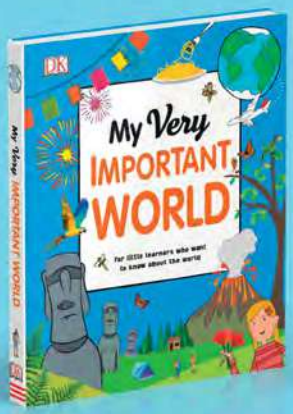

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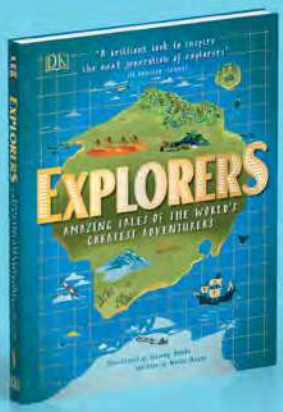

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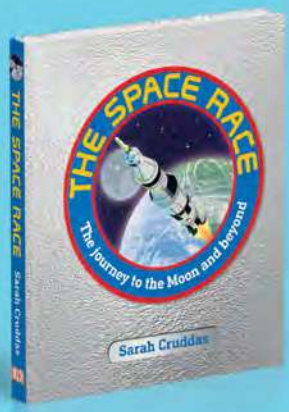

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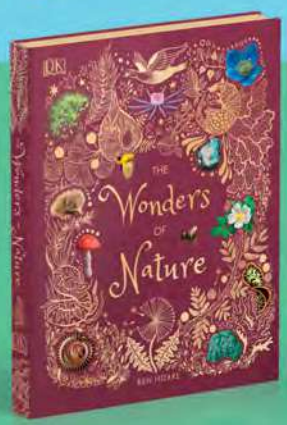

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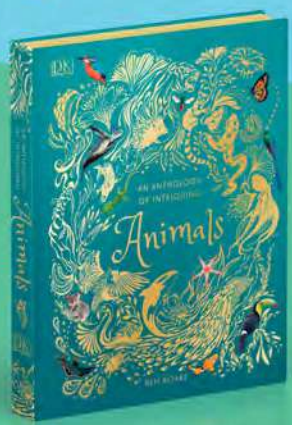

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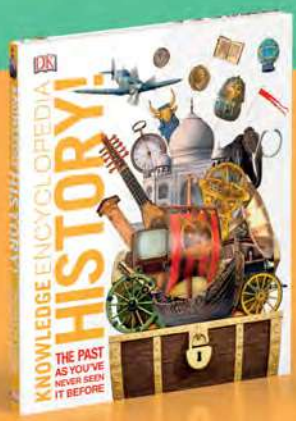

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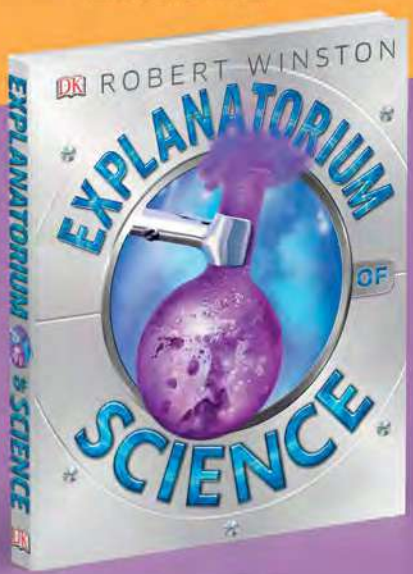

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ENGLISH

The English Skills Box

An exciting range of graded texts to support, match and challenge pupil needs in comprehension and vocabulary skills, from Prim-Ed

AT A GLANCE

- 75 comprehension cards and 75 child-friendly answer cards
- Rich test texts with SATs style focused questions
- Teacher Guide with card-by-card notes and answers
- Free downloadable progress tracking resources

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Having everything in one place makes life easier. That's why I love the new English Skills Boxes from Prim-Ed, because they are self-contained toolkits for the teaching, learning and assessment of comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

There are three boxes, with age appropriate and finely-tuned activities covering Years 2-6 that aim to bolster reading for meaning and pleasure. Each offers 75 graded texts and activities in 15 colour sets aligned to book bands that increase in sophistication, complexity and length.

Within each colour set children progress through five cards, which include a delightfully rich range of illustrated fiction, non-fiction, rhyme and poetry texts. All the questions are multiple-choice and there are dedicated vocabulary and spelling sections too. The cards within each colour set can be completed in any order, so there is plenty of flexibility, and each text has a cross-curricular challenge and bonus question at the end. Colours themselves can be used in sequence, or strategically selected to match identified needs. The follow-up activities on each card have been diligently crafted so they develop specific skills.

There are lots of ways to use the cards, too. They can be productively employed across a whole class, used for directed reading with small groups, or given for pupils to work on by themselves. When used for independent work, the boxes require little teacher support, as children can simply choose a card and mark it when they have finished using the answer cards provided, before moving on to the next.

Each box comes with a comprehensive Teacher Guide, which explains everything you need to know to make the most of what's on offer. Coverage maps make it easy to see at a glance which content domain for reading is assessed with which card.

When children have completed three card sets they take a progress test, written in the style of SATs, to review their knowledge and understanding. These are downloadable, and tracking sheets for teachers and pupils are also available, along with pupil answer recording sheets.

These time-saving boxes are ready to go and require very little setting up or planning. They are engaging, inspiring, consistent and connected resources for helping children enjoy the reading process.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

✔ Highly creative texts with bags of relevant and purposeful activities
✔ Brilliantly graded for solid skills progression
✔ Supports a consistent approach to the teaching of reading
✔ Extremely flexible, allowing teachers plenty of scope to find the right fit
✔ Supports formative and summative assessment
✔ Develops thinking skills, test technique and confidence

UPGRADE IF...

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READING & WRITING

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AT A GLANCE

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- Award-winning online interactive learning platform
- Activity Sheets filled with comprehensions, quizzes, puzzles and debates
- A dynamic resource with its finger on the news pulse

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Since its inception in 2006, First News has moved with the times, adding layers of new and exciting features. This is a resource with special attractions, one that can act as a real driver for the critical reading of news stories.

The First News printed newspaper is packed with rich nuggets of news, alongside a collection of fun and feisty features that will slip effortlessly into any reading and literacy programme. From quick news, big news, home news and world news, to special reports, animal features, science bulletins, interviews, book reviews, puzzles, sport, entertainment, games, quirky news and more – First News buzzes with life and packs a punch. There's even a regularly-aired two-minute video news roundup, First News Today, that's professionally produced by Sky.

First News doesn't shirk the big global issues. Instead, it tackles them head-on, giving short shrift to fake news in the process, and providing children with the means to become the canny and critical news consumers society needs.

First News also has its very own digital offering – a personalised enrichment learning platform called the iHub – that contains weekly interactive comprehension quizzes, vocabulary puzzles, polls and debates based on First News stories. The activities can be customised to individual readers according to their reading level, as assigned by the teacher. Activities can then be selected by teachers or via an automated option, whereby the iHub does the choosing itself and will even do the marking of multiple choice questions for you.

The comprehension activities show the total words read, time taken and points earned. What I particularly love about the iHub is that its 'news gallery' feature enables children to craft and create their own news feeds out of content that excites them and play at being editors. There's some top notch weekly content too, which is available as a series of printable PDF Activity Sheets and can similarly be tailored to suit different reading levels.

When it comes to the news, children need to be in the know, up to date and in control. First News is engaging, empowering and inspiring, providing children with the tools and the confidence to go with it. It's the Roger Federer of news resources – a real class act, jam-packed with information, insight and intrigue.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

✔ Fresh, relevant and beautifully written
✔ Helps children dive into the detail of news stories and become truly critical thinkers
✔ Flexible resources for fuelling an interest in current affairs
✔ A colourful and clever print/digital offering that's smart and serious, while also being fun and entertaining

UPGRADE IF...

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"Literature should help us find our voice"

If children don't see themselves in the books they read, they may never realise their own story is worth telling, says **Vick Hope**...

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is my favourite author. She has helped me explore my feminism, taught me about my Nigerian heritage and history, and her TED talk, *The Danger Of A Single Story* catalysed my love of storytelling and inspired me to write a children's book. Here are some quotes that explain why...

"Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanise."

On Sundays, I volunteer with the children's group at a refugee project called Akwaaba near my flat in Hackney, East London. We run a storytelling workshop, encouraging kids from hugely diverse cultural backgrounds to express themselves and share their experiences. Not only does this exercise help each child order their memories and gain confidence in representing themselves, but in listening to one another they also understand that their unique journeys and backgrounds are all equally valid, which is especially important when so many have been made to feel invisible so far in their lives. This invisibility shouldn't be exacerbated by the literary canon, but unfortunately it often is. I know too many kids who don't see themselves in books and therefore don't realise how special their place in the world is; too many kids who don't know that their story is worth telling or that anyone would want to listen to it, so say nothing.

"Show a people as one thing, only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become."

You can't be what you can't see. Absence from literature could become self-reinforcing if kids shun reading because the characters don't speak to them, and in turn they feel disinclined to become the authors of the future, when in fact this is exactly the reason they should be telling their stories. Literature can – should – help us find our voice, and find ourselves. When Malorie Blackman wrote of forbidden interracial love and the futile prejudice which hinders it in *Noughts & Crosses*, I suddenly understood what my parents suffered, having grown up in 90s Newcastle never meeting another family that looked like ours. When Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie filled in the gaps in my understanding of the Biafran War – the war that ravaged my mum's homeland – and explored the Nigerian diasporic experience, I felt a consolidation of my own history, and a pride in the resilience of my family and heritage. And I found solace in the pages of Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* simply by virtue of meeting a mixed race girl who was a little ashamed of looking the way she did, who was embarrassed to be smart and studious, who never felt like she belonged socially or culturally and who loved to dance. It was like Smith articulated things I had felt but never said; as a young girl who'd pleaded to straighten my hair and begged mum to 'wash the brown off me' in the bath, she made me feel less alone and she made me feel whole.

"The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

I wanted to write a children's book which championed and celebrated the multiplicity of kids' voices, which challenged stereotypes, and showed them to be the storytellers, uniting and working as a team to piece together their disparate perspectives; painting a picture of the world in glorious technicolour. For *Listen Up*, Roman (Kemp, my friend, co-author and co-presenter on Capital Breakfast) and I created a world I wish I'd seen as a child. We wanted the children reading to know that although the things that make them different (their backgrounds, abilities, passions, interests or looks) may make them insecure now – they can harness their unique stories. If they look at the world and don't see themselves represented, as I felt, I want to encourage them to write themselves into it. But like our Sunday circle at Akwaaba, this is never a single story: the conversation must be open, taking on board the rich tapestry of experience. We are not just telling our own stories, but listening carefully to everyone else's; we must listen up!

Vick Hope is a presenter on Capital Breakfast, and many other platforms. Her new book Listen Up, with Roman Kemp, is out now (Scholastic)

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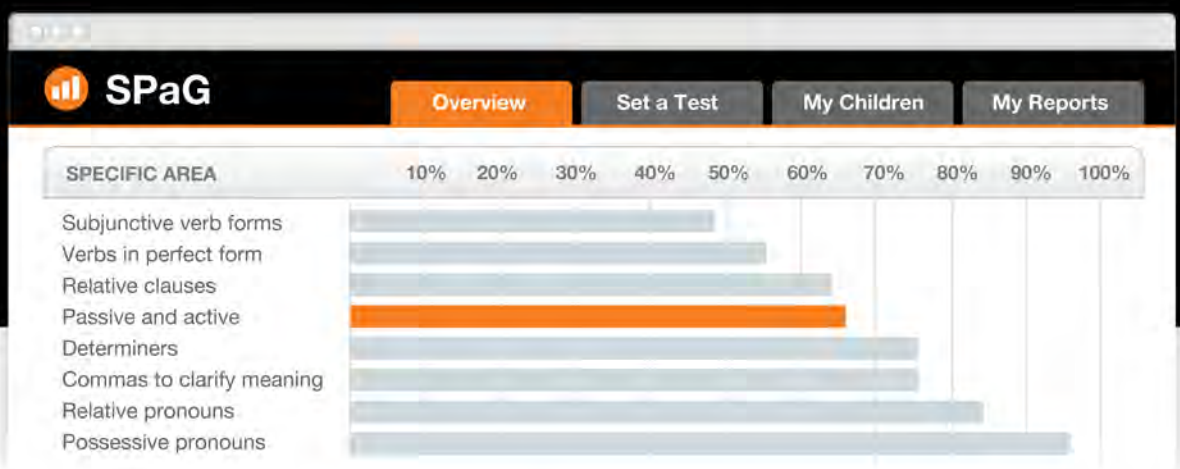

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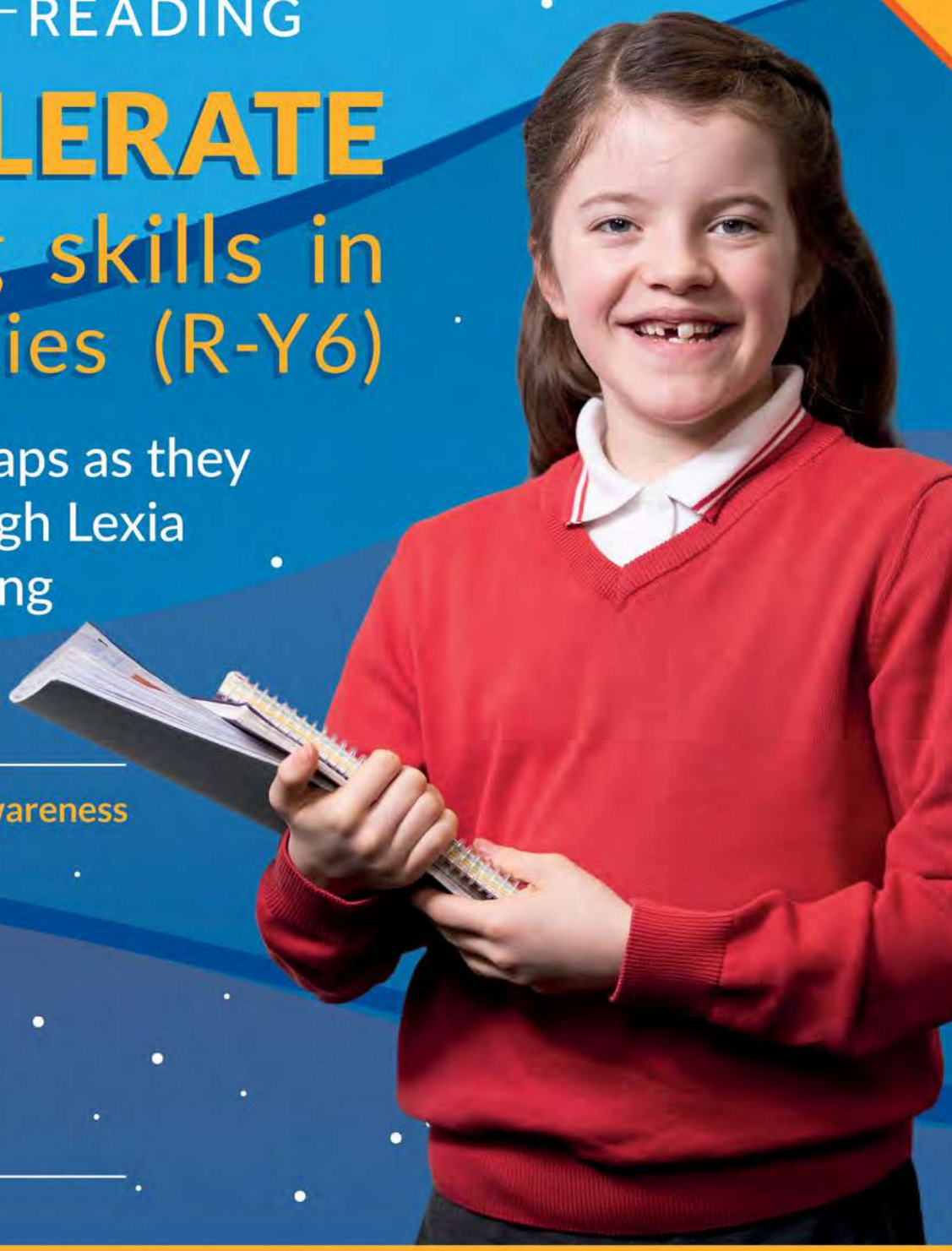

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