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Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"Literacy, and me"

EXCLUSIVE ESSAYS FROM:

Michael Morpurgo

Malorie Blackman

Anthony Horowitz

Jacqueline Wilson

Michael Rosen



Exclusive
Pie Corbett
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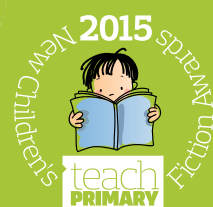
SO WHAT'S THE SECRET?

LEVELS –
LET'S GO FURTHER

Shirley Clarke
unpicks assessment

**SPAG
You're it!**

GRAMMAR GAMES
THEY'LL LOVE TO PLAY



This year's
**BEST books
for children**

*"All children
are poets"*

ROGER MCGOUGH
on keeping the sparks flying

Main illustration: LAUREN CHILD

SPELL IT OUT: WHO'S SMARTER THAN A 10-YEAR-OLD IN YOUR STAFFROOM?



Welcome...

One of the few points about education upon which pretty much everyone involved – parents, teachers, heads, governors, politicians and even (not that they are often asked their opinion) the children themselves – is in agreement, is that teaching young people to read and write is amongst the most important things schools can and should do.

How they should teach young people to read and write, on the other hand, is not the subject of a similar level of consensus – and this publication is in no way an attempt to force one. Instead, we've gathered together expertise, experience, passion and ideas from a whole range of interested, and interesting, contributors, with inspiration rather than instruction as our aim. We hope you'll pick and choose; debate and discuss; try things out and twist them around... and maybe discover something new that could make a real difference in your own classroom.

We also have thoughtful and entertaining essays from half a dozen of the UK's best known and most dearly loved authors about their personal literacy journeys – you may not currently be teaching a future Jacqueline Wilson or Michael Morpurgo, but what they and their fellow writers have to say might, perhaps, help you guide all your pupils towards becoming what Michael Rosen calls "the reading writer and the writing reader which we want all our children to be."

Have fun!

Joe Carter, Helen Mulley & Charlotte Smith,
associate editors

Find more
brilliant writing
and lesson ideas at
www.teachprimary.com

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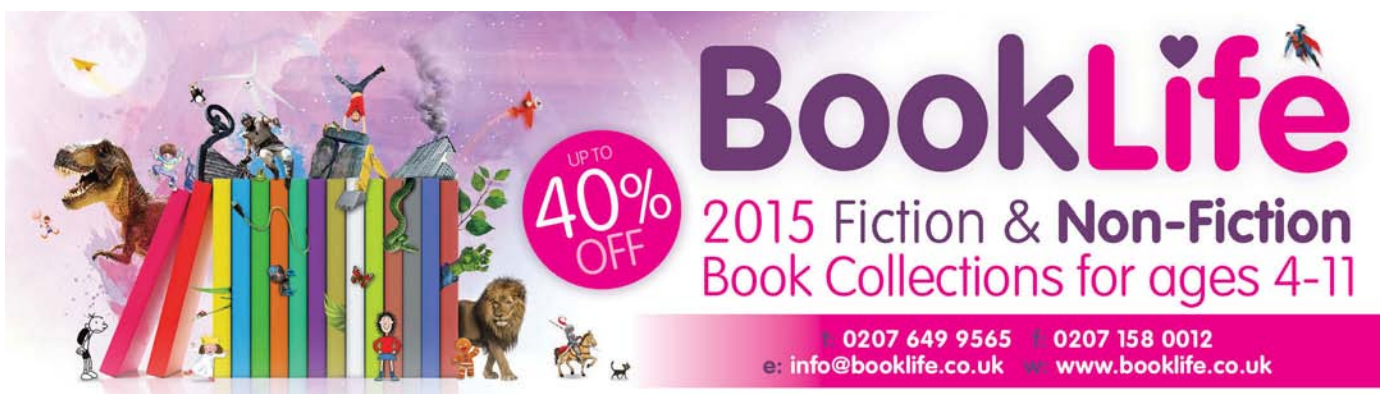
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Tom Starkey would like to say a huge thank you to primary school teachers of literacy, everywhere.



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Literacy, and me

Original essays from some of the UK's best loved children's writers...



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children's authors around reckons that young people always need more books.

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in brief

Get your class involved in some of the UK's best reading, writing, and speaking and listening events

As the tale goes, Hemingway won a challenge to write a story in six words. BBC's 500 Words is somewhat more generous with its word count to young short story writers. Find out more at tinyurl.com/TP500Words

Aspiring storytellers, poets and playwrights can showcase their talents and win great prizes for themselves and their school in The Wicked Young Writers' Award. With five age categories, all young writers can flex their creative muscles. wickedyoungwriters.com

No Pens Day Wednesday wants schools to put down their pens for a day of speaking and listening activities. It takes place on 7 October or you can download everything you need to run your day whenever, for free, at tinyurl.com/TPNoPens

Buzz WORDS

News and views on literacy and learning...

Quick on the draw

If you asked a child to name three awesome things, and he said "pirates, pants and wellyphants" you'd be forgiven for checking with his parents if he'd been feeling okay this week. But for anyone familiar with Nick Sharratt's work, you might be inclined to agree. Nick is the man behind the instantly recognisable illustrations for Jacqueline Wilson's Tracy Beaker tales, as well as many other beloved characters from the hundreds of books he has written and illustrated. *Pirates, Pants and Wellyphants: The Illustrated World of Nick Sharratt* is a new colourful, humorous and hands-on exhibition that is touring across museums and galleries around the country, including The Civic in Barnsley.

The show explores Nick's passion for

drawing, from childhood to internationally renowned illustrator and author, and will feature many of the well-known characters he has illustrated over the years, including Tracy Beaker, Daisy, Lizzie Zipmouth, Hetty Feather, Caveman Dave, Pirate Pete and Billy Bonkers. Immerse yourselves in Nick's world, as you enter a re-creation of his studio filled with the tools of his trade and the stages involved in creating his illustrations. You can even try your hand at a range of different drawing techniques and materials, including the opportunity to create your own digital 'Sharracter'.

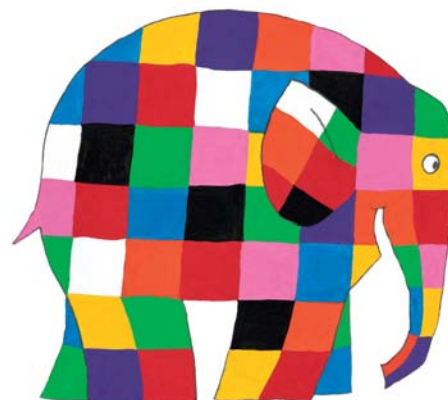
The Illustrated World of Nick Sharratt is free to enter, and coming to The Civic in Barnsley from 27 June-22 August this year.

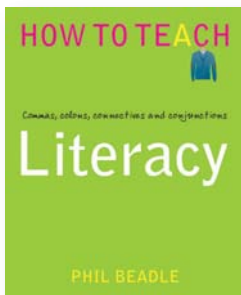
01226 327 000, barnsleycivic.co.uk



Jumbo Package

The adventures of everyone's favourite patchwork elephant, Elmer, are now available to read in ten dual-language editions, making it accessible to readers of Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Italian, Polish, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese in British schools.





Review:

HOW TO TEACH LITERACY

(Phil Beadle, Independent Thinking Press, £12.99)

Say what you like about Phil Beadle (go on, he'd love it) – the man knows how language works. Words are his passion, and he understands the subtle art of using them to convince, cajole and above all, clarify; even if subtlety is not, as a rule, his favoured rhetorical style. Not so much an enfant terrible as, well, terribly (or rather, gleefully) childish at times, Beadle also grasps the point so often missed by other writers on this subject; that literacy cannot be separated from politics, and that teaching young people how to express themselves effectively is one of the most powerful and exciting ways educators can help to change the world for the better. Yes, he over-swears and over-shares; but who cares? This book is full of stuff you didn't know you didn't know. Read it – and the odds are pretty good that by the end you'll be a better teacher of literacy than before you picked it up.

"Yes, he over-swears and over-shares; but who cares? This book is full of stuff you didn't know you didn't know."

Read into it
40%

Almost four in ten of the UK's poorest children are leaving primary school without the ability to read well. The Read On. Get On. campaign aims to have all children starting secondary schools as confident readers by 2025.
readongeton.org.uk



A VERY MERRY UN-BIRTHDAY

Fans of March Hares, Cheshire Cats and unanswerable riddles about ravens and writing desks will know that 2015 is the 150th anniversary of Lewis Carroll's beloved *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This means that there are numerous Wonderland-related events going on across the country from Mad Hatter's Tea Parties, theatrical productions and a fashion exhibition at the V&A, to exhibitions, courses, concerts, reading groups, parades, festivals, fairs, walks and talks. Just go to lewiscarrollresources.net/2015/find.html to join in the celebrations.



Walk on the wild side

Ex-Blue Peter presenter Helen Skelton ran a 24-hour marathon and kayaked the Amazon, but writing a children's novel proved to be an even bigger challenge...

When did you decide to write your book – *Amy Wild: Amazon Summer*?

I've always liked writing and done bits and bobs. I wrote a blog and some online articles while I was in the Amazon. Writing the book was a way of sharing my experience without me having to constantly say "I did this" and "I did that".

How was jumping into the world of literature?

I don't have any experience in it, so it's the scariest thing I've ever done by far. Especially because I met Francesca Simon and Jacqueline Wilson and they're amazing. Jacqueline asked for a copy, and I was just like "Noooo, I don't want to give it to you."

What made you want to write for a young audience?

Kids are just nicer. I get so many emails from kids every time I do one of my adventure trips. I was having a really dark day in the Amazon, and I got a letter from a kid who said: "Every morning when I wake up I think about where Helen is and if she's okay."



Michael Rosen

“Reading has to include making meaning”

Teaching phonics ‘first, fast and only’ is an absurdity and always has been, argues **Michael Rosen**...

I do remember learning to read; and being taught, too, which is not exactly the same thing. I was born in 1946, and at school the teachers used something called ‘The Beacon Readers’. I’ve been looking back at them recently, and it’s clear that the books I still recall from those days were designed to do two things at the same time: provide fun texts that had meaning (there were little plays in them for us to act out, and my dad used to do mickey-takes of the characters like Mrs Cuddy the cow and Old Lob the farmer); and encourage phonics practice along with learning basic word lists. The original edition of the Teachers’ Manual from 1926, which I have also studied, emphasises the importance of doing both:

“The act of reading – getting meaning from the printed page – is dependent upon two factors: (1) a mastery of the tools or the mechanics of reading; and (2) the ability of the reader to interpret the thought of what is read. The success and efficiency with which small children are taught to read depends upon the development of these two factors, and the maintenance of an adequate balance between them...”

We’ve actually had quite contradictory messages about the teaching of literacy over the years. On the one hand, you have those who – like the ex-Schools Minister, Nick Gibb – insist that you need to teach phonics ‘first, fast and only’; clearing out your Reception and Year 1 classrooms of anything other than phonically regular texts, or the children will ‘be confused’.

And on the other side, there are phonics enthusiasts who say, ‘No, no; we expose them to a wide variety of texts! Prose, poems... even yours, Michael, ha, ha!’

I’ve sat on a panel at a conference with such



© Babette Cole 2011

We’ve actually had quite contradictory messages about the teaching of literacy over the years. On the one hand, you have those who – like the ex-Schools Minister, Nick Gibb – insist that you need to teach phonics ‘first, fast and only’; clearing out your Reception and Year 1 classrooms of anything other than phonically regular texts, or the children will ‘be confused’.



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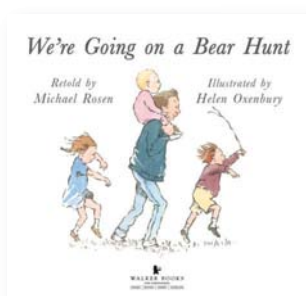
a person. He proudly showed a timetable, which included about an hour a day, right at the start, during which staff and pupils would share a rich range of stories, songs and poetry; but when I pointed out that this, alongside the phonics, was part of his teaching to read, he got quite angry and insisted that it wasn't.

I think he thought that this hour of 'literature' was helping pupils with something quite different, called 'comprehension'. After all, he might argue, how can you 'read for meaning', when you can't read?

But children from the age of one, two and three are sitting with their parents, grandparents, older siblings – hearing texts and seeing squiggles on the page. After they've shared *Where the Wild Things Are* a few times, they can't help but start to realise that the squiggles "and another", alone on the page, make mum or dad say those sounds, every time they appear. Just as they begin to notice that there are squiggles on road signs, which tell the driver which way to go, and on packets in the supermarket that say what's inside. To pretend this isn't going on, and metaphorically slap the wrists of parents and teachers who encourage and talk about this is absurd and has no basis in theory at all.

The phonics screening test is sometimes called a 'reading test', because it can sound too technical to talk about 'decoding'. The results come out, and the media report that children are 'improving their reading', when actually, the children are just getting better

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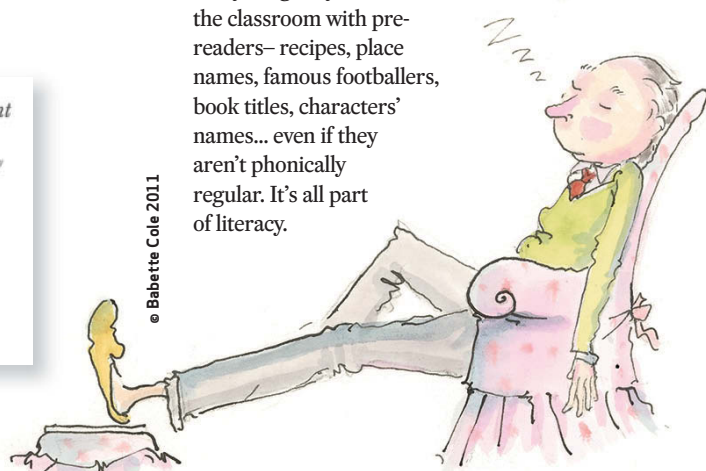


Michael Rosen / Helen Oxenbury 1989
25th Anniversary edition,
2014, Walker Books, £6.99

at decoding squiggles, which is not 'reading'. Reading has to include making meaning. I can phonically decode Italian – I was taught by my Latin teacher in the 50s, for fun. I can't understand it, though.

Reducing 'reading' to decoding lists of words changes what we know language is; you don't create important, powerful meanings out of single words, you do it through sequences – poets, authors and speech-writers all know this, and children instinctively understand it, too. There is no 'wrong' way to teach a child to read, as such; but, like nearly everything we learn as human beings, it is best approached in lots of ways at once if we want to create the 'reading writer and the writing reader' – which we want all our children to be. Teachers shouldn't be afraid to share the 'wordiness' of everything they talk about in the classroom with pre-readers – recipes, place names, famous footballers, book titles, characters' names... even if they aren't phonically regular. It's all part of literacy.

© Babette Cole 2011





"There were no books, plants or pictures in my home"

Professor Sonia Blandford set up Achievement for All 3As to help raise aspirations, access and achievement for all children – and her own childhood was the start of the story...

My parents' attitude to reading and academia was negative. There were no books, plants or pictures in my home. My dad worked in a factory and my mum was raised in a Peabody estate and post-war social housing, where she never learned to read and write. Throughout her life she worked on factory shop floors and took cleaning jobs. She wasn't confident around books, or around people who read them, so I didn't get any encouragement to read at home at all. Luckily, we had a teacher friend who lived in the private housing up the road, who gave me support in reading and writing when I started school.

My primary school had low expectations. It had been built to service the estate I lived in and it was abysmal. Out of the 35 or so children in my class, only four passed their 11 plus and went on to grammar school; the rest of us were channelled into the local secondary modern, which later turned into a comprehensive. We weren't offered the full range of academic subjects – while the boys were taught woodwork and metalwork, the girls did

domestic science and typing. In one case, I remember we literally spent weeks ironing the same top. For English, we learnt comprehension, but there were no grammar lessons and certainly no studying of major texts. I read my first book from cover to cover (Jane Austen's *Emma*) when I was 15, because I joined the local library.

I failed my O levels, except for music. At that time the height of my ambition was to go to the local tech to do catering. After only a few weeks of paid work, which I recall was putting cherries on grapefruits, I remember thinking, 'there's no way I'm going to do this for the rest of my life.' I persuaded my reluctant mother to let me stay on at the sixth form to study music, something she eventually agreed to on the condition that I paid my own way.

Further education, when you're poor, is tough. Many of my fellow music students were into the performing arts, but as my evenings and weekends were all spent working to earn cash, I wasn't able to rehearse, perform or even access some of the networks you need in order to succeed in this sphere. I wasn't well behaved and can't have been easy to teach, but one teacher in particular, Mr Barrett, worked hard to engage me and even took his music A level alongside me. I was the first pupil to pass an A level in music in my school, with the music teacher taking the exam alongside me, but it took me five attempts to get my English O level. I remember a teacher telling me in a report I should admit defeat as I was never going to succeed and me shouting back, "I'm not going to give up!"

I chose teaching because it was the only profession I knew. I got a place at Breton Hall College, part of the university of Leeds, to study for a teaching qualification in music. Here I had elocution lessons and additional support in reading and writing. There were nine trumpet players on my course and I was the ninth by quite a stretch. However, my teachers recognised my natural ability to direct music and they gave me many opportunities to shine. Thanks in part to this help, I came top in my year group and received a special commendation. I then went on to take an Honours degree, followed by two Masters (in music and education) and a EdD (Doctor of Education).

My experiences growing up shaped my attitude to teaching. We can't and shouldn't assume that all teachers are able to recognise or know how to respond to the many challenges that some children have to overcome, which is why we set up Achievement for All 3As. We train teachers how to interact with all kinds of pupils and their parents – who often need to be supported themselves in order to support their children – and how to find common goals which will enable children to progress, like enabling them to read for ten minutes, every day, for leisure.

I believe that everyone should have access to education, whatever the barriers. Achievement comes in many forms and it should be recognised and celebrated, regardless of how it has come about. It was these beliefs which inspired me to set up a charity while teaching, with the objective of enabling every child access to learn a musical instrument. This is still something very dear to my heart – after all, music was my way out.



DEBRA KIDD taught for over twenty years, across all age groups from 4 to post-graduate

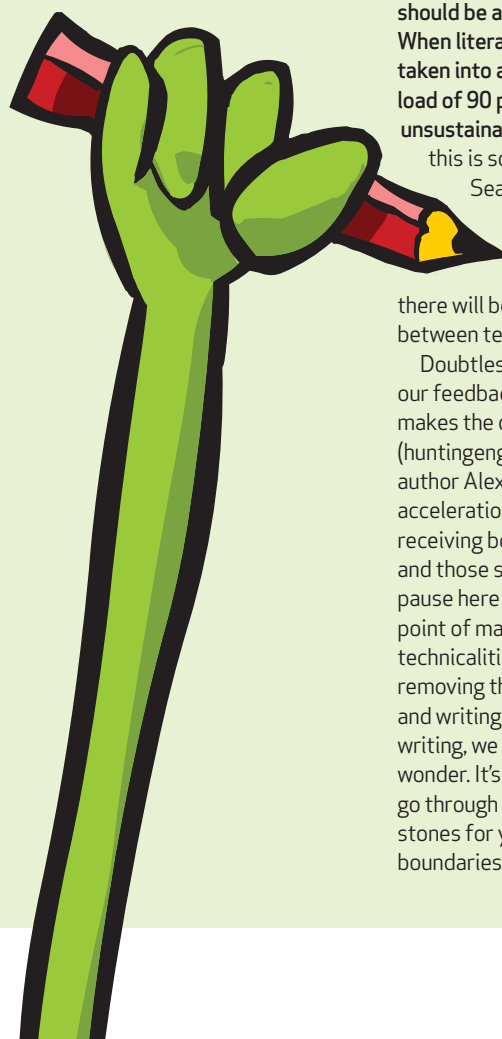
I like *what you* *did there*

Make your feedback specific, regular, dynamic and kind, says **Debra Kidd** – and you could save your pupils and yourself from the marking monster...

Educators have known for decades that marking matters; however, in recent months, it has also become a monster. Primary teachers report an enormous increase in expectations from headteachers that they should be annotating every child's work, daily. When literacy, numeracy and topic books are taken into account, that's a potential marking load of 90 pieces per evening – an unsustainable target. And it is a myth that this is something that Ofsted demands.

Sean Harford, National Director for Schools at Ofsted is clear: there is no expectation that every piece of work will be marked, nor that there will be lengthy dialogues in books between teacher and pupils.

Doubtless, marking is an important tool in our feedback kit, but it is feedback that really makes the difference. In his blog (huntingenglish.com), English teacher and author Alex Quigley notes a four-month acceleration in progress between children receiving both written and verbal feedback and those simply being 'marked'. We need to pause here and think about the purpose and point of marking. It is not enough to correct technicalities – and indeed, doing so can risk removing the beauty and awe from reading and writing. When we comment on a child's writing, we are helping him or her to craft wonder. It's something to bear in mind as we go through how we might create stepping stones for young people, rather than boundaries, on this journey of craftsmanship.



The balancing act

One of the most damaging aspects of leveling children – which is widely recognised now – was the way in which the levels became the objective of learning; reaching the next level, or sub level, superseded any idea of the value of reading and writing. Our feedback can only be effective if it genuinely empowers children to believe that they are on their way to something exciting and worthwhile. Marking should make children feel great. It should be specific, incremental and positive, and it needs to be empowering and kind. Having said that, we must take care. As Carol Dweck has shown, empty, vacuous praise really adds nothing to the process and can be damaging. Tim Taylor (imaginative-inquiry.co.uk), in a series of blog posts on marking, writes:

“I’m arguing against the kind of senseless and useless platitudes that once littered my own marking: ‘Wow’, ‘Fab’, ‘Brilliant work’. Frankly, who cares what I think? If I am simply saying, “Awesome” every time one of my students does any writing, what am I saying about them?”

“The principle I’m proposing is not about being dire and critical in our feedback, but about being honest and generous. Let’s not make the children dependent on our judgments, let’s help them to become self-analytical and self-motivated. The most important judgment, good or otherwise, is the student’s own.”

These are wise words – we need to target our feedback, making it meaningful and sincere.

Tim Taylor also explores the need to be clear about the purpose of marking. He comments that marking can be used for teachers’ accountability, for assessing pupils’ progress, for planning and for developing pupils’ skills and knowledge. It seems to me that in recent years, the first and least useful purpose has risen to the fore, dressed in the sheep’s clothing of the other three. Marking policies need to be manageable for the teacher. They should aid planning, not steal time from it. They must always be written with the interests of the pupil at heart. And a child requires more than written feedback to be able to understand what he or she is required to do.

Furthermore, in nursery or Year 1 settings, written feedback may have limited impact. Symbols, pictures, verbal guidance can be far more useful – some schools even adopt a system where parents can access these symbols on line and use them to support their child at home.

Feedback needs to make a child take notice – it needs to be acted upon or its not worth having been done. So with this in mind, here are some tips:

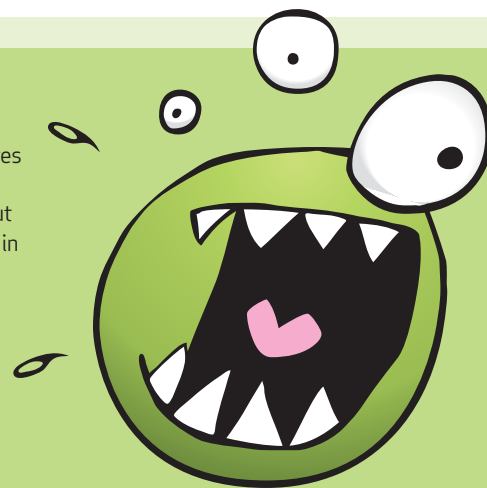
1 SHARE SYMBOLS – children are great at reading and interpreting visual clues, so use faces and pictures as codes for marking. You could have a range of stickers, for example, that you put in their books. Pupils then refer to a chart in your classroom, find out what the sticker means and write it down. It can be something really positive like, “This sentence used some great emotive language and made me feel happy”. And to improve you could have stickers/codes that suggest ways forward (always explaining why): “Using full stops and capital letters would make your writing easier to understand.”

2 DOT ON THE SPOT – if children are working independently in class, carry a felt tip pen with you. As you peer over their shoulders to read, place a dot where you spot a mistake. Before the child hands in, she must have found and corrected the mistake. Praise her for being a good editor. This saves you time later.

3 GIVE SECOND CHANCES – let children redraft and redo work; don’t always be in a rush to move on. If they’ve had feedback, it’s a good idea to let them try again to work their piece up. This is what happens in the real world and it’s an affirmative habit – they see that it is effort and persistence that creates excellence.

4 USE PEERS TO ASSESS AND REVIEW WORK. If you haven’t seen the brilliant clip on YouTube of Austin’s Butterfly, put this article down right now and go and watch it. That’s what I’m talking about – specific, clear and very, very kind feedback. And the teacher does diddly squat.

5 APPLY ‘WALKIE TALKIE THINKING’ to your assessments of reading and writing. When a child learns to walk, there are things that adults never do. They don’t give a grade. They don’t make the child listen to objectives before he tries. They don’t tell him that he’ll never run a marathon because he falls down. And they don’t



assume that the baby that walks at 10 months old is going to be more successful than the baby who walked at 15 months. If we apply the same thinking to reading and writing, we make our marking celebratory. We give lots of opportunities to try again. We reassure the child that she’ll get there in the end – that it’s no big deal if it’s taking her a little longer. We look at the whole picture and make time for developing fine motor skills with lots of art and craft activities; share books with children; build vocabulary through drama; create opportunities everywhere for them to write – on mirrors, in sand pits, on chalk boards, on windows...

6 BE VERY SPECIFIC IN YOUR PRAISE – target the work and the actions and effort made to produce it, not the child. Never use ‘You are clever/super’ etc but instead “The use of this adjective was really effective” or “that’s a powerful idea and is going to make the reader really think hard.” This kind of specific praise helps a child to know what to do again and it does not create an assumption that success was built on natural ‘talent’.

Remember progress without purpose is a house built on sand – make it matter; take your time; get them to suss out what is required; keep your eye on the child and not on the data. Learning happens in heads, not books and good verbal feedback can be far more effective than written words, especially when it is regular, short, targeted and kind.

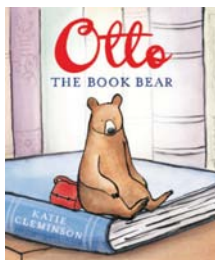
“I’m arguing against the kind of senseless and useless platitudes that once littered my own marking: ‘Wow’, ‘Fab’, ‘Brilliant work’. Frankly, who cares what I think? If I am simply saying, “Awesome” every time one of my students does any writing, what am I saying about them?”

11 Curriculum ADVENTURES

Lead your class on an exciting and imaginative learning journey based on one of these inspirational story books...

FOUNDATION STAGE

1



Otto the Book Bear
BY KATIE CLEMINSON (Random House)



About the book

Meet Otto, the bear who lives inside a book. He loves his story to be read, but is happiest of all when he creeps out from between the covers to explore, read other books and write! One day he discovers his family have moved

house, leaving him behind. Setting off on an adventure to find somewhere new to live, Otto goes unnoticed until he finally comes across the perfect place – a library full of other book characters waiting to welcome him in.

Themes and adventures

This story is about the love of books, focusing on the power of story-telling and imagination. You could take Otto on an adventure to your local library, or introduce him to different classrooms around the school. What characters might Otto meet in different story books?

Activity suggestions

- Use a small soft toy bear to hook your class into the book – invite your children to meet someone very special from the book you're about to read and introduce them to Otto before you start. Try passing him round to say hello to everyone so they can all have a hug, and make sure he's there to share the story. Create a pictorial map with drawings and photographs to show where Otto has been and what characters from books he has met along the way.





2



Rabbityness

BY JO EMPSON
(Child's Play)

About the book

Rabbit likes doing rabbit things, but he also likes doing unrabbit things! The other rabbits catch his happiness as he spreads colour and music far and wide through the forest. But when Rabbit disappears, how will the other rabbits cope? Luckily Rabbit has left gifts to help them make their own colour and music.

Themes and adventures

The story has a powerful message about creativity and provides possibilities for thinking about managing loss. It could be the starting point for any number of projects around inspiring people or individuality.



Activity suggestions

- If you have a wooded area nearby (or any trees at all), take some instruments outside and try to "fill the woods with colour and music." Take coloured fabric and ribbons to tie to the trees. Play 'Follow my Leader' and march around the woods with the instruments imagining that the person at the front of the line is Rabbit, leading the way.
- Ask pupils to paint a piece of paper with bright colours, and make it look as happy as possible, including all the things that make them happiest in the world. Use these paintings to make a 'happy corner' in your classroom. Whenever someone is feeling sad they can spend some time in the happy corner, surrounded by lots of happy things, to help them feel better.

3



Magpie's Treasure

BY KATE SLATER
(Andersen Press)



About the book

Magnus Magpie chooses only the brightest objects to hide in his home. His search for dazzling treasures takes him far and wide, and eventually towards the stars. However, with the disappointing discovery that the moon is not as shiny as he believed, a tired and lonely Magnus begins to long for the comforts of home. When he returns to his nest, a surprise awaits him – something more valuable than he could ever have imagined.

Themes and adventures

This book is ideal for generating discussion about home, what makes us happy and issues of taking things that don't belong to you. The class could create pictures and maps of landmarks from Magnus' journey to the moon and back as a starting point for knowledge and understanding of other places in the world.

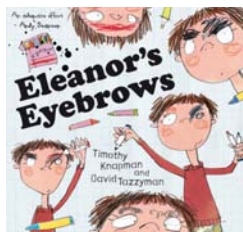
Activity suggestions

- Magnus likes shiny things. Collect shiny objects – crystals, prisms and objects with reflective surfaces – to create an interactive classroom display. You could include different patterned papers and foils including shiny sweet papers, and children could create individual collage pictures of treasure nests.
- Extend into exploring reflections in spoons, and use concave and convex mirrors to observe how light behaves on different surfaces. Have fun with the jewel-like patterns in kaleidoscopes or use different lenses and coloured viewfinders to explore the indoor and outdoor environment.



KEY STAGE 1

4



Eleanor's Eyebrows

BY TIMOTHY KNAPMAN AND
DAVID TAZZYMEN (Simon and Schuster)

About the book

Eleanor just can't see the point of her eyebrows. So, when she's fast asleep her hairy facial appendages set off on an adventure, in search of a more fulfilling career. They have a go at all sorts of interesting and sometimes dangerous jobs, including being a moustache for a magician and false legs for an ant who wants to be a spider! Back at home, Granny's horror at Eleanor's hairless brows lead her to try out some comical replacements before deciding she really needs to find her very own eyebrows and invite them back for good.

Themes and adventures

The book contains a gentle message about accepting and appreciating yourself. There is also scope for discussion on how emotions are expressed using our eyebrows – children can use mirrors or work in pairs to show and read happy, sad, surprised, angry (and so on) emotions.

“Granny's horror at Eleanor's hairless brows lead her to try out some comical replacements before deciding she really needs to find her very own eyebrows and invite them back for good”



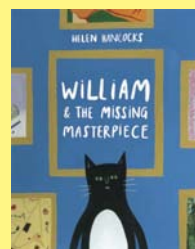
Activity suggestions

- How many different ways could you use a pair of eyebrows – or even a single one? Encourage your children really to think outside the box and come up with as many weird and wacky ideas as they can.
- Invest in a set of 'joke' false eyebrows, or cut some out of different fabrics and materials to help inspire pupils towards ever more creative thinking. Ask groups to work together to come up with their own lists of uses or jobs for the brows as possible.
- You could create adverts for the suggested jobs, or those from the book (e.g. magician's moustache). This could also be extended into a recruitment drive for other missing body parts!

5

William and the Missing Masterpiece

BY HELEN HANCOCKS
(Templar Publishing)



About the book

International cat of mystery William puts his holiday on hold following a desperate plea from a Paris gallery to investigate the case of the missing Mona

Cheesa. Who has stolen the masterpiece and how have they done it? Can William solve the clues and recover the world famous painting before the highlight of National Cheese Week, the Homage to Fromage Annual Art Gala?

Themes and adventures

This story presents the perfect opportunity to explore a whole new city, country and culture! Find out facts about Paris, and create a display in your classroom. Focus on the French language in the book and learn the meanings of new words.

6

Shadow

BY SUZY LEE
(Chronicle Books)



About the book

A mischievous little girl goes exploring in the attic and creates her own amazing adventures in the shadows cast by the junk stored there. In this monochrome world the vacuum cleaner becomes an elephant, a hose turns into a coiled-up snake and she steps right in to the story too. On one side of each double-page spread we see the real world of the attic,

Activity suggestions

- How are your class at being detectives? Can they solve a trail of clues to uncover a mystery? Recreate William's investigation by advertising a missing object around school and planting clues as to its whereabouts and the culprit. Ask your class to write newspaper articles about the mystery, or work in teams of detectives in a race to find the answer. Can they use their thinking skills to deduce the solution?
- Think about the attributes of a successful detective and ask your class to make detective fact files. Why is a cat like William particularly suited to this job? What other animals would be good at sniffing out clues (e.g. a giraffe peeking through leaves, a mouse listening from inside a handbag, an elephant with its big listening ears) and why?



on the other her make-believe story world. As she is drawn further in however, the line between the two places is blurred... until the spell is broken when she's called for her dinner and has to turn off the light.

Themes and adventures

This book highlights the endless creative possibilities that occur when we use our imagination. Classes could step in to the story – what do they see, hear, smell etc on any given page?



Activity suggestions

- Use light-sensitive paper, which can be developed using just water. Experiment by collecting a wide variety of objects with interesting shapes, placing them onto sheets of the paper and exposing the sheets to sunlight, before holding them under the tap to fix the resulting image.
- Play with a range of objects and torches behind a white sheet – can anyone match the object to its shadow? Can you turn some of the silhouettes into something else, in the way that the vacuum cleaner appears as a shadow elephant?
- Use photography or art work to capture the images you've made, and create your own shadow/silhouette book to tell a new story.



7

Grandpa Green

BY LANE SMITH (Macmillan)



About the book

Grandpa Green is old now and he can't always remember things, but his past is alive in the amazing topiary he lovingly creates. We follow his great grandson as he imagines and explains each precious and significant moment in the elderly man's long life and watch as he collects and gently returns the tools which have been forgetfully strewn between the bushes.

Themes and adventures

This book makes a perfect introduction to work on family trees, growing, ageing and changes, and sharing family stories. Children could bring photographs from home to help decide what sort of topiary they would put into their own special garden of memories.

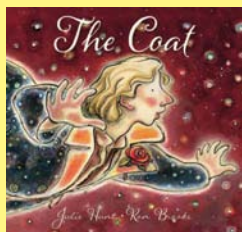
Activity suggestions

- Bring the garden to life using drama games - use the pictures in the story as starting points for children to recreate with their bodies. When they're used to organising themselves into still 3D shapes encourage them to bring their images to life and animate a small part of the story, group by group. How did it make them feel? Was this a happy memory?
- Give groups the opportunity to look closely at this book. Provide magnifying glasses and 'peepo cards' (a square of card with a small 10p piece-sized hole in the centre) to help focus on detail. What did they notice? Did anything surprise them?



KEY STAGE 2

8



The Coat

BY JULIE HUNT & RON BROOKS
(Allen & Unwin)

About the book

A coat stands in a field stuffed with hay, and a man is disappointed when he comes to have a look. That is, until he tries the coat on and realises that it has a life of its own! As soon as he wears it, he's transported into a Parisian world of beautiful illustrations inspired by famous artists. He eats musical dishes and finds himself thrust into the limelight with 'ventriloquism' and accordian skills he never knew he had. This is a book about being swept away by your imagination!

Themes and adventures

This book draws on influences from famous art and literature throughout the centuries. Children will love the idea of an adventuring coat, and the possibilities of what else might happen if they were to come across such a thing.

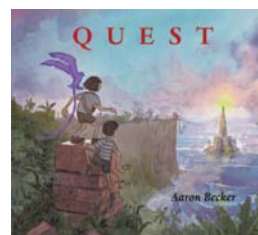
Activity suggestions

■ Look at the page where the man first sits down in Café Delitzia. He eats **Tango Zest, Rare Glissando, Fresh Duet, Wild Solo and Bass Magnifico**. Do your class think these are real dishes? They are all actually imaginary meals which take their names from music, but they sound very tempting! Can the children come up with some ingredients for the dishes? Maybe **Tango Zest** would be made from oranges and lemons, or fizzy sherbert. This could be turned into a poetry activity, where each person chooses one of the dishes and writes a poem about how to make it and what it tastes like. Or you could listen to pieces of music as a class, and create new dishes inspired by what you hear.

9

Quest

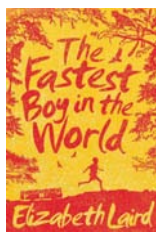
BY AARON BECKER
(Walker Books)



About the book

Two children sheltering from the rain in their local park are suddenly thrust into an unexpected adventure, when a king bursts through the door they are leaning against. He just has time to give them an orange crayon before he's dragged away, and they must work out what to do next. Collecting colours as they go, the daring pair follow into a strange and exciting world where anything can happen - anything they choose to draw!

11



The Fastest Boy in the World

BY ELIZABETH LAIRD (Macmillan)

About the book

Solomon lives with his family in a hut in the highlands of Ethiopia. He has dreamed of visiting the capital city of Addis Ababa, and hangs on every word of his friend's stories about it, but has never had the chance to see the towering buildings and busy roads for himself. That is, until the day that his grandfather decides to take him there - by foot. The reason for the journey is a mystery, but Solomon soon forgets about that when he discovers that the famous Ethiopian Olympic runners are arriving in town during their stay. How magnificent to see these

champions in real life - his friends will never believe it! But when Solomon's grandfather falls ill, who is fast enough to run all the way home and fetch help?

Themes and adventures

This is a brilliantly told and beautifully judged rags-to-riches tale that opens a window into the experiences of an ordinary boy's life in Ethiopia, giving a fantastic opportunity to find out more about the music, traditional dress, ancient religion and wildlife of the country. The themes of family history, inspiring heroes and personal aspirations run strongly throughout.



Themes and adventures

A fantastic wordless adventure. Quest is perfect for opening up an imaginative dialogue with your class, building their reading confidence and visual interpretation skills. In the story, children draw keys to open the door, giving your class a great opportunity for designing new keys or imagining doors to match real or photographed keys. You could also make links to famous journeys and mythical quests.

Activity suggestions

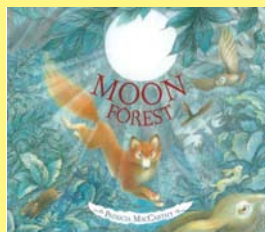
- **The battle in the story could be a great starting point for creative thinking and writing. We don't know how it began, or how long it has been going on, so your class can decide on their own versions of events. Ask them to create a history for the two warring kingdoms – create names for the monarchies of each and come up with the traits, beliefs & even national dishes of the different cultures. Who does the city belong to? Why is the invasion happening? Write two diary entries from the point of view of a citizen living in the city, describing the sights, sounds, smells and daily events before and after the battle began.**

Activity suggestions

- **Use the story as a springboard for exploring sports, athletic events, and sporting heroes. You could open this discussion out to include all kinds of heroes, and ask your class 'what makes a true hero?' Create a wall display showing all the attributes that make a person worthy of admiration – not just their abilities, but also their personal qualities and how they behave towards others.**

"This is a brilliantly told and beautifully judged rags-to-riches tale that opens a window into the experiences of an ordinary boy's life in Ethiopia..."

10



Moon Forest

BY PATRICIA MACCARTHY
(Frances Lincoln)

About the book

It's night time in the forest, but there's plenty going on. While we're all tucked up in bed, what are the wild residents of the countryside getting up to? Foxes hunt. Badgers, hares and water voles find hiding holes in the woods. Stag beetles lock horns in the undergrowth. Deer and birds scatter! You are invited on a journey under the full white moon, where anything can happen and the animals show their true natures.

Themes and adventures

Moon Forest represents a magical journey through the British woods, combining facts with poetry to create a remarkable insight into our native wildlife for readers of all abilities and interests.

Activity suggestions

- **Ask your class to write new stand-alone sentences or sentence**

fragments on scraps of torn paper, about some of the animals featured in the story or any others that aren't included. Put all the scraps into a hat and rearrange them randomly to create pieces of 'found' poetry. This could be extended into a bigger activity around found poetry, using extracts of non-fiction nature books to create poems. (Try searching 'Found Poetry' in your internet search engine, to find some inspiration.)

- **Bring the journey to life with drama – try using movement to represent the different animals. Which animals move quickly or slowly, nervously or confidently, gracefully or erratically? Which animals are lone predators, and which move in herds? How do the groups move together? You can try the same thing as a music activity – which instruments could represent the different creatures?**



MORE TO EXPLORE...

- **Seven Stories is the National Centre for Children's Books. Its mission is to champion children's books as an essential part of our childhood, national heritage and culture, inspiring a love of reading across generations. It is the custodian of the only collection in the world dedicated to children's literature from the 1930s to the present day.**
- **If you are inspired by the book selections, why not subscribe to the Seven Stories' Hooks into Books programme – seven of the latest high-quality titles in children's literature, delivered each term to inspire reading for pleasure across your school?**
- **For more information visit sevenstories.org.uk, or email jenny.rohde@sevenstories.org.uk**



Malorie Blackman

“Everything can be a literary experience”

Learning to read and write should be about discovery and wonder, not success and failure, says **Malorie Blackman...**

In its broadest sense, of course, ‘literacy’ simply means the ability to read and write, which should be a right for all our children. Yet we know – and by the way, I do not blame teachers in any way for this – that a significant number of young people are currently reaching secondary school, and even entering adulthood, without these essential skills; and the older you get, the harder it becomes to ask for help. We really need to tackle this, allowing schools to take a multi-pronged approach to nurturing literacy, and rejecting the language of failure, right from the start.

Of course teachers need to assess children when they arrive in their classroom, to discover what they know and can do already, in order to help them progress – but turning this process into a ‘test’, as they are now forced to do, introduces the ideas of competition, success and failure from a very early age. I have a real problem with that. It’s like that cartoon, showing a line-up of various creatures being told they must complete a standardised trial – climbing a tree. You know the monkey and the bird will be fine; but the elephant is unlikely to get past the base of the trunk – while the fish in a bowl doesn’t stand any chance at all.

I do remember elements of being taught to read at school – like the Peter and Jane books, and sitting, cross-legged on the carpet with flashcards being held up in front of us – but my most positive memories are of being read to by my teacher. Every day we would have story time, in every classroom, and I loved it. It made me want to seek out stories for myself. The first book I recall reading alone was Enid Blyton’s *Mr Meddle’s Muddles*, and it made me laugh out loud. Most of all, though, it gave me an immense sense of reading achievement, and inspired me to explore more books and to

“The first book I recall reading alone was Enid Blyton’s Mr Meddle’s Muddles, and it made me laugh out loud. Most of all, though, it gave me an immense sense of reading achievement”



create my own stories... which eventually led to me becoming a writer.

By the age of seven or eight I was writing stories for fun, and my teachers would give me feedback on them. Reading, writing, they’re all part and parcel of literacy – and there’s more, too, which is why I keep coming back to this idea of a ‘multi-pronged’ approach, tying literacy in with everything else that’s going on

in that child’s life and education. For example, you can play a piece of music to children, or a funny song, and then ask to explore how it made them feel; or in science, when showing kids what happens when you touch a lemon with a piece of litmus paper, encourage them to express the wonder of the change as well as the scientific explanation, getting them to talk about what they see, hear and smell, and then writing it down and sharing those thoughts with their classmates. Everything can be a literary experience. It’s hard though, I know, for teachers to find time and space within the curriculum for these kinds of creative activities. I couldn’t have more respect for what they do, under such immense pressure.

Most of all, I think, literacy should be about introducing children to all forms of writing including poetry, song lyrics and comics, and enabling them to find their own creative voice. That’s why I think *The Phoenix Comic*, published by David Fickling Books, is such a brilliant resource – it has so many fantastic stories in it every week, and they work just as well for those who come to a story by text, and others who are captivated by visuals. It’s perfect for juniors and upper juniors. We really miss a trick, I think, by not using graphic novels and comics more to engage children with reading. There is so much to discuss regarding what the words convey that’s not in the pictures, and vice versa, and the idea of blending a whole range of elements together to tell a story as powerfully as possible. These are crucial skills, especially in the digital age, and when you encourage this kind of diverse approach, no one is excluded.

Because the bottom line should always be that all children deserve to leave school feeling confident about their literacy, and with a love of reading. None of our young people should get left behind.



A way *with words*

Take a closer look at a technology solution developed to help every child achieve reading and writing success...



Clicker 6

Clicker 6 from Crick Software is fast becoming the word processor of choice for primary schools. Thousands of schools across the UK are already using Clicker to help raise literacy standards across the curriculum.

What is Clicker 6?

- Clicker 6 is a talking word processor specifically designed for children
- Teachers can create personalised reading, writing, speaking and listening activities
- Clicker also comes with thousands of free ready-made resources
- It's easy to differentiate activities for the variety of needs and ages in your school
- Clicker can be used to support learning across the curriculum, in any subject

Who is Clicker 6 for?

Every child in school can benefit from using Clicker:

- Help young learners take their first steps towards independent reading and writing
- Motivate reluctant readers and writers with engaging, age-appropriate activities
- Help children with special educational needs overcome their barriers to learning
- Build the skills and confidence of children learning English as an additional language
- Stretch and challenge gifted and talented pupils



How will Clicker 6 help?

Do either of the following classroom challenges sound familiar?



"He finds writing and spelling very difficult, and gets frustrated whenever he has to sit down and write"

Rob Smith, Silverdale Primary School

Rob was advised by his SENCo to take a look at Clicker 6. He gave the pupil regular access to the software during writing tasks, using the word banks and prediction tools to support him. Now, the flow of his writing has dramatically improved. In fact, every child with whom Rob has used Clicker now produces work of a greater quantity and a higher quality.



"He has some really great ideas, but just can't seem to organise or get them down on the page"

Becky Bissek, Hollyfield Primary School

Becky chose Clicker 6 to help up-level her struggling writers in Year 4. Many of these pupils struggle with sentence construction, but being able to listen back to their work with Clicker's built-in speech feedback enables them to make much more sense of what they are trying to put together. The vocabulary support has also really helped with the dreaded blank-page syndrome!

FIND OUT MORE

These are just some of the literacy challenges that schools are using Clicker 6 to address, with fantastic results. If you'd like to find out more, you can:

- Visit www.cricksoft.com/clicker to access Clicker videos and success stories
- Download the Clicker 6 28-day free trial from www.cricksoft.com/clickertrial
- Call 01604 671691 or email info@cricksoft.com and ask for one of Crick's Education Consultants to pop into school and provide a free staff demonstration.

In 2013 a school in the West Midlands hit the headlines. John White, the head of Colley Lane Primary in Halesowen had decided to ban the use of dialect in the classroom. Among the phrases axed were, 'Ay?' (used instead of 'pardon') and 'It wor me' (used instead of 'it wasn't me').

Explaining his decision, White wrote in a letter to parents, "We value the local dialect but are encouraging children to learn the skill of turning it on and off in different situations".

He's not alone. Other heads are keen to ensure that children know how to switch between standard English and dialect. But why is this seen as important? And why is it proving – at times – a contentious issue?

Code switching – why it matters

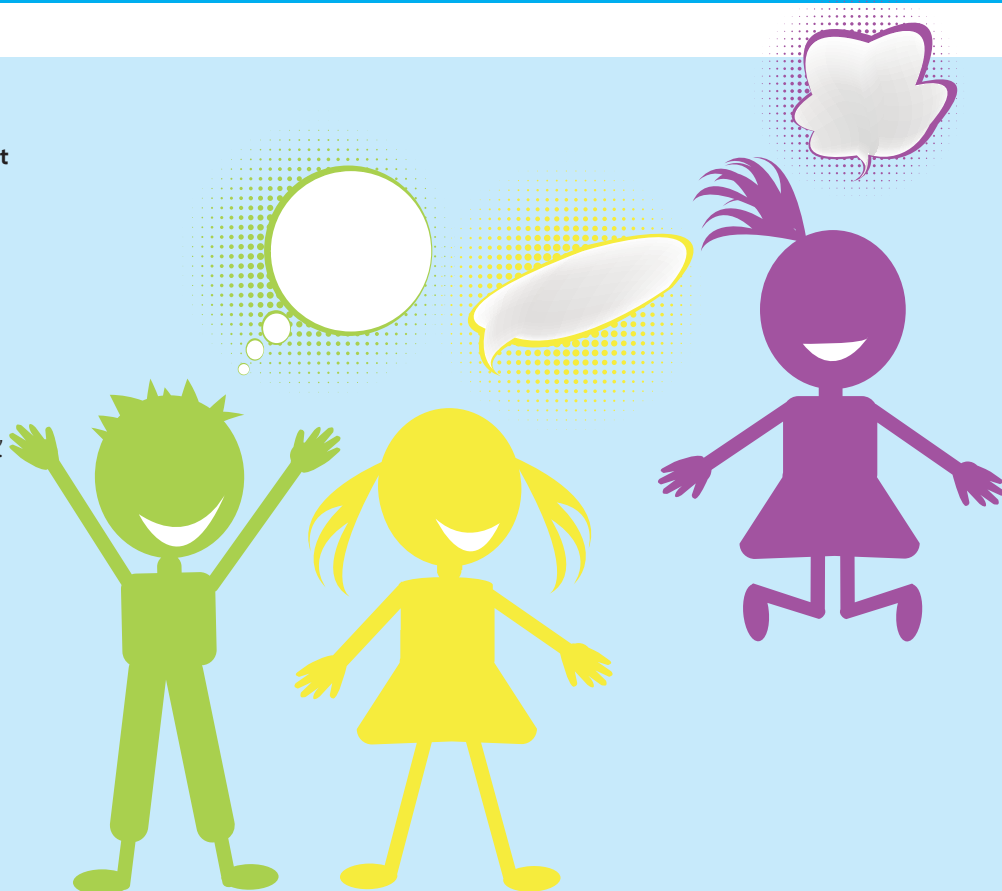
If children are exposed to both dialect and standard English they can learn to switch between them: in exactly the same way as bilingual children learn to switch between languages. But problems can arise if children don't master this ability to switch. That's because this affects their ability to communicate clearly and confidently with people outside their local community.

"This has a bearing on their future opportunities," says Ben Evans, the head of Edge Grove School in Hertfordshire. "What's going to make a university candidate stand out? Lots of children achieve top grades, so it comes down to the interview. Universities are looking for intelligent young adults who can use good, clear language to put across their views. It's a similar picture when it comes to careers. We don't know what jobs are going to exist in 20 years' time, but it's highly probable that many of them will need communication skills, because those lie at the heart of working in groups, facilitating groups and dealing with people."

Nevertheless, despite the importance of communication some parents opposed John White's crackdown on dialect at Colley Lane Primary. They called it 'patronising and insulting' Why?

Pride and prejudice

There are two reasons why a debate over dialect may raise hackles. The first is pride. Dialects are cherished. They reflect an area's history and culture. People worry that dialects may die out, so there is a natural tendency to try and protect them. The second is indignation. Suggesting that people should alter the way they speak – albeit only in particular circumstances – carries a implicit message: the way we speak matters, because



Look who's TALKING

Accent and dialect are part of what makes us who we are – so why are some schools apparently trying to change the way their pupils (and teachers) speak?

Katie Masters investigates...

it is something we are judged by. It is easy for these judgments to seem snobbish. But it comes back to the issue of communication. What aspects of speech are being judged?

The answer is accent, vocabulary and an individual's command of grammar. Like it or not, these are all things that help us quickly assess other people. Accent gives us clues about a person's origins. Vocabulary and grammar give us clues about her level of education. Dialects often obey different grammatical rules from standard English. They also use different words. As a result, if children can't switch comfortably between

these grammatical forms and words and those of standard English, they are likely to be viewed as less educated than children who can use standard English. That impression will have a negative impact on their future life chances.

"These are sensitive areas," says educational consultant Ros Wilson. "It's important to make it clear that this isn't about dismissing dialect: it's about teaching children to switch between dialect and standard English. It's using the right language for the right job."

So how can schools do that?



Teaching children to code switch

1. Talk like a duchess

"With Key Stage One level children, one of the easiest ways to introduce code switching is to use role play," says Ros. "I have a big navy hat with a feather in it. When I put it on I am 'The Duchess' and when the children speak to me they have to use words and language structures that the Duchess would use. The children enjoy the fun of it. It's non-threatening – if they can't think of appropriate words, the rest of the class will throw in suggestions to help them out. I also introduce the children to my imaginary friend Marmaduke. He's invisible, but he comes to school with me because he wants to learn. If the class is doing a writing session, Marmaduke will write too (I write for him). In his writing, he'll make the mistakes that I see children in the class making. At the end of the session, the children will help me to mark Marmaduke's work. They'll correct his mistakes: replace his colloquial phrases with standard English or correct his grammar. Again, it's helping them learn to code switch in a very non-threatening way."

2. Be a role model

Phil Mellen, the head of Stanley Grove Primary Academy in Manchester says, "At Stanley Grove, 90% of the children speak English as an additional language. Despite that, local dialectal phrases creep in. I hear children saying, 'I swear down,' instead of, 'I'm telling the truth' and 'You're peckin' me head' for, 'You're annoying me.' That's fine, as long as a teacher then explains the phrase is a colloquialism and gives an example of how it could be expressed using standard

English. Teachers have to model language – they may be a child's only role model for standard English. Teachers' speech needs to be grammatically correct. It's important they don't make grammatical errors when they're marking. In fact, it's important that every form of

communication that comes from the school is written to a high standard. And the other thing that's vital is making sure that children are reading literature of a high quality. Good books model good grammar and vocabulary. Re-stock the school library. Get authors in to inspire the children. Do parent-and-child school trips to the public library.

90%
OF OUR CHILDREN
SPEAK ENGLISH AS AN
ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

*Phil Mellen, the head
of Stanley Grove
Primary Academy
in Manchester*

COME AGAIN?

THE FOLLOWING PHRASES MAY COME TO A CLASSROOM NEAR YOU. GOLD STAR IF YOU CAN WORK OUT WHAT THEY ALL MEAN WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE ANSWERS...

- 1 Put t'wood in t'hole. (Yorkshire)
- 2 Kelly's on the drag, Miss. (Suffolk)
- 3 All right, butt? (Wales)
- 4 Tappy lappy doon the lonnen, quietly. (Newcastle)
- 5 It's puthering down. (Lincolnshire).
- 6 Give us a skelly. (Northern Ireland)
- 7 She's going gash! (Lancashire)
- 8 Away an' beil yer heid. (Glasgow)
- 9 'As g'an yam. (Cumbria)

- 1 Shut the door!
- 2 Kelly's running late, Miss.
- 3 Alright, my friend?
- 4 Walk down the lane, quietly.
- 5 It's raining.
- 6 Let me have a look.
- 7 She's really angry.
- 8 You're talking rubbish.
- 9 I'm going home.

3. Celebrate the spoken word

"For me, the drive to address language is driven by the desire to give children confidence in their voices," explains Benedick Ashmore Short, head of Hamford Academy in Essex. "I want them to be able to look up when they're speaking, make eye contact, control their emotions and – when they have a point of view – to feel able to express that point of view. We have a lot of children who can express themselves through the written word but who lose confidence when they talk. But, further on in their lives, if they can't express themselves verbally, other people won't believe in them.

"Everyone around a child acts as a role model: so we're also looking at the way the staff use language in school. On a recent professional development day, I brought an elocution teacher in to work with us. I was nervous about doing it – I thought some staff might feel offended. As it turned out they were so positive about the experience that we're planning to have the elocution teacher back to work with individuals. This isn't about accent: it's about using the correct tense, pausing at the right times."

The message for children is a simple one, as confirmed by Ros. "We should be proud of the way we talk," she says, "but we should be more proud of the way we communicate."

Wrong AGAIN

Five infuriating SPAG mistakes...
and how to stop children making them

No matter how many times you explain them, there are certain rules of spelling and grammar that just don't seem to stick in people's heads. The following five examples are perennially (and often perplexingly) problematic; you'll find confusion about them amongst everyone from children struggling with their first attempts at sentence construction or facing their Y6 SATs, to CEOs of major companies – and quite possibly in the staffroom, too. Will these teaching tips help pupils finally get them straight? Well it's not guaranteed; but they've got to be worth a try...

1 “I should of known...”

The issue is simple here. COULD'VE and COULD OF sound the same – so the only way to stop children writing the latter, when they mean the former, is to ensure they know why we say 'could've' in the first place. Take every opportunity to model non-contracted modal verbs in your own speech and writing ("Well done, Molly – although perhaps you COULD HAVE used more adjectives"), and get the class collaborating on a massive SHOULD'VE, WOULD'VE, COULD'VE wall display – Beverley Knight soundtrack optional...

2 “The dog wagged it's tail”

From the earliest days of teaching about apostrophes, we repeat to children that there are two ways to use them: to indicate missing letters when we join words together, and to show possession. In the above sentence, those rules are easily confused – it doesn't tend to

happen with other possessive pronouns (which also don't require an apostrophe), such as his, her and theirs, because they don't also happen to be contractions. There is really only one way to help pupils avoid this trap, and that is to remind them at every opportunity that IT'S means IT IS or IT HAS – and NOTHING ELSE. Every time they write 'it's' they should ask themselves 'can I replace this with IT IS or IT HAS?' And if the answer is NO, that means NO apostrophe.

3 “I've got less sweets than him!”

It is arguable that those '6 items or less' signs in supermarkets are at least partly to blame for the inability of so many people to remember the simple rule: if you can count what you are talking about, use FEWER; if you can't, use LESS. So, you can have FEWER sweets, minutes, bottles of pop or slices of toast – but should talk about LESS chocolate, time, lemonade or bread.

4 “This poem is by Grace and I”

The trouble with correcting the pronoun in a sentence such as 'ME AND Grace are playing together' (which should, of course, be 'Grace AND I are...') is that it's easy for children to take on board the unintended message that 'ME AND Grace' is always wrong, with '... AND I' a matter of elegance, rather than grammatical necessity. A failsafe way to help them get it right, every time, is to encourage them to repeat the sentence without 'Grace' ('this poem is by I'), and see whether it still works – because it should.

5 “Noisy, greedy and irritating, the MP has promised to get rid of pigeons from the town square...”

Dangling modifiers are the bread and butter of scriptwriters for satirical shows like Radio 4's *The News Quiz* – but when one isn't actually aiming for humour, they are best avoided. How? By asking WHO, or WHAT, is being described when you use a modifier – and then ensuring that person or object is RIGHT NEXT TO the description: “Noisy, greedy and irritating, the pigeons' days are numbered, says the MP.”





OVER TO YOU

FEELING SMUG ABOUT YOUR OWN MASTERY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE? TRY OUR FIENDISH SPELLING TEST TO SEE IF YOU ARE REALLY WORKING IN THE 'SECURE' BAND...

- 1 Mr Collins! Ms Jones! What on earth are you doing in the **stationery/stationary** cupboard?
- 2 Amusing though it was, a little more **practise/practice** could certainly have improved Y2's assembly today.
- 3 Thanks to the headteacher's impending **nuptials/nuptuals**, the atmosphere in school at the moment could be described as intense.
- 4 "Yes, indeed, Mrs Smith – **mischievous/mischevious** is one way to describe little Johnny..."
- 5 Given the quality of coffee available in the staffroom, the correct **pronunciation/pronounciation** of 'espresso' is unlikely to be a concern.
- 6 I am **definitely/definitely** going to stop marking after five more minutes.
- 7 There is a **miniscule/minuscule** chance that our next Education Secretary might actually know something about education.
- 8 Why on earth might being observed **effect/affect** the way someone teaches a lesson?
- 9 It is important, apparently, to keep work and one's homelife **separate/seperate**.
- 10 Whatever Mr Collins and Ms Jones are up to, I wish they would be a bit more **discrete/discreet** about it...

ANSWERS:

A, B, A, A, A, B, B, B, B, A



ROS WILSON is a former LA curriculum adviser, and creator of Andrell Education's Big Writing and V.C.O.P.

Hidden DANGER

Every curriculum has gaps – but some are wider and more treacherous than others. **Ros Wilson's** guide will help you and your pupils traverse the most perilous pitfalls...

Every curriculum has 'gaps' – it is probably impossible to write an English curriculum that doesn't, and even if you could, you wouldn't

want to. Such a curriculum would be a highly-detailed tome with no space for deviation, creativity, differentiation, diversity or anecdotal enrichment. There are countries where the designated curriculum is highly prescriptive and some where teachers are expected to be on the appointed page on the allotted day, but that is not conducive to developing independent and creative thinking students, who are willing to take risks and investigate new ideas.

The new English curriculum, however, is possibly the most prescriptive and least creative that teachers have ever been required to teach and has been given to schools at a time when central support is almost non-existent, budgets are depleted and schools are attempting to sift through a myriad of assessment models mainly produced by people with insufficient expertise to address the enormity of the job. Why, even the DfE failed to understand and address the complexities of providing valid performance descriptors for what achievement should look like. If it is unable to

achieve this, how can schools – who already have a full-time 'job' of providing, monitoring and managing successful academic and pastoral education for every child in their care – dedicate the time and expertise needed for the task?

We have now identified the first 'gap' in the writing curriculum. It is a gap in teachers' knowledge, caused by the imposition of challenging new content without appropriate support and guidance. And there are more...



1 Lack of teacher knowledge

Asking teachers to teach a list of 'stuff' they have never been taught themselves is a serious mistake, especially when there is no centrally provided support for mastery. The requirement that teachers should teach formal grammar to children aged five to 11 is arbitrary and misinformed; testing it at age 11 is a minefield. In English, the same word can play many roles and be defined as many parts of speech. Thus, the word 'before' may be taking the role of a preposition or of a conjunction, and 'present' may be a predicate,

a participle, a noun or a verb. Furthermore, terminology changes over time. I possess two different editions of The Concise Oxford Dictionary produced 10 years apart. One defines 'my' as a possessive pronoun and the other as a possessive determiner. Both are correct. 'My' is a possessive pronoun that determines to which object we're referring. But in a SPAG test we can be sure those marking the papers will only have one answer, and that if the answer given does not match the mark scheme, it will be marked wrong.

"Asking teachers to teach a list of 'stuff' they have never been taught themselves is a serious mistake, especially when there is no centrally provided support for mastery..."

3 No clear statement of intended outcomes

Giving a teacher a list of 'stuff' to teach does not enable him or her to interpret it into a curricular model that empowers children as writers. A great danger, in this new writing curriculum, is that a school could plan and organise the teaching of all the content in de-contextualised exercises and short models, but not develop that into a coherent programme for application and independence in extended writing. It is then left to the teacher to work out (or not) how to enable the transfer of those skills and that knowledge into the process of producing extended writing.

The solution to this 'gap' must be to ensure that all teachers know what the outcomes of effective teaching of writing should look like. This is surely the aim of the intended 'Performance Descriptors' for ages seven and 11, but alas, thus far the DfE has failed to provide these.

4 Failure to ensure a whole-school programme that puts learning into context for practice and development

As described above, when discussing the imposed requirements for grammar, it is quite possible for children to learn and demonstrate ability in the majority of the writing curriculum through de-contextualised activity, but never apply this learning in independent writing. I am still regularly asked why it is necessary to have an extended writing session every week. This horrifies me, as it is such a key and

challenging skill, and a child's prowess usually relies heavily on regular opportunities to practise, consolidate and innovate.

The solution is obvious: there should be a weekly, dedicated slot for independent writing during which children are required to demonstrate their improving ability to express themselves and to articulate in written language.

2 Missed buses

A second major gap is one that exists in every curriculum model and always has done. In Big Writing, we call it 'the missed buses.' Young children may 'miss' vital elements of learning for a range of reasons: they may not yet be ready for the challenge, or feeling tired or unwell; they may be absent, or simply not listening. If that element is not then retaught and effective learning confirmed, it creates a 'gap' that may make all future learning in that aspect of the subject insecure.

This type of gap is particularly damaging in writing as it leads to children aged seven and above not being able to spell confidently, having ill-formed handwriting, an awkward or incorrect pencil grip and/or posture, being insecure in use of punctuation, etc. Children with gaps in their learning caused by having 'missed the bus' are very often said to have 'special needs,' and this label can sometimes be used as a caveat to excuse a school's failure to teach that child effectively.

The solution to these types of gaps is to completely re-teach the writing process in the first half term of Year 3, when all children are now ready to learn them, and are mature enough for the teacher to be confident the learning will be retained.

5 Too much support

The final major gap in the impact of the curriculum is when children's once-weekly opportunities to write independently are not truly unsupported. This is often the case for children who may be behind the expectation for their age or who are still developing English as an additional language. The teacher may have spent significant time discussing potential content, vocabulary and phrases with the children. There may be examples on the whiteboard. A child may have adult or peer support or even a model text to guide him.

The solution to this is that, whilst everyone is committed to support for these children throughout the week, we need every child (at least from Year 2 onwards) to write once a week with no support. Only then can we know what the child can and cannot truly do, and so provide effective next steps. Supported writing masks the true needs a child may have.

Teaching writing effectively has always been challenging. We at Andrell Education are grateful to be able to offer a guaranteed approach that ensures success as writers for all mainstream children, independently of this or any other curriculum. Nevertheless, failure to heed these gaps would still be an impediment to every child becoming a confident and expressive writer.

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guided reading lessons to move them on. In the guided sessions we avoid too much directed questioning and use techniques that allow children to probe their own understanding. We chart the progress through a sequence of sessions which work cumulatively to build understanding.” It’s a rigorous but rewarding process, and teachers find that planning time is reduced once the strategies are embedded in practice.

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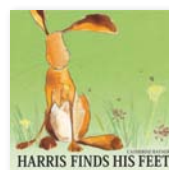
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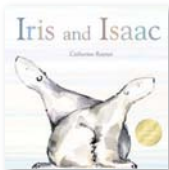
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Sylvia is the only dragon in the whole world, and she is very lonely... until one day, she meets Bird. A heart-warming story about friendship and appreciating what you have.



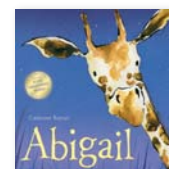
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PIE CORBETT is an educationalist and author

Lost *property*

There's more to **Pie Corbett's** story than first meets the eye – children will need to read closely to uncover its themes...



It had been her grandmother's and now it was hers. Leah held the locket tight in the palm of her hand and squeezed her eyes shut.

Gary peered at her, "You alright?" She nodded back at him. "Give us a look then," he demanded.

The silver locket was the shape of a small heart and on the outside surface, someone had etched the letters GH/SH above the date – 1954. Gently, Leah opened the catch and inside Gary could see two tiny photos – his gran and grandad when they had been younger. He grunted and ran off to play on his Xbox. Gary never seemed to mind anything. Leah envied the way he took everything in his five-year-old stride.

That night Leah hid the locket in her room. Carefully, she tucked it under the radiator where surely no one would ever dream of looking. Living with six other children was all very well but it did mean it was hard to keep a secret. She lay awake for a while, listening to Tamara's steady breathing from the bunk below. The moon crawled across the floor and, eventually, cast its bright light onto her bed. She often stayed up and waited for this moment. To be bathed in silver light somehow made her special.

The next morning was Saturday. Saturday meant taking the shopping down to Gran's but that wasn't going to happen any more. Instantly, a dull, heavy sadness crept over Leah that felt as if it would never go away. What could she fill the morning by doing? Tamara was already downstairs and she could hear the TV mumbling from below, accompanied by Gary's excited whoops. At least he was happy.

Clambering out of bed, Leah felt under the radiator and at once realised that the locket had gone. She lay down on the carpet and squinted into the space between the wall and the radiator but it was not there. It had to be Tamara who'd taken it! No one else could have known her secret hiding place.

Twenty minutes later, the pair of them were standing outside, fists clenched and panting heavily. Mrs Mac was having none of that sort of behaviour! The two girls stood glaring at each other.

"I never took it!" Tamara hissed, once again.

Not believing her, Leah turned away and peered through the back window. She could see Gary watching the TV. He was sitting on his own and, as he sat there, she seemed to see him more clearly than before. He was alone, with his thumb in his mouth, rocking gently side to side. In one hand, he was holding 'monkey' his bedraggled soft toy that he dragged everywhere. Then she saw it. Clenched in the other hand, he was holding the locket.

Leah saw him peer at the photo of their gran. He sniffed and stroked the picture with his pudgy fingers.

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"Twenty minutes later, the pair of them were standing outside, fists clenched and panting heavily. Mrs Mac was having none of that sort of behaviour! The two girls stood glaring at each other..."

FREE ONLINE RESOURCE

Share this exclusive Pie Corbett story with your class and then try the activities on the next page. To get a whiteboard-friendly version of the story, visit teachprimary.com/Corbett

TEACH PIE'S LOST PROPERTY...

I'm not too sure where this story came from. It's a mixture of things that have happened to me – I was one of five children and my mother did have such a locket. I suspect that in the story I am Gary, not giving much away on the surface and trying to keep the undercurrents hidden. Obviously, this is a story that may need careful handling but literature is about whom we are, what happens to us and dealing with sadness is part and parcel of growing up.

Read and gather ideas

Read the story to the class and take initial thoughts, responses and comments. Some children may need to talk about any similar experiences. In this sort of session, 'all ideas are accepted' which means that everyone has the right to say what they wish, and be taken seriously. Move on to children working in twos or threes to focus on these key aspects:

1 Questions

Where are the unanswered questions? Make a list of these and then ask the children to rank them in order, putting the most fruitful for discussion first on their list. If they miss something, draw their attention to a section or line for further consideration. They will suggest questions such as: Who is Mrs Mac? Are they all her children? What has just happened? Why did Gary steal the locket?

2 Inferring

Discussions around the questions will involve plenty of inference. Take the children back to what is stated in the text so that they back up their ideas. Ask them to build on and challenge each other's suggestions, and to offer different ways of looking at what the story might mean.

3 Imagining

Use a simple 'feelings graph' to track how Leah feels, complete with ups and downs. Annotate the graph with quotes from the story where the author suggests how she feels.

4 Prediction

Get the class to discuss what happened before the story starts and what might happen next. Encourage them to refer back to the text and find clues to back up their ideas.

6 Summarisation

Ask the children to try and capture what the story is about in one word. Make a class list of suggested words and then ask them to choose the main three. Put this new list together and gradually you will find that this takes the class towards capturing the essence of the story. Another avenue into summarising would be to get the children to write a 150-word 'blurb' for the back cover. What is this story all about?

5 Dramatise

Act out some of the mini scenes in the story – Gary and Leah looking at the locket; hiding the locket; Leah lying in bed; finding the locket has gone; accusing Tamara; being told off by Mrs Mac; staring through the window. Of course, any of these scenes could be frozen and the characters can be asked to 'think aloud' their thoughts and feelings.

Set up a 'think aloud' exercise in which children can contrast what is running through the minds of Leah, Gary, Tamara, and Mrs Mac. Explore Mrs Mac's thoughts further by staging a 'back-to-back' phone call between her and a friend about the incident, including what happened next when Leah came in. After some drama work, ask the children to write Leah or Tamara's diary entry about what happened.



Fig. 1

Underlying pattern	New ideas
Main character (MC) has been given or finds a precious item.	Brian finds a very large key on the rubbish dump
Describe the item and people's reaction.	It is silver and strangely marked.
The MC hides it.	He hides it in his Dad's allotment shed.
Time passes.	The next day, he goes to school.
The object has disappeared/ been lost.	When he gets back, it has gone.
The MC searches – in the wrong place.	He thinks his brother has taken it and there is an argument.
The MC finds the object.	On the school trip to the museum, he sees the key beside an ancient box. He opens and the box and...

Get children ready to write

Tune the children into the 'lost and found' theme by writing a simple list poem using the following pattern:

*When I lost my paintbrush,
I found a gallery of rainbows and gardens!*

*When I lost my shoes,
I found a race of laces!*

*When I lost my voice,
I found a choir of consonants!*

*When I lost my glasses,
I found a spectacle of surprises!*

*When I lost a tiger,
I found a cage of wasps!*

The knack is to think of something that you might lose first of all. Then tie that idea into the second line. Show the children my ideas, try several new ones together and then let them loose. It doesn't matter if their ideas do not tie up, just let them enjoy writing 'lost and found' sentences.

Now box up the story with the children (see fig.1, left). This should help them begin to see the underlying pattern; eventually they will be able to use this when writing their own 'lost and found' story. To complete the planner, ask the class to come up with ideas for a new story.

Once they have completed this exercise as a class, the children should then be able to write planners for their own stories.

Use shared writing to create a class version of the story before the children go on to write their own. Stretch this over a number of days so that their stories gradually emerge. You could use the following paragraphs as a starter:

Gary almost missed it. He'd just found a pile of rubbish and was busy sifting through when a box of wires and cogs caught his attention, and he nearly passed it by. Sticking out of the rubble was a huge, old key. He picked it out and held it up for closer inspection. It felt solid and heavy in his hand. It shone in the sun but was cold to touch.

The key was huge. One end was circular with a hole rather like an eye, while the other was curiously shaped, so that from one angle the teeth looked rather like a strange city skyline. What sort of door would a key that size fit, he wondered.

"What have you got?"

Gary didn't answer. He tucked the key away and pretended to carry on searching through the rubble and rubbish...



"Another avenue into summarising would be to get the children to write a 150-word 'blurb' for the back cover. What is this story all about?"



LEVELS—

Let's go further

Shirley Clarke unpicks what really matters when assessing children's writing...



The removal of levels may have caused a degree of confusion, but it has also been an opportunity for all of us involved in education to take stock and decide what really matters. And in my view, that means formative assessment; it is this that ensures achievement and progress, not its measurement.

Formative *assessment*, however, is a misleading term; it implies something is 'done to' the child to elicit information. In truth, what it actually describes is the process of learning

and teaching, and the central role of the child in becoming 'assessment literate': all-knowing about what she is learning, how to learn, how to critique, how to review, and how to make improvements.

That's not to say summative assessment does not have a role to play, and I'd suggest writing a clear policy that includes school-wide strategies to measure summative, and enable formative, progress. For instance, you might want to commit to termly class progress meetings in which a range of evidence is considered to ensure

every child is on track. Staff could also meet regularly to examine specific subjects, picking one area to discuss – such as spelling or story structure – and comparing samples from across the age ranges to make sure there is clear progress. Then there are moderation meetings to consider, in which samples of writing are used to determine whether teachers share the same interpretation of the performance descriptors. And each teacher could keep examples of four children's writing in a progress portfolio, which is updated termly.



SHIRLEY CLARKE has worked as a teacher and lecturer, as well as directing of national research projects

A tick list to assess what great formative assessment looks like might include:

- ✓ A learning culture that values talk partners and mixed-ability groupings for maximum inclusion.
- ✓ Assessment literate pupils, who know learning objectives, success criteria, and how to self and peer assess.
- ✓ Whole class starter questions for paired discussion at the beginning of lessons, revealing pupils' current understanding – which may affect planning.
- ✓ Clear learning objectives, co-constructed success criteria and the analysis of excellent examples.
- ✓ Teachers who wander around the room, and continue to probe children's understanding as they do so, in order to discover misconceptions before it's too late.
- ✓ Agreed staff strategies for dealing with revealed misconceptions or children who don't 'get it' during the lesson.
- ✓ Stopping mid-lesson to use the visualiser and critique a piece of writing at random, modelling the process of review and helping children to see what excellence looks like.
- ✓ Paired, cooperative review of writing in which improvements are made there and then.
- ✓ Teachers' marking that is specific and leads to progress.

That is the big picture; from here we can go on to look at some of the key points in more detail.



Shared criteria

Success criteria are tools to help children develop their writing, though they do not ensure quality. Non-fiction writing, for example, relies on children knowing which compulsory elements to include, but remembering to add all the ingredients of a balanced argument (for and against, title as question, etc), for instance, does not, in itself, guarantee the quality of the end result. Children need to include these ingredients, however, and maximum impact is achieved if they are co-constructed with the teacher. Present them with two different (but good) examples of non-fiction writing and ask them to discuss the defining characteristics in pairs, before collating a class list.

Then there are criteria children need to bear in mind every time they write – spelling, handwriting, punctuation, etc. In most cases (e.g. when using speech marks), children just need to remember the rules to be correct, and so it's a good idea to have them displayed on the classroom wall.

By contrast, when it comes to fiction, success criteria are optional. Children might identify a list of possible features in a successful piece of suspense, for instance, but again, simply using these will not necessarily lead to a high-quality piece.

Ultimately, the only thing that really matters is the intent of the author and the impact on the reader – in other words, what makes good writing (see panel, page right)?

We know that children's depth and breadth of reading matter is the key to their writing – avid readers are good writers. Unfortunately, many children seldom read, so the next best

thing is to show them many examples of excellence – often alongside the not-so-excellent, so the difference is clear.

I knew a teacher who helped his class to understand quality in a balanced argument by introducing them to a piece he'd written as child in 1997. Though his writing met all the success criteria for a balanced argument, the children rated it as Level 3. He then showed them a very good balanced argument from his previous Year 6 class, which they rated at Level 5. Their task then, in pairs, was to compare the two pieces – both of which had all the features of a balanced argument – and decide why one was better than the other, being specific with their answers. When the teacher sat with the children to ask what they had found, he received answers such as, "You only wrote one sentence giving your opinion in your closing, whereas the other person developed her closing, giving lots of opinions."

Cooperative feedback

When people talk about peer marking or peer assessment they usually mean children swapping books. In this scenario, the pupil becomes a teacher, working on her own and making comments on the work – what she liked and what could be improved. However, I have seen many examples of pieces marked by children in this way and, even at secondary level, it tends to be superficial and relatively unhelpful.

Cooperative feedback, on the other hand, is an entirely different and more productive experience. In this situation, both children read and discuss one of their pieces of work together, with one book placed on top of the other. Whoever is having her work discussed has control of the pen and the final say – unlike the swapping books scenario. Working together, the children decide the best bits (they may disagree) and underline these in colour – they must give reasons for their choices. They then talk about improvements that could be made and the author makes them there and then, writing on the work in a new colour. As the space available for improvements will be limited, many schools leave the left hand side of children's books blank. No comments are written on the piece by either child because this would take away precious time for making actual improvements. Once finished, the children repeat the activity with the author child's book on top.

This process can and should be modelled during mid-lesson learning stops in which one child's work is selected at random and placed under the visualiser. It's then up to the pupils, in talk partners, to discuss what they like about it, focusing on not only success criteria, but what



makes good writing. The class then share their suggested improvements and the author of the work decides which she likes best, or comes up with one of her own. This is then written on the screen and the best bits highlighted.

Teacher marking

If the children have done all this, where does it leave the teacher? For decades, studies have shown that most teacher marking has little impact on pupil progress: it's too late, too opaque, and too generalised. Any 'next time you write...' comments are likely to disappear into the ether – improvements need to be applied to and followed up on the piece in question.

Feedback at its best is much more immediate, with lots of oral interaction and cooperative peer marking. This sort of 'marking' such as ongoing improvements made by pairs during a lesson, is often invisible and so needs to be made much more explicit. Here are a number of useful strategies for doing just that:

- 1** Use codes in books to describe the type of feedback given: VS (visualiser stop); VF (verbal feedback); CI (cooperatively improved); SA (self-assessment).
- 2** Write improvements in a different colour using a 'polishing pen'.
- 3** Give children space for improvements to be made, such as the left hand side of the book, so amendments are not squashed in-between the lines or at the foot of the page.
- 4** With cooperatively improved work, get both children to initial or write their names at the foot of the page.
- 5** Write comments to acknowledge where work has been cooperatively improved in the lesson.

Where teachers feel it is appropriate to write an improvement comment, these don't need to be lengthy. In fact, the more targeted they are, the more successful they tend to be in eliciting a good response from the child (if a child writes that 'On Christmas morning the house was in chaos', but the description lacks detail, add a note to her book asking her to expand on 'How was there chaos?').

Piecing it all together

Before I finish, I'd like to share with you this quote from John Hattie (2011):

"The mistake I made was seeing feedback as something teachers provided to students. I discovered that feedback is most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher. What they know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged – then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful. Feedback to teachers makes learning visible."

This gets to the heart of good formative assessment. It is only when we find out what children do or don't understand, and then do something about it, that they can progress; feeling confident, learning from each other, and seeing models of excellence. They need to be able to get to a point where, unprompted, they are constantly reviewing and improving their writing, like real authors.

Shirley's latest book, *Outstanding Formative Assessment*, can be ordered from her website, shirleyclarke-education.org

WHAT MAKES GOOD WRITING?

DISPLAY THESE QUESTIONS ON YOUR CLASSROOM WALL FOR DAILY USE

- 1** What effect do you want your writing to have on the reader? How do you want him to feel at the beginning and at the end?
- 2** What is the best way to achieve this (e.g. dialogue, slow pace, atmosphere of suspense, humour, etc.)?
- 3** Have you avoided obvious clichéd descriptions (e.g. *the white, sparkling snow*)?
- 4** Have you made sure your adjectives tell the reader something they would not otherwise have known (e.g. *the rushing water*, rather than *the wet water*)?
- 5** Have you chosen interesting, informative nouns and verbs (e.g. *The supermodel devoured the lettuce leaf*)?
- 6** Have you shown the reader, rather than telling him?
- 7** Does your writing make the reader want to read on?

*Michael Morpurgo*

“When children want to learn, they will”

Focusing on test results is not the way to nurture our young people as readers and writers, says **Michael Morpurgo...**

Literacy' is the government's word now, and it's not one of which I am fond, loaded as it has become with political baggage. It is certainly good that over the past few decades we have recognised that the whole subject of reading, and getting children to read, is of prime importance – but rather than 'literacy', I wish we could talk about stories, poems, literature, creativity.

You see, once you label the complex development of a child's relationship with language and expression 'literacy', it tends to become first and foremost a written discipline. And that is putting the cart before the horse.

Spelling, punctuation, comprehension and handwriting – they all come in the package; but the problem with talking about these things (which are not, of course, unimportant – quite the opposite) arises when you do it before, and even to the exclusion of, the *enjoyment* of prose, poetry and drama. The love of creating and engaging with literature.

The politicians – and many head teachers and sometimes teachers, too – are looking at it in terms of outcomes: “How is all this going to appear in terms of results?” Over the years it has become fixed uppermost in people's minds that unless you deal with the cart first and the horse second, you are not going to achieve the

short term results you are required to produce. They may well be right about that. Everyone is fixated on this idea about measuring what a child learns in terms of being able to satisfy the examiners tomorrow. But there is more to education than that.

I was on a plane recently, and saw the film *Dead Poets Society*. It was especially moving for me, as it was about a school in America not unlike the one I attended in England (an experience I remember as full of fear and anxiety; a saga of failure and embarrassment). And the same thing applied then as applies now – what children need are teachers who understand that they are individuals, each



with his or her own, unique brilliance within. That's what education is about – bringing out the person a child is meant to be, not achieving statistical success according to strict, narrow criteria.

You hear politicians talking about how wonderful the 'results' are in places like South Korea; but there is a very different culture there. That's fine, but for us to try and imitate it is missing the point of who we are – our individuality, and our creativity. Because if these little islands have done anything wonderful for the world, it is the development and spread of the English language; through trade, yes, but also through literature, at which we are extraordinarily good – especially in the area of children's literature, which we practically invented! Those authors who created Toad, and William, and Winnie the Pooh didn't do it because they went to school and Did Literacy. Those stories came from a different place of learning, where children were allowed to explore, even when it became uncomfortable.

It would be wonderful, I think, if there could be half an hour at the end of every school day (that time when everyone knows you don't teach or learn anything, anyway) given entirely to story making. This used to happen at the last school I taught at – for the final thirty minutes, the teachers would read to the children, or there would be drama, or writing, or music, or all of them at once. It was the eagerly anticipated treat after hard work; and once it was over there was no

“What children need are teachers who understand that they are individuals, each with his or her own, unique brilliance within. That's what education is about – bringing out the person a child is meant to be, not achieving statistical success according to strict, narrow criteria.”

discussion, no questions, no test. It was all about the moment, and everyone loved it. That's the kind of excitement we have to leave room for in the curriculum... otherwise, teachers are left constantly trying to push a rock uphill.

When children want to learn, they will. You can force feed them, of course, and it will produce the goods in the short term – but it won't ease their progress through life. We need to give our young people something

else; something no test can measure. That battle between the conservatism of what politicians demand of our schools, teachers and children, and the holistic needs of the child – too easily and cheaply dismissed as 'so 1960s' – is something that can be fought with the passing on of stories, and the love of storytelling. That's putting the horse first, where it should be. The best teachers know that... and, thank goodness, there are thousands upon thousands of those.

Illustration from The Butterfly Lion (HarperCollins)





Order! ORDER!

The power of persuasion is a key element of the political process – and it's never too early to get children involved, says **Ruth Clements...**

Debate is at the heart of Parliament. As every teacher knows, the way to run an effective debate or circle time is with some order, and plenty of enthusiasm. When the head walks past and glances into the classroom, what might look like pandemonium to the unknowing eye is actually achieving a great deal. Despite what we may see in the media coverage of Prime Minister's Question Time, the same is true of Parliamentary debate; when the procedures and construct are not fully understood, the value being gained by the participants cannot be fully measured. This guide aims to demystify some of the conventions surrounding discussion and debate in Parliament and to give ideas about introducing young children to the process – both to enhance their skills of persuasive speaking (and consequently, writing),

and also to spark what could develop into a lifelong and valuable engagement with politics.

Rules of engagement

Debating begins with a motion: a statement outlining what will be argued. A classic like 'mobile phones should be allowed in class', or the more unusual 'Goldilocks was just a naughty girl' will divide the participants. Using a yes-no continuum to ascertain initial opinions is a good starting point, and also highlights why debate is useful. It is very rare that we all agree, and we are bound to argue. But if you want to win your opponent over, you need to argue well: enter debate. And that means you need evidence and depth for your arguments – the ability to offer something beyond 'because that's what I think' in response to the question, 'why?' Asking oneself 'why, many times over, is key to constructing a sound argument.

Being able to argue in a structured manner is important, without resorting to personal insults or 'Well you're...you're just wrong!'. It is to this end that MPs never refer to one another by name within the Chamber, but rather as 'the Honourable Lady/Gentleman' or 'the Honourable Member'; a key principle of Parliamentary debate is that you attack the idea, not the person.

Argument is essential in debate; without it we are simply giving speeches. In the 'Mace' style of debating often used in schools, four speakers are given seven minutes each to speak – two for and two against, after which the audience is permitted to question them. For younger children, it may be more appropriate that everyone is given the opportunity to speak, explain and explore the topics, so that all engage in debate.

"It is very rare that we all agree, and we are bound to argue. But if you want to win your opponent over, you need to argue well: enter debate"



Rebuttal is a technical debating term for disagreeing with your opponent, claiming that the other person's points are false and pointing out why you think they're wrong. However this does not mean casting your opponent as a liar – in fact this is 'unparliamentary' and can have you suspended from the Chamber (as can insulting Members, even if you use Shakespearean language). Rebuttal means being able to argue why your opponent is wrong, and why you are right. One technique is to question the opposition and perhaps undermine or contradict their points (asking 'why?' again). Another is to offer your own points persuasively. There is an abundance of opportunities for persuasive language in debate; appealing to your listeners' emotions, giving historical examples, or repeating key words and phrases.

In order to engage more reserved learners, ABC cards offer a way in. Every child has a set of cards and can hold up A to add a new point, B to build on the point being made and C to contradict it, whilst a classmate is speaking. The chair of the debate therefore makes a more informed choice of how to develop the discussion. Often children want to make their own new point, however ABC cards encourage listening and start developing the concept of building on what somebody else has said, or expanding the point further.

House party

Now you're ready to create your very own House of Commons in the classroom. The role of the Speaker could be compared to the teacher. His/her cry of 'Order! Order!' should draw the focus back to the current speaker. The Speaker chooses the next MP to speak, and should try to ensure a fair representation of the many viewpoints.

To become the next person to speak in the debate, bobbing commences. Rather than hands flying up and down, or lolly sticks being plucked from a jar, the potential contributors must stand and catch the Speaker's eye. Wave papers, lean into their eyeline, do what it takes to be noticed. Once you've caught the Speaker's eye, you stay standing whilst you speak.

If during a speech, you feel more information or clarification is needed, you can ask the person speaking to 'give way' by standing up during their speech. The person speaking announces 'I will give way,' and sits down to listen to the question, stands to respond, and then continues what they were saying. This is known as an intervention.

Undoubtedly there will be moments where people agree or disagree with the person speaking. Applause is rare in the Chamber. To agree, shout 'hear hear!' and to disagree grumble loudly and wave your paper at your opponent.

As the debate draws to a close (sometimes before all willing speakers have had a chance to contribute) there is a vote. The cry of "Division! Clear the Lobbies!" from the Speaker indicates that the MPs or Peers must get up and move to the Aye or No lobbies (corridors) for the Commons and the Content or Not Content lobbies for the Lords. The aye or content lobby is always to the right of the Speaker. Choose two children to act as 'tellers' by writing down the names of voters in each lobby, and counting the number of voters. The Speaker then announces that 'The [winning side] have it! The [winning side] have it!'

Political parties believe in the changes their party are striving for, and it is this that leads to lively, impassioned Parliamentary debate. This spirited exchange happens when people are engaged with the topic and want to persuade others to their way of thinking. Choose a picture from a news event that gets your class thinking, a local topic that is close to their hearts or a statement that will divide them. Above all, get them talking – and in doing so, taking the first step in their understanding of Parliament and in a lifelong engagement in politics.

There are all kinds of free resources for schools, including a new, 800 year anniversary Magna Carta assembly pack; lesson plans on Votes for Women, the Budget, debating and more. Search by Key Stage and resource type at parliament.uk/teach

The next bookings day for school tours of Parliament is Thursday, 24th September.





And the winners are...

The Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards shine the spotlight on books your pupils will love

Guiding children towards the kinds of books that will genuinely inspire, excite and amuse them – whilst also helping them progress along their personal reading path – is, of course, a vital element of every teacher's job.

With such a vast and rich range of titles for young people published every year, however, selecting those that are truly exceptional can be a daunting, not to mention time-consuming, task. Literary awards are a great way of swiftly identifying stories that have a proven mark of quality – and now there is a new scheme, especially designed to recognise books that are perfect for primary school teachers to share with, and recommend to, pupils.

The Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards are a celebration of original and engaging writing, with the winners and runners up in each of three categories (EYFS, KS1 and KS2) selected by a panel of dedicated and experienced judges according to a set of criteria including breadth of appeal, opportunities for language play, discussion and learning, and effective use of illustration, as well as sheer enjoyment value. Every book that appears on the shortlists has something very special to offer, and any of them might be the title that turns a reluctant reader into an enthusiastic bookworm – a brilliant result indeed!

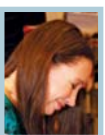


Meet the judges...



JO WHILEY is one of the best-loved voices in British broadcasting, having joined Radio 1 in

1993; she currently plays a mix of new music and classic album tracks from Monday to Wednesday on Radio 2, and presents the station's 'In Concert', featuring live performances and a gigs round-up. She has four children, and loves finding new books they can share together.



CARI ROSEN is the editor of Mumsnet's sister site Gransnet, a social networking site for the UK's 14 million

grandparents. Previously a successful television producer, and the author of three books, she is responsible for all the book content on Gransnet including the book club and the hugely popular kids' and picture books of the month features.



JON MAYHEW is a man with a dark imagination, who has always loved writing and storytelling. An

English teacher for 20 years, he now works as a specialist teacher for children with autism – and, when neither teaching nor writing, he plays in ceilidh bands and runs marathons. Jon's debut novel, Mortlock, was shortlisted

for the 2011 Waterstone's Children's Book Prize.



CORINNE GOTCH is programme co-ordinator for children's publishing partners at The

Reading Agency. She is an experienced, well-known publicity professional who has focused on children's books PR during the last 10 years, working with an array of writers, illustrators, publishers, librarians, schools, festivals and industry contacts.



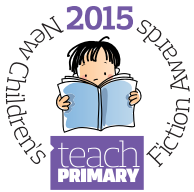
ABIGAIL MOSS is the deputy director of the National Literacy Trust and is

passionate about raising UK literacy levels in disadvantaged areas. She previously led a local government library improvement programme and worked at Arts Council England, and has also been a secondary school English teacher and a performer.



BROUGH GIRLING is the co-founder of the Readathon charity. A qualified teacher, he has

written over 30 children's books, broadcast widely and lectured in children's reading from Canada to Cairo. He was head of The Children's Book Foundation in London and Founding Editor of the Young Telegraph.



EYFS

Winner

OI FROG!

(Kes Gray & Jim Field,
Hodder Children's Books)

Frogs should sit on logs; whether they like it or not. Why? Because cats sit on mats, gophers on sofas, gorillas on pillars, and dogs... well, you don't want to know! This is glorious, rhyming fun from a master storyteller, with equally vivid and memorable illustrations. A real treat.

Jo Whiley: "This is simply an absolute delight to read aloud with your child and became a firm bedtime favourite with my 6 year old daughter, Coco. It was a fun read but also educational in terms of teaching spellings and phonetics while introducing her to new breeds of creatures and things they perched on! I also love the illustration – bright, clean and stylish. I took this into her school and it was a huge hit with both her teacher and classmates."



"I love judging picture books. A good picture book is one where you think 'I must share this with one of my grandchildren.' I look for a book where the child can tell me what's going on, without being able to read the words – so much more exciting than just being read to...."

Brough Girling



Runner up

THIS BOOK JUST ATE MY DOG!

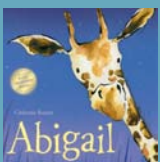
(Richard Byrne,
Oxford University Press)

Brilliantly simple and clever, this book is proof that you really don't need flaps, sound effects and glitter to provide a hilariously interactive reading experience – as, with the help of the reader's imagination, characters become swallowed by the very pages on which they are appearing.

"I loved the clever way it played with the form of the book so that it became a part of the story. I even caught myself trying to shake the characters free!"

Jon Mayhew

Also shortlisted:



ABIGAIL
(Catherine Rayner, Little Tiger Press)
A typically beautiful and engaging story from Catherine Rayner, about Abigail, a giraffe who loves to count but struggles to practise her favourite skill.



USE YOUR IMAGINATION
(Nicola O'Byrne, Nosy Crow)
Another creatively interactive book, which plays cleverly with the expectations created by traditional fairy tales, to enormously comic effect.



THOSE PESKY RABBITS (Ciara Flood, Templar Publishing)
Funny and lovable, this is the tale of a grumpy bear who is finally won around to friendship by the innocent persistence of his wide-eyed and uncynical new neighbours. Adorable.



DRAGON JELLY (Claire Freedman & Sue Hendra, Bloomsbury)
Gleefully grim, this is a revolting celebration of all things disgusting, as Max hosts a monster party complete with a feast to make grown-ups shudder... and children squeal with delight.

KEY STAGE 1

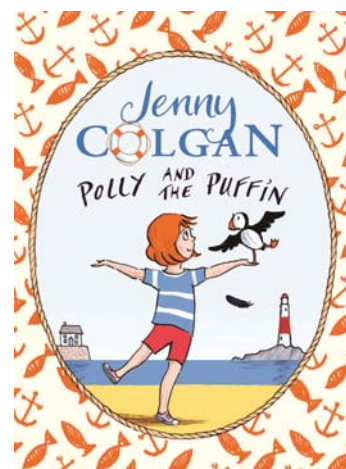
Winner

POLLY AND THE PUFFIN (Jenny Colgan, Little, Brown)

Sweet without being sickly, gorgeously illustrated by Thomas Docherty, and perfect both for sharing and early independent reading, this is a real gift of a book –

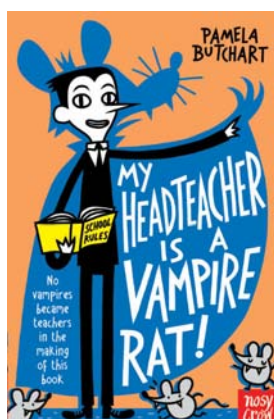
suggestions for activities, including recipes that could easily be followed in the classroom, are included at the end.

Brough Girling: "A really nice story, and the jokes and activity ideas at the end embellish an otherwise quite old-fashioned, gentle book. Lovely."



"I found placing the top four impossible. I chose the one that engaged me the most... but I am still torn, as the books are all so incredibly different."

Cari Rosen



Runner up

MY HEADTEACHER IS A VAMPIRE RAT (Pamela Butchart, Nosy Crow)

Definitely a cut above your average 'hilarious classroom romp', this is as 'zany' and 'bonkers' as the blurb suggests – but also cleverly plotted, well written and genuinely laugh-out-loud funny, with huge appeal for readers of both genders and all levels of ability.



Cari Rosen: "I read this on the way to work on a packed tube train, attracting the attention of a number of other passengers, all rather amused to see a grown-up so obviously engaged with a book clearly intended for people several decades younger – oh and my seven-year-old loved it, too!"

Also shortlisted:



Maisie Hitchens, the case of the blind beetle
(Holly Webb, Little Tiger Press)

A young, would-be detective in Victorian London solves the mystery of a stolen, precious artefact with the help of her trusty puppy; sharing insights into the stories of the adults she meets along the way.



Secret Agent Mummy
(Steve Cole, Random House)

As always, Cole serves up snappy dialogue, fast-paced action, wit, suspense and a dash of rudeness – as Ancient Egyptian mystery and magic collide with a modern world of spies, school and sisters...



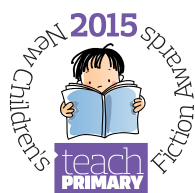
George and the Unbreakable Code
(Lucy and Stephen Hawking, Random House)

Perfect for pupils with an interest in all things scientific, this is a smart and pacey adventure underpinned with the kind of lively curiosity you'd expect from Stephen Hawking and his daughter.



The Big, Blue Thing on the Hill
(Yuval Zommer, Templar Publishing)

With gorgeous illustrations and a funny story that gently shares a message about the power of teamwork, this is a great picture book for early independent readers, as well as a joy to read aloud.



KEY STAGE 2

Winner

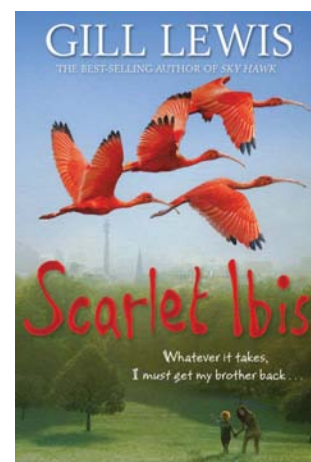


SCARLET IBIS

(Gill Lewis,
Oxford University Press)

12-year-old Scarlet cares both for her younger brother, Red, who has autism, and her chronically depressed mother; and she staunchly holds her little family together until an accident rips them apart. Beautifully told and deeply moving, this is a story, ultimately, of connection, and the triumph of the human spirit.

Cari Rosen: "Thought-provoking and well-written, with characters who come to life and engage the reader from the start. This is a book that really makes you think – and one that you will remember long after you've put it down."



"It was incredibly difficult to choose a winner from this category. The standard of storytelling was extremely high and the language wonderful."

Jo Whiley

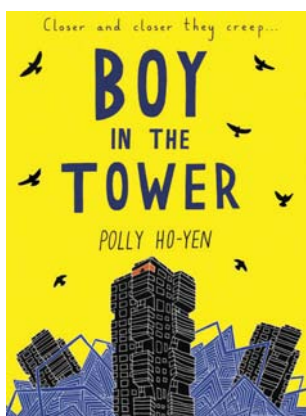
Runner up

BOY IN THE TOWER

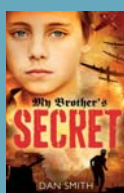
(Polly Ho-Yen, Random House)

This extraordinary, haunting work tells the tale of Ade, who lives a rather ordinary life in a tower block apartment with his mother – until the plants arrive, and the buildings start to fall down... A dystopian adventure with enormous heart, it's utterly gripping from start to finish.

Abigail Moss: "It weaves big, and sometimes uncomfortable, themes into an utterly compelling and totally unique story, and in the end is a testament to love, and to the power of nature, in many different forms. The main character, Ade, is evidence of a deep understanding of the individuality of children and of what bravery really means. One of the best books I've read, ever."



Also shortlisted:



My Brother's Secret, (Dan Smith, Chicken House)

The thought provoking tale of a young teenager in 1941 Germany, who gradually discovers the truth about the Fuhrer he's been taught to adore.



Binny for Short, (Hilary McKay, Hodder Children's Books)

A coming of age story with vivid characters, crisp dialogue, an absorbing story, and a heartwarming resolution – with the possibility of a few tears along the way.



Spacejacks, (Huw Powell, Bloomsbury)

An adventure that easily offers enough danger, defiance and destiny-seeking to satisfy fans of Riordan, Colfer et al. Great characters, a compelling plot and sharp writing.



Murder Most Unladylike (Robin Stevens, Random House)

This story of murder and sleuthing in a 1930s girls' boarding school is immensely satisfying; neatly planned, stylishly presented, and superbly readable.

That *special space*

A comfortable, creative book corner can go a huge way towards inspiring pupils to read more widely and often...



FU07270

An inspiring and inviting area for reading in your classroom can take minutes to create, yet can provide a child with hours of imagination, days of anticipation and years of progression – do you really need persuading?

It is important to note that each school will have a different reading corner suited to their pupils and teaching style, varying in terms of themes, furniture and equipment; but a few of the most basic yet important things to consider are:

- Comfortable seating including cushions, bean bags and a snuggly chair.
- Good lighting using natural or artificial light to create intrigue and ambiance.
- Practical book storage.
- Decorative personal touches to draw children in and keep them interested.



For more ideas and resources to transform your reading area or to request a FREE catalogue visit the TTS website www.tts-shopping.com



FU06680

Off the shelf

In relation to storage, the best option completely depends on the size of the space you have and the age of the children; easy access, low level boxes

and baskets with front facing books work more effectively for younger children, for example. If space is limited, consider wall hung book racks – whereas if you have more room to play with, rotating book centres will allow children to gather round and select books together.

Alternatively, if you are thinking of dividing a space, there exist some great curved units in a subtle 's' shape, which have shelving on one side and writing boards on the other for a dual purpose. Specialist trolleys are also useful for transporting books around – making sure the titles are shared across different classes and year groups.

Adding atmosphere

Regarding decoration, there are many different themes that can be adopted to make a reading corner appealing to children – and they can be changed as often as you like, with very little effort or expense. A few examples include:

- Jungle theme – use animal print fabrics and a leaf canopy.
- Sea theme – textured rugs help to create a coral underwater effect.
- Outdoor theme – artificial grass mats are super for this.
- Hot air balloon theme – hang a parachute from the ceiling over a hoop and cover a large cardboard box with some material to represent the basket.
- Western theme – use a wigwam or build a tepee-like den.

- Readers' Clubhouse – for older children, this is somewhere they can post their work, drawings and book reviews on bulletin boards on the walls, adding new vocabulary to look like trees are growing outside of the clubhouse.

Creating the right atmosphere and environment, as well as subtly incorporating modern-day technology is pivotal in the aim to get more children interested in reading. Tablets are now a part of everyday life, and although they certainly should not replace books, they can definitely be used as a tool to engage and appeal to children who may not be as enthusiastic about traditional reading material.



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Wordless WONDERS

Far from being an 'easy read' many wordless books provide challenging reading experiences and provoke thoughtful responses, says **Nikki Gamble**

I'm delighted to see a surge in publishing high quality wordless picture books, a valuable addition to classroom collections for children of all ages. There are many reasons to celebrate wordless

books, not least that they can provide a level playing field for children of all levels of reading attainment. Read and discussed in a group or guided reading session, the wordless book can be accessed by all. This gives readers for whom 'word reading' is difficult the opportunity to engage in discussion alongside children who are skilled word readers.

One outcome is the positive impact on self-esteem. However, there are further advantages. It's essential to give children who are struggling with word reading opportunities to develop their reading comprehension. Unlike many of the reading books that are written to help struggling readers, the wordless picture book may provide a multi-layered, polysemic experience which exercises the imagination, affords inference and allows readers to develop and express complex ideas.

Group work

High attaining readers also have a lot to gain. On a recent visit to a school in Nottinghamshire, I was invited to work with a year six (10-11 years) group of pupils, who, according to the teacher's assessment, were the most prolific and proficient readers in the school. They had been targeted to do well in the end of key stage tests. He was, however, concerned that reading had become a competition, with the number of words and the thickness of the book being the marks of a 'good reader'.

We invited the six children to bring the book they were currently reading to a focus session and invited them to talk about their choices. Books included Veronica Roth's 'Divergent' series, Michael Grant's 'Gone' and a range of classics. Apart from the issue of age appropriate book choices, the teacher also

raised a concern that some of the children were skimming books to get the 'gist' of the plot, but that the reading was, he felt, superficial. On the surface, they seemed to be moving rapidly through long books but he wanted to know how they might become more thoughtful, considered readers.

Thoughtful readers

After discussing the problem, we decided to set up a group reading session using David Wiesner's 'Flotsam'. Initially, the pupils expressed surprise that we had chosen a book without words. A couple looked affronted and felt we had obviously misjudged them. We structured the session to promote exploration, attentive reading and high quality discussion. At the end of the session, the group were asking if we could continue working with the book for the rest of the week... which we did.

Later, we interviewed the pupils about the experience. Opinions were overwhelmingly positive. We talked to the group about their views on the 'pace' of their reading and how important details can be missed if we read too quickly without thinking about what we are reading.

The reading of a wordless book provides a special experience from which all pupils can benefit. Of course, I'm not suggesting that it's the only kind of reading that pupils need, but the inclusion of one or two wordless books in the selection of texts available for group reading in each year would be a useful addition to the resource bank, as would a set of wordless books for the class or school library.

Nikki Gamble is the director of Just Imagine, working with schools both home and abroad to develop outstanding reading and writing schools, where stories and literature are placed firmly at the heart of learning. Go to justimaginestorycentre.co.uk to find out more.



SHARING WORDLESS BOOKS

- For younger children the wordless book affords an opportunity for child and adult to co-construct the story as they talk about the pictures together. The child can lead the telling of the story with gentle questions drawing attention to salient features and details.
- For older readers, the pace of reading a wordless book is different to one where the text leads and determines when the pages will be turned. Wordless books invite us to reflect, 'to stop and stare.' Encourage children to look more closely by covering the image and revealing sections at a time, asking them to talk about what they can see.
- Invite readers to think about what characters may be thinking or saying to each other. Post-its can be used for pupils to add their own thought or speech bubbles to an image.
- Encourage pupils to think about words and phrases that describe the scene. Alternatively, the scene could be described through the development of a musical score.
- Wordless books can be a brilliant stimulus and support for children's creative writing. Learners can create their own plot lines or narrate the story from the book and then write it down.



Illustrations from *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan



Shared Writing: Are You Getting It RIGHT?

How many of **Rachel Clarke's** do and don'ts feature in your teaching?



Shared writing – do

1 PLAN AHEAD

Do decide which aspect of shared writing you need to use in your lesson. Do your children need you to *demonstrate*, *scribe* or *support* (see 'what' is shared writing – right)? You may well want to combine all three strands of shared writing so that you start with demonstration, move into supported composition and then ask children to compose their own sentence using a writing technique you've been working on.

2 BE THE EXPERT

Do make sure that you assume the role of expert and demonstrate the writing process. Some teachers find this intimidating, but there are things you can do prior to the lesson to ensure that it goes as smoothly as possible. I always plan what I'm going to write on a post-it note or on the back of my plan. I don't stick to it religiously; the knack of a good shared writing lesson is knowing that you may need to scribe a pupil suggestion that is far better than your own. Even when the pupils' suggestions aren't as strong as I would hope, I still try to use them as a means of actively involving the children in the writing process.

3 GET IT WRONG

Do play 'silly teacher'. Make deliberate mistakes so that your class need to correct you. Delight your Year 1s by forgetting your finger spaces, and allow your Year 2s to revel in your repetition of 'and' as a conjunction. Making deliberate mistakes keeps the children on their toes and provides you with valuable assessment-for-learning evidence about their understanding of grammar, punctuation and the writing process.

4 STRIKE A BALANCE

Do balance the scales between the creative composition skills and the secretarial transcription skills of writing. Children need to know about grammar and punctuation, without these their writing makes little sense. But teacher demonstration (or modelled writing) needs to be more than an explanation of the technicalities. It also needs to explore creative language and literary techniques.

5 STAY FOCUSED

Do help children to sort the writing woods from the writing trees. It's all too easy to find yourself drawing their attention to a raft of

conjunctions, powerful verbs, varied openers and interesting descriptive language. Have a learning objective and ensure this is the focus of the writing you demonstrate, scribe or support. Your shared writing should serve as a model of What a Good One Looks Like (WAGOLL). That's not a generic WAGOLL exemplifying genre / text-type features, but one that meets your class's needs – be that for use of descriptive language, punctuation, or use of dialogue, etc. The shared writing needs to be supportive of the learning taking place in your classroom at that particular time.

6 DEMONSTRATE STRUCTURE

Do model beginnings, middles and ends. Most children's stories that I've read start well and gradually run out of steam up to the point where they go home for tea, or wake up and realise that it was all a dream. THE END. Target your shared writing to the parts of writing that your children find difficult. By doing this you should be able to scaffold their understanding of how to write those trickier parts of narrative.



Shared writing – don't

1 MAKE ONE EARLIER

Don't write an example text prior to the lesson and display it on the whiteboard for children to read and then spot the techniques you've used. This is passive and doesn't involve demonstrating, scribing or supporting. If your school uses a published scheme that includes examples of modelled writing, simply copy them and use them as a prop whilst demonstrating the writing process. If your school doesn't use a scheme that includes modelled examples, you could consider 'borrowing' extracts of published text and using these as the basis of your writing demonstration. Just remember, if you are planning on including teacher scribing as part of the writing process, you will need a flexible approach to amending this text, based on the children's suggestions.

2 FORGET TO USE YOUR VOICE

Don't simply write. This is where the fine distinction between demonstrating and modelling becomes evident. Demonstrating

suggests showing children how to write. Modelling involves sharing the thought process involved in becoming a writer...as I write now I've got I have a little voice in my head. It tells me how to write compose each section, it tells me which words to use and how to build construct my sentences. It's my writer's voice. It takes time for children to hear their writer's voice, so we have to model it for them switch it on for them through the pedagogical technique of modelling. This means the most important tool that you have is your voice: use it to explain what you are doing and to amend your own choices.

3 TAKE FOREVER

Don't spend too long on shared writing. Much is made of who is working hardest in lessons and, as a rule, it should be the children. Try applying the Pareto Principle (80:20 rule) to your writing lessons. Without getting overly mathematical about it, this means that in a 60-minute lesson you should be thinking about 12 minutes (give or take a few minutes either side) of shared writing. Moving through the processes of demonstration, scribing, and supported composition, you should achieve stimulating and action-packed writing lessons.

By understanding what we mean by shared writing, we can appreciate its diversity and usefulness as an approach for teaching. Writing is a complex skill and so we need to provide children with varied degrees of support as they learn new competencies. Teacher demonstration, teacher scribing and supported composition provide us with just this support.



WHAT REALLY IS SHARED WRITING?

Most schools have an expectation that teachers will use shared writing as a pedagogical approach to teaching English. But like many aspects of educational terminology, does 'shared writing' mean the same to all teachers in all schools?

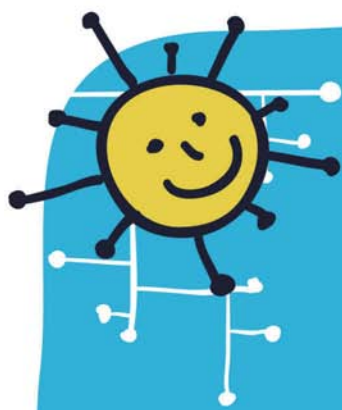
In my view, shared writing is a term used to encompass three main approaches to writing: teacher demonstration, teacher scribing and supported composition.

■ **In teacher demonstration** the teacher demonstrates how to write, commenting explicitly on what she is doing and why. This is sometimes also referred to as *modelled writing*.

■ **Teacher scribing** is when pupils contribute ideas and suggestions, while the teacher scribes to produce a shared text. Key to this approach is the way in which the teacher makes written conventions and grammatical procedures explicit through discussion with the children.

■ **Supported composition** is the term we use to describe how children use dry-wipe boards to write individually or collaboratively. In this approach we are looking for a limited amount of text from the children that focuses on a very specific learning objective. These compositions are then held up for the teacher to see and are supportive in making assessment-for-learning judgements about what further support children require with aspects of the writing process – particularly which children would be good candidates for *guided writing*.

What is apparent from these three aspects of shared writing is how each works to reduce the amount of scaffolding required over time. Teacher demonstration requires the teacher to act as expert and provide direct instruction; supported composition removes a layer of the scaffold so that children can offer their thoughts within a safe and supportive environment; and supported composition sees the teachers assume a more facilitative role as the act of writing composition is handed over to the children.



Crossing over

The gap. The jump. Transition. Whatever schools in your area call it, the leap from primary school to secondary is a journey fraught with tensions for the child: will I make friends? Will I get lost? Will I get my head flushed down the toilet? For the teachers waiting for their new Y7 students, the thoughts are largely along the lines of: how will I ensure they make progress from their KS2 levels?

The achievement drop is something that we all recognise, across the country. I do a lot of work with primary schools; I see how much effort and skill the teachers put in, and what the students can produce. Yes, there is the undoubted focus towards SATs and the additional interventions, but the bottom line is students 'seem' to be able to do things in year 6 that they conveniently 'forget' in year 7. It is our job as secondary school teachers to look at how we can help bridge this gap – particularly for English – by working together with primary colleagues.

I think I probably speak for many secondary school teachers when I say that I would struggle with the demands that come with working in a primary setting full time, marking and planning for different subjects and only teaching the same 30 students. I have a lot of respect for what primary colleagues do on a day to day basis, and have seen some fabulous teaching. It is recognising this, and sharing expertise, which will help develop improved student outcomes (whether through levels or age appropriate achievement or being secondary ready) – which after all, secondary or primary, is what we are all here to do.

Early connections

Working within a deprived area as I do, literacy levels in particular are low. This makes cooperation with our feeder

If primary and secondary teachers work together, they can stop the dreaded Y6 to Y7 achievement drop, says **Emma Kirby**...

To access the average GCSE exam you need a reading age of at least a 15 year old: we must work with primary schools to help students develop these skills ASAP

schools even more important. To access the average GCSE exam you need a reading age of at least a 15 year old: it is important therefore that we support and work with primary schools to help students to develop these skills as soon as possible. From my work with our feeder schools, the most effective ways we have been able to help have been in discussion with them, rather than 'doing to them' – it's about using the range of skills that both sets of staff have to achieve the best results: it will benefit the students; as if they can learn things sooner, they will be able to build and develop on this. And it benefits both schools too, as it leads to increased results and, hopefully, sustained improvements.

Over the last few years we have developed a number of interesting and innovative projects; these are shared either through discussions with primaries in terms of their need (Gifted and Talented intervention groups run by subject specialists; 3-4 intervention programmes); in terms

of something they would like (science afternoons, art lessons...); or something we have developed that we think would be suitable (we have just launched our CCA School of Excellence, bringing together year 5 and 6 students to work on higher level skills – we even did some A-level skills!) All of these projects are linked to the excellent relationships we have with our feeder schools, recognising the mutual benefits for both, and for the students we teach.

Inevitably, with the pressure of SATs, it is mainly numeracy and literacy that the primary schools request added capacity with. We have run several gifted and talented literacy and numeracy programmes – focusing on small



RUNNING A SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME:

- 1 Gives G and T students from all of our primaries the chance to come to the Academy and meet each other; getting them used to working with other people.
- 2 Means we are able to do extended projects – we've written an anthology within English with our own 'A level' commentaries.
- 3 Allows for interactions between primary and secondary teachers – discussing what works best.
- 4 Develops skills students have learnt at primary and gives them the chance to go back with more.
- 5 Can really extend and push them, with GCSE, and even A level, style work.

groups to try and access the level 6 paper. All skills and questions are directed by the primary teacher, it is a collaborative process. I do some work on writing skills every year with one of our key feeder schools – directed to topics and ideas by the class teacher; I then go and help moderate the writing marks (on an informal basis) after school. This has built great relationships between our schools, and the more students I get to know prior to their arrival; the better we can plan to ensure their progress continues beyond KS2.

Summer specials

The summer term after SATs is a key time when primaries and secondaries can work together. The pressure from the SATs has eased, and everyone (or, so it seems because of the longer days), has more time. This is the prime time when we develop induction days for year 6 (as many schools do); but also begin working with year 5 on transition days. We are beginning to cultivate a writing project,

where all students will then arrive to us in September with some examples of their best written work (the programme also involves some of our sixth form English students, going to work in the students' schools). And this is also the time when we select students to take part in our wide range of summer schools – chosen using staff assessments of students.

We went so far as to create a 'one off' programme for new Y7 students to tackle especially low literacy levels one year; with a four-week collapsed timetable, where students had maths, PE and then entirely literacy based lessons. This was linked to a specific thread: spies for top ability, zombies for mid and aliens for lower. A team of staff from across the curriculum created the resources, and the idea was not only would it improve literacy levels from a baseline test, but that it should make the transition for students easier. The results were impressive, with 19% of students making a whole level of progress. A huge range of people across the Academy were

involved: from sixth formers marking the books, to support staff coming to work in costume; and the zombie and alien invasion nights will live on in my memory forever! There are even potential plans to take this idea 'on the road', with one of our feeders keen to host a zombie sleepover night – staffed with teachers from both schools.

The changes made by the government to the national curriculum (for example some of the language devices now to be understood at KS2 were only encountered before by our A level language students); the erasing of levels; and most importantly, the wellbeing of our students, make the transition process more important than ever. Opportunities to share pedagogy and practice need to be allowed within schools of both sectors – opening up the discussions about how students learn best, and 'magpieing' the ideas that work well. By supporting each other, and working together, we can ensure that we get the best outcomes and smoothest transition for all of our students.



Mischief & MAYHEM

She might be the world's strongest girl, live alone with exotic pets and refuse to take orders, but can Pippi Longstocking teach your class anything about reading and writing? **Carey Fluker Hunt** thinks so...

"She was nine years old, and she lived there all alone..."

Unconventional, feisty and possessed of superhuman strength, Pippi Longstocking isn't your average child. She keeps a horse on the porch, shares her house with a monkey and makes pancakes whenever she pleases. Tommy and Annika don't know what to make of her. Surely it can't be right for a little girl to be financially independent? And where, exactly, are her parents?

But Pippi is as strong-willed as she is mischievous and gets the better of anyone who tries to tell her what to do. She soon vanquishes her opponents – but playfully, and never unkindly. No wonder her readers love her!

Written by Astrid Lindgren and first published in 1945, *Pippi Longstocking* is now available in more than 60 languages worldwide. Pippi herself has become something of an icon in terms of gender

equality and continues to entertain and subvert in equal measure – although not everyone approves of this. "Pippi-worship has turned everything upside down, in schools, in family life and in terms of normal behaviour," wrote a Swedish commentator as recently as the mid 1990s. But books have always been a place for children to explore disorder and make their own sense of the world, and Pippi is the first to admit that she's no paragon. "I'm lying so much that my tongue has turned black – can't you tell?" she asks Tommy and Annika. "You really shouldn't believe everything people tell you!"

Nobody can meet Pippi without seeing the world a little differently and it's this, along with Lindgren's talent as a storyteller, that makes *Pippi Longstocking* such an absorbing read.





Pippi ... "caught my imagination, influenced my games and has had a lasting impact on my work."

Lauren Child

Pre-eminent amongst UK illustrators and loved across the globe, Lauren Child admits that Pippi Longstocking meant a lot to her as she was growing up. This is evident in the quality and depth of the richly decorative collages and engaging typography produced by Lauren for the recent OUP edition. Her artwork brings a fresh, new feel to the text and has been widely admired, but Lauren isn't the only illustrator to have worked on this book.

Back in the 1940s Ingrid Vang Nyman won a competition to illustrate the first edition and her vintage style is much loved, although many other Swedish illustrators have since produced their own interpretations of Pippi.

In America and the UK, editions featuring Louis S. Glanzman's work are well known, while more recently Michael D.

Chesworth and Tony Ross have both captured Pippi's anarchic exuberance.

Whichever edition you're sharing, look for ways to discover Pippi's other illustrators. Comparing interpretations of a character can be an effective way for children to develop and express their aesthetic and critical awareness. And it's fun!

Name games

Pippi's full name is Pippilotta Viktualia Rullgardina Krusmynta Efraimsdotter Långstrump, which can be translated as Pippilotta Comestibles Windowshade Curlymint Ephraimsdaughter Longstocking.

Give your class some dictionaries, atlases and telephone directories and ask them to come up with Pippi-style names. Write each suggestion on a separate card, allocate them to one of three containers and let children 'lucky dip' a first, middle and last name for a new character.

Provide accessories and dressing-ups. Allow children to select a limited number of items, then interview them 'in role'. Ask questions to develop each character, such as "what do you do in your spare time?" and "what are you afraid of?"

Distribute paper and a range of drawing implements and impose a time limit while children create a sketch in response to a task: for example, two minutes to draw your character getting angry. Keep timeframes short to encourage an intuitive response. What matters is the process, not the quality of the outcome!

Once ideas are flowing, ask children to write in the first person to introduce their

characters. Then, working in pairs, read each other's work and imagine what would happen if both characters were to meet. Develop by allocating a setting to each pair and roleplaying the conversation.

Be a thing-searcher

"The whole world is full of things, which means there's a real need for someone to go searching for them..."

Go on a 'thing-search' with your class and try out different ways of grouping your 'finds': by shape, perhaps; or colour, or function. Invent ways to record this information. Follow up by writing an instruction manual on how to be a successful 'thing-searcher'.

As a variation, set up a 'thing-hunt' for your children, with clues that must be solved. Or ask them to devise, write and run their own 'thing-hunts'.

Pippi's treasure

In Pippi's living room there is only one piece of furniture – a cabinet with lots of drawers. Ask children to talk about objects that are valuable to them. Research historical 'Cabinets of Curiosities' and visit a museum to see how treasures are cared for today.

Make a model cabinet from shoeboxes and decorate it – or borrow a real cabinet with drawers. Add to the items discovered on your 'thing-hunt' with inexpensive objects such as shells and buttons. Maybe families could make donations of oddments they no longer need?

House Pippi's treasures in your cabinet. Write an informative label for each object and a guidebook for visitors. Explore individual items by touching them blindfold and writing a description, then match these to the objects being described.

Super-strength and other powers

Look over the text to discover how Pippi uses her strength. Ask children to suggest other super-powers. Which is their favourite? Take a vote and display the results. Talk about what you could do if you possessed a superpower and the rules you might need to follow to keep yourself and others safe.

Divide your class into groups and allocate a superpower to each. Ask them to devise a



news report about an incident involving a superpower. One child should narrate while the others mime the action. Discuss, then follow up by writing a report.

Funnybones and tall tales

Pippi is always laughing, and truly isn't bothered by other people's opinions. Revisit the text to find moments when Pippi interacts with others in a way that makes us laugh. Does Pippi mean to be cheeky or rude, or does she just see the world differently?

"Have I behaved badly?" asked Pippi, very surprised. "Oh, and I didn't even know it!"

Pippi also tells fibs. Is she trying to fool Tommy and Annika, or having fun? Telling the truth is important, but storytellers don't do it. When is an untruth a 'tall tale,' and when is it a lie?

Make a list of the countries Pippi mentions. Find out about them and look at how the information you've discovered differs from Pippi's tales. Which countries have children in your class visited or lived in?

Mark the places on a map.

Work together to generate ideas for more 'tall tales' and ask children to write them. Practise reading the stories aloud, then record them on a CD.

No-one tells me what to do!

Pippi lives all by herself and makes her own decisions. What does she do that she couldn't if she had an adult to look after her?

Ask your class to imagine their ideal house. Can they draw a cross-section showing all the rooms, and label it to record their ideas? What would life be like if they lived there, all alone?

Pippi's games

Pippi would much rather interact with the world than sit and watch. 'Do a Pippi' and learn to dance the polka, or play 'Don't Step on the Floor'. And if climbing across the kitchen furniture looks a little risky, why not set out mats and apparatus in your Hall?

For something a little quieter, take your class outside and draw some giant pictures with pavement chalk. Or collect patterned fabrics and other collage materials and make outfits for a Lauren-Child-style Pippi paper doll.

Follow up with some writing. Whether that means recipes for pancakes, instructions for playing a game or front-row reports on the latest paper fashions, your children will have plenty to say for themselves – just like Pippi.

GIRL POWER



Luckily for young readers, Pippi isn't the only strong, opinionated girl in children's books today. For imaginative stories featuring independent heroines who are forced to rely on their own intelligence and resourcefulness, try *Matilda* (Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake), *Ottoline and the Yellow Cat* (Chris Riddell) and the exuberant and very funny picturebook, *The Day Louis Got Eaten* (John Fardell).

Traditional folktales often feature girls who, though small, are more than a match for trouble. Look out for stories like *Vassilissa the Brave* and *The Clever Girl*, and as an antidote to the many pink and sparkly princesses out there, try *The Worst Princess* (Anna Kemp and Sara Ogilvie), *The Paperbag Princess* (Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko) and *Princess Smartypants* (Babette Cole).

Little Red Hood (Marjolaine Le Roy) is a wordless and very funny take on the Red Riding Hood story while *Swamp Angel* (Anne Isaacs and Paul O. Zelinsky) parodies a traditional American 'tall tale'. With its super-strong heroine who wrestles a marauding bear, the latter is well worth seeking out to read alongside Pippi and features glorious illustrations.

For stories that are more reflective of real life, try the classic and much-loved *Amazing Grace* (Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch). The delightful *The Trouble with Ramona and Beezus* (Beverly Cleary) is now available again, following the release of the film. And last – but by no means least – there's Pippi Longstocking's alter ego, *Clarice Bean* (Lauren Child).

For more ideas, check out www.amightygirl.com

All illustrations © Lauren Child





SPAG, you're it!

Why spoon-feed lessons, says **Debra Myhill**, when you can play your way to better grammar...

Mention the word 'grammar' and you will provoke either a grimace or a grumble: a grimace, because many people find grammar dull or difficult; and a grumble, because people love to complain about grammar errors and the state of the nation's writing. It's a subject which divides, and has done so for decades.

Politicians, teachers and researchers disagree about the value of grammar within the curriculum and whether it has a legitimate place in the language classroom. But regardless of this history, the renewed emphasis on grammar in the programmes of study and national tests means it has become a much higher priority in primary classrooms.

For me, this conjures an awful spectre of serried rows of children labelling and identifying word classes. But learning about grammar is learning how language works, or as Halliday expressed it, learning how to mean. It should be exploratory, playful and analytical, and it should help children and young people to see through language and recognise how meanings are made.

At the University of Exeter, we have been researching the teaching of grammar and have had the privilege of working with many teachers and children in classrooms across the country. Our approach is to help children explore the grammar they see all around them and in the texts they read, encouraging them to be curious about how grammar choices shape meanings.

If you'd like to do the same, here are some ideas for you to try in your classroom that encourage playful thinking. Do notice that each activity uses an authentic text – not texts artificially written to exemplify a point – and that all the activities involve discussion to help children see the possibilities of language, rather than rules about how they should write.

"Politicians, teachers and researchers disagree about the value of grammar within the curriculum and whether it has a legitimate place in the language classroom"



What's in a name?

KEY LEARNING: *Proper Nouns are one way in which writers establish character.*

Divide the class into groups and give each one a pile of fiction books from the library and a stack of blank name labels. Ask the children to look through the books, find as many character names as they can and write these on the name labels. Roald Dahl books work particularly well for this activity and it can help if groups focus on just the

first page of the story.

Discuss the names, explaining they are all Proper Nouns, and exploring what the choice of name suggests about the character (think, for example, of the Gruffalo, Willie Wonka, Jemima Puddleduck, or Dumbledore). Note that writers choose their character names carefully.

2 Setting the scene

KEY LEARNING: *prepositional phrases can be used to tell us about the setting of a story and where characters live.*

Display all the prepositional phrases in *The Gruffalo* on an interactive whiteboard (e.g. *in a deep, dark wood; in my log-pile house; in my underground house; on the end of his nose*). Explain what these are and that they all begin with a preposition. Work together to separate them into prepositional phrases that tell the readers

about the setting, and those which do not. Discuss how the prepositional phrases that concern setting often tell us where a character lives. Take suggestions for other animals that the mouse might have met in his walk in the wood, and in pairs create prepositional phrases that describe where these animals live.

4 Advertising extravaganza

KEY LEARNING: *long noun phrases are very descriptive and are often used in advertising to tempt us into buying the product.*

Cut out food advertising from magazines and food packaging and spread the examples out on tables around the room. Working in groups, the children 'carousel' around each table, looking for long noun phrases describing the food products. Who can find the longest noun phrase? Discuss why advertisers might choose to create such long noun phrases. With younger children, focus on the adjectives that come before the noun and show how it is possible to use lots of adjectives before the noun in advertising (e.g. the crumbliest, flakiest, chocolate...). With other children, look at the noun phrases that have extra information after the noun. Play with inventing new extravagant noun phrases for one of the food products.

3 Language detectives

KEY LEARNING: *the various permutations of be and have are verbs, even though they do not express an action.*

Ask children what a verb is and more than 90 per cent will say it is a 'doing' word. But many of the verbs found in a text are not obviously 'doing' verbs (for example, believe; trust; rest), and often it's the noun in a sentence that gives children a sense of the action. Take, for example, 'I like hunting': like is the verb, but many children will say it is hunting because it seems to express an action. And, of course, the verbs *be* and *have* do not communicate any activity but are very common in all texts.

Anoint the class as language detectives, divide children into groups and give each team a range of different texts (e.g. a story opening; a World Wildlife Fund campaign leaflet; a recipe; and a newspaper article) where you have highlighted a 100-word extract. Display all the variations of *be* and *have* on the board (see below) and ask the language detectives to scour the texts, highlighting any examples they can find. Count the totals.

Variations for 'be': be, is, am, are, was, were, being, been

Variations for 'have': have, has, had, having

Compare results across the class and note how common the verbs *be* and *have* are. Discuss whether any text type seems to have more or fewer of these verbs: a recipe might not have as many because it is using imperative verbs, giving a clear instruction.

5 On the move

KEY LEARNING: *moving adverbs and adverbials around in the sentence alters where the emphasis is placed.*

Children are often taught that it is good to start a sentence with an adverbial (a fronted adverbial), but an ill-considered adverbial at the start of a sentence is no better than an adverbial placed randomly elsewhere. Because adverbials are so mobile within a sentence, the choice of where to put them is linked to where you want to place the emphasis or clarification.

Find a text that makes use of lots of adverbials (for example, Karen Wallace's book *Think of an Eel*) and together as a class locate the adverbials in one paragraph or section of the text. Invite pairs to experiment with rewriting these sentences, relocating the adverbials. The opening sentence of David Almond's *Skellig* could be rewritten as below:

Original: *He found him in the garage on a Sunday afternoon.*

Alternative: *On a Sunday afternoon, he found him in the garage.*

Alternative: *In the garage on a Sunday afternoon, he found him.*

Discuss how moving the adverbial alters where the emphasis in the sentence is and draws the reader's attention to different information.

All of the activities invite children to play with grammar and they can be adapted for different age groups by choosing different texts. The important point is that they link grammar with meaning – and they are fun!



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WRITER'S PYRAMID



CONVINCE ME - SPAG



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- Your blog may be selected to appear on the TTS website



“I can’t bear snobbishness about books”

Structure and creativity were both important elements of **Lauren Child’s** literacy journey...

I have very vague memories of how I learnt to read; both my parents are teachers and we had books at home – but just as importantly, we went to the library at least once a week. I was aged eight or nine when I became fascinated by American history, probably as a consequence of reading *The Little House on the Prairie* books, by Laura Ingalls Wilder. It was an amazing thing to be able to request books on any topic and have them arrive a week or so later. It allowed a freedom to learning; I could explore what I wanted to explore and it was all free of charge.

I don’t remember much about the first primary school I went to, as we moved house not long after I’d started, but I do recall a reassuring sense of order. After a term at the local town school, (a place I found noisy and chaotic) my parents moved me to another village school, which suited me better. The head teacher was quite eccentric, and there was a lot of emphasis on acting, singing, writing, drawing, nature walks and local history. The days were very unstructured, which to begin with I found challenging – but it was also quite mind expanding and very creative. The downside was that a lot of things went by the by, maths for instance, along with grammar and science; there was a general lack of balance to my learning.

For my final year of primary education, I moved to a third village school – where my mum taught us creative writing. She was a good teacher and taught me that there are countless ways to tell a story and endless words to tell it with. The head was an incredibly inspiring person, and understood the importance of teaching children the rules and structure of language as well as allowing them to experiment. She

was a clever woman and kind with it; she saw the holes in my learning and was aware of how hard it can be for a child to feel that they have fallen behind. I made up the ground reasonably quickly, which is largely down to her.

Spelling is one of those skills that we set a lot of store by, and of course it’s worth working on. However, a lot of children (and indeed adults) struggle with it and can quickly get demoralised if they find themselves judged for something that they can never excel at; they should be reassured that being a good writer is not about being able to spell. Grammar really

“Being able to write a really decent, clear sentence – and then, if possible, an elegant one – is such a lovely skill.

I think a love of reading can teach one this; the more you read, the more you understand how to write”

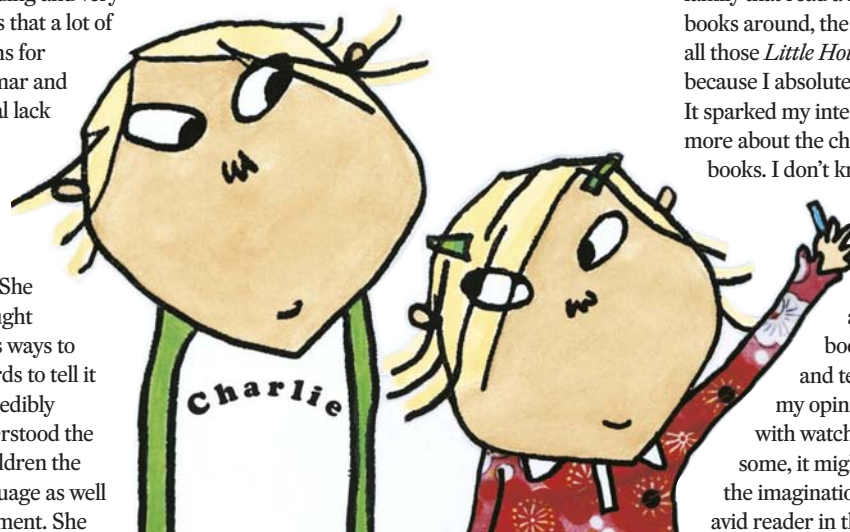
does matter, because that helps you communicate effectively – a comma can change the meaning of a sentence in a way that misspelling rarely does. Being able to write a really decent, clear sentence – and then, if possible, an elegant one – is such a lovely skill. I think a love of reading can teach one this; the more you read, the more you understand how to write.

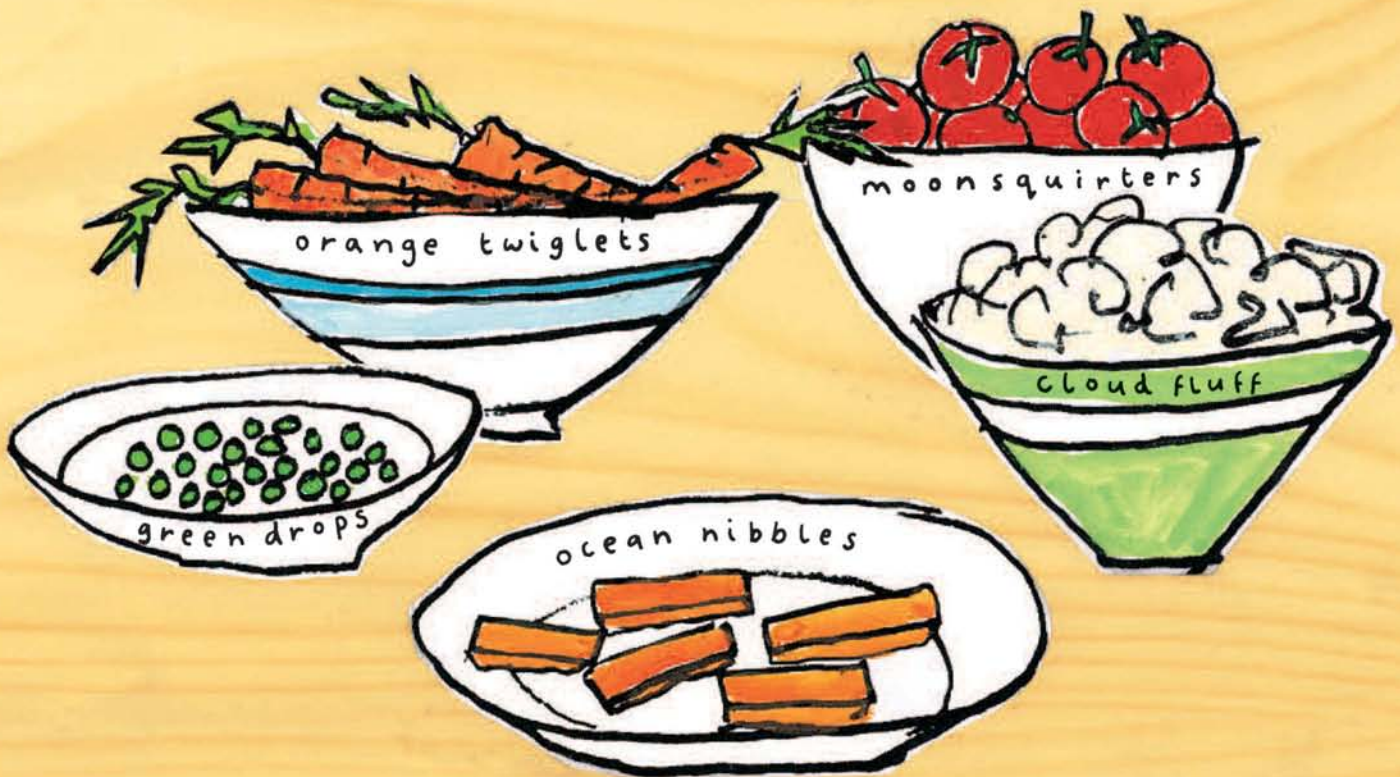
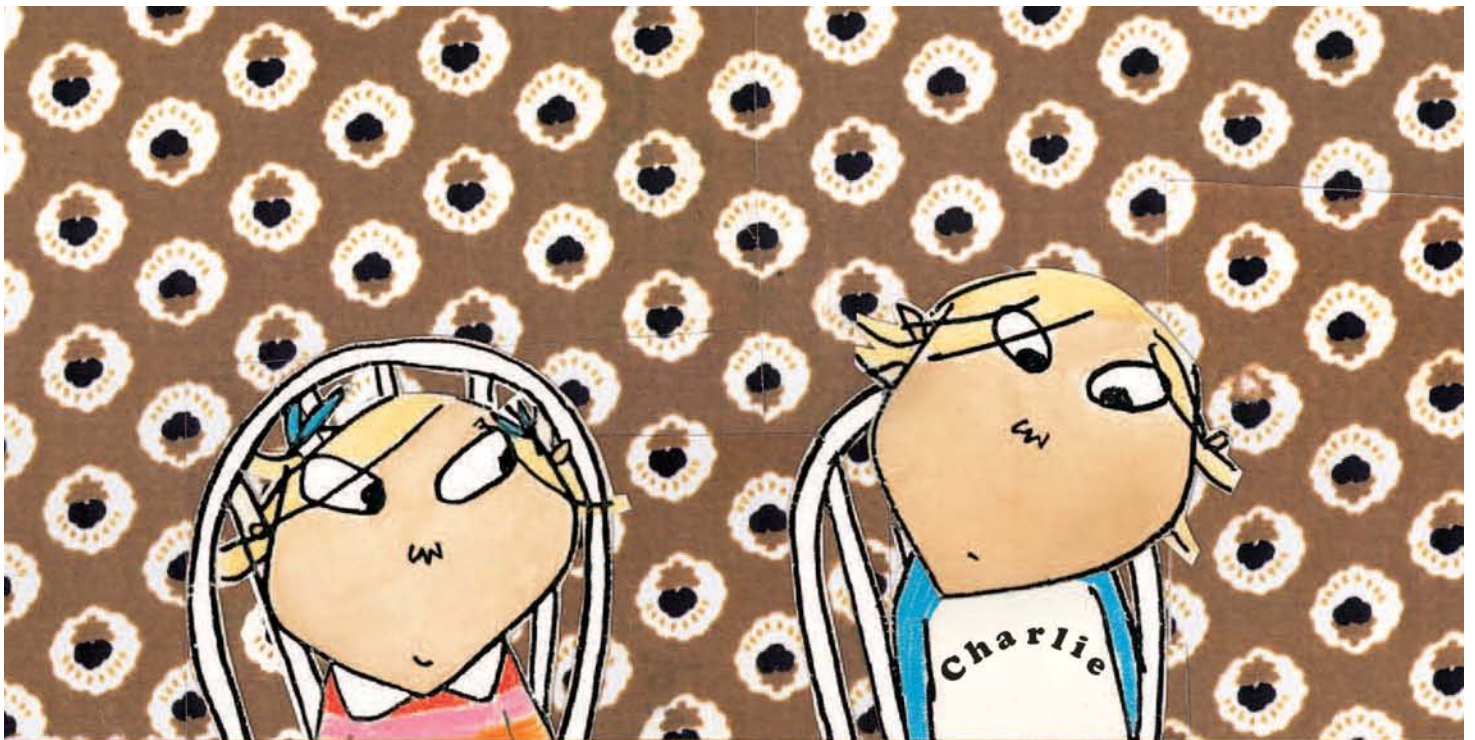
Another thing that was wonderful about my last primary school was the way that the head teacher would read to us at the end of every single day. She chose brilliant books, like *The Shrinking of Treehorn*, and *The 18th Emergency*, both of which I still love today. Having someone who is very good at choosing stories, whom you trust, is very influential. That said, I can’t bear snobbishness about books. I don’t think children should be told they ‘can’t’ or ‘shouldn’t’ read certain things. Of course it’s not ideal if children only ever read comics, or books that don’t stretch them and open them up to new ideas – but as long as they want to read, it doesn’t matter what generates that enthusiasm in the first place.

I should just add that although I come from a family that read a lot, and we had plenty of books around, the main reason I devoured all those *Little House on the Prairie* stories, was because I absolutely loved the TV show.

It sparked my interest and I wanted to know more about the characters and so I read the books. I don’t know if it’s because I was a

visual person or because I simply loved film and TV shows but it was often television that drew me in and then pushed me back to books. I know some parents and teachers frown on it, but in my opinion there’s nothing wrong with watching the film first, and for some, it might be the thing that ignites the imagination and makes them a more avid reader in the end.







No more BORING STORIES

Most story plots produced by young writers are clichéd, predictable or illogical because their authors go about thinking them up the wrong way around, says **Colin Macfarlane...**

If you ask youngsters to make up a spontaneous story they inevitably begin the plot with one of the first things that comes into their minds. Due to a

cognitive bias known as the Availability Effect, this starter idea is usually a situation that is everyday and mundane (such as 'a man was walking down a road...') or a concept that has become strongly lodged in their minds because it has been encountered recently or regularly (i.e. an idea from a story they've just

read or a happening or setting common in TV, computer games or animation).

This is clearly not an original or creative place to start the process of plot creation. Even worse, however, is that thinking onwards from such a starting point leads young writers into clichéd and predictable plot routes. This is turn can lead to a loss of interest in writing. To rectify this we need to teach children certain thinking skills that accomplished fiction writers have acquired through experience.

Why children use clichés

But let's start from the beginning. If children are asked to write fiction in the classroom without having been given such training they are in a similar creative vacuum to those asked to make up a story spontaneously. They will try to think of anything that helps get their minds rolling and it's usually one of those types of settings or situations described above. Let's call that Idea A.

They will then attempt to think of an idea to follow this, such as that the man who is walking down the road sees a dog, which we'll call Idea B. This may be followed by: the dog has a bone in its mouth (Idea C), the man tries to pet the dog (Idea D) but the dog runs away (Idea E). By this point, some may sense the story's lack of interest or direction and, in desperation, introduce something exciting or funny, but possibly relatively illogical, in order to make the plot less boring. This might be an idea such as a branch falls on the man's head, aliens appear in a spaceship or the man chases the dog and falls into a puddle.

There are two serious problems with this everyday approach. The first is that the starting point of the story is dull or clichéd and the second is that the writer's thinking moves forwards in a predictable sequential way (A – B – C – D ...) until he or she may become frustrated and introduce a random (possibly animation-based) occurrence, which often makes the plot more clichéd and silly.

How you can change this

We can cure the first problem through the use of a starting idea called an x-point. Instead of beginning with some mundane 'A' idea and thinking forwards, the writer first invents a fascinating moment that may later appear anywhere in the story.

This 'x-point' idea is simply a curious occurrence or setting that forces the writer to ask questions about how or why it came about. It often contains an intriguing juxtaposition. Here are some examples:

- A woman is leading a pig along a railway line by a rope around its neck.
- An object burrows up through the floor of a forest and surrounding trees glow with soft pink light.
- A tiny girl is crying on a slow-spinning park roundabout in the middle of the night.

You will see that these all throw up lots of questions about how the situations came about (Why was the woman leading a pig? Why on the railway line? Who is she? What happened to cause this?).

Through answering such questions, that second problem of predictable, sequential and uninspired thinking can begin to be solved. Possible first answers for the pig story might be that the creature had escaped onto the line/ the woman is hypnotised/ trains have stopped running for some reason, etc. I call these answers 'story excuses' because they attempt to explain the x-point.

Story excuses are also used to explain other story excuses. For instance, a next round of story excuses might speculate that perhaps the woman is taking a shortcut/ is making her escape after stealing the pig from a farm or testing laboratory/ is so poor she feeds the animal on the railway's un-grazed grass. Or perhaps it's a performing pig which has escaped from a circus near a bridge/ normal roads are flooded/ trains are not running, and so on.

Tertiary story excuses might, for instance, relate to why trains have stopped running. Perhaps because the woman has been seen on the line/ a train has crashed and the pig escaped from a wrecked railway wagon/ the pig has eaten through signal cables/ she is a war refugee and is also dragging a sledge along the snowy line, etc.

"Figuring out causes, reasons and back-story like this releases the writer from sequential thinking and leads to stunningly original yet logical plots..."



banquet, smashed through his feasting hall's impressive stained glass window and chased the monarch into his gilded bedchamber. The bear reappeared shortly afterwards with the greedy king's XXXL underpants on her head before disappearing to feed her hungry cubs with most of his sumptuous feast.

Authentic settings

Through creating x-points at a castle damaged during the civil war another KS2 pupil crafted a complex and evocative story about a serving girl given an honour for bravely helping to defend her master's castle. Not only was the storyline excellent, but the settings were richly described; a reader could even smell fumes of burning cooking fat drifting along dank stone corridors. The writer wove in many relevant facts related to the site (and her school history project) so she'd been learning history effectively while writing a superb story.

PART OF THE SCENERY

X-POINTS CAN BE DESIGNED TO TRIGGER AND DEVELOP STORIES IN ANY GENRE AND ARE SUPERBLY EFFECTIVE WHEN WORKED ON IN INTERESTING OUTDOOR LOCATIONS

Children guided to create x-points based on what they can see, hear or imagine in locations such as stately homes, battlefields, castles and hill forts, and old town centres produce much richer and more original plots. By brainstorming language, description and knowledge in the same locations, these stories can then be greatly enriched with well-observed and relevant authenticating details, settings, metaphors and moods that bolster the reader's sense of reality and believability.

A literary feast

One Year 6 pupil who brainstormed x-points and language with me at a stately home invented an x-point about a bear smashing through a window. This evolved into an hysterically funny story about an gluttonous and selfish king who kept bears on his estate for hunting. In the plot's denouement, a starving mother bear smelled the king's massive personal

You will notice that, through the creation of a curious x-point and the invention of possible story excuses to explain it, as well as further story excuses to explain these story excuses, the story writer has now begun thinking out most of the plot backwards instead of forwards. Figuring out causes, reasons and back-story like this releases the writer from sequential thinking and leads to stunningly original yet logical plots. Because these are thought out in the opposite direction from that in which the reader follows the story they are also delightfully unpredictable.

Much effort goes into teaching children to use good grammar and strong description but surprisingly little goes into explaining how to create a dazzling plot. The plot is, after all, the fundamental bone structure of any story. Using x-points and story excuses helps novices to excel at this essential part of becoming accomplished writers.



Shelf *Life*

A central library might be beyond your school's budget, says **Fiona Evans** – but there are still ways to stop children getting trapped in a single book corner...

Visiting a good library should be like going to eat in a great restaurant. You can have whatever you want – even if you don't like it when you try it – and the librarian is like the chef, telling you what's good on the menu. Without a central library, even the best schools run the risk of providing a somewhat bland and impoverished reading diet. While class book corners or book boxes provide some access to titles beyond the school reading scheme, few classrooms have the space to accommodate the wide range of material needed to inspire thirty pupils whose interests and reading abilities can vary enormously.

Schools have tried all sorts of creative ways of storing and distributing their book provision fairly around the building, but none of these is quite the same as a central school library – to provide freedom of choice – and a librarian to offer guidance. Without these, there's no chef and no restaurant; and children's appetite for reading can suffer as a result.

For some primary schools, dealing with tight budgets, limited space and rising school rolls, a central school library is just not possible. Yet of course, they all still aspire to provide those vital ingredients needed to entice and develop readers: a wide range of books, guidance, time, space and positive role models. Many are finding that the most cost effective way to achieve this is through creative collaborations with others.

Cross-phase partnerships

Excellent links have been made by some secondary schools with their feeder primaries by opening their library to them to run book groups and clubs. Not only does this encourage smoother transitions for primary pupils when they move to secondary school, it also allows the younger students to have a library experience that might not be possible in their current school. Older students and sixth formers are often very keen to work with



younger children as volunteers, developing skills themselves that are useful for work or their future further education.

Joining up with public libraries

It is often through the Summer Reading Challenge, run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the public library service, that primary schools begin and sustain a mutually beneficial relationship with their local public library. Last year, 850,000 children took part including 80,000 who joined for the first time in order to do the Challenge. Children join their local library, borrow and read six books of their own choice and come back throughout the summer to discuss them with library staff and teenage volunteers; on completing the Challenge they receive a certificate and medal.

Along the way, they also develop as readers, gain access to a broader range of reading material than might be possible in their school or at home, and their family can get involved in supporting their reading. In areas where





“Schools have tried all sorts of creative ways of storing and distributing their book provision fairly around the building, but none of these is quite the same as a central school library – to provide freedom of choice – and a librarian to offer guidance...”

participation in the Summer Reading Challenge is particularly high, librarians visit local schools to tell children about the Challenge and to fire their enthusiasm for the theme (in 2015 it is Record Breakers). In return, schools promote the Challenge to pupils and parents, supporting families who may need more information or encouragement to take part, and celebrate after the holidays with the children who have completed it. The Summer Reading Challenge is embedded in their reading policy and helps them to deliver the reading for pleasure aspects of the national curriculum.

Now in its sixteenth year, the Summer Reading Challenge helps teachers and schools achieve their aspirations for their pupils to become readers without eating into their

curriculum time, resources or budget. After they have completed the Challenge, children often go back to school and start a reading group or book club such as Chatterbooks, often with further public library collaboration or support from their local Schools Library Service.

It is vital for primary school children to experience those special places we call libraries, in all their wonderful, varied guises. The reading journey is lifelong and many reliable guides and role models will be needed along the way. If children come to see that knowledge, inspiration, community and pleasure can all be found in libraries, both in school and beyond it, they will continue to seek them out all their lives.

“The children love the library”

ELLEN KRAJEWSKI IS LIBRARIAN AT THE HEMEL HEMPSTEAD SCHOOL

“Our new library at The Hemel Hemstead School, a state secondary with 1120 pupils, is a crucial component of the school, highly valued by the senior leadership team and the governing body.

In March 2012 I was approached by the headteacher of South Hill School, our main feeder primary, to support their reading group and include some of their students in our author visits; so began a beautiful relationship. Each year a group of South Hill students joins us to shadow the Carnegie Medal. They come along to our lively discussion meetings, and are made very welcome by the older students.

During the last academic year I welcomed book groups from year 4 and year 6 to our library once a month after school. The children loved coming over to the library and were very enthusiastic about their books. They have also benefitted from the numerous author visits I have organised which have been free of charge to them.

I always aim to visit South Hill on World Book Day. As a secondary school librarian there is something really heartwarming about reading Chris Haughton’s *Oh No, George!* to a group of nursery children or *Paper Dolls* to year 2 with the children chanting along with the story. Our local bookshop had a run on *Hero With a Bicycle* by Shirley Hughes after I read an extract to year 6. Even the teacher was gripped and went out to buy his own copy!

Although I don’t get to spend as much time as I would like at South Hill, the link has been forged very strongly and I keep in constant contact. The children always welcome me with open arms and are keen to tell me what they are reading. When they reach year 7 I am a familiar face and they soon become library regulars.”





We are all familiar with the idea of using formative assessment to shape learning experiences, and this approach is vital when it comes to that most crucial of academic skills: reading. The Simple View of Reading (see diagram, bottom right) is often used to describe the development of reading ability, but it can be used throughout the primary phase – in conjunction with National Curriculum Programmes of Study (POS) – as an Assessment for Learning device that can radically influence how children interact with the wider curriculum.

If we imagine that the midpoint on each of the two continua on the Simple View marks, approximately, the expectations for word-reading and language comprehension for children of that age, we can then place the children in your class in each of the four quadrants of the graph, whether you teach Foundation stage or Y6. Since the new programmes of study are organised as expectations for word reading and for language comprehension, it makes sense to use these as reference points to enable this process.

We will find, in any year group, children whose word-reading is – for their age – considerably in advance of their comprehension (bottom-right quadrant), and children whose comprehension greatly outstrips their ability to read words (top left). But the children we worry most about are those in the bottom left, the ones who find it all hard: they need everything. And what of the top-right group? We can't just assume they can just get on with it; we need to feed their reading and ensure their enthusiasm continues.

Mixed abilities

One of the very best ways of helping children make progress in word-reading is, obviously, one-to-one reading, where an adult helps a child with recognition and decoding, fluency, and so on. The adult can ask comprehension-assessing questions, of course, but it is our experience that this is not the best strategy for the development of understanding. In a small, discussion-focused group, challenging questions can be put to children in pairs so they might build confidence by rehearsing their ideas and listen to the interpretations of others, thereby improving their comprehension. So we could say that the 'bottom-right group' needs more guided group discussion (as well as drama, being read to, use of lavish picture-books, enriched experiences and so on) and the 'top-left group' would benefit from more one-to-one reading. Not exclusively, but skewed that way.

Make more time for READING

If children struggle to read, there are opportunities in every lesson and subject to change this, say **Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton**



It follows that the 'bottom-left' group needs both approaches. And unfortunately, the kind of text that supports these children in the development of word reading in a one-to-one context is unlikely to stimulate much group discussion. In such a group, the teacher might read to the children, and then ask age-appropriate, challenging questions based on their listening. Primary teachers have the skills to provide these learning experiences; the issue is always time. Many schools run a system of daily guided reading whereby every child participates in a guided group once a week. But what of the children who could really benefit from more guided group discussion to develop comprehension? What about those children who would benefit from more one-to-one reading? And those 'bottom-left children' need more of everything - how do we make time for that? In fact, just spending more time reading will help many children, even the ones you don't immediately identify as a worry.

Cross curricular learning

One way of encouraging more reading is to integrate the teaching of word-reading and comprehension into the entire curriculum rather than keeping it separate: the sole province of reading schemes and guided reading sets. These resources definitely have their place and we are enthusiastic users of contemporary schemes, such as Project X, Big Cat and Bug Club, but in order that children get enough reading whilst also enjoying a 'broad and balanced curriculum', reading provision and practice must happen elsewhere too. Children can develop word reading and/or comprehension while learning about castles, continents and circuits.

For those who need it, allow an extra five minutes of one-to-one reading in humanities/science lessons using materials related to the topic. The targeted individuals don't need to come out of the lesson so they are not missing curricular learning. They might even be reading on an element of the topic that will be encountered by the rest of the class in the near future, placing them at an advantage and thus raising esteem at the same time as improving word-reading. The children who need to develop greater comprehension can be supported in small-group discussions using a set of topic books/resources. Greater understanding of the subject matter will go hand-in-hand with more practice of comprehension, and, indeed, development of the practical uses of the features of non-fiction texts, such as index, glossary, labels and diagrams. You might ask pairs within the group to 'research' slightly different aspects, and then

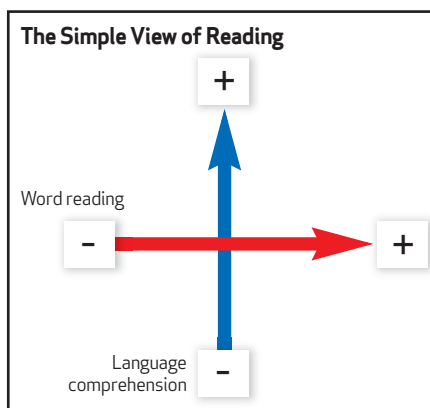
5 SIMPLE WAYS TO INCREASE OVERALL READING TIME

- 1 Use science and humanities text books for one-to-one reading time
- 2 Pair weaker readers with stronger readers for unsupported paired reading in topic lessons
- 3 Ask pairs within a group to research different aspects of a topic and then explain their area of learning to the group
- 4 Set up mixed ability groups of four to create a topic-related quiz from a text book or resource
- 5 Challenge mixed ability groups to collaborate and extract as much topic-related information as possible from difficult texts



explain their area of learning to the group: a lovely example of purposeful information retrieval. And of course, such a session might lead to a brief group presentation on the curricular learning acquired.

When children struggle with word reading, comprehension, or both, putting the appropriate approaches into humanities or science lessons will enable additional provision without detracting from their breadth of learning. But all children can also benefit from the application of reading strategies within history, geography, RE and science. Smart use of The Simple View of Reading can enable useful team-ups for unsupported paired reading in topic lessons. A 'top-right' child may well have the skills to support a peer struggling in the bottom-left of the chart, and together they can find out about Henry VIII's wives (in readiness for a mini-presentation, perhaps). Similarly, pairing a strong comprehender/poor word-reader with a child who has the exact opposite strengths and weaknesses might work particularly well: in effect, one child can read the text while the other explains it!



Challenging texts

The above approach may be developed into 'mixed-ability' groups of around four, interrogating topic-related texts together in readiness for a quiz, a 'jigsawing' activity, or another technique that will require all the children to have an understanding of the reading, thereby necessitating collaborative, peer-to-peer learning. This may be adapted further to develop an oft-neglected, yet vital, reading skill: perseverance/resilience in the face of challenging and perhaps not immediately engaging texts. In mixed groups, children should be challenged to get as much topic-related information as possible, collaboratively and against the clock (tight time-limits instantly make this an exciting game). We refer to this as 'risky reading' and it will support reading in test situations, in secondary (and tertiary) education and in real life!

Apart from this last idea, everything we have described above is dependent on History, Geography, RE and Science texts that children of different reading abilities are able to access, and this may be a stumbling block in your school. If it is, it's an area to be addressed as an utmost priority, whether or not you pursue any of our suggestions. Children must have accessible resources in topic lessons; anything less is not fair. And of course, buying such double-hit resources enables the doubling-up of literacy and other budgets. Making reading cross-curricular - particularly in support of those struggling with different aspects of reading - is a great way of getting more reading into the week. It also makes reading purposeful, which itself can make an enormous difference to slow-progress readers who may otherwise associate reading with their scheme books alone.



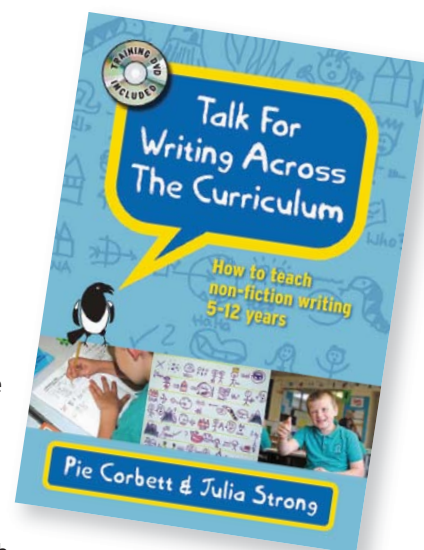
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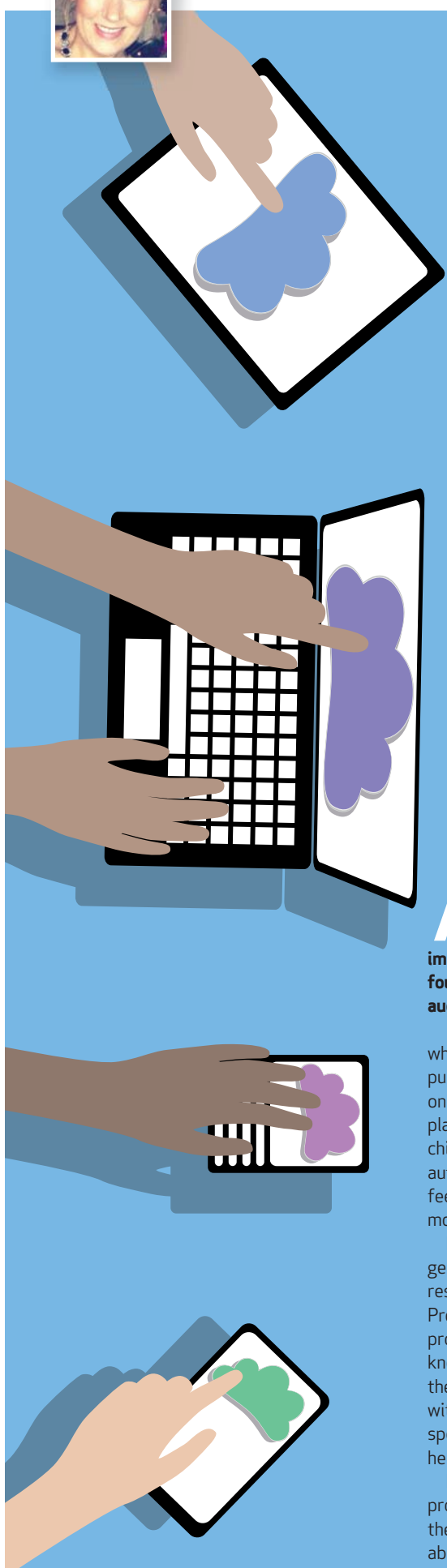
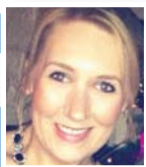
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Let ME SEE!

You may already have a class blog, but is it a powerful tool for formative assessment? Introduce these ideas from **Rebecca Matthews'** research-led project and it almost certainly will be...

As a class teacher I understood the simple recipe that would improve my pupils' writing: purposeful contexts + genuine audiences + effective formative feedback = improved quality of writing. The problem was I found it a struggle to create a purpose and audience for every piece of children's work.

It wasn't until a conversation with a teacher who was using a class blog to showcase his pupils' learning that I saw the potential that online writing offered. By creating an online platform for pupils' writing, we provide children with a contextualised purpose, an authentic audience and the potential for feedback from a global (and safe – when moderated) audience.

My eagerness to discover the impact of a genuine audience for children's writing resulted in the creation of the Online Writing Project (2012) – a research programme that provided pupils in a Year 5 class with a knowledgeable, interactive audience for their online writing. Pupils were paired up with trainee primary school teachers specialising in English, who were keen to help the children craft their writing.

Every week the pupils involved in the project posted a thematic piece of writing to their class blog. Student teachers were then able to provide next steps feedback for their

partner pupil via a comment to their blog post. Not only did pupils act on the feedback they received and adjust their next piece of writing, some also began learning conversations about how their writing could be improved. These online conversations didn't just take place between student teachers and pupils, either, but also between pupils and their peers. This was a truly collaborative learning opportunity for all involved.

From the children's point of view, it was exciting to receive feedback from someone other than their class teacher. They remembered their feedback vividly and even made use of it when writing in class. The interactive audience had a positive impact on pupils' writing, but also on their writing confidence and their motivation to write. More importantly, it engaged all of the pupils and, as we know, engagement plays a key role in improving attainment.

The reason why the Online Writing Project was so powerful was because the class blog acted as a vehicle for pupils to receive high-quality, actionable feedback. It offered an opportunity for truly formative assessment to take place.

So how can you use your class blog to develop your pupils' writing through online collaboration?

Effective formative assessment

In a world without levels, alongside new forms of summative assessment, the role of teacher assessment is going to be pivotal. As we know from the work of Black and Wiliam, high quality feedback is key to closing the gap between where a child's learning is now and where it should be. We are all used to providing next-steps feedback for children's writing; class blogs allow this feedback to be provided quickly and easily through comments on each child's blog post. The reciprocal comment system on blogs encourages a learning dialogue, which can continue outside of the classroom. An opportunity for purposeful, learning-based screen-time at home!

Ask children to reflect

To move away from a focus on teacher-led feedback, towards a pupil-led approach, involve pupils in self-assessment online. Traditionally, blogs were used as a reflective space, creating an archive of chronological posts. In the classroom, why not encourage children to write reflections on their learning after writing? This provides an insight into what they think they have achieved and their self-identified areas for development. You can then provide feedback on the basis of their reflections. Providing time for pupils to reflect on their writing and to consider their own next steps reinforces what they need to do to craft their writing.

Encourage mutual support

A class blog also provides the perfect vehicle for peer assessment. Setting up learning trios who provide feedback on the quality of each other's writing ensures that every pupil receives more than one constructive comment. Key to the effectiveness of this is the need to model formative feedback so that pupils can effectively peer assess. Upload a bank of phrases and a child-friendly feedback structure to your class blog and model using this to provide feedback. Before you know it, children will be using the metalanguage of assessment – a 'What to look for when peer assessing writing' guide can direct pupils to look for word choices, sentence structure and features of a text type. Providing a bank of sentence starters helps children to word the feedback they give: "I like it when you use... because..."; "(This word) was a powerful choice because it..."; "Take care with your..."; "Remember to...(mark the end of your sentence with a full stop)." By encouraging children to provide peer feedback through comments on blog posts, you create a learning environment that promotes mutual support for everyone's writing.

A working evidence base

By commenting on each other's work, pupils are seeing a range of writing on a regular basis. This interactive showcase of writing achievement builds writing motivation by offering inspiration and ideas. It also makes a blog the ideal place to share model examples of writing for pupils to explore and analyse. By uploading effective and ineffective models of the text type you are exploring, written by you, children can provide feedback for both and create success criteria on the basis of the effective text. Not only can this set of success criteria be used for self and peer assessment when it comes to independent writing, but it reinforces why those features are essential.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HOW TO BUILD AN AUDIENCE OF CRITICAL FRIENDS...

Children enjoy receiving feedback from a range of people and it seems this feedback is highly memorable. Think carefully about how you are using your class blog – are the only individuals contributing to your blog you and your pupils?

- **Consider the wider audience within your school – could you pair up with another year group to provide feedback on their writing?**
- **If your pupils are currently writing for a younger audience, why not share that writing with a younger year group, via your blog, and ask them for feedback.**
- **Involving your headteacher in providing feedback would certainly create memorable next steps!**

Why not look to parents and carers to build your class's audience further?

- **Holding a feedback training session with parents can support the quality of feedback they provide to pupils online.**
- **It's also worth looking to the wider community; could you recruit a librarian to provide feedback for pupils' book reviews or an author who could comment on children's stories written in their style?**
- **Don't be afraid to think globally – the exciting part of using a blog is that there are no boundaries to involving people from around the world.**

As a class blog stores a bank of chronological learning evidence, it offers an opportunity for true Assessment for Learning. By looking for trends in your pupils' writing online, you can undertake a gap analysis to inform your teaching and learning. Having all of your pupils' writing in one place means that you can easily track your pupils' achievement and make summative assessment judgements.

In today's digital learning environment, we're all on the hunt for technology-enhanced learning opportunities; using a class blog to develop your pupils' writing offers just that. Why not grow your blog audience, develop your pupils' assessment skills, build their motivation to write and see the impact on their writing unfold.

*Anthony Horowitz**“Sometimes the most rewarding reading can be difficult”*

A well-stocked, fully staffed school library should be a part of every child's literacy journey, argues **Anthony Horowitz...**

Literacy is very different from the love of literature. Each is as important as the other – without the essential foundation of literacy you won't ever know literature – but I suspect that, when talking about young people, the two are often confused.

In terms of my own literacy, I was brought up with a series by Angela Banner called 'Ant and Bee'; these were the books that taught me to read – and indeed, if you buy one now it will have a quote from me on the front cover saying precisely that. They are very simple stories, but I had a huge fondness for Ant and Bee (and for their friend, Kind Dog, for that matter). The experience of joining in is what I remember most vividly – there are short words in red throughout the text, which the child is encouraged to articulate. The whole experience was immensely positive; in fact, everything to do with books and reading has been positive, for me.

Modern parents seem to worry inordinately about their children's achievements, especially in reading. I don't blame them; it's the inevitable result of a society that puts in place too many exams, tests and benchmarks, and forgets that learning is supposed to be a pleasure. What seems to be missing from schools now is the leisure to read, and the opportunity to enjoy shared reading experiences, which are so incredibly important. I remember when I was at school, every member of each year group would be given the same book to read. We'd anticipate it – eagerly or otherwise – discuss it with each other, and by the end, have a sense of pride in having tackled and completed something that was perhaps more challenging than the titles we were picking up out of choice at that time.

I don't think there's anything wrong, by the way, in selecting certain, classic texts to be put

forward and shared in classrooms. The lesson that sometimes the most rewarding reading can be difficult is an important one – and in a sense, this highlights an issue I have with some of today's children's literature. A while back, authors like Philip Pullman, Michael Morpurgo and others raised the bar for popular books (J.K. Rowling too; let's not forget, the final Harry Potter ran to over 600 pages), but now it seems as though many titles on the best-seller lists are playing to the lowest common denominator. There's a place for – and real value in – fun books full of silly jokes, of course, and I'm not decrying them at all;

but they're not what I am in the business of producing and promoting.

I was a writer from eight or nine years old. I began by telling stories (it always starts with the story) to the other children in my dorm at the boarding school where I was unhappily incarcerated, and by ten or 11 I had a huge ledger I carried around with me, full of ideas, snippets and complete works. The first play I wrote was about Guy Fawkes, and called *The Thing That Never Happened*. It was never performed, though, because unfortunately I was at the kind of school that instead of encouraging my writing, punished me for doing it when I should have been otherwise occupied. Such a stupid, backward place; I'm still amazed my parents spent money on it.

Reading was my escape. The school library was both my refuge and my inspiration. I think it's very dangerous for someone like me to try and tell teachers what to do in order to improve reading and writing; it's arrogance to assume that simply because you have sold lots of books, you know it all. I don't. However, if I am asked what schools *need* in order to facilitate literacy, I can answer without hesitation: a well-stocked library and a full-time, trained librarian with the necessary resources and funds to ensure that library flourishes. The library should be the battery at the heart of every school. Everything begins there – communication, confidence, the acquisition of cultural references and the exploration of our hinterland. It's where you start to develop empathy and an understanding of the human condition – who you are, where you are, and how you got there. Alas, there's a disconnect between governments and educationalists who bang the drum about literacy... and the reality of how much, or little, time and resources people and schools actually have.

ON A MISSION

Anthony Horowitz's teen superspy Alex Rider is massively popular; and now YHA School Trips has worked with Walker Books and the author himself to come up

with a unique, action packed outdoor residential based on his exploits that will fire pupils' imaginations, boost their confidence, and send them away with a renewed enthusiasm for reading, too. Available at selected Youth Hostels as a 2, 3, or 4 night experience, the Alex Rider Spy Academy package will immerse youngsters in a thrilling world of espionage and adventure – and all participants leave with a free copy of *Stormbreaker*, as well as a 'mission complete' certificate.

Find out more at yha.org.uk/school-trips or call 0800 0195 465



“Modern parents seem to worry inordinately about their children’s achievements, especially in reading. I don’t blame them; it’s the inevitable result of a society that puts in place too many exams, tests and benchmarks, and forgets that learning is supposed to be a pleasure”

Between THE LINES

Roger McGough discusses rhyme, rhythm and the power of poetry in the classroom...

TR&W: *What part should poetry have to play in developing and nurturing children's literacy from an early age?*

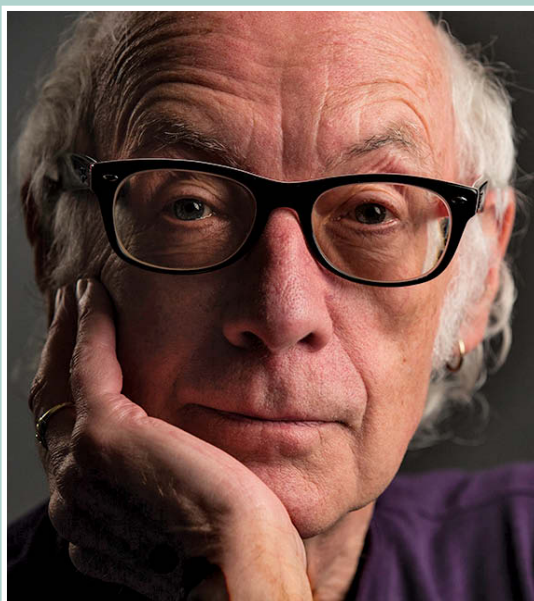
RMcG: It has everything to play, in a sense. We are born into a world of rhythm – from the heartbeat in the womb to the pulses of the seasons – and with a sense of expectancy when we know a rhyme is coming (although it doesn't always have to come, of course). Poetry just is, and the question, really, is how do we give children enough of it?

Is the idea of 'learning poems by heart' really as strange and retrograde as some commentators suggest?

It depends on what you tell children they are doing it for. Funnily enough, I, at a push, know only one or two poems by heart – and not my own, either. The same is true for many poets I know. But I was brought up on hymns, and prayers – they were, and are, very important to me, and have stayed. And many of my friends who no longer believe can also still remember those rhythms, rhymes and metaphors; your head may forget a poem, but if it has touched you, your heart will retain and thrill to it. Having to learn poems for the sake of it, though – being assessed and judged, so that some are 'better at it' than others, and if you fail, you fail... I'm scared of that.

Are some poems more 'important' than others? Are there some that should be considered too 'difficult' for primary aged pupils?

Certainly not 'more important' – and I don't think 'too difficult', either. Children can sense things. *The Tyger*, for example, is a complex poem, but even young children can get a feel for something from it. Poems aren't like stories – they don't necessarily have a clear narrative. And from my (brief) experience



as a teacher, I would say that it wasn't always the brightest children who 'got' poems, or wrote the best ones.

What advice do you have for primary school teachers who are keen to improve the way they use poetry in lessons?

I would say, if you can, keep up with what is going on around you, poetry-wise. Can you name ten living poets? Five under thirty? Get to live performances if you can, and certainly search on YouTube for videos you can discuss with your class.

Don't be afraid of what poetry can do; so often when it comes to, say, November 5th, everyone says, "Right! Let's write poems about the bonfire!" And you end up with pages full of 'fizzing' and 'whizzing' – but it's all descriptive, when poetry can be so much more than that. You could be the firework, for example, and talk about how that feels. You can be anything, do anything, with a poem.

All children are poets before they go to school, in the way they see the world. I remember my own son running in from the garden, crying, "Daddy, the wood's bit me," when he had a splinter. If we're not careful, as teachers and parents, we find ourselves saying, "Don't be silly; the candle isn't 'crying' – let's look it up, and see what is *really* happening!" We squash the imagination in our quest to have them understand the world – then struggle later on to relight that creative spark in their writing.

Finally, I still judge children's poetry competitions. A few years ago, you'd get a pile of handwritten poems, with little drawings and a scatter of spelling mistakes – but now it's a stream of perfectly presented, printed pages. They're all the same... and something is

lost. I would never write a poem straight onto a computer – the feel of the pencil on the paper is part of the process of creation.

You are Chair of judges for (not to mention a former winner of) the annual CLPE Poetry Award, most recently presented to Tony Mitton. How important is it to celebrate poets' work in this way?

Hugely; in fact, I only wish that some major corporation would come in and support it, like the Costa Book Awards. There was a time, in the 80s and 90s, when a lot of poetry was being published. But now it seems that many publishers simply don't see poems as a big money-spinner; and I want them to feel guilty about that. Books aren't just 'units', and publishing poetry for children is, I would say, a moral duty.

Find out more about the CLPE Poetry Award, and all the work done by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, at clpe.org.uk.

Letters from Wonderland

Lewis Carroll's famous game of croquet, starring the tyrannical Queen of Hearts, sets the scene for **Bob Cox's** fascinating literacy lesson for KS2 pupils...

Without challenging texts to inspire pupils to go 'beyond the limit' they are less likely to experiment, less likely to imitate clever models and less likely to ask questions about style, irony, rhyme or meaning. The key has always been to use the right kinds of methods to open doors. Without access strategies to challenging texts, rather than inspiring a love of reading and writing for life, the opposite can be the case.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll is such a well-known tale that accessing the text is not hard for young children. However, a few preliminary exercises will still help to set them up for the challenge ahead.

First, try using a visual question prompt. Show the pupils the two original illustrations by John Tenniel, labelled on this page as **picture 1** and **picture 2**. Ask them to come up with questions about anything which puzzles them about the images. Then move on to some 'opening doors' questions to help build comprehension:

- What kind of wonderland do you think Lewis Carroll has invented in his story from looking at the pictures? List 10 words or phrases which might sum up the type of story you expect.
- What other kinds of wonderland does this remind you of?

If you now read an extract to your pupils, they should be able to relate their thinking to the imaginative world of Alice and the Queen of Hearts.

Go to Chapter eight, 'The Queen's Croquet Ground'. Start from, "A large rose tree stood near the entrance of the garden..." and conclude

at "...Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed."

Learning objectives

- Understand how humour can be created through the apparently absurd.
- Know more about the use of direct speech to create characterisation.
- Demonstrate some original writing which imitates Carroll's style and shows imaginative power.



Opening questions: reading skills

Until harder learning opportunities are set, no teacher knows how well a pupil may do, so I recommend a 'hardest question first' pedagogy. I've found, time and time again, that when open and conceptual questions are set first, there's genuine surprise from teachers that so many pupils can access something harder. So, using this concept, see how many of your pupils can tackle the following open question:

'Since the gardeners may lose their heads in this extract, how does Carroll make the events seem funny?'

Gather ideas and evidence. A good way to approach this challenge is to find categories under which ideas can develop, a kind of inductive reasoning where classification supports higher order thinking. Excellent responses will include:

- Use of direct speech with specific personalities developed.
- A sense of the absurd with anything possible.
- Alice's brave responses.
- The extended pack of cards image.
- Using animals to play croquet!

There's a lot to explore in each of these points so, for example, playing card imagery might include:

- The visualisation of the card characters in our imagination.
- The way Two, Four and Seven speak, as if it's normal to do so!
- Painting the roses is both ridiculous and imaginative.
- The image of the court as a pack of cards is extended with the memorable Queen

of Hearts dishing out executions here, there and everywhere!

- Carroll gives us Alice's inner monologue, so that her whimsical thought processes (like the refusal to lie down) keep returning the reader to her own narrative and a form of 'reality' amidst the bizarre events.

Support questions for those children who need some extra help could include:

- Write about two absurd things which happen in this extract from Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland*. Why are they so strange?
- Some children are scared of the Queen of Hearts. Have they misread the story or is this an understandable response?
- What is croquet? Why did Carroll choose flamingos and hedgehogs for the unusual croquet game?

Alternatively, show the children clips from some of the numerous film versions. There are lots available online. Comparing films with texts promotes evaluative thinking and often leads to a greater appreciation of both media.

'Jabberwocky'

Carroll's famous poem 'Jabberwocky', from *Through the Looking-Glass*, is a fantastic resource to show your pupils how invented words and a play on our associations with monster stories can be exploited. Alice's comment says it all: "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas only I don't exactly know what they are!"

Get your pupils working on the shape and sounds of Carroll's invented words and then compare them with words they do know. The poem has to give the reader some clues as to what the words mean to avoid being completely baffling! For example, the word 'chortled' eventually became an accepted word meaning chuckling or laughing in a gleeful way.

The extract gives a taster of what is a fascinating text full of riddles, puzzles and fantasy. It's all a dream, of course, but reflections of the 'real' Alice's world are tantalisingly present too and the sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, is aptly named as that is how the reader grasps Alice's adventures.

For outstanding learning opportunities, young writers need models which demonstrate invention, originality and the unexpected. Exploring parody, pun and black humour will lead your pupils on to more challenging concepts, but scenes like the card procession and the croquet game are also entertaining in themselves.

Text extracted from *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose* by Bob Cox (Crown House Publishing). Sir John Tenniel's original illustrations are available at www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/tenniel/alice/gallery1. Online versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are available at: www.literature.org and www.gutenberg.org.

Why teach this?

Apart from being great fun, the Queen of Hearts extract will help your young writers with techniques such as:

- Parody (e.g. nursery rhyme characters)
- Puns
- Word invention
- Cross-referencing (i.e. referring to earlier writing)
- Nonsense language and verse



Extend the topic

Ask the children to think about an ordinary day in their life. Can they write about it as if it were dreamlike, absurd or seen through a mirror? They should enter their wonderland and write about it! Alternatively, the pupils could explore other texts and film adaptations which feature girls entering fantasy worlds:

- Wendy in *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie
- Lucy in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis
- Dorothy in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum



STEVE BOWKETT taught English for twenty years and is now a fulltime writer and education consultant

10 *Fun Ways to* TEACH Non Fiction

Steve Bowkett's lively lesson ideas present children with real world scenarios to encourage open-minded thinking

The principles for engaging children in studying non fiction and in crafting non-fictional forms of writing are those that underpin all good teaching. This is to say that the communication of facts should ideally be rooted in 'real world' problems and scenarios, practised in a safe environment within an ethos of playful enquiry, encourage a creative attitude which incorporates multisensory experiences and be underpinned by a thinking skills agenda.

Presenting your class with 'real world' problems and scenarios means they have some connection with and relevance to the children's own lives. If as teachers we can answer the question, 'Why does this information matter?', more children are likely to come on board and be motivated to learn. A 'safe environment' is essentially one where the children's thinking is valued and where they are genuinely encouraged to express and justify their opinions. An important element of such an environment is that it's OK not to know all the 'right answers' immediately. We are talking of much more than the transmission, retention and recollection of 'facts' here, but rather the investigation and testing of facts for accuracy, their relation to other ideas and their overall relevance. In short, children are asked to create information and meaning out of the material to which they are exposed.

The 'creative attitude' encompasses all of the above and includes the key elements of making connections and looking at things

from different perspectives. These elements rely on the core skills of noticing and questioning. When these are embedded in multi-sensory experiences where the children are challenged to practise a range of ways of thinking, then true and lasting learning will occur.

Defining fact and fiction

Many children hold on to the belief that non-fiction is made up of facts that are true, whereas fiction consists of stories, which are not true.

1 TRUE FACTS Point out that stories, poems, dramas etc can 'tell you something true', insofar as facts can be embedded in them. However, more importantly, they deal with emotions, beliefs and values that are just as 'real' as the fact that water boils at 100 degrees celsius... or does it? Well yes, at sea level on Earth (i.e. at one atmosphere of pressure). At the top of Everest it boils at 69°C (according to www.omgfacts.com). In other words, facts often need to be qualified and challenged, as they are sometimes provisional and sometimes ephemeral.

Fig 1



Mind warm ups

Get your class into thinking mode by starting lessons with a mind warm up. Try these for starters:

2 BOWL OF FISH Show the children a picture of a fish in a bowl that's standing on a table and ask them, 'How many objects are on the table?' Then show them an ambiguous object and ask, 'What could it be? What does it remind you of?'

3 LINKING GAME Show the class a selection of objects and ask the children to pick two that are linked in some way. Press for as many different connections as you can.

4 WHAT'S A CAT? Show a selection of pictures of, say, cats and ask the children to define a cat.

5 WORDS AND PICTURES Take two simple pictures and some vocabulary from a chosen topic. Ask the children to use both pictures and at least one item of vocabulary in a sentence. So in this example an acceptable suggestion would be, 'The rocket was launched into orbit before setting off for the moon.'

Teach questioning strategies

Active questioning lies at the heart of creative learning. Try the following activities in your classroom to get children really thinking:

6 CLOUD OF QUESTIONS Hold up an everyday object such as a pencil and ask the class to come up with as many questions about it as they can in two minutes (there's no need to know any of the answers). Afterwards categorise the questions. Ideally the children will think of their own categories, though you can start them off with a few suggestions such as: questions that have one answer or many answers; questions that have a definite answer that can't be discovered; questions about measurement, science, history etc.

7 20 QUESTIONS Within a chosen topic (e.g. the classification of animals), create a 6x6 grid of 36 animal images. Surround the grid with the vocabulary of the topic; amphibian, predator, invertebrate etc. Run the 20 questions game, encouraging the

children to use as much of the vocabulary as possible as they work towards the chosen animal. Do a 'question audit' afterwards by exploring which were the most effective questions and why.

8 THE COMPUTER IN THE BOX Bring a box into class and tell the children to imagine that inside it is a super-intelligent computer that can answer any question. Ask the children to write down the questions that they would like to ask. Now create a shortlist of the most interesting ones by saying that the computer will only answer questions that a) the children don't already know the answers to and b) that are clear and unambiguous. After the children have trimmed down the list, point out that the computer is low on battery power and can now only answer three questions. Have the children discuss which questions should be chosen and why.

9 WHAT IF? Ask the class a question such as, 'What if, after the age of 21, human beings started to shrink so that by the time they are 60 they're just three inches tall; then they stop shrinking?' Add these subsidiary questions: What would the world be like? What problems would we face? How could we solve those problems? Run this as a whole-class or smaller-group activity. Give the children a time limit of around 20 minutes to come up with some practical solutions to the problems. Note that although the initial premise is fantastical, the children will be tackling 'real world' problems that demand workable solutions.

10 WHODUNNITS You can find plenty of examples and books of whodunnits and mysteries online to boost children's reasoning skills. For example, Tony Bowman was killed around 11:00 a.m. last Sunday morning. His wife found the body and called the police. When they arrived they questioned the chef, maid, butler and gardener, whose alibis were:
 Chef – making breakfast
 Maid – getting the mail
 Butler – setting the table
 Gardener – watering the plants
 The police immediately arrested the criminal. Who was it and how did they know? Answer: the maid lied, as there is no mail on Sunday.

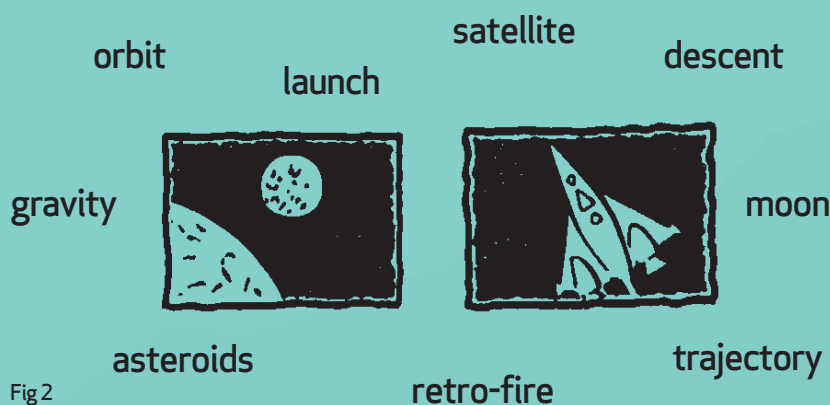


Fig 2

To see how some of these ideas work in practice take a look at the website of Bealings Primary School in Suffolk (www.bealings.org.uk).



Literary CIRCLES

Guided reading can be the perfect way of teaching the comprehension element of the new National Curriculum, says **James Clements...**

As a newly-minted teacher fresh from university, I decided I would spend my first English lesson with my new class sharing Kenneth Grahame's

classic *The Wind in the Willows*. I picked up my battered old copy, and without any introduction I began to read aloud, transporting my inner-city London class to the countryside idyll of the riverbank. I read the first chapter without stopping for breath, then finally closed the book and looked out to my class. They looked back at me, eyes sparkling, clearly enjoying the story as much as I was. Then a hand went up from the back. "That's a good story Mr Clements, but I've got a question. Ratty is a rat, yeah? But what kind of animal is Mole?" Ah...

Comprehension, constructing a mental model of what we read, is central to becoming a confident and competent reader, but teaching children to develop such a complex set of skills and behaviours can be notoriously difficult. In many English schools, guided reading is enjoying a renaissance, as teachers and English subject leaders revisit this method of teaching reading to address the challenging new requirements of the 2014 National Curriculum.

Organised and taught well, guided reading can be the perfect match for teaching the reading component of the new curriculum. It allows for plenty of teacher-child dialogue, and the interactive nature of working in a group means learning is collaborative, with children learning from their peers. Working in a small group enables the teacher to focus on each individual child, targeting her questioning, and addressing any misconceptions as they occur. It also allows the teacher to assess children's reading skills without having to resort to

written tests, which are often as much a test of writing ability as they are of reading.

So, what can teachers do in guided reading sessions to best support the development of children's comprehension skills?

1 Assess and teach 'casual inference'

Inference is often seen as the top of the hierarchy of comprehension skills. As teachers we're often keen to get to rich text or character-based comprehension questions such as 'how does Max feel when he is sent to his room without any supper?' But for many developing readers, the first potential stumbling block comes with casual inference, the little particles of understanding that confident readers take for granted. This can include missing cohesive devices such as not following lexical cohesion from sentence to sentence: 'Katie was thirsty. After some moaning, her sister handed her the bottle.' Or not being able to identify who is being referred to by a particular pronoun in a sentence: 'Tom snatched the ball from Sam's hands. He began to cry.'

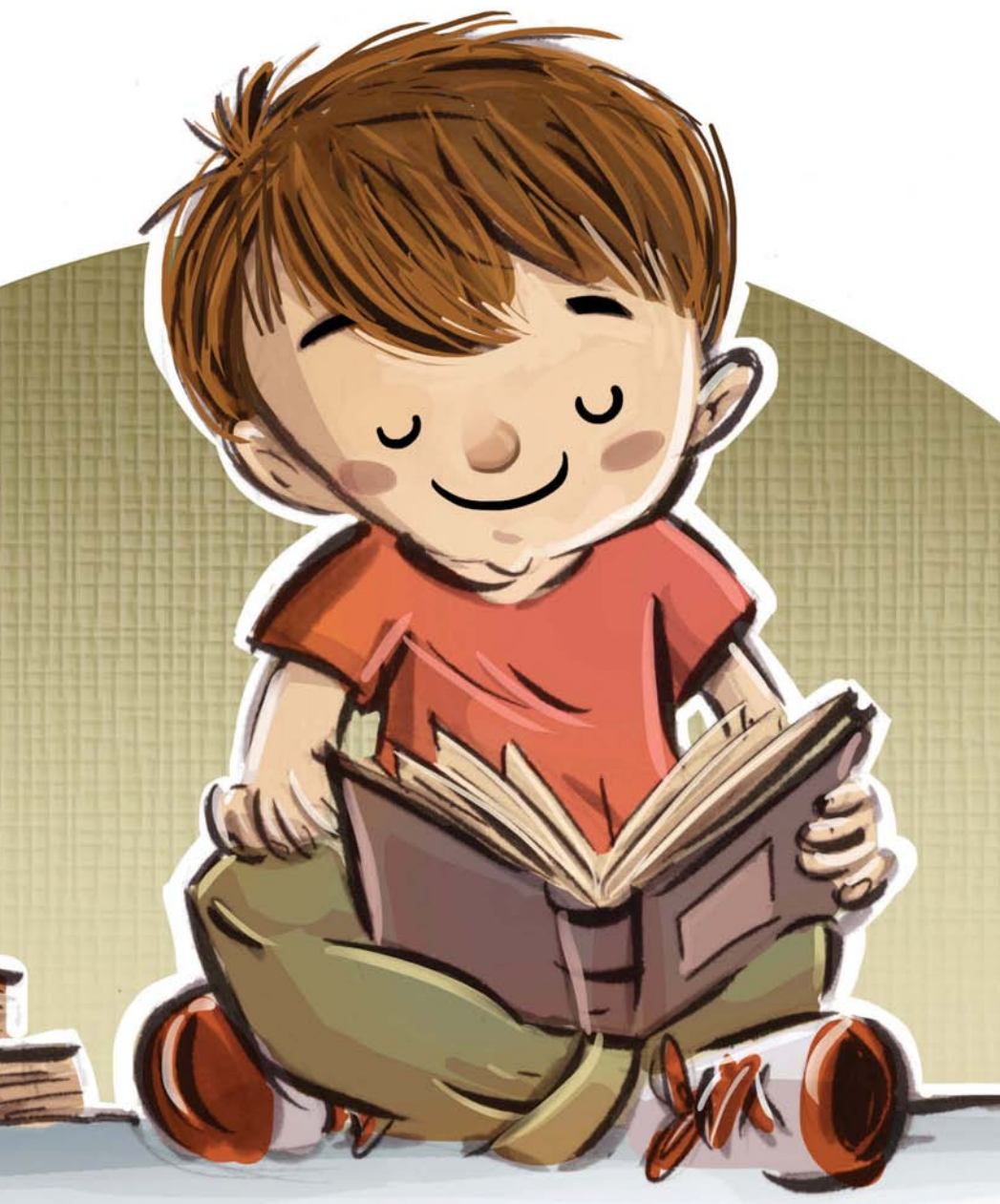
This is particularly true for children who are not yet strong word-readers and are using lots

of processing power to decode the words on the page. The small group nature of guided reading gives the adult the opportunity to check children's understanding of the text as they read, supporting them to make the casual inferences that are needed to understand the text as a whole.

2 Pre-teach the context

A key element of comprehension is being able to match what we're reading to our knowledge of the outside world, to use our general knowledge to build a mental image of the information in the text. If we don't know anything about a particular topic, it can be very difficult to make sense of what we're reading. For a child, Leon Garfield's wonderful narrative version of *Julius Caesar* is a much richer experience if they know something about the Roman senate and that the Romans overthrew their last king. This helps them to appreciate Brutus' dilemma and understand the significance of Caesar being offered a





crown. While it wouldn't be possible to pre-teach the background knowledge for everything children are about to read, guided reading gives an opportunity to do this in a small way. A few moments sharing a picture of the different animals in *The Wind in the Willows* at the start of the session means that all children, however limited their knowledge of woodland creatures, can access the story.

3 Model comprehension monitoring

Comprehension monitoring is the ability that confident readers have, allowing them to recognise if they haven't understood what they've read. It is what makes us re-read a sentence, make sure we haven't skipped a page, or even go away to undertake the onerous task of looking up the meaning of an unfamiliar word (like now, perhaps). A guided reading session allows the teacher plenty of

opportunities to model this behaviour with the children who need it most, using a text closely matched to their level of understanding. Effective teaching approaches include asking children to summarise the passage they have just read, or teaching children to form a mental image as they read, helping them to detect inconsistencies or missing information.

4 Give children regular reading time

One of the most effective ways of supporting children's developing reading comprehension is regular time to read. After the age of seven, most of the new words we learn come from reading, and breadth of vocabulary plays an important role in children's understanding of what they read. Effective guided reading can help to keep children interested in books by providing them with regular time to enjoy engaging stories that will resonate with their interests and capture their imagination.

GUIDED READING MYTHS

Some teachers still worry about how far they can stray from the traditional carousel model of five small groups reading with an adult once per week for 20 minutes. In fact, guided reading offers considerable flexibility as a vehicle for teaching reading:

MYTH: Children should be organised into five groups of six. **Actually, guided reading groups can be of any size: smaller groups for an intensive focus with the children who need it, to larger groups for longer reading sessions. The key is that each child is working with a text that is accessible but challenging, and has the opportunity to engage with the teacher and their peers in genuine discussion about the book.**

MYTH: Guided reading should be organised as a carousel. **There is no set structure for organising guided reading sessions. What is important is that children are engaged in meaningful activities that will develop some aspect of their reading and that guided reading is having an impact on the standard of pupils' reading.**

MYTH: All children must read aloud during their guided reading session with an adult. **Children who are developing as readers, especially those in the early part of the school, will benefit from reading aloud to an adult as often as possible. By KS2, guided reading is an opportunity for high-quality discussion based on the text, with children using the book they have read to justify their views. A literature circle approach can work well, with children reading the book away from the session and coming ready to discuss what they have read.**

MYTH: Guided Reading sessions should last for 20 minutes. **In most schools guided reading has moved out of the English lesson to become a part of the school day in its own right. The length of sessions is at the discretion of the teacher – many schools have successfully used a model where guided reading is organised into fewer, but longer weekly sessions.**

Reading Cloud

Contact: microlib.co.uk
Reviewed by: John Dabell



Reading Cloud is a blockbuster of a new resource; it's an online, cloud-based literary community that aims to encourage

reading for pleasure – and if you dip your toes in the water and experience it for yourself I think you'll find it does this with consummate ease. In fact, it's hard to come up with a stronger resource than this for searching, reserving or downloading resources – not only from your school library but from across the cloud, too. You can chat online with fellow users about books and authors, blog about them, recommend resources, and write and record a video book review. Reading Cloud even lets you share your home library with friends. Clearly, it's rather special.

Reading Cloud is attractive to look at – colourful, fresh, and friendly. Everything feels right. It has the look of an established social media destination – funky and creative; in short, it's a site learners won't be embarrassed to say they are using.

There is plenty to inspire on the Home Page, such as a Star Review segment, a Featured Author section, and Post-it style notelets that feature word of the day, fact of the day, news and feeds from Twitter and Facebook. The brilliant Meet the Authors video link is a place to head to for seeing real-life authors in the flesh talking about their books, and if you want to find a particular author then Who's Next? will help you. The Trending box contains words, authors and titles that are the most searched and at the foot of the page you will find a collection of the 100 most popular books to click on and read.

The big hitters on the home page, for me, are the author videos and the 'most popular

books' reports. The former would be great for kick-starting a literacy lesson or

inspiring a writing workshop;

the Reading Cloud automatically selects a random author video each time it is loaded but you can access others from a huge list.

Meanwhile, the most popular books section can be searched according to fiction and non-fiction, or gender-target, or new titles only.

Of course the idea of reading a book on your tablet isn't new – but this site enables pupils to feel part of a real reading community. It's a meeting place, a sharing place, a creative space and a quiet corner if you want it to be.

It's not all about school though. Parents get a piece of the pie too, where they are able to take a peek at reading choices made by their young ones, track progress, join in discussions, access e-books and take pride in their child's reviews, as well as find hints and tips from experts with useful links covering topics like bullying and schoolwork.

The home page is one thing but if you are logged on as a user then you'll notice the screen changes to an interactive personal homepage with further

features to enjoy. There is a popular What's on Your Mind? box where you can post a short status message for others to see and there is a timeline that displays all your personal activity on Reading Cloud, as well as the activity of friends.

I like the My Info area and so will pupils. It shows information on friends and their online status, notifications of friend requests, home library loan requests and the guaranteed-to-be-a-hit instant chat option; Microlib has really tapped into the student world. The My Profile section hits the back of the net too, because it enables users to enter a mini-autobiography, create their own avatar and view books, authors and profiles that they have liked.

Blogging is popular and it's also a great way to get students writing. With Reading Cloud, students' blogs are protected from public access but can be viewed by other users. Users can also add their own personal collection of books/DVDs/games to their Reading Cloud account so others can request to borrow them. Finally, surely one of the finest features on offer is the option not only to write a book review but record it as a video too. Once one learner starts, watch the snowball effect as creativity is inspired to new heights.



VERDICT:

Anything's possible

Buying into Reading Cloud is a no-brainer really. You get to elevate reading and your library to dizzy heights of popularity; you can create dynamic new lessons using the books and features on offer; and provide a safe network of enquiry-based learning. The fun needn't stop there, either, because not only will you be able to provide a literacy-centred online social network, you can even collaborate with other schools, and integrate public libraries into the Reading Cloud.

StoryStarter Getting Started Set

Contact: LEGOeducation.co.uk/storystarter

Reviewed by: John Dabell



A single brick of LEGO can tell a story all by itself. I found a bright red 1x6 brick the other day at home, pressed into a tub of margarine. There was glitter in there too, not to mention a LEGO man inside the milk. I quickly drew up a list of four suspects and interviewed them in the kitchen. As one started to explain what had happened, the others soon added their own layers of invention and by the end I was so impressed I couldn't help but admire their joint venture – even if it did mean another trip to the shops. It's funny how we sometimes say to children, "Don't tell tales" when actually that's what we should be encouraging.

Now, give children a pile of LEGO and you're guaranteed multiple stories and that's what I love most about these simple bits of Danish plastic. They are playful, addictive and, above all, world makers. You are the brick author and the possibilities are limitless. But while a LEGO factory of untamed ideas and stories are inside every child, sometimes they just need a bit of help getting them out.

This is where the StoryStarter set comes in – a clever tool for teaching literacy and writing sequences. It's like a pair of jump leads for the mind. This marvellous tub of fun from that small town in Jutland is something quite special. It is made up of 1,144 carefully selected pieces including assorted characters, animals, accessories, iconic elements (such as flags, boxes and wheel parts), basic bricks, and building plates for creating up to five story scenes.

You also get sorting trays and activity spinners. It has everything to support

a small group of pupils with building their own stories. Of course, the hardware is not the only star here; the innovative software that comes with it also shares centre stage.

The story plates are used to build a story sequence with a beginning, middle and end. Children choose their LEGO pieces to develop settings, characters and plots for the stories they have in mind and then explore their context through building and put their thoughts and creations into words. The spinners are there to help get their brains buzzing.

The kit works wonders in my opinion because children are attaching vocabulary to the pieces they select, inventing scenarios and making things happen whilst working collaboratively and sharing ideas. The obvious hands-on nature of LEGO means all children are involved and their literacy skills are being developed and polished every step of the way. Creating a small, three-part story would in itself be enough, but the software is there to add extra impact as it enables children to document and present their stories in a written format. This basically means taking photos of their bases, importing the images of their models to the software and then placing these into a number of brilliant templates such as a cartoon, a newspaper or a storybook. The software provides children with a publishing medium par excellence. They can use the templates as they are or customise them as they wish. This makes writing, printing and sharing stories exciting and a real team-effort. Children will find it easy to import pictures and images and will love using the storyboard layout to help organise their writing. The software is top-notch stuff and it purrs with quality and creativity.

If you are short of ideas then the StoryStarter also includes a bumper guide to help you create rich lessons and the 114-page curriculum pack contains 24 project-based English activities, a learning grid, rubric samples, lesson plans, worksheets and tips and tricks. It's certainly plentiful.

As any primary practitioner will tell you, story writing is blinking hard graft with stacks of scaffolding, patience and creativity

required by the bucket-load. All help is gratefully accepted, so thank you LEGO because StoryStarter is going to make a lot of teachers very happy. The canny combination of classic LEGO and the latest technology has the power to make waves. The physical LEGO models children create are the perfect aid to developing writing.

Previously I have been critical about the cost of LEGO, but with this kit I think you are getting good value. I still think there could be more pieces and some of those included are a bit too small for some children to manipulate, but these are minor moans.



VERDICT:

A creative storm

Interest level – on the ceiling. Writing motivation – secured. Combined effect – awesome. Children get to be really creative using low-tech and high-tech materials, and improve their story arc and five Ws literacy skills in the process. Construction, discussion, expression, writing with a voice, technology and performance, it's all here. This is playful and collaborative problem solving at its best, and now I want to work for LEGO.

Bug Club

Contact: pearsonprimary.co.uk/joinbugclub
Reviewed by: John Dabell



Research suggests that 9 in 10 teachers believe that reading books is becoming less attractive for children growing up in the digital age. Children appear to

agree, with two thirds saying that they would read more if their books could be accessed on a computer. Pearson has addressed this by creating Bug Club – a colossal and ground-breaking interactive reading programme that oozes excellence, top quality and high production values.

Bug Club is the first phonics-based reading programme that allows children to read from both hard-copy books and their online equivalents, and is underpinned by a meticulous pedagogy, pioneering technology and first-class levelling. It's a stroke of genius – a whole-school programme that contains a truly impressive level of resources including 325 fiction and non-fiction readers for Reception, KS1 and KS2. There are 48 plays to read for KS1 and KS2, six plays to act for KS1 and 44 comics for phonics. Moreover, there's a whole pile of teacher resources for planning and assessment, including guided reading cards and teaching guides, professional development courses and parent support. It really has been superbly put together, with all bases covered. And at its core is engagement – it's been road-tested by children, and this shows.

At the heart of Bug Club is something called ActiveLearn, which is an outstanding digital learning space for children and effectively a toolkit for teachers. This really is resource central and the hub of where you search, plan, allocate resources and assess. Pupils get their own, personalised, online reading world; a unique homepage enables them to see the books their teacher has allocated to them, and as they read there is a bug icon showing a quiz question to answer, which earns them coins that convert into rewards (games and stickers) – they can spend them straight away or save up. At the end of each book are further challenges and questions to answer.

The scheme uses popular characters that children want to read about, and language that is appropriate for their level. Bug Club is also the first scheme of this kind to include graphic comics, which can be great for encouraging reluctant readers. There are hundreds of books to choose from by some of the best children's authors and illustrators around; and familiar characters featured include Ben 10, Angelina Ballerina, Lego and Moshi Monsters. Bug Club books subdivide the

Book Band levels to give children finer steps in their reading progression. The digital flip books really are top quality and come with colourful graphics, zoom and drawing tools, and in some cases, sound effects, too. The engagement factor is A1.

For teachers, the planning and assessment tools

are superb as they are so instinctive and offer quite unequalled real-time online tracking of each pupil's progress. For example, the quizzes that children do as they read their books are fed to you via at-a-glance reports so you can see how they answered. Bug Club gives you the flexibility to differentiate reading throughout multiple levelled groups with relative ease. With the ActiveLearn site, you can easily search for a suitable book for each child based on a book band, phonic phase, reading recovery level or assessment focus. Levelling guidance charts allow you to use specific titles as benchmark books for one-to-one reading assessment. In addition there are planning and assessment guides, comprehensive lesson plans for whole-class sessions, photocopy masters, running records and curriculum information. I love the fact that

there is a guided reading card for every Bug Club book, too.

Bug Club treats accessibility very seriously indeed. The books have been designed to make it easier for children to learn to read with very obvious and careful thought given to text placement and font type and size. And the website includes a survey devoted to understanding more about its users and what could be done further to support those with disabilities; this is what I call service. As a subscriber, you also get a range of professional development courses to develop reading in your school and make the most of your investment.

Pricing is reasonable and transparent. Online services are offered at three price levels depending on the size of your school. Small schools pay less than big schools. That's fair. What is also very fair is that when you subscribe you get any new eBooks as they are released at no extra cost.

Modern and fresh, Bug Club is now available on i-Pad, which makes it even more appealing. This is a fun, highly interactive and charming resource that has titles that will appeal to all pupils of all backgrounds and needs. Its reward-based environment make it highly appealing to children and it offers second to none nuts and bolts support for teachers. Bug Club has been tried and tested in hundreds of settings – and has been highly ranked by children and adults alike.



VERDICT:

Join the club!

This is a conscientiously constructed reading programme that will go some considerable way in helping children become successful readers. It is a very powerful and enjoyable learning tool – a great way of helping children catch the reading bug.

Jolly Grammar

Contact: jollylearning.co.uk

Reviewed by: John Dabell



Between you and I, grammar just ain't what it used to be. Many teachers have a sketchy knowledge of the subject, often due to a lack of focus on it during their own schooldays, and of course, this easily impacts on pupil outcomes. SPaG is deeply important, then, because it is the very foundation of literacy – and it's good news that the curriculum now recognises this. But how do you find your way through the grammar maze and on what resources should you rely? We need a logical approach.

Publishers love grammar and they are happy to sell thousands of resources to insecure teachers and parents – but the standard and quality of these can vary enormously, with sometimes conflicting advice. One set of resources for which I have a lot of time, therefore, is Jolly Grammar – a truly well-thought-through and finely crafted bank of materials that provides sound guidance and activities for teaching grammar. The resources are written by expert practitioners who created the celebrated Jolly Phonics, which has achieved outstanding results. They are sensibly priced and well within the budget and pockets of most schools and teachers. Songs, activities, rhymes, dancing and colouring? In a grammar lesson? You bet – and Jolly Grammar shows us exactly how to do it, involving children in enjoyable lessons in context that help them deconstruct language to see how it works.

If you are looking for rigorous, reliable and quality – not to mention National Curriculum approved – resources for teaching grammar, spelling and punctuation concepts then The

Grammar Handbooks are just the job. They provide challenging lesson plans and activity pages for 36 weeks, with active and multi-sensory teaching right at their heart. There are five handbooks and each follows the same format so you know where you stand from one lesson to another – Grammar 6 Handbook will be published in January 2016, completing the primary school programme. A typical lesson includes an aim, introduction, main point, grammar sheet, extension activity and rounding-off. There are two one-hour lessons with the first devoted to spelling and the second to grammar, including some deliberate overlapping between the two.

Having used these resources for over a decade myself I can confidently say that they are a hugely effective guide to take you and your pupils through the grammar maze. I like the philosophy underpinning the approach. Some aspects of teaching grammar might not be terribly exciting but get children listening to stories, seeing images, singing songs and acting, and behold: dull old ditch water suddenly becomes a fun swim park. That's what Jolly Grammar does – for example, each part of speech is taught with its own colour and action, and the shades match those used by Montessori Schools. Jolly Grammar is a rainbow resource; three-dimensional, creative and fun.

The Handbooks are made up of primarily photocopiable activity sheets for pupils to complete and these are accompanied by easy to use step by step lesson plans. Both are user friendly. From a pupil point of view the activity sheets are challenging but 'doable'; they contain fun illustrations and are neither overly complicated nor too simplistic. The lesson plans contain the resources you need and a very clear sequence of what to do from start to finish. In addition to the excellent activities and notes, the Handbooks also contain teaching ideas for grammar and spelling, flash card sheets and spelling lists. I just wish these all came on a CD so that I could edit them to personalise and cater for pupils a bit more. Dovetailing the Grammar Handbooks there are also fun pupil books and grammar workbooks, which contain structured practice and support



that cover all bases.

But the grammar years in the Jolly Phonics programme are so much more than handbooks and workbooks.

Grammar Songs is a book and audio CD resource with 20 songs set to popular tunes that help to teach everything from adjectives to verbs. The words are fun and the tunes buoyant, making them memorable. Games and activities are also included.

Matching topics taught in The Grammar Handbooks 1 and 2 there is a Grammar Games CD, which includes five grammar islands for children to conquer. They join Inky Mouse and her friends to practise grammar, spelling and punctuation skills through a lovely collection of 20 interactive and thrilling games. Colourful, animated and engaging, this CD will excite even more senses. The Jolly Phonics Blends Wheels are also available for helping develop children's awareness of initial and final consonant blends for reading and writing. These ten, well-constructed and colourful wheels are double-sided, so that initial consonant blends can be made on one side and final consonant blends on the reverse.



VERDICT:

Just the job

High quality, dependable and packed full of what you and children need to know, Jolly Grammar is a must-have resource for your classroom.





Jacqueline Wilson

“True literacy is learnt outside the classroom as well as inside”

Teachers need the freedom to explore a whole world of reading and writing, says **Jacqueline Wilson...**

I used to visit more schools than the most active Ofsted inspector – and I’ve had enormous respect for teachers ever since. It’s easy enough for me to swan in as a novelty, chat about my books, sign some copies and then depart. I didn’t have to impart any significant knowledge. I felt my only reason to be there was to show children that reading can be fun, and inspire them to write their own stories. I suppose that’s my definition of literacy.

I’ve just looked the word up in the dictionary. Its definition more or less matches mine: 1. *The ability to read and write.* 2. *The ability to use language proficiently.*

I’m not sure how the lesson Literacy is taught in primary schools nowadays. I vividly remember when it became an important part of the curriculum, and was supposed to be taught in a very specific way. I couldn’t help wondering if this was always the right way. I remember a hugely successful children’s literary festival that attracted top authors and held all kinds of book-inspired events and activities. Thousands of children attended every year, but the school visits suddenly stopped – ‘Because we’re too busy doing Literacy in the classroom.’

I think true literacy is learnt outside the classroom as well as inside. Surely it’s about attending author events, reading lots of books for pleasure, making trips to the library, watching classic adaptations on the television, going to the theatre, singing songs and writing stories. It’s remembering that English can be a beautiful, flexible, creative language. It shouldn’t be reduced to current slang or the abbreviations used in texting. I’m sure most literacy teachers will agree with me. If only they had a little more freedom now, could tear up their lesson plans, and teach whatever they feel will stimulate their class.

I’m not silly enough to think the primary schooling I experienced in the 1950s were the good old days. School was often a bleak scary place, and those post-war teachers an eccentric bunch who thought nothing of throwing blackboard erasers at a child’s temple. But even so, some of the teaching was magnificent. My favourite year five teacher encouraged each and every child to shine at something. I was baffled by arithmetic and a total duffer at any kind of sport, but he liked my stories. He’d ask me to read them aloud to the whole class. I was a quiet child without much confidence, but I still remember that heart-thumping moment when I realised all those children at their desks were listening to me intently, thrilled by my story.



When I shyly told dear Mr Townsend that I wanted to be a writer when I grew up he didn’t laugh at me. He encouraged me to start writing a ‘novel’ there and then, and he recommended books I might enjoy reading.

My year six teacher, Mr Branson, was a terrifying man, famous for his quick temper and withering sarcasm, but he was a brilliant literacy teacher too. We were given dreary orange text books called Vocabulary, with twenty long words to learn on each page. Mr Branson told us what each meant, clearly and concisely, and then made up a hilarious surreal story incorporating all twenty of the day’s new words. He also read aloud to us for the last lesson of Friday afternoon if we’d been good all day. This was a clever way of getting us to behave, and think of books as a special treat.

I think books are the best way of all to teach literacy. Whenever children ask me how they can become authors I always tell them to read lots first and foremost. I’ve never met an author who isn’t an avid reader. It’s the most entertaining, absorbing, consoling, enjoyable occupation I know. If you read a great deal as a child you increase your vocabulary tremendously, you automatically see the point of paragraphs, you unconsciously learn about pacing and conflict, and the rhythm of the text teaches you grammar.

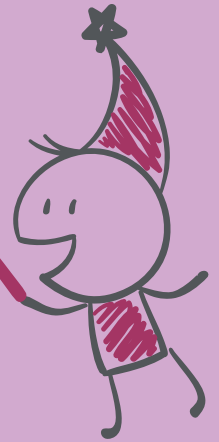
I haunted my local library as a child and read hundreds of books. I’d never heard of the term genre, but I decided I liked ‘family’ books best. I suppose that’s what I write now, even if my own fictional families are seldom conventionally structured. I doubt I’d be writing the books I do now if I hadn’t read *The Family From One End Street* or *Ballet Shoes* or *Little Women* or *What Katy Did* or *A Little Princess*. They were my true Literacy lesson.



Everyday MAGIC



Teaching a child to read and write isn't as easy as he used to think it looked, says **Tom Starkey...**



My eldest started primary last September. Me, being an English teacher and all, decided to prep him before he set off on his merry journey through the deep dark forest of burgeoning literacy. I tried to get him to recognise the letters in his name, gave him a go at writing using all manner of fun and permanently staining writing materials ('wipe-clean' indeed; our walls now look like a Jackson Pollock cast-off) and was generally insanely enthusiastic about the whole endeavour. Unfortunately my boy was having absolutely none of it. He would stare at me blankly and then just wander off, happily dismembering any superhero action figures he could get his felt-tip-caked hands on.

This perturbed me greatly. I was greatly perturbed.

Because I work at the other end of the spectrum. I'm currently in FE, have previously worked in PRUs and adult training and I witness, first-hand, the devastating consequences that a lack of skill in reading and writing can have. I see what it does to people's life chances, their confidence and their self-worth. Believe me, it's far from pretty.

So I fretted. I attempted to cajole, bribe, persuade, order... all to no avail. Term started and his Cs looked like spaghetti, he would treat his starter book with no less than complete disdain, and the alphabet was about as interesting to him as an superhero action figure that no longer had any of its appendages attached. I didn't hold out much hope for him. I was a teacher of 12 years, I had taught in some of the toughest educational establishments in the country, and I, with my great skill and endless fake enthusiasm, had gotten nowhere. Nothing. Nada. Zilch.



I was beaten; and if I had failed, what chance did his poor reception teachers have of unlocking the mysteries of the written word?

Mission accomplished

Well, every chance as it turns out. Seemingly without effort (although I know that's not in any way the case). Ego-deflating? Most definitely; but also a great relief and a complete joy to see. My son is now sounding, spelling, writing and reading the hell out of just about anything that comes his way. The change is remarkable.

It's a special type of everyday magic that repeats itself countless times up and down the country on a daily basis to such an extent it has almost become mundane and I, for one, am extremely grateful for it. Although, I suspect the term 'magic' is doing those classroom practitioners a massive injustice. Literacy is a hard won prize, but it is one that is absolutely worth the great time and effort spent.

Just ask the people who struggle.

I could spend the rest of this piece filling it with quotes from my students about how much they regret not being able to read and write to a level sufficient enough to get them to the place they want to be. I could fill it with words of anger and frustration at the missed opportunities or the shame of not being able to read a bedtime story to their own children. I could fill it describing the hours upon hours of time wasted on strategies and excuses for not being able to do the thing that so many of us take for granted. It would be easy; I have heard variations on the theme hundreds of times.

Open doors

It's this that has left me of the firm belief that there are few more important tasks in education than teaching a child how to read and write. It is truly fundamental not just for the child but in the shaping of the adult that the child will become. Literacy allows you access to the wider world and the opportunities that world contains. The students I see in many cases (and for a variety of different reasons) are denied those opportunities and that denial is keenly felt, often internalised, and can eat away at them.

So I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the primary teachers out there. The weavers of words and the shapers of sentences for creating the magic (yes, I think I will call it that, because, deep down, that is what it seems like to me). A magic that allows children to be able to experience their world in its full glory, a magic that can clarify, crystallise, and transmit thought, a magic that allows the communication of experience from one person to another. And for getting my son to sort out his Cs. That on its own must have taken a pretty powerful spell or two.

We are much obliged.

Thanks for reading.

Tom Starkey is an FE college teacher, and writer ([@tstarkey1212](http://stackofmarking.wordpress.com))