FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"Ho

JULIA DO
ANTHONY
SAM COL
LIZ PICHO

Putting literature back into children's hands

WRITING
POWER ENGLISH

Did you know that Lotus flowers grow out of mud? In the most difficult of circumstances, beautiful things can happen. In every home, there is rich learning occurring, but we must work to harness it.

It's often said that being an avid reader is fundamental to becoming a writer. But what is it writers do as they read and how are writers *influenced* by their reading? Children who are committed writers already know the answer to these two important questions. They have learnt the reading habits of real writers. Here we share with you how you can encourage children to take up these habits for themselves.

Writers read for pleasure

If we want to attract children like bees to the idea of writing, we must treat our classroom as a field and fill it with the sweetest of nectar – good literature. Writers are life-long and committed readers. That's why it's so important that schools and families support reading for pleasure. Classrooms must feel like inviting libraries. A place where children come in everyday to read and write together.

Writers learn from their heroes

Seeing is believing. Writers learn things from mentor texts crafted by their hero authors. If we give children great books to read, they'll begin crafting great texts in return. Invite children to take what they love from their favourite writers' books. Once we say this is OK, children become excited and motivated by the fact that they can do the exact same things their heroes do.

Writers study their craft

When children are treated as writers, they gain an amazing ability to read like writers. Children need to read and hear language used skilfully by the masters. Teachers can use great craft to deliver world-class instruction. Through daily mini-lessons, teachers can use literature to showcase just the sorts of things children are trying to achieve in their own writing. By using your library, and all the texts which sit within it, texts become an additional member of your class.

Turn to *page 14* for your **free writing at home activity pack!**

A1879

Pearson

Writers squirrel away great writing

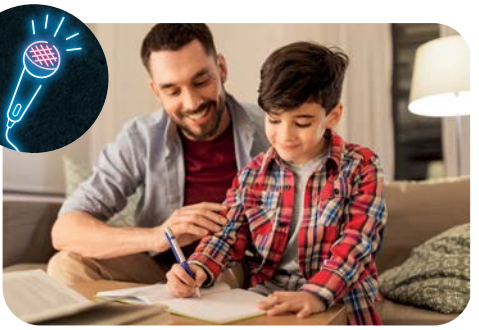
George Bernard Shaw famously said that imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery – it's the sincerest form of learning. Give children a personal writing book. You should have one too. Show them how, in the back pages, you squirrel away excellent examples of: titles, characters, settings, object descriptions, poetic lines, unusual ways of seeing things, plot ideas, story openers or endings whilst you are reading. Invite children to do the same. Over time, they will have a whole storeroom of great writing in the back of their notebook - ready to use when they are crafting their own texts.

Writers read and share their writing with others

It's essential that children be given ample time and opportunity to re-read their own writing with their classmates. Reading and talking about each other's developing compositions through class-sharing, and reading other's published writing are all vital aspects in building a rich community of writers and readers. Classes build up a rich repertoire of writerly-language in which to discuss and evaluate their own texts with each other and are better able to be an audience for each other's developing texts.

Writers are inspired by their reading

We know giving children ample time to read and hear stories aloud enhances the quality of their writing, and allowing them to write in response to the texts they've chosen to read significantly enhances their comprehension of them. Children who are consistently reading are ones who are constantly hearing writing ideas coming at them from the page. They even get into written conversations with the book they hold in their hands. Research has shown that personal reading time can profitably lead into writing time and how, through your reading, as a community of writers, you can unearth great writing ideas together.



Writers know about reading because they write things to be read

If children are lucky enough to learn through a writing workshop approach, they get an opportunity to write every day and always with a sense of readership. As genuine writers, they better understand this process when they read other peoples' texts. This helps with reading comprehension and with reading critically.

*Article by **Ross Young** & **Felicity Ferguson**, UKLA representatives, founders of The Writing For Pleasure Centre and authors of the book 'Real-World Writers'.*

*They are also the series creators of **Power English: Writing** published by Pearson Education.*

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FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"How we write"

JULIA DONALDSON
ANTHONY HOROWITZ
SAM COPELAND
LIZ PICHON

HOW TO
Ace every reading lesson

FEEL INSPIRED
Get your class excited about writing

THE SECRET TO 'GREATER DEPTH' SUCCESS

Main illustration: Axel Scheffler

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Welcome...

With the previous issue of *Teach Reading & Writing* having reached you in late 2019, it would have been hard to predict the circumstances in which this edition would be published. As we type, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 are being cautiously (though not cautiously enough for many) ushered back to school, with frankly heroic efforts from all staff to make the rapid preparations necessary to ensure pupils are as safe as possible on their return.

The experiences of those children over the last few months will have varied widely, though almost all will have missed the simple joy of mingling freely with their friends, existing instead in a strange new bubble. The luckier children will have had books to sustain them; the pleasure of temporarily escaping this world for another – be that one occupied by mighty dragons, teenage wizards, or simply a place where children are free to meet and play away from the watchful eyes of their parents. But there will also be some for whom books have become strangers, and they will need to be urgently reacquainted.

There is plenty in this issue to inspire that reunion. Carey Fluker Hunt's love of children's literature is as infectious as ever as she shares 10 books that help us reflect on how we might do a better job of taking care of our world (p.8); Nikki Gamble has been working with teachers on a project that combines history with English – to the benefit of both subjects (p.42); and and former headteacher and now literacy consultant Ruth Baker Leask looks at what schools can do to encourage and support reading at home for every pupil – not just those with families who have the resources to explore books with their children (p.26).

One last thing to mention before you dive in. If you are searching for a thoughtful and uplifting focus for your Y6 leavers in their final term, we've worked with HarperCollins to create a special, free resources pack based on Dr Seuss' *Oh The Places You'll Go!*, encouraging them to look hopefully to the future. Find it at **plazoom.com/seuss**.

Take care
Joe Carter & Helen Mulley
(associate editors)

"How we write"

JULIA DONALDSON
"I like to work out the last line before writing" p6

ANTHONY HOROWITZ
"It's in rewriting that we do our best work" p62

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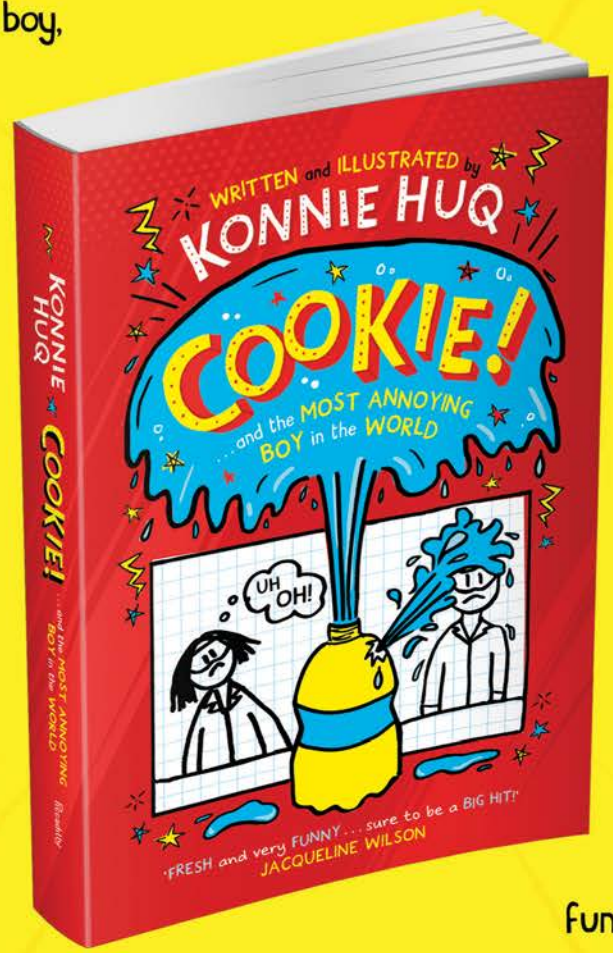
A LAUGH-OUT-LOUD STORY "EXPLODING" with SCIENCE + SCRIBBLES!

'Totally funny and charming and relatable. The book that is. Not the boy, he's really annoying.'
David Baddiel

'Smart, funny and full of warmth'
David Walliams



'I really love the book - it wasn't just funny, it was hilarious!!'
Althea, age 7

'A fresh and very funny story about an endearing Bangladeshi nine-year old.'
Jacqueline Wilson

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"You can't be perfect, and that's fine"

Getting children to create plays can unlock skills in the most reluctant writers, suggests **Julia Donaldson**...

TR&W What's the first thing that happens in order for a new Julia Donaldson book to be published?
JD Well, it would start with me getting an idea; that could happen in a number of different ways. Maybe I'll have been in Africa and seen some wildebeests, or I could be sitting at my desk and the thought of, say, a highwayman might pop into my head. I've got a whole file of half-baked ideas and beginnings – the hardest part is developing them. There are actually more days when I'm not writing than when I am – but I don't see that as writer's block; it's just getting an idea that I can go with.

Do you have a special place where you write?
At the moment, it's in my study, looking out at the high street below – watching people and dogs, and – except during lockdown! – the bustle of tearooms. However, most of my ideas are more likely to come when I'm out for a walk on the Downs. And problem solving happens in the bath.

Do you a have a routine?
I don't; I'm all or nothing! Well, actually, when I was writing my book for teenagers, and *The Giants and the Joneses*, for 8-11-year-olds, then I did have a routine: I'd come down in the morning, read what I'd written the day before, then try and write another thousand words. But I can't do that with a picture book – it doesn't work like that – if you don't have an idea you just can't write. At least with a novel, if you have a plan you can definitely write *something*.

"Almost always I'll have worked out the last line before I start writing things..."

Do you always 'hear' your words as you write?
Yes, I do aim for a lyrical quality to my writing – probably because I started out writing songs. But it's important not to have just endless rhyming couplets. I need there to be a pattern, and a refrain. Almost always I'll have worked out the last line before I start writing things – and perhaps that might be interesting for teachers to try in the classroom – rather than saying, 'Write a story that starts with...', they could try giving children an ending instead.

Do you ever wish that you could go back and change any of your books?
Occasionally, I've done exactly that! For example, in one of my books called *Rosie's Hat* I shortened it very slightly at the reprint because there was a little bit tagged on at the end that I didn't feel was needed. And when *One Mole Digging a Hole* is next reprinting, I might include the extra lines that are in the song, but not the book at the moment. Otherwise, though, you can't be perfect, and that's fine. Often, my books are translated by

Illustrations: above, Axel Scheffler, *The Gruffalo's Child*; top right, Axel Scheffler, *Room on The Broom*; bottom right, Sara Ogilvie, *The Hospital Dog*

famous poets, and it's fascinating to see how they manage the rhymes and rhythms.

What's it like when someone else illustrates words you've written?
When the publisher sends me the first drafts of the illustrations in the post I do feel a bit nervous before having a look – but of course, they are never going to capture my vision exactly. It's a little like going on holiday – you have an idea of the place in your head, and then you get there, and it doesn't quite match up, but you get used to the reality quite quickly. Very rarely, I might say 'no' to an illustration, but the normal process is that the illustrator submits sketches, and I look at them with the editor, without being too dictatorial.

Do you have any advice for children who really struggle to express themselves in writing?
I think a focus on dialogue can be really helpful. It can be hard to create a cohesive storyline, but if you get children to write a conversation, perhaps sharing lines back and forth between each other, then a narrative naturally starts to develop. In my experience, plays are one of the things children most enjoy writing. In fact, when I was a writer in residence, I worked with some brilliant teachers, and together we devised a model where we got children to write plays based on traditional stories, like *The Three Little Pigs*. We asked them to write a cast list first, with one or two adjectives for each character – it meant they could get on without having to worry too much about the plot, or all the descriptions. And then, once they've finished writing they can get together in groups and perform what they've written to the rest of the class.

Get them writing!

Julia's next book, *The Hospital Dog*, illustrated by Sara Ogilvie, is due to be published by Macmillan in October. Based on a real 'hospital dog', whose owner takes her to visit children's wards, it tells the story of how Dalmation Dot goes above and beyond the call of duty to help one of her patients, and is a follow-up to *The Detective Dog* (2017). Why not try these writing ideas, based on the books, with your class?

- What other kinds of jobs might a dog – or any other animal – be able to do? Can your pupils write a description of a day in the life of a different 'professional' kind of creature?
- Contact your local hospital, and see if it's possible for your pupils to write to any of their patients who might like to receive letters.
- Ask pupils to imagine that Dot the hospital dog has decided to retire. Could they design a persuasive poster calling for a volunteer to take over her role?

10 BOOKS THAT TREASURE *our world*

Issues such as climate change are of critical importance to primary children, and these thoughtful stories will help inform and enrich their convictions

FOUNDATION STAGE

Illustrations: Hannah Peck

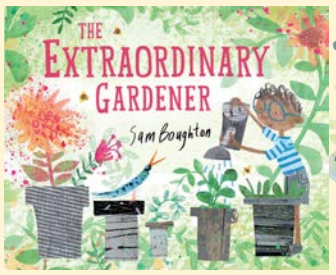
2 Somebody Swallowed Stanley

BY SARAH ROBERTS AND HANNAH PECK (SCHOLASTIC)

1 The Extraordinary Gardener

FOUNDATION STAGE

BY SAM BROUGHTON (TATE PUBLISHING)



What's the story?

Joe's imagination takes him to 'a world less ordinary' – a jungle paradise far from his grey apartment block. Hoping to make his visions a reality, Joe plants an apple pip. It takes a very long time to grow, but in the end it does and Joe is hooked. He plants more seeds, and soon everyone is marvelling at his balcony garden, and everyone wants to share the fun.

Sam Boughton's colourful illustrations are wonderfully immersive and will inspire artistic exploration. Spotting

"Create cityscapes and add tiny characters in pencil"

What's the story?

Stanley is a plastic bag and should not be swimming in the ocean. But there he is, looking rather like a jellyfish and causing all sorts of problems for the sea-creatures who insist on eating him (and suffer the consequences....)

At last, a boy rescues Stanley from a turtle – or is the other way around? – and Stanley finds himself recycled as a kite. What fun!

With its bouncy text and appealing artwork, this book introduces a serious topic in an engaging way. No sea-creatures are harmed during the story, but there's a definite splash of peril, and children will be well-prepared for subsequent fact-finding and discussion.

Thinking and talking

How do you think Stanley got into the ocean? What problems does he cause? What do you do with plastic bags you don't need? What happens to them?

Try this...

- Add faces to plastic bags and animate them using your hands (or attach to sticks with thread and manipulate like string puppets). Where have your bags been? What have they seen? What's their advice about caring for the environment?
- Name your bag and draw its portrait. Add a speech bubble!
- Find out about sea-creatures and the damage caused by plastic. How is plastic recycled? Can you help?
- Stanley was turned into a kite. Can you reuse plastic bags to make something new?

the tiny, pencil-drawn occupants of each flat and observing how they interact is a particular delight, as is their visible diversity.

Thinking and talking

Have you ever planted a seed? What happened? What do plants need to be able to grow? How does Joe's city change? Who changes it?

Try this...

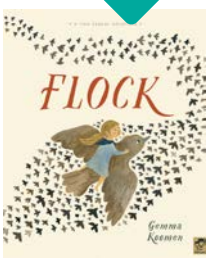
- Plant seeds and care for them. Keep a diary of the changes you observe. Share your plants with family and friends!
- Where are the green areas in your neighbourhood? Mark on a map and visit them.
- Inspired by Boughton's artwork and using a variety of techniques (washes, resist work, splatter-painting, collage...) create large-scale painted / printed cityscapes. Add tiny pencil-drawn characters and tell their stories.

Illustrations: Sam Boughton

KEY STAGE 1

3 Flock

BY GEMMA KOOMEN (FRANCES LINCOLN FIRST EDITIONS)



What's the story?

High on the branches of a huge tree live the tiny Treekeepers. It's their job to "nurture and mend, gather and tend," and Koomen's charmingly detailed, folk-inspired paintings show them hard at work.

Unlike the other Treekeeper children, Sylvia chooses to play alone – until a fledgling bird appears, demanding care. With Scruff at her side, Sylvia's world becomes wider and more daring, and when he flies the nest to join his starling flock, she misses him. Gradually she joins the other children in their games – and they, in turn, discover the pleasures of sharing Sylvia's quiet activities.

Flock is a gentle, thoughtful book that will stimulate children's interest in the natural world and show them that everyone has something valuable to contribute.

Illustrations: Gemma Koomen

Thinking and talking

What does Sylvia do when she's alone? What do you like doing by yourself? What has changed by the end of the book, and why? If you were a Treekeeper, how would you care for the natural world?

Try this...

- Visit the biggest tree you can find and get to know it by touching, drawing, measuring and describing.... Can you spot any Treekeepers?!
- Paint a huge picture of your tree. Draw tiny Treekeepers and collage onto your picture. Tell, draw and write stories about your characters.
- Collect natural objects outdoors and use these to make toys and games inspired by Sylvia's hollow.
- Find out about starling murmurations. In a large space, swoop and loop together, letting your wings "beat as one..."
- Use photos of starlings to paint accurate pictures. Assemble these on your wall in a flock.

4

KEY STAGE 1

The Trouble with Dragons

BY DEBI GLIORI
(BLOOMSBURY)

What's the story?

There are far too many dragons. They're using everything up and leaving such a mess! The other animals know what's to be done, but it takes rising floodwaters and imminent destruction for the dragons to listen. Fortunately, they're able to change their behaviour and reverse the damage. Gliori's entertaining rhymes and cheerful artwork offset this book's harder-hitting messages, but the parallels between dragons and people will be apparent, inviting thoughtful discussions and responses.

"Children will spot the parallels between dragons and people"

Thinking and talking

How are the dragons damaging their world? Why are they doing it? What does Debi Gliori mean about 'stories being linked'? How could this story help us care for our world?

Try this...

- **What are the dragons doing wrong? What advice are they given by the other animals? Make two lists and discuss. What changes must the dragons make? Write instructions for the dragons, and illustrate.**
- **What do you think the dragons would tell us, if they could? How would they advise us to care for our world? Make a dragon-sized poster of a dragon sharing his advice!**

Illustrations: Debi Gliori

KEY STAGE 1

About this book

Little Red is off to catch a wolf – but all she can find in the forest are binliners! At last she stumbles across a tree-cave where the Last Wolf is playing a board game with Last Lynx and Last Bear. In the Good Old Days, they tell her, the forest was endless and you could "lie on a branch and wait for lunch to wander by." Now, catching a square meal is almost impossible. What's to be done? Red thinks she might just have a plan...

KEY STAGE 1

6

Greta and the Giants

BY ZOE TUCKER AND ZOE PERSICO
(FRANCES LINCOLN)

Illustrations: Zoe Persico

What's the story?

Greta and the animals live in a beautiful forest, but the Giants are chopping down the trees. Greta decides to protest, but one girl with a placard is easily ignored. More children join her, and finally the Giants take notice. "Your greedy behaviour is spoiling our home!" Greta tells them. "We need to take care of our forest...will you try?" With an afterword explaining climate change, complex ideas

5 The Last Wolf

BY MINI GREY (RED FOX)

Illustrations: Mini Grey

Illustrated with Grey's characteristic humour and attention to detail, *The Last Wolf* is hugely entertaining. It also makes a gently affecting case for the predator's viewpoint, and will make readers think as well as smile.

Thinking and talking

How does Red help? What are the advantages and disadvantages of her plan? Wolves are often the 'baddies' in a story. Is there a baddie in this book? Who is it?

Try this...

- Plant trees from seed and care for them. Start an observational record. How do they change? Compare the tree seeds with something that grows more quickly!
- Find out about predators like bears, wolves and lynx. Where do they live? What must they have to thrive?
- How many versions of Red Riding Hood do you know? Read some, discuss similarities and differences, then share your discoveries in words and pictures.

are presented accessibly and with good humour. The book suggests ways for children to take action and will inspire readers to make a difference.

Thinking and talking

How does Greta make an impact? What persuades the Giants to change their ways? Are you a Giant? Do you behave like one?

"Inspire readers to make a difference"

Try this...

- Use plasticine or other materials to model the children and animals in this book. Make a placard for each character to hold. Paint a forest backdrop, then group your characters on the floor in front of your scenery.

In role as a Giant, explain to your protesters why you've been destroying their forest. How do you feel now? How will you make amends? Take photos, write about what you've done and display alongside your models and this book.

- Find out about the trees and other wildlife living in your nearest woodland. How can we protect them? Make a list of actions you could take – use the suggestions in this book to inspire you. Then challenge yourself to get started.

KEY STAGE 2

7 Earth Heroes: 20 Inspiring Stories of People Saving Our World

BY LILY DYU AND JACKIE LAY
(NOSY CROW)

Illustrations: Jackie Lay

What's the story?

From David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg to William Kamkwamba and Yin Yuzhen, this book tells the stories of real-life environmental activists and innovators from many cultures. Monochrome portraits and inspirational quotations accompany twenty biographical chapters.

Thinking and talking

Which Hero would you choose to help, and why?

Are there any Earth Heroes at your school? In your community? What are they doing to help?

What's the best way of persuading people to protect our planet? Discuss approaches – adverts, posters, debates, protests... Is it better to talk about successes or failures? Should we frighten people into action, or encourage them?

Try this...

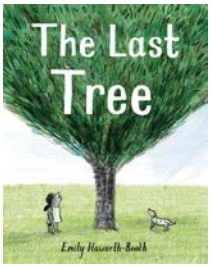
- On a world map, mark the countries featured. Add notes about what you've learned from this book. What else can you discover about conservation and environmental activism abroad and closer to home?
- Choose your favourite quotation from this book. Write it out carefully, decorate it, frame it and hang it somewhere to inspire you.
- Become change-makers by recycling, reusing, re-planting and conserving. Get involved in projects large and small, then write additional chapters about how your class is helping.

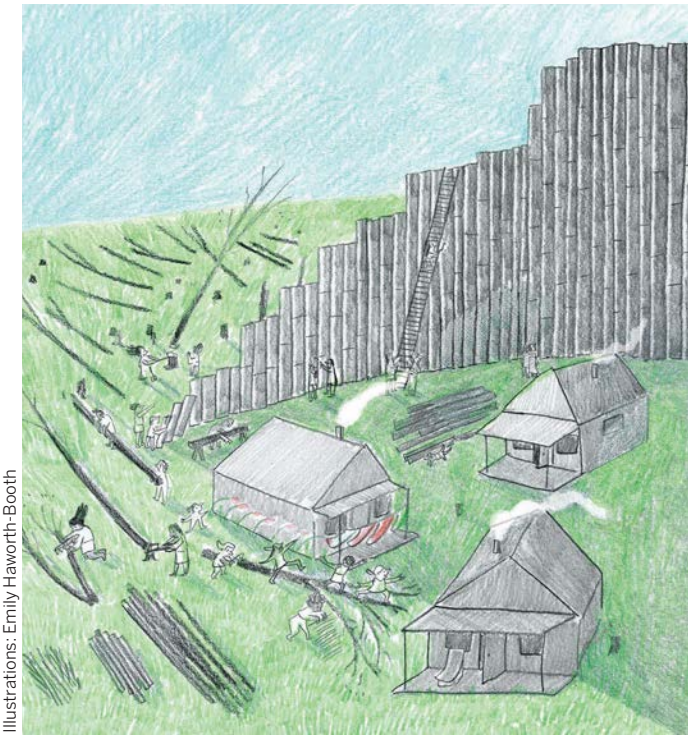
8

KEY STAGE 2

The Last Tree

BY EMILY HAWORTH-BOOTH
(PAVILION)





Illustrations: Emily Haworth-Booth

What's the story?

The characters in this story feel instantly at home in the dappled light beneath the forest canopy, but fires must be fuelled and shelters built. Every action has an unexpected impact that requires more action, and soon the forest has all but gone. Only one tree remains.

The Last Tree uses graphic-novel techniques to explore environmental themes in a lively and accessible way. Soft pencil-crayon drawings in a limited palette have the energetic line and storytelling quality of children's own artwork, and Haworth-Booth's characters feel very much alive.

How the children in this story persuade their adults to restore what has been lost is a cross-generational call to action that readers will enjoy.

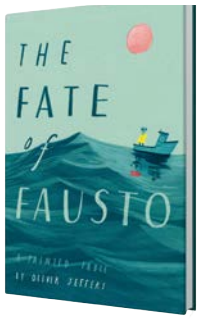
Thinking and talking

Did these people set out to destroy the forest? Did they foresee the consequences of their actions?

Why did they build the wall? What persuades the adults to save the tree?

Try this...

- How many different page-layouts can you spot in this book? Find examples of other graphic-novel-style techniques (speech bubbles, close ups, changes of perspective, labelled images...) Research a theme that interests you and create an informative booklet using some of these ideas.
- Find out about the world's forests. Who protects them? How can you help?



Illustrations: Oliver Jeffers

KEY STAGE 2

9 The Fate of Fausto

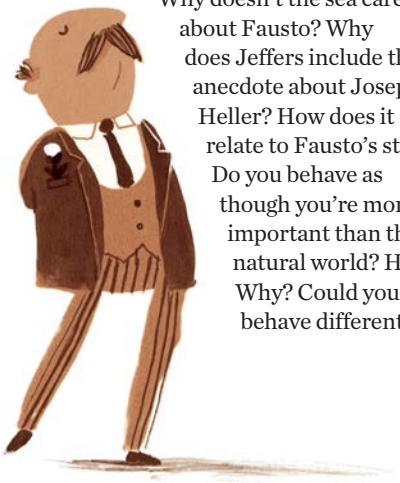
BY OLIVER JEFFERS (HARPERCOLLINS)

What's the story?

"There was once a man who believed he owned everything and set out to survey what was his..."

Fausto's pin-striped suit and air of entitlement ensure the immediate submission of flower, sheep and tree. Eventually the mountain also bows to him, but Fausto's tantrums have no impact on the sea. So Fausto climbs out of his boat to stamp on the water and show it who is boss.

This 'painted fable' about respecting the natural world and 'knowing when we have enough' features traditionally-printed lithographs accompanied by a spare and carefully-crafted text. Sentences run across several spreads, creating a sense of space and pace, and plain white backgrounds allow Fausto's expressive postures to dominate - even when all that's visible is a pointed finger or departing foot. Beautiful, timeless and thought-provoking, this is a picturebook with broad appeal.



Thinking and talking

Why doesn't the sea care about Fausto? Why does Jeffers include the anecdote about Joseph Heller? How does it relate to Fausto's story? Do you behave as though you're more important than the natural world? How? Why? Could you behave differently?

Try this...

- Copy Fausto's postures and gestures and make a list of words describing his emotions and behaviour. In pairs, roleplay the tantrum Fausto throws while talking to the mountain. Could it have won the argument? Roleplay a different conversation, then write about events from the mountain's perspective.
- Is it right for people to own the kind of things Fausto is claiming? What's acceptable and what is not? What responsibilities should come with such ownership? Discuss, then write a balanced account of your debate.

10 The Promise

KEY STAGE 2

BY NICOLA DAVIES AND LAURA CARLIN (WALKER)

Illustrations: Laura Carlin

What's the story?

In a mean and ugly city, a young thief snatches an old woman's bag. "If you promise to plant them, I'll let go," says the woman, and the thief agrees. The bag contains nothing but acorns, but a promise in such tales is binding. As she plants trees, the thief's life changes, and so does the world around her.

With its lyrical text and evocative artwork, this book explores our connection with nature – or lack of it – and makes a powerful plea for change.

Thinking and talking

Why does the old woman smile as she's being robbed? The thief describes herself as 'mean, hard and ugly'. Why is she like that, do you think? What do we lose by cutting ourselves off from nature?

Try this...

- Examine the text to find words describing the harsh realities of the thief's world.

What do the illustrations show? What do they add to the book that isn't mentioned in the text?

- Write a story about a promise kept (or broken...)
- Big changes can result from small actions. What could you do that would make a difference? What promise could you make?

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

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- Write using your favourite toys or the games you like to play.
- Write about what you know and are passionate about.
- Write about moments and memories you've all shared together.

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Write THIS WAY

At Thomas Jones school, a simple, but consistent, approach to teaching handwriting has been improving pupils' outcomes for over a decade, explains headteacher **David Sellens**...

It is rare in the UK to read about – or indeed hear reference to – anything that pertains to the teaching and learning of handwriting. Formally taught in Japan for centuries, it is still perceived there as one of the vital skills that children must learn; it is revered, and considered as integral as reading and writing. In Western Europe and Scandinavia children are introduced to handwriting from the moment they start school. The expectation is that they do not print because they are young. Instead, they learn to join from the outset.

In this country, though, it seems that schools have traditionally either purchased published handwriting schemes or subscribed to the 'why bother?' pedagogy. The view is that somehow skills are immediately acquired simply by following the rubric set out in the teacher's handbook; diluting any onus on the individual to acquire knowledge and expertise.

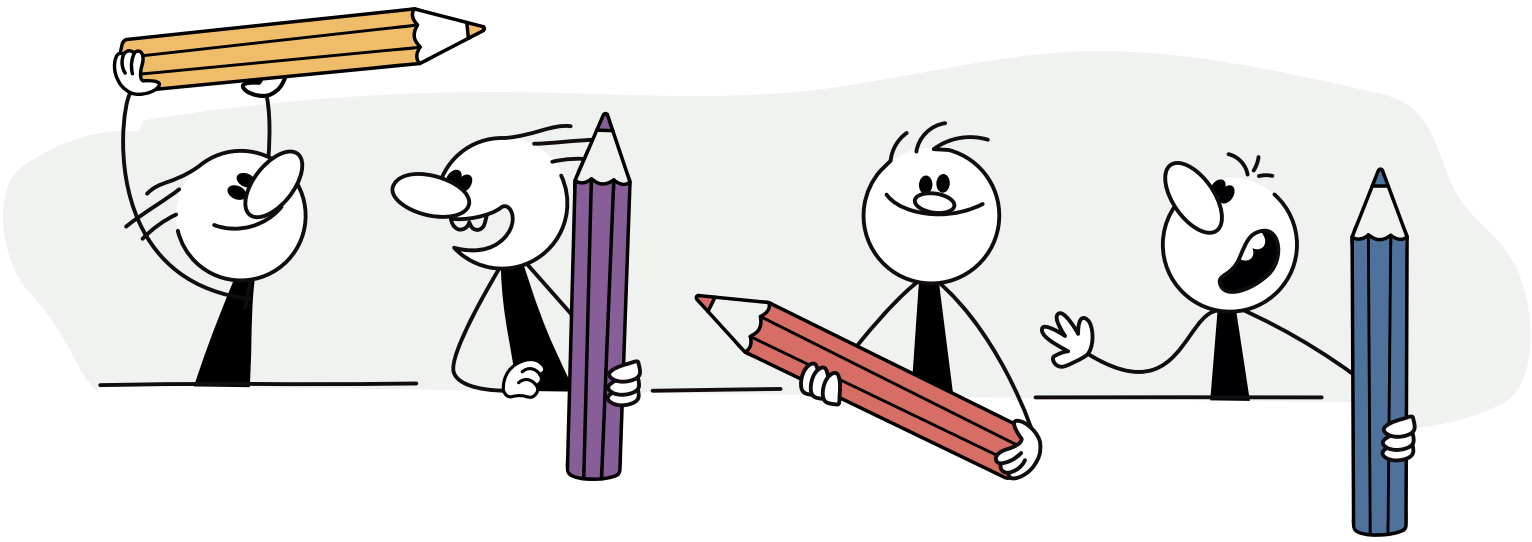
Published schemes, if introduced appropriately and reviewed at regular intervals, can be useful. If the planning for the teaching of handwriting using a scheme is monitored, then this approach can be effective. However, schemes are no more or less than what they are, namely, resources. The view that a published scheme is in itself the solution is short-sighted; the argument that an interactive white board is only as good as the person using it rings just as true in this case. Like any resource, handwriting schemes will, if utilised well over a significant period of time, pay dividends. If used erratically, the impact will be negligible. Alongside this we must consider the enormous amount of 'extras' that are sold in catalogues, including pencil grips, special handwriting tracing paper, dotty paper – some faddish, others viewed as legitimate tools to aid the process.

"If a pencil does not extend beyond a child's hand when held in a writing grip it should be thrown away"

A different angle

In the late 1990s I opted to reject all of the above, preferring an altogether more spare approach. The strategy I advocate is simple and inexpensive: daily handwriting, whenever possible – short, intense periods of teaching/modelling, focusing on the formation of one or two letters or joins, followed by short periods of 'having a go', in silence.

In my experience, children spending longish amounts of time copying from a book or worksheet can repeat the same mistakes over and over again. As somebody very wise once said 'getting children to write better is not simply about getting him or her to write more'. This is much how I see handwriting. Repetition is crucial;



revisiting what has already been taught and then teaching it again is as important as teaching it the first time. Ideally, teach something, then afford the opportunity to scribe, assess what has been drafted, offer advice, perhaps model how it can be further improved and then revisit the technical joins and spacing. In other words, assess, teach, self-evaluate, assess and teach.

Our handwriting lessons are carried out in the form of a workshop. Most of the writing produced by the children is considered dispensable – it is the process that is emphasised. The outcome, that every child has made significant progress, is what matters. For this reason most handwriting is produced on paper, with some saved and stored as evidence of progression.

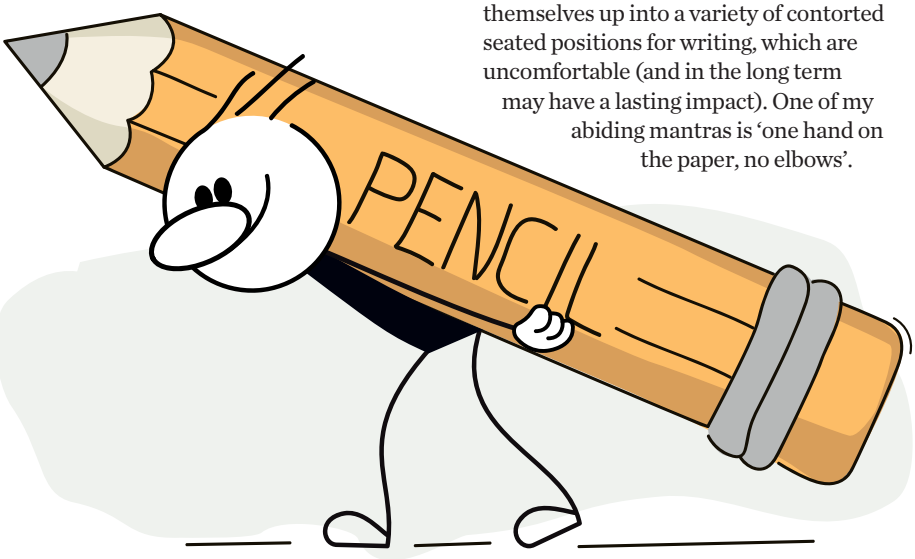
Erasers are allowed, but pupils are encouraged to use them sparingly and are taught specifically how to do so. Children cross out mistakes in an agreed fashion (a single, ruler-drawn line through the offending word). At regular intervals a piece of handwriting is produced in books as a record of development. Over the course of a school year there will be anything between nine and eighteen exemplars of learning of this kind, sufficient to demonstrate continuity and development.

I discourage teachers from marking handwriting. Instead, they are encouraged to give 'on-the-spot' immediate oral feedback, showing a child how s/he can overcome a particular difficulty or how to move onto the next stage. There is a lot of repetition – 'two steps back, one step forward' is a fairly accurate way of summing up the pace and approach that we use.

Between the lines

There are some other points to bear in mind. For example, space is a factor – in particular for left-handed children. Having pencils sharpened is hugely important; yes, it's obvious, but in my experience it's also frequently overlooked. If possible, invest in an electric sharpener, which will be worth its weight in gold (it will not 'over sharpen'). Get rid of tiny stubs – if a pencil does not extend beyond a child's hand when held in a writing grip it should be thrown away - and avoid pontificating about the relative merits of pens versus pencils. Ensure the classroom is well ventilated and that temperature is ambient. Consider using a non-interactive (old fashioned) white board.

Establish an agreed posture. Model it. Show the class precisely what it is you are keen to see. Many children wrap themselves up into a variety of contorted seated positions for writing, which are uncomfortable (and in the long term may have a lasting impact). One of my abiding mantras is 'one hand on the paper, no elbows'.



What doesn't work?

- Passive overdependence or reliance on a scheme.
- Becoming preoccupied with minutiae. On a number of occasions teachers have become preoccupied with minor detail. For example, 'is this letter formed exactly the way it is in our scheme?'
- Not modelling what is expected. Apart from the actual modelling during the handwriting lesson, it really helps to have lots of examples of the teacher's writing displayed around the classroom. Comments written in children's workbooks should be legible, neat and tidy.
- Where handwriting lessons are somehow perceived as an 'add on', and where links are not made to the writing of accounts, stories, poems, lists and letters.

Regular lined paper is appropriate for most children (slightly wider lines for Reception and Year 1 pupils). With a few exceptions, writing on every line will, even if untidy at first, pay off later. The assumption that younger children or children who experience acute difficulty manipulating pencils/scissors/paint brushes cannot cope with regular lined paper is worrying. With time and a consistent approach many pupils who initially find it challenging will adapt; practising handwriting on lined paper provides a scaffold/framework that plain paper does not.

David Sellens OBE is headteacher at Thomas Jones - an Outstanding and DfE designated Teaching School

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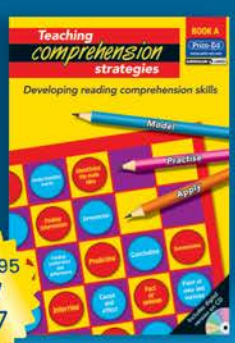

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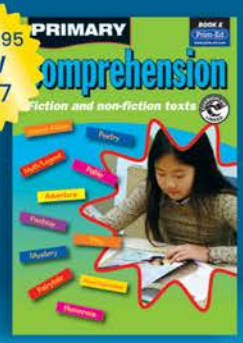

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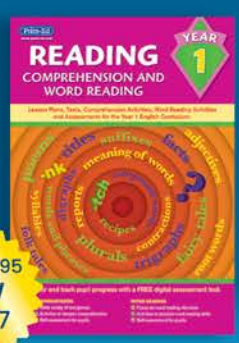

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How should we TEACH READING?

There's no one way to succeed, but if you've got good answers to these five questions, you're on the right path

We've all been there. It's the first day back after a school holiday. Your body clock hasn't quite recalibrated and the school hall feels alien. Your table is filled with sugar paper, sticky notes and – with any luck – a few biscuits. And then it begins: after the usual pleasantries, you are informed that today's training is on the subject of reading instruction. Once again, major changes are on the way for how reading lessons are to be structured across the school. Maybe you liked the previous structure for teaching reading; maybe you didn't. Either way, you can't avoid the nagging suspicion that perhaps there is no right structure, that there are in fact myriad ways to teach reading effectively, just so long as certain fundamentals are in place.

It is a suspicion worth trusting. Any structure is likely to be successful as long as a school has good answers to the following five questions.

How is phonics progress monitored?

Every school is required to teach phonics systematically. However, the extent to which children's phonics progress is monitored through Y2 and beyond varies dramatically between schools. Often, even those children that pass the phonics screening test return to school in Y2 having forgotten much of the learning content experienced just a few months earlier. In response, schools should ensure they can explain where every student is on their phonics journey and have systematic phonics interventions in place for those that still struggle, be they in Y2 or Y6.

How is reading fluency taught and assessed?

There are several reasons why children in upper key stage two might struggle to comprehend what they have read, and chief among these reasons is slow decoding that prevents understanding. There is a substantial body of evidence to suggest that repeated oral reading of short texts that are towards the upper limits of children's current reading ability can support children's development of the components of fluency, which are essential to reading comprehension. (These components of reading comprehension can be described as accuracy, automaticity and prosody. Prosody is concerned with the tone, intonation, stress and rhythm of speech – in this case the idea that these allow oral reading to sound natural and comfortable, akin to spoken language.) Nevertheless, this crucial area is too often neglected in primary schools. In Y2 and lower key stage two, fluency practice should be a major component of reading instruction, either as standalone lessons or as a regular part of reading sessions. Either way, it should never be dissociated from the ultimate purpose of reading, and well-chosen texts should ensure that the comprehension undertaken during fluency practice is valuable on its own terms.

Fluency should also be assessed to allow timely responses to the needs of individual children and classes. Tests of reading fluency such as DIBELS assessments, while something of a blunt instrument, are useful when used in conjunction with teacher judgements, which give context to results.

How much decoding do children do each week?

This is arguably the most important and overlooked question one can ask about a school's reading instruction. It may seem prosaic, but the process of learning to read

- in particular the development of rapid word recognition – can be considered as statistical; our brains are pattern spotting machines, and we rely on vast quantities of information to strengthen and hone our command of the patterns in the English language. This means it is essential that children spend lots of time meeting new text every school day, increasing their reading 'mileage'. You might be thinking, "Isn't this obvious?" Maybe it is, but this doesn't stop some children spending as little as 10 or 20 minutes each week processing text while children in similar schools do several times as much. While children's fluency is still developing, whole-class reading can ensure that reading mileage is prioritised. (I recommend children and adults take turns to read aloud; rulers and quick word checks can be used to ensure that children are focusing and keeping pace, and struggling readers can explore the text in advance during interventions to support this.) Once fluency is relatively established (100+ words per minute oral reading speed with high accuracy), silent reading followed by text-dependent questions is the most efficient method for children to meet new text.

How is vocabulary development supported?

Reading comprehension and vocabulary development reinforce one another. Plenty of time spent reading is essential, but vocabulary development can be best supported in two ways – by teaching children particularly useful words and by revealing to them the etymological and morphological structure of the English language. The first of these requires an underpinning rationale for which words to choose, and Beck, Mckeown and Kucan (2013) attempted to provide one by considering vocabulary as existing in three tiers. Crucially, what they defined as 'tier two' words were those that are rare in day-to-day informal language, but are used across the curriculum (i.e. they are not specific to particular subjects or contexts). By combining the concept of tier two vocabulary with the most common words in the English language, it is possible to compile a list of words that can be introduced to children, either in reading sessions, standalone vocabulary sessions or through 'word-of-the-day' style teaching. In addition, a large amount of the morphological and etymological structure of English can be revealed to children by teaching them key Latin and Greek root words (e.g. acro-, meta-) and by highlighting key morphemes that modify English words (e.g. un-, dis-).

"Some children spend as little as 10 or 20 minutes each week processing text while children in similar schools do several times as much"

While this teaching of vocabulary might seem detached from context, trust me when I say that the context will find you; teach children a tier two word like 'influence' or a morpheme like 'dis', and you won't have to wait long for children to notice these in texts and class discussions, much to the benefit of their reading.

Does the curriculum build children's knowledge of the world?

Reading comprehension relies on background knowledge. Put simply, high-quality teaching of science, history, geography, etc, is teaching reading. A curriculum that is coherently structured allows the knowledge children gain to become part of a rich network of understanding they can use in their reading and beyond.

So, is that it? Build a reading curriculum that has good answers to those five questions and success is guaranteed? Not quite, I'm afraid; nothing in teaching is quite that simple. Nevertheless, whether you're a headteacher, a reading coordinator or a class teacher, thinking carefully about those five elements is a considerable step towards ensuring your students have the best chance of learning to read.

Christopher Such is senior leader at Fulbridge Academy.

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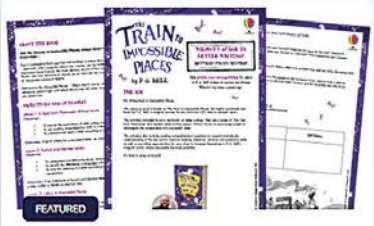

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Take description TO THE NEXT LEVEL

'Show not tell' makes for more impactful and effective writing – and **Tim Roach** has some great teaching strategies to help children put it into practice...

'Show not tell' is a common piece of advice given to young writers. But what exactly does it mean? Is it really a better way to write? And if so, how can teachers go about the business of teaching it for the benefit of their pupils?

On one level, 'show not tell' is the distinction between what the Ancient Greeks called *mimesis* and *diegesis*: imitation and narration. Mimesis is how the writer imitates what happens by representing the action through their writing. Conversely, stories told from the diegetic perspective offer an omnipotent narrator telling the audience what happens. I liken this to an intrusive voiceover in a film, which suggests that the director is not confident their footage captured what the screenplay inferred, so they add narration retrospectively.

Although there will be some variation by the receiver, readers imagine a story through the eyes of the character they're supposed to empathise with – so making a closer connection with that character is essential. Inherently, it's about representing the character's reality by describing their behaviour; so that the way they act and what they say disclose details about what they think, rather than having the narrator clumsily announce their emotions.

Change the task

Description is a necessary part of storytelling, but it needs to be balanced: not enough, and you're likely to have new characters teleporting into scenes; too much, and every character's entire wardrobe is listed in minute detail. And yet 'describe this character' is a writing task objective often set for children, as if a character description were an actual thing anyone would ever want to read, let alone write. Instead, why not ask pupils to select and describe two to three details that might cast light on some aspect of that character's life?

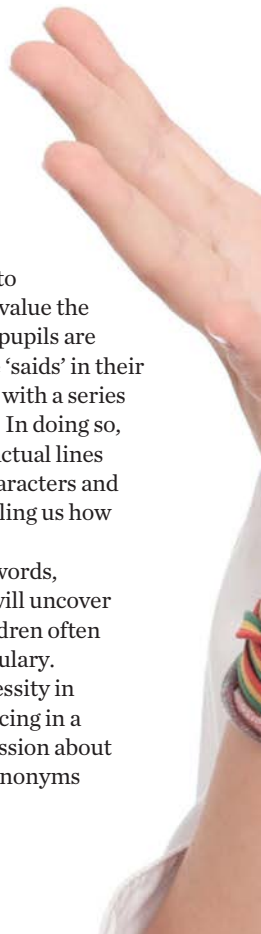
Similarly, 'writing a setting description' is a common task in English lessons. Wouldn't it be better if there were a purpose? For example, seeing the setting through a character's eyes, which in turn reveals something about them, or describing it in poetry to invoke a particular emotion. If you want to describe an entrance to a cave, it's clearly better to say that a character had to stoop to enter, rather than giving the exact dimensions. As C.S. Lewis said: "Instead of telling us a thing was 'terrible', describe it so we'll be terrified".

> *"It's about representing the character's reality by describing their behaviour"*

When it comes to teaching,'show not tell' is one area of writing in which I'd actively advocate the use of film clips. Analysing storytelling through the language of film will help children understand the power in where they direct the reader's attention. Show a short scene and pause it with each shot change. For example, in *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg's adaptation, not Crichton's original novel), the approach of the Tyrannosaurus rex is memorably signalled by the vibrations radiating across the surface of a glass of water. We're shown the consequences of the approaching dinosaur – but not the creature itself. As viewers, we know what's coming, but the film forces us to experience it as the characters do.

The right words

In primary writing, we often use the 'five senses' model to tune children into a piece of creative writing. One potential pitfall of this is that it can lead to formulaic description, listing all the things a character can see and hear, telling the reader everything about the scene before shifting to the plot. In contrast, placing a character into a scene, and having them purposefully notice and interact with a few details not only brings the setting alive, but also – more importantly – the character.



Dialogue is another way to 'show not tell' – and don't devalue the use of the word 'said'. When pupils are encouraged to replace all the 'saids' in their story, they inevitably end up with a series of paired verbs with adverbs. In doing so, they might think less of the actual lines of dialogue spoken by the characters and more about the artifice of telling us how they are said.

When using alternative words, modelling and dialogic talk will uncover misunderstandings that children often have about unfamiliar vocabulary. While thesauruses are a necessity in the classroom, cross-referencing in a dictionary and teacher discussion about the suitability of apparent synonyms

are essential. Otherwise, their use can lead to flowery phrases that miss the point entirely, due to the varied range of nuances within a set of synonyms.

Clichéd words and phrases, particularly when representing emotions, are obvious places where a teacher can model how to show what a character is feeling instead of telling that he or she is happy or sad. Zooming in on facial expressions and body language is a simple way to train pupils to think about how emotions manifest themselves through behaviour, whether conscious (she folded her arms) or unconscious (he bit his lip).

Finally, comparison is a wonderful way to add shades to writing, and it's more effective to teach figurative and rhetorical devices like metaphor and simile with this purpose in mind. Whilst poetry is an excellent vehicle for introducing the concept, what we really want to see is pupils using these descriptive tools across all their work.

5 GREAT EXAMPLES OF 'SHOW NOT TELL' IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

1 *"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.* The opening line of *Charlotte's Web* is perfect in its set-up. In one sentence, E.B. White shows us when we have stumbled into this scene, who is present, where they are and what happened immediately before, as well giving us a scintilla of what might happen next.

2 Another fantastic opening is to be found in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*. Although grisly, it is a masterclass in the careful reveal of small details within a horrific scene. Gaiman never signposts the action; he describes it in precise, unhurried sentences that disguise the assassin with deliberate ambiguity.

3 Ted's Asperger syndrome in Siobhan Dowd's *The London Eye Mystery* is never spelled out, but is alluded to by the main character himself in his self-aware, first-person narration (his "different operating system") and by other characters through their dialogue.

4 In Jakob Wegelius's *The Murderer's Ape*, the nature of the protagonist, Sally Jones, is hinted at with a solitary one-word clue – "fur" – in the prologue, before she reveals herself to be a gorilla.

5 *Letters from the Lighthouse* by Emma Carroll introduces an antagonist – Esther Jenkins – and gives just two small points of description: her dark brown plaits ("sucked to a point") and a voice that spoke English "a bit oddly". This clue to her background isn't resolved until a hundred pages later.

Tim Roach is a Year 3 teacher based in Oldham.

Pointless VOCABULARY

Playing games with language isn't just fun, it's the perfect way to learn the subtleties of choosing exactly the right words

If we wish to develop children's vocabulary quickly, activities such as Word Of The Week will be a laborious process. But there is an alternative: why not devise activities that generate several connected words and revisit these words often, so that children build vocabulary efficiently in their long-term memories?

You may have seen the TV show *Pointless* where members of the public provide answers within a category, e.g. countries with the letter "a" in them. The contestants guess which answers were not given, or were given by the fewest respondents. The aim of the game is to receive as few points as possible; zero points would be ideal. This generates myriad opportunities for adaptation in class: decide on a category, generate a list of your own, and open the floor to the children. For instance:

1 In pairs / small groups, children write down as many modes of transport as they can think of in two minutes. Then they choose three that they think will be on your list, with low points.

2 Display a list of 10 modes of transport prepared earlier. Words should be assigned a points value in advance: up to 15 points for obvious answers such as "taxi", "van", "lorry"; 5 to 10 points for less obvious answers such as "limousine", "horse and cart", "cruise liner"; and 1 to 5 points for more obscure answers like "rickshaw", "junk", and "steamer". Assign 0 points to a word you do not think children will come up with ("penny-farthing"). If children have a transport device on their list that does not match your list, they get 20 points. The winning team is the one with fewest points at the end of the game.

3 With younger children, you may ask them to pool their ideas and play against you as a class. You might simplify the game by giving children a point for each word they call out that is on your list and keep a more traditional method of scoring (i.e. the more points, the better).

4 Take time to unpick the vocabulary (you might wish to have images to show the children: "a rickshaw looks like this").

Alternative categories:

- Places you might live in, e.g. "flat", "cottage", "semi-detached", "bungalow", "end terrace", "shack", "castle", "tent".
- Things you wear on your feet
- Flower names
- Animals that begin with the letter "s"

Other words that work well are synonyms for overused verbs (such as "eat", "walk", "sleep", "go", "sit") for adjectives (such as "big", "red", "hot") or for adverbs ("fast", "happily", "suddenly"). Children could be invited to use a thesaurus to help them generate possible synonyms. Alternatively, you could link this game to spelling patterns that you have been studying in class. Try: job roles that end in "-er" / "-cian", or words that end in "-ful".

Keep categories as tight as possible to ensure children can see the links.

Choosing the right words

Broadening vocabulary enables children to select more specific words to enhance their independent writing, e.g. "The old crone lived in a shack in the gloomy forest" vs "The old woman lived in a house in the dark forest." If the children are to write a setting description based in a dark, scary forest, anticipate that they may well overwork these adjectives and use the game as a stimulus for a word bank so that children have the means to write "foreboding forest". It is only when used in context that children will truly embed language and learn (by trial and improvement) that simply swapping out words does not always create the desired effect. Whilst "The old woman lived in a dark, scary forest" works, "The antique woman lived in an opaque alarming forest" does not! The more often children meet the words, the more precise their categorisation will become, and the better they will be at selecting the most appropriate word for the context.

Ideas that work in home or school

Extend learning to the home, inviting families to participate in activities that will expand children's repertoire of words in their own setting.

1 Sticky note synonyms

Grab a pack of sticky notes and start labelling! Adults could support children to label familiar household objects with synonyms. They could compete with each other to supply alternative names such as: "looking glass" for mirror; "basin" for sink, "bedspread" for blanket or "lavatory" for toilet! Parents with

"It is only when used in context that children will truly embed language and learn that simply swapping out words does not always create the desired effect"

English as an additional language could add their home language onto the sticky notes. Can they spot similarities in any of the words?

2 Nuanced nouns

This idea is based on the old (but still available) series of i-SPY books. It develops a consciousness of the subcategories of common nouns. Simply provide a theme such as Out Of My Window or In The Garden and set the challenge of spotting items on the list. Sightings of relatively familiar objects such vans or street lamps would earn one point, whilst refuse collectors could earn five and emergency vehicles 10. Frequently spotted garden birds such as pigeons would score a measly single point whereas robins or magpies are awarded more and a colourful woodpecker or elusive bullfinch could merit double figures. You may need images of the items that children need to spot for reference.

3 Labelling the world

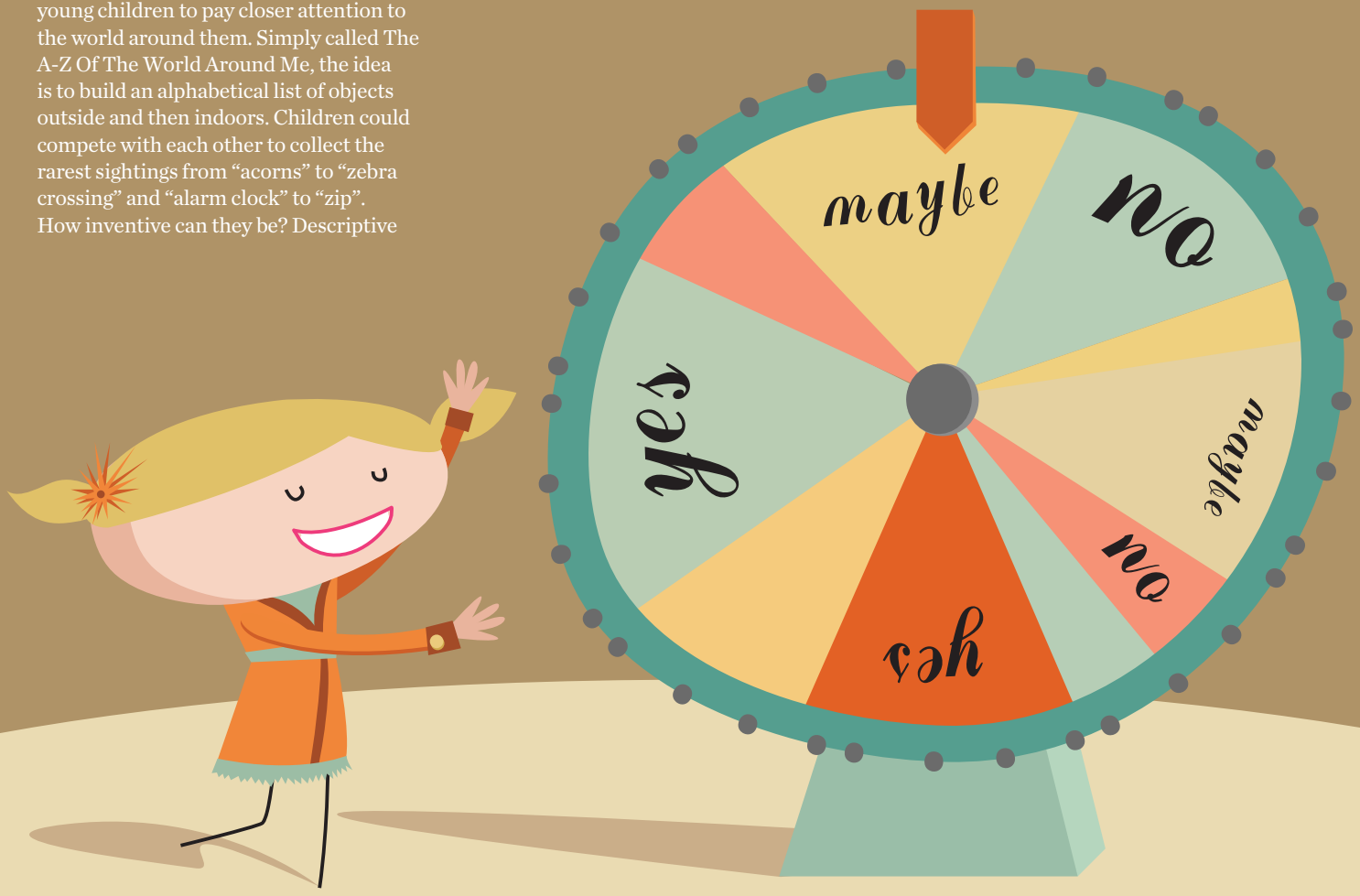
The following activity also encourages young children to pay closer attention to the world around them. Simply called The A-Z Of The World Around Me, the idea is to build an alphabetical list of objects outside and then indoors. Children could compete with each other to collect the rarest sightings from “acorns” to “zebra crossing” and “alarm clock” to “zip”. How inventive can they be? Descriptive additions could expand opportunities for older children: “blade of grass”, “yellow van”, “comfortable sofa”.

Young children will always tell you they are hungry, cold, cross or bored. Challenge them to generate synonyms for these overused words and create a ‘washing line’ of feelings, pegging them up in order of magnitude. Words could range from ″peckish″, through ″ravenous″ to ″famished″, or from ″mildly irked″ to ″absolutely furious″! This activity will generate lots of discussion as to where words should be placed. How cold is ″chilly″ compared to ″frosty″, for instance? No room to hang words up? Place words on sticky notes and move them along the scale as you decide where they belong. Children could even draw a thermometer and add words to the scale. What about a thermometer of happiness, for example? Where would they place ″jubilant″ or ″ecstatic″ compared to ″contented″?

There are so many possibilities for creative activities that allow children to broaden their vocabulary, whilst having fun. The initial hope is that they explore a few new words within a supportive scaffold; the long-term aim is that children learn to love language and develop a thirst for discovering and uncovering new possibilities for themselves.

Herts for Learning (HfL) supports schools and educational settings - see hertsforlearning.co.uk for the full range of training and resources. Coming soon: ESSENTIALspelling, a unique spelling scheme that supports KS2 teachers to close spelling gaps and accelerate learning to age-related expectations.

Michelle Nicholson is teaching and learning adviser at Herts for Learning.



The Reading HABIT

Getting some pupils to read at home can seem an impossible task, but there are ways to motivate parents, and children, to turn this around

In the last couple of years, we have seen teachers develop their understanding of the importance of reading for pleasure (RfP). These teachers seek out texts and strategies that will encourage their pupils to engage with reading and develop their reading preferences. It seems that RfP is high on everyone's agenda; however, there is one problem that remains in most schools I visit: how do we make sure that children are motivated to read at home when we (as teachers) are not there to facilitate this?

This issue does not look the same in every school. We all work with a proportion of families who are onboard with reading - parents who seek advice, regularly choose, borrow and buy books and attend reading workshops and celebration events. But what of those who don't? Some parents are eager to support their children with reading at home, but do not have the confidence to know where to start. For others, unfortunately, no amount of cajoling and coaxing leads to engagement. The strategies suggested in this article are designed to help teachers address this question from two angles:

- by supporting parents to understand how to get their children reading
- by motivating children to read without parental intervention

1 Make it easy to grab a book

Allow parents access to, and time to browse, the books their children choose to take home (e.g. by opening the school library after school; moving trollies of books onto the playground at home time; placing book displays near the school entrances) and be at hand to support and model conversations about children's book choices. This will strengthen the reading relationship between parents and children as well as making it more likely that the parents will want to share reading those books at home.

2 Ditch the reading diaries

For some parents, reading diaries are a chore, leading the adult to write similar comments week after week, or ignoring the diary altogether. To combat this, one of the schools I have worked with this year asks children to simply record how long they have read for, in the form of a bar chart, adding up the minutes and hours of reading. This home reading is then added to a class read-o-meter. By colouring the bars in according to the type of text they are reading (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, magazines, websites etc) the school has found that children are reading more widely and more often than before.

3 Send out regular reading bulletins

How many parents are familiar with their school's home reading policies? How many policies once read are tucked away and forgotten? As an alternative, provide parents with regular reading bulletins that showcase the reading activities taking place in school, recommend books and provide reminders of some of the ways reading can be encouraged at home. Failing this, hijack your school's newsletter, securing a regular reading update feature.

"How do we make sure that children are motivated to read at home when we (as teachers) are not there to facilitate this?"

4 Recruit parent ambassadors

When I was a headteacher, I always found that our greatest asset, when it came to parental engagement, was the parents themselves. Enlist those parents who understand the value of RfP to run book groups (for parents as well as children); organise book swaps; contribute to the reading bulletin and offer advice and support.

5 Value audiobooks

You can't guarantee that parents will regularly listen to audiobooks; however, if they do, encourage them to download stories for their children too. I have very fond memories of listening to a Jackanory LP of John Grant's Little Nose stories as a child, laughing out loud and listening again and again until I almost knew the stories by heart. This does not always come at a cost. Some classic children's literature is in the public domain and can be downloaded for free (librivox.org) and many websites

offer free examples of stories being read aloud, such as World Book Day Storytime Online (worldbookday.com) and Cbeebies Bedtime Stories.

6 Recommend a good series

Know your children's reading preferences, habits and interests and signpost them to books they will enjoy as well as encouraging them to re-read books they have loved. Loving one book leads to interest in the next, so if possible, find series of books to recommend such as the Claude books by Alex T Smith (KS1), Anna Hibiscus by Atinuki (lower KS2) or M.G. Leonard's Beetle Boy collection (upper KS2).

I grew up reading comics and am still an avid reader of graphic novels today, yet I rarely see children reading comics in the classroom. If you're not sure where to start try: *Hilda and the Troll* by Luke Pearson, *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier, or the Corpse Talk series from The Phoenix Comic.

7 Mix it up

Vary the texts you read aloud to ensure that your class are exposed to a range of reading material. If you are reading a longer novel that you know will take a number of days or weeks, find moments in the day to read something different, perhaps a poem, an extract from the newspaper or a section of a non-fiction book. Tempt the children into something new by reading the introductions to books to whet their appetites, and then return them to the shelf.

8 Find the perfect spot

Teachers are fantastic at creating spaces that encourage authentic reading behaviours, but do you know where children read when they're not at school? Think of ways you can support children in creating the perfect reading environment in their home. Ask them to consider where they might feel most comfortable, however small or unusual (e.g. under the bed, on the stairs), and invite them to take a photo to share with the class. Model this by sharing photos of where you read. This will be easier for some children than others, so remember to talk to families about why this is important first.

9 Let children lead

Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing. When a 'cool kid' loves a book, it is likely that the rest of the class will want to read it too. Many teachers share the books they are reading with their class, but it is just as important that children have chances to share the books they enjoy reading too. Display these books as 'Green Table's Great Reads' or 'Aaron's Book of the Week' and when a child has really engaged with a book, ask him or her to write a short review – or even just a couple of positive comments about it on a Post-it note tucked inside the front cover – and sign it. Children can then look for these when they are browsing.

10 Online is OK

I believe that children should experience a healthy balance of real books and digital reading; however, we must take into account that some children prefer reading from a screen. Encourage children to read online as well as on paper by recommending websites, online magazines and ebooks such as Newsround, Books for Keeps and the Nasa kids club.

Home reading has never been an easy nut to crack but the more often we model positive reading behaviours and the more we engage with our children as readers, the more likely it is they will follow suit. Once children experience the pleasure reading brings, boundaries between school and home reading can fall away.

Ruth Baker-Leask is director of Minerva Learning and chair of the National Association of Advisers in English (NAAE).

Launch their future

chatta helps children become better communicators, readers, writers and thinkers

Chatta is a unique, high impact approach (supported by training, resources & ongoing consultancy) which ensures accelerated progress for children from Early Years and beyond in all areas of learning and development. Chatta's focus on oracy and narrative competence has been proven to reduce gaps in attainment quickly preventing young people from falling behind.

Chatta matches quality experiences through photographs & images combined with modelled languagee development of the approach links learning, language and working memory whilst scaffolding pupils' thinking to enable them to organise & use their language effectively to communicate.

To find out more about how chatta can give your children the best start just call our dedicated team or you can drop us an email, we're always happy to help.

Tel: **0845 003 0896**
Email: **hello@chatta.co.uk**
Visit: **www.chatta.co.uk**

Giving children the best start in life

chatta

5 REASONS TO TRY... Pathways to Write

Master writing with the ERA Primary Resource of the Year 2020, from The Literacy Company

30 SECOND BRIEFING

Pathways to Write is an award-winning programme built around units of work that follow a mastery approach to the teaching of writing. It uses clear, detailed lesson plans and resources linked to high-quality texts to ensure engaging and purposeful English lessons

1 WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

Pathways to Write, from The Literacy Company, is a unique programme written as a mastery model comprising text-based units of work from EYFS to Y7. Coherently planned and sequenced across every year group, each unit focuses on a finite number of skills, built on progressively throughout the year – enabling pupils to grow in confidence and master each skill. Pathways to Write also includes year group overview grids, a progression document, a spoken language and reading tracking document, writing opportunities for the application of grammar and punctuation, and a wider curriculum map.

2 IMPACT ON STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Feedback from schools confirms the impact Pathways to Write has on children's attitudes towards writing and raising standards in English: a positive impact on standards has been reported across a good number of Pathways' schools. Assessment using the mastery approach is clear and precise within the programme. Ofsted reports show a palpable benefit from the introduction of the programme across a number of Pathways' schools in the UK and overseas.

3 INSPIRING CHILDREN

The Literacy Company is committed to developing a life-long love of literature. Pathways to Write uses high-quality, vocabulary-rich texts, across a wide range of genres, to engage and support children in their learning. The intelligent repetition and application of knowledge and skills in each unit provides scope and progression that can be tailored easily to suit the needs of pupils. Schools report that since the introduction of Pathways to Write, not only do pupils write for a purpose, but they write for pleasure, with children across all year groups expressing a love of writing and increased engagement.

4 IMPACT ON WORKLOAD

Schools are thrilled with the impact the Pathways to Write mastery approach has had on teacher workload. By freeing up staff to focus on teaching rather than planning, there is a real sense of liberation without losing ownership of the process. Marking and assessment is easier to manage, with skills planned in for teaching and then assessed on a half-termly basis.

5 THE WIDER CURRICULUM AND ADAPTABILITY

Pathways to Write can align with your school curriculum or provide a curriculum in itself for schools in the process of designing their curriculum. The texts have been selected to work with the themes within the wider curriculum and a curriculum map is included in the programme to illustrate these links across the whole school. It fits with the chronology of history topics as well as incorporating geography, science, art and design technology in the scope of the units. Pathways to Write can be introduced at any point in the school calendar

Contact:
theliteracycompany.co.uk
admin@theliteracycompany.co.uk
07525 268875
quoting TP2

era education resources awards 2020 WINNER

KEY POINTS

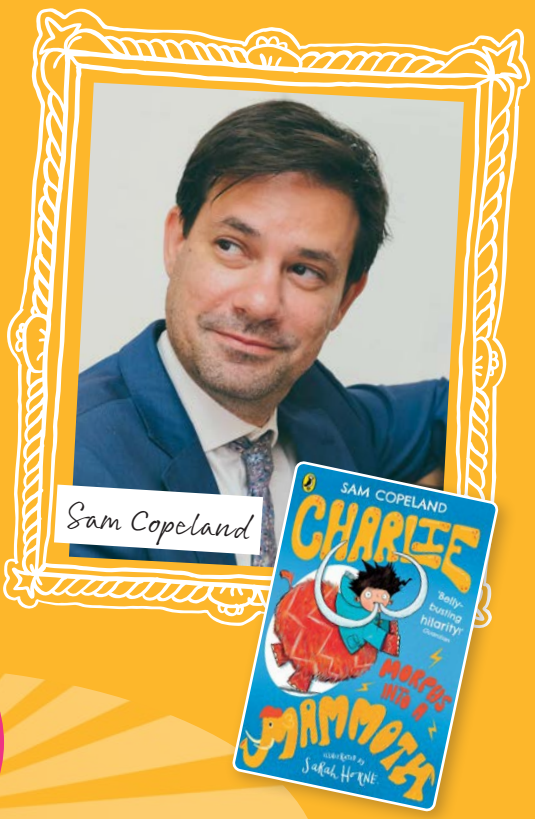
- **Pathways to Write is available from EYFS to Y7 with options for both single-age and mixed-age classes**
- **These award-winning resources are provided electronically and are available for immediate use**
- **A supporting suite of additional Pathways units are available: Poetry, Protect the Planet and the newly launched Pathways to Read**
- **Visit theliteracycompany.co.uk to sign up for free Pathways' webinars, access to the free home learning resources and information about The Literacy Company**

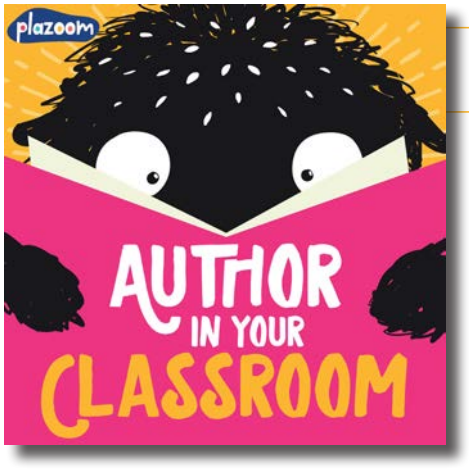
AUTHOR IN YOUR CLASSROOM

We've teamed up with Puffin to bring author Sam Copeland directly to your pupils – via a free podcast and downloadable resources

Fancy a virtual visit from a bestselling children's writer? Luckily for you, funny man Sam Copeland is ready and waiting to share his thoughts, ideas and inspirations with your budding wordsmiths, via our new literacy podcast. The experience doesn't end there either; we've created some amazing free teaching resources to download at **plazoom.com**, so you can continue your reading adventure in the classroom.

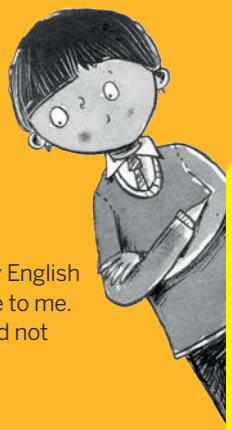
Writing stories with believable, three-dimensional characters can be a tricky thing for children to master – especially when there's the constant temptation to slip your favourite footballers or YouTubers into your story. Filling a tale with flawed heroes or baddies the reader can relate to helps to bring the story to life. In this episode, Sam focuses on how he created characters for his new novel, Charlie Morphs into a Mammoth.





HOW TO USE THE PODCAST

- Search for 'Author in your Classroom' podcast wherever you listen to podcasts
- Play it in your classroom in one go, or in seven to ten minutes chunks
- Pause the recording to talk about the points being raised



FOUR THINGS KIDS WILL LEARN FROM THE PODCAST

1 NOT EVERYONE IS BORN A WRITER

"I think I was ordinary at writing at school. I had a love-hate with my English teacher. This whole experience of being an author is a total surprise to me. If you'd told me when I was 20 that I'd be a published author, I would not have believed you."

2 MAKE YOURSELF LAUGH

"One of the frustrating things about writing a funny book is that you've got to think of jokes. I envy writers who don't have to write funny books because they can just get on with the plot! The number one person you need to make laugh is yourself. If it doesn't make you laugh, why is it going to make others laugh?"

3 DREAM UP FRIENDS

"I set out to write characters that I would want to be friends with. This is a weird thing to say, but I do feel like I've become friends with them – I like them very much! Writing naughty characters is also really fun."

4 LEARN THE RULES

"It's important to know the rules of writing before you go about breaking them. Learn all the boring rules so you understand the game, then you can stray outside the boundaries."

LISTEN TO SAM'S ANSWERS IN FULL BY DOWNLOADING THE PODCAST

SECRETS OF A 'NAUGHTY' KID

Author Sam Copeland wrote for us last year about his experience of primary school...

"I faced many serious problems as a child, such as parental divorce and slow terminal illness in my very close family, which I masked by messing about and acting up. Teachers could never have known what was going on for me. I never spoke about it – I felt too embarrassed and like I was the only one with these problems, so I hid them behind a veil of mischief, I was always in detention, which increased the stress I felt."

Read the full article at tinyurl.com/tpcopeland

plazoom | Schools

How to download the resources

To accompany the podcast, teaching experts at Plazoom have created free resources that you can use to develop your pupils' writing. The teaching pack includes lesson plans, a Powerpoint, teacher notes and activity sheets.
In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to create a hero, a villain and plan their own story, while learning to 'show, not tell' what a character is like.

DOWNLOAD THEM AT

PLAZOOM.COM/SAMPODCAST

Puffin Schools is curated by the children's publisher Puffin. You'll find video resources, book lists and ideas to bring stories to life at **puffinschools.co.uk**

CATCH UP: EPISODE 1 OF THE PODCAST FEATURED ROBIN STEVENS. FIND THE RESOURCES AT PLAZOOM.COM/ROBINPODCAST

The DUMP

Share **Pie Corbett's** story with your class and remind them how nature's magic stretches forward and back through time

We found it at the end of the cul-de-sac where the path led between two houses into a wooded bit beyond. Someone had chucked an old mattress out. The next thing we knew, it had become the local dumping ground. I could see it from my bedroom window. Our house backed onto the wood. Mum called it 'fly-tipping' and said it was because all the council tips were closed. "They'll not open the recycling centres until lockdown has ended," she said.

I wasn't allowed to the dump. Mum warned me a number of times. I could take my exercise in the back garden but couldn't go out of the gate behind Dad's shed. There wasn't much to do in the garden. It wasn't a garden really because it was mostly paving stones and a barbecue that Dad had built out of old bricks and half a metal drum. Then there was his shed.

You couldn't swing anything in the garden. It was tiny. Then I drove Mum mad by kicking my football against the kitchen wall 136 times. I was on the 137th when she exploded out of the backdoor and shouted at me to stop it or else. "But I'm exercising," I said. It's alright for her and Jasmine; they watch Joe Wicks and puff and pant in their leotards. You're not catching me doing that!

Anyway, she told me I could go out the back gate but not to go near the dump and not to play with anyone else. "STAY SAFE," she growled, 'STAY ALERT." Gosh, those eyes seem to be getting closer together, I thought. And I'm sure she never used to have a moustache before all this started. I was about to point this out when I thought the better of it and scooted off.

The woods are stuffed with bluebells. It looks amazing. A vast carpet of bluebells, but they are sort of more purple than blue.

The wood is full of sunlit beams and shadows. You can hear the trees moving as the wind blows. I watch where I'm placing my feet. Miss told us at school about adders and there's no way a snake is going to get me! The trees move ever so slightly, the leaves rustle and the shadows move with them.

It smells earthy and the bluebells stretch on in a shimmer of blue, violet and green.

It is rather like magic. I always feel that when I am here and now that everyone is on lockdown, it is quieter and stiller. The word *sacred* pops into

my mind. Mr Robinson taught us about sacred places. It means they are special places, holy. The wood's like one of those big churches you go to, where it's cooler inside and suddenly quieter and everyone stops being loud. It's a bit like that. It's a place of hush and shush. It's like being in a church or a temple but this is real. No one made it; it made itself. It grew itself.

Then I hear the birds. Pigeons making their soft cooing. A blackbird bossing the others about. I notice smaller birds but I don't know what they are. Shy, brown birds bobbing and flickering between the trees. Now I'm still, I can hear them and begin to see them. In the sunlit patches, bees buzz. In the shadows, the earth seems to be breathing. There's a huge oak tree high above me stretching its vast green tent of leaves and branches.

Mr Robinson told us that oak trees take 300 years to grow and then stand for 300, before taking 300 years to die and another 1,000 years to decay. They must see plenty across such a mighty life.

I think of the dump where people off the estate have just chucked their old stuff; here today, gone tomorrow. When I get there, the mattress and old clothes have started to mold. There are thistles poking up through the heap and ferns uncurling their tight, green tongues. Brambles have already begun to stretch their thin, thorny limbs across the pile of rubbish.

Nature doesn't hang about. It's not going to wait for a man from the council. Could be waiting a long time for anyone to sort this lot out. No, it's already got to work. Rotting what it can, covering the ugliness we've left behind. Stuff we didn't need. By autumn, this will be smothered in leaves and branches.

When I get back, I go upstairs and look out of my window. The wood is quietly getting on with the business of living. I get on the net and find the names of the birds I saw. The tiniest were wrens but some were tree sparrows. It's funny really. Once you know what something is, and you find out about it, then somehow you care a bit more. It matters more. It becomes a bit more... what did I call it? Oh yes, sacred.

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

From reading to writing

I wrote this story during lockdown. One of the things that lots of people have noticed is that wildlife has been making a return. The air is purer, animal life has been less disturbed. Gardens, parks and the countryside are flourishing. I imagined a dumping ground piled with people's rubbish and wondered what would happen in lockdown. Would nature begin to reclaim its territory?

Developing vocabulary

Read the story through, underline difficult vocabulary and discuss any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. List examples or synonyms and then try using the words in sentences. Use the words over a number of days for grammar games as well as rapid reading, spelling and when writing creative sentences.

Words to discuss

- cul-de-sac
- mattress
- fly-tipping
- council
- recycling centre
- metal drum
- bluebells
- adders
- sacred
- pigeon
- blackbird
- bossing/shy
- thistles
- ferns
- brambles
- wrens
- tree sparrow

"What would happen? Would nature reclaim its territory?"

Research local wildlife

Children should know about their local environment and this story highlights the importance of familiarising yourself the surrounding flora and fauna. Ask children to produce a fact file or poster about local animals, birds, flowers and trees. You could start with the ones mentioned in the story. The children should research and provide facts for each subject and add a drawing, labeled with information. Turn the different entries into a class book about your local area.

Oral comprehension

- Who do you think the 'we' is, mentioned at the start?
- Why do you think the main character is not allowed to the dump?
- Explain 'You couldn't swing anything in the garden.'
- Why did Mum get mad?
- Do you think the main character is a girl or boy and do you have any evidence for suggesting this?
- Why does it say that the character 'scooted off'?
- Why did the character have to 'watch where I'm placing my feet'?
- In what way is the wood 'like magic'?
- What is the effect of the phrase 'bees buzz'?
- What does the author mean by, 'here today, gone tomorrow'?
- Explain what the author means by 'Nature doesn't hang about'.
- Develop the point that the author is making in the last few lines.

Explore the story through drama

- Drama is a key strategy to help children deepen their imaginative engagement with a story. It can also help to have children writing in role as if they were one of the characters.
- Hot seat the main character about what happened
- In pairs, be 'eye-witnesses' and talk about how things have changed in the wood and what you saw
- In role as the main character, tell your best friend about what happened and then write a diary entry
- In role as school friends, 'gossip' about what you have heard about the dump
- In role as a local journalist, give a phone interview with the main character about the wood and how things have changed

Kennings are rather like very small riddles. A sword or axe becomes 'skull splitter" or "bone cruncher"

Play with poetry

Almost all schools have a copy of *Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. In the book, they celebrate birds, animals and plants that are in danger of being forgotten. Robert Macfarlane's poems are in the form of acrostics.
To write an acrostic, begin by observing your chosen subject closely and writing down, as rapidly as possible, a huge collection of words and ideas about the topic. Then write the name of your subject down the page like this:

I
V
Y

The trick is to create a poem or description weaving your writing around the structure, e.g.

Insinuated between stones; sprawled
across the wall;
Veins stretched through shiny, heart-leaves.
Green-gripper.
Yearning, ivy clings with tiny hairs.

Another way to do something similar is to write the name of the subject in the middle of the page and weave your writing around the word. This is called a mesostic, e.g.

Flitter-flickering, ash-**b**lack, cave-dweller.
Midge-ch**a**ser, night-racer.
Dusk-hun**t**er surprising the dark.

You will notice that a lot of the phrases that I have used are compounds called kennings. A kenning is a Norse term for a two-word phrase that is used to describe something. They are rather like very small riddles. A sword or an axe becomes 'skull splitter' or 'bone-cruncher'. The ocean was described as the 'whale-road'. To create kennings, select a subject that you know a lot about such as a 'barn owl'. Think about what it is like and what it does, e.g. huge eyes, white wings, flies at night, eats mice. Now, turn each idea into a kenning, e.g. night-starer, ghost-glider, night-flyer, mouse-grabber.

My cat, Cato
Flea-magnet
Person-snuggler
Night-stalker
Cheek-rubber
Fly-botherer
Fence-strutter
Tail-twitcher
Claw-kneader

By Elkie

Who am I?
Dirt-digger
Tail-wagger
Mess-maker
Sock-stealer
Slipper-chewer
Sofa-squasher
Foot-sniffer

By Eliza

To support schools during this time, free English units from Reception to Year 6 are available from: talk4writing.co.uk/home-school-units

Pie also co-presents RadioBlogging.net a daily free, interactive creative writing and reading show, ideal for KS2, 9:30 every weekday, including an author reading every day.

PIE CORBETT is an author, poet and former headteacher.

Inspire Progress

Eight exceptional ideas to keep children's literacy learning on track

1

One-stop shop

Hope Education provides educational resources to nurseries, schools and parents. There are over 30,000 products to choose from, covering all curriculum areas, as well as arts and crafts, stationery and much more. View the entire range via the website, where you can also visit the blog and view lots of free activity ideas for home learning. Hope Education was voted ERA Supplier of the Year in the Education Resource Awards 2020.
hope-education.co.uk

3

Strength to strength

Juniper Education is a comprehensive education support service, established to help schools go from strength to strength. Its award-winning school effectiveness services are proven to help with a wide range of requirements. That's why over 7,000 schools across 20 countries trust it to support them with everything from whole-school improvement to pupil tracking, HR, finance support and much more. **junipereducation.org**

The path to success

Pathways to Write, the Primary Education Resource of the year 2020, is used nationally and internationally by over 170 schools. It is built around units of work that follow a mastery approach to the teaching of writing, with clear, detailed lesson plans and resources linked to high-quality texts to ensure engaging and purposeful English lessons. Coherently planned and sequenced across year groups, each unit focuses on a finite number of skills, built on progressively throughout the year – helping pupils to develop confidence and mastery. Request your free sample pack:
admin@theliteracycompany.co.uk

4

2

Talk for Writing – at home

Teacher and literacy expert Pie Corbett and his Talk for Writing team have created 32 Talk for Writing Home-school English booklets available free to download (though a voluntary donation to charity for use is requested). The units are all 25+ pages long and age-related for Reception to Year 6. They include a model text, which is also available as a streamed audio recording and a number of engaging activities.
Pie has also been broadcasting a live, interactive and creative KS2 literacy show each weekday morning at 9.30am on RadioBlogging.net. Daily guests on the show have included Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Anthony Horowitz and Cressida Cowell.
www.talk4writing.com

6

Firm foundations

Rocket Phonics is a fresh and fully-decodable series from Rising Stars Reading Planet. Build firm foundations in reading with modern and colourful books aligned to Letters and Sounds. Your pupils will develop solid comprehension skills and practise phonic decoding in context through colourful fiction and non-fiction. Each Rocket Phonics book is also available in interactive eBook format as part of the Reading Planet Online Library, an online programme that can be accessed at home and school. Contact your local consultant now at **risingstars-uk.com/RPconsultants** to learn more about trying Rocket Phonics for FREE in print and digital format.

5

Thematic literacy

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The Write Stuff

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Make peace with HOMEWORK

If setting extra work is turning pupils' homes into a battleground, you can lighten the load without cutting back on learning

Getting the right balance of experience for children learning at home has never been easy; there's always the potential niggling belief that, like medicine, if it doesn't taste bad, it isn't working...

While certain aspects of primary English require grit and application, we believe that a great deal can be learned through a playful, joyful approach – and this can help parents and carers as much as children!

When looking at home-learning, we think there are three things that are worth bearing in mind:

- It shouldn't (and probably can't) feel the same as school
- Children's learning mustn't be entirely screen-based
- Not all children have parents who are in a position to help them

We think it's possible to deal with all of these points and create home-learning that is extremely educationally beneficial, yet barely feels like work.

Here, we suggest just a sample of activities that will help children develop skills within different aspects of writing: spelling; handwriting; vocabulary, grammar and punctuation; and story ideas / structure.

Many of them may feel familiar – the sorts of things we may have done as children, and that some children may even be doing at home as a matter of course. We have attempted to describe them in enough detail to be effective, while also keeping them loose enough that new and better interpretations may be spun from them, to allow for different ages and backgrounds.

It's important to remember that home-learning can often feel more intense, and so children will need to learn in shorter bursts of time with brain breaks (though if they become absorbed, let them get on, of course!)

The secret to creative stories

There's a simple route into children creating stories, and you can decide whether to keep them oral (and maybe practise retelling them), or to record them out loud, or to turn them into writing. The simple route is this.

Take a short-ish story that you know quite well, and split it into 'chapters'. We like five chapters, as then children can use the fingers of one hand to plan the story.

Traditional tales are great for this as their structures are fundamental. Here's an example for *Cinderella*.

- The invitation
- The Fairy Godmother
- The Ball (leaving the shoe behind)
- The Prince's Search (for the shoe's owner)
- The Shoe Fits!

From here, you can then make adaptations to the original story:

- First of all, change the setting (e.g. your town/ village/ city);
- Next, change the event that everyone wants to go to in Chapter 3 (e.g. an audition, a football trial, a play, a party);
- After that, come up with reasons your hero can't go in Chapter 1 (e.g. doesn't have the right clothes or transport/ unpleasant sibling...);
- Now decide how these problems will be solved in Chapter 2 (a friendly relative, a gift, a kind teacher...) and then watch how the rest of the story unfolds!

You can take the same structure and change it over and over (as Hollywood writers do!): you can set it in the past or the future, you can allow or disallow magic, you can use characters from other stories, like Jack and the Beanstalk!

Playing with grammar

One of our very favourite games for teaching children the sheer joy and potential of language is Grandma's Chocolate Cake. You repeat the sentence, "I didn't eat Grandma's chocolate cake," but each time you put emphasis on a different word: "I didn't *eat* Grandma's chocolate cake," – what did you do with it, then? "I didn't eat *Grandma's* chocolate cake," – whose cake did you eat, then? And so on.

The key is to talk about the new meaning each time. Very quickly, children will be able to compose their own sentences using the same sort of pattern: "I didn't walk to my friend's house." They might also use known stories: "He didn't walk across the Troll's bridge"; "Harry didn't like his new teacher," or even factual knowledge: "Henry VIII didn't execute all his wives"!

Similar-but-different to this is Every Word Counts, in which you take a sentence and change individual words within it, noting the different meaning that this creates each time: "She sat on the new bean-bag." What could you swap the first word for? (– He/ they/ I/ it/ Chris...); The second word? (– leapt/ slept/ bounced/ laughed...); The third? (– beside, across, beneath...); and so on.

"Home-learning can often feel more intense, and so children will need to learn in shorter bursts of time"

You can keep each change, or reset to the original sentence each time.

It's not absolutely necessary, but writing down each new sentence – or at least the favourite ones – will help with retention of learning (as well as practise handwriting and spelling!).

Physical punctuation is a great way of learning how punctuation works. Children listen to a story (or news article or, something from a magazine etc) being read aloud, and they indicate where the capital letters and full stops should go – so place your hand on your head as a 'cap' whenever a capital letter is needed, and form a clenched fist to represent a full stop. The key is that they do this without being able to see the text: they must listen and sense the punctuation.

Once children have mastered this (and not before) they can start indicating the commas – a crooked finger – the question and exclamation marks (a fist with a curved or straight forearm above) and so on. Introduce a new punctuation mark only when the last one is mastered!

Sharpen up spelling

Children can develop a positive attitude to spelling at home through fun word-creation games such as Boggle, Upwords and Bananagrams – all fantastic for improving word building and vocabulary. Keep a dictionary handy for checking, and you'll get purposeful dictionary work into the bargain!

I-spy (with my little eye...) is an old favourite, but try mixing up the use of letters and sounds: "...something that begins with a D," or, "...something that begins with the sound, /d/.

You can take this old game to a much higher level with "...something ENDING with ___" or even, "...something with ___ in the middle".)

Reading is essential to spelling, and if there are a few high-frequency words that a child struggles with (e.g. "what", "when", "which", "where", "said", "because"...), they could, when reading, notice these and copy them accurately in a special, personalised notebook.

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton work with schools in the UK and internationally to improve English teaching. Previously they were lead teachers in primary schools and local authority advisers. (primaryeducationadvisors.co.uk)

Adopt a whole-school, thematic, book-based approach to primary English!

The Literary Curriculum is a complete set of detailed planning sequences and other resources including a whole-school assessment tool and reading comprehension materials. Based around significant children's literature, it uses our embedded approach to provide complete coverage of the English Programme of Study. It is available to access as a school or individual subscription.

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Hannah Baker, Vice Principal, Highgate Primary Academy, Rotherham

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DON'T SAY BISCUIT, SAY GARIBALDI!

Clichés and generalisms make for plodding and tiresome poetry and prose. For writing to grab us, it needs to be specific

Here are some scenarios you have likely encountered.

You are reading a child's writing and despite knowing what they are trying to say, their message isn't coming across clearly. You are giving yourself time to do some creative writing, but your own ideas leave you feeling stale. A friend is telling you a beige anecdote and rather than it grabbing your attention, you are secretly waiting for it to end.

Oftentimes, the issue we have in our communication – whether written or spoken – is a lack of detail. In school, detail is often confused with length, when it ought instead to be synonymous with specificity.

A child's detailed sentence may well be short, snappy and packed with insight, but more often, we may instead find it is long-winded, meandering and seemingly unending not unlike – you might think – this sentence (this one), which is addled with unnecessary detail, dull repetition, and, some might say, profligate and unnecessary use of rare vocabulary and convoluted structures (including, but not limited, to overuse of embedded clauses).

See. Horrid isn't it.

Clarity can be achieved through being specific. This simple insight can support children and adults to become engaging writers and fluent communicators.

The writing in the BBC comedy *Inside Number 9* is exquisite, and in one episode, two men who used to work as the double-act Cheese and Crackers are bickering about the past. They argue about the name:

"I hate that stupid name. I always did."

"But somebody had already registered Cheese and Onion! I told you."

"Why did it have to be Cheese and anything? It's so babyish. And it's not funny."

"Well, I think it's funny."

"It's too generic. First rule of comedy – be specific. You never say biscuit – you say Garibaldi."

Too much of children's writing suffers from being biscuit when it could be Garibaldi. And while this rule may refer to humorous writing, I think the point stands across all writing and storytelling. By seeking to be specific rather than general in our language, we can often better elucidate ourselves.

Some of this can be reflected in the way that we frame writing tasks and questions with children. Rather than a general task like "Write about what you did this Summer", if the task were phrased as "Tell us about the strangest moment you had this Summer", we would already be guiding children towards sharing specific details from a specific event. Their choice of event guides them away from vague statements like "I played Xbox". The authenticity of children's voices comes out in the details.

Working with Year 5s from a group of primary schools in Newham, I was talking about food. We were exploring AF Harrold's *Midnight Feasts*, a wonderful poetry anthology, and we spent time just sharing stories that popped into our heads. Sometimes, proper conversations can be the best kind of planning.

Children's initial ideas were broad statements, and their poetry grew little beyond the repeated assertion that they like crisps. As we shared stories, the depth of our anecdotal exchanges opened children up to consider the details a little more. Phrases started emerging that had the ring of authenticity to them: "I would always hear the Gujarati songs my grandma sang, and smell the sweet scent of mango beside me." (Sianna)

These specific details, taken from a particular moment in time, enable the children to write and to speak with more candour and expression. Michael Rosen is a champion for the importance of anecdote, and for giving children the opportunity to write from elements of their lives. Loose topics such as 'food', 'rivalry', 'growing up' and 'fashion' can start children thinking about their own experience, and this can be channelled into their writing.

Perhaps the best starting point for all of us is found in our roles as teacher-writers. Let's experiment with our own writing, and explore whether we instinctively lean towards generalisms where specificities might be better. When we describe a new character's face, do we give a predictable roll-call of their anatomical features? When telling of a building, do we lean on cliché?

Anyway, enough for now, friends. I'm going to go and get a snack. Wait! What I mean is, I'm bimbling off to the kitchen to shovel a fistful of the dry roast into my face!

Jonny Walker is the director of OtherWise Education, and works with schools across England to run inter-school poetry retreats, creative writing networks and pastoral projects for pupils with additional SEMH needs. @jonnywalker_edu @OtherWiseEdu

But how DO WE KNOW?

When building depth into your curriculum, English and history can be combined with great results

"How do we know that Walter Tull didn't like it in the children's home where he was sent to live? The story says he didn't like it. But how do we *know*?"

Ravi and the rest of his Y4 class are reading an account of the life of Walter Tull, a black man of Afro-Caribbean descent living in London at the end of the nineteenth century, and he's challenging the text. It's a fictionalised scrapbook written in the first person as if Walter has assembled it – complete with what look like facsimile artefacts. In fact, Michaela Morgan, a white 21st century female author, has written the text and many of the artefacts have been created by a designer. The book won the Blue Peter 'Best Book With Facts' award.

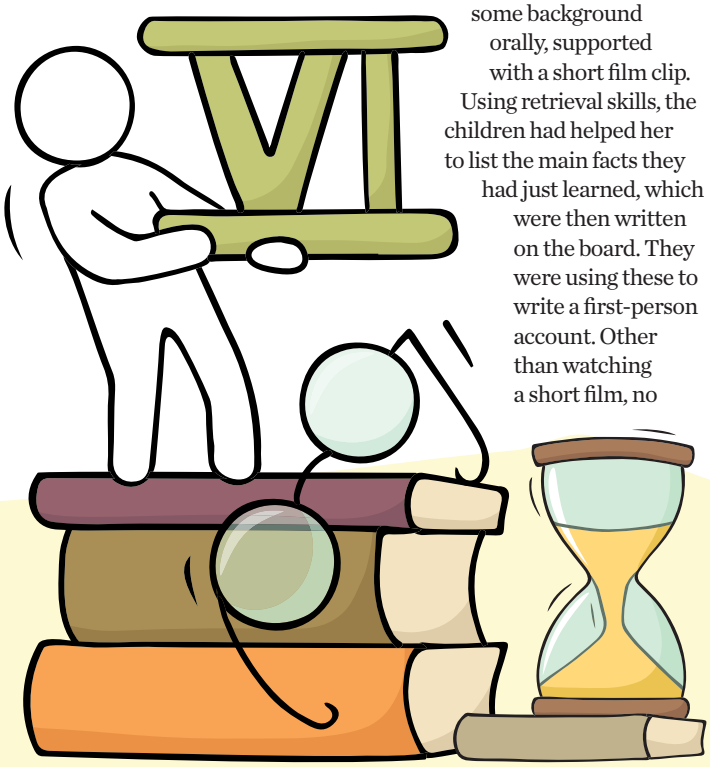
"That's an excellent question, Ravi. Do we know? Who wrote the book? Does it tell us *how* the writer knows? Or do you think she is filling in some knowledge gaps with her imagination? Let's see if there's some evidence to support these two theories."

Ravi's teacher, Lucy, is taking part in a two-year class-based project with six other teachers to look at ways to teach reading in history.

The research group

The project was set up by Just Imagine with a group of teachers to investigate some of the approaches being developing for our reading resource, Take One Book.

One of the teacher-researchers, Sam, was teaching a lesson about the Romans in Britain. She had presented some background orally, supported with a short film clip. Using retrieval skills, the children had helped her to list the main facts they had just learned, which were then written on the board. They were using these to write a first-person account. Other than watching a short film, no additional reading had taken place.



We talked about this later in the staffroom over a cup of tea. Was it a typical history lesson? Sam admitted that it was. She explained the teaching was supported by reading a class novel, *Across the Wall* by Teresa Breslin, which included a lot of historical details. Before studying the topic, the children visited a local archaeological site and were given a talk by one of the curators. The question that interested me was how much reading did they do for the subject? This seemed relevant as the discipline of history involves a lot of reading and interpretation of sources. Could more reading be incorporated in lessons?

This question was posed for the teacher research group to consider. Daniel, a Y5 teacher, reflected that his class did quite a lot of reading with the emphasis on information and research skills. They were skilled at skimming and scanning, using structural guiders and retrieving information from text. Usually they used this research to produce their own writing. However, he felt that there was scope to look more specifically at the reading skills of being a 'historian'.

Though they were approaching the project from individual contexts, the teachers felt there was some room for development – and these are some of the approaches they tried in their classrooms.

Questioning: who wrote it?

First, we agreed on a key question to ask before reading any new text, whether it was an information book, a novel, a website, or a guide book. Several supplementary questions were then devised:

- What knowledge does the writer have of the subject?
- Why did they write this text?
- When was it written?

"Posing questions in this way helped children to probe more deeply; to go beyond simply locating facts and opinions and to instead really interrogate them"

These questions, asked before reading, prompted the children to consider that writers have varying degrees of interest in the subjects they are writing about; a writer's motive could influence the way that they write. Being aware of this is the first step towards criticality. When Ravi asked how we know what Walter Tull felt, he was displaying an awareness that the writer might be making assumptions. That doesn't mean that it is untrue, but it's not an indisputable fact.

A year 6 class reading one of Wilfred Owen's poems discussed the same questions, and this led them to debate whether firsthand knowledge means that your view is more valid than the view of a

researcher using primary sources. 'Not always,' Jasmine argued. 'Sometimes it means you are too close and your feelings get in the way.' This group of pupils were beginning to think about the concept of subjectivity.

Questioning: how does the writer know?

Further questions to ask during reading were formulated by the teacher-researchers. 'How does the writer know that?' encouraged the children to probe more deeply than being asked to identify facts and opinions. Posing the question in this way helped them to interrogate the facts, rather than simply locate them.

For example, a class of Y3 children reading Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom's *Roman Fort* were fascinated with the details of the Roman ablutions. An illustration of three Romans chatting on the communal toilet was labelled "Sponges on sticks to wipe your bum. You wash your sponge stick and put it back for someone else to use!". They were fascinated to know if this could be true. Books for this age rarely have sources included in the text. Detailed referencing would weigh the writing down. But a quick check on the copyright page revealed that the book has been researched on location at Hadrian's wall and that an archaeologist had provided expert consultancy. Being able to find this information and know what it means is where reading like a historian begins.

Certainty and speculation

History is told with varying degrees of certainty. Words commonly found in historical texts such as, "possibly", "perhaps", "most likely", "are known to", "claimed", "first recorded" and "some experts think", were explicitly taught. The children learnt what they meant in relation to historical knowledge and were encouraged to look out for them when reading.

Comparing sources

Classrooms often have several books on the same subject for children to read when they are studying a historical topic, and it's not unusual for these books to be compared. From a historical point of view, we found it interesting to compare and contrast history books written in different periods to show how perspectives change over time. To do this, we bought some second-hand Ladybird books to compare with more up-to-date sources. One class studying exploration and discovery found a comparison of the 1957 Ladybird book about Walter Raleigh with the 1980 edition of the same book particularly revealing. There was a big shift in the perspective on Raleigh's colonisation in the Americas. In the earlier edition, the invader's point of view is shown and in the later, the point of view is alongside the native invaders, watching as strangers land on their beach.

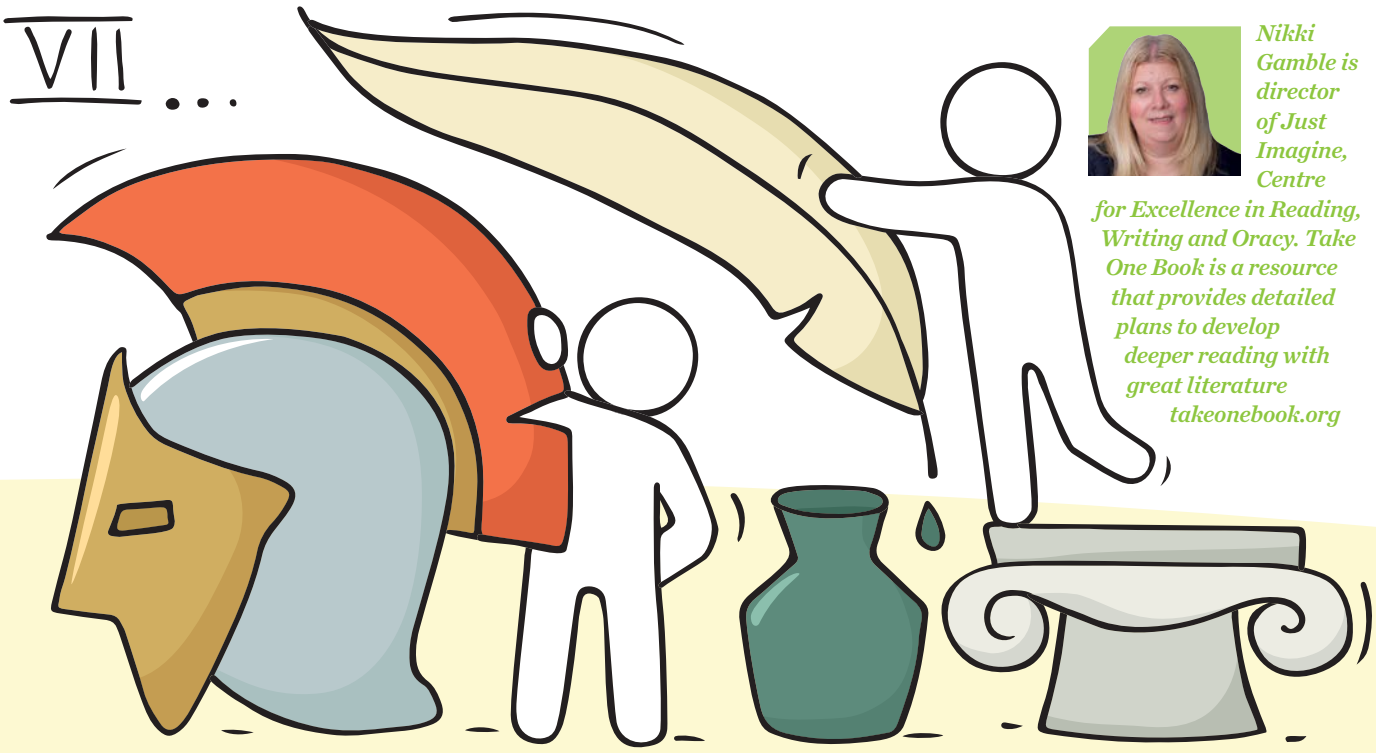
Vocabulary for history

The National Curriculum requires that pupils in KS2 "gain and deploy a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms such as empire, civilisation and peasantry". These are words which recur when reading history. We identified historical vocabulary that we were going to introduce focusing on concepts rather than names. So "monarchy" was chosen rather than King Aethelred. Once these words had been introduced, they were put in the History Treasure Chest and new words were accumulated across the year. Periodically words were used to play a Pictionary style game. The children demonstrated their understanding of the concept by drawing it. The following discussion reinforced the concepts so that learning was revisited and deepened. These changes were in many ways small adaptations of existing practice. This made it easy to implement. However, as Lucy pointed out at the end of the project, "It made me think how a small change to a question makes the historical learning more powerful, but at the same time we are still developing the comprehension needed for teaching English."

5 historical gems

Brilliant books to explore with your class

- **Stonehenge, Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom – Frances Lincoln (2014)**
- **Absolutely Everything, Christopher Lloyd – What On Earth (2018)**
- **Silk Roads, Peter Frankopan – Bloomsbury (2018)**
- **The History of Inventions, Catherine Barr – Frances Lincoln (2020)**
- **Undefeated, Kwame Alexander – Andersen Press (2020)**



Nikki Gamble is director of Just Imagine, Centre for Excellence in Reading, Writing and Oracy. Take One Book is a resource that provides detailed plans to develop deeper reading with great literature takeonebook.org

Are your pupils stuck on the STORY MOUNTAIN?

Move away from the standard storytelling model, suggests **Stephen Lockyer**, and you'll be amazed at the complex narratives children can produce...

If you were to ask a child in primary school to start a story, most would not have too much difficulty with this. Story openers tend to be vivid with description, using plenty of adjectives, and painting a fantastic initial picture. Ask them to plot out a more complex tale, however, or even write the ending, and many children become unstuck.

Problems are resolved with incredible speed, storylines are left loose or ignored - and without a gripping or entrancing narrative, the writing ends up being filled with shallow detail. Why is this, and how can we tackle it in the classroom?

Character is key

Children tend to grow up learning that there are three types of characters: good ones, bad ones and extras (companions or pets). While this works for simple stories, having just three types limits the intrinsic purpose any of the characters in a story actually has. Unpicking what makes a character good or bad, or the actual purpose of the extras, helps to flesh out the drive of each player in the narrative. For example, why is the Big Bad Wolf really bad? If he was just hungry, why does he keep hunting the pigs? Developing his back story helps in defining him more effectively.

Vladimir Propp wrote about character types many years ago. Thankfully, not only are the types ageless, they can also be taught effectively from a very young age.

"No-one wants to read a story where a third of it is an introduction into the character"

The character types are:

- The Hero
- The Helper
- The Villain
- The False Hero
- The Donor
- The Dispatcher
- The Princess
- The Princess's Father

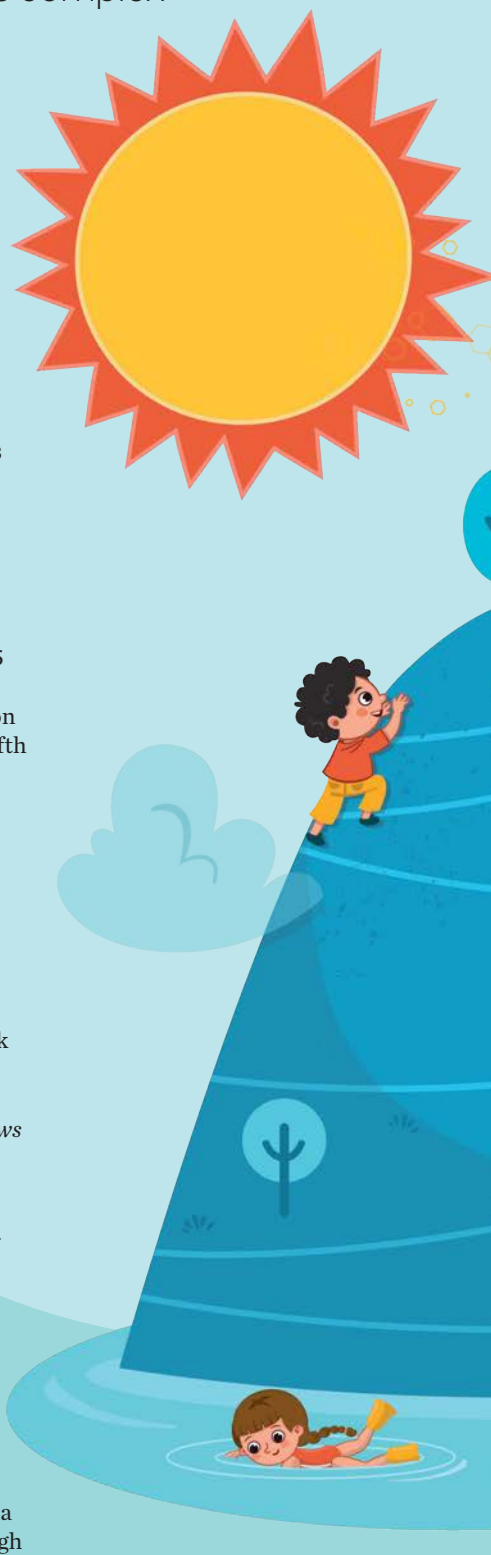
Now, clearly not all stories have all these characters, but even taking a simple adventure of a boy and his dog getting lost in the woods, uncovering the *character* of the dog (is she the helper, sniffing the way out of the woods, or is she the donor, uncovering a horde of food?) encourages the presence of the animal to have a purpose. With older children, the simple companionship of the dog can be helpful in driving a story forward.

The story mountain

We have all experienced this: introduction, problem, resolution/climax. There are several difficulties with this model, not least that it doesn't distribute the narrative in a particularly balanced way. No-one wants to read a story where a third of it is an introduction into the character. I use the five minutes/25 pages rule as an example in class; a new TV programme has just five minutes to draw me in, or 25 pages of a novel.

In reality, an introduction should take up the first twelfth of a story at most – we are here for the drama, not the setting! On two pages of A4 lined paper, that's just the first sixth of a page. Get to the problem as quickly as possible. This is setting out your stall – preparing your reader for a problem that's about to happen. If you think that a twelfth is too little, consider books or films you have consumed recently. *Jaws* starts with a shark attack; James discovers the giant peach in pages; the wolf gets Grandma at the very start of the story.

When plotting, begin with the end in mind. Almost all stories tell of a character who doesn't change in a new world, or one who is put into a new world and has to change (meaning a shift from normality, although



sometimes it does mean a literal new world). What is the end goal for our character: escape, transformation, saving, winning the prize? When we have solved their primal motivation, the one base instinct they are trying to resolve, we can then build the plot.

Stay the course

Problems are typically singular on the story mountain – it's at the peak part, and this is where most stories come unstuck. To help build up the plot more effectively, teach the children to imagine that it is an assault course that is being designed, rather than a mountain – lots of hurdles and challenges of increasing difficulty. Think back to the *Three Little Pigs* story – an easy house (straw), then slightly more difficult (sticks), and then insurmountable (bricks). By working out all the problems, and building them progressively through the plot, you are removing the story mountain, and replacing it with a saw teeth model, with increasing peaks and troughs as you follow the narrative.

Another helpful strategy is to work out concurrent storylines. Developing these helps to flesh out what is happening. In the 'boy in the woods' adventure, write it out in the centre, plotting out above and below what is happening for the boy's parents at the same time. When do they notice he is missing? What do they do next? When do they alert the police? By carrying out this task, you'll find that the children will want to intersperse their tale with alternative scenes. The biggest benefit of this is that you end up with converging storylines, and a much more interesting, dynamic story.

THE PROCESS OF WRITING – IN THREE STAGES...

1 Preparation
Use this to come up with a character set and plot, word bank and scenes. Use stimulus materials like story scoring sheets, photographs, props and maps. The aim should be that the children are raring to go, and desperate to write.

2 Writing
Using their assorted support materials, set the children off to write. Avoid using the rabbithole of dictionaries and thesauruses if you can, as they lock up creativity quicker than a wasp in the classroom. If the children get stuck, write a concurrent scene and return to the main plot.

3 Refining
Once written, now is the time to polish the final work. Carry this out by reading the work aloud, identifying any errors and correcting them as they go. Ensure that the drama is well-spaced and managed, and that the story works well. Emphasise that it should be the aim of every writer to encourage the reader to be desperate to find out what happens next.

Stephen Lockyer is a teacher and author, living and working in South West London.

Getting down AND DIGITAL

How to avoid the 'distraction factor' in digital learning and harness technology to better support pupils' literacy

SOPHIE THOMSON

There's no doubt that we live in a digital age. While this brings a world of advantages, if you're anything like me, you'll think about a task you need to do, grab your iPad or phone and open the relevant app or browser. Then, about ten minutes later, after a quick browse of eduTwitter, replying to a few messages, and glancing at the BBC News app twice (just in case something critical has happened in the minutes since you last checked), you'll realise you haven't done the task in hand.

Children are no different. We are all familiar with the lure of distraction that looms large on digital devices, so how can we engage children with a specific digital task, particularly when we're working with tight timeframes of 20 or 30 minute lessons?

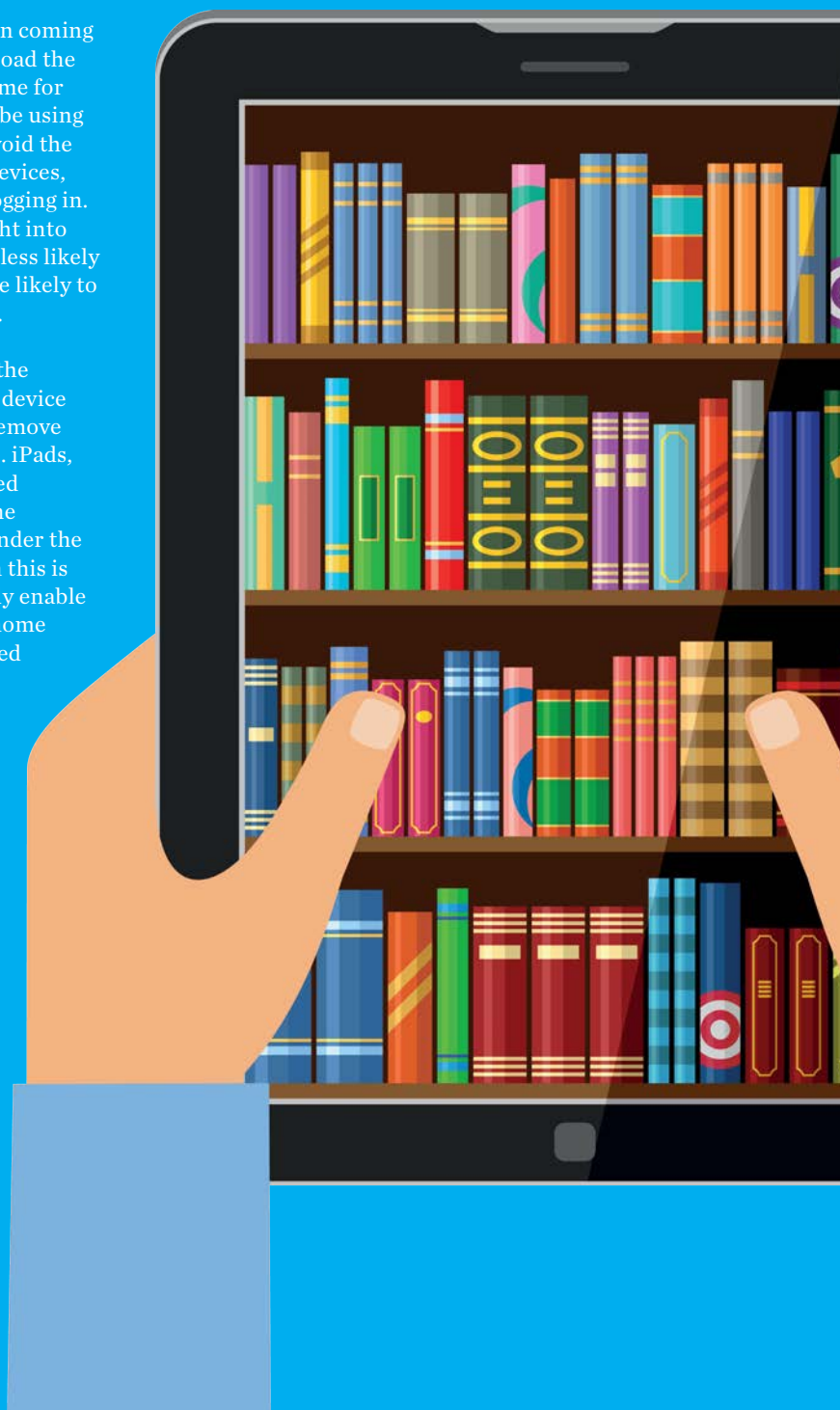
Practically speaking...

In the most practical sense there are some things you can try in your classroom to minimise distraction and set a digital lesson up for success:

1 Timetable lessons using digital devices after break-time or lunchtime, or as the first lesson of the day. This will give you, or if you're lucky enough to have one, your LSA, more time to set up the devices in advance of the children coming into the classroom. Pre-load the apps or log in ahead of time for the group you know will be using the app or platform to avoid the loss of time turning on devices, navigating to apps and logging in. If children can get straight into the task in hand, they're less likely to be distracted and more likely to turn their attention to it.

2 Consider employing the features of the tablet device you're using in class to remove temptation at the source. iPads, for example, can be locked down to one app using the 'guided access' feature under the accessibility tools. When this is turned on you can quickly enable it by triple-clicking the home button and starting guided access. Once enabled no one can leave the app or browser window unless they enter a four-digit passcode, so no matter how much the children in your class want to watch a video on YouTube instead of engaging with the task in hand, they won't be able to do it.

3 Don't think of digital tasks solely as independent or individual activities. Often, engagement in learning comes from discussing that learning – for example with an



ebook, thinking about how the characters and the story link to the reader's own experiences should be done with person-to-person contact. Within every digital lesson consider making time for children to talk, either with an adult, or with each other, about their learning. The power of talk for learning is well documented, and opening up dialogue will not only help keep children focused, but it'll also help to move their learning forward and aid with retention of the information.

"Being presented with 20 books to choose from can be overwhelming for children"

4 Think carefully about the purpose of the task being conducted digitally. What is the activity trying to achieve and what is the benefit of it being done digitally? How will you assess (in the loosest sense) whether the learning outcome has been achieved? Do the children know the intended outcome? By asking these questions ahead of planning a digitally oriented task you will be able to focus children's attention more effectively, and put in place any scaffolding needed around the technology to help achieve the aims of the lesson.

Deeper engagement

Once you've got beyond the distraction factor, there are lots of other subtle ways you can help children to engage in digital learning, particularly reading, to ensure positive outcomes.

One advantage of digital reading is that it can offer a world of choice. To ensure increased choice leads to increased engagement, there are a few areas that you should be mindful of.

When using a digital library, consider how much choice is appropriate for each child. For some children, being presented with 20 books to choose from can be overwhelming, and rather than settle down to read one text, they can spend 20 minutes flicking between texts, unable to make a decision. Does the digital library you're using allow you to make a smaller selection of books, or limit the selection for the child to choose from? Also consider whether there is adequate information presented for a child to make an informed selection; for example, has the system been designed so the child can see the blurb of each digital book? If they must open each book to do a flick test, this will use up precious lesson time in which the child isn't really reading.

Remember that, just as with using a printed text, children have differing interests and different books will engage each child. Ask yourself questions, such as: will the child be able to understand, relate and engage effectively with the topics and themes of this book? Digital libraries can help with this if they provide essential information about each text in an easily digestible format enabling you to match text to child successfully.

Digital advantage

While digital reading can present some challenges, these are easily overcome with careful thought and planning, and digital reading can offer huge advantages both inside and beyond the classroom. Digital libraries and educational apps, when used effectively, present the opportunity to put books and learning into the hands of every child, and allow children to engage with books on a wide range of devices beyond print. Unlike printed books sent home, digital texts can be reused again and again, they don't suffer bent corners, and they don't have accidents with the family dog (or toddler).

So when used effectively digital learning, in particular reading, has the power to broaden access to text and reading as a pleasurable activity... as long as we don't get too distracted in the process. **TP**

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT E-BOOK

When using digital content, particularly ebooks, it's important to be discerning about quality. While there are many free apps and ebook libraries available, we shouldn't treat them any differently from printed content. Rarely would we choose a book to read without a good scan of the cover, a skim of the blurb and a flick test, and digital books are no different. There is nothing more disengaging than being asked to read something, especially for 'pleasure', which is either inaccessible or poorly written, and this applies across all forms of media. When identifying an ebook for a child to read, here are some key questions to ask yourself:

- Is the text at the right reading level for the child?
- Are the digital features of this book furthering or aiding learning, or serving as a distraction?
- Are the illustrations or photographs in the text appropriate, of a high quality and interacting effectively with the text?
- Is the typeface used dyslexia-friendly and are the letter formations those which children will easily recognise for their age and stage?
- Is it written in British English?

Sophie Thomson is head of primary English at Pearson where she has spent the past eight years working with teachers and pupils.

How to INTRODUCE APOSTROPHES

Teach possession and contraction well in Year 2 and you can avoid a lifetime of confusion for your pupils, advises Plazoom's **Sue Drury**...

Is there any aspect of punctuation that leaves people more flummoxed than the apostrophe? Reading through social media posts by grown men and women can be enough to make you weep. It sometimes seems as though the appearance of the letter 's' at the end of a word sends people into panic. Yet it doesn't have to be this way. The rules for adding apostrophes are, by and large, pretty straightforward and consistent, provided one was taught properly in the first place ... which is where you come in.

1 All in good time

Although apostrophes should be easy enough for adults to handle, to be fair, they can be a bit tricky for Year 2 children. For that reason, knowing how to use them is regarded as a greater depth objective at this age. What's more, they are only expected to be able to use them for singular possession and contraction. Even so, as the teacher, you first need to be clear in your own mind just what are the rules for apostrophes.

2 Keep it simple

There is no need to overcomplicate this. There are just two basic rules that Year 2 pupils need to know when it comes to apostrophes:

Possession means belonging. If it belongs to something, it needs an apostrophe before the s: the cat's toy, the girl's book, the story's end.
Contraction is when words get squashed together and certain letters get removed, as if you didn't already know. In this case, the 'o' has been removed from 'did not' to make 'didn't'.

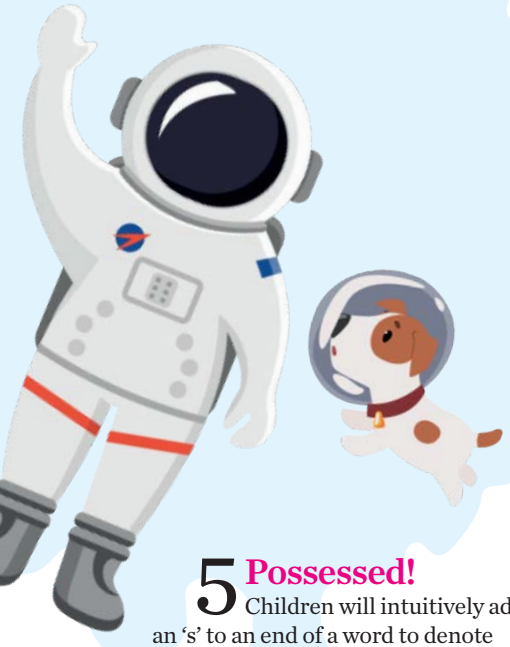
"Reading through social media posts by grown men and women can be enough to make you weep"

3 Make it memorable

Children love stories. We all do. To help them remember where to put the apostrophe in a contraction, give it a nickname to emphasise where it should go. For example, you could say that the missing letters have been stolen. So, when modelling writing a contraction, why not say something like, "And there's your burglar's calling card" or "Here's the thief's footprint," as you insert the apostrophe where the missing letters would have been?

4 The pesky 's'

Are you familiar with the grocer's apostrophe? It became a running joke to highlight the confusion that can be caused by the appearance of an 's' at the end of a word. There are three main reasons why this might occur: verb form (he runs); plural (ten green bottles); and possession (Mum's car). Only the last one needs an apostrophe, something fruit stallholders traditionally failed to appreciate when they hand-wrote signs saying things like "Fresh plum's," or "Pineapple's £1 each."



5 Possessed!

Children will intuitively add an 's' to an end of a word to denote possession because they have been hearing it all their lives. They might not readily connect it with the need for an apostrophe, however, so try to create a memorable narrative to help them. For example, you could point out that possession is when you *have* something so you need to *have* an apostrophe.

6 It's a contraction!

Is there any pair of homophones in the English language that causes more trouble than its/it's? Consider the sentence 'The tree shed its leaves'. Logically, you might think that the leaves belong to the tree, so its would need a possessive apostrophe. However, personal pronouns are an exception. Confusing, yes? And yet somehow this never seems to bother people when they are writing *ours*, *yours* or *theirs*. Simply pointing this out, even to young children, seems to help when you are teaching its and it's. Alternatively, just tell them to expand *it's* to *it is* and see whether the sentence still makes sense. If not, the apostrophe is not needed.

7 Names

Apostrophes in names can be a problem. Why does your name have an apostrophe, Ms D'Souza? Well, once children have learned the rules, why not challenge *them* to give an explanation that should help to confirm their understanding? The apostrophe does not precede an s, so it can't be a possessive in that sense. Therefore, it must be a contraction. In this case, it comes from the Portuguese words Da Sousa. The apostrophe in the surname O'Brien has a similar rationale although, apparently, it owes more to historical problems that English people had with spelling traditional Irish names!

8 Possessing singulars that end with s

Just because the singular of a word ends with the letter s does not change the rules for writing possessives, as in the boss's desk. This also holds true with most people's names: James's book, Mr Lewis's classroom. There are a few exceptions (of course!), but these are probably too niche to worry about at this age.

9 Plural possessive

Of course, plurals really put a spanner in the works when it comes to writing possessives. Luckily, as this is a Year 4 objective, you do not have to worry about it at Year 2. But, if you have successfully taught singular possession and the children have revised it at Year 3, they should have a fairly stable foundation on which to base this new knowledge.

And now you're in possession of all the facts, it's a strong possibility that you'll be able to teach each apostrophe's correct usage with confidence. Isn't that a relief!

Sue Drury is a content creator at Plazoom, with over 20 years' teaching experience.

How to write

THE WORLD'S MOST BORING STORY

Are your pupils struggling to produce exciting writing? If so, **Chris Wakling's** tongue-in-cheek advice could be just what they don't need...

First, some good news: you can head off your chances of writing a good adventure story well before you put pen to paper at all.

For starters, don't read any adventure stories, and if you do, don't slow down to think about how the story is structured, or what's motivating the characters, driving the action, building to the climax, knitting together in the ending, etc.

Next, don't practise. Writing just comes when you're inspired, right? So no need to write lots and lots of words, experimenting with voices and ideas. Don't plan either. Much better to spear in and see where the muse leads you. Just start! But how?

Vague ideas

Disembodied thinking is always a winner. Have somebody vague thinking about what happened before the story, which hasn't started yet, started. Possibly they could be staring out of a window.

Don't get the reader wondering about stuff, not 'What's in her pocket?' or 'Who is he running from?' Whatever you do, avoid creating that dreaded sense of 'What's going to happen next?'... otherwise readers might turn the page to find out.

Instead, consider weather. Rain works best. Veils of it. Start with your hero looking out of a window at the rain falling... on a roof. A slate roof. Possibly the sky could be the colour of a fading bruise. Spend a paragraph or so finding out. Readers love that stuff.

Definitely don't start with a character doing something interesting, possibly with a problem to solve, in a dramatic location. And don't up the stakes for them. Don't give them a break only to take it away, putting them somewhere worse. That way lies disaster: you might accidentally create a sense of escalating action, with more and more at stake.

On characters: keep them superficial. Clichés work best. Hit-men should have shaved heads, scars and no conscience, obviously. And don't worry about whether your main characters are likeable, funny, relatable, or even interesting; who cares?! The more minor characters the merrier. Why have one sidekick when you can have six? All with similar names. Just stick 'em all in any scene you like; the reader will work it out.

Silence is golden

I nearly forgot dialogue. Obviously don't have too much of it. Readers switch off when characters actually interact with one another. Go for long passages of description, with not much happening, instead.

If you accidentally make something happen use the phrases 'Started to' and 'Began to' before it does. 'He began to stand up.' 'She started to smile.' And if the action is really important let the reader know it's coming by saying 'And then it happened' before it happens. Chuck in a 'suddenly' too. 'And then, quite suddenly and without warning, it began to happen.' Boom!

A word on suspense and mystery. Kill these off quickly. If by accident you've raised a question or put a character in a difficult situation, give away the answer and get that character to safety really quickly: in the next chapter, or paragraph, or – if you can – the next line. Even little questions, left unanswered, can power whole stories if you're not careful.

Next, landscape. Have lots, lovingly described, as in described at tremendous length. Don't be too specific. Say 'car' instead of 'Mustang', for example, and drive that car down 'the next road' instead of naming an actual street. Don't make the mistake of varying where the action takes place. If you can, stick it all in one office, or a single garden, which you can describe again and again.

Anything goes

Back to dialogue. If you must have it, make the characters say exactly what they mean, repeatedly, regardless of whether the person they're speaking too already knows what they're saying.

'You're my brother, I've always looked up to you,' said Pete. 'I know, little bro, we're family. And I'll protect you. I always have and I always will, ever since you were first born,' replied Rob.

Another subtle area to work on is logic and coherence, both at plot and sentence level. By 'work on' I obviously mean 'totally ignore'. So long as you don't know why you've dropped a brand new character in just as the story is ending, go for it. You had a good reason to write, 'It was a torpid day in the tropics. Sweat plastered my hair to my brow, while a cool breeze fluttered around my ankles...' – anybody arguing you've contradicted yourself can go hang.

And let narrative convenience be! If you need a trapdoor in a scene have one character say 'If only there were a trapdoor,' and then have the other pull a branch or something, revealing a trapdoor neither knew about. Just make the first character say something like 'What luck!' and the reader will never notice.

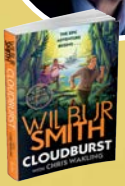
Leave 'em wondering

Don't worry, the end is in sight. It has to be. There's just the small matter of wrapping things up before the final full stop.

Now you may have ignored my advice and accidentally seeded your story with questions. Readers are very shallow and have been known to like a few answers

DO IT RIGHT

Meanwhile Wilbur Smith – Chris' co-author – has five pieces of genuinely sound advice for would-be adventure writers...



1 Read everything you can get your hands on, good or bad, it will help develop your taste and your appreciation of a well-told story.

2 Write for yourself. Don't write what your friends or teachers or parents might like. Write what you want to read.

3 Write what you know about. Figure out what you know about and write about that. We often underestimate how powerful our experiences are.

4 Don't share your work until you've finished it, let it sit for a while, and gone back and edited it until it's as smooth as a stone on the beach. The worst thing to do is talk your story away before it's written. Keep your bottom in the chair until it is done.

5 Expect rejection. Even if you send your writing to a competition and never hear back. Keep going. Someday, someone will sit up and take notice.

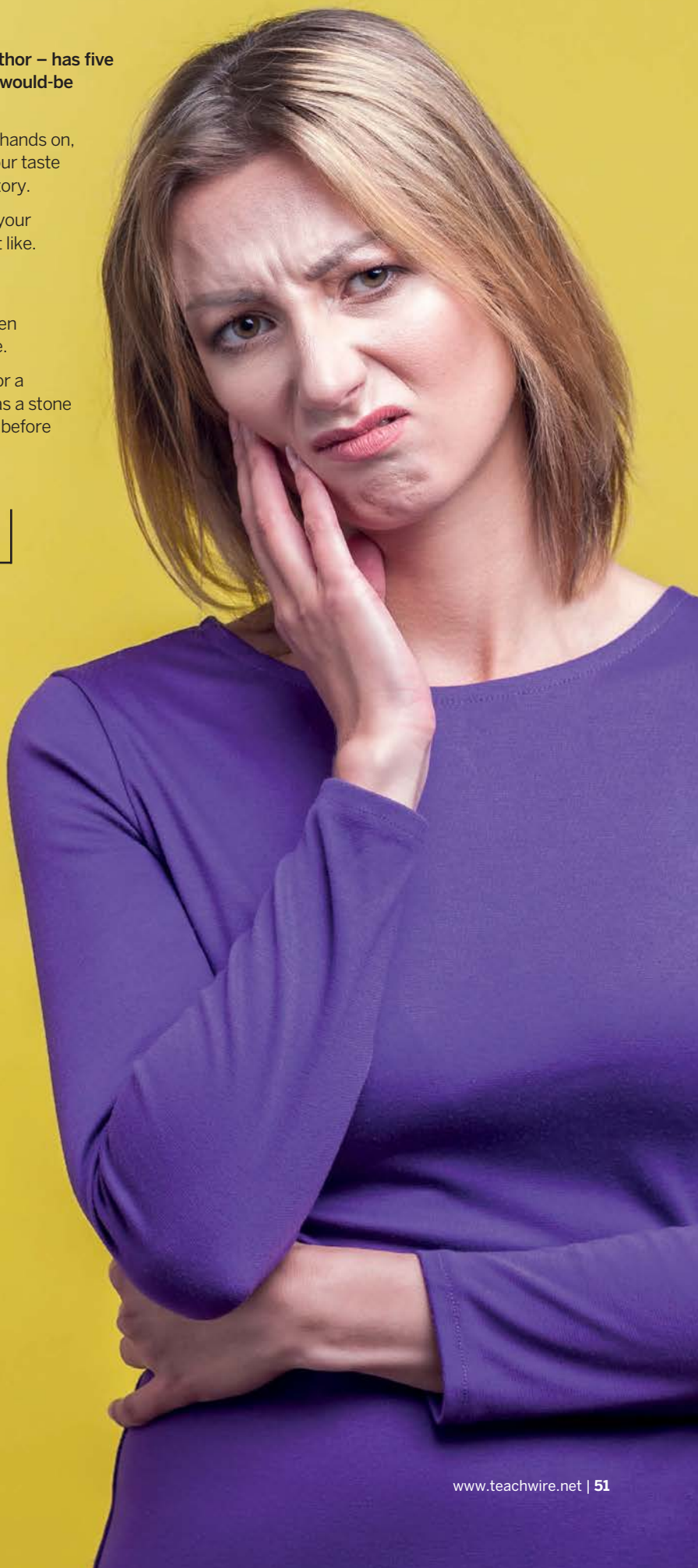
before you sign off. Don't give in to them. Keep things really open. Almost as open as if you'd forgotten the story ever posed the question, or remembered the question but couldn't come up with a satisfying response. Who killed Dave? Who cares! Does Jamal escape? Maybe! Ambiguity is sophisticated. It also leaves room for a sequel. Bonus.

If your adventure story is a quest, end before the final destination; if it's about a rescue, drift off and talk about someone else's backstory, and if all else fails just have the galaxy explode because of some previously unmentioned threat: job done!

Except it isn't, because you have to do some editing. Kidding! Do *not* get cold feet and go through your story doing the opposite of everything I've advised. Don't check it structurally, interrogating each scene, each character, each setting, every beat, motive, every escalating moment, asking what each and every component is for.

And finally, don't try to improve your sentences. There's no need: the muse gave them to you perfectly formed. Forget proofreading. Nobody cares about a few typos. They won't pull the ruder out o f the action at awl!

Chris Wakling is the co-author, with Wilbur Smith, of Cloudburst (Piccadilly Press), the first title in a trilogy for children aged 9+, starring 14-year-old Jack Courtney.



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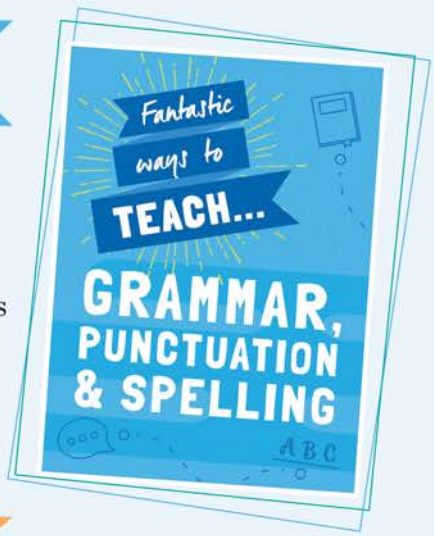

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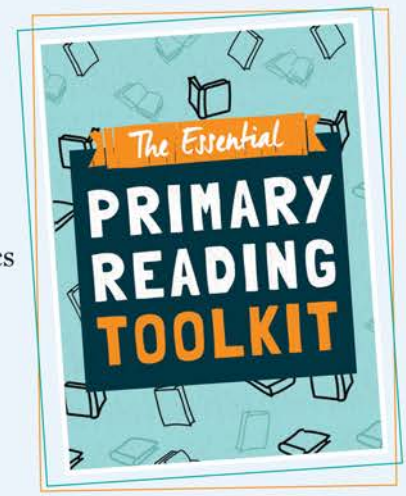

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Published by Walker Studio, 2019

The Hero's Quest

Go on an adventure with Jeffrey Alan Love's evocative picturebook

CAREY FLUKER HUNT

"This story begins, as all stories must, with a rider appearing from out of the dust..."

Whether we're reading about them, playing them in videogames or watching their adventures on film, tales of daring heroes still captivate us, just as they did when people first told stories by prehistoric fires. From Hercules and Mulan to Zelda, Frodo and Luke Skywalker – not to mention real-world icons and celebrities – we seem to be hard-wired to love and learn from tales of quests and courage.

In this picturebook, Jeffrey Alan Love distils 'essence of heroic tale' into a pacy, dramatic and hugely appealing reading experience. Engaging rhythms, evocative language and rhyme invite participation and performance, but it's the iconic artwork that really sets The Hero's Quest apart. Love also creates graphic novels for adults, and while the illustrations for this book are age-appropriate, they don't pull their punches. Using a largely monochromatic palette, Love plays with scale and viewpoint to increase tension: dramatic forms are silhouetted against white backgrounds and there's plenty of brooding disquiet beneath the narrative.

With every page turn come new settings and challenges. Many focus on familiar tropes – watchful dragons, ravening wolves – but Love's sophisticated artwork brings novelty and impact to every spread, and there are some unusual (and genuinely unsettling) dangers to be confronted.

The Hero's Quest delivers an intensely theatrical experience that will please a wide age range, and makes a great starting point for cross-curricular activities. It's worth saying that this story can be read in a non-gendered way – details could be interpreted as 'boy meets girl', but our hero really could be anyone.

How to share the book

Which books, films and other media do children know that feature quests? They may suggest Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, The Wizard of Oz, Finding Nemo, Frozen; stories about Beowulf, Hercules, Mulan; The Legend of Zelda. What sort of characters, objects and events would pupils expect to find in a quest story? Gather ideas on a whiteboard. Who or what is a hero? Describe them.

Show children the cover. What can they see? What kind of story does this suggest? Read the whole book for enjoyment and impact. Then re-read, drawing attention to details and inviting responses. What do pupils like about this book, and why? What does it remind them of? Did it surprise them? How?

Practical activities

Find the drama

Working together, create a 'bare bones' plot summary. What's been added to bring this story to life? Think rhyme, rhythm, exciting vocabulary, gestures, dramatic viewpoints, close-ups, colour and contrast, blank spaces, variations in scale.

Recreate these spreads as freeze frames, paying attention to body posture and gestures. What do they tell us about each character? Read the text aloud (independently and as a class), exploring changes of pace, dynamics and expression. Record your best version, then play back as you present your freeze frames.

If this book were a film, what soundtrack would it have? Investigate sound effects using your voices or found objects and musical instruments, then weave them together to produce a soundscape for one of the pictures. What are the characters thinking and saying in each spread? In groups, write thoughts and dialogue on sticky notes and add to pictures. Use them to help you write a script.

Whose story?

Group children and allocate a character-type to each: dragons, elves, dwarves, gods, kings and queens, creatures of magic, wolves, fate. Who are these characters? Interrogate the book to discover everything you can. What is happening in the picture showing each group's interaction with the hero? What do these characters want from him/her? What don't they want? How would the elves (and other characters) tell the story of their picture? How did events appear to them?

Allow groups to practise telling their part in the narrative, then visit each group in role as the hero and listen to their stories. Feed back and discuss, then build on the experience through creative writing. Alternatively, playing the role of a TV news reporter, interview each group to discover what happened and present their point of view.

Mapping the quest

Follow the hero's journey through the book's locations. Which landscapes must be navigated? Present this journey as a sketched map, diagram or infographic. How many ideas have you come up with? What works best? Write travel adverts for each location.

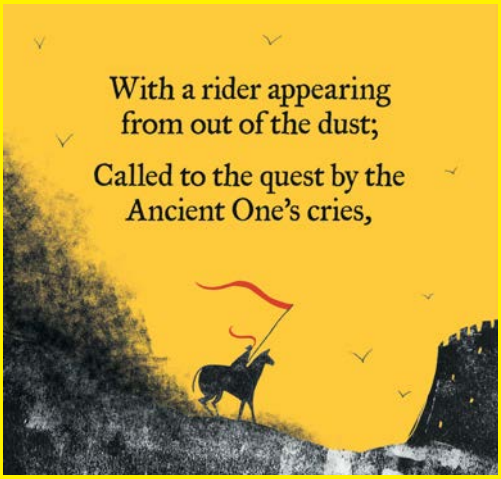
Take it further

QUEST-THEMED ZINE

Zines are booklets inspired by graphic novels in which words and pictures work together to tell stories and jokes, communicate facts or share an autobiography. They're often self-published using photocopiers. Inviting children to design, make and distribute a quest-themed zine will give them a taste of the skills and techniques involved in creating graphic novels. Kickstart mini enterprises by allocating a budget for materials and asking children to charge a small amount to cover costs.

STORYTELLING GAMES

Magical quest-themed games are great for developing literacy and numeracy. Dungeons and Dragons relies on a leader to prepare and map the story in advance, then narrate and manage the action by asking players to make decisions at key points. Outcomes are determined via polyhedral dice, which offer many possibilities for work around 3D shapes and probability, as well



Draw your own map of an invented story-quest world, then write a story set there.

Share a collection of story-maps from quest-themed books (Lord of the Rings, How To Train Your Dragon, Beyond the Deepwoods). What do they have in common? How do they differ? Which of these storyworlds would you most like to explore? Why?

Ruling as you please

Look at the 'kings and queens' spread. What do you notice? What could these kings and queens be thinking? Generate ideas, then add thought-bubbles to the picture using sticky notes. If kings and queens can rule 'just as they please', will their decisions be right? How do rulers and leaders make good decisions? If you were a powerful ruler and could do anything, what would you do? Why? Write stories about leaders who make selfish or disastrous decisions.

Other heroes

Share stories about Achilles, Heracles, the Norse sagas, King Arthur, Mulan and other heroes from far away and long ago. What do these stories tell us about their worlds? What can you discover about the cultures that produced them?

Exploring silhouettes

Roll black ink onto thick card shapes and use to print onto a plain white background. What effects can you produce? What happens if you use thick black paint instead of ink, or add white? What happens if you change the background? Sponge black or grey paint onto white card, then cut silhouettes and arrange to create a collage. Do pupils prefer printing or collage? Why?

Use printing or collage to create action scenes inspired by this book. Write about what you've done and display alongside your artwork. Could you retell the story using shadow puppets cut from printed card?

Picturebook detectives

A picturebook like The Hero's Quest is very carefully crafted. Text and images work well independently but together they have more to say and greater impact, and it's worth exploring how this is achieved. Observing, questioning, sharing insights and debating interpretations will develop children's oracy and critical thinking skills, as well as preparing the ground for follow-up activities.

What do you notice about the text? Choose your favourite words and images. What kind of rhyme scheme does this poem have? Read the text aloud, marking the rhythm. What happens if you change pace? What do the pictures show that isn't mentioned in the text? What do the words tell us that isn't communicated in the artwork?

Choose a picture, describe what you can see and share how it makes you feel. Have a go at expressing the effect this creates, or its impact on the book. Is the hero bigger or smaller than other characters and objects? Why? If these images were photographs, where would the photographer be standing to get each shot? What shapes do you notice? How would you describe them? Can you spot any straight or curved lines? Do they point at something or frame an object, character or scene?

Are the backgrounds white or coloured? Where are the empty spaces? How big are they? Ask children to write about one or more of the spreads, including some of the ideas you've discussed. **TP**

Loved this? Try these...

- Norse Myths: Tales of Odin, Thor and Loki by Kevin Crossley-Holland and Jeffrey Alan Love
- The Atlas of Heroes by Sandra Lawrence and Stuart Hill
- Beyond the Deepwoods by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell
- Quest by Aaron Becker

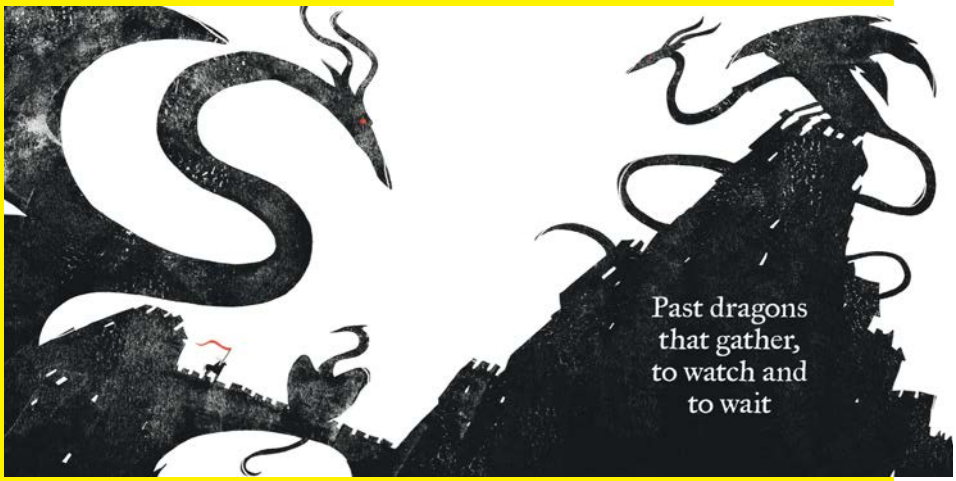
Carey Fluker Hunt is a freelance writer, creative learning consultant and founder of Cast of Thousands, a teachers' resource featuring a selection of the best children's books and related cross-curricular activities.

castofthousands.co.uk

as storybuilding. Alternatively, children could design, test and produce quest-themed board games based on Snakes and Ladders or make a set of storytelling cubes inspired by The Hero's Quest.

QUEST TRAIL

Create a trail with tasks to be accomplished along the route. Plan thoroughly, then provide a map and enough supervision to keep children safe while allowing them to make their own decisions. Theme your trail around a particular story and explore your school, grounds, or local park.



The stuff OF DREAMS

The subjunctive is a tricky topic for sure - but **Rachel Clarke's** masterclass will have you teaching it with confidence in no time

It's fair to say that not all grammar objectives are made equal. Some, such as using commas to separate items in a list, are easily understood by teachers and pupils alike. Whereas others, such as the subjunctive, leave us scratching our heads trying to work out what they are and how to explain them to children.

The subjunctive is tricky. It appears as a sentence level objective for children in Year 6 and requires a thorough understanding of prior learning about verbs, subordinating conjunctions, levels of formality and Standard English.

The subjunctive is a verb form associated with very formal Standard English. There are two main ways that it is used. The first focuses on the expression of dreams, possibilities and aspirations and the second on how to express importance and commands.

Wishes and hopes

Dreams, possibilities and aspirations are ideas that are subject to change. They cannot be pinned down or proven as facts. In formal Standard English, these ideas are expressed using the subjunctive. This means that the verb 'to be' takes the form 'were' rather than 'was' as it would in other sentences:

If I were *a millionaire, I'd buy a racing car.*

This use of were instead of was can be confusing to children, who may well start writing phrases such as *I were going to town* in the misbelief that they are using the subjunctive. To combat this, drawing their attention to the conditional nature of the subjunctive is essential. Point out how the example sentence uses the conditional (subordinating) conjunction 'if' and how this suggests the idea is hypothetical and may never come to fruition. One way to practise this in the classroom is to display sentences using 'were' and ask children to identify whether were is being used to form the subjunctive, the plural past tense of the verb to be or incorrectly:

If I were a grown-up, I'd go to the cinema every day. (subjunctive)
James and I were riding our bikes. (plural past tense)
Sam were doing his homework. (incorrect)

Useful models

If you're looking for examples that use if within a subjunctive sentence, there are a range of songs and poems that can be studied with children and then used as models for writing, e.g. the worship song, *If I were a butterfly* (bit.ly/trwbutterfly); *If I were a rich man* from Fiddler on the Roof (bit.ly/trwrichman; *If I were a boy* by Beyoncé (bit.ly/trwboy); *If I were a King* by A A Milne (bit.ly/trwking).

When studying these poems and songs, you'll also note that the modal verbs 'would', 'could' and 'I'd' are also frequently used. Reminding children that these modals reflect the uncertainty of dreams and aspirations will help them form the subjunctive in their own writing. You may also want to remind them that negative forms of these words such as 'wouldn't' and 'couldn't' are still modal verbs.

> *"Not all grammar objectives are made equal..."*

One of the greatest challenges we face when teaching children grammar, is knowing which types of writing use the feature authentically. In the case of the were form of the subjunctive you can use it to write simple poems about hypothetical situations:

If I were a teacher for a day
I'd give the children extra play

The subjunctive can also be used to good effect in discursive writing *(If people were to stop hunting whales... If you were to consider the following points...)*; and it can also be used to promote the features of a place or product in persuasive texts, e.g. *If you were lucky enough to visit the rainforest, you would see...*

Importance and commands

The second form of the subjunctive centres on being authoritative. This form of the subjunctive simplifies verbs so that they are in their infinitive form (to go, to be, to dance etc.) but without the 'to'. It also uses 'that' to link the subjunctive clause to the main clause in the sentence:

We ask that children be able to recite their times tables.
(We ask that children are able to recite their times tables).
It is recommended that he stay indoors until he is better.
(It is recommended that he stays indoors until he is better).

You may find that you need to spend time identifying the infinitive form of verbs with children. Providing them with a variety of verbs and asking them to write each in the infinitive is a good way to do this. You can then ask them to use these

verbs in model sentences using 'that' and the infinitive (without the 'to'). Vital to this work, is helping children remember that the infinitive of has, had and having is 'to have' and that the infinitive of am, are, being, been, is, was, were is 'to be'.

If you're looking for authentic opportunities for children to use the authoritative form of the subjunctive, you will almost certainly want them to use the highly formal tone used in letters from people in authority and in letters of complaint (*Dear parents, please ensure that all homework be completed in blue ink... I request that the item be returned to me...*). It can also be used for formal requests to visitors, such as those at a tourist attraction: *Whilst on the premises, we ask that visitors keep to the paths...*

ESSENTIAL PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

1 Ensure children recognise that verbs are having and being words as well as doing words.

2 Make sure children recognise which modal verbs indicate uncertainty. Extend this to understanding when modal verbs have been contracted (I'd) and that they recognise when modals have been combined with a negative statement (wouldn't, couldn't etc.).

3 Talk to children about the infinitive form of verbs. When inflections are regular e.g. swimming, it is easy to go back to the infinitive (to swim), but irregular past participles e.g. swam may be confusing to some children. Again, recognising all forms of the verb 'to be' is important here.

4 Children should recognise subordinating conjunctions such as if and that and appreciate how they affect all the words that follow them in a clause. They should also recall how commas are used to mark subordinate clauses when they appear at the front of sentences.

5 Talk about Standard English with children. Explain that Standard English is about grammatical rules such as subjects and verbs agreeing. In the case of the subjunctive, they are rules which make the Standard English sound very formal. Standard English is not about having a particular accent and it's possible to have informal writing that still uses the rules of Standard English.

Rachel Clarke is director of Primary English. She trains teachers all over the UK and beyond and is the author of Reading Detectives and Writing Mechanics, both available from Collins.

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"Everybody has ONE special TEACHER they remember FONDLY"

Author **Jacqueline Wilson** recalls how great teaching and a love of stories helped her get over the shock of the primary school dinner hall

My worst memory of primary school was having to stay for school dinners. My very first school was in Lewisham, south London. I was only there for about 18 months. This was way back in 1950. My mother was not a cook; we really had the most bland, repetitive meals. So I was completely taken aback by school dinners. I'd never eaten mince before, I'd never eaten stew, I'd never eaten salad. All of these things I would think fine now, but as a child I was frightened by some of the food and just sat there, totally alarmed.

On the other hand, I enjoyed the books. I do remember some of the learning-to-read books we had and while they weren't particularly inspiring, I liked the pictures of the children and I got the concept that those little black lines across the page were actually the words. If you could learn to read you were on the top table, if you couldn't read very well you were on the middle table, and then you were on the bottom table if you couldn't attempt it at all. I was on the middle table and I thought to myself, "Actually, I want to be on the top table!" I don't know whether it was a competitive streak even at that age, but certainly by the time I left the school, I was on the top table and I was the one who read aloud to the other children. Although I was pretty useless at arithmetic and everything else, I could read well.

I had a slightly rough first term when we moved to Kingston upon Thames and I went to Latchmere Primary School. When you're six, everyone makes their best friends and are in a little gang and you are the new girl. I do remember hanging round the playground rather pathetically by myself or creeping indoors and sitting on the radiator. But quite soon I did make friends and everything perked up. The four teachers I had for what's now called KS2 were all excellent.

The teacher who took us for Y6 was frightening and yelled at us a lot. But I remember his lessons very well. This was in the days when teachers could pick and choose what they wanted to teach children and he was very keen on increasing our vocabulary. We had a lesson where we had to learn the definition of 20 words, rather like a quiz. And then he would tell a funny story, incorporating all 20 new words. It was the most brilliant performance and we all looked forward to it. Also, if we'd been very good all week, after lunch on Friday he would read us a story, not to analyse or discuss but just for the sheer joy of it. Nobody needed to prod us or tell us to be quiet; we were just absorbed in whichever story it was on the day. So although we were all frightened of him and he would call us nasty nicknames and do things teachers would never do these days, he was a charismatic teacher.

My favourite teacher was Mr Townsend, in the equivalent of Y5. He had that gift of singling out the most unpromising child and making them feel special, as if they alone had a wonderful gift or talent. My talents were few, but he liked the way I wrote my stories and didn't laugh when I shyly told him I wanted to be a writer. He even had me read some stories out to the rest of the class, and that was just so wonderful for me because my mum and dad and everyone where I lived would have thought it mad to want to be a writer; I lived on a council estate and people like us weren't writers. I was so pleased because quite a while ago now I was on Blue Peter and Mr Townsend, who must have been well into his eighties then, was watching and actually managed to get in touch with me via the programme to say he'd been charmed to hear me talking about him. That gave me the opportunity to write back and tell him just how much he meant to me. Sadly, he died a few months later but I'm so glad I had that opportunity because I think everyone has got one teacher they remember fondly from the way they encouraged them in some way. Probably, a lot of teachers never get the feedback from the adults on what influence they had. Mr Townsend was a shining example of that type of teacher. **TP**

Jacqueline Wilson's latest book in the Tracy Beaker series, We are the Beaker Girls, is available in hardback (£12.99, Doubleday Childrens).

Grammar IN THE WILD

Budding writers must act like zoologists, studying language in its natural habitat

LAURA DOBSON

There are two approaches when learning about grammar: prescriptive and descriptive. The first of these follows a set of rules for language use and choices are either right or wrong. Prescriptive grammar could be taught through worksheets and tested through multiple-choice answers.

Descriptive grammar is the study of how a language is actually used in order to make sense of it. The English language is continually changing and while there are some hard and fast rules relating to grammar, much of the structure of our language can be manipulated and experimented with to create certain effects.

"Grammar is so much more than a set of rules"

A prime example of this came with the 2016 interim framework for KS1. A child working at the expected standard had to use sentences with different forms in their writing, including an exclamation sentence – introduced with a 'what' or 'how' phrase and followed by subject + verb + any other elements. When Y2 teachers started to explore this concept with their classes, they realised that some of the best examples – 'What a beautiful day!' from Rosen's We're Going on a Bear Hunt, for example – were not technically sentences as there was no verb: a prerequisite of a sentence. If we teach grammar as right or wrong, then Rosen is grammatically inaccurate and therefore wrong. How ludicrous!

When a zoologist wants to learn more about an animal, they study them in their natural habitat and make conclusions about their behaviour, drawing on what they already know and what they witness. This is far more fascinating than just reading about the animal in a book.

For our budding writers we must treat grammar in just the same way: with interest and an element of exploration.

In order for children to understand why different structures are chosen by authors, and how, as a writer, they can use grammar to shape a reader's view, it must be studied in context. A pupil could complete ten worksheets on semicolons but, without seeing them in action and considering the effect they can create, how will the child really know how best to use them?

Here are three examples of how excellent books can be used to teach grammar from the KS2 curriculum (right). When using great texts to teach grammar, start by asking yourself how the extract makes you feel, followed by how the author makes you feel like that.

Most importantly, remember that grammar is so much more than a set of rules. Grammar and punctuation, like vocabulary and ideas, are tools to help writers create effects to suit different purposes and audiences.

3 Secrets of a Sun King

BY EMMA CARROLL

This story is set in 1922. Lilian Kaye finds an Egyptian jar on her grandfather's doorstep which she believes is cursed. The more she finds out about the jar, the more she realises that her and her

1

Leon and the Place Between

BY ANGELA MCALLISTER

Leon visits the circus and when he is chosen to be in Abdul Kazam's magic show, he discovers what lies hidden in the place between. Concentrate on the below two spreads. How do they make the children feel? They may feel excited – like something is about to happen. The reader holds their breath then the 'bang' makes them jump. Suddenly it is busy – so much is happening. At the end you're holding your breath again.

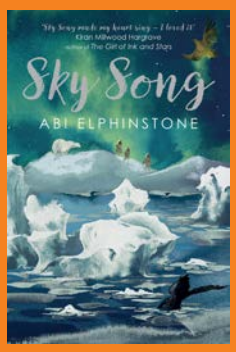
The author achieves this by her use of ellipses (Y6 objective) to create suspense. Stretching one sentence across a two-page spread builds anticipation. The sentence structure creates a busy rhythm. There are lots of adverbials but not the usual words that end in '-ly' (Y3+ objective; using '-er' to turn adjectives into adverbs is in the Y2 curriculum). The author also describes noise and movement and utilises some alliteration.

The grammatical devices and structures detailed above can all be explored through this book. With a Y3 class discuss why McAllister has chosen to list adverbials ('back and forth', 'up and over') and explore what happens if those adverbials are taken out or changed for adverbs ending in '-ly'. Create your own busy scenes in the style of McAllister, using similar grammatical devices and structures. Also consider other ways to create hustle and bustle and discuss why McAllister may have decided not to use these devices or structures.

2

Sky Song

BY ABI ELPHINSTONE



In the snowy kingdom of Erkenwald, Eska has been trapped by the evil Ice Queen. When she breaks free, with the help of Flint, Blu, Pebble and Balapan, she must quest to find the sky song and remove the Ice Queen from power before it is too late for Erkenwald.

Look at pages 168-169 for this activity. How does it make your readers feel? It's full of suspense so they may say that they feel excited and want to read on. Hopefully they will be interested in what the characters have to say. Elphinstone is writing to engage by using interesting sentence structures. She reveals things carefully to the reader and integrates dialogue and action.

This book models most of the KS2 grammar curriculum. Ask an UKS2 class to summarise what happens across these two pages in just three sentences. Study some less well-written dialogue, which does not move a story forward, and discuss how you feel reading it (bored!). Consider why we don't feel bored reading Elphinstone's dialogue and annotate why it maintains the reader's interest. After a discussion around this, the children can include dialogue in their next story, using the ideas gained from discussing Elphinstone's writing.

friends must take an incredible journey to return the jar to its rightful resting place.

First read pages 16-17, shortly after Lilian finds the package. How does it make your class feel? We can hear Lil's voice coming through and are interested and intrigued about what the next sentence will say. The author has used clever sentence structures and a wide range of punctuation to add variety and create the complexities that come from a character's train of thought.

Similar to Sky Song, you can use this book to teach most elements of the KS2 grammar curriculum. Something that really stands out in Carroll's writing is the excellent range of punctuation she utilises to add variety and construct sentences. UKS2 pupils can explore the use of punctuation in this extract, consider why it is being used and how else Carroll could have constructed her sentences. Use these sentences as examples to create definitions regarding how punctuation should be used. Discuss why Carroll has made the decision to construct her sentences like this and not in another way, always referring to the effect she is trying to create. Next, have a go at writing in the first person as a character, creating a complex train of thought which is mirrored through sentence structure and punctuation choice.

Laura Dobson worked for many years as a teaching and learning adviser for a large company and local authority. She now runs Inspire Primary English, providing consultancy and training in all areas of English.

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"I don't believe in writer's block"

When the words don't come it's time to dream, not panic, says **Anthony Horowitz**...

TR&W What's the first thing you wrote that you were proud of?
AH I wrote a play when I was ten years old. Its title was *The Thing That Never Happened*, and it was about Guy Fawkes. I was certainly very proud of it at the time – I carried it about with me and felt very excited to have all those words, in a book, created by me. And in fact, I've felt like that about everything I've written ever since. That was 55 years ago, and although I can't remember why I chose to write a play, or that particular subject, I can still picture the book and my handwriting in it.

What do you do when the words won't come?
Every writer has those moments. The answer is not to fear the blank page, but rather, to leave it alone. I go out; I walk the dog, or go to an art gallery, or the cinema. Or I read a book. I don't believe in 'writer's block'; if the ideas aren't coming, I don't sit and fret, I do something else. And it's the same for a child in a classroom, I think. If you've got 30 minutes to write a story, and it's not coming, then spending a minute gazing out of the window and thinking about the last time you were having fun, or just relaxing for those 60 seconds, is much more helpful than staring at an empty piece of paper, sweating.

How do you make your characters 'real'?
By knowing them yourself. By interrogating them, visualising them, spending time with them – just as you do with your actual friends. It's important to fill in all those blank spaces. Knowing their name is a big start, but then you need to think about what they think and believe, what they enjoy, what upsets them – where they live and what they eat. A good way for children to start is by using someone from their own life (although never a teacher; teachers always spot themselves!). Get them to think about a classmate, sibling, friend or relative and ask themselves, 'Why do I like this person? Is it their smile? Their jokes? Their naughtiness?' Then they can apply those things to the character they are creating. They might come up with someone who is mischievous, another who is sporty and a third who is hard-working – all those things can be put together to create a compound character. Doing that is much easier than starting with invisibility.

How do you know when a piece is truly finished; when to stop editing?
One of the hardest things for a professional writer is having to reread the work and change it. Once it's written, you just want to get it out there, and go and do something new and more fun. That's the same for children in a classroom, too. But we all have to work and work at it. The process involves reading what you've written carefully (possibly out loud, in a whisper) and questioning every single word. Can you understand what you've just read? Have you repeated yourself? And if the answer is essentially, 'This could be better', then you have to rewrite. It's in the thinking, and the rewriting, that we do our very best work. I don't stop when I think it's brilliant; I stop when I'm too tired and simply can't do any more.

"If there's one thing I've learnt, it's that there is no such thing as a child without talent..."

Do you have a favourite genre to write in?
I enjoy adventure and suspense. I like murder, of course, and mystery. And humour. And horror. The truth is, when I'm writing, whatever I'm writing, I love it. I'm passionate about writing – it's my life.

What does it feel like to know that so many young people have read your books?
I'm very happy that so many young people have enjoyed my books and discovered the pleasure of reading that way – it's a matter of great pride. Telling a story is about sharing – that's the joy of my world. There is no downside; it's all a pleasure. My career began in a dormitory in a horrid boarding school, telling stories to eight scared and lonely little boys. Those stories made things better. They were my power, and that hasn't changed.

Name one thing you wish you'd been taught at school, but weren't.
I wish I had been taught to believe in myself. I had a good time at secondary school, but at my prep school I was deeply unhappy. I was made to think I was worthless. If there's one thing I've learnt in all my years, it's that there is no such thing as a child without talent – and I wish I'd been encouraged to find mine earlier.

If you weren't a writer, what would you be?
It's impossible to think of my life without writing or books. But if I couldn't be a writer, I would like to have been a teacher. Exhausting and challenging though it must be, it's a wonderful role, and the opportunity to change lives must be endlessly rewarding. Whether I could be a teacher or not is another question. I've been very lucky, I guess.

Nightshade, the latest Alex Rider novel by Anthony Horowitz, is out now (Walker)

Words, words, WORDS...

For children to achieve greater depth writing, access to – and mastery of – a rich vocabulary is vital, says **David Waugh**

The *Oxford Language Report: Why Closing the Word Gap Matters* (2018) highlights the problem of children having narrow vocabularies and asserts that "Over half the teachers surveyed reported that at least 40% of their pupils lacked the vocabulary to access their learning" (p.2). A key factor in developing children's ability to write at a deeper level is enhancing their experience of texts and language usage. The following strategies are simple to use in the classroom with minimal preparation, and can be easily adapted to meet the needs of different classes and age groups. Used well, they can help develop children's vocabularies and understanding of language in an engaging and stimulating way.

1 Reading aloud

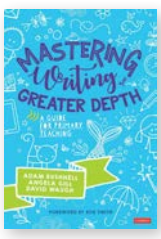
Reading to children is perhaps the most valuable activity we can engage in if we want to broaden their understanding of language and literacy. Many children start school with extensive experience of having tales and poems told and read to them. They are familiar with stories and story language, even if they are unable to read the words on the page. We need to ensure that all children are exposed to a broad and rich range of texts which they can enjoy and discuss. If we make stories engaging and exciting, we whet children's appetites for independent reading. We also provide a model for reading and can show how using expression and varying our voice can bring text to life. Children who struggle to read independently can discover what a book can 'sound' like and this can influence their own reading. Reading to children also provides lots of opportunities to talk about language and to discuss new words and phrases.

2 Speaking dialogue

Children can be engaged in texts through taking part in reading them. By selecting passages of dialogue in which children can be assigned the roles of characters in a story, they can learn how to use punctuation to help them to read the actual words characters say (without the addition of 'said Jo' etc) and how they might be spoken, using adverbs to guide them (whispered Sam sarcastically). This draws attention to speech marks and other punctuation, as well as promoting discussion about vocabulary, including alternatives to said, helping prepare children to write their own dialogue.

3 Hot-seating

Inviting children to answer questions from classmates in the role of a character from a story promotes discussion and comprehension skills. It is also a good preparation for deeper writing, especially when children have time to prepare questions beforehand, since it allows children to think more deeply about character traits and possible motivations for actions when writing their own stories.



With a foreword by Rob Smith of The Literacy Shed, David, Adam Bushnell and Angela Gill's new book, Mastering Writing at Greater Depth, includes chapters by a range of educators on different aspects of mastering writing at greater depth.

More richly written character descriptions can follow as children draw upon vocabulary and ideas from the session.

4 Conscience alley

This drama technique involves the class forming two lines between which a child, in role, walks slowly. One line of children promotes one course of action for the character, while the other line presents an alternative. The character has to listen and then discuss what they would decide to do and why. Again, this probing of motivations promotes deeper writing when children go on to write stories.

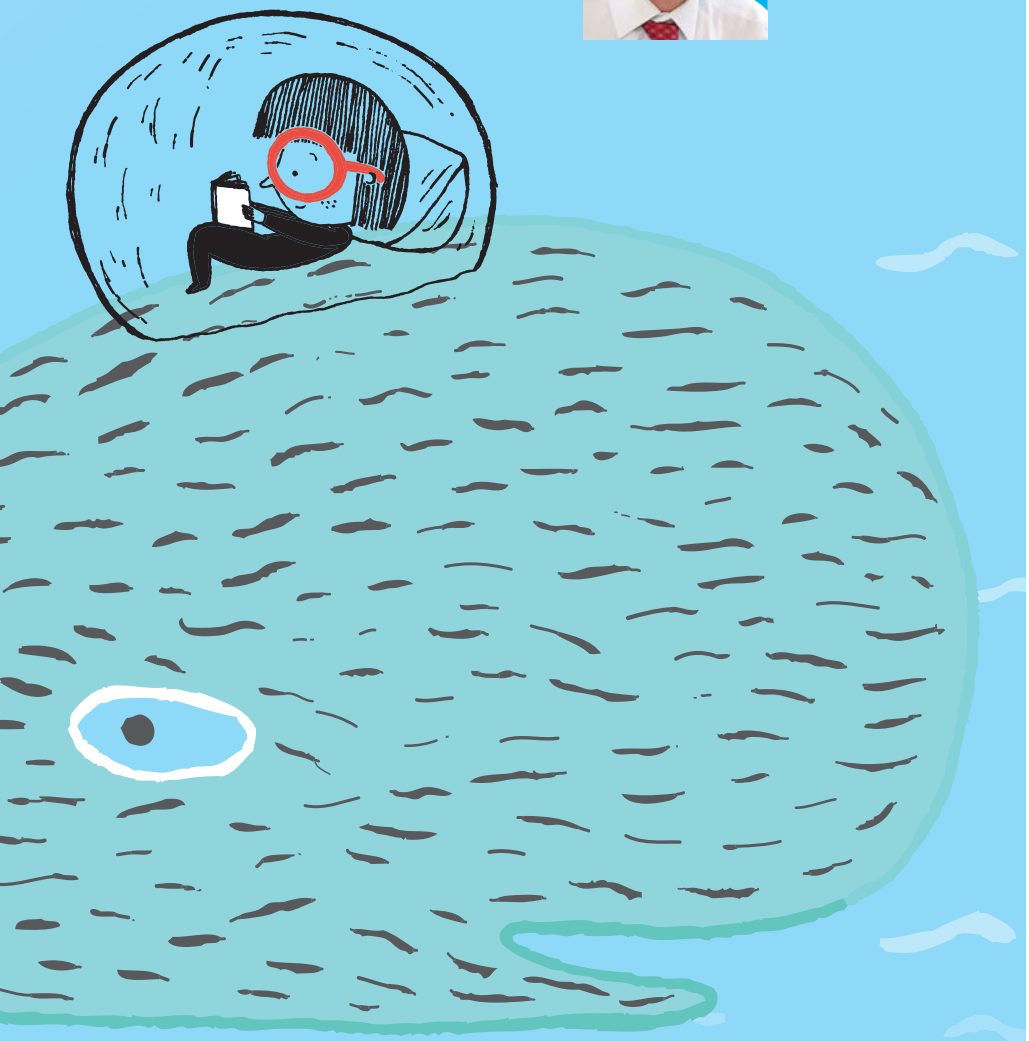
5 Predictions

The power of the cliffhanger is well known to TV and film companies, as exemplified by soap operas and thriller serials. This leads viewers to speculate about possible future events and to want to watch subsequent episodes. By leaving stories at exciting moments, teachers can invite children to predict what might happen next and, perhaps, to write their own version of events.

6 Shared writing

By acting as a scribe and modelling the writing process for children, we can help them to understand how writers think and work. We can garner their ideas and turn these into coherent texts, all the time articulating our thoughts aloud: *Oh, I need a capital letter here because that's his name. I'd like to use a more interesting word than 'nice' – does anyone have any suggestions? That's three times I've used the verb 'said' – can anyone suggest a synonym I might use?* Not only can we model how we write, but we can also make incidental and relevant use of terminology in a meaningful way. We can also demonstrate the strategies we use when we are unsure about spellings or phrasing.

Professor David Waugh is primary English subject leader at Durham University.



4 Quick Wins for Developing Vocabulary

PROVIDE WORD CARDS

Prepare for reading aloud to children by making a set of vocabulary cards. These can include names of characters, as well as interesting words which can be found in the text. Give at least one to each child, check who has which word, and ensure everyone knows how to say his or her word. Explain that you will pause at different points in the story to ask whose word has come up. When you do this, ask children to talk about their word and its significance to the story: What kind of character? Whom does the adjective describe? etc.

COLLECT SYNONYMS

When reading a story, give children sheets of paper with pictures and/or names of characters on them and ask them to write quick descriptions of the characters' moods and feelings at different points in the story. Share examples and write them on the board. Look for opportunities to seek synonyms. For example, if a character is described as sad and unhappy, ask if anyone can think of any other words with similar meanings. If there are few suggestions, tell the children you will start to sound a word you have thought of and that they can call out as soon as they think they know what it might be, for example, m...i...s...miserable.

'MAGPIE' WORDS

When children are writing independently, give them opportunities to pause and share what they have written with writing partners. Partners can give praise, make suggestions for improvements, and ask if they can 'magpie' some words or phrases to use in their own writing.

HAVE A WORD OF THE DAY

Have a 'word of the day' displayed, together with its definition and examples of its use in sentences and longer texts. Discuss the word and encourage children to use it orally and in writing. Once the idea is established, create a rota so that children take turns to provide the daily word.

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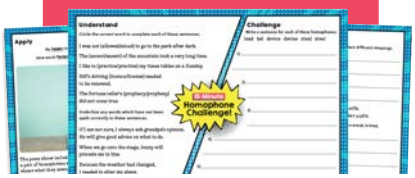

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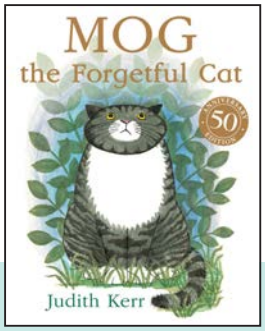
13 Ideas for GREAT LIBRARY DISPLAYS

With a little imagination and a touch of flair, each of these brilliant books can be used as a hook to temp children into some further reading...



Mog the Forgetful Cat

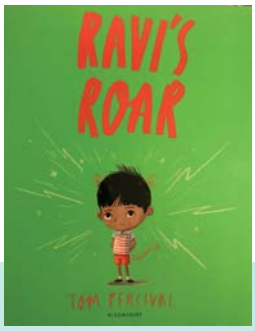
(HarperCollins, paperback, £6.99)

Keep an eye out for books and characters that are celebrating a special anniversary; publishers will often produce all kinds of display materials and resources to support the release of a 'birthday' version of a classic title, which can be used to create a real buzz in your library space. This year, it's the turn of Judith Kerr's much-loved creation, *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, to be in the spotlight – and, sure enough, Harper Collins is putting out a 50th anniversary edition of the book that was first published in 1970, along with a selection of resources that include colouring sheets, puzzles and a lovely day planner, too (download the resources at **bit.ly/plazoommog**).

Alastair Humphreys' Great Adventurers

(Templar, paperback, £9.99)

This beautifully illustrated, prize-winning book (it won the non-fiction category of the 2019 Teach Primary Book Awards) tells the stories of incredible journeys undertaken by 20 of the most heroic and impressive explorers who ever lived. It starts with a 'meet the adventurers' section, featuring a gallery of gorgeous portraits which would lend themselves brilliantly to a wall display if photocopied, cut out and fixed on a backing sheet. You could write an intriguing question by each one, prompting children to pick up the book in order to find out more about any of the intrepid characters they find particularly intriguing.



Ravi's Roar

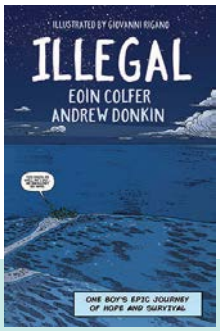
(Bloomsbury, paperback, £6.99)

Most of the time, Ravi can control his temper but, one day, he lets out the tiger within. He finds this great fun at first, because tigers can do anything they like – but there's a problem; who wants to play with a growling, roaring, noisy wild tiger who won't share or play nicely? The brainchild of writer, artist, video producer and musician Tom Percival, *Ravi's Roar* is a clever and engaging story about temper tantrums and learning to express and understand your feelings. Why not make a comfy reading corner in your library where children know they can go if they are feeling overwhelmed, and have a box of books there especially chosen for the way they deal with emotional issues?

I Saw a Bee

(Scallywag Press, hardback, £11.99)

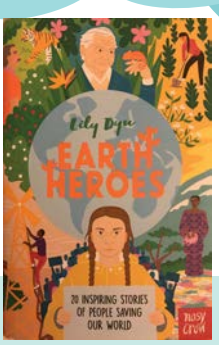
Minibeasts are always a popular topic amongst primary school, and so gathering together a handful of books about them (both fiction and non-fiction), adding a few models or toys that can be handled by the children, and perhaps even putting together a quick quiz sheet that can be completed and then dropped in a box for a chance to win a small prize, is an easy way to capture youngsters' interest – quite possibly including a reluctant reader or two. *I saw a Bee*, by Rob Ramsden, is the perfect star title around which to build such an exhibit, with bold, bright illustrations and a simple but compelling narrative told in delightfully rhythmic language.



Illegal

(Hodder, paperback, £10.99)

Beginning with a quote about illegal aliens from Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, this graphic novel, from the team behind the Artemis Fowl comics, could be used as the focus for a display that might help to start a discussion on the migrant crisis in an accessible way for your library visitors. The story follows 12-year-old Ebo as he makes the treacherous journey from Africa to Europe across the Sahara desert and Mediterranean Sea – and the map and cartoon strip telling a real-life refugee's story that is similar to Ebo's at the end of the book could be turned into a poster, with possible discussion questions added, and room for children to add their own comments.



Earth Heroes

(Nosy Crow, hardback, £9.99) image from TP 14.1

Earth Heroes features 20 inspirational stories highlighting the pioneering work of individuals from all over the globe, from Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough to Yin Yuzhen and Isatou Ceesay. Whether it's advocating for wildlife and conservation, striking to draw attention of climate change, planting trees to stop the desert or protecting the Amazon rainforest from deforestation, it's celebrated here. Children aren't likely to stop caring about the future of their planet any time soon, so a display on this topic will not only be appealing to them, but is also a way of indicating that their voices and concerns are being heard.

Julian is a Mermaid

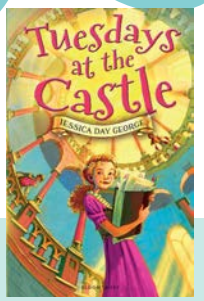
(Walker Books)

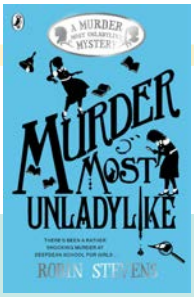
There are so many wonderful books for primary aged children that celebrate inclusivity and diversity; and this one is perfect to inspire a truly sparkly, shimmering show! It tells the tale of Julian, whose life is changed when he sees three enthralling women dressed as mermaids. When Nana sees Julian proudly transformed into his version of a mermaid, the empty space surrounding him and Nana's furious face suggest a devastating reaction. Many children will recognise the notions of rejection and invisibility, but Nana simply gifts Julian a pearl necklace to complete his glamorous outfit. They join a procession of mermaids "like you, honey" and a riot of colour reflects Julian's feelings of joy as he finds his true place in the world.

Diver's Daughter

(Scholastic, paperback, £6.99) image from TP 13.3

Tales with a historical setting are great for putting together powerful library displays, as you can make links across children's learning, and encourage them to dig even deeper into the past as they read. Diver's Daughter is part of Scholastic's excellent new Voices series – narrative non-fiction stories exploring authentic accounts of the life of British immigrants throughout history. It recounts the experiences of a young East African girl, Eve, living with her mother in the slums of Elizabethan London, and weaves the sinking of the Mary Rose into a compelling and thrilling story about lost treasure and personal courage. Could you find newspaper accounts of the raising of the Mary Rose, in 1982, to build some excitement around it?





Tuesdays at the Castle

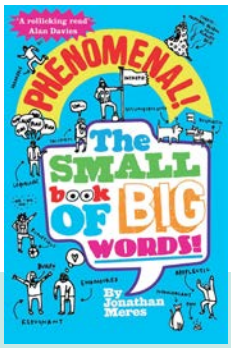
(Bloomsbury, paperback, £5.99)

If your pupils are still obsessed with Harry Potter (and why wouldn't they be?), use that relationship to get them trying something else, with a strong 'If you like XX, you'll love THIS!' message. Considerably more sophisticated and robust than the pink and sparkly cover artwork might suggest, *Tuesdays at the Castle* features strong and complex characters (including the powerful, creative and wilful presence of Castle Glower itself); a Shakespearean plot exploring intrigue, treachery and the nature of kingship along with family relationships and the merest hint of young romance; and consistently sharp, witty dialogue – and is bound to captivate youngsters who are still dreaming of being called to Hogwarts.

Murder Most Unladylike

(Corgi Children's, paperback, £6.99)

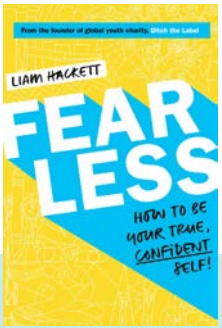
Take a multimedia approach to literature by introducing children to examples of their favourite authors on video, radio or even as part of a podcast, like *Author in Your Classroom*, from Plazoom. It's especially recorded to be played in schools; and in episode one, Robin Stevens - whose *Murder Most Unladylike* series blends together elements of Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton in a way that's simultaneously recognisable and totally original - talks about how to plan plots, edit your own writing and deal with those times when the words just won't come. What's more, there's a **free** resources pack to go with it, that's crammed with fabulous images and quotes for wall displays. Take a look at **bit.ly/plazoomrobin**.



Phenomenal! The Small Book of Big Words

(Macmillan, paperback, £5.99)

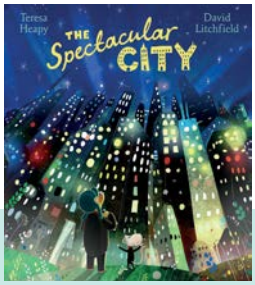
Make the most of the wonderful world of words with a display based on this fantastic celebration of language. Every entry has been carefully chosen to slip comfortably into playground conversation – these aren't just fancy tongue twisters selected on the grounds of length and obscurity, they are words that are as useful as they are interesting (think asinine, plethora, hapless and verve). Why not use the book to inspire a 'Big Word of the Week' challenge in your library, where pupils can clock up points by correctly using a particular lexeme in context?



Fearless

(Scholastic, paperback, £9.99)

Help to build children's confidence through promoting empowering messages, like the ones in this 'go-to guide for being your best self', aimed at young people aged 10+. The author does a great job, writing with empathy and respect, and urging readers to work out for themselves what kind of a person they are and want to be, then suggesting ways they can break free of stereotypes and labels. Including interviews with inspirational people, such as body positive activists, disability campaigners and others, it's a feisty and focused handbook that could really help equip today's young people to deal with prejudice, bullying and the myriad other pressures of our digital age.



The Spectacular City

(Red Fox, paperback, £6.99)

A really good picture book doesn't need much help when it comes to selling itself – just leave it open on a shelf and it will attract young readers like bees to a flower. This beautifully illustrated example is a tale of an unlikely friendship between a mouse and a bear, featuring a dastardly feline villain who attempts to separate the two in order to make a meal of one of them. Ultimately, ever-loyal Bear swoops in and saves the day, rescuing his chum with the aid of his incredible paper-folding skills; and there are instructions for making paper aeroplanes at the back of the book, so make sure you have a stack of suitable paper on hand so children can try it for themselves!

Planner, adventurer or VOMITER?

Which best describes your pupils? Once you know, these six strategies will help them to become confident, independent writers

As teachers, we often think of the writing process as linear: children work their way through the stages of generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising (evaluating), editing (proofreading) and maybe publishing; in that order and in much the same way.

In this we would be wrong because, in fact, an individual's process can be discursive, and all writers (both in school and those outside it) have their own preferred ways of working through some or all of these stages. We need to acknowledge and allow this.

Children like to personalise their process. They love deciding what kind of a writer they think and know they are. For example, they might fit into one of the following categories:

Adventurer
Likes to write a draft first before looking at it and using it as a plan for a second draft.

Planner
Likes to plan in great detail, working out exactly what will be written and where it will go before they begin their draft.

Vomiter
Likes to write their piece out from a plan, before attending to revision and editing separately.

Paragraph piler
Likes to write a paragraph, reread it, revise it and edit it before moving on to drafting their next paragraph.

Sentence stacker
Likes to write a sentence and ensure it is revised and edited just how they want it before moving on to the next sentence.

However, what we sometimes overlook is the importance of explicitly teaching each of these processes, maybe because our sights are fixed on getting to the end product quickly so we can get on with the assessment. So maybe we miss out revision, or rush children through the planning stage. Maybe we set rigid deadlines. But this won't give our young writers the process-knowledge they need to achieve long-term writing success. And everything will be so much better if we write ourselves, and share with children our own personal insights into what helps us to be a writer.

Six strategies to model to your class

In our own classroom we have found some good ways of teaching children strategies to manage the processes. All of them, if properly taught and if practised daily, can equip our apprentices to be self-regulating, to know what to do and how to do it and to write independently of us – in short, to do all the things that writers do out in the world.

You can teach these strategies in mini-lessons and invite children to use them in that day's writing. Think about modelling for the children the approaches you yourself employ when writing. Use good exemplars, ideally written by you, which could show your class how you planned, drafted or revised. And conference them while they are writing, ironing out any process problems as you do so.

1 Help them find their own ideas

Research shows that, when children have a personal investment in their writing topic, they write better, so don't let the fear of hearing "I don't know what to write" lead you to choose a topic for them, even though you might have selected and be teaching a particular genre.

All children have something to write about – friends and family, places, experiences, incidents, memories, interests, responses to books they've read, games, films. But they may need you to show them how writers tap into these possibilities. Let them record ideas, even if it's just one word, in an ongoing writer's notebook, and show them how to dabble – play around with drawings, words, phrases, and thoughts on paper to develop an early writing idea. Hold writers to high standards; your expectation will be that, whatever they decide to write about, it must be written well.

2 Show how you plan

You can share how you planned your own example text. Perhaps you spent a lot of time thinking or daydreaming. Maybe you did more drawing or played around with the dabbles. Maybe you talked it through to yourself or to someone else. Give children agency to do it their own way or let them choose from a variety of formats like grids, mind-maps or webs. Reassure them that plans can always be changed.

3 Draft and try things out

A draft isn't the final product; in fact, a draft is simply the place where writers are finding out what they want to say for the first time. We found in our classroom that children not only planned but drafted in different ways. However, we taught

everyone two really useful strategies, both aimed at helping them keep the composition flowing. The first was to suggest they used a 'trying things out' page in their book to do just that – try out a few different ways of saying something, or write an extra bit and see how it sounds. The second strategy was to make a set of 'drafting rules' to help children carry on composing and avoid getting hung up on transcriptional issues at the wrong time. The rules are: invent a spelling if unsure and circle it; put a box where you might need an item of punctuation but aren't sure; underline any 'sticky' bits, and read your writing to a partner if uncertain about how to go on. Transcriptional issues are fixed at the editing stage.

4 Provide a revision checklist

Revising is all about thinking how best to say what you want to say; it's not the same as editing, which is only concerned with transcription. Revision is quite a complex process, and it makes matters more difficult if we expect children to think about composition and transcription at the same time. We found teaching children to use the following strategies helpful.

- Re-read carefully as many times as you wish
- Share and discuss possible changes and improvements with a partner
- Keep in mind the purpose and audience for your piece
- Focus on whether your reader will understand the piece, whether it fulfills your intention and whether it sounds good

As a class, we wrote and gave out revision checklists tailored to our class writing project, making sure they were centred on composition and the needs of the audience.

"Children love deciding which kind of writer they are"

5 Use the CUPS strategy

Children gain from being explicitly taught how to proofread more than from having their teacher make the transcriptional corrections for them. We gave our class a number of strategies for proof-reading their manuscripts; especially useful was the CUPS strategy (Capitalisation, Use of vocabulary, Punctuation, Spelling) which had them editing their whole piece four times, with a different focus each time. We felt this strategy, combined with the use of an editing checklist, made proofreading a manageable task and helped children first detect and then correct their errors. You can easily model proofreading for them.

6 Offer a publishing menu

Children take pride in their compositions and are motivated to do well if they know there is a genuine opportunity for publication at the end. You can jointly construct with your class a varied and authentic publishing menu, with possibilities ranging from: texts placed in class libraries around the school; given as gifts; put out into the community – local libraries, waiting rooms, corner-shops, cafes; recorded as podcasts or videos; performed to parents; published online. And finally, publishing parties where balloons and cake are the non-negotiables!

Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson are the founders of The Writing For Pleasure Centre. You can now pre-order their book ***'Real-World Writers: a guide to teaching writing with 7-11 year olds'*** *from routledge.com*

Harness the Power of POETRY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Charlotte Hacking explains how verse can be used to develop all aspects of literacy throughout the primary years...

Poetry is a fantastic way of engaging children in the power of the spoken and written word. A classroom rich in a range of verse, where teachers use specific approaches to engage pupils in listening to, reading and performing poetry, can reap rewards in young people's reading engagement as well as developing their reading fluency, comprehension, ideas and inspiration for writing.

Our first experiences with poetry as young children often come through the songs, jingles and nursery rhymes we are introduced to when we are very small. A good nursery rhyme anthology is a staple for every Early Years classroom. Excellent examples of these are *The Oxford Treasury of Nursery Rhymes*, illustrated by Ian Beck and *Honey for You, Honey for Me* by Michael Rosen and Chris Riddell (releasing September 2020)

Across all year groups, ensure you have a range of collections, so that pupils can experience different styles and voices. Many think that poetry for younger children should be funny and rhyme, but children need to see that, as well as this, poetry can express, explain or tell a story, in a variety of ways. Titles such as *A Great Big Cuddle* by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Chris Riddell and *Zim Zam Zoom*! by James Carter, illustrated by Nicola Colton, are ideal.

Next steps

As children progress into KS1, consider collections which help them learn more about themselves and the world around them – for example, *Thinker, My Puppy Poet and Me* by Eloise Greenfield and Ehsan Abdollahi, and *Cherry Moon* by Zaro Weil and Junli Song. Moving into KS2, provide collections that share a range of examples, from the cleverly funny to the deeply emotional. *Things You Find in a Poet's Beard* by A.F. Harrold and Chris Riddell, *Bright Bursts of Colour* by Matt Goodfellow and Aleksei Bitskoff and *Werewolf Club Rules* by Joseph Coelho are excellent examples.

As children reach the end of the primary years, share collections that show them that they can be reflected in poetry and that it can provide a voice on events and experiences that matter to them, such as *The Rainmaker Danced* by John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura, *Overheard in a Tower Block* by Joseph Coelho and Kate Milner and *Everything All at Once* by Steven Camden.

Children need to see the universality of poetry; that it transcends age, culture, race, religion. The videos of poets performing poetry on CLPE's Poetryline website contain a rich variety of voices and are added to each year in line with CLPE's poetry award, the CLiPPA. Hearing a wide range of dialects and seeing a range of different poets opens up that poetry can be a place and space for everyone.

Read aloud

The beauty of reading a poem is that it can be dropped into any moment of the day – and this should be done for the pure pleasure of hearing it; we must make sure that we don't jump into trying to dissect the lines before giving children the opportunity to just listen and respond to it at a personal level.

With more fluent readers, a technique like 'poetry papering' works really well. Select a number of different poems, photocopy them, and pin them up around the classroom or another space for the children to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else.

This encourages the children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, considering what it makes them feel and think about. Let them look for connections, ask questions, explore what they like about poems and the use of language. You can then use their responses as an opportunity to introduce them to the names of specific forms or devices, such as assonance, alliteration, imagery, rhythm and sound.

"Children need to see the universality of poetry; that it transcends age, culture, race, religion"

Embrace performance

It is particularly important that children have opportunities to enjoy reading poetry aloud themselves, joining in, dramatising and performing poems. If poetry is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children.

Working up a performance is a fantastic way of improving reading fluency, encouraging children to read and re-read, note how the punctuation guides reading and where to pause to enhance the emotion and meaning. This is why CLPE set up the shadowing scheme for our poetry award, the CLiPPA. Every year we see outstanding performances from primary aged children that show how much they have understood about the meaning and emotion behind poems from shortlisted collections.

Explore language

Poetry also gives an invitation for children to play with words. Many poems contain 'nonsense words', which are a key feature of the current Phonic Screening Check. Exploring such words in the context of a familiar poem allows children to investigate how these are used and how we read their meaning in the context of the poem.

As children's knowledge of word structures develops, rhyming poetry is an excellent way of contextualising work around the variations in the English spelling system. A poem with rhyming couplets allows children to be supported in their reading by the rhyme patterns and they can explore the different patterns in the words and the similarities and differences in how they are spelt.

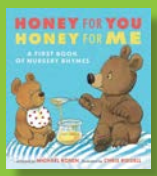
The figurative language used in many poems allows children to see the impact of well-chosen language in creating imagery to take a reader straight into a moment, or paint a descriptive picture. Through hearing, reading and recognising the impact this makes on them, they can in turn think about how to create these effects in their own writing.

Poetry provides the gateway for so many young readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate; delighting, supporting and engaging children as they build a love of literature. Ensure that it is a core part of children's everyday experience.

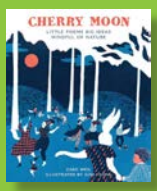
Access CLPE's Poetryline website, which provides a wealth of opportunities for exploring poetry in schools, including videos of poets performing, free teaching plans for using high quality poetry collections and further ideas for embedding poetry into the curriculum at *clpe.org.uk/poetryline*

Find out more about CLPE's Poetry Award, the CLiPPA, and its associated shadowing scheme at *clpe.org.uk/poetryline/clippa.*

5 ESSENTIAL COLLECTIONS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM...

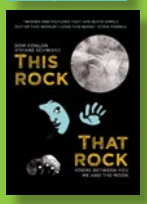


- **Honey for You, Honey for Me by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Chris Riddell (releasing September 2020)**
A brand new collection from a master of wordplay; impossible to resist for young readers.

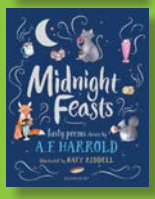


- **Cherry Moon by Zaro Weil, illustrated by Junli Song**
A beautiful and richly illustrated collections of poems inspired by the natural world.

- **Bright Bursts of Colour by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Aleksei Bitskoff**
A wonderful collection that takes children on a journey of what poetry is and what it could be for them.



- **This Rock, That Rock by Dom Conlon and Viviane Schwarz**
An original collection of 50 poems to celebrate 50 years since the Apollo 11 moon landings. Poems allow children to think about their place in the world and consider big ideas in a very accessible way.



- **Midnight Feasts by A.F. Harrold, illustrated by Katy Riddell**
An expertly crafted anthology of poems based around the subject of food.

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

“I never imagined I could write books”

According to Tom Gates creator **Liz Pichon**, coming up with ideas is the best part of an author’s job...

***TR&W* You started out as a graphic designer and art director – when did you realise that you were a writer, too?**

LP I didn’t – not for a long time. I am dyslexic and I never imagined I could produce a book, but I always loved making up stories and writing short poems. I used to illustrate other people’s books, and that’s when (very slowly) I began to think about writing my own. My first picture book came out in 2005, when I was in my mid-forties.

“It’s not difficult to remember what it was like being a kid!”

What’s the easiest part of a writer’s job? And the hardest?

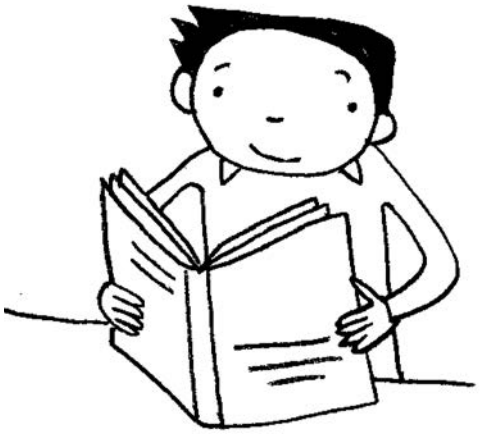
I think the most fun part is when you come up with the original idea for a book or story. It could just be doing some sketches or having an idea for a title. I love the part when the ideas are coming together and you can have a play with no expectations. The hardest part is always the deadlines.

Do you have a favourite place to write?

I try and write anywhere, especially just doing ideas. But I have a lovely, bright studio in the garden, which has been the place I’ve worked in the most.

How important is it to have a good editor? Do you do much editing of your own work?

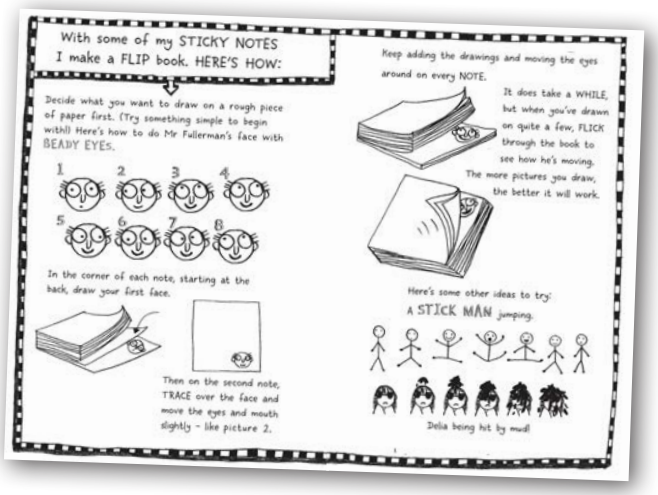
It’s essential! I’ve been extremely lucky with all the editors I’ve had over the last ten years.



They look at your story with fresh eyes and see things you don’t. I also do a lot of editing at every stage of the book. Sometimes I can only tell how a story’s working once it’s with the illustrations and laid out on the pages in the real font. Then you can see the spacing, timing and make even more cuts – or add something in.

If you could go back and change anything about your time at primary school, what would it be?

I wouldn’t worry so much about being dyslexic and I wouldn’t get so embarrassed by my dad, who used to dress up as a fortune teller for the school fair. He’d pretend to use a crystal ball and tell people’s fortunes, all for fun and to raise money for



All illustrations, Liz Pichon

the school. I found it excruciatingly embarrassing – even though my friends thought he was hilarious.

Is there a kind of book that you would really like to write, but that you don't think you
I wouldn't mind having written Harry Potter! I'd never have been able to write a story that long with so many amazing interweaving plot lines, though.

How do you plan out your plots?
I do lots of notes, then draw and write out the plot lines in a kind of big flow chart. It's useful to look back on when I'm writing the books – so I don't get lost!

Do you always know what's going to happen before you start writing?
Not always – sometimes I get other ideas while I'm writing and it's fun to go off in another direction.

How do you get 'inside the head' of your characters – given that they are very different from you?
Actually, Tom is based on me, so it's not difficult to remember what it was like being a kid!

Do you think drawing can help children become better writers?
It won't harm their writing that's for sure! I love illustrated books – pictures can really help to tell a story. Most children when they're little, enjoy drawing. So I'd say yes, it can help to visualise what you're writing about and get imaginations going.

Finally, would you share one thing that you've learnt in 2020?
How to light a Zoom meeting so I don't scare people when I switch on! Also, expect the unexpected.

LIZ'S TOP FIVE TIPS *FOR YOUNG WRITERS*

1. Get writing and reading as much as you can.
2. Have a notebook or diary so you don't forget any ideas you have (diaries are also a great way to get into the habit of writing a little bit every day).
3. Keep your ears and eyes open! You never know where ideas might come from.
4. When you write a story try and finish it – however long it takes you...
5. ...then read it aloud later, as it's easier to spot parts that might need more work when you do that. I always read my work out loud – it really helps.

Tom Gates: Mega Make and Do (and Stories Too!), **by Liz Pichon (Scholastic), is packed full of activity ideas as well as things to read; it's the perfect companion for keeping children occupied whilst out of school!**

Seven ways to BOOST SPELLING

Greater accuracy will free children to write fluently, at greater length and to include more challenging vocabulary, so try these tips...

KIRSTIE HEWETT

Spelling is a tricky business. It is the aspect of primary English teaching that I have been asked about most often in my work with schools and academies in my local area and beyond. It is also the aspect that I was least sure of in my own teaching. Research indicates that many teachers lack confidence in this area, so I was far from alone. My current role allows me to engage with research on a regular basis and one of my main goals when I took it was to hunt down the answer to the question, 'How can I teach spelling really well in my classroom?' So, here are seven tips to get you started!

1. Be really enthusiastic about words

Passion for any subject has a huge impact on learners. When a teacher stands before you and communicates with enthusiasm and energy, sharing their fascination for a particular subject or topic, a kind of magic settles in the room. English words are great! Yes, they're complex, and rules and patterns often seem more than a little haphazard, but in this lies their mystery and wonder. Spelling is a great skill. Accurate spelling frees children up to write fluently, at greater length and to include more challenging vocabulary in their writing so it's really well worth the investment. As teachers, sharing a passion for finding out about words will help our children see the value in what could perhaps be a rather dull and mundane part of learning that we spend time on only because the National Curriculum tells us we have to. So love it! Be fascinated by it and be fascinated by our brilliant brains, which can find different ways to make spellings automatic.

2. Teach spelling as a problem-solving process

How teachers view the learning of spelling makes a huge difference in the classroom. To spell successfully, children need a plan of attack. When they are trying to learn a word, what will they do first? Next? And then? What if they've tried writing the word a few times but can't quite get it right? Are there tricky parts and easy parts? How could they use visual and aural emphasis to help them with those tricky parts? Would breaking down the word and thinking about its meaning help? Words can be hard in different ways, so children need alternative methods for tackling them to develop automatic recall.

"When a teacher communicates with enthusiasm and energy, a kind of magic settles in the room"

3. Offer lots of opportunities for collaboration

Working together can make a real difference in the spelling classroom. Children can look together at words, sharing their thoughts on how they are structured and comparing their different strategies as they develop automatic, accurate recall. Articulating what they notice and which strategies they will try first encourages them to share expertise and consolidate their own thinking. Encourage collaborative discussion to contribute to a lively and engaging atmosphere for learning.

4. Allow time for exploring the structure of words

Look for patterns within words and make connections to other words the children know. This can take a little time to become established as pupils might not be used to looking closely at words at first. Allowing time to process the way words are structured (and in conjunction with lots of collaborative talk) gives children the chance to think more deeply, supporting automatic, accurate recall effectively. Again, the enthusiasm of the teacher will really make a difference here, as children make connections between other words and parts of words, and share their thinking.

5. Think of the curriculum as three different strands

I see the National Curriculum requirements as consisting of three different strands. First, there are the rules and patterns for each year group outlined in Appendix 1. These offer a great opportunity for children to study groups of words that have some connection. Becoming increasingly familiar with these connections (for example that 'y' sometimes makes a short 'i' sound as in 'myth' and 'gymnasium') increases the list of plausible options for encoding sounds that children can draw on when learning and spelling words. Of course, the origin of the word is a key factor in the example given, so exploring this will also provide children with additional information to support their understanding and help them draw conclusions about whether a 'y' is the best choice for spelling a particular word.

Another strand is the learning of the word lists contained in Appendix 1. These words are not necessarily connected linguistically to each other at all (although any

connections to the rules and patterns referred to above will be worth making), so these words can be looked at as entities in themselves. Lots of opportunities to study and recall these will help children develop automaticity and accuracy here, and collaborative games and challenges will help keep this fresh and interesting.

The third strand is the need for children to spend time on personal spellings. While they can explore both the above strands and gain valuable information about words, they still need to build their own repertoire of automatically recalled words to help them in their writing. Children will be applying their strategies to tackle the words they most need to know next. Building clear and simple routines for collaborative learning and individual practice is key to maximising time here, and offers good opportunities for children to apply and experience success if carefully structured.

6. Use spelling journals

These will help children to build their knowledge of words and about words, and they can refer back to it. They can record word lists, try out different strategies and engage in activities such as collaborative word hunts and sorts, allowing them to record their thinking for future reference. This can be really useful in helping children apply their spelling knowledge in their independent writing, as they can have their journals available to refer to. This resource also allows for an efficient approach to the frequent revisiting of previous learning and practice, again allowing maximum time to be spent on thinking about words and trying out strategies.

7. Audience and purpose

Finally, the importance of providing authentic reasons to write and real audiences to share writing with can make a real difference to children's motivation to get spelling right. Children are often particularly keen to make sure their spelling is accurate when they know their work will be read by someone other than just their teacher. This principle underpins the effective teaching of all English in the primary classroom, and can make a significant difference to children's enjoyment and engagement in all aspects of writing – even spelling! **TP**

Kirstie Hewett is a school improvement specialist (primary English) at the University of Chichester and author of UKLA's Teaching Spelling 6-11: designing effective learning in English and across the curriculum (£10 or £9 for UKLA members).

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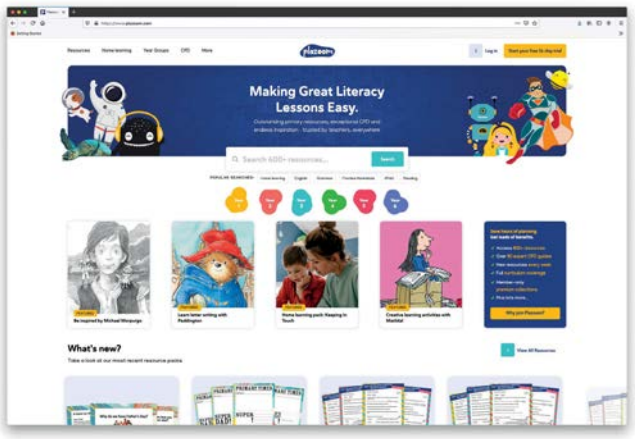
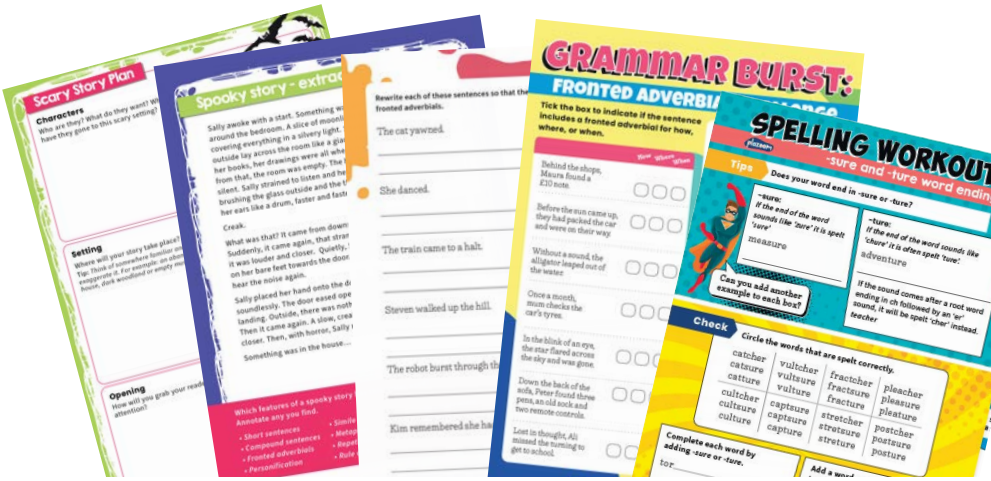


AT A GLANCE

- A comprehensive bank of activities and resources to help develop children's literacy skills
- Designed by teachers and aligned with research informed practice
- Access to over 600 resources, 80+ CPD sessions and full coverage of the primary literacy curriculum
- Resources for teachers as well as parents who are assisting with learning at home



REVIEWED BY: ADAM RICHES

The internet is full of literacy-focused resources that tout themselves as game changing for teachers. It isn't often that you come across a platform that actually delivers on its claims; Plazoom, however, breaks the mould somewhat in this respect – offering a full bank of literacy resources that are well designed, correlated with the curriculum and ordered in a simple, truly timesaving fashion.

Plazoom is incredibly simple to navigate. The interface is intuitive and the content is accessible, regardless of it containing well over 600 resources. These are linked by helpful tags, and each activity and resource is correlated to a substrand of the curriculum, with a preview display of what's included, making finding exactly what you're after incredibly easy; especially as you can filter by year group.

Another organisational feature I like is the concept of resource 'collections'. Plazoom's content is pooled into groups so that you are able to easily navigate between topics without missing any little gems. It sounds like a strange thing to say, but you get a real personal feeling from the platform – it's genuinely user-friendly, both in terms of functionality and interaction.

Of course, functionality and navigation aren't important if the content you're looking for is no good. Luckily, the resources on Plazoom are as impressive as the site itself. Take the 'spelling workouts' collection, for example: the aim of the sheets are clear, they are well laid out, the desirable difficulty is perfectly balanced with gradually increasing challenge and most importantly, they are presented in a way that engages learners. This is where you really see the expertise and knowledge behind the resource creation. The extraneous load is low and the tasks are focused, using subject specific language and action words from the curriculum objectives. The complexity is present but it is subtle. This approach is used right across Plazoom's resources for reading, writing, spelling and grammar. Very clever stuff.

At £25 for a year's full access (for a limited time only), Plazoom membership is a steal. The resources are worth their weight in gold for teachers; they will help children progress, and save hours and hours of planning time. In addition, the CPD offer – 80+ expert guides – is exceptional. The amount I have learnt that I am already considering translating to my own practice has really surprised me.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

✔ Exceptional breadth of resources that cover topics in substantial depth
✔ Highly accurate content that is meticulously planned for success and progress
✔ Resources based around real-life events and ideas creating high engagement
✔ Sequential resource design allows for full curriculum coverage
✔ Significantly reduces teacher workload

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a bank of well-planned, well-thought-through literacy resources that you can download and use instantly, plus solid CPD support. If you're pushed for time due to planning, this is a seriously credible platform from which to source content.

plazoom.com/benefits

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READING & WRITING

The Literary Curriculum

A whole-school book-based approach for teaching the English curriculum

AT A GLANCE

- A complete, thematic approach to English
- Over 100 literary texts with 80 significant authors
- Access to a range of resources to help plan and assess your English provision
- 100 planning sequences with in-built progression from Reception to Y6
- Whole-school overviews, coverage maps, thematic maps and literacy policy statement
- Includes interactive Reporting and Assessment Tool for reading and writing

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Although learning how to read is too complex a task to be taught using only one particular method, a predominantly literature-based approach can inspire and motivate children to become both successful readers and writers. This is what the Literary Curriculum actively sets out to do through its online subscription service.

Embedding a holistic book-based approach and using high quality texts, teachers can support children across the English curriculum.

The Literary Curriculum provides an intelligent planning sequence which leads teachers through a text from two to four weeks for teaching specific key skills. This really is wide-ranging and addresses writing, SPaG, phonics and reading comprehension. It's easy to set up too, with each year group selecting their own key texts for their literacy lessons.

A detailed set of daily plans with a medium term overview are provided, which can be used flexibly for adding your own personal touch. These offer delicious depth, teeming with grab-and-go ideas that will help you nudge children's thinking and enable them to use language more artistically.

Each year group has six cross-curricular rich themes including a minimum of 12 literary texts, and these stretch from 'Outside inside' and 'Journeys & Exploration' to 'Utopia vs dystopia' and 'Migration & movement'.

The plans put a high value on engagement and variety so children aren't just locked in one genre but enjoy distinct shorter and longer writing opportunities.

A book-based approach is far more than just giving children quality literature and so what the Literary Curriculum does is get children doing exciting and authentic activities in context.

If you want a whole-school strategy that understands individual differences in reading abilities and recognises different skills while focusing on meaning, interest and enjoyment, then the Literary Curriculum is for you.

These are tried and tested resources and a number of flagship schools have used the Literary Curriculum creatively within their own contexts for supporting engagement and raising attainment in English.

Placing children's literature at the core of your primary English provision by teaching through texts can help children become stronger and enthusiastic learners, and the Literary Curriculum offers a thrilling variety of literature to motivate and excite children to read and write.

Teachers committed to using quality texts find that the standard of teaching and learning is enhanced especially when supported by the expertise, sterling structure and creative content of the Literary Curriculum. This is a programme for training literary giants of the future.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ A brilliant and innovative way to inspire children to read and write
- ✔ Simple to implement across the school
- ✔ Great for getting children geeky about words
- ✔ Easy to adopt and adapt
- ✔ Plenty of quality opportunities for modelled and shared writing

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to cover all the bases of the English curriculum, get children in a bookish mindset and emphasise and enforce positive learning experiences.

"The Literary Curriculum offers a thrilling variety of literature to motivate and excite children"

Whole-school subscription from £600.00 p/a ex. VAT. Monthly individual subscription package available. literarycurriculum.co.uk

"I was broken; I WAS STUPID"

Helping children with dyslexia to recognise their strengths can turn the diagnosis into a superpower, suggests **Amber Lee Dodd**

I wasn't diagnosed with dyslexia until I was 20. It was the beginning of my second year of university, and I was struggling in exams and doing poorly in my essays. But it wasn't until I was doing some group work, writing down ideas on a big sheet of paper, that a friend looked at my handwriting and said,

'Are you dyslexic?'

No one had ever asked me that before – and it wasn't long until I started to wonder. I'd had problems all my life at school, but this was the first time I'd had the chance to get tested. It didn't take long to get a diagnosis of dyslexia and dyspraxia. And to get an assessment full of phrases like:

'Significantly below average.'
'Serious and significantly below ability.'
'Lowest percentile for age group.'

I skimmed through it feeling depressed. I was broken, I was stupid. I was probably never going to get my degree. It wasn't until my assessor asked how I'd gotten to university despite this going unnoticed, that I began to reassess.

Special status

From an early age I'd had problems at school. I'd struggled to learn to read and was put into special needs classes in infant and junior school. I went through a painful period at school where I sat at the back of the class and was made fun of. Or was sent to sit on my own to do 'special work'. I hated school, until it came to our rare creative writing lessons. It was the one area of school I excelled at. I was lucky to be supported and encouraged by my year 5 teacher in this. She made sure to put me front and centre when it came to reading out my stories. It helped give me confidence and kept me afloat through a tricky period.

By secondary school I had managed to catch up with reading. But academically I was all over the place. From bottom of the year group in some subjects, to a top set student in others. I needed support but it wasn't on offer. It was a large, underfunded state school with a revolving door of overworked teachers and too large classes. I had to fend for myself, so I adapted. I couldn't keep up with the reading or writing, so I learned to skim read and developed a clunky shorthand. For oral reports, I would listen to the rest of the class's, make a few notes and then make mine up on the spot. I learned to cram before exams by sticking coloured notes around my room. Or speaking out the answers again and again, whilst gesturing with my hands.

Real benefits

When I told my assessor this, he nodded. 'You learned to use the strengths of your dyslexia,' he said. I soon started looking into the strengths and benefits of dyslexia. The things you don't automatically associate with a learning difficulty; things like:

- Creative thinking
- Unique problem solving
- Adaptability
- Strong narrative reasoning
- Visual and kinetic learning
- Vivid imaginations

All the qualities I'd used to get myself through school, in fact.

Later I came to appreciate not only the strengths of my dyslexia, but the way I had been shaped by it. I have depths of perseverance, compassion and patience that I would never have forged without the struggle of my learning issues. Most importantly, I never would have developed my deep connection with stories and storytelling without it.

Today I'm a children's author and I teach creative writing. I often work with dyslexic children, so I employ all the things I learnt as a dyslexic student. I engage in visual thinking by getting students to draw characters and locations before writing about them. I get young people to talk to me and each other about what they are planning. I use questions and physical games to spark ideas. It is in engaging with the strengths and abilities of dyslexia, that we can discover all our pupils' voices.

Amber Lee Dodd is the author of The Thirteenth Home of Noah Bradley *(Scholastic). She has worked as a Learning Support Assistant in schools with disabled students.*

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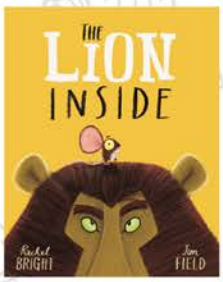

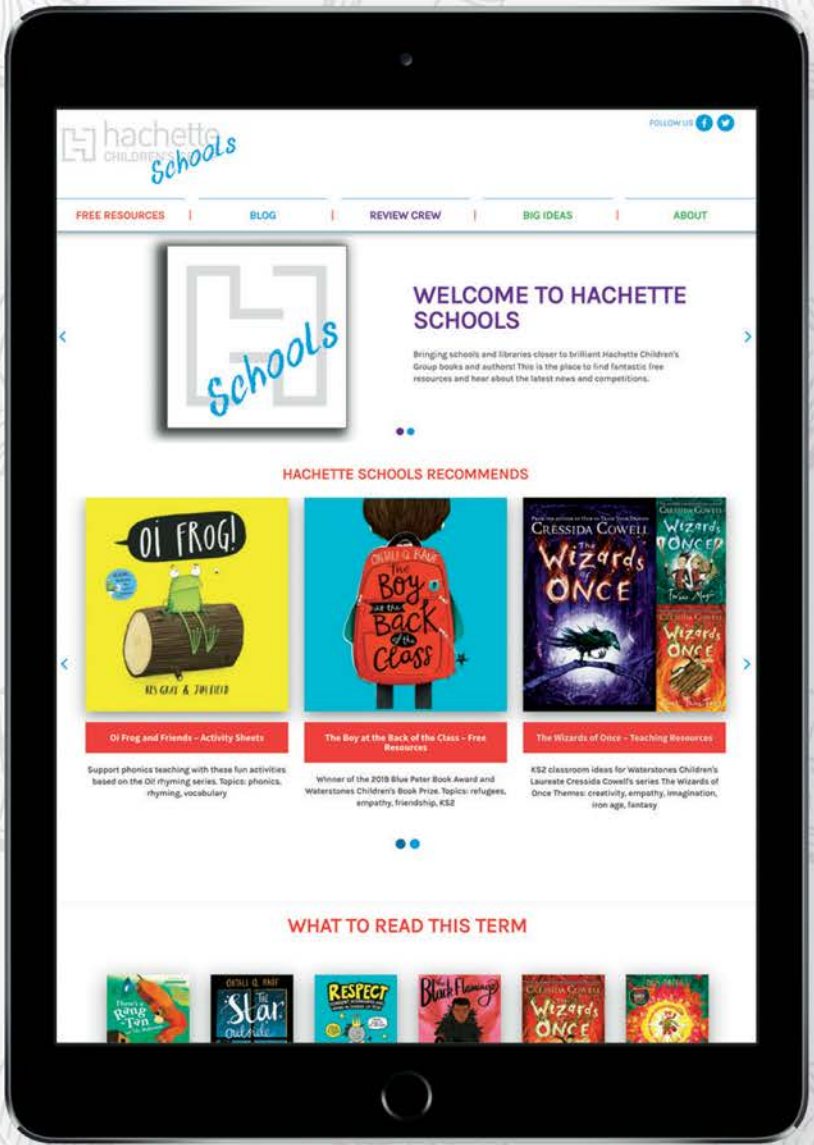

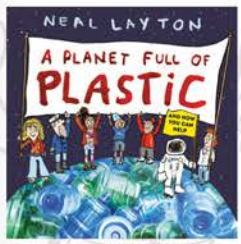

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