FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Authors in your classroom

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teach PRIMARY BOOK AWARDS

24 BOOKS TO INSPIRE LIFELONG READERS p.59

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Welcome...

Do you *really* know books? That's the question asked by the CLPE's Louise Johns-Shepherd on page 44 of this issue of *Teach Reading & Writing*, and if we're truly serious about supporting children towards the best possible literacy outcomes, it's one we should definitely all be regularly asking ourselves. Sharing the very best writing with pupils – from timeless classic texts to contemporary narratives, and across every genre – is by far the most effective way to help them develop their own powers of expression; and the more stories they absorb, the better able they will be to understand and contextualise their own experiences, as well as those of others.

And that's not all. Besides empowerment, books can represent escape, comfort and consolation, especially in times of change and uncertainty. Knowing exactly which work by which author will resonate with a particular pupil, situation or class should be every teacher's superpower – which is why, as ever, we've filled these pages with literary suggestions, reviews and recommendations for you to explore. You might want to take a look at **Carey Fluker Hunt**'s overview of ten tales that are ideal for encouraging discussion of difficult and challenging feelings (p.12), for example, or consider **James Clements**' list of rich texts around which a genuinely transformative English curriculum could be built (p.26). Plus, this is where you'll find the winners of the **2020 Teach Primary Book Awards** (p.59): 24 exceptional titles chosen by a prestigious panel of judges not only for their outstanding aesthetic appeal and sheer enjoyability, but also because of their potential to support learning both inside the classroom and beyond.

Of course, alongside the book-talk we've also pulled together pedagogical advice and practical activities you can weave into your own practice – including sound strategies for embedding tricky grammar from **Rachel Clarke** (p.42) and **Zoë and Timothy Paramour** (p.38); **Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson** on how to motivate young writers (p.46); and a superb teaching sequence for the present perfect tense based on an exclusive model text by award-winning poet **Joshua Seigal** on page 66.

There's plenty more, too. Which is why, however well you know books... we hope you'll find new inspiration here.

Best wishes
Joe Carter & Helen Mulley
(associate editors)

Author in your classroom

Play the podcast, share the teaching sequence - and inspire amazing writing from every pupil!

CRESSIDA COWELL
The children's laureate has plenty of suggestions on how to create magical creatures using a mixture of imagination... and nature's real wonder p10

PROFESSOR ROBERT WINSTON
Truly compelling non-fiction writing tells a story that's as powerful as any novel; as the eminent scientist explains... p30

JAMIE LITTLER
The author of the fantastic Frostheart *series shares his advice to help children build memorable fantasy worlds with words* p68

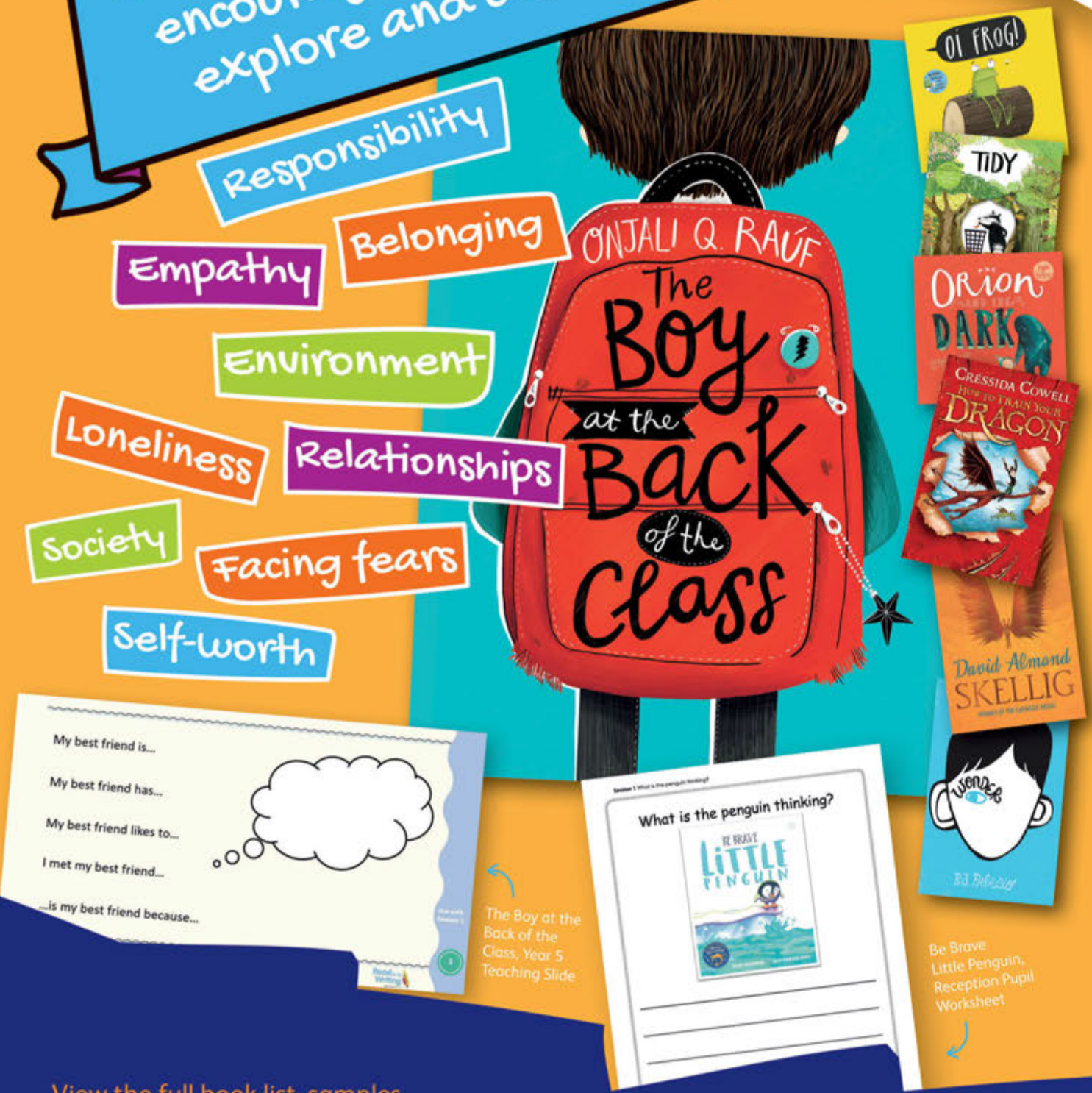
Illustration: Jamie Littler

Read in to Writing

R – Y6 whole-book digital teaching resource

Stories and lessons that encourage learners to explore and discuss:

- Responsibility
- Belonging
- Empathy
- Environment
- Loneliness
- Relationships
- Society
- Facing fears
- Self-worth



The Boy at the Back of the Class, Year 5 Teaching Slide

Be Brave Little Penguin, Reception Pupil Worksheet

View the full book list, samples, themes covered and writing outcomes:

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Year 6 Teacher, KS2 and English Leader, Jessie Farley, and her pupils share their thoughts on studying *Skellig* as a whole book through *Read in to Writing*.

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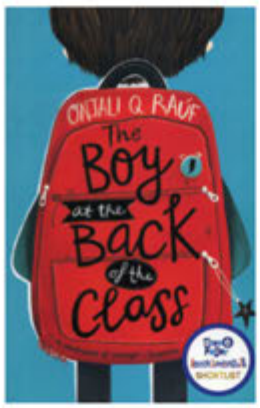

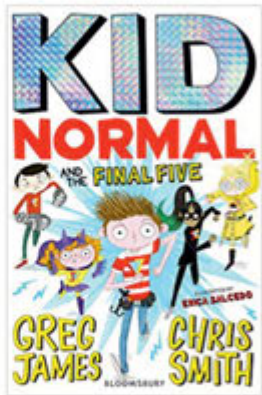

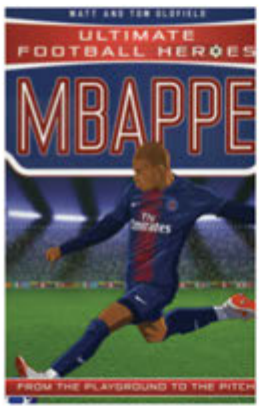

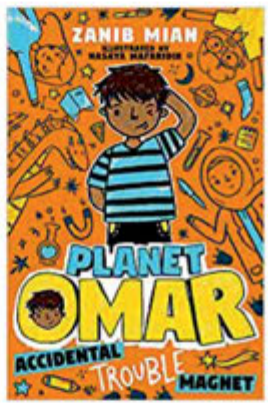

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HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR READERS?

Whilst it's hard to measure children's love of books, understanding their sense of engagement is invaluable, insists **Teresa Cremin**

As the year begins, what do you really know about the readers in your class? Already this term, you'll have assessed the children's phonic knowledge and/or comprehension to establish a baseline and set targets. Such knowledge is needed, especially following the period of home-schooling. But is it enough?

I'd argue teachers need a more rounded picture of each child as a reader. In order to nurture the reading habit and foster a love of reading, practitioners need to understand children's attitudes (e.g. motivations and dispositions) and their behaviours (e.g. frequency of reading and of initiating booktalk). Whilst we cannot measure children's pleasure in reading and must avoid reductive frameworks to assess their engagement, we have a professional responsibility to understand their sense of self-confidence as readers and to help them develop positive reader identities.

Tools to try

This need not be onerous – for example, some of the following tools may easily be used with the whole class, others with just a few target children, particularly those who 'can but don't' choose to read:

- **Observation** of your target children browsing/choosing texts, behaviour during reading time, and the extent to which they engage informally in book blether with their peers is critical. You'll be seeing how particular children enact their identities as readers in school.
- **Surveys** that involve exploring children's attitudes, self-confidence, home reading etc are useful. KS1/2/3 Surveys and tools to visualise the results are available on the OU website: **bit.ly/trwouresearch**
- **Reading Rivers/24 Hours Reads** are simple collages of everyday reading at home/school that reveal the diverse texts in which children engage. Rivers reflect a longer time (e.g. a half term). Be sure to share your own and to analyse these data sources.
- **Five things you need to know about me as a reader:** letters to their teacher enable children to open up and voice their likes, dislikes, and sense of self-confidence. Share your letter too and emphasise authenticity.
- **Reader to reader conferences** offer time to get to know individual pupils' attitudes, behaviours and whether they identify as a reader. You'll find it more productive if they've already undertaken a survey, reading river or letter, as you can explore these in more depth.
- **Reader to reader conversations** offer time for a group with shared reading interests to connect. This commonality will help as you seek to find out more about individual readers.
- **Home-school reading records and reading journals** offer book lists that can help you discern patterns or interests.
- **What is reading? discussions** often reveal children's implicit understandings. First though, invite written responses to a few questions e.g. What is reading good for? Why do we read? What makes a good reader?

A different view

Children's understanding of the nature of reading matters. Some will view it as an act of proficiency, others will see it as a pleasurable process of meaning making. Many will assume that reading equals books – and colour-coded ones at that! But through discussion and documenting their home reading (from top trump cards to text messages), children come to view reading differently, and in the process teachers will develop new knowledge of the uniqueness of each reader.

Using a mixture of these tools, always including observation, ensures children's voices and views are heard, informs your professional judgement and enables you to get to know them better as young people as well as readers. With new knowledge about individuals, you'll be able to offer more tailored text recommendations that tempt (always including choice), and adjust your reading for pleasure pedagogy in order to nurture the habit of reading, for all of your pupils.

For more examples of teachers developing their knowledge of readers and the impact of this, see bit.ly/OU_RfP

Teresa Cremin is a Professor of Literacy in Education at The Open University

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Podcast

Creating Magical Creatures, with *Cressida Cowell*

Play the podcast, share the teaching sequence – and inspire amazing writing from every pupil…

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to create a new magical creature and then write a scene from a story featuring their invention, learning from Cressida Cowell herself! Extracts from Plazoom's *Author In Your Classroom* podcast (series one, episode five) are used to support each section of the teaching sequence; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (**bit.ly/AIYCCressidaCowel**) before you start.

SESSION 1

FINDING INSPIRATION

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **01.20** up to **04.27**.

2 | Ask the children to think about how Cressida's experiences as a child helped her to write her stories. Ask: do you think you need to go somewhere very different from where you live (like a deserted island) to find inspiration? Why/why not? Share with children the idea that taking something familiar and then adding an imaginative slant on it can be a great way of starting a story.

3 | Play the section of the podcast from **17.28** to **18.38**. Tell the children that inspiration can also come from research: finding out about things in the real world and then using these to create something new.

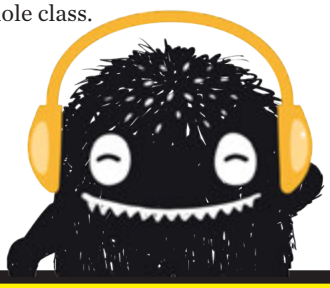
4 | Discuss how Cressida's experiences as a child helped her to create her stories. She took the real world and used her imagination to add some magic. Remind the children that they can do the same when they come to write. Imagination can be about inventing something completely new, but it can also be about looking at something that exists already in a new way or adding some magic to something very normal!

5 | Tell the children that, just like Cressida, they are going to use three things to help them invent a brand-new magical creature to write about:

- *their real experiences*
- *research*
- *their imagination*

6 | Then working in pairs or small groups, prompt the children to think about where they could draw inspiration from. If they wish, they could use books or the internet to research real interesting creatures, recording their ideas on sugar paper, in their books, or using the planning sheet included in the free resources pack available from Plazoom (see panel, below right).

7 | Once they have some ideas, they can share these as a whole class.



SESSION 2

APPLYING THEIR IMAGINATION

1 | Play the section of the podcast from **16.31** up to **17.28** where Cressida sets the challenge.

2 | Prompt children to think about what their creature is going to be like – scary, cute, funny, strange, etc. and then ask them to use their ideas from session one to create a creature that does just this. Remind them that their research and real-life ideas will need lots of imagination to change them to truly magical creatures!

3 | Working individually, children can draw their creature and record their ideas. Remind them to:

- *include plenty of detail in their drawings*
- *jot down any words or phrases that might be useful later*
- *not worry too much about the quality of their drawings* (they don't have to be perfect and neat, they are just a way of planning and recording their ideas)

4 | Once the children have finished their drawing, they can share their ideas with a partner.

SESSION 3

CREATING A PICTURE WITH WORDS

1 | Play the section of the podcast from **08.08** to **09.14**.
2 | Ask the children to look at their drawings and think about how they could describe their creature to the reader if they didn't have a picture. Collect some examples of the different strands to make sure children understand each one:

- *using all of their senses*
- *using similes and metaphors*
- *using rich and descriptive vocabulary, including adjectives*

3 | The children can then collect language and ideas they could use to describe their creature in writing.

SESSION 4

WRITING AN EVOCATIVE DESCRIPTION

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **11.37** until **16.26**, in which Cressida reads from *Never and Forever* (NB in the resources pack, the extract is also available as a PDF and on PowerPoint slides – see panel, below). Working with a partner, ask the children to describe the Tatzelwurm – what do they know about its appearance and its personality from the extract Cressida read aloud?
2 | Discuss as a class, jotting down their suggestions until you have built a thorough picture of the creature. Then, ask the children: how much of the description came from direct description and how much came from thinking about how the Tatzelwurm speaks and what it does? Remind the children that direct description can be useful, but so can indirect description, where we learn about a character from its actions, speech and relationships with other characters in the narrative.
3 | Working individually, ask the children to invent some examples of indirect description for their creature. They can then share these with a partner or small group.
4 | Ask the children to write a short description of their magical creature. Remind them that they can use the ideas they have collected so far, but that they can also make changes and add in new ideas as they think of them. Remind them that they might choose to use:

- *all of their senses: sight, sound, smell, feel* (but perhaps not taste, unless their magical creature comes to an unfortunate end!)
- *carefully chosen adjectives*
- *verbs and adverbs for description* (to describe how the creature talks, moves and behaves)
- *similes and metaphors to create images in the reader's head*
- *indirect description – how they talk, what they do, how they behave and what other characters think or say about them.*

5 | Once the children have finished their writing, ask them to share their work with a partner or look at some examples together as a class, sharing the parts that they are especially pleased with. Once they have had some feedback, they can look at their work again and make some changes to improve it.

SESSION 5

WRITING WITH EMPATHY

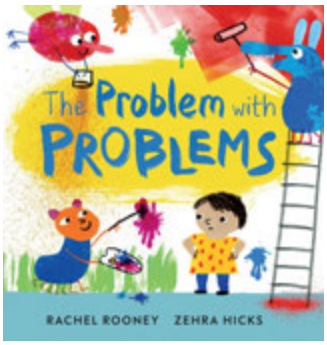
1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **19.18** to **21.41**
2 | Organise the children into pairs and ask them to look at everything their partner has created about their creature – their drawings and their writing. Ask them to think about how they would feel if they came across their partner's creature.
3 | Next, ask them to look at their own creature and ask them how it feels about itself. If it is cute, does it know that? If it terrifies people, why? Does it mean to? Does it eat people because it is cruel or because it is hungry? If it is a kind, friendly creature, does it have any negative features? If it behaves badly, is there a reason for that?
4 | Ask the children to write a short paragraph in the first person as if they were their creature, describing themselves. Remind them that they can use the same descriptive features as before, but this time they are describing the creature *as it sees itself.*
5 | As before, once children have finished, ask them to share their writing with a partner or with the class.

"Writing is like telling a REALLY big lie!"

10 BOOKS THAT EXPLORE *how we feel*

Anxiety, uncertainty, loneliness and loss – life is full of challenges, which stories like these can help us to untangle

FOUNDATION STAGE



Illustrations: Zehra Hicks

2 The problem with problems

BY RACHEL ROONEY AND ZEHRA HICKS (ANDERSEN PRESS)

1 The Colour Monster

FOUNDATION STAGE

BY ANNA LLENAS (TEMPLAR)

What's the story?

A monster scarlet with fury jumps out of the page, as a little girl explains that anger "blazes red, like fire". A small brown monster creeping through a wintery landscape gets a different message. "This is fear," she says. "If you're scared, tell me why and we'll walk through the forest together."

Soon there are five jars labelled Sadness, Anger, Happiness, Fear and Calm, and flaps reveal the colourful emotions within. But what about a pink monster? Where does he belong?

Children will enjoy identifying with the monsters'

moods. Complex ideas are described and depicted in an imaginative and accessible way, and the text provides a thoughtful anchor for the high-spirited pop-ups.

Thinking and talking

How do you feel when you're angry, happy or sad? What makes you feel that way?

Which emotions are not included in this book? What colour are they? Describe them.

People don't change colour, so how do we know how they feel?

What's the story?

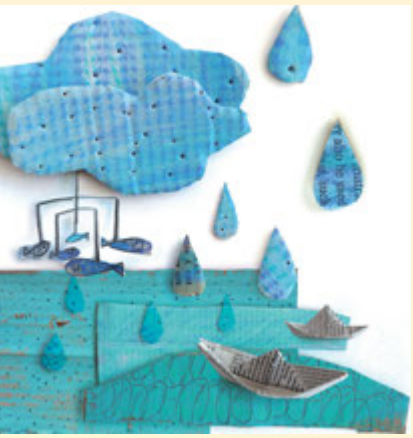
Did you know that problems come in many colours and sizes? They love setting traps and getting in your way – but don't worry, this book will tell you how to manage them! Brightly coloured illustrations play with the humorous rhyming text, taking the story somewhere fresh and new. There's plenty of zany fun here, but lots of common sense and powerful messaging, too.

Thinking and talking

Which is the friendliest looking problem? The funniest? The scariest? What kind of problems could they be? Have you ever had a problem? How did you deal with it?

Try this...

- Draw a problem-creature like the ones in this book. How does it behave? What would you say to it?
- Model your creature from plasticine. Create a Problem World landscape using fabric and other materials, then display your models.
- Try sending your real-world problems to join your creatures in Problem World!



Try this...

- Add scraps of fabric and painted papers to clear plastic bottles to make your own Colour Monster Jars. Label with the emotions they represent.
- Talk about times when you felt a particular emotion, then add your experience (in writing or pictures) to the matching jar. Are you missing any colours/emotions? Do you need more jars?

Illustrations: Anna Llenas

KEY STAGE 1

3 Baby Bird

BY ANDREW GIBBS AND ZOSIENKA (FRANCES LINCOLN FIRST EDITIONS)

What's the story?

Baby wants to fit in, but one of his wings is tiny and he can't fly. The irrepressibly cheerful Cooter offers to help, and Baby is put through rigorous activities. But nothing works until disaster strikes, when Baby discovers there's more than one way to reach his goal.

Told by a skilled storyteller with an understanding of performance and timing, Baby's emotional journey is convincingly portrayed and will strike a chord with anyone struggling against the odds. Zosienka's expressive illustrations have a real sense of movement, and unexpected viewpoints add to the drama.

How Baby learns to accept himself and reframe his ambitions without losing his courage or determination is a pleasure to share – and as a portrayal of true friendship, this book is pretty special, too.

Thinking and talking

What does Baby want at the outset? Why? What does he achieve by the end? Does it matter that he still can't fly?

What does Cooter do for Baby? Is he a good friend? What do you give your friends, and how do they help you?

Try this...

- Look at the pictures of Baby. Can you stand like him and copy his expressions? How do you think he's feeling? Use sticky notes to add words describing Baby's emotions to each spread.
- Make Baby and Cooter stick-puppets from card. Act out scenes from the story and invent new conversations. What do the friends like about each other?

Illustrations: Zosienka

4

KEY STAGE 1

Paper Planes

BY JIM HELMORE AND RICHARD JONES, (SIMON & SCHUSTER)

Illustrations: Richard Jones

What's the story?

Mia and Ben love making paper planes and dream about flying them across the lake. When Ben's family moves away, Mia feels abandoned and upset. Ben sends her a model plane, but Mia smashes it. Watching geese migrating leads her to dream about flying alongside, and when she wakes, she rescues and adapts Ben's model. It flies across the lake, just as they'd hoped, and the two children realise they can work together, even though they're apart.

There's a sense of straight-talking honesty about Jim Helmore's text that helps readers connect with the issues in this book. Complexity is acknowledged and there are no grand promises: progress is made through imaginative thoughtfulness, care and commitment. Sometimes our subconscious minds are better at solving problems than we expect, and allowing ourselves to rest or be playful can generate insights that really help.

Thinking and talking

Have any of your friends moved away? Do you miss them? What can you do to help someone who's missing a friend? How does Mia's dream help her? What problems does she address?

Try this...

- Dreaming is one way to connect with your intuitive self, but there are other ways to let your creative brain take over. Talk about playful, imaginative or relaxing things you could do instead of worrying and feeling sad.
- Fold some brightly coloured paper planes. Write your activity suggestions on them and hang your planes from the ceiling – or take them outside and see how far they'll fly!

KEY STAGE 1

5

When Sadness Comes to Call

BY EVA ELAND (ANDERSEN PRESS)

Illustrations: Eva Eland

What's the story?

A green blob is waiting at your door. It's Sadness – an unexpected visitor who drains the joy from every activity and "sits so close... you can hardly breathe". What's to be done when Sadness follows you around and just won't leave? As the child in this story discovers, Sadness may be unwelcome but ignoring him won't work. Much better to call him by his name and get to know him. You might even find a way of co-existing comfortably!

Not only does Eva Eland suggest practical action, she also manages to alter our perception of sadness and how we might react to it. This immensely engaging and expressive story will help children develop empathy and insight, as well as providing tools they can use for their own emotional wellbeing.

"The story alters our perception of sadness and how we might react to it"

"Write ideas on paper planes and hang from the ceiling"

Thinking and talking

What makes you sad? What does sadness feel like? What helps you feel better?
What does this book suggest that you and Sadness do together? Why? Could these activities help you feel better when you're sad?

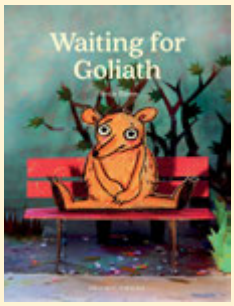
Try this...

- **Draw Sadness faces on green balloons. Ask children to care for their visitors, making sure the Sadnesses are safe. Cuddle them, ask them questions and listen to what they're telling you. Where have they come from? Why are they sad? Can you help them feel better? How?**
- **Draw a Sadness outline on a large piece of paper and colour it pale green. Within your outline, write how Sadness makes you feel. Around the outside, write or draw things you can do when Sadness come to visit, to help you (and him!) feel better.**

KEY STAGE 1

6 Waiting for Goliath

BY ANTJE DAMM (GECKO PRESS)



What's the story?

Bear is waiting for his friend Goliath. The seasons pass, but Goliath doesn't come. Should we worry? Or be optimistic, like Bear?
Bear is sleeping when a faint noise wakes him, "like a hand sliding across paper". Goliath has arrived at last... and he's a snail!

This touching story is more than a celebration of true friendship. It's a tribute to the power of optimism, hope and the value of living in the 'here and now'. Damm's carefully crafted text guides our reading of her photographs, which she created using hand-coloured cutouts.

Thinking and talking

How does Bear feel? Find textual and visual clues on each spread.

Have you ever waited a long time? Why? What happened? How did you feel?
How does Bear remain optimistic and patient? What can we learn from him?

Try this...

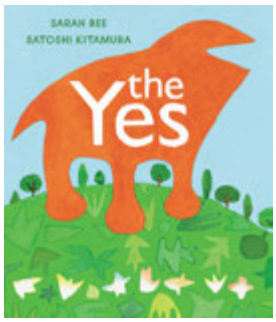
- **Sit a teddy on a chair, pretend he's Bear and interview him. How did he become friends with Goliath? What was Bear doing before he arrived at the bus stop? Why does he trust his friend? Suggest multiple answers and discuss. Re-read the story. Has your understanding of it changed?**
- **Paint a cutout Bear and stand him on a plain base. On it, write what Bear notices as he's waiting, together with things he does to enjoy the wait.**
- **Try some mindfulness activities yourself, paying attention to all your senses.**

Illustrations: Antje Damm

KEY STAGE 2

7 The Yes

BY SARAH BEE AND SATOSHI KITAMURA (ANDERSEN PRESS)



What's the story?

The Yes is a bright orange, endearingly lumpen creature trying to reach his destination – the Where. Leaving the safety of his nest, he forges a cheery path across the Here and Else, where swarms of irritating Nos get in his way.

But the Yes is so resilient and full of optimism that he is able to leave the No-ness and the Not-ness far behind, and reach the hillside of his dreams.

Bee's allusive, lyrical text is brought to life by Kitamura's arresting and deeply memorable artwork. There's more than a touch of the surreal to this book, and as a celebration of optimism and resilience, it's hard to beat.

Thinking and talking

Is this just a story about an imaginary journey, or does it have other meanings? What does it make you think about? What are the Nos? Was the Yes right to ignore them? Is the Yes being selfish? What if the Yes wanted something he really shouldn't have? Should he be stopped? Can you be too self-reliant and focused? When should other people have the power to intervene?

Try this...

- **Using a similar palette, paint landscapes inspired by those in this book. Cut an orange Yes-shape and place it in different positions on your landscape. Photograph your picture with and without the Yes. What does your Yes add to it? Think about colours, shapes, where your eye is led, how your artwork makes you feel...**
- **On the back of your Yes, write things that make you feel happy, optimistic or hopeful. Hinge-fix your Yes to your landscape, so people can read what you've written.**

8 Black Dog

KEY STAGE 2

BY LEVI PINFOLD (TEMPLAR)

Illustrations: Levi Pinfold

What's the story?

One morning, the Hope family wakes to discover a gigantic Black Dog peering through their windows. Terrified, they barricade themselves indoors, but the dog keeps growing. Then Small Hope wakes up. She's the youngest, and she isn't frightened. Girl and dog meet face-to-face outside to have fun in the snow – and that's when something even more remarkable occurs.

Pinfold's story borrows elements from folktale, although the telling is modern, and his richly-coloured tempera illustrations are full of quirky details. There's lots of depth here, with plenty to enjoy and unpick in both text and pictures – not least the question of the dog's identity.

Thinking and talking

Why does the dog change size? Who or what could it represent? What does fear feel like? Does everyone experience it the same way?

Why is Small Hope the only one to go outside? What is courage? Can you be courageous if you're not scared?

What have you done that was brave or showed courage? You can be brave about things no-one else notices, as well as daring deeds!

Try this...

- **Draw a black outline of a dog on a large sheet of paper. Inside it, write or draw your fears, worries and anxieties. Around the edge, record ideas for managing them. Who could help you? Are there practical actions you could take? Can you reframe your worries to make them seem smaller?**

9

KEY STAGE 2

Illustrations: Laura Carlin

The Space We're In

BY KATYA BALEN, ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA CARLIN (BLOOMSBURY)

What's the story?

Frank loves numbers, codes and thinking about the universe. He also loves his five-year-old brother Max, whose has autism. But everything's changing now Frank is in Year 6.

Told in Frank's own words, this engaging and searingly honest account of the year his mother dies is heartbreaking and uplifting. Written with insight, compassion and respect in a voice that doesn't falter, it enables readers to see the world through Frank's eyes and understand his experiences.

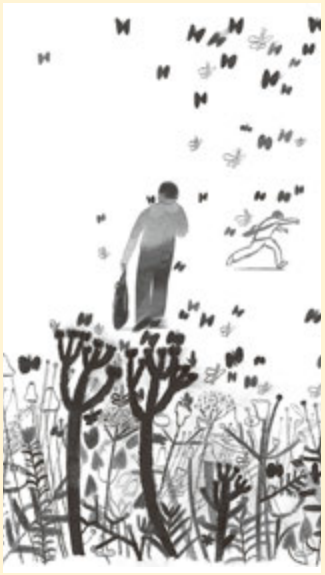
Black and white line drawings by Laura Carlin appear throughout, suggesting ideas and emotions and deepening the impact of the text.

Thinking and talking

What difficulties does Frank encounter in Year 6? How does he cope?

How do Frank, Dad and Max react when Mum dies? How do they get through the toughest times and face the future?

How did this book make you feel? What have you learned from it? Why does empathy matter? How can we develop (and use) it?



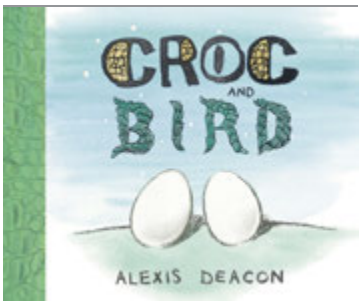
Try this...

- Discuss Noah's attitude to Max. How does Frank respond? What could your class do to ensure there are fewer people like Noah making life difficult for people like Frank and Max?
- Find out about neurodiversity. Discover what you can do to support people with autism, and those caring for them.

10

KEY STAGE 2

Illustrations: Alexis Deacon



Croc and Bird

BY ALEXIS DEACON (RANDOMHOUSE)

What's the story?

Two eggs are sitting on the lonely sand. From them hatch Croc and Bird, each with distinctive qualities but soon to be the best of friends despite their differences – until they discover a lake full of crocodiles by a forest full of birds, and decide to go their separate ways. Will they realise where true friendship lies before it's too late?

Deacon's illustrations are endearing and intriguing, with a sophisticated edge that appeals to older readers. There's an enjoyable undercurrent of humour in both images and text, with plenty of opportunities to find something extra that's not immediately apparent, and the story themes have universal resonance.

Thinking and talking

What does Crocodile want to do, and what does Bird suggest? How do they accommodate each other's differences? What do they learn from each other? How would you describe their friendship?

How are ideas of peer pressure and 'fitting in' presented in this book?

Who or what has influenced you? What have you learned, and how did you learn it? How can you find out who you really are?

Try this...

- Research two very different animals. Imagine them becoming friends, spending time together and learning from each other. Tell their story.
- Draw yourself in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Around yourself, create a spider diagram showing your family and friends, the things you're good at (and want to be good at), the things you enjoy and that matter to you, your hopes for the future, the people you admire.
- What does your diagram say about you? Does anything about it surprise you? Share your diagram with someone else. What have you learned about each other?

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

Don't stop at guided reading

Working in groups has its benefits, but a layered approach to whole-class reading is a highly effective way to improve fluency and comprehension for all pupils

Teaching reading is always a priority, but right now for so many children in our schools there is an even greater sense of urgency. And even before we entered these peculiarly challenging times, many schools had already started to re-examine whole-class reading as an alternative to the guided group approach.

Our experience is that children usually love it when it's their turn to participate in guided, group reading sessions with their teacher, but we've also observed the effectiveness of whole-class reading sessions; it makes us think of some wise words from the wonderful Nikki Gamble (co-author of *Guiding Readers – Layers of meaning*) - that guided reading is not a subject, it's a strategy we apply to reading. The same can be said for whole-class reading, one-to-one reading and every other permutation you can think of: all of them are tools that achieve slightly different things.

The perfect time for change

Right now, however, whole-class reading may just be the right tool for the job.

Many schools are having to find alternatives to close group work, and have arranged desks so that children are front-facing. Meanwhile, teachers everywhere are anxious to narrow gaps that have broadened over the last few months; often the response would be to group lower attaining pupils together during regular English sessions – inadvertently lowering expectations in our desire to help them.

Unfortunately, this can too often lead disadvantaged children into the "easy book trap", in which they are always kept together and only ever get to access books below age-appropriate levels.

In *Reading Reconsidered*, Lemov et al detail Layered Reading, followed by Close Reading, as the means by which we take children beyond the cosy read to the point of real challenge. That is precisely what we have experienced: the whole class accessing the same challenging text, with 'lower' readers answering questions brilliantly following multiple, layered reads, and the close analysis requiring all children – including the apparent high flyers – to root responses in evidence.

The key to this access to achievement is the layered reading approach, which we have detailed below. It's important to add, though, that some children may need additional support in order to access the text, and the best way of doing this is through pre-teaching of the text (the day before, or earlier the same day).

How layered reading works

Multiple reads (of the same piece of text) in different modes enables access and enhances comprehension at all levels. Here are some potential layers. You would never use all of these in a single session (research by Therrien suggests that after four reads, improvement in fluency can be minimal anyway), but rather select from them, as they each achieve slightly different things.

Layered reading works best when children have already achieved sound-letter correspondence and are able to blend.

Also remember that the overarching goal is understanding. After each layer, we like to have children discuss what more they have noticed in the text this time.

Model

Read the text to the class. The children should have access to it too, so they can follow it, but their main job is listening and

Online CPD for whole-class reading!

You can see exactly how this approach works in the classroom through a series of CPD videos on Plazoom, all of which are packed with practical suggestions.

Watch as Christine and Lindsay expertly demonstrate all the skills mentioned in this article with a Y4 class and get a great understanding of how to use these techniques to improve fluency and comprehension with your pupils.

Find over 60 CPD videos on plazoom.com/cpd-hub

FirstNews EDUCATION

INSPIRING LEARNING THROUGH
GLOBAL NEWS

GROW YOUR PUPILS' CORE SKILLS THROUGH NEWS-BASED LEARNING, FOR LESSONS, HOMEWORK AND REMOTE-TEACHING

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LEARNING BUILT AROUND GLOBAL NEWS

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*International Broadcasting Trust Report, Sophie Chalk, 2019

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Covering a vast range of stories from around the globe, First News cultivates a love of reading through growing each child's awareness of the world in which they are growing up. From politics to entertainment, sports to science and everything in between, First News upholds a balance between positive stories and hard-hitting news, inspiring young minds with fascinating facts and providing reassuring context to more complex topics. The need for young people to have access to a regular, reliable, age-appropriate source of news is more crucial than ever.

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"We have recorded a **notable improvement in both reading progress and attainment** in all year groups across the school. We believe the weekly use of First News as part of our learning journey is a significant contributing factor to this. Our pupils have an increasing awareness of the wider world and we feel that **our work with First News is helping us to give them the exposure to current world news that they need**, particularly as we prepare our Year 6 pupils for their transition to secondary school. Pupils say they enjoy reading the newspaper each week and we have a waiting list of pupils who would like to be part of the editorial team which suggests that First News has been a real inspiration."

Gemma Hall, Assistant Head Teacher (Writing Leader), Portway Primary School, London

PRINT NEWSPAPER

- Delivered every Friday during term-time
- Subscriptions start from £54/year
- 40 issues in the year

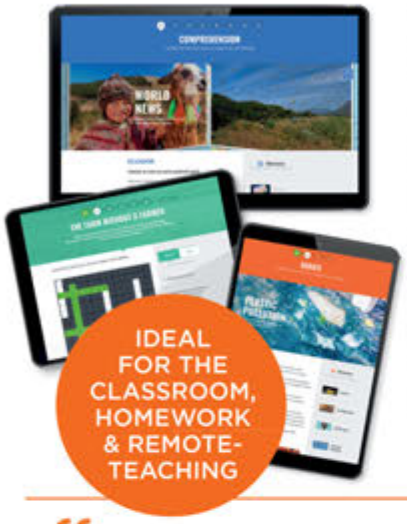
*Source: Opinion Matters Survey 2020

FOR CLASS AND REMOTE-TEACHING

VISIT SCHOOLS.FIRSTNEWS.CO.UK/DISCOVER

iHUB

THE INTERACTIVE NEWS AND LITERACY PLATFORM



The Bett award-winning iHub delivers weekly comprehensions, vocabulary puzzles, polls and debate topics based on the latest stories in the newspaper.

Each week, articles from First News are selected by our experienced education team to form online reading activities for Lower KS2, Upper KS2 and KS3. The iHub automatically tailors these at the reading level assigned to each pupil, saving teachers valuable time and enabling students to learn at the right pace. The platform can be customised to suit your lesson and homework plans, including the choice to select or automatically assign activities to complete each week. A reporting dashboard offers insight into pupil progress, helping you to drive motivation through rewarding achievements and identify where extra support may be needed.

Being entirely online, the iHub is an ideal tool for both remote-teaching and lessons in school, allowing teachers to switch seamlessly between the two.

> "The First News iHub, and its accompanying print newspapers, are something we now couldn't be without; we feel we would be doing our students a disservice by not opening up such opportunities to read and engage with the news. **Through the iHub, we have seen some of our most reluctant readers of fiction become some of our most avid readers of news**, with an increasing confidence to express opinions about the issues that concern them and their futures."

Richard Long, English Lead Practitioner, St Michael's Catholic School, Buckinghamshire

ACTIVITY SHEETS

PRINTABLE READING ACTIVITIES IN THREE LEVELS

Activity Sheets are weekly comprehensions, vocabulary puzzles, debates and quizzes based on delving into the week's news stories in First News. They are accessible online and sent via email every Friday during term time.

Created in three reading levels for Lower KS2, Upper KS2 and KS3, Activity Sheets deliver fully prepared lesson content every week. With the flexibility to assign the most suitable level for whole classes or individuals, these resources support you in developing children's skills in the most applicable way to achieve the best results. Activity Sheets support teachers and pupils to:

- Enhance reading comprehension skills, including developing vocabulary in context; identifying facts and opinions; summarising information; inferring ideas and finding evidence; identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning; identifying themes; understanding writer's intent; scanning to retrieve information
- Build topical knowledge of global news, linking to other subjects across the curriculum
- Grow confidence in expressing views, while appreciating and respecting those of others
- Develop understanding of newspaper traditions and journalistic writing

> "The activities are immensely interesting to the children, varied and educationally valuable. It's the **best classroom resource I have ever come across** in my 27 years of teaching."

Deborah Fitzpatrick, Deputy Head Teacher and SENDCo, Saint Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wythenshawe

noticing both what it is about, and how it is being read. The model read provides children with both an opportunity to concentrate on understanding without decoding, and an idea of what it is meant to sound like. Adult modelling of reading plays an important role in improving children's fluency.

Choral

The class reads chorally. This can be harder than you might guess; it often takes practice. Use your own voice to steer the expression and drive the correct pace. Move around to stand closer to individuals who are going too fast or who are opting out. This mode provides fluency practice for every child with the support of the teacher (as expert reader) as well as the support of their peers in the room. Every child has the opportunity to practise appropriate intonation and expression and to build the capacity to read phrases as units of meaning, rather than just individual words.

Echo

You read a sentence from the text, or a short section of it, and the class immediately re-reads it, trying to sound as you did. At whole-class level, this works particularly well for tackling long and / or tricky sentences – bits that have to be read correctly in order to convey meaning. Again, the main focus is developing fluency – but in this instance, that in itself may help with comprehension. Echo reading can also make for an effective catch-up intervention strategy for individuals / a group for whom fluency is an issue. Research (Adams 1990; NRP, 2000; Therrien, 2004) shows that re-reading facilitates growth in reading fluency.

Jump in

A combination of model and choral reading: you read, give an audible signal (a clap or finger click) and the whole class should take over from there. This process can be repeated – the idea is that children don't know when they will need to take over, so they have to track the text as you read. It's a fun way of increasing engagement, but again, you may need to move around to stand near certain children. Encouraging peer support for when a place is lost is a good idea, too.

Paired

After (at least) a model read, the children read the text together, taking turns to read each sentence (or whatever quantity you set). This works really well with near-ability or mixed pairing, so stronger readers can help partners. This is a big step towards independence and ownership of the reading process.

Pick up

This is the hardcore version of Jump In that worries some teachers but – in our experience so far – seems to thrill children: you model read to a point and then ask a specific named child to take over individually; then repeat with different children. They don't know when or if their name will be called, so they all have to listen and track the text carefully! The key here is to plan: who would be good at this part? Would this bit be too hard for this child?

You can annotate your copy of the text with children's names, so it isn't random (though they must experience it as exactly that)...and never ask a child who you feel sure will fail in front of the class. You can differentiate with the relative challenge of different sentences, and you can support further with pre-teaching (where possible) for those who need it. The key is to not tell children how long they will be reading for – that way, you can bail out a struggler without embarrassing them by stopping them early.

Close reading

This is the analysis of text – line-by-line and sometimes word-by-word – that really teaches children how to comprehend, and in particular, how to combine pieces of retrieved evidence with prior knowledge and experience to make inferences. It is the asking of many little questions to check and develop understanding before we get to the Big Questions; often, it involves the articulation of your own thought-processes. Close Reading needn't be applied to the entire piece of text you have been reading – maybe just a particularly tricky couple of sentences. It definitely works best when preceded by multiple layered reads.

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton work with schools in the UK and internationally to improve English teaching (primaryeducation advisors.co.uk).

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Jenny, Year 2 teacher

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5 REASONS TO TRY...

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)

Louise Johns-Shepherd, CLPE's chief executive and former headteacher, discusses how CLPE can improve literacy learning in your school

30 SECOND BRIEFING

The CLPE is a UK based literacy charity working with primary schools. Its work raises the achievement of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning.

1 EXPERT TRAINING

CLPE provides a wide range of professional literacy training at an affordable price, at our Centre in London and across the country. Investment in our training means you are accessing sound pedagogy based on extensive research and best practice. CLPE offers both face to face and online training. Find out more about our 2020/2021 course programme on our website.

2 TEACHING PLANS

Power of Reading Membership provides inspiration and structure for your primary literacy curriculum based on high quality books. Membership gives your whole school access to detailed literacy planning for more than 220 high-quality children's books, 1,500 examples of classroom practice, curriculum maps and home learning resources, helping schools to raise literacy standards and develop a love of reading and writing throughout their school.

3 FREE RESOURCES

CLPE is a charity and we want all schools to benefit from our work. We create a range of free resources including teaching plans, poet and author videos and activities to use at home. All of these are all based on credible research and on the principles of effective continuing professional development. Teachers and schools who learn from our work raise the achievement and attainment of their children in literacy in an effective and sustainable way. Our expert teaching team is constantly adding new free resources to our website to engage and inspire young readers and writers.

Contact:
clpe.org.uk
marketing@clpe.org.uk

CLPE is an independent charity with a national and international reputation, a huge purpose and the potential to reach thousands of children.

4 LITERACY RESEARCH

CLPE has made a substantial contribution to practice and theory in literacy teaching through its research and development projects since the Centre was founded in 1972. CLPE courses, conferences, training and resources are based on and share our research and the well-evidenced research of others in the field of education and literacy. Our most recent research reports include the ground-breaking Reflecting Realities research – a survey of ethnic representation within UK children's literature and our 2019 Power of Pictures report on the impact of picture books on children's writing.

5 CELEBRATING POETRY

The CLiPPA (Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award) is the only award for published poetry for children in the UK. Established in 2003, the annual Poetry Award encourages and celebrates outstanding poetry published for children. Alongside the award CLPE runs a schools shadowing scheme that promotes the teaching of poetry in schools and encourages children to perform poetry.

CLPE's Impact on Schools

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Taking T4W Across the CURRICULUM

Pie Corbett's approach has helped countless schools transform the way they teach writing - but it needn't stop there, explains **Julia Strong**...

All learning is based on moving from imitation to innovation to independent application – which is why these three stages underpin Pie Corbett's *Talk for Writing* approach. Of course, many primary schools already use this method to help support children's writing in English, but, excitingly for any literacy coordinator, it can be easily adapted to support learning in any subject. This article briefly shows you how, focusing on a Y6 maths unit on decimals by Tracey Adams, deputy headteacher and maths lead at St Matthew's, Birmingham. Because maths is clearly a very different subject from English, it's a good test of the flexibility of the approach.

Baseline assessment

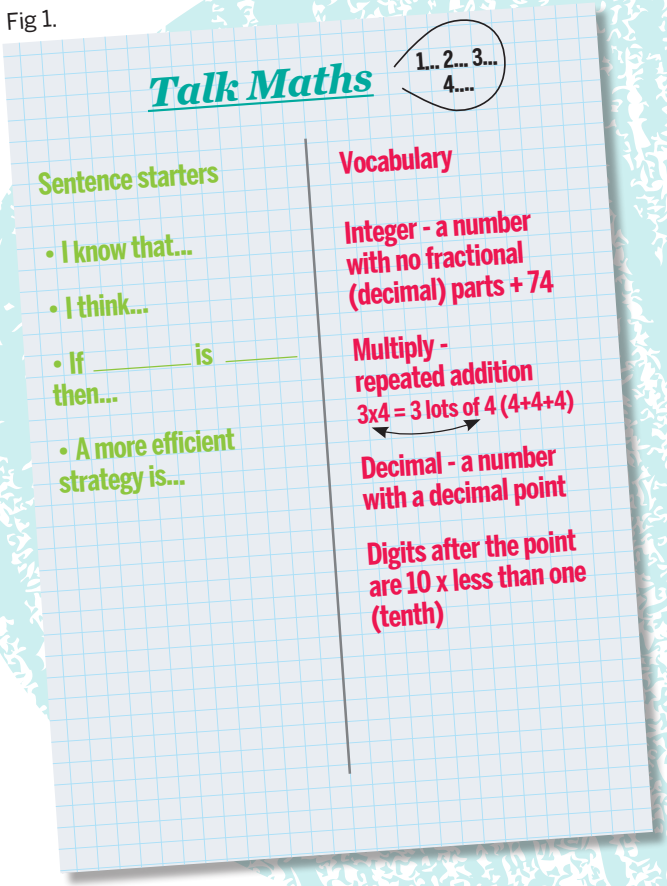
Whatever you are teaching, it's good to begin by establishing a baseline (known as the cold task) of what the children already know about what you are trying to teach. In this maths unit, Tracey linked in the cold task to each of the four objectives of the unit. As she explains, "This is a brilliant approach because, prior to using cold tasks, I would have been in the dark about what children were capable of doing. Now, both the children and I are clear about what they are good at and their next steps, and what will need to be covered in depth as the unit progresses."

The imitation stage

To write a story, you've got to be able to talk the text, so that you can say the words in your head and decide on the order and which words fit best. And in fact, the same is true of any other subject: it's just that the tune of the text is likely to be very different. In effect, the children have got to be able to start thinking and talking like a historian, a scientist, a mathematician, etc. In every case, though, talking your way to understanding will always be key.

"In every case, talking your way to understanding will always be key"

Fig 1.



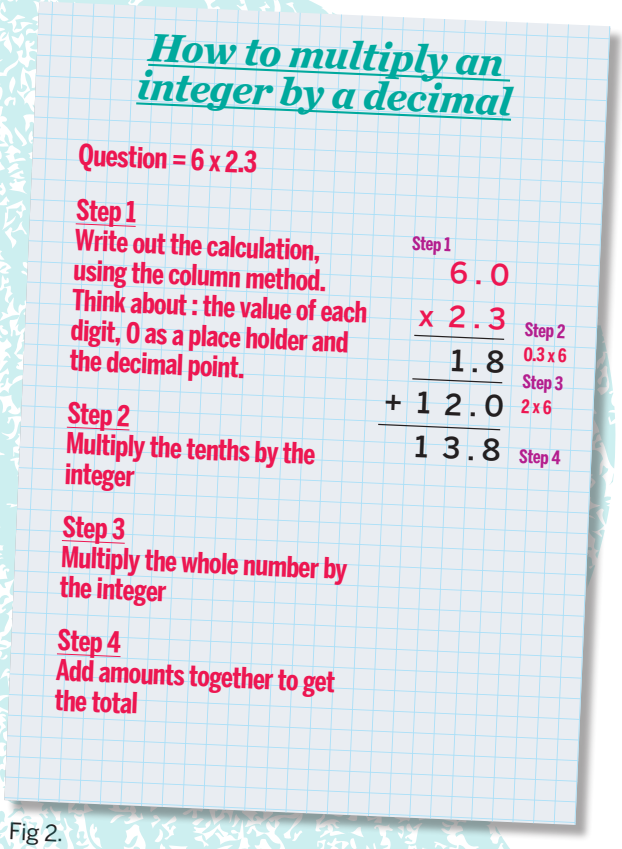


Fig 2.

• **Warming up the vocabulary and the key signposts:** In any unit, it is therefore essential that the children understand the underpinning vocabulary plus the key sentence signposts that bring coherence to the subject. In a story, this might be *Once upon a time*, *Later that day*, etc, but every subject has its own key signposts that glue the meaning together. Tracey uses talk frames, just as you might in English, but in maths they are there to help the children explain and reason - with one column for the sentence starters: *I know that ...*; *I think ...*; and another column for key vocabulary like *integer* and *multiply*, as shown in fig 1., above, to ensure the children's responses are specific and focused. Tracey feels these have revolutionised her teaching because she can now prompt the children to expand on any one-word responses – the frame enables them to structure their answers in a reasoned way.

• **Text maps:** Just as a text map can be used in English to help children internalise the underpinning tune of a story, in maths a text map tunes children into the key vocabulary and ideas which can then be referred to and built upon throughout the unit.

• **Boxing up the model:** Now, the teacher can model how to answer the questions and help the children build a toolkit of each thing that needs to be done, boxing this up in the order in which it should be done, so that each step is clear, as demonstrated in fig 2. This provides the children with a plan of how to set about solving the problem. Tracey explains that she writes the boxed-up toolkit in full sentences, "because the discussions that we have had to co-construct the steps would have taken place in sentences. Talking and writing in this way supports a child's mathematical thinking and conceptual understanding."

The innovation stage

Once children have understood the underlying process, it can be innovated on through shared calculating, by looking at a range of similar questions. The teacher can discuss with the children and demonstrate how to solve the problems. Crucially, the children can now explain the process, using the talk frame to help them talk their way to real understanding.

The independent stage

Just as in English the children would now write their own version of the story independently, in maths, they can now answer similar problems independently and reflect on the progress they have made.

For a handout that will help you apply the approach to any unit, please visit bit.ly/trwt4wunit.

If you are interested in learning more about this, see Pie and Julia's new book, Transforming Learning Across the Curriculum, available from talkforwritingshop.com

Former English teacher and deputy headteacher Julia Strong is now deputy director of Talk for Writing and is well known as an inspiring trainer for both primary and secondary schools

Books that build LITERACY

Want pupils to become keen readers and writers? Create your English curriculum around rich texts...

There are plenty of ways to build an effective and inspiring English curriculum in primary school and, quite rightly, every school adopts a slightly different way of organising all of the things they'd like children to learn and experience. One approach to curriculum planning that has grown in popularity once more over recent years is text-based planning: a model that puts books, poetry, and playscripts at the heart of the curriculum.

In a text-based curriculum, the elements that make up good English teaching – reading, writing, discussion, drama, learning about how language works – are all organised through the use of rich texts.

Broaden vocabulary

There are many reasons for organising your curriculum around texts. Firstly, the language used in written texts tends to be very different to that of spoken language. We're far more likely to encounter words that will broaden our vocabulary and allow us to express ourselves in different ways when we read or are read to. This might be through meeting some of the formal language of the classroom but is also some of the poeticised language that can be found in fiction. We might read: "The beast reared up in front of him and lurched forward, its talons out-stretched." This isn't the sort of language we use in day-to-day conversations. And the benefits are not limited to words themselves; the syntax and grammatical forms in written texts are often different too. They're more complicated and draw on a richer variety of forms. If we want children to be able to use these forms of language in their speech and writing, we can help by introducing them through regular interaction with great texts.

The second reason goes beyond language. Texts are receptacles to pass on other people's thoughts. Books are full of new knowledge and ideas that pass from the writer to the reader. It might be a fascinating fact about volcanoes from a non-fiction book or an insight into ambition and the ability of power to corrupt from a retelling of *Macbeth*. Books and poems introduce children to ideas that they haven't encountered before, broadening their experience and helping them to grow. This is what makes English as a subject different from literacy.

Thirdly, the stories and the characters that they meet in books allow readers to make sense of the world and understand their own place within it. The US academic Rudine Sims Bishop famously wrote about books as 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors':

"Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books."

The texts children read help them to navigate the world and that, to me, seems like a good reason to feed as many as we can into our curriculum design.

Getting lost

The final reason for giving children the chance to listen to, read, and talk about wonderful texts goes far beyond education. Reading might be good for the brain, but it's also good for the soul. Exciting stories, humorous poems or fascinating non-fiction are fun. While many children will be lucky enough to discover the pleasure that comes from getting lost in a good book, others won't. If those children don't have the chance to be immersed in books at school; if they don't meet a wide range of great texts and slowly form their own opinions and develop their own tastes, it might be that they never find the world of books and reading. All of the enjoyment and

pleasure will be lost to them. For me, that's the strongest argument for putting rich texts at the centre of the primary English curriculum.

Of course, adopting a text-based approach doesn't preclude making use of other curriculum drivers too. You might choose to use a model where your English lessons are sometimes based on an exciting class novel or fascinating non-fiction text and sometimes based on another stimulus, like what is happening in the news or on a shared experience such as an educational visit. And sometimes you might take the children's enthusiasms and interests as your starting point. With curriculum planning, as with everything else in education, the trick is to be clear about what you're trying to achieve, decide on the approach that best matches that, and then tailor that approach to the needs of your children.

"Reading might be good for the brain, but it's also good for the soul"

Whatever approach you opt for, carefully-chosen picturebooks, novels, multimedia texts, poetry and non-fiction can play a key role in a rich English curriculum, providing both a model for children's learning and a way of capturing their interest and providing motivation in the classroom.

Six great texts to use in class

Everyone has their favourite texts to use in the primary classroom, but here are six that I think every child deserves to meet as they pass through primary school. I could just as easily have chosen 60!

Clockwork by Philip Pullman

Perfect storytelling without a single wasted word.

Varjak Paw by SF Said

A captivating plot, beautiful writing and full of wisdom.

Good Little Wolf by Nadia Shireen

Funny, clever and, oh, the twist at the end!

Night of the Gargoyles by Eve Bunting and David Wiesner

Rich, poetic language accompanied by atmospheric illustrations make this the perfect choice to share across school.

Brenda is a Sheep by Morag Hood

Funny and inventive, it will delight the whole of KS1.

The Murderer's Ape by Jakob Wegelius

A unique book that manages to be both a page-turning thriller and a deeply reflective and thoughtful book full of ideas.

James Clements is an education writer and the author of Teaching English by the Book (Routledge), a guide to creating a text-based primary curriculum. @mrjclements, shakespeareandmore.com

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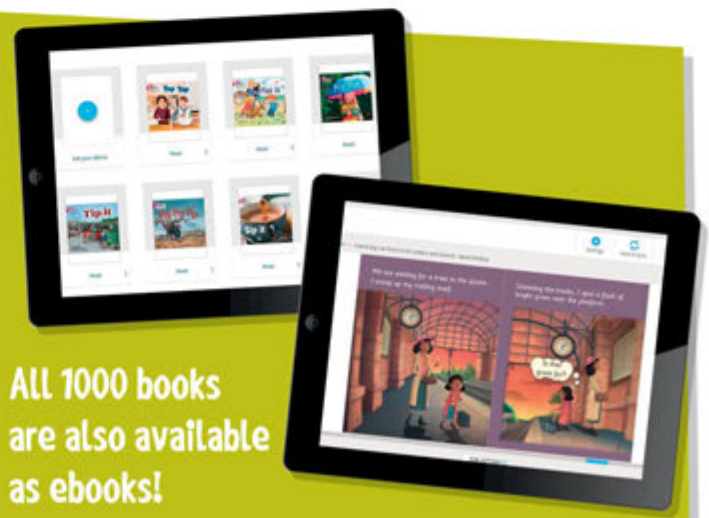

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*Competition is open to schools only. Closes midnight 31/10/2020. The winners will be notified by 6/11/2020.

Podcast

Writing Compelling Non-fiction, with *Professor Robert Winston*

Play the podcast, share the teaching sequence – and inspire amazing writing from every pupil...

Great non-fiction writing doesn't just depend on knowing the subject; successful writers need to know their audience as well, ensuring that they share their ideas in a clear, engaging and interesting way. And that's harder than it sounds.

Whom better to learn this tricky skill from than Professor Robert Winston, a scientist, writer and broadcaster whose experience in sharing difficult ideas both on television and in his writing is second to none? In this teaching sequence, children will follow the process of researching, planning and writing a piece of non-fiction writing, keeping their audience in mind all the time. Extracts from Plazoom's Author In Your Classroom podcast (series one, episode six) are used to support each section; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (**bit.ly/AIYCRWinston**) as an introduction.

INITIAL PLANNING

Before you start, decide how you will organise your class for this writing project. Will you create a whole-class book on a single topic, with each pupil contributing a page on an aspect that interests them? Perhaps you might divide the class into small groups, each collaborating on a single book? Or you may simply want every child to prepare a non-fiction page independently. Topics could be linked to something you are learning about in class, or follow children's own interests. Whichever approach you choose, giving children choice over what they write about is important.

SESSION 1

CHOOSING A TOPIC TO WRITE ABOUT

1 | Listen to the section of the podcast that starts at **23.22** until **24.45** and ask children to summarise Robert's key messages here: that it is important to choose something you are interested in to write about and the importance finding a 'hook', a little interesting something that brings the writing to life and engages the reader. Ask the children if they can think of any other non-fiction writing that shares an interesting idea or fact that has grabbed their attention. It might be something fascinating, funny or downright disgusting!

2 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **02.29** until **04.47**. Ask the children why they think Robert Winston chose to write about inventors.

3 | Working in pairs or small groups, ask the children to list what they think the attributes of good non-fiction writing are and then share these as a class. Are there many on which they all agree?

4 | Share the following list and ask children to comment on why each one might not make for good non-fiction writing. Ask the children to think about what the author might have to do in each case to make their writing more engaging for the reader:

- *A book about a really interesting animal written by a scientist using very long words and complicated language*
- *A book about a famous scientist that lots of people have written about many times before.*
- *A book about Ancient Greece that is very easy to read and gives you just the main facts you need to know.*

Illustrations: Jessamy Hawke

SESSION 2

RESEARCHING THEIR TOPIC

1 | Organise the children into the groups that they will be working in and make sure they are clear about the topic they will be writing about. Then ask children to think about where they can find information: online, books, interviewing/asking people etc.

2 | Give children time over several sessions to gather the information they need, recording their ideas on big sheets of paper, in their books, or using the planning sheet included in the free resources pack available from Plazoom (see panel, below).

3 | Once they have collected their information, ask children to discuss their findings in their groups or with a partner, sharing their findings and making sure there won't be too much repetition across their sections if they are collaborating.

SESSION 3

TELLING STORIES IN NON-FICTION

1 | Play the section of the podcast from **05.52** until **07.35**.

2 | Ask the children to recap why Robert Winston thinks that telling a story might be a useful skill in non-fiction writing. Ask the children to think about how this relates to his earlier points about finding quirky or funny ideas to bring non-fiction writing to life.

3 | Play the section of the podcast from **08.04** to **11.10** where Robert Winston reads aloud (in the resources pack, the extract is also available as a PDF and PowerPoint slides – see panel). Ask the children to listen and jot down examples of where the text includes quirky facts or interesting parts of Alexander Graham Bell's life. Share these as a class. How engaging is the extract overall? How do the details from Alexander's early life help to explain his later life and inventions?

4 | As a class, share the idea that when writing about a character from history, organising the text as a story can be quite straightforward – the author is sharing the story of their life. Ask the children if it would be as easy to organise every non-fiction topic as a story. Share the following examples and ask which ones might work best when written as a story and how they might do it:

- *The life of an Egyptian pharaoh*
- *How the water cycle works*
- *Information about the Amazon River*
- *Climate change*
- *Healthy eating and why different foods are important*

5 | Ask the children to work individually or in pairs to organise the information they have found into a narrative structure.

SESSION 4

WRITING THEIR NON-FICTION PAGES

1 | Discuss the importance of tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and formal language (including precise verbs) when creating compelling non-fiction (explain how it helps convey authority and makes the writer sound well-informed; someone worth listening to). Ask children to jot down some words they could use to help their own writing sound authoritative.

2 | Draw their attention to some of the other features of clear, engaging non-fiction writing, including:

- Using simple everyday language, rather than complicated technical terms. Where technical terms are used, simple explanations should be given.
- Using pictures or diagrams with annotations to draw attention to important information.
- Using short paragraphs, each about one idea or part of the story to break the text up.
- A mixture of longer and shorter sentences, each focusing on one idea.

3 | Now children can write their own non-fiction pages, drawing on what they have learnt across the sessions, including:

- Telling a story to engage their reader.
- Including quirky, funny or memorable facts.
- 'Thinking simply' – explaining their ideas in easy-to-understand language, not using too much technical language.
- Using some more formal language (e.g. precise verbs) to convey a sense of authority.

4 | Once the children have finished their writing, ask them to share their work with a partner, who can help them to look at it with fresh eyes and to make any changes. Finally, the children can work to prepare their writing for publication.

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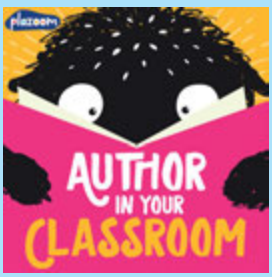

To download a full set of FREE resources for this teaching sequence – including planning sheets, teaching slides, themed writing paper and more – visit bit.ly/AIYCRWresourcepack. To subscribe for free, just search for 'Author In Your Classroom' wherever you get your podcasts!

What are YOU?

Pie Corbett's playful poem and activities celebrate the power of imagination

You are a lost glove
found on a path to nowhere,
like a stranded starfish.

You are a meaningful mirror
cracked as a tarantula's web
bringing 7 years of misfortune.

You are the sun shining
on Jack's axe blade
as it slices the stalk.

You are a Siamese cat
curled asleep
like a calm question mark.

You are the smell of an orange
hidden in a teacher's pocket.

You are in Manchester, waiting
on a rainy Saturday for sunlight.

You are a glass statue
trapped in a cage of elephants.

You are the sound of
a silent scream
echoing between heartbeats.

You are the memory of
my Granny Pointon's cold, thin hand
clutched tight.

You are the distance between
a friend's smile and a bully's sneer.
You are the taste of a tear
smudging a sad faced clown.

You are a poem
screwed into a tight fist.

You are number 6
with a snail's back.

You are a peach
like a lost, soft planet.

You are in the wolf's eye
and the deer's pause.

You are the impossibility of
soft concrete,
a cold sun,
a loud sneeze
& dry water.

You are the guilt we feel
like the ribs of a starving child.

You are Sunday morning
opening its eyes and grinning.

You are a toe tipping tap dance.

You are at the rainbow's end,
waiting patiently
for what will never arrive.

You are hiding in a cave
watching a spinning wheel weave
petrified dreams.

You are a forgotten wish,
abandoned at the roadside.

You are the victim
of a sunflower's grin.

You are the taste
of words like lemons,
the sun yellow of a canary
but sharp as vinegar.

You are December
with a cold nose, frozen toes
and one star above.

You are Horseshoe lake
laced with stars
like silver salmon scales.

You are the 8th invisible ring
of Saturn.

You are as
slow as a stone,
as quick as a card trick,
and quiet as moss growing.

You are the girl who became
a glowing shadow,
and the boy who became
a frozen flame.

You are the poem's threads,
tied neatly together like a shoelace.

You are the end.

DOWNLOAD PIE'S POEM FOR FREE AT www.teachwire.net/whatareyou

Getting imaginative

I first read this writing idea in a poem called 'What you are' by Roger McGough, which you can find in his Collected Poems. I tried a simple version with my first class and ever since have been using the approach to liberate the imagination.

Read and respond

Read through the poem fluently and expressively. Begin with a discussion of preferences – which sections do they like or dislike and why. The aim of this initial discussion is to get them digging deeper into the poem, thinking about its effect on them as readers and the images and ideas it creates. To generate thinking, use a variety of prompts such as:

- Which ideas are the most surprising and why?
- Which ideas interest you the most and why?
- Which idea is the cleverest / funniest and why?
- Find and explain the hardest idea.

Create a simple display by asking the class to choose and illustrate their favourite ideas. Model how to write a short paragraph about a verse of their choosing, using a simple framework, e.g. "I like the verse about the wolf's eye. The poet is suggesting that the wolf has seen the deer and the deer is aware of the wolf so it pauses. It describes a tense moment that might lead to life or death." Finally, split the class into groups so that each has a section of the poem, then work towards a whole-class performance.

Analyse the poem

Once everyone has had time to discuss and think about the poem, begin to analyse the various techniques children could use in their writing. This could involve a quick discussion and then immediately modelling, with the class joining in before they write several examples using a similar approach.

It's easy enough to spot obvious techniques such as using alliteration, or a simile with 'like' or 'as' to make a comparison. Look for playful juxtapositions of ideas such as 'silent scream' or 'soft concrete'. Note too, the way in which the poem 'names' things – Granny Pointon's hand, Horseshoe lake, Siamese cat and Manchester (rather than city). Encourage children to draw on places and objects in their locality by making a class list of possibilities.

How about setting the class challenges, such as having to include a character from a fairy tale, an animal, a fruit or flower, a city, town or village name, a number, a day or the week or month, a planet or an abstract noun (guilt)? These provide a range of possible prompts that may trigger ideas rather than a checklist of things that must be included.

Some of the verses have a useful phrase that can be borrowed such as 'you are the taste of, the smell of, the sound of', all of which draw on the senses. You might also try using other phrases such as 'you are the memory of, the impossibility of, the distance between'.

Creative alphabets

Before leaping into writing, warm up the imagination and get ideas buzzing with a word race. This could be played solo or in pairs. The children have a set time limit, five minutes or less, to complete an alphabet of objects or animals. Use a simple alphabet grid to help (see below).

With younger pupils, this could be done as a class. The aim is to produce a bank of possibilities for writing. With older children, create a list of abstract nouns, e.g. animosity, bravery, calm, danger.

Likes and dislikes

Try playing 'What I like about'. In this game, the children are given several minutes to make a list of things that they like. If pupils find generating ideas difficult, do this as a whole-class brainstorm. They then have to write what they like about their chosen ideas using the formula below. Model a few on the board before they write:

What I like about frogs is their trampoline legs.
What I love about clouds is their ever-changing pattern.
What I love about bridges is their curved spine.
What I like about sunlight is its warming touch.

You could also do the same with 'What I dislike about'.

Class poetry writing

By now, the class should have generated a large number of ideas from the games and by looking at the different possible challenges and techniques used in the poem. Begin by creating a class version using shared writing. Draw on the techniques, challenges and ideas that have been listed. Try to avoid modelling over-writing – where the children add in too many adjectives or show off by using fancy language that they do not comprehend. Model at a good pace for about 10 to 15 minutes, to make sure the children understand the challenge. Get them joining in. Be very explicit that this poem is not to rhyme.

Once they seem to be bursting with ideas, move into independent writing.

Alphabet	Animal	Object
a	ant	alarm
b	bear	bridge
c	cat	car
d	dingo	dust

Set them a time challenge of about 10 to 15 minutes and encourage them to write 'hard and fast', silently and in a concentrated manner.

Tim was eight years old when he wrote this response in about 10 minutes. Notice how each idea and word is carefully chosen for effect. He changes 'you are' to 'he is'. Apart from several repetitions (sharp/golden) that could be attended to, there are five interesting ideas, each one developed.

He is a misty cloud that floats through a bewildered sky.
He is in swirling smoke that bows at his honour.
He is in a sharp flash of fierce lightning.
He is in the sharp blade of a golden knife.
He is a buzzing fly that shimmers in a golden web.

This approach to poetry is playful and yet is also a serious challenge. It can be met at a very simple level and can also be tackled with sophistication and originality. The children will all succeed at their own level, begin to grow a sense of confidence in themselves as writers, and start to develop some new techniques. Alongside this, they will get a sense that writing is a way to play with the world around them; and everyone should be able to have their imagination celebrated.

"The children will succeed at their own level and begin to grow in confidence as writers"

***PIE CORBETT** is an education consultant, poet and author known for Talk for Writing. His most recent book is Transforming Learning across the Curriculum (talkforwritingshop.com).*

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8

Dive & swoop

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6

8 ways to build better SENTENCES

Give children's writing an extra level of sophistication, with these great teaching ideas from **Zoë and Timothy Paramour**...

Phrases are the building blocks that make up sentences. Sort of like word LEGO(™). And who doesn't love Lego? We use the word 'phrase' informally to refer to any short example of language. 'What a lovely turn of phrase,' we might say, or 'Let me rephrase this.' Indeed, a phrase is a very useful unit of language for teaching children about editing and improving their writing. In a sentence like 'The cat sat on the mat', I have the beginnings of three phrases, which I can expand infinitely: 'My grandma's ginger cat had sat down contentedly on the large, grey mat.' By seeing the phrases in their sentences, and editing them one at a time, your pupils will be able to improve and enhance their own writing – saving you an awful lot of work! According to the National Curriculum, phrases should be introduced in Year 2, starting with noun phrases. The other phrases covered in the following teaching ideas are all part of the current Key Stage 2 curriculum.

1 Write a noun phrase

Create a set of noun cards – these could be linked to a topic you are studying, or children's interests. Alternatively, there is a set available to download for free at bit.ly/trwnouncards. Each child is to take a card, stick it in their book and come up with as many different noun phrases as they can for that noun. For example:

Castle

The oldest castle in Britain

The cold and draughty castle

The looming castle

His favourite castle

The Queen's castle

A full set of noun cards could be:

pigeon	castle	cat
pirate	apple	bear
girl	teacher	baby
parrot	cheese	tree
garden	photograph	play

2 Describe the picture

Show your class a variety of images and ask them to describe them to a partner. Then get them to choose one image to stick in their book to generate noun phrases about. The website onceuponapicture.co.uk has an excellent collection of images for this activity in its 'Character Collection'.

3 How/when/where did they do it?

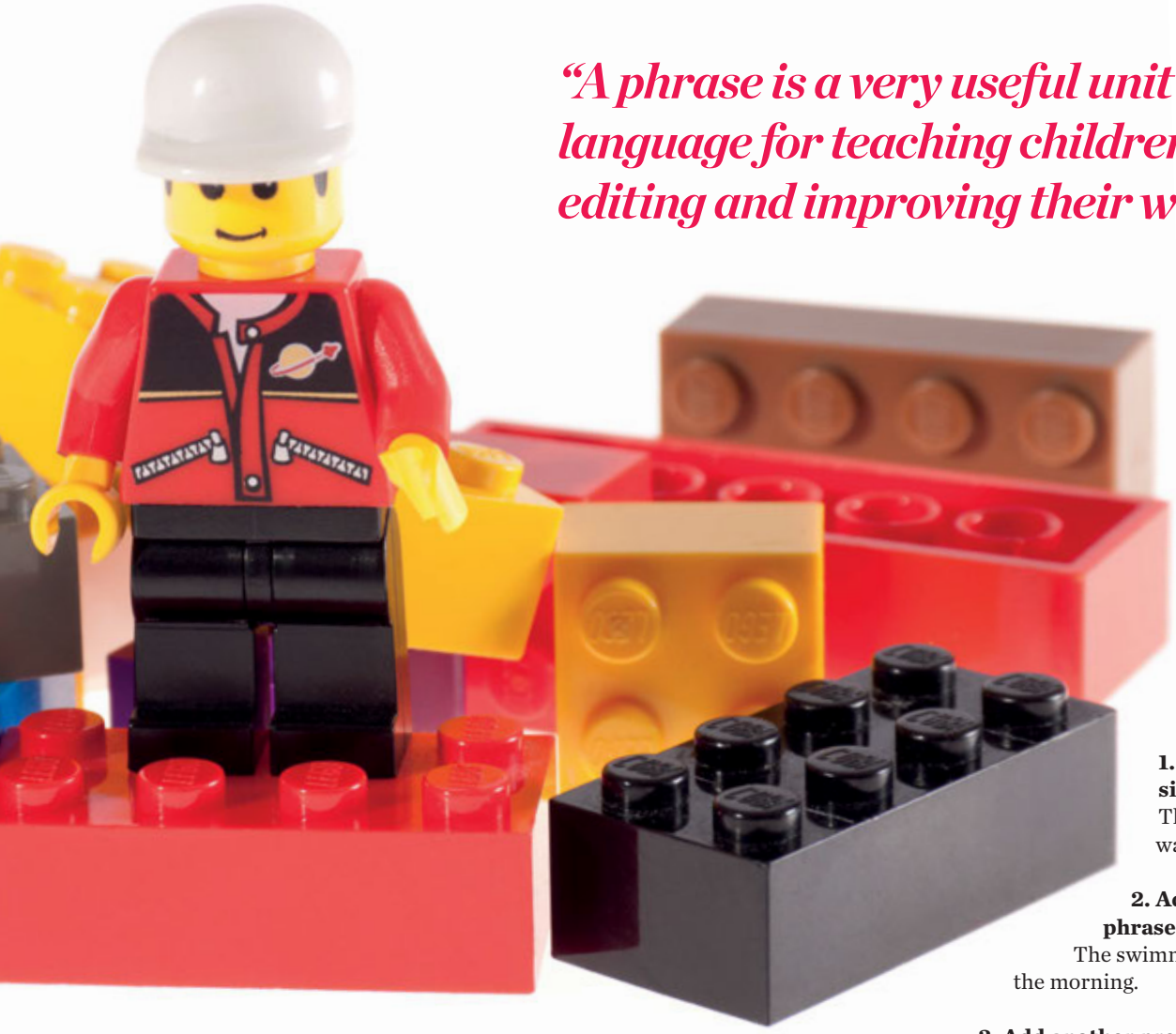
This is an activity for teaching adverbial phrases. Give out the following list of simple sentences and ask your class to add a relevant adverbial phrase to each one. They can decide whether to put the phrase at the beginning or at the end of the sentence. Choose a few children to share their finished work and discuss the decisions they made.

The dog dribbled.
The rocket landed.
I drove my car.
She opened the door.
He jumped over the hurdle.
The llama licked its lips.
They played a board game.
We went out for dinner.

4 Act it out!

Sit in a circle and choose a child to act out a hobby they enjoy. It could be anything: playing tennis, swimming, athletics. Ask the rest of the class to describe HOW they are doing the action, using an adverbial or prepositional phrase, e.g. 'He is swimming in a cold pool.'

"A phrase is a very useful unit of language for teaching children about editing and improving their writing"



5 Find the phrases

Use the model text below and agree on a class key for different types of phrases. Read it through and give your pupils time to highlight the different types of phrases. Once pupils have identified them, challenge them to replace the original phrases with their own phrases. How does this change the meaning of the text?

Cautiously and carefully, Elizabeth shuffled across the marble floor. She knew she wasn't supposed to be in the museum alone; her grandmother would be furious if she were to find out. Clutching the precious item and her grandmother's walking stick, she tiptoed up the stairs. She had assumed nobody would miss this dull, tarnished pot. Most of the visitors to the museum hardly gave it a second glance. Surely, it would be better with somebody who would actually appreciate it? She continued up the cold, hard staircase, being careful not to make a sound. Once she reached the top, she breathed a sigh of relief. The office was just three metres away. Above the door hung the brass key to the office door. Her grandma put it up there so it was out of her reach. All she had to do was creep down the corridor, knock the key off the hook using the walking stick and her mission would be complete. She put her foot on the thick, green carpet, stepping as lightly as possible.

'Elizabeth Alexandra Morris! What on EARTH do you think you are doing?'

6 Prepositional phrase walk

Take a walk around the school grounds and document it with photographs. Back in the classroom, ask the class to recap the walk using prepositional phrases, e.g. ' We walked through the classroom door. Then we walked down the corridor.' Alternatively, you could use the book *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins (2009) and describe Rosie's walk through the farm. Although this text is aimed at slightly younger children, it is full of prepositional phrases!

7 Write your own

Use this process with your class to get them writing their own sentences, including prepositional phrases.

1. Write a simple sentence:
The swimming pool was cold.

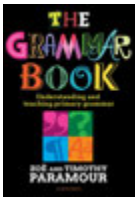
2. Add a prepositional phrase:
The swimming pool was cold in the morning.

3. Add another prepositional phrase to the beginning of the sentence and add a comma:
In the summer, the swimming pool was cold in the morning.

There is a template for this activity available to download at bit.ly/trwwriteyourown.

8 Identify the verb phrases

There are a number of online quizzes on verb phrases (yes, really). This is a particularly good one for children in Years 5 and 6: bit.ly/trwquiz. Put it up on the interactive whiteboard and get different pairs of children to come and identify the verb phrase in the sentence. Make sure you ask them how they know the answer as well as what the answer is!



These teaching ideas are taken from The Grammar Book, by Zoë and Timothy Paramour (Bloomsbury Education, £19.99)

4 REASONS TO TRY... PLAY PHONICS WITH SAMMY SOUNDS

Help children fall in love with learning to read

1 JOYFUL LEARNING

Play Phonics with Sammy Sounds brings slapstick and adventure to classrooms through on demand, interactive drama videos. Travelling to Phonics Land on an adventure with Sammy Sounds inspires children to fall in love with learning to read, whilst igniting young imaginations.

2 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

The videos demand constant involvement; children watching join in the funky phonics warm up, paint letters with their body parts, shout out the answers to beat the baddies, complete word tasks, sing songs and blend words from the blending machine. Through unique kinaesthetic, auditory and visual techniques, on demand videos have been carefully designed to enrich classroom teaching for Nursery, Reception or Year One pupils.

3 PROVEN TRACK RECORD OF CLOSING THE GAP

Play Phonics with Sammy Sounds has a proven record of using theatrical techniques to successfully close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Since 2013, it has helped over 10,000 children develop a love of reading through weekly phonics drama adventures in London school and nursery settings.

4 PERFECT AS A TARGETED INTERVENTION OR WHOLE CLASS APPROACH

It is a great way to meet the varying needs of your cohort at this time. For example, in one setting some Reception children watch Phase 2 phonics adventures as a catch up programme, whilst another group of Reception children watch split digraph videos as a learning extension.

PLAY phonics with Sammy Sounds

TRY FOR FREE at playphonics.net or get in touch at info@playphonics.net

At a glance

+ Each video teaches a new sound. Various courses available to cover phases 1-5. Perfect for preschool, Reception, Y1 or Y2.

+ In line with the curriculum, a great supplementary resource to enrich your daily phonics teaching.

+ Available on demand and on repeat, so you can meet the needs of your class.

How I do it

These are just some of the ways I promote a love of writing in the classroom

SADIE PHILLIPS

1

Getting to know your pupils' writing habits outside of school is essential for creating a community of writers. Writing rivers or 'Me as a writer' mind maps are fantastic tools for encouraging children to reflect on their writing preferences. I begin by modelling my own version and the children are often fascinated to hear about my own experiences. By showing them that I'm a writer, it allows them to start seeing themselves as writers too.

Let's write for pleasure! By Miss P

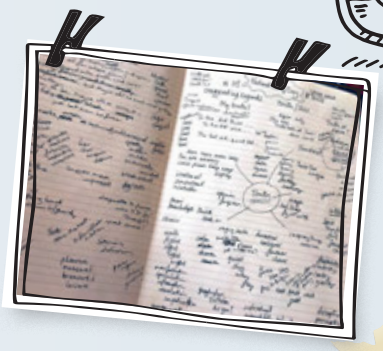
I, like many others, have been a huge advocate of reading for pleasure for many years now, but writing for pleasure seems to have slipped the net. We depend on it as the largest indicator of success and progress in learning, yet it doesn't quite receive the same limelight that reading does. Writing in primary schools should aim to inspire, excite and engage children in authentic, original and free-flowing expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas. Many pupils saw writing as a chore and gained little pleasure from it but now they have fallen in love with it, which has boosted their confidence, motivation, engagement, sense of achievement and attainment.

2

Social media provides an incredible opportunity to engage with authors and poets like never before. In my experience, they are always delighted to see children's responses to their work and are incredibly generous with their time in responding to the children. Connecting with the writing community outside the classroom can be truly inspiring for pupils, especially when they receive messages of praise from writers they admire.

3

Free from scrutiny of marking, children are given creative writing notebooks (decidedly not literacy books) in which they are encouraged to liberate their writer's voice in whatever form, on whatever topic they'd like. I usually start by showing them images of chaotic, scrawled jottings and scribbles from the notebooks of famous authors and poets, before sharing my own writer's notebook. We discuss how writing is a messy, creative process and they are then given the freedom to explore and experiment with their own interests and ideas, inevitably becoming more enthused and engaged, developing a fondness for expressing themselves through the written word.



4

Inspiring writing with props, visitors, trips and experiences can have a huge impact on levels of enjoyment. Budgets are tight, but even the simplest props can have a huge impact. I recently bought a set of vintage keys on eBay and used these as a stimulus for writing. The resultant writing was exceptional. I've seen so many teachers doing amazing things to inspire writing in their classrooms – from crime scenes and fairy doors, to character costumes and augmented reality. It's a sure-fire way to boost engagement, enjoyment and attainment.

5

Another way I promote writing is to give authentic purpose and audience for children's written work. I am constantly seeking opportunities to perform or publish written work. We've hosted a film festival screening of scripts the children have written, we've interviewed authors for a school magazine, we've worked with poets to host a poetry slam and we've even published books on Amazon! But it doesn't have to be as complicated as all that. It could be as simple as creating a display, presenting to another class or binding their mystery stories together to create a book of haunting tales for the reading corner – much simpler and just as effective. Providing children with a real audience is a huge motivator and gives them a renewed focus and enthusiasm for writing.

I hope these practical classroom strategies are useful and inspire you to adopt a writing for pleasure pedagogy in your own classrooms. Happy writing!

Sadie Phillips is an experienced KS2 teacher, blogger and English specialist.

literacywithmissp.com

Just add an ADJECTIVE?

If we oversimplify teaching noun phrases then children will carry their misconceptions with them throughout school and beyond

We've all been told that adding an adjective before a noun will tell us more about that noun and help our readers visualise our descriptions, but is that all there is to know about noun phrases?

In the first instance, we need to recognise the role of nouns as words that name people, places, objects and ideas. Then, *almost* as I've suggested above, we can begin to build noun phrases by adding further words to tell our readers more about those nouns. The thing is – it's not just about adjectives.

Let's start with the noun 'gate' and look at how we can add further words to create a noun phrase (see right).

First off, it's worth noting that once we attach a determiner to a noun, we've created a noun phrase. We should also note that *determiners* is a very broad term that includes words such as *a, an, the, some, those* and even numbers such as *one*. Quite understandably this can seem a little mind-bending, which I suspect is something to do with being told that noun phrases are formed by adding adjectives to nouns.

gate (noun)
a gate (noun phrase)
the red gate (noun phrase)
a gate with a yellow handle (noun phrase)
the red school gate with a yellow handle (noun phrase)

'The red gate' feels like a good, solid noun phrase, and so it is. It specifies the colour of the gate, which really helps the reader to visualise it. And if you want to examine the word categories being used, it consists of a determiner, an adjective and a noun.

Moving on to 'the red school gate' the noun 'gate' has been yet further expanded. Not only do we know about its colour, we also know what type of gate it is: a school gate. It's a cracking example for busting the myth that an expanded noun phrase needs to include at least two adjectives. Red is certainly an adjective, but school is a noun which is being used to give us some very specific information about the gate.

Sometimes we can add information after a noun in order to create a noun phrase. This is what we see in the examples 'a gate with a yellow handle' and 'the red school gate with a yellow handle'. In both of these examples a prepositional phrase has been added to the noun 'gate' in order to describe it in greater detail. They're both expanded noun phrases even though one has very little information before the noun and the other has lots. The eagle-eyed amongst you will also have noticed that 'a yellow handle' is in fact another noun phrase used within the prepositional phrase to tell us more about the gate!

How to teach noun phrases

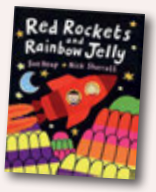
It's a lot to take in, but once you've tuned your eyes into spotting the different ways that words can be added to a noun to form noun phrases, you'll be spotting them everywhere, including in your children's writing. So, what can you do to teach children about noun phrases? Here are a few of my favourites:

- Use picture books that include detailed images. Ask children to label the nouns in the images and then to expand them to form noun phrases. This is easy to differentiate to match the stage and age of the learners so that younger children add adjectives, whereas older children write expanded noun phrases that use prepositional phrases after the noun.
- Provide the class with a partially completed noun phrase, e.g. the red school gate with... Take turns to complete the noun phrase. It doesn't matter if the noun phrase is silly or doesn't make total sense, it's all about learning a structure that they recognise and replicate in their own writing.
- Challenge children to find noun phrases in the titles of books in the reading area e.g. *The Cat in the Hat, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, The Little Prince.* Children could sort the titles into those that add information before the noun and those that add information after the noun.
- Create noun phrase pyramids like the one in this article. Challenge children to select and use their noun phrases within sentences. You can add rules such as: use your noun phrase in a sentence that starts with a fronted adverbial, or: use your noun phrase within dialogue.
- Provide children with extracts from texts that include lots of noun phrases. Ask them to mark the noun phrases. Extend the task by asking them to expand the noun phrases further such as by adding a prepositional phrase or adding further information before the noun.

Where to find noun phrases

One of the most important things to bear in mind when teaching any aspect of grammar is that it doesn't stand alone or exist in a bubble. Noun phrases are an essential part of sentences and one of the best places to find great sentences is in authentic children's books. Noun phrases are such a key part of writing that you won't struggle to find examples. However, some books are particularly good to share with children at different ages and stages of development.

- **Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly, by Sue Heap.** This is the perfect starter text for the youngest children. Over the course of the book, children see how descriptions are improved by adding adjectives. It's also a great book for teaching children to use 'and' to join words and phrases.



- **Titch, by Pat Hutchins.** This book contains lots of easy to replicate noun phrases where the expansion comes before the noun.

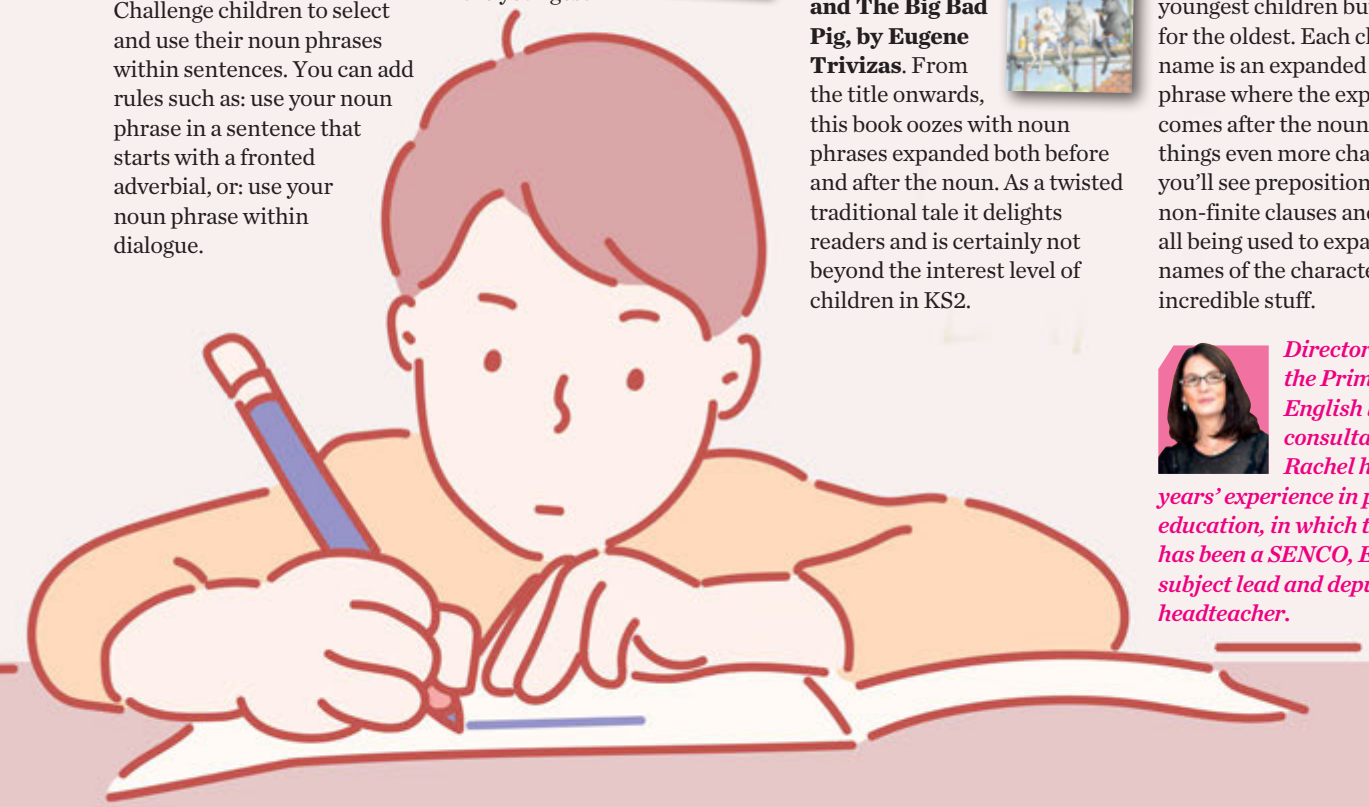
- **The Three Little Wolves and The Big Bad Pig, by Eugene Trivizas**. From the title onwards, this book oozes with noun phrases expanded both before and after the noun. As a twisted traditional tale it delights readers and is certainly not beyond the interest level of children in KS2.

- **Firebird, by Saviour Pirotta.** This one of my all-time favourite books for teaching noun phrases expanded with prepositional phrases. It's also an excellent book for learning about traditional tales from other parts of the world.

- **Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy, by Lynley Dodd.** Surprisingly, I'm not suggesting this book for the youngest children but instead for the oldest. Each character's name is an expanded noun phrase where the expansion comes after the noun. To make things even more challenging, you'll see prepositions, non-finite clauses and similes all being used to expand the names of the characters. It's incredible stuff.

Become a grammar guru

If you want to take the lead in driving excellent grammar teaching in your school, or just brush up on your own subject knowledge, Rachel's Clarke's Teaching Tricky Grammar CPD course provides a detailed view of everything from joining words with 'and' to recognising the subjunctive form. The training is delivered via video, so you can learn at your own pace, and is found alongside other literacy courses on **plazoom.com**



Directory of the Primary English literacy consultancy, Rachel has over 20 years' experience in primary education, in which time she has been a SENCO, English subject lead and deputy headteacher.

Do you REALLY KNOW BOOKS?

Quality children's literature should form the bedrock of any English curriculum, says **Louise Johns-Shepherd** – which is why every teacher must understand what it looks like...

Teaching children to become confident and competent readers and writers is surely the most important thing that primary school teachers do; it quite literally changes children's lives. And this is why we at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education do what we do. Our charity exists only to support the teaching of literacy; everything we publish, every training session we run, every resource we make is created with the purpose of ensuring primary school teachers have what they need to help children in their classes to become and to recognise themselves as readers and writers.

What is the main thing we need to support our teaching of reading? Books of course. Books with stories, with poetry, with characters and with illustrations that will encourage engagement whoever you are and whatever your starting point. Texts that take you to new worlds and introduce you to new people – real and imagined; that help you to discover patterns and constructions in language and bring you new ideas and understanding. Alongside books, you need a range of experiences to help you discover and respond to those books in a variety of ways – privately or as a shared endeavour – and skills that enable you to decode the text, make sense of the construction and allow you to respond to the experience. All of these things together are what we need to provide in a rich reading classroom

Extensive knowledge

When you're thinking about building a rich reading classroom you will need to think about the texts and the literature you want available – this is the foundation of your curriculum and the most important aspect of any reading classroom. You'll also need to think about how you want to present those texts, what messages your classroom and teaching is going to give the young readers who are learning in it, how you will create a rich reading experience and how you'll ensure that the children in your class are taught the skills they need to become competent and confident readers and writers.

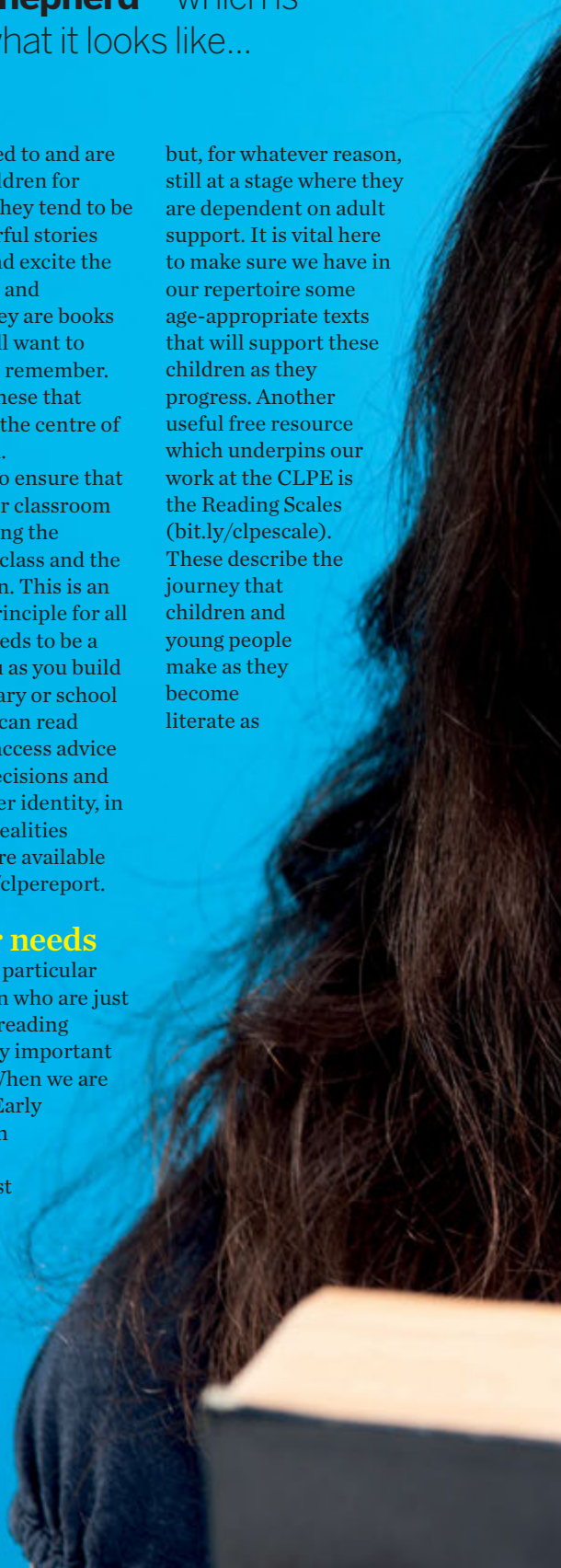
The use of high quality books as the bedrock of an English curriculum is at the heart of a school's successful approach to engage and support children to become motivated and independent readers. In order to recommend appropriate books to children, to extend and develop their reading and continue to feed their interests, adults working in schools need to have an extensive knowledge of the full range of children's literature available.

We know that there are books that lend themselves to being talked about, thought through, returned to and are engaging for children for many reasons. They tend to be texts with powerful stories that stir ideas and excite the reader's interest and imagination. They are books that children will want to re-read, and will remember. It is books like these that you will want at the centre of your curriculum.

You'll want to ensure that the books in your classroom are truly reflecting the realities of your class and the world they live in. This is an underpinning principle for all our work and needs to be a principle for you as you build a classroom library or school book stock. You can read about why, and access advice about making decisions and developing reader identity, in our Reflecting Realities reports, which are available for free at bit.ly/clpereport.

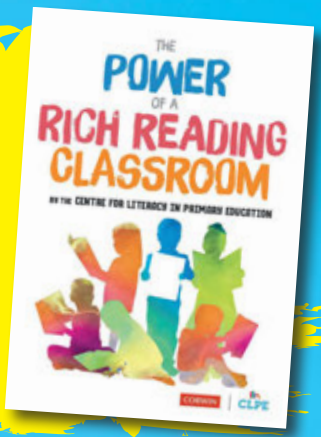
Particular needs

Considering the particular needs of children who are just beginning their reading journeys is a very important starting point. When we are thinking about Early Readers we often assume they are the very youngest children in our care, and this is usually the case. However it is also important to consider those children who may be older but, for whatever reason, still at a stage where they are dependent on adult support. It is vital here to make sure we have in our repertoire some age-appropriate texts that will support these children as they progress. Another useful free resource which underpins our work at the CLPE is the Reading Scales (bit.ly/clpescale). These describe the journey that children and young people make as they become literate as



"We know that there are books that lend themselves to being talked about"

THE POWER OF A RICH READING CLASSROOM
(£24.99, SAGE Publications)
The latest book from the CLPE is a practical guide that helps teachers understand how to build a quality reading rich curriculum, supporting the needs of all the children in their classroom. Find out more at bit.ly/clperrc.



well as offering advice about planning and provision in a 'next steps' section.

These scales are a useful reference point and will support you to develop your pedagogy and understanding of progression as you build your rich reading classroom.

Whatever age range you are teaching, make sure that you are including both picture books and poetry in your provision. In our work with schools we find that these two types of books are often overlooked, for very different reasons. Poetry is the poor relation of children's literature - often avoided or shoved into a short 'unit of work,' its transformational potential can be easily missed.

Similarly, it is often tempting to think of picture books as only having a place in the EY or KS1 classroom, but picture books offer unique and complex reading experiences and are key to developing reading skills throughout the school into Key Stage Two and beyond.

Quality first

All of our work at CLPE is centred around the importance of quality children's literature. We know that to develop a rich reading classroom, which in turn develops real readers, you need to know books, you need to know stories, you need to want to delve and lose yourself in new and unfamiliar worlds, to view the discovery of new characters and new plots with wonder and excitement. If you can create children who feel like that then you have created a rich reading classroom.

Louise Johns-Shepherd is CEO of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)

What makes children WANT TO WRITE?

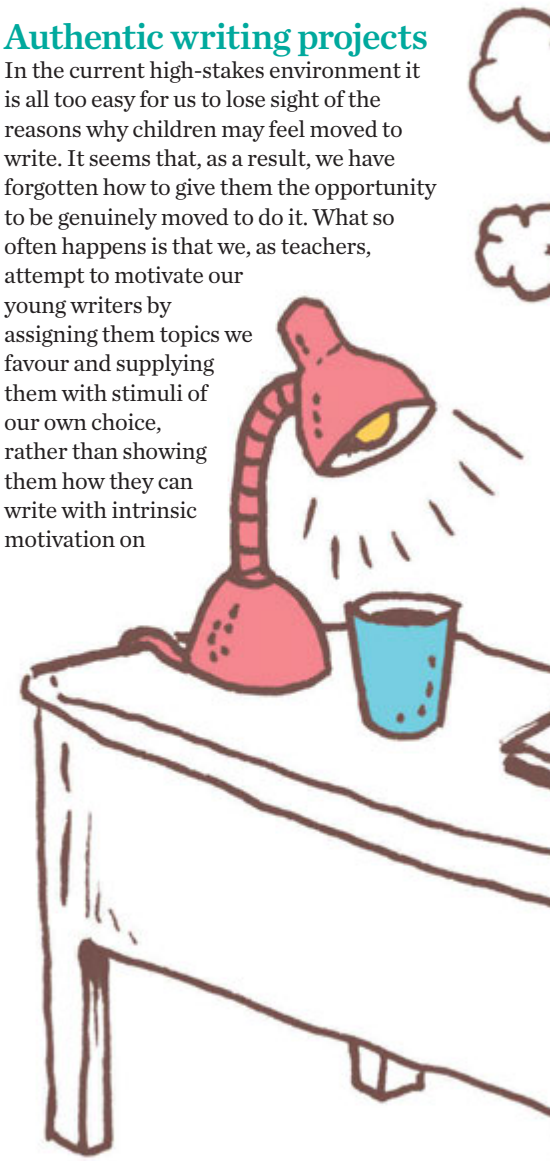
If it's always you dictating the topic for pupils' writing, you may never see the powerful results of letting them express what really matters to them

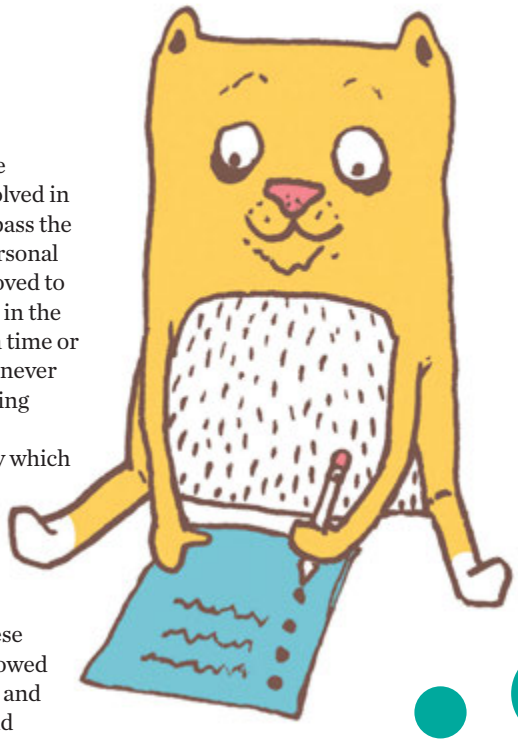
I recently had the privilege of reading a piece written during lockdown by a Year 4 girl. Her teacher had involved the children in a writing project in which he invited them, over 10 writing sessions, to craft a biography about a close family member or someone from the immediate community. The girl's piece was about her father, who had died two years previously, and she was moved to write it both in memory of and in homage to him. She wrote it for herself, for her family, and for the friends and teachers whom she trusted and of whose appreciation and sympathetic interest she was assured. It was engaged writing, infused with feeling and written in her own clear voice. Her closing words were: "As you can see, my dad was an amazing, kind, honest person who made me the person I am today." And as her teacher rightly said, in writing her dad's personal journey, she was writing her own.

There are many reasons why we are compelled to write because of an urge or fundamental need. In our book Real-World Writers, we consider how being moved to write can and should drive children's writing in school. They may, for example, be moved to teach others by sharing their experience or particular knowledge of something. Perhaps they are moved by the desire to persuade or influence others, sharing their thoughts and opinions about a topic and hoping to bring about change. They will sometimes be moved to entertain through the telling and writing of stories, both real and imagined, or simply be moved to paint with words, showing their artistry and creating images in their readers' minds to help them see things differently. Possibly they will be moved to reflect on a moment or passage from their own lives, or something recently learned, in order to better understand it. Or moved to make a record of an event which should not be forgotten by themselves or others. Writing because you are moved to do it presupposes that you are interested in your subject and have some kind of investment in it, and that you have in mind a clear and authentic purpose and a real audience for your writing. Having agency over your writing topic is therefore of huge importance.

Authentic writing projects

In the current high-stakes environment it is all too easy for us to lose sight of the reasons why children may feel moved to write. It seems that, as a result, we have forgotten how to give them the opportunity to be genuinely moved to do it. What so often happens is that we, as teachers, attempt to motivate our young writers by assigning them topics we favour and supplying them with stimuli of our own choice, rather than showing them how they can write with intrinsic motivation on





subjects they have selected themselves and with which they are authentically engaged. The result is that a class's written pieces can be lacklustre and depressingly similar to each other.

There is a way out of this situation, which hinges on the idea of why children write. Think about devising genre-based class writing projects which are authentic and purposeful. Teach craft knowledge and the typical features of the genre, then show your children how to apply this to their own writing ideas. The results will be striking. For example, in one information project children wrote to teach each other about things in which they were in some way expert, topics as various as girls' skateboarding, the Chinese Dynasty, the physics involved in the workings of a lift, and how to pass the London Taxi Drivers' test. In a personal memoir project, children were moved to write about and share with others in the class their personal experiences, a time or a moment in their life they would never forget – sad, happy or funny. Writing advocacy journalism, they chose individually to champion a charity which had significance for them or their family. This project gave them the means of expressing their support for an organisation seeking to make a particular improvement or change. In all these projects, agency over the topic allowed the children to be moved to write, and ultimately to produce personal and committed pieces.

Seeking out motivation

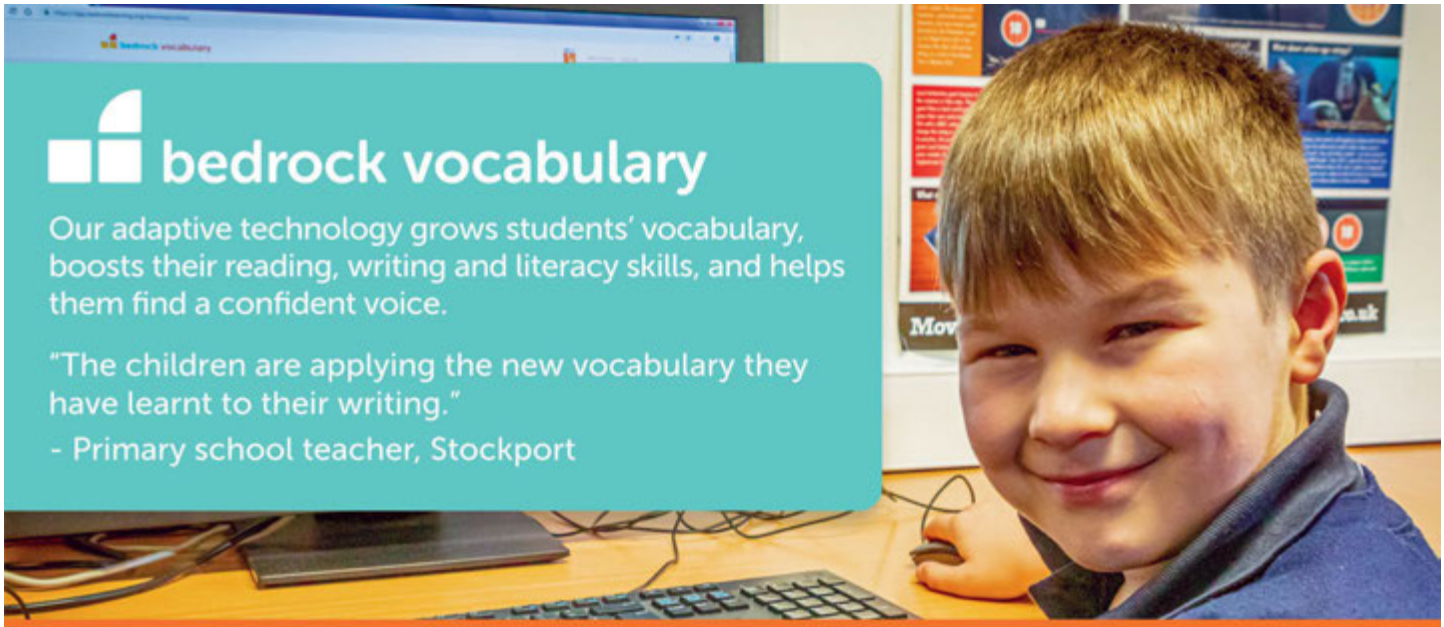
Make it possible for children to find their own motivation and their own reason to write, and you and they will reap rewards. You'll find they will write with more 'flow', concentration, persistence and pleasure. You won't receive 30 identical texts; each one will be unique. The writing will be significantly improved and better organised because you've also taught them how to do it. Not surprisingly, research will tell you that true motivation has a very positive effect on feelings of wellbeing, self-confidence, self-worth, and, in this case, writer-identity. Thus, as our book says, if children aren't moved to write, you've got a problem. But by showing them how to discover the things they are moved by, you will be allowing them to find the motivation to write to a high standard all the way through to publication. What's more, they will write to say what they really mean, and also to show who they really are.

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

How we get it wong

There are so many ways to put children off writing, but here are six of the prime culprits:

- Never allow children to choose their own topic, make their own writerly decisions and therefore be self-motivated.
- Assume the topic you choose to assign will motivate all children. It won't, and the writing will only have short-term value. Also, don't assign a topic children know little about.
- Fail to teach them craft knowledge and self-regulation strategies.
- In non-fiction writing, don't allow them to use their own voice or respond personally to the topic.
- Assign a writing topic which has neither purpose nor a clearly defined audience who will receive the published piece at the project's end.
- Convey to the children that you are primarily interested in evaluating their piece and are not really interested in what it is they have to say.



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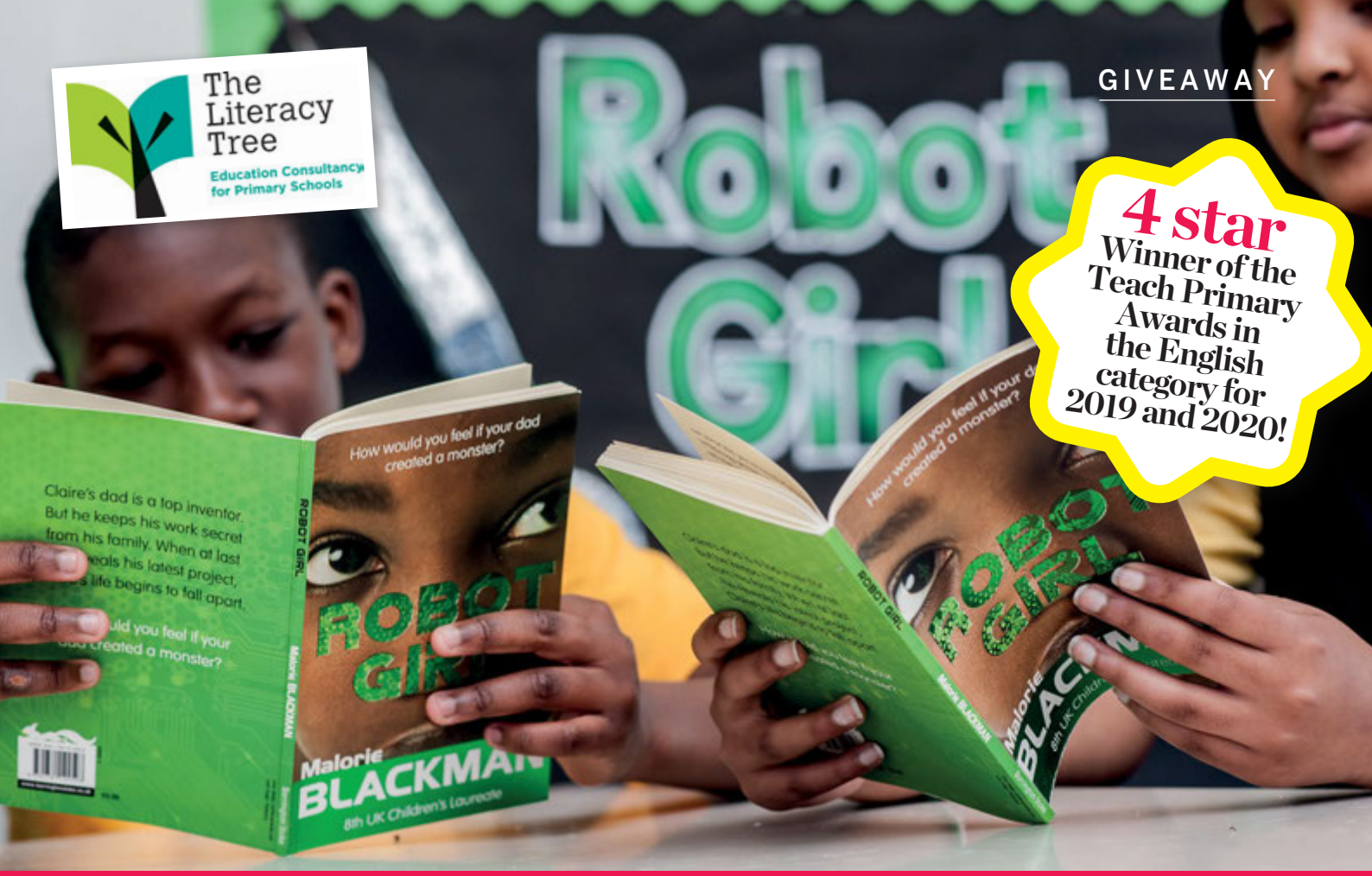

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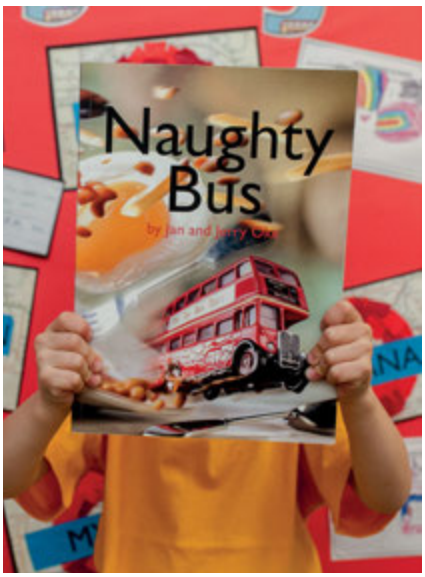
"The Literary Curriculum offers a thrilling variety of literature to motivate and excite children" John Dabell, Teach Reading and Writing Magazine

For more information, visit literacycurriculum.co.uk



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The winner will receive a 12-month subscription to Literary Curriculum online resource for up to 30 users, enabling whole-school access to detailed planning for writing, reading and spelling as well as home-learning resources for more than 150 high-quality children's books as well as examples of writing from each planning sequence.

PLUS – Everyone who enters will be sent a free planning sequence to use in their classroom!

Enter now at teachwire.net/giveaways

* Competition closes at 5pm on 30th November 2020. Winners will be notified within 21 days. Full terms and conditions available at teachwire.net

Inspecting PHONICS

With an Ofsted focus firmly on how reading is taught in schools, **Stephen Rickard** considers which books will stand up to scrutiny

Teaching children to read is like getting a cat down from a tree. Sometimes you can get the cat down with a few gentle calls, sometimes a tin of tuna will do the trick, and sometimes you just need to shake the tree and yell at the cat. Worst case? Call the fire brigade.

The point of course is that usually the cat does come down, but you're never quite sure which approach you used was the successful one.

Learning to read is the same in many ways. Experts have been arguing for decades about the best way to teach children to read, and there's still no consensus. Yet most children do end up reading, one way or another. Which approach worked for which child? Often we don't know.

The problem with the English language is that it's really messy. There are rules, of course, but the rules don't always apply. The letters 'ea' for example can be found in *bread* (same sound as in *said*), and in *bead* (same sound as in *feed*), or in *fear* (*deer*) or *bear* (*care*). And don't get me started on 'ou' (*through, though, ought, should*).

Synthetic phonics teaches children to synthesise, or build words, from the basic blocks of English. Starting with a few letters (say *s a t* and *p*), children can start to move up the reading curve.

In Ofsted's 2019 Education Inspection Framework, how children are taught to read was made a priority issue. All children are now required to undertake a reading 'deep dive', focusing on how reading is taught.

In terms of phonics, inspectors will be looking at the programme that is being used in a school and how successfully it is being implemented. They will pay particular attention to how the lowest performing 20 per cent of pupils are being supported, and how the school is assessing pupils' progress. They will look at how stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction are chosen for reading to develop pupils' vocabulary, language comprehension and love of reading.

In addition, the framework makes it clear that inspectors will be looking at the reading books that are used to support the teaching of phonics, paying particular attention to whether 'the sequence of reading books shows a cumulative progression in phonics knowledge

that is matched closely to the school's phonics programme.'

The latter is a new and welcome requirement. So why is Ofsted insisting on it?

Allow for success

The great benefit of teaching phonics in a systematic way is that children can soon be reading reasonably complex texts – but only as long as these texts are carefully written and use *only those letters* that they have already met.

If this principle is followed, children never meet anything that they can't read, and so their confidence builds as more letters and sounds are introduced. Confidence builds too because there are always clear rules to follow – and all the words the children meet in the books follow those rules. Phonics provides the children with strategies to read words that they have never met before, and these strategies always work.

This means that every book the child reads needs to be tightly matched to where the child is in the particular phonics programme that is being used. If a child is half-way through Phase 3 of *Letters and Sounds*, for example, then it will not be appropriate to present the child with a reading book that covers everything in Phase 3, as they won't yet have met some of the letters and sounds in the book. Not only that, their confidence in the whole reading process will be undermined. The principle they read by ('*every word in the book is either a high frequency word you have met, or is fully decodable using letters and sounds you know*') will simply no longer be true.

Similarly, many schools continue to use book-banded readers to support their phonics teaching. This too will cause the children problems if those readers include words that the children are not able to decode.

In other words, it is essential that we preserve the integrity of the one huge advantage that phonics offers – a secure, fully decodable reading environment.

Making good choices

Of course these requirements make considerable demands on the reading books that you are going to use to support your phonics programme:

- ideally the books need to be designed to match the programme that you are using
- they need to be carefully structured so that each book introduces or covers only specific letters and sounds or high frequency words

- the books need to offer progression on a *granular* basis – not just with new books at the end of each phase, but new books at the end of each week, or every time a few new letters/sounds are introduced
- The books need to offer support for weaker readers, too (perhaps with shorter texts, or with texts featuring more repetition)
- And the books also need to offer children a range of stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction, written to develop their vocabulary, language comprehension and love of reading.

There is another reason why I welcome Ofsted's recent requirements for phonics readers. In the past, phonics teaching has often been too focused on getting children barking accurately at the print, at the expense of the wider aspects of reading.

Phonics-based teaching needs to encompass these wider aspects – understanding grammar and punctuation, how to read a non-fiction text, how to use contents pages, captions, indexes and glossaries, how to infer meaning ... and so on.

That's why, when you're exploring which phonics readers to use with your children, you should also be looking at whether the readers include lesson plans for guided reading with each book. Lesson plans are a proven way of teaching these broader aspects of reading – *provided* that we stay within the confines of using only the letters, sounds and words that children have met.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE PHONICS WORK FOR YOU

1 Whichever phonics programme you use, always make sure children are secure at one level before moving on to the next. As children progress, more and more letters are introduced more quickly; if children aren't comfortable with what they've already met, they will quickly get overwhelmed.

2 Make sure that every reading book a child reads contains only those letters, sounds and high frequency words that the child has actually been taught. *Never* allow them to meet something they can't decode or read.

3 Make sure that the phonics books you use are as close as possible to real books. They should have beautiful illustrations, great stories and a range of text types. Don't use phonics readers just as a way of testing the children's decoding ability – that will kill any interest the children might have in reading.

4 Use guided reading lesson plans to support your children's reading of a phonics text. It's a proven methodology and works equally well with phonics books. Any good programme of phonics reading books will offer guided reading lesson plans to accompany each book.

5 Don't make every read a hard read. Now and again, give the children some easier books to read; it builds confidence and gives them the opportunity to spend more time enjoying the book and less time fighting through the undergrowth, grapheme by grapheme.

Stephen Rickard is a publisher and author, and is the series editor for Ransom's new Reading Stars Phonics programme of phonics reading books. He has been publishing educational resources for literacy for over 25 years.

PARTNER CONTENT

THE WOW FACTOR

Meet Ofsted's latest requirements with these fresh, new, fully-decodable phonics readers – and develop a love of reading in every child at the same time...

Reading Stars Phonics is a new series of 115 structured phonics readers, carefully designed to support children as they develop their phonics skills. Every week, as they learn new letters and sounds, there are new books for them to read – but at no time do the children meet any unfamiliar words or letters. Published by leading literacy specialist Ransom Publishing, the books are accompanied by support materials, including lesson plans for guided reading, phonics support and assessment resources.

Contact:
Ransom Publishing
www.ransom.co.uk
steve@ransom.co.uk
01730 829 091

MEETS OFSTED'S REQUIREMENTS

Reading Stars Phonics books are fully compliant with Ofsted's early years inspection framework, so you can be confident that children will already have been introduced to all the letters and sounds in a book, before they read it. No more unfamiliar letters or words that they can't decode.

NEW BOOKS EVERY WEEK

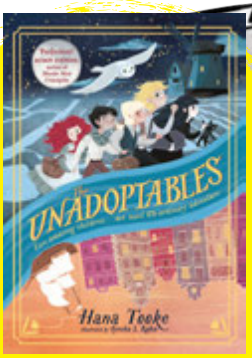
The books strictly follow *Letters and Sounds* on a week-by-week basis. Children can start reading as soon as they've learnt just four letters, and can then read at least two new books each week. So they can put their new knowledge into practice straight away – and consolidate what they've already learned.

REWARDING READS

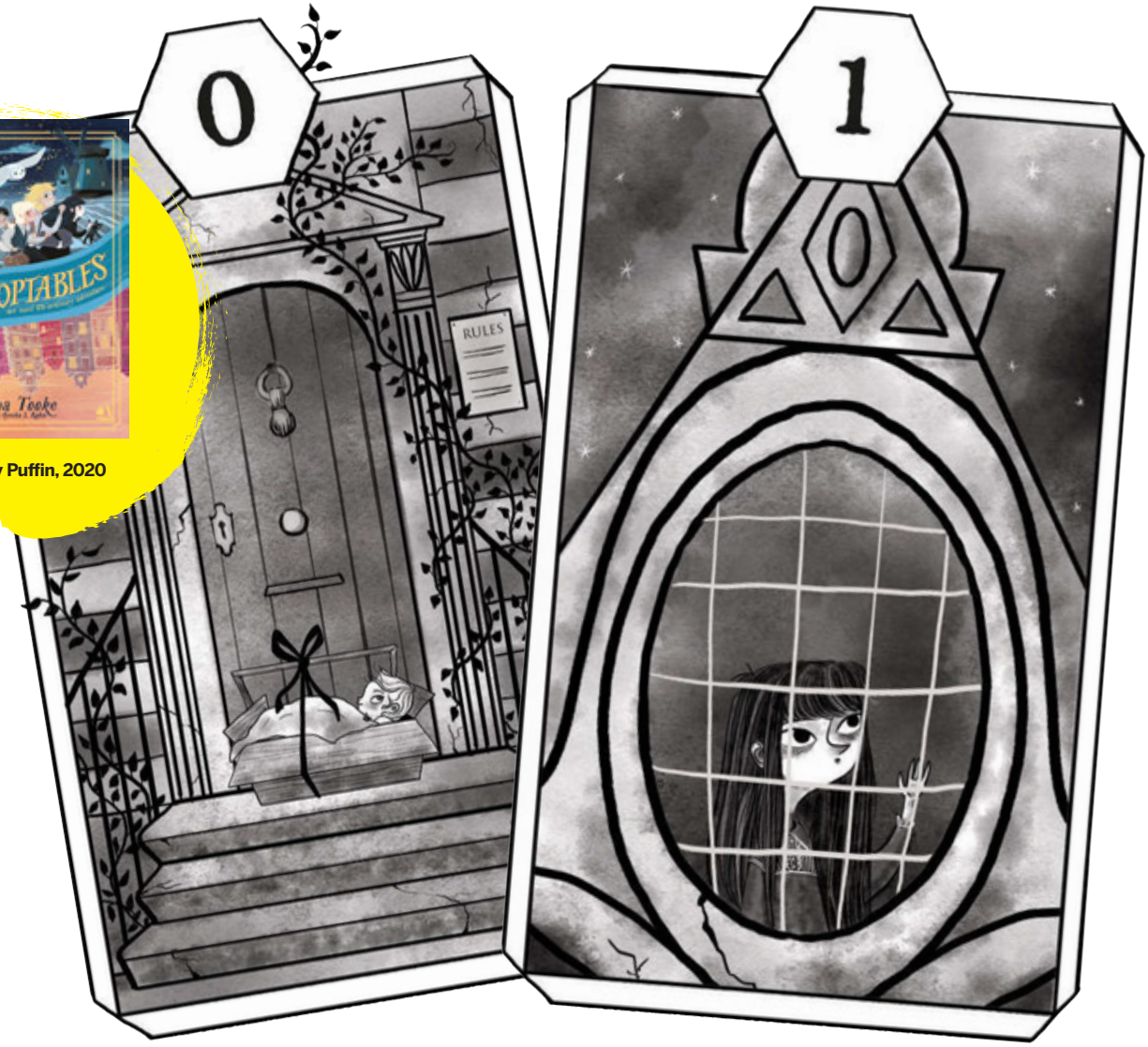
These aren't just phonics books. They're designed to delight, amuse, inform and develop a love of reading. They include fiction and non-fiction, as well as a variety of story types and illustration styles – all from experienced authors with backgrounds in phonics and in picture books.

SUPPORT AND ASSESSMENT

Accompanied by photocopiable teacher resource packs (including lesson plans for guided reading) and assessment resources, the programme supports every aspect of your phonics teaching – and beyond. Reading Stars Phonics makes it simple for you to help every child become a confident reader.



Published by Puffin, 2020



The Unadoptables

Hana Tooke's page-turner is bursting with eccentric characters that even reluctant readers will take to heart

CAREY FLUKER HUNT

Deep in the heart of Amsterdam sits a tall, narrow house. This is the Little Tulip Orphanage, a place of minimal suppers and very strict rules. Everything – including abandonment – is regulated. Babies must be wrapped in a *cotton* blanket, placed in a *wicker* basket and deposited on the *topmost* step. But in 1880, when this story begins, five babies are left at the Little Tulip in ways that are increasingly ill-judged. For Matron Gassbeek, the arrivals of Lotta, Fenna, Milou, Egg and Sem spell trouble.

Fizzing with invention, yet firmly rooted in first-hand knowledge and research, Hana Tooke's debut novel imagines a rollercoaster adventure for these unusual orphans. Paraded by Gassbeek for prospective adopters, the friends present themselves in an unappealing way – for if they are chosen, how will Milou's birth family know where to reclaim her? The children's 'unadoptable' attitude enrages Gassbeek, a Dickens-meets-Dahl villain, who finally offers the children to the mysterious Rotman, a ship's captain. But for what purpose? And can this man be trusted?

A real page-turner ensues, bursting with eccentric characters, intriguing subplots and memorable details. This larger-than-life story is spiced with peril and suspense – but at its heart lies universal themes about the power of friendship, accepting and celebrating differences, caring for each other and creating your own family.

How to share the book

Share the whole book as a reading-for-pleasure experience before exploring individual themes, so children can immerse themselves in the story and make a strong relationship with it.

Show children you value your read-aloud time by setting aside a regular slot when you're unlikely to be interrupted – daily, if possible - and give yourselves time to share responses afterwards. You won't be short of things to talk about. Here are some starters, but you'll inevitably find more...

- Why does Milou collect clues about her family? Does she achieve her goal?
- What talents and skills do the orphans possess? Are they superpowers? Could you develop them?
- Talk about Rose Speelman. Is it possible to do something wrong by following rules? When should you use your judgement instead?
- How much of this book is historically 'real' and how much is invented? Does it matter if you can't tell the difference?
- Why do you think orphans feature in so many stories?
- How does Milou use her 'sense'? Have you experienced anything similar?
- Who is talking in the epilogue? What's he going to remember? Is this a good ending, do you think?

Practical activities

Plots and timelines

Working together, summarise the story's main points. Can you find a way to keep track of other events and information? Organise pupils into groups and allocate a character to each – Gassbeek, Rotman, Edda, Milou, Bram Poppenmaker and Egg. What happens to their character in this story? Can pupils construct a timeline for them? Feed back and discuss. How do the timelines differ? Write an account of the story from one character's perspective.

Talk about first-hand experience, being an observer, and reliable versus unreliable narrators. For which events would these characters be good witnesses? Who wouldn't you trust? Why?

This book has a complex plot with many details that must be brought together and explained to provide a satisfying conclusion. How well do you think the author has succeeded in doing this?

Designs for living

The objects and devices in this book are vividly described. All are important to their owners and many are hand-crafted. How many useful artefacts and ingenious inventions can you discover in the text? What do they look like? Who owns or uses them? For what purpose?

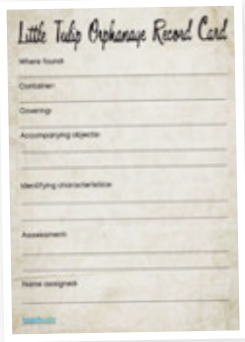
What are we told about the Poppenmaker mill and theatre, Edda's house or the Little Tulip Orphanage? What do these settings tell us about their occupants?

What would pupils' ideal house look like? How would it function? Ask the class to draw labelled plans and diagrams, and write about their ideas. How do their plans reflect their personality and the life they'd like to live? Ask children to imagine that their ideal house or room is being featured as a location in Hana's next book. How would she describe it? Write a paragraph.

What objects or gadgets would you put in your ideal house? Sketch ideas then choose one to develop. Can pupils make it beautiful and useful?

New arrivals

Print off blank Little Tulip Orphanage record cards from **tinyurl.com/tp-hana**. You'll also need a collection of different containers, each holding a soft toy wrapped in a distinctive covering, plus a note about where it was discovered. Working in pairs,



fill in cards for Lotta, Fenna, Milou, Egg and Sem, using information from the book. Feed back and discuss.

Distribute the containers around the room. Invite pairs to explore them and their contents, then choose one and complete a record card for him/her. Feed back and discuss. What happens to these new arrivals as they grow up? Write a story about them set in the orphanage.

Tick-tock clock

Edda describes herself as a 'clockwork artisan.' What does she mean? Re-read the sections about the clocks and other objects Edda creates. Is she right? How would you describe her job?

Display photos of famous or historical clocks alongside lots of different real-life clocks.

Take it further

INVESTIGATING TULIPS

Holland is famous for its tulips. Find out about bulb fields and flower parades. What are bulbs? Arrange for pupils to draw them from life using pencils, charcoal and pastels, then write about their observations.

Tulips can be grown indoors at any time using jars of water (where you can see the roots). Document a bulb's growth, then draw and paint flowering tulips from life. Extend this by looking at Dutch still life paintings and creating similar arrangements for children to paint.

In the 17th century, Dutch tulip bulbs changed hands for wildly inflated prices. Find out more about 'tulipmania' and present your discoveries. Extend this by making a tulipmania-themed 'Top Trumps'-style card game by downloading photos (or cutting them from bulb catalogues) and inventing statistics for each card (weight, price, rarity value, etc). Card sets will need careful planning, testing and modifying to play well.

PUPPET PROJECT

This book makes a great starting point for puppet and performance projects. Try setting up a workshop like Bram Poppenmaker's to

Examine them to find out about their design, manufacture and function. Does their intended use have any impact on their appearance?

Which clock do pupils prefer, and why? Draw one carefully from life and annotate the drawings with observations and descriptions, then write about the clock.

"A metal bear, head fashioned from an old saucepan and a body made of bicycle parts, loomed in the corner closest to the door. Its jaw was open in a silent roar and nestled in its mouth was a clock face...."

Design a magnificent clock for Edda to construct.

"It sounded like a thousand tiny metal feet dancing a chaotic rhythm...."

Create a steady 'tick-tock' beat by clapping, stamping or using instruments. Appoint a conductor to help you speed up, slow down and change dynamics. Ask small groups to invent new rhythms to 'fit inside' your tick-tock beat. Add rhythms, group by group, until they become one big soundscape.

"A row of metal cats hung in a line along one wall, their long tails swishing and swooshing and their eyes ticking left and then tocking right..."

Can you add body movements or actions to your performance? Write a report about what you've done, or a poem inspired by your soundscape.

Mysteries, clues and theories

What do we learn about Milou's past? Write each fact/clue on a sticky note and assemble on a wall. How can you arrange this information to make sense of it? Which are the most important clues and facts? How and when are we told about them?

Milou records information in her 'book of theories'. Re-read all four theories: Werewolf Hunter, Secret Spy, Baby Phobia, Unthinkable Theory. What evidence exists for each? What has Milou surmised from this evidence? What's real and what's made up? Invent a theory to explain the arrival of another orphan, and write an entry for Milou's book.

Mapping your world

Egg climbs over rooftops to draw a map of Amsterdam. Ask children to imagine they're on the roof of your school. What would they see? Draw a map showing the key locations in this book, and mark the journeys made.

"Beneath the stars I found you 52.284040, 4.784040; Under the moon I lost you..."

How do the children know where to go? Find out about coordinates, grid references, latitude and longitude. How many ways are there to communicate the exact location of your school?

How far do the children walk from the orphanage to the mill? How does Lotta know when they've arrived? Investigate ways of measuring distance such as pace and stride.

Fact and fiction

"In return for a steady supply of orphans each year, I will provide you with coin and rid this place of vermin."

What does Rotman mean? Re-read chapters 27-29 and use them to draw an accurate picture of De Zeehond. What happens on board? Which characters are present? Who knows what? Who sees what? Can children retell the action from different points of view?

In groups, roleplay an action sequence from these chapters. If you were filming it, you'd need a screenplay. Can pupils adapt part of the text to provide dialogue and stage directions for characters? How would a camera operator get the best shots? What kind of lighting would make it more exciting? Do we need special effects? Extend by adding 'technical' directions on how to film your scene.

"Researching is one of my favourite parts of writing. I wrote quite a bit of the final draft in Amsterdam to make sure I could get even more detail and authenticity into my descriptions."

Read the rest of this interview with author Hana Tooke at **tinyurl.com/tp-hana2**. What did pupils know about Amsterdam before reading this book? What have they learnt? Use the story facts to lead you to real-life facts and find out about Dutch history and the Netherlands.

Loved this? Try these...

- A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket
- Hetty Feather by Jacqueline Wilson
- The Wolves of Willoughby Chase by Joan Aiken
- Thursday's Child by Noel Streatfeild

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

explore puppet-making, or focus on script-writing and use commercially-available puppets for your performance.

Victorian children played with cardboard theatres. Watch Hana Tooke's video for the Puffin Festival of Big Dreams at **tinyurl.com/tp-hana3** where she shows you how to make a beautiful toy theatre in a box.

TRAVEL BY BOOK

Collect books set in lots of different countries and other locations and add them to your reading corner. Set up a roleplay travel agency where children can make travel brochures for each book, issue tickets and explore new destinations. Check out the All Aboard the Story Express downloadable resource pack at **tinyurl.com/tpstoryexpress**

The power of ROLE PLAY

Giving time over to drama lessons may feel like a risk, but it's certain to deepen children's understanding of fictional narratives

Not every teacher's encounters with drama are positive. We have all experienced that stomach-lurching moment when, during a training session, an overzealous course leader asks you to try 'a bit of role play'. Drama can feel daunting, and it would be easy to leave it in the hands of the talented, uninhibited few. However, many children have an often undiscovered natural talent for drama, and most pupils enjoy and engage with role play activities.

Drama is a useful method for teaching curriculum content, particularly reading and writing, and the well-worn quote from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee illustrates why we should be turning to role play as one of the essential teaching strategies we use to support children's understanding of narrative:

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." - Atticus Finch.

During the teaching of reading, drama and role play can support children to:

- engage with texts they might otherwise find difficult
- understand plot and action
- understand a story's setting and how this influences action
- predict and discuss future actions and their consequences
- understand and discuss mood and atmosphere
- understand characters' traits and infer their feelings, motives and intentions explore the language used by characters to express thoughts and feelings

Why role play?

From an early age, children explore worlds, real and imagined, through the act of role play. In Early Years they are provided with a range of opportunities to engage in imaginative play such as role-play areas, puppets and props, and through the act of small world play. Role play becomes more structured for older children but still provides the same benefits; it strengthens their comprehension skills by supporting them to make connections between a fictional world and their own lives as well as providing them with opportunities to explore scenarios within stories, considering their importance and consequences.

In addition, role play contributes to children's language development as well as developing confidence, creative thinking and strengthening collaborative relationships within the classroom.

Understanding book characters

Role play involves inhabiting the characters and their fictional world and, therefore, it is best to give the children time to explore these characters through book talk and discussion before leaping headfirst into a drama activity. Role on the Wall is a great way to do this and can be revisited at any point as a story progresses.

fig. 1

fig. 2

Here is an example of a KS1 Role on the Wall of Beegu, from the popular book by Alexis Deacon (see fig. 1 and 2). The first photograph shows how the character feels (inside her outline) when she finds herself stranded on a strange planet; around the outside of her outline are words that illustrate how others perceive Beegu (both her character and her appearance). The second photograph shows how a Role on the Wall can be added to and altered as a story progresses, allowing the children to notice how characters develop throughout a narrative (each coloured sticky note

represents a different moment in the story).

Time and space

Role play activities can be short and easily delivered during book talk or shared reading lessons, e.g. quickly hot-seating a character at a crucial moment in a story or taking a moment to explore a character's thoughts using a freeze frame. However, sometimes you may wish to make role play the main event, in which case you have to create or find plenty of space (every teacher should have a 'move the tables back' plan up their sleeve), and not feel guilty for taking a couple of hours out of the week to indulge in a bit of drama that might not have any form of written outcome. These are some of the techniques I like to use most often:

Familiar characters – there are many ideas we can use to support children in taking on the mantle of a known character.

Overheard conversations – in groups or pairs, children improvise conversations between key characters. The teacher and other class members eavesdrop and report back what they heard.

Telephone conversations – children mock call each other in role as characters from the story using the appropriate tone and language.

Flashback – children role-play a scene from before the beginning of a story.

Flashforward – children role-play what might happen next at the end of a story.

Gossip – in role as a chosen character, the children gossip about each other, making reference to critical events in a story.

Imagined characters – sometimes it is useful for the children to stand back from the action and adopt a different point of view. This is easily done by inserting new characters, who are imagined observers of the story, into a role play. For example:

- The policeman sent to the scene of a crime within the story
- A character's teacher who is talking about one of the characters during parents' evening
- A town councillor making an announcement about events that have affected the hometown of the character
- A character's parent or friend discussing their concerns
- A bystander gossiping about an event in the story
- The local wise woman, etc.

Writing in role

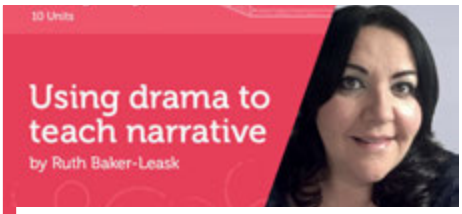
Writing in role is a worthwhile extension to most drama activities. It offers children a further opportunity to express a character's thoughts and feelings and allows them to reflect on the text as a whole. Writing in role provides children with an authentic purpose for their writing as well as enabling them to write freely, unrestrained by the expectations of more formal writing lessons. They might choose to write in role:

- A social media post
- A packing checklist
- A travel blog
- A diary
- An email
- A TV/radio interview
- A resignation letter
- An informal note to be slipped under a door
- A thank you card or letter etc.

Creating a soundscape

'Drama can support children in understanding how settings, characters and themes are central creating the mood or atmosphere of a story.' (DFE, 2014)

The above are abstract concepts for children to understand and explain. However, by using their voices, props and percussion instruments to represent the characters and actions within a passage of text, children can demonstrate their understanding of mood and atmosphere. By altering the pitch, pace, volume and tone of the sounds they choose to make, and by selecting specific instruments to represent each character, they can compose a dramatic soundscape that mirrors what is happening in a story. Children should always perform their soundscapes to others in the class as the text is read aloud. This can be particularly effective when the children are given sequential passages from the text, that can then be played in turn to demonstrate its changing moods.



Ruth shares many detailed strategies on how to use drama to deepen children's understanding of narrative in her video CPD series on Plazoom. Using some of her favourite books as examples, she walks teachers through how to build outstanding lessons around activities such as:

- Freeze framing
- Thought tracking
- Reader's theatre
- Whoosh
- Soundscapes
- Voiceovers
- Role on the wall

To start this and other online literacy courses, visit **plazoom.com**

Get involved

As you can see, drama and role play can support teachers to deepen children's understanding of text in varied and engaging ways, thereby avoiding the temptation to only teach reading comprehension through the model of teacher questioning; and using role play as part of your teacher's toolkit can be significantly enhanced when you get involved yourself (oh, there's that familiar stomach lurch!). No one likes to make a fool of themselves, but your children would appreciate it if you did. To fully immerse children in any dramatic scenario, you might need to jump in with them.

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

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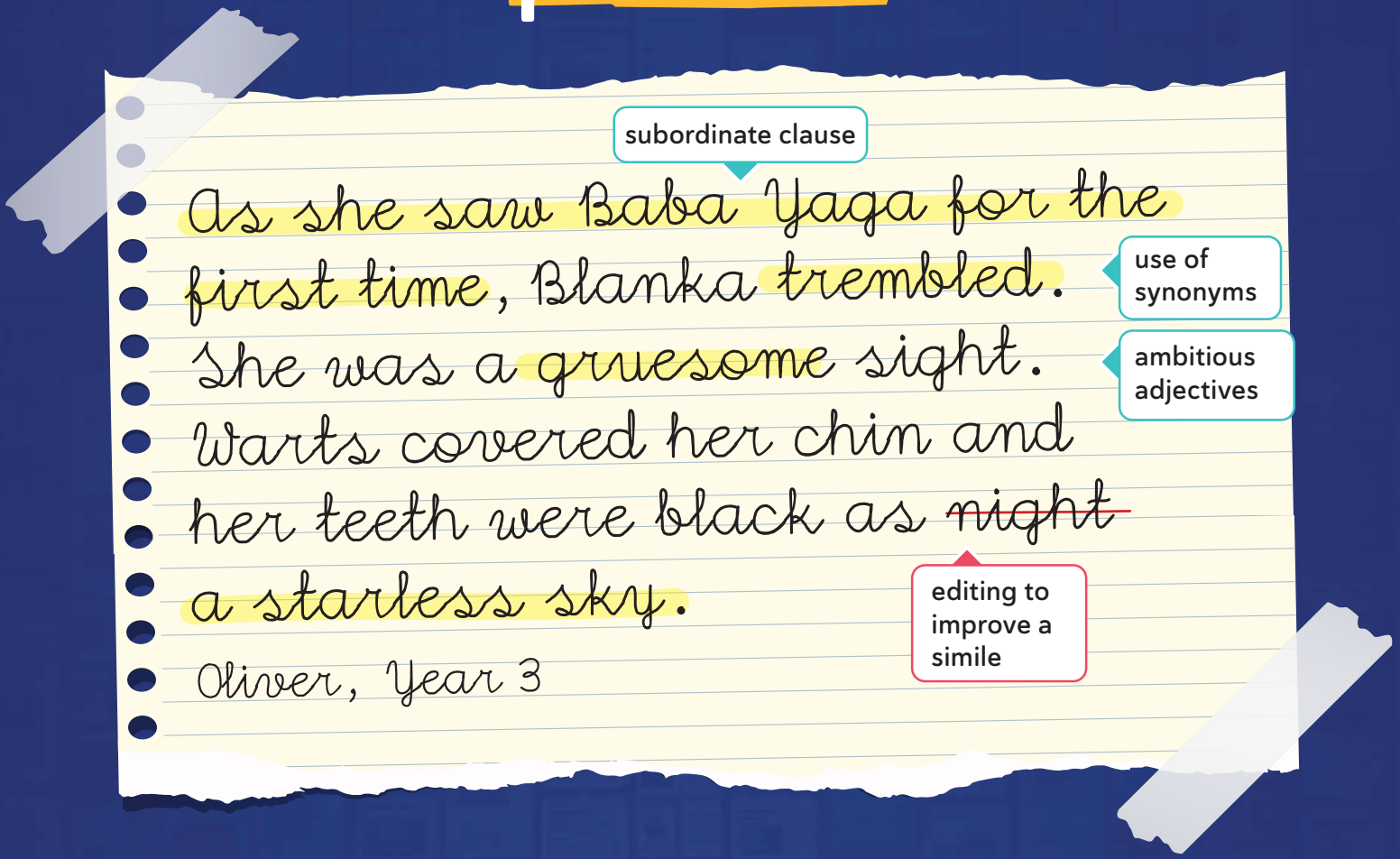

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Discover the titles no classroom can afford to be without this year...

The time has come at last – and once again, we are delighted to be able to share with you the results of our annual Teach Primary Book Awards – and prove in the process that not even a global pandemic can get in the way of the important business of supporting and celebrating the amazing world of children's writing!

Earlier this year – just as the nation went into lockdown, in fact – we called out for publishers to send us their very best books in any or all of four categories: Reception, KS1, KS2 and non-fiction. And as ever, despite the extraordinary circumstances in which we all found ourselves, they absolutely rose to the challenge.

Narrowing the entries down to a shortlist of just 24 titles was a tough enough proposition – and then, of course, our panel of brilliant judges had the even more difficult task of selecting the winners and runners up for each category. In order to help them do that, we asked them to assess each entry against a clear list of criteria, considering such things as learning opportunities, emotional depth and language play alongside superb writing and stunning illustration

Every single book listed here would be an asset in any classroom and can be recommended by teachers with confidence; those in the top spots are truly exceptional. We hope you enjoy exploring them as much as our judges did!

"I had such fun reading these. There are some truly gorgeous books in there that I will be recommending to lots of people!"

Judge: Lizzie Jones,

Programme Manager, Young Readers Programme, National Literacy Trust

Meet the judges

DAME ESTHER RANTZEN (judging the non-fiction category) is a journalist, presenter, and founder of Childline and The Silver Line.

ADE EDMONDSON is a comedian, actor, musician, television presenter and author (*Tilly and the Time Machine* and *Junkyard Jack* and the *Horse That Talked* are both published by Puffin).

BROUGH GIRLING is co-founder of the Readathon charity. A qualified teacher, he has written over 30 children's books, broadcast widely and lectured in children's reading from Canada to Cairo. He was head of the Children's Book Foundation in London and founding editor of the Young Telegraph.

LIZZIE JONES heads up the National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme – the charity's flagship reading for pleasure programme for primary school children.

EMILY GRAVETT is an author-illustrator who has twice scooped the prestigious CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal. Her book *Cyril and Pat* was runner-up in the 2019 Teach Primary Book Awards and won the inaugural BookTrust StoryTime Prize. October 2020 will see the publication of *Too Much Stuff* (Two Hoots) and the illustrated *Quidditch Through The Ages* by JK Rowling (Bloomsbury).

LISA THOMPSON is an award-winning author of novels for children, including the acclaimed *The Goldfish Boy* and more recently *The Boy Who Fooled the World* (both published by Scholastic). Lisa has sold over 100,000 copies of her books in the UK.

RECEPTION

KEY CRITERIA

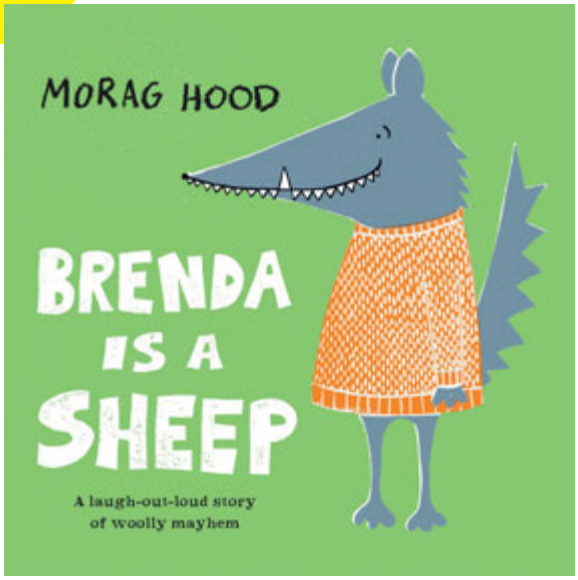
- Memorable illustration
- Read-aloud-ability
- Opportunities for discussion
- Encourages language play and development

WINNER

Brenda is a Sheep

Morag Hood (Two Hoots)

Brenda is the most popular sheep in the flock – but despite all her attempts to fit in, there's something about her that's just, well, a little bit different... This hilarious book deals brilliantly with ideas of difference and acceptance, cleverly letting young readers work out the subtext – and possible implications – of the story for themselves. This makes it perfect for using as a springboard for early classroom discussions about inclusion, as well as beginning to consider the notion of the 'unreliable narrator' with older children. And of course, it is simply great fun to read, too!



"Quirky and unexpected, with just the right level of peril. Hidden depths for parents or carers to explore with children. Another triumph from Morag Hood!"

Lizzie Jones

Runner up

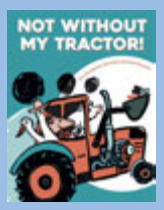
A Little Bit Different,

Claire Alexander (Quarto Kids - words and pictures)

Children and adults alike are bound to fall in love with Claire Alexander's adorable Ploofers, who have been practising doing something together, all at the same time. But hang on a minute, what's happening over there? This sweet celebration of uniqueness, with an uplifting rainbow glow, is a delight from start to finish.

"I loved this! Such a joy to read out loud. Loved the illustrations."

Lisa Thompson



Also shortlisted

NOT WITHOUT MY TRACTOR
Finn-Ole Heinrich, Dita Zipfel, Halina Kirschner (Little Island Books)
This quirkily illustrated and strangely touching story about a boy and his favourite vehicle is the perfect read for any tractor-loving child.

THE LAST TREE
Emily Haworth-Booth (Pavilion Children's)
A timely parable about what happens when a new community starts cutting down the trees in order to advance 'civilisation' – and how the children stop things before they go too far.

IZZY GIZMO AND THE INVENTION CONVENTION
Pip Jones/Sara Ogilvie (Simon & Schuster Children's UK)
The hugely popular junior inventor returns in a hilarious tale about self-belief, creativity and sustainability.

THE LITTLE ISLAND
Smriti Prasadam-Halls/ Robert Starling (Andersen Press)
A story of building bridges not barriers, and of finding friendship, rathr than fear – this charming, modern-day fable speaks above all of hope.

KEY STAGE 1

KEY CRITERIA

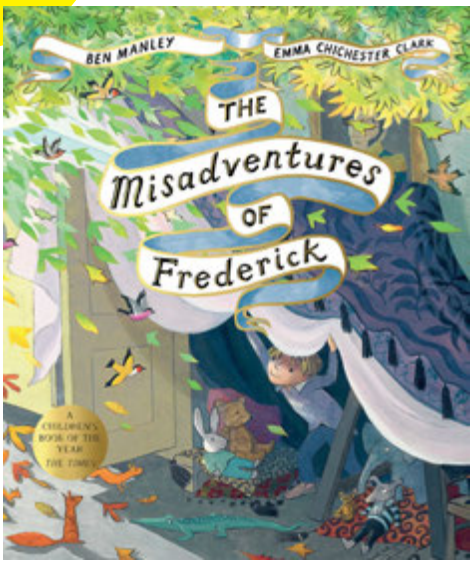
- Breadth of appeal
- Use of illustration
- Pacy, engaging story
- Learning opportunities

WINNER

The Misadventures of Frederick

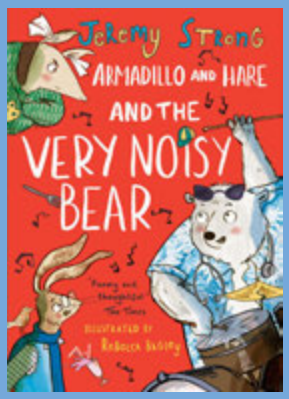
Ben Manley, Emma Chichester Clark (Two Hoots)

This playful, gloriously illustrated part-epistolary tale of one child's attempt to persuade another out of his over-protected bubble to taste a little of the adventure the natural world has to offer is one that pupils will return to time and time again. Handily, it's also an ideal way to start pupils thinking about the difference between formal and informal language – could they rewrite Emily's letters in the same style of Frederick's, and vice versa? How might that change the story?



"I just loved this! Bored posh kid meets sparky life-changing new friend. I kept picking it up for another go! Wow! Wonderful! Amazing illustrations. Book of the year for me."
Brough Girling

Runner up



Armadillo and Hare and the Very Noisy Bear,

Jeremy Strong, illustrated by Rebecca Bagley (David Fickling Books)

Armadillo and Hare live together in the Big Forest – and are great friends, despite their differences. This charming collection of short stories is witty and engaging, with elegant illustrations; a worthy addition to any classroom shelf.

"A funny, gentle and friendly book with memorable characters."
Lizzie Jones

Also shortlisted

GOOD KNIGHT BAD KNIGHT AND THE FLYING MACHINE
Tom Knight (Templar Publishing)
In this second title in Tom Knight's delightful Good Knight, Bad Knight fiction series, Berk and Godwin get literally carried away...

MADAME BADOBEDAH
Sophie Dahl (Walker Books)
Mabel lives with her parents in The Mermaid Hotel, by the sea – and when a particularly interesting guest arrives, her imagination sets to work; could this be a real life supervillain?

COOKIE! ...AND THE MOST ANNOYING BOY IN THE WORLD
Konnie Huq (Piccadilly Press)
In Cookie, Huq has created a brilliantly appealing character – feisty, science-loving, and above all, completely relatable.

THE SNOW DRAGON
Abi Elphinstone & Fiona Woodcock (Simon & Schuster Children's UK)
In Griselda Bone's gloomy orphanage, daydreaming is banned, skipping is forbidden and Christmas cancelled; but magic is waiting in the snow-filled sky.

KEY STAGE 2

KEY CRITERIA

- Originality
- Compelling plot
- Emotional depth
- Something to think about?

WINNER

The Space We're In

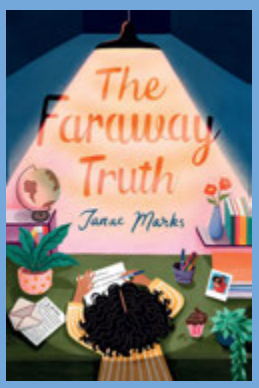
Katya Balen (Bloomsbury)

Ten-year-old Frank has trouble navigating his relationship with his five-year-old brother Max, who is autistic. Frank longs for the brother he was promised by his parents before Max was born – someone who was supposed to be his biggest fan, so he could be the best brother in the world. But when tragedy strikes, Frank finds a way to try and repair their fractured family and in doing so learns to love Max for who he is. This breathtakingly beautiful book has something special to offer every reader, and could certainly inspire some extraordinary and empowering classroom conversations.

"Astonishing, vivid and raw – an utterly compelling read. Frank's very original voice is at the same time heartbreaking and life-affirming. As engaging for adults as it is for children. Sensational."

Ade Edmondson

Runner up



The Faraway Truth

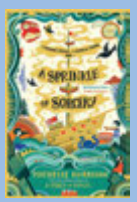
Janae Marks (Chicken House)

Zoe Washington has never once met her father, who was sent to prison before she was born. So, when she receives a letter from him on her twelfth birthday, it's a huge surprise – and sets her off on a search to find the truth about the crime he's supposed to have committed, and what she's been told about the kind of man he is. Heartwarming and uplifting, this is an intriguing mystery with real substance (and cake!).

"This gripped me! I thought the story was highly original and educational. A book to promote empathy (I loved the baking too!)"

Lisa Thompson

Also shortlisted



SMALL CHANGE FOR STUART

Lissa Evans (David Fickling Books)

This fun-filled adventure featuring Stuart Horten – ten years old and small for his age – is packed with puzzles and clues to solve; it's a real treat.

A SPRINKLE OF SORCERY

Michelle Harrison (Simon & Schuster Children's UK)

A great lesson in being kind to each other – beautifully written, with wonderfully drawn characters, sprinkled with magic.

THE THIRTEENTH HOME OF NOAH BRADLEY

Amber Lee Dodd (Scholastic)

The Bradley family have just moved into their thirteenth home – but will they escape the curse that follows them?

A HOUSE WITHOUT WALLS

Elizabeth Laird (Macmillan Children's Books)

This is a powerful story from an award-winning author, about family, hope and redemption amidst the refugee crisis in Syria.

NON-FICTION

KEY CRITERIA

Quality of information

Presentation

Is the writing entertaining and age-appropriate?

Will it provoke further curiosity?

WINNER

Invisible Nature

Catherine Barr (Otter-Barry Books)

Sounds no-one can hear, scents no-one can smell, colours we can't see, magnetic waves we can't feel – but some animals can, and use them every day. Without 'invisible nature' life on our planet would not exist. This fascinating, beautifully designed book shows how animals use it, and also how humans have learned how to tap into its powers in all sorts of important ways.

"I hope and expect this book will make the next generation far more respectful and appreciative of every aspect of our planet – and it's fun and astonishing too."

Esther Rantzen

Runner up

Big Ideas for Young Thinkers

Jamia Wilson/Andrea Pippins (Quarto Kids)

Described as, 'The book for inquisitive children with big ideas and busy brains' (so, 'children', then!), this absorbing and creative exploration of some of the questions that have stumped philosophers for generations will keep pupils' curiosity fed all year long.

"Ambitious, profound, clear, this terrific book makes us reflect on the most difficult questions – I loved it."

Esther Rantzen

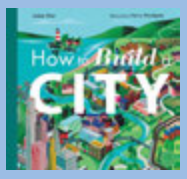
Also shortlisted

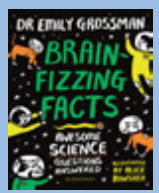
THE MISSING
Michael Rosen (Walker Books)
A personal, powerful and deeply resonant account of the Holocaust, by one of this country's best-loved children's authors

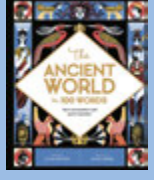
HOW TO BUILD A CITY
Isabel Otter (Little Tiger Group)
From solar panels to sewers and from trams to tower blocks; follow the step-by-step guide and watch the city grow...

BRAIN-FIZZING FACTS
Dr Emily Grossman (Bloomsbury)
Written by a science superstar and STEM Ambassador, this book answers all science questions with both wit and wisdom.

THE ANCIENT WORLD IN 100 WORDS
Clive Gifford/Gosia Herba (Quarto Kids)
With 100 carefully chosen words, each explained in just 100 more, this book provides quick and fun insights into the ancient world.







Read in to Writing

Spotlight on

Oi Frog!

KES GRAY & JIM FIELD

Oi Frog! Teaching Unit

Session Plan

Pupil Worksheet

Teaching slides

Overview

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MORE THAN WORDS CAN SAY...

When it comes to inference and empathy, picture books have plenty to offer pupils of all ages says **Nicola Mansfield-Niemi**...

"I once asked a group of pupils what picture books meant to them: 'safe', 'childhood', 'familiar', 'reception', 'colourful' were words that came up time and time again. One that didn't, though, was 'hard'. From a teaching point of view, I thought, 'Great – they will approach learning through picture books with a confidence they might not when faced with a novel'. From another perspective, though, I was saddened that we clearly weren't exposing children to a consistent and challenging experience of picture books as they progressed through school.

Since then, one of the best things we have done here at Broughton Fields is whole-school study of the same picture book. A few years ago, our work with *The Suitcase* by Chris Naylor-Ballesteros illustrated how attitudes, understanding and thought processes change as children get older. All pupils had the same text and the same variety of questions asked, yet the responses were wildly different. For example, the opening pages show a weary character with a suitcase. In KS1, they surmised he must be going on holiday, whereas from year 3 upwards they thought he might have lost his home. In UKS2, they decided he was escaping from something ominous, a black cloud in the corner illustrating the approach of something dark.

Deep meaning

In another scene you see a photo of the main character sitting and smiling broadly to the camera. A Y3 pupil with whom I was reading became very insistent that we stick on this page whilst he tried to decide why it was so important to him. In the image, you can see the faintest outline of a different character taking the photo, but they aren't with the weary traveller. The pupil linked this to grief; the character is missing someone important, which has added to what he is carrying. This is mirrored on the end pages, with recent photos of the character's new life – there is the smile but gone is the shadow of his past friendship.

There is nothing difficult in the language of this text – one or two sentences per page – but the children found it challenging nonetheless. The issue of friendship and belonging is so powerfully described through the pictures that they found themselves really debating what was happening, even questioning their own values and how they would treat a stranger. They were able to use the illustrations to aid them, including the use of colour to demonstrate emotions.

I repeated this exercise with staff in a short session, asking them what they were able to infer from a simple picture book, I then transferred this to a lesson where I showed how I would run a guided reading lesson with a picture book across school, altering the questions and the difficulty to suit the different ages.

Invaluable resources

Those familiar with EYFS/KS1 are already experts at picking up a picture book and running with it, developing the children's understanding of the world. It seems to be as we go up in year groups that we lose this, with novels taking precedence - but we neglect picture books at our peril. The depth of understanding about life in general and the sheer delights of language that they offer, not to mention how quickly children are able to see themselves, makes them invaluable.

When children have learnt to read, throwing them out of their comfort zone is a good test of their comprehension - the lack of words in picture books means they have to rely more on their own inference. It also allows weaker readers to take part in a lesson safe in the knowledge that they don't have to be on high alert about their decoding – they can show off a different range of reading skills.

As a school, we have continued to use picture books on a whole school basis – they are in our curriculum to ensure a rich, inclusive and diverse experience with different texts, themes and authors. I am proud of the experiences that children have, and how we are changing attitudes towards the place of picture books in schools.

Nicola Mansfield-Niemi is assistant headteacher and reading leader at Broughton Fields primary school.

I HAVE...

Explore the present perfect tense in Year 3 with this stunning, original model text by award-winning poet **Joshua Seigal** – and a teaching sequence from Plazoom

I have surfed on a bright, flashing comet through space

I have beaten a free-tailed bat in a race

I have found the Yeti in his hiding place —

These are some things that I've done.

I have bathed in a crater of hot, molten rocks

I have hiked through the forest in only my socks

I have wrestled and fought with the world's biggest ox —

These are some things that I've done.

I have caught a green dragon with only my hands

I have strummed a guitar in the most famous bands

I have ridden my bike to remarkable lands —

These are some things that I've done.

I have played for Brazil and have won the top prize

I have danced with a million pink butterflies

I may even have told one or two little lies —

These are some things that I've done.

Hook

Play a version of "Would I lie to you?" Explain to the class that you would normally expect them to tell the truth but, just for today, they have the chance to make up a story if they want to. Get each pupil to write down either something impressive that they have actually done (met a particular sports star, or helped out at a soup kitchen, for example) or something that sounds possible but which they haven't actually done. Individually call pupils to the front with their written experiences and select at random three other children to ask a question to see whether their story holds up. Once the questions have been asked, get the class to vote on whether they were telling the truth or not. (Pupils should rehearse sentences orally before writing examples.)

Familiarisation with the text

Read the model text together. What type of writing is this? (A poem.) How do pupils know? Explore the verb forms and tenses used (mainly present perfect tense; a discrete, fully resourced lesson on this tense is included in the full Real Writing unit for this text – see panel). Take the opportunity to revisit other skills from previous years (commas for lists, rhyming words, noun phrases) and find examples of these in the model text. Discuss tier 2 (guitar, hike, strum, surf) and statutory spelling words (caught, famous) that appear in the poem. Do pupils know what they mean? Ask pupils to make up a short story (a paragraph or two) about something they have done (even though they haven't really), using all the tier 2 and statutory spelling words listed.

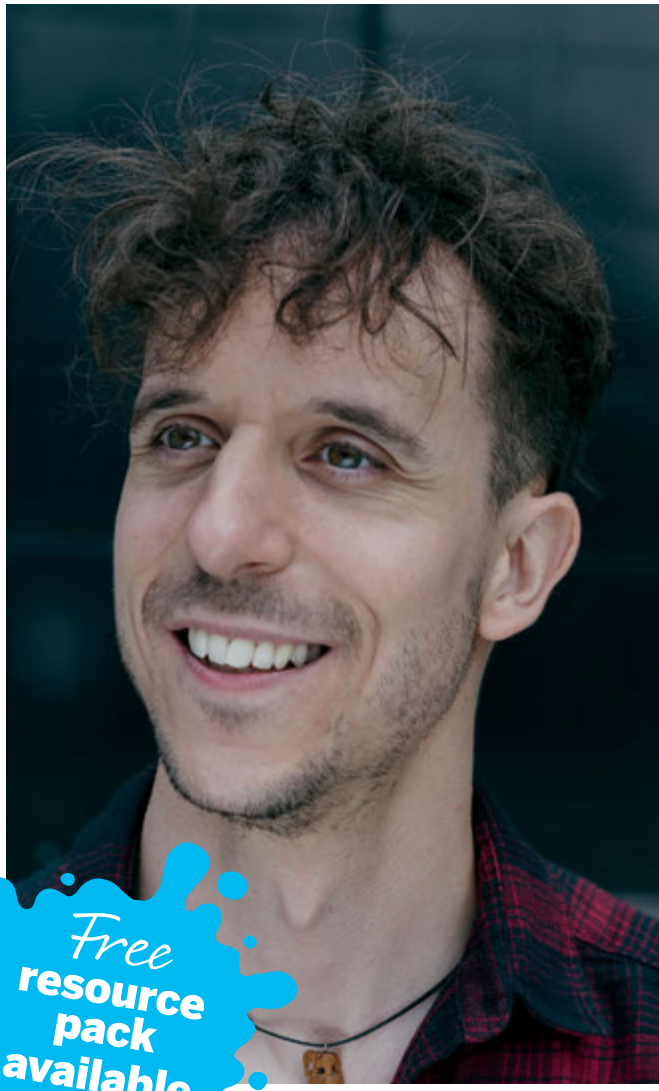
Writing

Talk about the features of this 'present perfect' poem. Discuss the structure (four stanzas; four lines per stanza; first three lines of each stanza have 12 syllables each; first three lines of each stanza rhyme with each other; fourth line of each stanza is the same) and the language (present perfect tense for first three lines of each stanza; prepositions to add detail; conjunctions and adverbs to express time, place and cause; commas for lists – especially adjectives in descriptions; figurative language such as metaphors and similes; exaggerated, impossible ideas; humour). Explain to pupils that they will be writing their own 'present perfect' poem, in the style of 'I have...' Give them time to plan their writing, then allow them to write their poems over several sessions, proofreading and editing where necessary.

Podcast

Building Fantasy Worlds, with Jamie Littler

Play the podcast, share the teaching sequence – and inspire amazing writing from every pupil...



Inventing new fantasy worlds can be a hugely rewarding experience for primary-aged children. It allows them to exercise their imaginations and play with ideas, as well as being a great way of starting them off with the tricky business of story writing. The added bonus is that for many children it's an extension of the playing they'd do at break time anyway, so it doesn't feel like work.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to create a new fantasy world and then write a story set there, learning from Jamie Littler, author of *Frostheart*. Extracts from Plazoom's *Author In Your Classroom* podcast (series one, episode three) are used to support each section of the teaching sequence; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (**bit.ly/AIYCJamieLittler**) before you start.

Free resource pack available

SESSION 1

WHAT IF...

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **18.29** up to **20.37**.

2 | Discuss the part where Jamie Littler talks about the game Floor is Lava and says 'what if there was a world where no one can touch the ground because dangerous monsters lurk beneath?' Do the children think this would be a good world to set a story in? Why? What possibilities might this give the writer to invent exciting scenes and set problems for the characters to solve?

3 | Ask the children to work in pairs to invent some other types of world that might be exciting places to set stories. Once they've devised some ideas, share them as a class.

4 | Working in pairs or small groups, prompt the children to think about the implications of living in this type of world. They can record their ideas on big sheets of sugar paper, in their books, or using the planning sheet included in the free resources pack that's available from Plazoom (see panel, right). Once they have completed this task, give children time to share their worlds and possible adventures with the rest of the class.

"Readers are intelligent people, you don't need to tell them everything"

Illustrations: Jamie Littler

SESSION 2

STARTING WITH A DRAWING

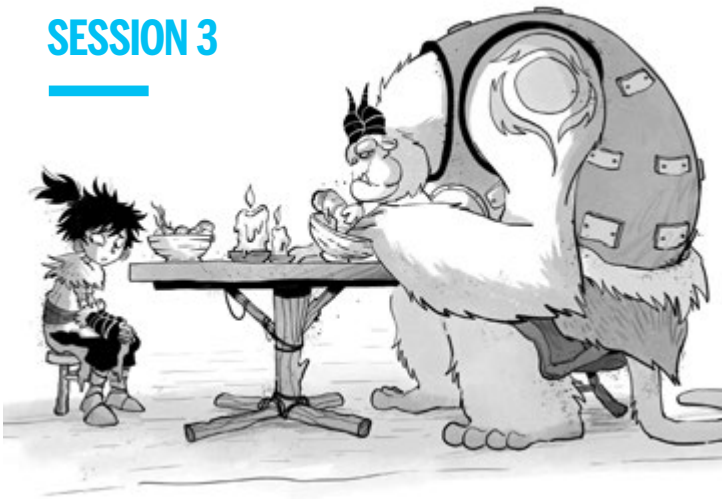
1 | Play the section of the podcast from the beginning up to **05.55**.

2 | Ask the children to plan a story by drawing pictures of key places or scenes and a map of where their story will take place. Remind them to:

- *include as much detail as they can – it is the little details that will help to bring their writing to life for the reader.*
- *annotate their drawings and map with text – names of places, descriptions, and scenes from the story. These will be useful when they come to write.*
- *remember that their drawings are just a way of getting their ideas onto the paper. They don't have to be perfect and they don't have to be neat at this stage!*

3 | Once they have their drawing and/or maps, they can work with a partner to think of some *what ifs* to help create a story.

SESSION 3



WORLDS APART

1 | As a class, discuss the idea that the reader might want to know how the new world they have created fits with our own world. Tell the children that their new world might be:

- *completely separate from our world*
- *part of our world, but hidden*
- *another planet, but in our universe*
- *a parallel world, which people sometimes travel to*

2 | Ask the children if they can think of books, films or games that are set in worlds that fit into one of these categories. Can they think of any other ways story worlds could fit with our own?

3 | Now get the children to decide how their world will fit with our own. If their world exists alongside our own, can people from our world travel there? If so, what might happen if they did? Perhaps this will give them a *what if* to help plan their story. Give the children time to gather their ideas together – again, on sugar paper, in books, or using the sheet from the resources pack.

SESSION 4

WRITING THE STORY

1 | Play the section of the podcast again that starts at **16:43** up to **18:29**, in which Jamie reads from *Frostheart* (NB in the resources pack, the extract is also available as a PDF and on PowerPoint slides – see panel, below left).

2 | Ask the children to turn to a partner and list as many things as they know about the Lurkers from the extract. Prompt them to describe what they look like, how they move and how the characters feel about them.

3 | Ask the children: how does Jamie Littler paint a picture of the Lurkers? How does he make clear that the Lurkers are dangerous and terrifying? If necessary, draw their attention to:

- The choice of adjectives (*wet, sleek and serpentine; six frost-white eyes; gaping jaws filled with ice-sharp fangs and drool-slick tongues; scrabbling claws and whip-long tails*)
- Verbs and adverbs for description (*graceless scrambling gait, they moved with terrible speed; racing hungrily towards him*)
- A poetic noun phrase (*a writhing mass of horror*)
- How the character react to them (*screamed; frozen to the spot in fear; whimpering in terror*)

4 | Remind the children that they can use these language features when they come to describe characters or the setting of different scenes in their own story.

5 | Ask the children to write their own stories set in the world that they have created. Remind the children to think about what they have discussed in the session:

- Make use of the possibilities of the world they have created to drive their story. This might be to do with the geography of their world – if the land is covered in snow, how will this affect the characters' adventures? Or it might be to do with what is possible in the world – if the characters can use magic, how could that help drive what happens?
- Describe their world, so the reader can imagine that they are there. They could use rich adjectives; similes and metaphors; and all of their senses.
- To *show, not tell* (if you wish, you could play the part of the podcast where Jamie and Helen talk about this - **26.10** to **27.20**), letting the reader find out what characters are like or what is happening in the story from the action and words of characters, rather than just stating it explicitly ('like a shopping list', as Jamie puts it!).
- Choose a consistent voice – either first person or third person.
- Use their drawings and maps to help them, but remind them that they don't have to stick to their plan – they can change things if a better idea comes along!

6 | Once the children have finished their writing, ask them to share their work with a partner or look at some examples together as a class, sharing the parts that they are especially pleased with. Once they have had some feedback, they can look at their work again and make some changes to improve it. If you have a working wall, extracts from children's work could be displayed for everyone to see.

DOWNLOAD NOW!

plazoom

To download a full set of FREE resources for this teaching sequence – including planning sheets, teaching slides, themed writing paper and more – visit **bit.ly/plazoomJLittler**. To subscribe for free, just search for 'Author In Your Classroom' wherever you get your podcasts!

Schools

This episode of Author in your Classroom is presented by Plazoom, in partnership with Puffin Schools, 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**

Back ON TRACK

Have your pupils' handwriting skills slipped over lockdown? Go back to basics with this advice...

LAURA DOBSON

Cast your mind back to when you learnt to drive. Remember the brain space that the mechanics of driving took up? There was little room left to think about directions. These days you drive to get somewhere and the mechanics are just part of the process. The same is true of the transcriptional skills of handwriting and spelling. They are not the reason we write, but if we are using up our brain capacity thinking about them, the real purpose of writing (to persuade, entertain or complain, for example) becomes secondary.

Although handwriting is not the most important factor of writing, children often place importance on it (and parents do too). Pupils will consider themselves a good writer if they have neat handwriting and vice versa. It has an impact on self-esteem. Poor handwriting often means a child cannot read their own work. How can they edit and improve if they can't understand what it says? If writing takes ages to do well, or it physically hurts, this undoubtedly has an impact on a child's enjoyment of writing. Here are some reasons that children struggle with handwriting, and how to rectify them.

Are your pupils ready developmentally?

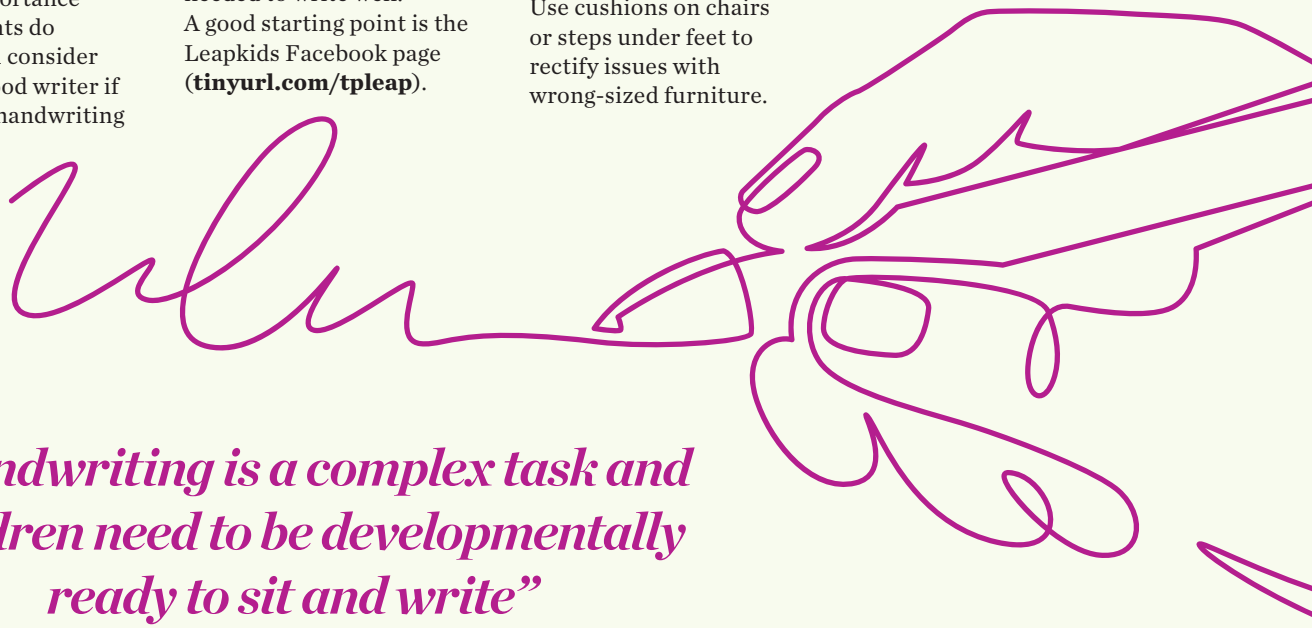
Handwriting is a complex task and children need to be developmentally ready to sit and write. You can find many fabulous pre-writing activities online to develop the skills and muscles needed to write well. A good starting point is the Leapkids Facebook page (**tinyurl.com/tpleap**).

Are they sitting right?

If a child's core, shoulders and hands are strong enough to write, poor handwriting could be due to incorrect writing posture. Pupils should sit right back in their chair, knees at 90° and feet planted on the floor. The chair should be tucked in, but children's torsos shouldn't touch the table so there is space to bend. Use cushions on chairs or steps under feet to rectify issues with wrong-sized furniture. Sitting at a desk to write before pupils are strong enough can lead to poor posture. It's far better for early writers to mark-make while lying on their stomach to develop strength in the shoulder girdle muscles, or write on a vertical surface to encourage wrist extension.

Is the paper positioned correctly?

With their forearm resting on their paper to anchor it, children should move the paper up the table with their non-writing hand as they write, allowing their wrist to stay below the writing line. So often I see children with hands 'hooked over' their writing because they haven't moved the page. Sometimes this is simply because the table is too cluttered. Tilting the paper makes writing more comfortable and allows children to see what they are writing. Left-handed writers will tilt the paper down and right-handed writers up. Children won't do this



"Handwriting is a complex task and children need to be developmentally ready to sit and write"

TIPS FOR LEFT-HANDERS

- Position left-handed children so their elbows don't bump with right-handed classmates.
- Left-handed pupils often have an inclination to form letters in the wrong direction – repetition of correct formation will help with this.
- Put any text to be read or copied on the right-hand side of their page so their arm doesn't obstruct it when they are writing.

HANDWRITING WARM-UP IDEAS

CHAIR PUSH-UPS
Develop shoulder strength by grabbing the sides of your chair and pushing your bottom in the air, ideally with your feet off the ground.

SCISSOR CUTS
Hold your arms out in front of you then cross them over up and down. This helps with crossing the midline (the ability to reach across the middle of the body with your arms or legs) and shoulder strength.

CRAB WALKS
On the floor, push up from sitting with your tummy in the air and walk around on your hands and feet to improve wrist and shoulder strength.

SPIDER PUSH
One-by-one, push your fingers together. This helps with finger strength.

RUBBER BAND STRETCH
Improve finger strength by wrapping a rubber band around your finger and thumb and stretching them apart ten times. Repeat on the other side.

automatically so model it and help them find the correct tilt.

Is their grip good?

Once they are developmentally ready, most children will benefit from being taught the dynamic tripod grip. However, there are slight adaptations to this which can also work well. Pupils should be able to see the nib of their writing implement and their wrist should be below the writing line. They shouldn't be pressing too hard and writing shouldn't hurt. There are some excellent grips available, but the end goal must be for children to have a good grip without aids.

How is their spatial awareness?

Can the pupil reproduce shapes? Do they have good spatial awareness? Do they use their non-writing hand to stabilise the paper and have a dominant writing hand? If any of these skills are lacking, handwriting will be difficult.

Are they in the mood?

Handwriting takes time and care to master. Attitude and mood can have a huge impact on it. Have a go at writing in Chinese script – it's hard and requires real focus and attention to detail. It will remind you how complex handwriting is.

Tips for KS1

Ensure your handwriting scheme or policy is being followed by all. The national curriculum guidance states that there should be frequent and discrete direct teaching of handwriting. Keep it interesting with a multi-sensory approach and lots of modelling. It will take more thought in the current climate, but find ways to make writing fun (gel pens, writing in the air, chalk writing on the wall, etc). The more children practise, the better they will get. Ensure handwriting is closely monitored and all staff know what correct formation and grip look like.

In the autumn term, re-evaluate posture, hand position, grip and paper position. If children have got into bad habits it will feel strange doing something different, but it is important to rectify these now or pupils could find writing painful, slow, and infuriating in the future.

No one is designed to sit and write for long periods of time, especially young children. Consider how you can provide breaks within the current restrictions. Warming up before writing can help (see panel, above). Ensure you also continue to focus on building up pupils' strength and hand-eye coordination.

Is KS2 too late?

It's never too late to put things right. Re-evaluate and identify any issues which require focus – seating (left and right-handed children not bumping), posture, hand position, pencil grip, letter formation, paper tilt.

Get children to evaluate their own handwriting. The National Handwriting Association has created a free poster – 'S Factors' – which encourages children to consider particular aspects of their writing: size, shape, slant, spacing, how words sit on the line and speed. Find it at **tinyurl.com/tphandwriting**.

Let children try out different writing implements and discuss their likes and dislikes. Consider any difficulties children may have copying from the board (light reflecting or losing their place, for example). Find ways to rectify these, such as numbering the lines.

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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Writer's BLOCK

We must find time for creative writing during teacher CPD sessions

MARK LOWERY

During seventeen years in teaching, I must've attended a hundred CPD sessions about writing. I've brainstormed six trillion ways to write in other subjects. I've got a black belt in 17 forms of assessment. I've moderated so hard I thought I might lose an eye. I've been rigorously drilled in how to write feedback comments, how to not write feedback comments, and how to express feedback comments through contemporary dance. I've attended a seven-day summit in Davos to resolve the whole purple-pen-green-pen controversy. And I've watched two mature female colleagues slug it out like drunken sailors in the car park over whether or not we should use 'well done' stickers in books.

But how many meetings have focused on me becoming a better writer? Exactly four. And those four sessions only happened because I asked the headteacher if I could run them myself. If I hadn't asked, then I wouldn't have ever had any training to develop my skills and confidence in writing.

We all agree that writing is central to the curriculum, and hugely difficult. We all agree that future employers are crying out for a creative workforce who can communicate effectively. We all agree that children learn better when their teacher is confident, enthusiastic, and has sound subject knowledge. And we all agree that it's really hard to model anything in front of children, especially if you haven't had much practice at it.

Yet, for a lot of primary teachers, creative writing isn't something they've actually done since secondary school. To quote a former colleague: "Outside the classroom, I never even write a shopping list." If schools find time and opportunities for teachers to develop their own writing skills, the benefits can be enormous. I believe that creative writing CPD has the potential to change a whole

"For a lot of primary teachers, creative writing isn't something they've done since secondary school"

school's attitude towards, and culture of, writing.

Morale and empathy

Firstly, teachers and TAs are extremely creative people. By offering writing CPD, schools can give them an outlet for this creativity, enable them to develop it and show them that it's valued. Perhaps it might encourage them to use their creativity in other ways, and boost morale.

It will also enable staff to develop a greater understanding of the writing process. They'll become more confident in their own skills, and consequently more able to model high-quality writing in front of a group. A staff meeting offers a safe and supportive space to practise, away from 30 sets of watchful eyes.

It should also lead to staff having greater empathy towards children. By carrying out writing tasks themselves and talking them through with colleagues afterwards, teachers can learn a lot about how children might feel during similar activities, and what might help them. How did it feel when you looked at the blank sheet? How did other people's ideas inform yours? Would you like to read it out or are you more comfortable to just share it with the person next to you? What might've made that task easier or more enjoyable? And, perhaps, did it help you when I wrote 20 technical points on the board that you had to follow or your work would be deemed a failure?

Box-ticking exercise

With this last question in mind, there's long been a dichotomy between the ideas of creativity and technical skill. The current heavy grammar focus, and the 'writing by numbers' approach of the Literacy Strategy before it, have meant that (in some classrooms) writing has become more of a box-ticking exercise than a worthwhile, creative activity in its own right.

Teachers, and by extension children, have been drilled that 'good' writing follows a set of predetermined features. Yes, these features are important but, sadly, this approach alone can result in us all missing the point somewhat. Really good writing transports us somewhere else, affects us emotionally and lets us walk in someone else's shoes.

How often have you lamented about a child whose technically-perfect work is bland and 'lacks a spark'? These intelligent, diligent pupils tick all the boxes because they're conditioned to believe that writing is all about the replication of a list of specified elements. However, without also focusing on the value of the intangible aspects of writing – the creative process, the essence of the piece – some children will only ever produce flat, uninspiring and uninspired work.

Shared experience

Giving children a strong purpose for their written work goes some way to developing the idea that it's valued and relevant. However, in order to really motivate children, teachers themselves need to be fully engaged in the creative process so they can model it with enthusiasm and credibility.

Put simply, being a writer is at the heart of teaching writing. By regularly experiencing creative writing, staff will be in a far better position to help others to do it more effectively. Hopefully they'll be more attuned to finding those sparks of brilliance that illuminate an effective piece of writing but perhaps don't tick a particular technical box. Which feedback would you prefer on your work: "Well done. You've used three relative clauses, a fronted adverbial and an obliterated espadrille"; or: "I love the way you've built up the tension here. It's so creepy. I found it really hard to do that in my story. Can we share it so we can all see how you did it?"

Of course, there's no reason why this shouldn't extend beyond the staffroom and into the classroom. The next time you set your class off on a piece of writing, why not do it yourself at the same time? Writing alongside you will show the children that the task is worthwhile. Afterwards, you can discuss the work with them as a fellow writer, comparing and contrasting your successes, challenges and shared experiences. Writing is hard. Teaching other people to write is even harder. But teaching people to write without writing yourself? That's impossible.

MAXIMISE YOUR WRITING CPD

- If you need some writing CPD, request it from your head or SLT. They can't know unless you ask them!
- Think carefully about when it's timetabled. The morning of an Inset day is probably best. People don't always jump for joy when they're asked to write a story at 3:30pm on a Thursday afternoon.
- Don't be too guided by outcomes. Well-structured but open opportunities to write work best, then reflect afterwards on what you found, felt and learnt. Comparing people's experiences can be really illuminating and leads to greater understanding of children's attitudes to writing.
- Invite TAs along. They'll benefit from practice too (as will the children they support).
- Think about the type of activity you want to do. Do you want to try several short, sharp tasks (eg story opener, poem, letter to a character), or do you want an hour to write a longer piece?
- Encourage everyone to take it seriously by explaining the reasons for it clearly.
- Repeat the training later in the year. Focus on different skills and reflect on any ways that the training has impacted on practice.

Mark Lowery is the author of ten books for children. His latest, Eating Chips With Monkey (Piccadilly Press), is out now. Mark carries out school author visits and teaches part-time in a primary school near Cambridge.

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Refugee KID

How to use modern classic The Boy at the Back of the Class to promote empathy and compassion in your classroom

JOHANNA HOWARD & JONATHAN ROOKE

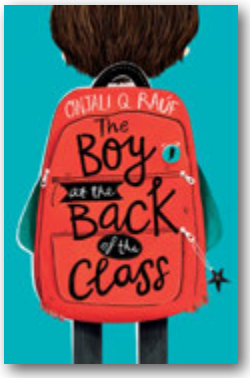
A mysterious new boy arrives in our protagonist's (who we shall call 'P' here) classroom. Who is he? Where has he come from? 'P' befriends this stranger and listens to his story of escape from Syria, his dangerous trek across Europe and his longing to be reunited with his family.

The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q. Raúf will deeply move children and has a place in every KS2 classroom. It covers themes of prejudice, difference and courage, all explored in ways which will lead children to ask questions, while enabling them to understand the content in an age-appropriate manner. It will aid you in exploring what are usually considered 'difficult' topics in a way which still feels comfortable.

Written from the convincing perspective of nine-year-old 'P', pupils will relate to the 'adult' concepts and will be encouraged to consider the views of others, promoting empathy and compassion.

Discover Syria

"He sat in the corner, staring at his rucksack."



• Find Syria on a map and plot Ahmet's journey across Europe. Watch a child-friendly explainer about Syria such as the Newsround video at **tinyurl.com/tpsyria**.
• Ahmet's language is Kurdish. Encourage children to learn a few words and phrases.
• Invite an adult to tell a story in a foreign language. Ask pupils how it feels.
• After discussing why refugees fled Syria, ask children what they would choose to bring from home if they could only carry one rucksack. Make a gallery with drawings of their objects and their reasons for selecting them.
• Compare Ahmet's first days at school with Auggie's in Wonder by RJ Palacio.

P4C enquiries

"What's a refugee kid?"

This book is bursting with 'golden concepts', enabling deep P4C questions to arise. Explore concepts of friendship, acceptance and loss through carefully designed philosophical questions. Hearing these types of questions will strengthen pupils' ability to ask their own questions.

• As you follow the characters' journey, encourage your class to ask questions as they comprehend what is happening.
• Pause while reading the book to ask your class questions and clarify that they understand the content.
• Begin with text-related questions, such as "How did Ahmet feel when this happened?", then progress to more open questions, such as, "Is it ever OK to be prejudiced?"

Figurative language

"I meant to give the pomegranate to the new boy at home time."

The pomegranate in the book unlocks themes of diversity, kindness and friendship.

• Ask children about gifts they have really appreciated. Have they ever gone to special lengths to find a present for someone?
• Ahmet wants a pomegranate because it reminds him of home. What gift would remind your pupils of home?
• Give the children a pomegranate so they can evaluate the author's use of figurative language. Let them try a cup of pomegranate juice. Observe different fruits and write your own

poems or descriptions.
• Make a pomegranate tree and hang the children's writing from the branches.

Role play

"I took a step forward and tried to grab the pomegranate back."

• Make freeze frames of the fight between bully Brendan and Ahmet. Encourage pupils to explore the courage it took for 'P' to take action and stand up for Ahmet.
• Retell the story from Brendan or Ahmet's point of view, using a scaffold of, 'I thought, I said, I felt, I did'.
• Use the richness of the scene to draw inferences about motivations from the characters' words and actions. Draw outlines of Ahmet and 'P"s bodies on a large piece of paper and fix to the wall. Ask the children to write down questions on post-it notes and stick them to the body shapes.

Writing descriptions

"Josie has large brown eyes and at least a million freckles on her face."

Raúf brings her characters to life with detailed, playful descriptions through the eyes of 'P':

"Tom's got short, spiky hair and a side smile and a big Adam's apple that looks like a ping pong ball got stuck in his throat. He's the smallest in our group but he's also the funniest. He only joined our class last year after his parents moved here from America but we became friends instantly."

• Use Raúf's accessible character descriptions to model literary features such as adjectives, similes and the use of subtle details. The descriptions are affectionate and even traits which are less desirable seem positive.
• There is nothing more important to most children than their best friend and children will relish the opportunity to describe them. Ask pupils to consider what will make their description interesting to the reader. After all, the child knows more about their best friend than most. Encourage them to think outside the box and describe them in a way that makes the reader feel that they could be best friends with them too.

Use drama

"My name is Ahmet. I am nine years old. And I am a refugee."

• Give children photocopies of Ahmet's drawings of his journey and let them decide how to sequence them. Predict, infer and tell Ahmet's journey orally or as captions on a storyboard.
• Invite children to form questions for Ahmet's family then hotseat one another.

MORE RESOURCES

The Boat is an Arts Council England funded project designed to challenge perceptions of immigration via a picturebook. The book is accompanied by free teaching resources that aim to engage children with this tricky subject. Find out more at the-immigration-boat-story.com

• Use masking tape to make the outline of a life-size boat on the floor. Ask children to sit inside it and invent dialogue. Use this oral rehearsal to write a playscript or new pages for the book.
• Set up a simple tent in the classroom. Encourage the children to imagine that they are Ahmet and compose diary entries.

Fact vs opinion

"What Mr. Brown and Mrs. Grimsby said."

As teachers, we understand the immense responsibility of providing children with facts rather than relying on opinion. However, children hear differing opinions every day and may take them at face value if they do not have the tools to distinguish them from facts. We must empower pupils to question what they hear. One of the KS2 reading objectives is to understand the difference between fact and opinion and this text provides ample opportunities for this.

• When reading aloud, pause when facts and opinions arise and challenge the children's understanding.
• Print out the below quotes, plus others, from the text and ask children to sort them into facts and opinions.

"Refugee kids come from big tents in the desert"

"Refugees have had to leave their homes and travel very far to try and find a new house to live in"

"It'll cause trouble, mark my words! They're only coming over here to take our jobs"

• Ask pupils to rank the quotes from most obviously an opinion to least obviously an opinion.

Reading for pleasure

"And it was all thanks to a boy who came and sat at the back of the class."

A dramatised reading of the final chapter will be a memorable reading-for-pleasure experience.

• Co-opt willing adults to dress up and act out 'P"s mum, Mrs Khan and Ms Duncan. Use props such as a birthday cake, a pomegranate, a birthday card from 'P"s dad, etc.
• Leave the props in a story box and encourage children to invent their own alternative endings.

Johanna Howard is LKS2 Y3/4 lead at Weeke Primary in Winchester. Jonathan Rooke is a senior lecturer in education at the University of Winchester.

The Reading Reconnection

Lockdown has left more children than ever unlikely to pick up a book for pleasure, says **Heidi Perry** – so how can schools and teachers turn things around?

The global pandemic has created consequences we couldn't have imagined a year ago. In education, the new reality is polarised; some children have experienced intensive home tutoring while others have had no 'schooling' at all. Teachers report a wide range of issues brought on by the impact of the lockdown; aside from the expected loss of learning and the widening attainment gap, there is a worrying acceleration of mental health issues, as well as a deterioration of behaviour in the classroom.

At Read for Good, the national charity with the objective of motivating children to read, we have asked teachers and librarians how lockdown has impacted children choosing to read for pleasure – an activity which even pre-Covid 19, was pinched by the diverse pressures, and pleasures, of contemporary life. The responses are best summed up by the words of one teacher: "*Those that do read, have read more, and those that do not, have barely read at all.*" For bookworms and those with access to books at home, lockdown proved to be the Holy Grail of getting children to read; i.e. keep them in until they are so bored of whatever screen time is available, that they will read and they will enjoy it! Reading also offered relief from the stresses of homeschooling; if a child is reading a book then there's no need to fret, is there?

Mixed results

At the other end of the spectrum, for homes without books, comics and magazines, and for those children who don't consider themselves 'readers', the lifeline of daily facilitation and encouragement provided by schools and local libraries was brutally cut off. One librarian we spoke to said: "*Many students have reported that they do not own a book, nor do any of their family. The in-school library closures have caused some children to lose six months of reading.*" And in those households, screen time was often the only way a stressed-out parent could occupy their child during lockdown.

Research conducted by BookTrust during lockdown showed similarly mixed results: 47% of parents said their children read more by themselves since lockdown; 34% of parents said they read to their children more; and more than one in ten parents (11%) said that the extra time at home meant that they read their child a bedtime story for the first time ever.

But 28% of families questioned said that they 'never' read bedtime stories during lockdown, a proportion that increased significantly according to socio-economic group.

"Those that do read, have read more, and those that do not, have barely read at all."

What next?

And of course, screen time soared – digital devices were used for educational purposes and socialising with friends and families, with gaming (68%), schoolwork (54%), and watching TV (49%) the most popular with children aged 4–11. Screen time amongst primary-aged children increased by over two hours a day.

For those challenged with the difficult task of making reading for pleasure happen in a packed curriculum, the idea that children have been in front of screens for hours on end may well be disheartening. How will we ever entice children back to the simple pleasure of turning a page to see what happens next?

The pandemic has pushed all of our boundaries, and perhaps herein lies a strategy; because sometimes, thinking outside of ordinary paradigms can be revelatory.

New conversations

In 2019 Read for Good delivered *Stories in Schools*, a pilot intervention comprising a series of workshops, run by skilled professionals, designed to engage disengaged and struggling readers and to transform even the most reluctant readers' attitudes towards reading. It offered pupils an inclusive, creative experience with no assessment or follow-up activities required. At the end, each chose a free new book to keep.

The methods used were experimental but effective; students were invited to discuss their experience of books, however negative. Once those views were safely aired without incurring judgement, participants were encouraged to think of stories they had enjoyed elsewhere; in – hold your breath – computer games, films, or cartoons. They were often shocked that they were allowed to discuss these story formats in this context and that were allowed to explore their personal viewpoints in such depth. What emerged was that participants often presented a surprisingly sophisticated grasp of narrative devices and characterisation, even if this had been experienced chiefly through gaming or watching films.

A source of comfort

Students who had previously rejected books outright, seemed to grow gradually more comfortable and willing to consider reading. Most often, once they realised that stories on 'screens' provided valid discussion points, and that their opinions were welcome, their negative attitudes towards reading began to soften. Workshop leaders found that it became easier to discuss what books children might read, were they offered one to choose to take home. A workshop leader remarked *"...each child had a strong understanding of their own tastes, styles and preferences...*
I was so impressed by the responses of some of the boys who had been the most resistant in previous visits. These were the ones who appreciated the books the most and became immediately engrossed. The boy who nearly got removed, who then loved his book said, 'This is my book now. I'm over the moon with mine' and 'I'm going to read it in detention.'"

Perhaps if we allow ourselves to welcome conversations about gaming and TV dramas, social media, and other digital content, they can provide a starting point for re-engaging children with reading. For many of us, this will feel like we are pushing more boundaries – but if not now, then when? The media content consumed by the children we know may not be as nourishing as the literary texts we long for them to read, but they may prove valuable as experiences of 'story' and a route in to reading, along with any available reading material children enjoy – comics, magazines, newspaper sports pages, and blog posts – each or any of these can be a source of comfort, consolation and connection in these Covid-19 times.

Five tips to re-engage children in reading for pleasure

- **Find a hook** – e.g. football, anime or gaming; games like Fortnite and Minecraft all contain elements of 'story' which can lead a discussion towards books. Building on a child's personal interest is also the basis of Reading Recovery teaching (bit.ly/TRW12RR).
- **All reading counts!** Forget about attainment levels and let children choose whatever they like; comics, magazines, graphic novels, even the sports pages.
- **Encourage re-reading** If books feel like familiar friends to revisit, enjoyment of reading will grow.
- **Try listening** Audio books and films can be a way into books that seem daunting.
- **Talk about it** Book talk and peer recommendations help to grow a sense of community in these socially-distanced times. Try to let conversation flow freely (bit.ly/TRW12BT).

Heidi Perry leads School Strategy and Creative at Read for Good, creating compelling strategies, Readathon resources and imaginative campaigns to get all children reading, for good.

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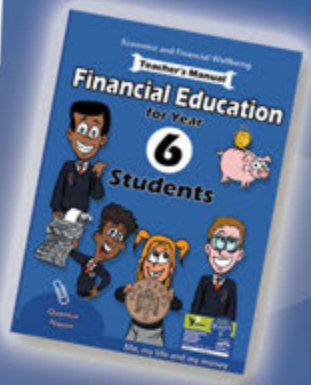

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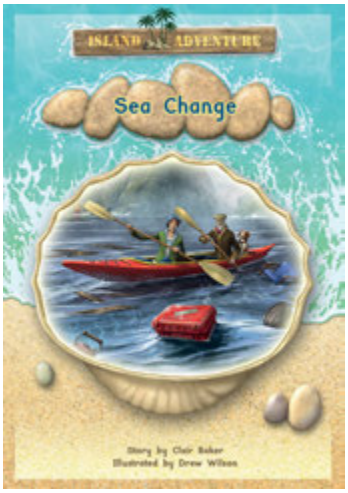
READING

Island Adventure Series from Phonic Books

Appealing, decodable books and activities aimed at older, struggling readers



AT A GLANCE

- Age-appropriate stories and illustrations for catch-up pupils aged 8-14
- Designed to work with any phonics programme
- Step-by-step progression
- Each book targets specific phonemes
- Supplementary photocopiable activities available

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

It's hard enough to be aware that you are lagging behind your peers with your reading. To be then presented with books clearly aimed at children much younger than you is just adding salt to the wound. Children grow up. Their tastes and interests evolve. Shouldn't their reading matter reflect this, even if their reading skills have fallen behind their chronological age?

The Island Adventure series from Phonics Books represents an admirable effort to meet that need. As well as publishing resources for beginner readers, Phonic Books has created a varied collection of story series aimed specifically at helping pupils aged 8-14 to fill the gaps in their phonics skills and knowledge.

You can tell that these resources have been produced by experienced teachers. As you read through the ten-book Island Adventure stories, for example, you can't help mentally ticking off all the elements you would want from such a series – not to mention a few you might not have thought of. There is clear progression. Each book focuses on one or two target phonemes but also revisits those from previous books. There is a practice page at the beginning to prepare the reader by introducing key words. There is also a vocabulary page, including idiomatic language, to broaden pupils' own personal lexicons. I particularly liked the way they unobtrusively show the readers how to split multi-syllabic words on each page – it suggests a thoughtful approach to teaching while remaining sensitive to the self-esteem of the child.

Just as impressive is the activities book that accompanies the series. With a section for each individual tale, it provides an interesting range of photocopiable challenges for the pupil to complete independently. These focus on a range of crucial reading and writing skills as well as providing targeted phonics practice.

Above all, these books have been created to make reading a genuine pleasure. The stories are fast-paced and absorbing, whilst the illustrations immediately appeal to the targeted age-group. By adopting a quest or mission style narrative, they cleverly draw in the reader and make you want to read further, not least by ending each book with a cliff-hanger (sometimes literally!) that propels you into the next book of the series. And if the target phoneme is a little obvious at times, that can be forgiven as these books are not meant to win literary prizes – they are there to build confidence, fluency and engagement in reluctant readers. Mission accomplished, I'd say.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Engaging, age-appropriate stories
- ✔ Visually appealing to the age group
- ✔ Sensitively supportive of the target audience
- ✔ Well-resourced with practice materials

UPGRADE IF...

... you want to help older, struggling readers close the reading gap with their peers without patronising them with reading materials written for younger children.

"You can tell that these resources have been produced by experienced teachers"

Island Adventure series (ten books): £39.00, workbook: £25.00 www.phonicbooks.co.uk

WRITING

STABILO EASYstart pens and pencils

State of the art design to support pupils' writing

AT A GLANCE

- Innovative triangular pencils with non-slip mouldings
- Ergonomically designed, refillable rollerball pens
- Developed in conjunction with experts in fine motor skills
- Different versions for left- or right-handers
- Ideal for young writers or those with special needs

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

Tyres have treads. Runners wear spikes. Gymnasts chalk their hands. Why? Because little slips can have big consequences, especially when you're just starting something new. So, it must surely make sense to apply the same logic to a skill that requires a similarly impressive level of control and precision as the aforementioned activities – by which I mean the art of handwriting.

If you think about it, you could hardly get a less helpful design for a pencil than the traditional frictionless, thin cylinder. Poles are made for sliding down – just ask any firefighter. Yet people have been pushing smooth, round pencils into children's sweaty palms for decades; then bemoaning their lack of control when it comes to letter formation. Thankfully, STABILO has taken matters into its own hands, coming up with a range of considerably more sensible solutions to make life easier.

Working with experts in ergonomics and fine motor skills, STABILO has created a family of products that have been specifically designed and developed to help young children really get to grips with writing. To start with, there are the EASYgraph pencils, with their triangular design to aid a reliable grip. (If you're not convinced about the need for this shape, simply rest your thumb and index finger together on your middle finger as if you were holding an invisible pencil and look at the gap between them.) This is further enhanced with non-slip grip moulds that provide a permanent reminder of the correct positioning of the fingers, no matter how much the pencil has been sharpened.

These pencils are available in 3.15mm (thick) HB graphite versions for left-handed children as well as right-handers. They have also been joined by the thinner 2.2mm EASYgraph S. Together, they offer pupils the best possible start as they set off on their writing journey.

Eventually, of course, children will be expected to swap graphite for ink (quite possibly having acquired a licence). Fortunately, STABILO continues to provide a steadying influence throughout this transition with its EASYoriginal pens. Once again, they are moulded to fit your fingers' natural tripod grip like a glove. In addition, they have a curved tail to nestle comfortably into your hand's shape for extra stability. The rollerball nib glides effortlessly over the paper with a smudge-free ease that positively invites cursive writing. You can even get refills for it, which is just as well, as its elegant if quirky design definitely makes it a keeper.

No doubt, you could find cheaper pencils and pens, but that's hardly the point, is it? Nor will every pupil need these specialist design features forever. But, for early writers and those with specific needs for support with their grip, these clever, thoughtfully developed tools will come in very handy indeed.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Fun, sturdy and attractive
- ✔ Designed for a firm grip and increased control
- ✔ Promotes good handwriting habits
- ✔ Builds confidence in early writers
- ✔ Makes writing fun

UPGRADE IF...

... you want to invest in pens and pencils that provide a solid foundation for confident, neat writing in young children and those with special needs.

"For early writers and those with specific needs for support with their grip, these will come in very handy indeed..."

EASYgraph pencils, £1.61 each; EASYgraph S pencils, £1.15 each; EASYoriginal pens, £7.70 each www. stabilo.com/uk

LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

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AT A GLANCE

- Designed with the busy primary librarian in mind
- Free migration of data from your current system
- A wide range of useful features
- No contractual tie-ins
- All the functionality of other systems at a much lower price

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

Children need to read. To read you need books. Books need a library. So far, so uncontroversial. The problem for primary schools is how to manage that resource effectively and efficiently. Of course, there are library management systems out there already. But do they sometimes make you wince – especially when you see the price?

Smart Librarian is a new library management software package aimed at primary schools. Developed by a family business, it is designed to provide everything you would want from such a system but at a fraction of the price.

So, does it give you everything you want? It certainly seems to, although I'm not a qualified librarian. But then again, most school librarians aren't either. In my experience, they are teachers or teaching assistants with a mountain of other things to do. So, what they want is a reliable, comprehensive, easy-to-use package that saves them time and effort.

As you would imagine, Smart Librarian provides scan out/scan in simplicity so you can tell exactly who has had what in their personal possession, and for how long. It also has an array of interesting special features, such as those helping you manage class-at-a-time library visits. But what I particularly liked about the system as a whole, were the little touches that makes you think this has surely been designed from the point of view of the passionate yet time-impoverished librarian. Need to update your pupil details? This will do it in seconds by drawing on your school's administrative system without you having to change entries manually or pay more to add a new intake.

There are plenty of other whistles and bells that are worth mentioning, from a handy webcam function for personalising records to comprehensive reporting possibilities, including school inspection reports for when Ofsted arrives. For example, it supports Accelerated Reader. It cleverly alerts you to potential issues with your data so that you can tidy up your own library records. What's more, it can even import all your data from your existing system, so you don't have to worry about re-entering all your stock.

You would probably need to have a play with Smart Librarian yourself to get a better picture of everything it can do. So it's lucky that its makers allow you to do this, free of charge, without obligation. And, if you like it, you can enjoy thinking about how you're going to spend the money you've saved. Perhaps you could buy a whole load of books for your library. Now there's a thought ...

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Excellent value for money
- ✔ Easy and intuitive to use
- ✔ Labour-saving features
- ✔ Perfect for primary school libraries

UPGRADE IF...

... you want all the library management and reporting features of market-leading library software but at a significantly lower cost.

"This has surely been designed from the point of view of the passionate yet time-impoverished librarian"

£300 per year smartlibrarian.uk

"I thought books WEREN'T FOR ME"

Konnie Huq's relationship with reading didn't start well - but then she stumbled across Judy Blume...

Growing up, I was definitely what you'd describe as a reluctant reader. I thought books weren't for me, I felt that they were a chore. Don't get me wrong, I loved picture books as a young'un, but mainly because of the illustrations and the fact that they could be read to me. Unfortunately, as soon as I began to learn reading and writing I just didn't want to read picture books for myself using these new skills - I still wanted them read to me.

When it came to the progression to longer books - those without pictures on every page, and chapter books - I felt that I had come to the end of the road in my relationship with literature. It had run its course, and I preferred drawing pictures anyway. I remember at school being forced in class to read *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. I couldn't engage with it, it just wasn't my thing. I recall quite distinctly to this day being freaked out by the assembly of the bits of metal in the junkyard and the scary red eyes. I didn't like it, so I decided reading didn't interest me. And that was that.

Hooked for life

Then one day sometime later, also at school, we were told to pick a book from the trolley at the side of the classroom and do some silent reading. Unlike with *The Iron Man*, this wasn't a story being read by the whole class, this would be my own independent choice of material. Even though reading wasn't my thing, we all had to do it, so I thought I may as well go through the motions. I picked up a book called *Superfudge* by Judy Blume because I quite liked the title. It was actually a sequel to an earlier book the author had written called *Tales of the Fourth Grade Nothing*. I opened the book and pretended to read it... by actually reading it. Before I knew it I was hooked.

> *"It seemed to me that this must be how grown up books are written"*

I devoured it. It spoke to me. This was the first chapter book I'd read of my own volition. It seemed to me that this must be how grown up books are written. It wasn't patronising in any way, and it was written in a style I could instantly engage with. I remember in the opening pages a description of the main character spitting out bits of chewed up carrot across the kitchen in shock having been told by his mother that she was expecting a baby, much to his disbelief. The writing simply grabbed me, cover to cover. Suffice to say I went back and read *Tales of the Fourth Grade Nothing* straight after. I had found my 'gateway' book. Many don't. And if you don't, you are often a reluctant reader for life, missing out on the unlocking of whole worlds and adventures in your head from the comfort of your own bed or sofa or bench or wherever you wish. What a loss.

Funny business

My older son reads, but computer games are stiff competition. His younger brother has yet to find his gateway book. I know that both my boys love funny stories, though, which suits me fine. It's important for kids to have a good sense of humour in my opinion - especially as it's these primary years that shape the adults they'll become. There is a snobbery in the book world against 'funny', which really grates with me. Any time a child picks up a book - or comic, or Pokémon index catalogue or whatever they wish - that's a good thing. These can all be gateways to reading. As long as they're reading, and it's a pleasure not a chore, that's what's important. Then hopefully they'll continue, and grow up to be adults who read - adults with empathy, knowledge and in some cases, a good sense of humour.

Studies show the more we read when we're young, the further we go in life. The more readers we have in society, the brighter the future looks for all of us.

Konnie Huq is a presenter, screenwriter and author. Fearless Fairy Tales by Konnie Huq and James Kay with illustrations by Rikin Parekh is published by Piccadilly Press.

My Twist on a Tale
writing competition

Launched on International Literacy Day, the **My Twist on a Tale writing competition** encourages young people to let their imagination run wild as they write a story based on a new theme for 2020: **Everyday Heroes**.

Following an extraordinary year of disruption, we want to provide children with a positive outlet to highlight the extraordinary stories that have emerged throughout the year. Children and young people aged 4-19, from across the UK, have the opportunity to write their own tales of people who have made a difference to them.

Entries close at 17:00 on **Friday 27th November 2020**.

Find out more and enter online here: **go.pearson.com/mytwistonatale**

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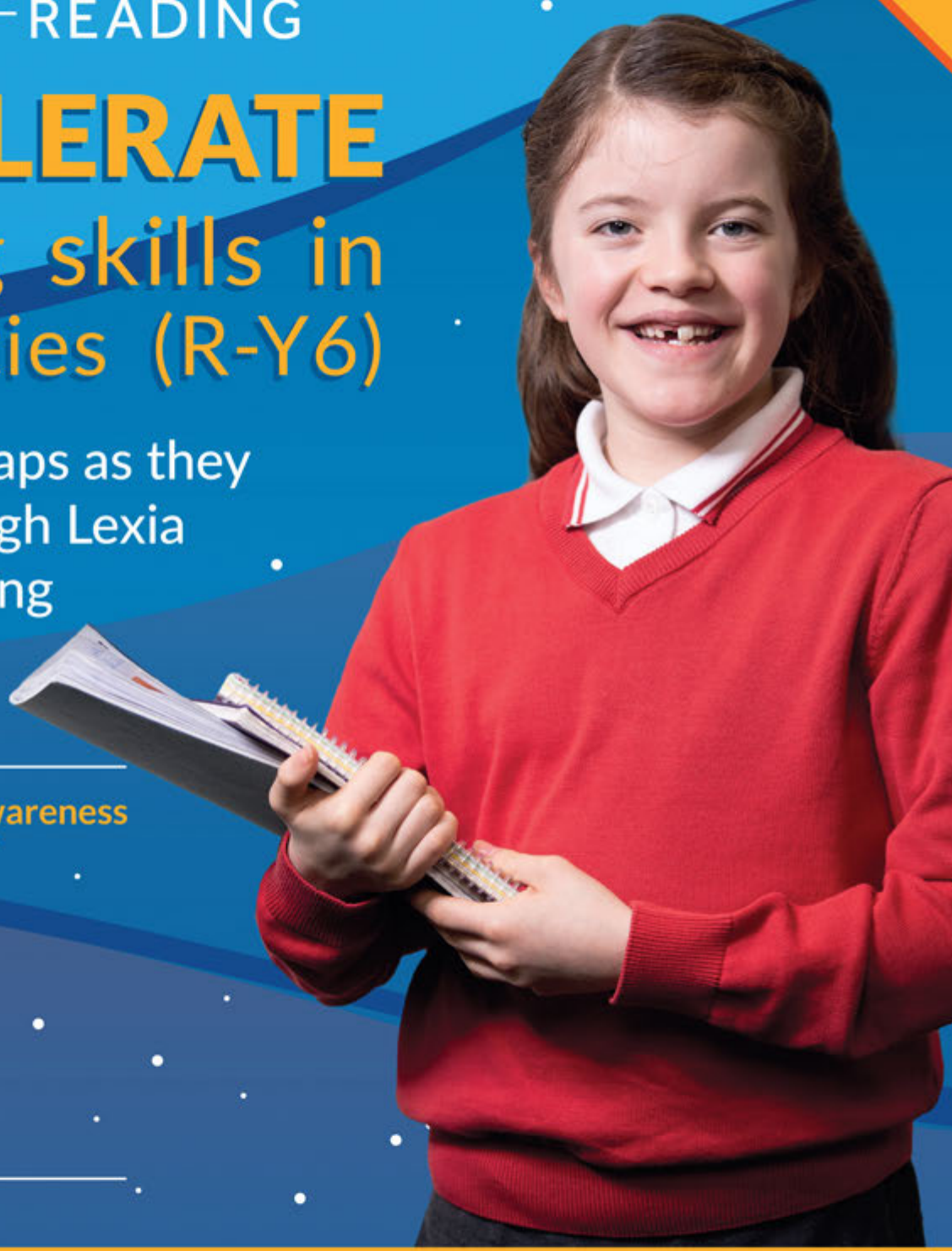

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