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IN WRITING!

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WENT ROGUE?

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CORBETT
MODEL TEXT

Expert WAGOLL

How to write fascinating
characters

KNOW YOUR
AUDIENCE
THE SECRET
TO REFINING
WRITING

HANNAH
GOLD

*"It was a joy to immerse
myself in the Arctic"*

STORYTELLING

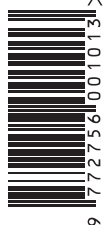
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Welcome...

Everyone's talking about AI in the classroom, but what if it got loose on the streets of Macclesfield?! Well, Pie Corbett's new sci-fi model text on page 42 suggests we might end up with killer robot unicorns, among other alarming entities. Something tells me that's going to be one literacy lesson that gets everyone on board...

Back safely indoors, Tim Taylor's charming exploration of the 'three teacher voices' on page 26 is full of practical advice on how to up your storytelling skills to really catch children's attention and get them hanging on your every word.

I really enjoyed reading how Adam Jevons-Newman took his class on a writing journey that ended with a proper published book (page 18). Involving a local author in the project brought some real-world interest and expertise to pupils as they worked on creating their own mythical stories.

As ever, we have great expert advice for you from some of your favourite children's writers. On page 34, Hannah Gold, author of *The Lost Whale* and *The Last Bear*, uses an extract from her new book, *Finding Bear*, to show children how they can create a sense of place in their writing. Meanwhile, Natasha Farrant takes an extract from her novel *The Rescue of Ravenwood* and explains how to write characters who are both fascinating and believable (page 10). Both of these 'What a good one looks like' features are accompanied by extensive teaching resources that you can download for free from teachwire.net – you'll find the links on the relevant article.

Don't miss our book topic either: on page 51 Jo Cummins takes a deep dive into Eloise Williams' historical adventure, *The Curio Collectors*. This is a dyslexia-friendly title from Barrington Stoke, which makes it a lovely accessible title for a whole-class read.

That's just a taste of what we've got in this issue – there's lots more advice from classroom teachers and literacy experts to enjoy. Happy reading!

Lydia Grove
(editor)

Practical teaching
tips and expert
advice from
classroom
teachers and
literacy leaders



NIKKI GAMBLE

Understanding common idioms will increase reading fluency and comprehension, but what's the best way to teach them?

Well it's all about context... p.36



CHRIS CALLAGHAN

Introducing children to work from diverse authors will help them feel that regardless of where someone is from, they can go on to achieve amazing things...

p.43



CAROLINE SCOTT

Images can open doors to learners who might otherwise be struggling with literacy. We need to choose and use pictures wisely though!

p.58

*Carey
Fluker-Hunt
recommends
gorgeous books
to read aloud
p.12*





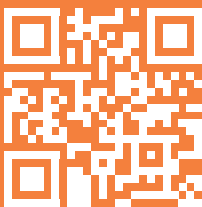
Agents of history Partners in mystery Sisters in solving crime

A note from J. T. Williams, the author of *The Lizzie and Belle Mysteries*:

The Lizzie and Belle Mysteries is my historical fiction series set on the dark and dangerous streets of Georgian London. My heroines, Lizzie and Belle, are based on real historical figures! Elizabeth Sancho lived with her family at their tea shop in Westminster, and Dido Belle was brought up at Kenwood House by her aunt and uncle. I wanted to put two Black British girls centre stage and invite them to tell their own stories. Meet Lizzie and Belle to find out more about our shared past ...

If you would like to bring *The Lizzie & Belle Mysteries* directly into your classroom and immerse your pupils in an inspiring and thought-provoking journey through the book's themes of identity, storytelling and resistance, Literacy Tree have developed an exciting and comprehensive teaching resource for *The Lizzie & Belle Mysteries: Drama and Danger* for Upper Key

Stage 2
based on
their
evidence-
informed
Teach
Through a
Text
pedagogy.
Scan the QR
code to find
out more.



Read an extract from *The Lizzie and Belle Mysteries: Drama and Danger*

My mother says that until the lions have their own storytellers, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.

She has a proverb to suit most situations. She says that proverbs are 'jewels from the ancestors' to guide us through the challenges of life.

I can definitely see myself as a lion.
I am strong. As strong as anyone my age.

I am fast. Superfast, some say. No one I've met can outrun me.

I am loyal to my pride. My family – my mother, my father, three sisters and a brother – are my world.

For every proverb my mother offers, my father has a quotation.

'All the world's a stage!' he claims.
'And all the men and women merely players!'

He believes that we each have a role to play in the great drama of life. That different situations call for different performances. The important thing is to be true to oneself in each performance.

Am I a performer? Or a storyteller? Can I be both? The heroine of my own story?

Mama says that if we don't tell our own stories, someone else will do it for us. And if we let them do that, how can we trust them to tell it right?

Until the lions have their own storytellers, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.

When this story began, almost everything I knew about the world I had learned from my parents. These events changed that forever.

I decided to write them down so that I could be a storyteller for the lions.

I did not yet know that this was the story of a hunt.

**The
Lizzie and
Belle Mysteries:
Drama and Danger
and its sequel,
Portraits and
Poison by J. T.
Williams are
OUT NOW!**



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How one website saved this teacher time and reduced the anxiety around teaching vocabulary...

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Robert Tregoning reflects on a childhood tinged with shame, but hopes his joyful story of gender expression will give solace to today's young readers

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Pleased to meet you

Want to learn more about your class? Just let them write, says **Simon Hunt**

At the beginning of the school year, I use creative writing to understand where each of my pupils is academically and to help me get to know all the children in my class.

Why not just give them a test, you ask? Well, it's remarkable what you can discover as a teacher when children have the freedom to express themselves. Creative writing offers an insightful window into a child's world, and you can learn a surprising amount about a pupil from just a short piece of their imaginative work.

Interests and passions

The choice of topics and themes in their writing can unveil children's interests and passions, which is an incredibly valuable thing to know. Whether it's street dance, football or dogs, you can use this knowledge to help spark their interest in maths, science, or any other subject by tailoring the examples you use in lessons to suit them.

Emotional expression

Creative writing also provides an avenue for children to express their emotions and thoughts, which will allow you to understand more about

their feelings and concerns. It can reveal a child's depth of insight and emotional intelligence that they may be hesitant to express verbally. This will really help you choose the right support for them through the school year.

Confidence and oracy

Reading aloud is an important part of writing stories, as it gives children the opportunity to practise their oracy skills: pitch, tone, and intonation. And vitally, hearing them read out loud will allow you to baseline their reading fluency.

Presenting their writing to an audience can be very intimidating though, so should be handled sensitively.

Some children naturally have quieter voices and may avoid volunteering to read aloud as they are aware that not everyone can hear them. In my class, we have a pass-around microphone that the children use when reading. The microphone is connected to a speaker, meaning that everyone can

hear them. The simple act of holding the microphone can significantly impact a child's focus when reading aloud – often serving as a sort of comfort blanket, boosting their confidence.

Ultimately, the important thing to note is that stories are meant to be read and heard, and anything we can do to encourage that nurtures children's literary and communication skills.

Imagination and creativity

Creative writing reveals a child's imaginative abilities, giving insights into their capacity for original thinking and storytelling. It can be surprising to see the children that excel at this, and it can help to highlight an aspect of a child's personality that might otherwise not have come to light until later in the school year.

How to make it work

If we want children to be excited about creative writing, we have to be too,

so think about how you introduce the lesson.

I often begin by telling my new class about how I felt about writing as a child. I loved reading books, but struggled at school with spelling and grammar (in fact I still do). So I share with the children how creative writing helped me overcome my fear of 'everyday' writing because I realised that what was important was the imagination and creativity I could bring to my story.

As a published children's author, I show them the books I've written and connect them back to what I learnt at school. I hope this helps them to overcome their worries about spelling and grammar – I've found post-pandemic that more children seem to feel anxious about 'getting things wrong'. Of course SPAG is still incredibly important but in creative writing I really want them to focus on telling me a good story.

There are so many ways to understand the children in your class and what makes them tick and, as teachers, we're attuned to gathering this information from day one. However, I think creative writing is one of the best because it gives us the basics but also tells us so much more about the child.

“If we want children to be excited about creative writing, we have to be too”



Simon Hunt is a Year 3 and 4 teacher at an inclusive school in Greater

Manchester. He is education consultant for 500 Words, the UK's most successful children's story-writing competition, hosted on BBC Teach. Details of the winners will be announced on World Book Day 2024 at tinyurl.com/56wr6r5r



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exchanged for resources.

A membership entitles up to 30 members in a school to access over 500 high-quality, book-based resources, including Spelling Seeds for spelling and vocabulary, and Literary Leaves to support the teaching of reading comprehension, as well as the original Writing Roots. We can create bespoke school memberships for small schools as well as MATs, Trusts and LAs.

Written by teachers for teachers, the resources use high quality and award-winning texts, and the Writing Roots are based on our 'Teach Through a Text' approach to primary English. We provide plans for Reception to Y6, which are easy-to-use, detailed sets of daily plans that guide teachers through using a text. The concept is innovative as our plans have discovery points using elements of dramatic conventions to generate interest; they develop vocabulary through interrogating text, and they include explicit grammar objectives that are always applied at the point of writing. We also provide models of writing and ensure the composition opportunities are as engaging as the books. Members also have access to hundreds of work samples from the resources.

Through use of the Literacy Tree, children build a literary repertoire and develop a knowledge of celebrated and significant authors, such as children's laureates and the Carnegie and Greenaway award-winners. The range includes novels, novellas, picture books, wordless texts, narrative poems, play scripts and narrative non-fiction, and prepares pupils for the subject content of critical reading at KS3. This is a key



feature of Literacy Tree as we choose books that are wide-ranging in genre, but that all possess literary features. Our book choices are deliberately diverse, and we review them continually with support from our teacher advisory panels for Race and Culture, LGBTQ+ and SEND. Children become critical readers and acquire an authorial style as they encounter a wide range of significant authors and a variety of fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

We provide curriculum maps that are free for all, too, which suggest a journey through the books in Literacy Tree. We have chosen books that sit together under literary themes and a school can adapt or adopt these as they wish.

Members have access to progression documents and live half-termly planning surgeries for no extra cost. Each school has a place on the termly subject leader meeting that takes place on Zoom with consultants and an author visit.

After downloading the resource, anyone can view the work samples that schools have shared, including high-quality published work and book-based displays. Stay tuned, too, because an app will be launched in September to help members to annotate plans, capture work samples and assess their children's progress.

And, if you're after some reassurance from those that have already used the programme, we have over 30 success stories on our site which are written by schools who have adopted and adapted Literacy Tree. These range from small rural schools, SEMH settings and even international schools.

Get in touch with the team to find out more about a membership size that can work for you – we can create a bespoke membership for a small school or for a large trust.



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– Headteacher, Van Gogh Primary, Lambeth



WAGOLL

The Rescue of Ravenwood by Natasha Farrant

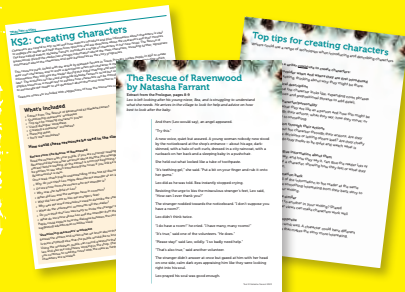
Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write fascinating and believable characters...



Photo © Red Photography

Text © Natasha Farrant. *The Rescue of Ravenwood* (£7.99, Faber & Faber) is available now.

DOWNLOAD
RESOURCES AT



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

tinyurl.com/tp-RR

On the top of the hill, overlooking the sea, that's where you'll find a magical place... To Bea and Raffy, Ravenwood is home. In its own way, the house rescued them, even if it did have a fallen-down tree taking up most of the kitchen. So the idea that it could be sold – demolished even – well, that's unthinkable. Then again, it's not like the children get a choice. But the truth is, we can all make our own choices, especially if we care enough...

Every story has a different starting point, and *The Rescue of Ravenwood* was born of a desire to write about the climate and ecological crisis on a scale that felt manageable for children, and in a way that balanced truth with hope.

It was a difficult book to write, chiefly because I wanted to stay true to the complexity of the issue while delivering not a lecture but a thumping good read.

In this story, three children band together to save a place they love – a home and garden; a solace for wildlife and for people. There are stowaways on trains and international police searches, heatwaves and fires, near drownings and swimming with seals, full-blown protests and long-buried secrets, friendship and family. But of course, it's those three children who are the key to the story. How can you be swept away, laugh, cry, care, if you don't love the heroes? Or indeed share their struggle, fear for their lives, and urge them on, if you don't believe in the villains?

It's all very well having an idea as a

starting point, but ideas don't live and breathe. The two biggest questions I ask myself when creating new characters are, 'What do they want?', and 'What do they need?'. These are rarely the same thing. For example, in my book, Noa wants her parents to get back together, but she needs to accept their separation. These questions, applied to every single character, provide the framework on which the plot will hang, and those twin quests (one conscious, the other subconscious) will drive it forward, making for a satisfying read in which plot and character are completely intertwined. They will also illuminate all those other questions you will need to ask about your characters' qualities, flaws, and even their backstory. Here's how I go about developing my characters...

FIVE STEPS TO BELIEVABLE CHARACTERS

THE BASIC STUFF

How old are your characters? What do they look like? The reader only needs a few details, but you need to know more – you need to know everything about them! Sometimes it helps me to draw them.

NAME

Names are important, and worth spending time on. I look for them everywhere.

Online lists, books, film credits, newspapers... When the name is right, the character suddenly comes alive.

GOAL

What does your character want more than anything in the world? Love? Revenge? Think carefully about this, as it's going to drive everything they do. What are they prepared to sacrifice in order to get it?

PERSONALITY

Are they brave or worried? Were they always this way? What has happened to make them so? And what do they need to change to reach their goal?

FEAR

What are they, perhaps secretly, most afraid of? This is also important in driving the plot forward.

Extract from

the prologue,
pages 8-9

Prologue

Leo is left looking after his young niece Bea and is struggling to understand what she needs. He arrives in the village to look for help and advice on how best to look after the baby.

And then (Leo would say), an angel appeared.

"Try this."

A new voice, quiet but assured. A young woman nobody knew stood by the noticeboard at the shop's entrance – about his age, dark-skinned, with a halo of soft curls, dressed in a city raincoat, with a rucksack on her back and a sleeping baby in a pushchair.

She held out what looked like a tube of toothpaste.

"It's teething gel," she said. "Put a bit on your finger and rub it onto her gums."

Leo did as he was told. Bea instantly stopped crying.

Resisting the urge to kiss the miraculous stranger's feet, Leo said, "How can I ever thank you?"

The stranger nodded towards the noticeboard. "I don't suppose you have a room?"

Leo didn't think twice.

"I do have a room!" he cried. "I have many, many rooms!"

"It's true," said one of the volunteers. "He does."

"Please stay!" said Leo, wildly. "I so badly need help."

"That's also true," said another volunteer.

The stranger didn't answer at once but gazed at him with her head on one side, calm dark eyes appraising him like they were looking right into his soul.

Leo prayed his soul was good enough.

An important part of this section is that it happens some time before the main story started. I wanted to give a sense of the importance of these events, which have passed into family legend, and used this device to suggest how often they tell the story.

Sometimes you only need a little word to tell you a big change is coming. I also chose not to use a verb in this sentence. I'm wary of doing this too often, but sometimes it gives just the extra punch or immediacy I'm looking for.

This is so typical of Leo! He rarely thinks twice. Sometimes it's a good thing, and his spontaneity leads to wonderful things. Other times, it leads to trouble. But there's an understanding here that impulsive Leo and the thoughtful stranger may be a good match.

Recognising when you need help and learning to work with others is one of the themes of the book, introduced right from the beginning. Here we get an insight into Leo's willingness to admit that.

Of course it's not a real angel who appears, but to Leo in this moment, that is how the young woman seems. The angel/religious theme is picked up in other places in this passage, through the words *halo*, *miraculous* and *soul*.

This is our first introduction to the character Martha, and this is the whole point of her – this sense of calm that she brings to everything. But of course she has a secret also... why is she here? Why does she need a room?

I did this for comic effect – all this talk of angels and miracles, and it boils down to a tube of teething gel that looks like toothpaste!

The volunteers don't play a big part in this scene, but they are very important at the end of the book. I needed to introduce them early on, and also to show that they know and appreciate Leo.

This line shows us how high the stakes are for Leo. He needs her help with Bea – but also the stranger already means more to him. I wanted the reader to think about what Leo's motivations are, and what he might do next.

10

BOOKS TO *read aloud*

Being read to is not only invaluable for developing fluency – it's an immersive, accessible experience for children of all ages and abilities...

1

FOUNDATION STAGE

It Wasn't Me!

BY MARTA ALTÉS, MACMILLAN 2023

About this book

Best friends Charlie and Ellis live all alone on a tiny island. They share everything, and everything is perfect until their breakfast pot goes missing. Keen-eyed readers will be in on the joke as the story unfolds. Could that cheeky red bird be responsible?

This beautifully observed story about falling out and making up is fun to read aloud, and the pictures add a whole new dimension to

the tale. Despite the humour, some complex ideas (rushing to judge without fact-checking, allowing anger to obstruct kindness, being unable to compromise) are addressed in ways that will make sense to young audiences and inspire thoughtful discussion.



Thinking and talking

- Why do Charlie and Ellis fall out? What could they have done instead?
- Would it be fun to live on a deserted island? How would you spend your time?
- What does it feel like to argue with a friend? Share your experiences.

2

FOUNDATION STAGE

One Fox: A Counting Book Thriller

BY KATE READ, TWO HOOTS 2019

**About this book**

Hens don't usually outwit foxes, but the friends in this counting book receive unexpected back-up when a hungry visitor appears. Traditional counting books will be familiar, but here the genre is given a gently subversive boost that takes it somewhere new, and Kate Read's dramatic tale of sisterly solidarity bubbles with wit and style.

Painted papers are cut and collaged to create eye-catching artwork, and the author's minimal text invites participation. *One Fox* shows just how much can be built and resolved when forty carefully-chosen words work so closely with the pictures.

Thinking and talking

- What's going on? Tell the story in your own words.

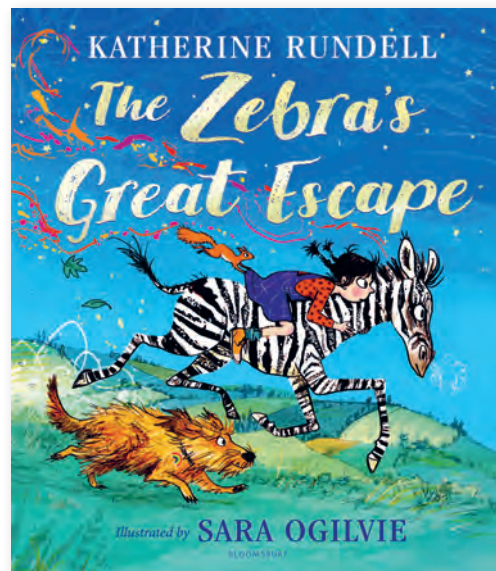
- What's a thriller? Did the hens find this story thrilling? What about the fox?
- Have you helped someone who needed it? Share your experiences.

Try this...

- Find the adjectives and explain their meanings. Collect others you could use instead – one clever fox, one tired fox – and add them to the spreads with sticky notes. Choose your favourites, then write new sentences using the counting book format.
- Paint pieces of paper, then cut them into feathers and make pictures of plump hens. Group in tens and count them. Paint a backdrop to display your flock.
- What brought the fox to this henhouse? Does he eventually find a meal? Tell his story!

**Try this...**

- Practise saying "If it wasn't me and it wasn't you, then... WHO?", then join in as the story's read aloud. Could you add some sound effects? Record your performance.
- Pretend to be the red bird in the tree. Swoop down and tiptoe to the pot. Is it heavy? How will you move it? Mime taking it to your perch, then sit on it. What's happening below? Tell your side of the story!
- What will Charlie and Ellis do without a paddle? Draw or write what happens next.

**About this book**

Gabriel's a zebra, and his parents have just been abducted by Mr Spit, a villain who's building his own zoo. Spit plans to stuff his collection and is working alphabetically, so there really is no time to lose!

Luckily for Gabriel, a brave and resourceful girl called Mink can talk to animals. How the two of them effect a daring rescue makes for a joyful and absorbing read.

Katherine Rundell's longer-form text is arranged over three very satisfying chapters, and Sara Ogilvie's pictures add plenty of rumbustious energy.

Thinking and talking

- What can you see in these pictures? What do they tell you that the words don't?
- What makes Mink such a good rescuer? Discuss her character.

KEY STAGE 1

3

The Zebra's Great EscapeBY KATHERINE RUNDÉLL
AND SARA OGILVIE,
BLOOMSBURY 2022

- What would happen if you found that you could talk to animals?

Try this...

- Imagine one of the characters is being interviewed about the rescue. What will the reporter ask? Role play their conversation.
- Can you identify the animals in the cages? Write and draw your own animal alphabet books.
- Find words and phrases in this text that you enjoy. What do they mean? Why did you choose them? Make a book for special words and use some in a story of your own.

4

KEY STAGE 1

My Beautiful Voice

BY JOSEPH COELHO AND ALISON COLPOYS,
FRANCES LINCOLN 2021

About this book

When you're small and anxious and starting a new class, sometimes your voice completely disappears. How wonderful, then, to have a teacher like Miss Flotsam! With her gently challenging support, the child in this story discovers a love of words and is able to speak out at last.

Sensitively illustrated with a summery palette and written by the current Children's Laureate,

this optimistic picturebook is full of creative energy and empathy. In keeping with a story about the power and appeal of words, Coelho's descriptions are striking and immediate, and the story draws on his extensive experience of working in schools as a poet.

Thinking and talking

- Why do you think this girl is so quiet? What helps her to speak out?
- Look for the peach-coloured line. Where does it start? What



happens to it as the story progresses? What do you think it's meant to be?

- Find some exciting words and phrases used to describe events and feelings in this book. Which do you like best, and why?

KEY STAGE 1

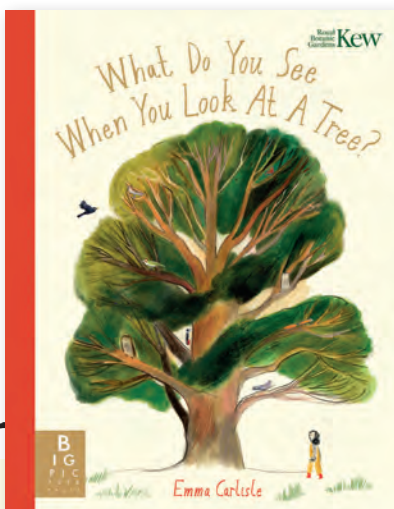
5

What Do You See When You Look at a Tree?

BY EMMA CARLISLE, BIG PICTURE PRESS 2022

About this book

Powered by one child's curiosity, the rhyming text in this lyrical non-fiction picturebook takes a tree-themed journey across time and space. Subjects include the comfort of home and family, the changing seasons and the wonder of the natural world. Standout spreads include 'How to be more like a tree', which links tree-knowledge to personal wellbeing.

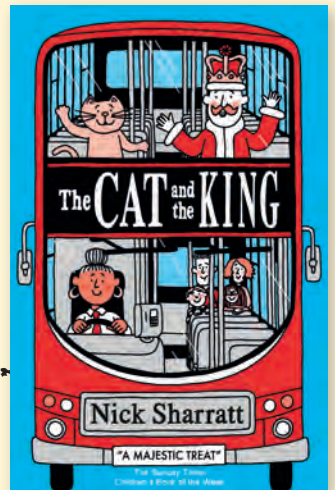


KEY STAGE 1

6

The Cat and the King

BY NICK SHARRATT, SCHOLASTIC 2016



About this book

“Everything ticked along nicely in the castle, until an Unfortunate Incident that the cat could not prevent...”

When a dragon destroys the castle, the King and his loyal helper – a sensible and resourceful cat – move to a smaller residence. The King’s new life couldn’t be more different, but Cat organises activities with a suitably royal flavour and everyone is happy. Except the dragon...

This fully-illustrated, twelve-chapter book will delight children who enjoy stories with a touch of eccentricity alongside reflections of everyday life.

Thinking and talking

- Have you ever moved house? Share your experiences.
- What surprises the King about Number 37, Castle Street?
- What would you do if your best friend were a cat?



Try this...

■ “Take a cat and a king and a catastrophe.... Add nice new friends and a nasty old dragon... Mix well....” Provide similar story-recipes to help children tell or write their own stories, or ask them to invent new recipes.

■ The King misses his jester, so buys a jokebook at the car-boot sale. Collect jokes to create a class jokebook, then host joke-telling sessions.

■ Set up a role play sale with odd or interesting items. Price them, allocate 22 ‘golden pennies’ to every buyer and create illustrated lists of your purchases. What will you do with each item?



Try this...

■ “The words of my poem are streaming out of me...” Practise saying the words of a poem, then let them stream out as you perform. Draw yourself sharing your poem, then add patterns to represent your words.

■ “My voice starts stretching its toes and arcing its back...” Explore your voice. Can you make

it sound like a booming hurricane, a key clicking in a lock, the first patter of summer rain...? Find new sounds to imitate, then write lyrical sentences to describe them.

■ “I feel like... I’m at the edge of a mighty cliff...” Share experiences about nervousness. What helps you feel better? Make a poster to help others.

Thinking and talking

- What does the writing in this book tell you about trees? What do the pictures show you? What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
- Compare this to other non-fiction books you’ve read.
- Share memories and experiences of special trees.

Try this...

■ Observe a tree and imagine its thoughts and feelings. Write from the tree’s perspective, then read your work aloud and listen to its sounds and rhythms. How could you improve your writing?

■ Make a poster telling people why it’s good to be more like a tree.

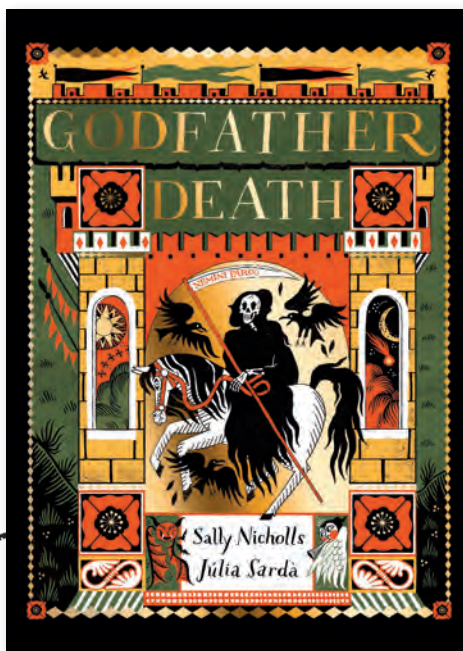
■ Grow saplings and observe changes over time. Find a safe place to plant them out and continue their care.



KEY STAGE 2

7 Godfather Death

BY SALLY NICHOLLS AND
JULIA SARDA, ANDERSEN
PRESS 2023



About this book

When a fisherman strikes a bargain with Death and fails to keep his word, Death finds a way to get his revenge...

Arranged over eight chapters, this stylish folktale retelling appeals

to older readers, but its brisk pace, sharp dialogue and carefully-managed vocabulary make it accessible to younger children too.

Echoes of woodblock

printing, medieval manuscripts and folk art are evident throughout, but there's plenty of humour alongside the traditional focus on human dilemmas and morality.

Thinking and talking

- Is the fisherman an honest man? Why is he so keen to find one?
- What makes the fisherman think that Death will make a better godfather?
- Describe the illustrations. What do you think they add to the story?

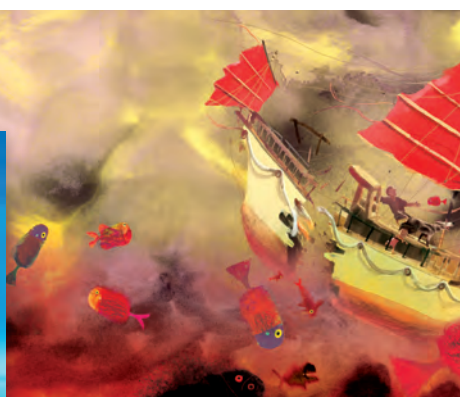
Try this...

- Make your own props by bottling and labelling coloured water. Advertise your 'medicines', roleplay consultations and write news articles about the miracle cures you've effected.
- What are the ravens thinking and feeling on each spread? In role as a raven, advise the fisherman on how to deal with Death.
- Why is Sally Nicholls' text so engaging and exciting? Choose one aspect for detailed exploration, then set writing goals to help children craft their own folktale retelling.

KEY STAGE 2

8 Island

BY MARK
JANSSEN,
LEMNISCAAT
2018



About this book

When their boat capsizes, three castaways arrive on what looks like an island. But as one colour-soaked scene gives way to the next, a wonderfully surreal adventure unfolds. The island is actually a giant turtle!

This large-format wordless picturebook features stunning artwork, and there's a clear narrative to follow. But alternative readings are also possible, and so *Island* makes a rich starting point for language and creative work.

Thinking and talking

- What's going on? Talk about settings, characters and events.
- How does this artwork affect you? Talk about colours, viewpoint, page layout.
- Is this book difficult to read? What does it gain by having no words? Does it lose anything? Share your thoughts.

Try this...

- Identify key narrative points, then record a simple retelling and listen back. Is your story as interesting as the pictures? How could you improve it? Write different versions and pick the best.
- Choose a picture and imagine you're stepping into it. What can you see, hear, smell and touch? How do you feel? Collect words and phrases to describe this image and your response to it. Use them to write a poem.
- What is the turtle doing? What does it know, and how does it feel? Tell the story from its perspective.

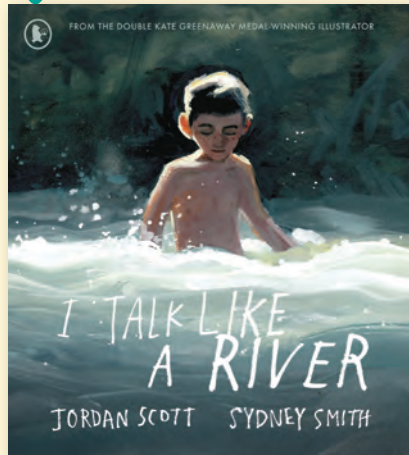


KEY STAGE 2

9

I Talk Like a River

BY JORDAN SCOTT
AND SYDNEY SMITH,
WALKER BOOKS 2021

**About this book**

The boy in this picturebook wants to speak, but his words get stuck inside his mouth. After school one 'bad speech day' his father takes him to the river. "See how the water moves?" he tells his son. "That's how you speak." Later, back in school, the boy discovers that he does sound like the water, with all its stops and starts. But he likes the river, and after that,

things don't feel quite as bad.

I Talk Like a River is a lyrical exploration of how it feels to struggle with disfluent speech, and its sophisticated, emotionally-charged illustrations extend the text in multiple ways. Written by a poet who stammered as a child, it explores the subject from a personal perspective and will prompt thoughtful discussion about kind and effective communication.

Thinking and talking

- For the boy in this book, what does a 'bad speech day' mean? Why do some people find public speaking so difficult?
- Compare the two pictures of the classroom. Why is the second image blurry, do you think?
- What worries you? Share experiences. How should we support people when they're feeling anxious?

**Try this...**

- How do the pictures make you feel? Can you spot anything (colours, viewpoint, layout...) that contributes to this? Does the artwork explain the text, or help you understand the book's meaning? Write about your observations and conclusions.
- Discuss the close-up of the boy's face. Collect words to describe his thoughts and feelings. Open the gatefold and imagine you're wading into the river together. What can he see, hear, smell and touch? What's he thinking? How does he feel? Write poetically or descriptively about his experience.
- How does a river talk? What does it say? Observe running water, then write imaginatively about its journey and experience.



KEY STAGE 2

10

October, October

BY KATYA BALEN,
ILLUSTRATED BY ANGELA
HARDING, BLOOMSBURY 2020

About this book

October and her dad live off-grid in the woods. They find, grow or make almost everything they need, until Dad has an accident. October has to leave the woods and live with a mother she barely knows in a city she detests. How she copes with the changes makes for a gripping story.

A range of intriguing topics (mudlarking, storytelling, off-grid survival, owls...) is explored in this stream-of-consciousness novel. Katya Balen's taut, lyrical text is expressive and engaging, and won her this year's YOTO Carnegie Medal.

Thinking and talking

- What does wildness mean to October? Have you been anywhere you'd call 'wild'? Share experiences.

- "She is alive in London the way ... Dad is alive in the woods." Discuss Mum and Dad's choices.
- What is a stream of consciousness narrative? How does this writing style make you feel? Why do you think Katya Balen used it here?

**Try this...**

- October's good at describing how she feels. Discuss her use of similes, metaphors and vivid vocabulary. Describe an emotion, October-style, without mentioning its name. Can people guess what you're describing?
- Draw a labelled diagram of October's and Dad's house. If you had your own wild house, what would it be like? Write about your off-grid life.
- For October, everything has a story. Collect objects for a 'finds table' and use as starting points for your own stories.



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Myth MAKERS

Guided by a visiting scribe, our quest to publish a real book was the stuff of legend, says **Adam Jevons-Newman**

Telling children they're going to become authors can be a really motivating introduction to a writing project. But what about telling them they're going to become real-life published authors? Or that they'll be working with a professional writer, and selling their book in a shop and online? Priceless!

It's an opportunity we were thrilled to share with our Year 5 pupils earlier this year. Working alongside author Gareth Baker, who is our patron of reading, the children embarked on a very special writing activity.

The project sat alongside the children's learning topic, Ancient Greece. By striking a balance between a scaffolded story concept and the freedom for pupils to make content choices, we could ensure all the children produced high-quality work. This approach was engaging, achievable and impactful.

Setting off

Our author, Gareth, began with a very open session that allowed children to really explore their ideas. They gave their characters talents, flaws, ambitions and values. "Often," he told us, "teachers might focus on plot, when the characters are the heart and soul of a story. When we talk

about our favorite stories – books, films – we usually talk about the characters we love the most before we get to the parts of the plot that were most memorable to us. The flaws and ambitions of the character should always drive the plot and make it engaging to the reader."

While guiding the children in creating both characters and the objects that would help them on their quest, Gareth encouraged them to avoid giving any one person or item too much power. "A bow and arrow that can disable all the enemies in one go takes all the drama out of the story," he observed.

The children were also asked to come up with a special object that had meaning to their hero's village. This object was somehow going to be taken by 'The Beast', a character the children had creative freedom to explore and develop.

"Ownership of the story is key," Gareth told us staff, and indeed, while the plan was to write Greek hero myths, some pupils did go off in other directions while maintaining the spirit of the story. These were engaged children, producing quality writing; we were happy to let them continue their own creative path and not try to redirect it.

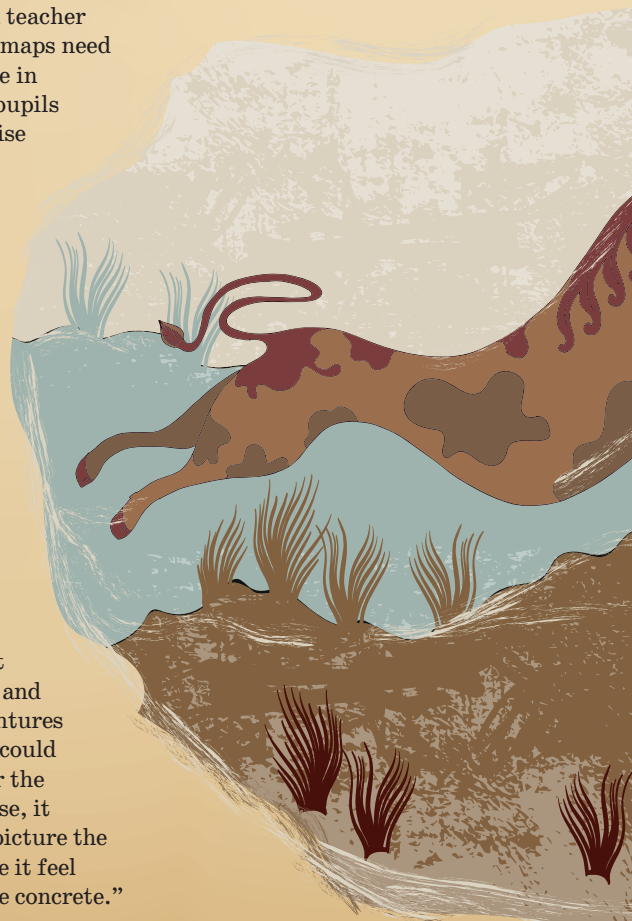
Side-quests

Before we wrote, we drew maps. Oh, how wonderful a map is to inspire writing; a plan of the village... the layout of the beast's lair... the route of an epic journey. This step removed some of the more abstract aspects of planning the stories. There are some great examples of maps in many children's books, but as a teacher I realised that maps need to feature more in how we guide pupils to plan, visualise and review cohesion of the narrative.

"There's something magical about a map," Gareth told me. "As a writer, it helps you to see the world in your story and stops plot holes. It also helps you to think about different environments, and the small adventures the characters could have there. For the reader, of course, it helps them to picture the world and make it feel more real, more concrete."

The actual teaching process worked by having the basic structures taught through mini three-lesson sequences. For example, we delivered three lessons on introductions, three on setting descriptions, and so on. This approach proved to be very effective.

In the first lesson of each sequence, we would explore a



model extract relevant to the part of the story we were at. This included looking at the introduction to *Holes* and exploring the setting description of *Camp Half Blood* in the *Percy Jackson* books. Integrating a variety of authors and genres also broadened pupils' reading for pleasure choices.

In the second lesson, we took those styles and techniques apart and tried our own versions. This included using short sentences to build up suspense in the action sequence (the battle). Pupils were road-testing ideas, adapting the styles to their own story content. Everyone knew we were trying things out and if it didn't work, that was ok; we could try something else.

"In all my years of teaching, not much has rivalled the enthusiasm and joy of holding your very own 'proper' book"

In the third lesson, pupils drafted and then typed up the stage of the story they were at. This made things much easier in the long run.

The last stage of the journey

Typing up wasn't 'The End' of this story, though. Next, the concept of proofreading and editing came into play, and we became editors of each other's writing. Noticing 'mistakes' or where things didn't make sense was easier, pupils reported, in others' work than their own. This insight really helped them.

"Editing is a fundamental part of the writing process," Gareth explained.

"Authors often say your first draft will always be terrible. Think of it like a marble statue. It's the fine, gentle work afterwards that truly makes the form accurate. For me an essential part of the process is leaving a sizable amount of time before re-reading, which I appreciate is difficult for schools. It's this 'distance' from the work that allows us to see our mistakes. And, of course, while I rewrite and draft my work, my editor spots my mistakes and points out if the plot is slow or needs more drama, emotion or whatever. Children need to have this in place too, so using peer-marking is not only a great process, it's a reflection of the real world."

We sent the completed pieces of writing to Taralyn Publishers, who did some very light editing and designed the layout of the interior. Their in-house illustrator, Vicky Kuhn, provided the cover artwork, which was based on an idea from the children. Once the interior and cover were complete, we checked everything in school and then Taralyn sent us proof copies for approval.

And before we knew it, we had a book. We were authors! In all my years of teaching, not much has rivalled the enthusiasm and joy of pupils holding their very own 'proper' book. I would do it again tomorrow. Creating inspired writers, who have achieved something few adults do? It's why I teach.

GARETH'S WRITING TIPS



- Research is essential, but don't let the truth get in the way of a good story. Likewise, planning is invaluable, but always be willing to change track. We often get better ideas as the story progresses.



- An exciting plot is important, but likeable (and not so likeable) characters are key. Your characters should drive your story. Why are they doing what they're doing? What do they hope to achieve? What is the reward? What will they learn? Make sure they are three-dimensional, with problems, flaws and things they are afraid of. These should be encountered during the story so that lessons are learned.



- Don't get caught up with detailed drafts. Unless it's a lesson with a very specific objective in mind, just write. Get the story down. Get the excitement. Get the interest.



- Improvement is the MOST important part of the process. Remember, we're not just looking for errors: we're looking for clarity, pace and interest.



- Editing should be done by someone other than the writer. It's easier to spot weaknesses in other people's writing than in your own.



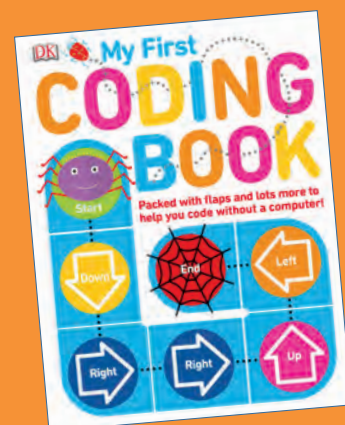
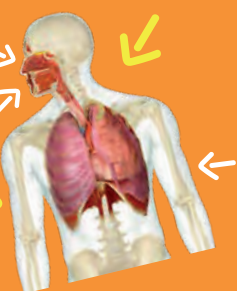
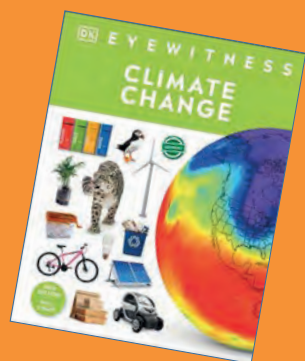
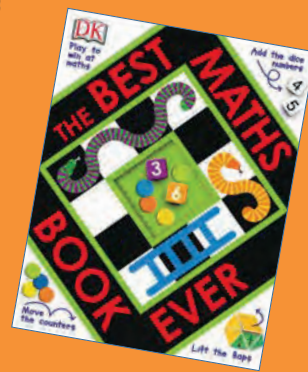
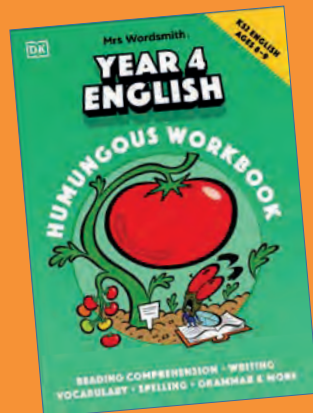
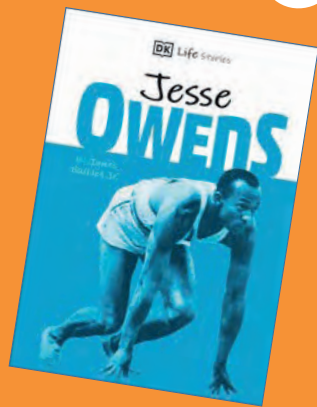
Adam Jevons-Newman is the deputy headteacher and curriculum leader

at a primary school in Nottinghamshire.

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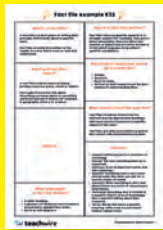
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As a matter OF FACT

Combining elements such as succinct sentences, tier 3 vocab, and content selection, a good fact file can offer numerous learning opportunities for pupils

AIDAN SEVERS

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At first glance, it seems that putting together a fact file on whatever topic you're currently teaching should be a straightforward task for children to tackle; especially if it's a subject full of objective, measurable information.

However, when it comes down to it, the various elements of informational writing can be quite tricky to get right, and require specific teaching. For example, as fact files are so short, writers have to be careful to select the most salient points to include, effectively providing a summary or overview of

the chosen subject. Because of this, the writing is often to the point, and not overly complicated with regards to sentence structure. The main complexity of a fact file lies in the vocabulary that is used – the words that are chosen are often specific to the subject (tier 3 vocabulary).

There's a lot to think about! So, here are some of the key elements to consider for your next informational writing lesson...

Content selection

As with explanation texts, it is important that children have a good understanding of what they are going to be writing about. This could be something that they have been studying at school, a personal interest, or even something imaginary: a mythical beast of their own creation, for example.

Providing pupils with a series of questions can help direct them towards selecting the most pertinent content, and will give you some parameters within which to teach. If you have opted for children to write fact files about different things, it may be more difficult to provide a set of questions which can direct their thinking, but if the whole class is writing on the same subject, you can formulate a pretty basic list to share. For example, if in geography, children are studying India, you might

ask them to frame their fact file information around the following questions:

- Where in the world is India?
- What's the climate like in India?
- What are the major cities of India?
- What are India's main landmarks?
- Which languages are spoken in India?
- What is India famous for?

Word-level work

In order for children to write a good fact file, they will need to have done lots of work on the words that they are going to use. We should introduce them to the relevant vocabulary and provide them with definitions, and should show examples of how this vocabulary is used in context. They should also have plenty of spoken and written opportunities to practise using and spelling the words correctly. For example, pupils could keep vocabulary journals in which they store words, their definitions, example sentences and drawings, or you could challenge them to say or write a sentence containing a particular word.

This word-level work can be delivered at the beginning of the learning sequence, but should be continued throughout as well, giving children the opportunity to encounter the words many

times, thus increasing their exposure to them, and improving the chance of these words becoming part of their own vocabulary. Fact files also often have a glossary of terms. Where pupils use technical vocabulary, they may want to create a section dedicated to providing definitions of key terms. This is an exercise in writing like a reader – being mindful of the audience – and ensuring that everything is accessible to a reader who might know nothing about the subject.

Sentence level

When teaching children to write sentences that are appropriate for a fact file, you may find yourself having to un-teach some of the things you have taught before. The teaching of writing can often focus on composing increasingly complex sentences, whereas the goal of a sentence in a fact file is to communicate full meaning as succinctly as possible.

The focus of your sentence-level teaching, regardless of the year group you teach, should therefore be on making appropriate choices. As with any text, it's important for the writer to be mindful of the audience and purpose of the piece. Children may know how to

write multi-clause sentences, but in a fact file they may not be appropriate. Carry out exercises where you give pupils choices about which sentences they would and wouldn't use in a fact file; or provide them with long, complex sentences

and challenge them to edit them into shorter ones.

Once children have carried out such exercises, they should have a go at writing the sentences that they want to include in their own fact file. It is at this point in any writing teaching sequence that teachers must prioritise giving feedback on what pupils have written. If children are not given feedback (and the chance to respond to it) at this stage in the process, the next drafts of their work will contain any errors and misconceptions that have not been picked up on.

Upper Key Stage 2 teachers may want to take this opportunity to teach children to write in bullet-pointed lists, too.

Text level

For a fact file, children will need to think about how the sentences they have written will be organised on the page so that the reader can very easily access the information and learn about the subject quickly. Again, remind pupils to be mindful of their audience and purpose for writing.

Examples of fact files will come in very useful when teaching children to arrange the information on the page. There are many ways this can be done – portrait, landscape, as a folded booklet or leaflet, using a grid or boxes, and so on.

In order for children to find the desired layout, you could ask them to write out their information in the sections of a grid, cut them out, then move the

pieces around like a jigsaw puzzle until they find the arrangement they want. Find a grid example in the download linked on the left.

Some of these 'jigsaw pieces' may be images and headings. They may choose to use colour to highlight some sections or to differentiate one section from another. When children find the arrangement they think helps to communicate the information most effectively, they could carry out a peer-assessment activity to ensure that a new reader's understanding is supported by the layout. Once it has been peer-assessed, pupils can glue their final arrangement onto another piece of paper, ready to inform a final draft.

Images

Drawing pictures and creating diagrams doesn't really fall within the remit of the writing lesson, so it may be the case that you choose to provide children with a selection of relevant pictures and diagrams printed out to an appropriate size, from which they can then select the images that best support their fact file (the photo printing options in Microsoft gallery are very useful for this). Again, the emphasis here is on making good choices about which images will be useful to the reader, and how they support the purpose of the text.



Aidan Severs is an education consultant and former primary

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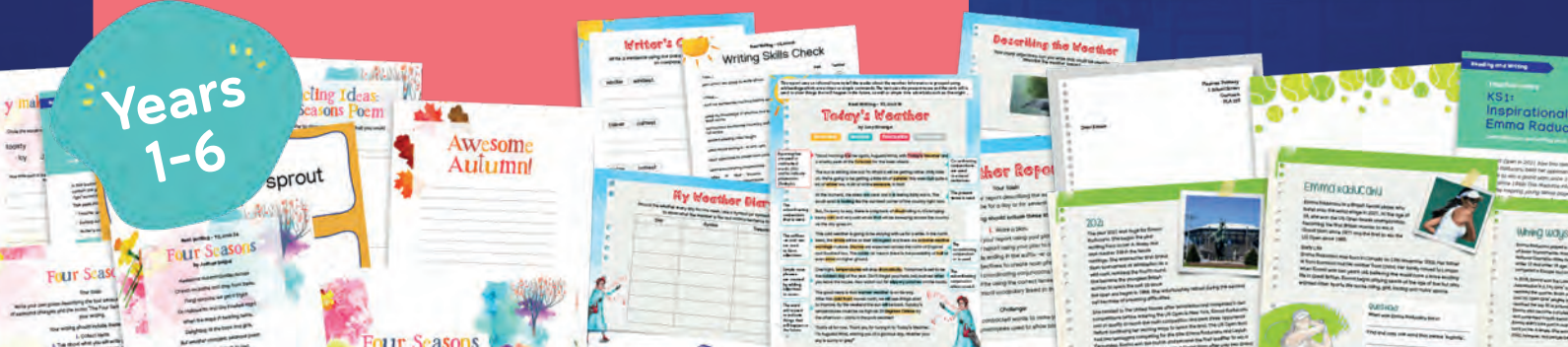


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Schools

Triple the THRILL

Making use of the ‘three teacher voices’ can transform your storytelling, says **Tim Taylor**

Last week I was working in a classroom with children who had recently joined reception. They were, as you can imagine, excited about the novelty of being in school and eager to make new friends. Keeping them focused on one task, even for a short time, was going to be a challenge. So whatever I did, it had better be interesting!

I asked them to join me on the carpet. Eventually they did. I pulled up one of the classroom chairs. One of the children asked me, “What’s that for?”

I said, “We’re going to start a story in a moment and when I sit on the chair I’m going to be someone in the story. Is that alright?” They shrugged; I took that as a yes and sat down.

Immediately, I winced and began rubbing my legs. The children looked concerned. I stretched my back and let out a bit of a groan. “Are you OK?” one of them asked. I carried on and began rubbing the joints of my hand and wincing. The children were all now staring in fascination.

I stopped, got off the chair and knelt back on the carpet. “What did you make of that?” I asked. The children started saying I was hurt and unhappy. “Not me,” I said, “I’m fine, it’s the man in the story. What was he doing?”

“Rubbing his legs.” One of the children said.

“Yes,” I said, “Why do you think he was doing that?”

“He’s hurt himself!” several shouted out.

“Maybe,” I said. “What else did you see?”

This carried on for a bit. The children were now riveted, desperate to find out what was going on. I said, “This time when I sit back on the chair you will hear a bit more, including what the man is thinking.”

I sat back on the chair and started narrating: “The farm was getting too much for him. He’d lived and worked there all his life, but now his body was starting to ache. ‘Oh,’ he said to himself, ‘there is so much to do. The animals need feeding, the fences need fixing, and now the tractor has broken down! What am I going to do?’”

Once again, I stopped and knelt on the carpet. “What did you hear?” I asked.

There followed a lively discussion with the children talking about the farmer and the things wrong with the farm. I said to the children, who had been sitting on the carpet for long enough, “What kind of things do you think there are on the farm?” They suggested cows, and sheep, and pigs, and an old barn, and a tractor.

I asked them “Why don’t we draw all the things on the farm? I’ve got some bits of paper here. Draw one thing on a piece of paper and then come and get another, once we’re ready we can lay them on the carpet.” The children set to work, now busy and focused on a common task.

What was that?

I don’t have the words to explain what was happening in their heads. It is, I think, extraordinary how even very young children can understand when someone is switching between the real and an imaginary world, playing someone in a story.

I suspect it has something to do with evolution and the way children learnt to make sense of the world around them in the long distant past, interacting with real and imaginary situations through play. In a reception class you can see it happening all the time, as well as out in the playground, because it is the primary way children interact and learn.

How it works

In the example above I was structuring their innate understanding of play with the use of a strategy called ‘teaching in-and-out of role’, using it to generate interest and to create a context to develop their learning in various ways. First watching, listening, and using words to describe what they’d seen. Then to make meaning and to contribute to the co-creation of a story, involving a rundown farm.

The facilitation of this strategy, which, by the way, is not just for young children, involves using what might be called ‘Three Voices’: teacher-facilitator, teacher-narrator, and teacher-in-role.

The teacher-facilitator organises, explains, and makes things happen. For example, “When I sit on the chair I’m going to be someone in a story.” And “What did you make of that?”

The teacher-narrator describes events happening inside the story as if they are a storyteller: “The farm was getting too much for him. He’d lived and worked there all his life, but now his body was starting to ache.”

The teacher-in-role is a character inside the story: “Oh, there is so much to do. The animals need feeding, the fence needs fixing, and now





TRY THIS...



Set down an empty chair in front of the class. Explain that the person sitting on the chair is in a story. The class will be able to look at them, talk about them and discuss what's happening, but the person sitting on the chair won't be able to hear, see or interact with them.



Sit on the chair and perform a simple action.

Give the class a bit of time to watch, then stand up.



Ask the class what they saw. Listen to the students' ideas – pay special attention to what they say about the character's actions.



Based on the students' ideas, use the narrator voice to describe the character's actions. Speak in the past tense, as if describing someone in a story.



Tell the students you're going to sit on the chair again. Ask them to think about what might be happening in the story: who the person might be, where they might be, and what might be happening. Sit on the chair and repeat the action.



Ask the students for their suggestions, keeping it speculative: "It might be ... it could ... perhaps" Ask them for more details to develop their ideas.



After two or three ideas have been developed, incorporate the students' ideas and develop a story. Use the narrator voice.



Finish the story at a point that feels satisfying – this could be a point of tension, or a question left hanging in the air.

the tractor has broken down! What am I going to do?"

By switching between these three 'voices' we can make all kinds of exciting things happen in the classroom, create imaginary situations, and use them to generate meaningful activities for learning. Imagine, for example, the children are back on the carpet looking at the pictures they have created of things on the farm. I carry on:

[Teacher-narrator] "Everywhere he looked the farmer saw jobs that needed doing: feeding the animals, fixing the tractor, mending

the roof on the old barn. He knew he needed help."

[Teacher-facilitator] "Would you like to help?" The children nod, some enthusiastically, some a bit uncertain. "Stand up then." [Teacher-in-role] "Oh, you've arrived! Thank you. There is so much to do! The pigs are getting very hungry, we should start there."

And so on. Using the 'three voices' I can continue to create all kinds of jobs, building a context that develops the children's knowledge of a farm, as well as generating activities for drawing, labelling, making,

talking, listening, and working together.

Give it a try – you may just be surprised by how effective a strategy it can be... and how much fun the whole class can have putting it into action.



Tim Taylor is a teacher, teacher trainer, and the author of *A Beginner's Guide to Mantle of the Expert and a new book, with Viv Aitken, Try This... Unlocking learning with Imagination.*

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Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching



1 The best start for handwriting

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*In UK user trials 95% of teachers approved the use of STABILO EASYoriginal pens and STABILO EASYgraph pencils in their schools.

Meeting the reading challenge

Over 20 years ago Robinswood Press introduced the Lifeboat Read and Spell Scheme. While immediately recognised as an excellent reading scheme for all children, it was also seen as particularly well-suited to pupils with dyslexia and SEND, due to its practical handwriting requirement, multisensory exercises and incorporation of repetition. Since then, many thousands of schools around the world have made use of the Scheme – not just in English-speaking countries, but in many cases as an EFL resource. The resources making up the Lifeboat Read and Spell Scheme are among a range of products from Robinswood Press that have helped many children with a variety of challenges. For more information, contact **01684 899 419** or email ops@robinswoodpress.com



4 Streamline KS2 writing assessment

WeModerate is a revolutionary moderation and assessment tool that simplifies primary writing moderation, saving time, energy, and stress for teachers, schools and MATs. Experience high-quality, online, on-demand, standardised writing moderation that enhances classroom teaching, destresses your teachers and gives you assessment peace of mind. Through our collaboration options, you can easily connect with others within your school or across MATs where moderation is required. Doing this significantly reduces processing time and provides evidence for the end-of-KS2 writing assessment in a much more timely manner. Visit info.wemoderate.app



Adaptive literacy learning

Reading Plus is an online reading development programme designed to develop pupils' fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. With a readability range from Y2 to beyond GCSE, it serves the needs of a wide range of students, including those below, at, or above year-level literacy expectations. Reading Plus is the only evidence-based adaptive literacy tool that addresses the hidden hurdle of inefficient silent reading – sparking confidence, unlocking the curriculum, and expanding opportunities beyond school. Visit readingsolutionsuk.com



Ireland leading the way

Did you know that the phonemic awareness of preschool / reception year children is the single best predictor of their future reading ability? 91 per cent of Ireland's primary schools now follow the Jolly Phonics Programme, with trained teachers, and in the latest PIRLS results for 10-year-olds, which compares reading and literacy skills across countries, Ireland came fourth out of 50 countries – and first in Europe. CPD College provides certified online training in Jolly Phonics on behalf of Jolly Learning. Visit cpdcollege.com

The big LEAP

Being asked to read longer fiction might be intimidating for some children, but careful choice of titles along the way can make for a confident transition from picturebooks, say **Sarah Botchway** and **Esi Merleh**

Moving from picturebooks to chapter books can be a big jump in a child's reading journey. Whilst picturebooks can be enjoyed into Key Stage 2 and beyond, there comes a time when young readers are ready to take on the challenge of longer fiction. To help navigate this step, support from their teachers and care givers is essential to ensure they don't become overwhelmed and give up.

A step up

It can be hard to find suitable titles for children who are starting to move on from picturebooks but not quite ready for the challenge of middle-grade fiction. *Magic Faces* is a great example of the type of series designed to help children make this leap. Illustrated in full colour by award-winning artist Abeeha Tariq, the books are a collaborative project led by the inclusive fiction studio StoryMix. This new adventure series is designed to help bridge the gap and help young readers progress in a meaningful and strategic

way. In each of the three books in the series, twins Alanna and Austin go on an exciting adventure created by a magic face painting kit. The plentiful pictures support young readers to not feel overwhelmed by the words on the page.

Pupils moving on to chapter books may still not fully enjoy reading or be confident in their ability to read. Longer books that share features with picture books such as colour pictures, fewer words on the page and feature text can really help children build up their confidence. They won't feel like too much of a departure from the child's comfort zone.

Getting them on board

Think also about the topic, themes and content of the book. Do they match the child's interests? This is particularly important for reluctant readers. Choosing a theme or topic that you know the child is interested in is a brilliant hook to get them reading longer text.

Does the book reflect the child's current developmental stage? If the story and events of the book are too young

or too old, there is a risk that the child will feel bored. Between the ages of five and seven, children are developing rapidly and making massive leaps physically and socially, which will be reflected in their reading journeys. By the time they start school, children are becoming more physically dexterous, and are delighted by movements that require skill and coordination.

Another example of an early reader, *Marv and the Mega Robot* by Alex Falase-Koya has plenty of running, jumping, climbing, dancing and some cool moves worthy of superheroes. Relationships with others take centre stage, and children look to books to learn about how to interact with friends, siblings and new adults. In a popular early reader series, *Isadora Moon*, by Harriet Muncaster, each book introduces new ways of managing emotions, conflicts and relationships with others.

Keeping it close to home

As teachers, we strive to foster the love of reading for pupils, not just the ability to read functionally. We want books to bring joy and ignite the imagination.

Think about how a book can do that, but remember that very small children can be quite inflexible, and some can find aspects of make-believe challenging. During the early years, pretend play will tend to be limited to role playing what they see in daily life, like feeding stuffed toys.

As children get older, magic and monsters take on a textural quality and can be almost overwhelming before they learn that there is a difference between what is real and what is not. So, as in the brilliantly imaginative series, *Aziza and the Secret*

Fairy Door, by Lola Morayo, home, security and familiarity should never too far away in the titles you choose.

In this transition phase, books have to appeal to both independent readers and children being read to. Even when children start to read by themselves, many still love being read to or reading in groups. Teachers can use modelling reading to show pupils how to read well, create enthusiasm and demonstrate the communal aspect of reading for fun. Modelling can be done as a whole class, where teachers read a few paragraphs followed by different pupils reading, or one-to-one with an adult and a pupil.

For reluctant readers, try finding books that the child can relate to, featuring children and families that look like them. Children love to feel a personal connection to the books they read. In this way, the book itself acts as a role model for what is possible in their lives.

The key to helping children blossom into confident readers is to find the right book to match a child's developmental stage.

“Even when children start to read by themselves, many still love being read to”



Sarah Botchway is the director of the London South Teaching School Hub, responsible for the training of teachers through primary to secondary across Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.



As a teacher, she taught at all levels from primary to adults, and was head of school at Reay Primary. Esi Merleh is the author of Magic Faces, an imaginative new early reader series.

OUR TOP FIVE TRANSITION TIPS

1 Explore resources from trusted organisations; they're a great source of reading materials for all abilities. Some of our go-to websites include:

- Education Endowment Foundation (tinyurl.com/tp-EEF-home)
- National Literacy Trust (literacytrust.org.uk)
- Oxford Owl (home.oxfordowl.co.uk)
- Cornerstones Education (cornerstoneseducation.co.uk)
- English Hubs (englishhubs.net)

2 Seek out books you enjoy and that speak to you. If you share books that capture your heart, your enthusiasm will transfer across. Model reading, and let the children enjoy listening to a range of readers including teachers, parents, authors and peers.

3 Engaging illustrations can help bridge gaps in comprehension. Find chapter books with illustrations that emerging readers will love. Spend time developing the child's language by discussing the pictures in a book and exploring their thoughts and feelings about the story.

4 Handle mistakes with sensitivity. Children feel secure when they know it's fine to get words wrong. Even as adults we learn new words all the time.

5 Don't give up! If a child is struggling to tackle bigger books, investigate why this is the case and try a new approach. Don't be afraid to choose easier texts and work back up to more difficult pieces as the child's confidence builds up.

Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1 *BSL for beginners*

Learning British Sign Language is fun, fast and effective with our online course. We offer a comprehensive introduction to BSL that covers a wide range of topics, beginning with the basics – such as fingerspelling, greetings, and colours – before moving through subjects such as food, time, money, animals, weather, feelings, and occupations, including education. Learners find out about the unique grammar and syntax of BSL along the way, and by the end of the course should feel comfortable holding basic conversations in BSL – even in topics that haven't been covered in the content.

british-sign.co.uk/learn



2

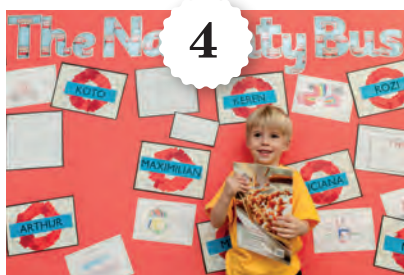


The Ten Minute Box

Many children master the basics of phonics but struggle to move on to the next stage: digraphs. Confidence is often low in these learners. The Ten Minute Box has expert support in one handy place: assessments, a structured programme of activities and progress trackers. Build self-esteem with individualised sessions that motivate even reluctant learners. Avoid learned helplessness with strategies that transfer across the curriculum. Implement multisensory teaching that identifies potential signs of dyslexia and boosts children with EAL or communication needs. A perfect use of targeted funding. Email for more information or to FREE TRIAL any Five Minute Box intervention.

info@fiveminutebox.co.uk

4



Book-based learning

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5



Books for all

Bloomsbury Education publishes an extensive range of books for Early Years, primary and secondary that help teachers to teach better and children to learn more. We have the curriculum covered with our classroom resources that make learning more fun, our professional development books that inspire your teaching, and our fiction that aims to get children excited about reading.

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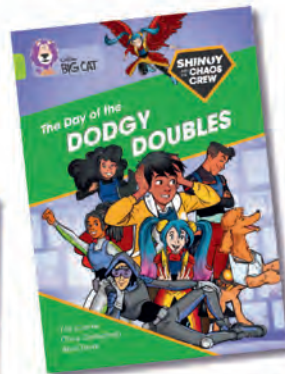
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WAGOLL

Finding Bear by Hannah Gold

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When I first sat down to write *The Last Bear*, I knew, deep within my heart, that there was a story I wanted to tell. A story of friendship, of love, of hope – but most of all, a story about making a difference.

The Last Bear was inspired by my deep love of animals, and I couldn't have foreseen everything that was to follow – not only awards and sales, but also how intensely children (and grown-ups!) around the world would take Bear to their hearts. And there was one question I kept hearing: will April and Bear ever see each other again? The answer was yes!

In *Finding Bear*, April has returned home from her adventure on Bear Island, but over a year later, she can't stop thinking about Bear. When she hears that a polar bear has been shot and injured in Svalbard, she's convinced it's her friend and persuades her dad to return with her to the northernmost reaches of the Arctic. So begins an unforgettable journey across frozen tundra and icy glaciers.

But along the way, April discovers much more than she bargained for – a tiny polar bear cub, in desperate need of her protection. Set in the thick of an Arctic winter, the story reunites us with April's father and her old friend Tör, plus we meet some new friends, including an entire team of gorgeous

husky dogs.

It was a joy to immerse myself in the Arctic landscape – a place of final frontiers and breathtaking beauty – and to bring this stunning scenery to life for the reader.

As with my first two books, *Finding Bear* touches upon the environment. In truth, it's impossible not to write about polar bears without paying heed to the melting sea ice. Children don't need preaching to, however. My goal remains to write big-hearted adventure stories full of emotion and excitement. But also, tales that act as a gateway into the natural world; that beg us to fall in love with it, to care for it, and ultimately to protect it.



Text © Hannah Gold. Finding Bear (£12.99 HB, HarperCollins) is published on 28th September, 2023.

5 TIPS FOR CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

IMMERSE YOURSELF

To capture a rich location like the Arctic, I like to watch videos – either documentaries or short videos on YouTube or Instagram etc – as part of my research. Not only does this bring a location to life, it helps me to depict more of the raw essence of the place.

LISTEN

To imagine key sensory scenes, like the Arctic storm or whales singing to each other, I find audio that I can listen to while writing. This brings me fully into the scene and reminds me to bring in auditory sensations and not just rely on visual elements.

VISIT

You might not be able to visit the Arctic, but are there any museums or exhibitions local to you that you can check out? When I was writing *The Last Bear*, I visited a small polar museum which contained lots of photos and Arctic equipment. It also featured diaries of Arctic explorers, which I found utterly fascinating and a brilliant way to get into the explorer mindset!

READ

As part of my research, I read books or articles on the location I am writing

about. Some written descriptions of the northern lights and the sheer solitude of the Arctic helped shape April's interpretation of it.

IMAGINE

Once you have collected all your research and immersed yourself, sometimes the best thing to do is just use the power of your imagination! Feel the cold on your face, the taste of salt on your lips, hear those gulls crying and see the vastness of the tundra stretch out before you. Our imaginations are wonderful, rich spaces and the best place to explore!

Extract from

chapter 18,
pages 164-166

Time doesn't really slow down, but there are certain situations or experiences that can seem to lengthen or shorten our perception of it. In this case, April's extreme peril makes her feel every single second, thus making time appear to feel endless.

Weather is one of the most powerful forces on earth; sometimes so powerful it can appear to be a character all of its own in books. Here the wind is almost deliberately snatching away April's voice. I like the idea of the storm having its own personality!

Using animal verbs such as 'howling', and later 'burrowing', to describe non-animal actions is particularly evocative as they function like imagery, and give the Arctic storm character, suggesting that it is wilful or purposeful.

Extreme weather experiences, like an Arctic storm, can have a truly visceral effect on humans. That's why I like to use all the senses when I am imagining a scene like this rather than just being reliant on sight and touch. How can we make the storm as affecting as possible?

The repetition of April being no match for the powerful landscape of the Arctic in this final line is deliberate. We see April finally accept Hedda's warning, and repeating this sentiment gives the moment more power.

Arctic Storm

The snow was falling so thick and fast that it took all of April's concentration just to hold on. Time became nothing but a blur. It was impossible to see or hear anything. Her goggles were clouded, all the exposed parts of her face were raw and her fingers and toes completely numb. Even with all her winter clothes on, she was still no match for an Arctic storm.

After what felt like an eternity, although she had no way to measure it, the dogs stopped, panting and heaving with their exertion.

The snow was dense, so absolute, she couldn't even see her hands or feet. It was not so much a blizzard – more of a wall. Something solid and impenetrable. April wiped her snow goggles, only for them to coat up almost immediately.

'DAD!' she cried. 'TÖR!'

But it was no use. No matter how loud she shouted, her voice kept being snatched away by the wind. A howling screech that pushed and buffeted her from all directions.

Now they had stopped moving, she could feel the cold seep into every pore of her body.

[...]

She swallowed hard.

The wind was relentless, battering her from all angles, the harsh sound of it burrowing into her head and drowning out all thoughts except one.

Hedda was right.

The Arctic wasn't a place for children. It wasn't even a place for humans.

One of the recurring themes is the idea that the Arctic is more powerful than humankind. It's something that Hedda has warned April about, but here April realises it viscerally. This theme is picked up again in the final sentence of the extract.

I love using senses to bring scenes alive. Here we have the panting of the dogs, the raw cold of the storm seeping into every pore of April's body, her goggles snowing up so she can't see, and the screeching of the wind. By bringing in all the senses, descriptive writing becomes three-dimensional. We can almost feel ourselves right there in the Arctic alongside April.

There's not much dialogue in this scene as April is alone with the husky dogs. But even if a character is alone, you can still have them speak – either out loud to themselves or even to inanimate objects. I find that adding a line of dialogue in a descriptive scene breaks up the text and brings a more dynamic quality.

I love using single-line paragraphs such as this one. I always think about how the text will look on the page, a bit like creating a painting, in a way. If the text comprised all long paragraphs, then it could feel a bit boring. By introducing single line paragraphs at pointed moments, it creates variety and a dramatic effect.

How to teach IDIOMS

Crying your eyes out or crocodile tears? Contextualising language will help develop children's comprehension and fluency, and give you a smile or two at the same time, says **Nikki Gamble**

Recently, I was visiting a primary school in Birmingham to work with some Y2 children. The headteacher looked in to check that we had everything we needed. "I'll pop my head around the door later," she said.

One of the boys sitting next to me paled and looked aghast. He'd understood that the head would be coming on its own without the rest of the body. I am sure we can all see the funny side to this story, but it revealed to me how much we take idiomatic speech for granted. And, as in this case, the particular challenges to understanding for additional language learners, who may not have the background of extensive conversations in English, which is how we mainly acquire our common figurative expressions.

Idioms are expressions where the implied meaning is different from the literal meaning, and our language is awash with them. There are lots of justifications for us taking time to teach idioms – they are essential for comprehension, knowing common idioms will increase reading fluency, and it's also a lot of fun. But what's the best way to go about it?

There are some principles to keep in mind. First, it is always most productive to teach language in context – either during

conversation or reading – and avoid decontextualised exercises. Secondly, it's best to teach idioms in groups. So, for example, we can teach idioms about emotions or plants together. Choose those in common usage rather than obscure examples. Once the meaning of an idiom has been defined and understood, provide opportunities for the children to apply their knowledge.

Here are some approaches I have used recently. Both lessons were part of an extended teaching sequence, but the focus here is specifically on teaching idioms.

"It's most productive to teach language in context, avoiding decontextualised exercises"

Cry me a river

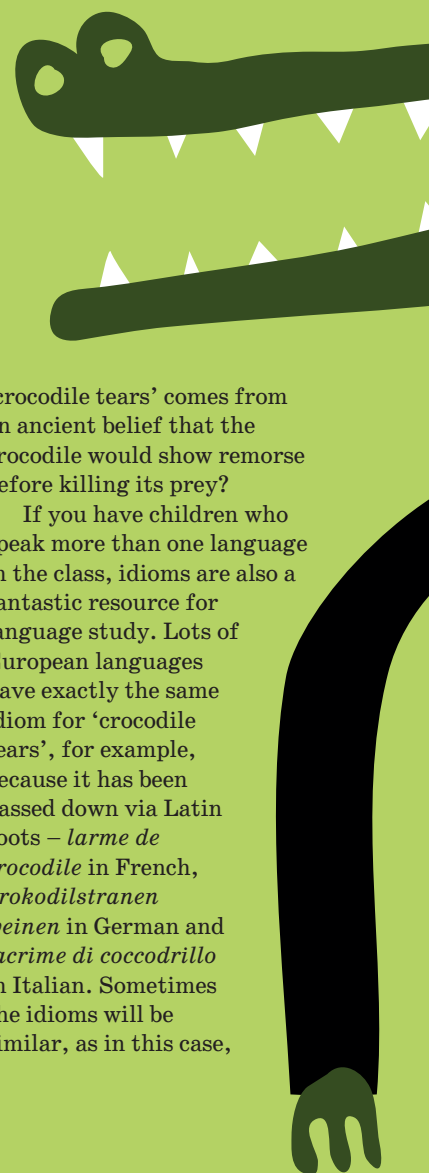
For one Y4 class, I based our idiom lessons around their reading of Carol Ann Duffy's *The Tear Thief*. After reading and discussing initial responses, the children returned to the text to look more closely at the language. For instance, the text includes the sentence, "The Tear Thief could tell that just one of these tears was worth a hundred cried over spilt milk or a thousand crocodile tears."

First, we focused on the phrase 'crocodile tears'. As a class, we discussed the difference between tears that showed genuine emotion and tears that were just for show, and pupils shared their experiences of both. For instance, one girl talked about footballers feigning tears when trying to get a player from the opposing team into trouble for a rough tackle. We then talked about other common idioms on the theme of crying, using images to show their literal meaning and then talking about the intended meaning. These included 'cry your eyes out', 'cry for the moon', 'floods of tears', and 'cry a river'.

Telling origin stories can help the meaning of an idiom to stick in pupils' minds, but more importantly, it shows that language arises out of real contexts, even if the context may not be immediately obvious to us anymore. For example, did you know that the phrase

'crocodile tears' comes from an ancient belief that the crocodile would show remorse before killing its prey?

If you have children who speak more than one language in the class, idioms are also a fantastic resource for language study. Lots of European languages have exactly the same idiom for 'crocodile tears', for example, because it has been passed down via Latin roots – *larime de crocodile* in French, *krokodilstranen weinen* in German and *lacrime di cocodrillo* in Italian. Sometimes the idioms will be similar, as in this case,



and in other instances, the idioms will be culturally specific. In France and Spain, for instance, they use the expression *pleurer comme une Madeleine* – no it doesn't mean that you are crying like a cake! It comes from a religious reference to the tears of Mary Magdalene. This isn't something we hear in the UK. When you explore children's languages, you also explore their cultures – and they become experts in the class, too. Try this as an extension activity if you have pupils who speak multiple languages, or to link to an MFL lesson.

A practical approach

In *The Tear Thief* lesson, the crying idioms were directly quoted from the book; in my next example, we used idioms related to the story, but not taken from the text. After reading and an initial exploration of Levi Pinfold's *Greenling*, a Y5 class returned to the text to review the themes. They were given cards with idioms or definitions on the theme of growing and nature. Half the pupils were given an idiom, the other half were given a definition. You can tailor these to individual needs by selecting easier or more challenging examples, but

here is a sample of some of the idioms I gave out:

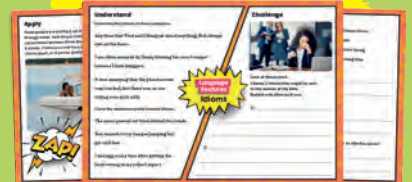
- gone to seed (def. become run down, unattractive);
- reap what you sow (def. good or bad actions lead to good or bad outcomes);
- nip it in the bud (def. stop something before it develops);
- sow seeds of suspicion (def. deliberately put a bad idea in someone's mind);
- let the grass grow under your feet (def. wait or do something very slowly).

To begin, the children moved around the space, trying to find an idiom – definition match, sitting down when they found the correct pairing. This involved a problem-solving approach and required more effort than had they been told the idiom meanings at the outset. This was followed by a discussion – we talked about the literal meanings of the idioms, and which was the correct definition.

The next step was to return to the book. In their idiom-definition pairs, children had to locate an episode in the story to which their idiom could apply.

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[tinyurl.com/
tp-IdiomsSPaG](http://tinyurl.com/tp-IdiomsSPaG)

For example, the pair that had 'nip it in the bud' chose the page where Mrs Barleycorn is urging her husband to get rid of the Greenling before he destroys their lives. The pair with 'sow seeds of suspicion' located a page where the local people are gathered around the Greenling. A preacher-type character appears to be telling the crowd why the Greenling should be destroyed. This application stage proved to be particularly powerful, not only in learning these idiomatic phrases but also in encouraging a reflective reading of the story.

There are lots of groups of idioms for you to explore with your classes – sport, weather, clothing, animals and time work well. Enjoy!



Nikki Gamble
is director of
Just Imagine
and runs
the *Take
One Book*
programme.

She is the author of *Exploring
Children's Literature* and
co-author of *Guiding Readers*.

A spoonful of sentences helps **THE WRITING GET BETTER!**

Separating out the ingredients of writing makes learning much more palatable, says **Chris Youles**

“We mustn’t spoon-feed students.” It’s a phrase I’ve never heard in relation to explaining long division, learning to drive a car, or becoming a brain surgeon. Yet I hear it frequently about teaching writing.

I wonder if people who state this think teaching students how to write is crushing their creativity, and that the secrets of writing must be guarded by us, the last protectors of the ancient scrolls?

When people insist we mustn’t spoon-feed, I suggest we step back and think about how incredibly difficult writing is. Pause to consider the cognitive drain on our Year 3 class on a wet Tuesday afternoon as they tackle their story writing.

Here’s a list of what’s involved: the physical act of writing, holding a pen properly, knowing your phoneme-grapheme correspondences, legible handwriting, cursive handwriting, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structures (simple, compound, complex, statements, questions, exclamations, commands), grammar, punctuation, syntax, figurative language, paragraphs, composition, pacing, audience and purpose, story structures, how to plot, using dialogue to advance the plot or reveal character,

setting, atmosphere, which tense and person to write the story, viewpoint, viewpoint switches, exposition, characters, protagonists, antagonists, character development, character arcs, cause and effect, show/not tell, theme, conflict, rising action, falling action, climax, stakes, conflict, resolutions, planning, proofreading, editing, redrafting.

These are all things that need to be taught; it’s hardly ‘spoon feeding’ if we do just that.

As teachers, we need to give our students every opportunity to learn how to craft fantastic sentences, securing the building blocks of writing before rushing to paragraphs and full compositions.

Breaking it down

The idea that I needed to focus on sentence structure took me a long time to discover and use in my own practice. It started when I read Frank Herbert’s sci-fi novel, *Dune*. In the book, I found a fantastic sentence structure. It was simple, using compass points to orient the reader, and precise detail to establish the main character’s viewpoint. Realising it would be useful to teach, I noted it and wrote a version down to use in class:

“On the horizon was the magical elven forest, to the

east was the endless Aatian Sea, and behind him were the rolling mountains he had just left.”

My class enjoyed playing with the structure and wrote some great sentences. Then I noticed some students used it again in their independent writing. I had always modelled sentences, but I had never been so explicit in using a particular structure for a specific writing lens.

The writing lenses are the four choices writers have when choosing a sentence: **Action**, **Description**, **Introspection (thoughts and feelings)** and **Dialogue**. Entire books are built of just these four choices. Don’t believe me? Grab a book and take a look. Every sentence leans into a lens, and combining them tells a story. Of course, the combinations of ideas within these sentences, the syntax of the sentence, and the words you choose are endless!

When I was teaching, the more I focused on sentence work, the more my students absorbed these sentence patterns and started to replicate them in their writing. As teachers, we know the students who read a lot, and how these children have a bank of internally stored sentence structures to draw on, but what about those who need it to be more explicit? How could we stretch all writers by making them think hard about their sentence patterns?

Playing with patterns

I usually teach sentences in three main ways.

One is to highlight interesting authorial techniques from the books I read with the class. I encourage all children in my class to keep a journal and add any sentences they come across. Squirrelling away these sentence ideas for future use is a great writer’s tool.





Secondly, if I write a model text, I select sentences carefully from the list, weave them into the model, and then highlight how and why I have used them.

As well as this, I teach students a sentence structure, and then we play around with it. We try different words. We play with the syntax. We discuss which version we prefer and why. Then, I get them to apply it in their writing.

Most importantly, we don't turn any of these into a success criteria checklist. Nothing is clunkier than writers shoehorning in sentences poorly because they think they must use them to get a highlighted tick on their work.

Remember when using any sentence that your audience and purpose are key. Why are you using a 'feeling' sentence here? Why an 'action' sentence next? What is

doubling the action here going to do? What about tripling it?

Building back up

Once children are confident in using them, the writing lenses can also be used to plan paragraphs or whole scenes. For example, I could decide to write the following sentences:

1. An **action** sentence to put my character in peril.
2. A **sensory** sentence to show what my character sees and hears.
3. A **feeling** sentence to show the emotional effect.
4. A **thought** sentence to show what they are thinking.

Putting it all together I might get this:
 "Jerry scrambled up the tree. Below him, he could hear the snarling wolf and see its eyes glowing yellow in the darkness. His hands shook as he pulled himself onto a branch, and an overwhelming tide of fear ran through him. 'What should I do? I must climb higher. But what if it can also climb? I have no other choice.'"

You could also take a paragraph from an existing book and deconstruct it. For example:

"Josh could hear the shouts from above. Water filled his mouth. His back scraped against the rocks. He looked around him in panic. The wreck of the ship sat on the sea bed. Its mast snapped in half, and its hull rusted black from its years in the salty oceans. Josh swam for the surface, but his heavy boots dragged him down. He cursed himself – why hadn't he taken them off before diving in?"

On examining this text closely we'll be able to identify where and how different writing lenses are used within it:

1. **Description** – A sound
2. **Action** – Seawater filling his mouth
3. **Description** – Setting description

QUICK IDEAS TO TEACH WRITING AT SENTENCE LEVEL

- **Sentence of the week** – pick a structure, put it on the board and let students play and practise with it.
- **Sentence warmups at the start of lessons** – can the children apply a specified sentence structure to an image?
- **Sentence walls** – display sentence structures around the room for the class to refer to and use. The children can add other interesting sentence structures they find in books.
- **Creative writing tasks** – ask pupils to combine different models into paragraphs.

4. **Action** – Swimming for the surface
5. **Thoughts/Feelings** – Cursing himself

Keep revisiting and refining these exercises and you'll notice that as they focus on their sentence structures, the children's confidence in their writing will grow. Not only that, but they will begin to think more carefully about why and how they are using each sentence they create.

Brick by brick we begin to build not just sentences, but writers.



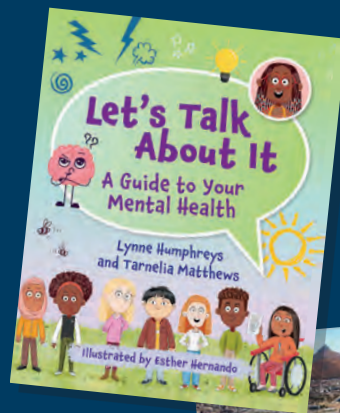
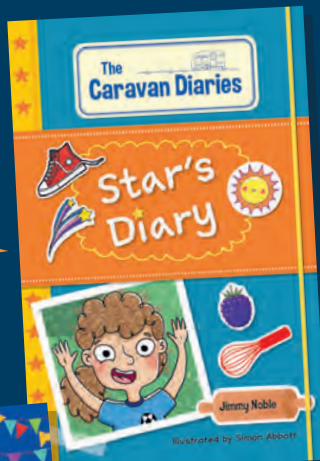
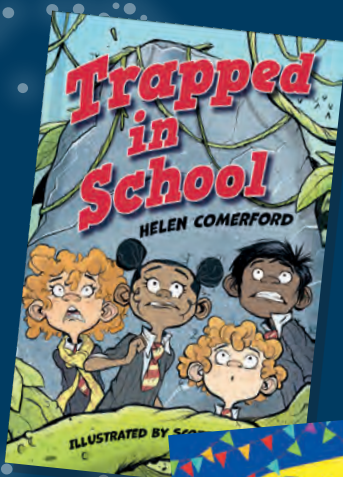
Chris Youles is the author of the bestselling book **Sentence Models for Creative Writing and Teaching Story Writing in Primary**.

A classroom teacher with 19 years of experience, he has been an assistant head, English lead, writing moderator and a specialist leader in education.

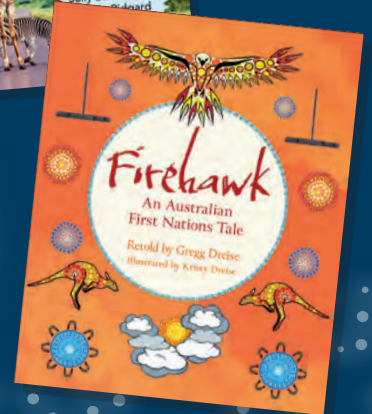
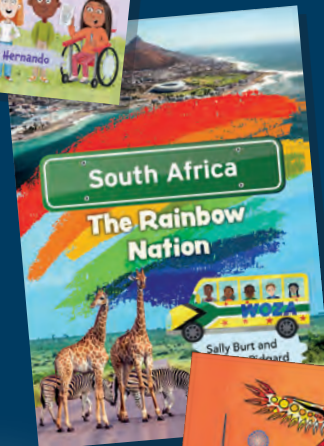


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HODDER
Education

Working class HEROES

Opening children up to authors' diverse backgrounds can improve both their enjoyment and understanding of books, says **Chris Callaghan**...

Boil-in-the-bag mince with a hefty dollop of Smash was considered a proper fancy tea when I was young. Smash (instant mashed potato) isn't easy to get right, but my mam often complimented my cooking with a wink, saying, "nice and crunchy". I grew up in a shipyard town on the banks of the Tyne. No central heating, a patchwork of overlapping second-hand carpets and ever-present candles for the frequent 1970s power cuts and those times we hadn't paid the electricity bill. Please spare me your violins, though: we were poor, but we were happy.

I didn't read much back then; books were not part of my world. I couldn't relate to the characters, who always seemed to be quite posh. The authors themselves appeared to be a different breed, too. They spoke differently, studied at fancy universities and lived in that far-off utopia known as 'doon sooth'. But all my life I was scribbling down ideas and stories, and after decades of writing purely for the

enjoyment of it, I found myself thrust into an extremely middle-class world. I didn't believe that it could happen to someone like me. But it did!

Real connection

I soon realised that it doesn't have to be only the well-off who can have all the fun. There is an escapist element to reading and we all love experiencing exploits from someone else's perspective; you don't need to be short with big hairy feet to enjoy a story about hobbits! We do, though, all need to be able to occasionally connect on a personal level for these stories to be important to us. My recent series of books and graphic novels called *Shinoy and the Chaos Crew* has a working-class family at its heart and is aimed at getting children reading. They're not stories about the hardships of that kind of life, but rather about their extraordinary adventures. I hope kids with backgrounds like mine who are reading this series can feel seen and represented by Shinoy and his family. But what else can we do to get pupils connected with stories like these?

First of all, children enjoy hearing directly from

writers: what do they look like? What do they talk like? What

is on the shelves behind them? Consider contacting

local authors or publishers to see if any would be willing

to organise a visit – most authors love to engage with

schools. Or perhaps they could send over a bespoke resource for you to share with your class –

I have videos introducing myself and my books, and often make short, personalised 'hello' versions for classes reading my stories (tinyurl.com/tp-Shinoy). If you wanted, you could even turn this into a writing project for your pupils – can they write a letter to an author and ask them about their book?

Personal experience

If you can't contact an author directly, you could ask children to research them. You could also try resources like the Author in Your Classroom podcast, each episode of which comes with an in-depth interview and related resource pack. Check it out for free at plazoom.com/podcasts

I always find that classes who have researched the author connect much more with their reading. When a child finds a character or scene that fits with the author's background, it increases their understanding of the story and why it was written, which will also encourage them to write from their own point of view.

Now that I'm a 'proper fancy' author (and make my Smash and mince with petit pois and crème fraîche) I often wonder if I'm no longer working-class – even if rather by a technicality than by design. The definitions and movements between classes will inevitably vary from one person to another, as will the details – remember, not *all* working-class folk live in high-rises in cities! But it is vital that children from all upbringings should be able to see themselves represented in books. Those children should also get the same opportunities to become writers, creating windows to their own underrepresented backgrounds. It shouldn't matter where you are from; it should only matter where your imagination can take you.



Chris Callaghan's book series, *Shinoy and the Chaos Crew* (starting at £6.25, Collins Big Cat) is available now.

 @callaghansstuff

 chris-callaghan.com



Phony brains

Pie Corbett shows your class how they can take the question “What if?” and run with it – into a dystopian future

She heard them before she saw them.

The rattle of metallic wings, the rasping of cybernetic engines, the soft buzz of solar machinery.

Ducking down, Halo hid behind the wreckage of a burned-out bus, long ago tilted onto its side.

At first, they had called it, ‘Artificial Intelligence’. The Prime Minister had appeared on TV, welcoming this new age development. He beamed, claiming that it promised improved technology: machines that could identify and eliminate diseases; write the finest books within seconds; paint like Van Gogh; create beautiful music and even halt the climate crisis. He promised machines that knew more than any human could possibly know with instant access to every library in the world. The PM grinned into the camera.

It didn’t take long. They dropped their guard and a teenager in Macclesfield hacked into a government computer linked to a military factory. He issued instructions to create the first cyberborgs. They had overtaken the unit within hours and altered the machines to produce what Halo had

just seen.

What had started with a teenager online-gaming, wrapped in a warped world of futuristic warfare, robotic-killers and an obsession with mythical beasts, had led to this dystopian landscape.

Metallic unicorns gleamed in the sunlight, flying at warp speed across the barren terrain. They were the third-generation model, each one of a higher spec than the previous. Like flying terminators, they relentlessly and ruthlessly pursued all forms of life. Halo shuddered.

After the unicorns, other creatures had soon appeared: skin-slashers, night-haunters and scar-crawlers scuttled across the cities, living in ancient sewers like futuristic rats. They were soon followed by mechanised minotaurs, cyborg serpents and metallic ghosts that flew at night.

But Halo had plans. She was already on Churchill Way in Macclesfield, heading for a small building close to what had once been Duke Street Car Park. It was the nerve center, a wild space where this technocracy had been created. The cyberborgs had built an underground

structure where one human lived, still a teenager, still a gamer, and the only person on the planet who might be able to reverse this apocalyptic world.

The journey to Macclesfield had taken over three months. Moving at night to avoid detection, Halo had learned to dodge the sweep of the night ghosts’ light-beams and to move stealthily so that their sonar alarms could not identify her every movement.

Along the way, somewhere on the outskirts of Stoke, she had picked up a companion. A wiry terrier, whose family had been bombed out of their home, had made friends. He too sensed when to lie flat and stay still and when to move. She had named him Gar as that was all that she could read on his leather collar. Probably, it was all that was left of his owner’s name.

And now they were there. Halo and Gar crouched and waited. Nothing moved. The car park was empty. Only a low building showed the entrance to the underground world from where chaos had been dictated. Halo crept under what had once been a dumpster that someone had upturned and made into a shelter. The hours slipped by, darkness closing in. Halo let her mind wander. She thought back to her family, to her friends and to all that she had lost. Once again, tears welled up and she had to push back down her misery and loss. Gar sensed her sadness and snuggled in closer, laying his little head on her lap. She stroked him and felt her heartbeat settle. Together, they had to see this through.

Across the town, the odd fire flickered. Stealthily, Maxonians moved under cover of darkness, keeping close to the shelters they had created from bombed buildings; the broken shells of what had once been blocks of flats and parades of shops.

“The journey to Macclesfield had taken over three months. Moving at night to avoid detection, Halo had learned to dodge the sweep of the night ghosts’ light-beams”

Under the moon's eyesight, Halo and Gar slipped from shadow to shadow towards the entrance in the low building. Perhaps, it was over-confidence; perhaps, it was an oversight, but the way in could not have been simpler. Halo, tugged the door handle and, a moment later, they were standing in a brightly lit corridor that led to steep steps. Below, engines hummed and she could hear someone singing to himself. Was this the person she had travelled so far to find?

Archie Mottershead stared at the mainframe screen, occasionally sipping from a metallic mug that kept his drink warm. He was patrolling the west coast of Ireland through the eyes of an automated cyber-phoenix. It was a new version and he was learning how to control its flight and speed. Every so often, he spotted what might have been something alive – a cow perhaps, a horse, a goat or maybe someone crouching in a ditch. He giggled as he let loose a sonic beam of laser-light and whatever had just been alive was incinerated. Months of mayhem had turned his head. To Archie, these were not real deaths. They were just games.

Halo watched, aghast. The months had hardened her against destruction

and violence but now that she was here, she had no clue what to do. So, she spoke. "Hi," she said, softly.

Archie spun round and stared at the girl. She looked wild and fierce; her eyebrows knitted into a frown. The dog growled. Archie had never liked dogs. He gulped. Embarrassed, perhaps ashamed, perhaps in a moment of realisation that what he had been doing was wrong... who

knows...but he stood up, abruptly, and in doing so knocked over his drink onto the computer console. There was a sudden fizz, a few sparks, and the computer screens went blank. Then all the lights went out. Only the darkness seemed to breathe.

Outside, there was a sudden hush. Just the wind whispering its way across what had once been Duke Street Car Park.





Teaching ideas that will grow. Because I can.

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TEACHING NOTES

Background

My starting point for this story was the old idea of creating a tale from the starting point of 'what if...' or 'supposing...'. In this case, 'what if Artificial Intelligence gets hijacked and misused'. 'Supposing it goes wrong'. From that start, it was simple enough to imagine what might happen if a hacker broke into a government computer and started to create a world based on war-gaming and mythical beasts. What else might go wrong?

Oral comprehension

You might want to check out the place names mentioned in the text using Google Earth and make the point that writers can use real places as a setting for their writing. Start with the children discussing what they enjoyed about the text and what did not work for them. This could then be added to by brainstorming ideas around the following headings on a discussion grid:

- What surprised you?
- What shocked you?
- What was the strongest scene?
- What could happen next?

Ask the class to complete the grid in pairs or small groups, adding ideas and using quotes. Then hold whole-class feedback and discussion. Encourage the children to refer back to the text to justify their ideas. Supplement this discussion with a few comprehension questions to encourage children to dig deeper:

- How does the opening sentence create suspense?
- From the opening few lines, how do we know that what she has seen is dangerous?
- How do we know the view of the Prime Minister?
- What should the government have done?
- Explain what lay behind Archie's actions that brought about havoc.
- What sort of character is Halo and how do we know.
- How does Gar help Halo? How might she help him?
- Explain these sentences: 'Months of mayhem had turned his head. To Archie, these were not real deaths.'
- What causes Archie's moment of realisation... and what did he realise?
- What might happen next?

Vocabulary

Read the story through, underline sci-fi vocabulary and discuss. Identify any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. List examples or synonyms and then try using the words in creative sentences:

- Definition – Solar means 'from the sun'.
- Explanation – So, the machinery is powered by the sun.
- Application – The solar panels throbbed.

Writing sentences

Go through the text and underline any useful words, phrases or sentence patterns that could be used when writing about a different creature. Practise writing sentences using different starters and patterns.

- The majority of...
- However, a minority....
- In the main, they are
- Amazingly, they have...
- Weirdly, ...
- Alarmingly, ...

Writing a report

Ask children to select one of the sci-fi creatures mentioned or invent their own. Give them time to draw and label their creature, adding information. This will help to prepare them to write their own short report, describing their creature. Here's an example of a report about the scar-crawler:

The scar-crawler

The scar-crawler is an extraordinary form of cyber insect that has only recently appeared. Would you even recognize one and is there anything crucial that we need to know about this new creature?

It is like most real insects in as far as it has legs, wings and is similar to the classic appearance of an insect. The majority of the scar-crawlers possess eight metallic wings which enable them to fly at very rapid speeds.

However, a minority have been seen with as many as sixteen wings and this variety is especially nimble, flying at great altitudes. In the main, they are the size of a large dragonfly and have rather similar eyes that bulge. Amazingly, they have the capacity to see in all directions at the same time.

The scar-crawler's body is multi-patterned and covered in tiny scales that shimmer like a rainbow as it flies. Weirdly, they can flatten their glittering bodies, and this means they have access to all sorts of places. They can squeeze under locked doors and even into boxes!

When cornered or frightened, the scar-crawler will attack humans with an especially savage and potent venom that is stored in its tail. Alarmingly, their venom is so powerful that it can burn its way through metal! So – beware!

Simple structure

Remind the children that their report needs to be structured. Encourage them to use this framework:

- Begin with an opening to introduce the chosen sci-fi creature or robot to the reader.
- Write a paragraph describing what it looks like.
- Add another paragraph of description.
- End with a brief comment or word of warning.

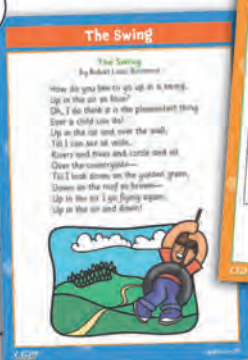
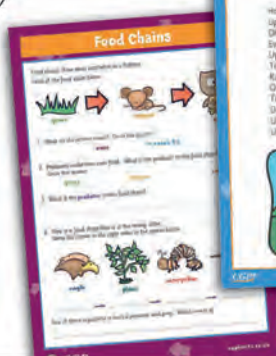


Pie Corbett is an education consultant, poet and author known for Talk for Writing. His most recent book is Catalysts: Poems for Writing (talkforwritingshop.com).

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Why revising WRITING MATTERS

Of course it's important that children can correct errors in their work – but that's not the only way to improve it, argues **Alex Quigley**

If I had to identify one important writing process that is too often neglected by pupils, it would be revising their writing. Why, though, is this vital strategy so commonly disregarded?

It seems to me that revising writing is commonly misunderstood and confused with editing. But what is the difference between these admittedly similar aspects of the writing process? I like to use the following definitions: revising is making changes to the content of the writing in light of feedback and self-evaluation; editing is making changes to ensure the text is accurate and coherent.

Am I just splitting hairs here? You could argue the two processes can be blurred, which is a fair claim. Crucially though, whenever I observe writing in classrooms – or recall my own pupils' efforts – children certainly attempt to *edit*, but they don't really *revise* what they have written. Almost all their attention goes to correcting their spelling and use of capital letters, along with fixing a few punctuation errors.

Pupils need to know that improving on a written draft is not just making

a neater version and correcting the odd spelling error. Real-world examples can help with this. For example, newspapers are revised to give different slants on stories, and scientific research is rewritten for more general audiences. Meanwhile, famous authors rework great prose and seminal sentences over and over. Ernest Hemingway rewrote the final page of *A Farewell to Arms* at least thirty-nine times to get the words

“The ability to revise their writing without guidance can prove crucial”

right – now that is revising your writing for quality!

In primary school, given the emphasis on independent writing for Year 6 assessments, the ability to revise their writing without guidance can prove crucial if children are to meet the ‘expected standard’ or better. In order to improve the quality of their writing, pupils need to take the time to work on early drafts with their audience firmly in mind.

Putting revision front and centre in the writing process

A key reason why pupils may neglect revising their writing is that they are overwhelmed by the sheer mass of moves required to improve on their initial efforts. If they know they must consider spelling, accuracy, using interesting vocabulary, a range of sentence structures, showing off their knowledge and much more, is it any surprise that revision – less easily ticked off a list of success criteria – gets dropped?

Fortunately, we can encourage children to revise their writing independently by chunking the process down into more manageable steps.

• Add, remove, refine

It's important to make clear to pupils how, exactly, they should revise their writing. Teachers need to disaggregate the process into clearer steps. First, pupils should add to improve; for example, by introducing more evidence, facts, or compelling style features. Then they need to read and revise to remove any unnecessary language, or sloppy sentences. Finally, pupils should refine their sentences, through such strategies as adding in adjectives for effect, or reorganising a paragraph to make a clearer point.

• The author's chair

We can make feedback and revisions more audience-focused by asking pupils to sit in an ‘author's chair’ and read what they've written aloud to their classmates, who are then invited to comment constructively on what they have heard. When children share writing with their peers – a real audience – they get the experience of receiving targeted feedback. It needs sensitive handling, but it can offer rich, even transformative, results.

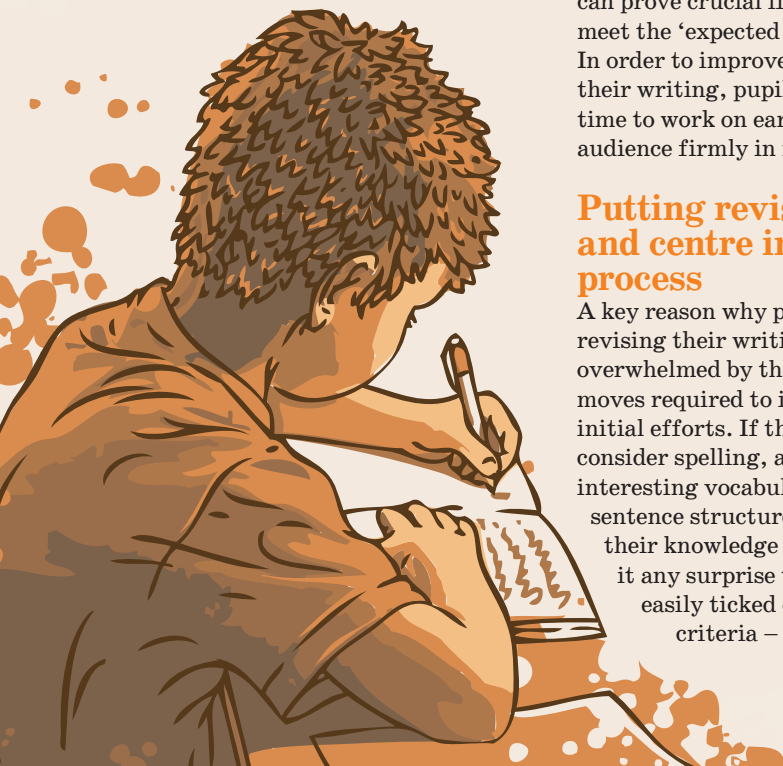
• Ask the editor

During the process of revising writing, tell pupils that they can ask the teacher (their ‘editor’) a specific number of questions to help them improve their writing. Rationing feedback in this way, can get pupils thinking more selectively, and in increasingly refined ways, about what to change, and how.



Alex Quigley is the author of Closing the Writing Gap. A former teacher, he is now the head of content and engagement at the

Education Endowment Foundation, alongside his personal writing and training for teachers.





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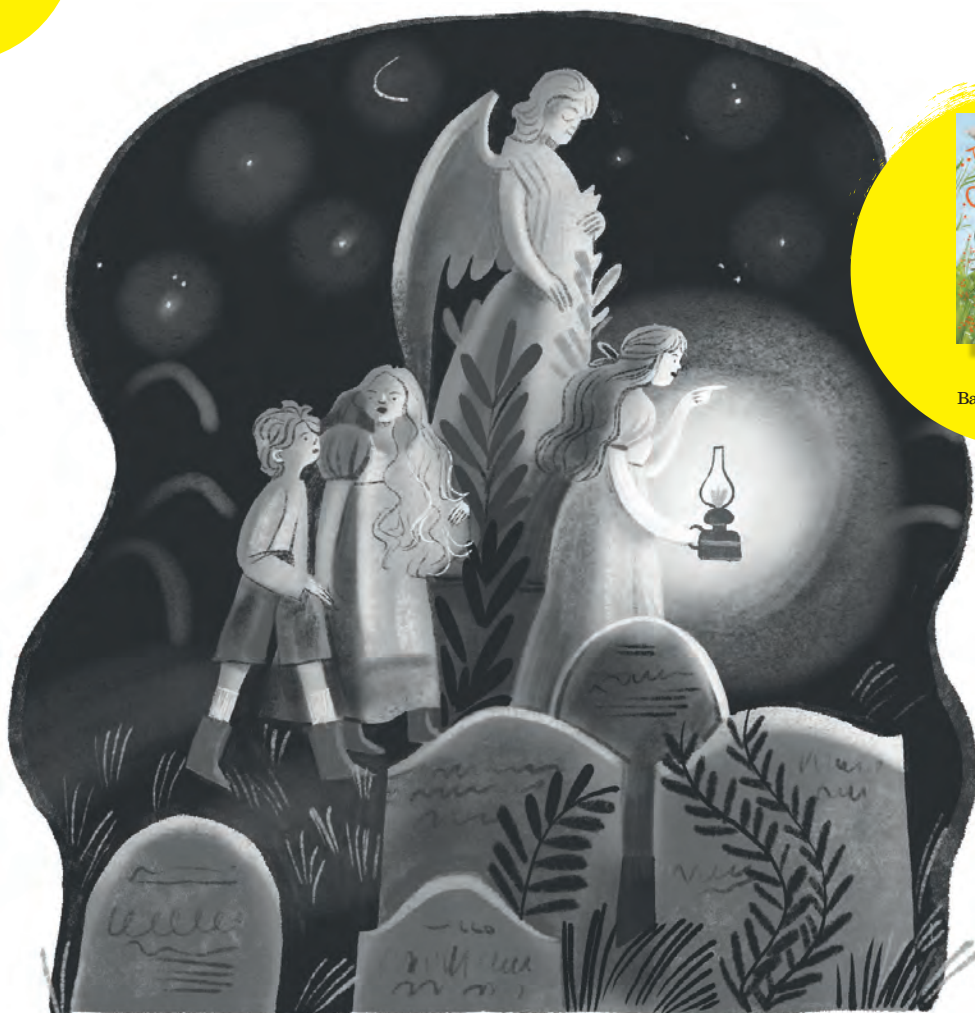


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Published by
Barrington Stoke,
2023

The Curio Collectors

Investigate Victorian botany and get hands-on with a suitcase full of curiosities in Eloise Williams' historical adventure

JO CUMMINS

There were two main reasons I was excited when a copy of *The Curio Collectors* dropped through my letterbox. Firstly, it was written by the award-winning author Eloise Williams, and secondly it was published by the wonderful people at Barrington Stoke.

Eloise Williams is a Welsh author who lives on the coast. This influence of the wildness around her is apparent in her beautiful writing where nature and the elements often play a key role. Her longer middle-grade novels are rich and atmospheric with punchy lead characters, so I'm thrilled that a new audience is now also able to enjoy

her work through her tightly written and pacey titles.

Barrington Stoke specialises in writing short, snappy, highly accessible books in a specially developed dyslexia-friendly font. They have an extensive range of titles from some of the very best children's authors, aimed at a variety of reading ages and interest levels. Eloise Williams is one of a growing roster of fabulous middle-grade authors to have joined Barrington Stoke's illustrious ranks.

The Curio Collectors invites much exploration over a range of subject areas, so it would be a great choice as the focus of a class topic on

the Victorians. The story could easily be used as a stimulus to help deliver curriculum objectives in English, history, science, geography and art. With that in mind, I have a few ideas to share with you to get your book topic started...

Activities Cover detectives

I often like to introduce a new book by having pupils explore the cover for clues as to what the story might be about. You could put a picture of the cover up on the whiteboard or have copies on tables for children to look at. Try asking them some of the following questions:

- What can you see in the front cover?
- What is the title?
- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?
- Who do you think are the main characters? Why?
- Where do you think the story might be set?
- When do you think the story might be set? What evidence do you have for this?
- What genre of story do you think this might be?
- What questions does the cover make you want to ask?
- If you could ask one of the characters on the cover a question, what would it be?

This is a wonderful way to encourage pupils to make predictions about a story and provide evidence for them. It also allows you to gauge what prior understanding of a genre or theme the children already have, and whether they are able to link the subject of the book to their own pre-existing knowledge or experiences. For example: "There is a traditional caravan on the front cover. I've been on holiday in a caravan. There wasn't much space, but you could travel



to a new place every day. Maybe the people in this story travel around too."

Tell me a story

One of the ways that Lily, Tom, and Ma Hawker persuaded people to buy their collection of curios was by weaving wonderful stories about where the objects had originally come from: a piece of leather and some old teeth become a snakeskin crown complete with venomous fangs; or an old piece of blue glass is a precious gem plucked from an ancient pharaoh's tomb.

Have a feely bag or old suitcase full of interesting objects – an old key, a chicken bone, an old doll etc. Reveal them one at a time and discuss what each object could be. Award bonus points for the most imaginative interpretation! You might like to record these as a class for children to refer back to later.

Allow some time for close examination, if possible, then ask pupils to pick one of the objects and answer the following questions:

- Where did it come from originally?
 - Who has it belonged to or where was it made? When?
 - What was it used for?
 - How did it come to be lost or thrown away?
 - Where could it have been found?
- For example, was it left behind at a caravan site or washed up on the beach?

Remember – the children need to make their objects sound as fascinating and fantastical as possible. They are going to use their ideas as the basis of their very own crowd-enthralling story. Ensure that lots of rich detail is included to create a vivid picture in their audience's mind and so convince them to part with their money.



For an interesting twist on this idea, pupils could try writing their stories in the first person from the perspective of the object itself, as though the object is recounting its life story.

Class museum

This book may also provide excellent inspiration for a class collection of curios to be displayed as though in a museum. You can encourage the children to bring in a 'found' object or an interesting item from home which could then be used to form an exhibition.

Visit some museum collections online and look at how the artefacts are displayed and labelled. What key information do the labels provide? (A description of what the artefact is, what

Take it further → → →

Clay tiles

Flora, the maid, is an avid collector of scrimshaw, as were many Victorians. Although scrimshaw is most commonly associated with items made from carved bone, rams' horn and seashells were also very collectable.

Give each child a clay tile and a selection of shells. Look at the various textures and sizes of the shells. After arranging them into the desired design, slowly but firmly push them into the clay then carefully remove,

leaving an imprint. When the tiles have dried out or been fired, the textured shell prints can be highlighted using paints or varnishes.

Lino printing

Shells are also the perfect inspiration for lino printing – this can also be done using polystyrene tiles and a pencil. Closely study a range of shells. Aim for a selection that has a variety of different markings, textures, shapes, and sizes. Real is better but

photographs would also work. The children need to create a sketch of their chosen shell or shells, which will be transferred onto a polystyrene tile using a sharp pencil. If the children want to create two-colour designs, they may just want to draw the outline of their shells onto the tile first, then print. When the print is dry, trace on the rest of the pattern using a different colour and print again over the top of the outline.

This technique would lend itself well to producing repeated printed patterns in the style of renowned Victorian designer, William Morris.

it's made of, where it was found, when, by whom.) Pupils could then write a similarly detailed label for their own artefact. This could be based partly in fact or in fiction – can they weave a tale that will draw in the crowds?

Once the items of curios have their labels, decide how the collection will be organised and displayed – in a timeline of discovery, by function, or by material, etc. The children will be able to devise lots of imaginative ways to organise them. You could then produce a map or guide to help visitors navigate the collection.

As an end to this project, you could invite families or other classes to come to a special viewing of the collection. There are lots of ways that pupils could be involved in organising and publicising this. They could help to write formal invitations to take home; produce persuasive, crowd-pulling posters; or make announcements in school assemblies.

Beautiful botany

One of the key issues within the story is that of Henrietta Meriweather's botanical research and notes being stolen by the wicked Mr Pinch and presented as his own. During the Victorian era, women were allowed greater access to the science of botany than other areas. The collecting, drawing, and studying of flowers was considered an elegant accomplishment. However, there were those who believed botany should be only for those with a formal education, meaning many women became excluded. I can certainly imagine many male botanists being jealous of the wealth of knowledge being collected by women and being very keen to claim some of it as their own.

Take time to explore some images of

Victorian botanical studies – what do pupils think of the illustrations? Do they have a favourite? Have any of the studies used pressed flowers? Can they identify various parts of the plants? What information has been included? Collect a list of technical terms which could be included in a glossary for use in their own writing later.

The children should be encouraged to become botanists and study the flora within their local habitats. Head out into the school grounds and survey what plants can be found. There are lots of free plant identification apps which could be used alongside classification keys or British flora guides. It might be interesting to be more scientific in your explorations and investigate whether different plants grow in different locations around the school grounds.

Collect samples of the plants within the grounds (for example: daisies, dandelions, buttercups). Take them back to class and try using flower pressing techniques to preserve them. This can easily be achieved by placing the leaves and flowers between two



Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Gaslight* by Eloise Williams
- ❖ *What a Shell Can Tell* by Helen Scales and Sonia Pulido
- ❖ *The House of One Hundred Clocks* by A. M. Howell
- ❖ *Where the Wilderness Lives* by Jess Butterworth
- ❖ *Fagin's Girl* by Karen McCombie

sheets of absorbent paper such as coffee filters or blotting paper, then placing them between the pages of a heavy book. An adult should also carefully dig up some samples with the roots intact.

Use magnifying glasses to carefully observe the collected specimens. What details are pupils able to see that are not easily visible to the naked eye? The children should then create careful pencil sketches or watercolour depictions of the flowers. When finished, add labels and information as per the Victorian studies you looked at earlier. Encourage pupils to use some of the technical vocabulary collected in the glossary of *The Curio Collectors*.



Jo Cummins is an advisory teacher for a specialist provision, an experienced English lead, and a children's book blogger. She has been part of the judging panel for several children's book awards and has delivered workshops at conferences across the country.



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The power of persuasion

The children could investigate some of the persuasive techniques the characters use to sell their curiosities, and try creating posters or persuasive slogans for a school event or for their own class museum.

Read page 30 as a class. What are some of the ways that the Curio Collectors try and draw in a crowd – what are they doing? Look at the language they use.

Can anyone find an example of alliteration? A superlative? Are there any words or phrases the children particularly like?

Pupils are now going to write their own

persuasive phrases. Start by thinking about some alternative names for the collection: *objects, artefacts, items, collectables*, etc. Create a whole class list. Do the same for superlatives: *amazing, awesome, outstanding, brilliant*, and so on.

Use these lists as a basis for a persuasive alliterative phrase which could be used to convince people they want to come and see or do something.

Fantastic females

This book touches upon the injustice suffered by many female botanists during

the Victorian era. Unfortunately, this gender bias was not limited to the study of botany, but across the sciences and many other areas too. Wouldn't it be fantastic if pupils were able to complete some research and create their own alternative timelines or texts? You might choose to focus upon science, but children may also want to look at other areas such as sports or computing, where the achievements of women have historically been swept under the carpet. There are lots of great biography templates online that you can use as the basis for a research project and more extended piece of writing.

Teach it from THE TOP

A more ambitious approach to text selection, and rationales for using them in English lessons, will benefit pupils of all abilities, says **Bob Cox**

Have you ever gotten in a knot working through a lesson plan – realising that just when you thought you were done, you needed an extension opportunity for advanced learners? What if, instead of thinking of these more difficult learner activities as a bolt-on to your lesson, you considered a higher-level approach for all children from the start?

Every school has high ambitions for its pupils, but it's not quite so simple to embody this ambition in an English lesson. How can we challenge pupils and ensure creativity becomes a cultural norm in school? And is it ever possible for us to pitch the work high, and still make it accessible to everyone in the class?

My team and I regularly visit schools across the UK, and have observed numerous examples of schools who have, with our help, asked and found satisfactory answers to the questions above. Here's how it works.

Big principles come first!

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, try reversing the way you think about lesson planning, and consider the most advanced elements first; abandon bolt-on extras and focus on the hardest possible level of understanding and writing to which your class might aspire. This is essential for ambitious approaches to

flourish, as expectations remain high for all.

This process is also much more coherent when scaffolded around quality literature; comprehension, fluency, vocabulary explorations, reading to writing routes and oracy are all enhanced via the scope and power of a complex text.

Ultimately, we want children to comprehend texts in this deeper way, and use that understanding to help them excel in writing. Take a look at this extract from a Year 6 pupil at Doncaster Primary Academy:

'His suit and tie are so tight that his big bull-neck hangs over his white shirt. This startling white shirt

"The deeper the knowledge of the teacher, the less planning is needed, and the more confidence grows"

only emphasises how red his fierce face is. In the centre of this raging redness is a broad nose with flaring nostrils. Although his eyes move slowly, they see everything: a child not doing their work; a child whispering to the person in front of them; even the child who dares to briefly look him in the eye.'

The pupil's writing has been influenced by his academy's rich curriculum, a great teacher, a depth of prior reading, and a keen response, but the stimulus

material has been vital, too. Here's a small sample of the text he was reacting to, an extract from Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*:

'Mr Davis had evidently taken his coffee too strong that morning; there was an east wind, which always affected his neuralgia; and his pupils had not done him the credit which he felt he deserved: therefore, to use the expressive if not elegant language of a schoolgirl, 'he was as nervous as a witch, and as cross as a bear.'

The 'quality text to quality writing' link gives you the chance to teach specific concepts – like these character descriptions – using sophisticated

models, and to improve writing via reading as the four modes of language – speaking, listening, reading and writing – run concurrently. This view has been reinforced by many theorists over the years, including Margaret Meek, who said in her book *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* (1988): 'If we want to see what lessons have been learned from the texts children read, we have to look for them in what they write.'

Ensure every child is challenged

There is no definitive list of the concepts we need to teach in English, but a good way to think about it is that with each text, you want to pull out a specific literary technique, rather than just rattling through a reading. For example, you might want to teach how to build tension, how structure has supported meaning, or features of effective personification. You can use a simpler part of the text with one pupil and a more challenging part with another, but by focusing on a specific approach, every child is learning about the same concept.

There are also some vital mindsets and strategies that I have observed across schools that successfully 'teach to the top':

- School leaders believe that all pupils are entitled to a challenging curriculum, and take action to make this happen.
- Schools provide CPD that explores subject-specific details and approaches. In contrast, some schools have digested principles around high



aspirational thinking very well, but they have not engaged in how different disciplinary knowledge is needed for different subjects – for example, what an excellence-for-all approach looks like in science as compared with English. This is essential.

- Coaching advice complements exciting curriculum developments to assist teachers’

knowledge acquisition and learning. This isn’t connected with performance management.

- Teachers are encouraged to maintain ongoing reading of literature and mastery of the texts they use. The deeper the knowledge of the teacher, the less planning is needed, and the more confidence grows.
- A clear action plan is devised for approximately one to two years – with periodic evaluation – to highlight the rationale for an ambitious curriculum and stages for achievement.

The right texts support change

I have been privileged to see many teachers discover the joy and scope that challenging texts offer for daily learning. It might be a picture book with a fascinating concept, like a wall which apparently offers protection from enemies on the other side, as in John Agee’s *The Wall in the Middle of the Book*, or the remarkable variation on fairy tale and myth in Andri Snær Magnason’s *The Casket of Time*, in which the language, style and sheer invention of the text itself offers opportunities for new learning.

In the end, it is you, the teacher, who makes the difference, who intervenes with that much-needed support and scaffolding, who inspires, who cares and who laughs with your pupils. High-quality English texts offer so many more openings for this to happen.

FIVE STEPS TO AMBITIOUS LEARNING



- Use challenging texts – with access strategies as appropriate – as a norm and they will eventually cease to seem harder to you or your pupils.



- Use challenging texts for reading aloud and improving fluency.



- Continually self-reflect and engage with others and in CPD sessions on the impact evidence coming from your lessons. Evaluate periodically using your school’s performance indicators rather than simply ticking boxes and delivering a set package.



- Chunk stages of knowledge acquisition. This makes complex texts manageable to the memory. Harder concepts may actually stick more reliably because of the hard thinking, talking and repeating ideas.



- Use excellent models of writing from various periods and locations, from picturebooks to contemporary literature; classic texts to poetry. The rich nature of these texts will open up many opportunities.



Bob Cox is the author of the award-winning *Opening Doors*

series. The newest installation, *Opening Doors to Ambitious Primary English* (£18.99, Crown House Publishing) is out now.

searchingforexcellence.co.uk

How to run an effective WRITING LESSON

Mix and match sessions and goals to find the perfect setup for your class, say **Doug Kauffman** and **Ross Young**

When it comes to developing an effective writing lesson, there are many approaches you could take. Sometimes it can be tricky to delve through all the advice available, but we've found that the Writing for Pleasure approach has been a great model on which to structure daily writing lessons. Experimental and random control trials, systematic reviews, meta-analyses and case studies, together with research into what the most effective schools do, all point to its efficacy.

But what does it look like in practice?

Sort a system

The components of an effective writing lesson typically involve a reassuringly consistent (though adaptable) routine of mini lesson, writing time, and class sharing. What is innovative with this particular approach is that, after a mini lesson, children are invited to practise and apply what's just been taught in a way that is relevant to their own writing. For example:

Section 1

Mini lesson (instruction): A period of direct and explicit instruction.

Trying it out (practice):

An opportunity to try the mini lesson out by having a brief practice.

Research and case study

findings to support: Children need regular and explicit strategy instruction and time to practise if they are to develop their writing craft.

Section 2

Writing time (applying and crafting): A sustained period for children to work on their writing and to apply the mini lesson to their composition.

Research and case study findings to support: Children need ample, sustained, and daily time in which to enact the processes involved in writing and to develop their writing craft.

Pupil conferencing (feedback): During writing

on and receive feedback from their teacher and peers.

Research and case study findings to support: Children need regular feedback, an opportunity to read and discuss their writing with others, and additional bespoke instruction if they are to become better writers.

An excellent foundation and a good rule of thumb when you're first setting up a routine for writing lessons is to follow this kind of order and timings:

1. Mini lesson (1-15 mins)
2. Trying it out (1-5 mins)
3. Writing time (20-40 mins)
4. Class sharing (5-15 mins)

silent writing, social writing, conferencing time and class sharing.

There are endless ways to play around with these key combinations. Here are just a few examples:

Routine 1

Occasionally, your instruction needs a bit more time, for example when you want to read and discuss a variety of mentor texts with the class. In this instance, you can switch around the mini lesson and writing time lengths as follows:

Bigger lesson (20-40 mins)
Writing time (3-10 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 2

Sometimes you'll want to get on and pupil-conference with your children during their writing time. This can allow you to stop writing time if you notice a key misconception through your pupil conferencing and want to address it with the whole class. You can stop the writing time and deliver the mini lesson before asking the children to work on the issue or misconception together during class sharing. E.g.:

Writing time (20-30 mins)
Mini lesson (5-15 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 3

Now and again, you just need your class to carry on from where you left off yesterday, and no mini lesson is required:

"A good routine always has a component of flexible response"

time, the teacher provides verbal feedback and responsive individualised instruction through pupil conferencing.

Research and case study findings to support: Children need regular feedback and responsive teaching based on formative assessment if they are to become better writers.

Section 3

Class sharing (feedback): Time for children to read what they've been working

Trial and error

Once you and your pupils are comfortable with this kind of routine, you can begin to play around with it. Routine doesn't mean rigidity – a good routine always has a component of flexible response. What's important is knowing *what* a good writing lesson typically involves, and having a shared vocabulary you can use with your class. Your pupils will soon get used to language like *workshop time*, *mini lesson*, *writing time*,

Writing time (30-50 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 4

Occasionally, during pupil conferencing, you pick up on something you want to teach to the whole class.

This requires an additional, responsive mini lesson to be delivered in the middle of writing time, like this:

Mini lesson (3-10 mins)
Writing time (10-20 mins)
Responsive mini lesson (3-10 mins)

Writing time (10-20 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 5

Sometimes having a sharing session in the middle of writing time gives children the opportunity to reflect on how they're getting on with applying learning from the mini lesson. For example:

Mini lesson (3-10 mins)
Writing time (10-20 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)
Writing time (10-20 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 6

You may also, now and again, want your pupils to review what they wrote yesterday with their peers, before continuing. In this case, you can teach a mini lesson based on what you're seeing during pupil conferencing, like this:

Class sharing (5-10 mins)
Writing time (10-20 mins)
Mini lesson (3-10 mins)
Writing time (10-20 mins)
Class sharing (5-10 mins)

Routine 7

Finally, sometimes you simply want your class to continue with their writing. You can then use the whole lesson for writing time and pupil conferencing.

Set goals

It's vital that we think carefully about the process goals we set for writing time, too. A process goal is something we would like children to achieve or get done by the end of a session.

It's important to say that by *writing time* we don't necessarily mean *drafting*, but simply time

engaged in the processes of writing. E.g.: making front covers; working on plans; drafting a picturebook page; drafting a single paragraph of writing; reading; conducting research; discussing and revising some already-crafted writing; proofreading for spellings; or publishing.

Like the main writing lesson, there are a variety of ways you can organise your goals. For instance, you might switch between drawing illustrations and writing about them. You might also want to give the children some time to draft, and then ask them to proofread what they've just written. For some lessons, you might set a specific goal you want your pupils to achieve during writing time. For example, proofreading their manuscript for spelling and grammar, or reviewing their writing against the product goals established for the class writing project. Finally, you may need to take into consideration energy levels, and split writing time up into chunks of 'silent writing' and 'social writing' to keep everyone on track.

The reason these components are so brilliant is because they offer the potential for explicit instruction, meaningful practice and formative assessment every single day. These are the absolute bedrocks of all teaching and learning.



Ross Young is the founder of The Writing for Pleasure Centre and co-author of Writing for Pleasure: Theory, Research & Practice and others. Doug



Kaufman is university teaching fellow at the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education.



A picture paints a THOUSAND WORDS

A well-chosen image can be an invaluable teaching tool, says **Caroline Scott**

Images can support vocabulary development, foster inference and critical thinking, and support the generation of ideas, among other valuable benefits. How, though, can we as educators select a great supporting image that results in learners experiencing these kinds of benefits?

Focusing in

Often, we can get bamboozled by the content of a topic. We're trying to inspire our imaginative learners to create an incredible piece of work, so lots of thought goes into how

What you'll most likely do is think about how you can use an introduction (and in this case, an image) to connect the learning with prior experience; and to scaffold not only the content that the child is about to write, but the literacy requirements they will need to produce a successful report.

Scaffolding

Hammond and Gibbons (2005) explain scaffolding as follows:

"...teachers need to provide temporary supporting structures to assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new

produce their final piece of writing.

Image is central to my work as an educator and author, and I have developed an effective scaffold for using images to support the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing. I've seen firsthand the positive impact it can have, and how beneficial it can be within the right setting, and have observed learners make a reading age

improvement of 14 months over a six-month period.

Best practice

So let's consider how you might select an image and use this as a scaffold for moving learning from speaking and listening into reading and writing.

Try to pick a single image that really encompasses the topic the children will be writing

"Using images as a foundation for scaffolding provides a powerful structure within which learners can produce their final piece of writing"

to enthuse them to write about a topic. The challenge that then occurs, time and time again, is how to maintain that excitement and sustain the momentum of pupils' written output.

Let's say the purpose of the image is to be a focal point for writing a non-chronological report about a particular topic. As a teacher, you're unlikely to provide a blank sheet of paper and ask the children to write something completely unprompted. (Unless you are, for example, trying to obtain an unaided writing sample for assessment purposes.)

abilities. As the learner acquires these skills, so teachers need to withdraw that support, only to provide further support for extended or new tasks, understandings and concepts."

When we scaffold learning, we consider the building blocks needed for learners to reach their next steps; thus, every image we select to support learning needs to provide this kind of support. Image is one of many ways to scaffold learning, and using images as a foundation for scaffolding provides a powerful structure within which learners can



about. Remember to consider a range of sources. These could range from video stills and screenshots to posters or postcards. You might even choose a graph or a collection of infographics.

Think carefully about what aspect of the picture you will ask the children to focus on – what prompt should it give them? You could, for example, select just one part of the image and present it as a mystery to be solved. Or you could display a picture that shows only half a story and ask the children to think about and write down what might happen next. Pictures of favourite characters can also be great starting points.

Consider beginning with a plenary activity in which you display your chosen image and ask the children to consider certain



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questions that you will raise about it in the later lesson. In this way they will have the opportunity to think about the image ahead of time.

Pre-learning can be used as a stepping stone for children who find literacy challenging. It's ideal for low-level literacy learners and those who have English as an additional language, as well as SEND students.

Using the image as a focus for speaking and listening

If possible, give each child a copy of the image to use during the lesson; tell them it's their own special source of inspiration.

Ask the children about the image. Your questions should be crafted carefully, to inspire them to engage in discussion about what they can see. The point here is to start getting them thinking about not just the image, but the vocabulary around it.

Using the image as a focus for moving to reading

Consider a shared read of a model answer that is based on the image. You can also use

videos or real objects related to your chosen image to stimulate even more discussion and, potentially, new vocabulary.

If we want learners to write something incredible, not only do we need to provoke debate around the topic, but we need to offer great reading text models to scaffold next steps. Make sure that when modelling a text you offer children the opportunity to rehearse reading it. You can also encourage them to change parts of it with reference to the image, so that they can make it 'their own', whilst keeping within the structure of the original model.

Using the image as a focus for moving to writing

The final step in this process is for learners to take the image and model for reference, and rehearse their own texts ahead of writing. This should keep them focused on the topic (inspired by the image) while maintaining a structure. Writing is creative, and this is the children's time to shine, following lots of modelling.

The power of images in teaching reading and writing cannot be overstated. Opportunities to use images as a focus for speaking, listening, reading and writing are limitless. However, finding the right image with the right structure of support around it can make all the difference to a learner's inspiration, motivation, output and ultimately, success.

TOP TIPS ON...

Questions to ask

- How did this happen?
- What happened 10 minutes earlier?
- What happens next?
- What was the result of this?
- Why do you think the image was made?
- What do you think is missing?
- How does it make you feel?
- Describe what else you see
- Why is the image presented in this way?
- Does the image suggest a time period? If so, how?
- What is your own experience in relation to the image?

Generating model answers

- Provide a list of key words that go with the image
- Write model sentence structures that go with the image
- Provide writing frames that go with the image
- Introduce a different image of a new character or setting
- Present a second version of the image in which an element has been altered



Caroline Scott is an EAL author and educator. As the founder of

Across Cultures and creator of the Learning Village programme, Caroline delivers training on EAL in schools in the UK and overseas.

AUTHOR IN YOUR CLASSROOM



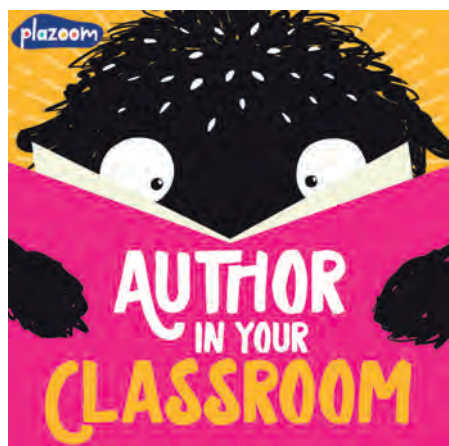
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Creating characters is often one of the most fun aspects of writing stories, and they can take years to develop. Whether basing them on people you know, have met, or just imagining traits you wish you had, you can soon end up with a full cast inside your own head!

In this episode, Lauren talks about her own cast of characters, how some books and stories can take years to develop, and how bringing other people's words to life through pictures can be both tricky and incredibly rewarding. She also discusses the fact that when you read a story, it becomes your own, and opens up an exciting new world every time – a great start for thinking about your own characters.



HOW TO USE THE PODCAST



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Play it in your classroom in one go, or in shorter chunks



Pause the podcast to talk about the points being raised, using our teaching notes

THREE THINGS KIDS WILL LEARN FROM THE PODCAST

1 TAKE YOUR TIME

"I write stories over years and decades. I have these little fragments of stories – some are nearly finished, some are in their early stages. And I gradually, gradually get to them. Some of them I look at and think 'Oh my goodness, no! What were you thinking of?' But some of them I look at, like my book *The Goody*, which has only just been published, but actually was written in 2003, and over the years I kept returning to it. And it would change, and then change into something else. And then, finally, I'd find the story in it."



2 INSPIRATION IS EVERYWHERE

"Hubert Horatio was a real aspirational character for me. And he comes from my childhood experiences – watching very glamorous films and wishing I could just fall into the cinema screen and be somebody like that. So, I wrote him as someone who I probably would have liked to have been myself."



3 EVERYONE IS CREATIVE

"I think the idea that there is a person who's creative, as opposed to someone who isn't creative, is quite a divisive thing in that it can make some children believe that they haven't been blessed with this gift, and therefore they will never be a writer, an artist, a musician, or anything else under that banner of 'Creative'. That's just not true – we all have potential to invent and problem-solve and create, but we all need time and practice to be able to do that. If you looked at my early writing you would never imagine I would become a writer or in any way be successful at it. It all took a lot of work, and a lot of exploring."

PREVIOUS EPISODES



HELEN RUTTER,

actress, comedian and debut children's author pops into the studio to talk about her first novel, *The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh*. The book stars Billy, who is just starting secondary school and wants to become a stand-up comic... and is also living with a stutter. Download our resources to help pupils learn about writing characters who are overcoming difficulties.



RHIANNA PRATCHETT,

video game writer and journalist, explains why writing for video games is such a uniquely challenging, enjoyable and satisfying way to bring a story to life. Download our accompanying resources to take pupils step by step through the process of writing their very own 'choose the ending' story.



How to download the resources



To accompany the podcast, teaching experts at Plazoom have created free resources that you can use to develop your pupils' writing. The teaching pack includes an extract from *Pippy Longstocking Goes Abroad*, teacher notes, planning sheets and beautifully designed elements for a working wall display. In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to create their own characters through both pictures and words, develop their character's personality, and plot ideas for a story. Extracts from the podcast are suggested to introduce each section of the teaching sequence, providing an excellent way to connect the things children are learning with the work of a professional author.

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Give these wordy games a go and sharpen up pupils' placement skills. . .

SARAH FARRELL

When you go about teaching anything as technical as punctuation, there's a risk that it can be quite dry. But it doesn't need to be! In fact, there's a wealth of high-quality punctuation games that children can use to practise basic sentence skills.

The main writing barrier I've found with the classes I've taught is a lack of a clear understanding about what constitutes a sentence. The purpose of the following games and activities is to help children understand the key parts of a sentence (the subject and the predicate), and then how to combine or extend the sentences that they write, to produce a coherent and flowing piece of writing.

For the majority of the below activities, you simply need a whiteboard or screen to display sentences on, and scrap paper, mini whiteboards or notebooks for children to work on. Enjoy!

KS1 games

Punctuation paddles

For this game, each child will need three pieces of paper with either an exclamation mark, question mark or full stop drawn on it.

Display a statement, command, question or exclamation without the end punctuation on the board, and ask children to hold up their paper 'paddle' with the correct punctuation mark.

You can also play this

game using Plickers (tinyurl.com/tp-Plickers) – children hold up a code similar to a QR code and orient it to a certain position to answer multiple choice questions. You then scan the cards using an iPad or other device to record pupils' answers.

Spot the mistake

If there's one thing that children enjoy, it's correcting their teacher when they make a mistake. This game doesn't need any preparation except for having sentences pre-written or ready to display on the board.

The most successful way I've done this is to choose a range of common misconceptions that have featured in pupils' writing, but also to recap basic sentence structure – such as missing a subject in a sentence. As a way of scaffolding this, you may want to provide the number of mistakes to look out for, or what type of mistakes. For example:

We cant wayt for tea.

(One piece of missing punctuation and one spelling error.)

Silly sentences

With all SPaG games, having a chance to be silly and creative is important (as long as the sentences that the pupils create are grammatically correct!).

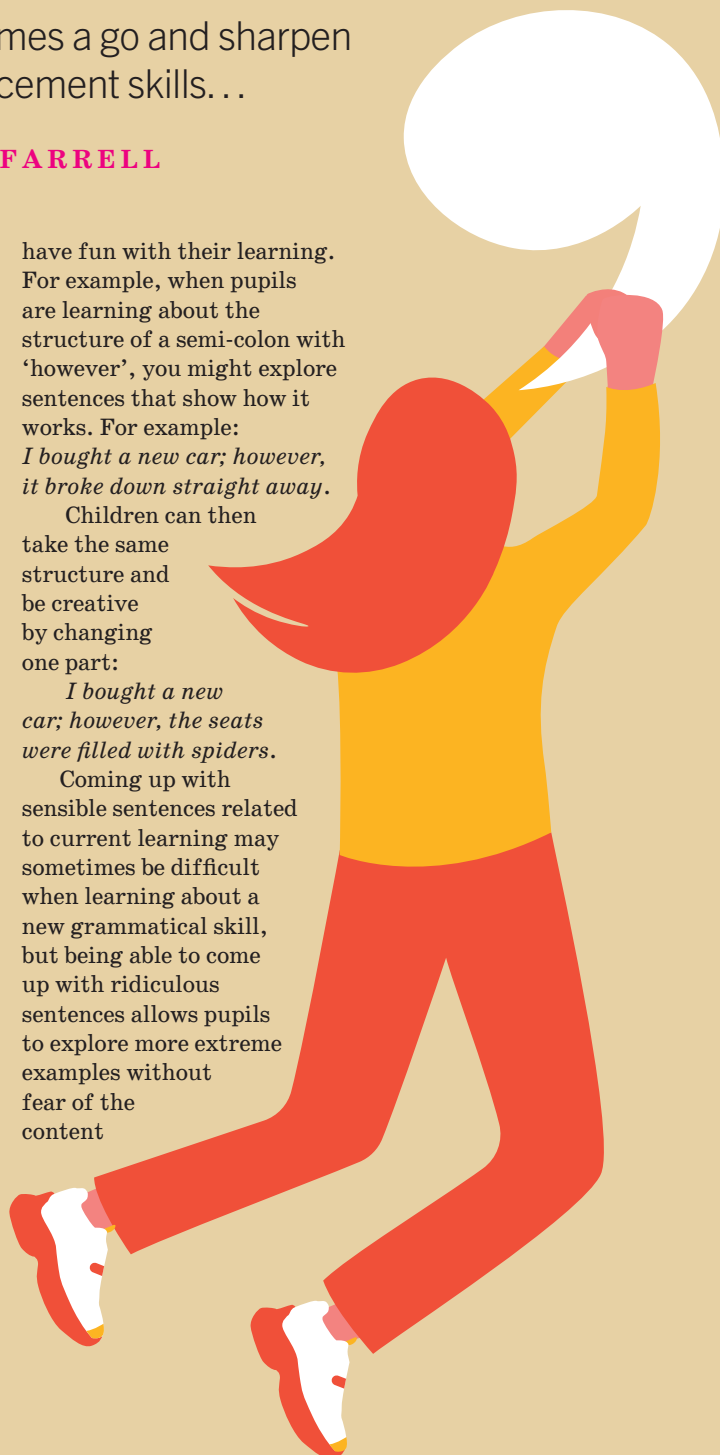
When introducing children to a grammatical technique, provide a chance for them to experiment and

have fun with their learning. For example, when pupils are learning about the structure of a semi-colon with 'however', you might explore sentences that show how it works. For example:
I bought a new car; however, it broke down straight away.

Children can then take the same structure and be creative by changing one part:

I bought a new car; however, the seats were filled with spiders.

Coming up with sensible sentences related to current learning may sometimes be difficult when learning about a new grammatical skill, but being able to come up with ridiculous sentences allows pupils to explore more extreme examples without fear of the content



“These games will help your pupils to understand the key parts of a sentence”

having to be accurate. Children with strong interests in a certain topic (Nissan GTRs, Ronaldo or narwhals are some examples that spring to mind from my own classroom!) enjoy having this opportunity to include those passions in their SPaG work.

Sentence matching

This is another game that can be played in several different ways. At word level, you can jumble up the words in a sentence for children to unscramble (download our example sentences using the URL in the panel on the right). To support this, start by keeping a capital letter on the word that should be at the start of the sentence. You can then remove this scaffold later on.

Extend this activity by providing a set of sentences that you've split up into parts (ideally separating the subject and the predicate, e.g. *The children ate / the delicious cakes*). Find cards for this game in the attached download.

Ask the children to mix up the cards until they create sentences that make sense. Alternatively, turn over a card from a deck and take it in turns to lay cards until a sentence is created. For an added challenge, include a mixture of statements and questions, along with the relevant punctuation.

KS2 games

Pick-up sticks

Write a selection of different nouns on lolly sticks and put them in a pot, then add a selection of different adjectives in a different pot, followed by grammatical skills (relative clause, apostrophe for contraction, etc) in a third. Children take it in turns to pick out a selection of sticks from different pots, then have the challenge of writing a sentence

containing, for example:

- rowing boat
- chicken
- angry
- a relative clause

At the start it's best to play this game in groups or without the grammatical terms, to allow children to explore the creativity of using the given words. You can then add in extra criteria as they become more confident.

Change a word

This game can work in several different ways, and the aim is to get children to play around with word class and sentence structure. One way to play involves all children having a piece of paper and writing a simple sentence at the top. For example:

The cat climbed the tree.

Now pass the paper onto the next person, with the sentence still visible at the top. The child who receives it changes one word in the sentence and writes it below the first one:
The boy climbed the tree.

Now fold back the top of the paper with the first sentence so only the second sentence is visible, and pass the paper on to the next child. Repeat the process, changing one word in the currently visible sentence:
The boy climbed the mountain.

After a few turns, extend this activity by asking children to add an adverbial phrase or another grammatical skill.

The purpose here is to help children to see the different elements that make up a sentence, and how they can be exchanged for another group of words that work in the same way.

Improving sentences

This game is best used to help children to edit writing. Display a set of different things that children can add or change about a sentence.

For example:

- change the subject
- add an adjective
- add a subordinating conjunction
- add a relative clause

It's best if these are things that you've recently

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covered in class to ensure that children know how to apply the skills. Accompany each item on the list with a number and provide children (either individually or in pairs) with a die. With either pre-prepared simple sentences or with their own, get children to roll the die and follow the instruction of the number rolled. After a few alterations, change the sentence for a different one and continue.


I hope these games will bring a bit of sparkle to your punctuation lessons, and help children to remember the rules more easily. Find more games for both KS1 and KS2 at tinyurl.com/tp-PunctuationGames

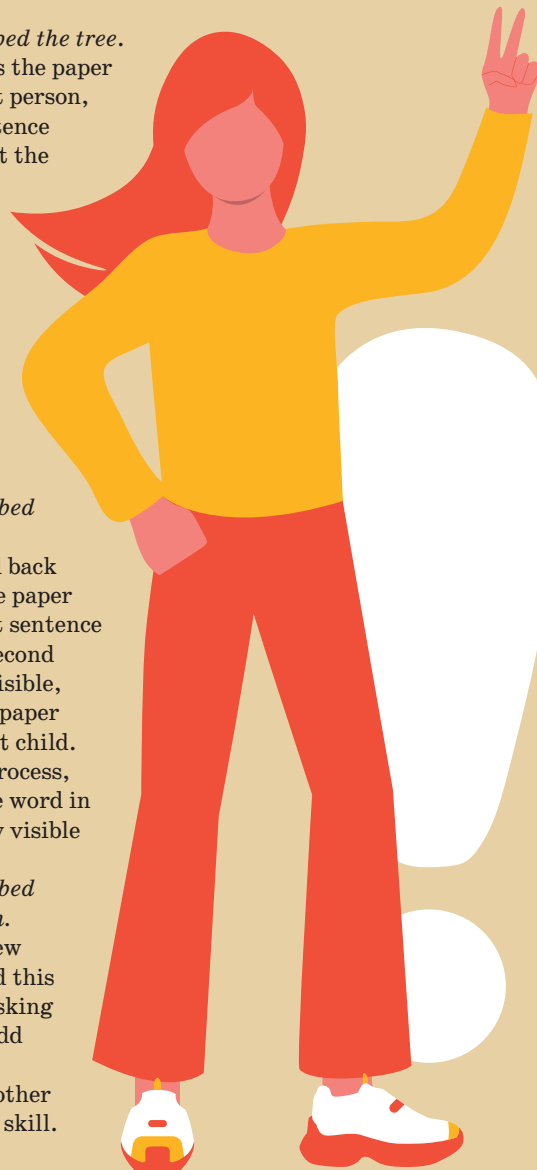


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Word PERFECT

How one website saved this teacher time and reduced the anxiety around teaching vocabulary...

DAN SMITH

Even as an experienced teacher, it still made me nervous when I thought about how I taught vocabulary: am I using the right methods? Should I use the Frayer model? Should I use vocabulary lists? How often should I test pupils?

Some teachers would rightly argue that even before I got to the methods of teaching vocabulary, I needed to correctly identify what words I should be teaching! Firstly, there are the three tiers of vocabulary: basic, academic and specialist. Secondly, the words generated by each topic. Thirdly, words that students would find useful in their own reading and writing.

Scaffolds and reassurance

As an English teacher I felt added pressure to be the expert in this field and to immediately come up with effective strategies to ensure that students improved their vocabulary. When I discovered Rewordify (rewordify.com), it helped in two important ways: it had some amazing tools that helped save me and my department hours of prep time. But perhaps more importantly, it also made me realise that I knew what I was doing all along: if there was a website that had the option to produce a glossary, matching exercises, and multiple-choice

quizzes (all things I was already doing independently), then surely I was doing something right!

Probably the best thing about Rewordify is how easy it is to use: you simply copy and paste any piece of text into the box on the home screen and press the 'Rewordify text' button. The website immediately identifies the tier two vocabulary in the text and gives you a range of options. The default option is a copy of the text with all the difficult words changed into simpler ones, highlighted in yellow. Pupils are therefore able to read the text fluently without being 'interrupted' by words they don't know and having to check across at a glossary.

However, although this option is useful, I find that simply replacing the difficult language with simpler words does not help children tackle more difficult language; it certainly won't help to embed new words into their long-term memory! So, instead of sticking with the default option, I click the 'print/learning activities' button, which presents a menu of options. From this menu you can immediately produce a copy of the text with all the difficult

vocabulary highlighted, and a glossary down the side with those words defined. This can be printed immediately with or without a space for the pupil's name to show it is their personal copy. They are now able to engage with more challenging vocabulary.

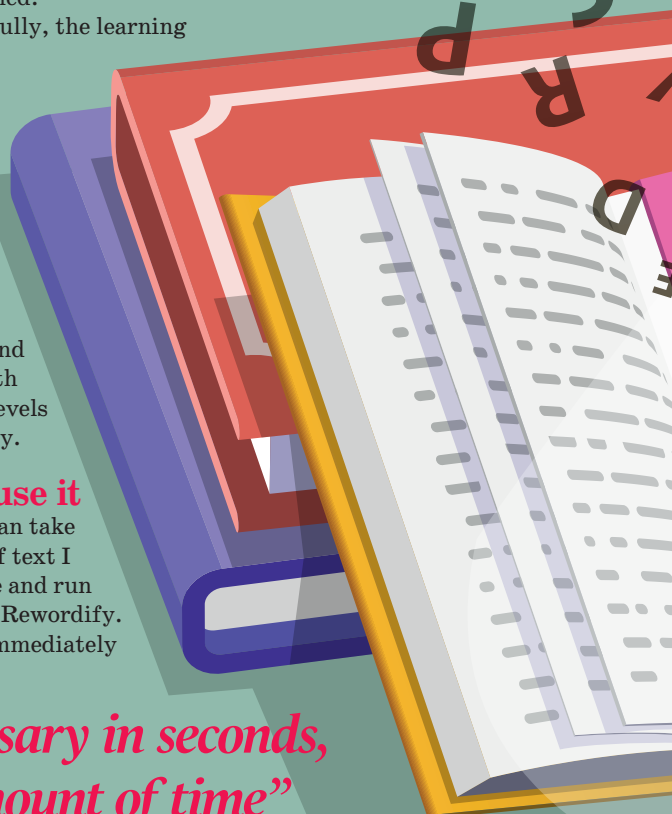
As I have already mentioned, even though a glossary will help a child to understand a piece of text, it will not help them retain that language. There needs to be more interaction with the new words – including recall – before that language will be really learned.

Thankfully, the learning activities menu contains a range of useful ideas for literacy activities, including matching exercises and quizzes with different levels of difficulty.

How I use it

Firstly, I can take the piece of text I wish to use and run it through Rewordify. This will immediately

"I can create a glossary in seconds, saving a huge amount of time"



identify and produce a list of the tier 2 vocabulary, and I can then decide whether to pre-teach it, or use the text with a glossary and then further embed the vocabulary afterwards. If the vocabulary seems particularly difficult, I usually choose to pre-teach it. However, if I feel that pupils will be confident and not

overwhelmed, I use the extract with a glossary first and then

embed the vocabulary in the following lessons.

For example, in our scheme of work we have an extract from *Great Expectations*: the extraordinary moment where Pip is confronted by Magwitch in the graveyard. This is for a secondary class, but the approach would work just as well with an extract for KS2. The description of Magwitch as a villain is vivid and terrifying; however, as a 19th century text there are several words that students wouldn't understand. I was able to identify all of the tier 2 vocabulary in the text so that students had a glossary to use while they were reading. After this, the matching exercises and word quizzes became literacy starters for the next few lessons. Students would come into the room and immediately complete a matching exercise

or a multiple-choice quiz in silence (you can scaffold this for KS2). The regular use of multiple-choice quizzes in particular helped to embed the vocabulary from this moment in Dickens' brilliant novel.

Another benefit is that once I have created a glossary for an extract I want to use in class, I have it forever. I can also add comprehension questions myself, thereby creating a powerful resource for my lessons. I have done this for a range of gothic extracts; stories such as *The Red Room* and *Dracula* would not be accessible without sensible scaffolding, but with the additions I have mentioned, students are able to explore the elements of a gothic story.

Best to check

This website of course isn't perfect; there will be times when you have to edit the glossary as it has either defined a word incorrectly, or it has identified a word that is too easy and given a definition. Even in the age of AI and ChatGPT, there still needs to be a professional teacher in charge of the final product or resource. However, it still saves a huge amount of time to be able to create a glossary and print one in seconds with a couple of tweaks, rather than generate the definitions and the template yourself. The same is true of the matching exercises and the quizzes.

There is an option to store your work on the website, however I simply download it myself so that it is stored on my drive. My department uses a central drive for schemes of work, so I have been able to produce extracts with glossaries and comprehension questions for everyone in my department to use. This benefits teachers and students alike and they can be used for several years, until we deem

HOW TO USE REWORDIFY

- 1 Copy any piece of text that you want to use.
- 2 Open rewordify.com and paste the piece of text into the box on the home screen and click the 'rewordify text' button.
- 3 The website will automatically produce the 'rewordified' text: however, I think it is better to choose the other options, so click on the 'print/learning activities' button, as simply replacing the difficult words won't help much with vocab development.
- 4 If you want the original text with a glossary on the side, you choose the 'text with vocabulary option'.
- 5 If you want a 'matching' exercise or quiz, simply choose these options from the same activities menu.
- 6 You can either immediately print the resource you have created, or you can copy the resource and save it to a Word document (I prefer to copy to Word).

it necessary to change our materials. However, the idea of changing materials and extracts is also less daunting as a result of using the tools we now have.

I found a time-saving tool, but I also found reassurance that the fundamentals of literacy work.



Dan Smith has been an English teacher for 12 years, and shares a variety of resources online.



@teach_smith



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LITERACY ➔



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REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



Recent research suggests that what helps children to develop their writing skills at different points in development, is focusing on teaching approaches such as sentence-combining, strategy instruction and emphasising the processes of writing. For this you need innovative, interactive and expert literacy resources such as those by Plazoom. For grappling with grammar then look no further than their new whole-school programme, Real Grammar.

This multimodal and visually appealing set of resources follows a new approach to teaching grammar to ensure deep learning through meaning, creativity and choice. Real Grammar adopts a very structured approach and is taught as part of the literacy sequence 'teach, practise, revisit, apply, revise', so that learning can be spaced over time. The units have been organised to cover all the grammar and punctuation objectives and each has a specially written model text showing the objective in context.

The 'teach' section provides comprehensive teaching sequences so that pupils are able to get to grips with every concept and can apply their learning in context. There are impressive teaching scripts to follow, with key questions and

prompts included for high-quality learning. The 'practise' examples are pitched at three different levels and so they should capture the needs of most pupils, and can be used to consolidate learning and identify any gaps or misconceptions. These sections can be adhered to as part of a classroom literacy routine, but they can also be used flexibly rather than as a fixed route through grammar terrain.

A range of games and activities are included so that areas can be revisited and embedded. 'Revise' sections include differentiated exercises to help prepare pupils for end-of-year assessments. Embedded within these sections is an outstanding collection of teaching essentials, including detailed notes, editable PowerPoint lessons, model texts, practice worksheets, games, writing prompts, and more, all of which have suggestions for challenge and support, with opportunities to investigate and develop ideas.

The high-quality resources are child-friendly without being childish, age-appropriate, and have plenty of pedagogical punch. These are genuinely outstanding materials that are expertly created for making grammar lessons easy.

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VERDICT

- ✓ A sure-fire way of helping pupils to generate sentences and get in the groove with grammar
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REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



How much do we think about handedness when we consider children's needs? Handedness is the preference for using one hand over another and when it comes to the school environment this really matters.

Left-handed children often struggle when the resources aren't there to support them. This is often the case when it comes to writing utensils and scissors. Left-handed pupils can often appear uncoordinated or disorganised as most equipment is set up for right-handed children.

STABILO has thought long and hard about the user experience to cater for everyone and its product range is impressively inclusive. Every operational characteristic has been considered from the size, weight, shape and length of the instrument to the surface texture and hardness of the shaft, ink flow, smoothness, writing fatigue and more.

The EASY Start range is a vibrant and ergonomic family of writing equipment specifically designed for learning and improving handwriting skills at a young age. Led by the latest research in handwriting ergonomics, these are clever products that put writing comfort, legibility, efficiency and motivation right at the centre of design so that children can have fun improving their skills.

STABILO's EASYoriginal pens are a joy. These really attractive wide-barrel refillable

pens have been ergonomically moulded so that children use the lightest grip possible while writing. The slightly arched shape helps pupils to achieve the recommended tripod grip, eliminating strain. It also features a rubberised grip around the pen barrel for increased traction.

The STABILO ergonomic pens use a rollerball design which flows freely. This helps reduce writing pressure which can lead to pain over longer pieces of written work. The nibs are broad and flexible and use royal blue erasable ink, ideal for school use.

STABILO's handwriting pencils with break-resistant 2.2mm lead have also been designed specifically for left- and right-handers. EASYgraph S pencils have a brilliant triangular design and non-slip grip moulds which magnificently support a relaxed hand posture. They also have a subtle yellow and red colour coding at the end of the pencil to indicate whether it is a left- or right-handed version.

They come in a range of five shaft colours and the S (slim) versions have a slenderer barrel than the original, but still with a space for inscribing your name.

Every child should benefit from adopting an ergonomic way of working and STABILO has given us the tools to work in a more efficient and child-friendly way. These are writing resources that truly break the mould.

**teach
PRIMARY**

VERDICT

- ✓ Sophisticated, intelligent and intuitive designs to tackle handwriting issues
- ✓ Non-slip, comfortable to hold and prevents stress, tiredness and potential damage to hand posture
- ✓ Revolutionary, fun and attractive designs
- ✓ Quality through and through for a great price
- ✓ Takes the stress out of handwriting

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“The message was relentless”

Robert Tregoning reflects on a childhood tinged with shame, but hopes his joyful story of gender expression will give solace to today’s young readers...

Five-year-old me wanted so badly to twirl around in a sparkling dress, but back then, in 1991, my joyful boyhood thoughts were laced with shame. Gender stereotypes were stitched into the fabric of the society I grew up in.

From a very young age, I was led to believe that at the toy shop there was a pink aisle for my sister and a blue one for me. Fast food kids’ meals often left me feeling anything but happy when I opened the box to find that my nuggets and fries came with a toy car instead of a doll in a dazzling outfit. Birthdays would mean card-shaped reminders of all the things I should be interested in: footballs, cricket bats and motor bikes.

The message was relentless, and the feeling that I wasn’t blue enough or boy enough hurt. It’s taken a lot of unpicking as an adult to embrace and celebrate all that makes me who I am; the masculine, the feminine and everything in between. Releasing my shame will perhaps always be a work in progress, but it has already brought me to writing for children.

I believe passionately in the power of books and stories to change perceptions. Books can be mirrors in which we see ourselves, our hopes and our dreams reflected, providing validation and reassurance. Just as importantly, books can be windows through which we can watch and learn about the lives and experiences of others, encouraging empathy and understanding.

I’m racking my brain to recall if I ever encountered



“Five-year-old me wanted so badly to twirl around in a sparkling dress”

positive representation of unconventional gender expression or LGBTQ+ experiences of any kind during my primary school years, but I’m struggling. I have no doubt that there was representation out there during the 90s, but perhaps not so much in a village in rural northeast England, in an education system complying with hateful, life-shattering Section 28 stipulations. I think I do remember seeing a pantomime dame for the first time and feeling a shimmering spark of possibility.

Sitting down to write *The Dress in the Window*, I told myself that this would be a book that would challenge gender stereotypes,

and that not a single speck of shame would be allowed anywhere near its pages. The drama would have to come from somewhere else.

While I was working on the story, my husband and I had a lot of conversations about the childhood memories that, unclouded by shame, brought us joy. I reminisced about visits to a haberdashery: the sequins, the tassels, and the flowing fabrics wrapped around mannequins. Billy recalled a shop window he would pass every day on his way to school, in which would be displayed the most incredible dresses. That image, of a boy gazing at a gown behind a pane of glass, so close but just out of reach, summed up perfectly the longing we’d both felt as children.

Then Billy said, “What if one day the dress was gone?” That was it – the drama that my book needed – and so was born a joyous tale of boy meets dress.

Pippa Curnick’s wonderful artwork brought this story of gender delight fully to life, and there is one illustration in particular that would have made five-year-old me feel empowered and less alone. It makes thirty-seven-year-old me burst with pride. I hope young readers will take away the image of a beautiful boy in a beautiful dress, and the idea that this glittering gown could be for anyone.



Robert Tregoning performed in West End shows before he began writing children’s books. Robert tells the stories he wishes he’d read as a child, hoping to provide a voice of recognition, validation, and kindness.

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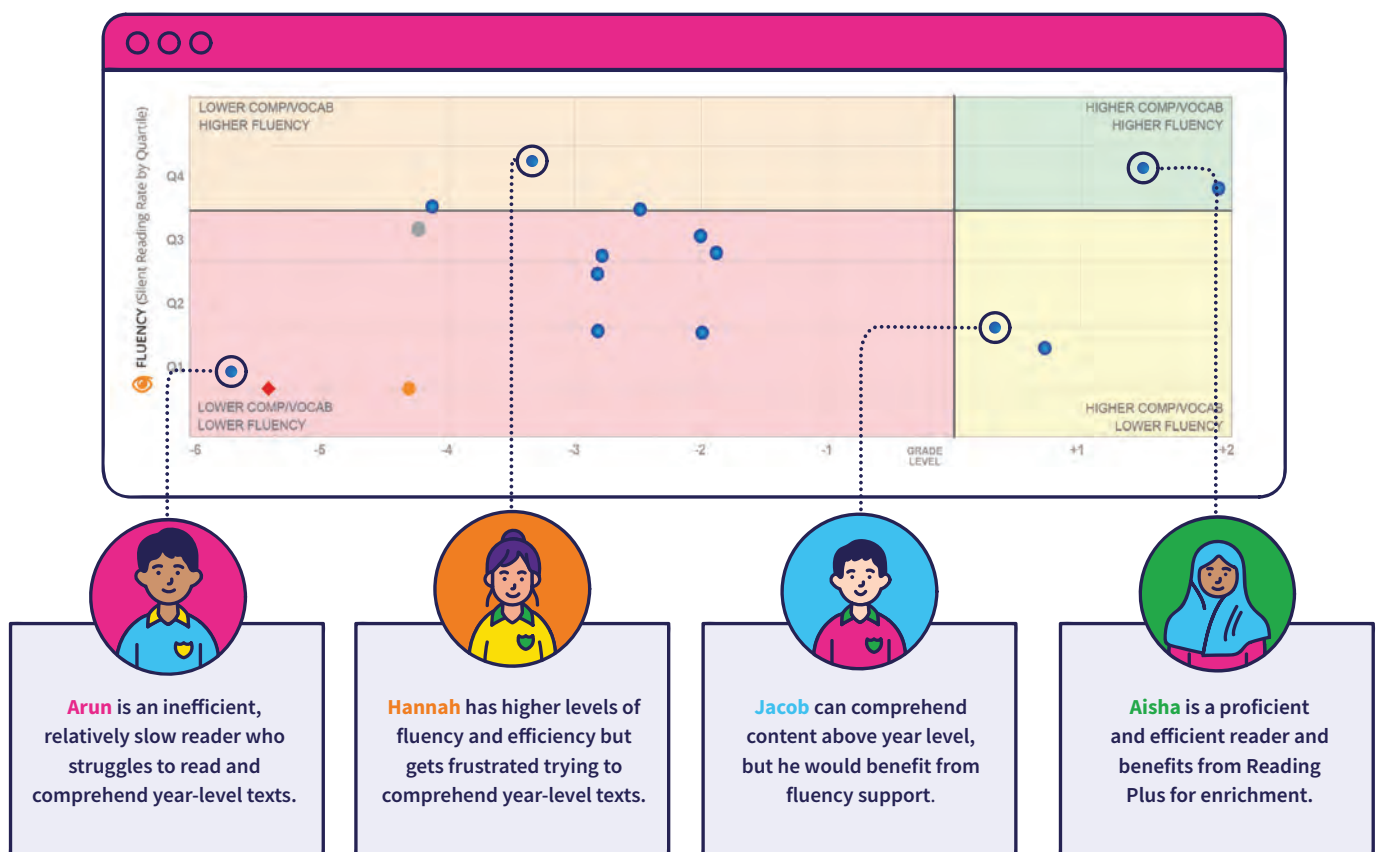
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