

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF
**teach
PRIMARY**

"What books taught me"

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Welcome...

Do you remember learning to read? Or perhaps, can you recall ever not being able to unlock the secrets of the written word? Are there memories you can retrieve of living in a world full of complex, coded messages, many of which seemed to be important – but none of which were within your ability to comprehend?

For a very young child, this lack of understanding is just one of life's many mysteries, to be unravelled and stitched into the bigger picture as she develops into an independent reader and writer. And in the meantime, the grown-ups tell her what the squiggles mean, because she is not expected magically to know.

Imagine, though, what it must feel like to live in that same, encrypted environment as an 11-year-old, when the assumption is that you *do know* what the squiggles mean. Or as a 16-year-old facing those exams you've been told are crucial for your future. Or as a young adult, searching for your first job.

It's a deeply unnerving prospect, yet one that is still the experience of too many people in the UK, let alone across the globe. And like you, we are determined to do what we can to help. Disrupted schooling; issues at home; special educational needs; arriving in a new country with little or no knowledge of the local language – there are many valid barriers along the road to literacy, and even with no obvious obstruction, every child's journey will involve challenges alongside, hopefully, plenty of excitement and adventure. With *Teach Reading & Writing*, our aim is to pull together a wide range of ideas, advice, strategies and suggestions, from which you can pick out elements that might be right for your classroom, and your pupils, whether they are sailing or struggling, or somewhere in between.

Joe Carter, Helen Mulley & Charlotte Smith,
associate editors

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literacy learning ideas at
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Phonics I - 0 Comprehension

Reading is a game of two halves; with the focus on phonics over the last few years it is likely your children have mastered their word recognition skills – but are their comprehension skills up to the higher expectations of the 2014 Primary National Curriculum?

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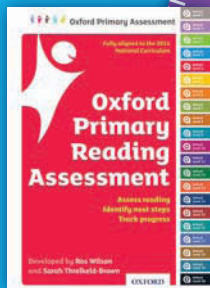
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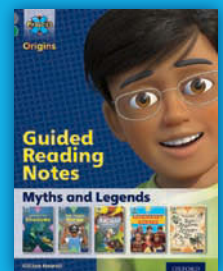


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St. John's Primary School*



education

*David Baddiel*

“The more you read, the more complexities you discover”

For comedian and author **David Baddiel**
the story always comes first...

Books were definitely important in our house when I was growing up. Not so much because of my dad – he was a scientist, and very keen that all his children should grow up to be scientists, too (although none of us did) – but definitely thanks to my mum. She was big on reading and storytelling, and from quite an early age I developed a love of Roald Dahl’s books, as well as *Just William* and *Billy Bunter*. Both my parents were collectors, and one of the things my mum collected was old children’s books, so they were a feature around our home, and easy to get into.

So easy, in fact, that somehow I ended up as a member of something called the Old Boys’ Book Club – it still exists, actually, with members getting together on the second Sunday of the month at various London locations to discuss the exploits of Billy Bunter, Dan Dare and other beloved characters with a healthy dose of nostalgia and “full tea provided!” according to the website. I was about 11 when I was going to meetings, and everyone else there must have been 70. I remember the tea, which was always very nice indeed, being a significant attraction; but I was also genuinely into the world of Greyfriars that Charles Hamilton created under the pen name of Frank Richards. I’m sure it was dated in lots of ways, even then, but for a kid leading a very ordinary, middle-class life in 1970s London, there was something magical about being able to escape into the adventures of a group of children at a rather gothic, castle-like public school – a precursor of Hogwarts, really.

I don’t have very clear memories of learning to read at school – I went to an Orthodox Jewish primary and therefore spent a lot of time studying Hebrew, which sort of gets in the way when I try and recall other aspects of my early education. For me, stories were



© Jim Field

We were talking about Harry Potter, and he suddenly said, “Why didn’t Harry just run away from the Dursleys and find a better family?” I told him I didn’t know, but it started me thinking about a story set in a world run by children, where you get to choose your own parents.



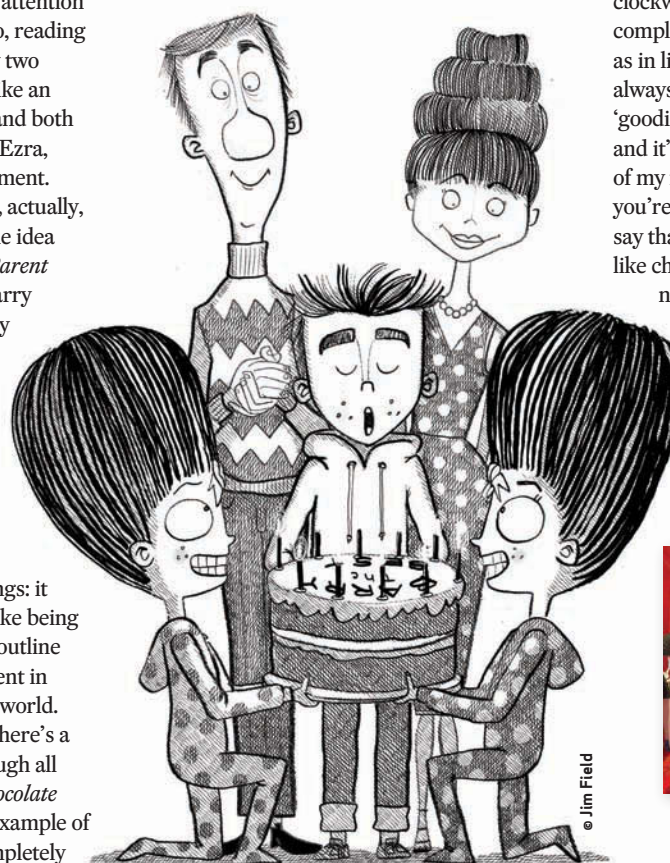
© Jim Field

something that happened at home, and my interest in narrative, which is very strong, was inspired mainly by my mother. It's been fascinating watching my own children go through the process, because although schools appear to pay much more attention to the mechanics than they used to, reading seems to have been something my two suddenly 'got', overnight almost; like an epiphany. They're 11 and 14 now, and both active readers – although my son, Ezra, prefers comics to books at the moment.

It was a conversation with Ezra, actually, when he was nine, that gave me the idea for my first children's book, *The Parent Agency*. We were talking about Harry Potter, and he suddenly said, "Why didn't Harry just run away from the Dursleys and find a better family?" I told him I didn't know, but it started me thinking about a story set in a world run by children, where you get to choose your own parents.

It seems to me that a great children's book should do two things: it should tap into a primal fantasy (like being able to pick your family), but also outline in its narrative the jeopardy inherent in bringing that fantasy into the real world. Roald Dahl was brilliant at this – there's a wonderful darkness running through all his books, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* stands out, for me, as an example of what happens when you get it completely

right (although I realise now that I'm not sure whether I'm remembering it with such affection from my own childhood or from later, sharing it with my children).



© Jim Field

There is no question in my mind that if you want to be a writer, the best thing is to read as much as you can. That's how you learn what a story is; its power, and its rhythm. The way all the elements move together, like clockwork. And the more you read, the more complexities you discover – like the fact that, as in life (and Doctor Who), in books it's not always easy to identify the 'baddies' and the 'goodies'. JK Rowling plays with this idea, and it's something that's a feature in the work of my favourite author, John Updike. When you're writing for adults, people will often say that the plot isn't as important as things like character development and dialogue; I've never thought that, and I love the way that when your readers are children, you don't have to be ashamed of putting the story right at the front of what you're doing; because ultimately, coming up with a really good story – one that says something true – is a beautiful thing.



David Baddiel's latest children's book, *The Person Controller*, is published by HarperCollins Children's Books

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Why the NC makes children write badly

Writing well is not about using long words, says **Cecilia Busby...**

I often visit primary classrooms as a children's author, promoting writing and reading. There's a phrase I have heard many times over during those visits: "Can you think of another, more interesting word you might use there?"

In itself it's an innocent enough nudge towards widening children's vocabulary, but it has become, in combination with pressure to get higher SAT scores and 'improve' children's NC levels, a symptom of the way children's writing has been and is being distorted by rigid, tick-box assessment.

I'd like to see the back of it, along with SATs and the NC assessment criteria for writing, which are frankly not fit for purpose. As far as I can see, they encourage both children and teachers to overvalue long words and complex structures at the expense of clear, fluent and thoughtful writing.

I first became aware of this when I was told by a teacher that 'big' was a 'banned' word in his Year 6 classroom. Children were simply not allowed to use it. They had to think of a 'more interesting' alternative. Pupils who described an object as 'enormous' or 'gigantic' or 'huge' got a pat on the back, while those who had committed the crime of describing something in their writing as 'big' were asked to reconsider.

Why? Not because in that particular piece of writing, or for that particular object, 'enormous' was a better, more accurate description. Not because 'big' had been used

once and repetition was not the intention. Simply on the basis that, whatever the circumstances, 'enormous' would always be a 'better', more valuable word than 'big'.

But here's the thing. Writing is not like Scrabble. 'Enormous' should not be considered something that gets you a triple word score while 'big' only gets you a single. 'Enormous' is an exaggerated adjective that should be handled with care – used when you really want to make a splash, want to set a certain tone, have a particular image in mind. It's a spice, not a staple.

The same thing applies to the use of adverbs, adverbial phrases, connectives, complex sentences structures and subordinate clauses. They all have their place, and it's true that more confident and fluent writers use them more often than less confident, younger writers. But shoe-horning them in wherever you can to show that you have 'reached' a certain level does not make for good writing.

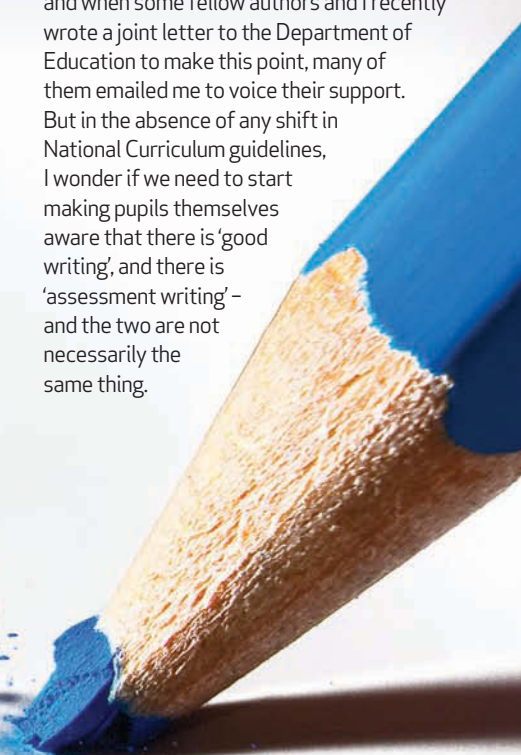
Let me give you an example: 'Despite the gloomy grey sky and howling wind hurtling down the winding narrow street, the hunched-up wrinkled figure of the octogenarian man strode thoughtfully past, whilst Sally flicked her red curly hair and pouted at her kind, generous friend. "He's mad!" she screeched sarcastically; Bridget bobbed her head like a seagull and laughed loudly.'

Despite the fact that this is obviously (I hope) an offence against the English language, it would tick a considerable number of boxes on the National Curriculum assessment criteria: namely, 'fronted adverbials', 'varied' and 'ambitious' vocabulary,

subordinate clauses, a semi-colon, a 'wide range of subordinating connectives', 'a range of verb forms' and use of similes. But it's over-flowery and painfully over-crammed with adjective and adverbs that don't always make sense.

Sadly, I have seen writers at Key Stage 2 and in secondary school produce these kinds of sentences because they have picked up the idea that the more long words you cram into your writing, the better. They ask themselves, 'can you think of a more interesting way of saying that?' They have been conditioned by the National Curriculum and SATs to write... badly.

I'm not blaming teachers at all. They are under immense pressure to produce measurable improvements in their pupils' writing in the terms set out by the National Curriculum. It's no surprise that they nudge their pupils towards the kinds of 'improvements' that will get them a higher level in assessments. Many of them are perfectly aware of the awful affect this has on writing fluency, and when some fellow authors and I recently wrote a joint letter to the Department of Education to make this point, many of them emailed me to voice their support. But in the absence of any shift in National Curriculum guidelines, I wonder if we need to start making pupils themselves aware that there is 'good writing', and there is 'assessment writing' – and the two are not necessarily the same thing.





CHRIS EDGE is a writer, author and children's novelist

“Miss, what’s an *ORGY?”*

Chris Edge considers the tricky issue of finding age-appropriate content for precocious readers...



When the best readers in your class have devoured every children's book on the shelves and are looking for more challenging material,

where do they go next? Often the answer is for them to seek out the cool teen reads that are being made into blockbuster films – series such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. But these are YA titles aimed firmly at a teen or even adult readership and can include contentious content, with sex, drugs and violence often on the menu.

In the USA, many of these books are 'challenged' by concerned parents who campaign for edgy titles to be withdrawn from school libraries and classrooms. But surprises can even lurk in the most innocent-looking books too – as I found when I read the comic book *Asterix in Switzerland* as a child and added to my vocabulary the word 'orgy', which my teacher helpfully defined as a "special kind of party"!

So what can you do to help the pupils in your class find the right books that will challenge them as readers without sending them into therapy? The key is to help them to make informed choices. If a nine-year-old has seen a trailer for the latest cinematic instalment of *The Maze Runner* and is now desperate to read the book too, make sure that you're aware of what they'll find on its pages, such as scenes of violence against children.

Informed choices

If you've not got time to read every 'hot' new series that is creating a classroom buzz, why not form a staff/parent reading group to read and discuss these books? This will help you to make decisions about the titles you want to stock in the school library – and you could even create display cards to flag any content issues in the ones you choose. Involving parents in the decisions you make can also help to head off any complaints about the availability of these books.

Equally important is to draw on your knowledge of your students when considering the books you recommend. You need to be confident that they are capable of handling not only the actual language and sentence structures of the novel, but also its content. Some of your pupils will be emotionally mature enough to tackle teen novels that deal with sensitive issues such as the loss of a parent in Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*, for example. However others will need the reassurance provided by books aimed at their age group featuring younger protagonists dealing with issues that will be familiar to them from their own lives.

Sometimes in Key Stage 2, the focus in the classroom can be on getting less-confident readers up to speed, with high-level readers

seen as self-sufficient and not needing any help with their book choices. However the danger can be that children falling into this category can end up reading too narrowly – for example, only picking books from a single genre or sticking to a favourite author. We need to remember that the best readers are 'deep and wide' ones, who enjoy all kinds of fiction.

To extend the variety and challenge of the books that you recommend to your most able readers, it's a good idea to consider age-appropriate alternatives to popular YA titles. For example for readers who aren't quite ready for *The Hunger Games* but want the 'cool' factor associated with this series, why not recommend *The Underland Chronicles*, a series for younger readers that Suzanne Collins wrote before she penned *The Hunger Games*? Or if your pupils are hooked on science fiction, you could suggest *Phoenix* by S.F. Said, an epic space adventure about a boy who's searching for his father.

Role models

In the same way that the genre known as 'YA' can actually span titles for readers in their early teens to twenty-something fiction fans, the best children's fiction can provide readers with ambitious language and challenging themes the equal of any to be found in books targeted at a more adult audience. Keep an eye on the winners of prestigious children's books awards such as the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize to find exciting reads that will enthrall your most able readers.

Another way to provide pupils with more challenging reads is to reach for the classics. From *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells to Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes, many students will be familiar with these characters and stories from blockbuster films and television shows. Getting to know classic authors such as Charles Dickens can move confident readers out of their comfort zones as they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence structures and settings, but unlock a treasure chest of timeless characters and stories as well.

Finally, reading books recommended to them by people they respect and trust, such as older pupils and other adults, can also help turn high-level readers on to new titles and authors. Think about how you could build on links with your local secondary schools to share information about the books their students are reading at Key Stage 3. Perhaps you could arrange a visit from a Year 7 or 8 class to talk to your Key Stage 2 students about the YA books they would recommend. Sharing, swapping and talking about books with others is a powerful way for people of any age to find new literary paths to explore.

NEW DIRECTIONS

From classics to contemporary children's fiction, here are ten great reads for confident readers:

- ***The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells**
For any fans of Doctor Who, this is a chance to read the adventures of the original time traveller.
- ***The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle**
One of the master sleuth's most notorious cases – a gripping tale of detection set in the wilds of Dartmoor.
- ***A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens**
The original, classic ghost story that's since been brought to life by the Muppets, as well as Bill Murray.
- ***Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson**
A timeless tale of adventure that will build pupils' reading stamina.
- ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll**
This extraordinarily strange tale is filled with inventive word play and humour.
- ***His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman**
A multi-award-winning trilogy that mixes fantasy, parallel worlds and weighty themes.
- ***Hitler's Angel* by William Osborne**
For readers looking for high-octane thrills, this high-concept WWII-set story creates a blockbuster tale.
- ***The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* by Joan Aiken**
A thrilling historical adventure for confident readers with a taste for tales of the past.
- ***Fly By Night* by Frances Hardinge**
The polished craft of Hardinge's prose will enrich every reader's vocabulary.
- ***The Last Wild* by Piers Torday**
This page-turner is a must-read for dystopia fans or readers concerned about the environment.

Chris Edge's latest children's book, *The Many Worlds of Albie Bright*, is a brilliant read that deals with issues of bereavement and bullying – not to mention quantum physics – in a way that's totally appropriate and accessible for KS2 pupils. Highly recommended by the TR&W editorial team.





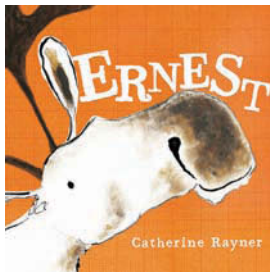
CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories

10 illustrations TO LAUNCH A TOPIC

Great children's book artwork is the ideal starting point for inspirational topics, says **Carey Fluker Hunt...**

Foundation Stage

1



Ernest

BY CATHERINE RAYNER
(Macmillan)

What's the story?

Ernest is a rather large moose. So large, in fact, that he doesn't fit inside this book. He tries to squeeze himself onto the pages but it doesn't work. So it's lucky for Ernest that he has a very ingenious friend...

Inspiring artwork

Show your class the picture of Ernest's paper-decorated antlers. Who could this animal be, and why is he peering over the edge of the page? If we could peep inside the book and see all of him, what would he look like? Add a sensory element to the discussion by offering children a basket of patterned and textured paper scraps and asking them to choose the ones they think Ernest would like.

Where will it take you?

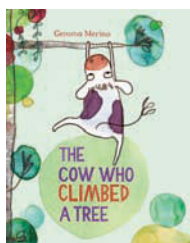
Join your paper scraps to create enormous collages and draw on them, or use them to make life-size paper cut-outs of different animals. Actual Size by Steve Jenkins (Frances Lincoln Children's Books) will help. And why not invent some characters who are friends, despite their differences?

ASK THEM...

Why is Ernest peering over the edge of the page?



2



Foundation Stage

The Cow Who Climbed a Tree

BY GEMMA MERINO
(Macmillan)



What's the story?

Tina the cow likes to explore the world and is always asking questions. Her sisters disapprove and want her to behave properly, like them. But one day they follow Tina into the woods and discover what they've been missing. Merino's charmingly quirky illustrations capture the mood completely.

Inspiring artwork

Look at the picture of the three cows walking through the wood. What can they see, and how are they feeling? Create a soundscape by asking each child to make a woodland noise (leaves swishing, wind whistling, owls hooting). On a given signal, ask everyone to make their chosen sound together.

What do you notice about the leaves on the trees? Do they look like real trees, or are they

more like patterns? Look through circles of coloured tissue paper. Tape them to a window so that the circles overlap. What happens to the colours? Cut long, thin rectangles of paper and add them to the circles to make them look like Merino's trees.

Where will it take you?

Tina wants to learn all about the world. Bring a soft toy cow into the classroom and tell her some interesting facts that you've discovered.

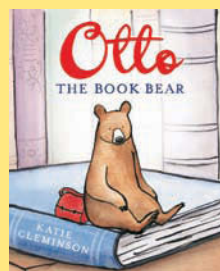
Merino creates her illustrations using monoprints, then colours them digitally. Use print techniques and inks to make a woodland scene based on her work.

What would you do, if you were going to try something new and wonderful? Talk about it!

"Look at the picture of the three cows walking through the wood. What can they see, and how are they feeling?"



3



Foundation Stage

Otto the Book Bear

BY KATIE CLEMENÇON
(Jonathan Cape)

What's the story?

Otto is a tiny bear who lives inside a book. One day his family moves house, leaving him behind, and he has to find a new home at the library. Luckily for Otto, there are plenty of other book-dwelling characters there to keep him company.

Inspiring artwork

Look at the picture of Otto staring at the van. Who is this bear, and how is he feeling? What might be going to happen next?

Give each child a teddy bear. Ask them to look out of the classroom window and talk to the bears about what they can

see. Might these bears have other, secret lives that we don't know about?

Where will it take you?

Invent names and characters for the bears. Make up stories about their adventures.

Visit a library to discover tiny toys hiding on the bookshelves. Read some stories to the toys – such as Bears Don't Read by Emma Chichester Clark – and make a library of tiny books for Otto. Role-play working in a library (complete with rubber stamps and index cards) and lend books to the teddy bears.

Key Stage 1

4



Welcome to Your Awesome Robot

BY VIVIANE SCHWARZ
(Flying Eye Books)

What's the story?

This is an activity book, a comic-strip story and an instruction manual all in one. Written, designed and illustrated by creative innovator Viviane Schwarz, *Welcome to Your Awesome Robot* is good for 'hooking' children who aren't usually book-focused, but it will be enjoyed by all.

Inspiring artwork

Show your class the picture of the unopened box. We know it contains a robot, but what kind of robot? Ask your class to draw and describe it. Try moving and speaking like a robot, and talk about the tasks you might have to do.

As well as conveying meaning, the text in this illustration is visually important. How are the words and speech bubbles arranged on the page, and what does this tell you about how the words should sound?

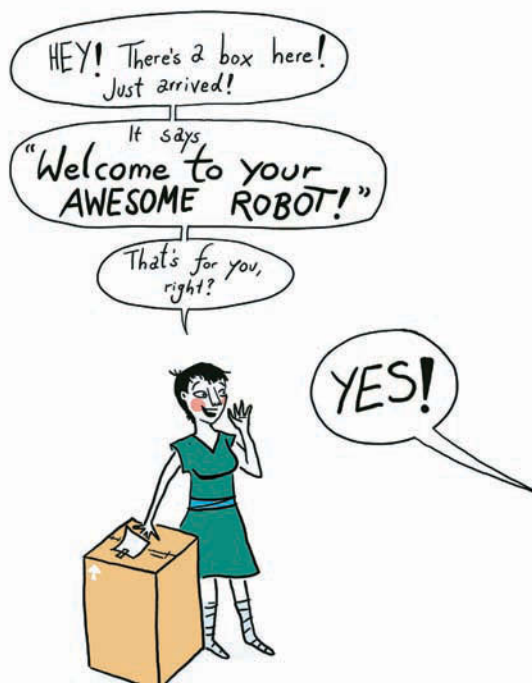
This image has a white background, which means the action could be happening anywhere. Talk about possible settings for the book and imagine what might be going to happen next.

Where will it take you?

Fill a large, sealed cardboard box with 'odd objects' and ask your class to imagine what could be inside. Explore the objects, then choose three and design a robot incorporating these parts. Draw annotated diagrams, or write a story about your robot.

As a class, investigate a practical process (such as making a salad or wrapping a present) and draw a strip cartoon explaining how it should be done.

Use computer-aided design kits to make and control small models or robots – or dress up as robots, using cardboard boxes, and choreograph a robot dance!

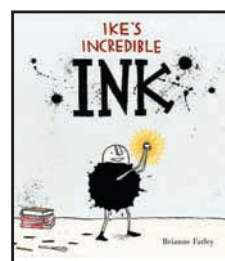


Key Stage 1

"Make a collection of household objects (like the sieve) for Traction Man: The Sequel. What could each object become? Record ideas by drawing and annotating, then develop into graphic-novel-style stories"



5



Key Stage 1

Ike's Incredible Ink

BY BRIANNE FARLEY
(Walker Books)

About the book

Ike is a 'can-do' character who's on a mission to make himself some ink - but Ike's concoction will be unusual, to say the least. Offbeat practicality and expressive inkblots make this a memorable read.

what do you notice about the character involved? Why has so much of the page been left blank, do you think?

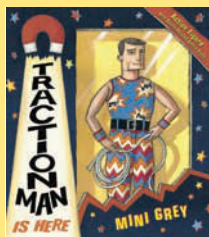
Pass around a clear, sealed container of black ink, tipping it to observe its movement. Think of as many words to describe it as you can.

Explore this image physically by jumping up and out of the blender, like the ink. Then show how Ike reacts to all the mess.

Inspiring artwork

Look at the picture of Ike and the blender. What's going on, and

6



Traction Man is Here

BY MINI GREY
(Random House)

What's the story?

Traction Man is a toy who battles evil wherever he finds it – even in the kitchen sink. Grey mixes real-world scenarios with Traction Man's exploits (and full-page illustrations with a busier, multi-frame approach) to create a funny and satisfying story about the power of imaginative play.

Inspiring artwork

Look at the picture showing Traction Man searching for the Lost Wreck. How do we know that Traction Man is in a sink? This image captures a frozen moment (like a film still, or single graphic-novel panel). What happened before this moment, and what will happen afterwards?

Pretend to be the Evil Dishcloth and creep up on Traction Man!

Where will it take you?

Make a collection of household objects (like the sieve) for Traction Man: The Sequel. What could each object become? Record ideas by drawing and annotating, then develop into graphic-novel-style stories. If toys could come to life, what adventures would they have?

Provide capes and masks for superhero role play, or help children make their own. Do girl superheroes behave differently to boy superheroes? Talk about stereotypes and the way that Traction Man and the Dollies are depicted in this book. Tell a story about the time the Dollies had to rescue Traction Man, instead.

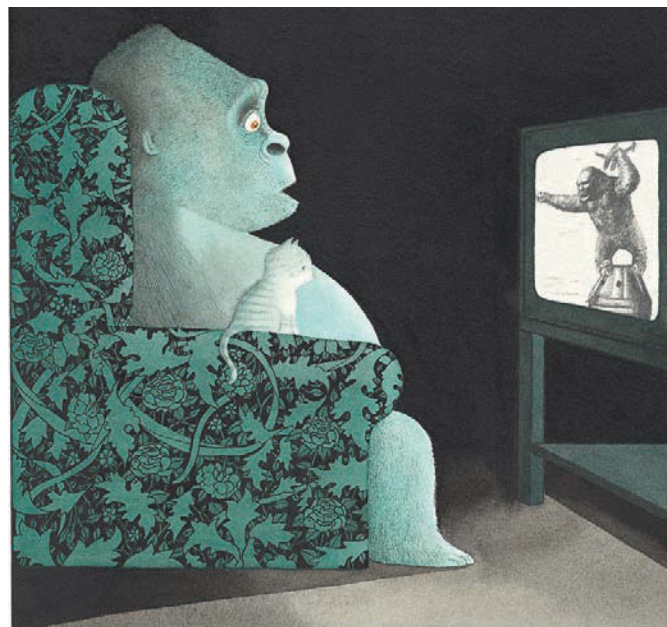
Read *Send for A Superhero* by Michael Rosen and Katharine McEwan (Walker) and compare it with Traction Man is Here. Which do you prefer, and why?

Where will it take you?

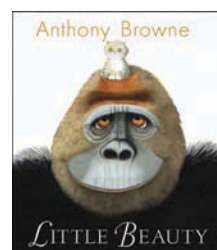
Drop small amounts of ink or paint onto large sheets of paper to create blots. What do they look like? When they're dry, add details using fine black pens to create characters. Choose your favourite

character and let it star in a story, then make up some lke-style recipes for different colours of ink.

Find out about real ink and how it's made. Are there any (safe) ingredients you could experiment with to create some ink that you could use?



7



Key Stage 1

Little Beauty

BY ANTHONY BROWNE (Walker Books)

What's the story?

Based on a true story, this book is about a gorilla who is the subject of a language and communications experiment. Anthony Browne's illustrations are always rewarding to explore with children, who notice more than we expect. Here, Browne marries his images with a sparse text that takes us right to the heart of what it means to be human, and the responsibility we have to the animals with which we interact.

What makes your children angry? Is it bad to be angry, or can it be helpful? Discuss.

Look at the way the gorilla has been drawn. Is its shape defined by solid lines, or is it suggested by soft marks and shading? Use soft pencils to create a similar effect.

Where will it take you?

Find out about apes and the Washoe/Koko experiments. If you could communicate with animals, what would you ask them and what might they tell you?

Learn some sign language and communicate without words. Make up your own new language and use it to say something.

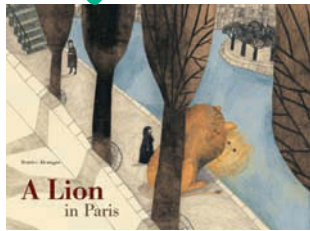
Talk about friendship and why it's important. How do we express our emotions? Do animals feel emotions, too – and how can we tell? Talk to people who have pets to find out what they think.

Inspiring artwork

Look at the picture of the gorilla smashing the TV. What do you think the gorilla is thinking and feeling – and how does the illustrator tell us this? (For example, red background, clenched fist, deep frown). Explore the emotional landscape of this picture by copying the gorilla's posture and role-playing what happens next.

Key Stage 2

8



A Lion in Paris

BY BEATRICE ALEMAGNA (Tate Publishing)

About the book

This gorgeously oversized book opens via a landscape fold to tell the story of an African lion newly-arrived in Paris. Lonely but intrigued, he tours the city and sees all sorts of marvels. Finally he discovers his 'perfect place' – a plinth in the middle of a busy roundabout. Alemagna's detailed and decorative illustrations repay close observation (and statues will never look quite the same again!).

Inspiring artwork

Show your class the picture of the lion in the café. Which is the main character, and how can we tell? Who might the other people be, and what could they be thinking about? What kind of setting is this, and can your children guess at its location?

Look closely at the illustration and talk about the materials used to create it (collage, pencil, gouache). Many textures are

suggested, such as the café's ironwork and the richly-patterned coat. How have these been realised, and what other patterns and textures can you find?

Where will it take you?

Use role plays and other drama exercises to explore ideas like leaving home and loneliness in a new place and use this to lead into discussion about refugees and migration.

Visit a statue in your local area and draw it – or research statues online. Make an interactive map showing their location and history. Role-play a statue that comes to life, then write about it.

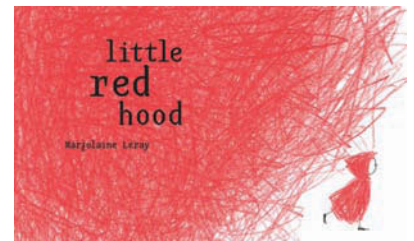
Find out more about Paris, and be inspired by Alemagna's artwork to create urban landscape collages of your own.

And if you're enjoying the living statues idea, try *Stoneheart* by Charlie Fletcher (9+).



Key Stage 2

10

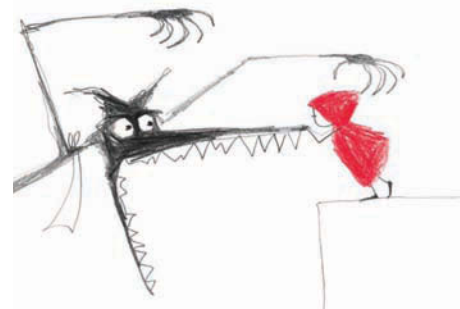


Little Red Hood

BY MARJOLAINE LEROY (Phoenix Yard Books)

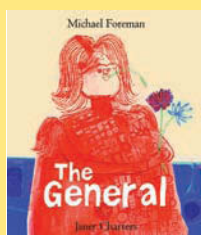
About the book

In this sophisticated but low-key take on the traditional tale, Red Riding Hood is played by a surprisingly expressive stick-girl in a red cape, and the wolf by a ragged (and very wily) assortment of pencil marks. The postures and dialogue give this book the air of a piece of theatre trapped on the page. It's also very funny.



Key Stage 2

9



The General

BY JANET CHARTERS
AND MICHAEL FOREMAN
(Templar)



About the book

What would the world be like if we said no to war? Foreman's General is bristling with medals and has an insatiable appetite for invasion and conquest. Will he ever change his mind?

First published more than 50 years ago at the height of the Cold War, this book still feels as fresh and relevant as ever.

Inspiring artwork

Show your class the picture of the nightmare. Who could the man be, and what is he dreaming

about? Role-play the moment at which he wakes. What will he say about his nightmare, and how will he interpret it?

Describe exactly what you can see in this picture, and talk about the way this has been realised – both stylistically and technically. Your children don't need to use the 'correct' language, but they do need to look closely and question what they see. For example, how does the depiction of the soldiers' legs differ from that of the man in bed (heavy black lines, etc) and how has the darkness been suggested?

“Show your class the picture of the nightmare. Who could the man be, and what is he dreaming about?”

Where will it take you?

What kind of leader must the General become? Find out about the actions and resources necessary to keep a country happy and prosperous.

How should a country treat its neighbours? Role-play scenarios that could end well or badly for

the country involved, depending on the decisions made. Look at newspaper reports about the actions of leaders around the world and discuss.

Be inspired by Foreman's artwork to create large-scale murals of landscapes, or a stylised aerial view of the area in which you live.

Inspiring artwork

Show your class the picture of the wolf shouting “jooooosey red meat!” Which story does this picture come from, and how can you tell? What makes Red Riding Hood such a well-known tale? Look at the body language of the characters in this image. Ask children to recreate their postures and expressions. What is Little Red Hood thinking, and what might she be about to say?

This illustration has a plain white background. What impact does this have on the viewer? And what do your class think about the way the characters have been drawn? It looks almost as if the illustrator has been scribbling, but the outcome is far from random. Give children soft graphite pencils and ask them to experiment using a similar approach. What happens if you introduce a single colour to your sketch?

Where will it take you?

Share the whole book, then recreate each illustration ‘tableau-style’, ensuring that children pay attention to their body language and posture. Bring each tableau to life in a series of mini-dramas, then join them to make a play – and video it!

If you cover the illustrations, how much needs to be added to the text to make the story interesting and complete? Expand the text to include details and descriptions, as well as more dialogue, taking care that the original characterisations are maintained.

Have fun applying Leroy's approach to different stories to make a folktale library.



“What is Little Red Hood thinking, and what might she be about to say?”

There, they're, THEIR

Persistent GaPS mistakes getting you down?
These suggestions could make everything better...

Like it or not, every primary school teacher now needs to be – for want of a better term – a grammar (and spelling) nerd. When it's part of the job to ensure that every seven-year-old can correctly punctuate reported speech and identify adverbs, there's really no room for poor modelling in one's own written work. And besides, few things are more dispiriting than having a letter you sent home with your pupils returned to you, errors circled pointedly in red pen, by parents who've spent the previous evening struggling alongside their offspring with this week's GaPS homework. With this in mind, here are a few potential linguistic traps into which adults and children alike are known to fall – and some ideas for how both you and your pupils can avoid them.

1 “The teacher's lecture had no affect on her students”

Overwhelmingly, ‘affect’ is a VERB, and ‘effect’ a NOUN – a handy trick to remember which way round they work is to think of **s**pecial **e**ffects. Alas, there are rare occasions when the reverse is true – but it's unlikely that your pupils will often need to express “the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily change”, which is the definition of affect as a noun. Effect as a verb is less unusual, as it conveys the achievement of a final result. For example, “the new classroom arrangements are designed to effect an improvement in behaviour” – but even so, it's probably sensible to focus on the more common usages when attempting to establish a clear difference between the two words.

2 “Lay lady lay”

Lie has several meanings – to tell a fib; to be kept in a specific state (e.g. “the old gym lies in ruins”); or to be recumbant. It does not, however, mean ‘to put something down somewhere’ – in the present tense, the word you are looking for here is ‘lay’ (e.g. “Please lay your books on the table”). In other words, Bob Dylan got it wrong. A handy, if rather old-fashioned way to check whether you've got it right or not is to remind yourself that “only hens lay”. Moving into the past tense, things get considerably more confusing, in that the past tense of lie is, erm, lay. And the past tense of lay is laid. Make a poster.

3 “If I was a rich man...”

The government's sample test papers for KS2 SATs in 2016 include a question on the use of the subjunctive – so, even though it's one of those fine points of grammar that is inexorably moving into the category of ‘officially incorrect, but accepted by most native speakers in general use’ (alongside the split infinitive), ‘I was’ should really be replaced with ‘I were’ when the speaker is talking about an imaginary, untrue or wished for situation. “If I WERE Secretary of State for Education, I would ban arbitrary grammar tests.”

4 “Whom is the culprit?”

Rather in the same way some people (and not just children, by any means) mistake “my friend and I” for a more formal version of

“me and my friend”, or assume that saying “please send the invoice to myself” sounds more businesslike than “please send it to me”, it's quite common for ‘whom’ to be flung into random sentences in an attempt to make the speaker/writer appear more elegant. In fact, WHOM is an OBJECTIVE PRONOUN, and should only be used as such. You can work out the correct option in most sentences by seeing whether he or him sounds better in the same place; the very best (if, perhaps, a little spicy for a primary school classroom) explanation of who vs whom, though, is provided by The Oatmeal, at theoatmeal.com/comics/who_vs_whom.

5 “There are resources available to compliment the text”

No one needs resources that ‘compliment’ a text – because that would simply mean they were saying nice things about it. When you want to say that something goes with something else (as in shoes that ‘complement’ an outfit), you need complement with an ‘e’, not an ‘i’. ‘Complimentary’ resources, on the other hand, might be a very good thing indeed, because as well as ‘making a kind or flattering remark’, complimentary can mean ‘without charge’. An easy way to remember when to use which spelling is to learn: “I like it when people **compliment** me. I also like free stuff.”



TEST YOURSELF

OF COURSE, AS AN EXPERIENCED TEACHER (AND OFFICIAL GROWN-UP) YOU COULD SAIL THROUGH KS2 SATS, RIGHT? WELL, THIS QUICK TEST IS BASED ON THE DFE'S SAMPLE MATERIALS FOR THE 2016 GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION AND SPELLING TESTS - HAVE A GO AND SEE HOW CONFIDENT YOU FEEL BY THE END OF IT...

- 1 **Which is correct?**
a) Should we really be reintroducing external tests for seven-year olds?
b) Should we really be reintroducing external tests for seven-year-olds?
- 2 "Make sure you don't **lose/loose** your worksheet as we go around the museum," instructed the teacher.
- 3 **Circle the adverb:**
"Sometimes," sighed the head, "I wonder what on earth we're all doing here."
- 4 **Identify the longest possible noun phrase:**
That poster showing all of England's monarchs is jolly useful when teaching history.
- 5 **Underline the present perfect verb form:**
Harry is a cheerful pupil and has worked hard all year. He will be delighted when he receives his report, which was written last night.
- 6 All personal **posessions/possessions** must be taken with you as you leave.
- 7 **Which of these sentences is a command?**
a) When you get home, give this letter to your parents.
b) In order to complete your homework, you will need to read this story.
c) I would like you to have your chores finished before lunchtime.
- 8 The **womens'/women's** dresses were all the colours of the rainbow.
- 9 **Which sentence uses a subordinating conjunction?**
a) It's important to work hard at spelling and grammar.
b) Spelling is easy, but grammar can be difficult.
c) My spelling and grammar will improve if I practise.
- 10 **Underline the synonyms:**
"Don't be sad," said Mary, kindly, when she saw her friend's dejected face. Her determined attempt at consolation, however, was unsuccessful.

ANSWERS:

1 - b 2 - lose 3 - Sometimes 4 - 'That poster.... monarchs'
5 - has worked 6 - possessions 7 - a 8 - women's 9 - c
10 - sad/dejected

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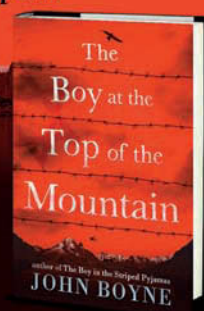
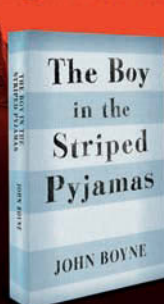
The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

COMES

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From one
boy to
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Inspiring you to share stories



John Boyne

“Life is too short to plough through a 50,000 word story you aren’t enjoying”

Without Ian Serraillier’s *The Silver Sword*, John Boyne might never have written his own children’s classics...

I don’t remember actually learning to read, but I do have memories of going to the library a lot. We had a fantastic one just down the road from my house; and we’d often spend Wednesday afternoons there, because that used to be a half day from school. I loved being able to browse those shelves, pick a title and just start to read it, there and then. I’ve always got a real kick out of books – not just the content, but the physical item itself; the feel of the paper in my hands.

I wouldn’t call myself a book hoarder now, although I used to be. When I first went to work for Waterstones I got sent loads of books, proof copies and so on, and I would keep everything. But who has space for that, really? These days I tend to have a little cull of my shelves once a year or so. There’s not much point storing books for the sake of it – anything I do hang onto needs to have a special place in my mind; it has to connect me to a time and a place when I first read it.

The *Silver Sword* is one book I have kept from my childhood. I read it at the age of ten or so, and always credit it as being my first introduction to the subject of World War II, which of course is a topic I’ve come back to in my own writing. It was probably the jacket that appealed to me at the time – I was just moving away from my Secret Sevens and Famous Fives, and looking for something a little more serious. I found it scary and exciting – the terrors the children experienced in the book left me frightened, but also wanting to know more. Who were these ‘Nazis’? What was going on?

I also have an edition of *Wind in the Willows* I got when I was 11 – it’s pretty battered, with my childish scribbles and drawings in the margins. And I still have all the Narnia books,

which my mother got for me when I had an appendix operation.

I was a great reader from very early on. I started on Dickens’ orphan stories when I was about 12; and then I saw – and persuaded my parents to subscribe to – one of those ‘collector magazines’ for ‘classic novels’. Every two weeks they’d send you a book, beautiful and leather-bound, with a magazine telling you about it. The first was *Pride and Prejudice*, then *Wuthering Heights*, then *Jane Eyre*, and so on. I read them all, desperate

to get through each one in the fortnight before the next would arrive.

There is such a rich stream of contemporary children’s fiction now, that perhaps young people are less likely to pick up the classics straight away – but given the choice between that, and how it was when I was a child, I’d certainly take the present. We never had authors coming in to visit us at school – because all the people who’d written what we were reading were dead! Besides, once children find good writing, of any kind, they’ll seek out more and be taken in all sorts of new directions.

I don’t get into schools much any more, unfortunately – but one thing that has surprised me over the past ten years of being part of the world of children’s writing is the extraordinary passion, commitment and enthusiasm that’s out there. In my head, I suppose I thought that kids don’t read any more – but they do, they love it, as long as they are allowed to explore and make their own choices. They’re discerning, too; you often hear adults say they ‘never give up on a book’, but I reckon life is too short to plough through a 50,000 word story you aren’t enjoying – and that’s how children think, too.

By the way, my latest book, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* (Doubleday, £12.99, out now) revisits the subject of WWII – but it’s not a sequel to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. I know that the publishing trend at the moment is for series – but I prefer standalone books; I feel, if a kid likes a book of mine, he or she shouldn’t have to read another one straight away, let alone six or eight. There are some great series, of course – think of JK Rowling and Philip Pullman – but for me, there is something special about saying everything you want to say about a subject in a single book.

MODERN CLASSICS

John Boyne’s recommended authors

SHOBHAN DOWD

She is one of the greats of the last 15 years, and it is so sad she is no longer with us.

KEVIN BROOKS

Yes, some were antagonistic when *The Bunker Diary* won the Carnegie Medal, but I think it’s terrific, with exactly the kind of resourceful central character young people should be reading about.

BRIAN CONAGHAN

I loved *When Mr Dog Bites*, his brilliant debut novel from last year.

JACQUELINE WILSON

She’s a phenomenon. I’ve been at literary festivals with Jackie, and have never seen anything like the queues of children desperate to talk to her.

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HELEN MEARS has an MA in the Advanced Teaching of Shakespeare and teaches at Suffolk New College

Well MET

Make sure your pupils' initial introduction to Shakespeare leaves them wanting to get to know him better, says **Helen Mears...**

How did you first encounter Shakespeare? Think back to that moment now. Was it sitting in a classroom reading barely comprehensible text aloud? Was it on the stage or screen listening to someone with a cut class accent reciting the words with an unwavering reverence? Or did you discover him by some other means? A passionate teacher? A parent or relative who couldn't wait to share him with you? First encounters with William Shakespeare are crucial; they shape future attitudes and perceptions of him. A negative encounter can put someone off for life, a positive one can be the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's *Stand Up For Shakespeare* manifesto is already established in the education system with its three key tenets: "Do it on your feet; see it live; start it earlier". 'Starting it earlier' can easily mean introducing Shakespeare at Key Stage 1 and then developing and building on that work through Key Stage 2. Children of this age have a natural predilection for rhythm, rhyme and storytelling – these elements are inherent to Shakespeare's work and are an excellent hook into the plays.

Get physical

One thing that is universal in the growing trend towards teaching Shakespeare in more engaging ways is to ensure that he isn't made to seem excessively special or important. The pleasure of the plays, particularly in performance, is their joyous irreverence, their imaginative play with language and their rich characterisations. These are elements that can be utilised in teaching Shakespeare to very young children. It is also productive

to approach the texts with a drama focus rather than an English one, making the topic more fun and accessible. The Department for Education's *Shakespeare For All Ages and Stages* publication suggests that storytelling, improvisation and role play be the focus of KS1 work while KS2 work can develop aspects of performance and dramatic approaches with cultural visits encouraged.

With the youngest primary children, an active and physicalised approach to the plays is recommended. A 'Whoosh' is an effective way to achieve this – this is an activity in which everyone stands in a circle; the teacher reads a synopsis of the play and the children are encouraged to enter the story and act out the actions that are being described. Examples of Whooshes are available in the *RSC Teachers Toolkit for Primary Teachers*, which should be available in school. Once the pupils have a sense of the story you can begin to work with small scenes or extracts from the play.

There are particular plays which lend themselves well to working with young children for differing reasons. *The Tempest* can be approached in at least two different ways. The first is to explore the storm scene at the beginning of the play, an activity described by the RSC's Joe Winston in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* in 2012. Children can be encouraged to recreate the storm using a range of percussive sounds and through vocalisations based on snippets of wording from the play itself. The Boatswain's lines are short and exclamatory and can be easily chanted; a cloth or parachute can be used to simulate the tempestuous waves and some children could take the roles of Ariel and his weather spirits raising the storm. This is an activity that would work well outside, particularly on a windy day. Winston also

explored the relationship between Prospero and Caliban via the angry language exchanged between the two. Children were split into two groups who used snippets of the insults from the text itself or those they had created. He believed that trading such insults in a controlled environment allowed children to safely experiment and play with slightly darker elements of language, something they naturally enjoy doing.

Feel the rhythm

Another way into Shakespeare's work is to focus on rhyme and rhythm. While most of Shakespeare's works are written in blank verse, he does use prose and other rhythms for particular effects and purposes, and one of these is particularly appealing to children. The witches in *Macbeth* speak in trochaic tetrameter (four pairs of a stressed followed by an unstressed beat) and this is a rhythm familiar through nursery rhymes such as *Mary, Mary Quite Contrary* and the opening lines of *Humpty Dumpty*. Shakespeare uses the rhythm to distinguish these supernatural beings from the play's human characters and the chant-like sound of the language will feel natural to children.

As an introductory activity to *Macbeth*, Banquo's description of the witches in Act I, Scene III can be used as a stimulus to encourage children to use their bodies to visualise the witches and to move around the space perhaps with added vocalisations. The 'double, double, toil and trouble' segment of the play is perfect to use with children owing to the chant-like use of trochaic tetrameter. The teacher can read the spell itself with the children joining in for the refrain, perhaps setting the words to a simple tune. Again, this activity would work well outside – a field or playground could become the witches' blasted heath and children could collect items to use in their own version of the potion which can then also be chanted together and then perhaps written into their own version of the

"One thing that is universal in the growing trend towards teaching Shakespeare in more engaging ways is to ensure that he isn't made to seem excessively special or important"



spell. The introduction of props, masks or other elements of costume could be used to bring added visual richness and the activity could also be used as a stimulus to a discussion of the nature of witches and to consider the impact on Macbeth of listening to their spells and prophecies.

These ideas are just a start. There are other plays which can be as easily adapted to use with primary aged children; the important things to remember are the focus on drama and performative elements, and giving children the chance to work with even very short extracts or text scraps of Shakespeare's original language. Look for the characters or aspects of language that will appeal to your pupils – and you will be well on your way to making their first encounter with Shakespeare a positive one.

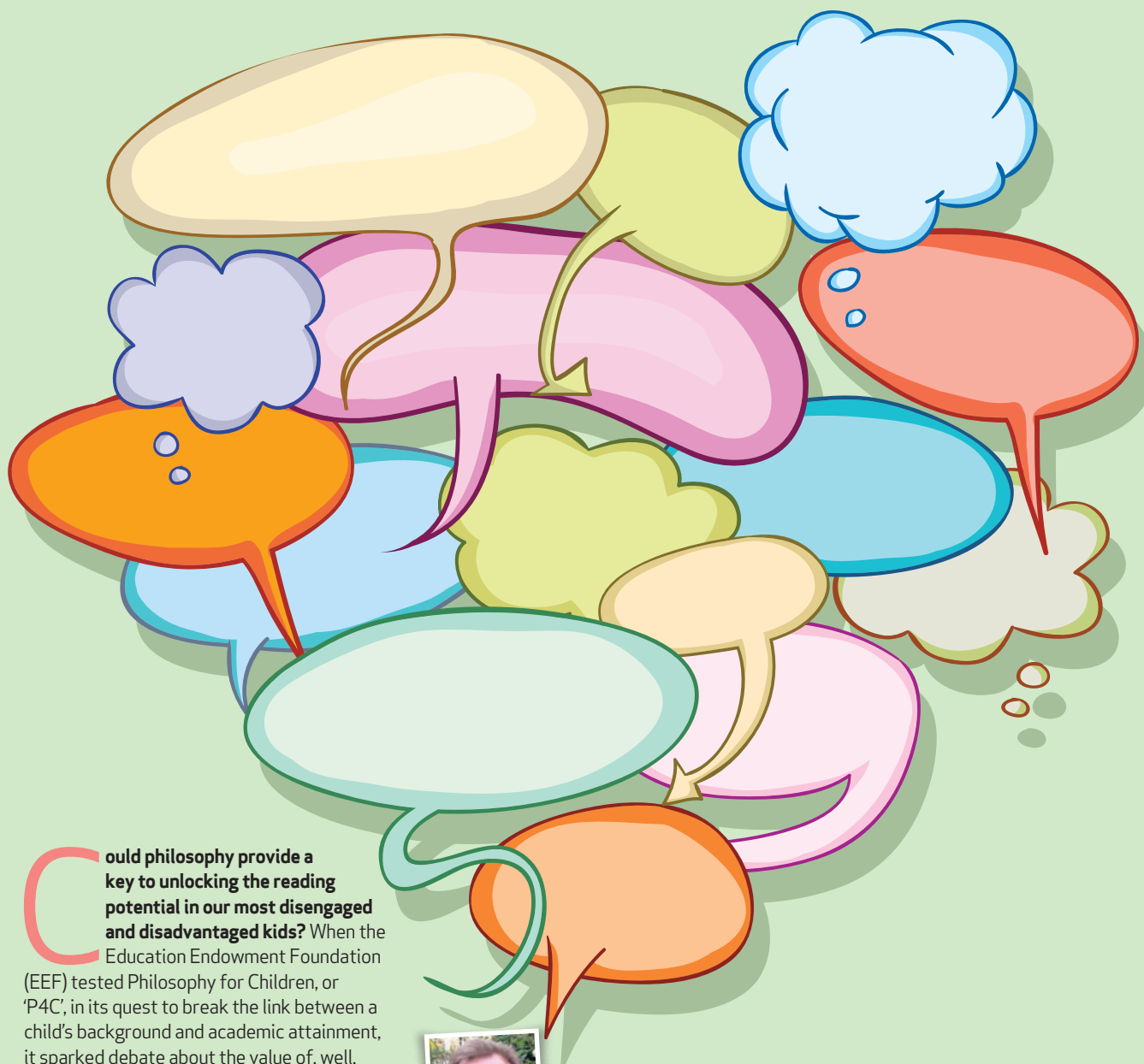
9 BRILLIANT SHAKESPEARE RESOURCES...

for primary school teachers

- 1 Springboard Shakespeare (Ben Crystal) ow.ly/UbvAU
- 2 Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company (Joe Winston) ow.ly/UbvY1
- 3 Creative Shakespeare; The Globe Education Guide to Practical Shakespeare (Fiona Banks) ow.ly/Ubvtw
- 4 Teaching Shakespeare (Rex Gibson) ow.ly/Ubvrb
- 5 The Globe Playground Website ow.ly/Ubvrv
- 6 The RSC Online Resources ow.ly/UbvK2
- 7 RSC Teacher Toolkit for Primary ow.ly/Ubv8y
- 8 British Shakespeare Association Teaching Shakespeare Magazine ow.ly/Ubv5m
- 9 Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages ow.ly/Ubv0x

Lots to THINK ABOUT

Dust off your Descartes – philosophy's back on the agenda and making waves in literacy, as **Anna Blewett** discovered...



Could philosophy provide a key to unlocking the reading potential in our most disengaged and disadvantaged kids? When the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) tested Philosophy for Children, or 'P4C', in its quest to break the link between a child's background and academic attainment, it sparked debate about the value of, well, debate. More than 48 schools – 3,000 children from Years 4 and 5 – took part in the study to evaluate the benefit of the approach. Headline findings suggest that, over the course of a year, an hour of guided philosophical enquiry each week gives pupils a two-month advantage over peers studying the original curriculum. What's more, pupils on free school meals actually recorded reading skills four months ahead of those in the control group, with writing also given a two-month boost. So what went on?



THE TRAINER

Bob House, chief executive of SAPERE

For the study we encouraged teachers to dedicate specific time for P4C sessions – a solid hour or two half-hour sessions a week. The sessions have a clear structure and progression: they start with a stimulus – a

story or video, something to prompt a discussion – and move on to a selection of questions, then a discussion and finally a reflection on that discussion.

One of the fundamental principles is assertions must be supported with a reason, and pupils are actively encouraged to disagree with others. It's not about conveying specific concepts but trying to get broader thinking going in relation to



THE CRITIC

Dennis Hayes, professor of education at University of Derby

My criticism of the study is that anything that is taught with real enthusiasm will have a good impact on the children. Philosophy for Children takes thinking about issues like truth, reason, God or justice out of any subject context, and gives the impression children can deal with them without having done a lot of reading and thinking. The reason it's popular is it flatters children in a way: it says you don't need to understand the theory of philosophers, just discuss things in a logical way. I'm very wary of people teaching philosophy; I just don't think it can be made simple.



THE RESEARCHER

Jonathan Sharples, senior researcher at EEF

How hard is it to evaluate the results of P4C? Hard. It's not easy to measure thinking skills but ultimately our interest was whether the approach could improve attainment. The primary measure of that in this study was the kids' Key Stage 2 results in reading, writing and maths. If you improve pupils' ability to discuss, question, debate, does that transfer into better grades? The results were very promising.

Is it a discussion about feelings? Absolutely not. The teacher picks a big issue: should a healthy heart be donated to someone who didn't look after themselves? Is it okay to wear religious symbols to work? They're tough, challenging questions and what P4C does is

P4C is actually dumbing down lessons. Education is about subjects but, whether it's to do with Ofsted or government, teachers often forget that. They shouldn't be finding space for anything else. Anything else that teachers look for to make life more exciting – happiness classes, 'brilliance training', or any of these other popular concepts – are basically wasting children's time, no matter how much fun they are.

I think more often than not these sessions are just about exploring feelings. If you've got a group of kids sitting round talking about bullying, for example, it's not philosophy. It's moralising, or exploring feelings in a therapeutic way. I think in the end it produces cynicism, because if you encourage people to be critical when they've got no knowledge, in the end they'll be critical of everything. I'm sure it's fun, but it's not really going anywhere.

help the teacher facilitate discussions so the pupils get better at thinking, questioning, debating, discussing and arguing. Whilst it's not on the curriculum, it's absolutely not content-free. It's not soft and easy. It was tested against schools that in most cases were spending the extra hour doing the 'hard stuff' – literacy lessons – instead, but on average those in the trial improved their reading and maths compared to the control. So the idea P4C's soft and woolly is not borne out in the evidence.

My advice to schools is: only you can work out if Philosophy for Children can complement what you're looking to do, but there's enough evidence to suggest it's worth thinking hard about. It's not just that it's nice to do in lessons; done well it's a positive way to raise attainment.

“The trickiest thing is letting go of some of the control of the classroom.”

topics that come up in the curriculum. So if the class topic was the First World War, a relevant enquiry might raise ideas like 'Is there such a thing as a just war?'

Often the trickiest thing about it for teachers is handing some of the control of the classroom back to the kids. The teacher chooses the stimulus but the children develop and select the questions to be discussed. That means the teacher can't necessarily

predict where the lesson will go or the content of the discussion. And it's about moving from closed questions to more open questions, creating a less predictable teaching situation.

As far as evaluation goes, we suggest teachers look at the mix in the class – those who perform to expectations, those who are behind or above – and monitor how that changes over time. You'd expect to



THE TEACHER

Paula Moses, assistant head at Millbrook Primary School, Manchester

The EEF study measured real increases in reading comprehension, but we've seen the benefits go way beyond that. The kids interact more, question received wisdom, and have become fantastic at forming arguments. The initial stumbling block with P4C is making time every week for a philosophical enquiry, but once we did it we realised it was a no-brainer. I've been using P4C in the classroom since 2007 but the study was a great opportunity for our school to train all our Key Stage 2 staff in P4C and really bring it to the forefront.

The stimulus for each enquiry can be anything – I've used a pot, a light bulb – but there are lots of brilliant children's books with philosophical themes. David McKee's Elmer books or Mr Ben series, for example. We use a planning sheet and think ahead about the concepts that might come up. The children will always surprise you, though. A classic example is reading *The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse* with Year 2. In the version we had, when the mice were in the country a goose stole their sandwiches. The kids were very concerned about this. So there was I in my planning predicting the text would raise issues about difference, acceptance and materialism, and the kids just wanted to talk about stealing.

As facilitator you have to be prepared to discuss any concept that comes up. You don't have to say "Nietzsche says this" but you can say "Some people might think X, some people might think Y" and you constantly bring them back to that philosophical question in an age-appropriate way.

see, as a result of P4C, a higher and higher proportion of the class meeting or exceeding expectations. We provide monitoring frameworks for that, but I'd also say it's not all about academic progress. There are non-cognitive benefits such as self-esteem. A lot of teachers say kids who have always been quiet in lessons find their voice through P4C, and then come out with some really insightful comments.



Just when we thought we had mastered the old national curriculum and that levels were firmly embedded in most teachers' minds, we have now reached the era of assessment without levels, and a swarm of fresh tests that go with it.

The new KS2 reading test, due to take place for the first time in May 2016, will focus on the English Programmes of Study that schools have been following since 2014. There will be no level 6 extension paper and instead the more challenging questions will be towards the end of the test.

For many teachers, the sample 2016 reading papers are largely familiar. They have three texts – not linked by theme – which pupils must read through before answering the questions, all in 60 minutes. However, there are subtle differences between the old and the new tests, so let's have a closer look at what you will need to know.

1 Assessment Focuses have gone

Over the years, Assessment Focuses (AFs) have been the bread and butter of reading or guided reading in many primary schools. However, these have now been replaced with a simplified focus on eight content domains (2a-h) that are primarily taken from the English Programmes of Study.

The new content domains contain areas such as: '2b – retrieving and recording information' and '2d – making inferences from the text'. Both of these areas – which

What's next for SATs

10 things you need to know about how the KS2 reading test is changing...

are similar to the old AF2 and AF3 – will carry the most weighting on the tests.

2 There are new areas of assessment

Some of the new domains will be familiar to teachers, but others will not have been a separate focus under the previous AFs. They include areas such as 'giving/explaining vocabulary in context' (2a); 'making predictions' (2e); and 'making comparisons within the text' (2h). The latter requires pupils to identify the difference between events, and so you should encourage pupils to use key words such as 'but' or 'however', e.g. 'At the start of the text he is excited but

at the end of the text he is scared.' There is also an increased focus on understanding fictional texts.

3 Say goodbye to guessing games

For many years, I have heard teachers and writers talk about how the reading test asks children to 'guess what's in the writer's head', rather than provide a focus on true comprehension. Previous AFs concentrated on 'explaining and commenting on the writer's use of language (AF5)' and 'identifying and commenting on the writer's purposes and viewpoints (AF6)'.

In the past, questions did seem to concentrate on the writer, e.g. 'What impression of wolves does the writer give?' (2013, KS2 reading paper) but now questions appear to be focused on the text, e.g. 'Explain how the descriptions...support the idea that they were inoffensive brutes...' (2016 sample reading paper). I'm sure teachers will be pleased with this renewed emphasis.

4 Not everything will be tested

In an ideal world, pupils would be assessed on all aspects of reading (although some would argue that reading should not really be tested at all). However, as with previous tests, certain aspects are difficult to measure – within the confines of a written paper, can you really discover if a child has learnt a wide range of poetry by heart, or participated in discussions about books? Both of these activities, however, will deepen children's comprehension skills, especially if they involve plenty of debate, and so should not be ignored. Similarly, even though the





tests place less emphasis on text structure (e.g. identify sub-headings, glossary, etc.), teachers should continue to teach these areas because they support pupils with their writing skills.

5 New vocabulary is important

With a greater focus on understanding vocabulary in context, pupils would benefit from word games that extend their vocabulary, such as creating synonyms. They should be encouraged to look up the meanings of unfamiliar words and use these in their own writing. Having taught in Year 6 this year, some pupils really struggle with definitions so there is much to gain from explicitly teaching new vocabulary to pupils.

6 A variety of question types will still be used

The following question types will be included, some of which are illustrated in the sample 2016 reading paper:

- Multiple choice (e.g. 2c *What is the main message in the story? Tick one, Q24*);
- Ordering (no example given);
- Matching (e.g. 2b *Match the events to the year in which they happened, Q10*);
- Labelling (no example given);
- Find and copy questions (e.g. 2a *Find and copy two more words from the poem that show that the frog was frightened, Q23*).

7 Challenge is not just about level 6

With a big focus on the mastery curriculum and Ofsted's spotlight on challenging the most able, I continue to receive requests for level 6 training, even though this test has been taken away.

There may be questions towards the end of the paper that will be reminiscent of the old level 6 test, but there are differences. It is important to note that challenging the most able is about pupils doing work that 'deepens' their knowledge, understanding and skills – rather than extending them too quickly before they have fully understood the curriculum content. The more challenging questions will require extended answers and it's up to pupils to structure and organise their responses (these are normally three-mark questions). Questions might also ask children to explain vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them, but they can use the context to aid understanding. 'Find and copy' questions may require pupils to discover answers from within the whole page rather than being given a specific section to explore. For example, 'Find and copy one word on page nine that suggests Malone feels part of the team of explorers'.

The test is focused on an in-depth understanding of the more challenging KS2 curriculum; not the KS3 curriculum, like the previous level 6 test. However, with the absence of levels, a clear definition of what it means to be within the standard is still needed.

8 Skimming and scanning skills

Pupils can benefit from skimming and scanning activities under timed conditions as this will support them with finding key points. Books such as *Where's Wally* are ideal for this – learning to skim and scan for Wally is never dull! Once these skills are secure, they can be applied to test questions, especially those that ask children to retrieve and record information (e.g. 'skim over and scan for key words').

9 Scaffold children's responses

Participating in oral discussions is a crucial aspect of developing pupils' understanding, especially if you give them a scaffold for their responses (e.g. 'I think that...because...'). This type of reminder will support them when it comes to giving extended responses, encouraging them to really think about using the text to answer questions, e.g. 'I think that she is unhappy because the text says that she is grumpy.'

10 Many questions will be familiar

Having a new KS2 test without any clear levels can be a daunting prospect. One comfort is that we are all doing this together and we're by no means starting from scratch – much of the test will be recognisable from previous years.

Shareen Mayers (@shareenmayers) is an experienced primary school teacher and is currently the Lead Primary English Adviser for Sutton Improvement and Support Services. She is a published educational author and series editor.

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Q&A: SPAG ASSESSMENT

Philip Orchard explains what inspired him to create an online assessment tool for spelling, grammar and punctuation

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TR&W Why did you develop SPAG.com?



PO When I was a Year 6 teacher, it felt like I was endlessly photocopying previous SATs papers for end-of-term assessments. On one particular

day, after wasting a whole lunchtime clearing paper jams in an attempt to photocopy the previous year's SPAG test, I searched on Google for 'grammar and punctuation assessments', but found nothing suitable. It was in the weeks following that I decided to set up a website that was solely dedicated to providing high quality grammar and punctuation assessments and gap analysis tools.

Wasn't developing SPAG.com a daunting idea?

Before training a primary teacher, I'd been the senior creative for a design company specialising in educational books. I'd also managed a number of large software development projects alongside a team of award winning software engineers. As a result, overseeing the development of SPAG.com was actually a lot of fun!

Did you use SPAG.com with your class?

When we launched SPAG.com in March 2014, I couldn't wait for my class to use it. Initially, I made use of the gap analysis tools to inform my planning. The reports also provided a useful starting point when chatting with the children about their targets. When I saw how much my class enjoyed going on SPAG.com, I began using it as a learning tool too. In these lessons, I'd encourage the children to beat their previous scores by talking through the questions and answers with each other before answering.

Does SPAG.com have to be used at school?

SPAG.com can be used at school or at home. In fact, I occasionally set a SPAG.com activity for homework, which always went down well! Like most schools, we made our ICT suite available to children after school and at lunchtimes, so there was never any excuse for not doing it. Many schools set SPAG.com activities for homework because they are instantly marked and teachers having the ability to easily track who has completed the work.

How did other schools hear about SPAG.com?

Over the years in teaching, I've spent plenty of PPA hours wading through piles of promotional junk mail, so I knew I needed to send something that would be useful and get teacher's attention. We ended up posting a beer mat to all Year 6 teachers with a reminder of the date of the upcoming SPAG test.



What kind of feedback did you get from other schools?

We've had some really encouraging feedback in the last year from teachers and children. Here are our favourite five:

- *The new year six teacher can use the wonderful materials! We again achieved highly in the sats, thank you.*
- *These are brilliant for grammar revision!*
- *I rarely endorse on Twitter but have to say that @spag has been one of the best investments. Brilliant resource.*
- *Please can you confirm the price. 58p seems too cheap for a child account.*
- *Hi, our results were amazing, definitely want to register for next year.*

What assessments does SPAG.com offer?

The most popular tests with teachers are the KS1 and KS2 practice SATs grammar tests. SPAG.com also has 80 assessments that cover all grammar and punctuation objectives from Y1 to Y6 – about 300 objectives are covered in total.

What's next for SPAG.com?

We regularly get requests and suggestions. Over the summer, we added a number of new features including an interactive answer section. We are also in the process of writing a child-friendly glossary of terms and helpful examples, which will be available for both children and teachers towards the end of 2016.

For more information or for a free demo account, please email support@spag.com.

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The OLD MILL

By analysing **Pie Corbett's** story children will learn to build excitement and suspense through whispers and warnings...

Stealthily, Jo crept down the stairs, dodging the fourth step in case it creaked. At the bottom she paused, but all that she could hear was a silence that filled the house with sleep. The cat wound its way round her legs, begging to be let out.

Twenty minutes later, she entered Deadman's Forest. Tall trees towered overhead and daylight filtered through the branches, casting ebony shadows. It wasn't long before she came to the ruins of the old mill. The pond glittered in the sunlight.

* A few bees buzzed busily.

Jo sat down under the trees and watched as the dragonflies flitted across the surface of the mill pond. It was here that she had first seen the unicorn. All morning she waited, till in the end her eyes closed and she slept, dreaming of crystal towers and goblins.

Later, she woke with a start. The sun had



FREE RESOURCE

Share this exclusive Pie Corbett story with your class and then try the activities on the next page. To get a whiteboard-friendly version of the story, visit teachprimary.com/Corbett2

slipped behind the trees, casting charred shadows across the water's oily surface.

A cold breeze whispered through the reeds. Jo shuddered. A twig broke, leaves rustled and something moved towards her! What was it?

Cautiously, Jo stared into the darkness between the trees where her imagination warned her anything could exist. A vague silhouette darted! Again, Jo shivered but not from the cold for, at that moment, she heard a sudden hiss and a red eye flickered. Jo gasped.

With her dreams of unicorns left behind, Jo ran. Branches whipped at her face and brambles tore at her feet. She was sure that she could hear something behind her, feet thudding through the undergrowth. Something breathing....

It was only when she reached the road beyond the tree line that she stopped. She stood, listening, but only her heart thudded. The trees were quite still. Nothing. Silence. It was as if the forest had swallowed its secret.

LET'S GET STARTED

This story is sufficiently dramatic to hold the attention of most children and has a simple pattern that can be re-used to create new versions.

You could kickstart the unit of work by showing images of old forests, trees with twisted roots and dark shadows. Look at photos of mill ponds so that the children can visualise the story. Show the title, 'The Old Mill', and ask them what they think will happen in the story. Then reveal the opening line: 'Stealthily, Jo crept down the stairs, dodging the fourth step in case it creaked.' Which words are suggesting that Jo does not want anyone to catch her? What might she be going to do? Should she be going out?

Learn the story

The story is an easy one for the children to map and learn orally, whether 'word-by-word' or retold in the children's own words. One simple way into the story is to split the class into seven small groups, giving each one of the paragraphs to learn orally. They should map their paragraph and use actions to help commit the words to memory. After 20 mins or so, each group performs in turn so that the whole story is revealed. This should work, as all the paragraphs are about the same length.

Keep retelling the story over a number of days so that everyone comes to know it intimately. Make sure that the children retell the story with expression. This is easy enough to achieve if you model reading expressively. Ask them to vary the pace, add in dramatic pauses and vary the volume for effect.

Use drama to hot-seat Jo before the event and afterwards. In role as Jo, hold a phone call to a 'best friend' about what happened or write her diary entry, describing the events. Role-play the scene when Jo arrives home and meets her mum or dad. Discuss how Jo would be feeling and how a parent might react.

There is an obvious invitation to write the prequel that tells how Jo had first seen the unicorn by the Old Mill. This need not be a whole story; it might just be a few paragraphs. It could be written as a story, a diary entry or a letter to a friend. Put the children in pairs, with one in role as Jo, to tell the story of how she had stumbled across the unicorn as a precursor to any writing.

Look for clues

Once everyone can retell the story well, read it through, pausing to discuss any vocabulary that might need further exploration. Notice how the mood changes at the mill. Initially, it sounds quite pleasant but this alters rapidly

once Jo wakes. How does the writer achieve this change in mood, at first lulling the reader into a sense of security before building the tension?

Initial description: *Daylight filtered; Pond glittered; In the sunlight; Bees buzzed busily; Dragonflies flitted.*

After sleeping: *Sun had slipped behind the trees; Casting charred shadows; The water's oily surface; A cold breeze; Whispered through the reeds.*

Read through line by line, checking for clues to how Jo feels as well as inferring what she might be thinking (see Fig. 1 for examples)

List any questions about the story that the children raise and select a few for discussion, e.g. Did Jo really see a unicorn? Why has she not told anyone about such an amazing discovery? Should she have? What might her reticence to tell anyone suggest about the others in the house? What chased her? What should she do next?

Children could write a 'blurb' for this story, in 50 or 100 words; design a simple front cover for the book of which this story is the opening chapter; write a newspaper report of 200 words, revealing why the mill is deserted; imagine that Jo finds the unicorn, and write a set of instructions to help her look after her new pet.

Fig. 1

| Quote from the original | Jo's feelings | Jo's thoughts |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Stealthily Jo crept | Anxious | I hope I'm not caught. |
| Dodging the fourth | Careful | I need to be quiet as possible. |
| She paused | Uncertain | Have I been heard? |
| Twenty minutes later | Relieved | Thank goodness I'm here. |
| The pond glittered | Happy | This is so pretty. |
| She... seen the unicorn | Anticipating | I might see the unicorn again. |
| All morning she waited | Patient | It's worth waiting. |





Fig. 2

| Technique | How + example |
|--|---|
| Main Character (MC) on his or her own in an unusual setting. | Jo at Old Mill – use scary place name – Deadman's Forest. |
| Lull the reader into false sense of security. | Describe setting to make it sound nice – pond glittered, daylight filtered, bees buzzed, dragonflies flutter. |
| Make setting sound scary. | Charred shadows, oily surface, cold wind whispered. |
| MC hears or sees something. | Twig broke, leaves rustled, red eye flickered. |
| Keep it hidden. | Use empty words – something, moved, shadow, silhouette. |
| Show how MC feels. | Jo gasped/ shivered/ shuddered. |
| Reveal MC's thoughts | Her imagination warned her that... Use a rhetorical question – what was it? |

1 (Main Character (MC) leaves the everyday setting.)

Jakub leaves the caravan where his family is having a holiday.

2 (MC arrives at the new setting. It sounds safe.)

He goes down to the sandy beach where there is a cave.

3 (MC waits for something magical but sleeps.)

He is sure that he saw a merman there, but falls asleep waiting.

4 (MC wakes. The setting seems more ominous. MC hears/senses a hidden threat.)

He awakes and the waves have cut him off so he has to shelter in the cave where he senses something.

5 (MC hears/ glimpses something alarming. It gets closer.)

It gets closer and he has to go deeper into the cave.

6 (MC flees and is chased)

He finds a stone staircase and begins to climb higher.

7 (MC escapes)

Luckily, he finds a way out.

Get ready to write

The better the children know the story, the more likely they are to be able to use it successfully as an underlying pattern for their own versions. Spend time deciding where to set the class story and use photos to build the imagination and make the writing easier. I have used images of old warehouses, abandoned hospitals, wrecked airfields, an old farmhouse and even a dilapidated school.

With the children, work out the underlying pattern in the story. Use this as a planner so that everyone uses the same sort of story pattern and idea, but each final narrative is unique. I created the following example with a class in Croydon:

Create a toolkit

The ideal focus for this story is suspense. Work with the children to find out the techniques that the writer uses to build tension (see Fig. 2 for examples).

Make it your own

Use shared writing to create a class version of the narrative, followed by the children creating their own stories, emerging over a number of days. Less confident writers might make only a few simple adjustments; whilst the more confident should move away from the original model, working directly from the basic story idea and structure. Compare these two openings, written by different children. One child hugs closely to the original, using the sentence patterns and ideas as support. The other uses the basic idea of a main character sneaking out, but otherwise does not use the original model at all. Confident writers should produce several paragraphs for each section.

A *Cautiously, Hamid sneaked down the wooden staircase, dodging the bricks his brother had left out in case he tripped over. At the bottom, he stopped but all he could hear was the fridge making a humming noise. The dog wagged its tail because it wanted to go out.*

B *Emily waited at the edge of the playground, tucked behind the gym while everyone else filed in after break. She stayed quite still as she could hear Miss Moynihan walking across to the school office. As soon as the playground was quiet, crows drifted. Emily was ready.*

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ROS WILSON is a former LA curriculum adviser

Don't leave literacy to CHANCE

If we want all children to become great writers, it's not enough to expose them to great writing. There are four key skills that we must teach, says **Ros Wilson...**

Many authors fight for high-quality literature to be available in schools, but while I respect this (and support their cause), its presence alone will not ensure children learn to be successful writers.

Those of us who were born into families where one or more adults talked to us in extended and articulate speech from the moment of birth or before, as though we could understand them, established a secure and finely tuned linguistic base. If discussion, persuasion and debate were the norm, we developed – during our early years – a linguistic ‘centre’ in the brain that is highly tuned and receptive to the acquisition of new vocabulary and language. We can learn new words and phrases easily, often at only one meeting. If our subconscious ‘likes’ them, it can store them instantly – and retain the knowledge of how or where to use them to best effect. Sometimes a word may not be used for years but, given a nudge, the subconscious can

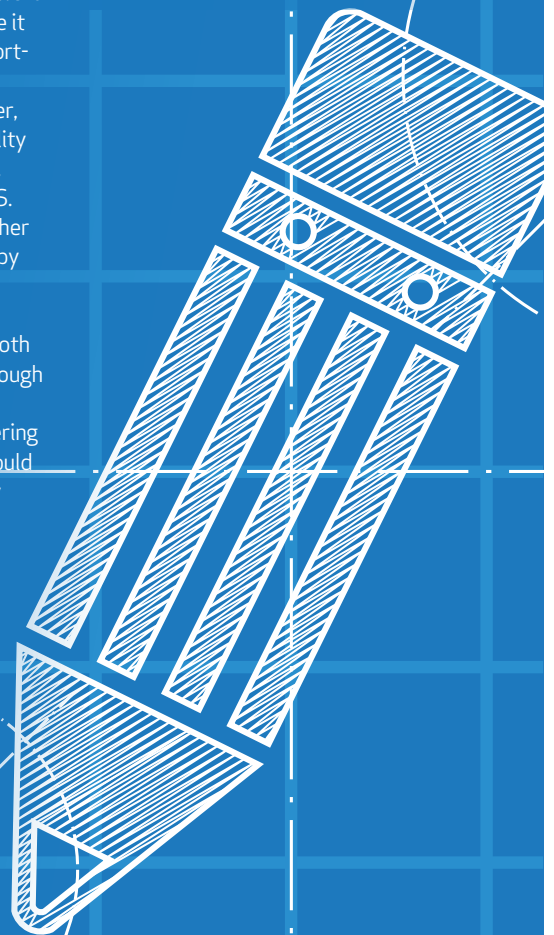
still retrieve it and ‘pop’ it into our conscious mind. I am overwhelmed with amazement when I try to contemplate the wonders of this process.

Children whose language centre is not highly stimulated in the first three years of their lives do not develop the same ability. They are often not able to retain a new word at a single meeting, and may need to use it many times in order to move it from short-term to long-term memory.

From the age of three to five, however, a lot can still be done to ‘switch’ this ability on – hence the cruciality of not just talk, but planned and prolific talk in the EYFS. From five to seven this may still be further strengthened; but if not fully activated by the start of KS2, the child will always struggle to learn new language.

That is why a system that develops both speech and writing through talk and through repetitive oral games and activities in a wealth of different contexts is empowering for so many children who, otherwise, would have little likelihood of becoming highly effective writers. This is the secret of the success of Big Writing.

“We can learn new words and phrases easily, often at only one meeting. If our subconscious ‘likes’ them, it can store them instantly.”





"It is only through trial and error that the true beauty of language will be developed"

The four toolkits of writing

I never set out to find such a system, even after nearly 30 years of teaching in a wide range of settings, almost all in complex and challenging circumstances. I never questioned the received doctrine – that the pathway to becoming a writer is through reading. That is the way my parents were taught, the way I and my siblings were taught, and the way every other child in the country was expected to learn. And that myth is still perpetuated today...

National tests (SATs) at age seven were introduced in England in 1991, and four years later in KS2 – coinciding with my appointment as adviser for assessment in Kirklees Local Authority. Schools performing well above or below expectation in the tests always received a visit (from myself in Kirklees or from the school's 'contact officer', as LA Personnel were then known). It was on one such visit that I found a team leader using a

list of criteria to defend her decisions, and I asked her from where they'd been sourced. She told me that they were the SAT criteria broken down into bullets. I then asked whether she was aware that she was not allowed to do that (she was, of course) and promptly 'stole' her idea. It was clearly so much more efficient and manageable – giving clarity and simplicity to the process.

Over the following five years, that first emergent Criterion Scale for the assessment of writing (now the Oxford Criterion Scale for Writing) was developed and refined. During that time, I assessed over 20,000 pieces of writing to ensure its accuracy. Very rapidly, however, two revealing truths about how writing 'works' emerged.

The first was that there are four 'toolkits' – or skill sets – that go to make up writing, and that children need to be able to operate all of these toolkits simultaneously (at around 98 per cent plus accuracy) to be writing at the very highest standard possible in primary education. Simply put, in order to become great writers, children need to be able to:

- Interpret the type of text to be written correctly, including the common features and characteristics;
- Respond correctly and appropriately (emotionally, factually and to audience or purpose) to the stimulus;
- Operate all four 'basic skills' (grammar, handwriting, spelling and punctuation) accurately and with automaticity (not requiring conscious management, except in rare searches for an elusive word or spelling);

- Use vocabulary and language structures appropriate to high-quality writing ('writer's voice'), which is usually different to the 'voice' of daily speech.

The answers to generations of struggling writers were immediately obvious. We, as teachers, must teach all four of these toolkits thoroughly, giving children enough practice to ensure full mastery and never accept less than the best, whatever the task, in order to ensure they move from conscious control to automaticity.

However, the revelations that came through constant use of The Criterion Scale for Writing did not end there. Although schools have always taught the four basic skills to some degree, the fourth Toolkit – 'writer's voice' – has never been taught in a clear and structured way that every child can understand. Rather, children have been expected to learn to write through being exposed to quality pieces of text and through being told to 'do it like this'.

This then, needed to be my priority.

Developing the 'writer's voice'

Using the same techniques that had led to the identification of the four toolkits, the search for patterns in higher level 'writer's voice' commenced and it soon became clear that there are, again, four key elements (the 'four generic targets') that are the main components of 'writer's voice'. These are:

- The range of vocabulary a writer uses, including ambitious vocabulary;
- The range of ways a writer joins, links, connects and extends language (connectives) and the impact of these on sentence structure;
- The range of ways a writer opens sentences and the impact of these on sentence structure;
- The range of punctuation a writer can use accurately, appropriately and effectively, including for impact.

Within these four elements it was then possible to identify the true 'power features' of writing and to create and develop age-appropriate approaches to teaching all the above in ways that would be enlightening, empowering and enjoyable for all children of primary age. Thus it was that 'Big Writing' was born.

Those children who have grown up in homes where articulate discussion and debate are the norm are likely to be highly articulate themselves, and they usually grasp the four generic targets quickly and easily. They will understand, as soon as taught or told, that overuse of any element is undesirable and they will rarely use language inaccurately or inappropriately. When they do, it usually only requires one conversation to correct the error. Many children, however, are starting from a more deprived language base and they will naturally make errors in their early attempts to apply the sophisticated features of high-level language. We call this early period of errors the 'emergent phase' and see it as a positive indicator that the child is starting to diversify his or her use of language, rather than as a negative proof that the approach does not work. (Children learning English as an additional language may also need to pass through this stage.)

The uninitiated, however, are not aware that this is a crucial phase for many children and that, if the teacher skilfully applies the many techniques and approaches recommended, the child will pass through this phase quite quickly and settle into an accurate and ever-developing and maturing 'voice'. When the decriers of this approach respond with indignation to the misunderstandings evident in the early attempts of some young children, they are doing themselves and the people who care about those children a disservice. Rather, they should study the evidence, visit the schools where successful

long-term implementation has led to incredible standards of writing and reflect on the damage caused by perpetuating practice from bygone years when so few achieved highly and those that did, did so mainly despite the system, not because of it.

Recent research in the United States of America has shown interesting parallels in whether children are taught to use fluent cursive handwriting or allowed to process electronically most of the time. Dr Karin James of the University of Indiana suggests that the process of making and correcting mistakes in formation of letters may be integral to the learning of them. Her observations suggest that it is only the actual effort of trying to form the letters that engages the brain's motor pathways and delivers the learning benefits of handwriting. Dr James is comparing children who physically form letters with those who only watch others doing it, or who trace letters to learn.

"When a kid produces a messy letter," Dr James says, "that might help him learn it."

We maintain the same premise works for developing accurate use of the art form that is 'writer's voice'. For many of the children we teach, it is only through trial and error that the true beauty of language will be developed.

HAVE A WORD

QUICK ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S VOCAB...

1. Call my bluff

- The Teacher puts a 'WOW' word (not yet known to children) on the board, followed by three definitions, only one of which is right, e.g. Copious = 1) A group of trees 2) In large amounts 3) A warm cloak.
- The children (in twos or threes) read the word and discuss each definition in turn.
- They 'guess' which may be the right meaning.
- They record A, B or C on their whiteboards or scrap paper, and hold up their answer when asked by the teacher. (If there is time, children can walk around and discuss their answers with other groups.)
- If time is short, the teacher gives the right answer. Otherwise, there is a race to find the right meaning in the dictionary.

2. Make me up

The teacher uses the few minutes at the end of a lesson to ask children to make up sentences using new WOW words they are learning. A similar activity can also be carried out during, or at the end of lessons, in foundation subjects. For example, if children are learning about volcanoes in geography and have just been introduced to the word 'copious', they could be asked to make up a sentence about what happens during a volcanic eruption using the new vocabulary. ("Copious amounts of lava spew from the crater of a volcano during an eruption.")



Oliver Jeffers

“Whoever said ‘never judge a book by its cover’ was wrong”

Don't underestimate the importance of illustration for kick-starting a love of reading in children, says **Oliver Jeffers...**

In *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*, I played with a literal interpretation of the way children are sometimes described as ‘voracious’ readers who ‘devour’ books (doing this for real is not recommended, by the way; it’s very bad for the digestion) – but I was definitely not that sort of child myself. I was much more interested in going outside and playing, than losing myself in a story. I was also, I suppose, rather anti-authoritarian, and not at all keen on doing anything that I had been told to do. So it wasn’t until much later, when I discovered books I wanted to read for myself, rather than those I’d been told to pick up, that I became an avid reader.

Also, although I don’t remember a time when I *couldn’t* read – I have no memories of

looking at a piece of text and thinking, I don’t know what that says – I do recall having to go and get additional support when learning to read at school, and suspect I may have been described by my teachers as a ‘remedial’ reader at the time. A scatty attention span and clear preference for getting muddy and climbing trees rather than sitting on the carpet and ‘reading nicely’ probably had a lot to do with that.

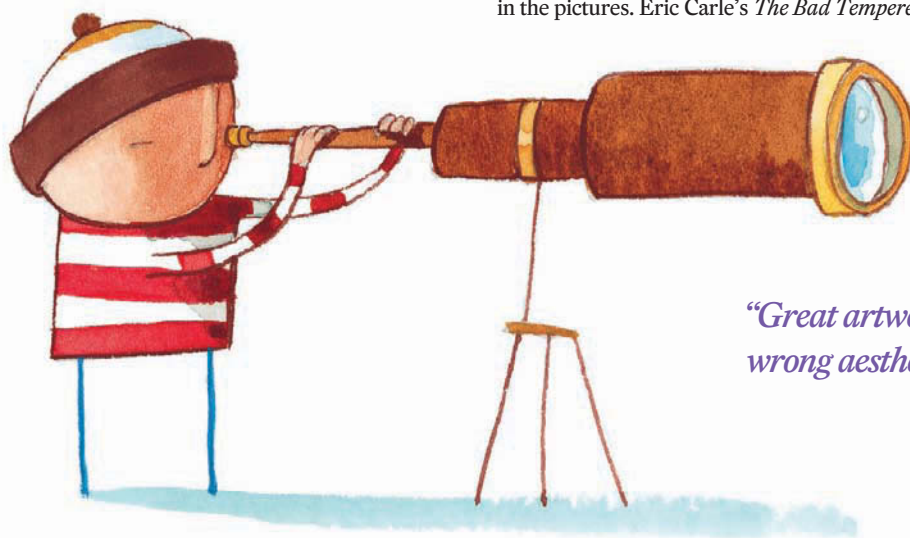
Books were important in our house, though. My dad, in particular, was a great reader – he went through a book a week when I was young, and now he’s retired, it’s more like a book a day. He and my mum read to me and my brothers an awful lot, and I recall being especially drawn to the illustrations right from the start. I was and am much more of a ‘visual’ than a ‘words’ person, so when I was being read to, I would become completely absorbed in the pictures. Eric Carle’s *The Bad Tempered*

Ladybird, for example, had a huge effect on me. I remember so well the sense of scale of it – the tiny ladybird having a fight with a giant whale, and all folded in the pages of the book in my dad’s hands. It was like a magic trick, and the images made it happen.

Brilliant illustrations are such an important part of nurturing readers. Whoever said ‘never judge a book by its cover’ was wrong; people do it every day, and the visual appeal of something is very, very important. Human beings make judgements all the time – great artwork can draw a child into a book; the wrong aesthetic can stop her picking it up at all. It’s no coincidence that Roald Dahl’s *The BFG* was one of the first books I read from start to finish, purely because I wanted to – it was as much Quentin Blake’s pictures, as Dahl’s storytelling, that appealed to me. And perhaps it was inevitable, given that my love of art started with picture books, that my career as an artist would include them in some way.

As well as *The Bad Tempered Ladybird*, books that have stayed with me from childhood include Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* – an influential work for most illustrators – and *Tusk Tusk*, by David

“Great artwork can draw a child into a book; the wrong aesthetic can stop her picking it up at all.”





McKee. I'm also excited to see the new crop of talent that's coming through, especially from Ireland, with people like Chris Haughton, for example (*A Bit Lost; Oh No George!; Shh! We Have a Plan*), and Kevin Waldron (*Mr Peek and the Misunderstanding at the Zoo; Tiny Little Fly*), who actually has a studio not far away from mine, in Brooklyn.

My recent collaboration with Eoin Colfer came about because we were both on the same circuit of literary festivals in Australia and New Zealand – at one point, we had to stand in front of a thousand or so people and tell a story; we followed straight after each other, and really enjoyed each other's words. We met a few more times and easily agreed

that we wanted to work together. It was a connection of imaginations, I suppose.

Imaginary Fred was an old idea that Eoin had kicking around and which came to the front of his mind as we were talking. As soon as he sent me the manuscript it all fell into place. Collaboration is very different from creating a picture book from scratch; this story arrived with me so resolved and direct (I made a few suggestions, but the words are entirely Eoin's), illustrating it required a process that's totally unlike building a concept from the beginning. Geographically, Eoin and I are nowhere near each other; creatively, however, we were very much on the same

page for this project. It was a very respectful experience, with each partner having full trust in the other's ability, and no arguments or drama – collaboration at its best.





STEPHEN LOCKYER is cofounder of teacherly and former deputy head at The Mead School

Teach grammar with a song

Pink Floyd were certain they didn't need "no education", but your pupils might think otherwise, says **Stephen Lockyer**...

Congratulations! You are teaching Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling. You've got the teaching side covered, but what to do for a purposeful activity?

This was exactly the dilemma I faced on a weekly basis. I began by looking at activities on popular websites, but they were all very focused on one particular punctuation or grammar rule, not to mention incredibly dull and uninspiring.

Anyway, one day after school I was called in to cover choir practice at the last minute and, in desperation, turned to YouTube, my overhead projector and some speakers in what I called 'Choiroke'. The children loved it! More than that, they knew almost all the lyrics. There was, however, a problem. The grammar policeman in me recoiled in horror at the awful punctuation and syntax of the lyrics. Take, for example, the hit song 'Blank Spaces' by Taylor Swift.

*Nice to meet you
Where you been?*

*I could show you incredible things
Magic, madness, heaven, sin
Saw you there and I thought oh my god
Look at that face, you look like my
next mistake*

But while cringing at the errors and omissions, a light bulb went on in my head. The very next day, I printed out several lyric sheets (which can be readily found online) and asked the children in my class to correct them as best they could.

It was a revelation. The class, recognising the words, took to the task instantly, adding speech marks, adjusting slang and colloquialisms, and generally upsetting the flow of a song so as to achieve a better grammatical standard. Taylor's lyrics now read:

*It's nice to meet you –
where have you been?*

*I could show you incredible things:
magic, madness, heaven or sin.*

*I saw you there and thought, "Oh my God,
look at that face; you look like my
next mistake."*

The dialogue around this task was rich from the off, and produced much debate. Should the children change the word 'nice' for a more effective adjective, for example? Would an 'or' in the list of incredible things be more appropriate than an 'and'? All these discussions came directly from the children, who, having endlessly sung the songs but never really examined the lyrics, identified that perhaps Taylor's lyricist would be wise to come back to school for a little while.

We continued to trawl, with the students starting to suggest song lyrics they knew to be poorly constructed. Frozen's 'Let It Go', for example, has a prose-like flow to it and simply needs some punctuation. While Pharrell William's 'Happy', on the other hand, is the equivalent of word soup. He's won plaudits for the song, but written down it makes little sense.

*It might seem crazy what I'm about to say
Sunshine she's here, you can take a break
(take a break)*

*Hot air balloon that could go to space
(we can go through space now)
Oh no, with the air, like I don't care baby
by the way*

In fact, 'Happy' produced the most debate, with the unusual mix of tense, possession and slang. The corrected versions bore no resemblance to the original, but that isn't the point.

Laying down your lyrics

If my experiences already have you trawling your mental jukebox for possibilities, I have some useful recommendations to consider before you go ahead and commit to a playlist. First, make sure you check any lyrics carefully before you decide to use them – some have thinly (and not so thinly) veiled sexual references. Milkshakes should remain in the yard.

It's best to double-space the lyrics to make room for corrections and if you want to focus on specific areas, such as punctuation or colloquialisms, it's helpful to identify these using different coloured pens. Another idea is to give each member of a group a different page of lyrics, then ask him or her to correct it before passing it on to the next person to repeat the exercise. This way children will identify different 'errors' and improve on each other's suggestions. (Again, you might want to let each member of the group use a different

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a recent analysis by the website SeatSmart, the average song requires the reading age of an eight-year-old; this age has declined in the past 10 years.



colour so his or her comments are easily recognised.) Lastly, try to use lyric sites where the writer is credited and include this information on the sheet – it highlights provenance from an early age.

The benefits of using a popular song for this task is that you get an immediate buy-in from the class, as you are using something familiar and important to them. By virtue of the words being lyrics, they often have poor punctuation, so almost any song is fair game. And the songs can be tailored to your children's most keen interests, which keeps the task fresh.

Working in these lesson, some of the children were the happiest I'd ever seen them – it's not often pupils set about adding semi-colons to a sentence with a broad smile on their face (and occasionally singing).

One unexpected side effect was that the children began looking more deeply at the content of the lyrics, and the sometimes ridiculous contradictions or metaphors used. I'll admit I set the children up on this one, but have you ever read 'Any Dream Will Do'?

CAR CRASH LYRICS

SOMETIMES EVEN THE MOST SUCCESSFUL RECORDING ARTISTS STRUGGLE WITH BASIC PRINCIPLES. HERE ARE SOME OF THE WORST OFFENDERS...

GWEN STEFANI, 'BUBBLE POP ELECTRIC'

*"I'm restless, can't you see
I try my bestest."*

Your "bestest", Gwen, would probably involve the word 'best'.

THE ROLLING STONES, 'I CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION'

"I Can't Get No Satisfaction."

Any, Mick, any. Tsk.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE 'WHAT GOES AROUND'

*"When you cheated girl,
my heart bleded girl."*

My heart bleeds too when I even hear this lyric, let alone read it.

JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP 'SMALL TOWN'

*"and I cannot forget from where
it is that I come from."*

This is confusing to read; it must have been even harder to sing.

SNOW PATROL 'CHASING CARS'

*"If I lay, if I just lay here / Would
you lie with with me, and just
forget the world?"*

Decide your tense, Gary Lightbody, and stick with it. Lay or lie – you choose.

*I closed my eyes, drew back the curtain
To see for certain what I thought I knew*

It didn't take long before the children spotted that it would be hard to see something for certain with your eyes closed! This extended into a conversation about the curtains being a mental reveal of the dream Joseph is having. We'd become literary analysts in just a few minutes.

Next time you want to recap some GPS rules, have a look at some lyrics. Just try to avoid any of your personal favourites. My party go-to of Basement Jaxx's 'Bingo Bango' fills me with shame when written down, and is pretty uncorrectable.



The power of performance

Forget staid recitals or silent reflection – poetry is enjoyed and communicated best together, out loud, with passion, as **Anna Blewett** explains...

When the CLiPPA (Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award) Schools Shadowing Scheme launched this year, classes across Britain were encouraged to discuss, interpret and perform the poems shortlisted for this prestigious poetry gong. The result? A new focus on the power of performance to give children ownership of the written word and a new relationship with language...

1 Share the pleasure of words

"I think as adults we can be quite fearful of poetry," says Naomi Cortes, a professional performer whose poetry programme supporting literacy at John Donne Primary

School in Southwark included taking part in the CLiPPA Schools Shadowing Scheme. "But most teachers know how to tell a story and a poem is just that. The first time I bring a new poem to the group I read it to them twice, and they can listen with their eyes shut or open. Then they see copies, so they see the words, and we say it out loud. I say to the kids 'The words are scrumalicious. Let's just see what they taste like in the mouth.' And then we go into the discussion. I might focus on a word that I think will be new to them. Or the topic. Or just the title. But we're always discussing the language. What does this mean? What does a poet want the audience to feel?"

2 Tailor your delivery

Addressing the individual needs of the child is crucial to excite and engage every

pupil. "It's our responsibility to find out how each child wants to engage with the poetry," says Naomi. "Working with whole classes I get to know who is very shy and who is outgoing. Some children have English as a second language or trouble with comprehension. But with a performance, if a child finds reading difficult they can just do the actions. If they're a bit more fearful they can hide themselves in the larger group. I work with a little boy in Year 3 who said to me 'I think poetry's really boring. I don't like it.' I told him, 'That's because you're not watching me. Watch me and I'll show you the poem.' Now he's putting his hand up and leading the discussion showing wonderful actions to bring to the words. He's made that journey in half a term. It's about what hook you can give to each child to engage them, whether that's visual, the speaking, the actions; there are so many different ways."



“TEACHERS SHOULD BECOME POETS”

POETRY IS ABOUT HAVING FUN WITH LANGUAGE, SAYS CLPE'S POETRY AWARD WINNER JOSEPH COELHO...

In 15 years working in schools I constantly come across teachers who are terrified of teaching poetry. They say 'I have no idea what to do' because they're not familiar with the basic poetic devices. And why should they be? It's quite a specialist area. But poetry keys into all other facets of writing. It's about your craft of using the written word. Poetry is wonderful at honing that skill.

If you're writing with small units, you can play. You can play with alliteration, having lots of words starting with the same letter; you can play with rhythm and rhyme. I try to think about a palette of language. 'Miss Flotsom' was inspired by a teacher I had in Reception who always had stories about travelling, so I was keen to layer that poem in the vocab of travel.

Right now kids are being very strongly encouraged to learn poems by heart; I have slight reservations. It's a good thing when it goes hand-in-hand with encouraging their own creativity, but it's such a shame that so many people's experience has been a negative one, being forced to learn something they find inaccessible.

My advice to the teachers who don't get a poet in? To become poets. Write a silly ditty and share it with the class. I'm constantly impressed by the impact of a teacher sharing their own writing. To a class of kids, the teacher is God! So taking that risk, doing the scary thing of sharing your words, means they'll become inspired to do the same.

Joseph's winning collection of poems, *Werewolf Club Rules*, is published by Frances Lincoln.



3 Find an audience

Cate Cooper is assistant head and English coordinator at Mandeville Primary School in St Albans, where the 'Chatterbox' group of Year 3 and 4 children chose to work on Joseph Coelho's poem 'School Today: Excuses For Mum'. "They performed the poem in whole school assembly," says Cate, "and then had the privilege of performing it at the awards ceremony too. The process helped them develop their ability to engage with an audience, using over-the-top gestures and facial expressions and vocal delivery so that every member of the audience could engage with the poem."

Valuable lessons about timing, waiting for a cue and responding to others helped the group wow the Shadowing Scheme's judges and win the chance to perform at the awards ceremony at the National Theatre. "They also realised how fantastic it feels to communicate comedy to an audience," says Cate. "They loved getting the laughs and learnt about pausing for them. The process has helped them to be more confident in class and lead the way in learning poems off by heart, which is integral to what we do as a school."

4 Celebrate the results

"Watching the video they sent for the Shadowing Scheme was really beneficial to the group," says Cate Cooper, "and showed them how much action matters. And how when speaking together everyone needs to be in time! Showing the video in school made

them really proud. In the process they learnt how to adapt their performance for different spaces - whether that was the school hall or the stage at the National Theatre - and the importance of really exaggerated expression so that everyone can be involved in the audience. They also learnt that performing on a stage is nerve-wracking so knowing the poem inside out and constant practice really helped." Naomi Cortes agrees. "Performing to others is such a wonderful way for children to highlight and showcase what they've learned. And in a more engaging way than just an examination."

5 Harness the energy

"At a school I work with in Southwark the governors have told me my poetry programme is having quite an effect on literacy and language skills," says Naomi, "But I know the teachers find the energy and engagement of kids starts to apply to other lessons too. Poetry's not a subject on its own; it's so easily linked to other areas on the curriculum." And the lasting benefits of performance? "It gives children more ownership of the work. Children are very active, highly imaginative, wonderful conversationalist and great storytellers. Using those performance skills and a more visual language brings an added dynamic to the written word."

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education's free *Poetry - We Know What Works* guide is available to download at clpe.org.uk



Creative writing ON DEMAND

Looking for ideas to help break children's collective writer's block? Literacy lesson plans in need of some spark? **Louie Stowell** might just be able to help...

Ideally, when writing a story, you'd be sitting in a peaceful place, with limitless time (and snacks) and no outside pressure. But when you're told, "Write me a story. Right now!" it can be difficult to actually get words down onto a page. As an author for Fiction Express, an e-book publisher in which authors write chapters based on children's choice for the storyline, live and in real time each week, this is something I face on a regular basis! However, there are some useful tricks to help you get words down on the page in spite of your rising panic/feelings of brain death and paralysis. Writing is a craft, and every craft has its tools. Using a formula isn't cheating: it's just the tools of the trade.

So here are a few tricks that any budding writer can use whenever he or she is faced with a blank page (or an empty lesson plan)...

What if...?

ALSO KNOWN AS... 'THE THOUGHT EXPERIMENT'

Lots of story ideas come from asking yourself the question, "What if?" You could try one of these or come up with your own "What if?"

"What if an alien took over the prime minister's body?"

"What if a girl found a dragon at the bottom of her garden?"

"What if you could read minds?"

"What if there were no such thing as death?"

X meets Y

ALSO KNOWN AS... 'THE MASH-UP'

This is a really simple formula for creating a story. Just pick two pre-existing characters and imagine what would happen if they met. They could be real people, fictional characters or archetypes. Here are a few ideas to play around with (I've gone with out-of-copyright options, but obviously kids could pick their favourite character too).

- Dracula
- Brave astronaut
- Lost explorer
- Hercules
- Clown
- Robot
- Annoying toddler
- Ninja
- Alice in Wonderland
(she doesn't have to be in Wonderland)
- Police officer
- Wounded soldier
- Grumpy pirate
- Wicked fairy
- Clever thief
- King Arthur

Think about the contrasting personalities of the two characters. Would they clash? Get on like a house on fire? Go on adventures together? Become mortal enemies? What are the characters' weaknesses? Strengths? And how would those weaknesses and strengths feed off one another?

Ruin their lives

ALSO KNOWN AS... 'DRAMATIC TENSION'

This is a story-building game, to be played in teams. I've used this in workshops, and it can be really handy for engaging the more reluctant children.

Before splitting into teams, everyone makes up a main character together, and decides on that character's goal in life (and in the story that you're going to write together). Then you form teams.

Flipping a coin to decide who goes first, the first team says what the character is going to do first to set about achieving their goal in life. Then it's the next team's turn. They invent a problem or obstacle to put in the character's way – this could be a hostile character, or an event.

Now the first team has to decide how to solve that problem. Then the second team tries once more to scupper the character's plans... and so on.

It's a great way to think about problems and solutions in stories, and can generate quite a lot of enjoyable rivalry.

True story

ALSO KNOWN AS... 'STEALING FROM REAL LIFE'

Take a story from the news – whether it's a local news story about something apparently petty and small, or a really big event that's splashed across the media all over the world. Then pick one person from that story and write about them. It doesn't have to be the main figure in the real-life drama – it could just be a witness. It could even be the journalist who is reporting the story. Think about how the events make them feel. Think about what they might do next. Think about what's not reported – are there any secrets hidden behind the story?

By using a real event, you have the beginnings of a plot already, but feel free to deviate from real events as wildly as you want. There's a real comfort from having something solid to work with.

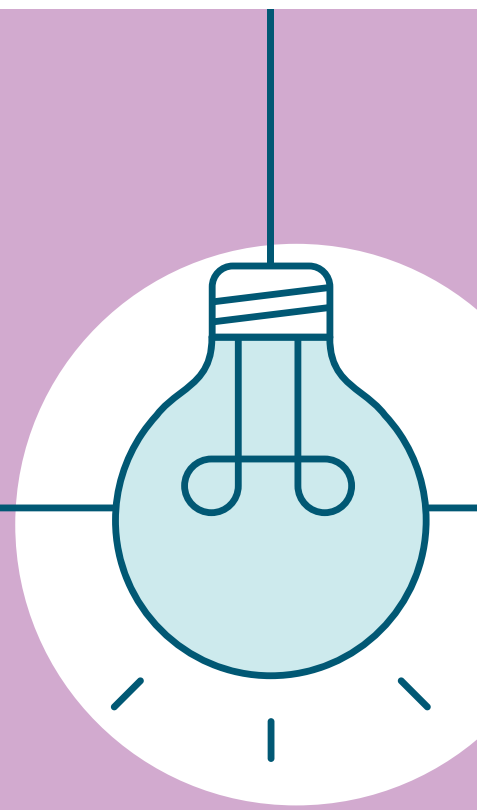
Pick a genre

As with a real-life event, having genre conventions to work with means you're not starting from a completely blank slate. Here are a few genres you could try:

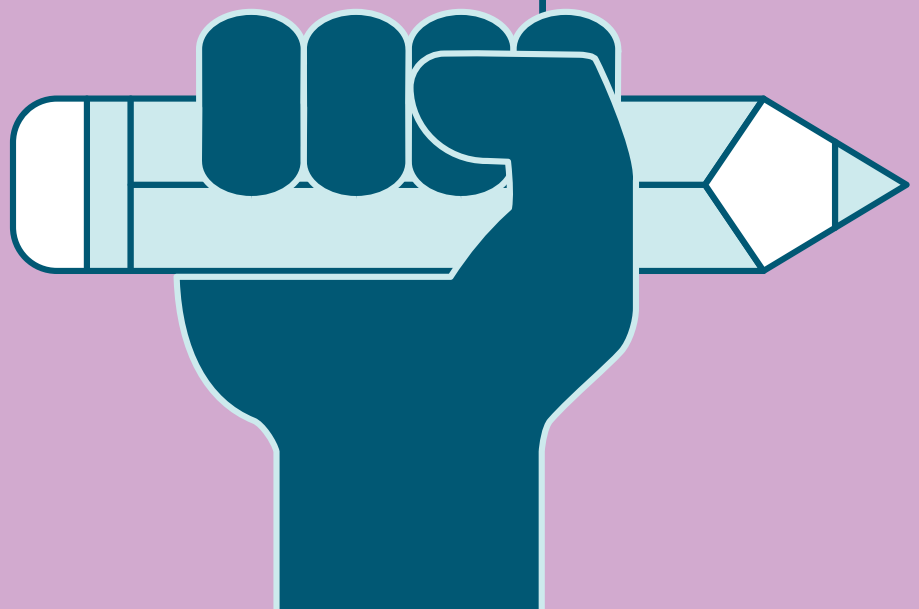
- **SPACE OPERA** like a soap opera, but in space; characters leading dramatic personal lives with lots of conflict and emotion, against a backdrop of interstellar travel and/or war.
- **HORROR** lock a bunch of characters in a haunted house or other scary place and create increasingly dangerous situations for them. Kill a few off, focusing on the ones who do silly things like go alone to check out the mysterious noise. Add monsters/ghosts/vampires and any other favourite things that go bump in the night.
- **FANTASY** mix elves and wizards with beautiful landscapes, magical objects and some kind of quest, plus a few mysterious helpers along the way and an even more shadowy villain who's trying to thwart the heroes at every turn.
- **DETECTIVE** start with a crime. Bring in a detective character (not forgetting to give them various personality flaws and other eccentricities) and take them through the process of solving the crime, with various red herrings and confusing clues along the way.
- **FAIRYTALE** princes, castles, spells, wishes, evil fairies and happy-ever-afters.

Writing interactive fiction for Fiction Express, I've definitely dipped liberally into numbers one, three and five. I won't comment on what I've stolen from real life! However, writing is all about finding something that captures your imagination, and running with it. Sometimes, it isn't always about the ending, it's about finding the story.

For more information on Fiction Express in Schools, visit schools.fictionexpress.co.uk



“Writing is all about finding something that captures your imagination, and running with it.”



LLynda set up a lunchtime writing club, 'Buzzwords', in her primary school. She began with Year 6 and, after a while, opened the club to children across KS2. Children were

given notebooks and encouraged to 'loosen their writing muscles' with a range of word hunts, lists and short writing exercises. She found oral anecdotes and memories powerful ways of engaging less confident writers.

She always read aloud a piece of writing to broaden the children's vocabulary, ideas and structures, and to increase their literary knowledge. A collection of simple writing prompts also proved effective – pictures, maps, word collections, opening lines and headlines. Children were happy to find their own materials and spaces, under desks as well as at them, and to write for 20 minutes. Lynda established an atmosphere of respectful attention so children who wanted to would read out their work. They were always keen to know their peers' responses and became fond of each other's distinctive humour.

In Lynda's view, children's increased ease with writing was the club's greatest success. This was especially the case for children with learning difficulties who had previously under-achieved because of low self-esteem, and for able writers hampered by the limitation of prescribed or over-structured writing tasks.

Join our CLUB

In the inspiring environment of a well-run writing group, children's literacy skills will flourish – so why not set up your own?

You may have heard of the National Writing Project UK (NWP UK). Perhaps you have attended one of its growing networks of 'writing clubs', which since 2009 have been bringing teachers together to write, share their work and enhance their practice. But have you considered setting up your own for your school's children? As the example above illustrates, the results can be well worth the effort...

Setting up a writing club

On your own:

Firstly, start writing today! Fix a regular time when you can sit quietly, and aim to write for at least 20 minutes. Sometimes this will be easy, at others hard, but you need to gain confidence to write even when you're not feeling like it. Try out the ideas you plan to use with the writing group.

Once you've done this for a week or so, you'll be ready to start. You don't have to share any of this with your club or class, but it really helps to write alongside pupils, using the same prompts, and to be prepared to show, share and discuss some of the evidence.

With the children:

Sound out your individuals and classes. Identify your keen writers. Discuss the idea with them. Establish a convenient time (lunchtime or after-school), so that you can meet once a week for at least half a term before you review or change anything. Engage your enthusiasts by word of mouth, and advertise.

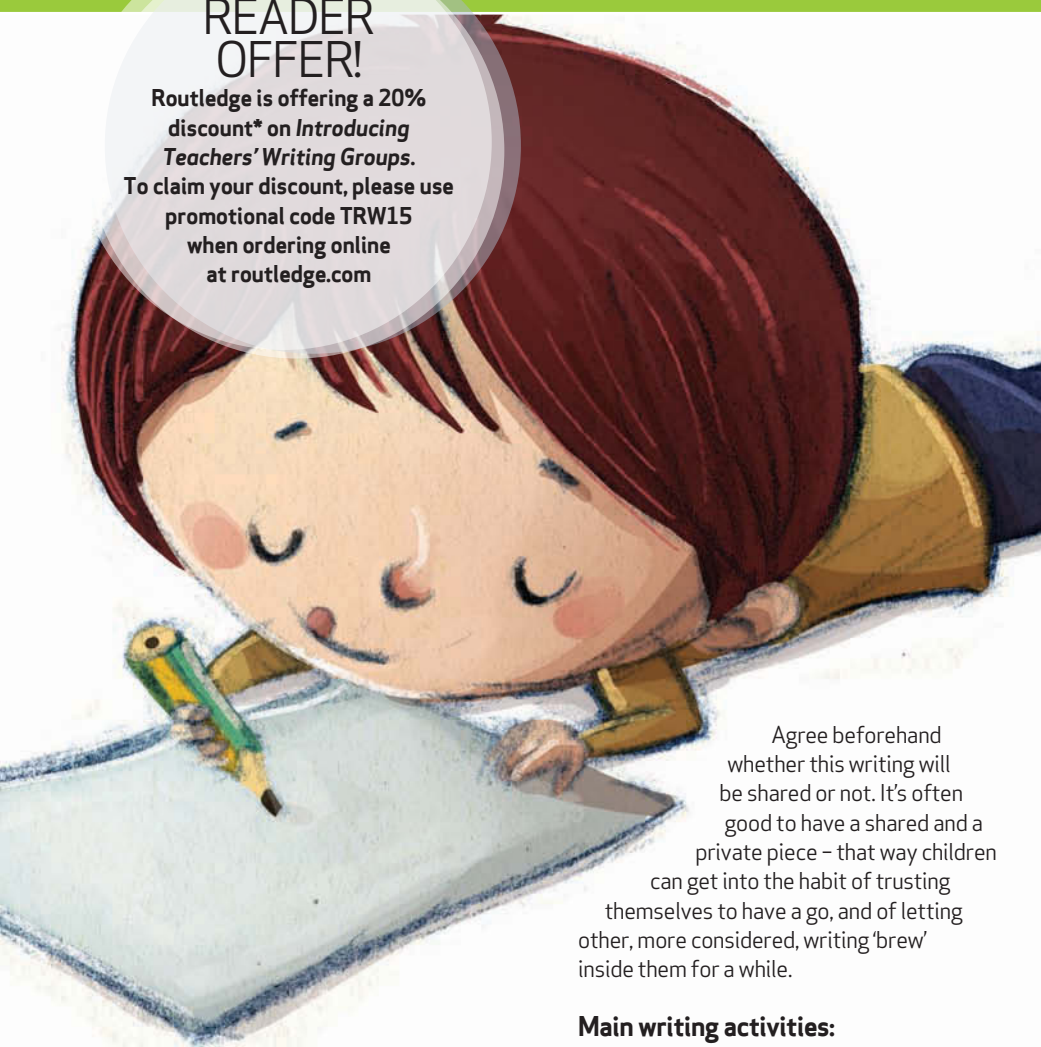
In a primary school assembly with about 300 children, one teacher announced the start of her Year 5 and 6 writing club with these words: "I will be doing this in Mrs X's classroom at lunchtime. If you would like to come along, we're going to be writing things that we want to write and, you know, it's for fun, basically."

Seventeen children came to the first session and twenty-five to the second. The club is still running after two years.



READER OFFER!

Routledge is offering a 20% discount* on *Introducing Teachers' Writing Groups*. To claim your discount, please use promotional code TRW15 when ordering online at routledge.com



Agree beforehand whether this writing will be shared or not. It's often good to have a shared and a private piece – that way children can get into the habit of trusting themselves to have a go, and of letting other, more considered, writing 'brew' inside them for a while.

Main writing activities:

After a while this is best left to individuals to decide, but at first, some children may appreciate some guidance. Try:

extending your writing from one of the first exercises (take a word, idea or phrase as a starting point);

writing in voices or from a particular perspective – what the woman in the picture was really thinking; how the artefact came to be here; what the tree remembers;

using snatches of overheard conversations or 'found' phrases to launch you into your own writing;

finding an object/picture/view that interests you and write about it twice, moving your writing position/perspective to do so – once from one point of view, once from another.

Again, agree beforehand how you will share the writing that takes place. Establish ground rules, for example, listening to each other attentively and not being afraid just to say thank you. It's useful to model how to respond to the writing process, rather than the product:

- Where did you get your ideas from?
- Which words/parts came easily and where did you struggle?

WRITING RESOURCES

The following items will help keep your children inspired for hours...

- Small boxes and envelopes, plain and coloured paper, card
- A range of writing implements
- Collections of postcards, pictures, quotations
- A book box with novels, picture books and poetry
- Magazines and newspapers to cut up
- CD/DVDs: music, short films or clips
- Ephemeral texts – newsletters, tickets brochures, catalogues and packaging
- A props box, hats and scarves, glasses, glove puppets
- A collection of objects – buttons, fir cones, jewellery, toys, bric-a-brac, shells, stones
- Once the group is established, it's good to ask children to bring and add ideas, texts, objects, pictures, DVDs of their own.

- What would you like to do next with your writing?

When children are ready to share, model attentive listening to tone and content (it helps to hear the writing before you see it). This process may be better in pairs at first, but where possible it's fascinating to read around the group and hear what different writing has emerged during the session from similar stimuli.

Taking it further

You might like to enhance your group by writing together online. Most schools have a VLE with separate forums that can be closed except to those who are password approved. This enables all children to see each others' writing and give feedback. A teacher of one Year 6 class said that the biggest boost to children's writing confidence came from appreciation and suggestions from their peer group.

This article is an edited extract of *Introducing Teachers' Writing Groups* by Jenifer Smith and Simon Wrigley (Routledge), which is available now. It explains the importance of said groups and offers guidance on setting up your own. Visit routledge.com/education. For a full list of NWP UK writing clubs, visit nwp.org.uk

Get them engaged

Your club should be fun and stress-free, with a range of quick writing games and short challenges. Meet in a quiet place. Give each writer a notebook and pen, or encourage them to buy a nice one. Establish ground rules about privacy, experimentation, practice, sharing and reflection. Write alongside the children. Get to know and value the different voices. Celebrate diversity and withhold judgement. Be prepared for the membership to change over time, but keep the invitations personal and positive, and keep repeating them.

Quick writing exercises:

You need something easy to break the ice and 'loosen up the writing muscles' – and "If it's a lunchtime club you have to have an activity ... that they can do while they eat their sandwiches..." noted one group's leader! The following list may provide some inspiration:

- Titles, newspaper headlines, opening lines ... closing lines
- Dilemmas
- Lists of words, word tiles to arrange
- A simple stem-structure such as "I like...", "I hate..."
- A 'scavenger hunt' of the place you are in
- Freewriting for five minutes without shopping



“Good morning, BOYS & GIRLS”

Books can open up new worlds for children, says **Irene Picton** – so let's stop limiting their choices through gender-specific marketing...

In 2013, I co-wrote an article for an academic journal about what seemed to be a regressive reappearance of books marketed explicitly by gender.

The titles that inspired the piece were *How to Be Gorgeous* and *How to Be Clever* (no prizes for guessing which was pink with a picture of a girl on the front) – but these were only the more egregious examples from a variety of similar publications springing up at the time. Yet one of the many wonderful things about books is the opportunity they offer the reader to consider others' lives and experiences. Along with our aversion to outdated gender stereotypes, we were very concerned about the impact that a more prevalent polarisation of children's books by gender might have on exploratory reading for all children.

It is tempting to speculate whether this turn of events may have been, in part, an unfortunate and unforeseen by-product of well-intended attempts to narrow the 'gender gap' in reading in the UK. The poorer literacy attitudes, behaviour and performance of boys have long been noted in national and international research. Even in 2014, when the National Literacy Trust's annual literacy survey showed record levels of children and young people enjoying reading, there was a gap of 15 percentage points between boys and girls saying that

they enjoyed reading (62% vs. 47%), and nearly twice as many boys as girls agreed with the statement "Reading is more for girls than boys" (15.0% vs. 7.9%).

Gap years

The association between reading enjoyment and reading attainment is well known, and narrowing this gap has therefore been a priority among not only educationalists, but also authors and publishers. One approach was to try and make books as 'boy-friendly' as possible, both in terms of content and cover design. However, while books featuring subject matter considered likely to motivate boys to read (action, adventure, sport and so on) may undoubtedly have been effective for some children, the very concept of 'books for boys' has the unfortunate side-effect of excluding not just children not of the target gender, but also those of the target gender who don't happen to share the interests prescribed for them. Some of the lazier tactics adopted by publishers (with a quick profit rather than the greater good in mind) reinforced this further; for example, adding a 'boy-friendly' sticker to particular covers simply perpetuated the sense that other books are somehow inherently 'boy-unfriendly'.

Revisiting the subject of gendered marketing in children's books two years on, it would appear that, broadly speaking, things have changed for the better. In the wake of campaigns such as Let Toys Be Toys (and their Let Books Be Books campaign), Pink



“Readers are more than happy to read about characters with qualities that may not, traditionally, have been associated with their gender”

Stinks and Princess Awesome, and a growing emphasis on the importance of encouraging girls to take STEM subjects and consider careers in industries such as programming and engineering, the tide of pink and blue book covers appears to have largely, if not entirely, abated.

While this is likely to have been the result of many factors, Let Books Be Books’ petition and letters to children’s publishers using gendered marketing resulted in immediate assurances from many that they would no longer be printing gender-specific titles. In addition, a host of well-known children’s authors went on to speak out in support of the campaign, sustaining the considerable media attention it had already attracted. Thankfully, recent visits to local bookshops would appear to indicate that explicitly-gendered marketing in children’s books is now much less evident, and indeed may have gone the same way as other publishing fads (with the notable exception of the sticker and colouring book sections, which for some reason largely remain ribbons of pink and blue).

Mixing it up

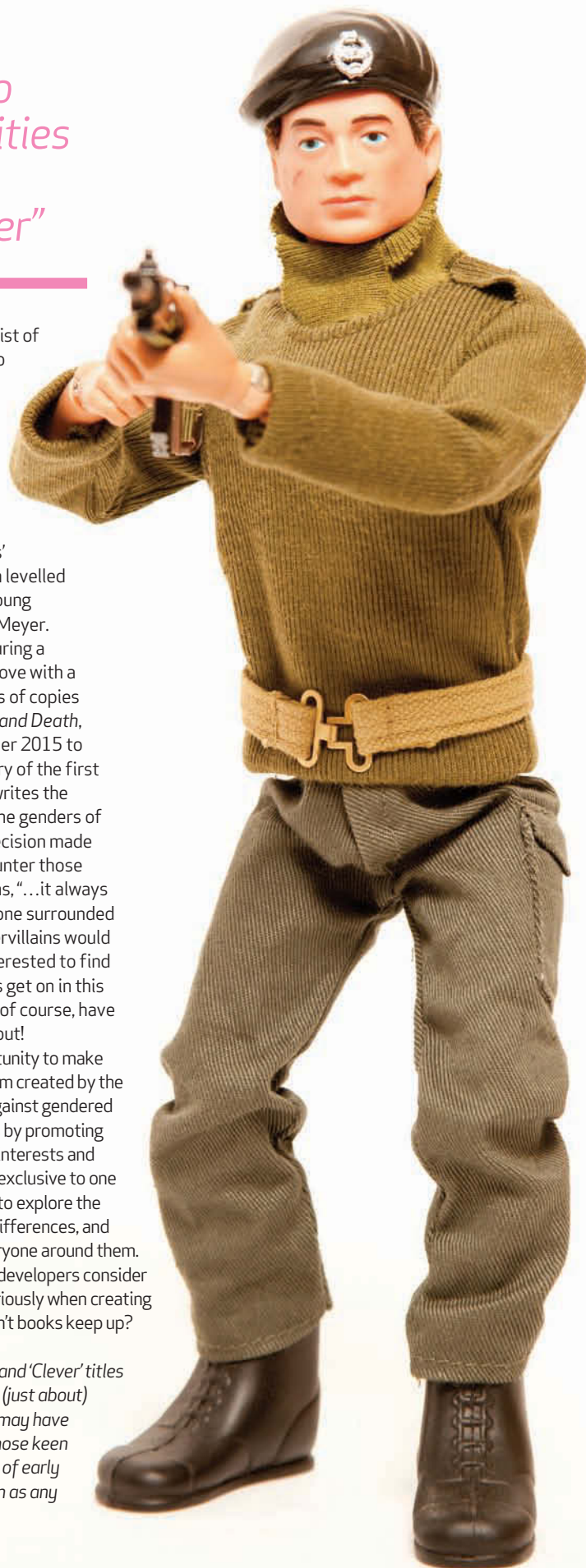
This is not to say that there is no place for glittery pink books or superhero stories (as part of a ‘balanced diet’, as they say), and there is still plenty of room for characters with qualities that might be more conventionally ascribed to their gender (for example, Horrid Henry and Percy Jackson). However, the phenomenal success of titles such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Hunger Games* shows that readers are more than happy to read about characters with qualities that may not, traditionally, have been associated with their gender. Greg Heffley, the eponymous Wimpy Kid, not only lacks the magical or super-powers that might usually be expected to oblige him to save the world, but his best-selling series revolves mostly around his relationships with family and friends (subject matter that boys may not, by some, have been expected to enjoy reading about). Katniss Everdeen, the complex and

capable female protagonist of the *Hunger Games*, is also quite the opposite of a princess awaiting rescue. Yet both of these series are extremely popular with children and young people, regardless of gender.

The ‘damsel in distress’ theme was an accusation levelled at another bestselling Young Adult author, Stephanie Meyer. Her *Twilight* series, featuring a teenage girl who falls in love with a vampire, has sold millions of copies around the world. In *Life and Death*, a title published in October 2015 to mark the 10th anniversary of the first *Twilight* book, Meyer rewrites the first book but reverses the genders of the main characters, a decision made in part, reportedly, to counter those criticisms. As she explains, “...it always bothered me a bit... anyone surrounded by superheroes and supervillains would be in distress.” Those interested to find out how the protagonists get on in this re-imagined version will, of course, have to read the book to find out!

We now have an opportunity to make the most of the momentum created by the successful movements against gendered marketing. We can do this by promoting titles that recognise that interests and personality traits are not exclusive to one gender, and help children to explore the fascinating and positive differences, and indeed similarities, in everyone around them. As a final note, many app developers consider gender neutrality very seriously when creating apps for children - shouldn’t books keep up?

Footnote: The ‘Gorgeous’ and ‘Clever’ titles of 2013 still appear to be (just about) available, although sales may have been driven as much by those keen to get hold of an example of early 21st century anachronism as any genuine buyers.





STOCK YOUR SHELVES

Brilliant books that don't fall into the gender trap

1 Pearl Power

(M Elliot, I Love Mel, £7.99)

When five-year-old Pearl moves house and school, she meets a boy as convinced that boys are better than girls as she is that boys and girls are equal. Pearl's kindness and wisdom win the day in this book that is as beautiful in presentation as it is in message.

2 Made by Raffi

(C Pomranz and M Chamberlain, Frances Lincoln, £7.99)

A wonderful story about a shy boy who doesn't enjoy the commotion of the playground, preferring to knit his dad a scarf for his birthday. Some of the other children tease him a little, but when a special costume is needed for the school play, Raffi's gift for creating beautiful things comes into its own.

3 The Odd Egg

(E Gravett, Macmillan Children's Books, £6.99)

Chicken, flamingo, owl and parrot have all laid an egg and are happily tending them, waiting for them to hatch. Duck is the only bird that doesn't have one – until he finds a very special, spotty egg of his own to take care of. This story explores feeling different, single parenthood and adoption with Gravett's usual delicacy of touch and expressive illustrations. Other great titles celebrating difference include *The Crocodile Who Didn't Like Water* and *Dogs Don't Do Ballet*.

4 Rosie Revere, Engineer

(A Beatty and D Roberts, Abrams, £6.99)

A book that is both a work of art and a work of inspiration, and another (like Raffi) title shortlisted for the Little Rebels Award. Rosie is a quiet child who loves to think up new inventions and dreams of being an engineer one day. Her first big project is to build a flying machine – will she be successful?

5 Ultimate Survival Guide for Kids

(T. Connell, QED Publishing, £7.99)

Adventurous types will find this book packed with hundreds of top tips and colour diagrams, covering everything from building a basic shelter to surviving avalanches and escaping from sharks and crocodiles. Readers will learn a host of new skills including reading the stars, telling the time by the sun and tying knots.

6 Robot Girl

(M Blackman, Barrington Stoke, £5.99)

A futuristic twist on the Frankenstein tale, this page-turner from an ex-UK Children's Laureate tells the story of Claire, a famous inventor's child, who is desperate to discover what her dad has been working on in his secret lab – but it isn't at all what she expected. A gripping story presented in a format more accessible for less confident and dyslexic readers.

7 The Boy in the Dress

(D Walliams, Harper Collins Children's Books, £6.99)

Comedian and extremely successful children's writer David Walliams' funny and insightful debut title features twelve-year-old Dennis, an ordinary boy who happens to enjoy both football and wearing dresses. The latter starts as a secret but when he meets an older girl at school he begins to experiment with an alter ego, Denise. Another great title exploring difference.

8 Mortal Engines

(P Reeve, Scholastic, £7.99)

A fast-moving tale set in a time when cities move mechanically across devastated landscapes, this beautifully written and cleverly-plotted adventure story features protagonists much more vividly-painted than the standard 'brave boy' and 'passive/feisty' girl. Tom is often anxious and uncertain and Hester is not conventionally beautiful, and only intermittently good-natured. A fabulous story that fans of Pullman's Northern Lights trilogy will enjoy. Younger readers will find similarly natural characterisation in Reeve's more recent *Oliver and the Seawigs*.

9 What's up with Jody Barton?

(H Long, Macmillan, £6.99)

Fifteen-year-old non-identical twins Jolene and Jody both have the world's biggest crush – on the same guy, the gorgeous Liam. But while Jolene has had loads of boyfriends and is an expert flirt, having feelings for a boy is new to Jody. Who will get his attention? A brilliantly-written tale with a huge twist!



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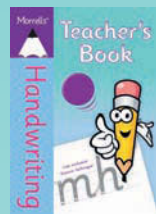
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CAREY FLUKER-HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories

Seriously FUNNY

Roald Dahl's stories are often hilarious, but behind the larger-than-life characters, imaginative settings and humorous situations there are also thought-provoking issues and questions for children to consider, says **Carey Fluker Hunt...**

Dahl is a master storyteller and his books simply fizz with memorable characters and outrageous happenings. They're also very funny, in a wild and subversive way beloved of children across the globe. Who wouldn't want to laugh at the expense of the powerful, especially when you're small and powerless yourself? It's easy to undervalue the role of humour in children's books, but funny stories are important, not just because they're entertaining but because – as Michael Rosen noted – “the underlying causes of the laughter are serious”.

It's the quality of the 'serious thinking' beneath Dahl's comedy that sets him apart. Yes, his plots and characters are memorable, and yes, his stories are daringly (and cathartically) hilarious. But they also give their audience something of substance to bite down on and digest in order to mature and grow. The 'runty' BFG is bullied by his peers, poor hungry Charlie Bucket must behave decently while others succumb to selfishness and greed, and fearfully intelligent Matilda is abused by her parents and headteacher – the very people who are supposed to be caring for her. In fact, the essential unreliability of adults is Dahl's biggest and most serious idea, and something that holds a terrifying fascination for his readers.

Despite this, Dahl's world-view is essentially positive, and his children always triumph – assuming they use their imagination, mind-power and sheer exuberant anarchy, that is. No wonder Dahl's stories are so perennially popular!

“Funny stories are important because ‘the underlying causes of the laughter are serious’...”

Illustration © Quentin Blake, Matilda

Getting into the texts

Read, enjoy and discuss *The BFG*, *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as part of a shared reading for pleasure experience before taking your explorations further.

1. Delighted to meet you

Dahl's descriptions are detailed and vivid: the BFG wears a "dirty old leather waistcoat with no buttons" and Willy Wonka moves with "quick, jerky little movements...like a squirrel". List the characters in all three books, and look at the phrases Dahl uses to describe them. Which descriptions work best, and why?

Make a collection of clothes and props associated with Dahl's characters, and use them to re-enact scenes from the books. Or use other dressing-up items to create new characters: a friend for Mrs Wormwood or another giant, perhaps?

Write about your character, making your descriptions as vivid as Dahl's.

2. "I is speaking the most terrible wigglish..."

Dahl loves language and so do his characters. The BFG's vocabulary, for example, is so richly satisfying that it doesn't seem to matter whether a word makes sense as long as it sounds good – and makes us laugh.

Delve into the book to find as much *wigglish* as you can. What are *bumplehammers*, *snozzcumbers* and *crodscollop*, do you think? Use the text to help you write definitions to create your own *Gobblefunk Dictionary*.

Matilda comes up with the ultimate 'underdog power' – she's able to move objects with her mind

Taking it further...

1. Imagination & invention

Dahl's imagination never fails him, and he's always urging his readers to be curious and come up with their own ideas. Why not create an 'Inventing Room'? Take inspiration from Willy Wonka, Matilda and the BFG, and equip it with different areas for different purposes...

Sweet factory

"The place was like a witch's kitchen..." Exploring tactile materials to 'invent sweets' and role-playing the action can lead to richer and more satisfying writing and discussion. Supply your factory with pans and spoons, and any other 'scientific props' you can acquire. Provide coloured water and other safe materials (washing up liquid? cornflour?) to mix concoctions, remembering to keep lab notes and label your potions. Now write some recipes!

Search the text for descriptions of sweets. Compile a catalogue for Willy Wonka and illustrate it. Include your own creations, then ask another class to spot which sweets are which.

Dream store

"Dreams is very mysterious things..." which float like "little wispy-misty bubbles..."



Have some fun outside with a bubble machine and extend the idea in PE by interpreting Dahl's descriptions of the way dreams look and move. What would you do if you were a nightmare, stuck inside a jar? And would a calmer dream move differently?

Build on this experience to make collaged and/or sewn 3D 'sculptures' of dreams to put in jars. Label them clearly. The BFG can make any dream he chooses, a bit like "mixing a cake". Write recipes for different dreams, using the BFG's 'dreamstarters' to inspire you.

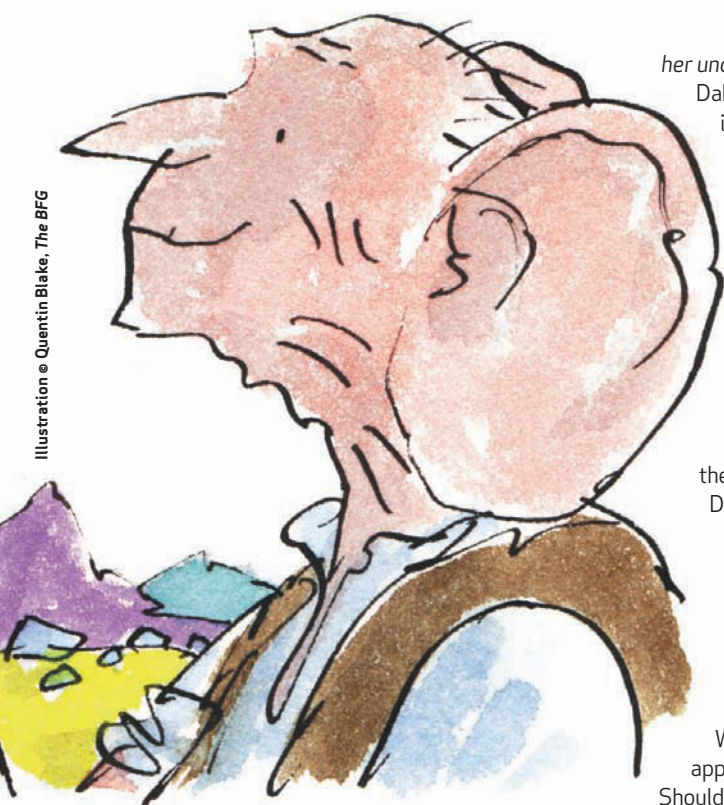
Matilda's library

Set up a reading corner full of stories and picture books to spark curiosity and inspire a creative response. Include vintage copies of the classics mentored by Dahl. The texture, weight and smell of old books have a special power and charm, and children who wouldn't normally read Dickens might want to 'do a Matilda' and take a look.

2. Being the underdog

"You're darn right it's like a war... and the casualties are terrific. We are the Crusaders, the gallant army fighting for our lives with hardly any weapons at all..." Dahl hated the casual bullying and abuse that went on at his school, and many of his books celebrate the underdog. The BFG, for





her understanding..."

Dahl's life spanned a period that included two world wars and he saw active service as a fighter pilot. He also suffered personal tragedies, including the death of his seven-year-old daughter – so it comes as no surprise to find some 'big ideas' beneath the anarchic verve and humour of his storytelling. Why not debate some of the ethical issues raised by Dahl's characters?

a. "I shipped them all over here, every man, woman and child in the Oompa-Loompa tribe. It was easy. I smuggled them over in large packing cases with holes in them..."

Willy Wonka has an autocratic approach to running his factory. Should he have uprooted the Oompa-Loompas and put them to work?

Do they have any rights? And how does Wonka's treatment of them compare with the way he acts towards the families of the children who disobey him?

b. The BFG can hear "all the secret whisperings of the world" and although some are wonderful, some are not. Felled trees make a noise "like an old man... when he is dying slowly", and the BFG doesn't believe in eating meat: "The human beans is making rules to suit themselves... but the rules they is making do not suit the little piggy-wiggies..." How far should we go to 'do the right thing', like the BFG? And what is the 'right thing', anyway?

c. "I don't want a grown-up person at all... (they) will try to do things (their)... way and not mine. So I want to have a child..." Is this a good reason for Willy Wonka to make Charlie his heir? What if Charlie changed his mind as he got older? How should power be used, to make sure it's not abused?

d. All three stories talk about celebrating differences and standing up to bullies. Research the history of schools and look at how they've changed. What do we do now to keep children safe? Should more improvements be made?

Matilda the musical is still showing at Cambridge Theatre, London, with educational packages available – why not plan a visit and see if/how it changes your pupils' ideas about the text?

example, is a 'runt' who is bullied by the other giants, and Charlie is so poor and unassuming that many people overlook him. As for Matilda, she suffers from such severe neglect and abuse, both at home and at school, that it's a miracle she survives at all.

But villains and underdogs are perennially popular, and stories allow children to explore emotions that might be threatening in other contexts...

Why is it interesting to have an 'underdog' as the main character?

Compare Dahl's adult and child characters. What kind of power do the adults have, and what do they do with it? (*The 'Chokey', Verruca's father spoiling her, Mrs Clonkers' orphanage...*)

What about the children? (*Lavender's newt trick, Augustus' disobedience, Sophie's quiet approach to problem-solving...*)

Matilda comes up with the ultimate 'underdog power' – she's able to move objects with her mind. What superpower would you like to have, and how could it be used to make the world a fairer place?

Dahl gives us the occasional 'true adult' (such as Miss Honey and the BFG) who can be relied upon by the children in their care. Take a look at the way Willy Wonka behaves. Is he a 'true adult', do you think?

3. Debating with Dahl

"The extraordinary giant was disturbing her ideas. He seemed to be leading her towards mysteries that were beyond

THE BIG 100!

2016 is the centenary of Roald Dahl's birth and a packed year of celebrations to mark this milestone is planned. Here are some highlights...

FEBRUARY

An exhibition, created in partnership with the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre, opens at London's Southbank Centre. Expect the museum's archive to "come alive in magical and unexpected ways". Summer will see the exhibition relocate to Cardiff's Wales Millennium Centre.

MARCH

World Book Day is 3 March, and Puffin is publishing a special £1 book, *The Great Mouse Plot* by Roald Dahl, illustrated by Quentin Blake, to mark the occasion.

JUNE

The Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary is published by Oxford University Press – aimed at ages eight plus, it celebrates Dahl's use of the English language, and his additions to it...

JULY

The BFG comes to a cinema near you, courtesy of director Steven Spielberg, and The Summer Reading Challenge, organised by The Reading Agency for ages 4–11, gets underway.

SEPTEMBER

Roald Dahl's birthday, 13 September, is Roald Dahl Day, and schools are invited to host their own party for Roald Dahl 100 – download your free party kit from roalddahl.com. This is also the month to watch out for the Puffin Virtually Live: Roald Dahl Show, broadcast into schools by Penguin Random House, and get involved in Dahlicious Dress Up Day to raise money for Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity.

DECEMBER

A new animated version of Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* airs on the BBC.

For more information on the complete programme of events for Roald Dahl 100, visit roalddahl.com



Cast your SPELL

Learning how (and why) certain letters fit together to make words can be a fascinating and rewarding experience that spans the curriculum, says **Rebecca Cosgrave...**

Don't worry about your spellings; we've all said it. We want a really imaginative, creative piece of writing and we're concerned that a focus on spelling will detract from the content. At other times – the Friday spelling test, for example – we require children to 'worry' greatly about their spelling. But what does this communicate about the place of spelling within the writing process, and why should children only 'worry' about spellings in selected contexts?

What this illustrates is that spelling is perceived to be a challenge for many children, and teaching it a challenge for many teachers.

The 2015 national curriculum has elevated the importance of spelling considerably; it could even be argued that improving accuracy in transcriptional elements lies at its very heart. But while we could debate the

ethical and pedagogical issues relating to this at length, we still have to teach the new curriculum and make it work for the children in our classes.

In many of the schools in which I work, spelling has not been taught as well as it might. And when the introduction of the Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar test increased the emphasis on spelling within KS2 SATs (it is now worth double the marks) the outcomes reflected this. However, we don't just teach spelling because that is what we're told to do. Spelling can be engaging, exciting and empowering. Learning about how our language works can grip children, enable them to generalise, and encourage them to find out more. So what makes for effective teaching of spelling?

1 Make it integral to the writing process *This means teaching spelling effectively, but ensuring learning is constantly applied in writing:*

Don't just focus on single word work. Children need to learn to spell words in context, which will only happen if you teach and assess in context. Learning must be applied in sentences and paragraphs in order to be sure children can (and will) use this learning when they write independently.

Teach spelling strategies for all parts of the writing process. In *No Nonsense Spelling* we target three types of spelling strategies: strategies at the point of writing (what do I do if I don't know how to spell a word as I am writing?); identifying misspelt words (what does proofreading look like and how do I spot words I may have spelt

wrong?); and strategies for learning words (how do I build my bank of known words and learn the tricky ones?)

Practise what you preach! We need to model all of the strategies we have taught whenever we write with children. It's no good expecting children to 'have a go' at unknown words as they write if we don't do it ourselves – or require them to do it when we are with them.

Teach spelling whenever children are writing. Spelling is a cross-curricular skill and we need to apply the same high standards and effective strategies at all times.





2 Actually teach it... don't just learn the spellings

We need to ensure we devote quality time to the direct teaching of spelling, of which learning spellings is a part. Effective teaching needs to be:

Regular, systematic and progressive.

Many of you may recognise these principles from the guidance on the teaching of phonics. The move from phonics for reading in FS and Y1 into phonics for spelling and a wider spelling curriculum from Y2-6, builds on the effective pedagogies used in the best phonics teaching.

Linked to meaning. Much of the word structure of our language is linked to meaning. We need to expose children to this in order to help them generalise. For example, adding the suffix '-ly' creates an adverb. We need to teach this when we tackle grammar, spelling and writing in context. It can be fascinating to explore the etymology of words too. For example, did you know that 'grammar' and 'glamour' are derived from the same source? The term 'grammar' goes all the way back to Latin and Greek, where it referred to all aspects of the study of literature. In the Middle Ages it came to be associated with just the linguistic parts, and particularly with the study

of Latin. The fancy, educated class studied Latin and also things like magic and astrology, so the word grammar sometimes referred to that aspect too. A mispronounced version, glamour, went on to stand for the magical, enchanting quality it is used to represent today! (reference: mentalfloss.com).

Based on curriculum expectations, but adapted to meet the needs of the class/ group, which are informed by assessment for learning. In *No Nonsense Spelling* we suggest a range of assessments strategies, but particularly error analysis.

Multi-sensory. Children learn about spelling in as many and varied ways as they learn anything else. We need to use images to support our teaching and to support their learning. Images can help to contextualise spelling so that we are focused on vocabulary and related words as well as patterns and conventions. Using images to support teaching can also provide hooks for children when they are trying to remember how to spell words.

"The 2015 national curriculum has elevated the importance of spelling considerably; it could even be argued that improving accuracy in transcriptional elements lies at its very heart."

3 Ensure children do the work, not the teacher!

Being a good speller is largely about taking responsibility for using what you know to the best of your ability. Strategies for developing this include:

a) Using spelling journals and giving children ownership of these. Let them make choices and decisions about how to organise and record their learning.

b) Setting clear 'non-negotiables' that are based on effort and the efficient use of resources, rather than being correct. For example, if a word is written on the board or on a table top chart, the expectation is that you spell it correctly.

c) Using praise and feedback to focus on the effective use of strategies and previous knowledge, rather than always on correct spelling.

d) Ensure that marking is targeted and enables children to develop their spelling through responding.

We need to teach spelling better because it is an entitlement for children, but also because it can be fascinating, rewarding, engaging, challenging, scintillating – all words I wouldn't choose to use if I wasn't confident about spelling them.

Together with the team at Babcock LDP (babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/literacy), Rebecca Cosgrove has written *No Nonsense Spelling* for Raintree.

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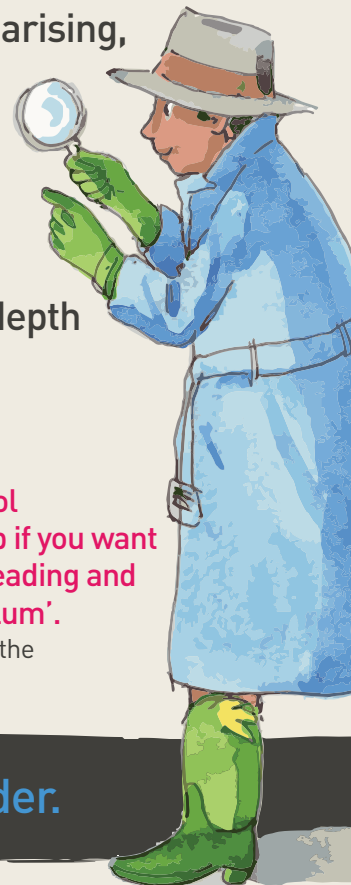
- Ofsted report, Whetley Academy, Bradford, 2014

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- Judy Clark Primary Advisor at the National Literacy Trust



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Crafty opportunities

This school year Mr Pritt and his friends are touring the schools of the UK and Ireland for the "Mr Pritt Roadshow"! At every school they visit they will lead a fun-filled arts & crafts activity session guaranteed to put a smile on children's faces.

By buying packs of Pritt Sticks, you can win the chance for Mr Pritt to come to your school as part of the Roadshow.

For more details visit www.prittworld.co.uk/teachers



No-prep creative writing

Starting a Creative Writing Club at lunchtime or after school is a proven way to boost writing. However, preparing activities is a time commitment. Creative Writing Club takes away the hassle, providing new writing challenges every week: superheroes, pirates, unicorns, gladiator, Boudica, enchanted forest, Vikings etc. The Apps zoom your students through the planning and guide their writing. Plus, why not use the 'Accelerated Writing' Apps in class? You'll save hours of planning and banish pupils' fear of the blank page.

Visit www.creativewritingclub.co.uk/signup or call 0845 838 5526 to set up your free trial.

Good THINKING

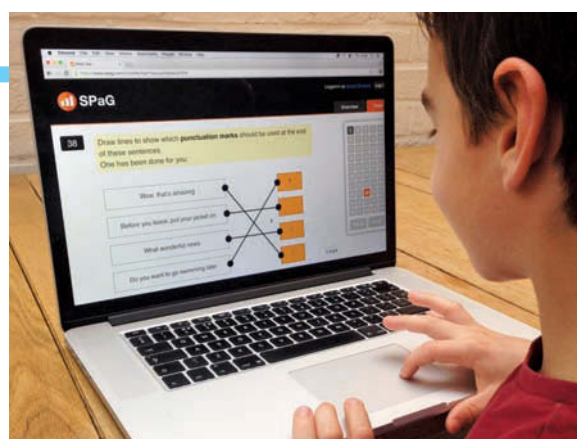
4 great ideas to boost pupils' literacy across the curriculum

Page turners

If there's one thing that teachers, parents and pupils all agree on, it's that Readathon is a brilliant way to get kids reading! Order a free Readathon kit stashed with everything needed to run a sponsored read, including age appropriate sponsor cards, posters, bookmarks and a DVD. Kids can read whatever they fancy for fun – from comics to classics. The money raised provides brand new books and

storytellers for children in a local hospital, which not only motivates kids to read, but gives schools a smart way to target both literacy and community cohesion at the same time. And 20% of the amount raised comes back to your school in free Scholastic book vouchers along with two National Book tokens. What's not to love?

Order your kit now! readathon.org/order or call: 08456061151



SPAG success

Frustrated by the lack of gap analysis tools available for assessing children's grammar knowledge, a Year 6 teacher – along with some generous investors and an award winning software development team – launched SPAG.com. Now, two years later, SPAG.com is used by over 2200 primary schools and offers 100 assessments covering all grammar and punctuation objectives from Y1-Y6. With all tests recently updated for 2016, now is good time to get in touch for a free demo.

Contact Liz at support@spag.com for more information. **SPAG.com**



Chris Riddell

“Books with brilliant pictures offered the best of both worlds for me”

Children’s laureate **Chris Riddell** learnt early on not to rely on the publisher’s blurb to identify a good story

I remember learning to read very, very clearly. First of all, I recall my anxiety about *not* being able to read, and a strong sense that this was a task I had to master. My school used the wonderful Ladybird reading books, and so I dutifully applied myself to the world of Peter and Jane, which turned out to be considerably less thrilling than I’d hoped. There was lots of having tea with mummy and daddy, and perhaps the occasional shopping trip... but not much by the way of adventure. Still, I toiled on, and there were landmark moments as I steadily climbed that ladder. At one point, when I was perhaps on book 2c, I wandered into a neighbouring classroom and saw on a table the book that represented the very pinnacle of literacy: *12c*, the very highest title in the series. On closer inspection, though, it appeared from the illustrations that Peter and Jane were still leading the same, rather unexciting lives – just with more words.

Just as I was telling myself that one day, I would be able to understand *12c*, and when I did, I would have cracked this reading business completely, I noticed another little book next to it. It was called *Agaton Sax*, and from the pictures alone I could tell that it was much more interesting than Peter and Jane, although the sentences were more complex. So I borrowed it, and worked my way through it – I understood maybe one word in five, but through context and the illustrations I got the gist of the story, which was about a Swedish detective with a bloodhound who loved cream cakes. It was exhilarating, and I suddenly realised that *this* is what reading was. *Agaton Sax*, then, was the book that made me a reader – and once I’d finished it, I went off in search of more stories like it.

As my competency grew, I read anything I could get my hands on. And quite early on, I discovered the joy of *not* judging a book by its cover, but instead, finding out what delights it held simply by diving in and beginning to read. There were a number of stories I found that way that I probably wouldn’t have tried otherwise – the first was a novel I picked up in the school corridor when I was about twelve. It had been dropped by someone, and had no

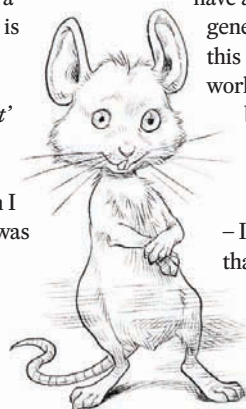
“Alice in Wonderland was a huge, huge thing for me when I was nine or ten years old – it was the book that made me aware of how powerful illustration can be.”

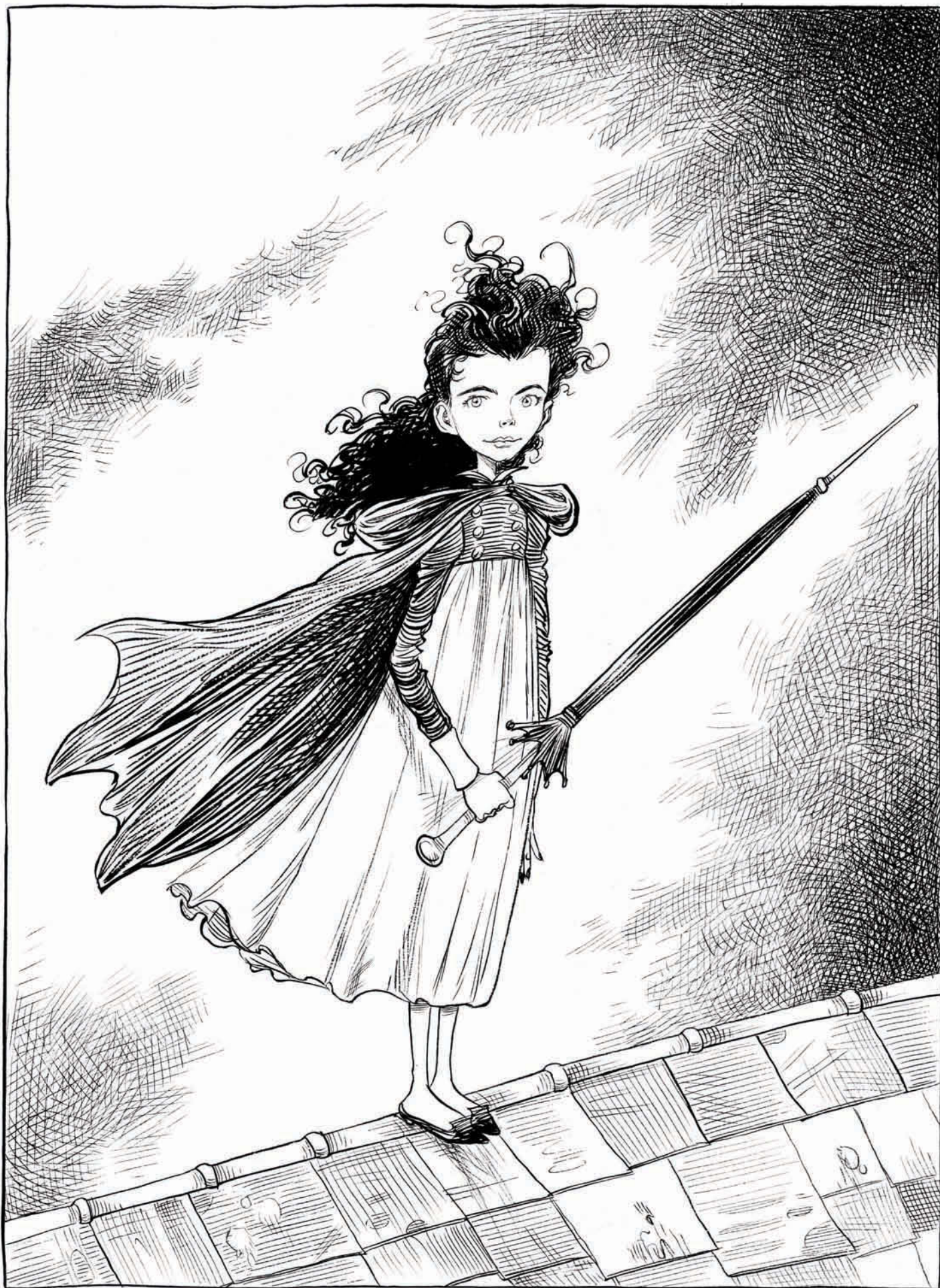
slip cover or blurb; all I knew was that it was called *Wuthering Heights*. If I’d been asked at that point, ‘Would you like to read a love story, set on the North Yorkshire moors?’ I would have stared blankly at the questioner; but in trusting the promise of a book, I got to know a tale that is still one of my favourites (and without which my book *‘Goth Girl and the Wuthering Fright’* probably wouldn’t exist!)

Alice in Wonderland was a huge, huge thing for me when I was nine or ten years old – it was the book that made me aware of how powerful illustration can be. And I came across Professor Branestawm one long, rainy afternoon in a

vicarage on the Scottish borders, where my father was acting as a locum – again, the illustrations were wonderful. I loved drawing as a child, but at that age I was primarily a reader. Books with brilliant pictures offered the best of both worlds for me; I adored *Tin Tin*, and the *Moomins*, and historical fiction, too, like Rosemary Sutcliff’s offerings, which were always beautifully illustrated. When I met Paul Stewart and compared notes, we realised we both loved these kinds of books, which is why together, we came up with the *Edge Chronicles*.

As children’s laureate, I want to get out and about as much as I can; I’m not going to be preachy or wag fingers, because teachers do an extraordinary job. But I do think it’s important that I talk about libraries and librarians, and what a difference they can make in schools, as well as celebrate all the wonderful reading spaces that are being developed in classrooms. And the other thing to talk about and highlight is how the UK is producing some fantastic new children’s illustrators at the moment. It’s more important than ever, I think, that we have a strong visual culture for the next generation and so I will certainly be taking this opportunity to promote artists and their work. One of the wonderful things about books is the way they can encapsulate our childhood, and it’s inspiring to see the baton being passed on; I was taught by Raymond Briggs, for example – I learnt so much from him, and I hope that perhaps younger artists might find something I do, and take ideas from it for themselves, becoming part of a strong tradition that goes all the way back to Kate Greenaway herself.







Coming to a school near you...

Dramatic, accessible and best of all free, book trailers can be used by the cunning teacher to inspire reading, writing and oracy, says **Rachel Clarke**...



As readers, books are gifts in which to lose ourselves. As teachers, they're a medium for teaching the reading and writing curriculum, and for inspiring a love of reading. But to publishers they are also a commodity to be marketed to consumers such as you and me. This is where the book trailer comes in. These short, animated adverts for books are designed to part us from our hard-earned cash, but they're also free resources with which to inspire children's reading, writing, speaking and listening.

How to 'read' book trailers

First off, 'reading' multi-modal texts such as book trailers isn't really any different to reading prose, so don't feel as though you have anything to lose by giving it a go. All that's different is that some of the evidence comes from the images, audio and choice of fonts used in the trailer.

When reading for meaning, there are three main questions I like to use with children:

- What do we know? (retrieval)
- How do we know this? (finding the evidence)
- What do we think we know? (inference and deduction)

A quick glance at any book trailer will show that these questions are still pertinent, even though a book hasn't been opened to this point. Book trailers are a visual blurb: a taste of what a book is about that leaves the reader desperate to know more – which is precisely why the three basic questions work so well.

"Book trailers are a visual blurb: a taste of what a book is about that leaves the reader desperate to know more"

Have a go at watching this book trailer for *The Dark*, by Lemony Snicket (tinyurl.com/tpsnicket) and ask yourself the three questions above.

Doing this immediately after a single viewing with children could be tricky, so consider asking them to watch the trailer through once just to get a sense of the narrative. Then provide them with questions one and two so they can watch again with focus. Finally, watch the trailer again with question three in mind. Give them time to talk to a partner about what they have seen and then collect their responses. This is a great way to introduce book trailers to children in KS1 and lower KS2.

Find puzzles and patterns

With book trailers working like blurbs, the questions 'What happens next?' and 'Why do you think this?' arise naturally when the trailer has finished. But whilst these are great questions, using Aiden Chambers' Tell Me structure (likes, dislikes, puzzles and patterns) with multi-modal texts takes things a step further, helping children to infer the different messages being conveyed.

Once accustomed to this way of working, children become adept at the two challenging aspects – 'puzzles' and 'problems' – and when watching a book trailer such as *The Wildwood*, by Colin Meloy, (tinyurl.com/tpwildwoods) we can see how Chambers' structure comes into its own. I'm personally puzzled by the baby in the wilderness, and in terms of patterns I'm intrigued by the sinister use of silhouetted wolves, crows, and the stark warnings of the narrator, all of which signal to me that this is not a good place to be. By looking for puzzles and patterns I'm drawing on my existing knowledge of texts and stories, and working at a deep cognitive level.

Stimulate writing

Writing and reading are two sides of the same coin. This is why we use texts as models of What a Good One Looks Like (WAGOLL). Many book trailers (particularly those for animated fiction) are gently evocative or lightly humorous films that quietly persuade us to read – see *Oh No, George!* by Chris Haughton (tinyurl.com/tpgeorge). Others employ many more of the obvious marketing techniques that we want children to master in their writing of persuasive texts. A single viewing of the book trailer for Rick Riordan's *The Throne of Fire* (tinyurl.com/tpthrone) is enough to realise that this is a hard-sell advert. It's just like going to the movies. This

trailer is incredibly short, but leaves you in no doubt that the book is a tour de force. Pulling out all of the persuasive techniques requires teamwork, so consider dividing children into pairs: one to listen to the book trailer, the other to watch. Ask them to make notes and then swap roles. They should be able to identify the strong voice, rousing music, and swooshes and explosions that mark this out as an action adventure. They should also be able to note the product placement making it clear this is a book advert and not a movie. It would be interesting to see if they could identify the target audience. Getting them to explain why will reveal sophisticated depths of inference and awareness of the multi-modal world in which they live, and their ability to make links across written and visual texts.

Story starters

Ideally we want to use book trailers to inspire children to read the books they advertise. But there's no reason why this should be the only way we use them. Many schools have a weekly writing lesson stimulated by an object, image or excerpt of text. Book trailers can be used in exactly the same way. Just take a look at *The Thickety* (tinyurl.com/tpthickety) as a potential scary story starter for Y5 and Y6 children; and in contrast *The Journey* (tinyurl.com/tpjourney) as an adventure story starter. Both trailers leave the viewer with plenty of unanswered questions that should provide sufficient inspiration for a class set of fabulous narratives. Of course, reading the book afterwards, or having it available for inquisitive children to read, is the perfect conclusion to using book trailers in this way.

Make your own book trailers

I'm not the most technologically minded teacher, but I have used Photostory with some success and think it's a particularly manageable and effective way for children to make their own book trailers. If you've not used Photostory before, I recommend taking a look at this website (tinyurl.com/tpphotostory). Here you'll find some examples of pupil-made book trailers and a simple tutorial for technologically nervous practitioners.

Animoto is also worth checking out and this YouTube video (tinyurl.com/tpanimoto) provides an easy-to-follow tutorial for making your own book trailers.

Once you've fathomed out

PEOPLE WHO ALSO VIEWED THIS LIKED...

All of the major publishing houses have YouTube channels promoting their children's book trailers. Consider bookmarking the following sites:

- youtube.com/user/HarperKids/videos
- youtube.com/user/RandomBooks/videos
- videos.simonandschuster.co.uk/Kids

I've also collected book trailers from around the web and curated them on:

- pinterest.com/PrimaryEngEd/childrens-book-trailers

And if using book trailers takes off in your school, consider all the different creative ways in which they can be used:

- Show them in the library as a way of advertising stock.
- Embed the trailer for your current or next class-reader into your class web page or blog.
- Use book trailers to promote the books featuring in your next whole-school reading event.
- Flip learning by asking children to watch the trailer for homework before starting work on the text in class.

how to make a book trailer, you're ready to help your class make their own. Why not start by watching a few official publishers' book trailers and deciding which features the good ones contain. Then set the children off to make their own book trailers – you'll never have to read a half-hearted book review again!





1 DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

When we describe an object we start with what our senses tell us are facts about it: how it looks, what it feels or smells like; if our focus is a character we begin with his or her actions and appearance. The ability to express what we know through spoken language is a vital part of language development, so give your children lots of practice...

Talking pictures

Give each child the same illustration and allow them time to explore it individually. Then ask each member of the group to tell one thing they know from looking at the picture, e.g. *There is a man wearing a bowler hat / He is standing beneath a large clock*. Return to the picture and, taking one of the descriptive statements, ask the children to add more detail, e.g. *There is an old man wearing a battered bowler hat / He is stopped beneath a large clock that shows the time 12 o'clock precisely*. Model extending the vocabulary used and the detail given.

This activity can be extended into the language of the imagination by going beyond what can actually be seen – the children can make assumptions about what they think has happened before the picture was taken (they must give reasons for their ideas) or they can predict what they think might happen next (again giving reasons).

Practice MAKES PERFECT

Are your pupils' English skills in need of a boost? Help them describe, express, punctuate and more with these creative activities...

2 EXPRESS YOURSELVES

We can often recognise when a speaker is afraid or angry by the way in which his or her words are expressed. It's this universal communication that makes poetry so accessible – and why it's so important to children's learning. Give your class frequent opportunities to 'play with sound' through poetry...

Echo valley

Have the children seated/standing in two rows facing one another. Introduce the idea that between them lies a deep valley and they must communicate with each other through echoing sounds, words and phrases. To begin with, give the children the words or phrases they

are to echo, but as the children become more experienced, allow them to lead. Play with the way in which words might be repeated or the volume might be explored. Extend to lines from songs and poems.

Call and response

Introduce call-and-response songs such as 'Boom Chicka Boom' or 'A Keelie'. These are ideal for warming up voices and developing confidence in 'performing'. To begin with, you will lead the call as the children respond, but, again, as they become more confident, give different groups and individuals this responsibility. The children can move on to create their own call-and-response verses.



3 MAKING SENSE OF MORPHEMES

A word's 'morphology' is its internal make-up or structure, and morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in words. Because they can tell us how a word functions in a setting, it's important to help children get to grips with what they are and how they work...

Find your partner

This activity explores compound words and requires two sets of cards, each containing one half of a compound word, e.g. *car - park*. The children are given one card each and must find their partner to create a compound word. This is not always as easy as it sounds and the children may discover that they can find more than one partner. Consider these six words and the number of compound words you might produce: *out, seas, break, play, side, time*.

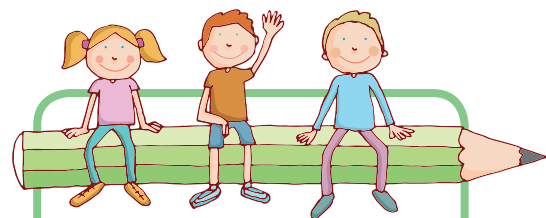
At the end of the exercise, ask the children to define the compound words they have constructed.

My word

The emphasis here is on really *understanding* the morphemes that are added to words to change their meaning. Give the children a list of known words that have prefixes and ask them to identify the meanings. For example:

dishonest - *dis* meaning 'not' - not honest
retell - *re* meaning 'again' - tell again;
autograph - *auto* meaning 'self' - self-written.

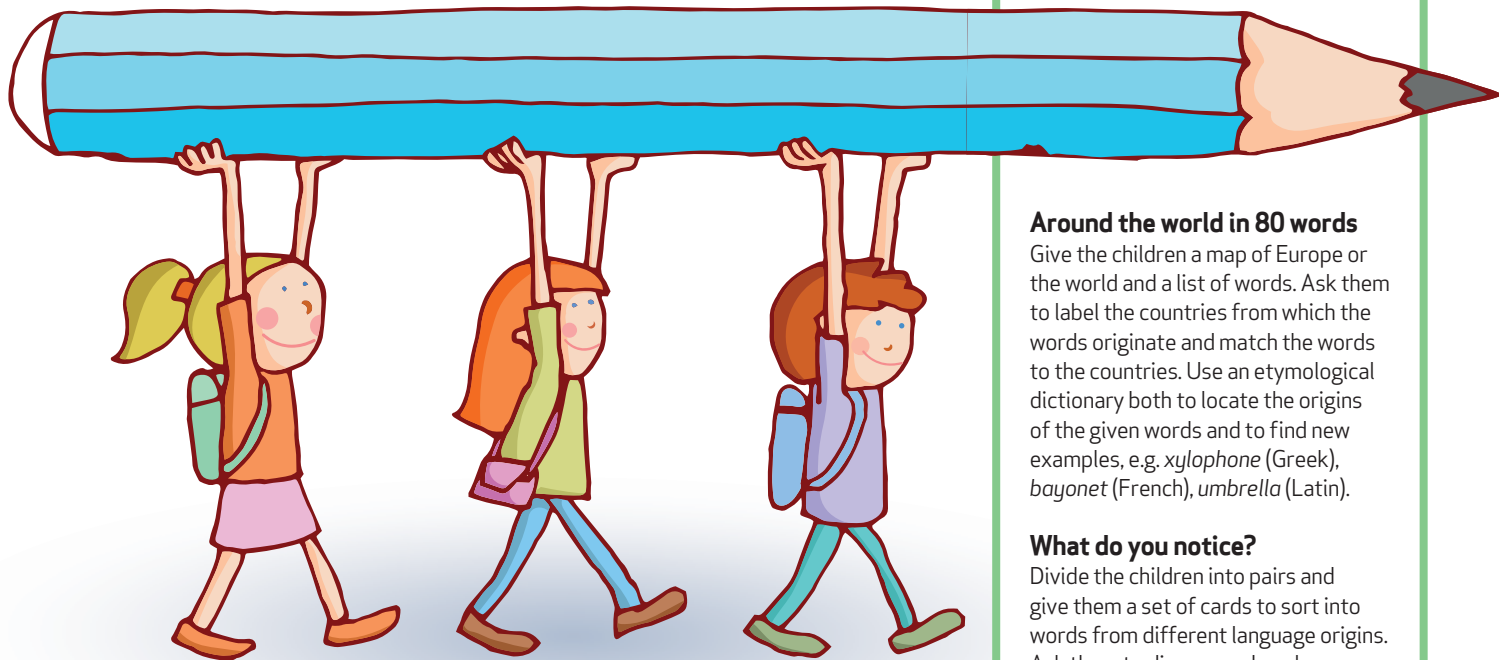
The children could then invent their own words, e.g. *disview/relove/autolike*, and write their own definitions.



5 ETYMOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

"A word's etymology is its history: its origins, in earlier forms of English and other languages, and how its form and meaning have changed."

Word reading is not so much about 'learning words' but 'learning about words'. In KS2 children need to use their etymological knowledge to understand the meaning of the new words they meet, so give them a boost with these two activities...



Around the world in 80 words

Give the children a map of Europe or the world and a list of words. Ask them to label the countries from which the words originate and match the words to the countries. Use an etymological dictionary both to locate the origins of the given words and to find new examples, e.g. *xylophone* (Greek), *bayonet* (French), *umbrella* (Latin).

What do you notice?

Divide the children into pairs and give them a set of cards to sort into words from different language origins. Ask them to discuss and explore what these words appear to have in common, e.g. *umbrella, tarantula, confetti, domino* (Latin); *scheme, chorus, chemist, echo* (Greek), or how they came to enter the English language, e.g. *bungalow, dinghy, jungle, pyjamas, shampoo* (Hindi/Urdu).

4 PRACTISING PUNCTUATION

Putting actions to punctuation, particularly early on in the learning process, helps children to remember them and physically mark their function. A popular example of this is Kung Fu punctuation (you'll find a number of examples on YouTube), but here's another activity to try...

Punctuation relay

Split the class into teams. Each team receives a poster with a number of sentences on it. Five to six sentences is

a good number. The teams also receive a bag full of punctuation marks. On the command 'begin' the children have to select punctuation marks from the bag. Each mark then needs to be placed throughout the sentences. The team that is able to place correctly all of their punctuation marks first wins the game. The points can be awarded by sentence or for completion of all the sentences. You might also want to use full paragraphs; in this case, the winning team will have to use all of their punctuation marks throughout the paragraph to be considered the winner.

This article is an edited extract of *Enriching Primary English* by Jonathan Glazzard and Jean Palmer (Critical Publishing, £20, ISBN: 978-1-909682-49-8), which provides trainees and teachers with creative approaches and enrichment strategies to promote best practice and outstanding teaching. To purchase a copy, visit criticalpublishing.com



MICHAEL WALSH is director of LTEnglish LTD

Become a better THINKER

If we can guide children with the right questions, they'll soon learn to navigate the pathways of deeper thought for themselves, says **Michael Walsh...**

A lesson in which there's no writing might not seem the best way to develop children's English skills, but whatever we write must first be rehearsed in the mind

and shaped through speech. It makes sense, then, that if we want to see an improvement in what's written on the page, we should start by sharpening children's minds – their ability to think and reason – and not just their pencils.

Let's Think in English (LTE) is a structured teaching programme to help pupils develop their reasoning skills in English. It draws upon research by Piaget and Vygotsky that suggests young people learn best when exploring ideas together, and can be traced back to the Cognitive Acceleration techniques first developed at King's College London in the 80s.

By helping to improve children's thinking processes, the project hopes to raise their intelligence; in KS2, lessons stimulate the deeper reasoning patterns that underpin a better grasp of English – in other words, understanding how the writer uses techniques such as narrative structure, figurative language, symbolism and genre to influence the reader.

Take, for example, the LTE lesson based on the Charles Causley poem 'What has happened to Lulu?'

*What has happened to Lulu, mother?
What has happened to Lu?
There's nothing in her bed but an old rag-doll
And by its side a shoe.*

*Why is her window wide, mother,
The curtain flapping free,
And only a circle on the dusty shelf
Where her money-box used to be?*

*Why do you turn your head, mother,
And why do tear drops fall?
And why do you crumple that note on the fire
And say it is nothing at all?*

*I woke to voices late last night,
I heard an engine roar.
Why do you tell me the things I heard
Were a dream and nothing more?*

*I heard somebody cry, mother,
In anger or in pain,
But now I ask you why, mother,
You say it was a gust of rain.*

*Why do you wander about as though
You don't know what to do?
What has happened to Lulu, mother?
What has happened to Lu?*

Children are asked to reason what the poet's intentions might be, and why we feel the way we do about the poem. Though Causley makes nothing explicit, there are plenty of clues to follow and, as in all LTE lessons – which are designed to be taught fortnightly – pupils explore the central theme through a five-stage process.

1 Concrete preparation: start digging

The lesson begins with a reading of the text before a question is posed that encourages pupils to re-read and develop their understanding of the poem. In this instance, Causley has already provided the question for us: 'What has happened to Lulu?'

In groups, pupils explore the question,

developing their understanding while becoming aware of alternative readings – we're careful to ask conceptual questions where more than one response is possible. The most common interpretations are that Lulu has either run away or has been kidnapped.

Conceptual questions have advantages – for starters, children can clarify and develop their ideas just by putting them into words. Hearing different thought processes and viewpoints is also beneficial as this presents pupils with a number of choices, namely to accept, develop or challenge a new reading. When pupils decide to challenge, they delve deeper into the text, seeking support for their opinions. When they build on ideas, they develop a richer reading than any individual could attain by him or herself. And when they adopt a new reading, they develop flexibility of thought.

Following the group discussion, the teacher acts as a mediator, developing whole-class readings and reasoning through thoughtful questioning.

2 Social construction: put your heads together

In LTE, we're interested in both the range and depth of ideas. Once children begin to discuss the poem, they realise there are a number of unanswered questions, such as 'What age might Lulu be? And does this matter to our reading of the poem?'





Once again, different readings emerge as pupils work in groups. I've often heard a pupil cry out in excitement that Lulu must be a child as she owns a rag doll. On his own, this child might not develop his reasoning, but in a group, another pupil is sure to point out that it's an 'old rag doll' and so initiate further discussion.

Many pupils feel Lulu's age is irrelevant to the poem as this does not change the plot, but we can challenge this view with suggestions that our empathy and emotional response to the poem depends on how old we believe

Lulu to be. Thus pupils start to become aware of how they can feel differently according to how they choose to read and interpret the poem.

Again, the teacher's role is to guide the subsequent whole-class discussion.

3 Cognitive conflict: spring a surprise

We now ask a question that students find puzzling, unexpected or discordant with their previous experiences or understanding.

Vygotsky believed instruction "marches ahead of development and leads it" and thus we should teach children at the limits of their Zone of Proximal Development (the level at which they can initially perform only with help from their teacher and peers).

In this instance, conflict arises when the class is posed a question they are unlikely to ask themselves – why did Causley create the poem as a series of questions? Groups often come up with some thoughtful responses, understanding that the poet may want to build interest and suspense, place us in the role of the speaker, make the poem sound child-like, or fashion a detective story. They're moving towards a consideration of Causley's intention and the writer's craft.

The teacher once more acts as a mediator, directing the whole-class discussion and assisting the groups to develop their ideas through the use of exploratory questions.

4 Metacognition: how did we do?

At the end of a lesson it's common for pupils to be asked what they have learnt, but in LTE we're interested in *how* they have learnt. We usually ask two questions: one focused on the text studied and another asking pupils to reflect upon their thinking.

In this instance, we explain Causley did not write for a particular audience and ask children to consider for whom they think the poem is written. The teacher will also encourage pupils to reflect on how they approached the questions and problems posed; as this is often the first LTE lesson taught, it may involve reflections on how successful their group was in the development of ideas.

5 Bridging: make all-round improvements

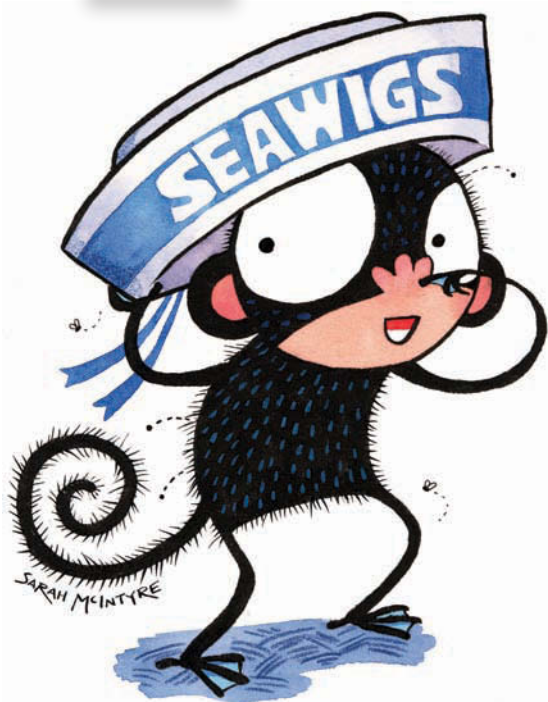
There is no writing in LTE lessons as, if introduced too early, this can inhibit thought, and pupils are less likely to change or build upon ideas once they've committed them to paper. However, subsequent bridging enables teachers to set writing tasks, e.g. create the letter Lulu sent to the mother.

Teachers report children's writing improves after LTE lessons as the sustained talk acts as a drafting tool. As pupils develop their understanding of the reasoning patterns that underpin the lessons, over time, they start to deploy these within their writing.

LTE lessons can also lead to opportunities to develop reasoning in other contexts and subjects. Many teachers involved in the project create metacognition walls where pupils record their reflections. When faced with problems, children are encouraged to look back on these notes for assistance and, over time, these strategies become internalised.

Let's Think in English (letsthinkinenglish.org) offers training for schools on how to encourage high-order thinking and how to get the best out of the lessons. There are also opportunities to review teaching and learning.

Michael Walsh (michael.walsh@letsthink.org.uk) has jointly developed Let's Think in English with Laurie Smith, a research associate at King's College London. Michael leads on KS2 while both are responsible for KS3 and GCSE.



Welcome to the COMIC JAM

Ask for a page of text and there may be an outbreak of writer's block, but throw in some pictures and the ideas will soon start to flow, says children's author and illustrator **Sarah McIntyre**...

Can you remember the last time you were given a blank piece of paper and told to 'write a story' or 'draw a picture'? It can be an unpleasant experience, especially when your brain refuses to cooperate, but it's part of daily life for school children. Some decide this means they hate writing or loathe drawing. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Children naturally connect with making comics. There's something about the combination of drawing and writing that pulls them through the process of creating a story, and it's more fun than trying to fill a page with writing alone.

In making a four-panel comic we can explore the basics of story structure, characterisation, plot, motivation and dialogue. And comics are a great medium for engaging kids who have a diverse range of skills and needs.

If a child's drawing isn't all that great, she can enhance basic stick figures with clever writing and still tell a story. If she can hardly write a word of English, she can tell a story in pictures, and get help when she decides she needs a sound effect here or there.

Reluctant writers are likely to enjoy the energetic nature of comics and the freedom that speech and thought bubbles provide. In a

workshop film I've produced for the children's reading charity Book Trust (available free online, see end), I start with a little tutorial on how to draw a Sea Monkey, a funny, incidental character in *Oliver and the Seawigs*, my illustrated chapter book with Philip Reeve. If the children have read the book, they'll enjoy seeing one of its characters going on to have further adventures (and even if they haven't read the book, it's still fun to draw Sea Monkeys). How often have you finished a great book and wished you could keep following the characters, even though the story has ended?

I walk the class through the process of creating a character they feel is their own. The kids can decide its name, how it will look, which kind of cheese it prefers, how it brushes its hair / scales / fur. It's like having a new friend, or a beloved pet. They warm to it, and it looks back at them from the page.

Give them the tools

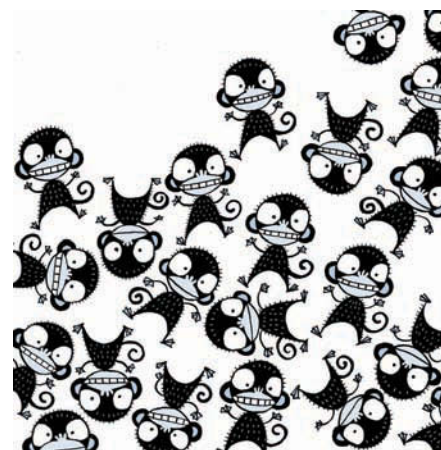
I used to think that step-by-step drawing lessons would stunt creativity by making kids think it's the only way to draw something, but I've been surprised to discover the reverse is true: when people learn how to put together simple shapes and come up with an

engaging character, it gives them some basic building blocks and the confidence to tailor those shapes into countless other character drawings. Add a moustache, a hat, give it bushy eyebrows, a tutu... suddenly their little creature looks very different.

After the children have created their characters, I give them tips for making effective comics and then we have a 'comic jam' session where the class participates in a story-making game. I lead the class through dividing their paper into four comic panels, then start them off drawing the first of these. After five minutes, I'll have the children swap papers and each child will begin working on someone else's comic for another five minutes. Three swaps and 20 minutes later, each child will have a finished four-panel comic, which is then returned to the original author so he can see what kind of adventure his character has been on.

Besides being fun, I've found this a strong learning exercise for several reasons:

"After the children have created their characters, I give them tips for making effective comics and then we have a 'comic jam' session where the class participates in a story-making game"



1 Teach clarity

The children learn that their storytelling has to be comprehensible to another person. If they get someone else's comic and find it's not clear what's happening, they begin to comprehend what it's like when their own stories aren't clearly told. They realise that what they see in their heads has to go onto the paper, or others will struggle to understand. And they see the importance of writing legibly.

2 Thicken plots

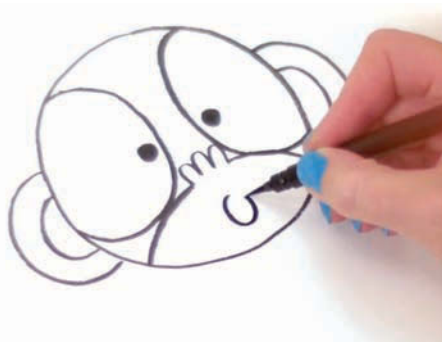
Writing comics is a good practice in storytelling: children have to think 'in this situation, what might happen next?' Random events aren't as funny or interesting as events that have some sort of logical progression. They learn about the importance of creating a setting for their characters.

3 Set a good pace

A comic jam helps pace the lesson. If each child created his or her own comic, you'd have some finishing in three minutes while others would still be working on the first panel at the end of the session. The game helps slow down children who work too quickly ('Now think, what else could you put in that scene?') and speeds up children who might be so precious about their work that they never complete it. A comic jam is more about communicating than making perfect artwork.

4 Create new possibilities

Because multiple authors are working on the same comic, children see how stories can take different turns. The sequences might be action-packed or slow and reflective. They might be funny, sad, or very ordinary. There's no set way to tell a story, and comics help children to understand this. By taking on a character someone else has created, pupils are also forced to empathise.

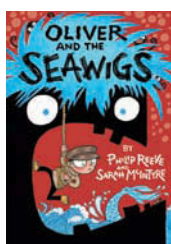


5 Write different endings

The children get a chance to reflect on what they've created. If they like the way their story has turned out, they can use it as inspiration for making more comics in a similar vein. If they hate what happened to their character they may feel indignant. But even that negative feeling can be inspiring; they can now go and create the story they envisioned – the 'wrong' ending having shown them a different way forward.

Something to remember: if you have any autistic children in the class, empathising with someone else's character may be hard for them, and they may balk at having to relinquish their work to someone else. In severe cases, it might be better for this child to work on his own comic, keeping the same panel-by-panel pace as the other children in the room.

At the end of the session (and my video workshop) children can sing along with a Sea Monkey shanty. Ending with a song gives a fun, noisy finale to a focused story session, but it also shows children that their characters don't have to stay on paper. Stories can find life in many different forms – songs, animations, puppets, and theatre – any of which may be less daunting to children than the blank white page.



Find out more about Book Trust's primary writing project The Write Book – and use Sarah's Comics Jam film workshop in the classroom – on booktrust.org.uk/programmes/primary/the-write-book. Sarah McIntyre blogs at jabberworks.co.uk. Find lots of tips on her FAQ page and follow her on Twitter: @jabberworks

How to get children writing with comics

1 HOLD A COMIC JAM
Have your children start a story, then find out what happens when their character goes off on its own adventure.

2 START A SCHOOL COMIC
Have your children make a comic about a standard school day. There is a twist, however. Each child should be the only human in his or her comic, everyone else is replaced with aliens or animals. The story could start with the child arriving at school to discover a very different population.

3 PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD
Each child creates a character around his or her favourite food, then has it interact with the other lunch items, creating a story.



*Cressida Cowell**“In Hiccup, I hope I’ve created a rather different kind of role model”*

Cressida Cowell crams her books with cliffhangers and very long words indeed – with thanks to Charles Dickens for the tip...

I slightly hate the word ‘literacy’; to me, it’s associated with all the things that turn children off in classrooms – not sharing whole books, tedious reading schemes, and far too little emphasis on creative writing within the curriculum. Of course, the special teachers find ways around this; I know they do. As a writer, I go into an extraordinary number of schools, and it is genuinely inspiring to see how dedicated so many educators are to nurturing a love of reading in their pupils. Against that, though, you have the other side – the immense pressure they are under, and how difficult the task facing them can be. I am shocked, often, when I see the vast differences in reading, writing and communication skills between children across the country, right from the start of their educational journey.

This huge range of abilities and levels of comprehension is something I need to bear in mind when I am writing – my books are read by children as young as five, as well as by secondary school pupils and even university students, so I really do have to work hard to ensure I am keeping them exciting, scary and challenging enough for teens, but still suitable for little ones and those who struggle.

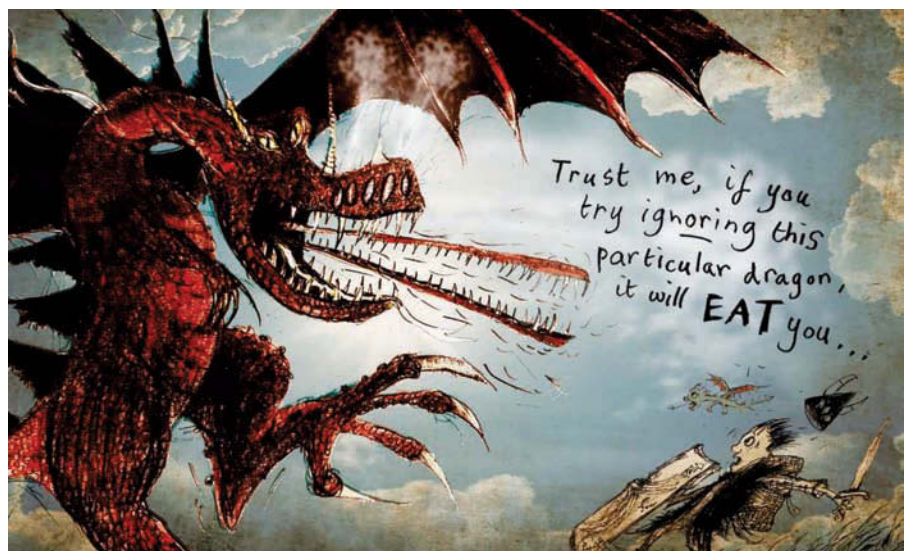
One thing I certainly do not and will never do, though, is ‘dumb down’ the language I use – I had a big fight with my editor at the beginning about that very point! My plots are sophisticated, I unapologetically reference Einstein and Shakespeare, and I use some very long words indeed. This is deliberate; children are natural linguists, in my experience – they love the rhythm of language and, thanks in no small part to television, can keep up with

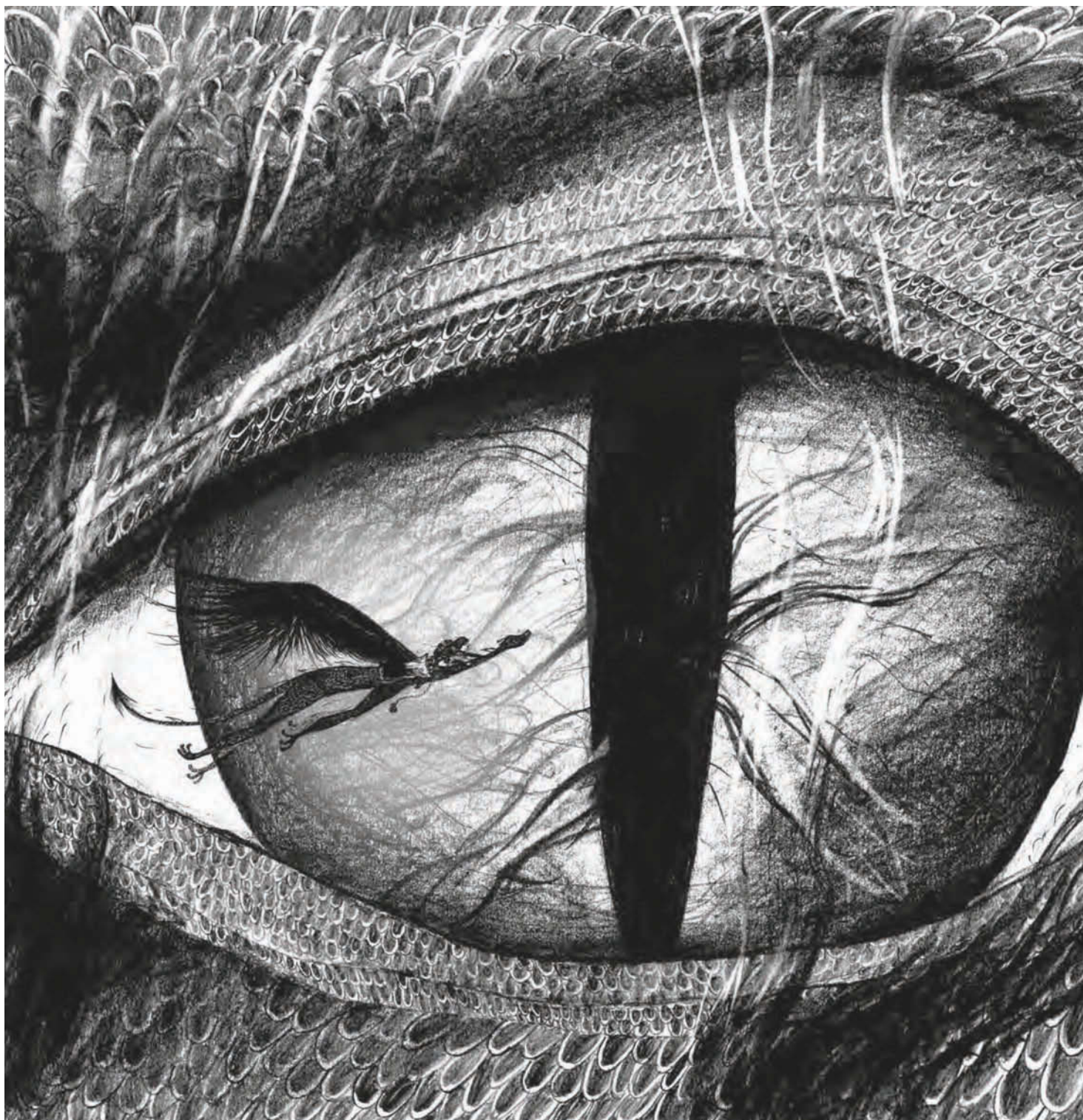
quite complex storytelling. That said, I am very aware that they may have a shorter attention span than perhaps was common a generation or two ago, so my books are relatively short, and I keep them ‘grabby’ and visual, with anarchic illustrations. I cram them with cliffhangers (a tip I took from Dickens, actually), and plenty of jokes and excitement.

“One thing I certainly do not and will never do, though, is ‘dumb down’ the language I use – I had a big fight with my editor at the beginning about that very point!”

They are definitely stories to be read for pleasure, but I am also trying to educate, I suppose, in a way. I explore difficult themes like bullying, finding a role in society, gender stereotyping and so on – and in *Hiccup*, I hope I’ve created a rather different kind of role model than the type of hero conventionally presented for boys.

Getting the right books into the right children’s hands, at the right time, is so important. I visit schools that have incredible libraries, but all too often it’s those youngsters who would most benefit from that kind of access to books at school, who are deprived of the opportunity. It’s so frustrating. I do a lot of work with the National Literacy Trust, and I remember when Baroness Estelle Morris chaired the School Libraries





Commission back in 2010. Its report found a clear link between the quality of a school's library provision and the literacy levels of its pupils, yet we are still failing to act on that information, and we are letting vulnerable children down as a result. I strongly believe that a central library should be a statutory requirement in state schools.

And the other thing that we should be encouraging is more opportunity for creativity within the curriculum. When I was six or seven, I had a wonderful teacher called Miss Mellows. She used to give us blank

exercise books and let us write in them whatever we wanted, without worrying about spelling, or paragraphs, or using metaphors and similes. I must have filled dozens of those books – and all the while, I was naturally developing as a writer. I wish there was more facility for children to do that in schools today, rather than having to focus on passing tests in spelling and grammar at the age of seven.

One of the reasons I support competitions such as *Wicked Young Writers*, for which I was a judge this year, is because they celebrate pure creativity. The creative industries are

worth £78 billion a year to this country, and we export more books than any other nation in the world. We should be thinking about that, and how we feed these industries, instead of focusing exclusively on STEM – essential though those subjects are. So often, we have countries such as Singapore or South Korea waved in front of us as an example of what we should be doing in schools... but in fact, those places are looking to us for help with original thinking and problem solving. We really need to start celebrating our strengths.



Why we love DOGGER

Nikki Gamble recalls the picture books we just can't leave behind – and suggests new ways to share them in your classroom...

Ask a room full of teachers which books had the most impact on them when they were young children and you can guarantee that both *Dogger* (Shirley Hughes) and *Each Peach Pear Plum* (Allan and Janet Ahlberg) will be cited at least once. Earlier this year, Shirley Hughes was awarded Book Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award, with Diane Gerald, Book Trust's CEO commenting that "Shirley's characters are imprinted on the memories of two or three generations, a recognition of their enduring charm." More recently, Allan Ahlberg was honoured by his peers including Brian

"Shirley's characters are imprinted on the memories of two or three generations, a recognition of their enduring charm."

Wildsmith, Shirley Hughes, Quentin Blake, Chris Riddell and Raymond Briggs for his outstanding contribution to children's books over the course of a career which has inspired children, parents and teachers, as well as a new generation of authors and illustrators.

Dogger and *Each Peach Pear Plum* were published within a year of each other, and both were awarded the prestigious Greenaway medal. When the Library Association conducted a poll in 2007 to discover which books in the history of the medal were the public's favourites, those two unforgettable books were awarded first and second places, with just 1% of the vote separating the pair. Why is it that these stories, along with a handful of other, iconic picture books, continue to delight young – and importantly, not so young – readers, decades after they were first published? What is their enduring appeal?

Heart to heart

From an initial glance it isn't easy to see what the connections might be: *Dogger* is a straightforward, realistic family story about the loss of a favourite toy, while *Each Peach Pear Plum* is a playful fantasy populated with familiar nursery story characters. However, what does connect them – and the other books mentioned in this article – is an indefinable quality that might be called 'soul'. There are many accomplished, clever and beautiful books, but the classic is marked out by having a deeper layer which comes from emotional authenticity, thrown into focus and consummately rendered through words and illustrations. *Dogger* is so powerful because it taps into universal feelings of loss in an accessible way so that it can be understood by a young child just as powerfully as a grown-up. Children and adults respond to these classic books at the 'feeling' rather than 'thinking' level, in the same way that a



Illustrations: Shirley Hughes



particularly soulful piece of music might raise a tear or a smile. Didacticism and moralising have no place – these stories do not seek to teach or lecture, though many lessons will be learnt from reading them.

It is part of their essence that classic picture books appeal simultaneously to adults and children. They are, as Victor Watson describes them, 'love stories' concerned with the love between an adult and a child. This operates at a profound level, much deeper than the plot.

So for example, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Where the Wild Things Are* can be seen as aspirational stories; they deal, albeit metaphorically, with growing up and inevitably leaving childhood behind. At the same time the authors ascribe a state of grace to childhood, which the adult sharing the book recognises and responds to as something precious that cannot be recovered, only relived through memories. Some books achieve this sensibility through playfulness and invention; *Each Peach Pear Plum*, with its memorable rhyming text based on a traditional nursery rhyme, is deliberately nostalgic. The Ahlbergs present a technology-free nursery world, where familiar characters are spotted as the pages are turned. It is this 'drama of the turning page' (Ahlberg) that makes *Rosie's Walk* such a thrilling experience for a young child (many EYFS teachers will be familiar with the excited gasps of anticipation

CLASSIC IDEAS

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS OF WAYS YOU AND YOUR PUPILS CAN BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO SOME FAVOURITE PICTURE BOOKS:

Where the Wild Things Are (1963)

Max visits the place of the Wild Things in his imagination. Have the children create their own imaginary landscapes using a range of art materials. Encourage work on large scale by having big rolls of paper as well as individual sheets available.

Mr Gumpy's Outing (1970)

Create a drama based on Mr Gumpy's outing. Assign animal roles to each of the children – you could make animal masks beforehand. Then improvise the trip down the river; as the boat sinks lower into the water, how do the animals react? When the boat finally tips, everyone swims to the shore and shakes and squeezes the water from their fur and clothes before settling down for a lovely afternoon tea.

Dogger (1977)

Invite the children to bring favourite toys into school (you may want to stipulate 'soft toys' to avoid games consoles, etc.). Bring one of your own and tell the children all about it. Have pupils draw their toys and write a few words about why theirs is so special. Sit

in a circle and share the children's words and pictures. Together, summarise some of the reasons why toys might be important to us.

Rosie's Walk (1968)

We never find out what Rosie and the fox are thinking, or what they might say. Give the children some blank speech and thought bubbles and have them write down their ideas. Share the different versions and invite the children to explain their choices.

Gorilla (1983)

This third person story is told from Hannah's point of view. How would it be different if it were told from the Gorilla's (or Dad's) perspective? Who is the Gorilla? Where did he come from? Why does he visit Hannah? What does he do after his visit to Hannah?

The Snowman (1978)

The Snowman is completely wordless, but you can tell the story. Allocate different parts of the narrative to pairs of children. Ask them to work on voicing their 'chapter' in an exciting and expressive way. Bring everyone together in a storytelling circle and invite the children to retell the whole story in their own words. You may want to record their version to accompany the book in the school or class library.



that this story generates). Similarly in *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, adults and children are implicitly invited to enact the story together and Helen Oxenbury's masterly illustration, which shows Dad fully participating in his children's playful adventures, reinforces the adult/child shared experience.

The qualities of the classic picture book allow for many re-readings. Dealing with themes of love, loss, redemption, acceptance, carnival, growing-up and so on, they reflect what is best in humanity – and as already suggested, the books will resonate with readers in different ways each time they are revisited. Although many children will have experienced these stories before they start school, they should be visible in classrooms and school libraries, and used for whole class shared reading so that children develop and deepen their responses.



KATE LEA is Oxfam's education resources manager

Out of the ASHES

Is it appropriate to use real-world disasters – recent or otherwise – as stimuli for literacy activities? **Kate Lea** explains the thinking behind Oxfam's *Stories from Haiti*...

TR&W: Why did Oxfam decide to create a resource based on the Haitian earthquake?

KL: Sadly, we know that news of destructive earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and tsunamis will hit the world's headlines every year. Most primary school learners will be aware of such events through watching or reading the news. Yet, because they are only reported for a short time before the world's press moves on to other things, there are many unfinished stories about places where disasters have struck. The story of Haiti's earthquake is no exception, and the untold narrative is not just one story of a disastrous earthquake. It is a multi-layered and complex combination of many histories, which demonstrate the resilience and determination of Haitian people in the face of difficulty. *Stories from Haiti* sets out to explore some of Haiti's multiple stories and answer such questions as:

- What happened to the survivors of the earthquake after the world's news reporters left Haiti?
- Why did the Haitian earthquake cause such unprecedented levels of destruction?
- Why do the poorer members of communities suffer most in any disaster?

Ultimately, *Stories from Haiti* builds on tragedy to develop a rounded and positive approach to understanding the wider world.

Is there a right or wrong way of bringing stories like the Haitian earthquake into the classroom?

Yes! Most teachers will be aware of the limitations of the media, whose job is, after all, to provide news as quickly as possible. This can lead to a distortion of the facts, either through misrepresentation or omission. For example, to present disasters such as the Haitian earthquake solely as a natural phenomenon is to omit the important point that it is poverty which usually causes so many people to die, be injured or become homeless. A further example of misrepresentation is the tendency to portray those caught up in disasters as victims, which does a great disservice to their resilience and determination. *Stories from Haiti* provides case studies which give teachers engaging stories and evidence to help them challenge such misinformed views.

How does getting learners to engage with a disaster like the Haitian earthquake support teaching and learning?

There is nothing like studying a real-life issue



to engage and motivate learners. *Stories from Haiti* opens the eyes of learners to the world around them, and enables them to see the world through the eyes of others, promoting empathy. The resources include a variety of participatory teaching and learning methodologies such as discussion, role play, cause and consequence activities and collaborative learning. These foster important skills, including critical thinking, questioning, communication and cooperation.

Throughout *Stories from Haiti*, pupils are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills to challenge stereotypes and misleading or misrepresentative information about Haitian earthquake survivors. For example, they are asked to compare the way in which the language used in a *Daily Mail* article leads to a very different overall impression of





TEACHING THE TOUGH STUFF

Three points to remember when planning any work based on disasters.

1 Even the youngest of children can be exposed to disasters and suffering through the media and their own life experiences. The classroom can provide a much needed safe-space in which they can begin to understand these human experiences while also exploring wider perspectives and stories of hope and resilience (such as those highlighted in Oxfam's *Stories from Haiti* but not always featured in media reporting).

2 Be prepared for some difficult questions and emotional responses, especially when it comes to producing creative writing, or role play; and have support strategies in place in case any children need some extra help processing the information.

3 Remember that there may be pupils in your class who have family links to recent disasters, which may require additional sensitivity. In any case, it is advisable to keep parents in the loop when handling any potentially sensitive issues or distressing material in the classroom.

Haitian people from that created by the choice of words and phrases in an article written by a Haitian newspaper, *La Nouvelliste*.

Why has *Stories from Haiti* been linked to the new literacy curriculum, and how does it support its delivery?

There is a growing appreciation of how global learning can be used to great effect in core curriculum subjects like English to engage learners and boost achievement. We have therefore sought to provide more support for teachers of literacy by creating subject-specific resources alongside our more 'traditional' cross-curricular resources. Written by English teachers, *Stories from Haiti* was produced in close collaboration with the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), and we are delighted that this inspiring subject association endorses the resources.

Taking the Haitian earthquake as a starting point, pupils use other real-life stories from Haiti to develop their spoken language, reading and writing. *Stories from Haiti* gets

learners working with real newspaper articles and both fictional and factual stories written in response to the earthquake, using them to inform their own stories about Haiti. Each of the twelve flexible lessons has clear Learning Objectives, Outcomes, Key Questions and links to the new English curriculum.

In part one, which looks at stories from Haiti up to 2010, pupils can:

- Generate lists of adjectives to describe photographs of Haiti which challenge stereotypical images of the country
- Take part in guided reading activities to extract and share information about the earthquake
- Use card games, dominoes and a quiz to extend their vocabulary
- Use role play to explore historical factors which led to so many people being vulnerable when the earthquake struck
- Compare the language used by the international and the Haitian press to describe the events of the earthquake

In part two, which looks at stories from Haiti from 2011–2014, pupils can:

- Consider how media stories change over time
- Take on the role of a journalist to gather survivors' stories and create a newspaper report which includes both direct and reported speech
- Take part in collaborative learning to introduce themselves to others in role as earthquake survivors
- Explore persuasive language and devices used in a leaflet about the benefits of urban gardening for earthquake survivors living in Port-au-Prince.
- Produce their own creative piece to share some of the stories they have learned about Haiti.

Visit www.oxfam.org.uk/education to download *Stories From Haiti* for 7–11-year-olds, accompanying SEN resources, and Oxfam's English and Global Citizenship Guide.



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written by Debbie Hepplewhite



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DEBBIE HEPPLEWHITE is the author of *Phonics International*

We're not banning good books

Teaching phonics 'first, fast and only' is not about restricting children's literary diet, argues **Debbie Hepplewhite...**

Michael Rosen's article, 'Teaching phonics 'first, fast and only' is an absurdity' (*Teach Reading & Writing*, August 2015, ow.ly/UvP5R) illustrates his anti-phonics stance, but it makes me question whether he's fully understood the research on language and reading instruction, and is confused about government guidance. From birth, of course we need to develop children's language comprehension and expand their vocabulary through spoken language (lots of high-quality chatter) and the enrichment offered by a wide range of children's literature. When those children reach the age of four, we can then proceed with the dance between teaching them phonics and continuing to develop language comprehension and book-knowledge – during which time wider literature and language activities still play an important role.

Though Rosen may decry the government's promotion of synthetic phonics and the Year 1 phonics screening check, it's as simple as this: children cannot enjoy reading and fully understand printed words and sentences, nor read to learn, if they are constantly struggling to lift the words off the page.

Raising standards

I visit primary schools all across England routinely. Contrary to the impression of various phonics detractors in the national news, I find teachers everywhere are excited about the year-on-year improvements in their children's capacity to read and write independently as a consequence of their phonics provision. Many teachers value the Year 1 phonics screening check for informing them about their relative effectiveness in phonics teaching. They recognise that the same

teachers with the same intakes can get very different results depending on their knowledge and understanding of phonics, the way in which they modify their practice, and the degree to which they work coherently with colleagues.

In 2015, 95 per cent to 100 per cent of children in 753 schools reached or exceeded the benchmark in the Year 1 phonics screening check, compared to the national average of 77 per cent (and 32 per cent in the 2011 pilot study). Our aspiration should surely be that all children in all schools accomplish this standard of phonics decoding and, of course, this will increase the likelihood of children becoming better readers in the fullest sense and enjoying their wider reading.

There are many different approaches to designing reading books for Reception children. In the whole-language era, reading scheme books were (and still are) based on repetitive and/or predictable texts. Increasingly since the Rose Report, the emphasis in England has been on the benefits of cumulative, decodable reading books, as these are designed to help children apply what they have been taught about blending and letter/s-sound correspondences. This, in turn, means children

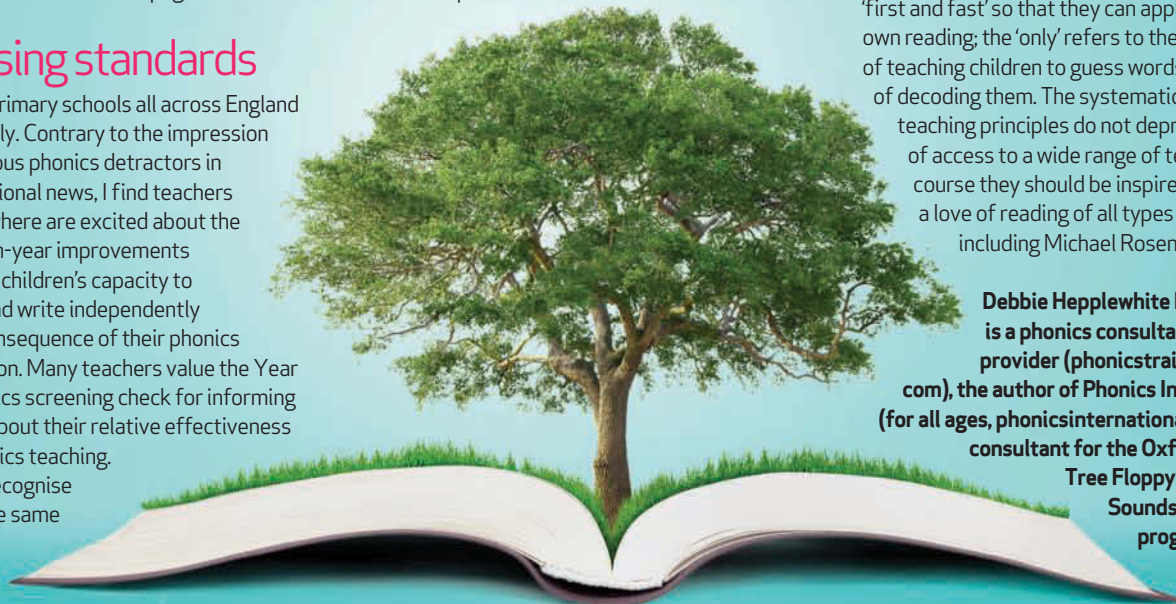
can read independently – building up their fluency and confidence and increasing their enjoyment of reading as they experience success. When children can decode words within their spoken language, comprehension is automatic.

Missed cues

The promotion of cumulative, decodable content for beginners is based on a body of international science that highlights the inherent dangers for many children of 'multi-cueing reading strategies' when these amount to teaching children to guess words from their global shape, their initial letters and from pictures, and context clues. These strategies are commonly taught, or inevitable by default, when children are asked to read books independently that they simply cannot decode well enough. If the alphabetic code is beyond them, children invariably have to guess (often incorrectly). Worryingly, for many people – including plenty of teachers – this apparently validates the notion of multi-cueing, which can be very damaging to at least some children.

The phrase 'phonics first, fast and only' makes the point that children should be taught the alphabetic code along with the blending skill 'first and fast' so that they can apply it to their own reading; the 'only' refers to the avoidance of teaching children to guess words in place of decoding them. The systematic phonics teaching principles do not deprive children of access to a wide range of texts, and of course they should be inspired to develop a love of reading of all types of literature – including Michael Rosen's!

Debbie Hepplewhite MBE FRSA is a phonics consultant and training provider (phonicstrainingonline.com), the author of *Phonics International* (for all ages, phonicsinternational.com) and consultant for the Oxford Reading Tree Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters programme.



Reading Cloud

Contact: microlib.co.uk

Reviewed by: John Dabell



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

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

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

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

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

books' reports. The former would be great for kick-starting a literacy lesson or inspiring a writing workshop; the Reading Cloud automatically selects a random author video each time it is loaded but you can access others from a huge list. Meanwhile, the most popular books section can be searched according to fiction and non-fiction, or gender-target, or new titles only.

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

It's not all about school though. Parents get a piece of the pie too, where they are able to take a peek at reading choices

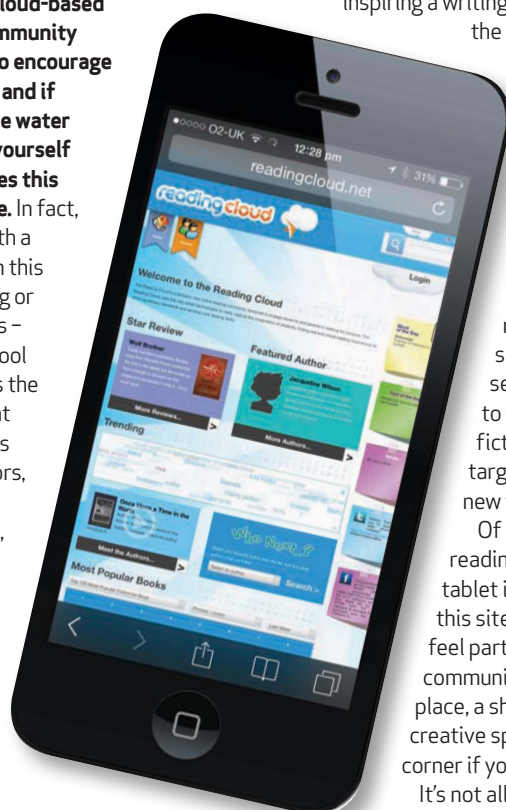
made by their young ones, track progress, join in discussions, access e-books and take pride in their child's reviews, as well as find hints and tips from experts with useful links covering topics like bullying and schoolwork.

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

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

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

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



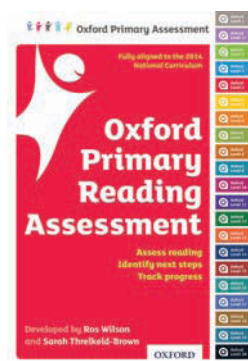
VERDICT:

Anything's possible

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

Oxford Primary Reading Assessment Handbook

Contact: ow.ly/TZdkn
Reviewed by: Louise Sage



Schools throughout the country are spending hours trying to find a way to prepare our children for the upcoming 2016 National Tests. What with old QCA and SATs tests being out of date, schools are struggling to create a system that tracks progress and informs planning.

Getting to grips with the new standards and expectations, alongside developing a new assessment procedure that is robust and consistent, is also a significant challenge. Reading, in particular, has proven to be difficult to assess under the new programmes of study due to changes in expectations. This handbook could be the answer.

Oxford University Press (OUP) has designed a comprehensive and robust whole school solution to teacher assessment of reading. Their aim - 'to ensure that all children develop their full potential as readers by acquiring a wide range of skills and an enthusiasm for reading' - runs throughout this handbook as a thread of consistency. It has been written by experts and thoroughly trialled in schools, therefore creating a well-thought out approach to assessment for reading.

OUP, working alongside the highly regarded Ros Wilson and Sarah Threlkeld-Brown, have produced a comprehensive assessment framework that takes each Year Band's objectives and uses them as 'I can' statements. Just like the previous Criterion Scale, produced by Ros Wilson to support the assessment of writing, each ticked objective adds up to help teachers in making judgements. The Oxford Reading Criterion Scale (ORCS) has been cleverly matched to the yearly expectations set by the new 2014 NC and supports teachers in assessing, tracking and reporting on pupil attainment and progress. So, how would it actually work in school?

The ORCS can be used for summative assessments at different points throughout the year, or for regular formative assessments of children as their learning progresses. For each year group there is a list of criteria that supports the 2014 National Curriculum. You tick them when they have achieved it, put a cross if they haven't or a dot to indicate where understanding is not quite secure, thus indicating obvious next steps. By adding up the ticks the child can be assessed as not yet working at standard, developing, secure or advanced.

Fine examples

Teachers' judgements are supported by 'Comprehensive Conversations', which can be carried out as a Guided Reading session. This is a realistic and effective approach for teachers to use as an alternative to 'testing' children with a written comprehension. The question stems for the different Reading skills such as retrieve, explore and deduce and infer are undeniably invaluable and are something I would introduce to support the teaching of regular GR sessions in my school!

Another successful addition to this handbook, is the exemplification of the expected standards at the end of each year group, which are provided to support teacher judgement. These are key to consistency across a whole school and understanding what is now being expected of children.

The other invaluable feature of this Reading Assessment handbook is the link between

assessment outcomes and book choice. As a large proportion of primary schools across England are resourced with books from Oxford programmes such as Oxford Reading Tree, Project X and TreeTops - which follow the same colour bands and Oxford Levels - links between each standard and book band colour have been developed. Therefore, we can now use our judgements through our teacher assessments and link them to the appropriate colour band or Oxford Level according to the new NC objectives. I, for one, know that this has been a headache in our school as we are extremely well resourced with many colour banded books but are not sure how they fit in with the new NC expectations. The chart, with suggestions of progression through the age ranges and links to other book levelling systems such as Reading Recovery and Read, Write Inc., gives teachers a great starting point to choose appropriate books for children to read with the right level of challenge to help them move forward and develop mastery.

VERDICT:

A viable solution

If your school is looking for a comprehensive, whole-school approach that breaks down children's reading development into small steps and uses teachers' best-fit judgements against National expectations, then this could be the system for you.



Q&A: Reading comprehension

Peter Sumner introduces Headstart Primary's new reading comprehension resources

Visit: www.headstartprimary.com | **call:** 01200 423405 | **email:** info@headstartprimary.com

TR&W *How are Headstart's new reading comprehension resources designed to facilitate pupils' progress?*

PS Many pupils struggle with higher order comprehension skills such as inference, authorial intent and summarising main ideas. These relate mainly to the more 'abstract' comprehension skills of 'reading between the lines'. The resources are designed specifically to equip children with the necessary skills to achieve in reading comprehension; they provide numerous opportunities for the teaching and learning of vital reading skills.

How will the resources support teachers with formative assessment?

Since the resources are designed directly from the objectives of the English national curriculum, and from the English Reading Test Frameworks 2016, identification of strengths

and areas for development is straightforward and purposeful. Gaps in learning can easily be identified and teaching planned to move children's learning forward. The resources provide abundant practice in all areas of reading comprehension, using skilfully designed texts, with built in differentiation and levels of challenge.

Will children enjoy using the resources?

Absolutely! The texts are varied and will appeal to a wide range of interests. There is a balance between fiction and non-fiction and they have been chosen and written specifically to engage children's interest. The colour version supplied on CD-ROM will facilitate use of the interactive whiteboard and enable class or group exploration and discussion of the topics covered in the books. The author's own distinct illustration style and humour also

add to the appeal of the texts. Case studies in schools to date support this view.

Are the resources designed to support children when it comes to tackling the new SATs?


This is their primary purpose. Each reading comprehension skill is practised, and analysis of strengths and weaknesses will then enable identification of individual and group performance against the objectives. The skills featured in the document 'English Reading Test Framework 2016 (Key Stages 1 and 2)' are explicitly covered throughout the books. As this is the same document that test designers for the 2016 tests will use, the materials are very relevant and focused. The inclusion of three end of term tests in each book will also provide teachers and children with further experience and purposeful practice of test questions and formats.


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Email. info@headstartprimary.com

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The Five Minute Box

Contact: www.fiveminutebox.co.uk

Reviewed by: John Dabell

The Five Minute Box is a very manageable system for helping children get started along the road towards literacy, and particularly for enabling the early identification of potential specific learning difficulties. It is entirely multi-sensory, following a 'hear it, see it, say it, write it' approach for sounds, irregular keywords and generalised spelling. It gives children an opportunity to learn with confidence and enthusiasm; it also helps prevent those who struggle from being at the back of the line, tailing off and always having to play catch-up.

The Five Minute Box is actually a little red suitcase which contains everything you need for every lesson – and rather reassuringly it is a million miles away from targets, testing and death by worksheet. It's perfect for one-on-one support to ensure that no one slips through the net, and can be used with all children for just a few minutes daily covering the basic skills needed for the acquisition of literacy.

What's in the box? Well it contains a surprising amount of resources for something not much bigger than an A4 piece of paper. You get a demonstration CD, a resource book, a mini-box with plastic letters of the alphabet, a sounds board, nine keyword boards, nine sets of keyword cards, three handwriting formation boards, a number formation board, whiteboard and pen, 20 Record of Achievement booklets, 40 Record of Work sheets and an instruction guide. All this for 5p shy of £100, which I think represents good value.

Simple sense

The Five Minute Box is a one-to-one resource, but very much for 'in-house' teaching. Gone are the days, I hope, where struggling children are 'withdrawn' from the class for a weekly catch-up lesson. With this kit, pupils stay with their classmates and learn alongside them for

five minutes at a time; it's part of classroom provision. It is also very easy to use.

You don't need to be a specialist multi-sensory teacher to get the most out of the Five Minute Box and in fact, it's ideal for support staff. As the system is progressive, there is no need to provide daily planning. There is no photocopying and no real preparation time required, although watching the 20-minute demonstration CD with its practical training videos is a must. The resource book includes key points to remember, baseline screening, step aside spelling programme, spelling lists and keywords check list. There are also a few teaching scripts (although more would have been great). Probably the most valuable resource in the box from a teaching point of view is the little instruction guide as this covers the essential elements that should be covered in every session – i.e. phonics, keywords and personal and sequential knowledge. You will probably want to photocopy and laminate this a few times over so that it is to hand for all staff using the box.

You might think that this resource is aimed at early years and KS1 – and you'd be right, but it could be just as effectively used with KS2 and even secondary students. It is certainly just the job for EAL learners of all ages. The

message behind the box is that we don't have to wait for children to fail before intervening in their learning. The Five Minute Box gets in there early, giving learners the responsibility for their own learning – as motivation, organisation and self-help strategies are built into the programme.

I have used the Five Minute Box effectively and with great success over many years to identify children needing help to acquire literacy skills, including those with dyslexia. Not once has it let me or the children down. Youngsters readily engage with the box, and I'm always amazed at how excited they get when they can carry it around and open it up themselves. In fact – living out of a suitcase has never been so enjoyable.

VERDICT:

Box of delights

If you're searching for an early literacy teaching system and screening tool I can think of few resources to match the Five Minute Box; its simplicity is in many ways what makes it great.





3P Learning

A place for schools and families to love learning

Spellodrome



Spellodrome is a digital resource that helps children to develop their spelling, writing and communication skills, to support them in the 'GPS' (or 'SPAG') elements of the new English curriculum.

It offers pre-populated 2014 curriculum-aligned word lists for KS1 and KS2, word lists that can be customised (from more than 10,000 words) to your own specific needs; extensive printable worksheets focusing on spelling practice, grammar and punctuation; fun and engaging activities based on your word lists; tools to develop writing skills and online standard benchmarking tests

"We've got children in year 6 who started using Spellodrome in year 3 and we can see the progression they have made over those three years that we definitely don't think they would have made without it."
Snowfields Primary

"Spellodrome has had a positive impact on standards in spelling and writing. Our end of KS2 results are the best they've ever been and this is partly an outcome of using Spellodrome in our lessons. Children's enjoyment and confidence in improving their spelling skills has grown."
Cadoxton Primary School



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Reading Eggs



Reading Eggs is a digital resource for literacy, designed to help teach children how to read and to develop a love of reading.

With 120 phonics and 200 comprehension lessons; 2000 eBooks with comprehension tests; creative writing areas; a teacher toolkit with lesson plans, comprehensive reporting and 'big books', plus online spelling, punctuation and grammar games, Reading Eggs provides you with all the tools you need to raise the profile of reading and nurture high literacy standards.

"We started using Reading Eggs about a term and half before SATs and for the first time in the school's history 100% of our pupils achieved level 4 or above in reading this year. Our children now love to read."

Penshurst Primary

"Over 75% of our students use English as a second language and Reading Eggs has helped these children to learn their sounds more quickly. Without realising it, pupils who didn't read much previously started to read and engagement in reading has increased throughout the school."

Montem Primary School

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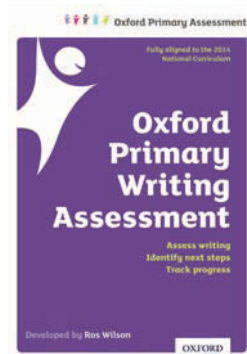
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Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook

Contact: ow.ly/TZdkn
Reviewed by: Louise Sage



difficulties of writing and how we, as teachers, need to give children interesting and engaging stimuli knowing what the outcomes of a successful piece of writing are in order to be able to judge whether they have deployed learning to maximum effect.

The handbook states that focusing on four main areas: the purpose of writing; type of text that would achieve that purpose; audience of the writing; and the stimulus for writing can influence how successful a piece of writing is. It also highlights the importance of good basic skills across spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. The emphasis for secure writing is on whether a child can consistently produce independent writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

Part of this handbook which could prove to be invaluable is the exemplification material for each year group. Moderation of writing is key to ensure consistency and progression across Key Stages; however, we now lack examples of writing that show the new standards and expectations. Using the marked exemplifications in school to practise using the criteria and gaining a common understanding of standards and then using the unmarked samples could be extremely effective for a school starting out on this complicated journey.

One of the most important questions in primary schools across the UK at the moment is: 'How are we going to assess, track and monitor the progress of writing?'

Leadership teams are working tirelessly to find a consistent and robust assessment system to support the teaching of writing according to the standards and expectations set out in the new National Curriculum. With the Government giving us freedom to choose an assessment system and Ofsted looking at how schools use, monitor and apply their assessment policy it is paramount that schools develop a rigorous and consistent approach to the assessment of writing. Could the Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook be the answer?

Working alongside the Oxford Primary Reading Assessment, the handbook aims to ensure children develop their full potential as writers by acquiring a wide range of skills and, most importantly, a life-long enthusiasm for writing. I, for one, am extremely glad the latter is given importance as with the growing emphasis on Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in the New National Curriculum, it is refreshing to know that experts in the field are still promoting the love of writing.

The Oxford Writing Criterion Scale is a comprehensive set of criteria created by the expert Ros Wilson, designed to inform

teacher assessment of writing. The criteria help to record and track pupil progress and attainment, whilst identifying next step targets. Just like with the Oxford Primary Reading Assessment, the tick sheets can be used to inform a best-fit judgement linked to the new standards. For each standard there is a list of essential skills laid out to ensure children don't progress without mastering some of the basics from the previous year group, but you may wish to check these against your school's own priorities in case they don't entirely match – as it's obviously important that children don't move up to the next age expectations before they are completely secure in all aspects of writing.

From start to finish

"Writing is like ballet." This is a quote from page six of the handbook, and a beautiful simile used to describe the journey of becoming a writer: "Only when all the steps have been learnt, sequences have been rehearsed and re-rehearsed, techniques have been honed and the performer has brought them together in a wonderful interpretation can the abilities of the writer (dancer) be truly judged". Reading this, from the point of view of a passionate and enthusiastic English Lead, it is wonderful and inspiring to find an approach that understands and values the

VERDICT:

Fits the bill

If your school is looking for a comprehensive and realistic assessment system then this could be for the one for you!



*Eoin Colfer*

“It was a very cultured way to teach someone how to read”

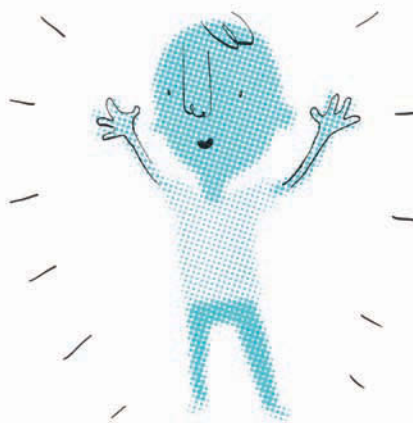
Helping his actress mother learn her lines taught **Eoin Colfer** about drama, dialogue, and how to spot truly great writing...

My earliest memories of books involve going down to the local library as a very young boy with my brother – we’d sit on the carpet in front of the ‘children’s section’ (which was just one set of shelves) and stay there for a couple of hours while our dad was at the back, browsing the reference section. That was where we learnt to love reading; a love that’s stayed with me my whole life.

I’m one of five boys, and all of us could read before we started school – our parents were very proactive in that area. I remember looking around the classroom on my first day and thinking to myself, in a most superior manner, ‘These children know *nothing*! I must be a genius!’ I was disgusted; I thought I’d be getting proper books, and there was this teacher, writing the alphabet on the board, for goodness’ sake. She was great, though. Her name was Miss Franey, and she’d give me – and a couple of the other kids who were also early readers – books she thought we’d enjoy. She was in a car crash that year, and had her arm in a splint for a long while; that was 46 years ago, and I still remember her clearly. It was lucky for both of us, I think, that I was really bad at maths – otherwise I might have been unbearable.

I always had access to books and literature at home. Our parents were quite liberal for the 1970s – dad was a teacher and artist, and mum was an actress and taught drama. From the age of six or seven, I used to help mum learn her lines, reading all the other parts for the scenes she was in. I loved those times; they were really special – like a secret we shared between us. It must have given me an early feel for dialogue and drama, and I also quickly developed a sense of discernment, identifying who the good writers were. Thinking about it,

“I was able to share books and authors I loved, like Roald Dahl, with my pupils. I’d start off reading a bit, and acting it out; then one of the kids would take over.”



it was a very cultured way to teach someone how to read – and it was very directly responsible for me becoming a writer, too; the first things I wrote were plays.

When I was teaching, I was lucky enough to work under a very enlightened principal, Mr Goff. He gave me a lot of leeway, so I was able to establish a regular reading time, of 30 minutes every day. That really wasn’t how the curriculum was set up at the time, and I know some people didn’t approve, but I was supported all the way. I didn’t read my own work – that really might have set me up for a moment of hubris – but I was able to share books and authors I loved, like Roald Dahl, with my pupils. I’d start off reading a bit, and acting it out; then one of the kids would take

over – and so on, until the last ten minutes or so, when I’d encourage everyone to read by themselves. It was great to see how it got them interested.

I think it’s hard for teachers to do that sort of thing these days. Books are expensive, for a start, and you need thirty copies for a class novel. And then there’s the question of time – with so much to get through, if you get ten minutes to catch your breath you’re doing well. Fitting ‘reading for pleasure’ into a day when you already have to cover more and more it seems, year on year, is a huge challenge, and I’m always impressed when schools manage it.

I have two boys of my own now. My older son, Finn, isn’t much of a reader at the moment, although he used to enjoy being read to. When my dad was alive, Finn used to sit on his knee while he told him stories; he adored that, but since dad died, that love of stories hasn’t translated into books, which I’m kind of upset about, because being a reader is so helpful for life in all kinds of situations. His younger brother, Sean, is a sucker for toilet humour – he loves the Wimpy Kid books, and was a Captain Underpants fan when he was younger. When Jeff Kinney was in Dublin, he came to see us – I think that was the moment my kids suddenly realised that having a writer as a dad could have its advantages!

Imaginary Fred, a collaboration with Oliver Jeffers, is my first go at writing for a very young audience; although it would be more accurate to describe it as a picture book for all ages, really. It has a sort of nostalgic look about it, so I hope that parents might pick it up, feel that connection to their own childhoods, and read it to their four or five year olds – who might then come back to it at six and read it for themselves, bringing a new perspective every time.



“Listening to a non-fluent reader makes me want to rip my ears off”

As a parent, you long for the day your children can read independently, says **Clare Mackintosh** – but in the event, it comes with mixed feelings...

My heart filled with joy the first time one of my children asked to read their school book to themselves, instead of reading aloud to me. Not (just) because it was an indication of how far they had come, and not (just) because it meant I could instead make packed lunches, locate a lost pair of trainers, and work out how to magic some supper out of a packet of bacon, a tin of chickpeas and some leftover roast potatoes. My buoyant mood stemmed instead from the sheer relief that I no longer had to sit at the kitchen table, listening to a child stammer their way through the *Magic Key* series.

I love being with my children. I love reading. Ergo, I should love listening to my children read, right? Not so. I take my hat off to primary school teachers, because listening to a non-fluent reader makes me want to rip my own ears off and use them as bookmarks. ‘Sound it out,’ I’d say to my six-year-old. ‘K - i - t - e - n,’ she’d say, confidently. ‘Brilliant!’ I’d cheer. ‘So what’s the word?’ A moment’s silence, as she’d scan the illustrations hopefully. ‘Cat?’ ‘Not quite!’ I’d trill, through gritted teeth, ‘let’s try again.’ On and on, it would go, my jaw spasming from too much engineered smiling.

Hard times

With three children all born within fifteen months, evening reading was a production line affair; the twins first, then their older brother, his seniority meaning chapters instead of pictures; books an inch thick, instead

of pamphlet thin. Even then I struggled. ‘Oh. No. Cried. Mum,’ he would intone; the most exciting story rendered dull as ditchwater, by his laboured diction. ‘Oh no!’ I’d repeat, leaping up with an expression more fitting of a Hammer horror film. ‘Hear the difference? Read that bit again.’ ‘Oh. No. Cried. Mum.’ I was beginning to know how she felt.

I am not blessed with patience. In this respect I am very much like my father, who drew huge pleasure in carrying out science experiments with his older grandchildren, but never knew quite what to do with a toddler. Not for me the baby days, or the faltering steps of an almost-walker. Sweet, yes. Amazing, yes. Interesting? Not so much.

And so it is with reading. After that first term at school, when their transition from non-reader to reader seemed like alchemy, I found the reading journey more chore than pleasure. A necessary path to follow, in pursuit of fluency.

Great expectations

But when they got there... oh what a joy! Finally I could listen to their reading without a fortifying swig of Pinot Grigio; without straining to hear the words, or make sense of a sentence lacking audible punctuation. Finally I could see the results of my Hammer horror acting; my children looked up as they read, they smiled, they laughed, they used pauses to build suspense. They were storytellers.

Now that my children are older, I am no longer obliged to sign their reading record beneath a suitably enthusiastic comment. Their reading is ‘self-guided’; they choose their own books, read every day, and write a line or two about each story for their teacher to review. They are confident, articulate readers with eclectic literary tastes and a vocabulary to match. ‘Will you read to me?’ I asked my eldest the other day. He looked up from his book; smiled politely. ‘I’d rather read in my head,’ he told me. ‘If you don’t mind.’

But I did. I remembered those after-school reading sessions; the chores neglected in favour of books. I remembered the rare opportunity they gave me to spend time with just one of my children. I remembered the weight of a small body in my lap, and the tickle of their hair on my cheek as I leaned forward to see the page. I remembered it all. And I missed it.



Clare Mackintosh is an author and mother to three primary school age children. Her psychological thriller *I Let You Go* was a *Sunday Times* bestseller and Richard & Judy book club winner. Clare is patron of the Oxford-based Silver Star Society, which provides special care for mothers with medical complications during pregnancy. Twitter: @claremackint0sh.



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