FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"The books that made me"

- ADE EDMONDSON
- TONY ROSS
- SHEILA HANCOCK
- PHILIP REEVE
- PATRICK NESS
- JAMES PATTERSON

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How one school's cracked it

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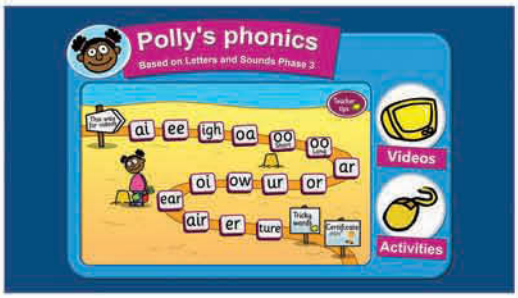

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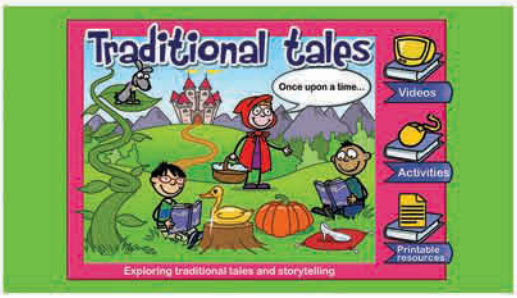

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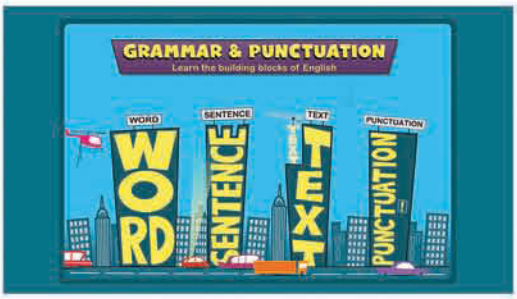

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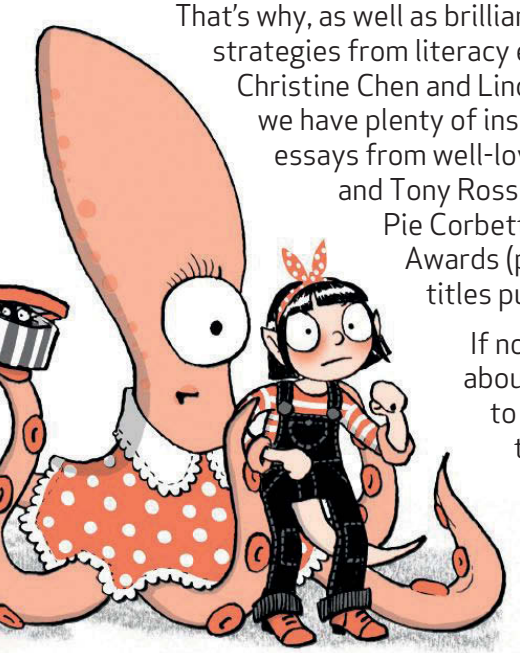
Welcome...

Human beings have always taught and learnt through stories; from the first fables that tried to explain natural phenomena and rules of behaviour, to the narratives through which today's leading thinkers choose to share their ideas and conclusions with as wide an audience as possible. Religion, science, politics, history, relationships - all the things that matter most deeply to us are presented in the form of stories; especially, of course, by the media.

In this era of so-called 'fake news', then - where convincing yet contradictory tales pour out around us at an unprecedented rate - teaching the next generation to read and write with confidence, discernment and enthusiasm has arguably never been more important. And the foundations we lay down in the early years and at primary school are crucial.

Teach Reading & Writing is all about those foundations; building the key skills of decoding, spelling, grammar, comprehension and fluency, yes - but also, encouraging youngsters to develop a personal relationship with literature from an early age.

That's why, as well as brilliant teaching and assessment strategies from literacy experts like Rachel Clarke, Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton (to name just a few) we have plenty of inspiring book topics; thoughtful essays from well-loved authors including Patrick Ness and Tony Ross; another original offering from Pie Corbett; and the results of our Fiction Awards (p. 52), highlighting the very best titles published this year.



If nothing else, education is surely about giving young people the ability to make sure that ultimately, each of them is in control of his or her own story. We feel privileged to be a part of that process.

Joe Carter & Helen Mulley, associate editors

"The books that made me"

ADE EDMONDSON knows what a responsibility it is to write for children – and now he's started, there'll be no stopping him

"Dahl was our favourite; I prided myself on my BFG delivery" p8

TONY ROSS wants children to get pleasure from reading, just as he found joy in *Just William*

"Forcing children to read particular books is likely to put them off reading altogether" p28

SHEILA HANCOCK shares how books and libraries opened doors to worlds far beyond her own experience

"I can't express how profoundly I admire teachers" p40

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"Anybody who doesn't believe that's their job should go do something else" p88

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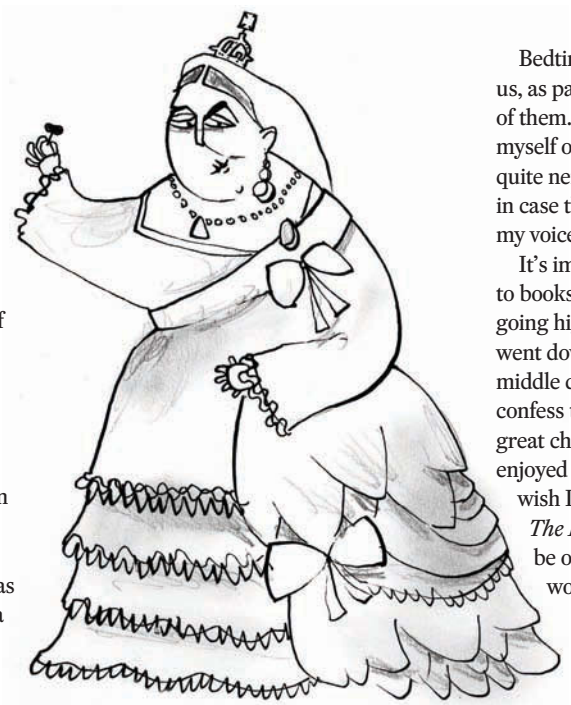
"Kids don't respond well to being forced"

Ade Edmondson knows what a responsibility it is to write for children – and now he's started, there'll be no stopping him...

When I was trying to recall learning to read, in order to write this, the first thing that came to mind was the Janet and John series. I wasn't sure I was remembering correctly, though, so I did a quick google. And sure enough, up on the screen came those pictures, so familiar, so completely of their time, and bringing with them a wave of memory. I loved those books; absolutely adored them – and I remember carrying them home from school with enormous pride and excitement.

Home, at that time, was an army camp in Cyprus, where my dad was a teacher, and my sister and I were definitely encouraged to read. We had no telly (although there was a radio, and Larry the Lamb played quite a significant role in my life), and books were an important source of amusement for us. I particularly remember a beautifully illustrated children's version of *The Iliad and The Odyssey*. I loved the stories, which must have been cleverly translated to enthuse a small child; but it was the pictures that particularly caught my imagination. They were great; verging on saucy, in fact. I kept that book for ages, and was perhaps disproportionately sad when it eventually got damaged in a flood in a student flat.

The first time I cried reading a book was when I was about eight years old, and had just got to the end of a biography of Napoleon, again, specially written for children. It must have been an astonishing hagiography, because I was left completely bereft when he died. There's a theme developing here, clearly, and the more I think about it, the more I realise what my dad was trying to do. He used to sit me down on a Sunday, put one of his dozen or so classical records on the gramophone player, and we'd play chess. This is how I developed a healthy hatred of both chess and classical music – although I love them now. Kids don't respond well to being forced, I find.



A matter of time

I did try to bear that in mind when we had our own children. We read a lot with them, but followed their lead as much as possible; and sure enough, they all ended up finding an area of literature to make their own. We have three girls – the oldest had piles of *Animals of Farthing Wood* magazines; the middle one became an avid *Beano* reader (she's a comedian now); and the youngest, whose nickname has always been Little My, found The Moomins.

Bedtime stories were shared between us, as parents, but I probably did the majority of them. Dahl was our favourite; I prided myself on my BFG delivery, and was really quite nervous when the recent film came out, in case they'd got it wrong – but luckily, it was my voice that Mark Rylance used. Good man.

It's important, I think, to introduce children to books at the right time. I remember once going highbrow and trying The Hobbit, which went down very well, especially with my middle daughter; much later, though, I had to confess that it was so wordy, I'd kept skipping great chunks. I do wonder if she'd have enjoyed the unedited version so much. And I wish I'd waited a bit before reading them *The Phantom Tollbooth*. You really need to be old enough to appreciate the wit and wordplay in that one.

Tilly and the Time Machine, my children's book, came from a slightly odd place. A friend of mine moved in next door to us with her three kids, the middle one being a seven-year-old girl who is very particular and forthright. She's a brilliant character, and I found myself writing a story for and about her.

I've had a few people close to me pop their clogs recently, and I wanted her perspective, in a way – that clear-sighted, almost brutally honest approach. Children's books can have an incredible legacy; the ones we love we revisit as adults, looking at them again with our years of experience, and we share them with our own children, too. It's quite a responsibility for an author. And yes, the first draft of my second story is already written.

Ade Edmondson's first novel for children, *Tilly and the Time Machine*, is published by Puffin.

Illustrations: Danny Noble

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How to teach English like Stephen King

We're not suggesting traumatising Year 1, but these shining examples can help to improve anyone's writing, says **Tim Roach**

As one of the world's most-read authors – not to mention an erstwhile English teacher – it's safe to say that Stephen King knows a thing or two about words. And while his blood-soaked books may not be appropriate for the classroom, it doesn't mean teachers can't learn from his methods – many of which are described in his memoir, *On Writing*.

1 "You must not come lightly to the blank page."

King believes the old adage 'write about what you know'; most of his main characters are male authors, after all. But many of our children can't write about 'what they know' unless we teach it to them first. If we don't engage or immerse the children right from the beginning, then writing at the expected standard is likely to be a pipedream. Class novels, picture books, video clips, photographs, real-life experiences (but please, not the school trip recount or 'What I did on my holidays') are essential to lay the foundations.

2 "The bread of writing, is vocabulary"

"The basic rule of vocabulary is ***use the first word that comes to your mind, if it is appropriate and colourful***." Fine advice for adult writers, but one that young children – particularly those of an EAL or disadvantaged background – need a great deal of assistance with. Without deliberate attempts to expand our pupils' spoken word vocabulary, they will find learning increasingly difficult and struggle to keep pace with their peers. We need to think about ways to equip our learners with a richer bank of words – such as the simple and easy-to-implement 'word of the day' activity.

3 "The business of meaning is a very big deal"

King posits: "Bad grammar produces bad sentences" to which I'd add ***bad speech*** produces bad grammar, which produces bad sentences.

Comprehending the very precise way that a misplaced word or phrase can render meaning unintelligible is hugely difficult for children who routinely miss out words in writing and speak in fragments of clauses.

Too much of children's writing exists solely on the pages of their exercise books, read only by their teacher. Understanding the meaning of their writing and the importance of the grammar they use demands re-reading, reading out loud, critique and public performance.

4 "Description is what makes the reader a sensory participant"

Description has to be interesting, therefore we must get children to know and care about the character they're describing. They need to know where they've come from and where they're going – to give them a trajectory. Otherwise, children's characters tend to be two-dimensional facsimiles of their own (ideal) self-image, reduced to a pair of trainers, skinny jeans or a dress. This is why I don't like to teach standalone lessons such as 'describe a character' or 'describe a setting', unless the passage forms part of a broader narrative arc.

5 "You learn best by reading a lot and writing a lot"

Books. They're a no-brainer, aren't they? Fiction, non-fiction, picture books, graphic novels... books should be at the heart of the curriculum. Teachers need to have a working knowledge of children's literature. They should read books, read children's books, read books about books, read books in the classroom – anything to encourage children to pick up a book of their own free will.

If we ***force*** children to read something, chances are there will be negative repercussions. If we insist on a written book review every time they finish a book, we're punishing them for reading. This is not what 'reading for pleasure' should entail. So, read to them. Have loads of books for them to choose from. Make homework reading.

Professional writers often commit themselves to writing a certain number of thousand words per day. I'd like teachers to have a similar expectation from their class. Writing is hard – perhaps the most difficult thing we teach – and good quality, daily practice is essential if children are to grow as confident writers.

TIM ROACH is Year 6 teacher, KS2 Leader and English Leader at Greenacres Primary School.

How comics **boost** comprehension

If children are word-reading but not understanding, graphic texts will help make them masters of meaning and inference

Comics haven't always enjoyed the same literary status as traditional texts. Even now, they're frequently seen as little more than a means to get reluctant children (usually boys) reading. This, to our minds, doesn't acknowledge the true worth of a form that can literally transform the imaginative lives of young readers, irrespective of their gender.

While it's true that graphic texts, with their low word count, are unlikely to contribute significantly to a child's reading speed or stamina, they can have a dramatic impact on reading comprehension (and even written composition) at all levels and so form part of the broader reading diet of all primary age children.

1. Get back to comprehension

Increasingly, we encounter children whose strong, phonics-pumped word-reading abilities are paired with comprehension skills that are, frankly, lacking.

A great antidote is for children to read a graphic text and then join together to discuss it. This book group-like approach is generally one of the more effective ways of running guided reading, but is essential with comics.

The reason graphic texts work so well for children who struggle with comprehension and word reading is that, although the word count is relatively low, there's still so much to talk about.

2. Analyse the artwork

Working with the author, a graphic artist will make similar decisions to a film director when it comes to how each frame will make an impact on the viewer. Thinking about this in the classroom leads to a more advanced level of analysis.

Make sure children notice when there is a close-up – a face, a hand, some inanimate object. What's the effect of this? Similarly, draw attention to the viewpoint: is a panel drawn as if viewed from above, from below, or perhaps seen through the eyes of a character? Why have these choices been made and why?

As well as the interpretation of what we might call camera angle choices, consider lighting and props. Where is the light coming from and where do the shadows fall? Why has the illustrator placed *those* documents on *that* table?

Children's understanding of the use of viewpoint and the ways in which atmosphere is created in comics can then be extended to more traditional texts. It can even help them to achieve similar results in their own narratives.

3. Give new vocab context

The way in which illustrations can scaffold the meaning of unknown words is a significant factor in how we (a girl with EAL and a reluctant / remedial boy) became avid and advanced readers. But as we mentioned earlier, these benefits ought to extend beyond those children working at a current deficit. With the right high-quality (but age-appropriate) graphic texts, we can expand the vocabulary of even the most voracious reader.

One option is to look at the growing genre of classics stories retold as graphic texts – Shakespeare, Dickens and Carroll, amongst many others, have received this treatment. To be clear, we are not for one minute suggesting that graphic versions replace the originals (though they may help some children towards them), but a child who is not yet ready to tackle the full *Oliver Twist* could encounter and grasp challenging vocabulary (and concepts, of course) in the graphic retelling.

Remember also that real reading is not close scrutiny of every word, but rather the understanding of complete pages. The graphic format very much emphasises this – each word contributes to the overall story, and one or two tricky ones here and there can be understood in the context of the whole.

4. Investigate the spaces between

Dave Gibbons, co-creator of the award winning *Watchmen* comic / graphic novel, speaks of the need to understand "the white spaces" between the illustrated panels. What isn't shown?

Investigating this will help build children's capacity for inference because we are talking about what is implied, rather than known. Look, for example, at the passing of time. Does one panel follow instantaneously from another, or have minutes / hours / days passed?

GRAPHIC TEXT RESOURCES

If you want to try the ideas in this article, 28 new Project X Origins Graphic Texts for Years 4-6 (global.oup.com/education) are available to help children develop higher-level comprehension. Created by 2016 Comics Laureate Dave Gibbons, and comprehension experts Lindsay Pickton and Christine Chen, they introduce sophisticated vocabulary and generate meaningful discussion that develops inference.

What must / might have happened in the meantime? Could it be a flashback? Shifts in place should also be noted, or instances when the location is the same, but the viewpoint has flipped.

Once children have reached this level of understanding, draw links between the graphic artist's manipulation of time and place and the paragraphing of a traditional writer. From here you can ask pupils to think about cohesion and paragraphing in their own writing. Not everything has to be spelled out for the reader and leaping forward in time is often a very effective narrative device.

5. Become inference experts

Inference is so often the major stumbling block for a young reader, yet the great majority of children are experts at making inferences in their daily lives. They learn to read facial expressions accurately from a very early age and quickly come to conclusions when they look around an unfamiliar room.

Graphic texts require these skills to be exercised on every page, every panel, and most children just get on with it, unaware that they are inferring at all. Capitalise on this by asking them how they know a character is feeling a certain way. How do they know when something bad is about to happen, or what happened the moment before, even though it isn't drawn or described?

Then, when returning to traditional texts, show them how the same skills apply – though they must see the people and places in their heads by reading and understanding the sentences.

CHRISTINE CHEN and **LINDSAY PICKTON** are independent Primary Education Advisors supporting English development nationally. They both grew up as avid readers of comics!

10 JOURNEYS INTO *other worlds*

Entering a hidden or imaginary space is always a thrill, and with these activities, children will never want to leave

Foundation Stage

1 Imelda and the Goblin King

BY BRIONY MAY SMITH (Flying Eye)

ILLUSTRATION: Briony May Smith

What's the story?

When the Goblin King arrives in the fairy forest, he bullies everyone. Will Imelda's pie change his mind – or will it turn him into a wriggly worm?

This retro-styled picturebook draws on traditional folktale motifs but serves them with a modern twist that will be enjoyed by admirers of fairies and goblins alike.

Thinking and talking

How does the Goblin King upset everyone and why do you think he acts that way? What should you do when somebody in school behaves like this? What kind of imaginary creatures might live in modern towns and cities?

Try this

- **Use plasticine and natural materials to make a fairy feast, then take it to the woods and arrange on leaves while you search for fairies and goblins. Mix mud pies for the goblin king. Write about what you've done and illustrate with photographs.**
- **Have a go at stamping and roaring like the Goblin King, then roleplay Imelda trying to persuade him to behave nicely. Will she succeed?**
- **Attach lolly sticks to cut-outs of fairies and goblins, creating toy theatre characters. Using the book's endpapers as scenery, act out stories.**

2

Foundation Stage

The Darkest Dark

BY CHRIS HADFIELD AND KATE FILLION (Macmillan)

ILLUSTRATION: The Fan Brothers

What's the story?

Chris Hadfield is an astronaut – who, as a small boy, was afraid of the dark! Here, Chris fictionalises his experience of growing up in the 60s and shows how the Apollo moon landing helped him overcome his fear.

This is a book about hopes and dreams as well as fears, set against the other worlds of deep space and the imagination.

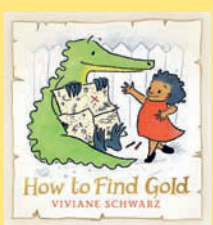
Thinking and talking

Why is Chris afraid of the dark, and how does he conquer his fear? Why do you think our imaginations create scary things? What would you like to be when you grow up?

Try this

- **Use cardboard boxes to make play models of rockets. Imagine you're an astronaut flying to outer space. What happens? Tell your story.**
- **Look at the picture showing Chris in bed surrounded by aliens. Pretend to be one of them and explain how you came to be there. What are you thinking when Chris wakes? Describe your alien world and draw pictures of it.**
- **What do we know about the other worlds that are our closest planets? And what is it really like to be an astronaut? Find out some facts about the first moon landings.**

3



Foundation Stage

How to Find Gold

BY VIVIANE SCHWARZ (Walker)

ILLUSTRATION © 2016 Viviane Schwarz from How to Find Gold, reproduced by kind permission of Walker Books

What's the story?

For Anna and Crocodile, planning and executing a dangerous mission is all in a day's work – and the gold they find will be theirs forever. But perhaps a more valuable prize is on offer? This exuberant picturebook can be read for its (very satisfying) story, or explored for insights around the value of imagination, friendship and an independent spirit.

Thinking and talking

What kind of imaginary worlds do you play in? The gold in this book's title could mean treasure, but it could mean other things – like friendship and happiness. What do you think are the most important things in life?

Try this

- **Look at the spread showing Anna and Crocodile burying the treasure. Create an imaginary island mural using crayons and pastels. What would happen if you sailed to your island world?**
- **Look at the way Crocodile and Anna interact. In pairs, role play their conversations. Using a collection of soft toys, invent imaginary characters. Create dialogues and record them, then transcribe and illustrate.**
- **How would you move underwater, and what would it feel like? The 'giant fish spread' depicts six views of Anna and Crocodile. Copy their movements and build on these to create your own searching for underwater treasure dance.**

Key Stage 1

4 Leon and the Place Between

BY ANGELA MCALLISTER AND GRAHAM BAKER-SMITH (Templar)

ILLUSTRATION: Angela McAllister

What's the story?

Leon is watching an old-fashioned show when the magician invites him to enter a box. Inside is The Place Between…

Beautifully designed to evoke old-fashioned variety-show bills and illustrated in a surreal and richly detailed style, this is a book that definitely benefits from close observation.

Thinking and talking

Look at the pictures. How have they been made (collage), and what effect do they have? If you could be taken somewhere by magic, where would you go and what would it be like?

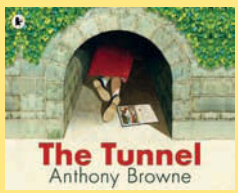
Try this

■ ***"With a ripple of gold braid the curtains slowly parted."*** **To reveal what? Make an opulent stage set with velvet curtains and painted gold ornaments. Use dressing-up clothes and props to create characters and scenes to be revealed as you draw back the curtains. Or perform your own variety show with magic tricks and juggling!**

■ ***"Inside, the box was not a box. It was a world of doorways to Somewhere Else…"*** **Cut a doorway into a huge cardboard box, then decorate the inside with collaged pictures to create some magic of your own. Use this to inspire writing and artwork about other worlds.**

Key Stage 1

5 The Tunnel



BY ANTHONY BROWNE (Walker)

What's the story?

While two quarrelsome siblings are out playing, the brother crawls through a tunnel, leaving the sister behind. When she follows him, she finds herself in a strange world of fairytale symbols – a world in which her brother has been turned to stone.

Anthony Browne's acclaimed classic showcases his taste for the surreal and will make an inspiring starting point for otherworldly explorations.

Thinking and talking

Where do you think the tunnel goes? Talk about fairytales and the traditional storyworlds in which they're set. What can you think of that's common to many of these storyworlds? (Dangerous forests, enchantments, talking animals, etc.)

Try this

■ **Look carefully at the hidden features of this other world. List words and phrases to describe it. Create portals (a cardboard tunnel, a table festooned with paper creepers) and crawl through them to another world. What's it like?**

■ **Using sticky notes, generate questions about Browne's pictures. Discuss in groups, then pool your answers and use to inspire creative writing about other worlds.**

■ **In PE, explore the idea of being turned to stone. In pairs, role play the meeting between the stone-hard brother and his sister. Find out about a local statue and imagine it unfreezing. What would happen next?**

Key Stage 1

6

The Adventures of Beekle The Unimaginary Friend

BY DAN SANTAT (Andersen Press)

What's the story?

Beekle has a problem. Born in a faraway land of imaginary friends, no child has ever called on him for duty. So Beekle takes matters into his own paws and sets off in search of a real-world person of his own.

Thinking and talking

What do we learn from the illustrations in this book that the text doesn't tell us? What do imaginary friends offer that real friends don't?

Try this

- **Who or what would your imaginary friend be, and what would it look like? Give it a name and describe its personality. Write stories about your adventures. Draw your friend's portrait and add to a faraway island mural.**
- **Look at the spread showing 12 small images of Beekle and Alice getting acquainted. Examine their body language and mimic it. Add dialogue using sticky notes, and use to create roleplays. How can we help each other make friends and communicate better?**
- **Beekle finds our world a bit odd. Go for a walk, looking at everything as if you were a recent arrival from another world. Take photos and make voice recordings of your observations. Use your research to create annotated diagrams of your route, including information for other visitors.**

ILLUSTRATION: Dan Santat

ILLUSTRATION © Levi Pinfold 2016

Key Stage 2

7

Song from Somewhere Else

BY A.F. HARROLD (Bloomsbury)

What's the story?

Nick Underbridge is bigger than the other kids and he smells weird. But there's more to him than meets the eye. He's a creature from another world.

Frank has found herself a special friend – but will she be able to keep Nick's secret from the bullies?

Thinking and talking

What do you think about the way A.F. Harrold writes about bullying? Why does Frank behave as she does? How would you advise her to behave? What do Levi Pinfold's illustrations add to the text, and what would this book be like without them?

Try this

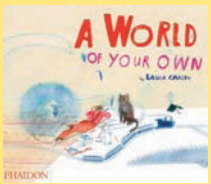
■ **Explore mark making using pencils, graphite, charcoal and ink washes. Share discoveries and methods with the rest of the class. Look at the smudges and shadows Pinfold has drawn throughout the book. Why are they there, and what effect do they have? Smudge-design your own paper, then choose your favourite passage from the book and write it out in your best handwriting. Display alongside charcoal drawings.**

■ **Pinfold drew feathery marks to represent the music (see p. 29). Find other ways to illustrate the music you listen to. Use instruments and noise makers to compose your own 'otherworldly' music.**

■ ***Monsters in our Midst.* This is the headline Nick imagines reading (see p.129). Write a newspaper report to match the headline, or a story inspired by it.**

ILLUSTRATION: Laura Carlin

8



Key Stage 2

A World of Your Own

BY LAURA CARLIN (Phaidon)

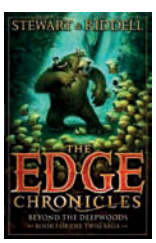
What's the story?

"Let me show you how I draw and make My World by looking at what already exists..." As Laura Carlin demonstrates in this beautiful and intriguing picture / activity book, imagination is a powerful force – and art is both its outcome and its inspiration.

Thinking and talking

What do you think is the most interesting idea in this book, and why? What would Your World be like if you were in charge?

9



Key Stage 2

Beyond the Deepwoods

BY PAUL STEWART AND CHRIS RIDDELL (Corgi)

What's the story?

On a journey through the Deepwoods, Twig does what his adopted woodtroll family would never do, and strays from the path. Pursued by bloodthirsty beasts and attacked by flesh eating trees, the Deepwoods threaten Twig at every turn.

Thinking and talking

What makes an imaginary world seem real? Have Stewart and Riddell achieved this, and if so, how?

Do you know of any other books featuring maps of imaginary worlds like The Edge? Compare them.

Try this

■ ***"The Edge Chronicles started with the map. Chris drew it in one of his***

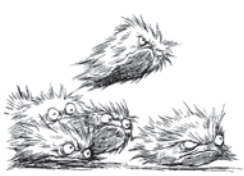


ILLUSTRATION: Chris Riddell

Try this

■ Look at Laura's model shop and its unexpected interior. Use folded card to make similar inside-outside models and group these together to create a town.

■ Imagine a world with a library where you could borrow anything. In groups, make lists of all the things that could be borrowed, then vote for your favourites. Write notes for each object, explaining what it is, why somebody might want it, how they should care for it and how they could use it. Create an illustrated catalogue for your imaginary library and share with another class. What would they borrow, and why?

■ Invent some animals for Your World by cutting up photographs and rearranging them. Choose your favourite and name it, then work in groups to design and build a zoo to house your creatures.

10

Key Stage 2

The Secret Garden

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT (Puffin)

What's the story?

Following her parents' death in India, Mary Lennox is sent to live with her uncle at Misselthwaite Manor, where she learns of a secret garden locked away behind a wall. When the spoilt and lonely girl finally enters the garden, a transformation begins – one that will see new life and hope for all concerned.

Thinking and talking

How can you tell this book was written a long time ago? Look for objects, words and ideas. It isn't just the garden that's locked away in this book. What are the characters hiding or ignoring, and how do they change as the story progresses?

Try this

■ **Find out about local gardens and parks, and the plants and animals that live there. Make a map to document your discoveries.**

■ **Find out about India in Mary's time. How did life there differ from Edwardian Britain? Use what you've discovered from the text and your research to make a presentation.**

■ **Other worlds don't have to be imaginary. Find out about hidden or overlooked realities, from underground worlds (such as sewers and transport tunnels) to the nighttime worlds of postal sorting and supermarket deliveries. How many different realities can you discover locally? Display your information.**

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative development manager at Seven Stories.

sketchbooks and gave it to Paul. 'This is The Edge,' he said. 'Tell me what happens there…'" **(edgechronicles.co.uk). In pairs, draw maps of imaginary worlds. Swap, then write an adventure set in your partner's world. Use chalks to draw an enormous map on the playground. Explore this through role play, use as a stimulus for creative writing, or as a prop for delivering 'guided tours'.**

■ **The Deepwoods are full of brand new creatures, many of which are extremely dangerous. Invent some life forms to populate an imaginary world. Draw diagrams and create a natural history guide.**

DISCOVER the joy of grammar

Changing just one word can transform the impact of a sentence – and take a familiar fairy tale somewhere new and exciting...

Why are we so squeamish about teaching grammar? We don't have a problem with technical terms in other curriculum areas, but we seem reluctant to name different kinds of word-function in English. Part of the reason may lie in the fact that we have a generation of teachers who were never taught grammar at school, but it might also be that grammar is often perceived as boring – which it certainly will be if reduced to decontextualised exercises, as well as ineffective. The power and joy of grammar teaching lies in exploring the impact of word choice and word order, first in our reading and then in our writing.

What does this look like in practice? Well, consider, for example, the story of Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH). Using the following sequence, there are many ways to explore how the use of grammar in this text makes an impact on the reader.

1. Identify the words / sentences the writer used.
2. Use drama, with group or paired activities to explore possible alternatives.
3. Discuss the impact of the different options and decide why the writer chose to use the words and sentences that are in the text.

The same steps can be used with any suitable text, as can all the activities in this article.

1 Changing nouns and verbs

Consider the sentence: ***In the woods, she met a wolf***. Identify the nouns in the sentence ***(woods, wolf).*** Which words might replace the noun 'wolf' if you changed 'woods' to, for example, 'pool' / 'desert' / 'park' / 'Arctic' / 'classroom' / 'lake'? Point out that we are limited in the kinds of words we can use instead of 'wolf' (we can only use nouns or noun phrases) and that the choice of the first noun ***(place)*** will affect the choice of the second noun.

Now identify the verb ***(met)***. Remind children that a sentence must have a verb. Which words could you use instead of 'met' ***(e.g. spotted, glimpsed, ran from, shouted at)***? Talk about how the verb sets up expectations of what happens next in the story. For example, if LRRH 'spotted' a wolf, we know that the wolf is hiding, or is perhaps a long way away. How will that affect what happens next?

2 Playing with sentence types

The story of LRRH has the full range of sentence types:

- Questions – "Where are you going with that basket of goodies?"
- Statements – "My grandmother lives in the cottage in the woods."
- Explanations – "What big ears you have!"
- Commands – "Lift up the latch and come in."

Play with the words in each kind of sentence. How do you change one sentence into a different kind of

sentence? How would it change the story if, for example, LRRH had asked "Why do you have such big ears, Grandmother?" or commanded "Show me your big ears."?

Allow the children to play with speech bubbles of sentences throughout the story, using the same kind of information but in different sentence types. Talk about the reasons why particular sentence types are used at each point in the story.

3 Tracking fronted adverbials

Adverbials are interesting because, unlike most word-types, they can move around a sentence. Ask children to consider the difference between

- Later that morning, she arrived at her Grandmother's cottage.
- She arrived later that morning at her Grandmother's cottage.
- She arrived at her Grandmother's cottage later that morning.

The same words are used in all the sentences, and the broad meaning is the same, but each sentence means something slightly different because the emphasis changes according to where in the sentence the information is included. Is the emphasis in the sentence meant to be on her *arrival*, or *when* she arrives?

Discuss the fact that we normally start a new paragraph if there is a new time, place, person or action. That being the case, which of the sentences is most likely to be used at the beginning of a paragraph? Talk about why.

Let children search for adverbials throughout the text. Where are fronted adverbials mostly used? Note that if there is a fronted adverbial, it often means that there should also be a new paragraph.

4 Acting out modal verbs

Ask the children to try some of the dialogue in LRRH with lots of modal verbs, e.g.

- "I might go later, if I have time," mumbled LRRH.
- "No, you must go now while the cakes are still warm," insisted her mother
- "But I should be at Goldilocks' house!" complained LRRH

Let the children use drama to explore how using different modal verbs in dialogue at key points in the story changes the relationship between the characters.

5 Creating suspense with passive voice

Challenge the children to create some tension in a modern retelling of the story by using passives:

- She had been told not to talk to strangers.
- She was being watched as she picked the flowers.
- As she crossed the room, each of her footsteps was carefully counted.

Clarify that the reason for using passives in a story can be because the agent is not important, but is more likely to be in order to hide the agent and create tension or suspense. Can this story work as a suspense story?

Choose your text, or write your own version of a familiar story with lots of examples of your grammatical focus, ensure that the children know what the target grammatical construction is and give them opportunities to play with language. Activities that engage children with grammatical structures, and which make them question and explore their use, are likely to improve standards in children's own writing far more effectively than decontextualised sentence-writing in weekly grammar lessons.

Kate's new writing resource *Cracking Writing* is available in June – find out more at risingstars-uk.com/writing

"We don't have a problem with technical terms in other curriculum areas, but we seem reluctant to name different kinds of word-function in English"

KATE RUTTLE is a literacy consultant and primary school teacher of 30 years. She has written the *Cracking Comprehension* and *Cracking Writing* resources for Rising Stars.

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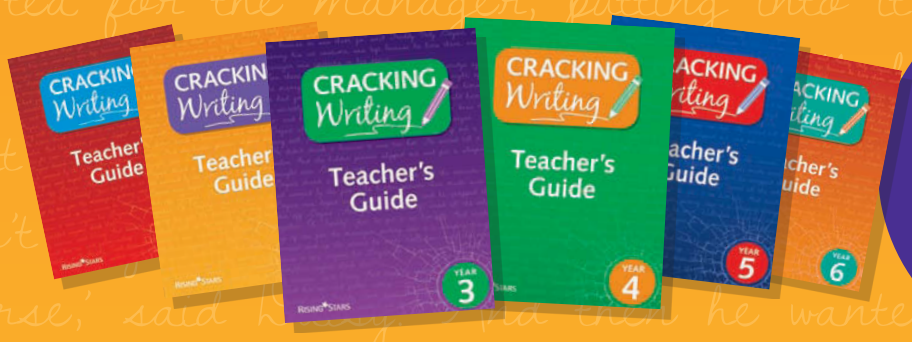

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KS2 LESSON PLAN

The fearsome Gruncher

Explore this mysterious creature with an art lesson from the **Roald Dahl** estate

What they'll learn

- Listen and respond appropriately to others
- Use spoken language to develop understanding through imagining and exploring ideas
- Use the medium of drawing to explore the imagination and share ideas

This autumn sees the publication of a new edition of Roald Dahl's book *Billy and the Minpins*, featuring illustrations by Quentin Blake for the first time. Use this lesson plan, plus the downloadable resources from teachwire.net, to bring this lesser-known tale to life.

START HERE

Make sets of cards, each one featuring a noun or adjective from *The Minpins*, such as 'hot', 'fire', 'magical', 'monster' etc (or download our version from teachwire.net). Discuss the definitions of noun and adjective then ask the children to take it in turns with a partner to pick one adjective and one noun card before using them appropriately in a verbal sentence. Share some ideas with the class and challenge pupils to add more adjectives to the sentence to make it even more descriptive. Discuss the value of detailed descriptions in helping us to picture things clearly.

MAIN LESSON

1 | Red Hot Fire

Read the description of the Gruncher from pages 22-24 to your class (or find it at teachwire.net), beginning at 'The one waiting for you down there is the fearsome Gruncher...' What do you think the Gruncher looks like? Discuss your ideas with a partner. What might its head look like? What about its eyes, nose and mouth? How can its belly store 'red-hot' fire? What must its legs look like if it can gallop so fast? Share some ideas as a class, noting down key vocabulary and adjectives. Explain to the children that they will now draw the Gruncher in stages using their imagination (download our worksheet at teachwire.net). Model drawing the head first using the shared descriptions from the pupils. Ask them to remind their partner how they picture the Gruncher's head to encourage variety, rather than copying the class version. Repeat these steps for the facial features, body and legs.

2 | Adding life

Model using shading and colour to bring the Gruncher to life. Ask the children to think carefully about the colours they wish to use and to explain the reasons for their choices with their partner.

3 | Art show

Ask students to walk around the classroom to look at the variety of Grunchers that have been created. Discuss the similarities and differences between them. Ask some children to share their favourite with the class and explain why they like it. Discuss the fact there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer because we all have unique imaginations.

A PERFECT MATCH

Giving children texts that offer just the right level of challenge can raise attainment without damaging their confidence, says **Jackson Stenner**

We all recall the national press headlines about pupils being 'reduced to tears' after the 'ridiculously difficult' 2016 KS2 SATs reading tests. Through our research at Metametrix, it is clear that the challenge was not solely about the difficulty of the questions but also about the complexity of the reading passages.

Last year, we conducted studies to examine the text complexity of material that students encountered in the course of each academic year. Using The Lexile Framework for Reading, which places both student reading ability and text difficulty on the same scale, we analysed the text complexity of the English reading sections from Key Stage 1 and 2 tests (2003 to 2016), including 2016 samples from the Department for Education, and textbooks for use in Years 1 through 11. Our Lexile Analyser software uses important predictors like sentence length and word frequency to determine the complexity of a text, which can range from below 0L for early readers to above 1600L for advanced texts.

We found that in terms of text complexity, the 2016 Key Stage 1 reading section was well aligned with the sample reading section and previous reading sections and just over 100L more challenging than Year 2 textbooks. The 2016 Key Stage 2 reading section was more complex than the sample section when measured by the Lexile Framework. But it incorporated passages with a similar range of complexity as observed on discontinued Level 3-5 and Level 6 tests. What stood out, however, was the difference between the complexity of the Year 6 textbooks and the passages from the reading KS2 section: there was a +300L difference in the average difficulty.

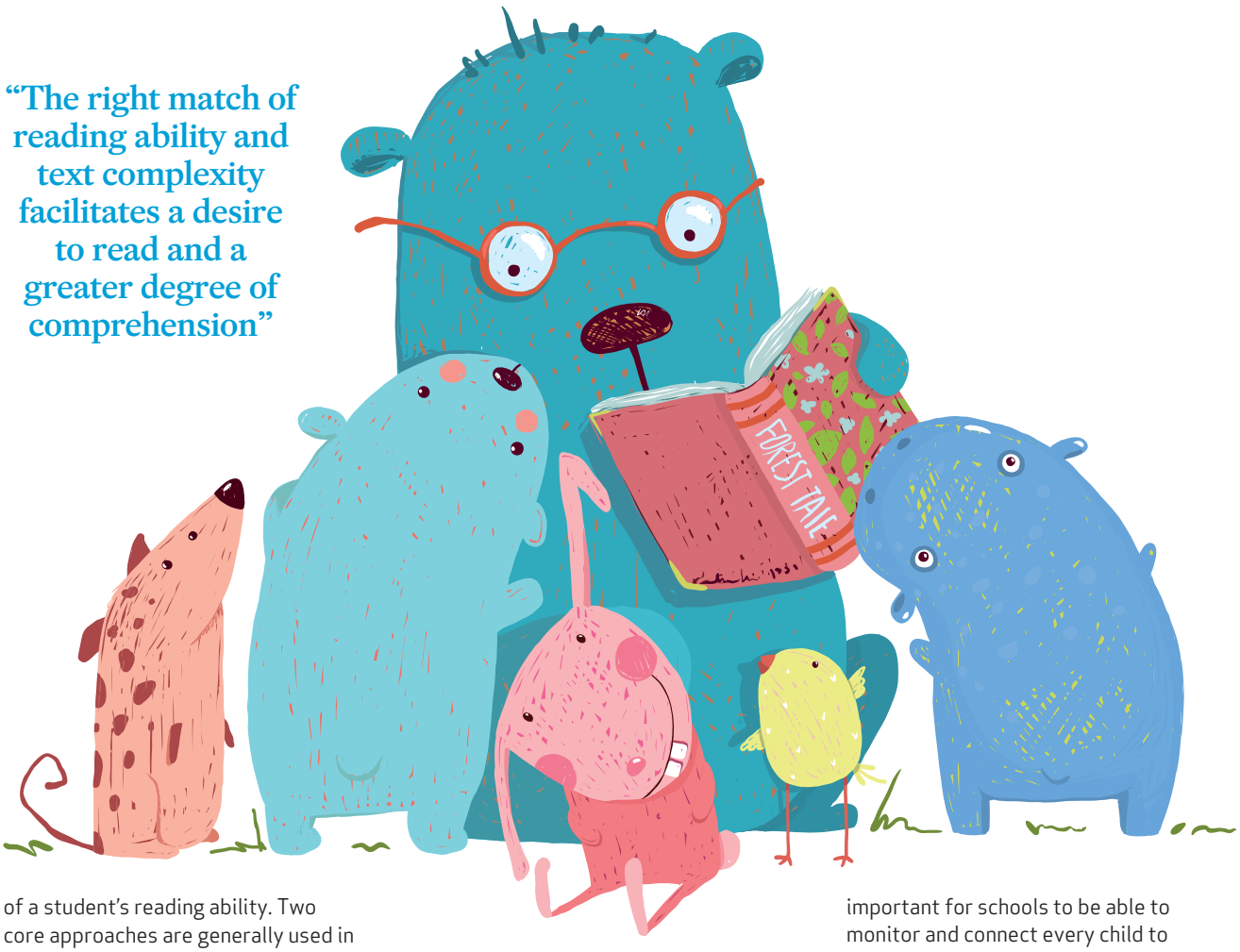
In that light, it isn't surprising that there were tears, given the huge disparity between what children would have been reading in the classroom and what they were expected to tackle in the test. So how do we raise reading attainment while avoiding unnecessary stress?

The issue with assessment

Ample evidence indicates that the right match of reading ability and text complexity facilitates a desire to read and a greater degree of comprehension. In our studies, students who selected reading material outside of their developmental zone demonstrated disengagement and a declining desire to read, whereas those with books targeted around their ability exhibited reading growth.

The first step in making an optimum match is to have a clear understanding

> "The right match of reading ability and text complexity facilitates a desire to read and a greater degree of comprehension"



of a student's reading ability. Two core approaches are generally used in education to assess this. In the first (largely applied in primary schools), a teacher will assign each child to the appropriate colour and level within the school's selected reading scheme after one on one evaluation. Books within the schemes are organised based on increasingly complex text features. An alternative approach is to create reading tests; either developed by a school or purchased from a publisher.

Unfortunately, the removal of levels means that each student's assessment results will be particular to the school's chosen system; and of course, assigning a measure to their reading ability is only half the equation. In order for students to grow as readers, being able accurately to match relevant books and study material to the child's ability is an essential requirement.

A clear measure

Over thirty years, the Lexile Framework has been linked to numerous reading assessments in use around the world. Because many book publishers report Lexile measures for their titles, educators can use a student's Lexile measure to connect them with reading materials that offer an optimum level of challenge. A benefit of the Lexile Framework is that it accounts for the fact that each pupil has his or her own 'optimum'. So, a native English student with a love of reading could be targeted at a 75% comprehension rate, making use of their excitement to stretch their skills. At the same time a pupil new to the language could be targeted at a 96% match to reinforce new skills and build confidence. This targeted, 'just right', match facilitates reading growth.

More than 200 publishers and digital platforms, including Pearson, Scholastic, McGraw Hill, Achieve3000 and HarperCollins, have adopted the Lexile Framework of Reading; and over 200,000 books and tens of millions of articles have received Lexile measures. For example, *The BFG* by Roald Dahl has a text complexity of 700L while J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is of an 860L level.

With each school now having its own assessment program and learning system it has never been more important for schools to be able to monitor and connect every child to reading material that has the right level of text complexity. Likewise, students should have the tools to independently select the appropriate reading material suited to their own development.

The earlier we help children to develop a passion for reading, the more likely it is that those students will grow into being strong readers. The early adoption of properly targeted reading practice is the most exciting phenomenon I'm currently seeing across the world – because regardless of where a child begins in life, we know that having a positive relationship with reading lays the foundation for a better future.

For further information on the Lexile Framework for Reading, current research, and a list of more than 200 publishers using the measure, visit lexile.co.uk

DR JACKSON STENNER
is chief science officer and co-founder of MetaMetrics

Higher Standards **AHEAD**

Good drivers don't panic or overreact when conditions get tricky, says **Mark Creasy** - and neither should great teachers

What sort of driver are you? I see plenty of different types during my hour-long commute to work; and over time, I've started to slot them into categories – just for my own amusement, you understand. So, do you recognise any of these?

- The 'Invisible overtaker' – won't move for anyone, regardless of space in the inside lane, or the pace of everyone around them.
- The 'Changer' – cannot stay still, jockeys from lane to lane trying to get an advantage, often going back to exactly where they started, no further ahead, but disrupting everyone else's flow.
- The 'Warner' – spots hazards (which everyone else has) but thinks they rule the road, so breaks and engages hazard lights to show they're in control; spreading panic as a consequence.
- The 'Parent' or 'do as I say, not as I do driver' - has a baby on board sign in their car telling everyone to give them an exclusion zone, then risks everyone's life, particularly their own child's, with their driving.

I bet you're nodding in agreement at this point; like me, I'm sure you see all kinds of dodgy driving as you go about your daily business – but what if I were to ask you to think about these descriptions of behaviour as applied to the KS2 classroom, rather than the road? And specifically, as applied to attitudes towards the new writing standards for children?

It only takes a brief moment or two on Twitter with the right hashtag to realise just how much consternation there still is about the changes to KS2 writing standards – and I'm convinced that many teachers are responding by adopting approaches very much like those I observe in my fellow drivers. It's understandable, but I think that if we were all gathered in a cosy service station somewhere over a hot cuppa and a packet of biscuits, we would probably all agree that it's far from ideal. Could there be a better way?

The question of time

By far the greatest cause for extreme reactions to the new standards, I would suggest, is the lack of time many colleagues feel they now have within the curriculum to ensure they can be met. All too often, in the cause of finding more space for English lessons other, non-core subjects are being squeezed out – which is a matter of huge concern for teachers, parents and indeed, the children themselves. However, whilst I agree that the changes to the Year 6 curriculum have provided challenge, they also offer plenty of opportunities, if colleagues are prepared to embrace them.

So, what to do to redress the balance and ensure successful delivery? I think the key is ensuring that the KS2 writing standards are delivered through humanities and science, too, rather than simply having more English lessons. In fact, as I showed in *There is Another Way: The Second Big Book of Independent Thinking* (Independent Thinking Press) if cross-curricular, project based learning is used correctly this will not only improve standards, but also stimulate learners in KS2.

A smoother journey

I would even go so far as to say that for a richer and more vibrant curriculum, the current quota of English lessons in schools could easily be scaled back and even more humanities and science taught – ensuring that the necessary skills are developed through purposeful and relevant topics for the learners. There's certainly more than enough scope across geography, history, RE and science, and PSHE to be able to fulfil all of the examples of writing required to be able to effectively assess the learners.

You see, to me, KS2 teachers need to be none of the above examples of drivers. Rather, they should aim to become what I call the 'Smooth Flow Merchants'. These people know where they're going, have a clear idea how to get there, and react to any changing conditions – including inclement weather and irritating obstacles – not with last-minute breaking or panicked accelerating, but maintaining a clear and calm disposition. Their journey is planned for, taking into account there will be hold ups along the way, but also allowing plenty of opportunity to appreciate the views along the way, not just once they've reached the destination.

> "There's certainly more than enough scope across geography, history, RE and science to be able to fulfil all of the examples of writing required to be able to effectively assess the learners"

4 STEPS TO A BALANCED APPROACH

1. **Ensure that teachers right across the school, including any non-English specialists, are fully conversant with the English writing standards – make them part of everyone's consciousness.**
2. **Reexamine your curriculum, and ensure that you have mapped out where each of the standards can be met, in the humanities and science.**
3. **Ensure that English (or literacy, or whatever its nomenclature) is focused on teaching the elements of grammar that are required.**
4. **Ensure that the humanities and science curricula allow opportunities for these skills to be deployed into the children's writing for these subjects.**

Remember: to absolutely secure the standards, the children need to be involved in recognising the standards. Pupils in my class have a reminder sheet out of expectations for every lesson, as well as individual sheets for every piece of writing. This makes them confident in recognising the standards – as does having to mark exemplar pieces I provide for them, using the W.A.G.O.L.L Principle 'What A Good One Looks Like'.

MARK CREASY is a teacher, and author of Unhomework (Independent Thinking Press)

"For me, the words are always the most important thing"

When it comes to great storytelling for children, no one can touch the genius of Astrid Lindgren, says **Tony Ross**

I remember learning to read at school, running my grubby finger along the lines of text, and breaking the words down into little pieces – but they are quite hazy memories, because I was never a terribly attentive pupil. I wasn't a very good reader; at Christmas, with my Rupert books, I would always follow the couplets rather than the full paragraphs. Of course, the illustrations would do the rest – and in fact, I still think it was a fantastically useful way of presenting a story, giving children the choice of reading text that was more or less complex, but with the same pictures.

I may not have been a prize learner, but I did love school. I was born in 1938, so my classmates and I had a wonderful war to enjoy, and it was one that had nothing at all to do with fighting or killing. My early experience of education was simply adventurous, and I liked everything about it except the lessons, of which there weren't too many, anyway. We were encouraged to bring books in to send to our troops, although I strongly suspected that the poor soldiers at the Front might have preferred a scarf or balaclava. Still, my teacher said books were what was needed, so I was quite proud of myself when I found a lovely pile of them, tied up with string (so clearly not wanted for reading), in our house, which I presented to her 'for the war effort'. I'm afraid my father was rather less impressed when he realised what had happened to his precious Dickens first editions...

The first books I recall reading at school for pleasure, rather than 'training', were the *Milly Molly Mandy* stories, written by Joyce Lankester Brisley and illustrated with her simple, memorable line drawings. I got the same satisfaction from Arthur Ransome's words and pictures in *Swallows and Amazons*. But it was only when I started devouring the *Just William* series that I really began to get an idea of the influence of illustration – I could tell there was something definitely fishy about Thomas Henry's artwork, although I couldn't pinpoint what it was. Sure enough, when I was older I realised that instead of capturing Richmal Crompton's Lancashire, he was conjuring somewhere more like Weybridge as the location for The Outlaws' exploits; and even when the stories were set against the backdrop of WWII, the pictures were somehow stuck in the 1920s.

I love to see a child poring over the pictures in a book, pointing out various details, and chuckling when the artist wants him to, but I'm just as happy to see another who treats the artwork as an irrelevance. It's different for each reader, which is lucky, as it gives us illustrators plenty of breadth. For me, the words are always the most important thing, though. I'd much rather have a well-told story with poor quality images than the other way around.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Tony Ross

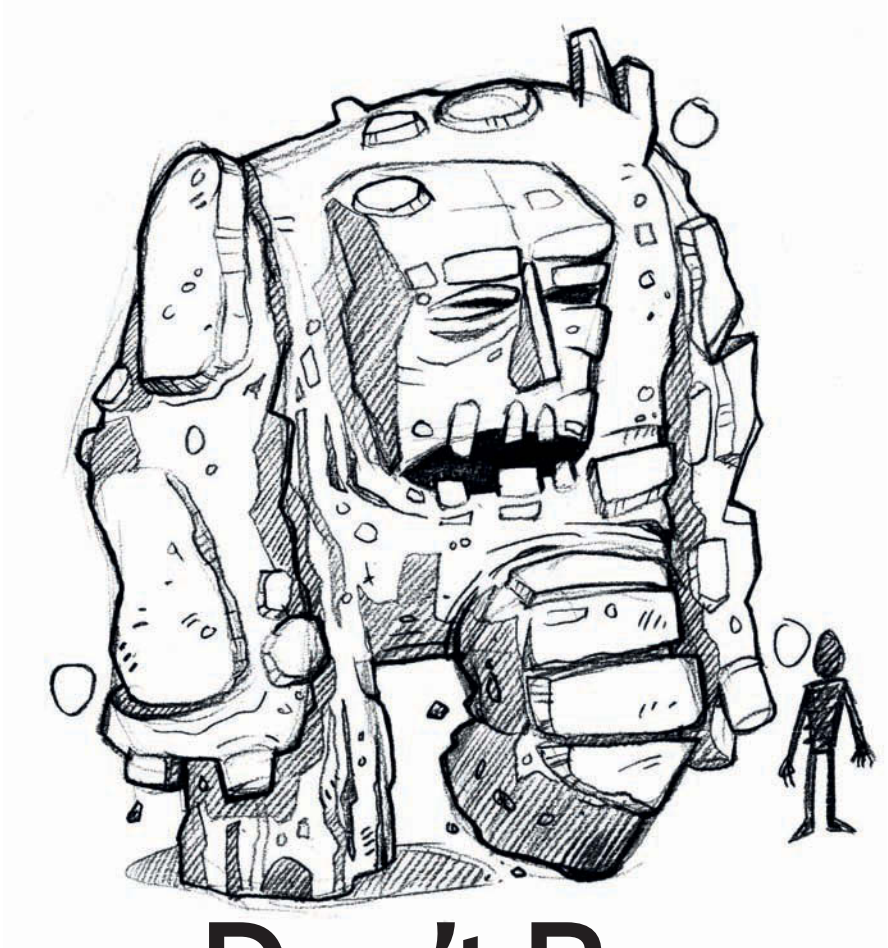
Besides, good illustration isn't about brilliant drawing; when Kenneth Grahame was choosing an artist for *Wind in the Willows*, he told E H Shepard, "There are people who can draw better, and who are more famous – but you make the animals come to life, and that's what I want." Sir John Tenniel was certainly a great and talented artist, but the plates he created for *Alice in Wonderland* are awful, in my opinion – a stiff, frowning little girl in all those thoroughly Victorian settings. Completely wrong; where's the magic?

I've been fortunate to have worked with some wonderful authors throughout my career, all of whom, by the way, write better than I can. And the best of them, without a trace of a doubt, is Astrid Lindgren. Her writing is unbeatable; she was a genius, and the only regret I have about the images I was privileged enough to be asked to create for *Pippi Longstocking* is that they aren't nearly good enough for the text. But then, nothing I could have produced would have been; I loved working with those words.

Funny or serious, illustrated or not, I don't think teachers, parents, or grown-ups generally, should judge what a child chooses to read on any grounds other than how much that child is enjoying it. Comics, for example, were really helpful to me as a young boy who would probably be known as a 'reluctant reader' today – the content may have been basic, but they were full of visual clues, so I could properly understand and enjoy the stories and jokes. Forcing children to read particular books is likely to put them off reading altogether; it should be a pleasure, not a horrible task, and for that to happen, youngsters need to be able to pick up what appeals to them, not have something handed to them whether they like it or not.

"I love to see a child poring over the pictures in a book, pointing out various details"

Author and illustrator Tony Ross is judge for the Klauss Flugge prize



Don't Be AFRAID OF FEAR

Our instinct as adults is to protect children from the scary stuff - but should we reconsider, asks **Curtis Jobling**

I blame my imagination. That was the principal reason I was such a colossal scaredy-cat as a child. It didn't matter what I heard, or saw, or read, my unconscious had an uncanny way of intensifying anything remotely frightful. If I saw tree-branch shadows playing across my window at night, they were always giant skeletal fingers. If I heard something moving through the undergrowth at dusk, you could bet your bottom dollar it was a werewolf stalking me. And don't get me started on the things that lurked in the graveyard around the corner from the house I grew up in.

Fear is the emotion that gets all the bad press. Sure, you can have fiery, furious Anger, gleeful, happy-clappy Joy, weeping and wailing Sadness and disapproving Disgust, but for some reason Fear is the one that folk don't want to talk about, certainly not with their children. Some parents would rather pretend it wasn't there, cover their kids in bubble wrap and keep that particular beast from the door. This is folly, and I'm going to try and explain why.

Childhood can be scary. Not in a monstrous sense, but certainly as a world into which children are taking tentative steps; it can be intimidating, and frightening. For some young people, the real world can be a place where there are genuine scares to contend with, and bad things happen. Where better to escape this misery – any misery – than within the pages of a good book? A well-crafted, age-appropriate scary story will always do more good than harm.

The importance of nightmares

Show me someone who doesn't know what fear is and I'll show you a troubled

Illustrations: Curtis Jobling

"A well-crafted, age-appropriate story will always do more good than harm. Where better to escape misery than within the pages of a book?"

individual. It's an emotion that starts the blood pumping, gets the heart racing, reminds us that we're alive. My earliest recollection of fear is via the nightmares of my childhood. Note to parents: you can't protect your children from nightmares. We all suffer from them, big and small. They're how our subconscious minds deal with real-life troubles, many of which we may not even be aware of. They can of course be influenced by things to which we are exposed; in my case, it was the stories I read, and tales I was told. *Where The Wild Things Are* and Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite are entirely responsible for the fact that I slept surrounded by cuddly toys and action figures for a fair few of my formative years. Hiding under the sheets can only last so long, though. Facing one's fears for the first time is a rite of passage. Only by being bold and conquering the things that scare us, will we become more confident, well-rounded individuals.

Cinema has a lot to answer for. Some of my earliest memories of frights were via the films I watched with my dad, curled up on the sofa beside him, taking in the late night chiller. Invariably this was an old black-and-white "Creature Feature", showcasing the shambling and slashing talents of Universal Studios' movie monsters. Lon Chaney Jr's Wolfman really stayed with me; I couldn't pass a fog bank without imagining the furry fiend was hot on my tail. Those scares I suffered were visceral, memorable, resulting in my overactive imagination keeping me awake at night. Watching scary movies? Fun at the time for sure, but those frights can leave a mark, especially in the case of a young viewer. Books, however, don't have the same nightmarish effect on their readers as films do.

Warnings and exploration

When we think of traditional children's stories, Grimm's fairy tales often come to mind. These narratives, and others of that ilk, weren't written to delight and captivate children, but to scare them. They were cautionary tales, highlighting the dangers of disappearing into the woods, the risk of talking to strangers, and the perils and pitfalls of entering gingerbread houses, or any abode fashioned primarily of cake, candy or confectionary. Stay away from the dark places, for horror and hellish shenanigans await thee within.

The best way for children to experience fear is from the safety of a good book. A book doesn't leap out and make you jump. A book doesn't chase you or beat you. Tasting terror from within the confines of a book provides the reader with a vicarious thrill, one which they're in complete control of. If a story proves scary – shut the book. And if it's really scary, throw the book in the chest freezer in the garage! Horror, like any genre fiction, can get a child reading; and the adrenaline-fuelled kick that a fright brings with it can fire a lifelong love of literature. What's more, we can work through our fears, both fictional and real, through our love of reading. A shared love of a scary tale could be the springboard for the most skittish soul to overcome that fear.

Shared triumphs

My Max Helsing books feature the exploits of a boy born into a world of monsters, where horrors await him at every turn. Only our hero isn't frightened by them for the most part. He's been around them all of his life. Max gets them –it's humans he doesn't understand! But for Max's friends – gearhead Syd Perez and homeschooled Wing Liu – these terrors are new and, understandably, scare the pants off them. Syd and Wing have to conquer their fears in each of these stories, battling the things they're afraid of and coming out the other side stronger and happier. As an author, fear in a story brings my readers closer to my heroes: they empathise with them, they feel the same sense of panic, of dread. When Max and his friends defeat their demons, that's a moment of triumph for the reader too.

In closing, I should probably add: I still get nightmares to this day. Only now they don't really scare me. They're like private viewings of an original horror movie, meant only for my giddy eyes. I get a thrill from them. That's because I know they're not real. I know I'm going to wake up. Like a scary book, the fright is fleeting - but the enjoyment remains.

CURTIS JOBLING is an illustrator, animator and author of numerous children's books - to find out about school visits, see curtisjobling.com

No sex please - it's Shakespeare!

The Bard's stories often stray into difficult areas - but sensitive retellings can prepare pupils for the rich possibilities of his original language, suggests **Jon Mayhew**

I always remember, as a young English teacher in a secondary school, hearing a grizzled old veteran complaining. "Why do we have to teach these kids Shakespeare?" he grumbled. "They don't understand a bit of it."

Those words came back to me when, some two or three years later and having moved to a special school, I sat in a sensory room listening to Macbeth with pupils who had profound and multiple learning difficulties. Inspired by the work of Dr Nicola Grove, we used props and sensory materials to explore the story. As English coordinator, part of my job was to ensure that pupils had access to an age-appropriate curriculum – and I wondered at the time what my old friend in the staffroom would have said.

The National Curriculum suggests that at Key Stage 2 pupils should read and perform playscripts, and have the opportunity to appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage. Given that Shakespeare is such a huge part of our literary and theatrical heritage, can we really achieve that without reference to him? My own experience of Shakespeare in primary school was limited to building a model Globe Theatre using cigarette packets and sticky tape; when I met his work again, I was convinced that the plays had been written purely to torture teenagers. An earlier, more positive introduction to the texts might have made a huge difference to the way I studied them. The chance to perform the lines and enjoy them would, I am sure, have transformed my understanding of the poetry of the language, and probably helped with meaning too.

A bloody problem

There are parallels between retelling Shakespeare plays and teaching him in class. Many of the texts deal with adult themes, serious issues, sex and violence, and the author or the teacher must navigate these sensitively. So, when Collins Big Cat Reading Scheme approached me to retell some of his stories for them, I admit to feeling a little daunted - given that these books can be read by a lone child, not in the presence of an adult, it was clearly a task requiring care and consideration.

Macbeth is quite a psychological play; gory and violent too. At first, I tried to work in some of the original script but it didn't really do the language justice or help with ease of understanding. Shakespeare's poetry shines when performed confidently, with movement and gesture. It congeals on the page, when read silently, somehow. Better, then, to imagine this book as a starting off point – to tell what is a great story in itself, then allow pupils to explore further in class with their teachers.

I remember well the email that came back after I submitted the first draft of the *Macbeth* retelling. "Can you tone down the gore, please?" An early scene in the play tells how Macbeth cuts a man in half. What's not to like? With the lone reader in mind, however, those descriptions are probably best left in the original and to the discretion of the teacher.

Naughty - but necessary?

In addition to violence, sex features frequently in Shakespeare's plays. Much of the innuendo is hidden in the complexity of the language and so it is easy for the teacher to gloss over it when looking at original texts. Retelling *Romeo and Juliet* presented problems; the scene after their wedding night, for example, not to mention the whole issue of suicide.

"The chance to perform the lines and enjoy them would, I am sure, have transformed my understanding of the poetry of the language, and probably helped with meaning too."

With both these plays, I decided to tell the story from a different point of view. In *Macbeth*, I invented a foot page who chases after the thane and runs errands for him; the child witnesses many things, but doesn't always understand them as an adult would. In *Romeo and Juliet*, I told the tale from the point of view of Balthasar, who is both a servant and a friend of Romeo's, but doesn't have the status to challenge his decisions. So, Balthasar waits for Romeo to 'say goodbye' to Juliet on their wedding night before leaving for exile. He is the one who, not being party to Friar Lawrence's cunning plan, gallops all the way to Mantua to tell Romeo of Juliet's death; think about his feelings when he finds out he was wrong! Imagining a narrative from a different viewpoint helps us understand supporting characters and bring them to life.

The anti semitism in Shakespeare's comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*, doesn't seem funny to a modern audience. By presenting the story from Portia's point of view, as I do with my retelling, the comedic elements become more apparent; here is Portia, surrounded by boastful, idiot men who want nothing but her fortune. When she does find her true love, he turns out to be almost as useless and needs rescuing from a vengeful money-lender. Again, viewing the events of a play through another character's eyes can give a new perspective on it.

A gradual approach

It's true that the complexity of Shakespeare's plays can be offputting for young readers; and I don't think simplifying the stories really damages children's first experiences of them. When they meet Shakespeare again in later years, that complexity can be addressed and the full story explored – there's no need, really, to try explaining the gatekeeper's jokes (about Hell and the effect of wine on the male anatomy) in Macbeth to a year six class. In my version of *Hamlet*, I use a crime-scene investigation format to explore who was to blame for the deaths at the end of the story. This means that the essential plot points are kept, without all the events being needed – and a deeply psychological play becomes accessible.

If you want to understand Shakespeare fully, with his original language, you can't beat acting it out and moving with the words. Seeing the play performed well will do so much to aid enjoyment and understanding; and this can work with even very young audiences. Alongside this, though - or before it happens - retellings are a great introduction to the Bard, and a brilliant way to start actually enjoying the stories he told.

JON MAYHEW is a children's author, who has written a number of retellings of classic stories for Collins Big Cat

The time-slip SCARAB

Whatever period of history your class enjoys, **Pie Corbett's** Ancient Egyptian adventure can be used to plan a fantastic series of writing activities

Every year class 5 went to visit the Fitzwilliam Museum and this year was no exception. The guide stopped at each display to tell the children about the different artefacts. It was only when they reached the Egyptian display that Emily became interested. A scarab beetle caught her attention: glittering wings flickered in the light; greens and blues shimmered like an iridescent gemstone and elongated feelers stretched towards her.

As class 5 meandered into the Viking section, Emily waited. As soon as they had gone, she reached out and touched the beetle. She felt a hot, stabbing pain and withdrew her hand as if she had been stung. A moment later and… she was standing at the edge of a desert. Huge, sand-coloured pyramids jutted upwards; white birds circled above, calling; a vast river oozed by and tall palm trees lined its edge. Emily gasped for she knew exactly where she was.

A procession wound its way from the river towards Emily. At the front, a tall man dressed as Anubis (god of the afterlife), wearing a jackal's mask, strode towards her. Drums beat, rattles shivered and the procession sung a low chant. Six men carried a huge, golden stand on which there was a throne. A beautiful woman surveyed the procession from on high. She was the only person without a mask and she was staring right at Emily, pointing!

Without thinking, Emily dashed towards a door set into the closest pyramid. Inside, it was cool and as she ran down a passageway. Torches burned to light the way ahead. On the walls, she saw carved images – an owl, fish, warriors and strange hieroglyphs that were hard to comprehend. She could hear voices shouting and the sound of running feet behind her but the way ahead was blocked! Spinning round, she found the jackal standing in her path. The mask seemed to grin.

Something itched against her leg; a shiny beetle glittered. Emily recognised the greens and reds glimmering in the torchlight. She reached down, touched the beetle and once again felt a hot, sharp stabbing pain and… there she was, back in the museum with Mrs Hardy striding towards her. "The museum has been closed for half an hour. We're all in the coach. Where have you been, young lady?"

"In Egypt," Emily stammered, but Mrs Hardy did not look at all pleased with her answer!

LET'S GET STARTED

Have you ever dreamed of time travel? Most children have and this story taps into their natural desire to cross the boundaries of time and space by sending the main character whizzing back in time. It is an ideal accompaniment to a topic on Ancient Egypt but could also be used as a model story for any historical period that you are studying. The plot hinges around the idea that there are 'portal' objects that, when touched, can magically can take characters back and forth in time.

DOWNLOAD PIE'S STORY FOR FREE: teachwire.net/scarabstory

Getting immersed in the story

Read the story through, underline difficult vocabulary and discuss any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding – for example, museum, guide, artefacts, scarab beetle, iridescent, elongated, Viking, desert, pyramid, oozed, palm trees, lined, exactly, procession, Anubis, afterlife, jackal, chant, throne, mask, carved images, hieroglyphs, comprehend, striding, stammered.

Try processing the words in different ways. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. List examples or synonyms and then try using the words in sentences. Some words, such as scarab beetle or palm trees, can be quite easily explained by using an image. Use the words over a number of days, incorporating them into grammar games as well as rapid reading, spelling and when writing creative sentences.

To deepen understanding, ask the following sorts of questions:

- What does the author mean by 'this year was no exception'?
- At the start of the story, how did Emily feel and how do we know?
- Describe what it was about the beetle that caught her eye.
- Why do you think she touched the beetle?
- How did she know so quickly where she was?
- What is the possible effect of the words 'rattles shivered'?
- Where is the woman sitting and how do you know?
- What does the fact that she has no mask suggest?
- Explain the word 'surveyed'. What does it suggest about the woman.
- What do the exclamation marks indicate?
- Why does it say, 'without thinking'?
- It was cool inside. What does that suggest about outside?
- How does the author make it seem as though Emily has no hope of escape?
- Does the mask grin? Explain what you think the sentence is suggesting – what impression is the author trying to create?
- Explain the choice of the word, 'striding'.
- Explain what Mrs Hardy thinks about Emily.
- Why does the author use ellipsis?
- Describe Emily's feelings as they change across the story and use quotes to support your ideas.

Explore the story through drama

Drama is a key strategy to help children deepen their imaginative engagement with a story. It can also help to have children writing in-role, as if they were one of the characters.

- Hot-seat Emily, the guide and Mrs Hardy.
- In pairs, be 'eyewitnesses' to what happened at the pyramids.
- Draw one of the key scenes and create a cartoon.
- Role-play what Mrs Hardy says to the other teachers.
- In role as Emily, tell your best friend

about what happened and then write a diary entry by Emily.
- Write a formal report about the event by Mrs Hardy for the school's headteacher.
- In role as soldiers, 'gossip' about what has happened.
- Draw hieroglyphs to show the key events.
- Make a phone call from the bus driver to his company, explaining why he is late back.
- In pairs or threes, tell the story of what happened when Emily is tempted to go back to the museum on another day. Try changing the 'portal' object that she touches.

Put grammar in context

Identify, or build into the model, several grammar focuses. For instance, focus on the use of the colon that creates a descriptive list in the first paragraph:

A scarab beetle caught her attention: glittering wings flickered in the light; greens and blues shimmered like an iridescent gemstone and elongated feelers stretched towards her.

Use the same pattern when changing the story. Choose the 'portal' object for the chosen time period. For instance, you might have a character put on a gas mask that sends him back in time as an evacuee or a stone axe to return to the Stone Age. Mark how in the opening of the sentence, the character notices the 'portal' object. It would help to provide several images of possible objects so that the children can write descriptive phrases. Use a colon to introduce the list, e.g.

An old gas mask grabbed his attention:
He noticed an old gas mask:
He saw an old gas mask:

Now create a descriptive list, using semicolons to divide each item, e.g.

He noticed an old gas mask: its wobbly eyes hung down; the strap had long since broken and the material seemed faded beyond repair.

Planning the story

Children love this story type. It is fun to send a character back in time to a favourite period, especially if the children have been studying an historical period in depth. This could tie into a visit to a castle, manor house or ancient site. Visits provide children with a deeper experience of history and can be used as a resource for writing.

The boxed up version of the story (panel, below) provides the basic structure.

Create a writing toolkit

A key aspect to this sort of story is description. It is important to be able to describe the portal object but also to draw upon historical detail and use it to paint a picture of the new setting for the reader. The

Underlying pattern	New ideas
Main character (MC) sees an historical artefact	Jon finds a flint axe in a field
The MC touches the object and is transported back in time	He picks it up, puts it in his rucksack and is transported back in time to the Stone Age
The MC is threatened by something / someone	Some hunters are chasing deer, see him and give chase
The MC flees but is chased	He flees into the forest and hides in a cave
The MC touches the object again and comes back to the present	As it is dark, he grabs the axe to spark a fire and is transported back to the field
A character makes a final comment	He visits a museum to see if he can find another magical object

key to description lies in writers having a strong picture in their minds of the object or setting. Here is a simple toolkit:

- use well-chosen adjectives to build the description, e.g. huge, sand-coloured pyramids;
- use historical details to bring the description alive, e.g. in a jackal's mask;
- describe what you can see but also use other senses, e.g. white birds circled above, calling;
- use a semicolon to write a detailed list, e.g. glittering wings flickered in the light; greens and blues shimmered like an iridescent gemstone;
- use commas in a list to pile up description, e.g. sand-coloured pyramids jutted upwards; white birds circled above, calling; a vast river oozed by and tall palm trees lined its edge; and
- use similes to help the reader imagine what something is like, e.g. like an iridescent gemstone.

Start shared writing

Begin the shared writing process by using the boxed-up planner to demonstrate how to plan a story. Use bullet points for ideas and involve the children. Draw on an historical period that is familiar. On the planner, list lots of their ideas so that there is a bank of possibilities for children to use as they write their own plans. Share a few of the pupils' plans with the whole class.

It is worth emphasising that the boxed-up planner should not restrict children's stories to five paragraphs. Each section might well include a number of paragraphs, especially if you encourage pupils to develop their stories. Weaker writers may hug closely to the model, but more confident children should move away from this and use the writing toolkit to develop their descriptions of the new object and setting.

In this example, I have moved away from the original text, but am still using the toolkit and the original plot idea.

"Drama is a key strategy to help children deepen their imaginative engagement with a story. It can also help to have children writing in-role, as if they were one of the characters."

All afternoon Jon had stumbled across Darker's field searching for his Mum's phone. He had been daft to take it in the first place but had so badly wanted to ring Miram. He would be in double trouble if he could not find the phone. Not for the first time, he regretted his stupidity. Why did he always act first before thinking?

Something caught his eye in the grass. He knelt down and stared: a smooth, green stone lay on the grass; strange marks snaked in circles across its polished surface and the edge was sharpened to a fine point. He knew what it was at once. They had studied Stone Age axes and he had actually seen several in their visit to the London Museum. One of them was exactly like this one. It was made of jade and had been found in the River Thames.

PIE CORBETT is a poet, author and former headteacher.

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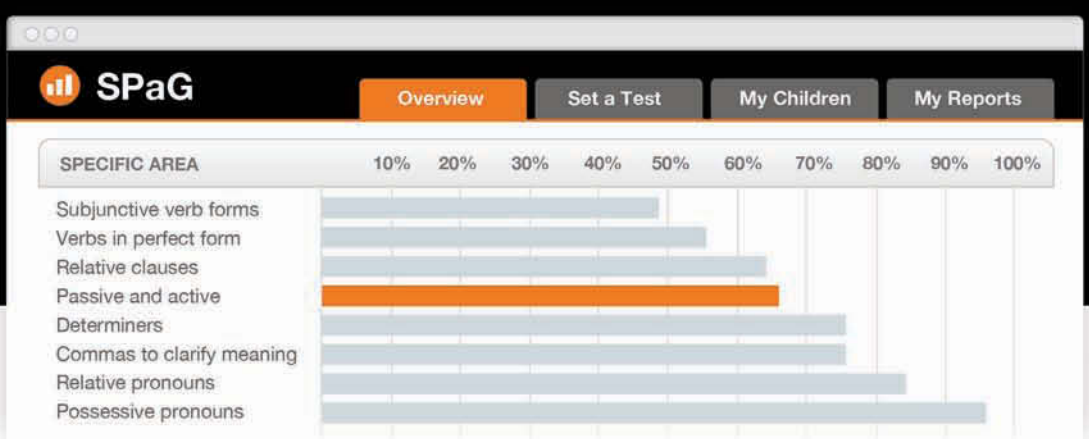

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"Books have always been my salvation"

For actor and author **Sheila Hancock**, reading opened doors to worlds far beyond her own experience...

I don't really remember a time when I couldn't read; but I do have memories of learning to write. As a young child living in London, I was an evacuee twice during WWII. The second time was when I was about eight, and I was sent to Somerset. I'd been learning how to print my letters, but suddenly found myself in this new, horrible school where the pupils were being taught cursive. We evacuees were much too timid to say that we didn't know how to do it, so I simply started adding rather random little loops joining my letters together after I'd finished a word. My handwriting is still terrible today.

Books, though, have always been my salvation. We didn't have many at home – just the bible, and some encyclopedias that my dad had inherited from his father. I still have them, actually; they were terribly out of date even back then, and written before the atom had been split – but they're marvellous. I also had a book called, *Ten Thousand Answers to Children's Question*s, given to me by my Aunty Ruby. But that was it; so libraries were a godsend for me. They were terribly strict about how many books you could borrow, and you couldn't talk in there, but I would have had a much less rich life without them, and I'm a passionate campaigner to keep libraries open today.

I got terribly hooked on H. Rider Haggard; I think his exotic adventures were the equivalent of all the amazing magic realism stories children get excited about now, for me. And I adored Enid Blyton. God knows why, because it was all about girls going off to boarding school, and I didn't know what a boarding school was... but it did sound wonderful. I wanted to be in one of those gangs of boarding school girls like anything. Comics were a treat, too.

When I had my own family, I was determined our house would be full of books, and so it was. I would always read stories to my daughters – even when I was working in the theatre, I'd try and make sure to do it before heading out. I'm trying to get rid of my 'library' at the moment (it's all part of the streamlining one tends to do as one reaches the later stages of life); I love books so much, and I'm never going to read these again, so someone else should have them – but I'm finding it agony, I really am.

I have grandchildren now, and reading with them is a huge pleasure. They always choose *Not Now, Bernard!* because they know it makes me laugh so much, every time. And I love the Charlie and Lola books, which are so well observed. Children's writing is an extremely strong genre at the moment; authors like Jacqueline Wilson are taking on major issues with such skill and sensitivity, and there are plenty of stories that are genuinely fun, and funny, for adults as much as little ones. I think J.K. Rowling has done such a good service to reading, too – children are avid to read the Harry Potter books, and hopefully that will open up a lifetime's joy for them.

In my novel, *Miss Carter's War*, set in post-war Britain with flashbacks to Vichy France, the lead character is a teacher, who is convinced of education's power to change the world, especially for women. The importance of education is something that I feel very, very deeply, which is why I am patron of a charity, DigiSmart, that specifically focuses on helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds to aquire the literacy skills they'll need as they leave primary school and move onto the next stages of their lives. It makes me incredibly angry when I hear teachers – and social workers – being blamed for all society's ills by the tabloid press. I go into schools often, and see just what incredible levels of inequality, poverty and deprivation these people are having to deal with, and how they keep coming up with the goods, despite all the pressures they are under; I can't express how profoundly I admire them. Teachers were venerated when I was a child, and really, we should be on our knees now, thanking them, and desperately trying to get more people of their ilk to join them.

As told to Helen Mulley in interview

"Teachers were venerated when I was a child, and really, we should be on our knees now, thanking them, and trying desparately to get more people of their ilk to join them"

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How to assess 230 stories in an hour

Forget individually marking each piece of writing – get all staff involved in comparative judgement

Have you ever had that feeling? You know, the close-your-eyes-and-take-a-deep-breath feeling? The one that accompanies that last piece of independent writing – the piece that needs an Enigma machine to decode and more than a few full stops.

Don't worry. You are not alone. What's more, help is available. And it comes in the form of assessment using comparative judgement (CJ).

What is comparative judgement?

In a nutshell, CJ is a different way of assessing tasks. Forget using prescriptive mark schemes, assessing each piece individually or managing only three pieces in an hour. With CJ, you make a series of judgements against pairs of tasks.

In my school, we looked at assessing writing with CJ in Y1-6 using Dr Chris Wheadon's online tool, No More Marking. We asked the question: which piece of writing is better? Judges were then shown a number of scripts in pairs and simply clicked on the one they thought was best.

Staffroom buzz

It's so much faster than marking one individual script, but my favourite aspect of CJ is that everyone in our school got involved. Teaching assistants in Y1 read scripts from upper KS2, where normally they wouldn't even be involved in the writing assessment process – great CPD. Staff have been to many moderation sessions – internally and externally – and we can honestly say this was the most pleasurable experience we've had. There was a real buzz in the room. Staff from opposite ends of the school were engaged in conversations about the children's writing, sharing the snippets of quality, humour and down-right ridiculousness that come from brilliant young writers.

Hidden talent

The biggest surprise in our experience was a high performing Y1 child who was actually writing to a Y5 standard. We knew they were a proficient writer, but we didn't realise quite how good they were. Other revelations were our 'top' writer ranking 39th in the school and some children in the top 20 that we never would have expected.

We examined scripts in follow-up staff meetings to explore these revelations further. We decided to focus on story writing, plotting and grammar. Now we're looking forward to seeing the next round of results.

If nothing else, CJ allows teachers to make quick judgements about pupils' work and moderate those judgements at the same time. It doesn't claim to be the answer to all assessment problems. But we've found that you get a lot less of that feeling and a lot more of another feeling – the feeling you're reliably and efficiently assessing young writers.

CRAIG WESTBY is the acting headteacher at Old Hill Primary School in Cradley Heath, West Midlands. Find out more about No More Marking at nomoremarking.com

WHY WE TRIED CJ

1 It reduces workload

To my dismay, I still hear about teachers spending three hours assessing and moderating writing. Last year's report, Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Associated with Data Management, recommends only collecting data that is 'purposeful, valid, and reliable' and to 'be prepared to stop collecting data if the burden of collection outweighs their use.' So, we ditched the archaic methods. What's more efficient: moderating three pieces in two hours or 230 in just one?

2 It's more honest

Writing assessment at the end of KS1 and 2 is a game of smoke and mirrors at the moment – even with the new guidance. We stripped back our writing assessment task to the bare bones: no planning guidance, no pooling of ideas, no working walls. No help. However, unlike the KS2 writing assessment of old, we didn't want the children to feel rushed, so we were flexible with timings. And do you know what? We got some amazing pieces of writing back. We still had that feeling with some of them, but it was all genuine.

3 It allows creativity

The KS1/2 secure-fit model asks pupils to demonstrate all of the standards, without exception. Before that was the slightly better rubric system. The issue with both of these is that creative pieces of writing fail because they don't meet all of the rubric or standards, while heavily coached pieces achieve expected standard or fit the rubric.

10 last-minute SATS CHECKS!

Not every lost mark on the test stems from a lack of knowledge – armed with these tips, you can help make sure children get the scores they deserve

Despite all the debate over whether or not we should even have KS2 SATs, pupils are still expected to take them in May 2017 – which leaves a few more valuable weeks of preparation. It's likely too late now to be teaching any new content, but there are some last-minutes tips and techniques that might help pupils gain extra marks.

In 2016 we had a new KS2 reading test with three unthemed texts (two fiction and one non-fiction). Many teachers talked about this being more challenging than previous years – especially as the harder questions weren't separated out into a Level 6 extension paper. Last year's KS2 grammar text was also new, with 70 questions that tested grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and spelling. In both cases, quite a few questions required an understanding of the mark scheme, rather than subject knowledge.

If this caught out your pupils, the following tips will support them with the subtleties of test techniques and understanding the questions.

RAPID READING FIXES

1. Tackling tough words

Teaching vocabulary skills in context is essential and the increased focus on this area proved a real surprise for many schools last year. Whilst we cannot predict the words that will appear on the test, we can give pupils quick strategies that will support them, whatever they encounter. For example, take a classical text and replace certain words with nonsense words. Can the children think of plausible substitutions for your replacements? (I sometimes add capital letters to nonsense words to indicate they might be proper nouns.) Pupils should be able to deduce what each word might be from the context.

2. Speed searches

Maintain a focus on scanning skills under timed conditions. Some questions in the 2016 KS2 reading test required pupils to find answers within the whole page, increasing the level of difficulty. Quick-fire activities, such as Where's Wally or spot the difference, are perfect for continuing to develop retrieval skills before they are applied to more complex texts.

3. It's not what 'you' think

It is crucial for pupils to recognise that all answers will be based on the test and not their own views. Questions that contain the word 'you' are somewhat misleading. For example, 'How can you tell…?' 'List two impressions this gives you.' Reinforce that evidence is found in the text.

4. Don't repeat the question

This might seem like an obvious point, but it is crucial that pupils do not repeat the question stem in their answer – rather, they should be able to explain it. For example, 'Why were the dodos curious and unafraid?' It's not unusual in instances like this for children to write something along the lines of, "Because they were unafraid", which means they'll miss out on a mark. To avoid this, work on using synonyms and explaining answers.

GREAT GRAMMAR TIPS

5. Perfect punctuation

Accuracy is extremely important. The punctuation of direct speech will only be creditworthy if the closing punctuation is placed inside the final inverted commas. Take a look at this example: *She asked him, "Do you want a banana?"* In last year's test pupils lost marks for inconsistencies such as mixed use of inverted commas (e.g. ' and ") and for not leaving enough space between the 'D' and the inverted comma.

6. Read questions closely

'Write a sentence using the word 'point' as a verb. Do not change the word.' In questions like this, make sure children follow the instruction closely. Pupils lost marks last year for adding a suffix (e.g. 'point*ed*' or 'point*ing*'). They also lost marks for not starting with a capital letter and ending with appropriate punctuation.

7. Watch for stray capitals

Last year, pupils were asked to write a sentence containing an adverb. Many children rose to the challenge but were penalised if they spelt the adverb incorrectly or if they started the adverb with a capital letter in the middle of a sentence. Don't let your pupils miss out due to simple errors!

8. Avoid getting caught out

A salient point to note is that prefixes, suffixes, verb forms and plurals must be spelt correctly. One question in the 2016 grammar paper required pupils to change the word 'caught' to the present tense. The answer is 'catch', but even though pupils knew the answer, they lost marks for spelling 'catch' incorrectly. Again, spelling does count within the grammar test - even though there is a separate spelling paper.

TEACH THE SIX CS

IF YOU COVER ALL OF THE FOLLOWING TECHNIQUES FOR THE GRAMMAR TEST, PUPILS WILL BE SURE TO DROP FEWER MARKS OVERALL.

- **Correct number of boxes are ticked (e.g. tick two…)**
- **Circle the correct number of words**
- **Clear punctuation (e.g. commas and full stops)**
- **Capital letters should not be in the middle of sentences (apart from when they are needed for proper nouns / acronyms, etc.)**
- **Contracted forms, plurals, verb tenses, prefixes and suffixes must be spelt correctly**
- **Copy correctly**

AND DON'T FORGET...

9. Tap into peer power

The best activities at this time of year involve challenging pupils to teach each other. Give each group a focus (e.g. answering questions using the text, or conjunctions) and ask them to create posters that they will use to support the rest of the class. This is a particularly powerful strategy for consolidating learning.

10. It's only a test!

Finally, it's important to relax, have breakfast and remember that SATs isn't the be all and end all. Give your pupils lots of love and let them know how fabulous they are.

SHAREENMAYERS iis currently teaching in Year 6 and is an independent English and assessment adviser. She is also a presenter, trainer and author.

Doing less, **but better**

At **Rhoda Wilson's** school, a new mastery approach in English is getting great results. Here's how it works...

Mastery is a term we teachers have heard a lot about recently, at least when it comes to maths. But what about English?

For me, the idea of spending more time focusing on fewer key concepts makes a lot of sense. In fact, "Do Less But Better" has become a mantra for my teaching this year. The issue is, perhaps, that we don't have a clear model for what mastery in English might look like.

For those of us who remember the National Literacy Strategy, it was far from a blueprint for English mastery. Schools were required to teach a wide range of objectives, marching through a long list of text types with little time to truly embed key objectives. But now, with the slimmed down objectives of the new curriculum and text types thrown out of the window, we have a perfect opportunity to rethink the teaching of writing in our schools and establish a more joined-up curriculum.

Writing with purpose

At our school, we are now thinking in terms of 'writing purposes', of which we have four: Writing to Inform, Writing to Entertain, Writing to Persuade and Writing to Discuss.

Our long-term plan sees teachers focusing on the same writing purpose for the whole half term, which is essential as it allows key skills to be embedded over a longer period of time.

The problem with our previous long-term plan was that our writing curriculum jumped around too much – it didn't allow children time to master new skills. A colleague might have been teaching a two-week story writing unit in which pupils needed to learn the new skill of punctuation. They'd just about be getting the hang of it, when suddenly the unit would end and they would have to move on to instructional writing. That tentative knowledge of speech punctuation was lost, with the teacher having to start from scratch a couple of months down the line.

In our new model, teachers still teach text types, but these have been slimmed down and matched to our writing purposes. For example, it may be that over a half term focusing on Writing to Persuade, Year 4 write a holiday brochure and a letter. As these two text types contain a lot of overlapping grammar, punctuation, and stylistic objectives, teachers are able to devote more time to ensuring key objectives are embedded and children can apply the skills they have learnt in different contexts.

Our whole-school approach

The number of writing purposes children encounter increases as they move through the school. Our KS1 pupils focus on Inform and Entertain only. Learning to Persuade is added in Years 3 and 4, and children study all four purposes in Years 5 and 6. Staff are able to choose the text types they wish to cover during each writing purpose – the only stipulation is that they must focus on the same purpose for the whole half term.

With my Year 5 class, we began the year with our space topic. Over the half term we looked at non-fiction reports about the solar system before moving on to newspaper articles about the first moon landings.

When planning, I thought very carefully about which objectives I wanted my class to master over the half-term period. For our non-fiction reports, we composed sentences with relative clauses, linked sections with fronted adverbials, and wrote descriptions using expanded noun phrases. We then repeated these objectives with our newspaper articles, since they all still applied. This meant that, instead of jumping from one concept to the next, we could embed learning over the whole half term. Pupils weren't overwhelmed by a great wealth of new knowledge; they didn't have have to start from scratch. Instead, they built on what they had previously learnt.

> "During an initial discussion on the features of persuasive writing, my Year 5 class could confidently remember every aspect of the Y4 success criteria"

Why less is more

Each half term we choose just five or six key grammar objectives to embed within the unit, and there are never more than two outcomes (e.g. a non-fiction report and a letter). This helps everyone have a very clear idea about what the end result should be and spend time keeping lessons focused on the skills that will lead to a successful piece – e.g. developing grammar and punctuation, investigating vocabulary, unpicking high-quality examples, creating plans, and writing collaboratively with peers.

When devising writing purposes for upcoming half terms, we ensure they contain at least some similar features, which means children have the chance to apply the skills they've already acquired in a new context. It's all leading to better progress and a greater likelihood that children get to experience success.

Making knowledge stick

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my children are retaining this knowledge remarkably well. Previously, when asking classes if they knew the features of a newspaper report, they might have responded with some non-specific answers such as "vocabulary" and "capital letters and full stops". Our writing curriculum had been so piecemeal that they were unable to pinpoint this genre, which is why they resorted to such generic responses.

This year, however, during an initial discussion on the features of persuasive writing, my Year 5 class could confidently remember every aspect of the Y4 success criteria. Undoubtedly, we were building on these skills in Year 5, but this time we had a solid foundation from which to progress.

At our school, we now have a model that allows us to build on our learning week by week, instead of wiping the slate clean at the end of each unit and starting again. I strongly believe that the simplest ideas in teaching are always the most effective, and I won't be letting go of this approach any time soon.

RHODA WILSON is an SLE, English Curriculum Leader and KS2 Teacher working at an inner-city school in Derby

"Reading should be more akin to watching television"

Have today's children lost the plot? Award-winning author and illustrator **Philip Reeve** thinks it's possible...

I actually learnt to read twice. The school where I started as a pupil in 1970 or '71 was still keen on the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA). This was a phonetic spelling system (devised by the grandson of Sir Isaac Pitman), and the idea was that children would start by learning the ITA, then move onto standard English. I'm fairly sure that as an educational approach it was more or less a disaster; it used a special alphabet – including strange symbols that looked like runes – to represent the various sounds of the English language, and of course, when I brought my reading books home my parents and grandparents couldn't make head nor tail of what was on the pages. The scheme was a weird, 60s fad – and on its way out, I think, by the time I was subjected to it – but my headmistress was a devotee, so that was what we did.

I'd always been read to at home, and I had plenty of access to books with 'normal' spelling in them, so the transition to standard English, which happened when I was about six, was relatively easy for me. But I expect that for some of my peers, the prospect of effectively starting again from scratch must have been a bit galling.

Ours wasn't a bookish house in the literary sense, but my parents read a lot, and there were bedtime stories every night, and weekly trips to the library to take out four or five books at a time. When I was about seven, my teacher Miss Ellis read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to us in daily instalments, as we sat on the carpet, rapt. I loved it, and after we'd reached the end I hunted out all the sequels for myself, before moving on

fairly quickly to *The Lord of the Rings*. I've always leant more towards fantasy and historical stories rather than contemporary ones – Rosemary Sutcliff was another big influence, and I remember finding paperback copies of her historical novels in the book corner at school.

I've been interested in both writing and illustration since I was very young; at primary school I was always drawing and making up stories, and I knew that ultimately I wanted to make a living doing one or the other. However, I had no idea how to get published – it wasn't like today, when there are all kinds of courses you can take, and social media platforms where you can hone your skills with fellow writers (and listen to them wittering endlessly about technique). So I went to art college, and kept writing as a hobby. Throughout my 20s I was producing plays and sketches which I'd perform with friends; the idea of simply sending a manuscript directly to a publisher was much too scary!

It's been a few years since my son was in primary school, and I don't really know what things are like for teachers at the moment, but there has always been this problem with reading, in that it's something everyone has to learn to do, in order to read letters and signs and instructions and so on... but this gets all tangled up with the act of reading for pleasure and entertainment, which really should be more akin to watching television or listening to music than studying maths or science. Because it's necessary, it becomes laden with expectations and pressures – and that can lead to anxiety. To be honest, I'm not sure how any education regime could square that circle.

It would be interesting, I think, to look into the way that kids relate to narrative these days. I remember watching a lot of television when I was young, and people tutting and saying that I should be reading instead, but I was absorbing stories and learning ways of telling them. Now children don't even seem to be very interested in TV. They watch endless online clips, which are just young people very much like them, talking about the game they are playing, or explaining a skateboarding technique. I'm not sure how you move from that to following a whole play, or indeed, a novel. But I don't think it's ever been possible to get everyone interested in reading and writing. I suppose all you can really do is have a good school library, encourage children to read the books they want to read... and hope for the best.

Philip Reeve is the author of the Railhead trilogy, published by OUP.

ILLUSTRATIONS: wSarah McIntyre

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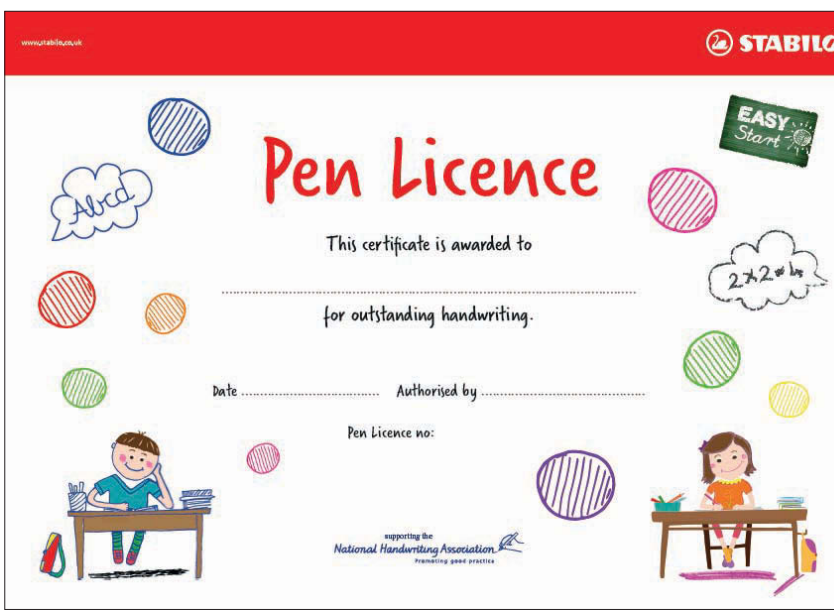

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THE BEST BOOKS OF 2017

The results of this year's New Children's Fiction Awards are in - it's time to find out which titles will be hot properties in and out of the classroom this year

Sometimes it can seem as though every third title on book shop shelves is proudly sporting some kind of shiny sticker or logo declaring it to be 'prize winning' in one way or another. Certainly, there is no shortage of award schemes in the world of children's fiction – and that's a good thing. Raising the status of reading, through celebrating both the activity itself and outstanding examples of published work, is something that none of us concerned with children's education should ever stop trying to support.

That's why, in 2015, we decided to add another competition to the list – but one designed with a difference. The Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards, now in their third year, specifically highlight titles that teachers can confidently suggest to parents and share with pupils. Our dedicated and experienced judges use a unique set of criteria to assess shortlisted books in each of three categories: EYFS, KS1 and KS2 – taking into account such elements as opportunities for deeper discussion, and text that encourages language play and development as well as engaging illustration and a great story. Above all, though, we ask them to pick the books they love; we hope you – and your learners – will enjoy this year's list of finalists as much as they did.

"There was a truly wonderful breadth of subject matter and approach in all three shortlists; a real testament to authors and illustrators and, of course, editors and designers too. To say that the judging was close would be an understatement – in some instances, there was a beard-hair's width between titles." ***Philip Ardagh, judge***

MEET THE JUDGES

Philip Ardagh – a Roald Dahl Funny Prize winner, is probably best known for his *Grubtown Tales*, but is in fact the author of over 100 books. He is also two metres tall with a ridiculously big, bushy beard and size sixteen feet, making him an instantly recognisable figure at literary festivals around the world.

Clare Argar is a senior programme manager at the National Literacy Trust, a charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Clare is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and a governor at a primary school in Battersea, London.

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

Tamara Macfarlane is a children's author and the owner of Tales on Moon Lane Children's Bookshop, Moon Lane Education Ltd, and Moon Lane Ink, which runs Pop-Up Bookshop Enterprise Days in secondary schools. She is passionate about promoting reading for pleasure through brilliant books and lively events.

Kate Williams is editor of Mumsnet, the UK's busiest site for parents. She was previously editor of the Mumsnet Bloggers' Network, where she championed great writing by parents and before that, she was a documentary director.

EYFS

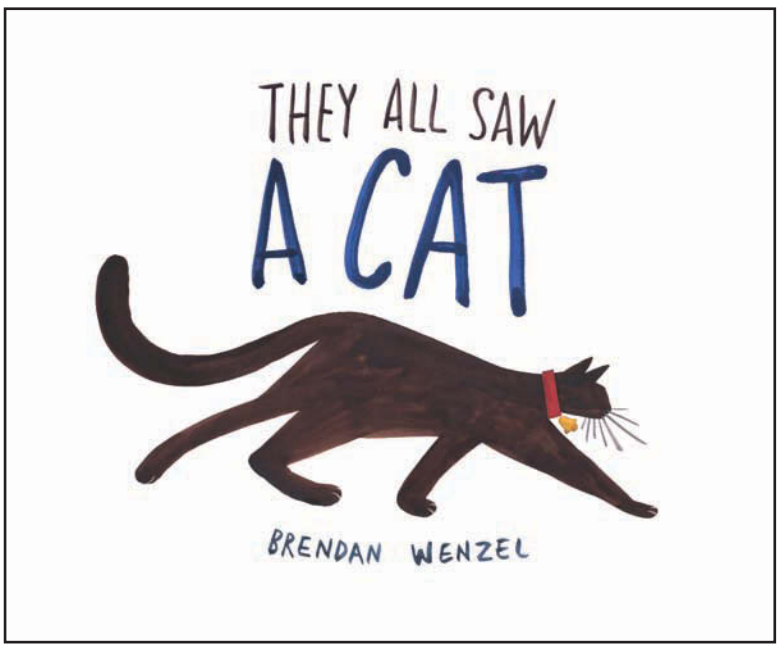
Judging Notes

Stunning illustration is obviously hugely important in this category – however, these are books for youngsters who are just starting to develop the skills that will help them become effective and creative communicators, so our judges were looking for inspiring and playful language, too.

WINNER

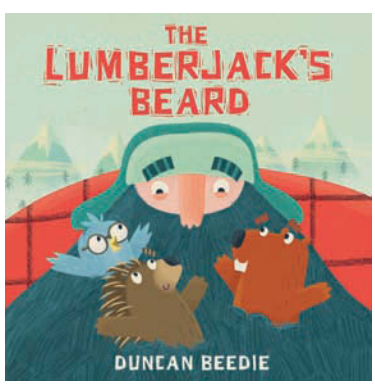
They All Saw a Cat *(Brendan Wenzel, Chronicle Kids)*

Empathy is one of the first things that most parents try and teach their children and is incredibly important in any classroom – but it's a difficult skill to learn. Sharing books that play with the idea of seeing the world from someone else's perspective can certainly help, and this is a brilliant and beautiful example of just such a title. The story is told in very few words: a cat takes a walk, passing a range of different creatures along the way. The cleverness lies in the illustrations – because the appearance of the cat changes dramatically, according to each observer. Whilst the child sees a cute, fluffy pet, for example, the mouse's vision is dominated by fearsome fangs and claws, and malevolent eyes. Wenzel's artwork could easily be used as the starting point for a creative project in which pupils try to produce drawings or paintings of familiar things from a perspective that is not their own.



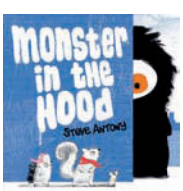
"They All Saw a Cat *is thoughtful and simple, with lots to talk about.*"
Brough Girling, judge

RUNNER UP

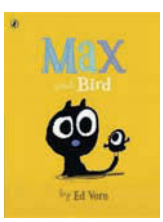


The Lumberjack's Beard (Duncan Beedie, Templar)
When Big Jim Hickory's tree-felling leads to his woodland friends losing their homes, he comes up with a bold idea that will change the way they share the forest forever.

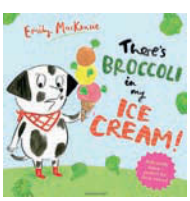
ALSO SHORTLISTED



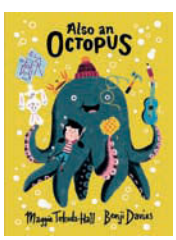
Monster in the Hood (Steve Antony, Oxford University Press)
He's grumbly and rumbly, and frighteningly hungry! But are things always as scary as they seem? A cautionary tale with a monster twist!



Max and Bird (Ed Vere, Puffin)
Max would like to be friends with Bird. He would also like to chase Bird, and maybe eat him as a tasty snack. But that's not what friendship is all about… is it?



There's Broccoli in my Ice Cream! (Emily MacKenzie, Bloomsbury)
Ingredients: one food-fussy dog; one greens-growing grandpa; one tricky situation; one veggie plot; one magic watering can; one clever plan; one very surprising outcome!



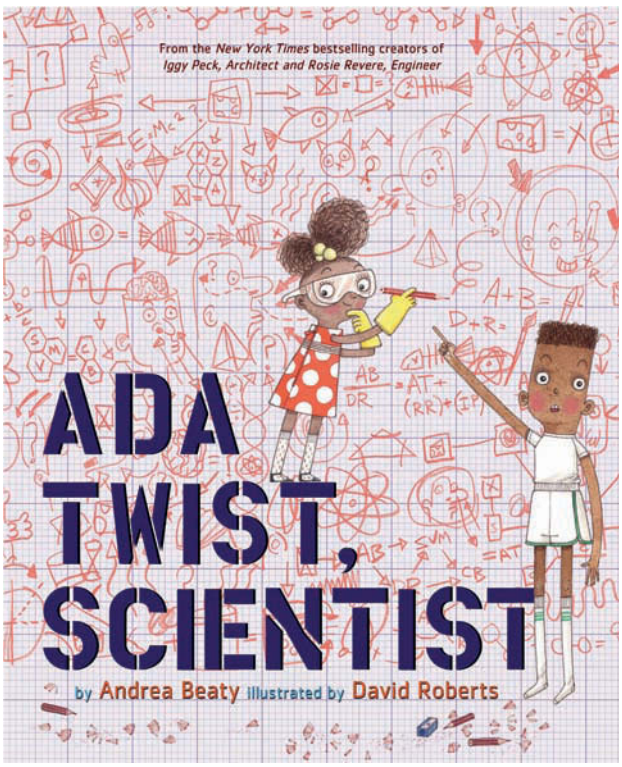
Also an Octopus (Maggie Tokuda-Hall/ Benji Davies, Walker)
Even the most totally awesome tale starts with a little bit of nothing – this brilliantly interactive book encourages every reader to become a storyteller.

KS1

Judging Notes

This is probably the trickiest category to tackle as an author; the range of reading ability can be dizzyingly wide, but the content still has to be accessible and age appropriate. Humour tends to be a useful ingredient – however, for a book to score highly here, it needed to demonstrate substance alongside any silliness.

WINNER



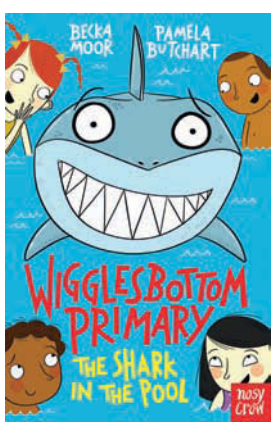
Ada Twist, Scientist *(Andrea Beaty/David Roberts, Abrams)*

What do your pupils think a 'scientist' looks like? Try asking them to draw a picture of one before you share this story – because it's unlikely anyone will come up with an image that's anything like Ada Marie Twist. Yet Ada – young, black, female, sporting spotty socks and bobbles in her hair – represents everything that science is about. Endlessly curious, and determined to find out the why and how of everything around her, she just can't help questioning and conducting experiments to test her theories – even when it drives her parents to distraction. Andrea Beatty's rhyming narrative is fizzy and joyful; and keen-eyed youngsters will be thrilled to spot evidence cleverly placed in David Roberts' illustrations that even Ada herself has yet to discover.

"This is a book for children of the 21st century. It's got rhymes as slick as Dr Seuss, illustrations full of life, and an inspirational storyline about embracing curiosity and ambition. Every child should read it."

Kate Williams, judge

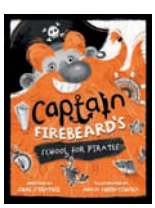
RUNNER UP



Wigglesbottom Primary – The Shark in the Pool (Becka Moor/Pamela Butchart, Nosy Crow)

Anything can happen at Wigglesbottom Primary, and it always does. Is there a shark in the swimming pool? Yes! Can a play parachute make someone invisible? Yes! And is that a dinosaur buried in the playground…?

ALSO SHORTLISTED



Captain Firebeard's School for Pirates (Chae Strathie/ Anna Chernyshova, Scholastic)

Join Tommy for his first term on board the Rusty Barnacle, as he learns how to walk, talk and swashbuckle like a proper pirate. Will he and his friends pass the pirate tests?

The New Teacher (Dominique Demers/ Tony Ross, Alma Books)

Mademoiselle Charlotte is a mysterious woman – a kind of modern Mary Poppins who brings creativity wherever she goes. This fun story is a real celebration of books and libraries.

Isadora Moon Goes to School (Harriet Muncaster, Oxford University Press)

Isadora Moon is special, because she is different. Her mum is a fairy, her dad is a vampire, and she is a bit of both – so when it's time to start school, where does she belong?

Are We There Yet? (Dan Santat, Andersen)

This original and interactive story explores the amazing possibilities of imagination on a long, boring car journey, as time slows down so much that it starts going backwards…

KS2

Judging Notes

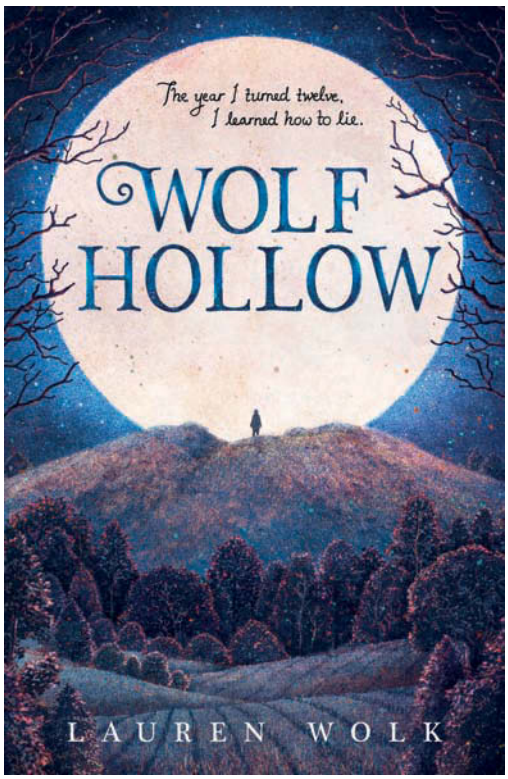
This category was the highest scoring overall; and it went right to the wire as the results came in, with opinions pretty fairly divided amongst the judges as to which of the titles should be named the best amongst an extremely strong field. Indeed, it would almost have been more accurate to present all six finalists as joint champions.

WINNER

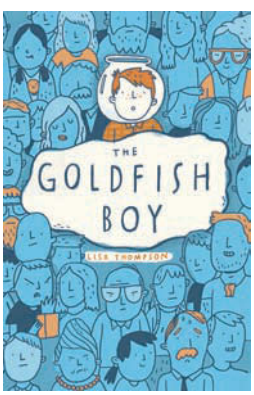
Wolf Hollow *(Lauren Wolk, Penguin)*

Annabelle McBride is a perceptive, honest and questioning narrator, who is determined to explain as clearly and truthfully as possible exactly what happens when her previously uneventful life in is turned upside down by the arrival of cruel and strangely cold Betty Glengarry in town. Set in sleepy Wolf Hollow, Pennsylvania, in the long shadow of the early years of World War II, and with the memories of the first World War still fresh in the minds of the characters, this is a tale of prejudice and trust, and what it might really mean to be a 'lone wolf. Whilst there are brutal edges to the plot that younger readers, expecting reformation and redemption, might find shocking, it is still an ultimately uplifting read, with hope for humanity at its heart.

"I had a clear favourite and then I went on to read Wolf Hollow, which has somehow slipped under my radar until now. This book is extraordinary. With shades of To Kill a Mockingbird but inspired by her own mother's family, Lauren Wolk has created a work of fiction where every character lives off the page. It is a gripping, moving, living, breathing tale written by a highly skilled hand. I cannot recommend it enough." ***Philip Ardagh, judge***



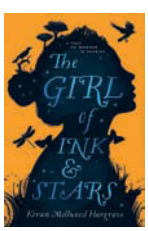
RUNNER UP



The Goldfish Boy (Lisa Thompson, Scholastic)

Matthew likes clean surfaces, staying safe in his bedroom, and making notes about his neighbours. He hates germs, going outside and feeling like a disappointment to his mum and dad. When a toddler staying next door goes missing, Matthew is the key to working out what happened – even as his own secrets start to unravel…

ALSO SHORTLISTED

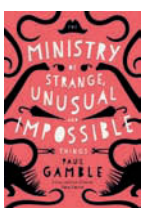


The Girl of Ink and Stars (Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Chicken House)

Forbidden to leave her island, Isabella dreams of the journey her father once mapped. And when her best friend disappears, she is determined to be part of the search party.

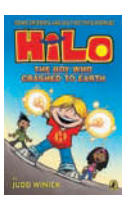
The Song from Somewhere Else (AF Harrold/Levi Pinfold, Bloomsbury)

Frank doesn't know how to feel when Nick Underbridge helps her escape from bullies. No one at school really likes Nick. And yet, there's more to him, and his house, than meets the eye…



The Ministry of Strange, Unusual and Impossible Things (Paul Gamble, Little Island)

The Ministry of SUITS deals with dinosaurs (live ones), were-books, piratoriums, evil beings, and the tooth fairy – who is over six feet tall and carries a pair of pliers. And only the Ministry can help Jack rescue his friend David from a situation too gruesome to describe…



Hilo, The Boy Who Crashed to Earth (Judd Winick, Penguin)

D.J. And Gina are totally ordinary kids; but Hilo… isn't. He doesn't know where he came from, or what he's doing on Earth – and as it turns out, he's not the only thing to have fallen to our planet.

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Opinion

Early Education chief exec Beatrice Merrick argues that reception needs to change.

Discussion

NQTs need to set summer behaviour expectations sky high, says Steph Caswell.

Advice

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

Resources

Head to Teachwire to download six of the best KS1 SATs resources for the maths reasoning paper.

What's trending

1. *Ideas to engage reluctant writers*
2. *Teaching the selfie generation*
3. *Are you ready to be head?*
4. *Stop eating your shoes!*
5. *Can we still afford glue sticks?*

A life in OBJECTS

The Matchbox Diary shows how the simplest possessions can tell powerful stories about who we are and where we come from

Picture books are miniature works of art, expertly imagined and imbued with multiple layers of meaning. The very best entice children, offer up meaningful encounters and then send them on their way, thoughts and memories enriched; they are more than the sum of their words and pictures.

The Matchbox Diary is such a book. Told entirely in dialogue, its luminous illustrations and pared-down text invite us to eavesdrop on a conversation between an old man and the great-granddaughter he's never met before. "Pick whatever you like the most," says the old man. "Then I'll tell you its story." The girl isn't sure what to select, but the old man reassures her. She'll know it when she spots it, he says, adding that her choice will help him understand her, too.

So the girl picks a battered cigar box. It's full of matchboxes, each containing something tiny: an olive stone, a ticket stub, a bottle top. Collected by an illiterate child as a way of marking his experiences, the matchboxes create a record of a time long gone. And so begins the story of the old man's life: of a childhood rooted in poverty, a long and frightening journey, and a new start in a place that has little to offer but hard work and anxiety.

> "It's a story of family ties, of intellectual curiosity and openness..."

The Matchbox Diary, however, is far from being a gloomy book. It's also a story of family ties, of intellectual curiosity and openness. Every page is suffused with warmth – and a clear-sighted optimism that will be welcomed in these uncertain times. While children are enjoying its artwork and narrative energy, they'll likely be unaware that it's a powerful advocate for tolerance, empathy and compassion.

Sharing the book

Everyone will want to talk about *The Matchbox Diary*, but give it the time and space it needs to work its magic before holding a discussion. It's best enjoyed as part of a shared, uninterrupted reading-for-pleasure experience, followed by plenty of time for questions and responses.

If you do want to prepare your class before reading, you could make a diary-inspired matchbox and invite the children to explore it.

Making your own matchboxes

Creating an object-based diary using matchboxes will appeal to children and give you plenty of talking and writing opportunities. Use 'reclaimed' matchboxes, or decorate the plain white variety sold by craft outlets. Fleischman's inspiration came from the map-covered diaries of artist Gary Hamel (paulfleischman.net/index.htm) – or you can use Ibatoulline's illustrations as a starting point.

Why not make a collaborative diary of a class visit, or create a record of an entire school term? Alternatively, collect tiny objects of significance for individual diaries. Write about the process, creating instructions for others to follow and 'object catalogues' with illustrations.

Why we treasure objects

Talking about the way our lives live on through objects, Paul Fleischman recalls that, "My father kept his tailor-father's heavy shears close by his desk."

Many people have highly prized objects that don't have a large monetary value. Talk about the items placed inside the boxes in this book. What events and memories do they represent?

Ask children to think about the objects they value, and to choose one. They should then describe it to a partner and invite questions. Why is it special? What does it do? Where do you keep it? How would you feel if you lost it?

Present the class with a dilemma: if they had to leave home and could only take one object, what would it be? Why did the boy in this story take an olive stone?

Collect tiny objects and explore them. What could they represent? Generate ideas before choosing an object and writing about it – both factually (what it looks and feels like) and fictionally (who it belonged to, why that person kept it).

Telling life stories

If an older visitor can tell your class a childhood story (or is prepared to share a migration memory) children can make audio recordings and transcribe them, rewrite stories in their own words or interview the visitor and compile a report. This may lead to stories emerging via children's families, so be prepared to extend your project and collect into a class book.

In the *The Matchbox Diary*, every sepia drawing has its story and Ibatoulline provides lots of cues and clues. If you have older visitors in class, pair them with children and ask each pair to work together to invent and tell the story of their chosen picture.

Experimenting with dialogue

As well as writing picture books and novels, Fleischman writes poetry for several speakers (which he describes as 'chamber music for voices') and playscripts. So it's not surprising to find him writing a text entirely in dialogue – but such a text is unusual in a picture book, and certainly worth exploring with your class.

What do your children think about the book's dialogue? Use a traditionally constructed text (such as When Jessie Came Across the Sea by Amy Hest and P.J. Lynch) to help you work out what's missing in the *The Matchbox Diary*.

What do the *The Matchbox Diary's* illustrations provide that the text doesn't? Would the book be as effective without its pictures? Talk about films, television dramas and plays that rely on visual storytelling as well as dialogue, and read the *The Matchbox Diary*'s dialogue aloud in pairs.

Collect old photographs showing people doing something, rather than posing for the camera. Interrogate by writing questions on sticky notes. Collate and discuss.

- Who could these people be?
- Why are they here?
- What are they thinking and feeling, and why?
- If you could step into the picture, what would you hear, smell and taste?
- Does anything surprise you?
- What happened before this photograph was taken? What will happen next? What do these characters want? What's stopping them achieving this?

Choose your favourite photograph. Using your responses, generate a mini-narrative and write it in traditional form, like the Jessie text. Once you've edited your narratives, rewrite them

IF YOU LIKED THIS, TRY…

- *Grandpa Green*, by Lane Smith
- *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan
- *When Jessie Came Across the Sea*, by Amy Hest and P.J. Lynch
- *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, by Susan Wojciechowski and P.J. Lynch
- *Weslandia*, by Paul Fleischman and Kevin Hawkes

as dialogues, like the *The Matchbox Diary* text.

In pairs, perform your dialogues – perhaps against a backdrop of your photograph, enlarged.

Painting reality

Ibatoulline's finely detailed and expressive illustrations were painted using acrylic gouache. Framed sepia vignettes depict the boy's memories, while the modern scenes are painted without borders in warmer shades of brown and amber.

Read this quote from *The Wall Street Journal*: "Ibatoulline can create images so exquisitely realistic… they could be mistaken for photographs"

Is this true? What tells you the *The Matchbox Diary's* illustrations aren't photographs? Is it good for art to be mistaken for real life? What can art do that photos can't?

Look at the work of 'realistic' illustrators (Kim Lewis, Christian Birmingham…) and compare with those using different approaches (Oliver Jeffers, Mini Grey…)

Draw an object from life, making it as 'real' as possible. Inspired by the less-realistic illustrations you've seen, draw the same object using a variety of techniques and media. Thinking about art and realism, what's the effect of each approach? Remember – there are no right answers and you don't have to be an expert to take part. By observing, reflecting, questioning and researching, children develop their aesthetic awareness and are better able to form and express opinions.

MINI THEATRES

Fleischman makes tiny working matchbox 'theatres' using cranks and other engineering to animate his scenes. Watch the online video for inspiration and instructions: **tinyurl.com/matchshow**

Playing with print

Fleischman's family owned a hand printing press, and typesetting was a familiar task. In *The Matchbox Diary*, the old man's childhood illiteracy and subsequent life choices form part of what Fleischman refers to as a "hymn to literacy" throughout the book.

Use the illustration of the typesetting workshop to play 'step into the picture'. Interrogate it for everything it can tell you about setting, characters and possible events. Use your observations to kickstart research into the history of printing. Set some type using an old-fashioned printing kit, and print a handbill for a school event or similar.

Explore computer fonts, using them to print your favourite poems. Collect font names, and create a sound-poem that plays with them.

Migration stories

Research early migration to America. What does the *The Matchbox Diary* tell us about the lives and experiences of such migrants?

Find out about migration today. Carefully selected newspaper reports alongside fictional resources will help generate a balanced, informed and age-appropriate discussion. Try *The Week Junior* for factual reporting. Fictionalised accounts can be found in all of the following: *Azzi in Between* by Sarah Garland; *The Silence Seeker* by Ben Morley; *Give Me Shelter* edited by Tony Bradman; and *The Unforgotten Coat* by Frank Cottrell Boyce.

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative development manager at Seven Stories.

We don't need to do this

Squeezing the passive voice into stories where it doesn't belong is not the best way to evidence that children have met key grammatical objectives. There's a much easier approach...

Not so long ago I worked with some experienced and skilled Y6 teachers who were having a few problems. They needed to find evidence of key grammatical objectives for the ITAF (Interim Assessment Framework) but were struggling to find it within the written tasks they had given their pupils.

Quite unsurprisingly, one of the objectives they found challenging was 'using passive and modal verbs mostly appropriately' (KS2 ITAF p.4). Experienced educators know teaching the passive voice for the spelling, grammar and punctuation test is fairly straightforward. Knowing when and where pupils will use it with purpose and for the appropriate audience is, however, quite another thing, and this was the problem for the Y6 teachers with whom I was working. They were providing children with sets of success criteria that included the passive voice and then looking for them to include it in their work. Cue problem one: the success criteria were so prescriptive that they were influencing the independence of the work. Problem two: the children were squeezing the passive voice into texts where it just didn't fit. Problem three: the teachers were manufacturing ever more writing opportunities, which created more work and stress for them and the children.

Where we go wrong

Helping my teacher colleagues solve this problem required some lateral thinking. I'll explain. Most teachers want children to write for purpose and audience and for their writing to be embedded in the curriculum being taught. We don't have to do this. We could quite easily teach grammar on one day, spelling on another and follow this with extended writing. But most of us prefer writing to have some context and be based on what's going on in the curriculum. This means we tend to have themes such as The Polar Regions, Life in the Stone Age, Dragons and so on.

Within these themes, teachers also use their collective expertise on genre. What we see then is diaries and letters about polar exploration, non-chronological reports about life in the Stone Age and explanation texts about how to look after a dragon. The problem facing so many practitioners is that, having done all this wonderful writing, they can't always reference the specific grammatical objectives for their year group. All too often they end-up doing exactly what my Y6 colleagues did; they create a new writing opportunity so that they can find evidence that pupils can use specific skills.

Match grammar to subjects

We all know the best evidence comes from children applying skills in their cross-curricular writing, but our anxiety to shore-up grammar gaps means we're frequently assessing through additional tasks undertaken in English lesson time. We don't need to do this.

The way I supported my Y6 colleagues was to help them think differently about writing – to look at the objectives they need to teach and which types of writing lend themselves to these objectives. That's not to say that children shouldn't write to inform, to instruct, to explain and recount previous events. They should. But they should do so as part of their mastery of different grammatical structures.

To stay with the example of passive voice used earlier, I asked my Y6 colleagues to think about what types of writing use the passive voice. They're a sharp bunch and knew that scientific write-ups (salt was added to the water…) recounting events (evacuees were transported by trains…) and formal persuasive texts (it was proven…it cannot be tolerated) are all examples of how the passive voice can be used authentically.

A smarter way of working

Identifying these authentic uses of the passive voice meant they could go away, look at examples of children's writing across the curriculum and see just how well the children were using the passive voice. What it also did was sharpen their teaching focus.

> "We need to adjust our understanding of genre so that we have a full understanding of the grammatical components of writing for different purposes."

If they still needed evidence of passive voice and they knew they had a science write-up to complete in the next week, they could ensure that passive voice was revised during their English provision and modelled in science so that 'salt was added to the water…' rather than, 'me and Sarah added some salt to the water…'

By knowing when we use different grammatical structures in authentic writing we can be more selective about the text types we choose to use at any given point with our children. We need to adjust our understanding of genre so that we have a full understanding of the grammatical components of writing for different purposes. Some objectives and genres are easier than others (such as teaching instructions for command sentences). But with a little bit thinking about the grammatical requirements of different written forms, we should be able to select activities purposefully, saving us time and ensuring that cross-curricular writing is used to showcase children's authentic application of grammar.

HOW TO EMBED GRAMMAR ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Here's how you can use cross-curricular writing to demonstrate children's understanding of grammar. You can also download a free booklet I put together called 'Embedding Grammar by Writing for Different Purposes and Audiences' here: primaryenglished.co.uk/resources.

YEAR 2
If you're struggling to teach the progressive form in context, watch a video of part of a sports game before trying to use the progressive form to say and then write sports reports. E.g. The player is / was running down the line…The goalkeeper was / is diving to catch the ball…

YEAR 4
Consider writing reports in geography and science that use prepositions after the noun as a way of helping children to expand noun phrases in varied and interesting ways. E.g. The polar bears with thick white fur…The isolated forests of northern Europe…

YEAR 6
If you're looking for an authentic context for teaching hyphens, why not write kennings? These could take the form of riddle poems. E.g. Shirt-ironer, graze-cleaner, lunch-packer: that's my mum…

RACHEL CLARKE is director of the training company Primary English (primaryenglished.co.uk)

40 BOOK TOPICS, 400 REVIEWS, All Free

If you're looking for story-led ideas you can bring into your classroom, the new 'books for schools' section at **teachwire.net** – the online home of *Teach Reading & Writing* and much more – is definitely worth a visit. From reviews and author interviews to lesson palans and book topics galore, it's got all the literary resources you need, and it won't cost you a penny.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

RECOMMENDED READS

Hundreds of the latest and best titles for young people, thoughtfully reviewed with an eye towards the kinds of elements likely to be especially of interest to teachers, plus suggestions for classroom activities. Search by age (birth to 16 years), or Key Stage.

EXPERT VOICES

Whether you're looking for advice on how to teach the finer points of KS2 grammar, or a lively debate about the best way to deliver guided reading, here's where you can delve into a wealth of lively and interesting pieces, written by some of the UK's most respected literacy experts and practising teachers.

AUTHORS' VIEWS

Michael Morpurgo, Malorie Blackman, Jacqueline Wilson, Lauren Child and Francesca Simon are just a few of the many well-loved children's authors who have shared their thoughts about reading, writing and publishing with us, offering fascinating insights into what a writer's life is really like.

WORLD BOOK DAY INSPIRATION

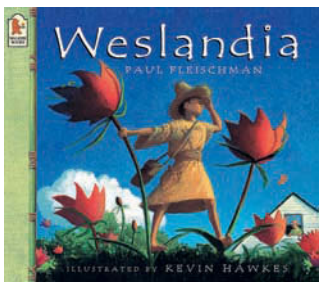
It happens every year – so why not be prepared? From ideas for costumes to suggestions for ways to celebrate, it's all here.

LESSON PLANS

Ultimately, it's all about the teaching and learning, of course; so the site is crammed with ready made lesson plans based around popular children's books such as *James and the Giant Peach*, *Journey*, *The Day the Crayons Quit* and many more – as well as other resources, including original stories by Pie Corbett. Read on for a taste of the kinds of book topic lessons you can expect to find…

Find more inspiration at **TEACHWIRE.NET/SCHOOL-BOOKS**

WHO AM I?



KS2

Weslandia

BY PAUL FLEISCHMAN
(Walker Books)

A good picture book can go straight to children's hearts, encouraging reflection, stimulating discussion and creating fertile ground for the kind of activities that broaden and deepen their experience of the story. In *Weslandia*, words and pictures work together seamlessly to deliver a quirky and appealing tale with a depth and power that's not easily forgotten. It provides a creative way in to so many different curriculum areas.

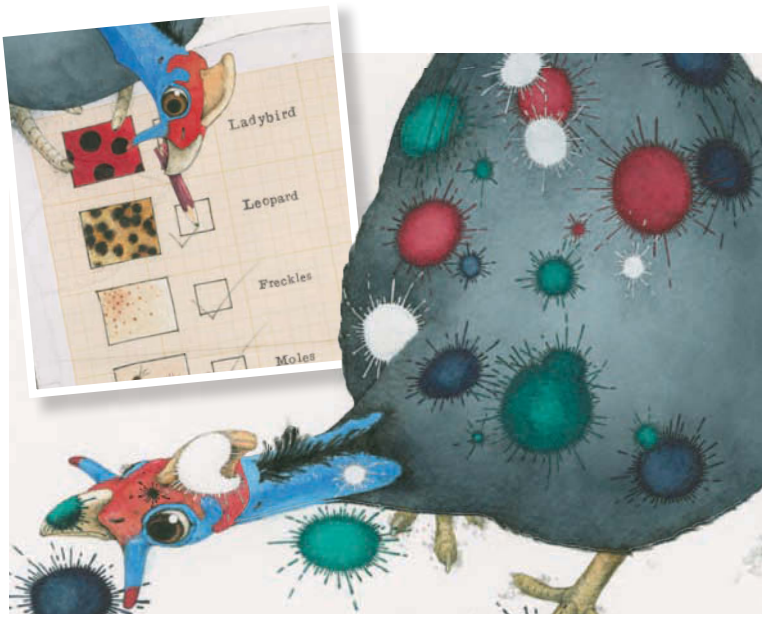
Standing out

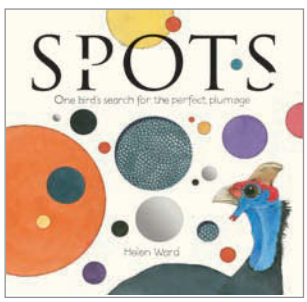
Wesley isn't like other kids – he likes books and doesn't want to pretend to be something he's not, even if he gets bullied. One summer, Wesley decides to create his own civilisation. With a little bit of magic and a lot of hard work, the world of Weslandia is born.

Try This

- **Make a list of things we know about Wesley. How do we know? Did a character tell us, and can we trust them to be right, or did we observe it in the pictures?**
- **Who persuades us what to do, eat or wear, and how? Gather different adverts and find out what's being sold and to whom. What tricks and techniques are used? Put children in groups and ask them to dream up, promoteand advertise a new product.**

Words by Carey Fluker Hunt





KS1

Spots

BY HELEN WARD
(Templar Publishing)

A guinea fowl pens a letter saying 'please send spots'. The next day a box containing spots arrive but unfortunately, they are not the right kind. Thus begins an entertaining and visually sumptuous exploration of the successive incorrect deliveries.

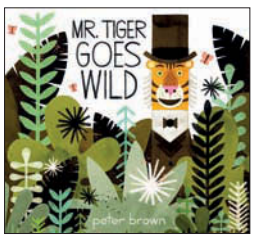
Rhyme time

Dedicated to the 'quietly eccentric', *Spots* features robust and satisfying rhyming text that less confident readers will enjoy.

Try This

- **Find out where different kinds of birds live, what they look like, what they eat and how they behave. Mark each bird's home country on a large map and create imaginary names and addresses for them. Set up a role-play post office and ask children to write postcards or letters between the birds or from themselves to the birds.**
- **Encourage children to create their own spots, dots, drips and blots. Make Jackson Pollock-style collaborative banners where everybody contributes drips of paint, or keep it small and contained with Seurat-style dotty colouring-in.**

Animal MAGIC



KS1

Mr Tiger Goes Wild

BY PETER BROWN
(Barefoot Books)

Mr Tiger wears clothes and lives in the city with his animal neighbours. Why, then, does he feel as if something's not quite right? Animals in stories often behave like people, but here the situation has gone too far and a strict adherence to good manners is stifling more natural behaviour. For Mr Tiger it's all too much and he's forced to take matters into his own paws.

First look

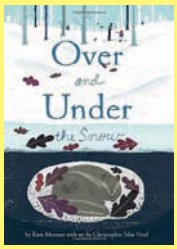
First take time to explore some of the pictures. Look at key spreads to stimulate curiosity and provoke debate. At this stage, aim for a discussion that encourages children to share their reactions to the images, rather than focusing on the story. Ask open-ended questions and welcome a diversity of responses. Think about things like use of colour, eyeline and page composition.

Words by Carey Fluker Hunt

Try This

■ **In the book, young animals are told to behave 'properly' – what does this involve? What does Mr Tiger think about it? What are good manners for, and what would happen if we abandoned them? Ask the class to suggest examples of good manners. Can they create a set of rules for good behaviour in the classroom?**

■ **Explore Mr Tiger through movement. Look at the spreads showing Mr Tiger stretching and leaping on all fours. Ask children to try the same thing. Make sure you finish your session with lots of roaring! Allow time for children to perform, observe each other and reflect on the tiger sounds and movements they are making.**



KS1

Over and Under the Snow

BY KATE MESSNER
(Chronicle Books)

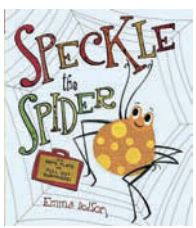
This book tells the story of a small girl and her father who are skiing home. As they pass through the woods, the girl spots lots of creatures that live above the snow – a red squirrel, a great-horned owl, a deer, and a bushy tailed fox. Meanwhile, her father tells her about all the creatures that are hidden beneath the snow, in their 'secret kingdom' – shrews, deer mice, voles, bullfrogs, beavers, even bears.

Wild questions

Before you read the story to your class, ask the children to think about all the different places where animals live.

› What is a 'habitat'?
› Can you name some different habitats?
› Do animals and birds always live in the same place allyear round?
› What effect does the weather in an area have on where animals choose to live?
› Why do animals sometimes need to hide? How and where do they do this?
› At what times of the year is it hardest for animals to find food and why?

Words by Sue Cowley



KS1

Speckle The Spider

BY EMMA DODSON
(Walker Books)

Packed with flaps and inserts to explore, this eccentric book follows the fortunes of a rather unappreciated spider, Speckle. Desperate for fame, fortune and to thrill the world with his astounding razzle dazzle dancing, he sets out on a journey of discovery. Inspired by his friend Mr Flip Flap the flea, he leaves his home in the Bahamas on a quest to show the world how special he is.

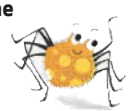
Extra special

Explore and discuss with the class what it is to be special. Do they think it is about having particular talents, like Speckle, or other personal qualities? Do the children think they are special and unique?

Words by Judy Clark

Try This

■ **Organise a class talent show and discover your pupils' hidden talents. Writing invites to parents, designing posters and adverts to promote the show, or even filming a short, X Factor-style trailer will inspire pupils to write for purpose and audience. Speckle receives a letter from his flea friend**



Try This

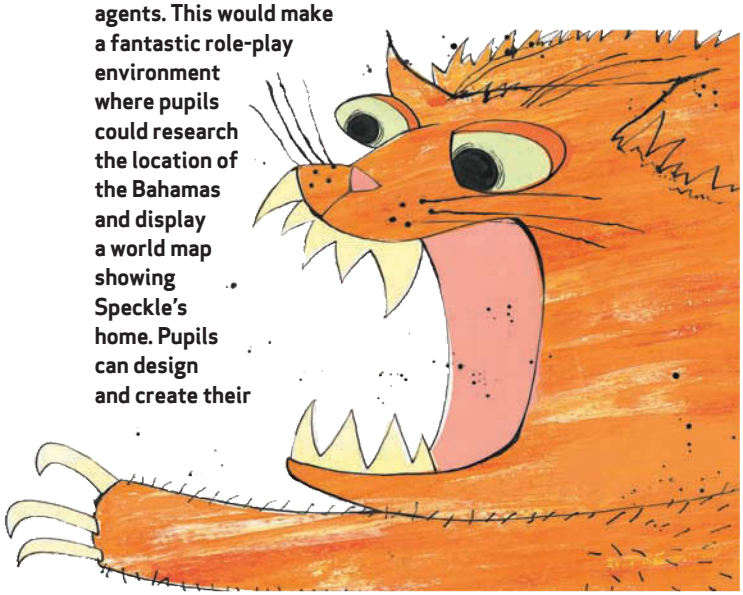
■ Take the children outside to look for some 'secret kingdoms' in your playground or local area. Encourage them to carefully lift up logs, or leaves, or rocks, to see what is hiding underneath. Look on tree trunks and up in the tree branches as well. The children could make notes, draw pictures or take photographs of what they find.

■ Work together as a class to create a giant 'secret kingdom' collage of all the different habitats you found, at different levels. You could gather leaves, twigs and other natural materials to add to your collage, to create a three dimensional effect.

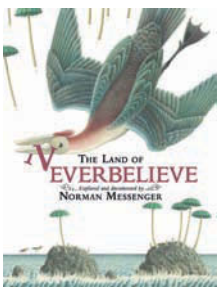
about his exciting life in the circus, complete with a promotional flyer. Use the flyer with its alliteration, word play, rhymes and great design to model a promo for your show.

■ Create your own class travel agents. This would make a fantastic role-play environment where pupils could research the location of the Bahamas and display a world map showing Speckle's home. Pupils can design and create their own passports and tickets or create and display a travel brochure.

■ Encourage children to experience the fun of headline writing, laying out a front page and inventing a title for their own newspaper.



3 Animal TALES for KS2

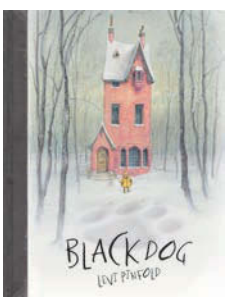


The Land Of Neverbelieve

BY NORMAN MESSENGER (Walker Books)

Part journal, part naturalist's report, this fascinating book takes the reader on a journey into Messenger's imagined world – an island he discovers while pottering at sea in his boat. This book has an almost magical ability to intrigue and astonish children through its carefully crafted words and delightful illustrations.

Words by Clare Pearson

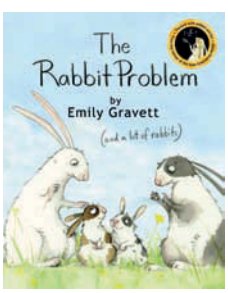


Black Dog

BY LEVI PINFOLD (Templar Publishing)

This multi award-winning story is about fear and bravery and many other things besides. Tightly written and evocative, the text appeals to older children as well as younger ones, but it's the illustrations that really set this book apart. Entertaining and visually sumptuous, it makes a rewarding starting point for creative investigations.

Words by Carey Fluker Hunt



The Rabbit Problem

BY EMILY GRAVETT (Macmillan Children's Books)

The Rabbit Problem is a book in the form of a calendar that offers its readers a completely different way of thinking about maths. Emily's rabbits engage in the kind of family relationships that everyone can relate to, then December arrives and 288 rabbits explode from the book in a pop-up surprise. It's a wonderful starting point for all sorts of cross-curricular work and one that readers will love.

Words by Carey Fluker Hunt

KILL THE PARENTS

Looking through classic and modern texts for orphans can encourage children to think more deeply about whose story they are reading, explains **Huw Powell**

Why do so many children's books feature orphans?"

This is a question that I was asked by a group of writers in Bristol. As I stood in front of the microphone, my initial thought was that this was a generalisation, that it was simply not true and that there were plenty of children's books with strong parental characters. However, the more I considered the question, the more I realised how many novels do feature orphans, or at least the authors have found a way to remove the parents.

Think of five classic children's stories. Where are the parents or guardians? Do they play a significant role? This is certainly not the case in many popular tales, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Thankfully, there are some stories with prominent parental characters, especially picture books and chapter books for younger readers. However, parents feature far less in middle-grade and young adult novels. *The Swiss Family Robinson* and *The Borrowers* are rare examples of stories about families working together.

The need for autonomy

In children's literature, the list of orphaned characters is surprisingly long – ranging from the classic Oliver Twist and David Copperfield to the more modern Alex Rider and Cassie Sullivan. And it's not just books; this trend is echoed across comics, film and television. In particular, superhero orphans, such as Superman, Spider-Man, Ironman, Captain America, Batman and Robin.

Why do so many authors remove the parents? According to Wikipedia, one definition of an 'orphan' is a child bereft through "death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation or loss from, both parents". Is it their tragic backstory that makes orphaned characters popular, because it encourages sympathy with the reader?

I feared that I had written a cliché with my Spacejackers trilogy. I reminded myself that my main character, Jake Cutler, may not be an orphan, because his father might be alive and waiting for him in the stars. But I had still found a way to remove the parents from the plot, by having Jake abandoned on a remote planet and raised by cyber-monks. Why had I done this? Was it subconsciously related to the death of my own father when I was a child, or perhaps something to do with becoming a father myself?

The answer is far simpler.

A child character cannot act autonomously in the presence of their parents. In literature, parental figures represent rules and order, therefore it's only when they are removed that the children are free to step up. For a child to be the main character, they need to be thrust into the driving seat, so that they can take control and make their own decisions. But this freedom comes at a price, because a family can also offer comfort and support, meaning that a 'parentless' character can find themself unanchored and exposed, which was taken to the extreme in *Lord of the Flies*. In most stories, the more challenging the situation, the more the reader can share the main character's elation when they overcome the odds and achieve their goal.

10 ICONIC LITERARY ORPHANS

1. **Oliver Twist – the unfortunate boy who experiences the cruel streets of London in the 19th century.**
2. **Peter Pan – the lost boy from Neverland who refuses to grow up.**
3. **Harry Potter – the tragic trainee wizard who embarks on a magical education.**
4. **Mowgli – the feral boy raised by wolves in the Indian jungle.**
5. **Dorothy Gale – the farm girl from Kansas who meets the wonderful Wizard of Oz.**
6. **James Bond – the charismatic secret agent who works for MI6 as codename 007.**
7. **Tarzan – the lord of the African jungle who was raised by apes.**
8. **Anne Shirley – the spirited girl who is mistakenly sent to Green Gables farm.**
9. **Pollyanna Whittier – the optimistic girl who transforms a dispirited Vermont town.**
10. **Paddington Bear – the marmalade-munching bear from Peru who moves to London.**

Can your pupils think of any more?

Unconventional heroes

Think how different some books would be if the main characters had not been orphaned. It's hard to conceive Oliver Twist not meeting Fagin, or Tarzan growing up in a boarding school, or Paddington Bear remaining in darkest Peru. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry reflects about how different his life would have been if his parents had lived. Aboard the Hogwarts Express, he imagines "a scarless Harry who would have been kissed good-bye by his own mother, not Ron's." But would this have made such a gripping story for readers? It's unlikely that Harry would have experienced such dangerous adventures under the protection of his parents.

"Harry's status as orphan gives him a freedom other children can only dream about," elaborates JK Rowling in an interview for *Salon*. "No child wants to lose their parents, yet the idea of being removed from the expectations of parents is alluring. The orphan in literature is freed from the obligation to satisfy his / her parents, and from the inevitable realisation that his / her parents are flawed human beings."

It's worth noting that many children do not come from a conventional family unit as portrayed in the books they read. However, we're starting to see new authors move away from traditional stereotypes and embrace a more diverse definition of family. In the Twilight trilogy, for example, Stephenie Meyer promotes a strong sense of family, but this is explored within different contexts, such as divorced parents, fostered vampires and a werewolf pack.

Whatever the definition, the main character must still be allowed to experience their own adventure and fight their own battles, which is often not possible with their parents in the room. So, while it's not essential for children's authors to 'kill the parents', the removal of parents or guardians forces a child character to stand on their own feet and become the hero of their own story.

HUW POWELL is the author of the Spacejackers series (Bloomsbury)

The secret to great GUIDED READING

Exploring texts with a small group is time well spent, but how do you make sure the rest of the class isn't losing out?

Guided reading has been, and still is, a popular way to teach, but it's easy to get wrong. For instance, I used to set up carousel activities during guided reading sessions, hoping these would engage the remaining children and keep them working independently. However, far too often these activities became time fillers, offering little challenge, enjoyment or scope for progress. As a result, those not taking part in guided reading would become distracted and disruptive, and all my time and energy would go into managing these pupils. How, then, do we ensure that all children are engaged, progressing and enjoying reading when not reading with an adult?

Cloze encounters

One of the activities I now set regularly is a cloze procedure reading task, which is simply where words from a passage have been deleted and children are required to fill in the gaps. If done well, this can be a powerful and interactive study in using contextual clues to find the unknown words. It also encourages discussion, prediction skills and can be a useful tool for assessing a child's grasp of language and text structure. In terms of the new National Curriculum objectives, cloze procedure passages can also assist children in the following:

- working out the meaning of words from the context;
- predicting what might happen from details stated and implied;
- retrieving information from non-fiction.

In the past, I have been reluctant to use cloze procedure passages, thinking them to be dreary and restrictive. They can, however, be adapted in a range of ways to guarantee a purposeful, stimulating activity.

Choose a wide range of texts

I regularly use poems, stories and extracts from non-fiction texts such as newspapers, adverts and magazines. This allows the children to explore the pertinent linguistic features of different text types. Sometimes I use extracts from classics such as *The Railway Children*, *Black Beauty* and *Peter Pan* if, say, I want to focus on exploring archaic language or investigating historical, social and cultural contexts. Or I might use a complete short story (around 100 words) to help develop the children's understanding of structure. I've also found it helpful to use extracts from texts the children have already read to help assess their recall of the main events, actions or ideas as well as to clarify their understanding of words or phrases.

Another good idea is to use a cloze procedure passage to introduce a text before you have studied it together. Here children's prediction skills can come into play and you can monitor comprehension and their prior understanding of a topic or a concept. The chosen text needs to provide challenge, relate to your pupils' interests, elicit an emotional response and offer interesting themes to discuss and consider.

Deciding what to eliminate

Traditionally, cloze procedure passages have been used to test children's subject knowledge or grasp of specialist, technical words. However, if you choose to delete a word that contributes to the overall meaning of the text, the activity can stimulate an interesting discussion. Try to choose words other than nouns to remove. You could eliminate words that support sentence and paragraph cohesion, such as co-ordinating or subordinating conjunctions, or conjunctions that signal time such as 'first', 'then' and

'next'. Consider deleting words that could have more than one alternative meaning in order to promote dialogue and debate.

Differentiate, support and extend

There are many ways to differentiate the cloze procedure activity – other than the choice of vocabulary, that is. Some children may reproduce the whole passage, including the deleted words, in order to develop their writing stamina, whereas others may only be filling in the blank spaces. Pupils might be provided with the missing vocabulary or asked to explore a range of alternatives and think of words that could sensibly fit and make sense. By emphasising words that are appropriate and meaningful, rather than words that are correct, children can be offered the chance to discuss, listen to others, enhance their understanding and revise their choices in an environment that is non-threatening.

You could also ask the children to colour code the missing words using a tool such as Rainbow Writing. Do they think the missing words could be nouns (red), adjectives (orange), adverbs (yellow) or conjunctions (green)? The cloze procedure could be adapted further by leaving gaps for punctuation – can the children punctuate the passage correctly using capital letters, full stops, question marks, apostrophes, commas after fronted adverbials and so on?

HAVE YOU TRIED?

AS PART OF A MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH TO GUIDED READING, YOU MIGHT ALSO ENCOURAGE...

EXPLORING PICTURE BOOKS

Encourage children to explore a range of picture books – they are ideal for developing inference, deduction and helping children to visualise a narrative. They can also be accessed at different levels and used with more than one group in a multitude of ways. Looking at the pictures, children can hypothesise and draw inferences about characters' thoughts, feelings and actions. The children can also be challenged to write their own narrative inspired by the images, artwork and design.

READING AHEAD

Allow some time for the children to explore the book before you read it together – you may want to focus on a specific section. It is best if the children have access to their own copy, so that they can read at their own pace. Encourage them to write down any questions, thoughts or reflections they have and use these to instigate a discussion when you read together. They will certainly be more engaged by working on their personal areas of interest and they will have more of a sense of purpose.

FREE READING

I feel that being given the freedom to choose what you read is a valid and important part of developing motivated readers. It also allows teachers to informally track their classes' reading habits and preferences. Ensure you have a range of appealing, high-quality books available for children to pick up, put down, dip into, explore, read aloud, laugh over and share.

IAN EAGLETON is director of NAHT Edge, the union for aspirational school leaders (nahtedge.org.uk)

Story hunters

Now in its second year, BookTrust, the UK's leading reading charity, brings you Story Hunters – an initiative designed to engage and encourage struggling readers in Year 4. Sign up now and your school will receive a personalised pack of carefully selected books and activities every month for six months, between October and March for £99 per child. Find out more by visiting **booktrust.org.uk/storyhunters**

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PICKED for progress

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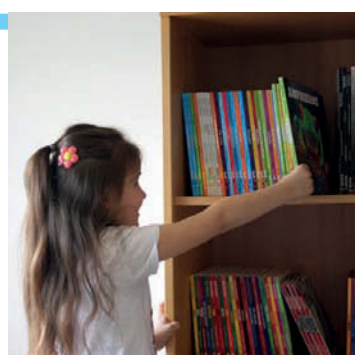
Penpals for Handwriting

Penpals for Handwriting is a whole-school scheme for children aged 3 to 11, combining fun, interactive activities for the whiteboard and comprehensive teaching support in the Teacher's Books with Practice Books and Workbooks. Fully updated to match the National Curriculum, it's supported by the National Handwriting Association. **www.education.cambridge.org/Penpals**

Book Life



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AT A GLANCE

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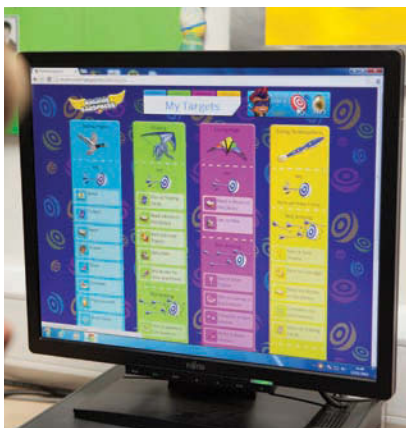
- **Focuses on core literacy skills**
- **Makes learning fun and progress easy to track**



REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Learning to read is 'no yolk'. There's a lot to crack and it can get messy. The egg analogy is a good one because just as there are lots of ways to cook an egg, there are lots of ways to approach teaching students how to read. Reading Eggs is a finely tuned site intended for children from 3-13 years, built around the five essential keys to reading success: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Reading Eggs is for children aged 4-7, while Reading Eggspress is for students aged 7-13, with a focus on comprehension gym work and timed challenges. The aim is to teach children how to read, or build on existing skills to become fluent, proficient and expert readers.

Children complete a series of animated online lessons that are packed with stacks of activities and a well-stocked library with over 2000 levelled ebooks. To get started they take a placement test that plugs them into the most suitable part of Reading Eggs. From there, they follow their own journey via 'My program', a dynamic learning pathway. Pupils follow particular lessons, focusing on certain books and suggested spelling and comprehension activities through 'Driving Tests' and 'Storylands'.

Rewards feature heavily within the programme. Children can earn golden eggs as they progress that can be used to buy games and items for their own avatar or house. They also earn a personalised certificate at the end of each map. After completing ten lessons, children are given a quiz that produces a report of their learning. Managing Reading Eggs on a day-to-day basis is easy via the teacher administration area which helps you co-ordinate the programme and support children. It's a rich area full of useful functions and will feed into your teaching, learning and assessment plans with plenty of insight, including a teacher guide to help you manage your class. You will also find invaluable support with student reports and can preview lessons, download supplementary resources, manage lessons and tests, as well as view pupil stats in either a brief summary format or as a more detailed report.

Beyond these functions, there are also fantastic year-by-year teaching resources such as posters, Powerpoints lessons, interactives, textbooks, teacher notes, pupil worksheets, book notes and 320 'big books' to use on your interactive whiteboard. It's a colossal collection of helpful resources and provides you with an enormous bank to withdraw from to boost reading skills. In-house support is superb and includes must-see video guides and webinars.

Teach Reading & Writing VERDICT

- ✔ **Contains thousands of resources**
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- ✔ **Built-in rewards keep children motivated**
- ✔ **Scientifically proven**
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Learn to speak PROPER

There are many ways to help children understand the difference between Standard English and other ways of speaking. Just be careful which real-life examples you share with your class!

When I was a (much) younger teacher, I played five-a-side football every Wednesday at some pitches near to my school.

One evening, the scores were tied at 3-3 with just two minutes of the game left. My last reserves of energy took me past a defender and through on goal. I paused for a second, ready to slot the ball into the net when I suddenly found my legs had disappeared from under me. Foul! I stood up to protest, only for the referee to wave play on. Furious, I stormed across to the defender responsible and made it pretty clear that I wasn't happy.

"Goodness me," I said. "I think that you fouled me there and I'm not terribly happy about it." Or words to that effect, anyway.

It was then that I heard laughter. I looked up to see a group of my Y6 boys pressed against fence, watching. "See you tomorrow, Mr Clements," one shouted, a giant grin spread across his face.

The next day I've never seen the children so keen to get into class. Once they were sat down, the first hand shot up.

"Good morning, Ali."

"I saw you playing football last night, Mr Clements."

"Did you, Ali?"

"Yes. You were using some… er… non-Standard English. You said… "

"Great. Thanks, Ali. Books out everyone."

Standard vs. Non-Standard

Teaching in a school in central London, we often talked about the use of both Standard and non-Standard English, hence the boys taking great delight in spotting my 'interesting' use of language. Helping children to be able to code switch to Standard English was vital – both for situations that required more formal spoken language, and for the impact it had on children's writing. Promoting Standard English in the classroom is also part of both the 2014 National Curriculum and the Teacher Standards for England.

Sort out your language

While the two are often conflated, Standard English isn't the same as formal English. Informal Standard English uses contractions (wouldn't, isn't), colloquial language (mates, the Rec) and abbreviations (TV, instead of television) – but doesn't use features of non-Standard English such as double negatives ('he hasn't got none') and dialect-specific subject-verb agreement ('we was' instead of 'we were'). Thinking about the two things and sorting phrases and sentences into formal and informal, Standard and non-Standard can be a useful way of making this distinction.

'What we all understand'

No varieties are right or wrong, better or worse – some ways of speaking and writing are just better suited to different situations and audiences. This idea sits at the heart of helping children to code-switch to Standard English and back.

Approached insensitively, encouraging code-switching becomes about 'speaking in a better way', potentially devaluing local dialects or ways of speaking that are used in a child's home. Talking about children's own language use, modeling 'classroom language', using drama and role play to explore language in different situations, and analysing the language from books and films can all help children to be aware of different language patterns and ultimately allow them to choose the words they use to express themselves in different contexts. Deborah Myhill and her colleagues at the University of Exeter use the phrase 'language that everyone can understand, not just people who live here'.

Forget the 'Queen's English'

Children sometimes need to be reminded that it is perfectly possible to use Standard English constructions in any accent at all. When we don't do this, accents often get mixed up with the structure of language, especially if children are encouraged to switch to Standard English by 'using a posh voice' or 'speaking like a queen'. These two ways of introducing Standard English should be avoided at all costs as they make it something 'other', a way of speaking used

UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS

While written texts are different from spoken language, they can still provide a useful vehicle for looking at different modes of expression – particularly when characters speak in regional dialects or use other non-Standard speech patterns. Some useful texts for exploring non-Standard English are:

- *I Yam a Donkey* (Cece Bell)
- *The Raven* (Edgar Allen Poe)
- *The Red Badge of Courage* (Stephen Crane)
- *Just So Stories* (Rudyard Kipling)
- *How the Whale Became* (Ted Hughes)
- *The BFG* (Roald Dahl)
- *Shakespeare Stories* (Leon Garfield)
- *Dis Poetry* (Benjamin Zephaniah)
- *Listen Mr Oxford Don* (John Agard)
- *The Owl Service* (Alan Garner)
- *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (retold by Geraldine McCaughrean)

people 'who aren't like us'. What we want is for Standard English to be a perfectly normal way of speaking – something for children to use when the situation demands it. Listening to the same sentence in different accents can be useful in helping children to see that the words stay the same, even if the way they are pronounced is different.

Use books as examples

Books can be used in two key ways. Firstly, they can illustrate Standard English in whole, grammatically correct sentences – something that is difficult to find in speech. Children can see how the language is organised and how it differs from spoken language. Texts where characters do not speak in Standard English are also useful (see panel, left). They give children an opportunity to discuss the features of different varieties of language.

Take every teaching opportunity

When I was at university, a tutor told me that even when things aren't going to plan, a good teacher can turn any situation into a teaching point. With this in mind, I could have shared my words on the football pitch with the whole class. I could have made the teaching point that while the grammar and syntax I employed in my sentence still reflected the structures of Standard English, some of the vocabulary choices I made were not Standard English. Looking back, I'm rather pleased I didn't. This might have been one opportunity to make a teaching point that was best missed!

JAMES CLEMENTS is an education writer, researcher and enthusiastic, if limited, midfielder. He runs the education website shakespeareandmore.com.

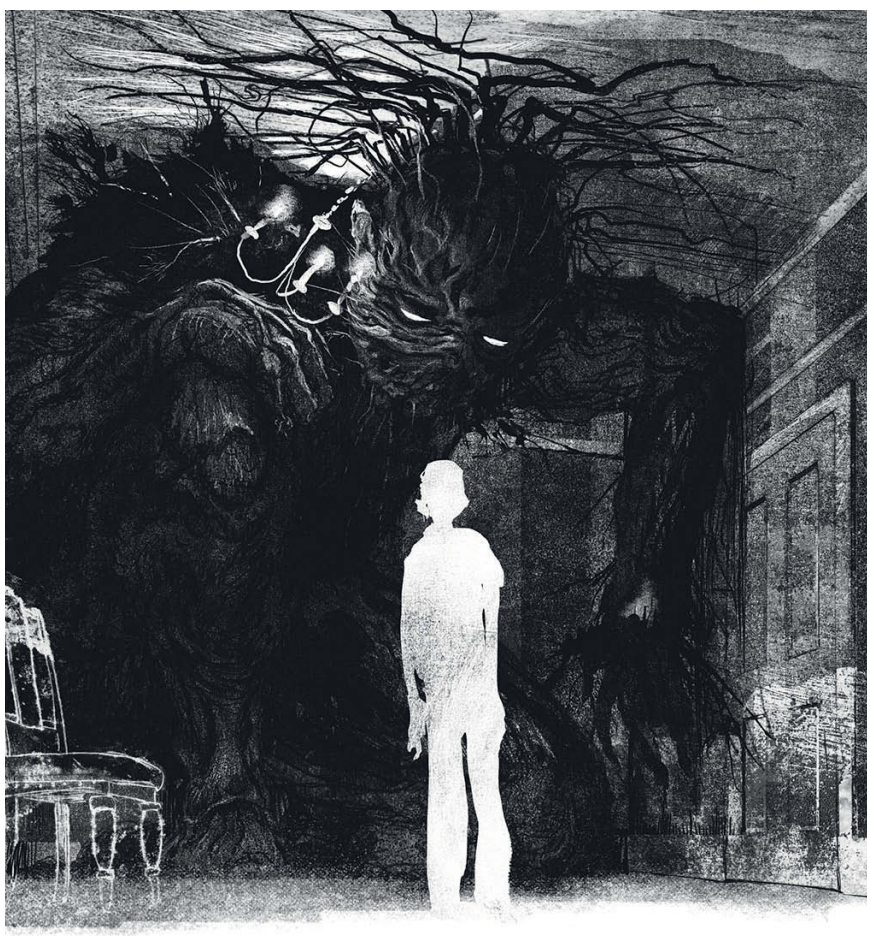
"I do try to write honestly about the darkness..."

Let children decide for themselves what an 'age appropriate' book looks like, says **Patrick Ness** – they might surprise you

The very first book I read – the one where the letters turned into words that made sense – was Richard Scarry's magnificent *Storybook Dictionary*. I remember associating the shapes with the pictures and thinking, 'So, that's what 'apple' looks like', and 'That's what 'cat' looks like'. I suppose I was three or four years old; I was quite precocious. I wish I could say my parents taught me, but I don't really remember. We were living in Hawaii at the time, and I just have a memory of sitting in the backyard, under the banana tree (yes, we had a banana tree, although it never gave us any fruit) with this book, and the overwhelming sense that it was *mine* – that Richard Scarry had written it for *me*. That's a powerful feeling; one of the most important things about writing for young people is enabling them to claim ownership of the books that speak to them.

A little later on, *The Westing Game*, by Ellen Raskin, was another 'aha!' moment. It's a really good, well-crafted mystery for younger readers that you can figure out as you go along, and it was hugely influential, because as I turned the pages I knew, absolutely, that this wasn't for my parents, or my teachers – it was for me. A clever book, for me. Fantastic.

I read constantly as I was growing up, and got most of my books from libraries – we didn't have a ton of money. I started out in the kids' section, but quickly moved over to start exploring the adult shelves. I don't think that was a problem; sometimes, tackling a book that's 'too old' for you, and not getting it 100%, is just part of becoming a reader. And besides, kids are fantastic



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"Recommended reading ages should be a loose guide, not a strict policy. It depends on the kid; they all develop differently, after all, and have varying experiences to bring to the table."

self-censors; not in a melodramatic way, it's just that if a book is too mature for them, they'll think, 'Oh, boring!' and put it down.

My latest book, *Release*, is at the older end of what I write for young people. It deals with sexuality, and other young adult themes – it's not a primary school story, and I'm okay with that. However, I know that my work is on a continuum, probably with *A Monster Calls* on the other end of it, and younger children might engage with it. But recommended reading ages should be a loose guide, not a strict policy. It depends on the kid; they all develop differently, after all, and have varying experiences to bring to the table. Luckily, I think most teachers do a pretty good job of knowing what their individual students are like, and not making a big deal about book choices in that way. Certainly for me, that felt like a real gift – I was being trusted, and because of that, I could make interesting decisions.

When it comes to teaching about writing, I understand that teachers are constantly having to deal with ever-shifting education

policies and I have enormous sympathy for what they have to put up with (I'm married to one, after all) – but despite the pressures of the curriculum, I do think it's still possible to sneak creativity in there. When I talk to young writers I always remind them that you have to learn the rules in order to break them; so I don't mind that grammar and structure are taught rigorously and early on – as long as it's not to the exclusion of creative expression. In fact, it's actually fun to try and work out how you can follow the rules and still do exactly what you want to do; stubbornness and spite are useful qualities for a would-be author.

As a young reader, the books I responded to most were the ones that dared to talk about the darkness. Being a new teenager puts you in a difficult place – for the first time, you are having to define yourself apart from your family. It's a necessary step, but it can be violent, and terrifying. All you have to do is read the short stories a teenager writes and you'll realise their own fiction is much, much darker than anything I would be allowed to publish; and that's fine, it's right. Growing up is about pushing the boundaries, finding your principles, testing yourself and working out who you are and where you stand.

So I do try to write honestly about the darkness. Because if I don't, I'm abandoning young readers to face it by themselves. And that, to me, is an immoral stance.

Patrick Ness is the author of *Release* (Walker Books, 4th May, £12.99)

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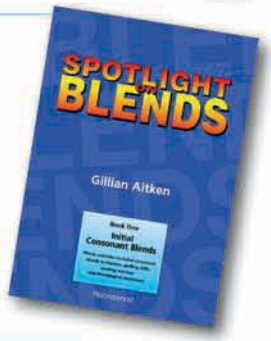

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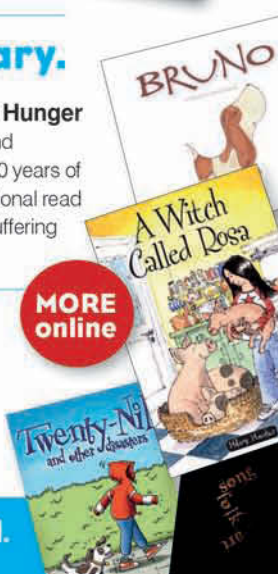

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The **write** way

Competent handwriting is a crucial skill for effective, creative communication, insists **Angela Webb** - so let's make sure we teach it properly

"Is handwriting a dying art?" This question has frequently been asked in recent years by the media who expect a clear answer: "Yes". And in truth, we adults do use handwriting much less often than we did even ten years ago, because we have such a wealth of technological alternatives at our fingertips; I haven't written by hand myself for days, despite chairing a charity whose core aim is to promote this fundamental skill.

So what is the honest answer? The first point to make is that handwriting is most certainly not on its way out, far from it. Ten years ago individual teachers were free to decide whether or not to teach handwriting, and many chose not to, preferring instead to concentrate their efforts on reading. Though they often felt uneasy about this, they struggled to justify the time and commitment required to teach handwriting well.

As it has turned out, their misgivings were well founded. Since the early 2000s educational researchers have sought evidence to support the continuing teaching of handwriting, assuming keyboarding skills would emerge as the logical replacement for the classroom. Interestingly, the results of these studies have astounded even the most dedicated hand-writers by the strength and consistency of their findings.

Benefits across the board

What has emerged is that handwriting confers benefits to the developing child, not matched by any alternative transcription mode. This is evident not only in terms of presentation of schoolwork but more importantly in how it impacts on the broader writing skills. It is demonstrated mostly clearly in the quality of the written content, in better-structured and more sophisticated composition. In short, the physical connectivity of the pen or pencil on the page enhances cognitive development and learning in a number of different but crucial ways. For example, handwriting has been found to stimulate creative thought, especially in narrative writing. Second, it results in compositions that have greater depth and are more interestingly expressed. Furthermore, it supports fact-retention, not only in the field of literacy, but also in maths and science. Finally, it leads to a much greater depth of processing across all disciplines, suggesting that learning is enhanced when a pen or pencil is employed.

Artistic writing, or calligraphy, has a special place in the history of different cultures and also in aesthetics. However, the handwriting used in schools, which researchers have studied and which we at the NHA promote, has a clear functional role. It is a tool for writing, and one that is as critical to the wider process of producing written text as a spade is to digging a hole.

"The results of studies have astounded even the most dedicated hand-writers by the strength and consistency of their findings"

Required standards

Given the strength and consistency of these findings it is not surprising that government policy on what is taught in schools has recently been revised. Since 2014 the position in the National Curriculum in the UK is that handwriting must be taught throughout the primary school, with an emphasis on correct letter formation and joins in Key Stage 1, on fluency and increase in speed in lower Key Stage 2, and on flexibility of writing styles and the development of automaticity in upper Key Stage 2. The goal of the revised policy is that all pupils should be able to produce legible, fluent and fast handwriting with the minimum of conscious effort by the time they transfer to secondary school.

Indeed, so committed is the DfE to the renewal of efforts to teach all children to handwrite, that in recent years in order for children to 'exceed the standard' of writing at the end of Key Stage 2, they must demonstrate good handwriting in their written work. However competent a piece is in content, the higher level cannot be awarded unless handwriting competence is also demonstrated.

How can this be achieved when former SATS have shown that roughly a third of boys and a fifth of girls cannot write well enough by the time they leave primary school to access the secondary curriculum? Well, here is some guidance, based on research findings and from NHA experience in schools over the last 12 years:

Support for success

The National Handwriting Association is a charity whose aims are:
- To raise awareness of handwriting asa vital component of literacy
- To promote good practice in the teaching of handwriting
- To support those who work with children who have handwriting difficulties

For those wanting guidance or support for teaching handwriting in their schools, the NHA can offer materials and INSET. Visit the website at nha-handwriting.org.uk

SOME FACTS:

It must be taught

• Handwriting is a skill that must be taught. It is a highly sophisticated system of symbolic representation which cannot be 'picked up' like jumping or kicking a ball.

There is a right way

• There are correct movements for forming letters and joins. These are the most efficient and ergonomic ways to perform the letters and they enable the writing to retain its integrity when speed is increased.

It bears repeating

• Handwriting requires practice. Although not purely a motor skill, like other skills with a motoric component, repetition helps to establish it and make it permanent.

Consistency is key

• Consistency between classes is essential. Children will respond best if they do not have to 'unlearn' aspects of how they write.

Policies lead to success

• Schools which develop a handwriting policy to which all members of staff adhere are the most successful in raising standards.

AND SOME MYTHS:

Cursive is best

• Continuous cursive handwriting does not confer greater benefits than other forms of handwriting. It is sometimes thought, that if children write cursively they will learn quicker, write faster, spell better, etc. There is no evidence to support these claims.

Entry strokes are helpful

• Teaching continuous cursive letterforms with baseline entry strokes does not make learning simpler. The complexity created by teaching letterforms with entry strokes leads to confusion with learning and reproducing those forms.

Cursive should come first

• Teaching continuous cursive from Reception will not help. Where individual letterforms are secured first with joining strokes taught later, benefits are found for handwriting and also early sound-symbol correspondence for reading.

DR ANGELA WEBB B.ED (HONS) MA PHD
Dr Angela Webb chairs the National Handwriting Association (nha-handwriting.org.uk)

TEACH GRAMMAR IN 10 MINUTES

Well, maybe not all of it. But quick daily sessions have helped to cement **Conor Heaven's** pupils' grasp of GaPS

Back in the 1990s, when I was at primary school, I struggled with writing. I loved language and how authors used it to develop wonderful characters, settings and plots – but sitting down creating my own for an hour? Not so much.

I think this led to me being treated as a lazy boy – someone who shouldn't be made to learn grammatical terminology in case I abandoned the writing process altogether. By the time I reached secondary school it was: "Heaven, for this next exercise, you will write a subjunctive clause." My heart would sink (I had no idea what a clause was).

As it turned out, I could, and did, use clauses in my writing – it's just that I hadn't learnt what to call them. Not that my grammar school's obsession with naming structures actually improved my grammar, or my writing.

My personal experience tells me there's something wrong with a Govian, conveyor belt education in which identifying and naming grammatical structures takes us from birth to exam success. It had little impact on my ability to use grammar successfully – so what's the point?

Having said that, I wouldn't go as far as Michael Rosen either (no matter how much I adore his poetry) in rejecting grammatical terminology. After all, if four-year-old children can use dinosaur names in context, they can probably remember their fronted adverbials, as long as we teach them in a fun and engaging way.

A new way to teach grammar

So, last year, our infant school took a different approach. We had three aims: children should learn grammar, enjoy it, and be able to name its features. Measuring success would be simple. If the mere mention of grammar wasn't accompanied by groans and children felt confident in tackling the GaPS paper, it would be job done.

We started by looking at when it would best fit in with our already hectic timetable. Some schools were teaching standalone grammar lessons once a week; we thought this would lead to superficial learning. To have a deep understanding of grammar, we agreed, concepts needed to be taught, developed, practised and embedded.

This led to us having 10-minute daily grammar sessions. What worked exceptionally well was that children could explore and play with punctuation and grammar each day before attempting to use it in their English lessons. The next day, the grammar session would be adapted to deal with misconceptions or develop the concept further.

What works best?

TEACHING KEY STAGE 1 GRAMMAR THIS YEAR? HERE ARE CONOR'S TOP THREE TIPS...

1 Consider a Talk for Grammar approach
Use a rich text (or WAGOLL) full of examples you want pupils to use. Children need to see and hear examples across the week. They need to play with and use talk to create their own versions. I knew my children had got it when they could sort examples and non-examples.

2 Name it!
Use the correct terminology. If reception children can learn the names of dozens of dinosaurs then children in Year 1 and 2 can learn 'adjective' instead of 'wow word', 'verb' instead of 'doing word', and 'conjunction' instead of 'sticky word'.

3 Embed the grammar in independent writing
By this, I mean don't teach to the test! The GaPS score will have some bearing on whether children reach the expected standard or not, but children need to confidently use these skills in their writing. Why not put the grammar 'objective of the week' in the success criteria?

So, where to start? We began with appealing and challenging texts. For my class, short passages from CS Lewis often gave the right balance of engaging, high-quality content. By analysing model texts, we ensured children could identify grammatical structures in context and begin to understand how and why they were used.

Create a working wall

Once we had shared our grammatical focus for the week, we would collaborate on a 'steps to success' working wall using the Frayer model, with a 'definition', 'facts', 'examples' and 'non-examples'. It was important to encourage children to look for more examples at home or in school and reward their discoveries. We would add these examples to our display using sticky notes. I would model using these grammar examples in shared writing, thinking out loud about my choices and asking the children to support me. Pupils then felt more confident using these aspects of grammar in their writing and would look at the display if they felt unsure.

Help everyone succeed

From the middle of the week onwards, children would begin to offer examples of the concept we had been exploring, discovering them in model texts and in our own books too. Whiteboard work would allow children to explore and play with the focus in a risk-free, collaborative environment. As they developed understanding and confidence, they began to experiment with new grammar in their written work. By the end of the week, most were confident in using it correctly, having spent close to two hours practising.

Of course, some children were not secure or didn't feel confident enough to use the new grammar in their independent writing. So, even though we would move on to a new concept, I would continue to identify previous examples when looking in model texts, modelling how to use it in shared writing. This ensured that children didn't forget, and those with misconceptions would have corrective teaching.

In our termly assessments we found children were able to recall the names and features fairly successfully. And our (hopefully outstanding) GaPS test results? Well, that was ruined when the 2016 test was shared early with everyone. Sigh.

CONOR HEAVEN
is a former teacher, now an education consultant for TT Education.
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Can fluency boost comprehension?

A classroom-based research project in Hertfordshire went in search of the answer, and threw up some interesting results

There is definitely a buzz in the air about fluency at the moment. And quite rightly so. The DFE videos *2016 teacher assessment exemplification*, released back in April last year, highlighted fluent reading of an age-appropriate text as an indicator of working at Age Related Expectations (ARE). They showed a range of children reading with accuracy, fluidity, appropriate intonation and expression – all of which gave us the clear impression that they were 'getting' what they were reading. Without the need to ask the children any questions, we could safely assume they understood the meaning of the words on the page.

This realisation was the starting point for a piece of class-based research I conducted with the Year 6 English subject leader at Reedings Junior School in Hertfordshire. Despite most children achieving well in the 2016 reading paper, this teacher was keen to raise standards even further by supporting those pupils who were in danger of dipping just below the expected standard. As is often the case, these children were still grappling with some decoding and comprehension issues, which meant they were mostly working on texts pitched below the standard that was age-appropriate for their year groups. The subject leader, having experienced the 2016 tests, was well aware that if these children were not given regular access to more challenging texts, and supported to access them, they would be ill-equipped to face the rigour of the KS2 reading paper. And so a plan was hatched.

Say it like you mean it

The basis for the plan was to explore the idea that repeated re-reading aids fluency, and that fluency, in turn, aids comprehension. Ultimately, we wanted to be convinced that the children had understood a text just by listening to them reading out loud.

Our plan was simple: model how a text should be read; support the children to read it in the same way; and then expect greater understanding of the text.

To help test our theory, we selected two children from Y5 who were both judged as being at risk of not meeting ARE by the end of Y6 and asked them to read a challenging text out loud. The extract chosen was from *All Summer in a Day*, by Ray Bradbury, which the subject

leader found many of her Y6 pupils struggled fully to comprehend.

What was obvious was that neither child 'got' the text first time round. Yes, they paid heed to the punctuation marks (dutifully rising in pitch where they noted a question mark), and yes, they were fairly fluent in their reading in regards to decoding. But overall, their reading could have been accurately described as 'barking at the text'. We knew this because of their answers to a series of simple questions following the initial 'cold' read.

Teacher: "What are they waiting for?"
Child 1 and 2: "The rain to stop."
Teacher: Where is this story set?
Child 1: "A planet."
Child 2: "I don't know!"

We had intended to ask more probing, challenging questions at this point, but based on the children's limited understanding of the text, we chose to move swiftly on.

Hearing the difference

Four more children were invited to join the group and I launched into a read aloud at full-throttle. The intention was to demonstrate how good readers pay attention to so much more than the obvious punctuation marks. Specifically, I talked with the teacher beforehand about things like how we would emphasise the verbs in the sixth sentence (*pressed* and *peered*) to alert children to the actions being undertaken. We discussed how we felt that a short sentence (in this case, consisting of only two words: *It rained*) required clear, bold intonation of each word, with a distinct and noticeable pause in between. And we went over how this phrase should be spoken in a way that expressed the disappointment felt by the children at this point, therefore using a lower pitch for the word 'rained'. The point was to consider just how much meaning could be conveyed through little more than intonation.

After my first reading, I dived straight into a second, but this time I paused after each sentence (and when the sentences became very long, I paused after each phrase). I challenged the children to explain why I read each sentence/phrase in a certain way, but they found this hard to articulate. Clearly they did not have the metalanguage to describe the techniques that a good reader employs when reading aloud.

After each sentence / phrase, I encouraged the children to "read that bit just like I did". I also invited them to repeat the section to their partner, taking turns and offering feedback.

I shared with the children how I had annotated my text to remind myself how I wanted to say certain words or phrases, and suggested that they do the same. It took about 10 minutes to work through the extract in this way.

Did it make a difference?

At this point, from our perspective, our input was done. We had modelled a meaningful read-aloud, and given the children multiple opportunities to read and re-read the text. However, at no point had we unpicked any of the language, nor had we discussed word choice, sentence structure, grammar etc – the usual stalwarts of a shared reading session.So, we wondered, would this be enough to give the greater understanding of the text?

We invited the two original children back to re-read the text aloud once again. The difference was stunning. What had been an inaccessible text was now read with all the outward signs of fluency for which we had been hoping. Most significantly, it sounded as though they were actually 'getting' what they were reading, much like the revered child in the DFE video. This of course we had anticipated, seeing as we had heavily modelled how to read the text during the session. The real test was whether the greater fluency had led to greater understanding. With fingers crossed, we asked the children the same questions again:

Teacher: "What are they waiting for?"
Child 1: "For the rain stop and for the sun to come out."
Teacher: "Where is it set?"
Child 1: "Venus"
Child 2: "Venus"

Both children offered this answer without hesitation. This time, based on the level of enthusiasm we were detecting for the text, we felt we could probe with a few further, more challenging questions.

Teacher: "How do they feel about the rain?"
Child 1: "They don't like it because it

"The difference was stunning. What had been an inaccessible text was now read with all the outward signs of fluency for which we had been hoping."

ruins everything. It's noisy."
(The child was able to locate sections from the text that supported his answer.)
Child 2: "They were happy that it was going to stop. They don't like it because it just never stops."
Teacher: "Who might the rocket men and women be?"
(Both children agreed that these must be the humans who travelled there from Earth.)
Teacher: "Would you like to live there?"
(This question created a moment or two of quiet thinking time before Child 2 offered a response.)
Child 2: "Yes."

At this point, we wondered if the child had fully appreciated the characters' despair at their monotonous and destructive weather conditions. Surely he could see that there would be downsides to living in a place like the one described? But he continued…

> Child 2: "At first, at least. I like going outside in the rain and mucking around in puddles. But it would get boring after a while. I wouldn't like it for long."

How wonderful to hear the children talking with increased understanding and engagement about the text, and offering many more thoughtful insights into its meaning. Clearly, they now had a much greater appreciation – and enthusiasm – for the text. Put simply, they 'got' it.

SHOULD THIS CHANGE THE WAY WE TEACH?

HERE'S WHAT PENNY AND HER Y6 COLLEAGUE DISCOVERED FROM THEIR EXPERIMENT:

MODELLING WORKS
As always, a session like this can often leave you with more questions than answers, but we concluded we had made some headway. Specially, we felt satisfied we would be able to present these children, and others at similar stages of reading development in other year groups, with age-appropriate, challenging texts, and that with some forethought – in the form of pre-teaching consisting of modelled fluent reading – they would be able to access and enjoy them, along with their peers.

IT CAN DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE
In the long-term, we discussed how repeated exposure to challenging texts would hopefully attune children's ears to the rhythms of complex language structures, making them more confident when tackling texts of this nature independently. We discussed how, moving forwards, we might be able to prompt children further in their response to questions about how we had modelled reading the text, and get them to use grammatical terminology in their answers. So, instead of saying "You paused after the word 'look' in line 7" they might say, "You paused before the prepositional phrase 'at the hidden sun'".

IT WILL TAKE TIME
Clearly this technique does not offer a quick fix, and the subject leader and I acknowledge this. Instead, it is more about the long game. However, our session made led us to believe that, on this occasion, it was a game well worth playing.

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EDU Q&A

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"I like to think I've saved lives"

For best-selling author **James Patterson**, writing funny books that children really want to read is a very serious business indeed

The thing about trying to recall the years when you were growing up is you can never be quite sure what it is you actually remember, and what you've heard as stories. So, I think I was reading at the age of three – but whether that's real, or something imagined and told to me by my mother, I don't know.

I was definitely literate from quite an early age; I wouldn't say that it was necessarily a turn on for me, though – I wasn't a huge reader as a child, and I feel a lot of that had to do with the kinds of books that were set before me back then. It's so important to put books in front of children that they are going to gobble up and ask for more of, but those just weren't the kinds of titles I was given, as a rule. I do remember being very interested in biographies, and particularly the lives of the saints, which I found intriguing; they were such wonderful stories. I enjoyed The Hardy Boys, and adventure tales like *Treasure Island* were important to me. But when I look at the world of children's literature now, and write a lot of it myself, I can see how I missed out on a properly varied literary diet when I was young. All broccoli and carrots isn't the way to get most kids reading.

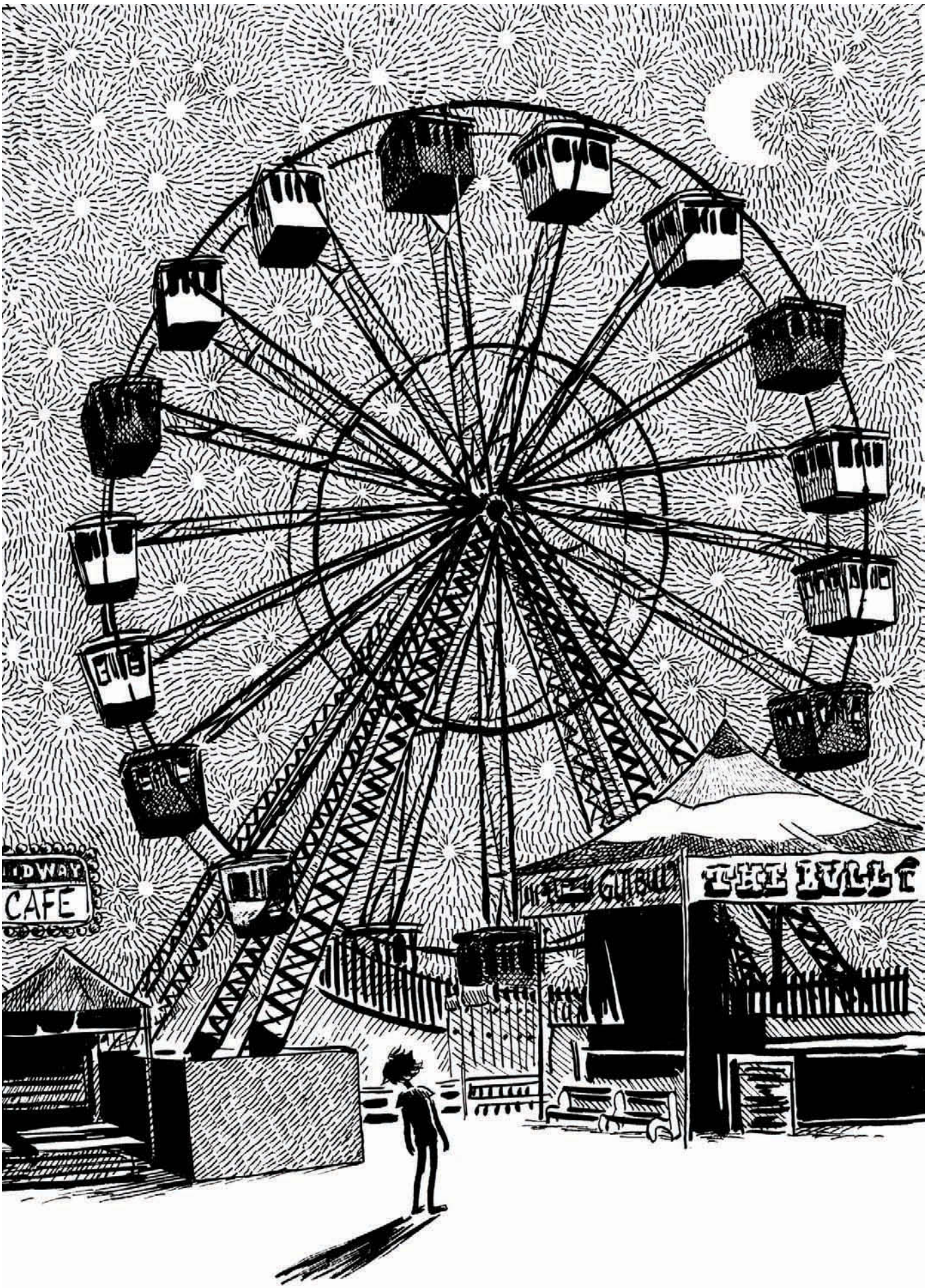
There's a tendency for parents and teachers to draw a distinction between so-called 'serious' literature and genre fiction. But I don't think it's as great a divide as people believe. There are some out-and-out masterpieces, of course; but there are also plenty of frankly so-so 'highbrow' books that get critical acclaim, and some mystery and suspense novels that are overlooked, but really quite special. Take J.K. Rowling; I don't know that the Harry Potter series is great literature, but it's wonderful storytelling. She's a very talented writer, and she has saved lives. I like to think I've saved lives, too, with my kids' books. In fact, anybody who doesn't believe that's the job of a children's writer should go do something else. If you don't have a passion for getting kids to be competent readers, you shouldn't be in this business.

That's why I have been so driven to set up initiatives like readkiddoread.com, which makes it easier for teachers, librarians, parents and grandparents to find books that they might match up with different kids and the Patterson Scholarships to support teacher training. In the States the Patterson Pledge Program, in partnership with Scholastic, funds school libraries and in the UK we partnered with World Book Day to do the same. There are countless studies showing the power of reading to create better citizens – husbands, wives, neighbours; the more we read, the more compassionate we become, as a society. And kids who aren't hooked into it by the time they are twelve or so, well, they risk getting lost. Completely. We can't let that happen.

When I'm writing for children, I try not to condescend to them. I respect their intelligence – they get it, they just might not have as much information as adults sometimes – and I aim to tell them a story that offers something worth thinking about, as well as being a lot of fun. With the I Funny series, for example, you have a kid who wants to be a stand-up comedian. What do you have to do if you really want something? Study, study, study – so that's what he does. And on top of that, he can never be a 'stand-up' comedian, because he's in a wheelchair, which raises a whole other thing about the power of humour to get us past certain problems in life. Similar themes come up in *Jacky Ha-Ha*, which is a terrific book about a Tina Fey kind of character, who wants her own daughters to know what it was like for her growing up with six sisters and a stutter, struggling to be heard. And then I have a book coming out later this year called Pottymouth and Stoopid; I know some gatekeepers might look at that title and get a little nervous about bringing it into the library, but it's actually about word-bullying, which is so prevalent and damaging these days (and not just in schools and playgrounds, either – look at politics, and the tabloids). It's a neat story; kids will read it, and love it, and there's something to get their minds working, to talk about in class. I think, in fact, *Pottymouth and Stoopid* might be the most important book I've ever written.

James Patterson's new book, *Pottymouth and Stoopid* is published this June.

Illustrations: Sue Patterson


CAFE
THE BULL

SOMETHING OF YOUR OWN

We all love to get lost in a story, says **Elen Caldecott** - but why should someone else be in charge?

I often visit schools to talk about writing, and my sessions always begin like this:

Me: Put your hand up if you've ever read a book and got so lost in the story, you haven't heard someone shout your name?

Baffled children: 35% (ish) put a hand up.

Me: Have you ever been to the cinema and got so caught up in the film that you feel you're in it?

Comprehending children: 70% (ish) now have their hand up, many of them have both hands.

Me: Have you ever played a computer game, and got so lost in the game that you forget to eat?

Enthusiastic children: 100% have at least one hand up. Lots have two. Some bright sparks stick a leg in the air. One per cent of the audience topple over.

The reason that everyone has a limb in the air – usually teachers included – is because we all of us know the pure, joyous magic of not being entirely ourselves for a while. Stories give our brains an off switch and we become someone else. You want to be an astronaut settling Mars? No problem, there's a film you can watch. You fancy walking the streets of ancient Rome? No worries, there's a book you can read.

It can take years to find just the right book, or film or game to have that magical effect. But when you finally find it, it's a wonderful moment – the point where you realise what all the fuss was about.

The problem with endings

I was a good reader at the age of about five. But it wasn't until I was seven that I actually got it. The book was *James and the Giant Peach*. I started reading, and, all of a miraculous sudden, I was surrounded by giant, talking insects inside flying fruit. Woah. And, indeed, blimey.

More stories followed at a voracious pace. I was Darryl at Malory Towers, I was Matilda moving objects, I was George (and Timmy) solving crimes.

To begin with my reading was simply a frothy joy – time spent in magical places. But, as my parents' marriage worsened, it became so much more than that. Switching off was a necessary escape and a sanctuary. I was never without a book, because I didn't particularly like being me.

But I was bereft when each book finished and the story was over. I had to go back into my own body. Until one day, my mum suggested that I stop moping that the Malory Towers series was done and just write a Darryl story of my own.

Was I allowed? And, if I was allowed, would it even work?

Take control

I found a pen and paper and began to write – Darryl Rivers Goes To College. I shamelessly stole all my favourite Malory Towers plot lines and characters. And I found, to my utter delight, that it did work. I had exactly the same feeling of being there, with the characters, as I did while reading. My friends were back, but this time, I was in charge! Darryl wasn't my only puppet. Elizabeth and Jessica from Sweet Valley High also found themselves being co-opted.

It didn't take long for fan fiction to become original fiction. I invented worlds and characters of my own to play with. But the feeling I'm trying to create in myself has stayed the same. The characters I write about are people whose voices I can hear, whose actions I can watch and whose emotions I can feel.

So, if there's something you want to do, and it's not possible in real life - like fly in a peach carried by a flock of seagulls, or re-stage an argument where you get to have the zinger final word, or even say something to someone when it's too late in real life - then try writing it down. Reach for a pen and paper and have the final word. And who cares whether it's great literature or for your eyes only?

Go on, I'm not joking. Find a pen, get scribbling. Lose yourself in your own story.

ELEN CALDECOTT is the author of many books for children, including the *Marsh Road Mysteries* series (Bloomsbury)

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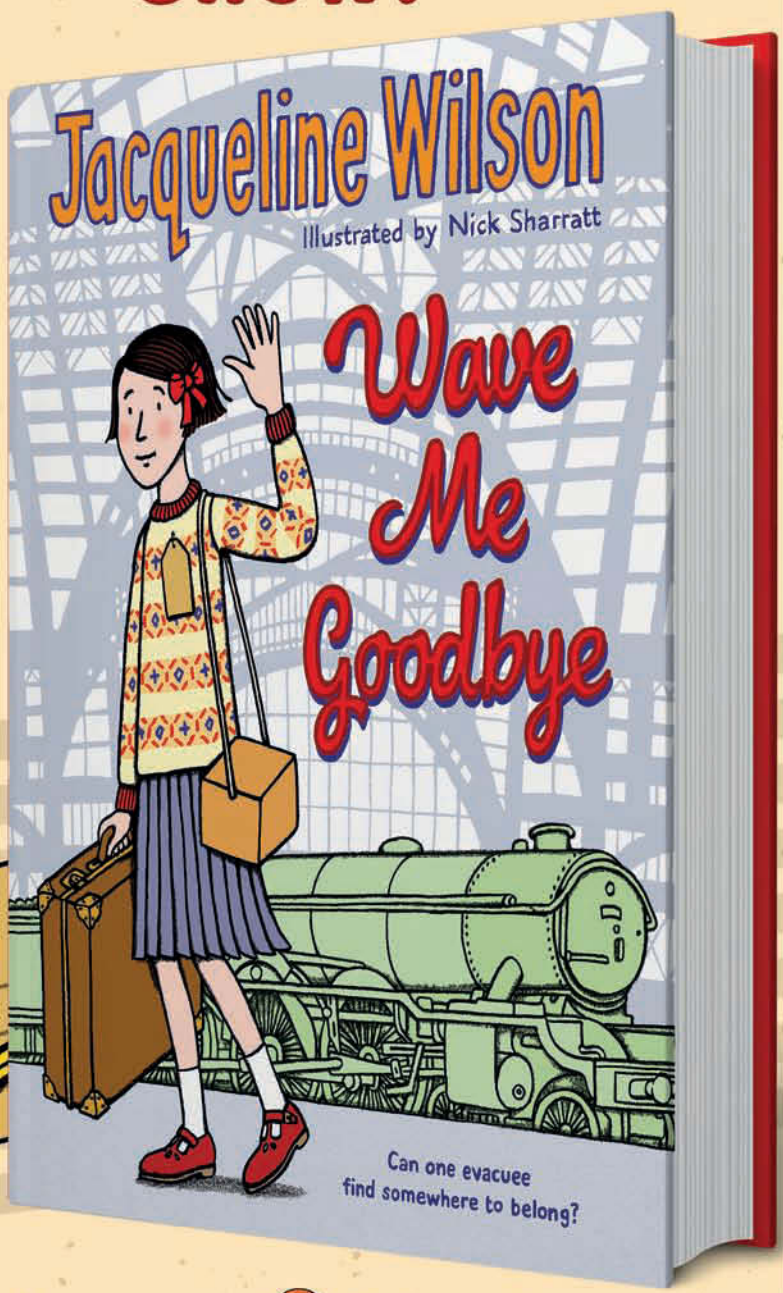

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