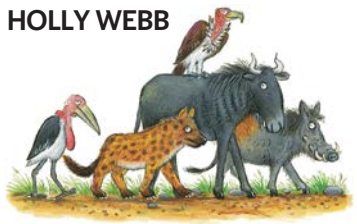
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF teach PRIMARY

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"My world of words"

- SHIRLEY HUGHES
- JULIA DONALDSON
- LAUREN WOLK
- JULIAN CLARY
- JON MAYHEW
- HOLLY WEBB



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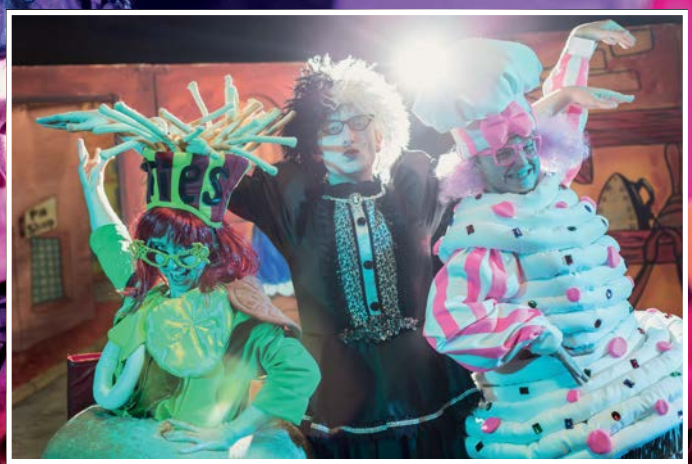

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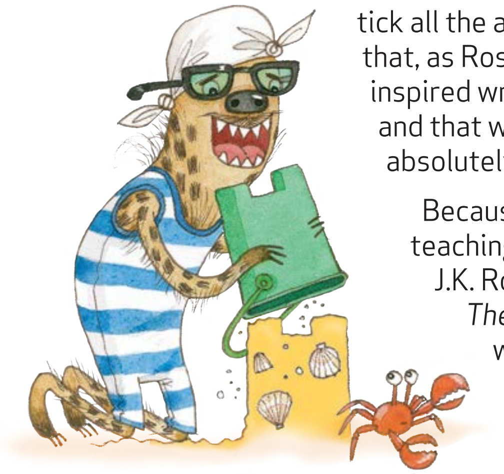
So, what's your new class like? You've only been calling the register for a few weeks, of course – but the chances are that you already know quite a lot about the small human beings to whom all of those names belong. For example, you'll certainly be aware who did, and didn't, meet age related expectations in reading, writing and maths by the end of last year – and what needs to happen in order for everyone to have made good progress by next June.

But what else have you learnt so far? How familiar are you with their individual interests and enthusiasms, hopes and fears? Are you starting to understand what topics will get them buzzing with excitement, and what's likely to leave them flat and uninspired? And – be honest – have you found yourself looking around at all those heads bent over books and asked yourself, 'Is there a future Man Booker Prize winner or Kate Greenaway Medal holder here?'

In this issue of *Teach Reading & Writing* our aim, as ever, is to support you as you guide your pupils towards those all important literacy targets, with expert advice on everything from improving spelling (p.74) to developing familiarity with academic language (p.63). At the same time, though, we want to encourage creativity and celebrate originality – even when it doesn't tick all the assessment boxes. We recognise that, as Ros Wilson points out on page 80, inspired writers are not born, but made; and that what happens in the classroom is absolutely a part of that.



Because you may not currently be teaching the next Michael Morpurgo or J.K. Rowling – but you know what? *Their* teachers didn't think they were, either....

Joe Carter & Helen Mulley, associate editors

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SHIRLEY HUGHES wants readers young and old to take more time as they turn the pages, and look beyond the words

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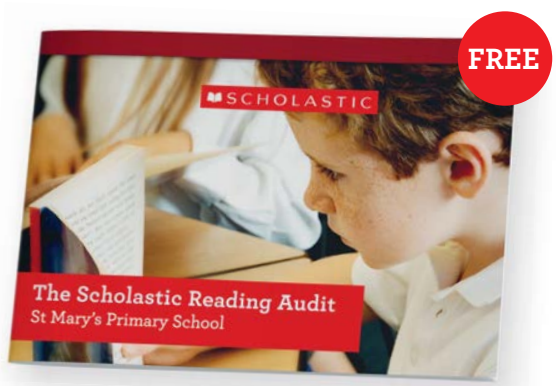

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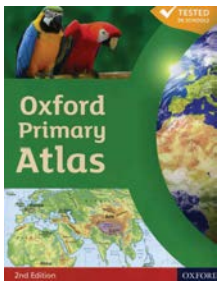

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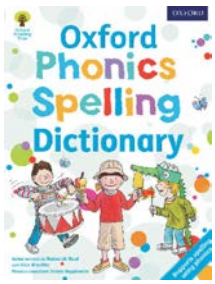

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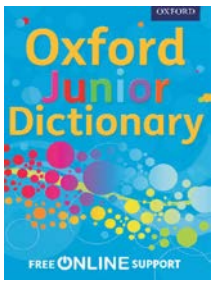

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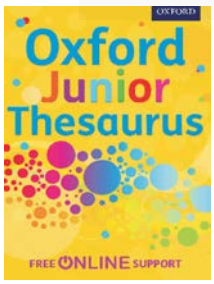

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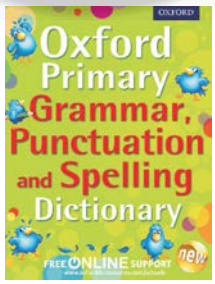

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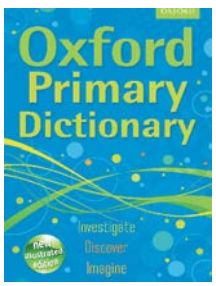

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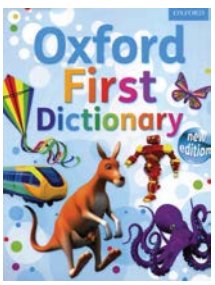

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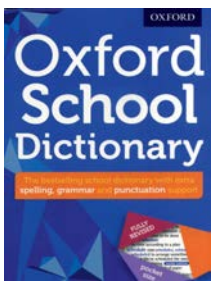

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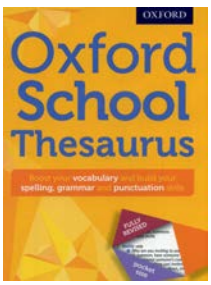

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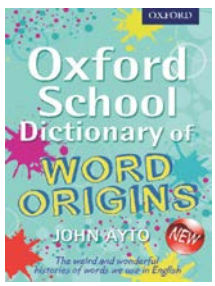

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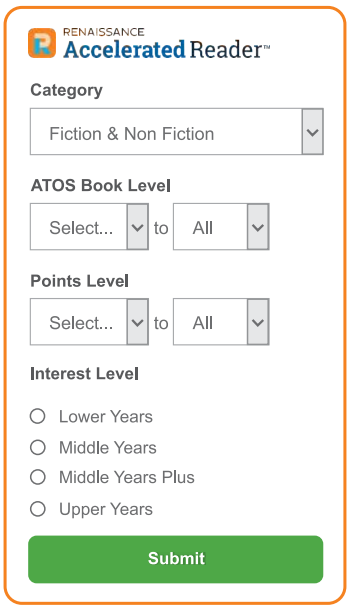

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"My job is to slow children down"

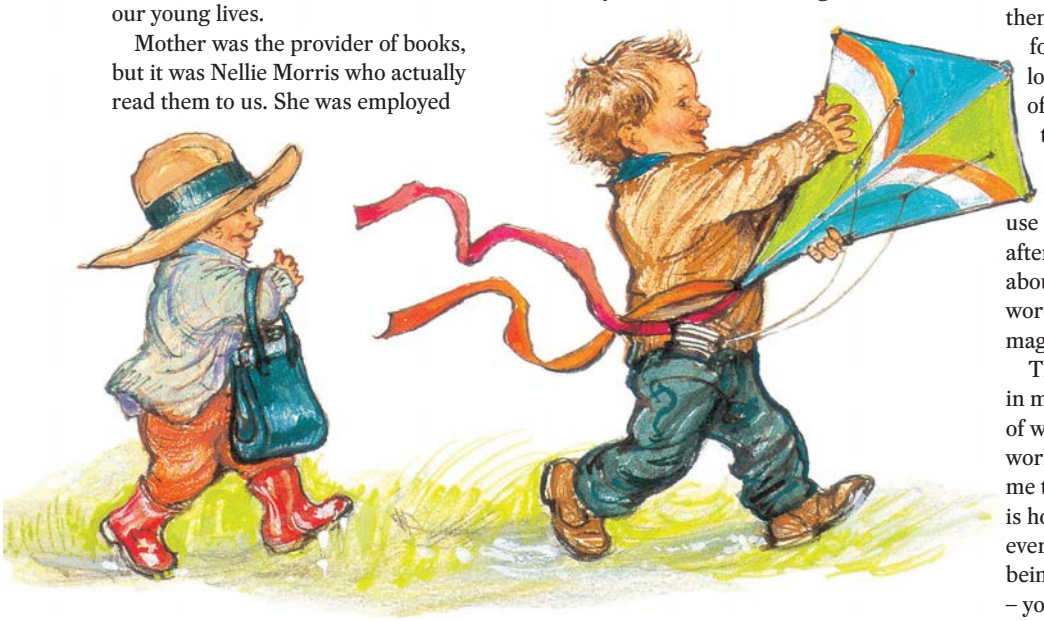
Shirley Hughes wants readers young and old to take time as they turn the pages, and look beyond the words...

I have no memory of being taught to read. But I do know that from a very early age I loved comics and the strip cartoons that used to be printed in newspapers. I suspect I learnt to figure out words from looking at the pictures and thinking about what must be in the speech bubbles; illustration has always been an integral part of the reading experience, for me.

When I was a child, the public libraries weren't really used very much for little people, but we were lucky in that respect, as there were plenty of books in our house. We had wonderful classics, with tipped-in colour plates that I adored by brilliant illustrators like Arthur Rackham, and Edmund Dulac – as well as the arrival of our favourite annuals each Christmas, of course, which was always a big moment in our young lives.

Mother was the provider of books, but it was Nellie Morris who actually read them to us. She was employed as a helper in the house and was, I now realise, very young indeed – perhaps only 15 or 16. She didn't live in, so we children would hang on the gate, waiting for her to come and bring the words alive. I wasn't that interested in my older sisters' school stories – I didn't want to join all those jolly girls in gym slips – but I loved the fairy tales and legends, the adventures, and especially, *Just William*. Nellie never, ever tired of reading to us; I owe her a great deal.

When I eventually had my own children, sharing books with them was something that came very naturally. I read to them every evening, and we'd talk about the pictures. We used to go on holiday to the middle of nowhere, with no television (or anything much else, really) and we'd always have a novel on the go, which we'd take turns in reading aloud to each other. *The Wind in the Willows* was a tremendous favourite, with Ernst Shepard's beautiful drawings; later, we explored *The Lord of the Rings*.



I have two sons, and a daughter, who is the youngest of the three. And, perhaps unusually, all of them always knew, pretty much, what they wanted to do with their lives. My older son, Ed Vulliamy, would be out on the pavements during an election when he was nine or ten years old, asking people for their reactions – he became a journalist and writer. His younger brother, Tom – now a professor in molecular biology – was a scientist from the start, cycling to school on Saturdays to check on his aphids. And with Clara, it was obvious that she was going to draw. All children make pictures, of course, but then they go through a phase – depressing for any parent – during which they lose their self-confidence and freedom of expression, and start to believe that they 'can't do it'. It's important to get past that watershed, and Clara did.

I never taught her a thing, but I did use to leave my paints out in the palette after a morning's work, and let her muck about with them. To have her illustrate my words, with our *Dixie O'Day* series, was a magical experience.

This is a golden age for publishing in many ways; there is such an array of wonderful authors and illustrators working at the moment. But it seems to me that one of the main problems today is how children are expected to react to everything so quickly. They are always being rushed from one thing to the next – you can see it in toddlers, sitting with a

Author photo: Lizzie Mayson

All illustrations: Shirley Hughes

tablet and swiping away, with one image replacing another at lightning speed. Then at school, teachers are supposed to push them along as fast as possible, constantly racing to the next target.

But reading isn't a competition (although you'd think it was, the way some parents go on!). My job, as an illustrator, is to slow children down; to encourage them to linger in the story, and to look. Because looking is a skill, and one we should nurture. And the book is a marvellous form for enabling this, for inspiring an appreciation of design, and colour – especially as reproduction is so beautiful now. There's a reason why proper, printed books are still popular, despite all the technology that's available to us. They give us something we need, as humans, and it's important, I think, to be able to enjoy them in a leisurely way.

"Children are expected to react to everything so quickly. They are always being rushed from one thing to the next"

Shirley Hughes CBE has twice won the Kate Greenaway Medal, and was the recipient of the inaugural BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015. She has written more than fifty books, which have sold more than 3.5 million copies, and has illustrated more than two hundred. A special 40th anniversary edition of *Dogger* was published this year by Bodley Head. @ShirleyHughes

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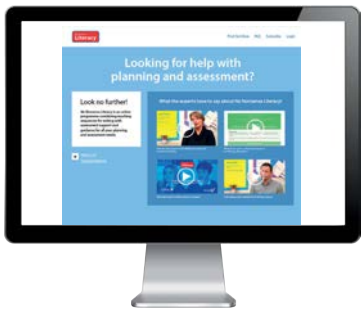

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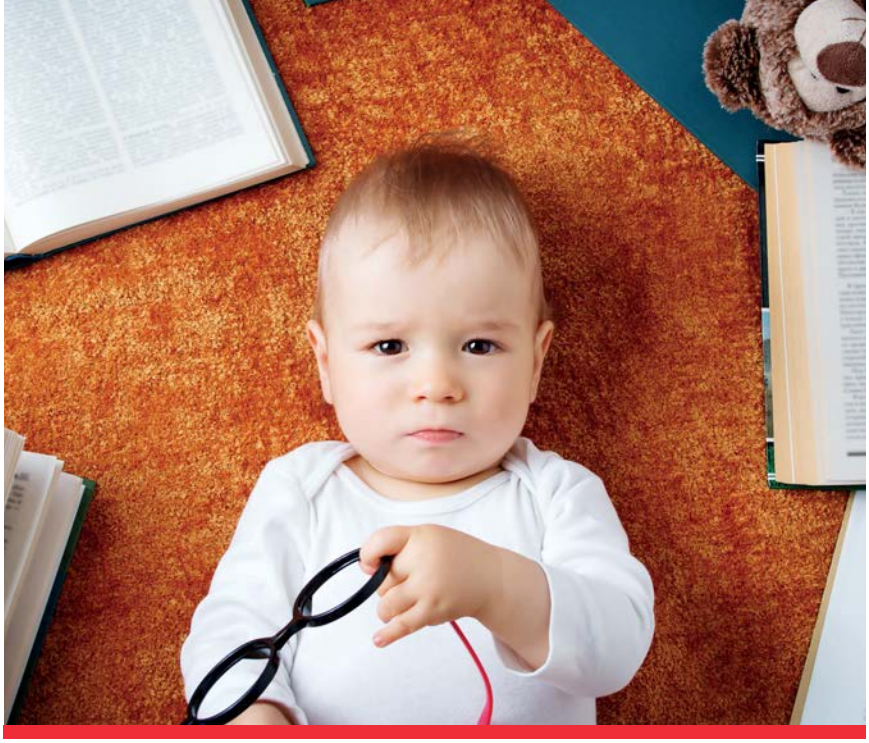


Why turn pictures into a problem?

Children may well learn more words when books have fewer illustrations, says **Patrice Baldwin** – but that's only part of the story...

"Picture books with too many illustrations 'hinder children's vocabulary learning'", proclaimed a recent *TES* headline (3rd July, 2017). When I read this, my heart sank. Why? Because the statement completely misses the whole point of picture books.

The children used for the research the article was reporting on were 3-5 year olds; I'm not surprised that their attention was drawn to artwork. Pictures are the obvious, accessible way for young children to start to make sense of a book. I suppose they *will* begin to pay more attention to the words when they are being steered away from images and channelled towards the text by a determined, assessment driven adult. Personally, though, I'd prefer to sit with them and share the sheer joy of a good picture book in its totality. It feels a bit mean and short sighted, to direct little ones away from illustrations that naturally interest them, just to increase their vocabulary score.

More than words

I can't help but wonder, what do these researchers think picture books are *for*? They seem to see the images as an unnecessary distraction; a source of extraneous information that somehow gets in the way of the 'real' purpose of reading:

"Our findings fit well with Cognitive Load Theory, which suggests that learning rates are affected by how complicated a task is. In this case, by giving children less information at once, or guiding them to the correct information, we can help children learn more words." (Zoe Flack)

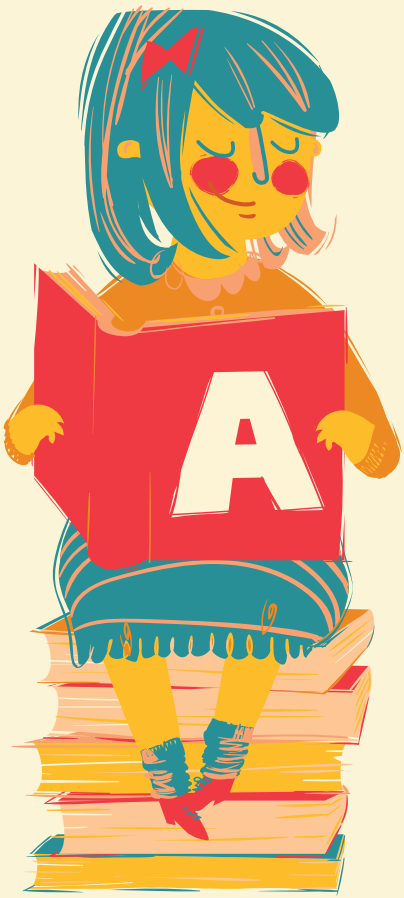
But most picture books are not written primarily as vehicles for learning vocabulary. They are an artform. They capture the interest of young children, through memorable and thought provoking images and words. They introduce them to fascinating characters and engaging situations, aurally and visually. They help youngsters to access meaning, through the interplay of the text and illustrations. They invite curiosity, wonder and imagination. Shared aloud (often repeatedly), they entice children to become 'co-readers' alongside empathetic, caring adults. The experience of sharing a picture book is personal, social and emotional; yes, it does also provide a good opportunity for the child to learn some new words within the context of a story, but a great picture book is much more than a compilation of vocabulary to be learned, and the images are not intended to be just servants of the text.

The wrong conclusion

Apparently, a follow-up experiment had two illustrations across each page, and involved the addition of a 'hand swipe gesture.' The adult gesture guided (focused), the children towards the 'correct' picture in advance of having the page read to them, which, it turned out, helped them learn more words. In Victorian times, the 'hand swipe gesture' of the day would probably have been a finger or stick, pointing and stabbing at the text – or the child; frankly, a different gesture keeps creeping into my mind.

The conclusion of the research was that 'decreasing the number of illustrations, increases children's word learning from storybooks'. Does this matter? What are the possible implications? Well, we can only hope it's a 'discovery' that's roundly ignored by publishers. It would be sad if books were commissioned to fit such a restrictive model, and then marketed as a way of hiking up vocabulary scores. Books should be generated by creative authors and artists, unfettered by government driven assessments. Thankfully, most of our enduring and great picture titles, authors and illustrators already don't fit the mould – and I'm hoping the children of the future won't either.

PATRICE BALDWIN is an *education consultant and author, specialising in 'Drama for Learning' and 'Literacy Through Drama' (www.patricebaldwin.com)*



It's time to change the reading record

What's the point of a reading diary if it puts children and parents off reading? Surely there's a better way, says **James Clements**...

Ah, reading diaries. A reliable fixture of the primary school classroom and the building blocks of an institution that's loved by parents and teachers alike.

Or are they? For every parent who is happy to provide a page-long essay describing their child's nightly reading in minute detail, there is another who suddenly realises that it is 9pm Sunday evening and there are now five days of comments to fill in. For every teacher who values the window these diaries offers into a child's wider reading, there is another who winces at the sight of 22 books awaiting comment (plus, naturally, another six to chase up and a further two that haven't been seen for several weeks).

At their best, reading diaries can be a useful record of a child's reading – a reliable means of communication between home and school. But the traditional model can bring challenges. For the youngest children, where the emphasis is on parents to fill them in, there are two issues. Firstly, for some parents, completing the reading diary becomes a badge of honour. Secondly, whether because of issues with their own literacy or trouble finding the time, some parents face a genuine struggle with the task. This means that the conversations between school and home aren't about the positives of reading or the joy of books – instead, they concern the reading diary itself and why it isn't up-to-date.

For children who are mature enough to complete their own diary, it can come to be seen as punishment; we extol the virtues of reading to children not just because of the educational benefits, but because reading is a wonderful, pleasurable way to spend their time. Then we ask them to complete a piece of writing about it. Most other pleasurable leisure activities – television, computer games, sports or after-school clubs, for example – aren't immediately followed by a piece of writing. Following reading with writing reinforces the message that this is *school business*, rather than something valuable and enjoyable in its own right.

On my travels to visit wonderful reading schools across the UK, I encounter more and more places that, conscious of these challenges, have moved away from keeping reading diaries in their traditional form. Here are some of the best alternatives I've discovered.

1. Create a reading tree

A display board with a bare tree ready to be covered in leaves can function as an effective whole-class reading record. Each time a child completes a book, they add a leaf with their name and the book, building into a wonderful display.

Adding a leaf to the tree can be a motivating reason to read. For younger children, parents can fill out a leaf when they hear their child read at home (in the same way as they would fill out a traditional reading diary). And at the end of the year, the display can be dismantled and the children reunited with the leaves detailing all of the books they've read. This can be an incredibly enjoyable session, with children gasping aloud at how much they've achieved and excitedly recalling their favourites.

2. Provide real reading journals

Many reading records or diaries are referred to as journals, but how many actually *are* journals? How many children have a space to respond in the way they want to the books they read, without having a set format or structure to follow?

Rather than a reading diary that only has space for writing, some schools are moving to a model where there is room for pictures, diagrams, cuttings, as well as the written word. It's somewhere for them to record their personal reading lives.

3. Make time to talk about books

One of the best ways of building a genuine reading culture is to allow children to talk about their reading. Building in regular time for children to share with each other the books they have (and perhaps haven't) enjoyed can create a buzz about books and help children to develop the literary language that is so useful as they move through school.

Two questions

My best advice when thinking about the use of reading journals would be the same as it is for any other activity linked to reading, whether it is book corners, displays, dressing up events, or reading competitions. I would suggest teachers always ask two questions:

- **Is this going to make anyone better at reading?**
- **Is this likely to help anyone develop a more positive attitude to reading?**

If the answer is anything less than a resounding 'yes', then we should give serious thought as to whether it is worth us expending our valuable time and energy. Like every tool we have at our disposal in the classroom, reading diaries will be what we make of them. Used well, they can be wonderful. Used without thought, they become another thing to do, hoovering up valuable teacher time. And like everything we do in school, we have the power to change this if we wish.

DITCH THE DIARY

Four alternative ways to keep a record of children's reading:

MAKE YOUR BOOKMARK
Use a simple bookmark with spaces for a parent to add their initials each time they hear a child read over the week. This gives the teacher a handy overview of reading and means there is no lengthy writing for the parent who is busy or who struggles to record a comment.

BUILD A BOOKSHELF
Have a sheet with a drawing of a bookshelf, where the spines are left blank for children to record the names of the books they've read.

TAKE READING SELFIES
A quick photo is taken of the child holding up the book they've finished. This is saved in the class's shared area, building into a gallery of each child's reading that year. Photos of favourite books can be shared in an electronic photo frame, giving a quick way of making class recommendations.

KEEP AN ONLINE RECORD
A quick search online will throw up a plethora of commercial software packages, but setting up a template on Word or Google Docs and hosting it on the class shared area is quick and easy (again, search online for handy how-to tutorials), and it's free.

> "How many children have a space to respond in the way they want to the books they read, without having a set format or structure to follow?"

JAMES CLEMENTS is an education writer and researcher. He is lucky enough to spend most of his time visiting schools trying to find out what makes great English teaching. Twitter: @MrJClements

10 BOOKS FOR THE *big outdoors*

The natural world is a place of adventure and excitement, so step out of the front door and take your class into the great unknown with these fiction-inspired activities...

Foundation Stage

1 On Sudden Hill

BY LINDA SARAH AND BENJI DAVIES (Simon and Schuster)

What's the story?

Birt and Etho like playing with cardboard boxes on Sudden Hill. Birt loves their 'two-by-two rhythm', so when another boy joins them, Birt feels left out. Then Etho and Shu create a Monster Creature Box Thing just for Birt, and he realises that actually, 'three-by-three' can be best of all.

This gentle book celebrates imaginative play and puts boys' friendships centre stage.

Illustration: Benji Davies

Thinking and talking

Have you ever felt left out or had friendship worries? What happened to make things better? What would you like to make from a cardboard box, and why?

Try this

- **Collect some enormous boxes and use to make dens and imaginary vehicles. Play with them, then write and draw about your experiences.**
- **Look at the picture of Birt on the swing seat. How is he feeling? Now look at the picture of him at the end of the book. How's he feeling now? What happened to change things? Pretend to be Birt and tell your story.**

2

Foundation Stage

There's a Tiger in the Garden

BY LIZZY STEWART (Macmillan)

What's the story?

"Are you real?"
"I don't know," says the tiger.
"Are you?"

Nora thinks Grandma's garden is boring and doesn't believe a tiger lives out there. But when Nora starts exploring, she discovers all sorts of creatures – from bird-sized dragonflies to the tiger himself. And is that a mermaid in the bath?

Strikingly illustrated with a rich colour palette, this book offers subtle philosophical reflections alongside great storytelling.

Thinking and talking

Are there really tigers and polar bears in Grandma's garden? What adventures have you had outside? If you could make something real by believing in it, what would it be?

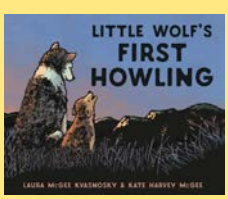
Try this

- **Plant props in a wood or garden (a tiny door on a tree trunk; a toy animal among the leaves…) then take children on a walk to discover them. Use your experiences to inspire storymaking and storytelling.**
- **Draw a large-scale map of Lizzy's garden-journey and illustrate to create a whole-class artwork.**

Illustration: Lizzy Stewart

3

Foundation Stage



Little Wolf's First Howling

BY LAURA MCGEE KVASNOSKY AND KATE HARVEY MCGEE(Walker)

What's the story?

"Ok, Son. Give it a try…"

Little Wolf's dad is taking him for his first howling. Little Wolf wants to get it right, just like Dad, but can't resist adding special touches of his own. It isn't proper howling – but luckily for Little Wolf his dad finds the yip-yip-a-dibby-dibby just as irresistible.

Set in the Yellowstone wilderness, this heartwarming tale about family relationships, 'doing your own thing' and the joy of music has been illustrated with bold graphic flair.

Thinking and talking

What have you learned from your dad, uncle or grandad? And what have they learned from you? If you lived in the wilderness, what would you do?

Try this

- **Have a go at some 'proper howling', Big Wolf-style. Listen (and move!) to some jazz. Can you invent some jazzy Little-Wolf-style howling of your very own? Practise until everyone can howl wolf-music together.**
- **These story-wolves inhabit a well-researched landscape based on a real place. Look at each spread and talk about the elements you can see – mountains, cliffs, trees, rivers, grass, boulders… What would it feel like to walk through that landscape, do you think? What might you be able to hear, smell and taste? Collect words and ideas, then write a description.**

Key Stage 1

4

Stone Girl Bone Girl

BY LAURENCE ANHOLT, ILLUSTRATED BY SHEILA MOXLEY (Templar)

What's the story?

"There was something hidden right inside the rock! 'It's TREASURE!' she gasped." Mary Anning was a fossil collector who became famous aged 12 for discovering an ichthyosaur. With plenty of 'factional' details and a strong narrative thread, this longer-text picturebook has a robust and intriguing heroine and can be used to introduce wider issues – such as Victorian expectations of women; and women in science *(Mary's contribution to Darwin's Theory of Evolution is mentioned in an appendix).*

Thinking and talking

What are fossils? Has anyone ever seen one? Why do you think Mary was so excited by them? What kind of work did girls usually do in Victorian times? What about boys?

Try this

- **Create your own cabinet of curiosities with carefully labelled natural objects, pictures and further information. Go on a walk to collect more exhibits.**
- **Find out about rocks, fossils and prehistoric creatures and present what you've discovered to another class, or in an assembly for the whole school.**
- **Use commercially available play fossils to create a sensory experience. Allow children to explore the collection, then hide your fossils in sand. Blindfold children and ask them to find (and identify?) the fossils by touch. Or bury fossils outdoors and host an 'archaeological dig' using brushes and other small implements to remove soil from your finds.**

Illustration: Sheila Moxley

Key Stage 1

5

A First Book of Nature

BY NICOLA DAVIES AND MARK HEARLD (Walker)

What's the story?

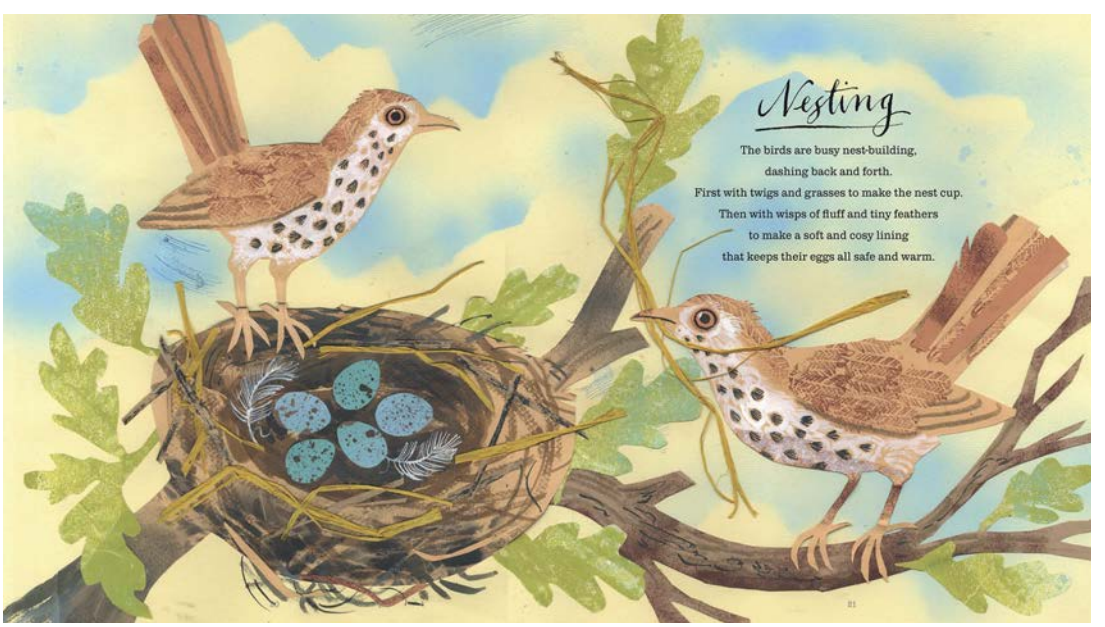
Part poetry anthology, part scrapbook, this book has been arranged by season. With richly decorative spreads on subjects ranging from stargazing to beachcombing, it's firmly rooted in children's experiences of the natural world and will inspire many outdoor adventures.

Thinking and talking

Which spreads describe familiar animals, events and experiences, and which are new to you? Which illustration interests you most, and why?

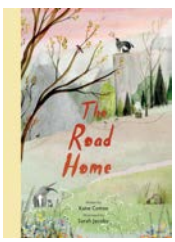
Try this

- **Use to mark the changing of the seasons in your book corner – dip in and out according to the date and/or weather!**
- **Have a go at some of the activities, then write about them: pond-dipping, den-building, compost-making, birdcake-making, seed-planting…**
- **Look at the patchwork pigeons and chickens on pages 52 and 94, then paint your own papers, cut into bird or feather shapes and use to construct your own collages, like Mark Hearld.**



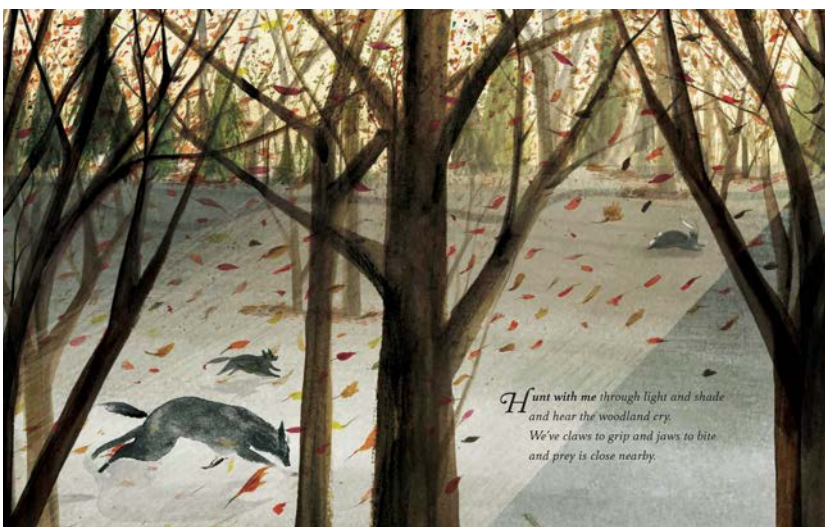
Key Stage 1

6



The Road Home

BY KATIE COTTON AND SARAH JACOBY (Frances Lincoln)



What's the story?

"This road is hard, this road is long, this road that leads us home…"

This book tells a poetic tale of survival and love in the animal kingdom. Finely balanced between reality and sentiment, its illustrations have both cosiness and bite.

Here, hunger burns and cold chills throats – but the animals urging us to fly and hunt with them draw comfort from each other and their natural place.

Thinking and talking

What is this book telling you about animals and their lives? Talk about *home* and what it means across a range of contexts. Why does the author say *"and so this road is home?"*

Try this

- **Look at the illustration of the field mouse nest. Investigate different media and ways of drawing similar nests and flowers. What happens if you use watercolour, pastels, coloured pencils, wax crayons, collage… or a mixture? Use your preferred techniques to create your own nests and flowers. Cut and stick on a large sheet of paper to create a whole-class artwork. Add some mice!**
- **Find out about different animal homes and create an illustrated report.**

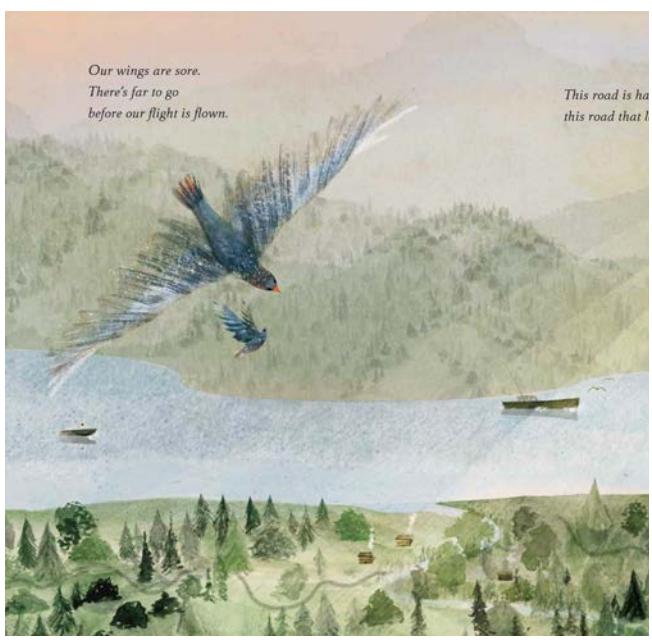
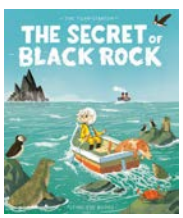


Illustration: Sarah Jacoby

Illustration: Joe Todd Stanton

Key Stage 2

7 The Secret of Black Rock



BY JOE TODD STANTON
(Flying Eye Books)

What's the story?

"Black Rock wasn't a monster, but a home to all these amazing creatures…"

The sailors in Erin's village are full of tales about Black Rock. But when Erin stows away on her mum's fishing boat and comes face-to-face with him, she discovers he isn't a rock at all – he's an enormous living creature, and many smaller creatures depend on him for shelter. Unfortunately, the adults in Erin's village plan to destroy him! Can Erin stop them?

With more than a splash of classic Famous-Five adventure, together with environmental awareness and humour, this is a story that appeals to reluctant and confident readers alike.

Thinking and talking

Why do the adults want to destroy Black Rock? Why won't they listen to Erin? What needs protecting in our oceans, and what are people doing about it?

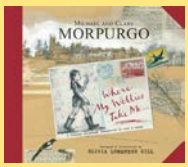
Try this

■ Look at the picture of Erin escaping from the house. If you didn't know what was happening, what would it tell you? And what's unusual about it? (Erin is shown four times in a single picture.) Try redrawing the action in this picture over four panels, each showing a single view of Erin, to make a comic strip. Now choose an action sequence of your own and draw it, first as a set of four panels, then as a single picture. Add some text!

■ Choose a real-world geographical feature to research - mountain, island, waterfall… Now imagine it's alive, just like Black Rock. Develop a character for your landscape-creature and write about it.

Key Stage 2

8 Where my Wellies Take Me



BY MICHAEL AND CLARE MORPURGO, ILLUSTRATED BY OLIVIA LOMENECH GILL
(Templar)

What's the story?

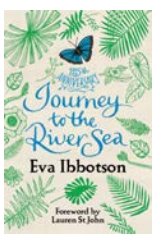
Pippa loves exploring the farm. She also loves poetry, and in this anthology there are plenty of country themed poems to discover, both old and new. Stunningly illustrated, this book includes numerous pull-out pages, maps and inserts.

Thinking and talking

Which double spread do you like best, and why? And which poem? What do you think of the way this book has been designed and produced?

Illustration: Clare Morpurgo

9



Key Stage 2

Journey to the River Sea

BY EVA IBBOTSON
(Macmillan)

What's the story?

It's 1910. Accompanied by the redoubtable Miss Minton, orphan Maia travels to the Amazon to live with her aunt and uncle, who spend all their time trying to keep the nasty jungle at bay. But Maia and Miss Minton discover another side to the Amazon – and so begins one of the most memorable wilderness adventures of all.

Themes to explore include ecology, wildlife, conservation, exploration, specimen-collecting and Victorian history.

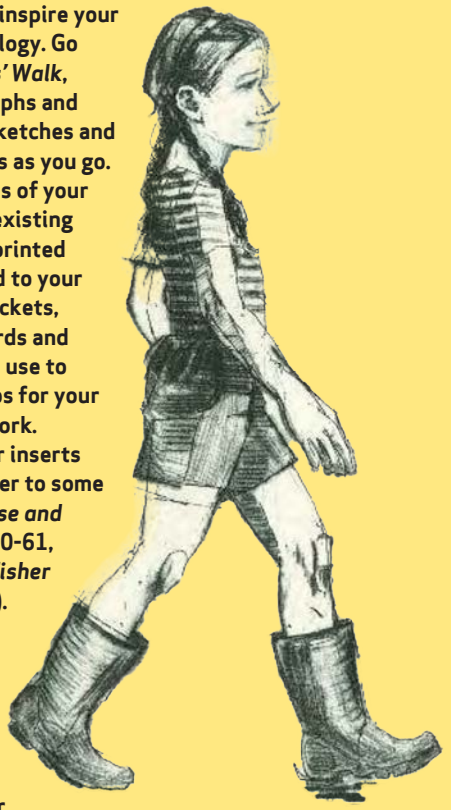
Thinking and talking

Which characters enjoy the natural world of the Amazon, and which don't? What do their attitudes tell us about their personalities, do you think? Who and what changes during this story? How, and why?

Try this

■ Use the text to create two sets of quotes: positive things about living in the Amazon (its beauty, diversity and freedom – as expressed by Miss Minton, Finn and

Try this



- Let this book inspire your own class anthology. Go for an *Explorers' Walk*, taking photographs and notes, making sketches and annotating maps as you go. Write new poems of your own, or choose existing poems. Collect printed ephemera linked to your route, such as tickets, leaflets, postcards and newspapers and use to create backdrops for your poetry and artwork.
- Tracing-paper inserts add an extra layer to some images (see *horse and rider* on pages 60-61, and *flying kingfisher* on pages 50-51). Can children use tracing paper to add extra layers to images they've found in a magazine, or drawn themselves?

10

Key Stage 2

Du Iz Tak?

BY CARSON ELLIS (Walker)

What's the story?

"*Du Iz Tak?*" asks an insect, looking at a seedling. "*What is that?*"

The seedling grows into a plant, and the insects build a tiny play-fort in its branches. The plant flowers – *unk scrivadelly gladdenboot* – and a spider arrives to menace everyone. And so it goes on… will *anything* survive?

Gently and with great originality, this book explores the cycle of life from an insect's perspective. Written in an invented 'bug language' but accessible to any curious reader with an open mind, it's a pleasure to share with older children as well as younger ones.

Thinking and talking

What did you think about the bug language? What helped you understand it? Why doesn't the bug on the last page recognise the new seedling? Does anyone in your class speak more than one language? Find lots of ways of asking *du iz tak?* – and lots of answers!

Try this

- **Invent names and back-histories for the characters in this book, then tell some of their stories using a first-person perspective. Remember – there's more than one story in this book. Look carefully at the twig and the cocoon!**
- **When you don't understand a language, facial expressions, tone and context can help you make sense of it. Discuss, then practise reading the bug dialogue in a way that helps your listeners.**
- **Find pictures of plants and enlarge. Graffiti tiny forts onto them, complete with platforms, ladders, shelters and other equipment, then write stories about them.**
- **Maia and negative (how unpleasant and 'different' it is – as expressed by the Carters, Clovis and the investigators). Discuss, then research the Amazon and its wildlife to find out more. Use to create written reports and presentations. Why do we need to conserve and protect wild places like the Amazon?**
- **Visit a museum with a collection of specimens such as beetles or butterflies. Sketch and photograph individual animals or insects and use to make accurate scientific illustrations to display in Victorian-style cases back in school. Research your specimens and write informative labels. Find out about the explorations and discoveries of Victorian naturalists.**

"Maia and the redoubtable Miss Minton discover another side to the Amazon - and so begins one of the most memorable Victorian wilderness adventures of all"

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative development manager at Seven Stories.

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FRANKLIN WATTS

When the **giggling** takes over

Taboos, timetables and terrible teachers. We need funny books to give children mental release, says **Michael Rosen**...

When I was a child, some of my favourite books and pieces of writing were funny. Whenever I think of why or how funny books appeal to children I think back to how much humorous books were a springboard for me to read. I was born in 1946, so my taste in humour was very much of that era: a character called Harris Tweed who appeared in the Eagle comic, the Beano, the Billy Bunter stories, the Professor Branestawm, Jennings and Molesworth books. There was a special pleasure that came with the experience of my brother reading me these in our bedroom in the mornings at the weekend. As with many modern comic books, Jennings and Bunter were reinvented for us as audio on Children's Hour on the radio or on children's TV. As a result of these inputs, the scenes, jokes, dialogue and plot-lines have lasted all my life.

Particularly strong in those books, and in books today, are the ways in which people in positions of power or with (supposedly) great knowledge are made to look ridiculous. Probably, teachers in those days were much more forbidding and so the small downfall of a suited, begowned 'master' was a great relief. Relief is one key element in how humour works. *The Beano* could be guaranteed to deliver up one of these relief-moments at least once a week while the Molesworth books represent many ways in which the power of teachers are unpacked and decoded for a young audience. Comedy can often play the role of letting you in on the secret but absurd side of authority figures. My brother took the Molesworth books one step further by mapping the cast of characters at St Custard's on to the teachers at Harrow Weald County Grammar School. It was almost as if the author Geoffrey Willans and artist Ronald Searle didn't just know the secrets of Molesworth: they knew the details of our daily life. Jennings and Bunter offered more of this personal approach. Like William's activities in the *William* books, they're full of furtive, illegal, ridiculous and over-ambitious projects that go wrong. This enabled us to laugh at ourselves without our being aware of it. These boys' projects were exaggerated versions of the minor tricks and jokes that we got up to – or if not us, then someone we knew. The books gave us a chance to laugh at something very much to do with our own psyches. This intimacy is another part of the comedy repertoire.

In on the joke

Another dimension came with the *Winnie the Pooh* books. As has been noticed many times, these are deceptively

> **"The relationship between child and caring adult is a complicated mesh of love, resentment, defiance, control, and rebellion"**

simple. On the surface they are simply the very small imagined adventures of a boy with his soft toys – a form of whimsical dramatic play. In fact, each of these adventures can be taken as a little philosophical fable about such things as truth, friendship, knowledge and the like. None of this would be at all funny if A.A.Milne hadn't set up the stories in such a way that even very young children are given the satisfaction of knowing more of what's going on than the characters: a juvenile form of dramatic irony! Whether it's the search for the Heffalump, Eeyore's birthday present, or the Pooh-Piglet-getting-lost episode, the reader knows the errors of the characters: another important aspect of comedy. A satisfying aspect of humour comes when the story appears to flatter readers by encouraging them to feel a bit superior. I can remember walking to school with my friend Brian and the pair of us would revisit the stories, laughing at how ridiculous Pooh and Piglet were in that they didn't realise they were just going round and round in circles or that Pooh with the jar of honey stuck on his head wasn't really a Heffalump.

These pleasures and satisfactions aren't trivial. Of course, books which tackle problems and difficult issues whether psychological or social are important and necessary. The book industry along with various parts of the library and educational services acknowledge these books with awards and prizes. When I was Children's Laureate (2007-2009) it slowly grew on me that as a collective, we had no means of acknowledging the power and usefulness of funny books. Every year, hundreds of books appear which children find funny. One major role model of these – Roald Dahl – broke new ground by giving us a cast of grotesque and gross adults who are often defied and defeated by resourceful children. Dahl knew that he was appealing to something deep, if not always acknowledged by children or parents: that the relationship between child and caring adult is a complicated mesh of love, resentment, defiance, control, and rebellion. He was fully aware that through exaggeration he was giving voice to this often concealed stream of emotions. Many authors since have picked up on the comic potential in exploring these feelings.

This reminds us that children are surrounded with taboos, restrictions, regulations, timetables, conventions, orders, commands and the like. The world is not of their making. Such a system of control offers writers and illustrators a wonderfully fertile ground for mockery, exaggeration, subversion and farce. Within the confines of a book, chaos can erupt and for that moment the child can find relief from order: the world doesn't seem quite as fixed as usual. The physical act of laughter involves a release of energy, a muscular exhalation of breath and humour in children's books involves a mental release too.

Funny story...

Since my time as Laureate I've been keen to find ways in which we can celebrate this long tradition in the here and now. The Laugh Out Loud awards (the 'Lollies') do just that. They provide a focal point for authors, illustrators, publishers, teachers, librarians, booksellers and adult carers which in turn serves the interests of the child readers. The prize creates a buzz and many talking points about humour, children and – yes – literacy. You might never know from the great sheaves of documents that come from many of the experts on reading that there's nothing better for fostering in a child the desire to read, than a book that a child *wants* to read! Of course, this may well be a book full of emotions other than humour but let's acknowledge and celebrate that when the giggling takes over, reading becomes intensely pleasurable.

Michael Rosen is head judge of the Laugh Out Loud awards (the Lollies) created especially to celebrate the very funniest and most engaging books in children's fiction.

Bah Humbug! written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Tony Ross will be published in October 2017 by Scholastic

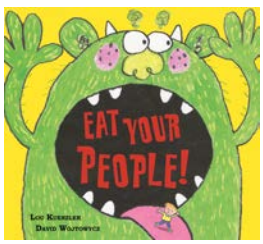
JUST FOR LOLLIES

If, like two thirds of children aged 6-17 who were surveyed in Scholastic's Kids & Family Reading Report, your pupils like to choose books that make them laugh, it's well worth introducing them to the **Laugh Out Laugh awards (aka the Lollies).**

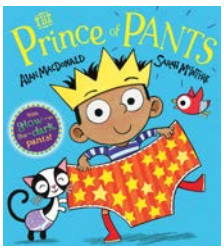
After sharing the 16 shortlisted books with your class, you can encourage them to get involved and help pick a winner in each of the three categories at **www.scholastic.co.uk/lollies** (voting closes on 8 December 2017)**.**

Best Laugh Out Loud Picture Book

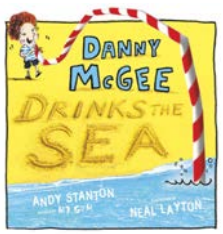
Oi Dog,
by Kes Gray and Jim Field
(Hodder Children's Books)



Eat Your People,
by Lou Kuenzler and David Wojtowycz (Orchard Books)

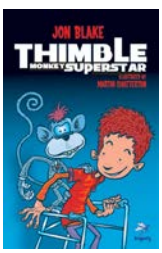


Prince of Pants,
by Alan Macdonald and Sarah McIntyre (Scholastic)

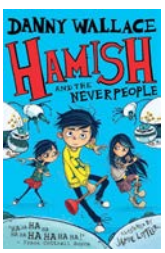


Danny McGee *Drinks the Sea,*
by Andy Stanton and Neal Layton (Hodder Children's Books)

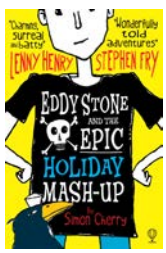
Best Laugh Out Loud Book for 6-8 year olds



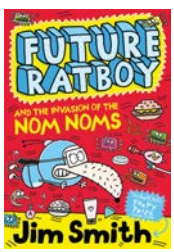
Thimble Monkey Superstar,
by Jon Blake and Martin Chatterton (Firefly Press)



Hamish and the Neverpeople,
by Danny Wallace and Jamie Littler (Simon and Schuster)

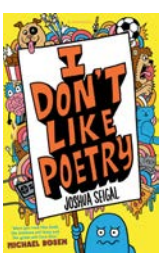


Eddy Stone and the *Epic Holiday Mash-Up,*
by Simon Cherry (Usborne)



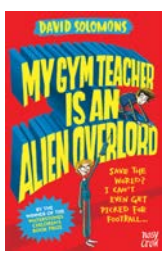
Future Ratboy and the Invasion of the Nom Noms,
by Jim Smith (Egmont)

Best Laugh Out Loud Book for 9-13 year olds

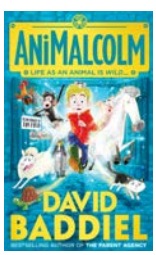


I Don't Like Poetry,
by Joshua Seigal
(Bloomsbury)

The Best Medicine,
by Christine Hamil
(Little Island Books)



My Gym Teacher is an Alien Overlord, by David Solomons and Laura Ellen Anderson (Nosy Crow)



AniMalcolm,
by David Baddiel and Jim Field
(Harper Collins)

WIN THE WHOLE LOLLIES SHORTLIST!

We're giving readers a chance to win a copy of every book on this year's shortlist. To enter, visit www.teachwire.net/giveaways

Phoneme a FRIEND

With a touch of game show theatre and very little effort, your phonics sessions can become a highpoint of the day, says **Jacqueline Harris**...

You might not believe me when I say phonics is fun, but it is, both for the teacher and the children. If you have fun and enjoy exploring words and spellings, you can't help passing on that enthusiasm to the children you teach.

Teachers are in the fortunate position that pupils like routine; they like to know what is going to happen next and how a lesson will pan out. Phonics is structured to use that love of routine, which makes planning easier as you don't need to do drastically different things each week. You can start to collect activities that you know your class enjoys and then reuse them with different phonemes and graphemes.

Curtain up

When I was doing teacher training (many years ago) my tutor said that whilst a child might not remember exactly what they were taught, they would always remember the content best if it was delivered in an engaging and exciting way. With phonics, however, it can be very easy to slip into a dull routine because you're covering the same subject every day. I try to keep in mind that teaching and acting have quite a lot in common; both are performances of a kind and many actors and entertainers were former teachers (Sting, Sylvester Stallone and Hugh Jackman were all teachers before they found fame of another kind). Phonics is 15 to 20 minutes to unleash your inner performer!

Some of the best lessons have what I call a 'ta-da!' moment. This conveys excitement and anticipation to the class. It can be as simple as a box or a hat from which a new grapheme is pulled – with an accompanying drum roll, of course. This is telling the children that learning new phonemes is exciting and something to look forward to. It can also be made a bit more dramatic by revealing objects ahead of the phoneme to see if the children can hear the same phoneme in the objects, e.g. a coat, a goat and soap before the */oa/* is displayed. I've even seen a teacher use a little theatre style box model, where she drew back the curtains to show the grapheme.

Your starter for 10

It turns out that phonics is entirely suitable to provide light entertainment in the form of game shows; you can really let yourself go here – some teachers even have props to accompany their quiz master persona. Practising the day's new phoneme and grapheme as well as revising previously taught letters works perfectly with the quiz show format and can consolidate word comprehension as well.

Is that your final answer?

Who Wants to be a Millionaire? is a very simple quiz format that is easy to turn into a phonics game. There's no need to do 15 questions, five will fit nicely into the practise part of the phonics lesson. You can, if you want, do the questions as multiple choice, depending on the class; multiple choice is easier.

Start with easy questions and ask the children to work in pairs to come up with the answers. I tend not to make children officially 'out', as then they would not be taking part. Add in 'phoneme a friend' for asking for support. So, your quiz could look like this:

> "*Pointless*, *Who Dares Wins* and *Blockbusters* can easily be given a phonics theme"

A PHASE 5 QUIZ ON /I/ MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- **For £100, spell the word 'tin'.**
- **For £1000, spell the word 'remind'.**
- **For £10,000, spell 'child' and 'children'.**
- **For £50,000, give two or more alternative spellings / words with long /i / sound. (E.g. pie, mine.)**
- **For £1,000,000, what does 'grind' mean? (Hold up the word but don't say it.) Alternatively, the £1,000,000 question could be a mini dictation for the 'apply' section of the lesson.**

Children love getting £1,000,000 and plan all sorts of ways to spend it – even though they know it is not real and would not even buy a house in parts of London!

Chequebook please!

Blankety Blank asks that children use comprehension as well as spelling. You give a word and the children need to come up with another word that goes with it, so 'ice' could become 'ice cream' or 'ice cold', etc. You give one point for the correct spelling of the key word, which will be a grapheme from that week, and then an extra point if the second word is also correct. If you are feeling generous, a third point can be awarded if they have more than one suggestion. The children can work in pairs or small groups to complete the tasks; those with good comprehension but possibly poor spelling can shine with this game if well paired with other children.

A PHASE 4 GAME MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- **Lamp - lamp post or head lamp**
- **Step - door step, foot step**
- **Stand - handstand, headstand, bookstand, coat stand**
- **Brush - hairbrush, nailbrush, paintbrush**
- **Lunch - lunchbox, lunchtime.**

You may need to give lots of clues when you first play this game, but children get better at thinking about words with practise such as this.

Cuddly toys ahoy!

This involves memory as well as spelling ability and, provided you can find the objects, is a lot of fun. Once again children play in pairs and you pick four or five objects with names that include the grapheme you are working on. Make a tray with the objects and give the children a short time to look at and remember them. Then cover the tray up and ask children to write down, spelling correctly, the objects.

A PHASE 3 GAME MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- **A tray with a ship, a shop (picture) a shell and a fish.**
- **A challenge for the more able might be the addition of a brush and a shirt.**

There are lots more games – such as *Pointless*, *Who Dares Wins* and *Blockbusters* – which can easily be given a phonics theme and made as simple or as challenging as you need. The great thing is that none of them requires lots of resource or preparation time, yet children find them enjoyable and a good way of consolidating their phonics learning. And while you do not have to be Terry Wogan, Chris Tarrant or Bruce Forsyth to make the lesson entertaining, it might be fun to try!

JACQUELINE HARRIS (@Phonicsandbooks) is a literacy consultant and passionate advocate of high quality children's literature.

Lost in TRANSLATION

If children only ever read books originally written in English, they're missing out on a whole world of opportunity and excitement, argues **Daniel Hahn**

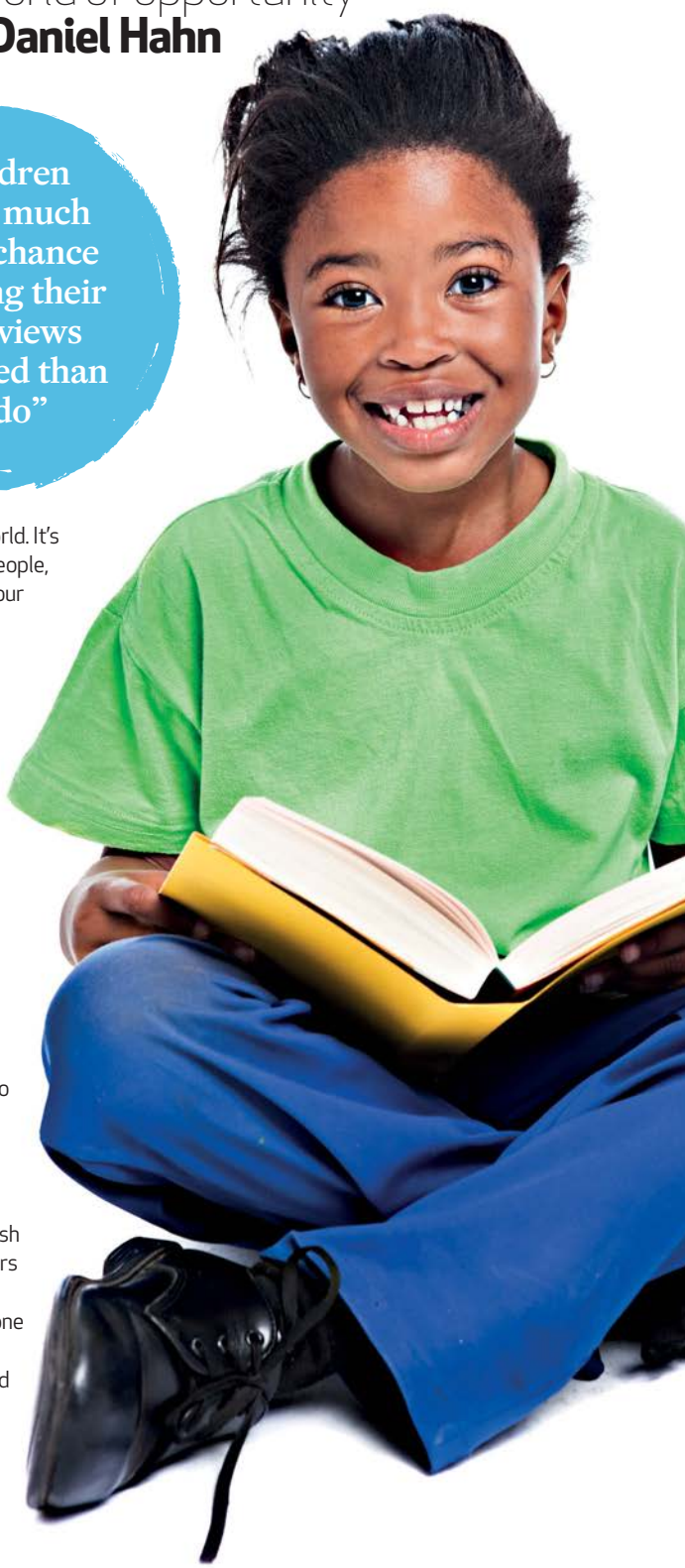
There must have been others before Asterix, of course – fairy-tales, probably, and at some point I definitely met Miffy, Pippi Longstocking, Emil and the Detectives… but Asterix was my favourite for a long, long time. It made me laugh, and still does, with jokes from the pen of master-translator Anthea Bell, whose name I would never have known but whose work I adored. Because of course the Asterix albums are foreign books, translated books, books that came to us from elsewhere and another language; and yet they made their home comfortably in my childhood bedroom in north London and were very welcome there.

Jump forward a few decades, and now I work with children's books (I recently published the new Oxford Companion to Children's Literature) but I'm also a part-time translator myself. I've translated about thirty books, from Europe and Africa and the Americas, nearly half of them for children. You almost certainly haven't heard of them. Because how many can you name, how many contemporary children's writers who produce their work in a language other than English? If you're a reader of *Teach Reading and Writing*, you can likely name many writers for children and teens, but I'd bet almost all work in English. Yet 95% of the world do not.

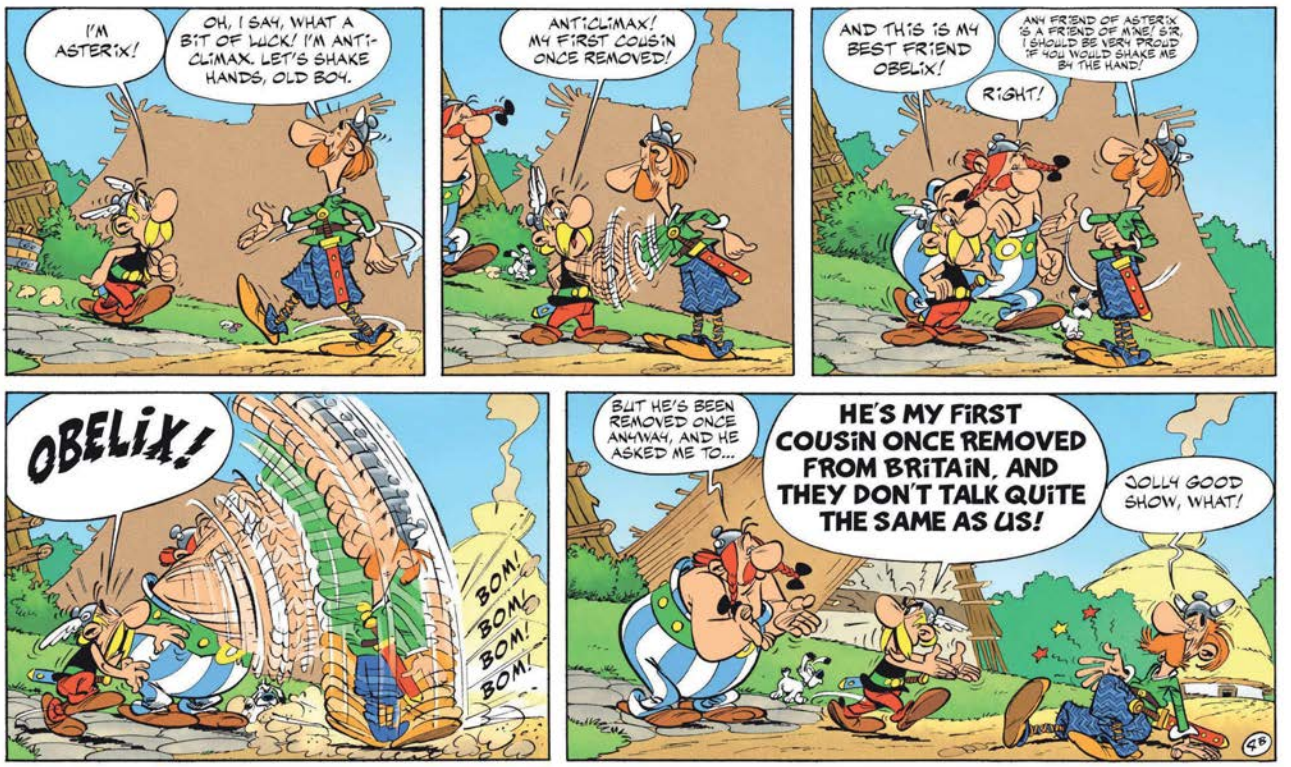
A varied diet

But why does the imbalance matter? Why should we care if our children are fed diets of nothing but 100% pure Anglophone writing? After all, we do have an awful lot of it! We publish tens of thousands of children's books in the UK every year (even without French, Spanish, Italian, Polish imports), and it's something the Anglosphere does well; even with those xenophobic restrictions to their diet, British kids are hardly going to run out of things to read anytime soon, are they? Well, no, it's true – there's no shortage of English-language books. But I think we should be reading much wider anyway, for two quite basic reasons.

> "Children have a much better chance of having their worldviews expanded than we do"



Reading helps us map the world. It's how we learn to inhabit other people, to see what they see, to frame our thoughts to theirs. And most of those people are elsewhere. Children have a much better chance of having their worldviews expanded than we do, of being changed by that alchemical process that adds imagination to understanding and transforms it into empathy. If we believe that reading does this, that it encourages acceptance of others, curiosity about the world, why would you feed that curiosity with a single repeated dish, so palatable because it's already so familiar? My translations have allowed readers to empathise with a Quebecois seven-year-old and an Angolan gecko and a Brazilian footballer and a Spanish explorer and a woman who wears a watermelon on her head just because it makes her happy. None of these stories, these voices, these views of the world started out in English – but all are in English now, and all bring my readers a tiny something that's



new. A sliver of a new culture, an aesthetic, a storytelling tradition.

Unnecessary limitations

So that's one argument: reading widely is mind-expanding, empathy-building, horizon-widening – all that sort of thing. But there's another, which is simply about numbers.

Imagine I proposed the following: that UK readers should be allowed to read *Pride and Prejudice*, but not *Jane Eyre*; that Dickens and Shakespeare are out, and so is Ian Rankin, but you can certainly read *The Handmaid's Tale*, if you like. No *Harry Potter*, no *Game of Thrones*, I'm afraid; but we're fine with *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Thomas the Tank Engine* and all the Jeffrey Archer you can manage.

My proposition, quite simply, is that you may read books by authors whose surnames begin with an 'A'. Alright? We do after all publish thousands of such A-authored books every year in the UK – far more than you could ever hope to read, even if you're deprived of the whole rest of the alphabet, so there should be plenty to keep you busy! Where's the problem?

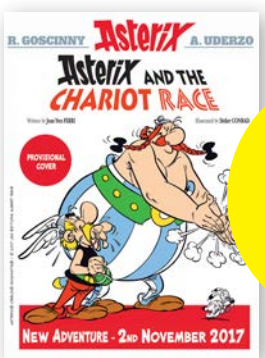
The problem, of course, is that my arbitrary criterion means you're missing out on the vast majority of the good stuff out there. Sure, it's great we have so many A-authors to read, but why limit yourself unnecessarily? Limiting ourselves to books originally written in English is, I'd argue, every bit as arbitrary, and deprives us and our children of the great majority of literary riches in just the same arbitrary way. If we want our children – and ourselves – to have access to the best books (the funniest, the liveliest, the most powerful, with the most vivid settings and characters who'll live forever), deciding to dismiss all but a relative few of the world's books as pre-emptively ineligible for our attention means we're going to be missing out on the best, on a colossal scale.

Too good to miss

Asterix, Babar the Elephant, Tintin, Pinocchio, the Moomins, Pippi Longstocking, The Little Prince, Miffy, Heidi, Swiss Family Robinson… An arbitrary language barrier would have diminished my childhood reading – and my discovery of a love of books – dramatically; and not because these were things I read particularly to broaden my horizons and understand people in worlds unlike my own (though that's a useful bit of collateral benefit), but because they were great stories, brilliantly told. Can you imagine how much we're missing out on today?

One of the projects I've been working on lately to bring some of today's great writing into English from abroad has been Aarhus39, a partnership between the Hay Festival and Aarhus 2017 European Capital of Culture. We've identified 39 amazing young writers for children and teens from across Europe and are celebrating their work, beginning with a pair of new anthologies, *Quest and Odyssey*. The collections include six writers who write in English, and thirty-two who don't, most of whom have never been translated before – so yes, some of the best new UK writing talent is there, but so are their equally stunning peers from Denmark, Germany, Portugal, France and fifteen other countries. A dispiriting reminder of just how much we're missing, perhaps; but at least it's a tantalising start, too…

The inaugural International Children's Literature Hay Festival will take place in Aarhus, Denmark, 26 - 29 October. Find our more at hayfestival.org/aarhus39.



DON'T MISS
the 37th Asterix album – from 2nd November, 2017!

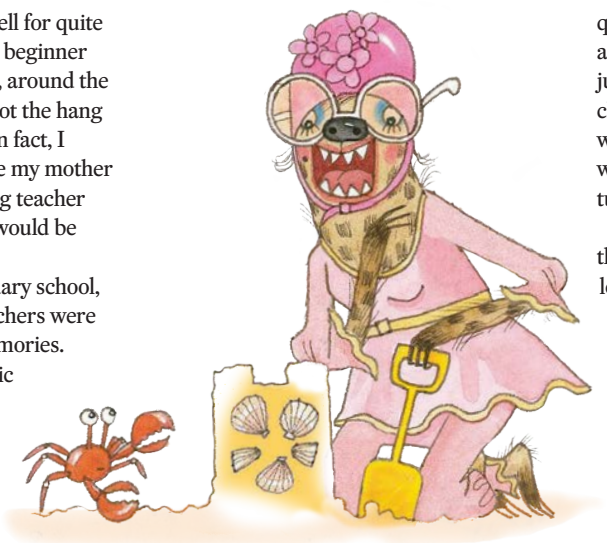
DANIEL HAHN is a writer, translator and the editor of Quest and Odyssey two new anthologies for young people, published by Alma Books and Hay Festival.

"It's such a lovely world to immerse myself in"

Julian Clary wasn't sure at first that children's writing would be a good fit for him – but it's turned out to be a surprisingly satisfying experience...

I couldn't read or write well for quite a long time; I was a slow beginner in that respect. But then, around the age of nine, I suddenly got the hang of both – and I was off. In fact, I ended up passing the 11+, despite my mother being told by a very well-meaning teacher fairly early on that such a thing would be beyond me.

I had a difficult time at secondary school, but primary was lovely – the teachers were mostly kind, and I have fond memories. I went to Sacred Heart, a Catholic school in Teddington. We lived right opposite, at number 39; you could hear the school bell from our front room, and I'd be there in seconds. My sister is a primary teacher, so I know a little about the level of paperwork, targets and inspections that schools face these days – but although I was 'behind' for the first few years, I don't remember any particular horror or pressure. Someone did come in to help me with my reading, I think, but I was able to get there in my own time.



And once I could read, I just loved it. I was voracious. Enid Blyton was standard children's fare at the time, but I didn't take to her much - I didn't like her world, or believe in it; something about her writing didn't appeal to me. *Swallows and Amazons*, though, was marvellous. It involved similarly idyllic childhood scenes, and adventures, but Arthur Ransome seemed to make it all more exciting, more intrepid – and more real.

My mother had a lot of books, and from the age of 11 or 12, I started picking things off the shelves at home. That was when I first read DH Lawrence – probably at much too early an age, really. I remember once at secondary school, they wanted us to study *The Rainbow*, and we were asked who had read any DH Lawrence and which titles. The teacher – a monk – was horrified when I told him I'd read them all ("...even *Sons and Lovers*!"). I enjoyed Thomas Hardy, too, moving on to Muriel Spark and Fay Weldon when I was 14 or so.

Perhaps they were odd choices for a child, but there was such an absence of alternatives for children of my age at the time. And given that I had no friends to speak of, I was happy to lose myself in a book – the longer and denser, the better.

Writing was a pleasure, too, as soon as I'd learnt the basics. From quite an early age I'd produce stories, poems, diaries – they're all still in a trunk somewhere. The first novels I wrote were for adults, which was great, but they took me such a long time, and had a tendency to sink without trace quite quickly, so my agent suggested I try to write a children's book. She knew, which I didn't, just how vibrant and exciting the world of children's publishing is. My first reaction was much the same as everyone else's – wouldn't that be a bit incongruous? But it turned out to be absolutely right for me.

I enjoy writing for children much more than I ever imagined I would. It's such a lovely world to immerse myself in, and I become a child again myself in the process. The age group I'm writing for – 5-10-year-olds – is so uncynical and responsive; their imaginations just go wherever you lead them. It's charming. I've spent thirty years making adults laugh, and still love doing it; but there's something special for a performer about children's laughter, because it's so completely genuine – at book events, for example, they don't know who I am, so their response isn't based on preconceptions, or humouring me.

I go into schools with the books (I'll go anywhere there's an audience, basically), and it's something I like doing very much. The illustrator, David Roberts, comes with me, and he draws while I read. We do interactive stuff, too, like designing a hat for Mrs Bold, and asking the children to suggest what it might be made of (someone suggested 'the sea', recently, which was quite a challenge for David) – it's inspiring to see their creativity being sparked by a story.

Writing is a great contrast to my other life – which essentially involves being on stage and talking filth. After six months of working on a book, I start to feel that I really want to go on tour and get all the attention; but after a couple of months of that, I can't wait to get back to writing quietly. The two elements of what I do at the moment complement each other rather well, I find.

Illustrations: David Roberts

poems with PURPOSE

Playing with poetry helps children to develop powerful language skills that will shine out in all their writing, says **Jane Andrews**...

How many of us profess a deep love for poetry and keep volumes by the bedside to delve into at every opportunity? In reality, very few. It is something we are all familiar with and have studied at school – there may even be particular poems or poets that stick in our minds (I, for example, have a soft spot for Dylan Thomas which began on YouTube). But if I ask teachers how they feel about poetry, I often get a Marmite response. Whichever camp you belong to, there's still much to be gained from using poetry in the classroom and the following ideas show just how much impact it can have on children's wider writing.

Better word choices

When writing, in their eagerness to get everything correct, children sometimes struggle to hit the right tone for the reader. A key issue in the past has been children thinking they have to use the 'wowiest' word available in a thesaurus, rather than the 'right' word. They may also be working towards lengthy success criteria and, when this process is not focused on the purpose of writing and its effect on the reader, it can send the outcome awry.

The following activities show how using a poetry unit to build vocabulary before a narrative or non-fiction unit can lift children's understanding of well-chosen language – how to paint a picture with words and play with the reader's emotions.

With free verse poetry, children don't need to worry about clause structures and, in fact, this is a place where playing with and breaking the rules is encouraged.

Let's imagine we have an upcoming narrative or non-fiction unit on dragons. Spend a week on the following free verse ideas, which will build the children's vocabulary and help them consider how this language affects the reader. A shared read of Jackie Morris's wonderful text, *Tell Me A Dragon* might be a good starting point and a way of firing up everyone's creative juices.

With all of the vocabulary building approaches, it is essential that you provide some words that children know but don't use themselves, and a few they might not know but would be very useful.

Develop vocab with acrostics

This approach helps children consider whether the vocabulary they are using is appropriate for the effect they wish to create. Is their dragon, for example, friendly? Might he be a hero? Or deadly?

Ask pupils to generate as many words as possible that might relate to their dragon beginning with each letter of the main noun itself (D-R-A-G-O-N). The teacher should add some suggestions and a variety of pictures to support and develop this process, and could model it using a different subject, e.g. 'T-E-A-C-H-E-R-S'. Eventually, children can write an acrostic poem,

leting those words set the tone for the rest of each line:

D*ragons*
R*age screaming from deadly eyes*
A*ngry fire destroying everything in its path*
G*igantic eyes, never missing a trick*
O*dorous steam streaming from its cavernous nostrils*
N*oxious breath*
S*cales like a knight's armour, shielding from attack*

Cut up poem

Take a short poem or a verse from a poem you will be studying. Print it, using double line spacing, and then cut up the lines. Place these in an envelope and then ask children to put the lines in an order they believe makes sense. Sometimes they will be able to begin with the only line that starts with a capital letter and put it at the top, then place the line ending with a full stop at the bottom. But not all poems give such clues and this is immediately something to discuss. There is no wrong and right; it is the conversations evolving from their thought processes that are important.

I might choose poems about animals e.g. *My Brother Bert* by Ted Hughes or *Penguins on Ice* by Celia Warren.

Suitable similes

I'm sure we've all seen a variety of inappropriate similes. I've seen 'as white as ice cream' to show how white somebody had turned in fear. We have only to ask the children if they want to put a picture of an ice cream into somebody's mind while building the tension in our story and they realise it's inappropriate. This approach helps them to consider how to develop appropriate similes and metaphors.

We start with the clichés such as 'As light as ….' and the children respond 'a feather'. We then model how to push this simile by explaining that I could think of something lighter. I would need to think of something really small, like a fairy. Then I would push it to find something even smaller like a fairy's eyelash and then a tear drop. Now I have as light as the teardrop on the end of a fairy's eyelash. Again, this is only appropriate if I want something as lovely as a fairy in the reader's mind; going back to my dragons I might have 'its fire is like a scorching wind striking down anything in its path'. I could then change that to a metaphor by saying that 'its fire is a scorching wind, striking down anything in its path.'

PLAYING WITH GRAMMAR

A simple game with great results…

First of all, decide as a whole class the feeling we want to create about our dragon, e.g. dangerous, endangered, friendly, etc. Mine is 'dangerous'. (The grammar exemplified is for Year 4, but you would choose word classes appropriate for your pupils.)

1 Fold a piece of paper in half and half again, creating four columns down the page. Write four verbs, one in each column to describe your dragon, e.g. screeching, tearing, attacking, swooping.

2 Fold the paper over and pass to the next person, who writes four determiners, e.g one, some, a, few.

3 Fold the paper over again and pass to the next person, who writes four nouns, e.g breath, nostrils, eyes, scales.

4 Repeat this process, with the next person writing four prepositions, e.g. beside, with, under, beneath.

The paper is then passed to the final person who has to create a poem. Each line must include a word taken from each column, but this can be placed anywhere within the line along with any other language. E.g.

One deadly breath
blasts from the giant
suddenly he is screeching to a halt
beside me

JANE ANDREWS is an English Adviser at Herts for Learning (hertsforlearning.co.uk), a provider of school improvement services.

How are you SPELLING THAT?

Tired of having his name misspelled and mispronounced, **David Waugh** has some strategies to help end his torment...

Do you have a name which you always have to spell? Most English-speaking people do. Even common names like Smith and Brown could be spelled Smyth and Browne. And if your name is *Waugh*, the possibilities are abundant: I've had *Wore, War, Warr,* Waw and even *Whore* on letters from parents. And I've been told I pronounce my name in an unusual way: it has been suggested it should be pronounced Waff as in laugh or Warf as in 'larf' from southerners, and I am regularly addressed as Mr *Wo*, or even the much preferred Mr Wow, by callers. For the record, Waugh is pronounced like 'war' and there is a certain logic to this, given the existence of words like *caught, taught, daughter* and *fraught*.

Why's it so difficult?

To spell, we need to understand the alphabetic system – the correspondence between letters and sounds. However, because English is derived from many different languages, there are many variations in the ways in which many phonemes can be represented. The following words show that the same vowel sound /*aw*/ can be represented using seven different graphemes, including three digraphs (*aw, or, au*), two trigraphs (*our* and *ore*), and two quadgraphs (*augh, ough*): *paw, morning, ought, caught, taunt, mourn, core*.

For children and EAL learners, the choices can be daunting and it is understandable that they may make mistakes. It is important, therefore, to provide children with strategies to support their spelling.

The strategies used by good spellers

Good spellers use four main approaches when attempting to spell a word:

- **Phonic** (spelling it the way it sounds) – this often produces a correct spelling, but sometimes graphemes are chosen that are phonically plausible but incorrect, as in '*possable*' *for possible* and '*seperate*' for separate.
- **Analogy** – drawing upon knowledge of other spellings. Thus, when asked to spell *bright* we might think of *fight, right* and *tight*.
- **Knowledge of root words.** Thus when asked to spell *definitely*, if we know that the root is finite we would be less likely to make the common mistake of spelling it 'definately'.
- **Visual** – this involves writing a word with different spellings before deciding which one looks right.

Some people rarely make mistakes, probably because they have a good knowledge of what is possible in spelling and can identify and memorise the tricky parts of words.

Fig. 1

Possible	Probable	Actual	How to learn
beleev			
beleav	beleave		
beleave	believe	believe	i before e except after c believe has "lie" in it
believe	beleive		
beleive			

Knowing the possibilities

A practical way to get children thinking about spelling is to give words orally and ask them to consider phonically plausible ways in which they might be spelled. You can do this with a whole class or with small groups, and you may wish to record the words so that children can listen to them at their own pace, pausing after each one to discuss possible and then probable spellings. They need to listen to the words carefully and perhaps repeatedly to hear each phoneme and assign a grapheme to it. It will help if you record the words using a fairly neutral accent. In the example shown in fig.1, left, children listened to the word *believe* and explored possible then more probable spellings, before establishing the correct one and considering how they could remember it.

If we start by eliminating some of the suggestions in the possible column, we can remove 'beleev' and 'beleav' because English words don't end in v (satnav, lav, etc are abbreviations). There is an opportunity here to teach a spelling rule that actually works consistently, and children could investigate which other two letters do not appear at the end of English words (j and q).

The next step is to look up the words in the probable column to find which is correct. Having established that the correct spelling is believe, children can consider how they might memorise this, perhaps using a 'rule' (i before e except after c) or a mnemonic (believe has a 'lie' in it). It is important when using i before e except after c to note that this is an unreliable rule with many exceptions (*their*, *being*, *science*, *foreign* etc).

Try this activity with some words from the English National Curriculum Y3-4 spelling list such as *accident*, *address*, *century*, *circle*, *exercise*, *experience*, *imagine*, *peculiar*, *possess*, *regular* and *separate*. Encourage children to make analogies with words they already know and discuss the etymology of the words, so that they can begin to make generalisations while expanding their vocabularies. If they learn that *century* means 100 years and relate this to *centimetre*, *centurion*, *cent* and *percentage* they will be more likely to spell other words related to one hundred 'cent' rather than 'sent'. *Accident* presents a challenge since the double c represents two sounds (*/k/s/*), whereas double c is often a single sound as in *account*, *accurate* and *accumulate*. Be prepared to discuss such spellings and find other examples that can be learned alongside the words children are working on, for example, *access, success, accent and succeed*. The key is to discuss spelling and vocabulary and encourage children to think about possibilities and probabilities so that they are better prepared to attempt new words.

Children's spelling investigations can be supported through phoneme charts which show some of the alternative spellings for each phoneme.

Name games

A class I worked with recently included Kaitlyn, Kaytlin and Caitlin: all plausible spellings. Many names can be spelled in a range of different ways. By exploring names and their spellings, children can engage with grapheme-phoneme possibilities and develop their ability to listen to the phonemic structures of words and relate these to the graphemes which can represent them.

Success in spelling is important, and not just because of GaPS tests. Spelling errors will influence readers' opinions of writers and may harm career chances. It is, therefore, important that we actually *teach* spelling and provide strategies, rather than simply giving children lists of words to learn for tests. It is also vital that pupils investigate and learn about words and discover generalisations about spelling that will enable them to make plausible attempts at new words.

Perhaps then my name might be spelled and pronounced correctly more often – although I would miss Mr *Wow*!

DAVID WAUGH
is Primary English subject leader at Durham University. He has written over 40 education books, as well as four children's novels, one of which, *The Wishroom*, was co-authored with 45 children from 15 schools.

Fowler's YARD

Pie Corbett's chilling tale of steel-skinned rats provides the perfect hook for exploring vocabulary, grammar and story writing skills with your class

Omar had always wanted to be famous. In his daydreams, he scored goals for Manchester United, ran faster than Usain Bolt, won the lottery three times in a row and outsmarted the Joker. So far though, his life had been about as dull as a dishcloth. What he didn't know was that things were about to change.

It was raining and already the streetlights had flickered on. Shadows began to fill the spaces between parked cars. After school, Omar made his way down Station Road to Fowler's yard, where they promised 'cash for scrap'. Peering through the barbed wire fence, he watched the tower crane pick up old cars and drop them into the giant car crusher like metallic candy. The crusher groaned into life, compressing the cars and scrunching metal till it screeched and squealed. Metal grated; sparks flew.

Seagulls wheeled above the stacks of crushed cars and the crane shuddered to a halt. The driver stepped down from his cabin and wandered off for tea. An Alsatian barked in Omar's direction but it didn't seem too interested. The rain had stepped up a notch and drifted across the yard, blurring his view. It was getting dark; Mum would be wondering where he was.

At first, Omar heard it. Something scratched! The sharp rasp of steel scraped against iron. It seemed to ooze from the bonnet of a wrecked lorry. Then he saw it: a copper body glinted; a pair of beady eyes stared towards him and metal claws grazed the bonnet's rusted skin. It was a rat, but like no other rat he had ever seen or imagined. Omar shuddered. A steel nose twitched, sensing the air; its coiled tail flicked; ferrous fur bristled. Other rats appeared, their curved claws lacerating the scrap metal, cleaving fresh scars. He saw their iron teeth glinting, heard their frantic chattering and smelt their stale bodies.

Slowly, so slowly, another shape appeared, dragging its chrome scales as it slithered out of its hiding place. Omar gaped as a metallic snake turned its huge head, twisted its chain-mail body and creaked as it turned towards him. His hiding place had been identified. Two furious eyes glittered and a bronze tongue flickered. Bitter rain lashed its rigid form. Omar gasped.

Without thinking, Omar ran, his legs pounding the glistening streets. Dashing across the road, he headed towards the park where he knew that there were hiding places. Ducking down under the bandstand, his heart thumped as he crouched and waited. By the park pond, a fox appeared, stood in the driving rain and glanced through the darkening trees before scurrying away towards the estate. Perhaps they had not followed him?

Then Omar heard what he had most feared. It sounded like the grinding of a

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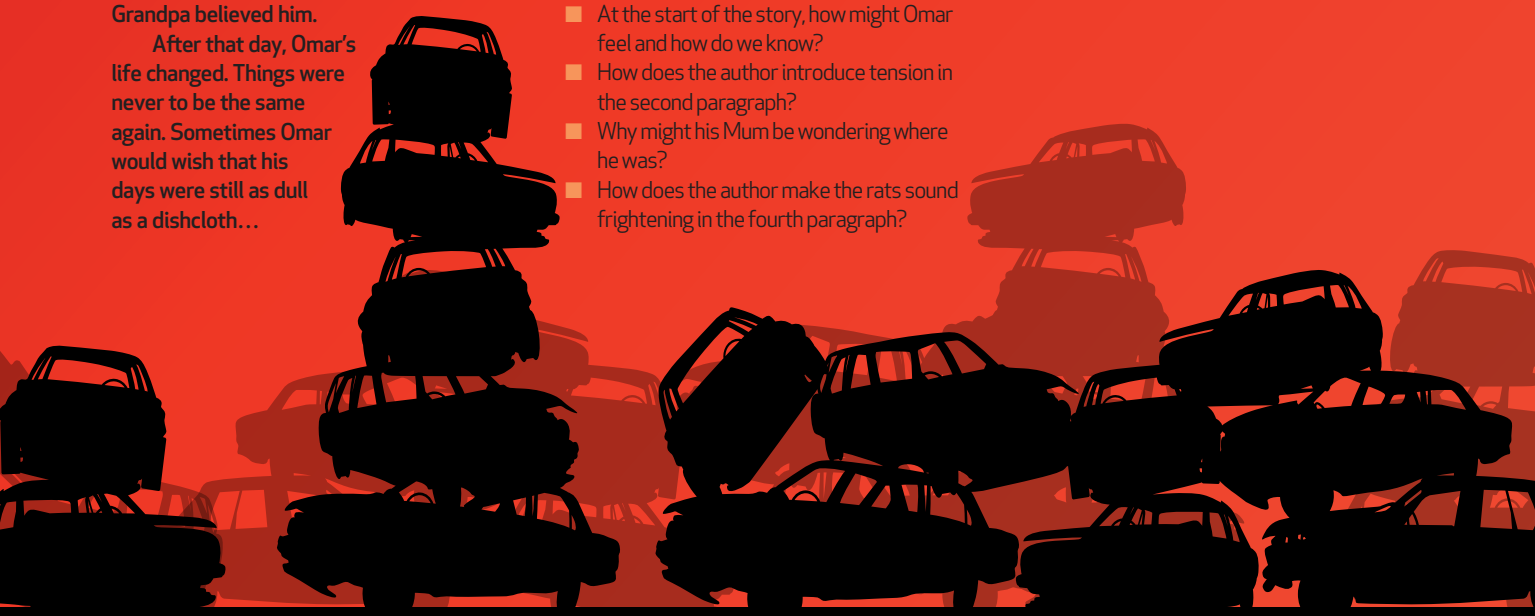
thousand metallic bones. The rat army had slipped swiftly through the fence, scurried down the road and into the park. The serpent cast a jagged shadow. Omar froze. Time crawled by and he waited, listening to the rats scuttling as they searched the undergrowth by the swings at the far end of the park.

After a while, he realised that the snake's shadow had blended with the darkness. The park seemed to settle back into silence. House lights speckled the gloom, the rain stopped and a few stars shone. The moon hung in the night sky like a silver claw. Omar peered through the shadows. At the other end of the park, he could just see the silhouette of the snake wrapping itself round the slide, as if it were cuddling the cold, shiny surface. He could hear the rats cracking their teeth against the park gates, spitting out shards of steel that were not to their taste.

Omar ran. He ran and he ran and he ran until he reached home where he blurted out what had happened. His mother did not believe him. She muttered about tricks of the light, an overactive imagination and tutted at Omar impatiently. His Grandma pursed her lips, shook her head and knitting needles clicked and clacked furiously. But Grandpa looked straight at him, his mouth open and, even though he did not say a word, Omar knew. He knew that his Grandpa believed him.

After that day, Omar's life changed. Things were never to be the same again. Sometimes Omar would wish that his days were still as dull as a dishcloth…



LET'S GET STARTED

Everyone at some time or another has wished that things were different. In this story, Omar dreams of having a more exciting life. An adventure begins but not perhaps as he was imagining. I wrote the story so that it could be used alongside great class readers such as Podkin One-ear by Kieran Larwood or Cogheart by Peter Bunzl.

Build children's vocabulary

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

Oral comprehension

How does Omar want 'to be famous'?

- At the start of the story, how might Omar feel and how do we know?
- How does the author introduce tension in the second paragraph?
- Why might his Mum be wondering where he was?
- How does the author make the rats sound frightening in the fourth paragraph?
- Why did the author state 'or imagined'?
- Explain why the author has chosen the words 'oozed', 'skin' and 'scars'.
- What is the effect of repeating the word 'slowly'?
- Who had 'identified' his hiding place? How did Omar know and why did this matter?
- What does the incident with the fox suggest?
- What did Omar most fear?
- Explain the use of alliteration in the words: slipped, swiftly, scurried.
- What does the word 'crawled' suggest?
- What is the significance of the phrase 'at the far end'?
- What is the purpose of the simile 'like a silver claw'?
- Why is the word 'cuddling' powerful?
- What does the repetition of 'ran' suggest?
- Explain the different reactions of the three adults.
- What does Grandpa's reaction suggest?
- Comment on the final sentence and what it suggests.

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 Omar and his family;
- In pairs, be 'eyewitnesses' to what happened;
- Create monologues for the crane driver, thinking about what he might have seen or heard;
- In role as Omar, tell your best friend about what happened and then write a diary entry by Emily;
- In role as school friends, 'gossip' about what you have heard about Fowler's Yard;
- In pairs or threes, tell the story of what happened when Omar is tempted to go back to the yard.

Choose a grammar focus

Identify, or build into the model, several grammar focuses. For instance, in Fowler's Yard, I have focused on the use of the colon to introduce a descriptive list. The list itself is separated by semicolons as the descriptions are detailed. This creates a descriptive list in the first paragraph.

Isolate the pattern so that it can be studied and then work as a class to invent new examples. The class then write their own, using the same pattern, e.g.

Original – Then he saw it: a copper body glinted; a pair of beady eyes stared towards him and metal claws grazed the bonnet's rusted skin.

New version – Then she saw it: a green body smothered in slime heaved towards her; scarlet eyes bulged out of a grotesque head and razor sharp talons clawed the ground.

Write your own stories

Less confident writers could use the same story pattern to create their own version of the story.

Underlying pattern	New ideas
Main character (MC) wishes things were different	Samira wishes that her life could be more exciting
MC is doing something / goes somewhere	She goes with her best friend Amira to play in the local park
A threat appears – is heard and seen	It is getting late, snow starts and they hear and then see – goblins!
The MC flees but is chased	They run and hide in an old house
The MC flees and hides	The goblins search for them but they manage to escape
Everything has changed for the MC	Samira's life is no longer boring!

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> "A key aspect to this sort of story is building the description of the rats and snake so that they sound threatening..."

More confident writers could choose from a number of different options, e.g.

- What happens when Omar returns to explore the yard?
- Omar returns with a friend
- The rat army appears at school / at Omar's home
- Omar finds a tunnel that leads to the Rat Kingdom
- The snake king has to be defeated
- Omar is chased by the rat army
- Omar finds a way to defeat the rat army

Build a writing toolkit

A key aspect to this sort of story is building the description of the rats and snake so that they sound threatening. The reader needs to be able to picture the creatures, otherwise there will be no tension. Build a toolkit with the children identifying techniques the writer uses to build tension:

- Put the main character on their own, in an uncomfortable setting, e.g. *the breaker's yard.*
- Use darkness, the cold and bad weather, e.g. *streetlights, darkness, rain.*
- The main character hears something, then sees it – e.g. *First, he heard it… Then, he saw it…*
- Use well-chosen adjectives to describe the threat, e.g. *steel nose, curved claws, ferrous fur.*
- Use unpleasant details to bring the description alive, e.g. iron teeth glinting.
- Use the rule of three (or four) to build description or action, e.g. *The rat army had slipped swiftly through the fence, scurried down the road and into the park.*
- Use a colon to introduce and semi-colons to write a detailed list, e.g. *Then he saw it: a copper body glinted; a pair of beady eyes stared towards him and metal claws grazed the bonnet's rusted skin.*
- Use similes and metaphors to help the reader imagine what something is like, e.g. *fresh scars, like a silver claw.*

Begin shared writing

Pitch the shared writing at the appropriate level for the children. With confident classes, leave the model behind and just work from the basic plot idea – as with this example:

Coral Ocean stood on the edge of the playground and waited. No one came near. All the other kids seemed to be absorbed in their own games. She gazed out through the railings and pretended to stare at something in the distance. Blinking back tears, she roughly rubbed her eyes and hoped that no one would notice. How she wished that she were anywhere but the Marshland Academy.

PIE CORBETT is an author and former headteacher.

The ultimate adventure

Discover the magic of learning as your pupils step into story construction at one of London's most immersive attractions.

A fully interactive environment for inspiring pupils' active imaginations, DreamWorks Tours: Shrek's Adventure! London brings storytelling to life as pupils board a magical 4D flying bus to Far Far Away and embark on a thrilling adventure through ten stimulating live shows. Aided by famous fairy-tale characters, pupils will find themselves working together to discover three magical ingredients to help find Shrek and outwit the evil Rumpelstiltskin.

The newest chapter in this unique experience features a **brand new schools room** and two new workshops focusing on story composition and characters. As an introduction to story creation, a new **KS1 'Once Upon a Time'** workshop will encourage pupils to engage with storytelling by exploring sequencing of events and identifying with characters through role-play. The brand new **KS2 'Build your Story'** workshop will delve deeper into the role of characters' feelings, thoughts and motives, look at plot and the importance of setting while also exploring the triumph of good over evil. Created in collaboration with an education specialist, the workshops link to various aspects of teaching spoken language, reading comprehension and writing composition and are delivered by experienced actors in a room that takes inspiration from Shrek's swamp.

Recognised by the Council for Learning Outside of the Classroom, the experience itself supports primary lesson plans by reinforcing elements of story construction, providing familiarity with fairy-tales and offering an insight into animation. To continue the magic back in the classroom the attraction also offers free teaching resources. Covering a range of activities pupils can delve into character profiles, explore review writing, develop their handwriting and spelling skills and construct their very own swamp in a shoebox!

With exclusive school rates and a 1:5 free teacher ratio, the adventure, including a workshop, is now available to book for 2018 onwards. With every workshop booking Mike, the attraction's schools co-ordinator, will be in touch before you visit to confirm your itinerary for the day and arrange use of the education space for lunch between adventure and workshop if required.

Students will...

- ✔ **Become part of a developing story from beginning to end**
- ✔ **Identify with character description**
- ✔ **Experience live performance and spoken language**

Fairy-tale characters you will meet:

- **Cinderella**

Gain your first clue in the heart of Shrek's swamp

- **Pinocchio**

Test your knowledge in a one of a kind Game Show

- **The Muffin Man**

Concoct your magic recipe at his home on Drury Lane

Find out more online at www.shreksadventure.com/schools

STICK TO *the script*

A pen licence scheme can certainly lead to improved handwriting standards, says **Louise Sage** – but only if everyone is completely clear about how it works...

The implementation of the revised National Curriculum in 2014 saw much greater emphasis placed on standards of handwriting; and rightly so, as research shows a clear link between children's ability to write legibly, and their composition and spelling skills. As the (fairly new) English lead at a small primary school in mid-Essex, it was essential for me to evaluate whether the way we had been teaching handwriting would be effective in helping children to reach these new standards at every stage of their time with us. Through many discussions with colleagues, observations of lessons, book scrutinies, and studying the exemplar materials, we agreed as a staff that what we were doing could most certainly be improved upon. And so our journey began...

A fresh start

At the end of the summer term in 2016, it was agreed that the cursive scheme we were using, whereby children from Reception were being taught to use lead-ins and lead-outs, was not leading to good handwriting in the later Key Stages. Over the previous few years there had been changes of staffing and therefore not everyone was on the same page. I had also introduced a 'pen licence' idea when I joined the school in 2013, however this was not working as successfully as I had hoped.

After much research and discussions with other English leaders and teachers, I met with a sales consultant from OUP, which promotes a handwriting scheme by Nelson. This had just been updated to be in line with the new NC, and linked the handwriting patterns to families and the Letters and Sounds phonics program – a detail which I really liked. The decision had to be a whole school one, though, so every team leader looked through the materials, including online interactive activities, until we were sure we all felt that this would be an easier and more consistent approach to teaching handwriting. However, this still left the issue of 'pen licences' to be resolved. Parents seemed somewhat confused to why some children could write in pen whilst others were never 'allowed' to do so; and teachers were unsure of the criteria for awarding a licence, leading to inconsistency across and within year groups and, in some cases, frustration and upset. So, the next big question was how to use pen licences more effectively to encourage and motivate our pupils to improve their handwriting skills?

A matter of pride

Whilst stressing our pupils through too much emphasis on passing tests is something we definitely want to avoid, we could definitely see a value in encouraging children to work towards particular fixed goals. We decided, therefore, that learners from Y2 upwards would be able to earn a pen licence once they could demonstrate they had reached a certain standard of handwriting, which would change for each year group.

Through workshops with parents, clear success criteria in lessons, and a whole school display in the hall on expectations for each year group, we started developing our children's understanding of what would be required of them. Obviously there are some pupils who have poorer motor control

"We could definitely see a value in encouraging children to work towards particular fixed goals."

skills and therefore need interventions for handwriting, but hopefully this is picked up early and support put in place; and we do sometimes make allowances for individual cases who make excellent progress.

With the aim that every child should reach at least the age related expectations regarding handwriting by the end of each academic year, it's important to instil high standards from day one. It's not easy to get your pen licence! Once a pupil meets a certain consistent handwriting style, and can produce this quality across different subjects over a length of time, they are sent to me by their class teacher to make the important, final decision. This has created consistency, but also, a real 'buzz' around the scheme.

Children are constantly asking their teachers to send them to me to show me their writing, of which they are very proud. They are keen to progress, and presentation has become high priority in our school. I love visiting different classes, as they always want to show me their amazing writing. The certificates are displayed in the classrooms or sent home to parents, and the pupils are given a pen that they can use for their. Once pupils reach Year 6, they are all automatically issued with a licence and a pen in order to prepare them for secondary school and to enable them to develop character and their own personal style. However, there are rewards for this cohort, too, as I give out special blue handwriting pens to those who write consistently with joined, cursive style.

Evaluating the impact

In the spring term of 2017, an LA review by our local borough commented that "expectations have raised the quality of presentation, demonstrating a pride in work." Teachers are feeling extremely positive about the progress being made by their pupils, which is evident in their books. One KS1 pupil stated, "I worked really hard practising keeping my letters the same and joining up. I feel really great and proud to have a pen licence."

A KS1 teacher commented on the progress made by her pupils: "Getting rid of break letters and loops has been really effective. Year 1 are beginning to join much earlier than in previous years. Having regular structured sessions and putting practice into application of sentences has seen an huge improvement across KS1 since we started using Nelson."

One year down the line, we know the introduction of the new handwriting scheme and the improvements of the 'pen licence' have been successful, and we are looking forward to continuing the development of even higher standards across the school.

SIX STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL PEN LICENCE SCHEME

1 Have clear expectations.

2 Get all staff on board and singing from the same hymn sheet!

3 Involve the parents.

4 Make it a big deal to earn a pen licence – the English leader is the only person who can issue them.

5 Reward pupils when they earn the licence – have their names in a star on a display, or mentioned in the weekly newsletter.

6 Consistency, consistency, consistency – it doesn't matter which scheme you use, just as long as everyone in the school is taking the same approach.

LOUISE SAGE is English lead at a small primary school in mid-Essex.

the wow FACTOR

Bringing stories, poetry and illustration to life

What they'll love

Whether it is to celebrate World Book Day, National Poetry Day, Black History Month, to tie in with a curriculum topic or simply to encourage reading for pleasure, children will be engaged and excited to meet an author, illustrator or poet 'in real life'. They'll enjoy discovering how simple ideas can become stories, gain encouragement and support for their own reading and writing, be able to ask questions and understand that books are created by people just like them. As one child said after meeting Cathy Cassidy "I liked that I was able to meet a real author, it made me realise that I might be able to write my own book in the future."

What they'll learn

Meeting an author, illustrator, poet or storyteller and hearing them convey their passion for their work can fundamentally alter a child's relationship with books and reading. It will build on literacy work done in schools, and contribute towards igniting a life-long love of reading. A report from the Society of Authors showed that 99.4% of schools who hosted an author visit considered it a hugely beneficial experience that promoted reading for pleasure and creative writing both in school and at home. Involving parents in an author visit can also help reinforce the positive messages from school about the benefits of reading and sharing books at home.

www.authorsalouduk.co.uk, info@authorsalouduk.co.uk, 01727 893992

"For me, books were bullies, not buddies"

Whether it's mountain biking or Minecraft, reading for pleasure has to start with something children love, says **Max Brooks**

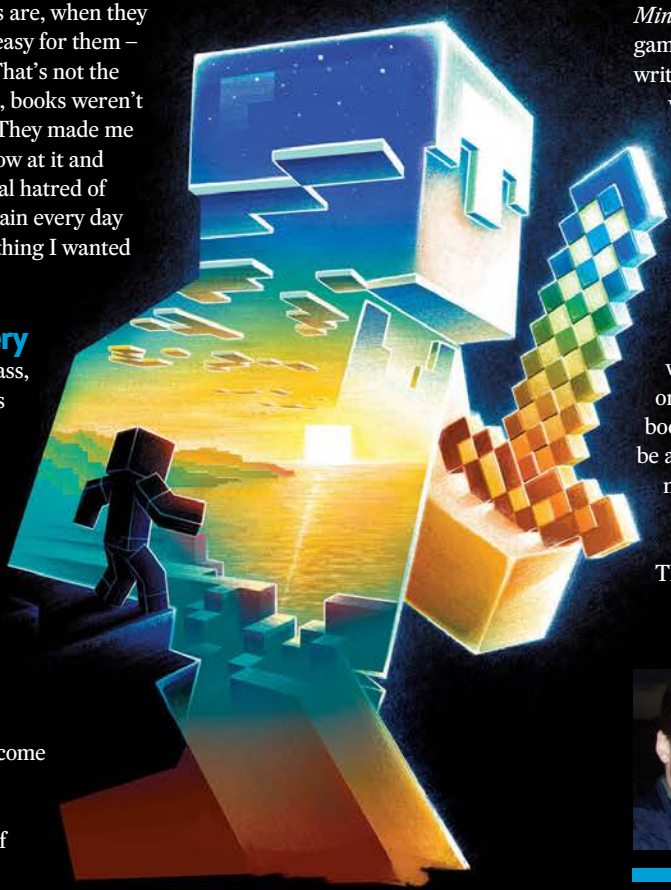
I hated reading. That's right. I said it. When I was a kid, in the suffocating, heart-breaking prison system we called 1980s American schools, reading was the *last* thing I wanted to do. I had a learning disability called 'dyslexia'. Nowadays we call it a 'difference' so people who have it don't get their feelings hurt – and that's a good thing. No one should feel the way I did – to have to work twice as hard and do half as well. I thought I was stupid; my teachers thought I was lazy. They couldn't understand why I didn't just automatically love to read.

And this is an issue some teachers *still* have, and not just when it comes to dyslexic people like me. The chances are, when they were young, reading came easy for them – books were their buddies. That's not the case for many of us. For me, books weren't buddies, they were bullies. They made me feel bad because I was so slow at it and over time, I built up a natural hatred of them. After breaking my brain every day reading for school, the last thing I wanted to do was read for pleasure.

A journey of discovery

So I was always behind in class, always the dumb one, always wondering what was wrong with me. And I probably would have never picked up a book outside of school if it weren't for that one person who not only gave me life, but saved it as well... Mom. My mother, who was one of the world's most famous Hollywood actresses, saw that I was struggling and put her career on hold to become my personal coach.

She started by finding the animated cartoon versions of books, hooking me on the subjects, then reading those books to me at night, and finally asking if I'd like to read some of those books myself. That's how I learned to love *Robinson Crusoe* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. That's why, at ten years old, I curled up in a corner of the local comic book shop and read *Rom: Spaceknight* for a time-stopping hour. That's why, at 16, I bought a book called *The Hunt for Red October* with my own money, which would shape the kind of writer I wanted to be. That's why, in college (which I never would have gotten into without Mom's help), I spent my free time devouring the 1,000+ page *Masters of Rome* novels by Colleen McCullough. And that's why, in my early twenties, after reading every sci-fi author from Heinlein to Turtledove, I worked my way up to *Odyssey* by Homer.



Follow your passion

Now I love reading and my only regret is that, as an author myself, I don't have nearly enough time to read for fun; too much of my time is taken up in researching facts for my own books. But stories... ah... there's nothing like the original words on the printed page. Time stops, the world leaves you alone and for a few minutes or hours, you're there, in the adventure, seeing it, feeling it, living it. It takes time, though. And practice. And it has to start with a subject you love! That's why I wrote *Minecraft: The Island* (Century). I love the game, I play it all the time and I wanted to write a story that took place in that world – where you could imagine yourself trapped, having to survive, feeling the fear and joy of crafting.

So the message for kids is, don't worry if you're not a 'reader' right now – you will be. Just start with what you love: *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars* or maybe a new book called *Minecraft: The Island*. That's the only way you'll fall in love with reading and once you do, it'll never leave you. In books you can go anywhere, do anything, be anyone. That's why I've made writing my career. That's why I read every day. Books used to bully me – now they're my best friends.

That's why reading matters.

MAX BROOKS is the best-selling author of *World War Z* and *Mindcraft: The Island*

"The best performers aren't always the strongest readers"

Former Children's Laureate **Julia Donaldson** finds acting out stories for children considerably less scary than talking to them...

I still have the book that helped me learn to read: *Tiny Tot's First Book of All*. It's big, with a pink cover, and introduces the alphabet as characters – so you have 'Big Mister A' (who looks like a ladder) and his brother, 'little mister a', and so on. I just loved the way the letters all had personalities; Letterland does something similar, and it's very appealing for children, I think.

Actually, I still have many of my books from childhood. I was a huge fan of the William series by Richmal Crompton, and E. Nesbit was a favourite, too. I wasn't keen on 'adventure' stories – although I enjoyed Malcom Saville's *Treasure at the Mill*. As a teenager I discovered Jane Austen, which my father and I would read aloud to each other. And reading *Lord of the Flies* was a defining moment for me – it was one of the first times I'd come across a story without a happy ending; I feel that book marked the end not just of my literary innocence but of my childhood.

I mostly enjoyed school – although I had a terrible time learning to knit. We had to use awful, greyish–white wool, which was more like string, and I simply couldn't do it. One day, though, it finally clicked. At the end of that lesson, we were all asked to hold our work up, then the teacher told everyone except me to put it down again. I thought she was going to praise the fact that I'd got the hang of it at last, but instead, she told the whole class that my effort was a perfect example of how not to knit. I was thoroughly humiliated, and never did take to handicrafts after that. I think if I'd known, aged seven, that several decades later I'd be coming back to that school as a successful, published author, I might have felt a little better.

"What I did like about my education, was the way that teachers were allowed to have bees in their bonnets"

I wrote a poem about the experience – it's called *Knitting Class* and is in my book *Crazy Mayonnaisy Mum*.

What I did like about my education, was the way that teachers were allowed to have bees in their bonnets.They could follow their passions in the classroom – within reason – rather than being told what to teach all the time. I remember one especially good teacher, Mr Davie, who loved italic handwriting and heraldry, so taught us both. Heraldry was particularly interesting and exciting – we made shields out of plasticine, which we rubbed with the back of a drawing pin to make it shiny, and learnt fascinating things about heraldic language, like the way that 'gules' means 'red', and comes from the

Illustrations from *The Ugly Five* © Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, 2017.

French word 'gueule', meaning the inside of an animal's mouth.

By the time my own children started school, though, things had gone somewhat awry. I certainly wouldn't argue in favour of bringing back the 11+, but if nothing else, it offered a framework. Without it, and before the introduction of the national curriculum, essentials could, and did, get missed. Phonics was practically a dirty word for a while – and I remember going to one parents' evening and finding my son's maths exercise book completely blank. Visiting schools these days, I'm universally impressed by how much better both the teaching and the care are than they used to be.

The worry now, is that the pendulum has swung the other way. I love phonics and I think it's something that should be offered to every child who is learning to read; but I've never been under the impression that it's the one and only approach, or that it works for everyone. And making six–year–olds sit

a test in it, which they might fail – well, the impact of that can last right through the rest of their education. Children in England are far too tested, in my opinion.

I started acting out stories for children because, frankly, the idea of walking into a classroom full of seven–year–olds and just talking to them terrified me. But there is definitely something in the idea of learning being easier when it's interactive; one of the things I did as Children's Laureate was set up a website, picturebookplays.co.uk, which explains how specific picture books can be acted out, either as a class activity or for a performance. It's great for encouraging expression, and improving understanding, as well as boosting confidence; the best performers aren't always the strongest readers. And most importantly, it's fun!

***The Ugly Five*, the new picture book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler is out now (published by Alison Green Books) and *A World Inside a Book: The Gruffalo, Dragons and other Creatures* exhibition opens on 21 October www.discover.org.uk**

Let's banish FEAR of writing

Kids need confidence to be creative, and **Steve Bowkett** has some great ideas for giving children faith in their abilities...

Helping children to feel confident about their creative writing is, in my opinion, just as important as teaching them strategies to write more clearly and accurately.

Many children are inhibited in their writing for a variety of reasons. These include the all-too-familiar 'fear of the blank page' ("I can't think of anything to write about!" is a common lament), trying to get all the technical aspects right as they compose their work (a sense of being 'overwhelmed'), and the fact that much of children's success in school is underpinned by an ethos of competitiveness and comparison, which can lead to a fear of failure and a lack of desire to try.

Any steps we can take to diminish these anxieties means that children will feel increasingly motivated to write, and so enjoy their writing more. This in turn will lead to the development of skills in all areas of writing, with the broader benefits this brings more generally in children's education.

So, without further ado, here are some easily applied and simple ideas for boosting self-confidence in writing.

Keep it creative

Make creative writing a regular activity. High priority is given to spelling, punctuation and grammar, but these need a context to be properly understood. Teaching the technicalities of language without giving children meaningful opportunities to apply them is like telling people the names of a car engine's parts without helping them learn to drive.

Model the behaviour

In other words, when you want your class to write a story or poem, have a go yourself and be upfront about the difficulties you encounter in trying to translate your thoughts into words.

Go easy on the grammar

Encourage children to write without them necessarily trying to remember and apply a raft of grammatical rules. An old saying has it that we should 'learn the rules well and then forget them'. Learning how to use punctuation, for instance, is necessary and valuable, but when children try and apply the rules consciously and laboriously as they go along, the creative flow can be stifled. Consideration of rules should, however, be an important element of the editing process.

Keep assessment focused

Where you do require children to focus on rules during composition, pick just one or two they can bear in mind as they write. Explain that you will mark for these without necessarily correcting other areas of GaPS. Not only will this save you time, but also children will be spared the demotivating sight of their writing covered in corrections (which many are unlikely to read).

Value effort

If a child tries hard but produces work that is technically poor, celebrate his achievement in making an effort and apply the old 'three stars and a wish' technique to the work by finding three points you can praise followed by noting one area where improvements can be made.

Leave room for improvement

Make clear that it's fine for children to change their minds, and that there is no expectation for them to 'get it all right' first time. Show the class before and after drafts from the work of well-known poets and extracts from stories. Where these have been hand written, they are often untidy and peppered with crossings out and other annotations as the writers tried to clarify their thoughts. If you have the facilities, invite children to word-process their stories using the 'track changes' facility. Encourage children to show their workings out, as you would do in maths.

> " Make clear that it's fine for children to change their minds; that there's no expectation to 'get it all right'"

Don't strive for perfection

Slay the 'practice makes perfect' dragon. It's a glib phrase and also an inaccurate one. Telling children that practice makes better is sound advice. But how could we ever say that a story or poem is perfect? Even highly experienced authors strive to improve.

Come back later

Leave some time – a couple of days will do – between children writing a piece and editing or redrafting it. This is often known as the 'cooling off' period. Many children will find that they come back to their work with fresh eyes that enable them to pick out more errors, and with new ideas for improving the piece structurally.

Try diamond 9

Use the diamond ranking tool to help children assess their own work. Give each child some scraps of paper or card and have them write on each an aspect of their writing, such as creating strong characters, controlling pace and tension, describing places and things, using 'punchy' verbs etc. Supply these elements as necessary, but allow children some leeway to think of examples of their own. Now ask each child to physically arrange these scraps according to how effectively they were used in the latest piece of work. So two writing elements that a child thinks are equally strong will be placed side by side, while an aspect of the work a child is pleased with will be placed above one that he / she is not so happy with.

Keep it varied

Vary the writing tasks. By this I mean it's not necessary to ask children always to write a complete story. Get them to create just an opening scene for example, or a vivid character description, or an exciting story climax. If more reluctant writers think they haven't got to write much they might be more motivated to have a go. Varying the tasks also helps to keep the process of writing fresh, while the results can form resource banks (of characters, scenes, etc) for future use.

Help each other

Highlight the idea that everyone in the class, including yourself, forms a community of writers. Here, difficulties can be aired, advice can be shared and successes can be celebrated as we all strive to 'dare to do it and do our best'.

STEVE BOWKETT taught secondary English for 20 years. Since 1994 he has been a full time author and has visited hundreds of schools to run creative writing workshops.

"My heroes, in the end, were people as scared and lonely as I was"

For **Lauren Wolk**, reading and writing have always represented both an escape from – and a route to acceptance of – the self

Consider this a confession.

When I was a kid, books let me escape from myself. Not from my life. I've always had a good, safe, nest-like life with a wonderful family, friends, teachers, adventures, enough to eat, a roof overhead, shoes... the works. I'm talking about escape from *myself*. Not from the best parts of me, which I can say, with both pride and humility, include generosity, kindness, and intelligence. I'm talking about escape from my own sulfurous darkness. From fear, obsession, fury, and doubt. Those wily, thorny monsters not under the bed but right in the bed with me. I was – and still, despite all efforts, am – a person who worries about everything, agonizes that I'm not doing enough to deserve this good life of mine, berates myself for standing in judgement, for uncharitable thoughts, for every lack and misstep. I, as an adult, have found ways to deal with all that. But I look back on my childhood through tears.

Picture a girl who sees, in school, a film about what to do during and after a nuclear attack. Memorising how to hide under my desk, then (afterward) throw that desk through the window to escape my ruined classroom. How to flip a loaf of bread upside down and cut open the plastic sleeve through the radiation-free bottom so I can eat the radiation-free bread inside. What a sweet and silly girl I must have been to believe such lessons. But I did. And I took the threat to heart. When I was a child, I lay in bed at night, sweating with fear, and imagined nuclear warheads arcing over the North Pole and straight toward my home, my family, all the things I loved. But I also feared more garden-variety threats, even if they were figments and phantoms. Picture a girl creeping through the house at midnight,

looking for dangers – fire, intruders, a whole raft of bogey-men – because the alternative, to lie in bed and ignore those possibilities, was unthinkable. Picture a girl who had never heard of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and never considered telling anyone about the fears that pinned her down and roared in her face.

Now picture a girl who read her way out of that cacophony. Who opened a book the way she might have opened the door to a doctor's office or a church.

I never thought about books that way. I didn't see them as a prescription or a refuge. But they were both. Books made me well and whole. Books such as *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* showed me what 'strong' looked like. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Secret Garden*, and *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* gave me friends as real as any flesh-and-blood companions. More real, in fact.

Books gave me time to grow up, and they showed me how to do that. How to be who I was without so much confusion and regret. My heroes, in the end, were people as scared and lonely as I was. People who taught me that bravery isn't possible without fear. So I became brave. And I became strong. And I began to write books of my own.

Oh, I had always written as a way to speak my own truths, make language into art, and relieve the pressure that made my heart and brain bulge and ache. But most of what I wrote in my childhood ended up in a locked drawer. Poems and books for people to read came later. And they brought with them the key to unlock all of me: good, bad, everything.

Now, when I write, I am not selective. I give myself to the process with a whole heart. I trust myself with my self. I know that honesty can be risky, but it is also at the heart of being well.

For me, writing a novel is an act of faith, confession, homage, and gratitude. As I wrote *Wolf Hollow* and *Beyond the Bright Sea*, I was fully alive, in every possible sense. Brain, heart, body, soul: invigorated, mighty, and whole.

I keep coming back to that word: whole. Back to 'all.' Back to 'well.' If I am a matter of pieces and parts, I cannot make sense out of myself. And if I can't make sense out of myself, I can't make sense. Period. I can't write anything worth the ink.

So. I don't have to love everything about myself. I don't even have to accept everything about myself. But I do have to admit it. All of it. I no longer try to escape from the sulfurous darkness. Instead, I kindle a light by working hard to be a whole person in a constant state of evolution. Reading helps. Writing helps. Always have. Always will.

***Wolf Hollow*, by Lauren Wolk, was the KS2 winner in the 2017 Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards. It is published by Penguin, as is her latest children's novel, *Beyond the Bright Sea*.**

Main Illustration: Tang Yay Hoong

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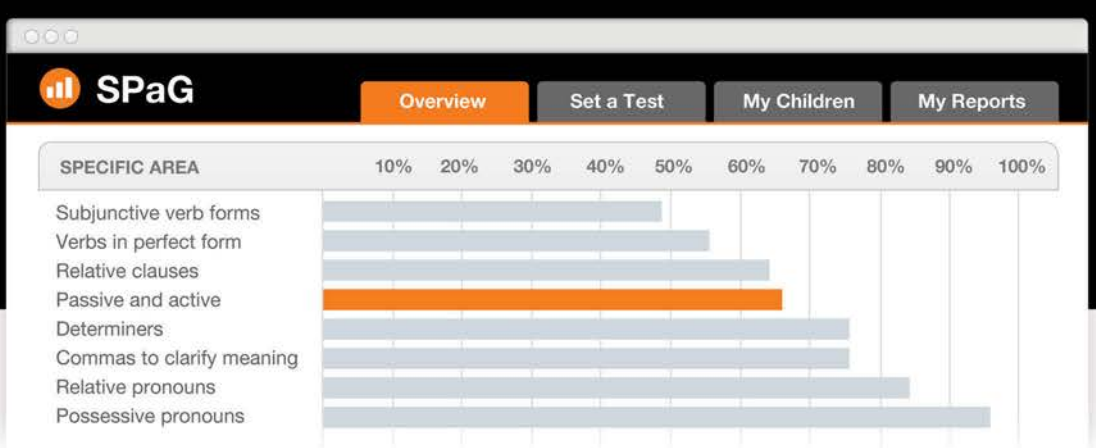

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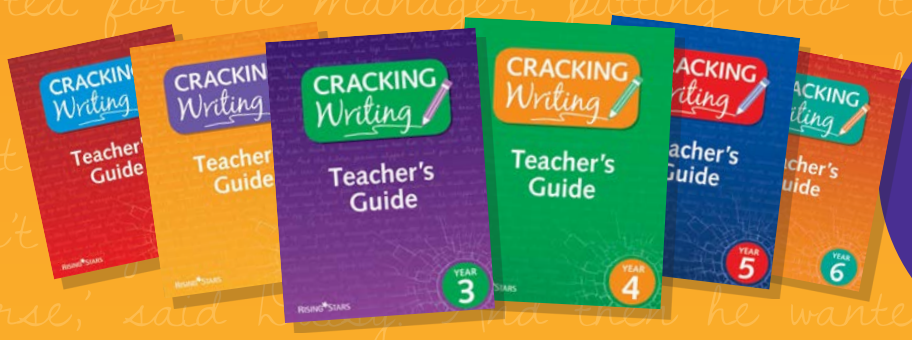

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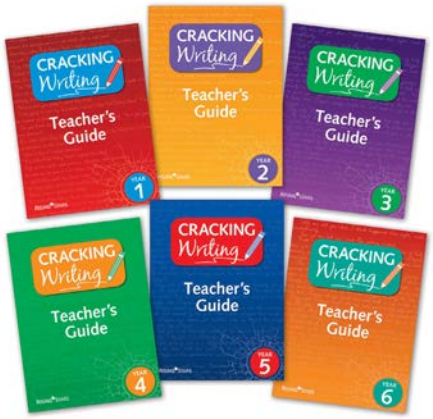

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REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Cracking Writing may sound like it could have been engineered and written by cheese-loving inventor Wallace with the help of his faithful, Dostoyevsky-reading best friend Gromit; but if you are seriously looking to boost children's writing skills, it's a programme that could prove to be just the ticket.

This is a comprehensive, step-by-step writing system with a solid structure, impressively creative content, and support more fortifying than a Lancashire hot pot. The programme is made up of individual year group Teacher Guides, each furnished with nine units of work. These include model extracts for children to read and analyse, focused GPS activities, vocabulary and proofreading sessions, guidance on moderation and yearly progression grids. There are four fiction units, four non-fiction and one poetry unit.

The units start with a model excerpt to read, analyse and dissect using a range of talking points to encourage lively and purposeful discussion and debate. A reading comprehension follows each text and comes with clear and copious teaching notes providing all the ideas and activities you'll need. If you are looking for a sturdy structure, then Cracking Writing suggests following a process of six stages, which are clearly explained. If on the other hand you want to go your own way, then you can easily use the material without sticking to a fixed plan, cherry-picking what works for you and plundering the rich and active learning suggestions at will. They can be used in any order and offer fantastic flexibility.

Cracking Writing also provides exciting activities to help children plan their work, and frameworks to facilitate effective writing. There are plenty of ideas to help children review, edit and tweak their writing, in pairs, groups or as a class. You can buy a whole school pack for £450 or purchase individual Teacher Guides at £85 each. There is more to be had online too, with additional content galore on the Rising Stars website including model texts highlighted with key grammatical constructions and editable success criteria. In short, Cracking Writing is a real treat.

"If you are seriously looking to boost children's writing skills, it's a programme that could be just the ticket"

Teach Reading & Writing

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- ✔ **Detailed help with a bumper collection of activities and guidance**
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We're wasting time with **differentiation**

Fixed ability groups in which 'lower ability' pupils are denied any real challenge are robbing children of their chance to succeed, say **Christine Chen** and **Lindsay Pickton**

The phrase 'can of worms' springs to mind as soon as we start challenging received orthodoxies around differentiation. And yet, in an educational climate in which Carol Dweck's concept of growth mindset has moved from the excitement of a new romance to comfortable cohabitation, we are still encountering rigid setting and in-class ability grouping. Hear that can of worms opening?

We want to challenge traditional classroom practice where children are rigidly grouped by ability and each group is given a different task. It's a massive, controversial topic and much of what we say will beg questions – questions to which we don't yet have the answers. But we want to provoke debate because many of the received orthodoxies of differentiation are eating up teachers' time without leading to the desired outcomes.

Exploring the depths

We are not suggesting that in every lesson all children should do the same thing in the same way. Some children have very lucky starts in life and arrive before us with advanced vocabularies, rich experiences, knowledge of basic story structures, and all the confidence in their ability to learn that these things inevitably bring. Others have had none of these things; some can barely speak on arrival in Foundation Stage. But when children from disadvantaged backgrounds are labelled Lower Ability (or, shudder, 'littlies') and placed in rigid ability groups, it presents a problem. Without cognitive challenge, how are these pupils ever to reach the golden 'nationally expected standard'? How often do we hear that 'the gap gets wider'?

An analogy with swimming clarifies. A class of children is required to swim 25 metres. Some can swim further already, and they need challenge: faster, further, different strokes. Others can't swim at all, but if they stay in the baby pool, they'll never develop the technique, stamina, or the courage to go out of their depth. Asking them to do so after years of paddling would be cruel.

In this example, differentiation by outcome is dangerous and some children may be put off for life! If these non-swimmers are to get to the expected 25m standard, they will need to experience the length and depth of the full pool – aided with floats, adults carrying poles they can grab, always being near the side, and so on. Some shallow-pool practice may help with technique, but we must limit decontextualised work: practice must be as similar to the desired outcome as possible.

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN ACCESS ACHIEVEMENT

1. In the development of comprehension, vocabulary and author technique, all children can work on the same book. Provide access by, for example, reading aloud to or with them, using drama, props and visuals to support understanding, and pre-teaching context and technical vocabulary where necessary. Greater depth of analysis can be planned for by having children make comparisons to texts by the same author or on a similar theme.

2. Inference is dependent on retrieval; don't separate the skills too much. Encourage rapid comprehenders to articulate their thought processes. This will help them as much as it helps those listening.

3. Research, plan and generate ideas in mixed groups – you don't know where the ideas and connections will come from, and the 'higher ability' writers won't always have the most creative thinking.

4. If children struggle with transcription, use technology to allow them to compose orally, then work on the transcription separately. This makes catch-up handwriting practice much more purposeful.

5. Edit / improve writing in supportive, mixed-ability pairs. If children read each other's work aloud, peer teaching and learning may occur.

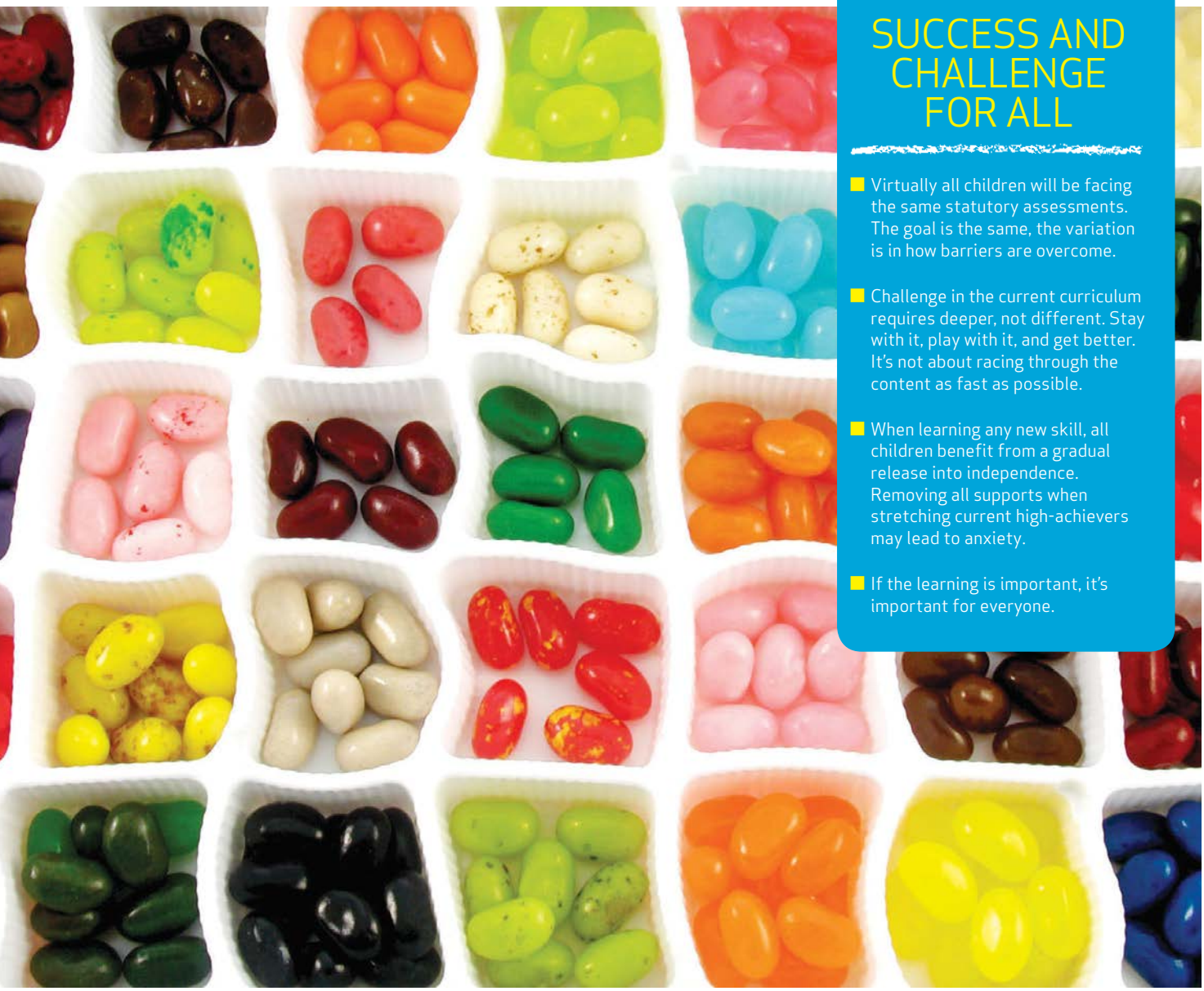
6. Use graphic organisers to support the scaffolding of ideas. Introduce choice (and options to adapt) as they become familiar with this way of working.

7. Make word banks accessible to all, not just the 'lower ability' writers. Encourage self-selection.

8. As far as possible, be flexible with pace. Some children can swim the 25m, but they may need longer to do it. This is no reason to keep them in the baby pool.

SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE FOR ALL

- Virtually all children will be facing the same statutory assessments. The goal is the same, the variation is in how barriers are overcome.
- Challenge in the current curriculum requires deeper, not different. Stay with it, play with it, and get better. It's not about racing through the content as fast as possible.
- When learning any new skill, all children benefit from a gradual release into independence. Removing all supports when stretching current high-achievers may lead to anxiety.
- If the learning is important, it's important for everyone.



Flexible, not rigid grouping

Ability grouping can also get in the way of collaboration, which is one of the most important strategies for learning and for success in life. If children are seated in ability groups, the opportunities for cooperative learning are likely to be much greater on some tables than others; it may also create a table that 'has to have an adult to do any work at all'. Why do they need to be together? What are they learning from one another?

On many occasions, mixed seating works well as it encourages peer learning (and teaching). At other times, it is useful to bring children with a similar need together for some brief, focused skill-teaching. Or we may assemble a group of current high achievers to go deeper, and then explain their new learning to the class. Flexible grouping would seem to be the solution.

Hidden abilities

This brings up the issue of what we really mean by 'high' or 'low ability'. In writing, for example, we have met 'low ability' children with terrible transcription, but whose compositional skills exceed age related expectations. Their classmates, on the other hand, with lovely handwriting and pedestrian composition, receive a higher level of expectation and challenge. A similar scenario is not uncommon in reading, where children with poor word reading but great comprehension find themselves switched off by basic books.

Let's redefine differentiation

The term 'differentiation' suggests 'different', and this is what we really want to challenge. What if, for those children whose experiences have been rich, we talked instead of *deepening* – through comparison, evaluation, and synthesis?

And for those children who have been less fortunate with their experiences so far, what if we talked about *access*? How will they access the swim, the story, the understanding? In maths, this has often been addressed through the use of multilink, number lines and other props. What might this look like in English?

If careful judgement is applied, differentiation by outcome may sometimes be appropriate. Let's give children the opportunity to surprise us.

CHRISTINE CHEN and **LINDSAY PICKTON** are primary education advisers supporting English development nationally.

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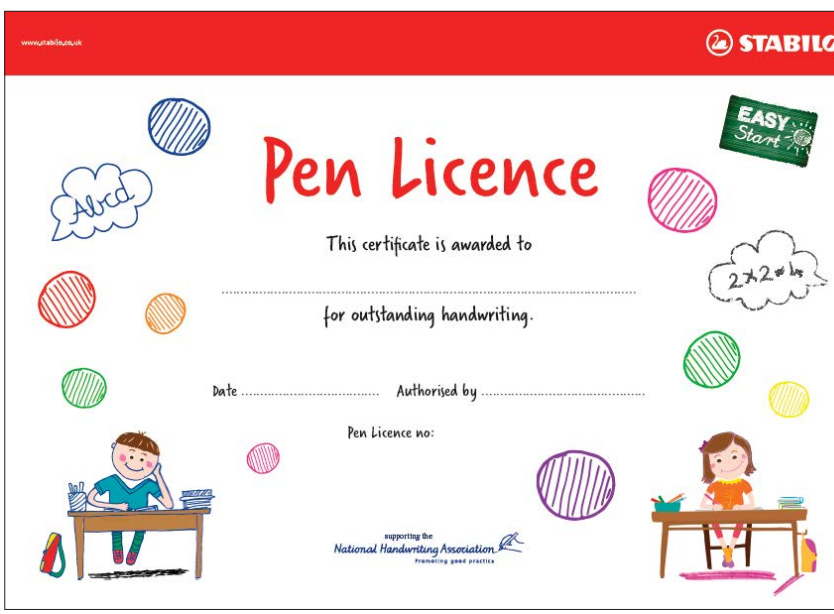

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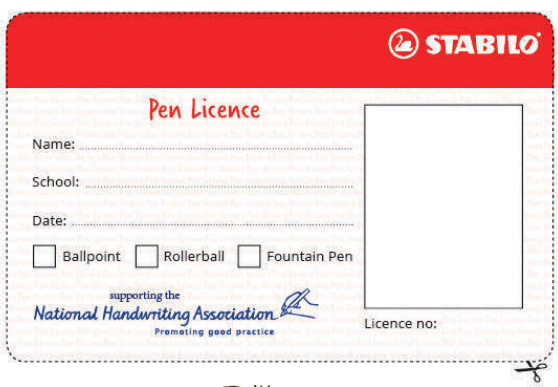

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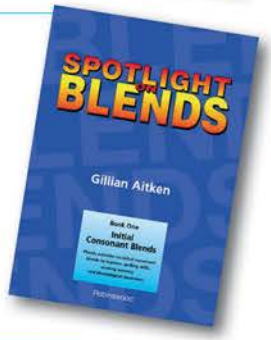

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Book topic
KS1/2

Billy & the MINPINS

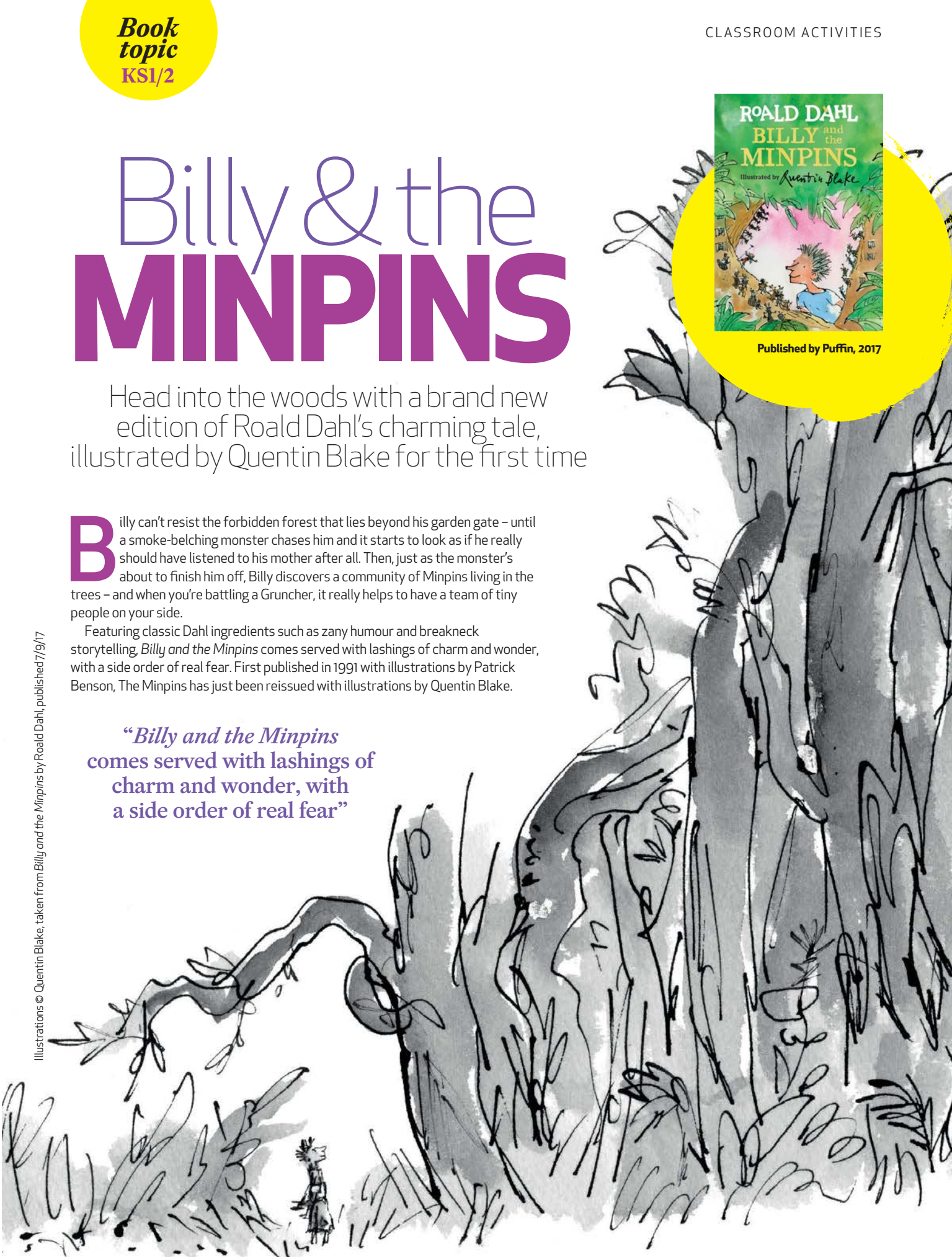
Published by Puffin, 2017

Head into the woods with a brand new edition of Roald Dahl's charming tale, illustrated by Quentin Blake for the first time

Billy can't resist the forbidden forest that lies beyond his garden gate – until a smoke-belching monster chases him and it starts to look as if he really should have listened to his mother after all. Then, just as the monster's about to finish him off, Billy discovers a community of Minpins living in the trees – and when you're battling a Gruncher, it really helps to have a team of tiny people on your side.

Featuring classic Dahl ingredients such as zany humour and breakneck storytelling, *Billy and the Minpins* comes served with lashings of charm and wonder, with a side order of real fear. First published in 1991 with illustrations by Patrick Benson, The Minpins has just been reissued with illustrations by Quentin Blake.

> "*Billy and the Minpins* comes served with lashings of charm and wonder, with a side order of real fear"



How to share the book

Billy and the Minpins isn't a long text, but you'll want to make the most of reading and discussing it, so give yourself plenty of time. What do your children think of the story? Does it remind them of anything? Talk about actions and motives, and how these relate to your children's own experiences.

"Little Billy's mother was always telling him… what he was allowed to do…"

Why do we have rules? Is it ever right to break a rule? How should children (and others) stay safe, and how can we look after each other?

"He saw a sight that froze his blood and made icicles in his veins…"

We're never told exactly what the Gruncher looks like, but there are clues. Use textual evidence to help you draw the terrifying beast. What makes a storybook monster frightening? Write about the most terrifying monster imaginable.

PHIZZ-WHIZZING FUN

When you've finished exploring Billy and the Minpins with your class, there are plenty of other free resources available to inspire topics based on Roald Dahl books. For instance, roalddahl.com now has a great set of activities for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory that covers PSHE and literacy.

"There were blackbirds and thrushes and skylarks and ravens…"

Go birdwatching in your local park. Record your observations and use them to create graphs and charts. Display alongside illustrations and informative writing, together with an account of what you did. If a Minpin could 'fly by bird' over your neighbourhood, what would they see? Look at maps and match with photographs taken locally. Create a class map, showing places of interest or importance to your children.

"You can't live in trees without suction boots…"

The Minpins use suction boots for walking up trees. Draw a diagram to show a pair of suction boots, labelled with features that make them effective – or design another piece of equipment for a Minpin. What might Minpins need to buy? Create a catalogue of products aimed at them. Include drawings, information and prices. Group children and give them a budget to spend on behalf of the Minpins. What will they choose, and why?

Take two illustrators

You'll need copies of both editions for this activity. Which scenes have the illustrators chosen to show us in each edition? What similarities do you notice between the illustrations, and what differences? Research Patrick Benson's technique (cross-hatching and watercolour, see **junomagazine.com/patrick-benson**) and Quentin Blake's (dip-pen, ink and lightbox: **quentinblake.com/about-drawing**), then write about what you've observed and learnt.

The Gruncher's POV

Pretend you're the Gruncher. Tell how you waited beneath the tree for the human boy, how hungry you were as you raced through the forest, and what happened when you fell into the lake.

"Swan... has agreed to become your personal private aeroplane…"

What it would be like to ride on a swan's back and where would you go? Remember, you can only go at night! Talk about what you can see, hear, feel, taste and touch. Make a list of words to describe the experience and use them to write a group poem.

"Sometimes mysteries are more intriguing than explanations…"

Where does the wind come from? Can birds talk? And could you have a conversation with them? Make a list of things you don't understand or can't explain. Can you find answers? How? And if you can't, is that a problem?

Choose a 'mystery' that can't be answered and imagine a solution. How many different solutions can your class come up with?

"We are the Minpins and we own this wood…"

Organise an expedition to survey some woodland for Minpin habitation. Sketch what you can see and list words to describe the landscape and experience of being outside. Collect leaves and twigs, and take photographs. Which trees, birds, animals and plants can you identify? Talk about the lie of the land, drainage, prevailing winds and how these might affect the Minpins' choice of home.

Group children and ask them to invent a Minpin family. What are their names and relationships? Invent details about each Minpin – likes, dislikes, occupations, ambitions, friendships, personalities – then ask each group to present their family to the class. Read aloud from the book as Billy is invited to observe the Minpins' homes. Pair children and give them card, scissors, sellotape and pencils. Use together with found objects such as twigs and leaves to construct a tiny house or dress a 'room space' for a Minpin. Photograph the results. Back in school, create reports and displays about these creations.

Loved this? Try these...

- *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton
- *The Little Grey Men* by B.B.
- *Danny the Champion of the World* by Roald Dahl
- *Jonathan Swift's Gulliver* retold by Martin Jenkins
- *Imelda and the Goblin King* by Briony May Smith

MORE BILLY IDEAS...

For more Billy and the Minpins ideas, download a special lesson plan pack from our website. It includes six lesson ideas covering literacy and art objectives and involves activities such as classroom debates, writing for a purpose and designing a poster. Areas of the curriculum covered include sentence starters, noun phrases and adjectives, among others. Find it at teachwire.net/school-books/roald-dahl

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT TEACHWIRE.NET

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle upon Tyne.

"Looking back, I feel jealous of nine or ten year old me..."

Holly Webster loves classic children's books so much, she's written sequels to two of her favourites

One of my strongest memories from school is getting into trouble for leaving a copy of *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* on the ground outside our classroom door. I'd been reading it, and then someone called me away to join a game, so I sensibly (I thought) left it ready to take inside later. I was banned from borrowing any more books from the class library, and I was devastated. Looking back, I do wonder if my teacher was cunningly trying to get me to stop reading and run around a bit more... it didn't really work. I read a lot as a child. It helped that my dad loved old books and our house was full of them. Plus we were lucky enough to have a local library that was nearby, and actually open.

When I was asked to write about my reading life and how I loved classic children's books so much that I'd written sequels to two books by Frances Hodgson Burnett, I was a bit worried that this was going to turn into one of those pieces – Ten Children's Classics That Everyone Must Read (and that you're not a proper reader if you haven't). It's not meant to be. There's a notion that classics are some sort of ultimate reading challenge – difficult and worthy and only for the very best readers. Of course many classic books are harder to read, due to unfamiliar vocabulary, and often a more formal writing style, but once you're past this these books are loved and passed down and celebrated just because they're so worth reading.

The books you really loved as a child stay with you always. I recently bought a new copy of *Theatre Shoes* by Noel Streatfeild (it was called *Curtain Up* when it was in my Christmas stocking when I was about nine) and discovered that my Puffin paperback must have been abridged. There were whole chunks that I'd never read before (the book was written in 1944, and the Puffin editors managed to remove most of the casual racism) and they jumped out at me. It made me realise how often I'd read the book, and how much I loved it.

The best thing is that so many of these books have something extra now that was never intended when they were written – they work as doors into an entirely different world. Not because they're fantasies (though so many brilliant ones are, think of Peter Pan, and the Narnia books) but because the everyday details from eighty or a hundred years ago are so very different from our own lives. *Theatre Shoes* is mainly about three children being sent to a theatre school (the same one that was made famous in *Ballet Shoes*) but it was written during World War Two, and set in London after the Blitz. The children have been living in the country, so they find wartime London very strange – but not nearly as strange and fascinating as a child reading the book now. Most of the houses in the London square the children move to are boarded up, or only half there.

Each of the empty houses has rusting cans of water on the doorstep, in case there's a fire. The children's school overalls have to be made out of blackout fabric, because it's the only cloth they can get that's not rationed. These details aren't vital to the story at all, but they can transport anyone reading into an eerily different world.

The two books I returned to most often as a child were written thirty years before *Theatre Shoes*, but I must have read them first at about the same time. Looking back, I feel jealous of nine or ten year old me, getting to read *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* without knowing what happens. It was actually terrifying, loving these books so much, to start writing a sequel. I never intended to – *Return to the Secret Garden* happened after a conversation with my editor about our favourite books. It was all her fault – I'd never have dared. But once she'd suggested it, the idea wouldn't go away. I loved the idea of taking new children, both characters and readers, to Misselthwaite Manor and the garden. I set it thirty years later, though, to let the dust settle. Then when I'd done it once, it was just so tempting to go back to *A Little Princess*. *The Princess and the Suffragette* is more of a direct sequel, but it's about Lottie, a supporting character from the original book. I loved getting to step back through that door, into the strange, stuffy, Edwardian world of Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies. It was such a fascinating time for girls to be growing up – I wanted to let a little fresh air into Lottie's life.

***The Princess and the Suffragette* by Holly Webb is published by Scholastic (priced £9.99).**

Black and white illustrations from Holly Webb's Furry Friends: Peril in Paris (illustrated by Clare Elsom)

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Cracking the academic code

Introducing them to formal and sophisticated language early can unlock long-term success for every child, insists **Alex Quigley**

How could a group of crossword puzzle champions save the world? Such a startling question has a very British answer, and it should inspire teachers everywhere. During WWII, at Bletchley Park, a collection of academics and other intelligent folk became ordinary heroes, busily decrypting German army messages and playing a pivotal role in the most destructive war the world has ever seen.

Today, as teachers, it is our role to help pupils become code breakers of a different sort. As children advance through primary school, they progressively move away from story-driven reading primarily based on action-filled lived experiences. What we read and how we write necessarily shifts to a more tricky, academic style. It is no surprise when students begin to struggle later in Key Stage 2, as the difficulty level increases steeply; and by the time they reach secondary school, they are expected to move between multiple, discrete disciplines in a single day. For many young people, the complexity of the very different academic codes they need to crack in order to achieve and thrive is frankly bewildering.

So, how can we help them? First, we need to understand the code ourselves. An academic text typically includes the following conventions:

- **Complex academic vocabulary**
Most of the difficult words used later in primary school and secondary school have Greek and Latin origins, like 'biosphere', 'biomass' and 'symbiotic' ('bio' comes from the Greek, meaning 'life'). The length and complexity of these words are built up with prefixes and suffixes.
- **Nominalisations and abstract nouns**
The words become harder and dense with meaning. Nominalisation is when verbs or adjectives become nouns, so 'sweating' shifts to 'perspiration'. Challenging, abstract ideas become more common, like 'gravity' and 'refraction' in science, or 'continuity' and 'causation' in history.
- **Long, multi-clausal sentences**
Sub-clauses are added to sentences to define things and ideas precisely. Longer sentences demand increased comprehension.
- **The passive voice and a formal style**
Academic writing is typically composed in the passive voice, moving away from concrete action to something a little trickier to grasp. It is made harder with the additions of discourse markers and other language features not used in daily talk.

Support strategies

With this in mind, here are strategies to help pupils 'code-switch' between everyday talk and its academic counterpart, and to support academic reading and writing.

1 Talk like a scientist

Nudge children to use vocabulary that is more academic by using words they don't quite know, explaining them, and so scaffolding their understanding. Respond to them by recasting their words with more academic terminology. For example, when a pupil says "food gives us the fuel to grow", reply with, "Ok – so human metabolism converts food into energy for growth". This daily boost to our academic talk can happen across the curriculum of course. Prompt thinking by nudging extended talk with discourse markers e.g. "there were no known cures for the plague. Consequently...".

2 Dig at the roots

Foster deep vocabulary knowledge by regularly foregrounding word roots and the history of those words. Words with common roots, for example, those describing the human body, like 'neuron' (nerve), 'carnem' (flesh), and 'psyche' (mind), offer us many opportunities for teaching and deepening our word knowledge.

3 Word building

By explicitly teaching prefixes and suffixes, we can help children develop 'word consciousness'. Using common prefixes like 'un', 're' and 'dis' can encourage a fun and creative engagement with words that proves a handy strategy for when children encounter new and complex academic words.

4 Develop debate

Everyday talk lacks an academic style. In contrast, by using methods like Socratic talk, or setting up formal debates using the 'Oxford rules' format, we can encourage research and reasoned talk in a style that encourages children to switch to the academic code.

5 Know and use the AWL

Averil Coxhead, in her 'Academic Word List' (AWL), has collated 570 crucial word families derived from over 3.5 million words from a range of university texts. It is the academic code! You can also scan texts online with the Nottingham University 'Academic Word Highlighter': http://bit.ly/2v3yoyu.

ALEX QUIGLEY is an English teacher, and author of 'The Confident Teacher' and the upcoming 'Closing the Vocabulary Gap'.

Find this year's winners at teachwire.net/fictionawards

Prize ideas FOR YOUR LIBRARY

Build a programme of events around the major children's book awards and your library will become the beating heart of your school, says **Nikki Gamble**

It's wonderful to see a renaissance taking place with school libraries. Neglected reading spaces – often taken over by IT suites – are being reinstated and loved again. Schools are investing in books, and teachers are devising creative plans to make the library an inviting space.

The reward is the visible delight on children's faces when these inspiring spaces are opened to them. However, it is easy to be swept along by the initial excitement. Development has to be ongoing – it's not enough for the library to be visually attractive, it has to be a living, breathing space where stock is replaced and pupils are involved in caring for it.

After an initial outlay, funds may be tight, so replenishing stock needs to be strategic. One approach I have used successfully with several schools is to put in place an annual programme structured around the major book prizes. There are three advantages to working in this way:

- Prize shortlists are constructed after a rigorous process, which means you can be confident of purchasing high-quality books for your readers
- Each prize affords opportunities to refresh the displays in your library, creating interest all year round. Many of the prize organisers produce resources that you can use for display
- You can engage pupils from the announcement of the shortlist through to the final award ceremony, setting up shadowing groups, making space for peer-to-peer recommendations, contributing to the award websites, and having your own school vote.

If you think you'd like to try this approach, I've put together a list my favourite awards that you can include in your plans.

Young People's Book Prize

What's it about?
Run by the Royal Society, this prize aims to inspire young people to read about science and promotes the writing of excellent, accessible science books for under 14s.

When is it?
Shortlisting takes place in May and the prize is awarded in November, making this a good prize to focus on at the beginning of the school year.

Something to try
Take the opportunity to spotlight the science section in the library. For instance, you could put up a display about famous women in science, or create some themed mobiles displaying your classification system to help develop research skills. And check the science

section to see if you have any gaps that need plugging.

Information Book Award

What's it about?

Administered by the School Library Association, this prize celebrates the very best in non-fiction publishing across all subjects. It has both an under seven category and a 7–11 category.

When is it?

Shortlisting takes place in May and the awards are presented in November, so this is another good prize to feature in the first half of the autumn term.

Something to try

The announcement of this award coincides with Non-fiction November, so it's the perfect opportunity to have a non-fiction focus in the library. Encourage children to read a non-fiction book during this month and design and print some response sheets for them to complete in the library. Questions might include – what made you choose this book? Did you learn anything new from reading it? Can you find books for the subjects that interest you? The response sheets can be used to inform your purchasing strategy.

The Lollies

What's it about?

The Lollies (or Laugh Out Loud Awards) came about after Michael Rosen noticed a distinct lack of funny books on the shortlists for major book awards, and decided something had to be done about it. After all, humour is consistently voted as a top reading preference for children in reading surveys.

When is it?

There's a long lead in time from the announcement of the shortlist in June to the award ceremony in January, giving children ample opportunity to read and vote for their favourite books on the Lollies website. A focus on this prize fits nicely into the second half of the Autumn term.

Something to try

Have children conduct a survey about the books that make people laugh. Do we all laugh at the same things? Make a display of funny books with readers' recommendations. Reproduce some funny quotations from the shortlisted books and display them.

The Kate Greenaway Medal

What's it about?

One of the most prestigious awards and companion to the Carnegie Medal, The Kate Greenaway Medal recognises distinguished illustration in books for children. The winning book can be from any genre: picture book, fiction or non-fiction.

When is it?

The shortlists are published in March and the announcement of the winning book is made in June, so it's a spring / early summer focus for this prize.

Something to try

Celebrate the importance of drawing as a means of nurturing creativity and developing the power of imagination. Invite local illustrators into school (and not just those who illustrate children's books). Set up a 'doodle-a-day book', display it in the library and invite visitors to draw on its pages. Start a new spread each day of the week. Read Anthony Browne's *Playing the Shape Game*, then organise a lunchtime Shape Game session in the library.

CLiPPA

What's it about?

This is the only award specifically for published poetry for children. There's just one category, so you may find some of the books are not suitable for primary.

When is it?

This is another summer prize. The books are shortlisted in May and the awards are presented at the National Theatre in July.

Something to try

Poetry is often poorly served and displayed in the primary school library. Consider moving it to somewhere prominent. If poetry is put on show, children will pick it up and read it. Have a Poetry Bookmark making session in the library, where pupils decorate plain bookmarks with favourite lines from the shortlisted collections, and organise a lunchtime poetry performance session.

HOW TO CREATE A BUZZ AROUND BOOK PRIZES

1 Have multiple copies of the books available to encourage peer-to-peer recommendation and create a buzz around the school.

2 Feature shortlisted authors. Create author displays and include backlist titles alongside the shortlisted book.

3 Organise a book assembly. Introduce the shortlisted books and then display them prominently in the library. Watch them fly!

4 Have a ballot box in the library so children can vote for their favourites on the shortlists.

5 Run a shadowing book group where the shortlisted books are read and discussed.

NIKKI GAMBLE is Director of Just Imagine, centre for excellence in reading, author of *Exploring Children's Literature* (Sage:2013) and co-author of *Guiding Readers: layers of meaning* (UCL:2016)

Someone else's SHOES

Drama is about far more than acting. With the right activities, we can help children understand texts in more detail than ever before, says **Ian Eagleton**

As a shy child, drama helped my self confidence immensely. I attended a drama club every week where I could perform, read scripts, improvise, play games and, for a brief moment, become someone else. Indeed, educators such as professor Ruth Heinig talk about how drama can act as a vehicle allowing children to explore new roles so that 'they see themselves in a new light, with an inner strength they never knew they had".

Primary school drama has often been associated with the Christmas play, and 'hot-seating' and 'freeze frame' activities. These strategies, whilst having benefits, often lead to a superficial understanding of a text. Children are encouraged to perform the text rather than explore the multiple meanings and interpretations that more detailed follow-up work can elicit.

Drama can be more than putting on a play, doesn't have to involve time consuming rehearsal, and can be used to support every aspect of the new English curriculum. It can promote a love of language and literacy, benefit children's fluency and expression when reading, as well as developing oracy, listening skills and social interaction.

So how can we develop a range of strategies and activities that use drama as an inspiring platform to develop empathy, inference and deduction skills, fluency and expression – as a tool for making and presenting meaning?

Text-edged drama (Wolf, 2004) is one way. Children start with a text (a book, play, picture book, object or film clip) and explore it. Rather than just performing it, they elaborate upon it, thinking carefully about the text's context and how it reflects various roles and people's social standing. It is essential that a 'critical space' is developed where children can perform, debrief and discuss their ideas. The teacher should not be too domineering and the role of a character should not be assigned to one child – it is everyone's responsibility to investigate and discover.

> **"Drama can be more than putting on a play, doesn't have to involve time-consuming rehearsal, and can be used to support every aspect of the new English curriculum..."**

There are a number of strategies to support this, which can be used as a starting point for investigating a text in more detail.

Positioning and status

This strategy allows children to understand the relationships between the characters they are studying and explore themes of power and status. Ask the children to think of a scale from one to 10, one being the lowest, to reflect a character's status. Ask the children to think of a quote for the character. For example, if studying the relationship between Caliban and Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest, you may choose Caliban's famous retort:

"YOU TAUGHT ME LANGUAGE, AND MY PROFIT ON 'T IS I KNOW HOW TO CURSE."

How might Caliban speak if he had a status of one? Would he be hunched over, nervous and quiet? How might this differ from a status of 10? How would he show

PLAYING AROUND

Three more ways drama can enrich children's understanding of a text...

• FOLLOW MY LEADER

Great for getting children immersed in a setting! Working in pairs, one child is blindfolded as the other leads them around the room which they imagine is a scene from a story or film, describing everything they can see, hear, touch and smell.

• WHOOSH!

This fun, engaging activity helps children sequence events in a story. A narrator stands in the middle of a circle and re-tells a story. The children (sat around the narrator) are tapped on the shoulder during the narration and become the characters, places, objects and actions. When the narrator says, 'Whoosh!' everyone sits down and the scene is cleared to start again.

• CONSCIENCE ALLEY

This 'thought tunnel' can help children develop prediction skills, understand the perspectives of other characters, listen to differing views and evaluate problems faced by a character. Choose a dilemma from a story. For example, in *The Girl of Ink and Stars* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave, the heroine Isabella is faced with a decision – should she stay with her good friend Lupe or venture further into the cave to defeat a terrible beast?

Split the children into two groups: for and against. One child walks down the tunnel as Isabella, listening to all the reasons she either should or shouldn't leave Lupe and fight the monster. When the child reaches the end of the alley, they must decide what they would do if they were Isabella and faced with this crisis.

"Children become emotionally involved with the characters, settings, stories and relationships"

his confidence and power? How would he move? What would his body language be like? How might Prospero react?

Overheard conversations

This activity can help children understand how a character might be feeling and how they might explain an event in the story or their own actions to another character. Children work in pairs to create and exchange conversations that are not part of the text. For example, one child may be in character as the bear from *The Bear and the Piano* by David Litchfield and another as the girl who encourages the bear to leave the woods and play in front of hundreds of people. They may discuss their plans, the girl could encourage the bear to come with her and the bear may voice his concerns about leaving the other animals. These conversations do not have to be between main characters. Children could imagine they are minor characters, which will challenge them to think about how these characters might feel about an event and the impact upon a wider group of people.

Front stage / back stage

Goffman (1959) theorised that we have front and back stage personas and present ourselves accordingly. 'Front stage' refers to how we present ourselves when people are watching us and is shaped by what is socially acceptable. 'Back stage' refers to what we do when we think no one is watching. Using this idea, ask the children to imagine a character is being interviewed (the Big Bad Wolf can be an interesting character). Ask them to verbalise his 'front stage' thoughts – why did he chase Red Riding Hood? Maybe the wolf's 'front stage' answers make him appear mean and angry? Now, using his 'back stage' persona, ask the same questions. Are the wolf's reasons for being bad different? Is he lonely? Was it an accident? Is he really kind, but pressured by the rest of his pack?

Using a variety of drama strategies can help children become emotionally involved with the characters, settings, stories and relationships and can mean they become physically connected to a range of high-quality texts.

IAN EAGLETON currently teaches in Y2, provides consultancy specialising in drama, reading and writing, and works with The Literacy Shed. You can follow him on Twitter @ieconsultancy

Risk writing with your CLASS

The creative process is full of hesitancy, crossings out and false starts, so why not show pupils this applies to you as much as it does to them?

Do you see yourself as a writer? Do you choose to write in your own time and take delight in blogging, tweeting, writing poetry or fiction, keeping a diary or sending good old-fashioned letters? Perhaps your writing is less personally and more professionally focused – dominated by lesson planning, responding to emails, commenting on children's work and the like? Either way, you *are* a writer. You are thinking and communicating on page or screen, informing or organising (yourself or others), and seeking perhaps to persuade, to influence, to inspire or entertain. Regardless of text type or length, all writers all have to make choices and consider their purpose, form and audience – however fleetingly.

I wonder, do you think the children see you as a writer? Perhaps you already compose spontaneously in front of the whole class and write alongside children undertaking the same work, following this through to a final draft before publication? If you don't engage authentically as a writer in your classroom, why not consider giving it a go? There's a lot you can learn from being 'inside the process'. It's easier of course to prepare that cinquain

or short story opening in the privacy of your own home the night before, with coffee, biscuits and TV breaks to oil your imaginative wheels! But why not challenge yourself – risk joining in the pre-writing activities in class, then turn to the flip chart and compose live? Your false starts, hesitancy, crossings out and constant iterative re-workings will reveal the emergent nature of your thinking as you write – despite detailed plans, we often find out what we want to say as we start to write it. Later, why not also settle down in a group and write alongside the children as a fellow writer? If you do you'll be a teacher *and* a writer, and in a better position to use your personal experience of writing and being a writer to enhance your teaching.

Yes, you're a writer

The project Teachers as Writers (TAW) (2015-2017) explored these dual roles of writer and teacher and considered the classroom consequences. It was fascinating. A partnership between Arvon, the Open University and the University of Exeter, and funded by Arts Council England, the project offered 16 teachers the opportunity to participate in a week's residential writing retreat and to work with professional writers on CPD days and in school. It also documented the impact of this collaboration on the teachers' identities as writers, on their classroom practice and on the young people's motivation and engagement as writers.

At the start of the research many teachers didn't see themselves as writers, including one who'd kept a daily diary for nearly 20 years! Like many of her colleagues she saw 'writers' as published novelists, poets, playwrights or journalists, not 'just everyday writers' (the comparatively disparaging label she applied to herself). Many teachers lacked confidence and initially avoided voicing their writing in the group; sharing represented a significant hurdle. They were intensely worried about the possible value judgements of others, both their colleagues and the tutors. But as the project found, even very experienced professional writers worry about their writing, and are sometimes fearful of being exposed or found wanting in some way.

Many children also express low self-esteem as writers, citing their inability to write neatly, to spell or to punctuate well; and voicing less than positive attitudes towards the whole process. In the current accountability culture the young are also likely to be concerned about whether their writing includes the 'non-negotiables' demanded by the system. That is if they care about reaching the 'expected standard'! Some novice writers appear disaffected and disengaged; perhaps they are merely playing the school game called 'writing', and learning to view themselves as passive producers of texts for teachers, not creative composers of their own meanings

In the TAW project, the tutors, Steve Voake and Alicia Stubbersfield, responded sensitively to the teachers' vulnerabilities and built an atmosphere of nascent trust and security at Arvon. Critically, they showed interest in the writers and their writing; they listened to the life experiences that often lay behind teachers' words and ideas, and responded as humans first and as writing tutors second. The informal 'shoes off' atmosphere was very supportive and gradually teachers' authorial voices were heard, their intended meanings discussed, and a community of writers developed before our eyes. This involved everyone, (including the tutors) in reading, discussion, writing, sharing, praise, critique, publication and celebration.

> "Even very experienced professional writers worry about their writing, and are sometimes fearful of being exposed or found wanting..."

What were the results?

Back in the classroom, the teachers tried to create the Arvon ethos, they developed a more relaxed time and space for children to 'Just Write' (freewrite), to share and discuss their work and to find their voices through this process. Many set up 'Just Write' notebooks which were not assessed (and became very popular), and they offered children greater choice over topic and form. In doing so they slackened the writing reins and let the young authors free.

These shifts in pedagogy paid dividends; young people reported considerably enhanced enjoyment and engagement; an increased sense of ownership; greater awareness of aspects of the writing process and more confidence as writers. They attributed their gains in confidence to more interactive and collaborative approaches to text development and improvement, whereby ideas and writing were shared and discussed at formative stages (just as at Arvon). They also identified approaches that helped strengthen their sense of authorial agency and self-assurance, which included teachers who shared their own writing and writing insecurities.

Whilst you may not have been on a writing retreat, you could take up the Teachers as Writers challenge and seek to expand your own understanding about writing and being a writer. Go on – recognise yourself as a writer, write alongside the children in your classroom and build a new community of writers. What's stopping you?

WHY NOT TRY?

- Making more time and space to 'Just Write'
- Writing alongside students, sharing your struggles
- Spending more time on editing and revisions
- Developing children's autonomy as writers
- Exploring the personal dimension of writing and drawing on life experience

Teachers as Writers

For the Executive Summary of Teachers as Writers, see arvon.org/schoolsandgroups/teachers-as-writers/

PROFESSOR TERESA CREMIN is a Professor of Education (Literacy) at The Open University in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies.

Were the 2017 SATs REALLY EASIER?

By unpicking the last two years' tests, we can help prepare children for any challenge yet to come, says **Penny Slater**

It would seem that we are in agreement (a rare occurrence in the education sector these days): this year's KS2 reading paper was, for want of a better word, easier.

We could leave it there, and simply hope that next year's offering is equally as pleasing, but from a teaching perspective, it would be helpful to take this opportunity to hone our understanding of what makes a reading challenge just that… *challenging*; and by contrast, what makes a reading task more accessible. With this knowledge, we might be able to shore up our teaching so that, going forward, our children are able to ride the wave of a more challenging test if and when it comes their way.

For this, we can begin by comparing the challenge of the two most recent KS2 reading papers: 2016 and 2017.

The first text offering in 2017 was *Gaby to the rescue*. My analysis would suggest that, in many respects, this was actually more challenging than the equivalent 2016 offering, *The Lost Queen*. For a start, it was considerably longer, thus demanding more stamina from our young readers. The 2017 text also boasted the longest sentence, outdoing its 2016 counterpart by 13 words. I would argue, too, that the grammatical complexity of the sentences was heightened in 2017, with there being a lower proportion of single clause sentences in *Gaby to the Rescue*, compared to *The Lost Queen*. The challenge continues: in 2017 there was a greater variety of verb forms; a greater use of pronouns and a considerably greater number of multi-clause sentences. However, we all agree that it *felt* easier…

Part of this is surely because, this year, we knew what we were in for. No doubt, the children who successfully navigated this year's test had been well prepared with a diet of top-notch, high-quality, challenging literature which, over time, had acclimatised them to the potential challenge of the texts they would be facing.

However, in addition to the fact that we may have been better prepared for this year's test, there are some key differences between the 2016 and 2017 papers to which we could also attribute this prevalent sense of relative ease. These being, from my analysis, *word familiarity, word complexity* and *familiarity of content*.

Conclusion 1: Reading is easier if children are familiar with the context

The first texts from the last two papers present this point perfectly. The impression the children may have got on first perusal of the 2017 text was one of familiarity: here is a story, they may have thought, to which I can relate. And, no doubt, when they began to get stuck into the reading material, that feeling grew for most children – cats getting stuck up trees, money worries, not wanting to ruin clothes, water fights. All these notions are well served by the day-to-day experience of a large number of 11-year-olds.

Rewind a year and we have a stark comparison. In order to feel at home with the first text from 2016, it would have helped to have some familiarity with the following notions: garden parties, houses with large grounds (including lakes with islands), adventures without adult supervision (on a lake… with no life jackets!), family crests, aristocratic traditions. Not your daily topics of conversation for the vast majority of children, you will most likely agree.

Conclusion 2: Reading is easier if the words are more commonplace

With this in mind, my analysis would suggest that a large proportion of the words from the first text in 2016 would have presented a significant challenge to most children. For evidence to support this claim, we can turn to the Children's Printed Word Database (created by Materson et al), which records

the frequency of words used across a huge range of children's literature. This tells us that despite being avid readers of good quality, age-appropriate literature, children are unlikely to regularly (or even occasionally) encounter the words *shallows*, *monuments* and *ancestors*, and many more examples from *The Lost Queen* may have only fleetingly crossed their vocabulary radar. Conversely, all of the concrete nouns listed in the first 100 words of the 2017 text are logged in the database.

Conclusion 3: Reading is easier if the words are grammatically less complex

Not only did this year's text contain a great deal fewer conceptually challenging words than the 2016 test, the words were structurally less problematic. To expand on this point, there were comparatively more words in the 2016 text that contained two or more morphemes, meaning that children were battling multi-layered words in quick succession. Each morpheme within a word – be it a prefix or suffix, or on many occasions, both – presented yet another linguistic hurdle. It would seem that these hurdles were too closely placed, or too high, for many of the 2016 cohort.

So, to summarise, this year's texts were challenging, no doubt about it. However, they may have felt considerably less challenging because: 1) teachers had successfully prepared children for the heightened challenge based on their knowledge and understanding of the 2016 test, and 2) the 2017 texts were easier in several aspects, and most crucially, those aspects that matter most for allowing young readers to feel confident when tackling a reading task.

Herts for Learning Ltd (hertsforlearning.co.uk), where Penny Slater is Deputy Lead Adviser for English, is the UK's largest schools' company and provides school improvement and business support services to schools, academies and educational settings.

SO, WHAT NOW?

RESPONDING TO THE SATS TESTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Now that we have an inkling of where the challenge (or lack of it) lies, we can use this information constructively back in the classroom to develop our teaching. Specifically, we need to keep up the good work in presenting children with great texts that also offer a good level of grammatical and syntactic challenge – clearly this is working! But, in addition, we need to seek out great texts that present children with the kind of challenge that we know makes reading trickier. I am referring to texts that...

- Place children in a different time and place – a million miles away from their own lives;
- Present them with words outside of their current vocabulary range;
- Use multi-syllabic and morphemically complex words for purpose and effect.

Then we need to find ways to encourage our weakest readers to relish the challenge that these texts provide. Easier said than done, no doubt – but a worthy challenge, nonetheless.

PENNY SLATER is Deputy Lead Adviser for primary English at Herts for Learning.

You'll never MARK FASTER

Fed up with marking against lists of exacting criteria? Just pick your favourite stories and take the rest of the day off, says **Jon Brunskill**...

I'd like you to close your eyes for a moment and think back to every piece of writing that the children in your class did for you last year. All of the stories, the setting descriptions, the information texts. Now I have a simple question: out of all of that writing, which piece was the best?

It's not a simple question, of course. Daniel Hahn, one of the judges of the International Man Booker Prize, believes that what makes a 'good' book is "a book that has found the unimprovable form of expression for itself." Although perhaps not on the same scale, each time we read a set of stories written by our children, I like to think of teachers as mini Man Booker judges.

My favourite piece from last year – the story to which I would award the mini Man Booker prize – was a narrative based on the Apollo 11 moon landing, written by a child in year two. Notice how I said "my favourite" piece of writing. There appears to be something hopelessly subjective about choosing the best writing in your class. And is this the same as 'securing age-related expectations'? What makes good writing, well, 'good'?

Playing favourites

The orthodoxy is for teachers to have a checklist of criteria against which they judge each piece of writing, before plonking the child responsible into the corresponding band or level. There is a great deal wrong with this approach, which I won't get into here. Suffice to say that 'criterion-based' assessment is unreliable (people don't agree) and invalid (it doesn't identify 'good' writers or writing). The new interim assessment framework suffers from same problems that national curriculum levels did, and most new assessment systems do too.

Whilst wrestling with these problems, I stumbled across an innovative and radical approach to assessing writing that claimed to evade these flaws. Known as 'comparative judgement', it relies on a single piece of criteria: which is the best piece of writing?.

Aided by a website called No More Marking, the work of an entire class is electronically scanned, and then two pieces of writing are displayed side by side. The teacher then simply clicks on which piece of writing they deem to be the better piece. No criteria, no tick boxes, just the simple question that we're really interested in: which is better? Instead of judging against criteria, we are judging against another piece of writing – something humans are naturally good at.

More and more pairs of writing pop up, and teachers complete a few hundred judgements for each class, which takes around an hour or so. At the end of this process, an algorithm is used to rank all of the children's work from best to worst, assigning a standardised score to each child (we set ours at 85-115 to marry with the KS1 scores following the SATs).

The gamification of assessment made the whole process very addictive, and teachers were especially keen to learn and improve their 'infit' score, which tells them how consistently they are judging against themselves. The process had the added benefit of taking a fraction of the time compared with levelling each child's work and then moderating these judgements across the year group.

Surprisingly consistent

Is it really possible to agree on which writing is better, though? After judging the Pulitzer Prize, Michael Cunningham wrote that "Utter objectivity is not only impossible when judging literature, it's not exactly desirable. Fiction involves trace elements of magic. It works for reasons we can explain, and also for reasons we can't." It may be surprising, then, that the reliability of comparative judgement is so high; teachers consistently agree on the ranking over 90 per cent of the time. Although we may not be able to articulate why, we have an implicit gauge of what makes good writing.

We enjoyed the same high levels of reliability during our experimentation with the scheme last year. This continued even when we invited other schools to submit work so that we could judge a much larger sample of

> "Fiction involves trace elements of magic. It works for reasons we can explain, and also for reasons we can't"

abilities. The final results gave us an insight into how our kids stack up against kids in other schools, crucial information to which we were previously blind. Coordinating across the schools was a bit of a pain but, thankfully, No More Marking has launched a 'sharing standards' tool on its website for this coming year which automatically compares your children's writing against kids from schools across the country.

But what about next steps?

Although we were delighted with the data that comparative judgement (or CJ, as the cool kids now refer to it) was giving us, we did wrestle with the 'now what' questions.

For all its flaws, criterion-based referencing does give a teachers a clear roadmap of next steps or targets for children. We have addressed this by asking our children to take part in the CJ process themselves.

Following the judging, we display two pieces of real writing and ask the children which they think was judged to be better piece, and why. Such an approach transcends the tick-box approach. Piece A and B may both include expanded noun phrases, but the description in B is more precise and visceral ('the rusting, blood-soaked dagger'), whereas 'the incredible, wonderful door' in A makes little sense.

It is my hope that in the future No More Marking publishes exemplar pieces from each year group to give teachers a clearer idea of what good writing looks like across different genres for different year groups. I know that I would find top, middle and bottom exemplar year 4 stories infinitely more useful than a list of criteria which, to be honest, looks very similar to the criteria used by years 3 and 5.

Of course, the elephant has not left the room. Statutory assessment remains stubbornly criterion based. It would be tempting to continue to fall into line, but we have made the choice to do the right thing, not the easy thing. We want to focus on great writing, and helping our children produce it. In this endeavour, CJ has transformed the way that we think about writing at our school. Could it do the same for you?

JON BRUNSKILL is the Head of Curriculum and a Year Four teacher at Reach Academy Feltham. You can follow him on twitter @jon_brunskill

Wickedly good WRITING

Entering a national competition en masse has produced some surprising outcomes for the children at Garstang Primary School, says deputy head **Suzanne Thomas**

Like many primary schools around the country, writing is one of our school improvement priorities. And just like for many other schools, the focus is on boys. We have introduced spelling and handwriting schemes of work, along with fabulous strategies such as Talk for Writing, each of which has helped us to steadily improve achievement in writing at our school. However, we are always looking for further ways to improve, so when a colleague spotted the Wicked Young Writer Awards competition, we decided we would enter en masse.

At first we saw the competition as a springboard to raise the profile of writing. At our school, enjoyment and pleasure are at the heart of our reading curriculum, yet it is 'purpose' rather than pleasure that has traditionally been the reason we give for writing. The competition was one way of redressing this balance, as The Wicked Young Writer Awards encourage young people to write about the things that are important to them. They are able to write in any form they choose (prose, poetry or nonfiction); and there is a maximum word limit but no minimum – a factor that gave our pupils even more freedom. In addition, we saw this as an opportunity to get parents involved. Our homework policy includes asking pupils to complete a themed, creative project four times per year. We decided that the Wicked Young Writer Awards could be one of these homework topics. Creative and independent, applying skills learned in school? It was absolutely perfect.

An author's life

For the competition our pupils were given complete artistic freedom. After a 'wow' start, they began the process at school. We used the resources on the website to inspire and ignite ideas, including a video of Cressida Cowell explaining what inspired her to become a writer; they were powerful tools.

Through the process, our pupils gained some insight into the lives of authors – they were given timescales, had a variety of editors (peers, teachers and parents) and were given lots of feedback. Over a six-week period we set a number of deadlines: start at school; go home and write your first draft; bring it back to school for feedback and editing before taking it back home to write the finished piece. Due to the nature of the project, we were able to do away with curriculum-led success criteria and instead we developed a set of feedback forms for the children to use together. Rather than judging each other's work on how many fronted adverbials were present, learners gave their feedback based on their enjoyment and understanding of each other's

writing. And as it happens, our pupils have become so aware of language features, they did challenge each other about sentence structures, language choices and the depth of description, too.

Unexpected excellence

This was a hugely empowering process for some of our pupils. A boy in Year 6, who would not go on to achieve the expected standard for end of Key Stage 2, nevertheless produced a wonderful story titled 'The Night of the Werewolves'. In it he described the effect of the moonlight 'slowly crawling into the mouths and eyes' of bystanders 'seeping into their bodies which started to shift and change shape'. Here was a boy clearly thrilled with the power he could wield through his pen.

Another of our pupils wrote to a fictional penpal in a compelling letter, titled 'My Old House'. It begins, 'You asked me to describe my old house…' She goes on to describe 'Mummy's office next to the kitchen where Daddy used to sneakily watch the rugby' and the 'chives which grew next to the compost heap' that she and her sister used to munch secretly. This child, a girl in Year 3, had told me of her sadness of leaving her old house. What occurred to me at this point was, had we not entered this competition, she may never have produced this wonderful piece of writing at all – there certainly wasn't scope for it within the Year 3 curriculum. It was hugely personal and powerful. How many other pieces were written that would never otherwise have been conceived? It is impossible to say.

A spectacular success

Five of our pupils, all in the 5-7 age range, were selected as competition finalists. The fact that we had so many successful pupils has been an inspiration and our entry in the competition has begun to create its own momentum. Chatting to the mother of one finalist on the school carpark, I asked her if her son had always been a keen writer. 'No,' was her surprised reply. In fact, his success in the competition had inspired him to write more. She told me that he'd already written a sequel and, what's more, he is already working on two possible titles for his entry next year. I can now see that the competition itself is beginning to create its own positive feedback loop.

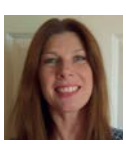
Looking back, we entered the competition because we thought it would be fun, a valuable project and would raise the profile of writing for enjoyment. What I can see now is that the process itself has given value to our children's own writing, whether or not they meet every criteria on the Interim Assessment Framework. It also has given our pupils a taste of the real publishing world – getting the views of others on your writing, editing and meeting deadlines. And finally, the children who were selected as finalists were not necessarily those whom we'd have predicted as our best writers, showing all of us the power of freedom of expression and the value of creativity.

CREATIVE LICENCE

Follow these tips for running your own Writing for Enjoyment event:

- Make it fun
- Get all the staff involved and use some of the great writing workshop ideas online (such as Wicked Young Writer Awards, Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing)
- Get parents involved, but discourage them from 'doing' the writing for their child
- Use social media to engage parents, publicise your writing event, remind everyone of deadlines, and celebrate every success
- Throw off the constraints of curriculum-led targets – let the children write just for the sheer joy of it
- Show your pupils that they are real authors by getting them to respond to feedback from lots of different people – adults and children alike
- Give your pupils freedom to write about anything they like, in any form they choose and show them that you value the subjects they choose
- Include everyone

Find out more about the Wicked Young Writer awards at www.wickedyoungwriterawards.com



SUZANNE THOMAS is deputy head at Garstang Primary School

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The inspiration BUSINESS

Rigid assessment frameworks risk crushing genuine creativity and flair in children's writing, warns **Ros Wilson** – why are we letting it happen?

'Inspiring divine influence, especially that which is thought to prompt poets etc... Thought etc. that is inspired, prompting; sudden brilliant or timely idea.'
(Concise Oxford Dictionary)

The dictionary does not actually adequately define the word 'inspiration' (or inspirational), other than attributing it to divine intervention. It should be noted, by the way, that the above quotes were copied verbatim – meaning that the Concise Oxford Dictionary has failed the 2017 ITAF (assessment of eleven-year olds' writing) due to a lack of accuracy in use of the semi-colon.

Inspired writers are not born, they are made. Of course, they must have the potential within them to produce exceptional work, but there is no recorded instance of a child becoming a great author without the outside influence of a parent or other adult or adults, and/or the love of reading and literature. Today, then, it is the role of the teacher to represent that 'divine intervention' for all children in primary mainstream education – to induce them to become inspired and inspirational writers in order to be 'secondary ready'... *or is it?*

Children jumping through the hoops of a technical grammar test with bizarre secret rules and test markers who clearly do not all understand grammar themselves (and why would they? It is a minefield that only the most dedicated linguist could pass through safely), and producing writing that evidences the required three examples of colons, semi-colons, passive voice and modal verbs, all used correctly, have far too much on their minds to worry about 'inspiring' their readers. What's their motivation? After all, there is nothing in the ITAF that requires them to be inspirational, or even to make sense. The last three years have led to the crushing of the eleven-year-old impassioned and inspirational, natural writer. In most schools, children's 'first drafts' are a mechanistic process to be gone through before they re-write, edit, are advised, study models and re-write again, until that piece no longer resembles or reflects the ability of the child.

Just say 'no'

For three years we have accepted this, grumbling and complaining, but still conforming… driven by goodness knows what, but at least partly by fear of the personal consequences of not doing so.

But this year, in one state school, for the very first time, one brave head teacher cried, 'Enough!'. Having read the Inter-Party Committee report that stated, uncategorically, that the current tests were 'not fit for purpose', she and the Governing Body of the school – in consultation with all parents – examined the evidence, studied the history, evaluated the historic emotional stress and impact on their pupils and the school and finally came to a radical decision: they would refuse to administer the tests.

Little London Primary School is in the deep inner-city of Leeds and is in the top 10% of most deprived areas in the country. It supports children with 77 different languages, with 82% of pupils having English as an additional language. Many youngsters enter the school speaking no English at all. Jill Wood – the head – and her team are passionate and inspirational teachers. Behaviour and manners are outstanding and the curriculum is rich and diverse. Having been in post for twelve years, Jill decided that she would not 'close down' the curriculum and rich learning experiences for children, only to see them stressed and often tearful as they struggled with cramming and swotting for significantly flawed tests.

I have visited this school. The ethos is all-pervasive and the amazing progress that the children make in its nurturing yet highly aspirational environment is phenomenal. This decision was, in my opinion, the correct choice for these children at this time. Pupils in this school are certainly inspired and passionate about their work, as the following examples of their writing (first drafts, unedited, spelling and punctuation reproduced exactly) demonstrate:

"One hot summer's day I was shopping in a book shop. I found a lovely book about castles. I touched the first page and it took me back to Medieval times.
I found myself on top of the drawbridge of a huge, amazing castle."
(Y2 pupil, EAL, Arabic)

"Fear, my master, torments me day and night.
Each morning my mind wonders
'Where is the light?'
What crimes have I committed –
for this daily torment?
Now my mind is forever bent.

I live in a place where my home is not known.
Where children cry out with deafening moans.
Hearing the whips of the disfiguring canes –
In a building where there is eternal pain."
(Y6 pupil, EAL, Congolese)

Joy, awe and amazement

Inspirational writing almost always springs from inspirational teaching. And inspirational teaching is the product of inspirational teachers. So what are the qualities of an inspirational teacher? I have asked this question so many times in schools and during conferences all over this country and overseas. The answers are always similar, they are about *personality* and *character*.

No-one has ever said, 'Knows more about writing (or maths, or history) than anyone else.'

I have had the great privilege of observing huge numbers of teachers teaching during my career, as an LA adviser, as an Ofsted inspector (active 12 years), as an AST assessor and as a primary strategy manager, and I have seen many outstanding, and inspirational, individuals. However, even outstanding teachers will tell you, they are not outstanding all the time. To maintain passion and enthusiasm, we need to be teaching things we care passionately about and believe in; not merely things that will lead to pupils passing tests. We need to be committed to ensuring that every child we teach achieves highly and shares the joy, the awe or the amazement at that which we are teaching, all the time.

The National Curriculum does not inspire passion, and many would say it shouldn't; that's not its job! But, more worryingly, it does not *enable* passion in many subjects – and certainly not in much of the subject of English. Any potential for inspired and inspirational writing is crushed by pages and pages of technical requirements – grammar terms, constructions, and statutory spelling lists that are more suited for employment in the House of Commons than use in the daily life of the average citizen in our inner-cities.

My prayer, therefore, is that other heads will unite next year, to protect their pupils and to enable their teachers to inspire a joy and passion for language and literature *every* day of their primary school life.

ROS WILSON has over 45 years' experience in education, including teaching, senior management, and advisory and inspection work. She now focuses on writing and her consultancy within Andrell Education.

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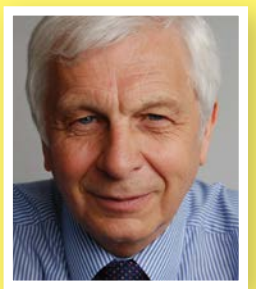

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"Wimpy Kid is fine as long as you're trying a bit of Michael Morpurgo too"

After failing to stay the distance with a school reading scheme, **Jon Mayhew** used American comics to build up his literary stamina

I was never a 'joiner-in' at primary school. If I received a party invitation, I'd do everything I could to avoid going. Team sports were a mystery to me and I lived on the outskirts of the playground, avoiding fast-moving footballs and games of 'pile-on.' There were plenty of others who inhabited these edgelands; daydreamers scraping in the mud, making swords out of sticks or taping together bits of pen and bulldog clip to create deadly lasers. If we played a game, I always wanted to be an alien with special powers.

This was back in the 1970s when, apparently, teachers thought basket-weaving and singing folk songs were a good alternative to learning spelling rules and how to read. I never experienced that. We were taught handwriting, spelling, some grammar and we read to the teacher every day. We wrote poetry and stories too. I remember being totally absorbed in a topic about Native American tribes. I was lazy, though, and clever enough to see the advantages of the Schools Maths Project system whereby pupils marked their own work using a book at the side of the class...

Like most schools, we had a reading scheme but each level consisted of one book and you had to go through every level before you could become a 'free reader' and choose what you read from the class library. Being a slow reader, easily distracted and somewhat lazy, it didn't take much to persuade me not to read. I was three books away from becoming a 'free reader' when I met *The Five and a Half Club*. For a nine-year-old boy who dreamt of being an alien with special powers, a book about five children and their little sister forming a gang and painting a shed pink was like kryptonite to Superman. My reading powers died. I spent the final long months of year six staring out of the window and wishing the teacher would let me move on to the next book in the scheme which was called *Brave and Bold*, a collection of Viking stories. So, my reading stalled.

> "My parents were quite concerned and sat downstairs in the living room, waiting for the comics to turn me into some axe-wielding maniac"

Around this time, I made friends with a boy from the other end of our street. His mum wrote plays and his dad was an English teacher at the local grammar school, a centre of excellence for which I was not destined. We shared a passion for American comics, specifically, Marvel comics. Not being a joiner-in, I used to love collecting titles that were less popular such as *Ghost Rider*, *Deathlock* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. As time went on, both my friend and I became comic 'nerds' collecting thousands of them, saving money to buy rare back-issues and attending specialist comic fairs. The stories in these comics kept my imagination alive and nurtured it.

Soon, I was drawing my own cartoons, very badly, it's true, but I was writing the stories to go along with the pictures. My parents were quite concerned and sat downstairs in the living room, waiting for the comics to turn me into some axe-wielding maniac. That never happened (honest!) but I do think that comics gave me an edge to my imagination that fed into my writing some thirty years later. It's no coincidence that one of my favourite titles was called Deathlock and my first novel called *Mortlock*. I stopped reading comics when I was about nineteen or twenty but recently I have started reading graphic novels and have found some to be complex and engaging.

My friend's parents insisted he went to the library every week and there's only so long you can stand watching someone choose a book before sheer boredom drives you to pick up one yourself. And that's what happened. The book in question was called *A Breed to Come* by Andre Norton. It was a science fiction story about a future Earth that was ruled by cats! I couldn't put it down. From there, I began a reading frenzy. It was as if someone had switched a light on. I read all kinds of genres: fantasy, Westerns, detectives, horror, and science fiction.

Of course, I'd been reading comics mainly and this had implications for my reading stamina. I found it difficult to get through some of the classics as I wasn't used to reading large texts. As I read what might be called 'less challenging' fiction, though, I found that my concentration and reading stamina grew, enabling me to tackle chunkier texts with denser print. I'm glad I was able to do that and, whilst I firmly believe that children should be omnivorous in their reading, I do believe they should push themselves. *Wimpy Kid* is fine as long as you're trying a bit of Michael Morpurgo too, or something by Louis Sachar – and building that stamina, so that when you pick up a more challenging text when you're older, it isn't a closed book to you.

Illustration: Fred Gambino

TELL ME ABOUT IT

Even in a house with no books, there are always stories waiting to be discovered and shared, says **Hayley Scott**...

When I was a child, my mum's story telling was the best part of the day; every day. She'd put on silly voices, and we would laugh raucously, or sniffle at the sad bits, or cry. By the time I started school, books were already my passion, and reading and writing seemed to follow with ease. I didn't know about clauses/participles or any of those things. But, I *knew* them.

It was a joke I told, but also true, that when I found out I was expecting my own daughter the very first thing I did – before thoughts of cots, or babygrows, or anything – was rush onto eBay and buy up copies of the Ladybird *Well Loved Tales* from my childhood. I had no idea about the practicalities of being a mother, but I knew that the starting point would be books.

So, in those first months of my daughter's life I read to her. I read her Shakespeare. I read her Ovid. I read her *Willa Cather's My Antonia, Mrs Frisby and the Rats of Nimh, Harry Potter, T.S Eliot, Watership Down, Anne of Green Gables*... I had a feeling in my gut that there was no such thing as reading too much or too early to a child. That this was a fact. And I stand by this.

Can you believe it?

But, as she got older and I was out doing supply teaching in infant and primary schools, I realised something else – I take books for granted. I've had them in my life so long, that I presume everybody else has, too. I've even had that conversation, which seems so embarrassingly sneery to me now: 'Can you *believe* some people don't have books in their house...?' The idea that this is an active choice, made by people who just don't care!

Teachers confront this all the time. Some children rush in having read books over the weekend. Others don't. The disparity between these two very different worlds, and how to nurture literacy for every kind of pupil, is a daily issue. Of course more books would help; but when Every Child genuinely Matters, it's important to work with what *is* there, not what isn't.

And what's there, always, are stories. 'Tell me something that happened...'; 'What's your walk to school like?'; 'What would be the first thing you'd do if you were really, really small?'

The reality is some homes don't have books. Some children don't have books. But to imagine these children, and these homes, don't have *stories* is to do them a great disservice.

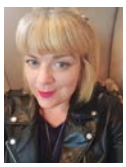
And to assume that these stories can't be spoken, and shared, and written, and used as a springboard to other stories, is reductive and harmful. Teachers know this; although policy often doesn't.

Someone like you

When I started writing the *Teacup House* books I couldn't stop thinking of a question my daughter asked me: 'Why aren't there many books for people like us? About a girl. Who lives with her mum. And still sees her dad? And whose mum and dad get on? And that's just a how it is, not all the story?'

It was a good question. There I was, a new mother with a literature degree and my first novel for adults about to come out, reading all those books; but how many of them were written by POC, LGBTQ or disabled writers, or had stories with those characters in? One, two, three at most? Those books are out there; why hadn't I looked harder for them? There are plenty of children who don't see themselves in books, and therefore don't see books as for them. We all need to seek out and share stories with characters from different backgrounds, families, experience. We need to give each child the chance to understand that their story matters.

Maybe, we shouldn't be asking, 'Where are the books?' at all. Maybe we have to start with, 'Where are the stories?' There are always plenty of those. And then the books will come.



HAYLEY SCOTT'S first book in the Teacup House series, *Meet the Twitches*, will be published by Usborne in February 2018.

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KS2

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