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Welcome…

'Once upon a time in a land, far, far away…' This opening may be old-fashioned (some may say 'classic'), but it's hard to deny that it sparks a desire to know what will come next. Most of us will have read or heard a tale – or many – that begins this way, and subconsciously internalised the fact that next we're going to be met with some kind of problem, an exploration of how to solve it, then, hopefully, a solution.

This sense of familiarity can be of great use when teaching children about how narratives are structured, which is why fairytales maintain such a relevance for modern pupils. In this issue, author Mio Debnam explores the three-act structure and explains how you can use stories like *Little Red Riding Hood* in class to help your pupils with their own writing. Head to page 17 to see what she has to say.

We're also looking into the benefits of another ancient storytelling format in this issue, going on a journey with Charlotte Hacking from the CLPE to understand what teachers have learned from 20 years of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award (CLiPPA). Flip on through to page 62 to read all about the elements that make up an engaging poetry lesson, and find some recommendations sure to get your class abuzz.

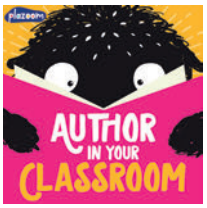
Of course, the mediums through which we absorb stories have developed significantly since the first fairytales were written down centuries ago. One of the most obvious changes in the modern era being the TV. Historically, there's been a certain snobbery around the cultural capital of the telly, but award-winning author and former reluctant reader Phil Earle is keen to change that perception. In our Q&A this month, Phil talks about the numerous writing tips he's learned from watching the box, and why kids can gain just as much from a good piece of screenwriting as from a novel. See page 6 for the exclusive interview.

If you're currently more concerned about the mechanics of reading and writing, check out Juliet McCullion's tips on using motor skills such as skipping and stirring to improve your children's handwriting on page 58; and have a look-see at Lucy Jarvis' approach to developing reading fluency (plus download her free vocab worksheets) on page 52.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy this issue.

Until next time…

Charley Rogers
(editor)



Author in Your Classroom

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

JOSEPH COELHO
Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho explains why he feels poetry should be read and enjoyed more widely – both by children and adults. **p8**

HELEN RUTTER
Helen helps pupils write stories based on a character who is finding their way in the world, using humour to soften tricky situations. **p32**

MAZ EVANS
Maz explains to young writers how a 'story stew', beginning with a character, can help them find their very own story. **p56**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artichoke

Published by: Artichoke Media, Jubilee House, 92 Lincoln Road, Peterborough, PE1 2SN Tel: 01206 505900

© Sarah Mason

‘I’ve learned so much about writing from really good telly’

Award-winning author **Phil Earle** shares what it’s like adapting a novel for TV, and why kids can gain just as much from the box as from books

TR&W While adapting *When the Sky Falls*, what differences have you noticed in working between print media and TV?
PE I’ve been incredibly lucky to find editors in both mediums that have been so, so helpful. I think any writer that tells you they don’t need their editor is either an idiot or a liar. Charlie Sheppard has edited my work at Andersen Press, and she’s brilliant. She has a sense of story I’ve never seen in anyone else. When I started working on the screenplay, I quickly realised I’d need that kind of expertise again. I began by adapting the book as a kind of page-by-page, straight adaptation, and of course that’s fine in working out how to move people around, etc, but you’re not making telly there. It’s a very different medium. And so I was again lucky that Studio Crook, who optioned *When the Sky Falls*, put me in touch with a script editor, Justine Potter, who helped me work out that if we were going to take this 300-odd-page novel and turn it into 12 episodes of telly, we were going to need much more content! So, one of the most interesting things to come out of the process is getting to flesh out some of the background characters from the novel and delve into their lives a bit more. One of my favourite things about writing is dialogue, so I think that’s worked out quite well.

TR&W Can children learn just as much from TV as from books?
PE For me, the important thing in any of these mediums is telling a story, whether that’s in a play, on TV, through film, or in audiobooks or comics. I wasn’t a big reader in school, but I went to see a lot of northern, working-class theatre, and I’ve always loved comics, so much of what I’ve learned about writing and story has come from those, and really good telly, rather than more ‘traditional’ channels. I’ve never taken a creative writing class in my life. I’ve been lucky enough to work with David Fickling for the last three years or so – he discovered Phillip Pullman, Mark Haddon and others; some of the most important storytellers of our time – and David is a huge fan of gaming. His love and knowledge of narrative spans so many different mediums, and it should be the same for kids – they don’t need to read only novels to get an idea of how to tell a story. It’s just snobbery that stops people from accepting all these things.

TR&W What impact might incorporating multimedia into literacy lessons have on pupils?
PE I think it’s hugely important. I go into schools most weeks, and one of the books that I always talk about is *Holes* by Louis Sachar. It’s brief – only 200 pages – and it’s multi-genre, incorporating thriller, crime, a love story, murder, family saga… I often hold it up in a classroom, talk about it, then ask who still wouldn’t want to read it. Inevitably some hands go up, so I suggest they go and watch the film. The adaptation is fantastic – it’s true to the story, and the film medium can remove some of the difficulty for reluctant readers. When I was a kid, I used to feel so overwhelmed by the idea of picking up 300 pieces of paper bound together with no pictures – it was too much for me. But if I’d seen the story somewhere already, I knew the characters, and it helped me to visualise what I was reading. It removed that fear factor. Another great way in is through audiobooks – multimedia helps with inclusion, especially for those with dyslexia or impaired sight – and I don’t care how old you are; there’s something magical about being read to.

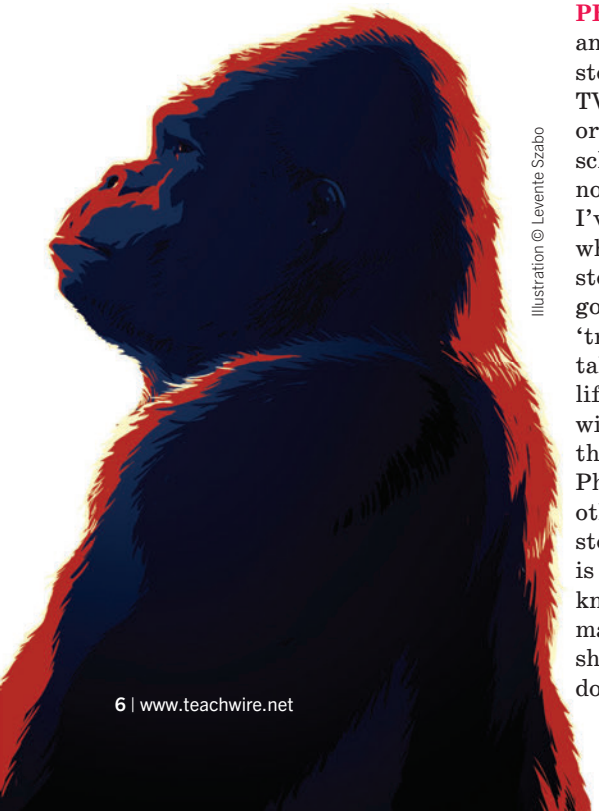

Illustration © Levente Szabo

Phil Earle is the author of the award-winning When the Sky Falls, While the Storm Rages, *and more. His new book* Until the Road Ends *(£7.99, Andersen Press) is out on 1 June 2023.*

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Podcast

Prompting poetry with Joseph Coelho

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

Photography: © David Bebber

Where do poets get their ideas from? Poetry is often used during times where emotions need to be shared, such as at weddings or funerals. However, in his episode of the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast, Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho explains why he feels poetry should be read and enjoyed more widely by both children and adults.

Joseph explains his early writing experiences, how he collects ideas, and how he uses the many poetry tools available to him when writing. He also shares how people can recognise a poem and how this differs from prose. He reads his poem *This Bear*, taken from his collection *Poems Aloud: An Anthology of Poems to be Read Aloud* and talks about how, in this collection, he gives suggestions for how the poem should be read.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to read and explore *This Bear* and investigate figurative language that Coelho has used from his 'poetry toolbox'. Extracts from the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast **(bit.ly/AIYCJCoelho)** are suggested to introduce each section of the teaching sequence, providing an excellent way to connect the things children are learning with the work of a professional author.

SESSION 1

PERFORMING A POEM

1 | Begin by listening to Joseph Coelho talk about his early writing experience and how he feels about becoming Children's Laureate in section 1 of the podcast (from the **start** to **7:40**). What do pupils think being Children's Laureate might feel like?

2 | Now listen to the beginning of section 2 of the podcast where Joseph reads his poem *This Bear* (from **7:40 – 11:22**). Discuss with the children what they think the poem is about and their initial responses to it. Can they imagine what may have

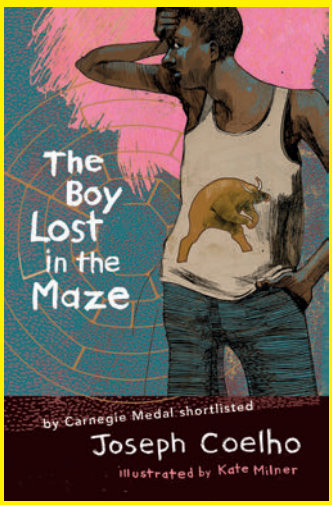
happened to the bear in the past and what has happened now?

3 | Discuss why Coelho has given performance instructions at the beginning of the poem. If possible, read other examples of poems by Joseh Coelho from his book *Poems Aloud: An Anthology of Poems to be Read Aloud* and take note of the performance suggestions.

4 | Invite children to read poems aloud. These could be by Coelho, including *This Bear*, or by other poets that the pupils enjoy. Ask them to think about how each poem might be performed and create their own performance notes.

5 | Invite pupils to perform the poems, sharing the performance notes with others. Would other groups give different performance notes for the same poem?

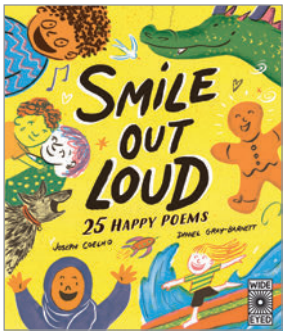
"We shouldn't only see poetry as something we turn to when we're feeling down"

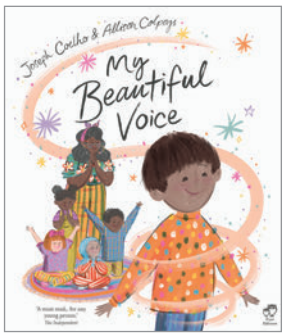


SESSION 2

TOOLS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF POETRY

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **14:05** to the **end of section 2**, where Coelho talks about how poets can use a wide selection of tools to create poems.
2 | What tools do pupils already know about what approaches could be used when writing poetry?
3 | Discuss different examples of figurative language and other tools that can be used when writing poetry, and make a class list together. Remind the children that this is a toolbox to choose from and that poets do not try to 'shoehorn' in all of these in every poem; rather, they select the ones they want to use.
4 | Give children a copy of *This Bear* (or a different poem of your choice) and ask pupils to annotate it, showing the tools that the poet has used.





SESSION 3

POETRY PROMPTS

1 | Discuss with children how they might collect ideas for poems.
2 | Explore the Poetry Prompts Library that Joseph Coelho is creating with the Book Trust to inspire everyone to write poetry. This can be found at **bit.ly/promptslibrary**
3 | Choose one prompt that you would like to focus on as a class and discuss ideas that pupils have after watching the short video.
4 | Ask children to jot down ideas for their poems based on the chosen prompt. These could be words, phrases or ideas that they can use in their poem.
5 | Using their ideas, encourage pupils to write their poems, thinking about the tools that they could use.

SESSION 4

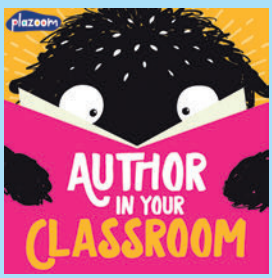
EDIT AND EDIT AND EDIT...

1 | Remind pupils that Coelho said that he edits his poem to add layers, using tools from the poetry toolbox. Revisit the tools that pupils could use in their poems using the class list you made earlier, reminding them that they do not have to include them all but should choose ones that create an effect they want to achieve in their poem.
2 | Allow pupils time to edit their poems, adding or removing words and phrases and making careful choices about vocabulary.
3 | Once a final draft is complete, publish the poems. Children could also add suggestions of how the poems could be performed by others when read aloud.
4 | Share the poems that have been created, reading them aloud to groups or the class.

AFTER THE UNIT...

- In the episode, host Helen suggests taking a piece of writing and rearranging it with line breaks to see if a poem is created. Explore this with the children, thinking about Coelho's advice on what makes a poem.
- This teaching sequence has given pupils the opportunity to write a poem based on one of the prompts that Joseph Coelho has created in partnership with the Book Trust. Explore more of these (**bit.ly/promptslibrary**) – in fact, you could use them to inspire weekly poetry writing in your classroom or even the whole school!

Free resource pack available



DOWNLOAD NOW!

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

plazoom

10 BOOKS TO SHARE WITH *friends*

From got-your-back besties to imaginary pals made real, these engaging titles salute every aspect of companionship. So, settle down with a buddy and enjoy...

1 FOUNDATION STAGE

Get Real, Mallory!

BY DAISY HIRST, WALKER BOOKS 2023

Illustrations © Daisy Hirst

About this book

When Nomi draws herself a dog called Mallory, her brother tells her to Get Real. No-one in their flats is allowed a pet, so why should she be special?

But Nomi is special, and that night, Mallory really does get real. In the park the following day, Nomi's so busy playing with her new friend that she doesn't feel left out. Everything's more fun with Mallory at her side!

Touching gently on loneliness and celebrating the power of imaginative play and its connection to wellbeing, this warm-hearted picturebook is full of fun and energy.

Thinking and talking

- What do Nomi and Mallory do together? What makes him a good friend?
- Talk about real pets and how we care for them.
- How could Nomi find a real-life friend?

2

FOUNDATION STAGE

On Sudden Hill

BY LINDA SARAH, ILL. BENJI DAVIES, SIMON AND SCHUSTER 2014

About this book

Birt and Etho enjoy playing outdoors and Birt loves the 'two-by-two rhythm' of their friendship, so when Shu joins them, Birt feels left out. How can Shu and Etho show Birt that 'three-by-three' is best of all? Their answer involves a cardboard box, imagination and a lot of paint…

This gentle story celebrates imaginative play, puts boys' emotions centre-stage and teaches gentle lessons about the ups and downs of friendship.

Thinking and talking

- What does Birt like about Etho? Why does he feel sad when Shu arrives?
- Have you ever felt left out, or had friendship worries? What made things better?
- If you had an enormous cardboard box, what would you make?

Try this…

- How does Birt feel when he's on the swing seat? How does he feel by the end of the book? Why have things changed? Pretend to be Birt and tell your story.
- Draw pictures of the three boys playing. How do they look after each other and make sure no-one's feeling sad? Write captions about their friendship.
- Collect big boxes and use them to make dens or imaginary vehicles, then talk about how you worked together.

Try this…

- Explore the picture of Nomi and Mallory jumping into the starry night. Where are they going? Tell their story.
- Draw a dog and name it. If your dog got real like Mallory, what would you do? Describe your new friend.
- As a class, use Nomi's and Mallory's friendship to help you compile two lists: *Friends do…* and *Friends don't…*

KEY STAGE 1

3

Bear and Bird: The Picnic and Other Stories

BY JARVIS, WALKER BOOKS 2023

Illustrations © Jarvis

About this book

Bear and Bird don't always see eye to eye, but they want to make each other happy. Their gentle everyday adventures are imbued with kindness and humour, and will prompt discussions about friendship and what makes it work.

With its well-crafted text and vibrant illustrations, this enjoyable book shows friendship in action and is great for readers taking their first independent steps.

Thinking and talking

- What do Bear and Bird enjoy doing together? Why do you think they like each other?
- List the feelings explored in these stories. Have you experienced these emotions?
- What makes someone a good friend? Refer to these stories for examples.

Try this…

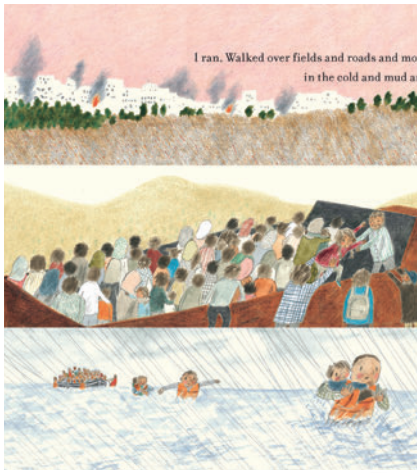
- Use movement, roleplay and freezeframes to explore scenes from this book and discover more about Bear and Bird.
- What do these stories tell us about friendship? Make 'Bear and Bird' posters about how to be a good friend.
- Use sticky notes to add thought bubbles to the picnic story. Why don't Bear and Bird say what they're really thinking? When should you keep quiet, and when should you speak up?

4

KEY STAGE 1

The Day War Came

BY NICOLA DAVIES, ILL. REBECCA COBB, WALKER BOOKS 2018



Illustrations © Rebecca Cobb

About this book

One ordinary school day, war arrives while a girl is drawing pictures. Forced to leave home, she makes a dangerous journey to a distant country where she hopes to draw again, but a teacher turns her away from a classroom because all the chairs are taken. The girl hides in a lonely camp, but a boy finds her. He's carrying a chair, and so are all his friends – enough for every refugee who wants to join their school.

This powerfully illustrated picturebook will stimulate informed discussion about empathy and inclusion as well as war and displacement. Its lyrical text was inspired by a real-life incident but ends on an uplifting note: individual actions matter, and everyone can make a positive impact.

Thinking and talking

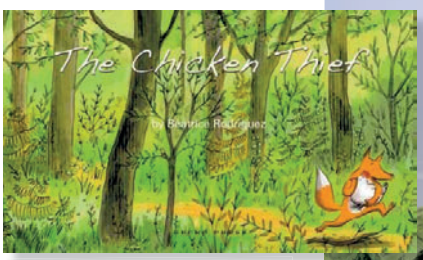
- Why does the girl long to go back to school? How does she feel when she's looking through the classroom window?
- Why does the boy want to help the girl?
- How could you help people who are lonely or far from home?

5

KEY STAGE 1

The Chicken Thief

BY BEATRICE RODRIGUEZ, GECKO PRESS 2009



About this book

When a fox kidnaps a chicken, her loyal friends set off in hot pursuit. An extended chase ensues through visually exciting landscapes, but all is not the way it seems. When the pursuers finally catch the fleeing pair, they realise that doing the best for their friend means respecting her wishes, rather than imposing theirs.

The absorbing, almost cinematic experience of decoding the wordless spreads in this action-packed picturebook helps children develop visual literacy and teaches a gentle lesson about different points of view.

Try this…

- Use key spreads to interrogate the girl's feelings at different stages of her journey. Capture words and phrases, then write about her experiences.
- Explore a collection of different chairs through observational drawing, roleplay and creative writing. Play musical chairs. How does it feel when you don't get a chair? Talk about loneliness and being 'left out'. How can you make everyone feel welcome?
- Why are chairs so important in this story? What do they mean? Decorate a chair with pictures and writing inspired by your discussions.

Illustrations © Beatrice Rodriguez

Thinking and talking

- Why do the three friends chase the fox? Why do they give up?
- What are Fox and Chicken doing while Chicken's friends are chasing them? How does Beatrice Rodriguez tell us what's really going on?
- Have you ever set out to help a friend? What happened?

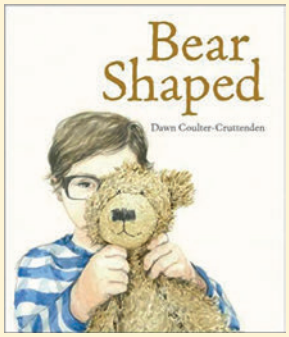
Try this…

- Collect words to describe how the friends are feeling in this story. Use sticky notes to add thought bubbles, dialogue and/or descriptions to each spread.
- Tell the story from Bear's perspective. How does Chicken feel about what's going on? Retell the story from her point of view.
- Draw a new wordless adventure for these friends.

KEY STAGE 1

6 Bear Shaped

BY DAWN COULTER-CRUTTENDEN, OUP 2020



Illustrations © Dawn Coulter-Cruttenden

About this book

When Jack's family ask for help in finding a lost teddy, Jack starts receiving supportive messages (and new bears) from people all around the world. Maybe giving the toys to children who've never had a bear of their own to love might soften the edges of Jack's loss?

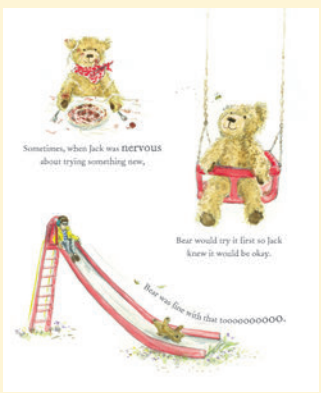
This realistic picturebook is based on a true story about an autistic seven-year-old and will prompt conversations about kindness, differing needs and inclusion, as well as the feelings children have for their attachment toys.

Thinking and talking

- Share your experiences of special toys. How would you feel if you lost them?
- What do Jack and Bear do together? Is Bear really Jack's best friend?
- Have you ever done something kind for other people? What did you do, and why?

Try this…

- Who is kind in this story, and when, and how? Make bear-shaped posters to remind people in your school to be kind.
- When and why does Jack wear ear defenders? Discover what it's like to reduce sensory input, e.g. with listening/blindfold games. Could you make a big, brave, bear-shaped decision about valuing differences? Use bear-shaped templates to record your pledge.
- Draw teddies, then tell or write stories about what they do when they get lost.

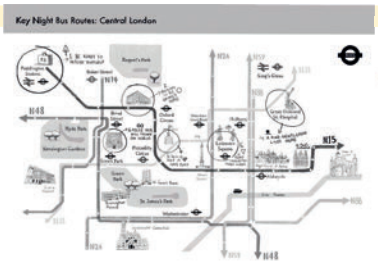


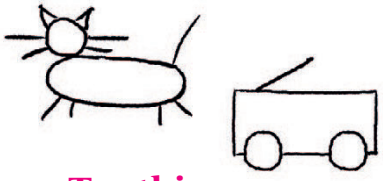
KEY STAGE 2

7 The Night Bus Hero

BY ONJALI Q. RAUF, ORION 2020

Illustrations © Onjali Q. Rauf





About this book

Set in central London, this absorbing novel tells the story of a bully and a homeless man who solve a series of audacious thefts. But their partnership is anything but obvious: Hector's antisocial behaviour and lack of empathy make him feared and excluded by his peers, and it's his (shocking but realistically convincing) act of unkindness towards Thomas that sets events in motion. Only Mei Li has the courage to stand up to him by bringing Hector and Thomas together and prompting necessary change.

This unusual and absorbing story is told from the bully's point of view and will stimulate thoughtful and informed discussion.

Thinking and talking

- What enables Hector to be such an effective bully? How does he use the same skills and abilities to help Thomas catch the crooks?
- How does Hector act in front of Will and Katie? How do they respond? Would you describe them as good friends?
- What does this book tell us about Hector's motivations? How does he view his behaviour? Is it important to understand why bullies act as they do, or should we save our empathy for their victims?

Try this…

- Summarise Hector's bullying actions and their consequences on flow charts. Add notes about his motivations, and how his victims feel. Could Hector have acted differently? Identify decision points, then advise him on what he should have done.
- Read the factual afterword. How is homelessness depicted in this novel? Write a report about it.
- "There's nothing funnier than getting shouted at by someone who can't run after you…" Who does Hector bully? What happens to them? Choose a character and write a first-person statement about the impact of Hector's behaviour. Hotseat Hector, then read him your statements and ask him to respond.

8 Welcome to Our World: A Celebration of Children Everywhere

KEY STAGE 2

BY MOIRA BUTTERFIELD AND HARRIET LYNAS, NOSY CROW 2018

Illustrations © Harriet Lynas

About this book

Covering a wide range of information and including words in other languages, this non-fiction picturebook explores some of the many ways that children live and communicate around the world.

Topics include food and drink, playground games and school, but there are plenty of surprises, too. From the noises animals make abroad – dogs don't all say woof! – to curing hiccups when you're far from home, this book is packed with kindness, fun and insight, and gently raises expectations about connecting across cultures as it celebrates commonalities and differences.

Cheerful, stylised illustrations and bite-size text ensure a warm welcome from Year 2 up.

Thinking and talking

- How do the children in this book differ from you? In what ways are they similar?
- Do you have relatives abroad? Can you speak languages other than English? Share information and experiences.
- How would you make friends with someone who didn't speak your language?

Try this…

- Working with a partner you don't know well, find three things you have in common and three differences. Share back and discuss.
- If we don't speak the same language, how do we communicate? Try telling a simple story without words!
- Help each other to learn some of the phrases in this book, or play some of the games. Cheer everyone on using the Words for Hooray! section, then celebrate with food and drink from another country.

KEY STAGE 2

9

Our Tower

BY JOSEPH COELHO, ILL. RICHARD JOHNSON, FRANCES LINCOLN 2022

Illustrations © Richard Johnson

About this book

Three friends are playing near their high-rise estate when they discover the Green Man's underground kingdom. His fairytale gift to them – a stone with a hole – turns everything 'upside-a-diddle' and when they return home, 'the wonder of their tower' has been unleashed and friendships are blossoming between neighbours young and old.

Our Tower is an enchanting illustrated poem celebrating the sense of wonder that comes from playing in the natural world, and the power of friendship.

Thinking and talking

- Do you play imaginative games outdoors? Share memories and experiences.
- What does the 'ancient magic' do in this book?
- Could you start the magic in your neighbourhood by bringing people together, or help out in another way?

Try this…

- Use sticky notes to add thoughts and dialogue to the final spreads. Choose a character and write from their perspective about what's happening.
- Make 'stones with holes' from clay or card and use them to explore the idea of seeing the world differently through drama activities and creative writing.

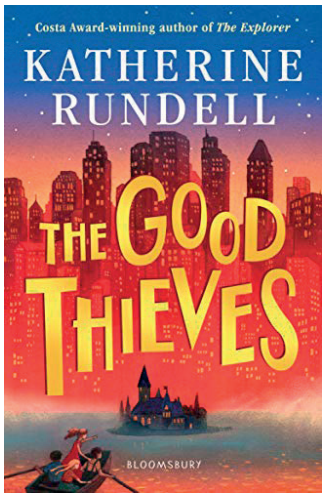
- Tell a new 'otherworld story' about these characters, or write a similar adventure featuring your friends.

KEY STAGE 2

10

The Good Thieves

BY KATHERINE RUNDELL, ILL. MATT SAUNDERS, BLOOMSBURY 2019



About this book

When Sorrotore cheats Vita's grandfather out of his crumbling ancestral home, Vita is determined to set things right. With the help of two circus boys and a junior pickpocket, she dreams up a lawless, death-defying plan that leads to surprises all round….

Set in Prohibition-era New York, this fast-paced adventure features a heroine living with the after-effects of polio, a castle in the middle of a lake and a gangster who'll stop at nothing to get what he wants. Full of escapist *joie-de-vivre* and featuring some genuinely scary moments, it puts friendship centre-stage and promotes empathy and insight. Will Vita's handpicked team succeed despite their differences? When does their business arrangement become a friendship? And how far will they go to support each other?

Thinking and talking

- What persuades Arkady, Samuel and Silk to join Vita's quest? Would you have followed her?
- What does Vita mean by "necessary thieves"? Argue for and against her actions.
- "We're a troupe now," said Arkady. "We fought together, we ate together. We're a crew." What brought you and your friends together? What's the difference between a team-mate and a friend?

Try this…

- Create character profiles for Vita, Arkady, Samuel and Silk. Where, when and why do they work well together? How do they support each other? What makes them a good team?
- What amazing talent would you choose? How would it help you defeat a crook? Work as a group to storyboard a new adventure, then tell the story.
- Draw a sketchmap of New York and annotate it with the locations and events in this story. Write a guide for tourists who want to follow in Vita's footsteps and discover more about her exploits.

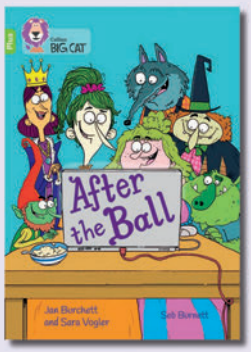
Carey Fluker-Hunt is a freelance writer, creative learning consultant, and founder of Cast of Thousands (castofthousands.co.uk)

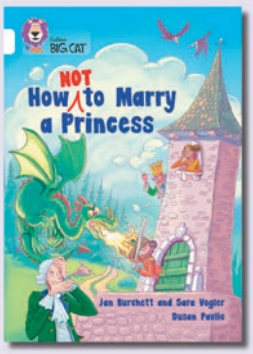
Collins
BIG CAT

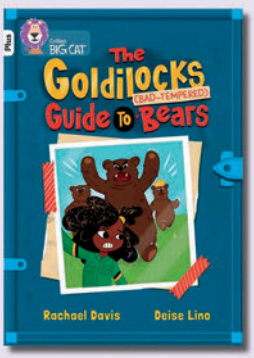
New for upper KS1 and KS2

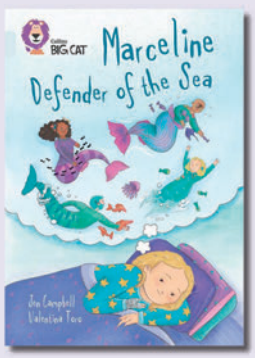
Discover NEW twisted fairy tales

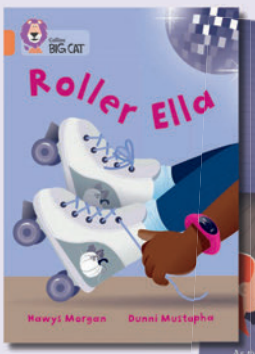
Challenge the traditional conventions of the fairy tale genre with reimagined versions of familiar favourites!

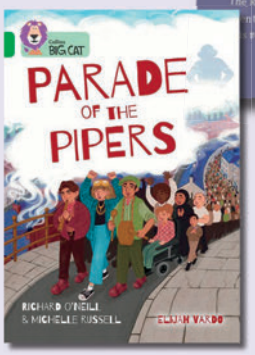












Browse the range

Love Reading

collins.co.uk/BigCat

Explore story structure WITH FAIRYTALES

What can kids learn from the Big Bad Wolf? Much more than not to talk to strangers, says **Mio Debnam...**

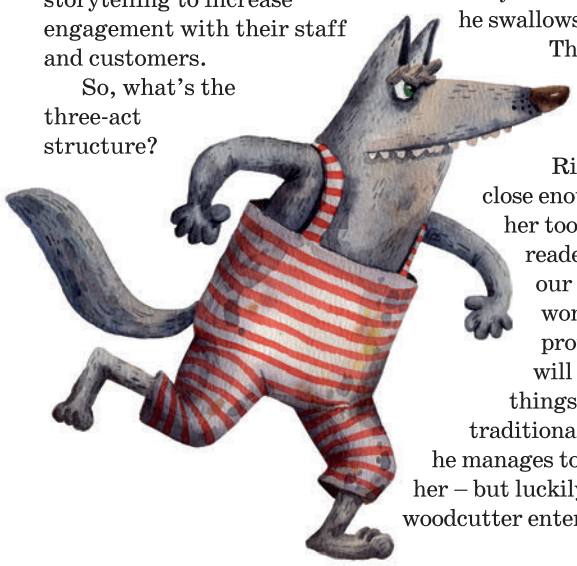
What do *Star Wars*, *Die Hard* and *Little Red Riding Hood* have in common?

Apart from the themes 'good triumphs over evil' and 'actions have consequences', they also share a critical detail: they are all told in a three-act structure.

Of course, this is not the only way to tell a story, but if you look around, you'll see that the three-act structure (which dates back to Aristotle's time) is used in everything from movies, to adverts, to fairytales. It makes for a simple, straightforward yet satisfying narrative arc.

It's also a good thing to teach pupils – because learning how to structure a story with a solid beginning, middle and end is a skill which will be helpful beyond essay writing at school. Even businesses use narrative storytelling to increase engagement with their staff and customers.

So, what's the three-act structure?



Act 1 (first quarter): The Hook

We meet the characters and learn their needs and wants. The 'inciting incident' launches them irreversibly into the story: In *Little Red Riding Hood*, we discover Red's granny is sick. Her mum gives Red Riding Hood a basket of goodies and warns her to go directly to Granny's, and not stray from the path. But when Red Riding Hood meets the wolf, she stops to tell him about her gran, then she decides to pick flowers for Granny as he suggests...

Act 2 (next half): The Meat

The story unfolds, and our characters head towards almost certain disaster. The tension builds until, near the end, we have what seems like an insurmountable problem: the wolf, on learning about Granny, decides he wants to eat her. Having distracted Red Riding Hood, he runs to Granny's cottage where he swallows her whole. Then, dressed as her, he tries to lure Red Riding Hood close enough to eat her too, while we readers bite our nails and wonder if our protagonist will figure things out. In the traditional fairytale, he manages to swallow her – but luckily, a brave woodcutter enters the scene.

Act 3 (last quarter): Closure

The problem is resolved, and our characters are changed from the experience. The aftermath: the woodcutter kills the wolf, splitting him in two so that Red Riding Hood and her gran can escape. Red Riding Hood resolves to always listen to her mum in future and they live happily ever after.

Fairytales are ideal for teaching the three-act structure as they are short, easy to summarise and analyse. They're also broadly familiar, and comfortable – even the most anxious child knows that they always end 'happily ever after'. However, content-wise, many traditional fairytales rely on two-dimensional, stereotypical characters: the villain is always 100% evil with no chance of redemption; girls are compliant, don't have much agency and need rescuing; and the male characters are always sure of themselves, and heroic. This is why it's good to discuss modern, twisted fairytales too, in tandem, as they often have all the things that make a traditional fairytale the ideal vehicle to teach storytelling, but also feature more complex characters, facing issues and simply existing in a way that ensures all children feel represented in the books they read. They also often have an unexpected twist at the end, which is fun!

STORYTELLING IN THREE ACTS

1. Summarising

Set a 10-minute challenge – each group has to work out how to summarise their story, then present it in one minute. Most will get bogged down in the details and barely make it past Act 1! Swap stories and try again, until each group is able to summarise their story into the main story beats.

2. Analysing

Do story beats belong in Act 1, 2 or 3? What did we learn about the characters? The inciting incident? The problem? What do we think will happen? What did happen? How was it resolved? What did the character learn and how did this change them?

3. Planning & writing

Get pupils to plan their own stories following the structure and beats from their analysis. Once they've figured out what to write and in which order, they can flesh it out with more details and create their own masterpiece. Bonus points for adding a modern twist!

Mio Debnam is the author of* Adam and Little Red, *one of 11 new twisted fairytales from Collins Big Cat, out now.

Why bother learning a POEM BY HEART?

Far from an old-fashioned pastime for the posh, committing verse to memory can open all sorts of doors for your pupils, argues **Julie Blake**

The poet Andrew Motion and I were asked this question many times when we began working on the first national schools' poetry speaking competition, and its associated poems and resources, for the Poetry By Heart website. That was 10 years ago. For some of our critics, learning a poem by heart was an old-fashioned, posh practice: long past its sell-by date, certainly in state schools. Why learn a poem by heart, especially an old one, when you could be reading poems, or listening to one being read, or writing your own? And maybe even poetry itself was out of date. Wasn't spoken word the thing now? There were also doubts about whether children would have the capacity to learn a poem by heart when they had become habituated to finding what they needed when they needed it on the web or social media. And behind those suspicions there was misery about the prospect of tedious rote learning. Would pupils be able to do it, want to do it, be prepared to do it? And what about their teachers? For some pupils, having to do poetry at all was bad enough.

From the beginning, the poets we listened to told us a different story: most of them said that to have a poem in the memory, learned by heart, was a treasure that could be drawn on throughout life. Simon Armitage, the current Poet Laureate, put it this way: "The poems we learn when we're young stay with us for the rest of our lives. They become embedded in our thinking, and when we bring them to mind, or to our lips, they remind us who we are as people, and the things we believe in. They become personal and invaluable, and what's more they are free gifts – there for the taking. We call it 'learning by heart', and I think such learning can only make our hearts bigger and stronger."

> *"The poems we learn when we're young stay with us for the rest of our lives"*

You can test this for yourself by thinking about some of the nursery rhymes, songs and poems you learned when young, and the way these keep you company still.

The poets we spoke to during our research, including Poetry By Heart's judges, also reminded us that poems came to a more vivid and compelling life when spoken out loud. And then there were ideas about poems and memory. Poet Alice Oswald told us that poems don't just "go easily into the memory and stay there;" it works both ways: "The memory goes easily into a poem and grows there, perhaps infinitely."

And, finally, the poets emphasised

choice. That children should be given the opportunity to explore a range of poems for themselves and find the ones that are special to them; special enough for them to learn, special enough to have a place in their future memory.

Poetry By Heart has been guided by poets and their thinking. These ideas shape every aspect of what we do. But how does it work in practice with teachers and pupils in schools? After 10 years, here are some of the things we've learned.

Keep 'em keen

By generating excitement about performing a poem, pupils get engaged in exploring verse to find their special one. As they learn their chosen poem by heart, they start to notice and explore its language, develop personal connections to their poem, and eventually start wanting to read more. Many of the pupils at headteacher Rowena Kaminski's small rural primary school in Shropshire arrived with significant literacy challenges. Rowena saw Poetry By Heart as a focus for changing this and after their first year, she described the impact on literacy: "Introducing more poetry into our school day has, without a doubt, helped to develop early literacy skills. Poetry has also enabled conversations and confidence around terms such as similes and metaphors. It has enabled our children to develop a love for literacy."

New approaches

When we started our programme at the school, some people said only the 'most able' pupils would be able to do it. We never believed that and it's the opposite of what Rowena told us after they'd tried it. She reported: "Poetry is very manageable for our children, who are generally 'put off' by huge chunks of text. We have a lot of children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and children with speech and language difficulties, so being such a small amount of writing, poetry is less intimidating. It has been wonderful to see Polish children in our community recite poems in English that they have learned by heart."

Room to grow

By performing in pairs or groups to start with, pupils quickly overcome any initial nerves they may have had, and the process has great benefits for their self-esteem. But there seem to be wellbeing benefits, too, due to the nature of poetry and the way it opens new spaces for children to explore their lives. Rowena reflected on poetry as a safe space. She said: "Children feel safe that there are no right or wrong answers when discussing their responses to a poem. For emotional support, poetry has provided an opportunity for them to explore their personal experiences and to write about themselves and their feelings."

Learning poems by heart, then, is all about developing confidence in an enjoyable, accessible and engaging way. You can sign up to Poetry By Heart **(poetrybyheart.org.uk/registration-form)** if you'd like some help with the process (or visit the sites in the panel on the right for some inspiration). Ultimately, the power is in your hands – help your pupils thrive and learn to love poems by sharing them – and learning them – together with your class.

Julie Blake is co-founder and director of Poetry By Heart. She is also a former FE teacher and university tutor. Poetry By Heart is funded with the support of the Department for Education.

@poetrybyheart

poetrybyheart.org.uk

5 FREE POETRY RESOURCES

1. 7+ timeline
Time travel across the centuries with this poetry resource for pupils aged 7-11. It offers biographies of poets, starter activities and video and audio performances. Use the filters to find short poems, funny poems, or poems about adventure and family. **poetrybyheart.org.uk/ks2-timeline**

2. Children's poetry archive
A treasure trove of recordings of poets reading their poems. Explore curated collections like Exploring Planet Earth or Hopes and Dreams. There are great teaching resources too. **childrens.poetryarchive.org**

3. Mix It Up collection
A fun and colourful way for children to explore poems to find ones they like. Hover on a picture tile to see the poem's title, click to read a juicy snippet and then dive into the poem. Hit the Mix it Up button to see why it gets its name. **poetrybyheart.org.uk/poetry-for-children/**

4. CLPE Poetry
A phenomenal collection of poems, often with videos, by the best contemporary children's poets from A.F. Harrold to Zaro Weil. Sort by year group or poem theme to find your perfect poem. **clpe.org.uk/poetry**

5. Poem of the Week email
A poem in your inbox every week in term time to share aloud with your class. Read for pleasure and enjoyment then go further with a fun activity to help pupils explore the sounds, shapes and meaning of the poem. **mailchi.mp/poetrybyheart/poemoftheweek**

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6 ways to improve PUPILS' WRITING

Although there is a need for independent writing, there are a number of benefits for paired or group tasks to help develop independent writing over time, says **Kris Gregory**...

Shared cognitive load

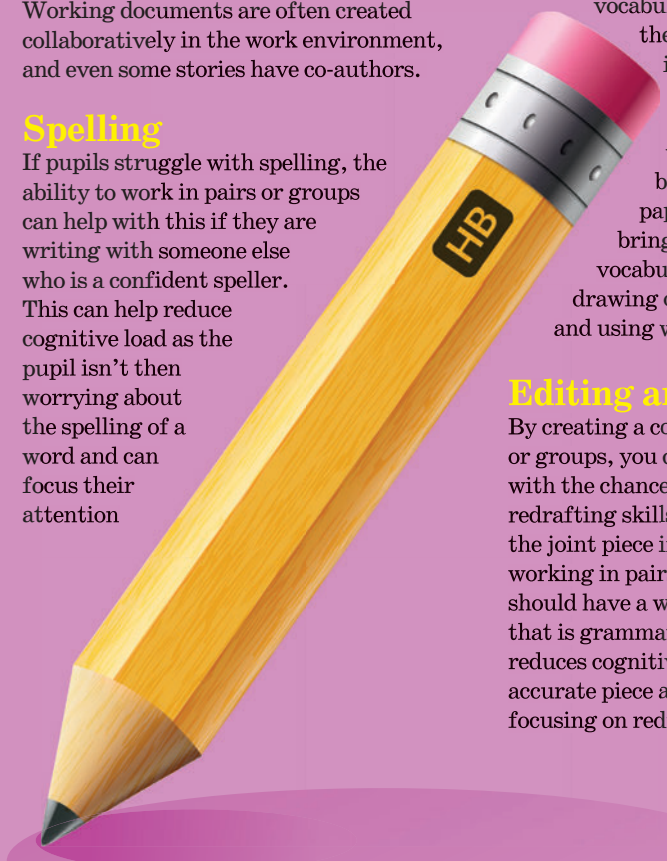
One of the reasons why pupils often find writing more difficult is because there are more factors that impact on cognitive load. By working in pairs or in groups on their writing, pupils are able to split this cognitive load by literally bringing more brains to the task. This can help prevent cognitive overload of each pupil, but also increase the total cognitive load that can be applied to writing through increased numbers.

Real-world application

How many written pieces in the adult world are done independently? How many are done in groups? Open up any research paper and you will often be met by a number of names where a group of people have worked together sharing their expertise and understanding. Working documents are often created collaboratively in the work environment, and even some stories have co-authors.

Spelling

If pupils struggle with spelling, the ability to work in pairs or groups can help with this if they are writing with someone else who is a confident speller. This can help reduce cognitive load as the pupil isn't then worrying about the spelling of a word and can focus their attention on the composition of the sentence. This will help develop them as writers, as their focus is where it needs to be to develop composition.



Handwriting

Similar to spelling, paired and group writing can support pupils who find transcription difficult. Each pair/ group can nominate a scribe for their writing. By not worrying about their handwriting, pupils are free to once again work on developing the composition of their writing and their ideas. This will also help pupils feel confident with writing, rather than worrying about transcription.

Oracy and vocabulary

The chance to work in pairs or groups on creating a written piece supports pupils in developing oracy alongside their vocabulary. This includes the language of working in a group, alongside developing sentences orally, playing around with them and debating before committing to paper. Pupils can also then bring different levels of vocabulary, with discussions drawing out improved vocabulary and using words for effect.

Editing and redrafting

By creating a composition in pairs or groups, you can provide pupils with the chance to develop their redrafting skills through rewriting the joint piece independently. From working in pairs or groups, they should have a well-constructed piece that is grammatically correct. This reduces cognitive load as they have an accurate piece and can then spend time focusing on redrafting it for effect.

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

teachwire

Download this article as a handy one-page poster for FREE at

tinyurl.com/tp-ImproveWriting

Kris Gregory is a Year 3/4 teacher, with responsibility for English and the wider curriculum at Ashbrook Junior School in Derbyshire.

How sentence starters upped MY WRITING GAME

Lose those exasperated refrains of "I don't know what to write", and get pupils off to a flying start with these irresistible ideas, says **Collette Waddle**

I've been a teacher for nearly 20 years, and almost every educator I know has suffered the pain of delivering what you believe is an engaging, stimulating, practically BAFTA-winning introduction to writing, only to be met with "I don't know what to write," or "What are we doing?". And so often the difficulty comes not from writing in general, but rather getting pupils to *start* writing.

We all know those pupils that struggle to write, and often it's the ones that don't read a lot. There are many reasons for this correlation, but I think one key factor is that they don't have that bank of imaginative ideas that reading provides, to dip into. Sentence starters are great for providing these ideas that allow children to get going. For me, they've been a game-changer. I made up a few within a lesson one day and popped them on the working wall. It was a spur-of-the-moment idea, but it really worked. The less confident children used them, found a voice and began to engage, safe in the knowledge that they were on the right track. Others even added their own suggestions.

So, how did it work?

If you haven't come across them much before, sentence starters, also known as sentence stems, give all pupils the chance to contribute, orally or in writing, while using complete sentences. They'll help the children begin their composition, while (sneakily) encouraging practice of the vocabulary and grammar conventions you want them to learn.

Types of sentence starters

Just like people, sentence starters come in many shapes and sizes. Some are a classroom staple and useful for many writing opportunities. Others are created for a more specific purpose. They can help to introduce, activate prior knowledge, build, support, structure, suggest, clarify, elaborate, give examples, reinforce and summarise.

You can use them at any point in the lesson to structure meaningful conversation. They can be useful at the beginning of a piece of writing, in the middle, or even towards the end – whenever you think they will clarify learning or aid progress.

Here are my steps to success:

Create

When thinking about writing genres, create your starters and always include genre-related key vocabulary, phrases and language structures. Start small and keep sessions speedy, oral and fun at first.

Adapt

Once pupils have mastered using them, download these ready-made sentence starter clipboards: **tinyurl.com/tp-SentenceStarters** Use as they are, or adapt to suit your style, teaching, children or aims. You choose. Just be sure to build in progression.

Model

Show pupils how to use sentence starters. Don't just focus on the writing, but the thinking, the choosing, and the 'hmmm, that one doesn't quite work, I need to change it' moments. Model changing your mind, and the messy planning and writing process: just do it with the sentence starters as part of the journey.

Practise
Review the starters you use regularly, and provide examples of how children could potentially complete some of them (oral or written). Complete a couple deliberately wrong and watch the fireworks! Can children identify what's wrong with the rest of the sentence? Can they correct it? Create opportunities for practice.

Review
Once pupils are confident with sentence starters, they can share their ideas. You can critique results, giving kind, constructive feedback. A crucial piece of advice to give to pupils is: "Vary your sentence starters." Even with strong sentence openers, writing becomes bland if they overuse the same ones. Encourage variation. Write your own bland version and read it out in a monotone voice, just to drive home the point.

Revisit (regularly)
Plan regular revisits. To encourage progression, challenge pupils with sentence starters that are just above their current assessment level. Make them work for it!

As well as making sure you're following the right processes, engaging activities can also help bring your writing lessons to life. These are my favourites for helping pupils use sentence starters:

Connections
Cut out (or just mix up on a worksheet) a selection of sentence starters and endings. Pupils need to match up each starter with the correct ending. Are there any starters that work with more than one ending? Why? This activity is great for provoking discussion on the ways we use language.

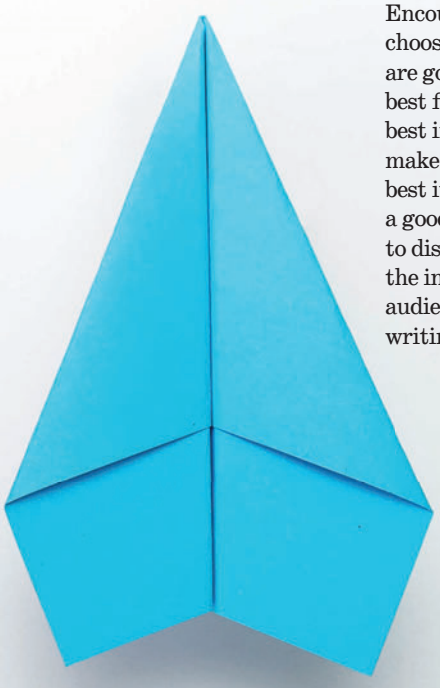
Upgrade
Prepare some sentence starters and give a copy to each pupil. Then, give them two to three minutes to complete each one, using information from recent learning. After three or four minutes, the children should swap their sentences with a partner and add to or edit the information on their partner's sheet. After another three or four minutes, pupils should then swap back and review their edited list.

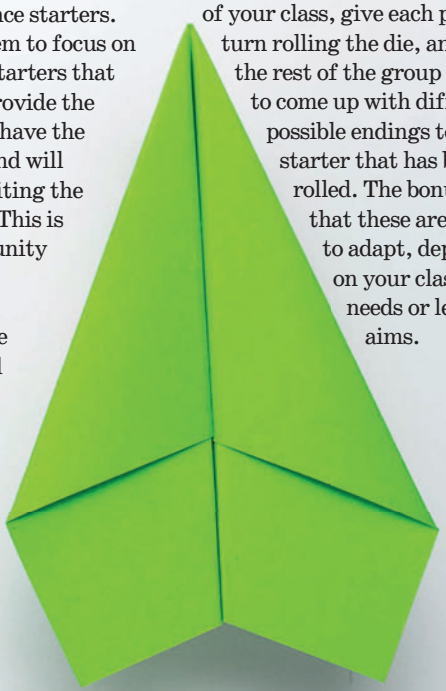
Sentence starter reboot
Get pupils to choose a paragraph from an old piece of writing that they want to improve, and have them redraft it using sentence starters. Encourage them to focus on choosing the starters that are going to provide the best flow, will have the best impact, and will make their writing the best it can be. This is a good opportunity to discuss who the intended audience of the writing is, and whether children can figure out which type of sentence starters will work best. For example, are they trying to introduce something, support an argument, give examples, or summarise a point of view?

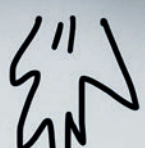
News at 10
This follows on well from 'sentence starter reboot', and involves pupils presenting their writing as a news report, using the appropriate sentence structures. You could even turn your classroom into a news studio and have the children take it in turns to read their work, and give each other constructive feedback.

Prior knowledge tap
For this activity, give the children a time limit and see how many sentence starters they can come up with. You could try prompting them with questions like: "How many sentence starters that you would expect to see in a set of instructions can you write in four minutes?"

Interactive dice
Try adding sentence starters onto interactive dice, so pupils have a fun way to practise their vocabulary. In groups of three or four, depending on the size of your class, give each pupil a turn rolling the die, and then the rest of the group need to come up with different possible endings to the starter that has been rolled. The bonus is that these are easy to adapt, depending on your class needs or learning aims.





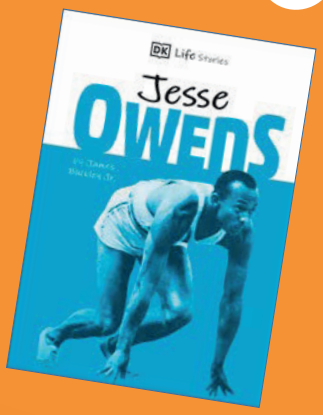


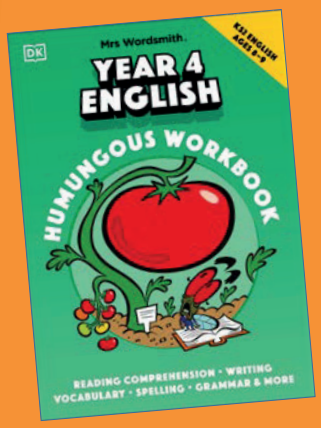
10 REASONS TO USE SENTENCE STARTERS

- They're easy to make, adapt and readily available.
- Starters provide scaffolding for pupils who need additional support and more time to think.
- Conversations become more vocabulary- and content-rich. Pupils build on each other's ideas.
- They create a supportive environment where pupils encourage one another.
- They can be adapted for individual SEND aims to allow all pupils to access learning.
- Familiarity with them can help to decrease anxiety and encourage a positive mindset to get started.
- Like the joy of a good pick 'n' mix sweet selection, a budding writer can really experiment and learn new ways of expressing themselves.
- Sentence starters often work like a 'word map' to help explain struggles when pupils need help. They are a great tool for children who are non-verbal – I found this to my absolute delight!
- You can use them for games and spelling when you have a few spare minutes.
- You can download a FREE set of sentence starters at **tinyurl.com/tp-SentenceStarters**

Collette Waddle is a UKS2 teacher and resource creator.

@ColletteR





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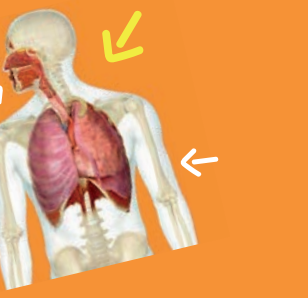
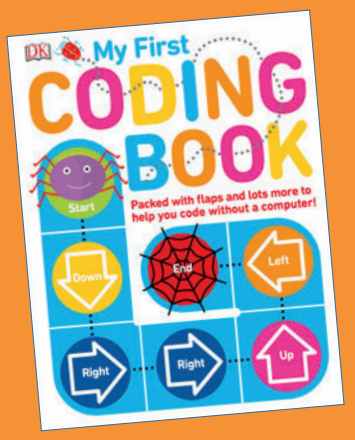
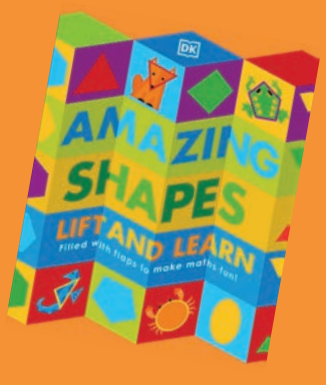






DK Learning

Meet the AUTHOR

One of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time was made by a young boy – a fact that's sure to make the Ancient Egyptians irresistible to your class, says **MA Bennett**

All the Butterfly Club books hinge on a theorem called The Butterfly Effect, a concept that, essentially, states that the mere flap of a butterfly's wings in one place can have a huge impact in another far away. Each book features time-travelling thieves Luna, Konstantin and Aidan who travel forward in time from Greenwich, London, in 1894, to steal artefacts from the future on behalf of a shadowy secret society called The Butterfly Club.

The Butterfly Club books are about the ultimate kind of travel – time travel. And because time travellers always – funnily enough – seem to wind up in the most interesting periods in history, the urge to have them meet real historical figures is irresistible. But I did manage to resist the temptation to have my three young heroes meet Shakespeare or Caesar or Columbus. Instead, the series takes as its subject very well-known events, but largely unknown heroes.

History's hidden heroes

Most everyone has heard of the Titanic, but Guglielmo Marconi, whose wireless radio saved hundreds of lives on that doomed ship and countless lives over the following century, is unknown to many. Similarly, most kids will have heard of the Mona Lisa, but lots of them won't know that the painting wasn't famous at all until it was stolen in 1911 by a man named Vincenzo Peruggia, who thought that her smile could save his home country of Italy from defeat in the impending Great War. And the moon landings of 1969 are familiar to the majority of people, but many space fans won't realise how close the Apollo 11 came to a fatal explosion on the moon's surface, only averted by the brave men and women of Mission Control. Each story in The Butterfly Club series focuses on one extraordinary real-life character from the past, who, in a small way, changed history; and *The Mummy's Curse* is no different.

So, with all the information already out there about Ancient Egypt, why did I decide to focus on this particular moment in history? Well, the real hook for me in the Tutankhamun story was the discovery that it was a 12-year-old waterboy – Hussein Abdel Rassoul – who actually found Tutankhamun's tomb first.

Abdel's mule stumbled on a long stone in the Valley of the Kings, which turned out to be the top step of twelve, leading down into the most incredible treasure chamber ever found. Howard Carter himself recognised Abdel's contribution to the find, awarding him with a priceless pectoral pendant from the tomb, made of gold and decorated with lapis scarabs as big as your fist. I thought Abdel would be such a good conduit into the story for a middle-grade reader, as it's pretty exiting that a boy just their age made the greatest archaeological discovery of all time.

Tut through the ages

It's an amazing story that has captured interest ever since, and we can see the impact of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun throughout different eras. There was a huge interest in Egyptology in Victorian times which you can see reflected in art and architecture, and even English tomb design. There were extraordinary public displays of 'unwrapping' of real mummies, and even a type of paint called 'mummy brown' was popular with the Pre-Raphaelites, which was actually made of crushed up mummies! So it's no wonder, when people

"The time travel device is a good one to put ourselves in the shoes of others, and also to bring little-known figures from history to light"

took such liberties with what were essentially people's corpses, that there were those who thought the manifold Egyptian gods would get angry...

And there's quite a weight of evidence for the curse of Tutankhamun, which began to gather traction when the British newspapers started to connect several tragic events to the opening of the tomb in 1922: as well as Lord Carnarvon (who provided the financial backing for the excavation), American railroad magnate Jay Gould died of pneumonia after visiting the tomb. French Egyptologist Georges Bénédite had a bad fall on the steps of the tomb and died, and Arthur Mace, one of Carter's own excavation team, had an entire physical breakdown which led to his death. Sir Archibald Reid, a radiologist who x-rayed some of Tut's artefacts, also died, and Richard Bethell, Lord Carnarvon's secretary, committed suicide. Bethell's father, Lord Westbury, on hearing the news, cried, "It's the curse of the Mummy!" and threw himself out of a window. In 1924, British Army major Sir Lee Stack was murdered in Cairo. And an Egyptian prince called Ali Fahmy Bey was shot by his wife in the Savoy Hotel, also after visiting the tomb.

Little wonder then that even 100 years later those ideas still prevail with films like *The Mummy* and MCU shows like *Moon Knight*. It's irresistible, isn't it, the idea that Tutankhamun would curse those who disturbed him? It's just something that seems to seize the imagination in any age, and perhaps that's the reason the Egyptian civilisation seems to hold such a fascination for schoolkids.

Friend or foe

Because of that, I took the opportunity in my own Egyptian adventure to get children to think about bigger themes. For instance, my character Konstantin is German-born, and in 1894 where he lives, everyone is friends. But in *The Mummy's Curse*, he is transported to 1922, just after the terrible First World War. Among the English in Egypt, there is a lot of anti-German feeling. Similarly, Lady Evelyn Herbert, Lord Carnarvon's daughter, has quite progressive ideas about women, who have just been given the vote. To the children from 1894, that idea is inconceivable.

So, the time travel device is a good one to put ourselves in the shoes of others, and also to bring little-known figures to light. Sometimes history can feel a bit dry, so if it's wrapped in a riddle and rolled in a mystery, I think it's easier to get children to engage. I call this 'stealth learning'. Kids are very smart and know exactly when they are being preached to. And if they sense the preaching, they can easily switch off. But I hope that by combining history with adventure, I've managed to sneak in some quite complicated ideas, such as the rights and wrongs of Empire, and the restitution of artefacts to their native countries.

And of course, my main objective in writing The Butterfly Club series was to bring unknown characters out of the shadows – like Abdel Rassoul – and into the light. Hopefully by reading these books more and more children will be made aware of extraordinary lives like his.

MA Bennett is the author of The Butterfly Club series. **The Mummy's Curse** *(£7.99, Welbeck) is on sale now.*

How to write MODEL TEXTS

Dropping Little Red Riding Hood into Ancient Egypt could be just the spark you need to get typing your own WAGOLL...

MATT BEIGHTON

Julia Donaldson, Stephen King, Philip Pullman and Eoin Colfer, not to mention me, all had careers as teachers before moving on to a life of crafting worlds and spinning yarns. It's perhaps no wonder that there seems to be a sneaky feeling that all teachers, particularly those working in a primary setting, are closeted writers desperate to break out. You only have to talk to a few about their confidence when it comes to creating short texts for their class, however, to realise this isn't the case.

Just as there are teachers who really have to study and work hard at their maths knowledge, their French skills (definitely me) or their grasp of computing, there are many who aren't immediately comfortable throwing together a few hundred words for their class. That might be you or somebody you know. It will probably be more people than you think.

We should clear up some confusing language first. If you teach using Talk4Writing, you might know them as model texts. You may refer to them as WAGOLLs or something else entirely. Here, I mean any content that you create for your class, be it a reading comprehension, an information text about rainforests, or the more classic structural model for writing.

When my school moved to a Talk4Writing framework, creating the model texts was the part that I enjoyed most. I was writing a lot at the time – both my own books and freelance – and it was something that I felt comfortable doing. Not everybody felt the same, though. I recently carried out a survey as research for my new book *Write It Level It Teach It*, which highlighted some interesting trends among the teachers who took part.

> *"Most teachers grade their confidence when creating content as about three out of five, or below"*

Most teachers graded their confidence when creating content as about three out of five, or below, and 69 per cent were spending at least an hour writing a text for their class. The main concerns were generating ideas, including grammar objectives and ensuring they were at an appropriate reading level.

The fact that you are reading this article might mean that you, too, are looking for a way to relieve some of the stress you feel when creating content. You might not have told anybody that you struggle, or you might be singing it from the rooftops, but you aren't alone.

Pupils in your class will consume more of your content than that of any other author. If you are creating content a few times a week, you are already guiding their reading experience. It's right that you want to make it an effective and efficient process.

So, here are five things to consider when creating your content:

1 It doesn't need to 'tie in'

Hear me out. Coming up with an idea that will hook your class is probably the most important part of the whole process. Your pupils might be totally immersed in the life of Victorian children, and your linked reading text might engage every one of them. Realistically, though, you probably have a group, however small, who are struggling to invest. Getting the hook right for your class is going to have more impact than ensuring it is linked to a topic. Writing a text focused on something that captivates your whole class –whether or not it has any direct link to your current topic – will increase engagement.

2 Think about familiar perspectives

If children see people they know appearing in your text, I guarantee they will be more interested. Instead of a letter from a child trapped in a workhouse, consider a letter home from the premises officer trapped in the school by a forgetful head who's left for the holidays. A mystery with a lunchtime supervisor at the centre is a great way to not only grab your children's attention, but encourage them to engage with other members of the school community.

3 Use classic stories

If you take Little Red Riding Hood and replace her with an Ancient Egyptian slave, you can create a simple narrative. The wolf could become the Sphinx, and the delivery of food to Grandma an important document to the High Priest. You can then take any part of this story and write it for a purpose: the meeting with the wolf/Sphinx could be a diary entry, the delivery of the food/document a newspaper article, and so on.

This works for non-fiction, too.

Little Red could be Ernest Shackleton. The food, his quest to reach the South Pole. The wolf, the harsh weather. If you use the same language that you would for the wolf (*stalk, lurk, pounce, creep*) to describe the weather, it becomes a great example of personification.

4 Get the right reading age

KS2 SATs papers have been consistently at a Y6 and above reading age. The latest maths paper had a reading age of Y6. If a Y6 class are only accessing texts at a Y4 level, they are at a disadvantage. Most KS2 reading books have a reading age of Y4, so you can't rely on them for exposure; it has to come from somewhere else. Renaissance, the company behind Accelerated Reader, have a free online tool that will tell you the reading level of any text or any book. Just search for ATOS Reading Analyzer to find out more.

5 Take inspiration from existing texts

All of this might sound daunting, but it doesn't need to be. There are lots of great resources out there to download and use. They are great time savers. In fact, if you use them as a source of ideas for your own writing, they can be a great tool. Downloading them as they are will be OK, but if you can use them as inspiration for your own writing, you will end up with a resource that is uniquely tailored to your class and their needs. You can find a selection of free fiction, non-fiction and poetry texts written by Talk4Writing founder Pie Corbett at **tinyurl.com/tp-PieTexts**

3 STEPS TO AN ENGAGING MODEL TEXT

- Remember the mantra: purpose, purpose, purpose. Does the text need to inform? Will it provide a structural scaffold? Are you trying to demonstrate particular grammar objectives?
- Consider whether it needs to include everything you are trying to fit in. If it's a scaffold, it probably doesn't need so many extra grammar objectives. If its purpose is to inform about a topic, are you adding to your stress levels by trying to include passive voice? Not only are you increasing your own workload, you are also muddying the water for the children. They will be looking to the text for guidance in one form or another, and if you aren't clear on what its purpose is, there's a good chance that they won't be either.
- Remember, at the end of the unit, your pupils are only going to be given 40 minutes or so to write their own text. If it's taking you over an hour, they probably won't be able to do it in less. If you're not expecting the children to include something, then don't worry if you don't either.

Matt Beighton is an experienced primary teacher turned full-time children's writer. Matt now splits his time between writing his* Monstacademy *and* Pick Your Path *gamebook adventures, writing for The Literacy Shed and running writing workshops in schools.

Resource roundup

Eight ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1

Book-based learning

Used by over 50,000 teachers, the Literary Curriculum from Literacy Tree is a comprehensive and cohesive award-winning, book-based approach to primary English. Written by teachers for teachers and using expertly chosen, high-quality texts, children are immersed in fictional worlds to heighten engagement and provide meaningful contexts for writing using its unique 'teach through a text' pedagogy, which ensures all National Curriculum objectives are embedded. School members have access to over 400 book-based resources for writing, reading comprehension and spelling, as well as resources for catch-up and home-learning. Book onto the next free Introduction at **literacytree.com** email **info@literacytree.com** or call 0203 196 0140.

3

Free back-to-school support

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) creates a yearly free back-to-school unit to support all primary school teachers to inspire the whole school community to come together around one book at the start of the academic year. This year the unit is based on *In Our Hands* by Lucy Farfort (Tate Publishing) and focuses on working together to achieve more. **#CLPEInOurHands**

Sign up to be the first to receive free notes in June at **clpe.org.uk/backtoschool**

2

Children's writing competition

The BBC is relaunching 500 Words, the UK's most successful children's writing competition, this September. This year, the competition is supported by BBC Teach and hosted by BBC Breakfast. There are two age categories: 5–7-year-olds and 8–11-year-olds, and children of all abilities can enter and not worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar. The best-selling authors Frank Cottrell Boyce, Francesca Simon, Charlie Higson and former Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman all return as judges, and joining the judging panel for 2023 will be Sir Lenny Henry! 500 Words will also enjoy the support of Her Majesty, the Queen Consort. Find out more at **bbc.co.uk/500words**

Create writing experts with STABILO

STABILO specialises in ergonomic shaped pens and pencils which are specifically designed for left and right handers. Learning to write is an important skill to master and with the EASY Start range of handwriting pens and pencils this can be made EASY. Within the range you'll find something suitable for all school ages and abilities. Also, the EASYgraph and the EASYoriginal are not only loved by kids but they are also approved by UK teachers. **stabilo.com/uk**

4

Boost physical literacy

A programme designed to improve children's physical literacy and activity levels has been launched by Premier Education. Wow Active helps primary schools measure the impact of their PE delivery and tracks pupil progress through a series of fun and inclusive challenges. Schools using Wow Active identified on average a 24 per cent increase in performance, with children participating in PE more effectively and being more accountable for their own health and fitness. Teachers can access Ofsted-compatible data, track and monitor individual pupils, compare class average scores against national averages and identify those requiring interventional support. Sign up now to get 50% off Wow Active until the end of the school year. Visit **premier-education.com/wow-active**

5

6

Over 10,000 teaching resources

CGP+ saves you time and effort when planning lessons. It has complete coverage of the whole Primary Curriculum with engaging resources to download for every subject – including worksheets, interactive games, PowerPoints and more. New resources are added all the time, like EAL and Comprehension, so there's always something exciting to discover (plus exclusive member benefits!). Teachers are giving CGP+ 5 stars; here's just one of the reviews: "The time I've saved already makes the subscription excellent value for money." Visit **cgpplus.co.uk** today to start your free trial, then it's just £3 a month!

Meeting the reading challenge

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

7

BSL for beginners

8

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

Podcast

Characters overcoming difficulties, with Helen Rutter

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

Starting a new school can be difficult, and some children face additional challenges as they adjust to the changes involved. Many novels are set in school, and children can read and learn from them, empathising with characters going through similar periods of transition or change.

Author Helen Rutter skilfully takes the reader on a journey from primary to secondary school for Billy Plimpton in her debut novel *The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh*. The move to Bannerdale was always going to be a little trickier for Billy as he has a stammer, but he still dreams of being a stand-up comedian. Rutter explores Billy's feelings using humour and empathy both for Billy, and for the characters around him.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write stories of their own based on a character who is finding their way in the world, exploring how they can show the character's feelings and using humour to soften tricky situations. Extracts from the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast episode featuring Helen Rutter **(bit.ly/AIYCHelenRutter)** are suggested to introduce each section of the teaching sequence, providing an excellent way to connect the things children are learning with the work of a professional author.

SESSION 1

FINDING A CHARACTER

1 | Play the beginning of the podcast up to **4:41**.

2 | Discuss with the children where Helen Rutter got the idea for her story (her own son has a stammer).

3 | Ask pupils to think about things that they may have found difficult at school (if they are happy to share) or what they think other children could find difficult, especially during the move from primary to secondary school.

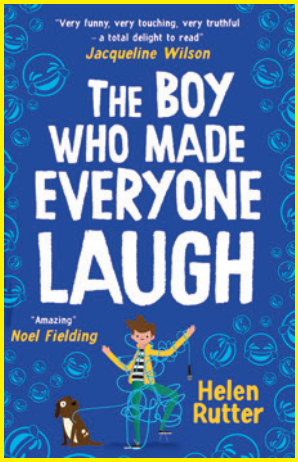
4 | Discuss with the children how, although Billy has a stammer, his dream is still to do something that involves speaking in front of lots of people – being a stand-up comedian! Discuss ideas for characters children might create, thinking about these questions:

- What might the character be good at?
- What might their dream be?
- What difficulties might they have in achieving that dream?

Discuss what the answers to each of these questions would be for Billy.

5 | Ask pupils to jot down their ideas for characters. If children cannot think of a character to write about, ask them to think about their own dreams or someone else's whom they know well.

"I want things to feel as real as possible"



Illustrations: Andrew Bannecke

SESSION 2

DEVELOPING YOUR CHARACTER

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **10:45** up to **20:45**. While listening to Helen reading the extract from the book, ask pupils to think about how Billy's thoughts and feelings are described. Discuss how Helen Rutter shows Billy's feelings through what he says, what he does and how he talks about events that have happened in the past, using these questions:

- What happens in this extract?
- How does Billy feel about this?
- How does Billy show those feelings?

2 | Point out how Helen shows Billy's feelings through his narration of the events (using the first person) and how he feels about Mr Osho. These are shown through his actions and inner thoughts, as well as what he says out loud to his mum. Billy also talks about 'Going Nuclear', describing how he has reacted in the past to situations that he doesn't like. Can pupils relate to this? Discuss what 'Going Nuclear' might look and sound like by role playing what he might say to his mum and dad. You could also explore how Billy's mum's feelings are shown in the extract.

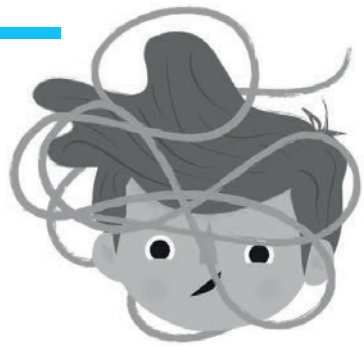
3 | Discuss the things that make everyone in the class special. What could actually become their very own superpower?

4 | Children should choose a character from their notes in session 1 and develop their ideas further using a sheet of paper or a new page in their writing book. Explain that pupils will be writing their own story about a character who overcomes a difficulty. Children can note ideas for events or difficulties their characters may face, how they feel about them and how they will overcome them.

5 | Pupils should explore their ideas with a friend and add additional ideas as they come up. Role play could be used to explore how characters might react to different situations.

6 | Pupils could write a character profile, describing their character's dream and the difficulties that they may face as they strive to achieve this.

SESSION 3



PLOTTING A STORY

1 | Discuss with the children why it is a good idea to plot out your story before starting the writing.

2 | In *The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh*, Billy goes through a series of events to reach his dream of doing stand-up comedy. If you have read the book, discuss the events.

3 | Children should plan their own story using ideas from the previous sessions, plotting the main points and how the character feels at each point.

SESSION 4

EDITING AND WRITING

1 | Play the section of the podcast again that starts at **4:41** up until **10:35** (the end of part 1). Why do the children think Helen Rutter advises them to get their ideas written down quickly?

2 | Listen to the extract again **(10:45** up to **20:45)** and explore some of the features that the author uses in her writing, including:

- first person
- describing characters' feelings
- using noun phrases to describe the scene
- including information about previous events
- using dialogue to advance the action

3 | Now, ask children to write their own first-person story based around their character achieving their dream. Remind pupils to get their ideas down, as they can always edit their story once finished.

4 | Ask them to share their work with a partner, working together to identify parts that they are especially pleased with and parts where they could make improvements. Then give children time to go back to work and make changes, rewriting any parts that they think could be improved.

5 | If you have a working wall, extracts from children's work could be displayed for everyone to see, perhaps as a 'before and after' with children's original section and then the new, improved section after they've rewritten it.

AFTER THE UNIT...

- Explore the stories of other characters from the book, particularly William Blakemore or Billy's mum. How do they feel about events in the story? Pupils could rewrite sections from a different character's point of view.
- Read examples of the jokes that Billy tells throughout the story. Which one is the children's favourite? Give pupils the opportunity to share their own jokes and create a stand-up comedy show!
- This teaching sequence has given pupils the opportunity to develop characters within a story. When reading other books, discuss how characters are feeling and the techniques that authors use to show this through dialogue or their actions.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOOKS

Having restrictive ideas and goals for children's reading will only make them resent it, says **Lis Jardine**. We need to be open to their choices, instead – so pass the comics!

As a secondary school librarian, I see first-hand a lot of children who stop reading, often in Years 8 and 9 (age 12–14). They find it boring, irrelevant, and no kind of competition to their screens. Any love for books they ever had has often been squashed out of them by the things schools 'have' to do to improve reading skills in their pupils – filling out worksheets, close reading, writing reviews or responses, and spending months on the same text.

I'm sorry to have to tell you that there aren't a bunch of quick fixes for this. No single activity or trick is going to give these kids back their love of reading.

But, what I think we should do to encourage a habit of reading in children is to relinquish control. And we need to begin this in primary school, so they have the skills to find texts that matter to them in those later years.

We all know that children's own choices of books are an essential part of enjoying reading. We've all seen a child we thought completely uninterested in reading finally get absorbed into a text they're genuinely fond of.

So, how does this work in the classroom? These are some ways we could give children back choice:

Be a role model

To help the children in your life, you need to read things you're passionate about, and talk all the time about what you're reading. Make reading time a priority in your own life. If you're a teacher or a librarian who deals with a lot of younger kids, read books for that age group. Without a community around them who all read and talk about their books, how will kids know that reading is rewarding and relevant?

Respect their reading rights

Don't ever laugh at, judge or invalidate what they read. No book should ever be ridiculed, especially if it's one they've chosen themselves. Superhero comics are reading. Beauty or car magazines, music websites, gamer blogs and technical instruction manuals are all reading. We must make sure kids know that all these forms are valid and that reading anything makes them a reader. This identity will stick.

Offer texts related to their interests

They aren't you and they won't necessarily like the books you read, or read as a child. Many children are jaded by old-fashioned books, and have no idea that fresh and exciting stories exist. Because so many people only shop for books in supermarkets, the rich diversity of current children's titles is never even noticed by the majority of adults – but there is something for everyone out there.

If they're gamers, get them gaming magazines or books that tie in to their favourites. If they watch Marvel films on repeat, why not offer them the source graphic novels? What you think of as 'quality literature' can come later; what we're aiming for is establishing the custom of reading.

Provide a vast range of material

Kids need to be surrounded, every day, with fiction, comics, magazines, non-fiction; whatever they express an interest in. All classrooms should have a big bookcase with modern and attractive books relevant to the age group and just above, especially short non-fiction reads for those kids who find chunky fiction off-putting (there are a huge number of kids who avoid anything longer than 50 pages).

Get rid of tattered or old-fashioned books in your collection. Their unattractive appearance will dilute the impact of any fun books you actually have.

Teach kids how to choose a book

And use a library! I've known (and continue to meet) many children for whom a library is a mystery. They don't know the vocabulary of borrowing, returning and renewing; they don't know how to find anything specific, or how books are arranged, or whether they can actually take the books home with them. But as the book blogger Dawn Finch says: "The library is a key factor in turning your child into an accomplished reader – precisely because of that treasure trove of choice. Where else can your child stand in the midst of hundreds of different titles and grab whatever catches their eye for free?"

"No book should ever be ridiculed, especially if it's one they've chosen themselves"

Give them time to read

In *The Book Whisperer*, Donalyn Miller suggests that without lots of time spent reading books they have freely chosen, children will not get that wonderful feeling of immersion in a story.

If you can, ringfence lengthy opportunities in class, and don't expect them to drop their book without a nice bit of warning (you'd hate it if you couldn't finish the chapter!). I heartily recommend Donalyn's book for anyone wanting to know more about her approach to encouraging reading.

Be flexible when using reading schemes

I've used schemes at two different schools and I see them as a means and not an end – I've learned to be flexible. Some kids will love the structure and the point-earning, and quiz frequently for that feeling of success. For other kids the limitations are terribly discouraging; they have to read something quizzable, and they have to keep trying to test and often getting disappointing results back. If they're slow readers they may be told off for not quizzing often enough; unsurprisingly, this doesn't make them any keener to read! Being told they can read what they like is a huge weight off their minds.

Focus on successes

And PLEASE don't insist that they must finish what they have started. Kids should be allowed to abandon anything that they aren't actively enjoying. Any kind of pressure to stick with something dull is giving them negative feedback.

HOW TO HELP KIDS CHOOSE A BOOK

- Look at the cover – does it spark your interest? Do you like the title? Is it a bit like other books you've enjoyed?
- Look at the back! Read the blurb to see if the book is about something that interests you.
- What genre is it? If you watch a lot of murder mysteries or listen to non-fiction podcasts, you might find books in these genres more attractive.
- Try a few pages! Read one to three, and see what you think. Is the writing style pacey and exciting? Do you want to carry on? If it's not right for you, just put it back and try again.
- Ask your friends or a teacher/librarian whose opinion you trust. What do they think you'd like? Do they know of something similar to books you've enjoyed before?
- Do the five-finger test: read one page from the middle of the book. Count one finger for every word you don't know, and if you get to five it might be that the vocabulary is too hard in this book.

* Adapted from the National Literacy Trust's 'How to choose a book'

Lis Jardine is a secondary school librarian and author. Her first book **The Detention Detectives** *(£7.99, Puffin) is out now.*

Learn to write like an AMERICAN PRESIDENT

The pen is more powerful than the sword, so lean into lessons from some of the US' finest, and teach your class to compose like a Commander in Chief

ALEX QUIGLEY

To succeed in the most powerful job in the world, you need to learn to wield a pen. From founding fathers like Benjamin Franklin, to modern-day presidents like Barack Obama, the humble instrument has proved just as mighty as the sword.

So, what can we learn about writing from American presidents past and present? Let's turn the page on the likes of Donald Trump and explore how Obama wrote himself into the hallowed pages of history.

Learn from the best

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the former president cites lots of early reading as the key to becoming a skilled writer. His voracious reading saw him consume, and then mimic, his favourite writers, such as the brilliant Black Americans Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin.

For primary-age pupils, mimicking the style of mature writers is an essential step in the process of finding their own voice. Too often, we pose great writing – like a speech from Obama or Martin Luther King – as models, but pupils find it too hard because there is simply too much sophistication.

Instead, we can retain the model, but likely shrink the challenge to imitating a single sentence. For example, we can take an Obama sentence like 'A change is brought about because ordinary people do extraordinary things', and we can begin to play with its language. What if 'a change' became 'a dream', or 'ordinary' was substituted for 'everyday'?

The mimicry of stirring rhetoric from a prominent president can offer vital modelling for our present-day pupils.

If at first you don't succeed...

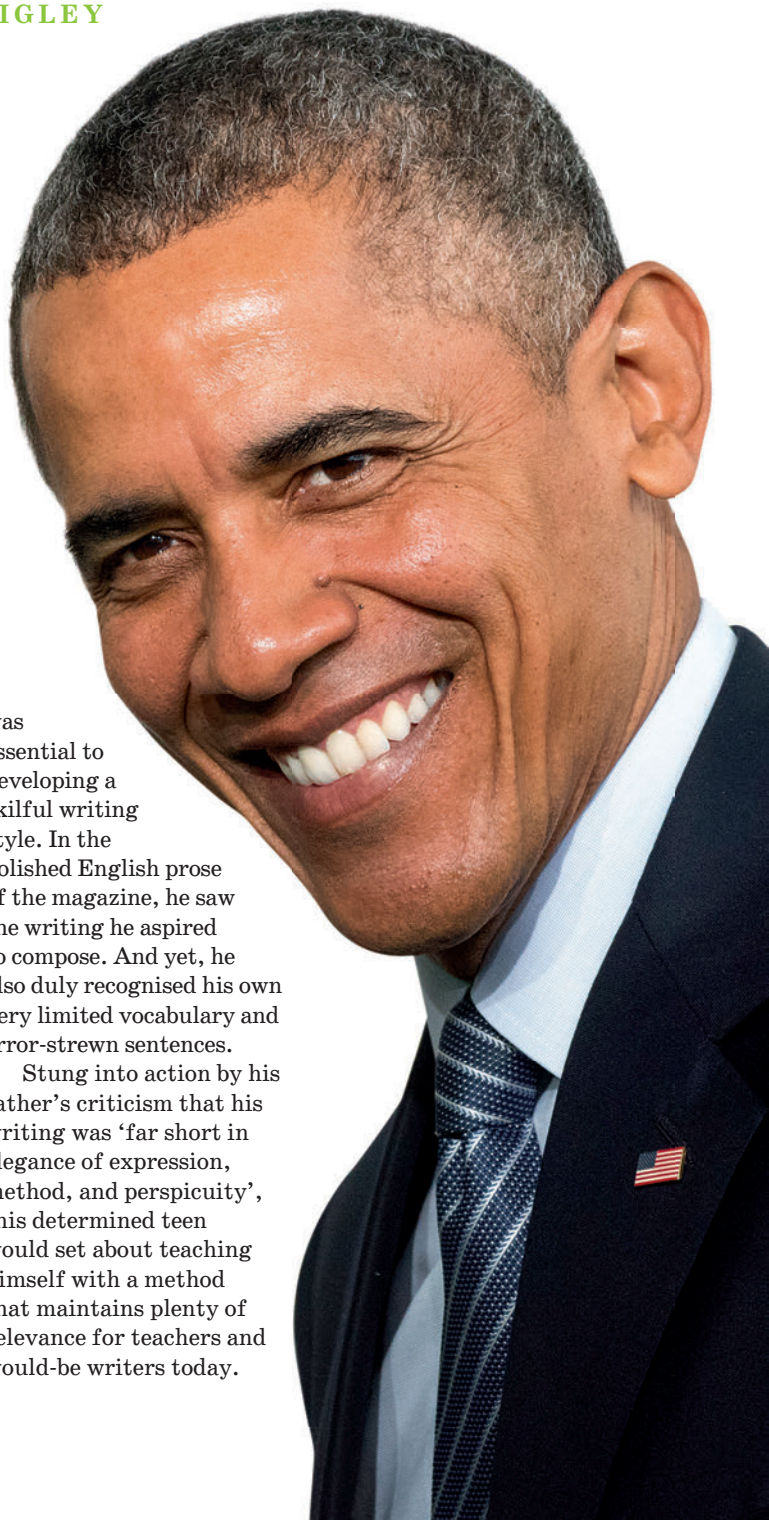
Arguably the most famous of all American writers, Benjamin Franklin, didn't quite become president, but he helped create the role as a founding father. Born in 1706, he played a huge part in building the America we know today and writing it into the history books.

Before he became a founding father in the first US government, Franklin was born into poverty, and he left school at just 10 years of age.

His story of teaching himself to write is quite famous, too. Franklin, without a teacher, was determined to be a great writer.

The Spectator was Franklin's magazine of choice. Akin to Obama, he recognised some early mimicry was essential to developing a skilful writing style. In the polished English prose of the magazine, he saw the writing he aspired to compose. And yet, he also duly recognised his own very limited vocabulary and error-strewn sentences.

Stung into action by his father's criticism that his writing was 'far short in elegance of expression, method, and perspicuity', this determined teen would set about teaching himself with a method that maintains plenty of relevance for teachers and would-be writers today.



Brilliant Benjamin

Franklin had three different but related strategies to learn how to write like an all-time-great.

First, like Obama, he would read voraciously. He would select great-quality articles from copies of *The Spectator*. Then he would test his knowledge and memory for those writerly moves:

'I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to compleat [sic] the papers again... in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them,' reports Franklin's *Autobiography and Other Writings*.

This 'text reconstruction' has the ingredients of memorable, deliberate practice. By imitating the stylish articles, forcing a little forgetting (deploying what cognitive scientists may term as 'spacing'), Franklin would come to remember powerful vocabulary and to pick up the patterns of the type of writing he would go onto imitate and ultimately surpass.

Franklin's second strategy was translating prose to poetry, and back again. This strategy could have come straight from Ancient Rome when it was commonplace. But why shift from prose articles to poetry?

Franklin himself described his approach, again in his *Autobiography and Other Writings*:

'Therefore I took some of the tales in *The Spectator*, and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. By comparing my work with the original, I discovered many faults, and corrected them.'

> *"Mimicking the style of mature writers is an essential step in the process"*

Articulating prose as poetry, with its regular rhythms and structures, forced Franklin to choose different, more fitting vocabulary. Once more, it would give him purposeful practice to work with language, sentence structures, and the subtle rhythms a writer learns over a time.

Finally, Franklin's third approach was to focus on crafting a well-structured piece of writing. He was again asserting his own degree of difficulty – to make the practice hard, but worth it – by jumbling up his sentence notes to force him into restructuring entire texts. He would have to consider the regular patterns, and parts, of texts.

What still applies?

A key approach that Franklin and Obama share is shedloads of purposeful writing practice. They both undertook a series of tricky challenges that forced them to consider word choices, sentence choices, and whole text structures.

Another key ingredient was imitation. They say great artists steal – well great writers imitate. Collecting good examples of writing, copying them out, forgetting them, and trying to remember them again can help our young writers.

Every teacher, and pupil, can practise like a president and develop their ability to wield power with the humble pen.

Alex Quigley is the author of **Closing the Writing Gap.** *A former teacher, he is now the head of content and engagement at the Education Endowment Foundation, alongside his personal writing and training for teachers.*

5 PRESIDENTIAL TEACHING STRATEGIES

1 Read, read, read. For a developing writer, there is no substitute for ample reading when it comes to absorbing the styles and structures of great authors. Wide reading offers pupils vital exposure to the rich vocabulary and approaches that they will need for academic success.

2. Imitate stylish sentences. It can be too much for a novice to absorb an entire great speech or story. We can focus on imitating stylish sentences instead, copying their structure, switching their words, adding to or shrinking them.

3. Style switches. Rather than simply imitate a famed speech or a slick story opening, we can get pupils to discriminate between the different styles they can deploy for effect. For instance, they could take a formal, lofty Obama sentence and make it short and plain. Equally, they can take old-fashioned writing and make it modern.

4. Turn poetry into prose (or vice versa). Pupils often struggle to understand the unique differences between poetry and prose. By modelling and practising the translation between the genres, we offer a clever way to aid deeper understanding, as well as undertaking some stylish writing and vocab practice.

5. Jumbled texts. With a little help from technology, or some scissors, we can jumble up sentences or paragraphs and get pupils to reconstruct the text. In doing so, children begin to recognise the language patterns and the typical transitions that signpost and structure successful writing.

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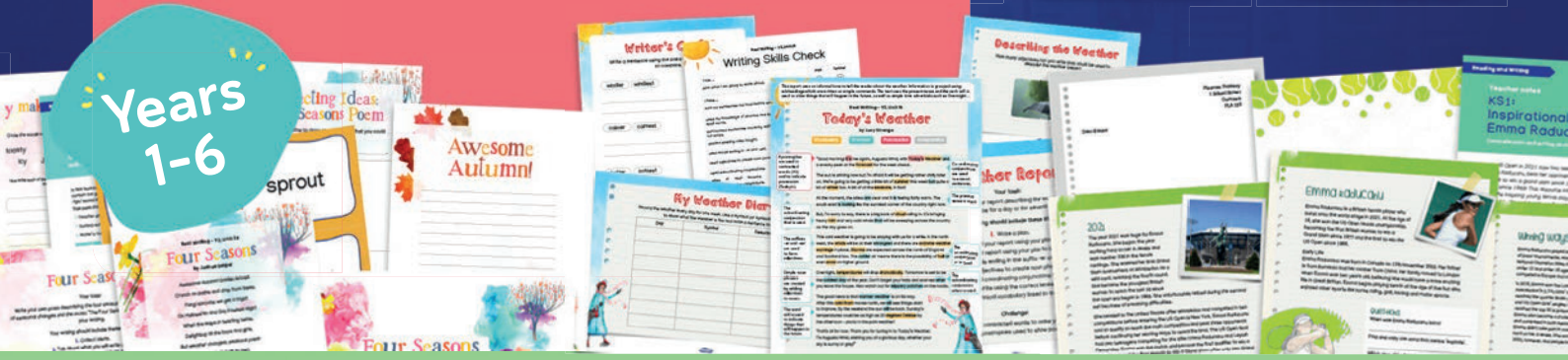

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Lost in translation

Hundreds of thousands of children arrive in our schools without the language they need, says **Fiona Harris**. But training up young interpreters can provide the skills to support them...

Hola! Buna ziua! Salama! Merhaba! Feeling lost? You're not the only one.

Have you ever arrived at an exotic holiday location only to find yourself struggling to understand the locals or unable to ask where the toilets are? Ever looked down at a menu to realise you haven't a clue what any of the items are, or if they're even edible?

Arriving in a new country can be exciting, but for many it can be a daunting experience – particularly when we don't speak a common language. So how can we help those arriving in our classrooms with little or no English?

No hablo ingles

There are currently 1.6 million children in England who speak English as an additional language (EAL) (DfE 2021), and many of these have arrived with little or no spoken or written English. How we welcome, support and teach these children is vital to their wellbeing, as well as their social and academic journey through school and later life.

Our city-centre school in the bustling heart of Cambridge has over 160 EAL children, with staff and pupils speaking a total of over 36 different languages! We welcome new pupils from across the globe every year, and have recently adopted a new approach to easing the transition into an English-speaking school.

Can I help?

We have introduced a scheme training up a group of 'young interpreters' with the skills to support new children arriving with little or no English. After being given a brief summary of the role, which includes being paired up with a younger child to help interpret, play games and introduce English vocabulary, an entire Y4 class were desperate to apply for the job, using a formal application form, to be one of these esteemed young interpreters.

The scheme is run by a member of staff who trains up the group. Not all the young interpreters are bilingual, and importantly they do not replace professional interpreters or bilingual staff. They are, however, totally enthusiastic and overwhelmingly eager to help! The young interpreters are paired up and then 'buddied' with a younger child who speaks the same mother tongue as at least one of the interpreters, so that someone has a common language with the new child. This isn't always possible, but we try!

Each young interpreter receives training on how to play with younger EAL learners, including being taught how to do a tour of the school for new or prospective children and their parents, and sessions learning how to use resources such as language picture cards to communicate with other children who are new to English.

I don't know about you, but I do love a bit of 'branded' clothing that identifies a group I belong to. The young interpreters are no different: they have identity badges and are fundraising for caps to wear to distinguish them and their role in the school. This motivates the helpers to live up to their role of facilitating positive play, communication and integration across all cultures and languages in the school.

All in this together

This scheme is reciprocal in its nature: not only are the new EAL children welcomed into the school and able to speak their own language with another pupil, but the young interpreters are empowered with the life-long skills to help others.

One young interpreter told me: "I've learned that you need to be kind to the children, and let them play what they want to play." Another reported that the younger EAL children had "made friends and have started learning more English words."

It's not all plain sailing though. The Y4 children are paired with those in Early Years or Reception, which is a considerable age gap and can cause some conflict. But pupils are learning how to communicate. One Y4 admitted that "it's not as easy as it sounds, but I've learned how to cooperate with younger children."

Even during the early stages of its implementation, we have found that the scheme has already begun to support early learners with their language, communication and play.

These are incredible skills to learn, and the programme is an amazing opportunity to bridge the language gap, welcome new learners into our community and develop lasting cross-cultural friendships.

You can learn more about schemes in your area by searching 'young interpreters'.

Fiona Harris is a teacher at St Matthew's Primary School, Cambridge.

The Tunnels

Pie Corbett shows your class how a fascinating portal story can liven up historical knowledge with this exclusive model text...

Mum made us go. She reckoned it was 'educational' and anyway, it would keep us out of the rain. Dover Castle.

Dad told me that there were secret tunnels under the cliffs – miles of them. Originally, they'd been built in the old days, two hundred years ago, when there was no TV, no mobile phones and people emptied their toilets into the street! Yuck. Anyway, he told me that soldiers had lived in the tunnels. He reckoned that they had been put there to fight against smugglers, but in the long run, the tunnels had been abandoned.

Once we arrived, there was a huge display about it all. I figured that there must be the ghosts of dead soldiers lurking in dark corners. Mum gave me her hard stare and Dad read the display while I looked at the old photos. At the start of the Second World War, the tunnels had been used as a military command centre and an underground hospital. I was right – there had to be ghostly screams from the hospital where the wounded still lay dying. I pulled my ghost face and Mum gave me another deathly stare like Darth Vader on a bad hair day.

I shuddered. It was cold in the tunnels. I thought about what might be lurking round the corner. The ghostly forms of rotting soldiers, dragging their wounded limbs or even headless smugglers! Then, I thought about the tons of rock and chalk above us. Supposing it came crashing down?

I was staring at a display when it happened. I've never been a great reader at the best of times; it made my eyes fuzzy! One moment, I was standing there, happy as a bunny in a corn field and then, I came over dizzy. The next moment, I was in a strange-looking room, dimly lit by a bare lightbulb with a huge wooden board against the wall, which was covered in a massive map.

A rather large man with a round head and glasses was sitting at a table covered in papers. He turned to stare at me, puffing vile-smelling smoke from an enormous cigar. I coughed. "Mmmm," he muttered in a deep gravelly voice, "A boy. Where did you pop up from?" I didn't know what to say and hadn't really got a clue where I had popped up from. I thought it best to keep shtum and say nothing.

"Care for one?" he asked, shoving a cigar towards me. I shook my head. Mum had warned me about the perils of smoking – quickest way to end up grinning at the daisy roots, she said. "Probably best," he muttered. "Well, my boy, time to stop gawping like a goldfish and make a decision! We are in a bit of a pickle at Dunkirk. The question is, what do we do?"

He picked up a wooden stick and pointed at a huge map on the wall. I recognised England and France. On the north French coast, the map was speckled with coloured pins. "Our soldiers are here. Thousands of them on the beaches at Dunkirk. But, the enemy are there," he grunted, "and they have us pinned down. No going forwards and if we try to run, it's straight into the arms of the ocean! We are trapped, my boy, between the devil himself and the deep blue sea." I wondered if I had got myself involved in some sort of battle game situation. Was this a version of Warhammer?

There was a knock on a makeshift door and a woman entered, clutching some papers. "Admiral Ramsay wants to know what you have decided for Operation Dynamo." She didn't look once in my direction. It was as if she hadn't seen me at all.

"We are deliberating!" he thundered and shushed her towards the door. Turning to me, he spoke again. "Well, my boy. I need your good counsel." I wasn't too sure what my good counsel was but had caught the drift of what he was asking.

"I'd get out of it, beat a retreat," I stuttered. "My Uncle Frank's got a fishing boat off Yarmouth; he'd help." As soon as I said it, I knew it was stupid. If we had thousands of soldiers pinned down on the beaches how on earth could Uncle Frank's boat be of much use?

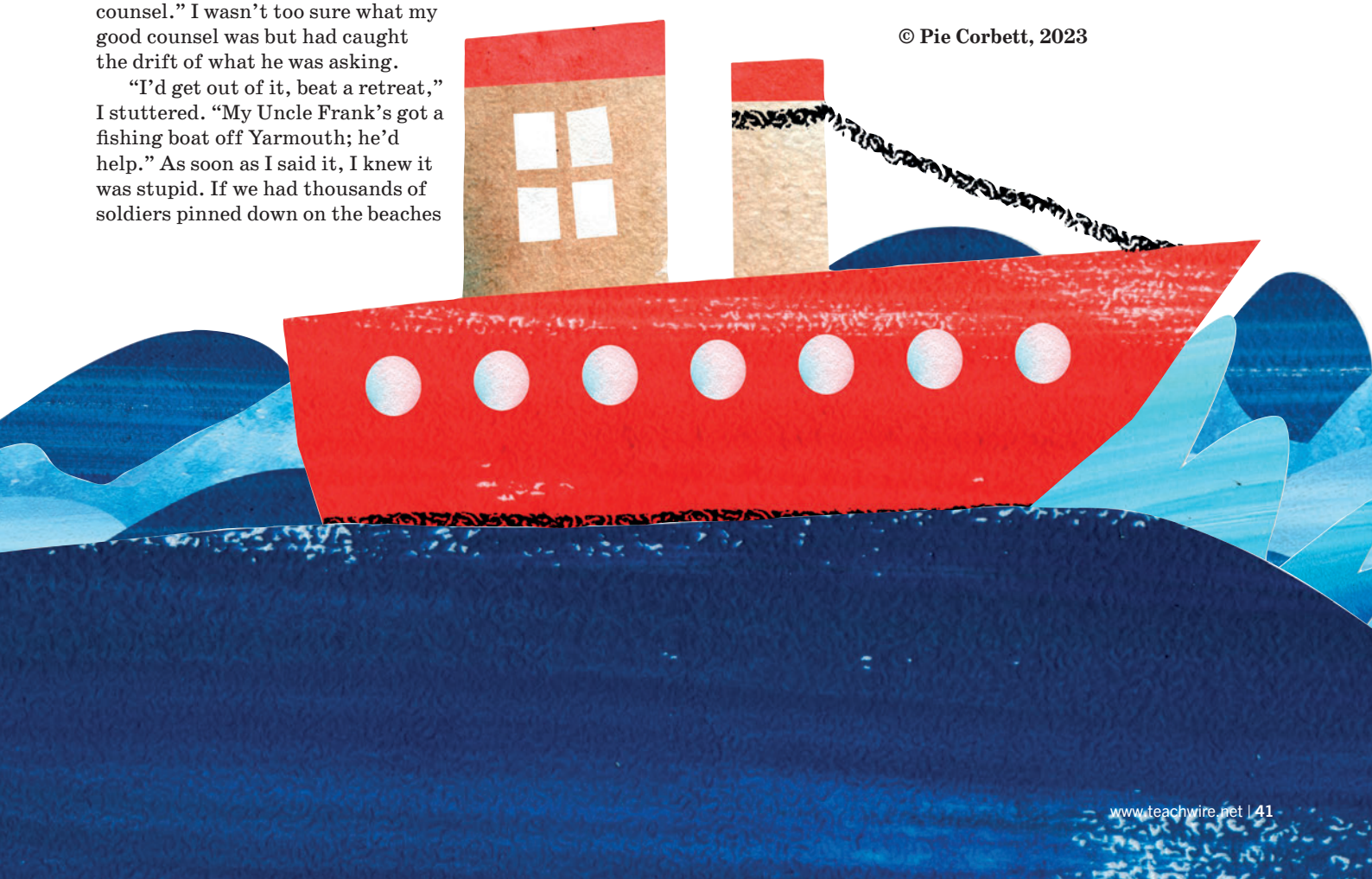
There was a silence as my gentleman puffed on his cigar. My eyes smarted with the smoke. It was worse than sticking your head in a bonfire. "Well, well, well that is not a bad idea for a pipsqueak of a boy. Boats. That's what we need. We are indeed a sea-faring nation. We will call upon your Uncle Frank and thousands like to him to save our boys."

He chuckled and his chin wobbled. "Good plan, my boy." Banging the table, he roared, "Miss whateveryournameis – get me Admiral Ramsay here! Now!" Once again, he swivelled to look at me with his sad, bloodshot eyes. "You had best skidaddle," he said. There was a knock at the door and in strode a tall man in uniform. He saluted my gentleman... and I took the chance to slip out of the room into a dark, damp corridor.

At that moment, I heard my dad's voice as if he was calling from a long way off. "Terry, snap out of it. It's no time to daydream. We've only got half an hour in the tunnels and then we'll see if we can get your mum into that burger bar we spotted." I shook my head. The fuzziness cleared. I was still standing by the display cabinet with my dad tugging at my elbow. I blinked in the light like a lost owl and muttered the words 'burger bar' several times.

Half an hour later, we walked back up the sloping tunnels and out into the daylight and there it was: a statue of someone I recognised. It was the man in uniform. Dad read the plaque. It was Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, who had led Operation Dynamo and the evacuation of the soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. "Clever idea," said my Dad. "He saved over three hundred thousand of our soldiers with his plan." I gulped!

Then I noticed that rather unfortunately for the Admiral, he had a seagull on his head... and yes, it had just pooped on him!



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TEACHING NOTES

Background

This is a portal story that has a flashback in time to a previous era. It is true that in May 1940, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay directed Operation Dynamo from the Dover tunnels. His statue does stand outside the tunnels, and thanks to his plan to use small boats to evacuate the soldiers from the beaches, he was responsible for saving the lives of 338,000 British and French soldiers. Whilst the prime minister Winston Churchill did order the evacuation, it is not known if he visited the tunnels. That part I invented.

Deepen understanding

Loiter with the story for a few days, if not longer. This will help the less confident internalise the patterns. Make sure that they have heard the story being read and read it themselves as often as possible. Display it on the interactive whiteboard so that it can be seen by everyone. Deepen understanding with the following activities:

- Use Google to find out more about Dover Castle and the tunnels.
- Who was Churchill and why is he remembered?
- Role-play the conversation between Dad and Terry, discussing what happened.
- Hot-seat Dad, Mum or Terry about the trip and compare different viewpoints of the trip.
- In pairs, explore viewpoint by interviewing Churchill and then Terry – and write the different diary entries, covering the events in the story.
- Draw a character graph to show how Terry's feelings change during the story – label the ups and downs with words and phrases from the story.
- Write a short description of being trapped in a tunnel – what do you see, hear, feel and think?

Writing your own version.

To help the children write a version of a similar story, use either somewhere local that the children have visited, or a period in time that they have been studying. For this story, I did consider my main character meeting the young Queen Victoria!

- Start the story by getting your main character to a place where a famous person once lived.
- Have your main character explore the chosen setting and then take them back in time. This could be through:
  - a 'fuzzy' moment;
  - touching an old object;
  - stepping through a magical doorway;
  - standing in a significant place.
- Use shared writing to model how to build up the tension by slowing the action down – use detail from the chosen time period to make it sound authentic.
- Experiment by writing in the first person for the story. To do this, it helps to imagine what it is happening as you write the story – 'see it in your head'.
- You could try and choose a key event from the chosen time period and involve your main character in that event.

Grammar for writing

Work on writing dialogue using the following key pointers:

- Think about how a character feels and show this through what they say, e.g. *'We are deliberating!'*
- Use powerful speech verbs, to show how a character feels, e.g. *thundered, muttered, stuttered, roared, grunted*
- Or, use said + adverb – *he said, nervously*
- Start a new line for a new speaker; start new speech with a capital, followed by either a comma, exclamation mark, or question mark
- Tag on what a character is doing while speaking, using a 'stage direction' – *he muttered, in a deep gravelly voice*
- Use quirky expressions to bring the character alive, e.g. *stop gawping like a goldfish*
- Tag on extra information about what is happening, e.g. *"Care for one?" he asked, shoving a cigar towards me.*

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

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A novel approach

Combine twisting tongues and paperback publishing to produce an exciting writing project that allows pupils to make their very own book

DAVID HORNER AND MIKE JACKSON

Have you ever tried to get your class excited about a writing exercise, only for them to pipe up with "But what's the point?". We've all been there, and it can be incredibly frustrating when you don't have an answer lined up.

Well, with this project, the outcome is both evident and impressive! As part of a workshop, we decided to show children the amazing process of publishing, while adding in some humour, and – of course – essential literacy skills…

We visited Helen and her Y6 class for a morning, and explained to the children that we would do some writing that would lead to the publication of their very own paperback book. We would act as their agents, editors and publisher; they would have full control over all other aspects of the process.

We settled on tongue twisters as our subject, and began by inviting children to try out some old favourites. After much twisting of tongues and accompanying laughter, we showed the children probably the best-known English example: the one featuring Peter Piper:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper.
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

We challenged the class to compose 26 brand-new twisters, each following the pattern of that original but finding their own vocabulary.

Helen organised the class into pairs or threes, and each group was given two letters of the alphabet to work on, ensuring no group got two of the trickier letters. Armed with dictionaries, the children got to work, and by breaktime had produced some impressively inventive twisters. Here's an example, cleverly coping with one particularly difficult letter:

Xavier Xmas x-rayed an extra-terrestrial xylophone.
An extra-terrestrial xylophone Xavier Xmas x-rayed.
If Xavier Xmas x-rayed an extra-terrestrial xylophone,
Where's the extra-terrestrial xylophone Xavier Xmas x-rayed?

Although writing was the focus of the project, there were clear opportunities throughout for lots of worthwhile speaking and listening, too. The pupils engaged in planning their tongue-twisters, and shared drafts in small groups. Next, the groups came together to swap ideas and ask for opinions, and, finally, children read aloud their contributions and again asked for feedback. As the children worked, they giggled a lot, but the seriousness and concentration they brought to the task was impressive throughout. The talk was easily focused, because, in national curriculum terms, pupils were 'discussing writing similar to that which they [were] planning to write'. There was also a clear need for writers to read the original text very carefully, which was built into their discussion and planning for their own verses. This focus was nicely balanced by the eager and sustained use of dictionaries and the need for creativity in their word-hunting, showing their 'enjoyment and understanding of language, especially vocab'.

Throughout, the process was always collaborative; writers understood they were working towards a shared, larger whole, and to tight deadlines, with a clear need for some 'speedy writing'! Once drafts were complete, all the children had to do some editing, and lots of proofreading.

After breaktime, we explained that once we were gone, they, the writers, would be in charge. All 26 twisters must be typed up and emailed to us by the end of the week. For the book, they must write a blurb and an introduction, and choose a title. We explained how easy and low-cost it is to self-publish; the only cost came with the ordering of actual copies and so they must settle on a price per copy and crucially decide how many they would like to order (sneaking in a bit of economics!). The children listened with real attention to all this and asked a good number of questions after, showing a remarkably mature commitment to the task.

Helen reported that the children very much liked the novel approach to writing. They enjoyed their shared creativity and loved being entrepreneurs, relishing the involvement and control they had over the tasks, the decision-making, and the purpose. For that short time, they had turned their classroom into a genuine publishing house and experienced purposeful writing for a real-world outcome – we won't soon forget the looks on their faces when they saw their books for the first time.

David Horner was a writer-in-schools for over twenty years.
davidhorner.com

Mike Jackson is a former primary school headteacher.
@mj51day

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Published by Simon & Schuster Children's UK, 2013

The Storm Whale

Dive deep into Noi's island world, and help pupils infer narrative from pictures in Benji Davies' enduring favourite

CHRISTINE CHEN AND LINDSAY PICKTON

Benji Davies' *The Storm Whale* is a much-loved picturebook with beguilingly simple illustrations and very few words on each page; it can be read to a Year 1 class in a matter of minutes. However, almost everything the story has to say is not actually said: true understanding requires a quite extraordinary level of inference that we have found to challenge older children (and some adults!).

In *The Storm Whale* we get to know a boy called Noi, who lives with his dad (and six cats) in what appears to be an isolated island coastal community; we don't get a glimpse of any other people, and other houses are depicted as set-apart. The housing is ramshackle, and the mod-cons limited, but the real hardship of Noi's life is the fact he is left alone from early morning until after dark, while his father fishes for a living. And even if you don't yet know the story, you'll have now worked out the main thrust of the book: Noi is alone – and, it turns out, lonely – most of the time.

His discovery and befriending of a small, beached whale leads his hard-working dad to recognise his son's loneliness, and we witness the beginnings of a more shared life together. It is a gently expressed story, but nonetheless should be handled with sensitivity: many children have hard-pressed parents, single or otherwise, and do not get the time and attention they crave. Be aware that *The Storm Whale* may touch some children very differently to others, and issues may have to be addressed, but the fact that the story emphasises the father's love for his child is important and is worth focusing upon.

Activities

Learning from the cover

This is one of those books that really rewards time spent pondering the front cover, especially if you can do this before children encounter the story. The cover provides a great deal of information... but it will also give you a sense of the prior knowledge your children are bringing to the story.

Ask pupils what they can see on the cover. Not every child has experience of the seaside, so tease out the clues that make it clear this is a beach (rather than a river): the waves, the expanse, the lighthouse, the animal. Check that they know whales shouldn't be on land, and that they are harmed by this. Remind them of the title and ask them to explain how the whale ended up on the beach.

Now look at the child in the story: what is he doing? How do we know he isn't trying to push the whale back into the sea? What sense do they have of his feelings – and why? What will he do?

Understanding the unsaid

As stated above, we have to infer much of what is really going on in this story – it's why it rewards repeat readings. Once you've read and relished the book a few times, return to the beginning and help children notice the clues that hinted at what was to come.

The first page of the book shows Noi's home: what do they notice? What does it tell you about his life?

Re-read the sentence on the other side of that double page. The 'six cats' information is quite distracting; redirect them to notice what they understand, that *isn't* written: who *doesn't* he live with? Help them notice that they can know things even when they aren't written!

Carry this over to the next page: what do they notice about Noi eating his breakfast? Who is he eating with?

Next, check that pupils understand the implication of the following two sentences: Noi is left by his father for a very long time.

On the next double-page spread, note how calm and peaceful the scene is, and contrast this with 'a great storm had raged' – the only clue that anything different has happened. Draw attention to the information about Noi: a child of about their age, allowed to explore a beach alone; how would they feel?

Then, several pages on, ask the children to explain why Noi is pouring his bucket of water over the little whale. If necessary, help them make the connection between this action and what we are told he knew about whales. When pupils first see Noi pulling the whale on his cart and saying, "I must be quick!", do they think he was going to put him back in the sea?

Show them the double page on which we are told that Noi 'did everything he could to make the whale feel at home,' and ask children to consider what he could have done to make the whale feel even more at home. And why does Noi tell the whale stories?

Remind the children that the author put all these clues in to help us understand more about Noi's life, without actually saying it.

Loneliness is not the only characteristic we can infer about Noi; he is also very kind. Ask the children if they can find clues that contribute to this sense of kindness.

Before and after

It's easy to miss (or dismiss) the double-page illustrations of whale silhouettes that are almost the first and last images inside the book, but they are worth talking about after the story has been enjoyed and understood. Draw their attention to the first, in which the smallest whale shape is apparently falling behind the larger whales; why would Benji Davies have put that picture there?

Then look at the equivalent picture at the end of the story: where is the small whale shape now?

Ask the children to speculate on what these pictures have got to do with the story – perhaps even write a sentence or two about each picture.

If it feels appropriate, ask them to consider what the little whale has in common with Noi. Relate this to the last picture of Noi and his dad,

Take it further

Island stories

When the whale is in the bath, Noi tells him stories about life on the island. Begin a discussion about what these stories may involve. What sort of things might happen on an island like Noi's? We know there are storms, and people, and fish... but what else might end up in a story?

Many children will find it very difficult to come up with appropriate ideas here, but think about possibilities in groups or as a whole class. What else might happen during or after a storm? What might happen in the summer holidays? Could there be a story involving all the cats?

You could support composition here by sitting in a circle and encouraging children to try to come up with the next sentence as you work around the group. Some will find this very challenging, though, so keep it light. Similarly, if you move this into writing, make it a low-pressure, collaborative piece, unless they are extremely adept with narrative!

Message in a bottle

Once the children have fully understood the story, ask them to think about Noi's feelings for the little whale: what would Noi want to say to the whale, if they did meet again? (What might he want to thank it for?)

If Noi wanted to write a letter to the whale, what would it say? How would he send it, given that water destroys paper? Introduce the children to the idea of a message in a bottle; then they can write short letters

and the two whale tails protruding from the sea.

Silent thoughts

Benji Davies occasionally lets us know what Noi is thinking, but for the most part, we have to work it out for ourselves. Take children through key scenes – for example, looking out of the window as Dad goes to work/ returns from work; sneaking fish to the whale as Dad naps in the chair; getting caught with the whale – and ask them to put into words the thoughts Noi must be having. Depending on the age and experience of the children, ask them to compose thought bubbles (you could use a template, or mini-whiteboards).

This entire process can be brought to life through freeze-framing identified scenes, as this almost always enhances children's ability to imagine the thoughts of a character. Ask them to make suggestions to each other about how they should be using their eyes, eyebrows, mouths etc to show Noi's feelings, as the illustrations are so minimal in this regard that we are left to infer his expressions.

Dad's diary

When Noi's dad finds the whale in his bath, we're told that he realises his son has been lonely. Discuss this with the children: how does he come to that conclusion? Why isn't he angry? Why has he not realised Noi was lonely? If appropriate, talk very sensitively about the pressure on parents /carers, especially when they're single.

What does Noi's dad decide to do, and why? Help the children to write a diary entry (or two) in-role, talking about their son Noi, how they felt when they saw the whale in the bath, and what they decided to do after that.

Titles

The story is very much about Noi's life, and his relationship with his dad. Ask the children why, then, did the author call the book *The Storm Whale*, rather than, say, *Noi*? Why is the little whale so important to the story? Can they come up with alternative titles for the book?

Next, divide the story into two, three or four parts, as feels appropriate, and ask children to come up with chapter headings for each section. Examples could include, 'Noi's lonely day', 'Finding a friend', 'Dad comes home', and 'Time with Dad'.

Loved this? Try these...

- *The Storm Whale in Winter* – Benji Davies
- *Grandma Bird (The Storm Whale)* – Benji Davies
- *Molly and the Stormy Sea* – Malachy Doyle and Andrew Whitson
- *All Things Whales for Kids* – Admore Publishing
- *Whales: Safari Readers* – Tristan Walters

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton are primary education advisers (primary educationadvisers.co.uk) supporting English development nationally.

in-role as Noi, and even put them in bottles! If appropriate, discuss what the whale might write back (imagining whales could write) and help them compose this, too.

With younger children, talk about writing a short message to the whale in the beach sand, and encourage them to have a go at this in a sandpit or tray, using either their fingers or a stick to make the letters.

Whale research

Provide access to appropriate texts or resources (such as Britannica for Kids: **tinyurl.com/tp-WhaleInfo**) and ask pupils to find answers to key questions such as, 'Why is it bad for whales to be out of water?' 'What causes them to be stranded on land?' 'What kind of whale is the storm whale?' 'In which seas do such whales tend to live?' and 'Can we narrow down the possible location of the island on which Noi and his dad live?'

Stormy seas

Spend some time looking at the images of the dark, rough sea of the inside title page, and also the two illustrations of Noi and his dad in the little rowing boat, again noticing the darkness and the roughness. How do these illustrations make the children feel?

Why has Benji Davies painted such an unwelcoming-looking sea? The sense of power and darkness through line and colour is extremely imitable, even by young children.

Show them how to mix appropriate colours with paints, or by layering crayon or pastel, and how to use wavy lines to get the sense of powerful movement and mystery.

With older pupils, consider transferring the same skills to other landscapes that may be depicted as dark and stormy, such as woodland, a park or a farmer's field.

WAGOLL

Winter's Keep by Tamsin Mori

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to create a captivating atmosphere with their writing...

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

teachwire

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

tinyurl.com/tp-WK

***Winter's Keep* is the third book in the Weather Weaver trilogy. Stella, the main character, and her storm cloud Nimbus, have completed their initial training in the art of weather magic and are now officially weather weavers. The story now turns to the righting of old wrongs. The council of elders have overturned the Storm Laws and decreed that all the storm clouds imprisoned by the Ice Weavers are to be released. However, the first storm cloud imprisoned was the most dangerous of them all – it belonged to the sea witch and now she wants it back. Throughout this story, Stella must make hard choices about who to trust; but if she gets it wrong this time, she risks plunging the world into endless winter...**

Text © Tamsin Mori. ***Winter's Keep*** *(£7.99, UCLAN Publishing) is available now.*

The premise of weather weaving is that clouds and their weather weavers share an emotional connection. In order to master weather weaving, Stella has had to learn to identify, conjure up and regulate her emotions. In *The Weather Weaver*, this is an explosive problem, as she's quite short-tempered and has caught a thundercloud. Teachers could use the weather-as-emotion theme to gently open discussions around feelings, wellbeing, self-regulation and empathy. In a wider sense, it is a very clear example of pathetic fallacy – the weather mirrors the characters' emotions and ways of seeing the world.

The sea witch is an enigmatic character – both terrifying and fascinating. In the scenes where Stella secretly meets her, she is rapidly trying to work out the sea witch's intentions. Teachers might find it useful to highlight how the descriptions of the sea witch within a single scene change as Stella's opinion of her changes.

The extract on the right is a high-tension moment, but the mood in the story quite deliberately alternates between moments of friction and moments of playfulness and curiosity. Comparing chapters with very different moods would be a good opportunity to compare how word choice, action, and setting can all be used to create different atmospheres.

Although the book is written in third person, most of it is very close to character. We get to hear Stella's internal dialogue and experience the world as she does. I very often 'act out' scenes when editing them, to make sure that the movement, body language and physical sensations are accurate and immediate. This might be a fun exercise to try in class!

5 STEPS TO IMPACTFUL WRITING

1 **Poetry scraps** – a bit like artists start with sketches, I often start with scraps of writing. I always carry a notebook and instead of drawings, I use poems to capture a scene, mood, or idea. I think of them as word sketches.

2 **Flex your writing muscles** – even when I'm not working on a book, I write something every day, just to keep my writing brain in shape. Writing gets easier the more you do it.

3 **Active editing** – when there's no-one around, try getting out of your seat and acting out a scene, complete with expressions and movements.

4 **Choose juicy words** – for me, the mood of the scene decides the word choices. Calmer scenes have time for meandering descriptions of setting and longer sentences. Active scenes are packed with bouncy verbs – jump, rush, hurry – and sentences tend to be shorter.

5 **Use all your senses** – what really brings characters to life, is being able to share their experience. If a scene is feeling a bit flat, try checking whether you've used all five senses.

Extract from

Winter's Keep, chapter 19, pages 165-166

I love using all the senses to build the mood of a scene. This is a spooky, uncomfortable scene, so I matched it with an icky uncomfortable sensation that everyone will have felt at some point.

Stella is in a hurry to find the gem before Tamar discovers what she's doing. You can feel the sense of rush in 'there'd been no time for planning' and 'scrabbled'.

Chapter 19

Should have brought a torch, she thought, squinting into the dark gap in the centre. But there'd been no time for planning.

She shoved her fingers deep into the cracks and felt about, mud and grit wedging themselves under her nails.

And then she felt it – a sudden round smoothness. She scrabbled at the gem until it came loose, and carefully pulled it out.

Stella wiped it on her jumper, then turned it round in her hand. The gem was larger than the one that had trapped Tas's cloud and it looked older; its surface pitted and scored. When she held it up to the light, it shone; glowing like a milky rainbow. Was it her imagination, or was something moving in the centre of it? A fragment of cloud.

The wind moaned and there was a fluttering overhead. Stella looked up. Tiny birds were streaking out of the walls of the broch – storm petrels, disturbed from their hidden nests. They circled Nimbus in a whirl of hurried wingbeats, then streamed out of the top of the tower. Wisps of cloud were emerging from the ancient stone wall – some of them weaving to and fro, clearly confused – four of them flickering with threat.

One of the things I love about Stella as a character is that she's very outdoorsy and practical. There are at least four clues to this in the extract, including 'wiped it on her jumper' – Stella doesn't much care about her appearance or getting mucky. Another example is her acknowledgement of 'storm petrels' – she can immediately identify the birds and knows where they nest.

I use an en-dash (literally a dash the length of the letter n!) when the second half of the sentence is a further description or explanation of the first half. It makes the beginning of the sentence a launch pad for the end.

This sentence refers back to events that happened in book 2, *A Gathering Storm*. However, it contains enough information that even readers who haven't read that book can glean the information they need.

I use a question here to fire up the reader's imagination and 'something moving' is very non-specific, which adds to the sense of spookiness.

I used a semi-colon here to let the phrase 'glowing like a milky rainbow' shine – a brief moment of wonder in an otherwise dark and tense scene. A comma or a dash wouldn't have created enough of a pause, while a full stop would have broken the rhythm and the sense of exploration.

I used the sound of the wind moaning to 'zoom out', reminding Stella (and the reader) that even if she's found what she's looking for, she's still in a dark spooky place on her own. Essentially it says: don't relax yet!

Here I wanted to build the tension with a sense of the rapid, unexpected movement overhead, which startles Stella (and hopefully the reader!). I used a whole series of active verbs and adjectives to create this sense of motion – *streaking; hurried wingbeats; streamed.*

Here, I've used dashes for rhythm. These could be three separate sentences, but I want the reader to read them all in one go, as a series of rapid realisations, almost as if you were inside Stella's head.

A new approach TO READING

Dump the boring books and reenergise poetry and prose with this simple lesson structure...

LUCY JARVIS

Is there a lack of love for reading in your school? Are your children struggling with their fluency? Are you stuck in a cycle of unambitious and boring books that you don't ever refresh? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it might be time to shake things up and reenergise your reading lessons.

Types of text

Before the start of the new academic year, you might want to consider the exposure your children have to different text types. At my school, we completely restructured our reading curriculum so that Years 2–6 now begin each term with a non-fiction text (which is linked to their current topic), followed by a fiction text and finally ending with either a picturebook, video, graphic novel or play script.

This range wasn't in our curriculum before, and our pupils were mainly limited to fiction. But we realised that children need to see a range of text types, because if they don't, they will never be given the chance to explore other reading that isn't just standard stories.

Step by step

We have five reading lessons in our school: four structured and one library session, which is where the children read for pleasure. The other four reading lessons are 45 minutes long for KS2 and 30 minutes for Y2. Our reading lessons follow this structure:

Vocab pre-teach (5 mins): in this warmup, key vocabulary is pulled from the text pupils will be reading in the lesson. We use pictures alongside trickier words, and add vocabulary to our reading working walls with definitions.

> *"The biggest mindset change was that children don't read in their heads"*

Low-stakes recap quiz (5 mins): here we quiz the children about what they read yesterday and the week before. It's often done verbally, but can be completed on whiteboards or using Kahoot/Padlet. Pupils discuss what has happened in the text so far (fiction) or what they learned from the text previously (non-fiction). We discuss as a class and ensure that we're all on the same page.

Teaching how to read (10 mins): I was inspired by Pie Corbett's Talk 4 Reading book where he discusses why you shouldn't focus on just one skill during a reading lesson – the children need to learn to read as a whole. As a result, we don't focus on a skill (inference, for example). We begin with an exploratory question such as 'How does Michelle Paver build tension in chapter four?' Then we may use inference, prediction, summarising skills, etc to become strong readers. During this ten-minute slot, the teacher models intonation and reading to the children; how to clarify unknown words; and how to answer questions about the text. Whatever the teacher models here is what pupils are expected to do in the next part of the lesson.

Children reading aloud with their partners (20 mins): the biggest mindset change for our teachers was that our children don't read in their head for their lessons anymore. Instead, they're sat in mixed-ability pairs and will read out loud (taking it in turns to read a section at a time) to each other. They must be mixed ability, but if you have a child working two

or more years below the rest of the class, you may need to look at adding in some pre-teach and ensure their partner takes the lead. While pupils are reading aloud, they are working on their clarifying skills – we use a prompt on the tables that gives them different ways to clarify unknown vocabulary, which we model first. If pupils finish early, we also have another prompt – a 'toolkit for finishers'– which gives them little tasks to complete. Download both worksheets at **tinyurl.com/tp-VocabToolkits**

Children answer questions (5 mins): at the end of the paired reading, children answer one or more questions about what they've read. This is linked to the initial question introduced at the start of the lesson, and can be recorded in their books or just be a verbal discussion.

Mini quizzes: once every two weeks (or once every week in Y6) the children take a mini quiz. They will read the text alone this time and answer multiple questions about it. You can track mini-quiz results and give support to children who struggle. This builds independence and prepares pupils for future reading assessments.

Speed read

Speed of reading seems to be only something that people check at the end of KS2, but we track it from the end of Y2. This is because we understand that reading speed is a huge barrier for some children, and is also often missed and not considered when wondering why a child hasn't made progress. So, from the end of Y2, our TAs test the children's reading speed six times a year. From this data, they are able to identify who is partnered with whom in reading lessons, who needs fluency interventions, and who needs extra one-to-one reading.

Learning to love books

After eight months of trialling this structure, we have seen very positive impact. For example, percentages of pupils on track have increased in every year group; we've seen increases of 41 per cent in Y3, and 24 per cent in Y6. Alongside this, progress across school is good and the gap is closing between those who are not meeting the expected standard and those who are.

However not all progress can be measured by data: children who used to get frustrated reading snippets of texts, now see a book through to the end and speak extremely positively about the experience. Pupils' vocabulary is improving rapidly and the link we make between reading and writing is showing. Poet and author visits are extremely important to our school, and we aim to have a visitor each term. As a result, children are inspired to write poetry and we have had many children enter poetry competitions and get published!

What next?

So, how can you prepare for September? Firstly, look at your reading offer – are children getting a variety? Are you exposing pupils to high-quality and ambitious texts for their age range? Remember, the fiction book does not have to link to the topic you're reading: try not to force links that aren't there. High quality has to come first and there are so many incredible texts out there.

Secondly, reconsider your reading lesson structure. How often do children read out loud to each other? Are you still grouping by ability? If you are, that must change. Stop putting ceilings on children and expose them to books that challenge them (with support if needed).

Lastly, have more fun with reading. Competitions, poet and author visits (even virtual ones are hugely impactful), reading newsletters, teacher reading swaps, reading buddies etc – is reading prominent in your school? Would I walk into your school and think 'this school prioritises reading?'

OUR READING LESSON STRUCTURE

- 5 minutes – vocabulary pre-teach.
- 5 minutes – low-stakes recap quiz.
- 10 minutes – teaching the children how to read using explanatory questions.
- 20 minutes – children reading aloud with their partners.
- 5 minutes – children responding to questions about the text.

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT teachwire

FREE RESOURCE
Download worksheets to support this lesson at tinyurl.com/tp-VocabToolkits

If not, why not? Remember that reading is the key to everything you do in school! If your children can't read, then they can't access anything else in the curriculum.

Lucy Jarvis is an assistant headteacher, Y6 teacher and English lead at a primary school in Lincolnshire.

Spice up your life!

Bored with your English curriculum and looking to add some zest? Try this recipe for a truly tasty scheme of work...

SARAH WORDLAW

I wonder how representative, engaging and inclusive the texts are in your school? Not just those in your book corners or libraries (if you are lucky to have one), but the texts used for reading and writing lessons. The exposure of children's literature within the primary school setting is vital as a rich and beautiful context for learning; not only within English as a subject but to support building a wonderful reading culture throughout your school.

High quality books – which are representative and diverse – offer opportunities for empathy and can aid philosophical inquiry as a means of developing spoken language through debate, drama and discussion. Using key issues raised through, and within, the texts, and having a variety of diverse books to teach inclusivity, supports teaching that there are no outsiders in our society.

A pinch of inclusivity

Representation within literature is imperative when engaging young readers. If children are able to see themselves, in some way or another, they are more interested and invested in stories. This is particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or marginalised communities. The reading spaces in your school need to have books that represent your school community and – if your school community is largely homogenous – marginalised groups from the wider national community. For example, if you have a largely Muslim community at your school, are there books (both fiction and non-fiction) about and written by this community? Take a look at your class – can every child see themselves represented in the texts in your classroom/school? Their race, their family, their religion, their neurodiversity?

"After reading a chapter of a book together, try asking children to summarise it in a TikTok-style video"

Did you know that only one per cent of children's books published in 2019 contained a Black main character? I'm sure you've heard time and time again that inclusivity is key, but how can you find the books you're looking for?

There is a wealth of wonderful reading lists for different elements of inclusivity – for example, books with a Black protagonist, or books that explore neuro and physical diversities, or strong female leads that challenge misogynist views. There are some brilliant graphic novels available too, which help to engage readers who may struggle with longer chapter books, such as *Illegal* by Eoin Colfer, or *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis.

Check out the Book Trust's reading lists **(tinyurl.com/tp-BTlists)** for some brilliant ideas to explore. The lists are categorised by theme, so you can navigate easily depending on what topic or issue you want to cover.

I know what you're thinking. Budgets. How can your school afford to buy amazing new books in this current climate? But there are lots of clever ways to generate funds for buying new texts:

1. Start up an **Amazon Wish List** – get your class involved. Add your desired books to your wish list, then share the list on your school website, send it home to parents/carers, tweet it, put it on your school Instagram and tag local businesses. You'll be amazed by how many people are willing – but also excited – to donate books to schools.

2. Class fundraising – use a PSHE lesson to plan ways to fundraise with your class.

From cake sales, to sponsored skips, to a performance, children will never cease to amaze you with creative ideas to generate funds for buying books.

Whenever you get a new book for your classroom, why not wrap it up in brown paper and write 'SPECIAL DELIVERY' on the front? Get a child to unwrap it and read it together with the class to generate excitement and interest for the text.

A slice of birthday books

Instead of children bringing in treats for their birthday, why not start the new academic year with children bringing in a birthday book? This is a book to share (and preferably donate) to the class; one that is meaningful to them. It doesn't have to be new, or expensive, and it could be anything from a picture book to a newspaper cutting, a chapter book, or even books in different languages. This is a lovely way to ensure every child is represented, plus if every class does this, you will end up with a very special personal library, which gives the children ownership of their reading spaces and creates a wonderful opportunity for them to share part of themselves with their classmates.

A teaspoon of critical thinking

In a world that feels like it is getting less tolerant and inclusive, it has never been more important to teach children to think critically about the world around them. With a range of diverse texts comes a range of opportunities to teach children about the different people that exist in our world, to teach human rights and equality, and to be *actively* anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, anti-misogynist and anti-ableist.

I love doing "Is it ok?" quick lesson starters with a thought-provoking image from real life, prompting discussion around topics reflected in the current text we're reading. For example, when teaching *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, you could show images of people protesting against migrants and prompt a discussion around acceptance and support of each other, in contrast to xenophobia and racism.

A smidgen of social media

Whether we like it or not, the children in our schools are exposed to a wealth of information online, through outlets such as gaming and social media – some good, some bad. Why not try and use structures from platforms in your English lessons to increase engagement? The ideal length of a TikTok video in 2023 is between 15 and 60 seconds, as this short format allows for quick and easy consumption, which is more likely to capture and retain viewers' attention. So, after reading a chapter of a book together, try asking children to summarise it in a TikTok-style video. Can they pull out the key information and keep within the time limit? This encourages engagement, critical thinking and creativity; you would be blown away by the different ideas children come up with, from acting, to dance, to puppets, to rap!

So go forth and use your sphere of influence to really make waves and help shape a better, safer, and more engaging future for children, through high-quality, representative and inclusive primary English teaching. It's quite the adventure!

Sarah Wordlaw is a headteacher in South London, with over 17 years' experience of working in education.

INCLUSIVITY IN NUMBERS

Exclusion rates for Black Caribbean students in English schools are up to six times higher than those of their white peers in some local authorities (McIntyre, Parveen and Thomas, 2021).

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were also excluded at much higher rates, with Roma children nine times more likely to be suspended in some areas. And exclusion rates for mixed-race white and Black Caribbean students were more than four times higher than their white peers (McIntyre, Parveen and Thomas, 2021).

86 per cent of LGBT pupils regularly hear phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' in school (Stonewall, 2017).

68 per cent of LGBT pupils report that teachers or school staff only 'sometimes' or 'never' challenge homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language when they hear it (Stonewall, 2017).

In the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated 1.6 million women aged 16 to 74 years in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

95 per cent of young Black British people have witnessed racist language in education, with 51 per cent of males saying they heard it 'all the time' (YMCA, 2020).

Podcast

Stewing up a story

with Maz Evans

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

"All my books are a combination of two things: what I know and what I love"

When faced with writing a story, many children claim they 'cannot write one'. Stories, however, are inside us all – we may just need some ideas and a little help to find them. In episode 20 of the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast, novelist Maz Evans explains to young writers how a 'story stew', beginning with a character, can help you find a story. What does the character want? What problem needs to be solved? How does the character solve the problem? Does the character get what they want?

These are all questions that can be asked to help develop ideas for a story in your story stew.

In the podcast, Maz Evans discusses her new book *Vi Spy Licence To Chill* – a story that's full of humour and excitement as the main character, Vi, discovers her mum is a spy and her dad a supervillain, whilst also accepting that her mum is remarrying and that a stepfather and stepbrother are now joining the family. Maz talks about where she got the idea for this spy-based novel, and her previous best-seller, *Who Let The Gods Out*.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write stories of their own based on things they know and love, and a character that they will design. They will also explore how they can make scenes within their stories more exciting, after listening to Maz's advice about the editing process. Extracts from the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast **(bit.ly/AIYCMaz)** are suggested to introduce each section of the teaching sequence, providing an excellent way to connect the things children are learning with the work of a professional author.

SESSION 1

WHAT DO I KNOW? WHAT DO I LOVE?

1 | Play the podcast from **4:46** up to **12:48** (the end of part 1). Discuss with the children how Maz Evans used things that she knew about and things that she loved, and squished them together to create a story.

2 | Ask children to think about what they know about and things that they love. Could any of these ideas be put together to create a story?

3 | Ask the children to jot down their ideas that they could combine to create stories. They should write a list of things that they know a lot about and things that they love. Remind the children that what they know about could include things that they have experienced, such as families separating and dementia, like Maz Evans did for her two stories mentioned in the podcast episode.

4 | Children should then explore choosing one thing from each category (things they know, and things they love), and think about how these could be combined to create a fantastic story. Encourage children to try combining a variety of different ideas, discussing these with friends to develop them further.

"The first draft is shovelling sand; editing is building the sandcastle"

SESSION 2

A STORY STEW

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **25:41** up to **29:45**. Discuss the questions that Maz suggests when developing a character for a story, listed below. You could explore what the children know about Vi Spy using the questions. If they haven't read the book, you might want to share some basic information about the story that doesn't give too much of the plot away (ideas beside the questions below). Or the questions could be answered about another character that the children are familiar with.

Who is the character? Vi Spy
What does the character want? To become a spy
What problem/s does the character face? Her parents don't get on
How will the problem/s be solved? They both want to protect Vi so agree to get along for her
Does the character get what they want? (We won't spoil the ending!)

2 | Discuss times when children may have been 'creative with the truth', sharing stories that they may have told to get themselves out of trouble (these could be imagined).

3 | Children should go back to their notes from session 1, and decide the things that they know about and love that will be included in their story. Using these ideas, they should begin to create their character. Explain that the character they create will be the one their own story is based upon. Children can note answers to the questions above to help them gather ideas for their story.

4 | Encourage children to discuss their characters with their friends, noting any further ideas.

SESSION 3

PLOTTING AND WRITING A STORY

1 | Listen to the section of the podcast again from **9:14** to the **end of part 1**, listening to the information Maz gives about her character and some of her journey within the story. Discuss again the two things that Maz put together to create her story (divorce and spies) and remind children that they will be combining their two things and the character they created to write their very own stories.

2 | Listen to Maz Evans reading an extract from *Vi Spy* **(13:01** to **18:02)** and discuss what we know about the two characters from this section of the story. Explore how the author has used dialogue to give the reader more information about Vi and her dad, Robert. Revisit punctuating direct speech, identifying punctuation used within the extract.

3 | Children should now think about the plot of their story, planning it carefully before writing it out.

SESSION 4

EDITING

1 | Play the section of the podcast from **18:02** up until **22.28**. Ask children to go back to their stories and pick a section that they think they could improve and discuss the following questions:

- How could you make this section more interesting?
- Do you have items that suddenly 'appear'?

2 | Ask them to share their work with a partner, working together to identify parts that they are especially pleased with and parts where they could make improvements. Then give children time to go back to their work and make changes, rewriting any parts that they think could be improved.

3 | If you have a working wall, extracts from children's work could be displayed for everyone to see, perhaps as a 'before and after' with children's original section and then the new, improved section after they've rewritten it.

AFTER THE UNIT...

- Explore other stories that the children could write using what they know and what they love, taking more ideas from their original notes – or swapping with their classmates.
- Read other examples of spy stories and collect ideas to write your own spy-based adventure tales.

Pen pals

Handwriting is definitely still a necessary skill, so roll, skip and stir your way to improved longhand for your pupils, says **Juliet McCullion**...

Handwriting can be like a fingerprint – unique to its owner and an expression of identity. At the start of a new academic year, how long does it take us, as teachers, to be able to distinguish the child belonging to that unnamed piece of work? Probably just a couple of weeks – days even – before we can identify the owner based on their handwriting alone. If handwriting is a piece of us on a page, often for others to see, it's understandable that some feel their handwriting is a representation of their self.

Struggling with handwriting can cause frustration over time: some even find it embarrassing. Someone brimming with ideas but unable to record them legibly could become disengaged with writing as a whole.

Is handwriting important?

There's plenty of emphasis on handwriting in the EYFS profile, and throughout the KS1 and KS2 English national curriculum. Yet it splits opinion in terms of its purpose in the digital age. While some would posit that it is not a skill worth pursuing these days, recent research suggests that writing by hand, rather than typing on a device, activates the brain – creating 'much more activity in the sensorimotor parts of the brain' (van der Meer, 2020), helping us to both learn and remember more effectively. Fluent handwriting will support writing stamina, too.

Once pupils have achieved fluent handwriting, cognitive capacity can be freed up to concentrate on the higher-level skills of writing, rather than worrying about formation of letters and whether writing is legible. Expending all energy on thinking about the strokes and shapes that represent the sounds needed to write leaves little room for coming up with something interesting to say. Furthermore, research suggests that practising words in fluent handwriting over and over can help the brain to spell the word using muscle memory. With increased automaticity in spelling too, children can focus on composition when transcription is no longer a chore.

How do I teach handwriting?

With their gross and fine motor skills developed, children will be better prepared for the demands of accurate and consistent letter formation. (For ideas on how to do this, try the activities listed in the panel to the right). While it can be tempting to teach handwriting along with phonics as children learn each grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC), teaching pupils groups of letters based on their formation makes independent writing easier. It makes sense that if a child has mastered formation of the letter 'l', working on the letters 'i', 'u', 't', 'j' and 'y' will be easier: each starts with a vertical, downwards stroke. Likewise, forming 'c' correctly will greatly support writing 'a', 'd', 'g', and so on.

The National Handwriting Association sets out great guidance in their 'Good Practice for Handwriting' toolkit. This fabulous, free resource explores the four 'P' checks: posture, pencil, paper, and pressure; and the eight 'S' factors: shape, space, size, sitting, stringing, slant, speed, and style.

Understanding each of the four Ps and eight Ss of handwriting will allow direct teaching of each aspect, to support children in 'getting it right' to begin with. Diagnostically assessing pupils using these criteria will allow you to understand the barriers children are facing. Set a short writing task for your class and take time to monitor each child. How are they sitting? What is their pencil grip like? You can then tailor the support offered based on your assessments: when we identify the 'tricky bit', it is easier to make specific interventions to address and overcome the challenge.

Classroom strategies

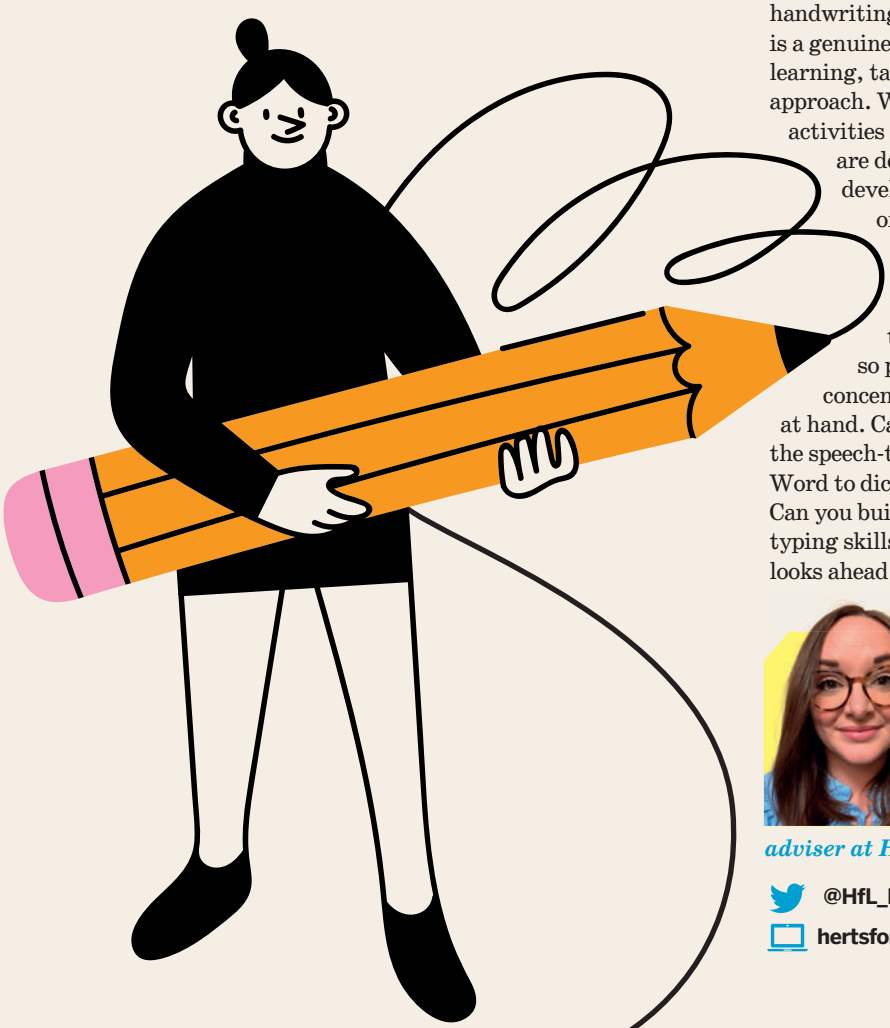
The 'gold standard'
Work with a child to identify a piece of work they are proud of in terms of handwriting and presentation (not handwriting practice). Photocopy and stick it into the cover of the child's book as a pull-out flap which the child can open up whenever they start a new piece of work. This is their own 'gold standard' below which they would not wish to drop.

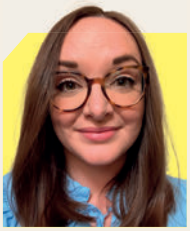
Small steps pathway
Supporting pupils to improve letter by letter will have a snowball effect. Identify one or two letters that the child is consistently writing incorrectly. Model the letter formation explaining what you are looking out for. Then, get the pupil to practise with you, and give them feedback. Challenge the child to start each piece of work with a row of these letters. Which ones are they proud of? Continue each week with a new letter, recording the previously addressed letters – perhaps on a bookmark.

Building stamina
Build stamina gradually. Can pupils give you one line of their 'gold standard' (possibly joined) handwriting today before they drop back to a more relaxed script? What about two great lines tomorrow and a short paragraph next week? Could they choose a short section of a written activity to edit and publish in polished form? This technique is particularly useful when you have children who can't sustain a joined script when writing at speed – they can write in a joined hand for a while then revert to print if they find that easier or quicker, until they have developed the skill.

Writing at speed
Consider if you need to introduce an element of writing at speed into handwriting practice. Set out the expectations for a lesson at the beginning, e.g: "These notes are for you, so make sure you can read them at the end," versus "This poem is going on display so do your best joined script today and take your time with presentation."

A two-pronged approach
If children struggle with handwriting so much that it is a genuine barrier to their learning, take a two-pronged approach. Whilst some activities and lessons are dedicated to developing the skill of communicating in handwritten form, ensure others remove that barrier so pupils can concentrate on the task at hand. Can the child use the speech-to-text function in Word to dictate their ideas? Can you build the child's typing skills? The final point looks ahead to skills for life.





Juliet McCullion is primary English teaching and learning adviser at HfL Education.

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HANDS IN MOTION

Children who have had plenty of opportunities to develop motor skills through play and exploration in their early years are more likely to have developed foundations for writing. Try these activities to build these skills:

Rolling, climbing and skipping will not only support children to develop their arm and shoulder strength, core strength and flexibility, but it will also prepare them for using tools such as pencils more confidently.

The variety of motion in activities such as threading, stirring, doing up buttons, using spray bottles and making models with clay lays the foundation for the directional movements necessary for letter formation.

Children require the ability to cross their midline. Take note of whether they can they paint or draw a long horizontal line across a large piece of paper/on the floor from their left to right or vice versa without swapping hands. Can they use one hand to roll a car along a track from their left to their right? If not, you could try playing hand-clapping games, kicking a ball, rotating the upper body, or creating big art with large circular motions. How about getting out the gymnastics ribbons to trace large shapes and letters in the air?

Some older children will benefit from revisiting gross and fine motor activities to strengthen the muscles and develop the dexterity required for writing. Once ready to put pen to paper, mark making and pre-writing shapes can continue to build fine motor skills and develop hand strength and co-ordination, alongside a rich diet of 'busy fingers'-style activities.

A trip down memory lane

Do you want your pupils to become passionate, confident writers? Try a spot of nostalgia and use your own experiences to inform your teaching, says **Kathryn Brereton**

I grew up in the 1970s in a working-class former coal-mining town. My first recollection of language-play was my grandad 'writing' rhymes just for me: *Little, little Kathryn sitting on a brick / Waiting for her daddy to come home from t'pit*. My first memory of 'proper' writing was being expected to write out a name card upon starting school (I could – gold star duly awarded; my friend couldn't – and 'failed').

An avid reader, favourite books and authors inspired me. Exercise books treasured by my mum show me channelling Enid Blyton in my *Mystery of the Two Notes* tale (a sample line being, 'It's jolly bad luck that Mary couldn't come to Cherry Trees these hols!'). And a devotee of *Smash Hits* magazine, I spent hours copying out Duran Duran lyrics. In later years, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* had me putting a padlocked journal on my Christmas list.

I also remember lots of letter writing – to my auntie in Scotland, to *Blue Peter*, to the *Daily Mail*'s Junior Letters page (a nice little earner at £10 a pop) and sending postcards from holidays. There were Sunday School handwriting competitions (all done with my 30-piece felt-tip pen set in my best bubble-writing) and, of course, the Brownie Guide 'Writer' badge.

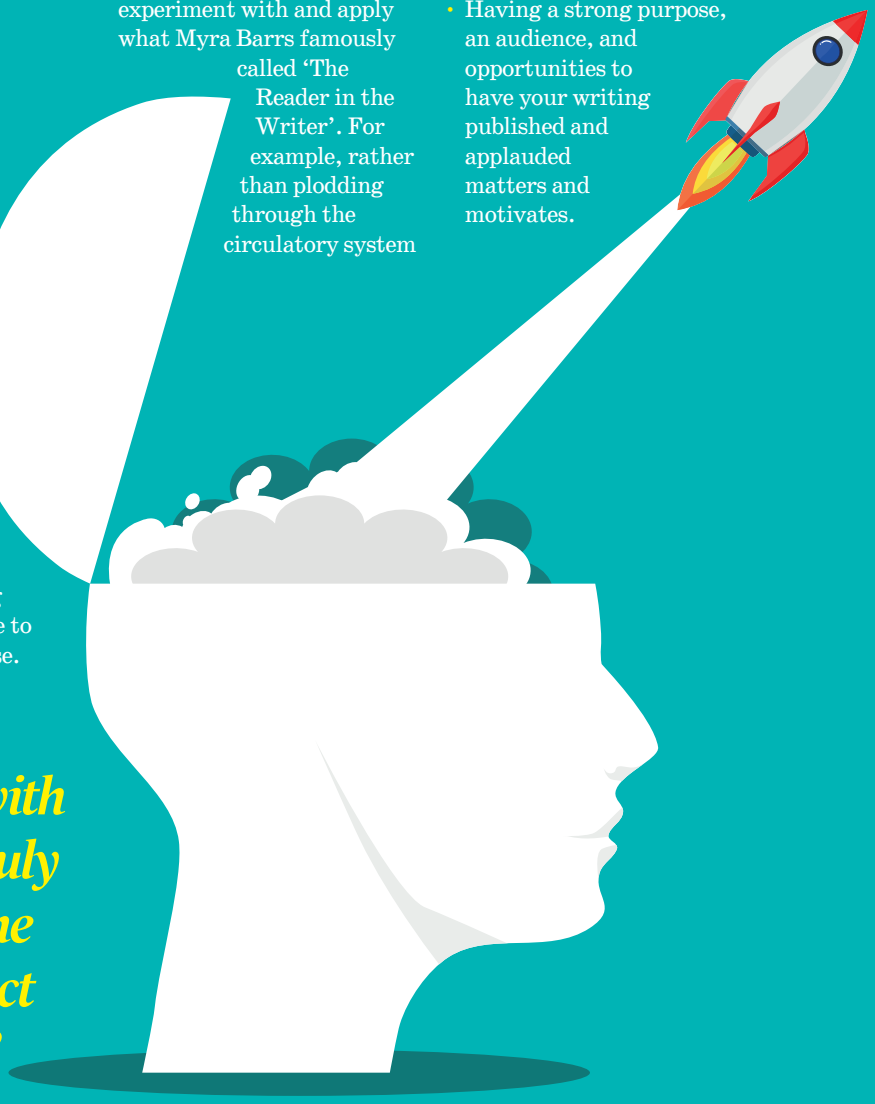
From then on, for many years, 'school' then 'work' writing crowded out writing for pleasure (although it did have a clear purpose to motivate me). Eventually, when on maternity leave, I enrolled in an online creative writing course and started to pen articles about local landmarks – I even had some published. The freedom to choose my subject matter, coupled with seeing my name in print (harking back to the joy of my *Daily Mail* days) also gave me an identity other than 'mother'.

Thanks for the memories

So what has this got to do with my teaching? Well, I've realised over the years that my own relationship with writing has duly influenced the way I instruct my pupils. For instance:

- Context is key. Children may have very different previous experiences of writing and we must take time to explore and value these.
- School-writing can mean children 'fail' and feel that writing isn't for them, or is a chore. We should promote and celebrate what else 'counts' as writing so that all pupils feel like writers and experience success.
- The link between books and other media with writing is evident. Children should be given opportunities to experiment with and apply what Myra Barrs famously called 'The Reader in the Writer'. For example, rather than plodding through the circulatory system as an explanation text, why not give children free choice as to the text type? I've received everything from poems to a diary entry from a red blood-cell! Other pupils filmed *Horrible Histories*-style reports about the Romans. This approach might also help pupils to nail the often-elusive greater depth standard in writing.
- Having a strong purpose, an audience, and opportunities to have your writing published and applauded matters and motivates.

"My own relationship with writing has duly influenced the way I instruct my pupils"



Similarly, the United Kingdom Literacy Association's (UKLA) *Viewpoints: Writing* says that, to develop as writers, children 'need to see writing as an act of social meaning making, a creative and communicative act of personal agency and an extension of their identities'.

Fancy having a go at reminiscing yourself? Use the prompts in the sidebar to get you thinking!

What did you find out? Can you make any generalisations? For me, reviewing my writing autobiography was a warm and fuzzy experience. Perhaps this wasn't the case for you? It wouldn't be for me if I was to apply this approach to maths or PE! Whether or not this activity flagged up motivators or barriers, consider how your personal experiences can inform the way you teach writing, and opportunities you provide going forwards (and think about if perhaps either implicitly or explicitly they already do).

Stir up your storytellers

So, how can you draw this all together to encourage your budding writers? Let's explore some ideas:

- Get to know your children's writing histories. Either through pupil-teacher conferences, questionnaires or by asking pupils (and their families) to jot down everything they write across a weekend. Use these communications to find out about the diverse writing practices and preferences beyond the classroom. What will you then need to put in place to harness these? One of my greatest joys as a teacher was a so-called 'hard-to-reach' parent and son sharing their joint love of doing *Take a Break* wordsearches together. Knowing this meant I could set up a lunchtime club (led by him) for fellow word-puzzlers. For once, this child was the expert writer.
- Listen in to pupils' chatter and keep abreast of any writing 'trends'. Again, this will support you to understand and cater for children's needs and interests. For example, children may not send many (if any) postcards – but they may have posted a travel edit on TikTok.
- Celebrate what 'counts' as writing. Invite staff, parents, and pupils to share their 'real' writing in assembly – everything from Tweets, to shopping lists, to comic strips.
- Provide real reasons to write with real audiences. I have seen many children try to churn out persuasive letters on subjects they just didn't care about. What are the real burning issues for your pupils? To whom might they write who has the power to change things? My son treated me to a full-on PowerPoint presentation (including research and quotes) when he coveted an iPhone. Is there something they'd like to happen in school or at home? Can they convince an adult why it should happen?
- Provide children with writing journals, where they can jot down snippets they've magpied and where they can write for pleasure using (and finding) their personal writing voice.
- Be a writer-teacher. Write alongside your pupils and share your own writing and your own top tips, as well as the challenges you face. Showing children that even practiced writers can struggle sometimes, and need to edit their work carefully, will show them that persistence is the key. Visit The Writing for Pleasure Centre's website for more on this (**writing4pleasure.com**).

Writing can be a pleasurable, satisfying, purposeful experience. We perhaps just need to make this clearer to our pupils. With you as an enthusiastic, sensitive, well-informed adult guide, you can hopefully ease out some of the bumps and provide many inspiring detours for your apprentice scribes. To quote from my masterpiece *Mystery of the Two Notes* again – "Golly – that does sound exciting!"

7 QUESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED

1. What are your earliest memories of writing?
2. Do you remember writing at home/school? Were there any differences?
3. What did you write? Where, when, why and with whom did you write? Did you share your writing?
4. What motivated you to write? Were you influenced by books/TV/comics?
5. Were you encouraged to write? By whom? Was your writing saved, displayed, or published?
6. Are some written texts more 'worthy' than others? Are some writers more 'worthy' than others? Why?
7. Was/is writing a pleasurable experience for you? Do you write for pleasure as an adult? Why/why not?

Kathryn Brereton has taught pupils across the primary age range and in a secondary school inclusion unit. She has also taught on creative writing courses for adults and is now an English adviser for Cambridgeshire County Council.

@kat_brereton

Rhyme and REASON

Poetry is a vital artform for children, but how exactly can you get your class excited about it? Here are the lessons learned from 20 years of the CLiPPA...

CHARLOTTE HACKING

Poetry provides the gateway for so many young readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate. It is a crucial genre for focusing on many of the most vital reading and writing skills and strategies, expanding the breadth of children's reading, enabling them to experience and understand a range of language and vocabulary, and improving their ability to decode words and respond to texts, as well as developing their reading fluency, inference and deduction.

This year celebrates 20 years of the CLiPPA – the Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award – so here's what we've learned about teaching poetry over the past two decades:

Listen

The best way to engage children is to make sure they hear a wide range of poetry as often as possible. It is important to hear and feel the distinct rhythms of different voices and dialects, and to see that poetry comes in different forms and can be written by a range of different people.

Each year, we video the five poets shortlisted for the CLiPPA, so your class can experience the form out loud from the writers themselves. Poets like Valerie Bloom, Joseph Coelho, Matt Goodfellow, Kate Wakeling and Nikita Gill serve as inspiration for pupils to perform and write poetry of their own.

Read

Look at the poetry collections and anthologies on offer in your school and curriculum. The CLiPPA shortlist (see the panel on the right), is a great place to start. Ensure that collections show what poetry is and what it could be, with a range of poetic forms and a variety of themes and styles. Rhyming poetry can support early readers and offer a wealth of opportunity for exploring language, as well as being fun to perform, but it's important to remember that children's poetry doesn't always have to rhyme. Matt Goodfellow's *Caterpillar Cake*, Zaro Weil's *Cherry Moon* and Kate Wakeling's *Cloud Soup* are good recent examples that showcase what this could look like for children in EYFS, KS1 and KS2 respectively.

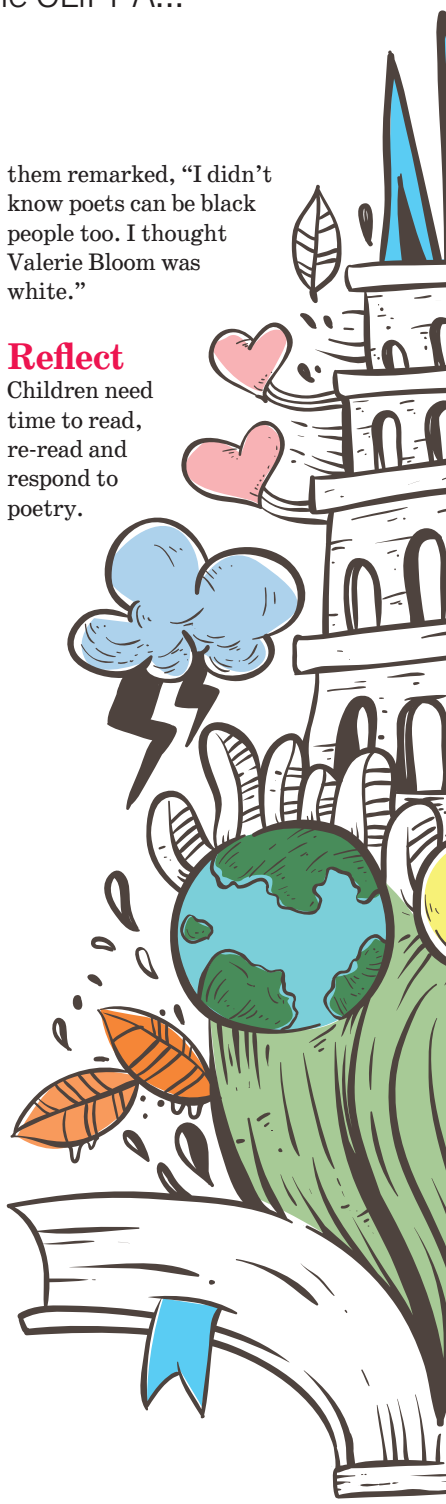
> *"Performing poetry is a fantastic way of developing pupils' reading fluency"*

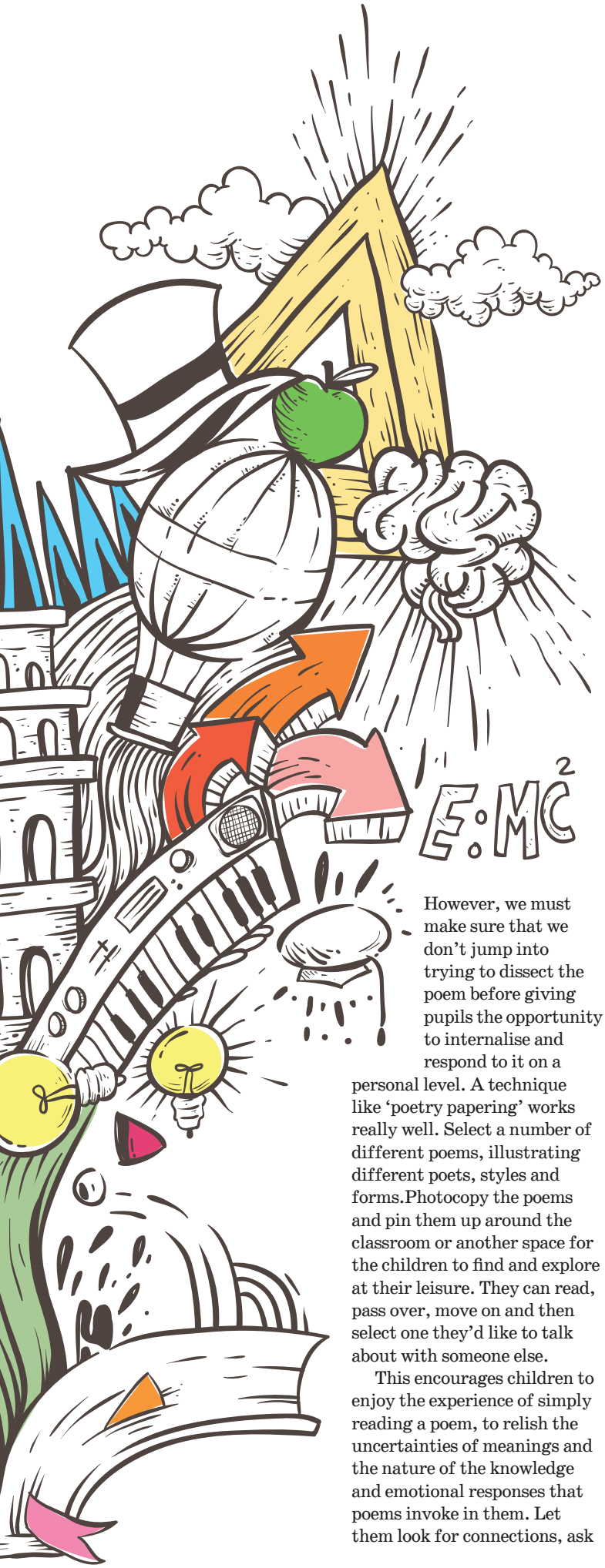
Many poems also contain 'nonsense words', which are a key feature of the current Phonics Screening Check. Exploring such words in the context of a familiar poem like 'Once', from *A Great Big Cuddle* by Michael Rosen, allows children to investigate how these are used and how we read their meaning in context.

Children will begin to develop their own tastes and preferences from what is offered to them, and teachers will often be surprised at the types of poetry they're interested in and respond to. When choosing poetry for your class, try not to be judgemental about what you think they will like or dislike, what you think might be too difficult, or be too narrow in choices about what constitutes poetry. Karl Nova's *Rhythm and Poetry* has engaged so many children, showing the musicality of language and the crossover between rap and poetry. Such resources are particularly important in opening up children's perceptions that poetry can also be for them. One teacher on CLPE's Power of Poetry project had shared Valerie Bloom's 'Haircut Rap' video with her children. One of them remarked, "I didn't know poets can be black people too. I thought Valerie Bloom was white."

Reflect

Children need time to read, re-read and respond to poetry.





However, we must make sure that we don't jump into trying to dissect the poem before giving pupils the opportunity to internalise and respond to it on a personal level. A technique like 'poetry papering' works really well. Select a number of different poems, illustrating different poets, styles and forms.Photocopy the poems and pin them up around the classroom or another space for the children to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else.

This encourages children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge and emotional responses that poems invoke in them. Let them look for connections, ask questions, and explore what they like about poems and their use of language.

As they reflect on and discuss the impact of poems in more depth, pupils will naturally move into conversations about the language and poetic devices used. Introduce children to the names of poetic devices that support them to identify rhythmic language, e.g. *alliteration*, *assonance* and *repetition*, as well as figurative language that draws them into the moments described, like *simile*, *metaphor* and *personification*. It's important they don't just identify where these have been used, but understand the authorial intent behind the choices.

Perform

Children also need to feel the joy in reading poetry aloud, joining in, dramatising and performing poems themselves. If poetry is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most.

Performing poetry is a fantastic way of developing reading fluency, too, giving pupils the chance to read and re-read poems, working to express the meaning behind the words by using their voices in different ways, and understanding how intonation and prosody can help translate this to an audience.

Find opportunities for children to perform poetry: shadow an award like the CLiPPA, enter recitation competitions, or simply perform poems they love in school. This is the perfect activity for group reading. Allow pupils to decide for themselves how best to organise the performance; whether they think it would be best to perform individually, in pairs, or if they want to work as a group. Give them time to look at the poem multiple times, talking specifically about the mood it creates and the emotions they feel as they read, and how they might convey this in their performance.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Try these, all shortlisted for this year's CLiPPA

- *Blow a Kiss, Catch a Kiss* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Nicola Killen (Andersen Press)
- *Marshmallow Clouds* by Ted Kooser and Connie Wanek, illustrated by Richard Jones (Walker)
- *Let's Chase Stars Together* by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Oriol Vidal (Bloomsbury Education)
- *Choose Love* by Nicola Davies, illustrated by Petr Horáček (Graffeg)
- *These are the Words* by Nikita Gill (Macmillan Children's Books)

Write

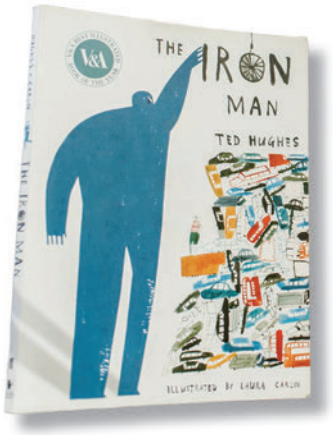
Children need permission and opportunities to share and write about themselves, their feelings, the world around them and important events in their own voices. The poems in *Being Me* by Liz Brownlee, Matt Goodfellow and Laura Mucha bear witness to children's thoughts, feelings, experiences and emotions in a way that genuinely offers recognition, affirmation and hope. Through writing poetry, children are encouraged to reflect on their experience, to recreate it, shape it, and make sense of it.

Charlotte Hacking is the learning and programme director at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), and a judge on the CLiPPA. Find out more about the CLiPPA Shadowing scheme at clpe.org.uk

LITERACY

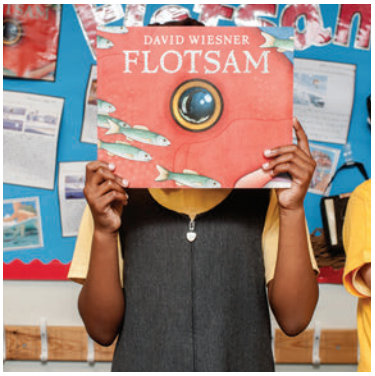
The Literary Curriculum

A complete thematic approach to primary English, with literature at its core



AT A GLANCE

- **A complete book-based approach to literacy to interest, engage and activate inference**
- **A rigorously curated collection of rich and varied books rooted in strong contexts**
- **Follows a 'Teach Through a Text' pedagogy**
- **Cohesive sequences to help children build a literary repertoire**
- **Structured to develop deeper reading**



REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Giving children access to all varieties of literature is extremely important for their success. One way to underpin your curriculum is to teach topics focused on a book-based English curriculum, encouraging children to work towards shared goals of ownership and authorship of their reading and writing.

Well worth considering is the award-winning Literary Curriculum, a complete, thematic approach to the teaching of primary English that places children's literature at its core. This flexible and cross-curricular treasure trove provides ideas, inspiration and structure galore for your literacy curriculum and raises standards by immersing children in a literary world, creating strong levels of engagement to provide meaningful and authentic contexts for their studies.

Taking out a school membership is probably the best value option because this gets you access to an impressive repository of 400+ top-quality resources. These include planning sequences, Literary Leaves, Spelling Seeds, Home Learning Branches, Learning Log videos, recover and catch-up resources, and writing samples. You also get access to a free termly subject leader meeting, an assessment tool for English, coverage and progression documents, curriculum maps with clear subject links, free termly online planning surgeries, and permission to use the Literary Curriculum badge on your website .

Let's not forget the 200+ books, which include an impressive range of novels, novellas, picture books, wordless texts, narrative poems, playscripts and narrative non-fiction with a healthy cross-section of genres from historical narrative and mystery to adventure and fantasy. They dare children to grow and challenge perspectives, and allow them to experience multiple realities and bring reading and writing to life.

Thorough downloadable planning is provided, too, based around high-quality children's books dovetailed to detailed daily session plans for writing, reading and spelling. All come with customisable medium-term overviews.

The plans follow a 'Teach Through a Text' pedagogy to ensure participation, scope and outcomes, including explicit grammar objectives, spelling investigations and purposeful writing opportunities that are varied and highly engaging. The planning, resources and activities are a superb mix and are brilliantly written and very accessible.

The Literary Curriculum provides children with innumerable opportunities to respond to literature and acts as a powerful change agent by developing their intercultural awareness while at the same time nurturing empathy, a tolerance for diversity, and emotional intelligence. It dynamically builds sophisticated reading and writing experiences, provides pleasure and its flexibility makes it particularly suitable for a wide range of needs.

It is a whole-language resource constructed with precision and flair with the belief that you can promote literacy by developing a love of literature and reading, through positive contact with books.

Teach Reading & Writing

teach PRIMARY AWARDS 2022 WINNER

VERDICT

- ✔ **Puts literature at the very heart of English provision**
- ✔ **Creates immersive experiences for children that provide a platform for learning**
- ✔ **Helps pupils develop their critical reading, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning skills**
- ✔ **Provides outstanding opportunities for children to write for a range of meaningful and 'real' reasons**
- ✔ **Creates opportunities for learners to develop empathy and enquiry**
- ✔ **Supports the development of a school-wide reading cultureintervention and development programme**

UPGRADE IF...

You want to develop a high-quality literacy curriculum, foster a whole school love of reading and writing, and provide children with plenty of cognitive and creative challenges.

Literary Curriculum whole-school membership for a single-form school – £714.00 www.literarycurriculum.co.uk

HANDWRITING

STABILO EASYoriginal pens & EASYgraph S pencils

Ergonomic pens and pencils developed by experts specifically for both left- and right-handed children

AT A GLANCE

- **Skilfully designed pens and pencils based on ergonomic principles in penmanship**
- **Left- and right-handed versions**
- **Focused on comfort and efficiency**
- **Tested by expert scientists**
- **Pencil wood is sourced from responsibly-managed forests**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

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

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

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

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

STABILO's EASYorginal pens are a joy. These really attractive wide-barrel refillable pens have been ergonomically moulded so that children use the lightest grip possible while writing. The slightly arched shape helps pupils to achieve the recommended tripod grip, eliminating strain. It also features a rubberised grip around the pen barrel for increased traction.

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

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

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

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

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

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

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for writing resources that truly cater for left-, right- and mixed-handers.

Pens from £3.29, pencils from £1.04, stabilo.com/uk

‘I love being lost in an adventure’

Liz Flanagan shares her ideal way to escape real life, and how fostering cats inspired her latest writing project…

I was definitely a bookish kid, experiencing new ideas and emotions through my reading, and, ever since, I’ve loved being lost in an adventure.

For me, combining the imaginative escapism of fiction with just enough threat of peril to keep the reader gripped is a recipe for a great story. Fantasy, in particular, can be a brilliant way of exploring difficult and challenging topics from our own world, but at one remove. For children especially, this safety net allows us to think through challenges in a protected way that also offers hope and solutions.

My writing is definitely inspired by everything around me, whether that’s family, friends, or even animals. I’ve loved animals as long as I can remember, and they have been a huge source of joy – both in my childhood and my present life. A few years ago, I began fostering cats and kittens for a charity, and this is where the idea for the *Wildsmith* series came from. Each new cat had a specific set of needs and a distinctive personality. Sometimes they were incredibly scared when they came to me: one sat in the corner and looked at the wall for the first 24 hours before she began to relax. I often wished I could talk to them and make them better, so in this series that’s the magical ability I’ve given to my character Rowan, who discovers she is a wildsmith: someone who can magically heal animals and communicate with them. It’s just wish fulfilment!

“In those months of our one permitted daily walk, I craved time outdoors very strongly”

When I began writing these stories, it was the summer of 2020, and I had realised during lockdown just how important wild places were to me. In those months of our one permitted daily walk, I craved time outdoors very strongly. We don’t have a garden, but I often walked in the woods near my house. Even in those worrying, stressful times, as soon as I was beneath the trees, I could feel my stress begin to melt away, and I always came back feeling better. So this definitely shaped the *Wildsmith* stories and made me so grateful for this beautiful landscape. I believe it’s something we all need but not everyone has the same access to.

Even though our world has opened up again, I still go on lots of different adventures through books. I love to read a variety of genres, and I often have several books on the go at once to suit my mood. Some of my favourite reading adventures have involved time travel – whether via the Rosemary Sutcliff historical novels I read in Year 6, the latest Emma Carroll, or the dusty Agatha Christie I discovered in a second-hand bookshop last week. Other times I might step into fantastical story worlds filled with dragons, and we have so many wonderful dragon books to choose from – including titles by Andy Shepherd, Stephanie Burgis, Cornelia Funke, Zeta Elliott and Cressida Cowell. I love the comforts of romance and the thrill of crime, and the challenge to my thinking that sci-fi provides. But the current crop of children’s books is just extraordinary: I’m very happy to live through this golden age of children’s literature, even if not a child myself.

For my next writing adventure, I am delving into the past. It has been a huge challenge for me, both in terms of research and trying to imagine the psychology of someone from another time: what do we have in common, and what is very different? But I’m sure I’ll return to fantasy before long. I’m about to start editing books three and four in the *Wildsmith* series, which are coming out next year, so I’m looking forward to hanging out with Rowan and some magical animals again!

Liz Flanagan writes for children and young adults. The first two books in the* Wildsmith *series, illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton (£7.99, UCLan Publishing), are out now.

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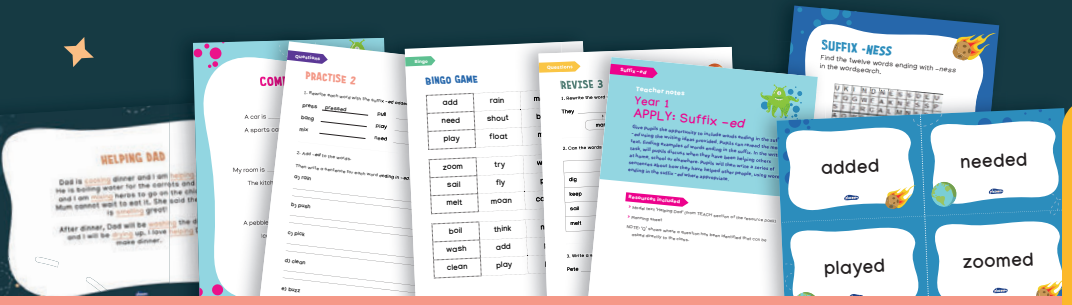

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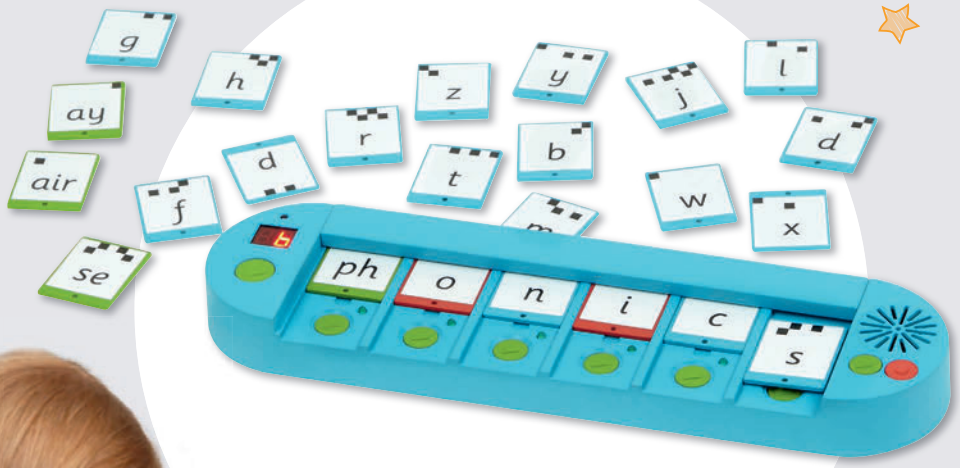

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