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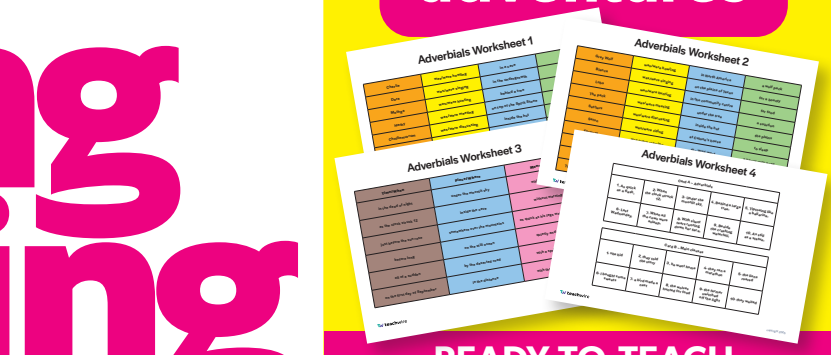

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Welcome…

Do you have a favourite part of grammar? Laura Dobson does – she loves adverbials, and has pulled together some fun and effective activities to help you teach them (page 30).

Something many children struggle with is drawing inferences from texts. On page 9, Rachel Clarke lays out how you can guide pupils to make connections within and between texts. She also explains the vital role TAs can play in ensuring everyone in the class hones their comprehension skills.

TAs figured large when I met up with the very charming George Webster, BAFTA-winning CBeebies presenter, to chat about his experience of attending mainstream school as a child with Down Syndrome (page 53). He – and his dad – had some great advice for anyone who wants to ensure that school is a positive and inclusive experience for pupils with additional needs.

On page 35, Jonny Walker has some thoughts on poetry teaching, Goldilocks and learning to ride a bike… It's all about getting your lessons 'just right', so that children learn to love poetry as a pure form of expression, while still understanding the theory that underpins their writing.

There's a somewhat legendary cyclist in our '10 books' feature this issue, actually (page 12). Carey Fluker Hunt has chosen an outstanding selection of fiction and non-fiction titles for EYFS to UKS2 that feature differently abled characters. There's a real variety of books, from whimsical tales to more challenging stories with lessons from daily life.

Other regular features that are back with a bang include two new model texts from Pie Corbett (page 42) and a WAGOLL from author Eve Wersocki Morris on page 20. Centring on an extract from her new book, *Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed*, Eve's feature is accompanied by a downloadable resource pack from Lindsay Pickton and Christine Chen.

Wishing you a summer filled with all your favourite books!

Lydia Grove
(editor)

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

In this issue…

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"It's about authentically and sensitively reflecting children's lives"

Award-winning author **Patrice Lawrence** talks about her new middle-grade novel, *People Like Stars*

TRW Why did you want to tell this particular story?
PL My mind is always creating stories from everyday prompts. The first one for *People Like Stars* came from a true crime podcast I listened to on a miserable, diverted bus journey through south London: *What if a child who was now a teenager was stolen as a baby?* Even if the baby was only taken for a couple of hours, and was found happy and well, what would be the ongoing effect on the family? In many of my books, I'm interested in the aftermath of crimes – the long-term fallout.

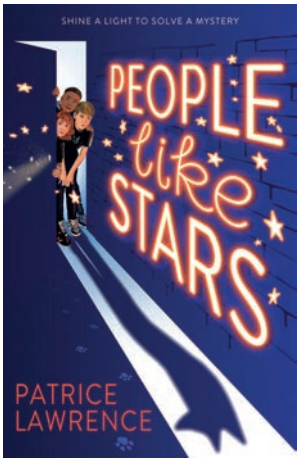
The second thread of the story grew from a challenge on a panel at an arts festival, about the representation of older women. Myself and many of my friends are grandma age, but certainly don't fit that mould. Neither did my actual grandmothers.

Nonetheless, I'd fallen into the trap of writing domestic, traditional grandmas, so I wanted to depict a flawed, non-stereotypical older woman.

I was also influenced by the fact that my paternal grandmother was Indian. I never met her and know nothing about that side of my heritage.

Finally, I was staying in a budget hotel in London and realised that it was also used as temporary accommodation for families with children. How could the lack of a permanent, secure home affect a teenager? What if she has finally found a home, but it's oh so precarious?

TRW What are your tips for getting readers hooked?
PL I'm usually pulled in by a character's voice – how they talk, what they talk about, their specific points of reference. If I believe in someone, I find it nearly impossible to leave a story. Humour is also good and under-used. Sometimes it can be useful to devise a 'set piece' at the beginning of a story – perhaps a meal, or characters hanging out together preparing for something. You can say so much through actions and interactions. Even the way that a character prepares and eats a sandwich can be compelling!



"Even the way that a character prepares and eats a sandwich can be compelling!"

TRW How do you approach the pacing of your novels?
PL I don't plan it – I don't think I know how to! However, it's important for me to know at the start of the process what each character wants – though that might change later. At the beginning of *People Like Stars*, Ayrton wants more freedom, Stanley hopes to meet his Forbidden Grandma and Sen longs for a secure home. I use these motivations to drive the momentum of the story.

TRW When writing for younger readers, how do you decide what level to pitch the content?
PL I spend a good deal of time thinking about my characters and how they see the world. Ayrton may not have been able to fully understand his mother's behaviour when he was younger, but he would still have felt the impact of it, especially when his parents separated. Likewise, Stanley lives in a happy, well-loved family, but he has that curiosity about his roots that's shared by so many children for many different reasons.

And Sen… Currently around 30 per cent of children in the UK – that's 4.3 million – are living in low-income households. 151,000 children are in temporary accommodation.
So, in a sense, it's not about pitching, it's about authentically and sensitively reflecting children's lives.

Patrice Lawrence's debut novel, Orangeboy, earned widespread recognition, winning both the Bookseller YA Prize and Waterstone's Prize for Older Children's Fiction. With over 20 years of experience working in charities advocating for equality and social justice, these themes resonate deeply in her storytelling.

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Making CONNECTIONS

Children are drawing inferences all the time, so why is it such a struggle when analysing texts? asks **Rachel Clarke**

We make inferences all day long – often without realising it. For example, if one of your children comes into the classroom after playtime with a grazed knee and clutching a wet paper towel, you will likely infer that they fell over on the playground. Equally, if your colleague says she has a headache and asks you for a tablet, you will infer that she needs the medicine to help ease her pain.

Two everyday inferences. One that requires us to take our knowledge of grazed knees, the power of the wet paper towel and experience of the rough and tumble of the playground to build a big picture of what likely happened. And another, smaller, inference where we connect two words (headache and tablet) to use our understanding of what a tablet is and how it will help our colleague feel better.

Our children make these everyday inferences, too. Just think how many times they look out of the window, see the rain and ask you if they'll get to go out to play today. They're making connections based on the available information and their previous experiences of what happens to playtime when it rains. They are experts at making everyday inferences, and yet when we ask them to answer inference questions about the texts they read, they find it somewhat more challenging. So, what can we do to help?

The local level

In the first instance, let's take a look at those smaller inferences, which are sometimes called 'local inferences'. As with the example of the headache and the tablet, these are connections that, as experienced adult readers, we hardly register that we are being asked to make. But at a very small, local level, all reading requires such inferences, which many of our children struggle to make. Here's a short 'story':

Sarah was thirsty. She asked her mum for a drink.

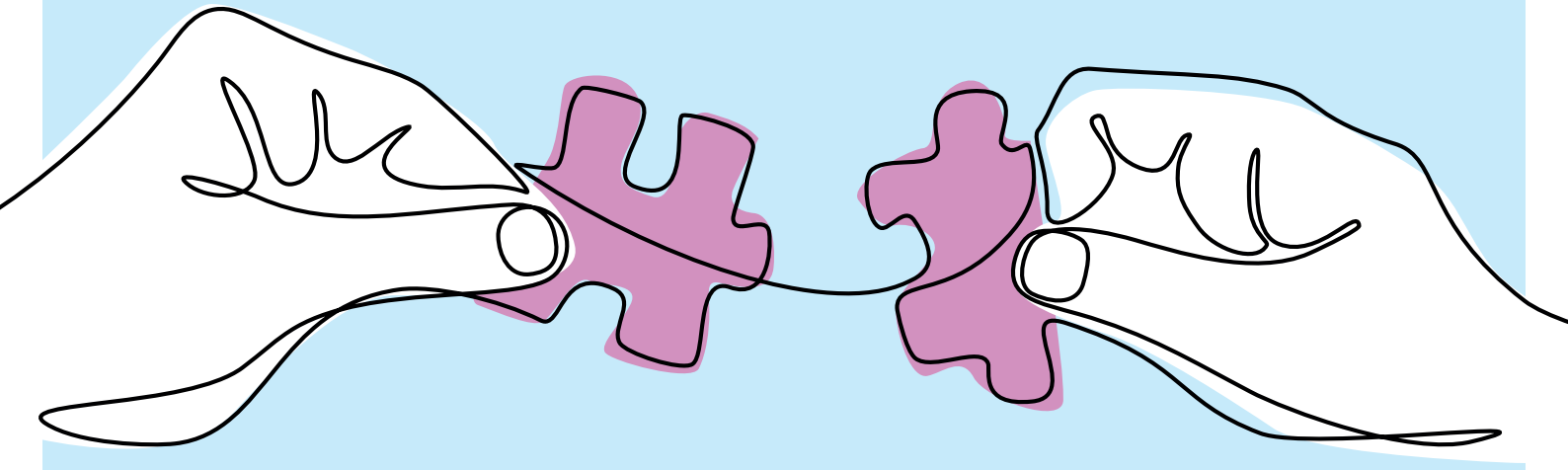
There are two main vocabulary connections that the reader needs to make to comprehend this story:

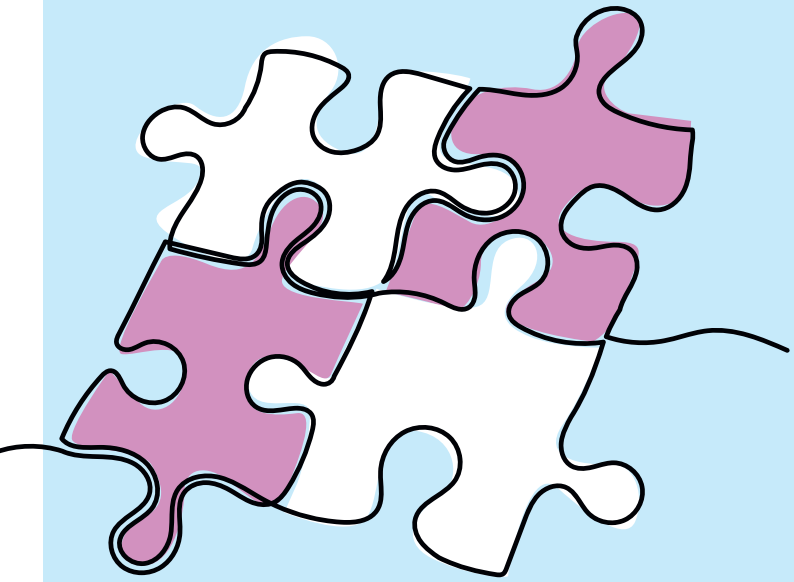
> ***"The reader also needs to understand that information from across the sentences should be linked"***

Sarah and *she* are the same person; the *drink* alleviates Sarah's *thirst*. The reader also needs to understand that information from across the sentences should be linked. There's a further challenge in this story, in that if you're not too sure about the pronouns *she* and *her*, you may struggle to connect them correctly to *Sarah* and *her mum*.

To help children who may struggle with making these small, local inferences. I would take the following steps:

- Tell the story in your own words.
- Identify who the characters in the story are.
- Circle the words that connect.
- Draw arrows between the connecting words showing how the information flows back and forth.
- Talk about how the key information is in more than one sentence.





It's interesting to note that pronouns are often the sticking point. Asking children to change the nouns in a short story, like the one below, into pronouns can help.

The children went to the park. The children played on the swings. Then the children played on the slide. After that the children had an ice-cream. Eventually the children went home and the children told the children's mum about their day.

This type of activity can equally be used to encourage the use of pronouns for written cohesion. It's likely that the children who are struggling to make small, local inferences are also struggling to write cohesive texts.

The global level

The big connections that take place across a text are sometimes called global inferences. These are the types of inferences where we may elaborate on top of what we have been told (like our grazed knee story), by making visualisations, exploring themes and forming evaluations.

Film can be a useful tool for helping children to make the visualisations that will help them connect with a text. For example, if you are sharing a story about a jungle, it's unlikely that all the class will have first-hand experience of that environment. So, sharing film clips of jungles will help pupils build suitable images. With these in place, they will find it easier to answer the inference question you may want to ask.

Drawing characters and settings based on the descriptions provided by an author is another useful way to help children create visual images that will support them to build connections across a text. Annotating their drawings with information from the text will be particularly helpful if they are required to reference the text when discussing their inferences.

As a twist on asking children to draw what they read, I recently used ChatGPT to create an image based on a text. The story I used was *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase,* a classic text full of antiquated and complex vocabulary that I didn't expect my students to know. By sharing the image after reading the text, we were able to see the challenging words – *crenelations, herring-bone brickwork, turrets* – in context. We could then open our discussions to make evaluations about how the author had led us to view the house as a safe, warm stronghold surrounded by a dangerous, desolate world. If you've not tried this, I urge you to do so.

Pick and mix

When we identify the theme of a text, we are making very deep inferences that sit below the story or narrative. As adults this can be tricky; for children it can be very hard indeed. A technique that I've found helps with this, is to provide the children with a range of possible themes to explore that suit the story. So, for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* you could give the class the option of *friendship, good vs evil, love* or *self-discovery*.

Encourage the children to discuss the themes and why they think they describe the message of the story. As an added extra, you could even print the themes onto cards and ask the children to place them on a target board to show their relevance by their proximity to the bullseye.

Rachel Clarke is the director of Primary English Education Consultancy Limited. She works with schools across the UK to raise standards in English. A keen blogger, she runs primaryenglished.co.uk – a website bursting with advice and resources focused on teaching English.

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ASK YOUR TA TO HELP

1 If you have children who struggle with vocabulary, asking your TA to pre-teach key words before the reading lesson can be a valuable use of time.

2 If you have children who struggle to make connections between related words, consider asking your TA to explore riddles with children, such as *I have hands but no face, what am I?* (clock). This playful use of language should grow pupils' vocabularies and help them appreciate how words are related.

3 One of the barriers to making local inferences is recognising pronouns. Ask your TA to run a short intervention on pronouns for any children that need it, making sure they can match pronouns to nouns.

4 For children who struggle to infer feelings, and words associated with emotion, build their bank of emotional language by asking your TA to undertake short role play activities with them where they 'show an emotion'. You could extend this to include synonyms for different feelings.

5 Create a collection of intriguing images. Ask your TA to discuss the images with the children, starting with the phrase "What's going on in this picture?". They should prompt pupils to explain what leads them to make their inferences based on the images and what they may already know.

6 Ask your TA to play the *What am I?* – placing sticky notes on pupils' heads and getting them to work out who or what they are by asking questions.

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10 BOOKS FEATURING *differently abled protagonists*

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1 FOUNDATION STAGE

Amazing

BY STEVE ANTONY, HODDER 2019

About this book

Follow a boy and his pet dragon as they charge around outside, play party games and generally have a wonderful time. There's a lot going on in this high-energy picturebook, but what's special is their fun and friendship – not the boy's wheelchair, which is clearly depicted but never mentioned in the text.

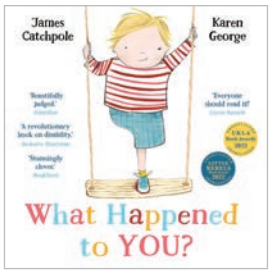
Joyful, dynamic and uplifting, *Amazing* focuses attention on what the boy *can* do, and will spark thinking and discussion.

2

FOUNDATION STAGE

What Happened to YOU?

BY JAMES CATCHPOLE, ILLUS. KAREN GEORGE, FABER 2021



Illustrations by Karen George

About this book

Joe loves telling stories. Except the one about why he's only got one leg, but that's the one most kids want to hear. When Joe finally gets a chance to talk about sharks instead, a marvellous game of Make Believe ensues, and Joe's frustration is neatly – and humorously – resolved.

James Catchpole writes from experience, and this eloquent and touching exploration of difference makes a rich starting point for both personal and group learning.

Thinking and talking

- What do the other kids keep asking Joe? How does it make him feel? What does he do as a result?
- Is it okay to be curious about people? Can you think of a better way to ask questions or discover what you want to know?
- Who likes imaginative games? Who prefers playing other things? Why aren't we all the same?

Try this…

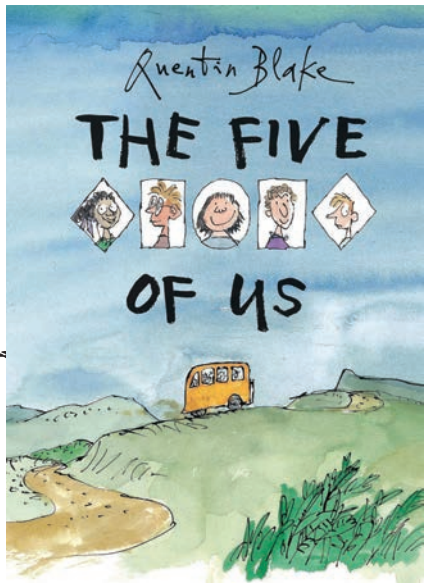
- Inside an outline of Joe, write words describing how he feels when he's being asked about his leg. Around it, write how the other kids feel when they're asking the questions. Create sentences: *Joe feels... because.... Yuto/ Ibrahim feels... because....*
- Collaborate on two big collages: one about things you have in common, and one about things that make you different.
- Joe only has one leg, but it's a strong leg. Explore hopping and balancing, using PE apparatus to create imaginative challenges.

KEY STAGE 1

3

The Five of Us

BY QUENTIN BLAKE, TATE PUBLISHING 2020



About this book

With Big Eddie driving their yellow bus, five children are off to the country for a picnic with their dog. Plans change when – miles from anywhere – Big Eddie faints.

What will Angie, Ollie, Simona, Mario and Eric do? Gleefully inspired by folktale traditions, these amazing children have some very unlikely skills, so the answer to that is quickly resolved. Angie can spot things miles away, and Eric doesn't need a phone to call for help. But it's Mario who carries Big Eddie all the way to the rescue helicopter – and although we're shown his wheelchair on almost every spread, no part of the text refers to it.

Thinking and talking

- Why does the boy think Zibbo is amazing? Why does Zibbo say the same about the boy?
- Share experiences of using wheels to get around, to play with, or to help with daily tasks.
- What would you do if you had a pet dragon?
- Why doesn't Quentin Blake tell us that Mario uses a wheelchair?
- Which super-skill would you have, and why?
- What emergency services can people call on for help?

Try this…

- Use the illustrations to inspire new stories. What happens, for example, when Zibbo's fire makes the boy's wheelchair go extra-fast?
- How many different vehicles can you spot? Which ones do YOU use? Inspired by the cover illustration, create a frieze by drawing yourselves with bikes, scooters, skateboards and wheelchairs. Could you bring some into school to try out?
- Tour your school or neighbourhood, looking for challenges faced by people using wheels to help them get around. Could anything be changed to help?
- Write a news report about this incident. Invent quotes from Eddie and the Fantastic Five, and add a hand-drawn 'photo'. Don't forget to publish your work!

"Gleefully inspired by folktales"

- What real-world skills do you have? What would your amazing superpower be? Talk or write about it.
- How could the children have helped Big Eddie in real life? Learn some first aid so you'd know what to do!

4

KEY STAGE 1

My Other Life

BY POLLY HO-YEN, ILLUS. BY PATRICIA HU, BLOOMSBURY READERS (BROWN BAND) 2020

About this book

Mae has asthma, and often ends up in hospital. The first time she sees a strange, dark hole in the wall, she ignores it. But when the portal returns, she travels to another version of her life – one where she isn't sick, and many things have changed as a result.

Gently tackling some big ideas about how our circumstances affect who we become, this short novel delivers quietly uplifting messages about what matters most, and valuing what we have. Mae's asthma is realistically portrayed, but family love and friendship are the book's key themes.

Thinking and talking

- When Mae goes through the portal, what changes? What stays the same?
- Why does Mae come back? What would you have done?
- If you could travel to another version of your life, what would it be like?

KEY STAGE 1

5

Emmanuel's Dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah

BY LAURIE ANN THOMPSON, ILLUS. SEAN QUALLS, SCHWARTZ & WADE 2015

About this book

When Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah was born in Ghana with a disabled leg, many people gave up on him. But his mum had strong ideas about education and independence. "Don't give up," she said. So he didn't. And when Emmanuel came up with an impossible plan for a poor boy with only one leg – to cycle around Ghana – he found a way to make it happen.

This beautifully illustrated non-fiction picturebook tells the story of Emmanuel's heroic ride.

Thinking and talking

- How do we know that Emmanuel is strong and determined? Find examples.
- Why did Emmanuel decide to cycle around Ghana? How did he manage with only one strong leg? Who and what helped him?
- As the final page says, *one person can change the world.* What would you do to make the world a better place?

Try this…

- Draw Rav on one sheet of paper and Mandy on another. Add speech bubbles and let them tell Mae why she should choose *them* as her friend.
- List the advantages and disadvantages of staying in Mae's other world. Use role play to advise Mae on whether to return home.
- What does this story tell us about Mae's asthma? How does she cope? Find out about lungs and breathing, and what to do if someone has an asthma attack.

Try this…

- Role-play Emmanuel being interviewed by reporters. What will you tell them about your ride?
- Emmanuel currently teaches people all over the world, and often says that "Disability does *not* mean inability". What does he mean? Draw pictures of Emmanuel on his ride, and add this phrase to turn them into posters.
- What does this book show or tell you about Ghana? Find out more and create a display.

6

KEY STAGE 2

El Deafo

BY CECE BELL, COLOUR BY DAVID LASKY, AMULET BOOKS 2014

Illustrations © 2014 by Cece Bell

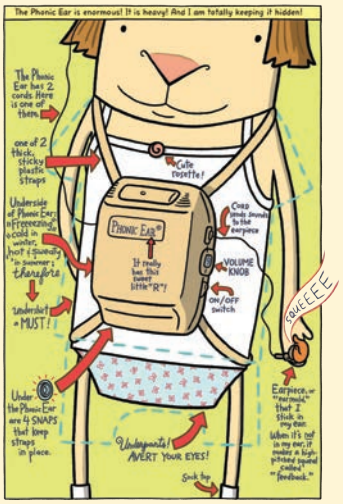
About this book

When Cece starts school, she's the only girl wearing a Phonic Ear. Strapped to her chest, the giant hearing-aid works using radio waves, and Cece hates being different – until she discovers an unexpected benefit. She can hear what's happening in the staffroom, hallway or wherever her teacher happens to be! Will she rock the world as 'El Deafo, Listener for All'? Or will she find better ways to make friends and discover who she really is?

This perceptive and humorous graphic-novel memoir about growing up in Seventies America is fun to read and prompts thoughtful reflection.

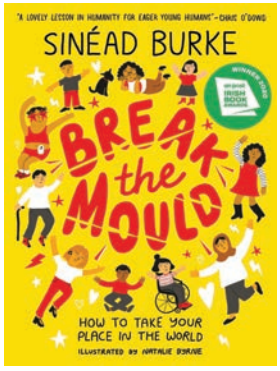
Thinking and talking

- Why does Cece call herself El Deafo?
- What helps Cece make friends and join in with everyday life? What makes things more difficult?
- What 'everyday superpower' would you want to have? What would your name be?



Try this…

- Use words and pictures to tell the story of something that happened when you were younger. What did you learn? Can you weave that into your work?
- Make your own *warm fuzzies,* like Cece. Who can you share them with?
- Write from Cece's perspective, explaining how she likes to interact with other people and how they can help. Is this true for every d/Deaf person? Find out more.



KEY STAGE 2

7 Break the Mould: How to Take Your Place in the World

BY SINEAD BURKE, ILLUS. NATALIE BYRNE, WREN AND ROOK 2020

About this book

As a Little Person, Sinead Burke uses her perspective on difference to power her work as a teacher, writer and activist. Packed with reflections on her own life journey, this illustrated handbook is a guide to believing in yourself and using your voice to make the world a fairer place. Kind, funny and full of common sense, it promotes self-knowledge, wellbeing and empathy and is aimed at all UKS2+ readers, whether or not they have a disability.

Thinking and talking

- What did you learn about Sinead by reading this book?What did you learn about yourself?
- What does Sinead say about language and its power? How could you use kinder words?
- What does being an ally mean? How does this book help readers become better allies?

Try this…

- Use Sinead's observations about her Ted Talk to help you plan and deliver a talk about something you think needs to change. Let personal experience guide you wherever possible, and talk to others affected by your chosen issue.
- What do you want to be remembered for? Discuss Sinead's 'unsung heroes', then write yourself into a new page of this book!
- Explore your surroundings to discover what's been done to help disabled people take part in every aspect of school life. Could anything be improved?

8 The Secret of Haven Point

KEY STAGE 2

BY LISETTE AUTON, ILLUS. BY VALENTINA TORO, PUFFIN 2022

About this book

Alpha was the Cap'n's first Wreckling, but since she washed up as a baby at his lighthouse, it's become a haven for any disabled person who needs somewhere to belong. With the help of some unusual mermaids, the Wrecklings scratch a living by looting from passing ships – until the arrival of an Outsider threatens everything.

Wildly imaginative and empowering, this middle-grade adventure puts disabilities of all kinds at the heart of the action in low-key, everyday ways that focus attention on the plot and characters. Seeing the Wrecklings through Bobby's eyes is a shock for readers as well as Alpha, and helps this novel work its many-layered magic to bring necessary change.

Thinking and talking

- What has brought the Wrecklings to the Capn's lighthouse? Why do they need its shelter and security?
- How do the Wrecklings' ingenious contraptions and adaptations make lighthouse life possible?
- What part do the mermaids play? What does their presence add to the book?

Try this…

- Design an imaginative and supportive home for a group of people with differing needs.
- Does shutting themselves away from the outside world work for the Wrecklings? Debate pros and cons.
- Write further diary entries recording Bobby's perspective on events following his capture. How and why does his attitude to the Wrecklings change?

KEY STAGE 2

9 Ella Jones vs. the Sun Stealer

BY LUCY EDWARDS, WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH KATY BIRCHALL, ILLUS. CAROLINE GARCIA, SCHOLASTIC 2025

Ella Jones vs the Sun Stealer is the first in a series – with the second releasing autumn 2025
Cover illustration: Two Dots | Interior illustrations: Caroline Garcia

About this book

When every scrap of light is extinguished from the world, Ella's amazed to find herself leading a battle against Lugh, an ancient and very angry Celtic god. As a blind person, though, she's used to navigating darkness with Maisie her guide dog – so maybe Ella's unlikely team can defeat Lugh, after all? Enter a second villain, to complicate the plot…

Written by a blind broadcaster and disability activist, this novel takes a realistic approach to fantasy, and readers will be fascinated by the can-do insights into Ella's sightless, otherwise-empowered world.

Thinking and talking

- How does being blind help Ella battle Lugh and Everett Croft?
- Talk about fantasy and reality in this novel.
- How do the colours of the rainbow make you feel? What memories do they evoke? Focus on senses other than sight.

Try this…

- Where would you hide the rainbow gems in your school? Create a treasure hunt, writing clues that require the use of senses other than sight.
- Summarise Everett Croft's villainous plan. In role as Everett, talk or write about what happened. How and why did things go wrong from your perspective?
- Could you make a raised map of your school? Test different ways of creating the lines and read them with your fingers. What are the challenges? What works best?

10 Owning It

KEY STAGE 2

EDITED BY JAMES CATCHPOLE, LUCY CATCHPOLE & JEN CAMPBELL, ILLUS. SOPHIE KAMLISH, FABER 2025

About this book

Growing up disabled can be an isolating experience, and the lack of role models and first-hand information really made an impact on the contributors to this book. *Owning It* – an anthology of own-voice writing by disabled people – aims to fill that gap. From playing sports at school and juggling hospital visits, to dealing with the confusion of getting too much free stuff, these writers share their memories – good and not-so-good – with honesty, directness and compassion. *Owning It* is about finding the strength and pride (and maybe even the words) disabled children and young people need. Packed with insight and kindness, it will also build empathy and understanding for non-disabled readers in UKS2.

Thinking and talking

- *We can't change our disabilities. But we can own them.* Discuss.
- What have you learned about disabilities from reading this book?
- Find positive things that came from some of the challenges faced by these writers.

Illustrations by Sophie Kamlish

Try this…

- This book is packed with insights. Find words you want to keep close, then record them in beautiful ways for sharing and display.
- How did their childhood experiences contribute to the choices these writers made as adults? Imagine a realistic future for yourself, built on what you know about your strengths, skills and interests.
- What have you already learned that might help your younger self? Write them a letter.

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

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Years 1-6

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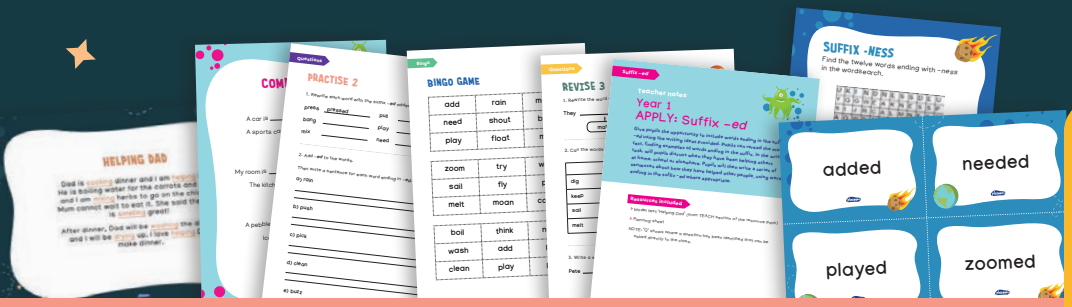

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- ✓ **Teaching information** from the **Teacher/Parent/Leader Guide** is available from my website linked to the primary grading system assessment statements.
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Rona D. Linklater £12.99 / 9781805144090

WAGOLL

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed by Eve Wersocki Morris

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to show a determined main character

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed **is the first book in a new thrilling adventure series about Clem Fatale, the youngest gangster in the city, set in 1950s London. Readers enter a fast and funny world of crooked criminals, glamorous nightclubs, secret alleyways and fantastic fry-up breakfasts.**

This story begins in the dead of night, when Clem and her dad Jimmy, a notorious jewel thief and leader of the Spider Gang, are on a heist. They're out to pinch the Fool's Canary, a rare yellow diamond belonging to the snooty Lord Weatherdale. But when Clem's dad vanishes on the job, the Spider gang have to scram.

Photo © Yellowbelly

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed ***(£7.99, Little Tiger) is out now.***

Clem sets off into the London underworld to get her dad back and find out who double-crossed them. By her side is her prisoner/sidekick Gilbert (whom the Spiders accidentally kidnapped). Gilbert, who has spent most of his life indoors like a hot-house pot plant, is thrilled at the chance to go on a real adventure. Together with a Jamaican taxi driver called Winnie and Clem's childhood friend Konrad, son of a Polish pilot, the two unlikely friends race to save the day.

I'm dyslexic, and when I was at school I used to find some books very boring. So, when it comes to writing my own books, I add as many twists and turns as I can to keep readers on the edge of their seats. Clem Fatale is stuffed full of action scenes – from escaping a grumpy barman, armed only with a vinyl record, to breaking into a fancy West End club.

The characters are always the most fun to write – from the cockney, geezer gangsters to the cold, cruel villainous businessman. But my favourite characters have to be Clem and Gilbert; they are as different as pigeons and poodles. Clem is tough, stubborn and rather prickly, but Gilbert is often naïve, cheerful and friendly. Clem will stop at nothing to find her dad, and her love, loyalty and determination make her the perfect main character.

HOW TO SHOW A DETERMINED MAIN CHARACTER

GIVE THEM SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR

When I create a new character, I make a character fact sheet. I draw a picture of them and scribble facts about them. For a determined character, it's important to know what is important to them: A friend? A parent? A pet?

GIVE THEM A MISSION

Once you know what your character cares about, take it away! Give them an emotional drive that will keep them going throughout the adventure. It will make the character more likeable if they're driven by love, rather than selfishness.

ADD ENERGY

Use dramatic, energetic words to describe the character. For example, have them run rather than walk. Keep them moving forward in every scene.

DON'T MAKE IT TOO EASY

The most determined characters are the ones who get knocked down and have to pick themselves back up. Think about mini challenges the character can face along the way.

GET IN THEIR HEAD

Once a determined main character makes a plan, they won't be able to think about anything else. You can show this in dialogue with other characters, or by describing your main character's own internal thoughts.

Extract from

Chapter 4, page 23

Prologue

The wild hedgerows towered above Clem and her captive as they charged down the country road.

Clem kept glancing behind them, waiting for headlamps to come tearing into view. She didn't know what the Spiders would do when they found out she'd done a bunk. She figured Monty would be disappointed, Whistler would be boiling about her pinching the witness, Screw would get in a flap about spies and double crossers watching the house, and Clem's mother probably wouldn't even notice that her only daughter had run away.

Clem set her eyes on the road and turned up the collar of her leather jacket. The jacket had been her dad's during the war. The seams were rubbed brown with French soil and the lining stained from sea-salt escapades – it was her battle skin. Tonight the jacket hung heavy round her shoulders like the comforting weight of her dad's hand. She'd find him. She wouldn't give up on him.

The boy Gilbert hobbled behind her. The treacherous walk across the narrow bridge over the Thames had made him quite lightheaded and his stomach was rumbling like a snoring dog.

"I say! so sorry to bother you," Gilbert called after Clem, "but could we have a breather? A quick break?"

"Quit stalling!" said Clem, without looking back. "Can't you walk and breathe at the same time? It's ten minutes until the town, then we'll pick up a cab. No stopping!"

Picking a dramatic verb like 'charged' helps convey Clem's sense of urgency and speed.

By having Clem imagine characters off scene, it brings them into the story – reminding the reader of the consequences of her running away and adding to the drama.

Describing where the character is looking gives us a glimpse of her inner thoughts; both her mind and her eyes are on the future.

This metaphor shows us how Clem feels about her dad's jacket. It makes us think about the qualities someone needs when going into battle: bravery, skill and determination.

Short positive sentences show Clem's optimistic determination. The repetition of 'him' conveys how her mind is constantly focused on her dad. Even though the narrative is in third person, we get these windows into Clem's mind – a technique known as free indirect speech.

This helps establish the characters' proximity to each other (where they physically are in relation to each other). The fact that Clem is in front of Gilbert shows their power dynamic: Clem is the leader and Gilbert is the follower.

Their dialogue helps establish each character's motivation in this scene. Gilbert wants to stop (and have a good snooze) but Clem wants to carry on until she's finished the mission.

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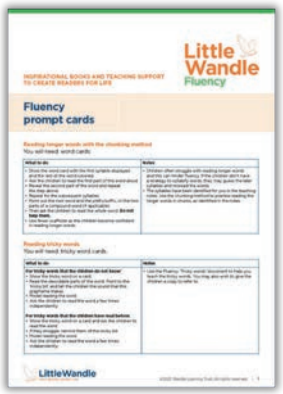

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Published by Puffin, 2024

Flower Block

Scale a magical plant and unearth your colourful community with this fairytale exploration of home and nature

JO CUMMINS

Flower Block is Lanisha Butterfield's debut picture book, inspired by her own childhood. She wants to represent children like her – from tower blocks and council estates, from biracial or single-parent families – in a positive light as she aims to challenge misconceptions of council estate life. It is so important that children are exposed to books that reflect the realities they live in, and that provide windows into the lives of others.

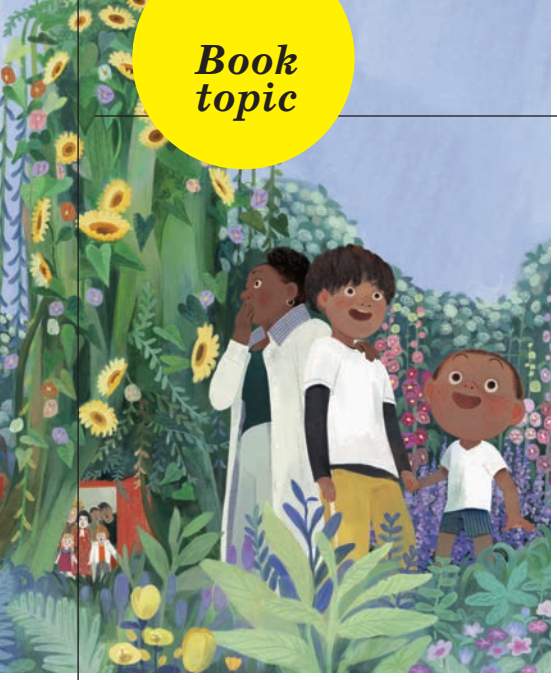
The book is a glorious fusion of the fairytale and the everyday, with a magical plant bursting up from the seeds planted by Jerimiah and his brother. As it snakes up through the floors of their tower block home, the brothers run to apologise to all their neighbours and discover a varied array of people, all keen to join them on their adventures. But what will be waiting for them at the top of the beanstalk? And what will their grumpy neighbour, Old Man Crisp, have to say?

It's a great story for exploring ideas of home and community, and the power of nature to unite people.

Cover reveal

Really looking closely at the cover of a book is a good way to get children thinking about what they are about to read by inferring information, and making links to pre-existing knowledge and experiences. There are lots of details in this front cover for pupils to explore and ponder over. Here are some questions you could use to promote discussion:

- What is the title?
- What do you notice about the style of font used for each word in the title? Why has the illustrator done this?
- How is the title a play on words?



(Flower block, not tower block.)

- Who are the author and illustrator?
- What kind of building can you see? Does anyone here live in a building that's similar?
- What is unusual about this tower block? Is the plant a 'normal' plant?
- Can anyone think of a fairy story that has a giant vine in it? (Jack and the Beanstalk.)
- How many people can you see on the cover?
- What are they all doing?
- Which ones would you like to visit?
- How many pets can you see?
- Who do you think the main characters are? Why?

Writing opportunities

There are so many wonderful opportunities for creative writing inspired by the characters and events in *Flower Block*. Some ideas to get you started are:

School vine

If you were feeling really creative, you could create a fake 'vine' coming up out of the classroom floor and back up through the ceiling as a hook into writing. If not, don't panic: a photoshopped image, or just the power of the imagination, would work just as well.

Ask the children to imagine what their classroom might look like if it were taken over by a magical garden. Would it be like a jungle? A country meadow? A tropical paradise? Looking at photos of varying types of plants and gardens might help inspire them. Different groups might like to write about rooms in the school: the hall, the head teacher's office, the music room, etc.

For the main writing task, encourage the children to think about what they might see, hear, and smell in the rooms. They should write a description of their room using appropriate vocabulary and figurative language.

Extension – the children could make 3D shoebox models of their gardens before or after writing.

What's at the top?

At the top of the tower block's vine is Flower Block paradise with a rainbow of blossoms, but what else could it be? What was at the top of the beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk?

Look at the final double-page illustration of the rooftop garden. What plants and wildlife can the children spot? What different zones are there? How are different people enjoying it?

What would pupils enjoy finding up on the rooftop? What might other people enjoy? Would this vary depending on their age group? Some possible ideas could be a crazy golf course, a waterpark, an urban beach,

or a Willy Wonka-style sweet garden.

Ask children to write a persuasive letter to the headteacher, pitching their idea to develop the roof of their school into the area of their choice.

As an extension, look at some simple garden landscaping plans. Encourage pupils to create their own plans for their rooftops.

Fairytale splice

In *Flower Block*, Lanisha Butterfield mixes some fairytale magic with an everyday urban tower block – with a giant vine sprouting up through the building. Her reasoning was that all children deserved to imagine that fairytales can happen wherever you live. What tales could the children imagine coming to life in their school or in their street? Perhaps the three little pigs might come to rebuild the

Take it further

COMMUNITY LINKS

One of the key themes in this story is the power nature has to bring people together. Members of your community may be able to come into school and work with children on planting or redeveloping a small area of the school grounds. Or you could take groups of children to a local residential home or similar, to weed the gardens or refresh planters. If your setting is looking at ways to help strengthen relationships with other members of the community, perhaps pupils could plant hanging baskets or pots to give as gifts.

ARTIST STUDY

Lots of artists have been inspired by nature and the beauty of flowers. A study of some of these would work well with the themes in *Flower Block* and could inspire a whole class art exhibition or collaborative mural. Some artworks to consider as starting points could be 'Flower Garden' by Gustav Klimt, 'Flowers' by Andy Warhol, and 'Hibiscus with Plumeria' by Georgia O'Keeffe.

Discussion points:

- What types of flowers were used in these pictures?
- What colours have been used and what feeling or mood does that create?
- How have the flowers been arranged? (Bouquets, single stems, scattered.)
- What technique has been used? (Oil paints, water colours, screen printing, etc.)
- What do you like about this painting?
- What one thing would you change or add to this painting?

FLOWER SEED BOMBS

Seed bombs can be used to introduce plants to areas of land that might not otherwise have any plants. Wastelands, road embankments or wild patches are all places that may benefit. Seed-bombing can help

roof, or gingerbread people, baked by pupils, could come alive and run amok?

Depending on the age of the children you work with, you could set up and photograph a scenario based on pupils' ideas to inspire their writing. If the children are older, they could photograph or photoshop their own ideas as a starting point. You could add speech bubbles to the photos, do some drama work to explore the characters' dialogue, or use apps to animate the characters and have them talking. You could also use the photo prompts to structure and plan a lengthier narrative.

Grow your own sunflowers

This story provides the ideal opportunity for the children to grow their own sunflowers. With strong links to the science and maths curriculums, there's plenty of scope for exploration.

Life cycle of a plant

Ask the children to observe and describe how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants. They could meet this objective by creating a seed diary for their sunflowers. Start at Day Zero with a sketch of the seed. Include details of how they potted the seed and what it will need to grow. After about a week, the first green shoots will appear, then a bud, then a bloom. The entire life cycle can take some time, so pupils may need to take their growing plants home to continue to observe and update their diaries.

Labelled diagrams

In both primary Key Stages, the curriculum requires pupils to identify the basic structure of plants and describe the functions of those parts (roots, stem, leaves, and flowers). As their sunflower seedlings grow, the children could produce labelled diagrams of them and research the role each part of the plant plays in its growth and development.

Plotting a graph

Depending on the age of the children you are working with, you could support them to collect data from the growing plants to produce a bar graph or line graph.

If you are hoping to produce a bar graph with your class, you could measure the height of all the seedlings on a given day and use that to help you decide what parameters you are going to have for your bars. For example: 0–2cm, 2–4cm, 4–6cm. Create a tally chart of how many plants you will have in each bar then plot onto a bar graph.

You could also collect continuous data from a nominated 'class plant' and measure it at regular intervals (every two days, for example). You could then use this data to plot a line graph with 'day' and 'height' on the axes. To extend this, you could plot and compare the data of two plants in the same graph.

Loved this? Try these...

- *Bloom* by Anne Booth, illus. Robyn Wilson-Owen
- *The Secret Sky Garden* by Linda Sarah and Fiona Lumbers
- *Every House on Every Street* by Jess Hitchman, illus. Lili La Baleine
- *Number 7 Evergreen Street* by Julia Patton
- *Seed* by Caryl Lewis

Jo Cummins is an experienced primary school teacher and English leader. As well as blogging about new children's books, and creating educational resources, she has been involved in long-listing and judging national books awards. Jo currently works for a specialist educational provision in Hampshire in a teaching and advisory role.

librarygirlandbookboy.com

restore biodiversity and create new habitats for wildlife.

How to make them:

- You need – meadow flower seeds, peat-free compost, water, powdered clay (from craft shops).
- Mix the ingredients in the ratio of 1 cup seeds, 5 cups compost, 2–3 cups powdered clay.
- Slowly add enough water to make everything stick together.
- Roll mixture into firm balls.
- Leave to dry in the sun.
- Have fun throwing them into bare patches OR bag them up and sell as part of a class enterprise project.

HAPPY SUNFLOWERS

Sunflowers always feel like a very cheerful bloom, which is why they are the perfect way to encourage children to think about all the things that make them happy. Not only are these useful for the children to refer to if they feel they need to, but also to help the adults around them understand better how to support them.

Start with a discussion about the kinds of things that make us happy. Are there any that are the same as anyone else? Do people have different things? Depending on the age and maturity of the children with whom you are doing this activity, you might get pupils naming objects (my teddy, pizza, my cat) or thinking a little deeper (going for a walk with my dad, watching the sunset with friends, doing things to help people).

The children are going to create 'happy sunflowers', where each petal has something that makes them happy written or drawn on it. Use pre-cut petals or paper strips, which can then be stuck onto the centres of the sunflowers. For the centres, you could use paper plates or circles of card with a photo of the child stuck on. If you wanted to get a little more creative, it is easy to create a pointillism effect using a cotton bud and brown or black paint, to look like sunflower seeds.

WAGOLL

The Boy in the Suit by James Fox

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a nerve-wracking scene

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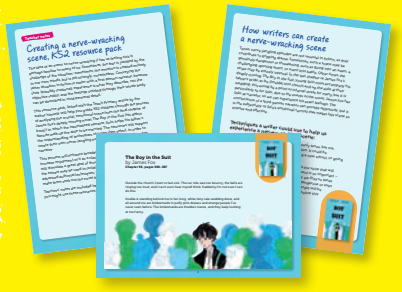


Download your **FREE**, exclusive teaching pack to help you explore both this extract and the rest of the book with your class.

tinyurl.com/tp-BoyInTheSuit

***The Boy in the Suit* is a middle-grade novel which follows ten-year-old Solo Walker and his complicated mum, Morag, as they struggle through the cost-of-living crisis. As a means to survive, the duo sneak uninvited into strangers' funerals, seeking food, warmth, and somewhere to be. The title refers to the ill-fitting, second-hand suit Solo must wear to blend into the funeral crowd. Naturally, the pair are eventually caught gate-crashing, and their already precarious world is tipped on its side.**

The Boy in the Suit *(£7.99, Scholastic) is out now.*

Solo, our main protagonist, must grapple with the impact of his parent's decisions, while learning that sometimes grownups have fewer answers than children do. Alongside their public shaming, he must learn to navigate family, school, and a budding friendship. Morag, embattled by failing mental health and media intrusion, is driven into hiding, leaving Solo to deal with problems that even adults scarcely know how to solve.

The story follows Solo and Morag as they transition from one normal to another, experiencing the good and the bad of the systems and community around them. There are unexpected kindnesses, thoughtful gestures, funny moments, and occasional missteps and oversights by the people surrounding Solo. Ultimately, the same systems and community come to their aid and help clear the path forwards with humour and care.

While the story oscillates between serious and funny, there is plenty of nerve-wracking action. My personal key to create a nerve-wracking scene is to establish a character's comfort zone, then write the exact opposite. Solo's comfort zone is any situation where he is alone, not being perceived. He hates being looked at and speaking in public, often flushing bright red when simply answering a question in class. What better than a ceremonial role in a grand church wedding, then, to illustrate Solo's nerves and provide an opportunity for character growth?

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE A NERVE-WRACKING SCENE

REVERSE YOUR CHARACTER'S COMFORT ZONES

Get to know your character's safe space, then flip it upside down. If they love staying indoors, put them on a mountain during a storm. If they typically avoid the spotlight, put them on stage with a mic and a hostile audience.

AMP UP THE SENSES

Nervousness comes with distinct bodily sensations. Describe what your character is experiencing through sight, sound, touch, and smell. Hone in on body parts that may betray nervousness: a churning stomach, trembling hands, a rapid pulse.

USE RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

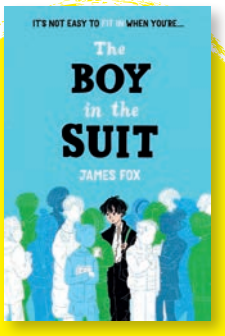
Express doubt and concern by using rhetorical questions in thought and dialogue. Will it be okay? What's going to happen? When will it be over? Answer these questions in the action.

CHOOSE AN IMPOSING SETTING

Certain settings have anxiety built in. Choose one with an element of risk, danger, grandeur or tension to it. Describe it in detail and make it seem alien.

DESCRIBE THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Have your character ruminate on their biggest fear. Is it fainting? Falling over? Describe their most dreaded outcomes in detail to create a vivid sense of anxiety.



Extract from

Chapter 56, pages 366–367

Churches can be daunting spaces – places of ceremony and grandeur, with an element of theatre. Large and imposing, the church contrasts with the meek personality and stature of the young protagonist.

Outside the church I start to feel sick. The car ride was too bouncy, the bells are ringing too loud, and I can't even hear myself think. Suddenly I'm not sure

The repetition of the adverb 'too' indicates the excess of Solo's sensory experience. His senses are overwhelmed beyond comfort by these unfamiliar surroundings.

I can do this.

Solo being perceived strangely by the bridesmaids adds a sense of awkward self-consciousness, adding to the overall discomfort of the scene and adding a 'fish out of water' feeling.

Imelda is standing behind me in her long, white fairy-tale wedding dress, and all around me are bridesmaids in puffy pink dresses and strange people I've never seen before. The bridesmaids are Imelda's nieces, and they keep looking at me funny.

Solo's attire is used throughout the book to represent his circumstances and state of mind. Here, a hot and sticky suit represents the formality of this occasion, a constraint that adds to the stress and bodily discomfort of nervousness.

I feel hot and sticky in my new suit, and a part of me wishes I was wearing my old baggy one instead. I shouldn't have eaten so much breakfast. What if I throw up and ruin the wedding?

True to form, Solo ruminates on worst-case scenarios through rhetorical questions.

A shaky hand starts to rub my shoulder.

"Bit nerve-wracking, isn't it, Solo?" Imelda says, bending down to whisper in my ear. She smells of flowery perfume and powdery make-up. She's trying to make me feel better but her voice sounds trembly and scared. "I feel the same, don't worry. I never actually thought this day was going to come!"

A key theme of the book is the imperfect nature of parents and adults, and this remains true in this scene. Although Imelda attempts to calm Solo's nerves through dialogue, her body betrays her trepidation, doubling the sense of unease in the scene.

Use of sound descriptors representing Solo's internal and external environments adds a sense of inescapable confusion and sensory overload that is common with anxiety.

I don't dare reply in case my breakfast reappears when I open my mouth, so I nod and focus on the stone floor, my heart pounding like an orchestra of drums in my chest. Organ music starts to blare out. My tummy somersaults and I plead with it to stay inside me where it belongs.

When calm, we mostly feel in control of our own bodies. By pleading with his body to play along, Solo narrates a lack of control and heightened nervousness. His tummy 'somersaulting' affords it agency and casts it as an opponent.

Imelda squeezes my shoulder even tighter now. "You've got this, Solo. Just like we practised. Pretend that nobody's here."

366–367

Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

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Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-BigPhonics**

3

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4

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Adventures with ADVERBIALS

Get children adding a bit of grammatical spice to their sentences, says **Laura Dobson**

My favourite part of grammar is adverbials. They are the herbs and spices in a grammatical meal, turning a fairly plain sentence into a culinary masterpiece. Their flexibility within a sentence allows you to play around with the effect you want to create.

What is an adverbial?

An adverbial is a group of words that acts as an adverb, and modifies the main clause in the sentence. Adverbials tell you when, where, how or why an action occurs.

Adverbial phrases do not include a verb. Adverbial clauses do have a verb, but the clause will be subordinate to the main clause in the sentence.

An example of an adverbial clause would be *When Charlie knocked on the door, Max stopped studying*. (The adverbial clause here tells us why and when Max stopped studying.)

Putting adverbials to use

The end of the Key Stage 2 writing framework talks about 'assured and conscious control'. It is referring to levels of formality, but adverbials also allow young writers to demonstrate assured and conscious control. By deciding where in the sentence the adverbial phrase or clause is, a writer can move the reader's focus within the sentence and develop atmosphere.

Let's consider the example given in the panel opposite, which illustrates the thought process a child might go through when considering how to use adverbials to build on a simple sentence. This is the level of thought you want children to be going through when they build sentences using adverbial phrases.

> *"Try not to overthink grammar and get bogged down in the terminology"*

They should be thinking about the effect their word choices and the word order will have on the reader. You want them to consider whether they have enough information in the sentence and, conversely, whether they have too much and therefore need to omit some words or phrases.

Exploring adverbials practically

I think this level of experimentation is best done by physically moving sentence parts around, rather than writing in a book with a pen and paper. Doing it as a physical activity allows for collaboration and conversation around choice and effect. Pen and paper feel more final – they don't allow for the experimentation that adverbs really require and truly deserve.

As a school, we have been using colourful semantics for a number of years as a speech and language intervention. The approach, created by Alison Bryan, is designed to help children develop their understanding of sentence structure and expand their sentences. When creating sentence-building activities as a school, we use the same colours as those detailed in the approach, to allow links to be made between the intervention and the learning in class. **Worksheet 1** and **Slide pack 1** were created using the colourful semantics approach, to develop sentence construction understanding with a Year 3 class using Sophie Kirtley's book, *The Wild Way Home*. **Worksheet 2** also follows the colourful semantics colours; it can be used with **Slide Pack 1**, and the cards are linked to a text our Year 4 classes use: *The Wolves of Currumpaw* by William Grill.

Even if you don't use colourful semantics as a school, I still highly recommend this sentence building approach. **Worksheet 3** provides children with a range of adverbials, colour-coordinated according to their purpose. Ask pupils to work out which colour correlates with which purpose (when, where and how) and then either give them a simple sentence or get them to write one. Now challenge them to build the sentence up using the adverbials. You may decide to add adjectives, too.

Worksheet 4 is a game: *Does it work?* For this game, you will need a 1–10 dice or a spinner. The instructions are written at the top of the sheet. This game allows children to consider sense when building sentences. '*As still as a statue, the lions roared*.' This is nonsensical because the adverbial doesn't relate to the verb '*roared*' and in the adverbial the singular 'a' is used, but in the main clause it is the plural '*lions*'. Children may not describe these things technically, but a more general discussion around sense will ultimately lead to more thoughtful writing.

Warm-up games

The best grammar teaching is embedded into units of work where children can see the grammar in context, practise using the grammar through discrete skills-based activities, use the grammar when writing in a similar style to the model they saw at the start, and then practise regularly to maintain the newly acquired knowledge.

Grammar games are an excellent way of providing repeated practice. A simple game is to put a variety of adverbials into a hat (you can use **Worksheet 3** for this). Pull one out and have the children write it on their whiteboards, then complete the sentence.

You could also play a good old-fashioned game of Consequences, but with sentence structure:

- Each child gets a piece of paper.
- They write a time adverbial, fold it over and pass it to the next child.
- Next, they write a place adverbial (on the piece of paper which has been handed to them), fold it over and pass it on again.
- Then, they write an adjective, fold it over and pass it on.
- Next, they write the subject (who), fold it over and pass it on.
- Now, they write the verb (what), fold it over and pass it on.
- Then, they write an adverb, fold it over and pass it on.
- Finally, they write the object (to, what or who).

BUILDING ON A SIMPLE SENTENCE

The swimmers continued their challenge.

How?

The swimmers continued their challenge with trepidation.

Where?

The swimmers continued their challenge with trepidation across the Channel.

Where? ... continued...

In harsh conditions and stormy waters, the swimmers continued their challenge with trepidation across the Channel.

What if I reorder the adverbials to create a stronger effect?

With trepidation, in harsh conditions and stormy waters, the swimmers continued their challenge across the Channel.

In this example, I want to add in additional adjectives to make it more impactful...

With trepidation, in harsh conditions and stormy waters, the **brave** swimmers continued their **gruelling** challenge across the Channel.

Now I'm starting to think that maybe the sentence would work better without the 'With trepidation' at the start...

- Each child then unfolds their paper and reads the sentence through. The sentences may not make sense, but they will make the class laugh, and it is a great way to recap the parts of a sentence.

A final thought...

Try not to overthink grammar and get bogged down in the terminology. 'Adverbials' is an umbrella term to describe adverbs, prepositions and many subordinate clauses. Ultimately, just ask yourself, "Is this part of the sentence telling me when, where or how the verb in the main clause happened?" If it is, then you are looking at an adverbial phrase or clause.

Laura Dobson worked for many years as a teaching and learning adviser for a large company and local authority. She now provides consultancy and training in all areas of English.

@inspireprieng

What comes after PHONICS?

Too many schools are teaching reading based on a foundation of misconceptions, says **Christopher Such**, but there's a way to fix that...

Over the past half-decade, my working life has been almost entirely focused on the mountain of evidence relating to reading instruction and the day-to-day teaching of reading occurring in English schools. Having spoken to countless teachers and school leaders, I have come to the following conclusion: far too many schools in England – perhaps even the majority of them – are teaching reading in ways that are founded on a misconception, leading to lessons that are both ineffective and stultifying.

Such a claim requires considerable explanation. For once, this is not an attempt to rehash arguments about the obvious importance of explicitly and systematically introducing pupils to the alphabetic code so that they can begin recognising words for themselves. Instead, my concern is with what comes *after* phonics.

Testing, testing...

Many schools – through a mixture of inertia, poor advice and understandable fears about accountability – currently teach reading in KS2 in ways that have been reverse-engineered from the end-of-school assessments, commonly called SATs. The content domains of the reading assessment have come to be seen as types of reading skill that pupils need to practise if they are to become capable of comprehending texts. This assumes that if pupils can, for example, answer a question requiring them to summarise, then this must mean they have acquired a discrete, transferable skill. Put another way, as long as we teach pupils how to answer questions that require summarising, then surely this is a step towards better comprehension capabilities.

> *"The theory of supposed discrete comprehension skills is utterly bogus"*

Or so the theory goes. The problem is that this theory is utterly bogus. A reader's aptitude in answering questions that require summarising is primarily based on their ability to read fluently and on their understanding of the written language specific to the text in front of them. And the same is true of every other supposed comprehension skill. Pupils can answer prediction questions, retrieval questions, explanation questions, etc, because their fluency and understanding of relevant written language allows them to comprehend the text, not because they have acquired some discrete, transferable skill.

Of course, preparing pupils for assessments is always likely to give a small boost to results, and a little SATs practice in Y6 that ensures children feel confident when the time comes is entirely justifiable. But structuring the teaching of reading for months and years around this assessment preparation is profoundly counterproductive, even when judged against the cynical goal of maximising test scores at all costs.

Read all about it

Due to this common misunderstanding about the nature of reading comprehension, thousands of schools teach reading lessons in which precious little actual reading takes place. Most of each lesson is spent instead in the modelling and practising of how to identify and answer particular types of SATs-style questions. And frequently the texts that are placed in front of pupils are brief, disconnected extracts, selected not for the language and experiences that they offer to young minds, but

conversely for the assumed skills they allow to be isolated and rehearsed.

It would be foolish in the extreme to blame busy classroom teachers or school leaders for the current state of affairs. Only the distorting effect of excessive accountability pressures could ever have led to something so obviously misguided. This is not to suggest that high-quality teaching would automatically flourish if these accountability pressures were less severe. Expertise in any area of teaching is hard won. However, I am certain that every teacher in existence – unencumbered by the misconceptions foisted upon them by a system superficially chasing test results – would correctly assume that reading instruction should include lots of time spent reading entire books and other texts carefully chosen for the language and experiences they offer to pupils. Instead, many of us have been guided to teach reading as little more than poorly disguised test rehearsal.

If I sound frustrated, then that is because I am: frustrated with myself for teaching in this way for the first half of my career; frustrated with a system that can distort the professionalism of teachers in such ways; but most of all, frustrated for pupils everywhere, deprived of lessons that genuinely develop their reading capabilities and motivate them to see the value of literacy. It is a situation that requires urgent attention.

Busting myths

As I am a primary reading consultant, you will be forgiven for thinking that I am incentivised to exaggerate the problem and then offer my own individual solution.

However, while I do support schools to use a specific approach, I certainly do not think that there is only one way to teach reading effectively. If as a profession we can move away from the misconceived view of discrete, transferable comprehension skills, then almost any approach to teaching reading in KS2 can be effective, assuming it meets three priorities:

1. Develop pupils' reading fluency through active decoding with modelling, practice and feedback. The teaching of initial decoding that is central to reading development in reception and KS1 merely begins the journey to fluent reading. It is the application of what pupils have learned to real texts – with unfamiliar words and unfamiliar parts of the alphabetic code – that builds their grasp of the English writing system and allows them to recognise words with the automaticity required for fluency. Ideally, every pupil would receive this practice via daily one-to-one reading with a trained adult, but such a thing is logistically implausible. However, whole-class structures, such as repeated oral reading, can achieve much of the same benefits through teacher modelling, purposeful rehearsal and discussion of a relatively brief text.

2. Increase pupils' understanding of written English and the world to which it relates by providing a variety of texts chosen for this purpose. We cannot profess to care about developing pupils' desire to read independently if our reading lessons do not frequently offer opportunities to become engrossed in books in their entirety. By reading at pace with occasional pauses to explain and ask questions in ways that do not overly interrupt the momentum, we can build pupils' knowledge of written language and show them the value of reading.

3. Nurture pupils' understanding of their subjective, strategic role in interpreting and appreciating texts by guiding discussions that analyse written language and explore children's own ideas. By engaging pupils in text discussions that explore an author's language choices and themes, we help them to recognise the craft of writing and the ways in which we can analyse texts. And by asking questions that platform pupils' own opinions and ideas, we nurture their curiosity and help them construct their own identities as readers.

In short, beyond focused practice to develop fluency, the effective teaching of reading mostly involves us introducing pupils to the wonders of written English through meaningful experiences with texts chosen for this purpose. Reconceptualising reading instruction in this way offers us the chance to replace years of tedious test preparation with reading lessons that are more efficient *and* more enjoyable. Our pupils deserve no less.

Christopher Such is an experienced primary school teacher, school leader, reading consultant and author. His latest book, **Primary Reading Simplified** *(£19.99, SAGE), is out now.*

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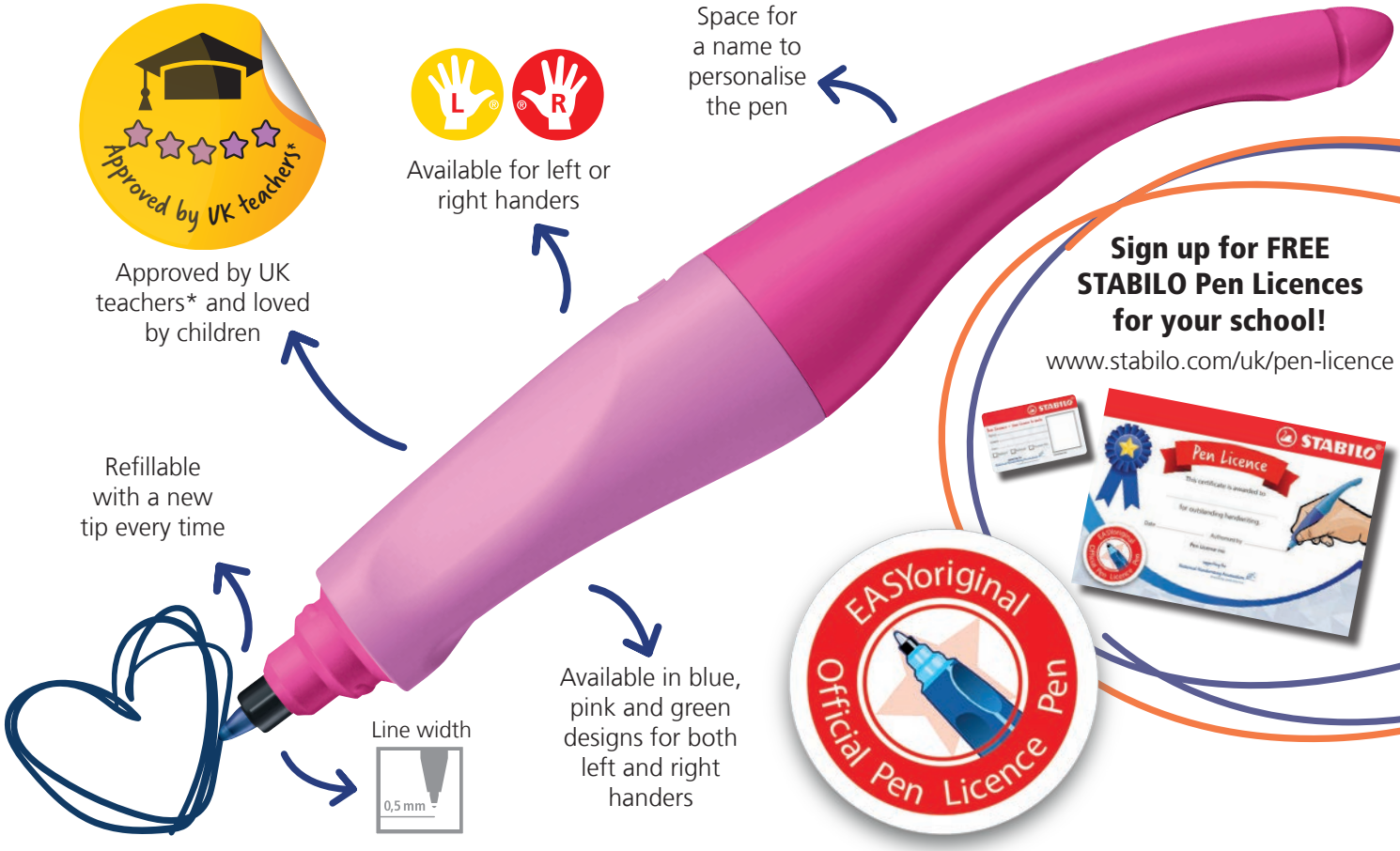

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The pilfered porridge OF POETRY

We can get our teaching 'just right', says **Jonny Walker**

Go with me on this… As teachers of poetry, we are a bit like Goldilocks. Not because we commit crimes of trespass and theft, but because, just like that flaxen intruder, we are searching for something that feels 'just right'.

Poetry teaching is a game of balance. On one end of our pedagogical seesaw, we have the desire for children to know, to comprehend, to analyse and perhaps to memorise poetry. We want them to understand poetic devices: what they do, and how they do it. On the opposite end, we have the desire for children to *feel* something through poetry, to use it to know themselves differently, to leave their own mark on the page and to create something meaningful.

Too much weight on the first side, and children miss that chance to see poetry, language and writing as a place of self-expression, as something alive that can do things for them. But make the opposite side too heavy, and poetry becomes just the shapeless transcription of whatever thoughts pop into pupils' heads.

And then there's us, bumbling wildly back and forth, trying to maintain the balance. This, friends, is teaching: making sure the porridge is neither too hot nor too cold – getting it 'just right'.

Balancing theory and practice

Theory needs practice, and practice needs theory. Knowing something about poetry and feeling something about poetry are not separate processes. Each feeds the other.

"If you limit one aspect of pupils' writing, liberate another"

Imagine two classes of eight-year-olds are learning to ride bikes.

The teacher of the first class decides the children should learn through theory. Pupils watch videos of people cycling. They learn the names and functions of the handlebars, the gears, the chain, the saddle and the spokes. A bicycle is brought in for them to look at and draw. This teacher says to the children: "I love cycling and I hope you will too."

But once they actually hop onto the saddles, they quickly find themselves on the concrete weeping over their grazed knees. Knowing what handlebars are doesn't necessarily help you to steer.

The teacher of the second class thinks the children should learn through practice alone, so off to the top of a hill everyone goes. Bums are on saddles before a word is spoken; it's one gentle push and down they go. Nobody knows that the thing near their hands is called 'the brake', and so they cannot stop. The children's legs are a blur as they go faster and faster.

"Please clap for Karolina and Abdulkarim, who managed to get to the bottom without falling off. Perhaps we can try and do it a bit more like them when we try tomorrow? And please stop crying, you've got a plaster now!"

The same tool would have benefited both these teachers and their unfortunate classes: stabilisers. Pupils would have been able to pedal with abandon, safe in the knowledge that they weren't about to collapse into a heap on the floor.

The stabilisers on a writing lesson allow the children to apply what they know, and embrace the beautiful risk of writing. They can maintain their balance, safe in the knowledge that they won't completely miss the mark.

What are the stabilisers in poetry teaching?

Stabilisers in a poetry lesson are whatever conditions you place on the writing. After balancing theory and practice, the next thing is to maintain equilibrium between constraint and freedom. If we restrict children's creative writing too much, we are essentially 'stabilising' them into stasis. They're not falling, but they're not moving, either. Does this sound familiar?

"I want you to do your own work, but remember, it needs to rhyme. Make sure you use your best handwriting, and check your spellings and grammar… I want you to use all those 'wow words' we shared, and it needs to stay on topic..."

If we apply too much constraint to what children write – this is true regardless of genre – then we should not be surprised when they show a lack of care or interest. We are essentially tricking them into writing exactly what we want them to write, whilst also trying to deceive them into thinking that this is what they wanted to do.

I'll never forget the words of a Year 6 child I taught a few years ago. We were celebrating his writing, which was lively and interesting, and had a bit more of a 'spark' to it than other children in the class. I said to him, "Wow, Eesa. That is really brilliant. Do you like writing?". I was asking this hoping to co-opt him to be my ally in the We Love Writing parade. He replied, "I really like writing, but I hate having to do it the way you all make us do it."

Ask an honest question, you get an honest reply. Speaking to him more about it, this was a child who wrote for fun, for meaning, for self-care, in his own time. For him, the excessive constraints and limitations of 'schooled writing', were an intense frustration.

But here is something interesting: most children, in my modest experience, prefer too much control to too much freedom. If children feel as though they are floating in the uncertainty of our expectations, not sure in even a small sense of what they are being invited to do, they experience a real sense of fear.

Put yourself in their shoes: imagine you come along to one of my workshops, and I share a poem with you: let's say Ted Hughes' poem *Hawk Roosting*. I read it aloud for you, we chat about it for five minutes, and then I say, "OK, now it's your turn. Write a poem inspired by it. I'll be asking four of you at random to get up and share your poems to the class in 20 minutes before breaktime. Let's go, poets! Crack on!"

It's too much freedom.

Children and adults alike want to know the parameters. They are stabilisers that help those of us who need to rely on them, but do not inconvenience those of us who are confident and skilled enough to race ahead.

Freedom liberates, but so can constraint.

Jonny Walker is a children's writer and specialist teacher of poetry, mythology and creative writing, working in primary schools worldwide. He created the teaching notes for 12 new **Big Cat Poetry** *books with Collins.*

How to get your poetry teaching 'just right'

- **Balance freedom and constraint**
  If you limit one aspect of pupils' writing, liberate another. So, if you're focusing on their ability to use rhyming couplets (limiting the form), let them write about a topic that interests them (liberating the content). If you want to task children with writing meaningful poetry about emotions (limiting the content), allow them to write poetry in whichever forms most appeal (liberating the form).
- **Talk is comprehension, talk is writing**
  The poetry classroom should be a place of free-flowing discussion. Poetry is about interpretation – what you take from a poem may be different from what I take from it. Let's talk about that. Poetry is social – expecting something great to grow in silence is like expecting a houseplant to grow without sunlight. Talk nourishes thought.
- **The figure of eight**
  Often, our poetry teaching follows a linear path. We read, then we write, then we perform. Interrupt that: instead of a straight line, think of there being a figure of eight weaving around reading, writing and talking. Performing it aloud might help a child to edit their writing, for example.
- **Be a poet with them**
  Don't just whack a model text on the whiteboard. Write alongside the children, as a writer. Join them in the joys, pleasures, frustrations and challenges that poetry writing can engender.

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An unlikely BEGINNING

Jennifer Bell explains how finding the right book set her off on a journey from reluctant reader to bestselling author

I absolutely love reading, and I seize every opportunity to immerse myself in a book. My shelves are bursting with everything from dog-eared paperbacks to fancy collectable editions, and I have a towering to-be-read pile that seems to grow taller every day. You might think that as a full-time author who spent fifteen years as a children's bookseller, my passion for reading must always have been there. But believe it or not, I didn't enjoy reading at all as a child.

When I share this with young people, they often find it hard to believe. "I can prove it!" I say, showing them some of my childhood books scrawled with handwritten comments including, 'Warning: this book can be boring', and 'Only read if you are an adult'. I'm embarrassed to say that my copy of *Little Women* contains a moustachioed illustration of Louisa May Alcott, and I even wrote 'Poo' in *Prince Caspian*.

Heavy going

The trouble was, as a child, reading felt like a chore. This was partly because, in both primary and secondary school, I was encouraged to read books that challenged me. I distinctly remember how, when I was ten years old, my teacher assigned me *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen to tackle over the summer. It turned out to be a miserable task. Just getting through the first few pages felt incredibly laborious. The book held little appeal for me: the language was unfamiliar, and I couldn't connect to the experiences of a corseted seventeen-year-old girl attending balls and reading Gothic novels. I was a Spice Girls-obsessed ten-year-old, who loved video games and Pokémon.

I continued to dislike reading throughout school and university; I only picked up the books required for my classes and never sought out anything to read in my free time. However, that changed in my early twenties when I received a copy of *Eragon*, a young adult fantasy novel by Christopher Paolini. Stuck on a long coach journey with nothing else to occupy my time, I decided to give it a try.

A life-changing read

Eragon was refreshingly easy to read and incredibly entertaining. I had never read fantasy before, but the story completely captivated me. It made me realise that a compelling story can pull you along without making you feel like you're doing any work. After exploring many different genres at my local library, I discovered I loved books and became the reader I am today. Crucially, I learned that it isn't always a great book that gets you into reading; it's a great reading experience. And this is something that looks different for everyone.

When I talk to reluctant readers today, I encourage them to seek out the right book for *them*. If they're unsure where to start, I ask them to consider the stories from their favourite TV shows, movies and video games. With a little searching, they're bound to find a book that contains all the same story elements they love. This is one of the many reasons it's so important that young people have access to libraries and bookshops. These spaces not only offer a diverse array of books, but also have knowledgeable librarians and booksellers who can provide valuable recommendations. It's essential for reluctant readers to have the freedom to choose the stories that resonate with them, whatever those may be.

When I started writing for children, I thought about that ten-year-old who had been put off reading. I was determined to create books that featured accessible language and compelling narratives – stories that were relatable, thrilling and, most importantly, exemplified the joy of reading for entertainment, not as hard work.

Jennifer Bell left bookselling in 2018 to become a full-time children's author. Her latest novel, Magicalia: Thief of Shadows, is the second book in an exciting new fantasy series.

@jenbellauthor
Jennifer.Bell.Author

Are you really READING?

Maddy Barnes introduces an innovative scheme that has transformed literacy outcomes for disadvantaged children

When I was a trainee, my tutors told me that the best thing about becoming a teacher was the ability to read stories to my class. Apparently, the pupils' minds would be a blank canvas, and as I read aloud my words would paint the most vibrant and beautiful paintings for them to visualise...

I honestly don't think that ever happened – certainly not with a whole class. Instead, like you, when I read to my class and asked a question like "So what did you think of the ending?", I was often met with blank faces.

So, was it just the pupils I taught who didn't imagine vivid images as I read – or was this a burning issue across education settings? I began to dig around and found myself discussing the topic with, dare I say it, secondary school English teachers.

A seamless transition?

Having many years of teaching Year 6 under my belt, I had built up a certain level of frustration with the Year 7 curriculum. After moving on to high school, my pupils would consistently report back that they were doing nouns and verbs, writing diary entries using *because*, *if* and *when*, and reading books they'd previously studied in Year 2.

However, a chance meeting with a head of English and his team at a local high school showed me that they were just as frustrated with the reading ages on arrival of Year 7 pupils who had passed their KS2 reading tests.

> *"It became obvious that the main issue was the assessment of reading"*

Primary and secondary staff tend to have preconceived views of what the other does and doesn't do – this is surely partially fuelled by forced transition projects. After several years of working closely with KS3 and KS4 colleagues, I feel ready to talk about what transition from KS2 to KS3 can really look like.

In September 2015, Ofsted produced a report – *Key Stage 3: The Wasted Years?* – which claimed the performance of secondary schools had stalled and that the transition from primary to secondary schools was poorly handled. One of the areas closely considered was progress in reading. This was the main driver for my chance meeting with the head of English at the local high school. He wanted to know what was going so wrong, and how primary and secondary could make this transition in reading more fluid.

After a morning of sharing materials, it became obvious that the main issue was the assessment of reading.

Mismatched expectations

The KS2 mark scheme is known to be a very precise document, where many pupils lose marks because their response is not represented in the mark scheme. There are no half marks in KS2 SATs, and a common refrain heard in Year 6 classrooms is "I know what you meant, but you won't get the mark in your SATs!" Could this perhaps be the reason why students appear to regress as they move to Year 7?

Colleagues in KS3+ are gobsmacked by the KS2 reading mark schemes, and exclaim how that explains the difficulty they have trying to encourage KS3 pupils to think for themselves whilst analysing texts. It seems that one curriculum/assessment style does not complement the other, and pupils are confused.

Really reading

My colleague, Lisa, and I decided to apply for a grant from SHINE that would fund a project to focus on developing summary skills for pupils – initially in Years 5 to 8. We wanted to create a toolkit that would equip pupils with the skills to summarise as they read, so that they would *really* read – and in turn, hopefully, begin to enjoy it! When pupils understand what they are reading, they can develop their ability to summarise quickly. This also means that they make links and connections with what they have read, identify significant events, understand cause and effect, and form opinions on characters or plot based on the text.

Theory into practice

Are You Really Reading (AYRR) is a teaching tool that enhances what is already in place for a school or setting. The toolkit, consisting of five strands, works alongside any approach to teaching reading. It doesn't replace the current reading offer for schools, because it is not a reading scheme.

Teachers can choose which strands would complement the text or stimulus that they are using. There is no rule book for how many times a strand should be taught, if the activity should be written or oral, or whether it should be recorded.

Modelling the strategies is key to the project, so adults can scribe for pupils, ensuring pupils can fully focus on developing their summarising skills. It has been designed to work alongside any teaching style, in any school setting and with any text choice (fiction, non-fiction, plays, poetry, etc.).

Although it was initially funded for Years 5 to 8 only, we knew the project would work from Early Years up, so we trained all our 200+ schools through each milestone – EYFS to KS1 and KS1 to KS2.

The same five strands are used through the programme, right up to KS4; the only thing that changes is the difficulty of the text. This is what makes the project accessible for all: it's simple and consistent.

Measuring outcomes

The effects of the AYYR programme have been overwhelmingly positive. Teachers see the impact of the project almost instantly – commenting on improved motivation, engagement, progress and oral discussion skills among their pupils.

EYFS and KS1 pupils love how they can use the strands in one year group and then the next. "Oh yes... we used emojis in Reception too!" exclaimed a previously reluctant reader in a field visit we observed.

WHY USE AYRR?

- **AYRR is very inclusive, and all pupils – including reluctant readers, those with individual or speech and language needs, and children who qualify for pupil premium – can benefit. ASD pupils have particularly enjoyed using the strands.**
- **The AYRR strands are transdisciplinary and can be used when reading across the curriculum.**
- **Although it's not a test technique tool, AYRR does equip pupils with skills to summarise whilst reading, which helps in test situations.**
- **Individual schools can decide how much written recording needs to be done, and how AYRR will fit alongside existing reading schemes.**

KS2 children are demonstrably motivated in sessions that use the strands. Pupils comment that they used to be scared of unseen reading texts, but now they understand the text as they read, instead of having to go back over it.

We are in the process of having the project externally evaluated. Early findings have shown that PP pupils using AYRR scored 3.0 to 4.7 points above the expected standard in the 2024 KS2 reading test – and the longer they participated in the programme, the higher their average scores.

Maddy is the executive director for English at The Three Saints Trust and is the project manager for Are You Really Reading?

Stormy RESCUE

Based on Betsy Byers' classic novel, *The Midnight Fox*, these model texts from Pie Corbett show how you can dig deeper into a story by retelling a scene from two different points of view

MODEL TEXT 1

Aunt Millie woke with a start. She lay for a moment staring at the ceiling. It was well after midnight and she wondered what had woken her. She could hear the rain lashing against the house, though it was not as bad as earlier. It was pitch dark outside.

The window was ajar. She'd left it like that so that she could hear if the fox came back after her turkeys. Yes, that was what had woken her: three sharp barks had stolen into her dream... and then the doorbell had rung!

Aunt Millie sat up and poked Uncle Fred to wake him from his slumbering. She put on her thin cotton night robe and made her way downstairs. Flicking on the porch light, she peered out. Who had rung the porch bell? At first, she couldn't see much, but soon her eyes adjusted.

To her surprise, it was Tom. As she told everyone later, he looked like a drowned turkey, standing on the porch and not moving. Hunched up against the weather, he was drenched, and his face was a mask. Flinging the door open and tut-tutting, she fetched Tom into the house.

Well, if he hadn't gone and let that baby fox out! "It's alright," she told him straight away, nudging Fred. Poor lad, he didn't want us to be disappointed. But that fox would be miles away by now, so maybe it was all for the good.

Aunt Millie went into the kitchen to fetch a dry towel. She should have known what he was up to earlier when she'd found him downstairs not in his pyjamas. What on earth was that boy up to, she thought to herself. She should have known that given a chance, he'd be out of the window onto the tree branch and mucking around outside. She shook her head. Boys will be boys, she thought. They just couldn't resist a bit of midnight mischief.

MODEL TEXT 2

Uncle Fred woke with a start. He rubbed his eyes, sat up and listened. The rain still poured down, less so than earlier perhaps. It was dark outside, but he knew that something had woken him.

He could hear Aunt Millie pulling on her night robe, shuffling downstairs and muttering to herself. What was she up to, he wondered with a sigh. What had woken them? Most likely that darned fox, he thought, as he tugged on his coat and followed her downstairs.

He could see someone on the porch. A bedraggled figure. Soaked to the skin, he was. Uncle Fred tugged his trousers over his pyjamas, stared at the figure, "Who is it?"

Inside, he already knew. It was Tom, talking about letting the baby fox go.

Uncle Fred looked into Tom's eyes and he could see a strange mixture of unease and guilt.

In that moment, everything fitted into place and Fred, he knew. Of course, he thought – why hadn't he seen the clues? So, the boy had found his way out late at night and let the baby fox go. Tom had released the cub because he couldn't bear the thought of a wild creature trapped in a cage, let alone being killed. Once, many years before, Fred had hand-reared a cub that his father had snared in a trap, so he knew. "I never like to see wild things in a pen," he told Tom.

Maybe it was right, that the cub should go free. And hopefully, that would be the end of it. The fox would not return. Foxes learned fast.

"Once, many years before, Fred had hand-reared a cub that his father had snared in a trap, so he knew"

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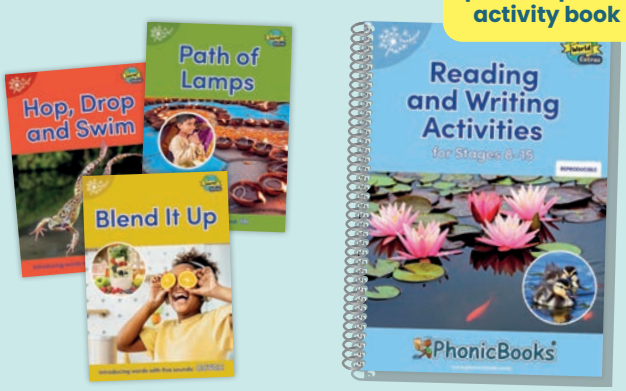

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TEACHING NOTES

The two models here both show the same event from Chapter 17 of Betsy Byers' classic *The Midnight Fox*. Published in 1968, it's a gentle story of a boy sent to live in the country for two months whilst his parents go on a cycling holiday.

The countryside does not suit Tom at all and, away from home, he feels isolated and lonely. Unfortunately, he's scared of animals too…

However, his discovery of a rare black fox and her cub changes his life. But, of course, foxes are not wanted on farms… and the tension builds from the moment his uncle says "…*you and I'll go after the fox*."

This is a book that runs deep, exploring relationships, loneliness and our connection with the natural world with sensitivity.

Different angles

Exploring different points of view adds real depth to a reading of any meaty novel. There are often multiple viewpoints: the characters, the narrator, but also how different readers might view a text.

In Chapter 17, Tom has just climbed out of the house, broken open the rabbit hutch and let the baby fox free.

Read the chapter several times, discuss it and find clues for:

- what Tom is thinking and feeling;
- what Aunt Mille thinks, feels and does;
- what Uncle Fred thinks, feels and does.

Some of this will be factual. For instance, Aunt Millie fetches towels, wears a cotton robe and is first downstairs. Dig deeper for evidence about the feelings and thoughts of the characters. Discuss Tom's motives for letting the cub free, and think about how he is feeling. The two models are written from Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred's viewpoints. Who misread the situation?

A wilder point of view

You can develop the idea of multiple points of view even further by asking what the fox saw. We know that she brought a dead frog for the cub to eat, but has been unable to get it into the rabbit hutch. Betsy Byars describes how the cub is cowering at the back of the hutch in a dry place. We know too that the fox barks when Tom is letting the cub loose. Given what we know of the fox, what might she be thinking and feeling? Write a paragraph or two from the fox's angle.

"Exploring different points of view adds real depth to a reading of any meaty novel"

Phone-call warm-up

To help tune the children into rewriting an incident from a different point of view, you can ask them to work in pairs: Partner A is a friend or relative; Partner B is the character. The children sit back-to-back and make a phone call that involves Partner B recounting the incident from the novel from their view as if it happened to them. They should draw on evidence from the text to help.

Change the text type

An alternative way into writing is to alter the text type. This means recounting a key incident from the novel into another form. For instance, Chapter 17 might be retold:

- in Aunt Millie's diary;
- as Uncle Fred writing a letter to Tom's parents;
- as Tom writing to his friend, Petie Burkis.

Of course, to do this the children have to read carefully, sentence by sentence, underlining or highlighting clues. In other stories, where there are dramatic incidents, this can be done by using the framework of a newspaper report.

Bringing a scene alive

A powerful way to help children slow down and deepen their experience of a text is to pause at a key point and then build a description. This could be done with Tom once he has climbed down the tree. Stop the reading at this point and together create a list poem, imagining:

I can see…
I can hear…
I can feel…
I can smell…
I wonder…
I hope…
I'm afraid that…

This exercise will help take the children deeper into any text and develop their ability to imagine a character, what they are experiencing and how they might be thinking and feeling.

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).

Role on THE WALL

You can use this simple technique in a variety of ways to explore and develop characters with your class, says **Samantha Marsden**

Role on the Wall is a versatile technique that can be used across a variety of subjects, including English, drama, history, science, and PSHE, to help pupils explore a character. Pupils engage in character analysis, empathy, and critical thinking, and the technique can also help them with naming feelings, values, and character traits.

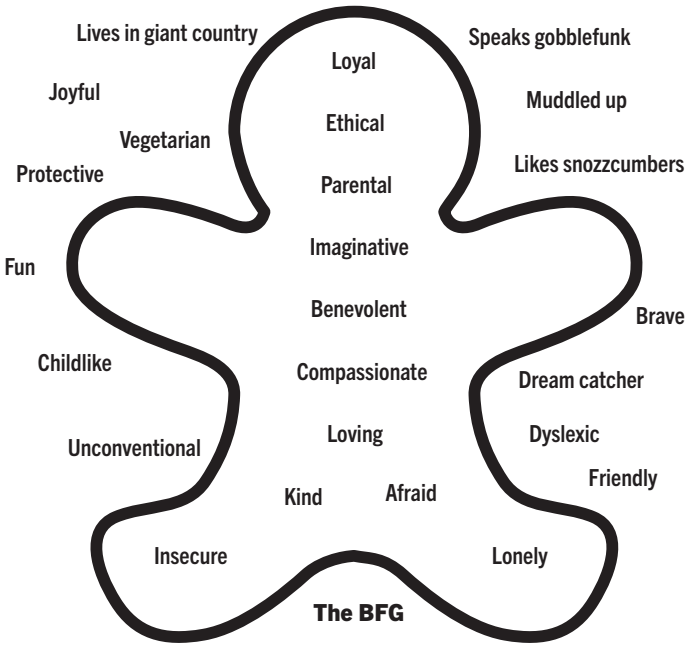
The interactive and visual nature of Role on the Wall increases pupil engagement and participation, and there are many different ways to explore characters with it. I've offered a few variations of the technique here, but feel free to get even more creative with your pupils as you study the complexity of human nature together!

When to use it

Role on the Wall is an excellent technique to use if the class are reading a book together – deepening their connection to the book and its characters. It's a great way to analyse protagonists, or antagonists, in novels, by mapping their complexities, while aiding in discussions about character development and motivations.

When it comes to creative writing, Role on the Wall is useful for helping children originate and develop fictional characters. Pupils can flesh out the characters before they start their stories, which can give them the confidence boost they need to get writing. The children might find it helpful to create three or four characters in this way before beginning their stories.

This technique can also be used to explore historical or contemporary figures, for example, famous scientists, musicians, Nobel prize winners or environmentalists. It can be a really interesting and creative way to explore character and external societal pressures. Make sure you provide the children with plenty of background information and historical context for the person they are going to analyse.

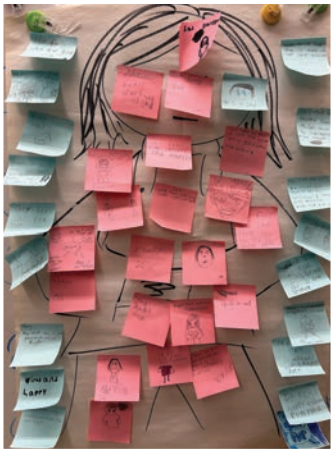


Preparation & introduction

Select a character relevant to your lesson. This activity can be done as a class collaboration, or individually, with each child creating their own Role on the Wall.

For a class collaboration, draw or print the outline of a human figure on a large piece of paper, or on a board.

For individual participation give each pupil a piece of paper. This could have the template of the outline of a person, or you can ask them to draw the outline of the character.

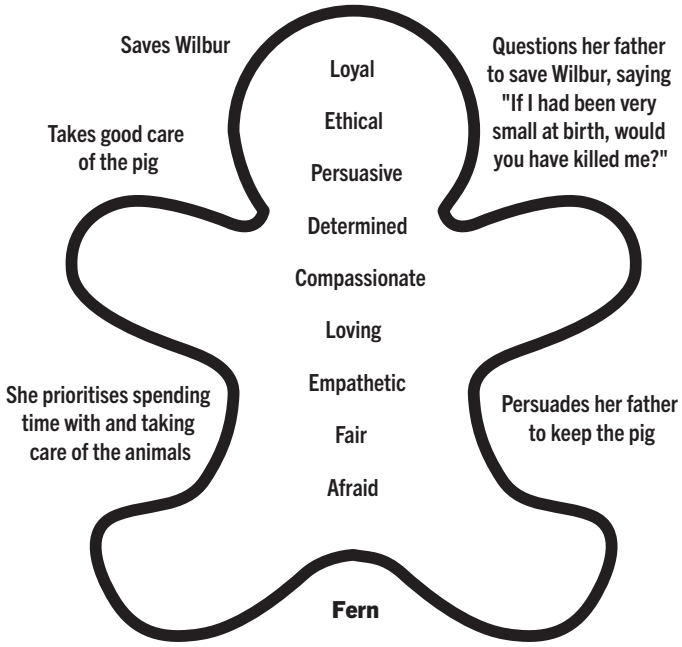


Pupils may already know about the character from a book or topic you're studying together. But if not, be sure to give them enough information to create a well-rounded profile.

Annotation

Inside the outline of the person, pupils write the character's inner characteristics, emotions, values, desires, and internal conflicts. They can do this with pens, or you might like to use sticky notes.

Outside the outline of the person, the children write external factors such as where they live, their likes, and how they show themselves to the outside world.



"Pupils engage in character analysis, empathy, and critical thinking"

Discussion and reflection

Analysing a character with Role on the Wall enhances analytical skills and helps pupils to understand a character more fully. Exploring a character's internal experiences fosters empathy, allowing the children to connect on a deeper level and to put themselves in someone else's shoes.

Facilitate a class discussion to delve deeper into the character – explain that it's okay for people to have different points of view.

Ask the children to reflect on how this activity has altered or deepened their understanding of the character.

Variation 1. Inside & outside

Ask pupils to write the character's emotions and inner thoughts inside the figure (e.g., for the BFG, this could be *kind*, *insecure*, *loyal*). Then, around the exterior of the figure, the children write what the character shows to the outside world (e.g., *speaks gobblefunk*, *childlike*, *friendly*).

Variation 2. Annotation & proof

Pupils write the character's traits, strengths, weaknesses, values and emotions inside the outline of the figure (e.g., for Fern from *Charlotte's Web,* this could be *empathic*, *loving*, *determined*).

The children then write their proof for each characteristic around the outside of the figure (e.g., *Fern rescued the pig*).

Variation 3. Footsteps

This is a particularly useful variation for creative writing. In particular, when children are developing characters for their own fiction pieces.

Inside the character's figure, pupils write character traits, strengths, weaknesses, values and emotions. Then they draw a path of footsteps, with each footprint containing past experiences that shape the character. For example, if a child has created a character called Scarlett, they might say she is honest, brave, fair, feisty, and too quick to act. Then, in her footsteps, they might say she has two older brothers who she fights with – one of them lies, which makes honesty important to her. She plays tennis, which teaches her to act fast, and once she saved a cat from drowning and learnt bravery saves lives.

Variation 4. Action & consequence

In this version of the activity, pupils write the actions of a character inside the outline figure (e.g., *Fern asked her dad if he'd kill her if she was born too small*). Then, on the outside of the figure, the children write the consequence of each action. For example, *Fern's dad does not kill the pig. Also, Fern takes care of the pig, and the consequence is a happy, celebrated pig!*

Variation 5. Individual & relationship

For this variation, use two character outlines next to each other. Pupils write character traits, strengths, weaknesses, values and emotions inside each character. Then, in the space between the two characters, the children write words that relate to their relationship. For example, if it were Mr Wormwood and Matilda, pupils might write *strained, abusive, unfair, not right, conflict, revenge, rage.*

***Sam Marsden has taught drama for fifteen years in a variety of settings. She's the author of* 100 Acting Exercises for 8–18 Year Olds, Acting Games for Improv, Drama Games for Early Years, *and* Acting Exercises for Creative Writing.**

@SamMarsdenDrama

marsdensam.com

GETTING IT RIGHT

- If you're doing a group Role on the Wall, make sure your paper is big enough, and that your pens are thick enough to read from a distance.
- Use interesting and complex characters that the class already have some understanding of.
- It's not recommended that you use any religious leaders, or real people that children in the class know personally.
- If you get curious about a character, your pupils will likely get curious, too.
- You might want to ask the children questions to inspire them to add their own words and ideas. For example: *How does the character feel about themselves? What are their passions? What are their values? What are their weaknesses? How would others describe them?*
- Reassure the children that people often have different interpretations of a character and that is okay; not everyone has to agree on the interpretation made.
- Ask pupils to use as few words as possible when adding their ideas.
- Explain to the children that one of the joys of reading is that the author creates a character in *their* imagination, and the reader gets to flesh out the character further in their own imagination. So, it's okay for pupils to get creative about their character interpretations while doing Role on the Wall.

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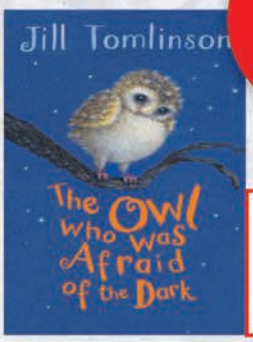

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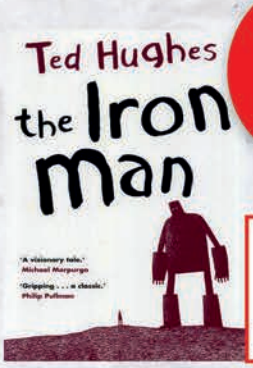

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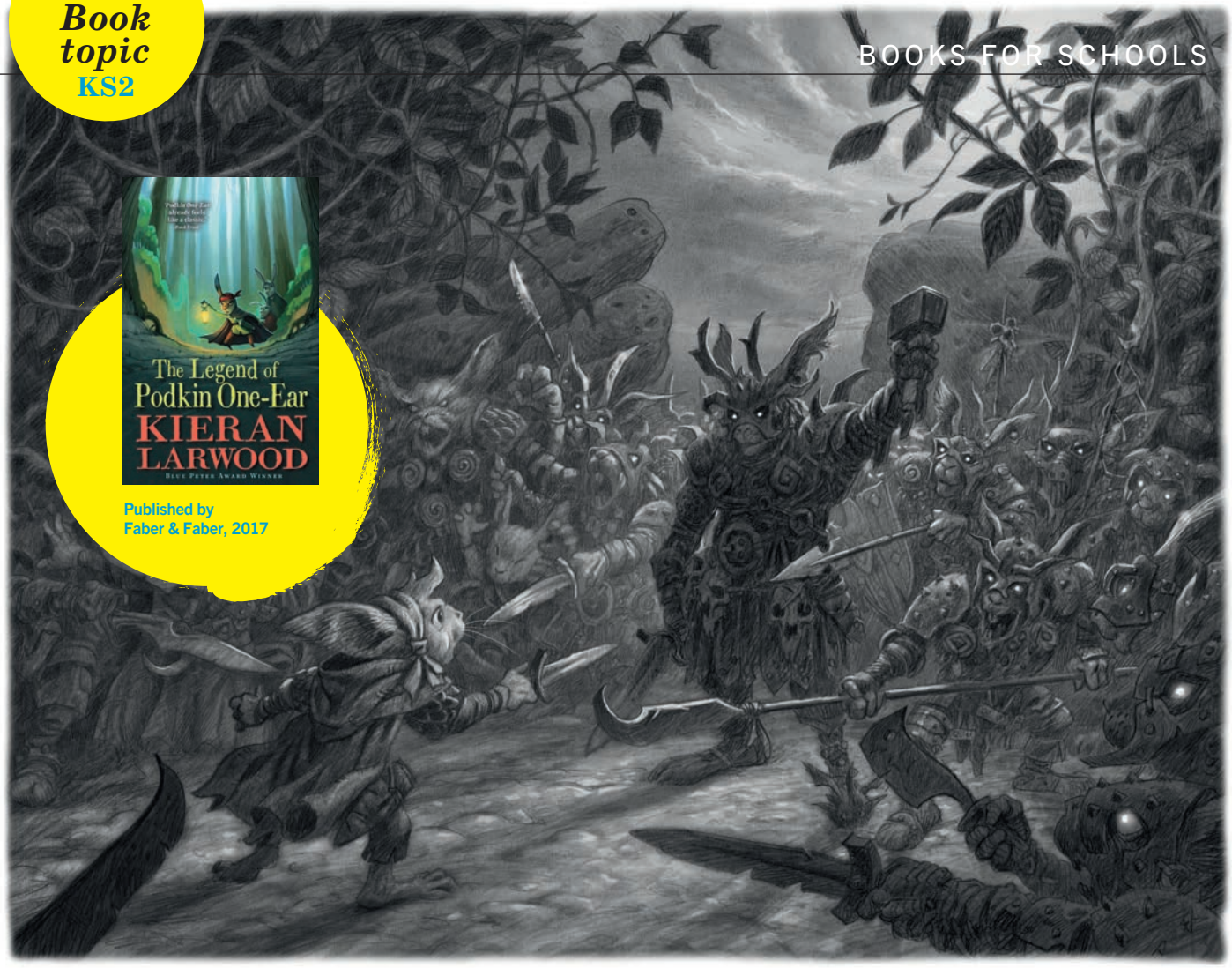

Illustrations ©David Wyatt

The Legend of Podkin One-Ear

Join a found family on a perilous journey, in Kieran Larwood's charming adventure story

JON BIDDLE

I remember reading *The Legend of Podkin One-Ear* when it was first published, and being especially impressed with two particular aspects. First, the story itself is outstanding; it is action-packed, filled with fascinating characters, both good and bad, and tells its story within a story extremely cleverly. Secondly, the world created by Kieran Larwood is exceptional. The book is almost Tolkienesque in the way that it is stuffed with mythology, folklore and history, all of which add extra depth to the main narrative.

The world of The Five Realms is expanded upon in the follow-up novels (which are all worth reading) and, by the time that you have enjoyed all seven books that are currently available, it's a world that you will feel totally immersed in. David Wyatt's incredible double-page illustrations bring so much to the book and, whenever you arrive at one, they are worth pausing at and taking some time to explore.

Being a fan of children's fantasy, I was delighted when *The Legend of Podkin One-Ear* won the 2017 Blue Peter Book Award, and feel that it is a book which is rapidly heading towards classic status. Every year, I have a group of children who fall in love with Podkin, his family and friends. It's a book that I often recommend to teaching colleagues because Podkin's universe is so rich with detail, and a huge amount of fun to journey through. It's filled with opportunities for discussion, writing and artwork, as well as providing wonderful chances to make comparisons with other books.

Recap

Podkin's comfortable life as the eldest son of Lopkin (the chieftain of the Munbury warren) is dramatically and tragically torn apart when a group of evil, iron-clad rabbits, known as the Gorm, invade his warren one Bramblemass Eve. Podkin, his sister Paz, and their baby brother, Pook, are forced to flee their home, leaving everything they know and love behind. As they begin to adjust to their new life, meeting a wide range of characters along the way, they realise that danger lurks almost everywhere. The relentless Gorm, led by the evil Scramashank, have no intention of letting them escape and are a continual threat. With the help and guidance of Brigid, a witch, they eventually arrive at Boneroot, a town of runaways and refugees hidden in an ancient graveyard. But, inevitably, all is not as it first appears.

Found family

On author Ian Eagleton's Reading Realm website **(thereadingrealm.co.uk)**, there is a fascinating interview with Larwood about how to create memorable characters and build believable worlds. One of his favourite tropes is that of the 'found family', where characters are thrown together because of the situation they are facing. This happens throughout *Podkin One-Ear*. As well as his siblings, Paz and Pook, Podkin joins forces with Mish and Mash, a pair of dwarf rabbits, Crom, a blind mercenary who once fought alongside Podkin's father, and Brigid, a witch with significantly more power than we are originally led to believe.

Creating a character web, showing how the characters first met, their relationships and their similarities and differences can really bring the story to life for pupils. It can be done visually, either in small groups or as a class. This also helps pupils to mentally create 'found families' when reading books independently (*The Outlaw Varjak Paw* and *A Street Dog Named Pup* are both excellent for this).

Characters' strengths and weaknesses (Podkin's journey)

The Podkin we meet at the beginning of the book is very different from the Podkin we leave behind at the end. He is lazy, spoiled and self-centred, avoiding as much responsibility as he possibly can, and has no interest in learning the skills needed to become the next chieftain of his warren. This stands in stark contrast to his sister, Paz, who is thoughtful, responsible and hard-working.

However, as Podkin overcomes each challenge he is faced with, he begins to realise that he is beginning to change, putting others before himself and facing up to danger, even though he is terrified of the possible outcome. When I last read this story with a class, they compared his journey to that of

Edward Tulane, which I think is spot on.

Creating a story timeline as you read the book, recording when the pupils notice a change in Podkin's attitude or behaviour and the likely cause of it, shows how authors develop characters during a story and is something children can begin to think about when writing their own narratives.

Rewriting the Battle of Boneroot

Although the Battle of Boneroot is not the climax of the book (that being the showdown with Scramashank), and takes place about two-thirds of the way through, for me it is the most

Take it further

OLIVER TWIST

When Podkin is captured by the villainous Shape and Quince and forced to go into the markets of Boneroot to steal for them, it is easy to draw comparisons with the behaviour of Fagin from *Oliver Twist*. Although I probably would not suggest reading the entire book, sharing some of the chapter where Oliver starts to work for Fagin is worthwhile, and provides the pupils a relatable – and enjoyable – introduction to the work of Charles Dickens. For me, when I am reading a book with a class, I always try to get them to make connections with other books, poems, films and TV shows. It's important to get children to realise that stories do not stand in isolation and that there are common themes, ideas and topics which run through them all.

THEMES

The theme of leadership runs through the book. Is it a skill that Podkin is born with, or something that he develops during the story? Ask the children to think about other books they have read where one of the characters needs to display leadership. Do they always get their decisions right? What do they do to inspire people to follow them? This will lead to a wider discussion about what leadership means. Who are the leaders in the school community? Can everyone be a leader? Pupils could create comic strips or posters demonstrating what leadership

exciting part. Read pages 188 and 189 to the children and stop at the line 'The Battle of Boneroot had started'. It provides a wonderful opportunity for pupils to make predictions about what will happen during the battle.

Once the chapter is complete, the children can then rewrite the battle from the point of view of one of the characters, focusing on their role in the battle as well as their emotions and feelings. Some of them will probably try and insist on writing from the point of view of the Gorm (well, they did in my class) but that gives them an opportunity to develop their empathy skills and think about the situation from an alternative point of view. Do the Gorm really want to destroy all the rabbits? Do they have any memory of what their life was like before they were transformed? It also provides a wonderful opportunity for children to explore famous artwork that depicts battles, such as 'The Battle of San Romano' by Uccello, and have a go at creating their own.

Bringing in drama

Oral storytelling plays a central role in the book, which is framed as a story told by a bard. This provides a natural segue into activities around storytelling and drama. Pupils could try retelling parts of the story in their own words or creating short scenes in which they act out key moments from the novel. By performing and dramatising the events, they will not only improve their understanding of the story, but also develop their public speaking and performance skills.

Anthropomorphic characters

There are many amazing children's books that feature anthropomorphic characters. Explain to the pupils what the term anthropomorphic means: non-human characters that have human characteristics, such as emotions, behaviours or intentions. Ask them to think about why we enjoy reading about such characters. Maybe the stories seem less threatening, or can share messages in an entertaining way, or the characters are more relatable... Each time I talk about this with a class, the answers are completely different. Give pupils time to work together and create a top ten of books featuring anthropomorphic characters (whenever I do this, I always pull rank and insist that *Watership Down* is included somewhere). *Varjak Paw*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*... a good chunk of the list almost writes itself. It is also worth pointing out that sometimes animals in books are biological, rather than anthropomorphic – make sure that children understand the difference.

Loved this? Try these...

- *The Last Wild* by Piers Torday
- *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien
- *I am Rebel* by Ross Montgomery
- *The Land of Roar* by Jenny McLachlan
- *The Last Firefox* by Lee Newbery
- *Ember Spark and the Thunder of Dragons* by Abi Elphinstone

Creating characters

Although *The Legend of Podkin One-Ear* is already full of rich characters, the class could work in groups to create new tribes of rabbits (or other animals) who live in The Five Realms. They could think about cultures and customs, what the warren looks like, what its members wear and who their leaders are. Whose side are they on? If they met Podkin and his siblings, how would they treat them? Would they try and capture them, or would they help them on their quest?

Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.

is. Perhaps a leader in the local community could visit and be interviewed by the pupils for the school website or a local magazine.

WORLD BUILDING

As a child who enjoyed fantasy books, I used to spend hours creating my own worlds that I could later use when playing Dungeons & Dragons. Although time is obviously a limiting factor in school, giving pupils an opportunity to think in detail about where a story might be set can produce some truly wonderful writing. Get them to come up with a central idea that they find interesting or exciting, such as an underwater kingdom or a world where only children can do magic, or a planet where apes are in charge... oh, hang on, that sounds familiar!

Once an overall idea or concept exists, it can be expanded. What does the landscape look like? What types of creatures live there? Does magic exist? Who is in charge? What traditions or customs do they have? Providing six or seven questions to start pupils thinking and talking will lead to much more. Get them to ask themselves 'What if?' as they ponder each idea. *What if there were only three colours? What if everyone lived underground? What if the days lasted for eleven hours and it never stopped raining?* Creating maps, coming up with names of gods and mythical creatures, designing houses and weapons... the opportunities are almost endless. Not only does it improve writing, world-building with their friends can also have a positive impact on children's creativity, problem-solving and empathy.

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"Don't assume a child with Down Syndrome can't do something"

CBeebies star **George Webster** – and his dad – were on fine form when they dropped by to tell us what can happen when mainstream schools get things spot on for pupils with additional needs

TRW Can you tell us about your new book, *George and the Mini Dragon*?

GW The main character, George, really wants a pet dragon for his seventh birthday. Amazingly, he finds a mini one, who he names Lava. She's very cute and cheeky, and gets up to all sorts of mischief. It's a story that celebrates difference, and is full of magic and fantasy.

TRW You went to a mainstream school. What was the best thing about it?

GW Everything! I made lots of friends and enjoyed all the things we learned, both in and out of the classroom. I still have good friends from back then.

I did really love school. I was a prefect, was on the school council, and even helped interview for a new headteacher.

My teachers said they loved having me in class, too. I was always happy to answer questions, and even if what I said was a bit off the wall sometimes, that didn't matter. I'm not scared to do things like that – when I went up to the stage to collect my BAFTA, I wasn't nervous at all.

George's dad He's a world-class speller, too. People with Down Syndrome tend to be visual learners, so he would learn the shape of a word and then be able to visualise it.

GW In my job, I have to communicate with my co-presenter and the crew, and school was one of the main factors in me developing those skills. I was given help with my speech and language throughout school, and was able to practise with my TA. I really loved drama lessons, and got used to having a script in my hand, communicating with the lighting and stage teams.

TRW Do you have any advice for teachers and TAs?

GW Don't assume a child with Down Syndrome *can't* do something. We all have different abilities and strengths. Being different isn't a scary thing; it's not a negative.

> *"Being different isn't a scary thing; it's not a negative"*

I always had a TA in the class, but they were there to help me be with everyone else, rather than me just being with the TA. My teachers and TA worked as a team; they got to know my family and what support I needed. My parents came into school a lot, and met with the SENCO. I had a school diary as well, so my family could see what I'd been doing every day. Everyone's always been there for me.

George's dad Communication booklets are invaluable. We used them to make sure that whatever was happening at home was also happening at school, and vice versa.

TRW How did your teachers and TAs treat you in lessons?

George's dad They didn't let him get away with things. It's so important that George thinks anything is possible, and that people at school said to him "You can do better than that."

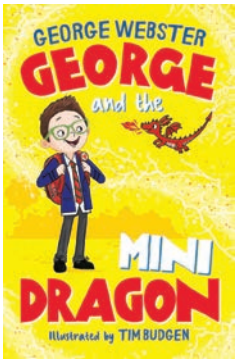
GW I remember once, a teacher asked why I wasn't doing something, and I said "People with Down Syndrome can't do that." But they wouldn't take it as an excuse because they knew I was being cute!

TRW What other useful things can teachers do for children with Down Syndrome?

GW Give them time to let information into their heads, and extra help to write neatly, as using a pencil or pen can be tricky. They might need more time to speak, and may have to use a tablet.

People came into my school from early on to talk about differences and teach us Makaton, which was great. We used Numicon as well – the other kids really liked it, and got involved too.

George Webster is an actor, BAFTA-winning TV presenter, and an Ambassador for Mencap.* George and the Mini Dragon, *co-written with Helen Harvey, and illustrated by Tim Budgen, is out now (Scholastic, £6.99).



Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1 Broaden children's knowledge of the world with The Week Junior

The Week Junior is the current affairs magazine that children love to read. It gives children aged eight to 14 a unique opportunity to learn about the world around them in an engaging, age-appropriate way, whilst developing a whole range of important skills needed for educational success. Take out a school subscription to:

- Inform, inspire and stimulate discussion with topical features and articles
- Develop critical thinking skills by encouraging curiosity and debate
- Provide high-quality current affairs to nurture reading for pleasure

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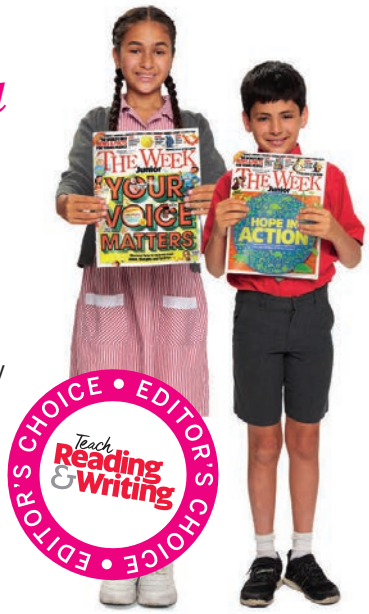

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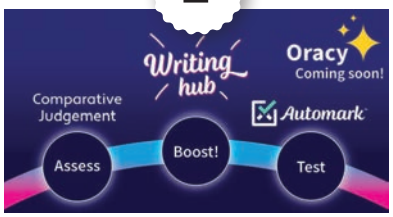

Improving writing and oracy

No More Marking's Comparative Judgement assessments have revolutionised the way primary writing is assessed, and provide schools with reliable and nationally-standardised data on their students' writing attainment. A No More Marking subscription now gives you even more. This year, for the first time, you can use Comparative Judgement to assess oracy. You'll also get access to two brand new resources aimed at improving writing and oracy. The Writing Hub hosts lesson resources, writing exemplars, professional development videos and our innovative Writing Progression. Automark offers instant analysis of quizzes linked to the Writing Progression. Find out more by visiting **nomoremarking.com/campaigns/power**

3 Spelling Shed

Want spelling that sticks? Spelling Shed, The Science of Spelling, is the proven spelling scheme with spelling games enjoyed by millions of learners worldwide!

Spelling Shed's scheme is based on cutting-edge research into the teaching of spelling and vocabulary. It includes proven approaches to teach spelling, such as using phonics as a base, exploring morphology and etymology, including activities that support orthographic mapping and explicitly teaching spelling patterns.

Rather than rote memorisation, Spelling Shed teaches children skills and strategies for spelling, promoting independent learning, increasing reading fluency and improving vocabulary acquisition. Spelling Shed subscriptions also include a full grammar curriculum, Grammar Arcade, Mastery Zone, Hive games, word lists, end-of-term assessments and data tools.

Visit **edshed.com**

SCAN HERE FOR YOUR FREE 30 DAY TRIAL

4 Summer reading challenge

What is the single biggest indicator of a child's future success? A love of reading. Recent research however reveals that just 1 in 3 children said they enjoyed reading in their free time. The Reading Agency is on a mission to change this.

The Summer Reading Challenge is a chance to step away from assessments, progress scores and SATs, and help children to discover a passion for reading, on their own terms.

It's FREE to take part and children can sign up at their local library and online.

Find out more and sign up at **summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/school-zone-src**

5

Fantastic phonics resources

Reading Planet Rocket Phonics is a DfE-validated SSP programme with a mission: to help every child to keep up, not catch up. Written by author, trainer and consultant Abigail Steel, the programme is available for Reception and Year 1. With Rocket Phonics, you get everything needed for reading and writing: fully decodable books, flashcards, teaching plans, pupil booklets and more. Plus, Rocket Phonics Online includes a range of innovative digital resources to bring phonics to life.

Find out more at **tinyurl.com/tp-RisingStars**

The Week Junior

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Who wouldn't want to write CAPTIVATING PROSE?

Inspiring curiosity and enhancing creativity, rhetorical questions can be a useful tool for young writers in both fiction and non-fiction, says **James Clements**

Aren't rhetorical questions great for getting children to share ideas and create effects in their writing? (Can you see what I've done there?)

The (unnecessary) answer is a resounding yes. A well-considered rhetorical question can draw a reader into a topic, create a sense of intrigue or provide an insight into a character's thoughts and feelings.

But, like every technique, rhetorical questions are best used sparingly and judiciously. One or two, well-placed, can bring a text to life. But a steady stream of them might make for a disjointed and rather odd piece of writing.

Knowing how to use rhetorical questions in an effective way depends partly on an ear for language and an understanding of how texts work, but it also depends on some knowledge about the approach and its possible uses.

Adventures and explanations

Rhetorical questions are versatile tools. They can be used in fiction for exciting action scenes or character dialogue, and to introduce key ideas in non-fiction. And they can help create a connection between writer reader in both genres.

Once children understand their purpose, we'd hope that they will choose to use rhetorical questions naturally, navigating when the technique best serves their writing. However, some pupils might benefit from having the writer's thought process explained explicitly.

To help, we can encourage children to follow four easy steps:

1. **Identify the purpose** – what effect do pupils want to achieve? Do they want to surprise the reader, make them think, or build suspense?
2. **Put ourselves in the reader's shoes** – imagine the question the reader might be asking themselves at this moment in the story or text.
3. **Don't expect an answer** – remind the children that the goal isn't to get a response, but to make the reader pause or reflect.
4. **Make it relevant** – the best rhetorical questions relate directly to the topic, action or characters' emotions in the story, keeping readers focused and engaged.

For example, let's imagine a child is writing an adventure story about a character named Ruben, who's exploring an ancient cave filled with mysterious, magical treasures. Here's how they might create a rhetorical question for a suspenseful moment in the story, following our steps:

1. **Identify the purpose** – we want to create a feeling of suspense, making readers wonder if Ruben is in danger.
2. **Put ourselves in the reader's shoes** – at this moment, the reader might be wondering, 'is Ruben safe or is something about to happen to him?'
3. **Don't expect an answer** – pupils should aim to phrase the question in a way that encourages reflection but doesn't require a specific answer.
4. **Make it relevant** – as the scene is set in a dark, mysterious cave, the question should relate to the setting and Ruben's feeling of nervousness and uncertainty.

The outcome could look like this:
Ruben took a step forward, his heart pounding. Was he truly alone in this ancient cave, or was someone – or something – in here with him?

If the child is writing a non-fiction text about volcanoes, they might use a rhetorical question to introduce a new idea or grab the reader's attention.

1. **Identify the purpose** – the child should make the reader curious and engaged with the topic of volcanoes.
2. **Put ourselves in the reader's shoes** – the reader might be wondering 'why do volcanoes erupt?' or 'What causes these eruptions?'

3. **Don't expect an answer** – the question should set up the topic without requiring the reader to have prior knowledge.
4. **Make it relevant** – the question should lead naturally into the explanation that follows.

The outcome could look like this:
Have you ever wondered what causes a volcano to erupt with such power and force?

Engagement and focus

So, why might KS2 children use rhetorical questions in their writing? (See what I've done again?) Here are some of the key effects they might try to create:

Reader engagement
Rhetorical questions can help readers feel directly involved in the text, sparking their curiosity and prompting them to think actively about the topic or story while, or even before, they read.

In fiction:
Sophie glanced around the empty room. Where had everyone gone?

This question invites the reader to wonder along with the character, increasing their investment in the mysterious scene that is about to unfold.

In non-fiction:
Have you ever wondered what life is like for astronauts staying in space?

Here, the rhetorical question is intended to pique the reader's interest, before providing a detailed explanation about life on the International Space Station.

Building tension
In narratives, rhetorical questions can build suspense.

In fiction:
The footsteps seemed to grow louder behind him. Was it just his imagination, or was someone following him?

This creates tension by making readers share the character's anxiety, enhancing the atmosphere of suspense and possible danger.

Drawing attention or focus
Rhetorical questions can help emphasise key points or ideas, signalling that a particular detail or fact is especially important.

In fiction:
But why would the thief risk everything to steal an old, battered box?

Here, we highlight the importance of the box, encouraging readers to think about its possible role in the story and why it might be worth risking being caught to steal it.

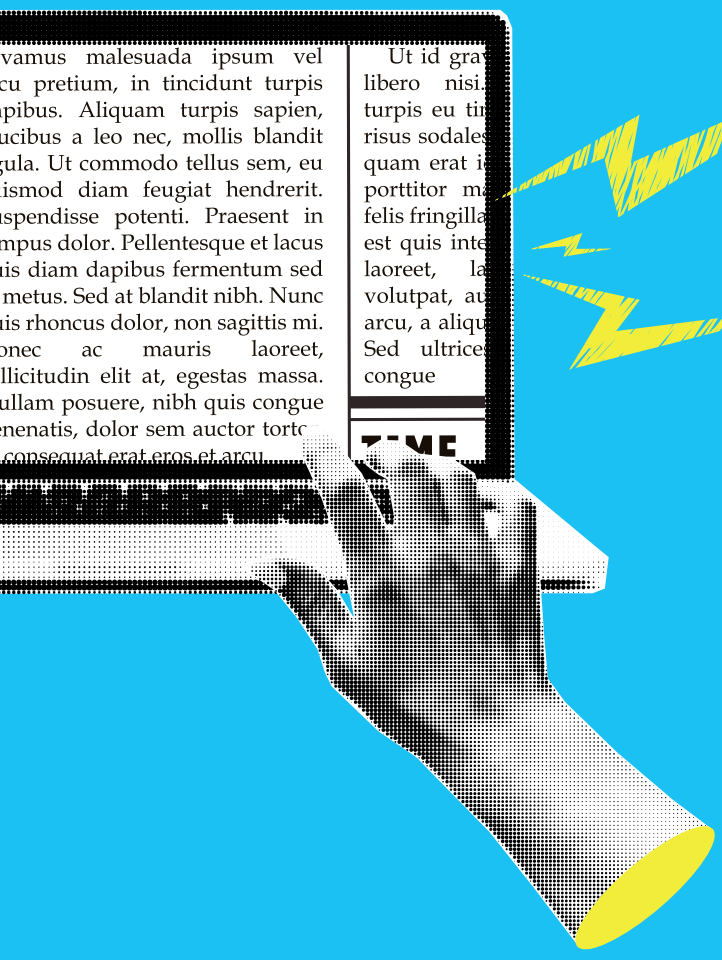
In non-fiction:
Why do many scientists think the rate of climate change is increasing?

This question helps focus the reader's attention on the most important point, framing the explanation of the issue that follows as something deserving of the reader's attention (and perhaps even creating a sense of urgency).

Establishing voice
In fiction, rhetorical questions can help children to show a character's personality. In non-fiction, they can establish a particular tone to their writing, e.g. building a conversational style.

In fiction:
'Did Deanna really think she could outsmart her wise old grandmother?' chuckled Gran to herself.

This question adds a mischievous, knowing tone to the writing, giving readers insight into Gran's perspective and hinting that Deanna might not get away with whatever she's up to!



In non-fiction:
I mean, if they could choose anything, who would actually choose to eat vegetables?

This question creates a playful, conversational tone, inviting the reader to reflect on their own experiences as if talking with a friend.

Whether they're crafting thrilling tales or explaining fascinating facts, children can use rhetorical questions to help their writing come alive by adding depth, engagement, and personality. Some time spent learning how this technique works, and how it might be employed most effectively, is time well spent.

James Clements is an education writer and researcher. His latest project is FluentZoo, a resource for supporting children's reading fluency.

@mrjclements
fluentzoo.com

Disciplinary literacy IN PRACTICE

Shareen Wilkinson outlines how senior leaders can implement reading, writing and communicating across the curriculum

Disciplinary literacy, as defined by Professor Timothy Shanahan, is the specialised way reading, writing, and oral language are used within specific academic disciplines like science, history, geography or mathematics.

It's more than just general literacy skills; it's about understanding how each subject uses language to create, communicate, and evaluate knowledge. This subject-specific focus supports pupils with their critical thinking skills, prepares them for future learning, especially for secondary school, and enables them to build rich vocabulary.

Adapted from the current national curriculum, the panel on page 19 demonstrates the subject-specific skills that pupils need in order to read and write to a sufficient standard within history, geography and science. Children will also need to know facts such as key dates, times, Tier 3 vocabulary, and statistics to develop their knowledge and show this in their writing.

Finding meaning

There are generalised ways of reading across the curriculum, which are well-established as reading comprehension strategies: making predictions, visualising, asking questions, making connections and summarising. These techniques encompass what readers might do before, in the moment of, or after reading. It's important that teachers model and articulate these thought processes at relevant points in the teaching sequence. These strategies should not be confused with reading comprehension questions (e.g. *How do you think the character feels?*).

Reading across subject disciplines

The comprehension strategies above can take different forms depending on the subject being studied. However, the same steps can be followed across science, history and geography topics:

- Make predictions
- Visualise
- Ask questions
- Make connections
- Clarify
- Summarise

> *"The same steps can be followed across science, history and geography topics"*

Teachers should 'think aloud' through each of these steps whenever they are reading disciplinary texts with a class. But what will this look like for different subjects?

Reading history

When making predictions, think about why a person is significant within the period you're studying.

Think about the period you're studying and try to visualise it. What can you see and hear?

How is the period you're studying different from the present? How is it similar? What has continued or changed over time?

Question both events and sources. What does a particular source tell historians, and how have they interpreted it?

Consider the connections between events and draw contrasts.

Are there any historical words that need to be clarified? Do you know who wrote or created each of the sources you've used?

Finally, summarise the key events and think about trends over time.

Reading geography

As you work through a text or topic, refer back to previous geography lessons to predict what might happen next.

Interrogate maps, diagrams, globes and aerial photographs as appropriate to understand each geographical concept you encounter in a text.

Ask questions at appropriate points: *Why is this place like this? How is this place changing? How are other places affected?* Can you make connections with other subjects, such as science or maths? How does this help your understanding of the topic?

Review the geographical vocabulary used. Does anything need to be discussed further or clarified?

Now summarise three things you have learnt.

Reading science

In experiments, formulate a hypothesis about what is going to happen. Think about the subject matter and refer to prior knowledge to make your predictions.

Use diagrams and pictures to understand the key processes involved in your experiment and the

topic it is part of.

Discuss the key concepts and why they are happening: *What helps the plant to grow? How did you...? Why does this...? What makes me think that...? What do you mean by that...?*

Connect your reading with prior learning from previous science topics or other curriculum areas.

Think about the key vocabulary, discuss the meaning of any new terms and check understanding of those you have encountered before.

Summarise five key scientific aspects that have been covered in the explanation text.

Making it work

Once we know the differences in reading between the subjects, how can we implement disciplinary literacy successfully? The Education Endowment Foundation's (2024) *A Schools Guide to Implementation* **(tinyurl.com/tp-Implementation)** provides some excellent advice that can be applied to this issue.

First, it's important to understand the 'Why'. Disciplinary literacy isn't about adding another burden, it's about empowering pupils to engage more deeply with subject content. Explain this clearly to staff and highlight how it can improve comprehension, critical thinking, and communication skills within each subject.

Don't try to tackle every subject at once – start with a few key areas where disciplinary literacy can have the biggest impact. Perhaps begin with writing like a historian or scientist, before moving on to reading. Consider your school's priorities and staff expertise, and think about your well-established subjects.

It isn't just a question of defining disciplinary literacy: it's helping teachers understand what reading, writing, and communicating look like within their specific subject.

The EEF recommendations go on to explain best practice for delivery and implementation. Start with strong foundational knowledge (decoding, handwriting, spelling, etc), before diving into subject-specific strategies. These foundational skills are crucial for accessing and understanding disciplinary texts. For younger pupils, ensure they are exposed to disciplinary texts (or non-fiction) so they can begin to build their background knowledge from early.

You should adapt your approach to the age and stage of your pupils. Younger learners can be introduced to disciplinary thinking through play-based activities and meaningful interactions, exploring different text types, and asking disciplinary questions.

Model how experts in each field read, write, and think. For example, when teaching history, show pupils how historians analyse or corroborate sources. Think aloud, demonstrating your own thought-processes.

Focus too on developing pupils' understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. Provide multiple exposures to these words in different contexts, and explore synonyms, antonyms, and word origins.

Try to choose authentic texts that are used by experts in each field. These might be primary sources in history, scientific reports, or literary excerpts. Provide scaffolding to support pupils as they engage with challenging texts. This could include graphic organisers, sentence starters, or key vocabulary.

Finally, make sure you teach specific reading and writing strategies relevant to each discipline. For example, show pupils how to analyse sources in history, and how to interpret data in science.

Read and write like...

...a historian

- Use historical vocabulary
- Understand and convey the concept of continuity and change
- Make connections, draw contrasts and analyse trends
- Give structured accounts of events
- Analyse events, and explore contrasting arguments and interpretations

...a geographer

- Use geographical vocabulary
- Collect, analyse and communicate a range of data fieldwork
- Interpret sources of geographical information
- Use maps, diagrams, globes and aerial photographs
- Communicate geographical information through writing at length

...a scientist

- Use scientific vocabulary
- Make predictions, analyses and conclusions
- Identify and classify data
- Make observations, record data, understand and use tables and diagrams

Shareen Wilkinson is an education adviser and executive director of education for a multi-academy trust. Her upcoming book,* Disciplinary literacy in primary schools, *explores reading, writing and speaking across the curriculum.

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Signs and SIGNALS

Topsy Page explains how to take oracy to the next level in your classroom

Imagine a classroom where every child speaks confidently. Where every child can be clearly heard sharing their individual thoughts and ideas. A classroom where children work productively in pairs and groups, where children support and challenge each other, listening with respect and encouragement.

How about a classroom where everyone knows that talking can help us think and thinking can help us talk? Where children express themselves clearly, are interested in each other's thoughts and ask each other questions because they know it helps them learn?

Oracy makes all this possible. It gives children a chance to develop a voice and be able to use that voice effectively in relationships, in work, in life. If children can't do these things, they won't thrive – oracy is a matter of social justice, citizenship and democracy.

Three essential ingredients

Oracy in primary classes means managing classroom talk to deepen learning across the curriculum, and equipping your pupils to use spoken language effectively in any situation. For oracy to flourish, it's vital to have the right classroom culture. This can be achieved by focusing on three key areas.

"The use of signals like these can offer a number of benefits to children"

1. Have high expectations

All your pupils can get better at communicating, so avoid underestimating them. Children respond to our expectations, so try to phrase the way you speak to them according. For example, "Please elaborate, Jack." or "Say it again, Simran, using our focus vocabulary."

Use a kind, respectful tone at all times. (This is not about mocking or intimidating pupils.) If a child doesn't immediately respond during whole-class talk, stay with them, support them and find out what they are thinking.

2. Be caring and thoughtful

All children have different starting points, and some are initially less confident with their oracy skills. Without losing your high expectations, be sensitive and nurturing. This can be a delicate balance; the key is to challenge at the appropriate level.

3. Create a culture of listening

For children to talk confidently, and to risk sharing thoughts, emotions or new ideas, they need to feel safe. They need to know they will be listened to with respect, and that everyone will value their contribution. Creating and agreeing ground rules as a class will help with this.

Hand signals for dialogue

Use active learning gestures to indicate 'I agree', 'I disagree' or 'I'd like to build on...' Decide on a set of non-verbal signals to indicate thinking during whole-class dialogue. Aim for still, silent signals, which are less likely to be distracting than moving or noisy ones.

Some examples could be:

- Open hand resting on heart – 'I agree.'
- Closed hand on heart – 'I disagree.'

- Thumbs and index fingers make two interlocking circles – 'I have something to say that connects.'
- Index finger up – 'I have a question.'

Give pupils opportunities to practise these hand signals before you begin using them in lessons.

Discuss how the timing of hand signals matters, and the pros and cons of showing signals while people are talking. Discuss the possible effects of 'jumping in' with a disagreement signal when someone is still making their justification. It's essential that your class use hand signals respectfully, and that this fits with your class ethos of respectful listening and positive attitude to learning.

The use of signals like these can offer a number of benefits to children. Firstly, they give pupils a non-confrontational mechanism through which they can challenge each other.

This changes everything! They now have permission to query what is being said, spot misconceptions, respectfully disagree and so on.

Gestures can help class dialogue go deeper as well, as pupils can ask peers why they disagree with them or look around for classmates who can support their point; thinking becomes visible, and everyone can see when others are listening. Everyone has a chance to show their opinions, even if there is not time to offer every child the chance to speak.

Finally, hand signals can help pupils to self-regulate – if they can show their thinking, they are less likely to shout out.

RAG cups

A powerful tool for assessment for learning, and talk. RAG cups are red, amber and green paper cups that some schools make available to every child in all lessons. The expectation is that children will continuously reflect on their learning, asking themselves 'How is my learning going?' throughout the lesson, and using the cups to signal their current thoughts to the teacher and TA.

The different colours are used to indicate the following opinions:

- Red – 'I'm stuck' or 'I disagree'
- Amber – 'I'm a bit confused' or 'I have a question'
- Green – 'I understand', 'I can teach others' or 'I agree'.

Give a set of cups to each child; the cups stay on tables at all times. Tell the class to start each lesson by stacking their cups with green showing. As the lesson progresses, they are responsible for changing the colour to reflect their learning status.

During whole-class learning, if you spot a child on amber or red, pause, and use pupil talk to progress. For example, ask another child, whose cup is showing green, to explain. (The cups develop accountability as well as oracy – children on green are expected to be able to give peer support.) If you see a lot of amber or red, consider alternative strategies, including different ways to explain.

When pupils are working on their own, if peers notice someone on red, they can provide support: "Are you OK, Emeka? Do you need help?". Likewise, as adults circulate the room they can quickly notice who needs support: "I see you're feeling unsure, Amy – why are you on amber?".

RAG cups are brilliant when pupils present work to the class, as children can change their cups if they spot any errors and then explain and make suggestions for improvements.

They can be used during whole-class or group dialogue too, with children using their cups to signal agreement or disagreement.

Make sure you invest time in this strategy to properly reap the rewards, and be consistent with your expectations. This is about children gaining the habit of reflecting on their learning continuously.

FOUR WAYS TO ELEVATE ORACY

- Don't label pupils as 'quiet' or 'shy'. A label can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children are developing all the time and it's our job to help them. They may not be speaking much simply because they haven't had the opportunity to find their voice.
- Value all accents and dialects – they are an important part of the children's identities.
- Know why you're doing it. Familiarise yourself with the underlying purpose of each idea, so you can choose the right approach for the right moment and use it skilfully.
- Stick at it. While some strategies can have immediate results, others take longer to bear fruit, because they are about a change in culture. Remember that new habits take time to embed.

***Topsy Page works with schools to develop a culture of high-quality dialogue and reasoning across the curriculum. She is the author of* 100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Oracy.**

topsypage.com

No more talking PARTNERS

It's time to start listening, say **Nikki Gamble** and **Jo Castro**

"Now turn to your talk partner." These words will be heard routinely, countless times, across primary schools in England every day. The intention is to provide an opportunity for the pupils in our classes to have time to think and develop answers to questions in the safety of their partnership. This encourages all children to engage, rather than just those brave enough to speak in front of the class or who think fast enough to get their hands up first.

This approach has become a familiar routine, where everyone plays their well-rehearsed part; but to what effect? There is often little time given for these conversations as the teacher strives to maintain 'pace'. The more confident child often dominates; both children talk at one another rather than listen; and the teacher frequently doesn't know what has been said.

Focusing on talk means focusing on what *we* need to say, rather than developing a dialogue—a genuine exchange of ideas. Imagine that we reframe this interaction, and instead of 'talk partners', we call them 'listening partners'. Immediately, the focus changes from 'tell your partner what you know' to an opportunity to listen to what someone else knows or thinks, and how that fits our understanding or opinion.

By listening actively, we connect more deeply. We show that what others say matters to us, and we are happy to wait for them to think; we learn a new perspective, and consider whether we agree or disagree with it. Both partners grow from the experience.

Listening partners in action

This process works for any paired talk around a text. Julie's Year 3 class is reading Joesph Coelho and Richard Johnson's *Our Tower*. They are discussing the details of the front cover. Julie has asked the children to work with a listening partner and assign themselves as either partner A or B. The children have been given a set of questions or prompts for Partner A to ask Partner B:

- Where do you think this is?
- What do you notice about the children?
- Where do you think they are going?
- Where do you think they have come from?
- What do you think the yellow things are?

When they have finished, Julie gets Partner B to ask Partner A the same questions, listening carefully to their replies.

It's tempting, as the teacher, to get involved with the children's conversations, but instead, allow them the space while you use the opportunity to make informal assessments. As the children share their ideas, you can observe, listen, and note insightful comments, particularly those that link to existing knowledge or present evidence of new learning.

Feedback

Typically, after paired talk, teachers ask children to share what they discussed with the class. Julie makes some small adjustments to this process to avoid the children simply repeating what they have already talked about with their partner, which often slows the pace of the lesson and doesn't advance the learning.

She gathers the class and shares a couple of her observations, making connections between the children's ideas and presenting contrasts in their thinking. This signals to the class that she is attentive and interested in what they say when talking in pairs or groups. In short, it models listening.

Sharing her observations also allows her to advance the learning by selecting those points that move the conversation on; it maintains a good pace in the lesson. Pace in this context doesn't mean speed; it means maintaining the learning pace rather than letting it drift.

Finally, Julie encourages the children to reflect on what they have learned from each other:

- Did your partner say anything that surprised you?
- Did you have the same ideas as your partner, or were yours different?

Let me tell you

Another way to avoid show-and-tell is to switch up the paired talk by asking pupils to comment on each other's work, rather than explain their own.

A Year 5 class is reading *The Promise* by Nicola Davies, illustrated by Laura Carlin. The teacher, Karl, reads the opening sentences, which set the scene for the story. He has withheld the illustrations. After a second reading, the children draw the pictures in their mind's eye, visualising the setting.

When they have had time to complete the task, Karl asks the children to turn to their listening partners.

As usual, they assign themselves as partner A or partner B.

Rather than show and explain their own ideas, they are going to explain what they understand about each other's work.

So, partner A explains how they think partner B has interpreted the scene and vice versa. If partner A thinks partner B has misinterpreted their ideas or has omitted something important, they have an opportunity to clarify.

This small adjustment to the more typical 'show and tell' approach keeps both partners active and involved, setting the conditions for active listening.

Moving partners

Nazreen's class are reading the *Greenling* by Levi Pinfold. They have been studying the book for three weeks and are at the end of the teaching sequence. They are considering the statement 'Greenling is a disruptive influence.'

After clarifying what they understand by the word 'disruptive', Nazreen organises the class into two concentric circles. The inner circle faces outwards so that each child faces a partner from the outer circle. Nazreen presents the statement and asks the children to discuss it with their partners.

For the first 15 seconds, partner A tells partner B their views and then the roles are switched. After 30 seconds, the inner circle moves to the left so the children have new partners. This is repeated several times before Nazreen asks the inner circle to move around to the right – the children are now talking with a partner they have already spoken with. In reflecting on the process with the class, Nazreen makes listening the focus: *Tell me two new ideas that you learnt from different partners*.

The strength of this approach is that the children carry with them ideas that they have heard expressed by different partners. It particularly supports children with English as an additional language, or special learning needs, allowing them to borrow ideas, practise language, and build understanding sequentially.

Getting pupils listening

- Organise the class so all the children can hear each other.
- Have high expectations for clarity and audibility.
- Encourage children to speak directly to each other rather than filtering ideas through you.
- Avoid repeating what the children say.
- Make listening a focus for feedback.
- Ensure you are a model of attentive listening.
- Change the terminology from 'talk' to 'listen'.

Nikki Gamble is the director of Just Imagine and provides consultancy and training in schools in the UK and internationally. Jo Castro is a consultant for Just Imagine and a leadership coach who works with teachers and senior leaders in schools.

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LITERACY

New Big Cat information books

A wide-ranging series of ability-levelled information books, covering a variety of non-fiction genres

AT A GLANCE

- Carefully levelled non-fiction books covering a broad spectrum of primary reading abilities
- Appealingly written and illustrated
- Covers most genres of information text
- Features an unexpectedly wide range of topics
- Part of the popular Big Cat series published by Collins

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

Sometimes my job isn't fair. I receive a set fee for writing a review, for which I then allocate a certain amount of time to getting to know the given product before putting fingertips to keyboard. It therefore simply doesn't make economic sense for me to spend ages immersing myself in the subject of my review. Yet, on this occasion, I spent far too long on the product-testing phase, because I really struggled to put these books down.

I found this new series of information books from Collins – part of their highly popular Big Cat scheme – a genuine delight. But, before I start enthusing about the content, let's get the technical essentials out of the way first.

These are carefully levelled readers to meet the needs of most reading abilities across upper KS1 and KS2. They join a programme of over 1,800 non-fiction and fiction books in Big Cat, which are designed to suit readers at all levels from novice to independent.

Each book is compellingly written yet precisely pitched. The design is lively and appealing, and the illustrations and photographs are well chosen. In short, teachers can be confident that the content will be spot-on for each child (assuming their reading ability has been accurately established) and there is smooth progression throughout the series, right up to seriously challenging texts for the most advanced Year 6 pupils.

But what really appealed to me was the range of ideas covered. Collins has clearly worked hard to include topics that will pique the interest and fire the imagination of today's school pupil. No doubt this will enhance the pleasure of reading, not just for the child, but also for the teacher, teaching assistant or parent. And, let's face it, one of the main objectives of creating a successful reading scheme must be to inspire a love of books.

As you might expect, there is a noticeable, though not obtrusive, nod to diversity issues, such as *Twentieth Century Trailblazers* – although even that included examples of women achievers well beyond the usual suspects. There are also playful appeals to perennial childhood fascinations, from football to slime.

But what really caught my eye were the books that provided an age-appropriate introduction to topics that are more typically reserved for adulthood, through their *A guide to…* titles. Psychology is a subject that is particularly close to my heart, so I was thrilled to see it given a book of its own. Similarly, I was pleasantly surprised to encounter a thoughtfully written guide to money. Before long, I was deeply engrossed whilst simultaneously admiring the careful way in which complex and even abstract concepts had been covered. However, as the saying goes, time is money and, despite the enhanced financial literacy granted by this book, I found that the time I was spending getting lost in these titles was becoming seriously economically unsustainable. So, I think I'd better leave it there and let you discover for yourself just how good they are…

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Enjoyable, well-pitched books
- ✔ Wonderfully informative
- ✔ Refreshingly unexpected
- ✔ Attractively presented
- ✔ A positive addition to any school library or reading programme

UPGRADE IF…

You want to foster a love of reading by introducing pupils to a wide range of fascinating topics through wonderfully crafted information books.

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ENGLISH

The Five Minute Box

A practical and comprehensive addition to your teaching arsenal

AT A GLANCE

- **A structured multi-sensory phonics programme and screening tool for potential Specific Learning Difficulties**
- **Designed to be delivered by teaching assistants**
- **Covers the first stages of phonics**
- **Supplements class teaching**
- **Gives children ownership of their own learning**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

When it comes to literacy interventions, what matters the most is how well pupils are targeted, assessed, and monitored within the framework of a particular programme. Although there can never be a single universally effective programme, some interventions do manage to work effectively for a sizeable number of pupils. One such literacy intervention is the recently updated Five Minute Box, a proven system for teaching early literacy skills providing high quality phonic work to ease reading difficulties.

This is really a sturdy, plastic valise of practical literacy resources packed together to help with confidence, reduce anxiety and help pupils to keep up and master early literacy. It's an easy-to-use and practical toolkit that is designed for direct 1:1 support for 'at risk' children with the aim of helping them improve their knowledge, understanding and attainment. As it is intended for individual tuition, children don't have to worry about group dynamics or the fear of failure in front of their peers. It's especially useful for helping children with dyslexia, developmental language disorder and social and emotional needs and allows for progress to be made at different rates.

What makes the Five Minute Box so good to use is that it is geared up for explicit and systematic teaching delivered in brief, but intensive, structured interventions. This means it provides clear models for positive and supportive learning using an array of examples proven to teach reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and literacy skills. Inside the case you get a newly updated 39-page resource book containing all you need to know about the box and how to get the most out of it. This includes the benefits and key points, initial assessments, teaching sessions, lesson plans, structured reading and spelling programme, and further assessments.

Also in the case you will find all of the hands-on materials you need for each lesson, including magnetic alphabet letters, sounds board, keyword cards and boards, handwriting formation board, record of achievement forms, record of work sheets, whiteboard and pen. As the materials are in one place, this helps save any preparation time and maximises time for actual teaching. There's a very handy fold-out instruction guide as well, which condenses the key information into easily digestible sections. The resource itself requires little in the way of preparation apart from familiarising yourself with the lesson plans and materials, so this is very much an 'open the box and get started' resource. Affordable training is also available if staff require it. Lessons are taught in small chunks, and each session covers a sounds board, keyword cards and personal information. The lesson plans included are all clearly set out in a step-by-step format using a 'Hear it, Say it, Read it, Write it, Read it again' approach. There are activities in phonics, keyword reading, spelling and writing and the box is intended for use in class rather than taking children out.

The Five Minute Box is not a box of tricks. It's a structured intervention toolkit of child-focused activities that allows all learners acquire secure phonic knowledge and literacy skills via short and impactful lessons that focus their attention and keep them involved. An intervention doesn't have to take hours to be effective, and The Five Minute Box proves that early intervention in short, focused bursts can really accelerate children's catch-up growth and be a rewarding not overwhelming experience.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ **Ideal support for dyslexic or second-language learners**
- ✔ **Gives pupils the phonic skills and confidence they need to succeed**
- ✔ **Gives pupils multisensory support to learn new strategies and skills**
- ✔ **Provides chances to think aloud and talk about their learning and decisions**
- ✔ **Provides pupils with extensive feedback, self-esteem, motivation to learn and self-help strategies**
- ✔ **Provides valuable data and easy to monitor by SENCo**

UPGRADE IF...

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Why the world needs utopian thinkers

Give young people stories of hope, not despair, says **Brogen Murphy**

My wife is a classical musician and workshop leader. She recently spent a week visiting schools to write songs about climate change and renewable energy. Each day, she came home and sang me the latest absolute banger the pupils had composed. From a disco anthem declaring *The world is turning hot, it's a heat wave*, to a punk-rock accusation of *No trees, no life, say goodbye to the animals*... it's clear these children get it: we're in trouble.

Today's children are more aware than ever of the world's challenges, from climate change to social injustice. They hear it on the news, learn about it at school, and read or watch stories set in vivid dystopian futures.

We are raising a generation of politically and environmentally engaged activists, which is something to be celebrated. But that awareness comes at a cost. As an educator, you'll have seen it first-hand: fear, anxiety, depression and hopelessness.

What can we do about that?

We need to start teaching something new – the ability to imagine a better world. Pupils need to know what is wrong, of course. But once that is established, we need to turn our attention to envisioning what *could be* instead.

As a writer, I never start a story until I can picture the last scene. I might not know the exact route to get there, or how to overcome all the challenges along the way, but I know where I'm going.

Right now, in the world, we don't know where we are going – and so of course we feel unable to see a way forward. I don't believe we're going to be able to steer ourselves away from disaster until we have a positive vision to work towards, rather than just a worst-case scenario to avoid.

"We need to start teaching something new – the ability to imagine a better world"

When I wrote my first novel, *Wildlands*, I wanted to create a vivid world that felt not just imaginable, but achievable. The story is set twenty-five years from now, when green energy, eco-design and plant-based diets are all the norm. But most radical of all is the complete shift in how we live alongside the natural world, from beavers in Bradford to dolphins swimming up the river Thames.

Key to this transformation was the creation of the Wildlands, an enormous rewilding project covering much of Northern England and Southern Scotland. Here, wild boar, bison and elk roam free alongside lynx, wolves and bears. Released from human pressures, the landscape has transformed into a vast wilderness of forests, meadows, scrubland, rivers, lakes, beaches and wild seas.

People enjoy a ten-mile buffer zone around the edge of the project, where they can hike, canoe and camp alongside these awesome wild creatures. But no human is allowed into the core of the Wildlands, except on the high-speed rail line that runs from Manchester to Glasgow.

At the beginning of the book, thirteen-year-old Astrid and her little sister, Indie, are travelling alone on the train. A rash decision leaves them stranded right in the heart of the Wildlands, with only a rucksack, a phone without signal – and each other. As every wrong turn takes them deeper into this truly wild land, they'll need all their ingenuity and determination to survive.

The stories we tell – whether in books, in the media, or in the classroom – shape young people's ability to imagine what is possible. So, if we get to create our own narrative, why not choose a thriving, beautiful utopia instead of a desolate, desperate dystopia?

Tales of a better future teach children that this world is still worth fighting for – that their choices and actions matter, and that they can make a difference. With my own stories, I want to encourage children to dream big, to ask *what if*, and to believe that another world is possible.

I want children to not only dream of a better future, but to believe that they can help create it.

With a background in zoology and climate tech, Brogen Murphy now writes middle-grade fiction. Their debut novel **Wildlands** *(Puffin, £7.99) is out now.*

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– Dyslexia Action

the five minute BOX

the number BOX

Five Minute Box

The multisensory phonics programme which enables the early identification of potential specific learning difficulties. The Box provides secure basic skills for reading, spelling and writing.
No preparation time needed, everything you need is in the box.

The Ten Minute Box

Multisensory programme for learning reading and writing digraphs and associated words. Fun activities ensure consolidation and are suitable for all learners of any age. This structured intervention works alongside any phonics scheme in use within schools and includes initial and summative assessments and progress tracking.

New Training Available

- Increase understanding of dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties.
- Signs and indicators of learning difficulties and how these children may learn differently
- Understanding of the psychology behind the Five Minute Box approach, getting the best out of children 1:1
- Practical 'How to' use the Five Minute or Number Box. Teaching Assistants will be able to go away and carry out the interventions with confi dence and enthusiasm after this training.

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