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PLAN

RACHEL CLARKE

Unpicks

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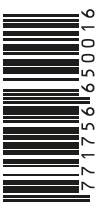
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Hello!




we need to have the courage to answer awkward questions if we want neurodiverse children to be understood by their peers (p69).

In our regular Teach Reading & Writing section, Alake's Pilgrim's WAGOLL feature on writing a breathless chase scene (p38) made me want to run out and grab a copy of the book straight away. Another gorgeous title we explore is Kate Greenaway winner Grahame Baker-Smith's *The Ever-Changing Earth*, which can take you way beyond literacy activities to inspiring art and design, geography, science, music and more (p47). As part of our poetry series in association with the CLiPPA, Charlotte Hacking takes a research-driven look at using poems in the classroom (p34).

I'm sure you'll all have seen, or at least heard about, Ofsted's English subject report by now. On p44, literacy expert Rachel Clarke picks out some of the key findings and offers recommendations for how your school can address the areas for improvement that were highlighted in the report.

Recently, we've had a lot of queries on our website (teachwire.net) asking for advice on two pedagogy hot topics: adaptive teaching and talk partners. So this issue we've included some useful articles on these for your reading pleasure. Professor Mike Askew details how to use adaptive teaching effectively for maths (p27) and Jack Dabell checks that you're going about talk partners the right way (p32). If you'd like to write a feature on how you incorporate techniques like these into your teaching practice, do drop me a line (lydia.grove@theteachco.com).

Lydia

Lydia Grove, editor
 @TeachPrimaryLG

*Don't miss our next
 issue, available from
 10th May*

At last, some sunny days are upon us! A hopeful ray of light is very much the vibe of this issue's SEND special too. We have some really heartening success stories for you, including Emily Rushton's moving feature about neurodiversity champions (p60). Lisa Pigg talks us through how her school rolled out a series of nurture spaces, and the impact they had (p66). Meanwhile Fiona Carswell suggests

POWERED BY...



ALISON EASON
 explains how to carry out
 a sensory audit of your
 school

*"The primary classroom as we
 know it simply doesn't work
 for every child"*

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KEVIN HARCOMBE
 is not impressed by the
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*"Part of a leader's duty of
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SARAH BOTCHWAY
 suggests we should be
 making more use of the
 NPQ programme

*"Sadly, I think the
 excessive workload that
 teachers and leaders carry
 has had an impact"*

P13



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We're all ears!

We want to make sure our magazine is a brilliant resource for teachers and are always striving to improve. We love hearing from real teachers about what they liked and what they would change. Got feedback about this issue? Contact us via the details in the yellow box below – we'd love to hear from you!

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We want to hear from you!

Get in touch with your rants, comments, photos and ideas.



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PUBLISHED BY:

Artichoke Media Ltd.



The views in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publisher. Every effort is made to ensure the veracity and integrity of the companies, persons, products and services mentioned in this publication, and the details given are believed to be accurate at the time of going to press. However, no responsibility or liability whatsoever can be accepted for any consequence or repercussion of responding to information or advice given or inferred. Copyright Artichoke Media Ltd.



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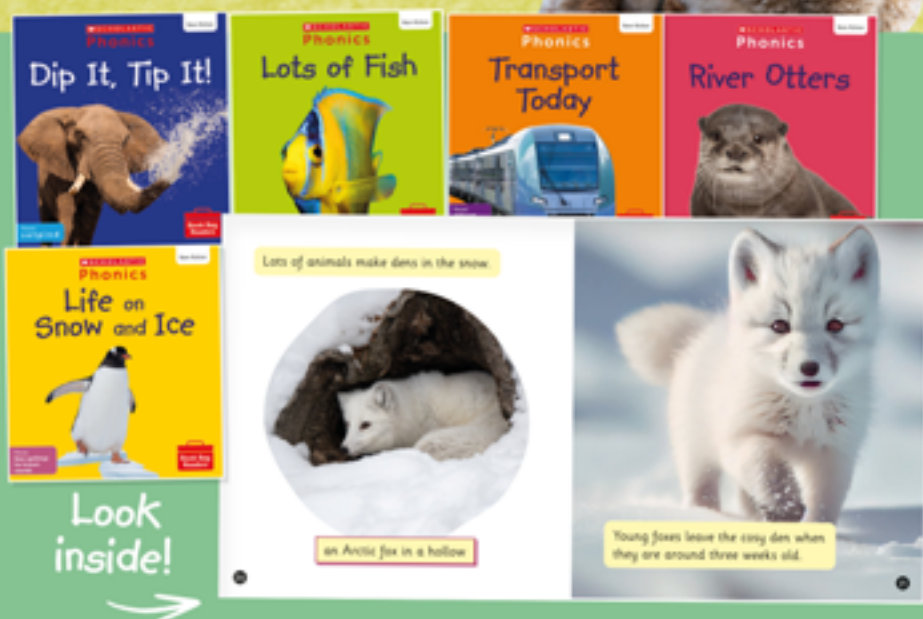
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Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research



Underground underwear

The Country Trust are encouraging children to celebrate spring by planting some pants!

The Plant Your Pants campaign is designed to encourage everyone to bury a pair of cotton underpants, and then dig them up again two months later to discover what's happened. Will the soil ecosystem have broken down all the cotton?!

Anyone can get involved with Plant Your Pants – it's free to register online and you can join with other 'partici-pants' by adding your experiment to an interactive map. Between 20 March and the big reveal in June, the Country Trust team, working with farmers and soil scientists, will send informative and fun updates that encourage partici-pants to use all their senses to explore the soil, and encourage positive action to improve its health. You can find out more about soil, and register to take part in Plant Your Pants at countrytrust.org.uk/plantyourpants

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3 INSTANT LESSONS... (You're welcome)



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A MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA

World-class musicians, producers and composers have teamed up for a series of special episodes of Armchair Adventures. This new project from the hit podcast for kids will help KS2 children explore and better understand the tricky subject of dementia. Read more at madebymortals.org



EARTH DAY 2024

We've pulled together a great range of cross-curricular resources to help you raise environmental awareness with your class on 22 April this year. There are all sorts of lesson plans and activities for KS1 and KS2, plus some expert teaching tips for you to try out. See tinyurl.com/tp-EarthDay

→→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**



Get grammar sorted!

Start each day with a quick, fun helping of SPaG revision, courtesy of Plazoom's Grammar Slam collection – five-step PowerPoint activities covering key word, sentence, text and punctuation skills from Appendix 2, for all year groups. Find out more and try Grammar Slam for yourself at [Bit.ly/PlazoomGS](https://bit.ly/PlazoomGS)



© Ben Wetherall



Return to Hundred Acre Wood

A major new artwork inspired by the adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh has been unveiled in Ashdown Forest – the real Hundred Acre Wood. The

'Tree of Trees' was created using recycled wood from species found in Ashdown Forest. Its branches are covered in fabric leaves decorated by over 1,300 children from 25 UK schools.

The installation was officially opened by author Jane Riordan, who has written *Winnie-the-Pooh: Tales from the Forest*, a new sequel to A.A. Milne's stories, illustrated by Mark Burgess. Children from St Mary's C of E Primary School, East Grinstead, joined Jane at the special opening ceremony. Find out more at tinyurl.com/tp-Ootiboo

Keep your pupils buzzing about reading

World Book Day and the fun that goes with it is over for another year, but keeping your pupils buzzing about books and the magic of reading is essential if they are to build a reading habit. To ensure children are raring to read, Scholastic have a few ideas to spark that book joy.

A Book Fair (tinyurl.com/3zy7xxyt) is a great all-school event to run at any time of year, and running a digital Book Club (tinyurl.com/2ctkt4pt) is a no-hassle way to help children discover and chat about new books. Download activity sheets associated with your pupils' favourite books to make the fun last longer.

Prompt your pupils to read books that are series-led and related to their favourite characters, such as Dog Man or Peppa Pig. At home, you can encourage parents to create a reading nook with their children so there is a special place they can go to get lost in a book. Or suggest family activities that involve books, such as a trip to the library followed by a hot chocolate.

Read more about how you can help your pupils continue with their reading journey in this blog post by literacy consultant Rachel Clarke: tinyurl.com/266jmzw



50% of primary teachers think that school readiness is getting worse

*kindredsquared.org.uk/projects/school-readiness-survey

Look ahead | Book ahead

THE SCHOOLS & ACADEMIES SHOW

Over 180 education suppliers will be in attendance on 1 May at this event for school leaders and MAT staff. schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk



LOCAL HISTORY MONTH

Discover some intriguing things about your area this May with our KS1 and KS2 lesson plans. tinyurl.com/tp-LocalHistory



Q & A



© Jo Charlesworth

Chris Packham

Naturalist, conservationist and presenter

How was primary school for you?

I remember my first day vividly. I made a plasticine model of a Tyrannosaurus, because I was massively into dinosaurs at the time. We had a teacher called Miss Beer, a very proper elderly lady with sort of... highly manicured hair... put it that way. The school was very dark and Victorian, but I remember it fondly. There were a lot of creative things going on; we'd spend the whole of December making decorations.

What did you enjoy most about writing your new book?

For me, it's about finding effective ways to communicate. There's a real urgency, and therefore you need to be imaginative and creative to catch people's eyes and ears. There's ferocious competition for attention, particularly that of younger people. Choosing animals that are surprising is one of the ways to achieve that. And in *Superhero Animals* we've tried to be a little bit confrontational in the topics that we've chosen.

What's one thing you think we could all do to help save the world?

If it's everyone, then food is the key thing. We're fortunate in the UK that most of us – not all of us, sadly – get to choose what we eat. So I think exploring the environmental cost of what you eat is one way of making real change. Even if it's just a child talking to their parents about where their food is from.

Chris began his TV career presenting children's series *The Really Wild Show*, and has since presented nature programmes such as *Springwatch*. His new book, *Superhero Animals*, is out now.



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6 WAYS to set meaningful objectives

With the right preparation you can power through your performance reviews

1 | SCAFFOLD YOUR APPROACH

Objective-setting provides a great opportunity to put professional learning at the centre of the appraisal process.

This can be done by applying a scaffolding technique. For example, you could structure each of your objectives using the following format: *To develop my ability to use [skill] when [situation] to ensure [outcome]*. This is an approach that offers a much more fluid and incremental way to identify your objectives than a standard tick-box template.

2 | DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

Your appraisal objectives should be focused directly on the elements of practice you as a teacher have control over, and they should be developmental in nature.

They should also be agile, to enable a continuous professional dialogue. And, of course, they must remain very much aligned with team and school priorities.

Make sure you word each objective in such a way that it focuses on the pedagogical changes that need to happen, rather than any data outcomes. Enquiry-led approaches can also play a part; these are not simple objectives but more question-led enquiries designed to prompt a teacher to investigate the impact of a methodology. For example,

Does the combined use of non-verbal and verbal communication increase clarity of communication and result in pupils exhibiting a clearer understanding of their work and improved behaviour for learning?

3 | LIST SUCCESS CRITERIA

Remember that success criteria don't need to be numerical. So in the example above, success could be evidenced by: effective use of non-verbal and verbal strategies including use of gestures; tone and purposeful rephrasing; use of purposeful rephrasing and modelling for abstract concepts; a decrease in pupil misunderstandings and off-task behaviours.



DENISE INWOOD

is founder and CEO of BlueSky Education, an online platform used by teachers in more than 40 countries worldwide to enable them to support their professional learning and objectives and link them to a school's strategic goals.

4 | DESCRIBE YOUR STRATEGY

How do you plan to achieve your objective? For the success criteria in Step 3, you could aim to review some of the current research on the role of communication in teaching, speaking to different groups of pupils and beginning to establish what clarity looks like to children

After this, you could observe experienced colleagues to see how they use movement, gestures, and verbal communication, then research the most effective strategies before trialling them with your class.

Once you've planned your strategy out, record it from start to finish in clear and unambiguous language. By keeping objectives focused on your practice, and avoiding traditional numerical measures, you will ensure that the objective-setting process genuinely supports your development.

5 | SPECIFY SUPPORT

What additional training or resource will you need to achieve success in each of your objectives? List everything you'll require. This might include an online learning module on clarity of communication, in-school CPD, and the opportunity to observe colleagues with successful practice in your objective area.

6 | MAKE IT SMART

Review each objective you've created to make sure that it is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-focused. It should be a clear question or statement, with quantifiable success criteria, setting out the steps and actions that you will take and the professional development and support you'll need in order to achieve your goal. Once your objectives have been agreed, make sure you regularly take a step back and check that they continue to be relevant to your classroom practice.



Are we making the most of NPQs?

Heavy workloads are dissuading teachers from taking up a useful free training opportunity

The first National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) were introduced for headteachers in 1997, but it wasn't until 2017, when three more NPQs were introduced for middle, senior and executive leaders, that they really entered education consciousness.

Now, you'd be hard-pressed to find a teacher who hasn't heard of them. The DfE recommends NPQs as the go-to programme for professional and career development; so much so that any competing programmes are discouraged.

The NPQs are currently on their third reform, with a plethora of new ones available – nine in total, and a tenth on its way in September.

Since 2021, £184 million has been invested by the DfE to ensure all teachers in the state sector can do an NPQ for free. However, with the current funding stream of NPQs expected to end with the spring cohort, have we made the most of this opportunity?

So far 35,666 teachers have opted to do at least one of the new NPQs, which equates to 6.3% of the current workforce – well short of the DfE's target of 150,000 teachers. This got me wondering why NPQs haven't been as popular as expected.

A free lunch

We all know that teachers get excited about receiving a freebie. New books for the library, a free lunch on a course – even complimentary tea and coffee in the staffroom – can feel like the ultimate treat. Our perks are a far cry

from the huge bonuses and lavish gifts seen in the private sector.

My non-teacher friends are always astonished when I tell them that staff Christmas parties are often in the staffroom, where we bring our own food and drink! Surely fully-funded, high-quality professional qualifications retailing between £1,000 to £4,000 would be the ultimate jackpot? So, why has the uptake been so small?

As director of a Teaching School Hub offering NPQs, I hear a range of reasons why teachers take on this CPD. Some of the most common are pressure from school leaders; making the most of a freebie; or (my favourite) "Others have done it, so I may as well do it too."

Lastly, some opt to embark on the NPQ journey because they have a thirst for knowledge and relish in the opportunity to learn something new to enhance their practice.

Sadly, I think the excessive workload that teachers and leaders carry has had an impact on them taking up this

opportunity. Adding another layer of teaching activity on top of what already feels unmanageable can become too much. We're all too aware that adding one more spinning plate to the many already on the go can bring everything crashing down.

Facing the future

So, without continued funding how will this DfE flagship programme survive? As workload remains high and school budgets limited, school leaders will be in an impossible position: unable to afford NPQ costs and unable to release the time needed to manage workloads. This will inevitably lead to even fewer teachers taking on this qualification. There is an expectation in other industries for professionals to continue professional development throughout their career; NPQs provide educators with that same opportunity of professional development.

Where recruitment and retention in schools are challenging, having an NPQ often isn't the deciding factor of whether a teacher is interviewed or offered the job. Nevertheless, completing these evidence-based qualifications deepens skills and knowledge, which in turn improves confidence. And that confidence in practice and knowledge can lead to career progression.

Nobody I know has regretted doing an NPQ, even with initial fears of additional workload to contend with. Evidence shows that more than anything else, the biggest impact on pupil standards is high-quality teaching. Therefore, any opportunity to improve this should be a priority.

Rather than removing the investment, the DfE and educators should be working together to eliminate all barriers to access for these programmes, and promoting them further for current and future teachers and leaders. **TP**

Sarah Botchway is the director of the London South Teaching School Hub, responsible for the training of teachers through primary to secondary across Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. As a teacher, she taught at all levels from primary to adults including headship in Lambeth.





FOR THE THRILL OF LEARNING



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23 ways you probably won't save time

We're all working too hard, and the latest government advice doesn't change that

to an old master with a delicately applied paintbrush. Of course, if there is a medical need present provision must be made – but it should be paid for, not simply added to the teacher's ever-lengthening list of duties.

If I had a hammer

These new guidelines are accompanied by a workload reduction toolkit. The word 'toolkit' suggests something practical – tried-and-tested implements that get a job done; solid practical things like hammers and drills. This toolkit contains nothing of the kind. It begins by blithely shooting itself in the foot by suggesting a survey to 'ascertain which tasks may be both unnecessary and adding to workload'.

In case this opening shot missed the toes, more follow: 'establish a school wellbeing committee' (so, more meetings); 'a workload and wellbeing action plan' (so, more paperwork); 'establish a school workload group' (so, more things to do) and, best of all, 'a programme of work to tackle workload' (so, more bloody work). You really couldn't make this stuff up – yet the DfE has. The first – and last – question on any teacher survey should be: 'Do you have to fill in mind-numbingly unnecessary examples of paperwork like this one?'

Barring the input of significant further funding, the greatest impact on increasing or lightening teacher workload comes from school leaders. If they're piling on the work, there isn't much teachers can do about it other than going to work for a less demanding headteacher. Or Aldi. Part of a leader's duty of care is to protect their team from useless nonsense,

but school leaders are sometimes too distanced from the realities of daily classroom life to realise how much they are part of the problem. The headteacher's – and government's – guiding dictum should be the same as doctors': *First, do no harm.* **TP**

Kevin Harcombe is former headteacher of Redlands Primary, Fareham.

Ten years ago, the then education secretary, Michael Gove, removed '21 tasks teachers shouldn't do' from the *School Teachers' Pay and Conditions* document. It saved a few pages on printing costs and, well, surely it was obvious what teachers shouldn't do? But now, like rickets and TB, these guidelines are back, with couple of new friends in tow.

23 Things Teachers Shouldn't Do is not what you'd call a catchy title. It's no *12 Labours of Hercules* or *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover*, is it?

The list comes from the grandly named Workload Reduction Task Force. To my mind, a task force describes something substantial and impactful, not a group of suits closeted in a Whitehall office with Styrofoam cups of instant coffee and half a packet of supermarket own-brand Hobnobs.

Perusing the list of the great and the good who make up this task force, I see what some unkind commentators might describe as a self-selecting group of superannuated educationalists. Plus, a junior minister whose principal role is presumably to give the team a semblance of authenticity. And maybe pay for the biscuits. Among this group of 14 people, there is only one classroom teacher.

Nothing new

Setting up a task force is a classic political response to something that is complex, imponderable and unlikely to be achieved without large amounts of cash. But it gives the impression that something is

going to get done about an issue.

Anyway, the 2024 list of things we shouldn't do has barely changed from 2009 (an indictment in itself). It includes bulk photocopying, duplicating data entry, putting up classroom displays and, you guessed it, taking down classroom displays.

My own list would include attending useless meetings (i.e. nearly all of them), and putting up with fidget spinners in a mainstream class. (This is related to the largest workload elephant in the room: the growing number of SEND children in mainstream classes without adequate support.)

And teachers should not have to wipe bottoms. I refer not to their own bottoms, you understand, but to children's. I once passed the Year R executive bathroom facilities and saw a be-gloved and clearly discomfited teacher tentatively, and wholly ineffectively, dabbing at a child's soiled behind with wet wipes. It put me in mind of some great artist like Caravaggio adding the finishing touches



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Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send

A letter to...

The education secretary

The growing attainment gap needs closing, and fast, says **Kevin Latham**



Last year, pupils from poorer families in England were a third less likely to achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and maths on finishing primary school than children from better-off homes.

The attainment gap – the difference in education outcomes between low-income students and their better-off peers – has widened significantly at KS2 since the pandemic. It's now at levels that haven't been seen since 2011/12.

We also know that the attainment gap only widens further post primary school as pupils make their way through the education system. So this is a crucial moment in which to tackle the disparity, and it is vital that action is taken now to stem the growth in educational inequality across the country.

The attainment gap has been with us for a long time and has proven a stubborn opponent, but we know there are interventions available to help close it. For example, evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation has found small-group tutoring can help primary pupils make on average four months' worth of additional progress. Pre-school breakfast clubs are another evidenced-backed intervention that can have a real impact.

But schools need funding to put these interventions in place, as well as wider changes throughout the school system and beyond. We need a long-term national strategy to bring a renewed and explicit focus to closing the attainment gap.

If they are to make any headway in closing the gap, the next government needs to do the following:

1 Reform the National Funding Formula to rebalance funding back towards those

schools that serve the most disadvantaged communities.

2 Reverse the real-terms erosion of Pupil Premium funding, restoring funding to previous levels.

3 Extend the Pupil Premium to post-16 institutions. The attainment gap doesn't end at 16, and neither should dedicated funding.

4 Renew the National Tutoring Programme with ringfenced funding for the long term, and target it at disadvantaged pupils.

5 Ensure no child is hungry in school by expanding free school meal eligibility to all children on Universal Credit and increasing breakfast club provision.

6 Tackle the teacher recruitment and retention crisis and incentivise the best teachers to work in the most disadvantaged schools by making changes across the system, including enhancing financial incentives and increasing flexibility.

7 Tackle pupil absence through evidence-based interventions, with a particular focus on getting the most disadvantaged pupils back into the classroom and keeping them there.

8 Reduce social segregation in schools by making admissions policies fairer, including requiring schools to prioritise Pupil Premium applicants in their oversubscription criteria.

9 Build evidence on, and scale up, the interventions that work. For example, through models like the Education Endowment Foundation accelerator fund.

“Not taking any action risks a major economic cost further down the line”

10 Plan to reduce, and ultimately end, child poverty in the UK; the education system alone cannot eradicate the attainment gap.

Not taking any action risks a major economic cost further down the line. Attainment, starting in primary schools and increasingly through the school system, is the biggest driver of gaps in university progression and has knock-on implications for young people's careers, their chances of social mobility and potential earnings.

In 2023, just over a quarter (25.2 per cent) of disadvantaged pupils achieved a strong pass in English and maths GCSEs. This compares to more than half of non-disadvantaged pupils (52.4 per cent).

Where attaining below someone's potential at KS4 can make the difference between being able to go on to A levels post-16 or not, the route to higher education is being blocked off. For others, it could mean the difference between gaining a place on a university course or apprenticeship, and missing out.

It also means that employers, businesses and the economy more generally are missing out on wasted talent, which could have made a vital contribution to economic growth.

The next government has a major opportunity not just to open up opportunities for young people, but also to benefit the UK economy in the long term by giving every child the chance to fulfil their potential.

From, Kevin



Kevin Latham is Research and Policy Manager at the Sutton Trust. He previously taught social sciences in a state comprehensive and worked as a university lecturer.



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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

We've lost sight of what is really important in our practice

Once, we gave children time to learn joyfully, and form their own questions – now we just bombard them with facts and expectations

September 2024 will mark 10 years since the 2014 national curriculum was introduced. Looking back, I was so excited as a new assistant head leading development on our school's curriculum.

In those 10 years, so much has changed...

I remember sitting with the senior leadership team, all of us so eager as we workshoped our new curriculum, determined to plan purposeful skills and knowledge for our children within our own context, with plenty of opportunities for them to rehearse learning and skills. The autonomy we felt we had, to ensure a personalised curriculum that worked for our children and would lead to deeper lifelong learning, sticks with me.

To say that feeling of joy around curriculum development has since vanished would be an understatement. Curriculum now hangs as a weight around the necks of many in schools, and the one we developed around that workshop table a decade ago is now almost unrecognisable.

In 2024, that same curriculum feels like a totally different beast... a never-ending list of knowledge, facts and information to be drilled into all children, no matter what.

It's a curriculum that feels suffocating: led by the same generic published schemes in most schools, every fact and every piece of knowledge having to be recorded to prove that pupils have retained each piece of information.

Teachers spend so much time trying to give all subjects equal weighting. They cram as many lessons as possible into each day, each with its own set of knowledge organisers, key vocabulary and flip charts.

When did that change happen?

In 2014, I felt in control of the curriculum outlined for my pupils. The day seemed long enough. I was able to make learning meaningful and even, dare I say it, identify cross-curricular links.

The learning journeys I created for my children were recognised by OFSTED as outstanding. Pupils learned whilst developing a variety of skills; they were

independent, talking and working together. Practical and interactive lessons were recorded when it was needed, in a purposeful way.

But most importantly, the learning was deep. The children I taught had time to breathe, to think and process, make links and form questions. They also had opportunities to enjoy, share and follow the interests they developed during lessons further. As a teacher I worked long hours, but I didn't feel constantly bombarded. I was able to explore learning in depth with my class.

Were those children worse off than the pupils of today? I'd argue not.

I could make time for each child, and differentiate for them. My pupils achieved their potential, but also enjoyed learning and school.

Maybe they didn't know everything about every era of history, but neither were they overloaded cognitively by a robotic teacher reading facts at the front of the class. They had lessons where the learning was active and practical.

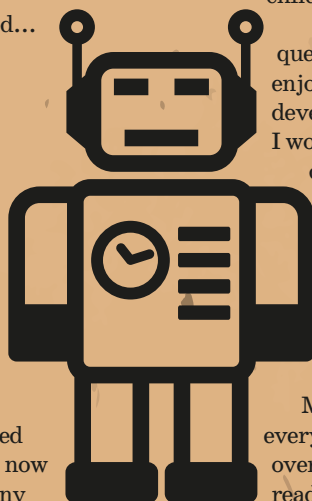
"What an old-fashioned and out-of-date view of learning for a curriculum leader to hold," I hear you say. But aren't primary teachers leaving in their droves, overworked, overburdened and exhausted?

Aren't so many children struggling to attend school: overwhelmed by the learning, the curriculum, the expectations to know and remember so

much? And aren't we faced with a generation of teachers who have been trained to return to the one-size-fits-all, 'chalk and talk' approach, just with an electronic board?

A few weeks ago, I overheard an older teacher telling a colleague how there used to be time for practical science investigations, and that the children always loved them and learned so much. Don't our pupils still deserve those learning experiences?

When *did* that 2014 curriculum alter? As far as I'm aware, it's still the same one I was so excited about a decade ago. Have the changes in expectations of educators since its publication transformed the lives of learners for the better, or made them worse? **TP**



"In 2014, I felt in control of the curriculum outlined for my pupils"

The author is a teacher in England.

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MARC BOWEN

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WEEK 1

Learning objective

- To express views about a text

The story of *The Island* deals with an anonymous individual washing up on an island. He is greeted with suspicion and prejudice, which ultimately turns into hatred; even the more compassionate islanders are caught up in the mob furor. It makes for a powerful and sobering lesson in why compassion is so important, as well as the very real dangers of prejudice. The stranded traveller does nothing to garner such hatred; it is the result of fear of the unknown.

A great way to hook children into a

new sequence of learning is to simply focus on an image. This empowers pupils of all abilities to be involved immediately. Start the session by explaining to the class what the book they'll be studying is about – but **don't** show them the cover or any images from it.

Ask the children to quickly sketch what they imagine when they hear the word 'island'. The typical response is the stereotypical 'desert island' with palm trees and coconuts. This is where the children will first experience the impact of Armin Greder's imagery.

Display the cover image of *The Island* (an imposing black wall) and review this in comparison to the children's sketches. Discuss similarities, differences and any



It seems that today we are surrounded by polarised opinions, especially within social media and journalism. The children in our classrooms must learn to navigate these turbulent waters, ensuring that their interactions with others are considered and compassionate. *The Island*, by Armin Greder, is a powerful picture book for older learners that tackles issues of prejudice and discrimination head-on, providing a potent means of exploring the importance of compassion. Through this sequence of lessons, the children will explore prejudice in the context of the story, before working to flip the narrative in order to create compassionate journalistic writing. This plan is accompanied by a comprehensive set of slides that you will need to familiarise yourself with ahead of each session.

surprises that have occurred (see slides). Explore how the cover image makes the children feel about the story itself. What themes might the book include?

With this discussion fresh in the children's minds, share the next image from the text (the edge of a simple raft in a stormy sea, from the perspective of the passenger who is about to wash up on the island). Discuss the image and then share four statements about the authorial intent of choosing this image (slide 7). Ask the children to discuss whether they agree with each statement and why. You should model how to use the language of the question to form a prose answer before the children then develop their own written responses.

A powerful way to conclude the lesson is to share the full content of the story and the illustrations. This may well lead to a stunned hush around the classroom when they discover what happens in the end!



Assessment

The written outcomes of the lesson will provide a valuable insight into the children's ability to formulate a justified opinion and how attuned they are to the tone of the story.



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- To show empathy for characters in a story

The purpose of this lesson is to start exploring the opposing views at the heart of the text.

It's helpful to revisit the story again as, with each visit, the children will

notice more of the details of the illustrations, which will add to their overall understanding of the themes of prejudice and compassion. It will also reinforce the suggested tragedy at the end of the story.

An effective way of collaboratively gathering ideas, vocabulary and points for discussion, which can be utilised throughout the remaining lessons, is to make use of a Padlet (e.g. tinyurl.com/tp-IslandPadlet).

When developing a Padlet for this task, a 'shelf' design works well, as it allows for ideas and information to be categorised and organised by subject or content.

Within the Padlet, the children will see four starter prompts for them to respond to as if they were the person washed up on the island. They will be asked to generate multiple statements in response to 'I heard/I saw/I touched/I wondered' prompts. In each case, a modelled example will help to demonstrate the level of precise language that is required and that there are no 'right or wrong' answers at this stage.

Having discussed their initial Padlet responses, the children will then be asked to change focus and make additions to the Padlet from the point of view of their choice of islander character. Would they respond differently to the stranded man?



Assessment

By asking the children to 'name' all their posts, it is easy for you to assess current levels of descriptive writing, as well as evaluating their understanding of prejudice and compassion within the story.

.....



WEEK 3 Learning objective

- Role play from a character's perspective

.....

Prior to the session, collate the key ideas from the previous lesson's Padlet, ensuring that there is a good selection of responses which reflect the prejudiced views of the islanders. Include those who might be motivated by fear and those whose prejudice might stem from a dislike of difference, especially from those islanders in positions of responsibility, such as the teacher.

Discuss the responses as a class,



ensuring that the prejudices are emerging from the characters' views, whilst also acknowledging the isolated voice of compassion in the form of the Fisherman, and how his views are ultimately drowned out.

Explain that pupils are going to work with a partner to role play two islanders who are responding to the events surrounding the stranded man entering their town. Emphasise that the children need to think about how their *character* might think and respond, and what they might fear.

This can be quite challenging for some pupils and may require modelling. Their capability will also depend on past experiences with role play tasks.

As a further scaffold, you could model some sentence stems that can be used to help structure the conversation (**slide 16**) which should help to avoid the role play 'drying up' or veering off into unrelated matters. These activities are often best delivered as a short burst, perhaps 15–20 mins of role play.

To end the session, ask as many pairs as possible to re-run their role play with the understanding that you may ask them to freeze. When frozen, lead the rest of the class to 'thought-tap' the characters, asking the children to explain why the character may have reacted in such a way.



Assessment

During the role play portion, there is ample opportunity for you to assess pupils' oracy skills, whilst the following discussion will provide opportunities to evaluate the extent to which the

children are able to empathise with the story characters.

.....



WEEK 4 Learning objective

- To identify the strength of a word

.....

Before proceeding further with the sequence it's important to establish a shared understanding of the actual meaning of prejudice and compassion. Spend time discussing different options before completing some quick-fire dictionary work to research definitions of both terms. Have the definitions on display for the remainder of the lessons in the sequence.

Introduce the class to the word 'cline' (essentially a scale). This could tap into further dictionary activities and vocabulary discussions linking into related words, such as 'incline' (**slide 22**). Having defined the term, discuss that the task will focus on comparing language based on the strength or impact of the words on the audience.

Model the process of developing a word cline, using a starter word such as 'love' at the centre of the cline. Model, write and verbalise the process of identifying synonyms for the target word. Then show how to make the decision about where to place the word on the cline in relation to the comparative strength of the individual words that are related to the root word (**slides 23–28**). Introduce the selection of starter words based on the comments, emotions and events within the story,



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asking the children to use these to develop their own word clines.

Once the children have all made some individual progress, pause the task to take some feedback on the words that have been sourced so far. It's typical for all the children to start this kind of task with vigour and a seemingly endless catalogue of words, but the 'vocabulary well' can actually dry up quite quickly. If this happens, ask pupils to form small groups based on the starter word that they have chosen from the initial selection. They can then collaborate and mutually scaffold the completion of their clines.



Assessment

In the most basic sense, the simple marking of the completed clines will inform you about the level of vocabulary skill within the children. In addition, effective feedback could also result in the children extending their use of vocabulary by conducting further, targeted language research.



WEEK 5 Learning objective

- To can identify the 5Ws of journalistic writing (who, what, where, when, why)

Start the session by discussing the concept of journalistic writing. What is it? What does it mean? Where might you see it? What is its purpose?

At this point, it may be appropriate to display some topical newspaper headlines about (age-appropriate) issues that are currently in the press where there is a degree of public disagreement.

Introduce the idea of effective journalistic writing being based around '5Ws', but don't tell pupils what these are. Allow the children time to discuss what each of the Ws could represent before co-constructing the definitive list of: who, what, where, when, why. Through further discussion, explore the role and importance of each of the 5Ws to ensure the children understand their purpose.

Next, introduce the children to the model text for the remainder of the lessons in the sequence (slide 35). Explain that the children will now be asked to evaluate this model text in relation to how successfully the 5Ws have been incorporated. This could be completed on printouts of the model article, using highlighters, or the children could be provided with digital

copies of the text and then use highlighting tools within the relevant software to code the text according to where they feel the 5Ws have been included.

Leave time for all the children to evaluate the text, then lead a class discussion to share what has been found. This is an excellent opportunity to model the reviewing and editing skills that the children may need later. Capture useful words and phrases for children to use when completing their own written articles.



Assessment

When reviewing the outcomes of this lesson, it will be important to look for any misconceptions relating to the words the children have highlighted, and how these relate to the 5Ws. Addressing these misconceptions at this stage will help to secure better quality outcomes in the remaining lesson.



WEEK 6 Learning objective

- To make careful word choices

Explain that the goal of this week will be to write newspaper articles in a style similar to the model text. However, these articles will adopt a more positive, compassionate and celebratory tone in relation to the arrival of the stranded man.

As a class, discuss the possible benefits that a more compassionate group of island residents could associate with the arrival of the man. The children might raise matters such as how the man may be able to help with tasks around the island or bring a new skillset to improve island life. Perhaps

he would introduce interesting new cultural practices or celebrations to the island from his homeland.

Return to the original (prejudiced) model newspaper article and begin to demonstrate how to skim and scan the text for those words that might be prejudicial. The children may need to refer back to previously captured vocabulary displayed around the room or refer to their own work from earlier in the sequence.

Once these prejudicial words have been identified within the text, model how they can be replaced with more positive and compassionate antonyms. Let each of the children have access to a thesaurus.

Now ask the children to choose a specific portion of the original article to redraft as a more compassionate piece of journalistic writing. Alternatively, for more able classes, the children could redraft the whole article.



Assessment

Depending on the chosen focus for the final lesson/s, you will be able to at least evaluate the children's understanding of how to make appropriate word choices. However, this could also lead to a more extensive final piece of writing, which could be used for a comprehensive evaluation of each individual's current writing ability. **TP**



Marc Bowen is a deputy head and primary teacher in South Wales. He welcomes any responses to this article, or

further questions via bowenm43@hwbeymru.net.

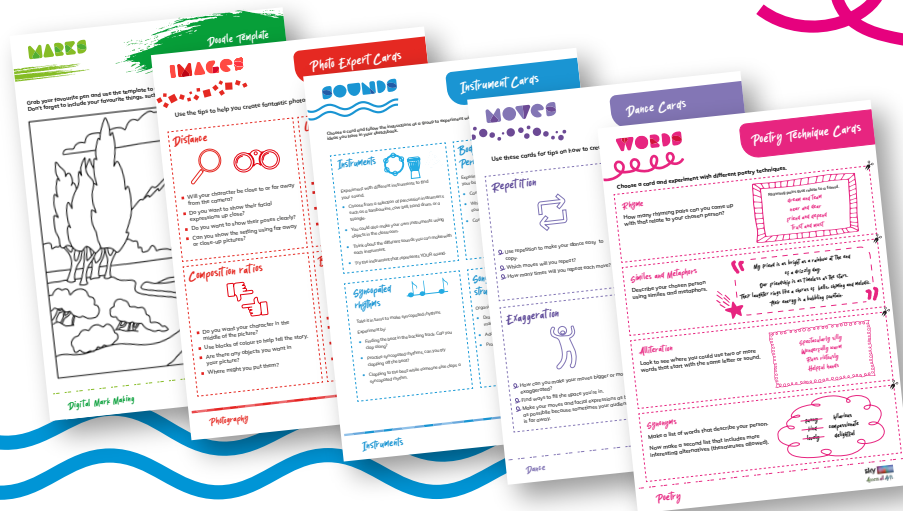
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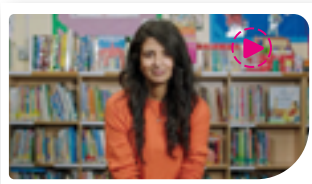
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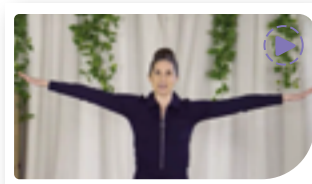
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Is adaptive teaching just differentiation under another name?

Absolutely not, says **Mike Askew**

A couple of decades ago, when England had the National Numeracy Strategy, Osted noted that differentiation within mathematics lessons was common and that ‘Teachers usually organise pupils into three ability groups’ (tinyurl.com/tp-Dera).

Since then, with the focus on all pupils mastering more of the mathematics curriculum, the language has changed, with Ofsted

guidance focusing on adaptive teaching rather than differentiation.

So what are the distinctions – and similarities – between these two ideas?

Both have the same underlying intent: to help pupils make progress; and adaptive teaching does involve a degree of differentiation. But adaptive teaching is not simply differentiation in new clothes.

To clarify the essential differences it’s helpful to address what I would call ‘classic differentiation’ – the practice of

grouping pupils by their perceived ability or level of attainment, and then assigning different work to different groups according to their needs. The problem with these practices, as many research studies have shown, is that over time, the spread of mathematical attainment in a class often increases rather than decreases.

Unlike classic differentiation, adaptive teaching is about helping the great majority of pupils all succeed at the same learning outcome.

The key question behind adaptive teaching then is not *What is the need of this pupil?* but *How must I change my teaching to enable all pupils to access the ideas being taught?* To answer this question, adaptive teaching has to operate at two levels: the intended (the planning for teaching) and the implemented (the moment-to-moment classroom interactions).

Planning for adaptive teaching

I’ve written before in *Teach Primary* about the distinction between task and activity – a task being what pupils are asked to do, and an activity being the mathematical thinking a task can potentially provoke (tinyurl.com/tp-MathsThinking).

Consider this ‘consecutive numbers’ challenge:

- Jot down pairs of consecutive numbers, such as 3, 4; 15, 16; 37, 38.
- Add the numbers in each pair: $3 + 4 = 7$ and so on.
- What do you notice?
- What do you wonder?

This is an unambiguous task, but beyond simply providing practice in addition, it has potential for considerable mathematical activity. For example, pupils will quickly notice that all of their answers are odd numbers. They may then wonder, *Can all odd numbers be expressed as the sum of two consecutive numbers? What happens with three consecutive numbers?*

“Unlike classic differentiation, adaptive teaching is about helping the great majority of pupils succeed at the same learning outcome”

Having worked through these ideas, and seen that both odd and even numbers can be expressed as the sum of consecutive numbers, pupils might go on to ask themselves these questions:

- *Given a number, can I figure out how to express it as a sum of consecutive numbers?*
- *Are there any numbers which cannot be expressed as the sum of consecutive numbers?*
- *Given a string of consecutive numbers is there a quick way to work out what their sum will be?*

'Consecutive numbers' can thus lead to a range of deep mathematical thinking, but the set-up, the initial task, is one with which everyone will initially be able to engage.

This is a task that will bring as many of the pupils as possible into some 'common ground' from which further mathematical activity can emerge.

Thus, a key question to ask when planning for adaptive teaching is: *How can a task be initially set up so that the maximum*

number of pupils can begin to engage with it?

Allowing pupils access to concrete materials that might help them start on a task is one possible strategy for creating common ground.

Another is to pose a task in a way that gives pupils some choice over their entry point into it. This can mean adapting closed tasks to be more open:

- **Closed:** Put a collection of numbers in order.
- **Open:** Write down five numbers that can be modelled with exactly three base ten blocks. Now put them in order from smallest to largest.
- **Closed:** Solve all the multiplication word problems on this page.
- **Open:** Choose two numbers to multiply together. The product must be greater than 100, and an odd number. Write a problem to go with your numbers.
- **Closed:** Complete this page of additions of fractions.
- **Open:** Write down two fractions with different denominators. Find the sum and difference of each of these fractions.

Adaptive teaching in the classroom

The main actions of adaptive teaching are the 'on the hoof' mediations

and interventions made in real-time teacher-pupil interactions. Generally, such ongoing interactions address one or the other of the following aspects of working:

1. Task completion – helping pupils to succeed in the task.

Strategies that support helping pupils complete a task include:

- reducing the complexity or difficulty of the task,
- helping pupils to focus on the most relevant aspects of the task,
- suggesting some concrete materials that might help.

2. Promoting higher order thinking (mathematical activity) – helping pupils

come to see mathematical generality in the specific task. As well as asking *What do you notice?*

helpful questions include:

- *Can you make up an example to test what you have noticed?*
- *What if you changed...?*
- *Can you write down a conjecture about what you have noticed?*

Alas, there is no magic formula for which type of intervention to adapt at any time; too much focus on task completion and pupils may not learn anything, too much focus on higher order thinking and they may get frustrated. That's that biggest challenge of adaptive teaching; but also the greatest joy when a decision works. **TP**



Mike Askew is adjunct professor of education at Monash

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What adaptive teaching is... and isn't

• Adaptive teaching involves real-time differentiation.

• At its best, adaptive teaching builds on what pupils can do. Different levels of experience are seen as opportunities to learn rather than obstacles to overcome.

• Pupils can succeed at tasks without necessarily learning the intended mathematics. Adaptive teaching involves formative assessment, with questions such as: *Can you explain to me how you would do a similar problem?*

• Adaptive teaching can help pupils become self-adaptors and to develop mathematical aptitude. Adaptive questions that pupils can adopt for themselves include: *What do you know? What have you seen before that is like this?*

• Research shows adaptive teaching that focuses pupils on the general mathematics behind a task can not only increase pupils' success in that activity, but also have a pay-off in increasing pupil success with harder questions (see tinyurl.com/tp-PISAquestions).

• Adaptive teaching is NOT about catering to pupils' supposed preferred 'learning styles'.

• A large part of adaptive teaching is carefully listening to pupils and watching them work.

• Help with simpler problems is likely to be more direct. Harder problems require subtler adaptive teaching, so that the thinking is not taken away from the pupils.

Wraparound care funding - what do you need to know?



With some important updates and announcements already happening this year regarding wraparound care – particularly relating to funding – we wanted to outline how the funding works and what you need to do next.

What is the funding for?

Essentially, the funding should be used to:

- Expand an existing provision. Create additional places where the current demand isn't being met. Extend the hours that the provision is available – unless data shows that existing hours suit demand for the area.
- Create a new provision. Establish a facility where there is none, currently. The provision should run from 8am–6pm.

How does the funding work?

The funding will be distributed via local authorities, who are responsible for leading the programme locally. However, it's schools who are central to the delivery of the scheme, and you'll be responsible for making sure parents know how and where to access wraparound care even if you are not delivering it directly.

Before funds are allocated, schools are required to demonstrate that there is a supply or demand issue, recommend the most effective delivery model and indicate costs associated. The local authority will review what's put forward by the school and grant funding if they deem it a viable solution.

What are the different delivery models?

- A school-led provision provided on the school site, by staff
- A private provider-led provision, held either on or off the school premises
- Community or cluster model
- Childminders
- Early years providers

What are the next steps for schools?

- 1 Work with your local authority as they start to map and predict demand. As part of this, it's also important to understand the current wraparound provision in your area. Your local authority will be able to help with this.
- 2 Once supply and demand mapping as taken place, you'll need to consider which delivery model would be most effective for your locality.

- 3 After funding allocations have been made, you'll need to work with your local authority to establish a new wraparound care provision, or expand an existing one.
- 4 If you've chosen to run the facility at your school, internally, please see our Ultimate Guide to Wraparound Childcare for practical help and advice on establishing a quality provision.
- 5 Promote the availability of the new or expanded provision to parents and carers.
- 6 Communicate to parents that childcare funding such as tax-free childcare or universal credit support can be used to help fund wraparound care.

We are here to help you navigate the challenges of wraparound care, and have a number of resources available such as a free webinar and downloadable Guide.

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How I do it

Wave confusion goodbye and get Year 6 children SATs-ready with this strategy for teaching long division

JESS EASTON

1

The example question I'll be using here is $2,142 \div 17$.

Begin by asking pupils to write down the first few multiples of the number they're dividing by, e.g. 17, 34, 51, 68, 85, 102... The multiples can either be written down in a list or on a number track.

Whilst long division is a fundamental part of children's maths education, it's a topic that raises a lot of questions and causes confusion – and not just for pupils! It can be something we, as teachers, shy away from. To help put these worries aside, I've broken down step-by-step how I would teach my students long division, using White Rose Education resources, so they're ready to face their SATs with confidence.

The next step is to ask students to put the question into the correct format. By this we mean placing the number that you're dividing by outside the overbar, or division bracket, and the number you're dividing inside it. The correct format should look something like this:

$7 \overline{)2142}$

Remind pupils that the number you're dividing by always goes outside the bracket. You could test this understanding by giving them another division equation and checking they place the figures correctly.

2

Now use sentence stems to help with the division.

The sentence stem here would be '___ hundreds divided by ___ is equal to ___ hundreds with a remainder of ___'. Fitting this stem to our division would look like '21 hundreds divided by 17 is equal to 1 hundred with a remainder of 4'. We've worked this out by calculating how many 17s go into 21 (which is 1), which leaves a remainder of 4.

3

		1		
17	2	1	4	2
–	1	7		
		4		

4

Now look at the tens.

Again, use the sentence stem to work out the answer. The completed sentence stem would be '44 tens divided by 17 is equal to 2 tens with a remainder of 10'. This is calculated by looking at the number track to see how many 17s go into 44 (which is 2) and this then leaves a remainder of 10.

		1	2	
17	2	1	4	2
–	1	7		
		4	4	
–		3	4	
		1	0	

5

This gives us our answer of 126.

Once your students have got the hang of this, I would challenge them with different equations, so they can face long division in their SATs with ease!

Finally, look at the ones. The sentence stem for this would be '102 ones divided by 17 is equal to 6 ones with no remainder'. This is calculated by looking at the number track to see how many 17s go into 102, which is 6 with no remainder.

		1	2	6
17	2	1	4	2
–	1	7		
		4	4	
–		3	4	
		1	0	2
–		1	0	2
				0



Jess Easton is an experienced education professional, with a background spanning over a decade. Jess' experience includes various leadership roles, including head of maths, and now works as director of CPD at White Rose Education.

TAKE TWO

Talk partners is a simple, effective technique – but you’d be surprised how many teachers get it wrong, warns **Jack Dabell**

You’ve probably heard about talk partners already, and may well have used this approach yourself. However, because it’s a tried and tested strategy, you might not have thought any more deeply than ‘this is a good thing to do, I’ll add it to the lesson plan.’ In this article, we’re going to take a closer look at talk partners as a teaching tool.

What is it?

Thankfully, talk partners has a fantastically self-explanatory title: it’s when children partner up (though it can be more than just two) and discuss a topic. The technique is sometimes called ‘Think, pair, share’ instead, because it’s often a three-stage process: first, the teacher poses a question or talking point; next, the children partner up and talk about it; finally, some children share what they were discussing with the whole class and their teacher.

It’s usually very quick and happens multiple times a lesson. Most commonly, teachers specify a time limit for the talking section: 30 seconds to a couple of minutes is typical.

The strategy is generally used during the teacher input part of a lesson, but you can set it going at any time you think it would be beneficial.

Positives

The power of talk partners is that it gets children involved and engaged in their learning. The biggest benefits I found as a teacher were around building confidence: children who were unsure about speaking in class could

discuss their ideas with a peer in a less pressured situation, which helped them to articulate their thinking. Even if the less confident child wasn’t the one to share the pair’s idea to the class, they still always got the benefit of being more involved in the discussion.

Another, unexpected, outcome was the increase in thinking time; before using talk partners I often fell into the trap of not giving my pupils enough time to think. Properly planning to use talk partners ensured more

“The power of talk partners is that it gets children involved and engaged in their learning”

thinking time, which led to more articulate answers and better engagement for all.

The technique also gave me, and the other adults in the room, an amazing opportunity to observe and listen to the children doing something incredibly important: talking.

Obstacles

There are two main challenges that can arise with talk partners. First, the relationships between the children; partnerships can get stale, and some children won’t like talking to particular classmates. One child might also be too dominant in the pair, which negates some of the positive effects for the other. You’ll need to monitor your talk partners as they work together. The conversations they have need to have a

balance and they need to be constructive. If they aren’t, change the pairings.

Secondly, how you choose to use the strategy can hinder more than it helps. Two problems I encountered when I first started using the approach were planning to use the strategy at the wrong time and letting the talking go on for too long.

And remember, talk partners is there to help the *children* get involved. This means you may need to adapt the strategy for pupils who use non-verbal

communication and/or have additional support needs. You must ensure *all* children in your class can benefit from some part of the process every time.

How to do it

It’s very important to introduce talk partners correctly. It’s a common approach, which can give a false sense that it’s already an embedded practice. However, even if your class used talk partners with their previous teachers, you need to introduce, model and reinforce how it will be used in your classroom.

The first time you want the class to use talk partners, choose one of your more confident pupils and model it with them. Ask another child (or your TA if you have one), to pose a question to you, then model a short discussion



with your volunteer.

Focus on being clear, sticking to the point and listening to the other person; all the things you want the class to be doing.

After you’ve modelled talk partnering, get the class to work together to develop some talk partner ground rules that you can display in your classroom (see panel).

Who goes with whom is arguably the most important thing when it comes to using the talk partners strategy.

In my experience, and in that of fellow teachers, you should generate pairings randomly and change them often. I mixed them up every week, and I’d certainly recommend not keeping the same partners for more than two weeks.

However, I would also suggest creating your talk partner pairings after school, so you can make any small changes as needed without prying eyes...

Once you’ve picked your



partners, it's time to plan. The best moment to have the children talk to their partners is after you pose an open-ended question, the purpose of which is to stimulate more conversation and different interpretations.

Be clear with the children that there is no right or wrong answer, as this helps to alleviate some anxiety and promote discussion. When I started, I found it helpful to include the times and questions on my lesson plan, but after a while, it became more instinctive.

It's quite common to ask children to use talk partners a few times in a lesson. When planning the lesson, decide which key questions you're going to ask and when these will be followed up by talk partners. In my experience, three times in a lesson was about right.

As for how long each instance takes, you want to keep the balance between maintaining the pace of your

lesson and giving enough time for it to be valuable to the children. Ideally, one minute for discussion and then two minutes to share with the class. Another tip: put a timer on your board!

Children sharing their ideas is just as important as talking about them with their partner, and there are different ways that you can do this:

- Select a few pairs to share their ideas with the whole class.

- Randomly select pairs to share with the rest of their table (you can join a different table each time).
- Ask the children to write their key points on a whiteboard to hold up and share with you.

However you do it, heavily praise whoever shares. Fostering a healthy attitude to sharing ideas and being respectful of others' thoughts will do wonders for your classroom ethos.

GROUND RULES

DO

- Listen to the other person
- Make sure both people get a chance to say something
- Be respectful of other people's ideas

DON'T

- Look bored when the other person speaks
- Talk about something completely unrelated
- Let your partner do all the work

Speaking of praise, make sure it is constructive and meaningful during every step ("well done" and "good listening" are neither). Try, "Artem, I saw you were really listening to Anna while she was talking, because you were looking at her and asking questions. Great work!" Or, "Matias, I love how confidently you just spoke in front of the class. You and your partner worked hard in organising those thoughts."

Talk partners can be one of the easiest and most useful tools you have as a teacher. Just remember to plan when to use it, provide open-ended questions, and change your talk partners often. Involve yourself in the discussions, and praise, praise, praise. **TP**



Jack Dabell is Education Advisor at Tapestry, the online learning

journal, and a former primary school teacher. He also writes for the Foundation Stage Forum.

 tapestry.info

Poetry in primary: WHAT WORKS

Poetry is often overlooked in the curriculum.

Charlotte Hacking asks why this is, and what we can do to change it

In January 2023, the CLPE and Macmillan Children's Books (MCB) came together in a new partnership to learn about poetry in primary schools. This began with a survey aimed at primary teachers to gain a picture of poetry practice and provision.

80 per cent of teachers told us that they thought poetry was a significant part of a literacy curriculum. As positive as this sounds, it still means that one in five schools didn't see poetry as a significant part of their English curriculum.

poetry is, what it can be and by whom it's written. It also limits poetry as a free choice for independent reading or reading for pleasure.

Previous research (*Teachers as Readers*, Cremin, et al., 2007; *Poetry in Schools*, Ofsted, 2007) showed that too limited a range of poets was known by primary phase teachers.

The responses from our survey showed that this has not really moved on in the 16 years since these two reports were published.

Aside from Valerie Bloom, Julia Donaldson and Joseph

teachers not valuing the importance of poetry.

- Poetry not being prominent enough in the national curriculum or assessment tests (SATs).
- National or school curriculum being weighted to fiction and non-fiction.
- A need to prioritise assessment preparation.

The project

Following the survey, we embarked on The Big Amazing Poetry Project. This was a training programme for 30 schools that completed the survey. It specifically addressed some of the issues brought to light and demonstrated the value of poetry in the primary curriculum.

The project was developed and led in partnership with two leading children's poets – Valerie Bloom and Matt Goodfellow.

The schools involved received a free poetry library from Macmillan to support them in creating create physical and joyful spaces to share poetry.

On each day, we introduced poets, poems, and teaching approaches and ideas that teachers could easily take back and replicate in their classrooms. We also provided texts and resources to facilitate them

in using and applying what they had learned during their training.

One of the most instantaneous and effective ideas was simply exposing children to poetry regularly. Teachers were introduced to a wide range of poetry using an approach called poetry papering. This involves pinning up poems by different poets around the learning space, exposing the teachers as well as children to poems and poets they had not met before. This approach gives more choice and voice in

“There are many perceived barriers to the regular teaching of poetry”

Teachers reported that children really enjoy hearing, writing and performing poetry. However, they also told us that poetry is read aloud less than once a week in 93 per cent of schools. In nearly 20 per cent of the schools, children never have the opportunity to hear a poem read aloud.

The survey results also showed that schools have limited poetry book stock. In 79 per cent of classrooms, book corners contained fewer than 10 poetry books, and in 44 per cent of classrooms, the figure was five or less. This is drastically low if we want to create an environment where children can see a range of poetry that gives them a broad perspective of what

Coelho, who has come to prominence in his role as Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024, the names of the top nine poets listed by respondents matched those in the *Teachers as Readers* survey from 2006–2007.

We also learned that there are many perceived barriers to the regular teaching of poetry. The most commonly cited were:

- Lack of time, confidence, knowledge and/or training.
- Lack of access to poets, poems and poetry texts.
- Finding it difficult to identify the grammar and writing expectations in poetry activities.
- The SLT and/or other



selecting poems of personal significance. Discussing these poems allowed a greater depth of response, empathy and understanding.

The teachers were given a copy of Macmillan's *Big Amazing Poetry Book* (tinyurl.com/tp-BigPoetry) and introduced to CLPE's bank of poetry videos (clpe.org.uk/poetry/videos). This had immediate impact on children's engagement and enthusiasm for the work of particular poets.

Teachers and children tracked their poetry journeys over the course of the entire project. They recorded their developing thoughts and feelings about poetry, as well as sharing poets and poems they had been introduced to, and whose work they had particularly enjoyed.

The impact of this was evident in every school. All the teachers felt better able to provide their pupils with a wider range of poetry both in lessons

and for independent reading.

When children were exposed to poetry, and when they could access it for their independent reading, their engagement with poetry and the time they spent reading it independently increased.

Valerie Bloom's session focused on responding to poetry through performance.

After the workshop period, the schools shadowed CLPE's Poetry Award, the CLiPPA. For three weeks, teachers incorporated a focused poetry unit into their curriculum, drawing on the teaching plans and video resources provided by CLPE.

As part of the scheme, the children learned poems from one of the collections shortlisted for the award and recorded performances of these to submit to the judging panel.

We found that the performance aspect of the award particularly engaged the children.

Another important part of the training was exploring effective approaches to writing poetry with children. Valerie Bloom introduced the teachers to a range of different forms that children could easily explore and replicate for themselves.

Matt Goodfellow's session looked at how to encourage children to write in their own voices and about their own lives. This proved particularly impactful for both teachers and children. They learned how important it is to be able to express themselves, their lives and experiences through the freedom of writing. The children also found it satisfying to write about things that interested them.

Evaluation of the project showed how much the course had developed

MY RECOMMENDED READS

- *Blow a Kiss, Catch A Kiss* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Nicola Killen: A wonderful example of the joy of early play with rhyme and song.
- *Caterpillar Cake* by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Krina Patel-Sage: The perfect introduction to poetry for children at the earliest stages of reading.
- *Marshmallow Clouds* by Ted Kooser and Connie Wanek, illustrated by Richard Jones: A celebration of the natural world and the power of poetry to express our connections and experiences with the world around us.
- *Bright Bursts of Colour* by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Aleksei Bitscoff: From the genuinely funny to the deeply emotive, this is a collection with something for every child to enjoy.
- *Stars with Flaming Tails* by Valerie Bloom: A feast of poetry from one of the country's most highly regarded children's poets, with a specific section focused on poetic forms.
- *Hot Like Fire and Other Poems* by Valerie Bloom, illustrated by Debbie Lush: A rich range of poems, some in Jamaican Creole, some in standard English, which bring light and life to diverse aspects of everyday life.
- *Let's Chase Stars Together* by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Oriol Vidal. A poignant, powerful and uplifting collection, that showcases the power of poetry to help people work through experiences and express emotions.
- *The Big Amazing Poetry Book*, edited by Gaby Morgan, illustrated by Chris Riddell: A brilliant introduction to 52 fantastic poets, packed with different styles of poetry from a wide range of voices.

teachers' subject knowledge and changed their perception of how poetry could (and should) be taught. The most significant impact was on children who had previously been seen as not engaging in literacy sessions, those who had previously been seen as needing additional support, and disadvantaged pupils.

Teachers also felt empowered to go back to their schools to deliver CPD to their staff teams based on the subject knowledge and activities they'd encountered as part of the programme, developing sustainability in the wider system.

Get involved

We've combined what we learned from the initial survey and the research project in a new edition of our *Poetry: What We Know Works* booklet (tinyurl.com/tp-PoetryWorks).

We'll also be continuing to provide poetry CPD for schools on our poetry course

in association with Macmillan and led by award-winning poet Kate Wakeling (tinyurl.com/tp-Wakeling). Schools can also register to shadow the 2024 CLiPPA (tinyurl.com/tp-ClippaShadowing) and be in with a chance for their children to perform on the stage of the National Theatre with this year's shortlisted poets. **TP**



Charlotte Hacking is the learning and programme director at the Centre

for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). She led and developed the CLPE's Big Amazing Poetry Project, designed to highlight the importance of poetry as a vehicle for improving children's engagement in and enjoyment of reading and creative writing in schools.

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3 REACH NEW HEIGHTS

Oracy is a crucial skill for advancement in any area; well-crafted communication cuts through social barriers to allow for genuine social mobility. Regardless of their chosen path, your students will need strong oracy skills to progress through life and reach their full potential, whatever that means for them.



4 ENCOURAGE EMPATHY

As well as helping your students express themselves, oracy skills will help them interpret what others have to say. By nurturing oracy, you're facilitating active listening. Naturally, this helps your students become more engaged, empathetic, culturally aware young people, able to better understand others and the world around them.



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Empowering your students with strong oracy skills is essential to smooth transitions through education. Students who confidently speak and actively listen are more able to express themselves well in new environments, seek out clubs, converse with teachers, and make new friends. They are therefore much more likely to have a successful and enjoyable start to each new stage.

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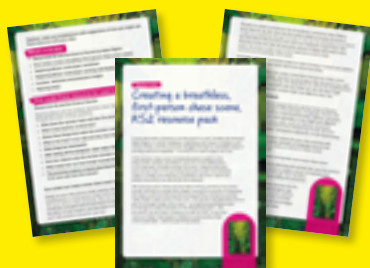
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Z*o and the Forest of Secrets* is an exciting fantasy adventure set in the lush natural landscape of the Caribbean island of Trinidad. It's ideal for readers aged nine and up who are fans of Katherine Rundell's *The Explorer* or the *Percy Jackson* series. The story features two children with different secrets who work together to battle strange creatures and dangerous adults who are after them and their gifts. The heroine, Zo Joseph is stuck at a remote seaside village. She's been forced to move there from the city with her mother's new family, after her parents' divorce.



Zo and the Invisible Island, the sequel to Zo and the Forest of Secrets is out now.

She's missing her father more than ever as he's out of the country for work. But Zo has a plan: she'll pretend to be lost in the forest so that her dad comes to find her.

Her strategy soon backfires though, and she finds herself in the forest being chased by robotic gnats, smart-mouthed Anansi spiders and a dinosaur-like creature she calls the Flesh-skinner.

Now, Zo has to figure out how to survive and get back to her family. On the way, she rescues a boy, Adri Khan, who is in Trinidad from New York to celebrate his mother's cancer remission. Adri has no memory of the weeks he and his parents have been missing from the village since their boat capsized at sea.

When Zo discovers she has the ability to fall into Adri's memories through touch, she hides it, not sure what his mind can handle.

But is Adri actually the one keeping secrets? After all, he has a broken key card for the abandoned research centre somewhere in the hills. The centre – a place locals called 'the Zoo' – was run by a secretive council who carried out experiments on animals... and maybe even humans. Adri thinks his parents are still in the centre and wants to find them. Zo just wants to get out.

As Zo and Adri fight to escape the Flesh-skinner, the insect-like X, and Yara, a powerful shapeshifter with secrets of her own, they must decide if they can trust each other and work together, to find their way back home.

FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A FIRST-PERSON CHASE SCENE

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CHARACTER'S BODY

What physical reactions are they having to being chased? How do these reactions change as the chase continues?

USE THE FIVE SENSES

What is your character seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching (or being touched by) on the chase?

CREATE STAGES

Think of the chase as having different stages. Have something change and become more intense in each stage: whether in the setting, events and actions, or your character's feelings and reactions.

ADD OBSTACLES AND SURPRISES

In addition to what's chasing them, what other challenges, blocks, surprises, or twists

does your character face as they're trying to get away?

PLAY WITH HOPE

Allow your character to have moments in the chase where things seem hopeful and they have near misses and near escapes, followed by events becoming more intense or taking a surprising turn. This will increase our sense of tension as readers.

Extract from

Chapter 4 – Run, pages 42-43

Zo and the Forest of Secrets

Here I used sound (what Zo is hearing) to create a sense of anticipation and fear.

Create a worthy opponent: someone or something smart enough, scary enough, or with interesting talents and abilities, to make the chase exciting. In this case, giving the beast a personified element ('a scream that seemed almost human') adds to the dread that Zo feels.

In addition to what's behind her, there are obstacles in Zo's way that she has to get around to escape what's chasing her. This makes the chase more exciting.

Zo keeps thinking of ways to escape, and this gives her and the reader hope that she might do so. We all need hope to keep going.

I turned and sprinted in the opposite direction, past the hill, into the forest. Behind me, I could hear the scrabble of sliding dirt and stones, the crack and crash of trees. Hopefully, the undergrowth would slow it down. I held the torch in front of me, jumping over roots, and ducking under branches. I didn't dare look back. I could hear it somewhere behind me: a repeating snarl that started low then got louder and higher, until it was a scream that seemed almost human. I pushed myself to run faster, ignoring the knot in my side.

My backpack hooked on some bushes as I scrambled through them. It dragged me backwards. I tried to pull free. I could hear the Flesh-skinner getting closer. I could smell it: a thick swampy rotten-egg smell. I yanked myself forward, but the backpack wouldn't budge. It was me or this bag. I had to leave it behind. I squeezed out of it and kept running.

Sweat blinded me. My legs whipped past each other. I stumbled but kept going. Any second, that thing might reach out and grab me. The thought alone gave me wings. I dashed between the trees. Did I have time to swing myself up into their branches? What if it could climb? There was no time to stop and find out. I kept running. Trees rushed past me. The ground started rising, slowly at first, then more steeply. I gasped for air. I felt the beast fall back slightly, but it was still close. I forced myself to go even faster.

I chose these more specific and dramatic verbs – 'jumping', 'ducking' – to create more intensity in Zo's movements, rather than using 'running' every time, to describe what she's doing.

Zo is already having uncomfortable physical reactions to the chase (a 'knot in [her] side') that make us nervous about whether she'll make it. Your characters' weaknesses and vulnerabilities are important for helping us connect to and root for them.

Even though she doesn't fully see what's chasing her, she can smell it. By dropping details from the five senses throughout the chase, I create a sense of dread in Zo and the reader about what's after her.

Zo's physical reactions are more intense now at this stage of the chase (she can barely breathe). There is tension between hope (the beast has fallen back slightly) and danger ('but it was still close'). This sets us up for the major twist that comes next! An exciting chase has the element of surprise. For more, check out *Zo and the Forest of Secrets*.

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Premier Education launches wraparound childcare guide for schools

If, like many primary schools, you're looking to establish wraparound care at your school, you may be wondering where to start. That's why Premier Education has developed *The Ultimate Guide to Wraparound Childcare*, a comprehensive but easy-to-digest e-book that covers all of the key considerations.

As well as covering topics such as staffing, booking, planning, catering and administration, the Guide has best practice at its heart. Alongside a wealth of practical help and support, it doesn't lose sight of ensuring positive outcomes for every child. Search 'Premier Education Ultimate Guide to Wraparound Childcare' to download the guide today.

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with teachers Helen Morgan
and Rebecca Dallas



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Telling THE STORY

Rachel Clarke breaks down Ofsted's recent English subject report and recommends ways to tackle the areas of weakness it highlights

Ofsted's recent English subject report, *Telling the Story*, landed in our inboxes in early March. Based on research visits to 50 representative schools (25 primary, 25 secondary), the report evaluates some of the common strengths and weaknesses of English teaching across the country.

There are several areas for suggested improvement including: handwriting; spoken language; the texts used for English lessons; reading aloud to children; and staff training.

The good bits

But let's start by celebrating the areas of success. First off, we can see that English is at the heart of curriculum across the country. This is great to hear and shows how schools appreciate the importance of English.

Next up, phonics. Thanks to the hard work of teachers and school leaders in addressing the requirements of the national curriculum, the situation here is a good one. The report points to the focus on systematic synthetic phonics as the main approach for teaching young children to read, and notes that the Phonics Screening Test scores have increased since the test was introduced in 2012.

All the schools included in the report teach pupils to read using a consistent systematic synthetic phonics programme. Most teach phonics daily to all pupils from the beginning of

Reception to the end of KS1. Pupils in all these schools practise word reading using decodable books that match the sounds.

We should certainly feel proud of ourselves for achieving such consistent practice and ensuring so many good outcomes for the children we teach.

Room for improvement

The report does note that some children struggle with phonics from the beginning and quickly fall behind.

Schools can implement a three-pronged strategy to address this issue. Firstly, teachers need to make ongoing assessments as they teach, and note which children are not secure with the grapheme-phoneme knowledge being taught. They then need to arrange immediate catch-up for children who are struggling. Time must be provided for them to revisit and practise the specific grapheme-phoneme knowledge they need to secure. Finally, all teachers, including those in KS2,

should be fully trained in teaching phonics so that they are equipped to meet the needs of children who may struggle.

Help with handwriting

The report suggests that not enough time is given to developing fluency in handwriting; children are thinking about letter formation rather than using it automatically. This takes up cognitive space which adds to the demands of writing.

My advice to schools is to continue with Early Years fine motor skills, for example creating pegboard patterns, threading beads onto laces and using spray bottles to build grip strength. Then, during Year 1, take time to ensure that all children develop an efficient pencil grip and that they know how to sit at the table correctly with their paper at a comfortable angle. It's particularly important to teach handwriting directly; it shouldn't be used as an independent activity as this is where formation issues slip in.

Speaking up

While schools understand that spoken language underpins pupils' reading and writing development, the *Telling the Story* report shows that they are not necessarily clear about how to teach it, and that in many instances the national curriculum requirements for this aspect

*“English is at the heart
of the curriculum
across the country”*



of English are not in place. Furthermore, they suggest that oral composition activities take place less frequently than they should.

If teaching spoken language is an area of weakness for you, begin by increasing your familiarity with the national curriculum objectives for spoken language, and the non-statutory guidance that accompanies them. *The Progression in Spoken Language* document created by Primary English is a useful tool to use for this (tinyurl.com/tp-Progression).

You can also visit the Voice21 website (voice21.org) for ideas about how to teach the different aspects of spoken language.

Finally, make sure you build oral composition into writing teaching sequences: if children can't say it, they can't write it.

Selecting texts

Most schools teach English through texts, using these as models for the writing that children will create. The *Telling the Story* report suggests that teachers should choose texts for their merits

as texts to teach English rather than because they link with the broader curriculum. This is not far from the advice I give to the schools I work with, and which goes something like this: if the curriculum-linked text is high quality and exemplifies the written features you want your children to learn about, use it! If the text links with your wider curriculum but is at the wrong pitch or lacks the depth and richness you are looking for, choose a different text.

Reading for pleasure

Primary schools are working hard to ensure that reading for pleasure is put at the centre of their provision, and this is acknowledged in the *Telling the Story* report. It explains that story times are a regular feature in Reception and KS1 classrooms, that children enjoy and value these sessions, but that in KS2, despite having a place on timetables, teachers

frequently run out of time to read to their children.

This is certainly something that I encounter in my advisory work. One suggestion I've made to schools is to help secure regular story times in KS2 by moving story time to a part of the day where it is less likely to be missed off. Immediately after lunch time can work quite well.

I also suggest using assemblies to read a short story or book to the children.

Keeping up with CPD

Continuing professional development and training came through as an area for development. The report notes that teachers in Reception and KS1 do receive training in phonics. Beyond this, the main type of English training tends to be on moderation of writing, and teachers make little mention of the English associations or the English hubs. The report authors suggest that as a result of this there is a need for training to improve subject knowledge. I've

CPD TIPS

- Engage with your local English hub and make use of their expertise.
- Consider an individual or school membership to at least one of the English associations. The UKLA and National Literacy trust are good places to start.
- Make contact with your local Independent English Consultant. There are lots of us about, with many years of expertise in training teachers in English.
- Create a staff CPD library. Fill it with books about English teaching. Staff could read these at their leisure, or you could use them to create your own CPD sessions.

provided some of my own CPD recommendations in the panel above.

In this piece I've covered just a few of the areas included in the report.


There are plenty more to consider, including spelling, teaching comprehension effectively, reading fluency, and vocabulary.

The report prompts us to consider how we are teaching English in our schools and settings. Not to create a tick list in preparation for inspection, but to evaluate our practice and consider what changes we may want to make to ensure that all children achieve success. **TP**



Rachel Clarke has 28 years' experience as a primary educator.

She is celebrating her 10th year as the director of Primary English, an independent consultancy working with primary teachers across the world.

 @PrimaryEnglish





AVA GOES GREEN

Turn children's climate fear into climate fun with book 1 from the 'MASC to the eco-beat' series. This lower key stage 2 performing and creative arts resource, by Rona D. Linklater, highlights the effects of environmental pollution. Designed to galvanise children into action, the novel music and stories will encourage them to help protect our ecosystem and make a difference. It will also teach all children how to make music together and develop their creative writing and communication skills.

Why choose this resource?

- ✓ **A unique fusion** of fiction and nonfiction, delivered through an integration of novel music, art, stories and creative tasks, will captivate and allow children to relate to the characters or creatures, such as Kitti kittiwake and Toyesh, the little turtle, explaining about the dangers they face from climate change due to human pollution.
- ✓ **QR codes** in the book allow access, via my website, to free music accompaniment WAV files for the novel songs, and free instrumental parts for classroom percussion. Ideal for music- non-music specialists, peripatetic sessions or out-of-hours clubs. (*Scan QRclip*)



- ✓ **Stunning illustrations** by Stu McLellan, through agent Beehive Illustration, create a magical world to stimulate children's imagination. Differentiated creative activities provide a fun reinforcement of the learning through interaction and inclusive

participation for children of all abilities. This approach aims to encourage experiential learning, and develop communication, confidence and wellbeing.

- ✓ **Teaching information**—Throughout this book, children are encouraged to take responsibility for developing their own ideas and those of their peers. (Five+ books recommended for class use.) While there are opportunities, through basic and extension activities, for the teacher to adjust the 'Let's Create' tasks to suit the individual needs of their children, the focus of these tasks has been linked to the primary grading system assessment statements. See the Teacher – Parent – Leader Guides from my website for suggested objectives and outcomes.

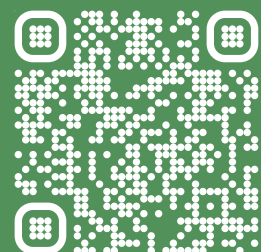
- ✓ "There is no more powerful message in the 21st century than climate change. There is no more powerful vehicle for communicating and delivering such a message to children than the performing and creative arts." So...

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Published by Templar Publishing, 2022

The Ever-Changing Earth

Grahame Baker-Smith's gorgeous picture book about the evolution of our planet provides young readers with plenty of food for thought

KAREN HART

'**K**ûn loves dinosaurs. They once lived where Kûn now lives. Millions of years ago the sky boomed with the wild beat of Pterosaur wings, and the roar of Tyrannosaurus Rex shook the mountains. In forests cool and ancient, strange birds opened beaks stippled with tiny rows of teeth, filling the branches with the first birdsong.'

The Ever-Changing Earth is a beautiful book, in both language and illustration. Grahame Baker-Smith takes the reader on a magical journey through the incredible story of Earth's

evolution; introducing us to its extinct creatures, buried oceans, and frozen layers along the way. The journey ultimately leads us to Solveig, a young girl on a small island, warmed by the heat at the centre of the Earth. And although she lives many miles from a young boy named Kûn on a continent far away, she's still connected to him, as everywhere on Earth is to everywhere else...

This is a great book to use with KS1 that can take you way beyond literacy activities and inspire art, geography, science and music projects.

The language employed here is poetic and carefully chosen to create a mood of mystery and awe – perfect for using as a base for poetry/descriptive writing activities, and the extraordinary creatures and cosmic activity that are shown throughout, are ideal for sparking the imagination in connection with artwork projects.

This is a book that covers a surprising amount of ground, with, importantly, plenty to captivate the imaginations of a whole class – a really lovely book from a Kate Greenaway award-winning author.





Maybe they could have one really long arm for reaching objects on high shelves, or super-bouncy kangaroo legs making it really quick to bounce to school. Encourage the children to be as imaginative as they can.

Activities

My evolved self

Working on A4 paper, ask pupils to think about the ideas talked about in class for inspiration, before drawing a picture of their evolved self. Give some starter ideas for things to include here, such as skin that can magically camouflage, extra eyes, ears, and noses, and longer or stronger limbs. Maybe even lots more teeth!

Ask volunteers to share their work with the class before handing out lined paper for pupils to write either a short description, a couple of sentences, or a few single words copied from the board (depending on age and ability) to accompany their drawing. Write interesting and relevant vocabulary on the board to help pupils along.

Display completed work to showcase pupils' ideas and imagination.



Talking about the book

After sharing the book with your class, talk about the following points:

- If dinosaurs shared the planet with people today, how do you think we would get along? Would we have to make sure all the dinosaurs lived in their own area – far away from people? After all, we do share the planet with dangerous animals today; lions, alligators and bears are just some of the animals that can be dangerous if we get too close. Can the class think of any other examples?
- The book talks about creatures evolving; does anyone know what is meant by the term evolution? One explanation could be: 'Evolution is the name given to the way living things – animals, plants, birds and insects, change very gradually over many generations to become better suited to the place where they live', e.g., many moths and bugs have evolved to look like the plants they live on – being hard to spot stops them being eaten. Another example here could be stick insects. Can the class think of any other examples?
- Can the class think of any ways they could evolve that would make their life easier? Ask for some suggestions.

Looking at fantastic sea creatures

Before starting this activity, prepare a large poster-sized: a simple outline drawing of the bottom of the ocean – blue paper, seaweed, some shells, a few jellyfish shapes etc.

Look again at the section of the book that shows the vibrant, complex undersea world. Talk about the different types of sea creature you can see. Have some extra images of unusual undersea creatures ready to show the class. Some good ones to introduce here are angler fish, sea angels and the flapjack octopus (tinyurl.com/tp-DeepSea).

Ask pupils to design their own fantastical sea creature, drawing it

on A5 paper. For anyone struggling to get started, explain how we often give creatures names that connect to something they look like, such as the blob fish or the hammerhead shark. Maybe they could imagine a creature that looks like a fruit or vegetable – a banana fish, or a mushroom shark. Ask pupils to think of a suitable name for their sea creature.

Next, ask the children to carefully cut their creatures out before taking turns gluing them to the under-the-sea poster. Display the poster to encourage imaginative ideas for other activities.

Class story

For a bit of fun, close your eyes and without looking, point to three of the sea creatures on your undersea collage to use as characters in a class story.

Take it further → → →

LOOKING AT NATURE

Start this activity with the fact that plant life makes up approximately 80 per cent of life on our planet.

Ask pupils if they think plants are important to us and why. Some pointers could be:

- They release oxygen through their leaves for us to breathe.
- Most of our medicines come from plants.

- Plant life is the habitat of many animals, birds and insects.
- People, animals, birds and insects use plants for food.
- Plants are an important part of the food cycle e.g., the little bugs that live on plants are eaten by bigger animals.
- People use plants as building materials.
- Plants can provide shelter in the rain or on hot days.

Next, take your class to a natural

outdoors space where they can see different types of leaves, trees, seed pods, grasses etc. Let pupils investigate the different types of plant life they see, taking some examples back to the classroom where these can be looked at in more detail.

Back in the classroom, pass the objects around, asking pupils to suggest words to describe how each one looks, feels, smells and sounds when you crinkle it or snap it. Write words on the board, with a column for each object.

Take this further by asking pupils to



contribution, this will really make it a whole-class collaboration.

Type the story up for your class and make it into a special book to share with parents and carers.

Writing a sailor's diary entry

Begin this exercise by talking about the meaning of the word 'extinction'. An explanation for KS1 could be: 'The complete disappearance of a type of animal (species) from Earth'. Another word to introduce here is 'endangered' explaining this as: 'Any type of plant or animal that is in danger of disappearing forever'. Talk about reasons some plants and animals could become endangered or extinct e.g., changes to their habitat, too much hunting or pollution.

Next, introduce pupils to the dodo, showing pupils a picture of the way we think it would have looked. The National History Museum website contains some really good information and pictures to use here (tinyurl.com/tp-Dodo).

Go on to explain how the dodo was a big, flightless bird. It was a bit bigger than a turkey, with bluey grey feathers and a long, hooked beak, small wings that were no good for flying, thick yellow legs and a tuft of curly feathers on its bottom.

The dodo was first seen by Portuguese sailors in about 1507. Can pupils imagine what an astonishing sight the dodo must have appeared to them? Ask pupils to imagine they are a Portuguese sailor in 1507, writing about seeing a dodo for the first time in their diary – explain what a diary is for those who may be unsure.

As a class, talk about how you would describe the bird, writing suggestions on the board for everyone to use in their work – big, yellow hooked beak etc. Go on to talk about

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Wild is the Wind* by Grahame Baker-Smith
- ❖ *The Rythm of the Rain* by Grahame Baker-Smith
- ❖ *Once Upon a Raindrop: The Story of Water* by James Carter
- ❖ *Up in the Canopy: Explore the Rainforest, Layer by Layer* by James Aldred
- ❖ *Our Planet* by Matt Whyman, with a foreword by Sir David Attenborough

what the sailors might have thought when they first saw the dodo. Were they surprised? Shocked by its strange appearance? Did it make them laugh?

Use a template for pupils needing a bit of help, for example: *Today I saw a dodo bird for the first time. It had... I thought it looked...*

Finish the activity by asking children to draw a picture of a dodo to accompany their diary entry.

Younger pupils can concentrate on thinking of appropriate words to describe a dodo as part of a class contribution, going on to draw a picture of the bird and copying some words they choose to describe their picture from the board.

The emphasis here should be on thinking of suitable descriptive words, extending vocabulary and letter forming or writing practice. **TP**



Karen Hart is an independent drama teacher, author and freelance writer.

f @Karen.Journalist

draw a picture of each object in their workbooks, writing their three favourite descriptive words next to each one. Depending on ability and age, differentiate this by changing the number of words required. Try to leave enough time at the end of this activity to have pupils share their chosen words with the class. This is an activity that can produce some great results, with children exploring a wide range of imaginative vocabulary inspired by having physical objects to interact with.

CARROT TOP PLANTS

This activity never fails to amaze KS1 children. All you need are some carrot tops roughly one inch thick, a shallow tray or saucers and a jug of water.

Let pupils help by pouring water into your container to a depth of roughly one inch, before placing the carrot tops into the tray. Place the container on a sunny shelf or windowsill and change the water daily – letting pupils take turns to do this. Roots and lovely feathery leaves should begin to grow in about three days. You can transfer your

carrot tops to a container of soil after a few weeks where they will continue to grow. Explain how these plants will not produce new carrots because the tap root (the carrot) has been removed, so only the leaves will continue to grow.

This is a great practical activity that gives really speedy results and demonstrates nature's way of forever striving to grow and regenerate. Pupils can draw a picture of the growing carrot leaves every three days and measure the foliage, noting this in their workbooks to record their carrot top's growth.

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love



Sounds Good! Discover 50 Instruments

*by Hans Konnecke, illus. Ole Konnecke,
trans. Melody Shaw*

(£16.99 HB, Gecko Press)

From snakes playing glockenspiels to vultures with harps, the creatures in this appealing hardback are keen to share the sounds their instruments can make. Just click on the QR links to hear original music for each spread.

The featured instruments come from a range of musical traditions and all corners of the globe. Attentive readers will spot playful connections between the sound files and the book. The pictured bee can be heard buzzing around the cello, for example, and despite stern authorial instructions, that noisy organist can't resist some jazz.

Ole Konnecke's concise and dryly humorous text includes well-chosen facts and feels like chatting to a friend. Beautifully designed and illustrated, *Sounds Good!* really makes an impact, and will be enjoyed by the whole school.



What Rosa Brought

*by Jacob Sager Weinstein,
illus. Eliza Wheel*

(£12.99 HB, HarperCollins)

In 1930s Vienna, life for Jewish families is getting tougher every day. The Nazis have forced Rosa's parents to close their shop, but her dad is working secretly. Can they survive the storm, or should they abandon everything to make a new life, far away?

Their visa comes with heartbreaking decisions to make – and they aren't about which dress to pack. Grandma isn't allowed to travel, but her love can. And in the end, that's all Rosa takes with her to America.

In this important and affecting picture book for Year 2 up, Rosa's son tells her true story in ways that help us connect and understand. Discovering the reality of war for just one child prompts questions about the bigger picture, and conversations about past and present will ensue.



Ava Goes Green (Music Art Stories Create: MASC to the Eco-Beat 1)

by Rona D. Linklater, illus. Stu McLellan

(£12.99, Troubador Publishing)

What do you do with your rubbish on a picnic? When Ava throws a plastic bottle into the bushes, the scene is set for a journey of discovery in this cross-curricular exploration of environmental impact and responsibility.

Four original and engagingly-illustrated stories explore the impact of rubbish on birds and marine life. As she listens and learns, Ava becomes an advocate for the environment. Each story is followed by questions to reinforce learning and prompt discussion, and the book includes related music, art and writing activities.

Ava Goes Green is aimed at LKS2 children taking part in guided group activities. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable adults will find plenty to draw on for lesson planning, and further materials are available online.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED**

RESOURCES

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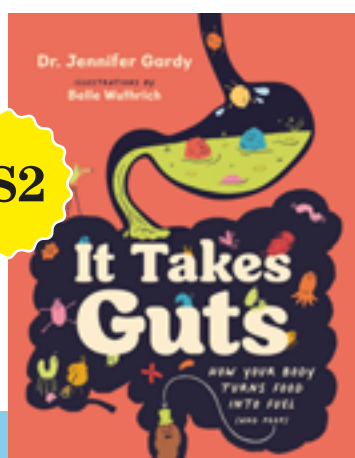
BUILD WORD POWER

Word Whoosh, from Plazoom, is designed to clarify and extend children's understanding of tier 2 words from Reception to Y6+, enabling them to make more ambitious and

accurate language choices when speaking and writing. Each resource pack explores six words through a series of four mini-lessons: read and visualise, associate, understand, and define and master (based on the Frayer model).

Find out more at bit.ly/PlzWords

KS2



It Takes Guts

by Dr. Jennifer Gardy, illus. Belle Wuthrich

(£9.99, Greystone Kids)

Gut microbiomes are in the news these days, but do you really know how your body changes food into fuel?

Friendly, approachable and packed with amazing facts, *It Takes Guts* follows a delicious meal on its long and complex journey through the 'wonderful world of guts'. Correct biological terminology (and Canadian spelling) is used throughout, but child-friendly explanations and clear in-context use increase accessibility, and every chapter is followed by a summary to highlight key points.

It Takes Guts will be enjoyed by confident readers from about eight years old, whose ability to tackle the vocabulary will grow alongside their fascination for the subject. The stylish illustrations are full of humour, and help to extend and cement our understanding of the text.

Taking Shelter: A Hugh Durnit Mystery

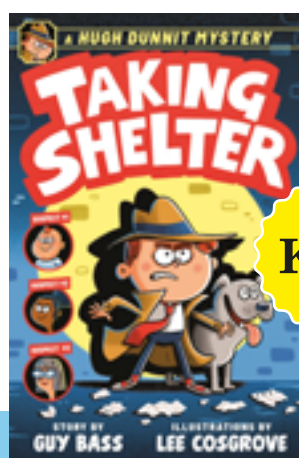
by Guy Bass, illus. Lee Cosgrove

(£6.99, Andersen Press)

Hugh Durnit's homework has been shredded. The evidence points to canine involvement, but Hugh is convinced there's another explanation. There has to be. Now he's finally got his rescue dog, Shelter, he doesn't want to lose her. And why accept the obvious, when your Detective Alter-Ego comes up with so many other (hare-brained) scenarios?

Written in short chapters, *Taking Shelter* is illustrated with black-and-white line drawings that blossom into graphic-novel interludes when Hugh's imagination takes over. As obstinate as he is imaginative, Hugh's know-it-all persona is softened by how much – and how often – he gets things wrong, and this light-hearted book will delight emerging readers who enjoy everyday absurdity and wordplay.

KS2



Meet the author

FAVOURITE FUNNY MAN GUY BASS DROPPED BY FOR A CHAT



What was primary school like for you?

I was shyer than a barn owl on a sunny day, which made school a bit challenging. But it

was still an inspiring experience. I got to do lots of creative writing and art, which I loved. I remember winning a class writing competition. I suspect my teacher rewarded me for vastness of word count rather than quality of content, but it did wonders for my confidence and was genuinely formative when it came to believing in myself as a writer.

How do characters like Hugh Durnit take shape in your mind?

I wanted to write a noirish detective story and fill it to bursting with wordplay and puns. I was too nervous about plotting a genuine mystery so as a workaround I came up with Hugh Durnit, who basically creates his own mysteries. I liked the idea that he saw himself as a grizzled private investigator, this ten-year-old who's already seen it all. His cases become such an obsession that he doesn't care how much trouble he causes, but he always has honourable motivations. In this book, he's clearing his dog's name for a crime he can't believe she's committed (even if the evidence is stacked is against her!). I find characters that are their own worst enemy the most fun to write: they're so single-minded that it takes a wrecking ball to break their vision of reality.

Do you have any advice for children who want to write funny stories?

Play with opposites. Pair shy characters with bold characters, uptight with laid back, serious with flippant and so on. Surround your protagonist(s) with characters who make their lives more difficult, frustrating and/or challenging – at least on paper. If they end up friends in spite of their differences, then so much the better.

Also, however absurd or daft or silly your story, make sure your characters take it all very seriously. The more serious they are, the funnier it is! And, whatever anyone tells you, the expulsion of human wind is never ever not funny.

Taking Shelter: A Hugh Durnit Mystery is out now.



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Event DETAILS

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THE SCHOOLS & ACADEMIES SHOW 2024

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#SAASHOW, known as the Schools & Academies Show
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As the education sector gears up to embrace new challenges in 2024, the Schools & Academies Show is set to make its highly anticipated return to **ExCeL London** on the **1st of May**, presenting not just one, but three co-located events. This event provides a pivotal platform where the education community can collaboratively prepare for the dynamic changes ahead.

Introducing **EdTech Innovate**, **The School Estates Summit**, and **The SEND Conference**: each co-located event opens doors to fresh opportunities, enabling visitors to connect and collaborate in a larger exhibition space with leading education suppliers. These suppliers empower school leaders to enhance school performance and elevate outcomes for all pupils.

The #SAAShow team have been working hard to bring together the sector's most decorated and influential speakers to share their knowledge, expertise, and best-practice guidance on how schools, academies and MATs can overcome some of the most pressing challenges facing the sector.

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For more information and to register, visit our website:
schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk

*Please note, registration is FREE for schools, MATs, academies, colleges, universities, charities, not-for-profits, local and central government and the wider public sector.

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How one school's neurodiversity champions built a culture of inclusion through disco and cake...



A few small adjustments to their environment could make all the difference to an autistic child...



A practical example of how to create effective nurture spaces around your school...



Why we have to let children ask questions about their neurodiverse peers...

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Fuel for THOUGHT

Studying with dyslexia is a bit like trying to run a diesel engine on petrol, says **Laughton King**

Contrary to popular belief, dyslexia is not a learning difficulty as such. It is more a teaching difficulty, in that it's the style of our teaching system that creates the dyslexic condition. Dyslexia as a social phenomenon is the product of the absence of language as a useful thinking tool in an individual person.

Consider that our current (western) education system is a recent historical development, evolving through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the egalitarian intention of 'an education for all'. Implicit to this education system, but not always acknowledged, is the fact that it is orientated to academic excellence rather than

overt practicality. It has a specific reliance on language: as a prime teaching tool, as an information recording and processing tool, and as an exclusive assessment tool.

So, we see that reading and writing, talking and listening, thinking and problem-solving in words, are the backbone of this education system that we insist every child has to endure. Education has thus become available to all. But there is a catch: in general it has to be accessed via language as a processing tool. This is a pathway that suits some more than others. Thus any child whose brain functions on a language-based processing style carries an inherent advantage in this system. Meanwhile those who have a more practical, hands-on and pictorial thinking style are actively disadvantaged by this pro-language orientation.

Labels and stigma

Years of working with children in schools taught me that the label ‘dyslexic’ is not a user-friendly term. Watching children who are experiencing both learning and social difficulties noticeably shrink when they hear that they are dyslexic quickly taught me to avoid this term. The technical meaning and spelling of the word is beside the point; to be given a label that is so similar to ‘disgust’, ‘disgrace’, ‘disturbed’... It doesn’t sit easily with these children. So it seems to me that we need to offer them an alternative way of describing how they learn.

The real essence of dyslexia is that these children are brain-wired for pictorial and image-based thinking, whereas most people are brain-wired for language-thinking. Pictorial-based thinkers tend to decipher language by matching words they hear with pictorial images. They hear ‘tennis racket’ and they get a distinct related visual image.

However, many of our words have no pictorial equivalent. Let’s use an older child as an example. If their teacher advises them to prepare for a test on Wednesday, the pictorial thinker may have little or

no ability to understand the meaning of those words, as none of them (prepare, Wednesday, test) link to a specific picture. The child may well be able to repeat words like these aloud, but will be unlikely to attach meaning to them. (I acknowledge that this can be very difficult for a language-thinker to grasp.)

Consequently, the child is unlikely to prepare for the ‘assessment’ and will predictably perform poorly. In such a case, rather than the child having a ‘learning problem’, we should really say the child has a ‘thinking/learning difference’. The teacher is trained in one system (language), but the child operates in another (pictorial images). We could go as far as to say that the thinking-fuel the teacher is offering in good faith in the classroom is not appropriate to the thinking-style of this child.

Our teachers are doing what they have been taught to do, and are doing it well, but are unaware of the different style of the child. Frustration, anxiety, anger and depression (for both teacher and child) will predictably follow. Ron Davis, in his book *The Gift of Dyslexia* (2010), identified approximately 220 words in the English language that do not have a pictorial component. He states that they make up 75 per cent of the most commonly used words in the English language, and include: is, and, a, the, too, to, two, was, went, who, what, where, why, how. These may be referred to as ‘sight words’ and ‘heart words’.

Different fuels and diesel learners

A parallel with petrol and diesel fuels thus becomes apparent. If we put petrol in the tank of our diesel car by mistake, it won’t run well – but we don’t blame the car for this. If we put petrol (language-based teaching) into the diesel (pictorial) child, they won’t be able to perform well either, but often end up taking the blame.

Unfortunately, because most teachers and parents don’t understand this, we inadvertently create an apparent learning difficulty. Many children of dyslexic style have a strongly practical, hands-on nature, and will be familiar with the ruggedness, strength and usefulness of diesel-powered machinery - bulldozers, tractors, diggers and trucks. They quickly grasp and understand the implications of the ‘petrol into the diesel tank’ analogy, and many readily embrace the positive associations with ‘diesel-power’ and take on the appeal of being a ‘diesel’ learner in a proud and assertive manner.

Although there are a number of characteristics of diesel engines that make this analogy appealing to many, it is not likely that every child will choose to see themselves as a ‘diesel’, and for their own reasons they may be more comfortable with the traditional labels. But it is important that they have a choice. Why not encourage them to come up with their own variations on this analogy? **TP**



Laughton King
practiced
as an
educational,
child and
family

psychologist for thirty years. His latest book, *Inside the Dyslexic Mind*, is out now.

“Years of working with children in schools taught me that the label ‘dyslexic’ is not a user-friendly term”





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On Tuesdays, WE DANCE

Our neurodiversity champions have built a culture of inclusion through disco and cake, explains **Emily Rushton**

In the same vein as Adam Kay's ability to construct an entire literary career from anecdotes in the NHS, any SENDCo worth their salt is potentially sitting on a goldmine of beautiful analogies and stories contextualising the challenges and brilliance of being neurodiverse.

As a disabled person myself, I observe keenly how decisions affecting disabled individuals are often made without affording them the opportunity for input or feedback. At our school we aim to ensure that the voices representing neurodiverse students are not only heard but amplified, becoming an integral part of the culture of inclusion.

The concept of building a group of neurodiversity

champions emerged from our exploration into how we could further champion pupil voice within the school. Recognising a similar trend across the country, with an increasing understanding and acknowledgment of neurodiversity, we wanted our students to take the lead in celebrating diversity.

Recruitment

Ensuring the entire process was fully accessible from start to finish was crucial. This meant expanding our application process to match the diverse nature of our students. Applications came in various forms – traditional letters, video submissions, beautiful artwork, live speeches, and even a pupil choreographing a dance about her experience

of being neurodiverse.

This approach ensured that every child felt confident in presenting their applications in a way that complemented their abilities the most.

Celebrations

One of the initial tasks assigned to the neurodiversity champions was to help plan our Neurodiversity Week celebrations in March. Over the past few years, these celebrations have grown more significant, and having champions ensured they became the core voice in organising the events.

Working with neurodiverse pupils brought absolute joy, with out-of-the-box ideas emerging. While some ideas, like fundraising for a school hot tub or borrowing Richard Branson's

rocket, were beyond our reach, they highlighted the unique thinking of neurodiverse individuals.

Despite challenges, we held onto the idea of how tiring being neurodiverse can be. Thus, the theme of the week became Let's Keep Talking, emphasising the importance of everyday inclusion and the lasting impact of awareness events.

When the week came around, I was genuinely blown away by the amount of time, effort and care the children contributed to the proceedings. As teachers, we are fairly used to facilitating events that are pupil-led by dragging ourselves through Poundland late on a Sunday afternoon to procure the materials needed. But in this case, I genuinely seemed surplus to requirement.



Countless posters turned up around the school advertising events, children organised presentations to other classes, entire assemblies were created, and all without a hitch. We should never underestimate what our pupils can do when they are passionate about a cause.

Move it, move it

To make the theme more accessible, the champions introduced British Sign Language (BSL) classes and interpreted assemblies.

'Makaton Monday' became a hit, offering students a chance to drop in and learn accessible communication strategies. The success of BSL classes led to its continuation as a regular club in the summer term for UKS2. Our champions took their advocacy to the airwaves, hosting a special podcast featuring Lizzie Acker from Great British Bake Off. The insightful conversation prompted a proposal for an audiobook library, currently in progress as part of our library service.

However, the biggest hit of the week was the dyspraxia discos, a brilliant idea from

one of our Year 5 pupils. We opened up our hall space in the morning for warm-ups and dancing, not only offering students an opportunity to understand more about how to support peers with dyspraxia but also, unexpectedly, having a positive impact on student wellbeing. The overwhelming feedback led us to initiate discos every morning in the summer term, ensuring every child had the chance to start the day with a smile.

At the end of the week, a few pupils requested that we made a video of what people can do to help neurodiverse people in class. It was always going to be a bold move to film children unscripted, talking about their education. However, it turned out to be one of the most meaningful pieces of staff training I've been able to share.

With students crab-walking across the

screen talking about their processing difficulties, and one student oscillating between gymnastics moves and then talking in depth about the 'red mist' that comes over when she thinks she's done something wrong, it was the most powerful student voice we had ever captured. When I asked the children if I could share the video, they seemed confused as to why I wouldn't.

There were not many dry eyes in the house when we shared the video on our INSET day.

We are the champions

A few weeks ago, as I walked back into class, a child proclaimed loudly "I'm officially dyslexic!", while being cheered by her classmates. I reflected on the true impact of our neurodiversity champions.

Throughout this project, the compassion and kindness radiating from their work, coupled with the sense of joy and positivity, have spread across the school, shaping an inclusive culture.

Neurodiversity has become a central language for our pupils, who have come to understand its importance as a key pillar supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion. Celebrating differences has become second nature, and in these times, witnessing students champion intersectional inclusion without hesitation is particularly poignant. Let's hope that, with enough neurodiversity champions, the world will catch up to them. **TP**



Emily Rushton
is **SENCO** and
neurodiversity
champion lead
at **Bromley**
High Junior

School in Bromley

Tips across the curriculum

In English: Create shape poems to illustrate how brilliance can come in all shapes and sizes. Use neurodiversity infinity symbols to encourage children to write upside down, inviting the audience to view the world differently.

In maths: Set up flexible learning stations that allow pupils to choose activities based on their preferences. One station could involve hands-on manipulatives, another logic-based challenges and a third visual representations

In art: Create woven 'brains' out of cardboard and scrap material. Have the children weave different colours and patterns onto cardboard scaffolds of brains to demonstrate how beautiful differences can be.

In PE: Use sensory circuits to improve coordination and working memory. Build up the difficulty by asking pupils to remember increasingly complex patterns while also working on proprioception of their own bodies.

In topic work: Have pupils create maps that highlight inclusion-friendly spaces in their local community. Expand this to look at where the most inclusion-friendly spaces are across the school. The children could design rooms or spaces that are inclusive and increase accessibility to all.

In PSHE: Ask pupils to draw a picture of themselves where they highlight parts that might be their hidden differences in exciting and bold colours. Create a 'gallery' for pupils to look at each other's work, adding positive comments about them, to help the children love all parts of themselves.

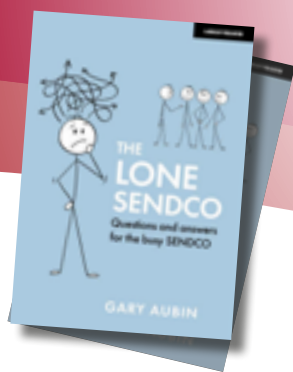
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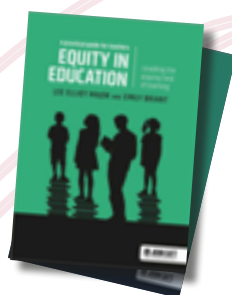


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How to carry out A SENSORY AUDIT

A few small adjustments to your environment could make all the difference to an autistic child, says **Alison Eason**

We all reach a point now and then where too much noise or chaos makes us want to shout “Stop!” But imagine if the place where you’re expected to spend every day calmly working alongside your peers caused this much sensory overload. Sadly, that’s the case for many autistic children.

The primary school classroom as we know it simply doesn’t work for every child. While their classmates thrive in the busy and stimulating space their teachers create, many autistic pupils find themselves struggling with the sunlight streaming in through the window, or with the sudden screech of a chair being pulled away from a desk.

This is why many mainstream schools and specialist autism providers are carrying out sensory audits. These help teachers and practitioners to make the right changes at school, so that autistic children feel more comfortable in their environment.

In our experience, sensory audits provide all staff with a deeper understanding of the challenges our pupils face, and how we can help children feel, calmer, happier and more at home in the classroom.

Here, I’ve outlined the key steps that I would recommend taking when starting out on a sensory audit for your school.



“The primary school classroom as we know it simply doesn’t work for every child”

1. Create a sensory checklist

While we often tend to refer to the five senses, there are in fact seven: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, balance (vestibular) and body awareness (proprioception). Processing everyday sensory information in any of these areas can be difficult for autistic people. They may be either over-sensitive or under-sensitive to stimuli at different times.

These sensory differences can affect how they feel and act, and can have a profound effect on a person’s life.

To gain an understanding of how the children in our additionally resourced

provision (ARP) are affected by sensory differences, we use a sensory checklist from the Autism Education Trust (AET), which schools can access through the AET’s training programme (autismeducationtrust.org.uk).

Another good sensory assessment checklist can be sourced from NHS Scotland (tinyurl.com/tp-AutismQuestions).

Your checklist should evaluate children’s responses to visual and auditory stimuli, tastes, smells and movement, for example, ‘puts hands over eyes or closes eyes in bright light’, ‘dislikes the feel of certain fabrics and substances’ or ‘responds

negatively to unexpected touch from peers’.

2. Conduct a sensory assessment

To gain a clear picture of each child’s sensory needs, we talk through each of the behaviour types listed in the checklist with someone who knows the child well. This could be a colleague, the child’s parent or carer, or even a sibling. We go through the statements together, and tick ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’ for each.

If the child is at the stage where they are able to self-advocate by communicating their needs, we try to include them in the process, too. But rather than saying “Amy has difficulty catching balls” we might simplify the sentence, changing it to something like “When a teacher throws ball, can Amy catch it?” or use

symbols to help the children communicate their own views and ideas.

Sometimes it's possible to detect patterns of behaviour that indicate a child is particularly sensitive to one or two senses, such as taste and smell. Other children will show sensory differences right across the board.

It doesn't take too long to assess each child, but the insight the process gives you is worth its weight in gold.

3. Identify triggers and comfort factors

With the information from the assessment, you can find out which aspects of the classroom may cause discomfort, anxiety or sensory overload for each of the pupils, and which elements could promote a calm learning environment for them.

Walk around the classroom with a parent or another teacher. Observe the environment and the sensory stimuli, then address each of the senses in turn to see which elements can be adapted and how.

If you have access to an occupational therapist, through your local authority or privately, they can support you with target setting and provide strategies to support the child both in school and at home.

A sensory audit should give you a classroom that works for all pupils as well as catering fully for neurodivergent children.

By implementing these reasonable adjustments, you will create an inclusive classroom and promote self-regulation at its heart.

4. Monitor improvements

Once you have put the adaptations in place, set an initial trial period to measure the impact of the changes. Observe how autistic pupils respond, and gather feedback from teachers, support staff and parents.

Based on this information, you'll see which alterations are working and where additional adjustments are needed.

It's a good idea to conduct regular reviews and updates of the environment to ensure

it is working effectively for the children and to address any changes, such as when a new child joins the class.

5. Get everyone on board

I'm a firm believer in the importance of embedding good sensory practice throughout the school. It's worth exploring training opportunities for teachers, staff and pupils to learn about the best way to support autistic children who have sensory differences.

It's also important to work with the whole school community to raise awareness about sensory differences and to keep parents informed about the sensory audit and the strategies you develop as a result of your research. **TP**



Alison Eason is head of the Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) at Chalgrove Primary School.

IDENTIFYING SENSORY TRIGGERS AND COMFORT FACTORS

Sight: Check fluorescent lights for flickering, and consider installing well-fitting blinds or a dimmer switch. Make sure the room is not cluttered and that resources are clearly labelled with a visual cue (e.g. Widgit symbols).

Sound: Keep equipment such as TVs and audio systems to a minimum, and switch computers off when they are not being used, as many autistic children can become dysregulated by small background noises.

Taste: Make sure all adults are aware of pupils who are sensitive to certain tastes, and make adjustments when organising cooking activities. Give children the opportunity to gradually try lots of different flavours.

Smell: For children who are sensitive to smells, explore ways to reorganise seating at lunchtime, or create a separate space where a child can eat. Be mindful of smells in the classroom environment, like cleaning products.

Touch: Check the classroom for materials that might trigger a pupil's sensitivity to touch, such as dressing-up clothes or playdough, and find alternative activities. Investigate tactile experiences for children with under-sensitivity to touch, e.g. sensory stickers, weighted blankets and fidget toys.

Balance: Ensure the environment is ordered and tidy, making it easier for a child with balance difficulties to navigate. If possible, include activities that can develop the sense of balance, such as dancing, playing on a rocking horse or swinging.

Body awareness: Clear enough space for pupils to sit and move around comfortably, and encourage activities that will develop body awareness, like throwing and catching, and parachute games.

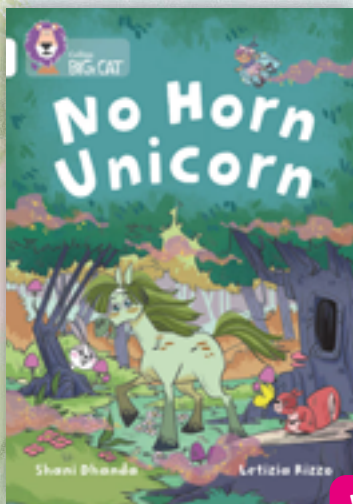




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Making SPACE

How one school used a four-step process to create new nurturing environments

LISA PIGG

In September 2018, I walked into my new school. I'd been offered the post when two children from my previous school had transferred there, and I had unfinished business. I was nine months into being a new SENCO: I needed to do my qualification and the two children who had transferred were midway through an Education Health Care (EHC) needs assessment with the Local Authority.

Straight away, I could see that SEND was a massive area of need, but it was being swallowed up by safeguarding concerns and put on the back burner. I needed to get SEND back on the agenda. The school had three pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), and that was enough for me to question what we as a school could, and should, be doing.

1. Identify and nurture

It soon became apparent that even though the three children with EHCPs had the correct provision in place, more needed to be done to support all of our school's pupils with SEND.

At the time we only had one nurture space, which was specifically for our Reception children. This wasn't enough even then, and during the following five years the number of children with SEND difficulties increased massively and continues to do so.

We brought in two new members of staff, who had a great vision for the future of the nurture space: it

would be a place that could build the children's sense of achievement, and where they could grow positive relationships and friendships within the school community.

The space, now called Patch, and based around a farmyard-themed doll who loves and nurtures

“SEND was a massive area of need in our school, but it was being swallowed up with safeguarding concerns”

vegetables, provides role play areas and reading corners as well as sensory areas to help children develop their resilience and independence.

All children within this provision now have a Boxall profile and a strengths and difficulties questionnaire filled in by their class teacher each term. This provides us with vital information that we can use to track and guide our planning. It's a great tool and there are many versions available online.

2. Create a calming space

In January 2019, we had our next vision: the Den. With an ICT suite surplus to requirements when the school bought more laptops, we ripped out the desks and purchased a sofa to bring the Den to life.

Initially, this space was

for one child, who couldn't regulate in the classroom and spent most of his days wandering around school with a Teaching Assistant following closely behind him.

We needed to work with him on his strengths and help him communicate his behaviour more positively.

However, there is another element of the Den which is undeniably one of the children's favourites – Bella, our adorable phantom cockapoo, who was recently joined by her sister, Honey.

3. Outdoor learning

Fast-forward to March 2020 and Covid-19 made school become a very different place. Our vision for children to be able to access both their classroom and a nurturing space was now impossible, thanks to the introduction of 'bubbles'. Even Bella needed to stay in her own bubble.

It was, however, a good time to get outside and develop our outdoor learning area.



We designed and created allotments with vegetable gardens and began to plant a new outdoor learning area for our KS2 children to use.

Three years later we won the Royal Horticultural Society's Primary School Garden of the Year award!

4. Reflect and adapt

2020 was also a time for us to reflect on the needs of our pupils, and the impact of the spaces we had created. We realised that some children who were accessing our nurture space really needed a smaller classroom. These

pupils were academically behind the rest of their cohort – some by over two years. This was when the idea for the Hive was born: bespoke sessions that would allow children to build on their independence and give them the confidence to have a go at any work that is suitably adapted to their academic ability. The sessions would also provide pre-teaching and post-teaching support to secure understanding.

We also realised we were missing support for one part of the four areas of SEND: social, emotional and mental health needs. We decided

to create another space, the TLC room. This is an area where children can access one-to-one and group interventions, such as LEGO or sand therapy, and where they can talk openly and honestly about any concerns or anxieties. These two new rooms have supported a number of our pupils greatly.

Run by a full-time teacher and TA, the Hive takes up to 10 children at a time. Morning sessions focus on English, maths, reading and phonics, and afternoons are comprised of targeted interventions for individual year groups.

Our TLC room is now run by our inclusion support assistant, who leads sessions that teach skills for anger management, and interventions aimed at improving the inclusion of children with challenging behaviour or who face other personal difficulties.

Over the past five years, we've seen massive changes regarding our children's needs and funding, during a time when we have unfortunately had to go through restructures, significantly reducing staff availability.

However, I'm proud to say that as a school we've continued to find creative ways for all our children to access the provision they need and deserve. **TP**



Lisa Pigg is assistant headteacher, inclusion team leader (SENDCO), deputy designated safeguarding lead and EAL lead at Sir Alexander Fleming Primary School in Telford.

MAKING IT WORK

- Know your children**
 As a full-time, non-teaching SENCO it's easy to get dragged into the paperwork and not see the children. I teach in our Hive provision on a Friday morning, and volunteer to attend trips with classes. I love the fact that some of our nursery children know my name.
- Make provisions work**
 We've created wonderful nurturing spaces, but no two years are the same. For example, last year our Den provision was for one child who was placed at our school whilst a specialist provision place was found for him. He required two adults to support his needs. The Den needed to be adapted to suit him. I visited the specialist provision for ideas and the team there supported us in creating the space we needed. This year, our morning Den sessions are for a group of Year 3 children who need that nurturing support for their academic progress.
- Visit other schools, including secondaries**
 Make time to see other provisions and explore what children will be offered once they transition to secondary school. I love having visitors to our school, where I can show them how we have created spaces and explain how we fund and staff them.
- Network with other SENCOs**
 I make time to network regularly with other SENCOs in my LA. We bounce ideas off each other and support each other; some of us have become friends, too.



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Fact-FINDING

If we want neurodivergent children to be understood and accepted, we have to let their peers ask questions, says **Fiona Carswell**

With a little under three years between my boys, the school nursery run with the younger inevitably meant catching sight of the elder in the playground at lunchtime. Always alongside him was his Additional Support Needs worker who is still such a huge part of our lives today.

But, as we queued for pre-school, we would pull in quite a crowd at the fence. Classmates of my elder son (then six) physically lined up to ask us questions about big brother: Why did he make that noise? Say that phrase?

Far from being annoyed by the many enquiries, I embraced them. Regardless of a particular question and how many times it had been asked by various kids over many, many months, we answered it in the fullest way we could. Every time.

You see, those questions – those answers – are essential if true inclusion is ever to work. In every other sphere of life, we encourage enquiring minds and

propagate inquisitiveness and persistence. Yet when it comes to something as vital as teaching kids about their neurodivergent classmates, we all too often get bashful.

Learning every day

If knowledge is power then knowledge denied is surely, what... fear? Perhaps that's too strong a word. But it's a sense of incompetence and inadequacy at the very least. Children, like so many adults, can feel inadequate around their neurodivergent peers. Those like my son, who needs something different from those around him if he is to stay regulated, feel safe and be able adequately to function – let alone be his full, vibrant self.

There is, in the education system in the UK, seemingly a presumption of mainstream for children with additional needs, even when those needs are pervasive and complex.

Of course, there is a sad history of autistic people being locked up, hidden from society and isolated; how truly unthinkable. But additional needs support is not about binaries, and

the way to address the truly horrific way in which autistic people were treated in the past is not simply to assume sameness and throw everybody together to prove we are all equal.

The fact is, we're not all the same, and so many times we hear of schools failing neurodivergent children because individual needs are being ignored in a misguided form of 'inclusion'.

Changing lives

Inclusion is explicitly *not* about everyone being the same; it's about recognising a child's individual needs and making all necessary accommodations to allow them to feel safe, secure and understood.

A huge part of that involves teaching our neurotypical young people more about their neurodivergent peers and how they can help them. Let's not get hung up on the semantics of whether somebody 'is autistic' or 'has autism', or on the ever-changing terminology that baffles and intimidates the most empathetic, kind

people into silence.

Even my youngest, who has never known anything other than his autistic big brother, still has occasional questions. Yes, even amid his vast, absorbed bank of lived knowledge and overflowing kindness. And it wouldn't occur to him not to ask.

My elder son has attended a specialist school for the last two years. He needs the extra help and attention, expertise and tailored experience, that a special provision offers. He'll attend a specialist secondary school and will, most likely, never be in a mainstream classroom again.

But he is understood so much more by the myriad of other children and adults around him in everyday life because of those snatched conversations with kids hanging over the fence. If true inclusion is the aim, as it should always be, then we have a duty to show children, time and time again, that it's okay to ask.

Answer their questions: whenever and however they come. Child by child, class by class, school by school, lives can be changed forever. **TP**



*Fiona Carswell's new book, **The Boy Who Loves to Lick the Wind**, is out*

now in hardback (£12.99, Otter-Barry Books).



plazoom

Years
1-6

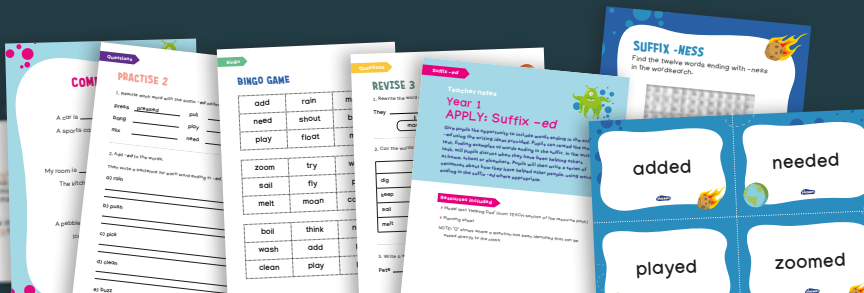
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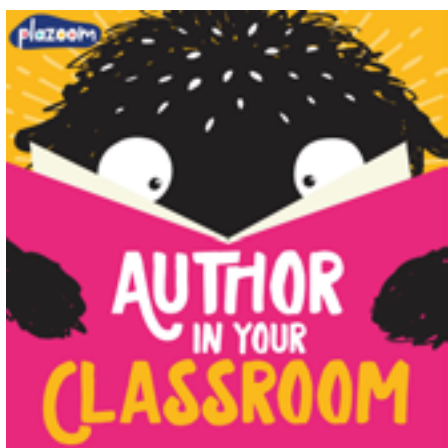
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Pause the podcast and use our teaching notes to talk about the points being raised in the interview.

DT, Art,
Outdoor
Learning,
Wellbeing



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How nature can be used as a tool for wellbeing and relaxation
- How green spaces are designed to help the community
- Teamwork and communication skills when creating a design
- DT design processes and using nature in art

Design your own perfect pocket parks



Explore the children's local green spaces and design a recreational space in this project from **Emily Azouelos**

[in](#) emily-azouelos-227502220

This lesson gets children out into their local green spaces and helps fuel their imagination by designing a small pocket park space where people could relax and enjoy nature. Pupils will be encouraged to look at different design elements, explore art in nature, and think about how nature can help them relax. They will then be asked to suggest improvements they may want to see in their community that could be pulled into their design, helping to make their case for change. Finally, they will share and discuss their completed designs with their classmates.



START HERE

Introduce the term 'pocket park' and ask the children to suggest what they think it might mean. Explain that it means a small area of green space that is open and accessible for the public to use for relaxation and enjoyment. Ask pupils if they can think of any examples of small green spaces in their community. Are there any near school? Use Google Maps to look at the children's suggestions on the whiteboard. Discuss how nature can be used for wellbeing, describing and sharing how being in nature makes us feel. Pull out key vocabulary for the children to use when explaining their experiences and feelings, and display it in the classroom for inspiration.



MAIN LESSON

1 | SCAVENGING FOR INSPIRATION

Conduct a local nature walk to some of the small green spaces you discussed when getting started.

As you're walking to the green spaces, take photos of things the children spot so that pupils can use them for reference and inspiration when designing the parks.

Collect natural items to inspire art that could feature in the children's pocket park designs. Assign groups of pupils an egg box to be filled with the different items they gather on their walk. Egg boxes are a great way to display natural objects. Holes can be poked through the cardboard to display items like twigs, leaves and flowers.

Back in the classroom, arrange the children's findings to form a display. Then use the collection to inspire the creation of art. For example, you could make animals or fantastical new creatures out of the objects.

Ask the children to think about the little details, like how they could make the eyes of their creature, what colours go together to create an interesting pattern, or whether they could use contrasting textures to create an animal that stands out.

Once pupils are happy with their arrangements, they should glue them down onto cardboard bases.

Local green spaces often feature artwork from members of the local community, so discuss how the children's creations could be displayed in their own pocket park.



“This lesson gets children out into their local green spaces and helps fuel their imagination”

Once they're happy with their designs, give them time to show their creations to other groups, reflecting and adapting their work as they think necessary.

3 | MAKING IT 3D

Start a nature collection in the classroom and encourage children to bring in a range of natural materials, textures and colours. Ensure the material collected is dry and can be easily stored; plastic tubs with lids are a good storage solution.

Using this collection, along with masking tape and junk modelling items, children can turn their 2D drawings of pocket parks into 3D models displayed on their tables. Masking tape can be used to create a bird's eye view of their pocket park design and map out the landscape details.

Notes and thoughts can even be written on the tape for further information. Another way to encourage children to add detail to their designs is to suggest they use sticky notes to label some of their pocket park features.

Give time for the groups to 'visit' everyone's designs and share feedback about what they liked or would have adapted from their observations.

Emily Azouelos is an experienced primary teacher who moved to the world of heritage and arts-based organisations two years ago. She creates educational related content for a variety of settings.

there differences of opinion that were unexpected?

Next, provide A3 sheets of paper to pairs or small groups of children and signpost them to the display they have created of the photos, reflections and nature art to be used as a tool for inspiration when designing. Remind them of the checklist they need to refer to alongside their design, and emphasise the importance of teamwork to create something that showcases all their ideas.

2 | REVIEWING YOUR WALK

Use these images to hold a class discussion about the features they liked in the green spaces and things they would improve.

Talk also about what they feel is missing from their local community, that they could pull into their designs.

Scribe some of the children's reflections, or encourage them to write down their thoughts on strips of paper. Display the reflections alongside the images.

Make a checklist of important elements from this discussion that children can refer back to during the design process. Is there something that all pupils feel there should be in a local green space, or were



EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Using the teacher-in-role drama technique, pretend to be a pocket park inspector and walk around the tables whilst students present their design ideas, trying to convince you to choose their design to bring to life.
- Ask pupils to write a persuasive letter to their local MP or councillor, outlining their ideas to transform their local community through pocket parks and highlighting the importance of green spaces as a source for wellbeing. Focus on persuasive language and use photos from the walk to remind them of the areas they felt needed to be improved and why.
- Involve the community by reaching out to local garden centres or allotments to see how they grow and plant items in their area. Encourage the children to use this knowledge in their designs.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

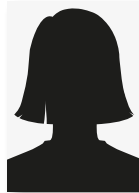
- Is it important to have green spaces in communities?
- What are the most important elements of a pocket park design?
- Describe and explain the reason behind your group's design choices.
- What would you change about your local community and why?



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- Times tables facts
- Reasoning skills
 - How to think about finding a way to a solution
 - The idea of a symbol (in this case a shape) representing a number

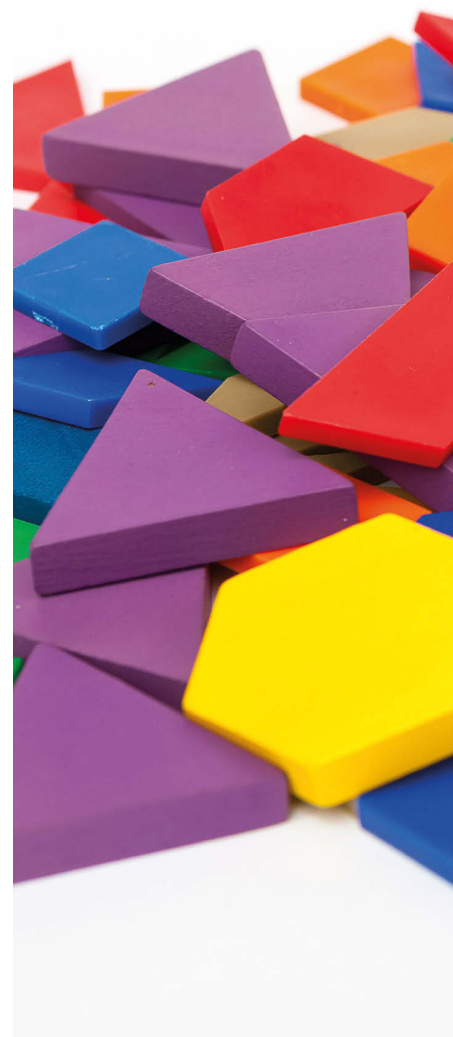
Colourful shapes and mystery numbers



The NRICH maths team demonstrate an intriguing problem that requires reasoning and abstract thinking

[@nrichmaths](#) nrichmaths.org

Although the maths curriculum focuses on fluency, reasoning and problem-solving, the need to prepare children for their times tables test often means that building their reasoning and problem-solving skills is overlooked, to allow time to develop number fluency and recall. NRICH's activities are designed to enable your learners to become more fluent alongside developing their reasoning and problem-solving skills. In this lesson you'll work through NRICH's *Shape Times Shape* problem (tinyurl.com/tp-NRICH) to practise and develop some of these underused skills.



START HERE

Make sure all the children can see the *Shape Times Shape* worksheet (tinyurl.com/tp-NRICH). You could display it on the board or give out copies of the printable sheet. Try to say very little as you introduce the task, just review what is stated on the problem itself and then give learners a few minutes to think on their own. Useful prompts to help get learners started could include: *What can you tell from the first multiplication with three purple squares and a yellow semi-circle? Perhaps you can use what you now know to help you with another calculation?* Invite pupils to talk with a partner and discuss their thoughts. This may involve asking questions or clarifying the task together, or it may be that they consider how to begin solving the problem.



MAIN LESSON

1 | ANY QUESTIONS?

Bring the whole group together to share their questions and ideas.

You might like to collate all contributions on the board without giving any response other than to thank pairs.

Children might find it easiest to have numbered counters or cards available, so that they can physically form the calculations to check their reasoning.

You can want support pupils' recording by giving out a sheet showing each of the shapes.

2 | WORKING TOGETHER

Once you have a full list of everyone's thoughts, you can decide how you will address them as a class.

Pass any questions back to the group as a whole: can any of the other children answer this query?

Once you feel that everyone has a good understanding of the task, give more time for pairs to work on the solution.

You might like to provide some copies of the calculations cut into strips, so that learners could move them around to group or sort them. Explain that when you bring everyone together again, you will be asking some pairs to share their reasoning at various stages of the problem-solving journey.

As you circulate, listen out for clear reasoning, based on learners' knowledge of number properties.

You may wish to warn some pairs that you will be asking them to share their thinking with everyone later.



“Listen out for clear reasoning, based on learners’ knowledge of number properties”

In contrast, Syzmon, Charlie and Hattie submitted this solution, which began by using different calculations from Ginny’s:

We realised that any time the isosceles triangle featured, the answer was the isosceles triangle, so it must be 0.

Then we figured out that the only cubed number below 12 was 2 because 1 would make it be another square as the answer, when it was a half-circle. That made the half-circle have a value of 8.

We knew that something times 2 equalled 8 so we then realised that the oval must be 4.

Next, we did the rectangle times rectangle and worked out that it was 3 because the only number squared that we could use was 3, as we had already used 2.

It would be worth stopping everyone for a brief mini plenary before that if you notice some interesting and efficient ways to record.

3 | SHARING YOUR SOLUTIONS

You might also like to share examples of solutions from other learners and compare them to the ones your class has suggested.

Here’s the beginning of a solution submitted to NRICH by Ginny:

I started with the first sentence, which is the square times square times square equals semi-circle one.

I used the process of elimination to figure it out.

It couldn’t have been 1, since then multiple shapes would have the same number. And it couldn’t have been 3, because that would’ve made

the semi-circle’s value larger than 12. So, I settled on 2.

After filling out the spots where the squares and semi-circles were used, I started creating a key which would state all the values I had found.

Note Ginny started with the first calculation, using the additional information given in the question to support her reasoning.



EXTENDING THE LESSON



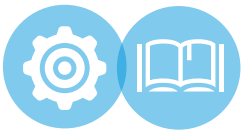
- Pupils could make up their own problem based on *Shape Times Shape* that also uses shapes as symbols. Just as in the NRICH example, they could write their own solution as well.
- The children could also write a list of hints and tips for others to help them get started on their problem.
- Ask children to try out their own problem on friends or family members, and perhaps develop it further based on their feedback.
- You could publish a selection of the final versions of the children’s own problems on your school website or in your newsletter.
- As a class or year group, you could create a maths activity book containing everyone’s problems, with an answer section at the back.

Did your learners use either of these approaches? Perhaps they found another way to solve the challenge?

NRICH is a maths outreach project, which is a collaboration between the Faculties of Education and Mathematics, based at the University of Cambridge. NRICH resources are free for teachers to use with their classes.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Where might you start, and why?
- Now that we know that shape, how will that help? What does that tell us? How do we know?
- How are you keeping track of what you have done?



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to operate green screen software
- How to place and manipulate props
 - Information retrieval and text selection
 - How to storyboard a scene
- Ways to make a scene more interesting or informative

Green screen magic – bring a book to life



Want to get children thinking deeply about a text? Challenge them to film it, says **Amanda van Dijk-van 't Noordende**

greenscreenbox.nl/en

In this lesson, children will use green screen techniques to help them examine, refine and re-present their understanding of a book or text. They will use software and props to create a book trailer, film a scene from a story, or 'interview' a character. You can download all the activity sheets for this lesson from tinyurl.com/tp-greenscreen

When you first start using green screens, it's good to let children experiment, and explore possibilities and limits. Letting them interact with the props and the software is a valuable experience, particularly for visual learners.



START HERE

Make sure you are familiar with how your green screen software works, and download a selection of images to use as your movie backdrops. Set up your app and props; select a picture as the background and make sure the app is connected to a camera. Ask pupils if they can guess what the equipment is for. Have them place different objects against the green background and see what happens on the screen. Let the children play with the setup for a few minutes, then show them how to record from the app and add different backdrops to the scene.



MAIN LESSON

1 | SELECTING YOUR SOURCE MATERIALS

During this extended lesson it will be useful to evaluate each activity as the children complete it, so that you can monitor their learning and make sure their final film will be a success.

You may want pupils to work with printables, or draw, colour and cut out their own characters. However, wooden peg dolls provide a sturdy alternative that will save time on crafting and allow the children to focus on story and imagery.

If you do use printables, for characters or text, laminate them before filming begins so that they don't get damaged while the children are setting up their sets or

moving the props around.

Once you've introduced the software to the children, explain that they are going to use it to make a short film. Discuss books that have been made into films, for example *Coraline* and the *Lemony Snicket* series.

In groups, direct the children to a small selection of books and ask them to choose one that they'd like to make a short film about. Explain that will be able to choose whether to reproduce a scene from the story, stage a pretend interview with one of the characters, or create a trailer to promote the book.

Show them some clips to explain what you mean for each of these. A quick internet search should help you find some of the lovely book trailers that publishers create for new releases.

“You might want to set up a ‘cinema’ space to make this a more memorable event”



2 | WRITING FOR THE SCREEN

Bring everyone back together and discuss the books you’ve chosen. Explain again that the children won’t be filming the entire book. Groups can swap books if they wish.

Give the children time to read their books and agree on the activity they want to do.

Hand out the worksheets to the children (tinyurl.com/tp-greenscreen) and explain that, before they start filming, they’ll need to select an extract or some pieces of information from the book.

Ask the children to work in their groups to create a storyboard for their film.

Pupils sometimes find it challenging to come up with plots, so provide plenty of support during this activity.

Remind the children that they will be using the green



screen, and encourage them to think about the effects and staging they could use.

Their films should include three scenes (introduction, main section, conclusion) they should add audible or visible text to each scene.

Some children can find recording speech difficult, so some of them may want to write out speech bubbles to include in the film instead.

Talk to the children about timings; their film must be no longer than two minutes – how will they keep to this limit? Remind them as well that the viewer needs to know what the film is about, so it should introduce the book and author, and explain who any featured characters are.

3 | FILMING AND EDITING YOUR MASTERPIECE!

Make sure you have quiet working spaces available for filming to minimise background noise.

You might want to test out different lighting options as well before you begin.

Allow at least an hour for filming so that the children have time to make mistakes and learn from them. Remind the children again that they need to monitor how long each scene takes.

Give the children time to edit the videos and add text or audio. Free video editing software currently includes

iMovie, Movavi, Canva and Clipchamp.

Finally, each group can show their film to the rest of the class. You might want to set up a ‘cinema’ space to make this a more memorable event.

If pupils have used copyright-free images and music in their films you can also share them online. It’s a great way to involve parents in the learning process or inspire fellow teachers.

Amanda van Dijk – van ‘t Noordende spent 18 years as a classroom teacher and now works as an education advisor for Greenscreenbox. For more green screen lessons, see greenscreenbox.nl/en/shop

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- With some extra help, younger children can create simple films too. So consider holding a school film festival with contributions from across all year groups.
- You could structure this activity around an author visit, with children using insights from the writer to inform their films. You can also give the author a chance to view the completed films.
- If your school is holding a book fair, ask the company for a list of popular books before it arrives and challenge your class to create trailers for their favourites. You can use this activity to start a discussion around the different roles involved in bringing a book to life and getting it into readers’ hands.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What would happen on the screen if you put a character dressed in green clothes into your scene?
- Why do you think film studios use green screens instead of real sets and locations?
- Can you think of any uses for green screens?

ENGLISH | MATHS | WELLBEING

BookTrust – Letterbox Club

Delightful packages of books, games and stationery for vulnerable children



AT A GLANCE

- Exciting packages for children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage
- Six parcels to be used flexibly to suit your school and children
- Quality fun and educational activities
- Perfect for schools and local authorities to support children with disrupted education

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



There's something magical about getting a pleasant surprise. Something exciting. Something inspiring. And something just for you. Even those of us who were lucky enough to have been brought up in a secure home might just remember that feeling. Perhaps it heralded a birthday or some other special occasion.

The sad fact is that there are many children who rarely experience that sense of being made to feel special. That is why the Letterbox Club, from the BookTrust, is such a gift.

The Letterbox Club is a delightful way of delivering joy to children who might otherwise miss out on such simple pleasures. Very often, these are children who have never experienced the wonder of receiving something just for them. These can include the looked-after, the previously looked-after and those on the edge of the care system as well as children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage.

Children in care often have few possessions of their own, things that actually belong to them exclusively, so the Letterbox Club parcels enable children to have some quality resources that are theirs to keep; helping them to feel valued.

I have known children who, on the face of it, are well looked after, yet are still suffering the effects of early-life trauma, neglect or abandonment. This can have a marked effect on their confidence, their behaviour and their capacity to engage with education. That's why I felt a strong surge of admiration for this excellent initiative.

Right, having got that out of my system, let's look at what the Letterbox Club actually provides. There are six parcels in total, available for each age group from three to 13. These can be used flexibly

to suit a school setting or group of children – either to be gifted to individual children each month or can be used as resources for use in school for small groups of children. That's exciting enough. But when I opened the sample I was sent, I was definitely impressed.

This was no tacky collection of stocking-fillers but a thoughtfully curated package of quality products. For a start, there are the books. My selection included a sweet, illustrated tale of fun and friendship and an exciting wildlife book packed with activities, information and stickers – who doesn't love stickers?

And remember, these can be used for children to keep, complete with labels to personalise them. For children who might never have had a book of their own, what a joy that would be!

There was a currency-based maths game, complete with a generous supply of replica coins and notes. There was also a pencil case equipped with pen, pencil, rubber, pencil sharpener and ruler (everyone loves stationery!) plus a lined notebook in which to jot down thoughts, stories, whatever.

And this does more than create a brief surge of wellbeing. According to testimonials from teachers and carers, it has helped to spark a renewed interest in learning and, in some cases, led to marked academic progress.

You can pontificate all you want about the 'failure of the system', the plight of these children and how life has dealt them a bad hand.

Then again, you can celebrate how, in a small way, Letterbox has delivered a way of bringing some tangible brightness to these tarnished childhoods for a remarkably small outlay.

In my opinion, it's worth every penny.

**teach
PRIMARY**

VERDICT

- ✓ Quality products
- ✓ Thoughtful mix of items and activities
- ✓ Educational without being oppressively so
- ✓ Tangibly joyful
- ✓ A genuine boon to children who really need it

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£152 per child, including VAT | booktrust.org.uk/letterbox-club

ENGLISH

Collins Big Cat: Books featuring characters with physical disabilities



Carefully levelled story books that explore a range of conditions

AT A GLANCE

- Sensitively written and illustrated by creators with firsthand experience.
- Covers a range of reading levels.
- Created in conjunction with relevant charities and support organisations.
- Includes useful teaching tips.



REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

If done well, story books can change perceptions more powerfully than any amount of lecturing, especially for children. At the same time, they can introduce ideas that may be outside most people's experiences, yet still make them seem a positive part of life's rich diversity. After all, when you have a world of imagination at your fingertips, you can control the narrative.

In the wrong hands, that power might appear a little sinister. When it is a trusted name in educational publishing, though, it should be a force for good. That's certainly the sense I get from these new books from Collins featuring characters with physical disabilities.

These titles are new additions to their Big Cat series. For the uninitiated, Big Cat is a whole-school programme to support primary reading from phonics to fluency. All told, it features over 1,800 books organised into carefully levelled bands according to reading ability. Furthermore, Collins is very keen to ensure that their stories reflect their diverse readership and offer broad visibility and representation.

This niche sub-series of books offers a natural extension of that ethos with a range of charming, simple stories in which one of the main characters has some form of physical disability. *Ruby Hastings Writes Her Own Story* is about a girl

with dyspraxia who dreams of becoming a journalist. *Going Viral* features an amputee with stunning footballing skills. In *The Dragon in the Sewer*, Ava uses the techniques she has learned to control her asthma to help a young dragon; *No Horn Unicorn* helps youngsters appreciate how being different does not make you less valued or any less of a friend.

To my shame, I confess that I was not familiar with Turner Syndrome, so *Monster Ranch: Paws of Doom* was very illuminating. Perhaps tellingly, it immediately motivated me to educate myself about the condition. I am, however, acutely aware of how some youngsters need to include uncomfortable procedures such as injections as a routine part of their lives so I was impressed by how sensitively this was weaved into the plot.

And really, isn't that one of the main points of these books? They are a wonderful way of shining a light on some conditions, illustrating how they can affect people's lives without

being the only noteworthy thing about them.

I can see them sparking all sorts of discussions within the safe space of a classroom, which can only be a good thing.

Above all, these titles achieve all this within the context of helping children achieve reading fluency and develop a love of books. Now that's what I call a happy ending.

"I can see them sparking all sorts of discussions within the safe space of a classroom"

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Enjoyable, well-pitched stories
- ✓ Part of an established reading scheme
- ✓ Admirably representative
- ✓ Subtly inclusive and inspirational
- ✓ A positive addition to any school library

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... you want to broaden the representation and diversity of your school reading scheme while promoting a love of reading.

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COMPUTING, STEAM ➔

HUE Animation Studio



Child-friendly camera and software kit for creating stop-motion animation movies. Age 7+

AT A GLANCE

- Flexible HD camera with USB connection.
- Animation software for Windows and macOS.
- Includes 64-page book of step-by-step instructions, hints and tricks.
- Fold-out mini stage with background and green screen.
- For children aged seven years old and over.

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



One of my happiest memories of classroom teaching was when I set my Year 6 pupils the challenge of animating their own take on the story of Beowulf. Using everyday items and figures from a variety of unrelated Lego sets, they had terrific fun scripting, planning and shooting a stop motion movie that really brought the story to life. So what if Grendel's ghastly mum bore an uncanny resemblance to Chewbacca? The kids were delighted with the results.

Unfortunately, the kit we had then was rather primitive. The images were often blurry and the sound tended to lose sync with the visuals. Nevertheless, the children found it a memorable and very satisfying experience. So imagine my excitement when I was given the chance to have a play with the HUE Animation Studio.

From flick-books, to Morph, to Wallace and Gromit, there's a particular magic to stop-motion creations. This wonderful resource helps to demystify the creative process and unleash a child's imagination. It encourages planning and problem solving. And, of course, it allows them to explore the possibilities of technology, almost without thinking about it.

Furthermore, it includes a time-lapse function that allows you to speed up reality in order to gain a realistic view of lengthy or slow-moving processes. You can imagine the potential, especially for science activities, for example. Now, of course there are plenty of clips available online of things like germination and growth or rotting and decay. How much better to be able to demonstrate these things happening within the classroom, without having to stare at nothing much happening for hours on end.

Of course, this is not the only such product on

the market. Nor is it the first. However, it really seems to hit that sweet spot between simplicity of use and breadth of functionality.

The camera itself almost conceals the quality of its output. Robust and brightly coloured, it comes with a long flexible swan-like neck which makes it easy to move into the optimum position. It also has a USB connection which means it can either be plugged straight into the computer or, perhaps more usefully, the sturdy, separate base that is included in the package.

But what I really liked was the software it comes supplied with. Not only is it intuitive and easy to use, but it achieves this while offering an enormous range of editing functions to trim, loop and otherwise manipulate animated sequences. Sounds can be added either through the in-built microphone or by inserting sound effects from the extensive library or importing your own from elsewhere. Children will also love the limitless possibilities of using the green screen function to add creative backgrounds to the action.

Having seen the speed with which youngsters work out how to use such technology, I have no doubt that they will soon be creating movies of impressive quality and technical skill. Even so, the package comes complete with a comprehensive set of instructions and there are links to concise video tutorials for specific functions.

Affordable, exciting and easy to use, this is an excellent addition to any classroom's technological tool kit. The potential educational applications are as extensive as your imagination. Above all, it will add fun and wonder to any activity into which it is enlisted.



**teach
PRIMARY**

VERDICT

- ✓ Impressive image quality
- ✓ Classroom-friendly and easy to use
- ✓ Complete with a wide range of features
- ✓ Produces impressive results
- ✓ Extensive educational potential across the curriculum

UPGRADE IF...

... you want to use fun and creativity to add visual appeal to an almost limitless range of educational activities.

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MATHS 

Maths mastery bundles

A comprehensive collection of digital resources offering a whole-school solution for achieving maths mastery



AT A GLANCE

- Centred on Power Maths – the only whole-class mastery programme fully aligned with the new White Rose Maths schemes of learning
- Includes Maths Flex for KS2, a digital adult-free intervention programme
- Also includes School Jam, a digital homework programme for Reception and KS1



REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

We've heard a lot recently about our nation's alleged 'anti-maths mindset'. Perhaps, part of the problem is that it can take so much work for teachers to plan and prepare lessons. For some, there might also have been the issue of converting to the wildly popular White Rose Maths model. What they need, then, is a complete package that takes a lot of the time and legwork out of creating inspirational maths lessons. And, look! Here's one!

Noted educational publisher, Pearson, has created a bundle of digital resources that could seriously reduce the headache-count for primary teachers. The range of materials is breathtaking, from planning, to professional development, to online pupil practice books and digital teaching tools and games. It is consistent with the concrete, pictorial, abstract (CPA) approach and, because the bundle follows the White Rose Maths small steps (and Power Maths is created in partnership with WRM) you get the sense that teachers would not have to look anywhere else.

The most important thing is that it should free up their headspace enough to improve their teaching practice. One of my biggest bugbears about the profession has been the way that it demands so much of its practitioners before they even enter the classroom. It's a wonder that teachers have any energy left to teach. This maths mastery bundle, however, looks like it could help to return some of that vim and vigour to the teacher's day.

It is immediately apparent how closely Tony Staneff, founder of White Rose Education, has been involved in this product. One look inside any of the Power Maths practice books will reveal the familiar techniques and illustrations that

have proved so popular in helping pupils develop an in-depth understanding of mathematical concepts at White Rose Maths.

Apart from the planning and practice materials, the packed online toolkit also includes teacher guides, starter activities, arcade-style games and training videos. I particularly liked the interactive teacher tools that will no doubt support the explanation of ideas very effectively. There are also e-textbooks and digital versions of the various practice books, which I can see coming in very handy, especially if you have limited storage facilities for all manner of workbooks, etc.

Beyond the routine classroom materials, the bundle offers Maths Flex, an intelligent maths practice service for KS2 that uses AI software (don't panic!) from Pearson partners Century Tech, to provide useful data for the teacher and personalised activities and interventions for the pupil. Essentially, the AI constantly adapts to a child's strengths and weaknesses while moving through the activities, thereby saving you time figuring out personalised differentiation for each pupil. There is also School Jam, which allows teachers to provide Reception and KS1 pupils with fun practice activities they can complete at home, thereby increasing confidence and, hopefully, parental engagement.

The whole package is hosted on Pearson's ActiveLearn platform which is easy enough to navigate so teachers should be able to find what they are looking for without difficulty. It's just another way that this offer helps to smooth the path to maths mastery. Altogether it looks like a powerful antidote to any lingering anti-maths mindset that might be clouding your class.

**teach
PRIMARY**

VERDICT

- ✓ An extensive range of digital teaching and learning materials
- ✓ Personalised intelligent practice to support and stretch every child
- ✓ A wide variety of supporting resources
- ✓ Attractively designed
- ✓ Thoughtfully compiled
- ✓ Hosted on a user-friendly platform
- ✓ Different elements can be bought separately
- ✓ Print options such as Power Maths textbooks and practice books can be bought alongside the bundle

UPGRADE IF...

You want to support the teaching of maths mastery with an extensive array of planning, teaching and assessment materials all in one place.

Q & A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

Working with a great, supportive team and having strong relationships with my class. When everything is going smoothly and you have those lovely moments where you see the learning click, it's just the best. Having amazing colleagues makes such a difference as well. If you're in an environment where you feel you can ask for help, share ideas and confide in the people you work with, it makes everything so much easier.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Realising I haven't brought any of the resources for a science investigation, turning up to a staff meeting to find out I'm meant to be leading it, forgetting to fill in a really important form... I have a memory like a sieve, so my greatest fear is just that I'll have forgotten something I was meant to do.

3 What is your current state of mind?

My mind is constantly a whirlwind. I started a job at a new school in September, so I'm still learning how the environment works as well as adjusting to a new job role. I always like to have a few projects on the go, but I have to rein myself in sometimes. I'm constantly thinking of new ideas and things I'd like to try.

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

It sounds odd, but dedication. By that, I mean teachers working themselves into the ground. It's so easy in education to spend hours honing resources to perfection – writing paragraphs in books, or creating individualised learning booklets – because we think it's what we need to do. And because we care. I know I've spent hours in the past doing all those things and more to try and be the best teacher I possibly could. Realistically, it just leads to burnout.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

Honestly, I don't think I do lie to my class. The only example I can think of is if a child is really excited to tell me a 'new' fact, joke or story. I pretend that I haven't heard it before, so they get the enjoyment of telling it to someone.

6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

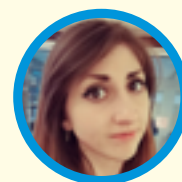
"This is a chance to show off how _____ you are." Whether it's in maths, science, art or writing, all children have something that they are particularly good at. It's our job to help them find out what. Putting their qualities and skills into words helps children to realise where their strengths lie.

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

I think my greatest achievements have been when I've worked hard to build a relationship with a child who has really struggled at the start of autumn term, and I've then been able to see them blossom over the school year. Those are the things that really stick with me and make me feel proud to be a teacher. Taking the time to form those relationships early on makes such a difference.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

A visualiser to screenshare to a board. From modelling handwriting to doing shared writes, demonstrating sketching to showing how to thread a needle, there are so many things you can use them for. I really recommend that you give it a go. Having your own exercise books to model in using the visualiser is a game-changer too. In my new school I don't currently have a visualiser and I didn't realise how much I'd miss it.



NAME: Sarah Farrell

JOB ROLE: Assistant head

EXTRA INFO: Sarah is the author of *Times Tables Ninja* (KS2 and KS1 versions)

"Putting their qualities and skills into words helps children to realise where their strengths lie"



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WHO'S IT FOR?

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2

6 Prep Lessons

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3

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