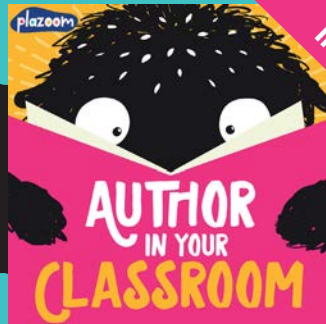


Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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Using mints to end
grammar amnesia

4

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Welcome...



...to the latest issue of *Teach Reading & Writing* magazine; coming to you at the end of an extraordinary year during which sales of fiction, we are told, soared by more than £100m for UK publishers. Deprived of our habitual interactions with the wider world, and learning to negotiate the ubiquitous presence in our lives of a new and invisible danger, we turned as a nation to the comforting familiarity and blissful escapism of books; and weren't we lucky to be able to do so?

For far too many children, though, this magical route to a place of solace and excitement has never been an especially welcoming one; and the isolation and uncertainty brought by the pandemic – not to mention the closure of schools and libraries as we tackled the crisis – have only increased the barriers, both perceived and actual, especially for youngsters from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Some stories, it seems, never change. But nor, we know, does the determination of teachers to do everything they can to open the world of literacy for every child, and within these pages, we hope you might find new ideas and insightful advice to help you do exactly that. We have tips for reaching reluctant readers (p.74) as well as challenging your most eager bookworms (p.38); Felicity Fergus on what 'writing for purpose' should really look like (p.44); and much more – including dozens of suggestions for brilliant titles that could ignite enthusiasm around STEM (p.12) and bring increased diversity to your library (p.59), as well as ways to use them in your lessons.

Oh, and if you are still looking for something to inspire those pupils who, despite all your efforts, are yet to be persuaded that the world of literature is for them to inhabit in the first place, you really couldn't do better than playing them the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast episode described on pages 10-11, featuring Benjamin Zephaniah, in which he wryly points out that "the people who probably find writing most difficult, are the people who have *no* barriers." It's a refreshing, and empowering, way to reframe an old, old narrative and, perhaps, start a new one for the days ahead.

Best wishes

Joe Carter & Helen Mulley
(associate editors)

Author in Your Classroom

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



BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH

The poet and author of Windrush Child has a powerful take on the importance of children using their voices

to tell their own stories. p10



BALI RAI

Sharing the untold tales of history is intriguing and exciting, explains the writer of Now or Never: A Dunkirk Story - but it comes with

responsibility, too. p30



JOAN HAIG

Writers really do have magical powers – and after listening to this episode, children will be eager to put theirs into action... p68



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Nearly 40 years after its publication, Rod Campbell explains how *Dear Zoo* still plays a vital role in children's reading journeys.

12 10 BOOKS TO MAKE STEM SPARKLE

Science and maths should be subjects of wonder; and these brilliant books will certainly awaken curious minds.

18 WRITING MUNDANE SONNETS

When children write poems about what's important to them, the subject matter might seem uninspired, but the results are anything but, says Jonny Walker.

26 WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?!

From the cliffhanger to the big reveal, James Clements shows you how *Orphans of the Tide* can be used to help children become masters of suspenseful writing.

32 EVACUEE

Mixing history with fiction can inspire powerful writing, and Pie Corbett's model text will show your class just how it's done.

38 HOW TO FEED A HUNGRY BOOKWORM

More able readers still need books that are right for their age group, says Nicola Mansfield-Niem – so what's the best way to keep them satisfied?

40 CAN YOU SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES?

In order to close the word gap for our children, focusing on the big picture of communication is crucial, argues Kelly Ashley.

42 WHY CAN'T THEY REMEMBER – FULL STOP?

Nadine Finlay noticed children seemed to suffer from collective amnesia when it came to spelling, punctuation and grammar, so she found ways to help them up their editing game.

44 ARE YOU FOR REAL?

Writing a letter to Dumbledore may be fun, but there are better ways to bring genuine purpose and authenticity to the writing classroom, says Felicity Ferguson.

46 4 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW... ABOUT READING

It takes time to learn how to teach reading well – but if you can answer these crucial questions you'll definitely be off to a really great start, says Christopher Such.

50 COMIC VALUE

From engaging reluctant readers to developing inference skills – the pedagogical potential of pictorial storytelling is impressive, insist Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton.

53 BOTHER THAT CAT!

Though Mog's memory may sometimes let her down, she has been an unforgettable character for generations of readers – which is something we think is worth celebrating.

59 13 IDEAS FOR A MORE DIVERSE LIBRARY

Make sure your shelves are packed with titles that reflect children's reality, and the infinite variety of the world around them...

62 WHY KIDS GET EMILY DICKINSON

The rich language of classic poems work wonders with vocabulary and grammar, but just as importantly the enduring themes still light a spark for children today.

65 WHEN HAVE CHILDREN 'MASTERED' PHONICS?

If we see the Year 1 check as the end of the phonics journey then we're missing the point, says Charlotte MacKechnie.

66 HOW TO TEACH EXPANDED NOUN PHRASES

Use these downloadable resources to help pupils get to grips with this area of the grammar curriculum.

70 RICH KNOWLEDGE, DEEP RESPONSE

Building our own understanding of ambitious texts, then sharing them with pupils, can lead to a truly rewarding learning experience explains Bob Cox...

72 START A WRITING REVOLUTION

Tre Christopher and Pet Henshaw describe a simple classroom innovation that can have a surprisingly powerful impact, from Reception through to Year 6 and beyond.

74 CAN WE UNLOCK THEIR ENTHUSIASM?

Rachel Clarke suggests ways teachers can ignite a love of books in children who have the skills, but not the will, to read.

82 LAST WORDS

Scriptwriter and children's author Ivor Baddiel didn't have a long career in the classroom – but he's still grateful for what it taught him.

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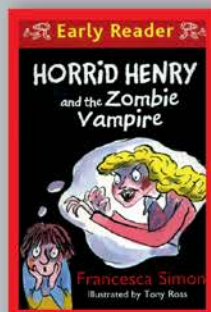
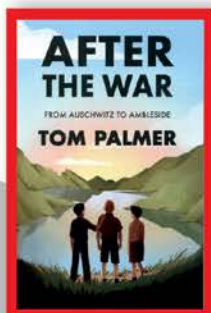
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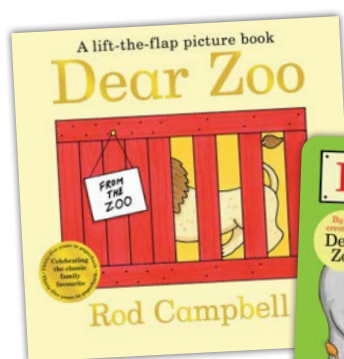


So much more than just letters and sounds



Dear Rod...

Nearly 40 years after its publication, **Rod Campbell** explains how *Dear Zoo* can still play a vital role in children's reading journeys



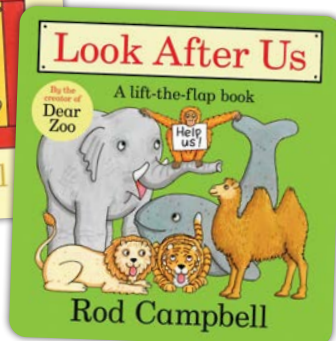
TR&W *Dear Zoo* has sold over 8m copies since it was first

published in 1982; what do you think is the secret of its success?

RC It's hard to say, but it seems that *Dear Zoo* has all the essentials for drawing the attention of pre-readers and beginning readers into the book. The flaps play an important part, as they require interaction to reveal well-known wild animals, each with a different characteristic the child can connect with. The simple text with some short repetitive sentences is soon known and can be repeated by pre-readers by heart, allowing the child to participate completely. After receiving, then sending back the unsuitable animals, the zoo finally sends us a perfect pet, which for the child is an unexpected, logical and joyful conclusion. I think it's the coherence of idea, text, and illustrations that makes the child want to read it again and again.

When you are planning a new book for very young children, how important is the story?

The story is really important and especially so for pre-readers and beginning readers – simple, not too long nor complicated, and I believe in the importance of repetition where appropriate. The text is for them and not for the parent! The child will be familiar



with the text and start to repeat it from memory and even pretend to be reading. In this way the child gains confidence in connecting the spoken word to the written word, which I feel is another step in the process and magic of learning to read.

Nearly four decades have passed since the arrival of *Dear Zoo*; what is the most useful thing you've learnt about writing for children since then?

The most interesting and important thing I have learnt over that time is that young children are basically the same in each generation, so I have continued to make books in the same way, with the focus on them and their world and what interests them. My approach has always been instinctive as I have tried to help them in the first steps on the journey of learning to read.

Did you think of *Look After Us* as a kind of sequel to *Dear Zoo* at first?

No I can't say I did, as it's a non-fiction book and needed a very different approach. It depended on me finding a way of putting across to young children the idea of saving wild animals from extinction. It was a challenge, but I realised that the very young are familiar with the idea of taking care of the things they love and this could be an understandable message when applied to wild animals. However, as in *Dear Zoo* I used elements of repetitive text, flaps revealing the animals, and a happy positive ending.

Do children still write to you about *Dear Zoo*? Would you like them to get in touch about *Look After Us*?

I receive letters and drawings about *Dear Zoo* from Reception class pupils when their teachers send them, and they are always a delight to receive. It's very touching to have this contact from children who want to share their thoughts and drawings – their enthusiasm is uplifting. I hope they will respond to *Look After Us* in the same way!



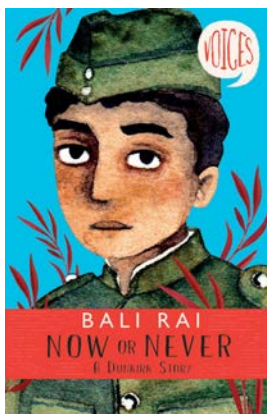
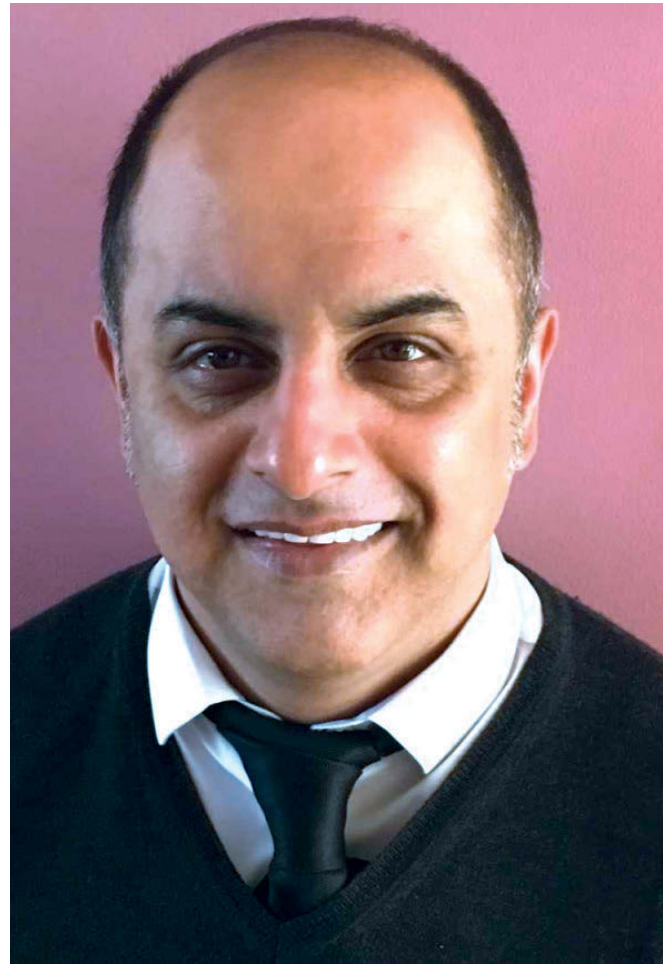
Look After Us, by Rod Campbell, is published by Macmillan.

Telling Stories from the Past,

with Bali Rai

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

Historical fiction is a popular genre for children, helping them to understand events from the past through well told stories based around true events of the time. However, many follow a similar narrative or retell the story from a similar viewpoint – for example, that of an evacuee, of service men on the frontline or of people who have been left behind. Although these are based on historical truths, there are many unheard stories from history that also need to be told.



In *Now or Never: A Dunkirk Story*, the author Bali Rai has retold the story of Dunkirk with a new narrator, Private Fazal Khan, who is a member of company 32 of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps. Many men left India to support the British in World War II, yet their stories have been left untold – until now. Rai has thoroughly researched the historical

events that the story is based on, to take the reader on a journey through the sights, sounds and emotions when involved in conflict, seen through the eyes of a soldier that many people may not know had been involved in the war at all.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write stories of their own based on a

historical event, telling the story from a familiar viewpoint or selecting a narrator whose voice may not usually be chosen. Extracts from Plazoom's *Author In Your Classroom* podcast (episode 12) are used to support each section; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (bit.ly/AIYCBaliRai) as an introduction.

SESSION 1

CHOOSING A HISTORICAL EVENT

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **19.28** up to **22.31**. Discuss with the



children why it is important to tell stories using unheard voices. Tell the children that in this unit of work, they are going to write stories based on a historical event. It might be a voice that is familiar when telling the story or the voice of another character whose story usually goes untold.

2 | Ask the children if there are any historical events that they are familiar with that they could base their own story on. The stories could be based on a current or recent historical period or event studied in the classroom, or could follow the children's own interests.

Ask the children to think about possible answers to the following questions:

- What event could a story be based upon?
- What historical details will you need to know?
- Who will narrate the story?
- Why is it important that their story is told?

3 | Ask the children to jot down their ideas. If they cannot think of a historical event to write about, remind them of recent history topics or an important event that happened to them and/or their family that they might like to write about.

4 | Discuss the historical events that the children would like to write about. Pupils should gather information about the event which their story will be based around so that they can include some historically accurate information in their writing.



SESSION 2

EXPLORING CHARACTERS' EMOTIONS

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **8.59** up to **16.17**. While listening to Bali reading the extract from the book, ask pupils to think about how the character, Fazal, is feeling throughout this extract.

2 | Discuss the events in the extract and how Fazal felt about each one:

- What events happen in this part of the story?
- How does Fazal feel about each one?
- How does Bali show this in

his writing?

3 | Ask the children to work with a partner and discuss how characters' emotions could be shown in their stories. Children should decide who the narrator will be for their story and make a note of events and how the character will feel about each one. Children could be challenged to write about the historical event using a narrator whose voice may not have been heard before.

4 | Explore how characters' emotions can be shown when writing stories, discussing

ideas in pairs (for example through dialogue, their actions, descriptions of the scene using all of the senses). Children should then jot down ideas for how their character's emotions could be shown in their writing.



SESSION 4

EDITING AND REDRAFTING

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

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

SESSION 3

WRITING THE STORY

1 | Play the section of the podcast again that starts at **16.18** up until **19.12**. Discuss why Fazal had 'grown to hate the Sergeant'.

2 | Bali shows that Fazal has some empathy for the Sergeant as he includes information about Sergeant Buckingham's history. How does this help the reader to understand Buckingham's unpleasant behaviour?

3 | Discuss as a class:

- How does sharing his feelings about Sergeant Buckingham help us to learn more about Fazal?
- Does giving the reader information about Buckingham's past help the reader to understand him?
- Has your view of Sergeant Buckingham changed?

4 | Children should now plan their own story using ideas from previous sessions, plotting the main points and the emotional journey that

their character will go on.

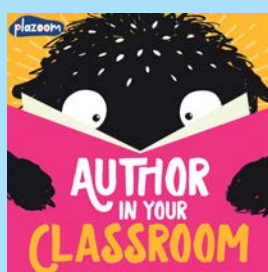
5 | Now, ask children to write their own first-person story based around a historical event. Remind them that they should include information about the characters emotions throughout. Challenge them to use some of the features that Bali Rai uses in his writing to bring their character's voice to life, including:

- Writing in the first person
- Telling the story from a particular point of view (perhaps unheard before)
- Detailing their character's feelings and emotions, including towards other characters
- Using the senses to describe
- Using historically accurate information in their stories



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"Stories are better when you understand people's motives"

AFTER THE UNIT...

Play the final section of the podcast that starts at **24.03** until the end.

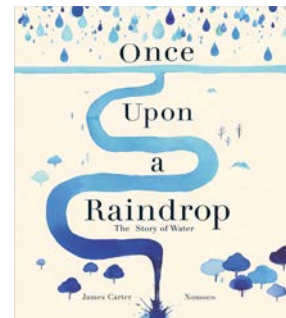
After listening discuss:

- Why might authors choose to give characters some traits that they have themselves?
- How does writing about a historical event help to end a story?
- Why is it important to research before writing a book based on an historical event?

10 BOOKS TO MAKE STEM sparkle

Science and maths should be subjects of wonder and these brilliant books will certainly awaken curious minds

FOUNDATION STAGE



Illustrations: Nomoco

2 Once Upon a Raindrop: The Story of Water

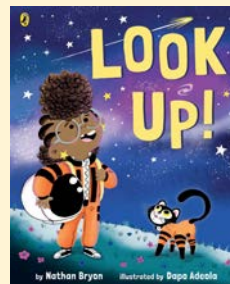
BY JAMES CARTER
AND NOMOCO
(CATERPILLAR BOOKS)

1

FOUNDATION STAGE

Look Up!

BY NATHAN BRYON AND
DAPO ADEOLA (PUFFIN)



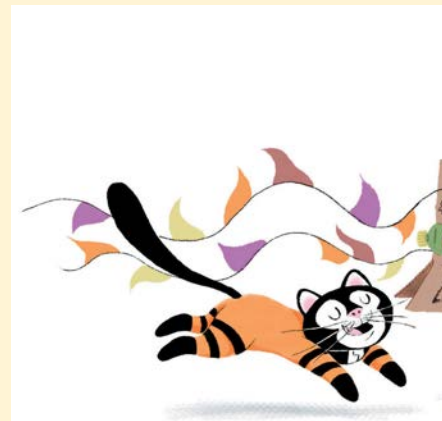
What's the story?

Rocket wants to be the world's greatest astronaut and star-catcher, and loves telling big brother Jamal all about astronomy – even when he's too busy to listen to her interesting facts! When the Phoenix Meteor Shower is due, Rocket wants everyone to see them. But will the meteors show up as planned? And will Jamal stop staring at his phone long enough to LOOK UP and see the wonders overhead?

This picturebook has a big heart and bags of scientific enthusiasm to go with its super-satisfying story.

Thinking and talking

What does Rocket tell us about space and stars? What did you know already?



Pool your knowledge.

Why do you think Rocket wants to be an 'astronaut, star-catcher and space-traveller'? What do you want to be when you grow up?

Do you have big brothers, sisters or cousins? What would you like to teach them? What have they taught you?

Try this...

■ Discover interesting facts about space and stars, then choose your favourite and write it neatly in a speech-bubble. Draw round someone and use the outline to paint a life-sized picture

What's the story?

Interesting facts about water are presented in a lyrical text that reads well aloud, and sophisticated illustrations add a wonderfully watery feel to every page. Themes include the water cycle, how water arrived on our planet, and facts and figures about water usage.



Thinking and talking

What was the most interesting thing you learned by reading this book? What was the most surprising? Which spread did you like best, and why?

How would you describe the pictures in this book? Why do you think Nomoco decided to paint them in this way?

How many forms does water take? Ice, liquid water, water vapour... How and where do we see or experience these different forms?

Try this...

■ Explore drips and drops of diluted ink or paint, tipping your paper to discover the



way gravity affects it. Create your own 'watery illustrations' and write your favourite water facts on them.

■ "Sun heats sea, which turns to clouds that trail the sky and drift around..." Explore the movements made by "cloud, rain, river, sea..." then add sound

effects and music to help you act out the water cycle. Add costumes and props to create your own performance!

■ Use your reading experience to inspire water-themed investigations such as floating and sinking, freezing and melting, and colour-mixing.



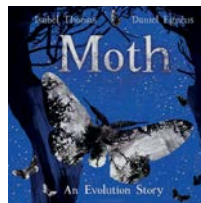
of Rocket. Display your speech-bubble facts around her.

■ Go out in the dark and observe the stars. What can you see? How does the night sky make you feel? Collect words to describe your experience, and use these to write descriptive sentences about the night sky.

■ Astronomers need to be observant. Go somewhere familiar and challenge yourself to notice five new things. What did you discover? Keep careful notes, like a scientist – and don't forget to LOOK UP!

KEY STAGE 1

3



Moth: An Evolution Story

BY ISABEL THOMAS AND DANIEL EGNEUS (BLOOMSBURY)

Illustrations: Daniel Egneus

What's the story?

"This is a story of light and dark. Of change and adaptation, of survival and hope..."

This picturebook explains natural selection in an engaging and accessible way by exploring changes in the wing patterns and colouration of peppered moths during the Industrial Revolution and beyond. Ideas including camouflage and predation, adaptation and heredity emerge within the narrative and are explored in a clear and

conversational way. The striking illustrations add depth and extend this book's age-appeal.

Thinking and talking

What have you learned by reading this book? Explain the key points in your own words. What questions do you have? How can you find answers?

How do we know about these moths and the way their wings adapted to changing pollution levels? Talk about scientific research. What is it, and how and where does it happen?

What is changing in the world today? How are

living creatures adapting? What happens if they can't adapt?

Try this...

■ Apply black and white paint to one side of a moth-shaped template, then fold and press to print a mirror image. Try placing your moth in different locations. Where is it most obvious? Against which background is it best camouflaged? Create a 'whisper of moths' by threading your printed templates together and hanging them where they can move freely.

■ Ask everyone to create a peppered moth using grey, black and white pigments (you could involve another class if you want more data). Keep your designs secret, then sort your moths by colour and pattern, in whatever way seems best – lightest to darkest, most to least patterned, largest to smallest, etc. What can you say about their appearance? Are they mostly dark or light? Patterned or plain? How many are dark? What fraction of the total is this? Pretend you're a scientist researching these moths, and talk about what you've observed and learned.



KEY STAGE 1

4

Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor: The Woman Who Loved Reptiles

BY PATRICIA VALDEZ AND FELICITA SALA (ANDERSEN PRESS)



Illustrations: Felicita Sala

What's the story?

Back in the days of “long skirts and afternoon teas”, a girl called Joan loved reptiles. Despite a chronic illness that led to her using a wheelchair, Joan became a scientist and curator at the Natural History Museum, and designed a new reptile house for London Zoo.

This picturebook tells an engaging non-fiction story with immense style, and, like its heroine, has a strong and eccentric heart.

Thinking and talking

Does it matter if we're afraid of reptiles? What's the best way of overcoming such fears, do you think?

How many jobs did Joan do? List them: scientist, curator, artist, model-maker, architect, vet, educator... What did these jobs involve? What skills did she need?

Try this...

■ Research a reptile and its habitat, then use what you've discovered to create a museum-style

diorama in a shoebox.

■ Look at the illustration showing Joan being interviewed. Write a newspaper report about



what Joan did, using the report described on this spread as a guide.

■ Can you turn it into the kind of report Joan wanted them to write, by adding interesting facts about the animals?

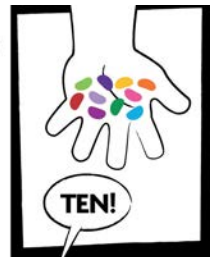
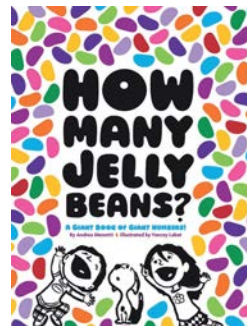
■ Find out about lizards – especially Komodo Dragons! – and give an illustrated presentation.

KEY STAGE 1

5

How Many Jelly Beans? A Giant Book of Giant Numbers

BY ANDREA MENOTTI, ILLUSTRATED BY YANCEY LABAT (CHRONICLE BOOKS)



What's the story?

How many jellybeans

should you ask for? Ten? Five hundred?

Ten thousand? Is it possible to have too many jellybeans?

Two children hold a realistic conversation about numbers in this outsized and brightly-coloured picturebook. Using dots to represent the beans, every number is illustrated – including a million on the giant foldout at the end!

Thinking and talking

Did anything surprise you in this book? What did you enjoy about it most?

What's your favourite sweet? How many do you (realistically) think you could eat in one day? How many would that be in a week? How did you arrive at this total?

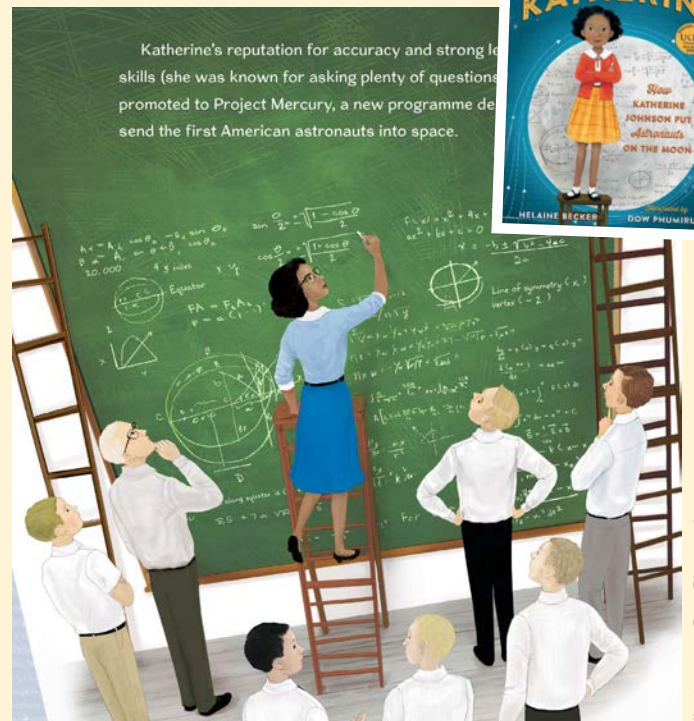
“Design a survey on favourite jellybean flavours”

KEY STAGE 2

6

Counting on Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Put Astronauts on the Moon

BY HELAINE BECKER AND DOW PHUMIRUK (MACMILLAN)



Illustrations: Dow Phumiruk

What's the story?

Born in 1918 in a segregated U.S. town, Katherine Johnson was a gifted mathematician who overcame significant obstacles to take a key role in America's Space Program. This appealing and beautifully presented picturebook tells her story in an engaging, character-focused way, allowing mathematical facts and ideas to emerge and be explained as part of the narrative.

Thinking and talking

What barriers did Katherine face in becoming a NASA mathematician? What qualities helped her overcome these barriers?

What does this book tell us about the development of computing machines? What

other knowledge do you have? Pool your ideas.

Try this...

■ "Because maths is a kind of language, Katherine could ask those questions..." What can you say in maths language? Look at some of the symbols you know, and talk about the ideas they represent. Can you make up sentences in English and translate them into maths language? Discuss your ideas: e.g. "How many sweets do I have if one pack contains 22 sweets and I have 8 packs?" could be written as $22 \times 8 = ?$

■ Challenge everyone to a Computing Bee. Work in teams of 'human computers' and imagine you're part of the Space Program. How many arithmetical problems can you solve? Which team works fastest? Which team is most accurate?



"Learn about lizards and give an illustrated presentation"

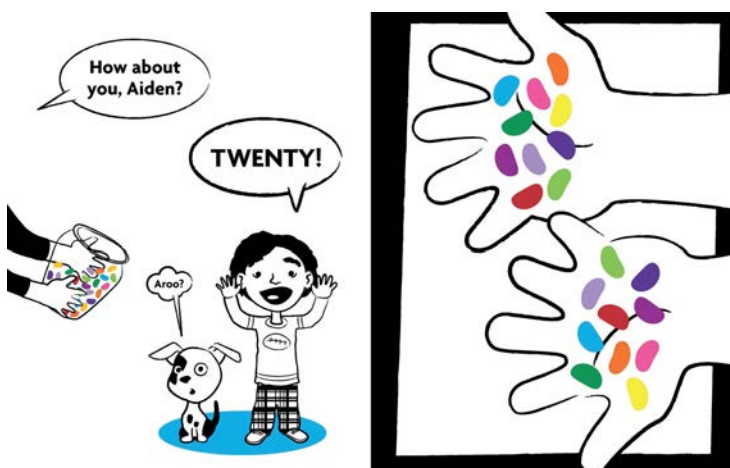
Try this...

■ Design a survey to discover people's favourite jellybean flavour. Display your results on a table, then use this to construct a jellybean-coloured bar-graph. What does it tell you about jellybean preferences in your school?

■ Explore one hundred by counting a hundred dried beans into a bowl. Is it easy to see how many you've got? Could you find other ways of arranging them that make counting easier? In groups of ten, for example,

or as an orderly 10x10 grid. Could you explore one thousand in the same way? Why would it be more difficult? Can you think of easier ways to do it? E.g. a hundred children count ten beans each.

■ Use counters to do some jellybean calculations. If bigger numbers are confusing (or you need too many counters) try making something to represent ten jellybeans, so you can count more easily. Talk about counting in tens, and how and why it helps.



KEY STAGE 2

7

Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species

RETOLD AND ILLUSTRATED BY SABRINA RADEVA (PUFFIN)



Illustrations: Sabrina Radeva

What's the story?

This attractive non-fiction picturebook tells the story of Darwin's famous publication within a broader scientific and historical context. Radeva's thoughtful illustrations deepen our understanding and create atmosphere, and

carefully-chosen quotations from Darwin's work give readers a taste of his original scientific language.

Thinking and talking

Using your own words, can you summarise the main points in this book? What is Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection about?

Darwin's theory started with curiosity and observation. What are you curious about? What do you like to observe?

Try this...

■ Use the chart on the endpapers to identify insects in this book. Why is it important to recognise and name living creatures? Consult handbooks to find

out about insects where you live, then draw and annotate your own chart to help you identify them.

■ Observe a living creature: a bird visiting a feeder, a spider in a web, a farm animal, your pet. How is it behaving? Draw what you see and make accurate notes. Report on what you've done, what you've learned and the questions your investigation has raised.

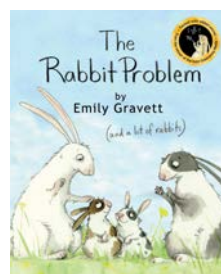
■ What happened when Darwin published his Theory of Evolution? Why did some people object? Are you aware of any arguments about scientific ideas today? What's the best way to establish the facts? How should differing opinions be accommodated? Discuss as a class.

8

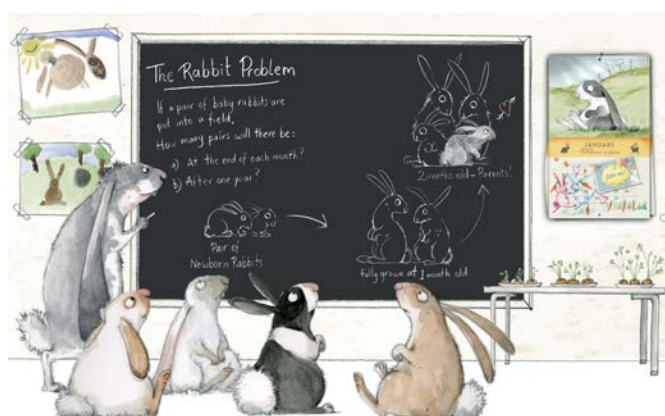
KEY STAGE 2

The Rabbit Problem

BY EMILY GRAVETT (MACMILLAN)



Illustrations: Emily Gravett



What's the story?

What will happen when Lonely Rabbit and his new partner become parents? By applying the same rules each time (rabbits become parents aged two months; no rabbits may leave the field) we're shown how quickly the rabbits

proliferate – and how their community evolves to keep them fed and entertained!

This book was inspired by the Fibonacci Problem and is bursting with mathematical ideas. Presented in calendar format, its inventive playfulness is enhanced by flaps and inserts throughout.

Thinking and talking

Which section did you enjoy most, and why?

Lots of maths ideas are explored in this book. How many can you find? How have they been incorporated into the story or pictures (e.g. number sequences, weight, length/depth, addition, units of measurement, temperature, tallying, bar graphs, line graphs, ordinal numbers, dates and times)?

Try this...

■ Create a table showing the months in one column, and the corresponding number of rabbit pairs in the other. What do you notice about the numbers of pairs?



1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21.... Can you see any relationships (or patterns) in this sequence? Each number is formed by adding the two previous numbers. Can you continue the sequence for the second year by applying the same rule?

■ Fibonacci was an Italian mathematician who was active in the early 13th Century. What can you discover about his life and work?

■ Take a look at some of the problems in your maths textbook. Could you turn one into an illustrated story?

9

KEY STAGE 2

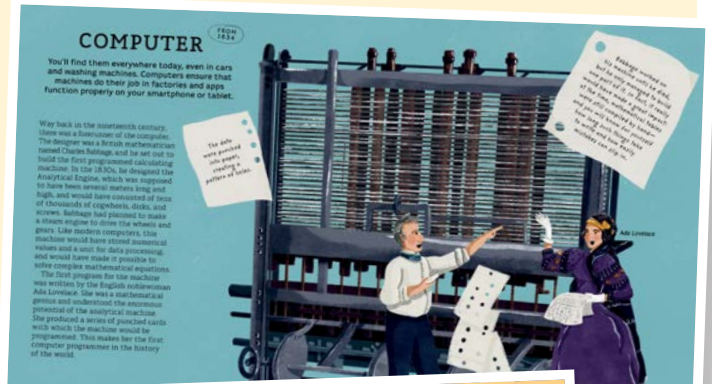
Who Invented This?
Smart People and
Their Bright IdeasBY ANNE AMERI-SIEMENS, ILLUSTRATED
BY BECKY THORNS (LITTLE GESTALTEN)

discovered these things (e.g. persistence, curiosity)?

Try this...

Choose an invention that hasn't been included. Research it, then write and illustrate an additional section for this book.

Why and how do people invent or discover new technologies and devices? Gather evidence from this book and other sources, and discuss. Write a short article about this subject, planning your argument carefully.



What's the story?

Thirty-four technological, cultural and medical inventions and discoveries are presented in article format in this attractive book. The text is accessible, authoritative and entertaining, and annotated illustrations provide further information and interest.

Each section stands alone, so readers can dip in and out, and the diverse topics include letterpress printing, the microchip, plastic, toothpaste, the electric guitar and traffic lights.

Thinking and talking

Which invention or discovery interested you most? Which do you think has had the biggest impact on our world?

What hasn't been included in this book that you would like to know about?

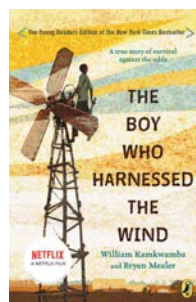
Can you identify any shared characteristics amongst the people who invented or



Illustration Becky Thorns. Who Invented This?, Little Gestalten 2021

KEY STAGE 2

10



The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (Young Readers Edition)

BY WILLIAM KAMKWAMBA AND
BRYAN MEALER (RAZORBILL)

What's the story?

When a terrible famine hits William's village in Malawi, his childhood interest in tinkering with machines becomes a determination to generate electricity via a wind-powered turbine built from junkyard scraps. This absorbing first-person account is adapted from the New York Times bestseller and focuses on William's optimism and resolve,

but this is a realistic story and there are some hard-hitting episodes.

Thinking and talking

What experiences and hopes do you and William share? In what ways does his childhood differ from yours?

This book shows creative thinking being applied to engineering and technology.

How, why and when is William creative in this book?

How does William respond to challenges, setbacks and failures? Find examples. What can we learn from this? Why do people often say that failure is an important part of the creative process?

Try this...

Make a list of the electrical terms and ideas referred to

in this book. In your own words, explain what they mean and why they're important in the story.

Working together, use electrical components and/or recycled materials to investigate some of these ideas, e.g. wiring bulbs in series, creating an electromagnet using a nail.

Wind generators are one way of creating renewable energy. Find out about other ways, and how they're being used around the world.



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

Writing mundane sonnets

When children write poems about what's important to them, the subject matter might seem uninspired, but the results are anything but, says **Jonny Walker**

I do not remember dissecting the structures of poems whilst I was a child. I am sure we probably did, but what I do remember is Mrs Haldenby. She was a cover teacher throughout my time in primary school and at the end of every morning, she would always perform a poem. It was her ritual. We would sit in crossed-legged anticipation whilst she delivered *If You Should Meet a Crocodile or Please Mrs Butler*. Then we would all traipse out to eat trayfuls of pie.

One of the other memories I have is of a weird rhyme created by a Year 6 classmate. We had been learning about chocolate. We had to make advertising jingles and one kid – whose song outlasted my memory of his name – created these immortal lines:

“Rolo bar got de taste dat you want / it’s nutritious and delicious, it’s what everybody wants / it’s going cheap / 30p / and when you buy one you get one free.”

WH Auden defined poetry as ‘memorable speech’, and these anecdotes attest to the peculiar stickiness of rhyme, rhythm and ritual. Poetry is social, and the threads of literacy are interwoven with the threads of friendship, relationships and memories.

Something I’ve spent a lot of time exploring is what can happen when we take full account of the social nature of poetry learning, and harness it in our classrooms. What are the pleasures of this, and what are the challenges? What, ultimately, could a poetry classroom be like?

Poetry that matters

In a recent book I wrote with Michael Rosen, *How to Get Children Writing and Performing Poems Too*, we look at how poetry should ideally

be a pleasurable experience for children. This pleasure might be found in the process of writing, or in the relief of finishing it after a period of struggle. It might be found in the satisfaction of spotting the ‘secret strings’ that hold a poem together. It might be found in the discussion and exchange of stories. Pleasure needs to be there somewhere though.

If we make it so difficult or so remote from the children’s lives or interests, then I think we end up in a state of negativity that is very hard to overcome.

Children should be able to create poetry that matters to them. The quality of a poetry lesson can often be determined by the

quality of its talk. The rich exchange of anecdotes, opinions and viewpoints grounds children’s writing and empowers them to write. But so many of our young poets struggle to write because they don’t know what to say,

within the parameters we set for them.

Perhaps we ought to query how necessary some of these parameters are.

Freedom and constraint

Poetry is often taught thematically. The children might read a poem or two about



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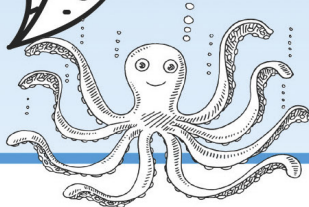


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Gemma Hall, Assistant Head Teacher (Writing Leader), Portway Primary School, London

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Richard Long, English Lead Practitioner, St Michael's Catholic School, Buckinghamshire

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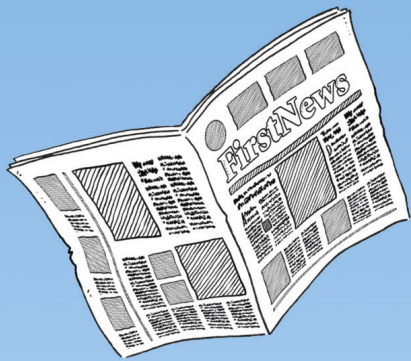
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Deborah Fitzpatrick, Deputy Head Teacher and SENDCo,
Saint Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wythenshawe

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“How many of our children are being coaxed to write about the bleating of lambs and the emergence of daffodils when they have not seen either?”

autumn, or about spring, and then be tasked to write their own poems... about autumn, or about spring.

How many of our children are being coaxed to write about the bleating of lambs and the emergence of daffodils when they have not seen either? How many of them are encouraged to write about the falling leaves in the forest, and all those barren branches, without having experienced them?

Similar things happen when we teach poetry in a text-based approach. Perhaps the children spend a few lessons studying a poem, before they make their own ‘version’, often using a frame or the sentence stems that we give them.

Is the quality of their poem judged on how closely it matches our model? Is the poem created to be enjoyed, or to evidence the child’s ability to shoehorn specific devices into their writing? Who is the writing for, and who is it by?

We can do things to give children greater ownership of their writing.

We can, for instance, help to widen their realm of experience to give them more to write about. Writing about the falling leaves becomes a more authentic task if you have spent time together in the woodland. Writing about the noise of the city means more when the kids have stood in the shadows of skyscrapers whilst traffic roars past.

As well as creating experiences, we can make a simple change in our language. This – I think – has the most effect. Instead of getting them to write poetry about autumn, and encouraging them to talk about those falling leaves, we can spend time talking about what autumn means for them. This is where we can find the uniqueness of experience and thought which characterises good, meaningful poetry.

Autumn, for one child, might conjure up the dimly-lit alleyway they pass through on the way home from football practice, which becomes a frightening place in the early dusk of November. Autumn might mean they

have to start wearing trousers instead of shorts again. Autumn might mean they are cold at bedtime.

Autumn might mean many more interesting things for them than the hibernation of an animal they have never seen. We need to open a space for children to express their own interpretations of our themes.

Overcoming challenges

When children know they have the permission to interpret writing tasks with some real autonomy, the process becomes altogether more exciting. It is not a question of absolute freedom and absolute control. In practice, all that we are doing is entrusting the children with more autonomy than we would afford them generally, whilst still giving them some structure and guidance.

A few years ago, I was teaching Year 5 about sonnets; we had been exploring Shakespeare’s sonnets alongside some from Rachel Rooney’s *A Kid In My Class* collection. We explored the themes that sonnets typically include. When planning the lessons, I began thinking about how the children might approach the themes of romantic love. Whilst some of them may have had things to say, I paused and asked myself a few other questions: why were we learning about sonnets, and what did I want them to gain from it?

I recognised that I wanted the children to experience the struggle and rewards of adhering to the sonnet form – the lessons were about introducing the rhyme pattern and metric structure. So I decided this is where I would put my control, and I would free up the content. What would it look like if they wrote sonnets about things that meant something to them?

This led to our collection of Mundane Sonnets. Some children did choose to play with ideas of romance – one boy memorably wrote a very

flattering poem addressed to the most handsome boy in the class (himself). Others played with the sonnet form, but spoke about how disgusting the Jubilee Line is.

Inviting real expression in our writing classrooms poses some challenges. Children are likely to produce wildly dissimilar pieces once they are writing for themselves and each other, rather than mainly to follow our instructions. Sessions may deviate from where we expect them to travel. Those children who currently thrive by writing-on-demand may feel disempowered at first by a move to an approach that values their own self-expression more highly.

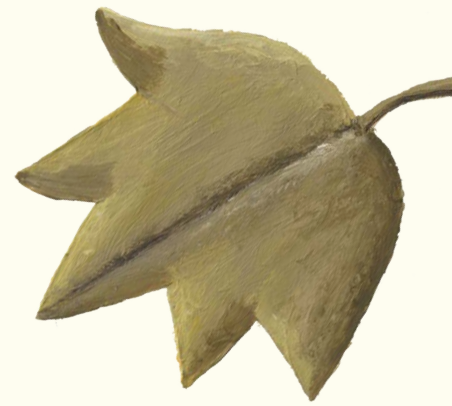
And these challenges are often the very same productive struggles that can bring us pleasure in our classrooms, as our children form a real writing community.



Jonny Walker is a primary teacher and poetry specialist teacher in East London. He is the author of Michael Rosen’s Poetry

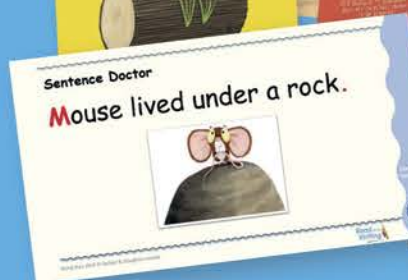
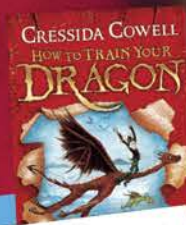
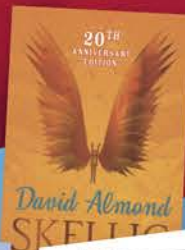
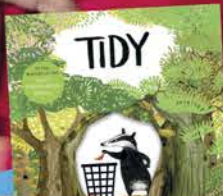


Videos: How To Get Children Writing and Performing Poems Too, written with Michael Rosen - available via MichaelRosen.co.uk



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Fairlop Primary School, Ilford

"The engagement of the class with these texts was outstanding"

Ian King, Year 5 teacher at Fairlop Primary School in Ilford, tells us why he chose Ray Bradbury's *Short Stories: Space* and how it has developed pupils' writing, punctuation, vocabulary, empathy and much more!

How did you use the Ray Bradbury *Read into Writing* unit with your class?

Both *The Rocket* and *All Summer in a Day* are texts that have really engaged the children and tie in well with the Year 5 unit of Earth and Space. For example, we were able to compare Ray Bradbury's depictions of Venus and Mars with what we know of the planets today.

I used the plans as they were, though found myself adapting one or two of the activities, so if I felt that drama was not going to work then we imagined that we were directors sat in groups discussing *how* that part of text may be dramatised, why characters may react in certain ways, and what this tells us about the author's intentions in terms of character portrayal.

How did your pupils respond to such an in-depth study of a book in terms of their enjoyment and engagement?

On the whole, the engagement of the class with these texts was outstanding, as was the resulting writing (relatively speaking).

The Rocket provokes philosophical discussion from the first few pages to the last: Should Bodoni follow his dreams or should he listen to the time-soaked wisdom of old Bramante? Should one of the Bodonis travel to Mars when the others cannot? Would Maria really have handed Bodoni the key to the closet in which she has locked the children? Is Bodoni, at the end of it all, a good father? These discussions really engaged the children.

Similarly, with *All Summer in a Day*, there is plenty of opportunity for philosophical discussion as well as drama and developing empathy for characters. I had mixed emotions when one of the children in the class burst into tears because, as someone who emigrated to the UK eighteen months before, she *felt* what Margot felt having been relocated to the planet of Venus where the rain falls continuously. She understood Margot's emotions completely and, boy, did it show in her writing.

The dialogic opportunities presented by these discussions not only allow the children to engage constructively with each other's views - creating hypotheses, clarifying their ideas, questioning each other's assumptions etc. - but they also allow exploration of the writing process itself.

How effective was the *Read in to Writing* approach in improving reading skills?

The children benefitted hugely from developing an in-depth relationship with the text: vocabulary, punctuation and syntax. Taking time to engage with the rhythm of the text by exploring how a writer has intended a text to be read, both through imitating how the teacher reads it and by exploring in pairs, is crucial to developing an understanding of the writing (and by extension the reading) process.

The *Read into Writing* approach also emphasises the importance of critical engagement with unfamiliar word and phrase choices, developing not only the children's vocabulary, but also their skills in deciphering language.

How effective was the *Read in to Writing* approach in improving writing skills including grammar and vocabulary? Did you find it effective to develop these skills in context?

I found the *Read in to Writing* approach highly effective in improving writing skills in particular. For the duration of this unit, children were always ready to write, showing they had developed a good understanding of the texts at a fundamental level, grasping not only character but also narrative structure. Examining *how* a writer writes and emphasising an engagement with a text on this level, while encouraging children to imitate the style of the writer, is the only way to get children to begin to understand how to write with 'voice', to understand how character is developed and to improve understanding of how dialogue works, as well as the silences in a dialogue between the spoken words.

Investigating the construction of sentences and paragraphs and emulating these is also central to the *Read in to Writing* approach and it is wonderful to see confidence grow with children of all levels.

Why Ray Bradbury's *Short Stories: Space*? What makes him such a great author to share in a classroom and to link with the wider curriculum?

Ray Bradbury is one of the classic American writers. He was prolific and his powers of imagination were immense, so there are many other stories of his with which to delight the children. The themes of *The Rocket* and *All Summer in a Day* are relevant to the children at all times, the theme of bullying in *All Summer in a Day* in particular. Space stories link beautifully to the topic Earth and Space, but it must also be remembered that Bradbury was writing in 1950s America, a time when interest in Space travel was huge. Today, thanks in part to the 50th Anniversary of the Moon Landings in 2019, interest in Space exploration is once again astronomical.

In your opinion, what are the benefits of exploring whole texts rather than shorter extracts?

All Summer in a Day and *The Rocket* are short stories, so they are perfect for a whole text approach that allows children to investigate how themes and characters are developed, as well as permitting sustained exploration into how a particular author *writes*, thereby giving the children the opportunity to learn the craft of writing through imitation. There will not be the same depth of character development that there would be in a novel, but the concepts of developing character through action and dialogue and in how they react to whatever conflict the stories hold will be valuable learning experiences for the children. Short extracts do not offer this same opportunity.

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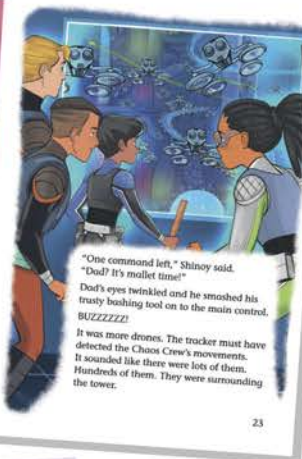
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(Keri Edwards, Agate Momentum Trust, 2020)*

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Suzanne McCaig,
Sheringham Community Primary School, Norfolk



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Creating good READERS

Boost pupils' post-pandemic skills by considering how you explicitly teach the strategies that children need to be successful

JO GRAY & LAURA LODGE

Reading is the key to learning. However, if you're a child who finds reading tricky, loving it can be a real challenge. Right now this is even more important, given that according to the DfE, pupils are on average two months behind in their reading learning as a result of the pandemic. How can we reverse this trend and ensure every child becomes a good reader?

The first step is to identify the exact level at which pupils are reading. A diagnostic assessment and gap analysis will give you the information you need. Try to get a snapshot of each child's reading attainment, including decoding, fluency and comprehension. Once your assessments are complete, look for patterns in your gap analysis and plan how to address these.

Widening repertoires

When teaching reading, choice of text is very important. Think about the complexity of decoding, vocabulary and content, and of course, engagement. Try not to just use familiar books, but instead focus on widening children's reading repertoire. This is where your knowledge of children's literature comes in. You could even explore paired texts, such as *Beetle Boy* and *The Beetle Collector's Handbook* by MG Leonard so that pupils can make connections in their reading.

Cultural capital

Pupils who struggle to read sometimes need to build their background knowledge and vocabulary. A child with good cultural capital will often have more of the

prerequisite knowledge needed to understand what they are reading than a disadvantaged child. Try exploring key concepts and vocabulary before reading. For example, with *Beetle Boy*, you might discuss mystery stories, insects and museums first. Then you could teach key vocabulary such as 'specimen' and 'archaeologist', giving them strategies to unpick unknown vocabulary. With 'archaeologist', for instance, explain that '-ist' means 'somebody who does or makes' and gather as many examples as you can, discussing their shared meaning.

Cognitive processes

Every good reader has a range of skills they use to make meaning. By explicitly teaching these, we can support all children to become resilient readers and give them the knowledge needed to comprehend any text. But which skills and strategies need to be taught? The most important skills of a reader are to retrieve information, define vocabulary in context and make inferences. A good reader will also sequence events, summarise content and predict what comes next. They will consider the effect of language, make comparisons and explore relationships. These aspects of reading need to be taught progressively and regularly. Skills need to

be explicitly taught and modelled, including the metacognitive processes we use when reading. For example, when teaching inference, introduce the idea of "What I read" + "What I know" + "What I think" = my inference". By breaking down the cognitive processes behind reading, you can show children what a good reader does and give them the strategies they need to create meaning, before they practise and apply them.

Teaching reading strategies is a complex process and can be daunting. Reflecting on your subject knowledge is really important and getting to grips with research such as the EEF Literacy Guidance Reports is a great start.

Reading journey

Reading for pleasure has a profound effect on children's ability to understand what they read. We need to encourage a love of reading whenever we can: children need daily time to read books *they* want to read, and need to see reading role models. By encouraging children to read for pleasure, we help them read more, and the more they read, the better readers they become. For children to achieve their potential, you must consider your whole-school reading curriculum and whether it teaches the skills needed. Supporting a child on their reading journey is about so much more than just academic success. The benefits of reading go far beyond this. When we support every child to be a good reader, the benefits will stretch throughout their lives.

Jo Gray and Laura Lodge are authors of Schofield & Sims' Complete Comprehension and education consultants for One Education.

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(Stephen Connor, Weston on Trent Primary, 2021)

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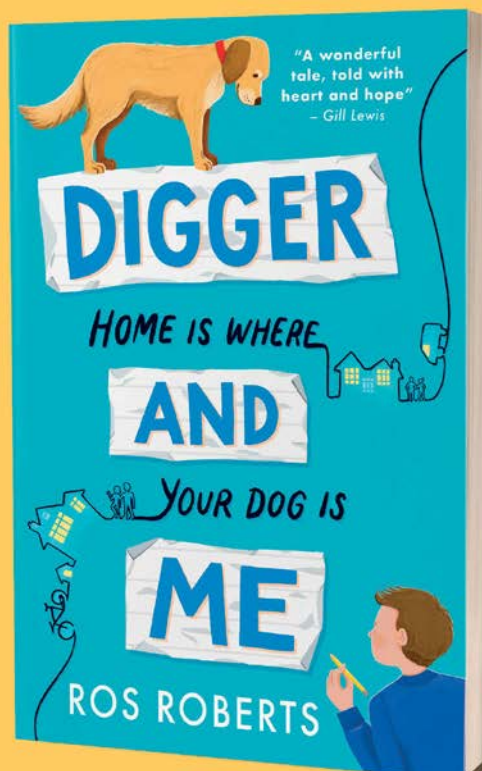
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What happened NEXT?!

From the cliffhanger to the big reveal, **James Clements** shows you how *Orphans of the Tide* can be used to help children become masters of suspenseful writing

Just what makes a story exciting? Ask a primary-aged class and they're likely to tell you that it's action: a rollercoaster of exhilarating events that leave you breathless and your heart racing.

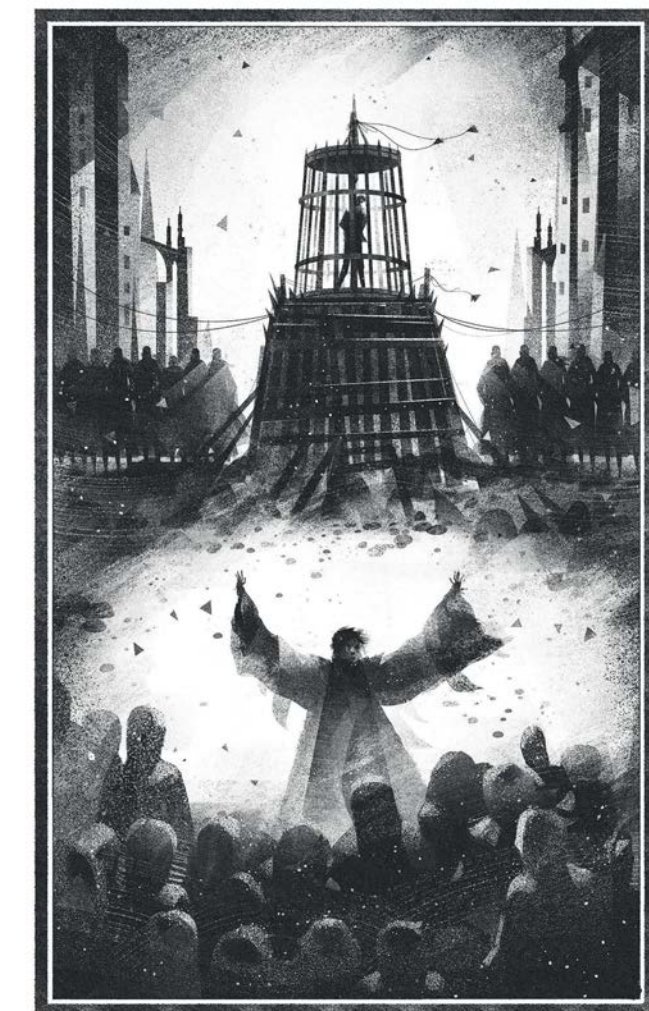
That's true, but the other thing that makes rollercoasters exciting is the anticipation, the slow ascent and agonising pause at the top before the plunge. An exciting story works in the same way, balancing action with space to build suspense – moments where the reader is waiting to see what will unfold, desperate to read on, but also nervous to turn the page just in case the terrible moment they're expecting actually happens.

Learning to master the skill of building suspense in their writing can be tricky for children, but it can also make for a hugely enjoyable and satisfying challenge. As with most good English teaching, success relies on seeing how something works in practice.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write their own exciting stories full of suspense, learning from one of the masters of the field, the author Struan Murray and his wonderful book *Orphans of the Tide*. Set in the strange City, the book follows orphan Ellie and the mysterious Seth as they struggle to find the truth about The Enemy and themselves. As well as inspiration for exciting writing, the book makes a wonderful read-aloud for upper KS2.

Where to start

The first activity is a simple one:



read and enjoy the book. This could be organised as the class novel, with the teacher reading part of the book aloud every day over several weeks; or it can be done in small-group or whole-class reading sessions, with follow up questions or activities as children read.

By the end, what we want is a class of motivated, excited children who've enjoyed a great shared class read and are full of enthusiasm before they begin writing their own stories.

1 Thinking about suspense

Ask the children to talk with a partner about how the book made them feel as they were listening. Was it exciting? Funny? Sad? Gripping?

Collect the children's ideas and ask them if they agree that Struan Murray creates a sense of excitement throughout the story. As readers, we're desperate to read on and find out what

happens next, even if we're worried about the characters and what might happen to them. This is a sense of suspense.

2 How to create suspense

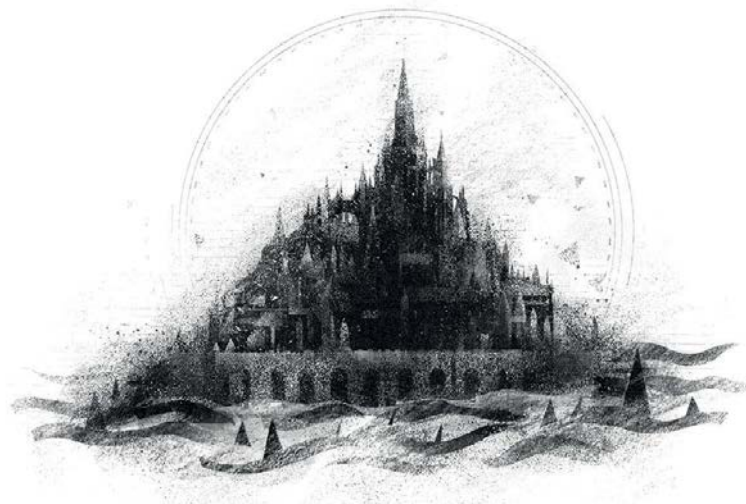
Next, ask the children to think about moments in the book where their heart was racing and they want to find out what is going to happen next. You might prompt them by suggesting some key scenes:

- When we first meet Ellie in The City
- When Seth appears from the whale
- When Ellie and Seth are caught in the fire at the Oystery
- When we finally discover who the Vessel is

Once they have shared these moments, ask the class to think about why they found them exciting. Thinking back over the scenes they have mentioned and the book as a whole, ask children if any of the scenes are exciting because they feature:

Cliffhangers

The classic technique for hooking a reader and compelling them to turn the page. Remind the children that a cliffhanger is where the action stops at an exciting moment and we can't bear not to know what happens next. In *Orphans of the Tide*, we have many of these, but the last line of Chapter 5, where Ellie discovers that Seth's execution is already underway, is a perfect example.



The big reveal

This technique is almost the opposite of a cliffhanger. Here, we end a chapter by finding out a piece of information that changes everything we thought we knew and we just have to read on to find out its implications. In *Orphans of the Tide* we have one of these almost every time the story moves to Claude Hestermeyer's diary (and we have the end of Chapter 15, where we find out...well, I'd better not mention it just in case you haven't read the book yet!)

Characters we care about

Empathy plays a huge part in building suspense: as readers, we need to be rooting for our characters and wanting them to succeed. In Ellie and Seth, we have the eponymous orphans, alone (apart from each other and a small cast of friends and allies) against far more powerful enemies. The fact they choose to help one another even when it puts them in danger, puts the reader firmly on their side.



A free writing class from Struan Murray



If you're interested in using Struan Murray's *Orphans of the Tide* books as a starting point for teaching children about writing for suspense, there's a wonderful free resource to help with just that.

Author in Your Classroom is a free podcast from Plazoom which offers a virtual author visit: 30 minutes of an author talking about their work and the craft of writing, supported by a free resource pack.

The Struan Murray episode features Struan talking about

building suspense and comes with an adaptable PowerPoint presentation, extracts from *Orphans of the Tide* and planning sheets and teaching notes. You can find it by searching online for 'Author in Your Classroom Struan Murray'.

Time constraints

Nothing helps to create a sense of tension like time ticking away - the display of a detonator counting down or the oxygen slowly seeping out of an air tank. In the book, we have the race against Ellie's slowly fading strength and the growing strength of the Enemy, adding an extra layer of tension. The characters don't just need to succeed, they need to succeed before they run out of time (and, of course, good authors add plenty of obstacles in the characters' way).

and it needs to be just as exciting as the one they've just read.

Give them time to plan their own story, drawing on the elements they discussed earlier, perhaps prompting them by asking:

- Where could you include a cliffhanger or big reveal in your story?
- How could you build in a time constraint?
- What is the question to which your reader is desperate to know the answer?

Posing questions

In the Author In Your Classroom podcast (see top right for details), Struan Murray describes suspense coming from the author asking questions to which the reader is desperate to know the answer. The trick is then to provide answers as slowly as possible, leaving 'a trail of breadcrumbs for them to follow'. In *Orphans of the Tide*, our understanding of the world the characters inhabit grows slowly, with the reader having to piece together clues until what's happening becomes clear.

Once they have planned their story, they can start writing before sharing their finished pieces with their classmates.

Finally, you could finish by reading the next *Orphans of the Tide* book - *Shipwreck Island*. How do the adventures they've created compare with Struan Murray's ideas about what happens next?

3 Writing for suspense

Tell the children they are going to write the story of Ellie and Seth's next adventure



James Clements (@MrJClements) is an education writer and researcher and the author of *Teaching English by the Book*.

English by the Book.



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KS2**

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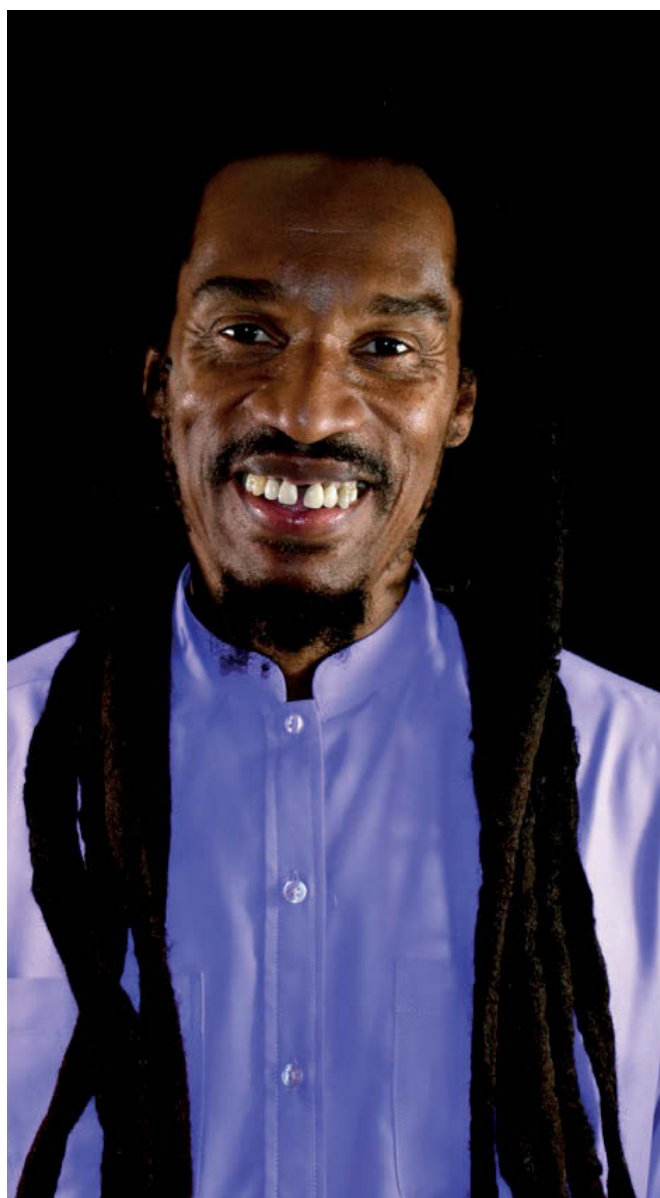
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Finding Your Voice, with Benjamin Zephaniah

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

There's nothing quite like that sensation when you settle down to read a book and a character speaks to you so clearly that it's like they're there in the room with you. You're there sharing their adventures, seeing the world through their eyes, feeling what they feel. It takes skill to write like this, but although tricky to master, it can be a hugely motivating and rewarding skill to explore in the classroom with young writers.

Of the many authors we might turn to for inspiration for this aspect of writing, few come more highly-qualified than the much-loved poet and author Benjamin Zephaniah. In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write stories of their own with a powerful voice, whether that is their own voice, sharing their perspective and passions, or writing in role as a character from history with an important story to tell. Extracts from Plazoom's *Author In Your Classroom* podcast (episode 11), featuring Benjamin Zephaniah, are used to support each section; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (bit.ly/AIYCBenZephaniah) as an introduction.



SESSION 1

STARTING WITH YOUR VOICE

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **27.48** up to **29.09**. Tell the children that in this unit of work, they are going to write stories with a strong narrative voice. It might be their own voice or the voice of another character



they have invented.

2 | Ask the children if there are stories from their own life that they think would be good to tell. Remind them that it doesn't have to be something big or dramatic like Leonard's story in *Windrush Child* – a small moment that they remember really clearly or something funny or strange that happened would make for an excellent story, too.

3 | Ask the children to think about possible answers to the questions:

- Is there a story from your own life that you think readers would like to hear?
- Are there any experiences you've had that other people might find interesting?
- What matters to you most in

the world? Is this something that could become a story?

- Has something happened that made you feel a strong emotion? A time where you felt very happy, sad, triumphant, or something that really made you laugh?
- 4 | Ask the children to jot down their ideas. Reassure them that if they cannot think of anything they want to write about from their own life or they don't want to share a personal story, there is another option for their writing in the next session.

***"If you don't write your
story... somebody will
write it for you"***



SESSION 2

STARTING WITH A VOICE THAT NEEDS TO BE SHARED

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **9:34** up to **12:52**. Ask the children if they were to 'reach into history and find voices that need to be shared', which voice might they choose?

2 | As a class, come up with a list of possibilities, prompting children's thinking by asking:

- Are there any stories from history that you'd like to tell?
- Are there any events or periods of history that you know lots about?

- Are there any periods of history that you've studied at school that would make good stories?

- Are there any aspects of history that people should know about because they are important or because we can learn lessons from them?

3 | Ask the children to work with a partner to think of some ideas that they might like to write about and then refine these down to one favourite idea. Next, they should start thinking about who could tell the story. Remind children that their character needs to be an eyewitness to the events, but that their writing is likely to be more powerful if it is someone affected by the

events, just like Leonard in *Windrush Child*.

4 | When they have completed this task, ask the children to share their research in groups or as a whole class. Are there any stories that people are particularly looking forward to hearing? Are there any stories that need to be heard?

5 | Finally, ask individual children to look at their two ideas (the personal story and the voice from history) and choose the one that they are going to use for their writing. Remind the children that if they like both of their ideas, they can choose one now and can always write the other one at a later time.

SESSION 3

WRITING THE STORY

1 | Play the section of the podcast again that starts at **13:30** up until **19:56**, where there is a reading from *Windrush Child*. Ask the children to close their eyes and picture carefully what happens to Leonard in the scene. How does he feel? (His emotions, not just that he feels cold!) How do we know this from

Benjamin's writing?

2 | Ask the children to think about how Benjamin captures and shares Leonard's voice in the part he reads aloud. They might comment on:

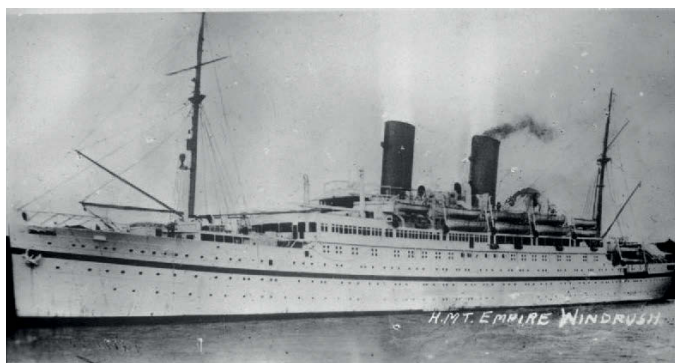
- The words and phrases Leonard uses (*she does kindness. She is kind to everyone*)
- The moments where Leonard shares his feelings and perspective (*I just wished I was big enough to help her; I felt the chill run all the way down my spine*)
- The fact that events are told

from Leonard's point of view (*I couldn't understand why she was trying so hard to look good now; for the first time since we left Jamaica I began to feel excited about seeing my dad*)

3 | Now, ask children to return to one of their plans and to write their own first-person story with a strong narrative voice. Remind them that it might be their own voice of the voice of a character (invented or real) from history.

4 | Challenge them to use some of the features that Benjamin Zephaniah uses in his writing to bring their character's voice to life, including:

- Writing in the first person
- Telling the story from a particular point of view
- Detailing their character's (or their own) feelings
- Using words and phrases to reflect how their character might speak/using their own unique voice



SESSION 4

EDITING AND REDRAFTING

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

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

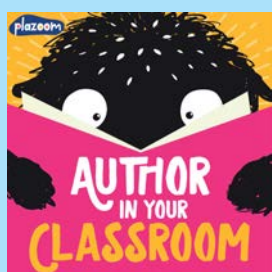
AFTER THE UNIT...

Play the section of the podcast that starts at **29:19** until the end.

Working as a class, summarise what Benjamin has to say about the power of poetry. Ask:

- Do the children enjoy reading poetry? Why/why not?
- Do they enjoy writing poetry? Do they see it as something for them?
- What could they learn from Benjamin Zephaniah about writing poetry and the importance of sharing their ideas?
- Read the children some of Benjamin's poetry aloud (*Talking Turkeys* is a great place to start) or watch some clips of Benjamin reading his poetry aloud online.

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



EVACUEE

Mixing history with fiction can inspire powerful writing, and **Pie Corbett's** model text will show your class just how it's done

Sometimes, I still think about it. Sometimes, I can see myself on the platform. A small, pale, insignificant figure waiting with Ma, and the loudspeaker blaring, "All passengers on train number 352, please climb aboard for departure!"

I remember holding tightly onto all that I had: a brown paper bag with a hot potato and my gas mask. I clambered onto the train and squeezed into a seat by several of my school friends. As the engine gradually began to move, pounding steam, I stared out of the window and saw Ma in the crowd, waving. I pressed my face against the cold glass and watched as the platform diminished until

Birmingham, my old life and my mother had gone. "I hope you're OK, Dad," I whispered. It had been weeks since he'd left and we still hadn't heard.

All I'd ever known was the back of Sherborne Street. As the train left the city, fields and farms swept past. My life until then had been back-to-back houses. It seemed an age before the train arrived in a green valley. I stood with the others on the platform at Chalford and waited. One by one, people came and took the others away until in the end, there was just me. Perhaps it was because of the shoes. I hadn't got any and my feet were black with grime.

Mrs Hill soon sorted that! Every Saturday, the metal tub was dragged outside and water pulled from the well so that I could be scrubbed. The soap made my eyes water and the brush she used was harsh on my skin. I had a little room in the attic. I'd lie in bed and stare out of the window,

astounded by the stars as I listened to the nightingales in Farm Lane. I remembered what Ma had taught me and, every night, I prayed for my dad and my ma and the king.

That winter, the village became locked in by snow. One Saturday, I woke to hear what sounded like gunfire. I peered out of the window expecting to see Mr Hitler and his army but the lane was white and everything seemed quite still. Until, another crack and bang! Then I saw it. The branches on the trees were breaking under the weight of the ice, some splitting the trunks right open. I tugged on my clothes and ran downstairs to check whether the rabbits had survived the cold. That was

organised for four of us to take it in turns to sleep over at the Hornby's house in Isles Green. It was the only local house with a phone and he reckoned that if there was an invasion then we could carry messages around the village.

So it was that the day after the snow had gripped the village, frozen the water in the Holy well and blocked some of the lanes, I left school on the dot and trudged up the hill towards Isles Green. Mrs Hill had made me some shoes out of an old tyre and some scraps of leather and material. They were better than nothing but by the time I got to the Hornbys' my feet were red and raw with the cold. Icicles hung

from the roof of the building like jagged teeth.

Mrs Hornby took me to the room where us lads always slept. It was a library, each wall covered in shelves of books. I loved it there. The

library was the place where my world grew. Until I came to the village, I had not been able to read. But once again, Mrs Hill had sorted that. She had made me read every night and gradually over the first few months it began to make sense. And once I was away, once I had cracked reading, then I read everything that I could and the Hornby's library was my favourite place. I read about Robinson Crusoe alone on an island and I read too of Captain Hawkins and Long John Silver. I learned to lose myself in stories. I even learned to love the smell of books, the feel of their covers and the crisp pages.

A fire smouldered in the grate. Mrs Hornby had left out a blanket, an apple, a piece of meat pie and two squares of chocolate. I pulled the blanket round me, took a cushion from a chair and as the darkness crept in, I snuggled down in front of the glowing embers and gently blew on them. It was too dark to read, so

"A pale, heart-shaped face with huge amber eyes stared back at me. I laughed with relief. It wasn't a lost soldier or a man of the road. It wasn't my father's ghost..."

one of my jobs. I made sure to collect grass, dandelions and greens to feed them. Mrs Hill had warned me not to get too fond of them and to make sure that I fattened them up...

Probably the most exciting thing that had happened since I'd arrived had been the plane crash-landing on Strawberry Banks. We'd been in the little village school, heard it screech overhead, just missing the bell tower and land in the fields. Old Mrs Bailey's maid found one German parachutist in the garden and fetched him a glass of sherry while the authorities came. Bob Gardiner's dad was the warden and had stood guard with his gun. What the pilot didn't know was that he had no ammunition! After that, Mr Gardiner

**TEACH
THE TEXT**
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Pie's story can be
found at [teachwire.
net/evacuee](http://teachwire.net/evacuee)

I lay there and wondered where my dad was. How was Ma? I seemed a very long way from Sherborne Street. Mrs Hill was fine enough but it wasn't like being at home.

Then I heard it. A scratch at the window. A whisper, perhaps. Then a tapping. I imagined it might be some poor soul, lost on the roads and in need of shelter. Perhaps it was a soldier lost in the snow. Then it occurred to me, ridiculous as it may sound, that perhaps it was my father trying to find me! For a while, the fear paralysed me. I could not move but in the end, I plucked up enough courage.

The windows were covered with a thick cloth so that no light escaped. I tugged

at the edge and peered out. A pale, heart-shaped face with huge amber eyes stared back at me. I laughed with relief. Then stifled it, in case I woke someone up. It wasn't a lost soldier or a man of the road. It wasn't my father's ghost, wandering the cold fields. It was a barn owl. It just sat there and wouldn't move even when I tried to shush it away from the window ledge. Stubbornly, it ruffled its feathers and looked at me with the deepest, soulful eyes.

So, I shredded the meat pie and fed

it scraps. It gulped them down and then looked to me for more. It finished the pie and then it even took a slice of apple. Once it had eaten, it swivelled its head to look across the garden towards the woods. With a sudden rush of feathers, it took off and like a ghost flew into the darkness.

And when I walked back to Mrs Hill's the next day, I scanned the trees hoping to see my owl but there was nothing, just the wind whipping the snow into drifts. Bisley Road was almost full of snow so I kept to the fields, tracking where a fox had stalked the night before. As I walked down Farm Lane, I could see a lantern at Mrs Hill's, casting a golden shaft across the snowy vegetable patch that had once been a lawn. She was up early. There was wood smoke





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“

The books are obviously chosen with care and skill and the layout of the catalogue and the year group packs meant that ordering a large amount of books took no time at all. I am delighted with them all! They have already taken pride of place in our library and there is a real buzz as children are choosing not just one book but a whole list that they want to read!

Amanda Dakin — Literacy Co-Ordinator

”



coming from the chimney and I could smell porridge. I stepped into the kitchen full of my story about the owl. Mrs Hill was waiting for me. And behind her, out of the shadows, somebody stood and, into the early morning lantern light, stepped my father, his face pale and his eyes staring at me.

Lesson notes

All writers do research before writing. Michelle Paver has visited wolves and the northern landscape to help her write the wonderful *Wolf Brother* series. Frank Cottrell Boyce researched robotics before writing *Runaway Robot*. The genesis of this story lies in researching World War 2 locally.

Research for writing

To find out about the evacuees, a simple online search is a good way to get started, or you might contact the local historical society or library. I took a number of different accounts of local life plus an interview with someone who had been evacuated from Birmingham and wove them together.

This is the second story I have written about evacuees in my local area. The first was called *The Tunnel* and if you'd like to teach that alongside this piece, the story is available for free from Teachwire at tinyurl.com/WWIItunnel

Making connections

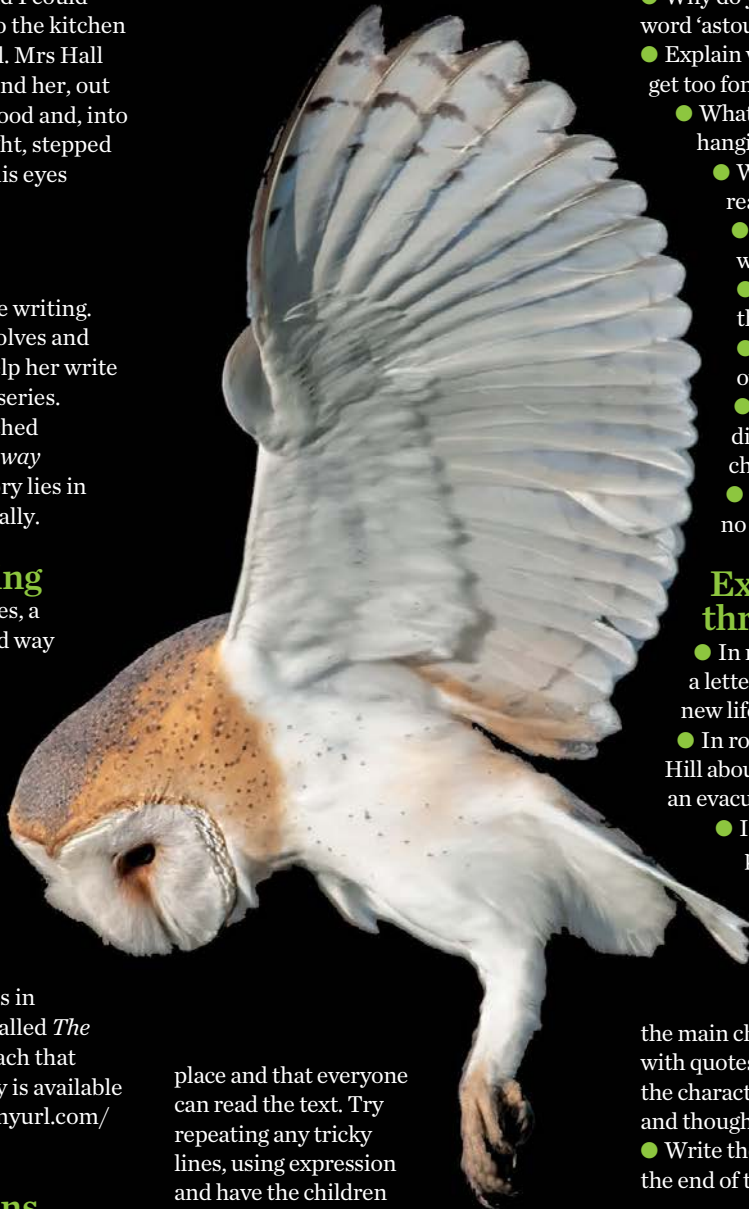
Excellent novels to read alongside this would be *Friend or Foe* by Michael Morpurgo, *Carrie's War* by Nina Bawden, *When the Sky Falls* by Phil Earle, *Fireweed* by Jill Paton Walsh or *Blitzcat* by Robert Westall, who also collected letters from evacuees in *Children of the Blitz*. Film clips that provide context are easily available through the internet, for instance on BBC Bitesize.

Oral comprehension

Read the story through and explore it by taking initial responses. What do children like or not like about the story? What interests or surprises them? What questions does it suggest? Then read it through again, ensuring that the vocabulary is in

place and that everyone can read the text. Try repeating any tricky lines, using expression and have the children copy how you read aloud. Tease away at developing and deepening understanding through questioning:

- Explain why the author used three adjectives at the start to describe the main character, 'A small, pale, insignificant figure'.
- Why did the main character hold his belongings 'tightly'?
- Contrast the two main settings, in Birmingham and then the countryside.
- How do the first few paragraphs set up the ending?
- What do you think Mrs Hill's first impressions might have been of the main character?
- How do you think Mrs Hill felt about the main character by the end and what is your evidence?



- Why do you think the author used the word 'astounded'?
- Explain why Mrs Hill didn't want him to get too fond of the rabbits.
- What is the effect of the icicles hanging 'like jagged teeth'?
- Why do you think he enjoyed reading so much?
- From the evidence, what can we tell about Mrs Hornsby?
- Why had Mrs Hill got rid of the lawn?
- In the story, in what way is the owl significant?
- Why do you think the author didn't let us know the main character's name?
- What is the effect of there being no name?

Explore the story through drama

- In role as the main character, write a letter to his mother describing his new life.
- In role as a journalist, interview Miss Hill about the experience of looking after an evacuee.
- In role as children in the playground, gossip about the new arrival.
- What would Miss Hill say to the main character's mother in a phone conversation?
- Create a timeline for the main character of emotions, labelling with quotes and then hot seat the character to explore his emotions and thoughts.
- Write the main character's diary at the end of the story.

Facts and fiction

This topic makes a wonderful bridge between historical work, where the children can use different sources and decide what we know for certain, what the sources suggest and what we cannot tell from the sources. Almost all the facts in this story are accurate, though how people behaved or felt are obviously invented.



PIE CORBETT is an education consultant, poet and author known for *Talk for Writing*. His most recent book is *Transforming Learning across the Curriculum* (talkforwritingshop.com).

Good Thinking!

Eight ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1 *A Stone Age Adventure*

Run wild with Wolf Brother in a Stone Age world we all want to be a part of, thanks to *Skin Taker*, the latest title from million-copy-selling author, Michelle Paver. This powerful story carries children back to the Stone Age and to nature, drawing them deeper into an astonishing environment and adventure which began with *Wolf Brother* and has captivated millions of readers since. "Paver's passion for nature, for wildlife, for the world's wondrous wilds is an immersive joy." – LoveReading4Kids

headofzeus.com



2

Get Everyone Reading

Whilst reading is a powerful tool for learning, it's also much more than that. Research shows that children who engage with reading for pleasure are more likely to have better mental wellbeing than those who do not. At the SLA, support is on offer for everyone involved in school libraries to help children discover the power of reading. The SLA has partnered with renowned storyteller Alec Williams to create Get Everyone Reading, a free primer on reading for pleasure available to everyone.

"Well worth downloading. Full of practical ideas about building reading cultures and recommendations for further reading." – Jon Biddle, teacher and English coordinator

Download your copy at sla.org.uk/get-everyone-reading



3

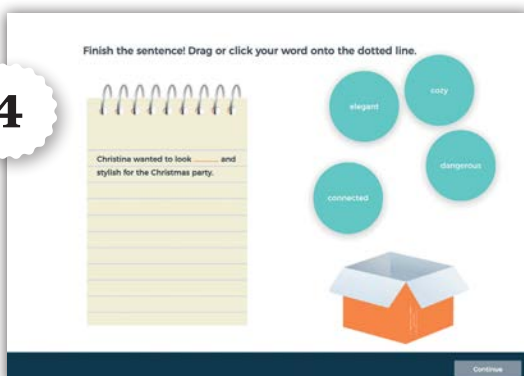


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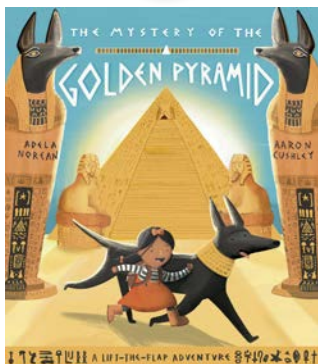
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5



A Quest for Success

Enter a world of magic and adventure in *The Mystery of the Golden Pyramid*, written by Adele Norean, and illustrated by Aaron Cushley.

Packed full of lift-the-flaps and die-cuts, readers are encouraged to help Sophie (the little girl at the centre of the story) on a quest to retrieve stolen treasure and uncover the secret at the heart of the Golden Pyramid. With detailed illustrations, perfect for look-and-spot possibilities on second and third readings, this story is heavily inspired by ancient Egypt. This fictional tale would make a great springboard for non-fiction discussions about pharaohs, hieroglyphs, pyramids and sphinxes.

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7

8



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Teach Through a Text

The Literary Curriculum from the Literacy Tree is an online, book-based primary English planning resource where teachers can download detailed planning sequences from Reception to Year 6, as well as book-based resources for comprehension, spelling, assessment and home-learning. The company provides training, consultancy and INSET to support its #teachthroughatext approach.

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We cannot thank you enough!" – Erika Eisele, Headteacher, Dalmain Primary, Lewisham

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6



How to feed a hungry BOOKWORM

More able readers still need books that are right for their age group, says **Nicola Mansfield-Niem** - so what's the best way to keep them satisfied?

Isn't it a wonderful thing to have children in your class who devour books by the page? Isn't it incredible when you have pupils who rush to you to share their thoughts about their latest read and to recommend books to you? Isn't it an amazing problem to have when they are always requesting the next text and hungry for the next book?

What then, when they have exhausted the library and all of your suggestions? Where do you take them next? How do we ensure that these incredibly motivated children are being challenged and are excited by the books they are reading?

There is sometimes a temptation automatically to give able readers books that are written for the next age group up, to make sure that they are experiencing syntax and structure that are more fitting with their ability – but the danger here is that such texts are often just not suitable for the maturity level of the younger reader. Ultimately, falling into this trap could result in children failing properly to understand the new level texts and therefore potentially not enjoying the stories. So how do we feed voracious readers without turning them off?

There are a number of things I have tried within my classroom, and that we all do within my school to ensure that we always have something to turn our keen readers

onto next – and not all of them are simply handing out a more challenging text.

Know your texts

First, I think we can all agree how important it is to know your texts and if you don't, to know who does in your school. I am an avid reader myself and a huge supporter of my local bookshops (too huge if you ask my bank balance!), but I am aware of my own limitations. My knowledge of KS1 chapter books is not the best, for example, but one of my fellow

reading team members has a wealth of experience in that area, so if people ask me for recommendations, I always send them in her direction.

This doesn't only apply to the age of the reader for whom we're seeking recommendations; it also applies to genre. It really helps to understand the reading habits of colleagues and we make sure we spend time during staff meetings to discuss books and our own reading identities. Fiction is my passion – if a child in my class adores comics, I could do reasonable research and make some good recommendations, but as I have a year 6 teacher who loves graphic novels himself, I would always rather ask his advice. I profit from the learning experience, widening my own knowledge, but it also facilitates conversations and

Book Talk between true fans of the genre, and this is key.

There is also a lot to be said for building a culture of reading for pleasure in school – when you spend time allowing children to identify their own reading identity and spot their own literary habits, they are able to partake in Book Talk more openly and honestly. When children really appreciate the books that they like and acknowledge what they don't like, they take their conversations and recommendations beyond their friendship group, connecting with classmates who they know enjoy the same kinds of texts as they do.



“It really helps to know the reading habits of colleagues”

Leading the way

Another thing that I have done in class is to create ‘reading leaders’. These are across year groups, representing a cross section of literary preferences – for example, some will be fiction specialists, some non-fiction – and they are peers whom children can approach if they just don’t know what to read. In my school we have weekly reading for pleasure time where pupils can relax and read whatever they wish, wherever they wish. It is a completely relaxing, non-threatening time with no place for snobbery regarding reading choices and is always followed by a session of Book Talk. I have found using these more able readers as reading leaders naturally pushes them to expand their own reading; they begin to dip into texts within their chosen genre/text type that they wouldn’t normally choose, in order to be the best reading leader that they can. This naturally exposes them to texts they wouldn’t have otherwise experienced, taking a sideways step into further interests, rather than pushing on to a more challenging text.

Of course, I am not saying that this will only happen if you have reading leaders. Sometimes simply putting books into the right hands will be enough. You know the children in your class and what their likes and dislikes are. If you tell pupils that you have a personal recommendation for them and they understand that there is no pressure to finish a text they don’t like, then they are usually more than willing to try anything you give them. This can offer an opportunity for you to take the last book they have read and branch out from it – something I have done recently with a child who was enjoying the brilliant *Beetle Boy* books by M.G. Leonard; once they had finished the series I slipped the non-fiction *Beetle Collector’s Handbook* in their hands and they were away. If I had suggested this beforehand it just wouldn’t have been received in the same way. Sometimes gently nudging a child out of their comfort zone by using something they have read already is a brilliant way to expand their reading horizons.

Family time

It is worth mentioning that I am not strictly against giving children texts

that are written for older readers; what I am suggesting is that you only do so when you know both the text and the reader well. I would also recommend doing so in conjunction with the parents’ approval. This has had wider benefits for our school community than I previously imagined. By having regular conversations with parents about book choices, our reading community has grown to include families as well, with them sending in their own recommendations for books that they think I will like.

In conclusion, I suggest you think laterally when it comes to the challenge of ‘stretching’ more able readers, trying to widen their horizon within their own age group with a change of text type and genre. We really are in the golden age of children’s literature at the moment, and there is a wealth of resources available to scintillate even the most reluctant of readers, let alone our more passionate ones.



Nicola Mansfield-Niemi is assistant headteacher and reading leader at Broughton Fields primary school



5 WAYS TO WIDEN THE WORLD OF MOTIVATED READERS:

1 Know staff and children’s likes and dislikes – they will be able to make age appropriate recommendations that you don’t know of.

2 Make children reading leaders – I’ve also seen these called reading ambassadors in other schools. They can be class based or school based and are role models of reading, who can be approached by their peers for recommendations.

3 Allow children the time and the space to identify their own reading identities and habits. By doing this children may naturally branch out into other genres themselves.

4 Recommend different text types and genres that link to their previously loved subjects – this will broaden the scope of their reading.

5 Discuss reading choices with parents and involve them in Book Talk. If you know the text well and can make pertinent recommendations rooted in what their child finds interesting, they may well approve of their child reading texts from the next age group. These conversations also help to build communities.



Can you see the wood **FOR THE TREES?**

In order to close the word gap for our children, focusing on the big picture of communication is crucial, argues **Kelly Ashley**

When deciding how to boost children's vocabulary, it sometimes seems like we can't see the wood for the trees. A focus on smaller details (such as introducing a 'word of the day') can show quick wins, but is this really addressing wider communication needs? What would we see if we took a step back, looking at the whole 'forest' of communication in school? In the latest, Covid-19 Attainment Gap report (March 2021), the EEF has identified a 'large and concerning gap for disadvantaged pupils' as a result of recent school closures. There is no better time, then, than the present to take a more holistic view of communication – but how?

First steps

First, we must consider how the curriculum offer invites learners in with opportunities to use vocabulary and language for different purposes. Receptively ('receiving' information), we use language to read and listen – interpreting ideas. Expressively ('expressing' ideas), we use language to write and speak – crafting ideas for different purposes and audiences, actively making decisions about style and form. Consider the role and purpose of communication across the school's curriculum. How does the offer foster communication for a range of purposes and how are knowledge and skills explicitly developed with the purpose of strengthening these processes?

Second, we need to help learners to access and connect the word and world knowledge that exists in their personal, mental libraries. We all have different experiences in life that shape who we are with connected word and world knowledge – associations and links that are uniquely ours. Our 'mental library' is a result of these experiences – each

of us with our own, bespoke network of connections. By planning opportunities to 'unlock' this information (Ashley, 2019), we can help learners to make connections between new and known vocabulary. Rather than starting from a place of deficit, 'unlocking' celebrates what learners bring to the table. A simple 'talk box'

with objects or images related to a topic that is going to be explored can be an eye-opening way to unlock and gather the language that learners use to express ideas.



Levels of detail

Third, it's important to support the retrieval and organisation of language within the mental library with purposeful, layered planning and practice. To explore this point, let's consider Walt Disney's four 'levels' of detail – the mantra of 'Imagineers' who design well-loved attractions in Disney parks around the world. Within each of these 'levels' we get closer to the intricate detail created as part of the attraction experience. Let's relate these levels of detail to the idea of descending deep into the 'forest' of communication:

Level 1 – *You're on the top of a mountain and looking down at a vast, green forest. You can see the tops of the trees blanketing the lush space.*

At this first level, we are taking stock and considering the big picture of communication across the curriculum. What different opportunities can we plan in – receptively (reading/ listening) and expressively (writing/ speaking) – across the year or stage? At this point, we are mapping out opportunities for learners to use communication for different purposes. Ensure that these experiences are varied, purposeful and contextual – helping novice communicators navigate the language landscape.

Level 2 – *You've descended down the mountain and you're now just on the edge of the forest. You can see the mass of trees in front of you.*

At the edge of the forest, we are now planning a learning sequence. We start by building in opportunities to unlock existing language and then use these ideas as a starting point for deciding what new language will be taught through explicit vocabulary instruction. Importantly, we also plan out how learners may choose and use new language to communicate in different contexts.

Level 3 – *You're now in the forest and you walk further inside. You see an interesting cluster of trees, noticing their colours, leaves and shapes.*

We are now 'deep' in the learning sequence, actively building knowledge and skills to support communication. Targeted vocabulary instruction is deliberate, teaching language that is linked to chosen purpose. Learners become word archaeologists, digging up connections between new and known vocabulary using

word-learning strategies – exploring sound links, visual features, layers of meaning, word history, meaning in context, etc. The adult expertly draws learners in – getting them to notice and being the amplifier of new learning and ideas.

Level 4 – *You're now at the base of a tree. You reach out to touch the rough bark, feeling the texture and the sticky sap on your fingers. You hear birds chirping overhead, unlocking a memory. Your nose fills with an earthy smell as you feel the breeze on your face as it chases through the trees.*

Even though we are now 'up close' to language application, we have the benefit of the rich experiences provided by the other 'layers' of communication that we've travelled through. Through skilful planning and support, communication power has shifted to the learner. They are now agents of communication, linguistic foresters forging their own path. The implicit opportunities that have been nurtured as part of a language-rich environment now come into their own. Learners are armed with new word and world knowledge, ready to share, discuss and debate new ideas – putting their communication skills to work.

Put it together

Whilst Disney wanted his guests to experience 'level 4' for a fully immersive experience, we can see how all four layers work together to help transfer responsibility to the communicator. By 'not seeing the wood for the trees,' we could jump too quickly to the finer details of tackling 'gaps' with quick-fixes, before carefully considering how all of these essential ingredients in the process work together to build strong communication.

The dictionary defines communication as 'the imparting or exchange of information, ideas or feelings.' To ensure that our classrooms are communication 'rich,' we must think carefully about imparting and exchanging as part of the bigger picture – helping learners to unlock, power-up, charge and recharge new understanding. Take a step back to consider how the strategies chosen to boost vocabulary development address the wider agenda. As rangers of communication, let's focus on building fruitful conditions to foster these processes, nurturing growth and interaction. In the wise words of Stephen Covey, 'You can't have the fruit without the roots.'

Five ways to focus on the big picture

● PUT WORDS TO WORK

Intentionally plan opportunities for learners to choose and use new language, in rich contexts. How are opportunities to put words to work carefully woven into the curriculum offer?

● UNLOCK KNOWLEDGE

Actively unlock learners' existing word and world knowledge – build on what they already know. How can we be sure to celebrate our learners' unique store of knowledge and experiences and use these as a springboard to connect new ideas and information?

● POWER-UP STRATEGIES

Teach new words and power-up word-learning strategies through deliberate and explicit vocabulary instruction. What personal connections can learners activate in their mental library to make word learning more memorable and purposeful?

● CHARGE AND RECHARGE

Charge and recharge new language through implicit instruction within a deliberately language-rich environment. How often (and how effectively) do learners talk to and interact with each other in pairs and groups to deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding?

● TALK, TALK, AND TALK...

Dialogue is key – talk, talk and talk some more! How will we ensure opportunities for learners to be engaged in both formal and informal dialogue that can also assist them to communicate their feelings, creative ideas and intuition?



Kelly Ashley (@kashleyenglish) is a freelance English consultant based in Yorkshire and author of Word Power: Amplifying vocabulary instruction (2019). For more information, visit kellyashleyconsultancy.wordpress.com

Why can't they remember FULL STOPS?

Nadine Finlay noticed children seemed to suffer from collective amnesia when it came to spelling, punctuation and grammar, so she found ways to help them up their editing game

I've been a primary school teacher for 18 years and this is a question I've heard teachers, including myself, ask many times. Do you ever find that the basics of grammar just seems to fall out of the children's brains? I know I do.

For example, I'll be teaching a lesson focusing on expanded noun phrases, only to discover children have forgotten how and where to use capital letters. This used to drive me mad as I knew this aspect was secure not so long ago, but when I sat down to think about it, I realised the answer was simple: there was too much cognitive load. Expanded noun phrases, a range of suffixes, different conjunctions, tier two vocabulary and the odd relative clause to add interest – it's not surprising capital letters didn't feature too highly on the children's to-do list.

My solution? A few years ago I decided to enlist a packet of Tic-Tacs to help my cause, and the difference has been remarkable.

Fresh thinking

It begins with introducing children to the acronym MINTS.

M - months

I - me

N - name

T - title

S - start of a sentence

I'll spend some time making sure children are familiar with and understand this, using each part of the acronym as a focused learning objective. Then, during independent writing, I've found that when I sporadically shake the Tic-Tac packet, the

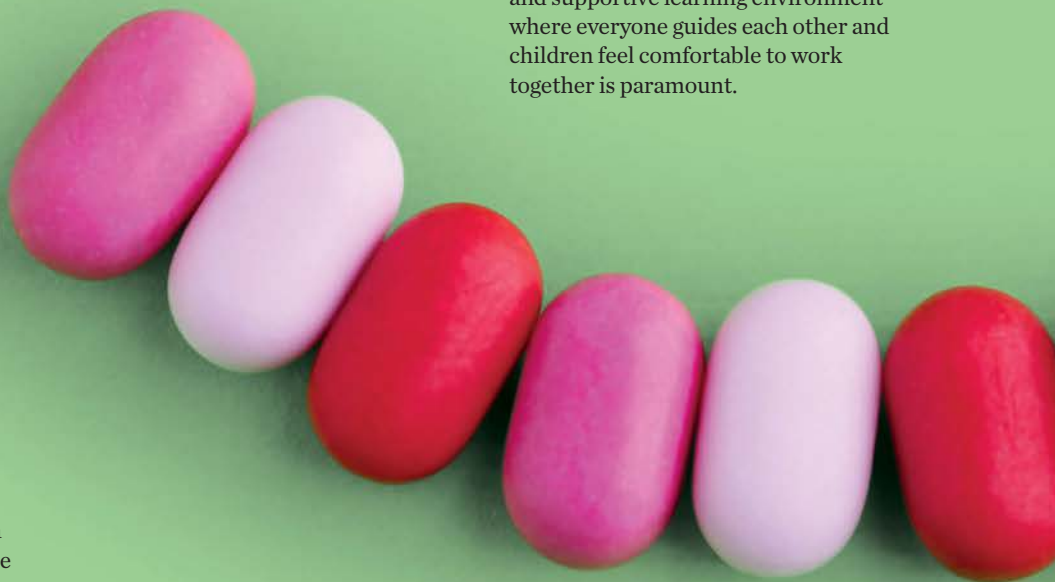
children check their work for missing capitals and edit it without further prompting. They've become so used to this 'trick' that when sharing a text under the visualiser, creating a shared write or even deconstructing a WAGOLL, the children will spot and comment when they've found MINTS in its different forms. This led me to look at editing and how I teach it in more detail.

Happy mistakes

In my experience I've often found the technique of learning to edit is not taught as a discrete skill. We expect children to edit their work, but it's something the children seem to learn by osmosis – or at least they're supposed to. The reality is editing has a negative connotation for pupils as it suggests their work wasn't good

enough to begin with and revisiting a piece can be disheartening when you've already put in a lot of effort.

To counteract this I spend time creating a safe environment by making 'unintentional' mistakes while I am modelling to the class, giving the children the chance to correct me ("Oh dear, Mrs F got it wrong again!"). Over the years, I've found that creating a respectful and supportive learning environment where everyone guides each other and children feel comfortable to work together is paramount.



Yellow words

As you can imagine, I have been through many local authority moderations in different parts of the country, and I've even set up my own moderation hubs as a means of bringing local schools together and gaining external judgement about writing. Through all this, I've begun to notice children can be held back from achieving Age Related Expectations (ARE) if they do not use a sufficient number of either High Frequency Words (Year 1) or Common Exception Words (Year 2). The result is I've lost countless hours searching through books to prove a child can spell 'steak', for example, so I now make a point of using a yellow highlighter to identify any time a child uses a HFW or CEW in any of their

books throughout the year. Then, when it comes to moderation, the yellow words jump off the page as we flick through the books.

Each week 10-15 of these yellow words are identified as a focus in a bid to raise their profile. They are incorporated into daily phonics lessons and sent home in reading records for families to practise together. I also live mark during independent writing with my trusty highlighter in hand. If the focus words are used and spelt correctly the children earn a team point. I've found each class I've worked with loves the yellow pen coming out and they challenge themselves to get more yellow pen than they had in their last piece of writing. It's a great incentive.

Personalised placemats

Placemats have also proved an invaluable asset in my classroom and I make one of these for each child at the beginning of the academic year. I know these can be purchased from large organisations – however, I try to personalise them based on the child's previous knowledge, looking at their needs and also incorporating the methods I use in the classroom, such as Tic-Tacs. Though to begin with the placemats are differentiated, they develop throughout the year to the point where every child has the scaffolding they need to be able to achieve ARE.

On one side of the placemats are all the graphemes children have been learning in phonics phases two, three and five. The reverse has different sections such as door words (sentence openers), conjunctions, a

suffix tree (with year 1 and year 2 suffixes), and contractions with examples. Using these as an editing aid, I aim for the children to move from novice to expert by the end of the year, meaning they will have gained the confidence to include each of these different aspects of grammar independently in their writing.

Getting grammar to stick

Here are a couple of snippets of techniques I use all the time in my classroom to help children remember points of GPS.

BIG ELEPHANTS CAN'T ALWAYS USE SMALL EXITS

This is a variation of the Big Elephants mnemonic that uses a story (and sometimes a badly drawn elephant too) to help it stick in children's minds.

"I have a friend who used to visit the circus and one day she saw an elephant calf. Every time she visited the circus the calf had grown a little bigger. One day the circus was going to move locations so they took down the tent, packed away all of the gymnastics equipment but that was when they discovered a problem. The exit door was the same size, it hadn't changed but the elephant had, he was much bigger and now he can't use the exit because ... Big Elephants Can't Always Use Small Exits."

THE QUESTION WORD RAP

Question words is another area I work on regularly so the children remember what they are and where to include a question mark. I wrote the Question Word Rap over a decade ago and still use it today.

"Who? What? When? Where? Why? Our question words I hear you cry."

Add in a bit of foot tapping and suddenly it's quite a catchy rhyme! Over time, other question words are identified, but these are the ones I start with.



Nadine Finlay (@MrsFKSI) is an assistant principal and Thrive lead practitioner who originally trained as an International Montessori Directress. She has written for the Nexus Education Blog and the TES.

"I've found that when I shake the Tic-Tac packet, the children check their work for missing capital letters"

Are you FOR REAL?

Writing a letter to Dumbledore may be fun, but there are better ways to bring genuine purpose and authenticity to the writing classroom, says **Felicity Ferguson**

Writing for a purpose means writing for real. It's reasonable to assume that every act of writing undertaken out in the world is underpinned by a reason to write it. Yet although we know from research that children take greater pleasure in writing for a purpose, and this in turn means they write better texts, it appears we often don't think of bringing authentic purposes into the writing classroom.

The whole issue of what could make writing authentic in school, including what a real purpose and audience for writing would look like, is well worth thinking about. Research studies on the subject express a broad but compelling consensus of opinion, agreeing that, to be authentic, a writing project must connect both with children's own lives and with how and why writing is undertaken in the world outside the school gates.

Who gets to choose?

The serious barrier to children having the opportunity to write with genuine purpose and for a genuine audience is that decisions about the genre,

the topic, the purpose and who it is being written for are almost always made by the teacher, who then assigns the project to the children to complete. Projects are often harnessed, in what seems to be quite an arbitrary way in terms

of the teaching of writing, to a current topic or to the particular class novel under study.

Teacher-chosen audiences and purposes are typically artificial and manufactured, having little or no connection to purposes and audiences in the real world, which means, bizarrely, that children are effectively being asked to pretend at writing. This may happen particularly in a literature-based approach to teaching writing: for example, children might be asked to write a letter to a book character, or a newspaper article about a dragon's egg appearing in the playground or about the day the chairs all left the classroom and



how they must be persuaded by letter to return. Such projects may seem seductively attractive and motivating on the surface, but they will have only a short-lived effect on children's development as writers. You could say it's rather like experiencing a sugar rush – high energy, but only for a brief space of time. And, in the context of assigning a writing 'task' attached to a topic, teachers inevitably find themselves receiving 30 very similar versions of, for example, a biography of Queen Victoria, or the much-favoured newspaper article about the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb, written for no purpose other than to have children repeat the given information, and with no defined audience beyond themselves and therefore no reason to be published. Hence the inauthenticity of so many writing projects.

How to create real purpose

However, we can avoid this scenario because, in actual fact, it's easy to create authentic and motivating projects with a real purpose and audience by the simple expedient of setting a genre as a parameter for writing, discussing for whom the piece is being written, and then giving children agency over their own writing topic.

If children have been taught idea generation techniques, they can learn about the conventions of the genre for the class writing project and then go on to choose what they want to write about, using their own funds of knowledge and identifying their own genuine purposes and audiences. To give some simple examples:

- write an information text, but choose a subject you know a lot about and which you think others would be interested to learn about too;
- write a persuasive letter to someone in the community who might have the power to act on your request;
- or, in a narrative genre, generate your own playful or imaginative idea and write it as a story, poem or as a piece of 'faction', with the aim of entertaining

readers and showing your artistry by painting with words.

These reasons to write do, of course, mirror real-world writing purposes, and the writing that springs from them is as authentic as the writing that takes place in the world outside school.

In summary, writing in school can be undertaken with genuine purpose if it matches the reasons why writers write in the outside world; if the topic is chosen by the child and is therefore relevant to their own lives; if it can be published and put to work in the world as entertainment, as a record, as an opinion or an attempt to influence, as a reflection or as an explanation about something. It will have an authentic outcome only if it has a real envisioned audience which may be close or distant, known or unknown, but is certainly not Dumbledore, a collection of chairs, or Paddington Bear. Nor is it the teacher, whose own purpose is primarily to read the writing for evaluation or assessment.

If genre is taught well in class writing projects and children are allowed to write authentically, finding their own reasons for writing and using the genre for their own purposes and in their own way, they will be experiencing a sincere curriculum which simultaneously attends to their emotional needs as young writers and fulfils official objectives. They will also be part of a process which not only helps them write better texts but gives them the opportunity to write for real, with purpose, power and pleasure.



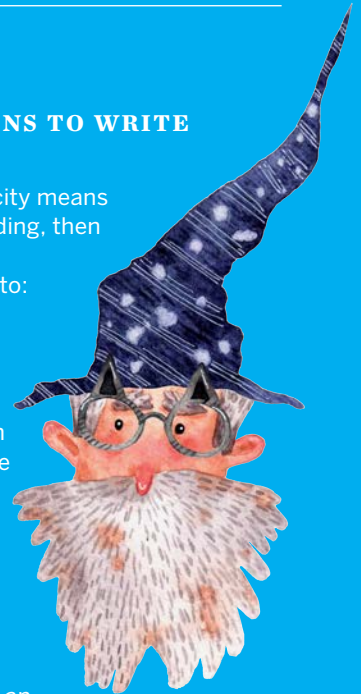
Felicity Ferguson helps run The Writing For Pleasure Centre, the aim of which is to help young people become passionate and successful writers. To find out more, visit their website writing4pleasure.com

Felicity Ferguson helps run The Writing For Pleasure Centre, the aim of which is to help young people become passionate and successful

REASONS TO WRITE

If authenticity means not pretending, then we should remember to:

- Give children a say in deciding on the purpose and audience for a writing project in a particular genre. As a class, have an 'ideas party' – collect ideas on flipchart paper for what they would like to write about and to whom, and then collaboratively agree on both.
- Alternatively, set a genre as the parameter and then give children individual agency over the writing topic. Teach idea generation techniques to help them find their own topic and then take a 'writing register'.
- Let children use their own funds of knowledge and identity in their writing in school. They need to write their own worlds and express who they are.
- Give children the chance to find reasons to be moved to write, and be who they want to be in their piece – maybe entertainers, biographers, poets, storytellers, teachers or advisers. Show them how they can mix elements of different genres together to do this.
- Ensure that the mentor texts you provide include authentic and legitimate examples from the world outside school.
- Make discussions about publishing possibilities an initial and important part of a class writing project.



“A genuine audience is certainly not Dumbledore, a collection of chairs, or Paddington Bear”

4 things you need to know... ABOUT READING

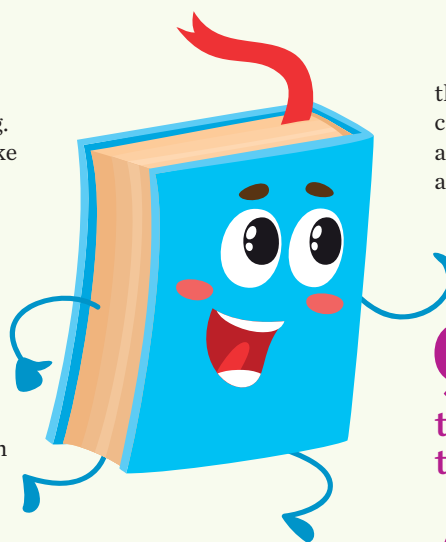
It takes time to learn how to teach reading well – but if you can answer these questions you'll be off to a great start, says **Christopher Such...**

Q1 Why must we persist with phonics teaching?

A Writing is a tool that uses symbols to represent the sounds of speech, and these sounds can be considered at different levels. For example, we can perceive the speech sounds of individual words (e.g. /teaching/). Equally, we can perceive speech sounds at a smaller scale such as syllables (e.g. /ching/) or phonemes, the smallest distinguishable speech sounds (e.g. /ch/). Due to the near impossibility of memorising individual symbols for each of the tens of thousands of words in the average person's vocabulary, all written languages involve – to some extent at least – the representation of sound below the level of words. Some languages, such as

Japanese, represent syllables in their writing. In contrast, English – like other Indo-European languages – has far too many different syllables to function like this. Instead, an alphabet is used to represent the approximately 44 different phonemes of English, depending on accent. In short, through necessity, writing in English is the representation of phonemes using symbols called graphemes, which consist of one, two, three or four letters. Reading in English thus involves decoding these phonemes that have been represented using graphemes.

This brings us onto phonics. Phonics is, by definition, the attempt to teach children to deal with written words using the bits of sound on which writing in English is based: phonemes. Due to the complexity of English spelling that has built up over time, there are roughly 175 common correspondences between the phonemes and graphemes of English that need to be learned. Additionally, children need to learn how to blend and segment phonemes (i.e. merge



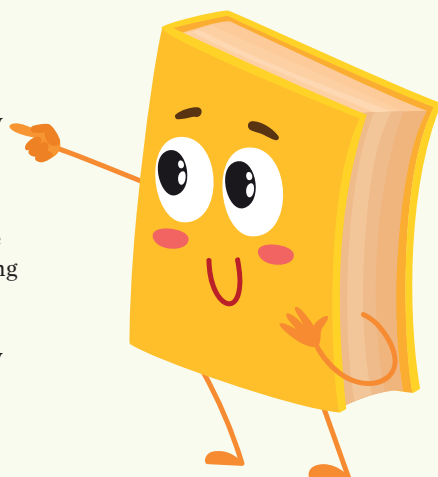
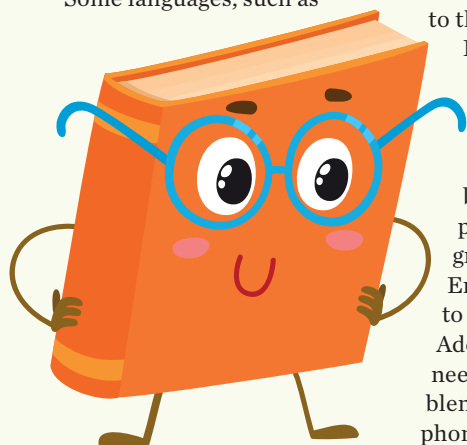
the sound-symbol correspondences of English and the skills of blending and segmenting. Where children struggle with these, persistence is required.

Q2 Why is it essential that we read aloud to children?

A Learning to decode on the phonemic level is necessary for the development of fluent reading... but it is not sufficient. The 'Simple View of Reading' describes reading comprehension as relying on two distinct aspects: decoding and language comprehension. Each of these is complex, but the key idea is that reading comprehension relies on children's ability to decode the words from the page and on their grasp

phonemes into whole words and distinguish phonemes within whole words). Learning the most common correspondences and the skills of blending and segmenting is no mean feat. Some children struggle more than others, occasionally tempting teachers to give up on the teaching of phonics. This means that children are either left to work out for themselves the correspondences and the skills of blending and segmenting, or they are asked by the teacher to begin memorising literally tens of thousands of correspondences between more complex symbols and sounds (usually whole words), a method of reading in English that tends to show some initial promise before resulting inevitably in dysfluency.

Ultimately, all children who become fluent readers do so by learning





of what the words mean in context. This latter aspect is based on children's vocabulary, background knowledge, understanding of sentence structures and appreciation of conventions in different forms of text. As well as being one of the great privileges of being a teacher, sharing wonderful books with children allows them to learn new words, to learn about how their world works and to grasp different types of text, all of which are vital for reading comprehension. Just as importantly, reading aloud to children helps them to develop a positive relationship with the written word, providing impetus during the often-challenging journey to reading proficiency.

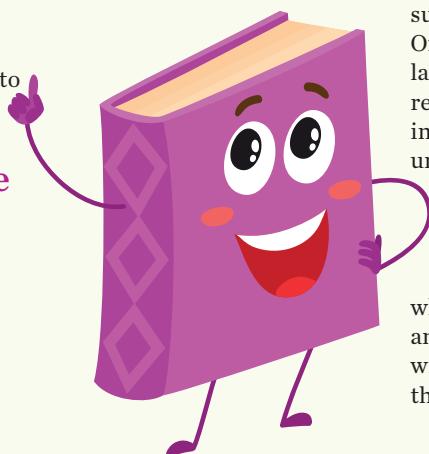
Q3 How do we develop reading fluency?

A Fluent oral reading supports reading fluency and requires accuracy, automaticity and prosody, i.e. mostly error-free, rapid decoding that sounds like a natural spoken voice. There are two straightforward things that teachers can and should do to support its development:

1. Focus on reading mileage: It may seem obvious, but almost certainly the most important factor

in the development of reading fluency is the amount of words that children decode each day. After only a few successful attempts to decode a new word and relate it to its pronunciation, the word becomes one that the child can read rapidly without conscious decoding effort. As reading mileage accumulates, more and more words are added to the list of those that can be addressed in this way, freeing up cognitive resources for comprehension. To this end, teachers should ensure that each school day provides ample opportunities for decoding practice.

2. Undertake repeated oral reading: Various studies suggest that reading fluency can be developed through children reading a short text repeatedly, aiming each time for greater fluency, after modelling from a teacher. Short texts that take around a minute to read are ideal. (Poetry and speeches work particularly well, though



“Sharing wonderful books with children allows them to learn new words and to grasp different types of text”

it is best to use a variety of text types.) This can be achieved by children reading aloud to a partner in the classroom – something supported by the pairing of stronger readers with weaker readers – before briefly discussing the text and having the opportunity to perform it aloud.

Q4 Why is it misguided to teach comprehension as a set of generic skills?

A It is common practice for children to spend a lesson, or even an entire week, working on a supposedly generic skill related to comprehension, such as inference or prediction. Such practice is probably misguided, something we can discern from our own experience: fluent adult readers frequently encounter texts where they do not have the requisite vocabulary to make the inferences necessary for understanding. Is inference a generic skill that has suddenly deserted them? Of course not. They simply lack the specific knowledge required to make the inferences necessary to understand that particular text. Trying to teach an aspect of comprehension as a generic skill is akin to teaching children what a zebra looks like and assuming that this will help them to name the other animals they



encounter because they have been taught the skill of animal identification. Yes, we can sensitise children to the need to make inferences – just as we can sensitise children to the fact that animal species can be identified – but developing children's ability to infer is in fact the gradual accumulation and integration of webs of knowledge relating to words, texts and the wider world, not the honing of a generic, transferable skill. The same is true of other aspects of comprehension.

The bad news is that there are no shortcuts to skilled reading comprehension via the teaching of misconceived comprehension skills. The good news is that a fuller appreciation of the interconnected aspects of reading comprehension leads to teaching that is more effective and more enjoyable through the sharing of great texts alongside rich questioning and discussion.



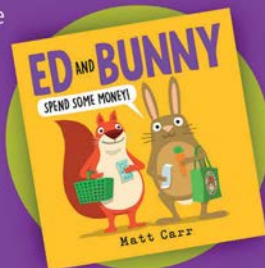
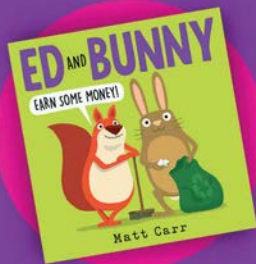
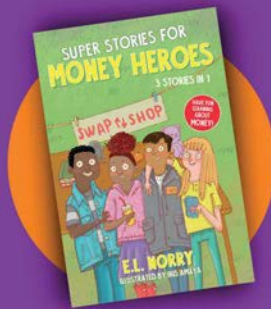
Christopher Such is a key stage one primary teacher and curriculum leader

from Peterborough.



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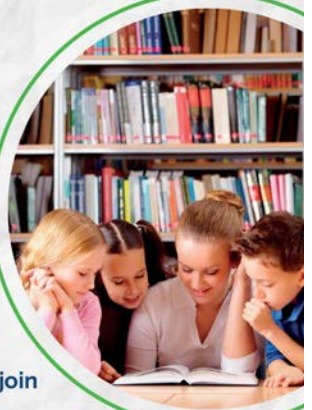
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WHY I LOVE...

First News is opening up the wider world to Tara Harmer's pupils and providing a meaningful focus for oracy, comprehension and writing...

ABOUT ME:

NAME:

Tara Harmer

JOB ROLE:

Deputy head

SCHOOL: Heron Way Primary School

FAVOURITE FEATURE: The accessible language and how using news as non-fiction engages readers, whilst appealing to children's interests



TALKING ABOUT: GROWING LITERACY SKILLS WITH FIRST NEWS

“ Why did you choose First News Education?

I purchased the First News newspaper and Activity Sheets for our school as it offered an accessible way for children to gain an insight into world and UK current events. First News allows us time to explore what's happening in the UK and around the world and come back to things as they change and develop over time. It helps support our literacy and PSHE curriculum and gives ideas and resources to use in debates. The children enjoy reading and sharing the articles and ideas with each other.

“ Why is news-based learning so important?

The articles in First News newspapers are diverse and appeal to a wide audience. Set out like any other newspaper, there is always something to grab the reader's interest, and the language used makes it highly accessible to a wide range of reading abilities. The variety of topics covered means that you can safely discuss issues that you might feel sometimes unsure about tackling. Children can be nervous and scared by the news, but First News writes about events in such a way that they can get the information they need without feeling overwhelmed.

“ How do First News Education's reading activities develop literacy skills?

The printable Activity Sheets mean that all children can develop key comprehension



Find out more about First News Education by visiting the website (schools.firstnews.co.uk) or getting in touch by email or phone: education@firstnews.co.uk 01371 851 898.

skills and have a sense of achievement. I love the debates – they are always lively. I think it is very important to develop our voices and express opinions. We need to learn to listen to each other and find a way to express a wide range of ideas. Additionally, the support from the First News Education team has been excellent – they are very prompt in responding to enquiries and I have found the iHub trial helpful in expanding my understanding of how we can fully embed First News Education's news-based learning tools within our school.

“ To whom would you recommend First News Education, and why?

Any school that is working to promote an enquiring mind, getting children to ask 'big' questions and be curious about the world around them. While we teach the children about creativity and imagination through stories and poetry, reading the paper allows them to see how non-fiction can work in a real world context. I use the paper as a model when writing articles to help the children understand the tone and features. It helps them to understand the purpose of audience and apply this to their own writing.

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Comic VALUE

From engaging reluctant readers to developing inference skills – the pedagogical potential of pictorial storytelling is impressive, insist

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton

Admit it. When you're basking in the sun, sand nestled between your toes, or when you're cosying up on your sofa after a hectic term, the book in your hands is seldom of the likes of *War and Peace* or *Ulysses*. More likely you've chosen to immerse yourself in a read that entertains, and one that does so without being overly taxing. So why do we insist – when it comes to children's so-called free-choice reading

– they must *always* choose traditionally challenging texts?

Just to be clear: we're not suggesting there should be no challenge. On the contrary; this is about children having a balanced diet with nutrition taking a variety of forms, including that of reading purely for pleasure (whether or not the serving includes tricky concepts or 'tier two' vocabulary!).

Comics are as varied as pebbles on a beach and among these can be found a wealth of appropriate literature – from

Captain Underpants,

to graphic novels and, the all-time favourite: *Beano*. Readers will often choose stories featuring familiar characters like Dennis the Menace or Minnie the Minx, forming favourites over time.

For many young readers, comics are the first type of text they turn to voluntarily; this isn't surprising, as the visual storytelling makes them accessible to the developing reader.

By connecting to their on-screen experience of cartoons and movies, comics allow children to immerse themselves independently in whole stories, with illustrations throwing light on unfamiliar vocabulary.

The stories themselves can be gut-bustingly funny or bring white-knuckle excitement of the kind children love to share with their friends. After

all, it's easier to pore over a comic with your peers than it is to huddle round a text-dense book, and this is something we might encourage more of in schools – be it during playtime, independent reading, or even an alternative form of reading club.

Learning from comics

A comic strip can vary in length from a single line of four or five panels, to an entire graphic novel. It's important to note that even if a child only reads the shortest of strips, they are becoming familiar with narrative structures – seeing stories through from beginning to end, sequentially, with all the cause and effect that entails. Children who appear to struggle with narrative structure in 'school books' and their own composition may be able to grasp narrative via the more accessible comic form; indeed, they may already have done so – we just need to show them how to transfer that understanding to other contexts.

Inference is a major stumbling block for many young readers, and yet most children make these constantly and effortlessly while reading comics. Inferences are conclusions based on literal retrievals, and the more this is practised, the easier and more automatic it becomes.

Character and emotional inference is the most obvious form supported by comics. There are, for example, plenty of literal observations – for example: *Dennis's mouth is wide open, his eyebrows have shot up and his hair is all pointing upwards; inference – he is shocked!*

Predictive inference is not speculation; it is a combination of retrieved evidence and prior knowledge (of characters and situations). In a familiar comic with familiar characters, children will have a strong sense of what is likely to happen at the outset of a story. When The Bash Street Kids turn up to school scrubbed clean and dressed uncharacteristically smartly for the class



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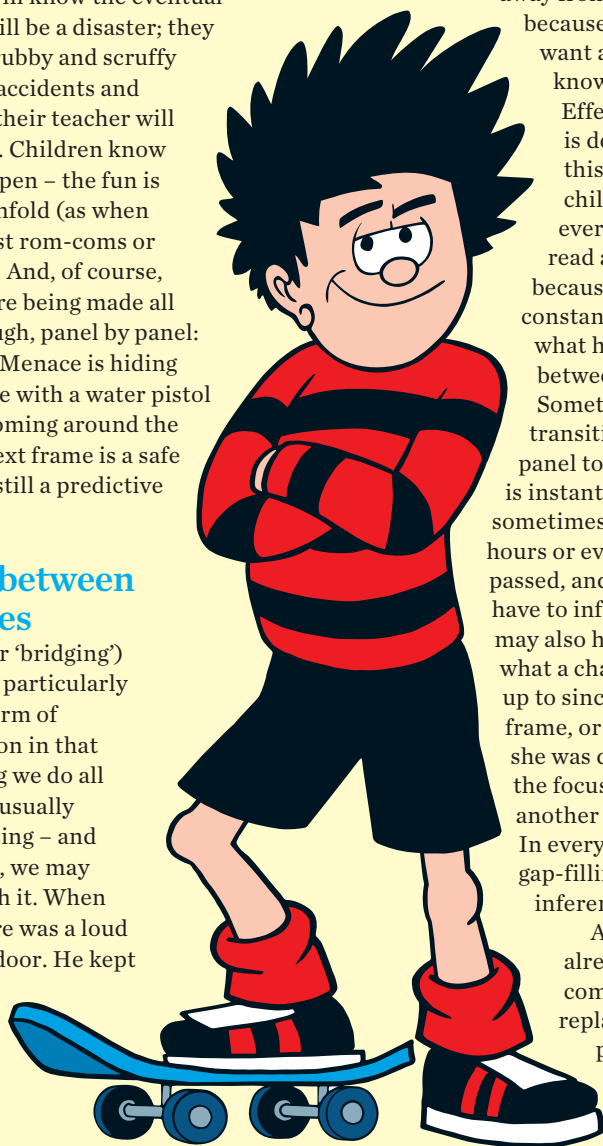
photo, their teacher is shocked... and any reader with even passing knowledge of this strip will know the eventual class photo will be a disaster; they will end up grubby and scruffy as a result of accidents and scuffles, and their teacher will be distraught. Children know what will happen – the fun is watching it unfold (as when we watch most rom-coms or horror films). And, of course, predictions are being made all the way through, panel by panel: if Dennis the Menace is hiding behind a fence with a water pistol and a foe is coming around the corner, the next frame is a safe bet – but it's still a predictive inference!

Reading between the frames

Gap-filling (or 'bridging') inference is a particularly interesting form of comprehension in that it's something we do all the time, but usually without noticing – and consequently, we may forget to teach it. When we read, There was a loud knock at the door. He kept quiet and stayed away from the window, we

comprehend: There was a loud knock at the door, so he kept quiet and stayed away from the window because he didn't want anyone to know he was there. Effective reading is dependent on this skill, which children develop every time they read a comic because they are constantly inferring what has happened between the frames. Sometimes the transition from panel to panel is instantaneous; sometimes, minutes, hours or even days have passed, and usually, you have to infer this. You may also have to infer what a character got up to since the last frame, or what he or she was doing while the focus was on another character. In every case, the gap-filling required is inferential.

As we've already stated, comics do not replace traditional picture books, text-only easy



4 WAYS TO EXPLORE COMICS IN THE CLASSROOM

1 An occasional comic will provide a refreshing change in a comprehension lesson, guided read or similar. Try springing it on the children as a surprise, and see how they respond!

2 Comic strips can be used to exemplify a range of inference-types in a very accessible format. Select a story carefully and plan inference questions accordingly. Remind children of what they were able to do with the comic strips when returning to text-only formats; show them how to transfer their inference skills from the easier format to the more challenging one.

3 Have children turn a comic panel into a freeze-frame, and then thought-track them in role, tapping each participant to unfreeze them and have them say what they are thinking and feeling at that moment in the story.

4 Provide children with a section of comic strip in which the content of (some or all) speech and thought bubbles has been masked. Their job is to infer the likely content of those bubbles and write it in place. The drama technique described above may help towards this. Alternatively, mask an entire panel; children must use bridging inference to work out the content of the missing section. You can increase the challenge by having them describe the likely facial expression and body language of the characters in the panel they haven't seen.

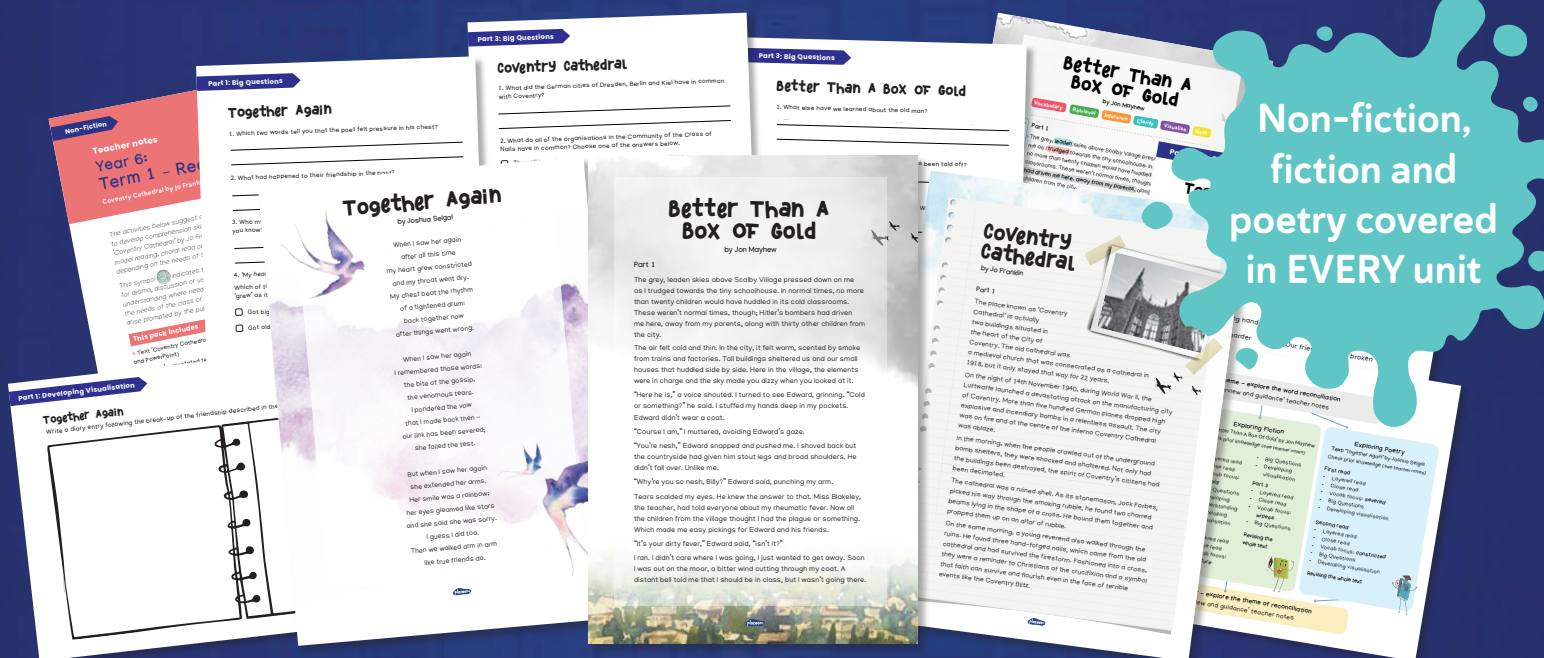
reads or the challenging books we help children study. But the ease and pleasure with which children may exercise the high-order skills we've just discussed must never be ignored; it is up to us to show them how to transfer those abilities to other contexts.



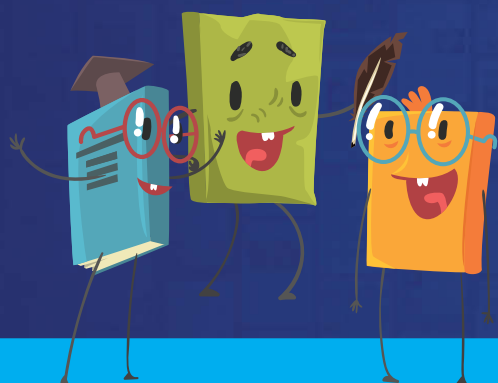
Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton are primary education advisers (primaryeducationadvisers.co.uk) supporting English development nationally.

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Bother that cat!

Though Mog's memory may sometimes let her down, she has been an unforgettable character for generations of readers – making her 50th anniversary something to celebrate

It's 50 years now since the iconic Mog first appeared in print, her recognisably feline confusion regarding the whereabouts of the cat flap winning over readers old and young. The book's longevity is testament to the storycraft of Judith Kerr, with its ongoing popularity likely proven by the presence of a copy in your school library.

To celebrate the anniversary of *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, we've created an assembly pack together with activity sheets that you can download for free.

The resources give early years and key stage 1 pupils the chance to share in the joy of the book and discuss the theme with adults at home, who will also take pleasure in discovering or rediscovering our absent-minded heroine.

If you'd like to try the lessons and assembly with your pupils, the following plan will guide you through the sequence, and all the activity sheets and the PowerPoint to lead the assembly can be downloaded from plazoom.com/mog-resources.

Getting started

Introduce the story to the children in a school or class assembly using the PowerPoint provided.

Display PPT slide 2. Before reading, ask the children the following questions:

- Do you have any pets at home? Or do other members of your family have pets?
- Which pets do you have?
- How do you look after your pets? Do you help to look after them?
- Do your pets ever do anything naughty?

Allow time for children to share their answers with the person they are sitting next to or with the whole group. Explain that today, they will listen to a reading of the book *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, by Judith Kerr. An image of the book cover is displayed on PPT slide 3. Display this and ask the following questions:

- Have you read/listened to this story before?
- Who do you think the main character is?
- What does the word 'forgetful' mean? Have you ever forgotten anything?

Read the story aloud to the children, allowing time for them to enjoy it and discuss Mog's adventures throughout her day. Ask the children questions about what they have heard:

- Which part of the story did you enjoy the most?
- Did you find the book funny? Which parts?
- What did Mog forget throughout the day?
- How was Mog's forgetfulness helpful in the end?
- Is Mog like any of your pets?

Discuss what the family said when Mog did something that got her in trouble. Display PPT slide 4 with the phrase "Bother that Cat!". Ask the children for examples of things that Mog did that got her in trouble (for example, sitting on the flowers, eating the egg, etc) and how the family reacted. Every time an example is given, encourage the children to say "Bother that cat!".



Ask the children whether their pets do anything that gets them into trouble. Allow time for answers to be shared in pairs and with the whole group. After each example is given, encourage pupils to say "Bother that cat / dog / rabbit!" to emphasise that the pet is misbehaving.

Being forgetful

"Mog was nice but not very clever. She didn't understand a lot of things. A lot of other things she forgot. She was a very forgetful cat."

Reread the story and talk about what it means to be forgetful. Explain that we all forget things sometimes, but that it can become a problem if we keep forgetting things. Ask the children what might happen to Mog if she keeps forgetting things.

ACTIVITY 1

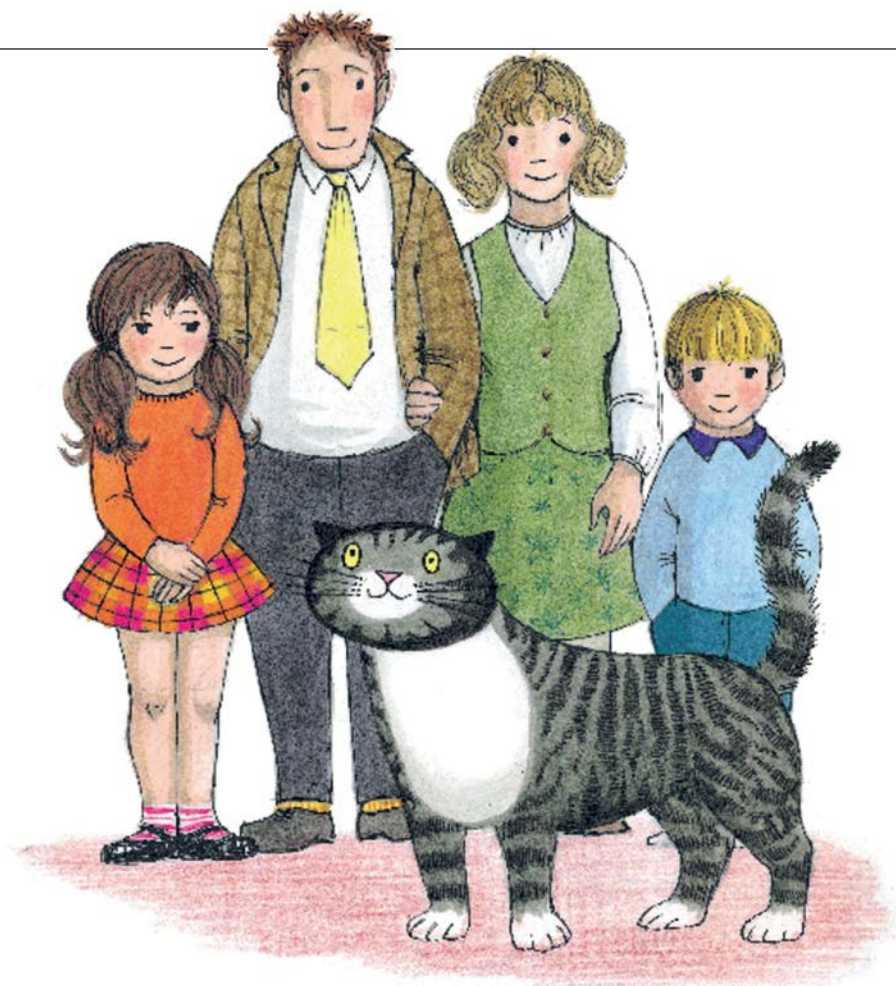
Mog's forgetfulness

Use the images from pages two and three of the story, available on Downloadable Activity Sheet 1, showing some of the things that Mog forgets. In groups, talk about what each picture shows Mog has forgotten and what might happen to Mog if she keeps forgetting these things. Children may link to experiences with their own pets when considering the consequences. Encourage children to share their suggestions with the whole class.

Share some of examples of times when you have forgotten someone to demonstrate that everyone forgets things at times. Encourage the children to do the same and share their forgetful moments with the class. Do the children know what the opposite of forgetting something is?

Talk about the word 'remember' and how everyone tries to remember important information.

Ask the children to share examples of what helps them to remember things - writing lists, taking photographs, using a calendar - and share some of your own methods too.



ACTIVITY 2

Memory trail

In preparation for this activity, print out the 10 picture cards from Downloadable Activity Sheet 2 and place them around the school or classroom.

As a class, talk about what memory is and how, like all skills, it is important to practise using your memory so that you get better at remembering things.

Tell pupils that 10 cards have been placed around the school (or classroom) and they must go to find them, and try to remember the image on each card.

Once they have found them all, they should come back to the carpet and talk about which images they remember. As a class, can you remember them all? Ask pupils to share any tips that may have helped them to remember what was on the cards.

You may wish to leave the memory trail cards up for several days so that pupils can repeat the activity. Talk with the children about whether they remember more cards each time they complete the memory trail and how memories become stronger with repetition. You could link this to skills that children learn at school, for example, the more that they practise counting, the easier it is to remember the numbers, or the more times they build the same

Lego model, the easier it becomes as they remember how to make it.

Talking about our pets

"What a remarkable cat!"

Talk about the story with the children and share ideas about what made Mog so remarkable. Ask the children the following questions:

- Do you think Mog is an important member of the family? How do you know?
- Why do you think people choose to have pets?
- What pet would you love to have?

Talk about pets that pupils have at home or that other members of their family have. Are those pets an important part of the family? Discuss the friendship and comfort that pets can bring and also the health benefits. Encourage the children to share experiences of when their pets have been a good friend, made them feel better when they were feeling sad or helped them stay healthy by going for walks or improving their mental health.

Explore what pets need in a loving home (food, shelter, exercise, etc) and ask pupils how they help to look after their pets. Also explain that not all families can have pets as they

may not have enough space or time to care for them.

ACTIVITY 3

Our pets

This activity could be completed in the classroom, or could be sent home to encourage children and parents to discuss pets at home.

Share Downloadable Activity Sheet 3 with the pupils and explain that this booklet will give pupils the opportunity to talk and write about any pets they have at home. If children do not have a pet at home, they can use the booklet to talk and write about a pet that another member of their family has, or they could use their imagination to write about their ideal pet.

The booklet includes a range of questions that children can explore, with opportunities to discuss answers with a n adult and draw pictures. Older children could use the space provided to add a written response after discussions with an adult.

Once the booklets are completed, give children the opportunity to share their booklet with friends in the class, talking about their pets or their ideal pet.

Mapping the story

Reread the story, encouraging the children to join in with predictable words and phrases.

“Once Mog had a very bad day.”

Talk to the children about what happens to Mog on her very bad day. Draw a story map to show the events that take place and use these to help the children act out parts of Mog’s day. Encourage children to think about how Mog, Debbie, Nicky, Mr and Mrs Thomas and the burglar felt about each thing that Mog did. As a class, the children could say “Bother that cat!” as each scene is acted out.

Explore how the family feel about Mog at the end of the very bad day, compared to the beginning of the day and throughout it. Ask them:

- How do you think Mog feels whenever anyone says “Bother that cat!”?
- How did Mog’s forgetfulness end up saving the day?
- Do you think Mr and Mrs Thomas like Mog more now? How do you know?
- What do you think ‘remarkable’ means? Have you done anything remarkable?

ACTIVITY 4

Stories about our pets

Explain to the children that they will be telling their own stories about their pets. Ask them to look at their My Pet booklet, which they will have completed in the classroom or at home, and share some of the naughty things that their pet (real or imagined) does. As they tell these stories, encourage other members of the group to say “Bother that cat / dog / rabbit!” as appropriate.

Using Downloadable Activity Sheet 4, pupils should draw five things their pet might do on a ‘very bad day’. The last box should be used to show something remarkable that the pet does that might solve a problem.

Once children have drawn their ideas, encourage them to use their plan to tell their story, using some of the language learnt from *Mog the Forgetful Cat* - for example “Bother that cat!”, “forgetful” and “remarkable”.

Children should have the opportunity to orally tell their stories to others, perhaps in a story telling area within the classroom, or within their groups. The planning sheet could also be sent home to give children the opportunity to tell the story about their pet’s very bad day to adults at home.

When older children are able to confidently tell their story, they could sequence their ideas to create a written story about their pet’s very bad day.



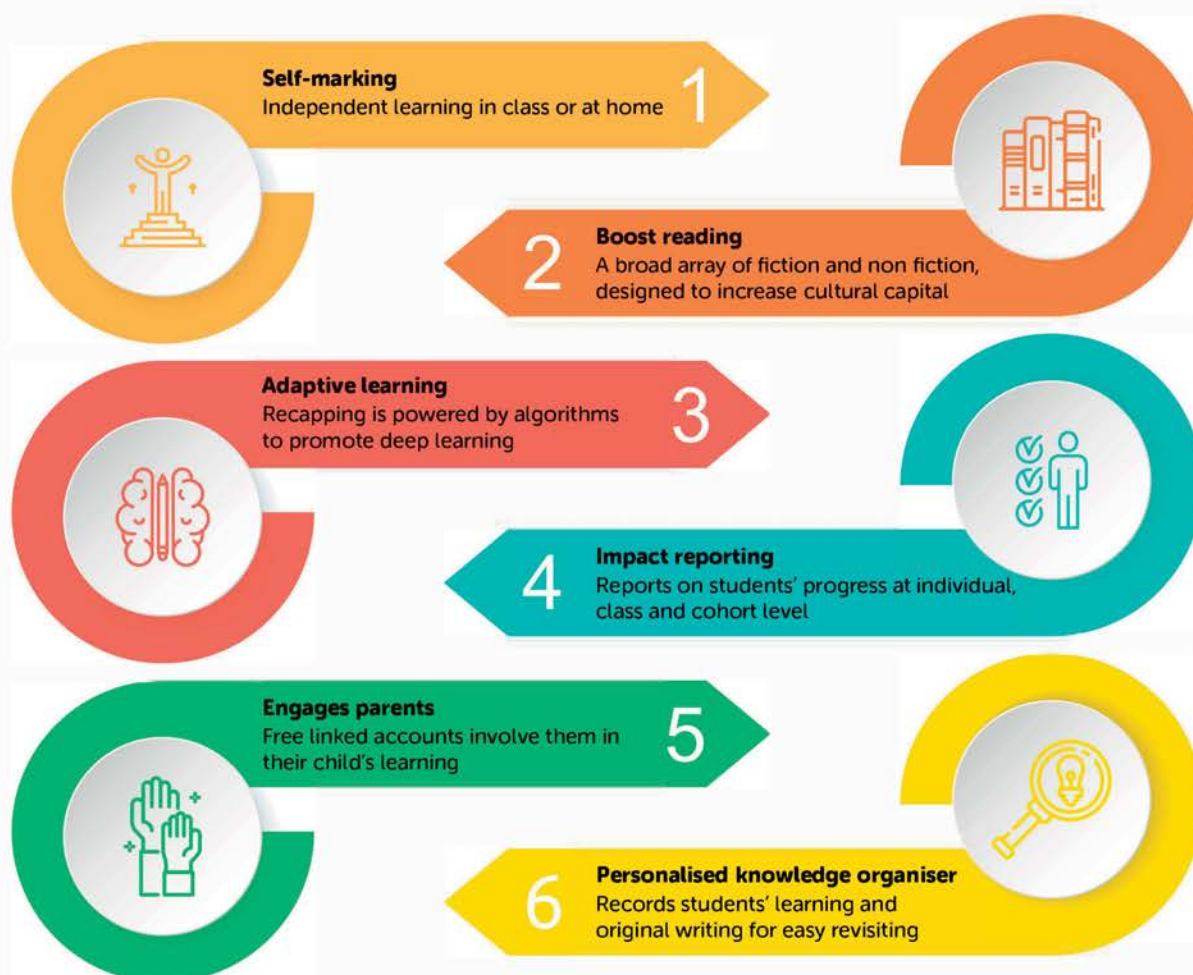
Your **FREE** resource pack

A full set of time-saving resources to accompany this plan are available to download for free from plazoom.com/mog-resources. They include:

- A set of visually engaging slides with questions to help you lead the assembly and enjoy sharing the story of Mog the Forgetful Cat with the children.
- Four image cards from the book to get children talking about the theme of forgetfulness, and the things their pets may forget.
- A visual memory trial of 10 images to place around your classroom or school so the children can test their collective memory. How many of the 10 images can they remember after seeing them only once?
- Perfect as an in class or homework activity. Children can take the sheets home and use the question prompts to chat with an adult about a family pet or an ideal pet. Can they draw and describe their pet’s character?
- This provides a framework to draw four things that their pet might do on a very bad day, followed by one remarkable thing. Their drawings and notes can then be used to support oral storytelling activities, or a written story for older pupils.



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REVIEWED BY: ADAM RICHES



Bedrock Vocabulary is Bedrock Learning's comprehensive online vocabulary programme for pupils from KS2 - KS4. It's now taught to over 250,000 students in 15 different countries, with the numbers rising all the time; and it doesn't take long upon investigation to realise why. The broad and rich curriculum immerses children in aspirational, Tier 2 vocabulary, helping to close the word gap whilst ensuring they read interesting fiction and non-fiction texts. However, the aspect that makes Bedrock Vocabulary so uniquely effective is that it's a personally tailored experience. This is achieved by using what Bedrock Learning calls the Alpha test, which benchmarks each pupil and then gives them access to materials that are suitable for their level of understanding and comprehension.

Learning with Bedrock Vocabulary is undertaken and tracked through a simple process of testing, reading, teaching and testing again. Not only do children see where they need to focus their efforts, teachers are able to track individual progress against the pupils' tailored needs. The interface for learners is intuitive, clear and well designed, so children quickly build familiarity with the layout and functionality. As such, Bedrock Vocabulary is a brilliant tool for home learning as well as classroom work, encouraging pupils to take responsibility for developing their own vocabularies.

The resources are aesthetically satisfying,

too, with neutral tones used throughout, and subtle backgrounds for the texts adding extra levels of interpretation. The instructions and the tests are well written, meaning that cognitive load remains low, ensuring the focus of pupils' attention remains on the words, rather than figuring out what to do next. Navigation between reading tests, resources and words becomes second nature with even the shortest exposure to the platform, highlighting the level of thought, research and development that Bedrock Learning has invested into every aspect of this programme. A nice touch is the progress bar on each aspect of each unit, as well as the overall progress bars on the student home page. Not only does it give some insight to the learner about their effort, but it also allows them an overview of the week which is comparable to the previous week. All of this data is trackable from the teacher view, too.

Crucial, of course, is the content – and there's no doubt that Bedrock Vocabulary has this just right. As they move through the programme, pupils are introduced to a dizzying range of genuinely engaging texts they'll love, with cross-curricular links to topics such as ancient Egypt and our solar system. And along the way, more challenging vocabulary is gradually introduced, at the right pace for them, and reinforced until knowledge and understanding are secure. Not only is this superb preparation for their KS2 SATs, it will set learners up marvellously for success at KS3 and 4; can you really afford not to give Bedrock Vocabulary a look?

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3

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13

Ideas for A MORE DIVERSE LIBRARY

Make sure your shelves are packed with titles that reflect children's reality, and the infinite variety of the world around them...



Teacup House: Meet the Twitches

by Hayley Scott, ill. Pippa Curnick
(£5.99, Usborne)

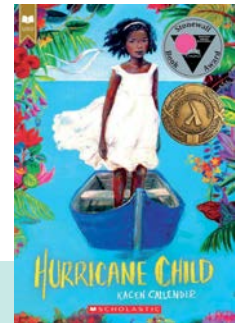
Moving from the top of an urban tower block to a cottage in the country might sound like a dream to many, but for Stevie Gillespie it just means leaving home, and she is not looking forward to it one bit. However, when Nanny Blue gives Stevie a toy house shaped like a teacup – and just the right size for a family of four tiny rabbits – to take with her, she starts to think that perhaps magic and adventures might lie ahead after all... Aimed at a KS1 audience, this book is a real delight; combining timeless tropes of great storytelling with a genuinely fresh and contemporary narrative voice, and affectionate illustrations that are effortlessly and gloriously diverse and inclusive.



The Pirate Mums

by Jodie Lancet-Grant,
ill. Lydia Corry (£6.99, Oxford
University Press)

Billy often wishes his family could be more like everyone else's. Billy's two mums love to dance jigs and sing sea shanties; their taste in home décor is decidedly piratical, and instead of a standard pet, they have a parrot called Birdbrain. When his mums volunteer to accompany Billy's class on a school trip to the seaside, with a boat trip included, he makes them promise to be normal. But when the boat gets into trouble, their nautical knowledge and salty sea-legs save the day. And that's when Billy discovers that it's what makes his mums different that also makes them – and him – special. This joyful, funny piece of storytelling is a true celebration of family love in all its wonderful shapes.



Hurricane Child

by Kacen Callender
(£6.99, Scholastic)

Being born during a hurricane is unlucky, and 12-year-old Caroline has had her share of bad luck lately. She's hated and bullied by everyone in her small school on St. Thomas of the US Virgin Islands, a spirit only she can see won't stop following her, and – worst of all – her mother left home one day and never came back. But when a new student named Kalinda arrives, Caroline's luck begins to turn around. Kalinda becomes Caroline's first and only friend – and the person for whom Caroline has begun to develop a crush. Together, Caroline and Kalinda must set out in a hurricane to find Caroline's missing mother – before Caroline loses her forever.



Nothing Ever Happens Here

by Sarah Hagger-Holt
(£6.99, Usborne)

Izzy lives in an exceptionally ordinary town. So, when her dad comes out as trans, it's bound to waves throughout the community. Despite her talent for acting, Izzy dislikes being in the spotlight; and that's just one of many issues she finds herself having to tackle as all the members of her family try to adjust to the new dynamic without losing the strong bonds that have always kept them together. Hagger-Holt is actually head of campaigns at Stonewall – and although she is clearly keen to open up important discussions with young people about gender and diversity, she never lets the book's simple and timeless message – that everyone has the right to be accepted and loved as their own, authentic self – eclipse its story.



On the Move

by Michael Rosen, ill. Quentin Blake
(£9.99, Walker Books)

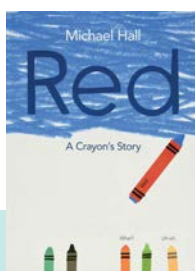
This extraordinary new collection from the former Children's Laureate, exquisitely illustrated by Quentin Blake, begins with poems about Michael's family life, as a child of Jewish migrants, then turns to the fate of his 'missing' relatives during WWII, before coming up to date and exploring the issue of migration around the world today. As the author himself says: 'Humans move; it's what we do' – and this anthology both acknowledges and celebrates that, looking at the ways in which people move as well as the reasons – some wonderful, some terrible – that drive them. It's powerful and moving, playful and heartbreaking, and a brilliant way to get children thinking about the migrant in all of us.



Literally

by Patrick Skipworth,
ill. Nicholas Stevenson
(£11.99, What On Earth Books)

Subtitled 'Amazing words and where they come from', this eye-catching picturebook introduces pupils to the rich history and cultural diversity of the UK, through the intriguing story of its language – revealing the fascinating origins of 12 words. Each spread zeroes in on a specific word and explains the hidden stories contained within – including 'companion' (original meaning: with bread), 'ukulele' (jumping flea) and 'safari' (journey). The author explores each word's cultural, geographical and historical connections, as well as what they literally used to mean, and at the back of the book is extra information about language families, including a large world map depicting where different ones are spoken.



Red: A Crayon's Story

by Michael Hall (HarperCollins)

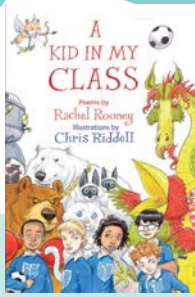
Red crayon is not very good at being red. Every time he tries to draw strawberries, hearts and cherries, everything turns out blue! His teacher thinks he needs more practice, his parents feel he needs to mix with other colours and many berate him for his lack of effort – after all, his label says 'red' and that's the way he came from the factory. But even when the scissors snip his tag so that he has room to breathe, Red still can't seem to be what everyone expects him to be. Eventually, a new friend offers Red the chance to be himself and Red discovers that he is, of course, Blue! A colourful, charming, witty picture book about the damage of forcing labels onto others and the freedom and delight that being yourself brings.



Sonam and the Silence

by Eddie Ayres, ill. Ronak Taher
(£11.99, Allen & Unwin)

In Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, little Sonam's world is dark and silent. Then one day, our protagonist follows a magical melodious sound to a walled garden, and her world is silent no more. The sound is music, and it lifts her up among the stars and takes her deeper than the tree roots in the earth. How can she hold on to this extraordinary feeling in a world where music is forbidden? Author Eddie Ayres, who grew up in England, has drawn on his experience of teaching music for a year in Kabul to write this lyrical, fable-like story which makes an excellent leaping off point for discussions about empathy, thankfulness and how pupils would feel if something they loved was suddenly deemed forbidden.



A Kid In My Class

by Rachel Rooney, ill. Chris Riddell
(£10.99, Otter-Barry Books)

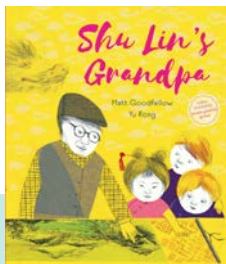
If Allan Ahlberg's *Please Mrs Butler* holds a special place in your heart, you'll love this new anthology from CLIPPA Award-winning poet Rachel Rooney, a former teacher of special needs children. Like the former, this collection is a glorious slice of classroom life, with each poem exploring a different pupil. They're all here, from the daydreamer and the new boy to the average kid and the fidget; and nor does Rooney shy away from deeper, more poignant topics: a girl sits on a memorial bench and remembers an old friend; a refugee reflects on her journey; we learn the real reason a tough kid behaves the way he does. Each poem is illustrated with wit and sensitivity by former children's laureate Chris Riddell in a distinctive blue colour palette.



Toto the Ninja Cat & The Great Snake Escape

by Dermot O'Leary
(£6.99, Hodder Children's Books)

This was Dermot O'Leary's first book for children, and inspired by two stray cats that he and his wife rescued from an olive grove in Italy. Just like her real-life counterpart, our hero Toto, a small black cat with a fluffy grey ruff, is almost completely blind, but is also one of the most skilled ninjas on the planet. One evening, news reaches Toto and brother Silver that a king cobra has escaped from London Zoo. Together they must investigate, sneaking out of the house at night, before it's too late. The page-turning antics of the Puglian paisanos are complemented by frequent bursts of bold, capped phrases that work to whizz the plot along, while Nick East's expressive illustrations help to bring nocturnal London and its inhabitants to life.



Shu Lin's Grandpa

by Matt Goodfellow, ill. Yu Rong
(£12.99, Otter-Barry Books)

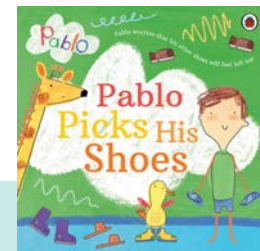
Shu Lin, a Chinese immigrant, is finding it hard to gain acceptance in her new school. She doesn't speak English very well, doesn't seem to want to join in with playground games and eats brightly coloured food with chopsticks at lunch. "What's up with her?" ask her classmates. But when Shu Lin's grandpa comes to school and shows the class his amazing Chinese paintings, everything changes. This touching story is perfect for helping pupils develop cultural understanding and empathy, and offers a vivid depiction of starting school in a new country – an experience that may chime with your pupils; author Matt Goodfellow is a former primary school teacher.



Loud!

by Rose Robbins
(£12.99, Scallywag Press)

Abigail is frustrated. She can't focus on writing at school. Instead, she scribbles, fiddles and fools around instead, often getting sent to the calming down room. When it's time for a music class and Abigail discovers that she can't make any of the instruments work, things are about to go wrong again, until a special teacher discovers exactly what to do to help Abigail find a special voice of her own. This sensitive book celebrates neurodiversity – specifically ADHD, and is a great starting point for class discussion about how differently we learn. The author has an autistic brother and teaches autistic young people, and the authenticity of her experience and knowledge clearly shines through.



Pablo Picks His Shoes

by Rosie King (£6.99, Ladybird)

Five-year-old Pablo is on the autistic spectrum and thinks a little differently. He creates imaginary friends who come to life and, together, they figure out how to face tricky everyday situations with confidence. In this book, Pablo is worried that his shoes will feel left out if they don't come on a trip to Granny's house. When she was 13, author Rosie King was featured in BBC Newsround documentary *My Autism and Me* and now voices one of the characters in the Pablo CBeebies series. It features a voice cast and writing team who are all on the autistic spectrum. Other books in the series cover feelings, being afraid of the dark, and noisy parties.

Why kids get EMILY DICKINSON

The rich language of classic poems work wonders with vocabulary and grammar, but just as importantly the enduring themes still light a spark for children today

Are you a teacher who loves classic poetry or do you shy away from it? Maybe you're not sure you'll get it right or worry there isn't time for it in an already overflowing curriculum? However, with the right tools and the right poems, exploring classic poetry with children is a wonderful way to broaden their reading horizons and unlock their imaginations.

Classic poems have stood the test of time. They have as much meaning now as when they were first written, drawing children in with rich language that allows them to think and feel in a new way. These poems create a window into the past while building empathy and understanding. Children find a shared language and tradition – an understanding of literary references, such as just how terrible it is to “have no time to stand and stare” or what happens when we “take the road less travelled”.

Children enjoy poetry for so many reasons. It is a place to escape with the power to take them beyond their own circumstances and change the way they see the world. Poetry can provide inspiration, hope and peace. Children can play with language and see that there is no one right answer – a freedom that allows many to find their spark.



With so much expressed in so few words, poetry is more accessible than a full novel. Children are able to explore language while developing their vocabulary. The musicality of poetry builds a sense of rhythm while developing an emotional response. The drama of *The Highwayman* is thrilling while the ghostly *Listeners* sends a chill down their spines. Poems may address familiar experiences and emotions or take the reader to a completely different place. Through this, children are given opportunities to find out more about themselves and the wider world.

Covering the curriculum

Reading, writing and performing poetry should be a key part of any school's English curriculum. Exposure to this powerful style of writing is important and should not be just an add-on. Carefully selected poems can be built into the long-term plan for English so children do not miss out on these valuable experiences.

Through poetry, children are able to tackle more complex vocabulary and increase their knowledge of synonyms and antonyms. They will develop an understanding of authors' use of language and hone their retrieval, inference, summarising and comparison skills. Performing poetry develops essential speaking and listening skills and provides deeper understanding.

There are so many brilliant classic poems that teachers are spoilt for choice when making selections for their classes. It's important to consider the author and try to stretch beyond the usual choices. Look for diversity in gender, ethnicity and nationality where possible to provide children with a wide range of reading experiences. Providing a variety of poetry is key. One poem may not speak to us while another might completely capture our imaginations. Children need to be given the chance to find the poems that make their hearts sing.

Why not try some fantastic female poets including Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, Rachel Field, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Amy Lowell, May Swenson and Effie Lee Newsome.

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS (by Emily Dickinson)

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without
the words,
And never stops at all,*

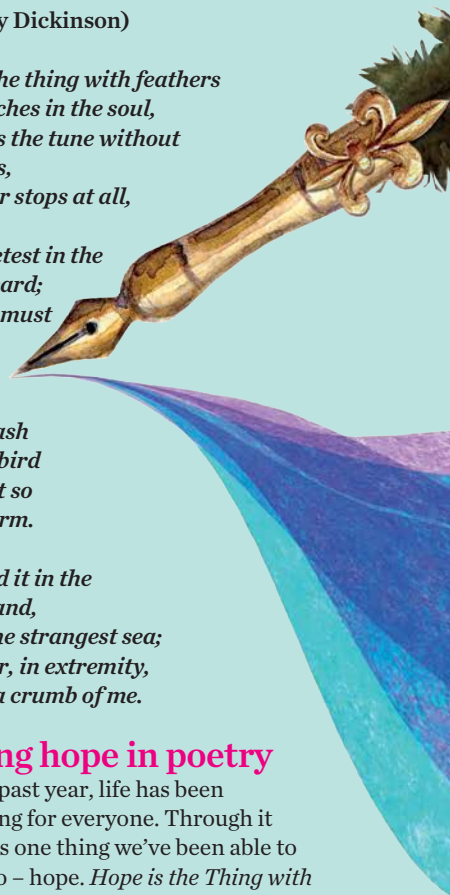
*And sweetest in the
gale is heard;
And sore must
be the
storm
That
could abash
the little bird
That kept so
many warm.*

*I've heard it in the
chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.*

Finding hope in poetry

Over the past year, life has been challenging for everyone. Through it all, there's one thing we've been able to hold on to – hope. *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Emily Dickinson is the perfect classic poem for discussing this with children. Shaped by their own experiences, each child will be able to take a different meaning and comfort from the words.

Begin by simply reading the poem. How does it make you feel? What might it mean? Move on to exploring vocabulary around feelings and the metaphor of the storm. It's sore and will abash the little bird. In the chillest sea, the strangest land,



CREATE A POETRY TOOLKIT

A poetry toolkit is a collection of language devices used in poems to create images and meaning. I encourage children to have these 'tools' handy whenever they read poetry so they can make connections and build understanding. They are great in a display or with actual tools labelled with each poetic device.

IMAGERY

The creation of mental images through description.

SIMILE

Comparing one thing to another by saying it is 'like' or 'as' that other thing.

METAPHOR

Something that represents or is a symbol of something else. The characteristics of one thing are similar to the characteristics of another.

PERSONIFICATION

Giving a human characteristic to an inanimate object, animal or abstract concept.

ALLITERATION

Repetition of the same initial sound in closely located words.

ASSONANCE

Repetition of the same vowel sound in the middle of closely located words.

CONSONANCE

Repetition of the same consonant sound in the middle of closely located words.

REPETITION

Repeating the same word or phrase for effect.

ONOMATOPOEIA

A word that imitates the sound it is describing (e.g. pop).

RHYTHM

The flow of a poem including the pattern or beat created by the syllables and stressed sounds in a line of poetry.

RHyme

Repetition of the ending sounds of words (often at the end of lines of poetry).

and in extremity, life can be harsh.

Continue by using inference skills to look for clues as to the meaning of the poem. What is the metaphor for hope? How do you know? What is life like for the narrator? How does the bird help?

Now children will be ready to think about the overall message of the poem. What are the themes? What does this poem mean for us today even though it was published in 1891 – one hundred and thirty years ago?



“Hope is the Thing with Feathers is the perfect poem to discuss with pupils. Each child will take a different meaning and comfort from the words”

Investigate the author's use of language. Hope

is for everyone. Hope

is everlasting. The bird's

song has no words so it can be understood by the entire world. What significance does this have for the world now? Can we relate to this need for hope?

Finally, look at how Emily Dickinson has played with the language. She uses alliteration, personification

and symbolism to build up her picture of hope. Identify the rhyme and rhythm of the poem. Which words are emphasised? What impact does this have on the reader?

Don't stop here, either. You can discuss other metaphors for hope, compare it to poems with similar themes, interpret the poem through art or movement – all of which are powerful strategies not just for *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*, but the many classic poems waiting to be discovered by your class.



Kate Heap (@KateHeap1) is a primary English consultant (scope-forimagination.co.uk). She has written two books



for teachers including *Developing Reading Comprehension Skills: Classic Poetry*, published by Brilliant Publications.

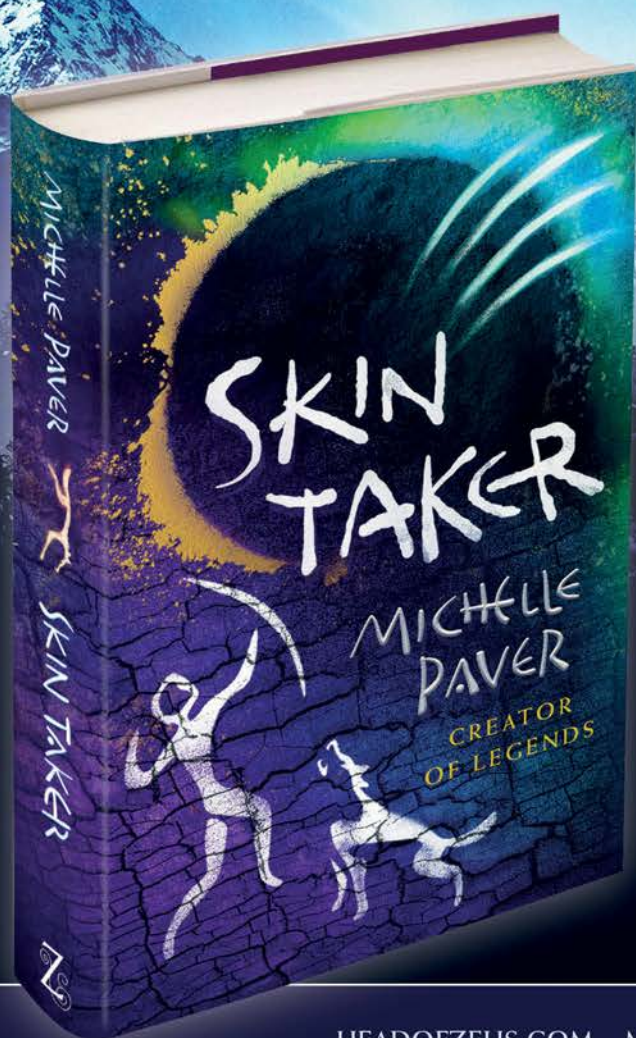


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When have children 'MASTERED' PHONICS?

If we see the Year 1 check as the end of the phonics journey then we're missing the point, says **Charlotte MacKechnie**

The problem with the phonics screening check is that its purpose is often misunderstood. We look to it to tell us whether or not a student has mastered phonics, when in fact it's only supposed to be an indication of whether a child has learned phonic decoding to the minimal expected standard for a six year old.

Some languages, and their alphabetic writing systems, are considered to be transparent because it is obvious how they work: they're easy to teach and easy to learn. Transparent writing systems have a largely one-to-one correspondence between sounds and their spellings – in other words, there is mainly one way to spell each sound. There isn't a single sound in the English language, however, that is represented by only one spelling; it's opaque.

With 44 phonemes represented by 175 graphemes, every sound has more than one representation (e.g. pie, sky, high, child, time), and many spellings represent more than one sound (e.g. dream, break, head). A spelling may be made up of one, two, three or four letters (e.g. sat, ship, care, through), which is tough enough at the monosyllabic level, but 80 per cent of the English language is polysyllabic. Students must learn to segment, manipulate and blend sounds and syllables to be readers and writers.

To demonstrate that you'd mastered decoding, you'd need to be able to effortlessly retrieve the correct sound-spelling correspondences when reading and writing (i.e. read and spell with automaticity).

Since the Rose Review (2006), teachers in England have been required to teach word recognition through systematic synthetic phonics, and the phonics screening check was introduced in 2012. The purpose of the check is 'to confirm that all children have learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard' (Standards and



- th ey
- eigh t

And, just for fun, here are all the other spellings of 'ae' that Sounds-Write identified:

- v ei n
- b a | ll et
- s t r aigh t
- g au ge

The test includes monosyllabic CVC words and words with two or three adjacent consonants (CCVC, CVCC, CCCVC) that may contain single letter spellings, consonant digraphs (two-letter spellings), frequent and consistent vowel digraphs, and some less frequent and less consistent vowel digraphs, and some two-syllable words.

All of which is good to make sure children are on the right track, but the phonics journey cannot not end here. The Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer, 1986) proposes that reading comprehension is the product of language comprehension processes and word recognition processes; it is essential that students master phonics, because students would be unable to comprehend what they read unless they have learned to decode.

And if we want children to master phonics, then its teaching must continue beyond Y1: it should be the primary route to correcting reading errors and teaching new spellings (alongside etymology and morphology), throughout the primary school years.

Testing Agency, 2017: 4). There's a particular phrase that stands out to me here, and that is: 'to an age-appropriate standard'.

The phonics screening check doesn't assess whether a child has been taught to deal with the alternative pronunciations of the 175 spellings of the 44 sounds in the English language. It isn't supposed to. Only 'frequent' and 'consistent' spellings are included – that is, only the spellings that appear in words that children are likely to encounter by Year 1. For example, only three spellings of the sound 'ay' can be included in the phonics screening check:

- c a m e
- b ai t
- s ay

...but Sounds-Write shows there are far more common spellings:

- c a m e
- b ai t
- s ay
- a | c o r n
- b r e a k



Charlotte MacKechnie (@c_mackechnie) is Reading Development Lead and a specialist leader of education for the STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub. You can read her blog here linguisticphonics.wordpress.com.

How to teach EXPANDED NOUN PHRASES

Use our downloadable resources to help pupils get to grips with this area of the grammar curriculum

REBECCA JAKES

It's been years since there were changes to grammar, punctuation and spelling in the curriculum, yet the teaching of specific grammar terminology is still the cause of many Twitter spats, lively debates and teachers pulling their hair out in the staffroom. So why after so long, is grammar terminology still an issue – and does it need to be? My answer is no.

For me, the answer is keep it simple and fun, learn it in context and practise with daily drip-feeding of terminology. As teachers we plan immersion into new vocabulary with every unit we teach, so teaching expanded noun phrases should go hand in

hand with this. Here I share my favourite strategies and activities for teaching expanded noun phrases.

Activity one

This activity is called 'Say six things' and really is as simple as it sounds. Add a picture stimulus to the centre box in **Resource 1** (below, left), or use our examples. To begin with, ask children individually or in pairs to write six nouns that they can see in the picture. For example, for this picture they might write 'trees', 'leaves', 'branches', 'elephant', 'grass' and 'river'.

Now move on to expanding the ideas. Give each child or pair some small sticky notes and ask them to choose an adjective to describe each noun,

then write them on the sticky notes. I always paraphrase when using terminology – I have no problem at all with reminding children that adjectives are describing words if it helps them remember it.

Place the notes over the boxes they have written the nouns in. Repeat two or three times until each box is covered with several layers of notes. For some reason, when the sticky notes come out, even the most reluctant writers want to join in. It never fails to get great outcomes.

This is a lesson in itself and it's important not to rush the teaching and generation of vocabulary. By gathering responses each time by asking for nouns and adjectives you are revising pupils' prior knowledge of this terminology. It's also the perfect opportunity to address any misconceptions about word meaning.

The following lesson can then be dedicated to turning these ideas into expanded noun phrases. Modelling is the key

here, with explicit labelling of terminology every time. This activity is an easy and adaptable activity and a great way to teach thesaurus skills. It's also a perfect opportunity to discuss the 'appropriateness' of a word.

Activity two

A character slinky is a fun way to teach expanded noun phrases. It's particularly effective with SEND pupils and supports EAL pupils with learning adjectives. Fold a narrow length of card concertina style (see example, below). Open out the card to create a character body. Ask children to attach a head, arms and legs to their card before adding a different adjective in each space created by the concertina.

To extend this activity, prompt children to focus on specific nouns related to their character as they add them – nose, eyes, legs, for example. This helps encourage children to look deeper into a character rather than think of the most basic adjectives. Once the







"For some reason, when the sticky notes come out, even the most reluctant writers want to join in"

My noun...	My noun...	My noun...
		
My noun...	My noun...	My noun...

RESOURCE 1



Dicey Characters

	Synonym 1	Synonym 2	Synonym 3
 happy			
 sad			
 angry			
 excited			
 upset			
 scared			

teachwire

RESOURCE 2

character slinkies are filled up, model turning the ideas into expanded noun phrases, then move to using these in full sentences.

Activity three

The great thing about teaching grammar in context, rather than as a stand-alone lesson, is that you can kill two birds with one stone. Expanded noun phrases are a great way to revise commas in a list at the same time. This activity works particularly well as a morning starter and can be completed as a thesaurus/synonym activity. The best thing about it is it teaches 'feelings' vocabulary, which pupils invariably find difficult. I can't be the only teacher who despairs when they hear the words 'joyful' and 'forlorn' as a synonym for happy and sad. Where do they get this from? It's not me!

Using **Resource 2** (above), let children fill in six adjectives in the first column, or use our examples. Children must first roll a dice to see which adjective they need to find a synonym for. For example, if a child rolls a one they must

then find synonyms for the word 'happy' and fill them in the three boxes along the row – 'cheerful', 'jolly' and 'smiling', for example. Continue the activity until the table is complete.













Next, looking at a picture you have provided or their own character or setting, pupils must choose two appropriate adjectives to turn into an expanded noun phrase in a full sentence. For example, if their image is of the BFG, they might write, "The jolly, smiling giant grinned fondly at Sophie."

Activity four

Children working at greater depth are likely to grasp the use of expanded noun phrases quickly. To enable them to work at greater depth from a grammar point of view, the following two resources can be adapted and used again and again.

A sentence generator (**Resource 3**, above right) enables pupils to generate adjectives and conjunctions with the roll of a dice. The challenge here is that children must build a sentence around

Sentence Generator

	 cold/wet	 quiet/timid	 murky/dull	 brilliant/vivid	 stubborn/cross	 kind/gentle
 although						
 because						
 as						
 when						
 if						
 and						

teachwire

RESOURCE 3

these given words by selecting an appropriate noun. For example, if a child rolls a one then a three, they must include the words 'although', 'murky' and 'dull' in a sentence. The challenge here is that all the other words they use must be appropriate too. So a child working at greater depth might come up with an expanded noun phrase in a sentence like this: "Although the sun was out, it was murky and dull in the forest." Get children to record the words they've used by putting an 'X' in the box. They can then roll the dice again and repeat the activity a number of times. Be sure to model the activity carefully first to ensure children fully understand what they need to do.

Once pupils become confident with a thesaurus, they can also be challenged with a 'zones of relevance' board (**Resource 4**, below)

Zones of relevance



terse	stormy	turbulent	calm
menacing	threatening	intimidating	dangerous
hostile	evil	dark	black
warm	comforting	light	cozy
gloomy	perilous	noisy	spooky



teachwire

RESOURCE 4

Free online resources

Download all these resources for free, including

blank versions, from [teachwire.net/teaching-resources/expanded-noun-phrases](https://www.teachwire.net/teaching-resources/expanded-noun-phrases)



to make their expanded noun phrases even more effective. Give children a stimulus and words to accompany it. They must decide how relevant the words are in the context of the stimulus. If a word is irrelevant, put it outside the circle. If it is relevant, decide how relevant – the more relevant it is, the closer it must be to the centre. Once pupils have decided, they can then use the relevant vocabulary to create sentences containing expanded noun phrases.

All of these strategies are tried and tested methods to teach expanded noun phrases in a fun and meaningful way. It's unlikely that the debate over grammar terminology is likely to go away any time soon but does teaching terminology have to suck the life out of learning? Absolutely not!



Rebecca Jakes is a Y2 teacher at Preston Manor Lower School in London. She has

worked previously as an associate English advisor.

Making Objects Magical,

with Joan Haig

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

Children can go on many journeys whilst reading. They could travel by train or plane, visit new and exciting lands or meet new characters all whilst reading. And often, a mysterious and magical object is discovered. In *Tiger Skin Rug*, the author Joan Haig takes children on an enchanting journey, travelling on a magical tiger skin rug. Through the eyes of the narrator, Lal, the reader is transported to India, which is beautifully described by the author.

In this teaching sequence, children will have the chance to write stories of their own based on a magical object that transports people on an epic adventure. Extracts from Plazoom's *Author In Your Classroom* podcast (episode 13) are used to support each section; you might want to listen to the whole episode as a class (bit.ly/AIYCJoanHaig) as an introduction.



SESSION 1

CHOOSING AN OBJECT TO WRITE ABOUT

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **6.51** up to **9.38**. Discuss with the children where Joan Haig got the idea for her story (from her auntie).



Illustrations: Marian Brown

2 | Ask the children to think about their own homes or places that they have visited. Can they think of any small objects that, perhaps, no one else noticed that they could include in their own writing? Or maybe someone has told them about an object that might be magical? Share ideas as a class.

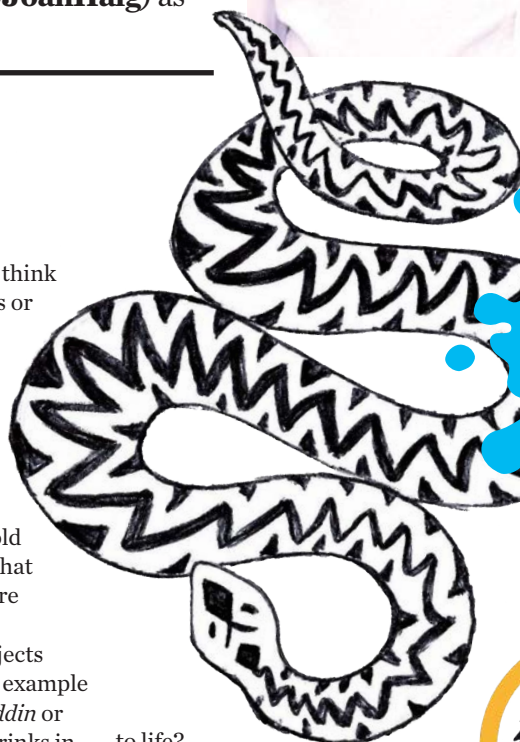
3 | Discuss magical objects from other stories (for example the magic lamp in *Aladdin* or the potion that Alice drinks in *Alice in Wonderland*). Ask the children to think of other objects that might become magical, considering possible answers to the questions:

- What could the object be?
- Where was it found?
- What might bring the object

to life?

- What magical powers could it have?

4 | Ask the children to jot down their ideas. If children cannot think of objects to write about, ask them to choose an object from home or within the classroom.



Free
resource
pack
available



SESSION 2

DESCRIBING A MAGICAL OBJECT

1 | Play the section of the podcast that starts at **10.20** up to **20.19**. While listening to Joan reading the extract from the book, ask pupils to think about how the tiger skin rug is described.

2 | Discuss Joan's use of description within the extract: How has Joan described the rug?

How does Lal feel about the situation?

How has Joan shown Lal's feelings?

3 | Discuss the writing techniques below that Joan uses in the extract:

- expanded noun phrases (*the*

tiger's mane, which was thick and glossy)

- similes (*like a current of electricity zipping between two poles*)
- the use of the senses (*until hearing the thud and click, pressing its forehead against my palm*)
- describing small details (*its nostrils flared*)
- precise nouns (*canines and carnassials*)
- first person

4 | Children should choose one of the objects they thought of earlier, and develop their ideas further, jotting ideas for how they could describe the object, using some of the techniques used in the extract.

5 | Pupils could use their ideas to write a short description of the magical object as it comes to life.



“Always listen out and watch around you – because there are ideas for stories everywhere.”

SESSION 3

PLOTTING A STORY

1 | Play the section of the podcast again that starts at **20.09** up until **22.58**. Discuss with the children why it is a good idea to plot out your story before writing.

2 | In *Tiger Skin Rug*, the children are taken on a magical adventure to India. Discuss as a class:

- Where will your magical object take you?
- Why does it take you there?
- Do you have a mystery that needs to be solved?

- Will anyone travel with you?
- What details might you describe on your adventure?

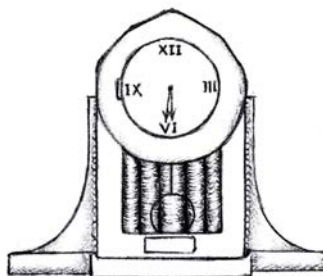
3 | Children should now plan their own story using ideas from previous sessions, plotting the main points and the things that they might describe at each stage of the story.

4 | Now, ask children to write their own first-person story based around a magical object that takes them on a journey.

5 | Challenge them to use some of the features that Joan

Haig uses in her writing:

- expanded noun phrases
- similes
- the use of the senses
- describing small details
- precise nouns
- first person



SESSION 4

EDITING AND REDRAFTING

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

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

AFTER THE UNIT...

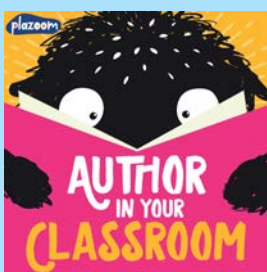
Play the final section of the podcast that starts at **22.59** until the end.

After listening discuss:

- Whom might the children ask to tell them stories about their families?
- How could the pupils share their own stories with others?



DOWNLOAD NOW!



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



Rich Knowledge, DEEP RESPONSE

Building our own understanding of ambitious texts, then sharing them with pupils, can lead to a truly rewarding learning experience explains **Bob Cox**...

I work with a huge network of schools, all trying to open doors for their pupils to challenging English lessons, new knowledge and literary contexts; these contexts are all bringing greater scope for response and productive talk: and the more focused the talk, the more the meaning takes shape.

Imagine the text you are using is something you can mould for your teaching purposes. You know it so well that you play with the words in your head; you've read the extract or poem many times, love to read it aloud, and even anticipate your pupils' reception of it. You are 'reading for teaching'; using your trained mind to assess text potential.

“Planning needs to support effective teaching, not swallow up creative energy time”

Lines of reflection

Somewhere within these complex, but fast-moving, mind processes lies the joy of English teaching. Let me take just a few lines from a poem teeming with mysteries and allusion to illustrate what I mean:

*“I went out to the hazel wood
Because a fire was in my head
And cut and peeled a hazel wand
And hooked a berry to a thread;”*

(From ‘The Song of Wandering Aengus’ by W.B. Yeats)

I hope those lines have got you thinking! I didn't choose them for familiarity or ease; but rather, because the more ambitious the text, the more knowledge-rich it becomes for us, as teachers, too. I always say that harder texts offer CPD every day in the classroom, costing nothing more than a curious mind (and if you'd like to find out more about this poem in particular, you can find the full text at bit.ly/trwBobCox2).

I recommend putting more time into supporting your own understanding of a challenging text compared with the over-planning sometimes associated with privileging content over concepts. A mass of charts can give a tidy feeling of control, but mastery of a complex text feeds ongoing confidence, adding to our own store of long-term knowledge. Planning needs to support effective teaching, not swallow up creative energy time. For example, when I looked up the ‘Aengus’ of Yeats’ poem, I found he was the god of love, beauty and youth in Irish folklore; which was new learning for me.

Collecting responses

Secure in your own expertise and fuelled by plenty of quirky staff room discussion about the poem, now it's time to let your pupils find links and connections across our few lines of poetry. For example, consider the associations of ‘hazel wood’ and ‘wand’. Is this ancient England? Who else in literature has a wand? How is the hazel being transformed? What kind of berries do you know? If it's being hooked to a berry, what happens next?

The questions will stimulate impulsive responses which you can

refine into evidence-based ideas. Use sticky notes to make a record of the discussion. Encourage your pupils' agency and relationship with words via simple thinking engine routines like those on the chart below. They can be used as metacognitive strategies to assist more awareness of how learning is being developed:

1) Activate prior knowledge

Immerse, connect ideas, question, think, engage, wonder.

...

2) Writing for reading

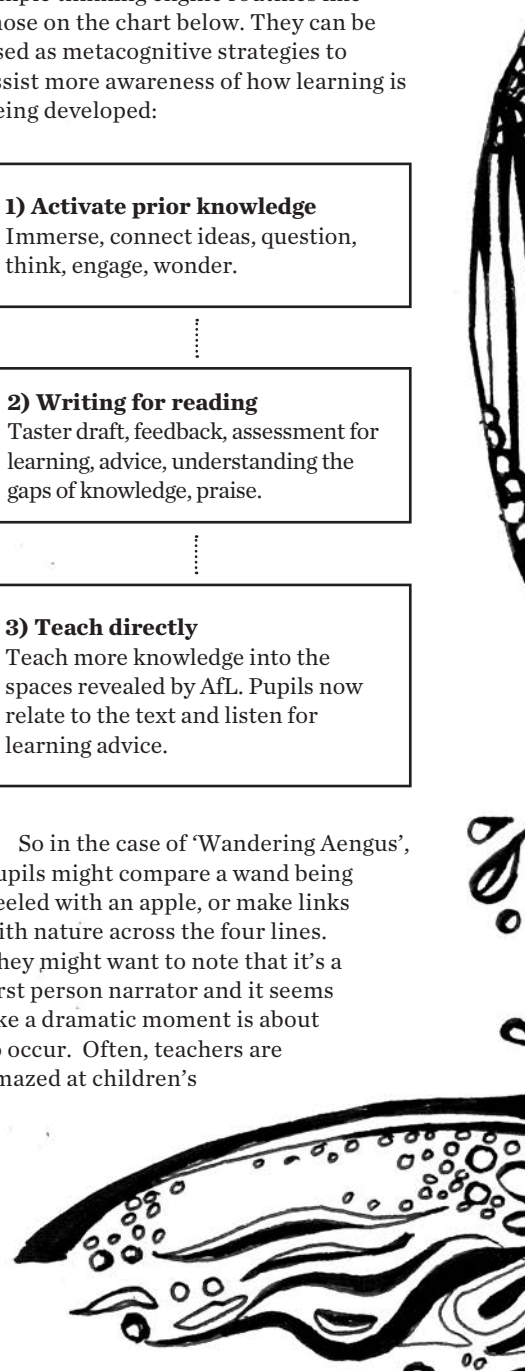
Taster draft, feedback, assessment for learning, advice, understanding the gaps of knowledge, praise.

...

3) Teach directly

Teach more knowledge into the spaces revealed by AfL. Pupils now relate to the text and listen for learning advice.

So in the case of ‘Wandering Aengus’, pupils might compare a wand being peeled with an apple, or make links with nature across the four lines. They might want to note that it's a first person narrator and it seems like a dramatic moment is about to occur. Often, teachers are amazed at children's



responses to unusual imagery or style; they love playing with word association. Ideally, of course, schools will be developing a map of learning from KS1, so that a poem like this builds upon prior experiences and immersions in challenging texts. Then fascination, rather than fear, becomes the tone of your classroom talk.

An entitlement for all

A rich curriculum is an entitlement for all; its acquisition stimulates a world of wonder, power, confidence building and exploration which can be constructed socially and sifted creatively. So yes, you can simply tell pupils that 'fire was in my head' might imply excitement – but instead, why not ask them in groups to compile a chart with the word 'fire' in the middle and all kinds of symbolism associated with it written quickly around the outside? Then you can take

FREE TEACHING MODULE

To access a teaching module, 'Symbol Source', from Leah Crawford (part of the Opening Doors series of resources) based on *The Song of Wandering Aengus* by W.B. Yeats and including the whole poem and analysis, see bit.ly/trwBobCox1.

feedback and teach explicitly about connotation after the responses have been heard.

You may be interested in an organisation called 'Let's Think' that will take strategies for response further; you can find out more about its approaches and beliefs at bit.ly/trwBobCox4.

I have kept to a discussion of just four lines to give this article a clear focus, but in fact, this 'zoom in' approach is getting encouraging results in schools as part of step-by-step methods to understanding new knowledge generally. The memory banks do not get flooded and all learners are nurtured on the journey. There is time to digest, reflect, retrieve information from previous stages and enjoy.

Primarily, though, to enrich pupils' knowledge, and elicit profound responses, a complex text is needed – one which supports the journey from surface features to depth, and brings out the wonders of literature for you as well as for your class. And this teaching of quality texts is in turn leading schools to a place where children are producing astonishingly high quality writing of their own – as you can see if you take a look at our online library of pupils' work in response to challenging texts, at bit.ly/trwBobCox3.

Illustration © Vicky Cox



Bob Cox is the award winning author of the 'Opening Doors' series, published by Crown House (bit.ly/trwBobCox3)

Start a writing REVOLUTION

Tre Christopher and **Pet Henshaw** describe a simple classroom innovation that can have a surprisingly powerful impact



an exercise book (the same size as the children's) and pop it on the visualiser. Each section of the table journals could have images either printed or cut from magazines/holiday brochures, with vocabulary added around the images as a memory hook.

How are they organised?

In KS1 a writing journal may have the following sections for collecting transferable words and phrases:

- Good characters e.g. kind-hearted, generous, compassionate
 - Bad characters e.g. selfish, pugnacious
 - Other words for 'said' e.g. muttered, shrieked, hissed
 - Other words for 'walked' e.g. swaggered, stumbled, strolled
 - Adverbs of time e.g. first, later, finally
 - Settings - beach e.g. shimmering, blue waves
 - Settings - forest e.g. emerald green, majestic trees
- In Key Stage 2 there are usually additional section headers, allowing pages that are more detailed and child initiated, so not every journal looks the same. The descriptions and language collected will depend on the texts taught and children's interests. Examples could include:
- Section for character e.g. evil characters; sly characters; funny characters; fantasy characters
 - Section for appearance e.g. character's hair; character's eyes; character's build

Writing journals ignite children's passion for language and raise standards in independent writing. Sometimes referred to as 'author's notebooks', writing journals are essentially vocabulary books in which children can capture gorgeous language that they will be able to use again and again in their own work. They are a type of personal thesaurus that children can refer to, supporting all forms of writing.

What do they look like?

Children will generally have their own writing journal – usually an A4 book – from Year 2 upwards. Before this, in Reception, we recommend a whole class, teacher-led journal, in order to model the process of capturing language, so it becomes habitual as children develop into independent writers. The class journal should be in the

form of a large book, such as an artist's sketchpad, to which the teacher can add fabulous vocabulary selected from stories shared together in class. Each double-page spread should have a header – for example, 'words to describe 'good' characters', 'words to describe settings' etc. The selected words are then added to the appropriate pages, to which the teacher can later refer back when modelling writing that could benefit from such vocabulary.

In Year 1, we suggest schools usually have one writing journal per table – again, this will ideally be a big book, like a scrapbook, into which teachers and teaching assistants can scribe. All teachers will also have their own journal for modelling how to select and use vocabulary effectively. This could be a similarly oversized volume, or some teachers prefer to use

REMEMBER:

- Do not include detailed toolkits or success criteria if you wish to use these journals to support assessed writing.
- Writing journals do not need to be marked, but you must check children's spelling.

To find out more about how to use writing journals, book your FREE place on this training session: dandelionlearning.co.uk/free-training-using-writing-journals.

they spot words they would like to use in their own writing. It is during independent writing time that children then have the opportunity to select vocabulary from the appropriate sections to enhance their own stories and texts. This is where you will see the impact that the journals have on raising standards in writing through the use of high quality vocabulary choices.

What do teachers say?

We recommend that children carry their personal writing journals onto the next class with them so that they can build on the vocabulary they have selected the previous year. Teachers we work with tell us they love the pupils bringing their old journals with them in September as no time is wasted repeating previous work, and children can continue to develop their vocabulary from the start. One school told us that some of their Year 6 children had even taken their journals on to secondary school with them and were still finding them really useful. Teachers tell us that using writing journals daily has made a real difference not only to the standard of writing across the school but even more importantly, to children's attitudes to writing. As one teacher enthused: "Our children love the writing journals and they cannot wait to write. They love writing now!"



Tre Christopher and Pet Henshaw are the founders of Dandelion Learning. Having worked as primary school teachers, subject Leaders and consultants, they now provide English training and support.



■ Section for settings e.g fantasy settings; Ancient Rome; mountains; rainforest; haunted house/spooky setting

■ Section for non-fiction e.g. persuasive language; phrases for conclusions; scientific terminology

When can we use them?**1. DURING SHARED, GUIDED AND WHOLE CLASS READING**

The children should have their writing journals on their desks throughout the day so that they can jot down gorgeous vocabulary that they discover during any of these reading sessions. Not all children will choose the same language – they can choose the words which appeal to them. This generates excitement around vocabulary and encourages independence.

2. DURING SHARED AND GUIDED WRITING

During shared and guided writing, the teacher will use their own writing journal as a model to demonstrate the process with their class. For example, when constructing some direct speech between two characters, the teacher may turn to the 'Other Words for Said' page and select

a more powerful verb to show how the character is feeling. Later, the teacher may say to the class, "I want to show that my character – the King – is really angry. Have a look at your 'Other Words for Said' page and choose a powerful verb to show this. Discuss your word with your partner or group." The teacher may then take some feedback and discuss the children's choices of vocabulary before choosing their favourite for this particular piece of writing. This clearly shows children how to use their journal effectively to select appropriate language during independent writing sessions.

3. AT HOME

Children can be encouraged to select vocabulary which they would like to include in their writing journals while they are at home, collecting words and phrases on sticky notes and bringing them into the classroom to be added to their journal. This raises the profile of the importance of vocabulary to parents.

4. DURING INDEPENDENT READING AND WRITING

During independent reading, children can add to their vocabulary collections as

Can we unlock their ENTHUSIASM?

Rachel Clarke suggests ways teachers could ignite a love of books in children who have the skills, but not the will, to read...

The first challenge when trying to inspire reluctant readers is finding a book they'll want to read. To do this, you need good knowledge of what interests the child out of school. This could be the television programmes they like, the sports they're interested in, the games they play and the types of texts they read in their own time. Once you know this, you can begin to find books based on these interests or that weave them into the narrative. This type of knowledge can take time to acquire, which is why books written with popular pastimes and interests in mind can be so helpful.

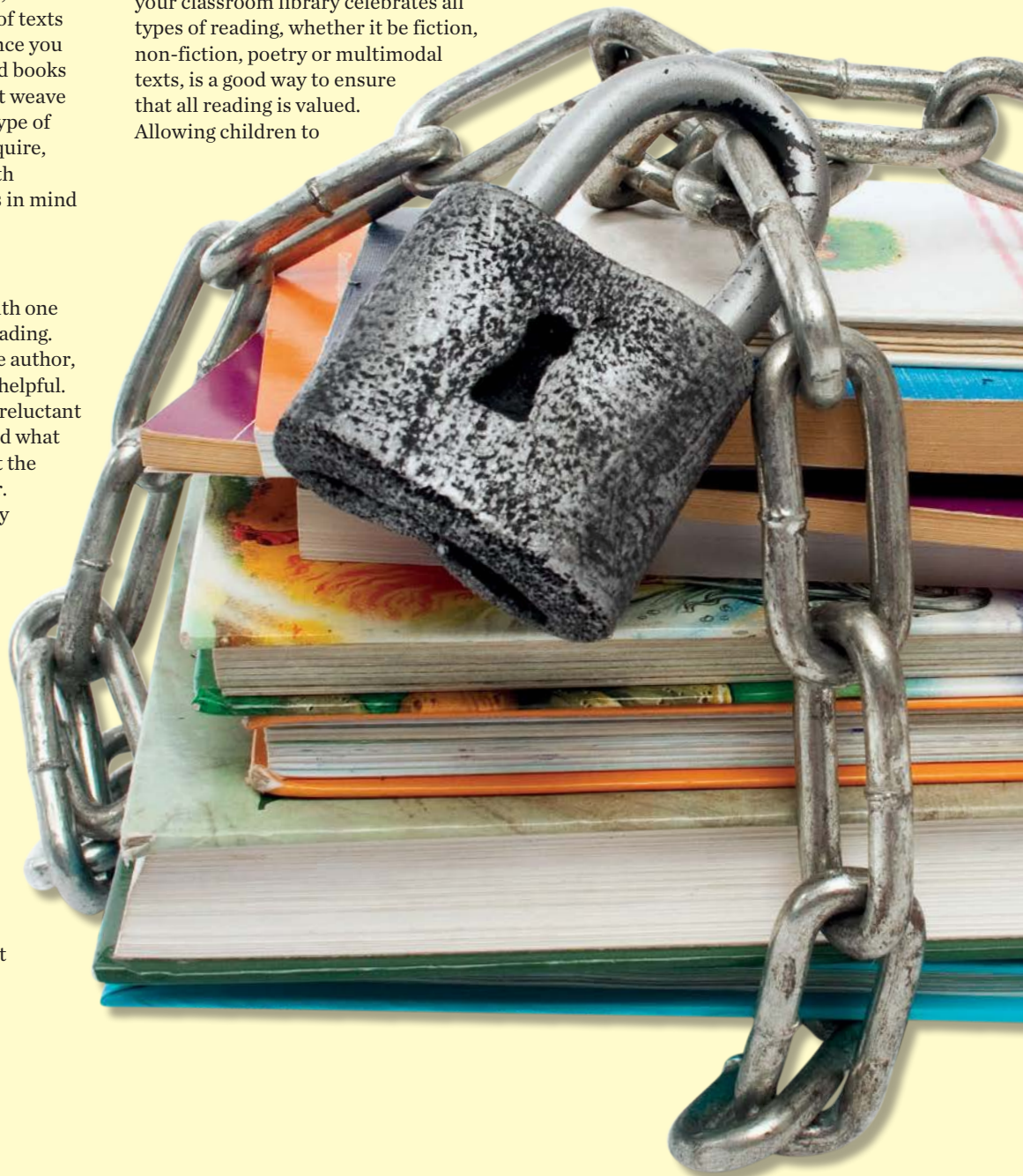
Keep them hooked

Once you've hooked a reader with one book, you want to keep them reading. This is where books by the same author, or in series, can be particularly helpful. They give a sense of security to reluctant readers that they're going to find what they like and that they can trust the author and illustrator to deliver. Ensuring your classroom library includes series of books is one of the best ways you can inspire children to develop an appetite for reading. A great way to introduce a book series is to read one of the titles during your read aloud time. This helps establish the characters and setting and will encourage children to seek out further books in the series. Pausing your reading after a cliff hanger and returning the book to the classroom library is a particularly effective way of creating some excitement about a book or series.

Value their choices

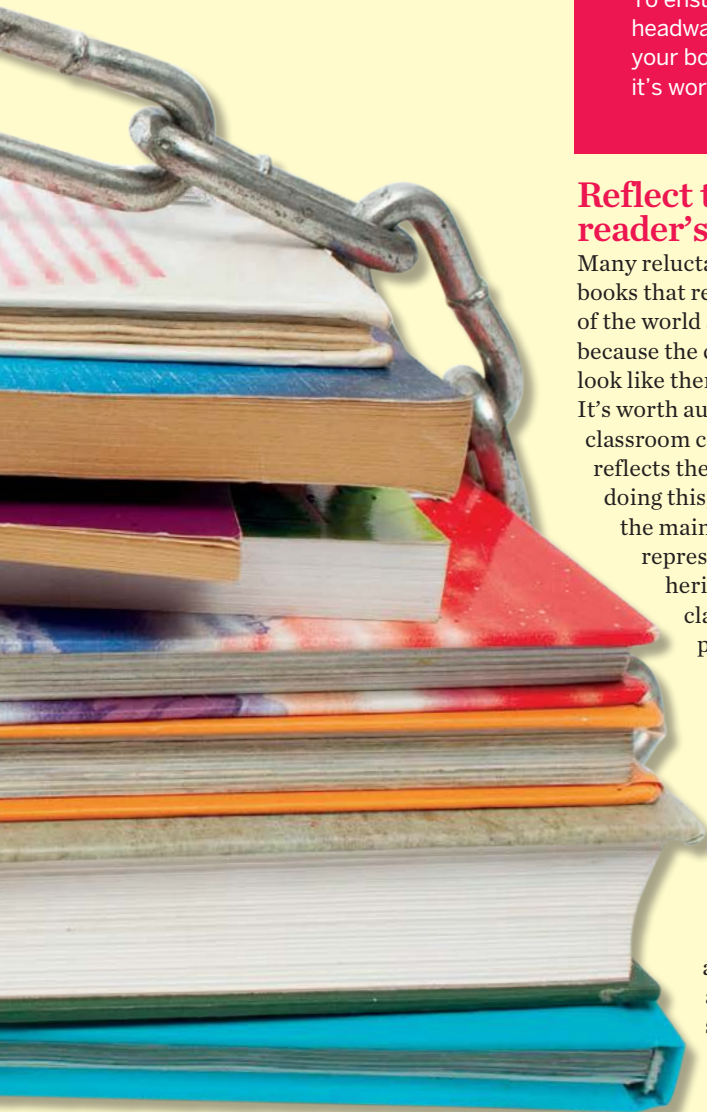
Many reluctant readers are put off by the look and style of most of the books we have in school. Yet, these same children are often avid readers of comics, magazines, e-books and graphic novels out of school. Ensuring that your classroom library celebrates all types of reading, whether it be fiction, non-fiction, poetry or multimodal texts, is a good way to ensure that all reading is valued. Allowing children to

choose what they want to read promotes reading as a pleasurable activity and not the task that too many of our reluctant readers feel it is. Be sure to display a range of books, including those from your reading scheme, with their covers



facing out in your classroom library. This will help promote the range of books available for children to choose to read. It's also worth asking children to write mini reviews for the shelf edges, like the ones in Waterstones, to encourage them to share their views about their reading and to foster a community approach to reading in your classroom.

“Look to buy books that create a truly diverse library that will appeal to as many children as possible...”



FIVE RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING RELUCTANT READERS

● BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

If you're looking to build your knowledge of children's books LoveReading4Kids.com is a great place to start. The site is full of recommendations written by children's book experts and can be searched by age group, genre, author and topic.

● GOING MULTIMODAL

21st century children are experts at navigating multimodal texts such as graphic novels, video game narratives and e-books. The Greenaway Award website is a wonderful resource for teachers looking for high quality illustrated books (carnegiegreenaway.org.uk).

● REFLECTING REALITIES

To ensure that you make the most headway possible when auditing your book stock for representation, it's worth taking time to read the

Reflecting Realities report produced by the CLPE (bit.ly/trwReflecting).

● STOCKING SERIES

Create collections of books in series that will appeal to the range of readers in your class. You often find these sets on special offer from online book suppliers. You may want to consider adding the *Shinoy* and *the Chaos Crew* books to your stock. These books are published by Big Cat and are written with reluctant readers in mind (bit.ly/trwShinoy).

● INVITING ENJOYMENT

Put Reading for Pleasure at the heart of your reading provision. This could be as simple as reading aloud to your class every day or ensuring that you have the most inviting class library possible. To get more ideas about how to promote reading for pleasure, take a look at the Open University Reading for Pleasure website (bit.ly/trwTeacherKnowledge).

Reflect the reader's world

Many reluctant readers struggle to find books that reflect their own experiences of the world around them. Often this is because the characters in books don't look like them or have the same interests. It's worth auditing the stock in your classroom collection to see how well it reflects the lives of your children. When doing this, think about how many of the main characters in books are representative of the cultural heritage of children in your class, how many books present positive images of boys and girls, whether your book stock includes children with disabilities and that there are positive images of people from a range of social backgrounds. Once you've undertaken your audit, look to buy books that create a truly diverse class library that will appeal to as many children as possible (for some great suggestions of diverse titles to stock, see the article on pages 59-61 of this issue).

Make time to read for pleasure

Choosing to read for pleasure is one of the most significant indicators for a child's future success. Not all children have homes with plentiful reading material or quiet places to enjoy their reading, so making time for children to read for pleasure at school is one of the most important things we can do to help them develop a reading habit. Reading might seem like a solitary activity, but it doesn't have to be. Pairing your reluctant readers with each other or more enthusiastic readers can be a good way to show them that reading is fun and pleasurable. Using your class reading for pleasure time to read children's literature yourself, whether it be on your own or with a group of children, is a great way to build your knowledge of children's texts. You'll also be presenting the children with an excellent model of what it is to be a reader.

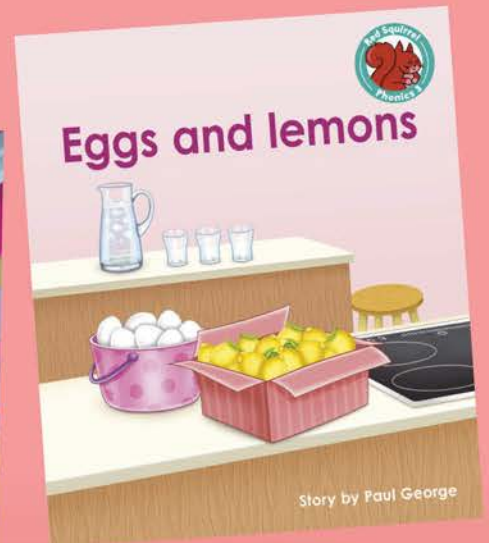
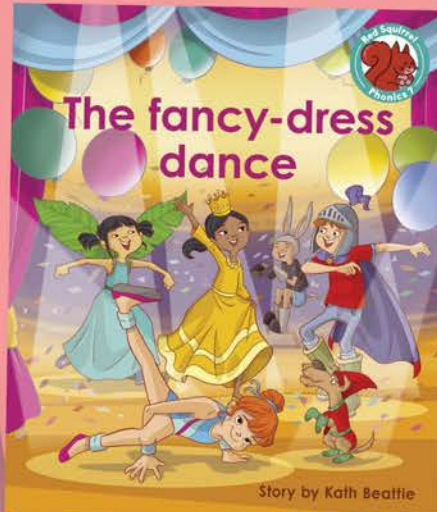


Rachel Clarke is director of Primary English and a former deputy head and local authority English advisor.

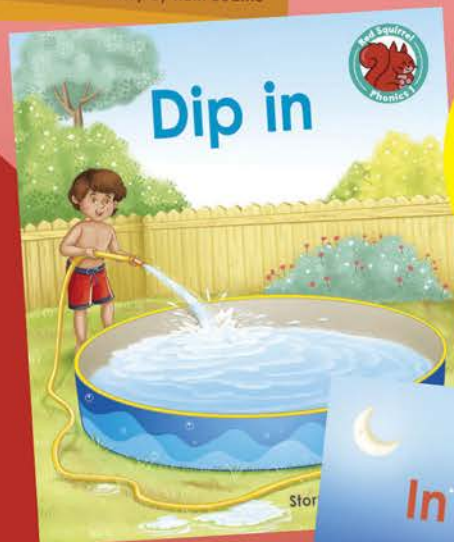


New for 2021

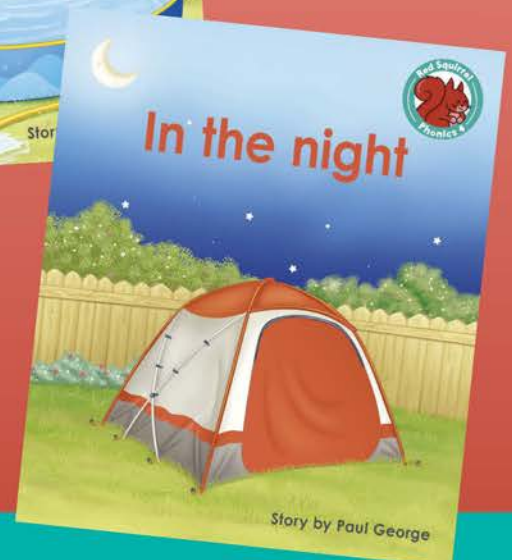
70 decodable books for effective phonics teaching



- 70 readers which can be used as a standalone programme or to complement Letters and Sounds
- Comprehensive Teachers' Books that include guided reading lesson plans, activities and assessment
- Teaching notes included in each book for before and after reading
- Fun storylines with decodable vocabulary and some high-frequency words—meaning reading success for children!



only £300
for the complete
set plus teacher
books



Find out more at
www.raintree.co.uk/red-squirrel-phonics

READING →

Red Squirrel Phonics

Raintree's phonics programme does an excellent job of teaching children to decode, but the resources offer plenty more besides...

raintree 

a Capstone company — publishers for children



AT A GLANCE

- 70 enjoyable stories that can be used as either a standalone programme or alongside other systematic synthetic phonics programmes
- Decodable vocabulary with some high-frequency words
- Systematic progression for learning the sounds (phonemes) and the letters that represent them (graphemes)

REVIEWED BY ADAM RICHES



Red Squirrel Phonics books are designed with one key purpose – for readers to succeed – and with 70 real stories they present an excellent way to help children start their reading journey.

The important point is that the series isn't just decodable texts. What makes them stand out is the quality of the stories.

The first 50 titles centre around the adventures of a small group of characters (Nat, Dan and Sam) along with their pets and friends, creating a sense of familiarity that's reassuring for children who are learning to read. There's plenty of intrigue and the books do a good job of widening pupils' cultural capital.

The last 20 titles introduce more characters, building an additional level of challenge and fostering a sense of independence, heightening self-efficacy in reading.

The programme teaches children phonics skills in a sequential and systematic way, so that they can learn the sounds (phonemes), and the letters that represent them (graphemes) and then practise and apply this knowledge through reading a text that makes sense. The graphic depiction of the stories supplement learning by disambiguating more complex ideas. As a whole, each text effectively and efficiently develops specific skills.

Aesthetically, the stories are designed with the reader in mind. With well spaced, perfectly sized text featuring alongside

colourful illustrations. The adventures depicted in the stories are completely relatable for young people and the characterisation is well thought through and developed.

The books are broken into seven levels. These levels each focus on different aspects of phonics, with sequenced, clearly defined words and sounds outlined at each phase. Levels one to three cover 23 phonemes of English, introducing all consonants and short vowels. Levels four to seven introduce learners to more complex sounds including consonant digraphs, vowel digraphs, trigraphs and adjacent consonants, as well as graphemes for the learnt phonemes. What is most impressive is the clarity of the learning journey. The books are designed for success from the outset and Red Squirrel Phonics has pitched the challenge of each text perfectly.

Red Squirrel offers two comprehensive teachers' books to accompany the stories. These additional resources give in-depth guidance and insight into the workings of phonics, making them the perfect accompaniment for both experts and beginners alike. The teachers' books contain a full phonics overview for the programme as well as explicit guided reading teaching notes and photocopiable activity pages for every story – perfect for extending the learning or for planning group exercises and homework. There are also word banks and assessment resources to help check understanding and track the progress of learners.

Teach
**Reading
& Writing**

VERDICT

- ✓ A comprehensive collection of stories to help young people to learn how to read
- ✓ The sequential nature of resources builds confidence and familiarity with reading
- ✓ Exceptionally well thought through aesthetics keep cognitive load low
- ✓ A sustained level of challenge in each text means that learners stay engaged
- ✓ The supplementary teachers' books allow non-specialists access to teach effectively

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to introduce a complete and engaging reading programme for beginner readers. Also consider if you are looking for a well supported resource that goes beyond just focusing on teaching phonics.

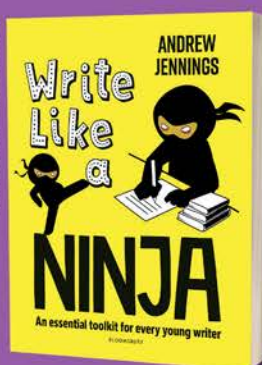
Cost: Prices start at £3.99 for individual books, with many sets available. See raintree.co.uk/red-squirrel-phonics for full details.

OUR TOP LITERACY TITLES FOR 2021

New from Bloomsbury Education



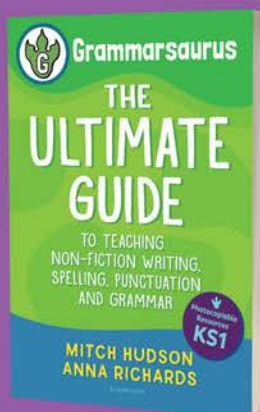
9781472988300 | £4.99



Write Like a Ninja

Empower children to write independently, vary their language and become writing ninjas! Complete with Alan Peat's exciting sentences, this is the must-have pocketbook for Key Stage 2 pupils.

9781472981219 | £24.99

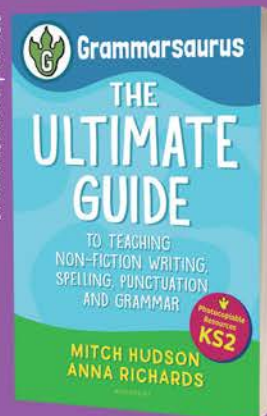


Grammarsaurus

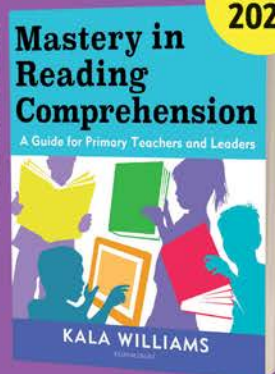
Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

The ultimate guides to teaching writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar, written by the creators of the popular Grammarsaurus website.

9781472988331 | £24.99



9781472980953 | £18.99

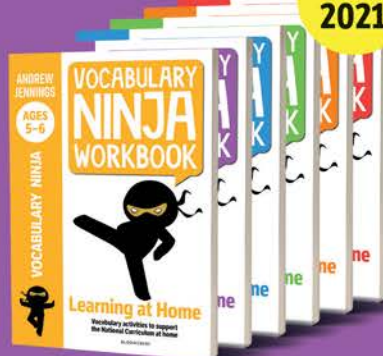


Mastery for Reading Comprehension

Make teaching reading comprehension simple, enjoyable and impactful, meeting the demands of the curriculum with these proven mastery methods.

Jul 2021

£4.99 each



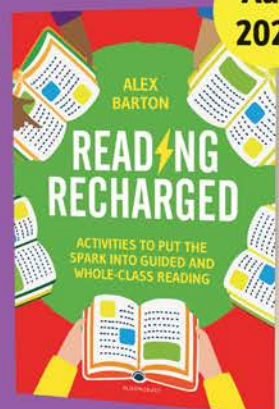
Vocabulary Ninja Workbooks

Ages 5-6 to 10-11

Perfect for homework, these workbooks are full of fun activities and colourful illustrations to reinforce vocabulary skills taught in school.

Jul 2021

9781472984869 | £24.99



Reading Recharged

Refresh your approach to teaching reading comprehension with these original guided and whole-class reading activities for the classroom.

Aug 2021

Comprehension Ninja: Fiction and Poetry

Ages 5-6 to 10-11

Photocopiable reading comprehension worksheets for teachers



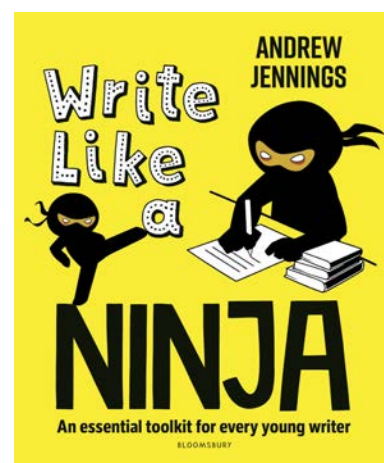
Nov 2021



LITERACY

Write Like a Ninja

Pocket-sized grammar and vocabulary toolkit, fully aligned to the KS2 writing curriculum



AT A GLANCE

- Essential toolkit for KS2 writers to use as a quick reference for writing tips
- Must-have writing workbox full of exciting vocabulary, grammar explanations and example sentences
- Includes a selection of sentences and a method for categorising sentence types with catchy names
- Fun, handy and highly accessible writing resource

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



While real ninjas were once famed swordsmen, writing ninjas focus on something mightier – the pen. Write Like a Ninja has a snappier title and its contents are snappier still. Its aim is a simple one: to get children to take ownership of their own writing and take on the world.

This book might be little but don't let its stature deceive you – it packs plenty of punches. The core ninja skills this mastery manual focuses on include grammar essentials, exciting sentences, word choice alternatives, setting vocabulary tips, character vocabulary and general vocabulary. The style, design and layout of this book has been carefully crafted to appeal to a wide audience. The text is user-friendly and there are plenty of fun splats, scribbles and decoration on each page, but not to the point of distraction. The content is king though. Each chapter has been cleverly constructed to help get children out of sticky writing situations.

Where an explanation needs to be given or a definition is required, these are written clearly and concisely, with no complicated thorny bits to confuse. Part thesaurus, part training manual, part inspiration

guide, Write Like a Ninja is a collection of writing tips, nudges and prods to get children thinking of rich alternatives and how to build on their own ideas. Pupils will love the ninja tips dotted throughout for varying their language use.

There is so much crammed into this book that it acts like an emergency literacy curriculum, yet it doesn't feel overwhelming or overpowering. Instead, it's enabling. It might be aimed at children but teachers will want a sneaky look at this book too, especially if you need nuggets of inspiration during brain fog moments. You could spend your evenings looking for writing ideas, falling down booby-trapped rabbit holes, or you could just get a copy of this book so you can rest like a ninja.

The skill of a ninja is the art of winning and this book teaches children how to win at writing. Just as ninjas need a wide range of skills to help them succeed in their mission, this book equips children with what they need for their next writing challenge. One thing you might want to get children writing about is, of course, being a ninja. This cracking little book has a big heart and is very affordably priced at £4.99.

Teach
**Reading
& Writing**

VERDICT

- ✓ A powerhouse of clever tips and catchy pointers
- ✓ Empowers children to be creative, perseverant and write independently
- ✓ Practical, engaging and immensely supportive
- ✓ Gives children plenty of ideas for great writing

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a high-quality vocabulary and writing essentials book that injects writing mojo and promotes writing mastery.

£4.99 or save 15% on a class pack of ten copies, [bloomsbury.com](https://www.bloomsbury.com)

Dragon Eggs Series



Who doesn't love dragons?
An exciting new quest series for emerging readers
to boost reading fluency.



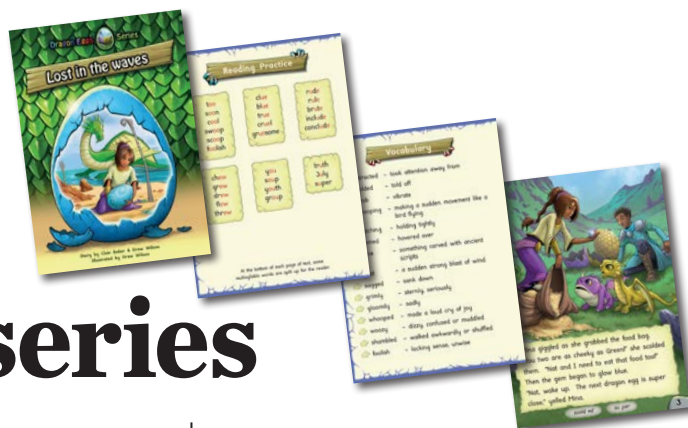
- Revisits tricky vowel digraphs
- Develops rapid word recognition
- Boosts reading fluency
- Develops reading comprehension
- Workbook for practice and consolidation



READING

Phonic Books Dragon Eggs series

Ten decodable reading quest titles for younger readers with an accompanying workbook



AT A GLANCE

- Portfolio of highly structured and decodable phonic story books
- Step-by-step progression for successful outcomes
- Reading practice with a laser-sharp phonic focus
- Synthetic phonics resources that sparkle
- Top quality, colourful books packed with excitement

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



Phonics knowledge is considered one of the key predictors of reading success. Getting the right resources is therefore crucial. To comprehend what is being read, children must be able to decode words and join the parts quickly and accurately so they can interpret and analyse words while reading. That is what Phonic Books is all about.

This new Dragon Eggs collection of books introduces words and word structures in a carefully planned scope and sequence to support reading accuracy, speed and expression. A common criticism of decodable books is that their inherent language constraints make them boring and stilted. Well, Phonic Books certainly aren't; these are exciting, adventurous and multi-dimensional.

Constructing meaning from written language requires making a connection to oral language and must be connected to an individual's phonological memory. One of the most powerful ways to make this connection is through stories, explicit instruction on learning to read and relentless practice – this is where Phonic Books excels.

The series is a daring decodable reading quest that breathes quality throughout. This delightful new collection of ten books is one splash of colour after another, with outstanding artwork that will turn children's heads. With appealing characters and a really reader-friendly layout, these books are ones

that pupils won't want to let go of.

The back of the books feature a clearly flagged target phoneme alongside a brief description of the story. Inside there is a page showing the words that make up the specific reading practice, chapter contents and a vocabulary page explaining some of the story words. Within each chapter there are also some multi-syllable words that are helpfully split up for readers.

The story chapters are short and sweet, making them ideal for keeping children's attention. What I like most is that these books expose pupils to highly consistent and prolific patterns in the text. They get practice with letter-sound correspondences that they can apply to other texts. These books are the perfect partner for helping children to segment individual sounds in words and show how these sounds are represented by letters and how to blend the sounds/letters into words.

The books also make sense as mini stories and build knowledge. You can have rich conversations about the chapters, asking comprehension questions to demonstrate that reading is about meaning.

To support this series is a wonderful workbook containing a wide range of reading, spelling and comprehension activities and games linked to the stories. The Dragon Eggs series clearly has the potential to narrow the gap in reading achievement.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✓ Purposeful and playful phonics for explicit and systematic instruction
- ✓ Builds automaticity in bottom-up skills so that words fly off the page
- ✓ Improves decoding, word reading, comprehension, reading stamina and spelling
- ✓ Equips children with reading strategies
- ✓ Helps develop reading fluency and comprehension in tandem

UPGRADE IF...

You want a fast-track decodable approach to teaching reading fluency and encouraging reading independence.

“I don’t think I was a particularly GOOD TEACHER...”

Scriptwriter and children’s author **Ivor Baddiel** didn’t have a long career in the classroom – but he’s still grateful for what it taught him

I’ve been a full time writer now for almost 25 years. Prior to that I taught in a primary school for four and a half years – but I didn’t plan to be a teacher. Or a writer.

Originally, I wanted to be a psychologist – a great psychologist. I dreamt of being the next Sigmund Freud, discovering insights into how the human mind works (or doesn’t, as the case may be). I was teaching in order to get the necessary experience to go on and study educational psychology... but things don’t always go to plan.

At the time my brother, (David, not Dan; I have two), was starting his comedy career, and I spent a lot of time in clubs watching him perform. It was a world I loved and one in which I wanted to get involved. I wasn’t a performer, so writing for stand ups seemed the obvious thing to do. Occasionally, people laughed at some of the things I wrote, which made me realise I wasn’t too bad at it, and that gave me the confidence to carry on. I didn’t for one minute think I’d still be doing it 25 years later, but, here we are.

Managing chaos

I look back on my time as a teacher fondly though. It was exhausting, stressful, demanding, challenging and infuriating – and I don’t think I was a particularly good teacher – but I am so pleased to have had that experience. It gave me many skills that I have taken on into my writing career, not least of which is, probably, writing (my grammar was shocking before).

However, as an NQT (are they still called that these days?) one of

“At times it was literally chaos in my classroom”

the first things I learnt, and quickly, was resilience. My first class, Year 1, was tough. The school was in a troubled area of London, shall we say, and the children were beset with difficult issues. When I first strolled in with my left wing, communal, “Hey kids, let’s do some cooperative learning,” approach, they practically ripped me to shreds. At times it was literally chaos in my classroom – the discipline side of things didn’t come naturally to me, but I had to learn it, and quickly.

Thankfully, I did, just about, and the levels of chaos eased a bit. And

whilst the world of writing is not quite as chaotic, it is tough. There’s a lot of rejection (oh is there a lot of rejection), and it hurts, but you can’t let that defeat you. You have to find the discipline and the resilience to get better and carry on (isn’t that some sort of slogan?).

Adapt and survive

I also learnt to be more adaptable and flexible as a teacher. Children learn in different ways, so you have to find what works best for a particular child, and that involves being creative and, to use a well worn cliché, thinking outside the box. The same is true of writing. Often you know what it is you want to say, but it’s how you say it that makes it interesting and readable. You have to challenge yourself creatively to find the best, the funniest, the most engaging, the most concise, way of getting something across.

I guess also, along with having my own children, (now 17 and 20, so they no longer find anything I say remotely funny) teaching also gave me some insight into what makes children laugh and what they enjoy. It’s not that my classroom was a comedy club, but you do want to make learning fun. It’s that aspect that I hope I’ve been able to utilise in my new children’s book, *Britain’s Biggest Star...Is Dad?* I’ve tried to inject a lot of humour into it and, if I’ve succeeded, I will be very happy. And if I’ve failed... well, I’m sure they’ll have saved a place for me on that Educational Psychology course.



Ivor Baddiel is an established TV and radio scriptwriter, and a former primary school teacher. His first novel for children, ‘Britain’s Biggest Star...Is Dad?’, is published by Scholastic.

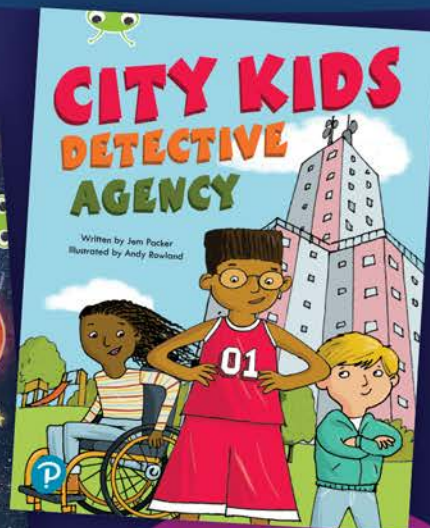
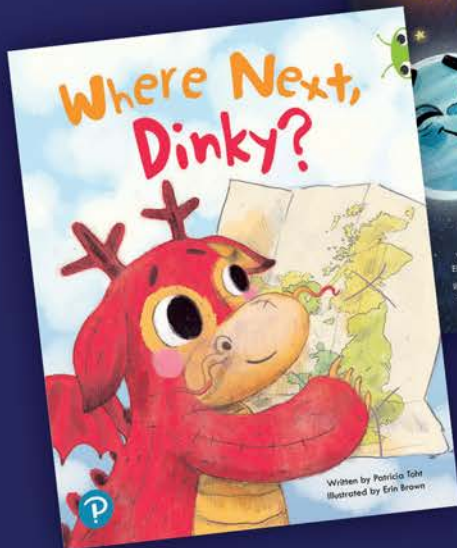




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