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Children's laureate

LAUREN CHILD

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Dear Reader,

LAUREN CHILD
Guest editor

I am delighted to act as editor for this issue of *Teach Reading & Writing*, but I am also going to admit to having some reservations. Not with the magazine itself, of course, but because I cannot possibly set myself up as an authority in spelling, phonics, comprehension and grammar. On the contrary, I am someone for whom the technical language of literacy is alien. I could no more identify a subordinate clause than I could introduce you to a gerund (although I do recommend Ronald Serle's drawings of gerunds in *Down With Skool*, including the historic moment when "Kennedy captures a gerund and leads it back into captivity").

Do not mistake me, I understand that those things are important, but they are technical. And 'literacy' for me is essentially non-technical, but is about communication: the ability to share our thoughts with others, and understand theirs in return. The use of words and pictures to convey abstract emotions is uniquely human, and doing so with accuracy and subtlety is at the heart of what authors and illustrators are striving for.

In my role as Children's Laureate, starting new and interesting conversations about the way we communicate through text, illustration and indeed speech is something I'm keen to promote wherever possible, and this magazine is a perfect opportunity to do that. I hope you'll enjoy the mix of advice and ideas we've put together. It seems that there's plenty of fun to be had with the technical stuff (take a look at Giulia Baker's suggestions for using riddles in the classroom on p.48, and James Clements' creative ideas for boosting vocabulary on p.19 , for starters), and I am particularly pleased to see so many brilliant and beautiful books being used to inspire all kinds of activities and adventures, like Carey Fluker Hunt's journeys back in time, for example (pages 8-13).

The way we use words is central to who we are, and there can be no doubt that helping children to develop as communicators is one of the most important things a teacher can do. Thank you for listening.

Warmest wishes, *Lauren*

"Finding my words"

ED VERE believes that authors can say important things to children.

"I feel a sense of responsibility" p6

LEVI PINFOLD thinks we should teach how to read pictures as well as words.

"Illustrations invite you into a narrative" p26

Find more literacy resources at teachwire.net!

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SMART THINKING TO BOOST PROGRESS

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HOW PAMELA BUTCHART MET SHAKESPEARE

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USE RIDDLES TO TEACH GRAMMAR

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"I make children happy for a living" p64

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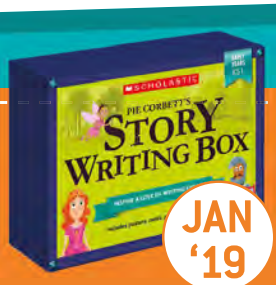

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"Opening a book is a gateway to all kinds of learning"

Creating books for children offers an unrivalled opportunity to say important things to them – and to their parents, suggests **Ed Vere**...

The first books I liked, and got properly absorbed in, were Richard Scarry's. I adored them; the pictures were wonderfully rich, and there were so many narratives and lives you could imagine. It was a beautiful world to enter, for a very young child. Later, when I was six or seven, I devoured *The Wind in the Willows*, and as an older reader I was gripped by the exploits of the *Famous Five*, and addicted to Willard Price's *Adventure* series. I hoovered that stuff up. But what I remember most of all about my childhood literary experiences is my father sharing the nonsense poetry he loved with me. He was a very good, theatrical reader, and read Lear and Belloc with enormous relish and a dangerous sense of fun. He died a couple of years ago, and I can still hear him declaiming the tale of 'Jim – who ran away from his nurse and was eaten by a lion'.

I was lucky, in that I was raised in a house where books were massively valued, by parents who read themselves and to me. That kind of influence makes a huge difference; which is why what BookTrust does, in terms of getting books into the hands of children who might not otherwise have access to reading materials, is so powerful. My book *Mr Big* was chosen as a Booktime title in 2009, and went out to 750,000 four- and five-year-olds. According to research, three out of ten of those kids would never have been read to by their parents – and for 57% of them, *Mr Big* would represent the first book they'd owned. I've done a lot of work with the charity since then, and honestly, I cannot overstress the significance of what it does. Opening a book gives you access to so many incredible worlds, and it's a gateway to all kinds of learning. It's such a simple act, to read to a child, and not doing it is such a tragedy. It's not a question of blame – there are many reasons why reading at home doesn't happen, including parents never having been read to themselves. BookTrust tries to break that cycle.

> "The truth is, the books we experience when we are young can be foundational to our thinking..."

Increasingly, as I look around, I see how enormously vibrant the children's books scene is, and it's a privilege and a joy to be a part of that. But I do feel a real sense of responsibility as an author and illustrator within that rich ecosystem. I think we should take seriously what we do, because the truth is, the books we experience when we are young can be foundational to our thinking. I never want to be didactic, absolutely not; at the same time, though, I believe it's

Illustrations © Ed Vere

right that I should be trying to present good messages about how to be – not only because stories can stay with children for their whole lives, but also because when I write a picture book, it's not *only* for the child. It's also for the grown up who will read that book to the child, and who might have a very different world view from me. I do a lot of events, at schools and literary festivals, and the ones I enjoy the most are those where I have the parents along, too. At least 50% of what I say is directed at them; and it's interesting, because when you are entertaining someone's child, talking and drawing with them, and allowing them to enter the world of books, the normal boundaries between two adults are broken down. You are almost a member of the family; and you can say important things in that space.

Not all of my books have an obvious 'message' (and frankly, *The Getaway* is positively amoral!), but the latest, *How to be a Lion*, is definitely my most explicitly 'purposeful' story so far. We're living in an age where certain things need saying. I was doing a book tour in the US in September and October 2016, at the height of the Trump/Clinton presidential campaign. Everyone I met was highly embarrassed, and reassured me that Trump would never actually win – but of course, we'd just had the Brexit vote in the UK, and I couldn't be so confident. I saw that Trump was actually appealing to people, despite his odious tactics. His belligerent, bullying voice was drowning out all the others, and I found it horrifying. Especially that this voice would eventually filter down to children. *How to be a Lion* is my attempt to counter that and demonstrate that you don't need to act that way in order to be heard; and that gentleness and compassion aren't weak traits. I want that message to go to everyone, but in this age of 'toxic' masculinity, I'd like it to be heard particularly by boys. There can be a narrow view of masculinity offered to boys. Leonard, my protagonist, is a lion – so he is strong and powerful, but also sensitive and emotionally engaged. He offers an alternative example of how to be a complete and rounded person. He shows the importance of thinking for yourself, and standing up for who you actually are. I hope children and parents alike enjoy getting to know him.

How to be a Lion, by Ed Vere, is published by Puffin (£11.99)

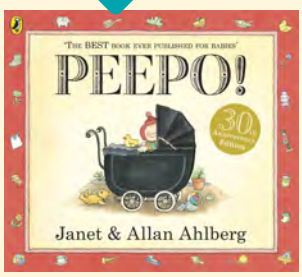
10 BOOKS TO DELVE INTO *History*

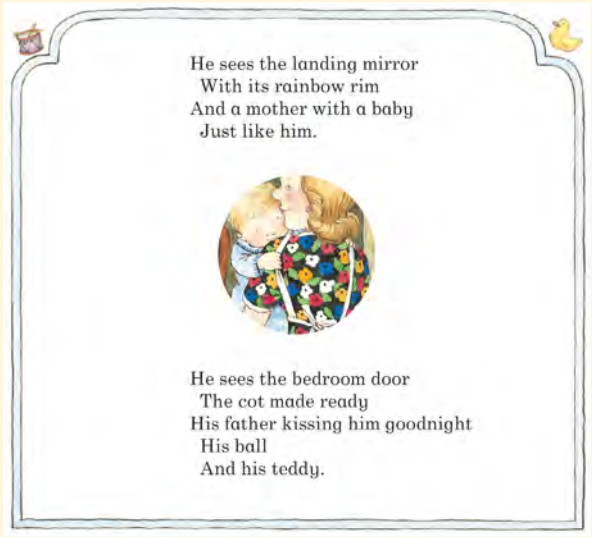
From the Stone Age to WWII, these memorable children's stories are a rich source of inspiration for writing, discussion and discovering more about the past

FOUNDATION STAGE

1 Peepo

BY JANET AND ALLAN AHLBERG (PUFFIN)





What's the story?

This much-loved picturebook with its peephole and rhyming text depicts scenes of family life during WW2 and will prompt discussions about families and babies as well as 'then and now'.

Thinking and talking

The text tells us what the baby's looking at (his family, his teddy) but the pictures show us everything. What do your children notice that the baby doesn't?

What's similar and what's different about the baby's home and your children's?

Try this...

- What do children remember about being babies / toddlers? What can their families tell them? Relate to the idea of personal history and draw simple timelines.
- What does *Peepo* tell us about babies and their needs? Invite a parent and baby to visit. Collect 'baby things' and compare with those in Peepo. Draw and write about your objects for a class display.
- Make 'Peepo cards' (plain card with a 5cm hole) and use these to examine the world around you. Peepholes are also great for isolating details in paintings – use historical pictures of families in domestic settings for a *Peepo* link!

FOUNDATION STAGE

2

Milly-Molly-Mandy Stories

BY JOYCE LANKESTER BRISLEY (MACMILLAN)

Illustrations © Joyce Lankester Brisley

What's the story?

Full of warmth and detail, these stories transport us to a time when a penny offered an exciting spending opportunity and five-year-olds ran errands all alone. Milly-Molly-Mandy's rural 1920's world vanished long ago, but this book brings it to life again in a way that children enjoy and can relate to.

Thinking and talking

Which story do you like best, and why? Do they remind you of things that have happened to you?

Examine the pictures and discuss Milly-Molly-Mandy's world. How does it compare to the world in which you live?

"What does Peepo tell us about babies and their needs? Invite a parent and baby to visit"

"List the traditional past times in this book"

Try this...

- Look at the picture-map of Milly-Molly-Mandy's village, then work together to make a 2018 picture-map of your local area. What's similar and what's changed?
- Invite an older visitor to talk about their childhood. Draw Milly-Molly-Mandy-inspired pictures to illustrate the stories you've heard.
- List the traditional pastimes in this book, then tick them off as you try them – growing mustard-and-cress, baking a patty-pan cake, eating bread sprinkled with hundreds-and-thousands, competing in a spoon-and-potato race.

Illustrations © Laurence Anholt

3

KEY STAGE 1

Camille and the Sunflowers

BY LAURENCE ANHOLT
(FRANCES LINCOLN)

What's the story?

This classic picturebook offers a gentle yet thought-provoking introduction to Van Gogh's work and gives readers a taste of everyday life in nineteenth-century France. There are plenty of references to van Gogh's artwork to spot, along with reproductions of Sunflowers and five portraits of the Roulin family.

Thinking and talking

Why did the children throw stones at Vincent? How did Camille try to help? What would you have done?

Look at reproductions of Van Gogh's work in this book alongside paintings that were popular in 1890. What was new and different about Vincent's paintings? Why do you think people didn't like them? Find out more about his pictures.

Try this...

- Look the paintings Van Gogh's Chair and The Bedroom. By painting ordinary, everyday furniture and objects, Van Gogh made them special and helped us imagine the world he lived in so long ago.
- What would it have been like to live in Van Gogh's room? How is it different from your bedroom, and how is it similar?
- Have a go at painting a picture of an ordinary modern chair (your school chair?) using colours and techniques inspired by Van Gogh.

"What was new and different about Van Gough's paintings"

Illustrations © Sheila Moxley

KEY STAGE 1

4

Stone Girl, Bone Girl: The Story of Mary Anning

BY LAURENCE ANHOLT AND SHEILA MOXLEY
(FRANCES LINCOLN)

What's the story?

Mary Anning was born in 1799 in Lyme Regis, where she hunted for fossils and, at the age of 12, discovered the world's first Ichthyosaurus. This beautifully-illustrated picturebook has a substantial text that encourages empathy as well as interest.

Thinking and talking

Why was it unusual for a girl to be a fossil-hunter in Mary's time? What were girls supposed to do instead of fossil-hunting?

Are there times when you have to resist pressure? How do you know whether to listen to other people or follow your own ideas?

Try this...

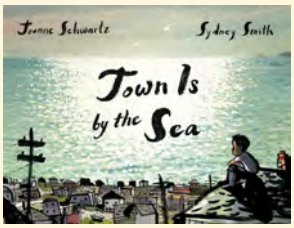
- Collect fossils and pictures to create a display. Label with names and approximate ages. How big is a hundred? A thousand? A million? Can you find a way to make the timescales more meaningful?
- Cabinets of Curiosities like the one Pepper made were very popular at this time. Create your own Cabinet and fill with historical objects you've collected or chosen. Write and illustrate a guidebook to your exhibition.

"Collect fossils and pictures to create a display"

KEY STAGE 1

5 Town is by the Sea

BY JOANNE SCHWARZ AND SYDNEY SMITH (WALKER)



What's the story?

Narrated by a young boy as he plays on the swings and runs errands, we share his clifftop experience of a glorious summer's day. The sunlight is sparkling across the sea, but deep beneath the water is the boy's father, digging for coal... how safe is he? Will he come home?

Set in a coastal mining town in the 1950s, this light-filled picturebook won 2018's Greenaway medal and offers family warmth and historical insights along with real depth and grit.

Thinking and talking

What does this book tell us about mining? The 1950s? How is the boy's life different from your own and how is it similar?

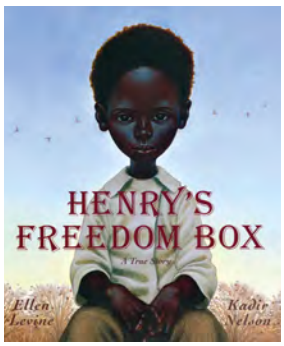
Smith's illustrations add a huge amount to the text. How do they make you feel? What can we learn from them? How does Smith achieve this impact and effect? Look at details, invite observations and help children notice things like viewpoint and framing; light and shade; Smith's colour palette and the quality of his line.

Try this...

- Make a timeline showing everything that happens to the boy, and what he notices. Use the book's text to structure writing about a day at home: When I wake up it goes like this.... First thing I see when I look out the window is... Which aspects of your daily routine would the boy recognise? Which have changed?
- Can your children remember Summer 2017? 2016? The boy in this book is talking about a summer long ago. Can anyone share memories of the 1950s? Chalk a timeline outdoors to show how many years have passed since then. Count the years in twos and fives and tens by jumping along it!

Illustrations © Sydney Smith

Illustrations © Kadir Nelson



KEY STAGE 1

6 Henry's Freedom Box

BY ELLEN LEVINE AND KADIR NELSON (SCHOLASTIC)

What's the story?

"Henry Brown wasn't sure how old he was. Henry was a slave, and slaves weren't allowed to know their birthdays."

Henry 'Box' Brown mailed himself to freedom inside a wooden crate using what became known as the Underground Railroad. In 27 hours, he travelled 350 miles from Virginia, where slavery was legal, to Philadelphia, where it was not.

This award-winning and affecting picturebook tells a fictionalised version of Henry's story in a way to which children can relate. It's well worth sharing, but hard-hitting themes remain.

Thinking and talking

Discuss this book and the true story that inspired it.

What does freedom mean to you? Should people be free to do whatever they want? Are we free if we have to obey rules and laws? How can we make sure our laws are the right ones?

Try this...

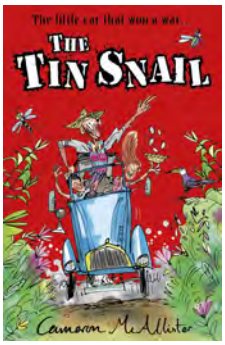
- Use sticky notes to add words describing the characters' feelings to each spread. These will help you write an expressive account of events from Henry's point of view.
- Examine the pictures for clues to what life was like in Henry's time. Make a list of what you've learned and a list of your questions. Use non-fiction books and online sources to answer your questions.
- What laws do we have to protect people from slavery and discrimination? Talk about how you can make your class and school a fairer and better place for everyone.

"What does freedom mean to you?"

KEY STAGE 2

7 The Tin Snail

BY CAMERON MCALLISTER (CORGI)



What's the story?

Angelo has come up with a revolutionary idea: why not design a low-cost vehicle for a French farmer and his wife? It would have to be capable of carrying two chickens, a flagon of wine and a dozen eggs across a field without breaking a single egg - and such a car would have to be hidden from the German Army, now occupying France. But with an entire village in on the secret, it might just be possible...

This exciting and unusual WW2 story is based on the true events leading to the production of the 2CV, Citroen's much-loved low-cost car.

Thinking and talking

What does Angelo do that children wouldn't usually be allowed to do today? What else tells you this story is set in a different time and place?

What is happening elsewhere in Europe during the events described in this book? How does the war affect Angelo and his friends?

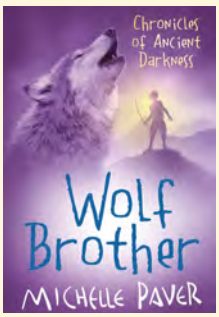
Try this...

- **Research car design and production through history and make a collaborative non-fiction book.**
- **Using commercially-available and reclaimed materials/objects, design and build a machine capable of transporting an egg safely over a given distance.**
- **Design your ideal car!**

KEY STAGE 2

8 Wolf Brother

BY MICHELLE PAVER (ORION)



What's the story?

This exciting story takes place thousands of years ago in a Stone-Age world so richly-imagined and distant from our own that the landscape seems almost sentient. Alongside the elemental magics, though, are numerous practical details about how to survive and thrive in such a place - researched by the author during field trips among people who still use the techniques described.

Thinking and talking

In what kind of world does Torak live? What skills and knowledge does he need for survival?

Do you think it's possible to accurately imagine living in the past? Does it matter whether we're right or not?

Try this...

- **Find out about experimental archeology and choose a hands-on project or challenge to explore – building shelters, hand-coiling a pot, creating and using natural pigments, grinding corn on a stone, cooking over an open fire. This kind of research informed Paver's writing: see tinyurl.com/TRWpaver**
- **Using a copy of the map, trace Torak's journey, marking key events. What do we know about Neolithic Britain? (Look at Skara Brae, Waylands Smithy, West Kennet Long Barrow, Maeshowe, Stonehenge, Ring of Brodgar, etc) What might your area have looked like in Neolithic times? Use Ordnance Survey maps to help you create a Wolf Brother-style map. Imagine you're alone in this landscape. What happens and how do you survive? Write an imaginative story based on your research.**

9

KEY STAGE 2

Sky Chasers

BY EMMA CARROLL (CHICKEN HOUSE)

What's the story?

When Magpie tries to steal valuable blueprints, she's swept off her feet by an enormous air-filled balloon! The experience changes her life forever, and soon she's working for the Montgolfier Brothers instead of robbing them. Will they be able to satisfy the demands of King Louis and Queen Marie-Antoinette and fly a balloon over Versailles? This exciting story is set in France in 1783 and won this year's Teach Primary KS2 Book Award.

Thinking and talking

What did you like best about Skychasers? How did the author bring Magpie and Pierre's world to life?

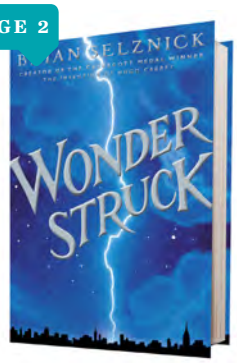
Try this...

- **Talk about historical research and the way authors create realistic fictional worlds. What can we learn from Skychasers about life in eighteenth-century France? Research an historical period of your choice and write a story set in that time, making it as accurate (and exciting!) as possible.**
- **Find out about the Montgolfier Brothers and the history of manned flight.**
- **Using DT materials and found/recycled objects, design and construct an independent device capable of lifting a load safely off the ground (e.g. a balloon lifting a soft toy) or slowing the descent of a load from an agreed height and ensuring it lands safely (e.g. a parachute for an egg).**

"What can we learn about life in 18th Century France?"

10

KEY STAGE 2



Wonderstruck

BY BRIAN SELZNICK (SCHOLASTIC)

What's the story?

Two stories are told in this mesmerizing book - one in words and one in pictures, set 50 years apart – and as they progress, the connections become more obvious, until both stories come together in the most satisfying way.

Rose is deaf and desperately wants the love and attention of her distant mother, a silent film star. Ben's mother dies in an accident and he wants to find the father he's never known.

Themes include independence, loneliness and the importance of family and friends; the development of museum displays; theatre and silent films; deafness and sign language; architectural modelling.

SPOILER ALERT: Rose is Ben's paternal grandmother!

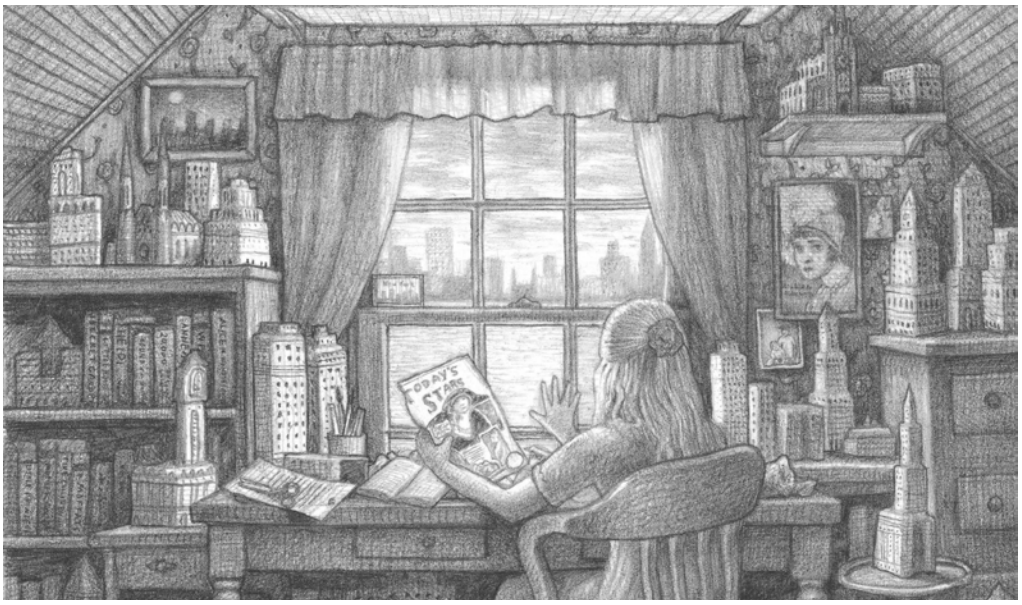
Thinking and talking

How does this book work? Look at the way the stories reference each other and eventually connect. How does Ben unravel the mysteries and make sense of everything? Does he need knowledge, skill or luck?

What does this book tell us about changes between 1927 and 1977? How has the world changed since your grandparents were children?

Try this...

- **Create timelines showing what happens to Rose and Ben, and how their stories intertwine. Add notes about the historical events referenced in this book (the first New York blackout, the arrival of the 'talkies..') and other contemporary world events.**
- **In this book Ben learns about museums, and the art and science of curation. Follow Ben's example and curate your own collections of objects (or pictures of objects) in boxes. What do your choices tell your audience about you and the times in which you live? Write about your objects and why you chose them.**
- **Construct models of buildings in your village, town or city. Create a 3D panorama like the one Rose built of New York, then research the history and architectural styles of your chosen buildings.**



Illustrations © Brian Selznick

Carey Fluker Hunt is a freelance writer, children's books ambassador and creative learning consultant. She is a founder member of Seven Stories.

6 inspiring WRITING TEMPLATES

When children are struggling to get their thoughts down on the page, a little structure can work wonders, says **Rachel Clarke**

Whichever type of writing I'm doing, it's the getting started that's the hardest thing to do. Take this article as an example – I was handed a brief to create six writing templates and type 1200 words for teachers about how to use them. No problem, I thought. Then I opened up Microsoft Word, made a pot of tea, unearthed a packet of chocolate digestives, did some 'emergency gardening', tidied the shoe cupboard... and stared at the blank document on my laptop and wondered just how to get started.

This is why writing templates are so very useful. They help inexperienced writers get started and to write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Of the six writing templates I've prepared for this article, two are suitable for use in KS1, two for lower KS2 and two for upper KS2. And because not all children are the same, three of these templates (one for each age-group) are differentiated.

1 Passing Through the Portal *Y5 and Y6*

When the Pevensey children discovered Narnia, they did so by opening the door of the wardrobe. Similarly, Alice stole her first glimpse of Wonderland after falling down the rabbit hole and peering through the keyhole. Doors and portals are frequently used to structure fantasy stories, making them useful devices for KS2 descriptive writing.

When planning to use portals with children, first work out what the portal will be, where it is located and what it looks like. As a class you should then decide where in the narrative the portal will be introduced, what is on the other side and how the portal will be used to return to the original setting.

When it comes to describing what is on the other side, most children benefit from working as a class or group to examine images of settings and brainstorming descriptive phrases about them. Once they've done this, they're ready to invent their own settings.

The Passing Through the Portal resource sheet scaffolds this process by providing a space for a drawing of the setting (a copied image could also be used) and spaces for pupils to write descriptive phrases based on their senses.

2 Reading Magnifying Glass *Y5 and Y6 (differentiated)*

Using a 'magnifying glass' to analyse text is a pupil-friendly way to promote close reading skills. If you've not followed the structure of this type of activity before, it's a technique that promotes deeper understand of text through re-reading.

On the first reading, pupils are encouraged to articulate what the text

is about and to notice its organisational features. They're then directed to read the text again; this time noticing the author's use of words and phrases and the effectiveness of these. Finally, pupils are asked to read the text a third time; this time taking account of the author's point of view and commenting on how they connect with the text personally.

The resource sheet provided with this article can be used to help pupils read deeply and carefully, but can also be used as a writing template for giving structured opinions about a text pupils have read.

3 Knock, Knock Jokes *Y3 and Y4 (differentiated)*

To many children, the rules and conventions of direct speech are an unfathomable challenge of where and when to use commas, inverted commas, full stops and capital letters. Enter the humble knock, knock joke.

First off, knock, knock jokes feature two speakers, so there's no need to contrive an awkward conversation for children to 'turn into speech'. Secondly, the page layout mirrors the rules of dialogue with a new line for each line of the joke. And thirdly, children like knock, knock jokes.

The resource sheet accompanying this article uses a small-steps approach to slowly scaffold children through the rules and conventions of dialogue. In the first instance pupils are simply asked to rewrite knock, knock jokes in speech bubbles. Once they've got the hang of this, they should then be encouraged to write the name of the speaker and 'said' before each speech bubble.

The second level asks pupils to write each line of the knock, knock joke using inverted commas. Each example on this sheet starts with the reporting clause before the dialogue, which enables pupils to practise adding a comma after the reporting clause. Additionally, pupils are encouraged to use a range of synonyms for 'said' at this point.

Once secure in setting out and punctuating direct speech with the reporting clause before the dialogue, pupils should then be shown how to add the reporting clause after the dialogue. This means learning to use a comma before the closing inverted commas and not capitalising the first word after the inverted commas – unless, of course, it's a name. So many rules!

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4 Top Trumps Character Profiles *Y3 and Y4*

Creating characters using the popular Top Trumps format is a useful way to encourage pupils to think beyond the appearance of their characters and whether they're adventurous, brave, cowardly or cruel, for example, and to consider their feelings, thoughts and motivations.

I find it's always best to model using a planning template such as this one so that pupils know how to get the most from it. Once I've completed a planning profile with pupils, I then model using it to write effective character descriptions, showing how to include aspects of character through my descriptions of actions, thoughts and dialogue.

5 Book Review *Y1 and Y2 (differentiated)*

Writing book reviews enables pupils to offer opinions based on first-hand experiences. Naturally, pupils shouldn't be expected to review every book they read, but from time to time encouraging them to reflect on their reading is a useful activity. As pupils are required to offer opinions when reviewing their reading, book reviews provide valuable practice at using the subordinating conjunction 'because', which makes them particularly useful teaching tools for meeting the writing requirements of KS1. The resource sheet provided with this article includes three book review templates to meet the needs of pupils of differing ages and abilities.

6 Autumn Writing Prompt *Y1 and Y2*

Writing opportunities can be stimulated by stories the class have heard, activities that have been shared or by looking at artefacts and images. The paddling pool writing prompt enables children to write from a visual cue. First off, children should be encouraged to talk about what they can see in the picture. You may need to expand their vocabularies by naming objects such as the hosepipe and the stool. You may also want to draw on the prior knowledge of children who have played in a paddling pool, sharing their experiences such as splashing in the water, taking care not to slip as they got in and out and shivering if the water felt chilly. Encourage children to phrase their observations as sentences and model writing these on the flipchart or whiteboard. Now ask children to write about the picture using the keywords to help them where necessary.

Rachel Clarke is the director of Primary English Education Consultancy Limited. She works with schools across the UK and is the author of several books published by Keen Kite.

"WE CAN ALL STARE INTO SPACE"

Creativity needs time and space to let minds roam, says TR&W guest editor, **Lauren Child**

Before I accepted the role of Children's Laureate, I thought long and hard. I felt that I wanted to take it on, and of course I was immensely flattered to be asked, but I knew that I could only do justice to it if I had definite aims for my time in the position, aims that really mattered to me. Eventually, I settled on three themes, each of which is, I think, as relevant in the classroom as out of it.

My sense is that visual literacy is often skirted over in education, but I'm passionate about its importance. Each of us is born with an incredible ability to 'read' the expressions of other humans – we aren't even aware we're doing it, but it is, or was, a critical part of our survival and development in the early years. As we grow older, we learn to read landscapes with great subtlety, again mainly at the subconscious level. And as part of this, we all respond emotionally to the visual world, whether we are aware of doing so or not.

However, as children get older, society tends to place more and more emphasis on the written word, and so send the message that the visual is secondary at best. Picture books are for toddlers; once you can read 'properly', you will be old enough to leave them behind and concentrate on text. There are no illustrations in Shakespeare even though they are plays with costumes, settings and props. As the daughter of an art teacher, I find this incomprehensible and frustrating. We can learn so much from images, including illustration, and I would love to see the visual arts given the academic status they deserve. High quality picture books are a fantastic teaching resource for pupils of all ages, whether using one of the many beautiful examples published in the last few years, or one of the established, timeless classics.

Everyone included

The second issue that I've been trying to address as Laureate is inclusivity. We need books for everyone; stories and illustrations in which children from all backgrounds can recognise themselves. I have been conscious for a long time of just how little diversity there is in picture books, as well as in films and on TV. The acceptance of that has always worried me. While my work has always included characters who look different from me, they were rarely at the heart of the story. *The New Small Person* was the first book I wrote and illustrated in which the family featured happens to be black. Their skin colour is irrelevant to the plot; it's just who they are. Whilst I admire writers who use literature to address issues of diversity, we all need to get far past the point where diversity in characters tends to occur when it is part of the plot. Ezra Jack Keats understood this back in the 60s – a New Yorker of Polish-Jewish descent, simply representing what he saw around him on the Brooklyn streets; it's definitely worth looking up his books if you're not already familiar with them.

Time to drift

Last is *Staring Into Space*. The idea came to me when I was thinking about a question which people in my job get asked all the time: *where do you get your ideas from?* I used to answer: childhood memories, things I notice when I'm walking down the street, conversations with friends, with strangers, conversations overheard, books I've read or old TV shows I've watched, things I've seen when looking up, looking down or looking out of the window, but I've come to realise that this doesn't get to the heart of it. Really, my ideas come from those moments when my mind is 'drifting', and my brain starts putting together random thoughts. It's the collision of these thoughts that makes the idea and transforms a memory, a chance sighting, a found object, into a story or a picture. Creativity may well be found in what we often dismiss as 'daydreaming' and, crucially, it's something that everyone can do. However, we do need to allow ourselves the time for it, to put aside those things which give us an escape from our own thoughts. We need to risk failure, and to endure and overcome boredom. So, I want to promote more 'staring into space', including at school. That doesn't mean that teachers should plan in daily sessions of 'enforced mind-wandering', but rather that we should encourage pupils to take time away from their devices and their desks, to notice small details around them as they walk or travel to and from school, and to start conversations about the things they see. It's amazing what we can come up with when we allow our minds to drift, and float, and be playful – and when we decide we don't *have* to be 'busy'.

Find out more about* Staring Into Space *at staringintospace.me, and download a full set of brilliant* Staring Into Space *classroom resources, created by Lauren with talented teacher Josey Scullard for BookTrust, at teachwire.net/staring-into-space

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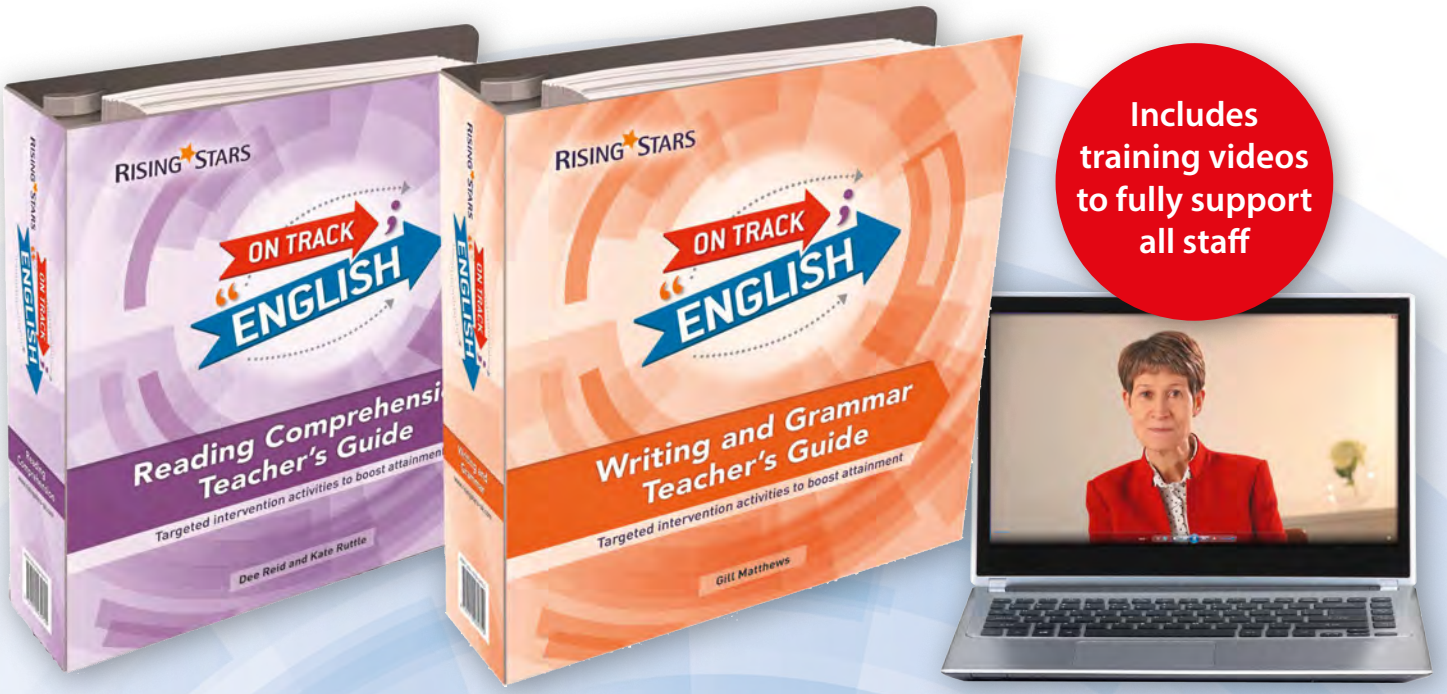

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The ultimate guide TO BOOSTING VOCABULARY

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Vocabulary development is suddenly a hot topic in education, yet schools have long recognised the relationship between language development and children's academic success. Teachers in particular are attuned to the importance of helping children develop both the ability to understand spoken and written language, acquiring a control of language that enables them to express their ideas and feelings clearly.

One key aspect of a child's language development is the growth of their vocabulary – the words they can understand and the words they use to communicate. Not surprisingly, educational research suggests a strong relationship between vocabulary and comprehension, where a broad vocabulary (knowing lots of words) and a deep vocabulary (knowing those words well) correlates with better understanding. When children write, a wider vocabulary gives them a rich palette with which to express their ideas, choosing a word to communicate with elegance and precision.

Most of children's language development and vocabulary growth will come from organic sources, rather than direct teaching: the conversations they have with their families and their peers, and with adults at school, and through the books they read and those that are read to them.

That doesn't mean, however, there aren't some ways we can help children to learn new words directly, and here are seven such approaches to building children's vocabulary in the classroom.

1 Display fascinating words

A great first step is helping children to be aware of any unfamiliar or interesting words they encounter. This might be in the classroom, the books they read, in conversation, or on television.

Having a wordarium on display (see Resource Sheet 1), where children jot down a new word on a sticky note and exhibit it, can motivate pupils to collect words. These can then form the basis of a class discussion, with everyone talking about the exotic new language displayed each week.

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2 Create word webs

Building a word web helps children to think carefully about the meaning of a new word and how it is connected to the words they already know. Resource Sheet 2 gives an example word web and a blank template for children to use as they learn new words around the same topic.

3 Explore morphology

Morphemes are the smallest units of grammar that convey meaning. They include roots (happi), prefixes (un) and suffixes (ness). By adding them together, we can create words that carry a distinct meaning (unhappiness). Learning some of the most common morphemes can help to unlock the meaning of many different words. Resource Sheet 3 introduces some common morphemes and gives space for children to find some of their own.

4 Collect words from reading

Learning the meaning of an individual word is trickier than you might think - so much depends on the context. Dog, for example, might refer to a common pet, but it might also mean to follow someone persistently. As the language used in books is often very different to that used in conversation, much of the rich language children learn comes not from explicit vocabulary teaching, but from reading. Resource Sheet 4 is a bookmark for children to collect words as they read and then share in class.

5 Choose the words carefully

Selecting a small number of key words to introduce to children is a common method of vocabulary teaching, but time is limited so choosing these words carefully is important.

Selecting words linked to specific topic (the Romans, electrical circuits) or words that have been picked because they might be especially useful ('analyse' or 'subtle', for example - Beck, McKeown and Kucan's 'Tier 2 words') is likely to have a greater impact than arbitrarily choosing some whizzy words for children to shoehorn into their writing.

Resource Sheet 5 is a template children can use to think about the words you have chosen to teach.

6 Think about idioms

Sometimes knowing what words mean won't help you understand the meaning of a particular phrase. With an idiom, for example, the meaning is well known, but isn't reflected in the individual words: you might know what a fence is and you might know what sitting is, but that doesn't help you know the meaning of sitting on the fence. Resource Sheet 6 gives children the chance to think about idioms.

7 Explore different vocabularies

Sometimes the discussion around vocabulary teaching begins with mention of a 'word gap', where for a range of reasons some children are seen as not having the words or language that their peers can draw on.

Whereas this might be true of some school-specific language, all children are likely to have areas where their vocabulary is already well-developed – often richer and deeper than their peers and the adults around them.

This is especially true of words linked to particular interests – ballet, skateboarding, dinosaurs, gaming. Giving children a chance to celebrate their existing word power is a great starting point for beginning discussions around how we learn words and why we might want to. And who knows, you might even learn a word or two!

Resource Sheet 7 gives a format for children to share their own word knowledge linked to a particular area.

Of course, vocabulary is just one aspect of the broad area of language development. Control of language depends on the words, but also on understanding how to employ the words, matching the purpose and audience to an appropriate grammar and syntax. If we want children to become as skilled as they can as communicators, it will take more than just learning lots of words. But helping to grow their vocabulary isn't a bad place to start.

James Clements (@MrJClements) is an education writer.

"I enjoy listening to children talking – they have a wonderful ear for language. They tend to be unselfconscious about using new vocabulary, keen to apply a new word to a thought or feeling."

Lauren Child – Guest editor

10 steps to SATS SUCCESS

The KS2 tests might seem a long way off, but planning for the best possible results starts here, says **Shareen Mayers**

Every year, there seems to be a sudden panic just before the KS2 reading and grammar tests. I often hear the same words each time I complete my training for Y6 teachers - "I wish I had known this earlier".

It doesn't have to be a last-minute dash, however. If you keep the following points in mind at the start of the year and then follow these 10 key steps, it will be a much smoother process - particularly if you're new to Y6.

WHAT TO DO IN THE AUTUMN TERM

Step 1 - Be aware of the NC expectations for Y6

It can be tempting to enter revision mode right from the start of Y6, but don't forget there are some topics that won't yet have been taught. There are, of course, key areas that will need to be revised through the year, but the following list picks out the parts of grammar that are unique to your pupils' final year at primary school:

- Semi-colon and colon
- Bullet points
- Subject and object
- Synonym and antonym
- Ellipsis
- Hyphen
- Active and passive

Step 2 - Review previous year groups

Notably, in the 2018 grammar test, approximately 90 per cent of the questions were not first taught in Y6. Similarly, the 2018 reading paper tests skills and curriculum areas from across KS2.

It's been interesting talking to Y3 and Y4 teachers who openly admit to avoiding grammar areas they are not confident about teaching; I often say it's not fair to leave it all to Y6, but we all know this sometimes happens!

Revision of previous year groups should take place throughout the year with more explicit teaching of test technique coming later on in the Spring term. For example, when teaching semi colons and colons, teachers could also revise what makes a sentence - as knowledge of an independent clause is needed to understand when and how to use a semi colon.

Step 3 - Drip in test-style questions

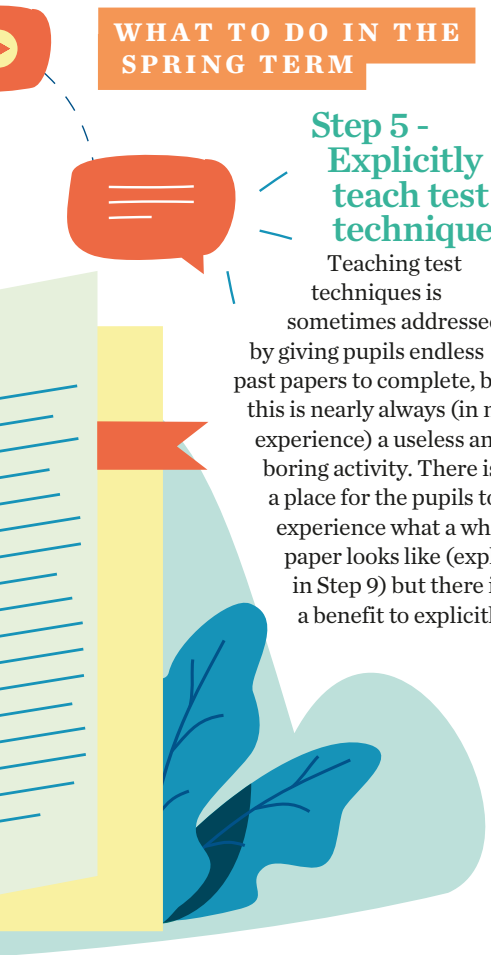
This strategy is often missed, but repetition is vital. The more pupils encounter test-style questions in a practical and fun context, the less fazed they will be when it comes to the actual test.

In practice, this simply means that when completing a reading lesson, you might adjust your questioning. For example, instead of saying, 'Why does the character...' this could be tweaked to 'According to the text, what impression do you get of the character...'

Step 4 - Keep reading for pleasure and information

This step is often ignored when there is a plethora of things to do. But the way to develop vocabulary (which carried 20 per cent of the reading paper this year) and be exposed to grammar in context, is to read a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts. This broadens pupils' experiences and ensures they have a rich vocabulary and knowledge to prepare for the demands of the tests.

WHAT TO DO IN THE SPRING TERM



Step 5 - Explicitly teach test techniques

Teaching test techniques is sometimes addressed by giving pupils endless past papers to complete, but this is nearly always (in my experience) a useless and boring activity. There is a place for the pupils to experience what a whole paper looks like (explored in Step 9) but there is a benefit to explicitly teaching skills.

For example, pupils need to be clear about the question stems used in the reading paper and have an in-depth understanding of the vocabulary. An 'impression' is normally an inference question, so pupils need to find clues in the text to support their answer. When answering fact and opinion questions, pupils need to think about whether a statement is true or false. In addition, is it what someone thinks or feels and is it stated or implied?

This level of explicit teaching will support pupils' understanding of reading test vocabulary.

Reading vocabulary to teach

- According to...
- How can you tell...
- Find and copy...
- Give two impressions...
- Fact and opinion
- Give the best summary...
- What does this suggest...
- Using evidence from the text to support your answer...

Step 6 - Avoid errors in the grammar test

One important factor concerning the grammar test is that there are very definite rules about how to answer the questions. Answers need to be clear and unambiguous; prefixes and suffixes, verbs, contractions and plurals need to be spelt accurately and the correct number of boxes should to be ticked – it is so frustrating when pupils miss a standard because of small errors, but we've all seen it.

Step 7 - Use fun and interactive revision strategies

Who says that revision has to be dull? I often hear this and it doesn't reflect my experience at all. Teaching inference skills can easily be covered by exploring the thoughts and feelings of characters in pop songs. Grammar should be explored in context, for instance creating wanted posters for word classes where pupils need to describe their function.

The best way to consolidate learning is to get pupils to teach other pupils in the class. Give them an area of focus and let them create a poster or worksheet that they will present to the rest of the class. Being able to fully explain a concept to someone else shows you have really internalised the knowledge.

Step 8 - Involve families where possible

Significantly, I always hear that some families are reluctant to attend information sessions. One of the key ways to get parents and families involved is through – you've guessed it – food! In the Spring term, entice your families with a SATs information event that includes the important stuff – like when the tests are, what they include and how parents can help at home. Just don't forget the biscuits and cake!

WHAT TO DO IN THE SUMMER TERM

Step 9 - Give pupils experience of the test papers

Whilst it's important to continue to teach and to drip test-style questions throughout Y6, pupils still need to be aware of the timings, especially for the reading paper where they have 60 minutes to read through and answer questions for three or four texts. Rapid retrieval is needed for this. Just try to keep test experience to a minimum.

Step 10 - Work on whole-school strategies

Having taught my own Y6 classes for 10 years and been a booster group teacher, I have seen the benefits of involving and training the whole school. The more all teachers see the test papers, have CPD opportunities to increase their subject knowledge, and the more senior leaders promote a whole-school responsibility for SATs, the higher the likelihood of success - especially in the more challenging schools.

Shareen Mayers (@ShareenMayers) is a primary assessment and English consultant, author and editor.

How CPD can make a lasting change

Far too many great training day ideas fizzle out in schools. So what turns the theory into day-to-day practice?

Monday morning, the phone rings. It's Jackie - headteacher at a three-form entry inner-city school.

"Two of my teachers attended a course on developing reading comprehension last term. They enjoyed the day and came back to school inspired and keen to put the new ideas into practice. We had a staff meeting so they could share what they'd learned and it's being going well, but we've stalled. I have a knowledgeable and enthusiastic English lead, but he's only been in post for a year. We need some support to guide us through the next step of the process."

The request is a common one.

"It's good to hear that teachers have been enthused, Jackie. That's a great starting point... " We end the conversation with an arrangement for me to visit Jackie and her team in school to identify the best way of moving forward.

Understanding what needs to change

The efficacy of one-off training days is limited. A reading comprehension course that lasts a single day can have a considerable and lasting impact if clearly focused on specific aspects of teaching, but systemic and cultural change requires more sustained professional development opportunities.

My first meeting with Jackie is spent fact gathering with the intention of devising a clear purpose for the professional development. What does the school already do well? What are the areas for potential change, development and growth?

Outcomes for pupils are the focus of the discussion. We look at the data, but also consider children's wider reading experiences and attitudes to reading. After an initial briefing, I spend the morning with the English lead, Stephen. We visit classes to see reading lessons, talk to pupils about their learning, look closely at the learning environment and the extent to which it supports children's development as readers.

Inevitably, teachers' level of subject knowledge and skills is varied. In some lessons the teaching of reading skills is underpinned by a clearly articulated understanding of what it means to be a good reader. In other classes it's more performative; there's a desire to do the 'right thing' but the understanding of why and how particular teaching approaches are used is less secure.

This is reflected in the way classrooms are set up. Some teachers have spent a lot of time putting together welcoming reading environments. There are impressive displays, complete with tree-like structures spanning out across the class. Others are lower key. In fact, the best-used reading area is one that's less visually impressive. Here the teacher has put up a temporary display

featuring some of her favourite novels and there's a waiting list of children wanting to read them. It's not the tidiest area, but it's not unkempt or uncared for either.

Hearing from the teachers

After the rounds I discuss this with Stephen. Initially, he's most impressed by the giant tree and fairy lights and feels the more informal display doesn't show enough effort. The benefits of fact finding, and the time afforded us to look around the school together is invaluable. Things come to light that might not have been regarded as significant or relevant to the CPD focus identified by the school. Themes are starting to emerge.

In the afternoon, Jackie has arranged for us to meet teachers in year groups for half-hour discussions. The aim is to learn about the teachers' perceptions of their pupils' progress and to help them identify their own training needs. Even in a school that has a shared goal, teachers are individuals.

The process takes a day, but it's time well spent. It becomes evident that this is a school with a supportive, constructive learning community that has a shared sense of purpose. Where this doesn't already exist in a school, it's important to structure professional development in a way that creates a shared vision.

After a short debrief with the senior management team outlining some key themes that have emerged from the day, there's a quick staff meeting to provide initial feedback from the morning's visits (and most importantly to thank teachers for sharing their time and practice).

Making a plan

Within the next week I write a report and a set of proposals for some planned development to take place over the next three terms, with a further option of a two-year development plan - subject to review at the end of the first year.

The way forward for Jackie's school is a monthly programme of CPD. An initial training day is followed by a series of in-school support sessions and staff meetings. The programme is devised collaboratively and is jointly facilitated with Stephen, the English lead. The training involves development of both subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy. Making links for teachers to what they know about generic pedagogy is important too. I observed excellent use of a Think Alouds strategy in maths lessons, but the same approach wasn't employed for developing reading comprehension. I also identify some key reading to support the training and sign post other resources and research for those teachers who want to dig deeper.

We set up learning triads of teachers working across different year groups. Time is allocated for these smaller groups to collaborate - rather than the usual whole-school staff meeting - so they can discuss and record key insights, which they then bring back to the next twilight session.

Responding to feedback

Although the year is mapped out, we respond flexibly to teachers' needs.

DOES YOUR TRAINING...

- start with an assessment of what outcomes should be for the children?
- look at what's already being done in the school, and what works best?
- have a clear, ongoing structure?
- provide space and time for reflection and peer-to-peer support?

We have been looking at the quality of teacher-pupil dialogue and one teacher asks if she can observe a session to fully understand what we have been talking about.

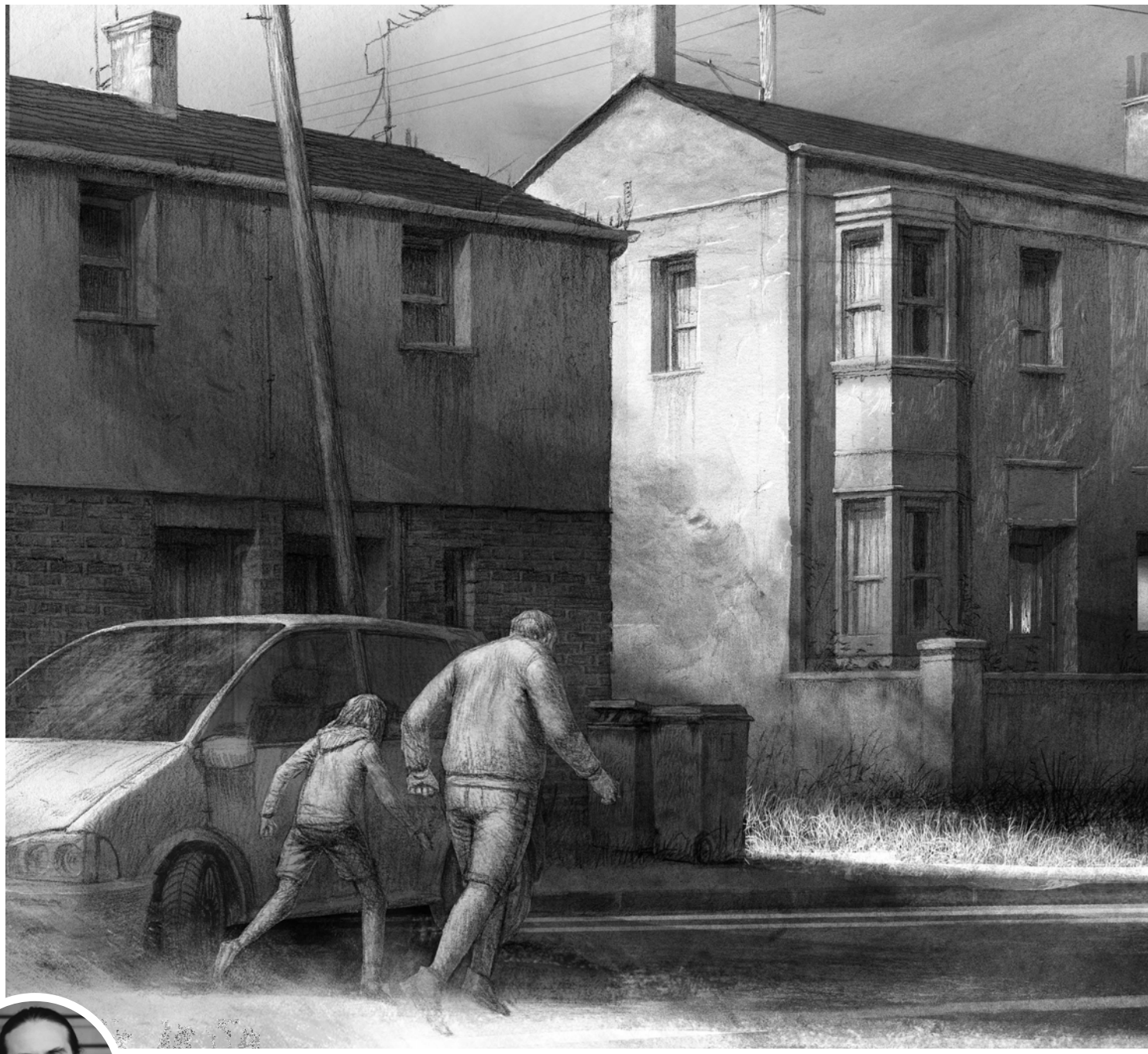
We set up an observation – not, we explain, to exemplify 'ideal teaching', but to provide a reflective space where we can look at how the discourse progresses without the teacher feeling that she is under the spotlight.

Removing the threat of being observed works well and for the following meeting the teacher is happy to share some video of her own teaching for the benefit of the group learning experience.

At the end of the first year Jackie catches me in the corridor. "I'm delighted how far we've come together," she says. "The secrets to success were here in school, we just needed help to see which bits we needed to work on and where attention was being misdirected. A whole-school focus has been great, and I think it's brought us much closer together as a team."

I agree, "Yes, but it's also the time you have allowed for teachers to deepen their understanding and the shared common purpose that's made such a big difference here."

Nikki Gamble is CEO of Just Imagine, the centre for excellence in reading, and associate consultant at the Institute of Education.



"Interpreting images is just like reading words"

Levi Pinfold reckons that we should teach children to engage with illustrations as deeply as they learn to dig down into text....

The first book I read all the way through, by myself, was The *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, from Ladybird's 'Well Loved Tales' series. The pictures were brilliant; I can see them now, if I think about it. I remember the feeling of triumph at having finally mastered this essential skill, especially as my older siblings had managed it ages before. I expect I danced about, and showed off a bit – well, you would, wouldn't you?

My parents weren't the type to order us to read – instead, they'd just sort of leave books around, where they might get picked up by one or another of us. On one occasion, my uncle and aunty came to visit, and they had a massive pile of library remainder books with them. They plonked this huge box down in our house, and it was like Christmas. We had books everywhere – all

kinds, all genres, and not all children's titles, either. I was far too young when I read Stephen King for the first time... but I enjoyed his work.

I suppose I was drawn to reading, but that wasn't my only pastime as a child – it was just one of the many things that were pleasurable. And it was the whole experience that appealed to me; the cover, turning the pages – I relished the thrill of a story, but I loved books as objects, too. I've carried so many of them with me into adulthood, like *Where the Wild Things Are*, of course, and *Faeries*, by Alan Lee and Brian Froud, which is one of those artistic creations that cements itself in your mind forever. I never walk past a pond and don't think about Jenny Greenteeth, and that terrifying illustration of her stretching a bony arm out of the water, about to curl her fingers around the ankle of a child and drag him into the depths with her...

It's the frightening stories I tend to remember above all others, in fact. *Hansel and Gretel*, and all those other dark and ominous tales. I love the strange and the interesting; the otherworld, and the world of the imagination. And I've always liked picture books – and comics – best. Illustrations are what invite you into a narrative; they tantalise you – but it's the story that keeps you there.

When I'm illustrating a story, whether it's my own or someone else's, it always, always comes back to the text. That's what you are trying to represent, as best you can. Even if I do have an image in my head before I write, it rarely makes it through to the final pictures, because by then, I have words that I need to service. Collaborating with another author is always a lovely experience, though, because you are pushed in directions you never thought you'd go. You get to know the other person incredibly well.

And then there's the experience of working with a narrative for which there is already a very potent visual element out there in the public domain, which is different again. Illustrating the *Harry Potter* books was a huge challenge, of course, but it was immensely satisfying, too. However hard you try, those previous iteration will be in there – but the thing is, there are descriptions in the books that the films got absolutely right, so it would be foolish to ignore that, on the grounds of some kind of principle, or determination to be different. You're stepping into a shared universe with a project like that; and there's a communal feel to it, which is really nice.

"It's the frightening stories I tend to remember above all others, in fact"

I know I would say this, but I do think there is definitely the potential for more illustration in books, especially those that are produced for older readers. At the moment, there's this kind of hierarchy, in which you start with picture books, and the older you get, the less artwork there is, until you finally end up with 'grown up' titles, that are just text. But no one stands in a gallery looking at a great painting and thinking, "Oh, that's only for children!". People tend to think they are being 'talked down to' with pictures – but whilst it's true that you can read them very quickly, that doesn't mean they aren't saying complicated and serious things.

I think that being able to 'read' pictures is important, and enjoyable. And up until the age of about six, kids can generally do it pretty naturally – but then we 'persuade' them out of the habit, because text is king; which really limits what you can do, as an illustrator, with this amazing art form. Reading images is no different from reading words, though, in that it helps you decode and unlock meaning in the world around you, and leads you to a deeper understanding. Wouldn't it be great, then, to have it taught in schools?

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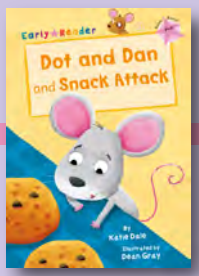

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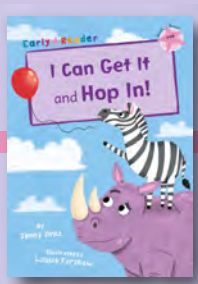

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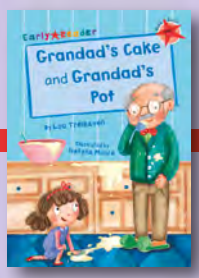

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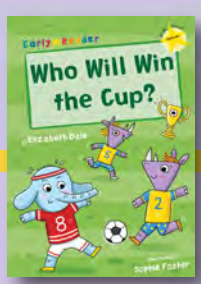

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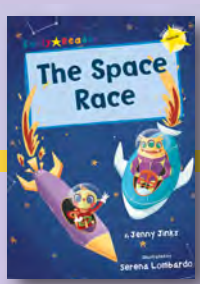

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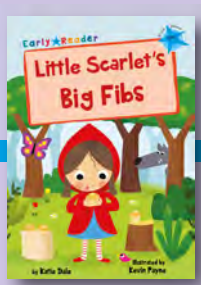

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- Flowing, interesting stories using natural English.
- Standard 32 page book format. Pink and red bands have two stories per book, higher levels have one.
- Either a quiz or a guidance page for each story.

Scan the QR code to view the whole scheme

the wow FACTOR

Find out how to enter the global Collins Big Cat Writing Competition

Collins BIG CAT Writing Competition 2018

What they'll love

Allow pupils' imaginations to run free with a global writing competition run by the popular reading programme, Collins Big Cat. Collins has launched this competition to raise the profile of writing for pleasure and to help teachers bridge the reading-writing divide, whilst offering fantastic prizes for schools and pupils.

The competition challenges pupils to engage with the writing process and compose a 300-500 word children's story on the theme of bravery and courage. Children have until 21st December to enter, and the stories will be judged by an award-winning author panel. The two lucky Grand Finalist winners will receive a trophy for their schools and have their winning stories transformed into videos, read aloud by a Collins Big Cat author.

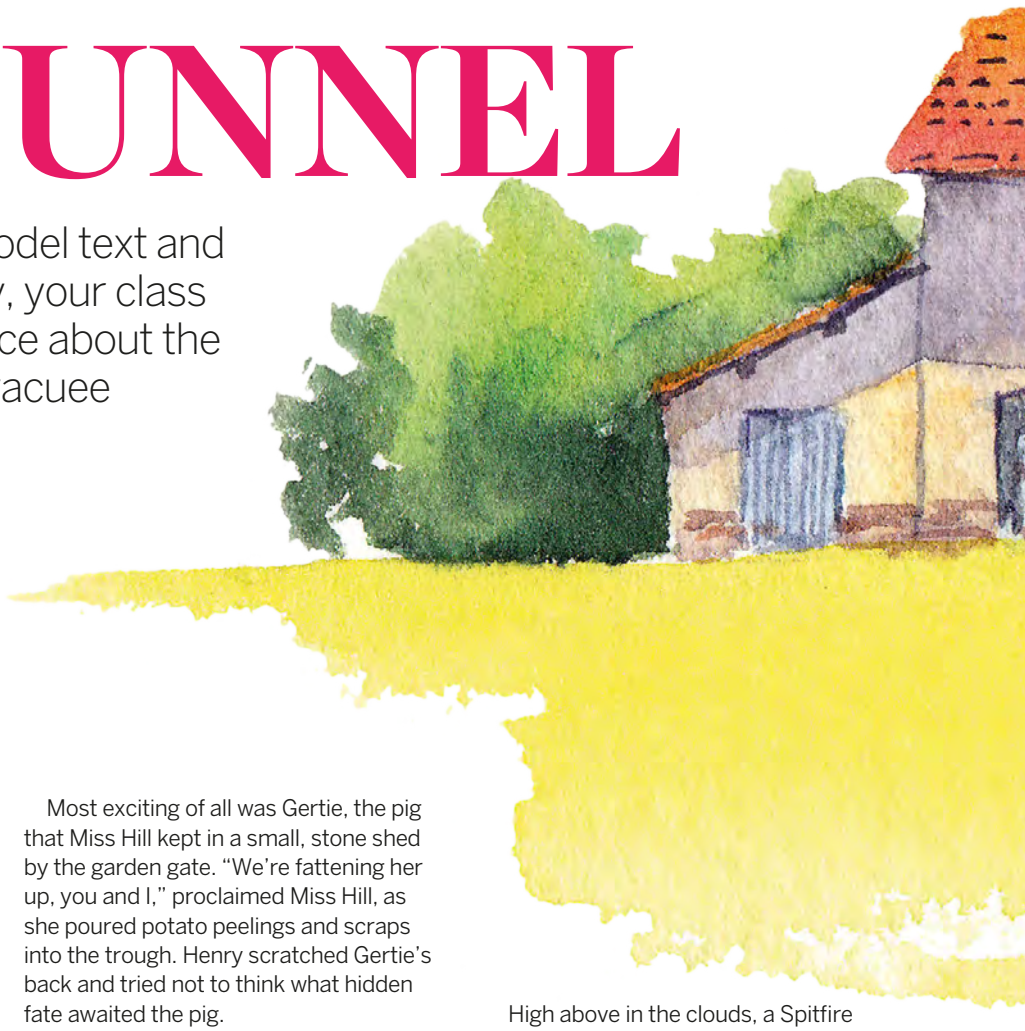
What they'll learn

Reading and writing need to be intrinsically linked – children need to read like writers and write like readers. This competition provides the framework for that skill development. There are a range of free teaching resources, available to download on the website, which can be used to educate pupils on the writing process. The resources include targeted lesson plans offering advice and support on aspects such as plot, characters, setting and polishing and editing the prose. Pupils can draw inspiration from the sample pages available for the recommended books on the theme of bravery and courage. Teachers can combine the free resources with the competition and host fun and engaging planning, writing and editing sessions for the children.

To find out more about the Collins Big Cat Writing Competition, including T&Cs, visit www.collins.co.uk/BigCatWritingCompetition. Share your writing journey with Collins using #BigCatComp.

The TUNNEL

Using **Pie Corbett's** model text and digging into local history, your class can write a powerful piece about the experience of a WWII evacuee



Henry had always hated the dark.

At night, Miss Hill put up the blackout curtains. When the light was off, the gloom descended and you couldn't see a thing. He had to learn to feel his way to bed. The stairs were unfamiliar, so too, the creaking boards and the smell of lye soap from the metal tub that was dragged out on a Saturday for his bath.

Oakridge Lynch village was nothing like the grimy London tenement block where Henry had spent his first ten years. Here, the valleys were a lush green: not a single street lamp and, at night, the darkness was full of owls, badgers digging for worms and foxes yelping. Every morning, Henry woke to the sound of a cockerel. At home, the streets had been packed with people rushing to work, cars and buses trundling by and the air was full of street cries. Here, chickens scratched in the backyard, rows of vegetables sprouted in gardens and only the odd cart and donkey passed the little cottage.

Most exciting of all was Gertie, the pig that Miss Hill kept in a small, stone shed by the garden gate. "We're fattening her up, you and I," proclaimed Miss Hill, as she poured potato peelings and scraps into the trough. Henry scratched Gertie's back and tried not to think what hidden fate awaited the pig.

That misty morning, the 15th July 1940, Miss Hill checked that Henry had his gas mask packed and walked him up the lane to the village school. There they sang a hymn, prayed for the country and Henry sat squeezed onto a bench at the back of the schoolroom, clutching his copybook. Later, at lunchtime, he deposited himself on the grass outside and ate his bread and dripping sandwich. Miss Hill had tucked in a slice of beetroot as a treat. Some of the boys munched on turnips that they had dug up on the way to school, washed in a puddle and dried on the tufted grass at the side of the road.

The afternoon stretched ahead; Henry's pen scratched as he tried his hand at copperplate. The schoolroom was silent as everyone worked. In the distance, they could hear planes and the sound grew closer until everyone stopped and looked up at the ceiling; the approaching engines roared and spluttered. Mr Weston yelled, "Under your desks!"

High above in the clouds, a Spitfire from Aston Down and a Hurricane from Kemble fought with a German bomber – a Junkers 88. Henry squeezed under a wooden desk next to Grace, closed his eyes and began to count. He had learned that trick in London when they sheltered in the underground. Counting backwards from a thousand kept your mind busy.

With engines screaming, the bomber shuddered overhead, scraping the school's bell tower. Mr Weston grabbed the wooden window pole and rushed outside to help capture the airman in Mrs Le Bailly's garden. Later, they heard that three of the airmen had managed to parachute down and had been taken willingly, but the pilot had stayed in the plane for too long, trying to guide it clear of the village. Miss Hill stated that the school had been missed: 'by a wing and a prayer'.

Over the next few weeks, what had been an obscure village became famous and people travelled for miles to see the wreckage. In London, bombings had been nightly but here in the sleepy valleys, dogfights were a rare sight.

DOWNLOAD PIE'S STORY FOR FREE AT www.teachwire.net/WWIIstory

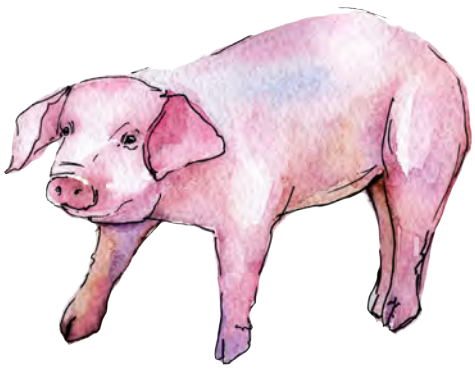
"With engines screaming, the bomber shuddered overhead, scraping the school's bell tower"

Mr Weston posted Henry at the gate to Strawberry Banks where the wreckage lay, to collect money for the troops. It was there, in early August, that Henry, full of longing and loneliness, decided to head for home, back to London.

He had been standing by the gate all afternoon but no one had come to view the wreckage. A skylark fluttered up and a warm wind swept down the valley, ruffling the grass and calling to him. He daydreamed, remembering his Mum standing on Paddington station, her thin coat flapping as the train steamed out, carrying Henry and his gas mask away from everything he knew and loved.

In the valley, below the village, ran the railway. Half an hour later, Henry walked along the tracks, his mind fixed on home. He could hear trains coming a long way off. The rails seemed to buzz a warning so that he could scramble up the bank and hide. The plan worked well enough until he came to Sapperton. Here, the train tracks disappeared into the dark mouth of the tunnel.

Henry stopped. To go back meant terrible trouble. School had ended a long time ago. Miss Hill would be fretting. At first, Henry didn't feel too bad. Behind him, he had the light from the tunnel's opening but, half way down, the tunnel curved: increasingly, the dark and cold closed round him like a poacher's steel trap. He pulled his piece of sacking cloth to him, stood and listened: his breathing



echoed, his heart thumped and, somewhere ahead, water dripped and something scuttled. Suddenly it hit him, and it all seemed too much: the bomber screaming overhead, the school shuddering as it scraped the bell tower, the tangled, smoking wreckage and the strangeness of trees and green fields. He sat down and waited, rocking as he cried.

Thomas Restall, a railway ganger, found the little boy, crouched in the darkness. Henry had tried to walk home but his shoes, resoled with an old tyre, had worn thin and, besides, the darkness had held him fast in its shadows.

Early in the evening dusk, as the stars started to freckle the sky, Thomas brought Henry back to Winsley Cottage. To his surprise, Miss Hill drew him close and whispered, "Oh Henry," as she gently stroked his hair. Inside, the kitchen lamp glowed.

Let's get started

Writing a story set in the past means the writer has to do some research. This story is about an evacuee and almost all of the tale is true. I had to use my imagination to describe Miss Hall and I invented Henry, but just about everything else is based on fact. The plot pattern hangs around the simple idea of a character having to face something they fear. The opening line gives the main theme away, 'Henry had always hated the dark'. The reader immediately knows that Henry will have to face the darkness! In these sorts of stories, the main character often defeats or overcomes their fear. In my one, there is light at the end of the tunnel for Henry, even if only in a small way when he gets back to the village.

Hook in the class

This story will be better appreciated if it is tied into some historical work on the evacuees so that children know what happened. Many schools will also have children whose families have moved to find a better life; some may have left members of their families behind. Excellent novels to read alongside this would be *Friend or Foe* by Michael Morpurgo, *Carrie's War* by Nina Nawden, *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 the context are easily available through the internet, e.g. from BBC Bitesize tinyurl.com/WWIIclips

Expand vocabulary

Read the story through, underline difficult vocabulary and discuss any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Some of the words and phrases will be related to historical information whilst other will be turns of phrase that are still currently used.

Historical	Current
blackout curtains, lye soap, metal tub, tenement block, street lamps, cart and donkey, gas mask, copybook, bread and dripping, copperplate, dogfight, sacking cloth, railway ganger, poacher's steel trap	grimy, lush, cockerel, badgers, owls, foxes, yelping, trundle, sprout, trough, fate, beetroot, treat, turnip, the underground, pilot, skylark, ruffle, obscure, longing, fret, echo, scuttle, resoled, tire, freckle

Children will also be interested in knowing about the three types of plane mentioned and time could be spent with maps as well as using Google Earth to locate the different places.

Oral comprehension

Read the story through and explore it by taking initial responses. What do they 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:

- Give two reasons why can't Henry see a thing and has to 'feel his way to bed'?
- Explain what the reader learns from being told that the stairs were 'unfamiliar'.
- Use a chart to compare life in the tenement block and life in the village. Which would you prefer and why? Are there clues that suggest what Henry thinks?
- What were the possible benefits for an evacuee and what might be the disadvantages?
- What 'fate' awaited the pig and why did most families keep one?
- Find three clues that suggest how Miss Hall treated Henry.
- Why during the afternoon lesson did everyone look at the ceiling?
- Explain Henry's trick and why he used it?
- Explain what the expression 'a wing and a prayer' might mean.
- Why did the crash make the village famous?
- Give three reasons why Henry decided to run away.
- What does the phrase 'thin coat' suggest about Henry's mum?
- Why do you think his dad had not been there to say goodbye?
- Why did Henry need to hide from the trains?
- Why did he pull a piece of sacking cloth to himself?
- Search for any references to 'darkness', in any form, and discuss the theme of dark and light.
- Explain the final two lines.
- Why do you think the story is called The Tunnel?

Explore through drama

- Write a letter from Henry to his mother describing his new life.
- In role as a journalist, interview Mr Watson and Grace about what happened and then write a newspaper article about the plane crash. The pilot was buried with full military honours, possibly recognising his attempt to steer the plane clear of the village.
- In role as Thomas Restall, tell the story of how you found Henry in the tunnel.
- Role play the moment when Thomas brought Henry back to Winsley Cottage.
- Miss Hall took on six children to help her run a smallholding. In role as Henry, what would you say, or write in a letter, to any new child coming to stay.
- In role as children in the playground, gossip about what Henry did.
- What would Miss Hall say to Henry's mother in a phone conversation?

"The train tracks disappeared into the dark mouth of the tunnel. Henry stopped. To go back meant trouble."

DOWNLOAD Pie's story and activities for free at www.teachwire.net/WWIIstory

Research for writing

This makes an ideal history based project as there may be older members of the community who are willing to share memories of being evacuated or discuss their memories of the evacuees. A ten year-old child who was alive at the time of the evacuation would now be about 88 years old. Many had a wonderful time but there were also plenty of children who were treated badly and were miserable.

To set about writing a story set in your locality, begin by using a search engine to find local information. The local library or historical group should be able to provide you with books charting the history of the surrounding area. Facts need to be listed and drawn upon to bring a story alive. I was lucky to find the story of the boy who was found trying to make his way home. The skill is to weave the information into the story. As well as looking for memories about evacuees coming to the village, I made lists of any facts that I could find about the school, home life, what people wore and ate. I then wrote 'tale of fear', weaving the facts in to provide detail that might make the story seem real.

PIE CORBETT is an author and former headteacher.

Why we mustn't ignore METACOGNITION

When pupils are taught to think about how they learn, they become better learners, says **Eleanor Stringer** – and she has the research to prove it...

Freya fiddled with her pencil case. Every Friday, she would experience a quiet dread when facing the weekly spelling test. This week, though, she felt more confident than before. After a couple of weeks characterised by annoying mistakes, she had worked hard in readiness for this test. She had devised two of her own mnemonics and she had practised her 'le' ending words, as well as 'surprise' with an 'r', repeatedly.

As Mr Thomas began the spelling test, Freya listened hard. She knew that sometimes she would feel a little pressure when her teacher moved quickly onto the next spelling, but that this week she would listen carefully and remember what she had practised. One or two words were no doubt tricky, but Freya had weighed up her options each time and she was utterly confident of her success.

Before Mr Thomas had a chance to cycle through the correct spellings, Freya sat up straight, with a smile lighting up her face, fuelled by quiet satisfaction. She had already thought about her new spelling routine and how she would stick to it next week, too.

This spelling test anecdote is a familiar scene that is played out regularly across the country. The actions and thoughts of Freya as she is learning her spelling, inside and outside of the classroom, are simply the typical stuff of everyday learning and school. And yet, despite much of her thinking and strategies remaining hidden and implicit, her success is instructive. Freya exhibits the thoughts and actions of a successful self-regulated learner, and she deploys crucial metacognitive strategies.

So why does this matter? Well there's a large body of evidence that tells us how effective developing metacognition is for learning. The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit, an accessible summary of international evidence, rates it as 'high impact for very low cost, based on extensive evidence'.

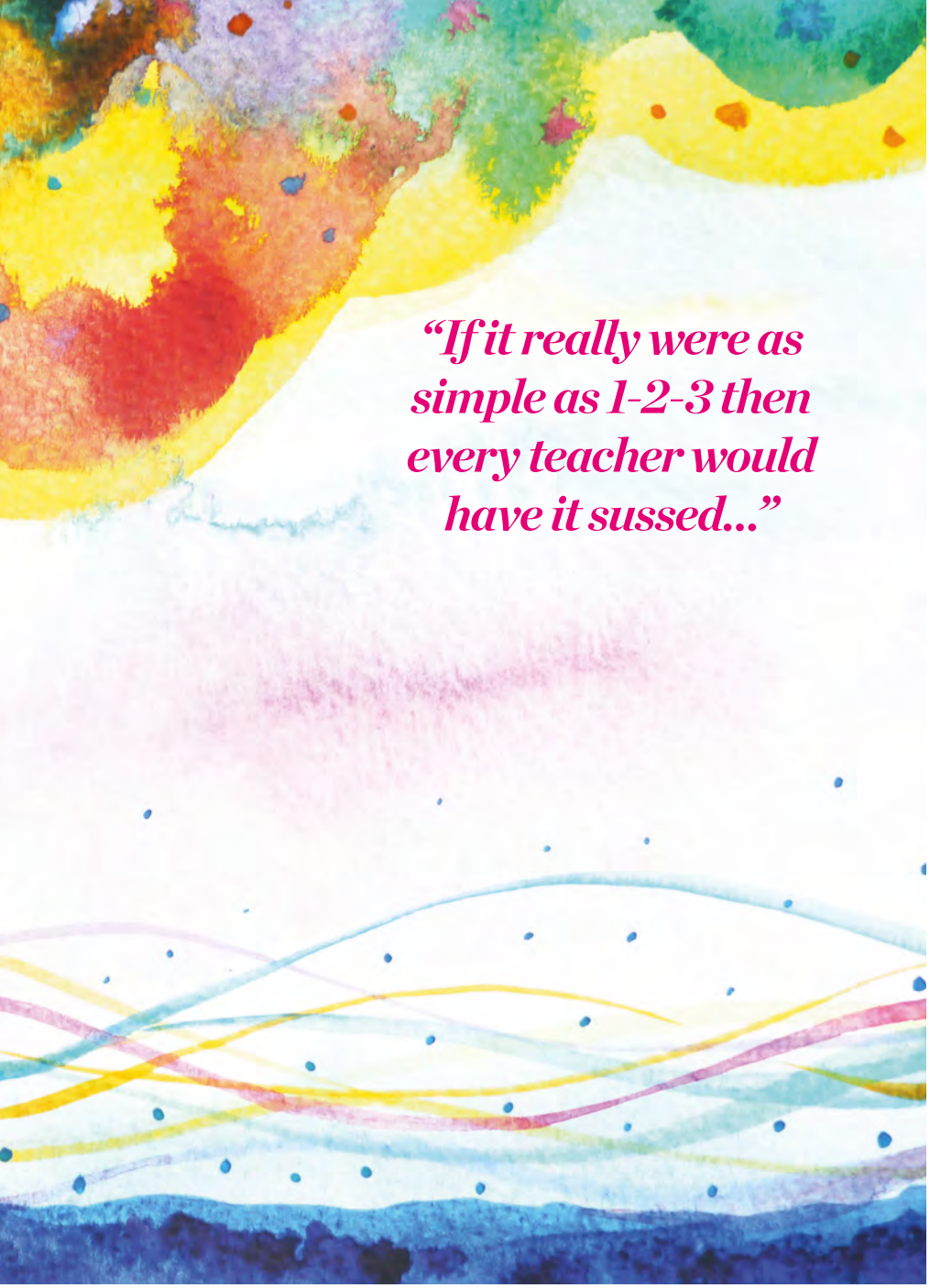
But despite all this evidence showing us the benefits of focusing on metacognition, it can still seem like an elusive topic. And with good reason. Beyond a simple definition of 'thinking about thinking' or 'learning to learn', it can be hard to describe what 'metacognition' means in the classroom, let alone put it into practice.

Plan, monitor, evaluate

On a very basic level, metacognition is about pupils' ability to monitor, direct, and review their learning. Effective metacognitive strategies get learners to think about their own learning more explicitly, usually by teaching them to set goals, and monitor and evaluate their own academic progress.

There's a common misconception that developing these metacognitive skills is only important for older pupils, and not for those in primary school. But we know from research that children as young as three can engage in a wide range of metacognitive and self-regulatory behaviours, such as setting themselves goals and checking their understanding. Focusing on metacognition in primary school is likely to bring long-term benefits to pupils' attainment.

However, 'teaching' metacognition is easier said than done; there's certainly no simple method or trick. We know that learners develop some metacognitive knowledge and skills naturally, and most teachers support metacognition in their teaching without realising it. For example, when introducing a maths problem, if the teacher talks the class through how they, as an expert learner, would think about finding a solution, they are making explicit their metacognitive processes. That said, it can be difficult to give concrete examples of



"If it really were as simple as 1-2-3 then every teacher would have it sussed..."

what metacognitive knowledge and skills actually look like.

But with a large body of international evidence telling us that when properly embedded these approaches are powerful levers for boosting learning, it's clear that we do need to spend time looking at how to do this well.

At the Education Endowment Foundation, we recently published a guidance report to support teachers in changing their classroom practice to improve their pupils' metacognitive skills (tinyurl.com/trweefreport). It offers seven practical, evidence-based recommendations, and shows how metacognition can helpfully be distilled down to three key steps in all learning:

"It is about *planning* how to undertake a task, then cognitively undertaking that activity, while *monitoring* the strategy to check progress, then *evaluating* the overall success."

Expert modelling

One recommendation from our report that could be particularly useful for younger pupils is teacher modelling. A tailor will teach an apprentice by allowing the beginner to work alongside them, watching their movements and techniques closely, modelling their craft. Teachers in all subjects do the same – revealing their expert subject knowledge and skill to their novice learners.

For example, while teaching young pupils how to perform a forward roll safely in PE, a teacher might talk through her actions as she demonstrates:

"I don't want to hurt my neck and want to do this neatly. So first, to protect my neck, I need to tuck my chin to my chest like this. Then when I start to roll, I remember not to roll onto my head. Instead, look how I'm going to roll onto my back and shoulders. This also means my back is round, so I can smoothly roll like this. Now, who can remember what I did first to protect my neck?"

This type of modelling is only effective if the pupils have access to relevant knowledge (in this example, if these are very young children, they may not even know what a forward roll is supposed to look like, so the teacher might perform one without talking it through first). It's also more effective when pupils are engaged in the task being modelled and have the opportunity to practise it immediately after the demonstration.

Structured support

Ultimately, the purpose of modelling strategies in this way is to help novice pupils become more capable of learning independently and thinking metacognitively, so the process should involve teachers making gradual changes in support.

For example, the teacher might support their pupils by using direct modelling and support, but as guided practice moves to independent practice, teacher input will change to monitoring and intervening only when necessary. Reducing support in this way helps to develop cognitive and metacognitive knowledge. Over time, such thinking becomes habitual – acting as 'internal scaffolding' that will support future learning.

Teacher modelling is just one strategy for developing metacognition. If it really were as simple as 1-2-3 then every teacher would have it sussed, but there is much more to learn and understand if we are to have a properly shared understanding of metacognition in staffrooms and classrooms around the country.

Nonetheless, what is so striking about the guidance report findings is that although we know that our pupils will develop strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning naturally, it's clear that by being more explicit in how we teach them to develop such crucial metacognitive knowledge and understanding, we can help our pupils to become much more successful and confident learners.

Eleanor Stringer is head of programmes at the EEF, and one of the authors of the EEF's guidance report on metacognition and self-regulated learning (tinyurl.com/trweefreport)

Outstanding examples

Eight fantastic literacy resources for your classroom

1

Morells Handwriting

Frustrated by poor handwriting in your school? Is slow writing speed lowering academic achievement in tests and exams? Morrells Handwriting is on a mission to improve the handwriting of all writers, from EYFS to Y13 and beyond. It's never too late to acquire legible handwriting. Morrells' ethos is to teach handwriting correctly. The high quality handwriting books improve the poorest of handwriting and the informative whole school training courses enable teaching staff to quickly fix handwriting problems: building handwriting legibility and speed; boosting student confidence and developing good handwriting habits for life.

Visit: **www.morrellshandwriting.co.uk**
email: **info@morrellshandwriting.co.uk**

3

STABILO

STABILIO is one of Europe's leading manufacturers of pens and pencils, including the award-winning EASY handwriting range of pens and pencils, specifically designed to help make writing more comfortable. STABILO is dedicated to helping the UK's children write... right. The company was the first to create ergonomic pens and pencils designed for either left or right handers, whilst encouraging the child to achieve the preferred tripod grip. For more than 160 years STABILO has been creating pens which are just like its brand: trend-conscious, inspiring and visionary!

For more information call the STABILO sales office on **01753 605656** or email **sales.uk@stabilo.com**

2

Scoop

Scoop is a bi-monthly magazine aimed at 7 to 12 year olds that publishes all forms of story, told by the most fantastic authors and illustrators including Raymond Briggs, Catherine Johnson, Tom Whipple, Jacqueline Wilson, Chris Priestley, Nicholas Bowling, Laura Dockrill, Emerald Fennell and more. Each issue includes short stories, non-fiction, poetry, comics, interviews, reviews, activities and quizzes - exploring everything from punk to painting, from science to poetry, from super-natural phenomena to playwriting!

Find out more at **www.scoopthemag.co.uk**

4

Book Life

Book Life is passionately committed to creating the very best educational books for children. The company's simple philosophy is to publish imaginative and informative books that will enrich every child's life. The books reflect the changing world around us and encompass key national curriculum areas, e.g. science, religion and culture. Each title is devised and sculpted to create a finished product that is distinctive and innovative.

www.booklifepublishing.com, 020 7649 9565, info@booklife.co.uk

5

Maverick Children's Books

Maverick is an independent publisher, which publishes picture books, early readers, graphic reluctant readers and junior fiction. By 2019 the company hopes to have a hundred early readers in its book banded reading scheme. Maverick has a strong ethos of creating high quality books with the aim to inspire a love of reading.

Investigate further at **www.maverickbooks.co.uk**

6

Good Knight, Bad Knight and the Big Game

Shortlisted for the Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards in 2016, Tom Knight returns with the armour-splitting Good Knight, Bad Knight and the Big Game, a hilarious series of middle-grade fiction about the same young rival of knights. Last term, Berkley Paggle (AKA Bad Knight) defeated a dragon at the end-of-term jousting match. When he comes back to school, he discovers that his dragon battling abilities have made him the most popular kid in class. He loves the attention, but his cousin, Godwin (AKA Good Knight), is not impressed when Berk lets his popularity go to his head.

"Genuinely, laugh-out-loud funny for little ones and adults alike..." – Teach Early Years on Good Knight, Bad Knight

7

Reading Gladiators™

Reading Gladiators™ is the annual school based reading challenge from Just Imagine... designed to promote deep level reading. It targets readers who will benefit from the challenge of reading the expertly curated selections, from opportunities for sustained reading and from taking part in collaborative reading challenges. Furthermore, the programme is designed to create reading advocates within a school, who go on to inspire other children to become more aspirational readers. This peer influence and the impact on the culture of reading has been observed by many of the schools that have taken part.

For further information about taking part in 2018/2019 visit **readinggladiators.org.uk** and get in touch

8

The Literacy Curriculum

Looking for book-based English provision which embeds all the National Curriculum requirements? The Literary Curriculum is an online, whole-school resource which provides teachers with detailed planning sequences for 100 significant and beautiful books, and school leaders with coverage maps and the curriculum links they make. Its embedded approach to planning ensures all the objectives for grammar, spelling and writing composition are covered through the text. Subscription packages are tailored to the size of the school. Get in touch to talk to one of the team at info@theliteracytree.co.uk and find out what proven impact this embedded approach has had in other schools.

literarycurriculum.co.uk
#teachthroughatext

"What incredible characters I found!"

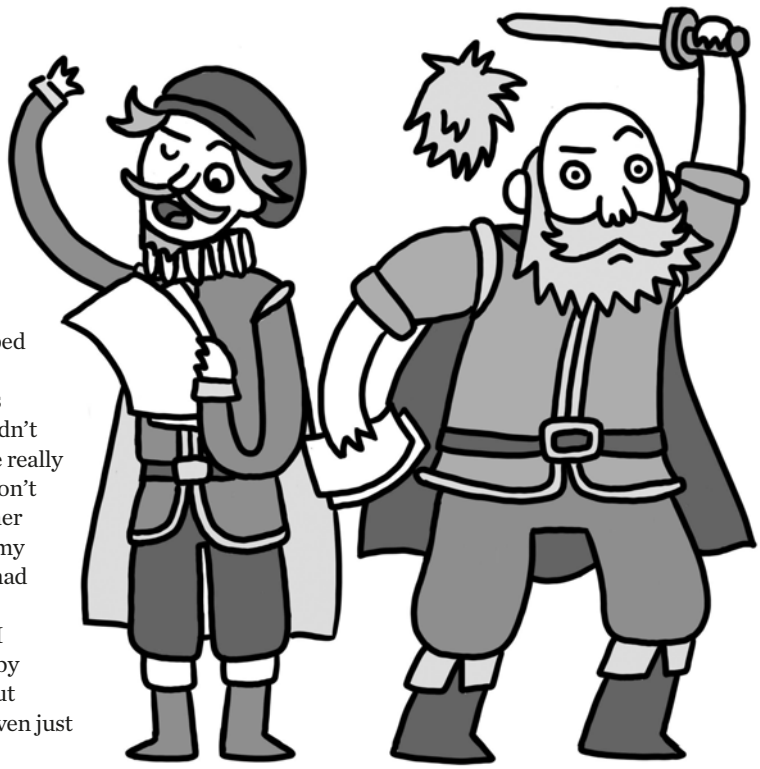
Pamela Butchart was 33 before she learnt to love Shakespeare – but with great storytelling, she reckons there's no need for children to wait nearly that long...

If it weren't for Judith Kerr, I'm not sure I'd be doing what I'm lucky enough to do today – writing stories for children. Her books are the first I can remember having, and loving; before I could even read. Those magical illustrations fascinated me, and I'd spend ages looking at them, filling in gaps in the story.

Later, when I'd learnt to decipher words for myself, I loved series books; I still do, in fact. It's so great to get to the end of a story, then realise that you don't have to say, 'goodbye'; that there's another one waiting for you. I'll read just about any genre, as long as the characters are strong. That's always been hugely important to me, and I think you can tell that when you read books that I've written; it's always the characters that stand out. T*he Secret Seven* was one of the first series that got me properly hooked – and to be able to have written two, brand new stories about those junior detectives and Scamper the dog is like a dream come true!

Dull, dry and dead

Although I read constantly throughout primary school, there was a period not long after I started high school when I stopped almost completely. I enjoyed fact books for a while, but couldn't find many that were really good – and then, I don't know, I suppose other things took over in my life. The novels we had to read, for English, didn't inspire me – I wasn't intimidated by challenging texts, but the ones we were given just weren't to my taste.



And then, of course, there was Shakespeare...

We had to read *The Merchant of Venice*. I hated everything about that title – I didn't even know what a 'merchant' was, for a start, and frankly, having it explained to to me didn't make the play seem any more appealing. It didn't help, either, that the teacher (and I can say this very firmly, being a teacher myself) made absolutely no attempt to make the text interesting, or come to life. The characters and story stayed resolutely on the page, dull, dry and dead. I rote learnt what I needed to in order to get the grade I wanted in the final exam, but I was left convinced that I couldn't understand Shakespeare, and that I definitely didn't like him.

So, when the BBC got in touch with me three years ago, asking if I'd like to rewrite a Shakespeare play for children, I was dumbfounded. In fact, I thought it must be a mistake; that they hadn't read my books, and thought I was someone else. But no, it turned out that they did know my work, and it really was me they wanted. After I'd got over my initial shock, I decided that it was a challenge I'd like to take on. I chose to tackle *Macbeth*, but instead of going straight to the original text, I read books about it, written for primary and secondary pupils.

The character connection

And oh my word; what incredible characters I found! Vibrant, complicated, intriguing characters, firing my imagination and making me actually want to read the play itself! Why had no one told me about this side of Shakespeare at school? I ended up retelling *Macbeth* using the voice of Izzy, the 8-year-old narrator of my series of books set in a primary school that starts with *Baby Aliens Got My Teacher*, and includes the Blue Peter Book Award winning *The Spy Who loved School Dinners*. It was recorded for the BBC, read by Shirley Henderson (who plays Moaning Myrtle in the *Harry Potter* films), and honestly, I think it's one of the best projects I've ever been part of.

I enjoyed it so much, in fact, that when my publisher, Nosy Crow, suggested I retell some more of Shakespeare's stories, I leapt at the chance, giving *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* the Izzy treatment. The resulting tales, along with *Macbeth*, were published together in a book called *To Wee or Not to Wee* (I couldn't believe how indecisive Hamlet was!), and it's a huge thrill for me when I hear that primary schools are using it to introduce pupils to Shakespeare. That's how it should be done, I'm sure – getting children to meet and fall in love with the characters, and become excited about the plots, so that when they finally tackle the original text, they are already ready to engage with it, and aren't put off in the way that I was. At the age of 33, the BBC was able to change my mind about Shakespeare; and now, if I only ever had one book published, I'd want it to be *To Wee or Not to Wee* – it's one of my proudest achievements.

***Pamela Butchart will be speaking at Cheltenham Literature Festival (5-14th October 2018,* cheltenhamfestivals.com /literature**

YOUNG POETS' SOCIETY

Taking 30 city kids on a creative forest retreat was an invigorating experience – and not just because I fell in a bog

Never in the field of health and safety has so much been owed by so many to so few. Namely, to me. By this, I mean to say that I fell in a bog during the risk assessment, and duly noted this hazard. As I heaved my foul-smelling self from the swamp in the New Forest, I thought dutifully of how fortunate it was that I didn't bring my nine-year-olds down into this experimental quagmire. Thankfully, this pre-visit swamp foible was the only thing to go wrong on our poetry retreat.

On the visit, in which we brought 30 children from four east London schools down to the New Forest for four days of creative wandering, we came to recognise the joy of an authentically rustic residential. Too often, even visits that take you out of the city see you following a set rota of high-ropes, orienteering and raft-building in activity centres. I love each of these activities, but the purpose of our most recent jaunt was different.

Having worked previously with Adisa – a poet who exudes so much creative energy you can charge your iPhone just by leaning it against him – he and I discussed how amazing it would be to take kids out of the city and to set up an actual retreat; some time away to replenish the soul and recuperate the mind by using it well.

We would go back to basics. We would need pencils, paper, antibacterial gel and unbridled curiosity. We would build confidence, friendships, deep thought and an unrelenting output of poetry for four days. We would experiment with the freedoms such a trip could afford us, without whiteboards, Powerpoints and vocabulary lists.

I contacted local schools in Newham until we had four, including my own, that were interested enough to commit. We booked out the whole of the youth hostel in the village of Burley and I spent an enjoyable weekend exploring the nearby forests, making maps, identifying unusual trees and falling in the aforementioned bog.

Now, there are very few primary teachers who do not value creativity at all, but only the most Dadaist among us would give complete creative freedom to an effervescent group of city kids armed with street smarts but very little field logic. With the prospect of pupils getting lost, nettled or attacked by marauding wild pigs, there was much to organise.

Adisa and I planned for almost every waking second of the week, to such an extent that – funnily enough – everything seemed very free and open. We could all just focus on the learning. As far as the kids were concerned, we were walking aimlessly through the ferns and gorse, but actually, the whole thing was being quietly steered from the sides.

The children responded unbelievably well to the visit. Despite it being the first time away from home for many of them, these young poets donned their thermals, sharpened their pencils and forged new friendships. We spent hours out and about in the breath-taking landscapes, dodging darkness and drizzle, telling stories and sharing ideas.

Us teachers had cause to marvel at what the children were able to produce in this strange learning context. Pupils who were shy and reluctant to contribute

"In order to learn, you have to understand the point of what you are learning – tying creative writing in with real world experiences can give children enormous motivation."

Lauren Child – Guest editor

in the classroom were overflowing with dazzling similes and inventive turns of phrase. As the group gelled, we came to know each other's personalities through our poetry; one girl amused us with her refusal to eschew the topic of the presidential election:

'Place your hands on the soil; feel the sorrow of sad Hillary, who failed'.

With almost annoying ease, Adisa's approach supported pupils to come up with genuinely good poetry. I have spent weeks in class labouring over the precise functions of figurative language with a politely disinterested literacy group, the output of which is either something formulaic and uninspiring, or some nonsense that nearly rhymes (sorry). The magic in the forest wasn't one of trolls and pixies, but this poet's ability to share his own work, point at a tree and suddenly cause 30 pencils to begin scribbling meaningful stanzas.

Pupils were selected for the visit based on the combination of pupil premium eligibility and an existing proclivity towards writing. We had introverted diarists, fervent MCs, bum-joke enthusiasts, grandiose thespians, young beatniks and those kids whose minds are so complex they often feel burdened by their thoughts.

I teach two twins, both with brilliant minds that work in different ways. The girl has an astounding sensibility for language; not only a wide vocabulary but a really intricate understanding of the difference between words with similar meanings. The poetry she created on the retreat was in turn visceral, well-crafted and moving.

Her brother has an imagination that, in class, seems harder to tame. If you ask what's on his mind, he narrates a maelstrom of ideas swirling around his head; the meaning of life, strange dreams and scientific questions all merge into an indecipherable fog of curiosity. Over the course of the week, in his joyfully idiosyncratic way, he commited his thoughts to the page with a new-found clarity.

There was an esoteric and unburdened feeling to our learning. We spent four days without written learning objectives, and I am pleased to report that nobody died as a consequence. The visit cast light on some of our classroom hypocrisies, whereby we encourage pupils to be inventive, yet often mark them punitively when they steer away from the narrow track that we have implicitly planned for them.

We spent our final evening sitting by the log fire, contemplating ways in which we had changed during the retreat, casting our regrets into the flames and sharing our favourite fragments from our notepads.

For me, this is the kind of learning experience that I became a teacher in the hope of finding. Adisa said, "Time and time again they would come up with lines that would leave me thinking, 'I wish I'd thought of that.' I have returned invigorated with a new lease of creative life flowing through my veins." And for the pupils? They are still talking about it now, and are pining for a reunion.

THE LIFE OF A BIRD

A POEM BY ABIA, Y5

I am just a few bird bones
And I have hardly any feathers
So I don't want to be this way.
I dream back to when I was a chick.
I came face to face with a giant,
snapping crocodile!
A bigger chick distracted it.
I don't want to be this way.
So I dream back to when I was
inside my egg.
I was safe there, protected by
my mother.
Not knowing that the world was
so dangerous.
I love being this way.
I dream on and on and on about this.

Jonny Walker (@jonnywalker_edu) is assistant headteacher at Park Primary, Newham.

"Miss Zeederberg said I could write a book, so I did"

If it hadn't been for one, inspirational teacher, **Lauren St John** might never have become a writer...

I put the fact that I'm a writer now down to three things. First, reading *all the time* – I was obsessed from the second I learned how to do it. Secondly, my mum, who inspired me to dream and told me I was capable of anything. Finally, and most importantly of all, I owe an enormous amount to Miss Zeederberg, who was my high school English teacher for just two years, and had such a profound impact on me during that time that it has lasted my whole life.

I don't remember actually learning to read, but I recall very clearly the feeling of freedom that being able to read brought me. The sheer joy of being able to dive into a book and escape to a land of adventures is unlike anything else; within two pages I could be on the moors with the Famous Five, or riding a black stallion across the desert. I loved mysteries, and animal stories – I'd read them over and over, and in between I'd pick up my dad's Westerns, or one of the art, history or travel books that my mum relished; I learned so much from her enthusiasms.

> *"The sheer joy of being able to dive into a book and escape to a land of adventures is unlike anything else"*

I was born in Zimbabwe. Until I was eight, we lived in a town; after that, we moved to a farm – and then, when I was 11, to a farm and game reserve called Rainbow's End. My life was full of animals, and I even had a pet giraffe, which was where the inspiration for my *White Giraffe* series of books came from. Because we lived in such a remote area, I went to boarding schools – not somewhere private and fancy, like Mallory Towers, but cheap, government ones. I adored boarding school – I had tons of friends, and for me it was an amazing time. But my experience of *schooling* wasn't great. At junior school there was a sadistic, abusive headteacher who would beat us and yell at us; and at high school, we were totally unsupervised, so my friends and I spent most of our time working out how to beat the system and get out of afternoon prep. I didn't learn very much.

However, when I was 12, Miss Zeederberg became my English teacher, and she was incredible. For reasons unknown, she thought I was a brilliant writer. She encouraged me, she built up my confidence, she told me again and again that I *could* write. And when she left the school, two years later, she said to me, "Lauren, by the time you are 18, you'll have written a book." That stuck in my head – through all the years that followed,

Illustrations © Beidi Guo

floating around, unsure of what to do with my life, I never forgot it. Miss Zeederberg said I would write a book, so I believed I could. I'm not sure teachers always realise just how powerful what they say can be, especially to dreamy, slightly hopeless children like I was. They can plant seeds which might flower years later. That's pretty wonderful.

When I found out that an extract from one of my books was being used for the Y6 SATs, in 2016, I was stunned. And honoured; it was a huge compliment. But there was a certain amount of irony there, too. I left school at 16, with a handful of O levels – and while I got As for both the English language exams I took, my result for English literature was a U, largely because I speed-read *Wuthering Heights* the night before the exam! There is such pressure on today's children to be perfect, and get amazing results; but really, through reading, and the inspiration of your parents, teachers, and other role models, you can achieve fantastic things, which aren't all exam-dependent.

I do worry about how prescriptive the teaching of writing has come to be. I visited a school the other day and watched an award being presented to a child for 'best fronted adverbial of the week'; I don't even know what a 'fronted adverbial' is – and that kind of classroom focus on naming grammatical structures would have killed writing for me. Encouraging children to love language and express themselves freely and creatively on the page is how you start developing them as writers; that, and building a lifelong love of reading. It doesn't matter what you read, either – it could be *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* one day, *the Famous Five* the next, and *Wuthering Heights* after that. For me, it's keeping children loving books that matters most.

Miss Zeederberg emigrated shortly after leaving the school where she taught me; and I ended up living in the UK. I've tried to find her, countless times, and even dedicated my book, *Rainbow's End*, to her. I wish I could tell her how things have turned out. She believed in me; her replacement didn't think I could do anything. Great teachers can make all the difference.

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FRANKLIN WATTS

The magic of SPOKEN STORIES

Take a deep breath, put your book to one side and step into the world of oral narrative. You'll be surprised by children's reactions, says **Mary Medlicott**

The boy was about five years old. As I'd learn later, he had special needs and rarely spoke, certainly not in the classroom. At this point, sitting by himself, he seemed completely absorbed in his work. When I approached, I saw he'd drawn the two houses in the story I'd told to his class and in between were about nine hills. In the story I'd told there are only three. But, hey, children love drawing hills and what this boy was eager to tell me was that he'd used white crayon on the top of some of his hills and green on all the others.

"You see, it's been snowing," the boy said with great pride. "These hills are where the snow has melted. And those are where it hasn't." For my part, I felt enormously touched. Making pictures of a story I've told is something I've invited children to do on innumerable occasions. It generally produces good results. But never before had I seen the idea this particular boy produced.

Afterwards, talking to the classroom staff, I knew he'd given me valuable evidence for how oral storytelling and follow-up activities can bring us new information about a child's potential.

What makes it different?

First, there has to be a story. In my experience both as storyteller and storytelling trainer, I know that an orally told story can bring about a completely different kind of attention from one that is read aloud. Partly this can be attributed to the fact that an oral story visibly does not belong to an author or illustrator. It comes out of a teller's mouth, goes into listeners' ears and, inside their heads, is open to the imaginations of those who've heard it to make of it what they will. Stories change as listeners absorb them. Hearing how and why is both fascinating and instructive.

Unfortunately, telling a story without a book is often a terrifying prospect to those who've never tried it before. This was a major reason why I was pleased to undertake my new publication, *Storytelling and Story-Reading in Early Years* – it offered the chance to help.

The first step on the path to oral storytelling is to accept the fears (we all have them). Then it's a matter of choosing and preparing a story, and trying it. After only the first time of doing this, most people are amazed at the difference it makes – the different quality of attention it produces. When novice storytellers then take the chance to think about the emotional dynamics of a story as well as such practical matters as props and tones of voice, they are well on their way to becoming able to exploit the full potential of oral telling.

Getting children involved

Take the example of Mrs Wiggle and Mrs Waggle, the story I referred to above. Making use throughout of the teller's hands and thumbs, this is so active a story that children can't help joining in; the teller's hands become doors, opening and shutting as their owners leave or enter. They then change into pointers on the journeys they take. On day one of the story, Mrs Wiggle travels those three hills to go and visit Mrs Waggle who, alas, appears to be out when her friend arrives. The second day, it's Mrs Waggle that makes the trip, again without success. The third day – and how amazing this is! – the two women meet on top of the middle hill.

The story is simple but engaging and the words in which it's told are so rhythmic and so often repeated – 'Up the hill and down the hill, up the hill and down the hill, up the hill and down the hill' – that children can't help but join in. Shy children, noisy children, learners of English – all naturally become a chorus which learns the story as it proceeds without consciously realising what's being achieved.

Where's the learning?

To introduce follow-up activities for the Mrs Wiggle story, a simple approach can be first to demonstrate on the whiteboard how the two houses in the story might appear, one on each side of the picture. Next, offer children large pieces of paper and crayons and invite them to draw the whole scene. As they progress, go round to observe what they're doing. You'll often discover new characters emerging. Mrs Wiggle's daughter (did you think she had one?) is taking a bunch of flowers to Mrs Waggle because the latter is sick. The postman is delivering a letter from one woman to the other. The two women together are pushing a cherry (a cherry?) up one of the hills. Such ideas create opportunities for the children producing them also to consider what the characters might be thinking or saying. A natural path for you as adult is to scribe what transpires, or for the children to write it themselves.

Shy children, noisy children, learners of English – all naturally become a chorus which learns the story as it proceeds without consciously realising what's being achieved

The process so far described – oral telling followed by the opportunity either to draw one scene of a story or create a storyboard or story-map of it all – works just as well with every year group in the primary age range. In my view, it can – and does – lead to three major gains for the participants. The first is the acquisition of complete stories that can remain in their minds. How many times have I returned to a school where children spontaneously remind me of whole stories I've told them on a previous occasion? Retelling a story in your head involves visualisation and language. Educationally, this can't be bad.

A second major gain is the acquisition of a sense of authorship and a third arises from the sense of communal achievement to which oral storytelling typically gives rise. Children who hear stories love to share their ideas about them. Children who make pictures of stories love to have these pictures displayed. Then they'll not only be seen by their peers but when words have been included, perhaps in speech-bubbles, perhaps below, their peers will notice these too. Besides, such pictures can be made into books.

In sum, I feel I want to say that oral storytelling gives so much that it's a crying shame it isn't a normal part of all schools. My advice – or is it my plea? – is 'Try it!'

Mary Medlicott is a professional storyteller, storytelling trainer and storytelling workshop leader. She is also author of Storytelling and Story-Reading in Early Years (£14.99, Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

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GRAMMAR? DIFFICULT? *Don't make me laugh...*

If children are struggling to grasp some of the trickier bits of the English curriculum, turn the whole thing into a joke, says **Giulia Baker**...

Why did the teacher have to wear sunglasses? Because her pupils were too bright.

Do you get it?

Most of you will have heard this riddle at some stage or another. If you first encountered it as an adult, it might have induced a groan, but if you were a child you may well have found it hilariously funny since it's exactly the kind of thing that's a hit with an audience of seven year olds – as a glance at any contemporary joke book will prove.

To enjoy the joke you first have to 'get' it. For a child, this means reflecting on the language used and identifying which words and phrases might have more than one meaning, then switching between the definitions until the correct 'fit' is found. It's more challenging than processing the language of, say, an age-appropriate fiction text, yet children are happy to stick with it because of the pleasure they get from unlocking the riddle. Which is precisely why jokes are a great learning resource – few children, after all, would choose a lesson on grammar over one on jokes (though in reality the two are not mutually exclusive).

Riddles into resources

So far so good, but how exactly can riddles become part of lessons? What skills can they help to develop, and where do they actually fit into the curriculum?

The good news is that riddles can be used to meet multiple criteria teachers need to plan for on a daily basis. As short, self-contained texts, they provide opportunities for children to perform, listen, read, problem-solve, discuss, explain, compose and evaluate (that's a lot of boxes ticked already). Listening skills, in particular, are well served as children must pay close attention to strings of sound when a riddle is read aloud. Take the following, for example: *Why did the jelly wobble? Because it saw the milkshake.* In order for children to make sense of this riddle, they not only have to divide the sounds they've heard into phonemes, blends and words – they must also think about word boundaries and potential meanings. Is it 'milkshake' or 'milk shake'? Building on this can lead to discussions on compound words and the different ways in which they can be formed.

Giggling at grammar

The very act of 'getting' a riddle involves children having to consciously reflect upon word choices, language rules and linguistic concepts that might otherwise remain tacit. Consider this example: *How was the blind carpenter able to see? He picked up his hammer and saw.*

Here we can introduce, practise and consolidate points such as homonyms ('saw'), word class (is 'saw' a noun or a verb?) or tense (the irregular past tense of 'see' is 'saw'). All of these are difficult concepts to grasp, especially for those who struggle with the more formal aspects of literacy, but by introducing them in the context of a riddle we can make them altogether less daunting.

An idiom's guide

How about using riddles to develop speaking and listening skills? Children enjoy explaining how they 'get' riddles and this, in turn, allows them to express their individual thoughts, ideas and understanding in a non-threatening and entertaining context. Or what about working on the specialist vocabulary of specific linguistic concepts? Why not lead a discussion about phonemes using this riddle: *What's a whale's favourite food?' Fish and ships.* Or you could introduce children to idioms and figurative language with this classic: *What does spiderman do when he's angry? He goes up the wall.*

While the focus here is on experimenting with and understanding linguistic concepts, the skills needed to 'get' a riddle are far more wide reaching. After all, can you think of any activity in which the ability to look at a problem from more than one angle is not useful or desirable?

Prepare to be dazzled

If at this point you're still not entirely convinced that teaching English with riddles won't get you laughed out of the classroom, I can offer you the assurance that academic research gives this approach the thumbs up. It shows that working in this way develops creative thinking skills, higher order reading skills, and improves reading levels. So next time you're planning your language lesson, don't rule out riddles. Give them a try and see the benefits they can bring for your pupils. You never know, it might prove so effective that you end up needing to wear sunglasses yourself!

Giulia is a primary teacher and former literacy co-ordinator. She recently completed her PhD at Cardiff University investigating children's understanding of verbal riddles.

"Reading isn't just about decoding words - it's about understanding what the writer is attempting to communicate through those words and your reaction to them."

Lauren Child – Guest editor

How to teach with riddles

Find regular opportunities for learning in your classroom...

SPEAKING & LISTENING

Discuss what riddles are and how they work with your class before reading a selection aloud. Encourage children to focus on the language used and to pick out the words and phrases responsible for making the riddles funny. Use this as an opportunity to introduce, practise and consolidate terms and linguistic concepts such as phonemes, homonyms, homophones, compound words, tense, and idioms (although not necessarily all at the same time!). Point out that you sometimes have to go back and look for another meaning in order to 'get' a riddle.

WRITING

Get children to brainstorm lists of homonyms, homophones, compound words, idioms etc. and use these as the basis for writing their own riddles. What riddle might they make from the idiom 'a piece of cake', for example? ('Why did the schoolboy eat his homework? Because his teacher said it was a piece of cake!')

RIDDLE BOX

Provide a riddle box in the classroom in which children can post any riddles they have heard / read / composed. Read out a selection at the end of each day (even if only two or three) and discuss what makes them funny, encouraging children to use the relevant terms for the different linguistic concepts that have been used to elicit humour.

READING & REASONING

Introduce a multiple choice activity by providing a riddle together with three potential answers (only one of which is the riddle's original punchline). Ask children to pick which they believe to be the 'authentic' answer and to justify their selection.

PERFORMING & EVALUATING

Allow pupils to read their riddles to the rest of the class (or in pairs / groups). Encourage them to reflect on which language features worked best to make the riddles funny (and which didn't) and how this knowledge can be used in future activities.

STORY TIME

Read together the Amelia Bedelia books – not strictly riddles, but nonetheless humorous – in which Amelia frequently misunderstands directions (e.g. make a jelly roll) to reinforce the linguistic concepts used in riddles to create humour.

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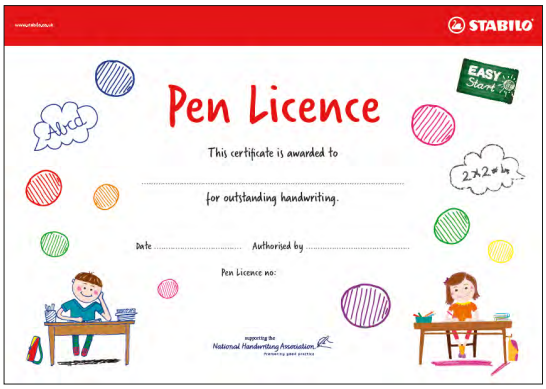

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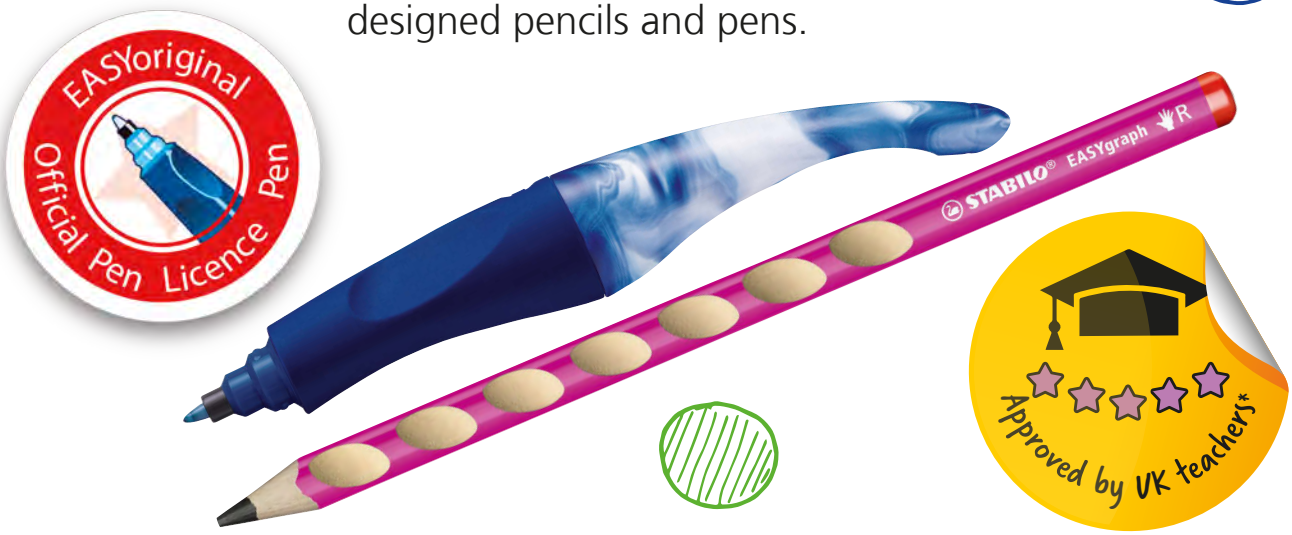

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A Bear Called Paddington

Celebrate the famous bear's 60th anniversary by looking back at the book where it all began...

CAREY FLUKER HUNT

"A bear? On Paddington station?" Mrs Brown looked at her husband in amazement. "Don't be silly, Henry. There can't be!"

But there it was, sitting on a suitcase with a label around its neck, surveying the world earnestly from beneath a very battered hat. 'Please look after this bear. Thank you' said the label – and how could the Browns refuse such a polite request? Paddington went home with them to eat marmalade sandwiches and the rest, as they say, is history.

In the 60 years since *A Bear Called Paddington* was published, his adventures have been translated into 40 languages and many millions of copies of the books have been sold across the world.

Described by his creator Michael Bond as 'eternally optimistic', Paddington stands up for fairness and common sense but is always getting himself into scrapes despite his best intentions. "I know just what (Paddington's) thinking," Bond said, shortly before his death last year at the age of 91. "To me he's very real." And it's this combination of integrity, belief and joie de vivre that gives Bond's stories their enduring appeal.

A Bear Called Paddington remains as engagingly fresh and accessible today as it was in 1958 and is great fun to read aloud. The chapters feature linked yet self-contained stories, offering rich opportunities for cross-curricular activities. There's also plenty of scope for children to read on independently through the other titles in the series.

How to share the book

What do children already know about Paddington? They'll probably talk about film or TV versions. Discuss the 'page to screen' idea, then explain that you're going to read the very first book, written 60 years ago. What was the world like in 1958? Find out first-hand from people who can share memories.

Show Peggy Fortnum's title page drawing. What does it tell us about Paddington? Read Michael Bond's description: "It seemed a very unusual kind of bear. It was brown in colour ... and it was wearing a most odd-looking hat, with a wide brim." What does the drawing add to Bond's words? (Dirty paws, Paddington's vulnerability.)

When you start reading, aim to share a whole chapter at a time so children can become absorbed in the story. Leave plenty of time for discussion. Prioritise storytime so you're reading when children are alert and you won't be interrupted. And keep the momentum going – a daily chapter will make all the difference to everyone's engagement and enjoyment.

Practical activities

Story structures

"Things are always happening to me. I'm that sort of bear."

Paddington means well but is always getting into trouble. Choose two escapades to compare and analyse. Create a timeline for each and mark key events. What decisions does Paddington make and why does he act as he does? What challenges does he face and how are they resolved? Add this information to your timelines, then use to discuss story structure. Can you invent some new 'happenings' for Paddington? Read your stories aloud, then record and share with other classes.

Friends for Paddington

Bond chose Paddington's name because he "liked the sound of it, and names are important – particularly if you are a bear."

Give a soft toy or photo of one to each child. Using atlases and gazetteers, make a list of possible bear names for children to choose from. Create character profiles for your bears – fill in quizzes to prompt imaginative thinking – then make each bear a passport and suitcase. Once the bears are ready to travel, send them home to take part in family activities. Document to share in class and use as a prompt for reportage and story writing.

Good manners

"He looks the sort of bear who means well."

Paddington's Aunt Lucy taught him to be polite. Find textual evidence for Paddington's thoughtfulness and good manners. Why do people value politeness and courtesy? Roleplay being courteous in everyday situations, then list things you consider good and bad manners. Do you agree about everything? Why or why not? Are good manners the same everywhere and under every circumstance?

"Different people have different ideas about being good."

Is being polite the same as being good? What is courtesy? Is it possible to be polite and bad? Use P4C approaches to explore these or similar questions. Can you agree on Paddington-inspired guidelines to help everyone be more caring and courteous?

What choices does Paddington make in these stories, and what are the attributes that drive these choices? (Kindness, empathy, practicality.) Bond says Paddington "has his feet firmly on the ground and ... a very strong sense of right and wrong" – so much so that when faced with a problem, Bond often asked himself what Paddington would do. Draw up a list of challenging situations. How might Paddington deal with them? Make a 'What would Paddington do?' poster for your classroom.

Map work

"Paddington liked geography. At least, he liked his geography..."

Look at a map to help you work out Paddington's Peru-London itinerary. He was going to tell Judy about South America, but "never got round to it". Research South America and create an illustrated display. Use what you've discovered to invent stories for Paddington to tell about his exploits, making them informative as well as imaginative.

What would Paddington think of your hometown? Take teddies for a walk and look at your neighbourhood through their eyes. What do they notice and what appeals to them? Draw and annotate maps showing your discoveries and use to help write a bear's guide to your area.

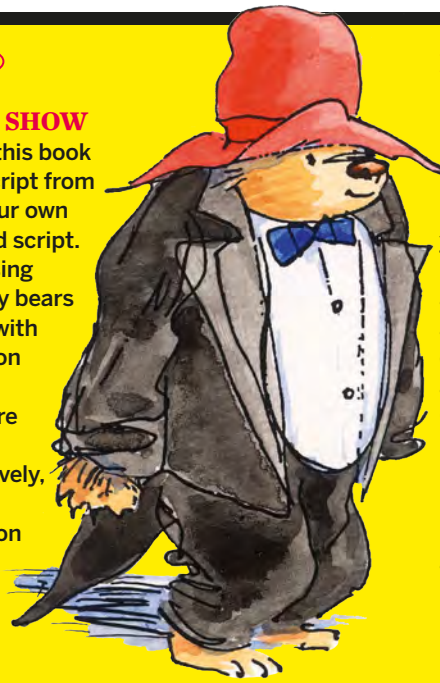
Take it further

ELEVENSES FOR CHARITY

Paddington and Mr Gruber are very fond of elevenses. They particularly like buns and cocoa – but your children might prefer something different. Design a survey to discover everybody's favourite snack then analyse your data and present as graphs and charts. Hold a Paddington-inspired elevenses sale using your market research to inform menu choices and donate your profits to charity.

A PADDINGTON SHOW

Retell a story from this book by creating a playscript from the text, or write your own Paddington-inspired script. Act out the story using hand puppets, teddy bears or a model theatre with cut-out characters on straws. See tinyurl.com/tpmodeltheatre for toy theatre resources. Alternatively, practise conjuring tricks like Paddington and perform your own variety show.



MESSY PLAY

Paddington loves getting his paws into things and often ends up very sticky. Find out about the benefits of sensory/messy play for young children and talk to EY teachers about these activities. Can you design a safe and enjoyable Paddington-inspired messy play activity for EY children? Observe them taking part and interview teachers afterwards. How did the participants respond and what did they learn? Could you improve your activity? Write an illustrated report or make a presentation.

Paddington uses Mr Brown's shaving cream to draw a map of South America on the bathroom floor. What 'messy media' could you use to draw maps? (Squirty cream, coloured sand, marmalade!)

Suitcases

"The suitcase was old and battered and on the side ... were the words WANTED ON VOYAGE."

In his suitcase, Paddington has an empty jar of marmalade, a scrapbook, some South American coins and a photo of Aunt Lucy. What would you put in your suitcase if you had to leave home? Discuss, draw pictures and write about your choices.

Prepare similarly-labelled suitcases, fill with props and arrange for discovery. Who could they belong to? Examine the contents and present your conclusions as news articles, stories or annotated illustrations.

Bears like marmalade

Taste a selection of marmalades and check ingredients. Which do you prefer and why? Interview an experienced marmalade-maker about ingredients, recipes, equipment and techniques. Review recipes, then choose one to investigate. Prepare marmalade according to the recipe and taste it, then make measured alterations (more or less sugar; different types of citrus fruit). What effects do your changes have on your product? Write scientifically about what you've done and learnt, or create infographics showing how to make marmalade.

Class council

Read chapter two and extract arguments for and against Paddington's presence at number 32, Windsor Gardens. Are these arguments convincing? Why or why not? How is humour used?

Convene a class council to determine whether or not a toy bear can remain in school. Group children and assign each team a statement: bears belong in their natural habitats; bears could bite somebody; keeping a bear in school would be expensive; bears make a mess.

Ask groups to prepare arguments in support of their statement, along with questions to ask others. Appoint a chairperson and agree ground rules: everybody must listen and be polite, etc. Invite spokespeople to present their arguments, then invite questions and discussion from other groups. Vote on whether the bear can stay – then write about the process and summarise arguments.

Can you adapt this to enable children to debate relevant issues? Decide on topics you would like to explore, linking to SMSC and British values, and take a democratic vote on where to start.

Shopping

"That bear gets more for his ten pence than anyone I know..."

Visit a market to discover how they operate. Working in groups, compete to find the best or most productive way to spend an agreed amount of money. What can you buy for 10p? What would two shillings have bought in 1958? Find out about the old money that Paddington used.

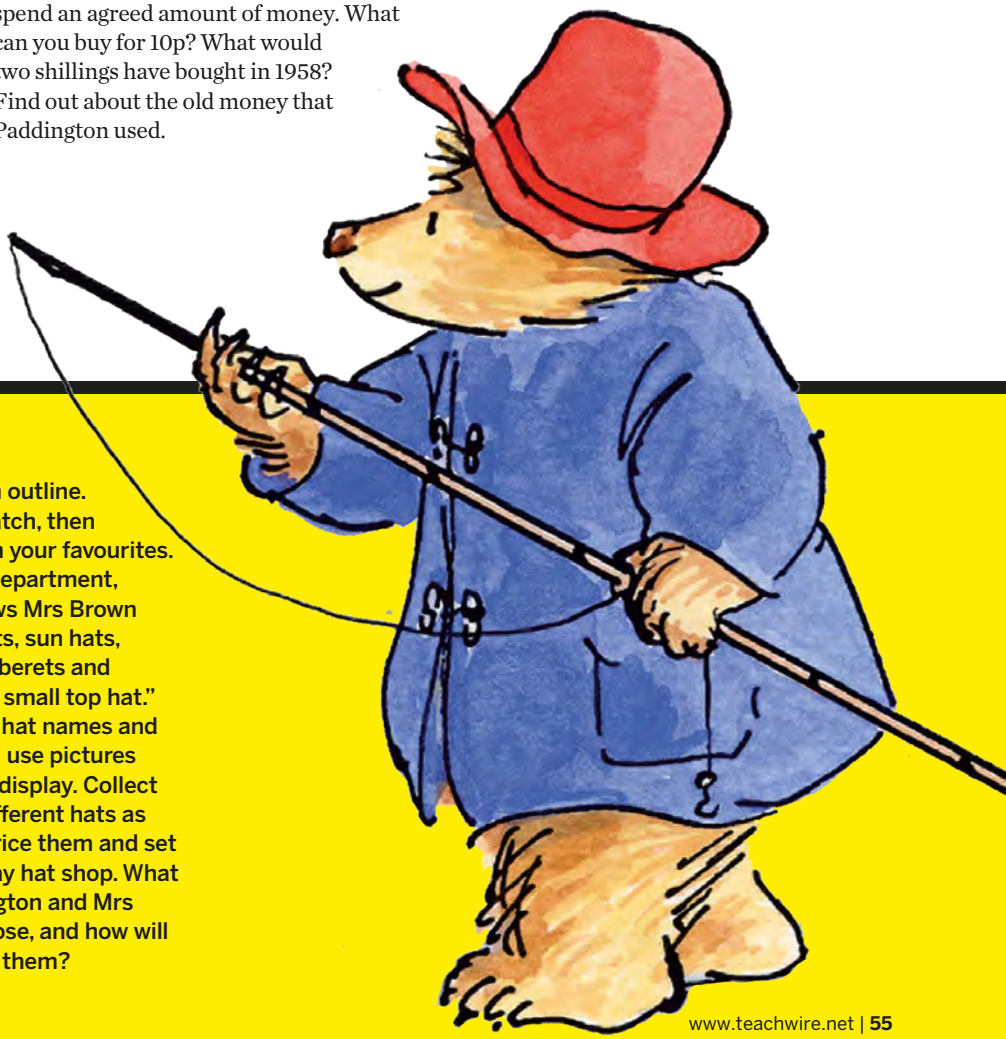
Loved this? Try these...

- *Love From Paddington*
- *More About Paddington*
- *Paddington Abroad*
- *Paddington Helps Out*

"He can have a pound a week, the same as the other children."

How do you think Paddington should spend his money? Draw pictures showing things he could buy with one week's pocket money (or two or three).

Carey Fluker Hunt is a freelance writer, children's books ambassador and creative learning consultant. She is a founder member of Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, where she was creative projects manager for many years.



PADDINGTON'S CLOTHES

Paddington has a blue duffle coat with red lining and toggles, an old bush-hat with a wide brim, a plastic mackintosh, a green woollen beret with a pom-pom, a weekend bag with 'PB' on, a straw sunhat, a bucket and spade, sunglasses, a rubber tyre and a labelled suitcase. Assemble a Paddington-inspired dressing-up box and use for roleplay and as a stimulus for drawing. Design new outfits by cutting paper clothing using scraps of fabric and wallpaper to fit a Paddington outline. Mix and match, then photograph your favourites. In the hat department, Albert shows Mrs Brown "bowler hats, sun hats, trilby hats, berets and even a very small top hat." Investigate hat names and styles, then use pictures to create a display. Collect as many different hats as possible. Price them and set up a roleplay hat shop. What will Paddington and Mrs Brown choose, and how will Albert help them?

Shelves of INSPIRATION

Keeping up with technology can make your school library an even more powerful place for learning and discovery, says **Alison Tarrant**

As everyone who's worked in them knows, libraries are far from being dust-filled retreats for people who refuse to give up scrolls and their beloved, ancient index cataloguing systems; at their best, they are hubs of energy and inspiration – often using the latest technological developments to remain so. School librarians seek to do three main things in their day to day jobs: increase engagement from pupils; reduce barriers to learning; and support teachers. Technology can be a helpful tool for all of these areas.

Most libraries would struggle these days without up to date Library Management Software (or LMS in library speak); keeping track of thousands of resources, group reads, additional worksheets and all the borrowers just isn't possible in most school libraries without one – and many LMS systems do much more than this, too. Some have integrated Attitude to Reading surveys, single search functions across all resources and reading trackers, and may even be used for uploading and holding school made documents as well. Modern LMS offerings both reduce barriers (such as time spent looking for resources), and increase engagement. Moreover, this sophisticated technology is a huge temptation for another important element of any primary school library – in that it can encourage children to get involved as pupil helpers, which is a great thing.

Breaking barriers

But however keen pupils are, the fact remains that if they face barriers to

literacy that aren't being addressed they are going to struggle meaningfully to participate in a reading culture. Again, tech can come to the rescue.

For example, audio books are a powerful way to spark interest, and can help reduce cultural barriers to reading. I know of families who listen to an audio book over dinner and then discuss it together, which can be an incredibly influential, enabling everyone to get involved; and now that audio streaming sites and e-audio lending are available it's a great way for any library to encourage that extra family participation in reading.

Book apps are another brilliant way of engaging children – especially those who might think of themselves as 'reluctant readers'. Two of my personal favourites for the primary age range are *The Monster at the End of this Book* by Sesame Street, and *The Fantastic Flying Books of Morris Lessmore*. With both of these, the reader has to participate in the story to move it on, and they are well put together in terms of graphics and plot development. (Morris Lessmore has also been made into a short film, which is equally delightful, and opens up further learning opportunities). The strength with book apps is how they allow the child to interact independently and have fun; so whilst they don't work as a whole class read, for initiating a love of literature they can be fantastic.

Added extras

Book reviews are, of course, a great way of encouraging readers to pick up a title they might not otherwise have considered – and turning a review into a word cloud (which you can do very simply online) can increase the likelihood of that happening, by reducing the number of words, adding colour and varying the font size, thus giving pupils an appealing and accessible first taste of the book that's being written about. Canva is another great piece of tech – it's an online graphic design tool that creates amazing posters and bookmarks, really easily. For some children, it's touches like this that can make all the difference to their relationship with reading (and for quite a few teachers, too!)

As well as e-audio, e-books can also have a role to play in reducing barriers to literacy. All the e-book lending platforms I've looked into feature the essential elements of allowing readers to change the font size and style, and the background colour; while some have the additional functionality of being able to embed notes, images, clips and links in the text. What a brilliant learning tool – to give a child a book slightly out of their comfort zone, but with the additional information they will need to make sense of it by themselves actually embedded within it.

Staff support

The library has to have tech for teachers, too. LMS systems, for example, do the routine things of sharing lists of overdue books so a classroom reminder can be issued; but can also allow online discussion, and help increase staff book knowledge – two key components of creating reading communities according to Teresa Cremin and the UKLA/OU research. Meanwhile, technology allows engagement even when the library isn't staffed – perhaps through QR codes that take pupils to a book trailer, or a teacher to some teaching resources for specific titles; there are fantastic sites that can be used to introduce activities during or after reading, building children's technology skills and checking their understanding of the text.

Even things as simple as shared online documents can be vital to supporting teachers and teaching assistants – a digital spreadsheet with titles of books ranked by age and linked to online resources for example, which can both increase someone's knowledge of high quality books and be a teaching tool pre-packed with comprehension questions or book trailers.

And finally, let's not forget the library staff themselves. They have a lot of demands on their time, and the huge number of high quality children's books being published means there's a good deal to keep up with. Luckily, there are a number of brilliant of YouTube channels making recommendations and reviewing books – allowing school library staff to demonstrate their multitasking skills, and catalogue while listening to some CPD!

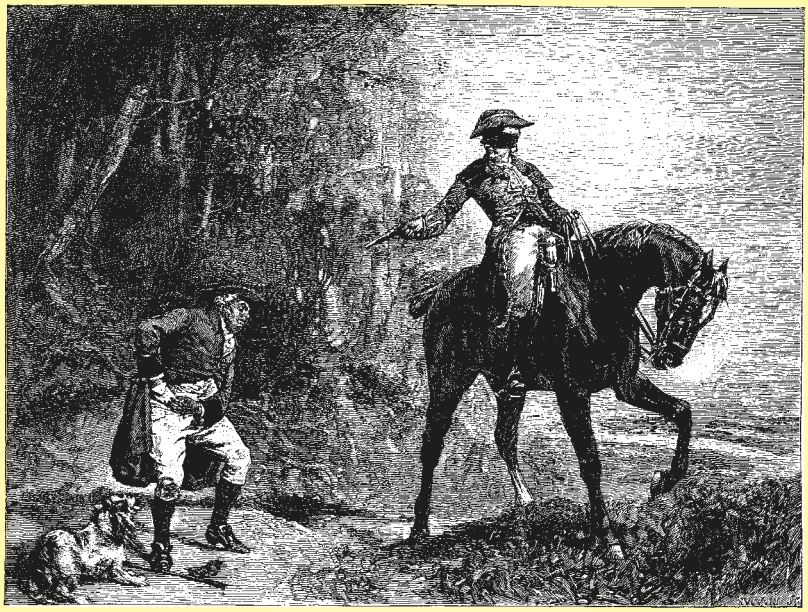
Alison Tarrant is director of the School Library Association.

FURTHER READING

Most of the technology covered in this article has been reviewed in *The School Librarian* – the quarterly journal of the School Library Association. The School Library Association is committed to supporting high levels of library provision, and ensuring the best outcome for all pupils. Membership is available to organisations for £89 a year – as well as the journal, members receive access to exclusive website resources, discounted publications and training and a personalised advice line for library staff, heads, governors and teachers. For more information email info@sla.org.uk or tweet @uksla.

Beyond The HIGHWAYMAN

If you're happy to share Alfred Noyes' famous narrative poem with primary school pupils, then why stop there, asks **Bob Cox**...



In many primary classrooms you can hear the '*tlot tlot, tlot tlot*' of a horse's hooves as described by Alfred Noyes in his much loved 1905 poem, *The Highwayman*; and it's often a memorable and challenging experience for pupils. Recitals, drama and sound effects follow upon a narrative wave of action – then there is the alliteration of clashing and clattering on the cobbles, the challenging vocabulary of 'ostler' or 'doe-skin', and even, if we dare go there, the 'red-lipped daughter'! The whole classroom travels with the highwayman along the 'ribbon of moonlight' and hardly notices when the bell goes. The potential for learning is huge; but I have been excited this year by the number of schools moving way beyond the same texts – often periodically passed round year teams – and into more coherent thinking about the range of literature needed to build a richer English curriculum.

Excellence for all

If there has been a barrier in the past then it's been lack of a confidence on the part of teachers; but many schools are now turning challenges into opportunities to include literature at the centre of the curriculum. If *The Highwayman* can be mastered, so can a whole range of other texts. Once a belief in excellence for all is established, I'm seeing the development of the richest curriculum possible from picture books to Dickens in schools all around the country; and standards are being raised thanks to the scope for learning afforded by the originality of the texts.

Let's take Red Barn Primary near Gosport in Hampshire. Here, Gemma Loveless has led a three-year initiative to build quality text to quality writing journeys through KS1 into 2, so that the present year 6 have acquired the habit of exploring extracts from books like *Jane Eyre* or *Great Expectations*. When I visited, I saw pupils comparing and contrasting these with whole texts like David Almond's *Mina*, and even a snippet from Oscar Wilde. They talked, talked, talked about dialogue and characterisations in guided groups, jigsawing round to contribute expertise. Their local secondaries will find these pupils an absolute dream next year, as their confidence is high and so is their progress in reading and writing.

Coastlands school in Pembrokeshire has pioneered the use of more challenging texts for some time. "Through the use of classic, challenging texts our pupils create high-quality, sophisticated work, from meta-poems in the form of sonnets based on Ted Hughes' *The Thought Fox*, to tantalising episodes of suspense based on the work of Wilkie Collins," explains Wenda Davies. "At Coastlands, poetry is a high priority. The main purpose is to read and explore the poem in an enjoyable way – poetry for poetry's sake."

Quality counts

In all the schools with which I've worked, there is always a quality text to quality writing link, and whole school progress towards a reading culture which includes for each pupil the expectation of challenge and the opportunity for personal choice.

These days, I'm just as likely to see and feel in a classroom the sinister crawl of Kafka's insect from *Metamorphosis*, the colour crafting from Christina Rossetti's *What is Pink*, or the '*roaming music of my dreams*' in Lopez Merino's *Lonely Street*, as the aforementioned '*tlot, tlot*'. With texts from the present by writers like Neil Gaimon, Valerie Bloom, Karl Nova, David Weisner or Geraldine McCaughran linked thematically with inspirations from the past, there is a growing sense of literacy through literature, exposure to a range of styles, and a hunger for more reading by everyone in the school community.

As Margaret Meek says in *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn:* "One of the sharpest late reading lessons I have learned is to let the texts teach the reader." The doors are opening to a real relish for literature in primary schools, and more creative and innovative written work as a result.

Bob Cox is the author of the 'Opening Doors' series. @BobCox_SFE www.searchingfor-excellence.co.uk

For pupils' work inspired by quality texts for your resources, see tinyurl.com/trwqualitytexts

Teach all pupils GREATER DEPTH *in writing*

If children aren't lucky enough to have a deep well of great literature stored in their heads, you can still help them draw on the rich language they need

Its claws scraped along the planks, moving menacingly towards the heady scent of the distracted goat. Only the crows noted its brutal form stalking across the beams of the bridge, sensing the quickening rhythm of its breath.

We wrote that. We were preparing for some collaborative composition work based on *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and we wanted to really ramp-up the suspense around the troll. We aren't writers of fiction, so we're quite proud of the outcome. We did, however, have quite a lot of help with the shape of it: have a look at the eerie opening of Gillian Cross's excellent *Wolf* and you'll see just how much help we had.

His feet padded along the balcony, slinking silently past the closed doors of the other flats. No one glimpsed his shadow flickering across the curtain or noticed the uneven rhythm of his steps.

Thank you, Gillian Cross.

The troll came to the far side of the bridge. A wicked wind whipped around its brutal form. Not for months had the beast smelt a living creature like this one. It inhaled the strong scent that swirled deliciously around its snout.

That's ours, too. This time, thank you Ted Hughes for writing one of the most memorable character entrances of all time in *The Iron Man*.

And it's not just KS2 texts that help us.

Although Willy was the smallest billy goat in the herd, he had the biggest horns. The thing was, he didn't use them. He never fought.

That's strongly influenced by Susan Hellard's wonderful *Baby Elephant*, often enjoyed in Y1. It's a marvellous way to introduce a characteristic you know is going to drive the narrative arc. Thank you, Susan Hellard.

What fuels good writing?

The best writers are immersed in – and have a deep appreciation of – the craft of other writers.

Like so many teachers, we have tried to teach children to write effectively with tips, tricks and grammatical devices ("start with an adverb, start with an -ing, use these conjunctions, use a short sentence...") but even when this goes well, not all outcomes are as good as those of the best writers – the ones we often erroneously refer to as 'natural writers'. They just seem to know how to do it more effectively, with better vocabulary choices and a naturalistic way of selecting sentence structures.

Language is acquired through imitation; the best writers are avid readers. You can even see this when you look at – or listen to – the composition of young pre-readers: you know pretty quickly which children have already got a head full of stories and, therefore, wonderful language models.

Of course, the idea of imitating then innovating from the language of a story isn't new, and it's the essence of Pie Corbett's transformative Talk for Writing. But even where schools are flying with this, the 'natural writers' soar higher. Why? Because they combine the

whole-class model with the treasure trove they have crammed in their heads from all their lucky literary experiences.

The Teacher Assessment Frameworks recognise this in the descriptors for Greater Depth writing at KS1&2. The KS1 TAF refers to children "drawing on their reading to inform the vocabulary and grammar of their writing"; at KS2 it's "drawing independently on what they have read as models for their own writing".

Modelling structure and language

Our Billy Goats Gruff examples are taken from our English sequence in which the original story provides a solid model for text structure. Additionally, we introduce opportunities to relish, assimilate and synthesise wonderful models for language.

We would keep referring to the text structure of the Billy Goats story, but relish the first pages of *Baby Elephant,* luxuriate in the *Wolf* or *The Iron Man* openings to introduce the troll, and so on. This is what the potential Greater Depth (GD) writers are doing. They aren't limited to the whole-class model for their language; they are dipping – possibly unconsciously – into their internal libraries to find appropriate language and structures. So many children lack that internal bank; let's give them an external one, and guide them through the process, very gradually releasing them into their own independent selection of language models.

Our process goes like this:

PLANNING:

- Think about the section of the story to be written in a given lesson; what effect are you after?
- Find brilliant writing that achieves that effect, and notice how it's achieved.
- Practise synthesising the content of the story-to-be-written with the language of the genius model. (This is for practice only; we don't show this to the children.)

IN-LESSON:

- Display the brilliant model-for-language on your IWB and lead a shared-write on a flipchart, demonstrating how to synthesise the model with the scene being written by the class. (E.g. "Ted Hughes has written, 'The wind sang through his iron fingers.' In our scene, the mood is more threatening, so how can we give the weather more menace? And 'sang' is too beautiful... Which part of the troll's body could we have the gail buffeting?")
- Remove the shared-write from view.
- Leave the rich language model on the board (on their desks, too, maybe).
- Children make their own adaptations, independently or collaboratively, having been shown how through the shared writing process.

Building a language bank

Two huge advantages of this approach quickly become apparent: the children's outcomes are enriched, and the shared writing process is significantly easier.

The challenge inherent in this approach is having a big enough bank of brilliant snippets. We can make recommendations, but 20 heads are better than two, so in the schools in which we work we always recommend building a shared bank of wonderful examples of writing that achieve specific effects.

What if everyone in your school, federation or alliance took responsibility for this and whenever they read something – alone or with children – that made them think, "that's a great opening / ending / character introduction / chase scene / example of dialogue-that-moves-the-story-on..." they banked it under a heading? Then, when a colleague needed a great example of dramatic tension or simply some gorgeous description of setting, there it is.

AND DON'T FORGET...

1 CARRY ON READING

Never forget that the extracts used as language models are potential 'trailers' for wonderful books. Capitalise on this!

2 TRY WITH NON-FICTION TOO

Even your avid readers are unlikely to have a head full of non-fiction models, and much of the information they do read may be in the modern, colloquial style that doesn't help when we want them to write in a formal and impersonal style. So make sure that you use the same process for non-fiction writing, when appropriate.

3 ALLOW FOR FREEDOM

Please don't restrict your already GD writers to either the model for text structure or the models for language; let them know they may experiment with both, but they might also have all sorts of other things in that wonderful mental library they may want to try.

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

Pebbles ON THE BEACH

Memoir writing encourages children to comb the beaches of their past for the brightest stones, with often brilliant results

Memoir is a hugely rewarding genre to teach, providing the best platform for children to feel they are experts in their topic before they begin writing, and giving them enough scope to be playful and try out many of the things they like writing best. It's very much in the business of storytelling and thus different from a recount where the emphasis is on a series of events described in chronological order.

When we began teaching memoir to our class, we spent a whole week preparing them to write their first draft. We wanted them to get a firm understanding of the memoir genre, what is needed to create a great one, and to give children the resources and opportunity to generate a memoir idea of their own. Here's how we did it.

DAY 1

Unpicking the memoir

We have created a number of booklets to support teachers and children with writing in different genres - instructions, newspaper articles, persuasive letters, etc - which share with pupils the hidden rules that govern the types of writing we engage in every day (find out more on our website - tinyurl.com/TRWgenre). Having shared our memoir booklet with children, they discussed in pairs the possible content and purpose of this mode of writing, and only then considered the linguistic devices memoir writers might use.

We then shared with the class some of the memoirs we'd written previously, which received a great response. It opened a lively discussion on the merits of different openings and endings, the quality of description, and most importantly why each of us might have felt the need to write that particular memory.

Children agreed that neither topic was remarkable in itself, but that we had made each one special and significant through description and feeling - through making it like a story.

We emphasised this point throughout the project, and referred to how Michael Rosen does it so well in his prose poems, which we regularly enjoy. In addition, making an ordinary incident into something worthy of a memoir means that children can avoid particularly heartfelt or personal subjects if they wish.

Within the memoirs we'd written children found examples of time references, simile and metaphor, repetition, poetic language and exaggeration. We reminded them constantly that they could use all these devices ('tricks') in their writing. We also emphasised the need to have one 'pebble moment' to focus on (taken from Nancie Atwell's book *In The Middle*). Children often choose general topics when generating writing ideas, such as When I went to the football, or Our school trip to PGL. What we have had to teach children is that these topics contain a beach full of pebbles they could write about - with each pebble being an idea for a piece of writing. They need to find just one pebble from their beach.

This was not always easy to convey at first, but by the end of the week 'finding the pebble' was a hugely rewarding pursuit.

DAY 2

Exaggerating the truth

We read the chapter in Roald Dahl's memoir *Boy* called The Great Mouse Plot. Children discussed the description of Mrs Pratchett and found the 'pebble' in this description (her fingernails). We reminded them that Roald Dahl probably wrote it many years after the event, and so questioned how he remembered what everyone said. We told children that they can make up speech when they write, and that they can depart from the exact truth of the events, that it can be quite enjoyable to use hyperbole (exaggeration) in your memories - and that in fact we do this all the time!

DAY 3

How not to do it

Within our genre guide booklet, we included an example of a 'badly written' memoir. Children immediately spotted the lack of description, character development, pebble, coherent story, and a number of unexplained references. This confirmed they had really internalised the essential ingredients of a good memoir. It was an enjoyable lesson hearing them be so critically engaged in a text.

Some children even began to revise it themselves, writing on the typed copy; all chose to add description.

When we checked in with the class on their own memoir ideas, we were worried that several children had not yet thought of anything, were coming up with ideas which had no depth or strong feeling or were too general. We decided to ask everyone the next day to share their ideas with the whole class as a way of enabling peer support.

DAY 4

Picking a pebble

Hearing other people's ideas acted as a spark and some pupils changed their topic for a stronger one. If a child couldn't decide between two ideas we considered putting it to a class vote. It's important to say that we rejected some ideas.

In this session children also had to identify the pebble for their writing. We both showed the children our own writing notebooks as these demonstrated how each of us had managed to move from the general idea to the specific focus.

This discussion seemed to turn things around significantly. We ended up feeling far more confident about pupils' choice of subject, and so did they. We asked them to straightway jot down the revised idea and what the pebble was going to be. There was a real buzz in the classroom and many children wanted to be given time in the week to write about other memoir ideas they were having.

DAY 5

Putting it all together

At the end of the week children were ready to write a first draft. We were confident they understood what they needed to do to write a good memoir: choose a topic which may be everyday or unremarkable in itself, but which can be made memorable both for themselves and the reader through an emotional investment; focus on one pebble; use description, poetic language, feelings, good openings and endings; and employ devices such as repetition and a little exaggeration.

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD MEMOIR

- Use 'idea hearts' (banks of writing ideas), and 'questions for memoirists' (What was the happiest/saddest /funniest moment you can think of?) to help with generating ideas.
- Write it like a story, using narrative devices, good openings and endings, poetic or figurative language, and attention to setting, description and character.
- Find your 'pebble'.
- Use a little hyperbole (exaggeration).
- See what techniques real writers use.
- Make the ordinary memorable - remember, ordinary things are often the things that really matter.

A final word about examples. We felt our own memoirs were very successful. We put this down to the fact that we presented them with enthusiasm and enjoyment and that we were able to talk to the children about the topic, how we came to write it, and our writing process. Children were really engaged to know and learn from this. We now have the idea of collecting the best memoirs written by the children in our class and using them as examples next year.

Felicity Ferguson and Ross Young are experienced primary teachers. Find out more about their Genre Booklets on literacyforpleasure.wordpress.com @writingrocks_17

"I get to make children happy for a living"

For **Rob Biddulph**, picture books should be as pleasurable to read aloud as they are to look at...

I can actually remember quite a lot of detail about my time at primary school – somewhat annoyingly, I have the kind of memory that means I can give you the names of all my classmates from Year 3, but am likely to struggle if you ask me what I was doing last Thursday.

For example, in my first year, my teacher was Mrs Harris, and she gave each of her pupils a special bookmark. As we learnt to read, there were 'sets' of books we had to complete in order; the very first one was called *The Cherry Family*; then came *Dogger*, followed by a story called *Toto*, and finally, *The Bread and Butter House*. This last title was absolutely notorious amongst my classmates – it was generally agreed to be *really* hard, and if you'd read the whole thing, well, you were definitely someone to be reckoned with.

The key, though, was that when you *did* finish a book, Mrs Harris would draw a picture of the lead character on your bookmark. And it was an incredible motivator – it felt like a real prize; a badge of honour for achieving something important. She'd write our 'tricky words' on there too; it was a proper, multifunctional literacy device! I'm sure there are plenty of other approaches that would have been just as effective... but I loved that bookmark.

I would say that reading came fairly easy to me. I wasn't the first in our class to get to the end of *The Bread and Butter House*, but I was by no means last, either. I was somewhere comfortably in the middle; and anyway, even by then, everyone knew that drawing was my thing. Books were pretty important in our house, though. My parents were big readers, and mum read to me a lot (dad, not so much – things were a bit different back then, I suppose). I loved all the *Mr Men* books, and read lots of Enid Blyton stories (including one called *Binkle and Flip*, which no one else seems to remember, but which definitely existed; I've checked). Richard Scarry was my absolute favourite – I was especially fond of his *Storybook Dictionary*. I'd look at the pages with mum, and she'd get me to find things. I'd also spend hours with my coloured pencils, trying to copy his cross-sections of trains and ships.

> "I would say that reading came fairly easy to me"

My wife and I introduced our daughters to books as early as possible, and we were still sharing nightly reading sessions with our eldest, now 21, when she was 14 or 15 years old. We've really treasured that chance to spend one-to-one time with each other; and all three of the girls are voracious readers now. However, when I visit schools as an author, one of the first questions I usually ask is, "Who has a bedtime story every night?" – and it can be quite shocking how few hands go up. I was at one primary school in Manchester's Moss Side, and it turned out that a good number of the kids didn't have a single book in their house. It's so easy to take that kind of thing for granted; getting out and about, and talking to children, has been a real eye-opener for me.

I've actually only been 'an author' (published, that is) for about four years – my first career was in magazine design, as art director for various titles including the *Observer Magazine*, *NME* and *Just Seventeen*. But I had a bit of an epiphany about ten years ago, reading a story to our youngest daughter, who would have been two or three at the time. I can't remember exactly what the title was, but I suddenly thought, "I could do better than this!"

I started looking more closely at picture books, seeing what worked and what

didn't, and eventually found two examples that really stood out for me. The first was *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, by Dr Seuss, which is such an incredible experience to read aloud; it's a performance, and that's hugely enjoyable for the reader and the listener alike. The rhythm and the rhyme are so well done, and such fun. And the other was Oliver Jeffers' *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* – which is a brilliant work of art, and really appeals to the designer part of my brain. I want the work that I produce to be satisfying both visually and in terms of 'read-aloud-ability', and I spend a long time trying to make sure I get it right.

I am so lucky to be able to do what I do. It's a lovely life, spending most of my time in the shed at the bottom of my garden drawing penguins, and the rest of it travelling around the country, and abroad, meeting my readers, who are also my best and toughest critics. I get to make children happy for a living; what could be nicer?

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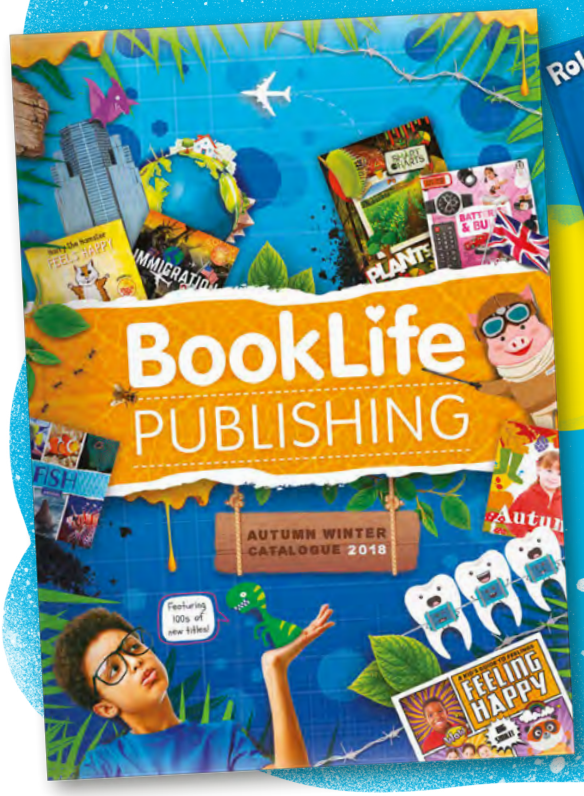
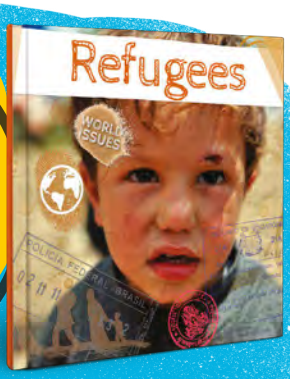


'REFUGEES' FROM OUR WORLD ISSUES SERIES AS SEEN ON PAGE 68!



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13 NON FICTION BOOKS

to open up the wonder of the world

Sometimes the most exciting stories are those we know to be true – so why not share these with your class, and see where they take them?

We love...

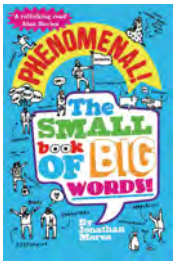
Really Big Numbers

(American Mathematical Society)

Few things fascinate children more instinctively than the idea of really big numbers. For a four-year-old, that might mean 50 or a hundred; but it's one of the great joys of teaching maths to see just how quickly he or she starts asking how high it's possible to count, and what's bigger than a billion, or a trillion. Starting with small, easily observable numbers and building up gradually to the dizzyingly huge ones towards infinity itself, Richard Evans Schwartz takes readers on a fascinating journey of discovery, making increasingly complex concepts accessible through a combination of striking illustrations and passionate, enthused writing.

DID YOU KNOW?

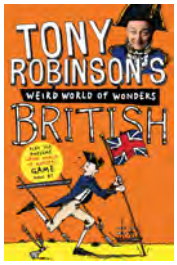
The Earth weighs about 7,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 kg



Phenomenal! The Small Book of Big Words

(Macmillan)

This is a truly joyful celebration of language, introducing a wealth of wonderful words with enthusiasm and a wicked sense of humour. The presentation is clear and accessible; the jokes genuinely funny; and the illustrations gloriously naughty. Best of all, perhaps, every entry has been carefully chosen to slip comfortably into playground conversation – these aren't just fancy tongue twisters selected on the grounds of length and obscurity, they are words that are as useful as they are interesting (think asinine, plethora, hapless and verve).

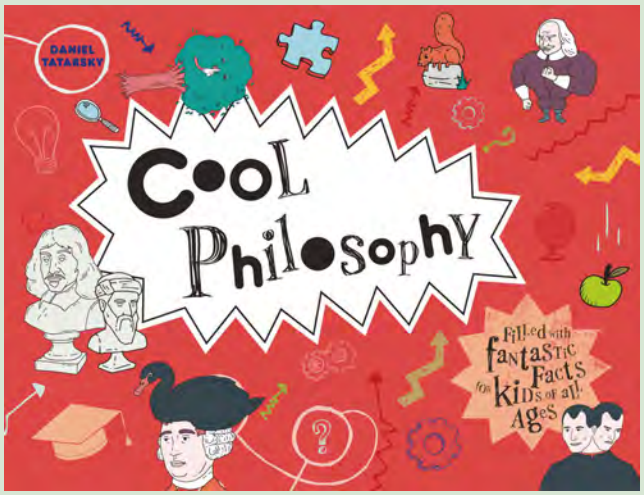


Tony Robinson's Weird World of Wonders – British

(Macmillan)

Getting children curious and excited about the past is a constant priority for educators, so there's always room on the bookshelf for another series that presents genuinely interesting facts with both humour and authority. And this is exactly what you get with Tony Robinson's *Weird World of Wonders*. The *Time Team* star's famous enthusiasm for digging down and discovering information about times gone by is immediate and infectious, and he writes as he speaks, with the captivating fluency of a born storyteller.

We love...



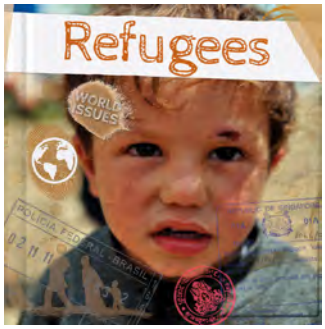
Cool Philosophy

(Portico)

The call for primary schools to start teaching philosophy as a matter of course is becoming increasingly widespread; this clear, comprehensive overview of mankind's search for meaning and truth in life provides a superb springboard for doing exactly that. Fizzing with excitement all the way, it traces the journey of debate and discovery from Socrates, Plato and Heraclitus to David Chalmers with his philosophical zombies – and beyond. Daniel Tatarsky explains and contextualises some of the most powerful ideas human beings have ever conceived with elegant and engaging simplicity; poses fascinating questions; and includes all kinds of quirky and cool facts. It's not big... but it's definitely very clever indeed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Socrates received an award for bravery, after serving as a foot soldier in the war with the Spartans

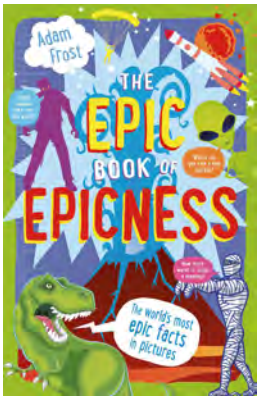


Refugees

(BookLife, hardback, £12.99, ages 7+ years)

The team at BookLife focuses on one thing – selecting engaging, imaginative and informative books that will inspire curious young minds and engender a lifelong love of reading; and luckily for schools and teachers looking for great classroom resources, it does this very well indeed. Amongst its range of carefully curriculum linked titles for all phases from EYFS to KS4 is the splendid 'World Issues' series for KS2 readers, which covers four complex but important topics – racism, immigration, staying safe online, and refugees – in a way that will enable youngsters to understand and engage with them in an age-appropriate way. There is also a helpful glossary, plus activity suggestions to check comprehension and inspire further thinking.

STORY STARTER: *"I didn't want to leave our home, but my parents said we must..."*



The Epic Book of Epicness

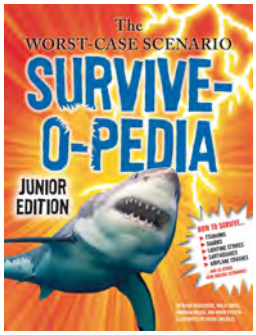
(Bloomsbury)

Is there no end to the appetite of small boys and girls for weird, ridiculous and preferably quite revolting facts that they can share with each other in the playground and, of course, relate gleefully to their teacher as a handy distraction from today's GaPS session? Apparently not – so check out this appealing little package, with quirky, bright infographics bringing each new, epic revelation to life, and topics ranging from, how long does it take different foodstuffs to go off?' to 'Who would win in a fight between a colossal squid and a blue whale?'

I Have the Right to be a Child

(Phoenix Yard Books)

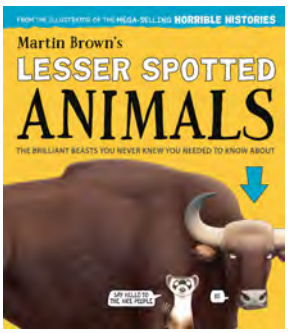
This beautifully illustrated book takes key articles of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, and presents them as deceptively simple – but open – questions that explore the nature of, necessity for, and responsibilities that must accompany our 'rights' as citizens of this planet. Every turn of the page reveals a new opportunity to explore assumptions about our entitlements as human beings, and consider the implications of turning them into a ratified treaty. For example: 'If girls and boys are different, can our rights be exactly the same?' 'Can playing be a right, too?' 'How about the right to breathe clean air?'



The Worst-Case Scenario Survive-O-Pedia

(Chronicle)

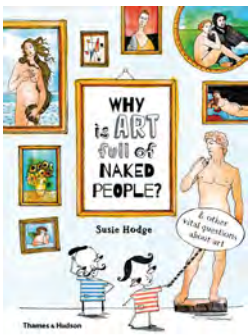
Not for those of a nervous disposition, this is an encyclopaedia especially for thrill-seekers, skipping all the useful-but-dull stuff about trade winds and corn laws, and cutting straight to the juicy bits: sandstorms, avalanches, meteor strikes, shark attacks and more. It's packed with gruesome details and dizzying statistics, which are so cleverly presented that children won't even notice the amount of physics, biology, history and geography that they're picking up as they leaf through the pages.



Lesser Spotted Animals

(David Fickling Books)

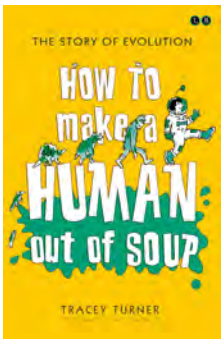
Fans of the *Horrible Histories* series will instantly recognise the style of illustration here – but in this case, the hugely talented Martin Brown is responsible for the words and research, as well as the accurate, yet irreverent, pictures. Packed with intriguing, yet easily digestible, chunks of information about each featured creature, alongside snappy and quirky fact files, this is a real treat for anyone who is interested in the natural world – especially if they reckon they already know pretty much all there is to know about zebras, lions, elephants and sharks.



Why is Art full of Naked People?

(Thames & Hudson)

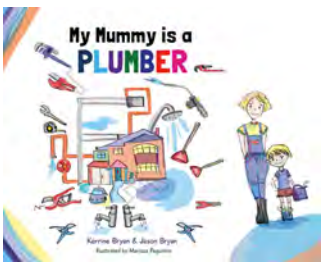
Learning about art can be tricky. As adults, we often keep our queries to ourselves – afraid, perhaps, of being exposed as someone who can't tell a work of staggering genius from the naive daubings of an amateur. And this in turn can lead to us dodging enquiries raised by children, just in case we give the 'wrong' answer. Thank goodness, then, for Susie Hodge, who highlights here many of the most common questions asked about the world of art, responding to each of them with an engaging combination of scholarly expertise and friendly enthusiasm, alongside examples of famous pieces to illustrate her points.



How to Make a Human Out of Soup

(Hodder & Stoughton)

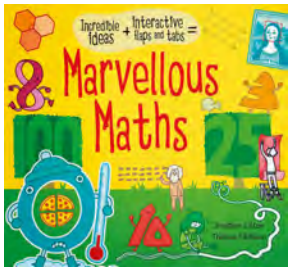
Any teacher musing how best to cover the 'evolution' aspect of the new Y6 programme of study for science might like to take a look at this enjoyable and comprehensive overview of the subject. Not only are the author's explanations models of clarity, they are delivered with deliciously irreverent humour – and there are oodles of activities that could easily be borrowed for the classroom, including a rather brilliant puzzle aimed at helping children understand the concept of genetic inheritance through studying 'zorgles' ('stinky drool is, unfortunately, dominant; non-stinky drool is recessive').



My Mummy is a Plumber

(Butterfly Books Ltd)

Butterfly Books is the brainchild of Kerrine Bryan – a chartered electrical engineer – and her brother Jason. Through a series of stories about the different kinds of jobs people do, the siblings hope to start making children aware of the full range of future career options open to them – gently challenging a few stereotypes along the way. Bouncy rhymes, plenty of watery onomatopoeia and cheerful illustrations make this a hugely enjoyable read – and a percentage of the publisher's profits go to supporting international children's charities, too.



Marvellous Maths

(Templar)

Maths is necessary. It's important. But it's also dull, and often impenetrable – surely, children can be excused for being less than enthralled by it as they progress from test to inevitable test? Well, if this is the image we sell to them from the start, then yes, probably. However, maths has the potential to be as exciting and creative as any other subject, and the earlier we awaken learners to this, the better their chances of engaging properly with this truly empowering and often magical discipline. Here, a phenomenal amount of information, exploration and interactivity is packed into a book that truly brings KS1 and 2 mathematics to life – and might even convert a parent or two.

4 great non-fiction resources for your classroom

1 HERE BE DRAGONS

If your children are brave enough, try Pie Corbett's beastly approach to non-fiction and writing instructions; ending up with the whole class collaborating on a 'dragon keeper's handbook'!
tinyurl.com/trwpie

2 NEWS FLASH!

The Week Junior is a weekly non-fiction magazine aimed at readers aged 8-14. It's a fantastic tool for teaching – and even if you don't subscribe, you can download loads of free resources from the website.
tinyurl.com/trwtheweek

3 CONVINCE ME...

This handy little printable PDF is packed with persuasive writing techniques that will serve as a great introduction or reminder for your pupils. It's got everything from alliteration to hyperbole, and imperatives to repetition, all wrapped up with succinct descriptions and definitions.
tinyurl.com/twrpersuade

4 STUCK FOR IDEAS?

If you're struggling to come up with a non-fiction writing activity for your class, don't panic, because the marvellous Geoff Barton has put together a list of no fewer than 85 smart suggestions, covering biography, reportage, historical and scientific writing and loads more.
tinyurl.com/trwgeoff

5 must-ask HANDWRITING QUESTIONS

How consistent is your school's policy, and do you really have every base covered?

Handwriting is incredibly important for both young learners and older students. Its benefits are diverse, ranging from increased information retention to higher quality written content. As such, it is vital to encourage good habits early in children's educational journeys to ensure that they become automatic as soon as possible.

The good news is that it's easy to teach handwriting well by making sure you have a well-thought-out handwriting policy for your school. This will help you plan an effective programme, identifying those students who need extra help and giving parents the opportunity to be involved. You just need to ask the right questions.

1 What script do we teach?

In the UK, each school chooses its own handwriting script, including guidance on letter formation, joining letters, and using capitals.

Choosing a handwriting script can often cause controversy, but the truth is that the choice of script itself is not terribly important since all scripts are a mixture of ovals and vertical movements. Most UK schools teach a simple script with exit strokes (flicks) after letters like a, d and i. These exit strokes help to promote easy joining of the 'natural' joins between letters, where there is no change of direction (like a to c, or d to e). Some schools choose to teach a script with entry strokes as well as exit strokes, where each letter starts and finishes on the line. The important thing is that everyone in the school uses, and models, the same script. Consistency here is key, hence the importance of having a policy that every teachers knows.

When you teach letter formation, you want children to learn the correct movement to form the letter - not just how to make the letter look right. Right and left handed writers form some letters

differently (crossing the t for instance), so it is important for your school's handwriting policy to have illustrations of how the letters should be formed by both left and right-handed writers.

You also need to know which joins to teach and when. Most UK adults write a semi-joined script, which is efficient and might even aid spelling. Some schools aim for a fully joined script (joining letters like o and w), but children tend to drop these difficult joins in years 5 and 6. It is important therefore, for your school policy to clearly set out which joins you should teach and when.

2 What do we teach in handwriting?

The first thing children should learn is correct letter formation. Fine motor activities like colouring, threading and stacking are a good start, but the best practice for learning letter formation is writing letters! This involves short bursts of fun activity - doing big movements in the sandpit, using chalks on the playground, tracing letters in jelly, cornflour and hair gel. Handwriting is 'language by hand' and if you can turn those movements into habits, you are giving children a flying start.

"If children cannot produce letters without cognitive attention, it stunts their ability to write fluently and efficiently"

As learners progress, a little practice every day helps establish good letter formation, letter orientation, sizing and even spacing of letters and words. Teachers need to schedule time for daily practice, taking care to observe children's progress in hand movements as well as their writing.

It's important to vary handwriting practice too. Switch between copying exercises (which is surprisingly demanding) and dictation, speed writing, or creative writing. Handwriting might not be the most exciting exercise for children, so try to teach it in short, varied, daily bursts.

As you move beyond simple letter formation training, remember to focus on efficiency and automaticity. A weekly 'neat write' exercise is a good experience for more advanced students, but remember that the end-goal is ultimately to produce efficient, automatic handwriting, and this is not always super-neat.

3 What should they write with?

Giving children the right resources can make or break their experience of learning to write by hand. Therefore, it's important to have a policy on what your pupils write with as well how they write. Young writers should use everything from wax crayons, paintbrushes and fingers in the mud, to pencils, pens, crayons and felt tips. The more tools that children use, the better their writing habits will become.

It's also good to have a school-wide policy on which kind of pencils and pens to use, taking into account design features that will help children develop skills as smoothly as possible. Using triangular pencils and crayons promotes a tripod grip that helps children develop good hand control. However, children who struggle with grip might need their pencil to go through a foam ball, a piece of pipe lagging or a pencil grip to help train their hands.

When the time comes to move to pens, it's best to avoid the cheapest options. Fibre-tipped handwriting pens have the all-important ratio of slip-to-friction that promotes control, meaning that it is worth making their use part of your school-wide handwriting policy.

4 How do we assess handwriting?

An important part of your policy should focus on how you assess handwriting. An obvious place to start is that handwriting needs to be legible. But, more importantly, handwriting needs to be automatic, because if children cannot produce letters without cognitive attention, it stunts their ability to write fluently and efficiently. You can choose to assess neatness by marking written work, but as previously mentioned, the much more important areas of handwriting proficiency are efficiency and automaticity.

5 How do parents get involved?

Involving parents in handwriting is simple and extremely valuable. Often, parents are simply too nervous to help their children practise, for fear of teaching them incorrectly. Parental input is a huge resource in a child's handwriting journey, so providing resources and support to parents, to make handwriting practice easier at home can be a game-changer. An easy way to do this is to make sure your school's letter formation sheets are readily available on the school website, and to send out hard copies to parents every year.

Parents typically do a great job of five-minute homework tasks and these little bursts of activity can really help some writers. If children need a bit of a boost, getting parents involved in a short bursts of practice can make a real difference. After all, with handwriting, little and often is the key. Practice tasks like sheets for 'rainbow letters' (tracing over giant letters in different colours) are easy to share, and allow parents to monitor their children's handwriting carefully, encouraging good habits.

A handwriting policy is essential to get everyone in your school working off the same page. When it comes to both teaching methods and questions of assessment, it is really important that your school adopts a unified approach to unlock the range of benefits that handwriting skills have to offer. Children who handwrite efficiently write better and learn more, so it's well worth it.

Dr Jane Medwell is a leading academic in the field of handwriting and literacy and Director of Postgraduate Research at the University of Nottingham.

A richer Relationship

Interacting directly with authors and illustrators can help children contextualise a wide range of texts, as those who took part in this year's Pop Up Festival discovered...

Photography © Zbigniew Kotkiewicz

In June 2018, more than 90 children's authors and illustrators took part in the second annual Pop Up Festival – a national schools' literature festival that reaches 15,000 children aged 3-14 in classrooms, libraries, museums and galleries across England and Wales.

Interactive workshops led by visiting authors and illustrators kick-started pupils' creative writing and illustration, with thousands of books supplied to participating primary, secondary and SEND schools in the process. Here, a participating illustrator and two teachers share their experiences of the event, and discuss how developing pupils' cultural capital can help them achieve their academic potential...

1 The illustrator

"I am helping to open that creative door"

"Over the years I have become increasingly saddened by the effect of government cuts to school budgets. Recently I have visited schools where they don't want to hand out too much paper to draw on because they can only use so much each term. Schools that have had to close their library to make way for an extra classroom. Schools that used to pay for author/theatre/artist visits from their budgets, but now have to raise the money directly from the parents (not easy in many catchments). No matter how well a school is run, these problems go far beyond leadership, as there increasingly seems to be less time, money and resources for the creative arts.

Education can never be 'one size fits all' and the creative arts can give children who struggle in traditional areas opportunities and experiences that can help them thrive. I know this because I am dyslexic, and at school I really struggled with reading and spelling. It was art that opened a door for me when so many others seemed closed. I was taken to the library, where I discovered the comic books that got me reading; and at school I was encouraged to draw, make and experiment, which led me eventually to a career as an illustrator.

Now, one of my favourite ways of introducing children to how words and pictures can work together to tell stories is to draw two versions of the phrase 'The cat sat on the mat.' In both versions the words stay the same, but one shows a sad feline locked out in the rain, and the other a happy creature inside in the warm. The children love to see how the pictures can change the story that the words are telling and are always keen to draw their own cats and mats to create their own completely different stories. After a session, teachers often remark how exciting it is for the children to have someone with a different take on literacy to help them engage with it in a new way. And every time I visit a school with Pop Up, I feel like I am helping to open that creative door a little bit further.

It doesn't matter where children come from; once that door is opened, they always want to walk through it – and when they do, the results can be amazing. And every time an artist, author or musician visits a school, the door is opened wider."

Thomas Docherty, illustrator of* Abracaxebra, The Knight Who Wouldn't Fight *and* The Snatchabook, *visited two schools in Telford

2 The literacy lead

"We're raising cultural capital"

"In our school, Pop Up Festival has been instrumental in promoting a commitment to reading; developing a wide a range of strategies – including stylistic, analytical, and problem solving; and also raising cultural capital. The carefully picked books are chosen to encourage engagement and to build a relationship between the narratives, as well as their authors and illustrators, and the reader. The texts are challenging, and take centre stage in our learning processes at Winyates, stretching across all areas of the curriculum. During this time, pupils are able to really dig deep, developing an understanding for the language used, the author's style and their motivation for writing. They are able to question, compare and evaluate what they have read. They are able to give critical feedback as well as form and articulate their own ideas, based on their reading experiences.

By the time the children get to finally meet their author or illustrator in person, they really feel like they know them well. Listening to an author describe their upbringing, their motivations for writing and their writing process, not only excites and motivates our children to read and write more, it also inspires them to have bigger aspirations. This cultural capital is nurtured through the creative approach Pop Up encourages and helps develop, through its teacher workshops, and the relationships that are built between the pupils and the authors and illustrators along the way."

Chris Favell is a senior teacher and literacy lead at Winyates Primary, Peterborough

3 The SLT

"It creates real and memorable learning"

"We began with the Pop Up pilot project and found the pupils engaged with the first book right from the start. It generated such interest across our small school: the creative juices began to flow and the pupils used the text as a way into an art and dance project that thoroughly challenged both them and the staff. From there we took on the full event, which has lead our pupils to access a dozen different authors; we've taken part and achieved the initial Arts Award, and linked our texts to computing in such a meaningful way it has enhanced our IT offer and is now embedded in our curriculum.

However, the most amazing opportunity that Pop Up has given our small school was the Year Six visit to Kensington Palace to work with author Peter Bunzl; bringing the author and setting together for was powerful enough to inspire even our most reluctant readers. What better way to bring the history to life than through an engaging story, and the story to life than by the reality of the historical palace, queen and rich heritage?

Any time allocated in the classroom has to deliver on several aspects of the curriculum to ensure it is well spent. This project does just that, and provides a great context for real and memorable learning."

Helen Osterfield is headteacher at Tibberton CE Primary School, Shropshire

FUTHER INFO

Find out how your school could get involved with Pop Up Festival at pop-up.org.uk

Moderation HEADACHE?

Planning for evidence will help you generate fantastic writing opportunities that also meet those all-important 'pupil can' statements

We all know the feeling – that anxious sensation in the pit of your stomach; the sense of dread creeping from your toes to the hairs on your head; the cold sweats and sleepless nights. It's a feeling that haunts teachers across the country. No, not Ofsted, a shortage of pencils or another staff meeting bringing the team together through yoga exercises. This is more serious: your writing is being moderated and you feel that, for some pupils, there is a lack of evidence in some critical areas. I'm sure you can relate to this sense of anguish.

Of course, this is a complete over-exaggeration (apart from the dread caused by communal yoga, perhaps). Since the changes to assessment in writing, collecting evidence to meet the continually evolving 'pupil can' statements in writing has been a challenge. Thankfully, the Teacher Assessment Framework (TAFs) has become less rigid and is becoming clearer year on year. By not having another time-pressurised test situation at the end of the year to show progress, it has given pupils the chance to demonstrate their writing prowess.

However, moderators and teachers can often struggle to see eye-to-eye over what constitutes quality evidence and this can prove problematic when agreeing judgements. The key element to success, I believe, is planning for evidence. This means being proactive, well-organised and having clear goals from September onwards, especially when it comes to writing opportunities. The following advice should help your moderation go like a breeze and prevent sleepless nights, whichever year group you work in.

1 Know your criteria

Planning for evidence can feel like you have to live, sleep and breathe the 'pupil can' statements. While this is another over-exaggeration, it is certainly helpful to have these at the forefront of your planning at the earliest opportunity, as well as making pupils aware of what is expected. Having this criteria present when completing medium term plans means that nothing will be missed or forgotten. When moderation is challenging, it can be because a critical element hasn't been given the teaching and learning time to be fully embedded.

Alongside this, a lack of staff understanding about end-of-year writing expectations can be a sticking point. If this is the situation at your school, the best solution is to be open about it as a staff and work together to find out more as soon as possible. Discussing it with colleagues and leadership can help your team to stay on the same page. Revisit your own subject knowledge if necessary and ensure you are clear on the technical terms (model verbs, passive voice, etc) – there are a range of good subject knowledge books out there to help you.

The absolute priority is to be clear on the terms 'mostly', 'appropriately' and 'effectively'. What do these look like in terms of evidence? At internal moderations, spend time unpicking these words, looking in depth at the exemplification materials and being specific about what they mean. Getting in contact with a couple of moderators and asking them to clarify these terms is another solution. Knowing the criteria in depth, down to the individual words, will help you in all aspects of moderation.

2 Think about frequency

One of the most difficult aspects of moderation is knowing how often you need to see a particular strand before the pupil has proved that they've 'got it'. My advice is to trust your gut feeling. If a pupil has used modal verbs effectively in a piece of writing once, does that sit comfortably with you? If you have a few pieces of work showing it done well, would you feel more confident should you be put on the spot? I know I would.

When planning to meet the criteria, having a number in mind is certainly beneficial. Remember that you would expect to see some of the TAFs more often than others, such as using a range of cohesive devices.

This may feel like I am encouraging a tick list approach. That is not the case. By ensuring that there is a reasonable amount of examples and you have agreed on what that quantity is, you can give pupils the best chance of achieving the right judgment.

3 Narrative, narrative, narrative

Non-fiction writing is vital. There are wonderful, purposeful non-fiction text types that can inspire all children and give depth to a topic or theme. However,

endless sets of instructions from Y3-6 are not going to help in the evidence stakes. Stories and narratives, however, do.

The criteria certainly leans on story writing – does your writing across the year reflect this? I am not encouraging an overreliance on narratives, but exploring and creating a variety of stories will give you far more evidence to contribute towards moderation. If you find yourself um-ing and err-ing over whether to do an explanation or a narrative because you need more evidence, go down the story route – it will give you more in the end.

"Exploring and creating a variety of stories will give you far more evidence to contribute towards moderation"

4 Spot opportunities

This is the big one. Many schools have different stimuli for their writing units – a topic, theme or text. The method I have found the most liberating and that offers the best opportunities is theme-based writing, such as 'heroes', 'famous people' or 'survivors'. Once you've been inspired by a theme, identifying a range of writing opportunities is important. By covering texts to entertain, inform and persuade in the course of a term, you should find that most criteria will be met.

From previous assessments, you may identify that you need to cover a text that addresses an audience, involves selecting appropriate language and uses modal verbs to indicate possibility. Next you need to identify the text type alongside the purpose and audience, linking it to the criteria. In this case, a persuasive speech will do the job.

After your independent writing, design the next unit to contrast with the first and provide opportunities to hit some of the other criteria. Mapping this out early is crucial and stops last-minute panic. I recommend identifying the criteria that needs to be met, then choosing the text type. For example, if you know that pupils need to use verb tenses consistently, incorporate dialogue to advance action and use punctuation to indicate direct speech, the first text type that comes to mind might be an exciting character-based quest narrative that uses conversation to move the story forward. It may sound obvious, but narrative can be neglected even when it is the best choice. Plan for evidence first, and you will generate some fantastic writing opportunities.

As the year progresses, it's vital that you revisit the criteria every half term or so to spot gaps and 'reset' – start over with the aim to tick most of the criteria again. Before you know it, you will have reached the end of May with bundles of writing, evidence galore and enthused pupils. The criteria are here to stay for the time being, so making planning for evidence part of your short, medium and long-term thinking will make a big difference.

Dan Hughes is an experienced primary teacher and a university tutor at the University of Worcester, lecturing in primary English and PE as part of the Primary Initial Teacher Training team.

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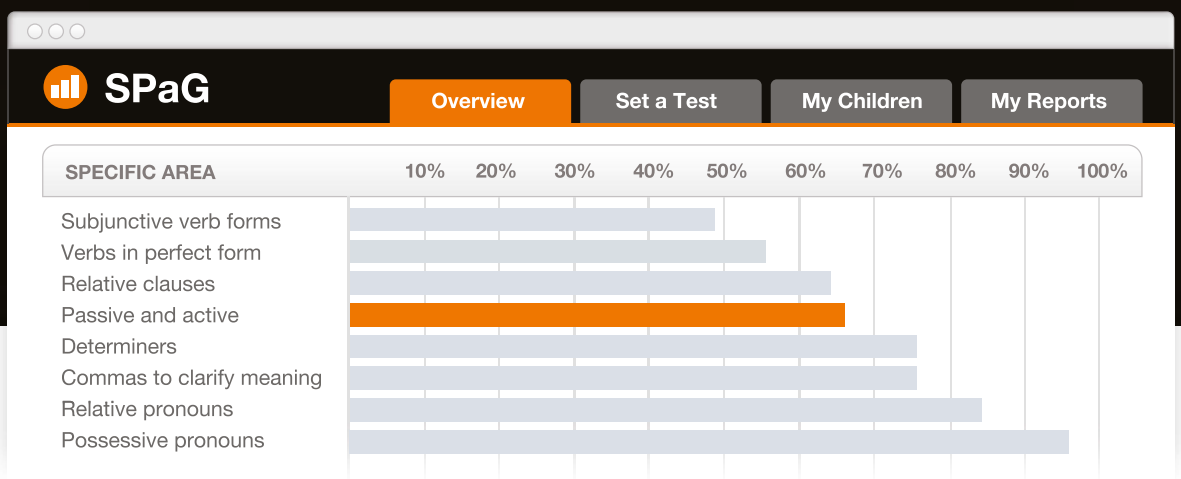

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READING

Pie Corbett's Reading Spine & Page Turners

Expert guidance on selecting the best children's books for schools

AT A GLANCE

- Recommended reading lists of classic, quality children's books
- Use from nursery through to Year 9
- Includes teacher guides with top tips
- Follow six steps towards creating a Reading Spine in your school
- Free downloads to teach comprehension, drama and writing
- Free online videos

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

What are the best books to share with your class? Do you have a list of must-have 'essential reads'? We've all got our favourites, but it's sensible to have recommended reads across the whole school that have been selected by an expert eye rather than a hotchpotch of top picks from here, there and everywhere.

Pie Corbett knows his onions. He has worked as a teacher, headteacher, lecturer and Ofsted inspector, and he's a hugely respected scripturient and a poet. He's also created a Reading Spine and a Page-turners Teacher's Guide which work together to support schools in building a core selection of the finest books to read aloud with children.

His selection builds from fledgling adventure picture books to meaty, intense and life-changing titles that act as rites of passage to other literary giants, classics and biblio banquets. It covers a range, so we know children are being introduced to a rich variety of authors rather than an overdose of a few popular names and genres.

Reading Spine pools together 82 literary staples for nourishing young readers and creating a living library to which they can refer and feed off. Pie has listed them in a suggested order that leads towards what he views as the greatest novel ever written for children. It's a collection with real backbone.

To accompany his choices, Pie has written a Teacher's Guide with short notes for every title that help to bring the books to life. It is characteristically intelligent, full of insight and packed with creative suggestions.

But that's not all. If you are looking for a collection of engrossing, gripping and compelling reads for KS2 then Pie Corbett has selected some edge-of-your seat options in his Page Turners resource. There are six titles highlighted for each year group, with another Teacher's Guide on hand with powerful pointers for deepening understanding and getting the most out of the books.

I think these resources will be welcomed with open arms as they are much needed. Although these are dynamic endorsements, they don't pretend to be 'complete'; instead they help create a common bank of high-standard books that everyone can share – especially for the essential daily class reader experience.

There are so many literary bucket lists and recommendations – such as the '50 books you must read before you are 12' – but these aren't expert-led and don't always unite the school community. I'd have no hesitation in making these recommendations central to my school's book stock for helping children to catch the pleasurable habit of reading.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Romping reads that promote reading as an enjoyable experience
- ✔ Helps build emotional connections with books and a sense of wonder
- ✔ Allows children to explore deeper themes and read as writers
- ✔ Rich and riveting books packed with intrigue, adventure and challenge
- ✔ Perfect for book talk, talk for reading, drama, music, writing-in-role and play.

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AT A GLANCE

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REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

For the uninitiated, Jolly Phonics is the active, multi-sensory product chosen by thousands of schools to support children learning phonic knowledge and skills using a systematic, synthetic approach – and the Jolly Phonics Starter Kit is a great value bumper set for delivering this in the classroom and beyond.

The kit includes a wealth of material. You'll receive The Phonics Handbook, an intelligently written book that explains the principles and the teaching behind Jolly Phonics; a DVD covering all the letter sounds and the five basic skills for reading and writing; a lovely CD collection of songs and actions for each of the 42 letter sounds; and a 24-page book including a spoken guide, games and activities.

Teachers will find the word bank book ideal for dictation and blending practice as this contains useful lists of words made from the individual letter sounds and digraphs. And for engaging active recall and promoting confidence-based repetition, there are four sets of flashcards covering letter sounds, regular and alternative word blending cards, and tricky words cards.

The kit includes 18 Level 1 and 18 Level 2 Jolly Phonics Readers – decodable reading books designed so that children can put their phonic skills into practice and read with confidence, using controlled vocabulary to encourage blending for reading. There are also seven 16-page Big Books with various exercises, each of which comes with a wipe-clean plastic sheet that can be clipped to pages.

For classroom display the kit comes with a seven-sectioned colourful wall frieze showing all 42 letter sounds in precursive letters and there are two bright posters, one showing the alphabet and the other alternative spellings with sample words and illustrations. To add to these are 72 word-wall flowers for teaching and reinforcing tricky words.

In addition to this, 30 reference sound strips are very handy for helping children remember the spelling of a sound when it comes to writing. Colourful and accessible, these have the letter sounds on one side with the alternative spellings of the vowels on the reverse.

Everything about this kit is pragmatic, purposeful and accomplished. Each part stands by itself as a quality resource but when pooled together you have an exciting, effective toolkit to support classroom management and inclusive high-quality teaching.

Fun, child-friendly and bursting with expertise, the Jolly Phonics Starter Kit is packed with multi-sensory and motivating activities created for pleasurable and memorable learning.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✔ Tried, tested and trusted resources in one handy set
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- ✔ Perfect for one-to-one, small groups, whole-class and home education
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"He just doesn't LIKE READING"

Author, parent and former teacher **Hayley Barker** never thought she'd be raising a child who would prefer screens to books...

I taught for seventeen years before I became an author, and I've been a parent for nearly ten years too. Teacher, parent, author – if that doesn't qualify me as an expert on how to get children into books, I don't know what would.

And yet... (embarrassing confession coming up)... *my older son doesn't like reading*.

I could not be prouder of my boy; he's kind and loving and funny and bright. But he has never, ever, *loved* a book, and sometimes the frustration I feel about that bubbles up to the surface.

The best laid plans...

Before motherhood, I knew exactly what you should do to make your child a reader: you make reading fun, and you do it every day. You go to the library and let children make their own choices. You have a home filled with books. Check, check and check; I started reading to my son when he was in the womb, happily rubbing my belly, certain that he would love literature as much as I did. Result: epic fail, so far at least.

He does read, reluctantly, dashing through a chapter at bedtime – the minimum amount he thinks he can get away with to keep me off his case. He reads beautifully, actually, and often seems to be enjoying it. These are the moments when I hold my breath hopefully for a few seconds before he inevitably slams the book firmly shut.

"Don't you want to keep going?" I ask, a hint of desperation slipping through. "You seemed to be enjoying it."

"Nah." he answers, "I can't be bothered."

Stiff competition

I know reading aloud to kids is important too and, between us, my husband and I have read the *Harry Potter* stories, *The Magician's Nephew*, *Matilda* and a million other shorter books to my children. My younger son sits there, enthralled, whilst his brother fidgets, tickles our feet, yawns loudly and, invariably, becomes so distracting that we end up kicking him out of the room.

Technology has made it even harder for books to compete. Yes, there are reading apps and educational resources but, when you are a tech-savvy and cool-ten year-old, you really don't want to know about those. All you want to do is watch other people playing video games.

And that leads me on to *Fortnite*...

Not heard of it? Oh, lucky, lucky you! *Fortnite* is an online game where you join up with your friends or other gamers and work together to try and shoot down a hundred other players.

From my personal experience, from the anecdotes of others, and from what I see and hear in the media about it, this game has taken hold of the consciousness of a generation of (mostly) boys, aged eight to eighteen and beyond. It's not that violent, us mums attempt to reassure each other, and they're playing with their friends, so it's quite social. And yet... it does involve blowing people up. 'Eliminated' is the euphemistic expression the game uses. "Mum, I've got another kill!" is what my son says.

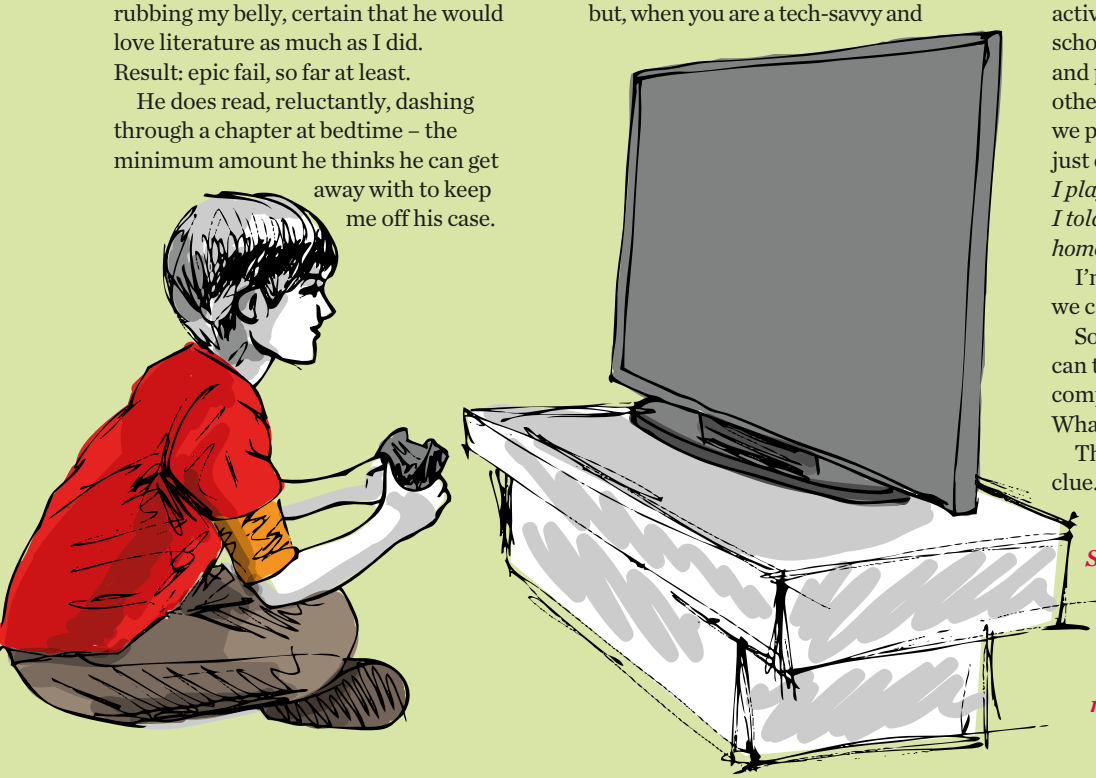
The big question

When they aren't doing clubs or activities, I take my kids to the park after school. They run around in the woods and play football while I sit there with the other mums, hanging out for as long as we possibly can. We all know that we're just delaying the inevitable: *Mum, can I play Fortnite when I get in? Why not? I told my friends that I'd play when I got home. Everyone else is allowed to...*

I'm dreading the winter months when we can't get out as much.

So what's the answer? How on earth can the books I love so much ever compete with the thrill of online gaming? What is to be done?

The answer is that I haven't a bloody clue. Anyone?



Show Stopper was Hayley Barker's debut novel; the sequel, Show Stealer, is out now in paperback (Scholastic).

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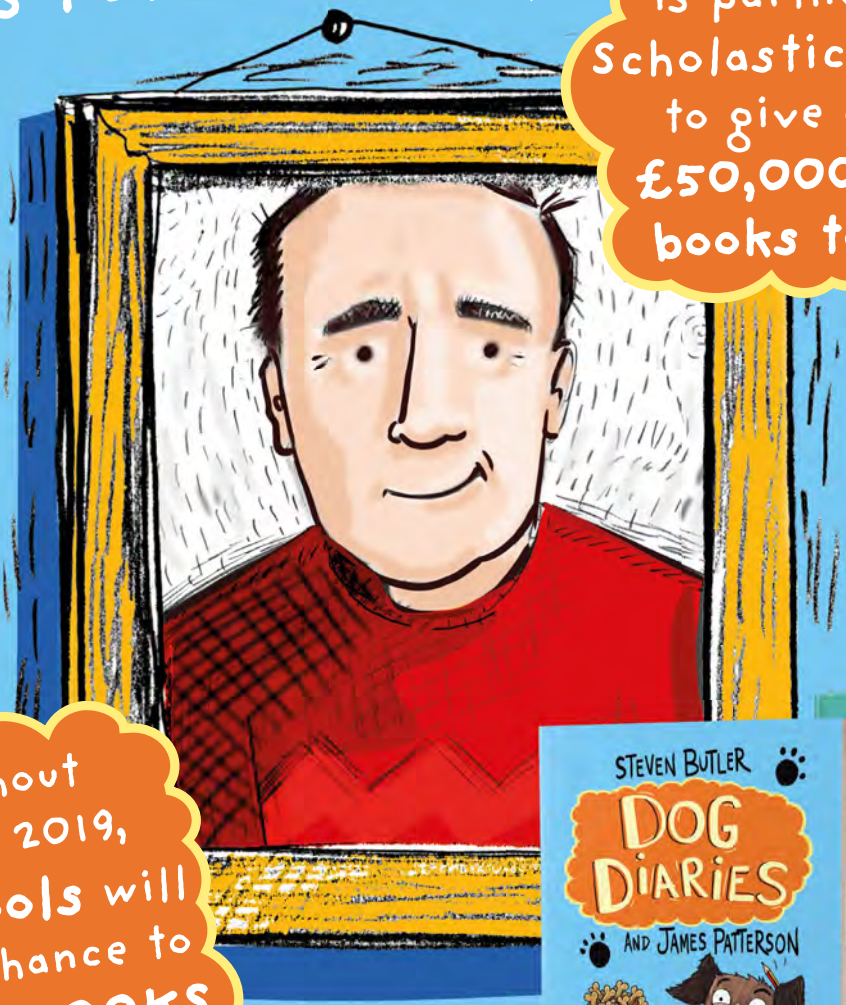

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