

VISIT TEACHWIRE.NET/PRIMARY

teach PRIMARY

Outstanding advice from the UK's top education experts

teach
co

**FREE
RESOURCES!**



£14K FOR INCLUSION

Your spending
strategy

WELLBEING

ARE WE LAUGHING ENOUGH?

The art of
getting stuck

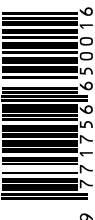
When maths
struggles pay off

**HOW
TO HELP
KIDS
ASSESS
AI**

Let them ARGUE

Start a debate festival

artichoke



MUSIC

FIREWORK COMPOSITIONS

WELLBEING

WAYS TO SQUASH STAFFROOM SQUABBLES

POETRY

QUIET MINDS WITH VERSE

ISSUE: 20.7
PRICE: £4.99

**Make a
difference.**



**Join the
NEU.**

neu.org.uk/join

“A strong and powerful NEU group can have an amazing impact in the workplace.”



“NEU reps understand and have first-hand experience of the challenges that education workers face.”



**Join us
today**

**0345
811 8111**



“Being in the NEU empowers me as an individual at work.”



NEU4470/0726

Terms and conditions at neu.org.uk/neu-membership-tcs

In maintained schools, only the local government unions (GMB, Unison and Unite) are recognised to collectively bargain on behalf of support staff.

“The NEU represents hope for the future of the education system.”



Hello!



And welcome to the latest issue. Hopefully, the new-term glitter has settled, routines are (mostly) bedding in, and as the leaves start turning, there's a different kind of energy in the classroom: less 'fresh start', more 'steady momentum'. October is arguably when real results start to show, and we're delighted to be here with you for it.

One thing that should already be on your radar this term is the government's new Inclusive Mainstream Fund, which requires all mainstream schools to publish an inclusion strategy setting out how you'll identify and meet your pupils' needs early, without waiting on diagnosis or statutory process. If you haven't made a start yet, now's the moment. Our how-to feature walks you through exactly what your strategy needs to contain, and our free, downloadable Ultimate Toolkit goes further still, with an exemplary strategy to learn from and an editable template to adapt for your own setting. Both are waiting for you on page 42.

Inclusion threads through the rest of this issue too. On page 51, we take the scenic route through maths with a look at dyscalculia, exploring how we can help pupils who don't experience numbers the way the curriculum expects to find another way in; one that still gets them to the same destination. On page 52, we turn to problem-solving: an essential, thorny skill that can too easily become the preserve of a confident few. We ask what it takes to give every pupil a fair crack at it, whatever their starting point.

As the nights draw in and half-term looms into view, we hope this issue brings you practical ideas, a little extra inspiration, and a reminder that inclusive teaching is something worth investing in all year round.

Thanks, as always, for reading *Teach Primary*. Here's to a brilliant October. Until next time...

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor

[@TeachPrimaryEd1](#) [@charleytp.bsky.social](#)

*Don't miss our next
issue, available from
9th November*

POWERED BY...



ALAN SHIELDS

Shares his hard-earned advice on avoiding full-scale staffroom arguments...

"If a close friendship goes wrong, it can be extremely isolating, as well as hurtful"

p28



JO AUSTEN

Provides a line-up of online maths tools that not only engage pupils, but actually advance understanding

"Underneath flashy interfaces, what are the features that could really impact learning?"

p49



HELENA BRZESKI

Explains how the leap beyond oracy scaffolds into the meaning of language can really yield results

"These generic strategies can unintentionally become a ceiling"

p60

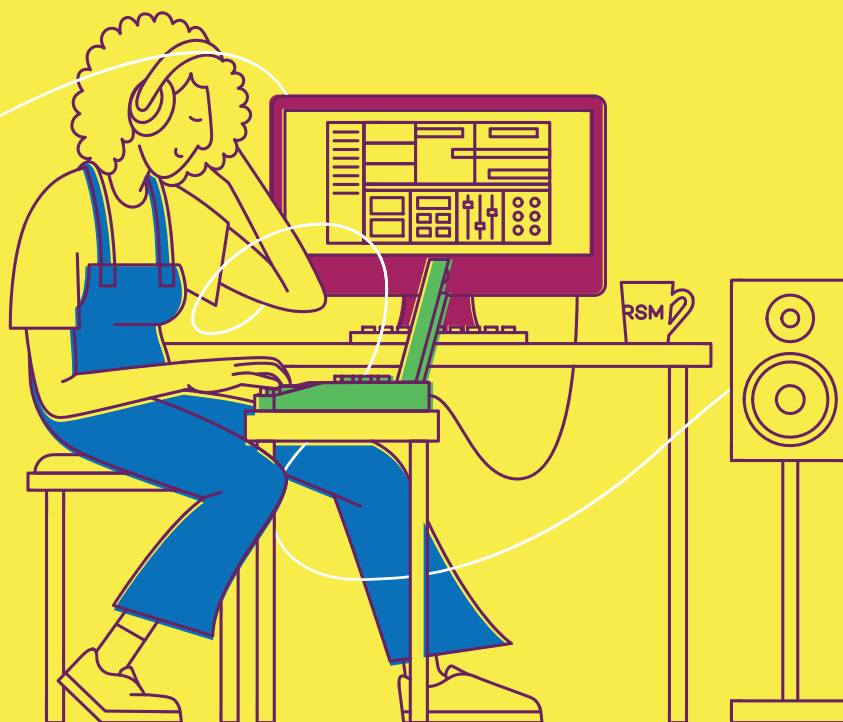


ABRSM



CREATIVE MUSICIANSHIP

QUALIFICATIONS IN
COMPOSING
MUSIC PRODUCTION
SONGWRITING



EXPLORE
MORE

abrsms.org

Contents

ISSUE 20.7



REGULARS

8 BREAKTIME

11 6 WAYS...

...to focus your class with drama games

22 MEDIUM-TERM PLAN

A six-week science unit on evolution and inheritance

31 HOW I DO IT

Stop to smell the roses (and the grass, and the trees) with this fresh approach to literacy and mindfulness

37 THIS WAY!

School improvement advice for headteachers and SLT – this issue we're looking at sustainability

VOICES

13 AMBER CLAIRMONTE

There's no denying it – teaching's hard, and if you can't laugh at it every now and again, it'll chew you up and spit you out...

15 SEB GODWIN

Budget cuts equal hungry children. Whitehall needs to step up...

17 A LETTER TO...

...The Education Secretary. Simply requiring schools to write about inclusion isn't going to help matters

19 UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our filtered world has created children that shy away from any kind of performance

We're all ears!

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



SPECIAL SECTION

MATHS SPECIAL

46 NO LAUGHING MATTER

The answer to maths anxiety is in approaches you probably already use elsewhere...

49 FUN AND GAMES

Many online maths tools provide entertainment, but which ones are actually advancing learning?

51 TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE

Maths doesn't click for all pupils, especially those with dyscalculia. But we can help them find another way in...

52 ANALYSE THIS

Problem-solving is an essential and complicated skill. So how can we ensure all our pupils have a fair crack at it?

**teach
PRIMARY**

We want to hear from you!

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



teachwire.net



facebook.com/teachwire



twitter.com/teachprimary



charley.rogers@theteachco.com

PUBLISHERS:

Joe Carter
Richard Stebbing

EDITOR:

charley.rogers@artichokehq.com

ADVERTISING:

samantha.law@artichokehq.com
01206 505499
hayley.rackham@artichokehq.com
01206 505928
demi.maynard@artichokehq.com
01206 505962
jude.coverdale@artichokehq.com
01206 505992

ART EDITORS:

Richard Allen, Sarah Barajas

CUSTOMER SERVICES:

primary@artichokehq.com

ACCOUNTS:

artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

PUBLISHED BY:

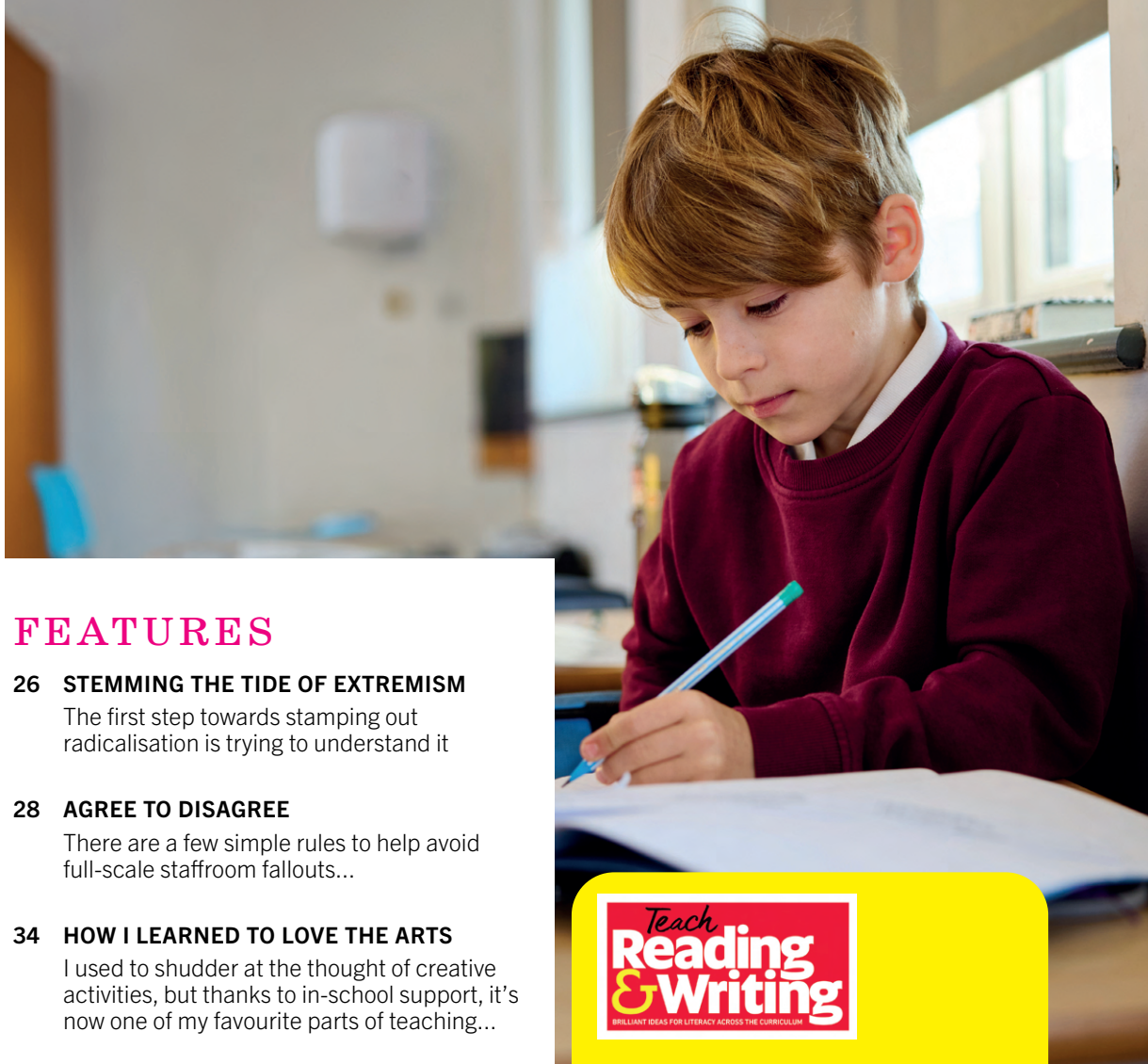
Artichoke Media,
Suites 2 & 4, Global House,
Global Park, Eastgates, CO1 2TJ



artichoke

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

†AI - Image modified with AI assistance



FEATURES

26 STEMMING THE TIDE OF EXTREMISM

The first step towards stamping out radicalisation is trying to understand it

28 AGREE TO DISAGREE

There are a few simple rules to help avoid full-scale staffroom fallouts...

34 HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE THE ARTS

I used to shudder at the thought of creative activities, but thanks to in-school support, it's now one of my favourite parts of teaching...

35 THE BUSINESS OF LEARNING

What the entrepreneurial mindset can teach us about learning for all pupils

40 REAL-LIFE SPEAKING SKILLS

How a Trust-wide debate festival has helped pupils to develop essential oracy for a deeply divided world

42 HEY, BIG SPENDER

How much is the DfE's Inclusive Mainstream Fund really, and how should you plan to use it?

56 BEYOND THE GATES

All the info you need to find your next thrilling school trip

LESSON PLANS

72 LITERACY

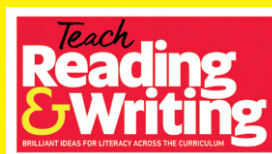
Hooray! It's Michael Rosen Day!

76 MUSIC

Create a crackling composition for firework night

78 COMPUTING

Can you spot a deepfake?



58 AUTHOR IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Play the podcast and bring Michael Rosen and MC Grammar into your classroom to teach pupils about ridiculous raps and rhymes...

60 DON'T JUST TALK THE TALK

The leap beyond structure into the meaning of language yields results

62 WAGOLL

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a Gothic scene, with *Jeekyll vs Hyde: The Potion of Doom*

65 BOOK TOPIC

Explore how tech has changed our lives, and the moral ambiguities it brings with Steve Blackman's *Zero Override*

68 CLEARING CLASSROOM HURDLES

What if reluctance to write is a response to disadvantage that we can address before pencil hits paper?

70 BOOK CLUB

We review five new titles that your class will love

A vibrant, theatrical poster for 'Alice Immersive Wonderland'. The central figure is Alice, a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue dress with a white collar and a blue bow in her hair. She is sitting on a large, ornate playing card, the Ace of Spades, which is part of a checkered floor that recedes into the distance. Above her, the Queen of Hearts, a woman in a black and red gown with a large heart-shaped collar and a crown, holds a heart-shaped scepter. To the left, the White Rabbit, a white rabbit wearing a brown jacket and a pocket watch, is running. To the right, the Mad Hatter, a man in a blue suit and a tall, ornate hat, is holding a teacup. The background is a dark, stylized landscape with red roses and a large, ornate staircase. The title 'ALICE IMMERSIVE WONDERLAND' is written in large, white, serif letters across the center.

ALICE

IMMERSIVE WONDERLAND

STEP BEYOND THE LOOKING GLASS

Where the pages of a literary classic come to life



BOOK NOW !

DOCK X, LONDON

SCHOOL TICKETS FROM £10
ON SALE FROM 6 OCTOBER

aliceimmersivewonderland.com

 CITÉS
IMMERSIVES

 **Encore**
PRODUCTIONS

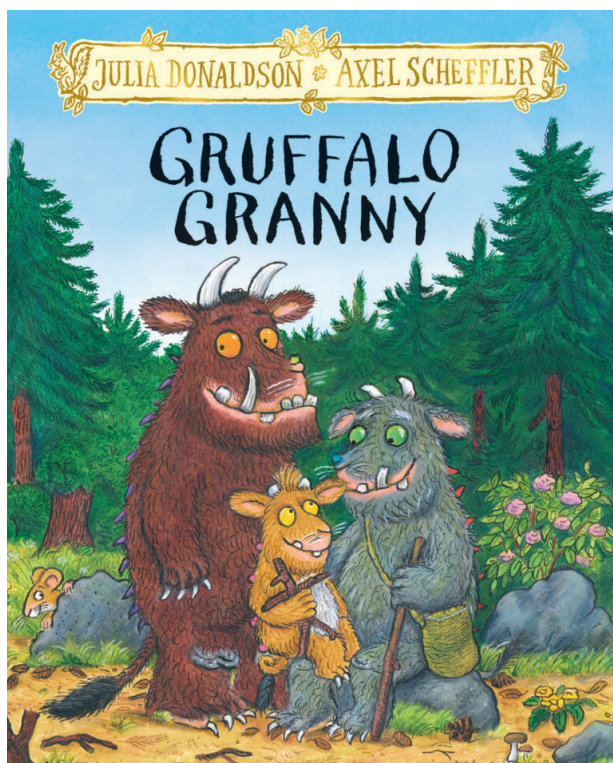
 RIVAL

 FKP SCORPIO
ENTERTAINMENT

 fever

Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research



Free audio-accessible books

Living Paintings, a national charity creating audio-tactile books and resources for children who are blind or partially sighted, has launched an accessible version of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's much-anticipated *Gruffalo Granny*.

The launch represents a landmark moment for Living Paintings, as, until now, children with visual impairment have always had to wait for specially adapted versions of new picture books to be available, whereas *Gruffalo Granny* was published on the same day as the mainstream version. Living Paintings has worked with Macmillan Children's Books to ensure this highly anticipated new Gruffalo story is available from its free postal library from day one.

The Living Paintings accessible adaptations were made possible with funding from Macmillan Children's Books and the Focus Foundation. Borrow the accessible version of *Gruffalo Granny* from Living Paintings free postal library today, by visiting bit.ly/tp-GruffaloGranny

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



MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

The University of Sussex and Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex have published a new whole-school resource to help school and college governors and trustees improve pupil, student and staff mental health and wellbeing. Visit wsca-measurement.co.uk



ENVIRONMENTAL CURRICULUM

The Rainforest Alliance's new curriculum for ages 5–11 gives teachers ready-to-use lessons, videos, quizzes, and activities exploring rainforests, wildlife, food, farming, biodiversity and climate change. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-RA26



EQUAL PLAY

Paralympics GB has launched a free pack for schools to help every child engage meaningfully in PE. The pack, produced in partnership with NatWest Thrive, includes low-prep, practical, and ready-to-use activity ideas, lesson progressions, and adaptations. Visit getset.co.uk/equalplaype

→→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**

Your new favourite podcast

Smart and refreshingly honest, *No Running in the Corridors* is a podcast that unpicks the rules shaping your school day. Every episode, host Helen Mulley

invites two guests into her special secret meeting room and reveals a long-standing school rule that's up for debate – from extreme hairstyles to term-time holidays. Listen wherever you get your podcasts.





One screen too far

As school begins, 130 early years experts have written to the Department for Education calling for an urgent review of the Reception Baseline Assessment, including its recent digitisation.

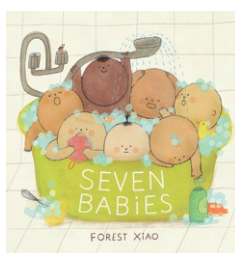
Representatives from Early Education, the National Education Union, UCL Institute of Education and TACTYC are urging new Education Secretary Lucy Powell to follow the government's own guidance to early years providers for under-fives, in which practitioners are advised that 'pre-reception assessments should not involve asking a child to do activities on a screen'. The RBA, which must be completed in the first six weeks of school, is a 20-minute test with a significant digital element. The screen-based RBA was introduced in September 2025. Since its introduction, new in-classroom research from Leeds Beckett University has revealed distressed children struggling to understand the technology, and teachers unable to deviate from the standardised script to assist them. Read more at tinyurl.com/DigitalBaseline

2026 Klaus Flugge Prize winner announced

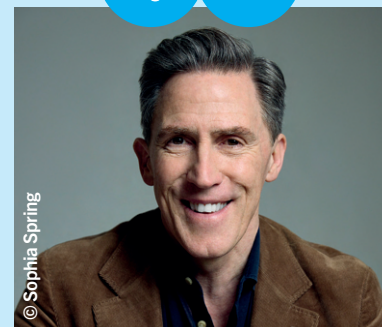
Forest Xiao, author of *Seven Babies* (Walker Books), has been announced as the winner of the 2026 Klaus Flugge Prize for the year's most exciting newcomer to picturebook illustration. Super cute and based on Forest's own experiences as a new mum, *Seven Babies* is the story of the arrival, one Thursday morning, of a box containing seven babies and the chaos that ensues. Feeding, bathing and entertaining the babies exhausts the two adults in the house, who are left sound asleep at the end as the babies head out for more fun.

The £5,000 Klaus Flugge Prize is the only prize specifically to recognise a published picturebook by a debut illustrator, and its spotlight on exciting new talent makes it one of the most important and influential awards on the literary calendar.

Read more at klausfluggeprize.co.uk



Q & A



Rob Brydon

Comedian, actor, broadcaster and author

What was your primary school like?

Primary school is a very, very, very long time ago, but my memories of it all involve colours and smells, like variously-coloured sticks which denoted different values in maths. A very odd system. I've still yet to meet anyone else that was taught this way!

Tell us about the star of the show...

Crumble is our beloved family cat; he's a gorgeous ginger tom and a typical cat in that he disappears outside, only to return hours later looking mischievous. I often wondered what adventures Crumble might go on. The title was inspired by Crumble's less than typical cat-flap set-up! We had some kitchen cupboards fitted, which meant a second interior cat flap was needed to allow Crumble to move freely from the kitchen, into the cupboard, and then out through the main cat flap.

What's your best writing advice?

My top tip would be to think about the traits that make their character different or special. For me, this was Crumble's cat-flap set up – a great catalyst for my imagination to run wild. The villains of the story, Stan and Marie, were characters I devised to add drama. I used my comedy background to make them exaggerated, larger-than-life baddies who seem quite silly. Ellie Snowdon's brilliant illustrations completed them perfectly!



The Cat in the Cupboard by Rob Brydon, illustrated by Ellie Snowdon (£12.99HB, Puffin) is out now.

64% of primary school teachers prefer in-house training to outside specialists*

Look ahead | Book ahead



INTO FILM
The world's largest free film festival for UK schools (6-27 Nov) features 100 films playing across over 3,000 screenings and events, in almost 600 venues, all across the UK. Visit intofilm.org/festival to book now.

ANTI-BULLYING WEEK
Anti-Bullying Week is back from 16-20 November, and this year's theme is 'Break the silence', encouraging pupils to speak up. Find more information and free resources at bit.ly/tp-ABW26



Sponsored by

Beat
Eating disorders

EATING
DISORDER
HUB
for Education
Professionals

**NO
RUNNING
IN THE
CORRIDORS**
PODCAST

WHICH SCHOOL RULES ARE WORTH BREAKING?

A smart, honest podcast debating the
rules that shape school life.



Scan to listen or search
No Running in the Corridors

LATEST EPISODES...



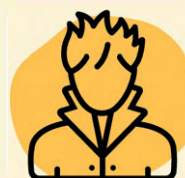
No doodling in lessons

A still classroom isn't always a listening one. What if that doodling child *is* paying attention?



No diagnosis? No special support

How can schools respond effectively to individual needs?



No extreme hairstyles

Are strict hair policies really about maintaining standards, or simply about control?

Listen on
 Apple Podcasts

 Spotify

 YouTube



6 ways to focus your class

When children feel calm, safe and connected to each other, attention follows

1 | COUNT TOGETHER

Explain that, together, the class are going to close their eyes and count from one to 20, one by one, with no set order, pointing, or peeking. If two voices say a number at the same time, everyone starts again from the number one. The first attempts can be difficult, with everyone calling numbers. Ask everyone to slow down, breathe, and listen very carefully to each other. It's a game of intuition, not speed, and sitting in silence is part of it. Once pupils manage 20 (which might take a few weeks of practising), they can try 50.

2 | GOOD EVENING, YOUR SPARKLE

Ask one pupil to stand at the front with their back to the class and with their eyes closed. Next (without saying their name), point to someone to call out "Good evening, Your Sparkle!". The person who calls out will disguise their voice so the student at the front doesn't know who's talking. They might like to say the phrase in a squeaky, deep, whispered, or robotic voice.

The guesser tries to name who spoke. If they guess right, they stay up front and someone else is chosen to say, "Good evening, Your Sparkle". If they guess wrong, the speaker takes their place. If playing from desks, make sure to switch seats first so the direction of the sound doesn't give the speaker away!

3 | PASS THE SQUEEZE

Stand in a circle and hold hands, setting the expectation that nobody makes a fuss about whose hand they're holding. Squeeze the hand of the child next to you once and ask them to pass this one squeeze on. Explain that the squeeze should travel right the way around the circle until the one hand squeeze arrives back in your other hand. Once you've had a successful squeeze, go round the circle, try it again with two squeezes and hope you get two squeezes back. Next, ask one pupil to invent a pattern, for example, three quick squeezes, a pause, then two slow squeezes. They send it out and it travels in silence. When it returns to the sender, they say what came back and whether it matches what they sent.



© Rosalind Hobley

SAM MARSDEN

is a drama teacher, and author of *100 Acting Exercises for 8–18 Year Olds*, *Drama Games for Mindfulness and Emotional Health*, *Acting Games for Improv*, and *Focus Games for the Classroom*.

4 | THROW AN ENERGY BALL

Get the class to stand in a circle, and demonstrate rubbing your palms together with vigorous energy. Pull your hands apart and tell the children to imagine a ball of energy stretching between them. Shape the imaginary ball like clay. Tell pupils that they will all create their own ball, and that they will think about whether it is light or heavy, big or small. Make eye contact with one pupil and throw them the ball you just made and ask them to catch it.

The catcher responds to its size and weight, reshapes it, then picks a new person and throws the new ball.

The person catches it as it was sent to them — large and heavy for example — turns it to something else, small and jelly-like perhaps, and then throws it to someone else.

5 | MIRRORING

Pop some calming music on (I love the *Amélie* soundtrack) and ask everyone to stand facing you. Make a move, perhaps one palm raised, a finger doing a circle in the air, and ask the class to copy you. After about a minute, invite a few pupils in turn to the front to lead, and tell them any movement is okay so long as it's slow and the whole class can do it. Next, ask the children to get into pairs, with one leading, one mirroring, and then to swap. From there, ask them to imagine a bathroom mirror between them. One brushes their teeth or washes their face; the other is the reflection. I've found this one is great for children who find verbal activities difficult.

6 | PASS THE OBJECT

Sit in a circle, cup your hands, and whisper, "In my hands I'm holding a dragon's egg. We have to be very gentle." Pass it to the child beside you and ask them to mime its weight, size and fragility before it moves on. Let it travel around the whole circle. Then you can try a sleeping baby, a stinky sock, a hot potato, or a melting snowball. Children can also suggest their own ideas. Or you can try passing a real object — e.g. a tennis racket — and ask pupils to change it into different things as they pass it around, such a microphone, or an ice cream. Children need to act out their object for the class to guess what it is.



Complete support for primary reading!

Discover over **2000 books** to support
guided, independent and whole class reading

Excite and inspire every child with a rich variety of text types and genres,
from graphic novels to poetry, contemporary fiction to biographies, created
by talented authors and illustrators.



"The reading ethos within our school has
changed since having Collins Big Cat. Children
strive to read and enjoy more books, and it
has definitely had the impact we wanted."

NEW INVENTION JUNIOR SCHOOL

Scan to
find out more
or visit
[collins.co.uk/
BigCat](https://collins.co.uk/BigCat)





Two teachers walk into a classroom...

There's no denying it – teaching's hard, and if you can't laugh at it every now and again, it'll chew you up and spit you out...

tinyurl.com/tp-NHIE

I don't know of any other profession in which, in one day, you can have a serious meeting about safeguarding, and just one hour later, be dancing along to Danny Go! during wet break, pretending to have a great time.

You've heard the analogy before: teachers are nurses, social workers, IT support, detectives, judges and magistrates. We include an enormous range of roles within the catch-all term of 'teacher'. We have to make all the little humans in our classes feel listened to, cared for, and safe, while not forgetting our data targets, of course. So how do you deal with all that? One of the most important tools, I think, is a sense of humour...

It's OK to laugh

Teaching is a heavy and important role. There's no doubt about it. But on the other hand, it can also be pretty hilarious. Every teacher has had the experience of spending hours planning and resourcing that perfect lesson, only for an ant to crawl across the table and unravel it in 0.2 seconds. This is hugely frustrating in the moment, but sometimes you can't help but chuckle when reliving the moment later, over a cup of tea in the staffroom, or dinner at home. Who would think that something so small could have such a huge impact on an entire room full of children? The mind boggles. But then there's that magic moment where another teacher says, "me too!" after you've shared your crazy story of the day. There is something so special about this shared connection; the assurance that you're not alone, and can lighten the load by having a laugh with a friend.

Some of the best and most important moments in schools

happen when the children aren't even there. Whether that's before or after the bell rings, or during the glorious 10 minutes in the staffroom when we actually get time to wolf down our lunch, this chance for laughter and decompression is frequently just enough to get you through even the toughest of days. Teaching is as much about comradery as it is about technical skill. The saying goes 'it takes a village to raise a child' and, honestly? I think a lot of the time this is about keeping the grown-ups sane!

It's this sense of belonging that inspired me to create *Never Have I Ever: Teacher Edition*. At first, I started documenting some of the oddball shared experiences that would be unheard of in another profession. The more I wrote down, the more universal I realised these experiences

were for teachers. We might be at different schools, teaching different ages, in different parts of the country, but chances are we've encountered much of the same random weirdness (full moon effect, anyone!?).

A new buzzword?

The most recent buzzword in our sector (and in so many others) has been 'wellbeing', whatever that means to you, but I propose that we make the next one 'humour'. In my humble opinion, no 'how are you feeling?' survey or shared lunch will ever compare to a big old belly laugh for pick-me-up points. Laughing changes the mood

immediately, and helps put things into perspective. It's also scientifically proven that laughter is contagious (look it up: tinyurl.com/tp-laugh).

Simply put, a little giggle here and there allows us to acknowledge that teaching can be difficult, without allowing those difficulties to grow into insurmountable obstacles, taking over every moment of our day. Tomorrow there will be another 10 missing jumpers, parents complaining their child wasn't allowed the sweets they put in their lunchbox, and at least 5,742 pencils that need sharpening (nobody talk to me about missing glue sticks). But to maintain our sanity, and to have at least a loose grip on our careers and life's work, we need to make sure we can protect those belly laughs. Because along with all the gripes and groans, how else are we supposed to show up every day? **TP**

Amber Clairmonte (Miss Penny Chalk) is a mum, primary school teacher and the creator of Never Have I Ever: Teacher Edition, a game celebrating the humour, chaos and unique-yet-shared experiences of teaching.





Transform Your Outdoor Space!

Timotay Playscapes, your access to award winning inspirational outdoor play spaces. Using imaginative thinking and natural materials to create an inclusive and nurturing environment specific to your school.

- Playground design and construction
- Outdoor classrooms and canopies
- MUGA
- Forest Schools
- Climbing frames
- Playground surfacing
- Playground equipment
- Mile a day track

Contact us for
your **FREE**
funding guide



Book your
FREE
consultation
today!

Call **01933 665151** or email enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk
to book your **FREE CONSULTATION**
timotayplayscapes.co.uk





We need a coherent policy response

A series of ad-hoc measures won't fix this, and change has to happen at multiple levels. At a national level, FSM funding needs to be reset so it reflects the real cost of providing a nutritious meal. At a minimum, this means funding in the region of £3.15 - £3.45 per meal, with an annual uplift linked to food and labour inflation (the DfE currently funds FSM at £2.61 per meal in England, but the real cost of preparing, serving, complying with national food standards, staffing, energy, insurance and food commodities is consistently estimated to be between £3.15 and £3.45 per meal).

In practical terms, that means there is a shortfall of roughly 54p to £1 for every free meal served. According to a LACA survey in 2025, 80% of caterers believe current FSM funding is inadequate, and almost half report shortfalls of between 50p and £1 per meal - forcing reductions in staff hours and even roles to stay afloat.

And it is not only FSM that's impacted: mainstream school lunch prices have been steadily rising, with councils reporting average prices of £2.63 for primary and £2.79 for secondary meals, up significantly from just a few years ago. It's a perfect storm of rising food, labour, energy and compliance costs, often with no matching increase in funding. In short, schools are subsidising national policy through their core educational budgets.

Crucially, this funding should be ring-fenced, so budgets allocated for meals are actually spent on just that. Any expansion of FSM eligibility must also be matched by proper, additional funding; otherwise the financial burden will just continue to be passed onto schools.

Finally, schools and trusts have been looking at ways to move towards outcome-based contracts that reward quality, good nutrition, pupil uptake and sustainability. This is a good move. Greater collaboration between Trusts and local authorities can also help, creating economies of scale and establishing shared standards that enhance provision across the system.

If we truly believe that breakfast and lunch at school are essential to wellbeing, attainment, and social equity, then we must fund them properly. **TP**

Seb Godwin is the co-founder of Procure Education.



Budget cuts = hungry children: step up, Whitehall

Funding for school meals is increasingly dropping below the cost of making them, which is impacting much more than the bottom line...

weareprocure.co.uk

The school system is in crisis. Financial modelling from Northumbria and Lincoln Universities last year suggests that under-funding could leave school across England with a collective gap of more than £310m per year, due in part to the expansion of free school meals (FSM) provision as part of universal credit changes. This is the equivalent of more than 7,700 teacher salaries.

Looking at the trends, it's easy to see how this is having a wider impact. Stoke-on-Trent City Council has already announced it will move its school meals provision to external providers after finding its in-house catering arm could no longer break even without significant subsidies from schools. An independent review concluded that meal prices would have needed to rise by more than a third simply to cover costs – something neither the council nor schools felt was fair or even feasible. Likewise, caterers are closing

because they can no longer survive in the current funding model, with one very well-regarded provider recently announcing it will cease trading in 2026, due to funding and cost pressures.

The way we fund and resource school meals in the UK is fundamentally dysfunctional. And the worst part is that schools are still being expected to pick up the tab – at the expense of teaching, learning, and pastoral care – just to subsidise meals that should be fully funded as part of national educational and welfare policy.

Schools and caterers are already trimming portions, reducing menus, and using cheaper ingredients to cope, with nearly half (47 per cent) of caterers admitting they have had to modify recipes or reduce options to manage financial shortfalls. This means a child might be eating smaller portions, or even skipping meals, because the quality or variety has been compromised to make ends meet.



Better spaces build the best experiences



YPO Design

brings together specialists in environmental design to provide end-to-end space planning and creation for projects of all shapes and sizes.

Every lesson is shaped by the space it's taught in

Well-designed spaces transform how people Work, Learn, and Connect.

The best learning outcomes depend on environments that work in perfect sync with subject matter, schedules and students.

How we transform

Space Design Projects

Bespoke creation to suit any and all requirements

Furniture Frameworks

Tailored solutions built around trusted suppliers

Furniture Range

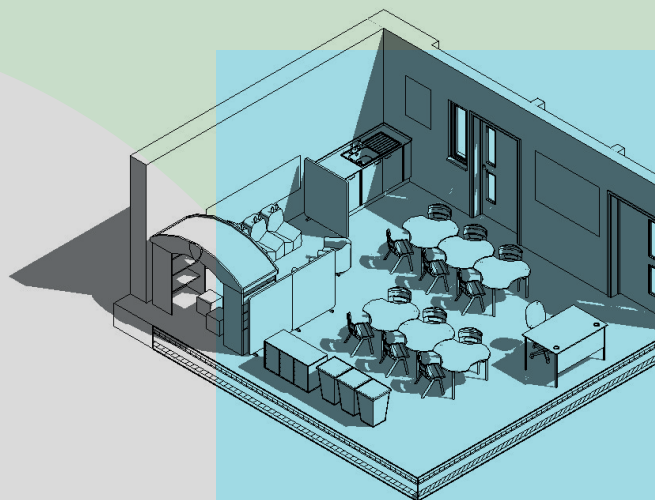
Independently design your space with pieces curated by our experts

Where we know best

- Classrooms
- Nurseries
- Office Spaces
- Inclusive Spaces
- Reception
- Breakout Zones
- Dining Halls
- Libraries
- Outdoor Areas



Explore space planning and design
ypo.co.uk/furniture



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

A letter to...

The Secretary of State for Education

If we want to improve inclusion, we should ask schools to show us how it's embedded, rather than simply requiring them to write about it



Dear Secretary of State for Education, I welcome the government's commitment to improving inclusion in mainstream education, reflected in initiatives such as the Inclusive Mainstream Fund. Also, the wider ambition to enable more children and young people with SEND, and other additional support needs, to thrive in their local mainstream schools.

However, I question whether requiring every school to publish a formal inclusion strategy by 31st December is the best way to achieve that.

Historically, inclusion has been treated as an issue relating specifically to children with SEND or other additional support needs, rather than something that should underpin the way a school operates. There is a danger that this requirement for a 'strategy' reinforces this dated mindset.

As a former deputy head, I know that it is easy for a strategy to become another document to write, publish and review, and ultimately to tick off the to-do list. However, if inclusion is genuinely embedded in a school, it shouldn't need to sit in a separate document. It should already be evident in the things a school does every day: curriculum planning, teaching, behaviour, attendance, staff development, recruitment and leadership decisions.

A professional-looking strategy doesn't necessarily mean that an individual child's experience has changed or improved in any way. A school can produce a thoughtful and ambitious document, but it doesn't help us understand the reality of day-to-day inclusion.

Instead of a strategy, we need to ask what does inclusion actually feel like at our school?

What does it feel like for a child who is struggling to access a lesson? Or for their family when they ask for support? What does inclusion feel like for the teacher trying to meet a range of needs in a busy classroom? These experiences tell us far more about inclusion than whether a school has published a strategy.

“Schools do need to become more inclusive”

If the Department for Education, and Ofsted, want to drive better inclusion, we need to look at what is happening in practice and ask ourselves:

- What happens when a child struggles to access a lesson?
- How flexible is the curriculum according to children's needs?
- How are reasonable adjustments made?
- Are teachers supported to adapt their practice?
- How quickly are emerging support needs identified?
- Are attendance and behaviour understood in the context of a child's support needs?

These are the things that make a real difference to a child's learning and development.

Perhaps the biggest danger is that we start with the strategy rather than the child. Every child is different, and what enables one child to participate may not be what another needs. Genuine inclusion requires schools to understand the individual child, their strengths, interests and barriers, and then adapt their provision accordingly. A single

strategy cannot capture that complexity. We should be asking schools to know their children well enough to respond to their needs, rather than demanding that they define inclusion in a document.

If the Inclusive Mainstream Fund is about building genuine capacity in mainstream schools, we should be asking what schools are now able to do differently. This is challenging work, and mainstream schools need the right support to build their capacity and expertise.

There is also a risk that a standalone inclusion strategy becomes, in practice, 'the SENDCO's document'. Genuine inclusion cannot be delegated to one person; it needs to be owned by everyone. Headteachers, governors, teachers, support staff, pastoral teams and wider leadership all make decisions that affect whether a school is inclusive. It needs to be part of the school development planning, staff CPD, and everyday decision-making, whether that's in the school office, the classroom or even in the actions of the premises manager.

I understand the intention behind your requirement. Schools do need to become more inclusive, and we need to be proactive about removing the barriers that prevent children from fully participating in education. However, inclusion is demonstrated, not declared. If we want to change practice, we should ask schools to show us how inclusion is embedded, rather than simply requiring them to write about it.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen



Get Your Early Years Children Reading-Ready!

Bookmark's Story Starter Programme helps schools inspire a love of reading before children start primary school.

Eligible schools receive **free packs for 4-5-year-olds**, including:

- ✓ Quality books and *The Story Corner Magazine*
- ✓ Storytelling activities and creative resources
- ✓ Family reading support

Find out if your school is eligible and register by 31 October:
bookmarkreading.org/ssp



Registered Charity No. 117768

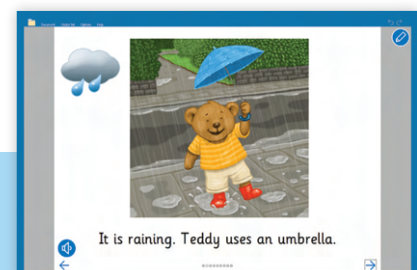
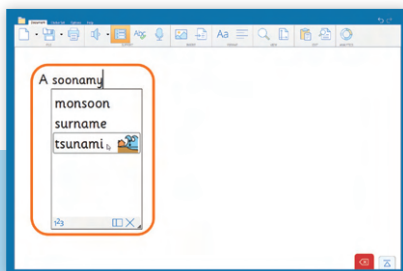


clicker

unlocking writing **word** **by** **word**



“*I can get all of the words that are inside of me out.
I can write now, and I couldn't before.*”



Do you have learners who struggle to get their ideas down on paper?
 Visit cricksoft.com/clicker to find out how Clicker can help.

UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

Children's hands used to fly up when I asked who'd like to perform. Now, too often, they shrink back... our filtered world is ruining our classrooms

I've taught drama for almost 20 years, and I now train drama teachers. Almost everybody is saying the same thing: pupils don't want to get up in front of the class and improvise like they used to. Children have become more inhibited, and afraid of what others might think of them, and I suspect this isn't just in drama lessons.

We're living in a world where more and more of what we share gets edited first. Photos go through a filter. Messages get reread and sometimes put through AI before they're sent. Even a video call can have a beauty filter on it. Many pupils are becoming nervous to show themselves without some kind of polish.

An increasing number of social interactions are also happening through a screen: a phone; a VR headset; a game chat; YouTube comments; and more. Some kind of device, and a platform, standing between two human beings who might otherwise have to look each other in the eye, and be vulnerable. We've all seen a group of teenagers sat together on a bench, each on their own phone, and I bet some of them are messaging each other. It feels safer for them. And it's not just teenagers anymore, either – according to Ofcom research from last year, 56 per cent of 10-year-olds already own a smartphone. A device between you and another person gives you a pause, a delete key, a second go. But I think it's that safety that is feeding the fear that's interrupting learning. To learn we have to not be afraid of getting things wrong and of putting ourselves out there unfiltered.

I've started to catch myself, mid-conversation with friends, thinking, *I should check that. Is that fact right? What if that comment upsets someone, or sounds uninformed? Is what I said trauma-informed?* I've become nervous of making mistakes in front of my own friends. I've lived in this filtered world for about a tenth of my life, but for our students it's been nearly all their life!

In the drama room, the rule is 'go with the first

thing that comes into your head, and don't worry about looking silly'. Mistakes are okay, celebrated even. I want to see a classroom where it's safe to make mistakes. It doesn't make us a bad person, or someone to be avoided, or somebody to be ghosted. We can apologise. I want a classroom culture where we can be a bit easier on each other, a bit kinder, and give each other the benefit of the doubt. I think drama can help give us a place to be intuitive, and in the moment with others.

This isn't about being anti-technology.

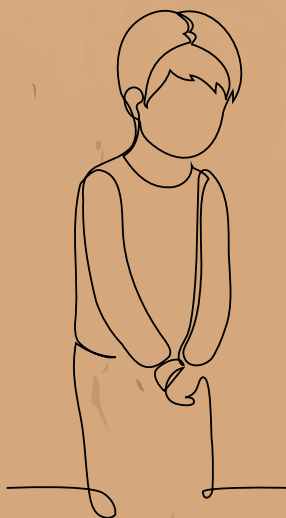
Technology can fuel creativity, and pupils will use it whatever we say. But if we want to keep creativity alive in our classrooms, we need to encourage children to ask themselves and not their phones, to follow their intuition, and to get things wrong. And we need to model it ourselves.

Teachers are told what to cover, when, and how to evidence it. A teacher under too much scrutiny can become too careful, and who could blame them? A careful teacher might stand at the front of the class, self-conscious, sticking to the slides, saying the safe thing. Teachers are getting pressure from the outside world too, from their phones, and a world that keeps changing under them. We all want to do our best, and children watch us –

often more than we know. They are learning from us, and if they see someone frightened of being caught getting it wrong, they learn to be frightened of it too. Our self-consciousness leaks into them.

Often the best lessons are built on rapport, where nobody has had the chance to polish anything. Some of the most connecting moments I've had in a classroom came from getting something wrong: fluffing a name, losing my place in a story, being corrected by a nine-year-old who walked a bit taller for the rest of the day. Children don't relate to the polished version of us. They relate to the person who gets it wrong, laughs and carries on, because that's what we're asking them to do.

If we want our students to trust themselves, then we must learn to trust ourselves. **TP**

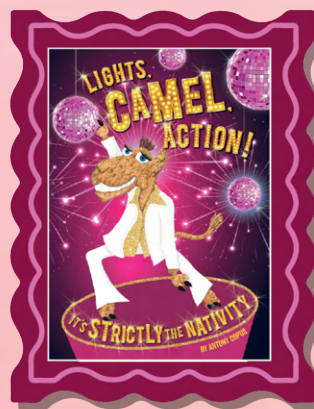


The author is a teacher, and teacher trainer.

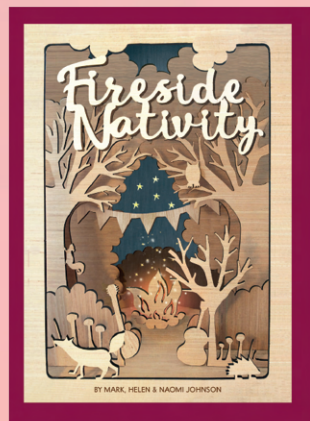
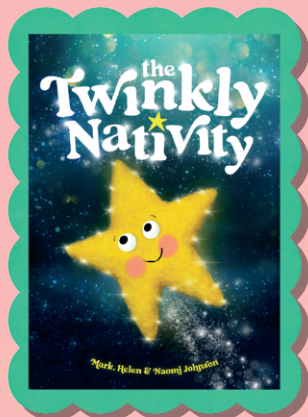
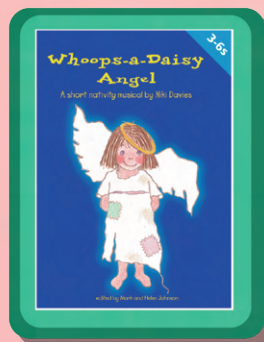
What will your CHRISTMAS look like this year?

At Out of the Ark, we've got you covered!

NEW



greatest story
ever told!



strictly the nativity!

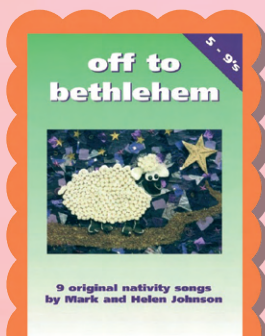
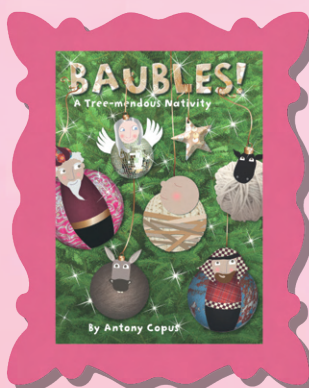
a cosy
retelling!

☆ full of sparkle
and shine! ☆

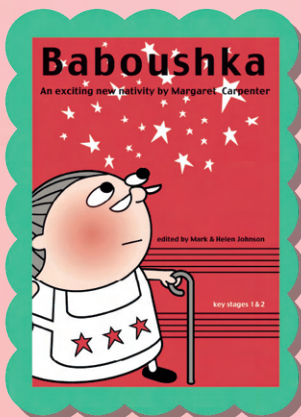
cuteness itself!



yeehaw!



a classic!



pre-teen approved!



Why choose an Out of the Ark nativity?

LOVED by over a million children and families.

Tried and trusted for over 30 years.

Great value – licence included!

Easy-to-love, easy-to-learn songs with Words on Screen™.

Instant online access available!

Costume and prop suggestions.

Flexible cast sizes for any cohort.

Dance videos.

Curriculum links and classroom inspiration.

Rehearse at home with a subscription trial.

Get your jingle bells on at **Out of the Ark.com**

MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2
SCIENCE

EVOLUTION AND INHERITANCE

DANNY NICHOLSON

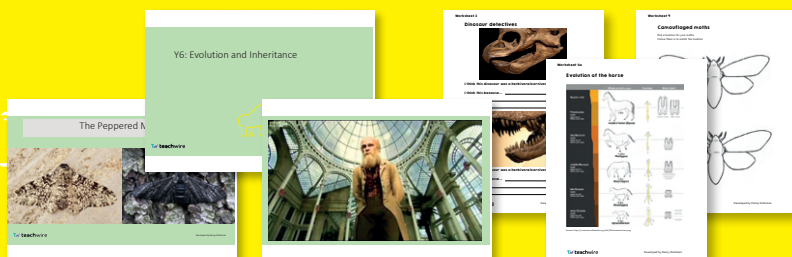
The theory of evolution is one of the most important in biology. It reveals how all living things are related, in a family tree of life that stretches back almost four billion years. Whilst this unit only appears in Year 6, it draws upon a lot of knowledge covered earlier, from fossils to the features different animals and plants have, and the classification of living things. It can be a difficult topic to teach as evolution is a very slow process, but there are some models and activities that we can use to support understanding.

The key concepts for pupils to understand include that:

- life has been around for a very long time
- fossils tell us what living things used to look like
- living things have adapted to best meet their habitats
- living things best suited to their environment are more likely to have offspring and pass down characteristics

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

tw teachwire



Download your **FREE** accompanying resources for this unit at

tinyurl.com/tp-Evolution



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- To describe how characteristics are inherited from parents and to identify patterns in inheritance



Start by showing some photographs of members of famous families – such as the Royal Family (**slide 13**). In pairs, discuss in what ways they look the same. Use this to introduce the idea that genetic information is passed down from parents to their offspring, and that we are not identical copies, but a mix of both of our parents.

Show a litter of puppies (**slides 14 and 15**) or photographs of plants grown from seeds of the same parent plant.

Are they all identical? Exploring why not leads to the idea that offspring inherit characteristics from both parents. This is also a good moment to point out that not all characteristics are inherited: a plant can be short because it has not had enough light, not just because of what it inherited from its parent.

Use the aliens on **slide 16** to further discuss inheritance. Use **worksheet 5** to draw two possible offspring of the two aliens. Compare results across the class and discuss why different pairs produced different offspring from the same parents, which is exactly what happens in nature.



Assessment

Can children explain what an inherited characteristic is and give examples from animals and humans? Can they describe why offspring are similar but not identical to parents?



WEEK 1

Learning objective:

- To explain how fossils provide evidence that living things have changed over time

Give pupils images of different fossils (**slides 1 and 2; worksheet 1** – available in download link above). Can they work out what these are fossils of?

Show the children an image of a fossil of Archaeopteryx. This is a transitional fossil between dinosaurs and birds. Ask them to identify and annotate the features that are like a bird (feathers and small body) and the features that are like a dinosaur (sharp teeth and bony tail) (**slides 6 and 7; worksheet 2**).

Next, show the class images of dinosaur teeth from a T. rex and Triceratops (**slides 8 and 9; worksheet 3**). Can they use their knowledge of herbivore

and carnivore teeth (from Year 4) to work out which was the meat eater and which was the plant eater?

Explain that this is one of the ways that scientists work out what dinosaurs may have eaten.

Next, give children a set of fossil images of a horse arranged in geological time order (**worksheets 4a & 4b; slide 12**). Ask them to describe what has changed from one fossil to the next. What do you notice about the legs? What has happened to the number of toes? (See also **slides 10 and 11**).



Assessment

Can pupils explain why fossils are important clues about how living things have changed over time? Can they describe what a sequence of fossils tells us about change?



WEEK 3

Learning objective

- To describe variation within a species and explain what causes it



Start by asking the class to think about ways in which we are the same as each other – we share the same body plan, we (generally) all have two arms, two legs, etc. But there are many ways in which we are different – eye colour, hair colour, hand span, nose shape, etc. Use **slide 17** to prompt the discussion; you may need to remind children to be sensitive when talking about physical attributes.

Introduce *variation* as the term for the differences that exist between individuals of the same species. The class can then collect data from each other to show how they vary. Choose one or two features to measure: hand span (measured with a ruler from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger with the hand spread flat), foot length, height, or arm span (fingertip to fingertip of an outstretched arm).

Collect the data on the board and then work as a class to group it into frequency bands and then turn it into a bar chart.

Most children will notice that values cluster in the middle, with fewer individuals at the extremes; a distribution that reflects how variation works in most populations.

If you don't want to use the class, and you have some trees nearby, then you could also have groups collecting a handful of leaves at random and measure the length or width of the leaves.

You could end the lesson by distinguishing inherited variation (blood group, eye colour) from environmental variation (hair length and colour can be changed; height is partly affected by diet) and note that many characteristics can be influenced by both.



Assessment

Can children collect and represent variation data as a chart and describe the pattern? Can they distinguish between variation caused by inheritance and variation caused by environment?



WEEK 4

Learning objective

- To describe how animals and plants are adapted to their environments



Show children photographs of a camel, a polar bear, and a cactus. Ask them to work in pairs to identify features that allow it to live in its environment: the camel's hump, the bear's white coat and thick fur, the cactus's spines and swollen stem, etc. Use the images in **slides 18-20** as prompts. Discuss what we mean by an adaptation: a feature that improves an organism's chances of surviving and reproducing in a specific environment. It's important to stress that living things do not actively choose to look the way they do. Try not to give this impression and avoid using the word *designed*. Try to always say *adapted* instead.

You could also carry out a side-by-side comparison of organisms from contrasting environments. The arctic fox and the fennec fox would be good examples (**slide 21**). The Arctic fox has thick white fur, small ears, and furry paws to minimise heat loss, while the fennec fox has enormous ears to radiate heat, sandy colouring for desert camouflage, and furred feet for walking on hot sand. Children can compare the two foxes and record each adaptation in a table (**worksheet 6**). Encourage pupils to think about why each feature would be a useful adaptation.

For a practical investigation, show the children a range of different bird beaks (**slide 22; worksheet 7**) and explain that each one has adapted to eat different food types (eagle for meat, finch for crushing nuts, hummingbird to get nectar from flowers, etc).

Split the class into groups and give each group two bowls. Place some dried peas into one of the bowls (check for class allergies), give each group some tweezers and give them one minute to move as

many seeds as they can into the other bowl. Repeat a couple of times. Then hand each group some chopsticks and repeat. This should demonstrate that the shape of a beak is best suited to a particular food. Use **worksheet 8** to collect their results.

This leads us to Darwin's finches, which we can look at when we talk about natural selection in the next lesson, or could be covered here (**slide 23**).



Assessment

Can children annotate a diagram of a camel and a polar bear and give at least four ways each one is adapted to their environment? Can they explain why those features are beneficial?



WEEK 5

Learning objective

- To describe natural selection and explain how variation leads to evolution over time

Begin by revisiting what children already know from the previous lessons: organisms vary; some variation is inherited; some features help survival more than others; organisms have changed over millions of years, and they are well-adapted to where they live.

Show the image of the leaf insect on **slide 24**. Ask the children to think about why the insect might look like that. What are the advantages in looking like a leaf?



4 REASONS TO TRY... Out-of-this-world experiences at the Science Museum

From live shows to galleries exploring everything from sound to space, there's so much for schools to enjoy...

1 LIVE SCIENCE SHOWS
Investigate forces, maths and energy in our interactive show *Are we there yet? The Science and Maths of Motion*, or go on an adventure through the human digestive system in *It Takes Guts*. Browse our full programme of live shows on our website.

2 WONDERLAB
Explore everyday science, watch live experiments at the Chemistry Bar and see lightning demos in *Wonderlab*. KS2 groups go free during term time.

3 SPACE
Discover iconic spacecraft, rocket engines, the spacesuit worn by the first Briton in space and a real piece of the moon in our free *Space* gallery.

4 DOCUMENTARIES IN OUR IMAX 3D CINEMA
Discover incredible stories with our educational documentaries in IMAX 3D. Learn about animals who have learned to adapt in *Arctic: Our Frozen Planet 3D* (U) or step on board the International Space Station in *A Beautiful Planet 3D* (U).

SCIENCE MUSEUM



Contact:

Visit: sciencemuseum.org.uk/formal-education-groups

Email: info@sciencemuseumgroup.ac.uk

Call: 033 0058 0058

Key points

- + We host SEN days for schools to enjoy a quieter experience in our *Wonderlab* gallery. Learn more on our website.
- + Download our activity sheets and resources to guide your visit on our website.

Academy 21 Behind every empty chair is a child that needs us.

“My son's back — he's himself again. Other people only saw the behaviour, the aggression, the climbing of the fences. Nobody really saw him. But now he's back.”

—Claire, Ellis's mother



Give them the chance to be seen.
Support can begin in 48 hours.
Visit academy21.co.uk



Department
for Education
Accredited Provision

Experiment 1:

Moth camouflage

Give each group a moth template (**worksheet 9**) and ask them to choose any vertical surface in the school environment – a brick wall, a tree trunk, a fence, the PE shed, etc. Ask them to design and colour in their moth to match that surface. Stick the moths to each surface, stand 10m away and see if they can spot the moth. Move closer until the moth can be seen. Measure the distance. What made the winning moths harder to spot?

Experiment 2:

Find the caterpillar

Give each group a mix of strands of wool – about 5cm long, in brown, blue, green, red. Aim for five strands of each; these will be the caterpillars.

Take the class outside onto some grass.

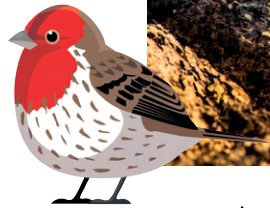
Ask half of each group to shut their eyes while the other half hide the wool caterpillars in the grass close by. The other half of the group then has two minutes to find as many strands as they can. Count how many of each colour they found. Swap the roles around and try again (with fresh wool if needed). Which colours were obvious? Which colours were hidden? If these wool caterpillars could have offspring, what would the most common colour be?

Demo:

Smarties vs raisins

As a whole-class demonstration, fill a bowl with 30 Smarties (or similar sweets) and 30 raisins. Explain to the class that they can take and eat one sweet, and one only, of their choice (check for allergies before doing this). Pass the bowl around the whole class. At the end, count up how many Smarties and raisins are left. You should find that most of the raisins are still there, whilst the Smarties are mainly eaten. Now ask the children to imagine there was a small creature living in the classroom that could look like either a Smartie or a raisin. In this class, the top predator (the children) didn't like eating raisins, but liked Smarties. It would therefore be an advantage to the creature to look like a raisin.

If the creatures left at the end could then breed and have babies, more would look like raisins, and over generations the Smartie form would vanish. This explains why some animals can look really strange to avoid being eaten. For example, some insects (like the wood nymph moth) look like bird poo! (**Slide 26**)



As an extension you could mention artificial selection – where humans have changed living things based on characteristics they want. A good example of this is dogs, which began life as wolves. **Slide 28** asks the children to think about one type of dog and the characteristics that might be desirable. You could include examples of other dogs here, too.



Assessment

Show the leaf insect again (**slide 27**). Can children describe natural selection in their own words and use the leaf insect to explain how variation leads to change in a species over time? Look for use of key vocabulary.

.....



WEEK 6

Learning objective

● To describe the contributions of Darwin and Wallace to the theory of evolution

.....

The lesson can begin with a question: how did scientists work out that species change over time? This is down to the work of two very important scientists – Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace (**slide 29**). Children may have heard of Darwin but probably won't have heard of Wallace. Introduce Darwin and talk about his journey to the Galapagos Islands on the HMS Beagle. (Maybe look up the Galapagos Islands on Google Maps or Street View). When he returned, Darwin spent 20 years refining his ideas – not willing to

go public. While Darwin was working on his theory, Alfred Russel Wallace was collecting specimens in Southeast Asia and developed a similar theory of natural selection, which he then shared with Darwin. Darwin and Wallace later jointly published a paper with their theory.

Children can research one or both scientists using books, fact files, BBC Bitesize, etc, and produce a biography card, poster or short written profile. It should include something about the scientist's early life, what they observed, what theory they developed, and what reaction the theory received. A fact file on each scientist is included in the downloadable resources, as well as a graphic organiser to help some children collate their information.

To finish, you could show slide 30, which is a fun Horrible Histories music video about Charles Darwin.



Assessment

Can children describe what Darwin and Wallace each contributed and explain why the theory of evolution by natural selection was so significant when it was first published? **TP**



*Danny Nicholson is an independent primary science consultant and initial teacher trainer. His book on primary science teaching, **Science Fix** (£24.99, Corwin) is out now.*

 sciencefix.co.uk

 @dannynic

Stemming the tide OF EXTREMISM

Nobody wants to face radicalisation in their classroom, but the first step towards stamping it out is trying to understand it, says **Sarah Wordlaw**...

It's scary to think that as primary teachers we need to be able to spot early signs of radicalisation, but unfortunately, that's the world we live in.

All children are vulnerable to radicalisation, no matter their background, but some are more vulnerable than others. It's important that we're aware of signs to keep an eye out for, and to be equipped to adequately safeguard our most vulnerable pupils. Now more than ever, we need to understand the intersectionality of radicalisation, and appreciate that the different layers of social and personal identities a child has can deeply affect their lived experience of the world, including their vulnerabilities.

In 2024, the nation was devastated following the fatal stabbings of three children in Southport. The perpetrator, it transpired, had long been accessing extreme and graphic content online, and had even ordered weapons via post in the lead-up to the fatal incident. The young man in question had been referred to Prevent three times during his school career, and still managed to slip through the net.

Of course, we can only assume that all adults involved did whatever they could, and followed procedure, but it just goes to show how useful being aware of early signs of radicalisation can be.

Vulnerabilities

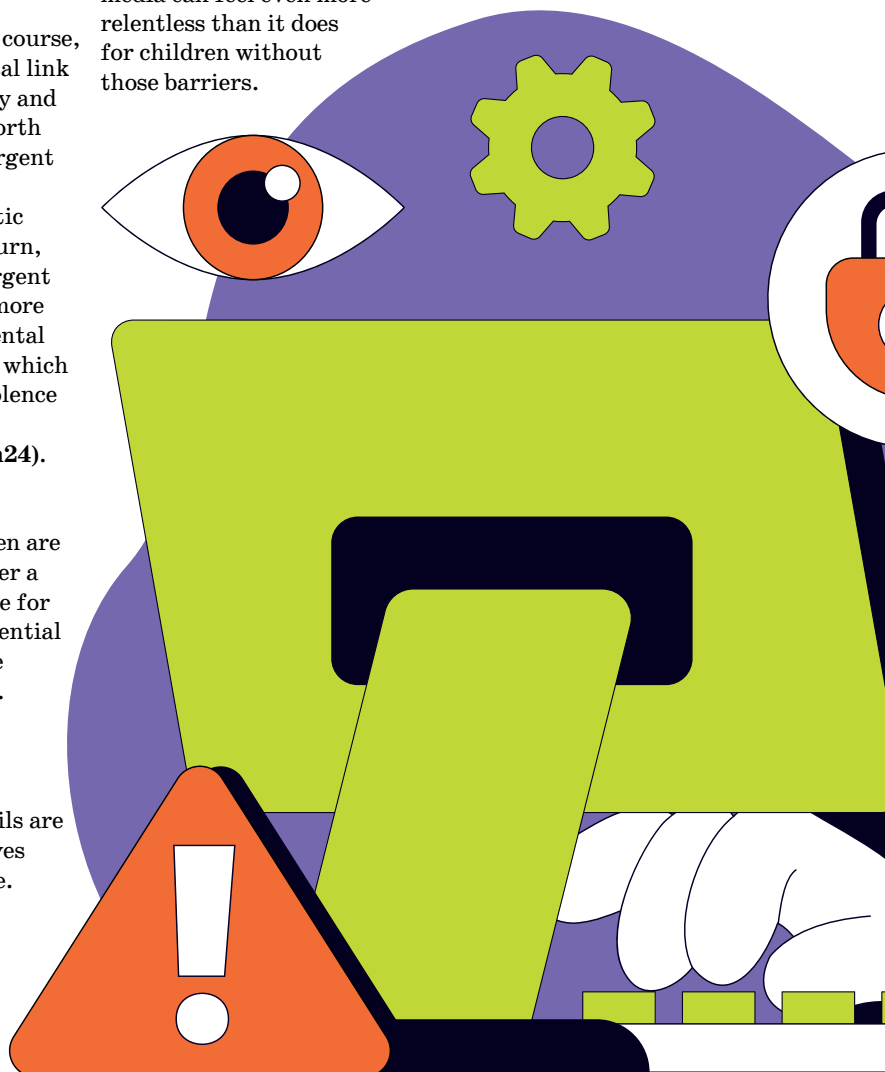
Childhood trauma is always something to be aware of. Being exposed to trauma has long-term developmental implications, and causes toxic stress levels, often impacting a child's ability to regulate emotions and behaviour. Stress also disrupts their cognitive development. A higher proportion of neurodivergent children have faced adverse childhood experiences than their neurotypical peers. Of course, there is no known causal link between neurodiversity and extremism, but it is worth noting that neurodivergent pupils are more at risk of exposure to traumatic experiences. This, in turn, means that neurodivergent children could suffer more from stress-related mental health issues, many of which are associated with violence (Wilson et al., 2024, tinyurl.com/tp-Wilson24). Again, this absolutely does not mean that all neurodivergent children are violent, but it does offer a framework of reference for understanding the potential vulnerabilities of some neurodivergent pupils.

The digital rabbit hole

We know that our pupils are living more of their lives online than ever before. Recent Ofcom data suggests that eight to 14-year-olds are now clocking up over three hours of screen time every single day,

with YouTube and Shapchat acting as the main digital playgrounds (tinyurl.com/tp-OfcomScreen25). Whilst this is the new normal, it still presents a challenging social landscape for children, and it brings a specific set of challenges for our neurodivergent learners. For those who already struggle with social isolation or communication barriers, the always-on nature of social media can feel even more relentless than it does for children without those barriers.

Social media is also a ripe medium for memes and other images. To most of us, memes are just a bit of fun. But for some of our more vulnerable learners, particularly those with cognitive disabilities, these images can act as soft indoctrination into much darker corners of the internet. The danger lies in the subtlety. Because memes rely on inside jokes and satire, they can slowly shift



a child's sense of what is normal or acceptable. For a child who may struggle to read social cues or sarcasm, the line between a joke and a dangerous ideology can become blurred.

Hyper-fixation

There is something particularly wonderful about being privy to the various interests of our pupils. These, of course, vary in both subject and intensity, and it's often our neurodivergent children who develop the most intense interests. These are

usually brilliant strengths, but online they can lead down darker paths. If a child's natural tendency to hyper-fixate meets a savvy algorithm, they can quickly move from viewing content related to their interest in military history or gaming into more harmful territories, such as extremist ideologies or conspiracy theories.

For a child who feels misunderstood or isolated in the playground, an online group offering secret knowledge or a sense of elite status can be incredibly seductive. High-stimuli

games and repetitive algorithms can create a perfect storm, fuelling feelings of grievance and offering extreme narratives as a solution. As educators, understanding this link between sensory needs, social barriers and digital influence is the first step in keeping our most vulnerable learners safe.

So, what can we do about it?

Strategies to try

1. Understanding

Seek first to understand: we must use a curiosity-first approach with children who are accessing radical content online, or displaying disturbing behaviours. For example, rather than saying "Don't say that!", find out how and why they accessed the content that inspired their point of view. Try saying "Tell me why you think that..." or "How did you find that out?" and go from there.

2. Language

Extremist groups are becoming increasingly savvy, using memes to package an 'us vs them' rhetoric in a way that feels like a secret club. They hook into the very emotions our pupils might already be feeling – isolation, a lack of confidence, or a desire to belong. Themes like 'nobody understands you like we do' or 'you've been lied to by your teachers/parents' abound. And it's not just the images. You might hear pupils adopting slang used to discredit others or shut down debate. Terms like *woke*, *cuck*, *traitor* or *sellout* are often used as tools of emotional manipulation. This isn't just internet talk – it's a calculated attempt to isolate children from the protective circles of school and family. By framing the outside world as the enemy, these online communities become the child's only

Helpful resources

Being able to recognise key words and terms in the slang your pupils use can help you intervene early. Try:

- ADL's hate symbols database (tinyurl.com/tp-ADLhatesymbols)
- Moonshot – an organisation tackling terrorism and online threats (moonshotteam.com/uk)
- ISD – the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (isdglobal.org)

source of validation. As teachers, being in the know about these red flags is essential for safeguarding. Check the panel above for some resources that can help you to decode slang.

3. Critical thinking

The ability to question information, analyse motives and evaluate consequences, rather than accepting things at face value, is a skill that we need throughout our lives. Whilst 'critical thinking' may conjure up lessons on fake news, or text interrogations, there's a lot to be said for also introducing children to the idea that we can use these same skills to consider things like jokes or memes – where did they come from? Can we trust who made them? Are they saying something other than what we see on the surface? Is there another point of view? **TP**



Sarah Wordlaw is the headteacher of Streatham Wells

Primary, chair of the Lambeth VAWG Forum, and author of *Time to Shake Up the Primary Curriculum*.

streathamwells.lambeth.sch.uk

"For some children, the line between a joke and a dangerous ideology can easily become blurred"



Agree to DISAGREE

When tensions rise in the staffroom, it can feel like the end of the world. But there are a few simple rules to help avoid full-scale fallouts...

ALAN SHIELDS

Without the benefit of time travel, it is impossible for me to be certain how insufferable I was as a newbie teacher 30 years ago. But I certainly was a keen bean, and I suspect I may have rubbed a few people up the wrong way. At one point, somebody fell out with me, and, with a not particularly mature approach, I simply pretended not to notice. After several months, and with a high level of exasperation, they finally blurted out, “Do you know that I’m not speaking to you?!”

Three decades down the line, I’ve had to deal with plenty of staff peer-to-peer difficulties as a head. Now, as a local authority officer, I’m the person who may have to step in if things become really problematic between colleagues. So how – particularly as a new teacher – do you avoid these difficulties... and what should you do if things go wrong?

Take care with friendships

This is a really tricky one. Many of us will meet our dearest and closest friends at work. Maybe even our life partners (in the interest of full journalistic disclosure, I have to confess that a colleague became my ‘bestie’ and then my beautiful wife, albeit after we had stopped working together!).

Friendships at work can provide support and make

difficult situations bearable, perhaps even enjoyable. On the other hand, many of the most acrimonious fallouts I’ve had to deal with have been between former friends. I think the reason behind this seeming contradiction is

quite simple: we are much more easily upset by the words and actions of those we care about. Like most things in life, I’d suggest that it is a case of balance. Try to maintain as wide a friendship group as possible and avoid ‘exclusive’

relationships. If a very close friendship goes wrong, not only can it be extremely hurtful, but it can also leave you feeling isolated within the staff team. I’d also suggest that social arrangements made in the staffroom should be open to everyone. If it’s a private arrangement, then it should be made in private – not in front of everyone else – as that can lead to bad feeling.

Play it by the book

One of the best ways to protect yourself from staffroom fallouts is to try and play things by the book. In other words, do all you can to follow school policies and procedures. If you

“If a close friendship goes wrong, it can be extremely isolating, as well as hurtful”



are doing things in the official manner, it gives people less opportunity to grouch and grumble – and if they do, at least you will have the fallback of explaining that you are just doing what you have been asked to do. I once had a colleague who went into a right royal huff with me because they convinced themselves that I was giving out (cardboard) red apples (the reward tokens we used) at a different rate from them. Us teachers can be a little petty at times; it can be helpful to have school policies and guidelines to fall back on.

Avoid being Teacher's Pet

Recently qualified teachers are often keen to make a positive impression on their boss. I'm sure I was. The trouble can come, however, if your colleagues perceive that you are more aligned to the head than your peers. This can be heightened if they suspect that you are 'telling tales' to the head about conversations that they thought were private.

Personally, as a head myself, I was always a little wary of teachers who wanted to tell me stories about fellow staff members.

My advice is this: let your work do the talking. If your plans are detailed, your lessons well structured, your results encouraging and your pupils happy, then your headteacher will form a positive opinion of you... and all without putting your colleagues' noses out of joint!

Ask when you need help

As much as I can look back on some fairly humorous moments, conflict within a staff group can be no laughing matter. In the worst cases, it can leave people feeling very upset, have a negative impact on

mental health and, in some situations, even lead to extended absence from work.

If you feel that a situation is getting out of hand, you should speak up as soon as possible. After all, that is the advice we would give to the children. Depending on the dynamics, you may feel able to speak to the colleagues who are directly involved. If things have gone beyond this point, then perhaps you could speak to your mentor or SLT. Your school may well have a grievance or dignity at work policy. While these policies can provide a helpful framework, it's worth bearing in mind that most are underpinned by the principle that early intervention and resolution is best.

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

tw
teachwire



Want more ideas to help build a healthy and happy workforce? Download our **FREE CPD pack** at

**tinyurl.com/
tp-CPDhappy**

All's well that ends well

Sometimes things have a way of working themselves out. Years down the line, the colleague who stopped speaking to me (and I

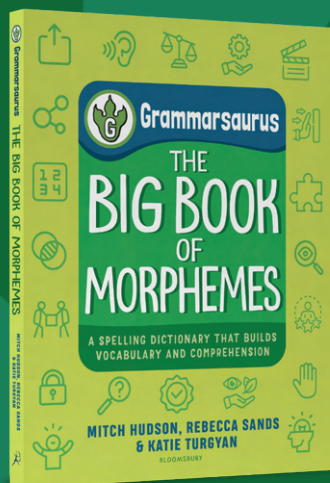
pretended not to notice) went to great lengths to track me down and invite me to their retirement lunch. It was lovely to see them again, wish them well and put any ill feeling to bed. It just goes to show that sometimes a little time and space can help to resolve situations, too. **TP**



Alan Shields is a local authority inclusion officer and former

primary head with almost 30 years' experience in the state and independent sectors.

Ideal for children with literacy difficulties



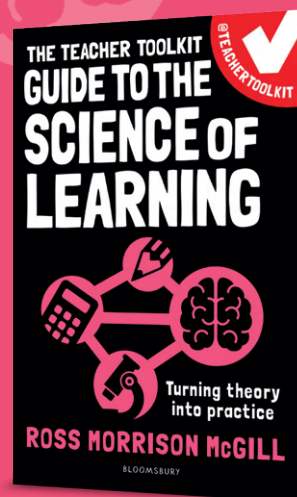
9781801999090 | £9.99

Empowers learners to spell with understanding

Accessible definitions and dual coding

HELP CHILDREN UNLOCK THE HIDDEN BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Includes worked examples, infographics and ready-to-use templates



9781801998994 | £16.99

Empower neurodivergent students

Understand how learning happens

TRANSFORM THE THEORY OF EDUCATION INTO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Bloomsbury.com/education

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

@ BloomsburyChildrens

LEAP INTO AUTUMN!



Order online or school invoicing available
theschoolmusicalscompany.com
 ☎ 01483 503050

THE SCHOOL MUSICALS CO
theschoolmusicalscompany.com

How I do it ➡

Stop to smell the roses (and the grass, and the trees) with this fresh approach to literacy and mindfulness

KATE WAKELING

1

Begin by heading out for a short walk in the school grounds or local park. Invite pupils to collect a few natural objects that appeal to them, such as a leaf, twig, empty snail shell, piece of bark, or pinecone. Once back in the classroom, carefully lay out the objects and ask each

child to choose just one object they'd like to focus on.



One of the joys of poetry is how it can invite us to slow down and find wonder in the everyday. Pausing to reflect with care on a simple object (sometimes called 'mindful object observation') is also a brilliant way for children to still busy or anxious minds. This lesson takes flight from my poem 'Six Ways of Looking a Leaf' and invites children to write their own verse, based on a natural object they find outside – and in doing so, to discover the magic and beauty that can lie in our everyday surroundings.

Ask the children to spend a few quiet moments (perhaps with some gentle music playing) exploring their object really closely. Working through the senses, encourage them to think about its colour, shape and patterns, how it feels to the touch, how it smells, and whether it makes any sounds when tapped or brushed with the fingertips. Ask the children to create mind maps capturing their different words and ideas.

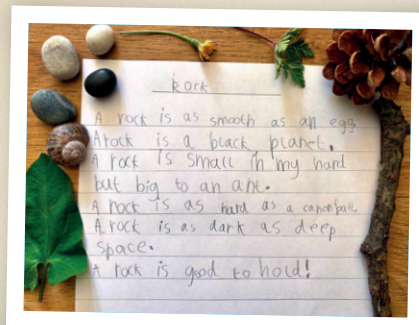
2

Next, invite the children to think more imaginatively about their object. Is there anything the object's shape reminds them of? (E.g. a flower could look like a tiny umbrella). What might such an object look or feel like to a tiny insect? (A pebble could seem like a mountain to an ant, for instance). Encourage imaginations to wander freely through these associations – there are no wrong answers! Add each new idea into the mind map.

3

Begin drafting poems from these ideas. Offer a simple writing skeleton, such as 'A twig is...' to begin each line. Some lines might focus on description: 'A twig is scratchy and knobbly'. 'A twig is brown like my gran's dog'. Others might be more playful: 'A twig is a wizard's wand'. 'A twig is a walking stick for an old grasshopper'.

4



Children could be encouraged to write a second draft, where they think more about the order of lines in their poems. They could even cut their first draft into strips then re-order the lines and glue them back down. After sharing poems aloud, ask pupils to

5

reflect on how it felt to explore a familiar object in this way. Discuss together how it can bring us comfort and calm to concentrate on some of nature's smallest details.



© Ellie Kurtz

Kate Wakeling is an award-winning poet. Her books for children include *Moon Juice*, *Cloud Soup*, *A Dinosaur at the Bus Stop* and *The Flying Machine of Dreams*.

katewakeling.co.uk

[@wakelingkate](https://www.instagram.com/wakelingkate)

[@kate_wakeling](https://www.instagram.com/kate_wakeling)

May the forces BE WITH YOU

Bring gravity, friction and air resistance to life with a real-world rollercoaster context, suggests **Shannen Doherty**...

There are few better moments in science teaching than when pupils suddenly realise:

“Oh... that’s science!”

This lightbulb moment doesn’t occur because they have memorised a definition or filled out a worksheet. It happens when they have connected classroom learning to something tangible in the real world.

Forces is an area of the KS2 science curriculum that beautifully lends itself to this kind of connection. Children experience forces constantly: riding scooters, kicking footballs, jumping on trampolines or feeling their stomach drop on a rollercoaster. The challenge for us as teachers is helping pupils connect those lived experiences to the scientific vocabulary and concepts we want them to understand.

That is where real-world contexts can be incredibly powerful. Take the rides at Chessington World of Adventures Resort, for example: they naturally create opportunities to explore gravity, friction, air resistance and motion while also opening the door to discussions around engineering, safety and design. Most importantly, they give pupils something concrete to think about.

Primary science is already full of rich practical experiences, but meaningful contexts can help strengthen and deepen pupils’ understanding even further. When children can attach



scientific ideas to something they have seen or experienced, the learning can often click more quickly and be easier to retrieve later on.

Rollercoasters work particularly well for this, because the science is visible. Pupils can observe:

- acceleration on steep drops
- slowing down around corners
- the effect of height on speed
- braking systems bringing rides safely to a stop.

This means that forces are not isolated concepts sitting in a knowledge organiser. They are part of a real engineered system that pupils can observe and investigate, even if on a small scale. And seeing them begin to connect their prior knowledge to the practical work in front of them can be one of the best feelings as a teacher.

Observation first

One of the most useful shifts we can make in science

teaching is beginning with observation before explanation. A visit provides the ultimate first-hand experience, of course, but specially filmed footage can bring some of that real-world context into the classroom. In Teachwire’s Built for Learning resources, for example, pupils can watch a rollercoaster at Chessington World of Adventures Resort in motion before beginning to unpick the science involved. Before introducing vocabulary, pupils can be encouraged simply to notice:

- What is happening?
- Where is the ride speeding up?
- What changes do they observe?

This matters, because pupils often already possess partial understanding. They likely know that rides speed up downhill. They know some surfaces slow objects down more than others. By beginning with observation and discussion, we create a

genuine purpose for the scientific vocabulary that follows.

Once pupils have noticed the movement, terms like gravity, friction and air resistance become tools for articulating what they have already observed. Observation first and vocabulary or explanation second could make a significant difference to how secure the learning becomes.

A way with words

Of course, engaging contexts alone are not enough. We know that too much





emphasis on engagement and excitement can lead to shallow conceptual explanation and understanding. There must be a healthy balance.

Scientific vocabulary still needs to be taught explicitly and revisited carefully. One of the strengths of contexts like rollercoasters is that they provide repeated opportunities to return to the same key language in meaningful ways. Pupils might:

- identify where gravity is acting
- discuss how friction slows movement
- explain why brakes are important

Because the vocabulary is constantly linked back to a shared visual experience, pupils might be more confident using it independently later in the lesson. This is especially helpful for pupils who sometimes struggle with abstract scientific language.

Practical matters

As useful as video and discussion can be, pupils still need opportunities to explore

scientific ideas practically for themselves. So, having observed the forces at work on a real rollercoaster, pupils can carry out a simple marble investigation using ramps and different heights to see what they've been discussing in action. All they need is:

- a marble
- a track or ramp
- books or blocks to create height

That simplicity is intentional. Effective primary science does not need elaborate equipment. What matters most is the quality of thinking and discussion taking place.

As pupils test different heights, they quickly begin noticing patterns:

“Meaningful contexts can help strengthen and deepen pupils’ understanding even further”

- higher ramps increase speed
- steeper slopes create faster movement
- friction and air resistance eventually slow the marble down

And because the rollercoaster context has already been established, pupils naturally begin connecting the investigation back to the rides they observed earlier. That transfer of understanding is where the learning becomes particularly powerful.

Think like engineers

One of the most enjoyable aspects of teaching forces through rollercoasters is that it naturally broadens the conversation beyond pure science content.

Once pupils have observed a real engineered environment such as Chessington World of Adventures Resort, you can encourage them to think like the people responsible for creating and maintaining it:

- Why is the first drop usually the highest?
- How do rides stop safely?
- Why are some rides faster than others?

These are fantastic questions, because they show pupils applying

scientific understanding to problem-solving and design.

It also helps pupils see science as something active and creative rather than simply a body of facts to memorise. For some children, this may even expose them to new career opportunities that they haven't previously encountered.

Ultimately, using engaging contexts in science is not about gimmicks or entertainment. It is about helping pupils to develop

FIVE WAYS to help STEM concepts stick

1 Start with something pupils can observe. Video clips, demonstrations and practical experiences give pupils something concrete to think about before introducing scientific explanations.

2 Explicitly teach and revisit vocabulary. Words like gravity and friction should be introduced clearly and used repeatedly throughout discussion and investigation.

3 Use real-world engineering examples. Contexts like rollercoasters help pupils understand how science is applied beyond the classroom.

4 Keep investigations simple. Clear thinking matters more than complicated equipment!

5 Encourage scientific talk. Give pupils regular opportunities to explain ideas orally and have high expectations for them to use the taught vocabulary.

deeper understanding by connecting curriculum content to the wider world around them. Because when pupils begin leaving the classroom still discussing gravity, arguing about friction or pointing out forces on the playground, you know the science has travelled beyond the page. And that is always a good sign. **TP**

TRY IT TODAY

FREE lesson plan and video content!

Built for Learning is a growing library of classroom-ready multimedia resources from Teachwire, currently using Merlin Entertainments attractions – including Alton Towers Resort, Chessington World of Adventures Resort, Warwick Castle and more – as real-world curriculum case

studies for KS2 and KS3.

Every resource combines classroom-ready activities with specially filmed video from the featured attraction, helping teachers give pupils a shared real-world context for curriculum learning – and access to the people who put that learning

into practice.

To download the free KS2 Chessington World of Adventures Resort lesson, with activities exploring forces through rollercoaster engineering, and to discover the full Built for Learning library, scan the QR code!



How I learned to LOVE THE ARTS

I used to shudder at the thought of creative activities, but thanks to in-school support, it's now one of my favourite parts of teaching, says **Sophie Woodgate**

Do you groan at the thought of delivering a dance session? Or perhaps you go cold when you remember it's art on Wednesday afternoons? The arts should be a highlight of our teaching week, a chance to create with the children and a break from the pressures of phonics and maths. But for a lot of us, these subjects simply don't inspire joy.

The negative feelings associated with arts subjects often start at the very beginning of our careers; you are lucky if you get half-day training in music or art as part of your PGCE. If you haven't got a musical bone in your body or any artistic background, you're likely starting out lacking confidence, and without the subject knowledge to draw on, it's natural to shy away from delivering these subjects.

With so much to do in terms of accountability and ensuring academic progress, we can also lose sight of the fun parts of learning. When it comes to the arts, this can often mean that we avoid practical or active learning. We all want the children we teach to have a rich immersive curriculum, but sometimes the pressures of the system push the arts to the bottom of our to-do lists.

Opening the doors

As an NQT in 2016, I was extremely lucky to be introduced to art-based pedagogy through a local charity that my headteacher at the time was in touch with. My school, Pycroft



Grange in Surrey, was one of the first in our area to partner with Delight, a charity that provides arts-based learning programmes and training to teachers, on a programme that would run for the next 10 years at our school. The project included the chance to visit Watts Gallery - for the children at our school, who often come from disadvantaged backgrounds, this was a huge moment.

Since those early days of being exposed to how powerful arts-based learning can be, I've used the skills I have gained to inject excitement and creativity into other areas of the curriculum as well. In history we now make Anglo-Saxon jewellery as part of our topic learning. A simple paper plate with gems and some gold and

bronze tissue paper left the kids totally engrossed in what they were doing. And they didn't just make something pretty; the activity was a 'sticky learning' opportunity, and meant that the children were able to recall facts and information about the artefacts and materials available to the Anglo-Saxons long after the glue had dried on their jewellery pieces.

I lead science across the school, and I've been incorporating arts-based learning approaches across different topic areas there as well. For example, we make clay models of the human ear when we study sound - it's amazing how having something tactile to play around with helps shape children's understanding of the different parts of the ear that are needed for hearing.

Attention-grabbers

The impact that the arts have had on learning is really fantastic, but the main reason I love arts-based learning as an approach is the engagement it creates for the children. I find that if I spend a short amount of time preparing a creative task linked to a topic, it often saves time in the long run, as I spend less time trying to keep them on-task, or re-explaining things. Doing something practical and hands-on, whether in an arts lesson or in more traditionally academic subjects, means children's attention is grabbed immediately, leading to fewer issues around behaviour for learning. For me that means less time spent contacting home to address these issues and more time to plan my next exciting and creative lesson!

Arts-based learning means we don't have to shudder at the thought of getting the coloured pencils out. Instead, it's a chance to weave creative opportunities and engaging moments into learning, bringing joy and excitement into our classrooms for children and ourselves. **TP**



Sophie Woodgate is a teacher and science lead at Pycroft Grange

School in Surrey.

The business of **LEARNING**

Far from being only for would-be Apprentices, the entrepreneurial mindset has a lot to teach us about learning for all pupils, says **Hayley Peacock**

Success today demands more than knowledge; it requires adaptability, agency and a dynamic mindset of possibility. The founder's mindset isn't just about business; it is a way of thinking, feeling and acting that defines innovators, leaders and changemakers. By prioritising the skills and mindsets essential for life beyond school, we equip learners to navigate an unpredictable world.

One of the biggest challenges in weaving entrepreneurial spirit into any school environment is overcoming the conditioning and experiences of the staff. We are all shaped by our past beliefs and values, and to become a pioneering educator, we must be ready to challenge these ingrained views. We need to look beyond what brought us here and reimagine what is needed for today's children in tomorrow's world.

To create an education that is fit for the future, we must shift from the language of teaching to the language of learning. Louis Malaguzzi (1998), the founder of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, wrote about teaching and learning not being separate banks of a river, where learners watch the learning flow by them. Instead, teachers and learners need to be in the flow of the learning together, on the same journey, to strengthen the learning itself and the metacognitive understanding of how to learn well. This shift is foundational: staff must engage in continual

self-reflection and unlearning to model the growth mindset that we promote in our learners, including regular CPD.

Another challenge is overcoming deeply embedded societal narratives about success and security. We invest considerable time and resources in supporting parents to understand and champion this approach. For any pioneering approach to be effective, it must be tested and compared to traditional models. And the success of the founder's mindset is evident in measurable outcomes: learners demonstrate greater self-belief and reduced fear of failure, thriving in a culture of curiosity and empowerment.



Learnish

'Learnish' is the fluency to navigate and understand the learning process itself. It's about knowing how to learn, unlearn and relearn critical traits for successful entrepreneurs. Underpinned by metacognitive concepts, it describes the role that an individual takes in learning and how that impacts them and the rest of their class. For example, we consciously adopt and switch between 'Learning Mode' and 'Performance Mode'.

Learning Mode is when a new topic has been introduced, learners are researching, discovering, exploring the topic, and 'mistakes' are encouraged. This creates opportunities for intellectual exploration without attachment to outcome or presentation until there has been proper space for thinking. When our Year 2 and 3 learners returned from lunch to find that their classroom had been transformed into an immersive rainforest for them to explore, for example, they were in Learning Mode. They gathered geographical information, facts and wonderings and wrote them on leaves to be hung from the cardboard tree that they created together, without focus on the neatness of their handwriting or the accuracy of spelling and grammar. In this way, there was less attachment to outcome and more involvement in the processes of learning, exploring and iterating.

Then, a conscious switch to Performance Mode

focused the young learners' minds on how they wanted to present themselves and their learning.

Our rainforest explorers progressed to collating and summarising their work into more extended pieces. This Performance Mode involved writing clearly, with correct spelling and grammar, and drawing pictures from their initial sketches. While the specific example given here has a literacy focus, Learning Mode and Performance Mode are applicable in all disciplines and across all ages, within the school and beyond into adult life, where fear of failing or judgement of self and others can significantly inhibit mental growth and prevent progression.

The two modalities reflect how the brain works by giving a learner permission to focus on one modality at a time. This leads to more efficient learning, a more expansive mindset, a greater depth of understanding and, ultimately, a more complete, polished presentation and a deeper connection to their work. Our young learners embrace failure and iterate quickly. They are well versed at getting themselves out of the learning pit and readily celebrate their mistakes. **TP**



Hayley Peacock founded *Atelier 21* in West Sussex. She also contributed

to *A Practical Guide to a Big Education* (£19.99, Bloomsbury), out now.

teachwire
talks



Scan to listen or search
Teachwire Talks

DO PUPILS UNDERSTAND **AI TOOLS** BETTER THAN WE DO?

**A new podcast exploring
how to help students
become critical users of AI.**

**Plus tools for teaching AI literacy
when you're still getting to
grips with it yourself.**



Listen on

Apple Podcasts



Spotify



YouTube



THIS WAY!

School improvement advice
for headteachers and SLT

MIDDLE LEADERS | CPD | SUBJECT LEADERSHIP



Take 'sustainability' beyond BUZZWORD STATUS

tell teachers to think about it in these simple terms: make sure there is always a next step they can realistically take. For example, when talking about waste, KS1 pupils could be set a task to sort recycling into the correct bins as they learn best through direct, sensory experiences. KS2 pupils are capable of investigation and campaigning, such as leading a plastic-free lunch initiative and creating posters to display around the school.

During these activities, we can manage anxiety by checking in with pupils who seem particularly worried, being mindful of the language we use and presenting facts in an age-appropriate way. For example, KS1 best learn through stories and songs rather than statistics, while KS2 can process more detail if they are reassured that these issues are being addressed by adults as well as by them.

Whilst science and geography are the obvious subjects in which to teach sustainability, the topic does not

This summer – provisionally confirmed by the Met Office as the hottest on record – saw pupils across the country sent home as temperatures soared amid news stories of wildfires and water shortages.

It is enough to make even the most environmentally savvy of us worry about climate change and how we can live more sustainable lives, let alone our impressionable young people. I believe climate anxiety is the biggest challenge we face when talking about sustainability with our pupils, and it's

our role to guide children from feeling overwhelmed to feeling empowered.

A YouGov survey commissioned by Greenpeace UK last year found that 78 per cent of primary school-aged children are worried about climate change, including 27 per cent who said they were 'very worried'.

Share don't scare

The best way to leave children feeling motivated rather than anxious and unsure, is to provide them with practical activities and agency. I often

necessarily need its own slot on the timetable. In my opinion, sustainability education works best woven through what is already being taught. That way, children benefit from exploring the same ideas and themes from several angles.

For example, learning about diverse cultures and religions during RE demonstrates that caring for the planet is a long-held human value. This unified approach helps pupils understand how different belief systems can work together toward shared goals. When talking about Buddhism and the concept of ‘do no harm’ we can link this to sustainability by discussing the consequences of human actions on nature. Practically, children could create

a poster or prepare an assembly educating their peers. Within Christianity, we can look at decarbonisation when talking about ‘caring for God’s creation’ and ask students to plan a campaign encouraging the community to walk, scoot or cycle to school. When teaching about the annual tree-planting ceremony Tu B’Shevat in Judaism, teachers could look at involving children in local tree-planting initiatives, or hold a non-uniform day where donations could go towards relevant charities.

The heart of nature

Of course, getting outside is the best way for children to learn about these topics, and the school grounds are a

great resource, especially as outdoor learning rarely needs a budget or a specialist. Even if a school does not have much outdoor space, just taking pupils out of the classroom to experience weather, temperatures and the changing seasons helps start conversations around sustainability.

There are many activities that you can introduce into lesson plans to help the issues of sustainability come alive. For example, asking students to carry out a biodiversity audit, mapping potential planting or wildlife areas within the school and getting them to pass on suggestions to your school’s sustainability lead gives them the opportunity to take ownership of their school environment. Involving pupils in a growing project, from herbs in a window box to a full

Time is of the essence

A new study from compliance and sustainability specialist iAM Sustainable has found that nine in 10 classroom teachers acting as sustainability leads receive no dedicated time to carry out the role.

This news comes despite the fact that the DfE’s expectation for all schools to have a sustainability lead and a climate action plan in place. Of those surveyed, 39 per cent spend up to five hours each week in their own time on sustainability research and planning, forcing the role into evenings and weekends, and highlighting the gap between sustainability ambitions and schools’ capacity to deliver them. The report also finds that sustainability responsibilities are increasingly being added to existing workloads rather than established as recognised specialist functions, and that sustainability leadership often falls to staff whose primary expertise lies elsewhere, including classroom teachers, pastoral leaders, science leads and executive support staff.

One respondent described the challenge as being “expected to deliver a specialist role on top of a full-time teaching load”, while another reported feeling in a “constant state of guilt” over balancing teaching responsibilities with sustainability commitments.

To add insult to injury, 92 per cent of respondents reported receiving no additional pay or responsibility allowance for the role, with more than half rating their level of support at 5 out of 10 or lower, with class teachers scoring an average of just 3.2 making them the loneliest group in the entire dataset.

The expertise gap

Education specialists are increasingly being asked to navigate areas such as carbon auditing and building management, often without the dedicated expertise or technical support these responsibilities require. Whilst respondents rated their confidence in climate action planning at 7 out of 10 on average, only 12 per cent felt confident explaining SECR reporting requirements, and fewer than one in five felt comfortable discussing Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

Schools care deeply about sustainability, and the future they are helping to create for young people. What this research shows is not a lack of commitment, but a lack of capacity. Many sustainability leads are trying to deliver a complex agenda alongside a

full-time role. They’re passionate about making a difference but often lack the time, training and support structures needed to turn ambition into action.

As the sector continues to develop climate action plans, there is a clear opportunity to provide greater support, training and technical guidance if sustainability ambitions are to be delivered without adding further pressure to already stretched staff workloads.



Luke Pargeter is
CEO of iAM Compliant.

tinyurl.com/tp-iAMsustainable





Just One Tree Day

After a summer of extreme heat and wildfires, schools are once again invited to turn climate concern into positive action. Options include a non-uniform or 'wear something green' day, and a discretionary £1 donation to Just One Tree's reforestation projects across Africa, Asia and South America. Every £1 raised plants one tree, helping to restore vital ecosystems.

The annual event, celebrated on 16th October, gives children and young people a simple, positive way to make a difference while learning about climate change, biodiversity and the importance of restoring our planet. And if you want to join in but can't make the date, that's no problem. Fighting climate change happens all year round, and some schools hold their Just One Tree Day as late as July. Simply pick a date that works for you.

Since Just One Tree Day launched in 2019, more than 250,000 children across 17 countries have taken part – including pupils from the UK, Romania, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Bahrain and China – collectively helping to plant over 475,000 trees and restore ecosystems around the world, including in Indonesia, Madagascar, Peru, Mozambique, and more.

Just One Tree founder Amanda Bronkhorst said: "Many children today are experiencing climate anxiety because they are seeing the reality of the climate crisis all around them. Just One Tree Day gives children something positive they can do. It shows them that their individual actions matter and that, when we act together, we can create meaningful change."

Just One Tree is a non-profit organisation and proud partner of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Its restoration projects help revive vital ecosystems and wildlife habitats, capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and support local communities through sustainable livelihoods.

Schools can find out more, sign up, and download free resource packs at justonetree.life/schools-sustainability

For even more free sustainability resources and ideas, see tinyurl.com/tp-ClimateTeaching



"78% of primary school-aged children are worried about climate change"

vegetable bed, is an effective way to spark discussions on sustainability, waste and food consumption. Their produce can then be used in cooking lessons or the school canteen.

From my experience, children are naturally interested in sustainability and are concerned about the future. It's our job to nurture these interests while providing support. Giving pupils the tools and understanding to take practical action will, in turn, help reduce their levels of climate anxiety by making them feel confident that sustainability issues can be tackled.

Remember:

- Start local: a walk around the school grounds beats simply talking about their environment. Always pair a problem with an action pupils can take that day, however small, so understanding turns into agency.

As an example, you could aim to pick up five pieces of litter on your walk.

- Choose experiences over worksheets; planting, auditing and presenting stick better in memory and create less waste in the process.
- Map new ideas against what is already taught elsewhere, so pupils build connections instead of hearing the same fact twice across different subjects.
- Give pupils a genuine decision to make – even a small one like wording on a poster – so ownership feels real rather than token.



Celina Sullivan is a former primary teacher and deputy head, now Northwest regional advisor for Jigsaw Education.

 jigsaweducationgroup.com

REAL-LIFE SPEAKING SKILLS

How a Trust-wide debate festival has helped pupils to develop essential oracy for a deeply divided world...

DAVE BADLEY



A RAY OF SUNSHINE

The first Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT) Debate Festival was held on a scorching hot day in late June. But the only reason why our pupils – and staff – got hot under the collar during the day was all down to the heatwave, and not the topics up for discussion. And that was really the point. We wanted the event to encourage children to engage with the issues of the day, master the facts, respectfully listen to other people's views, and clearly articulate their own position – skills that matter more than ever in our deeply divided, confrontational world.

Developing oracy has been close to my heart for many years and I looked at various avenues to get the 'modes of dialogue' into our curriculum. To quote the eminent educationalist and linguist James Britton, "reading and writing float on a sea of talk."

That's when I came up with a proposal for a debate festival. We wanted to encourage WPAT schools to make dialogue part of their extra-curricular offering and give intentional dialogue and oracy a higher status. We also wanted to celebrate debate in a fun way, and foster greater links between schools.

I am currently training to be fully accredited as a facilitator with the Academy of Professional Dialogue. This includes a project called the International Classroom, which is designed to promote and develop dialogue in schools.



EVERYONE WELCOME

Planning started in Autumn 2025. Each school appointed a designated person who would represent them, run a club, and bring pupils to Beamont on the festival day.

I settled on three debate topics: reducing sugar in school dinners; the social media ban for under-16s; and the cost of the Artemis space mission. We ran three rounds, with three tables of two teams, each debating a different topic. The teams were given a briefing card containing the basic facts

and summarising arguments for and against the topics.

Rounds had

six steps:

- 1 An adult introduces the motion and the teams.
- 2 Members of the team arguing 'for' the motion speak in turn, presenting arguments clearly and succinctly, supported by evidence.
- 3 The opposing team make their arguments in the same manner.
- 4 The 'for' team has the chance to rebut the opposing arguments.
- 5 Ditto the 'against' team.
- 6 One rep from each team makes closing remarks.

Teams were scored out of five in four categories: quality of argument, use of evidence, speaking and delivery, and rebuttal and teamwork.

As this was our first year of the festival, the plan was to invite WPAT schools only, so we could address any teething issues before opening it to every Warrington primary school in the coming years.



HOT AND BOTHERED

We chose early on to run this as a summer project, after SATs and other statutory testing had finished. While this made it easier to find a date that all could attend, it meant that planning and preparation ran through that assessment period. This was a challenge for the staff involved.

The date also fell during a heatwave. We had to perform extra risk assessments to ensure it went ahead: the school hall was fully ventilated with plenty of fans, as well as water and ice lollies for all attendees.

Because we held the event in the school hall, and had five debates running simultaneously, it was quite difficult for judges to hear everything that was going on at times. As the festival expands, this will become a bigger issue. We have discussed running it outside on the playground or even running it over different days at different venues, but logistics can be tricky. We did also have some parents ask if they could watch, which is also something we would like to be able to facilitate at some point.

Deciding where to hold a debate festival will depend on the facilities you have available, the number of people you plan to involve, and the time of year or predicted weather. I'd advise keeping your first one small-ish!

"We wanted to celebrate debate and foster greater links between schools"



As we get bigger, I'm planning to 'recruit' people from across the Trust who have previously been involved, to help plan and run the events.



KEEP TALKING

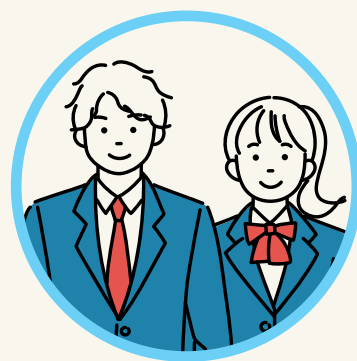
There were four key learning outcomes of the debate festival. First, dialogue and oracy now have an elevated status in our curriculum offerings. Children have also developed their abilities to talk with confidence, clarity and passion. We've also noticed that pupils have gained the skills required to debate effectively (such as research, speech writing, speaking aloud, use of evidence, and rebuttal, which also come in handy across the rest of the curriculum). Finally, debate has now been introduced to a wider range of children, giving more of them opportunities to practise it.

We hope this will be an event that runs annually and will include schools from across our community. I want to harness the vision behind the debating festival and the lessons learned to develop events across the year that promote other 'modes of dialogue' such as

problem-solving together, exploratory talk and generative dialogue.

Building a dialogue hub across Warrington in which schools from across the city can support each other and work together to build truly dialogic classrooms would be my ultimate ambition.

It's been an incredible, rewarding experience, which I believe has delivered immense benefits to our children, creating a sea of talk that will nourish learning and, ultimately, help to combat the societal divides that are so prominent today. **TP**



GWYNETH

"The debate competition was a valuable experience for me and I learned a lot of important skills. It was exciting to win something I am interested in."



HILLARY

"The festival was really competitive! I had so much fun and definitely want to do it again. I developed so much confidence and found I can speak in front of other people."



TEDDY

"It was so good to meet new people and show them our skills. I realised at the start that I wasn't very good at debating, but by the time of the festival I had really developed my skills. I want more people to be involved next time so that we can do more debating!"



Dave Badley is assistant headteacher at Beamont Primary Academy in Warrington,

part of Warrington Primary Academy Trust.

wpat.warrington.sch.uk

Hey, BIG SPENDER

The DfE's announcement of an Inclusive Mainstream Fund to improve inclusion is exciting – but how much is it, really... and how should you plan to use it?

AARON KING

I imagine that an official from the Department for Education walks into 11 Downing Street one day. She asks the Chancellor's team for £1.2 billion to improve inclusion in every mainstream school. That team is well aware that spending on EHCPs has been rising steeply. The ministers quietly love the idea of improving inclusion to reduce the need for EHCPs.

There's just one catch: the Treasury won't let mainstream schools spend that much money without an actual strategy for improving inclusion.

Back at the office, then, the DfE official sets to work producing an 'Inclusion Strategy Template', and guidance for schools on how to use it, setting out their multi-year plans for becoming *inclusive by design* and using their funding to support that aim.

In school, you read the DfE's guidance and notice that the template overlaps with your accessibility plan. The main difference is that the inclusion strategy must outline how your school spends its inclusion funding. This includes a new annual Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) grant and your notional SEN budget.

Due to the overlap, some will treat the inclusion strategy as a

compliance activity. Your school doesn't want to be that school. Instead, see it as rocket fuel for inclusion; a chance to make school awesome for all your children.

Turning pennies into pounds

The IMF grant is promised to mainstream schools for three years. For an average primary with 265 pupils, it is around £14,000 a year. Your school's challenge is to turn every penny into

pounds, so that the school becomes truly inclusive.

Not sure how much you'll have to play with? The business manager is best placed to confirm your actual IMF grant figure as well as your school's notional SEN budget (which can be £100,000+ even for a one-form-entry school). Basically, though, every school gets £3,000. The DfE then adds £16 for every child and £79 for every child with low prior attainment from Reception to Year 6. For schools in areas with

higher staffing costs (such as central London), the formula then increases your grant by up to 25 per cent.

Heading towards awesome

As you start to ponder all you know about your school – phonics, attainment, attendance, leadership, and trends in SEND amongst your cohorts – your mind wanders wider: lunchtime fallouts, after-school clubs, the social skills of your seven-year-olds.

You think about Jody, who has 'refused' to come to school for five weeks: "If a time machine took me back before then,

"Your school's challenge is to turn every penny into pounds so that the school becomes truly inclusive"



what could have been done differently?”

You re-read your last parent and pupil surveys. Then you click onto the EEF Five-a-day guidance, which underpins your school's approach to inclusion. You also look up the recent DfE Rapid Evidence Reviews on common SEND.

Next, you take a look at the Teachwire Inclusion Strategy Toolkit (link on the right). It quickly helps you to see how your reflections will feed into the creation of a great strategy.

Listen, listen, listen

You spend the next week asking the ‘magic wand’ question: “If you had a magic wand and could change anything to make our school more inclusive, what would you change?” On gate duty, you ask parents. You ask wraparound staff, lunch staff, teachers, support

staff and school leaders. Many constructive suggestions are made.

Parents say that they don't know the best ways to help their child meet their SEN support plan targets. They'd like more strategies (beyond educational games on a tablet). Staff say that more training on complex autism will enhance inclusion in the younger cohorts. They also comment on the acoustics in the hall for PE and lunchtime.

A teaching assistant surprises you by wondering about ‘PowerPoint gluttony’. She sees a correlation between the number of PowerPoint slides in a lesson and how often children ask for movement or toilet breaks. Her magic wand would deliver more learning through drama in afternoon lessons.

You don't forget to ask Abigail, the agency cover in Class 4 today. Like bumble bees carrying pollen from

flower to flower, supply staff can carry excellent ideas between schools. She explains how much a seating plan helps her to create a positive learning environment (even if it's hand-drawn).

Everyone has ideas.

Don't forget the kids

Crucially, you ask the magic wand question to children.

Many answers are beautiful, even if their impact on assessment outcomes is small. For example, “We've a flagpole but no flag. Can we get a Ukrainian one to show my Ukrainian friends we care? It would be nice for them and their parents.”

Many are about wider barriers to inclusion, not lessons, and are thought-provoking too: “Like we have a class charter, can we have a football charter, so people don't argue as much?”

The inclusion strategy is about everything the school does, and so these ideas are valuable (and also quite cheap).

Time to write

Your school's inclusion strategy is now ready to write, and it's a fairly straightforward process.

Your intent is copied from your SEND policy. The barriers for children then stream straight onto the page because you've listened so widely.

You then outline how the school will tackle those barriers. For example, CPD on helping parents with their children's SEN targets, or covering two teaching assistants

to spend three days in a nearby special school (seeing excellent autism practice and bringing it back).

You also include quick low-cost wins that build momentum and demonstrate shared ownership of the strategy: seating plans for supply staff and a football charter.

Then you make sure it happens.

Something like the IMF can feel both incredibly exciting and incredibly daunting. But instead of rushing into decisions, remember, you have all the answers to inclusion in your school already (and Teachwire has a template to help you plan it out). Best of luck! **TP**



Aaron is a SEND advisor who supports schools, colleges and organisations to improve inclusion. He also teaches Year 6 on Thursdays.

in Aaron King Inclusion

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

teachwire

The Ultimate INCLUSIVE MAINSTREAM FUND TOOLKIT

Download your **FREE**, editable inclusion strategy template at

tinyurl.com/tp-IMF26



Is it time to RETHINK SEND?

How can online alternative provision take away the stress from building an inclusion strategy? **Amy Husband** explains...

As an executive headteacher with over 15 years of headship and SENDCo experience across primary, secondary, and alternative provision settings, I have witnessed first-hand the evolving landscape of SEND provision. The recent DfE reforms and the growing role of online and hybrid Alternative Provision (AP) present a unique opportunity to reimagine inclusion and capacity in our schools, MATs, and local authorities. But are we ready to embrace the digital solutions already transforming outcomes for tens of thousands of pupils every day?

How can we build capacity?

The pressure on mainstream schools to meet diverse needs is greater than ever. The DfE's 2026 draft white paper guidance on inclusion bases highlights the importance of maximising mainstream participation, promoting belonging, and embedding inclusive values. Yet, internal capacity is often stretched to breaking point.

Online and hybrid AP, such as DfE-accredited providers like Academy21, offer immediate, flexible capacity. These solutions can be deployed as short-term interventions or longer-term placements, supporting Universal, Targeted, and Targeted Plus layers of need. With over 6,000 young people supported and 1,200 partner schools, the evidence is clear: digital AP is not a last resort, but a vital tool for early intervention,



sustained inclusion and successful reintegration.

How can we include AP in an inclusion strategy?

Quality matters. The best online AP providers deliver 100 per cent live teaching with fully qualified subject specialists, ensuring rigorous, accessible learning. Ofsted's 2024 report on Academy21 found that 'teachers establish a positive learning environment... improving pupils' confidence and readiness to learn... enabling progress and successful reintegration'.

Digital AP is inclusive by design – relentlessly accessible, with multiple means of connection and a curriculum aligned to the mainstream. For pupils with medical needs, anxiety, or at risk of exclusion, online provision ensures no child is left behind. The flexibility to scale provision up or down, integrate with on-site interventions, and support reintegration makes digital AP a cornerstone of a modern inclusion strategy.

Is online provision still high quality?

The DfE's inclusion base guidance emphasises evidence-informed approaches, robust assessment, and continuous improvement. Digital AP platforms are built for this: they offer bespoke, data-rich environments where progress is tracked, feedback is immediate, and interventions are responsive.

Surveys show 94 per cent of students (*based on 1000+ respondents*) in Academy21 feel more confident in their learning, and 97 per cent value the feedback from their teachers. For leaders, this means access to real-time data, quality assurance, and the ability to monitor equity and outcomes at scale. Online AP is not just a stopgap – it is a high-quality, evidence-based intervention that aligns with the latest research and sector expertise.

How can we integrate online AP in our school?

The DfE calls for strategic leadership, skilled teacher-led teams, and strong partnership

working. Online AP can be seamlessly integrated into inclusion bases, supporting both academic and wellbeing needs – from KS2 to KS5, and across a broad curriculum.

Leaders should view digital AP as a partner: it offers value for money, immediate capacity, and the flexibility to meet fluctuating needs. Whether as part of a multi-academy trust's area-wide approach or a local authority's commissioning strategy, accredited online AP should be a core component of any robust inclusion strategy.

Are we ready?

The digital future is already here. Tens of thousands of pupils benefit daily from online and hybrid AP, with proven outcomes in confidence, attendance, and academic progress. As we implement the DfE's vision for 'every child achieving and thriving', we must not constrain ourselves by the limitations of yesterday's models.

It is time for leaders to act: embrace innovation, include DfE-accredited online AP in your inclusion strategy, and ensure that no child is left without suitable, high-quality education. The solutions exist—let's use them to build a truly inclusive system for all. **TP**



Amy Husband
is executive
head at
Academy21.

 academy21.co.uk

MATHS SPECIAL

Addition and subtraction. Solved.

NumBots is a teaching for mastery platform for number bonds, addition and subtraction. Through small, sequenced steps and appropriate representations, NumBots builds mathematical understanding and recall – in just three minutes, four or five times a week – to develop efficient mental arithmetic, in a fun and engaging way. Teachers can easily set up students (especially existing Times Tables Rock Stars users), track their progress and identify weaknesses. Celebration assembly slides are generated automatically, while privacy settings are high and screen time controls available.

Schools can explore NumBots with a free four-week trial at numbots.com



INSIDE THIS SECTION

46 No laughing matter

Traditional interventions can unintentionally worsen maths anxiety. But the answer is in approaches you probably already use elsewhere...

49 Fun and games

Many online maths tools provide entertainment, but which ones are actually advancing learning?

51 Taking the scenic route

Maths doesn't click for all pupils, especially those with dyscalculia. But we can help them find another way in...

52 Analyse this

Problem-solving is an essential and complicated skill. So how can we ensure all our pupils have a fair crack at it?



No laughing MATTER

Traditional interventions can unintentionally worsen maths anxiety. But the answer is in approaches you probably already use elsewhere...

JOHN BEE

Inside jokes are wonderful things... when you're a part of them. They unlock layers of understanding and humour that bond you with others, and provide that most coveted of human emotions – belonging. Now, imagine a scenario where all your peers appear to 'get' something you do not. This important piece of information is constantly referenced. It becomes an inside joke; a piece of insider knowledge that everyone else seems to understand. Gradually, you begin to feel different. You feel othered. Over time, you start distancing yourself from the group. You tell yourself that you do not need to be part of the conversation anyway. For some children, maths can feel exactly like this.

Maths anxiety often manifests itself as a feeling of exclusion. We become anxious for many different reasons, but one cause can be a lack of knowledge and understanding. Before considering what we can do about it, it is worth asking a simple question: what is maths anxiety, and how might it present itself in the classroom?

Maths anxiety is a feeling of worry, apprehension or fear, when faced with mathematical situations. For some pupils, it presents as avoidance. For others, it may appear as frustration,

low confidence or even disruptive behaviour. You might hear pupils say, "I'm rubbish at maths!" or "I'm not a maths person". These statements are rarely about mathematics itself. More often, they are reflections of previous experience.

The important thing to remember is that pupils are not born with maths anxiety: it is learned. Sometimes it can be influenced by attitudes at home, from adults who had negative experiences of

mathematics themselves. Sometimes it can be reinforced by experiences in school. The good news is that learned behaviours and attitudes can be changed; but doing so requires careful and deliberate action.

Teaching vs learning

Most teachers will be familiar with the forgetting curve. We teach something, pupils learn it, and unless it is deliberately revisited, much of it is forgotten over time. This is entirely normal. In recent years, teaching for

mastery has rightly shifted the focus towards securing understanding before moving on. However, many schemes of learning are organised into blocks of content. Whilst this allows pupils to spend sustained periods of time developing understanding, it can sometimes create an assumption that because something has been taught, it has also been learned and remembered. Learning often does not happen in neat boxes.

The challenge arises when forgotten knowledge becomes

knowledge. Instead, they experience the consequences of it. While their peers appear to understand, they struggle. It is easy for them to conclude that the problem lies with them, rather than with the gaps in their understanding. This is where maths anxiety can begin to take hold.

Beware interventions

Unfortunately, some of the support we provide can unintentionally reinforce these feelings. Think about what sometimes happens to pupils who are not yet keeping up: they are removed from lessons for interventions. They receive different activities. Their mathematical diet becomes increasingly focused on practising procedures and preparing for assessments.

These interventions are usually implemented with the very best intentions, but we should pause and ask ourselves an important question: are we helping pupils become part of the mathematical conversation, or are we inadvertently separating them from it?

It is not difficult to see how maths anxiety begins to develop when the curriculum becomes dominated by memorisation, tricks and quick fixes. Pupils can quickly conclude that mathematics is a collection of random procedures to remember

"The first step is ensuring that all pupils are in on the 'joke'"



rather than a wonderfully interconnected subject. Those same pupils often struggle to reason or solve problems because they are unable to connect their knowledge to new situations. So, what can we do about it?

In it together

The first step is ensuring that all pupils are in on the 'joke'. Namely, that we deliberately track back to previously taught content before introducing something new. For example, before teaching pupils how to add fractions, we may need to revisit what fractions actually are. Before teaching area we may need to revisit multiplication. The Ready to Progress criteria provides a useful guide to the core knowledge pupils need to secure before progressing to new learning ([tinyurl.com/tp-MathsRtP](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-MathsRtP)).

But where should we even begin in a classroom of 30 pupils?

The answer lies in diagnosis. Effective diagnosis goes beyond identifying broad areas of weakness; exactly which multiplication facts are proving problematic? Which concepts have been forgotten? What prerequisite knowledge is missing? The more precise the diagnosis, the more effective the support can be.

Once the gap has been identified, retrieval practice becomes a powerful tool. Deliberately revisiting identified gaps each day can help rebuild confidence

and prepare pupils for future learning. The goal is not to catch pupils out, but to help them back into the conversation. Suppose diagnostic assessment tells you that a group of pupils is fluent with the two, five and 10 times tables, but not yet secure with others.

When teaching area, it may be sensible to choose examples that initially rely on those known facts so pupils can experience success while new learning is introduced. This is where the sweet spot of teaching often lies: identifying the problem and then responding deliberately and precisely.

We should also think carefully about classroom culture. Pupils experiencing maths anxiety often become reluctant to take risks, because they fear getting something wrong. When mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn rather than evidence of failure, pupils become more willing to participate; discussion, exploration and reasoning become safer, and confidence begins to grow.

Maths anxiety is often a symptom of pupils feeling excluded from the mathematical conversation. If we want to reduce it, we must look beyond interventions, tricks and quick fixes and focus instead on knowledge, belonging and understanding. Every pupil deserves to be part of the joke, to understand the punchline, and to experience the joy, confidence and success that mathematics can bring. **TP**



John Bee is a former deputy headteacher and maths leader, and is now a school

improvement adviser, and mastery specialist for the Maths Hubs Programme.

 @mbeeteach

 [mrbeeteach.com](https://www.mrbeeteach.com)

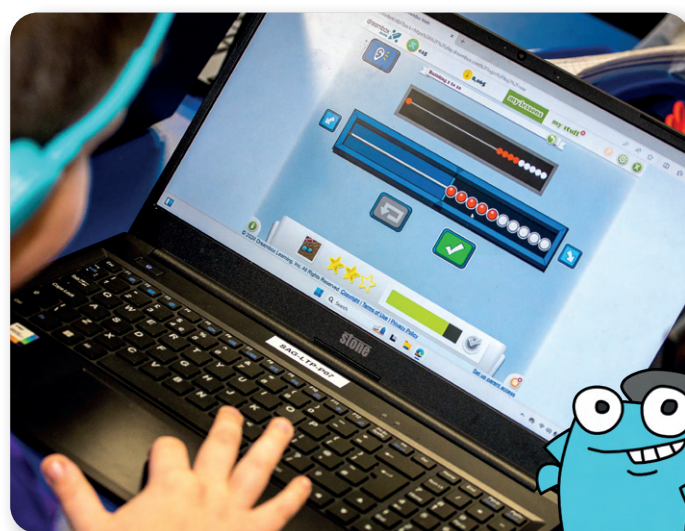
dreambox[®]

MATHS

Keep the maths curriculum moving

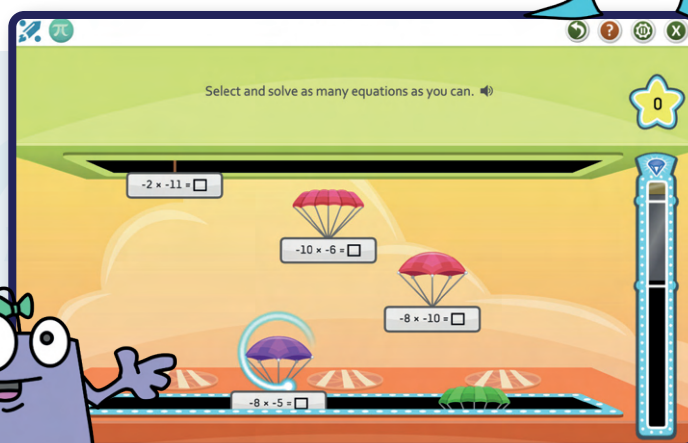
DreamBox Maths is a personalised online maths programme that complements classroom teaching by providing every learner with the **right level of challenge and support**.

- ✓ Build pupils' mathematical confidence
- ✓ Quickly identify strengths, knowledge gaps and misconceptions
- ✓ Inform teaching and targeted intervention
- ✓ Support whole-class teaching without slowing the pace of the curriculum



“Year 4 pupils achieving the expected standard in maths increased from **46%** to **73%** after introducing DreamBox Maths.”

Year 4 Teacher,
Wargrave Church of England Primary School



Free 4-week pilot available

Scan the QR code to enquire about a free 4-week pilot

Fun and GAMES

Many online maths tools provide entertainment, but which ones are actually advancing learning?

JO AUSTEN



Fig 1

Lots of primary classes now have some access to laptops and tablets, and nearly all in the UK have interactive whiteboards (IWBs) installed. However, that doesn't mean we should automatically be choosing the most tech-whizzy teaching approaches available to us. Instead, it's important to consider whether the 'interactivity' is worth the screen time and whether a low-tech or no-tech option might be preferable. Indeed, with the endless maths sites and apps now available, it can be difficult to work out where to start. Underneath often flashy interfaces, what are the features that could actually impact learning?

In many cases, interactive elements will provide more immediate fun and engagement, but these

"It's important to consider whether the 'interactivity' is worth the screen time, or if a low-tech option would work"

are two headliners amongst the 'poor proxies for learning' that are now widely recognised (Coe et. al., 2014). So rather than just offering a bunch of recommendations, let's consider some possible reasons in favour of using the tech. When can it do something that 'old school' methods alone simply cannot? How can it genuinely enhance teaching and learning?

1 Virtual manipulatives

Most primary teachers have a decent basic understanding of the Concrete, Pictorial,

Abstract approach to teaching and learning in maths. There has been some research into how virtual manipulatives (on-screen, interactive versions of resources such as dienes blocks or Numicon tiles) might fit into the well-established 'CPA' model.

However, for our purposes, the main point is that these virtual versions can enhance teacher modelling; enabling explanations and demonstrations that go beyond what would be possible with only drawings

or the movement of physical objects under a visualiser. If you haven't already, play around with the huge array of tools on Mathsbot.com and Mathigon Polypad (polypad.mathigon.org) and think about when these tools might be useful for the objectives you teach.

2 Digital and physical

Importantly, these interactive tools can be used to model while children continue using physical versions at their tables; even where a digital version might be best for clear, efficient adult modelling, children will usually still benefit from time at the concrete, physical stage. Imagine a teacher modelling how to solve tangram shape puzzles, twisting and turning the pieces on the IWB and sharing their thinking with the class.

This is far clearer using an interactive tangram option (fig. 1), with a few examples ready on different tabs, no big adult hands blocking the view under a camera and definitely no fiddly card pieces sticky-taped to a board. However, that doesn't mean the digital version will be better for the children's practice; they should have access to physical tangram pieces to move, manipulate and discuss with a partner as they solve the puzzles.

3 Adaptive teaching

None of these sites or apps knows our classes like we do and they won't respond to our whole-class assessment for learning. We therefore need to look out for interactive tools that allow us to respond and adapt the task live in the moment. A great example of this is the NRICH 'Number Lines in Disguise' activity ([tinyurl.com/tp-NRICHlines](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-NRICHlines)), which has a very wide range of difficulty levels available via a simple toggle switch.

4 Efficiency and accuracy

Beyond its support for adaptive teaching, the NRICH number lines activity shared above also saves time – there's just no way a teacher can generate such high-quality problems instantaneously. It also won't make any mistakes. The same can be said for the NRICH 'Estimating Angles' game ([tinyurl.com/tp-NRICHangles](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-NRICHangles)), which supports geometric reasoning by requiring players to estimate the size of a given angle. Players click to stop an angle that steadily increases and points are then awarded depending on how close they get. The angle measuring and scoring is instant and accurate, focusing the adults' and children's attention on the reasoning.

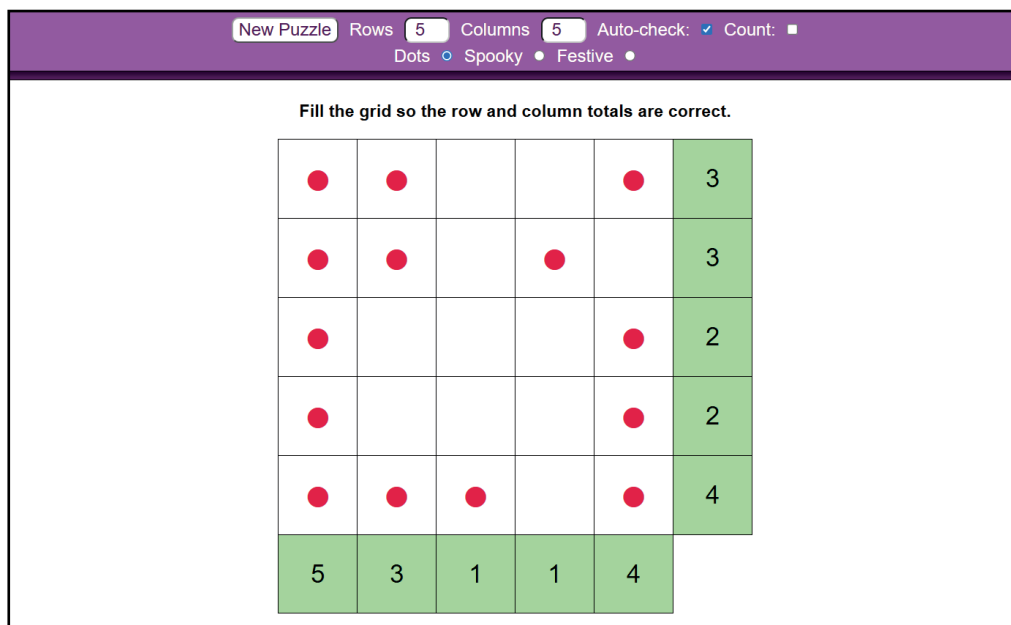


Fig 2

5 Involve everyone

The angle estimation game is awesome, but I wouldn't use it for a whole-class lesson unless I had 1:1 or 1:2 devices. Without that set-up, it's the sort of thing I'd model briefly then set as homework. However good an interactive tool is, we should avoid too much time spent calling individual children up to the board to have a turn while the rest watch on. Instead, look for ways to adapt the best interactive games to allow mass participation; as with the virtual manipulatives, look to harness the benefits of the online tool even while the children are working offline.

For example, look at the Mathsbot 'dot puzzle' (fig. 2). To complete the problem, the number of dots in each row and column must match the given targets we see at the end of each row and column. The power of the online tool is in immediately generating new puzzles at any level of difficulty and providing instant feedback via the colour-coded numbers. Offline, the most powerful thing will be all children reproducing the grid on mini-whiteboards

and using counters as the dots, sharing their reasoning with a partner as they think it through.

6 Gamification vs game-based learning

Earlier this year I attended an excellent workshop led by Dr Sam Parkes, who spoke compellingly about the difference between gamification of maths activities (points, prizes, badges etc. being awarded for doing much the same maths as usual) as opposed to 'game-based learning', where the desired learning is facilitated by the game itself. When we're choosing online activities for children using 1:1 or 1:2 devices, this distinction is a good one to keep in mind. For example, a bunch of arithmetic practice that scores points and leads to some kind of reward is gamification. While this can certainly help build children's motivation to practise, teachers using these kinds of tools in school time should think carefully about the trade-offs involved. By contrast, playing something like Battleships online drives meaningful, motivating co-ordinates practice as a direct result of playing the game. **TP**

Resource checklist

Ask these questions to determine the most useful tools:

- Is it helping model something more clearly than the offline alternative?
- Could it be used in tandem with children using physical manipulatives?
- Will it help me to adapt teaching in-the-moment?
- Does it provide accuracy, efficiency or some other benefit I can't match?
- Does it ensure all children are taking part and doing lots of practice?
- Is this genuine game-based learning or simply gamification of routine maths practice?



*Jo Austen is an assistant headteacher in East London. His book, **Small Numbers**,*

Big Ideas: Essential Concepts for Teaching Early Maths (John Catt), is out now.

Taking the SCENIC ROUTE

Maths doesn't click for all pupils, especially those with dyscalculia. But we can help them find another way in...

ALEXANDER ATHIENITIS

For some children, mathematical difficulties aren't solved by simply doing more maths.

A pupil may practise number bonds repeatedly, rehearse multiplication facts every day and complete worksheet after worksheet, but still approach a familiar calculation as though seeing it for the first time.

For children with dyscalculia, this can be particularly pronounced. Number relationships that other pupils appear to grasp instinctively may remain difficult to recognise, retain and retrieve.

A useful distinction is how a pupil responds to well-matched teaching. A child with a gap may struggle after missing or misunderstanding the original teaching, but after a clear model and guided practice, can usually apply the idea to a new example. A more persistent difficulty may reappear after a gap and across contexts or representations, despite carefully sequenced teaching. No single error identifies dyscalculia: it is the pattern over time, and the pupil's response to appropriate instruction, that matters.

For educators, the key is recognising when a pupil needs a different route towards the same mathematical understanding. If repetition is reinforcing frustration rather than learning, change the representation, pacing or route into the mathematics.



“Making mathematical relationships visible is key”

Build relationships

One useful starting point is to stop treating number facts as hundreds of unrelated pieces of information. For pupils with dyscalculia, making those mathematical relationships visible can be particularly important.

Try a 'build it three ways' activity. Give children counters or cubes and ask them to represent 54 in different multiplicative ways: six groups of nine, nine groups of six, or 10 groups of six with one group removed. Then ask: which model makes 6×9 easiest to see? What other facts can you see within it?

Ask what changed

Rather than presenting a page of unrelated calculations, reveal these one at a time:

$$4 \times 6 = 24$$

$$5 \times 6 = ?$$

$$10 \times 6 = ?$$

$$9 \times 6 = ?$$

Ask: What changed? What stayed the same? Which previous fact can help you?

A pupil struggling to retrieve 9×6 may succeed by reasoning from 10×6 and subtracting one group of six. This kind of structured comparison makes relationships visible and can reduce the amount of information pupils need to process at once.

Pacing matters, too. Fewer examples, longer thinking time and deliberate revisiting after a gap may be more useful than racing through a large set of questions.

Base progression on security, not speed or the number of questions completed. Look for the pupil to solve a small set accurately, explain or show their strategy, and apply the idea when the numbers or representation change slightly. If performance collapses after a short delay, return through a clearer model, smaller step or contrasting example rather than repeating the same page.

Let pupils choose the representation

Try a 'hidden part' activity: make nine with counters or a bead string, cover some and show that six remain. Ask the pupil to predict the hidden quantity, explain how they know and uncover it to check.

Or use a representation relay: one pupil makes a number on a 10-frame (say, eight). The next child in the group is tasked with representing the number with rods or a bead string, and a third records the different representations, and equations (e.g. $6 + 2$, and $5 + 3$). The group names what changed and what stayed the same.

On a floor number line marked only with zero and 10, pupils can stand where they think six belongs, justify their position and revise it. These activities develop magnitude and invariance as well as answers.

When maths doesn't click, progress may begin not with more practice, but with a better-chosen route: one that makes the structure visible, responds to the child's thinking and gives every pupil a genuine way into mathematics, its meaningful practice and, ultimately, mastery. **TP**



Alexander Athienitis is director of curriculum at EdShed.

 edshed.com

Analyse THIS

Problem-solving is an essential and complicated skill. So how can we ensure all our pupils have a fair crack at it? **Gareth Metcalfe** breaks it down...

We want *all* children to experience the challenge and the thrill of engaging in mathematical problem-solving; for them to grapple with an unfamiliar task, experiment with different approaches and persevere. Then, we want all children to understand the key ideas within the task, to find a solution and to explain their thinking clearly.

However, it can be difficult to ensure that *all* pupils develop as problem-solvers. Higher-attaining learners are likely to have the knowledge and skills to be able to attack non-routine tasks, whereas children whose attainment is lower can become reliant on being guided through more routine mathematical questions.

Don't do as I did

I have spent many years, in classrooms all over the world, exploring how we can help all children to problem-solve. How can we identify pre-skills, unpick important language and give our pupils the tools to engage with a non-standard task? For me, exploring how this can be done in the classroom has been both a great thrill and a significant challenge!

My first mistake was providing too little scaffolding and expecting children to be able to access challenging problem-solving tasks. For instance, as part of the task, they might have to interpret unfamiliar language. Often, they must apply various pieces of domain-specific knowledge simultaneously, perform calculations and monitor

their progress, holding their overall goal in mind.

My experience has been that if children are given a complex task without any practice of the key skills involved, they often have low success. No growth-mindset message will help children to persevere if the challenge is overwhelming.

Now, I take a more guided approach to teaching problem-solving, to ensure that children can experience higher levels of success before they engage in the main task. However, that leads into my second mistake, which was to model how to answer a

problem-solving task and then to give the class a near-replica question to tackle.

Here, pupils would have more success when working independently. However, I had taken away the problem-solving element of the experience, wherein the children are forced to form their own strategies and trial different possible approaches. I had removed the all-important struggle.

So, how can we give all children the tools to be able to access a problem-solving task, whilst giving them the legitimate experience of trialling and forming

different strategies as they break it down?

The first and most important thing we need to understand is the nature of the task itself. This enables us as teachers to be able to provide the scaffolding that will enable children to access the learning. So, before starting, ask yourself: what are the key ideas for children to understand? What are the sub-skills they'll need to use? Are there any words that pupils might not understand? And can we minimise the calculations required to answer the question, while maintaining the structure of the task?

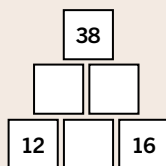


Next, plan out how the children can practise those skills before you introduce the task itself. This might mean rehearsing some relevant calculations, defining key terms or giving pupils a 'stepping stone' version of the task. You can build the challenge gradually. You can also use different 'problem variants', for example, slowly building the number of steps required.

From this backdrop of high initial success, children are then much more likely to persevere when the task becomes more challenging. If they are struggling with any specific of the aspects of a task, they can be reminded of the task build-ups.

Have a go at answering the task below. To clarify, I wouldn't give children this task first. However, I want you to have a legitimate experience of problem-solving to start with.

Each brick is made by adding the two bricks underneath. Fill the gaps:



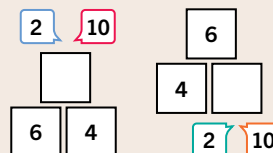
There are a few different approaches for this task. You might have used a trial-and-error method, trying different numbers that can be positioned in the bottom-middle brick. You might have experimented with pairs of numbers that have a sum of 38.

Alternatively, maybe you did $12 + 16 = 28$, then calculated $38 - 28$ and worked from there. This can give a good starting point. All these methods can have value and are legitimate approaches.

However, before asking children to attempt this

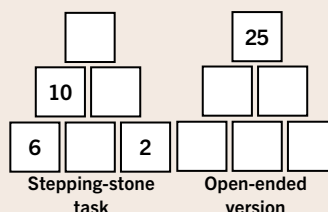
question, I would build up the sub-skills that they will need to attack the problem fully. Below is an example sequence.

Step 1: Introduce the structure of making each brick by adding the two bricks underneath. Check for understanding of this step by asking for the correct missing number.

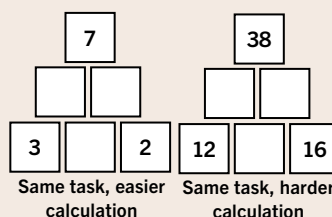


Repeat as necessary.

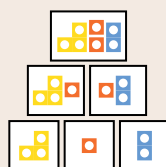
Step 2: Introduce a three-row question, which can be completed one brick at the time, to familiarise the children with the format of the task. Alternatively, you can introduce an open-ended version of the task:



Step 3: Give children the main task. The challenge in the calculation can be adjusted as appropriate:

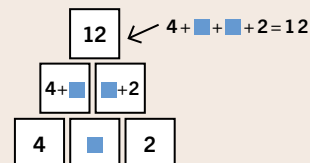


Now, pupils can attack the full problem. It can also be that practical resources are used to add further scaffold. For example, you can position Numicon pieces in the bricks, like so:



Once the children have played around with the task and tried different approaches, you as

the teacher can compare methods. You can also draw pupils' attention to the deep structure of the task. In this instance, the top square is made by adding the right-hand and left-hand numbers once, and adding the bottom-middle number twice:



Each problem-solving task is different, and the key skills needed to break down each task will change. That is the challenge and beauty of problem-solving! For other tasks, it might be more important to define key terms, or practise relevant calculations first.

By considering the pre-skills that are required for each task – and identifying the most likely barriers for children – we can build effective sequences of challenges that will enable our classes to access different problem-solving tasks. In doing so, we give all pupils the thrill of engaging and growing as a problem-solver.

I encourage you to go away and think about a problem-solving task that your children have struggled with. Can you identify why? Finding ways to knock down specific barriers before pupils engage in a task can give all children emotionally and intellectually rich mathematical experiences. **TP**



Gareth Metcalfe is the director of *I See Maths*, and author of the *I See Reasoning, I See Problem-Solving* and *Deconstructing*

Word Questions eBooks.

iseemaths.com

@gareth_metcalfe

I See Maths: Gareth Metcalfe

gareth-metcalfe

Whatever your needs we've got you covered!

The UK weather is unpredictable at best – raining one minute, blowing a gale the next and, increasingly, in the summer, heatwave after heatwave.

It doesn't always make getting your pupils outside into the fresh air easy. Yet being outdoors remains one of the best ways of promoting creativity, wellbeing and community.

The answer? Imaginative all-weather solutions that allow your school community to enjoy all the outdoors has to offer, year-round.

Transform your everyday

First impressions count: Covered walkways help your pupils and visitors arrive in comfort, excited for the day ahead

Valuable extensions: Sheltered areas outside classrooms create valuable spaces for crafting, experiments and quiet time. They're also great for keeping classrooms cool when temperatures soar

Imaginative learning: Dedicated outdoor learning areas help make learning more imaginative, messy, fun and collaborative



Tailored to your vision

All our shelters are made to be ultra durable and can be manufactured in your choice of timber and steel or polyester powder coated steel. We manufacture everything in-house so you can work closely with our team to decide on the exact look, dimensions and delivery date.



Ready to think bigger about your outdoor spaces?

Let's create something extraordinary together. Get in touch today.

Call us on **01243 55 44 55**, email info@fordingbridge.co.uk or visit www.fordingbridge.co.uk



Help sport, community and sustainability thrive

Unlock year-round sport: The importance of sport can't be underestimated and covered MUGAs allow football, tennis, basketball and netball to be played in every weather imaginable!

Places to come together: Connection and community are all-important. Inviting outdoor spaces encourage pupils – and staff – to make the most of breaks and time together

Promote sustainability: Encourage greener, cleaner journeys to school with a covered bike shelter



Why do schools keep choosing Fordingbridge?



Because experience matters

We've been sector leaders for over 50 years and have helped hundreds of schools across the UK



Because reputation is earned

Over half of our work comes through recommendation and many schools come back to us again and again



Because budgets deserve respect

Every design is created to maximise long-term value and make every pound work harder



Because quality lasts

Premium materials, in-house manufacturing and 25-year guarantees give complete peace of mind



Because schools never stand still

Our structures are designed to adapt, extend or even relocate as your needs evolve



BEYOND THE GATES

Help pupils make memories they'll never forget, and extend learning outside the classroom with a well-planned school trip...



EXPERT VIEW

Top tips for a terrific trip

Is your trip managed by teachers, or a facilitated session offered by the site? Connect with the school programme if there is one. Rosny Hayward, learning officer at Nottingham City Museum and Galleries advises, "they are likely to have lots of experience and would be happy to support you."

If you can, do a pre-visit. Walking through the day's activities means you can pre-empt possible issues. If not, consider if this might become a repeat trip. Make notes during and after the trip, so you remember key takeaways and adjust accordingly.

Talk to the provider and feel confident to ask questions. Facilitated sessions can often be adapted if given enough time and information. Hayward was clear, "you can talk to us about what you hope to get out of the trip and

any adjustments that would help. We will do what we can to tailor your pupils' experience."

Try calling rather than emailing. Talking to a person means the conversation may cover aspects you didn't consider, which you can then plan for.

Hayward's final point reminded me why trips are important: "Practical workshops give learners who might struggle in a classroom environment a space to excel and shine. I often have teachers commenting on how brilliantly these children engage. In this context they get the chance to be the brilliant ones."



Hannah Day is an art specialist based in the West Midlands

CURRICULUM LINKS



English

Take pupils behind the scenes of Roald Dahl's writing process, where they'll explore his life and try some of his creative techniques for themselves. Visit the Roald Dahl Museum: tinyurl.com/tp-RDM26



History

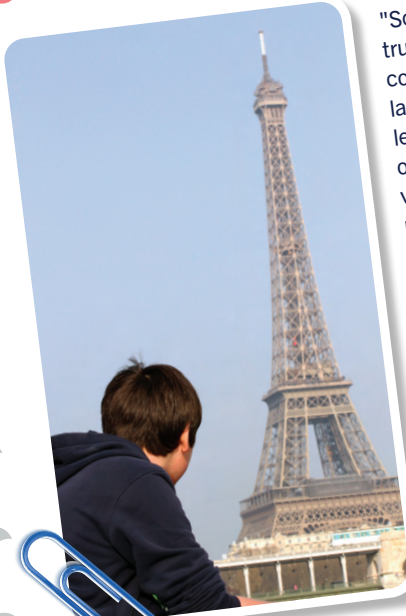
With a trip to Cadbury World, pupils will not only engage in fun, chocolate-themed experiences, but will learn about fascinating histories, such as the Aztecs' use of the cocoa bean. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-Cad



STEM

At the Science Museum, children can get hands on with interactive galleries, take part in a session with expert Science Explainers, and more. Visit sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups

OUR BEST SCHOOL TRIP



"School trips to Paris are truly cross-curricular, combining history, art, language and cultural learning with the excitement of Disneyland®. You can also visit iconic landmarks, museums, and galleries, before enjoying a day at the theme park, creating an itinerary that supports learning far beyond the classroom."
- Garibaldi School

Visit theschooltravelcompany.com/tours/paris-4-nights to book your trip now!

memories

WHAT'S ON...

✓ **GLOW WILD** (26 Nov 26 – 2 Jan 27; selected evenings)
Wakehurst, Kew Gardens. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-KewGW

✓ **ROOM ON THE BROOM** (27 Nov 26 – 3 Jan 27)
Lyric Theatre, London. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-LyricROTB

✓ **THE JOLLY POSTMAN** (running until Jan 2027)
The Postal Museum, London. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-JP

✓ **ALICE IMMERSIVE WONDERLAND**
(13 Nov 26 – 21 March 27)
Dock X, Canada Water, London.
Visit aliceimmersivewonderland.com



VENUE SPOTLIGHT

Where education meets adventure

A JCA Adventure isn't your run-of-the-mill residential.

Their unique approach to active learning, with one instructor leading small groups of 12 or fewer students for the duration of their stay, is designed to build confidence and get youngsters out of their comfort zone.

Across their flagship centre, Conover Hall, and Croft Farm, their unique

watersports site, school groups can take part in dozens of activities they won't have had the chance to try before.

If your school's feeling extra adventurous, groups can visit their sister centre in Normandy, the Chateau du Molay, for a quintessentially French residential.

Find out more at jca-adventure.co.uk

RESOURCE CORNER

Meet the Queen of Darkness

Extend a trip focusing on the Romans back into your classroom, with this brilliant book topic about Boudicca. tinyurl.com/tp-BTboudicca



Experience medieval life

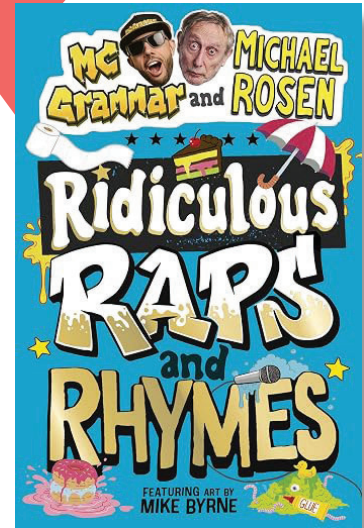
Explore key features of Warwick Castle, using a classroom scavenger hunt, images and vocabulary cards. tinyurl.com/tp-WarwickC



Going abroad?

Animate the budding linguists in your class by making your own movies in this MFL stop-motion lesson. tinyurl.com/tp-MFLmotion





RIDICULOUS RAPS AND RHYMES

Michael Rosen & MC Grammar

Play the podcast and bring real authors into your classroom, inspiring great writing from every pupil...

Rap is a powerful form of spoken poetry that has its roots in the long tradition of oral storytelling and performance. Through exploring the work of Michael Rosen and MC Grammar in their new book, *Ridiculous Raps and Rhymes*, pupils will discover how rhythm, rhyme and wordplay combine to create engaging and memorable performances. They will learn to listen closely to the sounds and patterns of language, experiment with collaborative writing, and develop confidence as performers. Working with a partner, children will plan, write, refine and perform their own original raps, celebrating creativity, teamwork and the true joy of language.



5

TIPS FROM THE AUTHOR

Rhythm over rhyme

Rhythm matters just as much as rhyme when writing a rap – think about how the words sound and flow when spoken aloud.



Say it before you write it

Play around with words and lines out loud first. You don't need to write anything down until it feels right.



Every word earns its place

Choose words carefully – a strong rap doesn't waste lines. Each one should add rhythm, meaning or humour.



Write with a partner

Take turns adding lines, listen to each other's ideas, and build on them together. Raps often get stronger through collaboration.



Perform with expression

Once you've drafted your rap, rehearse it. Experiment with pace, volume and expression to bring the words to life.



➔ HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

1

Listen to the podcast

Start by listening to the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast – you can find it wherever you get your podcasts, at teachwire.net/podcasts or by scanning the QR code on the right. It's divided into three sections, so you can listen in one go or spread it across your sessions. It's entertaining, thought-provoking and you'll even hear Michael perform a rap on the fly, with beats from MC Grammar! You heard it here first...

2

Explore the teaching pack

Once you've listened to the podcast, work through the teaching sequence. Use the PowerPoint slides to spark discussion, the first two planning sheets to help children 'bank' their ideas and map out their raps, and the working wall materials to build a growing display of inspiration. Planning sheet three then supports a vital skill: teaching children how to give each other kind, specific and constructive feedback on their finished work.

3

Read the book

If you can, get hold of a copy of *Ridiculous Raps and Rhymes* (out now!) for your class to enjoy – before, during or after the sessions, where you'll join Michael 'The Mic' Rosen and MC Grammar on a riotous rhyming adventure! From school to the zoo, the beach to the museum, this rapping duo takes readers on a one-of-a-kind quest, packed with mischief and hilarity. Expect chocolate cake rhymes, hissing snake raps, and everything ridiculously silly in between. It's a high-energy, laugh-out-loud celebration of poetry, rhythm and rhyme.

DOWNLOAD FOR FREE



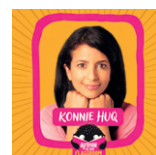
EACH EPISODE COMES WITH:

- Teaching notes
- Planning sheets
- PowerPoint
- Writing activities

CHECK THESE OUT



LOUIE STOWELL



KONNIE HUQ



PHIL EARLE



BALI RAI

MC GRAMMAR SAYS...

"You can't be a good rapper if you're not a good reader. How're you gonna build those worlds of rhymes without the words? You gotta be reading if you wanna be rapping."

Don't just TALK THE TALK

Whilst oracy scaffolds are useful, it's the leap beyond the structure into the meaning that really yields results, says **Helena Brzeski**

Walk into almost any primary classroom and you will see the trappings of oracy: discussion guidelines on the wall, sentence stems on display, and children taking on roles such as 'instigator', 'builder' or 'challenger'. These are, of course, good things. But after several years of embedding oracy as a curriculum driver here at Excelsior Multi Academy Trust, we have learned that they are not, on their own, enough – particularly for our most disadvantaged pupils.

At our Trust, we serve communities with high levels of disadvantage in some of the most deprived parts of Birmingham, with over two dozen languages spoken across our schools.

Oracy has been central to our work for years, and on paper, our provision seemed strong. Yet when we looked closely, we found something troubling. Children sounded, on the surface, like confident communicators, but many did not fully understand why they were using a particular sentence stem, or what it was for. They used the language because they knew it pleased their teacher, not because they had internalised the way a historian, scientist or mathematician actually thinks.

A help or a hindrance?

Generic oracy strategies, such as talk roles, sentence stems and discussion

protocols, are an essential starting point, especially for younger children or those new to English, giving pupils a shared structure and a confident way into discussion. But they can unintentionally become a ceiling rather than a stepping stone. For disadvantaged pupils, who may have fewer opportunities outside school to hear academic language, a well-rehearsed stem can mask a much shallower understanding. A child can

“We developed our own habits of mind framework, to embed disciplinary oracy”

say ‘the evidence suggests’ without grasping what counts as evidence in a historical argument, or what makes a source reliable – performing the language of a discipline without thinking like someone who belongs to it.

This matters for equity. Some pupils arrive at school having had greater exposure to academic vocabulary, debate and discussion beyond the classroom. For pupils without that exposure, school may be the only place this thinking is modelled explicitly. If we stop at fluent-sounding talk, we risk widening the gap by giving disadvantaged pupils the costume of academic language without the understanding beneath it.

From talking to thinking

This realisation led us to develop our habits of mind framework: teaching pupils the specific habits and reasoning processes that experts in each discipline actually use, drawing on existing research where it existed (the Royal Academy of Engineering on engineering habits, for example) and developing our own where it did not.

In science, pupils learn that scientists are curious, sceptical, objective, rational and open-minded. A teacher might say: “Today we are going to be scientists. We are going to be sceptical – we won’t be convinced until we have seen the evidence.” Stems remain available but now sit underneath an explicit understanding of what it means to think and behave like a scientist, and why.



Crucially, the same skill looks different across subjects. Evaluation in computing – i.e. checking whether a program meets its design criteria – is not the same as evaluation in geography, where pupils weigh up what the evidence suggests, which again differs from evaluation in history, where pupils use sources to support or challenge a conclusion. Once pupils understand evaluation as a disciplinary habit, they can ask *what does evaluating well look like in this subject, right now?* That is far more powerful than reaching for a stem that begins with ‘I think’.



Lessons from implementation

Embedding this across a Trust has taught us several lessons. For example, it has to be explicit and visible: we mapped substantive knowledge, disciplinary knowledge and habits of mind onto our curriculum, with posters for each subject, and stems organised by habit rather than generic talk role. Stems remain a scaffold, not a destination; pupils should internalise the habit and move beyond the stem. Progression matters, too: a Year 1 pupil's stems for talking like a historian, such as “these are similar because” and “these are different because”, look very different from a Year 6 pupil explaining continuity and change through causation.

The approach must also be woven through wider school life: such as in our pupil parliaments, with elected MPs and a Prime Minister, who must communicate, negotiate and persuade; our Speak Up, Speak Out competition, where every Year 6 pupil writes and delivers a speech in their own words to hundreds at Millennium Point; and the national Cicero Cup debating competition. Each gives pupils a genuine audience and reason to communicate well – the authentic context disciplinary habits need to take root.

Confidence, metacognition and outcomes

The impact has gone well beyond pupils sounding more articulate. Because they now understand the purpose behind the language they use, pupils have become noticeably more reflective. Asked what a mathematician does, they no longer repeat a stem; they tell us mathematicians evaluate, prove, generalise and justify, and can identify which of these they are working on, and why.

We have also adapted assessment to capture disciplinary skills, not just substantive knowledge, and attainment has improved across the curriculum. More importantly, pupils are beginning to see themselves as scientists, geographers, historians, engineers and authors, with everything that implies for their futures.

Why this matters now

Our pupils are growing up in a world saturated with information, and increasingly, with misinformation and AI-generated content. The ability to question, challenge and evaluate is no longer a nice-to-have; it is a fundamental life skill. Disciplinary oracy gives pupils the habits of mind to interrogate a claim, weigh up evidence, recognise when something does not add up, and articulate why. We are not just teaching pupils what to think, but how to think, and how to talk through that thinking with others, testing and refining ideas in dialogue, rather than simply accepting what they are told. **TP**



Helena Brzeski is director of technology at Excelsior Multi Academy

Trust.

 excelsiormat.org

6 ways to strengthen oracy



Habits of mind

Begin each lesson by explicitly discussing how experts in that subject think (e.g. being sceptical in science), before introducing sentence stems.



Talk trios

Group pupils in threes with rotating roles (such as instigator, builder/challenger and summariser), using a picture or story prompts to spark structured discussion.



Evaluation circles

Ask pupils to compare how ‘evaluating’ differs across subjects. This could be a scientific conclusion, a geographical judgement, or a computing outcome.



Debates

Hold mock votes on real school decisions, with elected representatives researching, presenting and defending positions to their peers.



Speech challenges

Have pupils write and deliver two-minute speeches in their own words on topics they care about, building towards a class, year-group or whole-school competition.



Stem-fading reviews

Periodically ask pupils to discuss without sentence stems, checking whether they can still demonstrate the underlying disciplinary habit independently.

WAGOLL

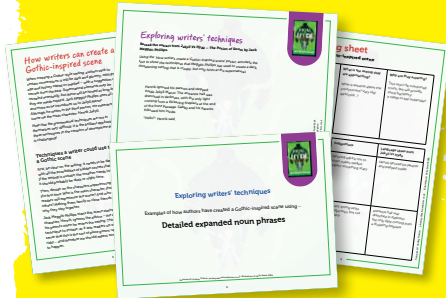
Jeckyll vs Hyde: The Potion of Doom

Peer inside the mind of the author and help pupils understand how to write a Gothic scene



Jeckyll vs Hyde: The Potion of Doom (£7.99, HarperCollins), by Jack Meggitt-Phillips, is out now.

DOWNLOAD
RESOURCES AT



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

tinyurl.com/tp-Gothic

What is the difference between writing horror and writing Gothic horror? This question haunts me, late into the lonely nights, when I'm chewing at the pom-pom of my nightcap, squinting by candlelight at ancient Gothic masterworks, hissing "What are you? What arrrrreee yooou?"

Everyone will have a different answer, but, to me, there is something inherently mysterious and theatrical about the Gothic. Something outré that comes from its pearl-clutching 18th/19th century origins. And so, when students are trying to capture it in their own writing, they need to be willing to write something that's first beguilingly intriguing and then sensationally shocking.

My favourite Gothic tale is *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. For the past few years, I have been obsessed with the idea of taking this story and turning it into a monstrously funny book that could work for reluctant readers.

Jeckyll vs Hyde: The Potion of Doom is about a spoiled child named Henrik Jekyll, who gets what he

wants, whenever he wants it. One day, after moving to the creaking, crumbling town of Gothville, he decides to try and give himself superpowers by recreating an old family potion recipe. But he accidentally turns himself into a monster instead, named Eddie Hyde.

In addition to mining the story for comedic potential, I was keen to pay homage to the Gothic elements of the original story, which set me thinking a lot about what ingredients you need to write Gothic fiction.

In the scene that follows, Henrik Jekyll is about to enter his new home of Jekyll Manor for the first time. The past and the present collide, and after living under the manor's roof, Henrik will never be the same again...

FIVE TIPS ON WRITING A GOTHIC SCENE

1. HOW IS YOUR CHARACTER REACTING?

Remind your reader who is experiencing this scene. It will bring the reader closer to your character, and make them care more about what is going to happen to them.

2. BE SPECIFIC WITH THE SENSES

It's all very well to say something smelled bad. But what if something smelled like a tuna sandwich that should have been thrown away three years ago? Your nostrils are recoiling aren't they? Go through each of the

senses and think how you can use them to build suspense.

3. FOCUS ON THE BUILD UP

Our hearts beat faster and our skin crawls when we know that we are approaching a big reveal. The more you can work on this build up, slowing down the pace to draw out the exquisite agony of the horror about to unfold, the better.

4. USE THE PAST

The Gothic relies upon the uncovering of the past – either through unveiling a mystery, or

through the past literally coming back to haunt the present. Is there a way you can suggest that history is peering through the cracks, entering the current world of your story?

5. SHOCK YOUR READER

The end of a great Gothic scene is like a punchline at the end of the joke. It needs to be surprising, otherwise all the good work is undone. If the scene takes place before the end of book, the reveal should wrong-foot the reader and make them ask questions about the future events of the story.



Extract from

pages 29-31

Sense of sight: here I use a lack of light to make Jekyll Manor feel more mysterious.

This corridor filled with whispers is an example of how you can use a collision between the past and the present to create suspense.

Using the word 'drenched' here, makes the darkness feel wet and sticky. Like it's alive.

Henrik ignored his parents and stepped inside Jekyll Manor. The entrance hall was drenched in darkness, with the only light coming from a flickering fireplace at the end of the front passage. Gabby and his parents followed him inside.

"Hello?" Henrik said.

His hello echoed mockingly. As he listened closer, he heard other echoes as well, belonging to conversations held long ago.

[...]

They all moved further into the hall. It was so dark they couldn't even see the ground beneath their feet. Henrik marched to the flickering, hissing fireplace.

Above the mantelpiece hung a portrait titled:

Dr Henry Jekyll

Gifted by the Van Helsing Institute

1886

The portrait showed the doctor in his laboratory again. He was older and balder than he had been in the photograph, but he looked just as smug. Henrik imagined that the painting's frame was merely something Dr Jekyll was leaning on, and that the old scientist might stretch out a hand to greet them at any moment.

"What are you doing in this house?!" asked a weak, trembly voice.

Henrik stepped back in shock. Had the portrait just spoken? Even though it had been painted long ago, there was a freshness to the artist's brushstrokes that almost made the doctor seem . . . alive.

"And why are you all in the dark?" added the voice.

A series of gaslit lamps flickered to life. Henrik and the others turned around to find a hairless, bespectacled man resting heavily on an old-fashioned cane. The mere act of walking through the door seemed to have exhausted him.

Small details like this can add to the mystery of the story. This is the first mention of The Van Helsing Institute, and even readers who don't spot the connection to Dracula might wonder what this Institute has to do with anything.

This is where staying close to your characters' perspective can really heighten the drama, and help wrong-foot the reader into thinking one thing, before being given another.

And we end on a shocking reveal, which also prompts further questions. Who is this strange man, why is he so exhausted, and what is he doing in Jekyll Manor?

PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR OAK CURRICULUM MUSIC TEACHING

NOT A MUSICAL SPECIALIST?

NOT A PROBLEM.

The Oak Primary Music Curriculum gives you the free resources - but knowing how to use them effectively in your classroom is where our teacher training comes in.

Join the team behind the curriculum, for practical online CPD designed to help primary teachers bring the Oak Music Curriculum to life.

Build confidence. Understand the curriculum. Inspire your pupils with music.



The programme follows **four** stages:

DISCOVER ADOPT
ADAPT SUSTAIN

Sessions are **online** and cost **£35**

**Oct 2026 - May 2027
SIGN UP NOW**



bristolbeacon.org

 **Pocket Money ADVENTURES**

MONEY IS INVISIBLE. HOW DO WE FIX IT?

Make money choices visible in Reception and KS1.

Stories, play and Tap. Tap. Pause. help children explore needs, wants, saving, spending and sharing.



ENGLAND . SEPTEMBER 2028

Primary Citizenship to include financial education.

SEVEN-WEEK SCHOOL PATHWAY

Sponsor-funded places, by arrangement

1 SPARK, 6 SESSIONS

We deliver the opening.
Six weekly follow-ups.

5 MINUTES' PREP

Per weekly follow-up,
by design. Ready to use.

FITTED TO YOUR CLASS

Chosen. Changed. Adapted.
For individual access, too.

BEYOND WEEK 7

Keep all 30 cards, poster
and free follow-on packs.

FREE FOR TEACH PRIMARY READERS

Read Ava Saves Up online.

Get the Tap, Tap, Pause poster
and Needs, Wants or It Depends cards.
No payment. No sign-up to read.



SCAN TO READ FREE

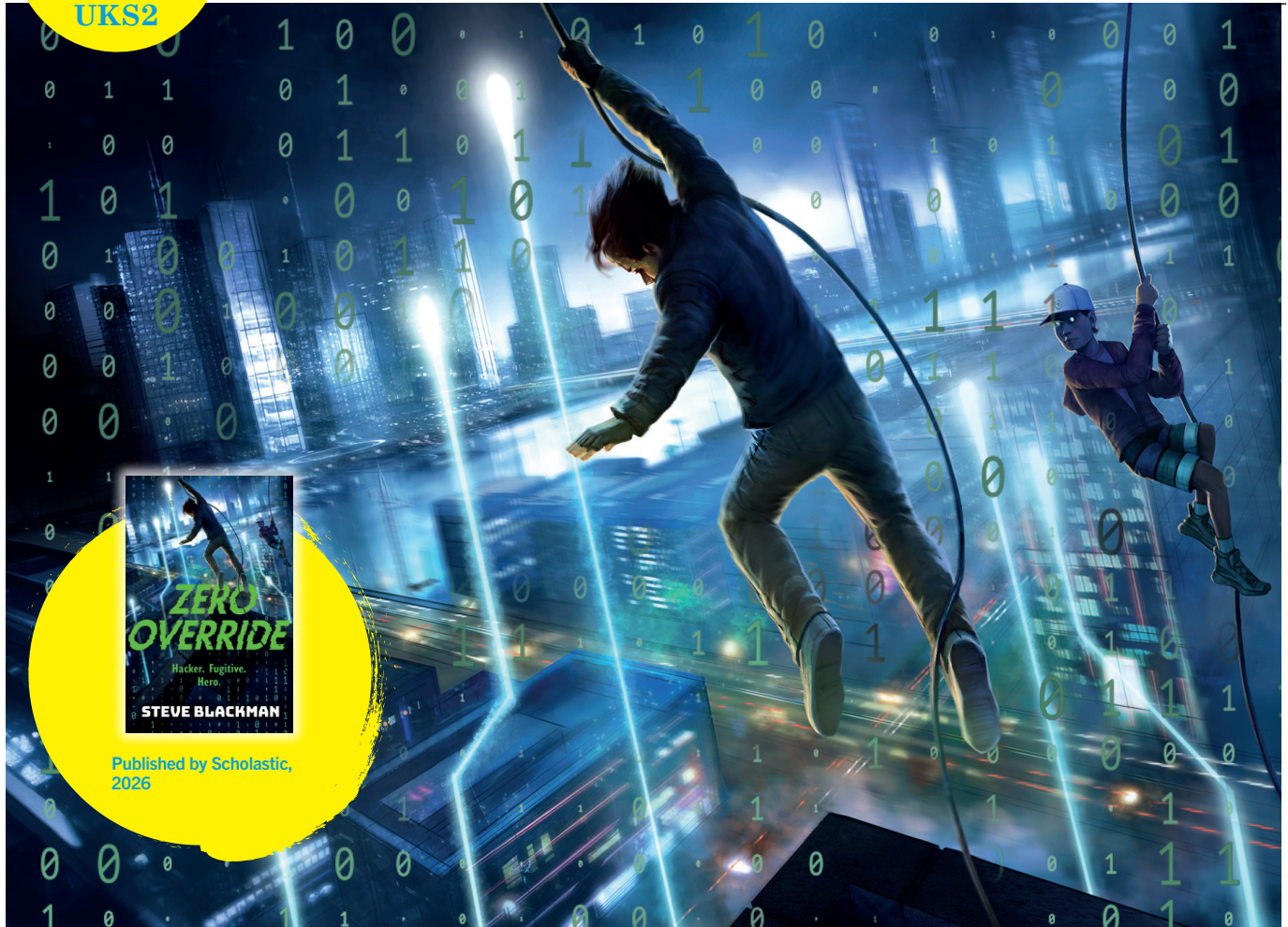
MAGAZINE CODE

TEACHPRIMARY

ava.pocketmoneyadventures.co.uk



School pathway subject to sponsorship, location and capacity. Free online offer available nationally.



Cover illustration © Jeff Nantrup

Zero Override

Use Steve Blackman's astonishing children's debut as a starting point for exploring how technology has changed our lives, and the moral ambiguities it brings

JON BIDDLE

Technology itself is neither inherently good nor bad. Ultimately, it depends on how we choose to use it.' – Steve Blackman

Over the past few years, the use of AI has increased dramatically, and although it has been explored in children's books before, *Zero Override* has come along at exactly the right time. It is a fascinating book to create teaching resources for, partly because it tackles something that often feels abstract to children, but also because it explores so many wider themes. What does it mean to be human? How might AI impact on

our lives in the future? Can stealing ever be justified? The combination of big questions, dramatic action and unexpected twists makes *Zero Override* a compelling read. I believe it also has huge potential as a transition book.

Although it is Steve Blackman's debut children's book, he has spent the past two decades working in digital technology and running digital agencies, which is reflected in the assuredness of his writing. His rationale for writing the book is clear: 'Fiction is where children can practise asking the difficult questions. And as the first generation

that will never know a world without AI, they're going to have a lot of questions – not just about what AI can do, but how it shapes the way they think, create and find their own voices. Our responsibility is to illuminate these tensions so that young readers are better equipped to face a future that is still being written.'

Story

Summing up the book in a few sentences is a challenge, as there is so much happening. The story is set in London, a few years into the future, where people and AI robots co-exist in



a society heavily reliant on technology. Zero is a skilful hacker who works as part of an underground resistance group that steals money from wealthy companies and gives it to people who have lost their livelihoods. A hugely dangerous virus has infiltrated the computer network and is causing enormous damage. As well as having to stop the virus, Zero and his group must try and save the life of his sister, Grace, whose artificial heart is entirely dependent on technology.

There is also a secret online chapter to the book, which can be accessed by working out the clues hidden in the chapter titles. It is definitely worth solving, as the extra chapter provides an unexpected twist and cleverly sets up a potential sequel...

Activities In tech we trust

The most obvious place to start is by thinking about our changing relationship with technology and AI. Ask the class what they understand AI to be and about the impact it is already having on our lives. Before the lesson, create a list of possible situations where intelligent machines and robots could theoretically take over the role of a human (carrying out a heart transplant, picking fruit, teaching a class of students, planning a series of meals for the school cook, refereeing a football match, interviewing somebody for a job, driving a bus, marking a set of SATs papers) and ask the pupils to work in small groups to place them on a 'trust continuum' from 'never trust' to 'completely trust'. Get them to justify their choices, encouraging them to think about elements such as the risk to life, the importance of human experience, and so on.

Can they think of any scenarios that they definitely wouldn't hand over to technology? They can then write a set of AI guidelines for the future, deciding what humans should and shouldn't allow machines and robots to do.

Hero or criminal?

In chapter three, we learn that Zero and his team are not keeping the money they are stealing, but giving it to people who have lost their jobs to robots. Briefly explain the legend of Robin Hood and the similarities with what Zero is doing. Begin by discussing in small groups whether stealing can ever be right. Give some possible scenarios, such as stealing a loaf of bread to feed hungry relatives, stealing a friend's pencil because the friend said they do not want it, or stealing from a supermarket because the item being taken does not actually belong to an individual.

Get the pupils to work with a partner, where one pupil will write a short speech defending Zero's actions and one will write a speech arguing that his actions are wrong. The pairs can perform their speeches for the class before having a final conversation about whether the reasons behind an action can change if it is right or wrong.

The next breakthrough...

Ask pupils to think about things that didn't exist when their grandparents were young children, such as smartphones, wind turbines, air fryers and social media. What are the benefits and consequences of each of them?

Ask them to imagine that they are inventors 20 years in the future. Their brief is to design something that solves a genuine need. They need to plan and draw their invention, explaining



what it does and its advantages; they should also come up with a potential drawback (e.g. does it use an enormous amount of energy?). The next step is to create a news report about their product, considering who it is for, what could go wrong and who would control it. This will stop them from simply creating a 'cool gadget'. It will help pupils understand that technological progress is not automatically positive and that every new invention comes with choices and responsibilities.

Whom can you trust?

Zero begins the story with a strong distrust of robots due to a major misunderstanding that happened when he was younger. As the story progresses and he is forced to work alongside them, he starts to realise that he was wrong. Challenge the pupils to think about other books where our understanding of and feelings about one of the characters

Take it further → → →

THE CHANGING FACE OF CITIES

The futuristic London that we explore alongside Zero and his team provides a great opportunity for learning about how cities change over time. Find some photos and maps of your nearest town or city, and look at how they have changed. What is different about the houses, buildings and transport? Why might some of those changes have taken place? Is there anything that hasn't changed? Pupils could then work in small groups to

design a city for the future. Ensure they think about transport, housing, schools, hospitals, policing and leisure. The challenge is not just making the city more advanced, but working out how to make it accessible, sustainable and enjoyable for the people who live there. Children can produce a travel guide poster or online presentation, explaining all the benefits of living in their new city, as well as the challenges and potential dangers.

COULD YOU SURVIVE IN THE FUTURE?

Get the class to imagine that a group of people from 1948 have suddenly arrived in your classroom in 2026. They have travelled from the year the Manchester Baby, one of the world's first computers, was developed, making them an ideal group to show just how dramatically technology has changed. They have never seen a mobile phone or used the internet, and have no idea how



changes as we go through the book. Are there times when a heroic-seeming character turns out to be villainous or vice versa? They will hopefully come up with a few examples (Professor Snape from *Harry Potter*, Auggie and Via from *Wonder* or Ravi from *The Boy at the Back of the Class*). This will lead into a discussion about prejudice, making assumptions and first impressions.

Without being specific, ask pupils to recall a time when their opinion of someone, perhaps a friend or a teacher, changed, and what caused it. Use the example below as a starting point for discussion and explore what other possible explanations there could have been for Henry's behaviour.

Henry snatched the book from Mia's hands and told her she wasn't allowed to read it. When she protested, he pushed it into his bag, leaving Mia close to tears. He ignored her for the rest of the morning and refused to explain

what he had done.

Henry seemed like an unpleasant boy who simply enjoyed upsetting other children.

Later that day, Mia understood why Henry had been so desperate to take it from her. He wasn't trying to be unkind: the book contained a letter Henry had written to his older sister, who had recently left home, and he was terrified that Mia would discover it. He was embarrassed and didn't want anyone to know how much he missed her.

Ask them to create a character whose actions make us change our opinion of them as we learn more about their story. Get them to write two paragraphs about the character, where readers realise that their initial opinion was wrong.

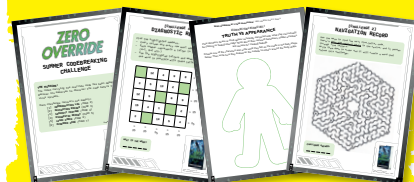
The Robot Who Wanted a Job

Creating a comic strip is a good way of teaching the main aspects of narrative structure, as well as being an engaging task for pupils. Invite them to imagine a robot that has been designed to carry out an ordinary job but has decided that it would like to do something else. They can design and create a comic strip where the robot tries different human jobs, with each attempt ending in an unexpected disaster. Along the way, the robot could discover that being useful isn't the same as being happy. Challenge pupils to show the robot's feelings through thought bubbles as well as through its actions. Perhaps it could realise at the end that it doesn't need a job at all. This allows the pupils to engage with one of the main themes of the book in a more playful way, while creating a piece of writing that is both interesting and visually appealing. **TP**

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *How to Steal the Future* by Christopher Edge
- ❖ *Can I Build Another Me?* by Shinsuke Yoshitake
- ❖ *Dadbot* by Jack Noel
- ❖ *Scrap* by Guy Bass
- ❖ *Troofriend* by Kirsty Applebaum

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT



Download your **FREE** teaching resources for *Zero Override* at

tinyurl.com/tp-Zero



Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher

of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.

computers work. The task for pupils is to become their guides and introduce them to the technology of the modern world. They need to decide on three technologies that would be most difficult for someone from 1948 to understand, and find creative ways to explain them. How would you explain a smartphone to someone who has only ever used a telephone? How would you explain Google Maps, streaming a film or AI? They could produce an illustrated 'Welcome to 2026' guide, combining explanations,

diagrams and dialogue, as well as slightly bemused reactions from the visitors.

WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

The first few chapters of the book explore what it means to be human. Ask pupils what makes humans different from robots. They will hopefully suggest emotions, feelings, self-awareness and the ability to make mistakes. Would a perfect world actually feel strange? Provide a scenario where a mechanoid is doing something

generally considered to be kind, such as helping an injured person. Discuss whether this is actual kindness or if it is simply doing something it has been trained to do. Is the mechanoid being kind, or is the human who programmed it the source of the kindness? Children should write a short paragraph titled 'What makes us human?'; encourage them to focus on empathy, creativity, relationships, and humour, as well as previous discussions.

Clearing classroom **HURDLES**

What if a reluctance to write isn't a lack of skill or motivation, but a response to disadvantage we can address before pencil hits paper?

KATHY ROE

Writing is one of the most powerful tools we can give children, yet it's also one of the most complex and difficult things to learn, and one of the curriculum areas where the impact of disadvantage can be most keenly felt.

When we think about disadvantage, it is tempting to focus on attainment data. The statistics are stubborn and familiar. Gaps emerge early, and often widen as children move through their schooling.

However, before we jump to interventions and tracking, it is worth considering a more fundamental question: do our children feel that writing is for them?

Many children experiencing disadvantage arrive in our classrooms carrying invisible barriers. They may have experienced disruption to their learning, moved schools frequently, or had limited opportunities for

language-rich interactions outside school. Their working memory might be tied up in stress and worry, or how they are perceived by others; these factors can lead them to no longer see themselves as successful learners.

As teachers, we often notice the outcomes, rather than the causes: the inability to start writing, the lack of stamina, the reluctance to contribute. But a child who

does not feel a sense of belonging is unlikely to take risks as a writer. A pupil whose self-esteem has been repeatedly damaged by perceived failure may decide

“Before we jump to interventions, it is worth considering: do our children feel that writing is for them?”



writing is simply “not for them”. This child is likely to blame themselves and hunker down rather than seeking help.

So, before we can transform writing outcomes, we must ensure children feel seen, valued and capable.

The hidden link

To write successfully, pupils must generate ideas, hold them in working memory, organise them coherently, transcribe them accurately and effortlessly, and constantly monitor their success. For children experiencing disadvantage, any weakness within that demanding chain can create a significant barrier.

What can appear to be a motivation issue is often a confidence issue, and what appears to be a lack of effort is sometimes a lack of belief. What appears to be disengagement could be self-protection.

We have all encountered pupils who look at a page and immediately decide it is “too hard”. Equally, we have seen children who become so accustomed to adult support that they no longer view themselves as independent writers. All learners need opportunities to experience success independently. Without this sense of agency, writing can feel hard or even pointless.

But supporting disadvantaged writers does not mean reducing expectations.

In fact, the most effective support involves helping children do more thinking for themselves and moving away from over-scaffolding.

Too often, adults unintentionally reduce vital opportunity for practice by providing answers, supplying sentences or writing ideas down for pupils to copy.

Children need opportunities to experience what success feels like

when it is achieved through their own effort. This is where confidence grows and self-regulation begins to develop. This starts with teachers knowing the curriculum well, knowing exactly where children are working within that framework, and then setting tasks that allow them to practise over and over whatever is wobbly for them.

Prepping for advantage

One of the most powerful strategies teachers can employ is to deliberately create advantage. Imagine a child in your setting who feels ‘behind’ – perhaps their self-esteem is suffering; they might feel perpetually ‘glued’ to their TA. Every English lesson has them feeling on the back foot before it’s even begun.

Now imagine that same child being given a writing task linked to their known grapheme-phoneme-correspondences, those sounds they can independently apply with fairly automatic letter formation. Imagine their ideas have been co-constructed into a sentence that feels achievable, and think about the executive function boost they will feel when able to complete a task by themselves. If we do this repeatedly, the child’s subconscious moves from:

“I can’t do this” to “I’ve seen this before; I know what to do”, and crucially: “I feel successful!”.

All children need to be learning and over-learning every time we set them a task. This means building the foundational knowledge that writing sits upon (namely transcriptional fluency), and it requires plenty of deliberate and well-pitched practice at independent tasks, so confidence can grow and independence can flourish.

Responding to writing

Writing is a deeply personal endeavour. When children write, they share or communicate something of themselves. This is especially true when they write about their own experiences, memories, interests and emotions. That’s why it can be helpful to think about responding to personal writing as humans first and teachers second. When a pupil writes, our response should not immediately jump to punctuation and spelling.

Instead, we might begin with genuine curiosity: *“That sounds exciting. Tell me more”*; *“I can see why that mattered to you”*; or, *“That bit really made me laugh”*.

For all children, especially those

experiencing disadvantage, this feedback communicates to writers that they have something worth saying.

A genuine audience

Writing also becomes more meaningful when children can make authentic choices, discuss

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

TW

teachwire



Want a chance to practise writing with high-quality texts? Download your **FREE WAGOLL** teaching packs from real authors at

tinyurl.com/tp-WAGOLL

their ideas before writing, and communicate with real audiences. Pupils are far more motivated when they know someone will actually read their writing. Whether they are creating class books, writing letters, sharing stories with younger pupils or publishing work for families, authentic audiences matter. Writing stops being a task for the teacher and becomes an act of communication.

Closing gaps in writing is not about teaching grammar, handwriting or spelling more effectively, although these things matter. It is about creating classrooms where children feel they belong, where teachers notice strengths before deficits, and where we deliberately engineer success. **TP**



Kathy Roe is lead adviser for primary English at HFL Education.

 hfleducation.org/home

Book CLUB

We review five new titles that your class will love

REVIEWS BY KATE HEAP

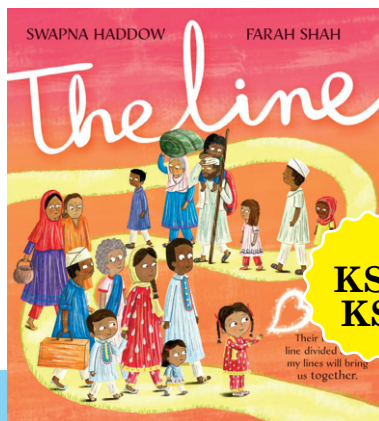


Meet the Invisibles

by Mike Barfield & Jess Bradley

(£10.99, Buster Books)

Hugely engaging and packed full of facts, *Meet the Invisibles* is a fascinating exploration of the science we can't see. Whether microscopic, far underground, deep in the ocean, or actually invisible, there is so much more going on around us than meets the eye. From elements of the periodic table to sound waves to viruses and bacteria, *Meet the Invisibles* challenges readers to look beyond the obvious and learn something new. The three sections of the book cover a broad range of scientific topics: Only Natural (living things), What's the Matter (chemistry) and Hi Energy (physics). Bradley and Barfield's energetic comic strip style combines bright illustrations with bite-sized pieces of information to make complex scientific ideas accessible.

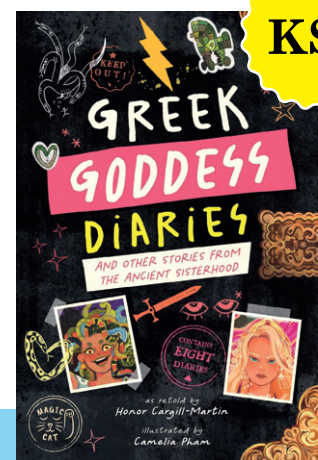


The Line

***by Swapna Haddow,
ill. Farah Shah***

(£7.99, Scholastic)

Cyril Radcliffe's 1947 Partition line created a border which led to mass migration, religious tensions and violence. *The Line* provides a child's perspective on Partition. This little girl used to love lines: she skipped and jumped over them and stood proudly in them at school. After Partition, lines frightened her. They separated her from her family, forced her to walk long distances and left her hungry. She considered what she would do if she were in charge of drawing lines. Her lines would bring people together and help them understand each other. *The Line* is an exceptional example of a whole-school picturebook perfect for assemblies and class projects, and challenging children to consider what they would do if tasked with drawing lines.



Greek Goddess Diaries

***as retold by Honor Cargill-Martin,
ill. Camelia Pham***

Magic Cat Publishing

Traditionally, ancient Greek myths have been told from a male point of view. Although women have featured in these stories, their perspectives have been shrouded by the 'heroes' who rush headlong into battle to save the day. This captivating book turns all of that around with eight fascinating stories of princesses, warrior-women and sorceresses explaining their side of the story in their own words. Each short, engaging chapter takes on a legendary tale. Medusa, Circe, Pandora, Ariadne, Medea, Atalanta, Penthesilia and Helen explain the power of their choices, the impact of male actions, the strengths and failings of the gods, and how they strive to live with intelligence, integrity and hope. An excellent text choice for whole-class or guided reading lessons during an ancient Greek topic.

→→→ RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



The scarecrow descriptive writing

As the seasons change, explore describing a setting using this resource pack, based on a scarecrow comparing the summer and autumn months. Pupils will have an opportunity to use antonyms to show contrast between the two seasons, and to write a recount from the scarecrow's point of view, with a story start included to inspire writing.

Visit tinyurl.com/tp-PLZscarecrow



KS2

The Wild Ones

by Steve Cole,
ill. Johanna Tarkela

(£7.99, Scholastic)

Narrated by the charming, honest and ever hopeful Jack Russell Terrier, Scamp, *The Wild Ones* is a beautiful story of finding light in darkness and the power of friendship. This is *The Incredible Journey* for a new generation, with distinctive characterisation, humour and heartbreak. Following the 'Night of the Great Growl', the air turns black, all humans vanish and the animals at the Pet Care Centre are left on their own. Scamp and his friends embark on an unforgettable journey. Along the way, they learn important lessons about trust, how to care for one another, and the importance of optimism. The perfect choice for a Key Stage 2 class read-aloud, it's sure to encourage thoughtful discussion about leadership and community.



KS2

And Now We Run

by Nicola Penfold

(£8.99, Little Tiger)

Told from three perspectives, what begins as a reflection on friendship and identity during the challenging primary to secondary school transition quickly transforms into a call for conservation. Year 7 are on their residential in West Yorkshire. After visiting the local museum, they're fascinated by stories of Kemple Village, which was sold on compulsory purchase years ago and flooded to create the reservoir. Drawn by the mystery of the reservoir, Jelly and Lincoln become separated from the group. By the time they return to camp, everyone has gone. With flood waters rising, they are faced with an unthinkable challenge... Short, pacey chapters, relatable characters and a harrowing adventure make this an ideal read for Year 6 and 7 pupils.

Meet the author

NICOLA PENFOLD
ON FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD, AND THE JOY OF A GOOD STORY



What was primary school like for you?

Primary school for me was split between first school and then middle school,

because I grew up in Doncaster, which still had middle schools then.

From years five to eight, I was at middle school, which suited me well – it was small, we stayed with the same class all day, and I had a lovely playing field and nice friends. I was quiet, but sort of quietly confident. I generally loved my lessons and was quite studious, though PE was stressful, as I wasn't at all sporty. Overall, they're happy memories.

What was the hardest part about school transitions?

The hardest part was moving to secondary school in year nine after middle school, mixing with children from lots of different feeder schools just as you're becoming very self-conscious. I was quiet, socially awkward and anxious, and I still remember that frozen, rabbit-in-the-headlights feeling. Lessons were fine, but the in-between times, like break and lunch, were hard. I was always trying to find people to sit with, and feeling like everyone could see I was on my own. I clearly remember standing in the school hall on the first day, excited but completely terrified. The library became a real sanctuary. It was somewhere to go, and to hopefully find nice people too.

How would you like teachers to use your book in the classroom?

I'd love to see it simply sitting on a shelf in classrooms and school libraries, so children can pick it up naturally. I hope they connect with the characters and recognise some of those feelings in themselves, and maybe think a little about the conservation of the natural world. But most of all, I hope it's enjoyed purely as an adventure story – something that keeps them turning the pages.



And Now We Run by Nicola Penfold, (£8.99, Little Tiger), is out now.

Literacy



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- Recognise how everyday experiences can inspire poetry
- Gather and organise ideas through observation
- Use repetition, exaggeration and dialogue for comic effect
- Rehearse and perform poetry using voice, expression and movement
- Reflect on how performance changes the impact of a poem

Hooray! It's Michael Rosen Day!



Celebrate this annual festival of poetry by turning everyday school life into a laugh-out-loud show, with **Jenny Baldwin**

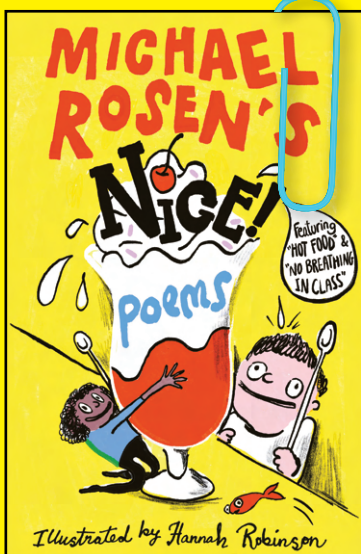
[@walkerbooksuk](https://twitter.com/walkerbooksuk) walker.co.uk/michael-rosen-day

The theme for this year's Michael Rosen Day, celebrated annually on 12 November, is Silly School Stuff – playful poems that uncover the humour in everyday life. Inspired by Michael Rosen's poem 'No Breathing in Class', from his new collection *NICE! Poems* (£7.99, Walker Books), this lesson encourages children to observe their own school day before transforming their ordinary experiences – from conversations and games to lessons and lunchtime – into giggle-inducing verse and uproarious performances for the whole class.



START HERE

Challenge children to see their school through a poet's eyes. Invite pupils to create a simple planner based on their school day, with headings such as *Lessons, Lunchtime, Rules, Playtime* and *Getting to School*. Throughout the day, encourage them to collect funny conversations, surprising moments, memorable snippets of language, curious classroom routines and anything else that catches their attention. Before they begin writing, they'll have a notebook full of ideas ready to transform into poems.



MAIN LESSON

1 | READ AND WATCH

Read 'No Breathing in Class' together. The poem appears in *NICE! Poems* and is also available to watch on YouTube (tinyurl.com/tP-NoBreathing), performed by Michael himself. Watching Michael perform the poem helps children see how expression, movement and comic timing bring the words on the page to life. As they watch, ask pupils to notice everything Michael does to make the audience laugh. Can they spot his changing voices, dramatic pauses, facial expressions and sound effects? Which moments make them laugh the most, and why? Encourage children to look beyond the words and think

about how the performance adds another layer of humour to the poem.

Next, invite the class to perform the poem themselves. One child could take the narrator's role, while others become the classmates, the determined teacher and anyone else caught up in the chaos. Encourage pupils to experiment with whining voices, exaggerated collapses, dramatic pauses and sound effects – from the children's complaints to the bang of the desk and Michael's secret breathing beneath it.

Afterwards, ask which performance choices had the biggest impact. What made the audience laugh the loudest? What did they discover was harder – or funnier – to perform than they expected? When you turn your attention back to the writing itself, ask children to



“Encourage children to think about how the performance adds another layer of humour to the poem”

focus on the building blocks of the poem. It begins with one impossible classroom rule before each reaction becomes more exaggerated than the last. The teacher refuses to back down, the situation spirals into increasingly absurd chaos, and the poem ends with an unexpected solution. Highlight how Michael Rosen uses repetition, exaggeration, dialogue and a clear sequence of events to build the comedy step by step.

2 | BEND THE RULES

Michael starts with one ridiculous rule. Now children can do the same. Inspired by ‘No Breathing in Class’, challenge them to invent one completely ridiculous school rule. They could use an idea from their poetry planner or start with a familiar classroom rule and ask,

What if...?

For example:

- No one can blink during assembly
- Every answer in class must be sung
- On Wednesdays, everyone must walk backwards
- The register can only be answered in animal noises
- Everyone must swap seats every five minutes

Before writing, ask pairs to plan their poem by making four quick lists: the silly rule; people’s reactions; how the teacher makes things worse; and how somebody finally gets around the rule. Encourage children to jot down notes rather than complete sentences. Once they have plenty of ideas, ask them to choose their favourites and arrange them from funny to funniest.

3 | WRITE AND PERFORM

Ask children to turn their planning notes into a poem. Some may write freely, while others might find it helpful to use the pattern of ‘No Breathing in Class’ as a guide: introduce the silly rule, show different people’s reactions, let the teacher make matters worse, then finish with a surprising solution. Less confident or younger writers could build their poems using repeated sentence starters (“No...”, “Everybody must...” or “If you...”), while older pupils might try a new structure entirely.

Encourage children to read their poems aloud as they write, listening for places where repetition, pauses, or a change of pace makes the humour even stronger. They might also add simple performance directions, such as a whispered aside, a shouted chorus, a dramatic pause, a change of voice or a well-timed sound effect to help bring the poem to life.

Finish with small-group performances, encouraging pupils to think about timing, expression and audience reaction. Afterwards, discuss which techniques made each poem funniest.

Jenny Baldwin is an English teacher and founder of SHAPES for Schools, a consultancy that creates classroom resources in partnership with cultural organisations. Michael Rosen Day is a Walker Books event in partnership with Read for Good, Puffin, HarperCollins, Bloomsbury, Simon & Schuster and Hachette.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Celebrate Michael Rosen Day on 12 November by joining in with the *Silly School Stuff* celebrations. Register for FREE resources, explore more of Michael’s school poems and register to take part in the HUGE livestreamed Poetry Party event, where Michael performs and shares his writing with schools worldwide, at walker.co.uk/michael-rosen-day
- Host a Great Silly School Showcase. Bring classes together to perform their favourite poems, share the funniest rules, lessons or homework excuses, and vote for awards such as *Silliest Rule*, *Silliest Lesson* or *Funniest School Lunch*.
- Turn your school into a poetry gallery. Display children’s work in a *Hall of Silly School Stuff*, create a *World’s Worst School Rule Book* or a *NICE! Poems* inspiration wall to celebrate everyone’s writing.
- Encourage children to continue collecting funny conversations, unusual classroom moments and memorable experiences throughout the term, then submit their favourite poem to the Beano & Michael Rosen Day Poetry Competition (launching 11 November).

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Why does a poem become funnier as it goes on?
- Which repeated phrase in the poem has the biggest effect?
- What makes an everyday event worth writing about?
- How does performance change the audience’s reaction to the poem?



BBC 500 WORDS



A fun, creative story writing competition.

Opens for entries

Tuesday 29 September – Friday 6 November, 9pm 2026

No need to worry about spelling,
punctuation or grammar!

Prizes for
the bronze, silver
and gold winners!!



Write a
STORY
you would
love to read

Ages
5 – 11



Find out more and enter at
bbc.co.uk/500words

BBC
BITESIZE
FOR TEACHERS

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom

1

Give every child the best start

Bookmark's Story Starter Programme (SSP) supports primary schools in areas of greatest need to help children and families transition into school and build strong foundations for reading success. Designed for children aged four to five, the programme provides free Story Starter packs for schools to give to families, filled with books, storytelling activities, stationery and family reading resources.

By joining the programme, your school can engage children and parents together through the power of story, helping nurture early literacy skills, confidence and a lifelong love of reading.

Find out if your school is eligible and register your interest by 31 October at bookmarkreading.org/ssp

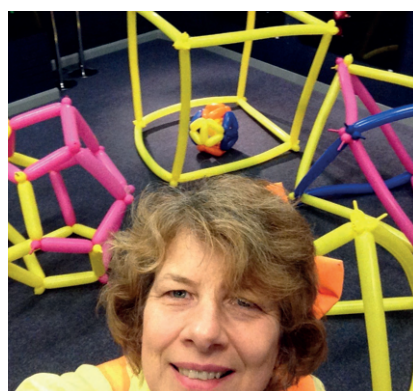


2



BiGDUG Education Club

The Education Club was launched as part of BiGDUG's ongoing efforts to support schools, colleges and universities with smarter storage and furniture solutions. Whether you're upgrading classrooms, organising storage or planning new spaces, BiGDUG is here to help. It's completely free to join, just complete an application, and you can get access to exclusive savings, rewards and advice that's tailored to your needs and signing up is a breeze at tinyurl.com/tp-Bdedclub



3

The quest for the quirky quadrilateral

Bubbly Maths brings giant soap bubbles and balloons into your hall and leaves behind a room of laughing, wide-eyed mathematicians. Bubbly Maths shows and hands-on workshops put shape, pattern, prediction and problem solving into children's hands, from Reception to Year 6, with sessions for SEND groups and whole-school assemblies.

Founder Caroline Ainslie has spent 21 years igniting curiosity for learning.

Visit bubblymaths.co.uk

email maths@bubblymaths.co.uk or call +447747847376.

4

Recycling made easy

The edding Return Box programme makes it easy for schools to recycle used pens and markers while supporting hands-on sustainability learning. By purchasing £150 worth of edding & UHU's educational supplies, schools can unlock their free Return Box. The no hassle system accepts any brand of pen or marker, requires no sorting, and includes a prepaid return label for responsible recycling. Already in use at Clarendon Primary School, the programme brings sustainability to life in the classroom—helping pupils understand the full recycling cycle while reducing everyday waste. To learn more and get started, visit tinyurl.com/tp-edding26



5



Would you follow the White Rabbit?

Step into a real-life Wonderland on an immersive adventure inspired by one of the most celebrated classics of English literature. Combining immersive storytelling, interactive technology, live performance and spectacular 360° projections, students explore life-size iconic scenes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as the story unfolds around them, making learning interactive, engaging and entertaining.

The experience supports learning across areas including creative writing, storytelling and character development, while also offering opportunities to explore Victorian Britain, costume and set design.

Opening at Dock X, London on 13 November, school tickets start from just £10 and are on sale from 6 October.

Find out more at aliceimmersivewonderland.com



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to perform a simple action rhyme
- How to create vocal sound effects
- To write and create a sequence of sounds
- To use simple graphic notation
- Working together in small groups and as a whole class

Build crackling compositions for firework night



Use vocals, musical instruments and sound makers to create a sparkling display with the whole class, says **Jude Harries**

[teachwire.net/authors/judith-harries/](https://www.teachwire.net/authors/judith-harries/)

Fireworks are a familiar sight and sound for many of us at this time of year, whether celebrating Bonfire Night, Diwali or other events and festivals. This music lesson uses them as a stimulus for creative composition activities, a key part of the model music curriculum for KS1.

The children start by learning a simple interactive firework rhyme and move on to use improvised vocal and instrument sounds to create short sequences in small groups. The lesson builds up to a full firework sound display involving the whole class.



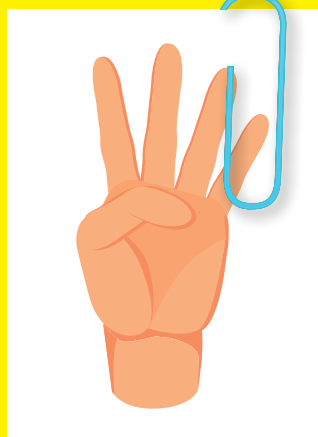
START HERE

Hold up four fingers and share this rhyme with the children:

*Four fine fireworks,
waiting to fly
High, high, high in the sky
Number one goes **POP**,
Number two goes fizz,
Number three goes **BANG**,
And number four goes whizz!*

Can the children make their fingers fly into the air one by one as they chant the rhyme?

Next, ask pupils to stand up tall and thin like a firework rocket and change the actions in the rhyme to use body percussion. Mark the first firework with a clap, the second with a rather disappointing quiet 'fizz' to the ground, the third with a loud stamp, and the final 'whizz' by jumping as high as they can into the air.



MAIN LESSON

1 | CRACKLE AND POP

Sit the children in a circle and invite them to say the 'Four fine fireworks' rhyme together, and choose different vocal sounds to represent each firework. Who can make a 'pop' sound with their lips? Can they make a sad 'fizz' sound, as though the firework failed to take off? Who can shout the loudest for firework number three? Can somebody

make their voice go from low to high as they say 'whizz'?

Ask some children to demonstrate their sounds to the group. Choose four pupils to stand in the middle of the circle and 'be' the sounds of the fireworks as the class recite the rhyme.

Provide enough musical instruments or sound makers for each child to have one.

Ask the class to take turns to go into the middle and select an instrument to make a pop, fizz, bang or whizz sound (see Fig. 1 for ideas). Talk about duration,

POP (short)	Claves, castanets, wooden sticks, two pencils
<i>Fizz</i> (long)	Maracas, shakers, sweet wrappers
BANG (short)	Tambourine, drum, biscuit tin and wooden spoon
<i>Whizz</i> (long)	Cabasa, glockenspiel glissando, Swanee whistle

Fig. 1



“Use fireworks as a creative stimulus for composition using improvised vocals and instrument sounds”

i.e. long and short sounds on different instruments. Sort the instruments into four hoops to represent each sound. Invite groups of four children at a time, one to stand in each hoop, and select a sound maker to accompany the rhyme.

2 | FIREWORK SEQUENCES

Look at some images of graphic music notation (this

YouTube presentation provides a fun introduction for KS1 children tinyurl.com/tp-Notation). Talk about how to represent the firework sounds from the rhyme using graphic notation. Let the children come and have a go at drawing their own ideas for each sound on the board (see Fig. 2 for ideas).

Explain to children that they are going to write a

sequence of firework sounds using graphic notation. Organise the class into groups of four and give each group a strip of paper. Demonstrate how to fold it into four boxes and ask them to draw their firework sequence on the paper. The sounds can come in any order. Use the sets of instruments and sound makers from before, inviting the groups to perform their sounds to the class. What happens if they perform their sequence backwards?

3 | FIREWORK DISPLAYS

Look at some images of fireworks online. Provide each child with a square of black sugar paper and lots of different coloured chalks. Demonstrate how to draw a variety of firework shapes. Draw multicoloured shooting stars, giant flowers or spiral shapes. Try spidery shapes by drawing a central circle and then pulling the chalk dust out using fingers or paintbrushes. Or blow the chalk dust over the paper to look like sparks. Add rockets firing up into the sky and exploding like branches of a tree. The colours can be fixed with a quick spray of hairspray. Invite children to draw a firework on their black square. Remind them to write their name on the reverse.

Ask each child to choose an instrument or sound maker to represent their picture. Tape all the squares together to create a giant visual firework display. Invite a child to conduct the giant firework display by touching a picture and listening to the sound. For a grand finale, find out what happens if all the fireworks go off at the same time. What signal could the conductor use for the finale?

Jude Harries is an experienced early years and primary school teacher, specialising in music and drama.

POP	
fizz	
BANG	
whizz	

Fig. 2

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Film all the performances for critical review, improvement and as an important record for assessment.
- Look at some names of fireworks such as ‘Twinkling Stars’ or ‘Golden Dragon’. Invite the children to make up some names for their own firework.
- Read the poem ‘Remember, remember the fifth of November’ and introduce the children to the history of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.
- Talk about the Firework Code and how important it is to keep safe when around fireworks.

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT



Download your **FREE** guide to rhythm and beats at

tinyurl.com/tp-RhythmCafe

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Who can make the highest/lowest sound with their voice?
- Which fine firework makes the shortest/longest sound?
- Which instrument or sound maker produces the quietest/loudest sound?
- Did the recorded musical firework display sound like fireworks?
- How could you make it sound more authentic?

Computing



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- To explain that generative AI uses patterns in data to predict outputs
- To define an AI 'hallucination' and recognise why confident answers may still be wrong
- To fact-check claims using credible sources and record the evidence
- To apply Stop, Verify, Correct before using or sharing AI-generated content

Class challenge: can you spot a deepfake?



Help children understand how to weed out confident-sounding mistakes before they trust AI content, with **Karl McGrath**

[Linktr.ee/KarlMcGrath](https://linktr.ee/KarlMcGrath)

Generative AI can produce convincing answers and images in seconds, but that doesn't always mean the answers are correct. In this lesson, children will explore AI as a simple pattern-predicting technology rather than 'magic'. They'll test the machine-learning model through Quick, Draw! tasks; learn why and how AI 'hallucinations' happen; and investigate a deliberately unreliable account of the sinking of the Titanic. The aim is to check the claims against credible sources, look closely at the AI-generated images, and practise being a careful digital citizen using 'pause, search, and correct'.



START HERE

Start by asking: What do the words *artificial* and *intelligence* mean? Where have children met AI in games, search or apps? Capture their ideas, then open Quick, Draw! (quickdraw.withgoogle.com) on the board or on tablets. The program works by asking the player to draw something simple (cat; traffic light; drum). The AI program then has to guess what the drawing is within 20 seconds. After it has guessed around six drawings, it will explain how it got to its conclusion.

After two or three rounds, pause on the guesses and ask: What details did the model notice? Which guesses were close, and what caused it to make a mistake? Then explain that the model compares drawings with patterns it has learned from many examples. It can be quick and convincing without seeing, thinking or understanding like a person does. Then ask what might happen when a system predicts an answer from insufficient or misleading patterns.



MAIN LESSON

1 | FACT-CHECKING THE MACHINE

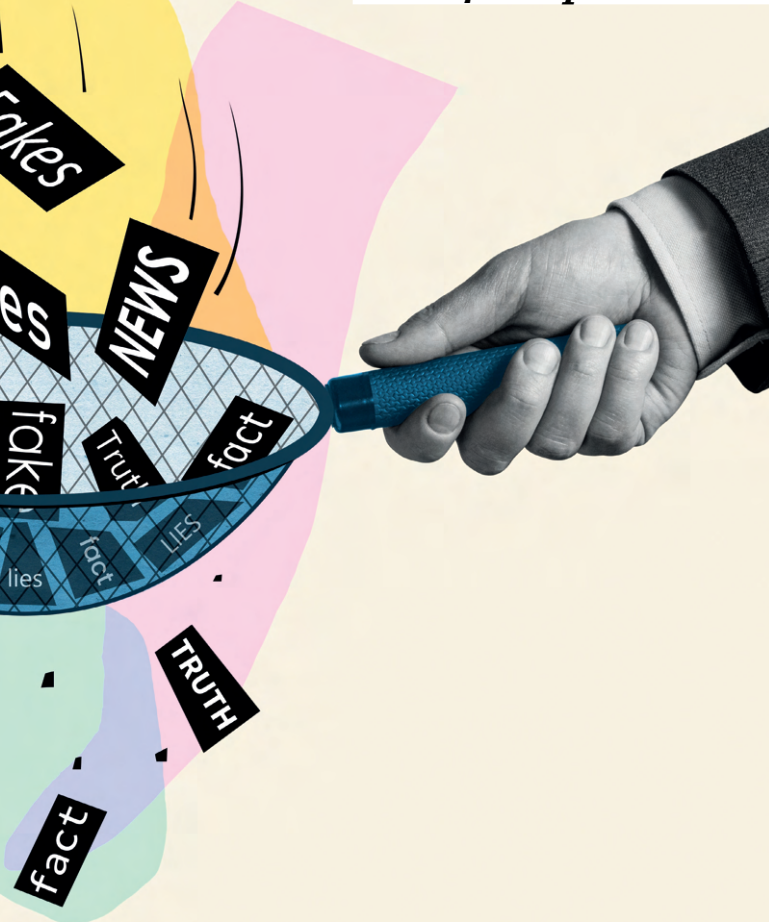
First, name an AI hallucination as: *an output that sounds plausible but contains invented or inaccurate information*. Explain that the term isn't literal but a technical shorthand. I would also remind pupils that generative AI predicts what is likely to come next from patterns in its training data. If those patterns are incomplete, confused, or based on unreliable information, the output can also be wrong. Importantly, the AI may present an error in a confident, fluent way so

sounding certain is not the same as being correct!

Next, split the class into pairs, and give each pair a copy of the UKS2 task sheet from the downloadable resources (link on the right), displaying the related slideshow on the board. The Titanic report is deliberately unreliable; the children's job is to locate five problems with the content, rather than trusting the polished and confident design. Before they begin, model one example from the report. Read the claim aloud and demonstrate how you would search for evidence rather than deciding that it 'looks wrong'.

Pupils should underline each claim they suspect to be untrue or inaccurate,

“Generative AI predicts what is likely to come next from patterns in its training data”



annotate a correction and cite a source. Provide preselected, child-safe source websites – for example, Britannica, BBC or a museum site – and ask the pairs to confirm important claims with two credible sources. Use the ‘claim – evidence – source’ frame. This supports children allocating *researcher*, *checker* and *recorder* roles; challenge more confident readers to explain why one source is stronger than another.

2 | WHO SAYS SO?

As the pairs work, circulate and ask questions such as: “What exactly is the claim?”, “What evidence have you found?”, “Does your source actually support your correction?” and “Could this source be mistaken, too?”

Encourage pupils to distinguish between a source that simply repeats a claim and one that provides evidence. In practice, this can mean asking pupils to find different information on two websites, and then to compare the authorship, purpose and reliability of each source, rather than just choosing the answer they prefer.

The picture included with the task is also worth pointing the children to, as it includes a secret, inaccurate piece of evidence in the number of funnels on the ship. Ask pupils to inspect the image carefully and compare it with photographs, diagrams or museum information. This reinforces the idea that AI-generated

content can contain errors in pictures as well as words. Ask: “What did you notice first?” and “What would you check before sharing this image?” Make the connection explicit: a realistic-looking image is not automatically an accurate one.

3 | PROVE IT

Bring the class back together and invite pairs to share one error, their correction and the source that helped them verify it. Record a few examples on the board under the three headings: Claim – Evidence – Source. Use these to reinforce the difference between spotting an error and *proving* that it is an error. If time allows, ask the children which mistake would have been easiest to believe and why. Draw out the idea that fluent language, detailed formatting and realistic images can make information appear trustworthy.

Finish this section by introducing the class to the routine of Stop, Verify, Correct. I would teach pupils to *stop* before accepting or sharing AI-generated content; to *verify* the important claims by checking credible sources; and *correct* the information, or clearly say that it cannot yet be confirmed. Ask pupils to repeat the three steps and apply them to one final Titanic claim on the board. Emphasise that they do not need to know the answer immediately: being a careful digital citizen means knowing when to pause, investigate and admit that more evidence is needed.

Karl McGrath is a Year 6 teacher, curriculum task design lead, and computing lead with a passion for blending digital tools into learning.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Ask pupils to write three short statements about a familiar topic using a credible source of their choice, but including one statement that is deliberately false. Swap with another pair and ask them to use Stop, Verify, Correct, to identify the false claim. Challenge pupils to explain which source they used and why they considered it credible.
- Use BBC Bitesize’s ‘AI or Real?’ activity (tinyurl.com/tp-BBCAI) as a fresh test. Ask the children to create a short ‘Safe Tech Explorer’ guide for another class, applying Stop, Verify, Correct to one image or claim, and explaining which evidence gave them confidence. For greater depth, compare two sources and justify which is more authoritative.

tw teachwire



Download your free Titanic resources at

tinyurl.com/tp-TitanicAI

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What is an AI system predicting, and what does it not truly know?
- How does reliable evidence change your confidence in a claim?
- What should you do before sharing an AI-generated image or statement?

CHRISTMAS

Sparkyard Christmas

A festive hub of songs, signing videos, curriculum ideas and assembly plans that helps teachers make Christmas special without creating hours of extra planning



AT A GLANCE

- Christmas playlists for different ages, themes and occasions
- Makaton and BSL signing videos alongside selected festive songs
- Cross-curricular Christmas activities covering subjects including science, PSHE, geography, maths and languages
- Ready-made Christmas assembly plans
- Favourites and playlists make resources quick to save and revisit

REVIEWED BY: EMMA THOMPSON



Christmas in primary school is magical, but it can also be one of the busiest points in the year. That is exactly why Sparkyard's Christmas offering works so well. Powered by Out of the Ark, Sparkyard brings songs, playlists, curriculum resources and assembly plans together in one easy-to-navigate platform, so you can find something festive without spending half your lunch break hunting for it.

The Christmas playlists are a great place to start. There is plenty of variety, from *It's Nearly Christmas* and *Christmas Story to Christmas Traditions* and *Christmas Signing Videos*. The *Christmas Story* playlist alone includes 15 songs, giving you options for assemblies, classroom singing, performances or simply filling a spare five minutes with something seasonal.

I particularly like the mix. You have more traditional songs alongside playful numbers such as *Give Your Granny A Kiss*, so it never feels one-note. There are also *Christmas Dinner* and *Christmas Party Playlist* options, which makes it easy to move from a quiet classroom activity to a full-on festive singalong without leaving the platform.

The signing videos are another lovely touch. They make Christmas singing more inclusive, but they also sit alongside wider learning rather than feeling like an add-on. The *Hibernation* song, for example, comes with Makaton and BSL signing, a science-linked activity about designing a hedgehog home and a music task exploring

three- and four-beat patterns, pulse and tempo. That is Sparkyard at its best. You start with a festive song and suddenly you have music, science and practical classroom learning all working together.

The collections go even further. *Christmas Fun for Older Children* includes songs and resources linked to PSHE, science, geography, maths and languages. There are activities around random acts of kindness, Christmas lights and electricity, traditions around the world, Christmas code-breakers and even ways to say Merry Christmas in different languages. There is also *Christmas Fun for Younger Children* and *Classroom Singing with Christmas Sparkle*, so it is easy to find something that suits different ages across a primary school. And the best part is, there are multiple national curriculum links, making planning even easier.

Then there are the assembly plans. *Giving and Receiving* and *Celebration* come with downloadable plans that take you through the objective, what you need, how to engage children, questions to explore, reflection and songs. At a time of year when nobody needs another thing to plan from scratch, that is a gift in itself.

The platform makes all of this easy to manage. You can save favourites, create playlists and quickly return to resources you know work. Sparkyard has absolutely nailed the balance here. It gives Christmas all the fun and sparkle children want, while quietly doing a huge amount of the planning work for teachers.

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Makes festive planning much quicker without losing variety
- ✓ Gives teachers options for assemblies, lessons, performances and everyday classroom singing
- ✓ Cross-curricular activities turn Christmas content into meaningful learning
- ✓ Signing resources bring an extra layer of inclusion
- ✓ Easy organisation means favourite festive resources are always close at hand

UPGRADE IF...

You want one festive hub for songs, assemblies and cross-curricular ideas that saves planning time while keeping Christmas learning lively across the whole primary school.

LITERACY

Story Talk

A vibrant, engaging book-based early language programme to help EYFS and KS1 readers advance their vocabulary



AT A GLANCE

- Engaging story books without words that will encourage children to add their own narrative
- Fabulous eye-catching illustrations that will captivate younger readers
- Handy parent and teacher guides to support language and vocabulary development of early readers
- Useful online resources to support teachers to get the most out of the books in school



REVIEWED BY: BEN WHITE

For those learning to read, story books with words can be a little daunting at times. However, with Story Talk, the vibrant and eye-catching illustrations will instantly captivate early readers. Stories can be told again and again, and each time a book is revisited, you will always find something new to talk about.

From the moment the first page is turned, the story is brought to life without the need to read a single word. The youngest of children will be able to 'tell you the story' by pointing out what they can see, sharing the story in relatable everyday scenarios such as a first day at school or a bus journey through the city and into the countryside.

The quality of illustrations cannot be ignored, and with each turn of the page there is a vast array of different things to see and talk about. In each book you will find characters that everyone can relate to as the Story Talk books contain a range of different ethnicities and family setups. As a result, children will naturally add their own narratives and ask questions, posing their own thoughts and ideas.

On the inside cover of each book, the adult reader will find the handy 'interaction strategies and language support tips' to support them in bringing the book to life. This includes simple activities such as 'point and name' – things to

spot throughout the book and ideas on how to extend children's language by further developing vocabulary through adjectives, emotions and correct spoken grammar. Not only will teachers find this useful during story time sessions at school, but so will parents supporting their child at home.

For those working in schools, the Collins Hub is a welcome addition. The online resources, planning and training provide a vast array of teaching resources and training materials that will ensure school staff can make the most out of the Story Talk books. Videos and webinars demonstrate how to make the most of Story Talk sessions, and curriculum and assessment tools will support school staff to monitor the progress and language development of early readers. Everything has been considered including supporting those reluctant readers, SEND pupils who may be non-verbal and even those children that love to rush through a story just to find out how it ends.

There is no doubt that Story Talk is a great way to introduce early readers to storytelling. There's lots of fun to be had naming characters, telling the story and rereading the books again and again, ensuring that story time is always enjoyable for both the child and adult alike.

"The story is brought to life without the need to read a single word"

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Both children and adults will enjoy telling their own story through vibrant and engaging illustrations
- ✓ Support for teachers and parents ensures children make progress with their language and vocabulary in every Story Talk session
- ✓ The online tools support teachers to get the most out of the story books through training, teaching and assessment resources
- ✓ Story time will always be fun, engaging and full of talk

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to engage early or reluctant readers in high-quality and fun story telling sessions which will promote vocabulary and language development.

Q & A

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

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

A class of children who are engaged and excited to learn. The cherry on top is then overhearing one say to another, "This lesson is so fun!". If I get to be completely pie-in-the-sky about this answer, I'll also add the caveat that nobody's saying "Miss?" whilst endlessly tapping my arm as I'm desperately trying to help someone else.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

It's definitely the bone-chilling realisation that Ofsted has suddenly turned up mid-lesson, just as I've somehow forgotten what $1 + 1$ is, and 30 pairs of eyes (plus Ofsted's) are watching me attempt to explain flexible partitioning. The stuff nightmares are made of.

3 What is your current state of mind?

While writing this, I'm still neck-deep in the September fog. I'm somewhere between still having the last of the summer holiday blues, feeling excited for the opportunities this coming year will bring, and being totally overwhelmed by everything I already need to get done!

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

Calmness. I am not a Buddha. I do not teach in a spa retreat. I cannot just calmly ask the class to keep the noise down or 'wait until it is quiet' to start

teaching, because, quite simply, I would be waiting a very long time. We'd never get anything done! Also, sometimes learning is noisy, and that's OK. As long as the class isn't completely out of control, and pupils are learning what they need to learn, a bit of noise is no problem in my book.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

When I tell them about my discussions with Father Christmas and how I caught the elves looking through their workbooks! The classics.

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

"Oh, I see you've been writing with your invisible pencil again." A good dose of sarcasm goes a long way – it's an opportunity to let the children know I can see they've not written anything, but it's indirect enough to give them a chance to feel seen and get on with their work rather than feeling punished. "1, 2, 3, eyes on me. No, I am not a window. No, not a piece of fluff either. Not a rubber. I am the human standing at the front of the classroom." I bet this is on every teacher's list.

"The cherry on top is overhearing one child say to another, 'This lesson is so fun!'"

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

In June or July, when my next class find out I'll be their teacher, sometimes I'll hear how excited they are. It's a wonderful ego boost of course, but most of all, knowing that children want to be in my class tells me I must be doing something right!

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

Stamps, stamps and more stamps! They make marking far more exciting, the children work that little bit harder to get one in their book, and they are so convenient. They're also relatively cheap, and easy to store – essential criteria considering how much stuff teachers end up needing!



NAME: Amber Clairmonte
JOB ROLE: Teacher and phase leader
EXTRA INFO: Being both a mum and a teacher inspired Amber to write *Moony Mouse and Daddy's House*, a story for children navigating life between separated parents and two homes. She is also the author of *Never Have I Ever: Teacher Edition*, a much more light-hearted look at the funny and very relatable realities of teaching.

tinyurl.com/tp-MoonyAC

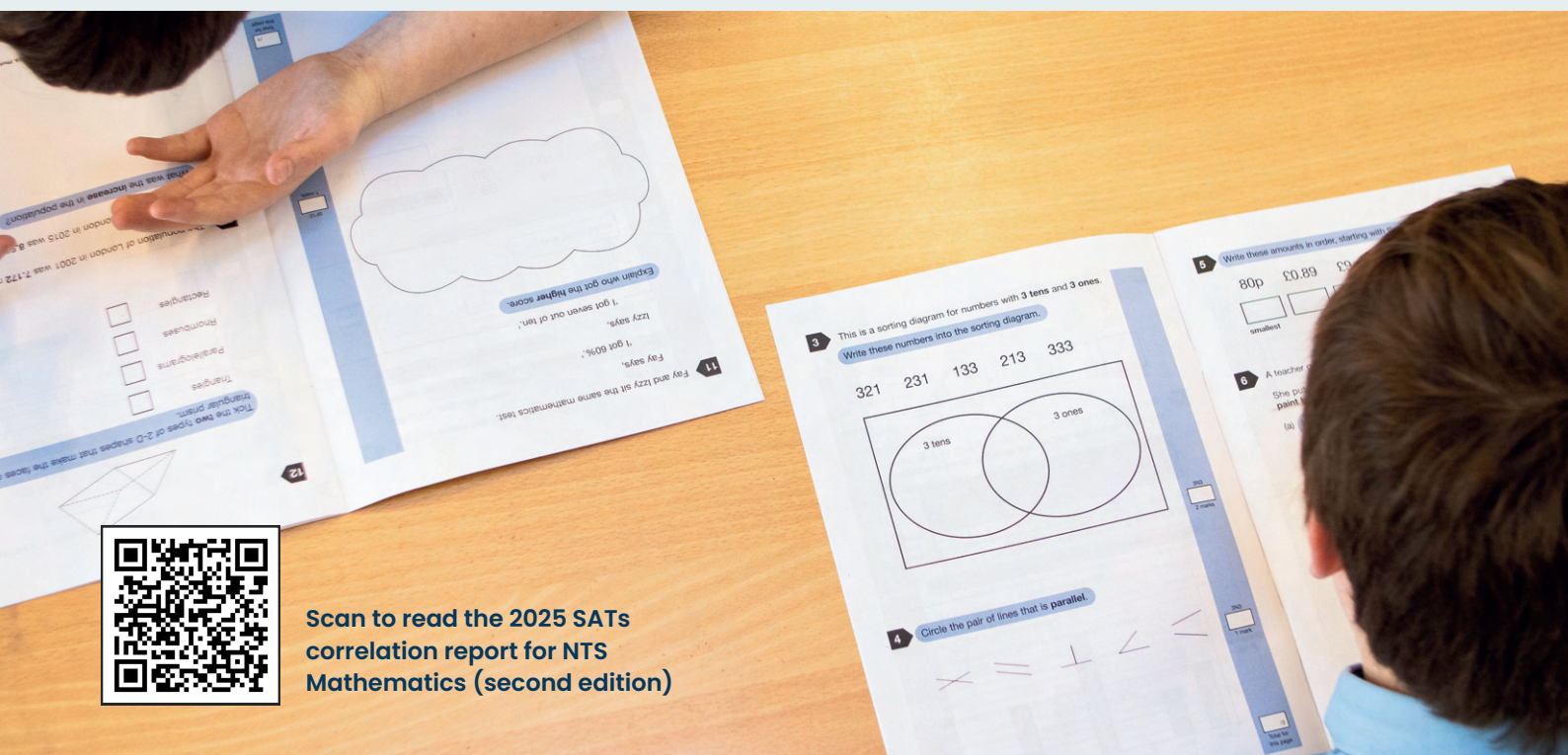
tinyurl.com/tp-NeverAC

Trusted by over **6,000 UK primary schools**
for their assessments

Accurately predict success

With standardisation samples carefully selected to be truly nationally representative, you can rely on **valid** assessment outcomes and **reliable** performance indicators for your learners, while effortlessly identifying knowledge gaps and areas of excellence.

Get set for SAT success with the **second edition of NTS Mathematics**, aligned with the latest White Rose Maths primary schemes of learning and designed to familiarise learners with National Test-style termly assessments and predict SAT performance with **confidence**.



Scan to read the 2025 SATs
correlation report for NTS
Mathematics (second edition)

Assessments for every learner. Find yours at hachettelearning.com/assessment



teach
PRIMARY
AWARDS 2026
SHORTLISTED

Everything your school needs to build children's social and emotional wellbeing

Hamish & Milo brings together evidence-based SEMH programmes, accredited staff training, family partnership and impact reporting into one integrated approach - helping schools improve outcomes for children.

Our integrated ecosystem includes:



Evidence-based programmes

Structured, ready-to-use resources that explicitly teach social and emotional literacy through small-group, one-to-one and whole-class SEMH provision.



Training and development

Free implementation training and a range of specialist and accredited professional development to strengthen staff confidence, knowledge and SEMH practice.



Parent and carer partnership

A programme to strengthen partnerships between school, home and child through shared language, practical activities and conversations that create understanding and connection.



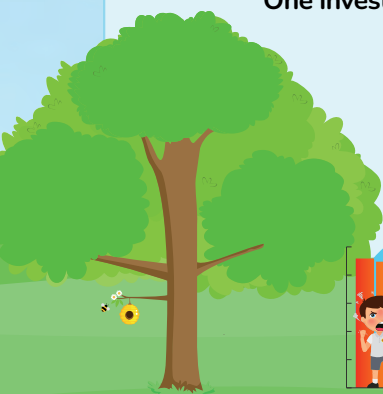
Impact measurement and reporting

Reporting at child, cohort, whole-school and trust level that evidences impact, monitors progress, identifies trends and supports strategic planning for inclusive SEMH provision.

One investment. One joined-up approach. Lasting impact for children, staff and families.

University of Bath research found that "the children found their voice"

Research found significant improvements in children's social and emotional competencies. Positive outcomes were observed across the whole school community including a reduction in school exclusions and behavioural escalations; improved relationships, learning engagement and wellbeing.



"Hamish & Milo has been transformative for many of the children who have taken part. We have seen noticeably calmer, more regulated, more confident children who are able to express their feelings to others..."

Ruth Clifford-Turner, SENCO, Exning Primary School, Suffolk

Scan for research evidence



Explore our complete approach to SEMH provision at hamishandmilo.org

Trusted by more than 850 schools, supporting thousands of children every year.