

Teach Reading & Writing

BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

"My life in books"

AXEL SCHEFFLER

LIZ PICHON

MICK INKPEN

LUCY WORSLEY

SIMON MAYO

ROBIN STEVENS



Boys & books

Why football stories
are not always enough

DOUG LEMOV:

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Welcome...



So, why did you become a teacher? Was it the idea of working with children – surrounded by all their charming, challenging curiosity – that appealed? Perhaps you dreamt of making a real difference in young people's lives; instilling self-belief, inspiring a lasting love of learning, and helping to create positive memories? Or maybe you just really like school dinners?

Whatever your reasons for signing up, it's probable that the prospect of training pupils to perform well in tough tests of reading, writing, grammar and spelling at the ages of seven and eleven wasn't amongst them. This year's SATs, designed to reflect the priorities and goals of the new primary curriculum, certainly provoked unprecedented levels of criticism and controversy throughout, arguably reaching a zenith (name the antonym, for 1 mark) in the aftermath of the 'ridiculously hard' KS2 reading paper, with reports of children reduced to tears and teachers left stunned by its level of difficulty. This wasn't the experience for everyone – and time will tell what, if anything, will change for 2017 – but there's no getting away from the fact that the tests themselves are here to stay.

At Teach Reading & Writing, we don't dismiss the importance of high standards, rock-solid competence in the basic nuts and bolts of language use, and rigorous assessment to ensure that all children, regardless of background or any special needs, are getting the education – and thus, the start in life – they deserve. At the same time, though, like you, we recognise that there is much more to literacy than what can easily be measured through examination. Our aim is always to strike a balance between providing a range of ideas and strategies for delivering the curriculum in as engaging and effective way as possible; and celebrating the sheer joy that comes from sharing stories, discovering books, writing for pleasure as well as purpose and generally communicating with each other as human beings. We hope that's what you find here.

Have a great summer,

Joe Carter, Helen Mulley & Charlotte Smith,
associate editors

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Reading
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Publisher:
Helen Tudor

Published by: Maze Media (2000) Ltd,
25 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Rd,
Colchester, Essex, CO2 8JY.
Tel: 01206 505900

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Axel Scheffler

“I think children really love seeing things their parents don’t”

Everyone knows what the Gruffalo looks like – but it’s not how **Axel Scheffler** first imagined him

A while back, I was at a flea market and spotted a book that I recognised; it was one of the primers that I’d had when being taught to read at school in West Germany (as it was then) in the early 60s. It looked like it could have been from the 19th century! I had to buy it, for the nostalgia aspect – in truth, though, I don’t really have very strong memories, positive or negative, about the process of learning to read. My partner does; she tells me about the huge excitement she felt when she could suddenly make sense of road signs and so on, but for me, well, it was just something that one had to do.

I didn’t have many picture books as a child – although I did have one that my father bought from East Germany, funnily enough. But my parents definitely read to me; I have photographic evidence.

Later on, when I was able to visit libraries and seek out reading material for myself, I loved stories – especially when they were told through illustration. I remember enjoying all kinds of comic books, including a series about a Danish character known as Petzi – he was a bear who had lots of adventures with his animal chums, presented like a comic strip, with no speech bubbles, but captions below the pictures. I definitely appreciated the way the words and images worked together to get the message across.

I always liked to draw – I don’t think my pictures back then were particularly special (mind you, I still feel the same about my work today, so what do I know?) but I produced a lot of them, both in and out of school. I would doodle in the margins of books, or on scraps

of paper, and then I started coming up with absurd little characters, which made my friends laugh and of course, that motivated me to do it even more. I suspect that’s how a lot of illustrators start out. Later on, after a brief and enthusiastic flirtation with the surrealists, I was inspired by artists like Tomi Ungerer; I loved his humour, and also how there are always funny details lurking around the edges of his images. I think children really love seeing things their parents don’t, and discovering those kinds of touches – it works for me, but then, there are many different styles and approaches for producing good picture books.

I know that my artwork is inextricably linked for most children, and their parents, with the stories of Julia Donaldson, and I am very proud of that. I feel privileged to be connected with her words, and happy that we are considered as a team, even though we don’t work ‘together’ as such. It’s amazing to me that my interpretation of what the Gruffalo looks like, for example, is an image that’s already in the head of nearly every child I meet.

That said, the way he appears today is quite different from how I first imagined him. He was much scarier; the editor said I needed to tone him down. Interestingly, when I show children the original version they always seem to prefer him the first way – but I can understand the argument for him being less intimidating. He’s an ambivalent creature, really; he’s not bad, or evil. Just a hungry Gruffalo.

I don’t have a ‘dream story’ that I wish I could have illustrated – I admire Winnie the Pooh, for example, but I wouldn’t want to try

and improve on EH Shepard’s interpretation of the characters. It’s perfect; such a classic. I turned down the opportunity to reillustrate *Wind in the Willows* for the same reason. It was different with *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*, by TS Eliot, though; there, it felt like I had room to explore my own ideas.

When I was younger, I thought that maybe one day I could write my own story; but it turns out to be more difficult than I thought. I haven’t quite given up – I like to remind myself that one of my favourite author-illustrators, William Steig, didn’t start writing until he was over 60 – but the fact is, I can’t do plots; I produce one picture, but I don’t know what happens next. My daughter is eight, and trilingual (her mother is French, and we live in London). Her reading journey has been a good one; she’s surrounded by so many books, in all three languages, that we could open a lending library, and it’s been such a great experience to see a child growing up with so many stories around her. Perhaps she’ll have the knack of narrative and write something for me to illustrate; in the meantime, maybe I should return to the Gruffalo and try giving him a new look?



Axel Scheffler is involved with Pop Up projects. Find out more at pop-up.org.uk.



"The way he appears today is quite different from how I first imagined him. He was much scarier; the editor said I needed to tone him down."



ISABELLA WALLACE is an author, visiting lecturer and former teacher

BOOSTING THE BASICS

If teaching English is restricted to set hours in the day, you're missing a trick. Here are 18 ways to enhance reading and writing skills in any lesson...

Contrary to the perception of many children, we teachers know that reading and writing is not just for 'English' or 'Literacy lessons'.

Both skills are golden tickets to success across the curriculum. Even in the absence of the written word, there is no lesson in which language is not important. In fact, poor literacy skills can underpin some of the biggest problems that face us teachers: frustrated behaviour, non-completion of work, low self-esteem, poor attendance and, ultimately, poor results. So how do we make sure children are developing their reading, writing or language skills in every lesson – regardless of the subject or topic?

To help in this monumental mission, here are 18 of my favourite ways to boost literacy skills wherever you are and whatever you're teaching.

1 Black out pens

After reading a text, have pupils prepare a creative summary by selecting words or sections to black out, leaving just 30 words showing (a black marker pen works well). Then ask them to go back to work with their 'black-out pens' so that the page is summarised in just 10 words. Which word would they choose if they had to summarise the text by leaving only one word showing?

2 Text detectives

In pairs, pupils read a given text. Pupil A chooses one word, sentence or paragraph and Pupil B must ask yes or no questions to ascertain which word, sentence or section Pupil A has chosen. This involves very close study of a text.

3 Zoom frames

After careful reading of a text, ask pupils to slide a 'zoom frame' over it (this can be created by cutting a small square in a large piece of paper). Pupils must explain why the words that are framed are important to the text. Alternatively, you might encourage a little grammar revision by asking them to define the word and / or explain what type of word it is.

4 Mission accomplished

Before they show you their written work, get children to highlight areas where they think they have really met the objective and areas where they already think they could do better next time. This will encourage the valuable habit of proof-reading and might even lead to some reflective revisions before submission.

5 What did I just say?

If, whilst circulating, you chat to a child about her work, ask her to try summarising in her own words what you have said to her – either orally or in written form next to her work. This not only reassures you that the pupil has listened to and engaged with your feedback, it also requires her to review and condense that feedback into useful action points.

6 Mix and match

Give half the class excerpts of pupils' written work and the other half teachers' summative comments (or the formative feedback stamps / symbols you usually use). Ask pupils to circulate, comparing the item they are holding with that of each classmate they speak to,

looking carefully for links between the items. They can be encouraged to spot similar features / ideas / information / mistakes in the samples of pupils' work – as well as to match up those samples with what they feel to be the most relevant piece of teacher feedback.

7 Writing galleries

Create a reading and writing gallery by placing different samples of pupils' first drafts around the room and asking pupils to circulate, making additions / suggestions / alterations / corrections at each post. You might even get them to take notes like serious mini art critics! This is an interesting way to explore the idea that a piece of work can always be appreciated as well as improved or enhanced in some way.

8 Problem words

After reading a text in any subject, invite pupils to highlight any words that they do not fully understand. These words can then be discussed as a class or researched independently.

9 Break it down

Present longer texts to pupils in a series of small sections to prevent pupils from feeling over-faced and to allow them to assimilate the information more effectively.

10 Sorted

Help pupils to make sense of written information or narratives by asking them to physically sequence a fragmented or disordered text.

11 Say it with plasticine

Ask pupils to convert a text into a different form – e.g. a chart or diagram, a poem, a cartoon, a set of models, etc. This is effective in helping pupils to remember the information. To test or consolidate their understanding, you might ask them to present it in a form that would be accessible to a very young child, or someone who doesn't speak English. Getting pupils to use plasticine to tangibly represent the main points – and then removing the original text and using only the models to make written notes is one way of showing pupils the difference between copying and actually condensing and transforming information.

12 Quiz masters

Instead of asking pupils to answer questions about the text, ask them to devise useful reading comprehension questions to test someone else's understanding of the text. (They should also have the answers ready prepared!)

13 Fill in the blanks

Display a text and ask pupils to read it. Remove the text for a while and then replace it with a version that is missing important words, phrases or whole sections. Ask pupils to attempt to "fill in the blanks". This act of information retrieval will help them to recall the information more easily at a later date.

14 Picture the reader

It helps to have a purpose and audience in mind when you are writing – even if you're simply recounting 'what you did at the weekend' (that Monday morning classic!). Help children to have a picture in their head of their intended reader so that they can consider how to capture that person's interest. Pupils can then be required to adapt style, structure and vocabulary appropriately. You might even display a picture of the imagined reader.

15 What not to do

Give pupils a good or really bad example of the writing they are being asked to produce. Pupils can then be encouraged to identify what they will need to do in order to produce a high-quality piece of work. Together you can create a checklist that pupils must refer to and assess their work against.

16 Secondary objectives

Regardless of the topic, announce a particular literacy focus (e.g. writing in paragraphs, writing in sentences, checking spelling with a dictionary, using interesting adjectives, etc.) at the beginning of the lesson – alongside the primary learning objective.

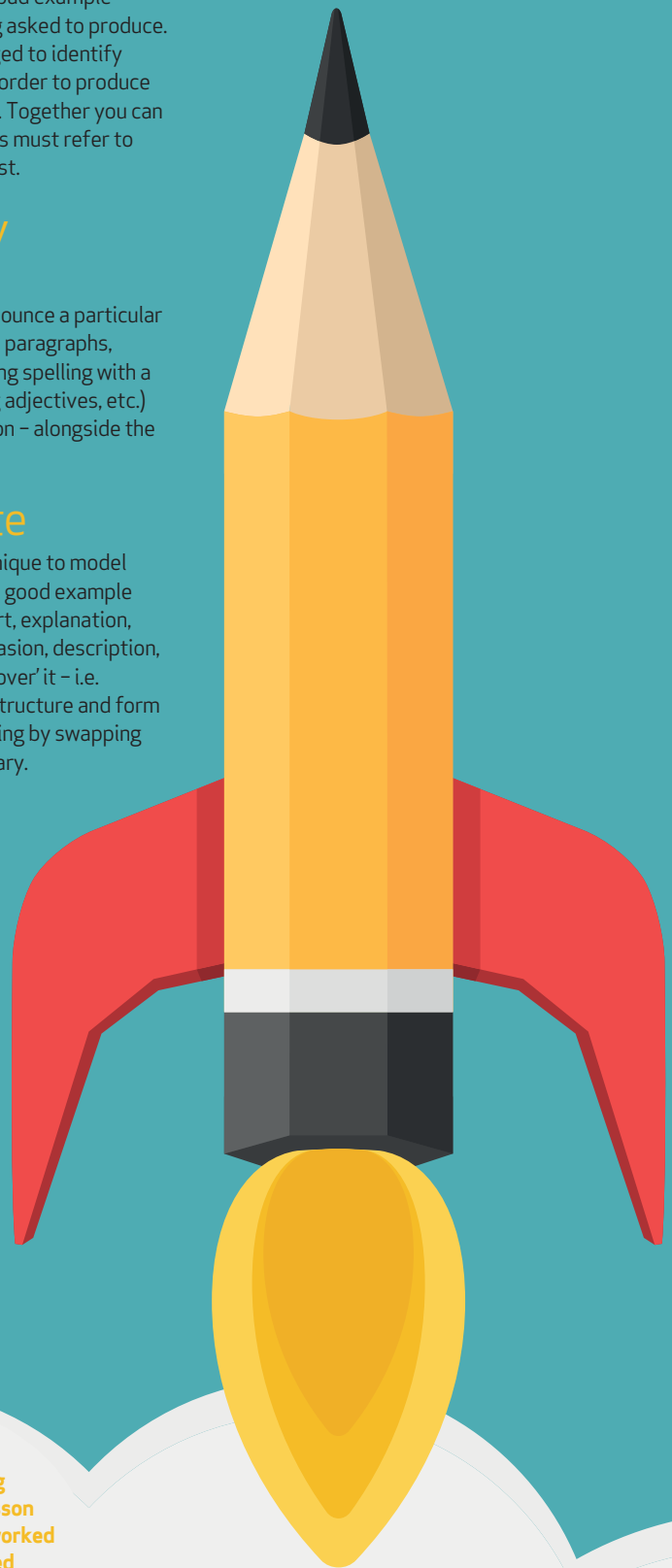
17 Ghost write

Use the 'ghost writing' technique to model excellent form: give pupils a good example of this type of writing (report, explanation, instructions, recount, persuasion, description, etc.) and ask them to write 'over' it – i.e. retaining the phraseology, structure and form but changing the core meaning by swapping in the correct topic vocabulary.

18 That's an order!

For each different subject, be aware of and focus on the subject-specific imperative verbs that pupils will encounter. For example, compare, calculate, describe, predict, explain, argue, discuss, demonstrate, etc. What exactly does each verb entail? Can the children explain the difference between them?

Isabella Wallace is co-author of the best-selling teaching guides, *Pimp Your Lesson* and *Talk-Less Teaching* and has worked for many years as an Advanced Skills Teacher.



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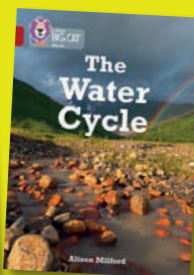


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“I felt like a non-reading loser”

As a child, **Phil Earle** turned his back on literature, but only because no one helped him find the right book, and it was out there all along...

Reading was too much for me as a child. Way too much.

Or rather, *the novel* was.

There's a distinction to be made here, an important one, as all too often 'the novel' is used as the definition of reading. *If you don't read Dickens, or the classics, then you aren't a reader.*

This is a line that was frequently rolled out in front of me as a child, a line that slammed the 'reading door' firmly in my face. I couldn't read Dickens; the sight of a thousand pages, each of them crammed with 500 words, made my head spin and my spirits fall.

I didn't have the confidence to climb that mountain, and frankly didn't see what was at the top of it for me anyway. I had no interest in reading about nineteenth century life, so I didn't bother. I read York Notes and bluffed my way through my education, seething about literary snobbery as I did so.

It doesn't have to be this way though. We don't need to be elitist about what our children or indeed our adults read, because the beautiful thing about reading is that there's something for everyone. Of course there is. We just have to redefine what reading is: we need to open the door and invite those on the outside, back in.

Yes, the novel is a wonderful form. I know that. I just needed to find a shorter one that held me by the lapels and shook me until I read 'The End' (that book was Louis Sachar's *Holes* by the way. I read it aged 26).

But let's not kid ourselves that the novel is the only answer. Let's offer our young readers illustrated work – stories such as Dr Seuss' *Horton Hatches The Egg*. It may be only 64-pages long, but it is the most joyful story to read aloud ever, and it is helped along the way by pictures: funny, sad, moving pictures that deepen our feelings for our hero. Having pictures doesn't make it less of a read; it makes it more of one.

For that reason, let's put graphic novels in front of our reluctant teenage readers. Let's give them Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, or Craig

Thompson's *Blankets*. Let's show them how words and pictures together, married on the page, can take them places they will never otherwise go. Let's encourage readers to engage with newspapers and magazines. If they love football, give them match reports to pore over, or stats from the World Cup final. If fashion is their thing, give them *Vogue* or *GQ*.

I haven't even got onto poetry yet.

There are magnificent poets writing for children today, my favourite being A.F. Harrold. His poem 'Midnight Feast' is a thing of wonder, made even better if you hear him perform it. There are others too: Kate Tempest, Lemn Sissay, Polarbear (aka Steven Camden), Laura Dockrill – all of them masters of their craft, not to mention Sarah Crossan who writes the most incredible novels in blank verse.

So let's find ways of grabbing readers and showing them the different routes to reading. I'm going through it with my son Albie at the moment. He's nine, and for years has struggled to engage. But just this week we have had a breakthrough.

I put *Tasmin and the Deep* by Neill Cameron and Kate Brown in front of him, a graphic novel collated from the glorious Phoenix Weekly Comic. He flew through it in two nights. This is unheard of for him. So now I've given him *Daredevil*, and I can see, reluctantly, the fire has been lit.

All I have to do now is furiously fan the flames.

And I will. Not just because I'm his dad, but because it matters. I want him to escape

outside of his own life. I want him to enjoy himself too, but most importantly, I don't want him to feel like I did, like a non-reading loser.

Not when there are alternatives, and loads of them at that.

Award-winning novelist for children and young adults, Phil Earle, has been appointed the new online Writer in Residence for children's reading charity, BookTrust. Phil is using his residency to record a series of vlogs, talking about his belief that everyone is a reader. Listen to them here: tinyurl.com/TRWbooktrust





HOW TO BUILD A ***buzz about books***

Golden tickets, canny advertising and peer power. There are countless ways to get children and parents excited about reading – even if it means offering a babysitting service, says **James Clements**...



Over the last few years, I've been travelling to meet teachers from right across the country, seeing what ideas they've come up with to make sure learning to read goes hand in hand with developing a love of books. What did I discover? Well, it may not surprise you that many of the heads, English subject leaders and teachers I met were keen to stress that it was an everyday focus on reading – not special events – that helped the children to see books in a more positive light. But that said, many of the schools had developed creative approaches to raise the profile of reading, often in response to a particular problem. These events helped to create a sense that reading was something special, raising its profile and making it exciting. Curious? Here are what were, for me, some of the more memorable ideas.

Look to rebrand

One school had a problem with 'silent reading', the independent reading slot that was timetabled for straight after lunch. The children didn't particularly enjoy this and so the literacy coordinator decided to take a leaf from an advertising department and rebrand it SQUIRT time – Super-Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time. The same children who were decidedly unexcited by silent reading skipped into SQUIRT time because it sounded fun.

Find a golden ticket

One librarian noticed that children were very keen to borrow new books that arrived in the library, but were sometimes unwilling to borrow some of the older books, even if they were great stories. She solved this by hiding Willy Wonka-style golden tickets in a selection of the older book stock. If a child found a golden ticket she would read the book, take it to the librarian (who would ask her some questions about the book to see if she had read it) and then she'd swap her golden ticket for a football bookmark or a jazzy pencil.

Reading buddies – from KS2 to nursery

Lots of the schools featured in the project used a system of reading buddies, where older children would meet to read with a younger child to share a book or hear him read. One deputy head spoke about the positive impact she'd seen from weekly reading sessions between Y5 and Y2 pupils. The Y2 children loved their reading buddy coming to read with them and benefited from the opportunity to read aloud to someone

who they looked up to. But she also noticed a positive change in the Y5 children: they thrived on the responsibility of being a reading buddy, being the expert and supporting someone else's reading. It also helped them to be conscious about what made a good reader and this had an impact on their own reading. So she decided to extend the programme.

As well as Y2 reading with Y5, she asked the KS1 children to go and read with a Reception reading buddy once per week. Again, she saw the growing sense of responsibility and understanding of what makes a good reader in Y2. So she decided to pair each Reception child with a child from the Nursery and give them a weekly slot to read together. Although the Reception child didn't necessarily have the best-developed reading skills, he could usually use the book to tell a story to his buddy, and the experience of being the expert at reading was priceless.

We dedicate this book to...

In one school, children were invited to write the titles of books they'd enjoyed reading onto slips and post them into a letterbox in the school library. If the school used a recommendation and bought the book, a nameplate would be put in the front of the book with the name of the child who suggested buying it. This served two purposes. Firstly, it got the children talking about books and recognised the keen readers who went to the trouble of recommending books to others. Secondly, it allowed the children to see who had recommended a book and sometimes this was enough to get a child to read it. The headteacher told a story about the time he was sharing some of the recommended books in assembly and he got to a book suggested by the captain of the Y6 football team; he said he could see the ripple of excitement through KS2 as groups of boys thought, 'That's the book I'm reading next!'

Free babysitting (or reading camp)

The final initiative goes well beyond the call of duty. One school from the project ran a reading competition each term. Every teacher nominated his or her 'Reader of the Term' all of whom won the following prize: they could camp out in the school hall overnight at reading camp. Reading camp featured stories, games and hot chocolate before sleeping in a pop-up tent in the school hall. It was held on a Friday night and if a child won, it wasn't just him that could attend, it extended to any other sibling he had at the school. So the parents got Friday night out with free babysitting!

DO IT BY THE BOOK

Think you have a good idea for a reading initiative? Ask them five key questions first...

- **What issue is it addressing?** Does it solve a problem or help children to see reading in a new or positive way?
- **Is it about reading?** Will it help children to become better readers or enjoy books?
- **Is it equitable?** Can all children access the initiative to the same degree? Events that involve dressing up or contributing money can be difficult for some children.
- **Does it help children to see the intrinsic value and enjoyment in reading?** Collecting stickers, rewards and points can be very motivating, but they're only valuable if children still read when they are aren't on offer.
- **Is there any lasting effect on reading at the school beyond the actual initiative?** Is the amount of effort expended on the event worth it in terms of its impact on children's reading habits?

Not surprisingly, the headteacher told us that the school had never had such a positive response to a reading initiative from parents – they chased him across the playground to tell him how often their children read and how much they loved reading. Like I say, well beyond the call of duty...

What made each of these initiatives stand out was that the school had thought carefully about a specific problem or issue with reading and then set about solving it in a creative way. So, what might work to promote and celebrate reading in your school?





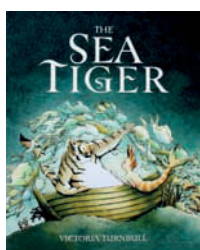
CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories

10 books with HIDDEN DEPTHS

Friendship, loss, memory, war and hope – children's books get to the heart of what it is to be human, so why not explore their many layers of meaning with your class, suggests **Carey Fluker Hunt...**

Foundation Stage

1



The Sea Tiger
BY VICTORIA TURNBULL
(Templar)

What's the story?

Oscar is a mer-boy. The Sea Tiger is his best (and only) friend, and they spend their days playing in an underwater paradise. But things can't stay the same forever. Oscar needs to grow up and move on – and to be a true friend, the Sea Tiger must help him.

Delicately drawn and with a muted colour palette, Victoria Turnbull's illustrations possess a quiet exuberance that's complemented by her poetic text.

Deep thinking

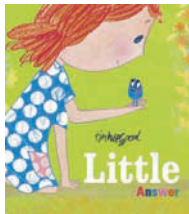
Themes include friendship, caring, understanding someone else's needs, loss, growth and change.

Try this...

- Talk about the changes your children have experienced, and how these experiences made them feel (e.g. starting school, moving house, losing a pet...). How can we help each other through difficult times, as well as enjoying the good things together?
- Pretend to be the Sea Tiger and find ways for him to move and speak and roar. Use chalky pastels and watered-down inks to create your own underwater pictures. If the children could have an imaginary animal friend, what would they choose and what adventures would they have?
- How should we treat our human friends to show them we care?



2



Foundation Stage

Little Answer

BY TIM HOPGOOD
(Random House)

What's the story?

When the answer's always sausages, finding the right question is very important. Readers will enjoy Little Answer's predicament as he searches for his One True Question. Will it be what clouds are made of, or what is the secret to happiness? Or maybe it'll just be what's for tea tonight?

This is a book that will be read and re-read for the sheer enjoyment of it, but it's the underlying messages about the importance of asking questions and never giving up that take Little Answer to another level.

Deep thinking

Themes include the importance of asking questions (and questioning answers), problem solving and persistence.

Try this...

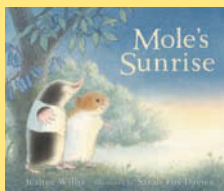
- The elephant, the butterfly and the snail ask questions that a scientist might answer. Can you find out why the wind blows and what clouds are made of? What else might the animals want to know – and can you help them find the answers?
- Owl's questions are trickier and need a different kind of answer. Talk about these questions, and see what you can come up with.
- Do you have any questions of your own? Have fun generating as many as you can. Which questions require information to answer them (what's the biggest animal in the world?) and which require imagination (why is that car red)?
- Use your 'imagination questions' to lead into storytelling.



artwork © Tim Hopgood.

"It's the underlying messages about the importance of asking questions and never giving up that take Little Answer to another level"

3



Foundation Stage

Mole's Sunrise

BY JEANNE WILLIS
AND SARAH FOX-DAVIES (Walker)

What's the story?

Mole wants to see the sunrise, so Vole helps him. They meet Squirrel, Rabbit and Sparrow, and the five friends wait until the sun comes up. Does it look like an egg sizzling in butter? Or is it more like the shiny button on Mole's waistcoat?

Gently, naturally and affectionately, Mole's friends help him experience the sunrise. He

might not be able to see it with his eyes, but he can see it with his mind.

Deep thinking

Themes include disability, blindness, friendship, empathy, connecting, caring, community, imagination, communication.

Try this...

- Choose some objects and describe them for Mole, selecting the best possible words and using all your senses to help him. Share The Black Book of Colours by Menena Cottin and Rosana Faria (Walker) and find out about Braille.
- In a safe place and with adult support, play some blindfold trust games. Explore a tree-trunk by touch alone, then remove your blindfold and find your way back to the same tree. What did you learn through your fingers that you didn't notice with your eyes?



Mole had never seen the sunrise.
"It's beautiful," said Vole.
"I'd love to see it," said Mole.
"Come with me," said Vole.

Illustration © 2011 Sarah Fox-Davies. From Mole's Sunrise by Jeanne Willis, illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd

Key Stage 1

4



Grandpa Green

BY LANE SMITH (Macmillan)

What's the story?

Grandpa Green wasn't always a gardener. Long ago, he was a boy on a farm. Then he was a soldier, a husband, a father... and now he's an artist with a failing memory, creating topiary pictures to remind him of a full and happy life. His great-grandson works alongside him, listening to his stories – and finding all the tools that Grandpa's lost along the way.

With its limited colour palette and quirky line drawings, this book crashes through the generational barrier and shows us there's more to Grandpa than meets the eye.

Deep thinking

Themes include ageing, memory, time, continuity and change, family, legacy, different perspectives.

Try this...

- Create family trees with information and photographs brought in by children and their families. What was the world like when their grandparents were young? Are any grandparents willing to come in and reminisce?
- Ask children to think about key moments in their own lives. Can they design a garden that includes statues, topiary and other features to commemorate these moments? Create maps, paint pictures, make models and write guidebooks about your gardens.
- Visit the same garden in different seasons and chart the changes that occur.
- Find out about memory loss. What can families do to help and support their relatives?



Key Stage 1

6



Little Evie in the Wild Wood

BY JACKIE MORRIS AND CATHERINE HYDE (Frances Lincoln)

What's the story?

It isn't difficult to summarise the plot of this book. Evie goes into a forest, meets a wolf and shares some tarts. What's harder is putting a finger on why it makes us feel the way it does. Is Evie meant to be Red Riding Hood? Because she doesn't seem to need a woodcutter to rescue her. And why isn't she scared?

With its mysterious and dreamlike paintings, this is a book that catches our memories, reminding us of stories half-forgotten and things misplaced. Words and pictures combine to create an atmosphere that lingers, and there are many opportunities for response.

Deep thinking

Themes include the power of the

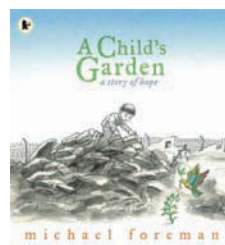
natural world, courage, risk and safety, fear, independence and self-reliance, growth, change, hidden meanings and symbols.

Try this...

- "Little Evie stepped over the stile and into the wild wood..." Explore what happens to Evie through drama and discussion. Be as imaginative as possible, then pick your favourite ideas and develop them.
- Can you think of other stories featuring forests? Read some fairy tales (Hansel and Gretel, Red Riding Hood) and Into the Forest by Anthony Browne. What do these forests represent (danger, fear, the unknown)? Use the image of the wolf towering behind Evie to talk about anxieties. What frightens you?

Key Stage 1

5



A Child's Garden

BY MICHAEL FOREMAN (Walker)

What's the story

A child in a war-torn landscape plants a vine, spreading happiness across the rubble. Soldiers from the 'other side' destroy it – but its seeds survive, and soon there are more vines, with deeper roots and spreading branches. Conflicts can be resolved, and caring about the natural world together makes it possible.

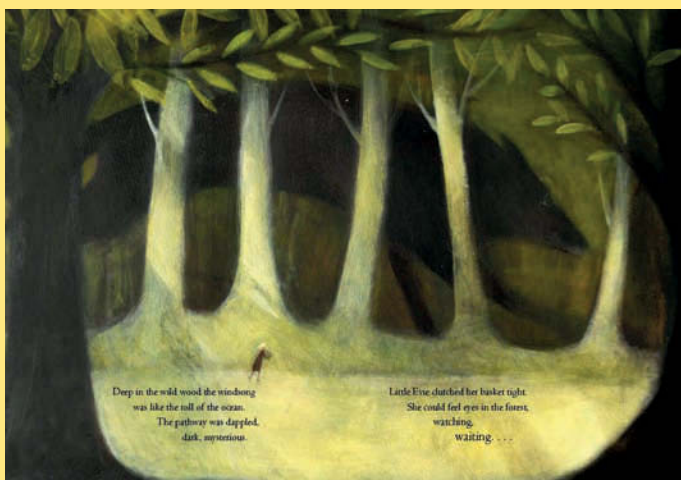
War is a difficult subject to address at KS1, and books that do so tend to avoid realism. Not

so Michael Foreman, who shows us piles of rubble and soldiers with bullets slung across their chests. He also shows us the power of the natural world, the resilience of the human spirit – and hope.

Deep thinking

Themes include war and conflict, resolution, healing, hope, the power of the natural world, and the human spirit.

"With its mysterious and dreamlike paintings, this is a book that catches our memories, reminding us of stories half-forgotten and things misplaced"



What is courage, and how do these characters display it? How might you be courageous in dealing with your fears?

● Talk about 'stranger danger' and other risks. Was Evie right to go into the wood? How can we stay safe and still be independent?

● Explore a wooded area, looking and listening for evidence of the things Evie notices. Collect words, impressions, drawings and descriptions of the wood you're visiting and use to create a collaborative poem or illustration.

Try this...

● Find a patch of disused land that could do with a bit of TLC. Take photographs and make plans. Research the best plants for your location and grow them from seed. Enlist the help of others to transform your space. Keep diaries and make a display. Take a look at *Belonging* (Walker) in which collage artist Jeannie Baker depicts the transformation of an urban neighbourhood.

● Create an enormous collage vine to decorate a corridor or other space. Invite everyone to write their hopes for peace on leaf-shaped cut-outs and tie to the branches.

● Find out about a charity that works for peace and reconciliation. Involve children in planning and carrying out a fundraising event, or write a report to share with your school about what you've learned.



7



Key Stage 1

The Jamie and Angus Stories

BY ANNE FINE AND PENNY DALE (Walker)

What's the story?

Jamie loves Angus, his toy Highland bull, and their experiences will be familiar to many children, who will enjoy these short stories in novel form.

Jamie is presented as a fully rounded individual with an important role to play within his family: one that involves responsibility as well as entitlement. In fact, there's a generous serving of 'right and wrong' in this book – although it wears its ethical hat lightly. These are humorous stories, full of warmth and charm, that show a deep understanding of family life and the way that generations interact.

Deep thinking

Themes include family, friendship, empathy, caring, responsibility, right and wrong, point of view, the importance of listening, independence, change and growing up.

Try this...

● "See you tomorrow," whispered Jamie to the package. The package rustled its paper excitedly... What would you like to find inside a package and why? Tell the story of what happened when you found a package that rustled.

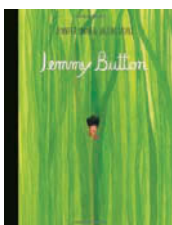
● Dad tells Jamie a story about his buggy. Have your children heard stories about themselves, and do they remember being little? How do they think they've changed since then? Use *The Perfect Day* to help you imagine what it might be like to be older.

● What choices does Jamie make, and what would have happened if he'd behaved differently? Make a list of new scenarios for Jamie to deal with. How should he act? Why do we sometimes do the wrong thing, and how can we make up for that?



Key Stage 2

8



Jemmy Button

BY WABY JENIFER
UMAN AND VALERIO
VIDALI (Templar)

About the book

This book tells the story of Orundellico, a boy from Tierra del Fuego brought to Queen Victoria's Britain. Known as Jemmy Button by the people who flocked to meet him, Orundellico finally returned home after many years, but struggled to relearn his native language and customs.

Uman and Vidali met online and corresponded before collaborating on this picturebook. Their images prompt an emotional response and the text is sparse, leaving room for questions and connections. Did Orundellico come willingly, or was he kidnapped? What did he think about his experiences? And what does it mean to be civilised?

Inspiring artwork

Themes include the environment, point of view, commonalities and differences, ideas of civilization and entitlement, loss, change and return.

Try this...

● What choices did the illustrators make about colour, composition and perspective, and what impact do these choices have on us?

What do the illustrators want us to feel, as well as see? The hand holding the button is enormous, for example. Why? And what's the effect of using faceless silhouettes?

● Research the story behind this picturebook and explore through drama. How does it feel to be alone and different in a new place? Debate the rights and wrongs of bringing Orundellico to Britain.

● For environmental links, read *Giant* by Colin McNaughton and *The Promise* by Nicola Davies and Laura Carlin (both Walker). To think more about difference, read *Beegu* by Alexis Deacon and *Eric* by Shaun Tan (Templar).

9



Key Stage 2

An Angel for May

BY MELVIN BURGESS
(Andersen Press)

What's the story

When we first meet Tam, he's angry and confused and in no mood to look beyond appearances. Unhappy at home, he runs off and discovers the ruins of Thowt-It Farm, high in the hills. There he meets May, who takes him into the farm as it existed 50 years earlier. Why has Tam gone back in time, and what's the connection between his new friend May and Rosey, the local 'Bag Lady'?

The events at Thowt-It help Tam set aside his prejudices and value the things that really matter.

Known for his gritty Young Adult realism, Burgess's subject matter can be challenging, but in writing for a younger audience the darker side has been tempered with insight, positivity and hope.

Deep thinking

Themes include divorce, bullying, homelessness, being an

outsider, abuse, understanding other points of view, friendship, ageing and change.

Where will it take you?

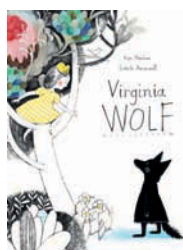
● Cut out some magazine photographs and use to generate questions: who is this person? What makes him or her happy? What is he or she afraid of? Invent histories for these people, and reasons for their behaviour. In pairs, roleplay conversations between characters. What prevents your characters from understanding each other and how can these barriers be overcome? Use your inventions and discoveries to inform storywriting about a particular type of prejudice and its resolution.

● For more 'timeslip empathy', try Tom's *Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce.



Key Stage 2

10



Virginia Wolf

BY KYO MACLEAR AND ISABELLE ARSENAULT (Kids Can Press)

What's the story

One day my sister woke up feeling wolfish..." Virginia is in a bad mood and nothing can shake her out of it. Nothing, that is, until her sister asks her where she'd rather be. "Bloomsberry," says Virginia. "A place with... beautiful flowers and excellent trees ...and absolutely no doldrums." So Vanessa sets out to paint Bloomsberry on the bedroom wall.

Isabelle Arsenault illustrates graphic novels as well as picturebooks, and their influence can be seen throughout Virginia Wolf.

Deep thinking

Themes include sadness and depression, anger, empathy, the power of creativity, caring, communication, and emotional literacy.

Try this...

● Which moments do the pictures illustrate? What do they show us that we can't get from the text, and how do they tell us what to think and feel? Look at the 'volume' at which Virginia speaks, for example, or the use of silhouettes. Try illustrating a specific emotion using an idea or technique seen in this book.

● Put on your (imaginary) wolf suits to explore the wolfish behaviour that comes with sadness, anger and fear. Talk about how it feels to be wolfish. What makes you miserable? Make a list of words to describe

sadness and 'wolfishness' and use to write a poem.

● Why does being creative make Virginia feel better? What else can people do to feel better, and how can we support them? "Bring the outside inside" by creating a giant Bloomsberry mural where it will cheer people up.

● Follow up with The Red Tree by Shaun Tan or Michael Rosen's Sad Book (illustrated by Quentin Blake).



Material from Virginia Wolf by Kyo Maclear and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault. Used with permission by Kids Can Press.

"Look at the 'volume' at which Virginia speaks, for example, or the use of silhouettes. Try illustrating a specific emotion using an idea or technique seen in this book"

*Mick Inkpen*

“I want the prize of learning to read to be worth the effort”

Assessment is important, says **Mick Inkpen** – but not everything that matters in education can be easily measured

I was one of those lucky kids cut out for school; good at most of those things, capable of being taught within the confines of institutional education. So once the terrifying prospect of the first day had been negotiated, I quickly hit my stride and never looked back.

I got used to house points and praise for everything – everything that is except my handwriting. In those days dip pens in the hands of left-handers like me were splatter guns waiting to explode their payload of ink across the page. But school reports were glowing. I don't think I became priggish. It was just the way it was. Expecting to do well became my normal; and so it must have been with learning to read. I have only a vague recollection of my first encounters with books. One that sticks in the memory is of an impromptu reading race with the other 'best reader' in the class. Elizabeth Scriven and I somehow got into a competition to see who could finish our books first, and I still shudder with embarrassment at the thought of the two of us hardly bothering to turn the pages before racing to the front of the class to claim another book.

Of course as a child I was unaware of any difficulties other children might be having learning to read. But what a strange and difficult skill it seems, especially if you first encounter it in the competitive atmosphere of the classroom. Abstract marks on the page that seem at first sight entirely arbitrary remain impenetrable to anyone without the means of interpreting them. Yet they are key to the rest of our learning, at least to the kind

of learning that will qualify us in the eyes of others to take our place in the world. Without reading we don't even enter the race; our self-esteem depends on these strange squiggles. So although my primary aim has been to make books that entertain, I've always had a weather eye on the business of learning to read.

In truth I rely on my intuition to sense how to write for children. Though it sounds a bit precious, my guide is the child in myself. This allows a certain amount of rule breaking. It opens up the possibility of being really playful, not only with the words, but even with the way a book is made. That playfulness is the best thing I can give to a child learning to read.

“There are many aspects of development that cannot be adequately assessed by placing a tick in a box”

I want the prize of learning to read to be worth the effort. I want their eyes to be on the story, on the jokes, on the absurdities, on page turns that reveal surprises. I want the sheer pleasure of turning the page to distract them from the difficulty of learning to read. Some children come to regard reading as a kind of unpleasant educational medicine. The best picture books play an important role in subverting that experience. And they also provide something of an escape from the experience of being assessed.

I don't have much direct knowledge of the way tick-box culture has been applied

to learning but I do occasionally encounter teachers who complain about how the process of assessment impinges on the teaching itself. I feel ambivalent about it. I can accept that all institutions need some external scale of reference by which they can judge themselves. And I can see that children also need to have a developing sense of how they shape up in what will become for them the increasingly competitive experience of education and work.

But there are many aspects of development that cannot be adequately assessed by placing a tick in a box. In the end the quality of teaching is far more reliant on choosing and developing the right people than in refining the systems within which they work. My fear is that those aspects of development that can't easily be assessed will be sidelined in favour of those that can. Perhaps if empathy had been on the curriculum Elizabeth Scriven and I might have been shamefully close to the bottom of the class. At any rate it seems to me that over-optimistic faith in systematic assessment is likely to result in the over-systemisation of teaching itself.

It must be that the kind of playfulness I recognise as essential in my work, relying as it does on sometimes going off-piste and being counter intuitive, on pushing boundaries, is also an essential part of teaching, just as it is of life in general. But it's something that we engage intuitively. It's not something we can allocate or quantify. It's impossible to formalise its place in education let alone assess its effect. Good teachers will always employ it, but in a culture that subjects everything to assessment what price playfulness?





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“Rigour and joy are not mutually exclusive”

Can we really develop a love of reading in children by giving them harder books? **Doug Lemov** thinks so...

Let's get a couple of things straight from the start: Doug Lemov doesn't want to tell you, technique by technique, how to teach; nor does he think you are currently doing it all wrong. Despite what some of his critics seem to believe, his popular but polarising handbook *Teach Like a Champion* was never meant to be used as a rigid blueprint for a single pedagogical 'style' – rather, it was a collection of simple strategies that Lemov knew to be effective, from extensive observation of successful classrooms, offered to educators so they could try them out for themselves. And now, alongside two of his colleagues at Uncommon Schools, he has taken the same approach to encouraging us to rethink a very specific area of the curriculum: reading.

“Our aim is always to highlight the benefits of constant reflection,” he explains. “And there are very good reasons to reflect, rigorously, on how we teach reading at the moment, and what we are sure is the right thing to do.” One of those reasons – undeniably compelling – is what Lemov describes as “the tyranny of correlation” linking socio-economic backgrounds with literacy attainment. When it comes to closing the gap, it seems we are not succeeding nearly as well with reading as we are with other subjects. “State assessments show that a student's level of proficiency in reading is 1.5-2 times as strongly correlated with socio-economics as is his or her competency in mathematics,” Lemov points out. “What have we missed? And what is the cost of that correlation to a society that's built on meritocracy? Reading is the key skill that opens doors to any kind of academic endeavour, and evidence shows that too many of our young people are applying for university not remotely prepared for the kinds of complex, deep reading they will be required to do there.”

Tough love

The book that Lemov has written with Erica Woolway and Colleen Driggs is called *Reading Reconsidered* and subtitled, *A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction*. “It does sound a little like a chapter heading in a Dickens novel,” he smiles when asked about this choice of language. “But we selected those words carefully. ‘Practical’ is important – we really did want to make this book useful for teachers. Theory and philosophy can be helpful, of course, but we were keen to talk about what actually happens in classrooms. And it's deliberately piecemeal; we see it as a book of tools, so people can take aspects of it, give them a try, see if they work. Teachers already do a lot right, there's no need for a ‘change everything from the ground up’ approach. You can take something from this book and test it out with your students tomorrow, without the angst of a ‘full reboot.’” And ‘rigorous?’ “That has to be the goal for all kids,” Lemov insists. “Besides, rigour and joy are not mutually exclusive!”

There are four key precepts at the heart of *Reading Reconsidered*: read harder texts; ‘close read’ texts rigorously and intentionally; read more nonfiction, more effectively; write more





"It's become accepted, for example, that levelling reading books for children is the way to go. There's a place for leveled texts, but students also need to be comfortable reading what's challenging"

effectively in direct response to texts. Can the first of these really be applied to teaching in primary schools, where children are taking their very earliest steps in the literacy journey? Absolutely, confirms Lemov, adding, "It's become accepted, for example, that levelling reading books for children is the way to go. There's a place for leveled texts, but students also need to be comfortable reading what's challenging (and worthy of challenge). They need both – and I see the cost of neglecting that, all the time. High poverty kids arrive at school with low literacy levels, so they get given books that don't challenge – or inspire – them. No one gives them a great book and says, 'I'm going to help you enjoy this'. Schools identify them as 'poor readers', and give them easy reads by way of supporting them – but in doing so, they unintentionally close doors of possibility for them." According to Lemov, there is some evidence that many of the things we assume build a love of reading – such as allowing children to access easy, instantly appealing books; choose their own reading materials; and read stories about characters just like themselves – do not necessarily achieve the desired outcome. "There is more to reading than following a snappy adventure," he observes. "I didn't become a reader, really, until a teacher gave me Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* when I was around 11 or 12; I enjoyed how demanding it was, yes, but also the depth of thought involved. There's a mindset that says children should never be given books in which there are more than five words on a page they don't understand – but I disagree; if we don't teach children to

unlock—and enjoy unlocking—a text that challenges them, who will?"

Shared stories

Reading with – and indeed, to – students is something that Lemov fears is becoming a dying art in schools. "Just hearing adults read books aloud helps children understand the purpose and potential of reading deeply, meditatively, with sustained concentration," he says. "Reading silently; students reading aloud; teachers reading aloud to pupils – all three of these options have strengths and limitations, and in the book we advocate finding the right balance between them. It would be a gift to children, of course it would, if they were all exposed to reading earlier, read stories by their parents, and surrounded by books at home. But there will always be the disparate impact of parenting and/or setting for kids. We must assume we will always have children entering our schools who are behind in reading; and as important to me as the fact that some youngsters start Reception not knowing that you read a book from front to back and left to right, is that we still have kids in Years 5 and 6 who have never read a book in full; never felt that joy, the completion. Understanding narrative, enlarging the vocabulary, and unwinding complex syntax – all these can be achieved through adults reading books to children that they might struggle to decode alone."

Reading Reconsidered, by Doug Lemov, Erica Woolway and Colleen Driggs, is published by Wiley (£21.99)

TRY THIS TOMORROW

According to Lemov, research shows a clear link between the breadth and depth of a child's knowledge of vocabulary, and his or her reading ability. He suggests a different approach to introducing new words in the classroom. "At the moment, a teacher might say, 'Who can tell me what 'decrepit' means?'" he explains. "Whereupon you get a whole heap of wrong definitions – guesses – and eventually a 'correct' one, thought up on the spot by a 10-year-old. So how about, instead of that, you give them an excellent definition first, then spend time playing with the word, instead of guessing what it might mean? You might ask, for example, 'Do you think you can be decrepit and wealthy?' 'Could a tyrant ever be decrepit? Why?' 'What might a decrepit person look like?' This is how you learn a word's shades and subtleties of meaning – because, as Isabel Beck points out in her excellent book *Bringing Words to Life*, if two words overlap 80% in meaning, like imitate and mimic, we tend to teach them as synonyms; but actually, it's the differences between them that help us understand the nuances of text."



PHILIP ARDAGH is a children's author, best known for his Eddie Dickens series



Where do you get your SHOES?

What happens when **Philip Ardagh** and **Axel Scheffler** pop up in your school? Kids get curious – about Gruffalos, Grunts and size-16 feet...

once curated a tent in a London Square, where adults were only granted access if accompanied by a child. Mine was one of a handful of tents of varying shapes and sizes, but *my* tent contained a corner of an upside-down room. Built especially for me by students from St Martin's College of Art, it had a laid-table – candle and all – hanging down from the ceiling (which looked like a floor), and an upside-down picture (of *me* of course) on the wall. Along with a few other odds and ends, this meant that if you were photographed sitting on the floor (which looked like a ceiling) and then turned the photo the other way up, it looked as if you were somehow sitting on the ceiling. Confused? How do you think I felt? Who'd have guessed be a children's author could be so much fun?

Elsewhere in my tent, which was erected for the very first Pop-Up Festival (pop-up.org.uk), there were optical illusions on the walls, and by the entrance there was a table, covered in a red table cloth, in the middle of which was a

small, green, wooden cage covered in warning notices. In the cage, amongst the foliage, was a small, snarly creature. This was really a glove puppet operated by my invaluable assistant, who was also the person who'd cut the hole in the table-top and table cloth to fit her arm through. (See what I mean by invaluable?) So good was her puppetry, no child *dared* stick a finger through the tiny, wooden bars.

I also hired two professionals: a close-up magician, who has since turned up in Downton Abbey as a love interest for Lady Mary, and a human bush. Yes, you read that right, he looked like a piece of topiary made from a privet hedge: a privet-hedge person. He was *superb*, though the victim of a little too much attention from a group of particularly boisterous children.

Now, I suspect that the brighter ones amongst you have spotted a theme here. This was a tent where nothing was quite what it seemed. It was my very own House of Illusions and I peopled it with guest authors

accordingly, each weaving his or her own word magic. As a genuine two-metre-tall giant with a genuine bushy beard and genuinely large feet, I was about the only thing there that was what it seemed. This was a place of wonder, with the wonder of stories – the wonder of words – at its very heart...

... and that wonder of words has continued, in a different form, in my subsequent involvement at Pop-Up. One of the things that makes Pop-Up so different from the majority of children's festivals is that each class involved gets a set of the author's book in advance – *That's me! I'm the author! That's my book!* – so the classes have a real opportunity to use it as little or as much as possible long before we arrive. When I say 'we', I'm not referring to me and t'other authors but to me and my illustrator because, for the past couple of years, I've shared my events with the illustrator of The Grunts series. When I say my illustrator, I don't actually have him all to myself. His name is Axel Scheffler and he's known to have done the occasion illustration for other authors such as Julia Donaldson. In fact, he's the man behind the woman behind *The Gruffalo* (if they all stand in a neat line). By having the books in advance, this means that Axel and I have been able to go into classrooms, school halls or theatres in the knowledge that just about every child in the audience has at least some rudimentary knowledge about the characters or story.

"After the events, some children have then gone away and, through their own initiative, finished the story, or edited it, or re-told it the way they think it should have gone"



Now that's a funny question

Questions from children over the years have been everything from "Why do you sweat so much?" and "Have you met the Queen?" to "What time do you have your first drink of the day?" and "Do you know JK Rowling?" The most common question for any author is, "Where do you get your ideas from?" and, requiring Size-16 footwear, often I'm asked, "Where do you buy your shoes?" The questions, "Do you base your characters on real people?" and "Do you put things that happen to you in your stories?" seem more relevant, but all questions can lead to interesting answers. And don't be fooled by 'funny'. The opposite of 'funny' isn't 'serious'. The opposite of 'funny' is 'not funny', and you can tackle the hardest of subjects with humour. In fact, funny is a great way of accessing more complicated ideas, because funny can't mean difficult can it?

One last question. Yes, you at the back. "Can I go to the toilet?" You'll have to ask your teacher that one, but it's fine by me. Happy reading.

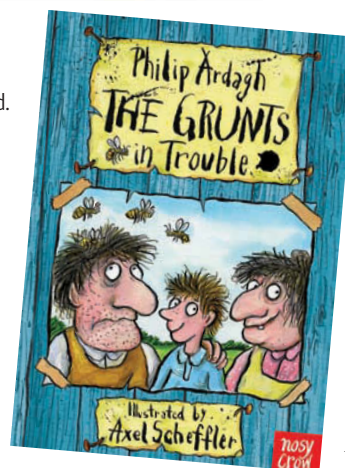
Many may have drawn pictures or done some off-shoot writing of their own.

Then comes the event: Powerpoint pictures, Axel drawing on a flipchart and, in the forefront, me running around waving my arms about, and talking, talking, talking. I'm forever asking questions, answering questions and getting the children as involved as possible. Though centred around *The Grunts*, we get to discuss reading and writing in general too. Tips. Hints. Ideas. Advice.

At some events, I've even had children come on up to act out elements of a story, using my What If...? approach ("What if this happens, then that might happen which then, logically, leads to this...") based on ideas from the audience, shaped and guided by me as the story progresses. To begin with, it's usually the brave ones who hesitatingly put up their hand to make a tentative suggestion. Ten minutes in, and there's generally a forest of hands, and it's hard to get them not to

shout out their suggestions, they're that engaged and excited. After the events, some children have then gone away and, through their own initiative, finished the story, or edited it, or re-told it the way they think it should have gone. All three approaches are fine by me! They're using their imagination; writing; planning; making the stories their own.

This year (2016) Axel and I opened the festival with two events in Essex, which involved the entire Year 4 from across all the schools in Canvey Island. What a reach! All of whom had copies of *The Grunts* and were clued up before I even opened my (lovely) mouth. So the books have a life before, during and after the event, where pupils and teachers can do more reading and more projects based around the books. What has been amazing has been the feedback. Yes,



it's wonderful to hear things from teachers, school librarians, classes and individual students, but Pop-Up also has the statistics to prove the success of such initiatives. After our visits to Hackney, both reading and writing levels improved in literacy tests to such a degree that I generated the heat of a five-bar heater, such was my glow of pride, whilst

Axel doodled Gruffalos on his toes.

Pop-Up puts books in the hands of children from more deprived and often more ethnically diverse areas, and really helps them to get the most out of what's between the covers. Long after we've been and come and gone, the benefits of the fun of reading and the power of words live on. And that's no illusion.



THE MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH

Don't just sling them a Roy of the Rovers annual and think it's job done – a more versatile set of resources is needed to turn boys on to reading...

Contrary to the perception of many children, we teachers know that reading and writing is not just for 'English' or 'Literacy lessons'. Both skills are golden tickets to success across the curriculum. Even in the absence of the written word, there is no lesson in which language is not important. In fact, poor literacy skills can underpin some of the biggest problems that face us teachers: frustrated behaviour, non-completion of work, low self-esteem, poor attendance and, ultimately, poor results. So how do we make sure children are developing their reading, writing or language skills in every lesson – regardless of the subject or topic?

To help in this monumental mission, here are 18 of my favourite ways to boost literacy skills wherever you are and whatever you're teaching.

1 What makes them tick?

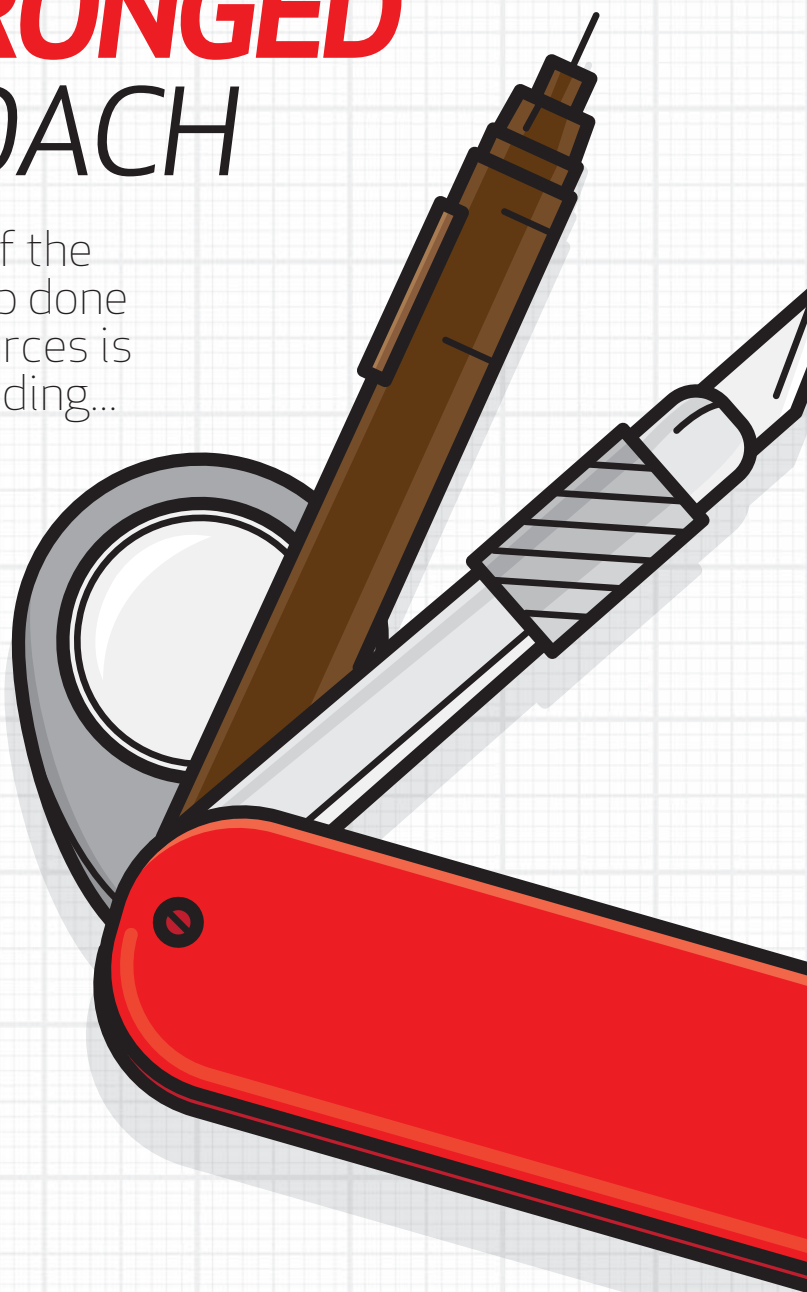
Some boys want to read about space, dinosaurs, cars and sharks...but some don't. If children are reluctant or struggling, prioritise finding out where their passions lie, and find reading material that engages them. Without this, their chances of committing to reading are slim. And the reading materials may not be books, of course.

2 Add some structure

Many boys respond well to structure; 10 or more minutes of independent reading may, for some, be too open-ended. Highly-structured sessions that require specific activities every few minutes may help. Try reading with a 3-5 minute timer. When the time is up, take one minute to record, draw or discuss a summary of the content, then repeat the whole process until the end of the lesson. Ensuring discussion is the major feature of reading sessions is vital.

3 Fine-tune progression

Graded progression through a high-quality reading scheme can instil confidence. It enables struggling readers to succeed daily – crucial in building enthusiasm for reading. But it is equally important that any such books are content appropriate; investment in 'high-interest, low-ability' texts is a must. And always promote progress in relation to a child's personal best, discouraging comparison with others.



5 Find a purpose

For those who don't yet read for its own sake, make it explicitly task-oriented, especially across the curriculum. Focus on the task ahead and some reluctant readers may not even realise they are reading! You could use guided and independent reading to find out about humanities or science topic subject matter, with the absolute requirement that the children must subsequently deliver short presentations, perhaps in pairs. Ban reading in these presentations, to stop children copying and then reading this out verbatim.

6 Get competitive

You may ask children working at similar current levels of reading achievement to try to be the first to discover a particular piece of information or to reach a specific event in a story. Working against the clock, with a collaborative partner, seems to get some boys motivated.

The rewarding of reading is a contentious issue; some say motivation should be intrinsic. However, for some children, we must try everything to hook them into reading, and the idea behind programmes like The Summer Reading Challenge is that, by increasing reading volume / frequency, we increase the likelihood of children developing the habit...and then no longer needing the bribe. We reward many learning behaviours in school; let's reward the one that is probably the most important of all.

7 Beware a focus on non-fiction

While it may be true that some boys really do only like non-fiction, we haven't encountered little boys finding story time unbearable or spurning the opportunity to listen to audio stories. Our theory is that many little boys adore stories and being read to, but reading fiction for themselves is a big commitment: start at the front and work all the way through, reading everything! Information books generally allow them to open a random page, peruse as much as they fancy, and then close it again – much less effort. With our very best intentions, we may be complicit in their development as reluctant – or even slightly lazy – readers.

8 Tempt them in

Try the 'film trailer' approach: read brief extracts from great books out loud, and then say, "You can find the book here!" Don't read the opening page; film trailers don't show the opening minutes: choose really exciting bits!

9 Be active

When looking at text as a whole class, try a second read-through that requires a physical response, e.g. children might indicate they've spotted particular grammatical features – verbs or adverbs, for instance – with particular hand signals as they read aloud.

10 Look and learn

Visually-appealing texts, such as picture books and graphic novels, can help with reluctance as they help readers both 'get in to a story' and make progress through it, while still wrapping them up in a great narrative.

11 Go digital

Various forms of e-reading can appeal in the same way; additionally, they can hide the fact that the child is reading an easier text, sparing embarrassment, and they also fit more neatly into perceived male culture, giving some boys permission to read.

4 Use peer pressure

Use the National Literacy Trust's Reading Champions approach to target 'cool' boys and take them from reluctant to keen reading via an exclusive, high-status club (nothing like traditional guided reading!); then unleash them and let peer-pressure work positively for boys' reading, for a change!



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"High-attaining readers were found to often fail to meet their full potential simply because their book choices were limited. Children met their potential when supported in their choices and given opportunities to engage in higher-level discussions. The first year of the programme ran in nine regions and has been an enormous success."

If you are interested in taking part in either the Year 4 challenge for high-attaining readers or the Year 5 and 6 whole-class challenge, please get in touch with Just Imagine, which is taking bookings until June 30th for its 2016-2017 programme.



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ELF ROAD

Reading **Pie Corbett's** portal story and then writing your own will open the door to fantastical adventures, and all sorts of literacy skills...

Billy had always been curious. One sunny afternoon, he was walking down Elf Road when he saw an unusual wooden door in the brick wall. The metal handle was shaped like a dragon's mouth. Gently, he turned it and the door creaked open.

Inside, there was a huge, dark hall.

On an enormous table, someone had set out a great feast with slices of chicken, bowls of salad, jars of fruit and plates of sweet puddings. Hundreds of tiny people were serving steaming pies, fresh strawberries like gleaming embers and glasses full of creamy drinks. They were dressed in rainbow coloured clothes with scarlet cloaks, pointed mustard yellow shoes and crimson caps. Billy tried to talk to the tiny people but they did not say a word!

In the middle of the table was a glittering dragon carved out of ice and in its beak there was a folded piece of paper.

*'Look where you wish,
but don't touch a dish.'*

So, Billy wandered further into the hall, walked past a great fireplace and, at the end, he found a golden cupboard.

Amazed, he opened the door and inside was a golden apple sitting on a silver plate. It smelt so sweet and his mouth was so dry that he picked it up and took a bite. The glistening apple tasted of sunlight! At that very moment, Billy gasped because he had remembered what he had been told.

Instantly, he could hear a thousand mocking voices ringing in his ears like sharp, clanging bells. Billy shuddered and ran from the echoing sound. Clutching the apple, he dashed through the dark hall, past the great table with the tiny people running behind him. Just in time, he found the wooden door that led him back to his own world.

Amazingly, two very strange things happened after Billy reached home. First, Billy planted the apple pips. One grew into a beautiful tree with blossoms of silver and apples of gold that glowed like tiny suns. His mother said that the fruit tasted sweeter than starlight itself. Second, poor Billy never saw the door again, even though he walked up and down Elf Road many times. At school, they said that Billy was always lost in his daydreams. He dreamed of dark halls, fantastic feasts and golden cupboards. Sadly, that other world had disappeared. Well, at least, Billy never found his way back...

LET'S GET STARTED

There are many stories around the world about gateways into other worlds. This 'portal' story has a warning at its core and is a great story for Year 3 and 4 children, though it can also be used with older pupils. Children love describing the new setting, the little people and the magical feast.

Get immersed in the story

Draw story maps and use actions to retell the story. Let the children work in groups. Weaker writers benefit from knowing a text word for word as this helps them to internalise sentence patterns and vocabulary. Stronger writers can retell the tale in their own words, embellishing. Make sure they perform their stories using expression.

Once the class are familiar with the story, read it. Discuss any vocabulary and also the following questions:

- What does 'curious' mean?
- Which words make the door sound different?
- Discuss the effect of the words that make the hall sound scary: Gently, he turned it and the door creaked open. Inside, was a huge, dark hall.
- Give two reasons to explain why Billy picked up the apple.
- Which words suggest that the apple was amazing?
- How do we know how Billy felt once he had eaten the apple?
- Why were the voices 'mocking'?
- Explain why Billy shuddered.
- How has the adventure changed Billy?
- What do we know about Billy's mother that might suggest what happened?
- What does the final line suggest?

Explore grammar in context

Use the story to teach several 'grammar for writing' focuses. Notice the use of the comma and how it doesn't appear before the word

'and' in the lists, e.g.

- slices of chicken, bowls of salad, jars of fruit and plates of sweet puddings.
 - steaming pies, fresh strawberries and glasses full of creamy drinks.
- Underline the nouns in one colour and the adjectives in another colour. Children love writing descriptions of food so bring in a tablecloth, plates and a tea set to create a dining table. Make a list of favourite foods and brainstorm possible adjectives before creating new descriptive lists, building up noun phrases to describe food, e.g. on the table, he could see chunks of cheese, tasty teacakes and plates of buttery crumpets.

Bring in some items of clothing to stimulate lists that describe what the little people wear, e.g. they were wearing flat cloth caps, mauve silk shirts and emerald green ribbons in their hair. Note down items of clothing and possible adjectives before getting started.

Improve writing with drama

Use a 'feelings graph' to show how Billy's emotions alter during the story, noting quotes from the text to mark the ups and downs. Push back the tables and create a space in the classroom. Children should speak aloud what they know about or think of Billy before he had his adventure and afterwards. How has he changed? Children then step into the space and freeze to become an object in the great hall. As the teacher moves round in role as Billy, pupils say aloud what object they are and



describe themselves. Encourage them to use adjectives to build description and similes to show what things look like, e.g.

- *I am the flame's flicker in the great fireplace, like the scarlet tongue from a dragon's mouth.*
- *I am the great table, made from ancient oak and carved with strange creatures and peculiar patterns.*
- *I am a silver plate, complete with a pile of ruby raspberries that have sugar sprinkled on top like snow.*

After the descriptive work, turn what the children have said into a descriptive paragraph. Show the scene through Billy's eyes (Billy stared round the hall) and use prepositions to build the description, e.g. in the middle, on top, to one side.
Billy stared round the hall. In the middle of the room stood a great table, made from ancient oak and carved with strange creatures and peculiar patterns. On top of it was a silver plate, complete with a pile of ruby raspberries that had sugar sprinkled on top like snow. To one side, flames flickered in the great fireplace like the scarlet tongue from a dragon's mouth.

Fig. 1

Underlying pattern	New ideas
Main character (MC) finds a magical portal and enters.	Josie finds a door in the cupboard under the stairs and goes through it.
Describe the new setting	It leads to a world of magical animals, guarded by tiny elves.
The MC is warned not to do something in the new world.	She is told she can explore the world but should not touch the birds.
The MC explores the new world and disobeys the warning.	She frees a 'bird of paradise' that has been trapped and picks up a feather!
The MC has to escape and return through the portal.	She is chased and just manages to escape through the portal.
The MC cannot find the portal again and has brought back some magical item.	She can never find the door again but the feather grants her a magical wish.

Let the children draw the little people, colour in their clothes and provide descriptive labels. This will help children imagine the scene. In role as Billy, children can then write a diary entry about what happened.

Generate new ideas

Start the children thinking about journeys into 'magical worlds' by using a playful poetry pattern. Read the poetry example below, then use shared writing to show children how to generate and craft their own ideas before they write independently. The aim is to create interesting sentences of three, using commas and alliterative adjectives:

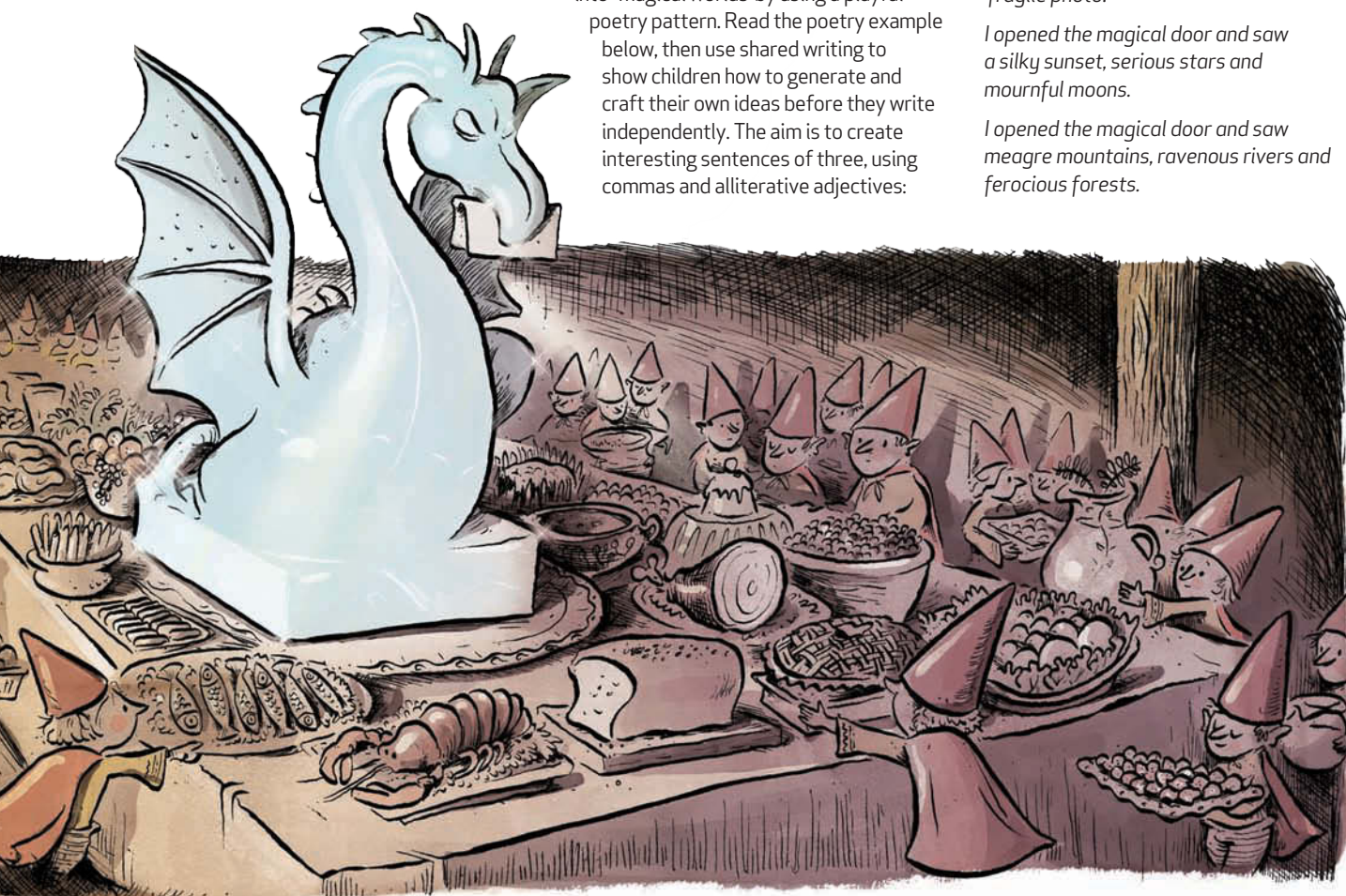
I opened the magical door and saw a diabolical dragon, an elegant elf and a greedy goblin.

I opened the magical door and saw a silent snake, a gorgeous goat and an elegant elephant.

I opened the magical door and saw a charming cherub, a sunlit saucer and a fragile photo.

I opened the magical door and saw a silky sunset, serious stars and mournful moons.

I opened the magical door and saw meagre mountains, ravenous rivers and ferocious forests.



Analyse the structure

Now box the story up with the children (see Fig.1). This should help them begin to see the underlying pattern that eventually they will be able to use when writing their own 'portal' story. Complete the planner with the class giving ideas for a new story. The children then complete their own planner for their own story.

Create a writing toolkit

Focus on learning to write effective descriptions.

Draw attention to the use of descriptive lists, well-chosen adjectives and similes to show the reader what things look like. Also, highlight the way in which the prepositions help the reader see where things are placed when describing. Illustrate the toolkit by referring to the story as well as creating new ideas. (see Fig. 2 for examples).

Write your own portal stories

Use shared writing to create the class story with the children then planning and writing their own versions. Stretch this over a number of days so that their stories gradually emerge, e.g.

Josie had always been nosy. Early one morning before she set off for school, she noticed a strange looking door at the back of the cupboard under the stairs. It had peculiar carvings and the handle was shaped like a pair of strange wings. Carefully, she

tugged it open, crouched down and crawled into the darkness.

The inside opened out into what looked like a vast park. In the distance there stretched a bright green forest. Far away, she could see a thin blue line that must have been the sea. Everywhere she looked, she could see strange creatures. Ahead there were yellow monkeys with scarlet wings, tiny

tigers with ragged ears like elephants and giant, striped giraffes. Thousands of tiny people seemed to be guarding these strange animals. They were dressed in flat, blue caps, mauve, silk shirts and had emerald green ribbons in their hair. Josie asked one of the tiny people where she was but he just said, "You can wander wherever but don't touch a feather!"



Fig. 2

Tools	Example from the story	New idea
Tool 1 – lists using commas	Steaming pies, fresh strawberries like gleaming embers and glasses full of creamy drinks.	Lemon biscuits, rich cake and malted scones.
Tool 2 – well-chosen adjectives	Billy dreamed of dark halls, fantastic feasts and golden cupboards.	She dreamed of glittering rivers, jagged rocks and slender reeds.
Tool 3 – similes	The metal handle was shaped like a dragon's mouth.	The door was carved like an ancient face.
Tool 4 – prepositions	Inside, in the middle, in, at the end, from, down.	Beside, under, on top, outside, across, behind.
Tool 5 – comparisons	Sweeter than starlight	Larger than an elephant



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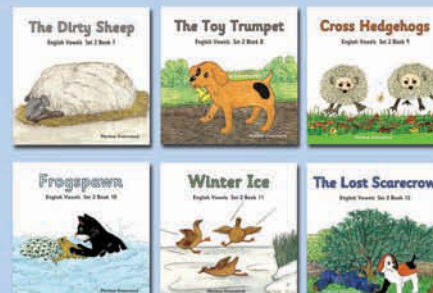
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Why did you do that?

Ian Eagleton saw big improvements when he helped children to take control of their writing – down to the very last semicolon. Here's how you can do the same...

A **Year 4 class. We're tackling *The Tempest* as part of a theme week and I am thoroughly enjoying the challenge of presenting Shakespeare to children at primary age.** During a class discussion, I pose the question:

"So how do you think Ariel became imprisoned in a tree?"

Obviously, I know what the answer should be. We have already explored the characters and their relationships and I am expecting them to remember from the previous lesson's freeze-frame activities the role of the unseen witch, Sycorax. Someone will answer in the affirmative and I can then pat myself on the

back at seeing how much they have remembered.

A hand flies up. It belongs to a child whose feet were kicking in excitement as we watched the BBC's Shakespeare: The Animated Tales. She was transfixed by the magical story of mischief and mayhem on a forgotten, unknown island.

"Yes, go on. Have a go! Why do you think Ariel is in a tree?"

"Because he wanted to be!"

Sniggers from around the class and the children shake their heads. I take a deep breath.

"Well...if you think about it, the tree is a prison for Ariel, isn't it? You wouldn't want to

be trapped, all squashed up in a tree, would you? Has anyone else got an idea?"

But the hand flies up again.

"No I wouldn't want to be in a tree, but maybe Ariel is punishing himself for something..."

Now at this point, I can either end this exchange with, "That can't be right..." – after all, time is precious in a classroom. Instead, I choose a different tack.

"Go on..." I say.

"Maybe a spell went wrong and he feels bad, like in the story you told us, when we did the Romans, about Boudicca poisoning herself. She might have felt she had let the Celts down and so she killed herself and

perhaps Ariel is doing the same thing for something bad he's done."

Silence. I am dumbfounded. The child in question struggles with her spelling and handwriting, and with our relentless focus on grammar and spelling, has found the new curriculum demands particularly difficult – along with countless other children across the country.

"I would never have thought of that. What a thoughtful answer," I say, still slightly bemused.

A smile spreads across my face and the child giggles nervously. The class clap. This is perhaps one of the most defining moments of my career, which I have based on a love of stories and teaching English. It is only later in the day that I have time to reflect.

This is an example of when an answer reminds you of why you began teaching – something entirely unquantifiable. Something that you can't assess or level. An answer that could only come from a child. An answer that shows she has made connections with

other areas of the curriculum studied, with other stories we've shared and with other periods of time.

It got me thinking. I knew the answer – Ariel was in the tree, bound by Sycorax's magic. It concerns me that, had the child in question not continued with her line of enquiry and had I not, begrudgingly, allowed her to explore her idea further, she would never have been able to formulate her own response to the text. I would have, skilfully through questions and probing as all good teachers do, led the children to the conclusion I expected. I may have limited that child's creativity and confidence to freely respond.

It made me wonder how often I had dismissed an idea or response from a child because it didn't fit with my own adult interpretation? In the past when I modelled then asked the class to write a good example of a newspaper article or persuasive advert, was I asking them to write with an adult's voice? Having taught in Year 6 for many

years, I have been guilty of giving children a pre-prepared list of Success Criteria with the implication that if they tick everything off the list – full stops, capital letters, a fronted adverbial, a range of conjunctions – their writing will suddenly be great. But it doesn't work like that.

Over the last year, I have begun to rethink and redesign my teaching of writing. I am only too aware of the New Curriculum requirements and the focus on learning a host of complex terminology and spelling patterns, which promote a superficial, closed, 'right or wrong' understanding of English. The suggestion being that writing can be only interpreted in one way. Children may be able to tell you fluently and, in my experience, rather manically by the time SATs lurch around, what a 'determiner' is, but is this really what writing is about?

Our role as teachers and educators is surely to help children develop their own voice and allow them to write for a range of real, age-appropriate purposes. I believe it is important that children learn the correct terminology and the structure of the English language. But is this all there is to it? Or do they need to know about subordinate clauses and be able to explain why they have used one – what has it added to their text and how it influenced their reader – and then choose when they use it?

In my experience, there are a number of ways we can navigate the new curriculum and develop our children's passion for writing, helping them understand the impact of their writing.

1 Read, read, read

Read everything with your class. Adverts, newspaper articles, different versions of the same story, poems, instructions – anything can be enjoyed and shared. Very often when I read with a class, we have periods when we 'just' read. That's to say we get swept along by a narrative and engrossed by what is happening. We also take time to look at the language an author has used and discuss the impact it has had on them, as a reader. This is vital in helping children understand that everyone writes for a reason.

2 Now explain yourself!

The most powerful questions I now ask when my children are writing are, "Can you tell me why you've used that particular word?" or "What were you trying to get the reader to feel here?" What follows is always an interesting discussion where the children are allowed to explain and justify their vocabulary choices and discuss the impact of their sentence structures.

"They need to know their words have value and are listened to; given time to talk and explore language so that the sun's rays can be as long as spaghetti and that water can be as dazzling as the stars"





3 Less marking, more feedback

My own feedback to children's writing has changed. I no longer write lengthy responses such as, "Well done, you've used lots of good adjectives, similes and adverbs!". I talk to the children, using the correct terminology, about their writing and the image they are trying to create. What did they imagine the reader would be doing whilst reading their story? This means less time marking and being able to give immediate and thorough feedback, such as: "This short sentence made me jump!" or "How can you increase the tension and excitement in this paragraph?" If they want, the children then use a purple pencil to edit and improve their text.

4. Hand control to pupils

When peer marking, my children now have the freedom to choose whether they change their writing in the light of feedback from their response partner. They are in control. Sometimes I've heard children say, "No, I wanted to use that word because I think..." Sometimes they may go with their partner's ideas. Children shouldn't be pressured into writing what or how we want.

5 Read it out

The occasional mini-plenary throughout the lesson is great for getting children to read their writing and to give them feedback. I do lots of my marking in this time too, as I talk to children about how their writing sounds and the impact it's had on me as a reader. I simply write 'Verbal Feedback' (VF) in the margin. Sometimes I ask children to read out a sentence they'd like some advice about – or of which they are particularly proud. This should be a relaxed, enjoyable session where children

can share their writing and celebrate what they have achieved. Hearing their work read aloud and the musicality of language encourages other children to listen more carefully than if the work is placed under a visualiser. It helps promote a love of language, rhyme and pattern.

6 Let children choose success criteria

When I model writing, I talk continuously about why I have chosen a certain word or why I feel a particular sentence construct works well and how I want my reader to feel. What I've changed, however, is that I now give the children the option of using my work as a scaffold or of creating their own success criteria. However, they need to explain to me what they are trying to achieve and make their reader feel through the particular style they have chosen. For example, they may not wish to begin the introduction of their report with a question. Children should be allowed to take their reader on the journey of their choosing.

7 Have a sense of purpose

Children at my school are publishing articles for the school's newsletter, performing scripts and poems to each other, taking part in debates, writing letters to NASA, creating their own eBooks. They are writing persuasive adverts for apps they've created, using technology to plan and record their ideas, taking notes in school council

meetings, taking part in children and parent writing workshops and running our book fairs. These are all opportunities that are very real and important to them. They are writing at greater length, across a wider range of topics and are thinking about how they can motivate and inspire a reader through their own personal word choices. More importantly, they are starting to tell me why they have chosen a certain adjective, adverb or felt a subordinate clause was needed.

Children need to be aware of their reader and how they can create a living, breathing world of characters to enjoy. They need to know their words have value and are listened to; given time to talk and explore language so that the sun's rays can be as long as spaghetti and that water can be as dazzling as the stars. Children need to know that their words have impact. They need to know how to write, why they write and to whom they are writing. This is how we develop the voice of a child.

Ian Eagleton has been teaching for 10 years and is currently a Year 4 teacher and phase leader at Elmwood Primary School, South Woodham Ferrers. He also an English consultant working with Just Imagine (justimaginestorycentre.co.uk). He can be contacted at: ian@justimaginestorycentre.co.uk



“Human beings have always shared stories through images”

When it comes to illustration, **Liz Pichon** is keen for people to look at the bigger picture...

I do have memories of learning to read – like sitting with my mum, trying to sound out words from a book and being told to “break it down” every time I got stuck. I found that SO frustrating; I just wanted her to tell me what it was so I could get on with the story! My strongest memory, though, has to be getting my first library card. I remember this amazing building, completely crammed with books, and being told we could choose five to take away. That seemed like a huge number, and the range of content was dizzying. I always went for the pop-up books, which were usually a bit shabby, but they were expensive to buy and my absolute favourites. I’ve still got some picture books from when I was five. One in particular – Brian Wildsmith’s representation of Aesop’s fable about the Lion and the Rat – is stunning. I was given it by my older sister for my birthday, and even back then I was struck by how beautiful and special it was. The way the text was laid out on the page, working with those distinctive illustrations; it felt like a book to be treasured.

My parents were avid readers, so there were always books in our house – I’d pick them up if I knew something about the story or the covers looked interesting. Artwork and the look and feel of a book has always been an important part of the reading experience for me; tiny fonts or great long wedges of text I found really tricky to read. I had a huge collection of different comics that I’d read over and over and again and then copy all the characters from them too.

It really bugs me when people say it’s not ‘proper’ reading if a book has too many pictures. I heard an ‘education tsar’ on TV the other day

say that designing posters as part of a lesson is a waste of time. I’ve lost count of the amount of times I’ve had to convey information to people visually on a webpage or through posters or postcards. Human beings have always shared stories through images; why wouldn’t it be a useful and helpful communication skill for children to learn about?

I never expected to write books at all. I trained as a graphic designer and worked for a record label doing album covers until I built up a portfolio and went freelance. I did loads of greetings cards, T-shirts and magazines then got commissioned to illustrate a few baby board books, which gave me the confidence to write my own children’s stories. *My Big Brother Boris* won a Smarties Silver prize, which was amazing. I look at that book now and can see it was like an early version of Tom Gates, which actually started out as a picture book idea first. I had to rewrite it a few times and the age range just kept going up; it wasn’t until I sat down with a real school exercise book, and imagined Tom writing about a terrible camping holiday, complete with doodles and ink blots on the pages, that I knew I had something that would work. My lovely agent asked if I’d heard of ‘Wimpy Kid’ – my heart sank! But I think the popularity of Jeff Kinney’s books worked in my favour in the end as publishers were looking for something similar, though Tom Gates and Greg Heffley are very different characters and the voice and style aren’t the same either.

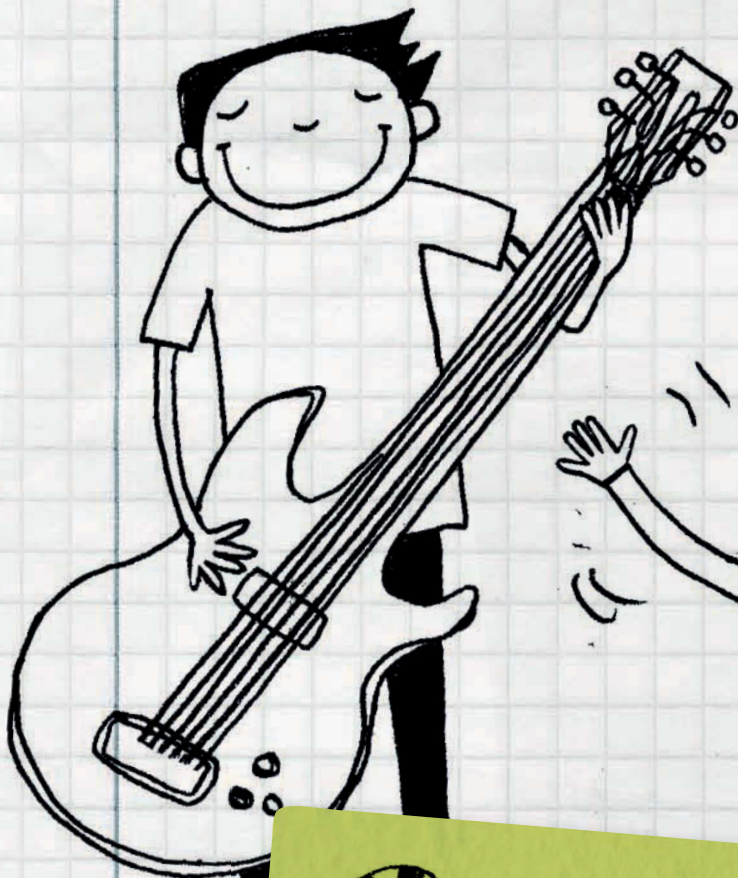
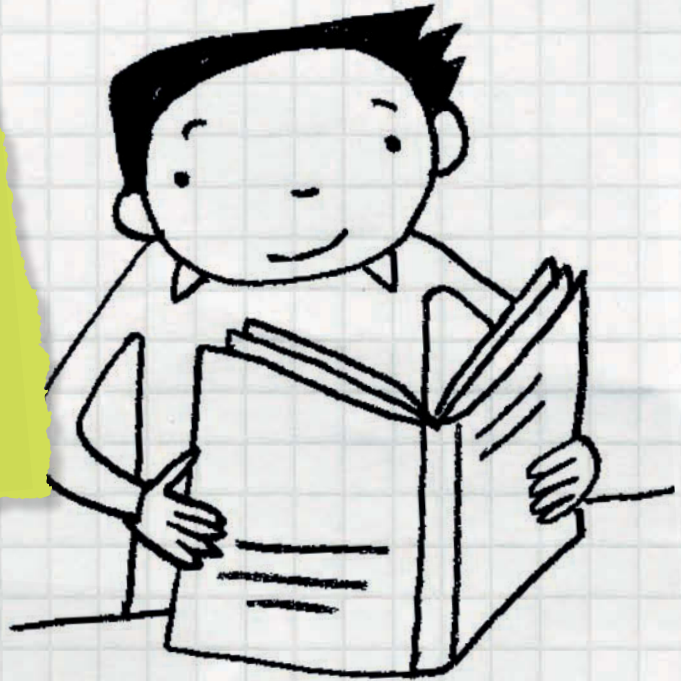
I love the fact that I can incorporate lots of different strands of creativity into my work – music, for example. I met my husband when I was working for the record label; he still works

in music and worked on some brilliant tracks for all the different bands in the books, which fans can play and sing along with. I always put in lots of interactive “EXTRAS” for readers, like drawing on -shirts and making paper bangers. I love showing kids how to doodle at events, it’s especially great watching them realise that they CAN draw and seeing the results they get too.

It’s so hard for teachers right now as it feels like time for being creative is being squeezed out of lessons because of all the changes that are being made. I was thinking about the Olympic Games opening ceremony four years ago and how much of it was bursting with fashion, music, art, books – all the things we do so well in this country, historically. We’re known for being a creative nation. I’d love to see more creativity in all areas of learning – not less.

It’s one of the reasons I’m so thrilled that my books are read by kids with such a wide range of ages and abilities. Quite often I’m told it’s ‘reluctant readers’ – which is not something I ever purposely set out to have happen. I just want to write the best story I could and something I would have wanted to read at that age. I can’t think about how other people react to it – I’d go nuts if I did. But now I get emails every day from parents keen to tell me how much their ‘struggling readers’ enjoy Tom Gates. My own son didn’t learn to read or write until he was 11 and had a rotten time at mainstream school before being moved, so I can really empathise with what they are feeling. I’m SO unbelievably lucky to have found something that I love doing so much. I just want to keep writing and drawing books for as long as Judith Kerr has.

**TOM
GATES**



FANTASTIC



The SCREEN TEST



Movies make a great end of term treat – and a powerful tool for teaching literacy all year long, says **Jane Fletcher**

Film – a medium that is accessible and appealing to all – is often overlooked as a serious means for literacy learning. Many teachers have little formal

training on how to integrate it into their practice, consequently its use is often limited to a starter activity or as an 'add-on'. Indeed, it can sometimes be perceived only as a way to engage reluctant or less able learners – however, feedback from those already working with the medium shows that when it's placed at the heart of the curriculum, film can significantly improve literacy across the board.

For example, the Leeds Partnership Project: Improving Literacy Through Film (2014/15) – a programme developed to support raising literacy across ten primary schools in Leeds – recorded a 96% improvement in average points' progress in reading, and a 60% improvement in average points' progress in writing in pupils regularly engaged with film watching and filmmaking.

The following film-based activities provide learners with opportunities to articulate their responses to text and demonstrate and develop their literacy skills. Why not try them with your Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils?

THE 3Cs & 3Ss

The 3Cs (colour, character, camera) and the 3Ss (story, setting, sound) are features of all film texts. They can be used as a basis to deconstruct or construct any text, and build on pupils' prior knowledge and engagement with a variety of visual media from a young age. A full list of useful 3Cs and 3Ss discussion questions can be found at intofilm.org/resources/127.

ACTIVITY ONE

SOUND ON/VISION OFF

PUPILS WILL

- Demonstrate and develop active listening skills
- Deduce and infer meaning and consider purpose of a film text through analysis of sounds
- Demonstrate prediction and encoding skills

1 Choose a short (maximum two minutes) sequence from a film – preferably one which contains a variety of different sounds and has little or no dialogue. Play the

soundtrack, without images, twice through for pupils to listen to, encouraging them to identify the different sounds they hear.

2 Lead discussion using questions like: Is there music in the film? Are there moments of silence? Was it quiet/Was it loud? What instruments could you hear? Was it fast/was it slow? Was there any speech/dialogue? How did the sounds make you feel?

3 Ask pupils to respond to the clip, by thinking about and writing down what they heard and what they would expect to see. Encourage pupils to consider all the Cs and Ss – what colours are they imagining? When will they see a close-up or an establishing shot? What characters will there be? What does the setting look like? Where and when is the story taking place?

4 Now ask pupils to demonstrate their ideas by drawing a picture of the scene and labelling it with descriptions of the sounds, using paper and colouring pencils or an app like Sketchbook Express.

5 Finally, watch the clip with the images. Take a still from the sequence and ask pupils to imagine this was a book, and to write the opening/closing paragraph or chapter to explain the story for the reader.

This activity will help learners to 'hear' sounds when they read and write, and support deeper analysis and construction of richer texts.

ACTIVITY TWO

ROLE ON THE WALL

PUPILS WILL

- Deduce and infer meaning about characters from film text
- Compare and contrast characters, and consider the purpose of a text by retrieving information from a film text
- Demonstrate prediction and encoding skills through writing and drama activities

1 Choose one or more short (maximum two minutes) sequences from a film, featuring a selection of characters you wish to focus on.

2 Before watching the clips provide learners with simple outline drawing of the characters – or create them together, perhaps by getting pupils to lie down on large sheets of paper and have their friends draw around them to make life-sized silhouettes that can be stuck to a wall.

3 Divide pupils into groups, and assign one character to each. Explain that you will be showing them film clips, and afterwards, you would like them to write words describing 'their' character on the matching picture. They should add words describing how the audience and other characters see them outside the outline, and words explaining how they see themselves, within it (alternatively, you may prefer to ask the whole class to focus on one character at a time and then compare and contrast them).

4 Ask groups to bring their annotated character outlines together, adding speech and thought bubbles to demonstrate how these characters interact – this can consolidate what pupils have seen in the film or support prediction.



5 The annotated character outlines can then be displayed in the classroom and serve as an aide-memoir for writing and drama activities. For example:

- A chat show or press conference with the characters.
- Creation of a character wordle, acrostic, poem or set of trading cards.
- Creation of a flash forward storyboard to plan what the characters do after the film has ended. This can be developed into a simple film and/or a piece of writing.

This activity will help learners to visualise characters they read and write about, and develop an understanding of their ranges of thoughts, feelings and motivations. It supports pupils to consider and demonstrate how authors (including themselves) encode information to tell the audience about a character through their physical appearance, thoughts, speech and actions, and that these may change throughout a story.

'heard' as you were reading. Use the 3Cs and 3S questions to lead discussion.

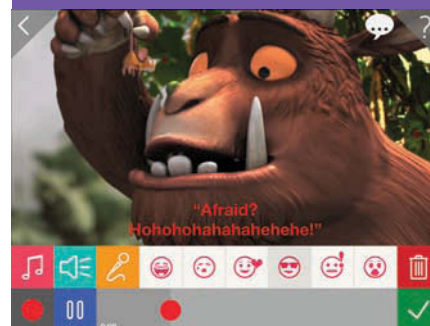
3 Now read the text again with pupils, providing them with a copy.

4 Explain that pupils are going to create the film set for this scene, using a shoebox and craft materials. Students should think about all Cs and Ss and encode their set with the meaning from the written text. The set should include characters and cameras that can move around (these can be created using card stuck onto pencils or figures like Lego).

5 Once the set is complete ask learners to take a series of photographs to demonstrate which shot would be used at each point. To complete this learners can break down the written text for themselves or you can provide the text divided into five or six manageable sections.

INTO ACTION

INTO FILM OFFERS A WEALTH OF FREE RESOURCES FOR PRIMARY LITERACY – HERE ARE FIVE THAT WOULD MAKE A GREAT STARTING POINT FOR EXPLORATION:



- Storymaker: The Gruffalo Edition (cross curricular activities and technical advice to support Into Film Storymaker: The Gruffalo Edition app, available from The App Store) intofilm.org/resources/133

- Book to Film (explores popular book adaptations on film) intofilm.org/resources/278

- Creating Effective Film Reviews: Primary intofilm.org/resources/108

- Roald Dahl on Film intofilm.org/resources/116

- Communication Symbols for Film Reviewing (for use in a SEN/ASN Setting) intofilm.org/resources/225

Into Film (intofilm.org) is a UK-wide education organisation which puts film at the heart of young people's learning and personal development. For further training, resources and activities, book a free 'Raising Literacy Attainment Through Film' session for teachers at your school at intofilm.org/training

ACTIVITY THREE

SHOEBOX SET DESIGN

PUPILS WILL

- Demonstrate and develop close listening and reading skills to retrieve information
- Evaluate structure and discuss language to decode a written text
- Encode meaning using all 3Cs and 3Ss

1 Choose a written piece of text that describes a setting and features one or more characters. You may choose a piece of fiction, a poem or a description of an historical event.

2 Ask pupils to close their eyes and listen to you read it aloud. Then ask for their initial ideas about what they 'saw' and

6 The photographs can be printed out with the text inserted underneath or assembled in a storyboard using an app like Comic Life.

7 Following this activity students could do it 'in reverse', working from a set of film stills, annotating them with a description and dialogue, and then developing ideas into a piece of extended writing.

This activity will help learners to visualise the texts they read, using the skills they have developed through watching film texts to construct a rich piece of writing including evidence of all the Cs and Ss.

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Story Hunters

Contact: booktrust.org.uk/storyhunters, 020 7801 8825

Reviewed by: John Dabell

Imagine being eight years old and receiving a parcel addressed to you. The excitement grips as you open it up. Inside are two books, a jotter, a pencil and a couple of pens. There's also a poster and a personalised letter. By now you'd be feeling pretty happy and special.

Now imagine getting The Usborne Official Astronaut's Handbook with a foreword from Tim Peake, and finding out more about eating, sleeping and going to the loo on the International Space Station. Or, how about getting Ottoline and the Yellow Cat by Children's Laureate Chris Riddell – reading along and using the jotter and pens to help Ottoline solve a crime? Then imagine getting a parcel like this every month for half a year! Well, if you're a Story Hunter, this can happen for real.

Story Hunters is the newly launched reading initiative from reading charity BookTrust, a model built on the award-winning Letterbox Club, which aims to provide enjoyable educational support for looked-after children aged 5-13. Children are signed up by schools, then every month from October 2016 to March 2017 pupils are sent a colourful, personalised parcel of books, activities, stationery and other complementary materials to boost their educational outcomes.

For £99 per student (and schools can use Pupil Premium), the monthly packs include at least two high-quality and age-appropriate books (fiction, non-fiction or poetry) that are ideal for independent or shared reading. There is also a fun and engaging writing game or activity, a personal letter to the child with ideas about how to use the materials and stickers, and letters from well-known children's authors that can act as a hook to read more books by that author or from a particular series.

The non-gender-specific titles are carefully selected to reflect the diversity of life in Britain. They are books that capture curiosity and inspire a dialogue between parents/carers and their children – establishing and feeding a culture of reading at home that is the greatest harbinger of success for struggling or reluctant readers.

Why this initiative works so well is that it aims to inspire children to read, write and draw more regularly, to develop good habits, spend time sharing the books and activities with others and to increase their confidence and enjoyment of reading. It's clear to see how the parcels can extend children's reading repertoire too, as Story



Hunters offers access to a wide range of genres. And it's also a great way to build links between school and home.

It's estimated that around four million children in the UK don't own a single book. And children who don't own a book are almost three times more likely to have literacy levels below the norm. But for families with little to no disposable income, books often just aren't high on the list of priorities. On the other hand, some reluctant or struggling readers might own plenty of books, but ones that sit gathering dust on the shelves. This is where BookTrust can help.

By providing books once a month, the charity gives children a magic carpet to other worlds. Having materials sent to them, bearing their name, will make them feel important, excited and pleased that someone is interested in how they are getting on.

It's widely known that reading for pleasure has a dramatic impact on children's educational outcomes, wellbeing and social mobility, which is why this initiative deserves a standing ovation. Story Hunters gives children the opportunity to experience the rich and positive glow a book can provide, helping to empower them by igniting a love of reading and boosting their confidence.

VERDICT:

Wise words

A home library is a consistently powerful predictor of academic achievement, and for some a Story Hunters pack might put their first books on the shelf. So it plays a valuable role in creating a taste for fiction, non-fiction and poetry, and promoting the skills and knowledge that foster literacy and lead to lifelong academic advantages.

It is absolutely essential that children and young people have access to books and reading, so hats off to Story Hunters. Books shouldn't be luxuries, they should be a necessity alongside food, shelter and health. This initiative makes that more of a reality.



New Children's FICTION AWARDS 2016

Get ready to update your library shelves – the results for this year's quest to find the very best titles for young readers are in!



"Ask any literacy expert – especially an author – and they will tell you that by far the most effective strategy for developing a love of reading in children is quite simply to make sure that they have

access to as many brilliant books as possible. And of course, schools and teachers have an important part to play in helping to make that happen, especially for youngsters who, for one reason or another, may not get hold of much reading material at home.

With around 10,000 new children's titles published in the UK each year, picking out the very best examples for both keen and more reluctant readers is no mean feat – which is why last year saw the launch of the Teach Primary New Children's Fiction Awards, developed to recognise and celebrate original and exceptional writing that teachers can readily recommend to and share with all their pupils.

For year two of the Awards, our panel of judges has once again used a unique scoring system to make its judgements, taking into account a range of criteria not always assessed by other schemes including 'learning opportunities', 'encouragement of language play' and 'emotional depth' (not forgetting sheer enjoyment, naturally); the result is another truly inspiring selection of books, each of which is definitely worth exploring for your school library or classroom shelf, and which I am delighted to be able to share with you here. Enjoy!"

Helen Mulley, literary reviewer, Teach Early Years, Teach Primary and Teach Secondary magazines

Meet the judges...



CLARE ARGAR

is a senior programme manager at the National Literacy Trust, a charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Clare is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and a governor at a primary school in Battersea, London.



CLARE MACKINTOSH

spent twelve years in the police force. She left in 2011 to work as a freelance journalist and social media consultant, and now writes full time. She has three children, all at primary school. Clare's debut novel, *I Let You Go*, was a Sunday Times top ten bestseller for 12 weeks; her next, *I See You*, will be published in July 2016.



BROUGH GIRLING

is the co-founder (with his wife Gail) of the Readathon charity. A qualified teacher, he has written over 30 children's books, broadcast widely and lectured in children's reading from Canada to Cairo. He was head of The Children's Book Foundation in London and Founding Editor of the *Young Telegraph*.



SARAH CROWN

is the editor of Mumsnet. Formerly, she was the Guardian's online literary editor, and in June she will be moving to the Arts Council England to take up the role of director of literature.



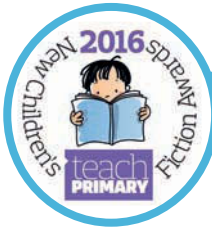
DAVID MELLING

is a bestselling author-illustrator with worldwide acclaim; his books have been published in over 30 languages and sold over 3 million copies. *Hello, Hugless Douglas* was a number one bestseller across all book charts and David's stories have been turned into apps and theatre shows, and regularly appear on CBBC.



LUCY PORTER

is a comedian, writer and actress. As well as touring her stand-up work, she is regularly to be seen and heard on popular panel shows including *Q.I.*, *Mock the Week*, *Argumental*, *The News Quiz*, *The Unbelievable Truth* and many more. She has written for prime-time TV, and has recorded a sitcom called *The Fair Intellectual Club* for Radio 4. She has two children.



EYFS

Winner

NIBBLES THE BOOK MONSTER

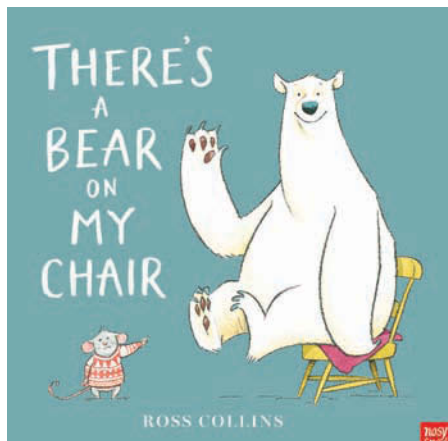
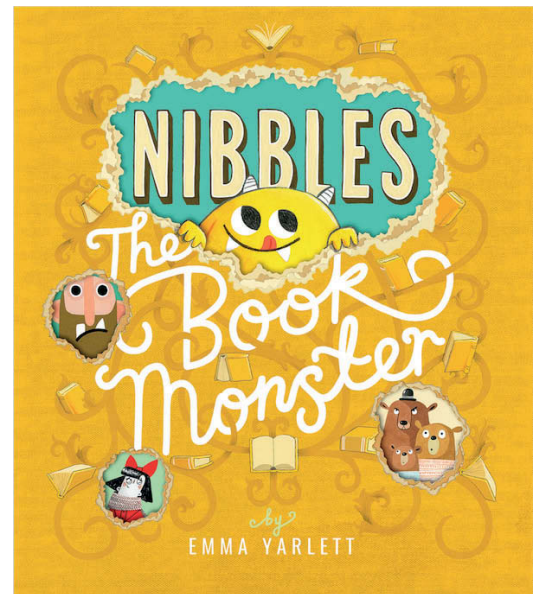
(Emma Yarlett,
Little Tiger Press)

Nibbles likes nothing more than to chomp and chew his way through anything from socks to clocks – but his favourite thing to chew on is books, which leads to much

confusion when he escapes from his cage and starts eating into other characters' story time. Emma Yarlett's inventive panoply of illustrations and the 3D nature of some pages (there are holes, gaps and flaps a-plenty to be explored) mean that children are constantly intrigued, surprised and delighted by Nibbles' progress through and to the end of the book.

"This is a charming, fun and beautifully produced book with delightful illustrations, a wonderful attention to detail – and, of course, a fabulously cheeky protagonist."

Clare Argar



Runner up

THERE'S A BEAR ON MY CHAIR

(Ross Collins, Nosy Crow)

Smart, sassy wordplay, classy typography and endearing, enduring illustrations come together here to create a shared reading experience that's pure pleasure for narrator and audience alike. Internal rhymes keep the story bouncing along, and the range of options Collins comes up with for 'bear/chair' is impressive; might your pupils be able to pool their resources and put together a similarly lengthy and varied list for another creature? What if there were a cat on their mat? Or a flea in their tea?

"My interest has always been in recreational reading – books that will get children hooked on reading for pleasure. Bear on the Chair was my clear favourite – wonderful words and pictures. I loved it."

Brough Girling

Also shortlisted



GOOD KNIGHT, BAD KNIGHT

(Tom Knight, Templar)

With his permanently tousled hair, skull-emblazoned tunic, and inability to do anything that is asked of him at school without making a complete hash of it, Bad Knight is the kind of hapless 'hero' with whom children can instantly identify; and Tom Knight tells his story with with, charm and empathy.



I'M A GIRL!

(Yasmeen Ismail, Bloomsbury)

In this bright, bubbly snapshot of one pre-schooler's life, Ismail plays with notions of gender stereotyping, making a gentle and reassuring nonsense of the idea that all girls should be soft, neat and quiet, wear certain clothes and colours, or enjoy particular toys – and encouraging children to celebrate being themselves.

WALTER'S WONDERFUL WEB

(Tim Hopgood, Macmillan)



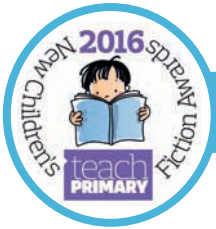
Web design goes back to nature in this clever and engaging board book about a spider who keeps spinning new shapes, only to see them destroyed by the wind; Tim Hopgood's artwork is stylish and appealing, and there's a genuinely enjoyable story to be shared alongside the learning.



GRRRRR!

(Rob Biddulph, HarperCollins)

Fred is a champion, but in order to keep his place at the top, he has to train relentlessly – leaving him no time to have any friends. It takes the arrival of a new bear on the scene – and the mysterious disappearance of his famous roar – to help our hero learn that there are more important things than winning.



KEY STAGE 1

Winner

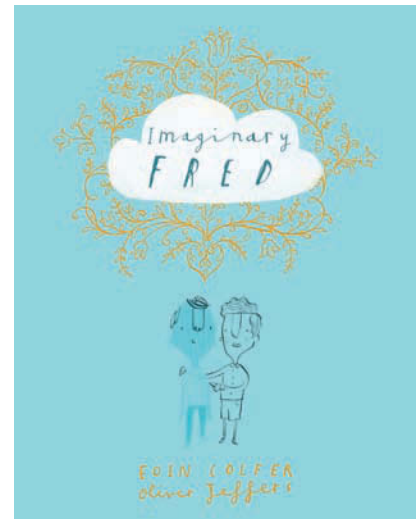
IMAGINARY FRED

(Eoin Colfer, ill. Oliver Jeffers, HarperCollins)

Many youngsters will know exactly what it means to have an imaginary friend – but what must it feel like actually to be one? That's the intriguing question explored in this magical book, which is the result of a collaboration between two of the best loved names in children's fiction. Sophisticated jokes are scattered throughout – both in Colfer's beautifully poised prose and Jeffers' distinctive artwork; and there's a reassuring message about the ability of true friendship to survive inevitable progression and change.

"A moving tale of loneliness, growing up and change and, in my view, told with sensitivity and with just the right amount of humour."

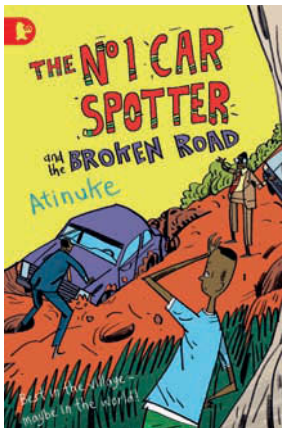
David Melling



Runner up

THE NO 1 CAR SPOTTER AND THE BROKEN ROAD

(Atinuke, Walker)



Oluwalase Babatunde Benson is the Number 1 car spotter in his village – and quite possibly, the world. He is also excellent at solving problems; but when the only road that runs through the place where he lives becomes so full of holes that cars can no longer drive on it, meaning that there are no customers for Mama Coca-Cola's cafe, his ingenuity is stretched to its limits. It's still astonishingly rare to find contemporary, light-hearted stories for seven to nine year olds that are set on the continent of Africa, so to have something as engaging, accessible and well-told as this is extremely pleasing.

"I loved The No. 1 Car Spotter because it was so funny. The characters were so deftly drawn and I loved the upbeat, feel-good ending. I immediately went out and bought all the other books in the series."

Lucy Porter

Also shortlisted



Fox Investigates – a Brush With Danger
(Adam Frost, Little Tiger Press)

Confident readers will love this

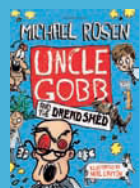
funny, clever story of dastardly deeds and international detection, featuring plenty of naughty wordplay and slapstick humour. The plot bounces along at an impressive pace, and there are cunning plans, last-minute escapes and groovy gadgets galore.



Superbot and the Terrible Toy Destroyer
(Nick Ward, David Fickling)

This hugely enjoyable

story of an amazing robot with super skills who defeats a toy-stealing baddie through a combination of cunning and compassion has all the instant appeal and accessibility of a graphic novel; with text that will challenge but engage struggling readers.



Uncle Gobb and the Dread Shed
(Michael Rosen, ill. Neal Layton, Bloomsbury)

Teachers might read this book

as a piece of biting satire about what happens when political ideology takes over the development of a state education system; children will simply recognise the craziness they see all around them, adore the absurdity – and relish the invitation to rebel.



Let's Play
(Hervé Tullet, Chronicle Kids)

Following on from the hugely

popular and original interactive picture books Press Here and Mix It Up comes another work of creative brilliance from Hervé Tullet. Share it with your touchscreen-savvy youngsters, who will be entranced at just how much they can make happen in the absence of electronics.



KEY STAGE 2

Winner

RAILHEAD

(Philip Reeve, OUP)

Profoundly romantic and brilliantly original, this thrilling adventure from the apparently limitless imagination of Philip Reeve steers away from the dystopian, post-apocalyptic

visions that have so dominated the fiction scene for children and young adults in recent years; offering instead a heady slice of high-tech space action. The writing is masterful; the characters fantastic; and the ending, perfection. There is room for a sequel – but as a standalone novel this is simply exceptional.



"For sheer, exhilarating, sitting-up-until-the-early-hours excitement, this is one of the finest books for any age group – children or adults – that I've read in a long time. Reeve appears to have left the door ajar for a sequel; here's hoping he pushes it open."

Sarah Crown

Runner up

HOW TO LOOK FOR A LOST DOG

(Christopher Edge, Nosy Crow)

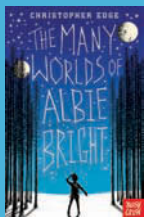
Rose is nearly twelve years old, and autistic. A stray dog provides a calm and reliable presence at the centre of her volatile world, until a terrible storm changes everything. Martin captures Rose's voice with precision and purity; a narrator with autism is in many ways the most reliable there can be, which makes the moments of intense, aching sadness and flashes of genuine joy amongst the lists and literalism all the more impactful.



"The characters are so well-drawn and I loved Rose, Uncle Weldon and of course Rain the dog. Original and moving, the story has an emotional depth and realism which really speaks to the reader and gives you something to think about."

Clare Argar

Also shortlisted



The Many Worlds of Albie Bright (Christopher Edge, Nosy Crow)

Bereavement, bullying and quantum

physics combine here for an accessible, inclusive delight of an adventure with a bittersweet centre. Chris Edge's writing is wonderfully fresh and acute, and he tells Albie's story with enormous empathy and a wicked understanding of a ten-year-old's humour.



Beetle Boy (M.G. Leonard, Chicken House)

This exciting and unusual story about a young boy searching for

his father – and the strange but powerful bond that develops between him and a surprisingly smart stag beetle as he uncovers a conspiracy along the way – is a superb, read that will keep young people turning the pages to its end.



Heartsong (Kevin Crossley-Holland, ill. Jane Ray, Orchard)

Achingly beautiful, deeply moving and exquisitely

illustrated – with Vivaldi's Four Seasons always playing between the lines on the pages – this very special short novel about a voiceless orphan who is rescued by music could surely unlock poetry in the soul of the most pragmatic reader.



The Thing About Jellyfish (Ali Benjamin, Macmillan)

In this deeply touching exploration

of friendship, grief, change, growing up and 'fitting in', Ali Benjamin traces a young girl's journey towards acceptance alongside a fascinating trail of scientific research into the mysterious world of jellyfish. It's an absorbing, and ultimately, empowering read.



KATIE MYLES is a primary advisory teacher at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)

Set in your ways

Want to stretch your more able readers at KS2? Then start by removing the limits for all learners, says **Katie Myles...**

When we talk about the 'more able', what do we really mean? How helpful is this type of description and how do these definitions affect children's (and teachers') perceptions of themselves as learners and individuals?

In a recent discussion with some KS2 pupils, a boy revealed to me that he knew the reading groups in his class were organised by ability. The groups were all named after famous authors, and the child began to try and assign the quality of the author's work to the ability of the children, which was either 'high' or 'low'.

Despite the teacher's best efforts to mask the fact that children had been put into sets, the pupils understood they had been grouped according to their perceived abilities. For the KS2 boy, this had implications both for his perception of himself, and his opinion of the other children in his class.

This is not to say that children all have the same level of ability, but the 'more' or 'less' able in our classrooms are context dependent, and strengths and weaknesses shift depending on the experiences and provision educators make available.

So how do educators support all children to make progress, attend to each child's specific needs and ensure high aspirations? The following suggestions ensure quality-first teaching that will support and stretch all learners, as well as challenging the 'more able'.

Build a positive learning culture

■ Think beyond levels and labels. The post-levels environment gives us the opportunity to frame the language of assessment differently and to think about how we positively communicate with children and parents about attainment, progress and development – all of which helps teachers to move beyond confining children to ability groupings.

■ At the CLPE, we have developed The Reading and Writing Scales (tinyurl.com/clpescales) – a free resource that describes the journeys children make in order to become literate. Each scale offers a description of the observable behaviours of pupils at different stages, rather than making a single judgement as to whether the children are more or less able in the subject. This kind of resource provides formative information to support children's progress.

■ Build on what children know and can do. Teachers need to use formative assessment information to inform their planning, and consider the practice and provision that will take children to the next phase of their development. This creates high aspirations for all and supports all students to make progress, whatever their starting point.

Expand children's experience of literature

■ Maintain a rich reading programme that will nurture children's increasing knowledge and understanding of literature. This will ensure

pupils make progress towards becoming experienced and independent readers and will prepare children for the transition to secondary school. High-quality text choices must be included in school reading programmes, and routines should make space for uninterrupted free reading time. Reading for purpose and pleasure across the curriculum is fundamental to creating experienced and independent readers at KS2.

■ Employ texts that can be used across the curriculum to promote higher-order thinking skills, empathy, and that promote reading as a social act. This is vital for developing children's critical thinking. Pupils need to be supported to move from being able to identify textual features to being able to talk and write about the impact these might have on the reader. This is also especially supportive for transition from KS2 to KS3.

■ Ensure that teachers have good knowledge of both classic and contemporary children's literature so they can make meaningful and personalised recommendations. Children need books that promote discussion and reflection. These are likely to be multi-layered; capable of being read at different levels; based on pertinent themes; from different cultural settings; and written by skilful and experienced children's writers using lively and inventive language.

Develop critical thinking

■ Use an approach such as literature circles: small, temporary discussion groups reading the same text. This gives children independence and experience, but avoids labelling and fixed groupings. Each child should take on a key role and works collaboratively to respond deeply to his or her shared text. Teachers can also scaffold and extend the talk, promoting

critical thinking, engaging children in debate, and sparking discussions around character, themes and intent.

■ Nurture a culture of 'book gossip' in which children become accustomed to discussing, sharing and recommending future reading, and where teachers model how to elicit inference and deduction. This enables children to evaluate books, critique author intent and reflect on reading choices in a positive learning environment.

■ Provide opportunities for children to develop deeper responses to text and illustration. Allowing pupils to respond through art, music, performance and drama will ensure progress towards fluency and independence at KS2. Examples of where schools have used these approaches are available on the Power of Reading website (clpe.org.uk/powerofreading).

Use effective questioning

■ Look to address the balance of teacher versus pupil talk. When reflecting on questioning, consider this: who asks the majority of questions in the classroom? Have teachers ever analysed the kinds of questions they ask? How many questions do teachers ask to which they already know the answers? What do teachers do with the pupils' answers? What proportion of questions are deliberately open ended? And what balance of pupil and teacher talk exists in classrooms?

■ Facilitate children to ask questions. Encourage them to develop critical awareness as readers, analysing how language, form and structure are used by a writer to create meanings and effects. Encourage them to question content and function. Using an approach such as Aidan Chambers' 'Tell Me' helps children to generate their own questions, which they can answer through further reading, discussion and book talk.

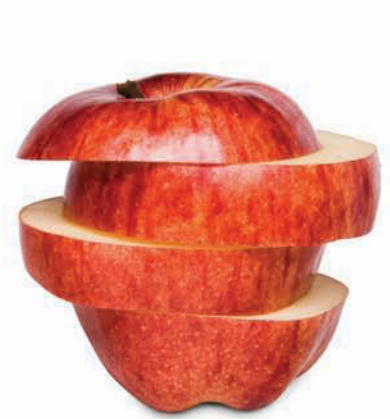
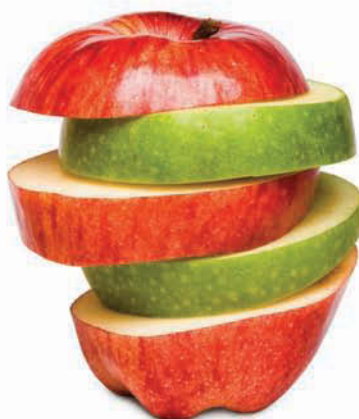
EXPERIMENT WITH CREATIVE WRITING

Children should learn to think critically about the writing of authors, as well as their own work, and visits from published writers will help to make this process meaningful.

■ Use drama and oracy to stimulate real and imagined contexts for writing. This provides the opportunity for children to have their writing read aloud, performed or dramatised, then discussed and polished further. It ensures children have the chance to explore high-level and precise vocabulary, and develop a sophisticated understanding of context-specific vocabulary and why it has been used to achieve impact.

■ Encourage children to keep creative or free-writing journals in which they can explore a range of ideas privately, allowing them to hone a personal style and voice. Children also need the opportunity for extended writing, including self-directed writing, which can be revisited, redrafted, edited and refined, using peer response and self assessment. Being an experienced and independent writer involves a subtle understanding of the relationship between the writer and the reader.

■ It is really important to remember that supporting fluent and experienced readers and writers to make progress at KS2 is not about establishing a separate curriculum. Structures, processes and pedagogical approaches that support higher-order thinking provide a positive, supportive learning culture within which quality children's literature is at the heart of all learning.



Tricky CUSTOMERS

If common exception words are causing a nuisance, these marvellous suggestions will take the weight off your mind...

Look at the words below and decide which are spelled correctly: *accomodation*, *seperate*, *supercede*, *minuscule*.

What did you look at? Almost certainly you looked at the Cs and the M in *accommodation* and may have decided that one M was missing. In *separate* you may have noticed that the E after the P was incorrect, while in *supercede* most people seem to think that is the correct spelling (it isn't!); *supersede* is spelled with an S because it comes from Latin: *super* (above / beyond) and *sedere* (to sit), so that *supersede* means, literally, to sit above. The only word that is correct is *minuscule*, but many people would expect it to be spelled with an I rather than a U, probably because they associate the smallness suggested by the word with the prefix *mini-* rather than *minus*.

The words you just looked at might be termed 'tricky' because they include some spellings that cause confusion. But rather than using the term *tricky words* - which



occurs throughout government-backed resources such as Letters and Sounds, as well as in phonics programmes such as Read Write Inc. – the 2013 National Curriculum uses the term *common exception words*. The curriculum requires children in Year 1 “to read common exception words, noting unusual correspondences between spelling and sound and where these occur in the word” (DfE, 2013, p.20). It is important to remember that, whatever we call them, *words* are not tricky, only parts of some of them are.

Many English words include grapheme-phoneme correspondences that children have not met by the time they need to read and write them. In this article, we will focus on words that may challenge children in Key Stage 2.

Why are some words ‘tricky’?

English words derive mainly from old German and Norman French, as well as from Latin and a range of other languages, but the spellings have evolved over the years in weird and wonderful ways, often due to ignorance about etymology on the part of printers and dictionary compilers. It is important that children understand why English spelling can be so challenging and recognise that adults also experience difficulties with many words.

In English, almost every phoneme can be represented in more than one way. Look at the following examples:

/or/ - cork, pour, haul, paw, ball, taught, thought, score

/r/ - run, write, hurry

/o/ - hot, cough, want

/s/ - sip, cell, pass, scene, psychology, dance

/sh/ - shop, chef, conscience, spacious, initiative, sugar

In words like *diarrhoea* and *yacht*, the grapheme-phoneme correspondences for some elements do not appear in any other words children are likely to meet, so we need to focus on those parts of the word and help pupils to learn them as exceptions. The /o/ sound in *cot* is the same sound that is represented by *ach* in *yacht* and the /r/ sound in *rub* is the same sound which is represented by *rrh* in *diarrhoea*. The rest of each word will be familiar from words like *yet*, *yes*, *got*, and *diagram*, *diagonal* and *idea*. The key to learning the words is to focus on what is easy to learn and then learn the more difficult bit.

The same, but different... HOMOPHONES

The English language has many words that sound the same but are spelled differently (*homophones* – meaning same sound, from the Greek *homos*, same, and *phone*, meaning sound). Look at the words below:

wee, bee, ah, ewe, hear, know, sew, watt, wear, witch, sore, write, putt

We only know how to spell some of the words if we have some context for them. If you heard those words without seeing them and were asked to spell them, you might write:

we, be, are, you, here, no, so, what, where, which, saw, right, put

We need context for words if we are to be sure to spell them correctly. So *read* is the past tense of the verb to read (I read the book last week.) and *red* is a colour (a red shirt). For children learning to read and spell, homophones can present problems and cause misunderstandings.

HETERONYMS

Just to confuse matters further, English vocabulary includes several heteronyms: words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently and have different meanings. Consider how you would pronounce *record* and how different pronunciations would give different meanings to the word.

Consider the following words and how you would say them and what they mean. What would you need to know to ensure that you pronounced them correctly and understood their meanings?

read, sow, lead, close, rebel, desert, minute, present

As children learn more about homophones and heteronyms and become confident about their spellings, they might go on to make collections and even create their own jokes involving a play on words or misunderstandings.

Embrace the unusual

Most tricky or common exception words can be learnt using a combination of phonic strategies. It is important to emphasise that all words have grapheme-phoneme correspondences for every phoneme, even though some of these may be unusual. For example, in the word *people* the /ee/

TEST FIRST, NOT AFTERWARDS

USE ASSESSMENT TO HELP EVERYONE SUCCEED...

Some schools give children the ‘test’ before they see the list of words they have to learn. This enables children to have a go at the spellings and to identify which they already know and what the tricky bits are in those they can’t yet spell accurately. They can then focus their learning on what they actually need to remember, such as *separate* has “a rat” in it, and *thumb* ends with a b. By using ‘tests’ in this way, we can remove the negative overtones and show that we view them as part of a learning strategy instead of an unpleasant event for some children at the end of the week. Rather than teachers testing the whole class, children can work in pairs or groups to test each other and to help each other to learn the spellings. If a test is administered you can collect each group’s aggregate scores rather than each individual’s. This provides a real incentive for groups to work cooperatively to help everyone to succeed.

sound is represented by the diagraph /eo/, a combination of letters that actually occurs in almost 2000 English words (*geography*, *stereo*, *pigeon*, *yeoman* etc), but hardly ever to represent an /ee/ sound (*diarrhoea* is a rare example). Nevertheless, when explaining how to spell and read the word *people*, you should point out that /ee/ is represented by *eo*, while explaining that this is very unusual.

Allowing children time to explore, discover and discuss common exception words is pivotal to their development as spellers. Providing a range of strategies to help children remember, and ensuring frequent exposure to these words, will assist in breaking down the barriers to spelling.

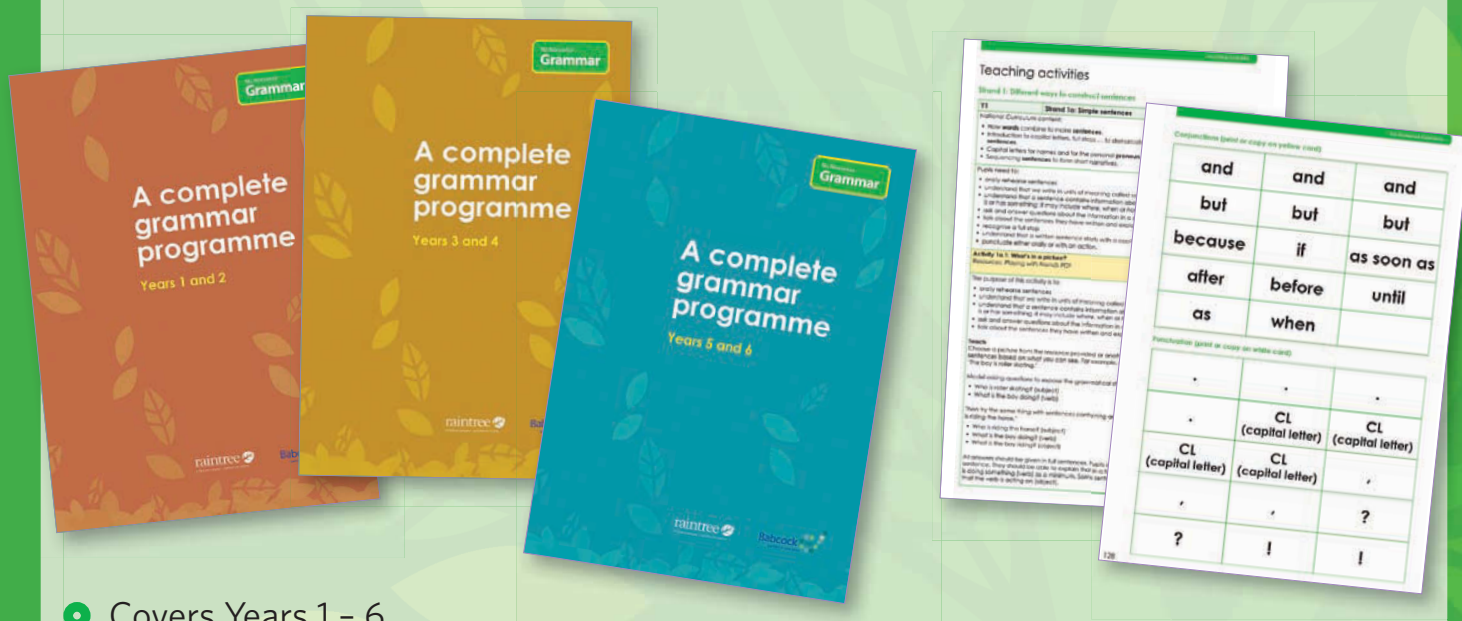
David and Angela are joint authors, with Wendy Jolliffe, of *Teaching Systematic Synthetic Phonics in Primary Schools*. David has also jointly written *Teaching Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in Primary Schools* and *Lessons in Teaching Phonics in Primary Schools*, as well as an app, *Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar for Children Count*. All include sections on teaching tricky words.

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written by
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CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories

SEEING THE UNSAID

The pictures in Anthony Browne's books often tell a different story to the words, and getting children to fill in the gaps between the two is rich and rewarding work, says **Carey Fluker Hunt...**

Browse through any picturebook by Anthony Browne and you'll soon get a sense of the scope and power of his work. From the reassuring domesticity of *Dad* to the dysfunctional family in *Piggybook*, readers embark on a journey from the familiar into places in which little is predictable and everything can be challenged. Take *Voices in the Park*, for example, in which four narrators offer different perspectives on the same event, or *Changes*, in which a child's sense of unease about his family is revealed by the way that household objects are transformed. These books grab our attention by drawing us into detailed and unsettling worlds that are quite simply impossible to ignore, and make a rewarding starting point for discussion and creative work with older children, as well as younger ones.

Discover the detail

Start by sharing *Changes* with your class. What's happening in this book? Are the objects really changing? If not, why do they look as if they are? Talk about what isn't being shown (the events 'off stage'; the anxieties and emotions...) How is Joseph feeling, and how can we tell? Look for hidden details. Why did Browne choose to include them, and what effect do they have?

Browne has always been interested in dreams, symbols and transformations – not just

“These books grab our attention by drawing us into detailed and unsettling worlds that are quite simply impossible to ignore”

for their visual possibilities, but because they help him explore the emotional landscape of a book and make deeper connections with his readers.

Investigate dreams and symbols

What happens in your dreams? Do you think about them when you're awake? Has a dream ever told you something about your feelings that you didn't know?

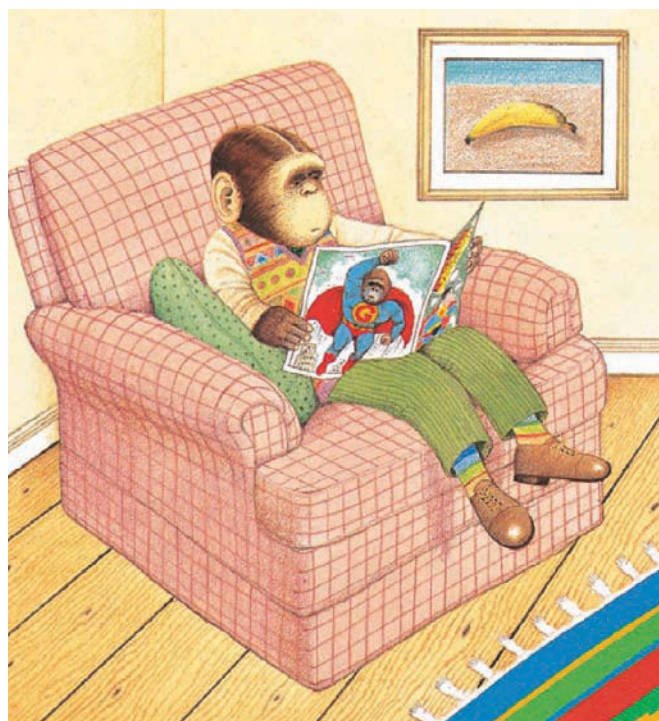
Collect dream-elements and categorise your material. Is it possible to use a single image or symbol to represent a category?

For example, a fire to represent anger, or wings to represent flight.

Dreams link to our subconscious, and being aware of our subconscious can help us be more imaginative and creative. This idea lies at the heart of Surrealism.

Find out about Magritte and Dali (who influenced Browne's work) before exploring some of the books listed below. Put on your Surrealist hats and look more closely at the illustrations to find as many dream-details and hidden clues as you can. Can you make any connections with the dream elements you collected earlier?

Are the hidden objects in Browne's pictures 'real'? Or do they represent something: an idea, perhaps, or an emotion? To Browne, these details are visual similes whose function is to make us question and connect. The trees in *The Tunnel* aren't really turning into wolves (but Rose is frightened



Illustrations: Copyright © 1984 Anthony Browne. From *WILLY THE WIMP* by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd

that they might) and the visitors in Zoo aren't animals. They just behave like them.

In fact, Browne doesn't go in for what he calls a 'departure from reality'. His books often begin and end with domestic events, and the surrealist details are there to draw our attention to the psychological landscape of the story.

EXPLORE THE SURREAL IN...

The Tunnel; Into the Forest; Changes; Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; Hansel and Gretel; Gorilla; Zoo; Piggybook; Little Beauty; King Kong; Voices in the Park

Transform your view

As well as including hidden clues in his books, Browne also enjoys transforming objects. What is it, for instance, about the objects in *Changes* that suggest their 'alter egos'?

Make a 'thought collection' of transformable objects. Create before and after pictures to show the transformations in action: a table could turn into a horse, for example, or a saucepan could become a fancy hat.

Gather some ordinary household objects together. Choose two, then combine them to produce something new. Think about the appearance, composition and characteristics of each object before creating your hybrid.

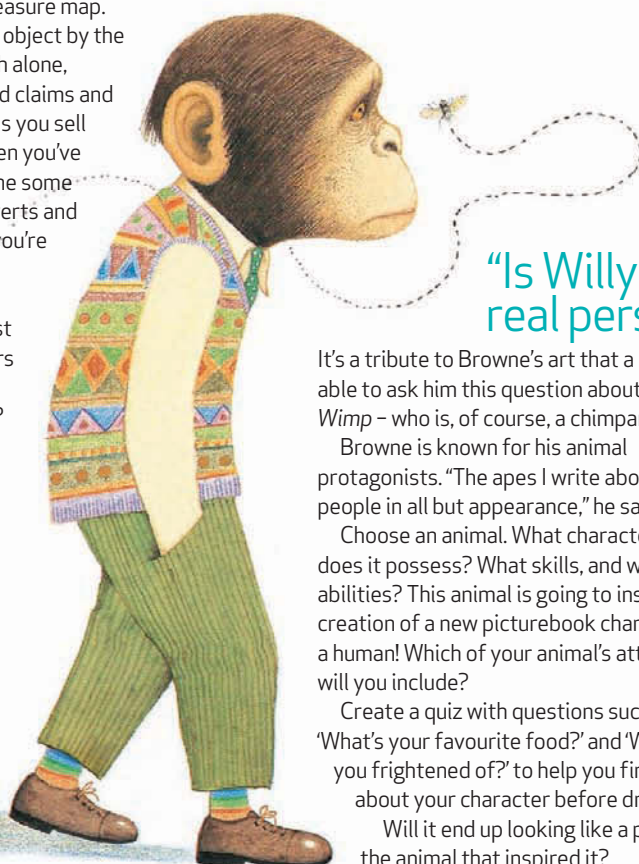
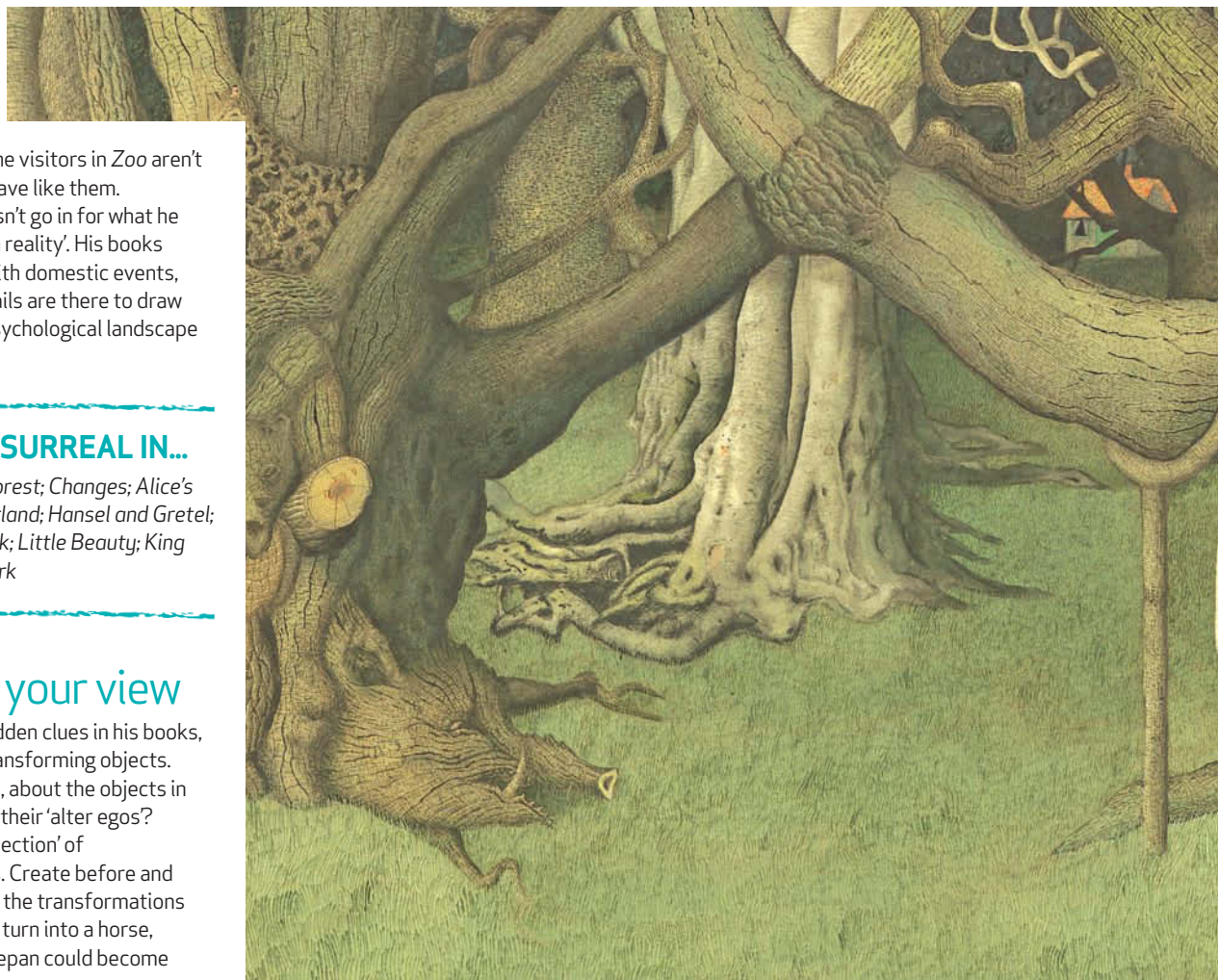
We don't always need to witness a transformation to believe in it. People are good at seeing what they want to see (and giving objects a status or characteristics that they don't possess – something that's used by advertisers the world over).

Choose an object and transform it solely by the power of speech. Visualise your transformation, then tell everyone what your object has become – a length of hosepipe could become an exotic fortune-telling snake, for example, and a crumpled

newspaper a treasure map. Transform your object by the power of speech alone, encouraging wild claims and vivid language as you sell your wares. When you've finished, examine some commercial adverts and work out what you're being invited to believe. Why do some things cost more than others that look very much the same?

SHAKE UP YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS

Another way to explore surrealist ideas is by playing the Shape Game. Browne uses this technique when he wants to generate ideas. Draw an outline, then invite someone to transform the shape into an object. This game is explored in *The Shape Game*, in which the family from Zoo visit an art gallery.



"Is Willy a real person?"

It's a tribute to Browne's art that a child was able to ask him this question about *Willy the Wimp* – who is, of course, a chimpanzee!

Browne is known for his animal protagonists. "The apes I write about are people in all but appearance," he says.

Choose an animal. What characteristics does it possess? What skills, and what abilities? This animal is going to inspire the creation of a new picturebook character – a human! Which of your animal's attributes will you include?

Create a quiz with questions such as 'What's your favourite food?' and 'What are you frightened of?' to help you find out more about your character before drawing it.

Will it end up looking like a person, or the animal that inspired it?



BEHAVE LIKE AN ILLUSTRATOR

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS OF WAYS YOU AND YOUR PUPILS CAN BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO SOME FAVOURITE PICTURE BOOKS:

Illustrators look closely at everything around them and pay attention to colours, textures, shapes and details. They think imaginatively and ask lots of questions. What if... that wheel turned into an apple? What if... the people visiting the zoo were like animals? What if... the trees were hiding a wolf? A pumpkin? An axe?

GET SKETCHING

Give children a small sketchbook for recording notes and ideas. Illustrators use different methods from quick thumbnail sketches to full-page drawings – look at some artists' sketchbooks (which can be quite messy) to show children what's possible. Hold one-to-one 'sketchbook reviews' and allocate time for children to develop their ideas into pictures.

MAKE A PICTUREBOOK

Being an illustrator is a bit like being a film director. Imagine filming everything that happens to you in a single day. It would be long and boring! What would you cut to make it more interesting? Now try making a picturebook about your day, instead of a film.

EXPLORE THE SHAPE GAME

Challenge children to doodle as a way of connecting with their subconscious. Encourage them to look carefully and draw from life, to be positive and confident and to critique each other's work with sensitivity. Welcome different styles and approaches; share outcomes and value them.

PLAY WITH PICTURES

Visit an art gallery and choose paintings to act as a starting point for new stories. Create Willy's Pictures-style illustrations with them.

BECOME ART INVESTIGATORS

Browne tries to make his pictures tell most of the story and is interested in the way that words and images work together – "I like to include...gaps between the two components that the reader has to fill..." His books are a great way for children to explore the impact of composition, style and page layout on the reader's experience.

This ability to 'read' and talk about pictures is a key life skill. And in this world of advertising and manipulative imagery, it's important to be more critically aware!

Share *Voices in the Park*. What do the pictures tell us about the way each character thinks and feels? Encourage children to look closely and ask lots of questions.

Talk about colour and what it suggests. Talk about style. Has the image been drawn loosely? With a hyper-realistic attention to detail? Or in some other way? Talk about size and scale. Is this image a close-up or does it show a long perspective? Talk about framing. What could a heavy frame tell us, and why might an object or person break through it? Talk about point of view. If this image were a photograph, where would the photographer be? What does this add to our experience? Talk about gaze. Where are the characters

looking, and why? Talk about the chosen medium (such as charcoal or watercolour) and its impact. Talk about the lighting. Where's it coming from, and why? Are there any shadows? Talk about pacing. Is there a single picture on a page, or several? Are we encouraged to take our time or turn the page quickly? And talk about those hidden details... why are they there?

Now apply your critical skills to *Zoo*, *Hansel and Gretel* or *The Tunnel* before splitting into pairs to explore a wider collection of Browne's work.

Build on what's been learned by writing about it. Report on what you've done, write explanatory guides to help other children get more out of a specific title or contribute an article to a class magazine about Anthony Browne.

Develop visual literacy

In 2001-2 Anthony Browne was artist-in-residence at Tate Britain as part of the Visual Paths project, which explored the use of great works of art to inspire children's literacy development. Many of Browne's books already featured classic works of art, either as a background detail or as part of the main narrative (as in *Willy's Pictures*);

The Shape Game was a direct outcome of the residency.

Wearing your 'art investigators' hats, work in pairs to explore images from *Willy's Pictures*. On a large sheet of paper, write as many questions about the story behind each image as you can (e.g. why does that chimp look so surprised?) Circle the questions that most interest you and try to answer them. Lead into storymaking and storysharing.



Oh, what an atmosphere!

Share Alison Wilcox's tips for more descriptive writing with your pupils, and see their creativity soar



One of the areas of creative writing that pupils consistently fail to incorporate into their work is the technique of building tension, atmosphere

and suspense. The following simple steps are some that I have found to have an immediate impact on children's writing in this regard:

1 Use your senses

As well as sight, think about what your character can hear, smell, touch and taste. This will enable the reader to feel the tension, the anticipation, the warning of approaching danger etc. more easily. For example:

Sounds

- The footsteps were louder. Another creak, another shuffle, just down the corridor. Now only seconds away.
- The sound of the wind among the trees suddenly stopped.
- The world was completely still. Nothing moved, not a leaf quivered, but over the silence brooded a ghostly calm and the whisper of his smoking breath as it rose in gasps and lingered in the frosty air.

Touch

- Her foot kicked something round, hollow, something which rolled away into the shadows.
- He ducked as something dark rushed through the air and brushed his head with its icy fingers.

Smell

- Trish cupped her fingers around her nose and mouth, but the stench of graveyards and decay wafting up from the darkness seeped through her fingers and made her retch.
- She took out a handful of green powder from her purse and tossed it on the fire. Within seconds, a very sweet and heady scent filled the room.

Taste

- The drink was bitter and stung her throat as she swallowed it. She could feel it scorching through her veins.

2 Turn off the lights

Darkness will mean that the character(s) has to rely on his other senses and makes it easier to include sounds, touch and smells, which adds to the tension. Add detail and description to paint a picture in the reader's mind. Giving a setting an atmosphere is more than stating that 'it was dark'. For example, adding more descriptive detail could give you:

She lay motionless in the darkness and listened to the night. It was an unsettling, menacing darkness, full of dancing shadows and the occasional creak and rustle from the house. A tingling sixth sense warned Kitty not to move.

3 Keep it building

By gradually adding to the atmosphere you are creating, you increase tension; making the setting scary and the action scenes exciting. Think about putting in details such as background noises, flickering lights and shadows, and tricky terrain, such as muddy or uneven ground during a chase. For example:

- The batteries in her torch were running low and the beam kept flickering and fading as she moved it from side to side.
- Rob couldn't tell where the steps were coming from. He quickened his pace, but the ground was uneven and he stumbled, crashing to the ground.

Weather and darkness can be used to great effect to create a scary atmosphere and tension:

- Howling winds
- Mist or fog
- Ferocious storms
- Relentless rain
- Dusk, shadows
- Pitch black

For example:

- It was taking too long. The shadows spread and lengthened. She looked at her watch again. She should have heard something by now. All



day she had been haunted by the feeling that she was being followed, and her fear grew as night fell. Fear of the unknown. Fear of what lurked in the shadows.

- A cold, shivering wind blew on the back of her neck and ears like the touch of cold fingers. Suddenly, the whole world seemed unnaturally dark, as if it had been drained of all light.
- The wind was ferocious, gaining in power all the time, until it screamed over the house and beat like a fist against the walls.

As before, adding detail and description will give the reader a more vivid sense of what is happening:

- It was quiet. Too quiet! The birds had fallen silent and even the wind seemed to have died down. All was as still as death and dark as the grave.

4 Give them a clue

Include hints to the reader of the danger to come, or indications that the danger is getting closer. Think about:

- Entering the danger zone - what's lurking outside, at the top of the stairs?
- A feeling of being followed/watched
- Fear of discovery in a hiding place as footsteps/voices, thuds, crashes get closer.
- Use of punctuation to add suspense - include a sentence that holds back essential information from the reader until its ending, using colons, commas and repeated full stops to delay the revelation.

For example:

- Climbing the ladder, he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks.
- She heard the shuffle of footsteps, the scrape of metal. Silence. A shadow loomed over her. She dropped to her knees. Silhouetted in the flickering light was....

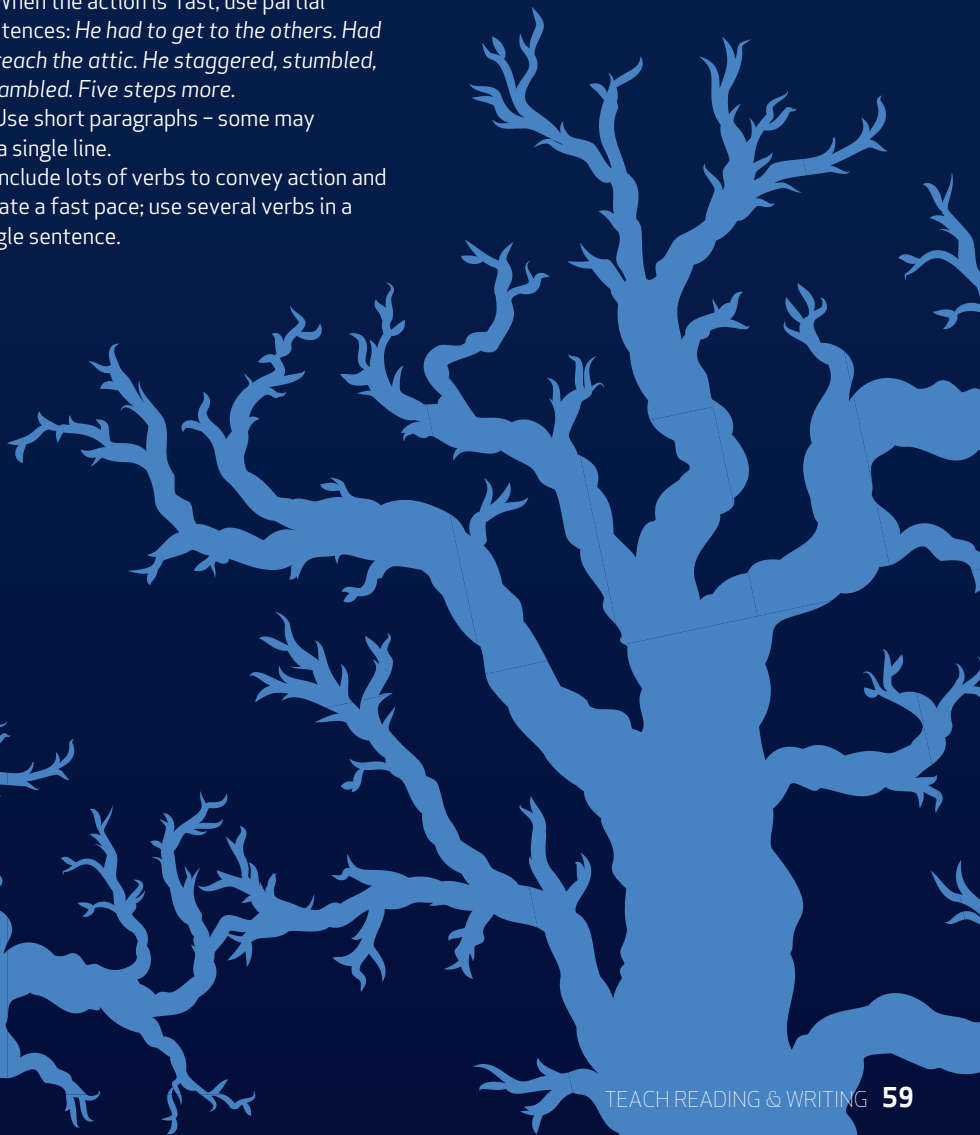
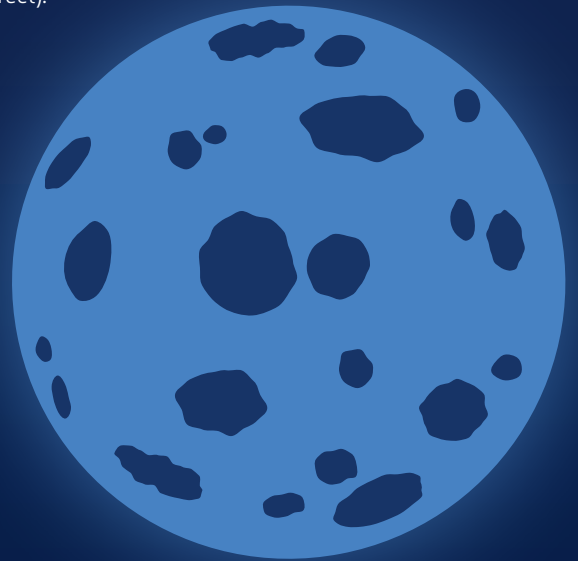
5 Vary the pace

Build a sense of tension by making frequent references to time (the 'ticking clock' effect):

- Could he make it in time?
- He searched desperately for a way to escape. Frantic now...time was running out.
- The next few seconds unfolded in horrifying slow motion.
- For fatal seconds, he stared, unable to think or move. And as he faltered, the jaws of the trap closed around him.

Vary the length of words, sentences and paragraphs to increase the pace and tension:

- Use short words, for example, 'at once', rather than, 'immediately'.
- Place several short sentences consecutively. *She ducked. He lunged.*
- Include one or two-word sentences. For example: 'Oh no!' or 'Coming closer. Too close.'
- When the action is fast, use partial sentences: *He had to get to the others. Had to reach the attic. He staggered, stumbled, scrambled. Five steps more.*
- Use short paragraphs - some may be a single line.
- Include lots of verbs to convey action and create a fast pace; use several verbs in a single sentence.



"Brilliant, child-friendly and joyful!"

Rachel Snape, NLE & Head Teacher
Spinney Primary School, Cambridge

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Michelle Larbey as the Phonics Fairy, presenting on the TTS stand

The world is full of wonder, so let's not restrict children's experience of it to the parts that can be named with CVC words, says **Michelle Larbey...**

Ever sat with a blank page in front of you, feeling a little lost and afraid? It isn't whether or not you know how to write that holds you back, it's actually having something you want to say. Even the urge to write isn't enough on its own. Many people feel the creative call to write, paint, sculpt or compose, but then sit and stare at a blank, silent space not knowing where to start or what they want to communicate. Anyone who has experienced this – which must surely be all of us – will have a sense of how disheartening it is.

A significant part of learning to read is having something you want to find out and a significant part of learning to write is having something you want to say. Children do not cap their thoughts and curiosity based on the phase of phonics they happen to know. Children are magical, crazy learning machines. They put snails in their mouths just to find out what slime tastes like; they mix milk and washing-up liquid and mud together to make magic potions; they wade through muddy puddles to watch the ripples turn into tidal waves. They exasperate their parents with questions like, 'What would happen if mammoths got their tusks stuck in a fire-engine's hose?' drawn from a seemingly bottomless well of curiosity. Children want to talk and read and write about the endless variety of the world around them and to make sense of it in their own way. They do not want

to think only about the parts of the universe we can name with CVC words.

Taught well, synthetic phonics can give children some tools to help them express themselves and find out what they want to know. Taught out of context, with little purpose other than to get better at phonics and without a deep understanding of the relationship between spoken and written English, it can be a demotivating experience for children and set up a lasting tension between what they want from school and what they actually get from it.

Make the experience as rich as possible

A multi-sensory approach means so much more than simply using magnetic letters or phonics frames. The world is full of sights and smells, textures and tastes, and every great story or poem weaves these into every page. Even more than that, our language is fraught with emotion – fear, hope, dreams, suspense. The more children experience language and texts through drama, through play, through touch and feel and the movement of their whole body, the more they will have a hook on which to hang their new understanding. The more they sense the language as a part of their magical, wonderful world, the more they will see that their new phonics knowledge can help them explore what's in it.

Explore the deep connections between spoken and written English

The sounds and the sights of English are connected, but the roots are deep and complex. Phonics at phase 4 and beyond starts to hint at the complexity, and this can be a significant hurdle for many pupils. Many parents will not have an understanding of how phonics relates to written English as they were taught it, and so will find it difficult to support at home. Also, many teachers lack confidence in just how deep to go in order to help pupils unpick the patterns and the exceptions to the rules that start to appear after phase 3 has finished. To teach these patterns in context requires much more than a sound understanding of the phonics phases, it requires a sense enjoyment to be had.

Use brilliant stories

No one can resist a well-told story and the pull of what's going to happen next, or to find out if the hero will save the day; even though we know everything will probably turn out for the best, we still want to be sure. It's in our DNA. On the other hand, anyone can resist learning taken out of its context and put forward just for its own sake. The English language is incredibly rich, with a deep history and a very wide vocabulary. Its rhythms and patterns have been passed down to us in songs and rhymes and tales of wonder, in fairy tales and snippets of Shakespeare and in the language children use to convince, cajole and discover.



Simon Mayo

"It's hard to teach the joy of writing, if it's a chore"

You can't force children to enjoy reading, says **Simon Mayo** – but great stories have their own power...

T rue story: I actually wrote my first book before I could read. Or write. It's not as crazy as it sounds; my father and grandfather were both academics, so I grew up with books being created all around me. As a very little child I'd sit next to my dad and he would scribble on pieces of paper then give them to his secretary, who would type it all out. I deduced from this that the process of 'making a book' must be a kind of mind reading, and I wanted to do it, too. I got hold of a notebook and pencil, and 'wrote', thinking about a great story all the while. When it was finished, I proudly handed the 'book' to my mum; I wanted her to read it, for real, and she couldn't. It was quite a shock to realise that there was more I needed to do.

That said, at my primary school (St John's in Croydon), I do remember reaching the end of the reading scheme they were using, and becoming a 'gold star' reader as a result. One of the final books was 'Magic Everywhere', and there was a story in it – in my memory, it was called, 'Long, Tall and Broadsight', but that doesn't quite work, because it was about three giants with different qualities. I remember thinking it was wonderful, anyway; I've tried to find it online so I can revisit it as an adult, but I haven't managed to track it down so far.

I think my experience of reading less once I left leaving primary school is fairly typical – I remember enjoying Willard Price's 'Adventure' books when I was thirteen or fourteen, and finding them exciting, but otherwise, it's like a black hole; nothing else comes to mind. And I can't stand those '100 essential books' lists that newspapers are always publishing, because I've never read any of them. The only 'classics' I can tick off, more

or less, are the ones I had to write about for English Literature, which was a subject that was a struggle for me. *Twelfth Night*; *The Crucible*; *Far From the Madding Crowd*. I suppose Michael Gove might be pleased to know that there really are some adults in the country who have never read *Of Mice And Men*.

"Coming up with a story, a character with a spark, an idea that gets readers caught up with it – that's something special, and incredibly rewarding"

I know that there's a huge drive for schools to promote 'reading for pleasure'; but it seems to me that all authors can do is come up with the best stories they can and hope they get into the hands of people who will enjoy them. If schools are able to provide the 'raw materials', then that's great – and a buzzy, vibrant librarian can make a huge difference. My own children are surrounded by books – and are lucky enough to have met authors like Malorie Blackman, Jacqueline Wilson and JK Rowling, too; thanks to my job. And they do all enjoy reading, I think it drips in by osmosis.

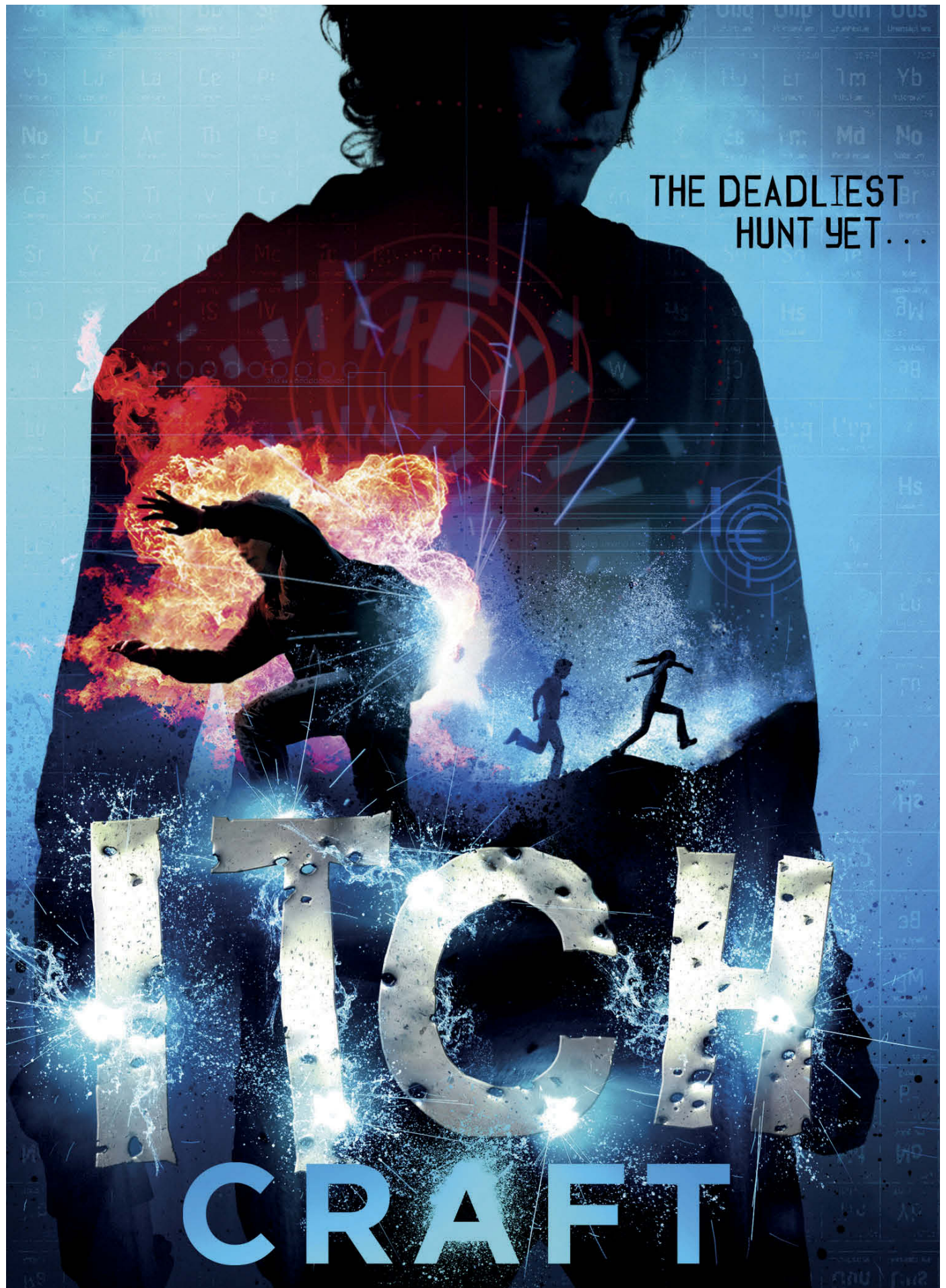
When they were little, I was always in charge of bedtime stories, mainly because I was doing the Breakfast Show at the time, so I wasn't around in the mornings. At the risk of going over very familiar ground, Harry Potter was a revelation, and a revolution. I'd become so bored of the books we were reading, and then Ben, who was exactly the right age when *The Philosopher's Stone* was published, came home and said, 'Dad, people at school are talking about this book...' I found a copy at the

Waterstones near the BBC, took it home, and read the first chapter to Ben that evening; then sat on the stairs outside his room and just carried on reading, thinking, this is amazing. I'm sure a lot of parents will nod at that. I read the series to all three of my children in turn; the youngest was resistant at first, because clearly, anything the older two had enjoyed must have been rubbish. But I told him I'd read the first chapter, and if he didn't like it, we'd never mention it again. And of course, *The Boy Who Lived* is a brilliant opening, and he was hooked.

As for writing, well, the great thing about the 500 Words competition run by the BBC – and other schemes like it – is that it places the emphasis on the right aspects, in my opinion. Coming up with a story, a character with a spark, an idea that gets readers caught up with it – that's something special, and incredibly rewarding. Obviously, for a written piece in an exam, grammar and spelling will matter, but for 500 Words the message is: just go for it. You're writing for pleasure – just start, even if it sounds like you've dived in halfway through. There's an enormous liberation in that. It can be difficult these days, I think, for teachers to give children opportunities to write creatively, with no pressure to craft their sentences perfectly. And it's hard to teach the joy of writing if it's a chore; so the fact that schools are getting involved with 500 Words in increasing numbers is deeply satisfying.



Blame, the new YA title by Simon Mayo will be published by Penguin Random House on July 7th 2016





BRUCE WAELEND is an education consultant and former headteacher

The art of **brilliant** WRITING

Children suffering from writer's block? Ask them to put down their pens and pick up a paintbrush, says **Bruce Waelend**...

A few years ago, while I was still teaching regularly, our school set out on a thrilling journey to help children develop a genuine excitement about writing – we wanted their eyes to light up when they knew they were going to write, to come in and ask, “Will we be writing today?” Our solution was to introduce three elements centered around one key component: embedding art – the use of watercolour painting – into writing.

Strand 1

CREATING ILLUSTRATIONS

First, children learned how to use watercolour to produce vibrant illustrations. Each child had a box of paints, a thin sable brush and a small pot of water. Starting with only one primary colour and white, the challenge was for them to make as many variants and tones of that one colour on a 2cm x 2cm square of good-quality paper as they could. Some of the patterns and designs they produced were wonderful: thin, wispy lines weaving across the paper, lines of paint that varied in tone almost imperceptibly and blocks of finely graduated colour.

Once they had practised this for a while, they moved on to try it with two primaries. They were enthralled and discovered a love and respect for watercolours, which they found could be full of surprises and pleasures.

Next came the challenge of producing illustrations. Some wanted to copy pictures. Others wanted to branch out and draw from real-life plants or artefacts. Still others wanted to use their imagination.

Resources were plentiful so that all children could find something to help them.

At the same time, I showed pupils some watercolour work I had done using exactly the same techniques I was teaching them.

They were amazed at what could be achieved and this drove them on to become more adventurous and skilful in their work. Throughout this process, the teacher's modelling of excellence was paramount.

Strand 2

STIMULATING THE SENSES

The second strand focused on inspiring children to discover an authentic love for writing. I read to them daily, immersing them in excellent stories, prose and poetry. They enjoyed learning at first hand and as practically as possible. This fuelled in them a desire to write as experts and they flourished quickly as writers, finding their own voice and appreciation for the nuances of language.





For the first writing activity, we went onto the school field on a warm September day. Each child found a place where he or she could be completely alone and just sit still and experience being 'in the moment'. Children were encouraged to listen, smell, touch and feel. I asked them to capture that moment in time, writing down some thoughts, feelings and experiences on a pad of paper. They had 20 minutes. It was too short for some pupils, who loved this quiet, sensory experience; however, it was long enough for others to become bored. I also asked children to bring one thing back that would remind them of that 20 minutes. Some chose a flower or branch, others a stone, still others a sweet wrapper, lost toy or piece of litter.

Once back in class, they started to write what they had experienced during that time on the field on a plain A4 sheet of paper. They also had to include a watercolour illustration of the object they brought back. The children could combine the two in any way they liked, and it was their choice as to whether to begin with the writing or artwork. For those children for whom drawing and painting was a challenge, I told them to find something they felt confident painting – a leaf, a small petal, a twig, a pumpkin stalk – "Keep it as simple as it needs to be for you to be able to succeed," was the mantra.

I reminded them, as so often I did when teaching writing, that this piece of white paper in front of them was magical. It would contain ideas, thoughts and stories that would never be captured unless they wrote them. And because they were putting these marks on a piece of paper today, their children, grandchildren and people who live hundreds of years from now would be able to read and know exactly what they were thinking today. Magical!

They also knew they had to get it right first time, as they weren't going to be able

to redraft or edit. It had to be carefully rehearsed in their heads before it went on paper. That is one of the great advantages of painting and writing together. When the ideas dry up for a moment, or you need to think things through for a bit, then you put down your pen and pick up your pencil or paintbrush again. Each helps the other. This was especially true for those who struggled as writers initially, but could draw and paint well. The fact that they were able to produce one thing to a high standard seemed to convince them subliminally that they could the other as well.

From that small beginning they started to develop their own voices as writers and also to write at greater length, quickly graduating to A3 sheets. Improvements were rapid and striking. They began to discuss the best words to use to bring out a particular shade of meaning and comment critically on each other's work. They had started the journey to becoming authors.

Strand 3

PERFECTING PENMANSHIP

The third strand was a heavily structured emphasis on handwriting. As a school, we took the decision to teach an italic style, which they learned quickly and used for their 'best' handwriting. It swiftly revolutionised the way that children regarded their work. They took immense pride in it, so that their handwriting matured in style and legibility and, together with the amazing watercolour illustrations and their renewed skill as authors, their achievements and attitudes to learning in general were transformed.

ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH

THE SECRET TO GREAT WRITING?
QUALITY IN ALL THINGS...

■ Make sure that everything you put in front of children is of real quality: whether it's paper, paints, brushes, pens or examples of work. It all needs to add to the message that only the best is good enough.

■ Immerse children in language from a range of genres that will interest, excite and entertain. Help them to become connoisseurs of English.

■ Make learning as real as you possibly can. Involve children in making decisions about what they would like to learn and how to learn it.

■ Give children time to do things really well. It can take a while to achieve something of real substance, but the effort and the time invested yields benefits, both in their levels of engagement, but also in their attitudes to learning.

■ While editing and redrafting had no place when producing this 'best' work, there were also times when children were taught how to spell accurately and to master key grammar skills. Handwriting was always taught in a very focused way. Indeed, these aspects became easier to teach, as children knew they were being equipped with new skills to enhance their craft.





Tools of the trade

Teaching grammar well means giving children a functional, flexible set of instruments for lifelong effective communication, says **Rebecca Cosgrave...**

It wasn't long ago that the average primary teacher would not have been able to distinguish a progressive from a perfect and a subjunctive from a subordinate; in fact, to be fair, most of us might still struggle with it! The expectations of the National Curriculum for grammar are challenging for both children and teachers; and perhaps the toughest aspect of all is being able to teach it in a way that is meaningful, engaging and manageable.

Unlike many aspects of the curriculum, grammar is assessed in two ways: through a stand-alone test and through teacher assessment of writing. This is because fundamentally, grammar provides the toolkit we use to communicate clearly in writing – and in order to achieve that outcome, we have to understand how each of the tools within it can work.

So what are the key challenges for teachers?

Subject knowledge

Most teachers I work with have areas of their own grammatical knowledge that are not secure. In order to teach concepts effectively, we have to understand them thoroughly enough to explain and exemplify clearly. Teachers cannot avoid this challenge and need subject knowledge guidance, which goes beyond the expectations of the curriculum in order to be one step ahead. Within schools, we need to continue grappling with the intricacies of subject knowledge, and support each other as we do so.

Progression and filling the gaps

The National Curriculum has clear progression but depends on all teachers understanding and revisiting what has come before. This is a particular challenge as we implement a new curriculum: children in KS2 have not had the grounding of KS1 grammar teaching so there is a lot of 'catch-up' required. In No Nonsense Grammar we have stranded

the curriculum and outlined progression within each strand to support teachers. These progression charts can be downloaded from www.babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/literacy, and can help teachers to identify the core foundations of understanding within each strand.

Securing understanding

Children now need to understand the key grammatical concepts at a depth beyond previous expectations. This is in line with the aims of the new national curriculum. An example of this can be seen in the following question from the sample SATs for Y6:

Tick all the sentences that contain a **preposition** -

- Ali locked the door before he left.
- The shops are beyond the main road.
- My brother is behind me in the race.
- Barry is below Andrew in the register.

In order to answer this question, pupils have to understand the function of the preposition in each sentence and recognise that in the first sentence, the word 'before' is acting as a conjunction to join two clauses; they need to recognise that there are two verbs in this sentence therefore there must be two clauses. Questions like this are daunting but also encouraging – it's important that children should understand grammar at a functional level and be able to explain how language is working in context. However, if teaching has focused on identifying words – e.g. underline the preposition – rather than function, learners will struggle.

Much of the useful research into effective teaching of grammar has been undertaken by Debra Myhill and her team at Exeter University. Our work at Babcock LDP is underpinned by the key principles that they have identified. These have been summarised in their excellent new book, *Essential Primary Grammar* (2016), which I would wholeheartedly recommend to all teachers, as follows:

“Rules of usage are well worth mastering, but they pale in importance behind principles of clarity, style, coherence and consideration for the reader.”

— Steven Pinker

“Always link a grammar feature to its effect on writing.

Use grammatical terms, but explain them through examples.

Encourage high-quality discussion about language and effects.

Use authentic examples from authentic texts.

Use model patterns for children to imitate.

Support children to design their writing by making deliberate language choices.

Encourage language play, experimentation and risk-taking.”

Myhill et al (2016)

Adopting this pedagogy enables teachers to teach children the concepts, terms and conventions which will enable them to be successful in tests, but more importantly also requires them to apply their growing knowledge of grammar to enhance their writing.



3 STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL GRAMMAR TEACHING...

1 Always use examples in context, preferably from a real text

Why would we make up examples, or use dry exercises when there is such richness in the books children are reading? For example, who could resist Jackie Morris's tiny dragons 'with whisper-thin wings of rainbow hues' (*Tell me a Dragon*) when teaching expanded

noun phrases including prepositional phrases (y3/4)? Teachers need to use the quality texts they are using for literacy teaching as models of the grammatical concepts they need to teach. Examples can be explored, replicated orally and finally applied in children's own writing.

2

Use multi-sensory teaching approaches

Grammar is essentially a very abstract concept for children to learn. The more we can make this concrete, the easier the concepts will be understood. At Babcock LDP we have developed the idea of a sentence toolkit where physical tools represent grammatical concepts. This allows teacher to use real (toy!) tools, images and actions to support understanding. For example, we use the image of an extending tape measure to represent noun phrases; this allows the teacher to model how a phrase/clause can fill the noun slot in a sentence by extending the measure, but also can model how the noun phrase can be replaced with a single noun or pronoun, by pressing the button and shrinking the measure. Similarly, we use the image of a screwdriver to represent punctuation, to reinforce the fact that the purpose of punctuation is to fix meaning for the reader. This helps to reinforce the idea that punctuation is about comprehension not respiration!

pupils' understanding. When children are given opportunities to explore concepts and explain their understanding, it becomes very clear what further teaching is required. One really useful example of this is an activity I would use to clarify understanding about sentences: provide your class with a range of sentences (simple and complex), clauses and phrases on cards and ask them to sort them into 'sentences' and 'non sentences'. Challenge pupils to explain how they know. From this, understanding about sentences, verbs, punctuation, phrases and clauses can be assessed.

There is no doubt that grammar teaching can be exciting, empowering and creative - provided we accept the challenge of developing our own knowledge and skills. Research evidence suggests that if we do, we can expect to see gains not only in GaPS understanding, but more importantly, in children's writing, enabling them to be more aware of the choices and decisions they make to communicate more effectively to their reader.

3 Secure key concepts before moving on

Children need to see how grammatical concepts are related to each other, building one on another with secure foundations. There are some key ideas secured early in the curriculum which are essential to understand more complex concepts later. For example, Y2 pupils will not be able to learn the differences between questions, exclamations, commands and statements if

they do not securely understand the concept of a simple sentence. Similarly, learners cannot understand joining clauses to make complex/compound sentences if they do not understand that a clause needs a verb and that a simple sentence is a single clause.

Teachers need to focus on high quality formative and diagnostic assessment to identify misconceptions and probe their





RACHEL CLARKE is the director of Primary English Education Consultancy

SERIAL *offenders*

Hooking children into reading a series of books is a great way to promote a love of literature that becomes a lifelong habit, says **Rachel Clarke**...

As the final credits roll, we exhale deeply and turn to each other. "Oh my goodness! What are we going to do now?" It's the end of another one of those late night box-set binges. You know the feeling: the final episode comedown and the search for a new serial-fix to fill the void left by a completed Netflix blockbuster. I've watched most of the big ones, have waxed lyrical about the characterisation and narrative pace of several, and of course adopted the knowing superiority of 'one who has read all of the books' for that one with dragons and the high head count. I am a serial offender.

Like many people who consider themselves a reader, my addiction to stories told in series precedes the phenomenon that is the digital box-set. Since childhood I've committed myself to tales that run and run. Not counting repeats, I made seven visits to Narnia and three to the Enchanted Wood. As an adult, I've followed the uplifting exploits

of Precious Ramotswe (The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency) and the contrastingly dark Scandi-noir adventures of Harry Hole. And I'm not the only adult who does it. Stacked on the shelves of my local bookshop are piles of Patricia Cornwell's Scarpetta novels, Philippa Gregory's historical serials, and the works of Victorian serialisation pioneer, Charles Dickens. Who'd have thought you could create a chain from *The Pickwick Papers* to *Breaking Bad*?

Box-sets (or stories in series as we should properly call them) can be a great way to introduce children to reading, hopefully making them readers for life. So, when setting up a school library or class book corner, it's always a good idea to include stories in series. Here are just a few reasons why...

Old familiar

Storybook characters are fictional friends and it's rather comforting to check-in on



them from time to time. What's more, being in the company of friends is easy. You don't need to work hard at building rapport, as you've already been through life's adventures together. Confidence stems from familiarity; meaning that books in series provide a safety net for reluctant readers. Pointing them in the direction of a good set of stories frequently gives these children the confidence to continue with the rest of the series.



A need to succeed

Whether it's the boys, girls or both, there are very few classes without a competitive contingent. Foster this 'need to succeed' by getting them hooked on a box set. You only need to read the first instalment, point them in the direction of the rest of the serialisation and they will soon begin competing to see who can complete the set first.

Collector's item

Children also like building collections. Publishers know this, which is why they produce series such as *Beast Quest* and *The Rainbow Fairies*. If you can hook your children into a great reading box-set, they'll soon be saving their pocket money to add to their collection. So, if you run a school bookshop make sure it's stocked with books in series at pocket-money prices.

Comic relief

We're all different as readers: some of us struggle to find the time for reading and seek quick, easy-access texts. Bearing this in mind, not all children want to work their way through a reading box set, which is where comics can play a role. Not so long ago my then 11-year-old daughter told me that Friday was her favourite day because it was when her Phoenix story comic arrived. She'd never been a reader of great stamina but she

was fully committed to her weekly comic instalments. She went on to achieve a Level 5 in her reading SAT, showing just how valuable comic-book stories can be to children who don't choose to read longer texts.

Character study

While thinking about the merits of books in series, it is also worth thinking about stories featuring well-loved characters such as Kipper the dog, Percy the Park Keeper and Horrid Henry. These don't need to be read in

Precious Ramotswe stories by Alexander McCall Smith

A set of tales about his famous detective when she was a girl. These are fabulous for using as models for writing mystery stories and great reads for newly independent readers in lower KS2. A good alternative to Enid Blyton for lovers of crime fiction and a strong female role model.

Little Nose by John Grant

These stories are experiencing a resurgence in popularity since the introduction of the new national curriculum. Not only are they great for writing stories set in the Stone Age but they are short, enjoyable and suitable for children gaining reading independence in lower Key Stage 2.

Percy the Park Keeper by Nick Butterworth

Gorgeous stories full of familiar characters which lend themselves well to writing in KS1.

Bob stories by Simon Bartram

Popular with children and teachers alike, these are particularly good stories for boys and for topics about space. Perfect in KS1.

Paddington by Michael Bond

The adventures of this bear from Peru have always been popular and have enjoyed a resurgence since the release of the Paddington movie. A really useful addition to the class library in KS1 and whenever you're learning about London.

Ottoline stories by Chris Riddell

The children's laureate has created a hugely entertaining and unconventional series featuring Ottoline. These books are a visual and linguistic treat giving them wide appeal to all types of reader in KS2. Particularly appealing to those children who love comics and graphic novels, Ottoline offers an alternative female role-model to those portrayed in the Rainbow Magic series.

order, but just like their sequential cousins they reward readers with familiar characters, settings and stories.

Read and write

The best writing comes from experience. So immersing children in several stories about the same characters supports their own narrative writing. Once children know the characters well, they can easily plan and write new adventures by changing the setting and events.

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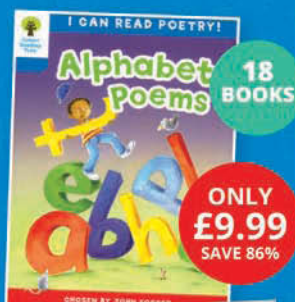
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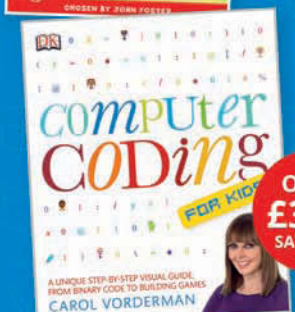


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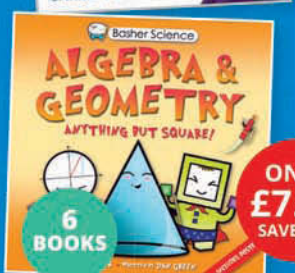
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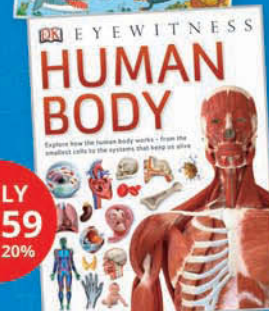
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Celebrate reading

Just go to readathon.org to order your free sponsored read kit stashed with sponsor cards, bookmarks, posters and a DVD. There are extra resources to download on the website too, along with inspirational tips and ideas in the Readathon blog. The charity has tried to think of everything to make running a sponsored read with your class, tutor group or whole school a simple and brilliant way to boost literacy skills, and to reach your school's community engagement and citizenship goals at the same time. The money your school raises will provide brand new books and storytellers for children in a hospital near you. What's not to love?!

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CHRIS WATERWORTH has been working in primary schools and experimenting with technology for over 10 years.

Chocolate BLOCKS

When **Chris Waterworth** asked his class to recreate Willy Wonka's factory in Minecraft, there were delectable changes to children's writing...

It is possible you work in a primary school and somehow haven't (repeatedly) heard about Minecraft, but it's unlikely – such is its popularity.

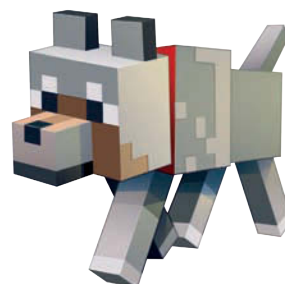
But despite children's enthusiasm for the program, which allows you to build your own worlds with a variety of simple blocks, many teachers I've met shun the idea of using a 'game' in the classroom – which seems odd when you consider its potential for engaging children in learning (particularly now Minecraft EDU, the school-ready remix of the original, has been purchased by Microsoft, making it easier to access).

Yes, if used without purpose the game will be a flash in the pan – a gimmick; fun at first but lacking in educational value. But for me it seems an obvious opportunity to improve the learning outcomes for the children in my class, particularly the reluctant writers, which is why I took the plunge and tested it with my seven-year-old son, and haven't looked back since.

Creating a world for writing

Getting caught up in a great book is, in my experience, the first step children must take in order to write creatively, as being immersed in a story gives them many more ideas to include when it comes to putting pen to paper. I started my Minecraft experiment by reading Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – one of my all-time favourites and a fairly safe bet if you want to engage the class.

Having read the book and explored its characters using drama and roleplay, I told the children that there was a section missing – the infamous



'Lost Chapter' that was never published. And since this remained a mystery, it was down to them to write their own, creating a new character, chocolate bar or sweet, and room in which the action could take place.

This is where Minecraft came in. To help children imagine and describe what the new room might look like, they would first build their own chocolate factory in the game world.

They went wild. Engaged? I think so – I couldn't stop them talking about it.

After the children had calmed down, I explained how the process would help them to write – describing how the detail of their model could cross over into their compositions.

Building skills

The beauty of using Minecraft EDU is that the whole class can collaborate on one project in real time. This meant I could literally see the chocolate factory being constructed around me, with corridors, pipes, windows, chimneys, strange machines and even the odd Oompa Loompa in chocolate rooms.

I was blown away at the level of detail the children had included in their designs. Some even used 'redstone' (a Minecraft substance that transmits power and can be used to operate mechanism such as door and pistons) to make their machines move and work – a future electronics lesson, perhaps?

Was it worth the effort?

Could I have just asked the children to design their chocolate room on paper? Yes, but I've done that in the past and, by comparison, using Minecraft took this to another level. The children were able to talk with much more confidence about their creations – they could walk you through the space.

I designed my own room alongside the children and remember thinking: this is why I became a teacher. The classroom was alive with talk of confectionary and machines; I already had a hunch I'd be reading some cracking pieces of writing as a result.

A word of caution at this stage. One mistake people often make when using technology is to forget everything they know is good practice. We can't lose sight of the fact that computers and games must still go hand in hand with quality-first teaching.

In my project, the technology was only there to enhance the children's writing – the outcome

was for children to write a new chapter for the book – not build a 3D digital chocolate factory. So I used the work we'd done in Minecraft as the basis for shared writing; I wrote my own chapter using the chocolate room I had built as inspiration, then analysed my work with the children, looking at what made it engaging to the reader.

We played around with language, created some effective sentences, and looked at speech and how it can move a story on. The writing skills still needed to be taught, but we had a wealth of things to write about. It was interesting to see the children ask for more adventurous language to describe their machines and extending sentences – there was so much they wanted to write about.

Before we began to write, I fired up the server again and allowed the children to explore each other's rooms and ask questions about the chapters they were about to write, e.g. 'How did your new character get into trouble?' They answered with such confidence. They knew where the characters entered the space, what they saw, where in the room the machines were located and how their protagonists got up to mischief – all because of Minecraft.

The children sat and wrote. And they wrote and they wrote. They wrote flat out for two sessions, without much prompting or encouragement from me. The level of detail in their writing was such that I could match each piece to the Minecraft room on which it was based.

Using Minecraft turned out to be a masterstroke. The writing process itself didn't change all that much, but we sometimes forget children cannot write creatively about things they have never experienced. And walking round a chocolate factory, albeit a virtual one, makes all the difference.

Read more about Chris Waterworth's work at videoformyclassroom.blogspot.co.uk



Setting up a virtual writing world

1 WHERE DO WE START?
Minecraft EDU is relatively simple to use in school. You need to purchase a server license and then individual licences for each computer that will run the program. (We opted to buy a licence for every other computer and allow children to work 2:1.)

When I introduced Minecraft to my class, almost every child already knew how to use it, which meant we didn't have to spend several sessions just getting to grips with the basics.

2 IS IT SAFE?
As the server is hosted in your school, you can be certain it will be safe for the children to use – the outside world cannot get in. Just be sure to run through a few e-safety rules with your class regarding giving respect to other people's designs and how to give structured, constructive feedback.

3 TAKE IT HOME
You can continue the learning conversation outside of school by setting up an online community. We use Edmodo, which allows children to share and discuss screenshots from Minecraft. (It's an app we use for a lot of flipped learning at the school.)

If at any point you get stuck, all the information you will ever need is on minecraftedu.com





Lucy Worsley

“Nothing is pointless if it helps people to learn”

Historian, presenter and author **Lucy Worsley** thinks there is more than one way to awaken children's interest in reading...

The first book I read was called *Naughty Amelia Jane Again*, by Enid Blyton. Amelia Jane herself was a doll who bullied the other toys in a nursery, and I don't think that anyone today would give their children books to read in which the characters include a naughty goliwog. In fact, I'm not sure my parents particularly approved of this book even then. I picked it up during a family visit to a bookshop when we were staying at my granny's, and as no one knew that I knew how to read, no one noticed that I was reading it until I had finished. Then, I believe, my parents paid for it because they felt a bit bad that I'd consumed it for nothing.

When I was a bit older I began to read Jean Plaidy's stories for children, and I especially loved *The Young Elizabeth* and *The Young Mary Queen of Scots*; both books I wish I'd written. As well as being very entertaining, they were a painless way of absorbing Tudor history, and I can recite the names of Mary Queen of Scots's servants, the Four Marys, for example, to this day – or describe the opening scene of *The Young Elizabeth*, which takes place at Hampton Court and features the christening of the Princess Elizabeth's baby brother, Edward, in 1536. I know now, although I didn't realise it then, that Jean Plaidy was basing her stories on real historical documents, and that many of her details are true.

My 1973 copy of *The Young Elizabeth* has a picture of Hampton Court Palace on its cover. And it's certainly one of the reasons, when I grew up, that I wanted to work so much as a curator at Hampton Court Palace, a job that I've done for the last ten years.

In fact, eighteen months ago I actually got to take part in the re-staging of Edward VI's christening procession in the rooms where it really happened at Hampton Court. This involved persuading 100 of my colleagues who work at the palace to dress up (the men in tights!) in order to recreate this magnificent Tudor court ceremony for a television programme on BBC Two that I co-presented with David Starkey.

Those historical novels of my childhood have always remained so vivid to me that I wanted to have my own go at enticing a new generation of kids into the past. That was my motivation for writing *Eliza Rose*. In my version of the Tudor court, we visit the reign of Henry VIII, and find out in particular what happened to his fifth, teenage, wife, Katherine Howard. In fact, I propose a new reason for why she had her head cut off.

If even one of my readers decides, as a result, that she too wants to become a curator at Hampton Court Palace in a future life, I'll be utterly delighted. My goal in all my work as a historian or as the presenter of history documentaries is to be the thin end of the wedge; to entice just a few people over the threshold of getting interested in history.

I know that this softly-softly approach of mine does actually work, too, because one of the great pleasures of my life is getting the occasional letter from someone who tells me that they started out being completely uninterested in history, but then watched a documentary, read a book, attended a course, and ended up getting a history degree from somewhere like the Open University!

When I was little, I actually worried that I spent too much time reading, and tried to set

myself a limit of only two hours a day.

My mum, though, has had a career in teaching literacy, so I know from her that sometimes you need games, or props, or more active ways of getting people to enjoy read. My sister-in-law is an editor of books for little boys, a tough market to crack. My brother and my stepfather have both featured in titles that she has edited, about skateboarding and astronomy respectively.

So, working hard to get people to enjoy reading is a mind-set that has stuck with me as a curator. Even when you're designing an exhibition, you've got to think what families, or that bored person who's been dragged along by their partner, might get out of it. It annoys me if people use the expression 'dumbing down' when they look at the efforts museum curators or television programmes might make to draw people in. It's an expression that really means: 'I'm too clever to need your efforts, therefore they're pointless'. But nothing is pointless if it helps people to learn.

Historic Royal Palaces is an independent charity that looks after the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace, Kew Palace and Hillsborough Castle. It helps everyone explore the story of how monarchs and people have shaped society, in some of the greatest palaces ever built. It raises all its own funds and depends on the support of our visitors, members, donors, sponsors and volunteers.

“When I was little, I actually worried that I spent too much time reading, and tried to set myself a limit of only two hours a day”

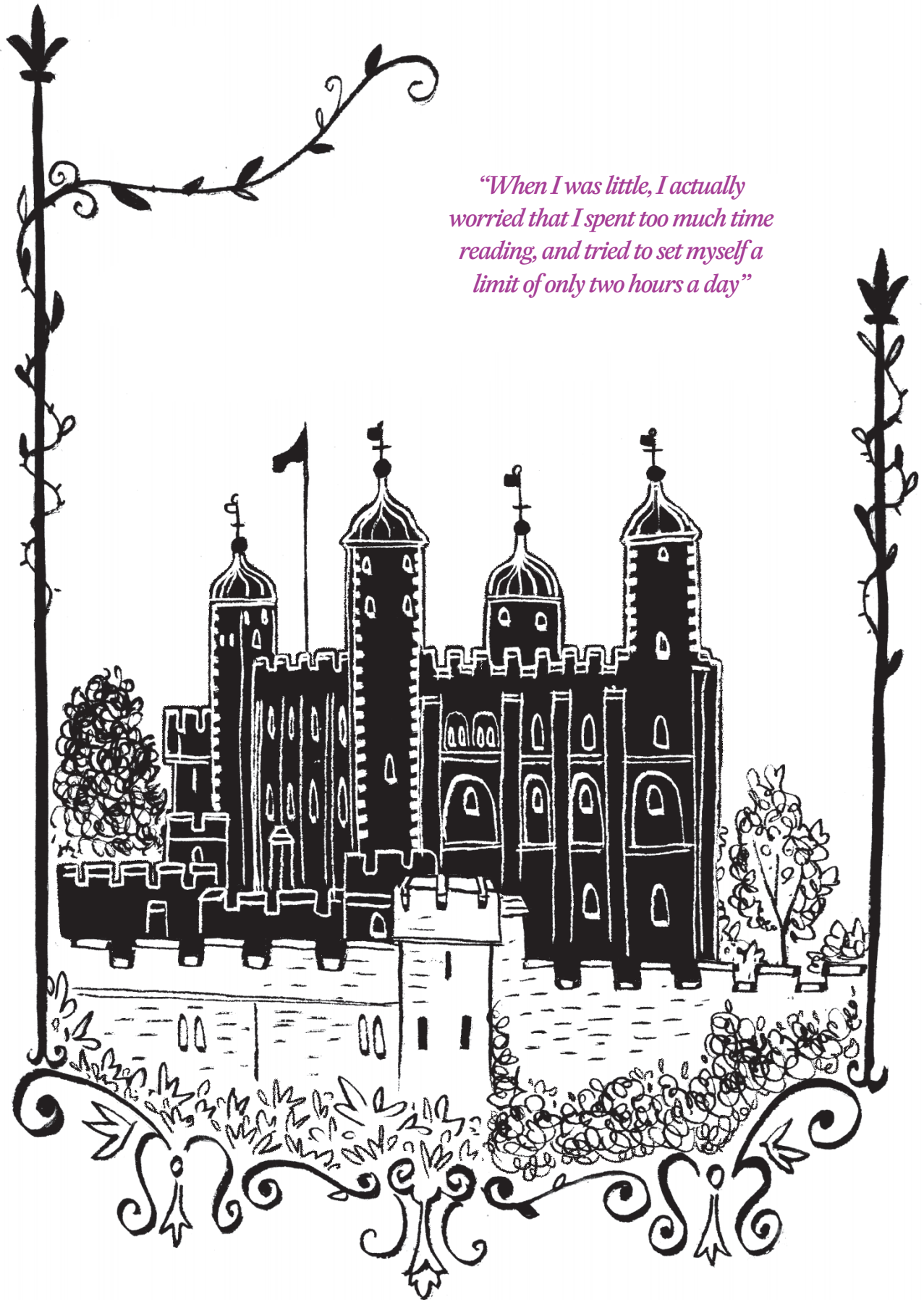


Illustration: Joe Berger



After all the discussion and debate surrounding the KS2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test, schools were set for the introduction of its KS1 counterpart – until, that is, it was discovered it had already been introduced, appearing online as a sample paper. Oops.

Despite the error, which led to the paper being withdrawn, some schools decided to take the test anyway as their pupils had prepared for it; others saw this as a golden opportunity to enjoy the rest of the term and do something else.

At the time of writing, however, the KS1 grammar test is still set to go ahead next year, and the content remains unfamiliar territory, even for experienced teachers. It contains two papers: a spelling test with words placed within contextualised sentences; and a grammar, punctuation and vocabulary test that has a series of questions for pupils to answer. So, for anyone feeling at all uncertain about either of these aspects, here's a closer look at what your pupils are expected to know and understand by the end of KS1.

1 Spelling and grammar are key

The Paper 1 spelling test – which has 20 words in contextualised sentences – is worth 50 per cent of the overall marks; the Paper 2 grammar test carries between 25 per cent to 38 per cent of the marks. Many teachers were surprised by the increased focus on spellings. From my own deep analysis of the sample spelling paper, 50 per cent of the spelling questions cover content from Year 1, and 50 per cent focus on content from Year 2.



If your school is concentrating on teaching phonics in Year 1, it's possible the spelling sections in the new curriculum will have been overlooked. But since these will be included in the test, it's worth ensuring they are covered.

2 Teaching in context is essential

Words can mean different things depending on the context. It is no longer beneficial to have a list of words on display that are not contextualised, as this could be confusing for pupils. For example, in the following sentence (taken from the sample KS1 grammar paper), pupils are expected to identify the verbs:

*'Yesterday **was** the school sports day and Jo **wore** her new running shoes.'*
(Answers in bold).

Clearly, quite a few pupils would circle 'running', but if they are aware that they need to look at how words are used in context, this might support their understanding. Luckily, there were no questions like this in the 2016 feature.

3 Year 1 and Year 2 content is covered in the test

The test will cover areas from both Year 1 and Year 2. From analysis of the Paper 2 2016 grammar test, 90 per cent of the questions are from Year 2, and 10 per cent are from Year 1. The weighting may change, but it demonstrates that putting all your efforts into Year 2 will not be enough.

Fill in the GaPS

Don't get caught out by the KS1 grammar, punctuation and spelling test. Here are 10 things every teacher should know...

4 Use creative ways to teach test techniques

A fabulous book for developing test techniques is *The Great Fairy Tale Search* by Chuck Whelon. Pupils might not be familiar with ticking, circling or filling out questions with missing gaps. This book offers a practical way for pupils to develop these skills. Pupils can find three ducks by ticking them or they can circle two Gingerbread men. This way, they are learning test techniques through more engaging means.

5 KS1 is also tested in the KS2 test

Many of the areas within KS1 are also tested in the KS2 grammar test – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, capital letters and full stops all feature. In Year 2, pupils are introduced to the past and present progressive (e.g. she was running / she is running). They do not need to know this term in KS1, but they do by the end of KS2.

6 Challenging the most able

The level of difficulty is increased by questions that require pupils to write, rewrite and explain – such as these examples from the 2016 paper:

- 'Write a question they could ask their teacher in the speech bubble. Remember to use the correct punctuation.'
- 'Write the words 'did not' as one word, using an apostrophe'



10 The difference between exclamation marks and exclamations!

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the KS1 grammar test was the introduction of exclamations as a type of sentence / phrase. This is because these types of sentences do not appear to be within the vernacular of many Year 2 pupils. The most salient point to note here is that pupils need to know the difference between the exclamation mark and the exclamation as a type of sentence or phrase. According to the national curriculum, exclamations must start with 'what' or 'how.' Be careful! Pupils need to be able to write exclamations (with verbs) to be at the expected standard in writing by the end of KS1.

■ 'Circle all the full stops that are in the wrong places'

Teachers can challenge pupils by asking them to rewrite, write or explain the grammar and punctuation they have used.

7 Connectives are out

Within the programmes of study for English, pupils learn the full range of what used to be called connectives in Year 3. These have now been broken down into conjunctions, adverbs and prepositions. However, within the KS1 grammar test, conjunctions are called 'joining words'. Pupils can be exposed to the term 'joining words' in KS1 as they do not need to know the term 'conjunction' until Year 3.

8 Use the correct terminology

To stress the point, it's now time to let go of time connectives! (E.g. first, second, next, etc.) From presenting at conferences across the country, I know that teachers love them. Despite this, the term 'adverb' is now a statutory term for Year 2, so what were 'connectives' are mainly called adverbs of time – or time adverbs.

9 Not all verbs are 'doing' words

That pupils should understand 'doing' verbs and 'being' verbs is not really explicit in the National Curriculum, but children do need to be familiar with 'being' verbs such as: is, am, was and are, etc. (This was seen in the 2016 paper). In addition, this is a great way to teach present and past tense so that pupils are able to apply this knowledge to their writing.

EXCLAMATION MARK

Get out!

(This is a command using an exclamation mark to express a mood/surprise etc.)

I am happy today!

(This is a statement using the exclamation mark to express a mood/surprise etc.)

Hey!

(This is an interjection using the exclamation mark to express a mood / surprise etc. Pupils do not need to know this term.)

EXCLAMATION (as a type of sentence or phrase using 'what' or 'how')

What a lovely painting you have!

How exciting it must be for you!
(These are exclamations as types of sentences using verbs, e.g. 'must', 'be' and 'have'.)

How exciting!

(This is an exclamative phrase because it does not have a verb.)



RHYME AND REASON

Encouraging children to listen for the rhythm of everyday language can help them become better readers and writers, says **Andy Croft**

■ **I can hear with my little ear someone who sounds like...** a washing machine (Nadine), a bike (Mike), a panther (Samantha), the moon (Haroon), a melon (Helen), a panda (Amanda) etc.

2 Hungry Jack

Begin by reciting the following adaptation of the nursery rhyme 'Little Jack Horner':

*Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner
Eating his Christmas pie
He put in his thumb
And pulled out a plum
But the plum was too big
So he swallowed a...*

Pretend you can't think what comes next. Ask if anyone can suggest what else Jack could eat instead of the plum. To complete the line they have to fill in the missing beat with a one-syllable word that rhymes with big. You probably won't have to explain this; most of your class will hear the rhymes pig, wig or fig. This gives you the subject of the next couplet. For example:

*...But the pig was too fat
So he swallowed a...*

It is important that you say the first line of each new couplet. This allows you to control the rhymes so that they are within your children's vocabulary range. Remember, you supply an adjective, and your children find a noun. Prepare a list of possible rhymes in case your children get stuck. Don't let anyone repeat a rhyme you have already used or you will go round in circles. Encourage your class to 'hear' the missing word instead of thinking about it.

*...But the cat had no tail
So he swallowed a snail
But the snail had no shell
So he swallowed a bell
But the bell was too loud
So he swallowed a cloud
But the cloud was too dark,
So he swallowed a shark...*

You can make it easier by introducing two-syllable words:

*But the shark was too lazy
So he swallowed a daisy
But the daisy was too pretty*

Rhymes are everywhere – songs, playground games, football chants, hymns, nursery rhymes, raps, TV adverts, radio jingles, tabloid headlines. You don't have to think to find them; all you need to do is listen.

You don't even have to be 'good at English' to be able to enjoy the music of ordinary speech. Very often children who think they are 'useless at writing' are perfectly able to listen to the common music of language. They use their ears, as writers and audiences have always done.

Here are three learning games you can use in the classroom to encourage your children to become writers and readers through the noisy practice of rhyme and rhythm, sound, pattern and echo. They are designed to encourage a sense of the magic of words, the poetry of everyday subjects and the value of memory and anticipation.

1 I Can Hear...

This is an improvisation game based on finding hidden rhymes. It can be used in the classroom as a starter activity or as a model for individual, group or whole-class writing. It is suitable for all ages and abilities.

First, ask if anyone knows the answer to the riddle, 'What's orange and sounds like a parrot?'

At least one child will either know or hear the correct response; ask them to explain how a carrot can sound like a parrot.

Now, tell the class that poets don't play traditional 'I Spy'. Because they have to use their ears as well as their eyes when they write, poets start the game with, 'I can hear with my little ear'.

Choose some objects in the classroom for which there are easy rhymes within your children's vocabulary range (chair/bear, pencil/stencil, hen/pen etc.) You start the game by saying, 'I can hear with my little ear, something that sounds like a... bear'. Some of your children will get the joke and hear the rhyme for, say, 'chair' immediately. Others will need several examples before they understand the double meaning of 'sounds like'. If no-one can hear the hidden rhyme, try some easier ones (something that sounds like a... stencil; something that sounds like a... fable). In a couple of minutes everyone should be able to join in. For example:

■ **I can hear with my little ear something that sounds like...** a hen (a pen), a witch (a switch), a war (the door), a robe (a globe), a fight (the light), a bug (a mug), beautiful pearls (girls), a loud noise (boys) squids (kids).

This can be developed to include two syllable rhymes. These are often easier to guess because there are fewer possibilities. For example:

■ **I can hear with my little ear something that sounds like...** a scooter (computer) a feeling (the ceiling), a jeweller (a ruler) a horrible creature (guess who).

Remember, you have to be able to see the objects as well as 'hear' them. When you have rhymed with all the inanimate objects in the room you can take on words like noses, ears, shoes, boys, girls, teeth, smiles, bums, toes and so on. Then you can include the names of your children, for example:

*So he swallowed a city
But the city was too scary
So he swallowed a fairy
But the fairy was smelly
So he swallowed a telly...*

You can bring this game to an end by bringing it back to the beginning:

*But the boy was too glum
So he swallowed the plum!*

3 Shopping for baby

A more advanced version of the previous game is based on the lullaby 'Hush Little Baby.' It is more difficult because each new rhyme requires two beats and three syllables. On the other hand, this allows you to 'funnel' your class towards the missing bits.

It doesn't matter if your class do not know the original lullaby. You begin by reciting the first three verses:

*Hush little baby, don't say a word
Daddy's going to buy you a mockingbird*

*And if that mocking bird don't sing,
Daddy's going to buy you a diamond ring*

*And if that diamond ring don't shine,
Daddy's going to buy you a...*

Ask your children if they can suggest what Daddy can buy next for the baby. To complete the line they have to fill in the missing two beats with three or four syllables (e.g. diamond mine, washing-line or porcupine). This gives you the subject of the next couplet for which you supply the first line and your children the following rhyming line. For example:

*And if that diamond ring don't shine,
Daddy's going to buy you a bottle of wine*

*And if that bottle of wine is drunk,
Daddy's going to buy you a smelly skunk
And if that smelly skunk's too clean*

*Daddy's going to buy you a washing machine
And if that washing machine won't spin
Daddy's going to buy you a wheelie-bin...*

After a few minutes most of your children will understand that they have to add three syllables, the last of which must rhyme with the last word of the previous line. Don't explain this – it is better that they learn this themselves by listening. Some children will quickly discover the value of using a two-syllable adjective (a golden bed/a purple shirt/a silver chair etc); don't let your class repeat the same adjectives.

If some children find this game hard, you can direct their responses towards the rhyme by giving them all but the last word of the line. For example:

*And if that grizzly bear's too fat
Daddy's going to buy you a pussy...
And if that pussy cat's asleep
Daddy's going to buy you a flock of...
And if that flock of sheep won't baa
Daddy's going to buy you a racing...*

You can bring the game to an end at any time by introducing a down/brown/clown rhyme, for example:

*And if that garden shed falls down
You'll still be the sweetest little baby in...*

Most children will hear the rhyme 'town' before you get there. Not because they are mind-readers, but because they have learned to listen to the words that are hidden all around them.



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Smarter phonics

Teaching pseudo words is a waste of time, but getting children to decode real language that is alien to them is anything but...

Should we teach alien words? No, we shouldn't! It's a waste of valuable time, especially for children with poor vocabularies. But should the Phonics Screening Check include pseudo words? Yes! They're excellent for assessment.

Children who can read pseudo words can decode well. When they come across an unfamiliar word, instead of struggling to work it out – or trying to make it fit a familiar word – they read it easily and mostly accurately, and then use context to understand it. Their vocabulary increases, they read for meaning and they enjoy reading.

In contrast, children who can't decode pseudo words may love reading books with familiar words, but when they're faced with unfamiliar words in increasingly complex texts, they fail. They can't learn from their reading and they certainly don't like reading.

So what should teachers do if they don't want to waste time teaching alien words, but do want their pupils to succeed with the Phonics Check? The answer is simple: every day, from



From *No Nonsense Phonics*, by Elizabeth Nonweiler, published by Raintree

the day children begin to learn to decode words, ask them to read a real word that is unlikely to be in their spoken vocabulary. Make sure it includes only letter-sound correspondences they've learnt. First ask them to decode the word and then tell them what it means. No more alien games or pseudo words – just rigorous synthetic phonics teaching by a well-trained teacher with an effective programme.

No Nonsense Phonics books include words that are likely to be unfamiliar to children and can't be guessed easily, as well as colourful photographs and interesting information about the meaning of the words. They're ideal for consolidation before the Phonics Check, because the letter-sound correspondences in the words match those in Sections 1 and 2 of the Check. They're popular with older pupils too.



Teach to Read

If you would like training to help your pupils succeed with the Phonics Check, and help pupils of all ages become excellent readers, contact Teach to Read at www.teachtoread.com

What are you reading?

Reading can be a solitary pleasure, but books are also something we can and should celebrate as a whole school and community, says Readathon schools manager **Heidi Perry**...

"Reading is unique because it's the only art form which is experienced privately; music, art, dance, theatre, all those are group experiences we share with others, but reading is intensely solitary – unless you go to a literary festival to share the wonder of reading with others."

This is the view of Peter Florence, director of the annual Telegraph Hay Festival. I was talking with him at the launch of its free programme for Welsh schools, part of the HayDays festival for children which gathers some of the biggest names in children's fiction.

It was a fitting conversation to have at this event, which also celebrated the success of this year's partnership between the Telegraph Hay Festival and Readathon, the charity I work for. Readathon's sponsored reading event in schools encourages children to read whatever they chose – from comics to classics – to raise money for Readathon's programme, which provides a regular supply



of brand new books and storytellers in all of the UK's major children's hospitals. In the weeks before the Hay Festival we launched a nationwide campaign inviting all schools to read along together by running Readathon. As an extra incentive, all those who ordered our free resource kit went into a prize draw to win a visit from CBBC stars and authors Sam and Mark. An amazing 150 schools signed up, with 41,000 children pledging to read!

This remarkable response demonstrates

that reading can indeed be a shared experience and one which schools can use to help children embrace reading for pleasure. During an era in which children and young people share much of their lives with each other online, it feels right to champion the very real experience of reading both as a private and publicly shared activity.

Readathon is also partnering with Manchester Children's Book Festival (mcbf.org.uk, 23rd June- 4th July) and the Telegraph Bath Children's Literature Festival (bathfestivals.org.uk/childrens-literature, 30th September – 9th October). To order your free Readathon kit go to Readathon.org/order or call **08456061151**





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STUNNING COMPOSITION

With the curriculum's heavy emphasis on grammar, there's a danger children could be put off writing for good. But get your planning right and there's plenty of fun to be had, says **Emma Caulfield...**



I like to begin any training that I do on writing composition with the question, "What makes a book a good book?"

Participants discuss their favourites and then we draw conclusions about their choices – what is it about these stories that they really love?

I often get similar responses: "It helps me to escape"; "I can really relate to the characters"; or "It's a real page turner."

But the point I like to make is that while the quality of the story is subjective – it depends on individual tastes – the quality of the writing is more tangible and can be judged on how well the writer communicates his or her tale, which can be hindered by elements such as poor grammar, punctuation and spelling, and by illegible handwriting.

So, what does the National Curriculum for English tell us makes writing good? And what are the most crucial elements – the ones by which children (and teachers) will be judged? Well, there are 12 elements in the National Curriculum Interim Teacher Assessment Framework (2016) for writing at the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 1 (Standards & Testing Agency, 2015): one on expanded noun phrases for description and specification; four on grammar and punctuation; and seven on spelling and handwriting.

Similarly, in the framework for writing at the end of Key Stage 2 (Ibid), six out of nine aspects relate to spelling, handwriting and grammar and punctuation. And to be working at 'greater depth' at the end of KS2 children need to be able to manipulate grammatical structures, select verb forms for meaning and effect, and use the full range of punctuation.

The trouble is, spelling, grammar and punctuation can be exceptionally boring, and if children find an activity dull they will not write well. But great teachers love introducing the more technical aspects of language because they know children really enjoy discovering how these can be used to enhance their writing.

It doesn't have to be boring

Ensuring that children are fully engaged in writing and that they understand how to use grammar and punctuation to good effect is a fine balance, but there are lots of ways to achieve this in the classroom. Here are some strategies that I've found work really well:

- Choose a text-type that you can have some fun with – adventure stories, spooky stories, and twists on traditional tales (ditch some of the old National Strategy narrative units!). When it comes to non-fiction, how much more enjoyable is it to write instructions for preparing a Gruffalo's tea than brewing a common cuppa?
- Create a high-quality hook to get your children engaged in the text – just a small investment in time can result in a big pay-off. For example, scattering Gruffalo's footsteps at the classroom entrance.
- Make sure that the children are familiar with the text-type. Read, read and read – immerse them.
- Identify the grammar and / or punctuation within a model text; discuss the job that it is doing – how is it enhancing meaning? Label it, teach it directly, and play with it. For example, play with speech punctuation by providing statements that children can punctuate using punctuation fans or finger-actions; or play with fronted adverbials by providing a sentence such as 'John dug a hole' and asking children to suggest appropriate fronted adverbials.
- Continue to play with grammar and punctuation. Find it in other texts, discuss its effect, and develop and extend examples.
- Use shared writing to model what you are looking for, step by step, section by section.
- Keep marking and feeding back during the whole process so that children's writing develops as they go along.

Planning a unit that brings together all of the elements above is easy and I like to use the tried and tested 'circles planning' approach (around 2 – 3 weeks' work depending on the age / stage of the children). This uses the Teaching Sequence for Writing from the National Strategies as its basis, and lays out the key points that should be included in each of three phases.

Phase 1:

- Immersion in text
- Shared reading
- Enjoy, explore and respond to text
- Develop comprehension skills
- Identify language / genre features

Phase 2:

- Gather ideas



- Oral rehearsal
- Plan

Phase 3

- Shared writing
- Teacher modelling
- Teacher scribing
- Supported composition
- Guided writing
- Independent writing
- Draft, revise, edit

My planner contains three empty boxes with a 'final outcome' box and three 'key focus' boxes outside of this (see Fig. 1 for a completed example). Once you have decided on the text that the children are going to learn to write, and identified the key areas on which you need to focus (e.g., grammar, vocabulary or text structure), use these steps to plan a unit:

Step 1:

Complete the 'final outcome' box, e.g. Write an information leaflet.

Step 2:

Enter the two or three key focuses for the unit (e.g. Effective use of cohesive devices within paragraphs, and effective use of brackets) into all three of the 'key focus' boxes.

Step 3:

Add your key focuses to the 'final outcome' box, e.g. Write an information leaflet making effective use of cohesive devices within paragraphs, and effective use of brackets.

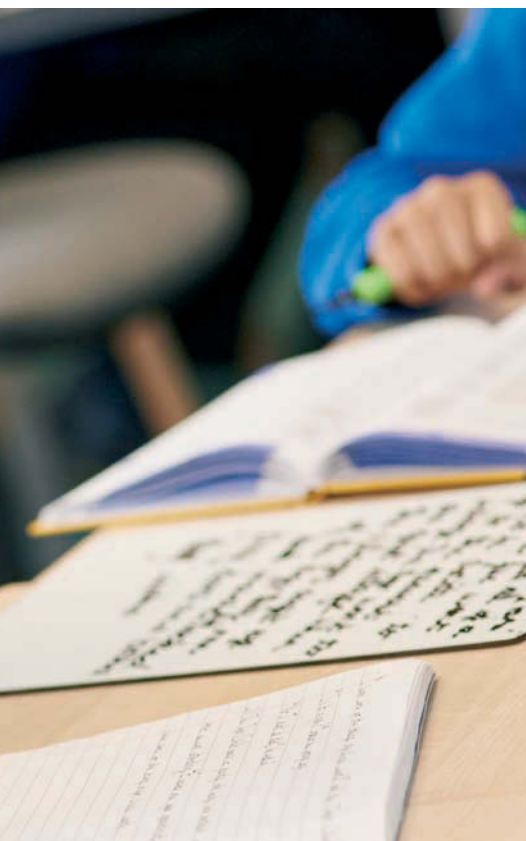
Step 4:

List the activities that will be carried out during the three phases, using the key points from the Teaching Sequence for Writing outlined above to make sure that you are covering each step.

Step 5:

Go through and slot in 'key focus' teaching – this should be in every phase so that there

Fig. 1



are lots of opportunities for children to practise and apply grammar, punctuation, etc. For example, in phase 1, analyse text for cohesive devices within paragraphs; teach and play with these cohesive devices.

Step 6:

Decide on the hook into writing and slot this into your plan, e.g. watch film clips of firework festivals.

Step 7:

Clarify audience and purpose for writing. Where will it be published?

(NB Make sure that you base your planning on the needs of the children – use your assessment information to inform the key focuses)

If we, as teachers, are bound by the National Curriculum, we should perhaps make sure that we adhere to the principles of effective writing that are laid out within it: “Effective composition involves articulating and communicating ideas, and then organising them coherently for a reader. This requires clarity, awareness of the audience, purpose and context and an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.” (National Curriculum 2014, p.15)

If we do this – and trust in what we know makes a good writer – there’s every chance our pupils will leave us not only fulfilling their potential as writers, but also enjoying writing.

Final outcome: Write a firework festival information leaflet making effective use of cohesive devices and brackets within paragraphs.	
Phase 1 As a class, read a variety of information texts about festivals / carnivals Compare and contrast; explore and respond – likes, dislikes, puzzles, patterns And identify purpose and audience of each Begin to collect ‘writer’s hints’ (including persuasive techniques) Immerse the children in information leaflets so that they internalise the language patterns Analyse paragraphs for cohesive devices – teach and play with these Collect effect language and vocabulary Chunk an information leaflet into sections to analyse structure – check children’s understanding of the purpose of each section Direct teach the use of brackets for parenthesis	Key Focus Effective use of cohesive devices within paragraphs, and effective use of brackets Phase 1 Outcome I know what a good information leaflet looks and sound like.
Phase 2 Hook – watch film clips of firework festivals and explain task Use the ‘chunks’ from phase 1 to start planning the leaflets Research firework festivals to collect facts and interesting information Play with cohesive devices, using them to join the information collected during children’s research Use talk activities to support with the developed and oral rehearsal of ideas for each chunk of the plan Play with brackets to add information; use talk activities to find the most effective uses Finalise plan Consider the design elements of the leaflet (layout, photos, text)	Key Focus Effective use of cohesive devices within paragraphs, and effective use of brackets Phase 2 Outcome I have planned my information leaflet
Phase 3 Use shared writing to write the opening section of the leaflet as a class (model effective use of cohesive devices) Children independently write opening section Mark, and support children to edit, refine and evaluate Where necessary, use shared writing to write the other sections of the leaflet (model effective use of cohesive devices and brackets) Children independently write the other sections Edit and refine to check for impact on reader Add design elements and check leaflet is as visually effective as possible Publish, share, evaluate	Key Focus Effective use of cohesive devices within paragraphs, and effective use of brackets Phase 3 Outcome I have planned my information leaflet



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*Robin Stevens*

“Boys definitely should read books about girls – and vice versa”

Telling children which stories are ‘for them’ risks turning them off literature completely, suggests **Robin Stevens**

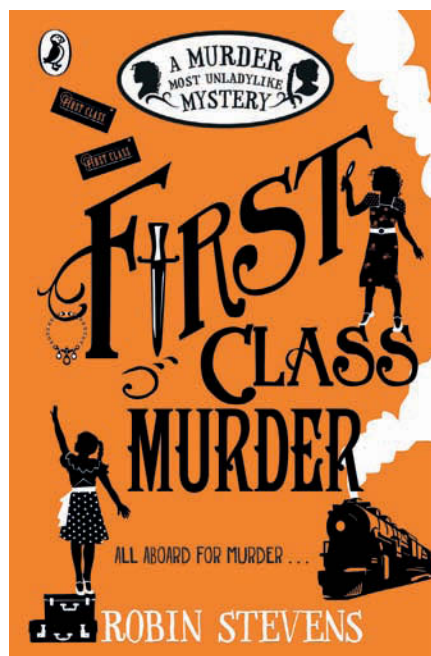
T rue story: I actually wrote my first book before I could read. Or write. It’s not as crazy as it sounds; my father and grandfather were both academics, so I grew up with books being created all around me. As a very little child I’d sit next to my dad and he would scribble on pieces of paper then give them to his secretary, who would type it all out. I deduced from this that the process of ‘making a book’ must be a kind of mind reading, and I wanted to do it, too. I got hold of a notebook and pencil, and ‘wrote’, thinking about a great story all the while. When it was finished, I proudly handed the ‘book’ to my mum; I wanted her to read it, for real, and she couldn’t. It was quite a shock to realise that there was more I needed to do.

As it happened, I was a little late to read – at least, compared with what the school thought should be happening. I was born in California and we moved to London when I was three. When I was about five and a half, my teacher suggested to my mother that my American accent was holding me back! Of course, my mother took no notice – and shortly after that, something suddenly clicked in my head, and all those squiggles started to make sense. I remember looking at street signs, realising that I could understand them, and getting incredibly excited about making that connection. And then I went mad; with nothing stopping me, I read everything.

One of the earliest books I remember (it feels like it can’t be true, but it is) was *The Hobbit*. I was lucky, as a kid who wanted to read, to have parents who valued that. We moved to Oxford when I was five, and the

library there was a treasure trove, where I discovered Diana Wynne Jones, Eva Ibbotson and Terry Pratchett. To read his Discworld books I needed to venture into the adults’ section and that felt amazingly cool at the age of eight.

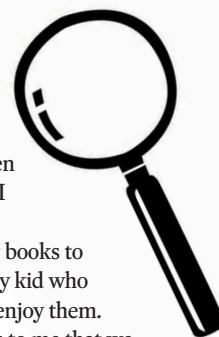
My mystery series, about a pair of schoolgirl detectives, is described as Agatha Christie meets Enid Blyton quite a lot. I’m very happy with that – both of those are writers I read hugely as a child. I remember ‘graduating’ from Blyton to Christie, and wondering where the middle ground was; the books about kids solving murders. In a way,



Murder Most Unladylike is the book I wish I’d been able to read when I was younger.

I really want my books to be accessible to any kid who is the right age to enjoy them. It seems ridiculous to me that we are increasingly splitting stories by gender; whom a book is about has no bearing on whom the book is for. Hazel, one of my two main characters, is Chinese, and I love the thought that whenever a white person reads the book they’re identifying with her as the narrator, not looking at her as someone different from themselves. This is why I believe that boys definitely should read books about girls and vice versa: seeing the world through someone else’s eyes is a really powerful way of understanding them.

Schools work very hard to nurture a love of reading in their most reluctant pupils – but sometimes I think adults try too hard to push particular books on children. The closest I’ve ever come to a non-positive experience with books was when my teacher gave a list of ‘advanced’ titles to my mother. My mother is very rule-abiding, so she’d only allow me the books on the list itself. I was so furious that I refused to read *Skellig* in protest – I finally read it as an adult and realised how stupid I’d been. All the same, I was turned off reading it by an well-meaning adult trying to force a connection that wasn’t there. I think it’s so easy to do, albeit with the best will in the world; we need to trust children to find their own way, in their own time.





Feel the fear

Y4 teacher **Ross Geraghty** knows how scary it can be to have to produce a piece of writing to order – no matter how long you’ve been doing it...

So anyway. Here I am, at the coalface, metaphorical pick and shovel in hand, chipping away at the mine of primary school writing potential. Twenty-seven unkempt Year Four faces pore down at their now-scraggy exercise books, deploying their eager minds like an overused simile.

On the still-new, funky interactive whiteboard thingy is the stimulus – a wild Hockney painting this time, carefully chosen by yours truly; on the other board, the modelled writing showing how we “can start to describe this setting, or the characters in it ... who can think of something to share with the class?”

Yet then, the inevitable, moments later: “Mr G, I don’t know what to write.” Or: “Mr G, I’ve copied your writing off the board, I can’t think of anything else.” Or, after precisely 38 seconds: “Mr G, I’ve finished, what shall I do now?”

Hard times

As someone who has written all of his life, and made a living from the written word back before I got the calling, there are a few things that I know. One is that writers’ block is real, no matter who you are. Why, even sitting down to write this article – deadline: tomorrow, if you please – I stared at the blank page for several moments before remembering to do that spot of cleaning behind the fridge. It’s done now.

Two, you usually never finish until someone else stops you. There are novelists who would have nothing published, ever, if their editors hadn’t torn soggy manuscripts from their clammy, self-critical hands.

And three, most relevantly: for most human-folk, the fear of genuine creativity is real, too. Of really opening up, I mean. The resultant self-censorship is an act of cruelty and anxiety, not a desire to perfect

anything. Added to this, as a professional I also fear what the editor of this goodly magazine will say about my own humble scrawlings. What if she shakes her head, ruminating, “Oh dear, this is not what I wanted, not at all.”? Or gently returns it, with some tickled-pink and green-for-growth marks thereon? The anxiety, even for an old hand, is palpable.

Let it go

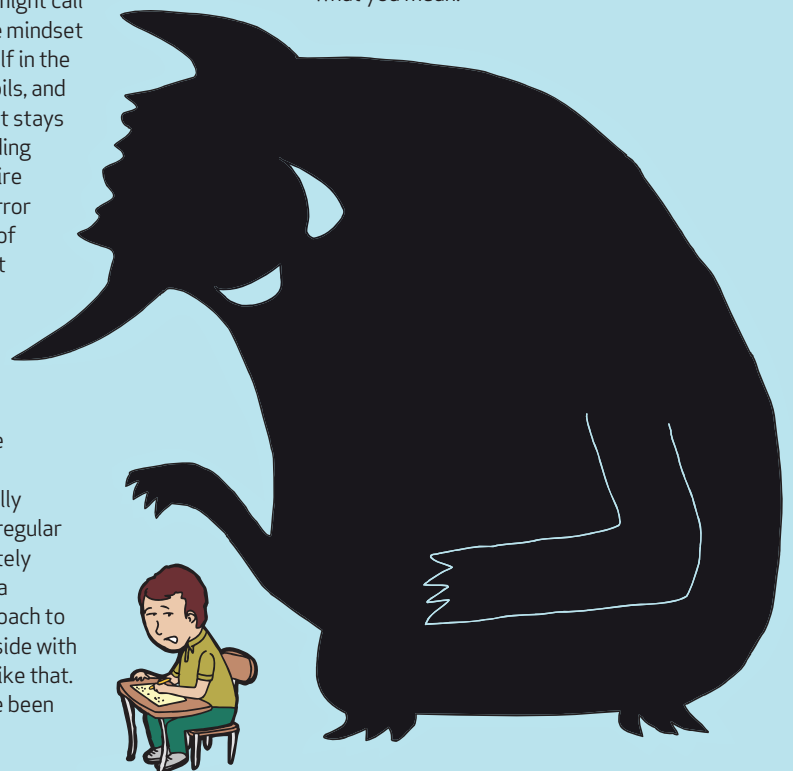
When I started teaching writing, I took the didactic role, thinking I had something important to impart, some teaching to do. And, in fact, I have. However, it’s not simply the technical – inverted commas, fronted adverbials, subordinating conjunctions... you know the drill. No, the most important learning I can impart is that the fear mindset stops all of us from doing our best. Not just you, Year Four children, but me too.

Perhaps you might call it the regressive mindset – to place oneself in the shoes of my pupils, and feel the fear that stays their pencil-holding hands; their desire to please yet terror of falling short, of being told, albeit gently, “no”, despite their very, very best efforts. In essence, all of the self-same anxieties that I feel, and hopefully overcome, on a regular basis. It completely opens me up to a whole new approach to teaching. I’m onside with them, and they like that. The results have been

great for one-third of the children, good for another third and have impacted the already-fluid writers a little, too – they like how I let them go off-piste.

At the heart of my new writing lessons, and (mark!) my marking, is something seemingly forgotten: children need to enjoy writing, first and foremost because, when they do, the technical stuff falls into place accidentally on purpose. We may teach a grammar point for them to include, and keep the English coordinator happy, but primarily writing is about expressing yourself, and if fear keeps you from doing this then the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Oh, and clichés.

So anyway, I get in character daily now. I play me as an adult in the mindset of an eight-year old. And for those children who give it, “I don’t know what to write,” or, “I don’t know how to start,” my response is, “You want to know something? I know exactly what you mean.”

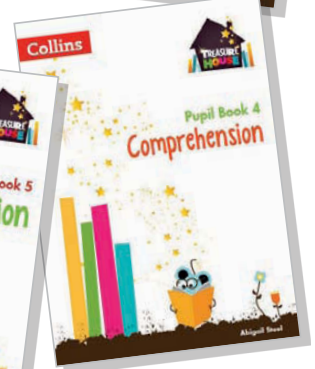
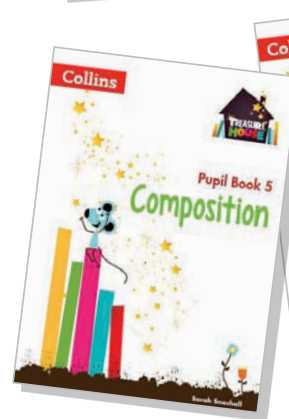
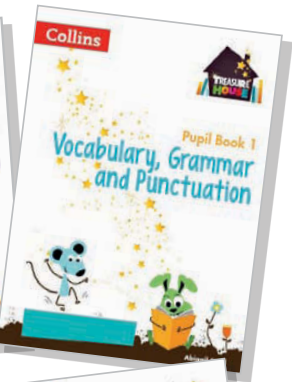


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